

2040 Washington  
County **Comprehensive Plan**



*Aerial view within Washington County towards the Twin Cities*

# Chapter 1 - Executive Summary

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### Washington County Vision

A great place to live, work, and play... today and tomorrow.

### Washington County Mission

Providing quality services through responsible leadership, innovation, and the cooperation of dedicated people.

### Washington County Goals

- To promote the health, safety, and quality of life of citizens.
- To provide accessible, high-quality services in a timely and respectful manner.
- To address today's needs while proactively planning for the future.
- To maintain public trust through responsible use of public resources, accountability, and openness of government.

### Washington County Values

- **Ethical:** to ensure public trust through fairness, consistency, and transparency.
- **Stewardship:** to demonstrate tangible, cost-effective results and protect public resources.
- **Quality:** to ensure that services delivered to the public are up to the organization's highest standards.
- **Responsive:** to deliver services that are accessible, timely, respectful, and efficient.
- **Respectful:** to believe in and support the dignity and value of members of this community.
- **Leadership:** to actively advocate for and guide the County toward a higher quality of life.

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ..... 1-i

List of Figures..... 1-ii

Appendices ..... 1-ii

Setting ..... 1-1

Purpose and Scope ..... 1-1

County Role ..... 1-1

Metropolitan Development Framework and Policy Plans ..... 1-2

2040 Comprehensive Plan Overview ..... 1-4

    2040 Forecasts..... 1-4

    2040 Comprehensive Plan Intent ..... 1-4

    Priority Planning Principles..... 1-4

    2040 Plan Public Engagement ..... 1-5

        Phase 1 – Discovery ..... 1-5

        Phase 2 – Element Review..... 1-6

        Phase 3 – Plan Review ..... 1-6

Plan Elements ..... 1-7

    County Context – Chapter 2 ..... 1-7

    Goals and Policies – Chapter 3 ..... 1-7

    Land Use Plan – Chapter 4..... 1-7

    Transportation Plan – Chapter 5 ..... 1-7

    Water Resources Plan – Chapter 6..... 1-8

    Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan – Chapter 7 ..... 1-8

    Housing Plan – Chapter 8 ..... 1-8

    Resilience and Sustainability Plan – Chapter 9..... 1-8

    Economic Competitiveness Plan – Chapter 10..... 1-8

    Implementation Plan – Chapter 11 ..... 1-9

# List of Figures

Figure 1: What is your favorite characteristic about Washington County? ..... 1-5

Figure 2: Which amenities provided by Washington County are most valuable to you? ..... 1-5

# Appendices

Appendix A: 2040 Comprehensive Plan Public Engagement Results

Appendix B: Washington County, Minnesota 2017 At-A-Glance

Appendix C: 2040 Washington County Projected Population Growth by Community

Appendix D: 2040 Washington County Projected Household Growth by Community

Appendix E: 2040 Washington County Projected Employment Growth by Community

Appendix F: Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA)

Appendix G: National Register of Historic Places Sites in Washington County

Appendix H: List of Historic Sites by Community in Washington County

Appendix I: Bicycle Planning Memo

Appendix J: Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Information

Appendix K: Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Map

Appendix L: 2040 Base Traffic Forecast Model Methodology

Appendix M: Roadway Improvements in 2040 Base Traffic Model

Appendix N: Impaired Water Bodies List

Appendix O: Watershed Management Organizations (WMO) Summaries

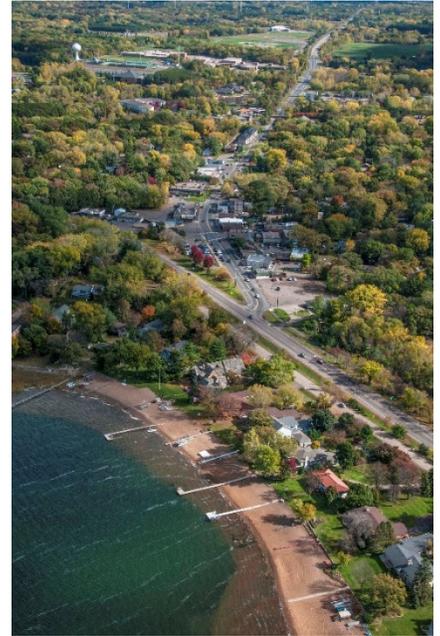
Appendix P: Washington County Community Development Agency 2017-2019 Economic Development Plan

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## Setting

Washington County is an area of abundant beauty, historical character, and agricultural heritage located on the eastern edge of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The county has historically played a diverse role in the region, serving the Twin Cities with its commercial, industrial, community, natural, and agricultural resources. Today the county is no less diverse. From the corn fields of Denmark Township to the residential communities of Woodbury and Cottage Grove; the office and retail complexes along I-94 to the cooling waters of the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers; the booming industry in St. Paul Park and Bayport to the outdoor recreation in Lake Elmo; and the lake communities around Forest Lake to the pastoral wooded settings of Scandia and May Township, each area plays a unique role in the county and region.

Washington County covers 423 square miles, measuring 38 miles from north to south and 14 miles from east to west. The county contains 27 cities and six townships. The western boundary of the county is within 5 miles of St. Paul. The eastern boundary shares the beautiful St. Croix River as a border with the State of Wisconsin. The county is bounded on the south and southwest by 16 miles of the commercially navigable Mississippi River.



## Purpose and Scope

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan describes the analysis, future projections, goals and strategies that Washington County has developed for how decisions will be made over the next twenty years. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan is an official document adopted by the County Board as a guide for policy decisions about the physical development of the county. The plan sets broad policies and strategies to direct the future growth and development in the areas of land use, transportation, water resources, parks, trails, and open space, housing, resilience and sustainability, and economic competitiveness. For each topic, the plan identifies issues, sets goals, establishes policies to achieve the goals, and identifies strategies and actions needed to implement the policies.

## County Role

Washington County, like the other 86 Minnesota counties, provides a variety of essential services to create vibrant, healthy, and safe communities. The role that the county government plays supplements the efforts completed at both the state and local level. Counties support and maintain public infrastructure, transportation and economic development assets; keep residents healthy; ensure public safety to protect its citizens; maintain public information; and implement a broad array of programs in a cost-effective and efficient manner.<sup>1</sup> These efforts are coordinated with many government partners, including:

<sup>1</sup> Why Minnesota Counties Matter!, Association of Minnesota Counties

- **Cities and Townships** – Washington County cities and townships provide services at the smallest form of government. These local governments provide essential services like those provided by a county, including transportation and utility infrastructure, public safety, public administration. Cities and townships in Washington County provide a majority of land use and zoning authority in an effort to protect the health, safety and welfare of all residents.
- **Metropolitan Council** – Washington County is one of the seven-counties included within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, referred to as the Metropolitan Council. The Council was established to develop a shared vision and direction and to provide regional planning and guidance for the metro area. The essential services provided by the Metropolitan Council include operation of Metro Transit, Metro Mobility and Transit Link services; collecting and treatment of wastewater; water supply planning; planning for future growth; providing affordable housing options; and planning and developing a regional parks and trails system.
- **State Agencies** – Washington County coordinates with a variety of state agencies to coordinate planning efforts and implementation. These include agencies such as the Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR). Each of these departments provides for improvement and planning of various systems across the State of Minnesota.

## Metropolitan Development Framework and Policy Plans

The Metropolitan Council was created in 1967 to help ensure the coordinated, orderly and economic development of the seven-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (1967 Minnesota Laws, chapter 896). State law requires the Metropolitan Council to adopt a comprehensive Metropolitan Development Guide that establishes parameters for regional infrastructure and local planning. This guide is comprised of a Regional Development Framework and policy plans for water resource management; parks and open space; and transportation, including transit and aviation. Minnesota Statutes section 473.864 requires local governmental units (Counties, Cities, and Townships) to develop a comprehensive plan, fiscal devices and official controls that conform to the metropolitan policy plans.

The 2040 Regional Development Framework, *Thrive MSP 2040*, was adopted by the Metropolitan Council on May 28th, 2014, and sets out five broad outcomes to guide the region’s development:

1. **Stewardship:** Responsibly managing the region’s natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region’s future.
2. **Prosperity:** Fostering investments in infrastructure and amenities that create regional economic competitiveness, attract and retain successful businesses, a talented workforce, and wealth.
3. **Equity:** Connecting all residents to opportunity and creating viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities.
4. **Livability:** Creating and renewing vibrant places and underlying infrastructure, investing in regional parks and affordable housing, and collaborating with partners to achieve the full range of possibilities.
5. **Sustainability:** Protecting regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity to maintain and support our region’s well-being and productivity over the long term.

*Thrive MSP 2040* contains the following guiding principles to govern how the region will implement the systems and policy plans to advance the outcomes of the plan.

**Integration.** *Thrive MSP 2040* recognizes that a key factor in the success of the region is the ability to integrate its activities to pursue the five overall outcomes, achieve greater efficiencies, and address complex problems that require the input of all involved. Coordinating effectively with stakeholders and partners of all backgrounds, abilities, and desires is crucial in the long-term wellbeing and sustainability of the region.

**Collaboration.** The Metropolitan Council recognizes that the issues and challenges that face the region cannot be solved by a single individual or organization. No single entity has the capacity or authority to take on the burden of working alone. Success is a result of coordinated collaboration between a range of public and private entities and extensive partnerships with residents and local organizations.

**Accountability.** Results matter to the Metropolitan Council. Forming a lasting commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices allows governing bodies to adjust course to improve future outcomes. Improved accountability is achieved through data-driven approaches to measuring progress, providing easily accessible information, and actively learning from Thrive indicators.

The Metropolitan Council has adopted policy plans to implement *Thrive MSP 2040* and to guide the expansion of the four regional systems: transportation, housing, water resources (including wastewater collection and treatment), and regional parks and open space.

- The **2040 Transportation Policy Plan** addresses the need to prepare for expected growth in the region. The transportation policy gives priority to maintaining the existing metro highway system, reducing bottlenecks that impede travel, implementing new strategies to improve the system's efficiency, and adding capacity where possible. It also supports the expansion of the transit system. Aviation is included in the transportation policy plan.
- The **2040 Housing Policy Plan** addresses complex and difficult housing challenges in the region. It recognizes that these challenges demand more innovative strategies, increased inclusion, and greater collaboration. The policies that this plan lays forth strive to manage and preserve the existing housing stock, create and conserve a mix of housing affordability, and expand housing options for people of all life stages and economic means.
- The **2040 Water Resources Management Policy Plan** establishes policies to ensure the protection of water resources as the region continues to grow. It focuses on assessing the region's water supply, protecting surface water from pollution and ensuring that wastewater flowing into sewer systems is treated efficiently.
- The **2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan** recognizes the need to maintain and expand the open spaces that promote the quality of life in the region.

## 2040 Comprehensive Plan Overview

### 2040 Forecasts

The Metropolitan Council projects the following forecasted growth for Washington County between 2015 and 2040:

- 79,185 people (32 percent increase)
- 37,421 households (40 percent increase)

The Metropolitan Council projects the following forecasted growth between 2010 and 2040.

- 33,453 jobs (46 percent increase)

### 2040 Comprehensive Plan Intent

As part of the plan's public engagement efforts, the intent of the Comprehensive Plan emerged. The plan intent is a broad statement that encompasses the overarching aspirations of the plan. More importantly, this statement reflects the public's desire to maintain the County's unique character.

**To accommodate the county's projected population growth of 79,185 people between 2015 and 2040 while incorporating sustainable growth and preserving the natural, cultural, and historic characteristics of the county.**

### Priority Planning Principles

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan supports a development pattern that, as much as practicable, meets current needs without creating environmental, economic, and social burdens on future generations. The County is committed to maintaining or enhancing economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend.

Customer service is an important part of county business. Maintaining a high level of satisfaction from citizens about quality of service, knowledge, courteousness, and responsiveness while experiencing an increased demand for services is important to the County. The County uses a performance measurement program to maintain and improve upon its commitment to high-quality service that meets and exceeds the needs and expectations of county residents.

Washington County's core functions foster an environment where commerce can develop and thrive. The Washington County Community Development Agency supports a robust business climate by: providing well-planned, essential infrastructure; maintaining a low tax rate; and assisting in creating an ample pool of skilled employees. The County strives to maintain the right blend of services to support a vibrant business sector, be it transportation and transit services, public safety, health and human services, corrections services, workforce housing, or other public services. The County is committed to stewardship of cultural and natural amenities such as land and water resources, parks and open spaces, and libraries which contribute to a high quality of life for business owners, employees and families. The County's efforts in workforce development provide skilled employees that enable companies to be competitive and successful in the local, regional, and global economies.

In 1996, the Minnesota Legislature defined sustainable development as development that maintains or enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Washington County aims to meet current needs without placing environmental, economic, and social burdens on future generations to meet their own needs.

## 2040 Plan Public Engagement

Public engagement is a key component of the successful implementation of long-range planning efforts. A three-phase engagement strategy was developed to incorporate the public’s desires for the future of their community and stakeholder-supported strategies into the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The input received throughout this effort is directly connected to the goals, policies and strategies described within each of the plan elements.



### Phase 1 – Discovery



The first phase of public engagement set out to gain initial input from residents throughout the County regarding the opportunities and constraints they perceive for the future. Engagement events during this phase were aimed at gathering input that would inform the goals and policies of each plan element. A total of nine “pop-up events” occurred during the first phase, engaging over 250 residents. This strategy meets people where they are and captures their participation for a short period of time. General questions regarding participants’ favorite characteristic or valuable amenities were asked (see Figures 1 and 2). Detailed results are included in Appendix A.

Figure 1: What is your favorite characteristic about Washington County?



Figure 2: Which amenities provided by Washington County are most valuable to you?



### Phase 2 – Element Review



The second phase was held mid-way through the plan’s development to provide an opportunity to share initial findings and strategies with the public. Input gathered during this phase ensured that the draft elements were responding to the public’s concerns and began to lay out a path towards achieving the vision.

Three open houses were held, directed at the northern, central and southern portions of the county. Participants were invited to review boards that described and outlined the initial findings of each plan element. Input received during these meetings helped to inform the finalization of each plan element of the draft Comprehensive Plan. A Local Government Unit (LGU) forum was also held which gathered together representatives from the 33 cities and townships of Washington County. A presentation was given and covered the plan elements and progress to-date. The LGU Forum also offered an opportunity for each agency in attendance to share the status of their Comprehensive Plan and ask questions of the county.

### Phase 3 – Plan Review

The third phase of public engagement set out to gain input from residents regarding the final draft plan, and to confirm and reiterate the results of the first two phases of engagement. This final phase of engagement also set out to provide educational materials to the public regarding each plan element, future trends that may impact the county, and how the Comprehensive Plan will work to address and mitigate potential impacts that may arise.

Following the release of the draft plan for public review in early 2018, a survey was developed to gain insight into resident’s understanding and thoughts of the Comprehensive Plan. The results of this survey allowed for a better understanding of what about the plan residents would like to see improved upon as the plan is being completed.

Brief informational videos, covering each plan element and its contents, were produced and made publicly available for comment on the plan’s website starting in March 2018. Videos were approximately two minutes in length.

Lastly, Washington County staff were present for the entirety of the Washington County Fair from August 1<sup>st</sup> through August 5<sup>th</sup> of 2018 to promote and discuss the Comprehensive Plan. Staff were present with a variety of materials including a full draft copy of the plan, handouts containing information on each plan element and links to the online survey, as well as a screen showcasing the introductory Comprehensive Plan video. In total, nearly 200 visitors stopped by the booth to learn more about the comprehensive plan and provide input.



## Plan Elements

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan contains 11 chapters that are guided by the County’s mission, values, goals, vision, and priority planning principles and public engagement findings. Many of the policies and plan elements remain consistent from the previous 2030 plan. New elements, strategies and actions from a decade of planning and projects since the adoption of the last plan include changes to land use regulations and the addition of resilience and sustainability and economic competitiveness chapters. It also includes new policies and strategies to address contemporary issues such as emergency preparedness, healthy communities, transit, and transit-oriented development. Below is a summary of each chapter of the plan and its goals.

### County Context – Chapter 2

This chapter takes a close look at Washington County’s people, economy, and important themes that face the County in upcoming years. It contains key data that lays the framework for the plan.

### Goals and Policies – Chapter 3

This chapter outlines the vision, goals, policies, and strategies for the 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan. These elements have been refined from the previous versions of the Washington County Comprehensive Plan, and include feedback from public outreach events, to reflect the current desires and concerns of residents. These elements, when utilized together, serve as a guide for how the community acts and grows as the plan is implemented. Beyond inclusion in this chapter, the goals, policies and strategies are integrated into each respective chapter.

### Land Use Plan – Chapter 4



The Land Use Plan describes the areas where the County maintains land use authority, including subsurface sewage treatment systems, the Lower St. Croix River bluff land and shoreland areas, other shorelands, mining, floodplains, and the official map for Big Marine Park Reserve. Land use authority for all other areas is maintained by the respective city or township. The Land Use Plan provides for logical development patterns that preserve the existing natural resources, retain the existing character of the County, and provide a high quality of life.

### Transportation Plan – Chapter 5

A key function of Washington County is to provide a robust transportation system. The transportation system supports the County’s land use and development plans, while minimizing the impact on the County’s historic and natural resources. The Transportation Plan provides policies and strategies that keep the transportation system functioning safely and efficiently. The plan’s overall goal is to increase capacity, improve safety, and reduce congestion within the constraints of the existing infrastructure and to avoid premature roadway widening.



### Water Resources Plan – Chapter 6



Washington County promotes holistic management of groundwater and surface water resources and strives to work with local and state agencies to maintain a safe and abundant supply of water resources. This chapter summarizes existing conditions related to surface water, water supply, and wastewater, and discusses the structure for managing these resources across multiple agencies and levels of government.

### Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan – Chapter 7

The Washington County park system provides large open spaces that preserve the County's unique and sensitive natural resources, and provides recreational experiences that supplement local, state, or federal parks. The Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan sets the overall goals and policies that guide development of county-controlled sites and facilities. It establishes a direction for land preservation, development, and use of various resources of the county park system.



### Housing Plan – Chapter 8



Washington County directly supports a variety of interrelated resources and service, including first-time homebuyer assistance, financial and budget counseling, transportation assistance, employment services, social services, and housing maintenance. The Housing Plan focuses on promoting a diverse housing supply, ensuring that affordable housing options are available to residents and those who work in the County, and safeguarding the physical quality of housing to provide healthy living environments.

### Resilience and Sustainability Plan – Chapter 9

The Resilience and Sustainability Plan is a new addition to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan which supports the County's vision for the future. Washington County strives to maintain its identity, high quality of life, and access to a healthy lifestyle for current and future residents. A key factor in this is ensuring resilience and sustainability through the County's ability to react, adapt and thrive in the face of environmental, social, and economic changes. The Resilience and Sustainability Plan summarizes the current strategies related to resiliency and sustainability in the County and it presents an implementation plan for future decision making processes.



The County's commitment to a resilient and sustainable future is incorporated into all element of the plan. While resilience and sustainability are new concepts to comprehensive planning, these concepts are widely included in current County operations. Strategies and initiatives that support this commitment are highlighted and identified with the symbol to the left, with text highlighted in a light green.



### Economic Competitiveness Plan – Chapter 10

The Economic Competitiveness Plan is another new addition to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, but highlights initiatives that remain a core part of Washington County's planning activities. A large part of these initiatives is recognized in Washington County's Economic Development Plan prepared by the Community Development Agency (CDA). The CDA has created this plan in

collaboration with local cities and townships. This is a plan that reflects their vision of the county from an economic development perspective.

**Implementation Plan – Chapter 11**

This chapter outlines the tools, funding mechanisms, ordinances, and other plans available to the county that can be utilized to carry out and achieve the goals, policies, and strategies for the 2040 Washington County Comprehensive Plan.

