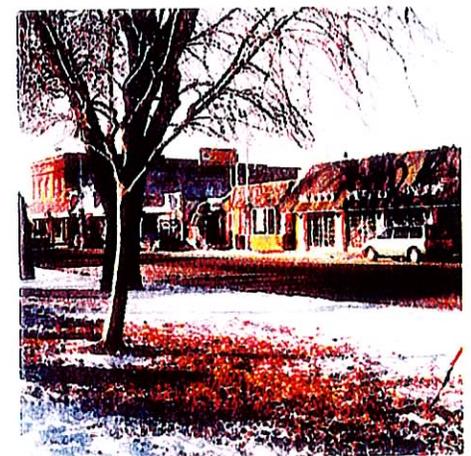
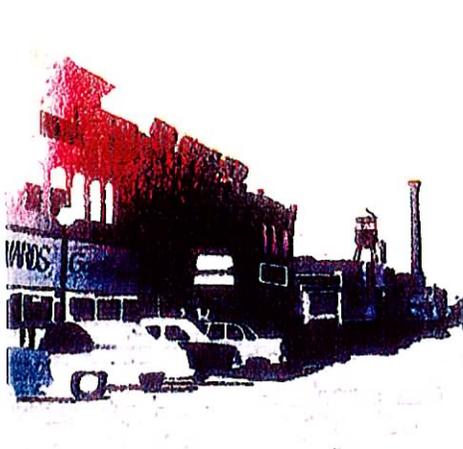
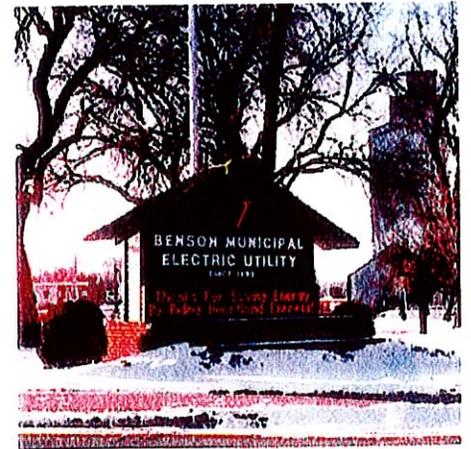
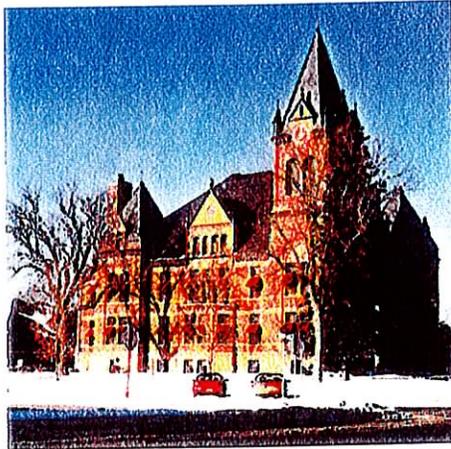
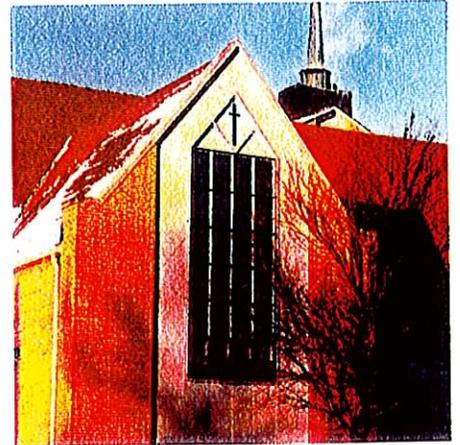

City of Benson Comprehensive Plan 2000



A GUIDE TO BENSON'S FUTURE

A Vision for Benson's Future

Benson is a good community to live and work in. We cherish its small town atmosphere. It's a friendly community - one where people know and respect each other. It's a safe, quiet, and peaceful community. We are proud of our schools, churches, parks and community events. These are the qualities of Benson that we value and want to carry forward into the future.

We want Benson to grow, but we believe that growth should enhance the small town character of Benson rather than detract from it. We want Benson to have an attractive and strong central business district - one that meets our shopping needs and respects the viability of small, locally owned businesses. We will strive to diversify our industries and embrace technologies that will provide Benson with strong economic growth and good paying jobs. We want to refine our transportation system to be safe and efficient for pedestrians and vehicles.

In short, we like Benson. As we move forward, we will be proactive in preserving and enhancing the qualities of Benson that we value.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Overview	1-1	6 Community Facilities and Services	6-1
Purpose of the Plan	1-1	Introduction	6-1
Use of the Plan	1-1	Inventory and Analysis	6-1
Planning Process	1-1	Goals and Policies	6-3
2 Community Background	2-1	Community Facilities Plan	6-4
Introduction	2-1	7 Park System Plan	7-1
History	2-1	Introduction	7-1
Regional Context	2-1	Inventory and Analysis	7-1
Natural Features	2-3	Goals and Policies	7-4
Demographics	2-5	Park System Plan	7-5
Community Survey	2-7	8 Utilities	8-1
A Vision for Benson's Future	2-9	Introduction	8-1
3 Land Use	3-1	Inventory and Analysis	8-1
Introduction	3-1	Goals and Policies	8-1
Inventory and Analysis	3-1	9 Implementation	9-1
Goals and Policies	3-7	Introduction	9-1
Land Use Plan	3-13	Goals and Policies	9-1
4 Housing	4-1	Implementation Tools	9-2
Introduction	4-1	Priorities and Indicators	9-4
Inventory and Analysis	4-1	Vision	9-5
Goals and Policies	4-3		
Housing Plan	4-4		
5 Transportation	5-1		
Introduction	5-1		
Inventory and Analysis	5-1		
Goals and Policies	5-5		
Transportation Plan	5-8		

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Benson's Comprehensive Plan is a vision of what the City wants to be. It is a guide to help the City preserve what they value and to enhance what they feel should be improved. More specifically, the Plan serves the following purposes:

1. It addresses physical planning issues such as land use, transportation, housing, public facilities, and parks and open spaces. Yet it also considers social and economic issues.
2. It ties together various components of the City (land use, transportation, parks, etc.) into one "comprehensive" plan that reflects the interrelationships between these components.
3. It expresses a long range vision that can serve the City through the year 2020. Yet it also provides specific recommendations that address current issues.
4. It identifies key issues, sets goals, develops policies for achieving the goals, and describes actions needed to implement the policies. This provides the legal basis for land use control and it provides a link to the City's ordinances which, by law, must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
5. It guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and private developers in decisions related to preservation and development in the city.

USE OF THE PLAN

Several parties will find this plan useful:

1. City staff and government will use the plan to assist them with a variety of tasks including:
 - development and infrastructure decisions

- acquisition and use of public land
 - budgeting capital improvements
 - annexation issues
 - establishing regulatory changes
 - communicating to the public Benson's vision for its future
2. Property owners and residents will use the plan to assist them with tasks such as:
 - determining potential property use
 - understanding possible land use changes in the surrounding area
 - establishing reasonable land value
 - understanding future infrastructure improvements
 - making property improvements
 3. Developers will use the plan as a basis for:
 - property acquisition
 - establishing reasonable land value
 - coordinating development plans with City infrastructure plans

PLANNING PROCESS

The City began the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan in early 1999. They organized a Comprehensive Plan Task Force to work with a planning consultant on development of the Plan. The task force included representatives from City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, Benson residents, and Swift County residents.

Throughout the planning process, the City encouraged community input into the development of the Plan. They mailed surveys to all city and surrounding area households. They also distributed surveys to high school students. Over 700 people completed and returned the survey.

The City and Comprehensive Plan Task Force held a public open house on December 12, 1999 to receive comments on draft goals, policies, and sketch plans. Based in part on public input at the open house, the Plan was revised and refined. A draft Comprehensive Plan was prepared and presented for task force approval on May 23, 2000. The Planning Commission held a public hearing in June of 2000 to review and recommend approval of the Plan. The City Council reviewed and adopted the Plan in July of 2000.

CHAPTER 2: COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly describes the history of Benson, its regional context, natural features, and people. This overview provides insight into how Benson developed and how it may develop in the future.

HISTORY

Prior to the mid 1800s, the area that we now know as Benson was part of what appeared to be an endless prairie. The Chippewa and Sioux were the primary residents in the area, but by the early 1860s, settlers from the east began living in the area.

In 1870, the Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad Company prepared a plat for the City of Benson and they extended their railroad from Willmar to Benson. Because the railroad did not construct additional tracks for over a year, Benson was, for a while, the "end of the line." As such it became a regional center serving the needs of people within a 100-mile area to the north, west, and south. It also became a starting point for the Red River cart trails that carried goods and people farther west. By 1875, Benson had a population of 300 people and it had four general stores, two drug stores, two machinery houses, three hotels, one bank, and two saloons.

The railroad's original plat for the city included a town square and commercial development just north of the railroad track at the present day site of the Swift County Courthouse. But because of the importance of the railroad, most commercial development occurred along both sides of the railroad track rather than around the platted town square. In essence, the 250 foot-wide railroad right of way evolved into Benson's town square with the railroad taking center stage.

Over the years, trucks and automobiles became an

important mode of transportation. As a result, commercial and industrial uses began to develop along the highway system - particularly just east of the city on Highway 12. Many of the industrial and commercial uses that developed related to the agricultural base of the area.

Although Benson has grown and changed since the 1870s, it has also remained the same in many ways. Benson's economy is still strongly tied to agriculture. And the railroad and highway system continue to have a strong presence in the community. But perhaps most important, Benson continues to be a regional center that provides goods and services to the surrounding area.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Benson is located in Swift County in western Minnesota. It is approximately 120 miles northwest of Minneapolis, 30 miles northwest of Willmar, and 75 miles southwest of Saint Cloud (see Figure 2-1: Location Map).

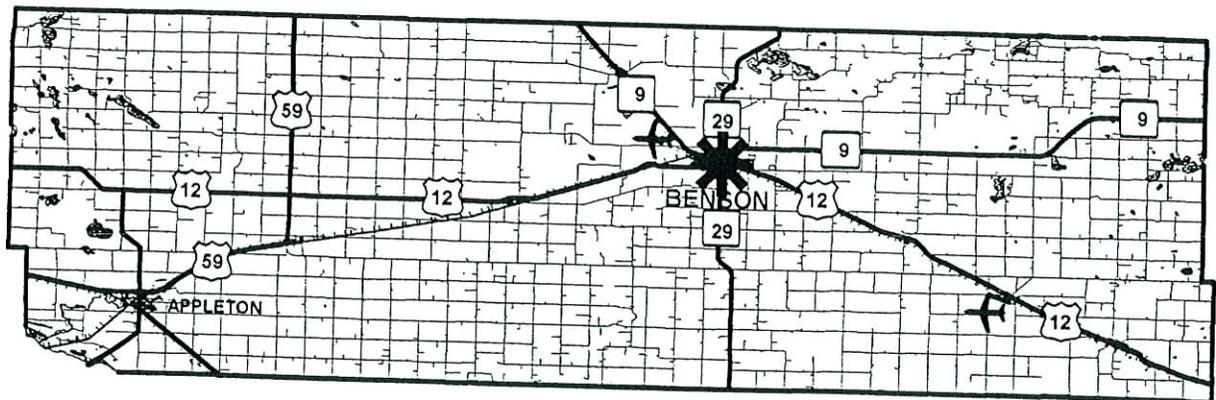
Benson is well served and easily accessed by several major highways, a railroad, and an airport. U.S. Highway 12 provides direct access between Willmar and Benson (roughly 30 minutes travel time) and Minneapolis and Benson (roughly two hours travel time). Morris is accessed by State Highway 9 and is roughly 30 minutes travel time from Benson. The Burlington Northern Railroad passes through the center of the city and provides an opportunity for Benson industries to transport grain and other freight by rail. The Benson Municipal Airport, located one mile out of town, has a 4,000 foot paved and lighted runway. The airport provides an important link to the broader region. Benson's transportation system is described in more detail in Chapter 5: Transportation System.

Benson is in the Upper Minnesota Valley Development Region. This is a rural, agriculture region that includes the counties of Swift, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, Lac Qui Parle, and Big Stone. From 2000 to 2025, this region is expected to lose over 7,000 residents or roughly 15% of the existing population. Much of this expected loss is based on agriculture related issues - specifically, the belief that farm consolidation will continue to occur.

Unlike the surrounding region, Benson's population will likely increase over the same time period. This is partly because Benson is an significant regional



LOCATION WITHIN STATE



LOCATION WITHIN SWIFT COUNTY

Figure 2-1: Location Maps

center. In addition to serving as the County Seat, Benson has a hospital, schools, stores, and industries that serve an area much greater than the City itself.

Although much of the surrounding area is rural farmland, the Benson area also provides many opportunities for recreation - particularly hunting, fishing, and camping. Five state parks exist within roughly 30 miles of Benson: Sibley, Lac Qui Parle, Monson Lake, Big Stone Lake, and Glacial Lake. Many Wildlife Management Areas, glacial hills, and lakes provide additional opportunities for hunting and fishing. These recreational opportunities are a strong asset to Benson and the region.

NATURAL FEATURES

This section provides a brief overview of the natural features that have shaped, and will continue to shape, development in Benson and the surrounding area.

WATER FEATURES

Figure 2-2: Natural Features, shows wetlands, the river, and the perceived floodplain in Benson.

The wetlands shown are based on National Wetland Inventory Maps that were prepared from aerial photography flown in 1980. Most of the wetlands are "palustrine" wetlands which means they are shallow, freshwater wetlands that are usually vegetated. Pursuant to the Minnesota Wetland Act (1991), all wetlands are protected by state, federal, or local government regulations and requirements, but permitting procedures may allow some modifications of existing wetlands. Because most of these wetlands have not been field delineated, refer to this map for general planning purposes only.

The East Branch of the Chippewa River joins the main branch of the Chippewa River at the municipal golf course in northern Benson. The river then runs from north to south through Benson and eventually to the Minnesota River. Prior to 1950, the meandering river frequently flooded. During the 1950s, however, the river was channelized to reduce the possibility of flooding. After the channelization project was constructed, the threat of flooding was thought to be virtually eliminated and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) classified Benson as "having no special flood hazard". However, in 1997, substantial flooding occurred within the city limits. Although the floodplain has not been officially delineated, a perceived floodplain (based on

community recollection of the 1997 flood) is shown on Figure 2-2: Natural Features. The City should, however, seek to provide a more accurate delineation of its floodplain.

The Chippewa River is a valuable recreational resource for the community. The water quality of the river is important to Benson and other communities along the river. The streams and drainage ditches that drain to the river are significant, in part, because they contribute to the water quality of the river.

The Chippewa River also defines the western edge of development in Benson. Although the city limits extend farther west than the river, extension of City sewer past the river would be difficult.

VEGETATION

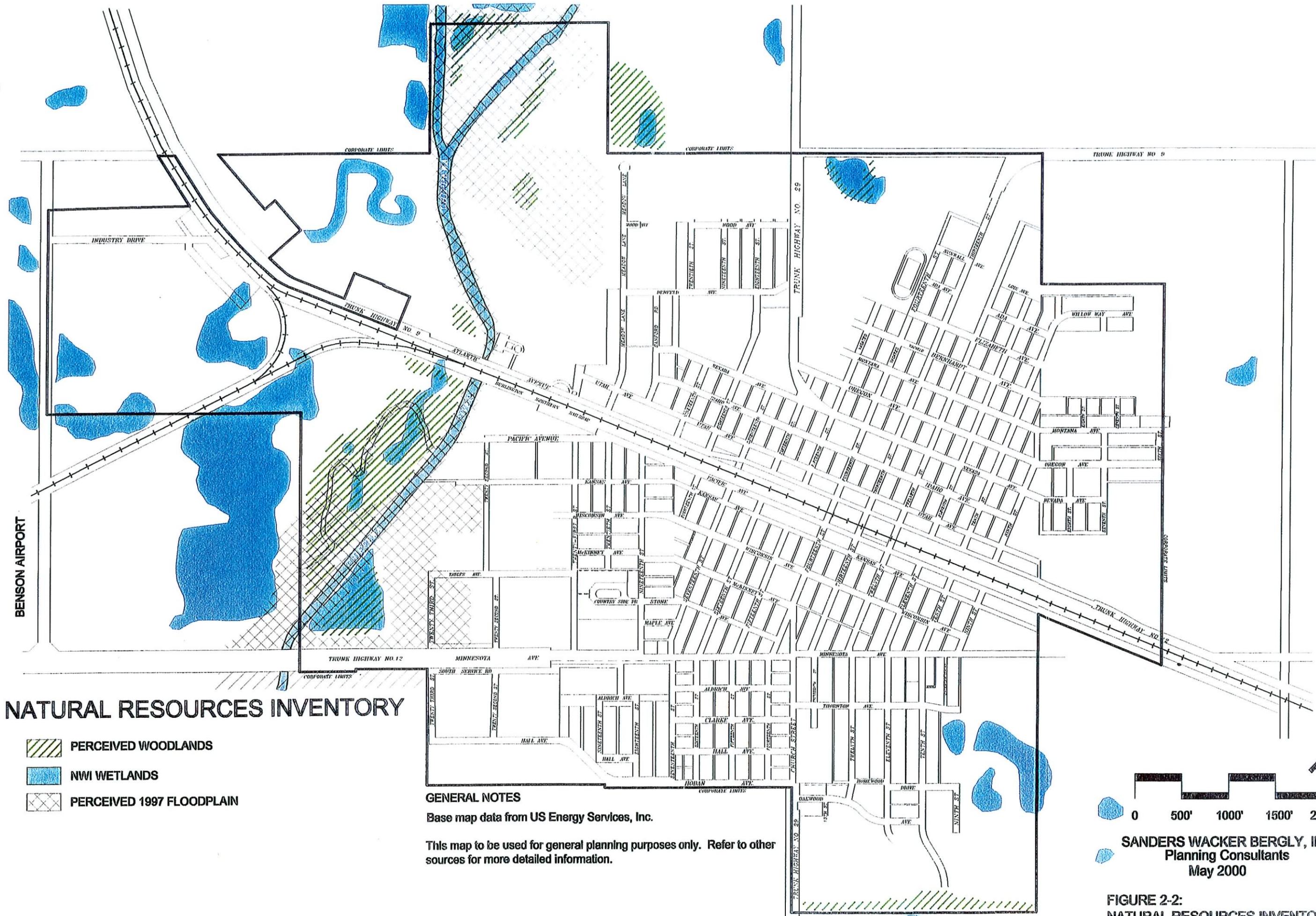
Pre-settlement vegetation in the Benson area consisted primarily of wetland vegetation and tall grass prairie. Wooded areas were found along rivers and streams.

Most, if not all, of the native prairies in the Benson area have been converted to cropland, grazing land, or urban development. Some wetlands have been drained - others remain. The wooded areas have likely grown since the 1850s, but are still found primarily along the waterways.

Most larger masses of vegetation coincide with the area's floodplain and wetlands. Plants typically found in these large masses include grasses (sedges, rushes and various other marsh plants), shrubs (dogwoods, alders, buttonbush, swamp-privet) and trees (cottonwoods, ash, and willows). Major areas of tree cover are shown in Figure 2-2: Natural Features.

SOILS

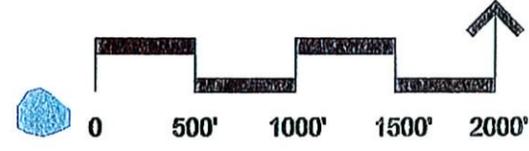
The Soil Survey of Swift County (1973), classifies the soils in Benson as belonging to the Arveson-Marysland-Hecla Association. This association is defined as "level, poorly drained, medium-textured soils that are shallow and moderately deep to sand and gravel; and deep, nearly level, moderately well drained, coarse textured soils". Throughout the City and the surrounding area, the wetlands and high water table associated with these soils place limitations on septic systems, road, and building development. The soil survey does not identify prime agriculture land within a one mile radius of Benson.



NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

-  PERCEIVED WOODLANDS
-  NWI WETLANDS
-  PERCEIVED 1997 FLOODPLAIN

GENERAL NOTES
 Base map data from US Energy Services, Inc.
 This map to be used for general planning purposes only. Refer to other sources for more detailed information.



SANDERS WACKER BERGLY, INC.
 Planning Consultants
 May 2000

FIGURE 2-2:
 NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

TOPOGRAPHY

Benson is located in a large, nearly level basin. About 8,000 years ago, the area was covered by glacial ice. As the ice receded, melt water and alluvial deposits washed into the basin where the deposits remain today. The basin drains slightly to the southwest and eventually into the Minnesota River. The only areas that contain steep slopes are relatively narrow strips of land along the streams and riverbanks. The nearly level topography found in Benson is perhaps more problematic to future development than the few steep slopes that exist in the city. Although development is possible on these nearly level areas, the development may require additional fill and earthwork to ensure positive drainage.

DEMOGRAPHICS

This section shows how the population of Benson has changed over the years and how the population will likely change in coming years. Planning implications are discussed throughout this Comprehensive Plan.

POPULATION CHANGE FROM 1960 TO 1990

Every ten years the federal government conducts a census of the United States population. The census provides reasonably accurate information about the number of people living in a particular area at the time of the census.

The census shows that from 1960 to 1990....

- the population of Benson decreased from 3,678 to 3,235 (-12%),
- the population of Swift County decreased from 14,936 to 10,724 (-28%), and
- Benson's share of Swift County's population increased from 25% to 30%

Much of the population loss during this period is attributed to agriculture related issues. Farm consolidation, changes in farming practices, and a changing farm economy, meant fewer people were needed to farm the land. Some who worked in agriculture left the area for other employment opportunities. Young adults, in particular, moved out of the area.

However, Benson, as a regional center, did not lose population to the same degree that Swift County did. Indeed, some people who moved out of the surrounding rural area moved to Benson for

employment or retirement. Nevertheless, when a significant loss in a sector of the population occurs, it has a detrimental effect on the remaining population. With fewer people in the area, there was less need for the same number of stores, restaurants, and the like. Thus, from 1960 to 1990, the population loss in the rural area surrounding Benson contributed to Benson's population loss.

1998 POPULATION ESTIMATES

In between the years the census is conducted, federal and state governments (and sometimes local governments and private businesses) provide population estimates. They base these estimates in part on building permits, school enrollments, retail sales, and the like.

The Minnesota State Demographic Office estimated that Benson's population in 1998 was 3,316. This is a decrease of 11% over the 1980 population of 3,635, but it is an increase of 2.5% over the 1990 population of 3,235. Easy Analytic Software, Inc. (a private company that specializes in population projections) estimated that Benson's population in 1998 was roughly 3,476. This is an increase of 6.9% over the 1990 population.

As described above, population estimates for the same region are often different depending on who prepares the estimate and what assumptions they base their estimate on. However, it appears that Benson's population has increased in recent years, rather than decreased.

Recent population growth can be attributed to many factors including:

- an improvement in the economy as a whole,
- an improvement in the farm economy (although there are recent signs that the farm economy may be slowing - especially for small, family farms), and
- an increase in people moving to Benson to retire or to start new jobs

Benson's potential for future population growth is discussed below.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population projections are powerful planning tools when used properly. They are based on many factors including assumptions for future birth rates, death rates, migration, and economic conditions.

Assumptions are based on past trends and the best information available at the time - but assumptions do not always hold true. Unexpected changes can occur - for example, existing industries may close or they may choose to expand. In a small community, these changes can have a major impact on the population. Therefore, small communities like Benson should use population projections as a general guide - not an absolute - and they should periodically review and update their projections based on new conditions.

Projections from the State Demographic Center suggest that *Swift County's* population will fluctuate slightly over time, but that it will remain fairly stable at least until 2025. The state's 1997 population estimate for Swift County is roughly 11,159. Their population projection for Swift County in the year 2025 is 11,010. Based on these findings, and assuming that recent trends will continue, one can speculate that Benson's population will also remain fairly stable at least until 2025.

Easy Analytic Software, Inc. (a private company that specializes in five year population projections) projects Benson's population will be at 3,538 in the year 2003. This is an increase of 1.8% over their 1998 population estimate of 3,476. Another way of looking at this projection is that Benson's population will increase by roughly 12 people a year for five years.

If recent trends continue, Benson will likely grow at a moderate pace (perhaps 1 to 2%) over the next five years. In comparison, the State of Minnesota expects to grow at a rate of roughly 3% over the same period.

Again, it is important to realize that the accuracy of population projections depends on the accuracy of assumptions used. If conditions dramatically change, for example, an industry leaves or moves into the area, these projections should be reevaluated.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Not only is it important to know how many people live in a community, it is also important to know key characteristics of those people - for example, their age, education, and employment. This helps communities plan for facilities and land uses that respond to the needs of the people in the community.

AGE. Several age groups have a significant effect on the future of Benson: those under age 18, those between the ages of 25 and 54, and those over 65.

The number of people under 18 will fluctuate over the years, but overall, this age group will likely not increase and may, in fact, decrease at least until 2020. There are two major reasons for this. First, the "baby bust" generation (those born in the 60s and 70s) are entering their prime childbearing years. Since there are fewer people in this "baby bust" group than the generation before, it follows that there will be fewer children born. Second, people today are having fewer children than people of the previous generation. So unless Benson attracts younger families from other areas, the number of children in Benson may decrease over the years.

People between the ages of 25 and 54 are at their prime working age. Most of the people that are currently in this age group were born during the "baby boom" era and therefore represent a relatively large percentage of Benson's population. However, the "baby bust" generation is moving into this age group, so the size of the 25 to 54 age group will begin to stabilize and perhaps decline. This is significant, because if Benson is to attract additional industry, the City will also need to attract additional people in this age group to fill the jobs created by new industry.

The over 65 age group is also important to the future of Benson. As life expectancy continues to increase, the number of people in this age group will also continue to increase. Currently, Benson has a fairly large percentage of elderly people, but this will likely begin to change. From 2000 to 2010 or so, the population of this age group may begin to decline in Benson. This is because starting in the 1960s and 1970s, many of the younger people born and raised in rural areas - including Benson - moved to metropolitan areas. Therefore, the metropolitan areas will see a dramatic rise in the elderly population, but Benson may actually see a decrease in this population group. However, if the "baby boomers" who now live in Benson also retire in Benson, this population group will begin to increase again after 2015 or so.

HOUSEHOLDS. In 1990, there were 1,485 households in Benson and 887 families. Nearly 90% of the families involved married couples and roughly two-thirds of the married couples had children under the age of 18 living with them. While married couples with children will continue to be the predominate household type, a shift is gradually occurring. In the future, there will be a larger percentage of married couples who will not have children living with them. There will also be more households with children that will have only one parent in the household. More households will involve a single person living alone or

sharing a dwelling unit with other single, unrelated people.

The median household size in 1990 was roughly 2.2 persons per household. Given the trend for more single person households and smaller family sizes it follows that household size will also decrease. Therefore, assuming that Benson's population will continue to grow at a moderate pace and household size will continue to decrease, Benson will need to plan accordingly to allow for development of an adequate amount and variety of housing.

RACE AND ORIGIN. Over 85% of Benson residents were born in Minnesota. Most are of Norwegian or German ancestry. Over 99% of the residents are white and speak English well. Although these statistics may change only slightly over the next 20 years, if Benson is to attract new industry it will also need to attract new residents. Therefore, Benson will gradually become more diverse.

EDUCATION. Nearly 60% of Benson residents over 25 years old have a high school graduate degree - nearly 10% have a college degree. In recent years there has been a dramatic rise in high school students that go onto college or vocational school. However, the general trend in most rural communities is that young people with college degrees usually leave rural areas and move to metropolitan areas. So even though the population is becoming more "educated", the challenge for rural communities like Benson is to entice younger people to return or move to their communities.

EMPLOYMENT. The Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development identifies the following major employers in the Benson area:

<u>Employer</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Employees</u>
Tyler	Farm Equipment	300
School District	Education	191
Lor-AL	Farm Equipment	155
Custom Ag	Farm Equipment	120
Future Products	Knit Outerwear	112
Benson Hospital	Hospital	98
Meadow Lane	Healthcare	94
Lorenz	Farm Equipment	35
Ethanol Plant	Chemicals	28

The Bureau of Labor Statistics breaks down the workforce in Swift County by the following sectors:

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Pct of Total Employment</u>
Government	22.7%

Manufacturing	13.3%
Retail Trade	12.7%
Services	9.5%
Wholesale Trade	5.2%
Finance/Real Estate	2.9%
Transportation/Utilities	2.8%
Construction	2.1%
Agriculture	Unknown
Mining	Unknown

As the County Seat, Benson has a relatively large percentage of its workforce employed by the government. People from federal, state, county, and city government live and work in Benson. Most of the manufacturing in and around Benson is related to agricultural products. Tyler, Lor-Al, Custom-Ag, and Lorenz are major employers of agricultural products. As a regional center, Benson's retail and service industries cater to an area much greater than the city itself - this is reflected in the number of people employed in these sectors.

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Population projections are powerful planning tools, but their accuracy is dependent on many assumptions that may or may not come true. Therefore, Benson should use the population information in this Comprehensive Plan as a general guide and not an absolute. With this in mind, we can expect that Benson's population will likely grow at a pace of 1-2% for at least the next five years and possibly for the next 20 years. The median age will continue to increase. If Benson is to maintain population growth and attract additional industry, the City will need to encourage young people to stay in the community and the City will need to entice more people between the ages of 25 and 54 to move to Benson. Planning implications related to demographic characteristics are discussed in more detail throughout this Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

As part of the planning process for development of the Comprehensive Plan, the City surveyed residents of Benson and the surrounding area. The following provides a brief overview of the survey results. Pertinent survey results are discussed in more detail throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Refer to Appendix A for a detailed summary of the survey.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The City distributed surveys to roughly 1,450 households in Benson, 350 households in the surrounding townships, and roughly 200 students at the Benson High School. The survey was also printed in the local newspaper.

The City received 712 completed surveys. Respondents represent a broad cross section of the community:

- 81% are Benson residents
- 19% are township residents
- 58% work in Benson
- 20% are under 19 years old
- 10% are 19-34 years old
- 30% are 35-55 years old
- 12% are 55-65 years old
- 28% are over 65 years old

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Of the various issues discussed in the survey, transportation issues appear to be a significant concern of people. People feel the railroad is a major inconvenience and a hazard. They also feel that traffic management, in general, should be improved. The younger respondents indicated that they would like to see more parking in the downtown area.

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

Overall, people indicated that they believe Benson has adequate recreation and open space. Younger respondents, however, would like to see more recreation areas.

LAND USE

Another major issue that came out of the survey is that people would like to see additional stores in Benson. In particular, the younger respondents indicated that they do much of their shopping in other towns because they feel that local stores do not meet their needs. The need for a new or improved discount store was also brought up by a significant number of respondents.

In regard to housing related issues, most respondents feel that the existing housing stock is adequate. However, younger respondents indicated that they would like to see improved rental and low income housing opportunities.

COMMUNITY IMAGE

Overall, the respondents indicated that they feel that Benson has an attractive community with a good image. One area of concern is that people feel that the entrances into Benson are not very appealing and that they should be improved. Most people feel that Benson is a safe community to live in.

QUALITY ISSUES

Overall, people feel that Benson offers a high quality of life. They are pleased with fire protection, the library, and schools. However, they feel street maintenance and Internet services could be improved.

VALUES

Respondents indicated that having a strong education system in Benson is very important. They feel believe Benson should be an attractive community to live in and that Benson should continue to attract new businesses and industries.

POSITIVE IMPRESSIONS

In general, respondents indicated that they like the small town atmosphere of Benson. They appreciate that it is a safe, quiet town - a town that they are comfortable raising a family in.

DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS

Many respondents feel that Benson needs more retail stores. In particular they would like Benson to have more clothing stores, a shoe store, a 24/7 convenience/gas store, and a discount store like Target. Many people also feel that the traffic situation in Benson should be improved. They are concerned about truck traffic, trains, and uncontrolled intersections. The younger respondents feel that there should be more places for teenagers to "hang out".

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the survey suggest that people are generally happy with Benson. They enjoy the small town atmosphere and want the City to work at maintaining and enhancing the positive qualities of the City. Those who participated in the survey were appreciative of the opportunity to express their opinions and contribute to the planning process.

A VISION FOR BENSON'S FUTURE

A vision for Benson's future was developed through input from the community survey described above, discussions with the Comprehensive Plan Task Force, and public review. The vision is as follows:

Benson is a good community to live and work in. We cherish its small town atmosphere. It's a friendly community - one where people know and respect each other. It's a safe, quiet, and peaceful community. We are proud of our schools, churches, parks and community events. These are the qualities of Benson that we value and want to carry forward into the future.

We want Benson to grow, but we believe that growth should enhance the small town character of Benson rather than detract from it. We want Benson to have an attractive and strong central business district - one that meets our shopping needs and respects the viability of small, locally owned businesses. We will strive to diversify our industries and embrace technologies that will provide Benson with strong economic growth and good paying jobs. We want to refine our transportation system to be safe and efficient for pedestrians and vehicles.

In short, we like Benson. As we move forward, we will be proactive in preserving and enhancing the qualities of Benson that we value.

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes existing land use patterns in Benson and it sets forth a plan for future land use that is in keeping with the City's vision. The Land Use Plan guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and private developers in decisions related to the type, location, and density of future development in the community. It also serves as the basis for the City's Zoning Map, Zoning Ordinances, and Subdivision Regulations.

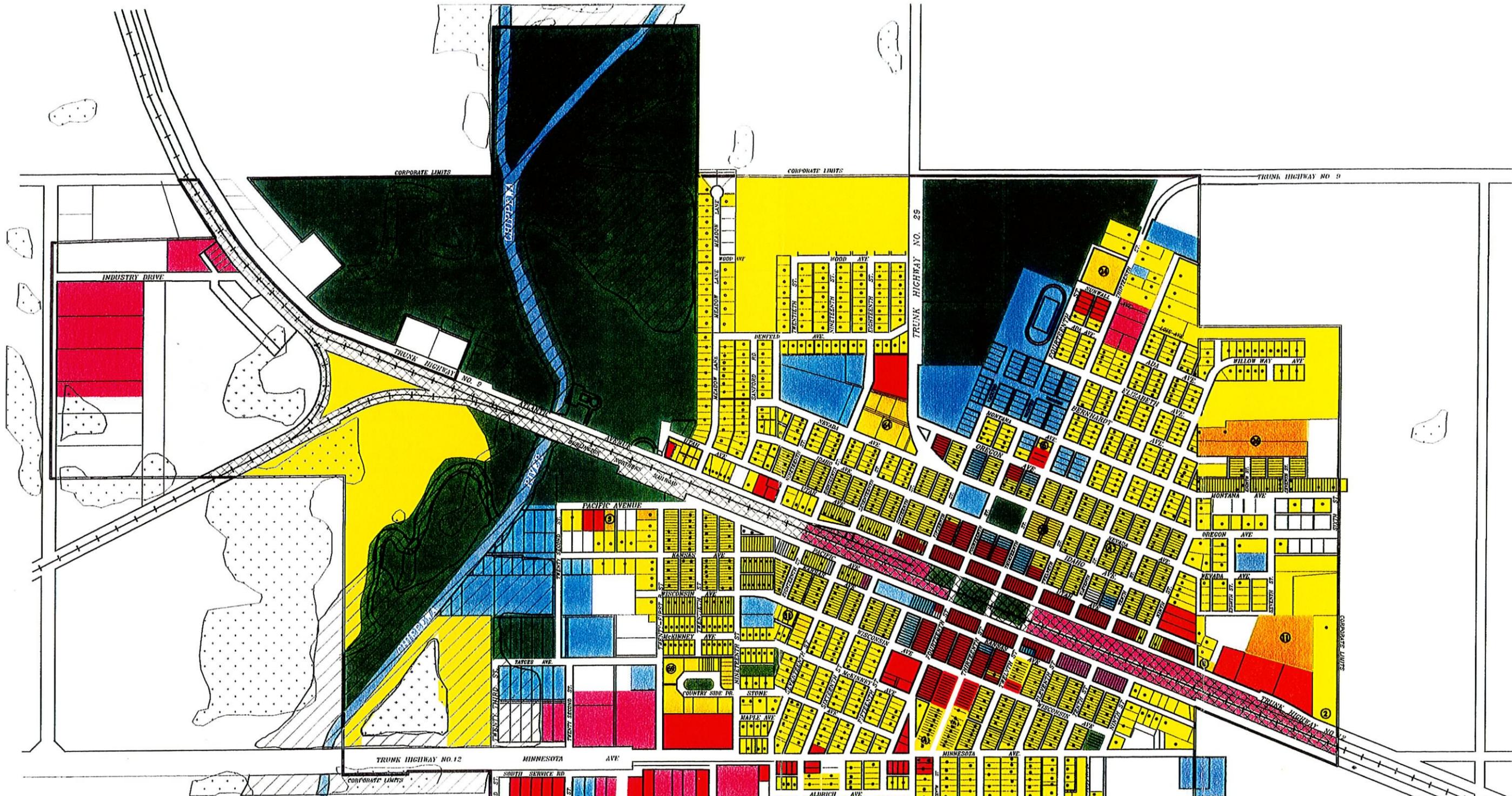
INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

This section describes existing land use in the City of Benson. Figure 3-1: Existing Land Use, shows existing land use in 1999. Table 3-A: Existing Land Use Tabulations, describes the number of acres in each category of land use. Refer to Chapter 2: Community Background, for related information including maps and descriptions of existing natural features.

EXISTING LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The following describes the existing land use classifications in Benson:

- **Agriculture.** Land used for agriculture production - row crops or hay fields. No grazing/pasture land or animal holding/production facilities exist within the city limits.
- **Single Family Residential.** Single family detached housing including manufactured housing on a single family residential lot.
- **Multi Family Residential.** Attached housing including duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, apartments, and senior housing.
- **Mobile Home Residential.** Mobile homes and mobile home parks.
- **Commercial.** Retail sales and services, including professional services that are predominantly privately owned and operated for profit.
- **Industrial.** Manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, facilities involved in the movement of goods, construction, communications, utilities, and wholesale sales.
- **Public/Semi Public.** Publicly owned facilities including schools, the sewage treatment plant, and City Hall. Institutions including churches and hospitals.
- **Park/Open Space.** Parks and recreational facilities and open space owned or leased by local or other government.
- **Vacant.** Undeveloped land not used for agriculture or other existing land uses described herein.
- **Road Right-of-Way.** Public right-of-way used for roads or available for construction of new roads.
- **Railroad Right-of-Way.** Right-of-way used for the railroad and related uses. Part of the railroad right-of-way overlays other uses including industrial and park/open space.
- **NWI Wetlands.** Wetlands identified in the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). These wetlands are based on 1980 photographs and have not been field verified.
- **Perceived 100 Year Floodplain.** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) classified Benson as "having no special flood hazard." Although not officially delineated, the perceived floodplain shown is based on community recollection of the 1997 flood.



EXISTING LAND USE

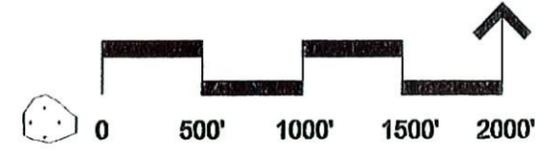
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agriculture | Public/Semi Public |
| Single Family Residential | Park/Open Space |
| Multi Family Residential | Vacant |
| Mobile Home Residential | Road Right of Way |
| Commercial | Railroad Right of Way |
| Industrial | NWI Wetlands |
| | Perceived 100 Year Floodplain |

GENERAL NOTES

Base map data from US Energy Services, Inc.

Existing land use data based on visual field checks by Sanders Wacker Bergly, Inc. and by Benson's Comprehensive Planning Task Force.

This map to be used for general planning purposes only. Refer to other sources for more detailed information.



SANDERS WACKER BERGLY, INC.
 Planning Consultants
 May 2000

FIGURE 3-1:
 EXISTING LAND USE - JUNE 1999

Table 3-A: Existing Land Use Tabulations

Existing Land Use - 1999			
Developed Land Use	Acres	% of Developed Land	% of Total City
Single Family Residential	300.6	24.6%	19.0%
Multi Family Residential	20.5	1.7%	1.3%
Mobile Home Residential	14.3	1.2%	1.0%
Commercial	53.3	4.4%	3.4%
Industrial	79.9	6.5%	5.0%
Public/Semi Public	91.3	7.5%	5.8%
Park/Open Space	319.4	26.1%	20.2%
Road Right-of-Way	278.2	22.8%	17.5%
Railroad Right-of-Way - leased for Industry or park	28.2	2.3%	1.7%
- undeveloped	36.0	2.9%	2.2%
Subtotal of Developed Land	1221.7	100.0%	77.1%
Undeveloped Land	Acres	% of Undeveloped Land	% of Total City
Agriculture - <i>not in</i> floodplain or wetland	138.9	38.2%	8.8%
- <i>in</i> floodplain or wetland	20.3	5.6%	1.3%
Vacant - <i>not in</i> floodplain or wetland	150.5	41.5%	9.5%
- <i>in</i> floodplain or wetland	27.6	7.6%	1.7%
Water	25.9	7.1%	1.6%
Subtotal of Undeveloped Land	363.2	100.0%	22.9%
Total City	1585.0		

EXISTING SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL. Nearly 25% of the developed land in Benson is classified as single family residential. Benson has roughly 1,470 dwelling units, of which approximately 1,100 (or 75%) are single family homes. These homes are evenly distributed throughout the city. Most of the housing areas are on a grid street system, but a few of the newer areas are on curvilinear roads and cul-de-sacs.

In the older parts of town, the lots were originally platted at a width of 25 feet and housing was constructed on lots of 25 foot increments. Some housing has 50 feet of frontage, some 75 feet, and some 100 feet or more. This has led to a variety of lot types - some of which could possibly be subdivided for infill development if desired.

In the newer parts of town, lot widths vary between 75 feet and 100 feet. Most newer neighborhoods have consistent lot widths, but a few larger residential lots exist in these areas. These could possibly be subdivided if desired. Housing is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4: Housing.

EXISTING MULTI FAMILY RESIDENTIAL. Benson has over 300 multi family residential units. These are spread throughout Benson. Four major complexes are in north Benson, one is senior housing and one is long term care. Three major complexes are in south Benson, two of which are related to senior housing or long term care.

EXISTING MOBILE HOME RESIDENTIAL. There are two mobile home parks in northeastern Benson. One park has 26 units and the other park has 11 units. A six-unit mobile home park exists along Pacific Avenue in western Benson.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL. Approximately 53 acres (3.4%) of Benson is classified as a commercial land use. Most commercial uses are located along the major highways in Benson.

The primary commercial area is in the central business district at 12th, 13th and 14th streets. This area has a variety of retail stores, banks, restaurants, and a grocery store. Although most commercial buildings have been well-maintained, there are opportunities to enhance existing buildings and the streetscape in the area.

Another major commercial area is along U.S. Highway 12 in south Benson. Much of the commercial use in this area is intertwined with light industry. Major retailers in this area include Pamida and Fleet Farm.

There is very little vacant land for expansion of commercial uses in this area.

Most commercial uses are concentrated in the two areas described above, but there are also several small isolated spots of commercial scattered throughout the city. Most of these are in areas zoned for commercial use.

EXISTING INDUSTRIAL. Roughly 80 acres (5%) of the city is in industrial use. Industry is located in several areas of the city.

A 100-acre industrial park is located west of the Chippewa River in Benson. Roughly 25 acres have been developed with the largest user being the County Recycling Center. The City of Benson owns the remaining 75 acres of land. Since the railroad is next to the park, it is possible that future industry can construct a spur line off the existing railroad for their use. The site also has good access to Highway 9. Possible issues that may limit future development in the park include potential wetlands on the site and the fact that City sewer and water do not serve the site. Part of this site is also within the horizontal airspace of the airport. So if an industry requires a tall smokestack, for example, it may not be able to be developed in this industrial park. See Chapter 5: Transportation for additional information related to the airport and horizontal airspace.

Approximately 30 acres of light industry is located near U.S. Highway 12 in southern Benson. Roughly 50 acres of vacant industrial land exist in the area, but much of this land may not develop due to floodplain and wetland constraints. Also some vacant lots are relatively small and this may limit the type of industry that may be developed. The industrial uses in this area are intertwined with commercial and public uses.

Roughly 20 acres of industry is in the railroad right of way in downtown Benson. Some of these industries (like the grain elevator) use the railroad. There is very little room for industrial expansion in this area. However, some existing buildings are in poor shape and could possibly be enhanced or redeveloped.

A three-acre industrial site is located along 13th Street in north Benson. It consists primarily of a ready-mix plant and a plumbing and heating business. It is surrounded by residential uses and a school, so it is unlikely that this industrial area will grow. In fact, the City should consider rezoning this area to commercial or residential use.

EXISTING ROAD RIGHT-OF-WAY. Approximately 17.5% of the city is devoted to road right-of-way. This is consistent with most communities. Road right-of-way will increase as vacant land is developed, but the overall percentage should be similar.

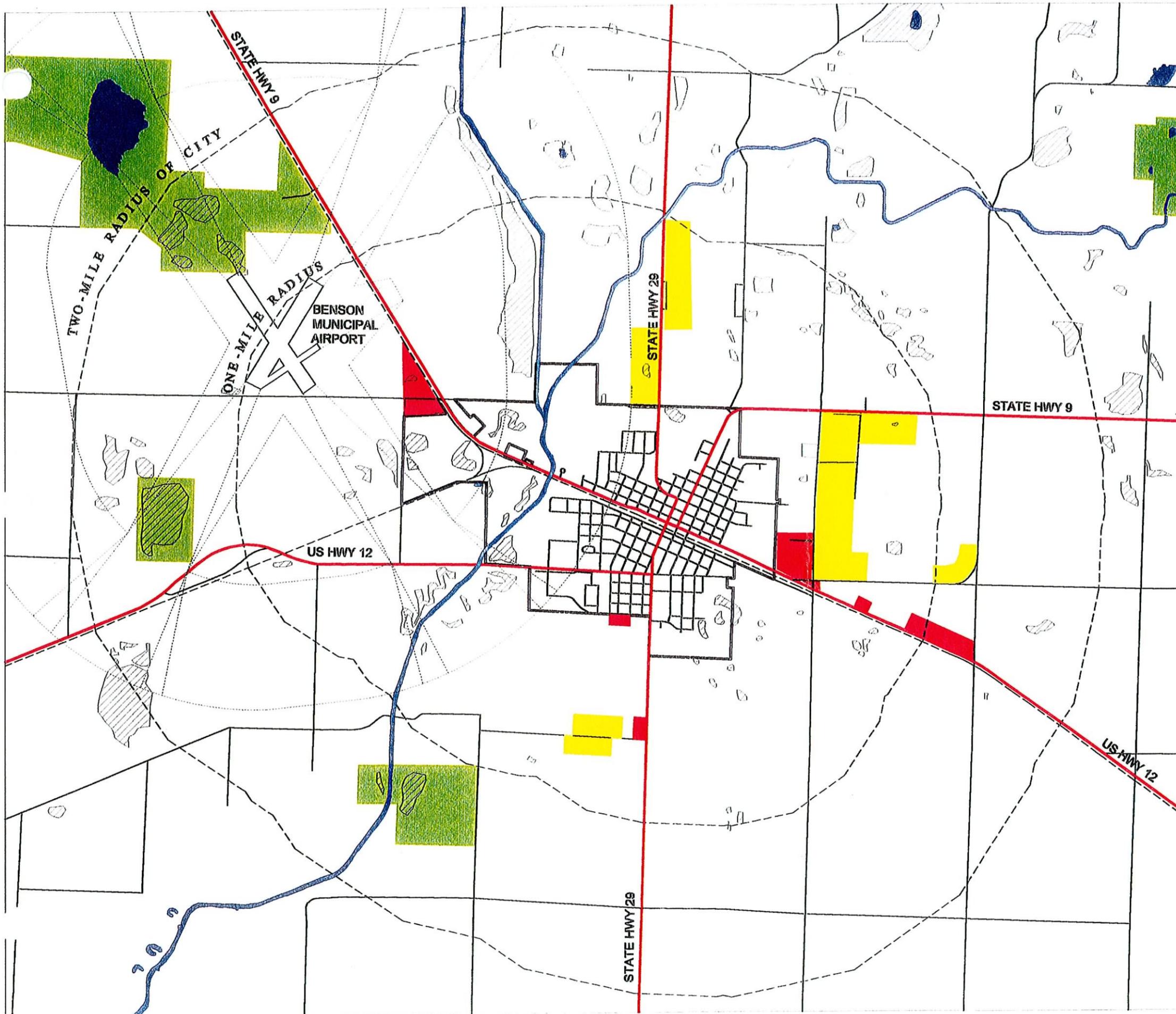
EXISTING RAILROAD RIGHT-OF-WAY. The existing railroad right-of-way essentially divides Benson into two sections: north and south. The only railroad crossings in the city are at 12th, 13th, and 14th streets. In the central business district, the railroad right-of-way accommodates industrial uses that use the railroad (for example, grain elevators). It also accommodates a city park. The railroad is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5: Transportation Plan.

EXISTING AGRICULTURE AND VACANT LAND. Several agriculture areas exist within the city limits. However, there are no grazing or animal production-holding areas within the city. Some of these areas could be converted to other land uses in the future. Other areas, especially those areas where sewer and water service may be difficult to provide, may remain as agriculture through the year 2020 and beyond. The Swift County Soil Survey does not identify prime farmland within the city.

Roughly 11% of the total area of the city is classified as vacant land. Vacant land is scattered throughout the city, but the greatest concentration is near the corporate limits. Most of this land is available for future development. A small percentage will likely never be developed because of floodplain or wetland constraints, but some of these areas could be used for future park or open space.

Existing agriculture and vacant land suitable for development (basically upland area) is zoned (in 1999) as shown in Table 3-B: Zoning of Existing Agriculture and Vacant Land.

EXISTING WATER. The Chippewa River is a valuable recreation resource that helps link the north and south sections of the city. No City sewer services exist west of the river. Since extending sewer services beyond the river may be unlikely, the river also defines the western edge of development in Benson. There are no lakes or ponds in Benson. See Chapter 2: Community Background for additional information.



SURROUNDING EXISTING LAND USE

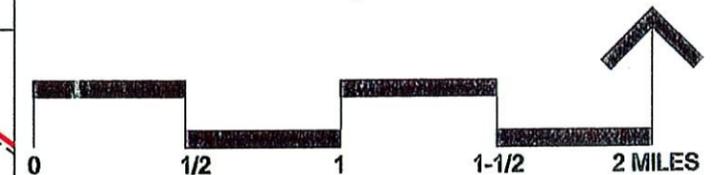
-  CITY OF BENSON
-  RURAL RESIDENTIAL
-  COMMERCIAL
-  INDUSTRIAL
-  PERCEIVED WETLAND
-  WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
-  AGRICULTURE OR OPEN SPACE

GENERAL NOTES

Base map data from US Census TIGER files.

Existing land use data based on interpretation of aerial photography.

This map to be used for general planning purposes only. Refer to other sources for more detailed information.



SANDERS WACKER BERGLY, INC.
 Planning Consultants
 MAY 2000

FIGURE 3-2:
 SURROUNDING EXISTING LAND USE - JUNE 1999

Table 3-B: Zoning of Existing Upland Agriculture and Vacant Land

Zoning District	Agriculture Acres	Vacant Acres	Total
R-1	76	35	108
R-2	17	20	37
B-3	–	1	1
I-1	–	32	32
I-2	46*	62	108
	139	150	289

* Agriculture land in the I-2 district will likely not be developed because of difficult access to these areas.

EXISTING WETLANDS AND PERCEIVED FLOODPLAIN.

As described in Chapter 2: Community Background, only general information is available regarding existing wetlands and the floodplain. Detailed studies should be conducted to more clearly delineate these areas. There are only a few places in Benson where wetlands or the floodplain will limit future development: 1) immediately adjacent to the river (much of this land is currently zoned for industrial use) 2) in the southeastern area of the city where wetlands will likely limit future development, and 3) in the industrial park west of the river where possible wetlands may limit future development. Most of the floodplain and wetlands in the city are located in park or open space.

SURROUNDING LAND USE. Most of the land next to Benson is agricultural land that has little impact on the city. However, several industries exist just outside the city limits of Benson (see Figure 3-2: Surrounding Land Use). These industries provide employment opportunities for residents, but they also impact the city in other ways.

An ethanol plant, located just west of the city limits, produces emissions that are visible for miles around. At certain times, unpleasant odors from the plant can be detected throughout the city.

Several industries exist just east of the city, along U.S. Highway 12. These industries are not within the corporate limits, but they are connected to City sewer and water. Because these industries line the entry into the city, they affect the perceived image of the

city. Although they appear to be well maintained, any visual enhancements to these industries will reflect favorably on the city.

EXISTING ZONING ORDINANCE AS IT RELATES TO EXISTING LAND USE.

The Zoning Ordinance provides a means to implement the Comprehensive Plan's vision for future land use. The Zoning Ordinance must relate to the Comprehensive Plan. Benson's Zoning Ordinance, current at the time of this planning process (early 2000), separates land use into three major categories: residential, business, and industrial. Refer to the City's official Zoning Map for the most current information.

Residential. There are two zoning districts under the residential category:

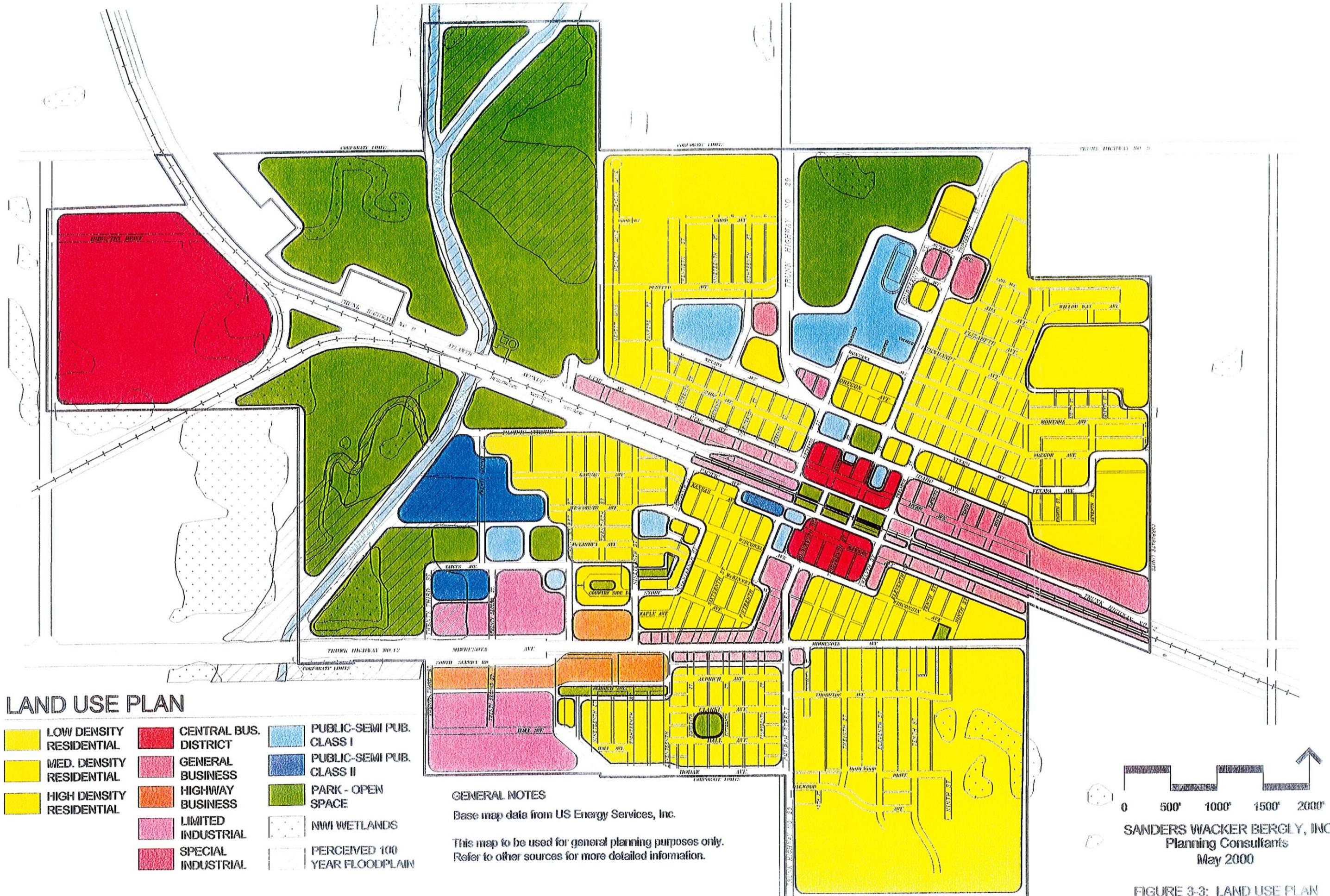
1. R-1: One and Two Family Residence District. This district allows one and two family attached dwellings.
2. R-2: Multiple Family Residence District. This district allows one and two family dwellings as well as multiple dwellings of any number.

Both residential districts allow for various types of public or semi-public uses including churches, schools, hospitals, and parks.

Roughly half of the residential area in Benson is zoned R-1 and the other half is zoned R-2. This zoning allows a great deal of flexibility in where multi family housing can be developed. However, it is possible that a substantial multi family complex could be developed in a single family residential neighborhood. The Zoning Ordinance could more clearly address site plan requirements (parking, screening, setbacks) that would allow multi family complexes in single family neighborhoods.

Business. Three business districts exist under the business category:

1. B-1: Central Business District. This district allows typical retail sales or service businesses including gift shops, barber shops, drug stores, furniture stores, grocery stores, etc. The B-1 District is essentially the core downtown business area.
2. B-2: General Business District. This district allows for all B-1 uses plus some more intense business uses like auto sales and repair, lumber yards, and warehouses. The



LAND USE PLAN

- | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| | LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | | CENTRAL BUS. DISTRICT | | PUBLIC-SEMI PUB. CLASS I |
| | MED. DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | | GENERAL BUSINESS | | PUBLIC-SEMI PUB. CLASS II |
| | HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | | HIGHWAY BUSINESS | | PARK - OPEN SPACE |
| | | | LIMITED INDUSTRIAL | | NWI WETLANDS |
| | | | SPECIAL INDUSTRIAL | | PERCEIVED 100 YEAR FLOODPLAIN |

GENERAL NOTES
 Base map data from US Energy Services, Inc.

This map to be used for general planning purposes only.
 Refer to other sources for more detailed information.

0 500' 1000' 1500' 2000'

SANDERS WACKER BERGLY, INC.
 Planning Consultants
 May 2000

FIGURE 3-3: LAND USE PLAN

B-2 District is the next tier out from the B-1 Central Business District.

3. B-3: Highway Business District. This district allows for all B-1 and B-2 uses plus some more intense uses.

Industrial. There are two industrial districts:

1. I-1: Limited Industrial. This district allows for service and light industries that do not have objectionable influences upon abutting properties. It also allows for any business use.
2. I-2: General Industrial. All uses, except those that are prohibited in the city are allowed in this district.

Pyramid Zoning. Benson's Zoning Ordinance essentially follows the pyramid (or cumulative) zoning concept that allows more restrictive uses to be built in less restrictive areas. For example, a B-1 use would be allowed in an I-2 district, but an I-2 use would not be allowed in a B-1 district. Benson, however, only allows residential uses in residential districts (with minor exceptions).

Pyramid zoning allows flexibility in land use, but it also allows for potential conflicting uses to be built in the same district. For example, a gift shop could hypothetically be located between two industrial uses. Or retail uses could potentially take up all existing industrial land, leaving no land for future industry while other commercial land sits vacant. Therefore, the City may want to consider allowing cumulative provisions only within the basic districts. In other words, business uses would only be allowed in business districts. But a B-1 use would be allowed in a B-3 district.

Community Unit Development. The Zoning Ordinance allows for community unit developments (also known as planned unit developments). This essentially allows for residential and related uses to be planned and developed as a unit. It provides flexibility in lot sizes and layouts. Thus, land that would otherwise be hard to develop because of wetlands, lot configuration, and so on, can more easily be developed as a Community Unit Development.

Non-conforming Land Uses. In part because of pyramid zoning, there are only a couple areas of non-conforming land use. The business uses in the area of Montana Avenue/Oregon Avenue and 13th Street

are in a residential district. These businesses are non-conforming uses that should eventually be converted to residential uses.

LAND USE GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for future land use in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of land use decisions that will be made through the year 2020. The land use goals and policies are as follows:

COMMUNITY IMAGE

GOAL 1. Improve Benson's image to residents, visitors, and passers by.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Establish and promote an overarching community image theme to strengthen the positive aspects of the City.
2. Develop incentives for site improvements.
3. Publicly recognize outstanding residential and commercial improvements. Inform residents of the City's image theme through a public relations campaign.
4. Through City example, funding assistance, and community education, outline specific things that residents, business owners, and land owners can do to promote and enhance this goal.
5. Work with individuals and businesses to establish garden contests for individual lots or blocks.
6. Work with property owners along the approach routes to the City to improve the physical and aesthetic character of these highly exposed areas.
7. Install City signage, features, and landscaping at City entrances. Use trees to emphasize the entrance corridors.
8. Develop a tree ordinance to assure that

- trees are planted and/or preserved with the development of buildings and parking areas.
9. Accentuate the town square/central business district.
 10. Build on the historic character of the City.
 11. Prepare to "sell" Benson - just as you would prepare to sell your home.

GOAL 2. Eliminate aspects of Benson that detract from or are contrary to the established image goals.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Review, update, and enforce nuisance and open storage ordinances.
2. Remove dilapidated and unsafe structures within the City.
3. Initiate a building and site renovation program for business and residential areas.
4. Acquire terminated leases.

GENERAL LAND USE

GOAL 3. Cluster similar compatible land uses with the intent to prohibit incompatible or scattered uses from occurring or expanding. This will result in more efficient use of land and group uses having similar service and access requirements.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Rezone and enforce the "non-conforming" use regulations.
2. Work with owners of the existing incompatible uses to make the operations as acceptable as possible or to relocate them to more appropriate sites.
3. Require all new business or industrial uses to obtain site plan approval before allowing a new use to begin, with the intent being to encourage development, but to be sensitive to the surrounding properties.

4. Accompany any intensification of land use activity and development with appropriate and corresponding increases in related support and service facilities.
5. Allow a planned mix of uses only through the planned unit development procedure.

GOAL 4. Develop or redevelop properties that utilize existing City streets and utilities. This "in-fill" and "backfill" development is not only cost effective but will help to revitalize the older parts of the community.

In order to accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Provide incentives for in-fill and backfill development and removal of substandard buildings.
2. Provide City assistance in consolidating land for development or redevelopment.
3. Have the City serve as a clearinghouse to connect property owners who are willing to discuss potential redevelopment of under utilized property with builders or developers.
4. Encourage in-fill and backfill development that demonstrates compatibility with and sensitivity to existing neighborhood characteristics, in terms of quality, density, building height, placement, scale, and architectural character.
5. Undertake redevelopment only on a well planned, orderly, and controlled basis.
6. Redevelop substandard and grossly incompatible development through private means and if necessary public action.

GOAL 5. Develop properties that are logical expansions of existing development and to which existing utilities and streets can be extended logically and economically.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Provide development incentives for logical expansion and provide development disincentives for "out-of-sequence"

- development.
2. Avoid premature or over allocation of land use types on a community-wide basis as well as a sub-area basis.
 3. Prevent undue scattering or "leap-frogging" of commercial, industrial, and residential development. Provide for orderly, guided, and contiguous growth and development of remaining undeveloped or agricultural land within the community through a coordinated program of public service extensions.
 4. Encourage transitions between varying types of land use to occur in an orderly fashion which will not create a negative impact on adjoining developments.
 5. Encourage changes in land use types to occur at mid-block points, at borders of areas created by major urban and/or natural barriers, and at rear property lines rather than using streets as land use division lines.

GOAL 6. Use the Planned Unit Development (PUD) procedure wherever extraordinary environmental conditions are present.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Use Benson's PUD provisions to permit flexibility in the use of structures and land to protect unique or environmentally sensitive areas including wooded areas, wetlands, historic sites and buildings.
2. Provide incentives for using the PUD approach.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

GOAL 7. Encourage a full range of residential diversity.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Preserve and enhance the existing overall, mixed density character of residential neighborhoods.

2. Consider the diverse needs of renters and homeowners an important factor when making residential development decisions.

GOAL 8. Encourage the rehabilitation and reinvestment in existing neighborhoods in order to maintain existing housing stock and preserve desirable neighborhood characteristics, particularly in older neighborhoods.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Maintain a high quality residential environment through rehabilitation, or where necessary, redevelopment of substandard units. Undertake such actions through private means, or if necessary, public action. Continue to actively seek federal and state housing rehabilitation grants and loans.
2. Remove substandard housing incapable of being corrected to prevent the spread of deterioration and blight.
3. Support the enforcement of regulations to maintain a high quality residential environment.

GOAL 9. Encourage a wide-range of multi-family housing to meet the needs of a diverse population - (income, age, single persons, mobility, etc.).

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Allow multi-family housing in locations which offer a wide-range of supportive service, commercial, and recreational facilities.
2. Discourage using high density housing to buffer negative impacts of commercial or industrial uses from single family residences.
3. Encourage multi-family housing styles and development techniques that conserve land and increase efficiency.
4. Ensure that sufficient supportive facilities, such as off-street parking, are provided when older, large, single-family homes are converted to multi-family dwelling units.

GOAL 10. Define, plan, and develop Benson on a neighborhood basis as determined by physical barriers and/or homogeneous or compatible land use characteristics.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Define, plan, and establish identity for each of the residential neighborhoods in Benson.
2. Protect residential neighborhoods from encroachment of more intensive use types by requiring adequate buffering and separation from incompatible land uses.
3. Prohibit residential development where geologic, soil, or flood hazards exist unless they are remedied and approved by the appropriate state and/or federal agencies.
4. Protect residential neighborhoods from through traffic (traffic without origins or destinations in the neighborhood).
5. Require business uses transitioning into residential uses to submit a site plan to the City for review prior to the approval of such change.
6. Help neighborhoods organize and foster a more localized sense of pride in Benson's rich heritage.

GENERAL COMMERCIAL

GOAL 11. Concentrate future commercial development within the CBD (Central Business District) and other existing and expanding commercial districts within the City.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Prohibit further scattered and strip type commercial development.
2. Provide and protect adequate land area so future commercial expansion will have space to locate in or near existing and expanding commercial areas.
3. Consolidate, when opportunities arise, existing spot or linear commercial

development into more functional and coordinated patterns.

4. Rehabilitate or redevelop substandard and/or functionally obsolete commercial development through private means or, if necessary, public assistance.

GOAL 12. Preserve and strengthen the Central Business District (CBD) by encouraging retailers and/or similar business operations to locate in the downtown area if they add to the business diversity rather than displace existing businesses and services and if they help maintain a viable and healthy business climate.

To accomplish this goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Locate uses in areas of the CBD that meet the following criteria:
 - A. Compatible with existing uses.
 - B. Appropriate vehicle and pedestrian linkages to the existing movement pattern.
 - C. Architecturally compatible with existing uses.
 - D. Enhance obsolete, underutilized, or inappropriately used buildings and sites (use the new development as an opportunity for redevelopment).
2. Provide City assistance such as street and alley vacation, property consolidation, relocation, etc. to facilitate development in the most appropriate area.

GOAL 13. Encourage development of efficient, aesthetic and functional business districts.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Restrict street access to commercial development at street intersections. Commercial development of one quadrant does not dictate commercial use of the remaining quadrants.
2. Encourage consolidating entrance drives in industrial/commercial areas to simplify

access, create safer ingress/egress, and to provide the opportunity to create more parking for customers and employees.

3. Adequately screen or buffer service and commercial uses from adjacent residential development.
4. Discourage through traffic in commercial/ service centers. Instead, require commercial/ service centers to be served by major streets.
5. Develop and implement a City Tree Ordinance to assure that trees are planted and/or preserved within the development or redevelopment of buildings and parking areas in commercial areas.
6. Adequately design and landscape commercial sites including parking lots.

GOAL 14. Encourage residents to support local businesses.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Work with existing business groups to determine the types of goods and services that the community identifies as important and necessary.
2. Actively pursue and/or promote commercial uses identified as needed or desired.
3. Support and encourage first time business owners and/or newly established businesses by providing a supporting environment.

GOAL 15. Enhance the Central Business District (CBD) so it can continue to be the City's focal point and activity center.

In order to accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Encourage new retail and service development within the CBD.
2. Develop strategies to stimulate the redevelopment of underutilized sites and the development of vacant land and buildings within the CBD.

3. Identify certain fringe areas of the CBD as transitional. Zone them accordingly to allow for a mix of single family dwellings and commercial uses.
4. Encourage and assist inappropriate uses in the downtown area to relocate to more suitable sites.

GOAL 16. Establish a cohesive, unified image for the CBD based on established Downtown Design Guidelines.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Encourage and assist business owners to remodel, rehabilitate, and enhance building exteriors through financial incentives. To accomplish these changes, promote the use of the revolving loan program for facade improvements .
2. Promote a harmonious interrelation of building materials, colors, signage, and architectural design in the CBD.
3. Enhance, protect and preserve the historic architectural character of downtown buildings and sites.
4. Enact and uniformly enforce a commercial maintenance code to ensure proper upkeep and constant improvement of the CBD. The Fire Department or similar City authorized group/person will be responsible for enforcing the City's commercial maintenance code.

INDUSTRIAL

GOAL 17. Establish the City's primary industrial district in close proximity to existing industrial areas.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Continue to work toward annexation of industrial development in the primary industrial areas.
2. Encourage existing scattered non-conforming industrial uses to relocate in close proximity to existing industrial areas.

3. Encourage industrial uses to have easy access to major streets, highways, the airport and the railroad.
4. Discourage industrial-oriented traffic from using local residential streets.
5. Ensure that adequate services, off-street parking, and off-street loading facilities are available prior to all new industrial development.
6. Isolate heavy industrial uses from commercial as well as residential development.
7. Encourage industrial uses to effectively screen parking, loading, storage and other such areas of activity from view.
8. Develop and implement a Tree Ordinance to assure that trees are planted and/or preserved with the development or redevelopment of buildings and parking areas in industrial areas.
5. Develop financial incentives and programs to facilitate achieving economic development objectives.
6. Continue to use billboards and signs to inform the public of opportunities in Benson.
7. Encourage cooperative marketing campaigns that highlight the Benson area and specific businesses or attractions.
8. Ensure that Benson has high quality phone, cable, and Internet service to provide the framework for businesses that use current technology.

STAGED GROWTH

GOAL 19. Take a pro-active approach to annexation by anticipating and planning for and not reacting to future growth and expansion.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 18. Support all those groups and individuals involved in creating job opportunities and addressing a wide-range of economic development issues in Benson.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Assist and cooperate with local, regional, and state organizations to promote existing businesses and attract new business and employment opportunities for the local work force.
2. Solicit businesses that fill voids in the current range of retail and business services offered in Benson.
3. Encourage commercial and recreational development that will enhance the City's tourist industry and create opportunities for all-season tourist attractions.
4. Work with County, City, and local community organizations to provide and enhance special events and attractions.
1. Prevent potentially detrimental development from occurring adjacent to the community by entering into a land use policy agreement with the surrounding township(s) and county. The agreement will provide for the orderly growth and development of land within the two mile extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City of Benson.
2. Require that expansion only occur in those areas of the City that can support/accommodate the logical, economic extension of the present community, existing infrastructure, roadways and access points, and avoid natural and man built development barriers.
3. Require municipal services to be adequate and available to all types of development in annexed areas with the exception of residential development on large parcels capable of providing acceptable on-site sewage treatment systems.
4. Analyze all annexation proposals to assure that the long term public interest will be served.
5. Encourage all types of development designed to: (a) utilize Benson's employment base, (b)

utilize Benson's public services, and (c) benefit from Benson's purchasing power, to locate within the existing City limits if possible, or to be annexed and thereby fully participate in the City's fiscal well-being.

LAND USE PLAN

The primary purpose of the Land Use Plan is to enhance existing land uses and guide future land use development. The land use goals and policies discussed above provide the framework for the Land Use Plan (see Figure 3-3, Land Use Plan). The proposed land uses are described below.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

The Land Use Plan divides residential land use into three densities: 1) Low Density, 2) Moderate Density, and 3) High Density Residential. These uses are briefly described below. Refer to Chapter 4: Housing for additional information.

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL. This is the primary land use in Benson. It represents detached, single family residences with a density of 1 to 5 dwelling units per acre.

MODERATE DENSITY RESIDENTIAL. This land use includes duplexes, triplexes, quads, townhomes, mobile homes, and the like. It has a density of 6 to 10 dwelling units per acre. Most of the moderate density residential areas surround the central business district. It is not the intent of this land use to phase out existing low density residential in the area, but rather to suggest that the area could accommodate moderate density residential if appropriately designed.

HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL. This land use includes apartments. It has a density of 11 to 15 dwelling units per acre. The Land Use Plan only identifies existing high density residential areas. Refer to Chapter 4: Housing for additional information on where future high density residential may go.

COMMERCIAL LAND USE

The Land Use Plan divides commercial land use into three categories: 1) Central Business District, 2) General Business, and 3) Highway Business.

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT. This area is in the heart of Benson. It serves as a commercial center

and as a cultural and civic center. Typical businesses include gift shops, barber shops, drug stores, furniture stores, grocery stores, and the like. Considerations for this area include the following:

1. There is little vacant land in the central business district; however, there are several vacant buildings that could be filled. Also, there are several existing residences that could be redeveloped into commercial uses in the future.
2. Promote and maintain the central business district as the commercial center of the community. Refer to the goals and policies described earlier in this chapter for additional information.

GENERAL BUSINESS. These areas allow typical retail uses plus some more intense business uses like auto sales and repair, lumber yards, and warehouses. These areas are the next tier out from the Central Business District. Considerations for the general business areas include the following:

1. The Land Use Plan proposes general business at the intersection of 13th Street and Ada Avenue in north Benson. This area is currently an industrial area, but at some point it would be appropriate to phase in commercial uses. A Neighborhood convenience store that serves the school and residential neighborhood would be a positive addition to this area.
2. The City should develop guidelines for the general business areas proposed along the Highway 12 and Highway 9 corridors. Single family residences currently exist in some of these areas. The Land Use Plan suggests that existing residential may be phased out over time as commercial developers acquire land from willing residential sellers. Nevertheless, commercial development in these areas should be sensitive to the existing character of the neighborhood.
3. Because the general business areas line the corridors into Benson, their appearance greatly affects the image of Benson. The City should develop guidelines for development in these corridors that would help promote a positive image. For example, parking should be encouraged in back or to the side of

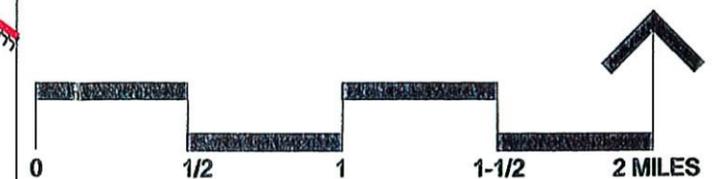
STAGED GROWTH PLAN

-  EXISTING CITY LIMITS
-  **A** AGRICULTURE / RURAL RESIDENTIAL USE- STUDY POSSIBLE PHASED EXTENSION OF CITY SERVICES
-  **B** AGRICULTURE / RURAL AND URBAN RESIDENTIAL- STUDY POSSIBLE PHASED EXTENSION OF CITY SERVICES
-  **C** EXISTING INDUSTRIAL / PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION UTILIZE EXISTING CITY SEWER
-  **D** EXISTING INDUSTRIAL / PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION STUDY POSSIBLE PHASED EXTENSION OF CITY SERVICES
-  NWI IDENTIFIED WETLANDS

GENERAL NOTES

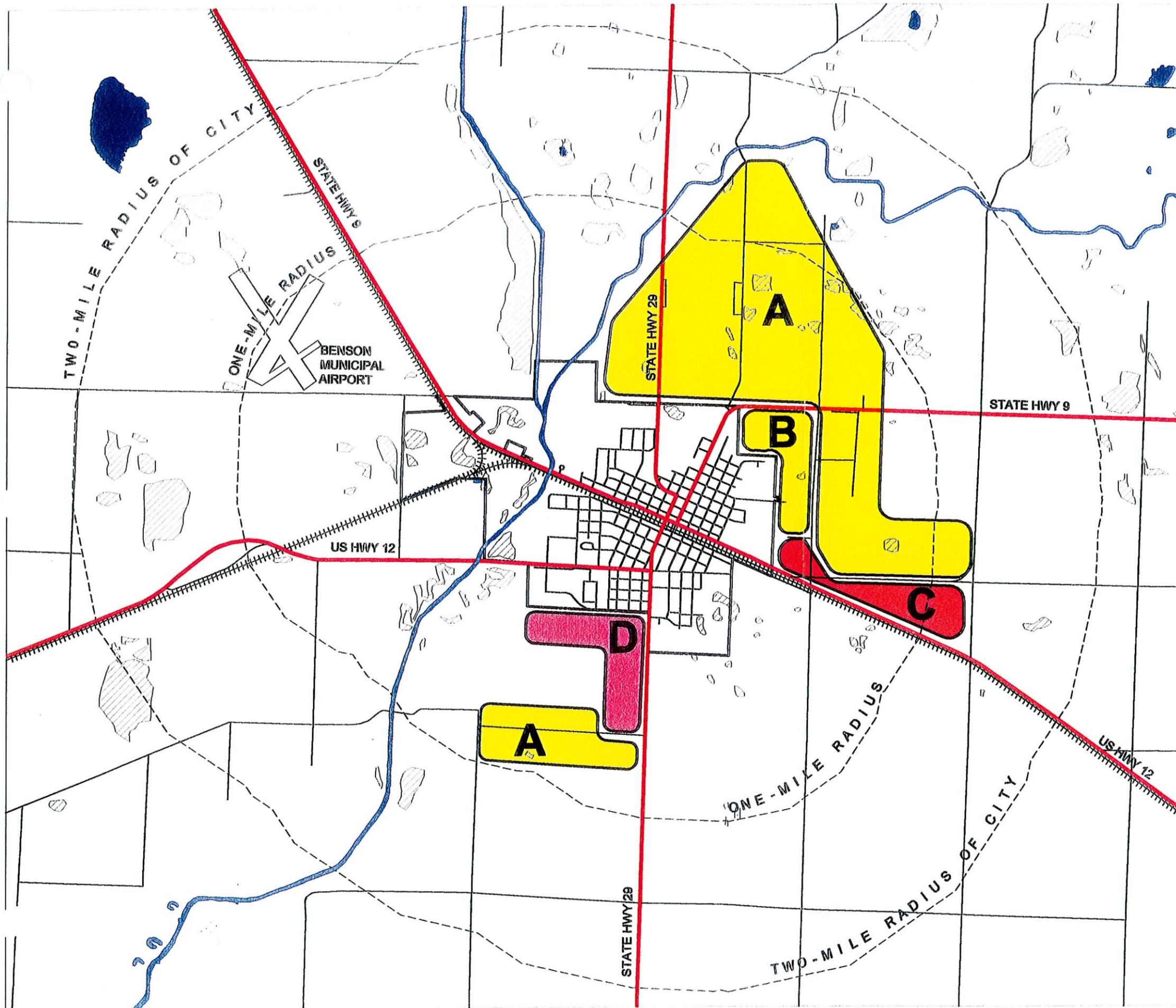
Base map data from US Census TIGER files.

This map to be used for general planning purposes only. Refer to other sources for more detailed information.



SANDERS WACKER BERGLY, INC.
 Planning Consultants
 May 2000

Figure 3-4: Staged Growth Plan



buildings rather than in the front yard along the street.

HIGHWAY BUSINESS. These areas relate to highway use. Larger stores or shopping centers with substantial parking lots, auto dealers, lumber yards, and the like are appropriate uses for these areas. The proposed highway business areas are shown along Highway 12 in southwest Benson. Although some of this land is currently zoned for industrial use, highway business would be a more appropriate use directly adjacent to the highway. This Plan simply recognizes the existing land use pattern. There is little vacant land available for expansion of highway business.

DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT STORE. The community survey, discussed in Chapter 2: Community Background, found that a significant number of residents want a new discount department store in town or they want the existing discount store to be substantially enhanced. High school students, in particular, stated that they want to see a Target or Wal-Mart in Benson. Although this may not be feasible in the near future, it is important that the City have a plan to address the discount store issue. Following are considerations related to discount stores in Benson:

1. The existing discount department store is located in the strip shopping center along Highway 12 in southwest Benson. A bank, grocery store, and Fleet Farm are also tenants of the shopping center. The shopping center is surrounded by existing development and it is highly unlikely that it could expand. However, any one of the tenants could possibly expand their area in the center if another tenant chose to develop elsewhere. Therefore, an expanded and enhanced discount department store could possibly be developed at this site.
2. There is little available land for development of a discount department store in the central business district.
3. The City should consider the effect an additional discount department store would have on existing businesses and the central business district. The central business district should remain the primary commercial area in town.
4. If a new location for a discount department store is needed, the City should promote the

area along Highway 12 on the east side of Benson. However, without redevelopment of existing property, there is little available land within the city limits.

INDUSTRIAL LAND USE

The Land Use Plan identifies three proposed industrial use districts: 1) Limited Industry, 2) General Industry, and 3) Special Industry.

LIMITED INDUSTRY. The Plan proposes two areas of limited (light) industry: 1) the area along Highway 12 in southwest Benson, and 2) the area along the railroad in central Benson.

Considerations for limited industry along Highway 12 in southwest Benson include the following:

1. Promote consolidation of interrelated uses. For example, the Benson Street Department, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the County Highway Department have separate sites. Explore the possibility of consolidating these sites so that they function as an interrelated complex. Perhaps the various departments could use the same stockpiles, scales, and the like. If future industry develops south of Hoban Avenue, consider relocating the Benson Street Department and Minnesota Department of Transportation next to the existing County Highway Department.
2. Current zoning (in 2000) allows business and limited industry in this area. Therefore, future industries should be compatible with the existing business uses. Industries that require little truck traffic (for example, a small office -showroom-warehouse) may be more compatible next to an existing office building than would a more intense industrial use.
3. The Land Use Plan identifies that the boundary of the industrial area will be different than the area that is currently zoned Limited Industry. The Plan reduces the area for industry and increases the area for business and residential. This approach recognizes and builds on the existing land use pattern.
4. A significant portion of this area flooded in 1997. The floodplain should be clearly

delineated before allowing future development in the perceived floodplain. In flood prone areas, recreation/open space may be an alternative to industry.

Considerations for limited industry along the railroad in central Benson include the following:

1. The railroad right-of-way is approximately 300 feet wide, but the buildable area within the right-of-way is considerably less. This limits future development in the area. Also noise and vibration from trains could negatively affect future development.
2. Industries in this area may have access to the railroad. However, allowing spur lines in this area may not be feasible or desirable given that this area is in the heart of downtown Benson.
3. Because this industrial area is next to the central business district, the use and appearance of the area have a major impact on the overall image of the community. Some existing buildings in this area are in poor shape and should either be demolished or renovated. This should provide opportunities to enhance the image of the area.

GENERAL INDUSTRY. The Land Use Plan identifies that all general industry development will occur in the staged growth areas outside the existing city limits. Considerations for development of general industry include the following:

1. General industry should have easy access to the major highways. The two areas proposed for general industry are along Highway 12 east of Benson and Highway 29 south of Benson.
2. The existing industry along Highway 12 east of Benson is served by City sewer and water. There are few environmental constraints that would limit future development in this area. Given that the area has the basic infrastructure to accommodate future industrial development, it is logical to promote additional development in this area. The City should continue to work with the Township to annex this area.
3. Currently, there is a small amount of industrial development along Highway 29 south of

Benson. The area is not sewered; however, extension of City sewer and water may be feasible. Future development should ideally extend out from the city, rather than starting well outside the city limits.

SPECIAL INDUSTRY. The Land Use Plan identifies the existing industrial park along Highway 9 in west Benson as "Special Industry". Other than the existing County Recycling Center, the park is mostly undeveloped. Several factors may influence future development in this area:

1. The site is not served by City sewer and the railroad and river hinder future extension of sewer service to the site.
2. The site has good access to highways, the railroad, and airport.
3. The site may contain wetlands, so part of the site may not be developed. A wetland delineation of the site should be conducted.
4. The airport's horizontal airspace extends over part of the site. This will limit the height of smokestacks or other tall structures that can be placed on the site (see Figure 3-2: Surrounding Existing Land Use).
5. An existing ethanol plant is located in the township adjacent to the site.

Considerations for future development of this site include the following:

1. Encourage "green" industries or industries that would have a symbiotic relationship with the existing ethanol plant and/or county recycling center. For example, encourage industries that could use recycled products from the recycling center to locate in this industrial park.
2. Encourage industries that could benefit from railroad access to locate in this industrial park.
3. Given that this site is on the outer edge of the city, encourage industrial uses that involve a significant amount of truck traffic to locate in this industrial park.
4. Given the costs involved in extending City sewer service to the site, carefully consider

what industries are appropriate for development without sewer and what industries would warrant extension of the City sewer service. A large industry that employs a substantial number of people may warrant extension of the sewer. However, a relatively small, light industry that requires sewer service may be better located in the light industry park discussed earlier.

INDUSTRY MIX. Most industries in and around Benson are related to agriculture. However, the agriculture industry is changing - farm and industry consolidations are common. Benson should work to maintain its existing industries while promoting complimentary industries that respond to new opportunities in agriculture.

Benson should also promote tourism. Many rural communities that have a tourist industry have maintained or increased their population, while rural communities that do not have a tourist industry have lost population. As described in Chapter 2: Community Background, Benson and the surrounding area offer many outdoor recreation opportunities. Benson should continue to promote tourism as an industry important to the livelihood of the City.

Benson should take advantage of opportunities offered by recent advances in technology. The Internet, in particular, could provide a wide range of possibilities for new businesses and industries in Benson. Residents who might otherwise leave Benson for employment opportunities, may be able to remain in the city and work via the Internet. Likewise, companies that conduct their business through the mail or over the Internet, may want to relocate to a community with a small town atmosphere, like Benson. The City should continue to work to ensure that the technological framework for the Internet and e-commerce is available. The City should also promote to prospective companies the benefits of living and working in Benson.

PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC CLASS I

This land use category includes public and semi-public land uses that are compatible with residential development - parks, schools, churches, cemeteries, and the like. Refer to Chapter 6: Community Facilities and Services for additional information.

PUBLIC/SEMI-PUBLIC CLASS II

This land use category refers to public and semi-public land uses are not compatible with residential development. These uses have an industrial character to them. Examples of these uses include the sewage treatment plant and the street department. Refer to Chapter 6: Community Facilities and Services for additional information.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Land Use Plan shows existing parks and existing or proposed open space. Refer to Chapter 7: Park System Plan for additional information on parks and open space.

AGRICULTURE

The Land Use Plan does not identify agriculture as a future land use. However, agriculture is an appropriate use until development is feasible. Some agriculture areas in the city may never be feasible to develop. For example, part of the existing agriculture land in western Benson is in the floodplain and much of it is difficult to access. It would, therefore, be appropriate for this area to remain in agriculture (at least through 2020) or to convert the area to park or open space.

STAGED GROWTH PLAN

The draft staged growth plan shows potential areas for future growth. Most growth is expected to occur to the east and south with limited growth to the north. Utility and environmental constraints will discourage growth to the west. Figure 3-4: Staged Growth Plan shows the following areas for potential growth:

- Area A: These areas should remain as agriculture and rural residential with little growth expected. The City should work with townships and residents to study the possibility of extending City services to the homes in these areas.
- Area B: Agriculture, rural residential, and urban residential may be possible within these areas. Phased development should be based, in part, on interested landowners and the ability of the City to logically extend services to these areas.

Area C: City sewer serves existing industry in this area. The City should work with the Township and landowners to study the possibility for future industrial growth and City expansion in this area.

Area D: The City should work with landowners and the Township to explore the possibility of industrial growth, extension of services, and City expansion in this area.

CHAPTER 4: HOUSING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Available, affordable, and well-maintained housing are key components in the appearance and livelihood of Benson. Future land use, economic growth, and community pride are all strongly tied to housing.

This chapter describes existing housing in Benson and it sets forth a plan for future housing that is consistent with the projected needs and vision of the City. The Housing Plan guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and private developers in decisions related to the type, location, and density of existing and future housing in the community.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

The section describes the existing housing conditions and the projected future housing needs in Benson. Refer to the Chapter 2: Community Background and Chapter 3: Land Use for additional information.

EXISTING HOUSING UNITS

The following information is from the 1990 United States Census. When compiled and released, the 2000 Census will provide Benson with valuable, updated information on housing. Key characteristics of Benson's housing units are as follows:

- 1. Total Housing Units 1,484
 - a. Owner occupied units 909 (69%)
 - b. Renter occupied units 417 (31%)
 - c. Vacant units 158
- 2. Type of Housing
 - a. Single family units 1,098
 - b. Multi family units 333
 - c. Mobile homes 39
 - d. Condominium 9

- 3. Year Structure Built
 - a. 1980-1990 135
 - b. 1970-1979 162
 - c. 1960-1969 255
 - d. 1950-1959 206
 - e. 1940-1949 288
 - f. Before 1940 438
- 4. Year Moved into Unit
 - a. 1980-1990 586
 - b. 1970-1979 340
 - c. 1960-1969 183
 - d. Before 1960 226
- 5. Number of Bedrooms
 - a. No bedrooms 10
 - b. 1 bedroom 271
 - c. 2 bedroom 411
 - d. 3 bedrooms 573
 - e. 4 bedrooms 200
 - f. 5 or more bedrooms 19
- 6. Sewer and Water
 - a. Public sewer 1,457
 - b. Septic tank or cesspool 27
 - c. Public water 1,461
 - d. Individual drilled well 23
 - e. Lacking complete plumbing 8
- 7. Heating Fuel
 - a. Utility gas 1,143
 - b. Bottled/tank gas 18
 - c. Electricity 53
 - d. Fuel oil 139
 - e. Wood 8
 - f. No fuel used 21
- 8. Median Monthly Housing Costs
 - a. Owner occupied with mortgage \$370
 - b. Owner occupied no mortgage \$132
 - c. Rent \$175

EXISTING FAMILIES

The following information is from the 1990 United States Census. Key characteristics of Benson's families include the following:

- 1. Total Number of Families 887

2. Total Married Couple Families	787
a. With children age 18 and over	64
b. No children age 18 and over	723
3. Total Other Families	100
a. Male (no wife) with children age 18 and over	5
b. Male (no wife) with no children age 18 and over	4
c. Female (no husband) with children age 18 and over	35
d. Female (no husband) with no children age 18 and over	56
4. Household Type by Age of Householder	
a. 15 to 24 years	19
b. 25 to 34 years	115
c. 35 to 44 years	154
d. 45 to 54 years	94
e. 65 to 74 years	190
f. 75 years and over	131
5. Family Income in 1989	
a. 0 to \$24,999	530
b. \$25,000 to 49,999	307
c. \$50,000 to 74,999	33
d. \$75,000 to 99,999	15
e. \$100,000 or more	2

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF HOUSEHOLDS

The demographic profile of households impacts the housing needs of a community. Typically, households move through several life-cycle stages:

1. Entry level households
2. First time homeowners
3. Move-up buyers
4. Empty nesters/young seniors
5. Older seniors

ENTRY LEVEL HOUSEHOLDS. People in the 18 to 24 year old age group typically leave their childhood home and establish their own household. They often rent a house or an apartment because they generally do not have the income and savings needed to buy a home. In addition, many people in this age group move frequently and are, therefore, not willing to purchase a house. They are also more apt to share

an apartment with other unrelated people of similar age.

The actual population in this age group will vary from year to year. In the short term the population may increase slightly, but in the long term (unless current conditions and trends significantly change) it will likely decrease slightly.

FIRST TIME HOMEOWNERS. First time homeowners are typically in their 20s and 30s. They are usually move up renters and are often married with young children. Increasingly, first time home buyers are single. They are often prone to moving within several years of buying their first home for several reasons including: increased salaries allow for more expensive housing, children may require larger housing, and job opportunities in other communities may require that they move. Like the 18 to 24 year old age group, the population of first time homeowners may increase in the short term, but (unless current conditions and trends significantly change) it will likely decrease in the long term.

MOVE UP BUYERS. Move up buyers are typically in their 30s and 40s. They move up from the smaller, less expensive houses than they had purchased earlier. From an economic growth standpoint, this is an important group of people. Typically, move up buyers are more apt to stay in the community, in part, because they often have children and are less apt to move the family to another community and start over.

EMPTY NESTERS/YOUNG SENIORS. Empty nesters are generally in their 50s and 60s. Their children have moved out of the house and left them with a larger house than needed. Empty nesters, like young seniors, often want to move to smaller houses with less maintenance, for example, townhouses. As the baby boomers move into this age group, this population will likely increase in Benson.

OLDER SENIORS. Those in their 80s and older are often looking for low maintenance or assisted living housing. Although this population may decrease in the short term, it is expected to increase over the long term.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING HOUSING

The Community Survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan planning process provides general information about housing perceptions in

Benson.

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "No, Not at All" and 5 = "Yes, Definitely") if the current housing stock was sufficient. The results are as follows:

- High income housing 4.16
- Senior housing 3.58
- Low income housing 3.55
- Moderate income housing 3.43
- Rental units 3.28

Attitudes about the sufficiency of the existing housing stock in Benson relate to the age group of the respondents:

- Those under the age of 34 were least satisfied with existing low income housing and rental units.
- Those over the age of 65 were least satisfied with existing senior housing.
- Those between 19 and 55 were least satisfied with existing moderate income housing.

Survey participants were also asked if, overall, housing in Benson is well-kept. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "No, Not at All" and 5 = "Yes, Definitely"), the response average was 3.96. So, people generally feel the existing housing is well-maintained.

As stated earlier, the survey results provide general information about housing perceptions. A more detailed housing study could provide additional information. For example, it could help clarify if residents feel there is an insufficient *amount* of rental housing or if they feel the *quality* of rental housing is insufficient. A more detailed survey could also identify needed housing improvements. The City could use the results to address housing issues in more detail.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

TYPE OF HOUSING. Most housing units in Benson are owner occupied single family units. This will continue to be the case in the future. However, other types of housing units are also important to the future of Benson.

Each life-cycle stage discussed earlier in this section has significant planning implications. Adequate rental units and entry level housing are needed if Benson is to retain and attract people in their early 20s. This is

critical if Benson is to promote economic and population growth.

Likewise, if Benson is to maintain people of prime working age (25 to 54) the City must have adequate moderate to high income housing. Although the traditional single family detached house is of prime importance to this group, other housing options will likely become more popular. For example, townhouses are becoming an accepted choice for single people and married couples without children. Although townhouses are traditionally not as popular in rural areas, this trend is changing.

Finally, as Benson's population continues to age, the senior population will increasingly seek to live in low maintenance housing. Again, townhouses and senior apartments will likely become more popular.

HOUSING AGE AND CONDITION. Roughly 50% of the housing in Benson was built before 1950. While older housing often has an appealing character, several concerns related to older housing exist: structural integrity, safe and adequate mechanical and electrical systems, lead-based paint, asbestos, and energy efficiency. Most older homes are on public sewer and water, but a few have their own well and septic system. As septic systems need replacing, all homes in Benson will have public sewer.

HOUSING GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for housing in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of housing decisions that will be made through the year 2020. The housing goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Cooperate with local development groups and builders to help ensure that the future housing needs and programs are available or met for all people living and wanting to live in the community.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Encourage and promote a wide-range of housing types, values and rental options in existing and new neighborhoods.

2. Provide sufficient housing options to meet the needs of all segments of the population, including the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, and those of low and moderate income.
3. Ensure that all new housing (including rental housing and housing for persons of low and moderate income) adheres to functionally acceptable City standards of planning, design, and maintenance.
4. Establish incentives, such as financial incentives for those developments within the City service area/limits, to produce a mix of affordable housing types based on a current, reliable housing analysis.
5. Encourage the construction of quality, low-moderate income housing based on a current, reliable housing analysis.
6. Allow multi-family units to occur in certain zoning districts of the City where they will blend well with the surrounding single-family neighborhoods, for example on the fringe of the CBD.
7. Encourage cluster developments as a means of obtaining larger open space areas, using infrastructure investments efficiently, and providing for traditional neighborhood oriented interaction.

GOAL 2. Eliminate substandard housing.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Improve available housing through federal and state housing rehabilitation programs.
2. Encourage rehabilitation, or where necessary, redevelopment of substandard units. Undertake such actions through private means, public action and/or with assistance from non-profit groups, homesteading programs/grants, etc. (e.g. Habitat for Humanity).
3. Establish a Rental Housing Maintenance Inspection Program to enforce the City's housing standards and require that all rental housing units be examined for code violations at the time of sale or lease of property.

4. Remove substandard housing incapable of being improved to prevent the spread of deterioration and blight.
5. Utilize federal, state or regional housing assistance programs to provide needed low cost housing that may not otherwise be feasible.
6. Discourage concentrating any one type of housing in only one area of the City. For example, do not group all low income or rental units in one area of the City.

GOAL 3. Preserve and protect the City's unique residential structures and features.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policy:

1. Identify significant historic structures and encourage preservation and enhancement of those structures.

HOUSING PLAN

The City can help guide housing in Benson by regulating existing and proposed housing (zoning, subdivision regulations, and building code) and by promoting and offering programs that help people acquire and maintain housing. More specifically, the City can address housing issues through the following:

1. The City's ability to zone, making housing opportunities more or less varied.
2. Housing and subdivision standards affecting the cost of housing.
3. Federal, state or local funding of housing assistance, rehabilitation programs or housing for special populations.
4. Private/public partnerships to assist first-time home buyers and foster the provision of adequate and affordable housing.

This section of the Housing Plan, describes actions the City can take to ensure the availability and variety of quality housing opportunities to present and future residents.

SURVEY EXISTING HOUSING

Roughly 50% of the housing in Benson was built before 1950. In order to better evaluate the existing condition of the City's older housing stock, and develop a plan to address identified needs, a city-wide study of housing built prior to the 1950s should be conducted. The study should:

1. Identify current housing in need of clearance or rehabilitation.
2. Study and develop funding programs to help homeowners improve structures and bring them up to code.

APPROPRIATE MIX OF HOUSING

This Housing Plan does not prohibit certain types of housing or exclude certain "groups" or "classes" of people. The Plan promotes an appropriate mix of housing types intended to serve the diverse needs of the community. The Plan also promotes "life-cycle" housing. This essentially means a young resident could start out in Benson by renting an apartment, then move to a starter house, then to a move-up house, and perhaps finally to senior housing or assisted living. The goal is to provide adequate housing at all stages of person's life.

The Plan also recognizes that demographic characteristics are changing. More people are choosing to remain single, people are living longer, there are more single parent families, and so on. Although changes in Benson will be gradual, the City must be sensitive to the fact that housing needs are beginning to change and that the City will need to provide the appropriate mix of housing to meet those needs.

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT

This Housing Plan encourages the use of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) for land that would otherwise be difficult to develop. For example, a PUD could be successfully used in areas that have wetlands or are partially within the floodplain. This approach would provide flexibility in lot size and layout. It would also provide flexibility in housing types and other types of uses. For example, a housing development could incorporate a small neighborhood store that caters to the residents of the development. A PUD approach could also help preserve open space and natural areas.

RENTAL HOUSING

Given that roughly 30% of Benson's residents rent, rental units (multi family units in particular) are an important part of Benson's Housing Plan. As discussed earlier, rental units provide housing opportunities for all segments of the population, but especially for the younger and older population groups.

The younger population is important to economic future of Benson. If the City is to retain its younger population, it must have adequate affordable rental units. Likewise, as Benson's population ages, older residents will be inclined to move to quality rental units including rental townhouse units and apartments.

Multi family rental housing should be integrated with the community. The City should continue to ensure that future rental housing is well-built and well maintained.

HOUSING INFILL OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to vacant lots, there are several large residential lots scattered throughout Benson. Some of these lots could be subdivided for future housing development. Housing infill is often a cost effective way of providing new housing since much of the existing infrastructure (the streets and utilities) already exists in these areas.

There are also opportunities to provide living units above existing businesses in the central business district of Benson. Problems commonly encountered in developing living units above a business (building code issues, parking, handicapped accessibility, and so on) can generally be solved. Housing in the central business district can promote a more vibrant downtown. It can also cater to a population that finds it desirable (or necessary) to walk to local businesses.

HOUSING ALTERNATIVES FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

There is a growing need for housing that adequately meets the needs of those who may require special residential arrangements (seniors, families in stress, the physically handicapped, the mentally ill, juveniles, and others in need of special housing). As this section of the population grows, there will become a greater demand for housing such as the following:

- Low-cost housing (for the elderly on fixed

incomes) which will permit people to live independently for as long as possible.

- Housing that is accessible to physically handicapped persons.
- Foster homes.
- Housing that offers assisted living services that help extend a person's independent living arrangement.

Housing Finance Agency.

The City can foster housing programs and assisted living services so people can remain in their own homes longer or postpone institutionalized living arrangements.

REGULATING HOUSING

The Zoning Ordinance and Building Code are tools the City of Benson can use to improve the City's housing stock. These regulations are intended to protect the health, safety, and welfare of existing residents without excluding any group because of age or income status.

The City's regulations not only help control and prevent poor housing conditions, but they can also help promote desirable and sensitive housing. For example, the City can amend its Zoning Ordinance to allow accessory apartments in single-family neighborhoods to permit the elderly to obtain the financial ability to retain their own homes.

MAINTENANCE INSPECTION PROGRAM

In addition to any rehabilitation and preservation efforts, the City should consider establishing and enforcing a Preventative Maintenance Inspection Program. Under this type of program, all housing units would be examined for code violations at the time of sale or lease of property. The City would require that real estate agents inform sellers and buyers of this required inspection and would inform property owners and leasing agents of the inspection program. The inspector would identify any problems with the housing unit and provide a full disclosure of the defects. This would then provide an opportunity for the homeowner, renter, or the subsequent purchaser of the property to make necessary repairs.

In the event that major code violations are discovered which would specifically endanger the life and safety of the residents, this program could also mandate that these corrections be made. In addition, the City would encourage the use of home improvement grants and low interest loans available through the Minnesota

CHAPTER 5: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Transportation helps bring a community together. A well-designed and maintained transportation system provides safe, efficient, and reliable ways for residents to access their homes, schools, businesses, and places of work. Furthermore, it provides recreation opportunities (bike and walking paths) and it contributes to the overall image of the community. Transportation also links a community to its surroundings. It facilitates import and export of goods and services and is a major factor in determining future land use.

This chapter describes the existing transportation system in Benson and it sets forth a plan for maintaining and improving the system. The Transportation Plan is a general guide for City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and others involved in making transportation related decisions. The Plan also provides the framework for future, more detailed transportation studies.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Benson's transportation system includes roads, trails, railroads, and the airport. The following provides an inventory and analysis of each of these. (See Figure 5-A: Transportation Plan).

EXISTING ROAD SYSTEM

The existing road system is perhaps the most important aspect of Benson's transportation system. It provides links within the community and to the surrounding area. This section describes a road classification system for Benson, it provides an inventory of the existing roads, and it summarizes the major issues related to the existing road system.

ROAD CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM. For purposes of this Plan, roads are classified as principal arterial,

minor arterial, collector, and local streets. This classification system recognizes that roads perform specific functions.

In general, arterial roads provide connections between regions - for example, between Benson and Willmar. They move large volumes of traffic at relatively high speeds on reasonably direct routes, so private property access, parking, and street intersections are often limited to help facilitate smooth traffic flow. However, arterial roads in a central business district often allow parking and additional street intersections.

Collector roads generally provide major connections within a community or neighborhood. They provide a link between local streets and arterial roads. Collector (and sometimes arterial) roads usually serve commercial and industrial uses and uses that attract many people (retail centers, civic centers, and the like). Parking and private property access may or may not be limited on collector roads.

Local streets are generally found in single family residential areas. They provide access to private property and they often allow on-street parking. They handle the least amount of traffic volume and are usually narrower than other types of roads.

EXISTING PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL ROADS. US Highway 12 is the only principal arterial road in Benson. It is a regionally important highway that connects Benson to Willmar, Minneapolis - St. Paul, and other regionally significant communities.

US Highway 12 generally runs east-west through the center of Benson. However, it has two 90 degree turns within the city and an at-grade railroad crossing. Within the central business district, the speed limit is 30 mile per hour, intersections are frequent, and on-street parking is allowed. At the outskirts of the city, the road serves industrial and highway business uses and intersections are less frequent. In the western part of the city, a frontage road runs parallel to the highway to help reduce the number of access points along the highway.

MINOR ARTERIAL ROADS. State Highways 9 and 29 are the only minor arterial roads in Benson. They are not as heavily traveled as US Highway 12, but they provide important regional connections.

Highway 9 runs primarily east-west through Benson, but it takes two turns within the city: a broad, sweeping turn at the northeast end of the city and a 90-degree turn at the intersection of Highway 12 in the

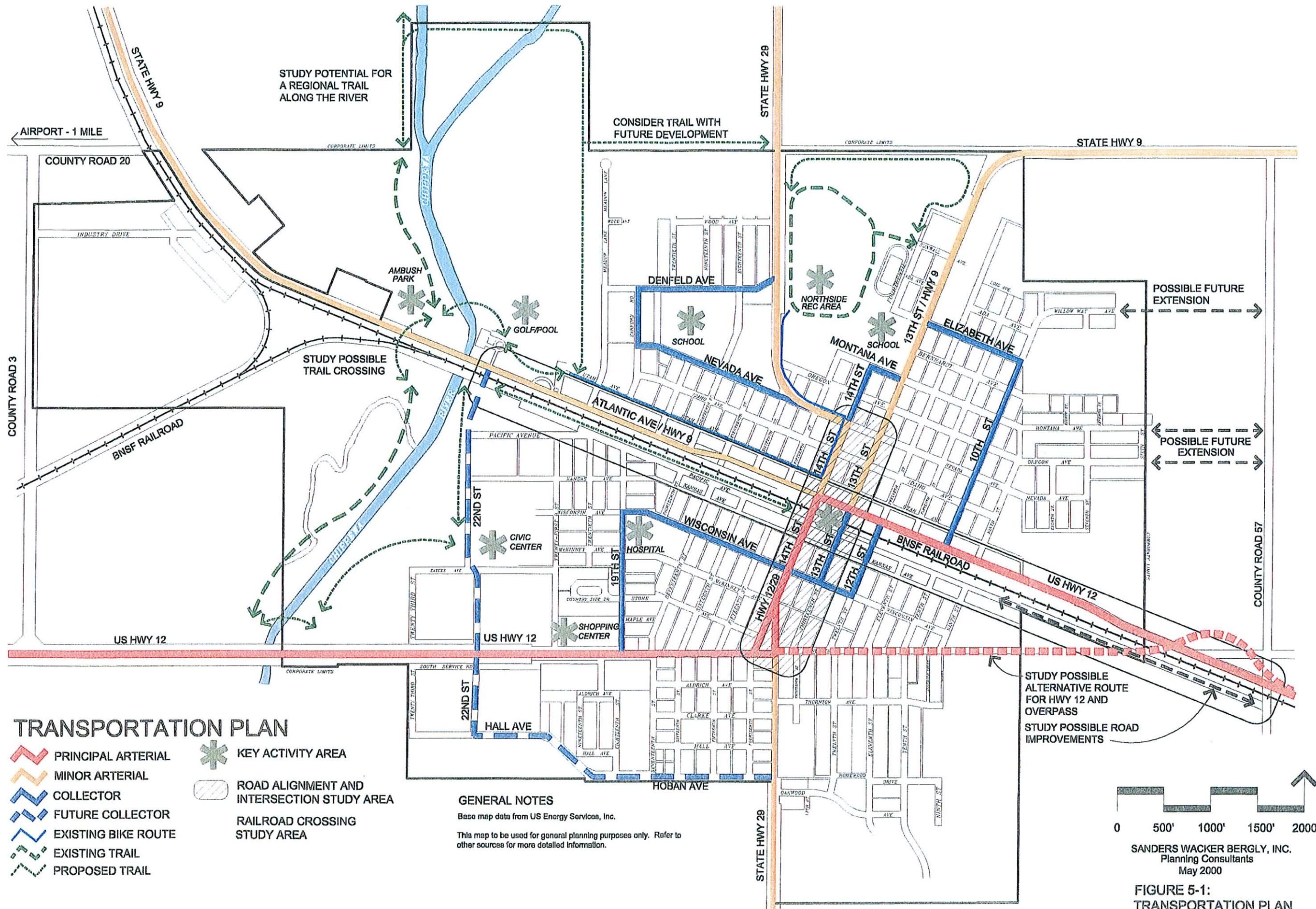


FIGURE 5-1:
TRANSPORTATION PLAN

central business district. Highway 29 runs north-south through the center of Benson, but it has one broad sweeping turn and one 90-degree turn.

COLLECTOR ROADS. The existing collector roads shown on Figure 5-1: Transportation Plan, were determined by the planning consultant based on general observation. In small, rural communities, collector roads are often not clearly differentiated from local streets. However, in Benson there may be a few roads that serve as collectors. The City may want to conduct a detailed transportation study that more clearly designates collector roads. For purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, the collector roads are identified as follows:

12th and 13th Streets in the CBD. There are only three railroad crossings within the city. These are at 12th, 13th, and 14th Streets. All of the north-south traffic in Benson is funneled through these three streets. 14th Street is Highway 12/29 (a principal arterial road) so it receives more traffic, but 12th and 13th Streets also receive considerable traffic.

Wisconsin Avenue and 19th Street. This collector loop provides access to the hospital and to the multi family residential units at Country Side Drive. Both uses generate more traffic than their surroundings, so it is logical that they are served by a collector road. Also, declaring these roads as collectors will allow a reasonably direct route to the hospital to be maintained.

Denfeld Avenue and Nevada Avenue. This loop picks up traffic from several side streets and it serves the elementary school and a multi family residential complex.

14th Street and Montana Avenue. This is a short loop that serves the Junior/Senior High School. It does not collect much traffic from side streets, but handles a moderate level of traffic.

Elizabeth Avenue and 10th Street. This collector loop appears to collect a fair amount of traffic from side streets. However, these streets are not clearly differentiated from other streets in the area.

LOCAL STREETS. Most roads in Benson are local streets. They provide access to private property - primarily single family homes. Benson's Subdivision Regulations require marginal access streets to have a right-of-way width of 40 feet and a pavement width of 32 feet. All other local streets are required to have a right-of-way width of 70 feet and a pavement width

of 44 feet. The regulations do not allow private streets.

Like many small towns, the local streets do not have a clear hierarchy to them. Controlled intersections may be in response to specific neighborhood concerns rather than an overall transportation plan.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS. This section provides an overview of the major issues and concerns related to the existing road system in Benson.

Arterial Roads. Benson is at the intersection of two State Highways and one US Highway. These highways provide the City with important connections to the surrounding region and they provide a strong framework for the Transportation Plan. However, they also present challenges to the community.

The three arterial roads intersect in the central business district. Although this is positive in that it helps funnel people to the downtown area, the road alignment involves 90 degree turns that some trucks find hard to negotiate. Also these roads have at-grade railroad crossings so traffic is frequently delayed by trains.

Collector Roads and Local Streets. As is often the case in small towns, collector roads and local streets in Benson are not clearly differentiated. Given the size of the community and the amount of local traffic, this is likely not a major problem. However, because the City does not have an overall plan to control local street intersections there are inconsistencies in which intersections are controlled. This can present a dangerous situation for vehicles and pedestrians.

Road Improvements. The streets are generally in good condition. Not all roads are paved and some roads have drainage problems. However, the City plans to correct the most severe problems and it makes repairs and improvements every year.

EXISTING TRAILS

This section provides an overview of existing trails as they relate to the overall transportation system. The recreation aspects of trails are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7: Park System Plan.

For purposes of the Transportation Plan, existing trails are classified as bicycle routes and off-road trails. However, there are also sidewalks in Benson and snowmobiling is allowed within the City.

BICYCLE ROUTES. A bicycle route is simply a road signed to encourage bicycle use. A road designated as a bicycle route generally signifies that the road provides a safer (and often more scenic or more direct route) than the surrounding roads. The existing bicycle routes in Benson are described below:

Utah Avenue. This route encourages bicyclists to use Utah Avenue rather than Atlantic Avenue as a way to get from the central part of town to the recreation areas in western Benson.

Highway 29. This route provides a way for bicyclists to get from the central part of town to the Northside Recreation area.

OFF-ROAD TRAILS. For the purpose of this Transportation Plan, an off-road trail is a trail (or path) separate from a road. The existing off-road trails in Benson are described below:

Northside Recreation Area. The trails in this area not only provide a means to get to the recreation fields, but they also provide recreation opportunities. Rollerbladers, bicyclists, and pleasure walkers use these bituminous trails.

Ambush Park / Open Space. The park and open space west of the Chippewa River has several off-road trails. These trails are unpaved and used for recreation and nature observation.

SIDEWALKS. Sidewalks are located throughout the city. Usually they are not wide enough to serve as functional bicycle paths. However, they provide a safe alternative to travel on the road system.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS. Snowmobiling is a regulated, allowable use within the city limits.

EXISTING RAILROAD

The railroad has a strong history in Benson. In 1870, the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad extended its tracks from Willmar to the area that we now know as Benson. Because this area was the "end of the line" for over a year, the City of Benson developed into a regional center.

The train was an important mode of transportation in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Then, over the years, trucks and automobiles became important and trains became less important. Because train traffic decreased, there were likely fewer conflicts between

trains and vehicles than there are today. Since the 1990s, however, freight train traffic has increased dramatically. As a result, conflicts between trains and vehicles have become a major issue in Benson.

Today, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad operates the railroad. They have a main line that connects Minneapolis and Seattle and they have a branch line that serves the agriculture industry in western Minnesota and South Dakota. These two lines intersect in western Benson. The main line runs east-west through the central business district. At-grade crossings exist within the city limits and are at 12th, 13th, and 14th Streets. Because the railroad operates a switching operation at the intersection of the main and branch lines, the trains on the main line often block the at-grade crossings at 12th, 13th, and 14th Streets while they marshal cars to and from the branch line onto the main line. The railroad does not provide passenger service.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS. The railroad was important to the development of Benson and it continues to be important to the City. Yet there are several concerns related to the railroad that should be addressed.

Blocked Intersections. Perhaps the chief concern with the existing railroad is that trains frequently block all railroad crossings in Benson for periods over ten minutes. The main problem is that trains often stop for the switching operation at the intersection of the main and branch lines. Not only does this result in traffic delays, it also presents a dangerous situation in that emergency vehicles may be delayed.

Barrier between North and South Benson. The railroad essentially divides Benson into a north and south half. The only permitted crossings within the city are in the central business district. This is not necessarily negative, in fact it may help strengthen the downtown area. However, there are other areas in the city where crossings would ideally occur, but cannot occur because of the railroad. For example, providing a crossing that would connect Ambush Park in western Benson to the open space south of the park would be desirable. But an at-grade crossing here is highly unlikely, so the two uses are fragmented rather than united.

Noise and Vibration. Noise and vibration can limit land uses next to the railroad. Residential development in, particular, may be less desirable in areas near the railroad.

Land Use on Railroad Property. The width of existing railroad property limits the size and shape of development that can occur next to the railroad. In addition, train noise and vibration limit the type of development that is compatible with the area. As a result, existing land use is generally of an industrial type that is perhaps not overly concerned about image. Yet this area and these uses are a highly visible part of the community. Although an attractive park is on railroad property in the central business district, the areas farther out from the downtown area are not attractive.

EXISTING AIRPORT

The Benson Municipal Airport is one mile west of the city limits. It has a 4,000 foot paved and lighted runway. The airport primarily serves single and twin engine aircraft. Currently, there are no charter or commercial flights out of the airport. Commercial passenger and freight air service is available in St. Cloud, approximately 90 miles away. There are six city-owned hangars available for use at the airport.

As described in the Land Use Plan chapter, protected air space around the airport limits the height of structures in the airport area. Refer to the Land Use Plan for additional information.

EXISTING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The Heartland Express Transportation Program provides rides to those needing transportation services. Mini-buses are available with hired drivers to serve persons of all ages and all income levels.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

The Community Survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan planning process provides general information about transportation perceptions in Benson.

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "No, Not at All" and 5 = "Yes, Definitely") several transportation related issues. The results are as follows:

- Is traffic in Benson well-managed? . . . 3.28
- Is truck traffic a problem? 2.66
- Is Benson a pedestrian friendly town? . 3.66
- Is there enough parking downtown? . . 3.89
- Is the railroad a major inconvenience? 4.17
- Is the airport a valuable part of

- Benson's transportation system? 3.11
- Does the public bus system provide adequate service? 4.21

As stated earlier, the survey results provide *general* information about transportation *perceptions*. As expected, residents feel that the railroad is a major inconvenience. Although residents gave overall traffic management an above average score, they expressed several transportation concerns. In response to the open-ended question in the survey, "What, if any, improvements would you like to see in Benson?" the second most commented on issue involved transportation concerns. Roughly 15% of the people who responded to this question felt intersections on the local streets should be better controlled and that, overall, traffic should be better managed in Benson.

TRANSPORTATION GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for transportation in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of transportation decisions that will be made through the year 2020. The transportation goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Design and develop the Vehicular Transportation System based on the hierarchy of travel functions. Distance of travel, speed, safety and access requirements will be factors in determining the functional classification of individual streets and highways.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Coordinate (comprehensively) all transportation related facilities into one system - roads, trails, rail, and air.
2. Ensure that the highway system complements and facilitates movements provided by local roads, trails, and pedestrian walks.
3. Establish and maintain a line of communication with county and state highway officials to ensure that planned improvements are consistent with the goals and objectives of the community.

4. Develop the transportation system to focus mainly on the activity centers within the community.
5. Provide transportation opportunities that meet the mobility needs of all individuals within the community according to the American Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and requirements.
6. Plan and design transportation facilities that preserve natural resources and existing infrastructure and reduce the total need for new public investment.
7. Reduce, where possible, dependency upon automobile oriented transportation.

GOAL 2. Plan and design the streets and highways to preserve their traffic carrying capability.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Reduce the conflict between local and through traffic by limiting vehicular access onto arterial roadways and by using appropriate driveway spacing and traffic control devices.
2. Limit direct land access onto major streets, wherever possible.

GOAL 3. Protect the traveling public by designing safe streets and highways and providing needed traffic control devices and enforcement.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Discourage through traffic from penetrating residential areas.
2. Design service roads that parallel major arterials to reduce the number of traffic conflicts, hazards, and resulting accidents.
3. Identify all traffic safety hazards within the City and establish a phased program to improve hazardous and poorly designed intersections and access points to increase the safety to both motorized and non-motorized traffic.

4. Require proper signing, traffic controls, and visibility at railroad crossings.
5. Establish safe access points to all uses abutting highways and arterial streets.
6. Design arterial highways in the city to prevent unregulated pedestrian and bicycle crossings and protect pedestrian and bicycle movement paralleling vehicular traffic.
7. Appoint a committee to address safe street and highway design, needed traffic control devices, and enforcement.

GOAL 4. Maintain, upgrade and reconstruct streets following contemporary standards.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Plan street and highway improvement projects to include facilities for pedestrians and bicycles within existing and new areas of the City.
2. Develop all additional elements of the street system (sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, etc.) with high design and construction standards, considering abutting land uses and overall transportation objectives and policies.
3. Continue a long term street maintenance and construction program and establish a formal petitioning process for such improvements.
4. Use curb and gutter when possible on every street throughout the community.
5. Appoint a committee to: 1) oversee the development of a sidewalk plan showing existing and proposed City walkways and walkways in need of repair, and 2) determine appropriate incentives to develop and repair sidewalks in existing residential neighborhoods.

GOAL 5. Develop plans to lessen the noise, congestion, and safety concerns of truck and train traffic on Benson's residents, businesses, and public institutions.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Work with the State and other communities that are looking at the train traffic as a much broader issue.
2. Require appropriate signing, traffic controls, and visibility at railroad crossings.
3. Use the expertise of State agencies to investigate, plan, and resolve solutions to the truck traffic problem as most of the problem relates to the State highways within the City.
4. Develop parking areas that conserve land, allow joint use and reduce conflicts with moving vehicular traffic, pedestrians and bicyclists.
5. Encourage safe and attractive parking lots, with landscaping, lighting and hard surfacing, and provide appropriate locations for long-term parking of commercial vehicles to enhance the image of the CBD.

GOAL 6. Develop an assessment procedure for street improvements that recognizes unique neighborhood characteristics.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Investigate the demographic characteristics of the area to be served and tailor the project scope to the ability to pay. A less costly, lower quality project, may be appropriate sometimes.
2. Use variable term assessment periods to allow homeowners to adjust their payment schedule to match their ability to pay.
3. Project pavement/construction alternatives on a life cycle cost basis.
4. Plan for improvements within a long-range pavement management plan so residents will be alerted to upcoming projects well before actual implementation.

GOAL 7. Assist the downtown area in planning and providing off-street parking.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Discourage on-street parking on arterial streets when adequate off-street parking is available.
2. Appoint a committee to address parking issues and needs within the City.
3. Reduce overall demand and resulting space requirements for parking through consolidation and concentration of related land uses and through improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

6. Coordinate the planning of all parking facilities within the CBD area to ensure the highest possible use and appropriate parking locations for commercial vehicles.
7. Require handicap parking in all new and existing parking facilities according to the American Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and requirements.

GOAL 8. Insure the continuation of public bus service to Benson residents.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Maintain a continuing dialog with the service provider to assure that service is preserved and expanded as necessary to meet changing needs.
2. Encourage primary beneficiaries of the service (nursing home, hospital, the elderly, apartment complexes, etc.) to keep the City and service provider aware of changing needs.
3. Encourage use of the service to help assure that the operation will remain viable.

GOAL 9. Continue to develop trails as an important component of the Transportation Plan.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Review development proposals to decide if, how, and where trails may be appropriate in the development.
2. Coordinate with the State, County, and others to explore opportunities for development of regional trails that would be linked to Benson.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Transportation Plan guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and others involved in making transportation related decisions. The goals and policies discussed above provide the framework for the Transportation Plan. This section describes, in a general manner, possible ways to implement the goals and policies.

ROAD SYSTEM

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Transportation Plan helps bring the community together and link it to its surroundings. It also has a major impact on existing and future land uses. Therefore, the Transportation Plan is a very important component of the Comprehensive Plan. And the road system is the most important component of the Transportation Plan. Therefore, the City should carefully study future road improvements in Benson. The following provides an overview of possible road improvements and how these improvements may be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan.

ARTERIAL ROADS. Highways 9, 12, and 29 all converge in central Benson. From one perspective, this is good in that it brings traffic to the central business district. However, the manner in which these highways come together has created circulation problems - problems that are further compounded by railroad issues. One problem is that trucks, in particular, have difficulty negotiating the 90 degree turns in this area.

The City should work closely with the State and others in developing possible solutions to this problem. This is not simply a local problem. Traffic on State and US Highways is also affected, so the cost and effort needed to solve the problem should be shared with others.

The City should initiate a study that explores how these three highways can better relate to each other. For example, Highways 9 and 29 might converge so that they intersect Highway 12 at one intersection rather than the two intersections that currently exist. Or perhaps Highway 12 could be rerouted to go down Minnesota Avenue.

These alternatives may help solve circulation issues in the central business district, but they may also create other problems - especially problems related to

existing and future land uses. Studies should examine these and other impacts in more detail. The Comprehensive Plan does not recommend rerouting highways around the city. Bringing traffic and business into the city is important.

COLLECTOR ROADS. The City should study the possibility of providing an alternative railroad crossing near 22nd Street and Atlantic Avenue (Highway 9). If this proposed crossing is feasible, 22nd Street should be designed and treated as a collector road.

If additional development occurs south of Hoban Avenue, the Hoban Avenue / Hall Avenue / 22nd Street loop would likely be heavily traveled and should then be treated as a collector road.

LOCAL STREETS. If future construction occurs as identified in the Land Use Plan, additional local streets will need to be constructed accordingly. For example, in the northern part of the city, 18th, 19th, and 20th Street will likely need to be extended. If additional land outside the current city limits is developed and consequently incorporated into the city (for example next to County Road 57) the City should consider extending roads including Willow Way, Montana, and Oregon to County Road 57.

Like many small towns, Benson's streets do not have a strong hierarchy to them. As a result, controlled intersections may be in response to specific neighborhood concerns rather than an overall transportation plan. This provides a confusing and potentially unsafe situation. Benson should develop a clear and consistent plan to control intersections. Where only local streets are involved, the City could consider placing stop signs at every other intersection. This would serve to slow traffic throughout the area. The City should also explore other solutions.

It should be noted that in early 2000, the City will conduct a study to decide if a traffic signal is warranted at the intersection of 14th Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Perhaps the City could expand this study to include a plan to control intersections at local streets.

PARKING. The Community Survey did not identify a perceived parking shortage in the downtown area. Nevertheless, if there are land use changes in the downtown area, the City should study the need for additional parking. The City should also consider revising its parking standards to encourage adequate landscaping and to allow innovative approaches to parking including shared parking arrangements.

ROAD MAINTENANCE. The City has a road maintenance and improvement plan. The City should continue this program to ensure that roads will remain safe and functional in the future.

TRAIL SYSTEM PLAN

This section provides an overview of proposed trails as they relate to the overall transportation system. The recreation aspects of trails are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8: Park System Plan.

Benson has several existing trails and there are many reasons why Benson should continue to enhance its trail system:

1. **Recreation Opportunities.** Trails provide a variety of recreation opportunities for people of all ages. Walking, biking, nature observation, snowmobiling, and horseback riding are possible recreation uses of trails.
2. **Alternative Transportation Routes.** Trails can give residents a safer, more enjoyable way to get around the city. In addition, trails encourage people to use their cars less. This in turn can help reduce traffic congestion and parking problems.
3. **Link Neighborhoods.** Trails can help link isolated neighborhoods and provide a stronger sense of community.
4. **Buffer Different Land Uses.** Trails can help buffer different land uses (for example, commercial and residential).
5. **Economic Benefits.** Communities that support *regional* trails have often found that the economy of their community improves. Regional trail users often patronize local businesses (restaurants, motels, etc.) and new businesses may develop to serve trail users (a sporting goods shop, for example). Also, all other factors equal, businesses and industries may be more apt to locate in a community where trails and parks contribute to a high quality of life.

Potential Regional Trails. There are many significant recreation areas within 30 miles of Benson. If these areas could be linked with a trail system, it could greatly benefit Benson.

The City should work with the County and State to

ensure that regional road improvements consider including an 8-foot wide bituminous bicycle lane. This could help promote bicycle use throughout the region.

The City should also work with snowmobile associations to enhance snowmobile trails in the area. Perhaps opportunities for a regional cross-country ski trail exist. Regional snowmobile and cross-country ski trails are often on private land and are maintained by associations with support from the State.

If there is interest, the City could work with the Minnesota Horse Council and other equestrian associations to explore the possibility of providing an equestrian trail in the area. Perhaps a trail head could be provided at the existing equestrian club or at Ambush Park.

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES. The Transportation Plan identifies potential trail areas. However, there may be many other areas the City may want to consider for future trails. The following guidelines are intended to help Benson in developing the trail system within the City:

1. Use this Comprehensive Plan as a general guide for trail development, but work with residents, landowners, and developers in designing and constructing specific trails.
2. Provide trails that link key areas of the City. For example, provide trails that link major residential areas to schools, the downtown area, parks, and future regional trails.
3. Do not expect the City of Benson to design, fund, build, and maintain every trail in Benson. Associations, clubs, and others often work with private landowners to provide and maintain trails on private land. The City can help coordinate planning efforts with organizations that may be interested in developing trails in Benson.
4. Design the trail system to be accessible to people with physical disabilities. Guidelines for developing accessible trails are available from many sources including the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
5. Provide trail loops of various lengths that allow users to return to their starting point without backtracking.
6. Design and construct trails with proposed

development. Do not wait until after development has already occurred.

7. Provide a maintenance program that ensures trails will be properly maintained. Poorly maintained trails are more of a liability than an asset.
8. Consider providing a separate bicycle lane on heavily traveled bicycle routes. This lane could simply be identified with paint on the pavement of a road. This would give bicycles an unimpeded lane for travel. The City should consider the implications of designating a bicycle lane on a road where parking exists.

TRAIL CROSSINGS. The railroad and river limit where and how trails can be linked in Benson. This section describes possible solutions to trail crossings at the railroad and river.

Trails can only cross the railroad at approved railroad crossings. Therefore, north and south trails should be linked at the existing crossings in the center of the city. This would likely affect the central business district. However, providing a crossing in the western part of town that would link Ambush Park and the open space to the south would also be beneficial. If a new at-grade road crossing is provided at 22nd Street, a trail crossing could be integrated with the new road. Also, the City might explore the possibility of developing a trail underpass or overpass in this area.

The Chippewa River separates eastern and western Benson. Unfortunately, the existing Highway 12 and Highway 9 bridges provide little area for integration of safe and functional trails. Therefore, the City should explore the possibilities of providing separate bridges for proposed trails. The City could also consider working with the State to explore the possibility of cantilevering a separate walk (or trail) off the existing bridges.

RAILROAD SYSTEM PLAN

The major railroad issue that must be addressed involves blocked crossings. Working by itself, the City is limited in addressing this issue. Essentially, the City can continue to ticket the railroad if it blocks crossings for over ten minutes, but this does not solve the problem. The City will need to work closely with the railroad, the State, and others. This is not just a local problem. Traffic on State and US Highways is

also affected, so the cost and effort needed to solve the problem should be shared with others.

The following describes possible solutions to the crossing problem. The City may choose to study any of these in more detail:

1. Consider an overpass or underpass in the downtown area. This would help with crossing delays; however, it could have a potentially negative impact on how the downtown area functions. The area needed to ramp up or down would likely require Highway 12 to be rerouted which could affect downtown businesses. The cost could also be prohibitive.
2. Consider improving the existing crossing east of Benson at County Road 57. It is currently possible for those traveling on Highway 12 to cross the tracks here and take Pacific Avenue to the downtown area. The City should consider if improving this road would give residents a viable alternative route in crossing to and from the north and south sides of town when the downtown crossings are blocked. If Pacific Avenue is improved for truck traffic, this could help alleviate congestion in the downtown area, but it could create additional problems by encouraging more traffic in areas that currently do not have high levels of traffic.
3. Explore the possibility of adding an at-grade crossing at the west end of town near 22nd Street. This may provide a useful connection between north and south Benson. However, if the switching operation remains as is, it is possible that this intersection could also be blocked.
4. Explore the possibility of rerouting the branch railroad line so that it would intersect with the main line either farther west or east of Benson. If this could be done, trains would not have to obstruct the crossings in downtown Benson during the switching operation.
5. Work with the railroad and State to explore other options including scheduling switching operations to occur at the least disruptive times.

AIRPORT

The Airport is an important part of Benson's transportation system. Businesses and industries often look favorably on communities that have an airport. Also, the airport allows Benson to be serviced with emergency air service. Therefore, the City should continue to maintain and enhance the airport so that it remains an important component of Benson's Transportation Plan.

CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

Community facilities and services include lands, buildings, services, and systems that benefit the public - for example, parks, schools, health and safety services, and transportation and utility systems. These elements contribute to the quality of life in a community and therefore affect a community's ability to maintain and attract existing and future residents, businesses, and industries.

The extent of these facilities and the level of services offered is based, in part, on the public's perception of the need for public services. This perception changes over time depending on a variety of factors including demographic characteristics (age, income, etc.) other nearby facilities, perceived threats to safety, economic conditions, and political inclinations. To keep up with changing perceptions and to anticipate desired changes, the City must be continually aware of public response to the services it offers. Public input in the budgeting process, assessment hearings, and reactions to public improvement projects provide valuable insights. The City may provide, franchise, or coordinate many of these services to ensure that residents receive an appropriate level of service at a reasonable cost.

This chapter describes existing conditions, sets goals and policies, and provides a plan for community facilities and services in Benson. Refer to other chapters in the Comprehensive Plan for additional information on community facilities and services.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

This section provides an overview of major community facilities and services in Benson. This overview is not intended to provide guidance in developing a capital improvements program for the facilities, but rather it provides insight into quality of life issues that affect

Benson residents, businesses, and industries.

TRANSPORTATION

Following is a brief description of major transportation facilities in Benson. Refer to Chapter 5: Transportation Plan for additional information.

BENSON AIRPORT. The airport is a valuable part of Benson's transportation system. It allows for emergency air service and corporate and pleasure planes. The airport is located roughly one mile west of Benson. It has a 4,000 foot long paved and lighted runway and several hangars. The City may want to explore ways to use underutilized hangars.

MNDOT HIGHWAY, COUNTY HIGHWAY, AND CITY STREET DEPARTMENTS. The MNDOT and City Street Department are in the industrial park near the Civic Center in southwest Benson. The County Highway Department is located just outside Benson off of Hoban Avenue. Although each department functions separately, the City should consider possible efficiencies in grouping these facilities together.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES. Prairie Five Rides provides rides to disabled persons. Heartland Express provides intra-city bus service.

EDUCATION

Benson offers a variety of education opportunities, including the following:

BENSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS. Benson Public School District 777 serves a 400 square mile area including the cities of Benson, DeGraff, Clontarf, Danvers, and Swift Falls. The School District serves approximately 1,200 students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

BENSON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL. This is a non-denominational school that offers a kindergarten through 12th grade education. The school emphasizes strong family and church standards.

EARLY CHILDHOOD - FAMILY EDUCATION. This program offers preschoolers and their parents education opportunities. It also organizes social outings for children and their parents.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION. This program offers a variety of education opportunities including first aid, business, and language classes. The program also helps interested persons earn a GED.

SWIFT COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE. The extension service provides a variety of classes dealing with agriculture, business, and leadership programs.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Benson is home to eight churches:

- Assembly of God
- First Baptist Church
- First Evangelical Church
- Pilgrim Congregation Church
- Our Redeemers Lutheran Church
- St. Francis Catholic Church
- St. Mark's Lutheran Church (LCMS)
- Trinity Lutheran Church (ELCA)

Benson also has two cemeteries.

COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS / EVENTS

Benson has several annual celebrations and events. These events help draw people to Benson and promote a sense of community. Following is a list of some of the major events:

- Annual Easter Egg Hunt
- Syttende Mai, Scandinavian Festival
- Pioneerland Band Festival
- Annual Kid Day
- Little Britches Rodeo
- Antique Car Show
- Fly in Breakfast
- Farmers Market
- Crazy Day
- Missoula Children's Theatre
- Swift County Fair
- Germanfest
- Community Rummage Sale
- Fall Craft Show

PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICES

Benson residents are well served by police, fire, and emergency medical technicians. Following is a brief overview of each:

FIRE DEPARTMENT. Benson built a new fire station in 1999-2000. The fire station is well equipped. 32 volunteer fire fighters serve in the department.

POLICE. Benson has five full-time and 3 part-time police officers. The Benson area is also served by 13 full-time, six part-time, and five volunteer officers of

the sheriff's office.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS. Benson has 16 volunteer emergency medical technicians.

COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

CITY HALL. The City Hall is located in downtown Benson. It has been recently remodeled and has a relatively large meeting room for public hearings. The building should serve Benson well for many years.

LIBRARY. Benson has a relatively new, well equipped library located in the downtown business district. The library offers Internet access and is a member of the Pioneerland Library System which allows interlibrary loans with other libraries.

CIVIC CENTER AND PARK FACILITIES. The civic center and park facilities are discussed in Chapter 7: Park System Plan.

HEALTH SERVICES

Benson is fortunate to have a hospital and other health services. Following is a list of health services in Benson.

SWIFT COUNTY - BENSON HOSPITAL. The existing hospital was constructed in 1949 and an addition was added in 1949. The hospital holds 32 beds. A staff from the shared physician program of Affiliated Community Medical Center is located in the upper level of the hospital. The hospital is important to the residence of Benson and the City should strive to ensure the hospital will remain viable in Benson.

MEADOW LANE HEALTHCARE CENTER. This center provides 63 skilled nursing beds and 29 licensed board and care beds. There appears to be little room for expansion of this facility. Given the aging population, the City should work with the Center on any future expansion or relocation plans.

OTHER HEALTH CARE SERVICES. Other health care services available in Benson include Country Side Public Health (which coordinates emergency medical services planning, conducts immunizations and blood pressure clinics, and provides water testing), Counseling Associates, and Woodland Centers.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

The Community Survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan planning process provides general information about the perceptions of community facilities and services in Benson.

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "No, Not at All" and 5 = "Yes, Definitely") several community facilities related issues. The results are as follows:

- Overall, does Benson have a positive image? 4.02
- Is the Central Business District attractive? 3.68
- Are the entrances into Benson appealing? 3.48
- Has Benson done a good job of protecting its historically significant structures 3.42
- Overall, is housing in Benson well-kept? 3.96
- Is there a strong sense of community in Benson? 3.96
- Is Benson a safe community to live in? 4.31

Participants were also asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "Very Poor" and 5 = "Very Good") several questions related to the quality of services in Benson. The results are as follows:

- Street maintenance 3.83
- Fire protection 4.49
- Police 3.78
- Sewer and water 4.23
- Garbage collection 4.40
- Medical facilities 3.90
- Handicap access to facilities 4.06
- Schools 4.20
- Library service 4.43
- Community events 4.13
- Internet service 3.82
- Cable television 3.89
- Phone service 4.21
- Air quality 3.83
- Water quality 4.20
- Overall quality of life 4.32

Participants ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "Not at All Important" and 5 = "Very Important") several questions related to the value of various items. The results are as follows:

How important should it be for Benson to:

- Retain a rural character 4.21
- Preserve its history 4.32
- Have a variety of housing types 4.28
- Project an attractive image 4.68
- Protect the natural environment 4.63
- Develop or enhance a community theme 4.28
- Promote building rehabilitation 4.17
- Grow in population 4.04
- Maintain a strong Central Business District 4.52
- Attract new business and industry 4.52
- Manage new development sprawl 4.21
- Provide good educational facilities 4.77

When asked to describe what they liked best about Benson, participants responded as follows:

- Like the small town atmosphere 51%
- Safe and quiet town 15%
- Park and recreation opportunities 12%
- Clean and attractive town 11%

Other responses included schools, churches, and community events.

When asked to describe what, if any, improvements they would like to see, participants responded as follows:

- Need more retail stores 35%
- Improve traffic management 15%
- Have a hang-out for teenagers 12%

As stated earlier, the survey results provide *general* information about the perceptions of community facilities and services. Residents appear to be pleased with the overall quality of life in Benson. They especially value the small town atmosphere of the community.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for community facilities in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of community facilities decisions that will be made through the year 2020. The community facilities goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Continue to be a full service City.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Increase the City's level of participation with other governmental jurisdictions concerning infrastructure planning and development.
2. Serve as a clearinghouse for a wide range of public services especially for the elderly and home bound.
3. Expand services for the social, recreational and employment needs of all community members, especially people with special needs (youth, elderly, and disabled), whenever possible.
4. Locate public buildings and services in central locations within the community, to provide ease of access and minimal response time.
5. Continue to support private and public endeavors that help those elderly persons who want to continue living in their own homes until it is no longer safe or feasible to do so.
6. Continue community-based service education programs with the school district and organized youth groups.
7. Work with public and semi-public institutions within the community to insure a responsive, high level of service. In case of closure, analyze other possible public uses.
8. Encourage all governmental units to maintain their buildings and facilities at the highest standards to serve as examples for private development.
9. Achieve full use of investments in public facilities and services prior to making new public investments.
10. Evaluate the potential of any future public sites based upon their compatibility with: 1) community goals and objectives for land use development; 2) the transportation system; and 3) other community facilities and services.

GOAL 2. Ensure that the City's image is enhanced

through the beautification of its infrastructure and property.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Encourage businesses and home owners to participate in programs that improve and enhance the City's entryways.
2. Adopt a design plan for public informational signs and city entrance signs so that colors, materials, and placement are coordinated.
3. Participate in programs that help preserve and restore buildings of historic and architectural significance.
4. Publicize the City's involvement in any ongoing preservation projects, events, and surveys.
5. Improve street safety through the appropriate use of street lighting, address/street numbering, and sign controls. Develop a Street Safety Public Awareness Program to familiarize the public with the program and distribute street safety information. Provide a stop sign policy for street intersections.
6. Require, where necessary, buildings and facilities to be screened, landscaped and buffered to reduce impact on surrounding uses.
7. Encourage the planting of street trees and planting by developers, individual property owners, and neighborhood groups.
8. Require that public development set a high standard as an example for private development.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN

The Community Facilities Plan guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and others involved in making decisions related to community facilities and services. The goals and policies discussed above provide the framework for the Community Facilities Plan. This section describes, in a general manner, possible ways to implement the goals and policies.

IMPROVEMENTS TO CITY ENTRANCES

Residents want Benson to project an attractive image. The existing entrances provide visitors with their first impression of the city. The City should, therefore, develop a plan to enhance and define the entrances. This will likely include plantings and signage. The entire route of the major highways into the city should be carefully considered for improvements - this might include street trees, ornamental lighting, and similar design elements. Adjacent landowners should be involved in the planning process.

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT IMPROVEMENTS

The Central Business District is the heart of Benson. It is essentially Benson's town square. A place where people gather, work, and shop. It is also a place where visitors come for celebrations and events. The City should, therefore, develop a plan to enhance and maintain the quality and vitality of the downtown area. The plan should provide guidelines for building renovations, signage, streetscape improvements, parking, and circulation.

SWIFT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Swift County Historical Society is an asset to the community. The existing building is located in a highly visible area off of Highway 12 and in this respect, it functions well. However, the City should explore options with the Historical Society to relocate to less of an industrial area and more of a natural area. This would give the Society an opportunity to have both indoor and outdoor exhibits (demonstration gardens, sod homes, and the like). Two possible sites to consider include the Ambush Park area and the area adjacent to the Civic Center and horse area. Refer to the Park System Plan for additional information.

CONSOLIDATION OF STREET AND HIGHWAY DEPARTMENTS

The State, County, and City operate separate street and highway departments. The City should explore if there are efficiencies to be gained in locating these departments in one general area. If the City and State facilities were to move to the area of the County facilities, this would free up land for additional industrial development in the existing industrial park.

CIVIC CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

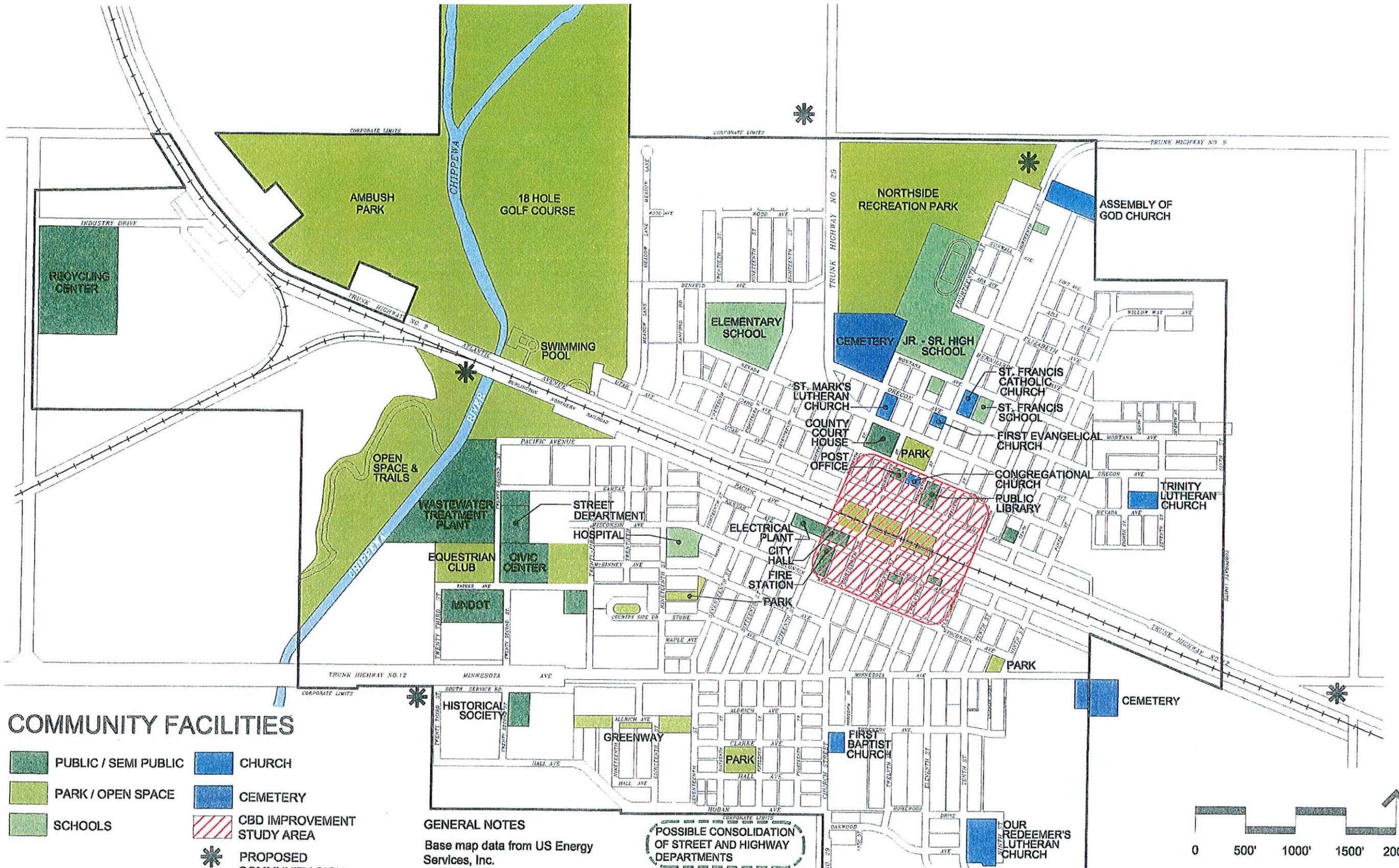
The civic center is located away from the downtown core. Yet it is relatively easy to access. It is unlikely that the City will build a new civic center in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the City should consider making improvements to the building and the surrounding area. The City should also explore providing additional outdoor recreations opportunities adjacent to the building. Refer to the Park System Plan for additional information.

PROMOTIONS AND CELEBRATIONS

Celebrations and events contribute to quality of life in Benson, but they also provide an excellent opportunity to market Benson to others. The City should continue to promote its annual events and celebrations and the City should continue to explore unique ways to promote tourism and conventions.

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

The improvements described above provide only a taste of possible enhancements to community facilities and services. There are many other opportunities that the City will want to explore that are not described above. The City should, therefore, periodically review and update the Community Facilities Plan as needed.

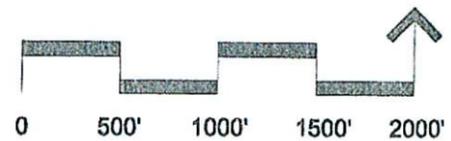


COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|----------------------------|
| | PUBLIC / SEMI PUBLIC | | CHURCH |
| | PARK / OPEN SPACE | | CEMETERY |
| | SCHOOLS | | CBD IMPROVEMENT STUDY AREA |
| | | | PROPOSED COMMUNITY CENTER |

GENERAL NOTES
 Base map data from US Energy Services, Inc.

POSSIBLE CONSOLIDATION OF STREET AND HIGHWAY DEPARTMENTS



CHAPTER 7: PARK SYSTEM PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Parks contribute to the quality of life in a community. A well-designed and maintained park system provides recreation opportunities for residents of all ages and it contributes to the overall image of the community. Parks also play a role in the City's ability to maintain and attract existing and future residents, businesses, and industries.

This chapter describes the existing park system in Benson and it sets forth a plan for maintaining and improving the system. The Park System Plan is a general guide for City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and others involved in making park related decisions. The Plan also provides the framework for future, more detailed park studies.

Refer to Chapter 5: Transportation Plan and Chapter 6: Community Facilities for related information.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

This section defines a park classification system for Benson and it provides an inventory and analysis of existing parks.

PARK CLASSIFICATION

The park system plan defines two types of parks in Benson: (1) neighborhood parks, and (2) community parks.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS. Neighborhood parks offer neighborhood residents easy access to a variety of recreation facilities including play equipment, athletic fields, court games, and picnic facilities. In Benson, major roads and the railroad help define the service area of neighborhood parks. Residents should not have to cross highways and railroads to get to their park. If neighborhood parks are to be used and enjoyed, they must be carefully located for safe and

convenient access. They must also respond to the needs of the residents in the neighborhood. For example, if a neighborhood consists of mostly starter homes with young families, the neighborhood park should offer recreation facilities geared toward young families.

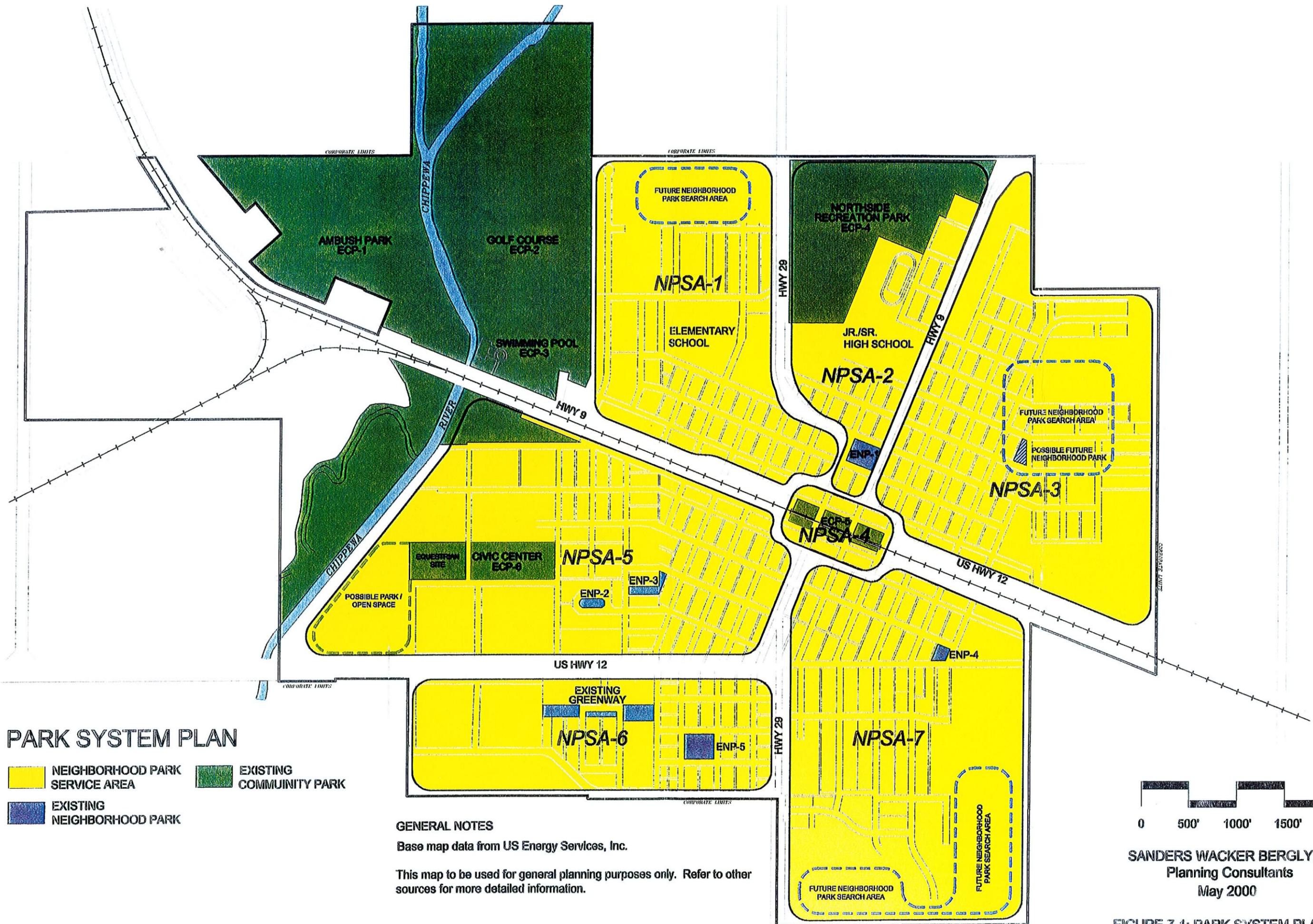
COMMUNITY PARKS. Community parks are different from neighborhood parks in several ways. Community parks service several neighborhoods or the community as a whole. As such, they provide facilities that will attract people throughout the community. Some community parks focus on passive activities like hiking and picnicking and are often found in areas that offer unique natural amenities such as wetlands or woodlands. Other community parks focus on active forms of recreation. They may provide a series of athletic fields for organized sports. Because community parks attract more people than neighborhood parks, they are generally near arterial or collector roads. Ideally, residents should have the opportunity to access community parks via trails, but most people who use community parks live far enough away from these parks that they will likely drive to them. Therefore, these parks need to provide adequate parking and restroom facilities.

EXISTING PARKS

The Park System Plan (Figure 7-1) shows neighborhood park service areas and existing parks in Benson. The following provides a brief description of these service areas and parks. The City may want to conduct a more detailed inventory and analysis in the future.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK SERVICE AREAS. The Plan identifies seven neighborhood park service areas (NPSAs). Major roads and the railroad define the boundaries of these areas. Ideally, each service area should contain at least one park.

Two service areas do not have an existing park: NPSA-1 and NPSA-3. NPSA-1, however, has an elementary school, so younger residents have access to the play areas at the school. NPSA-4 is in the central business district. Although few people are living in this area, the business people, shoppers, and visitors in this area should have access to a park.



NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS. Benson has five existing neighborhood parks. These are identified in Figure 7-1: Park System Plan as parks ENP-1 through ENP-5. Although these parks are relatively small (0.50 - 1.75 acres), they provide adequate play equipment and informal play fields suitable for younger kids.

The existing neighborhood parks have a total area of roughly 5.75 acres. Typical park standards suggest that communities should have roughly three acres of neighborhood parks for every 1,000 people. This would mean Benson's neighborhood parks should total roughly ten acres. However, it is important to note that these standards provide only a general guideline for neighborhood park development. Benson should increase the size or number of its neighborhood parks based on neighborhood needs rather than trying to meet or exceed typical standards.

Other than the fact that NPSA-3 should have a neighborhood park, it appears that Benson has adequate neighborhood parks. However, the City should consider developing additional neighborhood parks in NPSA-1 and NPSA-7 if substantial residential development occurs in these areas in the future.

COMMUNITY PARKS. Benson has six community parks or recreation facilities that offer residents a variety of recreation opportunities. These parks and surrounding open space have a total area of roughly 290 acres. Typical standards suggest that communities should have roughly five acres of community parks for every 1,000 people. This would mean that Benson's community parks should total between 15 and 20 acres. So, for its size, Benson has an impressive area and number of community parks. Following is a brief description of each of these:

ECP-1: Ambush Park. This is a passive recreation park next to the Chippewa River in western Benson. It provides camping, picnicking, hiking, and natural and historic interpretation opportunities. The park's campground attracts people from around the region and state.

ECP-2: Benson Golf Course. This is a popular 18 hole golf course next to the Chippewa River. Much of the course flooded in 1996.

ECP-3: Swimming Pool. This community outdoor swimming pool is well-located in respect to Ambush Park and the Golf Course. It is an older pool that will likely need repairs or perhaps even replacement in the future.

ECP-4: Northside Recreation Area. This active recreation park contains several athletic fields and trails. The park is next to the junior/senior high school, so it complements the school's athletic facilities. The park is suitable for tournament play and attracts a great deal of use.

ECP-5: Downtown Community Park. This is a highly visible park in the central business district of Benson. The park provides opportunities to host special community events. Park features include a community billboard, a train caboose, and a waterfall constructed by the Jaycees. The waterfall has become a high maintenance item, so at some point the City may want to consider replacing it with a different feature.

ECP-6: Civic Center. The Civic Center is heavily used for hockey games and tournaments. The center also provides space for other community shows and events. Informal play fields are immediately east of the civic center and an equestrian/rodeo site is immediately west of the center.

OPEN SPACE. Benson has a substantial amount of public open space - most of which is next to the Chippewa River in western Benson. Trails run through some parts of the open space. Other parts are left undeveloped and provide habitat for wildlife.

TRAILS. In many communities, trails are becoming an important component of the Park System Plan. Benson has several recreation trails. Off-road trails are in the open space along the Chippewa River and in Northside Recreation Park. Refer to Chapter 5: Transportation Plan for additional information.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

The Community Survey conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan planning process provides general information about park and recreation perceptions in Benson.

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "No, Not at All" and 5 = "Yes, Definitely") several park and recreation related issues. The results are as follows:

- Are there adequate active recreation opportunities in Benson? 4.35
- Are there adequate passive recreation opportunities in Benson? 4.37
- Are open spaces and natural areas well-protected? 4.11

As stated earlier, the survey results provide *general* information about park and recreation *perceptions*. Overall, residents gave the existing park, recreation, and open space system high marks. In general, younger residents expressed more of a need for additional recreation opportunities and trails while older residents felt the existing system was adequate. In response to the open-ended question in the survey, "What, if any, improvements would you like to see in Benson?" many younger respondents stated that the City should have more recreation areas for teenagers to "hang out" at. Several younger respondents also commented that the City should do more to protect and enhance the natural environment (particularly the river) in Benson.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for parks in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of park-related decisions that will be made through the year 2020. The park goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Provide parks, recreation, open space and trails that meet the needs of all City residents.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Develop and improve the City's parks and open space areas to meet the changing needs of the community, taking advantage of natural community features, in particular, the park/recreation/open space lands within the City and next to the Chippewa River.
2. Maintain an equitable distribution of parks and open space throughout the community, which provide year-round programs and activities to meet the needs of all people and sufficient facilities tailored to suit the neighborhoods they serve.
3. Provide for an adequate balance of active and passive recreational areas and facilities throughout the community.
4. Plan for, develop and coordinate open space facilities and trails within all new development and any redevelopment within

the community.

5. Acquire and reserve sufficient park and open space land to fulfill the needs of the present and projected future population of the City.
6. Provide park facilities and equipment that meet the needs of park users according to the American Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and requirements.
7. Create programs and incentives that continue a high level of maintenance and improvement of the City's existing park, recreational, open space and trail facilities according to the ADA.

GOAL 2. Cooperate with other agencies and groups to enhance the park, recreation, and open space system in the City.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Maintain cooperation and programming of school and park facilities.
2. Locate school and park facilities, wherever possible, close to one another to conserve land and maximize daytime use.
3. Continue to plan for bike and walking trail improvements and connections to respective trails.

GOAL 3. Design and construct park and recreation facilities to best serve the intended purpose.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Prohibit active park and recreation related structures from occurring within wetlands, floodplains and other natural features that perform important functions. Where desirable and practical, maintain natural areas in a condition appropriate for recreational uses.
2. Where necessary, screen, fence and buffer park, recreation and open space areas for the safety and protection of the user and adjoining properties.
3. Provide facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists with street improvement projects

when financially feasible.

4. Provide safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access to all recreational and school facilities within the community.
5. Enlist professional advice and services on extensive and complex development proposals/issues to work closely with local citizens.

GOAL 4. Protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Encourage sensitive development that is compatible with environmentally sensitive areas within the City.
2. Require all development to preserve the natural features of the site, avoid areas of environmental sensitivity, and reduce negative impacts and alteration of natural features.
3. Preserve as undeveloped open space the following environmentally sensitive areas, to the extent consistent with the reasonable use of land, and in accordance with applicable federal, state and local regulations:
 - a. The Chippewa River and its adjacent lands.
 - b. Unique and fragile areas, including wetlands as defined in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, as amended, and delineated on National Wetland Inventory maps prepared by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, field verified by on-site inspection.
 - c. Significant trees or stands of trees, defined as the largest known individual trees of each species in the state, large trees approaching the diameter of the known largest tree, or species or clumps of trees that are rare to the area or of particular horticultural or landscape value.
 - d. Lands in the floodplain.
 - e. State and federal threatened and endangered animals and plants, as well as their habitats, as identified on federal and/or state lists.

- f. Historically significant sites, including significant archaeological sites, as listed on federal, state and/or local lists.
- g. Groundwater and aquifer recharge areas.

4. Work in cooperation with federal, state and local agencies involved in environmental issues.
5. Adopt ordinances that will help protect mature trees and plantings from encroachment during construction.
6. Where appropriate, encourage the natural treatment of storm water by requiring on-site (off-site, if appropriate) storm water detention basins for all new development.
7. Require gravel pits and similar excavation sites to be restored to a usable, safe and appropriate end condition.
8. Encourage the use of the PUD District as a means to protect areas with sensitive environmental conditions.

PARK SYSTEM PLAN

The Park System Plan guides City Staff, the Planning Commission, the City Council, and others involved in making park related decisions. The goals and policies discussed above provide the framework for the Park System Plan. This section describes, in a general manner, possible ways to implement the goals and policies.

PROPOSED NEIGHBORHOOD PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Benson does a good job of maintaining its existing neighborhood parks. The City should continue to evaluate the condition of its existing parks and to make annual repairs and improvements. The following provides an overview of proposed long range improvements to the neighborhood park system.

FUTURE PARK IN NPSA-1. Although this area does not have an existing neighborhood park, it has an elementary school with play equipment and informal play fields. However, if substantial residential development occurs in the northern part of this area, the City should consider developing a City park within the residential development. The play equipment and

facilities should complement rather than duplicate what exists at the elementary school.

FUTURE PARK IN NPSA-3. All areas of Benson, except NPSA-3, have relatively easy access to an existing neighborhood park. NPSA-3 is an established neighborhood with a potential for future residential growth. Therefore, it is important that the City provide a neighborhood park in this area. Development of this park would not have to wait for future residential development to occur.

Ideally, the proposed park should be centrally located. However, if this is not possible, the City should consider incorporating the park into future development. The proposed park can be one-half acre or more in size. Neighborhood residents should play an active role in the design of the park.

FUTURE PARK IN NPSA-7. This area has an existing park in the northern part of the neighborhood. However, the City may want to consider providing an additional neighborhood park in the southern part of the neighborhood if substantial residential development occurs there. Also, if the eastern part of the neighborhood were to develop (perhaps as part of a planned unit development), the City should explore the possibility of integrating a park and trails into that development. Regardless of where a future park may be developed, neighborhood residents should play an active role in the design of the park.

PROPOSED COMMUNITY PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Benson has an excellent community park system. Over the years, the City has done a great deal to maintain and enhance its community parks. The City should continue to make repairs and enhancements annually. The following provides an overview of proposed long range improvements to the community park system.

AMBUSH PARK. The City has prepared a master plan for Ambush Park. The following comments are intended to reinforce and enhance ideas discussed in the master plan.

Ambush Park, the golf course, the swimming pool, and open space should relate to each other. Unfortunately, the river, the highway, and the railroad separate these areas rather than unite them. The City should explore ways to connect these areas. Refer to Chapter 5: Transportation Plan for possible solutions.

Given the historical significance of the park, enhancing the historic theme of the park may be appropriate. Perhaps, in the future, Swift County Historical Society could move to Ambush Park. This would give the historical society an opportunity to develop outdoor related exhibits, including gardens, sod houses, and the like. Perhaps in the short term some of these exhibits could be developed without moving the historical society to the park. The City should also consider working with the historical society, the school district, and others in developing nature interpretation trails and exhibits.

Ambush Park is an important park in that it provides recreation opportunities to residents of Benson and to those who may be visiting or passing through Benson. There are many opportunities to enhance the existing facilities in the park. Residents and special interest groups should be involved in the park planning process.

GOLF COURSE AND SWIMMING POOL. The existing golf course and swimming pool are a sense of pride for many people in the community. The golf course, in particular, attracts people from the surrounding region. The City should continue to maintain these existing facilities and plan for future improvements.

The swimming pool is an older pool that may need major repairs in the coming years. The City should explore whether to repair or replace the pool. If the City chooses to replace the pool they might consider developing a "zero-depth" pool or possibly an aquatic park facility.

Perhaps the golf course clubhouse and the pool can be better integrated if major remodeling or rebuilding of the facilities is considered. Also, as described earlier, the City should explore how to connect the pool and golf course to Ambush Park.

NORTHSIDE RECREATION PARK. The only regulation athletic fields in Benson are at Northside Recreation Park and the adjacent junior/senior high school. The park and school facilities serve the City's athletic needs well. As with all its parks, the City should maintain and enhance the park as needed. The park provides opportunities to promote athletic tournaments - which in turn can be beneficial to the community at large.

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY PARK. This park is essentially Benson's town square. It has a high degree of visibility and is suitable for community

events including art fairs and the like. It has several features including an electronic community billboard, a train caboose, and a constructed waterfall. The park also incorporates parking for downtown businesses.

Given its high visibility and its central location, the City should continue to promote this park for community events. Keeping the park clean and well-maintained should remain a top priority.

The existing waterfall provides a strong focal point for the park. Unfortunately, maintaining the waterfall has been difficult for the City. Therefore, the City may want to replace the waterfall with a feature that would require less maintenance - perhaps an attractive plaza.

The City should update the park master plan as part of an overall downtown improvement plan. Consistent paving, benches, lighting, plantings, and so on would help tie the park to the surrounding businesses and reinforce the image of this park as the town square.

CIVIC CENTER PARK. The civic center provides opportunities for indoor hockey and community events. Although the center is not ideally located within the city (it is not an attractive or highly visible site) its location does provide some unique opportunities to develop additional recreation facilities. The site directly east of the center provides outdoor hockey rinks and informal play fields and the site to the west is used by an equestrian club for rodeos and horse shows.

The City should develop a master plan for the civic center and the surrounding area. The master plan should address a broad range of issues including access to the site, parking, building improvements, and integration of the surrounding outdoor recreation facilities. The City may want to include the agriculture and open space area next to the river in the master plan study area. Perhaps this open space could be used for equestrian trails, community gardens, or some similar type of use.

FUTURE COMMUNITY PARKS. Benson has an excellent community park system. Other than enhancing the existing community parks, the Plan does not foresee the need to acquire and develop new community parks.

TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

Trails are not only an important part of the

transportation system, they are also an important part of the park system. They provide recreation opportunities to residents of all ages.

Benson has a good start on its trail system. The City should continue to look for opportunities to develop additional trails. The City should also explore how regional trails could be connected to the city.

OPEN SPACE

Most open space in Benson is next to the Chippewa River. Because of flooding and access issues, this area will likely never develop. However, other open space exists at the edges of the community. Some of this land could be sensitively developed in the future.

The City should continue to value open space as an asset rather than a liability. Where development is proposed, the City should ensure that the development is sensitive to the existing open space. The planned unit development process may be a helpful tool in ensuring adequate protection of open spaces.

PARKS FOR ALL PEOPLE

Benson's park system should meet the diverse needs of its residents - young, old, disabled, and so on. All parks should be designed to be accessible to those with physical disabilities. The City should continue to involve the public in park improvement plans.

FUNDING PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Although parks require funds to build, operate, and maintain, they also contribute greatly to the quality of life in a community. Therefore, the City must find sufficient funds to develop and maintain its parks. Following is a brief description of several options.

PARK DEDICATION. The City does not have provisions for parkland dedication. Many communities require residential subdivisions to dedicate 5-10% of the development for parkland. If land dedication is not appropriate, park dedication fees are often accepted in lieu of land.

The idea behind park dedication is that additional development places additional strain on the park system. Park dedication provides a means for the City to build and maintain its park system.

Benson may want to consider developing and

implementing park dedication requirements. The City should also consider how planned unit developments can incorporate park and open space with the proposed development.

PARK BOND REFERENDUM. Many cities have passed park bond referendums to help them in finance park development. With proper planning, timing, and promotion, Benson could consider passing a park bond referendum.

DONATIONS. Cities often receive donations from service organizations, businesses, and landowners. Donations range from tree plantings to major parcels of land. For example, a landowner with a large tax liability may want to donate some of his or her land to the park system, in part, to reduce their taxes.

Donations can be a significant part of Benson's park system; however, the City must make its needs known to potential donors. The City should also be prepared to help donors through the process.

GRANTS. Grants can be competitive and are sometimes difficult to obtain. Yet, they offer an important funding opportunity that the City should pursue. Grants come from many public and private sources - too many to describe here. In addition, grant programs frequently change - some programs are phased out while others are added. Therefore, it is important for the City to review available grants on a regular basis. A good source for grant information is the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

JOINT VENTURES. The City should actively pursue joint ventures that would benefit the park system and other parties. For example, a business may propose to build a horse arena on city land. If properly integrated into the park system, the horse arena could be used for other activities like community events or recreation shows. Thus, it could benefit both parties.

FUND RAISING EFFORTS. Some communities will promote fund-raising efforts for special projects. For example, a service organization like the Jaycees may organize efforts to help provide playground equipment for a neighborhood park. The City may provide a plaque in the park with the names of those who donated money to make the play equipment available.

USER FEES. User fees are typically used to offset maintenance and operation costs of specific park facilities, like picnic shelters or boat rentals. The City should not look to user fees to fund major capital improvements. In addition, fees are not appropriate

for basic park services like using play equipment in a neighborhood park.

Potential uses for user fees include renting a picnic shelter for a company picnic or a family reunion. The City should carefully analyze the need for user fees and propose fees that users are willing to pay and that the City feels is fair to recover some or all of the costs for providing the service.

TAX FORFEITURE. Although the City cannot count on receiving forfeited land, some land may become available in the future. The City should contact the County to express possible interest in forfeited land for inclusion in the park system.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BUDGET. Elected officials determine how expenditures are made. To help meet the goals of the Park System Plan, the City may consider increasing expenditures on its park system.

Again, there are many sources for financing Hugo's park system. The City should work with traditional sources like park bonds, but they should also be open to non-traditional sources of funding like joint ventures. The City cannot depend on its existing park funds to meet the goals of the master plan. The City will need to proactive in obtaining additional funds.

MAINTENANCE AND STAFFING

As Benson's park system continues to develop, the City will need to be diligent in maintaining the system. A poorly maintained park and trail system can be more of a liability than an asset. Park and trail designs should be prepared with maintenance concerns in mind.

The City may need to hire additional staff to help oversee and maintain its park system. Seasonal and part-time staff as well as volunteers may contribute to park staffing and maintenance.

CHAPTER 8: UTILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The availability and cost of utilities affect the quality of life in a community and they affect the community's ability to attract new businesses and industries. The availability of utilities and the feasibility of extending utilities also help guide future land use decisions.

This chapter provides a general overview of existing utilities in Benson. It describes goals and policies for utilities and it sets forth a general plan for utilities.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

The following lists utility service providers in Benson:

- Electricity City of Benson
- Natural Gas Minnegasco
- Water City of Benson
- Wastewater City of Benson
- Local Telephone Sprint/United
- Cable Television Bresnan

The City is well served by utilities. The following provides a brief analysis of existing utilities from a planning standpoint. Refer to the Public Works Director and engineering consultants for additional information.

ELECTRICITY

The City of Benson generates its own electricity. Substantial discussions and concerns have been raised regarding deregulation and the future of public utilities. However, Benson is in an excellent position to offer a reliable source of electricity to industries and businesses.

WATER AND WASTEWATER

Water services are owned and operated by the City.

Water is obtained by wells. Wastewater collection and treatment are provided by the City's sanitary sewer system. The sewer plant is located next to the Chippewa River in west Benson.

Benson conducted a wellhead protection study. They also have a plan to repair and replace aging sewer lines and a plan to deal with stormwater issues.

Most properties within the City limits are served by City sewer and water. However, the area west of the Chippewa River is not served by City sewer and water and it is highly unlikely that it will be served in the foreseeable future.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Benson has telephone, cable, and Internet services. The City is fortunate in that it may receive high-speed telecommunication services as part of a development for a telecommunications super highway corridor that would run along Highway 12.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for utilities in Benson. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of decisions related to utilities that will be made through the year 2020. The utility goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Participate in the design (capacity and aesthetics), maintenance, and placement of utilities.

To accomplish this goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Coordinate and cooperate with Swift County, the School District, surrounding townships, and utility companies in providing services and utilities to areas where possible future City jurisdiction may occur.
2. Prohibit small lot development in areas not serviced by City sewer and water. Where such development presently exists, enforce state regulations and standards for on-site sewage systems.
3. Uniformly locate easements for utility

systems, provide easy access for maintenance and repair service vehicles, and allow for minimal disruption of other activities or areas.

4. Monitor and maintain all utility systems to assure a safe and high quality standard of service.
5. Minimize the impact of required utility facilities and services upon surrounding uses.
6. Encourage the installation of all new utility services to be located underground where feasible.
7. Prohibit extensions of sewers into areas where development should not occur such as floodplains and wetlands.
8. Provide for the in-sequence extension of infrastructure which will induce development of areas designated within the City.
9. Plan and anticipate long-range future infrastructure needs to accommodate both the current and new development.

GOAL 2. Use utilities to promote economic vitality.

To accomplish this goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Strive to provide the latest telecommunication technologies for Benson residents, businesses, and industries.
2. Promote the reliability of Benson's public utilities to businesses and industries.
3. Utilize advances in telecommunications and the Internet to market Benson as a home to future businesses and industries.

Refer to City's consulting engineers for additional information on utilities.

CHAPTER 9: IMPLEMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

Benson's Comprehensive Plan is a vision of what the City wants to be. It is a guide to help the City preserve what they value and to enhance what they feel should be improved. However, a Plan is of little value unless it is successfully implemented. This chapter guides the City in implementing the Plan. It sets forth goals and policies and describes tools that the City can use to implement the Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies express the community's vision for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. The goals are broad, general statements that the City will strive to attain. The policies are specific, action-oriented statements that provide the framework for a wide range of actions that will be taken through the year 2020. The implementation goals and policies are as follows:

GOAL 1. Review and update the City's Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations and other related development processes on a regular basis to ensure that plans, regulations and requirements are current and reflect the community's interest and changing needs.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Prioritize the goals and policies of the Plan and develop indicators to measure progress in implementing the Plan.
2. Appoint a task force comprised of realtors, builders and/or developers to work with a sub-committee of the Planning Commission. The task force will annually review the

Comprehensive Plan and all related ordinances and regulations to ensure compliance with the community's vision.

3. Prepare and annually update a Capital Improvement Program for the management, programming and budgeting of capital needs.

GOAL 2. Ensure fair, consistent and thorough review of all development applications.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Ensure that all development proposals are adequately considered and that sufficient time is provided for thorough analysis and decision-making. If annexation is requested as part of the proposal, it shall not become effective until all components of the development are approved.
2. Keep citizens informed of the City's planning and development review process. Seek community input through the use of community surveys and other similar tools.
3. Ensure that all decision-making regarding development proposals is thoroughly substantiated and documented to prevent setting unintended precedence and to legally support City decisions.
4. Formulate and implement an application fee schedule and consultant reimbursement program that assigns City costs for development proposal review and/or other land use related actions, to the benefitting developer or property owner(s) rather than having the City, as a whole, assume the burden of covering the cost through the general fund.

GOAL 3. Amend and enforce the City's ordinances to facilitate development that is consistent with the objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

To accomplish this Goal, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Allow variances from the standard ordinance requirements where enforcement of the standard regulations would destroy natural features such as mature trees and slopes.

2. Encourage use of planned unit development provisions where flexibility in enforcing land use regulations and public/private trade-offs will allow a more sensitive approach to development.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

The City can use various tools to achieve the vision, goals, and policies of the Plan. The most common tools are the Zoning Ordinance, the Subdivision Regulations, and the Capital Improvements Program. Zoning Ordinances and Subdivision Regulations control land use and the pattern of development, while the Capital Improvements Program defines the procedures and budget for capital expenditures. These tools are described below.

ZONING ORDINANCE

Benson's Zoning Ordinance controls density and location of land use. The Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map divide the city into districts and regulate land uses within those districts in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan. The City should ensure that zoning classifications are generally consistent with the land use designations indicated on the Land Use Plan.

Because the Land Use Plan shows only generalized land uses, it may not always be consistent with the zoning of specific parcels. While the Land Use Plan depicts the long-term goals for development within the City, the Zoning Ordinance must consider if the classification is appropriate for a particular property. Therefore, if a zoning classification consistent with the Land Use Plan causes excessive harm to property owners, parcels may be zoned to allow existing uses to continue as "conforming uses".

The City must amend its Zoning Ordinance to be consistent with and facilitate the implementation of the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The City must address the following:

RESIDENTIAL. The Zoning Ordinance defines two residential zoning districts: R-1: One and Two Family Residence, and R-2: Multiple Family Residence. Both residential districts allow for various types of public or semi-public uses including churches, schools, hospitals, and parks. Roughly half of the residential area in Benson is zoned R-1 and the other half is zoned R-2.

The Land Use Plan, however, identifies three types of residential land use: low, medium, and high. The Zoning Ordinance and Map should be revised to reflect the Land Use Plan. Also, the Zoning Ordinance should more clearly address site plan requirements (parking, screening, setbacks) for multi family units.

BUSINESS. Both the Zoning Ordinance and the Land Use Plan identify three business districts: B-1: Central Business District, B-2: General Business District, and B-3: Highway Business District. The boundaries of the business districts on the Zoning Map should be revised to reflect the intent of the Land Use Plan. The Ordinances should also be revised to address site plan requirements including parking, screening, landscaping, and so on.

INDUSTRIAL. The Zoning Ordinance defines two industrial districts: I-1: Limited Industrial and I-2: General Industrial. The Land Use Plan is generally consistent with this in that it proposes two land uses: Limited Industrial and Special Industrial. The Ordinance, however, should be revised to reflect the intent of the land uses described in the Land Use Plan.

PYRAMID ZONING. Benson's Zoning Ordinance essentially follows the pyramid (or cumulative) zoning concept that allows more restrictive uses to be built in less restrictive areas. For example, a B-1 use would be allowed in an I-2 district, but an I-2 use would not be allowed in a B-1 district. Benson, however, only allows residential uses in residential districts (with minor exceptions).

Pyramid zoning allows flexibility in land use, but it also allows for potential conflicting uses to be built in the same district. For example, a gift shop could hypothetically be located between two industrial uses. Or retail uses could potentially take up all existing industrial land, leaving no land for future industry while other commercial land sits vacant. Therefore, the City may want to consider allowing cumulative provisions only within the basic districts. In other words, business uses would only be allowed in business districts. But a B-1 use would be allowed in a B-3 district.

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The City's ability to review and approve subdivisions gives the City another way to implement the vision, goals, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. Subdivision regulations ensure compatible growth of

contiguous areas by mandating specific provisions including parks, streets, public utilities, and so on. Subdivision regulations also carry out City policies such as requiring secondary access where appropriate, providing measures for the acquisition of neighborhood open space, and protecting the environmental assets of an area. It is in the Subdivision Regulations that a City may require impact fees to meet the needs generated by a development project. Impact fees are only for improvements that benefit the development paying the fee and should be consistent with the City's Capital Improvements Program for community-wide facilities.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

The Capital Improvements Program organizes City expenditures for capital improvements, some of which are proposed in the Comprehensive Plan (street changes, parks, beautification projects, etc.) A formal Capital Improvements Program is not a part of this Comprehensive Planning Program.

A Capital Improvements Program links development policies established in the Comprehensive Plan to future receipt and expenditure of funds and construction of capital improvements. The City should systematically review all capital projects for consistency with the adopted goals and policies established in the Plan.

RELATED PROCEDURES

The City will need to periodically amend the Comprehensive Plan and rezone parcels. This section provides basic guidelines the City should consider in taking these actions.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS. Benson should periodically review and amend its Comprehensive Plan if any of the following occurs:

1. Significant physical, economic or demographic changes. For example, if a major industry comes to the community or if a highway is rerouted, this could greatly affect the Plan.
2. Significant changes in attitude, priorities, community standards or trends.
3. Significant technological changes that have different requirements.

4. Regulatory changes by state or county jurisdictions.

If a proposed development is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, a landowner (or the City) must first secure approval of a Comprehensive Plan Amendment that would make the proposed development consistent with the Plan.

Applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan should include the following:

1. Description of request.
2. Location and map of surrounding properties.
3. Map of any other properties impacted.
4. Explanation of request, including:
 - A. Reasons for request.
 - B. Overall impact on community.
 - C. Impacts on the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.
 - D. Impact on adjacent lands.
 - E. Impact on transportation, sewer, water and other city services.
 - F. Impact on water bodies.
5. Public Notice is placed in the local newspaper and notices are sent to all property owners within 350 feet of the subject property, if the amendment is applicable to adjoining properties. Any amendment that impacts a surrounding community will require a notice to the governing agency.
6. Planning Commission holds public hearing.
7. Amendments that impact other jurisdictions should be sent to those jurisdictions for their review.
8. Planning Commission makes a recommendation to the City Council.
9. City Council approves or denies amendment.
10. Changes are made to the Plan to reflect the amendment. Concurrent amendments to the Zoning text and/or map are made.

REZONING. As Benson continues to develop, it is likely that several parcels will be rezoned. The following provides basic guidelines that the City should consider in reviewing applications for rezoning.

The Planning Commission's recommendation for rezoning will be consistent with the best interest of the City and will be based upon fact, not opinions. The recommendation should be based upon the following:

1. Staff or consultant findings and comments.
2. Facts brought out in public hearings.
3. Physical inspection of property in question by members of the Planning Commission.

The following items should be considered in reaching a decision:

1. Is there a public need for additional land to be zoned to the district requested?
2. If there is a public need for additional land to be zoned as requested, should the rezoning be done in areas requested, or would the public interest be better served if the rezoning were done in other areas of the City?
3. Would the granting of the rezoning request conform to the presently adopted land use plans for the City as well as existing land uses in the vicinity?
4. Would the granting of the rezoning request adversely affect property values of adjacent landowners to an unreasonable degree?
5. Would the granting of the request impose undue hardships such as noise, electrical display signs, odors, or other nuisances on adjacent land owners?
6. If the request was granted, would the necessary utilities be available to serve the purpose intended?
7. If the request was granted, what additional public services would be required?
8. Could the Planning Commission suggest an alternate area for the use that would eliminate the necessity for rezoning?

9. Was there an error or oversight in preparing the original zoning map which indicates that this zoning should have been included at that time?
10. Is this change really needed by the public, or is it merely a convenience to the owner?

PRIORITIES AND INDICATORS

It may take twenty years or more to achieve the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Progress towards meeting the goals generally occurs in increments or phases, rather than all at once. Therefore, to help ensure continuous progress, the City may prioritize and divide their goals into short, mid, and long term goals. Although it is important for the City to follow the guiding vision of the Plan, it is also important for the City to be flexible in implementing the vision. Therefore, the City will need to periodically review and refine their goals and priorities.

The following provides guidelines the City may want to consider in prioritizing its goals. lists goals

SHORT TERM GOALS

Short term goals should reflect actions that must be taken over the next couple of years. For example, the City must update its Zoning Ordinance and Map within several months of approving the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, this must be a short term goal of the City.

Short term goals should also reflect issues that are very important to the community. For example, transportation issues are a major concern in Benson. While the City may not implement solutions in the short term, the City should implement studies to address the concerns. These studies, in turn, can provide a timeline for implementing the solutions. Also, goals like promoting industry are important to the community and should be addressed in the short term.

It is also helpful to develop short term goals that will make an immediate impact on the community. For instance, many Benson residents expressed a need to improve the appearance of the entrances into Benson. Improving the entrances would likely not cost the community a great deal of money, but it would have a high impact on the community and it would likely inspire a desire to implement other projects in the Comprehensive Plan.

Developing short term goals and making quick,

tangible progress in implementing these goals, will help the community develop and meet long term goals that may be more involved.

MID TO LONG TERM GOALS

The City does not have the time or financial resources to address all of its goals in the short term. While the City may conduct studies in the short term, some study recommendations may be better implemented in the mid to long term.

Major transportation improvements, for example, may require extensive studies and funding from other jurisdictions as well as from the City. This process may take many years before actual construction would take place. Also, other related projects, for example downtown streetscape improvements, may not be implemented until transportation issues are resolved.

Mid to long term goals are as important as short term goals. Therefore, the City should not delay discussion of long term goals until far into the future. To do so, would suggest that the long term goals may never be addressed. The City should periodically review the status and conditions of its long term goals.

INDICATORS

The City should develop indicators to help evaluate progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. For example, Benson residents strongly value living in a safe community. Indicators that would help measure whether Benson is continuing to remain a safe community include crime rate statistics and the attitudes of residents as expressed in community surveys.

The City should periodically review the findings of its indicators. If the indicators show that City is not making progress on meeting its goals, then the City should either refine the goals or develop new strategies for meeting the goals.

VISION

It is appropriate to conclude the Comprehensive Plan where it started - the vision of the community. The vision succinctly states what the community wants to be. Benson should carefully consider this vision as it moves forward in implementing in the Plan.

Benson is a good community to live and work in. We cherish its small town atmosphere. It's a friendly

community - one where people know and respect each other. It's a safe, quiet, and peaceful community. We are proud of our schools, churches, parks and community events. These are the qualities of Benson that we value and want to carry forward into the future.

We want Benson to grow, but we believe that growth should enhance the small town character of Benson rather than detract from it. We want Benson to have an attractive and strong central business district - one that meets our shopping needs and respects the viability of small, locally owned businesses. We will strive to diversify our industries and embrace technologies that will provide Benson with strong economic growth and good paying jobs. We want to refine our transportation system to be safe and efficient for pedestrians and vehicles.

In short, we like Benson. As we move forward, we will be proactive in preserving and enhancing the qualities of Benson that we value.