

1.0 Introduction

Rice County is located in a transitional area between south-central and southeastern Minnesota, approximately 50 miles south of Minneapolis – St. Paul metropolitan area. The location has contributed to diverse land uses and development patterns. The County is predominately rural in nature with a total land area of roughly 496 square miles or 329,914 acres. Much of that land is used for the production of agricultural crops, in particular corn and soybeans, as well as livestock operations. The County’s cities are home to industry and education. Faribault has been known for woolen products, its garden and nursey industry and

Minnesota State Academies. Northfield is known for its two liberal arts colleges, St. Olaf College and Carleton College, and the Defeat of Jesse James.

“The board has the power and authority to prepare and adopt by ordinance, a comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan or plans when adopted by ordinance must be the basis for official controls adopted under the provisions and sections 394.21 to 394.37”

-MN Statue (Section 394.23)

1.1 Purpose of the Plan

The Rice County Comprehensive Plan (The Plan) is prepared to assist in the decision making to guide the growth and development through 2040 and beyond. It also represents

the goals and values of Rice County and provides the legal basis for updating Rice County ordinances. The first being the update of the Zoning Ordinance. It is understood that no plan can anticipate all the changes that will occur in that time frame so The Plan will need to be reviewed and amended from time to time. Action items will need review every one to two years to ensure implementation of the plan is on course.

1.2 Vision Statement

A vision statement provides strategic direction and describes what residents want the county to achieve in the future. A vision statement is a county’s road map, indicating both what the county wants to become and guiding transformational initiatives by setting a defined direction for the county’s growth. Vision statements undergo minimal revisions, unlike operational goals which may be updated from year-to-year. Vision statements also serve as the foundation for a broader strategic plan; motivate current and future residents by clearly categorizing the county’s goals; and focus efforts



and facilitate the creation of core competencies by directing the county to only focus on strategic opportunities that advance the county's vision.

The 2040 Vision is a long-range, big picture portrayal of our desired future. The vision was developed during multiple work sessions with the Steering Committee. Below is our 2040 Vision:

“As Rice County grows and evolves into the future, we will support and encourage orderly growth and a diverse economy that will continue to create jobs and a high quality of life for our citizens. We will aspire to maintain the small town feel of our cities and preserve our agricultural heritage.”

1.3 Fundamental Inventory Guide – Background Information

The Plan has been prepared in two documents, The Plan and the Fundamental Inventory Guide (FIG). The purpose of having separate documents is to maintain a more user-friendly, compact and interactive document. The FIG is an integral component of the Comprehensive Planning process. It provides extensive background information and data used in the development of The Plan. The following components are contained in the FIG: Agriculture, Community Facilities & Public Services, Demographics, History, Land Use, Natural Resources and Transportation. It is designed so that information and statistics can be updated more frequently than The Plan. The FIG can be found in Appendix A of this Plan and Online access to the FIG is available on the county website at: <http://www.co.rice.mn.us/482/Fundamental-Inventory-Guide-2040> . The FIG will be updated as new and additional information becomes available.

1.4 Planning Process

The process to prepare the 2040 Plan involved an ongoing exchange of information, analysis, and response between public officials, citizens, and County staff. The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee was comprised of Rice County Commissioners and members of the Planning Commission. Preparation of this Plan was organized into five phases:

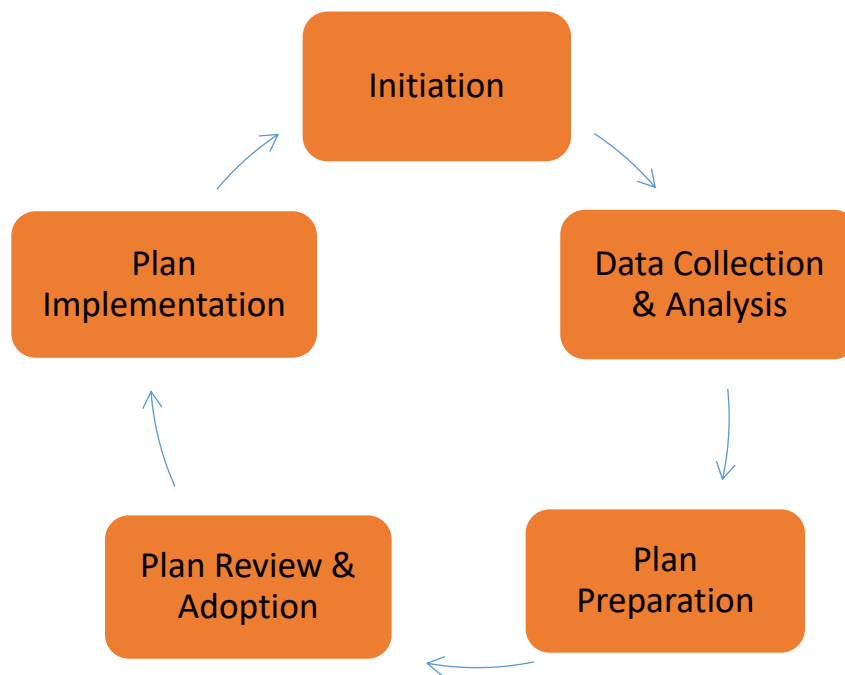
Phase 1: Initiation – This phase involved the formation of the steering committee, initial meetings of the steering committee to provide background information on existing plan and development of a public participation plan.

Phase 2: Data Collection & Analysis – This phase involved collection and analysis of data related to Rice County. Staff analyzed growth trends, community changes, and future projections. The FIG was updated and reorganized into an interactive document. Another objective of this stage was to increase public awareness and education. Various methods were used at this stage to improve awareness, including press releases, Rice County website, newsletter and factsheets. Presentations were made to community and local groups. This step also involved the creation and distribution of a citizen survey.

Phase 3: Plan Preparation – This phase constituted actual plan formation. It involved regular work sessions with the Steering Committee and meetings with city and township officials.

Phase 4: Plan Review & Adoption – This phase involved steering committee, local units of government and citizen review of the newly drafted Rice County Comprehensive Plan.

Phase 5: Plan Implementation – Following the adoption of the Rice County Comprehensive Plan staff will initiate implementation of the plan, focusing attention on updating all relevant land ordinances to be consistent with the new comprehensive plan.



1.5 Community Engagement

County residents were able to participate throughout the planning process in a variety of ways, including community forums, citizen survey, Steering Committee work sessions and public informational meetings.

Community Forums

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan update began with public outreach that included three community forums. Community members gathered in three different locations and were informed about the comprehensive planning process and participated in a series of small group discussions. A total of 99 attendees responded to four questions asked at each meeting.



Citizen Participation at community forum in Northfield.

Top themes from the forums are summarized in “Comprehensive Plan Public Forum Summary” that is included in Appendix B.

Citizen Survey

A citizen survey was also prepared to aid in developing The Plan goals and objectives. The survey was a way of soliciting public input on specific topics and issues. A press release was issued and contained a link to the online survey. Letters to each of the 14 township officials were also distributed. In addition, a paper copy of the survey was included within the County’s Newsletter that is dispersed to all mailing addresses in Rice County. In total, 1,326 residents and landowners in Rice County responded to the survey. The results are summarized in the report titled “Rice County Comprehensive Plan Survey Summary” that is included in Appendix C.

Steering Committee Work Sessions

Steering Committee work sessions were regularly held prior to Planning Commission meetings and/or during County Board of Commissioners Committee of Whole work sessions. County staff facilitated discussions on Plan elements to the Steering Committee. Meetings were open to the public.

Meetings with Cities, Townships and Other Interested Community Groups.

Rice County staff conducted numerous meetings throughout all phases of the plan process with staff from the various cities in Rice County, various townships and other interested community groups. These meetings were valuable in getting input on various components of The Plan.