

DAKOTA COUNTY 2020 LAND USE POLICY PLAN

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VISION

The Land Use Policy Plan contains a growth management strategy that includes the values of the communities in Dakota County and recognizes the role and responsibilities of Dakota County within the metropolitan region. It is the County's growth management strategy to protect the cultural, economic, built environments, and natural environments of Dakota County's communities and the metropolitan region. The County will coordinate County plans with local community plans, regional plans, and work with communities to coordinate land use decisions with transportation, facility siting, and other County plans.

INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Council forecasts that approximately 140,000 more people will live in Dakota County by the year 2020. In general, most citizens polled in the public participation process of the County Comprehensive Plan thought the County is growing about right or too fast. Only a very small percentage of people thought the County wasn't growing fast enough.

In the 1990s, over 3000 housing units per year were built in the urban areas of Dakota County at densities of approximately 2-3 units per acre. This residential development consumed over 1000 acres of land per year. During the same period, approximately 100 houses per year were constructed in the townships and rural cities of the County, but at much lower densities. Although the number of new houses built in these rural areas was significantly less, the lot sizes are typically 5, 10, or 20 acres. At this rate and density, scattered rural development uses up an amount of land comparable to that used by suburban development.

In addition, commercial and industrial land use trends create new challenges for the County. The rate of employment growth in the County exceeded the rate of population growth in the past 10 years.

In the future, Dakota County must prepare for similar growth pressures, but in the context of changing circumstances. The newly created Metropolitan Council's Growth Management Policy Areas seek to direct development in the County. New programs such as Livable Communities will impact the location and density of future development in urban areas. Trends in population aging suggest that the housing market will need to provide more housing options for empty nesters.

In short, the County must address the land use issues brought on by rapid growth and change. Land use impacts have a significant impact on the County's citizens and the delivery of County services and programs. Dakota County must address these issues without the land use zoning tools available to local government.

The issues addressed in this plan are broken into the following topics:

Purpose and Scope
Development History
Existing Land Use
Future Land Use
Land Use Goals, Policies and Implementation Strategies

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Land Use Policy Plan is to outline County policies that plan for the future of Dakota County and address the land use decisions made by local units of government.

County agencies impact land use in the following areas:

- 1) Location of County roads, County/Regional parks, and County buildings
- 2) Review of plats and development proposals contiguous to County roads
- 3) Enforcement of shoreland zoning, wild and scenic rivers, and floodplain regulations along designated public lakes and rivers
- 4) Provide general land use planning assistance to cities and townships such as:
 - GIS information and analysis to help them prepare their comprehensive plans
 - Assist in the preparation of local Critical Area plans

The Land Use Policy Plan will establish goals, objectives, and policies that will apply to decisions made by County agencies that impact land use. The policies in the Land Use Policy Plan will be used as a basis for County decision-making regarding land use proposals. The policies serve as a planning and management decision-making framework for County agencies and government officials concerning all public and private actions and development that occur within the County's jurisdiction.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Land use patterns in Dakota County can be explained in large part by changes in transportation technology. Since most of the population growth in Dakota County has occurred since World War II, the County's land use patterns were shaped primarily by the use of the automobile.

There are some notable exceptions; portions of South St. Paul and West St. Paul developed when street cars were the mode of transportation. Consequently these areas have higher population densities. Cities such as Farmington, Hastings, Lakeville, and Rosemount have older downtown districts that date back to when these communities were agricultural centers. Land use patterns in these downtowns are very compact, originating from the days of early settlement when the horse cart and walking were modes of transportation.

Most of Dakota County's land use patterns were created as a result of automobile use. In 1990 the U.S. Census reported that 97% of all households in the County had at least one automobile, and 70% of households had 2 or more automobiles. Automobile centered development yields low density land use patterns. These patterns are directly evident through the large amounts of land needed for parking lots, roads, highway right of way, and freeway interchanges. Automobile use changes land use patterns in other ways as well. Cars make it possible for people to travel faster and farther than before, thereby increasing the supply of land, and consequently reducing the per unit cost of land. As a result, people live at low densities. Commercial and industrial businesses buy more land and build single story buildings because land costs are cheaper than construction costs of multi-story buildings.

Historically, suburban growth in Dakota County, as in other metropolitan areas of the United States, has its roots in the Federal highway and home mortgage credit programs developed in the 1950s. Beginning with the Eisenhower administration, billions of dollars were invested in highway programs. FHA and VA mortgage programs encouraged single family home ownership by providing long term, low interest, Federally guaranteed loans to prospective home buyers. New freeways and highways made high speed travel a reality, and the home mortgage programs made it possible for millions of Americans to own homes. Dakota County, being relatively close to Minneapolis and St. Paul, and possessing an abundant supply of cheap land needed for low density single family home building, was in an ideal location for the new form of suburbia.

In Dakota County, suburbanization started with single family home development. The earliest subdivisions were located with access to major freeway and highway corridors. In the 1950s and early 1960s Dakota County's land use development patterns were dominated by large tract suburban developers. In Burnsville, hundreds of homes were constructed in the "River Hills" subdivisions along State Highway 13. In Eagan "Cedar Grove", was developed just south of the Cedar Avenue bridge. In Inver Grove Heights, over 1000 homes were built in the "South Grove" additions adjacent to State Hwy 56. Similarly, Orrin Thompson's "Apple Valley" subdivisions in Apple Valley, and the "Valley Park" subdivisions in Lakeville characterized the new land development pattern. Commuters found that the miles of additional travel required to reach these developments translated into a few extra minutes of travel time via state highways and interstate freeways. In most cases, the development of the Federal, State, County, and local road system made it possible for developers to create subdivisions in locations that were formerly too remote to develop.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the pattern of patchy dispersed single family land use that was formed in the previous era began to give way to infill development. Also, major transportation improvements made it possible for more intense land uses to move into the County. The completion of 494, I35E, and a new Cedar Avenue bridge accelerated the land development process. Large multi-family residential projects were built along 35W, State Hwy 13, and other transportation corridors. The Burnsville Center was constructed, and employers began to move into industrial parks in all of the County's suburban communities. Although land speculation was still very much a part of the development process, local units of government and the Metropolitan Council began to exercise more control over land use development and land use became more contiguous. As in the previous era, transportation improvements and land development were directly linked.

In the 1990s, Dakota County communities are continuing their evolution from bedroom suburbs into more diverse land use patterns. During the 1990s, the rate of employment growth has surpassed the residential growth rate. Employers locating in Dakota County find inexpensive building sites, urban design County roads, and access to the regional roadway system. Some examples of recent employer location decisions include; West Publishing, Cray Research, Northwest Airlines and Blue Cross Blue Shield. Continued urbanization has brought an increasingly larger share of commercial and industrial land use to the County. These land uses are even more closely linked to transportation improvements than residential growth, and they attempt to locate along the busiest transportation corridors.

