



# 2040 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update

Adopted July 25, 2023



HOUSTON COUNTY  
MINNESOTA

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# Introduction

## Planning Process Overview & Community Profile





## The Planning Process

Houston County's Comprehensive Plan will serve as an expression of the County's future vision and a strategic map to reach that vision. The plan will be an important tool for the County to articulate desired land use patterns to ensure safe, pleasant, and thriving economic environment for residential, agricultural, commercial, and recreational activities. The Comprehensive Plan will also provide the overall foundation for all land use regulation in Houston County. In Minnesota, Counties are authorized to plan under Minnesota Statutes Section 394.232.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan will:

- Guide County residents and decision-makers in planning for future growth and development through 2040 and beyond, ensuring that important agricultural land, natural resources, and other open lands are preserved
- Represent the goals and values of Houston County and a vision for maintaining a high quality of life
- Serve as a communication device between decision-makers, units of government, and property owners
- Provide the legal basis for the establishment of ordinances to carry out this 2040 Plan
- Provide an implementation plan for achieving desired outcomes

## Why now?

Houston County's current Comprehensive Land Use Plan was adopted in 1998. The time that has passed, along with the desire to engage Houston County residents and stakeholders in a new plan, make it desirable to launch this effort now. This plan was developed by Houston County, its partners, and the public and serves as a roadmap for the future success of the County.

## Public Engagement

The community members and their values are at the core of this plan. The planning team performed community outreach events and gathered a spectrum of feedback from those who have a vested interest in the plan's success. The following represents a summary of the engagement performed throughout the planning process:

“ Houston County is one of the most beautiful places on Earth in my opinion. We are right in the middle of the Driftless region, small farms enhance this natural beauty, and our county has not been adulterated from poor land use decisions. ”

“ The peace and quiet, the beautiful bluffs. Good neighbors and sense of community. We live in an oasis and should treat it as such keeping the environment pristine and protected. ”

“ I love the diversity of natural habitats and species, the high number of rare species, and the beautiful, beautiful landscape here. ”

“ Keep county roads well surfaced. Monitor growing ATV activity on public roads/speed/noise (other than farm use). Employ sufficient maintenance numbers and fair pay to keep roads well maintained. ”



## A Snapshot of Engagement:

**329**

Survey responses



### Bus Tour

The County led a guided tour of the County, highlighting the unique character of the area.



### Multiple Touch Points

The project team performed several touch points with the community including phone calls, postings in community buildings, and pop up events.

**165**

Email subscriptions

**Over 2,000**

Website views



### Houston County is a beautiful place.

Participants spoke frequently about both the physical beauty of the County, as well as community. Overwhelmingly, people feel that the County is an exceptional place of beauty.



### Balance needs of agricultural community and the environment

In many areas, agriculture serves as the backbone of Houston County and needs continued support from the community.

Additionally, the natural environment is an important asset that needs protection. The plan should balance both of these community needs.

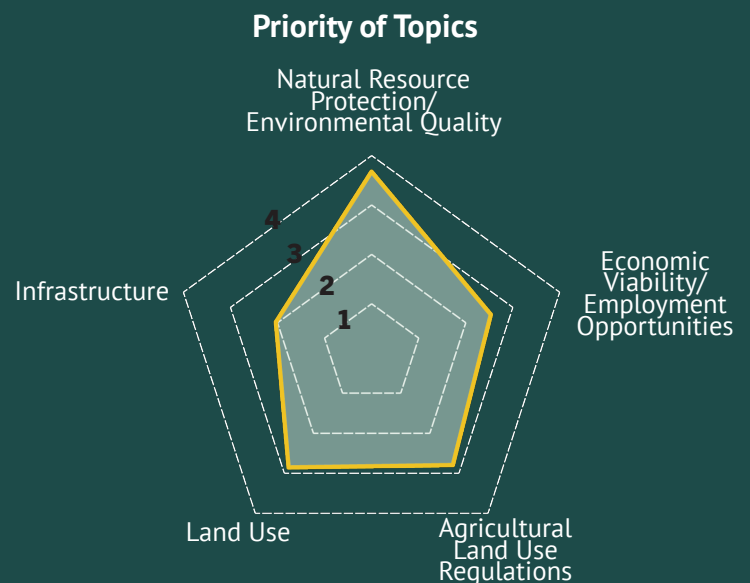


### Economic Development

The County's infrastructure provides many opportunities for continued economic development. Areas for growth include expanding recreational activities such as trail connections, as well as marketing to work-from-home employment opportunities.

## Plan Prioritization

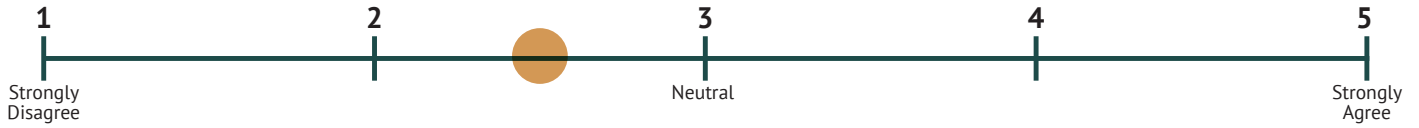
Participants were asked to prioritize the components of the plan. The graphic on the right illustrates the weighted priorities from responses collected. Protecting the natural environment was the top priority while future infrastructure improvements were ranked the lower in priority.



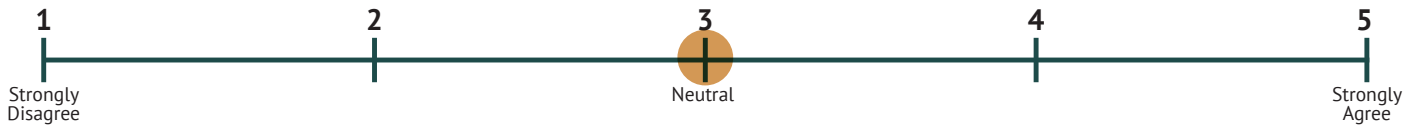
# Continuum Statements

The following statements were presented to participants for feedback. People were asked to rate the level they disagreed or agreed to high-level statements about certain topics in the plan. The results below are representative of the average score received.

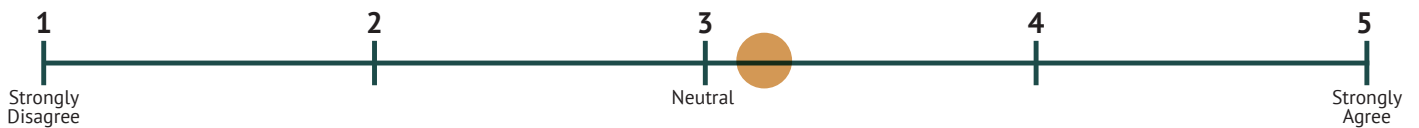
**“Houston County currently has enough employment opportunities for residents for the next 10 years.”**



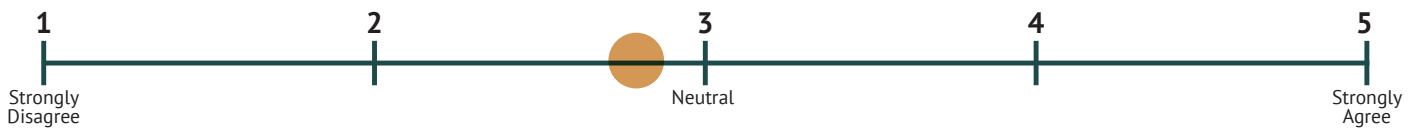
**“There is enough opportunity for industrial development in rural areas outside of City Limits.”**



**“The County’s existing roads are sufficient to accommodate growth in the next 10 years.”**



**“Houston County should modify its ordinance to allow additional dwellings on these agricultural properties.”**





# Comprehensive Plan Framework

The structure of this plan is built off Houston County’s vision and value statements. The remaining framework is comprised of a series of goals and policies that outline the aspirational statements of the community and policies needed to attain them.

## Houston County’s Vision Statement:

“*Provide quality, essential and affordable public services to the community.*”

## Houston County’s Values guiding the plan:

- Houston County recognizes the cultural and economic importance of agriculture to the community. Local decisions should support maintaining and sustaining the vitality of family farms and locally owned agricultural operations and support practices that balance the conservation of soil, water quality, and economic viability.
- Houston County values the importance of sound environmental practices that promote the efficient use of all natural resources and protection of environmentally sensitive natural resources.
- Houston County acknowledges aggregate materials are important to the economic basis of the community and to use in construction, road maintenance and other uses, and strives to balance access to materials with protection of natural resources.
- Houston County affirms the need to promote growth, retention and diversification of business to provide employment opportunities and access to goods and services for the County and regional population.
- Houston County has a significant proportion of land classified as natural resource areas and supports the federal and state regulations requiring careful control of development in sensitive areas to minimize pollution problems and protect public health and safety.
- Houston County has a road network of Township, County, and State roads that meets or exceeds standards of safety and accessibility and encourages continued priority of maintenance and improvement of road segments to support the economic vitality of the County and region.
- Houston County desires citizen participation in all phases of the preparation and implementation of this Comprehensive Plan including planning and general county operations.

# Plan Organization

The following represents the organization of the recommendations in this plan. The goals and policies are set forth in the following chapters, followed by an implementation chapter.

## Community Vision:

The big statement that guides development of the plan

## Engagement:

Community-led planning process

## Goals:

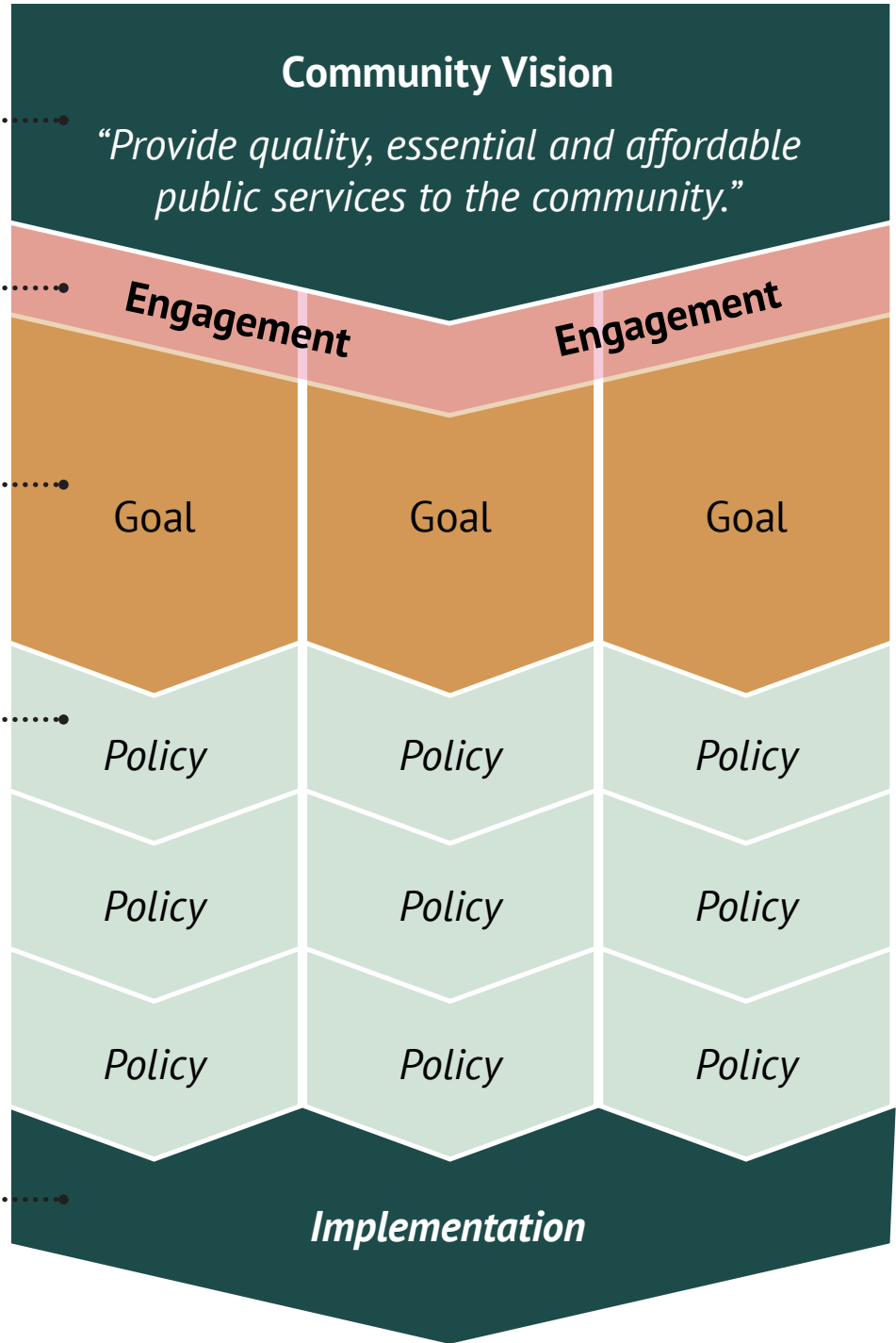
Topic statements that address long-term community desires

## Policies:

Measurable actions needed to achieve the goals

## Implementation:

The steps needed to make the plan a reality



# Context

Located in the Driftless region of southeastern Minnesota, Houston County is made up of close-knit communities in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the state. The County is made up of 5 districts, 17 townships, and 7 incorporated cities as illustrated below.

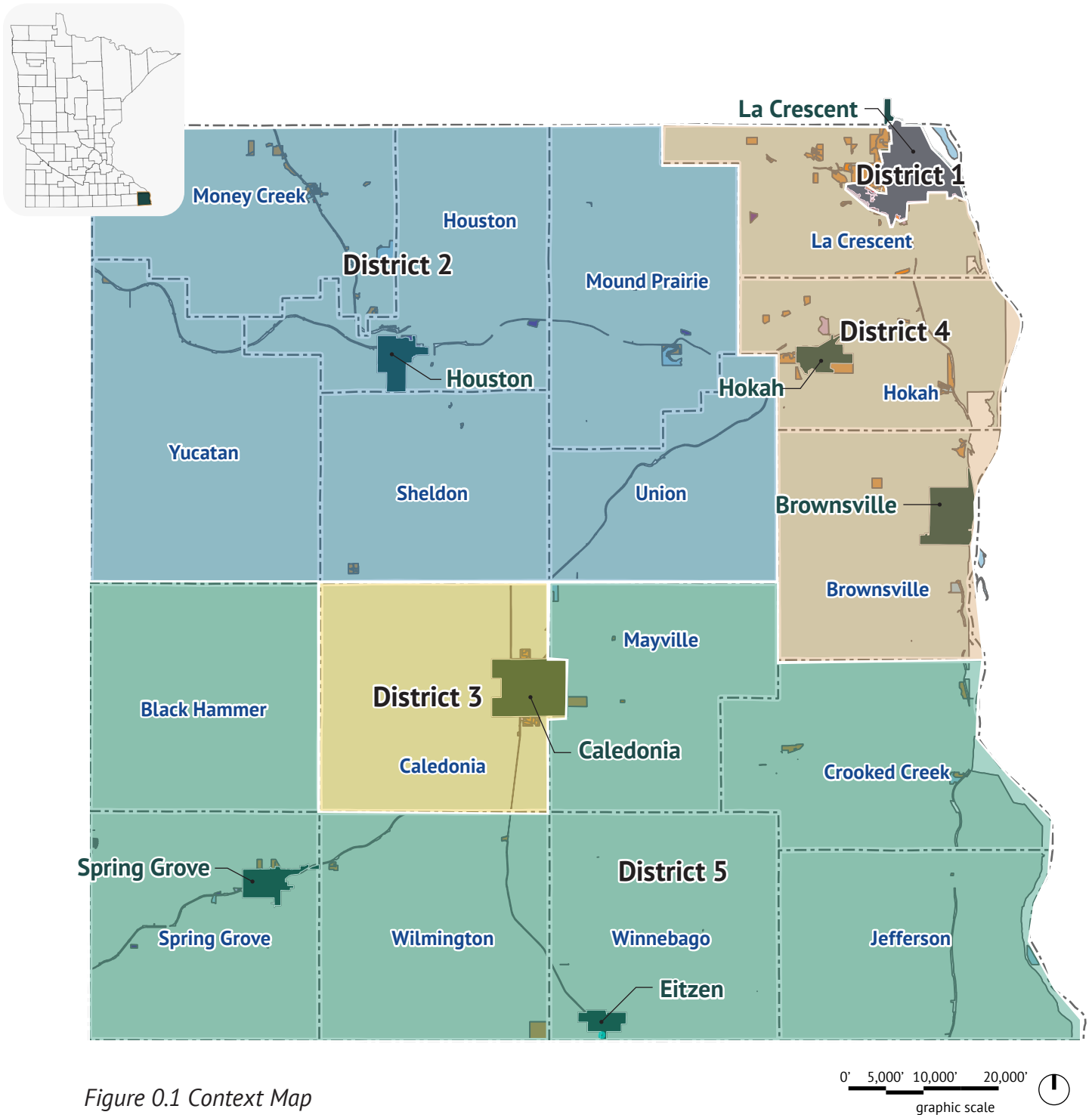


Figure 0.1 Context Map

# History

The Driftless Area encapsulates the portions of Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota that escaped the glaciers of the last Ice Age. The lack of ice means there is no glacial deposits, or drift, present in the region, hence the name. The region was occupied by Native Americans for thousands of years, with archaeological evidence dating back 13,000 years ago<sup>1</sup>. Modern day Houston County was part of the Louisiana Purchase, though it was not until treaties and land cessions with the Native American tribes that the land was organized within American territories. In 1854, the territorial legislature of Minnesota created Houston County. Named after former General Sam Houston<sup>2</sup>, the first county seat was the aptly named village of Houston. Debate ensued over the years of where to house the county government, as the first courthouse and jail were built in Caledonia in 1855. The current courthouse was completed in 1885<sup>3</sup>, though not without a referendum on moving the county seat again, which Caledonia won. The Mississippi provided a means for grains and other goods to be shipped south via steamboat during the 1850s and 1860s<sup>4</sup>, with Brownsville becoming an early shipping stop. Railroads reached the area in the 1870s, and provided early residents of the county with further connections to the larger cities and markets to the east and south. The 20th century saw roads and highways replace rail as the main method of transportation for goods and people in the county. Today, seven incorporated cities and a number of unincorporated settlements and communities call the county home.



*Images courtesy of Houston County Historical Society*

1 <http://houstoncountyhistoricalsociety.org/nativeamericans.html>  
2 Gannett, H. (1905). *The Origin of Certain Place Names*. Department of the Interior United States Geological Survey  
3 <https://web.archive.org/web/20071206133702/http://www.mncourts.gov/default.aspx?siteID=0&page=CourtHouseProfile&ID=40026>  
4 <https://www.mnopedia.org/structure/jefferson-grain-warehouse>

# Chapter 1

## Background and Forecasts



# Introduction

Houston County is located at the southeastern corner of Minnesota, bordering Wisconsin and the Mississippi River to the east, and Iowa to the south. The county is a mix of many unique and beautiful natural and rural landscapes as a result of being within what is referred to as the Driftless Area. A number of cities and communities have called Houston County home since it was first organized in 1854. As the County moves forward into the future, this Plan will be a blueprint for decision-making at the county level.



# Community Profile

## Socio-Economic Conditions

The following data represents the current demographics for Houston County. This information represents a snapshot of the County today and its community. Data was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, Minnesota State Demographic Center and from the County.

### Population

The estimated population of Houston County in 2021 is 18,778 people. As illustrated in the graph below, the population in the County has been in decline. In 2020, the County experienced a small jump in population, but has decreased since.

**Population by Year, 2000-2021**

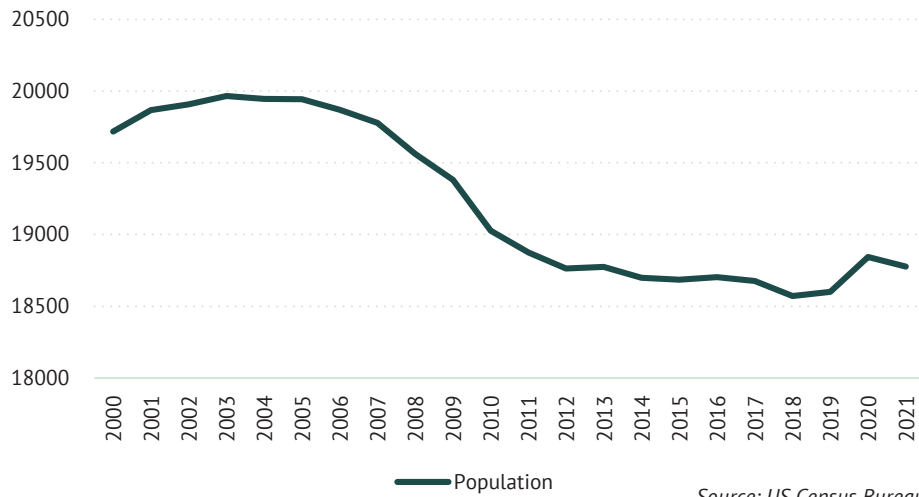


Figure 1.1 Population change over time

Source: US Census Bureau

The County has seen an increase in the portion of the population living within incorporated cities, as only 37.79% of the County’s population lives in the townships. This is a drop of just over 3.5% from the 2000 Census. This change is a result of a loss of over 1000 residents from the townships, while the cities within the County saw a slight increase over the last 20 years.

**Percentage of County Population, 2000-2020**

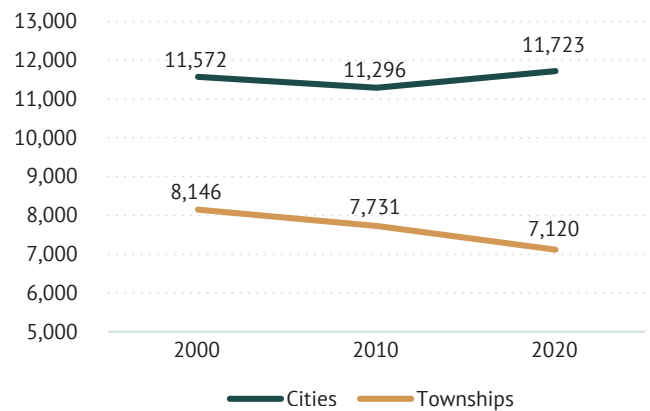
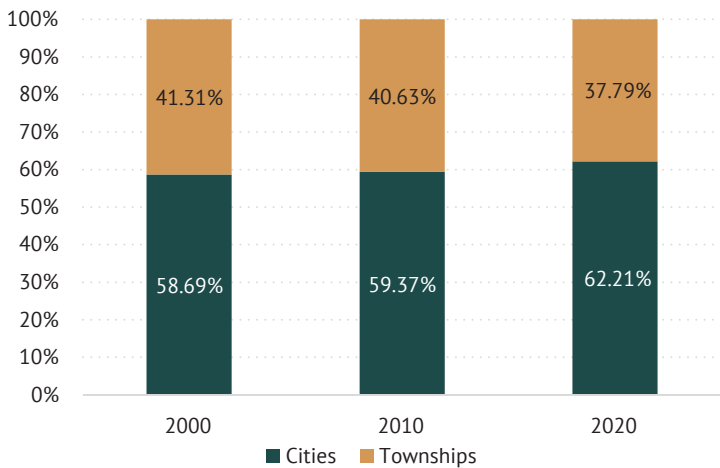
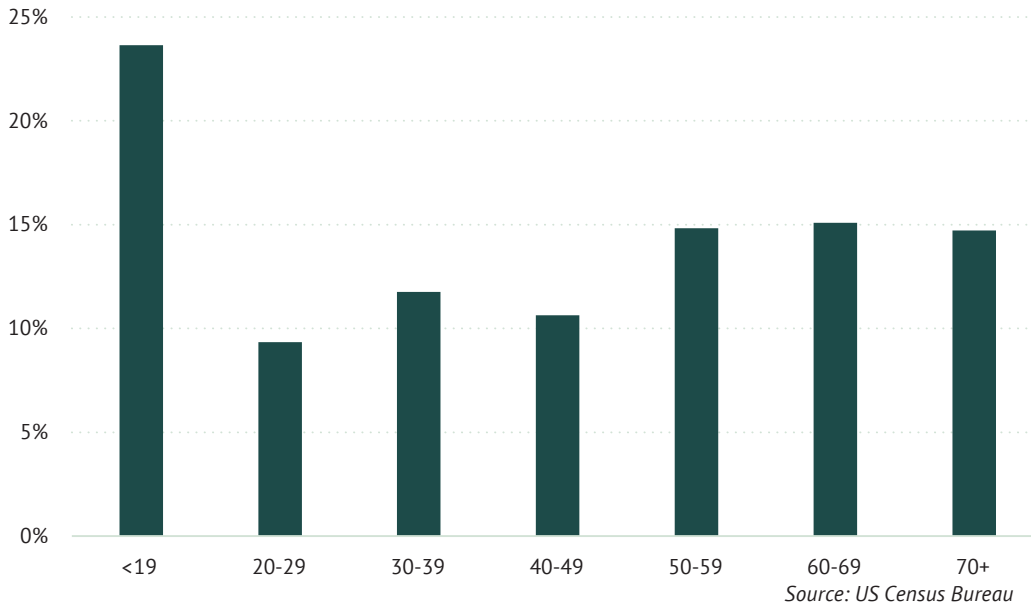


Figure 1.2 Populations within Cities & Townships

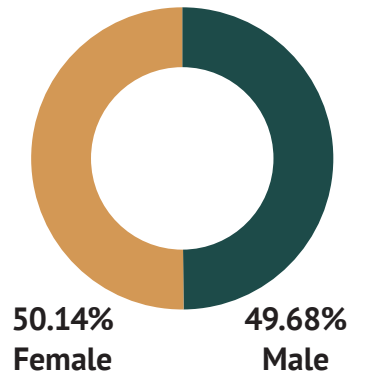
Source: US Census Bureau

The age distribution in the County is shown below. The County’s population skews towards higher ages, with the median age being 45.3 in 2020. The median age of county residents has increased over time, as it was 38.8 years in 2000, and 42.9 years in 2010. The population is nearly an even split in terms of gender, with a slight majority of the population being female.

### Age Distribution



### Gender Distribution

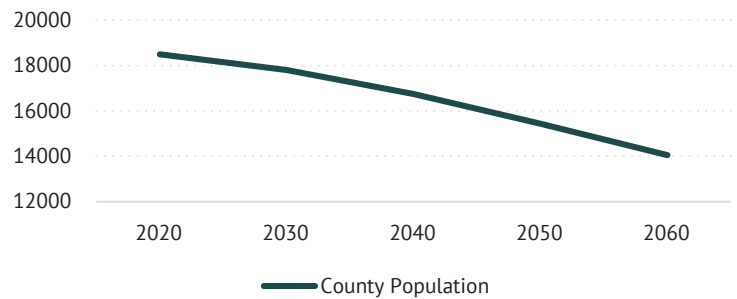


Source: US Census Bureau

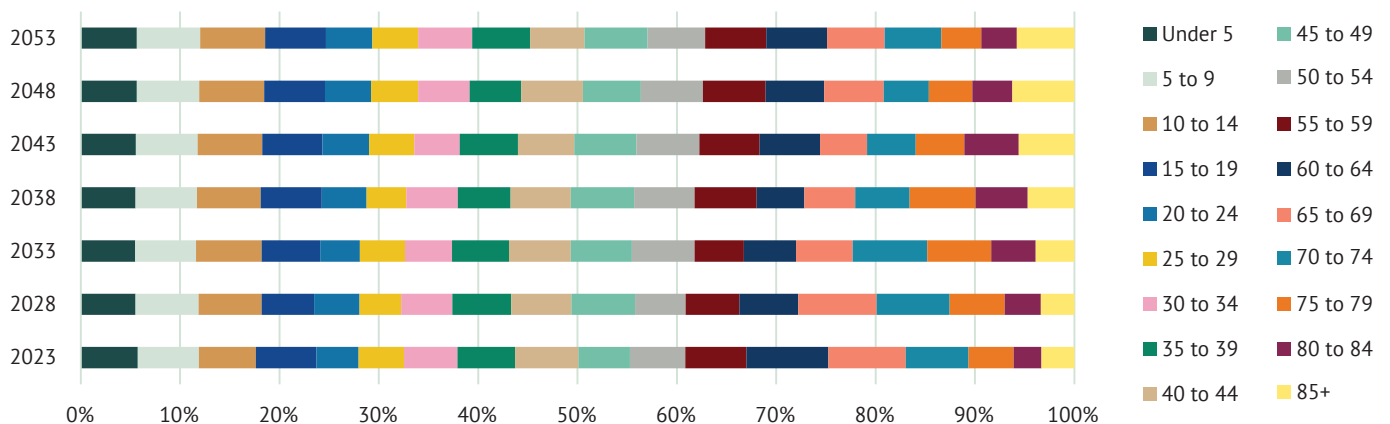
Figures 1.3&4 Age Distribution and Gender Distribution in Houston County

The State Demographer’s Office projects future populations of cities, townships, and counties. The projected population of the county is projected to decline over the next 40 years to nearly 14,000 in 2060. The population by age is expected to fluctuate some, with the State Demographer showing a predominantly older population in the next 15 years.

### State Demographer’s Population Projected - 2020 to 2060



### Projected Population by Age Groups, 2023-2053



Figures 1.5&6 Projected Populations

Source: Minnesota State Demographer



The population of the County is predominantly white, per the 2020 Census. Just over 3 percent of the population reported as being ‘multiracial’.

Racial & Ethnic Makeup	Totals	Percent of Total Population
Population of one race:	18,843	
White	17,900	95%
Black or African American	98	0.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	54	0.3%
Asian	101	0.5%
Hispanic or Latino	243	1.3%
Some Other Race	96	0.5%
Multiracial	590	3.1%

Source: US Census Bureau

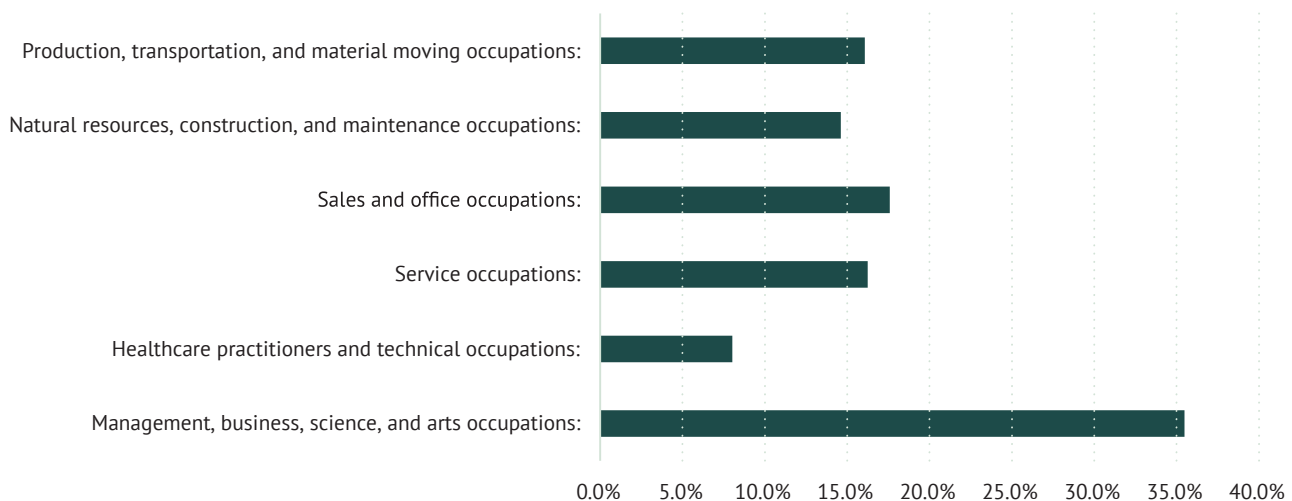
Figures 1.7 Racial & Ethnic Makeup in Houston County

## Occupations

The census measures the occupations of the employed population age 16 and above. 10,118 people over the age of 16 reported as employed in the 2020 census, resulting in a labor participation rate of 68.7%. Participation rates have decreased since both the 2010 (69.5%) and 2000 census (70.1%). The 2020 Census counted just under 15%, 1,479 of 10,118, as working ‘Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance occupations’. Of those 1,479, 182 were classified as ‘Farming, Fishing, and Forestry occupations’. The 2000 Census counted 280 workers, while the 2010 census counted 192 residents within the ‘Farming, Fishing, and Forestry occupations’ category.

Houston County’s median income for a household in 2020 was \$59,514, an increase from 2010 (\$50,855) and 2000 (\$49,196). Approximately 6.4% of people living in the County in 2020 were living at or under the national poverty level in 2020.

### Occupation for Population Over 16 in Houston County

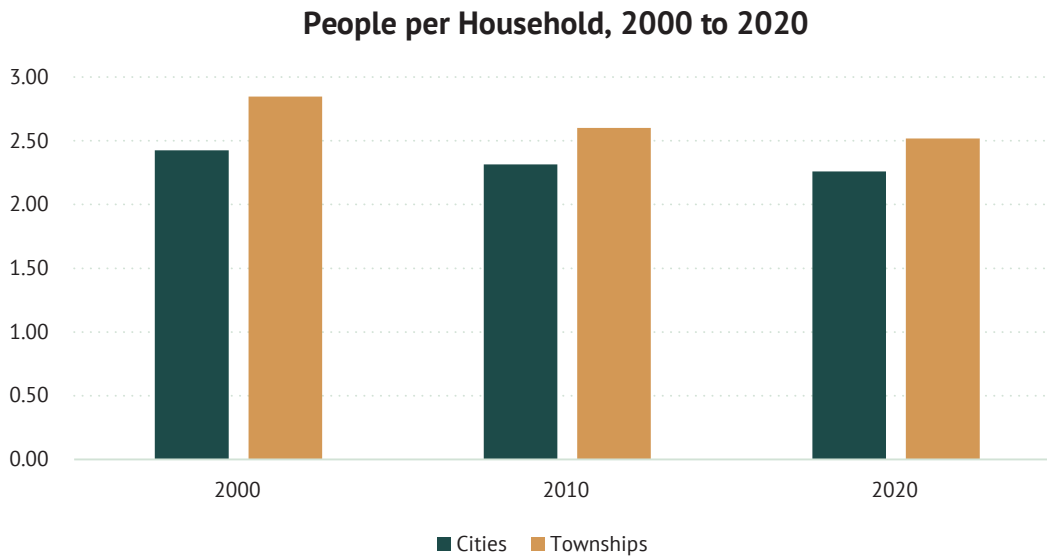


Figures 1.8 Occupation for Population Over 16 in Houston County

Source: US Census Bureau

## Housing & Households

In 2020 the US Census counted a total of 8,773 housing units and 8,286 households within the county. This is an increase in the number of housing units (8,601) and households (7,770) counted in the 2010 Census; as well as in the 2000 Census, which counted 8,168 housing units and 7,594 households. The average household size was 2.22 persons, a decrease from 2010 (2.43) and 2000 (2.53). 44.8% of households had one or more members at age 60 or above. 29.5% of households consisted of only one person, with 12.5% of households consisting of only one person 65 years or older. Household size has decreased both in cities as well as townships.



Source: US Census Bureau

Figures 1.10 People per Household

# Goals & Policies

## Goals

**Goal 1.1:** Preserve commercial agriculture as an essential long-term, permanent land use in the County.

**Goal 1.2:** Protect the major natural resource areas of the County including the floodplains, wetlands, trout streams, steep bluffs, and hardwood forests, so they will serve as a basis for recreation and logging in the County.

**Goal 1.3:** Locate urban development near the major cities where services can easily be provided and extended.

**Goal 1.4:** Implement economic development strategies that reflect our values and supports agriculture, while attracting compatible new businesses.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Enact programs to protect and preserve prime agricultural land which has been historically tilled.

**Policy 2.** Locate rural housing development away from recognized commercial agricultural areas and into areas with marginal agricultural soil, and areas adjacent to existing cities, where urban services can easily be extended.

**Policy 3.** Enact programs to preserve and protect historically significant areas throughout the County.

**Policy 4.** Adopt State of Minnesota standards as minimum requirements for the protection of floodplains, wetlands, solid waste disposal, feedlots, sanitary waste disposal, water quality standards, and other necessary pollution control measures.

**Policy 5.** Enact programs to protect the natural resources in the County. Use natural resources information as a basis for determining future areas for urban expansion.

**Policy 6.** Enact programs to protect and preserve shorelands, floodplains, wetlands, trout streams, and steep bluffs from urban development which may be detrimental to the general public health and welfare.

**Policy 7.** Prohibit extensions of public services into areas where development should not occur due to natural and man-made constraints. Such areas include floodplains, steep bluffs, major forest and parks, and wildlife areas.

**Policy 8.** Adopt utility standards and programs (sewer and water) that will minimize pollution problems and reinforce the County development policies.

**Policy 9.** Allow rural housing in areas where the soils, topography and water table are such that the individual sewage disposal systems can properly function.

**Policy 10.** Locate transportation facilities in such a manner as to minimize environmental damage, and reinforce County growth policies and plans for the areas. These uses include highways, airports, railroads, and other modes of moving people and goods.

**Policy 11.** Coordinate County policies with the adopted policies of the cities for extension of their development into the rural areas, and review plans and ordinances of cities as they are proposed and adopted.

# Chapter 2

## Land Use and Zoning, Housing, Natural Resources, Agricultural Resources, Economic Development, and Alternative Energy Systems



## Introduction

The county's location within the Driftless Area creates a beautiful patchwork of changing elevations and land cover, as visitors and residents alike will tell you. This unique topography results in a variety of existing natural features intermingling with farms, acreages, parks, and a variety of incorporated cities and unincorporated communities. These many natural features create both challenges and opportunities with development of housing, expansion of farming operations, and the siting of business and industry.

## Agriculture & Agricultural Resources

Much of the existing land use in unincorporated areas has historically been centered on agricultural uses and activity. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 891 farms in the county, with the average size of a farm in the county being 244 acres. Houston County's average farm size was similar, though slightly smaller, than that of nearby Winona County and Fillmore County. Of Houston County's 353,280 acres of land, 217,048 acres were a part of farms in 2017. The median farm size was a bit lower than the average sized farm, coming in at 160 acres. Agricultural products sold from farms in Houston County comprise of a variety of items; milk, grains, and cattle/calves comprised of the largest market values. Of the milk producing counties in the state, Houston County ranked 14th in sales in the 2017 Census.

### Percentage of Houston County Land within Farms

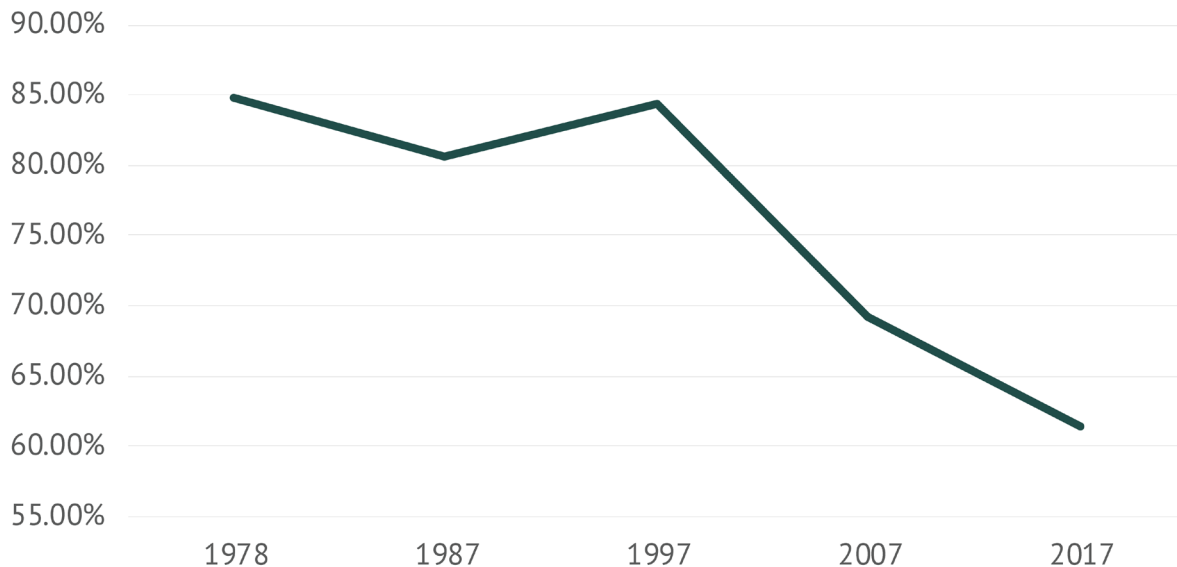


Figure 2.1 Percentage of Houston County Land within Farms

Source: 1978, 1987, 1997, 2007, & 2017 Census of Agriculture

The amount of land in farms saw an 11% decline from the 2007 Census, and a 27% decrease from the 1997 Census. The number of farms has also declined since the 1997 Census, which counted 954 farms in the county. The 2007 Census counted 1,041 farms. The average farm size increased by 9 acres from 2007 to 2017, though this is still less than the average farm size of 313 acres in 1997. The median farm size has shrank by 54 acres since 1997; previous censuses did not report a median size. Looking back to before the Farm Crisis in the 1980s, the 1978 Ag Census reported that there were 1,177 farms in the county, with the average farm being 254 acres in size. The total amount of land in farms was reported as 299,377 acres in 1978.

Compared to statewide numbers, the decrease in the number of farms in the county has mirrored statewide trends. Land in farms has decreased much slower in Houston County than the state. Average farm sizes have increased much more statewide, though the median farm size in the county has closely followed that of the state. The slower trends in between average farm sizes and land in farms suggests that sprawl and development pressures found elsewhere in Minnesota are not as strong in Houston County. A decreasing median farm size and number of farms, compared to a stagnant average farm size, suggests that consolidation of farms is occurring in Houston County, though to a lesser degree than the rest of the state.

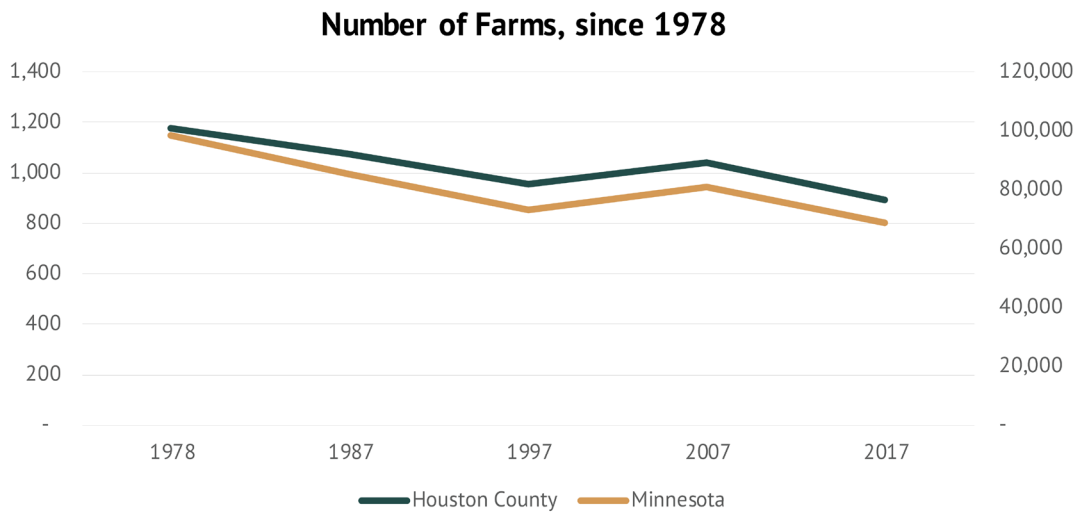


Figure 2.2 Number of Farms, since 1978

Source: 1978, 1987, 1997, 2007, & 2017 Census of Agriculture

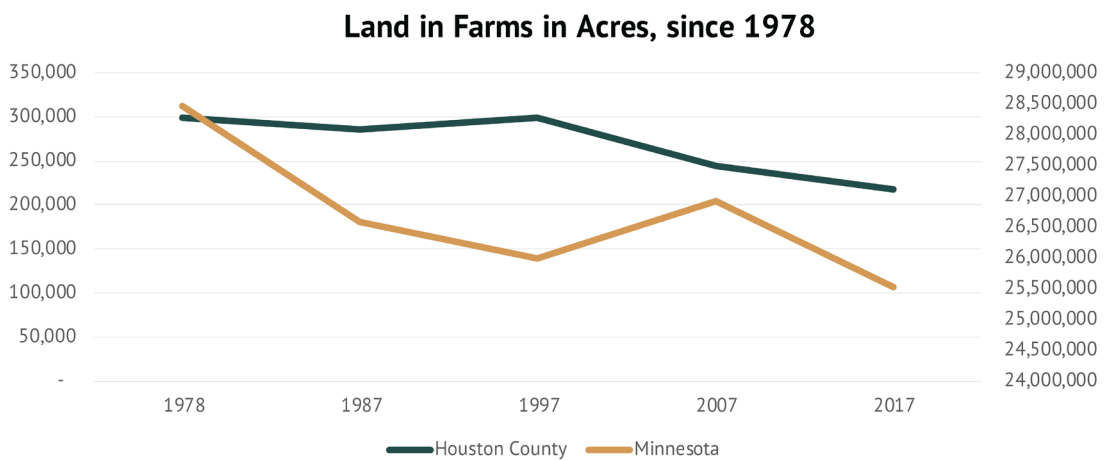


Figure 2.3 Land in Farms in Acres, since 1978

Source: 1978, 1987, 1997, 2007, & 2017 Census of Agriculture

### Median Farm Size in Acres, since 1997

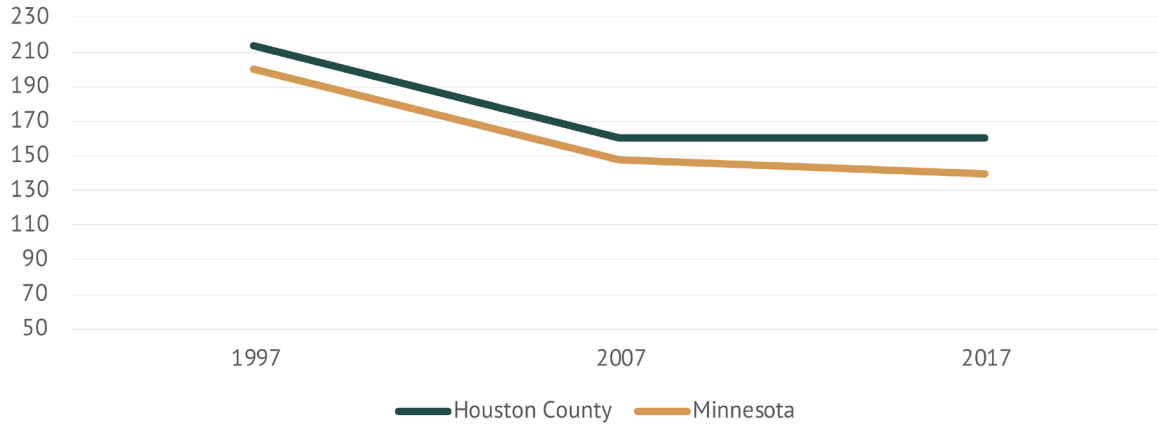


Figure 2.4 Median Farm Size in Acres, since 1997

Source: 1997, 2007, & 2017 Census of Agriculture

### Average Farm Size in Acres, since 1978

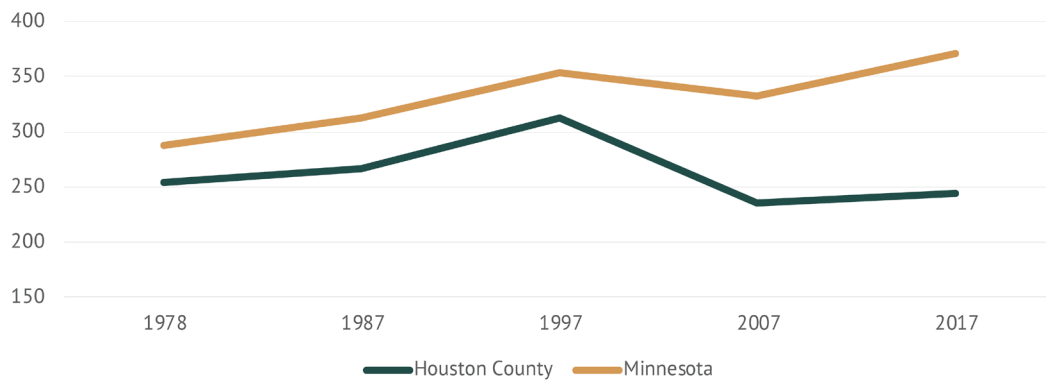


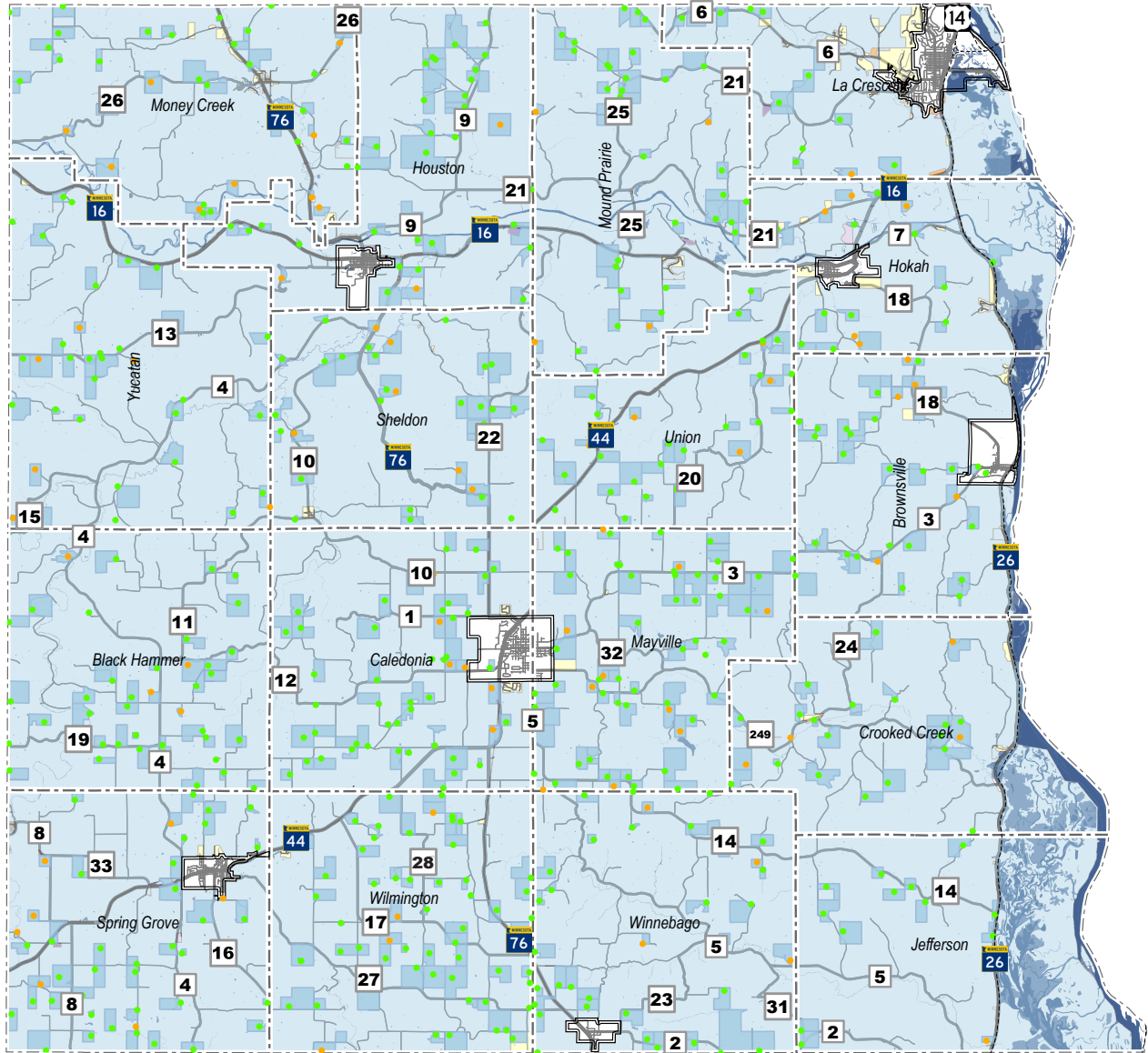
Figure 2.5 Average Farm Size in Acres, since 1978

Source: 1978, 1987, 1997, 2007, & 2017 Census of Agriculture

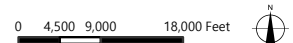
The County has enacted zoning ordinances that permit for agricultural use by right, and has historically limited development of single family residences to densities of one dwelling unit per one 40 acre quarter-quarter section in past iterations of agricultural zoning districts. The County has also strived to continue to preserve commercial agriculture as a viable, permanent land use and as a significant economic activity in the County.

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Feedlots



- Zone Class**
- Agriculture Protection
  - General Business
  - General Industry
  - Highway Business
  - Limited Industry
  - Residential
- Feedlot Parcel
  - Active Feedlot
  - Inactive Feedlot
  - Township
  - Corporate Limits
  - Roadway
  - USA Railroads



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR

Figure 2.6 Registered Feedlots in Houston County

Source: MPCA



# Agriculture Goals & Policies

## Goal

**Goal 2.2: Promote agriculture as a viable, permanent land use and as a significant economic activity in the County.**

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Protect and preserve prime agricultural land throughout the County by limiting development in agricultural areas, unless identified for development under city capital improvement plans or city comprehensive plans.

**Policy 2.** Promote County and state legislation which will sustain and promote agriculture as significant economic activity and land use in the County.

**Policy 3.** Encourage governmental units to avoid locating major public facilities, roads, and developments in good agricultural land areas.

**Policy 4.** Encourage farmers to adopt and maintain sound soil erosion control practices.

**Policy 5.** Carefully control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement areas in the County to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.

**Policy 6.** Clarify what is and is not allowed for lot splits within the County zoning ordinance.



## Natural and Historic/Cultural Resources

Like many counties located in the Driftless Area, Houston County has vast stretches of pristine natural beauty, which the County wants to see maintained for future generations to enjoy. This includes numerous creeks, ponds, lakes, and rivers. The waters in the county eventually flow into the mighty Mississippi River, which also forms the county's eastern border.



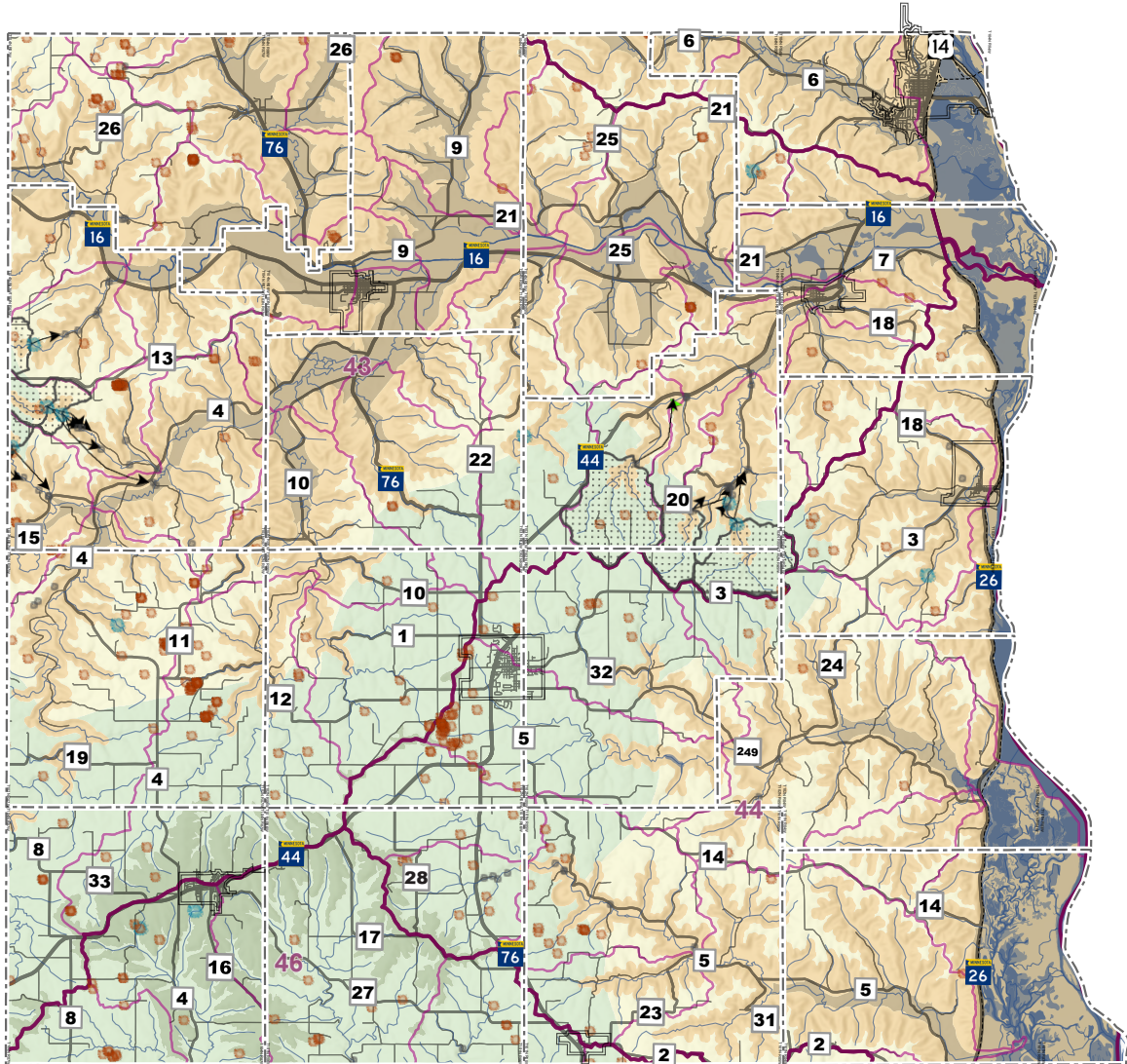
Community engagement during the comprehensive planning process gave insights into the thoughts of county residents and the townships. A common theme arose regarding the protection of water resources within the county. The Houston County Water Plan was recently amended in 2013 and 2017. The Minnesota Board of Water & Soils Resources (BWSR) approved the WinLac (Winona/La Crescent) One Watershed One Plan in 2023. The Root River One Watershed One Plan was completed in 2016. Each plan identifies goals to achieve, as well as an implementation strategy.

Karst is a type of terrain with distinctive landforms and hydrology created primarily from the dissolution of soluble rocks. It is characterized by sinkholes, caves, springs, and most significantly: rapid-flowing underground drainage. This type of terrain is common throughout the Driftless Area, and is especially prevalent within Houston County. Karst terrain has resulted in a number of springs and trout streams naturally occurring throughout the County. This terrain also creates challenges with development and construction, primarily of septic systems and wells. Contamination of groundwater is also a concern, as the rapid flow of groundwater through a karst environment leaves such waters vulnerable to activities on the land surface, and can complicate protection and remediation practices.

The County has identified, under previous Comprehensive Plans, goals and policies to help protect and promote the natural resources of the county. These policies have resulted in shoreland and floodplain regulations being adopted, which limit land alteration within those areas. It is the goal of the County to continue to utilize these tools in order to protect the natural landscapes of the county. Mineral extraction, exploratory borings, and mining are permitted in the county, though such activity is regulated as either an interim use (short-term mining operations of up to three years), or as a conditional use.

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Karst Landscape Units



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI

Figure 2.7 Karst Landscape Units in Houston County

# Natural Resources Goals & Policies

## Goal

**Goal 2.3:** Protect and enhance air, water, and land resources in the County as a vital part of the quality of life.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Promote sustainable land management practices that protect the natural resources in the County, including wetlands and sloughs, bluffs, woodlands, and prime agricultural areas.

**Policy 2.** Protect the woodlands and hardwood forests in the County by carefully regulating the location and density of development and by prohibiting the clear-cutting of the woodlands. Woodlands need to be protected for the following reasons:

1. To absorb stormwater in order to minimize stormwater runoff and the consequent soil erosion.
2. To serve as a continuous source of lumber and firewood.
3. To serve as vegetation in order to retain a proper balance of nature.

**Policy 3.** Protect existing wetlands and sloughs in the County by prohibiting development and adverse altering of these areas.

**Policy 4.** Promote the preservation and improvement of all rivers and trout streams in an unpolluted state.

**Policy 5.** Promote soils conservation and erosion control practices in the County.

**Policy 6.** Encourage development to conform to the natural limitations presented by topography and soils, so as to create the least potential for soil erosion.

**Policy 7.** Control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement areas in the County to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.

**Policy 8.** Regulate the location of waste management activities to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.

## Housing and Economic Development

A majority of the county's population and housing units are located within incorporated cities. Houston County has a number of unincorporated communities that have historically been developed on small lots at 'urban' densities closer to what one would find in an incorporated city.

Land within the county is primarily zoned and used for agricultural purposes, while less productive lands have been developed as other uses (residential, commercial, industrial), or remain as undeveloped open spaces. Most new housing, as well as new commercial and industrial development, is expected to occur within the cities of the county where they can access city utilities and services. New housing outside of cities is expected to be limited to unincorporated communities, where onsite wells and septic can be accommodated, or locations where agricultural activities are not as viable due to soils, topography, and other factors. The county may want to investigate new options for housing in the future, with such options allowing residents to age in place, or allowing multiple generations to develop next to each other. New commercial and industrial growth outside of cities is expected to be focused on jobs and businesses that supplement or complement the rural and agricultural character of the county. The county may want to look towards growing options for tourism, given the many beautiful parks and natural areas available. Remote working, 'teleworking', and 'work from home' have become more common in the last few years; the county may be able to lure these workers to move here based on affordable costs of living, natural assets, and the rural lifestyle the county has to offer.

Goals identified by the county related to housing include providing a broad choice of housing types for all income groups, providing convenient access for housing to public and private facilities and activities, and providing safe, healthful, and blight-free residences and residential developments.

## Housing Goals & Policies

### Goals

**Goal 2.4:** Maximize a broad choice of housing types for all income groups.

**Goal 2.5:** Promote convenient access for housing to public and private facilities and activities.

**Goal 2.6:** Provide safe, healthy and blight-free residences and residential developments.

### Policies

**Policy 1.** Encourage the location of residential subdivisions and major developments near existing cities where urban services can easily be provided.

**Policy 2.** Discourage scattered and “leap-frog” residential development in commercial agricultural areas.

**Policy 3.** Encourage the use of natural resource information such as soils, topography, groundwater, etc., in residential site designs.

**Policy 4.** Prohibit the location of rural housing with septic tanks and drainfields in areas of steep slopes, high bedrock or water table to minimize pollution problems.

**Policy 5.** Use soils and other-natural resources information as a basis for establishing minimum lot sizes for rural housing with septic tanks and drainfields.

**Policy 6.** Encourage the location of manufactured home parks in urban residential or mobile home residential districts which are served by central sewer and water services

**Policy 7.** Only allow the location of multi-family residential development in areas where community sewer and water facilities are available.

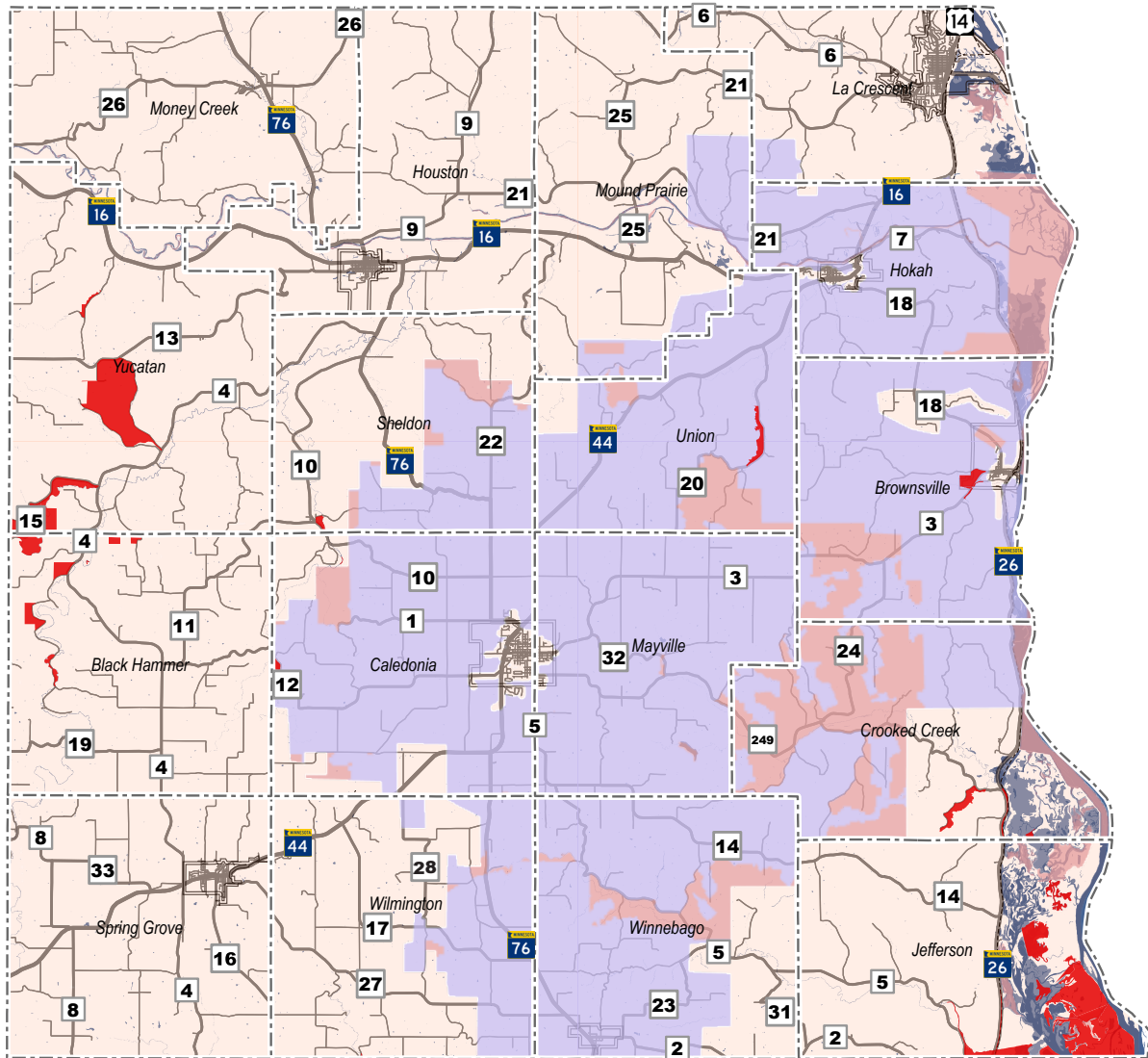
**Policy 8.** Develop and adopt provisions in development ordinances which encourage energy-efficient and sustainable site and housing unit designs.

**Policy 9.** Encourage programs that promote the rehabilitation of existing older homes.



# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Broadband Availability



- No Broadband Available
- Underserved Area (At Least 25M/3M, Less than 100M/20M)
- Unserved Area (Less than 25M/3M)
- 100M/20M
- Roadway
- USA Railroads
- Township
- Corporate Limits

0 5,000 10,000 20,000 Feet

TKDA

SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, Connected Nation

Figure 2.8 Broadband Availability in Houston County

# Economic Development Goals & Policies

## Goals

**Goal 2.7:** Encourage and promote diversified economic development in order to provide for continued employment opportunities.

**Goal 2.8:** Encourage and promote the continued expansion of trade and service industries in the County.

**Goal 2.9:** Encourage and promote intentional commercial facility locations, to provide reasonable access for citizens to an adequate supply of goods and services.

**Goal 2.10:** Encourage and promote the continued expansion of industrial development in the County to provide employment opportunities for the citizens.

**Goal 2.11:** Encourage and promote the location of commercial and industrial development to minimize conflict with surrounding land uses.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Encourage programs that will promote diversified economic development in the County, such as industrial, retail, trade, healthcare, ag-oriented, and service industries.

**Policy 2.** Encourage industrial development in such a way as to enhance the tax base and increase employment opportunities while at the same time placing minimal demands on the environment.

**Policy 3.** Encourage major industrial developments to locate in or near existing cities where public services (such as city sewer and water) can easily be extended and near places of adequate transportation systems.

**Policy 4.** Encourage major commercial developments to locate in or near existing cities where public services (such as city sewer and water) can easily be extended and near places of good accessibility.

**Policy 5.** Carefully consider unplanned, scattered, and strip commercial development in unincorporated areas that may have an adverse effect on existing commercial centers.

## Land Use & Zoning

The County has established zoning districts that guide development within the county. The 'Agricultural Protection' zone encompasses most parcels not within an incorporated city. The zone permits primarily agricultural activities, and limited development of non-agricultural uses. The 'Residential' zone encompasses parcels of land used primarily for single family residential developments near incorporated cities, or unincorporated settlements that were platted out in the 1800s and early 1900s. The County has two zones for commercial business-type uses – 'Highway Business' and 'General Business'. There are two zones that permit primarily industrial-type uses – 'Limited Industry' and 'General Industry.'

Minnesota cities have extraterritorial powers when it comes to land use, in that a city can extend their zoning and subdivision ordinances into unincorporated territories within two miles of their boundaries, unless said territory is within a city, town, or county that has adopted their own zoning regulations. Since Houston County has adopted zoning ordinances, cities within the county are unable to extend their zoning authority beyond their borders. State statutes also grant cities the power to extend utility services beyond their borders to serve adjoining areas. The alternative to extending utilities beyond city limits would be for properties looking for city services to be annexed into the city, where they would have access to city services and have to adhere to city zoning requirements.

Zoning ordinances are not set in stone, they are amended and updated over time to meet the evolving needs and desires of the county. As the county plans for the future, a future land use map is a tool that can help guide the future of development and zoning in the county. This map is to be consulted by staff and elected officials during review of requests that may come before the county, such as a rezoning, an amendment to the zoning ordinance, or a subdivision of land. The future land use map helps guide the future of development within the county, therefore any such requests received by the county must be consistent with the future land use map. The future land use map is not meant to compel or force changes in use or zoning designation of a parcel; the map allows the county to react and assist with decision-making during reviews of requests.

During the lifespan of the Comprehensive Plan, the county may find it appropriate to revise the future land use map if a proposal is appropriate and desirable to the County, or if changes are proposed to the Zoning Ordinance. The process to revise the map is referred to as a 'Future Land Use Map Amendment'. The criteria below shall be considered by the County when reviewing a request to amend the map:

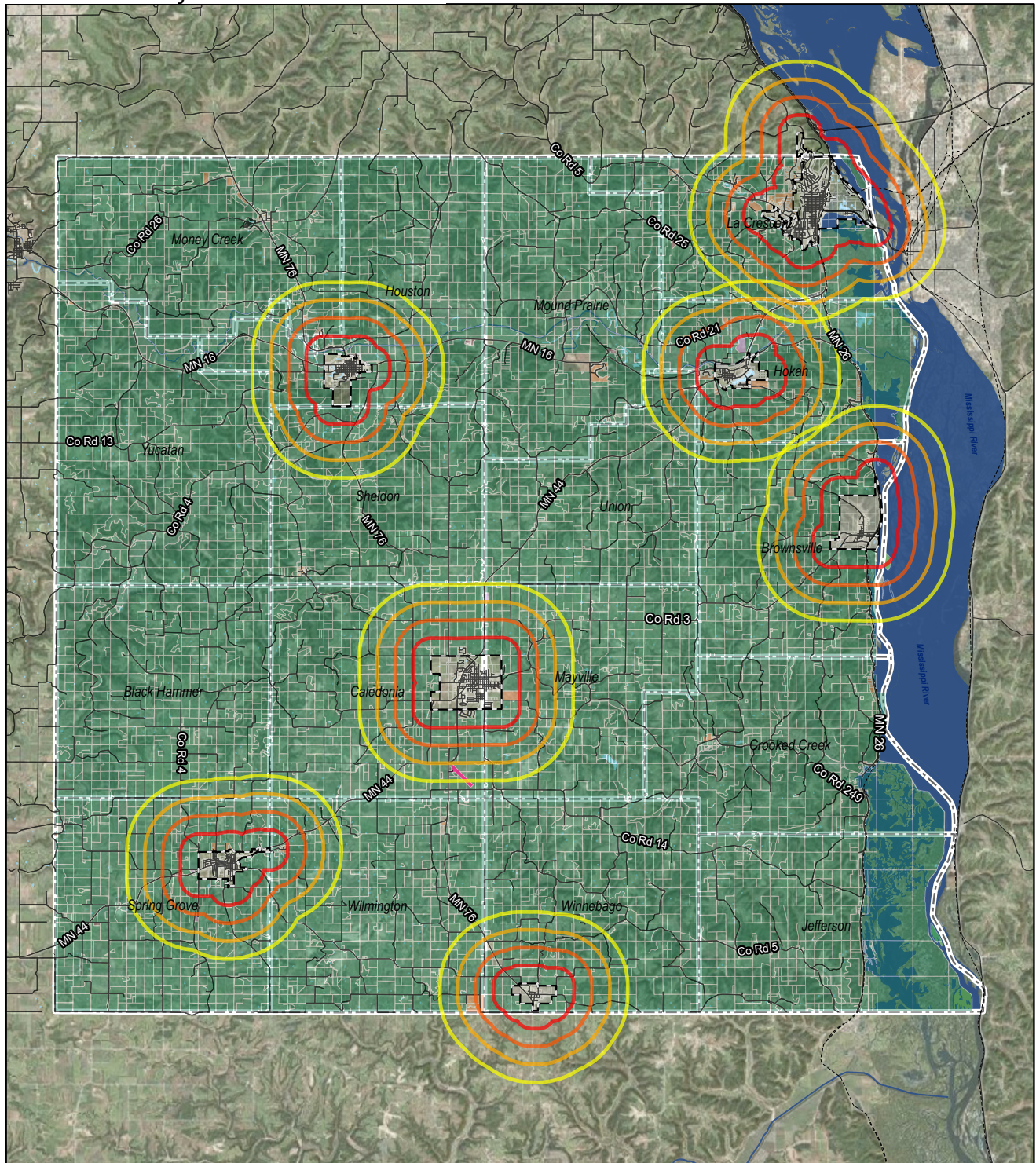
- The proposed amendment would permit a use or uses that are compatible with adjacent uses.
- The proposed amendment would permit a use or uses that are compatible with, and will not adversely impact natural resources (such as wetlands, waterbodies, bluffs) on, or adjacent or adjoining to, the subject property.
- The proposed amendment would permit a use or uses that do not require an expansion of county facilities, infrastructure, or services to the extent that an unreasonable financial burden would be placed on the County.
- The proposed amendment would be consistent with and help the County meet the goals and policies of this Comprehensive Plan.

The future land use map identifies areas within close proximity to incorporated cities, as well as major intersections. These Urban Expansion Areas, due to proximity to main transportation routes, city services, and existing population centers, are the most likely locations to garner interest in development over the next twenty years. The further a parcel is from a city, the likelihood of annexation and denser development decreases. Areas within a half mile of a city are encouraged to request annexation into a city in the event a property owner is planning to develop at densities or uses that are different than what the County permits, or if the properties are unable to accommodate on-site wells and septic systems and require city services. Extension of city utilities should only occur for parcels of land identified within municipal service areas, areas identified under city comprehensive plans, or city capital improvement plans. Orderly annexation agreements can be used to avoid issues between cities, townships, and the county. Property owners within two miles of a city who have prime agricultural land are encouraged to continue to use their land for agricultural purposes. Lands beyond two miles of city limits are expected to remain primarily agricultural in nature, with residential development limited to low densities. Commercial and industrial activity is expected to be limited to locations where such uses are compatible with their surroundings.



# Houston County

## Future County Land Use



<b>Zone Class</b>	<b>Future Land Use Growth</b>	<b>DNR Water Features</b>	<b>Corporate Limits</b>
Agriculture Protection	0.5 Mile Growth	Lake or Pond	MnDOT Routes
General Business	1.0 Mile Growth	Riverine	USA Railroads
General Industry	1.5 Mile Growth	Wetland	
Highway Business	2.0 Mile Growth	Inundation Area	
Limited Industry		Island or Land	
Residential			
Not Defined			

SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR

Figure 2.9 Houston County Future Land Use Map

# Land Use Goals & Policies

## Unincorporated Community:

Unincorporated communities in Houston County are unique in their development by having both residential and commercial areas. However, these areas do not have identifiable boundaries and are governed by the County. Because of their unique situation, a series of policies for land use within these areas are needed and the zoning of each of the major land use categories must fall under specific districts. The following goal shall serve as guidance for development in unincorporated communities:

### Goal

**Goal 2.12:** Cooperatively plan the orderly development and redevelopment of unincorporated communities (Freeburg, Money Creek, Reno, Riceford, Sheldon) to minimize pollution and conflicts with agricultural uses.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Recognize unincorporated communities as urban type densities and apply appropriate land use controls.

**Policy 2.** Require new development in unincorporated communities to install septic systems that meet the requirements of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Houston County.

**Policy 3.** Require all new development to conform to the land use classifications permitted in each zoning district, as established by the County.

**Policy 4.** Permit existing lots of land that are not meeting minimum lot standards or density requirements to be developed, provided they can meet minimum standards for disposal of onsite sewage.

## Urban Expansion Areas:

Areas adjacent to incorporated communities are most susceptible to urban growth pressures; therefore, distinct policies should be adopted to ensure orderly and timely growth, and to retain the land for agriculture purposes until such time as conversion to another use is appropriate.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Carefully regulate urban expansion in the areas around incorporated cities to minimize scattered development from occurring.

**Policy 2.** Develop a review procedure between the cities and the County for all development proposed in this area.

**Policy 3.** Allow urban development in an area only if the area is included in the City's Capital Improvements Program, or identified in their Comprehensive Plan, as areas to provide public services such as sanitary sewers and highways.

**Policy 4.** Plan future urban expansion areas around the cities on projected land use needs as determined by proper planning.

## Alternative Energy Systems

From the use of cords of wood to heat home when Houston County was organized, to today's use of electricity and natural gas, the technology and methods for the generation of energy has evolved. In 2020, renewable sources of energy (including wind, solar, hydropower, and biomass) generated the largest share of electricity in the state<sup>1</sup>. Wind energy now provides most of the state's renewable electricity generation. Wind energy conversion systems of over 40 kilowatts and less than 5,000 kilowatts are permitted under the County's zoning ordinance through a Conditional Use Permit. State law preempts the County from regulating wind energy conversion systems that have a nameplate capacity of 5,000 kilowatts or more.

Over the last twenty years, solar has become an attractive alternative for those interested in generating some potential added income while becoming less reliant on fossil fuels. Solar panels are typically either placed on the roof of an existing building (commonly referred to as 'building mounted'), or are installed as an array on an open area (commonly referred to as 'ground-mounted'). Solar systems are already a permitted use under the county's zoning ordinance. The Minnesota Department of Commerce has collected a vast resource of information for property owners interested in installing solar panels. One such source is the 'MN Solar Suitability Analysis App', which provides location-based information on potential solar generation<sup>2</sup>. A variety of state and federal loans, grants, and tax credits have been created over the last twenty years to incentivize property owners to invest in renewable energy<sup>3</sup>. Mi Energy Cooperative also has a variety of information for county residents to utilize when considering alternative forms of energy.

## Alternative Energy Goals & Policies

### Goal

**Goal 2.13:** Encourage options for alternative energy systems in the County

### Policies

**Policy 1.** Review and explore standards and permitting requirements for alternative energy systems used for personal use, or by individual residences or businesses.

1 <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=MN#40>

2 <https://solar.maps.umn.edu/app/?lat=43.66848278423848&long=-91.49656328564241>

3 <https://programs.dsireusa.org/system/program/mn>

# Chapter 3

## Transportation, Water Resources, and Solid Waste Management



# Transportation

The movement of goods and people throughout the County is primarily carried out through a vast network of streets and roadways under the jurisdictional authority of the State of Minnesota, Houston County, townships, and cities. The rural nature of Houston County requires that the transportation system allow for the efficient movement of products and raw materials to sustain economic vitality. It is also imperative that the County’s transportation system complements the geographic characteristics of the County. The County also owns a public airport. Canadian Pacific (CP) owns a Class I railroad located along the eastern edge of the county.

## Existing Road Conditions

A well maintained transportation system improves quality of life, fosters environmental health, and ensures the County’s economic competitiveness. According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the County has 927.756 miles of roadways, as of 2021. Over half of the roads within the County are gravel, while nearly 44% are a bituminous surface. Approximately one percent of roads in the County are either dirt/unimproved, or surfaced with concrete. Figure 3.1 shows the miles of roads within the County by route type. Township Roads make up approximately 50% of roads within the County. Route types under the County’s jurisdiction include major and minor collector roadways. The State has jurisdiction over US Highways, State Highways, and roads within State Forests and Parks. Municipal State Aid Streets and Municipal Streets are under the jurisdiction of the cities they are located within.

Route Type	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles	Daily VMT	Annual VMT
US Highway	3.21	12.89	51,290	18,720,954
State Highway	103.37	208.31	296,269	108,138,332
County State Aid Highway	248.47	496.94	98,095	35,804,729
Municipal State Aid Street	6.09	12.18	6,199	2,262,508
County Road	13.51	27.02	3,431	1,252,451
Township Road	465.10	930.20	27,906	10,185,624
Municipal Street	74.74	149.48	42,004	15,331,341
State Park/Forest Road	4.34	8.68	22	7,922
Alleyways	8.93	17.85	45	16,292

Figure 3.1 Miles of Roads & Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), by Route Type

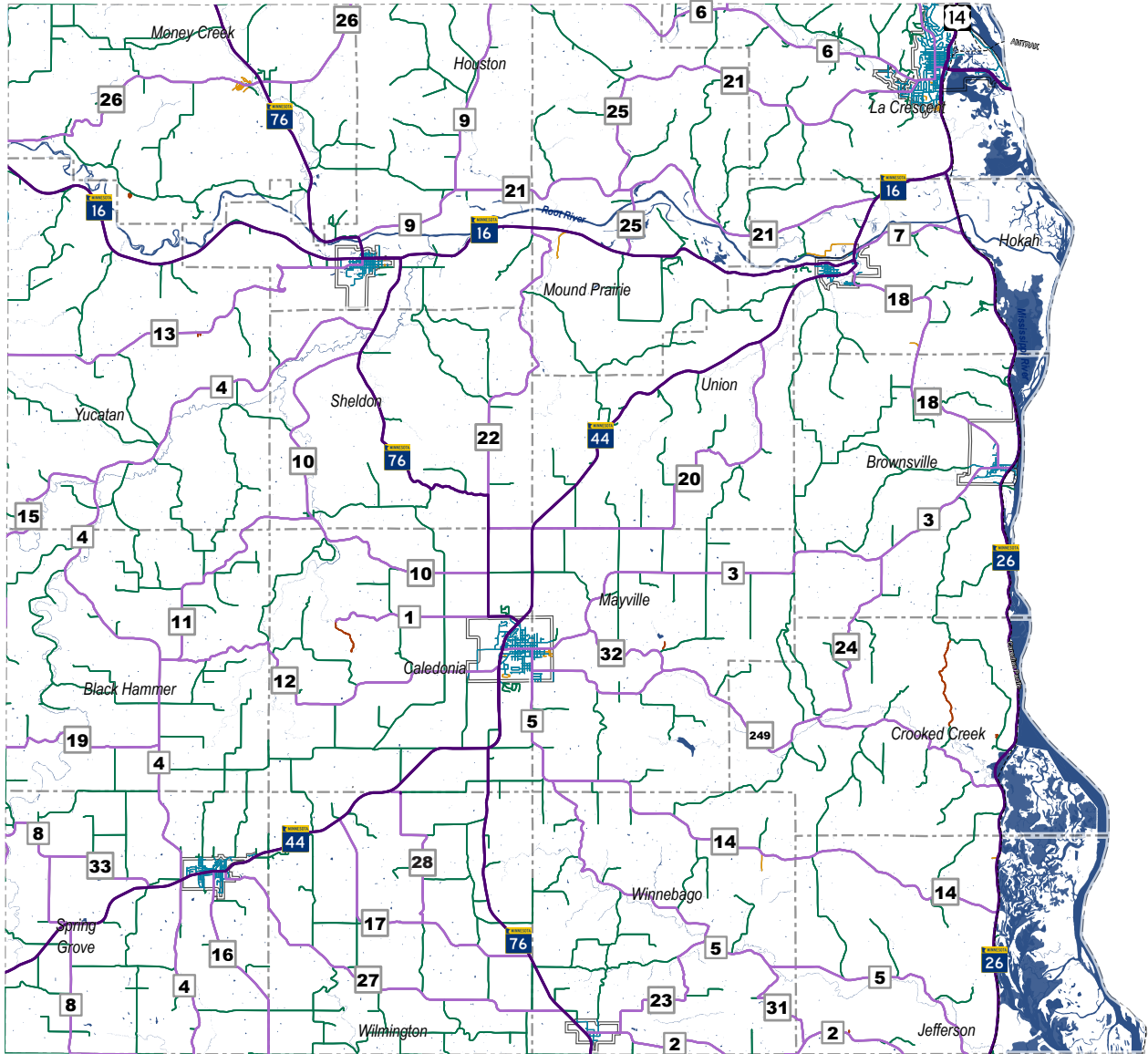
Source: MnDOT

## Functional Road Classifications

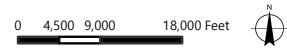
Functional classification is the grouping of streets and highways into classes or systems according to the character of service they are intended to provide. MnDOT develops and updates the classification of roads within Minnesota, in cooperation with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regional development organizations (RDOs), counties, and local jurisdictions.

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Route Jurisdiction



- Route Jurisdiction
- City or Municipal Highway Agency
  - County Highway Agency
  - Private (other than Railroad)
  - State Highway Agency
  - State Park, Forest, or Reservation Agency
  - Town or Township Highway Agency
  - USA Railroads
  - Township
  - Corporate Limits

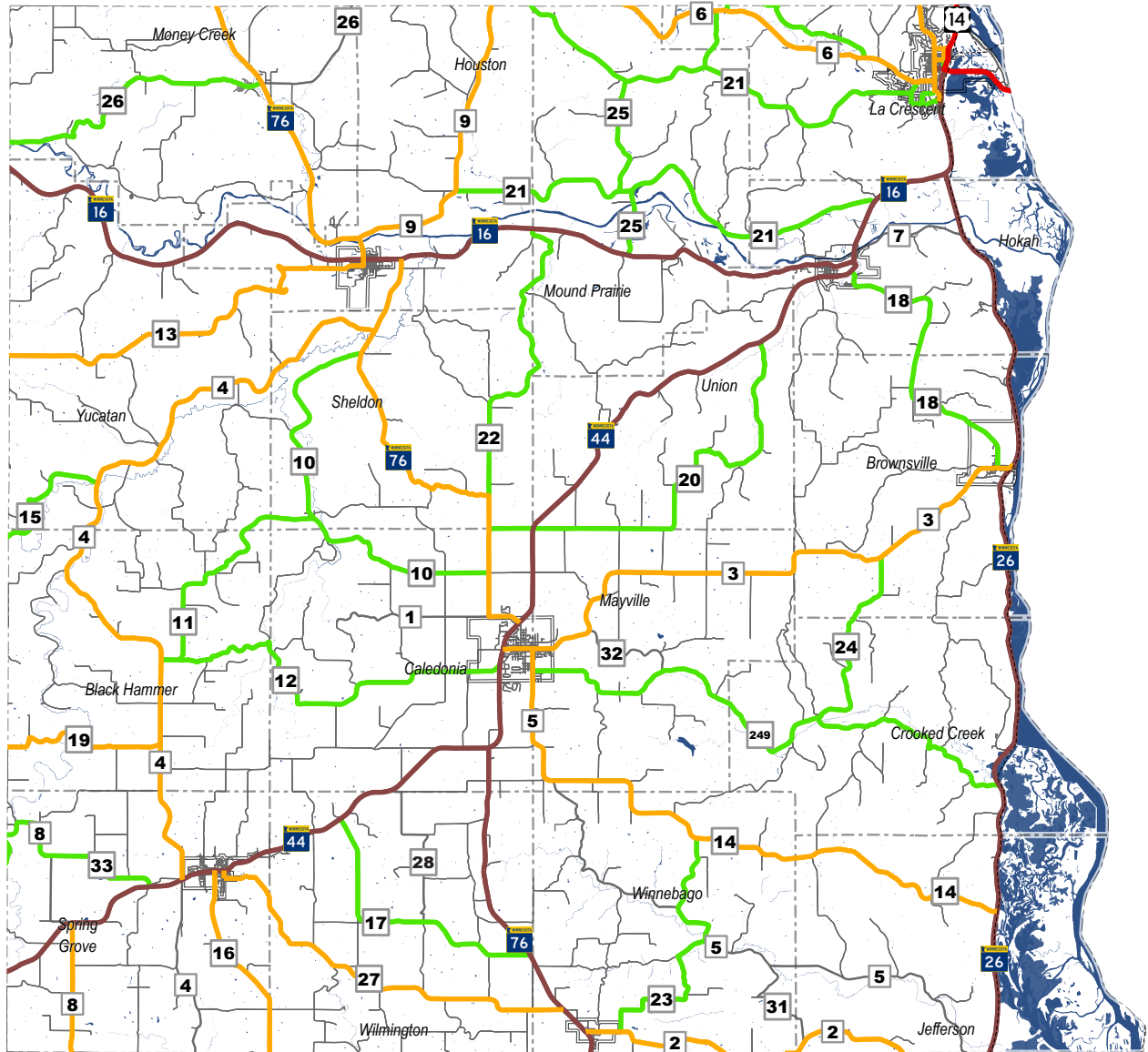


SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI, MNDOT

Figure 3.2 Route Jurisdiction in Houston County

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Functional Classifications



Functional Classification

- Interstate
- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Local
- USA Railroads
- Township
- Corporate Limits



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI, MNDOT

Figure 3.3 Functional Classifications in Houston County

The three main types of functional classifications are Arterial, Collector, and Local. ‘Arterial’ roadways can be further split into either ‘Principal’ or ‘Minor Arterial’ roads. ‘Principal Arterials’ include interstate highways, controlled-access highways, and other highways; these roadways provide a high degree of vehicle mobility in urban areas and through rural communities. Minor Arterials provide service for trips of moderate length, as compared to Principal Arterials, and are typically designed to provide relatively high overall travel speeds, with minimum interference to through movement in rural areas. Houston County does not have any interstate or controlled-access highways. The closest interstate highway to the County is Interstate 90, which runs east-west through Winona County before crossing the Mississippi River north of La Crescent into Wisconsin.

‘Collector’ roads connect traffic using Local Roads to Arterials. ‘Collector’ roads can be broken down into either ‘Major’ or ‘Minor’. ‘Collector’ roads generally serve primarily intra-county travel, and have moderate posted speed limits compared to ‘Arterial’ roads. ‘Major Collectors’ generally have less driveway connections and higher speed limits than ‘Minor Collectors’. Any remaining roadways not classified as ‘Arterial’ or ‘Collector’ are classified as ‘Local’. A majority of the roads within the County are under the ‘Local’ classification.

Functional Classification	Centerline Miles	Lane Miles	Daily VMT	Annual VMT
Arterial	88.22	184.48	318,135	116,119,441
<i>Principal Arterial</i>	3.21	12.89	51,290	18,720,954
<i>Minor Arterial</i>	85.00	171.59	266,845	97,398,487
Collector	253.24	506.46	131,057	47,835,687
<i>Major Collector</i>	123.61	247.21	98,607	35,991,687
<i>Minor Collector</i>	129.63	259.25	32,450	11,844,000
Local	586.30	1172.61	76,068	27,765,024

Figure 3.4 Miles of Roads & Vehicle Miles Traveled, by Functional Classification

Source: MnDOT

## Road Usage

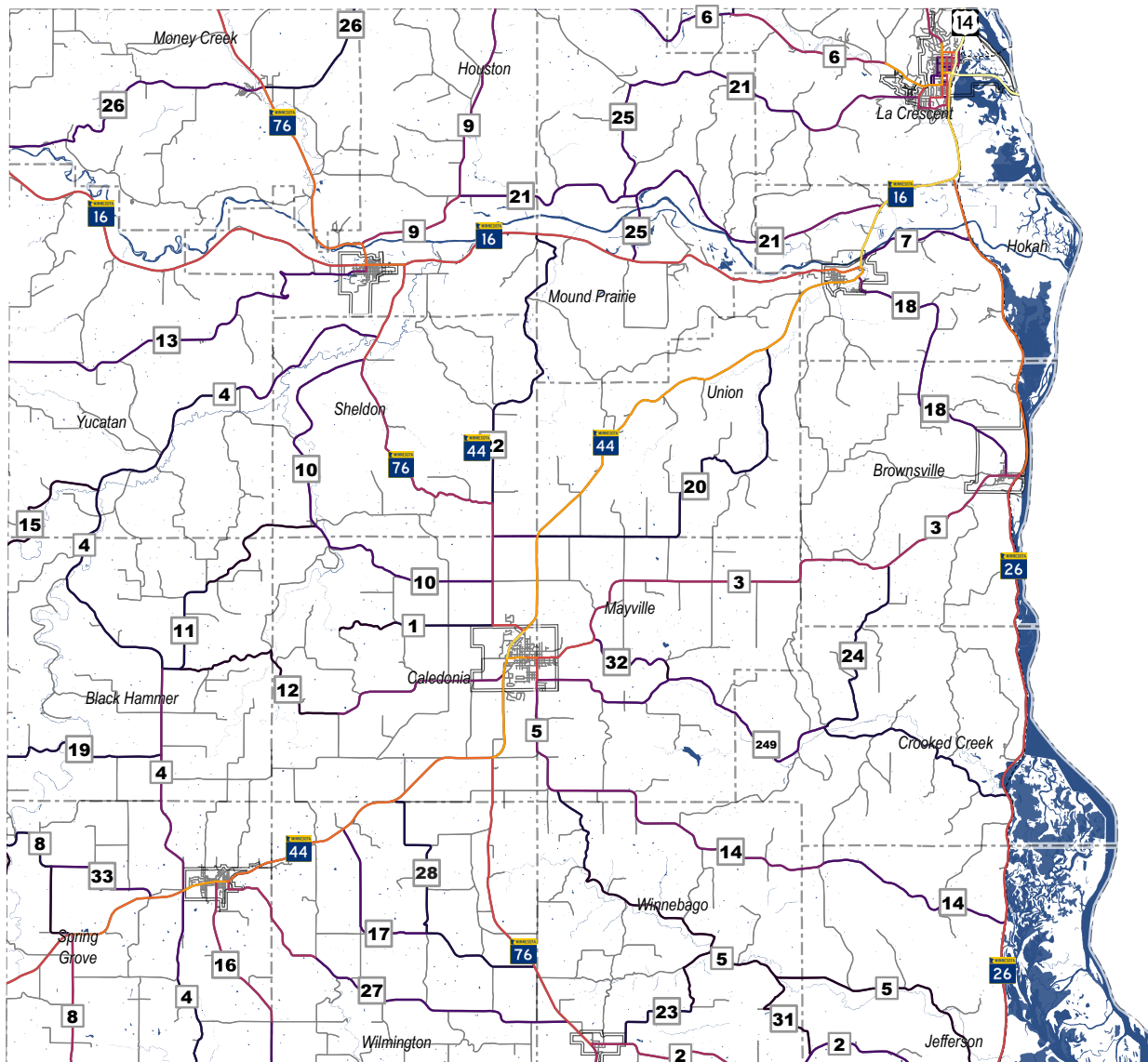
MnDOT collects information on usage of roads in the state, including ‘vehicle miles traveled’ (VMT), and ‘annual average daily traffic’ (AADT). The most recent daily and annual VMT counts, from 2021, sorted by road type and functional class, are shown in the previous tables. The AADT of roads in the County is shown on the following map. Roads with the highest usage tend to be state and county state aid highways, with township roads having lower usage.

Automobiles are the primary users of roadways in the County. Commercial trucks and freight haulers are also popular users of roadways in the County. Farm equipment is a common sight on roads during planting and harvest seasons.



# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Annual Average Daily Traffic



- Annual Average Daily Traffic
- 50-70 daily travelers
  - 70-200 daily travelers
  - 200-405 daily travelers
  - 405-737 daily travelers
  - 737-1232 daily travelers
  - 1232-2000 daily travelers
  - 2000-3450 daily travelers
  - 3450-6500 daily travelers
  - 6500-15000 daily travelers
  - 15000-203000 daily travelers
  - Unknown daily travelers

- USA Railroads
- Township
- Corporate Limits



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI, MNDOT

Figure 3.5 Map of Houston County Routes and AADTs

Source: MnDOT Traffic Forecasting & Analysis

## Road Improvements and Maintenance

Maintaining existing roads within the County is critical to the success of Houston County’s transportation network. The Houston County Highway Department is responsible for the design, construction, inspection, maintenance, and repair of the County highway system and the 180 bridges owned by the County and/or townships. The Highway Department currently has three outlying shops; over the next twenty years it is expected that the storage sheds for salt and sand at each shop will likely need replacement.

The department plans and schedules future projects based on needs and costs. Houston County has recently reconstructed many of their roads, which allows the department to focus on preserving and maintaining existing roads. The County’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) helps plan and fund large projects. Maintenance of the roads also includes paving shoulders and widening aggregate shoulders, with paved shoulders often used by bicyclists as well as farm equipment.

Houston County is required to comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In 2016-2018, the County conducted an inventory and evaluation of pedestrian facilities within its public right of way. Based on this self-evaluation, the County developed an improvement schedule. Recent and upcoming projects that the County has performed to improve accessibility include installing and repairing curb ramps and sidewalks, crosswalk and bike lane pavement markings, signage, street lighting, traffic control signals, and rectangular rapid flash beacons (RRFB). These projects are covered in detail under the County’s ADA Transition Plan<sup>1</sup>, which was adopted in 2019.

MnDOT created a Highway Safety Plan and Highway Safety Improvement Program to plan and implement safety projects and strategies. MnDOT District 6 (southeast Minnesota) has a ‘Toward Zero Deaths’ strategic plan, using education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency medical and trauma services to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on roadways to zero.

Crash Severity	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
<b>Fatal</b>	2	0	4	0	3	2	3	1	2	1	18
<b>Serious Injury</b>	4	2	2	5	4	5	4	1	3	6	36
<b>Minor Injury</b>	19	13	13	22	21	18	18	18	20	21	183
<b>Possible Injury</b>	24	24	20	12	15	16	23	14	13	24	185
<b>Property Damage Only</b>	170	133	121	76	71	73	85	84	82	80	975
<b>Unknown</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>1397</b>

Figure 3.6 Houston County Crash Data

Source: MnDOT

## Transit

Houston County does not operate any transit systems in the County. However, residents within the County have the option to utilize public transit services from Rolling Hills Transit, operated by Southeast Minnesota Community Action Agency (Semcac), which receives funding from Houston County. Rolling Hills Transit serves all of Houston County, and also provides services in Dodge, Fillmore, Olmsted, and Winona counties. In 2022, Semcac reported that it provided 8,482 rides in Houston County.

The City of La Crescent is a part of the La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility (MTU), which has routes in La Crescent, La Crosse, and Onalaska, WI. The Apple Express route provides bus services throughout La Crescent, and gives riders the opportunity to transfer and connect to other MTU routes at the Downtown Transit Center located in downtown La Crosse.

1 Source: ADATransitionPlan.pdf (houston.mn.us)

At the state level, MnDOT conducted a study of travel and transit within District 6 in 2016, looking at what new services may be feasible for the region. MnDOT's latest Transit Investment Plan<sup>2</sup> for greater Minnesota was last updated in 2015; the plan outlines strategic direction and investment priorities for transit services over a twenty year time period.

## Air Travel

The County is home to one airport, the Houston County Airport (CHU), located approximately 2.5 miles south of the County Courthouse in Caledonia. The facility opened in 1969, and is owned and operated by Houston County. The airport is a general aviation facility primarily serving local business owners and recreational pilots. The property for CHU consists of approximately 52 acres of land. The runway, paved with an asphalt surface, has a length of 3,499 feet, and is 77 feet wide. An Arrival/Departure building is on the site to greet users of the airport, along with hangars for aircraft and equipment. In 1977, the County adopted an Airport Zoning Ordinance, which prohibits land uses and development that could create hazards to the airport or the flying public. The County recently adopted a Master Plan and a Layout Plan for CHU in 2020, which guides planning, maintenance, and new improvements for the airport over the next twenty years.

Larger airports nearby to Houston County include La Crosse Regional Airport (approximately 26 miles north of the County Courthouse), and Rochester International Airport (approximately 70 miles northwest of the County Courthouse).



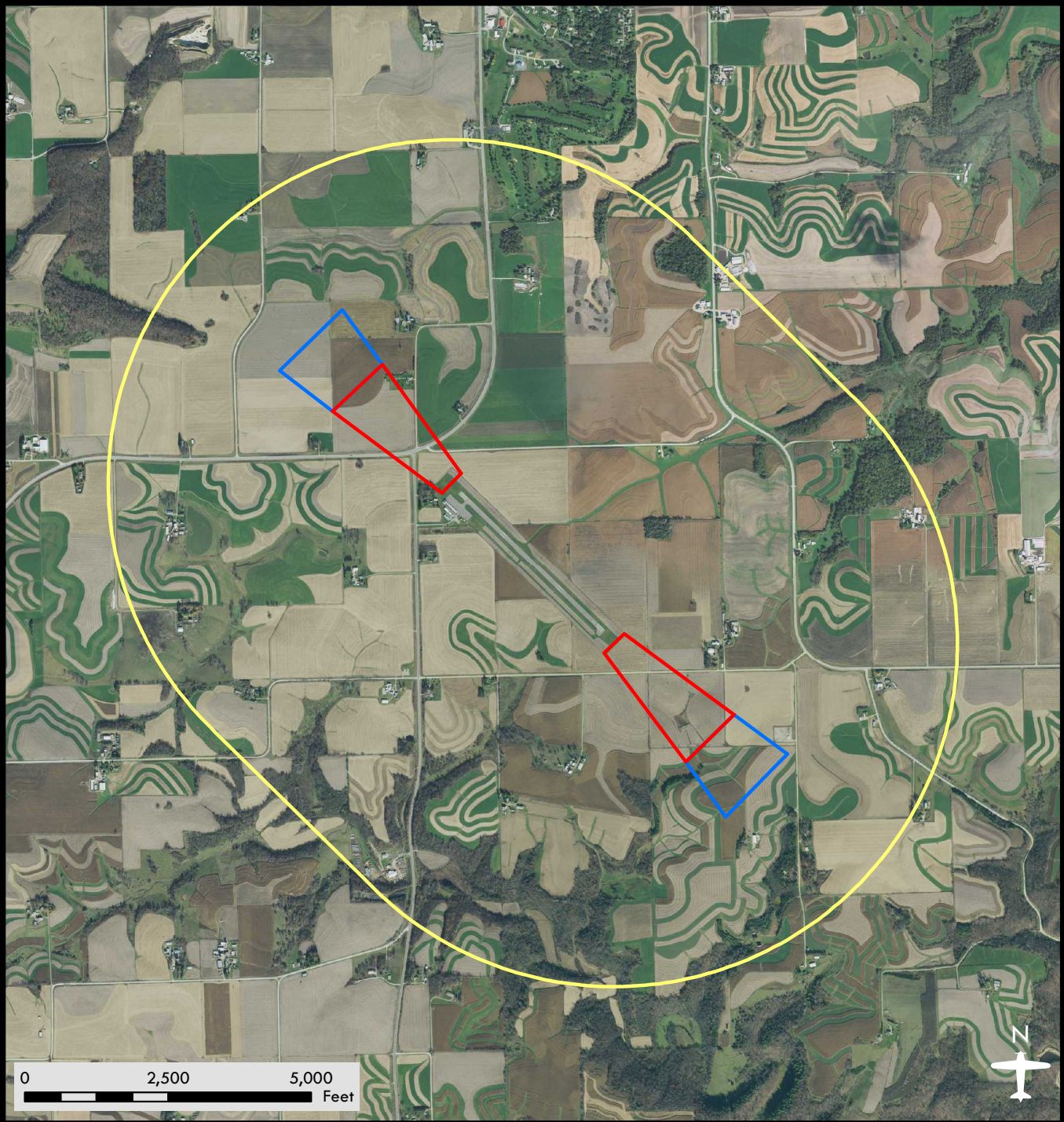
*Image Courtesy of Houston County*

<sup>2</sup> <https://minnesotago.org/index.php?CID=435>

# Houston County Airport

Airport Safety Zones

Date: 08/08/2018



## Legend

- Zone A
- Zone B
- Zone C

**DISCLAIMER:** This is not an official zoning map. To view the official map and ordinance for this airport, please visit the Airport Zoning Information Warehouse at <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/planning/zoning-warehouse.html>. The State of Minnesota makes no representations or warranties expressed or implied, with respect to the reuse of the data provided herewith regardless of its format or the means of its transmission. There is no guarantee or representation to the user as to the accuracy, currency, suitability, or reliability of this data for any purpose. The user accepts the data "as is." The State of Minnesota assumes no responsibility for loss or damage incurred as a result of any user's reliance on this data. All maps and other material provided herein are protected by copyright. Permission is granted to copy and use the materials herein.

