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Certified, Filed and or Recorded on
APR. 20, 2006 AT 02:15PM

Signed: BA
MARILYN J NOVAK B V I
BENTON COUNTY MINNESOTA
MARILYN J NOVAK
COUNTY RECORDER

BENTON COUNTY ORDINANCE NO. 393

WHEREAS, the Benton County Department of Development instituted proceedings to amend the Benton County Ordinance 296; and,

WHEREAS, on, October 25, 2005, Notice of Public Hearing and Intent to amend Benton County Ordinance was published in the official newspaper of the county; and,

WHEREAS, on November 10, 2005, the Benton County Planning Commission held a public hearing and on December 6, 2005 recommended approval of the changes; and,

WHEREAS, on November 15, 2005, the Benton County Board of Commissioners held a public hearing and on January 3, 2006 approved the proposed ordinance amendment without the Land Use Plan map ; and,

WHEREAS, on January 17, 2006, the Benton County Board of Commissioners approved the proposed Land Use Plan Map; and,

NOW PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY VESTED BY MINNESOTA STATUTES SECTION 394.23, THE BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ORDAINS:

The amended Benton County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, attached hereto as Exhibit A, is hereby adopted and made a part of this ordinance. The attached plan shall supersede and replace all previously adopted Benton County comprehensive land use plans.

This ordinance shall be effective upon publication.

DDD

Approved and adopted by the Benton County Board of Commissioners this 17th
day of January in the year of 2006.



Duane Grandy, Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:



Montgomery Headley
Benton County Administrator



ENTON COUNTY
MINNESOTA



*Comprehensive
Plan Update*

20 March 2006

Benton County Comprehensive Plan

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Introduction

This document updates the 1999 *Benton County Comprehensive Plan*, principally by amending the Land Use Plan chapter but also by making revisions to the goals and policies of subjects such as Housing, Transportation, Public Facilities and Economic Development.

This plan update was initiated by the County's participation in the Healthy Communities Partnership (HCP) Program through the Central Minnesota Initiative Foundation. The HCP Program was a community-based initiative to identify and understand the problems and opportunities facing Benton County. The greatest concern was that the 1999 Comprehensive Plan was not adequate in addressing the needs of a County transitioning from agricultural to residential.

Another impetus for these plan amendments was the Orderly Annexation Areas that were adopted adjacent to the Cities of St. Cloud Sauk Rapids and Sartell. Finally, large-scale residential growth has been occurring in Watab Township on private, shared wastewater treatment systems, a trend that could overwhelm public facilities and services without better controls, planning or public spending.

All of these issues were discussed and considered throughout the plan update process.

Healthy Communities Partnership Program

The Healthy Communities Partnership Program began with a public opinion survey in January, 2004. These surveys were mailed, given to civic organizations, available online and distributed by our HCP Committee members. The County continued to accept completed surveys through March, 2004.

General Public Opinion Survey Results

Table 1
Most and Least Liked Characteristics – General Public

Most Liked Characteristics of Benton County	Least Liked Characteristics of Benton County	Most Desired Changes in Benton County
Rural character	Road conditions	40-acre lot requirement
Central location in Minnesota	40-acre lot requirement	Planned growth management
Proximity to St. Cloud and the Twin Cities	Planning and zoning	Overall attraction

A total of 151 surveys were received.

High School Students Survey Results

Table 2
Most and Least Liked Characteristics – High School Students

Most Liked Characteristics of Benton County	Least Liked Characteristics of Benton County	Most Desired Changes in Benton County
Rural character	Lack of activities	Entertainment
Quality of life	Road conditions	Recreation (parks, trails)
Public schools	Having to commute for school, entertainment, etc.	Road conditions

A total of 126 surveys were received.

BrainStorming Benton

Participants seated at each table at the BrainStorming Benton session were asked to answer the following questions:

- What do you like best about Benton County?
- What are your concerns?
- What are the trends?
- What will Benton County be like in 2014?
- What are some actions we should begin to work on?

Forecast for Benton County in 2014

The following is a compilation of the county forecast from all 13 groups at BrainStorming Benton.

Benton County is a growing, balanced community of rural and urban residential environments. It is a healthy, vibrant place to live that welcomes pro-active human services and promotes responsible agricultural and business practices. We have an integrated transportation network, an interconnected park system, an excellent education system and affordable housing opportunities. Government has listened to the people, respected the rights of individuals and implemented a comprehensive plan that has created the quality of life we all wanted for Benton County.

What We Like Best

There are many reasons Benton County residents live where they do, whether it is because of the rural nature with the proximity to two metropolitan areas, the friendly atmosphere including safety and privacy, or the potential for well planned growth with city and county cooperation.

Our Concerns

Yet with all of the things that we like about Benton County, there are concerns as well. Irresponsible development brings worry to losing that rural feeling as well as the amount of farmland and woodland. There is also a desire to create comprehensive plans for townships that would be proactive instead of reactive. This would in turn fix the problem of the “Band-Aid” fixes that aren’t solving the true problems.

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Top Priority Benefits and Concerns

From compiling all of the benefits and concerns, participants were then asked to vote for their top three priorities, not specifically, but by category.

Table 3
Top Three Priority Subjects

Land use	102
Environment and natural resources	59
Economic development and growth	34
Transportation	23
Agriculture	22
Education	17
Community atmosphere	15
Housing	9
Human services	3

Action Plans Created at Brainstorming Benton

- Update the County comprehensive plan
- Review zoning measures
- Promote economic development
- Enhance parks and trails
- Preserve natural resources
- Promote agriculture
- Improve transportation
- Enhance educational opportunities
- Improve governmental cooperation
- Explore opportunities for youth
- Improve human services
- Enhance culture and the arts
- Examine housing options.

Recommended Task Forces

At a follow up meeting citizens reviewed the results of the Brainstorming event. The priority action to come from these meetings was to update the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. Task forces were formed around the major land use categories and issues to identified specific concerns in the current plan and revise the goals and policies.

Designated task forces:

- Agriculture
- Rural Residential/Rural Service Centers
- Transportation
- Commercial/Industrial and Economic Development
- Urban Transition
- Parks/Trails and Natural Resources

Task Forces were responsible for answering these five questions:

1. What are the issues around your section of the plan?
2. What does the current Comprehensive Plan say about these issues?
3. What input has the public given related to these issues?
4. What input does the task force have regarding these issues?
5. Is there a need for more public input?

Each Task Force set up their own meeting schedule and the number of meetings held varied from group to group. An Executive Committee comprised of Task Force chairs and HCP members was established to coordinate all of the efforts. A report for each task force was generated and submitted to the Executive Committee for review before final submission to the Planning Commission and County Board.

Summary of the Land Use Plan

The 2005 Benton County Land Use Plan updates and replaces the plan adopted in 1999. Many of the basic features of the 1999 plan are retained by this new plan, but there are also several new land use categories on the map, and some of the features of the retained plan categories have been revised.

Plan Category	Intent	Provisions
Agricultural	Farming and low density non-farm housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 houses per 40 acres Up to 6 houses per 40 acres if clustered through Conditional Use Permit.
Rural	Farming activities and non-farm housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5-acre lots (2.5 of which must be dry and buildable).
Urban Growth	Keep land available for annexation, resubdivision and municipal utilities and roads. May include commercial or industrial development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 houses per 40 acres. Allows clustering through Conditional Use Permit based upon growth plan. The City plan should guide land use, density, roads, utilities and parks. Approval remains with the County.
Rural Residential	Semi-rural housing that is not expected to be annexed to a City.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies to properties in Watab Township zoned R-1, R-2 or R-3 at the time of the adoption of this plan. Lot size determined by current zoning (2.5 acres, 1 acre, 21,000 square feet; 12,000 square feet with public wastewater treatment).

The areas shown on the Land Use Plan map, and described below, are not the same as the County's zoning districts, but they will be used to amend the zoning regulations and map that comprise the County ordinance which specifically regulates land use.

Plan Category	Intent	Provisions
Rural Service Center	Unincorporated concentration of housing and businesses surrounded by an Agricultural Area or a Rural Area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing allowed on small lots with individual or private, shared wastewater disposal. Commercial or industrial development may be allowed with a Conditional Use Permit from the County. Any existing lot may be developed with a house if sewer and well requirements are met.
Orderly Annexation Area	Location of agreement between a City or Township and the County for future property annexation to a City.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land use and housing density will be guided by the adopted plan.

Plan Category	Intent	Provisions
Commercial and Industrial	Businesses on large lots without public sewer or water service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial or industrial development near the Cities is permitted in locations appropriately planned and zoned by Benton County, or in locations planned by a City, annexed to that City and rezoned appropriately. Allowed in an Urban Growth Area by Conditional Use Permit and City review. The Benton County Land Use Plan map indicates locations suitable for commercial or industrial development outside the Cities. These are principally along the Highway 10 corridor. Industrial or commercial businesses that are clearly and primarily related to agriculture may be allowed in a township by Conditional Use Permit in or adjacent to a Rural Service Center or at public road intersections along Highways 23, 25 or 95. Businesses must show that their water and sewer needs can be addressed by on-site systems that meet County requirements.
Shoreland Protection	Protect the environmental and scenic qualities of the edges of lakes and major streams.	Land within 300 feet of designated streams or 1,000 feet of designated lakes. Includes regulations on land use, lot size, setback from the water, building elevation, grading and filling, tree and shrub removal, docks, natural resource protection and related matters.

Plan Category	Intent	Provisions
Floodplain	Reduce damage from flooding.	Land mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Administration with potential to flood periodically. Includes regulations on land use, parcel size, floodproofing, building elevation and floodwater obstructions.
Park	Provide outdoor spaces for public recreation.	Public park land, including county and township parks.
Seasonal Recreation	Allow private recreation.	Golf courses, campgrounds and shooting ranges.
Public and Semi-Public	Allow a variety of public or on-commercial private facilities.	Major public facilities other than parks; State wildlife areas; churches and similar private facilities serving the public.

Major New Features

- **Agricultural :** Basic allowable housing density is increased from the present 1 house per 40 acres to 4 per 40. Rural housing clusters would be allowed with a conditional use permit to allow up to 6 houses per 40. The former Rural Area that was applied in Minden and St. George Townships has been eliminated.
- **Urban Growth Area:** Greater clarity in the allowable housing density. Larger coverage areas.
- **Watab Township and the Urban Transition Area:** The Urban Transition Area from the 1999 plan has been deleted. It was replaced with the Agricultural Area and the Rural Residential Area. This land use plan pattern is consistent with the current zoning. It is also consistent with the intent of the Urban Transition Area in the 1999 plan which stated: "... the vast majority of the Urban Transition Area shall remain zoned Agriculture."
- **Rural Service Center:** This is a new land use plan category. It addresses locations previously regulated under the Urban Transition Area or the Agricultural Area. Residential lots served by a community sanitary sewer system may be as small as 17,000 square feet.
- **Commercial and Industrial Area:** Smaller land parcels allowed (1 acre rather than 5). Small, existing sites in rural areas are acknowledged in the plan. Access controls are tightened.
- **Orderly Annexation Area:** Expanded.

Planning Framework

Overview

Early Settlement

Benton County is located in central Minnesota and is part of the rapidly growing St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. (See Figure 1.) Since it was first settled in the late 1850's, Benton County has been primarily an agricultural and rural community, as family farmers found its rich soil suitable for horticultural production, animal pasture land, and dairy operations.

Today the County remains primarily agricultural in its land use, although its southwestern corner is under increasing pressure to accommodate urban development around the Cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Sartell. The economic resources of the county are diverse in terms of income sources from agriculture, industry and retail.

Transportation Access

Because of its central location, Benton County is well-served by the State's regional highway network. U.S. Highway 10 runs along the Mississippi River in the western part of the County, and State Highways 95, 23, and 25 also connect Benton County to the region and the State. It is also well-traversed with County and farm-to-market roads, giving all landowners access to a regional transportation network. State financial commitment to commuter rail service was approved in 2005 that would connect Big Lake in nearby Sherburne County to the Twin Cities.

The BNSF rail line, located roughly parallel to U.S. Highway 10, sends 60 to 80 freight trains through the County a day. Other than that, rail line, air and rail transportation comprise a relatively minor component of the County's overall transportation system.

Water Resources

Water resources are an important part of the County's land form. The County's western border is formed by the Mississippi River, which is a source of recreation and industry. There are a number of other rivers and streams that run through the County including the Platte River, the Elk River, the St. Francis River, the Rum River, Collner Creek, Stony Brook Creek, Bailey Creek, Little Rock Creek, Bunker Hill Creek, and Mayhew Creek. There are only a few lakes located in the County, the largest being Little Rock Lake, followed by Mayhew Lake and Donovan Lake. The County Comprehensive Water Plan provides additional information about surface and groundwater resources.

Cities

There are seven incorporated cities located in Benton County. The County Seat is Foley located in the central part of the County. The Cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Sartell are also located in Benton County; however, Sauk Rapids is the only one situated entirely within the County, making it Benton County's largest city by population. The other incorporated cities are Rice, Gilman, and Romeby, all of which have less than 800 residents. Refer also to Figure 2, Benton County Political Jurisdictions.

Rural Service Centers

In addition, there are also a number of rural service centers situated across the County. These are locations, usually at the crossroads of two major highways or County Roads, that are not incorporated but still have a commercial establishment or two, sometimes a church, and a handful of residences. Some of the larger rural service centers include Duelm, Oak Park, Pople Creek, Glendorado, North Benton, Mayhew, and Brennyville. Although it is not anticipated that they will incorporate, there may be opportunities to allow limited development in and around these centers.

Agriculture and the Benton County Economy

Agriculture has been the center of economic activity for Benton County. After a dip in the 1990s, an increase was reported in the 2002 Census of Agriculture for the number of farms, the acreage farmed and the percentage of the land in the county devoted to farming. As the number of farms has increased, the average size has declined. Refer to Table 5.

In the Benton County economy, agriculture is not as dominate as it once was because of the emergence of other sectors such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail sales and so forth. However, farming still contributes approximately \$90 million annually to the county economy, so it continues to be significant.

Among the 3,075 counties in the United States reported in the US Census of Agriculture, Benton county ranks 627th or at about the 20th percentile for value of agricultural products sold.

In addition, the average age of the principal operators of farms in Benton County has declined slightly. Although farmers' average age is increasing nationwide, Minnesota's average is among the lowest along with several Midwestern and northern states. Benton County is part of a belt of below-average age farm operators across southern and central Minnesota.

These statistics indicate that farming is thriving in Benton County.

**Table 5
Agriculture in Benton County, 1978-1992**

Year	Number Farms	Land in Farms (acres)	Average Size (acres)	% of Total Land	Average Age of Farm Worker
1982	1035	198,778	192	76.1	47.1
1992	865	183,760	212	70	50
2002	965	195,949	203	75	49.5

Source: US Census of Agriculture

In 1860, Benton County produced wood, grain, meat, and dairy products. Wheat and potatoes were the cash crops.

Today, lumber production has declined significantly while milk from dairy operations and broiler chickens dominate. Beef cattle and hogs provide additional income. Corn, soybeans, potatoes, and specialty crops are the primary cash crops in Benton County with a good share of corn and hay, and other grain crops fed to livestock.

- Corn production has increased over the past twenty years from 2.7 million bushels in 1978 to around 6.4 million bushels in 2002.
- Oat production has declined from 740,000 bushels in 1978 to 359,000 bushels in 1993.
- Benton County is above the state average for the estimated market value of land and buildings per acre (\$2,024 vs. \$1,513) but below the state average for value of equipment (\$63,700 vs. \$86,369).
- Benton County is above the state average for net cash farm income (\$25,354 vs. \$23,831).

In addition to the direct income from agriculture, many other companies are supported locally through sales to farms or by adding value to farm commodities, although that economic activity is not usually reported among the agricultural statistics. Local firms in farm implements, poultry

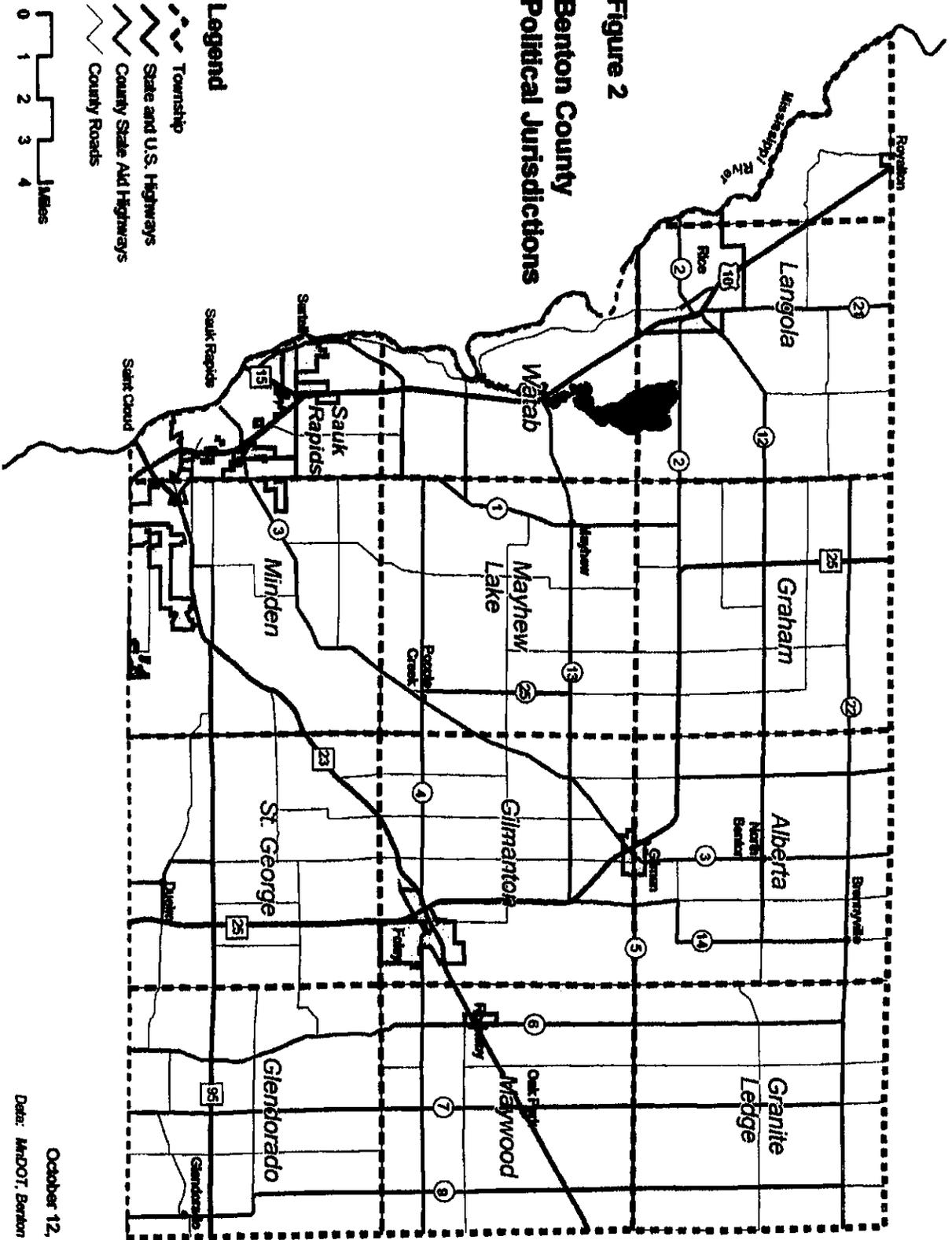
processing, ethanol production or general retail sales are dependent on the basic farm economy.

Conclusion

One of the most significant factors affecting agriculture in Benton County is the upward pressure on land values created by other market forces. These include farmers relocating into Benton County after selling farmland for urban development near the Twin Cities, companies buying a tract of land for a home in the country, companies buying land for subdivisions, or people speculating in land. Farmers cannot compete with these other users in the land market. It remains to be seen whether the Green Acres tax deferral program will motivate many of these buyers to keep a significant portion of their land in agricultural production by renting it to farming neighbors or operating small enterprises on their own.

In conclusion, agriculture will continue to be important to the County and a focus of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

Figure 2
Benton County
Political Jurisdictions



October 12, 2005
Data: MNDOT, Benton County

Land Use

Although Benton County has a wide-range of land uses, 75 percent of the 410 square miles of the county is devoted to farming. This includes lands used for crop production, pasture lands, dairy farms, and other open areas associated with farming. The pattern of land use as of 2004 is illustrated by Figure 3.

Agricultural Land Use

The townships located in the central part of the County (Alberta, Graham, Gilmanton, Mayhew Lake, St. George) have 94 to 96 percent of their total land area classified as agriculture (See Table 6). Large family farming operations dominate the landscape in these townships, with corn production and dairy farms being predominant.

In areas of sandy soil irrigation is needed to maintain the production levels for farming. However, those locations are often the most fertile lands in the County and are especially well suited for specialty crops such as vegetables.

Residential Land Use

Housing comprises the next largest land use category. The Rural Residential category on Figure 3 refers to the large lot (over 5 acre) non-farm residential lots scattered throughout the county.

The Single Family category on Figure 3 refers to smaller residential lots, farmstead lots and lots in platted subdivisions. These units are found scattered across the county but most prominently located in the Highway 10 corridor and along the Mississippi River. Watab Township, with its proximity to Sartell and Sauk Rapids, easy access to Highway 10 and its location near Little Rock Lake, has by far the highest concentration of residential development in the non-urbanized portions of the County.

**Table 6
Benton County Land Use Distribution, 2004**

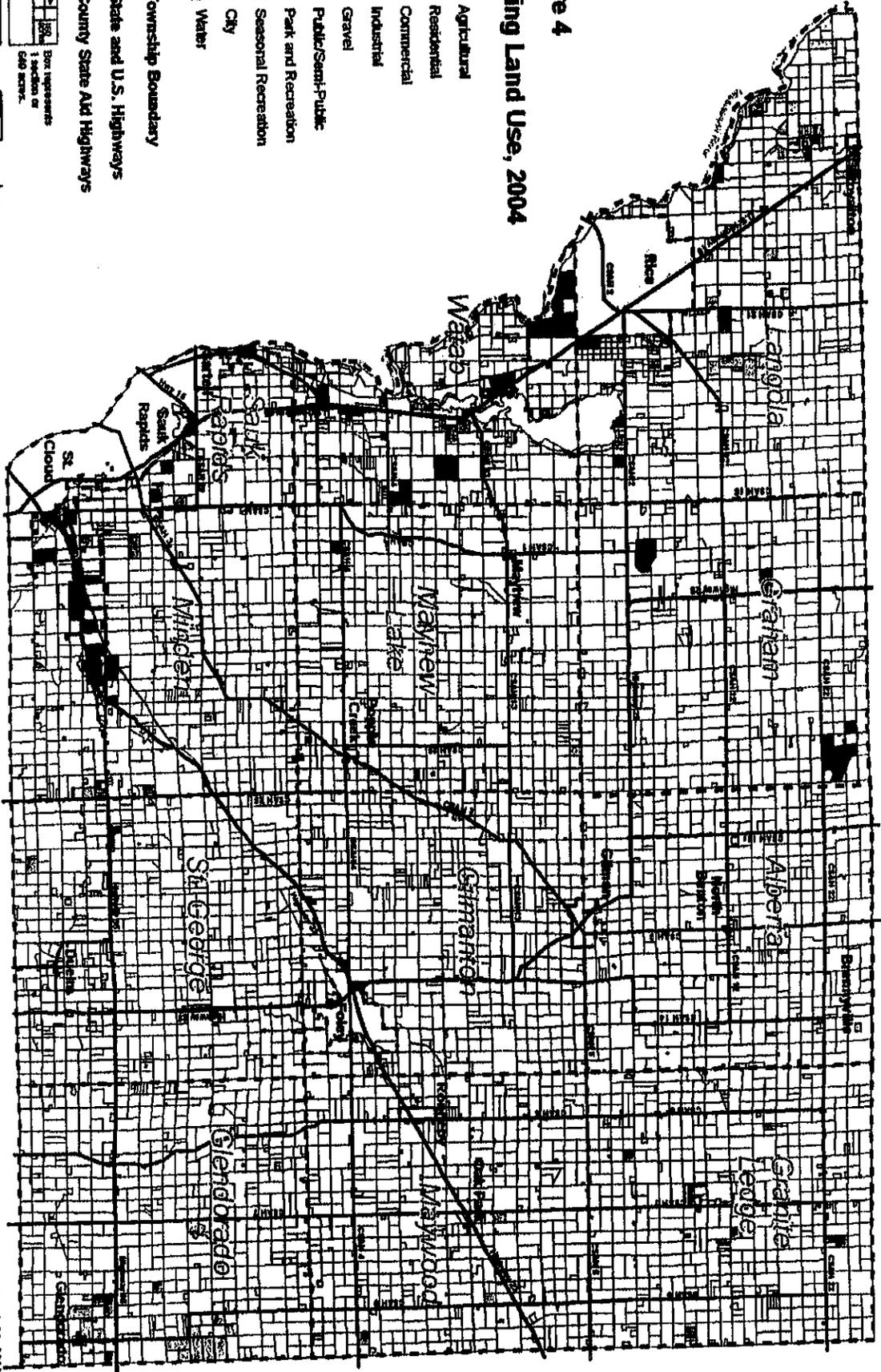
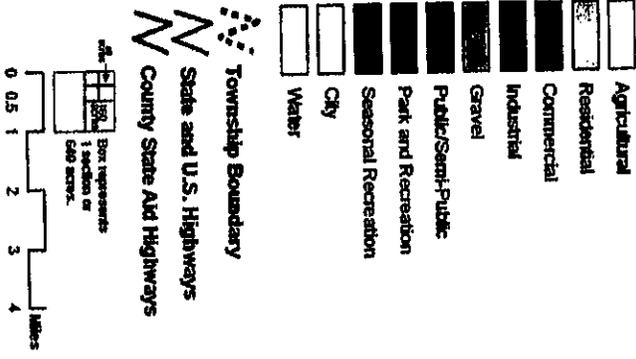
Land Use	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	228,610	86
Rural Residential	8,865	3
Single-family Housing	9,914	4
Commercial	1,271	0.5
Industrial	233	0.1
Gravel	210	0.1
Public / Semi-Public	1,426	0.5
Park / Recreation	1,390	0.5
Seasonal Recreation	1,088	0.4
City	9,939	4
Water	1,640	0.6
Total	265,174	100

It should be noted that Benton County has not experienced the large-scale residential subdivision of its rural areas that its neighbor, Sherburne County, has. This is because Benton County is farther from the focus of urban development that is occurring between the City of St. Cloud and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Still there is increasing pressure for residential development in Benton County, especially in the western part adjacent to the urban areas and Hwy. 10.

Business and Industrial Land Use

Commercial and industrial land uses make up a relatively small part of the county's land area. Development is primarily located in the urbanized cities. The commercial and industrial uses that do exist in the township are typically located along a major highway, adjacent to a City or in a rural service center. These developments are typically unsewered and either provide goods and services to the surrounding agricultural community or to the traveling public.

Figure 4
Existing Land Use, 2004



March 23, 2006

Mining Land Use

Aggregate mining is a small yet important component of the county's economic base. Comprising 209 acres, aggregate mining operations are located mainly along the Mississippi, Elk and St. Francis Rivers. Strategies for continuing their operation in light of development pressure will be of particular importance.

Parks Land Use

Park and Recreation Areas along with Seasonal Recreation Areas provide opportunity for active and passive outdoor activity for the entire county. Seasonal Recreation areas include DNR wildlife areas, while the Park and Recreation category represents the County's public parks and designated open space areas.

There may be opportunities to pursue additional areas for park and recreation in the county, especially at the property recently acquired in Watab Township for Bend in the River Regional Park; north of Little Rock Lake; in Granite Ledge Township; at Peace Rock on the Mississippi River; and the cross-county bike path project between the Mississippi River and Highway 10. The Benton County *Master Plan for Parks, Trails and Open Space* (2003) includes detailed recommendations for these and other properties.

Water Resources Land Use

Major water resources include the Mississippi River, the Harris Channel, Little Rock Lake, Mayhew Lake, Lake Vicki and Donovan Lake. There are a number of other rivers and streams located in the county that were not represented on the County's base map and therefore the land area for those minor water bodies was not included in Table 6.

Land Use Summary

In summary, Benton County's dominant land use is agriculture, which contributes to its rural character. Although scattered housing is found throughout Benton County, this land use is still small-scale in nature and thus far has not significantly altered the County's rural areas. Commercial and industrial development has for the most part been confined to the areas around Highway 10 and State Highway 23.

There is increasing pressure for residential and commercial development in the western third of the county. In Watab, Sank Rapids and Minden Townships, two large residential neighborhoods with suburban-sized lots and private, community on-site sewage treatment plants have been approved. These developments have led to concerns about urban-scale development being located in places without adequate arterial roads, drainage, parks, public safety or other urban services. The use of the Urban Transition Land Use category in County's 1999 comprehensive plan created confusion about its intent in managing land use in Watab Township. It is the intent of this plan to scale back the potential growth area and plan according to current zoning and existing infrastructure.

Orderly Annexation Areas have been jointly approved for a significant land areas adjacent to the Cities of St Cloud, Sartell and Sank Rapids. This property will be gradually annexed from the townships to the cities as development becomes imminent. The agreement allows the land use and road systems to be planned and regulated by the Cities to ensure that urban growth can occur in an efficient and economic manner.

Although agriculture will remain the predominant land use in Benton County for the foreseeable future, there are locations that may not be appropriate for long-term farming. These include parts of Watab Township (especially along Highway 10 and around Little Rock Lake), Sank Rapids Township and the western one-third of Minden Township. Those locations are under increasing pressure to convert to urban uses. Areas in northeastern Granite Ledge that because of soil conditions and rock outcroppings are also not conducive to long-term farming.

Population Characteristics

Past Growth

Benton County is one of the faster-growing counties in Minnesota. Its location near St. Cloud and along the Highway 10 corridor provide easy access to jobs. Sauk Rapids and a small part of St. Cloud have absorbed most of this growth.

Benton County added 4,041 people between 1990 and 2000 (a moderate 1.3 percent annual increase), and an estimated 2,500 more in the first half of the next decade (a 2.4 percent annual increase).

The townships grew by only 663 people between 1990 and 2000, a 0.6 percent increase. In 2000, only 37 percent of the county's total population resided in the townships compared to 39 percent in 1990.

The majority of the townships contain fewer than 1,000 people. The greatest growth has been on the western edge of the County, in Langola, Minden, and especially Watab Township, which has seen an explosion in population. In fact, Watab's population is greater than the cities of Foley and Rice combined.

Table 7 shows the breakdown of the historic and current population for the County by Township and City.

Table 7
Benton County Population by Township and City, 1980-2000

Townships	1980	1990	2000	County	Percent of County	% Change 1990-2000
Alberta	757	760	772	2.3	2.3	2
Gilmanton	861	775	769	2.2	2.2	-1
Glendorado	765	762	785	2.3	2.3	3
Graham	579	549	567	1.7	1.7	3
Granite Ledge	581	615	685	2.0	2.0	11
Langola	714	795	916	2.7	2.7	15
Mayhew Lake	743	751	804	2.3	2.3	7
Maywood	817	845	860	2.5	2.5	2
Minden	1,828	1,900	1,790	5.2	5.2	-6
St. George	959	856	924	2.7	2.7	8
Sauk Rapids	758	850	723	2.1	2.1	-15
Watab	1,843	2,394	2,920	8.5	8.5	22
Twp. Total	11,205	11,852	12,515	36.6		6
Cities						
Foley	1,606	1,854	2,154	6.3	6.3	16
Gilman	205	192	215	0.6	0.6	12
Rice	499	610	711	2.1	2.1	17
Ronnely	56	58	16	0.1	0.1	-72
St. Cloud (part)	4,645	5,950	6,391	18.7	18.7	7
Sartell (part)	2,137	1,844	2,011	5.9	5.9	9
Sauk Rapids	4,834	7,825	10,213	29.8	29.8	31
City Total	13,982	18,333	21,711	63.4		18
County Total	25,187	30,185	34,226	100.0		13%

Source: US Census Bureau, Profile of Demographic Characteristics, 2000.

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Except for the City of Romney, in the eastern part of the County, all of the cities in Benton County have experienced growth since 1980. In 1940, the cities' populations comprised 26 percent of the County. That figure is now 63 percent. Most of that increase has been in Sauk Rapids, Sartell and St. Cloud in the county's southwest corner.

(It should be noted that changes in population can occur due to annexations. For instance, Gilmanton's population decline in the 1990's is a direct result of land that was annexed by the City of Foley. Populations in Sauk Rapids and Minden Townships would also be much higher if they had not been partially annexed by their adjacent cities.)

Forecast Growth

The State Demographer predicts that Benton County's population will continue to increase modestly through the year 2030 to 44,960 (a 1.0 percent average annual increase).

**Table 8
Benton County Forecast Population Growth, 2000 to 2030**

Year	Population
2000	34,226
2010	39,010
2020	42,600
2030	44,960

Population Characteristics

The population of Benton County is relatively young. Nearly 39 percent of the population is under 20 years old, compared to 30 percent for Minnesota. This percentage has increased from 1980, when it was 32.5 percent.

The County also has a higher proportion than Minnesota in the 25 to 44 age bracket but a significantly lower proportion than the state in the 45 to 64 and over 65 age brackets.

The median age in Benton County is up since 1980 from 26.6 to 29.2 but lower than the State as a whole, which was 33.9. Benton County has a slightly smaller proportion of working age population as compared to the state.

**Table 9
Benton County Age Distribution**

Age Group	Total	Percent
Under 20 years	13,457	39
20 to 44	13,738	40
45 to 64	6,397	18
65 and older		11

These figures indicate that Benton County is home to young families with children. Nearly 40 percent of the County is in the 20 to 45 year range, which is considered the prime family formation years. This will have a large impact on the services required from the County, including schools, parks, and other facilities geared toward families. It should be noted that these figures include both City and Township jurisdictions. Much of the older population resides in the townships while the younger families tend to reside in the cities.

Income

Benton County has a higher proportion of households in the lower income brackets than the State as a whole. Median per capita income lags behind that of the state and the nation. Median household income is also below the state and the nation, but is above average when compared to other Minnesota counties. Out of 87 counties, Benton County ranked 25th.

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Housing

Portions of Benton County are suburbanizing, with growth occurring in the townships around the edges of the major cities, especially in the county's southwestern corner. There is a correlation between level of income, housing value and geographical location. The cities tend to have an older and smaller-sized housing stock which is declining in value. The housing just outside of the cities, however, is newer, larger, higher in value, and inhabited by higher wage earners. This is rapidly changing in Sank Rapids and Sartell as both of these Cities are experiencing continued residential growth within their City limits.

Table 10 ranks the townships and cities by median household income and median housing value. Sank Rapids Township has the highest median household income and the highest median housing value, with Minden Township coming in second but possessing the highest average number of rooms. Most of the cities are near the bottom of the list. In the southwestern corner of the county, Sartell, Sank Rapids and St. Cloud are all characterized by lower median housing values and lower median household incomes than the surrounding townships. Sank Rapids and Minden Townships have significantly higher median housing values and incomes than the cities they surround.

Housing values and household incomes are generally higher in Minden, Sank Rapids and Watab Townships than in the outlying cities such as Ronneby, Gilman and Foley. Of cities that lie completely in Benton County, Foley has the lowest median household income, and Foley and Ronneby share the lowest median housing value and smallest houses. These two cities may be declining because they are so far away from the high-growth areas in the western part of the County.

Table 10
Median Household Income and Housing Value, 2000

Townships	Median Household Income	Median Housing Value
Alberta	49,958	109,600
Gilnarton	45,893	115,400
Glendorado	49,643	114,100
Graham	42,389	118,300
Granite Ledge	44,063	114,400
Largo	52,667	126,400
Mayhew Lake	48,750	127,300
Maywood	47,500	99,500
Minden	58,854	115,500
St. George	50,694	125,400
Sank Rapids	61,161	121,200
Watab	50,604	97,700
Townships Total	50,181	105,640

Cities	Median Household Income	Median Housing Value
Foley	38,393	80,000
Gilman	49,063	92,500
Rice	48,173	92,800
Ronneby	40,625	80,000
Royalton (part)	0	0
St. Cloud (part)	28,254	71,600
Sartell (part)	36,250	70,000
Sank Rapids	48,857	102,600
Cities Total	36,201	73,687

Benton County had a total of 13,460 housing units in 2000, including both year-round and seasonal units. The number of households in 2000 was 13,065, a 23 percent increase since 1990. The majority of Benton County's housing stock was built after 1970, a greater proportion than the state as a whole. Almost 20 percent of Benton County's housing stock was built prior to 1940; however, this is still a smaller proportion than the State as a whole.

Of the roughly 13,500 housing units in Benton County in 2000, approximately 8,800 (67 percent) were owner-occupied and 65 percent were single-family detached.

Housing Starts

There is not a huge demand for residential development in the County's rural Townships.

Between 2000 and 2004, Benton County has had 380 building permit applications for new housing units, as shown by Table 11. Watab has had the greatest number of housing permits filed each year since 2000, with an average of 20 permits per year. Alberta had the least (not counting Sauk Rapids, in which most housing growth is being annexed to the City of Sauk Rapids).

**Table 11
Residential Building Permits, 2001-2004**

Township	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Alberta	9	1	1	3	14
Gilmanton	12	8	5	8	33
Glendonado	10	3	5	5	23
Graham	6	4	6	6	22
Granite Ledge	6	4	11	12	33
Langola	2	9	7	11	29
Maynew Lake	13	9	5	5	34
Maywood	6	8	7	10	31
Minden	5	4	4	3	16
St. George	21	7	11	19	58
Sauk Rapids	0	0	1	1	2
Watab	18	20	21	22	81
Totals	108	77	90	105	380
Average Value	\$129,528	144,805	170,058	189,516	

Source: Benton County

Housing Summary

In summary, Benton County has a growing population with a high percentage of young families with children. That growth, however, is predominately located in the County's urban areas of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids and Sartell, as well as Watab Township, and to a lesser degree, Minden Township – all located in the western part of the County. Benton County's rural townships are growing at a much slower pace, and its population is typically comprised of aging farm families.

Because of these trends, strategies to accommodate growth in and around the western urban areas, while preserving the rural character of the remaining Townships, and striking a balance between agricultural and rural residential uses should be a major focus of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

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County Parks

The Benton County Park System currently consists of four developed parks and three undeveloped parks. They are:

Benton Beach Park: This is the largest developed (30 acres) and most popular park in the county system. Its primary recreational features include a swimming beach, campground with both tent and RV sites, restroom and shower house, boat launch area, picnic facilities, playgrounds and a conference center complete with a two-story deck overlooking Little Rock Lake. The two picnic shelters and the conference center are available to rent.

Mayhew Lake Park: This park (4.4 acres) provides public access onto Mayhew Lake. Amenities include an improved boat launch, picnic tables and grills. Portable restrooms are provided.

St. Regis Park: This relatively small neighborhood park (0.6 acres) provides picnic tables and grills. During the summer, the gate is closed to prevent erosion in the Shoreland Zone; however, visitors can easily walk in from the parking area. During winter months, the gate is open and it is a popular access onto Little Rock Lake for ice fishing.

Rose Anna Beach: This relatively small (0.6 acres) neighborhood park includes a picnic table and grill, and provides winter access onto Little Rock Lake.

St. George Township Park: This parkland (17 acres) is undeveloped at this time. County residents donated this land, and deed restrictions indicate that it can be only used for wildlife habitat and nature study.

Wapicada Village / Mayhew Park: This parkland (12.5 acres) is undeveloped at this time. The terrain and location in the Watub Creek floodplain make it difficult to access or develop. An abandoned railroad right-of-way (now privately owned) goes through this property.

Bend in the River Regional Park: This land was purchased Aug 12, 2002. It consists of 289 acres, including 3,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline on the Mississippi River, a rare feature. High banks provide scenic views of a river bend and islands. Master Park planning is expected to be complete by the end of 2005.

Regional and State Trails

While there are not currently any state trails in Benton County nor are there links to any state trails there are connection opportunities to existing trails in adjacent counties.

Soo Line Railroad Corridor: Morrison County has acquired the abandoned Soo Line Rail Corridor between Genola and the Stearns County line and intends to develop this corridor as the Soo Line Railroad Corridor Recreational Trail. This portion of trail will connect to the existing trail running northeast from Genola to Moose Lake (connecting with the Willard Munger State Trail to Duluth and the North Shore). This same trail will also travel southwest to connect with the Lake Wobegon Trail in Stearns County stretching to Albany, Melrose and Sauk Center to the west.

Glacial Lakes State Trail: The Glacial Lakes State Trail, which travels northeast from Willmar toward Cold Spring in Stearns County, does not enter Benton County but is on a trajectory consistent with connecting to and extending through the County along Highway 23 or the abandoned rail corridor to Milaca and beyond.

Paul Bunyan State Trail: Connections to the north along the Mississippi River could also provide links to the Paul Bunyan State Trail in Brainerd.

Ecologically Sensitive and Unique Areas

Wetlands

The Mississippi, Elk, and Rumm River watersheds are considered high priority areas for wetland preservation, enhancement, restoration, and establishment. The wetlands located in the watersheds have high public value for water quality, flood water retention, ground water recharge, wildlife, and public recreation.

Erosion is the primary concern for both the Elk and the Rumm River watersheds since the soil is relatively fertile in these areas. The Mississippi River watershed is characterized by soil with high permeability. Contaminants may be able to reach the ground water more readily as a result.

High priority wetland areas in Benton County include:

- All wetlands identified on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Protected Waters and Wetlands Inventory
- All wetland types 1-8 within cities
- All other type 3,4,5, and 6 wetland
- Other wetlands or areas with a significant hydrologic or public value such as flood control, water quality, etc. that have been identified through a County Wetland Management Plan (when developed).

Figure 4 indicates the approximate location of major wetlands in Benton County.

Major Streams

There are several major streams, including the Mississippi River, in Benton County that serve as important corridors for wildlife. These surface water features serve to connect natural areas and enable the movement of plants and animals and the chance for isolated natural areas to maintain their quality and function. Below is a brief summary of the major stream corridors in Benton County:

Mississippi River: Chief among the corridors in the county is the Mississippi River, a migratory corridor of national significance used by migratory birds, fish, far-ranging mammals, plants, and others. The river provides added significance to natural features that occur near it.

Little Rock Creek and Lake: This corridor supports a wide variety of natural communities and provides a relatively continuous tract of natural areas from Little Rock Lake to north of the Benton County line.

Mayhew Creek and Mayhew Lake: Although much of this watershed is under cultivation and portions are ditched, the area immediately adjacent to the stream itself is mostly in permanent cover. This provides wildlife opportunity for travel. Also of interest is Mayhew Lake and the shared watershed/stream channel with Little Rock Creek to the north of the lake (known as a stream bifurcation). Although not mapped by the MN DNR MCBS, the confluence of Mayhew Creek and Elk River supports a large, contiguous tract of moderate-quality natural communities of local significance.

Elk River: This watershed originates north of Benton County and ends well to the south, in the City of Elk River. It constitutes the major watershed in the central portion of the county. It supports a relatively unbroken network of moderate-quality natural areas and permanent agricultural cover such as pastures through the county. As noted in the Mayhew Creek description, the confluence of Mayhew Creek and Elk

River supports a large, contiguous tract of natural communities of local significance.

St. Francis River: The watershed for this small river represents a significant portion of eastern Benton County with the headwaters in Alberta Township. The immediate area around the river supports a wide variety of wetlands, forest, and grassland, as well as areas in permanent nonnative plant cover and row crops for agriculture. The stream corridor is significant in a regional sense because it serves as a connection between areas inside Benton County and Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge to the south.

West Fork Rum River: This is a tributary for one of the major river systems in central Minnesota that extends from Lake Mille Lacs to the Mississippi River in Anoka. The portion of the Rum River watershed that occurs in Benton County is small but supports a significant portion of the county's remaining quality natural communities—in particular oak forest. It also occurs in an area with significant granite bedrock near the surface that forms the falls area in Granite Ledge Township.

Donovan Lake: This small lake significantly represents the only natural, deep marsh/shallow lake in Benton County. It occurs in a somewhat secluded area that is visually isolated from surrounding roads. The immediate area around the lake has a number of moderate-quality natural communities, including deciduous woodland and a planted pine stand, that have the potential to be managed to an improved quality. These natural areas help to buffer the lake from surrounding land uses.

Fish and Wildlife

There are nine Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) in Benton County.

They include:

- Graham WMA (38-30-11)
- Benton WMA (38-30-17)
- Bibles WMA (38-30-29 & 30)
- Collner Creek WMA (37-28-14)
- Sartell WMA (38-31-15 & 22)
- Michaelson Farm WMA (38-31-32 & 37-31-5)
- Bibles WMA (36-28-15)
- BenLacs WMA (36-28-12 & 13)
- Glendorado WMA (36-28-25)

Donovan, Mayhew, and Little Rock Lakes have been given game and fish management classifications. Donovan Lake serves as a walleye rearing pond. Four basins (three in Langola Township and one in Mayhew Lake Township) serve as sucker rearing ponds.

Bunker Hill Brook (38-30-6 and 38-31-1,2,10 & 11) and Little Rock Creek (38-31-3,4,10,15,21,22 & 28) contain brown trout and thus have been designated as trout streams.

Geology

There are number of geologic features in Benton County that (1) occur in association with high-quality plant communities, (2) are known to have historical significance, or (3) stand as unique features on their own. Below is a brief list of some of the most prominent geologic features in the county.

Peace Rocks: Along the Mississippi River in Watub Township, Peace Rock has historical significance as a neutral meeting place for Native American tribes, and as supporting a significant (MCBS-mapped) plant community type. It is also significant because it occurs within the Mississippi River corridor.

Granite Ledge Township: This area has shallow soils and substantial areas where bedrock is at the surface. These occur with significant stands of forest and in the vicinity of a small waterfall on the Runn River.

Eskers: These glacial features are serpentine-like hills that form as meltwater stream sediments stack upward from the ground, under a glacial ice sheet. There appear to be several of these interesting glacial features in the south and east part of the county. These sharp, short hills are typically droughty and often support savanna-like areas with scattered, open-grown oak trees.

Drumlins: Teardrop-shaped hills that are oriented from east to west resulting from glacial ice flowing around previous deposits. Because the drumlins in Benton County are relatively low lying, many of them are farmed, or are inconspicuous in wooded areas. Although drumlin features may not be visibly noticeable except in the western part of the County, the soil types associate with them exists countywide. These soil conditions can be problematic from a construction and sewage treatment standpoint because down-slope groundwater movement keeps the soils saturated for a sufficient portion of the growing season to produce anaerobic and reducing soils conditions.

Langdon Terrace: Langdon Terrace is located along the Mississippi River and has typically sandy soils and supports a variety of quality natural communities. It forms the broad expanse seen from Highway 10, looking toward the Mississippi River. This landform supports some of the best remaining examples of savanna and prairie in the county.

The most significant geological condition in Benton County is the large sand plain region located along the western and southern borders of the county in the Townships of Glendorado, St. George, and Minden. Ground waters are in danger of contamination from agricultural and development activities in these areas due to the high permeability of the overlying materials.

Crushable Granite: Benton County also has significant potential for finding locations that have crushable granite. Figure 4 indicates the location of bedrock formations that consist of moderately and highly desirable granite that is suitable for crushing. These granite units consist of some of the highest quality crushed stone resources in Minnesota. They are inferred to be very thick (50 to several hundred feet) with overburden thickness of less than 30 feet. These bedrock resources are most commonly at or near the surface in the southwest and northeast parts of the county.

Figure 4 also illustrates the location of areas that are inferred to contain moderately to highly desirable sand and gravel deposits, which are typically along streams.

Bluffs

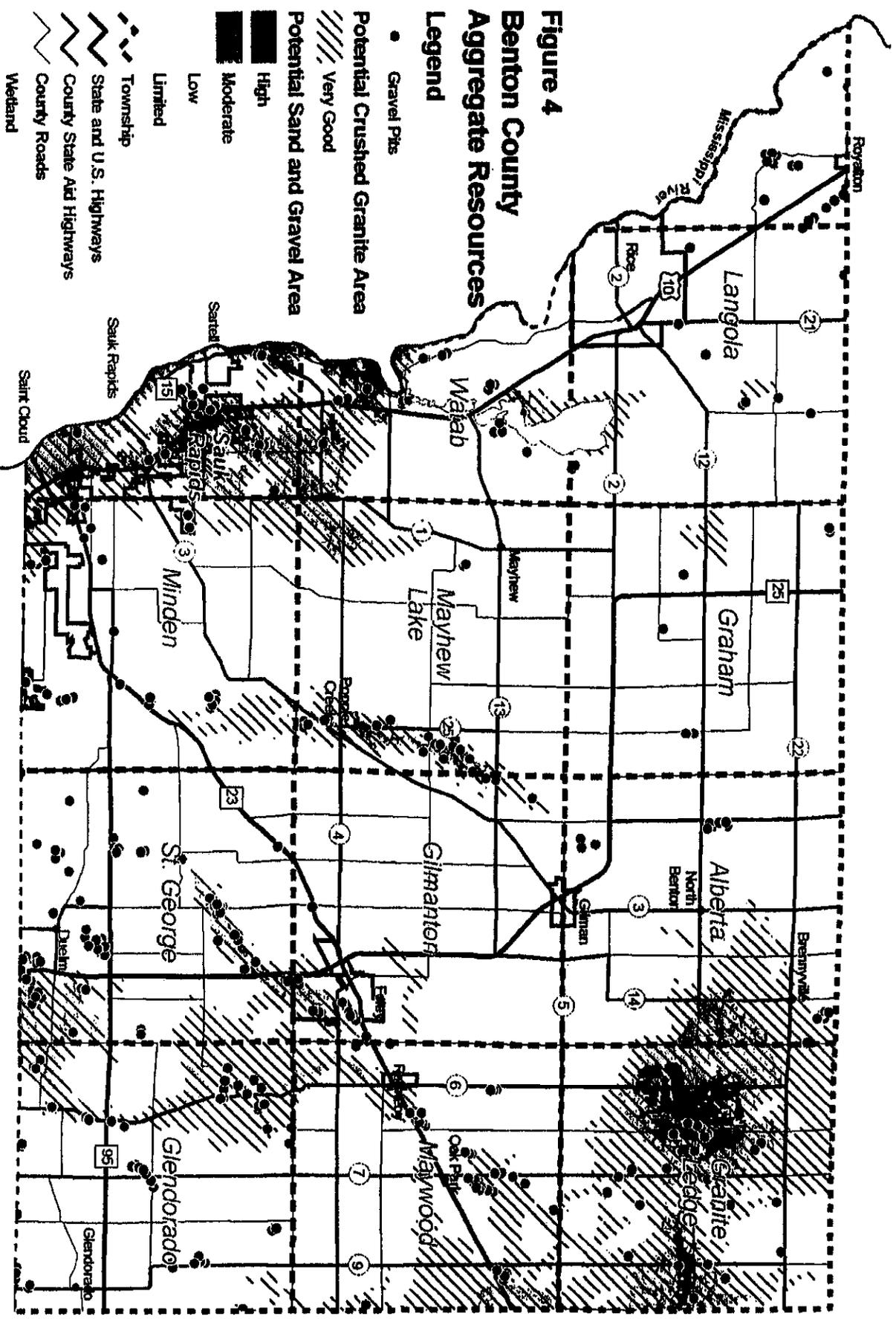
Another special geological condition that exists in the county is the occurrence of high bluffs adjacent to some of the rivers and lakes. These areas are very sensitive to disturbance. If disturbed, they become quite susceptible to erosion from surface runoff. These bluffs have been given special protection through an updated ordinance (1992) which created an impact zone. Development is restricted and vegetation is protected in this zone. Setback requirements for structures are also addressed in the ordinance.

Forests

- There are four unique types of forest within the county. They include:
- One northern hardwood-conifer forest,
 - Maple-basswood forests,
 - One mixed oak forest,
 - A dry savanna oak site.

The northern hardwood-conifer forest is located in parts of Granite Ledge Township and is comprised mainly of sugar maple, basswood, birch, white spruce, and balsam fir. Glendorado and St. George Townships

Figure 4
Benton County
Aggregate Resources



contain the maple-basswood forest type (which is comprised mainly of sugar maples and basswood).

Sauk Rapids Township contains the only mixed oak forest in the County. It consists of white oak, northern red oak, and bur oak.

Langola Township has a dry savanna oak site (a grassland community supporting trees which are scattered either singly or in small patches in a groveland mosaic).

(Before European Settlement, the county was mostly covered by forests. There were major prairies in Langola and western Graham Townships and smaller prairies along the streams and in parts of Minden Township.)

Plant Communities

Two unique plant communities are located within Benton County. A bur oak-northern pin oak savanna occurs along the Mississippi River sand plains. Typical plant species include bluestem grasses, June grass, porcupine grass, lead plant, puccoons, pasque flower, and gay feathers.

Prairies

Mesic black soil prairies can be found in Minden, Sauk Rapids, and Graham Townships. Typically, tall prairie grasses such as big bluestem and Indian grass dominate. Other characteristic flora include: death camas, blazing star, golden Alexander, prairie dandelion, slender wheatgrass, prairie onion, smooth aster, green needlegrass, prairie thistle, sunflower, and milkweed.

Historic Landmarks

A unique feature that is also a historic landmark is Peace Rock, located in Watub Township on the bank of the Mississippi River. It served as the negotiating point for the Chippewa and the Sioux (Lakota) tribes. No fighting ever occurred on this neutral ground.

Scenic Waterfall

A scenic waterfall, the only one in the county, is located in Granite Ledge Township in a reach of the West Rum River.

Minnesota County Biological Survey

During the 1990's the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources County Biological Survey (MCBS) documented a number of high-quality natural areas in Benton County. It should be noted that while the MCBS documents only the highest-quality remaining natural areas, there are numerous lesser-quality areas in Benton County that could be managed to improved quality. With a few exceptions, the remaining high-quality natural areas are concentrated in a few areas in the county.

Confluence of the Platte and Mississippi Rivers: One of these concentrations is at the confluence of the Platte and Mississippi rivers in the northwest part of the county. In the Platte River valley, slopes are steep and soils tend to be droughty as a result of sandy river terrace deposits. Here, there is an occurrence of quality dry oak savanna and a few small dry prairies.

Southeast of Rice: Further down the river, southeast of Rice, there are high-quality areas including wet meadow, shrub swamp and floodplain forest. Moving again down the river, just downstream from the confluence of Little Rock Lake with the Mississippi is a relatively large dry oak savanna, and several scattered granite outcrops that were noted by MCBS as high quality. Significant in this area, too, are the natural areas that occur on the Graves Property. This property was strongly supported for parkland acquisition during the early stages of this planning process, and was actually purchased before completing this master park plan.

Little Rock Creek Corridor: The corridor along Little Rock Creek, both north and south of Little Rock Lake, hosts the greatest variety of high-quality natural community types found in the county. This broad corridor includes such varied natural communities as maple-basswood

forest, oak forest, dry oak savanna, dry prairie, shrub swamp, and rich fen.

Northwest of Sauk Rapids: Just northwest of Sauk Rapids and Highway 10, MCBBS staff documented a rich fen, oak forest, and wet meadow. Together these total a sizeable 250-300 acres. This area is part of the orderly annexation agreement for Sauk Rapids, and is at high risk for development; however, the County owns 40 acres of this natural area. The county-owned property is "landlocked" lowland and is not likely to be suitable for development.

Minden Township: Minden Township hosts the only occurrence of mesic prairie in Benton County. This area, known as Thielen Prairie, supports a population of the state-listed tubercled-rein orchid *Platanthera flava*, and occurs adjacent to other open, grassy areas that have been pastured and have the potential to serve as a larger prairie/savanna natural area.

Granite Ledge Township: Granite Ledge Township supports the largest and most contiguous parcels of deciduous forest in the County, including oak, maple-basswood, and white pine-hardwood forests, and a few wetland areas of significant quality. This township also hosts the best example of White Pine-hardwood forest in Benton, Mille Lacs, and Morrison County. MCBBS staff thought so highly of this stand that they recommended it be used as a reference stand for restoration of white-pine hardwood forests elsewhere. Since the MCBBS staff visited the forests in the Granite Ledge area, rural development and logging have occurred on a number of parcels. These activities resulted in lowering the overall quality of those particular tracts—for decades in the case of logging, and more permanently for those with structures placed in them.

Glendorado Township: Glendorado Township in the southeast part of the county has several maple-basswood forests that are considered to be high quality. One of these was apparently logged in about 1998, but was reported to have been selectively cut in a way that did not substantially harm the overall quality of the site.

Other Natural Areas: Despite the apparently few high-quality natural communities mapped by the MCBBS, there is a significant amount of land in Benton county that supports natural communities of lesser quality. These lesser-quality areas have, in some way, had their characteristic species composition, three-dimensional structure or overall function altered. Some of the activities that may impact quality include things such as logging, intensive long-term grazing, ditching, road building, development and others. Some influences such as logging and grazing have the potential to be corrected through natural processes or with active management. Activities such as plowing, road building and development cause a permanent loss.

Because most natural areas have some potential to improve in quality with time and/or active management, these somewhat lower quality natural areas play an important role in the big picture of natural areas within Benton County. Similar to the overall character of the County, the most common lesser-quality natural areas in the south and west are savanna-like areas, woodlands, wet meadows and prairie, with forested areas being most common in the north and east.

Summary of Major Ecological Resources

In conclusion, efforts should be made to preserve and protect all ecologically sensitive and unique areas in the county. The highest priority should be given to those areas that are in immediate danger, whether from development or agriculture.

The mixed oak forest located in Sauk Rapids Township and the dry savanna oak sites located in Langola Township are the remnants of the type of ecosystem that originally occupied much of Benton County. Thus, these areas should be preserved if only to show others what the landscape originally looked like. Because of the lack of northern hardwood-conifer forests and maple-basswood forests in the county, the few remaining stands should be protected.

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Water quality of Little Rock Creek and Bunker Hill Brook should be given special consideration (because of the presence of brown trout). All wetlands within the three watersheds that are in direct contact with ground water or immediately adjacent to areas that flood frequently need thorough protection.

As a national landmark, Peace Rock should be recognized as such. Currently all of the land surrounding the Rock's location is owned privately. Efforts to obtain this area should be undertaken by the County in order to preserve this unique area for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

If the diversity of the county is maintained, the wildlife habitat and recreational potential will be maintained as well. Unique areas should be viewed as special places for education and historic.

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Summary of Major Planning Issues

The following is a summary of the major land use planning issues confronting Benton County in 2005:

Rural Non-Farm Housing

What should be the allowable density or minimum lot size for new non-farm housing in the rural areas? To what extent should the County regulate land use and zoning to sustain large areas for agriculture?

Major Subdivisions Outside the Cities

To what extent should the County allow residential subdivisions in the rural areas that are served by shared sewage treatment systems?

Natural Resource Protection

To what extent should Benton County regulate land use or acquire property to protect water quality, major wooded areas, locations of special resources or rural character?

Land Development and Fiscal Health

To what degree should Benton County consider the long-term effects on public spending and revenues when regulating land use?

The Highway 10 Corridor

Should future residential and commercial development be guided into the cities along Highway 10 or allowed to grow in the townships?

Particularly, should additional large residential neighborhoods be created with community wastewater systems?

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Goals and Policies

The following statements will help guide County planning, regulations and spending, including the preparation of specific plans for land use, roads, water protection, parks, economic development and housing assistance.

General Goal #1: Growth and Livability

Maximize the potential of Benton County as a thriving center for agriculture, business, and recreation, while maintaining and enhancing its livability.

Policies

1. **Comprehensive Planning:** Promote the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan that effectively plans for land use, community facilities, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental protection, and technological advancement for Benton County. Plan for land uses that support and enhance Benton County's ability to attract and direct quality development.
2. **Plan Implementation:** Review the *Comprehensive Plan* annually and amend as necessary to ensure its usefulness as a practical guide for current and future development. Adhere to this Plan, which shall guide all zoning changes, as closely as possible to ensure consistent development policy. Formulate and enforce County ordinances to ensure development in accordance with the *Comprehensive Plan*.
3. **Population Diversity:** Promote appreciation of ethnic differences and mutual acceptance by encouraging effective integration of diverse populations.

General Goal #2: Service Efficiency

Maximize public service efficiencies at the local level both through effective planning and management practices, and by exercising sound fiscal responsibility.

Policies

1. **Capital Improvement Program:** Continue to plan for the maintenance and upgrading of all public facilities through the use of a County capital improvement program.
2. **County Staff:** Continue to improve and update the County's staff capabilities through training, improved facilities and equipment, and better management.
3. **Volunteerism:** Encourage volunteerism, participation in community activities and acceptance of community leadership positions.
4. **Public Participation:** Encourage and listen to resident participation in the local decision-making processes.

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Land Use Goals and Policies

Land Use Goal #1: Rural Land Use

Sustain an agricultural Land Use pattern in harmony with low density rural housing.

Policies

1. **Rural Land Use:** Plan land use and provide roads and other public services so as to sustain most of the County as a low-density, rural and generally agricultural environment.
2. **Agriculture:** Recognize and support the agricultural practices, character and lifestyle within the County allowing for the pursuit of agriculture as a career.
3. **Urban and Rural Distinction:** Keep the cities dense and urban and the rest of the county very low density and generally agricultural. Maintain a difference between the two.
4. **Rural Non-Farm Housing:** Allow additional rural non-farm housing so owners can extract some equity from their property while sustaining agricultural operations on their land and their neighbors'. Seek creative solutions to the tension between preservation and development by using techniques such as clustering and transfer of sale of development rights.
5. **Special Soils:** Recognize and protect soils that are highly productive when properly managed (i.e. irrigation).
6. **Granite Ledge Township:** Allow a higher degree of housing development in Granite Ledge Township on sites that are suited for on-site sewage treatment systems.
7. **Cost of Rural Housing:** Recognize that rural non-farm housing development tends to cost local and county government more than it returns in revenue, and regulate land use accordingly.
8. **Urban Fringe Growth: Encourage residential, commercial and** Industrial growth in an orderly and compact fashion around the established urban areas and rural service centers. This is so that new developments can be efficiently served by public improvements and reduce pressure on the character and quality of the County's rural areas.
9. **Highway 10 Corridor:** Do not allow the Highway 10 corridor to evolve into an urban area without urban services. Reduce from recent past practices the intensity of development in Wataub Township and bring more order to the planning of roads and drainage.
10. **Confined Animal Feedlots:** Continue to allow confined animal feedlots in the rural area by protecting them from new non-farm housing through County zoning. Require strict pollution controls consistent with State requirements.
11. **Right to Farm:** Support a farmer's right to farm when they are using generally accepted farming practices.

Land Use Goal #2: Orderly Growth

Plan for the orderly and efficient growth in the County.

Policies

- 1. Urban Growth Areas:** Cooperate with St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, Sartell, Rice, Royalton, Gilman and Foley to plan and approve perimeter growth for urban services and annexation. Work with the Cities to prepare conceptual land use plans for the identified urban growth areas that account for future roads, major utility lines, protected shorelines and wetlands.

- 2. Re-subdivision Sketches:** Require urban re-subdivision sketches to be submitted along with large-lot plats in the Urban Growth Areas.

Land Use Goal #3: Commercial and Industrial Development

Plan for the orderly and efficient growth of commercial and industrial development in the County.

Policies

- 1. Commercial and Industrial Development:** Encourage the majority of new commercial and industrial developments to locate within Benton County cities in accordance with their comprehensive plans. Commercial and industrial development that does not need public sewer and water services should be located within planned areas with adequate road service and regulated through Conditional Use Permits.

- 2. Home Businesses:** Allow home-based businesses in rural areas that are compatible with neighboring properties and the access road.

- 3. Aggregate Resources:** Allow a very low density of rural, non-farm housing development in areas of mapped sand and gravel (aggregate) resources. Require adequate buffering, landscaping, and end use plans.

Land Use Goal #4: Natural Resources

Identify, protect, and preserve the County's high quality natural areas and open space.

Policies

- 1. County Biological Survey:** Develop strategies for the conservation of the County's environmentally sensitive natural areas identified on County Biological Survey.

- 2. Development Review:** Protect the integrity of major natural resources through development review and regulation.

- 3. Master Plan for Parks Trails and Open Space:** Utilize the Master Plan to identify potential trail corridors and resource based parkland.

- 4. Scenic Resources:** Protect scenic values by controlling billboards and regulating signs, auto junkyards, and other potentially unsightly land uses and practices.

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Housing Goals and Policies

Housing Goal #1: Housing Stock

Continue to maintain a high quality living environment in all residential neighborhoods and upgrade those in need of improvement.

Policies

1. **County HRA:** Explore the expansion of the County HRA's role in housing development and redevelopment activities.
2. **Life Cycle Housing:** Promote the improvement and maintenance of the existing housing stock to ensure that an adequate amount of housing is maintained, including retrofitting existing homes to better serve families in need of affordable housing.
3. **Sewage Treatment:** Require community sewer districts or package plants for residential developments that are clustered on small lots and allow individual sewage treatment system on larger rural lots that have the appropriate soil types.

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Public Facilities Goals and Policies

Public Facilities Goal #1: Community Facilities

Continue to maintain and improve all community facilities.

Policies

- 1. Community Facilities:** Continue to maintain community facilities and identify areas of improvement in a capital improvement plan.

- 2. Facility Coordination:** Promote maximum cooperation and assistance to other governmental agencies in planning and developing facilities to provide a high level of service and avoid duplication of services or facilities.

Public Facilities Goal #2: Cost of Services

Work to achieve an equitable distribution of the cost of providing County services.

Policies

- 1. Growth Management:** Work with cities in Benton County and their adjacent townships to plan for orderly growth outside of their corporate limits.

- 2. Development within Urban Growth Areas:** Allow only low-density development in the municipal growth areas so that development of infrastructure can be done efficiently and effectively.

- 3. Wastewater Treatment:** Monitor and inspect residential and commercial areas with on-site sewer systems to ensure that they function properly. Promote the utilization of private community sewer districts or package plants in areas with failing or potentially failing systems.

Public Facilities Goal #3: Parks and Trails

Develop, maintain and manage a County park, trail and open space system to meet the needs of the Community by utilizing various methods of fiscally responsible funding strategies.

Policies

- 1. County Park System:** Develop, enhance and maintain the existing County park system that is safe and meets the intergenerational needs of the community.

- 2. Connectivity:** Ensure that there is a balance within the County Park System that creates connections between the rural and urbanizing areas of the County.

- 3. New Park Development:** Take advantage of opportunities to acquire new park and open space areas in those locations identified for both natural beauty, and the existence of unique environmental, plant, animal, social, or historical features (County Biological Survey and Master Plan for Parks Trails and Open Space).

- 4. Trails:** Promote the development of an interconnected trail system utilizing public participation and trail advocacy groups.

- 5. Shared Facilities:** Promote the sharing of recreational facilities among area communities.

- 6. Funding:** Consider various funding options in the acquisition of parkland and development of recreational and/or community education activities.

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Transportation Goals and Policies

Transportation Goal #1: Transportation System

Provide and maintain a safe, convenient, and efficient County transportation system for the movement of people and goods.

Policies

1. **Funding:** Establish a consistent and continuous funding mechanism for Benton County's transportation system.
2. **Regional Planning:** Take an active role with MnDOT, Benton County Cities, Townships, the APO, and other agencies involved in transportation planning, to provide the most effective transportation system for Benton County.
3. **Plan Implementation:** Update the Transportation Plan to identify and designate future roadways within the County by their functional classification and prioritizes system improvements.
4. **Support Roads:** Extend local and service roads in an efficient manner consistent with the County's Transportation Plan that is complimentary to the state highway system.
5. **Commercial and Industrial Sites:** Locate and design industrial and commercial developments to avoid truck traffic through residential and agricultural areas.
6. **North Star Corridor:** Work with State, Federal, and other transportation agencies in the planning and construction of the North Star commuter corridor through the County.
7. **Circulation Improvements:** Support a regional transportation system that circulates traffic in and around the metro area, eliminating jogs and bottlenecks in the system (Sauk Rapids Bridge).

8. **Multi-Model Transportation:** Investigate multi-model transportation opportunities within the current system such as air cargo, rail, transit and ground transport.

Transportation Goal #2: Safety

Advance the safety of the County transportation system

Policies

1. **Safety Improvements:** Improve unsafe access points, crossing conflicts along State and County Highways and at-grade railroad crossings. Recognize and manage the conflicts created by fishing on and around bridges in the County (Gordon and County Road 2).
2. **Education:** Increase public awareness on roads designed to wash out around existing County bridges during large rain/flood events.
3. **Recreational Activities:** Identify and pave shoulders within high growth corridors as a part of County Road projects for recreational purposes.
4. **Emergency Preparedness:** Encourage the development of through streets for more efficient emergency response.

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Transportation Goal #3: Appearance

Enhance the aesthetic character and functional qualities of the transportation networks within the County.

Policies

1. **Visual Aesthetic:** Encourage developing properties to create landscape buffers to maintain the aesthetic quality of the area.
2. **Signage:** Promote the appropriate use of signs (directional informational and advertising) to create community identity.
3. **Rural Character:** Maintain the rural character of the State and County highway system by identifying appropriate commercial and industrial sites that cluster development rather than sprawl development along roadways.
4. **Drainage:** Identify and maintain the County's road ditches and culverts in a manner that is consistent with state law.
5. **Government Cooperation:** Coordinate with Townships on road development issues including location and configuration.

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Economic Development Goals and Policies

Economic Development Goal #1: Growth

Cooperatively utilize the existing resources in the County, develop new resources for economic growth, and ensure a quality labor force.

Policies

1. **Local and Regional Cooperation:** Promote an on-going cooperative effort on a local and regional basis, utilizing the County, its Cities and Townships, the HRA, local Economic Development Authorities, local Chambers of Commerce, the Initiative Foundation, state agencies, local builders, business owners, the educational community and citizens to pursue a wide range of economic development opportunities.
2. **Business Retention:** Continue to support efforts to retain and expand existing businesses.
3. **Business Development:** Recruit new businesses and promote the idea of incubator space for emerging businesses.
4. **Asset Marketing:** Identify and market the County's internal (i.e. business friendly regulations) and external (i.e. labor force) assets more aggressively to attract and expand diversified businesses.
5. **Agricultural Businesses:** Encourage value-added agricultural industries, businesses and diverse agricultural operations to locate in the County.
6. **Infrastructure Development:** Recognize the County's current and future infrastructure needs (i.e. transportation and global communication) to support and promote development.
7. **Human Resources:** Maximize our human resources through early childhood care and education, training and retention of our youth, and continued education for adults.
8. **Life Cycle Housing:** Encourage the availability of a range of quality housing types and values to ensure an ample labor force.
9. **Availability of Education:** Promote local access for continuing education by actively seeking out institutions to offer programs and services through the use of available technologies.
10. **Diversifying the Workplace:** Utilize technology to expand various workplace opportunities (telecommuting).

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Environmental Goals and Policies

Environmental Goal #1: Stewardship

Promote environmental stewardship for the County's long-term environmental benefit.

Policies

1. **Wildlife Habitat:** Protect the integrity of wildlife habitat by acquiring prime tracts of land for public open space, by regulating rural land use for a very low intensity of development, enforcing regulations on wetlands and shorelines, and by designing new development and roads to keep major woodlands intact.
2. **Best Management Practices:** Protect water quality by enforcing the use of "Best Management Practices" and other features of the County's Water Plan in private development and public improvements.
3. **Wetlands:** Continue to enforce wetland regulations. Support individual landowners' efforts to reestablish pre-existing wetlands by using a wetland banking system.
4. **Watershed Management Organizations:** Implement through zoning and public works the policies of the watershed management organizations consistent with the County's Water Plan.
5. **Individual Treatment Systems:** Continue careful consideration and review of soil suitability for the placement of individual sewer treatment systems before the issuance of a permit.
6. **Hazardous Waste:** Continue to work to promote the proper handling, disposal and recycling of hazardous waste.

Benton County Land Use Plan

Several land use planning areas are described by the following text and Figure 5 to guide land use and development. These areas are not the same as the County's zoning districts, but they will be used to amend the zoning regulations and map that comprise the County ordinance which specifically regulates land use. Following these general descriptions, the planned land use for each township is described and illustrated in detail.

The Benton County Land Use Plan categories are:

- **Agricultural:** Farming and low density non-farm housing.
- **Rural:** Farming activities and non-farm housing.
- **Urban Growth:** Areas targeted for annexation, resubdivision and municipal utilities and roads. May include commercial or industrial development.
- **Rural Residential:** Low-density housing that is not expected to be annexed to a City.
- **Rural Service Center:** Unincorporated concentration of housing and businesses surrounded by an Agricultural Area.
- **Ordery Annexation Area:** Location of agreement between a city and a township (as well as the County) for future property annexation to a city.
- **Commercial and Industrial:** Businesses on large lots without public sewer or water service.

Agricultural Land Use Area

The Agricultural Land Use Area has been determined to be most appropriate for long-term farming because of its soils and history of agriculture. Comprising the bulk of the County, the Agricultural Area reaches from north Langola Township to Graham, Alberta, Mayhew Lake, Gilmanton, Maywood, Glendorado, and most of St. George and Minden Townships. These areas are currently being used for farming, pasture land, dairy operations or the raising of cattle, poultry, pigs, horses or other animals.

Soils in the Agricultural Area are generally considered "prime" or "good" for agriculture or can be made so through irrigation, fertilization and crop rotation. The sandy soils of southern Minden and St. George Townships are an example of soils that are not naturally prime for agriculture but can be managed for high productivity. Thus, the southern portions of Minden and St. George townships are among the most agriculturally productive of the county.

Housing Density in the Agricultural Area

Housing should be permitted in the Agricultural Area at a density of no greater than either:

- A. 4 houses per 40 acres; or
- B. 6 houses per 40 acres (measured on a Quarter-Quarter Section basis) if the houses are clustered or otherwise located in a way that maximizes the agricultural use of the remaining farmland. A Conditional Use Permit should be required for clustered housing. Wetlands may be counted when calculating allowable density in the Agricultural Area.

Additional Requirements

The following conditions also apply to new housing in the Agricultural Land Use Area:

Parcel Size

Land parcels for housing need only be large enough to meet the County's requirements for an on-site sewage disposal system, a replacement drain field and a private well. Thus, the minimum parcel size will vary depending on soil conditions. The County encourages small parcels but low density in order to keep land in cultivation, minimize interference with farming and reduce complaints about farm operations such as odors or machinery noise.

Preferred Locations for New Houses

New houses should be located where they will cause the least interference with farming (example: the corner or edge of a site rather than the middle, or a wooded area) and have minimal environmental impact.

Clustering

Houses may be clustered onto smaller parcels than normally allowed if all County requirements for sewage disposal and water are met and the remaining open space is preserved in perpetuity.

Housing clusters should be allowed by Conditional Use Permit so that it may be judged whether there would be negative impacts on either nearby farming operations or the new residents and appropriate access can be provided to the site. Clusters may be required to mitigate potential impacts by creating their own buffers such as setbacks or dense trees.

Prior to preparing a plan for clustered housing, applicants should draw an analysis of site features and determine which areas should be kept open and which are most suited for housing, and review it with the Planning Commission. Houses should then be tightly grouped with the

aim of preserving farmland, wetlands, mature forest and rural views. Creating shared, central open space is a desirable technique for promoting a sense of community within the cluster.

Open Space Preservation

Land designated as open space through the process of clustering or deed restriction and not developed with lots and roads will be preserved in an undeveloped state either through the county's land records and zoning mechanisms or by the landowner granting a conservation easement to the County. The most appropriate and efficient way to communicate and enforce such agreements will be determined by the County subsequent to the adoption of this plan.

Road Access

New housing should preferably be accessed by a township road. A driveway may be connected to a County road if there is no other access to the property and County access management guidelines are followed. When more than one new housing parcel is created by subdivision and access is directly via a County Road or County State-Aid Highway, the access management guidelines of Benton County and the Minnesota Department of Transportation must be followed.

Existing Parcels

Lots of record at that are able to meet the requirements of the Development Code with the exception of density would be entitled to at least one house.

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Tracts Smaller than 40 Acres

The allowable number of houses for land parcels smaller than 40 acres at the time the County zoning ordinance is amended to implement this plan should be proportionate to the size of the holding.

Allowable Housing Types

Each housing unit must have an individual outdoor entrance on the ground level. Thus, detached houses and "townhouses" should be allowed, but not apartments.

Feedlot Setbacks

New non-farm houses must be separated from existing confined animal feedlots according to the requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance. Feedlots must be separated from existing non-farmhouses by the same distance.

Record-Keeping

The County will map and record the number of housing units allowed in each Quarter-Quarter Section. Deed restrictions should continue to be used to control resubdivision.

Zoning

All property in the Agricultural Area of the Land Use Plan map should be zoned A-1. The A-1 district should be amended to allow 4 houses per 40 acres (instead of the current 1 per 40), or to allow 6 houses per 40 acres by Conditional Use Permit.

The current regulations for the A-3 District should become the Rural District.

Sand or Gravel Mining

Mining of sand or gravel may be allowed in the Agricultural Land Use Area or the Rural Land Use Area by Conditional Use Permit under the County zoning ordinance.

Figure 4 of this Land Use Plan identifies locations likely to contain some of the highest quality crushable granite in Minnesota according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (Ellingson, 2002). Granite in these locations is expected to be 50 to several hundred feet thick with overburden less than 30 feet thick. Housing may be built in one of these mapped locations at a density no greater than 4 houses per 40 acres. (This requirement does not apply in the Urban Growth Area.) However, if it is demonstrated that the property does not contain crushable granite, the normally allowable density is permitted.

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Rural Land Use Area

The Rural Area may not be conducive to long-term agriculture because of soils that cannot be made highly productive for farming, rock outcroppings, high water table and woods. Nevertheless, portions, of the Rural Area are being farmed or used as pasture land.

The Rural Area is designated across all of Granite Ledge Township, and that is the only location in Benton County where that plan category has been applied.

Housing Density in the Rural Area

New houses should be allowed in the Rural Area on **5-acre lots** (2.5 acres of which must be dry and buildable). This would be consistent with the current zoning of that area, A-3.

The following features of the Agricultural Area should apply in the Rural Area

- Calculating allowable density
- Open space preservation
- Allowable housing types
- Road access
- Existing parcels
- Feedlot setbacks
- Record-keeping.

Urban Growth Land Use Area

The Urban Growth Area covers locations adjacent to or near the cities that may ultimately be annexed, served with municipal utilities and subdivided into City-sized lots for housing. This Area does not include the land covered by the Orderly Annexation Agreements for Sartell, Sauk Rapids and St. Cloud. The Urban Growth Area is expected to be predominately housing, but retail, service or industrial businesses may be allowed under certain conditions.

Careful planning and regulation is needed in the Urban Growth Area because preventing unplanned semi-rural sprawl near the cities is probably the most important feature of the *Benton County Comprehensive Plan*.

Housing in the Urban Growth Area

New housing in the Urban Growth Area should be limited to very low densities in order to promote efficient extension of roads and utilities, cost-effective urban growth, affordable housing, compact neighborhoods, low public costs, large-tract design and agricultural preservation. All County requirements for sewage disposal and water must be met.

In the Urban Growth Area, **4 houses per Quarter-Quarter Section** (40 acres) will be allowed.

In the Urban Growth Area, **clustered housing** may be allowed by Conditional Use Permit to maximize the opportunity for resubdivision to urban densities and annexation by the City.

Benton County would prefer that most new housing be on properties that are annexed to a City. However, when that is not the case, the design of subdivisions and lot splits must be coordinated with the adjacent City to ensure that the City's roads, utilities and housing patterns can be extended economically and efficiently. Thus, subdividers must demonstrate how

their proposed development will eventually be incorporated into a City's street and utility system plans.

The City's plans for land use, roads, utilities and parks should be followed in the Urban Growth Area although the County will retain final approval control.

Parcel Size

Land parcels for housing need only be large enough to meet the County's requirements for an on-site sewage disposal system, a replacement drain field and a private well. Thus, the minimum parcel size will vary depending on soil conditions. The County encourages small parcels in order to keep land in cultivation, minimize interference with farming and reduce complaints about farm operations such as odors or machinery noise. Clustered lots in the Urban Growth Area should have an average size no greater than 1.5 acres if drainfield soils permit and should be managed in such a way as to not hinder future annexation.

Clustering

Houses may be clustered onto smaller parcels than normally allowed if the subdivision layout and house sewage systems are designed to easily accommodate eventual annexation by the City and service by the City's sewer and water systems. The subdivision plat should indicate how the tract could be later resubdivided into city-size lots for utility service.

Clustering may be allowed by Conditional Use Permit to be consistent with the growth plans of the area.

Existing Parcels

Lots of Record will be determined according to the Benton County Zoning Ordinance and are entitled to one dwelling unit.

Tracts Smaller than 40 Acres

The allowable number of houses for land parcels smaller than 40 acres at the time the County zoning ordinance is amended to implement this plan should be proportionate to the size of the holding.

Zoning District

Properties in the Urban Growth Area should be rezoned to a proposed new district, Urban Growth District.

Livestock

No new livestock operations should be allowed in the Urban Growth Area.

Other Conditions for Residential Land Subdivision in the Urban Growth Area:

- **Official Map:** The subdivision must be consistent with the City's Official Map of roads, utilities, drainage and parks (if such a map covers the area in question).
- **Land Use:** The subdivision must conform to the City's plan for land use type and residential density (if such a map covers the area in question).
- **Jointly Adopted Plan:** The subdivision must be consistent with any plan for land use or zoning that may have been jointly adopted by a City and the County.
- **Resubdivision:** The subdivision must be easily resubdivided into city-sized parcels. The applicant must submit of urban overlay plat that illustrates how the area can be further subdivided to urban densities and not impede the ultimate orderly and efficient urbanization of the area. Houses must be located in conformance with the resubdivision plan.

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Retail, Service and Industrial Businesses in the Urban Growth Area

• **Public Utilities:** The subdivision must be able to be economically and efficiently retrofit with City sewer and water lines.

• **Engineering Standards:** If clustering or density transfer results in an average lot size 1.0 acre or smaller (with individual sewage treatment systems), the subdivision must conform to the nearby City's engineering standards for roads, sidewalks, utilities, drainage, lighting and street trees.

• **Private Sewage System:** Private, individual sewage treatment systems must meet the County's adopted requirements.

• **Community Utilities:** To achieve residential densities in the Urban Growth Area beyond those allowed above, City utility lines must be extended and the property annexed to the City.

• **Access Management:** Spacing of driveways and public street intersections must conform to the County's access management guidelines.

• **Future Public Roads:** The subdivision must be able to easily provide public road access in the future to the portions of the tract not adjacent to the County or Township road.

• **Environmental Protection:** The subdivision must conform to the County regulations for the protection of wetlands, shorelands and floodplains.

Retail, service or industrial businesses may be allowed in the Urban Growth Area under these conditions:

• Consistency with the land use plan of the nearby city, or the land use plan and zoning of a joint City-County planning and zoning board (if applicable).

• If there is no City land use plan that addresses the location in question, under a Conditional Use Permit issued by the County with the review of the nearby City.

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Rural Residential Land Use Area

The Rural Residential Area is applied only in those portions of Watab Township that were zoned R-1, R-2 or R-3 at the time of the adoption of this plan. Those zoning districts should be continued unchanged in the Rural Residential Area. The minimum lot sizes in those districts are:

R-1	R-2	R-3
2.5 acres	1 acre with Individual wastewater disposal.	21,000 square feet with Individual wastewater disposal.
	17,000 sq. ft. with Community or Central wastewater disposal.	17,000 sq. ft. with Community or Central wastewater disposal.
	12,000 square feet with publicly-owned wastewater disposal.	12,000 square feet with publicly-owned wastewater disposal.

There are three categories of private wastewater disposal: (1) Community (more than 10,000 gallons per day), (2) Central (less than 10,000 gallons per day) and (3) Individual (one septic tank and drainfield per house). Any private wastewater treatment system or water supply system must meet all of Benton County's adopted requirements.

Wetlands

Wetlands should not be counted when calculating allowable density in the Rural Residential Area.

Access Management

Spacing of driveways and public street intersections must conform to the County's access management guidelines.

Future Public Roads

Subdivision must be able to provide public road access in the future to the portions of the tract not adjacent to the County or Township road.

Environmental Protection

Subdivisions must conform to the County regulations for the protection of wetlands, shorelands and floodplains.

Livestock

No new livestock operations should be allowed in the Rural Residential Area.

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Rural Service Centers

Benton County intends that the Rural Service Centers should continue to grow with housing and businesses. The pattern of land use should be similar to these centers' historic character; that is, a mixture of residential and non-residential development on compact lots.

Orderly Annexation Areas

The Orderly Annexation Area applies to the property covered by an agreement between a city and a township (as well as the County) in which land will be annexed to the city in the future under specified conditions. This Area is located in southwestern Benton County adjacent to the Cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids and Sartell.

New Housing

Housing should be permitted in the Rural Service Centers on parcels large enough to meet all Benton County requirements for on-site wastewater disposal systems and individual water wells. If a private Community or private Central wastewater disposal system is used, housing parcels may be as small as 17,000 square feet.

In the Orderly Annexation Area, land use, housing density, subdivisions, roads and public utilities will be guided by the plan adopted by the City.

(There are three categories of private wastewater disposal: (1) Community (more than 10,000 gallons per day), (2) Central (less than 10,000 gallons per day) and (3) Individual (one septic tank and drainfield per house).

New Business or Industry

Non-residential development should be allowed by Conditional Use Permit. The County should review each application separately to determine its potential effect on nearby land use, traffic and environmental quality.

Zoning

A new Benton County zoning district, Rural Service Center, should be written and adopted to implement the intentions of this plan.

Existing Parcels

Any existing lot of record may be developed with a residence and individual wastewater and water well services.

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Commercial and Industrial Land Use Area

Benton County prefers that commercial and industrial development be located in the Cities. However, some businesses are suited for locations without municipal sewer, water, road, fire or police services. Such businesses may need large amounts of outdoor storage and have low numbers of employees.

Commercial or industrial development near the Cities is permitted in locations appropriately planned and zoned by Benton County, or in locations planned by a City, annexed to that City and rezoned appropriately.

Location Criteria

- The Benton County Land Use Plan map indicates locations suitable for commercial or industrial development outside the Cities. These are principally along the Highway 10 corridor.
- Individual industrial or commercial businesses or Business Service Centers may be allowed in a township by Conditional Use Permit in or adjacent to a Rural Service Center or at public road intersections along Highways 23, 25 or 95. Such businesses must demonstrate that their water needs and sewage outflow can be accommodated by on-site systems that meet County requirements.
- Locations in an Urban Growth Area around the Cities of Foley, Rice, Gilman or Ronneby may be allowed by Conditional Use Permit and the review by the City.

Parcel Size

Commercial or industrial buildings should be located on parcels that can accommodate future expansion. Commercial or industrial buildings must be located on parcels that can accommodate future expansion. Exceptions may be granted to this requirement for locations in an Urban Growth Area around the Cities of Foley, Rice, Gilman or Ronneby with the approval of the City.

Road Access

Road access must conform to the access management requirements of Benton County and/or the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Screening

All commercial or industrial development must be screened from view from adjacent houses or farms.

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Shoreland Protection Area

Land within 1,000 feet of specified lakes or within 300 feet of designated streams in Benton County is protected under the County's Shoreland District Management regulations. Those lakes and streams are illustrated on the County's Official Protected Waters and Wetlands Map.

Regulations vary according to the classification of each lake or stream. Lakes classified as Natural Environment are: Bible Duck Slough, Donovan, Mayhew, Pularskis and Vicki. Lakes classified as Recreational Development are: Little Rock and the Little Rock Channel and Flowage. All rivers and streams are classified as Forested, Transition, Agricultural, Urban or Tributary.

Regulations address land use, lot size, setback from the water, building elevation, grading and filling, tree and shrub removal, docks, natural resource protection and related matters. Shoreland regulations supplement and modify the "base" zoning.

Floodplain Management Area

The Floodplain Management Areas are not shown on the Land Use Plan map but are illustrated by the federal Flood Insurance Rate Study map, which has been adopted as a supplement to the County zoning map.

The regulations of the Flood Plain District are the same as those of the model flood plain district developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in conformance with the Flood Plain Act, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 104. Included are regulations on land use, parcel size, floodproofing, building elevation and floodwater obstructions.

Implementation of the Land Use Plan

These steps should be taken to implement the revised Benton County Land Use Plan:

Zoning Map

- All property in the Agricultural Area of the Land Use Plan should be zoned A-1.
- Create and maintain a digital version of the zoning map and display it on the County Web site.

Zoning Ordinance

- Amend the A-1 zoning district to allow 4 houses per 40 acres or to allow 6 houses per 40 acres by Conditional Use Permit.
- Delete the A-2 zoning district (ten-acre lots)
- Rename the A-3, Agricultural / Rural zoning district, to R, Rural.
- Create an Urban Growth Area zoning district that is consistent with the Urban Growth Area land use planning district.
- Create a Rural Service Center district that allows for mixed uses and greater residential density through cluster development.

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Plan Monitoring

Staff of the Benton County Department of Development will prepare an annual report describing:

- How the plan was used to direct major spending, regulatory and construction decisions
- How development and redevelopment did or did not coincide with the guidance of the plan
- How the County has changed in ways that may call for amendments to the plan.

Other County departments and related agencies such as the school district should be consulted for their opinions about these reports as appropriate.

The report should be transmitted to the County Planning Commission and the County Board of Commissioners, and made available to the public. Brief verbal presentation at workshop meetings should be conducted to call attention to the major findings of the annual report.

No plan amendments are necessitated in conjunction with these reports, although such amendments may be appropriate depending on the reports' findings.

Periodic Amendments

The Benton County Planning Commission will propose amendments to the comprehensive plan from time to time as circumstances warrant. The public, including representatives of the Townships and the Cities, should be notified of these major proposed changes and allowed an opportunity to become informed of the change and comment. The County will consider township opinion in evaluating how a proposed change would meet the above criteria. The county could consider soliciting public opinion through direct mail survey forms, township meetings (when applicable) or Planning Commission public meetings.

Criteria to Consider When Reviewing Plan Changes

1. The change is consistent with the goals and objectives or other elements of the *Benton County Comprehensive Plan*.
2. The change does not create an adverse impact on public facilities and services that cannot be mitigated. Public facilities and services include roads, drainage, schools, sheriff, fire and parks.
3. Development resulting from the change does not create an undue impact on surrounding properties. Such development should be consistent with the physical character of the surrounding area.
4. The change allows a more viable transition to the planned uses on adjacent properties than the current land use.
5. The change does not have a significant adverse impact on the natural environment including trees, slopes and groundwater, or the impact could be mitigated by improvements on the site or in the same vicinity.
6. There is a change in County policies or township characteristics that would justify a change.
7. The change corrects an error made in the original plan.
8. There is a community or regional need identified in the *Comprehensive Plan* for the proposed land use or service.
9. The change does not adversely impact any landmarks or other historically significant structures or properties unless mitigated through relocation, commemoration or dedication.

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Regular Reviews

At least once every five years, the County will instruct its Planning Commission and staff members to conduct a formal review of the entire plan, changing those features and sections that are judged to be out of date and/or not serving their purpose.

At least once every ten years, the process for the formal review should involve an *ad hoc* advisory group that assists the County Planning Commission.

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Transportation System Analysis and Plan

Introduction

Benton County has many transportation needs that vary from urban to rural locations and also include recreational travel, each important in its own right. These needs are served by the County road system and by the State and local area systems. It is imperative that the future network continues to meet the needs and serves locations of growth.

This chapter outlines system conditions in 2005 and describes the major planned improvements.

Goals

The *Benton County Transportation Plan* guides transportation decisions that will serve growth that is forecast to increase trips by 150 percent during the next twenty years. The goals of the plan are:

1. Provide and maintain a safe, convenient and efficient County transportation system for the movement of people and goods.
2. Advance the safety of the County transportation system
3. Enhance the aesthetic character and functional qualities of the transportation networks within the County.

Based upon the stated goals, a complete assessment of the current road system should be conducted. The evaluation should include a study of functional classification, structural capacity and jurisdictional designation.

Existing Conditions

Structural Capacity

Rural roads must be able to move goods to and from markets. This requires a system capable of accommodating the heavier loads placed upon them by trucks and farm equipment. A plan for an interconnected ten-ton road system would help the County accommodate those needs. Figure 6 shows the location of 9- and 10-ton roads.

Functional Classification

A primary element of the *Benton County Transportation Plan* is the functional classification plan. Functional classifications for roadways include the following categories (with some minor variations):

- Principal Arterials
- Minor Arterials
- Major Collectors
- Minor Collectors
- Local roads.

The order of classification is from Principal Arterials at the highest capacity and the highest mobility function down to Local roads with the greatest access function. Farm-to-market roads are typically Minor Collectors and Principal Arterials are the multiple-lane limited-access roads. Characteristics considered when preparing a functional classification system are:

- Land uses adjacent to a route
- Route continuity
- Route ability to serve and major activity generators
- Trip length characteristics of a route
- Spacing of routes with regard to function of the route.

Because of extensive development and changes in land use, a study of the functional classification of the existing roads in the County is needed. Many roads have moderate to high levels of congestion should be ranked in priority for capacity improvements.

Jurisdictional Classification

- Roads in Benton County consist of County Roads, County State Aid Highways, State Trunk Highways, Township Roads and local streets in the cities. The mileage of roads, excluding municipal streets is:
 - Minnesota Trunk Highways (TH): 82 miles
 - County Roads (CR): 226 miles
 - County State-Aid Highways (CSAH): 226 miles
 - Township Roads: 298 miles

- Benton County has a higher ratio of County to CSAH roads than is typical in Minnesota. Statewide, CSAH mileage is twice that of County Roads:
 - County Roads: 14,997 miles
 - County State-Aid Highways 30,317 miles

In surrounding counties, and in counties across the State that are experiencing rapid development, the CSAH mileage is usually much greater than the County Road mileage. Because Benton County has an unusually high proportion of County Roads to County State-Aid Highways, it is recommended that some of the County Road mileage be transferred to the County State-Aid system. Also, some Township or City Roads should be transferred to the County Road or CSAH systems.

Access Management

Access control is an important element in preserving road mobility and safety; it helps define and protect the function of the road. Roads that are expected to provide high mobility (e.g. Freeways and Principal Arterials) have the strictest access control; local road access is allowed at a much greater frequency given that access is its principal function.

The Benton County Highway Department regularly receives requests for additional access (e.g. new public streets, commercial driveways, residential and field accesses), and these requests are be evaluated by various agencies, the Benton County Planning Commission and Benton County engineering staff. Because of the number of individuals and agencies involved, it is easy to have inconsistent application of access controls and different viewpoints on the need for access restrictions. Therefore, a key element to developing a successful access plan is to have published guidelines. Standard access guidelines can be used to improve communication between agencies, landowners and developers. This will also establish initial expectations for access spacing on higher-level routes and promote consistent access practices among agencies.

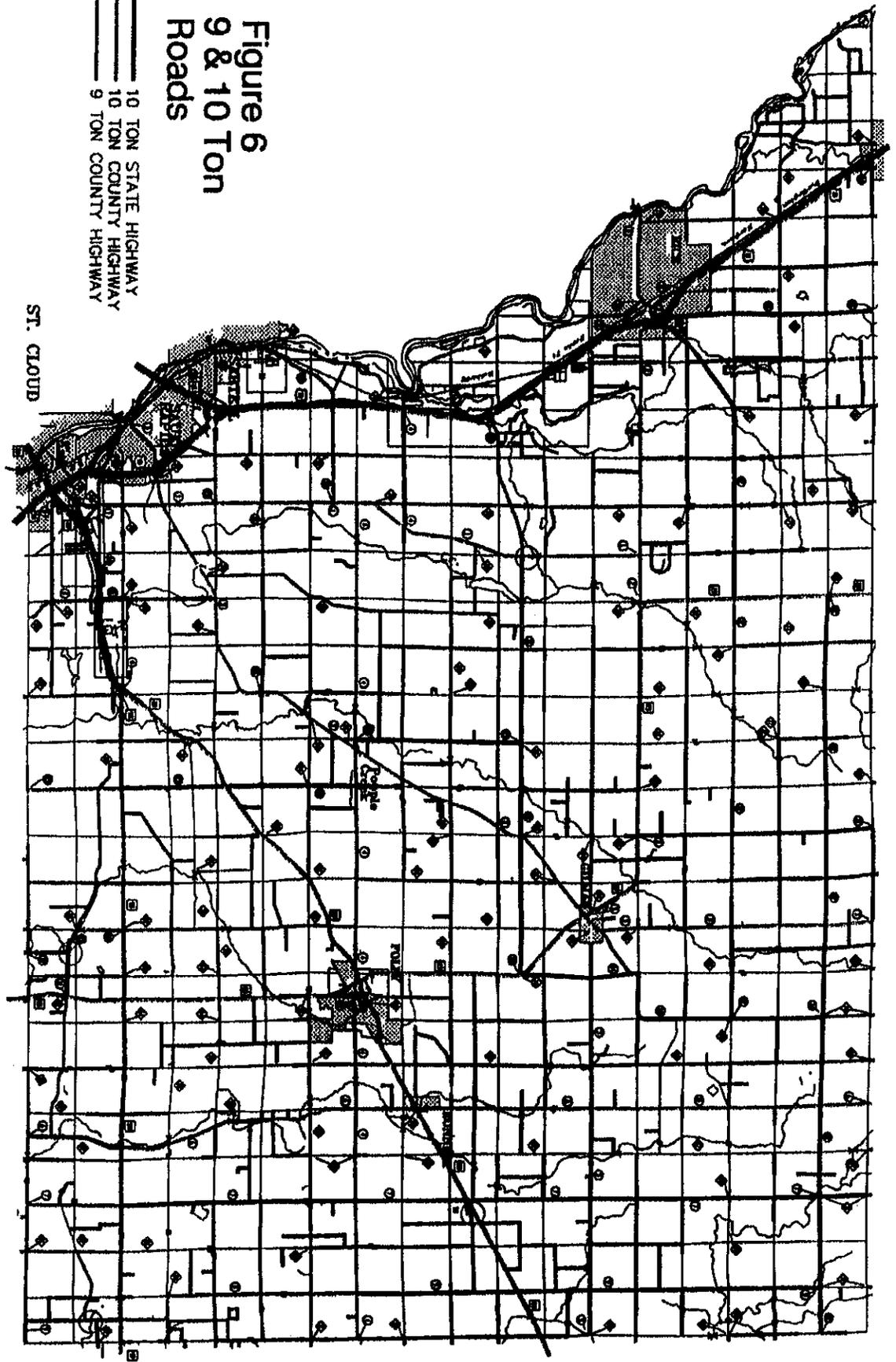
Access to Arterial and Major Collector roads is of primary concern since these facilities normally carry the highest volumes and have the highest traffic speeds. The effects of poor access management are loss of roadway capacity and increased hazards. (Access points introduce conflicting traffic movements that affect roadway safety.) Providing access control in some form, whether it is through grade-separated crossings, frontage roads or right-in/right-out entrances and exits, reduces the number of conflicts and increases safety.

Where significant development has occurred, the number of existing access points is likely to exceed the access guidelines. Unless these areas are undergoing redevelopment, their access will probably not be changed. It is recommended that these corridors minimize any new accesses while consolidating and/or reducing existing points as redevelopment occurs.

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Figure 6 9 & 10 Ton Roads

- 10 TON STATE HIGHWAY
- 10 TON COUNTY HIGHWAY
- 9 TON COUNTY HIGHWAY



Road System Improvement Plans

Circumferential Road

An improvement ranked highly by several local governments and the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization is loop around the urban area of Sartell, Sauk Rapids and St. Cloud in Benton County. This road might run from the interchange of TH 10-15 at CSAH 29 on the north and connect to TH 23 at CSAH 8 on the south. There could be a future connection into Sherburne County at TH 10.

Auxiliary Regional Projects

Other capacity improvements identified as regional transportation projects are:

- Expansion of CSAH 3 to four lanes from TH 10 to CSAH 33 in the City of Sauk Rapids
- Expansion of CSAH 33 to four lanes from TH 15 to CSAH 29 in the City of Sartell.

These two projects would provide high volume roadway capacity continuity from the new Sauk Rapids Bridge through the region.

Highway 10 Interregional Corridor Study

Trunk Highway 10 is a four-lane expressway through Benton County. This corridor provides transportation access to area residents and serves as a major link between the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the St. Cloud metropolitan area and northern Minnesota. Because of its regional significance an Interregional Corridor, a study of TH 10 was completed that outlines management strategies that could be used to improve its function. Benton County supports the recommendations of that study.¹

¹ MnDOT, TH 10 Corridor Study in Benton County, January 2001.

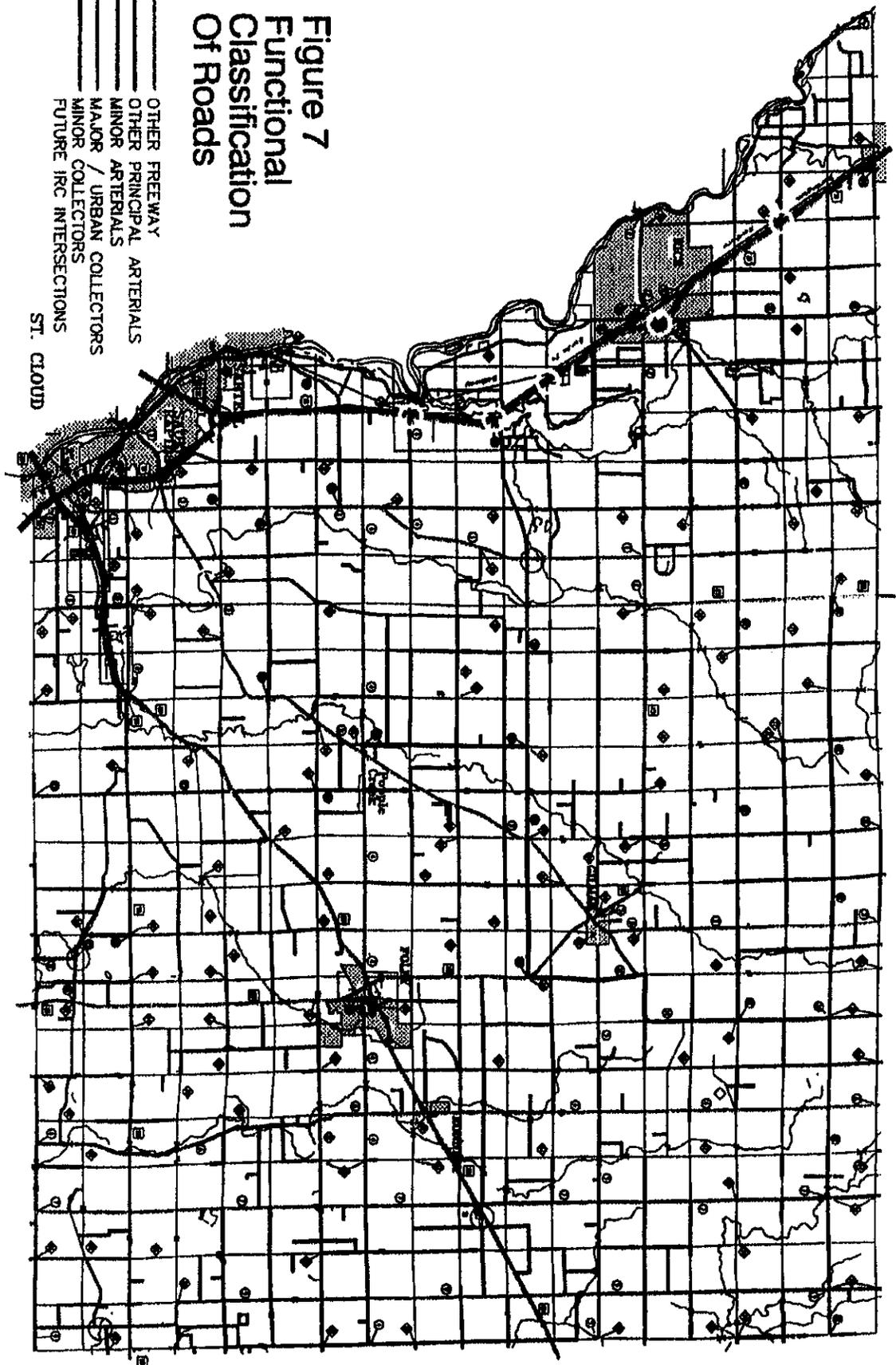
Highway 23

Trunk Highway 23, part of the National Highway System, is classified as Rural Principal Arterial and is on the Market Artery System. TH 23 is part of the "Backbone System" identified by Mn/DOT in the 1970's and is also identified as an Interregional Corridor. TH 23 runs diagonally through Minnesota from I-90 in the southwest corner of the State to the northeast of Duluth. An Environmental Assessment was completed for the major reconstruction project on the portion of TH 23 from east of the junction of TH 95 to east of the junction of TH 25 in Foley. That project will create a four-lane controlled-access road for 8.5 miles on the current alignment.²

² MnDOT, District 3, Environmental Assessment S.P. 0503-75 on Trunk Highway 23 in Benton County, November 2003.

Figure 7 Functional Classification Of Roads

- OTHER FREEMWAY
- OTHER PRINCIPAL ARTERIALS
- MINOR ARTERIALS
- MAJOR / URBAN COLLECTORS
- MINOR COLLECTORS
- FUTURE IRC INTERSECTIONS
- ST. CLOUD



Public Transit

Bus Service

The St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) provides fixed-route public transit service in St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids and Sartell. There are four fixed routes that serve residents of Benton County in those cities as well as Campus Clipper routes that serve the University on both sides of the Mississippi River. Benton County residents within a 20-mile radius of St. Cloud may use the Tri-Cap Dial-A-Ride service. Tri-Cap also provides fixed-route service from St. Cloud to Foley twice a week.

Northstar Commuter Rail Corridor

The Northstar Commuter Rail Corridor runs along TH 10 from downtown Minneapolis to the City of Rice. MnDOT and the Northstar Corridor Development Authority studied transportation options for the Corridor and recommended commuter rail as the best alternative. The initial phase will be a 40-mile line with six stations and an estimated daily ridership of 5,600 trips per day.³

Park-and-Ride Facilities

Benton County does not have any official park-and-ride facilities. As volumes increase and transit service expands, it would be desirable to establish some park-and-ride lots in communities such as Foley and Rice. This would allow people the option to park at these lots and use transit to complete the home-to-work trips to the St. Cloud area. The park-and-ride could also be a central location for carpool participants. These activities could become a joint venture between the transit agency, MnDOT, the County and the Cities. Park-and-ride lots translate into fewer vehicle trips during the peak traffic hours.

³ MnDOT/NCDA <http://www.northstartrain.org/about.cfm>

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