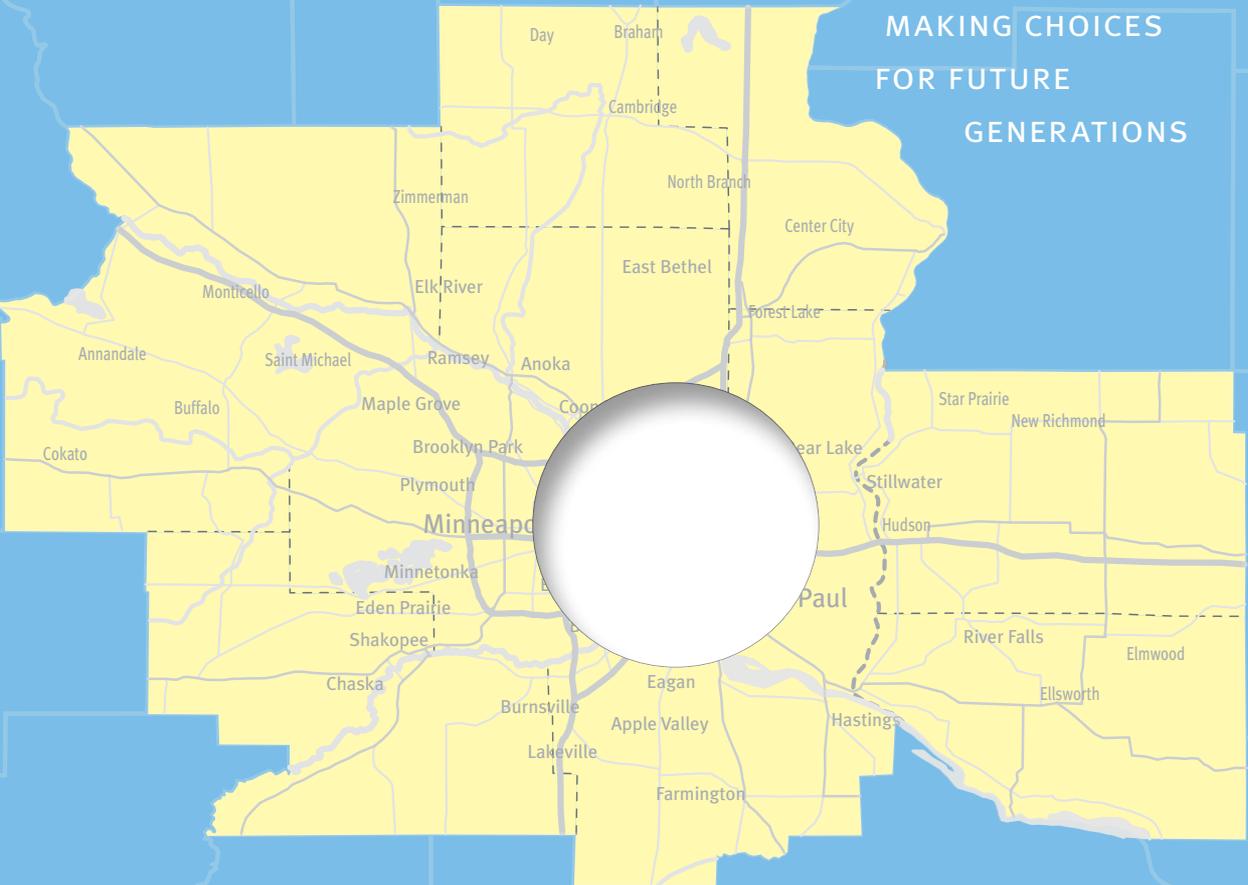


# re: focus

MAKING CHOICES  
FOR FUTURE  
GENERATIONS





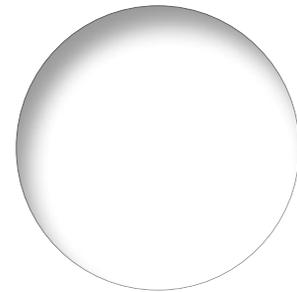
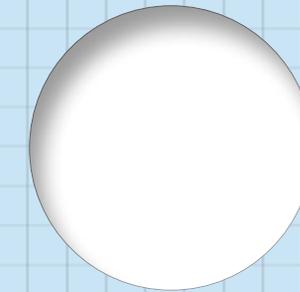
Introduction by Kate Wolford, President, The McKnight Foundation

Doesn't look right, does it?

You can't miss it. There's a hole in the center of this book — starting with its cover, right where Minneapolis and St. Paul should be. We know that any image of the metro area, or even of our state, isn't the full picture without its urban core.

The empty spot encourages us to look beyond the known center. Simply put, it isn't about the hole; it's about the *whole*.

Similarly, any image of the Twin Cities without their outer-ring suburbs is no more complete a view. At its heart, this report is about our interconnectedness, and about the importance of making decisions that have long-term implications for our shared future.



## Contents

Introduction: Kate Wolford, The McKnight Foundation	3
Growing pains	7
Creating a common vision	16
Images of the edge	29
Resources	44
Conclusion	49

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based private philanthropic organization, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, coalition-building, and encouragement of strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve.

To consider the “whole,” with this publication we focus on a part of the region that is often overlooked. We highlight our area’s outer-ring suburbs, and their zone of growth and development which — as it continues to widen — has potential to either enhance or diminish the region’s overall quality of life. For our part, McKnight embraces the vital interdependence that exists across our region to provide the greatest opportunities for the prosperity of all families, as well as for healthy economic competition with other regions in a changing economy.

Since we began working in what some people refer to as “edge communities,” we’ve seen that external factors are constantly changing the dynamics that shape them. The mortgage crisis has slowed growth pressures. The rise in gas prices has made transportation a central consideration in families’ decisions about where to locate within the region. Finally, a full third of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that cause climate change are believed to come from transportation, which has exposed the inefficiencies of our current land-use patterns, calling for creative solutions. All these external factors further reveal the interdependence of our region, and the growing need for local responses within this larger context.

Between 1986 and 2002, the populations in “urban” areas of the seven-county region developed one-and-a-half times as quickly as

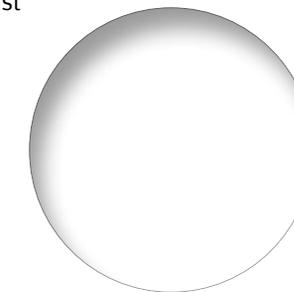
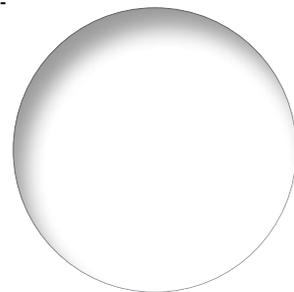
Minnesota’s general population. That trend is expected to continue. By 2030, the population of our regional metropolis is expected to increase by more than one million; more important, if leaders and citizens cannot find creative new ways to grow, three-quarters of that growth will be spread farther and farther into the countryside.

What, how, and where we grow have crucial implications for all of us. In 2030, will this region be famous for its traffic congestion? Will we have pockets of ever more entrenched poverty? Will we have struggling urban cores,

emptied by outer-ring growth? Or will we instead be known, as I believe, for our preservation of the natural beauty that attracts tourism, for our unbounded areas of opportunity, and for central cities that remain the heart of growth and prosperity?

Communities on the region’s edge grapple daily with the personal hopes and fears of citizens, thinking about imminent growth and its eventual impact on their quality of life. Yet the development decisions made on the edge will ultimately have far wider impact, on both our region’s quality of life and our economic competitiveness with other regions across the country.

Over the past four years, The McKnight Foundation has worked with the University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs on what we’ve called the “Edge Project.” This publication tells the story of what we



learned when we brought together a rich diversity of experienced people and organizations on the rapidly growing urban/suburban edge. The messages are clear:

**Future plans are needed now.** These days, most edge communities recognize that more growth is coming. With that realization, they are beginning to understand that they must take charge of their destinies to fulfill them. Without a shared vision and vigilance, communities will suffer and the assets they cherish — historic, cultural, and environmental — will disappear. Comprehensive community plans — which all communities in the seven-county Twin Cities region must periodically submit to the Metropolitan Council — offer opportunities to establish forward-looking development policies and a framework for regional growth. The manner in which these plans are understood and implemented can positively shape growth, both inside and outside the seven-county metro. The region’s growth ring includes Sherburne, Isanti, Chisago, and Wright counties, for example, which fall outside of the Met Council’s planning requirements.

**Well-informed citizens make better choices.** The record shows that, when provided with good information, citizens make sound choices. Now more than ever, thanks to the information revolution, citizens have information at their fingertips to help plan for the future. Tools that help communities visualize future development are particularly powerful. A sampling of some of the best tools available

for edge communities can be found in this report. But these tools are no substitute for leadership. Champions are needed. Citizens, elected officials, nonprofit and business leaders — anyone who is committed to learning and staying involved in planning for growth — can make a world of difference in shaping the future of rapidly growing edge communities.

**Common concerns and opportunities can provide the focus.** Edge communities share several characteristics that require undivided attention and support from policymakers throughout the region. There is much to learn and much to share. First and foremost, many of them want help. The time, community consensus, and tools required to manage growth are stretching many small townships and cities beyond their limits. This is the moment to prepare for the next wave of development.

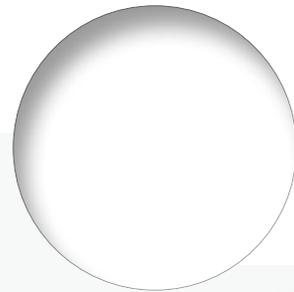
McKnight’s experiences across programs tell us one more important thing: provided with appropriate resources, **the Twin Cities’ edge communities can tackle the challenge before them.** Residents new and old have a common interest in preserving what is best about rural areas and small towns, while also improving their quality of life through development that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. We are inspired by the leadership, ingenuity, and commitments we have witnessed over these past four years in residents of edge communities across the region. We thank the communities and

leaders of Hassan Township, Carver, Dayton, Independence, and Ramsey, among others, for experimenting with ways to plan for the future and for sharing insights that we hope will be useful for others.

Thoughtful, strategic, comprehensive community planning is not easy, but it is critical to our future. Demographic shifts increasingly encourage us to think about broader perspectives, a continuum of housing choices, and development patterns that function better for our people, places, and the environment.

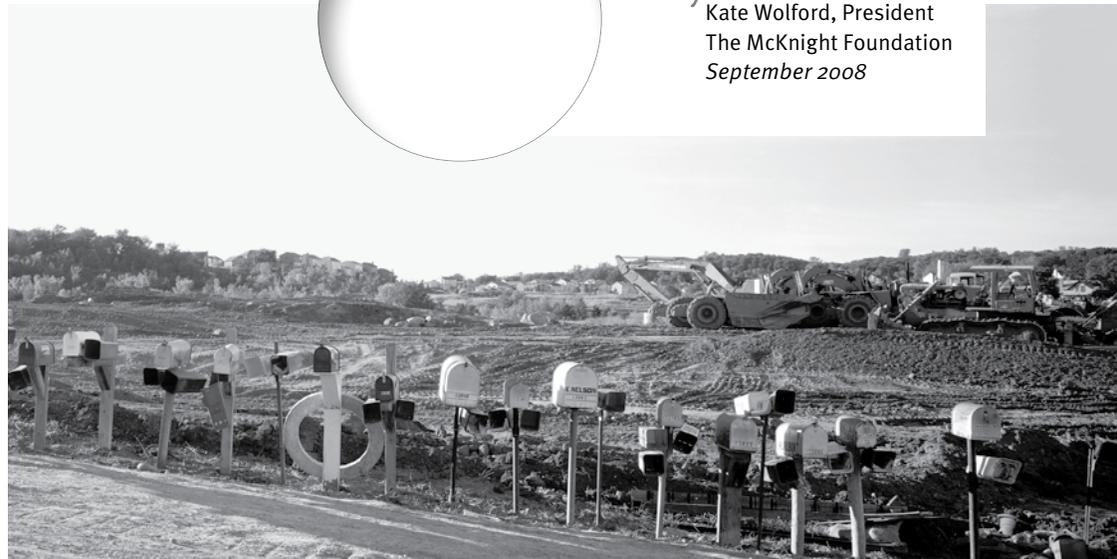
In planning for change, we encourage you to honor the past while embracing the future; and to think creatively about community development, rather than adopt cookie-cutter approaches. **The decisions you and your community make today will affect not only your community but our entire region for generations to come.**

By placing a spotlight on edge communities, we hope this publication will spark a call to action, and begin to generate the resources, the technical assistance, and the leadership necessary to improve the way we grow.



