



# 01. INTRODUCTION

*"Market Fest Le Sueur MN 2015"  
Photo submitted by:  
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## what we heard

**“ We fell in love with the people when introduced to the town**

Founded in 1852, Le Sueur is a small, agricultural community located in the middle of the beautiful Minnesota River Valley. With a population of just over 4,000, Le Sueur’s community is rich with history and small-town character, which act as the foundation of the City’s identity.

Le Sueur is surrounded by agricultural land. As Le Sueur has grown, some agricultural land has slowly been developed to add housing and commerce to the City.

Le Sueur’s residents enjoy easy access to Highway 169, connecting them to retail, entertainment, and employment opportunities in major cities like Mankato and Minneapolis. This adjacency works both ways, making Le Sueur a visible destination for visitors travelling along the major thoroughfare.

The Minnesota River, in addition to a multitude of other streams and tributaries, has carved out the beautiful landscape that surrounds the community, creating a sloping landscape that has preserved much of the City’s natural areas from cultivation or development.

The Le Sueur Comprehensive Plan seeks to highlight the community’s identity and core values in an effort to shape the decisions and actions that will be taken to preserve and enhance the character of the community.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VS. ZONING ORDINANCE

### Characteristics of a Comprehensive Plan:

- » Broad in scope
- » Visionary
- » Principles and Policy oriented
- » It's a guiding document
- » Conceptual and idealistic
- » Focus is on neighborhood, community or regional scale
- » Flexible in its interpretation

### Zoning Ordinance:

- » Narrow in scope
- » More rigid standards
- » It's the law
- » Detail oriented, specific
- » Focus on the district and site level

So which one rules? In many instances, State Statutes make direct references linking a zoning ordinance provision to a community's master plan. Case law over the years has proven that a zoning ordinance in sync with a comprehensive plan is a more defensible ordinance than one that is not in sync or is not based on an approved comprehensive plan.

A review of zoning and subdivision ordinances always follows the updated comprehensive plan, resulting in minor or major modifications, depending on the new directions forged by the comprehensive plan.

## A Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a statement of what the community wants to become. The plan is based on a composition of concepts, patterns and relationships that deal with integrating the social aspects of a community with its physical development. Unlike a zoning ordinance, a comprehensive plan is futuristic in that it guides decisions that have yet to be made. The word "comprehensive" in itself provides meaning to the plan: it deals with the whole community and not just the parts.

The Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint for the future of Le Sueur; guiding the use of every parcel of land (public and private) in the City.

However, land use is only the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. It creates implications for city investments in infrastructure, facilities and services.

Streets provide the capacity for land development and, in conjunction with sidewalks, trails and bike paths, for movement within Le Sueur. The character of streets and the volume of traffic affect adjacent land uses and the ability to move people. The Comprehensive Plan must balance the transportation and land use aspects of the street system. Consideration of "complete streets" can maximize the value and impact of streets on the community.

Development requires service by municipal sanitary sewer and water systems. Development can only occur within the capacity of the city's sewer and water system. The City seeks to provide a safe water supply at pressures needed to provide adequate fire protection.

Parks are an important component to the quality of life in Le Sueur. To meet the needs of the community, the types and location of parks need to be considered. A system of trails and sidewalks should allow people to move throughout the community on foot and bicycle, thus promoting an active and healthy lifestyle.

The pattern of development and the characteristics of the population influence the nature of public services.

All of these factors create financial implications. Land use creates the value used for property taxation - the primary source of revenue for the City. Many revenues used to build public improvements come directly from new development.

These factors make the process of updating the Comprehensive Plan critically important for Le Sueur.

## This Plan is a Guide & a Tool

The plan for Le Sueur will be used as a guide for making land use decisions, preparing and implementing ordinances, preparing capital improvement programs and influencing the rate, timing and location of future growth. All land use decisions faced by the City of Le Sueur will be determined using the goals and policies in this plan. While the City Council will ultimately determine the fate of any proposal, the Planning and Zoning Commission has the authority and responsibility to evaluate all such proposals for their consistency with the intent of the plan and the needs and desires of the people of Le Sueur.

## This Plan is Dynamic

While intended to guide change, this plan must also remain flexible to respond to changing needs, conditions and emerging trends. City officials must understand that they are responsible for the future of their community, and they must consider carefully the merits of adjustments to the plan. This is a critical step in the community development process; proposals need to be evaluated against the goals and vision laid out in this plan. Some proposals will fit well, while others may not. Regardless of their overall quality, any ideas that are good and worthy of further consideration could quite possibly lead to changes to the vision or the plan. These proposals will trigger the community planning process.

## Contents of the Plan

Le Sueur's Comprehensive Plan includes many components. Woven throughout the plan are goals and policies that promote active and healthy living, complete streets, sustainability, and energy conservation among others. Key elements that can be found in the plan include:

- » Community background and history
- » Vision and guiding principles
- » Natural resource management
- » Neighborhoods with a focus on land use, housing, commerce, economic development and infrastructure systems (parks, roads, schools and natural resources)
- » Focus areas that define the land use form and character of Le Sueur's unique areas
- » A system for parks and open space
- » A system for trails and sidewalks
- » A street network that emphasizes complete streets and community identity
- » Infrastructure systems that connect the development of neighborhoods with potable water, sanitary sewer and public services
- » Implementation action steps and project ideas

## Planning Horizon (2016-2040)

This update of the Comprehensive Plan looks to the year 2040. Considering a future over 20 years away forces the community to broadly consider issues and opportunities facing Le Sueur. Issues are easier to face before they become a problem. Opportunities can be capitalized upon early.

A Comprehensive Plan is not only about encouraging the right actions, but also preventing the wrong ones. A residential subdivision in the wrong place may block the expansion of a needed industrial area or the right-of-way for a critical road corridor. Looking into the future helps to prevent unintended consequences.

### KEY TERMINOLOGY

**Sustainability** refers to the ability to continue a defined behavior indefinitely. For example, environmental sustainability is the quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance.



# Engagement Strategies

Over the course of the planning process, a working group composed of key community members met to provide input and direction. In addition to the working group, two phases of stakeholder engagement were conducted in efforts to involve all residents and members of the community. The first phase was intended to guide the direction of the plan; providing an understanding of the community’s needs and desires. The second phase presented the direction to the public, to ensure their initial input was correctly interpreted, and to uncover any new or missing opportunities. Over the course of the project, over 700 points of contact were made with the community.

## Phase One

In efforts to engage as many interested community members as possible, several input methods were utilized during this phase, including:

- » An online survey in February of 2016, which received 548 responses.
- » A visit to the Le Sueur School District on February 9th, 2016, where 2 classrooms were engaged in engagement activities
- » A monopoly-style game that was played at a community open house on February 25th, 2016, as well as at various small-group meetings throughout the spring which collected well over 100 in-person responses



Throughout this phase, participants identified the small-town community, the school district, the hospital, and the location as characteristics they love about their City. Participants also identified what they would like to change about Le Sueur, which included the amount and diversity of retail and entertainment options, the configuration of Main Street and the Mall Site, and the opportunities available to youth.

## Phase Two

The second phase of engagement involved presenting and collecting input on a vision statement, a set of guiding principles, a land use framework, and a series of project ideas. These were established based on an extensive analysis of existing conditions, trends, and input from phase one. Engagement efforts during phase two included:

- » An online survey throughout the month of July, which received almost 100 responses
- » A community workshop on June 28th, 2016, and a follow-up focus group meeting with the Rotary Club



Key takeaways from this phase included ensuring that the vision and guiding principles are clear and forward-looking, considering the feasibility of project ideas in their prioritization, and much enthusiasm regarding the redevelopment of the City’s Main Street and Mall Site.