

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to provide a summary of the Comprehensive Plan and its process, and to provide residents and interested parties with the key findings and components of this document. This summary provides a concise snapshot of the entire Comprehensive Plan and what is contained in each chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to facilitate more consistency in decision-making throughout the City and to provide everyone with the key information that will help define the community, and ultimately make the City of Isanti a unique and special place for people to live, work and recreate. Ultimately, this document will function as a tool and a reference for the City when making tough land use decisions in the future. Although this chapter provides a summary of the information contained within the overall document, there may be times when greater detail with respect to goals or policies or other characteristics will be necessary. Each chapter of this document will build upon information presented in previous chapters, and as such provides a comprehensive view of the community from past, present, and into the future.

The following chapter will introduce the Plan, the Project Team, the Vision for Isanti, and some of the highlights from each of the plan chapters. More detailed information about each of the plan topics can be found in the subsequent chapters.

Early in the Comprehensive Planning process, two levels of analysis were chosen, a “Planning Boundary” and a “Study Area”. The “Planning Boundary” is defined as that land area north to 301st Avenue, west to the Rum River, south to the Athen’s Township line, and east to Durant Street. The City of Isanti recognizes that there are limits in respect to the land areas in which logical and continual growth of the community could occur. The area as described will enable the City to continue to grow and develop in a contiguous and sustainable pattern in the years to come.

In addition, the City acknowledges that there are many other factors that lie beyond this specifically identified “Planning Boundary”, which influence how the City of Isanti will grow and develop into the future. Natural resources and transportation systems do not end at the city limits or the “Planning Boundary”, but are extended into neighboring communities, townships, and Isanti County. Yet, these systems play a vital role in the overall growth and development of the City. As a result, a “Study Area” has been identified, which allows the City the opportunity to look at physical factors that exist within a broader context, which contribute to the overall function of City systems, specifically natural resources and transportation.

Chapters within the Comprehensive Plan discuss both this larger “Study Area” as well as the more narrowly defined “Planning Area”. The City of Isanti recognizes that the community is intertwined with surrounding cities, townships, and the County. The examination of both a “Planning Boundary” and “Study Area” will enable the City to grow in a more conscious manner, taking into consideration the effects that future planning, growth, and development will have on surrounding areas.

Location

The City of Isanti is located approximately 45 miles north of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (TCMA). The City has over 5,000 residents and has experienced significant growth in the recent years. The community is located on Highway 65 which serves as a strong north-south connection between Isanti, the TCMA, and Cambridge to the north. This corridor has high traffic volumes and is easily accessible to Isanti residents. The primary east-west corridor through the City is County State Aid Highway 5 (CSAH 5). Many of the City's services and community facilities are near the CR-5 corridor including the downtown, banks and businesses, the schools, banquet center and recreational facilities.

The City of Isanti is dedicated to planning for the future to ensure people want to live, work, and recreate within the community. This Plan was prepared with the help of community members, public officials, staff, local organizations and citizens using an open meeting process. Each of these groups played an integral role in creating and developing the vision, goals and objectives for this Plan. This document has been supported by those involved in the public participation events held as part of the planning process as well as by the Planning Commission and City Council. Preparation of the document began the summer of 2005 and continued through the fall of 2007.

The Planning Process began when the City applied for, and received, grant money to prepare this Plan from the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF). When the community applied for this money, the City understood there would be specific goals and expectations that they would need to adopt as a part of the Plan. Some of the principles GMHF was interested in included: housing diversity, contiguous and efficient growth, job creation, and natural resource conservation. When the City accepted the grant money they also accepted these principles as important to the success of this Comprehensive Plan which is a unique starting point in the process. City leaders and officials accepted these as guiding principles for plan development, but realized it would be up to community members and the advisory panel to determine in what capacity, and where, these principles were addressed, emphasized or used. In addition, the City provided matching funds to the development of the Plan to ensure that it truly reflected the goals and aspirations of the community, while utilizing some of the new principles as a guide for plan development.

This Plan replaces the City's current Comprehensive Plan completed in 2002. Over the past five years, several changes have occurred with respect to the City that has made it necessary to update the existing plan. A large quantity of land was annexed into the City over the past five years, and as a result there is a significant need to plan for and consider these properties, and to do so in a way that includes new residents. This Plan identifies and plans for land within the existing City boundary and a larger planning area. The City acknowledges the value in planning for areas outside its boundaries to suggest its intentions and goals for the future specifically with respect to infrastructure and City services.

The process culminated with a series of meetings to review, refine and adopt the Final Plan. The project consultants presented the overall content and results of the Plan for public review and feedback. Based on this input, the Plan was revised and presented at a Planning Commission Public Hearing/Open House in November 2007. After additional revisions, the Plan was adopted by the City Council in December 2007.

Project Participants

The process to develop this document was extensive and included several meetings with the Public, the Advisory Panel, the Planning Commission, Isanti City Staff, and ultimately the City Council. These groups were the key players in preparing this Plan. The roles and responsibilities of each group were critical to successfully creating this document.

The Advisory Panel met frequently early in the process to discuss the components of the Plan and to work on its development. The Advisory Panel was appointed by the City Council to be the central work group for the development of this Plan. Starting in the Fall of 2006, the Planning Commission took the lead in reviewing each chapter. This effort also involved the Economic Development Authority (EDA) and the Park and Recreation Board. The Council was deliberate in appointing a large cross section of residents to serve on the panel, which included township representatives to ensure that all voices and interests were represented.

The Public was invited to several meetings throughout the process to respond to the work completed by the Advisory Panel and Staff. These meetings were held every couple months to ensure that residents had the opportunity to participate and comment on plan development.

Also playing an indirect role in this process was the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF) who hosted some of the meetings and provided guidance throughout the process. The presence of this organization helped to facilitate several of the discussions and contributed to the process.

Ultimately the City Council is responsible for adoption of the Plan. Throughout the process, the council was updated on the process and plan development. The document was prepared under their direction with full review by the Planning Commission.

A Unique Community

Throughout the planning process, Isanti was dedicated to creating a plan that acknowledged the unique characteristics and attributes of the City. The planning process was initiated as a result of significant population growth in recent years. This growth has had increasing implications on the City including availability of services, infrastructure and community facilities. The City is dedicated to making Isanti a unique place for residents, but in the face of such significant growth, this can pose a challenge. As a result, this planning process attempts to address some of those challenges and ultimately seeks to develop a plan for the future that is responsive to the growing needs of residents, while maintaining the small town character desired by the City.

This document attempts to address community concerns raised during the process and ultimately to encourage open discussion and communication between residents, community representatives and leaders into the future. A key priority for this plan is to facilitate land use discussions that focus on building social and community capital throughout the City between all residents. The City acknowledges that future collaboration is integral to the success of the City and of this plan.

A Place with Direction

Through the planning process, a vision for the future of Isanti was established. Defining a vision for the future of the City is a critical foundation from which to implement this Plan. In order to realize a vision, the City must support it in every aspect of planning and development. The purpose of the vision is to tell a story about the big themes and ideas that the City will concentrate on over the next several years. Rather than creating rigid prescriptions, the purpose of the vision is to help shape and define the future, while enabling residents, developers, and interested parties to be innovative and creative when making decisions. The process the City went through in developing the vision can be found in Chapter 1; however, it is essential that this vision becomes familiar early in the document to see that implementation and success of the plan happens. The vision created during this process focuses on the interrelated quality of each element of the Plan.

Vision Statement

"The City of Isanti is a place with a strong sense of community that welcomes new residents while embracing existing residents; the City provides diverse housing and unique neighborhoods thereby accommodating a variety of needs and demands for residents; it is a sustainable community that provides economic opportunities to residents and local businesses; natural resource conservation guides future land use and development decisions; encourage active living by creating a network of open spaces, parks, and trails that are connected to residents, neighborhoods and community facilities; land use and growth will be carefully considered to ensure a high quality of life for all residents; efficient transportation systems will encourage modal choice and variety while promoting accessibility and effectiveness."

Chapter Structure and Highlights

Each of the chapters contains a short inventory and analysis of existing conditions with respect to the topic chapter. Existing conditions and patterns of development in the City and the surrounding area have a great influence on the City's future. Thus, accurate, complete and up-to-date information on existing conditions is essential to a successful Comprehensive Plan. Each of these chapters also provides more specific recommendations and objectives related to the future growth and development of the City. Most chapters include graphics, maps, and images to suggest how or where objectives and recommendations could be implemented. Many of these graphics are reflective of the goals and aspirations for the community, and depict how the City will or may look in the future.

The Community

The City of Isanti is a place with a strong sense of community that welcomes new residents while embracing existing residents.

The purpose of this Plan is to help describe who is living in the community today, and what the City intends to plan for the future. The Community chapter also describes what facilities are currently serving the community, and what types of intergovernmental relationships could be facilitated to better serve the City. These characteristics are invaluable with respect to planning for the future of the City, because the residents are at the center of all decision making.

The impetus for this Plan was to make Isanti a better planned place for residents to live, work, and recreate. The changing demographics, increasing population and strain on the infrastructure all contributed to the desire to plan for the future to ensure that the residents

maintained a high quality of life. This chapter provides the background about the people in Isanti, to ensure decisions throughout subsequent chapters responds to the needs and demands of residents of the community.

Housing and Neighborhoods

The City provides diverse housing and unique neighborhoods thereby accommodating a variety of needs and demands for residents.

The majority of development in the City of Isanti has occurred over the past 10 years. In the past 5 years, the population in Isanti has doubled, and many new residents have purchased homes in newly platted subdivisions. New housing in the City has been relatively homogenous in the past 5 years, and has primarily focused on single-family residential development. Many of these developments have offered young families the opportunity to purchase homes in the community. The presence of these families contributes to the growing focus on neighborhoods, community, and activity within the City.

The City's focus on families and neighborhoods has strong implications with respect to future development. The presence of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF) had a significant influence on plan development because of their focus on mixed-income neighborhoods and the development of the Housing Action Plan (HAP) that is adopted as part of this Plan. The HAP responds to growing needs and demands on housing and neighborhoods over the next several years. The City is dedicated to creating new neighborhoods that provide for a diverse population at various economic levels.

In addition to diverse housing and neighborhoods, the Plan also encourages conservation based development that utilizes the natural resources framework identified in the Natural Resources chapter. Neighborhoods and housing should happen in a relatively contiguous manner when possible to ensure availability and efficiency of services, and preservation of prime ecological systems.

Neighborhood design and quality was also discussed during the planning process. Existing patterns were upheld in this plan including primarily low-density residential development, particularly in areas located further away from major corridors. The Plan introduces higher intensity development along the Highway 65 and CSAH 5 corridors to encourage more diverse land use patterns in highly accessible areas. These changes are likely to happen as market demand increases, which is hard to project. However, this plan is flexible enough to change over time and to meet demand increases or decreases. The City's goal is to promote future development that diversifies the existing housing stock to help support a more sustainable community.

The Economy

Create economically viable opportunities that support the community.

This chapter addresses the City's desire to create jobs and create a more balanced, sustainable community. Economic development efforts will be focused on a couple of different planning areas. The City has a unique downtown that has the opportunity to foster a sense of community and gathering space for Isanti residents. Economic development efforts in this area will be focused on community based businesses that support resident's daily needs. The downtown was identified as an important attribute to Isanti, and as such, a parallel study was conducted to specifically address downtown. The City is dedicated to revitalization of the downtown area to further support the unique quality of the community.

In addition to revitalization of downtown Isanti, significant discussion focused around the Highway 65 corridor. This corridor is a primary north-south corridor linking Isanti with surrounding job centers and retail opportunities. The Highway 65 corridor will be an important area for Isanti to focus on, because of its visibility to residents as well as those who pass through the community. This area is guided for primarily commercial and light industrial development and limited residential. The corridor will help define Isanti as a community, therefore special design standards and development requirements will be developed to ensure the corridor represents Isanti as a desirable place to stop and shop or work. In addition, the City has set aside a significant quantity of land for light industrial uses in the existing industrial park and has expansion area to the north, located on the west side of the Highway 65 corridor. Ultimately the Highway 65 corridor will be an economic corridor supported by nearby residential development.

Market research suggests that it is likely services and businesses will choose to locate in the City when the population increases enough to support the business and/or use. This means that planning for residential development, increasing population along key corridors and within proximity to downtown and other economic nodes, will increase the likelihood of businesses, offices, medical facilities (doctors offices, dentists offices, etc.), and light industrial uses to locate within the community.

Natural Resources

A place where natural resource conservation guides future land use and development.

A key component of this Plan is the Natural Resources chapter and subsequent conservation framework developed as a part of this process. Although not overt, Isanti has many areas with high natural resource value including the Rum River, woodlands, and wetland complexes that provide value and quality of life in Isanti.

The conservation framework is the foundation from which every other element of this Plan was built upon to ensure that development and planning happens in a way that is mindful of the natural systems in the community. The natural resource inventory was taken a step further and provided prioritization and analysis on a parcel by parcel basis. This chapter prioritized and analyzed each parcel in the City for ecological and natural resource significance. These areas were defined and prioritized to guide development and planning into the future, to ensure future conservation practices are upheld.

The conservation network helps to shape and identify prime-developable areas as well as those areas that should not be developed. The prioritization pays special attention to key areas and provides options for preservation. The high interest areas are defined as highest-priority and subsequent categories lessen with respect to developability.

The purpose of the conservation framework is to provide a common starting point for every land use and development decision in the City. The natural resources in the community are invaluable and oftentimes can not be recovered if not protected and maintained from the beginning. This framework helps the City define and identify these areas so that the City can make plans for conservation into the future.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space

Encourage active living by creating a network of open spaces, parks, and trails that are connected with residents, neighborhoods, and community facilities.

Building on the conservation framework is the network of parks, trails, and open spaces. Historically, the City of Isanti has been dedicated to promoting active residents and encouraging healthy lifestyles and choices. To enable healthful activities, the City will continue to provide access to parks, trails, and open space to ensure a high quality of life for all residents. Linking neighborhoods with these areas will encourage residents to live a healthier and more active lifestyle than if those community areas were not provided.

This chapter emphasizes the relationship and location of parks, open spaces and trails within the conservation network. Each neighborhood platted in the City will be required to demonstrate how residents will have access to amenities, such as trail access and connections, pocket neighborhood parks, and other recreational opportunities. In addition, the idea of connecting community facilities, parks, and open spaces within the community, is the idea of connecting these elements on a regional scale. Some of the goals in this section were to encourage the use of trails for transportation, not just recreation, and to provide easily accessible recreational opportunities for every resident. By providing these linkages and creating accessibility, the City is strongly encouraging the uses of these amenities.

Land Use and Growth

Land use and growth will be carefully considered to ensure a high quality of life for all residents. Master Plan key areas with high natural resource value to create an integrated system of multi-purpose greenway corridors and development.

The Land Use and Growth Chapter focus on the physical development of Isanti. Recent growth has spurred significant interest and concern in the City because of service and infrastructure availability. Although land in proximity to the City seems somewhat unlimited, there are other limitations influencing land use decisions in the community. The current wastewater treatment facility has capacity up to 10,000 people, at which point other options will be necessary. This means that efficient, deliberate and orderly development will be necessary over the next several years, to ensure development is the most compatible in the community, consequently careful monitoring of service availability will be essential. The City is dedicated to creating a diversity of land uses, and as such, the Future Land Use Plan considers a variety of land use designations. In addition, there was a strong interest in creating spaces and development that would enhance the City's natural resources. The Land Use Plan and growth scenarios were carefully developed with the conservation framework in place, to ensure that developers, residents, and the City were aware of the most critical natural resources.

A part of the Land Use and Growth Chapter is a short description of future wastewater and water services that will be necessary to accommodate future growth in the community. These plans heavily influence where and what type of development will happen in the City over the next several years and what infrastructure improvements will be required. The Implementation chapter addresses this issue and suggests that the City prepare a Capital Improvements Program to ensure funding and timeliness of major projects necessary to ensure the success of the community.

The City was also concerned with the overall development pattern and was interested in creating connections, placing compatible land uses next to each other, and accommodating for a variety of uses. This interest was supported through the process of developing the Future Land Use Plan. The Land Use Plan also demonstrates fairly balanced land uses that supports the goals and aspirations of the community with respect to developing into a sustainable community.

As a part of this planning process new land use designations were created. These land use designations are new to the community and as such, have not been previously defined. The Land Use and Growth Chapter also includes a short discussion on these new designations.

Transportation

Efficient transportation systems will encourage modal choice and variety while promoting accessibility and effectiveness.

The intensification of land uses and organization of land requires a well connected, and planned road network. The Transportation Chapter identifies primary corridors and does not get into logistics of individual neighborhood networks, with the exception of those neighborhoods already established.

Some of the transportation issues that were focused on most during the process were that of road safety. Highway 65 poses a significant barrier between the east and west side of the City, and as a result, much discussion was centered on bringing the two sides together. Pedestrians and bicyclists have a particularly hostile environment to overcome with respect to Highway 65. The Plan proposed a pedestrian/bicycle bridge to connect both sides of the City over Highway 65. In addition, several roads were realigned and straightened in this Plan to promote easier turning movements, greater visibility, and safer speeds. Beyond major roads and connectors, the City established goals for neighborhood level streets. These goals aimed at creating connections when possible, and avoiding cul-de-sac development when nearby residential development could be connected for safety and efficiency. In addition, development should consider contiguous neighborhoods, and therefore plan for future connections.

Roads were the primary focus in this chapter, however, mass transit (park and rides) and alternate modes such as biking and walking were also addressed. Transit opportunities are on the horizon especially the potential for commuter rail running through the City. The Transportation Plan identifies these two potential locations for a park and ride/transit stop. The City is interested, and encourages, planning for mass transit opportunities along the corridor. Walking and bicycle paths were also discussed as a transportation mode rather than purely a recreational opportunity. The same connectivity and accessibility issues were discussed and considered when preparing the Transportation Plan.

Implementation

The implementation chapter describes how the City intends to execute this Plan. It includes a description of the tools available to the City to implement the Plan. In addition, this chapter has direct, action-oriented statements that will guide the City towards ways to make sure the work completed and prepared as a part of this process is used in future decision-making in the City.

A top priority in the Implementation Chapter is to produce a Zoning Map and applicable zoning ordinances that support the Land Use Plan prepared as a part of this Plan. Zoning is the City's regulatory tool that affects how land is used and developed and therefore should be consistent with the information in this Plan. In addition, the Implementation Chapter outlines future studies that should be completed to supplement this plan including the creation of a Housing Task Force to evaluate potential housing tools and financing options in the City. The Implementation Chapter further supports goals to evaluate uses, businesses, housing, etc., in the Downtown area. Additional recommendations in the Implementation

Chapter respond specifically to issues discussed during the Comprehensive Planning process and are recommendations to be completed and/or started within one year of adoption of this Plan.

Appendices

Included in the appendix is the Housing Action Plan (HAP). The HAP is a detailed guide for future housing quantities and allocations into the future. Also included is the Trunk Sanitary Sewer, Water Main and Storm Sewer Plan.