Greater Bemidji Area

Land Use Plan

Joint Planning Board
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Greater Bemidji Area Land Use Plan was developed through the dedication and perseverance of the following stewards of the Bemidji Community:

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The Greater Bemidji Area gratefully acknowledges the Northwest Minnesota Foundation whose financial support made this effort possible.
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INTRODUCTION

Background
The creation of the Greater Bemidji Area Land Use Plan began with some initial discussions between the elected leaders from the City of Bemidji and Bemidji and Northern townships. Frustrated by their inability to make decisions related to annexation and service delivery in a manner that was in the best interest of the community they decided to take a bold new approach. A task force of 12 members -- four from each jurisdiction -- studied the efforts of other communities, educated themselves about the tools available, and, most importantly, worked hard to develop relationships between themselves, and delivered a detailed framework that will benefit the entire community for the next twenty years and beyond.

These leaders developed an orderly annexation agreement that determined the amount and location of land to be annexed into the City over a fifteen year period. They also formed a Joint Powers Board (JPB) that is now the policy body responsible for land use planning in the Greater Bemidji Area. In fact, the ability to plan together for the future of the community as a whole was one of the most valued outcomes of the early accomplishments of the JPB. This Land Use Plan provides the policy framework to guide land use decisions within the entire community through the year 2025.

In January 2010, the Joint Planning Commission, with the support of the Joint Planning Board, agreed to serve as the Task Force for an update of the Greater Bemidji Area Transportation and Land Use Plans. This update was not a comprehensive update. Rather, it was specifically intended to frame the concept of active living, which is a concept that has gained a lot of momentum in the Bemidji Area because people realize more than ever the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle. Inactivity and poor nutrition increase the risk of preventable illness and death. The revisions are aimed at setting a policy direction that will ensure the Bemidji Area will be designed and build in a manner that makes physical activity a safe and convenient option for all people.

Public Involvement
There were a variety of opportunities for the public to be involved in this planning process. These opportunities provided documentation of the core values held by citizens relating to existing and future development in the community.

Specific public involvement activities included:

- An on-line survey posted on the HRDC’s web site. The URL for the survey was noted in the Bemidji Pioneer, and interested citizens were asked to respond to a series of questions related to growth and development in the Bemidji community. The survey instrument was used as one method to hear what community members value in the Bemidji Area, and the perceived threats to those things that make the community a great place to live.

- Meetings were held with approximately 20 community groups to discuss this planning process, and to hear from a variety of people what it means, from their perspective, to do an excellent job managing growth in this community. This provided another opportunity to confirm the values that the public holds related to growth and development issues in the Bemidji Area.
The JPB appointed a Planning Committee, with representation from each of the three jurisdictions. The Planning Committee guided the planning process and made policy recommendations to the JPB. Planning Committee members attended many of the meetings with community groups to share their perspective, and to listen to participants. The Planning Committee members also attended public meetings within each of the three jurisdictions, and conducted the hearing prior to the recommendation for adoption of the Plan by the JPB.

Scope of Planning Effort

This Land Use Plan represents a bold effort by the Bemidji community to work together in an effort to manage growth and development in a manner consistent with the values of community residents. The Plan attempts to capture the vision of the community that people desire based upon the values shared by its residents. It also provides the basis for implementation of specific strategies including regulations provided in a single ordinance which includes zoning, subdivision, and shoreland management regulations.

The Bemidji Area Growth Management Plan includes three sections.

- The first section is an inventory of current conditions in the Greater Bemidji Area. It includes information on population and households, employment, existing land use, soils, and wetlands. This section provides context for the assessments and policy portions of the Plan which follow.

- The second section of the Plan includes several assessments. A general assessment provides an analysis of population and household trends and projections in the Bemidji Area. Several geographic area assessments were also completed. For convenience, the Greater Bemidji Area was divided into eight planning areas, and assessments were conducted on each for discussion by the Planning Committee. The assessments characterize each area, and identify present and emerging issues in each. The assessments were used to discuss policy inclinations used in the development of the Land Use Plan, including the future land use map.

- The Land Use Plan is the third section of the document. The Land Use Plan contains the vision statement, goals, objectives and policies designed to bring the vision to fruition. The section also outlines specific strategies to be undertaken by the JPB to implement the Plan.
1. INVENTORY

The Inventory section provides an overall picture of the current conditions in the Greater Bemidji Area including information on population and households, land use, transportation, and natural resources. Demographic trends are provided in the Analysis section of the Land Use Plan.

**Population and Households**
The population of the Greater Bemidji Area increased over the past 10 years. Growth in the City has been moderate, with the townships growing at a more rapid rate. Growth within the city includes increases of population and households due to annexation, as well as new construction activity. The total population of the area increased from 17,543 in 1990 to 18,872 in 2000, an increase of nearly 8 percent. Table 1.1 shows population by jurisdiction in 1990 and 2000, as well as the percent change over that time.

The number of households in the Greater Bemidji Area has been increasing at a faster rate than the population. The number of households increased from 6,268 in 1990 to 7,150 in 2000, a 14 percent increase. Table 1.2 shows the increase in households by jurisdiction from 1990-2000.

**Employment & Income Characteristics**
Employment patterns in the community reflect Bemidji’s status as a regional center. The Greater Bemidji Area includes a State University, a regional hospital, numerous social service providers, and several “big box retailers”. The largest industries by employment are Education and Health Care, Retail Trade, and Food & Entertainment. Figure 1.1 shows employment by industry in the Greater Bemidji Community in 2000.

![Figure 1.1 Employments by Industry 2000]
Land Use

The Greater Bemidji Area can be characterized by a wide variety of land uses. The heart of the community is the downtown. Downtown Bemidji contains a mixture of commercial and service establishments, and is the government center for both the City and Beltrami County. The downtown is surrounded by traditional higher density residential neighborhoods. Bemidji State University is north of the downtown area and situated on the shoreline of Lake Bemidji. Numerous fast food restaurants and strip malls, one large mall, and several “big box retailers” are located along Trunk Highway 197 west of BSU. The regional airport and a few hotels are located just west of this area. A prime site for redevelopment, known as the old Georgia-Pacific site, is situated along the southern shore of Lake Bemidji. The City has one industrial park which is located at the southern entrance to the City. The City of Bemidji and areas directly adjacent are urban and suburban in character.

Much of the land outside of the core area of the community is characterized by moderate or low density residential development. There are a few scattered commercial establishments spread throughout the area. There are also significant tracts of public lands, primarily federal land held in trust by local governments and managed for public use. There are several large hay fields and pastures located in the area, although most of those lands have been facing significant development pressure over the past several years. Map 1.1 shows current land use in the Greater Bemidji Area.

Map 1.1 Bemidji Area Land Use
Natural Resources

Soils
The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) completed a detailed soil survey in Beltrami County in 1986 that identified approximately 107 soil types in the southern part of Beltrami County, including the Greater Bemidji Area.

For planning purposes the soils are divided into three broad categories: hydric, prime farming, and highly erodible. Hydric soils are characterized by a high water table, where the soil is saturated, ponded or flooded for large parts of the growing season. Prime farming soils represent land that is best suited to food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. Highly erodible soils are soils that are prone to wind and water erosion. Map 1.2 displays the three broad soil types in the Bemidji Area.

Map 1.2
Bemidji Area Soil Types

Wetlands
According to the Department of Natural Resources, wetlands are defined as those lands that:

- have a predominance of hydric soils;
- are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions; and,
- under normal circumstances support a prevalence of such vegetation.

Not counting open water or lakes, there are approximately 5,740 acres of wetlands in the Greater Bemidji Area. These wetlands account for 14.8% of the land area. Open water/lakes occupy 17.6% of the total area.

Map 1.3 shows the distribution of wetlands across the Greater Bemidji Area as documented by the National Wetland Inventory.

Map 1.3
Bemidji Area Wetlands
2. ANALYSIS

This section of the Plan presents both a general assessment and several detailed geographic assessments. The general assessment describes population and household characteristics and trends in the Greater Bemidji Area through 2020. The population and household projections provide an indicator of the residential land use needs for the next fifteen years.

For planning purposes, the Greater Bemidji Area was divided into eight geographic areas. An assessment was completed for each of the eight planning areas (see Map 2.1). Each assessment described development trends and emerging issues within the area.

The General Assessment and eight Area Assessments follow.
Map 2.1
Geographic Assessment Areas
General Assessment

Population and Household Trends and Projections
The Greater Bemidji Area has been experiencing moderate to strong growth for the past several decades. The total population of the area was 15,198 in 1970 and increased to 18,872 in 2000 (U.S. Census.) This increase of more than 3,500 residents represents a 24% rate of growth over the past thirty years. The Minnesota State Demographer estimates the population in 2003 at 19,661, a 4.2% increase in just three years.

Household growth has also been strong over the same time period. The number of households in the planning area increased from 4,412 in 1970 to 7,150 in 2000 (U.S. Census.) This increase of more than 2,500 households represents a 62% growth rate over the past thirty years.