*Kate Wolford*

Kate Wolford, President  
The McKnight Foundation  
September 2008



## Growing pains

**Ramsey is like other edge communities: it's large area-wise, and it developed as rural with no center. Until recently when city services came in, much of the city was still rural and large lot. We're losing our rural feel, and we like the rural feel. But what is the rural feel? Is it undeveloped land, or five-acre lots? We struggle with how to define "rural" and the quality of life that goes with it. We are trying to develop a common vision of where we're headed.**

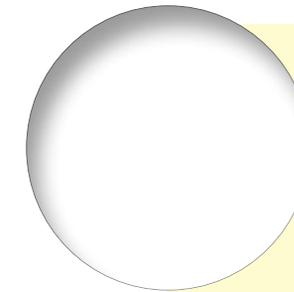
— Sarah Strommen  
Ramsey city council member

How do you envision your community's future? Are you optimistic that you and your neighbors can work well with municipal staff and elected leadership over the coming years to establish a vision and a plan for how your community will grow, or are you feeling disempowered and disconnected? Do you live in a place where farmlands abut new housing subdivisions? Do you ever wonder if your community is suffering from an identity crisis?

If you think these questions sound familiar, you are not alone. The communities on the edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area have a lot in common with one another. Farmers talk of their desire to keep their land in the family, yet

the odds of keeping their land in agriculture rather than seeing it sprout new subdivisions seem stacked against them. Newcomers move to edge communities seeking more breathing room, open space, and views of agricultural Minnesota. Some come seeking connections to a small-town community while others come to be left alone. Some come for a slower pace than they've found in urban areas. But whatever the lures, tangible or intangible, these places are in transition.

"Recently there has been an influx of people who live [in Carver] but don't work there," says Cindy Olness, consulting city planner



for the city of Carver. "Some had the impression they were moving to a quiet subdivision with a view of a rural landscape, even people who came one year ago. They didn't realize others were coming too."

One of the clearest signs that indeed, others are coming too, is a postcard alerting a homeowner to a development proposed for a property adjacent to his. Imagine that the homeowner is already plugged into his community's affairs; he has been attending planning meetings for years. He knows the city planning staff and the planning commissioners, and he understands the broader context for the city's growth and recognizes that the proposed development is one he's been hearing about for a while. This postcard brings no alarm to the household. The homeowner will attend the city meeting to get a sense of other

neighbors' reactions, and possibly put in his two cents about the development. During prior community conversations, he has heard the developer agree to the city's requests to preserve the maximum amount of open space; provide a variety of housing types, sizes, and prices; and through design integrate the new development into the surrounding neighborhood. While the homeowner may wish that his uninterrupted views of natural areas could be preserved forever, he knows that the growth in his community requires some community-wide concessions. But in the long run, because he has been involved in planning discussions for several years, he is reassured that his neighbors and the city leaders are in agreement about preserving maximum open space and maintaining the character that distinguishes the city from its neighbors.

Well, that's one way a postcard about a proposed development next door might be received. But suppose that, like most other homeowners, this homeowner isn't already in the loop. Perhaps there haven't been public meetings about creating a long-term vision for the community. Or maybe notices about such meetings never seemed relevant to his corner of the city, so he didn't attend. But on this particular day, he goes out to get the mail, and there in his hands is a postcard with a message that the property next door will no longer be open space; a new development is coming, and he thinks it can't be good.

He wants to be involved in his community; he wants to have a say. He will attend this public hearing, that's for sure, and he'll oppose the development. And while his frustration will resonate throughout the chambers of city hall, there won't be a thing the council can do about it, because if the proposal meets the zoning codes, the council has no choice but to approve it. Unbeknownst to this homeowner, the opportunity for meaningful input ended months earlier.

Sarah Strommen, a city council member in Ramsey, is very familiar with this situation.

Too often, residents come to city meetings to speak out when it's too late to change the course of a proposed development. "Unfortunately, people don't get involved at the comprehensive planning stage," she says. "They get involved when they get a letter notifying them of a public hearing of something happening within so many feet of them. They come and see what it's all about. But at that stage we can't deny the development if it meets the zoning requirements."

Citizens may not have gotten involved at an earlier stage because they didn't feel the same sense of urgency. Only when a real development proposal is on the table for an adjoining property do they come to express their concerns — perhaps that the property ought to be preserved as a natural area or ought to be designated for one type of land use over another. But those decisions have already been made.

Cindy Olness, the city planner consulting in Carver, voices the same concern: "People are most interested in developments occurring next door to them. They receive a public hearing notice about an application near them, and they show up to what is actually the last public hearing in a series of many that shaped that development. They are concerned about what the underlying land-use guidance should be, when it's a little too late for that since the proposal is in compliance with the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance," she says. "Meanwhile, the city is working on a 2,000-acre area that will be developed and still has significant opportunity to be shaped by the public, but few are interested at the earliest stages of the planning process except the few people who live right by it. There are 40,000 car trips anticipated due to the new development, and the environmental review is on the website. But it seems boring and people don't get engaged." She expresses frustration that a 2,000-acre development that will undoubtedly impact more people on a daily basis can't draw nearly the attention it deserves, while far smaller developments will engender vociferous public comment.

Strommen also expresses concern that even if people do get involved at an earlier stage, and have a chance to review a city's land-use plans, they may not have the background to adequately assess the plans and respond meaningfully to them. She longs to receive

more public input but senses a disconnect in the process. "It's frustrating to put up a plan, and people who are provided with no knowledge or tools are asked to comment on it," she says. "They can only really say if they like it or don't like it. We haven't set up a meaningful process. We can't just say we won't have a plan. They, and we, don't know why they don't like it. So the plan gets tweaked and passed, and then residents say, 'You adopted a plan we said we didn't like. You didn't listen to us.'" So even when a city follows a common citizen-engagement process, the staff and officials are not satisfied with the results, and neither are the residents.

The City of Ramsey has made significant strides in engaging residents and providing them with frequent workshops on planning topics such as walkable communities and workforce housing. This engagement process, called "Ramsey<sup>3</sup>," includes open, resident-led discussions that encourage people to tell stories about what Ramsey should be like in the future. That rich base of community discussion is being translated into the city's comprehensive plan. Patrick Trudgeon, a planner in Ramsey, says the process is helping residents move from a reactionary stance to a proactive one. "Through the open dialogue the city is asking residents, 'What do you want in your backyard?'" And that's a transformative notion.

## GROWTH PROJECTIONS — AND PRESSURES

No matter how idyllic your own backyard view may currently be, if your community is slated for a highway expansion, a new river crossing, a commuter-rail stop, or a sewer connection, you can bet more growth is coming your way. In the meantime, just living near rapidly growing municipalities gives you a firsthand look at the way growth can reshape a community.

In the 1990s, Rogers all but put out the welcome mat for growth. Almost overnight, its gently rolling hills absorbed a rough-and-tumble mixture of scattered new subdivisions, bordered by main roads lined with truck stops and big-box retailers and — just as in big cities — burdened by predictable traffic snarls. Residents of neighboring communities see the changes in Rogers and wonder whether their towns are headed in the same direction, or if growth will pass them by.

The Metropolitan Council and the state demographer's office generate population projections based on past trends and other data. Their projections for edge communities are staggering. Consider Scott County, which had an estimated household count of just over 41,500 in 2005, according to the U.S. Census. By 2035, Scott County is projected to have more than 112,200 households, an increase of 170 percent. Carver County had more than

30,200 households in 2005, a figure that is projected to more than double by 2035 to 62,250 households. Similarly, Carver County had just over 85,200 people in 2005, but will leap to 195,400 residents by 2030, according to the Metropolitan Council. The four collar counties — Chisago, Isanti, Sherburne, and Wright — are on a similar path; they are all projected to double in household size by 2035.

The growth pressures in edge communities are part of the larger fabric of the metropolitan area, which operates within a single economic system. Census trends indicate that Scott

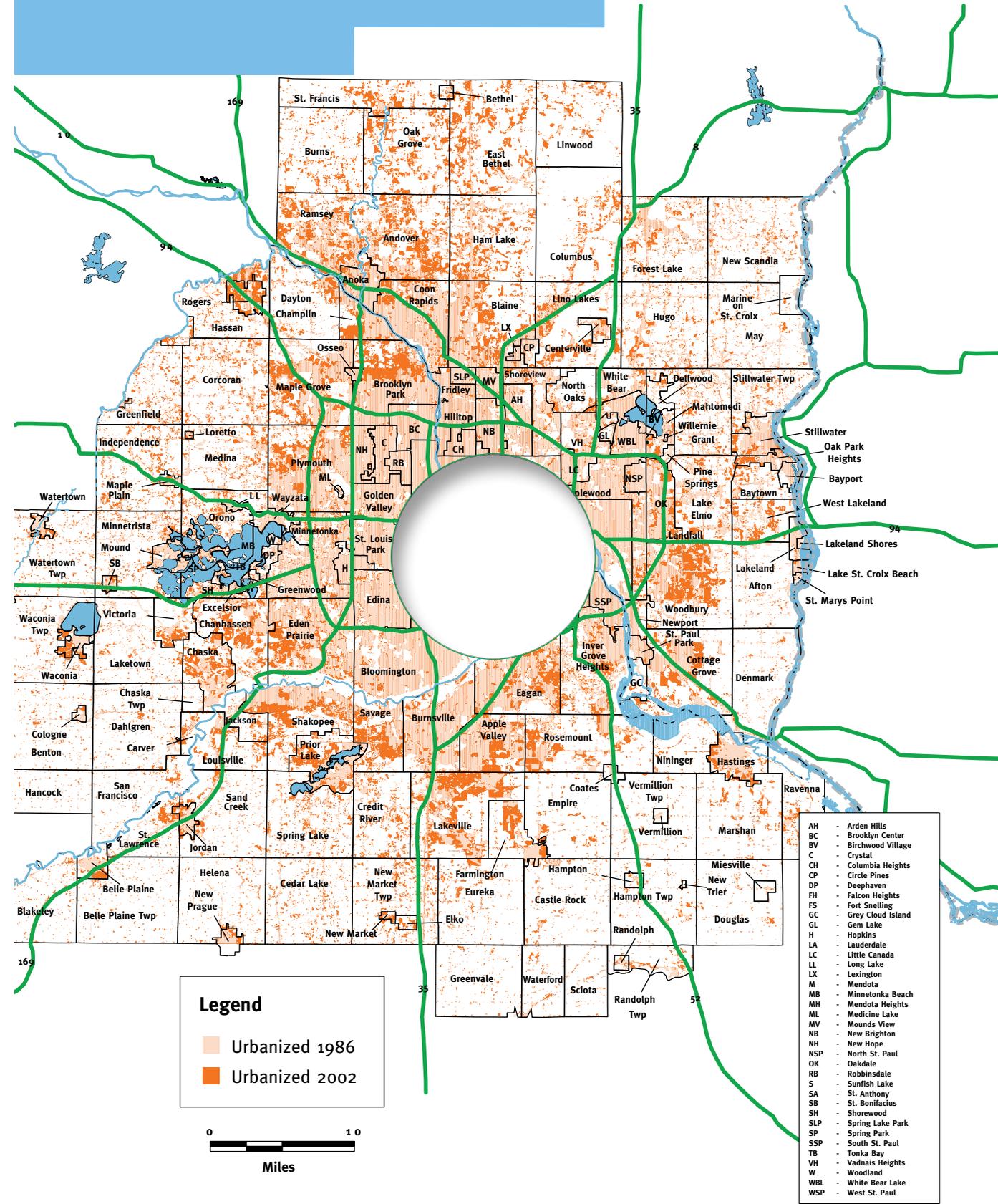
and Carver were among the country's 100

fastest-growing communities. But even bigger news was that five metro edge counties — the collar counties mentioned above, plus Wisconsin's St. Croix — had also made the list. Having a little distance from the metropolitan core of Minneapolis and St.

Paul is very attractive to a lot of people, such as those who want access to jobs in the Twin Cities and the surrounding suburbs, yet also want to own land with great views. The current trends point toward a long-term expansion in the edge and outer counties, with the whole region anticipating an increase of more than one million people by 2035.

Granted, the home-mortgage crisis, rising gas prices, and the overall national economic downturn suggest that the population projections made in sunnier economic times will need to be adjusted. State economist

Over the past two decades, rapid urbanization has occurred in noncontiguous, less dense patterns that surround the Twin Cities. (Graphic from Growth Pressures on Sensitive Natural Areas, Ameregis and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2006.)



Tom Stinson says, “The population projections for 2030 were made when gas was \$1.25 and \$1.50 a gallon, and I think they are optimistic compared to the projections that would be made today, even if we assume that gas will stabilize at around \$2.50 or \$2.75 a gallon.” Stinson finds that people’s decisions to relocate to edge communities made more economic sense when housing costs were the primary factor; as gas prices climb and commute times creep upward, a move farther from the core of the region looks less attractive. In his words: “The combination of operating costs and travel time that it takes to get to work in the metropolitan area will be such that it will produce increased demand for housing closer to the region’s employment centers. There will be some movement of retirees away from the central cities and the most congested areas, but that will not be the primary driver of economic growth in the edge cities.”

Stinson’s comments allude to a way of calculating cost of living that includes both housing and transportation costs. The Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Center for Transit Oriented Development have created an online tool (available at <http://htaindex.cnt.org>) that combines housing and transportation costs to gauge the affordability of communities in major U.S. metropolitan areas. The researchers have determined that comparing the relative costs of housing

throughout a region is only meaningful when transportation costs are also taken into account. When a family is making a move that will take them farther from their jobs, schools, and other destinations, rising costs in maintaining one or more vehicles can take a significant toll on their ability to afford the house.

The Metropolitan Council issues its own population projections for communities within the seven-county metro. According to forecaster Todd Graham, the council is not convinced that the current economic downturn will stifle population growth. Graham notes that the growth in some communities has already surpassed the Metropolitan Council’s 2010 forecasts. The council intends to revise its regional forecasts for population growth sometime in 2010 or 2011. In past years, the council has relied on a forecasting model that looks at land supply, policy area designations, and historic trends, but that does not include spatial analysis or consider what’s happening in nearby economic centers. By the time it revises the forecast, the Met Council intends to begin using a more sophisticated socioeconomic and land development modeling program that will include “feedback” between land-use development and transportation modeling. Modeling of local real estate market dynamics may also be possible. Either way, the future projections will provide more detail and traceability of

forecast assumptions and forecast results, giving communities better planning tools moving forward.

When cities prepare a comprehensive-plan update in the Twin Cities area, local forecast numbers are reviewed and can be modified. Some communities ask the Met Council to revise their population projections upward or downward, depending on their visions for growth or acknowledgment of market constraints or other factors. East Bethel revised its forecast in 2006, anticipating that by 2030, it would have 9,000 households rather than the 4,600 originally projected. Mayer too has revised its projections upward, jumping from 2,500 projected households to an anticipated 3,700 households by 2030. New Germany had been projected at 370 households, but the community asked the council to revise that upward to 650 households; while the number may seem relatively small, the magnitude in percentage terms is significant. Prior Lake, meanwhile, asked to be revised downward by 1,200 households by 2030, to reflect its plan to have wider buffers around lakes and wetlands, as well as to reflect the fact that some tribal lands there are no longer deemed available for development.

The question of whether population growth matches the state’s or the regional planning agency’s projections is overshadowed by a

concern that, Stinson notes, will affect edge communities in the years ahead. Many developers have land in their portfolios that they purchased in edge communities in recent years but have not yet developed. “Pressures are high for developers who already own land,” says Stinson. “They’ve paid a price based on what they thought they could sell housing for when gas was \$2.25 per gallon. In order to be able to make a profit on this, they have to be economical when they develop the land. They’re going to have to cut costs in some way; the price of their target will be lower. You can cut costs by changing the kind of housing you’re producing and the number of amenities you’re offering.”

Communities will be under pressure to accommodate developers’ needs in tighter economic times. Stinson warns that “communities will be played off against each other in negotiations; a developer might say, ‘I’ll just build in the adjoining township where I have property.’ It will be important to have coordination of standards across jurisdictions so that communities can get what they can from a developer. The big image of the project you had when you approved it will slip compared to what it would have been in 2004.”

The pace of population growth in edge communities — explosive or merely steady — combined with current trends in the layout of suburban-style developments, will lead

to further housing development, new schools, more water usage, new sewer lines, and more cars on already congested roads. And a lot of people choosing to live in edge communities want the same things; they seek the same views of open land, access to open space, and a high quality of life. How can communities pay for the necessary changes?

The bottom line is that growth doesn't happen by chance. Market forces may be driving development in your area, but community conversations and visioning help to establish what the community collectively wants to have happen. The current housing market offers an opportunity to prepare for more growth. By making community decisions before growth is upon you, your community is in a much better position to set the parameters for what kind of development ends up where, as well as for how well natural resources are preserved. These decisions matter; they affect the way we live and plan our days. Will you be able to walk to the store to get a quart of milk, or will you have to drive every time? The way we build our communities shapes the access we have to our workplaces, the errands we run, and where we go for recreation.

Counties with a low tax capacity are stressed when their populations start to rise. Tax capacity is a measure of the tax revenue collected per capita in the community — revenue

that is used for services such as roads, sewers, parks, fire and safety, and schools. These are services we take for granted and expect our communities to provide. Smaller communities must scramble to generate the necessary tax revenue from businesses and residents when the population rises, because an increase in households results in congested roadways, crowded public schools, and strained sewer and water infrastructures. Improving all these services — building new roads and new schools, laying new pipes, hiring more fire and police personnel — requires significant investment. For this reason alone, cities, townships, and counties must anticipate future population growth and plan accordingly so that the systems don't all require costly upgrades simultaneously.

Moving your community from the point of recognizing a looming challenge to effectively engaging other residents and city leaders based on facts, and then developing and implementing a plan for growth, is how you can take charge of your own destiny. There are so many choices to be made along the way — each one with the potential to move your community toward a future embraced by its residents, or to leave it exposed to a churn of rapid changes that may bring a higher tax base, but also myriad other challenges.



In the planning process, citizen involvement is essential to integrate technical components with practical human experience, for a more balanced whole.



## Creating a common vision

While the immediacy of a proposed development next door is likely to spur residents to attend planning meetings, the long-term planning efforts pursued by cities establish the rules of the game but do not always inspire the same level of engagement. Sarah Strommen, city council member in Ramsey, says her council discussed how it might drum up the same level of enthusiasm for ongoing planning as it sees in site-specific plans. “We are thinking about sending a flyer saying, ‘There might be town-homes in your backyard!’” says Strommen. “We don’t want to be false or scare people, but we do want to be a little edgy in our communications, and explain that it’s our backyard.”

Communities do have to get creative to draw out residents who might not see the relevance to their lives — why attend a meeting tonight about how your community will look and function in 10 years? Clever communications can make the connections for residents, conveying the sense of urgency and underscoring the magnitude of the decisions that will be made about their community along the way.

Once people are in the door, it’s important to use their time well and give them a reason to return. “Planning is not a one-time event,” says Chuck Marohn, principal planner with

the Community Growth Institute. “I like to think of it as an ongoing, unfolding process, like a public website, gradually growing and expanding over time.”

Proactive communities provide residents with educational workshops that give them the framework for growth and planning. By hearing from experts from outside the community, people gain new understandings of the inter-related systems within their municipality’s borders, such as transportation, land use, water quality, and natural resources. As they learn what is happening elsewhere and what is possible, a city’s leaders and staff, local residents, and businesspeople can gear up to have productive conversations about their visions for the future.

In less proactive communities, concerned residents should lobby their city leaders to initiate a long-range planning process with broad citizen involvement. Residents deserve and should demand opportunities to learn about growth issues and participate in conversations about the future. Regardless of their grasp of the intricacies of transportation planning or wastewater treatment, residents and business leaders possess insight that is relevant and necessary to inform the planning process.

Anticipating almost inevitable growth is a lot more painful when the community is deeply divided over its future. Take Lake Elmo as an example. Its website prominently features a classic farm scene and kids with a golden

retriever, projecting an image that is far from urban. Yet Lake Elmo is in the direct path of growth. Some there see advantages in growth, while other citizens want to stop it at all costs. In a long struggle with the Metropolitan Council, finally settled in court, an agreement emerged to provide sewer capacity for a section along the I-94 corridor and for an expanded area around the historic village center. But Lake Elmo politics today illustrate the tension between preserving historic rural character and acknowledging the reality of population pressure. As city administrator Susan Hoyt expresses it, “People know what they want to protect, and they’re right, but now we have to figure out how to do that. We’re in a real transition.” Lake Elmo residents are realizing they face a complex balancing act; in this case, they may need to put higher-density housing near the freeway in order to maintain open space elsewhere within the municipality’s borders.

How to preserve the character of a small town or a rural area is a real conundrum for many communities. While people seem to be saying they want the same things, they can disagree completely on how to get them. There are many perceptions of what densities can be permitted while retaining the character of the community. In Dayton, real estate agent Bernie Kemp says she thinks five-acre lots throughout the community, with a few 40-acre lots, will maintain her community’s

rural character. Meanwhile, according to former Hassan Township administrator Danny Nadeau, a board member there thinks that uniform two-acre lot development throughout the community will retain its character. “Others say we’d like some higher-density areas, and in the south, some 10-acre areas. But [this board member] wants complete and total build-out at two acres, and thinks this will retain the rural character,” says Nadeau. Though Nadeau believes consistent two-acre lots would undermine the rural character, removing any chance of uninterrupted views, he acknowledges that the proposal holds sway among some residents: “That’s a perspective that carries some weight; after all, he got elected.”

Finding community consensus on what’s desired and not desired starts with getting enough people to examine all the facts that can be assembled.

Veteran planner John Shardlow says the starting point is to create a natural resource inventory, followed by up-to-date market research that reveals the extent of demand for residential and commercial or industrial space. “What I find,” Shardlow says, recalling his experience with residents of Chisago City, “is it helps to show pictures of different approaches to development — what worked and, just as important, some very revealing mistakes.” And, he adds, “nothing beats seeing, so load people up in a bus and go see places where growth’s already arrived.”

Communities must work their way through these conversations in order to come to some agreement on how best to accommodate projected population growth. Many edge community members likely share the sentiment expressed by Dayton resident Doug Baines, who takes the long view: “I think we will all be singing from the same page, that we don’t want explosive growth.” Implementing any collective goal requires skilled leadership, engaged residents, and a civil and transparent process.