EXISTING LAND USE

Dakota County is a rapidly suburbanizing county located south of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The County is bordered on the north by the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Freeway bridges link Dakota County's commuters to both Minneapolis and St. Paul. The once agricultural land to the north has undergone a transition from farm fields to bedroom suburbs, and more recently to a more mature form of suburbia characterized by abundant shopping and dispersed employment locations.

More than 330,000 people are concentrated in the northern one-third of the County. The other two-thirds of the County remains agricultural.

Developed Cities

The northern cities in Dakota County are extensions of St. Paul's early suburbs. The development pattern in West St. Paul and South St. Paul is more compact because they were built before freeways and widespread automobile use. Many of the homes in these cities were built before World War II.

Suburban Areas

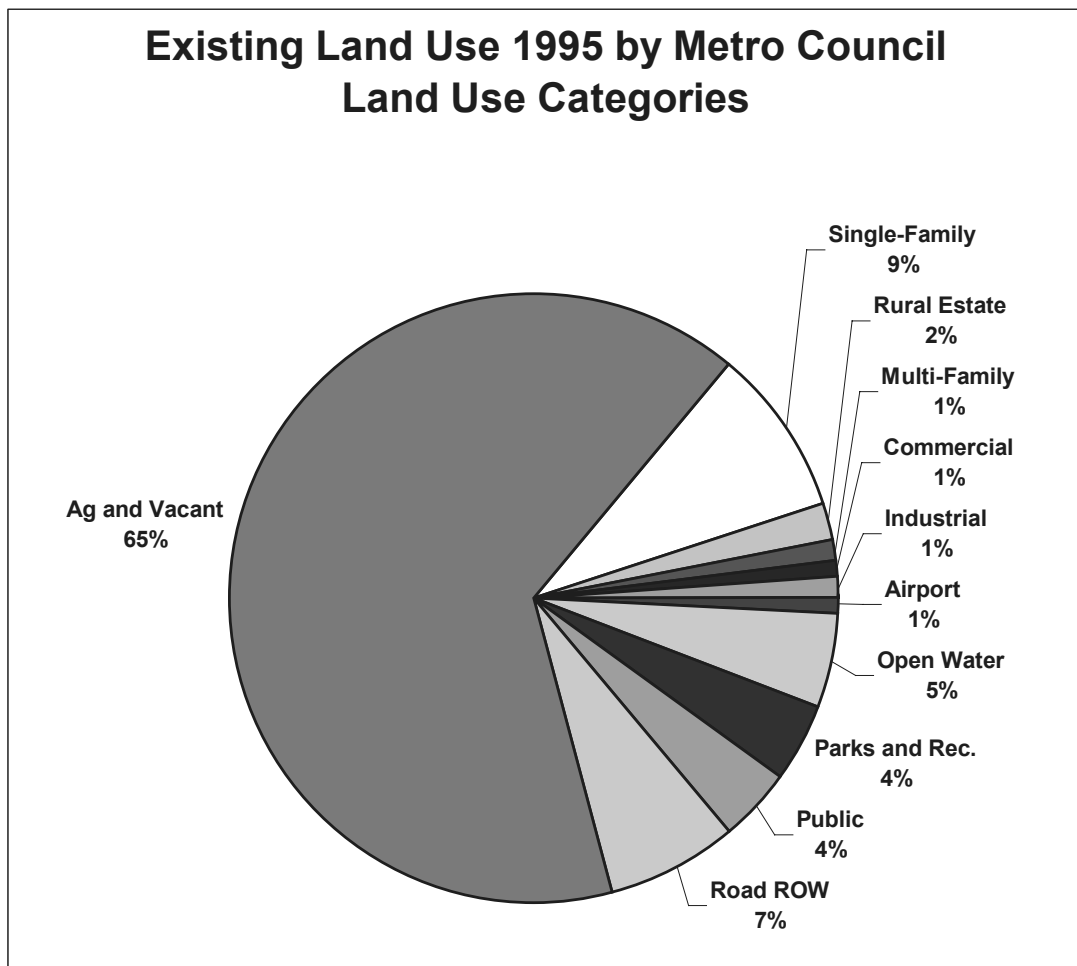
The suburban areas of Dakota County are where development has more recently occurred or is still occurring. They are the cities of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights, Mendota Heights, Lillydale, Lakeville, Farmington, and Rosemount. Some of these cities once were agricultural centers, but are now criss-crossed by major roadways and saturated with low density development.

Rural Townships and Rural Cities

Dakota County's townships are dominated by agricultural land use. Most of the townships have density zoning restriction of 1 housing unit per 40 acres. The rural cities have small populations and are closely tied to the surrounding agricultural land. A few townships such as Ravenna, Nininger, Marshan, Empire, and Eureka have experienced limited residential development pressure.

Land Use Analysis

Dakota County's predominant land use is agriculture in the south, and single family residential in the northern suburban areas. There are 40,700 acres (10%) of single family land in the County. Surprisingly, 25,400 (7%) acres of land are within road right-of-way. Large lot residential (with on-site well and septic systems) uses 16,000 acres of land. It is interesting to note that while a large amount of County's land use falls into the large lot residential category, there are only 3,300 homes that use 16,000 acres of land in the large lot residential category, averaging 1 house per 5 acres. In the 1990s, 2,000-3,000 acres of land each year has been converted from agricultural to suburban uses.



Source: GIS land use database, Dakota County Office of Planning.

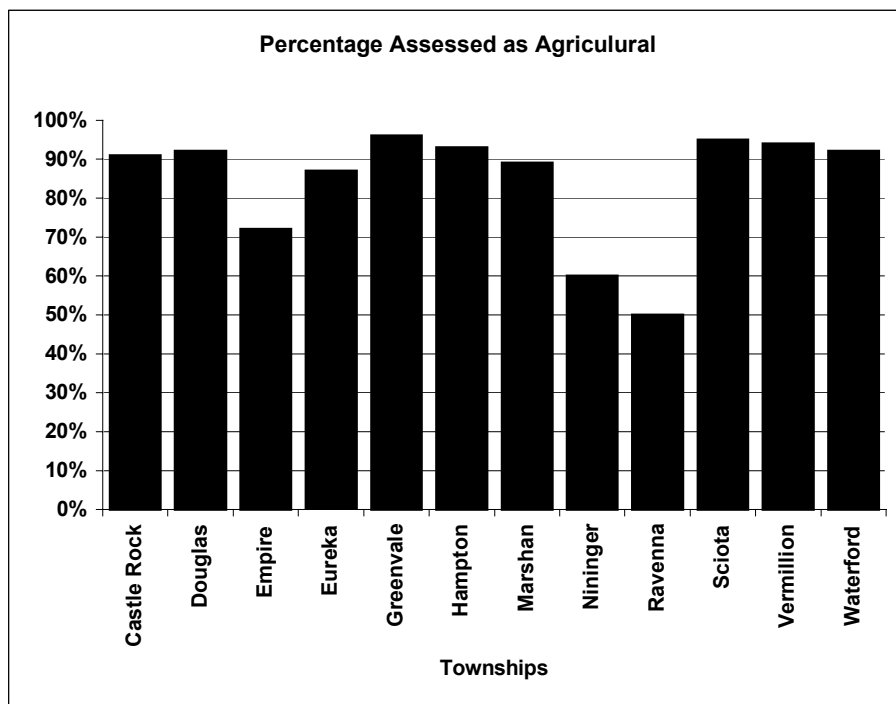
Agriculture and Land Use in Dakota County – Historical Data and Trends

(Sources: 1995 Agricultural Profile, Univ. of Mn/Extension Service; US Census)

Farm Acreage

Out of the 371,200 acres of total acreage in Dakota County in 1950, 85.3% (or 316,647 acres) were categorized as agricultural land. In 1992, 59.6% (or 221,193 acres) were categorized as agriculture. The decrease in farm acreage was primarily due to urbanization of the County.

The number of farms with irrigated land has increased significantly since 1959, when there were 11 farms irrigating 151 acres, to 1992 with 203 farms irrigating 47,710 acres.



Source: Dakota County Assessor's Office and Dakota County GIS property basemap 1997.

Farm Types

The predominant form of agriculture in Dakota County is crop production, mainly corn and soybeans. Livestock production is also a major agricultural activity in the County. There were 75 dairy farms in the County in 1996.

1995 Predominant
Crop Production

85,700	Acres of Corn
59,300	Acres of Soybeans
16,000	Acres of Hay
6,700	Acres of Oats
2,600	Acres of Wheat

1995 Predominant
Types of Livestock

78,000	Pigs
49,500	Hogs
34,600	Cattle and Calves
5,400	Milk Cows
2,300	Beef Cows
1,200	Sheep and Lamb

Alternative farming enterprises in 1992 include horses and ponies, bees and honey, goats, and a variety of miscellaneous crops (asparagus, beets, cantaloupes, cucumbers and pickles, dry onions, green lima beans, hot peppers, pumpkins, squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, Irish potatoes, green peas, snap beans, watermelons, apples, nursery/greenhouse products, sod, grapes, raspberries, and strawberries).

Number of Farms and Rural Population

	Status in 1950	Status in 1990
Number of Farms	1,932	869
Rural Farm Population*	8,619 (18%)	2,200 (1%)
Rural Nonfarm Population**	9,099 (19%)	13,104 (5%)
Urban Population***	31,301 (64%)	259,923 (94%)
Total County Population	49,019	275,186

The number of farms in the County has decreased for two reasons. First, urbanization has reduced the total number of acres in agricultural use. Second, nationally as well as in Dakota County, consolidation and corporate farming have increased farm sizes. The average size of farms has increased – from an average of 164 acres in 1950 to an average of 255 acres in 1992.

Rural farm populations have decreased over the period from 1950 to 1990. Farm populations have diminished because the decrease in agricultural acreage, increased mechanization, and smaller household sizes. On the other hand, rural non-farm population has increased as a result of urban sprawl.

Definitions

- * Rural Farm Population: For 1990, all rural households selling \$1,000 or more of agricultural products in 1989.
- ** Rural Nonfarm Population: The remaining rural population.
- *** Urban Population: For 1990, all places of 2,500 population or more.

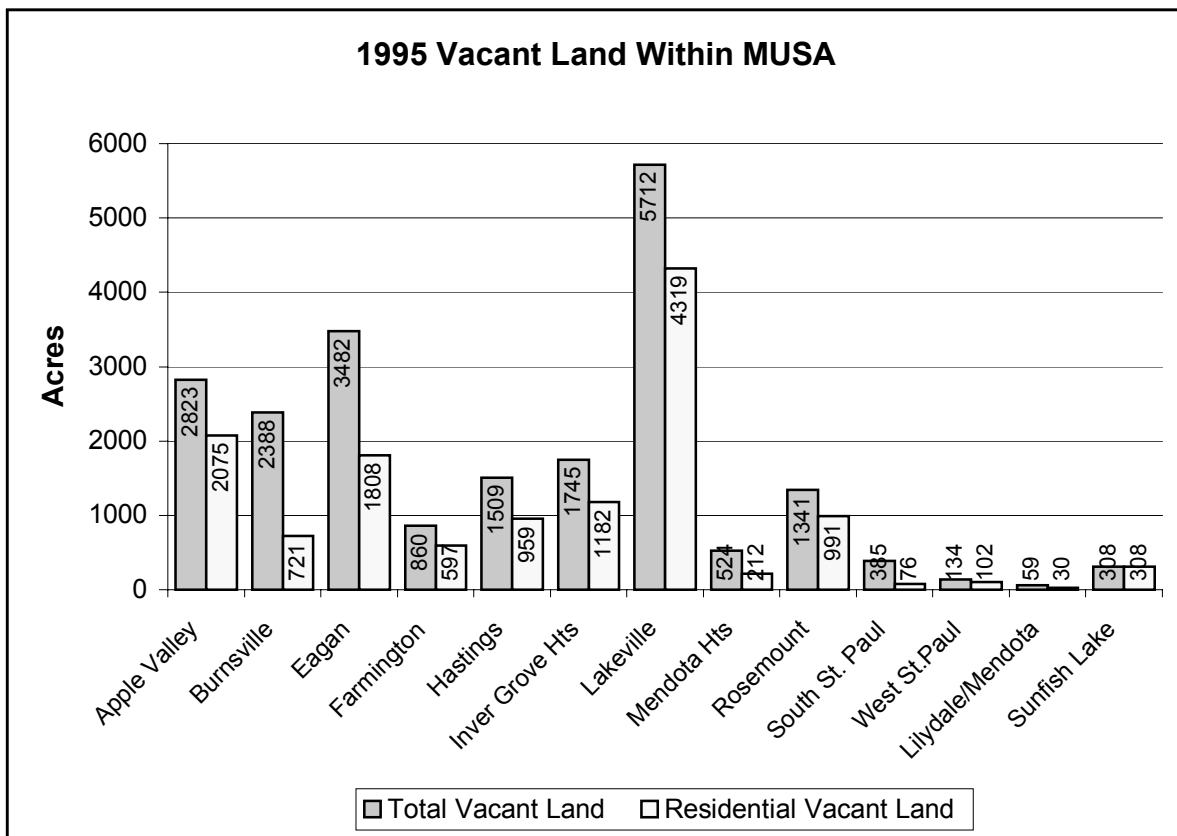
Economic Impacts: In 1992, 1,376 persons were employed by owners of farms in Dakota County. An additional 1,620 people worked at jobs in agricultural services, forestry, fish, and other farm and farm-related employment sectors. In 1992, the 869 farms in Dakota County purchased an average of \$88,395 worth of farm-related goods per farm, for an estimated total of \$ 76,815,255 total purchases by farms in Dakota County. In 1992, the total earnings by farms and farm-related industry in Dakota County was

\$25,552,000. (For comparison, the total non-farm earnings in Dakota County for 1992 was \$3,776,623,000.)

Developed and Undeveloped Land in the MUSA

The Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA) is the area in which urban services will be provided. A total of 26% of Dakota County's total area is within the MUSA. The MUSA is intended to keep suburban development from leapfrogging into agricultural areas. Development that occurs outside of the MUSA requires on-site well and septic systems.

In 1995, there were 21,000 acres of undeveloped land inside the MUSA. The vacant acres of land are distributed among the following cities:



Source: GIS land use database, Dakota County Office of Planning.

FUTURE LAND USE

For the most part, land use decisions in the County are made by the cities and townships through their zoning and land use plans influenced by regional agencies. Dakota County does not have land use authority. Therefore, the following future land use section is a compilation of local and regional plans that will influence County policies and plans.

City and Township Zoning/Land Use Plans

The cities in Dakota County independently administer zoning and comprehensive planning land use controls. These decisions are made to build a tax base, respond to the land market, reduce conflicts between adjacent land uses, and to reflect the communities' vision. The challenge for Dakota County is to look at the collective impact of these individual planning processes, and evaluate how the impacts of their decisions will affect the delivery of services and coordination of multi-agency plans.

County Land Use Forecasts

Dakota County's land use forecast attempts to predict where development will occur over the next 20 years given existing trends and future expectations. Planning staff created this forecast by combining and analyzing information from many different sources. Staff met with all the city planners in the County to discuss the pace and location of future development and to review development history. Future land assignments were based on; building permit trends, zoning maps, comprehensive plan maps, Metro Council forecasts, topography, MUSA extensions. Dakota County's land use forecasts will need to be revised following completion of the Cities' Comprehensive Plans.

Metro Council Growth Management Policy Areas

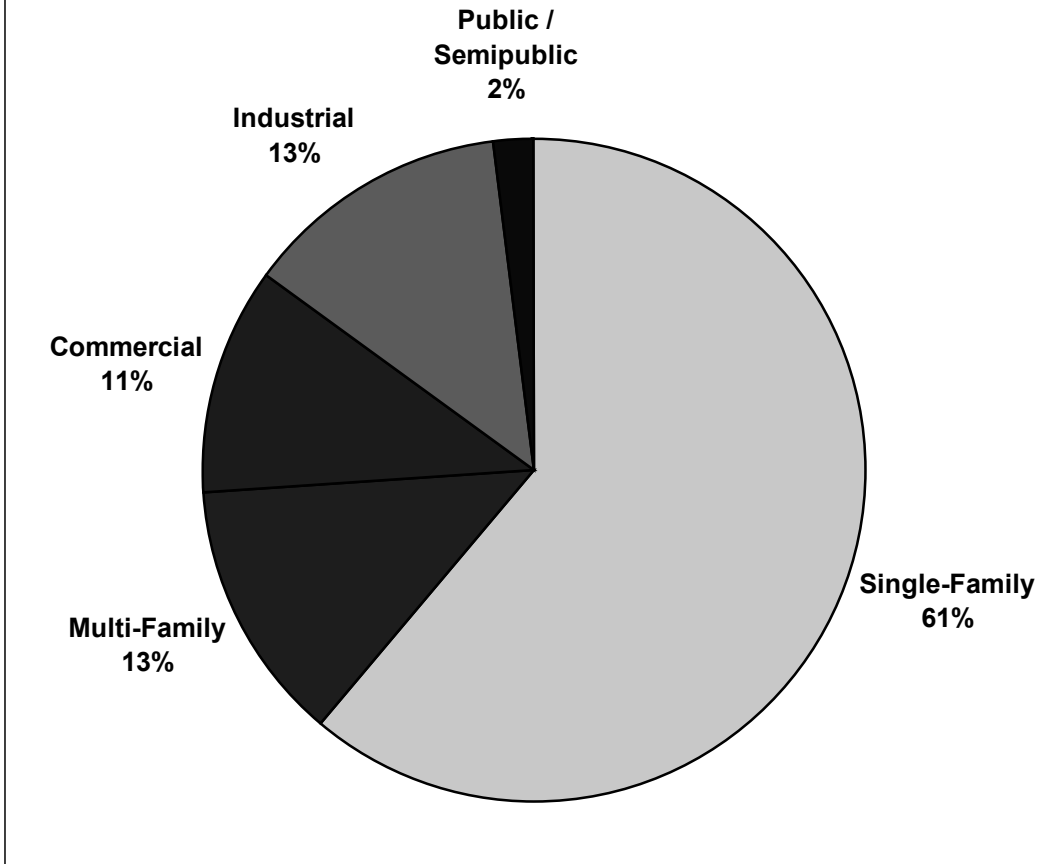
The Metropolitan Council has identified growth management policy areas for Dakota County and the rest of the metro area. The policy areas are intended to direct metropolitan growth through the year 2040. The Council's growth management policy areas are in conflict with local land use plans. The Council has designated areas of Randolph, Empire, Eureka, and Marshan townships for higher residential densities (1 house per 10 acres) than indicated in their local plans (1 house per 40 acres). At the time this Plan was being written, the Council and the townships were negotiating to make regional and local plans consistent. The following map and chart show where growth is guided, and the supply of land allocated for future development.

Dakota County Land Area by Growth Management Policy Area

Policy Area	Acres	Percent of Total Land Area
1996 MUSA	96,400	26%
Urban Reserve (2040 MUSA)	56,200	15%
Permanent Agriculture (1/40)	189,900	51%
Permanent Rural (1/10)	31,900	8%
Rural Growth Center	1,400	<1%

Source: Metropolitan Council Growth Management Policy map.

Figure 2.6
Dakota County Land Use Forecast 1995 - 2015



Source: GIS land use forecast, Dakota County Office of Planning.

Dakota County Land Use Forecast (1995-2015)

Future Development	Acres
Single Family	16490
Multi Family	3522
Industrial	3668
Commercial	3072
Public/Semi-Public	485

OFFICIAL LAND USE CONTROLS

Dakota County administers the following ordinances for the purposes of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Dakota County, and to protect the natural resources of the County.

Zoning

The County does not administer zoning except in the floodplain and shoreland districts of the unincorporated areas of the County (see shoreland and floodplain ordinance below).

Street Naming and Numbering

Dakota County assigns street names and numbers for the cities of Apple Valley, Inver Grove Heights, Lakeville, and the unincorporated areas of the County.

Contiguous Plat Ordinance

Dakota County has plat review authority over plats filed adjacent to County roads and parks. The County Plat Commission reviews plats for issues of county-wide significance including ingress and egress to and from county roads, approach grade intersection with county needs, drainage, safety standards, right-of-way requirements of county roads, and local road system integration with the county road system.

Shoreland and Floodplain Zoning Ordinance

Shoreland and floodplain areas are regulated to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The ordinance regulates land subdivision, use, and development of shorelands and public waters. The ordinance was adopted to; preserve and enhance the quality of surface waters, protect and preserve the outstanding values of a designated Wild and Scenic River, to conserve the economic and natural environmental values of shorelands, and to provide for the wise use of waters and related land resources

On-site Sewage Treatment

Each city and township administers their own sewage system ordinance that the Dakota County Office of Planning administers the sewage system ordinance within the Shoreland and Floodplain areas of townships. All municipalities are encouraged to adopt Dakota County Individual Sewage Treatment Ordinance No. 113. The primary intent of Ordinance 113 is to protect our irreplaceable natural resources of groundwater, surface waters, soils and bedrock, and to promote the public health, safety and general welfare of the citizens of Dakota County.

Solid Waste Management Ordinance

Dakota County manages solid wastes in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public, prevent the spread of disease, prevent the creation of nuisances, conserve our natural resources, and maintain the beauty and quality of our natural environment.

Hazardous Waste Management Ordinance

Hazardous waste generators and facilities are required to be licensed by the County. Inspections of the businesses may be performed by County staff to assure proper management of the hazardous wastes on the site. Violations may be prosecuted as a misdemeanor or felony. Violators may also be subject to civil action under the Administrative Penalty Orders Ordinance.

Standards Adopted By Reference

The Dakota County Comprehensive Plan adopts by reference all future revisions to its official controls which are identified in the Plan upon their approval by the Board of Commissioners, including all future amendments made as the result of changes in State law and rules.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL 1: MEASURE AND EVALUATE DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN DAKOTA COUNTY AND THE REGION

In order to efficiently deliver County services in a coordinated manner with local land use plans, the County needs to be aware of existing land use patterns, and future land use development. Clearly, County decisions regarding roadway expansion or location of new facilities have a direct influence on land use decisions. The County's ability to coordinate its plans with local land use plans will be based on its ability to monitor and evaluate development trends to create a basis of information for sound decision making.

Citizens' Corner

Citizen Survey: 78% of citizens felt "planning for future growth" was a "very important" function for Dakota County to undertake
20% said somewhat important
1% said not too important
0% not at all important
1% don't know/refused

Citizen Jury: In general, the Citizens Jury supported more government cooperation and communication, more joint planning, and government coordination.

Citizen Update: 30% of people feel that population growth is much too fast
35% somewhat too fast
30% about right
2% somewhat too slow
1% much too slow
2% don't know

Focus Groups: (did not address)

- L.1. County will analyze and provide information on development trends and land use forecasts to cities, townships, school districts, and other agencies to coordinate planning efforts in Dakota County**

Strategies

- Map construction of new houses.
- Monitor and map rural residential development patterns in agricultural areas.
- Track employer sizes and locations.

- Map and analyze demographic trends.
- Meet with cities on a regular basis to update county land use forecasts.
- Distribute information to agencies and citizens.
- Prepare and periodically update land use forecasts.
- Provide support to townships in their administration of 1 unit per 40 acres zoning density.

L.2. County will use development trends and land use forecasts to review the need for County services such as roads, service centers, highway shops, bike trails, parks, and other facilities.

Strategies

- Provide land use needs analysis to other County departments.

L.3. County will review regional and local plans for compatibility and impact on County plans.

Strategies

- Monitor and comment on local communities' requests for MUSA additions.
- Monitor and comment on other communities land use plans and make adjustments to county plans if necessary.
- Environmental review (feedlots, gravel operations, eaws)
- Review Metropolitan Council Regional Blueprint and comment.

GOAL 2: PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND AND FARMING

Dakota County has some of the most productive farmland in the State of Minnesota. Rapid suburban development has diminished the total amount of land used for agriculture.

Rural residential development threatens agricultural land in two ways. First, residential development reduces the total amount of agricultural land. Second, the mixing of residential development with agricultural land cause land use conflicts that interfere with farming practices. Most of Dakota County's townships have implemented 1/40 zoning regulations to attempt to curb the construction of new suburban houses in agricultural areas. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, approximately 100 houses per year have been constructed in the townships. Most of those houses have been built in plats that were approved before 1/40 zoning and are "grandfathered" uses. However, other counties in the metropolitan area have experienced widespread large lot development throughout their agricultural areas, and Dakota County's townships will likely experience increasing pressure to approve residential developments as well.

There are many reasons the County may wish to play an increased role in farmland protection. These include;

- To protect agriculture as an industry
- Save prime farmland as a resource
- Minimize land use conflicts between agricultural areas and rural residential development.
- Protect private open space and scenic vistas
- Preserve rural communities/lifestyles
- Limit the cost and energy required to raise crops
- Limit public infrastructure costs at the urban fringe by keeping urban/rural land uses separate
- Preserve the local economic base

The issue of farmland protection was frequently discussed in the Comprehensive Plan citizen participation groups. In those discussions, people generally expressed a desire to preserve farmland and open spaces, yet recognized that land owners have certain rights regarding the use of their property.

While the County cannot preserve farmland through the use of zoning authority, it can choose to support local land use initiatives. For example, the County could assist township government in the use of purchase of development rights (PDR), transfer of development rights (TDR), conservation easements or clustering techniques. The County's role could be one of education or administration of those programs. In addition, the County could make available its resources to help townships identify areas of prime farmland and help them target those areas for preservation.

Citizens' Corner

Citizens' Survey: 33% strongly favor land use regulations on agricultural land

50% favor

7% oppose

1% strongly oppose

9% don't know/refused

12% of citizens strongly support putting “restrictions on the location of rural non-farm homes”

40% somewhat support

21% somewhat oppose

10% strongly oppose

17% don't know/refused

Citizen Jury: *We value: farms, open space, agricultural lifestyle, and family farms*

Citizen Update: *52% strongly agree that the community values most likely to be harmed by growth are the role of the agricultural economy in the County and environmental quality.*

26% agree

9% neither agree or disagree

8% disagree

4% strongly disagree

1% no opinion

Focus Groups: *2/3 of citizens wanted new programs and policies to preserve rural areas
1/3 of citizens endorsed continuing current zoning patterns and programs for protecting rural areas
No one reported that they wanted to “loosen up” zoning to allow more homes on land where septic systems would need to be installed.*

L. 4 County will help cities and townships protect prime or productive agricultural land for long term agricultural use.

Strategies

- Participate in farmland protection advisory committee.
- Identify prime farmland using land evaluation methods.
- Identify prime farmland in the path of development using site assessment methods.
- Investigate a program to donate development rights to a public land trust.
- Provide township maps for community planning including: site evaluation maps, prime farmland maps, septic suitability maps.
- Support SWCD and Ag Extension services (map high erosion areas, pesticide leaching potential, feedlots, CRP, etc.)
- Support and strengthen agricultural zoning (1 unit per 40 acres density). Consider county involvement in township zoning administration, record-keeping, mapping.

L. 5 County will promote planning efforts to preserve agriculture as a permanent land use and a viable economic activity.

Strategies

- Evaluate the benefits of a right-to-farm ordinance.
- Participate in Phase I and Phase II of the Metro Council's Agricultural Land Protection Task Force.
- Host an educational forum to discuss the local governments' capability to preserve agricultural land preserve rural communities.
- Investigate the use of the following agricultural protection tools: more consistent 1/40 zoning, purchase of conservation easements, clustering, and purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, rural center growth etc.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE LAND USE PATTERNS THAT VALUE AND SUSTAIN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

As the suburbs of Dakota County continue their advance southward there is increasing pressure to develop remaining natural areas. In the Comprehensive Plan public participation process, citizens have expressed concern over the future of these natural areas, and have indicated a desire to increase preservation efforts.

Citizens' Corner

Citizen Survey: 45% strongly favor land use regulations on the remaining undisturbed natural areas in the County.
42% favor
5% oppose
2% strongly oppose
6% don't know/refused

Citizen Jury: *Acquire/purchase remaining natural areas for purposes of protection/preservation.*

Maintain priority of preserving open space throughout the County.

- *Maintain priority of preserving wildlife and natural resources.*
- *Extend shoreland protection to include a wider area*
- *Keep open spaces*

Provide financial incentives that encourage preservation of natural areas including:

- *More use of Land Stewardship organization*
- *Easements should be provided*
- *Tax breaks to support conservation*
- *Initiate program with incentives to encourage non-development of natural areas*

Develop partnerships between city/county to develop area-wide corridors

Citizen Update: 54% of people agree that the County should encourage policies that manage growth so that we can keep pace with our ability to provide a supply of quality resources --- even if property taxes were increased to provide financial incentives to encourage preservation of natural areas.

18% neither agree or disagree with the above statement
26% disagree
2% no opinion

Focus Groups: 2/3 of the residents interviewed indicated that they wanted new programs and policies enacted to protect environmental and natural resources

1/3 favored existing programs

The majority of residents wanted who favored new programs and policies tended to be in favor of purchasing the remaining natural areas, of funding incentive programs to encourage landowners to protect the land, and to a lesser extent, of developing new regulations to control activities or land uses that pollute. Programs to raise public awareness and better enforce existing regulations were seen as being less effective options.

Nearly ¾ of those who participated in the focus group discussions indicated that they would support the enactment of new programs and policies to develop parks, recreation, and open spaces in Dakota County.

Land use planning efforts will determine how many of the County's remaining natural areas are preserved. The County's efforts in natural area protection and preservation can be directed towards the following topic areas:

- 1) Shoreland and floodplain districts
- 2) Mississippi River Critical Area
- 3) Other high value natural areas and open space

SHORELAND AND FLOODPLAIN DISTRICTS

While the County has few land use controls, it does have zoning authority in the floodplain and shoreland districts of the unincorporated areas. Dakota County's shoreland areas are designated by the MN Department of Natural Resources. Floodplains in Dakota County have been mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (see figure). The County regulates subdivision, use, and development of shorelands and public waters through its shoreland and floodplain management ordinance adopted in 1973. The ordinance was adopted to:

- Preserve and enhance the quality of surface waters
- Protect the health safety and welfare of the public
- To protect and preserve the outstanding values of a designated Wild and Scenic River
- To conserve the economic and natural environmental values of shorelands.
- To provide for the wise use of waters and related land resources

The shoreland and floodplain districts experience greater development pressure than the surrounding agricultural land for a number of reasons. Typically they are more scenic because of the presence of trees, water and terrain. Also, farmers are more likely to subdivide land in shoreland/floodplain areas because of topography and they are more likely to have marginal soils that are less suitable for farming.

While pressure to develop shoreland/floodplain districts is not likely to decrease, opportunities may exist to improve existing programs and ordinances using increasingly better land use information. One example of such an improvement would be to consider consolidating floodplain/shoreland review with address

assignment, well permitting, and septic inspection, effectively creating one point of contact in the County for its citizens.

- L. 6 County will protect shoreland and floodplain areas to preserve and enhance surface water quality, prevent economic loss, and conserve the natural environment.**

Strategies

- Prohibit new residences and businesses from locating in existing floodplains and evaluate a program for amortizing non-conforming uses.
- Map non-conforming land uses in the shoreland/floodplain districts, as defined by the Dakota County shoreland/floodplain ordinance.
- Review and evaluate requests from township officials or property owners for rezoning, subdivision, lot splits, and zoning appeals in the shoreland and floodplain districts.

- L.7. County will promote and maintain cooperation with the townships to protect shoreland and floodplain areas.**

Strategies

- Meet annually with township officials for review and update of the floodplain and shoreland program.
- Notify landowners with property in the floodplain and shoreland districts of new information or program changes affecting them.
- Maintain and periodically distribute maps of all property in shoreland and floodplain districts.

- L.8. County will limit development in shoreland and floodplain areas in a manner consistent with state statutes.**

- L.9. County will continue to administer its floodplain/shoreland ordinance in a fair and consistent manner, based on the most accurate information available.**

Strategies

- Continue to improve the identification of district boundaries (two-foot contours).
- Update shoreland/floodplain ordinance and implementation schedule.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER CRITICAL AREA / MNNRA

The Critical Areas Act was passed by the Minnesota Legislature in 1973. The entire length of the Mississippi River within the seven-county metropolitan area was designated a critical area, in response to concerns about preservation and enhancement of the Mississippi River. The purposes of the Mississippi River Critical Area designation were to:

- 1) Promote orderly development of the residential, commercial, industrial, and public areas in the river corridor.
- 2) Conserve the natural and scenic beauty of the corridor
- 3) Conserve and develop natural resources in the corridor
- 4) Provide for the compatibility of land use throughout the corridor

In 1988 Congress established the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNNRA) as a unit of the National Park System. The MNNRA boundary coincides with the Critical Area boundary. The National Park Service has a comprehensive management plan to help local communities plan and manage the resources of the river corridor.

Please refer to the County's Critical Area Plan for specific policies.

L.10. County will support actions by local governments to protect the natural environment of the river corridor in order to preserve wildlife habitat, biological diversity, and scenic character - before the opportunity is lost to development or land use change.

Strategies

- Plan and implement County Critical Area requirements.
- Consider preparing County MNRRA Plan.
- Work with and assist local communities to prepare maps and GIS data for their critical area plans.
- Work with Metropolitan Council, State, and Federal agencies on the American Heritage River Program.

HIGH VALUE NATURAL AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Only 2% of Dakota County remains in its natural state, ½ of which is protected. The other ½ of the remaining natural areas in the County are unprotected and could potentially be lost to development. The traditional planning, zoning and subdivision process often does not provide for the protection of these kinds of areas. While the County does not have land use controls to directly influence land use planning, the County has opportunities to protect natural areas in any or all of the following ways:

- Identify sensitive, unique, or highly valued natural areas
- Promote the use of new and innovative land use planning techniques so that cities and townships can minimize the loss of natural areas
- Use GIS and County resources (e.g. databases, people) to identify and prioritize threatened natural areas
- Coordinate private, local, regional, state, and national planning efforts
- Use County zoning tools when available (shoreland/floodplain districts)
- Purchase properties
- Purchase conservation easements

L.11. County will try to preserve environmentally pristine, sensitive, or unique areas, and set aside other open spaces (even if not environmentally significant) that are highly valued by the County's residents, before they are lost to development.

Strategies

- Identify, categorize and map high value natural areas and share with local communities and land trusts.
- Notify land trusts and request that they facilitate or directly purchase high value natural areas.
- Consider purchasing entire properties or conservation easements over the highest value natural areas.
- In cases where natural or open areas cannot be entirely preserved, encourage the use of creative urban design to cluster development and preserve open space.
- Use parks, open space, trails, and zoning (where the County has authority) to create greenway corridors.
- Conduct resident surveys to identify “high value” open spaces that may not necessarily be sensitive or unique.
- Coordinate county greenway planning with local plans.
- Identify and delineate potential greenway corridors.
- Clarify purpose of individual greenway corridors.
- Apply for greenway grants.
- Use existing sources of data such as the DNR County Biologic Survey.
- Use partnerships with other agencies to protect high value natural areas and open spaces.

GOAL 4: SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT

Many studies have shown that it is costly to provide government services to certain land development patterns such as leap frog residential (non-contiguous development) or scattered large lot development with on-site well and septic.

The following concerns and costs are associated with large lot development:

- High road construction and maintenance costs
- Difficult to provide transit service
- More expensive to deliver social services
- Land use conflicts between rural residential and agricultural use
- Accelerated consumption of agricultural land
- On-going environmental management costs
- Barriers to orderly expansion of municipal services
- Fragmentation of agricultural parcels

In the Comprehensive Plan participation process, citizens expressed concern about the conflicts that occur between large lot development and farming.

Currently, the Metropolitan Council uses a Metropolitan Urban Service Area boundary (MUSA) to limit the extent of development with city water and sewer. While this boundary is intended to stop the spread of the urban area into the countryside, it restricts the amount of land available for development. As a result, people build houses outside of the MUSA boundary with on-site sewer and water. Therefore, the MUSA, while created to reduce spreading of urban areas into the countryside, may actually have created unintended consequences (people buy cheap land outside the MUSA for wells and septic.)

Once again, while the County has very limited authority to guide land use through local controls, the impact of local land use decisions on the delivery of County services is significant. The County can support orderly development through its road construction policies, and through the local plan review process.

Citizens' Corner

Citizen Survey: *In answer to the question: "What do you feel is the most serious issue facing Dakota County at this time?" The number one answer was "growth"(23%), followed by "crime"(20%) second, and "taxes" (18%) third. Similarly, when posed with the question: "Now, looking ahead in time... And, what do you think will be the most serious issue facing the County in the next twenty years?" The number one answer was again "growth" at 35%*

78% of citizens felt "planning for future growth" was a "very important" function for Dakota County to undertake

20% said somewhat important

1% said not too important

0% not at all important

1% don't know/refused

53% of people feel that the population growth was about right
42% say too fast
3% say too slow
2% don't know/refused
23% strongly favor clustering housing to preserve open space
44% favor clustering
13% oppose
6% strongly oppose
14% don't know/refused

26% strongly support "strict adherence to a plan which specifies appropriate locations for various land uses"
51% somewhat support
7% somewhat oppose
5% strongly oppose
11% don't know/refused

Citizen Jury: General Policy Statement (1) Encourage policies that manage growth so that we can keep pace with our ability to provide a supply of quality resources (24 – 0)

Citizen Update: 69% of people agree strongly with the statement that the county should encourage policies that manage growth so that we can keep pace with our ability to provide a supply of quality services.
19% agree
7% neither agree nor disagree
2% disagree
3% strongly disagree
1% no opinion

Focus Groups: ¼ recommended that Dakota County continue its current policies with respect to older communities
¾ favored enacting new programs and policies to address the needs of older communities such as private/public partnerships with non-profits and other organizations.

The focus group participants engaged in an exercise where they were each given 100 points to allocate to 32 separate issues including growth management, environment, transportation, and parks and recreation. Participants allocated the most points to "policies that support slowing down growth", followed by "support development of light or commuter rail" and "policies that support the current growth rate".

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

- L.12. County will support land use planning which encourages orderly development and redevelopment in anticipation of the growth forecasted for Dakota County.**
- L.13. County will support land use patterns that are compatible with the Metropolitan Council's growth management policy areas and local comprehensive plans.**
- L.14. County will recognize and plan for the County's share of metropolitan growth, where supported by regional and local comprehensive plans.**

EXISTING URBAN AREAS

- L.15. County will support sustainable urban communities and neighborhoods**

Strategies

Equitably plan (according to population distribution), site, fund, build, and maintain county facilities in existing urban areas (bike trails, parks, roads/change cost share agreements, libraries, service centers, transit hubs), as in other parts of the County.

Assist cities in identifying and cleaning up brownfield sites, to prepare them for redevelopment.

Support the use of tax increment financing to redevelop blighted areas

Map and identify where TIF has been used in the past to redevelop blighted areas and other areas.

Identify pockets of transit dependent populations and support land use and transit solutions.

Support redevelopment and transit initiatives through the Dakota County Economic Development Partnership and the County Transit Coordinator.

Use GIS to help cities inventory and categorize historic buildings, culturally significant areas, and sites.

RURAL TO URBAN TRANSITION AREA

Transitional areas are areas without urban services (sewer, water, etc.), but which are planned to become urban and be provided with urban services in the future. Transitional areas should include the following

characteristics: a distinction between existing rural and planned urban areas, compatible land use patterns, large land parcels (20-plus acres) prior to urban services, timing and staging of urban services for planned land uses and population forecasts, and new urban development served by urban services.

L.16. County will review city, township, and regional plans for compatibility with county plans and potential impact on county services or facilities.

Strategies

- Compare projected land use needs (by land use category) with land use supply and plan facilities roads, transit, and facilities to match planned land uses and service needs.
- Review and comment on cities' requests to the Metropolitan Council for extension of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area as required by statute.
- Use the County Plat Commission to require modification of plats where internal circulation patterns negatively impact County roads with unnecessary short, local trips. Offer incentives to encourage quality designed cost-efficient subdivisions.
- Plan and acquire right-of-way dedication according to County traffic forecasts and long-range local planning. The County will build or upgrade roads concurrent with demonstrated need.
- Review and comment on proposed subdivision plats of significant size or potential impacts on services or natural environment.

L.17. County will support local planning for transitional areas through timely provision of County facilities which supports planned urbanization and preserving rural areas.

Strategies

- Identify future urban growth areas/transition areas
- Develop County C.I.P. in agreement with growth management areas

L.18. County will support local city and township long range planning for orderly annexation or incorporation

Strategies

- Encourage local communities to use long-range planning techniques (such as "shadow platting") to anticipate future land uses, scale of development, and staged provision of urban services.
- Publicize the urban growth area boundary and staging supported by Dakota County to land owners, realtors, and developers.

L.19. County will discourage large lot residential development in transitional areas

Strategies

- Review local plans and support consistently enforced agricultural zoning density (1 unit per 40 acres)

RURAL AREAS

Orderly development in rural centers is supported by local plans and zoning which restrict non-farm development from agricultural areas, supports land uses which are compatible with agricultural operations, supports the small-town quality of life and "rural character", and which provides funding for urban public services (such as sewer and water) in rural centers which want to encourage development in their cities.

L.20. County will support the planning and zoning efforts of rural centers and townships and guide rural residential development to rural cities with urban services

Strategies

- Guide rural residential growth to urban density development in small towns

L.21. County will restrict rural residential development in long-term, permanent agricultural areas.

Strategies

- Publicize the urban growth area policies for rural cities, to landowners, developers, and realtors.
- Dakota County will support local plans and zoning ordinances which limit residential development to a zoning density of 1 dwelling unit per 40 acres ("1 per 40") in rural, agricultural areas.
- Promote conservation easements and restrict rural residential development by linking taxation policy and township zoning authority.
- Dakota County will support the Green Acres and Agricultural Preserves programs, and participate in regional and state initiatives to protect agricultural land.
- Dakota County will not build highways prematurely or at a scale that serves more than agricultural use and density in rural, agricultural communities. Dakota County will not build roads to promote growth in rural areas. Dakota County will continue to use its practice of approximately 300 ADT (average daily traffic) for decisions on paving rural roads.

GOAL 5: ENCOURAGE LAND USE PATTERNS AND COMMUNITY DESIGN THAT SUPPORT PEDESTRIAN AND TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Dakota County's land use patterns have been shaped by the use of the automobile; they are not conducive to transit use. Although there are opportunities to increase transit use through park and rides, these facilities still require the use of an automobile.

There are two types of transit riders in Dakota County. The first group are people that are dependent on transit to get to work, shop, school, medical appointments, etc. People in this group include children, persons unable to afford a car, people that choose not to own a car, handicapped people, or the elderly. The second group, are people that have an automobile but choose to use transit either for convenience, cost savings, or other reasons. There are major differences between these two groups of people and the transit services they need or desire. Transit dependent riders need a geographically extensive transit network with long hours of operation since they do not have other transportation alternatives available to them. The other group, people that have automobiles, desire transit solutions that offer competitive travel times and convenience, but not necessarily the costs of transit associated with long hours of operation or extensive service areas. Despite their differences, both groups require "transit friendly" land use to make transit work.

Adding more transit service will not alleviate traffic congestion in Dakota County unless land use patterns change as well. Land use solutions, such as more mixed development, pedestrian friendly design, and the incorporation of transit service into future land use patterns is necessary to make a measurable difference in traffic congestion.

If the County becomes more active in transit, it may designate transit corridors and work with cities to design transit in a manner that is supported by "transit friendly" land use patterns. In addition, the County could use its funding policies to reward cities and townships that strive to develop orderly land settlement patterns that reduce the cost of County systems and programs.

Citizens' Corner

Citizen Survey: 47% of citizens felt there was "too little" transit, bus service, park and ride lots, or car pool lanes in the County.

38% said enough

3% said too much

12% don't know/refuse

47% thought that there was "too little" off-road bicycle or pedestrian paths in the County

42% said enough

1% said too much

10% don't know/refused

Citizen Jury: *General Policy Statement (1) Encourage policies that manage growth so that we can keep pace with our ability to provide a supply of quality resources (24 – 0)*

Focus Groups: $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants wanted new programs and policies enacted with regards to transportation in Dakota County. Those who endorsed change in the transportation system were particularly drawn to the transit options – especially the development of light rail and the expansion of transit hubs. At the same time though, there was general consensus that the many forms of the high density residential development needed to make transit work were undesirable.

L.22. County will encourage land use patterns that provide alternatives to automobile use

Strategies

- Identify and map concentrations of compact residential development that can be potentially served by transit.
- Identify existing land uses and travel corridors in the county that could be transformed into transit friendly corridors.
- In the County's review of tax increment financing (TIF), consider supporting the use of TIF for transit-friendly land uses and communities.
- Locate transit hubs, transit ways, and other transit infrastructure in coordination with transit friendly land uses.
- Set an example for the planning and design of transit-friendly land uses by attempting to locate County facilities in transit corridors or where transit service is available.
- Dakota County will work through its Housing and Redevelopment Authority and local cities to locate senior housing in or adjacent to transit hubs.
- Encourage cities in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area to adopt a plan for developing or redeveloping areas to include transit-friendly land uses.
- Encourage local planning for mixed land use areas in or adjacent to transit corridors.