The rate of growth for households has been significantly greater than that of the population. This is due to the deceasing size of average households. From a land use perspective the trend is significant because the number of households fuels the demand for residential land, whether in rental units or single family homes. Between 1970 and 2000 the average household size has decreased from 3.44 to 2.64. Figure 2.1, below, graphically illustrates these trend data.

Figure 2.1
Projecting changes in population and households is an inexact science at best. A reasonable premise is that the best prediction of the future may be found by reviewing what has happened in the past, especially the recent past. The average rate of population growth has been 7.5% each decade. The average household growth rate has been 18%. Growth has been a little stronger over the past few years based on State Demographer’s estimates. It would be reasonable to project a population of 21,000 (12%) in the Bemidji Area in 2010, and 23,000 (10%) in 2020. A reasonable household projection would be 8,150 (14%) in 2010 and 9,100 (12%) in 2020. Figure 2.2 provides a graphic illustration of the population and household projections through 2020.

**Figure 2.2**  
Bemidji Area Population and Household Projections to 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population/Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The projections indicate an expected increase of population of the Bemidji Area of more than 4,000 people between 2000 and 2020. The projections also indicate an increase in the number of households of 1,950 over the same twenty year period. This model represents an increase of almost 100 households per year over the next two decades. Considering housing units that will be lost to demolition, there will be a need for residential property to accommodate more than 100 housing units per year.
Description of Area
The area is bounded on the west by Eckles Township, on the north by Turtle Lake Township, and on the east by Turtle River Township. The southern boundary is framed by the northern tip of Lake Bemidji and a large expanse of public lands to the east and a mixture of public lands and wetland areas to the west. The area encompasses approximately 8,950 acres. The area includes an interesting mix of rural and suburban development. There are many residential subdivisions scattered throughout the area. A high percentage of the housing is relatively new. While there are a couple of older, lesser quality development areas, much of the development in this area is high quality. There are a large number of vacant building lots in several subdivisions.

Access to Infrastructure/Amenities
There is no access to municipal or central sewer and water in this planning area. Most of the area enjoys terrific access. Irvine Avenue runs north from the Northern School to County Road 22 at the Township line. U.S. Highway 71 runs northeast from the Buena Vista State Forest to the northeast corner of the Township. County 21 (old 71) runs roughly parallel to TH 71, from Rutgers Resort, at the southern edge of the planning area, to the northeast corner of the Township. Many streets are paved, but a substantial number of streets are gravel.

There is a large amount of public lands in this planning area, primarily State Trust Lands. Movil Maze, a popular place for cross country skiing is located on Trust lands in the northeast part of this area. Two acres Resort is located on the eastern shore of Lake Movil. Another recreational amenity, the Bemidji Town and Country Club golf course, is located at the southern boundary of this area. Rutgers Resort is also located on Lake Bemidji, just west of the Country Club.

Development Trends
This area is rapidly developing. The accessibility of the area, combined with the natural amenities, makes this area prime for additional development. Development potential is scattered throughout the planning area, but the greatest potential is in the northwest corner where there is substantial open land available. There is much development taking place in this area at the present time.
**Development Constraints** There are a few small wetlands in the planning area, and some extensive areas of publicly owned land, that are constraints to development. There is an extensive area prone to ground water flooding in the western portion of this planning area. Otherwise, there are few natural constraints to continued development in this area.

**Emerging Issues**
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Provision of Central Services.** *Should central sewer and water be extended to serve the residential development along the north shore of Lake Bemidji?* The area is presently served well by private well and septic systems, but the density of development and its close proximity to the lake suggests, at some point, this area be considered for central services.

- **Quality of Development.** *What specific tools can be implemented to insure that development is done in a manner consistent with the desires of the community? Should mixed uses in residential subdivisions be better controlled? Should cluster development be promoted? Should standards be raised for the construction of streets to be accepted by local jurisdictions?* The quality of development can be managed by effective use of zoning and subdivision regulations. Zoning requirements can be used to minimize conflicting uses. Subdivision regulations can be used to promote cluster development and to increase standards for the construction of public roads.

- **Junkyards.** *What can be done to minimize the adverse effect of junkyards?* There is at least one junkyard in this area that many people find objectionable. While it’s true that some junkyards may be legally established nonconforming uses, it is possible to establish strict policies to manage such uses. Nonconformities need not be allowed to expand.

- **Potential Groundwater Flooding.** *What can be done to minimize potential damage to structures from ground water flooding?* The zoning and subdivision ordinances can be used in order to minimize density of development in flood-prone areas, and to require appropriate storm water management.

- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities.** *Should the Bemidji Area ensure that new subdivisions accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists in rapidly developing areas? What infrastructure is needed to provide desirable routes to destinations in the core of Bemidji?* Zoning and subdivision controls can be used to ensure that adequate infrastructure is including when land is subdivided and developed. Such controls should include accommodations to connect to adjacent destinations and future subdivisions.
Map 2.2
Issues in the Northern Tier
Northeast Area

**Description of Area**
The area is bounded on the west by Lake Bemidji, the south by the Mississippi River, the township boundary to the east, and the northern boundary of Bemidji State Park on the north. The area encompasses 3,482 acres.

The State Park and a one square mile block of forested, public land known as “Section 36” occupies 60% of the area and the remaining 40% is residential and open space. Residential development along the lake is very dense with most of the lots west of Lake Avenue being one acre or less in size. Most of the other residential lots in the area are 2-10 acres in size.

**Access to Infrastructure/Amenities**
Twenty four homes along Waville Rd. NE are served by a common sewer system but none of the remaining area is served by public sewer and water. The area is well served by roads and the main collector for the area (Lake Ave.) has recently been improved.

The State Park and Section 36 provide area residents with ample access to hiking, mountain biking, and cross country ski trails. The Paul Bunyan State Trail, which is paved for that section, also runs through the area, but there are no “playground type” parks in the area. Lake Bemidji has two public boat accesses in the area, but one is in the State Park so residents would have to buy a park permit to use it.

**Development Trends**
The area is pretty much “built up”. A small area approximately 160 acres in size between the State Park and Section 36 is still sparsely populated with houses but only one large lot remains that has not been split up or subdivided. A few other large lots are scattered about the assessment area that could be subdivided, but most new residential development will occur on lots currently vacant or on lot splits.

**Development Constraints**
Other than the lack of remaining private land for development, the area has few if any development constraints.
Emerging Issue
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Provision of Sewer and Water.** Should sewer and water be extended to the small lots along Lake Bemidji in the Lavinia area? Most of the lots do not appear large enough to support two drain fields but all are currently in compliance and none are known to be failing at this time. The density of development and its close proximity to the lake suggests, at some point, this area be considered for common sewer and water.

- **Management of Section 36.** Are the State’s management objectives for this large piece of public land consistent with the community’s vision for the area? Section 36 is land held in trust by the State, and revenues generated by it are for the benefit of the State’s school districts. The goal of the State is to maximize revenues generated from School Trust Lands, and it can do this in one of two ways: extract resources, timber in the case of Section 36; or sell the land at public auction. Currently, revenues generated from Section 36 are from the sale of its considerable timber resources, but it could also generate revenues through the sale of the land to private developers which would put those parcels back on the tax rolls. What would the “unlikely” sale of all or portions of Section 36 for private development do to the area? If the State increases harvest levels, will individuals living in an area that is becoming more urbanized tolerate an increase in timber harvest activities? Section 36 is also one of the few areas in the state designated as a “non-motorized” area, so it could see increased use by individuals not wanting to use trails that could be frequented by ATV’s/OHV’s. Will individuals who prefer these low impact recreation areas tolerate more intensive timber harvesting operations?
• Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities. How does the Bemidji Area accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists as development occurs? Zoning and subdivision controls can be used to ensure adequate infrastructure throughout the AOR.

• Encroachment on the State Park. Will continued development or an increase in the density of development surrounding the State Park affect the character of the park? The more people living around the park the more and varied the uses of the park will be. People living near the park treat it much like a “neighborhood park” in the way that they access it and use it. The mix of amenities and uses of a neighborhood park are much different than what the State Park has traditionally supplied. More development around the park could also make it much harder for the park to manage its lands with controlled burns and timber harvest like it has in the past.
Map 2-3
Issues in the Northeast Area
Northwest Area

**Area Description**
In general, the area extends from Anne St. NE, north to just shy of Town Hall Rd NW. Lake Bemidji and the township boundary form the east and west boundaries. The area is 5,366 acres in size.

The area is predominately residential with large open spaces occupied by wetlands and pasture. A few subdivisions are in the northern portion and higher density residential development is along CSAH 21 and Birchmont Dr. NE. Some commercial is scattered about but the larger operations are in the southern area concentrated along CSAH 21 and U.S. Highway 71.

**Access to Infrastructure/Amenities**
The area is well served by north/south roads with U.S. Highway 71, CSAH 15, and CSAH 21 all providing easy access to the amenities of the City. The lots along Anne St. west of Irvine Ave. are served by sewer and water but no other portion of the area is served. There are two large blocks of public land but they have no known developed hiking trails or other amenities, and no developed “playground type” parks are in the area. There are some excellent bicycle routes on the east side of this area, but very few throughout the rest. As development continues, the need for safe and convenient infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians will increase as well.

**Development Trends**
The area will continue to see residential development throughout. Many large lots remain that could be split or converted to small sub-divisions. U.S. Highway 71 could see some more commercial development near the airport area.

**Development Constraints**
The one major, natural development constraint is the large interconnected wetland complex that covers the entire area. One minor man-made constraint is related to the establishment of airport runway clear zones that extend outside of the airport boundaries.
Emerging Issues
There are a couple of issues important to the future of this area. These are:

- **Preservation of the Wetland Complex.** Could continuing development in the area adversely impact the wetland complex? Should the extent or type of developments be limited in this area? Excessive draining or extensive fragmentation could lead to loss of valuable habitat, and water quality degradation in area lakes.

- **Groundwater Flooding.** Are homeowners adequately protected from poor or careless building practices? Some areas developed and yet to be developed lie within the groundwater flooding area delineated in a study by the engineering firm WSN. Homes with basements that are not outfitted with systems for preventing water from entering or removing it in a timely manner could experience extensive damage during wet years.
Map 2-4
Issues in the Northwest Area

Newer, Mid to Upscale Housing
Potential for Groundwater Flooding
Balsam Creek
Wetland Complex
Cummer's Landfill
Need for Central Services
West Area

Description of Area
The West planning area encompasses Anne Street and the airport to the north, Lake Bemidji to the east, skirts the downtown and follows 5th Street to the south, and CSAH 11 to the west. This boundary encompasses a total of just over 5,300 acres.

There are a wide variety of uses and neighborhoods in this area. The airport dominates the far western portions of the area, while a heavily developing commercial area follows Paul Bunyan Drive as you enter town from the west. North of that corridor is the technology park, the regional medical center and a growing office building strip along Anne Street. Bemidji State University and the original residential areas of town cover the eastern half of the area. In the southwest, the U.S. Highway 2/71 bypass is surrounded by rural residential subdivisions and a major wetland complex south of the middle school.

Access to Infrastructure/Amenities
Most of the area is served by central services, except on some northerly and westerly fringe areas. While there are a few minimally-developed city parks in the area, there are no trails. Some of the core residential neighborhoods and the BSU area have sidewalks. The abandoned railroad corridor, running from downtown, west across Fifth Street and out to the planning area boundary near 15th Street, is in various stages of planning for trail development.

Development Trends
The most significant trend of the past few years, expected to continue, is the dense commercialization of the west end of town along Paul Bunyan Drive and U.S. Highway 71 North to the technology park. The medical park area is growing as well, along with office and light commercial along Anne Street. There are housing developments to the east of the hospital toward Lake Bemidji. The majority of the community’s multi-family housing is in this area. Some portions of this area, such as the BSU neighborhood and the residential area northwest of downtown, may see redevelopment pressure. The area surrounding the new High School is also expected to see continued suburbanization.

Development Constraint
Development is hampered by a fairly large wetland complex south of the Middle School to 5th Ave and Lake Irvine. The Bemidji Regional Airport also has mandatory development restrictions in place that extend in cone shaped zones from the end of each runway. Mn/DOT holds Access and Scenic Easements for the U.S. Highway 2/71 Bypass.
Emerging Issues
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Character of the West Paul Bunyan Drive Area.** What should the west community entrance on Paul Bunyan Drive reflect about the community? What specific policies can be implemented to ensure that development in this area is consistent with the desires of the community? How can the functionality of the corridor be improved? What signage standard is effective and appropriate for this area? The corridor has a very dense concentration of retail services in what can be considered a typical big box/strip mall environment. It is also a major regional draw, creating an impression on most visitors to the community as to what Bemidji is all about.

- **Improving Core Residential Neighborhoods.** What can be done to help reinvigorate the core residential neighborhoods? How do we deal with BSU expansion needs? The older residential areas of the community, north and west of the downtown and surrounding BSU, have changed over the past couple of decades. Rental occupancy rates have increased, several lots have been converted to other non-residential uses, and housing quality is inconsistent.

- **Anne Street Mixed Development.** What are the appropriate uses along this corridor? How can various incompatible uses be separated? How much multi-family housing can the area sustain? The Anne Street corridor, from Bardwell Park through the medical center to industrial uses at the Bemidji Avenue connection, has developed tremendously over the past five years. This development is increasingly complex and dense, with significant long-term traffic, character and potential wetland impacts.

- **Active Living.** What are the key destinations in the community? Which of these destinations are likely to attract people that bicycle or walk instead of drive? What facilities need to be in place to allow people to safely bicycle or walk to these destinations? This area, in particular, has a wide variety of destinations and should be considered the top priority when considering pedestrian and bicycle needs. Destinations include schools of all levels, high density residential development, strip commercial and shopping areas, medical facilities, the airport, parks, ball fields and others. On-road facilities, such as bicycle lanes and signage, and off-road facilities, such as multi-use trails and sidewalks, are needed so people have a variety of ways to get to their destinations.
• **Airport Development and Character.** How can the adverse effects of surrounding development on airport operations and public safety be mitigated? What process or tools need to be developed to ensure that airport zoning is adhered to? The Bemidji Regional Airport is the region’s only commercial carrier airport. In the past, the Airport and local jurisdictions have not collaborated very well on controlling development in accord with state and federal airport zoning regulations. This has resulted in a chain reaction of significant but potentially avoidable infrastructure investments by the City, private developers and the Airport.

• **Development Pressures in the High School Neighborhood.** Is rural residential the desired predominant use along Adams Avenue and the Bypass? How should the Division Street corridor develop? What tools are available to make both visions a reality? The new High School is a driver for development on the southwest end of town. Defining the character and use in this area will help define the need for services as the area continues to develop.
Map 2-5
Issues in the West Area
Southeast Quadrant

**Description of Area**
The area contains approximately 6,200 acres, is bounded on the south by CSAH 50, on the west by Lake Bemidji and Lake Irving, on the north by the Mississippi River, and on the east by the Bemidji Town Line. It is a newer section of the community, and includes a number of attractive residential subdivisions and significant open space.

The east (of Tyler Avenue) part of this area is decidedly different from the west. It contains significant open space that consists of forested and pasture land. It has a much lower density of development, and significantly larger parcel sizes.

**Access to Infrastructure/Amenities**
It presently has no access to central sewer and water, nor is the area provided with storm water facilities. Most streets in the west half are paved; most in the east (east of Tyler Avenue) are not. It has one large parcel on the Mississippi River dedicated to parkland, as yet undeveloped.

In addition, the Paul Bunyan Trail runs along Lake Bemidji, and a significant amount of Lake Bemidji lakeshore is part of Lake Bemidji State Park, although physically removed from the main section of the park. Beyond the State Trail, there are relatively few facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians. As development occurs, providing facilities to compliment the State Trail will be important.

While the land east of Tyler Avenue is accessible, its roads are, as stated earlier, unpaved. Also, it is just far enough from the core of the community, and just far enough away from our signature amenities, that development pressure is significantly less than what is present to the west.

**Development Trends**
The west half of this area continues to see suburban-type residential development. Numerous subdivisions of one and one-half to one acre lots provide opportunity for additional development over the next decade. The east half of the area is experiencing slower residential growth. Again, this part is not quite as accessible.

**Development Constraints**
The far southwest corner of the area has an extensive area of wetlands that are a significant constraint to development. The limited access to U.S. Highway 2 in this area is also a constraint.
For the most part, the rest of the planning area presents minimal natural constraints.

**Emerging Issues**
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Services Delivery.** *Should sewer and water be extended to this area? Does part of this area need storm sewer infrastructure?* While this area is seeing strong residential growth, at present it lacks access to central sewer and water, and storm sewer facilities. Decisions need to be made concerning the desirability of extending these services; these decisions will be one factor in determining the density and character of different parts of this planning area.

- **Park Needs.** *How much land is needed for parks? Where is the need? What type of facilities are desired?* There is some land dedicated to park facilities. The need for park and recreation opportunities in this area is great. Whether this park is adequate, and if it is, what the facilities should consist of, are questions to answer. There are likely more park and recreation needs unmet in the south part of this area. The next question is how do people access the parks if they are bicycling or walking given the number of streets that are not paved?

- **CSAH 50 Entrance to City.** *What does the community desire for this entrance into the community?* An old entrance to the Community, it is less developed than any other entrance. While not presenting the best face for Bemidji, it has good potential to be made much better.

