

Chapter 3

Vision, Goals + Policies

The Comprehensive Plan is a statement of what Benton County wants to become. It is a set of goals and policies designed to achieve a community wide vision. The Comprehensive Plan is based on a composition of concepts, patterns and relationships that deal with integrating the social aspects of a community with its physical development. Unlike the Development Code, the Comprehensive Plan is futuristic in that it guides decisions that have yet to be made.

In many ways, the 2040 Comprehensive Plan builds on prior planning efforts. It includes directives (goals and policies) for maintaining our landscape, while preserving our rural and farming character, abundant open spaces and natural resources. Recognizing that the overall environment is an economic asset of the County, protection of our lands and natural resources is a high priority. The livability, public health and economic vitality of our towns are also highly valued. Our values are captured in the Plan's vision, goals and policies. These plan elements are defined below:

- **Vision:** The vision is a broad statement that encompasses the overarching aspirations of the county over the next twenty-years.
- **Goals:** Goals are broad statements that describe a desired outcome or end-state. Goals are often long-term in scope.
- **Policies:** Policies describe the general course of action or way in which programs and activities are conducted to achieve a stated goal. Policies speak to underlying values, context, or principles, and are sometimes place-specific.

Vision Statement

As part of the plan's early public engagement efforts, a vision emerged for the future of Benton County. The vision is a broad statement that encompasses the overarching aspirations of the county. More importantly, this statement reflects the public's desire to maintain the County's unique character and sense of place.

2040 Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement

The following vision statements were used to help guide the development of the plan's goals and policies.

Benton County is a vibrant community which seeks to:

- **Uphold its quality of life, a standard of living that preserves the rural and agricultural nature of the County, while enhancing its worth with quality services and programs**
- **Balance land uses and growth in a sustainable manner**
- **Promote economic development in business and agriculture through its use of technology and available resources**
- **Protect its environment and natural resources including farmland, water, air, habitat and aggregate resources**
- **Recognize mobility as a contributing factor to the economic development, health, and quality of life of rural communities**

Goals + Policies

The Comprehensive Plan is guided by a set of goals and policies that have their origins in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan. Since that time, the goals and policies have been expanded upon to reflect community and stakeholder input. The goals and policies have also been categorized into five key areas that capture the themes described in the vision statements (Quality of Life, Land Use, Economic Development, Environment and Natural Resources, and Mobility). A narrative for each area is described below to provide general context behind the listed goals and policies.



Quality of Life

Residents continue to cite “quality of life” as one of the strongest assets that draw people to Benton County. The comprehensive plan is a reflection of these values, such as rural, farming and agrarian lifestyles, and are translated through the various plan elements (e.g., land use, transportation, natural resources, and parks and trails). The comprehensive plan also recognizes that the values tied to a high quality of life are fostered through County programs and services.

Benton County is committed to providing a high quality of life for its citizens through access to a variety of County programs and services, housing options, public health initiatives, and recreational amenities. Achieving these standards can be challenging from a funding and staffing perspective. Therefore, it is important to recognize the financial commitments and resources required to deliver

various programs and services. The comprehensive plan is not a financial document; instead, the goals and policies provide direction for future decision making. As part of these efforts, it is also important to recognize the County’s changing demographics (e.g., aging population, shortage in workers, and an increase in diversity). These shifts may influence the demand and delivery of a particular service or program over time.

The following goals and policies reflect Benton County’s quality of life and commitment to delivering services and programs.

Goal 1: Livability

Maintain and enhance the livability of Benton County for all members of the community.

Policies

1. **Population Diversity:** Promote appreciation of diverse populations.
2. **Human Services:** Continue to provide human services serving a wide variety of Benton County residents including vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, minorities, and those with disabilities. Expand online resources with web links for information and services specifically targeted towards these groups.
3. **ADA Transition Plan:** Continue to work toward creating an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan and Inventory. Once the plan is created, follow its implementation strategies.
4. **Age in Place:** Pursue opportunities to assist seniors to “age in place,” including providing options for life-cycle housing and transportation choices to essential destinations and resources.
5. **Mobility Options:** Promote transit options (public and private) that serve a growing population that requires alternative modes to access key destinations (e.g., jobs, public services, schools and town centers).

6. **Plan for Health:** Consider public health as an important factor when developing County programs, services, plans and policies. Pursue health options in all long range planning with a preventative approach.
7. **Funding:** Actively pursue various funding mechanisms (e.g., grants) that help enhance Benton County's quality through active living and public health initiatives.

Goal #2: Housing Stock

Continue to maintain a high quality living environment in all residential neighborhoods and upgrade those in need of improvement.

Policies

1. **County HRA:** Explore the expansion of the County HRA's role in housing development and redevelopment activities.
2. **Life Cycle Housing:** Promote the improvement and maintenance of the existing housing stock to provide sanitary living conditions and ensure that an adequate amount of housing is maintained, including retrofitting existing homes to better serve families in need of affordable housing.

Goal 3: Parks & Trails

Develop, maintain, and manage a County park, trail, and open space system to meet the needs of the community by utilizing various methods of fiscally responsible funding strategies.

Policies

1. **County Park System:** Maintain the existing County park system in a way that is safe and meets the intergenerational needs of the community.
2. **Recreational Diversity:** Provide recreational amenities ranging in intensity and recreation type across a broad spectrum of skill levels and abilities to meet the needs of all residents.

3. **Coordination:** Coordinate with local and state agencies to avoid overlap in park and trail development, and work together to fill gaps in the system.

4. **Destinations:** Create and improve key County park destinations (e.g., Benton Beach and Bend in the River), while finding opportunities to support new parks in areas of the County that are underserved.
5. **Connectivity:** Ensure that there is a balance within the County Park System that creates connections between the rural and urbanizing areas of the County.
6. **Trails:** Promote the development and improvement of a larger interconnected network of both on-street and off-street trails.
7. **Greenspace:** Preserve and protect natural areas, open spaces and water bodies that can contribute to an interconnected greenway system.
8. **Shared Facilities:** Promote the sharing of recreational facilities among area communities.



9. **Coordinate and Collaborate:** Coordinate and collaborate between departments (e.g., administration, planning, public health and public works) and with state agencies (e.g., DNR and MnDOT) to ensure future park and trail improvements achieve regional and community benefits.
10. **Funding:** Review the current funding mechanisms for parks and trails, and consider various funding options for the acquisition and maintenance of parkland and the development of recreational and/or community education activities.
11. **Park Dedication Fees:** Maintain a sustainable park dedication fee that helps enhance the parks and trails system at the local and regional level.

Goal 4: Community Facilities

Continue to maintain and improve all community facilities.

Policies

1. **Community Facilities:** Continue to maintain community facilities and identify areas of improvement in a capital improvement plan.
2. **Facility Coordination:** Promote maximum cooperation and assistance to other governmental and partner agencies in planning and developing facilities that provide a high level of service and avoid duplication of services or facilities.

Goal 5: Service Efficiency

Maximize public service efficiencies at the local level both through effective planning and management practices, innovation, and sound stewardship of human and financial resources.

Policies

1. **Capital Improvement Program:** Continue to plan for the maintenance and upgrading of all public facilities through the use of a County capital improvement program.
2. **County Staff:** Continue to improve and update the County's staff capabilities through training, improved facilities and equipment, and better management.
3. **Volunteerism:** Look to provide opportunities for volunteerism, participation in community activities and acceptance of community leadership positions.
4. **Community Engagement:** Engage and invite community members to participate in the local decision-making processes.



Goal 6: Public Health

Assure that opportunities to be healthy are available everywhere and for everyone.

Policies

- Building Capacity:** Use a collaborative approach to improve the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across all sectors and policy areas.
- Food:** Pursue opportunities to provide and grow healthy and affordable food options for County residents.
- Planning for Health:** Consider food access, active living, environmental quality (e.g., air, water, smoke, and toxins), health care options and human services when planning for future land uses.
- Inform & Educate:** Expand conversations about what creates health and educate residents on the social determinants of health.
- Assessments:** Continue to monitor, report and plan based on the health status of County residents.



Land Use

Comprehensive plans play a pivotal role in shaping our landscape by influencing future land use decisions that can have a significant impact on the built environment and access to resources. In that respect, the Land Use Plan is arguably the most prominent chapter in the Benton County Comprehensive Plan. It gives people a visual representation of what the county is expected to look like in the future. The text, maps and images contained in the Land Use Plan provide a basis for making decisions on future land use regulations and development. The Land Use Plan also includes provisions that protect development from resources to minimize conflicts, and directs higher density development towards urban areas to help maintain efficient delivery of services.

The following goals and policies emphasize Benton County's land use controls, while balancing growth in a sustainable manner.

Goal 1: Planning for Growth

Maximize the potential of Benton County as a thriving center for agriculture, business, and recreation, while planning for orderly and efficient growth.

Policies

- Comprehensive Planning:** Promote the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan that effectively plans for land use, community facilities, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental protection, and technological advancement for Benton County. Plan for land uses that support and enhance Benton County's ability to attract and direct quality development.

2. **Plan Implementation:** Review the Comprehensive Plan annually and amend as necessary to ensure its usefulness as a practical guide for current and future development. Adhere to this Plan, which shall guide all zoning changes, as closely as possible to ensure consistent development policy. Formulate and enforce County ordinances to ensure development in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.
3. **Urban Growth Areas:** Maintain the urban growth areas as an effective tool to guide planning and growth management decisions. Collaborate with the cities and townships to monitor growth and adjust the urban growth areas when necessary.
4. **Development within Urban Growth Areas:** Allow only low-density development in the municipal growth areas, so that development of infrastructure can be done efficiently and effectively as cities grow and expand.
5. **Re-subdivision Sketches:** Require urban re-subdivision sketches to be submitted along with large-lot plats in the Urban Growth Areas.
6. **Orderly Annexation:** Work with cities in Benton County and their adjacent townships to plan for orderly growth outside of their corporate limits. Pursue Orderly Annexation Agreements with townships surrounding the cities of Royalton, Rice, Gilman, and Foley.
2. **Agriculture:** Recognize and support the agricultural practices, character and lifestyle within the County, allowing for the pursuit of agriculture as a career.
3. **Age in Place:** Allow lot splits on rural land or accessory dwelling units to allow family members or other caregivers to live near seniors in an effort to allow people to age in place.
4. **Urban and Rural Distinction:** Keep the cities dense and urban and the rest of the county very low density and generally agricultural. Maintain a difference between the two.
5. **Rural Non-Farm Housing:** Allow additional rural non-farm housing so owners can extract some equity from their property, while sustaining agricultural operations on their land and their neighbors'. Seek creative solutions to the tension between preservation and development by using techniques such as clustering and transfer or sale of development rights.
6. **Special Soils:** Recognize and protect soils that are highly productive when properly managed (i.e. irrigation).
7. **Granite Ledge Township:** Allow a higher density of housing development when feasible in Granite Ledge Township on sites that are suited for on-site sewage treatment systems and do not negatively impact the environment.
8. **Urban Fringe Growth:** Encourage residential, commercial and industrial growth in an orderly and compact fashion around the established urban areas and rural service centers so new developments can be efficiently served by public improvements and reduce pressure on the character and quality of the County's rural areas.
9. **Highway 10 Corridor:** Support various developments along the Highway 10 corridor that apply innovative design solutions to minimize impacts to the environment and transportation system.

Goal 2: Rural Land Use

Sustain an agricultural Land Use pattern in harmony with low density rural housing.

Policies

1. **Rural Land Use:** Plan land use and provide roads and other public services to sustain most of the County as a low-density, rural and generally agricultural environment.



10. **Confined Animal Feedlots:** Continue to allow confined animal feedlots in the rural area by protecting them from new non-farm housing through County zoning. Require strict pollution controls consistent with State requirements.
11. **Right to Farm:** Support a farmer's right to farm when they are using generally accepted farming practices.

Goal 3: Commercial and Industrial Development

Plan for the orderly and efficient growth of commercial and industrial development in the County.

Policies

1. **Commercial and Industrial Development:** Encourage the majority of new commercial and industrial developments to locate within Benton County cities in accordance with their comprehensive plans. Commercial and industrial development that does not need public sewer and water services should be located within

planned areas with adequate road service and upland area, and regulated through Conditional Use Permits.

2. **Home Businesses:** Allow home-based businesses in rural areas that are compatible with neighboring properties and the access road.
3. **Aggregate Resources:** Allow a very low density of rural, non-farm housing development in areas of mapped sand and gravel (aggregate) resources. Require adequate buffer, landscaping, and end use plans.

Economic Development



Benton County has primarily stayed a farming and agricultural community. These land uses have played a pivotal role in shaping today's local and regional economy. As the County continues to promote its economic vitality through farming and agricultural uses, it is committed to finding new opportunities to diversify the economic climate. Rural economic opportunities may include a growing demand for "farm-to-table" restaurants, schools and daycares, home businesses, maker-spaces, breweries, event space, and businesses that process their crop production on-site (e.g., hops to hop-pellets).

Innovative strategies are needed to strengthen and diversify our economy, while attracting new businesses and a qualified labor force. As the County looks to the future, technology will play a pivotal role in fostering economic prosperity in rural parts of the county. For example, broadband access will open the doors for economic growth, while supporting entrepreneurs and telecommuters. It also elevates the county's ability to support workforce development by offering rural residents access to online education and resources.

Benton County is committed to business retention and expansion, workforce development, marketing the county, and quality of life initiatives. These values are reflected in the following goals and policies.

Goal 1: Resources

Cooperatively utilize the existing resources in the County and develop new resources for economic growth, and ensure a quality labor force.

Policies

1. **Local and Regional Cooperation:** Promote an on-going cooperative effort on a local and regional basis, utilizing the County, its Cities and Townships, Housing Redevelopment Authorities (HRAs), local Economic Development Authorities (EDAs), Benton Economic Partnership, local Chambers of Commerce, the Initiative Foundation, state agencies, local builders, business owners, the educational community and citizens to pursue a wide range of economic development opportunities.
2. **Business Retention:** Continue to support efforts to retain and expand existing businesses.
3. **Business Development:** Recruit new businesses and promote the idea of incubator space for emerging businesses.
4. **Asset Marketing:** Identify and market the County's internal (e.g., business friendly regulations), external (e.g., labor force) and natural (e.g., parks, trails and land) assets more aggressively to attract and expand diversified businesses.
5. **County-Wide Assistance:** Provide economic development assistance and resources to all parts of the County, particularly those areas on the eastern side of the County facing more challenges with and barriers to development.



6. **Entrepreneurship:** Support entrepreneurship through small business retention and expansion, and home based occupations that are not in conflict with the Benton County Development Code.
7. **Technology:** Extend broadband service throughout the entire County by 2040.

Goal 2: Agricultural Hub

Promote Benton County as a hub for diverse types of farming and agricultural businesses.

Policies

1. **Agricultural Businesses:** Encourage value-added agricultural industries, businesses and diverse agricultural operations to locate in the County.

2. **Crop Variety:** In addition to the regularly farmed crops in Benton County such as corn and soy beans, encourage the production of a variety of crops such as vegetables, fruits, and hops.
3. **Infrastructure Development:** Fund future infrastructure needs (i.e. farm-to-market roads and global communication) in a fiscally responsible manner that supports and promotes development.
4. **Development Process:** Implement strategies to streamline the permitting and development review process to attract new businesses to the County.

Goal 3: Labor Force

Ensure a quality labor force for existing and potential businesses and operations.

Policies

1. **Human Resources:** Maximize our human resources through early childhood care and education, training and retention of our youth, and continued education for adults.
2. **Life Cycle Housing:** Encourage the availability of a range of quality housing types and values to ensure an ample labor force including tenant housing for farm workers.
3. **Availability of Education:** Promote local access for continuing education by actively seeking out institutions to offer programs and services through the use of available technologies.



4. **Diversifying the Workforce:** Utilize technology to expand various workplace opportunities (telecommuting).
5. **Labor Shortages:** Pursue strategies to address the labor shortages experienced by farming and agricultural businesses and operations.

Environment & Natural Resources



Benton County's landscape is a complex ecosystem comprised of natural resources and water features. The landscape of the community is defined by fields, rolling topography, the stands of mature timber, large wetland flats and depressions, the scattered lakes, and the Mississippi River, which forms the western boundary of the county. Each one of these features contribute to the unique characteristics that Benton County resident's value.

Respecting the natural environment pays us great dividends over the long-term. A healthy urban forest helps shade our community. Wetlands recharge groundwater and clean our lakes and water resources. Intact open spaces serve as habitat for wildlife populations displaced through development. Preservation of natural resource areas and the integration of development patterns within the natural characteristics of the landscape contribute to a healthy natural environment.

As part of our natural resources, the mining of aggregate resources plays an important role in Benton County's economy. These resources and those discussed above are reflected throughout the goals and policies.

Goal 1: Stewardship

Promote environmental stewardship for the County's long-term environmental benefit.

Policies

1. **County Biological Survey:** Develop strategies for the conservation of the County's environmentally sensitive natural areas identified on the County Biological Survey.
2. **Development Review:** Protect the integrity of major natural resources through development review and regulation.
3. **Scenic Resources:** Protect scenic values by controlling billboards and regulating signs, auto junkyards, and other potentially unsightly land uses and practices.
4. **Wildlife Habitat:** Protect the integrity of wildlife habitat by acquiring prime tracts of land for public open space, by regulating rural land use for a very low intensity of development, enforcing regulations on wetlands and shorelines, and by designing new development and roads to keep major woodlands intact.
5. **Hazardous Waste:** Continue to work to promote the proper handling, disposal and recycling of hazardous waste.

Goal 2: Aggregate Resources

Protect the County's supply of aggregate resources.

Policies

1. **Preservation:** Identify areas throughout the County that are rich in aggregate resources and manage development in areas in order to preserve access to the aggregate resources.
2. **Resource Retention:** Encourage aggregate resources that are extracted in the County to be used locally when possible.
3. **Land Use Compatibility:** Minimize land use conflicts adjacent to mining operations.

Goal 3: Water Resources

Protect the groundwater supply from contamination, while providing County businesses and residents with an adequate supply of clean water.

Policies

1. **Best Management Practices:** Protect water quality by encouraging the use of "Best Management Practices" and other features of the County's Water Plan in private development and public improvements.
2. **Wetlands:** Continue to enforce wetland regulations. Support individual landowners' efforts to reestablish preexisting wetlands by using a wetland banking system.
3. **Watershed Management Organizations:** Implement through zoning and public works the policies of the watershed management organizations consistent with the County's Water Plan.
4. **Vintage Resources:** Preserve vintage water resources throughout the County.
5. **Ditch Maintenance:** Regularly maintain the official County ditch system, while complying with "Ditch Laws" in order to handle stormwater, protect private property from flood damage, and maintain high water quality.
6. **Sewage Treatment:** Explore the best sewage treatment options (best practices) for clustered residential developments and allow individual sewage treatment systems on larger rural lots that have the appropriate soil types.
7. **Individual Treatment Systems:** Continue careful consideration and review of soil suitability for the placement of individual sewer treatment systems before the issuance of a permit.



Mobility



Access to transportation contributes to the economic development, health, and quality of life of rural communities. Reliable transportation is needed for rural residents to access health care services, employment and educational opportunities, and social services. More importantly, reliable transportation is needed for farmers and rural businesses to move goods and products. This includes safe access to highways, linkages to shipping yards and rail, and access to freight routes.

It is clear that transportation alternatives are on the verge of changing. Over the next thirty years, ride-sharing, autonomous vehicles and increased access to public transportation are anticipated to change how future generations move about the county. The biggest unknown is the advancement of autonomous vehicles and its impact on the built environment. This plan does not address these anticipated changes given its unknowns. Instead, it continues to emphasize the importance of providing a safe and connected transportation system that meets all users, while preparing the County for the future.

Goal 4: Energy

Explore new opportunities for clean, affordable and sustainable energy throughout the County.

Policies

- Clean Energy:** Encourage businesses and residents to utilize clean energy, including solar and wind power in permitted areas.
- Plans:** Incorporate renewable energy into County plans and policies.
- Ordinance:** Periodically review and update the County's ordinances that regulate the use of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power.
- Permitting Process:** Review the County's land use controls on an annual basis to determine if there any challenges in supporting the use of clean energy.



Goal 1: Transportation System

Provide and maintain a safe, convenient, and efficient County transportation system for the movement of people and goods.

Policies

1. **Funding:** Establish a consistent and continuous funding mechanism for Benton County's transportation system.
2. **Regional Planning:** Take an active role with MnDOT, Benton County Cities, Townships, the APO, and other agencies involved in transportation planning, to provide the most effective transportation system for Benton County, particularly regarding Highways 10, 23, and 95.
3. **Maintenance:** Maintain the county's transportation assets (e.g., road and bridges) in good conditions or otherwise known in the industry as a "state of good repair."
4. **Preservation:** Explore system preservation strategies and low-cost/high benefit solutions before expansion.
5. **Plan Implementation:** Update the Transportation Plan to identify and designate future roadways within the County by their functional classification and to prioritize system improvements.
6. **Support Roads:** Extend local and service roads in an efficient manner consistent with the County's Transportation Plan that is complementary to the state highway system.
7. **Commercial and Industrial Sites:** Locate and design industrial and commercial developments to avoid truck traffic through residential and agricultural areas.
8. **Circulation Improvements:** Support a regional transportation system that circulates traffic and enhances the ability to move goods and products between cities and town centers.

9. **Ten Ton Routes:** Identify heavily traveled freight corridors and maintain their ten-ton route capacity to safely move goods and products throughout the county and region.
10. **Multi-Modal Transportation:** Investigate multi-modal transportation opportunities within the current system such as walking, biking, air cargo, rail, transit and ground transport.
11. **Connectivity:** Provide pedestrian and bicycle enhancements as part of roadway reconstruction or expansion projects in urban or urbanizing areas when feasible.
12. **Programming and Prioritization:** Consider programming transportation projects as a higher priority when they achieve other benefits or objectives (e.g., trail improvements or wetland restoration needs).

Goal 2: Safety

Advance the safety of the County transportation system.

Policies

1. **Safety Improvements:** Improve unsafe access points, crossing conflicts along State and County Highways and at-grade railroad crossings.
2. **Recreational Activities:** Identify and pave shoulders within high growth corridors as a part of County Road projects for recreational purposes. The shoulders should be wide enough to accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle activity.
3. **Emergency Preparedness:** Encourage the development of through streets for more efficient emergency response.
4. **Education:** Increase public awareness on pedestrian, bicycle and driver safety.
5. **Funding:** Pursue funding opportunities to address safety concerns identified as part of the County's Highway Safety Plan or through other safety studies.

Goal 3: Aesthetic Character and Function

Enhance the aesthetic character and functional qualities of the transportation networks within the County.

Policies

1. **Visual Aesthetic:** Encourage developing properties to create landscape buffers to maintain the aesthetic quality of the area.
2. **Signage:** Promote the appropriate use of signs (directional informational and advertising) to create community identity.
3. **Rural Character:** Maintain the rural character of the State and County highway system by identifying appropriate commercial and industrial sites that cluster development rather than sprawl development along roadways.
4. **Drainage:** Identify and maintain the County's road ditches and culverts in a manner that is consistent with state law.
5. **Government Cooperation:** Coordinate with Townships on road development issues including location and configuration.

Goal 4: Technology Based Solutions

Advance the County's transportation system by incorporating new technologies that prepare the County for the future.

Policies

1. **Autonomous and Electric Vehicles:** Consider transportation investments that support electric and connected autonomous vehicles.
2. **Intelligent Transportation Solutions:** Incorporate technology based solutions when feasible to improve the safety and mobility of all users.