

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The update to the Comprehensive Plan serves a number of purposes. Most importantly, the update more accurately reflects recent as well as anticipated growth within the community, and lays out a strategy by which the City can best manage the challenges growth presents. The update also addresses the need for and interest in implementing municipal services within portions of the community – highlighting ways in which these improvements will enhance the economic vitality of the area, provide for well-planned concentrated areas of development, preserve natural land and resources, and create a community identity that residents can appreciate and be part in shaping.



The plan is a culmination of several months of work reviewing various documents, plans, projections, and community interests developed since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in October 2000. The 2000 Plan, however, does not accurately estimate the potential growth in East Bethel, particularly as it relates to the opportunities new public services will provide to businesses, residents, and the overall quality of life within the community.

### **Purpose and Authority**

The City of East Bethel has developed the 2008 Comprehensive Plan as an update to its previous 2000 Comprehensive Plan in an effort to more accurately reflect the current landscape and changing needs of the community. The following sections provide an overview of the comprehensive planning process as well as the general guidance and requirements provided under the metropolitan planning organization for the seven-county metro area, in this case the Metropolitan Council.

### **Comprehensive Planning Process**

The comprehensive planning process, under the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, requires local communities to adopt comprehensive plans that are consistent with the Metropolitan Council’s 2030 Regional Development Framework and its four “metropolitan system plans” – for transportation, aviation, wastewater treatment, and regional parks (Minn. Stat. 473.858-.859; 473.864).

*The 2030 Regional Development Framework was prepared under the authority of state statutes, which direct the Council to: ...prepare and adopt...a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. It shall consist of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development, public and*

*private, of the metropolitan area. The comprehensive development guide shall recognize and encompass physical, social, or economic needs of the metropolitan area and those future developments which will have an impact on the entire area including but not limited to such matters as land use, parks and open space land needs, the necessity for and location of airports, highways, transit facilities, public hospitals, libraries, schools, and other public building (Minn. Stat. 473.145).*

The Development Framework is the initial chapter and the unifying theme of the Metropolitan Council's *Metropolitan Development Guide*. The "framework" is the umbrella statement of regional policies, goals, and strategies that form the Council's metropolitan, or regional, system plans for transportation, airports, wastewater service and regional parks, as well as other comprehensive development guide chapter policies adopted by the Metropolitan Council.

The framework's strategies are organized around four policies:

**Policy 1: Work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected, and efficient manner by:**

- Supporting land use patterns that efficiently connect housing, jobs, retail centers, and civic uses.
- Encouraging growth and reinvestment in centers with convenient access to transportation corridors.
- Ensuring an adequate supply of developable land for future growth.

**Policy 2: Plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices, based on the full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region's economic needs by:**

Improving the highway system, removing bottlenecks, and adding capacity. Making more efficient use of the highway system by encouraging flexible work hours, telecommuting, ridesharing, and other traffic management efforts. Expanding the bus system and developing a network of transitways based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

**Policy 3: Encourage expanded choices in housing location and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities by:**

Allowing market forces to respond to changing market needs, including increased demand for townhomes and condominiums as baby-boomers age. Preserving the existing housing stock to help maintain a full range of housing choices and ensure existing local and regional infrastructure is fully utilized. Supporting the production of lifecycle and affordable housing with better links to jobs, services, and amenities.