Figure 3.7 Houston County Airport - Safety Zones

Source: MnDOT

## Rail Travel

Railroads have been present in Houston County since the 1800s, with both passengers and freight using the railroads. Like many counties in Minnesota, and throughout the country, the amount of rail lines has decreased over the last century. Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) owns the route track currently in use within the County. CPKC<sup>3</sup> is in the highest classification of rail carrier – Class I. CPKC subsidiaries Soo Line and DM&E (Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern) operate the CPKC tracks within the County. The route runs north/south along the Mississippi River, with a crossing over the river located in La Crescent. There are some at-grade crossings of the tracks on local roads, while intersections with County and State Highways are grade-separated.

Freight is a major user of railroads in the County. MnDOT District 6 completed a district-wide freight plan in 2022. The plan analyzed long term freight needs of the regional transportation system, and will help shape the next statewide Freight Plan.

For passenger rail services, Amtrak runs its Empire Builder line from Chicago to Portland and Seattle. A portion of the route runs through La Crescent after crossing the Mississippi River, before running north along the river and US Highway 14. The Empire Builder makes stops at Winona and La Crosse. The Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail Project (TCMC) plans to add a second, daily round-trip service between Chicago, IL, and Saint Paul, MN. Currently, the TCMC project is in the final design phase, with construction planned to begin in 2024. There are also studies being conducted by the Federal Railroad Administration, in cooperation with MnDOT, on high speed rail in the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago corridor.

## Shipping

Before the advent of rail and automobiles, rivers and streams were the primary option for the moving of goods and people. While there are no ports currently within the County, both Winona and La Crosse have marine ports located on the Mississippi River. Both ports are used for shipping of goods, as well as the occasional tourist vessel. The main river and navigation channels of the Mississippi are maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The Corps also maintains the lock and dam system, and performs periodic dredging of the river. The portions of the river between Minneapolis and Guttenberg, IA, are within the St Paul District of the USACE. Lock and Dam #8, opened in 1937, is located approximately 3.6 miles southeast of Reno in Genoa, WI. The most recent Statewide Ports and Waterways Plan was published by MnDOT in 2014.

The Northern Grain Belt Ports (NGBP), which include the nearby ports in Winona and La Crosse, were federally recognized as a Port Statistical Area in December of 2022. It is anticipated that the NGBP will be listed each year as a top 100 U.S. Port (based on tonnage handled). The application for recognition included a resolution of support from Houston County. The NGBP joins three other ‘corn belt ports’ located in the upper Midwest, and is planned to aid in reporting of shipping data as well as assist in transportation planning and investment for the region.

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3 CP Rail recently completed the acquisition of Kansas City Southern (KCS) in April 2023. The new name as a result of the acquisition is Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC).

# Transportation Goals & Policies

## Goal

**Goal 3.1:** Maintain a transportation system which compliments land use development and land use policies through the County.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Develop a transportation system which reinforces the County's growth policies.

**Policy 2.** Coordinate land use, airport master plans, and transportation plans to minimize adverse effects of transportation systems (noise, air pollution) on adjacent development.

**Policy 3.** To the extent possible, avoid placing transportation facilities (such as roads, bridges, airports, park and rides, maintenance shops) in locations that adversely affect the natural resources and prime agricultural areas of the County.

**Policy 4.** Encourage the development of a transportation system that properly balances considerations of safety, accessibility, environmental protection and cost.

**Policy 5.** Regulate land use development at transportation intersections and interchanges in order to avoid compromising safety, accessibility, and functions of highways.

**Policy 6.** Encourages the development of a transportation system which properly integrates the various types and levels of highways (state, County, and local) to maximize safety and accessibility.

**Policy 7.** Carefully review the location of pipelines and high voltage transmission lines in the County in order to minimize impacts.

## Water Resources

### Wastewater

Unincorporated areas that are not served by municipal sewer systems are served by subsurface treatment systems (SSTS), commonly referred to as septic systems. State rules govern the design, installation, and management of septic systems; the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is the agency in charge of said rules. These rules are enforced by local units of government, who adopt their own ordinances that are in compliance with MPCA rules. Along with adoption of rules, local units of government must also manage records of permits, variances, certificates of compliance or noncompliance, and inspections. Local units of government can adopt ordinances that are stricter than those of the state. For example, state rules do not require a compliance inspection of a septic system prior to a property being sold/transferred, though many local units of government can choose to require them as part of their ordinances.

Houston County enforces SSTS rules within unsewered portions of the County, and has adopted MN Rules 7080 through 7083 by reference in their Zoning Ordinance. Cities with municipal sewer systems typically require new developments to connect to the system by local ordinance. The County Zoning Ordinance also permits for the ability of a franchise for a community sewer system, provided it is approved by the County Board of Commissioners, the MPCA, and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) prior to construction.

Compliance and enforcement of rules for wastewater systems is important, as proper maintenance of any such system is necessary to protect groundwater, lakes, rivers, streams, and humans from harmful pathogens, odors, nitrates, bacteria, and chemicals. The unique karst geology of the County leaves groundwater supplies especially vulnerable to noncomplying or failing septic systems, due to the high transmissivity in bedrock cavities present in karst formations. County staff works with citizens and contractors on ensuring rules are complied. In addition to regulatory and educational activities, Houston County provides financial assistance, when funding is available, to property owners who own failing SSTS systems to facilitate bringing the systems into compliance.



*Images Courtesy of Houston County*

## Wastewater Goals & Policies

### Goal

**Goal 3.2:** Serve as the Local Government Unit for Sewage Treatment Systems in order to protect public health and the environment.

### Policies

**Policy 1.** Discourage development in areas where on-site sewer systems are likely to malfunction due to poor soil characteristics and encourage alternative system use.

**Policy 2.** Implement the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's standards concerning on-site sewer systems.

**Policy 3.** Encourage the extension of public utilities in an orderly and economic manner.

**Policy 4.** Concentrate major residential, commercial and industrial land uses near cities which have access to City water and sewer systems.

## Water Supply

Drinking water in the County is acquired primarily from groundwater sources, with unincorporated areas served by private wells and most cities served by community water systems. The City of Brownsville is the only city in the County without a community water system. Community water systems are required to have a wellhead protection plan, which limits uses and activities that could impact the well(s). Private wells have setback requirements that dictate where new wells can be placed. All wells in the state are regulated by state and federal laws, with MDH administering well construction and abandonment within Minnesota.

Community water systems are tested regularly to ensure compliance with state and federal laws. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets the ‘maximum contaminant level’ (MCL) that can be present in drinking water supplies. MCLs are set for arsenic, haloacetic acids five (HAA5), nitrate, total trihalomethanes (TTHM), radium, and uranium. Testing results for community water systems are available from MDH and are regularly posted on the MDH website. MDH issued a report on drinking water in southeastern Minnesota in 2016<sup>4</sup>, with the focus of the report on wells that were verified to be located within Paleozoic bedrock aquifers. Private wells within Houston County included in the 2016 report were located using either the St. Peter-Prairie du Chien-Jordan Aquifer, or the Tunnel City-Wonewoc Aquifer.

Private well owners in Houston and other neighboring counties are eligible for financial assistance to address drinking water quality concerns in private wells. The Safe Drinking Water for Private Well Users’ Assistance Program provides funding to eligible landowners or renters to replace, reconstruct, or treat drinking water supplies that are contaminated with nitrate-nitrogen. The Root River Soil and Water Conservation District receives funding through the MN Department of Health’s Clean Water Funds to facilitate the program. Well owners that meet the financial hardship criteria, and the well eligibility requirements, are prioritized for funding. The private water supply must be used as a source of potable drinking water for the residence to qualify for financial assistance. Funding is available on a first come, first served basis.

Like wastewater systems, compliance of rules for wells is important, as noncompliance can adversely impact groundwater supplies and drinking water, which can directly harm human health. Whereas systems used by municipalities are required to be tested regularly, only newly constructed private wells are required to be tested for contaminants. Educating the public on applicable rules, and steps to take to maintain and protect their wells, can help protect water supplies. Regular inspections of wells and testing of well water can keep owners and users informed on if maintenance is needed, or if filters, distillers, or other equipment may need to be installed. For wells that are no longer used, there are requirements on how to properly cap and seal the unused well so as to prevent contamination of groundwater. A contractor licensed by MDH is required to abandon and document an unused well. MDH has technical assistance for property owners with the do’s and don’ts of private wells.<sup>5</sup>

## Water Supply Goals & Policies

### Goal

**Goal 3.3:** Work with local, regional, state, and federal entities to protect drinking water in the County.

### Policies

**Policy 1.** Prioritize groundwater impacts in policy development.

**Policy 2.** Encourage policies that positively impact the drinking water in the County.

4 <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/docs/swp/no3report.pdf>

5 <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/mwi/index.html>



## Surface Water Management

Surface waters include rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, wetlands, and other waterbodies. Management and protection of these resources is important, as they provide fishing and recreation for citizens and visitors of the County, and help contribute to the County's unique and picturesque landscape.

The DNR tracks infested waters within the state. The Mississippi River was the only waterbody listed as containing an aquatic invasive species that could spread to other waters. The MPCA assesses which waters in the state are impaired (failing to meet one or more water quality standards of the Clean Water Act) every two years. A number of waters within the County were listed in 2022 as impaired, as shown in Figure 3.6.

Wetlands are protected by Federal, State, and local regulations, based on the wetland type and their location. The Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) regulates wetlands in the state that are not public waters. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) provides oversight to cities, townships, and counties that administer the WCA.

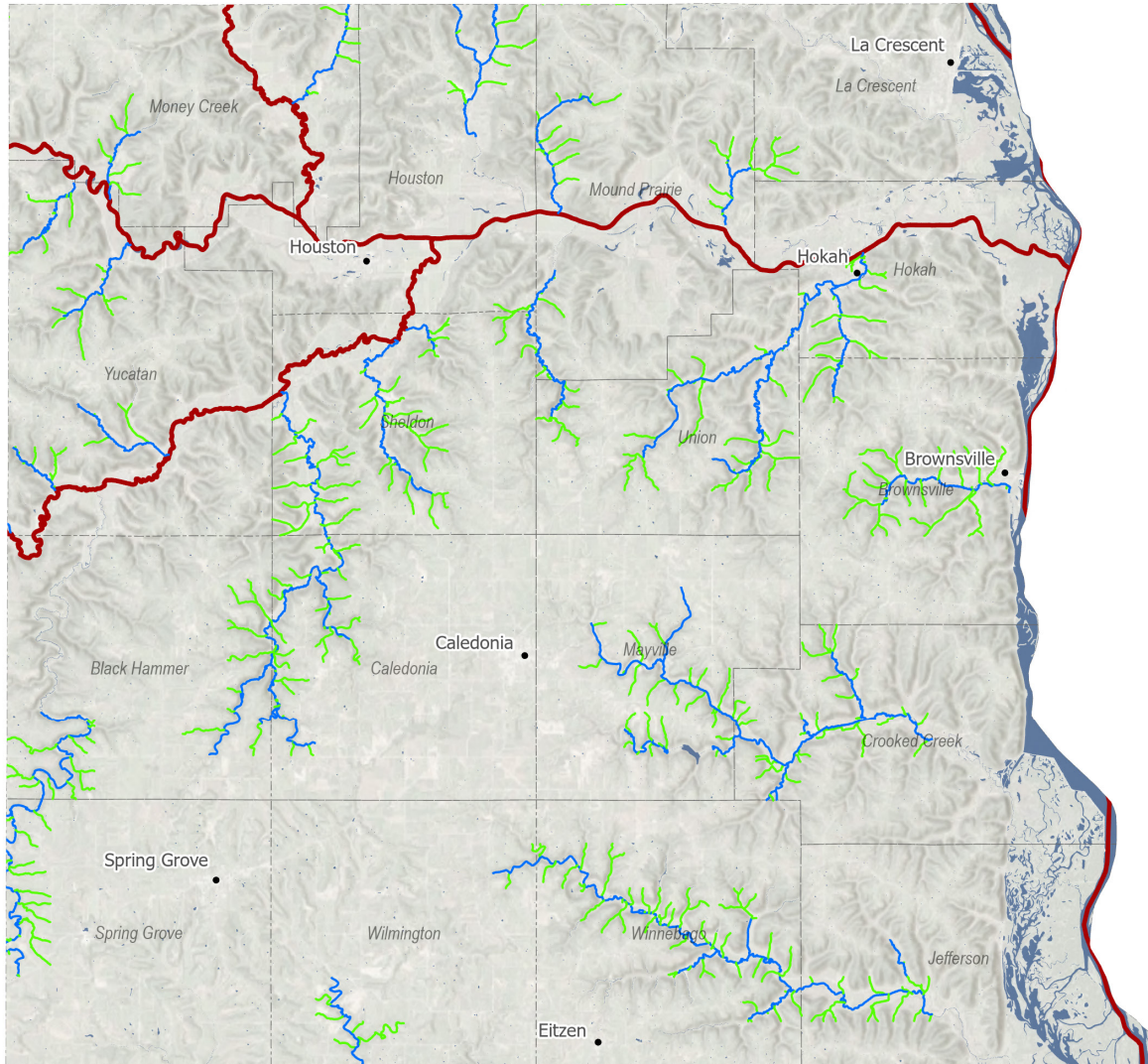
Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions that are established in order to conserve soil, water and related natural resources on private lands. Each county in the state has at least one soil and water conservation district (SWCD). The State Legislature allowed for the creation of SWCDs in 1937 as a response to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, with SWCDs helping landowners to update their farming techniques to better conserve soil and water. The Root River SWCD serves Houston County, working with property owners, cities, and townships on management and conservation of the natural resources of the County. The County has designated the Root River SWCD with the oversight of the County's efforts to prevent and limit the spread of aquatic invasive species in the County. The Root River SWCD also assists the County with reviewing site plans for new construction, technical assistance with feedlots, nitrate testing, implementation of the County's Comprehensive Water Plan, and assisting and educating the public on State and Federal conservation programs.

The State allowed for the creation of watershed districts in 1955, with a goal of creating water management policies based on natural watershed boundaries instead of political boundaries. The County has one established watershed district, Crooked Creek.

The unique karst geology has created an abundance of cold-water streams in the County. These streams are the perfect environment for trout and other fishes. The DNR has created public fishing easements along creeks and streams throughout the State. Fishing easements in Houston County include portions of Badger Creek, Bee Creek, Beaver Creek, Crooked Creek, Wildcat Creek, and Winnebago Creek. Ongoing preservation and protection of surface water and groundwater will continue to allow for future anglers to enjoy fishing in Houston County.

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Trout Streams and Impaired Waters



### DNR Trout Streams and Impaired Waters

- Designated Trout Stream
- Protected Tributary to Designated Trout Stream
- Impaired Streams
- Townships
- Cities and Towns

SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, Connected Nation



Figure 3.8 Map of Impaired Waters in Houston

# Surface Water Management Goals & Policies

## Goal

**Goal 3.4:** Work with local and regional, and federal entities, such as watershed management organizations and SWCDs, on programs that protect surface waters in the County.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Support the Root River One Watershed One Plan, the WinLac One Watershed One Plan, Crooked Creek Watershed District, and the Houston County local water plan.

## Water Planning

As mentioned in the Natural Resources section of Chapter 2, Houston County is a part of multiple efforts to manage and protect water resources. Over the last ten years, Minnesota has moved towards comprehensive water plans that are based on watershed boundaries, instead of county lines. The legislation allowing for these new regional water plans is typically referred to as ‘One Watershed, One Plan’. Starting in 2014, BWSR began work with five watersheds across the state to create ‘pilot plans’, which will help guide future comprehensive water planning processes and implementation.

The Root River watershed, which encompasses much of Houston County, was one of the first natural watersheds selected by BWSR for a pilot plan. This pilot plan would become the Root River One Watershed, One Plan, which was adopted in 2016. The Root River One Watershed, One Plan includes multiple counties (Dodge, Fillmore, Mower, Olmsted, Houston, and Winona), SWCDs (Dodge, Fillmore, Mower, Olmsted, Root River (Houston), and Winona), and the Crooked Creek Watershed District. The members entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for the formation of the plan, and are partnered through a Joint Powers Agreement for implementation of the plan. The planning area covers 2,059 square miles; 26.2% of the planning area is in Houston County.

The Mississippi River Winona / La Crescent (WinLaC) Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan is another One Watershed, One Plan partnership, which includes four counties (Houston, Olmsted, Wabasha, and Winona), four SWCDs (Olmsted, Root River (Houston), Wabasha, and Winona), the City of Winona, and the Stockton-Rollingstone-Minnesota City Watershed District. The portions of Houston County within the WinLaC planning boundary include La Crescent, and the areas along Pine Creek. The WinLaC Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan is currently being developed, with adoption expected in 2023.

## Shorelands and Floodplains

In addition to waterbodies, shorelines and floodplains are also important to protect and manage. Floodplain management and regulation is key to preventing and minimizing risks from potential flooding. The primary role for the County in floodplain management is the regulation of land uses and developments in floodplains through zoning. By limiting or prohibiting development in flood-prone areas, potential flood damage can be avoided in the future. Compliance with floodplain management regulations can save both private property owners and taxpayers money. Floodplains within Houston County are located primarily in low-lying areas along the Mississippi and Root Rivers, and along creeks and streams. The Floodplain Management Act, passed by the State Legislature in 1969, gives the DNR the ability to set floodplain regulations, which cities, townships, and counties are to implement into their zoning ordinances.

## Definition of Shoreland

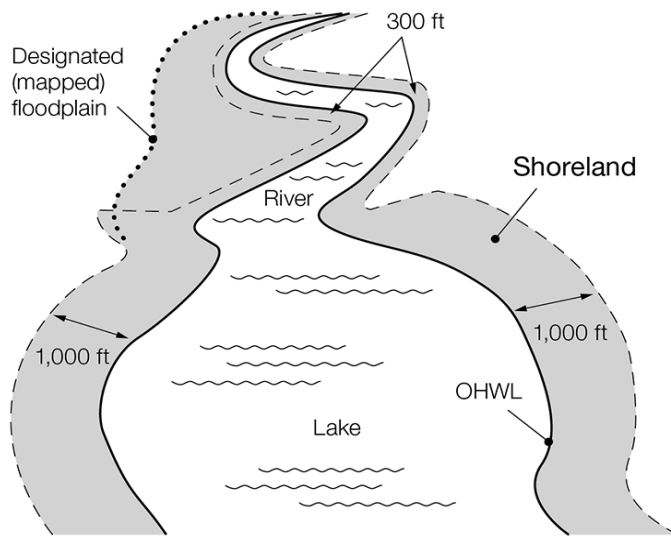


Figure 3.9 Visual Definition of a Shoreland

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Shorelines, and the lands adjacent to them, are managed through Shoreland zoning ordinances. The Shoreland Management Act, also passed in 1969, gives the DNR the ability to set the minimum standards for development in areas designated as being within a shoreland, though cities and counties can establish standards that are stricter. These standards include establishing the minimum distance or 'setback' a new structure must be from a waterbody, limiting impervious surface coverages on parcels, as well as the minimum setback of new structures from steep slopes and bluffs. The DNR reviews all Shoreland Management ordinances, as well as amendments to such ordinances.

As noted in Chapter Two of this plan, Houston County has adopted both floodplain management standards and shoreland management standards within their Zoning Ordinance to manage development within floodplains and shorelands.

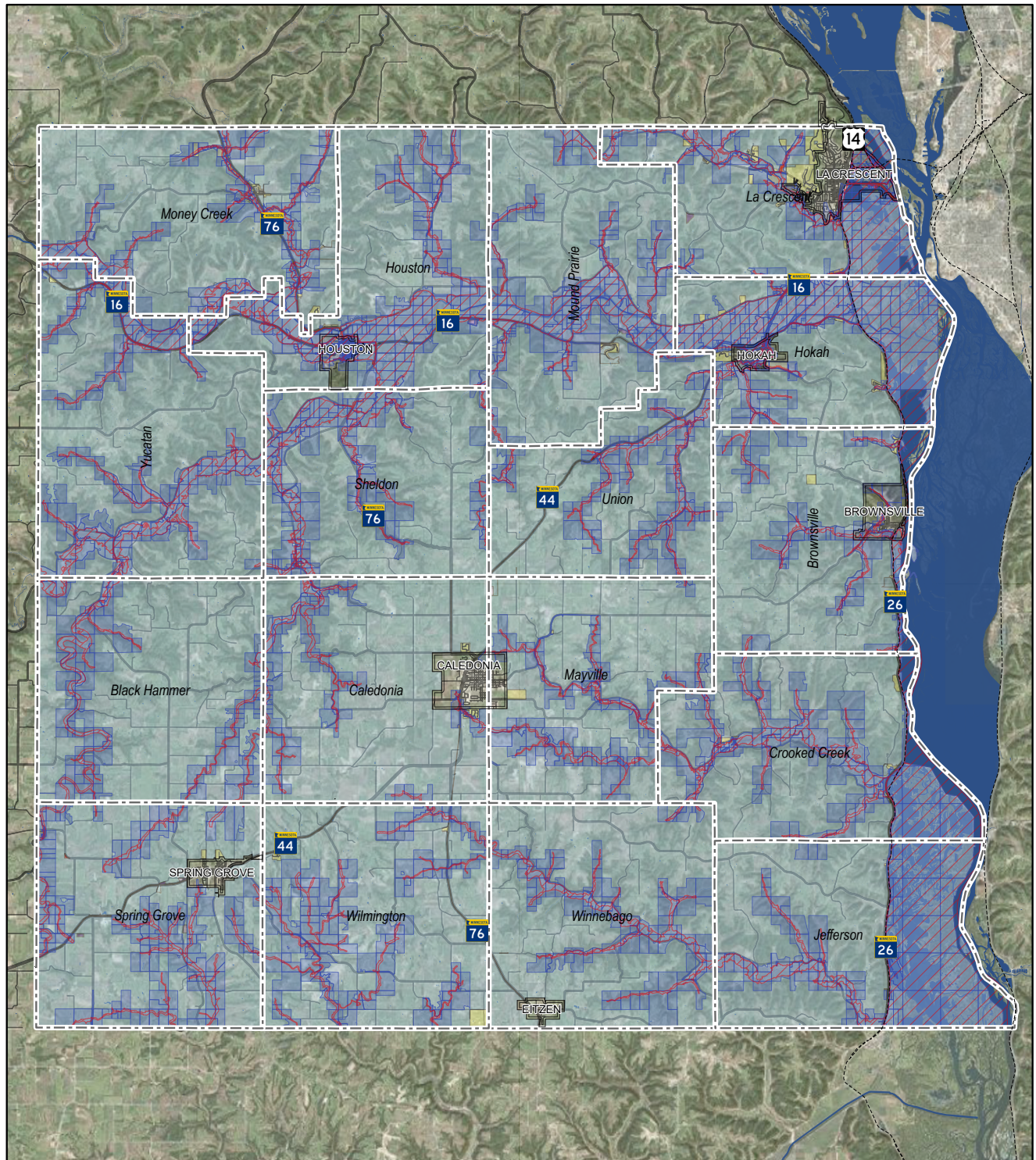
## Stormwater


Once precipitation lands on a surface, it becomes stormwater. Stormwater can infiltrate through pervious surfaces and enter into the groundwater supply, evaporate back into the atmosphere, or it can accumulate on an impervious surface and runoff into surface waters. Areas with high amounts of impervious surface create more runoff than areas with infiltration and pervious surfaces. Excessive stormwater runoff can lead to flooding, erosion, and damage of property. In addition, stormwater runoff can accumulate soil and sediment, debris, pollutants, and other materials and dump them into surface waters. In order to protect surface waters, groundwater, and property, State and Federal laws have been established addressing stormwater management. These management strategies include retention of runoff, treatment of runoff for pollutants, stabilizing slopes, and removal of debris and other pollutants from the path of stormwater runoff.

A variety of systems can transport stormwater runoff, such as roads with drainage systems, municipal streets, catch basins, curbs and gutters, ditches, man-made channels, and storm drains. A municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) is a system that is owned or operated by a public entity, such as a county, is designed or used for collecting or transporting stormwater, is not part of a combined sewer, and is not part of a publicly owned treatment works. MS4s that are regulated by the MPCA are required to get a General Permit, and are required to create a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) that incorporates best management practices (BMPs) to reduce stormwater impacts most appropriate to their MS4.

# Houston County

## Flood Zone



Zone Class			
	Agriculture Protection		Parcels in Flood Zone
	General Business		Flood Zone
	General Industry		Roadway
	Highway Business		USA Railroads
	Limited Industry		Township
	Residential		Corporate Limits



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI

Figure 3.10 Houston County Flood Zone

According to the MPCA, an effective SWPPP has six components, called minimum control measures (MCM), which include:

1. Public education and outreach.
2. Public participation: Include residents in solving stormwater pollution problems.
3. A plan to detect and eliminate illicit discharges to the storm sewer system (such as chemical dumping and wastewater connections).
4. Construction-site runoff controls.
5. Post-construction runoff controls.
6. Pollution prevention and municipal measures (such as inspecting and maintaining infrastructure, covering salt piles, and street sweeping).

The Houston County MS4 is located around La Crescent (permit # MS400139)<sup>6</sup>, and was issued coverage under General Permit MNR040000 in 2021. The latest SWPPP for the County MS4 was adopted in 2022.

## Solid Waste

Houston County's rules and regulations regarding solid waste are found in Ordinance #11, 'Solid Waste Ordinance,' adopted by the County in 2010. Counties in Minnesota have the authority to manage their own waste as part of the Minnesota Waste Management Act. Counties outside of the seven-county metropolitan area are required to prepare and implement detailed solid waste management plans every ten years. Houston County last updated their waste management plan in 2018<sup>7</sup>. The County has five drop-off sites for refuse and recycling for residents to use, and also has a recycling center that can process aluminum, cardboard, and electronic waste. The cities in the County, as well as La Crescent Township, also have weekly curbside collection of trash and recycling materials. The 2018 Solid Waste Management Plan estimated that 15% of residents in unincorporated areas had contracted collection services, with the rest self-hauling to drop-off sites. Waste material is then taken from the drop-off sites to either the Xcel Energy French Island Waste-to-Energy Plant located in La Crosse, or to the La Crosse County landfill. Approximately 15% of the waste in the County ends up in the landfill, with the rest either recycled, composted, or used for resource recovery.

The County recently extended their disposal contract with La Crosse County to run through 2030. Recent improvements to the landfill have extended the life of the facility to 2027. The 'La Crosse County Landfill Feasibility Report – Proposed Phase 2 North Expansion' in 2021 noted that potential expansion could extend the life of the landfill to 2034. The karst geology of Houston County makes siting of new landfills within the county undesirable, due to the environmental risks. The last landfill in the County was closed in 1983 due to groundwater contamination. The closed landfill located at 12229 Hwy 16, near Houston, is in the MPCA's Closed Landfill Program (CLP), which has a land use plan restricting development and includes continued monitoring of the site.

Along with recycling and disposal of refuse, the County works to educate citizens and businesses; teaching strategies to reduce waste generation, proper disposal of hazardous items and materials unable to be accepted in landfills, and improve composting and recycling practices.

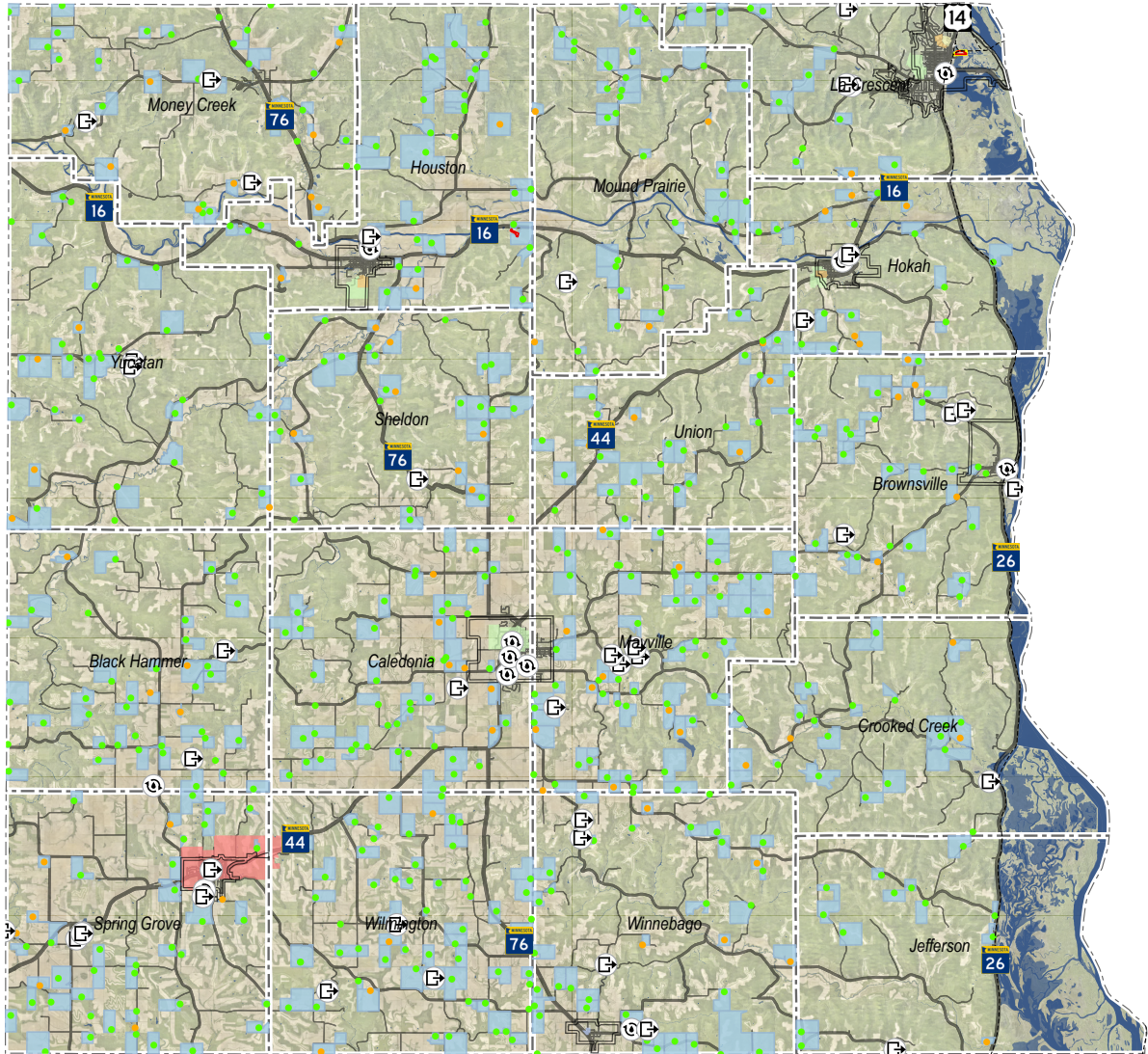
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6 Stormwater Mapping Tool - MS4 Program (arcgis.com)

7 <https://www.co.houston.mn.us/?mdocs-file=2888>

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Waste Management



Drinking Water Supply Management Area Vulnerability

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

- Landfill Waste Footprint
- Landfill Land Management Areas
- Feedlot Parcel
- Active Feedlot
- Inactive Feedlot
- Wastewater Facilities

- Wastewater Discharge
- Roadway
- USA Railroads
- Township
- Corporate Limits



0 5,000 10,000 20,000 Feet



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, MPCA

Figure 3.11 Houston County Waste Management

# Solid Waste Management Goals & Policies

## Goal

**Goal 3.5:** Efficiently manage solid waste in the county in order to mitigate environmental impacts.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Update solid waste management plans and ordinances in accordance to state law.

**Policy 2.** Continue to provide waste management facilities for residents and businesses.

**Policy 3.** Continue to partner with other regional agencies on addressing waste materials and disposal.



# Chapter 4

## Parks, Trails, and Open Space



## Parks & Trails

Houston County is home to Beaver Creek Valley State Park, which is located west of Caledonia and south of Sheldon. The park, established in 1937, provides opportunities for hiking, skiing, fishing, and camping.

There are two County Parks: Wildcat Park and Landing, and Bob Botcher Park. Wildcat Park and Landing is located along the Mississippi River by Brownsville and features facilities for camping, two boat landings, and a fishing pier. The park is leased by the County from the US Army Corps of Engineers. Bob Botcher Park is located along County Highway 10, between Houston and Sheldon. The park consists of approximately 40 acres of land, which was donated to Houston County by Robert Botcher in 2006. The park includes picnic areas, hiking and walking paths, and wildlife viewing locations.



*Image Courtesy of Houston County*

The County Zoning Ordinance outlines procedures for dedicating lands and easements for public use during the subdivision and platting process. The County could consider creating park land dedication standards in the future as a way to help create parks through the subdivision and platting process.

## Bike and Pedestrian Trails

The Root River State Trail is a 42 mile paved trail owned by the DNR that runs along the Root River on former railroad right-of-way located in Houston and Fillmore counties. The trail attracts locals, as well as many out-of-town tourists. The Root River State Trail was authorized by state legislation and added to the Minnesota State Trail System in 1971. The east trailhead begins at Trailhead Park on the northwest side of the City of Houston. The city park and trailhead consists of sites for tent camping, a rentable pavilion, a one acre natural playground, a band shell, and the Houston Nature Center.

The State Legislature and DNR have studied potential extensions of the Root River State Trail multiple times since 1971. The 1998 Master Plan focused on the extension of the trail to Houston. The 2011 Root River State Trail Extension Houston to La Crescent Master Plan set a goal to extend the Root River State Trail east to the Wagon Wheel Trail in La Crescent. This extension would create a multi-use connection from Houston to Hokah, La Crescent, La Crosse, and trail systems in Wisconsin. In 2022, the County joined the cities of Houston, Hokah, and La Crescent in a memorandum of understanding to coordinate planning and implementation of the extension of the trail from Houston to La Crescent. The 18 mile corridor from Houston to La Crescent was added to the Root River State Trail statute in 1992; the Root River Trail was also reorganized as the Blufflands Trail System in the state statute<sup>1</sup>. Part of the reasoning for the new name under the statute was due to the inclusion of potential extensions to areas away from the Root River. Extensions identified in the legislation included extending to reach Caledonia and Spring Grove, as well as extensions north from Houston into Winona County and east to Olmsted County. The state statute notes the trails are to be developed primarily for non-motorized riding and hiking, and that abandoned railroad right-of-way is to be used wherever possible. The State Parks and Trails System Plan<sup>2</sup>, last updated by the MN DNR in 2019, includes the Root River State Trail extending to the Mississippi River as a 'priority corridor'. The extension of the trail to other locations as identified under the Blufflands Trail System legislation are 'secondary corridors'.

### Potential Future Trail Corridors

**Short-Term Priorities:** Houston to Hokah and La Crescent

**Medium-Term Priorities:** Houston to Winona County, Houston to Caledonia, Caledonia to Spring Grove

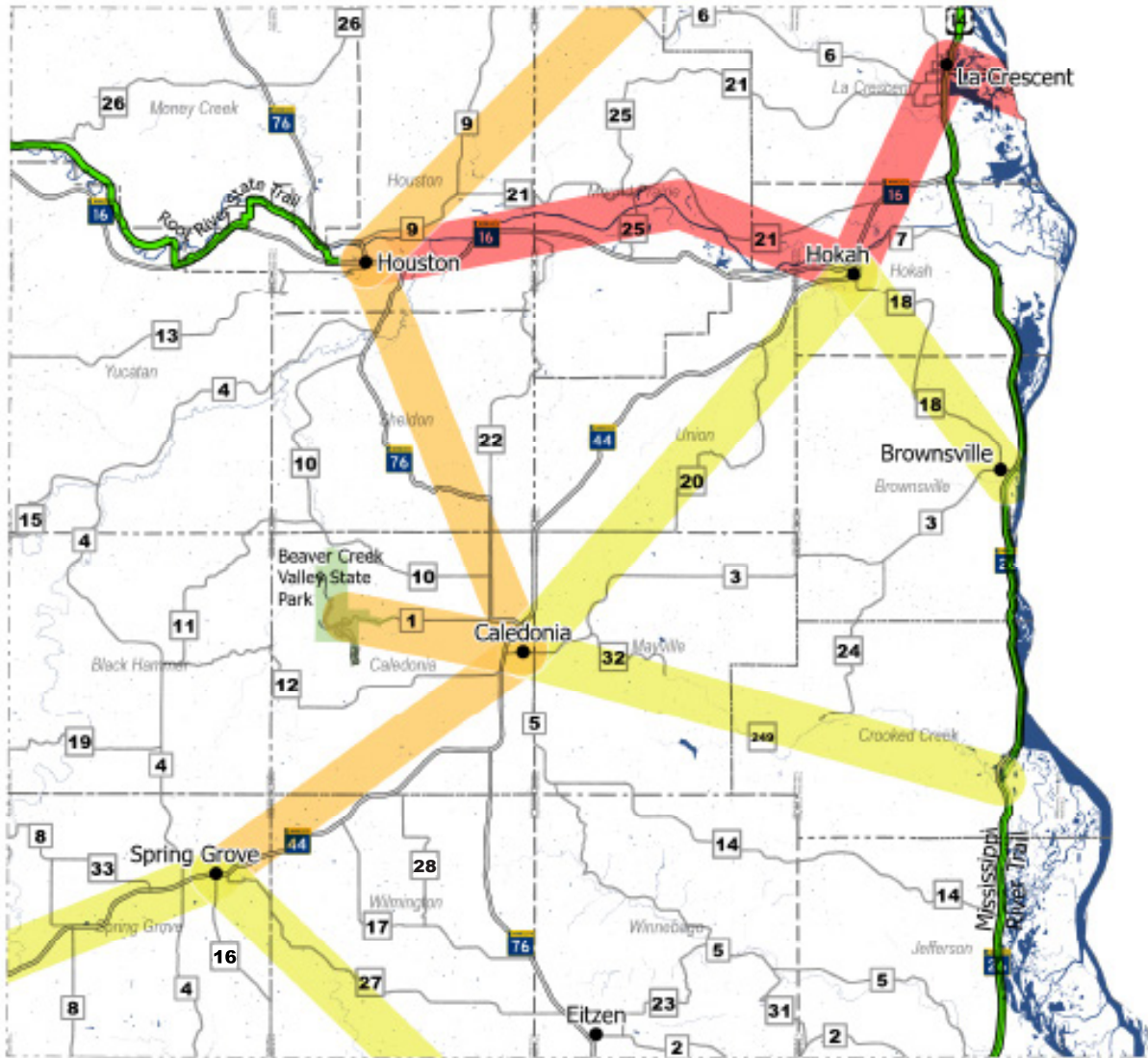
**Long-Term Priorities:** Hokah to Brownsville, Hokah to Caledonia, Caledonia to Reno, Caledonia to Beaver Creek Valley State Park, Spring Grove to Fillmore County, Spring Grove to Iowa

1 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/85.015>

2 [https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/pat/system\\_plan/system\\_plan.pdf](https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/pat/system_plan/system_plan.pdf)

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Potential Trail Routes



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, Connected Nation

Figure 4.1 Future Trail Corridors

The Mississippi River Bike Trail runs along the river on the county's eastern border. The northern trailhead is at Itasca State Park, and runs south to the Iowa border. The Bike Trail is mainly located on road shoulders or along roadways. The Bike Trail follows US 14, and State Highways 16 and 26 in Houston County. A spur of the route runs along the 'Apple Blossom Scenic Byway' in La Crescent and Winona County. The Mississippi River Bike Trail is part of the nationwide United States Bicycle Route System, and is designated as US Bicycle Route 45. Beyond Minnesota, US Bicycle Route 45 is planned to eventually connect with proposed and existing trails to extend south along the Mississippi River to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

MnDOT District 6's 2019 Bicycle Plan<sup>3</sup> identified two corridors within the County as regional priority corridors. These corridors include a north/south corridor running from Winona to Houston to the Iowa border, and an east/west corridor along the Root River and the Root River State Trail. These regional priority corridors are a focus for future bicycle trails, trail connections, and improvements. The County Highway Department has also identified adding and widening shoulders of existing roadways as a way to increase the amount of pathways and corridors available in the County for bicycle use.



Source: MnDOT

## Other Trails

The DNR has 35 designated water trails in the state, with two located in Houston County. Water Trails are rivers and streams that provide opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, and paddling. The Root River State Water Trail follows the Root River starting at Chatfield in Fillmore County, through Houston County, and finally to the Mississippi River. The Root River has an average drop of 3.4 feet per mile as it meanders its way to the Mississippi. The Mississippi River is itself a State Water Trail, with the water trail running the length of the river from the Minnesota/Iowa border in the south to Itasca State Park in northern Minnesota.