Which way to turn?

## HOUSING CHOICES

Once a common vision is reached, certain zoning, ordinance, and regulation changes must be implemented to achieve the vision. Every community will struggle with these shifts, because they are the real guideposts for development. Consider the major issues that quickly rise to the surface when a rural community begins to grow at a rapid pace. First, there’s the need for more housing. What will it look like? How dense will it be? Will it consist of townhomes dotting the landscape at regular intervals or clusters of housing with open space nearby? How much open space does your community want to have when the development boom slows and the dust clears? Many residents say they are dismayed at the quality of the new

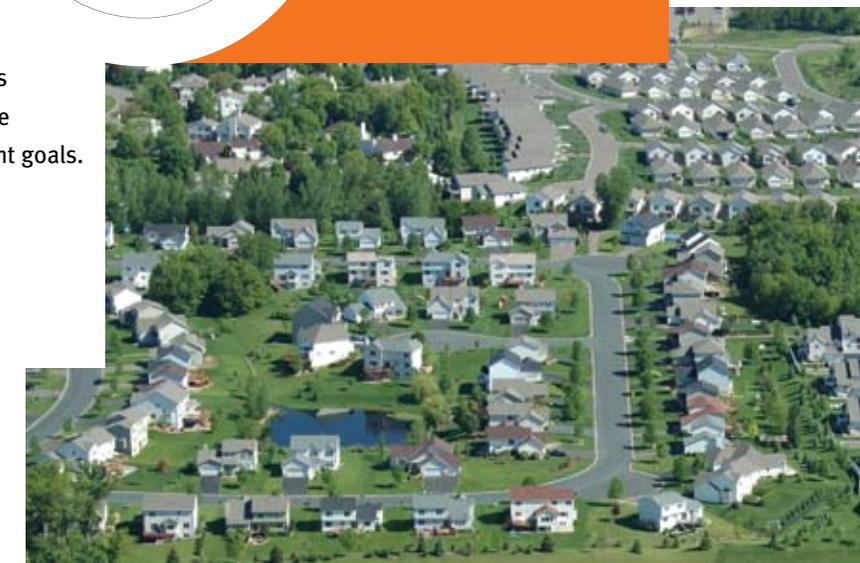
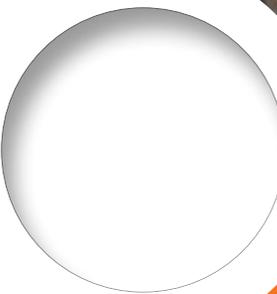
housing stock in their communities. It feels cramped in, they say; it looks cheap. It does not reflect the old downtown that defines the community, nor does it complement the 20-acre hobby farms. A uniform large-lot plan for development can’t realistically endure, given the projections — the entire community would immediately be filled up, with no open space left, and still there would be insufficient housing to meet the demand.

Residents and municipal staff have to wrestle with the mix of housing sizes and prices that will best meet the needs of current and future residents.

The size of the houses and the mortgages they require affect directly who can and will live in the community. Will the housing that is developed meet the workforce and job-growth demands of the community? If residents seek a cradle-to-grave community — in which young families can afford to buy a home and raise their families, and later retire to a smaller unit without leaving the area — a mix of housing is required. Too often, suburbanizing communities develop a mono-culture of large-scale, single-family housing that appeals to only a subset of their residents.

## ENVISIONING HOUSING:

- Set a number of housing units per acre that both accommodates growth and preserves a rural character.
- Vary housing density throughout the community to allow for walkable neighborhoods among larger blocks of open space.
- Cluster housing to preserve open space.
- Minimize soil and water quality impacts through conservation design and low-impact design rather than conventional developments.
- Align housing build-out scenarios and housing types with workforce needs and economic-development goals.



## TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

People buying new homes in edge communities probably don't expect to work near their new homes. They arrive already employed at jobs in the suburbs, in the Twin Cities, or in neighboring counties. Over time, the concentration of workers grows. Commercial business, retail enterprises, and other services develop in the area. Congestion snarls get worse.

How housing is designed in relation to transportation significantly affects our lifestyles and access to jobs, stores, and community facilities. Transportation investments are very expensive and are therefore a critical planning issue in every community. Where housing is sited directly affects the average number of vehicle miles traveled by residents to commute to work and run their errands. With the growing awareness of climate change and of the need to curb carbon emissions, communities can minimize their future carbon footprints by planning roads and housing in tandem. Communities that have sidewalks, bike paths, and walking trails encourage more active living, reducing the risk of obesity and helping people fight diseases exacerbated by our auto-dependent lifestyles.

Surprisingly few communities are coordinating comprehensive development plans with their nearest neighbors, perhaps fearing a loss of independence in their development decisions.

Yet communities would benefit greatly from knowing what's going on next door; in some cases, a lack of cross-regional planning has resulted in inefficiencies related to road construction, in miscalculations in wastewater systems planning, and in lost wildlife habitats. And natural systems such as lakes, streams, creeks, watersheds, and habitat corridors don't follow city or township boundaries, often requiring cross-jurisdictional coordination.

The effects of natural and man-made systems often resonate beyond any one community's borders. The traffic now flowing through Rogers, for example, has a significant effect on Dayton and on Hassan Township. If a proposed bridge is built over the Mississippi (which currently has no direct freeway access), the impact on Dayton's development will be dramatic. Former Hassan Township city administrator Danny Nadeau points out that when it comes to issues like transportation improvements, such as a new road, the addition of a new lane, or a plan to add an interchange to a major highway, "people take these things personally. One person sees a road improvement as an opportunity for themselves; others say, 'Whoa!'"

Public-transportation routes offer particularly fruitful opportunities for cross-community planning. The creation of the 82-mile Northstar Commuter Rail corridor, forecast to be fully operational by 2009, represents a prime

opportunity for all the communities that lie along its planned route between Minneapolis and St. Cloud. Especially where stops are planned, the door is wide open for development or redevelopment encouraging higher-density residential districts, mixed with retail and offices, within easy walking distance of each rail station.

How land-use and transportation systems are planned has implications related to climate change. Our choices in the design and location of new housing developments are already leading to annual increases in overall vehicle

miles traveled. As John Bailey of 1000 Friends of Minnesota puts it, "The growth in vehicle miles traveled is projected to offset any other technological improvements in vehicles and fuels. Our development patterns require people to drive ever longer distances with few, if any, transportation alternatives."

As climate change rises on our local and state agendas, we will have to think more carefully than ever about the role commuting plays in development plans.

### ENVISIONING TRANSPORTATION:

- Decide as a community whether to seek or discourage further connections to nearby highways.
- Consider how people who don't drive get around in your community. Public transportation gives commuters options for how they get to work — and about half the U.S. population (including seniors and children) does not drive.
- Support shorter car trips and alternative routes to major roadways with local and regional street patterns.
- Track other transportation planning efforts underway that would benefit from cross-community planning.
- Ensure that children have safe routes to walk and bike to schools.

## SCHOOL CHOICES

As communities expand and new homes bloom, young families are sure to follow. With them come children who need schooling. Initially, local schools can absorb growth in student population, but they eventually reach a tipping point and require the construction of new schools. The question of how to provide enough school facilities to accommodate the growing population does not only affect families with children. Since more school buildings leads to increased operating expenses, everyone's tax burdens are affected.

Also important is how schools serve the community's long-term development plans. Should schools remain small, nestled within neighborhoods? Or do communities want to turn cornfields or pastures into new school sites, with the added burdens of higher transportation costs and more traffic? Schools on the outskirts of town require significant long-term costs for roads and for the sewer and infrastructure connections that must be built and maintained.

Current Minnesota regulations for school construction, combined with the cost of land, encourage the placement of schools on large, remote sites that can lead to a feeling of disconnection in communities. Many families feel helpless in the face of ever-larger schools

placed far from community centers. What would happen if communities located their new schools on sites that are available within existing neighborhoods, where street and sidewalk connections are already in place?

### ENVISIONING SCHOOLS:

- Locate small school sites in neighborhoods to facilitate local community connections.
- Recognize that removing large school sites from downtown will lead to longer car trips and make it impossible for students to walk or bike to school.
- Consider data on projected and cyclical growth in student population when making school plans.
- Make certain that school expansion plans align with the community's housing and transportation plans.

## NATURAL RESOURCE CHOICES

One of the trickiest areas of community discussion is natural resources. There is a range of options regarding how to approach these issues: some people are willing to relocate wetlands to accommodate new housing development, while others say all natural areas should be set aside and preserved. "Open space" is a simple yet amorphous concept. Does it mean large tracts of productive agricultural land that happens to be privately held, or is it protected state forest, or both? Is open space active or passive? Even a simple term like "park" is thrown into question: Are parks refuges for wildlife and habitats for birds, with minimal intrusion from people, or are

they playgrounds, walking trails, and municipal swimming pools? Are all equally valued?

How communities answer these questions determines the course they will take to protect them. If passive landscapes seem underutilized, they may be slated for future development, ignoring their invisible yet vital role in filtering sediment from runoff and providing groundwater recharge areas. Water moves through plants very differently than it does through a ball field. The bottom line is economics: no community can afford to protect all its natural resources. But costs cut both ways. While it costs money to take land out of circulation via conservation easements, transfer or purchase of development rights, or donation of the land to the local government, it also costs a lot to ignore the environmental needs of the community in favor of achieving the greatest economic-development potential. No community can afford to lose its green infrastructure, which has economic benefits of its own.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been testing the water quality of Minnesota's lakes and streams for several years, and the early results are disturbing. Of the still fewer than 20 percent of all water bodies tested, the DNR is finding 40 percent unsafe for either fishing or swimming. On the edges of the metropolitan area, what happens if Lake Minnewashta in Carver County becomes so polluted that



people cannot fish or swim in it? Property values — and, more critically, the quality of life — go down in Chanhassen and Victoria.

Local communities whose assets and amenities are tied to irreplaceable water resources should do everything possible to protect the quality of what they have. And that sort of mandate envelops decisions about where and what kind of residential development to welcome, how responsible agricultural practices are in the community, and where new industry might be located. “Nonpoint-source pollution” — such as runoff from too much fertilizer, soil erosion, and road salt — has terrible long-term costs for the community. How local communities shape their development and zoning policies directly affects the water quality of local streams, lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater. Everything that happens on our land manifests itself in our waterways. How ironic would it be if Minnesota, a water-rich state, squandered its most valuable economic, social, and recreational resource?

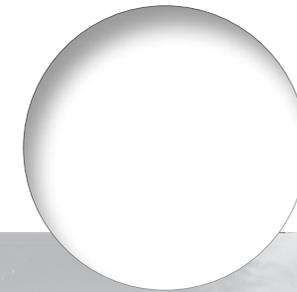
Renowned urban planner Peter Calthorpe once made a perceptive observation about the Twin Cities metropolitan area. He said that while growth in other regions is restricted by mountains, bodies of water, and other clear boundaries between urban areas and natural wilderness, the Twin Cities’ growth is not similarly constrained by its lakes and wetlands. Our greatest regional asset is our wealth of

water; what should be a development barrier is instead a magnet for development potential and residential homesteads. People love lake views and Minnesota’s trend is toward larger homes by the water. If we were serious about preserving our water quality, we would send regulatory signals that development is not welcome on shorelands, yet water-rich areas continue to grow in population. Calthorpe notes the irony that what defines the pride of Minnesota, our “land of 10,000 lakes,” is a real development challenge.



## ENVISIONING NATURAL RESOURCES:

- Facilitate conversations about what the community means by open space, natural areas, and parks.
- Identify, inventory, and preserve the natural resource assets that are most valued by the community.
- Ensure your community has a plan for long-term management of conservation easements it holds.
- Assess the health of local bodies of water.
- Revisit nonpoint-source pollution policies relating to runoff from impervious surfaces, overfertilization, soil erosion, and salt from roads.
- Build the economic case for keeping local lakes clean and healthy.
- Research the connections between the health of local bodies of water and the sources of residents’ drinking water.
- Support statewide shoreland-management standards that protect water quality and keep new developments in balance with natural systems.
- Understand your local watersheds and engage your local watershed districts in planning discussions.



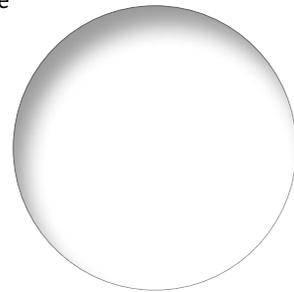
## COMMUNITY CHARACTER CHOICES

Some communities may feel they have enough land available to handle growth pressures. They know that many farmers in their community are willing to make subdivisions their last harvest, but they see no problem in allowing developers to scatter new development across former farms and forests.

But some communities are considering their heritage and longer-term identities. Cambridge recently had a rare opportunity to reconsider the use of a parcel of land that sits squarely in the middle of the community. Eighty-six acres became available when a state hospital closed. Working with the Growth Corridor Initiative of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, Cambridge citizens and public officials designed a district called Heritage Greens, laid out like a classic small-town grid of streets with sidewalks and alleys, and houses with front porches. It's a mixture of single-family homes and townhomes, with almost half of them targeted at a price attainable by lower-income families. Although sales slowed during the real estate downturn of 2007–2008, city officials and citizens of Cambridge are confident that this redevelopment sets a model for reinforcing their core community while welcoming more residents. Consuming 86 acres outside Cambridge would have had dramatically different results — converting more land, straining infrastructure and other services, and complicating the challenge to provide schools near where chil-

dren live. Retooling old sites for contemporary new purposes is cost-effective, making good use of existing infrastructure like sewers and roads to enhance existing character.

Consider also the experience of Chaska, 26 miles southwest of Minneapolis. Only a decade ago, Chaska was a small farming community that could have just gone with the flow of development, as growth moved inexorably outward. But public officials and active residents had a different idea: to create great neighborhoods nearby; to build attractive public facilities including parks, trails, and open space; and to ensure an appropriate diversity of accessible housing.



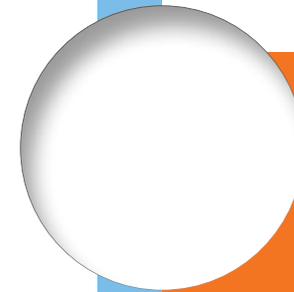
The result, after only a few years, is a community that is winning national awards and has been named one of the top 10 small towns in America by *Money* magazine. Instead of spreading all over the countryside, it has shaped its growth by, as its city planner Kevin Ringwald puts it, “enhancing its community character.” What does that mean? Chaska officials say they decided where growth should go, how they could build and protect a system of parks and trails, and how they could preserve their natural areas. Bob Roepke, Chaska’s mayor from 1984 to 2002, explains it this way: “We could share with developers our vision, values, and goals, rather than reacting to proposals we saw.” There is a world of difference between that philosophy and letting market forces take their course without local guidance.

The public decisions get tense, though, as farm owners are pressured to decide when to sell and to whom. Some communities are learning about the advantages of tools such as the transfer of development rights, by which farm families are compensated (usually through local municipalities) for not giving over their land for development. As the population increases and people look for attractive and affordable places to live, the pressures to develop haphazardly become immense.

Dayton resident Doug Baines says, “Most of the time, farm family kids can’t afford to take over the farm, and because the land is that family’s only real asset, selling it looks like the best option.” When farmland is sold, more development comes. Former Hassan Township administrator Danny Nadeau thinks back on how many new residents have come to the region’s edge, admiring the agrarian landscape, only to be shocked when farmers sell to developers and change the views that new residents have across the road.

### ENVISIONING COMMUNITY CHARACTER:

- Identify the community’s greatest historical, cultural, natural, and agricultural assets and agree to preserve them to the extent possible.
- Encourage development adjacent to existing town centers to reduce pressure on open space elsewhere.
- Support creative solutions such as transfer of development rights to keep more acreage in agriculture and help local farmers remain in the community when possible.
- When farming sites are developed, insist on designs that integrate the new areas with neighboring sites.
- Make sure zoning ordinances and regulations are changed so that implementation builds on community character.



The interlocking areas of housing, transportation, schools, natural resources, and community character are among those in which growing edge communities face recurring challenges. How communities face them today largely defines what these communities will become tomorrow. Developing a vision lays the groundwork; formalizing the vision into a comprehensive plan, future-land-use plan, and other official guiding documents is critical; implementing the plan through every carefully framed ordinance and every proposed development, no matter how small, is essential.

## YOU HOLD THE KEYS TO THE FUTURE

There is no script for how each edge community should or will grow. As described earlier, there are many choices along the way, each decision adding a twist to a community's growth path.

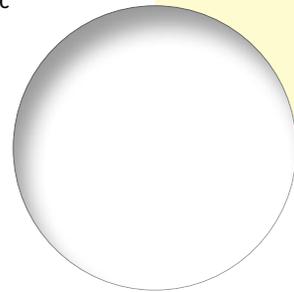
One thing is certain: Doing nothing will not take you where you want to go.

A new housing development that will meld right into the community, that provides solid structures at modest prices, preserves open space nearby, provides public parks and trails, adds new road connections, and generates a new elementary school that fits in seamlessly, strengthening the fabric of the community in tangible and intangible ways — none of that will happen by accident. Yet all of it is within your reach if community conversations about a vision and a plan start now and continue. Your localized knowledge of what's working well in your community and what needs improvement is valuable and welcomed at city meetings.

What persuaded you to move to the town where you live? Or, if you've always lived there, what makes you stay? Is it the views;

the small downtown; the people; the proximity of farms, crops and animals; the close connection to the land? Did you leave behind a larger city, a suburb, places that felt more congested and urban than was comfortable for you? Thinking through what made you move here in the first place holds the key to what would make you stay in the long run.

If we don't invest the time and energy in our current communities, what are our options? Move again in two years to a new community a little farther out on the edge? What happens when growth reaches the doorstep out there?



Growth and change are inevitable in developing areas — but how that growth occurs is truly in your hands.

## Images of the edge

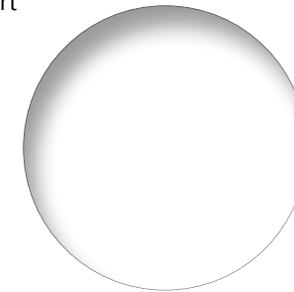
A couple of years ago, the City of Dayton invited the Edge Project and 1000 Friends of Minnesota to provide some guidance to its Open Space Committee. Together, these two organizations used Google Earth and other visualization resources to help Dayton residents understand the layout and geography of their community in a new way, and to facilitate more productive conversations. Dayton resident Dorothy Zaccardi recounts, "We had maps up at our meetings and people would walk over and say, 'I live here and this is what I'm concerned about.' That would start the conversation. You wouldn't believe what a difference it made to have people get up and go to the map and say, 'I live here.' People were relaxed and would listen to your viewpoint. The conversation would start with where we live, but then it would go beyond the five-block area we knew best."

The transformative power of claiming a place on the community map carved out some figurative space for every participant. Then, comments and concerns made by each resident were recorded on the digital map. Starting with something as simple as where you live and then tapping your firsthand knowledge of what is happening in your corner of the community make other, potentially more difficult conversations possible. Visualization draws out residents' innate understanding of their own

communities, and can lead to surprising insights that extend beyond the map on the wall.

The Edge Project's Dan Marckel comments, "Visualization tools break down the fear barrier like nothing I've ever seen." Sally Wakefield of 1000 Friends of Minnesota agrees; in the absence of visualization tools, she finds that citizens are sometimes suspicious of the data outside experts put up on the screen. Sending participants home with a CD of all the data shared at a meeting — so they can root around in it, test it against their local knowledge, and learn about other aspects that intrigue them — builds trust. And having a common map that people can walk up to, point to, comment on, and see their comments embedded in, captured for future participants to see, reassures residents that they are truly part of the process.

The visioning exercises provide meeting participants with a common language and an understanding of planning concepts. As Wakefield puts it, "The term 'development patterns' may bring up 12 different images in the minds of the 12 people sitting around the table. Showing images of what a clustered development looks like compared to a traditional cul-de-sac layout helps build a common understanding of the terms being used." She also notes that about 80 percent of all data



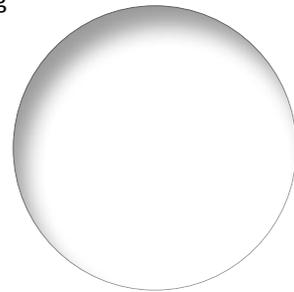
collected by government agencies is geographically based and can be represented visually. When dry spreadsheets are transformed into visual aids, everyone around the table can see the same images, and they are less likely to misunderstand one another.

Danny Nadeau is convinced that it is vital to use interactive tools to facilitate visioning conversations when there is no immediate pressure to make binding decisions. "It's important to be able to have discussions in a safe setting, but it doesn't happen often enough, because staffs have to focus on results, not just talk about all the possibilities," he says. The Edge Project's visioning exercises in Hennepin County communities "created an environment for people to talk and open up possibilities. They allowed people to have an environment where they could come to have discussions. That's a good thing; that's good planning." Having a safe setting in which to learn about facets of community growth allows participants to ask questions and try out new ideas. Nadeau says that in small communities, "once you take a position, you never lose it." A safe setting is

critical to bringing solid data, reliable information, and common understanding to the group before tensions harden into "us" versus "them." Resident Dorothy Zaccardi sums up her experience in the Dayton Open Space visioning conversations: "I can't say enough how useful, helpful, and necessary it was."

Visualization is powerful even in its simplest form. Architects have recognized the value of pictures for centuries; planners and consultants are following their lead by sharing images of developments achieved across the metro and beyond, illustrating the range of options in new construction and landscape design.

In that spirit, the following pages provide images that capture what exists or could occur in edge communities.

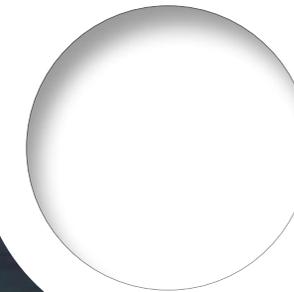


Google™ Maps and Google™ Earth are trademarks of Google, Inc.  
Yahoo!® Local Maps is a registered trademark of Yahoo! Inc.  
Microsoft® Live Search is a registered trademark of Microsoft, Inc.

## VISUALIZATION TOOLS:

- **Google™ Earth**— Download Google Earth for free to discover new ways to look at your community. Google Earth enhances community discussions by providing three-dimensional views of the community. By working with a local planner, consultant, or nonprofit like 1000 Friends of Minnesota, communities can add layers of local data to experience their area in new ways, enabling insightful conversations about growth trends. [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)
- **Live Search**— Microsoft® Live Search Virtual Earth is similar to Google Earth, and also available for downloading. [maps.live.com](http://maps.live.com)

- **Google™ Maps and Yahoo!® Local Maps**— Google Maps, available at [maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com), and Yahoo Local Maps, found at [maps.yahoo.com](http://maps.yahoo.com), allow two-dimensional interaction with maps at a regional or local scale.
- **Visualizing Density, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy**— Visualizing Density is a book as well as an online collection of hundreds of aerial photographs of urban, rural, and suburban areas showing various degrees of density on the land. It translates into visual terms the difference between two units per acre and 10 units per acre, while raising land-use considerations. [www.lincolnst.edu/subcenters/VD](http://www.lincolnst.edu/subcenters/VD) (Registration required to access free content)



# housing choices

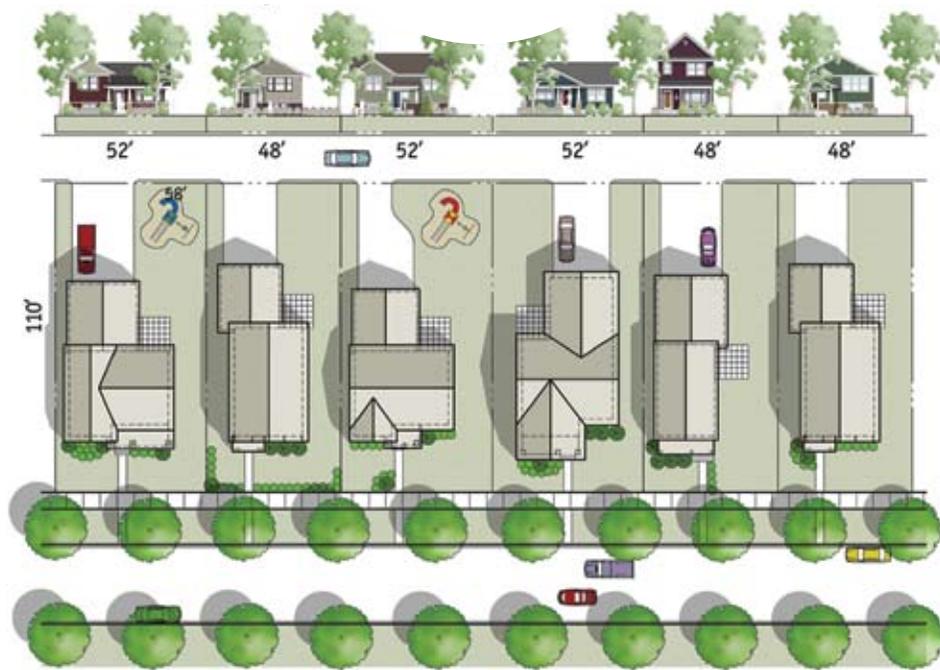
HOUSES ARE FOR PEOPLE ...



... OR CARS?

Communities benefit from incorporating sidewalks, alleys, and front porches for people, like at the top and bottom of this page.

The image just above reflects an outdated but typical development, centered on cars, driveways, and garages.



Images of the edge



The plan above emphasizes pedestrian-friendly streets, green space, and a range of housing types to connect residents and build community.

Below are different densities of housing within a single development, serving a growing community's diverse housing needs.



Images of the edge

ONE HOUSEHOLD ENJOYS THE COUNTRYSIDE ...



... OR MANY ENJOY THE SCENERY



One development goal is to create views for households. Large lots create views for one at the expense of the countryside; other types of lots incorporate well-integrated natural areas for all (just above).



A conservation development (right) follows low-impact design principles, clustering homes to preserve more natural areas, enhancing natural assets, and ensuring more environmentally sustainable practices.

HOUSES ARE PART OF THE LANDSCAPE ...

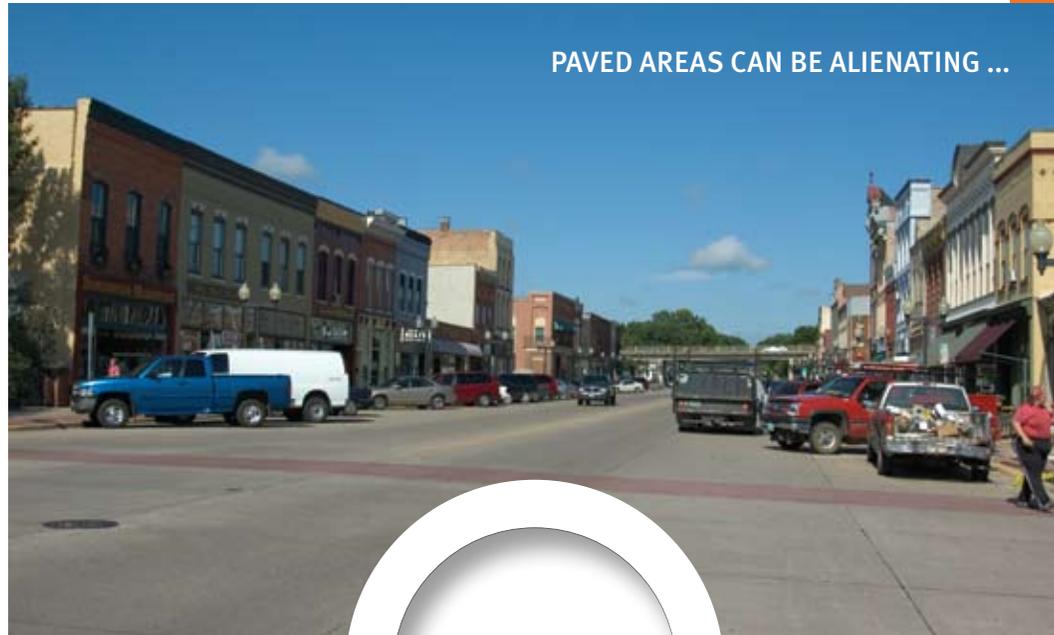


... OR PLACED ON TOP OF IT



# transportation choices

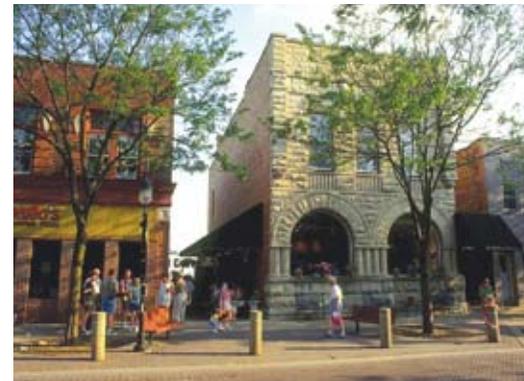
PAVED AREAS CAN BE ALIENATING ...



Successful development (below) features human-scale connections.

Massive roads and parking lots are major obstacles to building community.

... OR INVITING



Rather than the classic image of wide, high-speed roads lined with impersonal retail, communities benefit from incorporating sidewalks, medians, and plantings.



# school choices



FAR FROM EVERYTHING ...

Above, the school is surrounded by farmland, and removed from its community.

Below, a better approach integrates the school into its neighborhood.



... OR PART OF IT ALL



A school's location can determine community dependence on buses and individual drop-off and pick-up traffic.

Successful school siting promotes walking, biking, and easy community access and engagement.

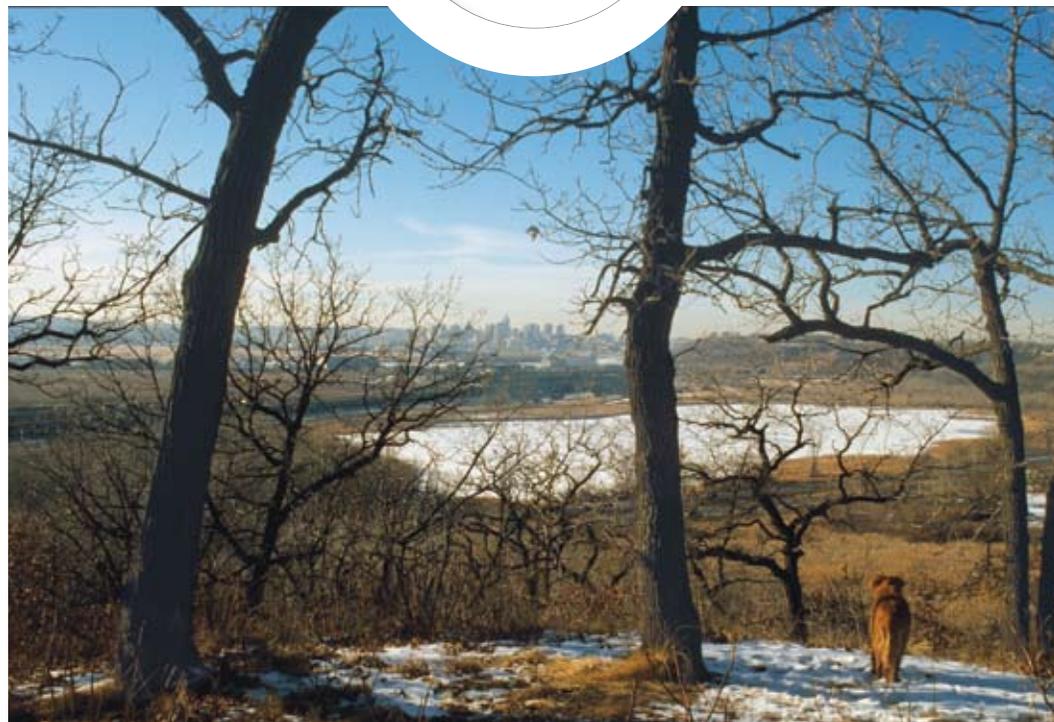


# natural resource choices

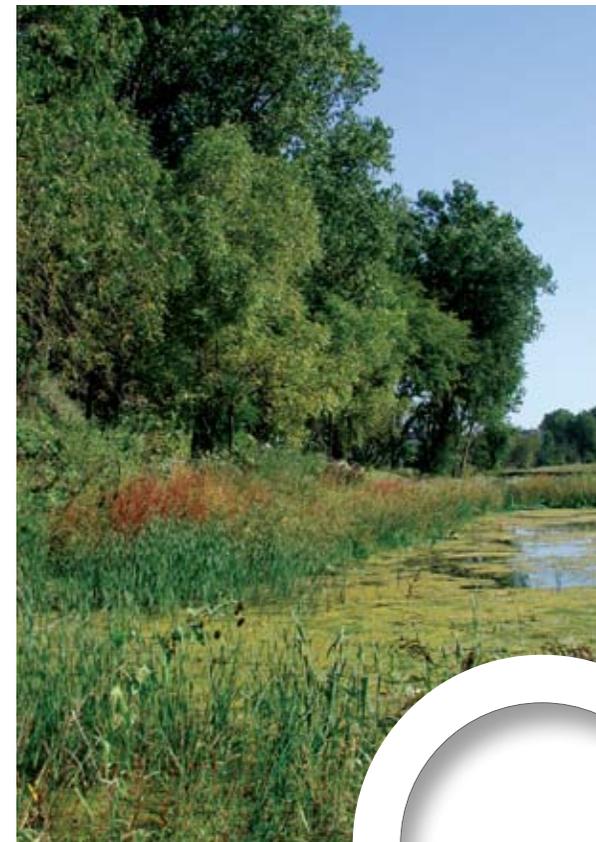


Public parks and green space play an important role in the civic health of a community.

From trails and recreation to pristine natural settings, open spaces give us room to breathe.



Images of the edge



This shoreland has been sensitively maintained to allow for natural stormwater mitigation and to serve as wildlife habitat.



Less environmentally friendly development may feature fertilized lawns up to the water's edge or shorelines serving as parking lots for boats.

Images of the edge

# community character choices



BUILDING ON A VISION FOR THE FUTURE ...

Thoughtful planning and design help define our communities when they draw on the shared visions of its residents.

The design, infrastructure, and development of our growing communities today will define the character of our region for future generations.



... OR BEING DEFINED BY GROWTH?

When planning for development, communities can compare their options for accommodating growth. Different options to site the same number of houses (below) can serve a variety of housing needs while maximizing the community's shared open space.



Holding a common vision for the future enables communities to work with developers to achieve it.



# Resources

Fortunately, now more than ever, there are tremendous resources available to help citizens and community leaders work together to understand the facts of growth and respond accordingly. The University of Minnesota Edge Project researchers found that the reports, software, mapping tools, and other resources described in this section are most effective when presented to a group of concerned citizens by someone steeped in the language of planning issues. In this way, the group learns together and builds the foundation of core planning concepts it needs. Without a guide, those new to planning may get lost or overwhelmed by the new technical jargon or other obstacles.

The Edge Project researchers also discovered that very few of the resources available are targeted in a way that is precisely appropriate for edge communities. Publications and websites filled with planning resources may appear to be too urban or suburban in focus to be relevant to developing communities, yet with some tweaking, the assessment tools may be just as effective in edge communities, and some or all of a suburban report's recommendations may apply. Edge community citizens have to be creative to recognize aspects of their own communities in assessments of larger communities. But there is no need to reinvent the wheel; tools and resources are often just a mouse click away.

These are some of the best starting points, arranged from most general to more specialized.

## GETTING STARTED WITH PLANNING GUIDES

**Local Planning Handbook, Metropolitan Council** — The Metropolitan Council is the official planning entity for the seven-county metropolitan area. Every municipality within the seven-county region is required to produce a comprehensive plan every 10 years.

This handbook, and related resources, are intended to guide and support municipalities in developing and amending their comprehensive plans, which are due by the end of 2008. [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org) (search for “local planning handbook”)

**Under Construction: Tools and Techniques for Local Planning, Minnesota Environmental Quality Board** — The guide offers ideas for developing a comprehensive plan that articulates the aspirations and vision of a community. It suggests how a plan should provide the policy framework for decisions regarding development, public investment, and delivery of government services. The guide is based on the principles of sustainable development, which means simply that it considers how environment, economy, and community are interrelated, as well as how a sustainable community lives within its means in both the

short and the long term. [www.gda.state.mn.us](http://www.gda.state.mn.us) (search for “under construction”)

**A Citizen's Guide to Influencing Local Land-Use Decisions, 1000 Friends of Minnesota and Minnesota Waters** — This joint publication provides an easily accessible collection of short essays and Minnesota case studies of ways citizens can actively engage in local planning issues, plus a few tips on avoiding ineffective engagement. [www.1000fom.org/Posted\\_Documents/CitizensGuide.pdf](http://www.1000fom.org/Posted_Documents/CitizensGuide.pdf)

**Planning 1-2-3, Campaign for Sensible Growth (CSG)** — CSG is a coalition of civic, government, and business leaders who are interested in better planning in the greater Chicago region. This guide is instructive for local officials and civic leaders in creating comprehensive plans that promote bold and balanced growth. [www.growingsensibly.org/cmapubs/planning123.asp](http://www.growingsensibly.org/cmapubs/planning123.asp)

### Additional resources

- Metropolitan Council, [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org)
- University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, [www.cura.umn.edu](http://www.cura.umn.edu)

## PLANNING DATA AND MAPS

**Metropolitan Council** — The Met Council provides an interactive tool with a wide range of baseline information on every community within the seven-county metro area. It also provides a wide variety of reports, data, plans, maps, handbooks, and expertise to the

region's citizens and communities. [gis.metc.state.mn.us](http://gis.metc.state.mn.us), [www.metrocouncil.org/resources/resources.htm](http://www.metrocouncil.org/resources/resources.htm)

**MetroGIS DataFinder** — DataFinder is a one-stop shop for discovering geospatial data pertaining to the seven-county area. Its primary function is to facilitate sharing of GIS (Geographic Information System) data among organizations serving the Twin Cities region. [www.datafinder.org](http://www.datafinder.org)

**State of Minnesota Land Management Information Center (LMIC)** — The former Minnesota Planning Office is now housed at the Minnesota Department of Administration and offers baseline maps, trend reports, and data-management tools to help you gather and map the information most relevant to your community's needs. [www.lmic.state.mn.us/chouse/mapgallery.html](http://www.lmic.state.mn.us/chouse/mapgallery.html), [www.lmic.state.mn.us/datanetweb](http://www.lmic.state.mn.us/datanetweb)

**U.S. Census data** — For quick and easy access to census data on your community, try Data-Place by Knowledgeplex, [www.dataplace.org](http://www.dataplace.org), or go directly to the Census Bureau at [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov). Both provide easy-to-use tools to examine your community's demographic, social, and economic characteristics and place them in a broader context.

Check your county's website for parcel information, natural resource inventories, and other specialized studies on your community. Your community may also have reports, data, and analysis online.

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND LIVABILITY

**Livability 101: What Makes a Community Livable, American Institute of Architects (AIA)** — Livability 101 offers communities the resources to develop a vision for the future, including 10 principles for creating more livable communities. [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org) (search for “livability 101”)

**Getting the Growth You Want, Montana Smart Growth Coalition** — This guide for residents and elected officials is focused on making sure that growth through subdivision development has a positive impact on a community. Although set in Montana, its message and content are relevant to many edge communities in Minnesota. [www.mtsmartgrowth.org](http://www.mtsmartgrowth.org)

**Protecting Rural Character and Planning for Rural Lands, Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC)** — The State of Washington requires all counties to plan for and manage growth and development in rural areas. It is instructive to see how other places have established the framework, resources, and tools to manage land use in rural areas. [www.mrsc.org](http://www.mrsc.org) (search for “Protecting Rural Character”)

**Growing Smarter at the Edge, The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy** — This comprehensive case study explores some of the best urban-edge development practices in western master-planned communities. The findings can inform

land-use planning in cities across the country, improving their long-range economic vitality and livability. [www.trustland.org/publications/growing\\_smarter.cfm](http://www.trustland.org/publications/growing_smarter.cfm)

**Additional resource** — 1000 Friends of Minnesota, [www.1000fom.org](http://www.1000fom.org)

## COMMUNITY HOUSING

**Building Better Neighborhoods, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF)** — This publication provides important tools to help guide the creation of better neighborhoods and balanced community growth for small towns throughout Minnesota. [www.gmhf.com](http://www.gmhf.com)

**Creating Great Neighborhoods: Density in Your Community, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** — This publication highlights the success of nine community-led efforts to create vibrant neighborhoods and provides readers with an understanding of livable-community concepts. [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

**Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact, Urban Land Institute (ULI)** — This report explores the impact of more dense development on property values, infrastructure costs, traffic, diversity, and suburban markets. [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org) (search for “higher-density development”)

**Affordable Housing Design Advisor, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** — This website is a tool, resource, idea bank, and step-by-step guide to design

in affordable housing. While focused on affordable housing development, it offers resources applicable to any development project. [www.designadvisor.org](http://www.designadvisor.org)

### Additional resources

- Family Housing Fund, [www.fhfund.org](http://www.fhfund.org)
- Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, [www.gmhf.com](http://www.gmhf.com)

## TRANSPORTATION

**Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)** — CSS is a way to plan and design roads and highways to be more sensitive to the communities and lands through which they travel. The site provides definitions, examples, and resources to help citizens communicate with transportation planners. [www.contextsensitivesolutions.org](http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org)

**Street Design Manual, Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)** — CNU and the Institute of Transportation Engineers came together to create this popular online manual for implementing context sensitive solutions in designing major urban thoroughfares and walkable communities. [www.cnu.org/node/127](http://www.cnu.org/node/127)

**Building Transit-Friendly Communities, Regional Plan Association** — This two-part report provides examples of places where project design has been used to help transform suburban communities into more transit-friendly places. [www.rpa.org/publications/design.html](http://www.rpa.org/publications/design.html)

### Additional resources

- Transit for Livable Communities, [www.tlcminnesota.org](http://www.tlcminnesota.org)
- Complete Streets, [www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)

## CLIMATE CHANGE

**Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change, Urban Land Institute** — This book documents how key changes in land development patterns could help reduce vehicle greenhouse-gas emissions. It concludes that urban development is both a key contributor to climate change and an essential factor in combating it. [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org) (search for “growing cooler”)

**Regional Impacts of Climate Change: Four Case Studies in the United States, The Pew Center on Global Climate Change** — This study was established to provide credible information, straight answers, and innovative solutions in the effort to address global climate change. [www.pewclimate.org](http://www.pewclimate.org)

**Additional resource** — Fresh Energy, [www.fresh-energy.org](http://www.fresh-energy.org)

## SCHOOLS

**“School Buildings and Community Building,” American Planning Association (APA)** — This article by Timothy Torma, published in the APA’s magazine *The Commissioner* (for planning commissioners), discusses the national

trend toward larger school sites removed from community centers and provides a number of related web-based resources. [www.planning.org/ncpm/pdf/commissionerarticle.pdf](http://www.planning.org/ncpm/pdf/commissionerarticle.pdf)

**Safe Routes, National Center for Safe Routes to School** — This program’s website contains online resources to help communities enable and encourage children to walk and bike to school safely. [www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes)

**Additional resource** — Minnesota Safe Routes to School, [www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes)

## NATURAL RESOURCES

**Using Natural Resources in Comprehensive Planning, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** — This guidebook walks communities through the key questions and strategies for including natural resources and water protections in comprehensive plans. [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us) (search for “comprehensive plans” and see “Handbook”)

**Local Greenprinting for Growth, Trust for Public Land** — Published in partnership with the National Association of Counties, this workbook series is packed with examples of communities creating conservation programs in the face of growth. [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org) (search for “greenprinting”)

**A Look at Community Capacity to Conserve Open Space in the Twin Cities Area** — Embrace Open Space and 1000 Friends of Minnesota published this report, based on the results of a questionnaire examining local government capacity to conserve parks and natural areas in the 11-county Twin Cities metro area. [www.embraceopenspace.org](http://www.embraceopenspace.org)

**Natural Resources-Based Planning, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD)** — The MCWD’s sole purpose is to protect the water quality of and manage runoff into the Minnehaha Creek watershed. This site provides some of the best information

available on how to include natural resources protection in your community’s planning and practice. [www.minnehahacreek.org/nrbp.php](http://www.minnehahacreek.org/nrbp.php)

**Natural Resources Digital Atlas, Metropolitan Council** — This seven-county digital atlas is very user-friendly, providing extensive data along with information on how to use it. [www.metrocouncil.org/directions/planning/planning2006/NRdigitalatlas.htm](http://www.metrocouncil.org/directions/planning/planning2006/NRdigitalatlas.htm)

### Additional resources

- Embrace Open Space, [www.embraceopenspace.org](http://www.embraceopenspace.org)
- Minnesota DNR Community Assistance, [www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco)

## Conclusion

The metro’s edge communities carry a heavy burden of responsibility to plan effectively for their growth and prosperity. With limits on resources, technical assistance, and supports, they face great challenges. To succeed, they will need local leaders and citizens who understand their choices and share a vision for the future.

### KEYSTONES TO SUCCESS:

This publication provides a starting point on the path to a better future, with resources and information to help along the way. Success depends on each community building a set of commonly understood capacities:

- Recognize the facts about growth, and plan a response.
- Develop a workable consensus on a desired future.
- Garner the resources to build and maintain local staffing capacity to prepare for and manage community decisions regarding growth.
- Strive to maintain political accord on tough and controversial development decisions.
- Implement development standards that are transparent and understood by the community.
- Collaborate with developers to negotiate the results the community expects.

What is your community’s capacity to respond to growth? The actions we take now can rejuvenate the essential civic function of planning

throughout our region, for a better tomorrow that builds on today’s quality of life.

Here, we offer a few recommendations to help communities, the public sector, and private citizens start down that path to the future together:

### Ensure that local citizens participate in the development of a shared community vision.

Cities that set high bars for citizen participation can expect great returns. To provide people with information and foster a greater understanding of community growth issues, use innovative tools such as participatory websites, interactive mapping software, and other resources. To create a welcoming atmosphere, planning teams can post agendas, meeting minutes, and related documents on a well-maintained website, and plan for open discourse that fosters mutual respect between local leaders and citizens.

The process will benefit from an environment in which citizen involvement is expected, is respected, and drives decision making.

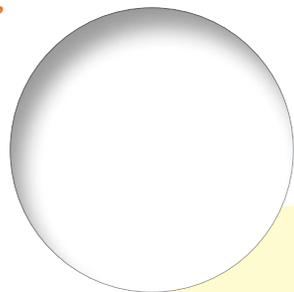
**Develop a comprehensive plan that reflects the shared vision and continues to engage local citizens.** Participants should ensure that the final plan for land use and transportation relates seamlessly to the community’s vision for open space, parks, trails, and wetlands.

After identifying the assets that hold the community together, the team should establish clear statements reflecting what the community agrees to preserve, including a map of future land use to illustrate community decisions about growth. Because planning is an ongoing process, officials would do well to keep citizens involved even after the official plan is completed, perhaps through periodic workshops related to evolving community needs. Constantly engaging and informing citizens — especially during times of calm — will serve the entire community well when inevitable conflicts arise from growth pressures and ongoing hard choices.

**Ensure that all local ordinances, regulations, and zoning mechanisms reflect and reinforce the community's vision and comprehensive plan.** As part of the process, planners need to assess and, if necessary, revise local policies that undermine the community's goals. For example, successful plans would encourage new development in urbanized areas, and discourage growth in significant natural or agricultural areas. Communities can save infrastructure and environmental costs by supporting local codes that coordinate the location of new roads and sewer extensions. And to ensure that all projects are in the community's best interest, officials should conduct full-cost accounting of any new developments. When a comprehensive plan is successfully embedded in all ordinances, developers get a more transparent understanding of the working environment, and the community is more likely to see the development it seeks.

**Keep an eye on the "outside game."** There is a limit to what can be accomplished within one community's borders, in operations referred to as the "inside game" by urban affairs expert David Rusk. In the inside game, each community has autonomy and control. But, as this publication points out, there is also inherent interdependence among communities across the region. The external forces — what Rusk refers to as the "outside game" — drive change in directions that may run counter to community goals. Market forces; climate change; gas prices; real estate trends; and state and federal policies on transportation, housing, and the environment all put intense pressure on local communities. Although there is little that one Minnesota community can do to change the outside game, there are regional and state systems shaped at the state Capitol, where local voices can and should be heard.

**Weigh in on legislative discussions that could affect your community.** Every year, state legislators revisit policies that affect what happens within each town's borders. The diverse experiences of involved citizens, city council members, and planning commissioners all carry weight when those legislators are speaking at hearings at the Capitol about issues that affect our communities. Will regional commuter rail lines run through your community? Will area lakes be affected by changes to shoreland-management standards? Does your city council consider eminent domain



Conclusion

## THE GRAND ROUNDS, ENCOMPASSING PART OF THE MINNEAPOLIS SYSTEM OF PARKS AND RECREATION CENTERS.

Our modern park system traces back to the long-term vision of Theodore Wirth, Minneapolis Park Superintendent and planner starting in 1906. Generations later, the system remains a treasured asset, still helping to define the character of our community. (Map from Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.)



Conclusion

as a tool for redevelopment? Could your community put state planning funding to good use? Questions such as these make plain the case for local governments and citizens to pay attention and get involved in legislative debates each spring. Listed in the back of this book are several local nonprofit organizations that give voice, shape, and power to collective action at the state level.

**Encourage local leaders and citizens alike to advocate for statewide funding to support planning in local communities.** Until it was dismantled in 2001, the Community-Based Planning Act set statewide goals for development. Creating a similar community assistance program today would go a long way toward helping the state plan how best to accommodate the million new residents anticipated by 2030. To ensure ongoing planning engagement, dedicated funds could be distributed to Minnesota communities through a competitive application process. In turn, local communities would have the fiscal resources they need to draw from when weighing the costs of planning against other budget items.

Without additional statewide planning investments, Minnesota faces distressing long-term consequences. But with appropriate funding and leadership, the full breadth of community involvement, and a comprehensive strategic vision, the decisions we make today will strengthen our regional quality of life for generations. And the value of such planning isn't just idle speculation — it's *history*.

One hundred years ago, the newly appointed Minneapolis parks superintendent, Theodore Wirth, had a bold idea. At a time when Minneapolis was still an emerging city, Wirth believed the future metropolis should have a playground area within a quarter mile of every child's home and a larger recreational area within a half mile of every family. Although it took decades to develop what is now 6,400 acres of parks and recreational spaces, Wirth's achievement stands today as a testament to the power of envisioning the future.

Vital communities blossoming along the outer edge of the Minneapolis and St. Paul suburbs face challenges and unprecedented opportunities. The very notion that these communities can both anticipate and handle their coming population growth — and in the process become even better places to live and work — that, too, is a bold idea.

Wirth's park system reminds us of the long-term significance of the decisions we make concerning development and the environment. Growth and change are constant, but having a vision and framework for growth helps citizen planners and local leaders sustain their communities' quality of life. No community can fulfill a dream without a plan. Making decisions about land use, transportation, schools, housing, or natural resource preservation on a project-by-project basis threatens to condemn a community to a haphazard collection of piecemeal development choices.

The result is unlikely to be attractive or economically competitive.

In 2008, McKnight launched a multiyear effort, called Community Growth Options, with 1000 Friends of Minnesota, the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. Community Growth Options is a community assistance program that provides planning grants to up to 10 edge communities, to be used for community visioning, comprehensive planning, ordinance revision, plan implementation, public education, policy and procedures assessment, and internal education and training. The project offers a limited response to the lack of state investment in community planning. We anticipate it will demonstrate the value of planning, support leaders pursuing it, promote a better quality of life, and help local citizen leaders make informed choices regarding their community's future.

Citizen involvement holds phenomenal potential for community visioning and planning. By engaging and supporting citizens to plan for their own future, all our region's communities can become promising examples of the leading edge of growth, managed for long-term community success. In so doing, these cities and towns can improve our economies while preserving our invaluable quality of life.

In 2008, Minnesota celebrates 150 years of statehood. It's a good time to embrace our

past, rich with civic and public sector leaders such as Theodore Wirth, who recognized the value of our community assets. Such leaders made sure that future generations would share in their prosperity.

The legacy we leave our own children can be just as powerful, if we make the effort to plan for it together today, sharing responsibility for the places we call home.

## LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

**1000 Friends of Minnesota** is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the important connections between development patterns and the health of communities and the environment. The organization's mission is to promote development that creates healthy communities while conserving natural areas. Its most recent effort, Community Growth Options, will work with up to 10 local communities to foster and sustain long-term demand for planning and a balanced growth approach to community development. [www.1000fom.org](http://www.1000fom.org)

**The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)** at the University of Minnesota is an applied research and technical assistance center connecting university resources to nonprofit organizations, businesses, neighborhoods, and local governments. CURA is partnering with 1000 Friends and the school of planning at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs to provide more targeted assistance in edge communities struggling with issues of growth. [www.cura.umn.edu](http://www.cura.umn.edu)

**The Family Housing Fund** is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to produce and preserve affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The fund supports the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Metropolitan Council, and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency in their efforts to preserve and expand the region's supply of affordable housing. The Family Housing Fund has a growing interest in and capacity to support expanding diverse housing choice in communities facing significant population growth. [www.fhfund.org](http://www.fhfund.org)

**The Greater Minnesota Housing Fund**

addresses the need for decent, affordable housing in greater Minnesota, which includes the 80 counties outside the Twin Cities seven-county area. Its Growth Corridors Initiative and Building Better Neighborhoods programs offer experience, strategies, and financing to ensure diverse housing options for growing communities. [www.gmhf.com](http://www.gmhf.com)

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

The mission of the DNR is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to promote outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in ways that create a sustainable quality of life. It offers technical assistance to help communities plan for growth while sustaining their natural resource assets. [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)

**Minnesota Housing Partnership** assists community housing organizations in becoming active in creating and maintaining affordable housing across Minnesota. It has experience in helping a variety of communities develop plans and strategies to offer diverse housing choices to build healthy communities. [www.mhponline.org](http://www.mhponline.org)

**The Minnesota Land Trust** is a private, nonprofit organization that preserves the natural and scenic heritage of Minnesota by permanently protecting the lands and waters that enrich our quality of life. It provides assistance to communities seeking to preserve vital natural areas in perpetuity. [www.mnland.org](http://www.mnland.org)

**Sierra Club North Star Chapter**

Inspired by nature, the Sierra Club works to protect our communities and the environment through educational programs and political activism. Minnesota's North Star Chapter is one of the club's oldest, recently celebrating its 35th anniversary. [northstar.sierraclub.org](http://northstar.sierraclub.org)

**Transit for Livable Communities** is a nonprofit organization that works to improve the quality of life in Minnesota communities through a balanced transportation system that encourages transit, walking, biking, and transit-oriented development. In the extremely technical field of transportation, Transit for Livable Communities offers communities options to create transit systems that enhance their quality of life. [www.tlcmnnesota.org](http://www.tlcmnnesota.org)

**The Trust for Public Land** is a national, nonprofit organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations

to come. Its Embrace Open Space project has helped communities realize the critical importance of natural areas in planning and development decisions. [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), [www.embraceopenspace.org](http://www.embraceopenspace.org)

CREDITS

We want to acknowledge the valuable contributions to this publication by numerous partners, creative minds, and passionate believers in building a region that provides opportunities for all and a quality of life that is sustained for many generations to come. Special contributors to this publication include:

Curtis Johnson, *The Citistates Group*  
 Dan Markel and Jim Solem, *Center for Urban and Regional Affairs*  
 Jill Mazullo, *1000 Friends of Minnesota*

We are also grateful for the ongoing efforts of our many grantees, cited throughout this publication.

**Photography**

Chris Faust — *pages 6, 25, 32 (middle), 34 (top), 40 (bottom), 43 (bottom)*  
 Metropolitan Design Center Image Bank — *pages 19 (bottom), 33 (bottom), 35 (both), 36 (top), 38 (both), 40 (top, middle), 41 (top), 42 (both), 43 (top), 51 (bottom)*  
 Chris Gregerson — *page 24*  
 Aaron Holmberg — *page 32 (top)*  
 City of Chaska — *page 33 (top and bottom)*  
 City of Minneapolis — *page 34 (middle)*  
 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency — *page 34 (bottom)*  
 Excelsior and Grand — *page 37 (bottom)*  
 Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation — *page 41 (bottom)*  
 Board of Park Commissioners of Minneapolis — *page 51 (top)*

The McKnight Foundation is committed to the protection of our environment, a philosophy that underlies our practice of using paper with post-consumer waste content, and wherever possible, environment-friendly inks. Additionally, we partner with printers who participate in the PIM Great Printer Environmental Initiative. This report was printed on FSC-certified paper manufactured with 20% post-consumer recovered fiber and electricity in the form of renewable energy.

**Paper**

Utopia One X: Green Matte, 100 lb Cover  
 Utopia One X: Green Matte, 80 lb Text

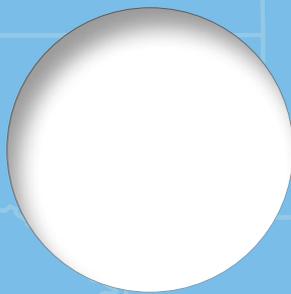


**Printing**

Shapco

**Design/Concept**

HartungKemp



**THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION**

710 South 2nd Street, Suite 400  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401  
t 612-333-4220 f 612-332-3833  
[www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org)