2030 Framework Planning Areas Map Highlighting Proposed East Bethel Rural Center

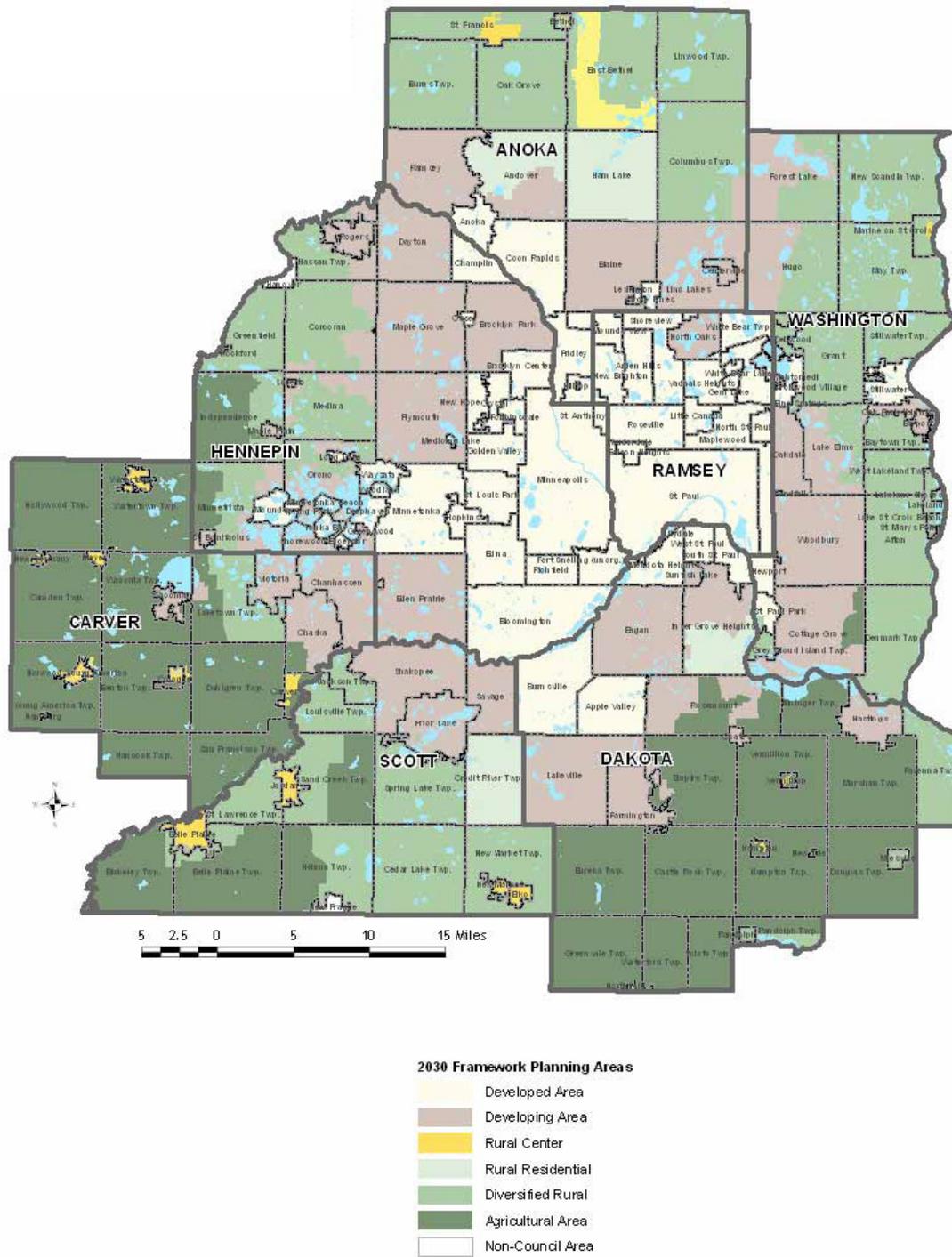


Figure I-1. Metropolitan Council Development Framework Geographic Planning Areas

**Policy 4: Work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect, and enhance the region's vital natural resources by:**

Encouraging the integration of natural-resource conservation into all land planning decisions by seeking to protect important natural resources and adding areas to the regional park system, and by working to protect the region's water resources. The *Framework* recognizes that "one size does not fit all" – that different communities have different opportunities, needs, and aspirations. It includes implementation strategies that are tailored for different types of communities – fully developed communities, communities that are still developing, and four different types of rural communities.

## **Systems Statements**

In September 2005 the Metropolitan Council prepared "systems statements" for each community in the seven-county area informing local officials how their community will be affected by the Council's regional system plans. These statements are intended to help communities prepare or update their local comprehensive plans which, under state law, must be consistent with regional plans. Under state law, each city and township in the seven-county metropolitan area is required to at least every ten years review and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan to ensure that the local plan and local fiscal devices and official controls are consistent with the Council's metropolitan system plans (Minn. Stat. 473.864). The next round of updated local plans will be due in 2008. This update completed in 2006 will significantly reduce the amount of revisions the City of East Bethel will need to undergo in submitting a comprehensive document at that time.

The system statement for the City of East Bethel "includes forecasts at densities that assure regional growth is achieved consistent with adopted policies." These forecasts are developed by the Metropolitan Council and are designed to ensure that growth and land use development occurs in a way that efficiently and in a coordinated fashion provides for regional services and infrastructure. Also provided in the system statements are specific changes within each of the four "system plan" components (transportation, airports, wastewater service, and regional parks) that may affect the City of East Bethel.

The *Framework* sets out different strategies for communities based on the types of growth that are expected as identified in Figure I-1, and identifies an urban area and a rural area each of which occupies approximately half of the region. The urban area is divided into two specific geographic planning areas: the Developing Communities and the Developed Communities. The rural area is divided into four specific geographic planning areas: Rural Centers/Rural Growth Centers, the Diversified Rural Communities, the Rural Residential Areas, and the Agricultural Areas. Approximately 91-95 percent of new growth is forecasted to be located in the urban area – in land use patterns that make efficient use of regional infrastructure – with the rest (5 percent to 9 percent) in the rural area, particularly in small towns to be designated as Rural Growth Centers.

One of the primary differences among these planning areas is the density at which they develop. The Metropolitan Council has established benchmarks indicating the overall densities for planned development patterns in each of the geographic planning areas. The Metropolitan Council negotiates a share of the regional forecasts with each community based on its

geographic planning area designation(s), development trends, expected densities, available land, local interests, and Metropolitan Council policies. The cumulative results of the community-negotiated distribution of the forecasts among planning areas becomes the basis for determining the required land supply, and becomes Metropolitan Council's plans for investments in regional systems such as highways and wastewater service.

The City of East Bethel is currently classified as a "diversified rural" geographic planning area under the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Regional Development Framework. However, the *community* is pursuing a number of opportunities, including the implementation of municipal services, a City Center development, and other strategies that would indicate potential growth in this area which would justify East Bethel's transition into a "Rural Growth Center."

To that end, the City of East Bethel has the authority to, and made the decision to, prepare a significant update to its existing comprehensive plan that will direct development and manage growth. This update replaces the Comprehensive Plan that was developed and adopted in October 2000.

## **Community Planning Process**

A forward-thinking, community-driven approach is most effective when building support and consensus for change within a community. The Comprehensive Plan is the result of a process that included public meetings, review of existing plans and policies, discussions with business owners, and a host of other sources to gain input that was incorporated into the plans, policies, and action steps included in the update.

An initial strategic planning session was held with City Council members and staff in May 2005 as an opportunity to revisit existing plans, policies, and strategies which have been revised in an effort to better anticipate, and therefore accommodate, growth. Transpiring from the meeting were new goals and objectives designed to work toward the implementation of a longer-term vision for the community: a vision that creates a sense of place within the community, and an identity that residents and other members of the community can relate to, appreciate, and enjoy.

The most significant changes from the 2000 Comprehensive Plan were made to existing and future land uses, municipal services, public facilities, and park and recreational uses. Elements of the 2000 Plan that remained primarily the same include the community's history and inventory of natural and geologic features such as waters, wetlands, and soil types.

Public participation was also part of the update process. Input was sought and provided by elected and appointed officials, local business and property owners, as well as residents. A town meeting was held in April 2005 as an opportunity to provide residents with an initial snapshot of the various planning activities the City was initiating, such as a City Center development plan, possible implementation of municipal services, revisions to the comprehensive plan, and public services such as the construction of a new fire station and new technology including severe weather sirens – all of which tie together to make up the larger picture of East Bethel's future.

The most repeated issue raised at the meeting among residents was the need to be informed and the desire to participate in shaping the future identity and growth of the community. Other

concerns included traffic issues and future transportation improvement plans along State Trunk Highway 65 and County Road 22, mixed interest relative to “big box” development, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas (namely wetlands), the preservation of existing residential development densities, and the need for senior housing opportunities.

A draft of the updated Comprehensive Plan was submitted to the East Bethel City Council and Planning Commission in October 2005 for review and comment. The Planning Commission held special work sessions throughout the month of November 2005 to discuss and refine the Proposed Land Use Map developed as part of the planning process.

Open house events were held January 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> as an opportunity for members of the community to review the major components of the Comprehensive Plan. Stations for the primary plan elements including proposed land uses, the City Center development, transportation, parks and open spaces, transit services, and public utilities were the focus of discussion and information provided. The open house events were an extremely valuable portion of the process to obtain feedback from members of the community. Attendance at these events was high, and overall comments were positive in nature; individuals were pleased to see that the City was in fact planning for the short and long-term future and integrating the major planning elements into one vision.

A formal public hearing was held March 8, 2006 for official public comment and review. Draft copies of the plan have been submitted to neighboring communities and appropriate review agencies for comment. Individual meetings were also held with each review agency in an effort to discuss the various project and plans proposed. The intent is to adopt a final draft of the Comprehensive Plan and officially submit the document to the Metropolitan Council for review and approval.

## **Community Goals**

The City is establishing a set of goals to help guide the community, particularly the roles and responsibilities of City government. These are official statements that reflect, to the degree possible, consensus of participants in the planning process. They represent desired outcomes or conditions related to the physical, natural, and economic characteristics of the community. Policies, on the other hand, are specific, official positions of the City that guide day-to-day planning, administration, and implementation strategies such as capital improvements, zoning, and other official controls.

## **COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

Community appearance directly relates to a community’s identity. It’s this appearance that first greets visitors and potential residents or business investors. Therefore it is important to continuously access what the community’s appearance communicates to residents and visitors and to take appropriate steps to ensure that the image is what the community intends. One such step in a growing community such as East Bethel is for the City to



define and standardize certain key design and quality elements for all new construction, and to provide practical guidance to continually improve the quality of the community's physical environment. The concepts and ideas provided in the following sections relate to new development as well as redevelopment, and provide examples of how the City can establish a positive, attractive, and inviting feeling to those who live in, work in, and visit the community. These efforts also recognize that maintaining vibrant and attractive residential and commercial areas within the community is a critical obligation/responsibility of the City to those who have invested in homes and businesses there.

Open space and the natural environment are also important ingredients that contribute to the overall quality of a community's physical environment. These areas provide people with places to relax and enjoy the beauty of nature. No two open space areas or natural settings are alike – they may take on a wide variety of shapes, styles, and uses from active to passive and from formal to informal. Active open space fosters social interaction and a sense of place among the residents. Passive open spaces can be enjoyed visually from a road or actively through nature walks or water activities.

## **Commercial Development**

It is also important for public and private developments to integrate quality design that recognizes the importance of 'human-scale.' The composition and context of community design elements such as pedestrian spaces, streetscapes, and landscaping, as well as other design consideration, play a critical role in defining quality community appearance.



When designing any development, it is important to remember good design does not interrupt the existing land uses or predominant character of the surrounding area – it complements it. To accomplish this, design elements must include a scale and mass that exhibit a proportional relationship between the built environment and the people who will live, work, and play in that setting.

The City has an obligation to ensure that the design of its public facilities and roadways complement the character of the surrounding community. The size and architectural choice of buildings, orientations of buildings, open spaces, streets, colors, landscape features, sidewalks, lighting, and other design considerations of public improvements must be composed in a manner that is harmonious and consistent with the land use goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

East Bethel encourages good site design, which maximizes safe pedestrian movement to the areas within the community, connecting parks, and places of interest through a local and regional system. The City supports community design alternatives that reduce crime, improve the attractiveness of the setting, and promote a sense of comfort and security to its residents and guests.

Understanding the physical opportunities and constraints of land and applying good planning and design principles are essential first steps in the process of developing property. The quality of a community's design is influenced by such factors as the existing characteristics of the physical site, the flexibility or lack of flexibility of development regulations, and the value and marketability of the site which affect investor financing and other decisions. Achieving quality community design begins with an understanding of the larger land planning goals of how the proposed development relates to the other land uses in the area. Once these goals are understood, decisions then focus on implementing more specific elements such as detailed site designs, structural improvements, and other issues.

Protecting scenic views and vistas, planting trees, landscaping parking lots, integrating amenities, and controlling signs not only improve the overall livability of communities, these elements are fundamentally important to their economic health. The City shall encourage and assist residents and businesses to pursue projects that will improve the environment, image, aesthetic quality, and consequently, marketability of their neighborhoods. There are many other ways to accomplish these objectives. Various examples include street tree planting, trail connections, waterway cleanup, street and alley cleanup, housing code enforcement and rehabilitation, traffic calming, and transit opportunities.

All development should incorporate environmentally sensitive design that protects the integrity of existing neighborhoods, complements adjacent land uses, incorporates crime prevention principles, and enhances the overall function and visual quality of the street, neighboring properties, and community. The creation of design guidelines provides assistance in creating a quality development. Those developments that promote quality design should be recognized.

## **Other Development**

Residential development should enhance the quality of life for residents by incorporating safe, innovative design that integrates planning elements such as connectivity, visually and functional open space, pedestrian networks, and landscaped streetscapes.

Non-residential development should incorporate solutions and design principles such as connectivity and consolidation while responding to adjacent residential development, improving the streetscape, and enhancing the experience and perception of employees and customers through appropriate scale and mass.

Industrial development should utilize appropriate design elements to avoid intrusive visual, noise, odor, and other potential impacts on adjacent uses. Such design should consider the link between function and aesthetic quality and contribute to the planning goal of achieving a quality physical environment.

## **Community Identity Goal and Policies**

### **Goal:**

*Implement controls that promote a positive community image and support quality of life and economic vitality.*

**Policies:**

1. Draft and implement land use controls that set minimum and/or desired standards for residential, commercial, and industrial development; include appropriate design elements to avoid intrusive visual, noise, odor, and other potential impacts on adjacent uses.
2. Pursue “city center” concept as a focal point of the community with a “sense of place.”
3. Capitalize on the rural characteristics and feel of the community – avoiding urban sprawl type development through the use of buffer areas, ghost platting, and other land use controls.
4. Develop a plan for the implementation and enforcement of housing maintenance codes.