- **East (of Tyler Avenue) area access and development type.** *Should this area be encouraged, or allowed, to develop into the half to one acre residential living prevalent just to the west? Or should the more rural character of this area be preserved?* A decision on this question will determine the type of policy and strategy needed in this area.
Southwest Area

**Description of Area**
This area is bounded on the south by Hubbard County and on the west by Grant Valley Township. The north and east boundary starts south of the High School, travels east along Division Street to downtown and the south shores of Lake Irving. From Lake Irving, the border follows the bike/snowmobile trail over TH 197, skirts around the southern edge of the Industrial Park, and then follows County Road 50/U.S. Highway 2 to the southeast corner of the Joint Planning Area. The area encompasses approximately 9,000 acres.

The most prominent built feature of this area is the US Highways 2 and 71 bypass, running from the northwest to the southeast. In the western and northern portions of the area are significant bodies of water, including lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands, and the majority of residential development. The southern and eastern portions of the planning area are primarily flat agricultural lands.

**Access to Infrastructure/Amenities**
Sewer and water were recently extended to the South Lake Irving neighborhood, in addition to the service provided near downtown north of Lake Irving. There are two parks in the planning area: one with a tennis court in the South Lake Irving neighborhood, and a small lakeside picnic area owned by Bemidji Township on the east side of Lake Marquette. The only trail segments are those portions of the Paul Bunyan trail near Irvingboro and running along County 50 to the east.

**Development Trends**
Residential development in this area has been largely driven by waterfront and back lot development and access to the rapidly growing western part of the community. Most residential lots are developing in the north, near the commercial core, or around the Mississippi River, Lake Irving, and Lake Marquette. Additional residential areas can be found near the Industrial Park. Very little residential development can be found south of the U.S. Highway 2 bypass and Lake Marquette. Commercial development is occurring in relation to Trunk Highways 71 and 197 as it enters the City. Particular focus is on the junction of Highways 2/71/197, where substantial commercial developments are being planned.

**Development Constraint**
The extensive riparian wetlands around lakes and rivers, such as those in the west, are more sensitive to development. The far western lands also have an existing potential for wildfire. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has access and scenic easements along the bypass.
Emerging Issues
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Highway 71 South Corridor Development.** What is the character of development desired along the rural sections of 71/197? How far and deep should intensive development go on the TH 2/71 interchange? How can access along the corridor be best managed? This is one of three major entrances to the community, and has a long history of hodge-podge development. Pressure to develop the Bypass interchange is also building.

- **Industrial Park.** How do you buffer for residential and commercial uses adjacent to the Industrial Park? There have been recent examples of local resident concern about particular types of adjacent uses in the industrial park. Buffers could be physical structures such as trees, walls, etc., or it could be separated by some distance or intervening uses.

- **Low Density Agricultural Area.** What is the desired character of development in this area? What mix of uses is acceptable in this area, and how can conflicts between residential and other uses be minimized? This area has traditionally been very rural and agriculturally based. Residential and agricultural development sometimes comes into conflict over some agricultural management practices.

- **Mississippi/Schoolcraft Corridor.** Are any parts of this area in need of central services? What, if anything, needs to be done to protect the extensive water resources in this area? This area has fairly good access to the core community and very attractive amenities that will drive growth and development, in particular along the waterfront.

- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities.** How does the Bemidji Area accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists as development occurs? Zoning and subdivision controls can be used to ensure adequate infrastructure throughout the AOR.
Map 2-7
Issues in the Southwest Area
Nymore Area

Description of Area
The area contains approximately 1,150 acres, is bounded on the south by CSAH 50 and an old Soo Line Rail spur, on the west by Lake Irving, on the north by First Avenue East and Mill Street, and on the east by Lake Avenue. It is an older section of the community, and includes Bemidji’s major industrial park, one of the oldest community neighborhoods east of Paul Bunyan Drive, and the south and east entrances into town.

Access to Infrastructure/Amenities
Most, but not all, of the area has access to sewer, water and paved roads. The far southeast corner is without utilities. Parkland is limited. There is some recreation open space available at the new Lincoln Elementary School, and a largely undeveloped park is available in the center of Nymore. There is no safe crossing for students to cross First Street or Lake Avenue to get to school. The BREC will add significant traffic in this area.

Development Trend
This is a largely developed area, with some limited vacant land. There is transitional development underway in two areas. The Lake Irving-Lueken’s South area has undergone a transformation over the last several years. It now includes a small commercial center and newer housing. It is now an attractive middle class neighborhood in close proximity to downtown. While a handful of conflicting uses remain, it is well on its way to being a quality neighborhood. The City has hired a consultant to provide recommendations for the old Mn/DOT building and property, and for the old police training center property. Redevelopments at both sites would further improve this area.

There is evidence of a transition of a different sort in the triangular area bounded by Washington Avenue, the railroad and the Eagles on the south. Long ago a residential area along Washington, with some commercial and light industry along the railroad, uses are now more intermingled and of lower value, with little discernable pattern or trend in development. This area is not the best advertisement for visitors to the community.

“Nymore proper” is predominantly a residential neighborhood, with a long-forgotten downtown that now consists of a couple local convenience establishments and more than one vacant building. The housing value in the area is below median for the entire area, with a range of quality.
**Development Constraints:** There are few natural constraints to development. The area is flat for the most part, and contains few wetlands.

**Emerging Issues:**
There are several issues of importance to the future of this area. These include:

- **Renewal of Nymore Core.** *What needs to happen to get to the “tipping point” that will turn this neighborhood around?* The original Nymore (i.e., the west part of the neighborhood) is characterized by older and, for the most part, smaller homes, and a scattering of other mixed uses. While much of this area contains sewer, water and paved streets (but not all), the major concern is the quality of the housing stock. The neighborhood’s location gives it some locational advantages if the housing quality issue is addressed and some of the modest blighting questions are eliminated.

- **Washington Street-Railroad-Eagles Club Entrance to the Community.** *What type of transition is desired in this corridor? How can we make this a showcase entrance into town?* The corridor from the U.S. Highway 2 bypass to Paul Bunyan Drive is a mix of residential, commercial and industrial uses. While it is one of 4 main entrances into town, it is the one that gives the poorest impression of the community. Many uses are an historical remnant of a time when community traffic patterns and the role of this area were decidedly different.

- **Industrial Park Uses.** *What types of industrial uses should be accommodated within the Industrial Park? Are there enough differences in the impacts of different industrial uses that certain uses need to be segregated? How should that be accomplished?* The Industrial Park is a triangular shaped property sandwiched between CSAH 50 (Old U.S. Highway 2) and the old spur railroad track. There has been some discussion concerning certain proposed “heavy” industry and its impacts.

- **Continued Improvement of the Irvingboro neighborhood.** *What should the re-use of the old Mn/DOT building and property, and the old police training center property, consist of?* This area is on the way to becoming a first-rate neighborhood. Changes in use of the above-mentioned properties would accelerate the area’s improvement.

- **Impacts from South Shore Development.** *How will the development of the South Shore impact the Nymore neighborhood?* The development of the South Shore, including the Bemidji Regional Event Center will no doubt have an impact on traffic – including both motor vehicles and other modes. It will be important to provide adequate facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists to maintain (or improve) a safe environment for all people in the area.
Map 2-8
Issues in the Nymore Area

Legend
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Other
- Public Open Space
- Residential
- Right-of-Way
- Timber Lands
- Transit/Utilities
- Vacant
- Water
- Wetlands

Nymore Core in Need of Renewal
Evolving/Improving Neighborhood
Inactive City Entrance
Downtown

**Description of Area**
The downtown Bemidji planning area includes the central business district, the Southeast Lake Bemidji redevelopment area, and the commercial strip along Paul Bunyan Drive that links the two. The total area encompasses just over 280 acres. The planning area is bisected by the Mississippi River as it flows southwest from Lake Bemidji into Lake Irving. The northern portion of the planning area is bounded by the Beltrami County Government Center to the north, older, primarily residential development to the west and southwest, Lake Irving to the south, and Lake Bemidji to the east. The southeastern portion of the planning area includes the land south of the Mississippi River between Lake Bemidji and Lake Irving. This includes the sewage treatment plant as well as the portion of the Southeast Lake Bemidji area formerly owned by Georgia Pacific and Burlington Northern. While the Burlington Northern rail line that came through this area has been abandoned, the old Soo line (now Burlington Northern-Santa Fe) that traverses the area is still active. A major revitalization of the core downtown area took place in the early 1980’s. While the downtown has held its own through the years there is an acknowledgement that continued enhancement and reinvention is necessary in order for it to remain vital in the face of relentless competition.

**Access to Infrastructure/Amenities**
The entire downtown planning area is well served by municipal infrastructure, including sewer, water and paved roads. Parkland and public open space is very limited. The statues of Paul and Babe, at the Tourist Information Center, are a major draw to the area. Library Park, located just north of the old Carnegie Library Building, provides a small open space along the lakeshore. There will be considerable more public space along the south shore of Lake Bemidji. There is also a small privately-owned marina south of the railroad tracks on the northern shore of Lake Irving.

**Development Trends**
The core part of the downtown is fully developed, although a handful of buildings are currently vacant. Beltrami County recently developed a government campus located at the northern edge of the central business district. This campus includes a new Community Services Building, Law Enforcement Center, Administrative Building and Judicial Center. The County Courthouse is being renovated for use as probation and parole offices.
Paul Bunyan Drive runs north-south through the planning area. This corridor has been split into paired one-ways from the southern boundary to the central business district. A paved trail runs adjacent to the corridor.

Decorative fencing has been constructed along the trail along the shores of Lake Bemidji. The realignment project will help stabilize the shoreline and will spur additional redevelopment along the commercial strip. One such development is the Hampton Inn which was completed last year. The Tourist Information Center was rebuilt several years ago, also enhancing the character of the area.

The old Georgia Pacific property has been purchased by a private party who has expressed interest in developing the site. The same developer is negotiating to purchase the property that had been previously owned by the Burlington Northern Railroad. The Georgia Pacific plant has been demolished. The City has developed a conceptual site plan for the Southeast Lake Bemidji area which promotes a combination of private and public development on this unique property. There is more than one mile of undeveloped shoreline on Lake Bemidji available at this location. This property provides a once in a lifetime opportunity for the Bemidji community.

**Development Constraints**
There is a small wetland located near the western edge of the old Georgia Pacific plant site. Conceptual plans call for utilization of the wetland as an asset in the redevelopment of the Southeast Lake Bemidji property.

**Emerging Issues**
There are several issues critical to the future of downtown Bemidji. These issues include:

- **Waterfront Enhancement.** What improvements are desired at or near the Lake Bemidji waterfront in order to enhance the area for residents and visitors? How can the community provide a stronger linkage between the waterfront and the downtown? The Lake Bemidji waterfront provides a unique competitive advantage for downtown. The draw of the waterfront will serve to draw potential customers close to downtown businesses.

- **Southeast Lake Bemidji.** How should the community influence redevelopment of the Southeast Lake Bemidji area? What should that redevelopment look like? The Georgia Pacific plant closed its doors in March of 1999 providing an opportunity for the community to alter the character of this prime lakeshore. Georgia Pacific has since sold the property to a private developer. The Burlington Northern Railroad corridor was sold to the same developer. North Central Door has plans to move its operations from this area into the
Industrial Park. With more than one mile of urban shoreline, the redevelopment of this property will alter the character of this community for decades to come.

**Housing. What needs to be done to encourage housing development in or near downtown?** Are there any regulatory barriers that may prevent multiple-family housing or mixed use development from being built? Housing opportunities in the area will bring additional people downtown and, perhaps, provide a catalyst for additional development. Having more downtown residents will help avoid the feeling of the area being vacated after normal business hours.

**Parking. How can downtown parking needs be most effectively met?** Like most downtowns, there is a perceived shortage of convenient parking in Downtown Bemidji. The Downtown Development Authority has proposed development of a parking ramp just east of the Bemidji City Hall. The ramp would be financed by the City and DDA in a joint venture, and maintained by the City.

**Event Center. How does the Bemidji Area fully utilize the south shore of Lake Bemidji? How will the property develop?** The South Shore of Lake Bemidji was chosen as the site for the Bemidji Regional Event Center (BREC), which will open in October 2010. The BREC is part of a large PUD that will feature mixed-use development, including a large amount of parks, beach, and open space. The Minnesota DNR is planning on completing the Paul Bunyan State Trail from the east side of Lake Bemidji, through the South Shore, and connect to the existing trail that heads out of Bemidji to the south.

**Public Places to Congregate. What type of public spaces should be provided in the downtown area for people to congregate? What activities should the spaces encourage? What locations are most appropriate for these spaces?** People will spend time downtown if there are appropriate spaces for them to gather and recreate.

**Linkage with County and City Properties. What can be done to provide a strong linkage between the downtown and the City and County campuses?** Beltrami County has made a substantial investment in downtown Bemidji through the development of several County buildings at the north edge of downtown. The City of Bemidji is considering development of a City campus downtown as well, which would include a new City Hall and, potentially, a Public Works Building. A discussion should take place regarding how these public investments can compliment other downtown development.
Map 2-9
Issues in the Downtown Area

Use of Waterfront as an Economic Advantage

Southeast Lake Bemidji Redevelopment Area

Legend
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Other
- Public Open Space
- Residential
- Right-of-Way
- Timber Lands
- Transp./Utilities
- Vacant
- Water
- Wetlands
3. GREATER BEMIDJI AREA LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan consists of a community vision, a statement of overall values and goals, an identification of specific land use objectives and policies that promote the accomplishment of these goals, and a future land use map and description that provides a spatial characterization of the goals, objectives and policies. Finally, there is a description of specific, short-range strategies that will be undertaken by the Greater Bemidji Area to implement the plan.

Vision

Through intentional, collective action, Bemidji will be:

- A healthy community, successfully balancing regional center amenities and small town beauty and character;
- A vibrant economic center recognized for its innovation, creativity and knowledge;
- A social, cultural, recreational, medical and educational magnet;
- An active community, where physical activity is safe, easy, accessible and a common occurrence for all residents;
- An embracing, culturally diverse community;
- A community that protects its natural environment;
- A people committed to shared prosperity and long-term community stewardship; and
- The star of the north, a national model of community success.

Overall Values and Goals

Values

The following values are important to residents and of the Greater Bemidji Area, and, along with the statement of the Community’s goals, provide a guide for development of implementation strategies:

- The Greater Bemidji Area is a single community;
- Maintaining and enhancing our “north woods character” is vital as it relates to development and redevelopment in the community;
- The community will promote individual choice in the types of work and leisure to pursue, where to live, and in residential lifestyle;
- Resource conservation is important. Natural resources are a major asset of the community. Those resources will be used in a way that they remain healthy for future generations;
- There will be equity in the distribution of resources, the improvement of infrastructure, and in the decision making process;
- The community will expect and embrace respect for the knowledge, abilities, and role of all jurisdictions involved in managing growth in the Greater Bemidji Area; and
- Health of residents in the Bemidji Area is more important than ever. It is particularly important to provide opportunities for residents to reduce obesity and improve overall wellness.
Goals
The following are six overall goals that describe the general vision of the Greater Bemidji Area. These overall goals provide a framework that will guide the development of other more specific planning tools.

1. Create and maintain a community that protects its natural resources.
2. Promote and enhance a community rich in character desired by its residents.
3. Ensure a diverse range of economic, housing, transportation, and recreational choices for Bemidji Area residents.
4. Create and maintain a healthy and vibrant downtown.
5. Value and embrace our rich history and diverse culture.
6. Become a Community that embraces growth and change in a manner that promotes our northwoods character.
7. Build a community that boasts safe and convenient connections to destinations.

Land Use Objective and Policies

Objective #1:
Promote patterns of development that make efficient use of the Community's infrastructure and that promote the Community’s overall goals.

Policies

a. Encourage development at moderate densities in areas well served by existing roads and other infrastructure.

b. Discourage higher density development in less accessible areas that are targeted for lower levels of public services.

c. In areas where central services are desired, higher densities should be encouraged.

d. Limit development densities in areas not targeted for central services so that individual septic systems and wells will provide adequate service.

Objective #2:
Maintain and, where necessary, enhance the environmental quality of the Greater Bemidji Area through the wise stewardship of its natural resources.

Policies

a. Encourage cluster development and other development approaches in order to protect environmentally sensitive areas, including wetlands.

b. Encourage strong enforcement of wetland regulations to ensure a no net loss of wetland values in the Community, and the protection of higher priority wetlands.
c. Limit back lot shoreland development densities to reduce the negative impact on surface water quality.

d. Recognize development constraints and limit development densities to those appropriate for the natural conditions and the type of sewer and water service to be provided.

e. Utilize subdivision regulations to effectively manage and treat storm water run off.

**Objective #3:**
Maintain the rural and small town character of the Greater Bemidji Area, including the preservation of trees and open space, the prevention of land use conflicts between residential and non-residential uses, the retention or creation of vegetative buffers, and appropriate management of signs and billboards.

**Policies**

a. Create a healthy, vital and livable downtown.

b. Provide strong incentives for cluster development, particularly in the high amenity growth area, through regulatory measures in the Subdivision Ordinance.

c. Encourage significant setbacks for residential development along collector and arterial roadways.

d. Support efforts, both educational and regulatory, to preserve natural vegetation as a buffer along collector and arterial roadways. Promote vegetative buffers that provide screening for residential areas and beautification of commercial areas.

e. Encourage and support the concentration of commercial activity in designated commercial centers in the Community.

f. Limit the spread of extensive commercial strip development along roadways in the Community.

g. Manage signs in a manner that reflects north woods character.

h. Minimize light pollution.

**Objective #4:**
Promote convenient access to goods and services, by a variety of transportation modes, for residents and visitors throughout all parts of the Community.

**Policies**

a. Provide areas for highway-oriented commercial development. Discourage inappropriate commercial strip development.

b. Encourage the aggregation of commercial activities in designated commercial areas.

c. Encourage access to public transportation.
d. Provide for an accessible system of trail connections and bike lanes that roughly parallel the collector arterial road system.

**Objective #5:**
**Protect the safety and functionality the road system in the Community through the promotion of appropriate development patterns.**

**Policies**

a. Land use decisions should take into account the amount of traffic generated and its impact on the system.

b. Limit commercial and industrial activity to specific areas where appropriate, safe access can be provided.

c. Encourage or require Complete Streets in all new subdivisions.

d. Manage access on roadways based on their function.

e. Manage traffic and parking within and between commercial developments to promote order and reduce conflicts.

**Objective #6:**
**Provide Community residents with a broad range of housing and lifestyle choices in environmentally appropriate ways.**

**Policies**

a. Identify different areas of the Community that will be developed at different densities and that provide a range of residential options.

b. Encourage and promote a variety of different development types, options and designs.

c. Allow for different types of compatible land uses close together in appropriate locations to shorten transportation trips and facilitate multimodal development.

d. Provide opportunities for persons with special housing needs to be adequately housed.

e. Encourage and promote the creation of neighborhood parks, trails, and recreational amenities.

**Objective #7:**
**Promote the economic health of the Community in environmentally appropriate ways.**

**Policies**

a. Promote and support industrial development within designated industrial parks.

b. Promote and support development of low-impact technology based enterprises within designated technology parks.

c. Promote development types and activities that support and enhance the tourism economy of the Community.

d. Limit development densities adjacent to areas actively managed for timber production in order to limit conflicts with management activities.
Objective #8: Promote the improvement of residential neighborhoods throughout the community.

a. Encourage public investment as a means to encourage private investment to create livable residential neighborhoods.

Objective #9 Promote best planning practices in the implementation of the land use plan including, but not limited to, administration of all ordinances.

a. All regulations should be enforced in accordance with Minnesota Statutes. Use variances and spot zoning will not be allowed.

b. Approval of conditional use permits, variances, and requests for zoning amendments will be made only when consistent with the spirit and intent of the land use plan and upon positive findings of fact.

c. The Planning Commission and its staff will be proactive community stewards. The Planning Commission will promote leading edge planning practices through recommendations to the Joint Planning Board and will advocate to its members specific strategic actions that would benefit the Greater Bemidji Area.
Description of Land Use Vision
The following section describes the community vision for land use in the Greater Bemidji Area in 2025. The vision was created based on conversations with hundreds of people in more than twenty meetings held over a twelve month period. The Planning Committee reviewed population trends and demographic changes occurring in the Bemidji Area, as well as existing spatial information regarding land use and development limitations, including public ownership and wetlands. The narrative identifies several specific development "tiers". For each tier, a specific intent statement, a description that characterizes that tier, and a statement of potential management approaches that could be used to bring about the desired nature of development within that tier are provided. The spatial representation of the land use vision is displayed on the future land use map provided as Map 3-1.

In addition to the eleven development tiers, two overlay areas are also identified. The overlay areas are those which warrant special attention due to concerns related to either to the natural environment or the desired character in a particular area. Again, each of these areas is provided with an intent statement, a description of the character of development within the area, and the potential management approaches that could be used to accomplish the specified intent.

The land use vision has been crafted to work within and take advantage of the trends occurring in the Bemidji Area, promoting those trends and activities that are consistent with the long-term aspirations of the Area, while working to modify those trends, activities and developments that run counter to that vision. The implementation section that follows provides yet more detail on specific strategies to be undertaken by the Greater Bemidji Area to implement the vision.

The following is specific narrative for each of the identified development tiers as well as the two overlay areas.
Map 3-1
Future Land Use 2025
Public Use/Ownership Area

**Intent:** Preserve and promote for a broad range of public uses, including recreational and resource management.

**Description**
Large tracts of public lands within the Bemidji area are included in this tier. Much of the public land is State-owned and is managed by the State or County for public purposes. One of the largest sections of public land is the Lake Bemidji State Park which is primarily located adjacent to the northeast corner of Lake Bemidji. A large area of State Trust lands is located southeast of Movil Lake. One portion of the Buena Vista State Forest is located at the northwest corner of Lake Bemidji. A second portion of the Forest, known as Section 36, is located east of Lake Bemidji just north of the Mississippi River outlet.

By means of public ownership, substantial control can be exercised over these lands. The area is not without its potential use conflicts, however. Continued strong demand for timber and an increase in multi-seasonal motorized use could result in disagreements over the preferred management of these public areas.

**Management Approaches**
The management of these lands is accomplished principally through the negotiation of public policy. Two effective strategies for long term management that prevent conflicting uses include:

- **Segregation of different uses.** Some uses need to have separate areas to be completely compatible.

- **The institution of best management practices.** Some uses can occur in close proximity to others as long as certain best management practices are instituted.
**Rural Area**

**Intent:** Preserve very low density rural character and prevent the need for extensive investments in new infrastructure.

**Description**

There are three primary rural areas identified on the Future Land Use Map. One is located in the southeast part of the Bemidji Area, mostly east of Tyler Avenue and south of the Mississippi River. Another rural area is located northeast of the Bemidji Airport. The third major rural area is located west and northwest of downtown Bemidji. These areas currently have lower densities and lower growth rates than other parts of the Bemidji Area.

Community conversations have revealed that the desired character of these areas includes maintenance of the low density to ensure rural character.

**Management Approaches**

A number of management approaches can affectively promote the intended character of these areas.

- **Require a five-acre minimum lot size.** Low density will preserve the character and prevent growth that will require substantial road investments.

- **Allow cluster development.** Planned unit developments can promote compact development patterns in exchange for the preservation of open space.

- **Allow a broad range of uses at low densities.** Low density will prevent most use conflicts and will protect the rural character of these areas.

**Figure 3.1**

The traditional design on the left and the cluster design on the right yield the same number of units. The cluster design preserves two-thirds of the property as open space.

*Source: Rural By Design, Randal Arendt, 1994.*
Suburban Unsewered

**Intent:** Accommodate suburban residential development and other compatible uses at suburban densities that will not require central services.

**Description**
The suburban unsewered areas are represented by the light tan color on the Future Land Use Map. The suburban unsewered areas are located in both the north and south portions of the planning area. This area contains subdivisions with numerous lots, and is rapidly developing with predominantly single family home residential development, especially in the north. These areas are very attractive to families due to the close proximity to high quality natural amenities, a high quality road system, and excellent access to the goods and services in the core area of the community. This area is also subject to increasing development pressures and potential use conflicts.

**Management Approaches**
There are a number of management approaches that can support and promote the type of suburban activity described above, while limiting incompatible development.

- **Designate minimum lot sizes of approximately 2 acres.** This lot size is high enough to allow the efficient provision of roads but low enough to prevent the need for central services.

- **Implement strong cluster development incentives within the subdivision ordinance.** This tool may have the greatest potential to preserve the character of this area over the next two to three decades. Strong cluster development incentives will help preserve open space.

- **Implement limitations on the locations of commercial development, particularly strip development.** Nothing could damage the character of this area more than incompatible commercial structures scattered at random.

- **Limit development to specific uses compatible with residential activity.** Densities are high enough that use restrictions are needed to prevent conflicts.
**Suburban Sewered**

**Intent:** Provide for predominantly residential development that can be efficiently served by central services, and provide for a range of residential choices.

**Description**

The suburban sewered tier is identified on the Future Land Use Map in tan. Three areas immediately adjacent to municipal services are identified as appropriate for suburban sewered development. One of those areas is located east of Lake Bemidji and includes property both within and outside City limits. This area includes much of the land along the east shore of Lake Bemidji and along the Mississippi River. A second area shown as suburban sewered is located along the northwest and western shore of Lake Bemidji. A third area is located both north and west of the U.S. Highway 2 bypass, south and west of Lake Irving. Some higher density areas along Lake Marquette and Movil Lake are also identified as suburban sewered areas. Each of these areas are either developed or are developing at a density that could benefit from central services, and have an existing character consistent with suburban development.

These areas are subject to many of the same pressures as areas in developing municipalities: conflicting uses, and the need for central services to protect the health and safety of their residents. Some of these areas will become a part of the City of Bemidji over the long term and some will not. Regardless of jurisdiction, these areas will benefit from central services, and as a result, densities that allow the efficient provision of these services should be promoted.

**Management Approaches**

The management approaches that are appropriate for these areas are commonly those that are used by cities to manage their growth.

- **Provide density incentives within a zoning ordinance to encourage the provision of central services.** Higher densities benefit developers and the public if central services are provided.

- **Limit the location of commercial uses, particularly strip development.** Incompatible uses scattered throughout the area would detract from the character of the area.

- **Limit development to specific uses compatible with residential activity.** Use restrictions are essential in order to prevent conflicting uses in higher density areas.
Urban Residential

**Intent:** Maintain high quality residential neighborhoods, promote improvement of the existing housing stock, promote a broad range of housing opportunities, and discourage incompatible uses including extensive commercial strip development along Bemidji Avenue.

**Description**

The Urban Residential Area is shown as yellow on the Future Land Use Map. It includes the core area of Bemidji surrounding both downtown and the campus of Bemidji State University. It also includes Nymore and the Irvingboro development along the eastern shore of Lake Irving.

This tier is mostly well served by central services, and is already intensely developed. Irvingboro is a newly developed residential neighborhood that includes a mixture of high quality single family homes, townhouses and apartments. Much of the multiple family housing development is located north of the Paul Bunyan Mall and south of North Country Health Services. This tier also includes some of the oldest residential neighborhoods in the community, including the Original Townsite, just north of downtown, and the Nymore neighborhood. Many of these areas were platted and developed prior to the adoption of zoning and subdivision regulations.

The intent in this area is to promote and maintain high quality neighborhoods that provide a wide range of residential options. Investment in the improvement of existing housing should be encouraged to the extent that it does not compromise the long term health and vitality of the neighborhood. Uses that are incompatible with residential living should be restricted.

![Image of Urban Residential Area]
**Management Approaches**

A number of management approaches can be used to accomplish the intent described for this area.

- **Provide a range of residential zoning districts with a variety of minimum lot sizes and setback requirements.** Consideration should be given to the existing setback requirements and density of development when minimum standards are created. Excessive setback and lot size standards would increase the number of nonconforming structures and limit the ability of owners to make improvements to their structures.

- **Limit the proliferation of commercial and other uses not compatible with residential uses.** Expansion of commercial uses, especially strip development along collectors and arterials, would detract from the quality of residential neighborhoods.

- **Allow other compatible uses.** Numerous other uses are compatible with residential development, and should be accommodated within these areas.
Commercial

**Intent:** Encourage concentration of commercial uses in specific areas in order to provide convenient access to goods and services and to limit the need for extensive commercial strip development.

**Description**
There are several commercial areas identified on the future land use map. A major commercial area includes the west-end development south and east of the airport. This area includes older development such as the Paul Bunyan Mall, and newer development including Wal-Mart and Home Depot. Also included in this area is Bardwell Park, a hodgepodge of commercial and other uses, and the Technology Park which provides property for professional offices and cleaner type heavy commercial uses.

**Management Approaches**
There are a number of management approaches that will help ensure high quality, healthy, vibrant commercial areas while preventing the need for expansion of commercial strip development. Some of these approaches include:

- Within the zoning ordinance, identify areas appropriate for commercial uses. Making these uses legally permitted encourages their maintenance and potential expansion.

- Within the administration of a zoning ordinance, look favorably upon proposals for rezoning to commercial use areas directly adjacent to existing commercial uses when the rezoning is consistent with the policies in the Land Use Plan. This approach encourages location decisions consistent with the desired development pattern.

- Limit commercial land availability outside of those areas designated for future commercial use. Limiting areas for commercial activity encourages commercial activity in those areas designated for commercial use.

- Regulate signs in a manner promotes northwoods character. Inappropriate signs can detract significantly from the character of commercial areas desired by the community.
**Industrial**

**Intent:** Accommodate and limit industrial uses to areas appropriate to that development type. Require buffering between industrial uses and other uses surrounding industrial development.

**Description**
The Industrial tier is located in the southern part of the Greater Bemidji Area, east of Washington Avenue and west of Country Road 50. This development tier is designed to accommodate manufacturing, assembly and storage uses that rely on the sewer, water, rail service, a ten-ton road system, as well as the close proximity to U.S. Highway 2.

**Management Approaches**
Following are some management approaches that could be used to promote industrial development in locations appropriate for that use:

- Restrict industrial uses to the specific area shown on the future land use map. Limitations on use will minimize potential land use conflicts throughout the community.
- Require moderate setbacks, and require a vegetative buffer between industrial and adjacent non-industrial uses. These two requirements will result in the retention of a more rural “feel” to the development.
**Institutional**

**Intent:** Support and manage institutional uses in a manner that promotes harmony with surrounding development.

**Description**
There are a number of areas identified on the future land use map as institutional. Institutional areas include the campuses of Bemidji State University, Northwest Technical College, and Oak Hills Christian College. Other institutional areas include the campuses of North County Regional Hospital, Bemidji High School, Northwest Juvenile Training Center, Beltrami County Fairgrounds, County Government Center, and the Bemidji Regional Airport. All of these institutional uses are tremendous assets to the community and generally fit well within their respective locations.

**Management Approaches**
Following are some management approaches that could be used to promote appropriate development in institutional areas.

- **Designate most institutional uses as conditional uses in appropriate zoning districts.** The conditional use process allows for a particular use provided that specific conditions are met in order to insure compatibility with surrounding uses.

- **Create and utilize unique zoning districts for selected institutional uses such as colleges and medical facilities.** Separate districts can be used in order to increase the number of “permits by right” and decrease the need for public hearings for some development activities.
Urban Renaissance Area

Intent: The community will capitalize on its proximity to Lake Bemidji, its local history and traditions, its significant arts and cultural offerings, and its position as a major regional center in order to make downtown Bemidji the premier shopping, entertainment and recreation destination in northern Minnesota.

Description
The core area of downtown Bemidji is bound by the County government center to the north, Lake Bemidji to the east, the active Soo Line Railroad corridor to the south, and a major wetland complex to the west. Residents of the area identify the downtown as the heart and soul of the community, offering a vibrant and livable environment for both residents and visitors.

Management Approaches

- **Promote development of higher density housing in and around downtown.** Housing in and around downtown will increase the level of activity in the area. Market rate housing will help increase the level of economic activity needed to support the entertainment.

- **Allow mixed-use development in the downtown.** Traditional Euclidean zoning segregates uses by district and minimizes conflicting uses. However, the results of this type of zoning limits high quality mixed use developments that often make places unique and interesting.

- **Implement strict regulations on signage.** Inappropriate signs can seriously detract from the desired character of the downtown.
Lake Oriented Commercial Corridor

**Intent:** Promote high quality highway oriented commercial development that takes advantage of its proximity to Lake Bemidji and provides an attractive transition from the southern entrance of the community into the downtown.

**Description**
This corridor provides a transition into the downtown from both the southern entrance into the community and from the Lake Oriented Development area along the south shore of Lake Bemidji. The corridor begins at the south on First Street where Highway 197 is split into paired one-ways. The north bound lane runs along the shore of Lake Bemidji and provides the primary frontage for highway oriented commercial establishments located along the corridor to the bridge over the Mississippi River where the roads rejoin. The south bound lane runs behind many of the businesses and adjacent to the City’s sewage treatment plant which is located on the shore of Lake Irving.

**Management Approaches**
Following are some management approaches appropriate for the Lake Oriented Commercial Corridor.

- **Limit allowable uses within this area to those consistent with the desired character of development along this corridor.** Not all commercial uses promote the desired image along this special commercial corridor. The zoning ordinance can be used as a tool to differentiate those uses based on the desired development outcome.

- **Implement strict regulations on signs.** Inappropriate signs can seriously detract from the character of development along this corridor.

Lake Oriented Development Area

Greater Bemidji Area Land Use Plan

Land Use Plan 3-18
**Intent:** Support redevelopment of this area in a manner that incorporates a mixture of residential and commercial uses, preserves open space and public access to Lake Bemidji, and incorporates a public trail system.

**Description**
This former industrial area was home to the Georgia Pacific plant for fifty years. The property was also bisected by a Burlington-Northern rail corridor. The Georgia Pacific plant closed in 1999. The rail line has also been abandoned. A private developer has purchased the property previously owned by Georgia pacific as well as some additional properties in the area. The same developer is also negotiating with Burlington Northern on the rail corridor property.

The City of Bemidji has developed a redevelopment concept for the Southeast lake Bemidji area. The concept includes a combination of residential and commercial development along with the provision of public space, including a multi-purpose trail system.

**Figure 3.2**

Management Approaches

Following is a management approach for the Lake Oriented Development Area.
- Develop zoning regulations that support opportunities to redevelop this area in a manner consistent with the stated intent, and that take advantage of the location of the area on the shore line of Lake Bemidji.
**Environmentally Sensitive Overlay**

**Intent:** Retain wetland-related public values for the Community, and discourage intensive development in wetland areas.

**Description**
There are four areas identified on the Future Land Use Map as environmentally sensitive based primarily on the National Wetland Inventory (NWI). Existing state policy promotes a goal of no net loss of public value within these areas, and a locally-adopted wetland conservation ordinance regulates the draining or filling of these wetlands to promote this policy. The lands within this overlay area are scattered throughout the community, but the largest area is primarily located in the Rural and Public Ownership/Use areas northeast of the airport. Another relatively large area of sensitive land is located west and northwest of downtown Bemidji. Smaller, but still significant areas are located south of Lake Irving and southeast of the Industrial Park.

Wetland related values can be preserved through the use of cluster development techniques, as well as by limiting density in these sensitive areas.

**Management Approaches**
A number of management approaches, some already in place, can effectively address development issues within this overlay area. These include:

- **Promote effective administration of the Wetland Conservation Act.** This tool, administered by Beltrami County, provides strong policy direction for the avoidance of development in wetlands. When development is unavoidable, the tool will limit the impact and, if need be, require replacement of the value that was lost through draining and filling.

- **Require large minimum lot sizes.** Large minimum lot size dilutes the adverse impact of development. Large lots provide individuals with more area, and hence more ability to avoid negative wetland impacts.

- **Provide incentives in the subdivision ordinance for cluster development.** Appropriate use of this tool can provide development flexibility to avoid adversely impacting high value natural resources.

**Figure 3.3 Alternate Subdivision Design**

On the left, a conventional two-acre subdivision with homes located on sensitive but buildable land. On the right, an alternative design preserving sensitive land as open space.

Trunk Highway 197 Corridor Management Overlay

Intent: Protect the character of the Trunk Highway 197 road corridor, as well as the functionality of the road system, through the use of access, setback, use, and vegetative buffer policies.

Description
Two sections of the Trunk Highway 197 corridor are highly susceptible to some negative consequences of strong growth due to increased traffic. Paul Bunyan Drive NW, from Bemidji Avenue to the east to the airport at the western edge of the community, has already experienced substantial commercial strip development that threatens the safety and functionality of the road. This stretch of highway has developed in such a manner that it lacks “northwoods character.” It looks and feels as though it could be anywhere. While much of this section is already developed, there are areas of vacant property and substantial redevelopment potential.

A second section of Trunk Highway 197 that is of concern is Washington Avenue from First Street south to Oak Hills Road. The northern portion of this segment is characterized by a mixture of old and new commercial enterprises interspersed with some older residential housing. Between the trail overpass and just north of the U.S. Highway 2 bypass the corridor is primarily residential in use and character. Due to its strategic location, the area surrounding the intersection of Trunk Highway 197 and U.S. Highway 2 is developing as a major commercial activity center.

Due to the special characteristics of the corridor, special policy considerations are warranted. Without active intervention on the part of the community, the character of this corridor will most certainly change for the worse.

Management Approaches
The following management approaches will be effective at retaining the character of this corridor.

- **Limit commercial uses to specific parts of the corridor.** This would limit the amount of strip development and the related consequences, and encourage the concentration of such uses in appropriate locations.

- **Use the subdivision ordinance to limit direct access to the trunk highway.** Preservation of road functionality and safety is largely accomplished by limiting direct highway access. Subdivision control is the most effective tool.

- **Implement regulations on signs and billboards.** Inappropriate signs and billboards can detract from the character of development along the corridor.
- Require moderate setbacks for residential and commercial uses. Requiring building setbacks is a simple but effective tool to help maintain green space.

- Implement open space and green space requirements. This requirement can help maintain and enhance the character of development along the corridor.

Figure 3.4
Corridor Design Concepts

The Land Use Plan provides the foundation for the primary land management implementation tools. Adoption and enforcement of the Greater Bemidji Area Zoning Ordinance, which includes the subdivision and shoreland management regulations, is the primary implementation approach. It’s clear however that simply adopting and enforcing the proposed regulations, no matter how well done, will be insufficient to help the community become the place that it strives to be. Following is a list of the most important issues to be placed on the community’s planning agenda for next three to five years.

1. **Active Living**

   There is a growing understanding of the link between the built environment and active living. Active living is a way of life that incorporates physical activity into daily routines. The benefits of active living are wide ranging and include improvements in long term health indicators, mental health, safety, accessibility, and quality of place. It will be important for the Bemidji Area to consider how the physical development of the community impacts the ability of residents and visitors to be active in the public environment. In order for active living to be integrated into the fabric of the Bemidji Area, the community should continue to move forward on policy and physical improvements to build a community where the healthy option is the easy option. Implementation will be successful to the extent that the broader community can partner on high priority issues.

2. **Building Quality and Design**

   Adoption and enforcement of a building code ensures uniform quality of construction of all buildings throughout the community. Currently only the City of Bemidji enforces building code requirements. A zoning ordinance may include provisions specifying appropriate building design guidelines, either for the entire community or within specific areas such as downtown or along commercial corridors. Design guidelines should be considered in order to encourage construction of buildings that reflect the unique northwoods character desired by the community.

3. **Downtown**

   Downtown Bemidji is the heart and soul of the community. Strengthening the health and vitality of the downtown is essential in order for the community to achieve its vision. The community should work together to make downtown the center of community life by creating a place where people chose to recreate, work and live.

4. **Bemidji State University Campus**

   Bemidji State University is a major economic engine for the community and the surrounding region. BSU is landlocked and has an expressed need to expand the campus boundaries. Past efforts have met with opposition from surrounding residents who fear that the removal of existing housing threatens the future of their neighborhood. The community should initiate a planning process that involves the key constituencies including the City of Bemidji, Bemidji State University,
and the surrounding neighborhood. The process will be designed to discuss the interests of each of these groups, and to develop agreement on an approach to meet the needs of each.

5. **Housing Quality Improvements**

The quality of housing is uneven throughout the community. To a large extent the housing stock in the suburban areas is in good condition, while the older core neighborhoods in and around the City have a large number of substandard units. Areas with a concentration of single family houses used as rentals tend to have greater need for attention. A single, consistent, rental housing registration and licensing program tied to enforcement of a housing code should be considered. Improving residential neighborhoods requires making them places where people choose to live. The higher density core neighborhoods offer convenient location but few amenities. Older residential neighborhoods suffer from inadequate investment over a number of years. Increased public investment in the amenities that people value is needed in order to increase the desirability of neighborhoods. Public investment should be used as a catalyst to encourage private investment. Improving parks and trails in the community is one approach. Renovation of the existing housing stock should be done in some areas, while redevelopment is necessary in others.

6. **Southeast Lake Bemidji Area Redevelopment**

Closing of the Georgia-Pacific Plant in 1999 left the community with a unique opportunity to redevelop an industrial area into a showcase lake-oriented recreational destination. A conceptual plan has been developed which is broadly embraced by the community. Much of the property is in private ownership. The City of Bemidji has already taken steps to rezone the area to eliminate future industrial use. The community should support and provide leadership to efforts designed to redevelop this area consistent with the adopted vision.

7. **Entrance Corridor Revitalization**

There are a few key transportation corridors that serve as entry points to the community. Two of those entry points deserve special attention. Washington Avenue South between the trail overpass and First Street South is an area in dire need of redevelopment. There is also redevelopment potential along the west end of Highway 197. The character of development along Highway 197 entering downtown from the south is also important, and redevelopment of this area should be explored.
8. **Green Up!**

The community has been challenged to plant 10,000 trees per year for ten years. The challenge fits well within Bemidji’s vision to become a city within a park and the broader community’s interest in enhancing northwoods character.

9. **Preparing to Move Forward**

The creation of a joint Land Use Plan brings with it a host of new opportunities and challenges. Among the challenges is the need to provide high quality staff support to the planning function, including but not limited to enforcement of the zoning ordinance. The members of the Planning Commission, Board of Adjustment, and Joint Planning Board will also benefit from training in land use and zoning procedures. Formal training would enhance the collective skills and abilities of all planning participants. Government Training Service offers a series of workshops relating to planning and zoning ranging from the basics to more advanced topics. The JPB should sponsor GTS Training in order to provide a strong foundation among all planning participants.

In the short term it will be necessary for existing planning staff from the City and townships to work closely together in the administration of the land use regulations. Staff will need to develop protocols for administration so that enforcement of regulations is done consistently throughout the community. In the mid to long term the planning function should be undertaken by a single Planning Department guided by the Planning Commission under the policy direction of the Joint Planning Board. The planning department will be expected to administer the land use regulations and to provide leadership on the critical planning issues facing the community.

10. **Bemidji Regional Airport**

Management and regulation of land use on real property surrounding the Bemidji Regional Airport is of vital concern to the Greater Bemidji Area Community. The airport is a critical economic resource, as are the commercial entities clustered at the intersection of US Highway 2 and State Highway 71, and extending in all four directions from there. Additionally, air travel is a transportation mode upon which many residents of the community and region rely, and their safety and that of residents on the ground, is a responsibility of local government and land use administrators. Consequently, the community must endeavor to fulfill the responsibility delegated to it by the legislature to protect the sometimes competing interests at the interface between the airport and the immediately surrounding community. In that a major runway realignment project is underway, which project may redefine the extent of the impact of Safety Zones A, B and C, over the next 24 month period the community should work through coordinated efforts of the Joint Planning Board and Joint City-County Airport management to achieve an outcome either of joint administration of airport zoning regulations or, the JPB’s adoption of responsibility for administration of airport zoning regulations within the jurisdiction of the Greater Bemidji Area Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance.