

Sherburne County

COMPREHENSIVE

LAND USE PLAN

ADOPTED 1992

SHERBURNE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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SHERBURNE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN
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Amended: November 9, 1996

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Through the Summer and Fall, the Task Force met monthly to review the information obtained and the problems presented and to refine the land use planning issues. The Task Force studied the regulations and practices of other counties and heard from representatives of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Soil Conservation Service.

During the Winter months of 1991-1992, the Task Force debated land use goals, objectives and policies and prepared a plan map that reflected the needs of our citizens. The fruits of that labor are contained in this book.

The preliminary plan will be discussed in public meetings in each Township, and the Task Force will hear comments and refine the draft plan before presenting another draft to the County Board of Commissioners for their consideration in a public hearing.

If adopted, the Sherburne County Land Use Plan will be the basis for amending the County Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map, which regulate land development in the townships. The Task Force will continue to be involved in that process during 1992.

MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE

As the Task Force reviewed conditions, studied the experiences of other similar counties and surveyed public opinions, several factors emerged that strongly shaped the Land Use Plan.

Preserve Important Farmland. The first factor was a recognition of the importance of preserving for farming those areas that have highly productive agricultural soils. The members understood that these soils are an irreplaceable resource upon which the future of our county, state and the world may depend.

Keep Taxes Reasonable. The second element was the fact that many counties and townships in other locations have not been able to afford the many costs that accompany widespread development of houses on lots in areas that are not prepared for development.

Many studies, including one conducted in 1989 for Wright County by a public financial analyst, bear this out. A carefully drawn land use plan would allow the County and the townships to make the most efficient and economical use of public funds and investments.

Promote Good-Quality Economic Development. Another major consideration was the importance of promoting good-quality commercial and industrial development. It was acknowledged that the cities were the best places to accomplish this as they are prepared to offer the public services that businesses require. To guide businesses to the rural area would work against farmland preservation and would involve, in most cases, more public cost than benefit. Strong and healthy cities were seen as a key to economic development, so a parallel aim was to ensure that the cities could gradually grow in harmony with the townships.

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Other Considerations. Other considerations by the Task Force included protecting water quality, preserving rural scenic character, protecting wildlife, and perpetuating the rural social environment and township and city fiscal health.

The goals, objectives and policies of the Land Use Plan, along with the Land Use Plan Map, are a reflection of these major considerations.

* The percentage of county residents living within the townships (not in the six cities) has decreased from 55 percent in 1970 to 47 percent in 1990.

**TABLE 1
SHERBURNE COUNTY POPULATION: 1970 - 1990**

Zone	L.V. P/kh	1970-80			1980-90		2000
		1970	1980	Change	1990	Change	
✓ Sherburne County	12961	18,344	29,906	63%	41,945	63182 40%	
✓ Elk River, City	↓	2,179	6,785	211%	11,143	64% 41170	16447
✓ St. Cloud, City	US Census 1995	3,918	4,421	13%	5,246	19%	5982
✓ Big Lake, City		1,015	2,210	118%	3,113	41% 20770	6063
✓ Zimmerman, City		495	1,074	117%	1,350	26% 17370	2851
✓ Becker, City		365	601	65%	902	50%	2673
✓ Clear Lake, City		280	266	-5%	315	18%	266
Baldwin Twp.		1,099	2,412	119%	2,909	21%	
Becker Twp.		799	1,341	68%	2,336	74%	
Big Lake Twp.		1,708	2,679	57%	4,452	66%	
Blue Hill Twp.		495	678	37%	763	12%	
Clear Lake Twp.		612	1,048	71%	1,225	17%	
Haven Twp.		1,049	1,603	53%	1,921	20%	
Livonia Twp.		705	1,629	131%	2,288	40%	
Orrock Twp.		502	1,140	127%	1,474	29%	
Palmer Twp.		663	1,362	105%	1,717	26%	
Santiago Twp.		541	657	21%	789	20%	
		8143	14549	78%	4170	96.9	

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Sources: State Demographer's Office, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.

Note: Elk River annexed Elk River Township January 1, 1978.

Minerals

In addition to deposits of sand and gravel along the Mississippi River Valley (Sand & Gravel area of Figure 2) referred to before, there are other minerals present in Sherburne County. Near St. Cloud there are deposits of granite and other rock products of significant value including crushed rock, aggregates, riprap, and dimensional stone. The eastern portion of the county (Gravel area of Figure 2) has some potential for some industrial minerals such as lead and zinc, in addition to the gravel mined in this area. The area identified as part of the Anoka Sand Plain (Wind-Blown Sand area of Figure 2) is made up of very fine sands that are of little value as an aggregate resource.

Rivers, Lakes and Wetlands

Wetlands are found throughout the county. These wetlands are protected by county, state and federal regulations that require special site-by-site review when any type of development is considered. Surface water (lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and drainage ditches) and the presence of a high water table in many areas create additional constraints on development.

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The Mississippi River forms the entire southern border of Sherburne County (see Figure 2). The Mississippi-Sauk Watershed drains 90 percent of the County and includes the Elk and St. Francis Rivers and Rice Creek. The Rum River and watershed drain the extreme eastern 10 percent of the County. The Mississippi and Rum Rivers are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District.

There are 168 lakes of 10 acres or more in size located within the county. This represents more than 11,443 acres, or about four percent of the county's total land area. In addition to the lakes, there are many acres of wetlands in the county (Major wetlands are identified on Figure 2). A considerable portion of the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge contains lakes and wetlands; however, lakes and wetlands occur throughout the most of the county.

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Shoreland Regulations, from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, are enforced on lakes greater than 10 acres within incorporated areas and on lakes greater than 25 acres within the County and on rivers. Private man-made bodies of water can be exempt from these regulations. The Sherburne

County Comprehensive Water Management Plan will cover all aspects of the hydrology of the county, including ground water and surface water.

Woodlands

There are woodlands scattered throughout most of the Sherburne County, except large areas (Non-Wooded area of Figure 2) along the Mississippi River and Highway 10. Woodlands represent about 55,400 or 19 percent of the total land within the county. Large tracts of land were planted with trees in the 1940's to reduce soil erosion, establishing the Sand Dunes State Forest. Many acres of Christmas trees can also be found in the county.

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Natural Areas and Preserves

Approximately 43 percent of the county is open land (not farmed) and contains dispersed rural residences. This land is covered by scattered woodlands, wetlands, lakes, and other natural areas. Development in these areas must address various issues, including the preservation of wildlife habitat, other natural areas, and water quality. Designated areas such as the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and the Sand Dunes State Forest occupy over 12 percent of the county and are not available for development.

Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge

The Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (see Figure 3) contains 30,600 acres with 12,500 acres of that total classified as wetlands. This Refuge is part of the national system along the Central and Mississippi Flyways, with the primary purpose of providing habitat for ducks, other waterfowl, and upland game.

Sand Dunes State Forest

The Sand Dunes State Forest, located adjacent to the southern boundary of the Wildlife Refuge (see Figure 3), includes 5,500 acres. This area was once intensively farmed until it would no longer support an agricultural crop. The Sand Dunes State Forest was established in 1943 for the purpose of soil stabilization by the planting of trees. The result is over 3,500 acres of artificially regenerated forest. The land has been purchased through voluntary sales, unlike the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. Future acquisitions of land within the Forest boundaries are planned. The DNR would like to prevent residential encroachment on land they have designated for acquisition.

The area is open to the public for various recreational uses including hunting, trapping, hiking, snowmobiling, and cross country skiing. In addition, the forest is managed for wood production.

Agriculture

Approximately 81 percent of Sherburne County can be characterized as being open land, farmland, or in a natural state (undeveloped). This land defines Sherburne County's image and perhaps the most important reason people are attracted to the county. The importance placed on the preservation of farmlands and/or the rural character of the county will be a major influence on the land use plan and policies.

In 1940 there were 248,080 acres in farmland in Sherburne County. As of 1991, the amount of farmland in the County was 73,700 acres, or 26 percent of the County. Of that 73,700 acres of farmland, approximately 34,360 acres (47 percent) are irrigated. According to the Soil Conservation Service, only 7,600 acres (10 percent) within the County are considered "prime" farmland, as defined by Crop Equivalency Ratings (CER's). The soil productivity of Sherburne County ranks 73rd out of 87 counties (1st being best) in Minnesota. Additionally, farmland of State Importance is 1,750 acres. This is land that has limitations, such as steep slope, wetness or droughtiness, which need to be overcome with more comprehensive application of soil and water conservation. Crop production figures for 1991 are shown in Table 2.

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Land Use Distribution

In the analysis of land use in Sherburne County, land uses were mapped (see Figure 3) into the following categories: municipalities, rural subdivisions, business, industrial, wildlife refuge (includes state forest), and agricultural (includes open land). The approximate acreage of each land use category are listed in Table 3. Over 69 percent of Sherburne County is farmland (73,700 acres) and open land (122,530 acres).

TABLE 3
SHERBURNE COUNTY LAND USE DISTRIBUTION, 1991

Land Use	Acres	% of total
Incorporated Areas	39,990	13.5
Residential	14,440	5.0
Commercial	750	0.3
Industrial	490	0.2
Wildlife Refuge/State Forest	34,100	12.0
Farmland	73,700	26.0
Open, not farmed	122,530	43.0
Total County	286,000	



Source: BRW, Inc. 1991.

Incorporated Areas

The six incorporated areas within Sherburne County occupy approximately 39,990 acres or 14 percent of the total area. The approximate acreage of each city's corporate limits are summarized in Table 4. As stated earlier, the City of Elk River occupies an entire township which makes it considerably larger in land area and population than the other cities of the county. In 1990, the total population of these six cities (22,069) represented approximately 53 percent of the total population of Sherburne County, an increase from 45 percent in 1970 and 51 percent in 1980.

**TABLE 4
LAND AREA - CITIES OF SHERBURNE COUNTY**

City	Acres
Elk River	27,910
Becker	6,350
Big Lake	1,820
St. Cloud	1,530
Zimmerman	1,430
Clear Lake	560
Princeton	390

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Source: BRW, Inc.

Rural Subdivisions

As shown by Figure 3, there are many rural subdivisions, some being seasonal homes, throughout the county. These residential areas within the townships cover approximately 14,440 acres. The amount of land in each subdivision category are listed in Table 5. Other residential uses include mobile home parks near Princeton and Clearwater and several campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks.