

Community Vision, Goals and Policies

COMMUNITY VISION

The goals and policies of the 2020 Independence Plan adopted in 2001 were based on establishing clear objectives for rural residential and agriculture preservation. This plan explored the meaning of the word “rural” and what it means to the community.

Since the previous plan was initiated, the mix of rural residential housing and definition of rural living has continued to change. There is still a strong component of agriculture preservation, but it is less than a decade ago. The City has continued to experience the growth and urbanization pressures of being between the expanding growth centers of the Minneapolis metropolitan area and the City of Delano. The revised mix of residential and agricultural land uses now yields a variety of lifestyle choices. Most residents refer to their particular living situation as "rural". But rural has a broad range of definitions. An engineer might define rural as "gravel roads, on-site septic systems and private wells". A farmer would define rural as "agriculture as a job and a way of life". A commuter could well define rural as "large lot residences, with long vistas, clean air and quiet evenings". A local contractor would say rural is when "you can operate your business from your home and not be overly encumbered by City land regulations". In Independence, all of these viewpoints are represented.

Rural, in Webster's Dictionary, is defined: *"Pertaining to the country, as distinguished from a city or town, suiting the country or resembling it; pertaining to agriculture or farming"*. Suburban is defined: *"an outlying part of a city or town, a part without the boundaries but in the vicinity of the town "*.

From these definitions, a rural Independence is not part of Maple Plain or Delano, but has a separate sense of place. The aesthetics to this "place in the country" has agricultural roots, a lack of obvious boundaries, and continuity with the natural landscape.

The resulting policy needs are to provide a broader, more inclusive definition of rural. Clearly Independence has little to label it urban. The expansive agriculture land, wetlands, parks, hobby farms and large lot residences are undisputedly rural in character. Yet rather than separate and compartmentalize these different land uses, the new plan should strive to find common ground, synthesizing the variety into a cooperative rural community.

The current Metropolitan Council System Statement for the City of Independence and the 2030 Regional Development Framework identify roughly the western two-thirds as “agricultural” and roughly the eastern one third as “diversified rural” While this map is somewhat similar to the adopted 2020 Independence Comprehensive Plan, the policies for the categories are different,

and the map does not identify the Cities existing commercial/industrial area. It also does not differentiate the existing areas subdivided prior to zoning controls around Lake Sarah and Lake Independence that are served with metropolitan sewer as a program to clean up and protect the regions lakes, streams, and ground water.

The Metropolitan Council's regional Blueprint and subsequent Development Framework has defined Agriculture as 1 unit per 40 acres in density minimum and "Rural Residential", now "Rural Diversified" as 1 unit per 10 acres. Rather than adopting a policy that the City develop in its entirety as rural residential at 1 unit per 10 acres, the city adopted a policy in 1980 and again in 2001 of allowing 1 unit per 5 acres (with strict land compatibility requirements) in roughly the eastern one third in the rural residential and 1 unit per 40 acres in the western two-thirds agricultural area. The intent of this policy was to better serve the rural residential area with the various municipal services such as police, fire, and road maintenance, as well as provide controlled growth and better subdivision layout.

Although the plan in 1980 and 2001 offered an alternative to the strict 1 unit per 10 acre density, the Metropolitan Council has always found this policy of controlled growth and preservation of agriculture **"to meet all regional system plans and requirements of the Metropolitan Land Planning Act"**.

The Metropolitan Council policies call for maintenance of commercial farming and related agri-business activities as the primary activity in the commercial agriculture region. This area should also provide land for other low intensity uses such as hobby farms, horticulture, and conservation of natural resources. The general rural use area permits commercial agriculture but anticipates primarily residential uses in a somewhat greater density. Independence permits development at one residence per 40 acres for prime agricultural land and one per five acres in the rural residential zone. Land enrolled in the agricultural preserve program must be maintained in agriculture for a minimum of eight years in exchange for a decrease in property taxes.

Many planning efforts in rural areas elaborate on rural centers as a mix of urban and rural uses. Maple Plain, Rockford and Delano are cities that provide a full range of land use opportunities. With these urban centers so close, duplicating their features not only would appear unnecessary, but would most likely be counter-productive. Independence is different than those communities and should compliment the land use variety of those more urban settings. The land use in Independence is far more comprehensible when the interdependent dynamics with the surrounding communities are understood.

Attempting to duplicate the urban services and land use options provided in the neighboring urban areas is neither economically feasible nor a publicly responsible decision for Independence. All cities cannot be all things to all people. Independence cannot provide a full range of public services any easier

than Minneapolis could provide adequate farm land for people needing space to cultivate. This limit of what is possible directly translates into terms like "economically sustainable", "carrying capacity", or "publicly viable. This recognition of limits is a primary building block for local policy decision making.

The previous land use plans have focused objectives on control of suburban growth and preservation of agriculture. While the latter was an attitude of community consensus, the on-going dispute over subdivision of land remains unresolved. Utilizing a carrying capacity method, the confluence of population, city services, transportation needs and ecological responsibility development point toward a continued gradualism of development. Independence can be a place of mixed rural lifestyles, continuing to rely on surrounding urban areas for urban functions.

Considering the diversity of land uses in Independence, achieving a situation of community harmony will require a careful balancing of the policies underlying local decisions with successful communication of common goals. The objective of the process is mutual compatibility of local land uses within the community. The goal is rooted in preservation, to the greatest extent possible, the essence of a rural way of life in Independence. The hope is to blend the local variety of lifestyles into a peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

The City's Comprehensive Guide Plan has therefore been prepared to reflect the diversity and variety of values and needs within the community. The city will endeavor to retain its rural character, providing a variety of rural living choices, from rural residential and rural hobby farms to the preservation of prime agricultural lands and natural environmental features. The rural, non-farm lifestyle alternatives local residents may pursue should be designed and maintained so as to preserve local aesthetic and natural feature amenities. These rural residential neighborhoods should also be planned and designed to maintain the high level of public service citizens have come to expect, without an undue increased burden on the rest of community

The future physical, social; and economic decisions that will be made by the City require an overall policy direction, a means to implement these lifestyle options. The following goals and policies form the rationale for local decision-making.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Community goals are generally defined as the objectives or end products that a City hopes to achieve through local decision making. These broad objectives are usually community-wide and describe an optimum social and physical environment. Policies are the means by which the goals are achieved. They are more detailed, providing guidelines for specific decision alternatives.

The combination of goals and their supporting policies provide the framework for public decisions. They are meant to alleviate misunderstanding between

community residents and decision makers. Imperative to this understanding is that any decision or action taken by the City should be appraised and evaluated in light of these goals and policies. In this way, decisions made by the City are both reasonable and consistent. These goals and policies are meant to be flexible enough to apply to present needs and adaptable enough to appropriately address future demands.

Some of the goals and policies from the previous plan remain relevant. However, the city and its environs have changed, becoming more complex. The policy plan reflects this new complexity in addressing a much broader range of issues in a more precise way.

Community Goals

- To provide for a variety of rural residential and agricultural lifestyles within the community.
- To provide a variety of experiences and opportunities for residents in terms of living, working and social activities.
- To provide, maintain and enforce standards for development which will enhance public health and the maintenance of a quality standard of living.
- To provide for limited retail commercial services and industrial development in an effort to expand the tax base and to provide employment opportunities and services that are now not available in the community.
- To maximize public service efficiencies through effective planning and management practices at the local level.
- To actively encourage and utilize citizen participation in the local decision-making processes.

A. General Land Use

Goals

- To set adequate standards for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of City residents, but not to go beyond those necessary safeguards.
- To concentrate rural residential development in areas where services can most economically be provided.
- To guide development of land uses according to function, minimizing land use conflicts and/or damage to the environment.

- To foster a harmonious, convenient, compatible, workable relationship among a balance of all land uses and local supporting services within the community.
- To protect and preserve local property values.

Policies

1. The city shall keep the local public informed as to decisions on land use, community facilities, and city policy, as these decisions are being made.
2. Land uses--should be determined by the natural limiting characteristics of the land.
3. In a property division, for the lots to be considered buildable, the lots must meet minimum lot size requirements and soils must be compatible with proposed land uses.
4. The city should promote development of transitional land use alternatives between non-compatible land uses.

B. Natural Environment

Goals

- To protect and enhance the natural environment through sound land stewardship practices in order to maintain a proper balance between man and nature.
- To preserve significant open spaces and natural spaces.

Policies

1. Land uses should not be allowed which degrade the quality of the air or ground and surface water supplies below present conditions.
2. Major unique natural features (bluff areas, wildlife areas, woodlots and lakes) having historic and aesthetic value should be preserved and protected as perpetual community assets.
3. All individual developments should be designed so as to preserve and enhance existing topography, water bodies, natural vegetation, permanent wetlands, wildlife areas and other natural amenities.

4. Water bodies should be protected from human encroachment and damage through purchase or dedication of lakeshore property, scenic easements, expansive setbacks and the enforcement of approved waste water disposal methods.

Erosion Control Policies

1. Erosion protection and soil conservation measures should be required for all new development, including:
 - a) The drainage system should be constructed and operational as quickly as possible during construction.
 - b) Where the topsoil is removed, sufficient arable soils should be set aside for spreading over the developed area. The soil should be restored to a depth of four (4) inches and should be of a quality at least equal to the soil quality prior to development.
 - c) When soil is exposed, the exposure should be for the shortest feasible period of time so as to minimize sheet and gully erosion.

Drainage/Water Quality Policies

1. The City's natural drainage network of wetlands and streams should be maintained and protected to provide a natural storm water system for runoff storage, filtration and maximum ground water recharge. Specifically:
 - a) Storm water drainage should be discharged to retention basins or other treatment facilities prior to discharging to lakes, streams, rivers or other DNR protected wetlands.
 - b) Wetlands currently used for storm water should provide for natural or artificial water level control.
 - c) Temporary storage areas, retention basins, or natural swales scattered throughout developed areas should be encouraged to reduce peak flows, erosion damage, and construction cost.
2. Diversion, retention, and treatment of wastes from feed lots and stables should be required to conform to Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's regulations for agricultural waters.
3. Private septic tanks and drain fields should be installed according to

State regulations to assure that they are working properly.

4. City water quality should be protected by adoption and adherence to
a) MDNR Statewide Standards for Management of Shoreland Areas;
b) MPCA "best management practices" as outlined in Protecting Water Quality in Urban Areas; and c) Utilizing National Urban Runoff Program standards for new storm water ponds.
5. The City should restrict development of land in the 100 Year Flood plain, and follow the guidelines of the National Flood Insurance Program.

C. Agriculture Preserve

Goals

- To preserve agriculture and agriculturally productive lands.
- To protect and preserve the rural character of the City of Independence.
- To promote continued commercial-agricultural use of the land and prevent the decline of agriculture in the city's economy.

Policies

1. The city shall encourage and protect long term agriculture through progressive community planning, creative land use ordinances, and reasonable tax policies.
2. The city shall discourage the placing of public facilities, roads, and developments in prime agricultural land areas which would increase land values and encourage additional development.

Development Standards

1. Residential development should be limited to one residence per 40 acres of agricultural land. Development should occur on soils suitable for on-site sewage disposal, as demonstrated by a percolation test and/or soils analysis.
2. No more than one rural view lot for the first 50 acres of land and one rural view lot for each 40 acres thereafter is allowed. If 40 acre tracts under single ownership are not contiguous, the City Council may consider a density transfer option.

3. Rural view lots may not be less than 2.5 acres or more than 10 acres in size.
4. Each rural view lot must be a minimum of 2.5 acres contiguous, buildable land with a demonstrated capability to accommodate two on-site waste disposal systems.
5. No controls should be adopted in this district to eliminate or reduce normal farm odors, dust and noise; except that feed lot concentrations of livestock may require special pollution controls.
6. Location of feed lots, and septic tank systems shall be on suitable soils approved by the City.
7. The assessed valuation of lands in agricultural production should be limited to agricultural use value and not for its value as potential residential use.

D. Rural Reserve

Goals

- To reserve land as a holding area from further subdivision and development until City services are more readily available.
- To allow for planned and controlled growth of the community at a rate consistent with population projections and the ability of the City to efficiently serve the area with police, fire, paved roads, and street maintenance.
- To protect and preserve the rural character of the City of Independence.
- To allow agricultural landowners an option to develop portions of their property that is unsuitable for agricultural purposes when appropriate services are determined to be economically feasible.
- To allow agriculture and very low density residential until such time greater densities are able to be served.

Policies

1. The city shall encourage and protect long term agriculture through progressive community planning, creative land use ordinances, and reasonable tax policies.
2. The city shall discourage the placing of public facilities, roads, and

developments which would increase land values and unfairly tax other Rural Reserve landowners not ready or able to develop at higher densities.

Development Standards

1. Residential development should be limited to one residence per 40 acres of agricultural land. Development should occur on soils suitable for on-site sewage disposal, as demonstrated by a percolation test and/or soils analysis.
2. No more than one rural view lot for the first 50 acres of land and one rural view lot for each 40 acres thereafter is allowed. If 40 acre tracts under single ownership are not contiguous, the City Council may consider a density transfer option.
3. No controls should be adopted in this district to eliminate or reduce normal farm odors, dust and noise; except that feed lot concentrations of livestock may require special pollution controls.
4. Location of feed lots, and septic tank systems shall be on suitable soils approved by the City.
5. The assessed valuation of lands in agricultural production should be limited to agricultural use value and not for its value as potential residential use.

E. Rural Residential Development

Goals

- To provide a variety of residential alternatives for residents of Independence.
- To allow continued commercial agriculture within the rural residential area while permitting rural non-farm lifestyles to co-exist in an agricultural setting.
- To maintain the City's existing housing stock in good condition, thereby reducing the need for additional new housing construction.

Policies

1. Development in the rural residential district should be permitted at a density of one residence per five acres.

Development Standards

1. Development within the rural residential district shall be permitted only on 2-1/2 acres of buildable land which can successfully accommodate two septic systems.
2. All on-site sewage disposal systems shall be on suitable soils approved by the Independence Department of Inspections.
3. Subdivisions within the rural residential district shall provide, through dedication, easement land for public parks and trail systems, or if such land is not needed by the City in the areas to be subdivided, money corresponding to the value of such property.
4. Road maintenance should be kept to a minimum by requiring subdivision paving.
5. Controls should be adopted within the rural residential district to reduce excessive farm odors and noises, in order to reduce problems of compatibility between agricultural and residential uses.
6. Non-rural land uses such as commercial, industrial, and multiple-family which are inconsistent with the semi-rural lifestyle should be prohibited.

Housing Policies

1. The City should encourage new and alternative types of housing which meet housing performance standards as well as encouraging planned unit developments and cluster developments, as a means of obtaining larger open space areas and protection of natural resources within residential areas.
2. Quality residential site planning should be encouraged. Quality planning would include that which preserves natural resource, features such as wetlands, lakeshores, steep slopes, and woodlands.
3. Housing should be clustered (higher density in clusters, same overall density) whenever possible to preserve natural amenities, provide open space, and to achieve greater distance between housing and external problem areas (such as major_ highways, railroads, industry, etc.). Clustering is also encouraged to reduce development costs, maintenance costs and assessments of roads, utilities, etc.
4. Substandard housing should be given incentives to meet requirements, but only when requirements of the sewage disposal code can also be

met.

F. Environmental Protection Residential

Goals

- To assure feasibility of the land to continue to support the existing lots and residents and overt potential damage to the areas environmental resources.
- To protect the City's lakes, surface and groundwater by allowing existing lots of record to connect to the regional wastewater system consistent with Metropolitan Council approval policies.
- Eliminate and prevent the contamination of the regions lakes, streams, and groundwater.

Policies

1. Existing lots of record are allowed to connect to sewer services at existing densities.
2. New construction must comply with the Shoreland Management Ordinance.

Development Standards

1. Shoreland Management Ordinance standards apply to lots within the Shoreland Management Overlay area.
2. Lots with Individual Septic Treatment Systems not in compliance with current State and local requirements must connect to the metropolitan sewer system within 3 years of availability to the property.
3. Subdivisions within the Environmental Protection Residential area shall provide, through dedication, easement land for public parks and trail systems, or if such land is not needed by the City in the areas to be subdivided, money corresponding to the value of such property.
4. Road maintenance should be kept to a minimum by requiring subdivision paving.

G. Commercial/Light Industrial

Goals'

- To provide quality development that will insure an expanded tax base and employment opportunities for residents.
- To provide an opportunity for local residents to be employed at home or within the community.

Policies

1. All commercial and industrial activity should be located on or with direct access to a principal arterial road and rail service.
2. All commercial and industrial developments should be physically clustered rather than linear or "strip" development.
3. All commercial or industrial development must comply with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, State and County Health requirements regarding waste emissions.
4. All commercial and industrial uses shall be adequately and appropriately landscaped.
5. Residential uses shall be prohibited in industrial areas.
6. All commercial and industrial development shall provide adequate off-street parking facilities.

Small Business/Home Occupation Policies

1. All occupations or in-home businesses shall be required to obtain a Conditional Use Permit for that business.
2. All home-based businesses should not adversely affect neighboring residents rights to privacy, quietude or quality of life.

F. Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Goals

- To provide for a limited system of parks, trails and open spaces which will satisfy both the active and passive recreational needs of all local citizens.
- To preserve significant open spaces and natural areas.

Policies

1. The City should actively pursue the recommendations of the Parks System Plan.
2. The City should make every effort to coordinate with Regional and County park, trail, and open space plans.
3. Development along the shorelines of lakes, streams and public wetlands should emphasize preservation of natural features and provisions for public access.
4. The City should require land dedication from all developers for park and open space purposes or an equal cash payment in lieu thereof; and, if physically possible, an internal trail system meeting the Park Board's approval.

H. Community Facilities

Goals

- To provide a basis for developing and maintaining a sound financial planning program for capital improvements and relating those improvements to need, location and proper timing.
- To avoid unnecessary cost, duplication and inefficiency in providing needed facilities and services.

Policies

1. Multiple use of public facilities should be encouraged in order to provide for economy in government and to make the best use of these facilities.
2. All public buildings should be located on a site of sufficient size for the buildings and should have adequate space available for any accessory facilities or expansion.

Fire Protection Policies

1. The City should maintain current rural fire service contracts with adjacent communities.

2. New development shall unduly compromise the ability to provide adequate fire protection and response time.

Public Safety Policies

1. Independence should continue to rely upon the joint powers agreement with Maple Plain for police protection provided by West Hennepin Public Safety.
2. New development shall unduly compromise the ability to provide adequate police protection and response time.

Public Works Policies

1. In the Rural Residential District, the City should provide and maintain a system of cleaning and snow removal, mowing and weed control, boulevard tree trimming, street signage.
2. New development in the rural residential shall provide paved roads for adequate public safety and road maintenance
3. In the Agricultural District, the City should provide rural road maintenance services, cleaning and snow removal, limited tree trimming and seasonal mowing.
4. The City, through its building inspector, shall provide for inspection of construction and redevelopment of structures as well as enforcement of health regulations.

Sewer and Water Policies

1. No dwellings or development should be permitted in areas where suitable soils are not available for supporting on-site sewage disposal systems.
2. On-site sewage disposal systems will only be permitted on large lots where hydrologic and soil porosity conditions substantiate the reliability of systems for the density conditions, including the cumulative effect of development that will occur.
3. City shall continue to work with the Metropolitan Council to connect failing systems to available metropolitan sewer lines.
4. Private wells, the treatment and distribution of water, should only be allowed in conformance with State sanitation laws and regulations.

5. Maintenance and preservation, of the City's natural drainage system should be required as insurance against future storm sewer needs.
 - a) Natural ponding areas and the local network of streams and intermittent streams should be identified in all development proposals and subsequently preserved as an alternative to a man-made storm sewer system. All due attention must be given to the natural high water mark.
 - b) Drainage easements should be required on any development proposal traversed by any waterway.

Electric and Telephone Policies

1. Electric lines and telephone lines should be placed underground whenever possible.

Administration Policies

1. Independence shall develop and enforce its Comprehensive Plan complete with Land Use Guide Plan map; supported by a zoning ordinance and official zoning map, subdivision regulations, building code, and sewage disposal regulations.
2. The City will continue to demonstrate economic responsibility in preparing the annual budget and through its process of proposing bond issues to the local public.

H. Transportation

Goals

- To provide a transportation system that is designed and maintained to encourage development in accordance with the Independence Land Use Guide Plan.
- To promote a transportation system which minimizes deleterious impact on the natural environment and which enhances local aesthetics.
- To provide for safe, convenient and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the City.
- To create necessary and convenient linkages between land uses which minimize traffic conflicts and which provide for smooth and efficient systems of people and goods movement.

Policies

1. A hierarchy of streets and highways should continue to be adhered to according to use and function
2. All circulation systems should be coordinated with those of adjacent communities, and the metropolitan and county systems.
3. Every attempt should be made to segregate traffic according to type and function; pedestrian from vehicular, through traffic from local traffic, fast from slow, commercial from residential.
4. Arterials, freeways and expressways should be located so as to bound rather than bisect residential neighborhoods.
5. Frontage should be maximized along State and County roads in order to limit the number and frequency of access points to those roads which do not function primarily to provide direct land access.
6. Existing roads should be utilized to as great an extent as possible in developing a thoroughfare plan.
7. The City should limit access to arterial roads which are intended to serve primarily as movement corridors and not as access corridors to adjacent parcels of land through the use of frontage roads and construction of such collector and local roads as may be needed.
8. Only such new streets as are necessary to provide good circulation links or convenient access should be developed at the present time.
9. Existing City roads in the Agriculture District should be maintained at rural service levels (gravel) except where traffic indicates a need for upgrading to a bituminous surface and higher classification.
10. Road maintenance within the Agricultural District shall be kept to a minimum.
11. Snow plowing of roads within the Agricultural District should receive second priority to those in the Rural Residential District.
12. All subdivisions shall provide an outlet to accommodate future adjacent residential development. These shall be designed to provide linkages between existing collector and minor arterial streets.
13. New streets in subdivisions should be built to local street standards to assure lower demands for maintenance.

14. Residential setbacks from elevated arterial streets should be a minimum of 150 feet to minimize noise levels. Landscaping should be required to further reduce noise impacts.
15. Residential setbacks from rail lines should be a minimum of 150 feet and landscaping should be required to reduce noise impacts.
16. The City should establish a program to convert gravel roads to paved roads based on residential traffic volume criteria.
17. Increased development densities that would require additional paved roads should be allowed in areas that do not place undue burden on the existing transportation, public safety and maintenance systems.
18. All public roads within the Agricultural District, except County roads, may remain as gravel surface until traffic levels dictate upgrades.

I. Planning Implementation

Goals

- To efficiently and effectively prepare for and manage the various systems of the City so as to insure the general health, safety and welfare of local residents.

Policies

1. All rezoning and development proposals should be evaluated in light of Independence's Comprehensive Plan.
2. To maintain flexibility, lands should not be rezoned in advance of actual development.
3. When a rezoning request departs from the land use shown on the Guide Plan, it should be objectively evaluated as a possible alternate use. Approval or denial of such rezoning should be based on: the size of the area being planned (a large, well designed development may warrant a departure from the Guide Plan); the probable impact of the alternate development on surrounding properties (health, welfare, safety and aesthetics) as compared to the Guide Plan use; and compliance with the policy framework.
4. The City should encourage citizen participation (meetings, neighborhood discussions, etc.) to enlighten and inform local citizens of planning related matters and the local decision-making process.

5. The Guide Plan should be periodically reviewed and updated to maintain its effectiveness.