

# City of Blue Earth

*Land Use Plan Addendum  
June, 2012*

## *Introduction*

### **General Statement of Effect**

The local land use plan can be described as the city's "blueprint" for future development. It represents the community's view of its future; a document containing the goals and policies upon which the city council and planning commission will base their land use decisions. To illustrate its importance, all subdivisions, public works projects, and zoning decisions must be consistent with the plan. If inconsistent, they must not be approved.

### **Long-range Emphasis**

The land use plan is not the same as zoning. Although both designate how land may be developed, they do so in different ways. The land use plan has a long-term outlook, identifying the types of development that will be allowed, the spatial relationships among land uses, and the general pattern of future development. Zoning regulates present development through specific standards such as lot size, building setback, and a list of allowable uses. Development must not only meet the specific requirements of the zoning ordinance, but also the broader policies set forth in the local general plan.

### **This Plan Addendum**

The plan contents that follow represent the results of two short work sessions with the City Council in May, 2012. The existing land use plan, completed in 1997 was found to be no longer relevant, either because goals and objectives had been accomplished or the activities specified no longer held the importance placed on them fifteen years ago.

The shortened planning was a desire to bring this planning document up to date with a set of new goals and objectives that fit the community's working priorities, completes an update of the City's infrastructure narrative, and provides an update to the City's demographic changes following the last two census surveys.

What follows are the results of these efforts.

# City of Blue Earth

## *Land Use Plan Addendum*

## *Goals & Objectives*

The revision and updating of Goals and Objectives occurred during working sessions with the City Council and City Staff in May, 2012.

### ***HOUSING***

**Goal:** To provide a full range of housing opportunities that meets the needs of all income and age groups and establish a set of development criteria to ensure a variety of development types can be done as well as to ensure that the developments are "good" developments.

**Objectives:**

1. Identify land parcels that would be suitable for single family residential development (see areas on following map).
2. Identify and draft zoning language that would allow for a mixed housing type use district and/or flexible or varied development performance standards that would be appropriate for infill development.
3. Identify outside financial resources to mesh with local financial resources for the purpose of administering an acquisition program for either the City or the HRA. Implementation of such a program would involve acquisition and redevelopment of blighted or underutilized parcels within the City.
4. Identify outside financial resources to mesh with local financial resources for the purpose of administering housing rehabilitation grants that help low and moderate income homeowners make improvements to blighted homes. These same grant funds could also be used to help rental property owners make code improvements to existing but blighted rental housing stock.
5. The City and/or the HRA, in conjunction with other housing providers, will:
  - a. continue to jointly market elderly housing options;
  - b. continue to encourage new development of elderly housing options;
  - c. continue to work with those providing services needed by elderly homeowners to remain in an independent living arrangement for as long as they are able.

6. The HRA should look into securing funding from outside resources to establish a First Time Homebuyers program or it could sell bonds to accomplish the same task.

## ***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

**Goal:** To promote economic development by maintaining and enhancing the capital base of our industries through supplying resources, recruiting, and community support.

**Objectives:**

1. Acquisition of additional industrial designated land for future industrial development and/or the extension and development of infrastructure services to existing industrially designated land.
2. Development of a spec building or preparing a shovel ready development site by the EDA a newly established industrial park.
3. Empty retail space is a growing problem. Perhaps repurposing that space should be evaluated or reviewed. Instead of trying to recruit new retail tenants, other types of uses may be a fit for that vacant space. Some examples are:
  - a. Empty lots in commercial districts could be re-used as community garden space;
  - b. Empty building space could be re-used to house service providers, such as:
    - i. General multi-purpose space that could be used to house local non-profit group meetings, community group meetings, outreach programs, house workshops, etc. The vacant retail space offers very flexible setup arrangements;
    - ii. Cultural programming such as art exhibits can increase foot traffic to adjacent retail uses;
    - iii. Small clinic outreach space;
    - iv. Service space for those attending to seniors;
    - v. Satellite teaching space for regional colleges.
4. Two blocks of the downtown commercial area will be undergoing a street, utility, and sidewalk redevelopment program in 2015. The City and commercial owners should work with those involved with the redevelopment of the #TH169 corridor so that the new facilities tie together in appearance.
5. The EDA in conjunction with other local groups need to devise strategies to market the City of Blue Earth and the surrounding area for tourism possibilities. The natural resources of the area along with a trail system,

historically significant sites, the fair and fairgrounds, and agriculturally based tours can all serve as a tourist destination for the area.

6. The City should investigate ways to provide aid to those institutions and business enterprises in the community that are seeking to fill labor needs. Recruitment efforts should be comprehensive and not limited to the following listing. Current identified shortages of professional skills include:
  - a. Dentists;
  - b. Controllers and Accountants;
  - c. Information Technology professionals;
  - d. Teachers;
  - e. Welders;
  - f. Medically trained professionals; and
  - g. Veterinarians.

## ***RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT***

**Goal:** To provide new recreational resources and update existing recreational resources for the purpose of meeting Blue Earth residents needs. Also, some recreational improvements may help attract some of the regional tourist trade.

**Objectives:**

1. A variety of recreational shortages or desires have been expressed to the City Council, including, but not limited to:
  - a. additional ball fields;
  - b. a disk golf course;
  - c. a skateboard park.
2. Blue Earth has a walking path system planned and partially developed. Completion of that system and repairs and maintenance to the existing facilities should be undertaken when opportunities arise. In addition, opportunities should be explored regarding tying into a larger regional trail system thereby stimulating additional tourism opportunities.
3. Replace or upgrade recreational infrastructure needs of the City's park system.

## ***INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS***

**Goal:** The City needs to continue to invest in its infrastructure on a scheduled basis to keep costs at a predictable and budgeted level, as much as possible, and to allow for timely analysis of different methods to finance the scheduled improvements,

**Objectives:**

1. Currently the City of Blue Earth uses a Capital Improvements Plan in which proposed improvements or extensions of public utility services are scheduled. This plan also proposes the schedules for the maintenance or replacement of City equipment. The plan covers an anticipated five year period containing estimated costs which aids in the drafting of a yearly budget. The plan is reviewed and updated annually. The City needs to continue this scheduling of projects.
2. The City will support activities that increase the number of acres of developable industrial land, including the extension of city utilities to service such sites and the improvement of access points and service roads to those same sites.
3. Local beautification efforts should include looking at ways to improve the community's entrances, stress the planting of trees, and a general clean up of lots.

## *Implementation of Goals*

To fully implement this land use plan, the City will continue to enforce its ordinances that regulate the use of land. It also proposes to amend some of its ordinances to reflect the new goals and action steps. Among the ordinances referred to above are:

- Zoning Ordinance; and
- Subdivision Ordinance;

### **Conventional Zoning**

This is the most common device for guiding development. The City does have a Zoning Ordinance and Map that governs the use of land. The general purpose of zoning is to avoid undesirable side effects of development by segregating incompatible uses and by maintaining adequate standards for individual uses.

It is also important to review the land use controls regularly. One suggestion was to annually review the City's zoning ordinance, perhaps at budget time. The review should include a look at variance requests to determine if such requests merit revision of existing ordinance standards.

### **Subdivision Ordinance**

The City of Blue Earth has a subdivision ordinance that controls how a developer must undertake the division of land. The regulations provide for the preparation of plats and the required information to be included, the procedures for the approval and recording of plats, design standards for the installation of streets and other improvements, and specifies penalties for violations of the ordinance. Standards for the dedication of park and open space are also specified as is the requirements for the maintenance of open space.

Other land use regulations the City may consider:

### **Conditional Use Zoning**

Under this zoning technique, the City would approve a use which subjects the property to conditions in exchange for a desired zoning change and is specific regarding the use. Conditional Use zoning involves limitations on and concessions from a developer, but it does not include a reciprocal obligation on the part of the local government to change or forgo any aspect of its regulatory power.

### **Performance Standards**

These are standards which will be included in the zoning ordinance and are based on the permissible effects of a development upon the environment and other factors. Used extensively in industrial areas to set standards on noise, glare, dust, toxic emissions, vibration, heat, odors, etc. This will give the City a way to control undesirable aspects of development that usually cannot be controlled by conventional zoning techniques.

**Site Plan Review**

This would allow the City to review the site plans and maps of a developer to assure that they meet the stated purposes and standards of the zone, provide for the necessary public facilities such as roads, protect and preserve topographical features and adjacent properties through appropriate siting of structures and landscaping, and protect and preserve environmentally sensitive areas through dedications of open space or employing innovative zoning techniques. The process allows considerable discretion to be exercised by the City and its communities, since it may deal with hard to define design considerations.

**Cluster Zoning**

Dwellings are clustered in order to avoid other less developable portions of the site or to preserve environmentally sensitive areas.

**Average Density Zoning**

The method allows an adjustment in the location and density of development on a site so long as the total number of units does not exceed a set number or density ratio.

**Overlay Zoning**

A set of zoning requirements that is described in the ordinance text, is identified on the zoning map, and is imposed in addition to those of the underlying district. Developments within the overlay zone must conform to the requirements of both zones or the more restrictive of the two.

## *Community Infrastructure Highlights*

The **Water Utility system** has approximately 1,691 private and municipal connections served by a 400,000 gallon elevated water storage facility along with two storage tanks at a combined capacity of 1.2 million gallons. The system has a pumping capacity of 3,750 gallons per minute or 5.4 million gallons per day. Average demand is 400,000 gallons per day while peak demand reaches 750,000 gallons per day. The 2010 audited operating revenues show an average residential customer charge of \$269 dollars per year and an average commercial customer charge of \$729 dollars per year.

The **Sewer Utility system** has approximately 1,779 private and municipal connections served by a 980,000 gallon per day wastewater treatment facility. Average flow is 500,000 gallons per day while peak flows have reached 3.25 million gallons per day. The audited operating revenues show that an average disposal charge per household and commercial customer is \$442 per year.

The **Electric Utility system** has approximately 2,079 connections. The electric system purchases power from Alliant Energy, the Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, the Midwest Independent System Operator, and also purchases power from Blue Breezes Wind Energy. It also owns and operates five backup generators. It is tied to the transmission system, owns 69 KV subtransmission infrastructure, and distributes customer generation.

**Information technology**, a highly valued community asset, is provided by BEVCOMM. This company is a broadband provider, a local communications utility which provides state-of-the-art telecommunications. Its fiber optic infrastructure is capable of providing any speed needed to customers within the City of Blue Earth. The company also provides redundant fiber optic connections to the internet over self healing ring topology. The fiber optic connections outside the City allows for any customer to connect to other managed service providers. Services include online backup, web design and web hosting. A variety of local and long distance telephone services are provided through a number of tailored plans.

**Health care facilities** are provided by the United Hospital District, an independent health care system, comprised of a 25 bed critical access hospital, a 24 bed adolescent chemical dependency treatment facility, a primary care clinic with two satellite regional locations. A major facility upgrade was completed in 2011, adding 57,000 square feet of building space to the hospital campus and 17,000 square feet to the Adolescent Treatment Center in the City of Winnebago. UHD employs 250 people in the community

including six (6) physicians and five (5) midlevel providers. A full array of services are provided including family medicine, obstetrics, and gynecology, with a number of specialty services including cardiology, emergency care, occupational therapy, surgery, and a variety of others.

**Public education facilities** are provided and maintained by Independent School District No. 2860. It serves the communities of Blue Earth, Delavan, Elmore, Frost, and Winnebago. There are two elementary schools, one in Blue Earth and one in Winnebago, a middle school in Blue Earth, and a high school, also in Blue Earth. There are approximately 1,217 students in the school district for the school year ending spring 2012.

## Demographic Updates

### Introduction:

The City of Blue Earth is located in Faribault County, one of the southernmost counties of Minnesota. It is a rural community that is strongly influenced by the agricultural industry.

### Demographic Snapshot:

	1960 <sup>(1)</sup>	1970 <sup>(1)</sup>	1980 <sup>(1)</sup>	1990 <sup>(1)</sup>	2000 <sup>(1)</sup>	2010 <sup>(2)</sup>
<b>Population</b>	4200	3965	4132	3745	3621	3353
<b>Age less than 18</b>				961	838	719
<b>Age 65 or older</b>				952	935	829
<b>Median Age</b>			36.7	41.2	44	46.4
<b>Households</b>		1366	1613	1530	1535	1514
<b>Persons Per Hshld</b>		2.9	2.56	2.45	2.36	2.2
<b>Median Household Income</b>			\$14,379	\$22,237	\$34,940	\$34,773
<b>Per Capita Income</b>			\$7,366	\$11,944	\$18,037	\$19,963

(1) US Census

(2) American Community Survey

The population of Blue Earth is experiencing a slow decline. Between 2000 and 2010, the bulk of the population change has occurred with those persons aged younger than 18 and those aged 65 and older. The population change during that time period was a decline of 268 persons. The number change in the two earlier mentioned age groups during the last decade was 228 persons, or 85% of the total change. What's happening within the remaining age groups? There was an increase in the number of persons aged 20 to 29 (+52), a decrease in the number aged 30 to 39 (-55), a huge decrease in those aged 40 to 49 (-163), and a correspondingly huge increase in those aged 50 to 64 (+143). Interestingly, given that the population declined by 7.4% during the most recent decade, the change in the number of households changed by a mere 1.4%, a very small drop in the number of households during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

	1970 <sup>(1)</sup>	1980 <sup>(1)</sup>	1990 <sup>(1)</sup>	2000 <sup>(1)</sup>	2010 <sup>(2)</sup>
<b>Housing Units</b>	1454	1696	1644	1669	1638
<b>Owner Occupied</b>	989	1206	1126	1136	1089
<b>Renter Occupied</b>	377	407	404	399	425
<b>Vacant Units</b>	82	83	114	131	185
<b>Vacant units – for rent</b>	21	40	52	44	58
<b>Vacant units – for sale</b>	29	26	31	34	45
<b>Vacant units – seasonal</b>				14	17
<b>Vacant units – other</b>	32	15	31	39	65

(1) US Census      (2) American Community Survey

As is typically seen in most Minnesota Cities, the predominant housing type in Blue Earth is the owner occupied detached dwelling. There is a very strong rental market, with the number of occupied rental units being nearly 30% of all occupied housing units. During the 50 year time frame, the largest number of owner occupied housing was slightly more than 1,200 units in 1980. It has been around 1,100 units since then. A similar situation exists for rental units, with the number of occupied rental units sitting at about 400 through the 50 year time period. The number of vacant units has increased through the time period with highs in the number of homes for sale, for rent, and those in the “other” category. The number of homes for sale remained fairly stable through 2000, experiencing a jump in 2010, as would be expected, given the problematic housing market countrywide.

<b>Units in Structure</b>	<b>1970<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>1980<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>1990<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>2000<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>2010<sup>(2)</sup></b>
1 unit	1180	1278	1251	1283	1259
2 units	135	113	108	103	34
3 or 4 units	55	111	57	89	38
5 or more	79	139	162	173	289
Other – mobile homes	3	50	44	21	7
<b>Year Structure Built</b>					
2005 or later					19
2000 to 2004					15
1990 to 1999				82	31
1980 to 1989			125	122	147
1970 to 1979			305	204	220
1960 to 1969			144	189	170
1950 to 1959			306	227	290
1940 to 1949			199	186	163
1939 or older			562	659	572
<b>Median Hsg Value – owned</b>		\$36,100	\$43,100	\$62,300	\$81,800
<b>Median Rent – monthly</b>			\$259	\$292	\$445

(1) US Census

(2) American Community Survey

As can be seen in the data above, the single family home is the predominant housing type. These numbers are very stable, remaining virtually the same through all five decades. Lots of changes are seen in all the remaining types of housing however. Duplexes are seen to decline steadily through the time period, going from a high of 135 units in 1970 to a low of 34 in 2010. Those units with three to four units experienced the high point of 111 units in 1980 and a low of 38 units in 2010. Steady growth is seen in those units containing five or more units, moving from a low of 79 units in 1970 to a high of 289 units in 2010. Mobile homes were an important housing choice in 1980 and 1990, but have fallen out of favor since. The housing development periods that were most active were 1950s and the 1970s. It has slowed significantly in the 1990s and

2000s. Despite the construction slowdown, housing values continue to grow at a steady pace. Between 1990 and 2000, the median value increased by nearly 45%. Between 2000 and 2010, the median value increased by 31%. In the same comparison of rents, between 1990 and 2000, rents increased by 12%, but between 2000 and 2010, rents increased by more than 52%. However, the cost of housing in the City of Blue Earth is quite reasonable, when compared to the State's median numbers. The median housing value of Minnesota is \$194,300 while the median rent is \$764.

<b>Industry of Employment</b>	<b>1970<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>1980<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>1990<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>2000<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>2010<sup>(2)</sup></b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, & hunting		24	29	30	59
Construction	69	86	91	75	85
Manufacturing	199	326	269	301	377
Wholesale Trade	83	73	90	50	18
Retail Trade	391	316	358	265	119
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	24	82	54	77	40
Information				51	86
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, & leasing	156	81	56	100	64
Professional, scientific, management	41	101	31	76	43
Educational, health & social services	282	376	379	46	387
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, & food service	85	68	64	112	175
Other Services – except public admin.	37		150	77	78
Public Administration	81	56	80	94	20
<b>Total Employed</b>	1508	1648	1694	1772	1551
Average Travel Time to Work		7.3 mins	11 mins	15.8 mins	15.4 mins

(1) US Census

(2) American Community Survey

As can be seen in the data above, job growth for those residents of Blue Earth occurred in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and the education, health and social services. The average travel time indicates that the majority of residents work locally or close by. It hasn't increased much over the years reviewed.

# Blue Earth Plan Map

