

2040 Comprehensive Plan



A Shared Vision for the Future



Acknowledgments

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County Staff Lead

Roxanne Achman, Department of Development Director

County Board

Ed Popp
Jake Bauerly
Spencer Buerkle
Steve Heinen
Warren Peschl

Planning Commission

Art Buhs
Dan Gottwalt
Gerry Feld
Jerry Lang
Mary Jo Holewa
Mitch Czech
Scott Johnson
Steve Heinen (Alternate)
Warren Peschl

Park Commission

Cindy Voit
David Rixe
Greg Bruestle
Mary Kivi
Paul Wesenberg

County Staff

Chris Byrd, Public Works Director/County Engineer
Monty Headley, County Administrator
Nicole Ruhoff, Public Health Supervisor
Scott Zwick, GIS Coordinator
Sean Moe, Land Use Technician

Organizations

Town Board Officials
John Uphoff, Executive Director, Benton Economic Partnership

Prepared by

Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
1.	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
What is a Comprehensive Plan?.....	2
Why Plan?.....	2
How to Use this Plan.....	3
2040 Comprehensive Plan.....	4
The Planning Process.....	4
2.	
COMMUNITY DIRECTION.....	9
Population.....	10
Diversity.....	12
Agriculture.....	14
Labor Force.....	17
Mobility.....	19
Communication.....	22
Housing.....	26
Public Health.....	27
3.	
VISION, GOALS + POLICIES.....	33
Vision Statement.....	34
Goals + Policies.....	35
Quality of Life.....	35
Land Use.....	38
Economic Development.....	40
Environment & Natural Resources.....	42
Mobility.....	44
4.	
LAND USE.....	47
Existing Conditions.....	48
2040 Land Use Plan.....	50

5.		
TRANSPORTATION.....		69
Existing Conditions.....		70
Multimodal Planning.....		79
Balancing Transportation Needs with Land Use.....		81
Implementation.....		86
6.		
PARKS.....		89
Existing Conditions.....		90
Past Planning Efforts.....		92
Emerging Trends & Opportunities		98
Future Needs.....		100
Next Steps.....		108
7.		
IMPLEMENTATION.....		111
County's Role in Implementation.....		112
Implementation by Topic.....		112

Chapter 1

Introduction

Benton County is located in central Minnesota and is part of the rapidly growing St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. Since it was first settled in the late 1850's, Benton County has been primarily an agricultural and rural community, as family farmers found its rich soil suitable for horticultural production, animal pasture land, and dairy operations.

Today the County remains primarily agricultural in its land use, although its southwestern corner is under increasing pressure to accommodate urban development around the Cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Sartell. The economic resources of the county are diverse in terms of income sources from agriculture, industry and retail.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is an expression of the county's vision for the future and a strategic map to reach that vision. Comprehensive planning is an important tool for communities to articulate desired land use patterns to ensure a safe, pleasant, and economical environment for residential, agricultural, and commercial activities. A comprehensive plan provides the overall foundation for all land use regulation in the county. In Minnesota, authority for land use planning and regulation is vested primarily in local governments. For cities and townships, the authority to plan is found in Minnesota Statutes Section 462.353. Counties are authorized to plan under Minnesota Statutes Section 394.23. Planning can help:

- Preserve important natural resources, agricultural land, and other open lands.
- Create the opportunity for residents to participate in guiding a community's future.
- Identify issues, stay ahead of trends, and accommodate change.
- Foster sustainable economic development.
- Ensure more efficient and cost-effective infrastructure and public services.
- Provide an opportunity to consider future implications of today's decisions.
- Protect property rights and values.

Why Plan?

We plan for the following reasons:

Understanding the Big Picture

The "comprehensive" nature of the plan requires that all facets and functions of community life be considered. The data collection, analysis, and public engagement that feeds the plan provides a holistic view of county conditions and dynamics. This holistic view allows for future planning and decision making to be based on an informed, factual understanding of the county.

Framework for Local Decision Making

The vision, guiding principles, goals, and policies outlined in this plan provide a basis for decision making and ensure that future actions respond to the desires, priorities, and concerns expressed through the public engagement process.

Guidance for Landowners and Developers

By articulating a vision for future land use, public investment priorities and policies, and development goals, the plan provides guidance, resources, and reassurance to property owners and developers looking to farm, build, or reinvest in the community.

Inform and Engage the Public

The planning process is an avenue for informing community members about the Comprehensive Plan, gaining input on the county vision and priorities, and encouraging broader discussions about community improvement. Just as the public plays a critical role in creating this plan, they are also a key to its successful implementation. Community members play a role as future advocates for the plan, as well as active participants in its implementation.

Mobilize for Action

The plan is intended to be action-oriented, recommending concrete steps and strategies that can be implemented by the County in the immediate future. Many of the strategies recommended in the plan require the cooperation of outside groups, agencies, private businesses, and individuals in the community. The plan provides a basis for future partnership and collaboration.

How to Use this Plan

While intended to guide change, this plan must also remain flexible to respond to changing needs, conditions and emerging trends. County officials must understand that they are responsible for the future of their community, and they must consider carefully the merits of adjustments to the plan. This is a critical step in the planning process; therefore, future decisions need to be evaluated against the vision, goals and policies laid out in this plan (see Chapter 3). Some decisions will align well, while others may not. This could quite possibly lead to changes to the vision or the plan. These proposals will trigger the community planning process, which should engage community members and stakeholders on updates to the plan.

Further guidance is provided in the chapters on how to achieve the Plan's vision and goals. These are discussed through a series of guiding principles. The guiding principles serve as a yardstick to measure the appropriateness and results of future initiatives. The guiding principles are a tool for future decision-making and help to define the character, values, and priorities of Benton County.

Comprehensive Plan vs. Zoning

Comprehensive Plan:

- **Broad in scope**
- **Visionary**
- **Principles and Policy oriented**
- **It's a guiding document**
- **Conceptual and idealistic**
- **Focus is on community or regional scale**
- **Flexible in its interpretation**

Zoning Ordinance:

- **Narrow in scope**
- **More rigid standards**
- **It's the law**
- **Detail oriented, specific**
- **Focus on the district and site level**

So which one rules?

In many instances, State Statutes make direct references linking a zoning ordinance provision to a community's master plan. Case law over the years has proven that a zoning ordinance in sync with a comprehensive plan is a more defendable ordinance than one that is not in sync or is not based on an approved comprehensive plan.

A review of zoning and subdivision ordinances always follows the updated comprehensive plan, resulting in minor or major modifications, depending on the new directions forged by the comprehensive plan.

2040 Comprehensive Plan

The last comprehensive plan was adopted in 2006. Comprehensive plans are typically updated every ten years and reflect a twenty year time horizon. Considering a future over twenty years away forces broadly consideration of issues and opportunities facing Benton County. This Comprehensive Plan looks out to the year 2040. In many ways, this Plan builds on past planning efforts.

This plan contains a series of plan elements and is organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1 - Introduction:** Defines the comprehensive planning process.
- **Chapter 2 - Community Direction:** Sets the stage for the plan by providing an overview of the County's existing conditions and emerging trends.
- **Chapter 3 - Goals and Policies:** Defines the Plan's vision, goals and policies.
- **Chapter 4 - Land Use Plan:** Describes Benton County's desired land use and development patterns, while recognizing the area's natural resources.
- **Chapter 5 - Transportation:** Describes Benton County's transportation system and provides policy direction on how to maintain this system, while accommodating all modes of travel.
- **Chapter 6 - Parks & Trails:** Describes Benton County's park and trail system, and provides a ten year work plan.
- **Chapter 7 - Implementation:** Identifies how the plan will be implemented to achieve the identified goals and policies.

The Planning Process

The Benton County Comprehensive Plan was developed over a year long process (May 2018 – June 2019) undertaken by the Benton County Department of Development and planning consultants from Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc. The planning process consisted of three phases:

- **Discovery Phase:** The discovery phase identified existing conditions and emerging trends that may influence Benton County's future.
- **Exploration Phase:** The exploration phase included ideas on how to update the Comprehensive Plan that reflected the community's issues and concerns, while considering emerging trends.
- **Adoption Phase:** The last phase of the planning process aimed to build consensus on the draft Comprehensive Plan.

Public and stakeholder engagement played a vital part of the comprehensive planning process, ensuring that recommendations in the plan are based on a well-rounded understanding of community needs, values, issues, and opportunities. This planning process employed a number of traditional and contemporary modes of public engagement, and provided a range of opportunities for public input throughout the process. A summary of these activities are discussed in this section.

Online Engagement

An initial step in the updating process was to conduct a community-wide survey using an online engagement tool (i.e., Social PinPoint). The online tool (see image) provided insight into what makes Benton County a great place to live, work and play. Participants were able to take part in conversations and like or dislike a comment that was shared on the "ideas wall." The online tool was promoted through various marketing materials, including flyers that were handed out during the County fair and Amnesty events. County Commissioners and Planning Commissioners promoted the Comprehensive Plan update by distributing business cards that included project contact information and a website link. Online surveys and comment forms were also available during the planning process to garner feedback on draft materials and staff addressed township officials at two Association of Township Officers Meetings.

The "Ideas Wall" attracted over 200 unique visitors, who offered their input on the future of Benton County. Many people used the words "rural," "farming," "townships," "the people," and "parks" to describe Benton County's characteristics.

Figure 1.1. Social Pinpoint "Ideas Wall"

What is your vision for Benton County? Share with us your thoughts by answering the questions below.

Describe the County

What makes us Great?

Challenges

Additional Comments

No big box stores, please

View the discussion

2 months ago

Like Dislike

Support family farms, local & sustainable food

Join the discussion (2)

2 months ago

Like Dislike

Future growth in our school districts, business areas, cities, and rural-urban townships needs to be well thought out and planned for in advance if we want to smoothly transition to our vision for 2040.

View the discussion

2 months ago

Like Dislike

People see Benton County (with its farms, communities, neighborhoods, schools and parks) as a great place to live and raise kids. There are many job opportunities available here and in the nearby tri-county area.

View the discussion

2 months ago

Like Dislike

majority rural, western corridor urban

View the discussion

2 months ago

Like Dislike

rural and urban, river, farms

View the discussion

2 months ago

Like Dislike

economic development

Join the discussion (1)

2 months ago

Like Dislike

combination of rural and some urban areas, farms and woods. Working in the same county I live in is a plus.

Focus Groups

Focus groups served as a sounding board, idea generator and a gauge of community sentiments. Each focus group member served as a "champion" of the process by promoting the public engagement activities and sharing ideas from their interest groups and circles of acquaintances. The focus groups consisted of the following members and met on July 26, 2018 or July 30, 2018, and May 8, 2019:

- Economic Development and Builders Association
- Farm Representatives
- Environmental Representatives
- Township Representatives
- Benton County Public Services
- Benton County Sheriff
- Benton Economic Partnership (April 25, 2019)

In September 2018, the focus group representatives were provided the first draft of the Vision, Goals and Policies chapter and were asked to review and provide comment back to the County.

Township & City Engagement

Many meetings occurred with the townships and cities to better understand their aspirations and concerns (see Table 1.1 & Table 1.2). As part of this effort, Benton County hosted several town hall meetings to fully engage township officials. These meetings occurred on July 18, 2018 and January 16, 2019. Those who chose to participate in the meetings are noted in Table 1.2. In September 2018, all township officials were provided the first draft of the Vision, Goals and Policies chapter and were asked to review and provide comment back to the County. In many respects, a larger part of this process focused on full transparency and collaboration with the townships. The Comprehensive Plan has embraced their desires and aspirations for the future, while addressing their concerns.

Table 1.1. City Meetings

City	Meeting Date	Notes
Foley	July 18, 2018	Meeting with Staff
	December 13, 2018	Meeting with Staff
Rice	December 13, 2018	Meeting with Staff
	February 25, 2019 *	Planning Commission
Royalton	December 13, 2018	Meeting with Staff
Sartell	December 13, 2018	Meeting with Staff

* The City of Rice submitted response regarding their growth areas (see Appendix A); the Comprehensive Plan has addressed these comments accordingly and are reflected in the Land Use Chapter.

Table 1.2. Township Meetings

Township	Meeting Date	Notes
Alberta	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Did Not Attend
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Did Not Attend
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Gilmanton	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Did Not Attend
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Glendorado	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Granite Ledge	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Langola	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	December 13, 2018 Town Board Special Session	Representatives Attended
	December 20, 2018 Town Board Meeting	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
Mayhew Lake	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Maywood	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Minden	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
St. George	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended
Sauk Rapids	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Did Not Attend
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Did Not Attend
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Did Not Attend
Watab	July 18, 2018 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	January 16, 2019 Listening Session	Representatives Attended
	February 21, 2019 Annual Township Meeting	Representatives Attended

Parks Commission

During the planning process, the Parks Commission was re-established after being inactive for several years. The Parks Commission served as a guiding body in creating the Parks Chapter. The planning consultant met with the Parks Commission on four occasions:

- July 26, 2018
- October 16, 2018
- February 6, 2019
- March 27, 2019
- April 24, 2019

County Board and Planning Commission

Both the County Board and Planning Commission were engaged during project milestones. A summary of these meeting and discussion topics are listed in Table 1.3. Meeting minutes are available on the County's website.

Table 1.3. County Board and Planning Commission Meetings

Meeting Date	Meeting Topic	Topic
May 29, 2018	County Board – Committee of the Whole	Kick-off meeting to discuss the direction of the Land Use Plan
October 30, 2018	County Board and Planning Commission Workshop	Review and discussion pertaining to the draft goals and policies
December 19, 2018	County Board	Project update and discussion pertaining to the growth areas identified in the Land Use Plan
March 14, 2018	Planning Commission	Review and discussion pertaining to the draft plan.
April 8, 2019	County Board – Committee of the Whole	Review and discussion pertaining to the draft plan
May 23, 2019	Planning Commission	Recommendation to adopt the Comprehensive Plan
June 4, 2019	County Board	Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 2

Community Direction

Benton County is a dynamic and growing area. The County balances growth within its cities while maintaining its historic characteristics of promoting agrarian lifestyles, natural resources and rural communities. Finding that balance presents both challenges and opportunities for the future. This chapter provides a snapshot of the economic, demographic and social trends within the County today, and highlights where we are going in the future.

Population

The central region continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in the state. Economic Development Region 7W includes a total of four counties, located in the larger 13 county Central Minnesota Planning Region. The region saw a 31 percent population increase since 2000, making it the fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state, and now the third largest in total population after gaining over 100,000 new residents. Benton County grew by 16.8 percent between 2000 and 2016. In comparison, the State of Minnesota saw a 12.2 percent gain during this time period, meaning Region 7W accounted for 16.6 percent of total state growth (see Table 2.1).

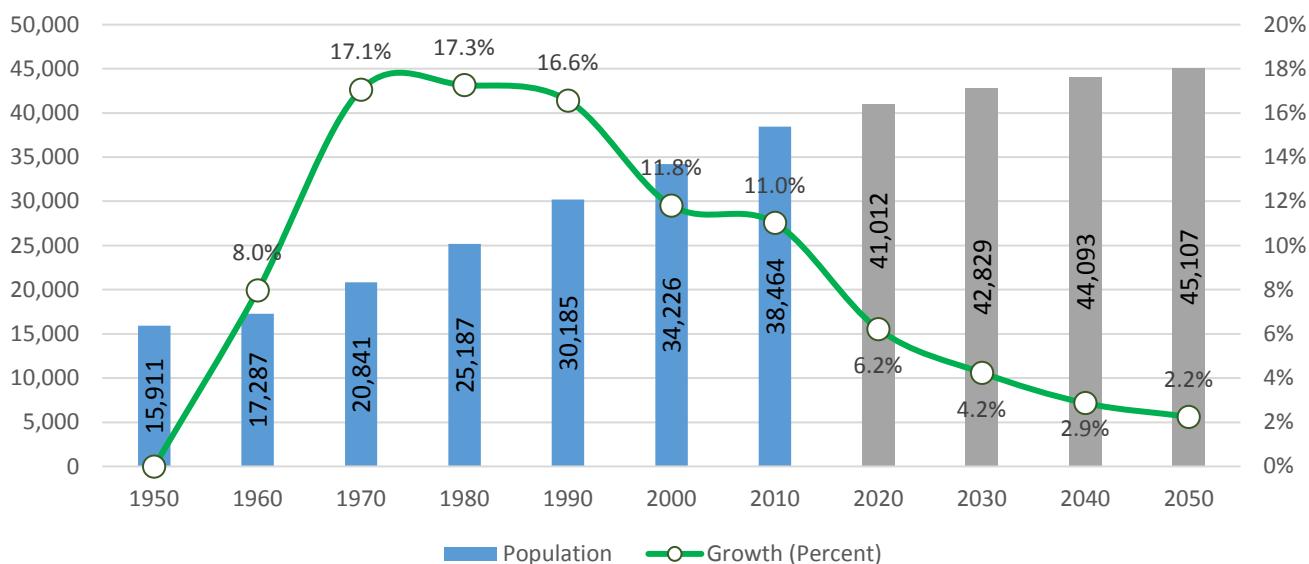
Figure 2.2 provides additional information on Benton County's historical population growth. The table also provides population forecasts generated by the State Demographers. Benton County is projected to continue to grow at modest levels, reaching 45,107 (5,776 new people) in 2050.

Table 2.1. Population

Area	2000	2016 (est.)	Number	Percent
Region 7W	321,795	421,722	99,927	31.1%
Benton County	34,226	39,992	5,766	16.8%
Sherburne County	64,417	93,528	29,111	45.2%
Stearns County	133,166	155,652	22,486	16.9%
Wright County	89,986	132,550	42,564	47.3%
Minnesota	4,919,479	5,519,952	600,473	12.2%

Source: 2000 Census - 2016 ACS

Figure 2.2. Population Trends & Projections



Source: State Demographer

As part of this growth, it is also important to recognize that the population is aging. Benton County's median age increased slightly from 33.7 to 35.8 between 2000 and 2016. This increase suggests residents are aging in place. The most notable change includes a decrease in the younger population between the ages of 15 and 29; however, there is a visible increase in the population of 35-44 year olds (see Table 1.3). This suggests the younger population is staying in the County as they enter adulthood.

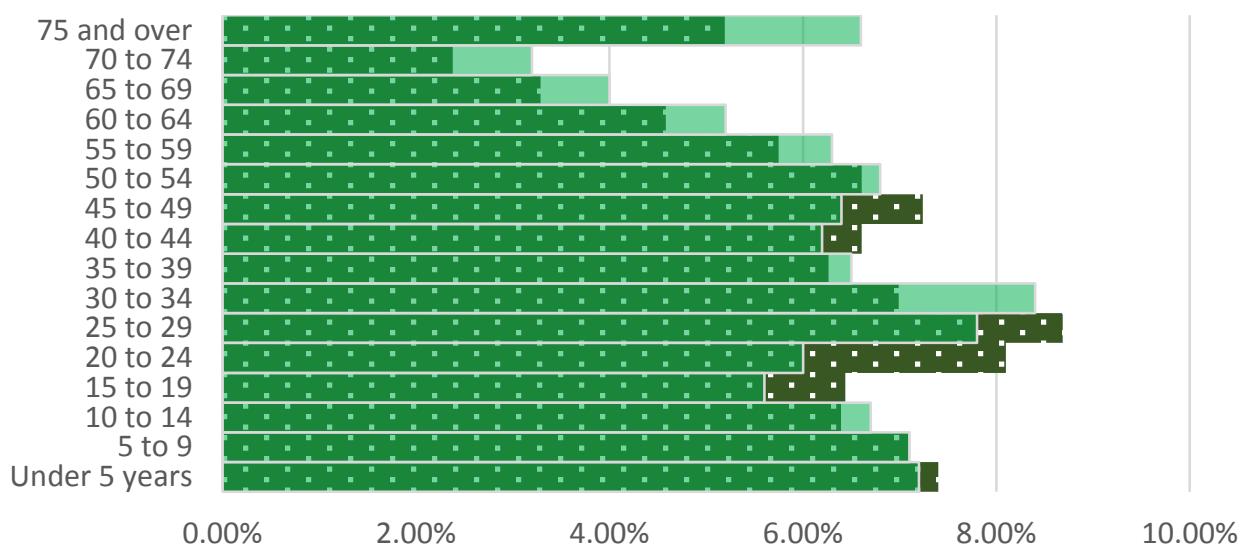
Furthermore, Benton County has a substantial senior population. Over 14% of the population is over the age of 65, and it is assumed this population will increase over the next ten years as the subsequent age groups continue to age in place (see Figure 2.3).

Population Trends

According to the Minnesota Center for Rural and Policy Development, "more rural counties have had higher median ages and a larger percentage of their population 65 or older throughout the second half of the 20th century. With the combination of increasing out-migration of younger people to urban areas and an in-migration of older people to rural counties, the median age of our most rural areas is increasing faster than in urban ones. In 1980, the average median age in our entirely rural counties was 34 compared to 27 in our entirely urban counties (a gap of 7 years). In 2016, the average median age in our entirely rural counties increased to 47 while the entirely urban counties had an average median age of 36 (a gap of 11 years)."

It is important to examine the age distribution of current Benton County residents, because they will demand certain types of housing as their age and family composition changes. Spending patterns also change, which affects economic development. As the population continues to age, needs such as health care, loss of mobility, financial concerns, and home maintenance will change and new demands will be placed on Benton County.

Figure 2.3. Age Cohorts



Source: 2000 Census - 2016 ACS

■ 2016 ■ 2000

Diversity

Benton County has seen an increase in minority populations over the last decade. In 2000, 96% of Benton County identified themselves as "white alone" (non-Hispanic/Latino) (see Table 2.2). By 2016, 92% of Benton County's population identified themselves as "white only," which is similar to neighboring counties: Wright (95%), Sherburne (94%) and Stearns (93%).



Diversity Trends

Minnesota's population is changing and so is that of Benton County (see Sidebar). Like the State, Benton County is becoming more diverse. The Region 7W 2017 Regional Report recognizes these changing demographics. For example, the region saw a 23 percent gain in the number of "white-alone" residents, but saw a much faster increase in every other race group. The number of Black or African American residents rose by 350 percent.

These trends may be one of the defining elements of the region over the next decade. Benton County's ethnic diversity is changing slightly and over time may shape the County's housing demands and the delivery of services such as recreation opportunities, multiple language materials and communications, and school programming.

Table 2.2. Race & Ethnicity

Race	2000	2000 Percent	2016	2016 Percent	2000 - 2016 Change
White	32,796	95.82%	36,337	92.09%	9.74%
Black or African American	266	0.78%	1,046	2.65%	74.57%
American Indian and Alaska Native	177	0.52%	161	0.41%	-9.94%
Asian	392	1.15%	437	1.11%	10.30%
Hispanic or Latino	274	0.80%	791	2.00%	65.36%
Two or More Races	321	0.94%	685	1.74%	53.14%
Total Population	34,226	100.00%	39,457	100%	13%

Source: 2000 Census - 2016 ACS

Minnesota's Changes in Race & Ethnicity

The following statements were listed on the Minnesota State Demographic Center's website:

- In 1920, about 1 in 5 Minnesotans was foreign-born. In 2015, about 1 in 12 were (8.3%, or about 457,200 residents). Forty-nine percent of Minnesota's foreign-born population are naturalized U.S. citizens.
- In 2015, the largest groups of foreign-born Minnesotans were born in Mexico (about 67,300); Somalia (31,400); India (30,500); Laos, including Hmong (23,300); Vietnam (20,200); China, excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan (19,900); Ethiopia (19,300); and Thailand, including Hmong (16,800). These estimates do not include U.S.-born children of these immigrants. They also likely underestimate the size of our immigrant populations because trust and language issues reduce response rates to Census surveys.
- 11.5% of Minnesotans (age 5+) spoke a language other than English at home. Behind English, the most common languages spoken are Spanish (about 193,600 speakers) and Hmong (56,200 speakers).
- In Minnesota, people of Color (those who identify as a race other than White alone, and/or those who are Hispanic) make up 19% of the total population. Non-Hispanic White Minnesotans represent the remaining 81% of the statewide population.
- All race groups have grown recently in MN, but between 2010 and 2015, the state has added four times as many people of Color as non-Hispanic White residents. Populations of Color are distributed unevenly across the state, and are more likely to live in metro areas than rural areas.
- Between 2010 and 2015, the fastest growing racial group in Minnesota was the Asian population, which grew by 22%, adding nearly 48,000 people. Second fastest was the Black population, which grew by 16%, adding 45,000 people, followed by the Hispanic population, which grew by 13%, adding 32,000 people. (Asian and Black race groups are that race "alone" and non-Hispanic).

(All data from 2015 Population Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau)

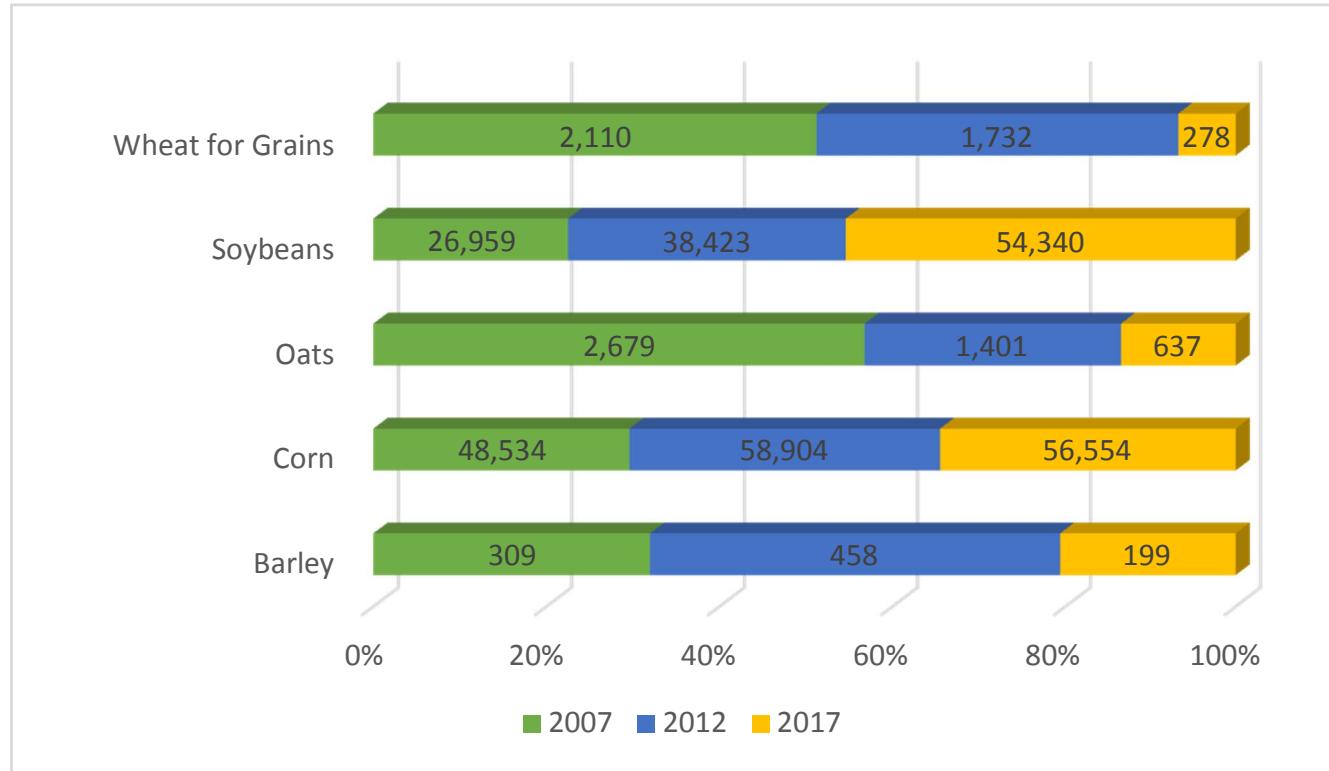
Agriculture

Agriculture has been the center of economic activity for Benton County. In 1860, Benton County produced wood, grain, meat, and dairy products. Wheat and potatoes were the cash crops at that time. According to the 2017 US Census of Agriculture, the largest value of sales by commodity group included poultry and eggs, cattle and calves, milk from cows, and hogs and pigs. Cash crops continue to play a significant role in today's economy. However, Benton County has seen a shift in the production of certain field crops (see Figure 2.4). These shifts demonstrate the economic volatility in cash crops and how the supply and demand for a particular crop can change annually. Regardless of these shifts, Benton County still ranks above the 20th percentile for value of agriculture products sold amongst the 3,075 counties in the Untitled States.

In addition to the direct income from agriculture, many other companies are supported locally through sales to farms or by adding value to farm commodities, although that economic activity is not usually reported among the agricultural statistics. Local firms in farm implements, poultry processing, ethanol production or general retail sales are dependent on the basic farm economy.

Farming will continue to be one of Benton County's strongest economic engines. However, there has been significant changes in how farms are owned and operated at a national level. Figure 2.5 highlights these national changes, which include a decrease in the number of farms, while the average size of the farm has increased. Benton County has seen a decrease in the number of farms in operation between 1982 and 2017 (see Table 2.3), while the amount of land being farmed has increased. This finding suggests smaller farms are removing their land from production or selling to larger operations/corporations, which mirror national trends.

Figure 2.4. Field Crops (Acres Harvested)



Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

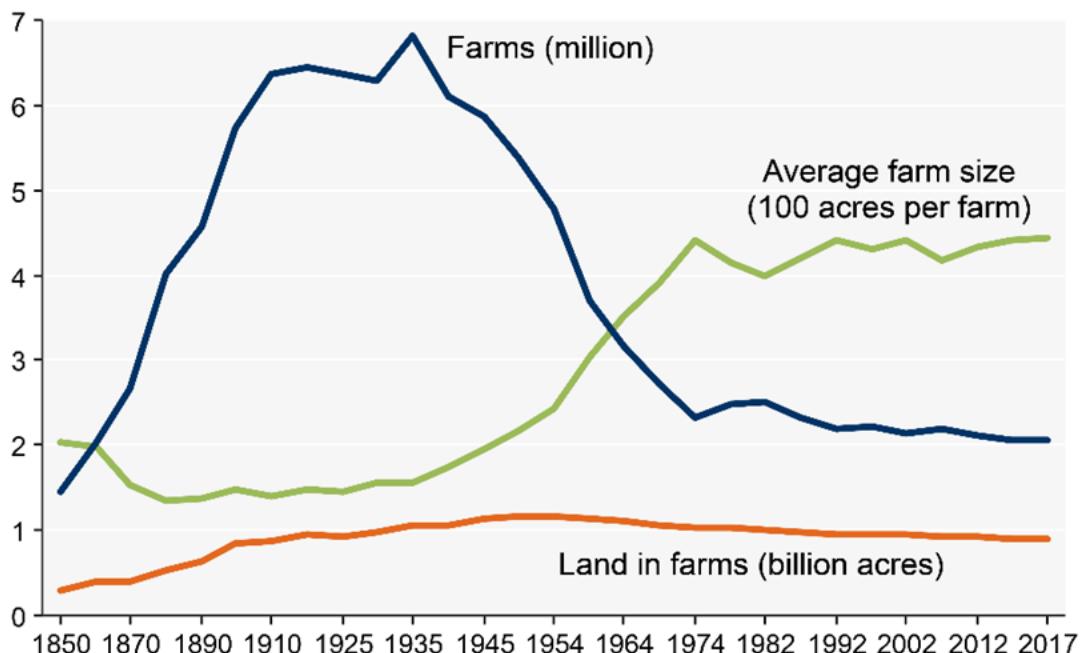
Table 2.3. Farms in Benton County

Year	Number of Farms	Land in Farms (acres)	Average Size (acres)	% of Total Land
1982	1,035	198,778	192	76.1%
1992	865	183,760	212	70.0%
2002	965	195,949	203	75.0%
2012	958	188,735	197	71.2%
2017	816	194,832	NA	75.3%

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Figure 2.5. US Farms, Land in Farms, and Average Acres per Farm, 1850 - 2017

Million farms, billion acres, or 100 acres per farm



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture (through 2012) and *Farms and Land in Farms: 2017 Summary*.

Agriculture Trends

Minnesota has the fifth largest agricultural economy in the US, contributing to the state's ranking as the eighth best in the nation for business. Benton County can position itself as one of Minnesota's leading counties for business by capitalizing on new markets tied to farming. Some of these new markets and trends are followed:

- **Farm to Table:** Farm to table is a social movement, which promotes the serving or preparing of foods directly from a farm to a restaurant. This movement has sparked a resurgence of entrepreneurs opening restaurants or "dinner on the farm."

- **Farm to School:** Nearly 6 percent of Minnesota school districts have a Farm to School program, up from 2.3 percent in 2006. These programs establish a direct link between a local producer where their goods (e.g., vegetables, fruits or meat) are acquired and used for student meals. This is a similar model as the “farm-to-table” model. Programs of this nature have helped educated students on the importance of nutrition, while connecting students to the farming community.
- **Hop Farms:** In 2011, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law legalizing tap rooms. Since that time, Minnesota has experienced a large number of breweries popping up across the state. This in turn has created a significant demand for hops and other grains. Benton County is now home to the first farm (Mighty Axe Hops) that processes hops into pellets that brewers use as a key ingredient in their beer.



Benton County should consider these emerging markets when establishing economic initiatives that support local agriculture and farming businesses.

Benton County should also be aware of the following trends that could impact the local economy positively or negatively:

- Minnesota agriculture will likely stay strong for the foreseeable future. Competition between different agriculture niches such as vegetable and grain crops and dairy have increased competition for farmland.
- National policies on tariffs continue to change, which may play a role in regional and local commodity prices, as well as the exporting of goods.
- Livestock farms (dairy and hogs) have grown in size creating concerns over manure management, noise, smells, water quality, and water quantity.
- Benton County has already seen climate changes. The projections for the County’s climate by the middle of this century indicate continued increases in temperatures. Additionally, precipitation patterns are anticipated to change, providing an increase in the overall rainfall as well as an increase in the number of days without rain - exacerbating both flooding and drought potential. These trends will play a significant role in crop production.
- Many farmers also lack adequate physical and financial infrastructure on their farm and in their region for harvesting, processing, storing, and distributing food to nearby markets.

Labor Force

As depicted in Table 2.4, Benton County saw a significant increase (18.57%) in the number of jobs between 2002 and 2015. In 2015, the manufacturing industry holds the largest number of jobs within Benton County. This is followed by health care and social assistance, retail trade, and construction. It is important to recognize that the Census measures employment through surveys of "covered" industries (i.e., industries that pay unemployment insurance), which typically leaves out farmers and self-employed

individuals. Therefore, Table 2.7 may not provide an accurate picture of the number of agriculture or farming jobs in Benton County.

Overall, Benton County has seen positive growth in the number of new jobs between 2002 and 2015. However, the region will start to see a decrease in the labor force as the population becomes older (see Figure 2.3 and Table 2.5). This is also seen in Table 2.6 as the average age of a Benton County farmer has increased from 47 in 1982 to 54 in 2012.

Table 2.4. Jobs by Industry 2002-2015

Industry	Jobs (2002)	Percent (2002)	Jobs (2015)	Percent (2015)	2002 - 2015 Percent Change
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	217	1.50%	239	1.30%	9.21%
Construction	1,173	8.10%	1,805	10.20%	35.01%
Manufacturing	4,369	30.20%	3,791	21.30%	-15.25%
Wholesale Trade	789	5.50%	1,098	6.20%	28.14%
Retail Trade	1,436	9.90%	1,905	10.70%	24.62%
Transportation and Warehousing	448	3.10%	1,111	6.30%	59.68%
Information	123	0.90%	233	1.30%	47.21%
Finance and Insurance	150	1.00%	216	1.20%	30.56%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	54	0.40%	235	1.30%	77.02%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	203	1.40%	344	1.90%	40.99%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	265	1.80%	328	1.80%	19.21%
Administration & Support, Waste Mgmt. & Remediation	890	6.20%	908	5.10%	1.98%
Educational Services	1,011	7.00%	1,240	7.00%	18.47%
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,381	9.50%	2,269	12.80%	39.14%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	36	0.20%	75	0.40%	52.00%
Accommodation and Food Services	970	6.70%	1,043	5.90%	7.00%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	612	4.20%	487	2.70%	-25.67%
Public Administration	334	2.30%	431	2.40%	22.51%
Total:	14,461	100%	17,758	100%	18.57%

Source: 2015 US Census Longitudinal-Employer Household

Table 2.5. Labor Force by Age Groups

Age Groups	2020 Labor Force Projection	2030 Labor Force Projection	2020 - 2030 Change Numeric	2020 - 2030 Change Percent
16 to 19 years	24,377	20,772	-3,605	-14.80%
20 to 24 years	47,880	49,370	1,490	3.10%
25 to 44 years	145,833	153,417	7,584	5.20%
45 to 54 years	77,001	71,742	-5,260	-6.80%
55 to 64 years	70,087	59,372	-10,715	-15.30%
65 to 74 years	18,092	23,798	5,706	31.50%
75 years & over	3,082	4,684	1,603	52.00%
Total Labor Force	386,352	383,155	-3,197	-0.80%

Source: 2017 Region 7W

Table 2.6. Average Age of Farm Worker

Year	Average Age of Farm Worker
1982	47.1
1992	50.0
2002	49.5
2012	53.4
2017	NA

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Labor Force Trends

Benton County will continue to experience a shift in the labor force as the population gets older. Retaining and attracting a younger labor force (born between 1981 and 1999) may be challenging given Benton County's proximity to job centers, such as St. Cloud and the Twin Cities. Therefore, it is important to recognize the jobs that are attracting a younger labor force that is interested in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). For example, a recent study by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) identified a list of top jobs for millennials based on wages, projected growth, millennial share of employment, and total number of jobs statewide. The jobs identified in this study align with Benton County's top industries (see Table 2.4), including construction trade workers and health care. National studies have also indicated a resurgence in farming. Farming is now seen as a profession that has evolved with science, technology, and engineering. These advancements have attracted a younger population to farming, as well as entrepreneurs focused on farm-to-table ventures.

Other notable trends described in the State of Minnesota (2018) report by Center for Rural Policy and Development include:

- Government continues to be a significant source of employment in rural counties. Through the second half of the 20th century, the private sector has declined across rural areas, driving that sector's employment lower. However, there is still a high need/demand for public-sector services in these areas. While some public-sector employment is geography-based, low population density doesn't mean less of a need for services.
- Minnesota has experienced significant increases in the percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds participating in the labor force since 1970. The largest increases have occurred in our more rural counties, where the labor force participation rate increased by 17 percentage points.
- A significant percentage of the workforce in the more rural parts of the state also operate as non-employers, meaning they have a non-farm business with no employees, have annual receipts of \$1,000 or more, and are subject to federal income taxes—what we generally think of as self-employed.

- Throughout the 1990s, unemployment was highest in our most rural counties. However, that began to change in the mid-2000s, and in fact, the most rural counties weathered the Great Recession better than other county groups, largely due to the healthy state of agriculture at the time. With the economy picking up again, all regions have recovered from their recession levels.
- The growing number of retirements and lack of growth in the labor force is contributing to vacancy rates.



Mobility

Roadways provide for an integrated transportation system that will serve the future needs of its residents, businesses and visitors, and will support the County's agricultural and economic development initiatives. Maintaining and improving this system is important to the ongoing economic health and quality of life in the County. It is also important to maintain the ability to travel easily and safely to work and other destinations.

Benton County has many transportation needs that vary from urban to rural locations and also include recreational travel. Each need is important in its own right. These needs are served by the County roadways system and by the State and local area systems. Benton County is responsible for 225.59 miles of County Road (CR) and 224.42 miles of County State Aid Highways (CSAH).

Mobility Trends

In today's funding environment, roadway agencies (township, city, county and state) are expected to do more with less. This imperative has resulted in a larger emphasis on preserving existing assets in a "state of good repair," while balancing the mobility needs for all modes of transportation (e.g., cars,

pedestrians, bicyclists, and trucks). In light of this situation, many Counties are faced with difficult decisions in prioritizing and budgeting transportation projects.

Benton County should consider the following rural transportation needs when planning for future transportation investments.

- **Recreational Needs:** Trails are an integral component in any transportation system. Trails offer residents safe access between towns and key destinations. Most of the trails in Benton County are destinations in themselves, offering scenic routes such as the Mississippi River Trail (MRT). In addition to trails, paved shoulders provide transportation along major corridors throughout the County.

Simple steps to make bicycling safe and comfortable pay huge dividends in civic, community and economic development. Given the opportunity to ride, residents enjoy dramatic health benefits, reduced congestion, increased property values, and more money in their pockets to spend in the local economy.

- **Commuter Needs:** The transportation network in rural Benton County has developed over the decades with a larger emphasis on the automobile. This development pattern is based on low population and employment densities in rural parts of the county that does not make transit feasible. The transportation network in these areas provide efficient connections between cities, townships and key destinations within and outside the County limits.

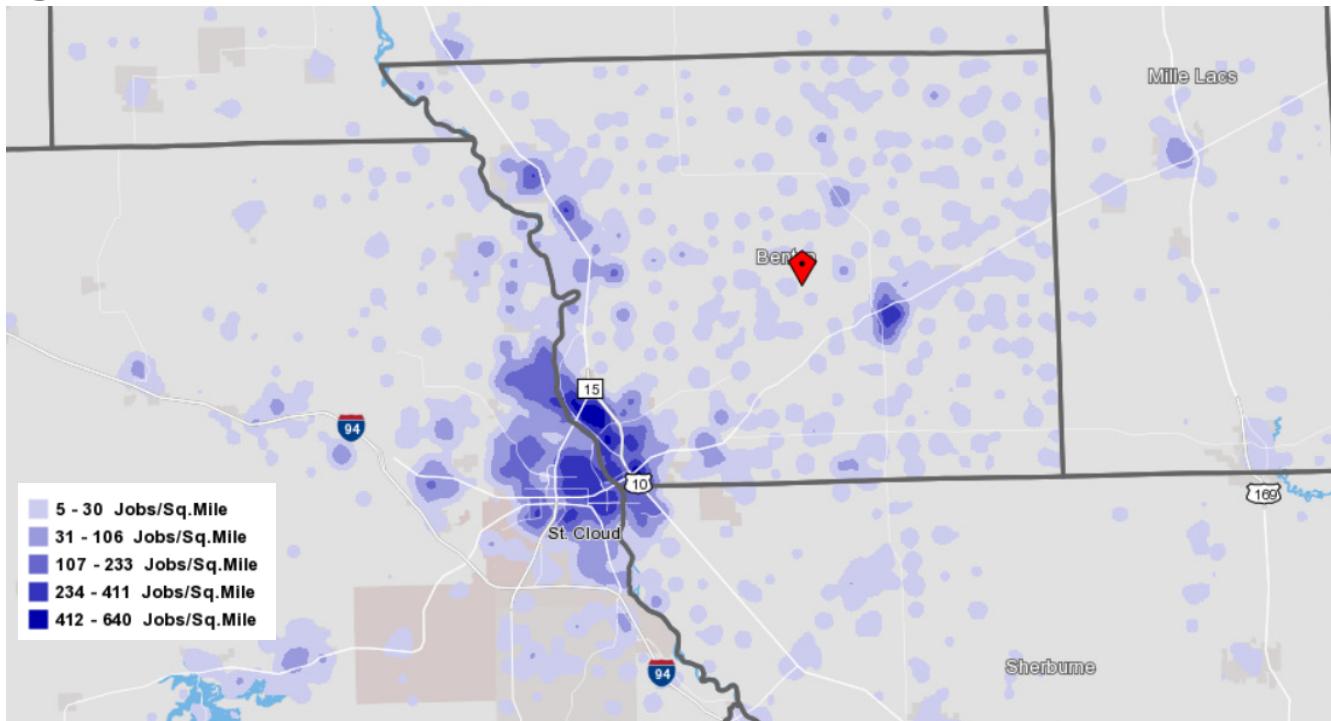
As illustrated in Figure 2.6, residents live throughout the county and commute longer distances to their jobs. According to the 2016 US Census ACS, the average travel time to work for a Benton County resident is 22 minutes. In comparison, it takes a St. Cloud resident, on average, 18 minutes to travel to work. It will be important to continue to provide safe and efficient transportation routes for rural residents.

- **Farm to Market:** As noted throughout this Chapter, farming plays a significant role in the

County's economy. The County should consider prioritizing transportation improvements that provide mobility benefits in moving goods (e.g., crops and livestock) between the farm and final destination (e.g., farmers market, school, distributor, processing facility or grocery store).

- **Senior Needs:** Transportation options for seniors will become increasingly important as the population ages in rural Benton County (see population trends on page 3). For example, seniors will need access to many services and activities on a regular basis, including health care facilities, grocery stores, community centers, faith-related gathering places, places that support social activities, and housing options.
- **Farming Needs:** Growth in agriculture has resulted in increasing demands on local resources and facilities. Farm equipment has also increased in size and weight, adding pressure to the local roadway system. Future roadway improvements should consider the design and pavement structure to handle an increase in vehicle weight.

Figure 2.6. Jobs Per Square Mile



Active Living Trends

Residents who can easily and comfortably move on foot in their neighborhoods tend to get more physical activity and feel more secure while also having a large impact on the economic development and growth of a community. Opportunities to walk or bike can decrease vehicle emissions, improve air quality, increase the desirability for people to reside in the community, and draw new customers into businesses in downtown districts. Being able to reach these types of destinations by means of walking, biking, or public transit is essential for healthy communities, but to be active, one must have safe and convenient access between neighborhoods, jobs, services, and recreational activities. Adequate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure is necessary to create safe connections for all users, including people who do not own a vehicle. Ample parks and open spaces also provide residents with opportunities to integrate physical activity into their daily habits. Land use patterns should also promote active living and encourage a reduction in driving to improve air quality and respiratory health.

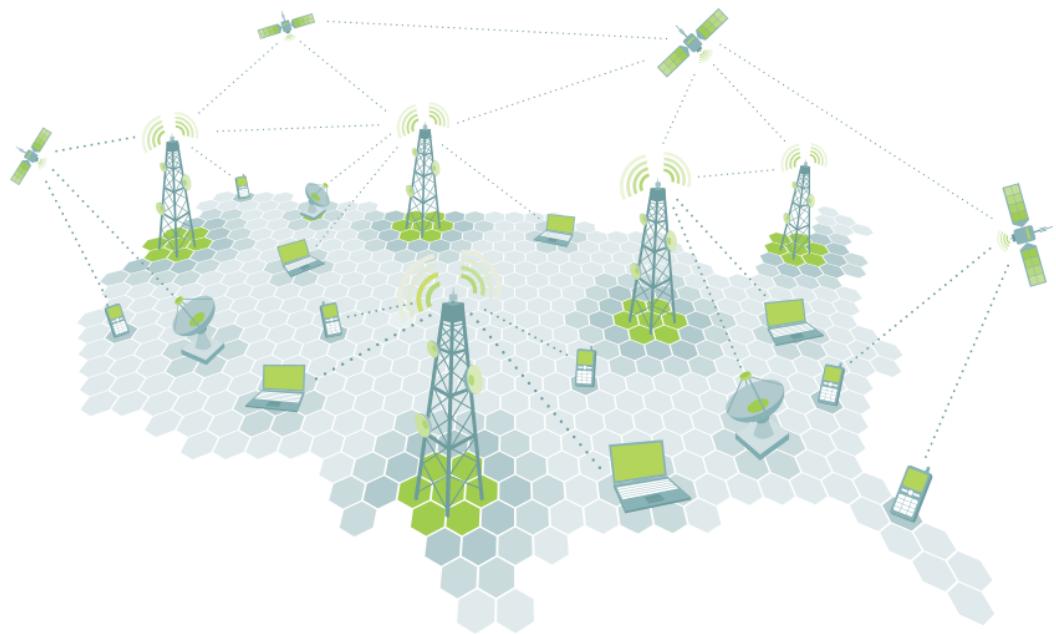
Regional Active Transportation Plan

The Public Health Divisions of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties, working together under the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), have developed a Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP) that identifies a set of strategies that can be implemented by SHIP staff and/or community partners in the region. For this plan, a Regional Network was identified that connects the nodes and corridors in the region. The Regional Network represents high-level, conceptual connections between important regional origins and destinations and does not identify specific street routes or facility types. Benton County should continue to use this plan to help implement projects that support active living initiatives from a transportation perspective.

REGIONAL ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

November 2015





Communication

Reliable and affordable internet (wireless or broadband), also known as e-Connectivity, plays a fundamental role in our economic activity. More importantly, access to high-speed internet is vital for a diverse set of industries, including agricultural production, manufacturing, mining, and forestry. This connectivity acts as a catalyst for rural prosperity by enabling efficient, modern communications between rural American households, schools, and health care centers. In that respect, it is important to recognize the internet coverage in Benton County. In general, approximately 25 percent of the county is

served with wireless broadband, while 25 percent is underserved. The remaining 50 percent do not have access to any form of wireless broadband.

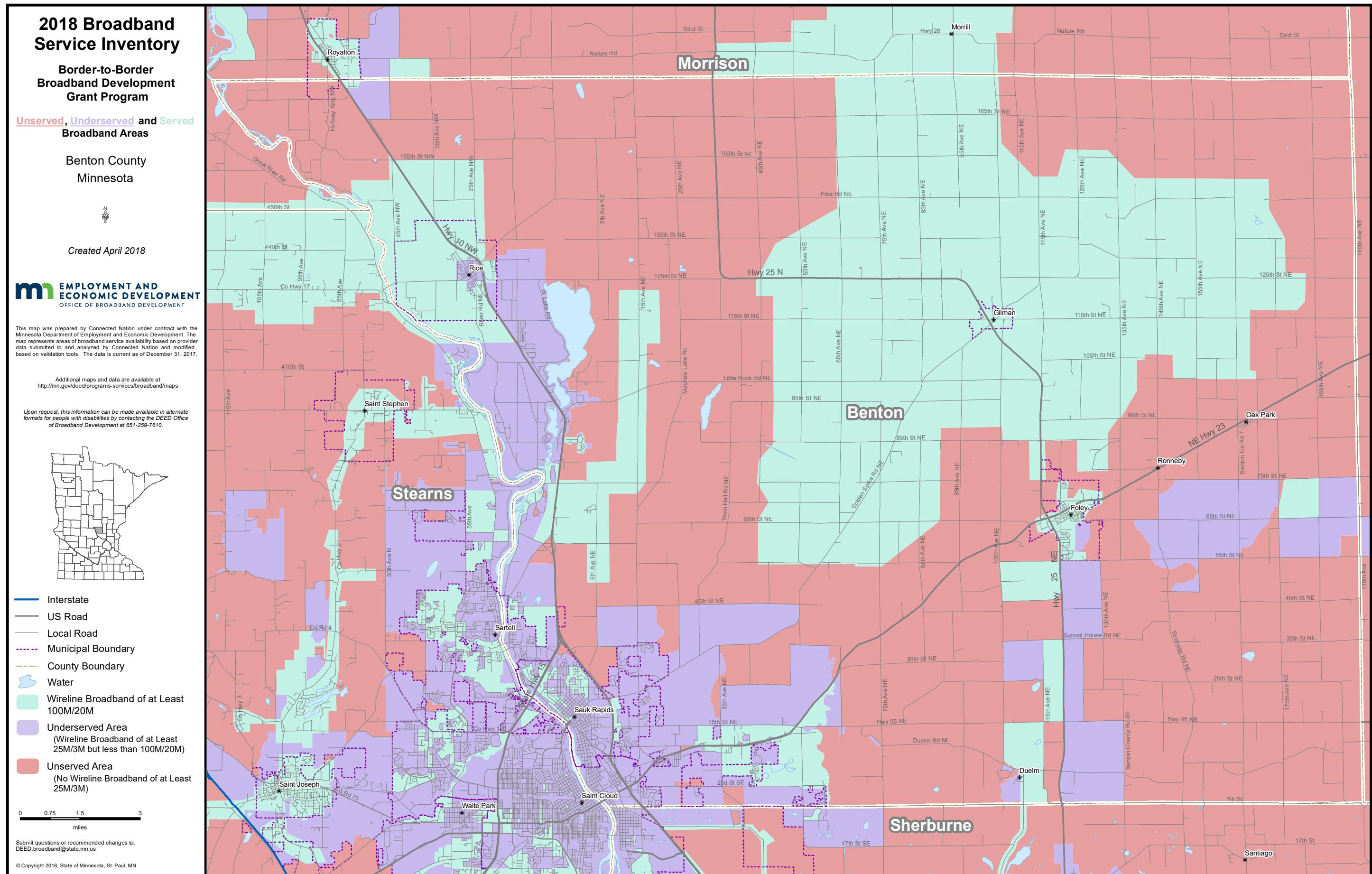
The 2012 US Census of Agriculture is another source of data to better understand Benton County's internet coverage (see Table 2.7). In 2012, 73 percent of Benton County farmers had some form of internet, which represents a 15 percent increase from 2007.

Table 2.7. Internet Access to Benton County Farmers

Year	Number of Farms	Farms with Internet	Percent with Internet
2007	919	537	58%
2012	958	695	73%

Source: 2012 US Census of Agriculture (data was not collected as part of the 2017 US Census of Agriculture)

Figure 2.7. 2018 Broadband Service Inventory



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Communication Trends

According to a 2017 report by the Federal Communications Commission, 80 percent of the 24 million American households that do not have reliable, affordable high-speed internet are in rural areas. Key findings from this report include:

- From 2012 to 2014, mobile LTE broadband was newly deployed to 34.2 million people, including 21.5 million rural Americans. But in the following two years, new mobile deployments dropped 83 percent, reaching only 5.8 million more Americans, including only 2.3 million more rural Americans.
- Rural and Tribal areas continue to lag behind urban areas in mobile broadband deployment. Although evaluated urban areas saw an increase in data speeds (LTE broadband at speeds of 10 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second) from 81.9% in 2014 to 90.5 % in 2016, such deployment in evaluated rural and Tribal areas remained flat at about 70% and 64%, respectively.
- Approximately 14 million rural Americans and 1.2 million Americans living on Tribal lands still lack mobile LTE broadband at speeds of 10 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second.
- Approximately 92% of the population has access to both fixed terrestrial services at 25 Mbps/3 Mbps and mobile LTE at speeds of 5 Mbps/1 Mbps. In rural areas, 68.6% of Americans have access to both services, as opposed to 97.9% of Americans in urban areas. With respect to fixed 25 Mbps/3 Mbps and 10 Mbps/3 Mbps LTE services, 85.3% of all Americans have access to such services, including 61% in evaluated rural areas and 89.8% in evaluated urban areas.

- Approximately 98.1% of the country has access to either fixed terrestrial service at 25 Mbps/3 Mbps or mobile LTE at 10 Mbps/3 Mbps, with that number dropping to 89.7% in rural areas.

The Nation and State continue to recognize the wireless and broadband gaps that exist in rural areas. In response to this issue, the State of Minnesota has established two goals in providing better access:

- By 2022, all Minnesota businesses and homes will have access to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second.
- No later than 2026, all Minnesota businesses and homes have access to at least one provider of broadband with download speeds of at least 100 megabits per second and upload speeds of at least 20 megabits per second.

As part of this effort, Benton County should take an active role in helping advance affordable and reliable internet access from border-to-border.

Housing

Cities within Benton County are seeing growth, and there is continuing demand for more residential options at the edges of these cities. Many townships within the County are seeing more demand for traditional "suburban" residential development, with large lot, single family detached homes.

There is a correlation between level of income, housing value and geographical location. The cities tend to have an older and smaller-sized housing stock which is declining in value. The housing just outside of the cities, however, is newer, larger, higher in value, and inhabited by higher wage earners. This was seen in the early 2000s as Sauk Rapids and Sartell felt a boom in housing. Both of these Cities

are experiencing continued residential growth within their City limits.

Table 2.8 ranks the townships and cities by median household income and median housing value. St. George Township has the highest median household income and one of the highest median housing value. Most of the cities are near the bottom of the list. In the southwestern corner of the county, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and St. Cloud are all characterized by lower median housing values and lower median household incomes than the surrounding townships. Sauk Rapids and Minden Townships have significantly higher median housing values and incomes than the cities they surround.

Table 2.8. Median Household Income & Household Value

Rank	City or Township	Median Household Income (2016)
1	St. George Township	\$79,375
2	Langola Township	\$76,250
3	Mayhew Lake Township	\$74,375
4	Gilmanton Township	\$74,107
5	Sartell (part)	\$71,959
6	Watab Township	\$70,938
7	Graham Township	\$70,833
8	Glendorado Township	\$70,781
9	Sauk Rapids Township	\$70,583
10	Rice	\$69,044
11	Gilman	\$68,750
12	Maywood Township	\$67,583
13	Minden Township	\$67,125
14	Alberta Township	\$62,679
15	Granite Ledge Township	\$61,071
16	Royalton (part)	\$52,778
17	Foley	\$52,394
18	Sauk Rapids	\$48,164
19	St. Could (part)	\$45,223

Rank	City or Township	Median Household Value (2016)
1	Mayhew Lake Township	\$239,200
2	Glendorado Township	\$230,600
3	Langola Township	\$227,200
4	St. George Township	\$222,700
5	Maywood Township	\$212,900
6	Graham Township	\$212,500
7	Gilmanton Township	\$209,900
8	Sauk Rapids Township	\$205,600
9	Granite Ledge Township	\$201,900
10	Watab Township	\$190,100
11	Alberta Township	\$187,500
12	Minden Township	\$181,700
13	Sartell (part)	\$180,300
14	Rice	\$153,600
15	Sauk Rapids	\$148,300
16	St. Cloud (part)	\$144,100
17	Gilman	\$140,300
18	Royalton (part)	\$132,100
19	Foley	\$131,100

Housing Trends

According to a 2017 study prepared by the Urban Institute, the nation can expect the following housing trends in rural America:

- Rural areas will see slow growth rates.
- Rural Americans are aging faster than Americans in metropolitan areas.
- Rural households will become as racially diverse by 2030 as the nation was in 1990.
- Demand for housing in rural areas will increase.
- The housing needs of rural seniors will require urgent attention.
- A growing share of working-age rural Americans may need housing assistance, even if they do not qualify for it.



Public Health

The comprehensive plan can play a pivotal role in promoting the health of the County. The natural and built environment provides the opportunity to support or limit healthy behaviors and active lifestyles. Our health begins with decisions on where to place things such as county facilities and services, transit routes, parks, trails, and highway investments. County operations, public entities, community organizations and businesses should be encouraged to consider community health as early as possible in the decision-making process to ensure all residents can lead healthy lives. A "health-in-all-policies" approach recognizes that community leaders, planners and engineers are in a unique position to improve the county's health by shaping the environments where people live, work and play.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and local public health agencies have recognized the impacts the built environment can have in achieving healthy communities. MDH has identified numerous practices that can be implemented to promote a healthier environment for our residents. In Benton County, this work is guided by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) grant from the MDH, with a strong focus on reducing health care costs and reducing chronic disease by creating sustainable policy, systems, and environmental changes. Local public health agencies and SHIP are working to create healthier communities across Minnesota by expanding opportunities for active living, healthy eating and tobacco-free living. Comprehensive planning can draw upon these connections and put policies in place to support healthy communities. The Benton County Comprehensive Plan has started



the healthy community discussion by recognizing existing programs and initiatives, as well as highlighting health inequities and opportunities for chronic disease prevention by increasing active living opportunities and access to local foods.

Planning for the Public's Health

Benton County Public Health tracks and monitors the health status of county residents. The county's overall health is defined based on various health metrics such as rates of chronic disease, substance and alcohol use, and nutritious food intake, to name a few. All local public health agencies in Minnesota must participate in assessment and planning to determine local public health priorities and focus local resources accordingly. These findings are primarily detailed in the following documents:

Community Health Assessment (CHA)

The CHA is updated every five years. The CHA discusses a wide array of information about the conditions and factors affecting health, as well as indicators of population health status. It represents a snapshot in time of the health of people, adults and children, and the environments in Benton County. This assessment is one tool that helps to identify the top health priorities for community action. An area

of focus for this work is chronic disease prevention. Public Health works to improve health by reducing risk factors that contribute to chronic disease, resulting in reduced health care costs.

Central Minnesota Community Health Survey

The Central Minnesota Community Health Survey is one part of the planning process that asks important questions about the health and wellness of the respondents and community. Surveying will occur on a three-year cycle, as both hospitals and local public health are required to complete the survey every three to five years. This survey is part of an ongoing collaboration between Benton, Sherburne and Stearns Public Health agencies along with CentraCare Health, Fairview Northland Medical Center and the United Way of Central MN. The results of this survey are invaluable to Public Health to assist in determining the direction of their work and measuring success.



Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

The CHIP is a long-term, systematic effort to address public health priorities identified in the county. The CHIP is used by Benton County Public Health and community partners to set priorities, coordinate resources, develop policies, and set actions to protect and promote health.

Public Health Trends

The majority of Benton County residents would describe their health as good, very good or excellent. We fare well in many health indicators when compared to other counties in the state and at the national level. Yet when we really start to look at the data, we see that while we have made progress, we still have much work to do. We are particularly interested in health disparities, described as differences in key determinants of health such as education, safe housing, and access to healthy food, which may have an adverse effect on select populations.

We are also looking at health inequities which are described as differences in health that are not only unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are considered unfair and unjust. Health inequities are rooted in social determinants that make some population groups more vulnerable to poor health than other groups. Knowing where these disparities and inequities exist helps target our resources for those most in need.

Current health findings are documented in the County's CHA, Central MN Community Health Survey data and the CHIP, in addition to other public health resources.

Food Access Trends

Ensuring access to a healthy, sustainable food system is key to establishing and maintaining a high quality of life. The ability to easily access basic needs and services influences a person's social, economic, physical, and mental well-being. Planning for future development requires integrated thinking about transportation (e.g., roads, sidewalks, paths, transit) and land use, including considerations about where and how people will obtain food. Long-range planning must support a balanced retail environment, including a fair distribution of food outlets, and a diversity of options to purchase healthy food. Access to healthy foods can reduce the rates of preventable diseases, improve the county's overall health, aid in community and economic development initiatives, and promote a fair share for all residents.

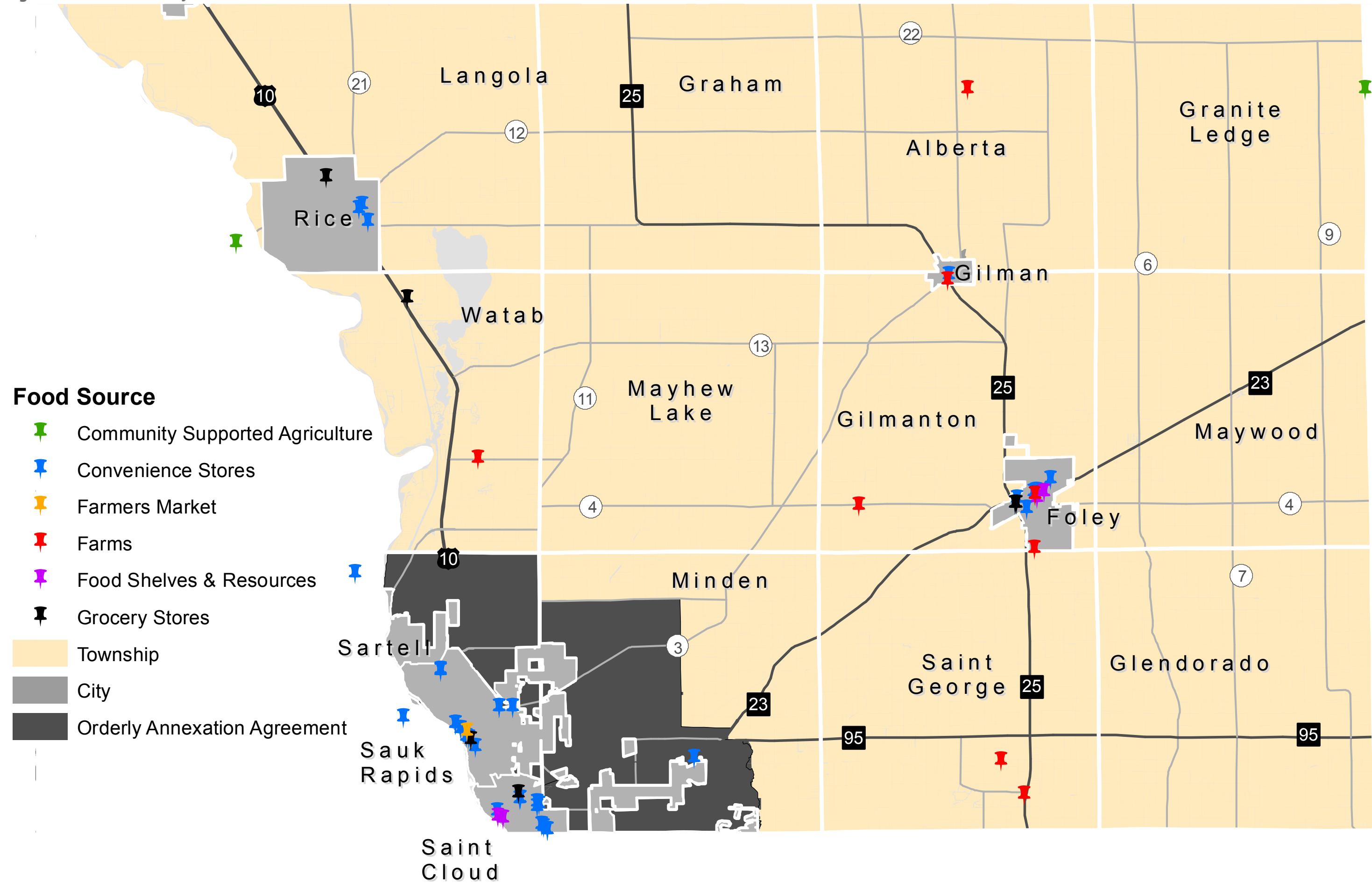
Access to healthy food is a challenge, particularly in rural communities. Long drives to healthy food sources, and associated transportation costs, are a deterrent to obtaining healthy foods and maintaining a nutritious diet. Distance is compounded for households that lack a personal vehicle or the ability to drive one. The growth of rural poverty means that more low-income households are located in communities where transit service is limited or nonexistent.

To address these needs, Benton County can move toward including food, equity, and health-related policy and systems changes in this comprehensive plan. This should include:

- Affordable, safe, and reliable transportation to food sources.
- Support for small- and medium-sized food and farm enterprises.
- Zoning code regulations that support healthy food infrastructure.
- Access to and preservation of land for food production.
- Support of community food assets (such as community gardens, pollinator-friendly habitats, food hubs, and farmers' markets).

Creating reliable access to safe, affordable, and healthy food is an important way to ensure health for all. Food access locations in Benton County and surrounding areas is shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.8. Benton County Access to Food



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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

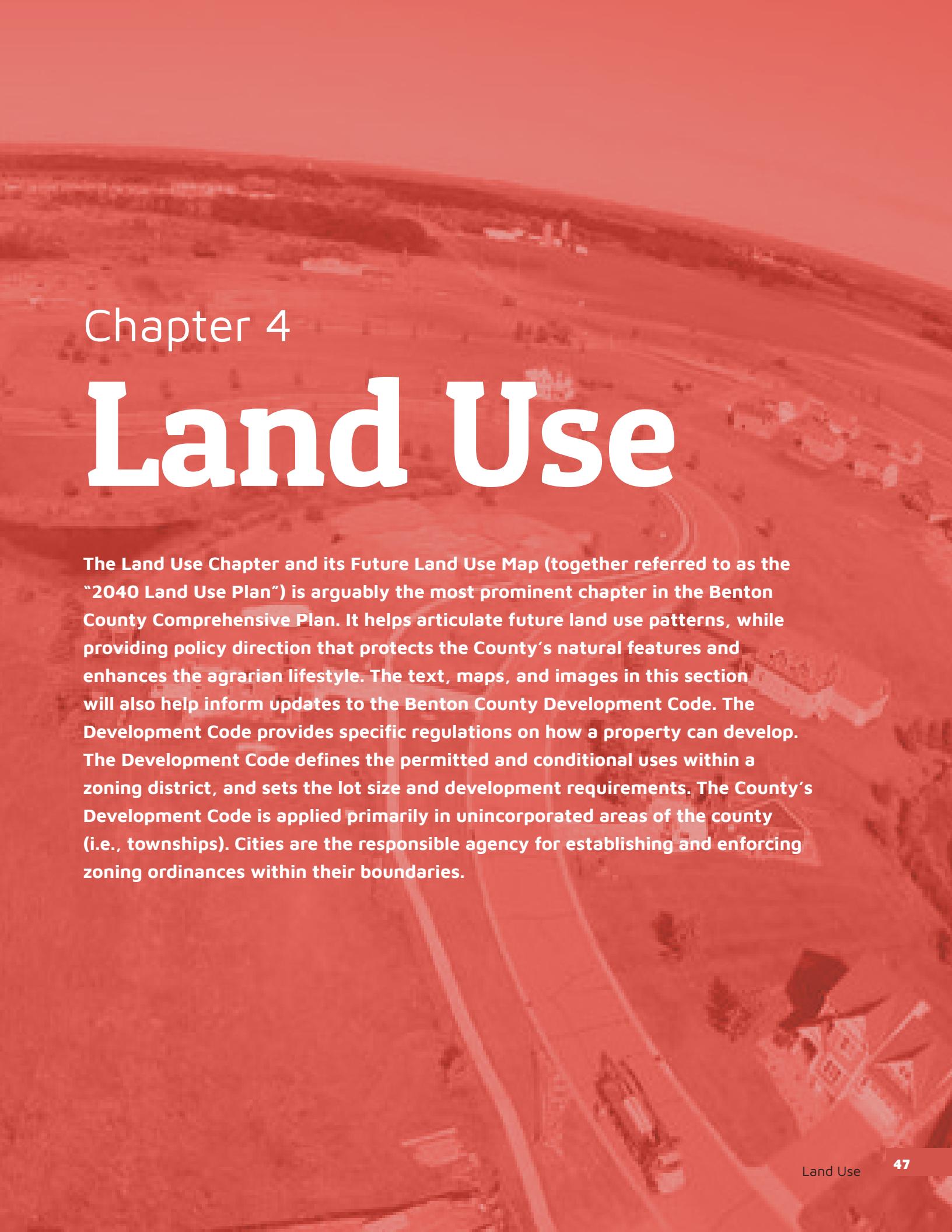
1. **Visual Aesthetic:** Encourage developing properties to create landscape buffers to maintain the aesthetic quality of the area.
2. **Signage:** Promote the appropriate use of signs (directional informational and advertising) to create community identity.
3. **Rural Character:** Maintain the rural 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.

A faint, semi-transparent background image of an aerial view of a rural landscape. It shows a mix of agricultural fields, some roads, and a small cluster of buildings that could be a town or a farm. The colors are mostly earthy tones like browns, greens, and blues.

Chapter 4

Land Use

The Land Use Chapter and its Future Land Use Map (together referred to as the “2040 Land Use Plan”) is arguably the most prominent chapter in the Benton County Comprehensive Plan. It helps articulate future land use patterns, while providing policy direction that protects the County’s natural features and enhances the agrarian lifestyle. The text, maps, and images in this section will also help inform updates to the Benton County Development Code. The Development Code provides specific regulations on how a property can develop. The Development Code defines the permitted and conditional uses within a zoning district, and sets the lot size and development requirements. The County’s Development Code is applied primarily in unincorporated areas of the county (i.e., townships). Cities are the responsible agency for establishing and enforcing zoning ordinances within their boundaries.

Existing Conditions

Benton County is approximately 259,000 acres in size (see Table 4.1). Approximately 10 percent of those acres are within incorporated areas or orderly annexation areas. Benton County's land use control falls within the remaining 233,000 acres. Of those acres, 76 percent is predominantly used for agricultural purposes, including land for crop production, pasture lands, dairy farms, and other open areas associated with farming. Non-farmstead (i.e., rural residential) homes are also scattered throughout Benton County. These land use patterns (8.5 percent) are small-scale in nature and thus far have not significantly altered the County's rural areas.

Commercial and industrial land uses are also located throughout rural parts of the county. The type of uses vary greatly, but typically cater to the agrarian economic lifestyle. These uses for the most part have been confined to the areas around Highway 10 and Highway 23. It is also important to recognize the numbers in Table 4.1 do not account for the number of small businesses that are operating from their home or farm. These type of businesses (e.g., salons, woodworking, auto mechanics and accountants) are typically approved through a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). A total of ten CUPs were issued by the County in 2017 and 2018. Figure 4.1 illustrates the existing land use patterns as of 2018.

Table 4.1. 2018 Generalized Existing Land Uses

Generalized Existing Land Use Category	Acres	Percent
Incorporated Areas (Cities)	10,972.11	4.24%
Orderly Annexation Agreements (Existing)	14,483.86	5.60%
Sub Total	25,455.97	9.84%
Agriculture & Farming Uses	196,524.84	75.99%
Rural Residential (40 acres or less)	22,230.40	8.60%
Commercial/Industrial	691.63	0.27%
Public / Semi-Public (e.g., ROW, Church, School)	1,088.18	0.42%
Parks & Open Space	4,811.29	1.86%
Rural Vacant *	7,810.99	3.02%
Sub Total	233,157.33	90.16%
Total	258,613.30	100.00%

* The parcel is not actively being farmed or contain a structure/home.

Source: Benton County Tax Assessor Data

How are Land Use Decisions Made Today?

The authority to engage in land use planning is set forth in Minnesota law. Planning is considered to be an exercise of the police powers of the state. City, township, and county planning is based on state law, often called state planning enabling legislation. Under enabling legislation, planning begins with an analysis of community needs and goals, which are then formulated into a Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan then becomes the guiding policy for community development. The zoning ordinance and other land use regulations must be based on this comprehensive plan.

For cities and townships, the authority to plan is found in Minnesota Statutes Section 462.353. Counties are authorized to plan under Minnesota Statutes Section 394.23.



2040 Land Use Plan

The 2040 Land Use Plan takes a system-wide approach that integrates natural features and soil data to better inform land management and decision making. This approach was established to provide the following benefits:

- Articulate desired land use patterns that align with the Comprehensive Plan's vision, goals and policies.
- Identify areas that should be preserved for farming based on soils, natural features and development patterns.
- Illustrate the County's vast range of natural features (e.g., open water, wetland and streams) that defines its landscape.
- Manage growth in a sustainable manner that preserves and protects natural features.
- Conserve farmland and natural areas by limiting sprawl.

The 2040 Land Use Plan (see Figure 4.2) should also be used to help articulate the County's expectations for future development. These expectations are translated through a set of community values. The community values were identified by county stakeholders during the planning process and serve as a blueprint for future land use decisions, while helping align the 2040 Land Use Plan with the County's Development Code.

Community Values

- **Aggregate Resources:** Encourage development to occur in areas that do not contain accessible large aggregate deposits.
- **Agricultural Resources:** Protect Benton County's agricultural lands as a resource base for its agricultural industries and for related benefits they contribute towards the County's rural character, scenic quality, natural environment, and economic health.
- **Environmental Resources:** Enforce State and County regulations that protect natural resources, wetlands, shorelands, and floodplains.
- **Growth:** Protect existing farms by directing development pressure towards areas served with urban services or existing complementary development.
- **Housing:** Expand housing choices for county residents and an expanding workforce by creating development opportunities throughout Benton County.
- **Natural Resources:** Preserve and manage Benton County's natural resources in order to protect the environment and conserve resources for future use.
- **Open Space Preservation:** Encourage open space preservation through the process of clustering homes.
- **Rural Residential:** Buffer development from farming operations to minimize conflicts between the two uses.
- **Water Resources:** Protect the quality and supply of surface water and groundwater resources.

Figure 4.1. Existing Land Use

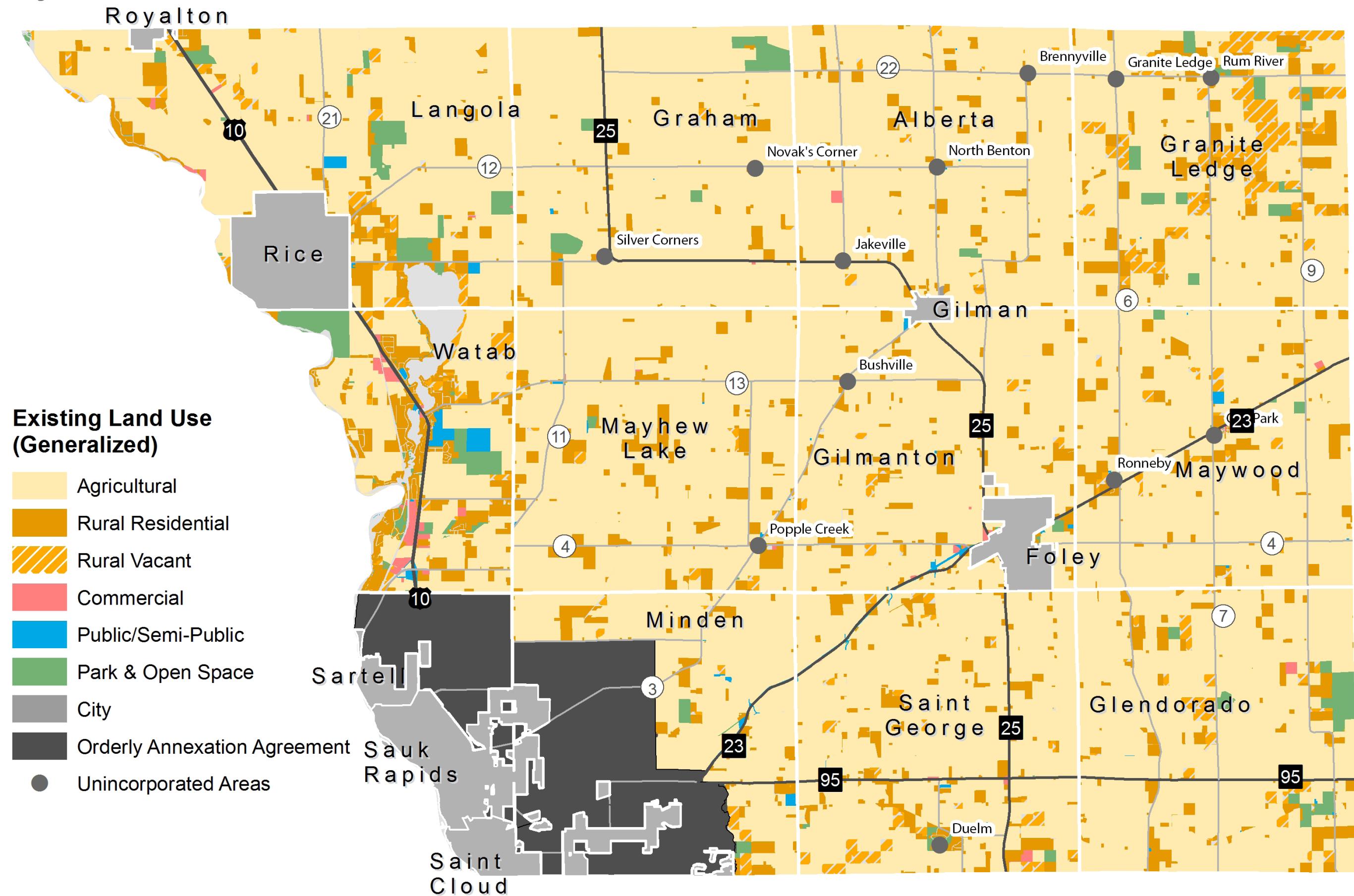
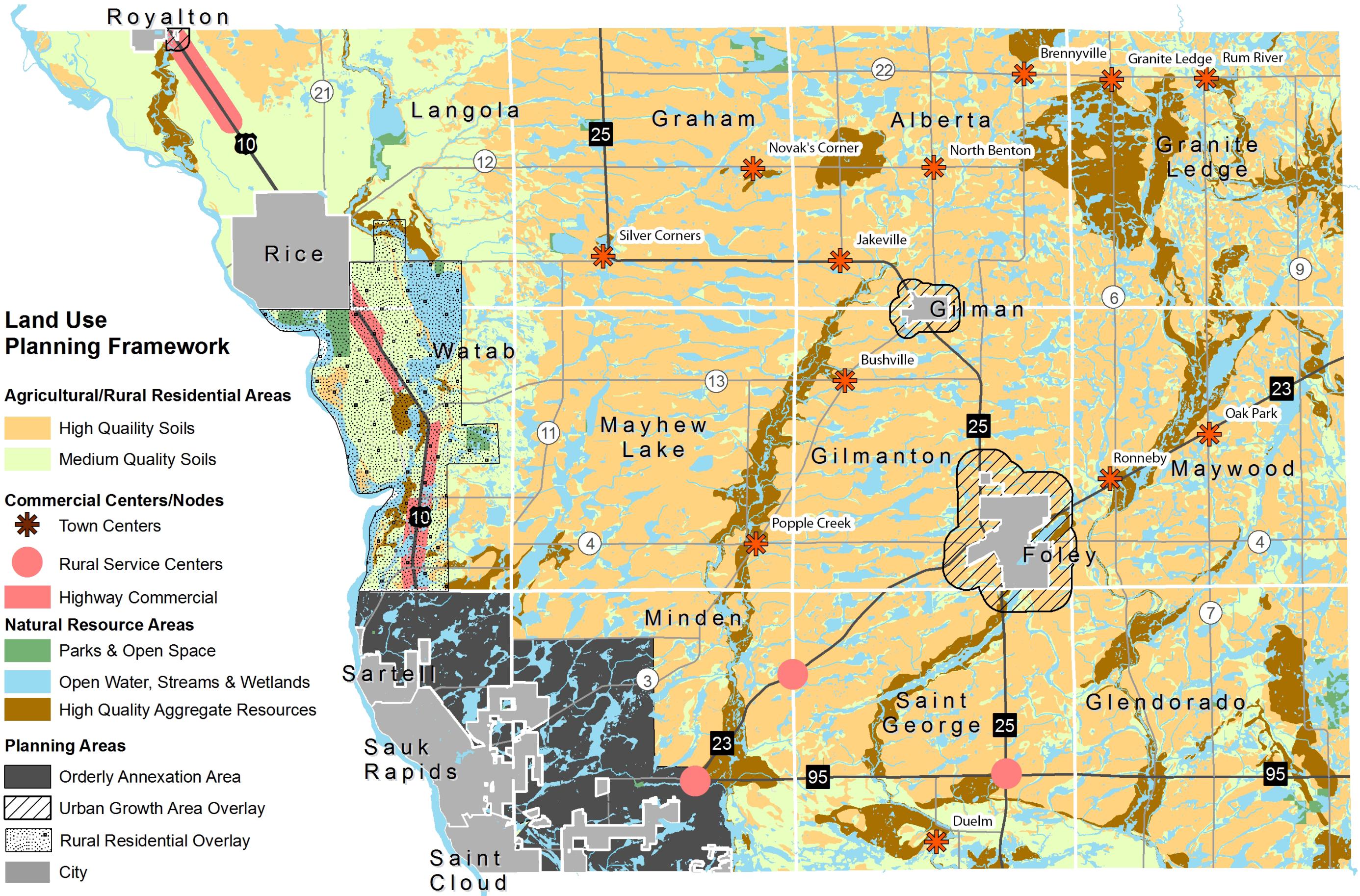


Figure 4.2. Planned Land Use (2040)



Future Land Use Categories

The following section provides general descriptions of the future land use categories (or typologies) contained within Benton County's 2040 Land Use Plan (see Figure 4.2). The categories were established to better reflect future land use patterns and community values. The boundaries of the future land use categories are defined based on existing land use patterns, local jurisdictional growth plans, and natural resources.

Agricultural & Rural Residential Areas

The majority of Benton County will continue to be used for agricultural purposes, while supporting low-density non-farming housing (i.e., rural residential). Figure 4.2 helps demonstrate future land use patterns suitable for agricultural purposes by depicting soil types (source: University of Minnesota and Land Management Information Center). The soil types include:

- **High Quality Soils:** These areas have been determined to be the most appropriate for long-term farming because of its soils and history of agriculture. High quality soils are generally considered "prime" or "good" for agriculture use.
- **Medium Quality Soils:** Medium quality soils are generally considered "good" or "fair" for agriculture use or can be made so through irrigation, tilling, fertilization and crop rotation. The sandy soils of southern Minden and St. George Townships are an example of soils that are not naturally prime for agriculture, but can be managed for high productivity. Farming is supported in these areas as long as it is maintained outside of the current city limits and planned growth areas.





To help preserve these areas for future agricultural uses, development should be guided at lower densities. A density of 4 dwelling units per 40 acres is desired. A slightly higher density can be achieved if homes are clustered and developed at 6 dwelling units per 40 acres (measured on a quarter-quarter section basis). Future residential development should also be situated in a way that maximizes the agriculture use of the remaining farmland.

Natural Resource Areas

The Natural Resources Areas begin to highlight some of the unique features that define Benton County's landscape. The 2040 Land Use Plan depicts these natural resources as parks and open space, open water, streams and wetlands, and high quality aggregate resources.

Parks and Open Space

Parks are an essential amenity that positively impact the health of the county. Benton County maintains and operates 4 county parks that encompass 338 acres in total. The two largest county parks include Benton Beach and Bend in the River. Benton County's parks provide a range of community gathering space and recreational activities. The parks system also offers a variety of options for the user, such as camping, picnic shelters, trails, and passive open spaces. The park system is further complemented by city parks and open space areas. A more in-depth look at the Benton County park system is discussed in Chapter 6.



Open Water, Streams and Wetlands

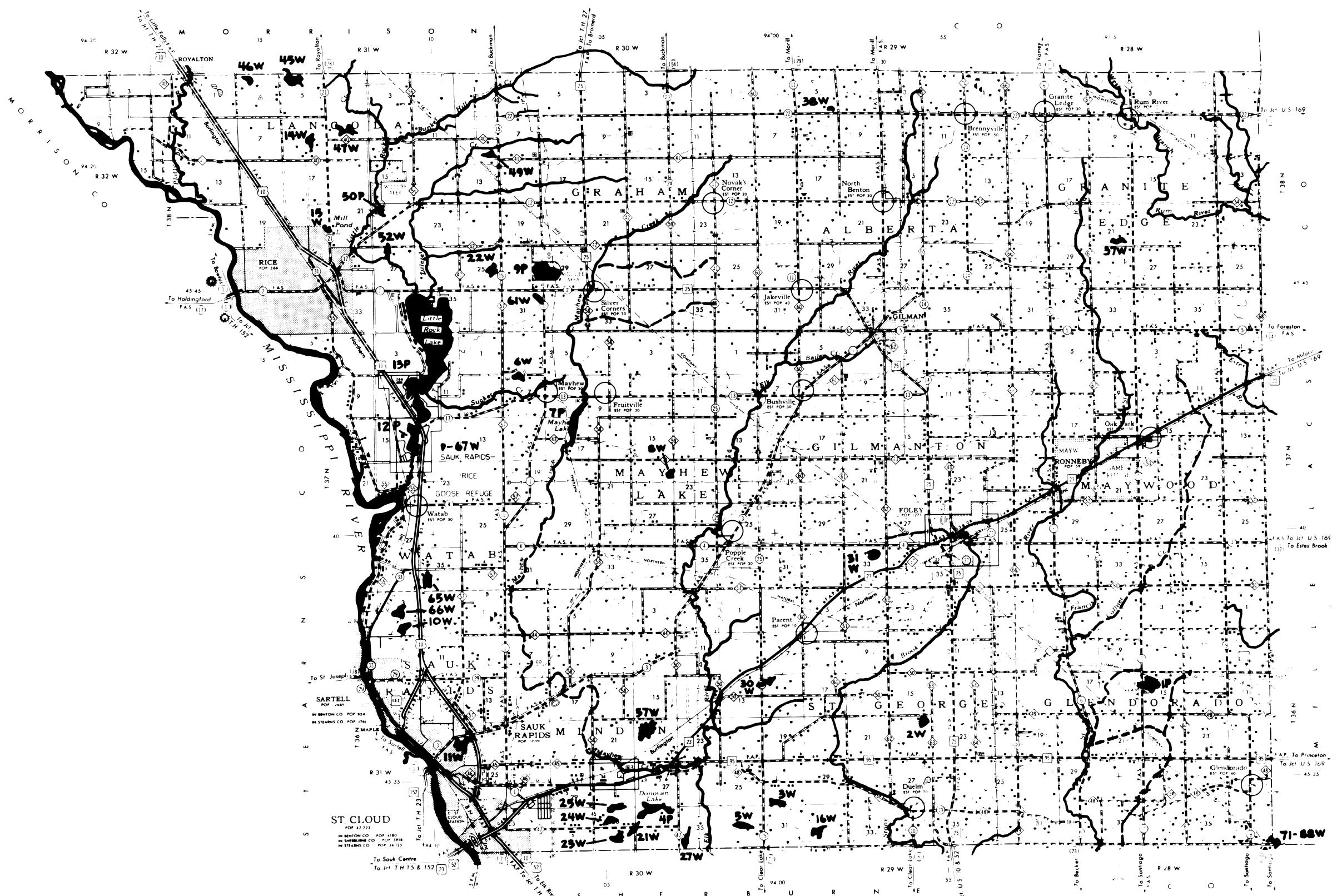
Water features are among the highest profile natural amenities within the county. The vast amount of wetlands, creeks, and streams are particularly valuable. The Mississippi River is also a defining water feature that draws visitors throughout the region for boating, fishing, and other recreational activities.

The water features identified in Figure 4.2 represent wetlands, lakes, rivers, streams, and creeks. These water systems support wildlife habitat, natural vegetation and spawning areas. Alteration of these systems in the form of pollutants, filling or draining can have an adverse effect. For this reason, they require special attention (see sidebar).

High Quality Aggregate Resources

Large portions of aggregate resources can be found throughout the county. High quality aggregate areas are identified in Figure 4.2 (source Minnesota Geological Survey) and may consist of sand and gravel and crushed stone. Most of the highest quality aggregate in these areas are used for construction purposes, such as the manufacturing of concrete or asphalt. Aggregates of lower quality are used for fill, base-course for roads, and for a variety of other purposes.

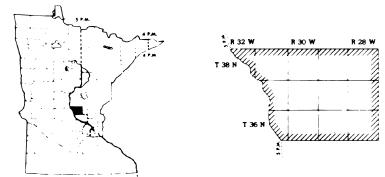
Figure 4.3. Protected Waters and Wetlands



PROTECTED WATERS AND WETLANDS

BENTON COUNTY MINNESOTA

SHEET 1 of 1



LEGEND

Protected Waters:

- Basins are identified with a number and the letter “P”.
- Watercourses are identified with a heavy, dark line.
- Public ditches are identified with a dashed line.

Protected Wetlands:

Protected Wetlands:

This map is intended for use with a separate descriptive list. The boundaries of the protected water bodies shown on this map are plotted as accurately as possible, consistent with the map scale, but are still approximate. A protected water body boundary coincides with the ordinary high water mark of the water body as defined in Minnesota Statutes, Section 105.37 and is determined through DNR field inspection or survey.

Protected waters and wetlands are subject to Minnesota Statutes, Section 105.42, which requires that a permit be obtained before making any alteration in the course, current or cross-section of these waters. Contact the DNR office in your area for further information.

Trespass

The designation and mapping of protected waters or wetlands **does not** entitle anyone to cross private land in order to gain access to the water. Please respect the property of others.

Water Bank

Wetland owners may be eligible for compensation for preservation of protected wetlands. Contact the DNR office in your area for further information.

SCALE: $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1 MILE



Department of  Natural Resources
Division of Waters 1983
Revised 1996

Figure 4.4. Floodplain Management Areas

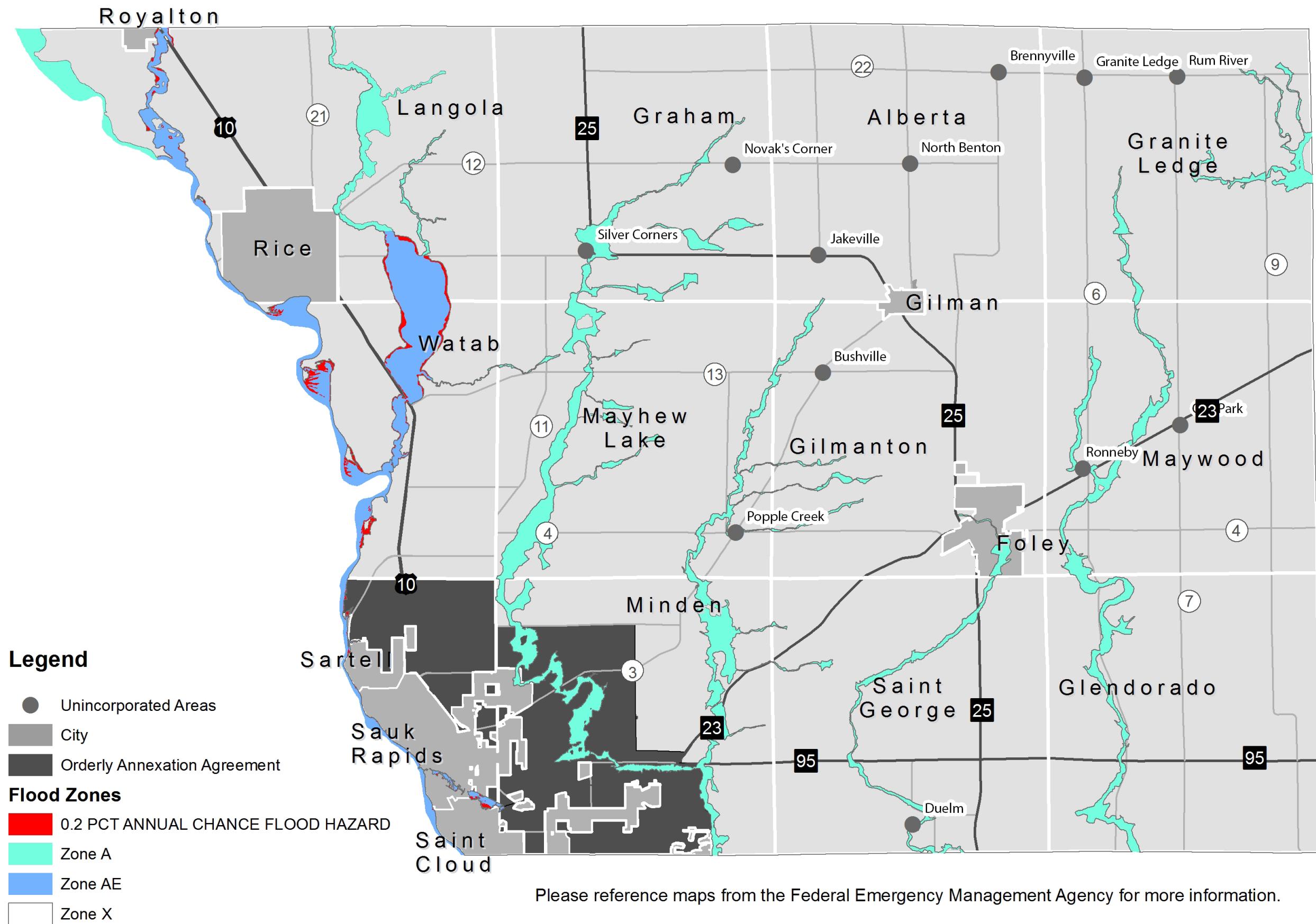
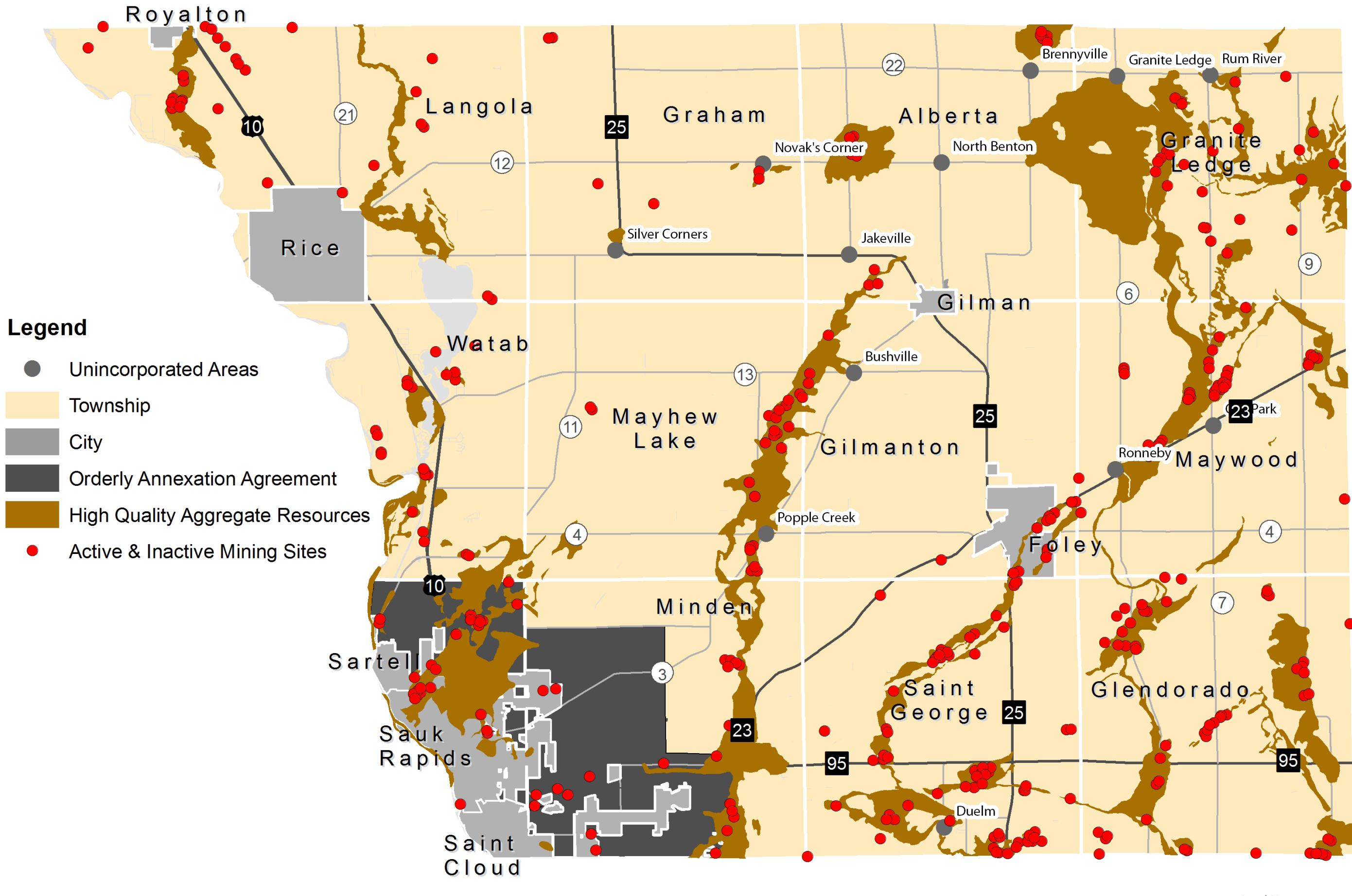


Figure 4.5. Aggregate Resources & Mining Areas



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Benton County has a total of eight quarry pits and 336 gravel pits (sand, gravel, and/or crushed stone) that have been or are currently being mined (see Figure 4.5). Pit and quarry locations have been gathered from several different sources through the Minnesota Geological survey records. The pits and quarries range in size from less than one acre to greater than 50 acres and may be active, inactive, depleted, or reclaimed. The aggregate quality of the pits varies.

Aggregate resources in the region, particularly in the Twins Cities is rapidly diminishing. Benton County recognizes these trends and the growing demand for mining operations in the area. There is a desire to preserve these resources for local economic development initiatives and public works projects. Accessing these resources locally can reduce the costs for local construction projects, compared to shipping resources from outside of the region. In an effort to preserve these resources, Benton County should consider the following policies:

- Locally source aggregate resources for construction projects, such as county roadway improvements or other public works initiatives.
- As part of the development review process, applicants should demonstrate to the satisfaction of the County that their project does not impact future access to aggregate resources.

Examples of State and County Regulations

Shoreland Protection Area: Land within 1,000 feet of specified lakes or within 300 feet of designated streams in Benton County is protected under the County's Shoreland District Management regulations. Those lakes and streams are illustrated on the County's Official Protected Waters and Wetlands Map generated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (see Figure 4.3). Regulations vary according to the classification of each lake or stream. Lakes classified as Natural Environment are: Bible Duck Slough, Donovan, Mayhew, Pularskis and Vicki. Lakes classified as Recreational Development are: Little Rock and the Little Rock Channel and Flowage. All rivers and streams are classified as Forested, Transition, Agricultural, Urban or Tributary.

Regulations also address land use, lot size, setback from the water, building elevation, grading and filling, tree and shrub removal, docks, natural resource protection and related matters. Shoreland regulations supplement and modify the "base" zoning.

Floodplain Management Area: The Floodplain Management Areas are not shown on the Land Use Plan map but are illustrated by the federal Flood Insurance Rate Study map (see Figure 4.4), which has been adopted as a supplement to the County zoning map.

The regulations of the Flood Plain District are the same as those of the model flood plain district developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in conformance with the Flood Plain Act, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 104. Included are regulations on land use, parcel size, flood proofing, building elevation and floodwater obstructions.

Commercial Centers/Nodes

The work of business retention and attraction is critical to the local economy in Benton County, driving growth of the local tax base and expanding the employment opportunities, services, and amenities that residents depend on and desire. Benton County aspires to bring new opportunities, businesses, and economic vibrancy to the community in the next 20 years. These initiatives are reflected in the Benton Economic Partnership's 2019 Strategic Plan. The 2040 Land Use Plan has identified areas in the unincorporated areas that are suitable for commercial and industrial uses. These areas are reflected in Figure 4.2 as Town Centers, Rural Service Centers and Highway Commercial.



Images of Town Centers in Benton County

Town Centers

Town Centers capture small housing and business nodes (e.g., commercial establishment or two, a church, and a handful of residences). These locations are usually at the crossroads of two major roadways that are not incorporated. Historically, these locations have provided rural parts of the county access to goods and services. The number of businesses today may be relatively small, but can range from implement stores, storage facilities, restaurants/bars, and religious institutions. Smaller subdivisions and single-family residential homes are also common land uses in these areas.

Some of the larger Town Centers include Duelm, Oak Park, Mayhew, and Brennyville. Although incorporation is not anticipated, there may be opportunities to allow limited development in and around these centers. For example, Benton County allows for a variety of home occupied businesses through a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). Typical home businesses in the county include "cottage" type industries or services, ranging from woodworking, cabinetry, contractor yards, small repair shops, seamstresses and beauty salons. As these businesses prosper, they may outgrow the home business and seek to expand their services by relocating. CUP's who choose to expand should be encouraged to locate in and around Town Centers. Clustering businesses at key nodes can help generate stronger economic prosperity for rural parts of the county, while providing a centralized location for commerce.

Rural Service Centers

The Rural Service Centers are similar to the Town Centers; however, they do not have the historical context as an unincorporated Town Center. The Rural Service Centers are primarily located at nodes where state highways intersect. The Rural Service Centers should continue to grow with housing and businesses. The pattern of land use should be similar to these centers' historic character; that is, a mixture of residential and non-residential development on compact lots. Housing should also be permitted in the Rural Service Centers on parcels large enough to meet all Benton County requirements for on-site wastewater disposal systems and individual water wells.

Highway Commercial

Commercial and industrial land uses make up a relatively small part of the county's land area. Suitable locations for commercial or industrial development have been located outside the incorporated areas. These areas are principally located along the Highway 10 corridor. Development is typically unsewered and either provide goods and services to the surrounding agricultural community or to the traveling public. Residential development is typically prohibited in these areas.

The feasibility to develop along the highway may be challenging from a transportation and environmental perspective. These challenges include limited roadway access, wetland constraints, and the ability to address sewer and water needs.

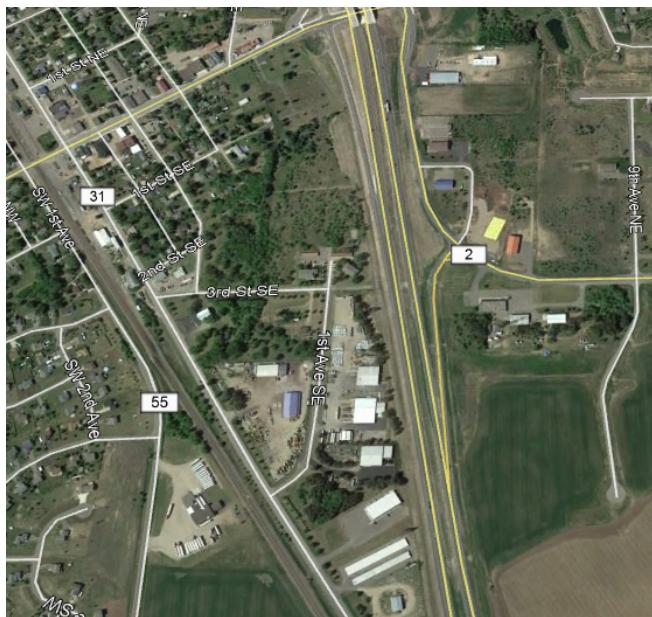
The following guiding principles should be used to promote development in a sustainable manner.

- **Clustering:** Businesses should be clustered together. Clustering development in this manner will help businesses support one another, providing successful and viable businesses.

- **Design:** Ensure a compatible design transition between commercial uses and residential or agriculture uses including retaining existing features of the landscape as defining elements of site design (fence rows, ditches, wetlands, woods) or incorporating greater setback and landscaping standards. All commercial or industrial development should be screened from the view of adjacent houses or farms.
- **Image:** Site design and building aesthetics along the corridor should promote a positive image of the community. This can be achieved through design principles (e.g., building materials and landscaping) that convey the corridor as an attractive place for visitors and prospective businesses.



Highway 10 near Royalton, MN



Highway 10 south of Rice, MN

- **Environment:** The proximity of new commercial development with the natural environment needs to be monitored. Appropriate mitigation strategies need to occur to avoid impacts to wetlands, open waters, natural species, etc.
- **Road Access:** Road access must conform to the access management requirements of Benton County and/or the Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- **Signage:** Sign restrictions (e.g., height, design and location) should be applied to mitigate negative visual impacts to the corridor.
- **Zoning:** Commercial or industrial development should be permitted in locations appropriately planned and zoned by Benton County, or in locations planned by a City, annexed to that City and rezoned appropriately.

Planning Areas

For the purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, the County assumes a majority of the growth projected for the year 2040 and beyond (see Chapter 2) will occur within the cities or along their borders. Growth outside of the city limits have been identified in the 2040 Land Use Plan (see Figure 4.2) as Rural Residential Overlay, Orderly Annexation Areas, and Urban Growth Areas. The purpose and intent for each of these land use categories are described below.



Precedent examples of design elements (e.g., lighting, signage, and rain gardens) that can help portray a positive image of the community along a roadway corridor.

Rural Residential Overlay

Although agriculture remains the predominant County land use for the foreseeable future, there are locations that may not be appropriate for long-term farming. These include parts of Watab Township (e.g., along Highway 10 and around Little Rock Lake), Sauk Rapids Township, and the western one-third of Minden Township. These locations have the highest concentration of residential development in the non-urbanized portions of the county. These areas are not anticipated to be served by City water and sewer utilities, except where failing septic systems or contaminated private wells cause health concerns.

The overlay encompasses existing residential lots and platted subdivisions where the density is greater and services are nearby. Development in these areas typically range between 1 to 2.5 units per acre. Future land use patterns in the overlay should be within these density ranges. The density may exceed 2.5 units per acre if a connection to a public wastewater treatment facility is made. Future subdivisions should be able to demonstrate best practices and the latest in innovative technology to address on-site septic.



Urban Growth Areas

Over the years, cities have become more urbanized with more commercial development and higher density residential uses. As a result of these development pressures, some of the townships have seen changes to their borders with neighboring communities. These types of changes have made it harder for some of the townships to stand alone as rural communities as they once did, and in many respects still do. The need for land use planning is evident based on these changing environments. Good land use planning begins by recognizing areas of growth identified by a city and their planning documents (e.g., comprehensive plans or land use studies). At a minimum, the County's Comprehensive Plan must address these areas of growth as prescribed by Minnesota law (see page 16).

The Urban Growth Areas have their origins dating back to the 1999 Benton County Comprehensive Plan. These areas were recognized as "Urban Transitional Areas." The 2006 Benton County Comprehensive Plan also identified "Urban Growth Areas" around the cities of Foley, Gilman, Rice and Royalton. During this plan's public involvement process, it became clear that the 2006 Urban Growth Areas may no longer reflect a city's growth projections (too much or too little) or aspirations to develop in that manner. Based on



Precedent examples of rural residential land uses

Minnesota State Statute (Urban Growth Areas)

The following are excerpts from Minnesota State Statute regarding Urban Growth Areas:

- **Minn. Stat. § 462.352 (Subd. 18) Urban Growth Areas.** “Urban growth area” means the identified area around an urban area within which there is a sufficient supply of developable land for at least a prospective 20-year period, based on demographic forecasts and the time reasonably required to effectively provide municipal services to the identified area.
- **Minn. Stat. § 462.3535 (Subd. 1) General.** Each municipality is encouraged to prepare and implement a community-based comprehensive municipal plan.
- **Minn. Stat. § 462.3535 (Subd. 4.): Cities; urban growth areas.** (a) The community-based comprehensive municipal plan for a statutory or home rule charter city, and official controls to implement the plan, must at a minimum, address any urban growth area identified in a county plan and may establish an urban growth area for the urbanized and urbanizing area. The city plan must establish a staged process for boundary adjustment to include the urbanized or urbanizing area within corporate limits as the urban growth area is developed and provided municipal services.
- **Minn. Stat. § 462.3535 (Subd. 5.) Urban growth area boundary adjustment process.** (a) After an urban growth area has been identified in a county or city plan, a city shall negotiate, as part of the comprehensive planning process and in coordination with the county, an orderly annexation agreement with the townships containing the affected unincorporated areas located within the identified urban growth area.

those conversations, the urban growth boundaries were refined to both simplify and better-reflect community direction.

The Urban Growth Areas are now represented as illustrative boundaries (approximately a quarter-mile to a half-mile from existing city boundaries). This approach will help continue to manage growth in a sustainable manner, while working towards a more formalized process for creating a boundary at the parcel level. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the city and the townships to work together to better define those boundaries. It is the County's role to recognize these areas as part of the Land Use Plan and serve as a resource in future land use planning decisions.

Overall, it is important to recognize the Urban Growth Areas as part of the 2040 Land Use Plan. The boundaries help guide potential growth and prevent the encroachment of non-farm uses into agricultural lands. The boundaries can also be used to plan for the efficient extension of roads and public services. If and when development occurs, the Urban Growth Areas should be limited to very low densities (4 units per 40 acres).

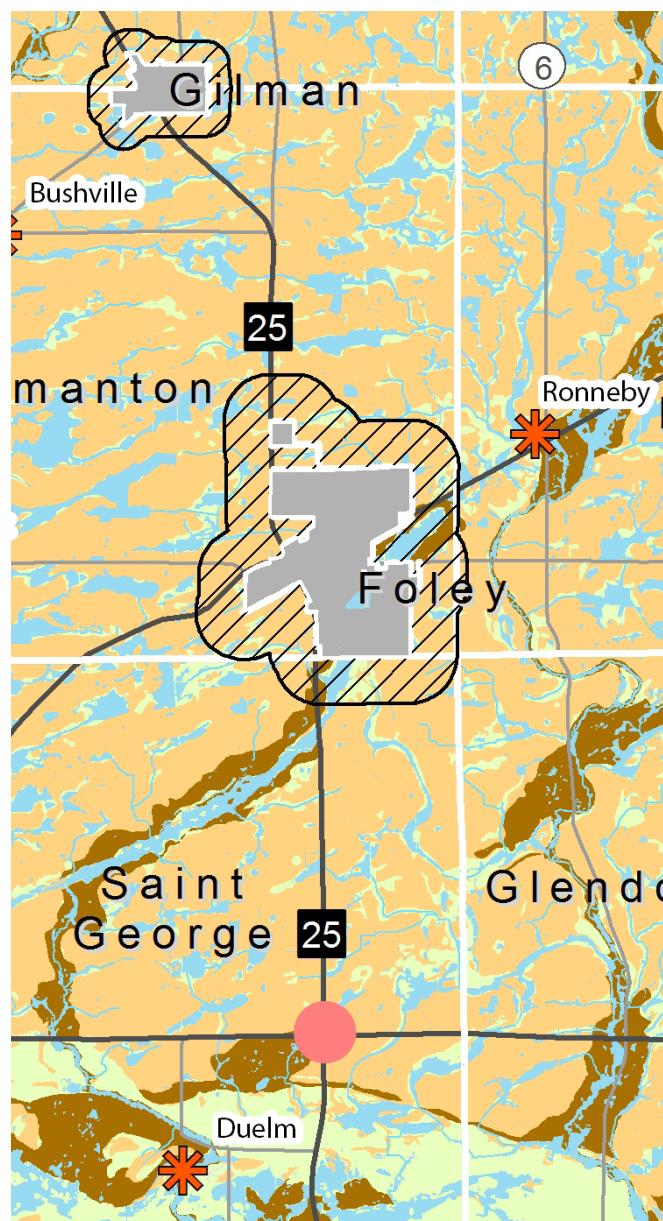
Development in the Urban Growth Areas should follow the following guiding principles:

- **Clustering:** Houses may be clustered onto smaller parcels than normally allowed if the subdivision layout and sewage systems are designed to easily accommodate a future annexation by the City and service by the City's sewer and water systems.
- **Collaboration:** Cities and Townships should work together to better define the urban growth boundaries.
- **Commercial and Industrial Uses:** Retail, service or industrial businesses may be allowed in the Urban Growth Area under these conditions:
 - If there is no City land use plan that addresses the location in question, under a Conditional

Use Permit issued by the County with the review of the nearby City.

- Consistency with the land use plan of the nearby city, or the land use plan and zoning of a joint City-County planning and zoning board (if applicable).

The Urban Growth Areas are represented as illustrative boundaries (approximately a quarter-mile to a half-mile from existing city boundaries).



- **Environmental Protection:** The subdivision must conform to the County regulations for the protection of wetlands, shorelands and floodplains.
- **Future Public Roads:** The subdivision must be able to easily provide public road access in the future to the portions of the tract not adjacent to the County or Township road.
- **Livestock:** No new feedlot or livestock operations should be allowed in the Urban Growth Area. This provision does not apply to the expansion of existing feedlot or livestock operations.
- **Long-Range Planning:** A new development should demonstrate how its proposal (e.g., subdivision) will eventually be incorporated into a City's long range plans, including street and utility system plans. This would occur when a development is achieving over 5 units per 40 acres.
- **Official Map:** The subdivision must be consistent with any Official Map of roads, utilities, drainage and parks (if such a map covers the area in question)
- **Parcel Size:** The County encourages development on smaller parcels in order to retain larger parcels intact for cultivation, minimize interference with farming, and reduce complaints about farm operations such as odors or machinery noise.
- **Private Sewage System:** Private, individual sewage treatment systems must meet the County's adopted requirements and state laws regulating Sanitary Sewer Treatment Systems (SSTS).
- **Public Utilities:** A subdivision should be able to economically and efficiently retrofit the site with City sewer and water lines.
- **Subdivisions:** A subdivision plat should indicate how the tract could be later resubdivided into city-size lots for utility service.

Orderly Annexation Areas

The Orderly Annexation Area applies to the property covered by an agreement between a city and a township (as well as the County) in which land will be annexed to the city in the future under specified conditions. Orderly annexation agreements are a legal tool that can help a township control, to some degree, when and how land is annexed. This proactive measure includes an agreement between both the city and township that stipulates the terms and conditions in the transition/annexation of land. Typical terms and conditions state the time, location, tax revenue, infrastructure and land uses associated with the property. This binding agreement has been a common practice by several communities in southwestern Benton County. Existing agreement and their boundaries are reflected in Figure 4.2. Please reference Minnesota State Statute 414 to learn more about the legal process for municipal boundaries adjustments.

The 2040 Land Use Plan does not promote or encourage annexation, but merely identifies best practices and policies to help facilitate growth in a sustainable manner. These best practices are discussed throughout this chapter.

An Urban Growth Boundary Approach

The following example is an approach a city or township may use to better define their growth boundaries at a parcel level.

Step 1: Prepare an estimate of population growth of the city and county over the next twenty years based on past trends. The population's estimates help identify the amount of land needed for new development of housing, commercial, industrial, and public spaces.

Step 2: Prepare an inventory of existing public facilities (e.g., sewer, water, roads, schools, and parks), their capacity, and projected needs. The projected needs should reflect any concurrency and adequate public facilities requirements. The estimate of future infrastructure should reflect anticipated development densities and realistic costs and financial ability to pay for new and upgraded public services.

Step 3: Prepare an estimate of the amount of buildable land needed for the next twenty year. This estimate should take into consideration development constraints, such as wetlands and topography. Other consideration should include physical or political barriers to the expansion of the growth boundary identified.

Step 4: Prepare a detailed map showing the growth boundary and the areas to include inside the boundary. A mapping exercise should be prepared to clearly demonstrate what parcel falls with-in or outside of the growth boundary.

Step 5: Develop a growth boundary agreement that documents the findings above. The findings should inform amendments to the city, township or county comprehensive plans and zoning maps; in addition to documenting the agreement on the location of the growth boundary. The agreement between the local governments should also describe the procedures for reviewing and updating the growth boundary, and state the urban services (e.g., public sewer and water) that will not be extended beyond the growth boundary.

Step 6: Agree to implement low-density agricultural or rural residential land uses outside of the growth boundary. This should be done by the local governments after the boundary agreement has been adopted (through resolutions). This will protect not only farm land, but also water supplies, wildlife habitat, and sensitive rural lands. Low-density zoning outside of the growth areas can ensure large residential and commercial developments do not leapfrog over the growth boundary, or hobby farms do not over run the agricultural areas.

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Chapter 5

Transportation

Roadways provide for an integrated transportation system that will serve the future needs of residents, businesses, and visitors. Maintaining and improving this system is important to the ongoing economic health and quality of life of the county, and to the ability of people to travel easily and safely to work and other destinations, to develop property, and to move goods. Chapter 5 provides a framework for balancing future transportation needs throughout the county.

Existing Conditions

Benton County has many transportation needs that vary from rural to urban settings. These needs are served by the County, State, and local transportation system. This existing system is documented throughout this section.

Jurisdictional Classification

Jurisdiction over the roadway system is shared among four levels of government: state, county, city, and township. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) maintains the trunk highway system on behalf of the state. Benton County maintains the County State Aid-Highway (CSAH) and County Road (CR) system. The County's CSAH system is supported by state aid funds, which can be used towards road construction and maintenance. The remaining streets are the responsibility of the cities or townships.



The jurisdiction of roadways is an important element in the Transportation Plan because it affects a number of critical organizational functions and obligations (regulatory, maintenance, construction, and financial). The primary goal of reviewing jurisdiction is to match the roadway function with the organizational level best suited to handle the route function (see next section on functional classification). The existing jurisdiction of roadways in Benton County is illustrated in Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1. Figure 5.1 also depicts the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) volumes for this system.

Table 5.1. Roadway Mileage by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Centerline Miles	Percent
US Trunk Highway	20.75	2.13%
State Trunk Highways (TH)	63.51	6.53%
County Roads (CR)	225.59	23.20%
County State Aid Highways (CSAH)	224.42	23.08%
Municipal State-Aid Street	20.66	2.12%
Township Road	307.56	31.36%
Municipal Street	109.99	11.31%
Total	972.48	100%

Figure 5.1. Existing Roadway System by Jurisdiction & 2017

Traffic Volumes

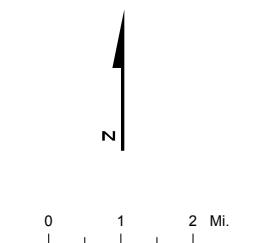
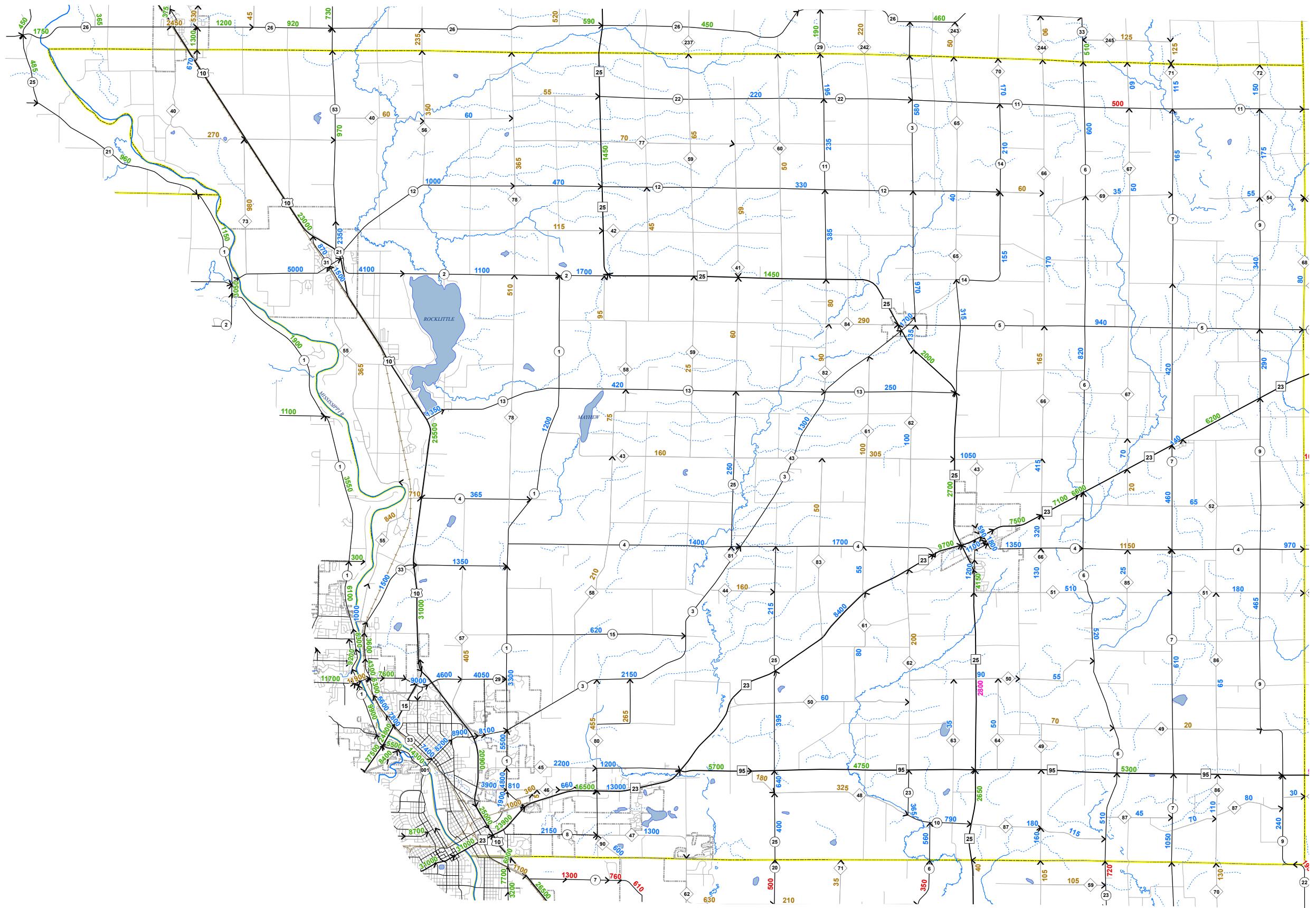
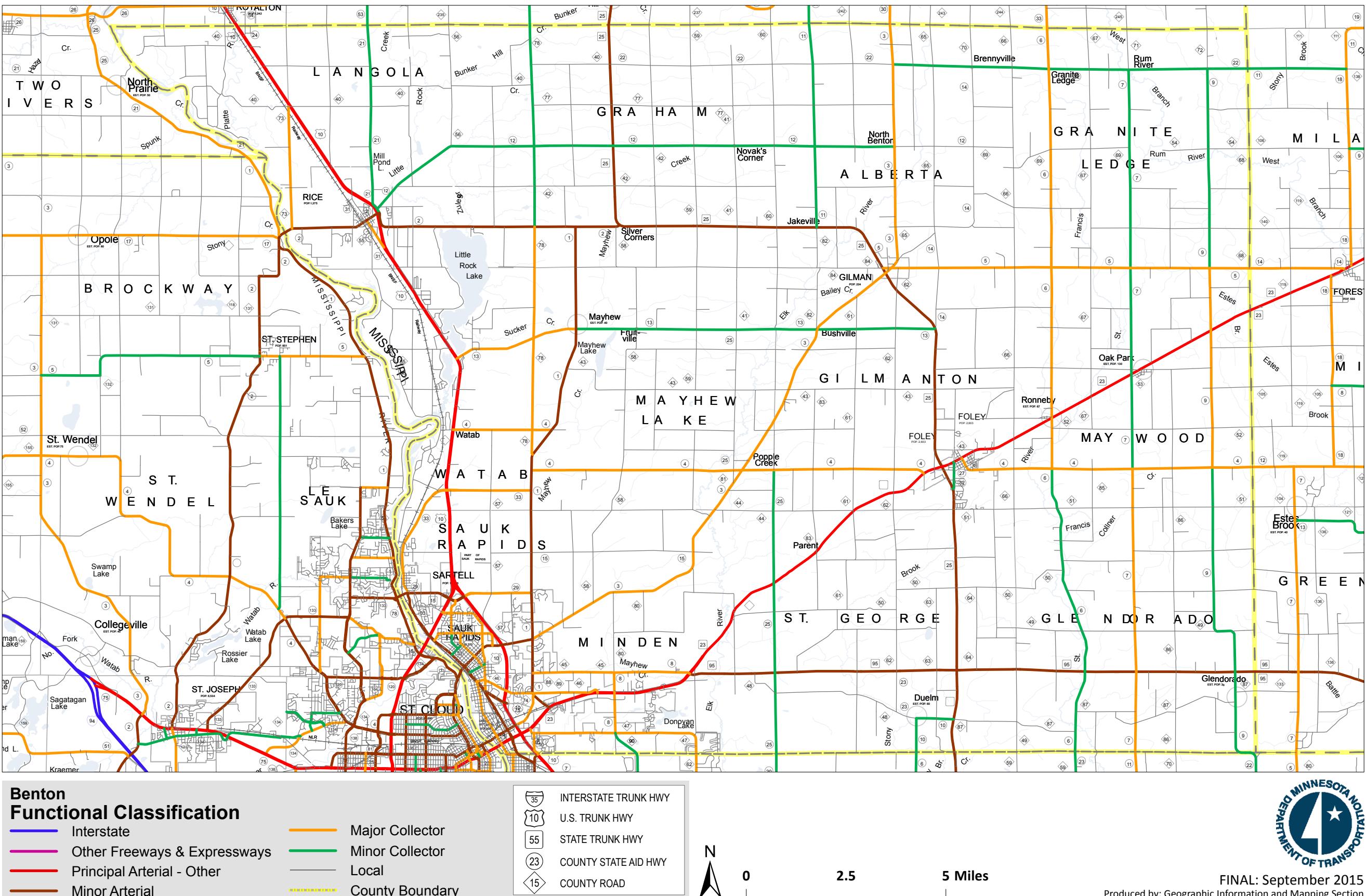


Figure 5.2. Existing Functional Classification System





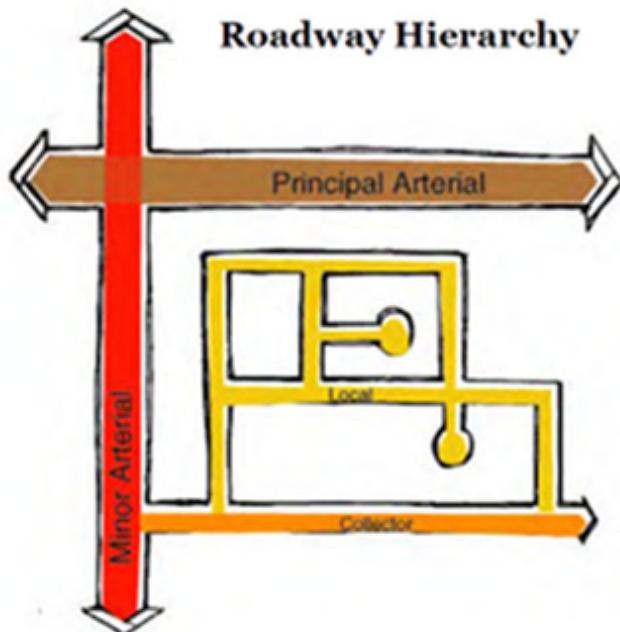
Functional Classification

Roadway functional classification categories are defined by the role they play in serving the flow of trips through the overall roadway system. The intent of the functional classification system is to also create a hierarchy of roads that collect and distribute traffic from neighborhoods to the county or state system (see Figure 5.3). Roadways with a higher functional classification (arterials) generally provide for longer trips, have more mobility, have limited access and connect larger centers. Roadways with a lower functional classification (collectors and local streets) generally provide for shorter trips, have lower mobility, have more access and provide connection to higher functioning roadways.

The order of classification is from Principal Arterials at the highest capacity and the highest mobility function down to Local roads with the greatest access function. Characteristics considered when preparing a functional classification system include:

- Land uses adjacent to a route
- Route continuity
- Route ability to serve major activity generators
- Trip length characteristics of a route
- Spacing of routes with regard to function of the route

Figure 5.3. Roadway Hierarchy by Functional Class



Under Federal Law (Title 23, Statute 470.105), state transportation agencies have the primary responsibility for overseeing functional classification of roadways. MnDOT works in cooperation with Benton County and the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) to assign the functional classification to roadways and to maintain the classifications within the ranges allowed under federal guidelines. Benton County's system was documented in 2015 by MnDOT (see Figure 5.2). This system includes Principal Arterials, Minor Arterials, Major Collectors, Minor Collectors, and Local Roads.

- **Principal Arterials:** Principal Arterials provide high-speed mobility between the cities and important locations outside Benton County. In Benton County, Principal Arterials are generally constructed with limited access with signalized intersections. Private access is typically prohibited.
- **Collectors:** Collectors are designed to serve shorter trips that occur within the county and to provide access from neighborhoods to other collector roadways and the arterial system. They are expected to carry less traffic than arterial roads and to provide access to some properties. Collectors are designated as either major or minor collectors:
 - **Major Collector:** Major collectors supplement the arterial system by emphasizing mobility over land access.
 - **Minor Collector:** Minor collectors emphasize land access over mobility and provide connections to major collector and minor arterial routes.
- **Local:** Local streets provide access to adjacent properties and neighborhoods. Local streets are generally low speed and designed to discourage through traffic. These types of roads are typically owned and maintained by cities and townships.

Updates to the statewide functional classification is typically conducted every 10 years or on an as needed basis when changes to the system occur. At any given time, Benton County may request a change to a county roadway's functional class. These requests are typically made when a new roadway is added to the system or the attributes/characteristics to a route change (e.g., increase or decrease in traffic volumes).

Benton County should continue to monitor and update the county's functional classification system. This will help ensure the county system is being maintained and operated by the appropriate roadway agency. It is also an opportunity to better align roadway improvement needs with potential funding opportunities. For example, roads classified as a Minor Arterial or higher are typically eligible for federal transportation funds.

Access Management

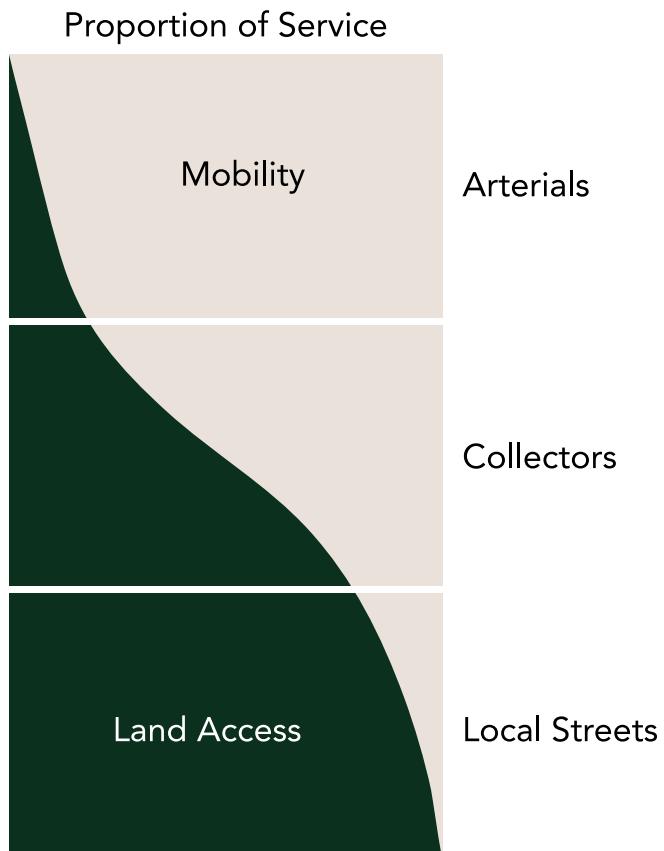
As applied to the roadway system in Benton County, the term “access” is the relationship between local land use and the transportation network or system. There is an inverse relationship between the amount of access provided and the ability to move through traffic on a roadway (see Figure 5.4). Access management guidelines are developed to maintain traffic flow on the network so each roadway can provide its functional duties, while providing adequate access for private properties to the transportation network. This balance of access and mobility is the focal point to effective access management.

Through access management, Benton County strives to maintain the integrity of the roadway system by preserving the balance between safety and mobility. With limited ability to improve the system, the County strives to adequately and efficiently provide service to through traffic movements while simultaneously providing adequate access to serve development. The County can then stipulate the specific access spacing requirements for various County roads through plat reviews and/or specify the best location and requirements for access through their access permit process.

Key points when reviewing access management include the following:

- Adequate spacing of access points
- Adequate sight distances
- Avoid off-set or dogleg intersections and entrances
- Encourage development of turn lanes
- Encourage proper driveway design including width, radii, and sight angles

Figure 5.4. Access & Mobility Relationship

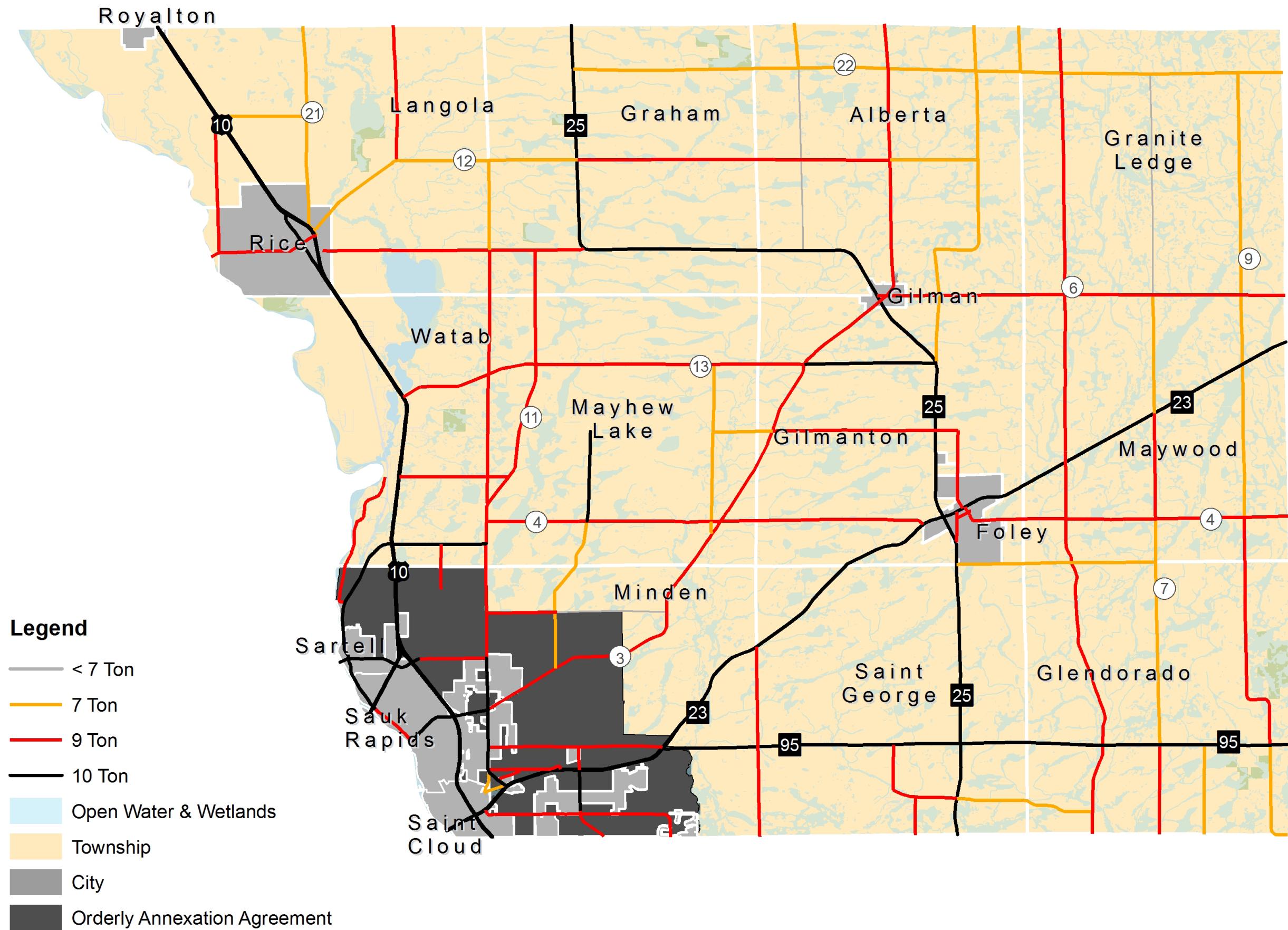


Freight Movement

Benton County's transportation system plays a major role in helping move goods and products between agricultural hubs and urban centers. Key freight corridors include the State Highways, which provide regional connections to the Twin Cities and beyond. The County's nine- and ten-ton roads (see Figure 5.5) also provide a critical role in moving goods and products. These routes are capable of accommodating the heavier loads placed upon them by trucks and farm equipment. Maintaining and expanding this system helps support the rural economy and farm-to-market routes. Farm-to-market routes are typically county roads that provide access between agricultural hubs and town centers. The County should monitor this system and upgrade roads to ten-ton standards when feasible.



Figure 5.5. Ten-Ton Network



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Multimodal Planning

As the County grows, so will its transportation needs. These needs will vary across all modes of transportation and in different parts of the county. The popularity of multimodal facilities (e.g., sidewalks, trails and bikeways) has consistently increased over the last few decades as Americans have used them to promote health, fitness, and sustainability. Trails provide opportunities to travel safely within a community, exercise, and enjoy natural areas. However, these amenities must be balanced in the right environment when feasible. Table 5.2 demonstrates this balance by aligning multimodal improvements with the land use patterns in Benton County. Examples of multimodal elements include:

Bike Lanes

A bike lane is located on the road and designed through pavement marking and optional signage. These type of routes are typically used by “confident riders,” who are sharing the road with vehicular traffic. A striped bike lane is typically six feet in width and found in suburban and urban settings.

Shared Lane or Shoulder Improvements

Pavement markings are placed in the vehicle travel lane to indicate where people should preferably cycle. These routes are typically used by the “strong and fearless,” who are advanced and confident riders. They take the shortest route possible and are comfortable in sharing the road with vehicles. Shoulder improvements (two to four feet in width) in all settings (rural and urban) can provide enough room for a bicyclist.



Separated Shared Use Path

A shared use path is separated from vehicular traffic and supports multiple recreation and transportation opportunities, such as walking, bicycling, in-line skating and people in wheelchairs. These types of improvements are typically eight to twelve feet in width.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are paved paths (four feet in width) for pedestrians that are separated from vehicular traffic. Sidewalk connections are typically made as part of subdivisions and new developments. Sidewalks can offer a high-quality experience for users of all ages and abilities as compared to on-roadway facilities.

Fixed Route Transit

Portions of Benton County (i.e., St. Cloud, Sartell and Sauk Rapids) are served by one urban bus operator and two rural bus systems. These operators provide transit services at fixed times at fixed locations. This type of service is located in areas that warrant transit demand, which typically includes suburban and urban settings. The St. Cloud APO has identified future transit needs as part of their Long-Range Transportation Plan and should be referenced for more information.

On Demand Transit Service

On demand transit is a valuable transportation service for seniors, people with disabilities, and those who can't use the standard fixed route transit systems to travel to medical appointments, employment, school, or even to conduct errands such as buying groceries. This type of service is typically scheduled ahead of time and is offered throughout Benton County through public and private providers. The demand for this service will likely increase as populations age in rural parts of the county.

Table 5.2. Common Multimodal Treatments by Land Use Type

Land Use Type	Bike Lanes	Shared Lane or Shoulder	Separated Shared Use Path	Sidewalks	Fixed Route Transit Service	On Demand Transit Service
Rural/Agricultural Areas	●					●
Town Centers/Service Centers	●	●		●		●
Urban Growth & Orderly Annexation Areas	●	●	●	●	●	●
Urbanized Areas	●	●	●	●	●	●
Commercial Corridors			●		●	●

Balancing Transportation Needs with Land Use

Planning for the future transportation system should account for the effective linkages between urban and rural environments. To help achieve this objective, this section identifies the type of transportation systems and strategies commonly associated with different land use patterns.

Agricultural & Rural Residential Areas

The Land Use Plan recognizes Benton County's vast amount of rural and agricultural landscapes. These areas have very low-density residential development accessory to agricultural or farm operations of varying sizes. Farmsteads and homes are typically located on local roads with minimum right-of-way widths and generally see lower traffic volumes. Due to the low densities and large separations between land uses within these areas, pedestrian and bicycling accommodations are minimal or non-existent.

Transportation investments in these areas typically focus on low-cost/high-benefit solutions that address safety issues, drainage, and system preservation needs (e.g., crack sealing, mill and overlays, and shoulder repairs) that help maintain the roads and bridges in a "state-of-good" repair. Larger investments over time may include full reconstruction or the upgrading to meet ten-ton standards. A ten-ton road helps support heavier truck loads and farming equipment. More importantly, ten-ton routes serve as important



connectors between freight generators and receiving facilities (e.g., farms, mining operations, grain elevators, agricultural business centers, freight terminals, and distribution centers). Maintaining and managing this system is important to Benton County's quality of life and economy.

The following guidelines should be considered when balancing transportation needs in the Rural Residential/Agricultural areas.

Transportation Guidelines for Agricultural & Rural Residential Areas

- New housing should preferably be accessed by a township road.
- A driveway should be connected to a county road if there is no other access to the property and County access management guidelines are followed.
- When more than one new housing parcel is created by subdivision and access is directly via a county road, the access management guidelines of Benton County and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) must be followed.
- Prioritize ten-ton route improvements to roads that are designated as major collector or higher.
- Consider adding a two-foot paved shoulder as part of roadway reconstruction projects to accommodate the potential for pedestrian and bicycle needs.

Town Centers/Rural Service Centers

Town Centers and Rural Service Centers are unincorporated areas located at the crossroads of two major roadways. Historically, these locations have provided rural parts of the county with access to goods and services. The number of businesses today may be relatively small, but can range from implement stores, storage facilities, restaurants/bars, and religious institutions. Smaller subdivisions and single-family residential homes are also common land uses in these areas. Although incorporation is not anticipated, there may be opportunities to allow limited development in and around these centers.

Transportation improvements at these key nodes should be tailored to meet their settings, while preserving their historical nature. Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is one approach to evaluating transportation needs that also protects and preserves these areas. CSS is defined by MnDOT "as the art of creating public works projects that meet the needs of the users, the neighboring communities, and the environment. It integrates projects into the context or setting in a sensitive manner through careful planning, consideration of different perspectives, and tailoring designs to particular project circumstances. CSS is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in providing a transportation facility that fits its setting. It is an approach that leads to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and environmental resources, while improving or maintaining safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions."

A noticeable change in these areas has been an increase in traffic volumes on the roadways, which has caused concern in regards to safety, mobility and access issues. Some of these concerns stem from the higher speeds of traffic when approaching an intersection. A more permanent way to address these concerns is through traffic calming and safety



treatments. These can be low-cost/high-benefit solutions that change the look and feel of the road and communicate to drivers that the function of the roadway is changing. Other safety measures may include flashing beacons, rumble strips, edge treatments, and turn lanes.

The following guidelines should be considered when balancing transportation needs in the Town Centers and Rural Service Centers.

Transportation Guidelines for Town Centers/Rural Service Centers

- Exercise flexibility and creativity to shape effective transportation solutions, while preserving and enhancing the Town Centers and Rural Service Centers.
- New development should be planned accordingly to respect future right-of-way needs, mobility, access, and safety. Roadway drainage is also a big variable that affects the amount of potential right-of-way needed.
- New development will need to follow the Benton County and MnDOT Access Management Guidelines.
- Monitor safety issues at intersections, and program improvements as needed.
- Collaborate with local agencies and businesses to implement Context Sensitive Solutions as part of future county roadway projects.

Urban Growth & Orderly Annexation Areas

Urban development within the growth areas typically requires the greatest degree of planning and entitlements. As areas develop, they generally require being rezoned, platted, and having infrastructure extended to serve them with city sewer and water. Key factors that influence the timing of development expansion into planned growth areas include: willing sellers/buyers, market conditions, proximity to and capacity of trunk sanitary sewer and water systems, and collector or arterial roadway capacities.

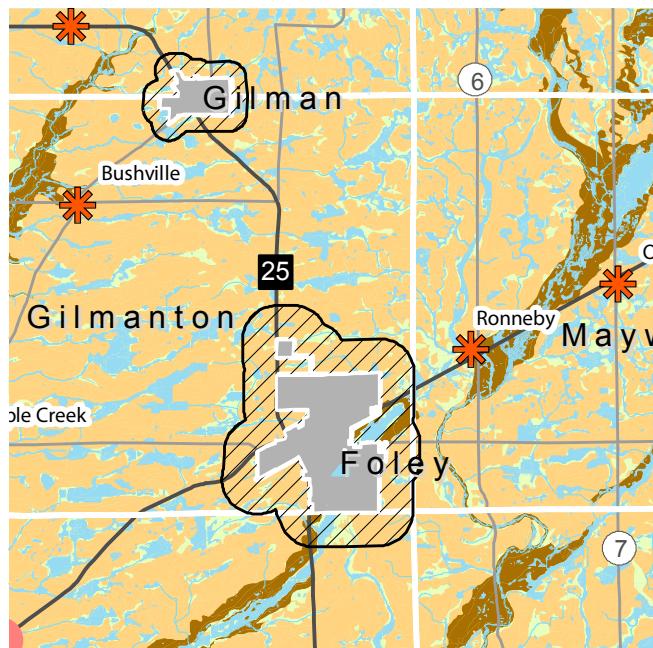
As these areas develop over time, future rights-of-way should be valued as public assets. Therefore, right-of-way needs to be protected and managed in a manner that respects the roadway's intended function, while serving the greatest public good. A common practice used in protecting future right-of-way needs is through the "official mapping" process (see Minnesota State Statutes 462.352 and 462.3). An official map would show affected properties, future right-of-way needs, centerline alignments, setbacks, controlled access locations, and other transportation facilities. This will provide some level of control in protecting the corridor from development. Official mapping provides a basis for restricting development in designated rights-of-way, or between designated setbacks, to allow the government authorities time to purchase or otherwise reserve the land.

Platting and subdivision regulations also give the County authority to consider future roadway alignments during the platting process, because most land must be platted before it is developed. The County may use their authority in the townships to regulate land development to influence plat configuration and the location of proposed roadways. In most instances, planning and engineering staff work with developers to formulate a plat that meets

development objectives and that conforms to a long-term community vision and/or plans.

Planning for future growth in urbanizing areas should also take into consideration other modes of transportation. Pedestrian and bicycle trails play a large role in the overall transportation network by offering an alternative means of transportation to places of employment, primary points of interest, and recreational areas. In that respect, a "Complete Streets" approach is typically applied in developing areas and urban environments. Complete Streets are commonly defined as roadways that accommodate all users (e.g., pedestrians, bicyclist, vehicles, and transit), regardless of age and ability. This is important to consider when recognizing the diversity of people traveling throughout the community.

The following guidelines should be considered when balancing transportation needs in growing parts of the county.



Urban Growth Area Examples (Foley and Gilman)

Transportation Guidelines for Urban Growth & Orderly Annexation Areas

- Careful planning and design should be done to cluster development in a way that envisions longer term urban development form/patterns with municipal infrastructure, such as roadways.
- New development should be planned accordingly to respect future right-of-way needs, mobility, access, and safety.
- New subdivisions should be able to easily provide public road access in the future to the portions of the tract not adjacent to the County or Township road.
- New development will need to follow the Benton County and MnDOT Access Management Guidelines.
- Evaluate future development areas to establish alignments for future road corridors in order to optimize the widths of these corridors from a “complete streets” perspective.
- Given the potential for larger traffic volumes in these areas, a sidewalk with a substantial buffer between vehicle travel lanes should be developed to ensure the safe access of the roadway by pedestrians.
- Multimodal design of public rights-of-way should utilize innovative and non-traditional design standards in a way that is equitable for all modes/users, inter-modal activities, and is respectful of the surrounding community.

Urbanized Areas

A portion of Benton County’s roadway system is located in the Cities of Foley, Rice, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and St. Cloud. It is important to recognize this system as it supports development efforts and complements a portion of the urbanized transportation system that lies within the City’s boundaries. Enhancements to this system are primarily focused on traffic operations, access management, preservation, and the integration of multimodal improvements. The demand for multimodal improvements in the urbanized areas has grown in recent years. As a result, many roadway improvement projects have included trails or sidewalks, providing more connections to neighborhoods and key destinations, while enhancing the local and regional trail network. The urbanized areas should continue to foster a proactive approach to planning the pedestrian network; one that recognizes the needs of vehicle traffic, but does more to meet the unique demands of pedestrians. In some respect, these initiatives need to be driven at the local-level and integrated into their planning efforts.

A multimodal approach will also help mitigate congestion issues in the Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and St. Cloud area. Users consider facilities congested when speeds are reduced significantly below posted speeds and/or long queues are evident at intersections. Congestion can lead to increases in crashes, diversion from desired roadways or use of



local routes for regional movements, and increases in travel times and vehicle emissions. Maintaining and improving this system is important to the ongoing economic health and quality of life of the County by allowing people to travel and move goods easily and safely and also to facilitate property development.

The following guidelines should be considered when balancing transportation needs in the urbanized areas.

Transportation Guidelines for Urbanized Areas

- Work with the St. Cloud APO to identify transportation priorities and investments.
- The street and public right-of-way network should be used to connect various public realm amenities, so neighborhood residents can use a range of intermodal activities (e.g., walking and biking) to travel to and from destinations such as schools, parks/open space, shops and businesses.
- New development will need to follow the Benton County and MnDOT Access Management Guidelines.
- Municipalities should play an active role when planning improvements to the County Roads in these areas from a planning, engineering, and financial perspective.



Commercial Corridors

Benton County has excellent access to the regional transportation system, which is served by State Highway 10, 23, 25 and 95. These corridors provide critical connections to the Twin Cities and beyond, while providing relatively high levels of service. The State Highways have significant volumes of traffic and consequently, pedestrians and cyclists do not traverse these roadways.

The Land Use Plan recognizes the commercial and industrial land use patterns that have located along major highways, particularly along Highway 10. Land uses include a wide variety of both established and newer commercial uses, as well as light industrial and manufacturing, and wholesale and warehousing activities. As the primary commercial corridor passing through the heart of Benton County, the success of Highway 10 as a commercial corridor is critical to the local economy. To promote reinvestment in the area, the County will continue to collaborate with MnDOT to improve the corridor's mobility and safety.

The following guidelines should be considered when balancing transportation needs along Commercial Corridors.

Transportation Guidelines for Commercial Corridors

- Access needs to be limited in order to preserve the ability of the roadway to accommodate high volumes and to maximize safety.
- Access management along these corridors should continue to follow the guidelines established by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (in terms of spacing of cross streets and access points).
- Local agencies should establish a series of parallel streets on either side of State Highways to provide enhanced access to individual businesses and residences along the corridor.



Implementation

Infrastructure systems such as roadways, bridges, culverts, and sidewalks have become very expensive and difficult to maintain in today's environment with aging infrastructure, rising costs of materials, and stagnant or declining revenue. In fact, many local agencies are being forced to pause and ask questions about the costs and benefits of continuing to maintain assets throughout their entire system, or if other approaches should be explored to better balance needs with available resources. Generally, considerations to include are:

Performance Standards and Measures

A performance-based approach improves the accountability of local infrastructure investments, assessment of risks related to different performance levels, and monitoring of progress, and also increases transparency.

Project Prioritization

Project prioritization can help Counties rank infrastructure needs in a manner that is consistent with preservation goals and objectives. This technique can help avoid the typical "worst first" approach to programming preservation projects

that tends to invest limited resources in the most expensive "fixes" such as reconstruction, instead of directing maintenance funds to infrastructure that merely needs rehabilitation and will provide more cost-effective, timely solutions. Project prioritization includes applying the correct "fix" at the right time by performing lower cost maintenance actions sooner in the life of the roadway.

New Revenue Sources

There are methods to capture new revenue streams to close the financial gap in maintaining assets in a "state of good repair." Exploring new revenue sources will allow the County to expand and accelerate preservation initiatives. Some Counties have used their powers to increase the wheelage tax or implement a local transportation sales tax under State Statute (Minnesota State Statute 297A.993).

New Maintenance Techniques

There are new maintenance techniques that can extend the lifecycle of an asset. For example, new maintenance techniques for roadway surfaces can provide longer service life and higher traffic volume thresholds, resulting in more stable road maintenance costs. Cost reduction of life cycle

extension strategies which save money, or extend surface life, can directly benefit preservation needs and minimize any identified financial gap.

Asset Management

Tracking assets and their condition will provide a stronger outlook on lifecycle costs and replacement schedules, which will help establish funding plans and identify future funding gaps or shortfalls.

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Chapter 6

Parks

Parks are often cited as people's favorite places. They are the places people go to have fun, relax, and play. Whether it's a place to fish, take a quiet walk through the woods, or go on a vigorous run with the dog, a high-quality park and trail system has something for all ages and abilities.

Benton County has acknowledged the importance of providing park, trail, and open space opportunities that enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors. Parks and trails are essential to promoting community health and wellness, connecting individuals and families to ecological education and stewardship, promoting cultural understanding, and fostering economic viability.

The Parks chapter will serve as a implementation guide for future investments to the County's parks and trails.

Existing Conditions

Benton County includes a variety of county parks, trails, and natural areas that provide access to the outdoors for residents and visitors (see Figure 6.1). This system is further complemented by regional and local parks. The County's park and trail system is further defined throughout this section.

County Parks

County Signature Parks

Signature parks are larger in scale, provide active and passive recreation, and typically provide access to regional destinations such as lakes, rivers/creeks or forests. These parks are designed to serve a large number of park users throughout the county. Users are typically traveling longer distances (up to 30 minute travel sheds) to access these parks. Features unique to the County's signature parks might be a public beach, campgrounds, large rentable picnic shelters, multi-use open spaces, restroom facilities, and larger play areas. Today, there are two signature parks in Benton County:

Bend in the River (289 acres)

This land was acquired by the County in 2002 and is the largest county park in the system. The park includes 3,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline along the Mississippi River. Scenic views of the river bend and islands in the Mississippi River are one of the park's main attractions.



The County completed a master plan for the development of the park in December 2005 and amenities include restoration of the natural prairie, provision of picnic shelters, provision of hike and ski trails, wildlife viewing blinds and observation areas, and a preserved historic farmstead. A notable outcome of the Bend in the River Master Plan was the construction of a canoe landing.

Benton Beach (30 acres)

Features of the park include a campground with tent and RV sites, a restroom and shower house, and a picnic shelter. Lakeview Center is a 100-person capacity conference center with a two-story deck overlooking Little Rock Lake. Both the conference center and the picnic shelter are available for rent. For athletic and recreational facilities, the park provides a playground, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball courts, a softball field with backstop, a basketball court, and a disc-golf course.



County Community Parks

These parks are smaller and scaled for community or family gatherings, or for access to lakes. Typical amenities include passive open spaces, access to water bodies, picnic areas, and restroom facilities. Community parks generally have a closer service area, attracting visitors up to 15 minutes away.

Mayhew Lake Park (4.4 acres)

This park currently provides boat access to Mayhew Lake and has a picnic area. Amenities include an improved boat launch, fishing pier, picnic tables, and grills. Portable restrooms are provided.

Rose Anna Beach (0.6 acres)

This park serves as a neighborhood-scaled park, providing a picnic table, and a grill. During the winter months, the park provides access to Little Rock Lake.

St. Regis Park (0.6 acres)

This neighborhood-scaled park provides picnic tables, grills, and portable restrooms for park visitors to access Little Rock Lake for picnicking, fishing, and ice fishing. Limited vehicle access during the winter prevents erosion of the shoreline during the warmer months. Residents have indicated that future priorities for this area include: installation of hardy, native plants, educational or interpretive markers, and the installation of a canoe launch.



Rose Anna Beach (top image), St. Regis Park (bottom image)

County Natural Area Parks

These areas are intended for passive recreation uses such as walking and nature enthusiasts. These areas are unlikely to develop with recreational amenities. These areas are intended to be preserved, while providing residents access to nature. Future amenities may include non-paved trails, seating areas, informational kiosks, and picnic tables.

St. George Township Park (17 acres)

St. George Township Park is undeveloped at this time. Land was acquired through a generous donation by a county resident, and deed restrictions indicate the future use is for wildlife habitat and study of the natural area.

Wapicada Village / Mayhew Park (12.5 acres)

Wapicada Village / Mayhew Park is undeveloped at this time. The terrain and location in the Watab Creek floodplain make it difficult to access or develop as a viable park today. An abandoned railroad right-of-way, now privately owned, traverses the property.



Mayhew Lake Park

Regional and State Parks

Benton County does not have any regional or state parks. Regional and State parks in close proximity to Benton County that offer recreational options for residents include the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Rum River State Forest, Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, and St. Wendel Tamarack Bog Scientific and Natural Area.

Trails

County Trails

Benton County has developed some trails within its park system including at Bend in the River and Benton Beach. These internal trail networks provide pathways for walkers and runners within the signature parks. The County does not own or operate any trails outside of its current park system. The majority of the existing trails in Benton County fall under municipal jurisdictions and the state. However, this Comprehensive Plan recognizes the desire to build a more cohesive network of trails identified in the Regional Active Transportation Plan (2015).

These routes are identified in Figure 6.2.

State Trails

The Mississippi River defines Benton County's western border between Sherburne and Stearns County. The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) bikeway follows the river roughly 600 miles from its source at Itasca State Park to the Iowa border. Located largely on road shoulders, the route also includes segments of scenic state, regional and local trails. Minnesota's route, sometimes on both sides of the river, totals more than 800 miles. Portions of the MRT are located in the cities of Rice, Sartell, and Sauk Rapids (see Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4). The MRT is intended to extend all the way to the Louisiana Delta Region at the Gulf of Mexico - some 3,000 miles.

Past Planning Efforts

A variety of plan documents were reviewed during the planning process. These plans and supporting planning/policy documents have been created over the last 10 years and provide a foundation for developing this chapter. The following is an inventory of relevant findings from this plan review.

Benton County Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan (2002)

This Plan identifies and prioritizes existing parks, trails and natural resource areas within the county that have a high potential for public use and enjoyment. In some respect, the plan today has been viewed as too aspirational from a programming and budgetary standpoint. The 2002 Master Plan provided a foundation for shaping the Parks Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan and its recommendations.

Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015)

The Public Health Divisions of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties, worked together under the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) to develop a Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP) that identifies a set of strategies to be implemented by SHIP staff and/or community partners in the region for pedestrians and bicyclists. For this plan, a Regional Network was identified that connects the nodes and corridors in the region. The Regional Network represents high-level, conceptual connections between important regional origins and destinations and does not identify specific street routes, or facility types. The Plan serves as a guiding document in helping prioritize trail investments throughout the region.

Figure 6.1. Existing County Parks

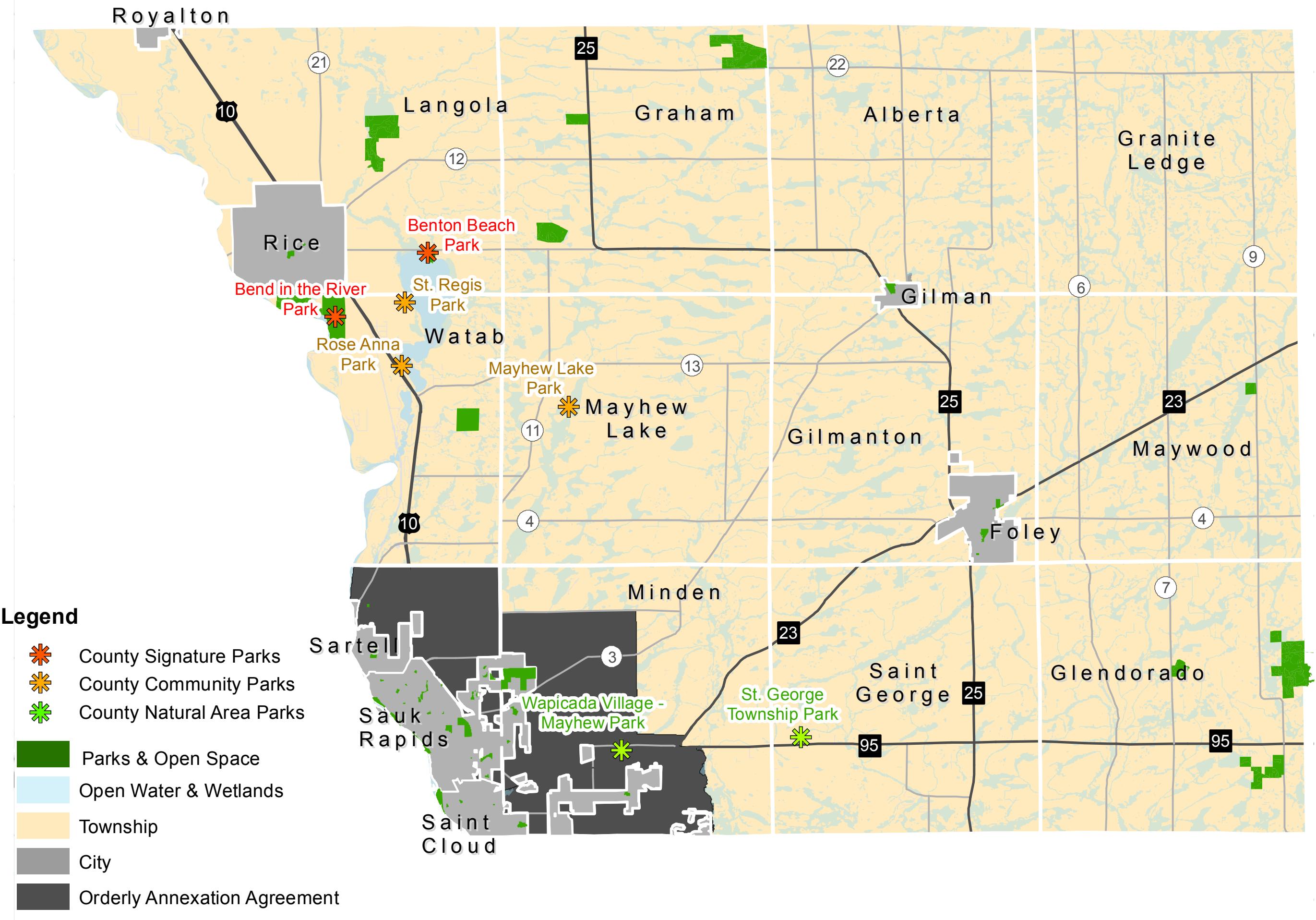


Figure 6.2. Regional Active Transportation Plan

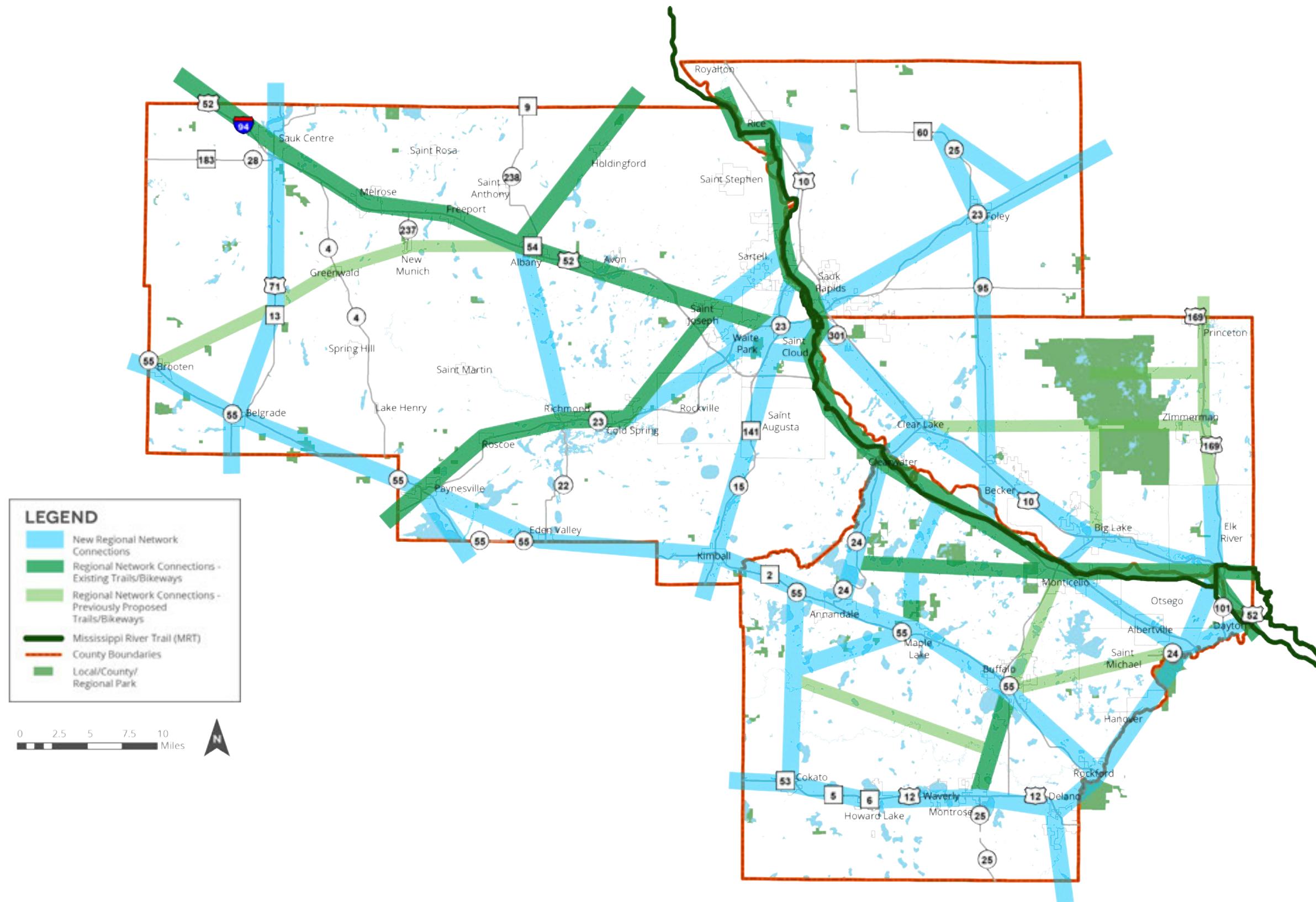


Figure 6.3. Mississippi River Trail (Map 1 of 2)

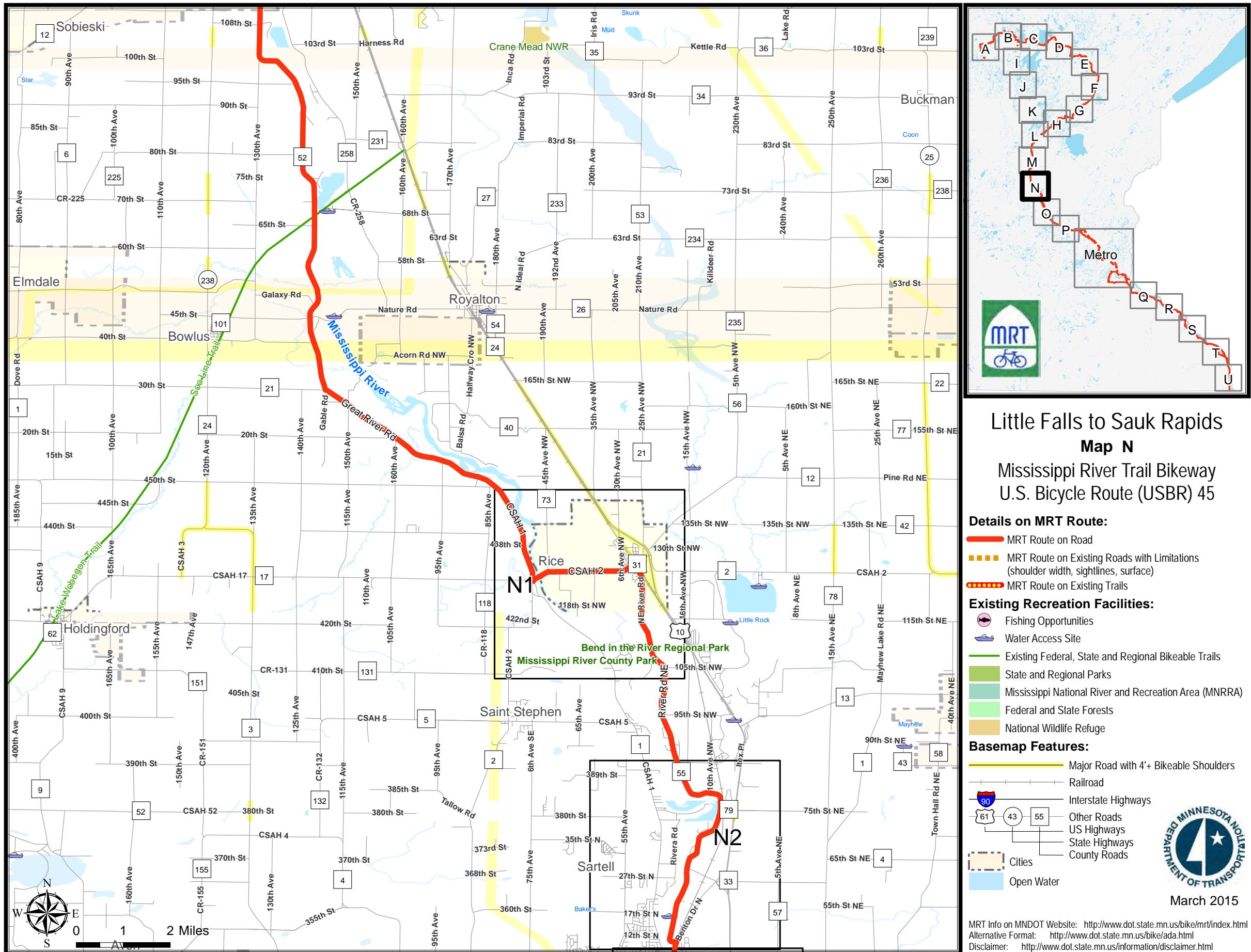
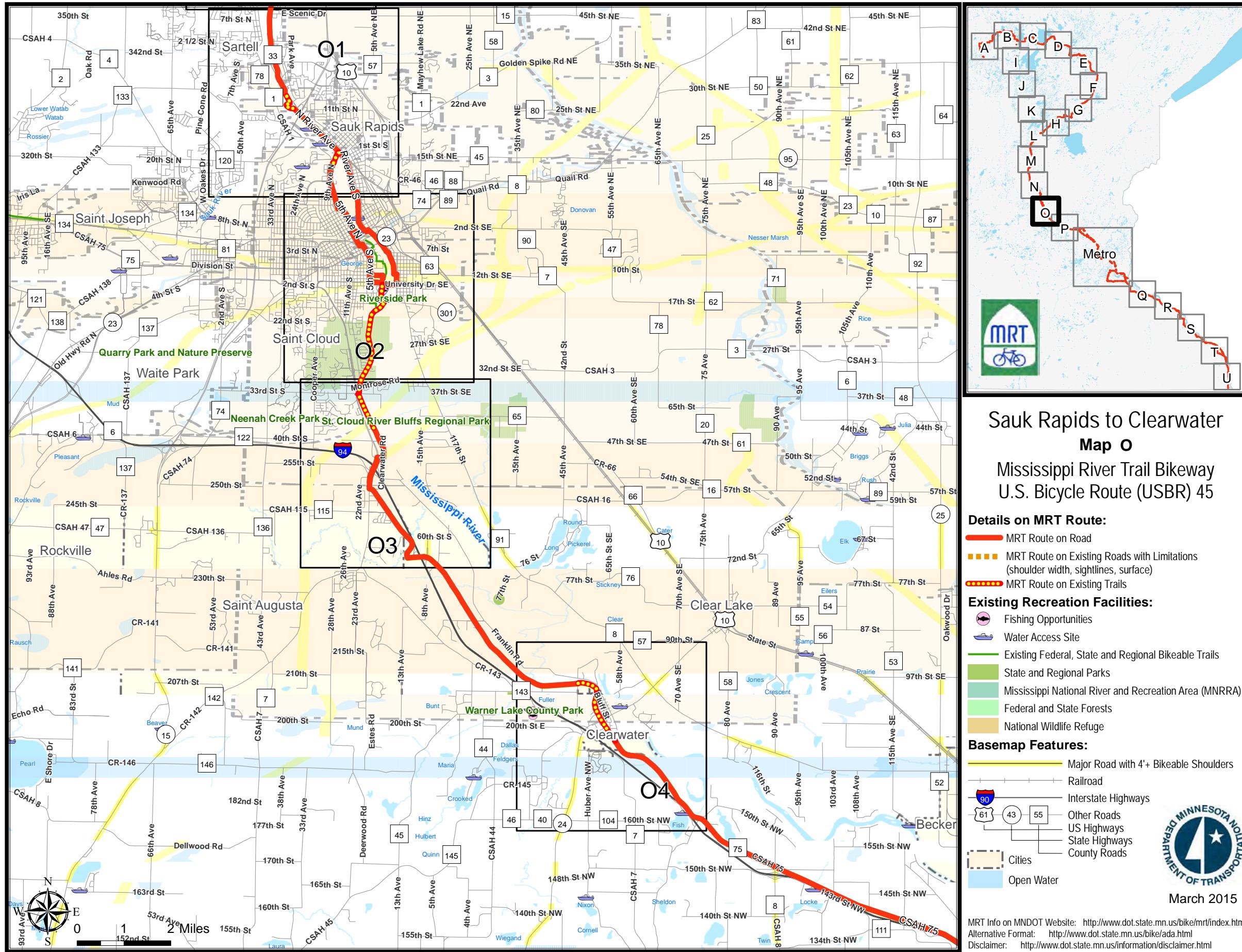


Figure 6.4. Mississippi River Trail (Map 2 of 2)



St. Cloud Area Planning Organization's (APO) Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The St. Cloud APO is a regional body responsible for transportation planning in the entire urbanized area and is independent of the individual cities/counties in the region. The APO is responsible for developing and maintaining a twenty-year transportation plan for the St. Cloud metropolitan area, which includes portions of Benton County. The most recent Plan (Year 2040) was adopted October 21, 2014. The LRTP discusses bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. These initiatives include a regional network of trails and sidewalks that safely move people throughout the region. As it pertains to Benton County, this Plan provides policy direction for helping achieve a multimodal network within the St. Cloud metropolitan area (i.e., Sartell and Sauk Rapids).

Local Comprehensive Plans

The Cities of St. Cloud, Rice, Sartell and Sauk Rapids have adopted comprehensive plans or parks and trail master plans. These plans provide a framework for establishing their local park and trail system through goals, policies, and the identification of specific needs and projects. For example, the City of Rice adopted a Parks & Trails Master Plan in 2017. This plan identifies various improvements to the local system, including trail improvements along County Roads that connect downtown Rice to the Mississippi River.

Influencing Factors

How people play and spend leisure time has changed over the last 10 to 20 years. Benton County recognizes the ever-changing recreational needs of the county. Some of the influencing factors that have shaped how people play and spend leisure time locally and nationally include:

- People are increasingly busy and have more demands on personal time
- Importance of place and desire to make memorable experiences
- People want to share their experiences on social media
- Concerns for safety in public places and neighborhoods
- Governments and agencies have tight budgets
- Interest in staying active while aging
- Higher frequency in new residents moving to the community
- Popularity of trails and information recreation
- Increased interest in specialized recreation facilities and aquatics
- Increase of technologies leads to disconnection from nature
- Popularity of non-traditional recreation activities
- Green alternatives to traditional landscaping and for water quality

Emerging Trends & Opportunities

Benton County recognizes changing and emerging trends that are influencing how people play and use park facilities. The following list includes trends that have emerged locally and nationally over the last ten years that serve as potential opportunities for Benton County. Whether the trends are on the rise or in decline, they are worth noting as they may affect Benton County residents in one way or another.

Access to Water

Benton Beach and Bend in the River have become popular tourist destinations in part due to their relationship to water (e.g., the Mississippi River). Visitors and residents are participating in more non-motorized water activities, such as canoeing and paddle boarding. As the County improves its park system, consideration should be given to creating better access to the river and lakes. As part of this effort, the County will need to be aware of invasive species, and ongoing implications to erosion and sedimentation.



Active Living

A healthy recreation and park system equals healthy residents. People who engage in regular physical activity are healthier and happier. When people have access to parks, trails, and recreation, they exercise more. In addition, increased exposure to natural areas has been linked to improved physical and psychological health. Benton County's Public Health Department can serve as a resource in helping promote active living goals, while seeking funding opportunities to enhance the park and trail system.

Fiscal Constraints

Many communities are dealing with tight budgets due to the economic downturn in the past ten years, as well as the impacts of the retiring baby boomer generation. In an effort to address these fiscal constraints, some counties are deferring maintenance in the upkeep of their parks and recreation system. This approach can result in a backlog of operations and maintenance costs that lead to a negative perception and decreased use of the park system.

Residents and stakeholders have expressed the importance that parks and trails play in their quality of life. Numerous studies have shown that residential property values increase as investments are made to the park and trail systems. Parks and trails can also positively affect commercial property and can be catalysts for development. For example, bike trails are growing in popularity and trail heads are being promoted as tourist destinations by other counties. New businesses (e.g., restaurants, bike shops, bed and breakfasts, and gift shops) are looking to locate along these corridors to meet the needs of visitors.

Greenway Corridors and Trail Connections

Today, trails have become part of greenway corridors that provide wildlife habitat and movement corridors, open space vistas, water treatment benefits, and the opportunity to interpret local history and culture. As part of the County's trail planning efforts, best practices should be applied that enhance and protect natural resources and water quality.

Natural Resource Management

The need and awareness to be environmentally sensitive in the way residents and visitors impact the county's natural surroundings is ever increasing. Benton County recognizes that in order for change to occur it must start by adopting goals and standards to protect resources for future generations. These goals are reflected in Chapter 3.

Reconnecting with Nature

A larger emphasis is being placed on regional destinations, especially at the county level. Regional destinations provide a different level of service that cannot be offered at the city level. County parks typically provide opportunities to reconnect with nature in larger, rural landscapes and serve visitors at a regional scale. Benton Beach and Bend in the River serve this role.

Safety

Safety was listed as a key value to the Benton County Park Commission as part of this process. Residents value the safety they feel living in Benton County and desire parks and trails that promote safety. Future investments in the parks should take into consideration Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED are design principals that help reduce crime (e.g., lighting and open sight lines).



Placemaking & Memorable Experiences

More communities are building parks and facilities that facilitate placemaking opportunities (e.g., festivals, concerts, events, and places to gather). The Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org) describes "Placemaking" as a process that facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. The rise of social media has also played a significant role in how people capture (e.g., sharing photos) their memorable experiences. Residents have cited Benton Beach and Bend in the River as two county amenities that have shaped memorable experiences in the county park system.

Future Needs

In order to evaluate the future needs of Benton County's parks and trails, several methods were utilized:

- **Peer County Comparison:** A peer review of similar counties was conducted to better understand emerging trends and needs at a county level.
- **Travel Shed Analysis:** The County parks were evaluated using a level of service analysis to determine if residents have adequate access to recreational opportunities.
- **Park Dedication Review:** An overview of the County's Park Dedication Fee was documented to determine available resources for future park and trail improvements.
- **Park Commission Engagement:** The Park Commission was actively engaged throughout the planning effort. Their input was utilized to help share the plan's recommendations.

Peer County Comparison

The counties selected for the Peer County Comparison include Freeborn, Goodhue, Isanti, McLeod and Steele County (see Table 6.1). The survey focused on the size of their system, emerging needs, department organization, and operations and maintenance needs.

Peer Review Findings

Findings from the peer review indicate the following:

- Benton County's park system is similar in size to its peer counties (see Table 6.2).
- There is a growing demand for more walking trails or pathways within the Benton County Parks and peer counties.
- The peer counties are experiencing a decrease in outdoor picnic rentals. However, the counties are seeing an increase in rental facilities that offer modern amenities (e.g., air conditioning and restrooms).
- The demand for camping sites has risen, in addition to electrical sites for recreational vehicles/campers.
- County residents and visitors are looking for a stronger connection to nature through passive open spaces.

Table 6.1. Peer Community Context Comparison

Context	Benton	Freeborn	Goodhue	Isanti	McLeod	Steele
Population (2017)	40,128	30,550	46,562	39,553	35,884	36,828
Households (2017)	16,012	13,121	19,205	14,710	14,675	14,489
Persons Per Household (2017)	2.44	2.28	2.38	2.66	2.41	2.50
Acres	260,986	461,426	498,888	289,970	324,334	276,487
County Seat	Foley	Albert Lea	Red Wing	Cambridge	Glencoe	Owatonna
County Seat Population (2017)	2,717	18,032	16,572	8,868	5,519	25,922

- Benton County and the peer counties are seeing a stronger demand for mountain bike trails, which has resulted in competing interests and conflicts between other users (hikers and skiers).
- The peer counties are placing a larger emphasis on creating regional destinations, while maintaining existing assets and amenities. This has resulted in the counties pursuing regional designation for their parks through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission.
- The peer counties are actively chasing grant funds to help offset costs. Park Master Plans have played an important role in helping secure funding.
- There is a growing demand by County residents to see more investments in the park system.

Travel Shed Analysis

The following information offers one lens through which to view the state of Benton County's park system. Typically park planning is done through a level-of-service analysis, which measures the number of parks and their size, the type of amenities offered in each park, and a resident survey/assessment to determine their needs. These findings help shape specific recommendations for each park.

This analysis looks closer at the County's Signature Parks (Bend in the River and Benton Beach) and their service areas from an access/mobility perspective. Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6 demonstrate that both of these parks are within a 10 to 30 minute driving radius. This standard is used as a typical baseline for assessing gaps in the county system. Based on these radii, Benton County's Signature Parks serve most if not all of its residents. Underserved areas include far reaching areas along Benton County's eastern border.

The travel shed assessment assumes that everyone has access to the County's Signature Parks by vehicle. Accessing these parks by bus, bike or foot is limited. Benton County should explore opportunities that provide better connections for these users. The Transportation Chapter in this Comprehensive Plan and the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015) provides guidance on how to improve these connections.

Table 6.2. Peer Community Park System Comparison

Park System	Benton	Freeborn	Goodhue	Isanti	McLeod	Steele
Number of County Parks	4	4	1	6	6	4
County Park Acreage	338	266	25	684	571	23
State/Regional Parks (Acres)	0	0	78	244	0	0
Indoor Regional Recreational Center	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Park Acres	338	266	103	928	571	23
Percent of Park Acres to County Area	0.13%	0.06%	0.02%	0.32%	0.18%	0.01%

Figure 6.5. Bend in the River Travel Shed

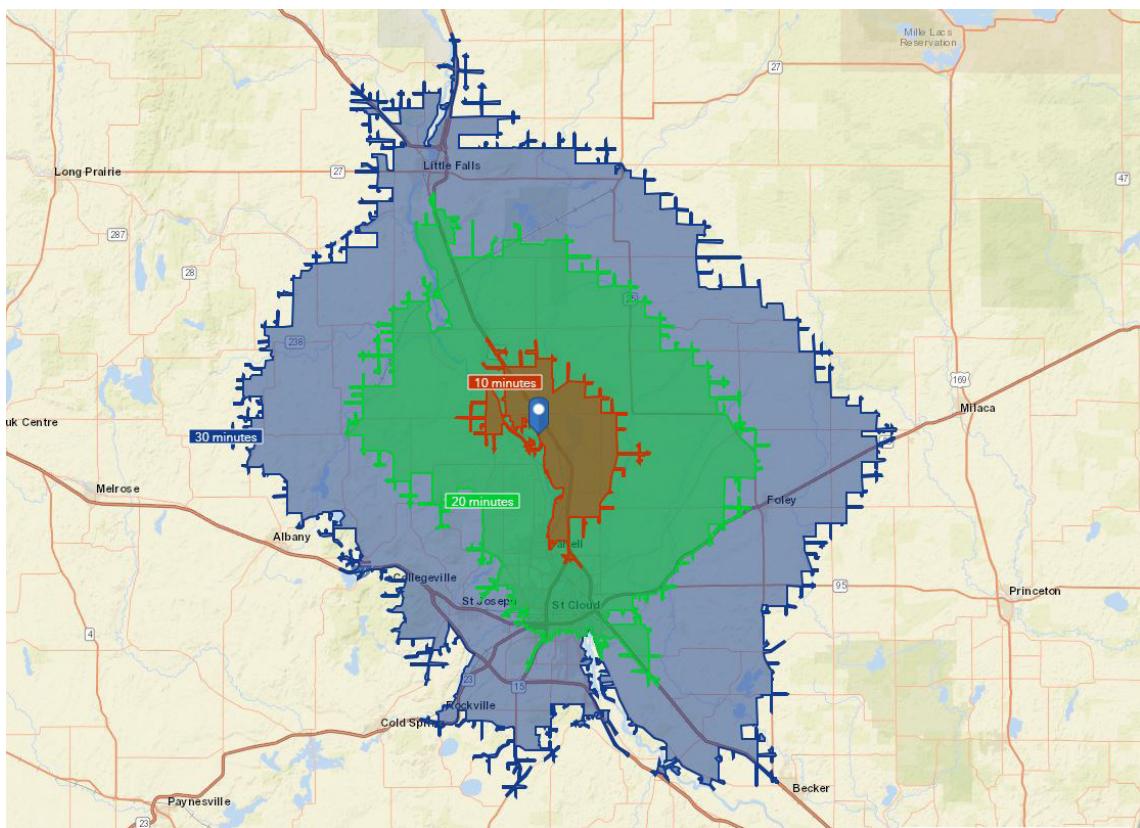
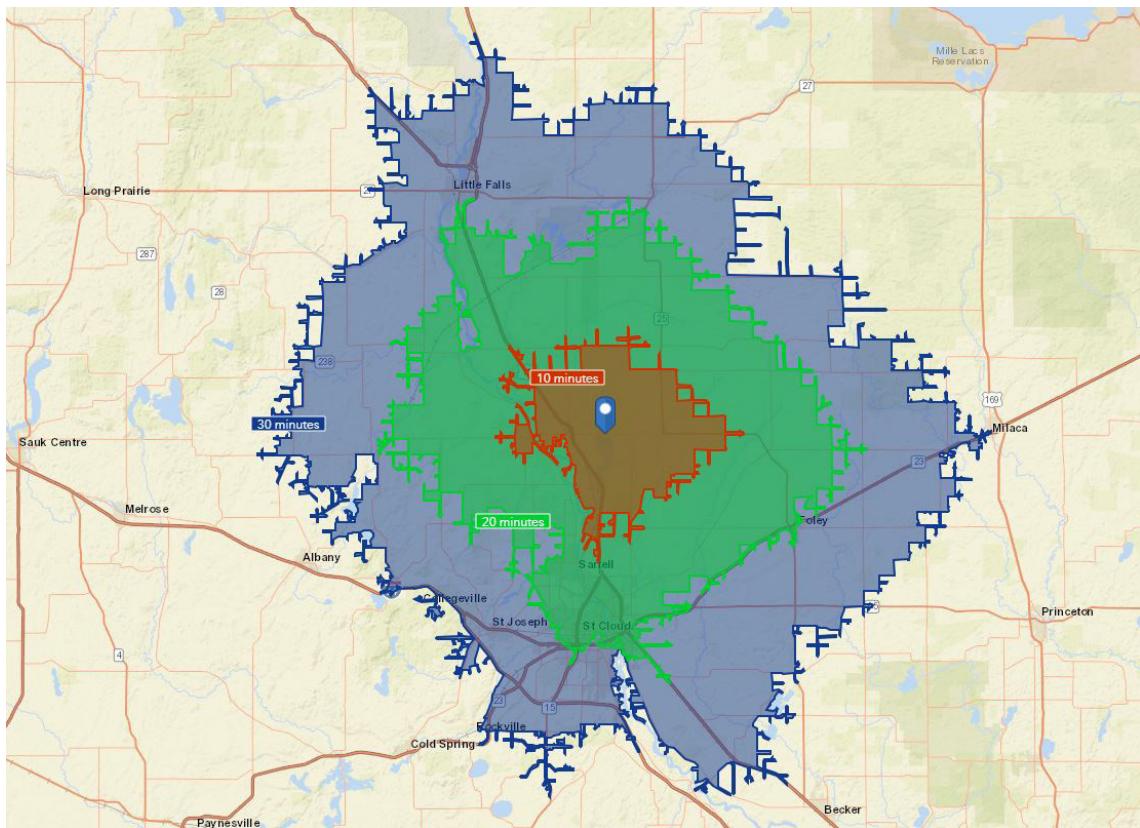


Figure 6.6. Benton Beach Travel Shed



Park Dedication Review

The County's existing Park Dedication ordinance and fees collected to date were evaluated to determine available resources for future park and trail improvements. It was also an opportunity to educate stakeholders on how these funds can be used according to state law.

Minnesota State Law

As part of the land development process, Benton County may require a developer to dedicate land to the township for park and recreation purposes (Minnesota State Statute 394.25 Subd. 7 applies to a County and 462.358 Subd. 2b applies to a City). This requirement is typically addressed in a County's Development Code or subdivision ordinance, and referred to as a park dedication. A park dedication ordinance recognizes that with development there is an increased need for parks and open spaces. At its discretion, a county or city may require a developer to meet those needs by choosing one or more of the following options:

- Pay a fee to the municipality (known as a fee in lieu) for future park investments;
- Donate land for park and recreational purposes;
- Construct recreational facilities; and/or,
- Privately reserve land within the subdivision for public park and recreation purposes.

Benton County's Park Land Dedication

Benton County approved a Park Dedication ordinance in 2004 (see sidebar), requiring dedication of park land or park dedication fees with all new development. Since the establishment of the park dedication ordinance, Benton County has collected an annual average of \$4,000 in fees (see Table 6.3).

The fees are collected if the County Board, at its discretion, accepts a per lot cash fee in lieu of land. Historically, this has been the most common approach. The fee may be up to 10 percent of the

Benton County Park Land Dedication

**(Development Code Section
10.12.2 - Ord. #373, adopted
2/17/04)**

All new residential plats, including plats associated with planned unit developments, shall be subject to the park dedication requirements prescribed in the Benton County Development Code. In all new subdivision plats, up to 10% (ten percent) of the gross area shall be set aside and dedicated by fee title or easement to Benton County for public recreation space.

In lieu of land dedication, the County Board and Director may require a financial contribution. Historically, this has been the most common approach.

Table 6.3. Benton County Park Dedication Fees Collected

Year	Collected
2012	\$4,200
2013	\$3,000
2014	\$4,800
2015	\$4,800
2016	\$600
2017	\$1,800
2018	\$7,100
Average	\$3,757

median undeveloped lot value as of the date of final plat approval, as determined by the Benton County Assessor.

Per State Statute (394.25 Subd. 7), the County must use at least 75 percent of these funds in the township or city where the collection occurred. The township board may agree to allow the County to use these funds outside of the township in a manner that is consistent with the comprehensive plan, master plan, or capital improvement program. The Parks chapter also provides a long-term plan for future park and trail improvements that (in conjunction with other master plans) forms the nexus for establishment of park dedication.

Using Park Dedication Funds

Table 6.5 summarizes Benton County's 2018 Year End balance for the park dedication fees based on the 75/25 percent statutory requirements. A few townships (i.e., Gilmanton, St. George, and Watab) have utilized their funds in recent years (see Table

6.4). Benton County's park dedication funds may be relatively small in nature; however, these funds still serve as a resource for implementing new parks and amenities. To help maximize these dollars, the Township(s) and County should work together to find projects that provide regional benefits.

Table 6.4. Park Dedication Fees Spent

Year	Townships	County
2012	\$0	\$0
2013	\$0	\$0
2014	\$0	\$0
2015	\$10,722	\$0
2016	\$0	\$0
2017	\$8,000	\$0
2018	\$0	\$0
Total:	\$18,722	\$0

Table 6.5. Benton County 2018 Year End (YE) Balance of Park Dedication Fees

Township	75% Portion			25% Portion		
	Township \$ Collected	Township \$ Spent	Township YE Balance	County \$ Collected	County \$ Spent	County YE Balance
Alberta	\$0	\$0	\$900	\$0	\$0	\$1,223
Gilmanton	\$0	\$0	\$2,800	\$0	\$0	\$3,600
Glendorado	\$1,350	\$0	\$2,700	\$450	\$0	\$900
Graham	\$0	\$0	\$2,700	\$0	\$0	\$600
Granite Ledge	\$0	\$0	\$4,050	\$0	\$0	\$1,350
Længola	\$900	\$0	\$2,250	\$300	\$0	\$1,200
Mayhew Lake	\$0	\$0	\$5,339	\$0	\$0	\$1,761
Maywood	\$900	\$0	\$6,075	\$300	\$0	\$2,025
Minden	\$450	\$0	\$8,438	\$150	\$0	\$2,813
St. George	\$375	\$0	\$375	\$125	\$0	\$6,325
Sauk Rapids	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Watab	\$1,350	\$0	\$11,587	\$450	\$0	\$5,118
Totals	\$5,325	\$0	\$47,214	\$1,775	\$0	\$26,914

It is important to recognize these projects need to align with State Statute requirements (Minnesota State Statute 394.25 Subd. 7). Per State Statute, funds can be used for the acquisition and development or improvements of parks, recreation facilities, playgrounds, trails, wetlands, or open space. Funds cannot be used for ongoing operation, maintenance, or redevelopment of existing parks, recreational facilities, playgrounds, trails, wetlands, or open space.

Moving forward, the Townships and County should work together in maximizing their park dedication funds. To achieve this objective, both parties should consider the following:

- Determine the Township's recreational needs and develop objective standards for the amount of recreational lands and facilities that will be needed to meet growth and development. At that time, redirect park dedication funds to those needs.

- Utilize existing park dedication funds as a local match for grant applications.
- Identify park needs that provide regional benefits to multiple Townships within a specified area. Utilize park dedication funds to meet those needs; however, this may require a Township(s) to redirect their park dedication funds to an improvement outside of their jurisdiction.

Table 6.6 is a tool the County and Townships can use to evaluate and budget for new improvements. In general, the capital costs can be viewed as eligible projects that can be funded with park dedication fees if they provide a "new" recreational amenity. Ineligible projects include operation and maintenance needs. State Statute should be reviewed to determine what constitutes as an eligible project.

Table 6.6. Planning Level Cost Estimates

Park Element	Capital Cost	Annual O&M Cost	Estimated Life (Years)	Notes & Assumptions
New Park Development				
County Park	\$90,000/Acre	\$550/Acre	25-50	
General Grounds & Landscaping				
Mowed Turf Grass (Irrigated)	\$60,000/Acre New Sod \$34,000/Acre New Seed	\$1,000/Acre	15-30	Includes mowing, trimming, fertilizing, weed control, aerating & overseeding.
Mowed Turf Grass (Non Irrigated)	\$30,000/Acre New Sod \$2,000/Acre New Seed	\$800/Acre	15-30	Does not assume hydroseed. Includes mowing, trimming, fertilizing, weed control, aerating & overseeding.
Irrigation	\$25,000/Acre	\$1,300/Acre	25	
Contractual Landscape Maintenance	\$6.50 Sq. Ft. (\$282,600/Acre)	\$.25 Sq. Ft. (\$9,250/Acre)	20	
Prairie Restoration	\$5,000/Acre	\$300/Acre		
Naturalized Shoreline	\$100/LF	\$400/Acre		

Park Element	Capital Cost	Annual O&M Cost	Estimated Life (Years)	Notes & Assumptions
Rain Garden	\$10/Sq. Ft.	\$300/Acre		Low end - high end could be up to \$20/Sq Ft
Woodland / Slope Restoration	\$4,000/Acre	\$400/Acre		Assumes restoration of existing wooded area. \$20,000/Acre if new tree planting required
Park Building & Shelters				
Buildings with Restrooms	\$300-\$400/Sq. Ft.	\$11,000/Bldg./Yr.	40	Includes all buildings
Picnic Shelters	\$150-\$200/Sq. Ft.	\$3,800/Bldg./Yr.	40	Includes all shelters
Trails & Surfaces				
Trails (10 Ft. Wide Asphalt)	\$50/LF	\$5,280 Per Mile	30	
Parking Lots (Asphalt)	\$2,500-\$3,000/Stall	\$20-\$25 Per Stall	40	
Sidewalks (Concrete)	\$30/Linear foot			Assumes 6 foot wide sidewalk
Natural Surface Trails	\$30/Linear foot if limestone ADA or \$5/Linear foot if rustic footpath	\$500/Mile	-	
Park Amenities				
Lighting	\$15,000		15	Includes 2-3 pedestrian scale light posts
Nature Play Areas	\$50,000-\$100,000	\$1,000/Site	20	Assumes 1 to 2 signature features and remainder natural materials
Community Gardens	\$10,000-\$20,000/Acre	\$800 Acre	-	
Off-Leash Dog Park	\$10,000-\$50,000 Acre	\$800 Acre	15-20	
Fishing Pier	\$25,000		20	Includes 100' long wood pier with railings
Dock	\$10,000		20	Includes 40' long metal dock
Swimming Beach	\$15,000		25	Includes grading and sand
Splash Pad	\$600,000	\$5,000	15-20	
Amphitheater	\$800,000		50	Assumes open stage and seating for 200+
Disc Golf Course	\$25,000		25	

All costs are planning level costs in 2018 dollars and do not necessarily reflect additional costs, such as engineering, design, construction administration, and staff time.

Parks Commission Engagement

The Park Commission was actively engaged throughout the planning process and served as a guiding body in creating this chapter. The planning consultant met with the Parks Commission on five occasions to discuss various aspects of the plan.

- July 26, 2018
- October 16, 2018
- February 6, 2019
- March 27, 2019
- April 24, 2019

As part of these meeting discussions, the following objectives were identified to help guide the Parks Commission in their future decision making:

- Maintain and enhance Benton County's Signature Parks and County Community Parks before adding new County parks to the system.
- The County will only take on the responsibility of managing and maintaining the existing County Parks and natural areas. Townships may choose to build new parks with their park dedication funds (in accordance to state statute) or through other financial resources. However, the Townships will

be the sole party responsible for managing and maintaining these parks over time.

- Find opportunities to maximize and use the park dedication funds (both county and township) that enhance the County's Signature Parks and Community Parks.
- Townships who choose to use or transfer their park dedication funds should provide the County a township resolution.
- Find opportunities to start implementing the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015) to provide better pedestrian and bicycle access between county parks, townships, and cities. A short-term priority should include better connections between the City of Rice, Mississippi River, and Bend in the River. The City of Rice's 2017 Parks and Trails Master Plan should serve as a guide in helping inform this connection.
- Actively pursue funding opportunities (e.g., grants) that will support improvements to the County parks and trail system.
- Formalize internal roles and responsibilities in planning, maintaining, and managing Benton County's parks and trails.



Next Steps

Parks are not mere expenditures, but an investment in the future well-being of individuals and groups, as well as the continued attractiveness and viability of the County. Based on the future needs assessment, stakeholder input, staff direction, and guidance from the Parks Commission, the Parks chapter calls for a generalized list of projects that will focus on short-, mid-, and long-term action items (see Table 6.7). These projects were informed by the objectives established by the Parks Commission in the previous section.

The goal of this type of implementation strategy is to prioritize larger initiatives. The County and Parks Commission will need to continue to evaluate individual park needs on an annual basis and program these improvements in a fiscally responsible manner.

The priorities have been summarized into three categories:

- **Planning Initiatives:** Planning initiatives typically include master plans, environmental studies or engineering design. These type of initiatives are typically done to help set the stage for future capital investments. These types of initiatives help support a grant application by demonstrating to the grantee that the project has been fully conceptualized and planned accordingly.
- **Capital Investments:** Capital investments are physical improvements to the built or natural environment. This may include new buildings, land acquisition, environmental restoration, or park amenities (e.g., benches, signage or playground equipment). Capital investments should be programmed or considered as part of future Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs).

- **Policy & Staffing:** The implementation of planning initiatives and capital investments require time and resources. In that respect, this category has identified additional staffing needs to help formalize a parks department and carry out the priorities identified in this plan. This may also include policy revision to better align and support emerging trends and park needs.

Ongoing Projects

Equally important to the initial capital costs for a project are ongoing operations and maintenance costs. Adequately budgeting operations and maintenance ensures that facilities fulfill life expectancy and that parks remain safe and welcoming. Investing in the park system is an important aspect of retaining and attracting residents, while improving their quality of life.

In addition to the priority projects, Benton County should consider the following on-going initiatives.

- Continue a regular patrol of parks to provide for the safety of park users.
- Periodically update and distribute the list of available public park facilities, park maps, and trail maps to the community and interested groups. This can be achieved online or through various marketing materials.
- Continue to actively engage the Parks Commission as the guiding body for recommendation to the park and trail system.
- Identify and program improvements as part of the County's Capital Improvements Program.

Table 6.7. Priority Projects**Short-Term Priority Projects (1 - 3 Years)**

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Update the Park Master Plan for Benton Beach & Bend in the River.	Design, install and maintain standardized park signage for all County parkland and trails.	Dedicate one full-time staff member to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Investigate the feasibility of implementing a county trail system that compatible with the Active Transportation Plan recommendations.	Create improved trail and pedestrian connections within the existing park systems.	Update the County Park Dedication Fee ordinance.
Seek a regional designation for Bend in the River through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC).	Develop and implement a program (e.g., skiing and snow showing paths) for year-round use in the County's signature parks.	Begin prioritizing and programming investments through the Capital Improvement Programs process.
	Collaborate with the City of Rice in expanding the Mississippi River Trail (as identified in their 2017 Parks Master Plan) by implementing an off-street paved trail along CSAH 2 between the Mississippi River, Bend in the River, and downtown Rice.	

Mid-Term Priority Projects (4 - 7 Years)

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Explore methods to integrate parks and trails with the networks of adjacent communities (cities and counties) and State facilities.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Benton Beach and Bend in the River Master Plans.	Expand park staff to two full-time staff members to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Develop a Park Master Plan for Rose Anna Beach.	Begin investing in trail improvements that adhere to the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan and feasibility report recommend as part of the short-term priority projects.	Formalize a Parks Department as it's own group or within a similar department (e.g., Public works).
Develop a Park Master Plan for Mayhew Lake Park.	Re-establish a swim area at Benton Beach.	

Long-Term Priority Projects (8 - 10+ years)

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Seek opportunities through public or private funds for the establishment of a new county park.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Bend in the River and Benton Beach Master Plans.	Expand park staff to two full-time staff members to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Investigate the feasibility of implementing a county trail system that is in unison with Active Transportation Plan's recommendations.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Rose Anna Beach and Mayhew Lake Park Master Plans.	

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Chapter 7

Implementation

The Benton County Comprehensive Plan sets a number of goals for the county to achieve or strive to achieve over the next ten to twenty years. Goals, policies and initiatives referenced throughout the plan can be implemented through a series of public and private actions.

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented in a number of ways. On a daily basis, the document is used by County staff to help frame recommendations to the County Board and other advisory commissions. It is also used by residents and developers to understand the County's intentions for the use of land, the provision of housing, infrastructure needs, and planned park and open space improvements.

County's Role in Implementation

Benton County's role in achieving its vision and addressing the trends affecting it can be thought of as a continuum of increasing involvement, expense and commitment. In some cases the County's role is clear; in others the role is variable and yet to be determined. The following guiding principles should be considered when implementing this plan.

- **Study:** Identify trends and issues, research, monitor, analyze for policy development, and conduct pilot studies.
- **Inform and Educate:** Share information to increase awareness of issues, protect public safety, provide technical assistance, and motivate sustainable behavior.
- **Advocate:** Promote policies in local, regional, state and federal government that will benefit the people of Benton County.
- **Collaborate and Facilitate:** Work in partnership with others, coordinate activities and relationships to achieve more than could be done unilaterally.
- **Operate and Lead by Example:** Manage County facilities and run programs to higher standards that will demonstrate both the County's commitment and potential best practices.
- **Regulate:** Administer ordinances and laws through permitting, inspection and enforcement.

Implementation by Topic

Each chapter provides guidance in how to achieve the Comprehensive Plan's vision over the next twenty years. The following is a summary of the implementation measures discussed throughout these chapters.

Agriculture & Economic Development

- Partner with USDA, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and local community development agencies to explore programs that facilitate farm-to-table, farm-to-restaurant, and farm-to-school programs between Benton County farmers and communities.
- Study ways to support existing small-scale farmers and to help newcomers establish small-scale farms.
- Take an active role in assisting the State of Minnesota achieve its goal of providing high-speed Internet access to all County residents by 2022 and businesses by 2026.

Mobility & Transportation

- Plan for trails and other facilities that connect destinations and create a network across the County, providing recreational opportunities as well as transportation alternatives for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-vehicle users.
- Continue to support and maintain the network of safe and efficient County roads that provide transportation routes for rural residents throughout the county.

- Prioritize transportation improvements that provide mobility benefits in moving goods (e.g., crops and livestock) between farm and final destination (farmers market, school, processing facility or grocery store).
- Explore ways to increase transportation access for aging rural seniors, connecting them to services and their communities.
- Schedule all County Roads to be upgraded to 10-ton load limit to accommodate the increasing weight of freight and farm equipment.
- Utilize the Regional Active Living Plan as a metric when making transportation decisions.
- Update the Transportation Plan to identify and designate future roadways within the County by their functional classification and to prioritize system improvements.
- Refer to the St. Cloud APO Long-Range Transportation Plan when identifying future transit needs within the County.
- Follow Transportation Guidelines for various land uses listed within "Balancing Transportation Needs with Land Use" on page 81

Land Uses

- Adjust zoning and subdivision ordinances to promote land use patterns that provide alternatives to motorized transportation in order to promote active living.
- Review the Comprehensive Plan annually and amend as necessary to ensure its usefulness as a practical guide for current and future development.
- Formulate and enforce county ordinances to ensure development remains in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Facilitate cooperation between cities and their surrounding townships when making land use decisions.

Public Health & Food Access

- Integrate a "health-in-all-policies" approach to County decision-making and implementation measures.
- Adopt zoning code regulations that support healthy food infrastructures.
- Explore programs that preserve land for food production and provide access to that land for interested newcomers.
- Update County website to include an expanse of resources to information and services to assist vulnerable populations in the County.
- Continue to work toward creating an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan and Inventory and follow its implementation strategies.

Parks and Trails System

- Create better access to rivers and lakes, both as recreational amenities and as natural resources to be preserved
- Enhance and protect natural resources and water quality by adopting surface water management and design best practices when establishing greenway corridors within the County
- Consider Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards when designing and investing in future parks
- Explore opportunities to better connect potential park users accessing County parks by bus, bicycle, or foot.
- Maximize park dedication funds by working closely with Townships.
- Implement the Ten Year priorities.

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