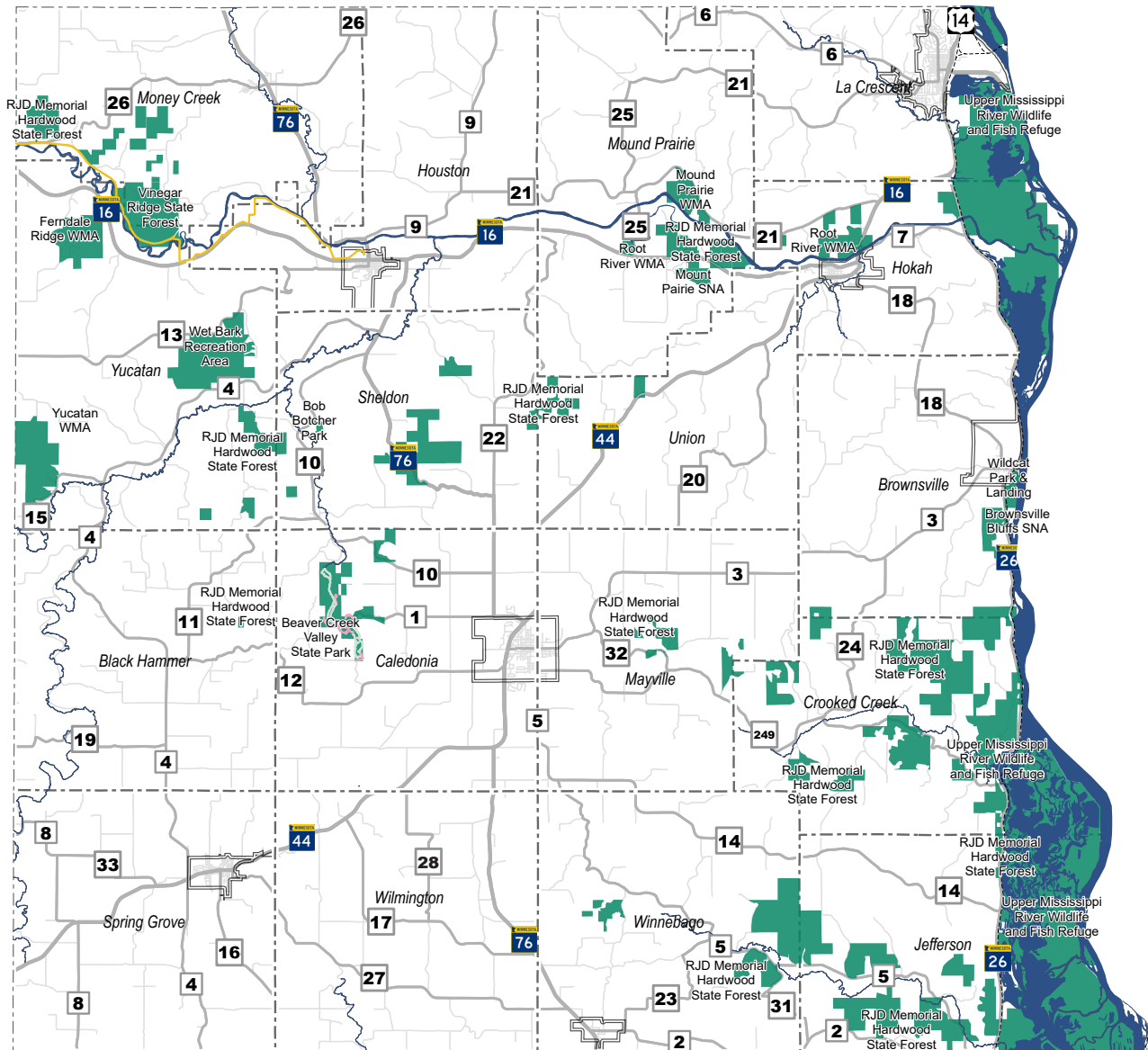
During winter months, snowmobiling is a popular recreational activity in the County. The State Legislature established a grants in aid (GIA) snowmobile trail assistance program in 1973 to help develop and maintain snowmobile trails throughout Minnesota. Today, there are now nearly 22,000 miles of groomed trails in Minnesota, which are maintained primarily by snowmobile clubs and the Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association (MnUSA). The DNR maintains approximately 740 miles of snowmobile trails in the state. There are a number of trails and routes that traverse the County. They include Trail 134 running through the southern half of the County before moving along the Mississippi River to Hokah, Trail 135 near La Crescent and Mound Prairie, Trail 136 near Yucatan and Spring Grove, and Trail 137 running east-west through the county from La Crescent to Fillmore County. Local snowmobiling clubs in the County are located in Caledonia, La Crescent, Houston-Money Creek, and Spring Grove.

While they are not trails in the traditional sense, scenic byways connect visitors and locals to parks, streams, and the communities nearby them. Houston County has multiple scenic byways running within its borders. The Great River Road follows the Mississippi from its headwaters all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Like the Mississippi River Bike Trail, the Great River Road byway follows US 14 and State Highways 16 and 26 in the County. The Historic Bluff Country Scenic Byway follows State Highway 16 in La Crescent west through Hokah and Houston, before running through Fillmore County and terminating in Mower County in Dexter. The Apple Blossom Scenic Byway, as discussed earlier, runs through the apple orchards located in the northern edge of the County in La Crescent before entering Winona County.

<sup>3</sup> [MnDOT District 6 Bicycle Plan \(arcgis.com\)](#)

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Parks and Recreation



- Parks and Recreation
- Water Features
- State Trail
- Hike Club Trail
- Self-Guided Trail
- Corporate Limits
- Township
- Commissioners District



SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR

Figure 4.2 Parks and Recreation Map - Houston County

## Open Spaces & Recreation

A not-so-hidden secret of Houston County is the amount of undeveloped natural areas and open space present in the County. The County is home to multiple open space areas managed by the DNR. Eight Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are located within the County; these areas provide opportunity for hunting, trapping, and general viewing and watching of wildlife. The County is home to two Scientific and Natural Management Areas (SNAs) – Mound Prairie and Brownsville Bluff. SNAs, according to the DNR, protect natural features of exceptional scientific or educational value, and provide opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, and some hunting.

The County also has twelve Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs), which provide angler and management access to streams. Along with access, these areas help protect critical shore land habitat, and provide areas for education and research. AMAs are limited to ‘general use’, ‘restricted use’, or ‘easement’. The AMAs in Houston County are all easements over private property, meaning any use other than angling requires landowner permission.

The Richard J. Dorer Memorial State Hardwood Forest is made up of over 1 million acres of land within multiple counties in southeastern Minnesota, with portions of the Forest located in Houston County. The Forest includes lands under ownership of the State, counties, and private owners and organizations. The portions of the Forest in Houston County include facilities for camping, a horse camp near Reno, hiking paths, and horseback riding trails. The Root River State Trail and Root River Water Trail run through the Forest and the Vinegar Ridge Recreation Area (located west of Houston) before entering Fillmore County.

The Vinegar Ridge Recreation Area within the Hardwood Forest is identified as a ‘core forest recreation area’ under the 2019 State Parks and Trails System Plan, in that the MN DNR will continue to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and will be maintained and improved as needed. Other sites in the Forest identified in the plan are the Wet Bark Recreation Area southwest of Houston, and the camping and horse camping facilities near Reno. Both are identified as ‘minimum maintenance forest recreation areas’, in that current facilities would remain but would have limited maintenance. There are not currently plans to add ATV or OHV trails into the portions of the Forest within Houston County.

Name	Acres
Chisholm Valley	79.64
Ferndale Ridge	657.81
Mound Prairie	436.92
Root River - Main	838.35
Root River - West	52.37
Rush Creek*	274.62
Winnebago Creek	174.96
Yucatan*	966.53

*\*Portions are also within other counties*

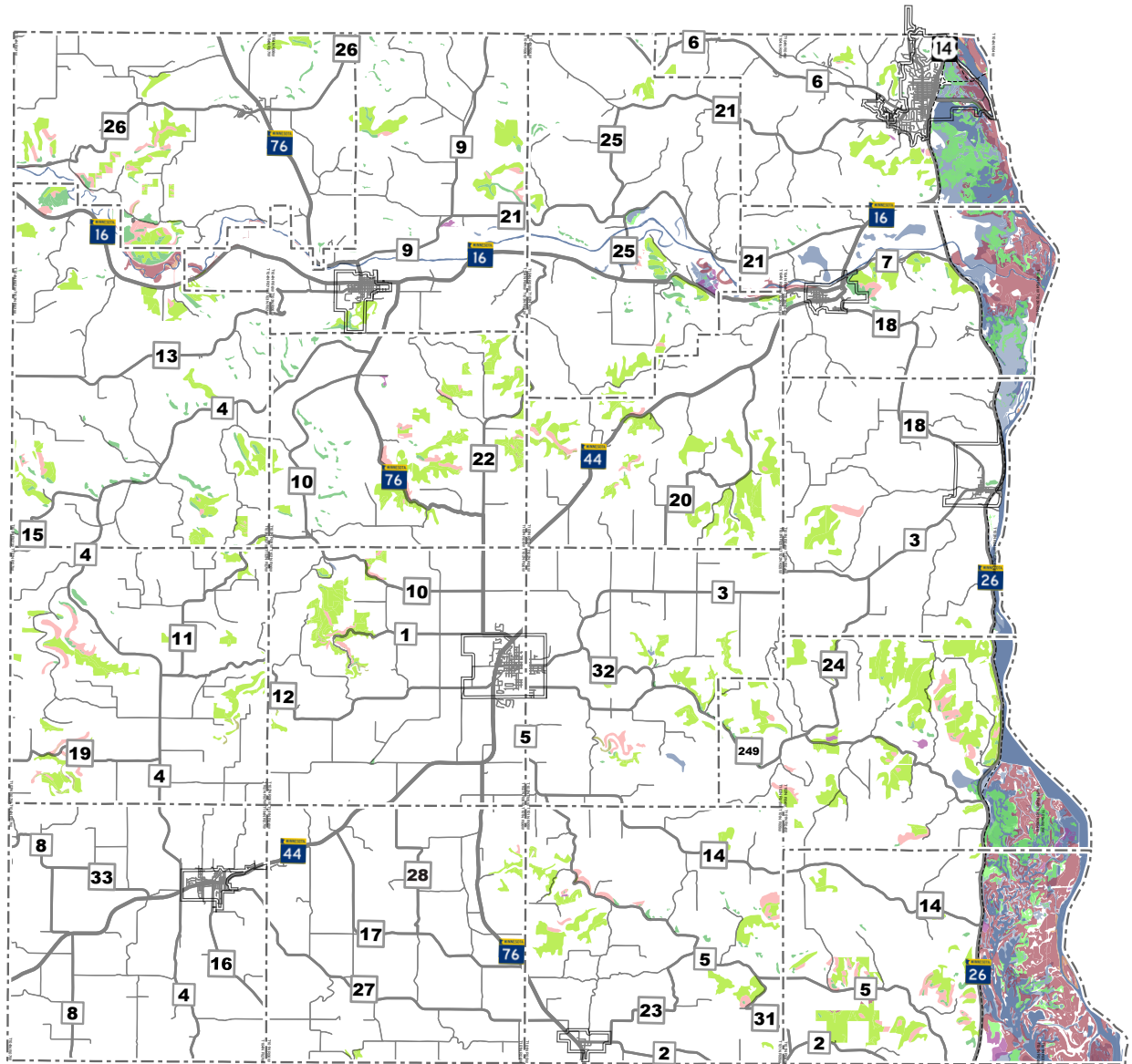
*Source: MN DNR*

*Figure 4.3 WMAs within Houston County*

Protection of open spaces on private land is important in order to maintain the scenic beauty of the County. The Zoning Ordinance currently includes regulations regarding preservation and protection of bluffs, trees, and woodlands from development. The City of La Crescent has their own Blufflands Plan, adopted in 2017, which focuses on bluffs, recreation, and preservation of lands in and around the city.

# HOUSTON COUNTY

## Native Plant Communities



DNR Native Plant Communities

- |                                       |                              |                        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Acid Peatland System                  | Lakeshore System             | Rock Outcrop System    |
| Cliff/Talus System                    | Marsh System                 | Upland Prairie System  |
| Fire-Dependent Forest/Woodland System | Mesic Hardwood Forest System | Wet Forest System      |
| Floodplain Forest System              | Open Rich Peatland System    | Wet Meadow/Carr System |
| Forested Rich Peatland System         | River Shore System           | Wetland Prairie System |
|                                       |                              | Complex community      |
|                                       |                              | Waterbodies selection  |

- Corporate Limits
- Township
- USA Railroads
- Roadway
- State Funded Conservation Easements



0 4,500 9,000 18,000 Feet

SOURCES: Houston County, MNDNR, ESRI, BWSR

Figure 4.4 Native Plants - Houston County

## Outdoor Recreation

Hunting is a popular activity, due to the amount of wildlife and many undeveloped and wooded areas within the County. White-tailed Deer are a common sight outside of the cities. The DNR provides yearly population estimates on pre-fawn deer densities (deer per square mile) throughout the state. The estimates are broken down by 'deer permit areas'; these permit areas are used by the DNR to help with setting of annual hunting regulations. Houston County lies within two deer permit areas (646, 649). The pre-fawn deer density of each area has increased over the last five years, providing ample targets for hunters.

Deer Permit Area	Land Area (square miles)	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
646	319	32	37	44	46	47	52
649	492	28	32	31	36	39	45

Figure 4.5 Pre-Fawn Deer Density (Deer per Square Mile)

Source: MN DNR

Deer Permit Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
646	2903	2680	3254	3040	2916	2461
649	2361	2169	2297	2444	2498	3422

Figure 4.6 Deer Harvested, per Year

Source: MN DNR

Deer Permit Area 649 tends to have higher harvest numbers, though the area is also 173 square miles larger than Deer Permit Area 646. Deer Permit Area 646 includes the areas of Houston County north of the Root River, as well as portions of Winona and Fillmore counties. Portions of Houston County south of the Root River, and the western edge of Fillmore County, are in Deer Permit Area 649.

The DNR has data available by county from their Electronic Licensing Center on licenses and participation for both hunting and fishing. In 2015 (latest data available), Houston County had 23% of residents aged 16 or older participating in hunting, while 27.3% were active in fishing. Northern and Central Minnesota counties rank the highest in participation percentages.

Activity	2015	Median County %	Houston County Rank
Hunters (age 16+)	3,481 / 23.0%	19.8%	33/87
Anglers (age 16+)	4,145 / 27.3%	34.5%	67/87

Figure 4.7 Fishing and Hunting Participation

Source: MN DNR



# Parks, Trails, and Open Space Goals & Policies

## Goals

**Goal 4.1:** Provide sufficient parks and open spaces to meet the recreational needs of the County.

**Goal 4.2:** Encourage recreational facilities and programs in existing parks to meet the needs of all income and age groups.

## Policies

**Policy 1.** Maintain County Parks to a level that compliments State Parks, and meets the demands of citizens in the County.

**Policy 2.** Encourage the creation of new parks as they are needed and desired by the citizens of the County.

**Policy 3.** Provide sufficient recreation facilities within County parks to maximize the use of the parks.

**Policy 4.** Protect high-quality natural resource areas (wetlands, floodplains, forests, bluffs/steep slopes) and encourage passive and active public recreation uses.

**Policy 5.** Encourage establishment of trails for use by pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users.

**Policy 6.** Connect Root River Trail to Caledonia and La Crescent.



# Chapter 5

## Implementation

This Comprehensive Plan outlines a vision for the future of Houston County, and provides guidance for decision-making by elected officials, committees and staff. For example, a proposed new development would be reviewed for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

Along with guiding decision-making, this Plan can be used as a tool to help market and build support for new initiatives. A Comprehensive Plan can be used to help gain support for grants and funding for projects and investments, and can help ensure that regional plans and projects are consistent with Houston County's vision for the future. The goals and policies identified in this Plan can also involve more than just county or local units of government; non-profits, community organizations, private businesses, visitors, and residents can help achieve the County's vision as well.

## Amending the Comprehensive Plan

Like many government plans and documents, a comprehensive plan is a living document that may need to be changed from time to time to address ever changing wants and needs of the County. As such, processes and procedures to amend this Plan are outlined here. Two types of amendments could be considered by the County: a text amendment, or a map amendment. Amendments to a comprehensive plan may be initiated by the County, or can be proposed by a property owner. Examples of a text amendment could include updating Chapter 4 if a new park is created, a trail is established, or an addition of a new goal or policy. Examples of a map amendment could include adding a new road into the road maps in Chapter Three; Chapter Two specifically discusses amending the Future Land Use Map.

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed by the County Planning Commission. The Commission will review an amendment request, and provide a recommendation on the request to the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners will ultimately decide whether to approve or deny a requested amendment to the Plan.

### Criteria to consider when reviewing an amendment:

- The change is consistent with the overall vision of the County
- The change does not create an adverse impact on public facilities and services that cannot be mitigated
- The change results in development that is inconsistent with or negatively impacts surrounding properties
- The change results in consistency between city, township, county, and/or other regional plans
- The change is necessary due to an identified or demonstrated need not identified at the time of the Plan being adopted

The County should review and update the Plan on a regular basis. Minnesota State Statutes outline the rules regarding County Planning; 394.232 notes an update shall occur at least every ten years.

## Tools for Implementation

The County has multiple tools available to help implement this Plan. The first tool available is the County's official controls, primarily the County Zoning Ordinance. With the Comprehensive Plan as its guide, the zoning and subdivision regulations within the ordinance set specific controls and requirements that ensure new development, redevelopment, and land uses are consistent with the Plan. The County will need to review the Zoning Ordinance and the Zoning Map on a regular basis, as it is imperative for the County's zoning and subdivision regulations to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The County can also utilize budgeting plans and policies, such as a Capital Improvement Program, to help plan for projects that carry out the goals of this Plan. The County also incorporates the comprehensive plans of the cities within the County into this Plan by reference, and looks to further work with the cities and townships to coordinate actions and activity moving forward.

## Implementation Action Plan

Actions will be needed to turn the goals and policies identified in this plan into reality. In addition to the tools above, an Implementation Action Plan is included to help guide the County with implementing this Plan. This action plan helps consolidate the policies identified throughout the Plan into one location, and includes the following information:

- Policies
- Priority Levels
  - Policies are identified as primarily short-term or long-term in scope.
  - Some policies may not fit perfectly into one single priority level, so the County should be flexible in how they interpret and schedule the implementation of specific policies.
- Who will lead the implementation of the policy, and who may assist and provide support
  - County Staff will likely undertake the day-to-day implementation of most policies.
  - The Board of Commissioners, as the legislating body of the County, will likely be involved in the implementation of many policies.
  - Other groups not listed in this action plan can also contribute to the implementation of policies in this Plan, so these should not be construed to be exhaustive lists.
- Current status of implementation
  - Some policies are already being implemented, and are designated as ongoing, whereas other policies may require the County to create a specific work plan or schedule prior to starting implementation.
- Notes for consideration
  - This commentary is meant to help clarify and provide further details regarding the implementation of specific policies.

This Comprehensive Plan is meant to guide the County for the next twenty years, so implementation of some policies will not occur immediately. The implementation of some policies is already underway, though, as a result of past policies and plans, and past and current ordinances. The County Board of Commissioners and/or Planning Commission should review the progress of the action plan with County staff on a yearly or every other year basis.

## Implementation Action Plan

	Policies	Priority	Lead/ Primary	Secondary/ Support	Status	Notes
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>						
1	Enact programs to protect and preserve prime agricultural land which has been historically tilled.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County Zoning Ordinance includes requirements that protect and preserve agricultural land. Staff enforces the ordinance; PC & BOC will consider goals and policies when reviewing development requests, ordinance amendments, and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.
2	Locate rural housing development away from recognized commercial agricultural areas and into areas with marginal agricultural soil, and areas adjacent to existing cities where urban services can easily be extended.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Current Zoning Ordinance includes requirements that limit rural housing developments. Staff enforces the ordinance; PC & BOC will consider goals and policies when reviewing development requests, ordinance amendments, and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.
3	Enact programs to preserve and protect historically significant areas throughout the County.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, County Historical Society, Planning Commission, Townships	TBD	County can work with residents, property owners, towns, cities, and other organizations to identify historically significant areas and properties in Houston County.
4	Adopt State of Minnesota standards as minimum requirements for the protection of floodplains, wetlands, solid waste disposal, feedlots, sanitary waste disposal, water quality standards, and other necessary pollution control measures.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County staff will continue to review ordinances are up-to-date with state standards.
5	Enact programs to protect the natural resources in the County. Use natural resources information as a basis for determining future areas for urban expansion.	Short-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships, Watershed District	Ongoing	
6	Enact programs to protect and preserve shorelands, floodplains, wetlands, trout streams and steep bluffs from urban development which may be detrimental to the general public health and welfare.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Current Zoning Ordinance includes regulations protecting shorelands, floodplains, and bluffs from development.

7	Prohibit extensions of public services into areas where development should not occur due to natural and man-made constraints. Such areas include floodplains, steep bluffs, major forest and parks and wildlife areas.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, County Engineer, Townships	Ongoing	
8	Adopt utility standards and programs (sewer and water) that will minimize pollution problems and reinforce the County development policies.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	
9	Allow rural housing in areas where the soils, topography and water table are such that the individual sewage disposal systems can properly function.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, County Engineer, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff, PC, and BOC will consider this when reviewing development applications and zoning requests.
10	Locate transportation facilities in such a manner as to minimize environmental damage, and reinforce County growth policies and plans for the areas. These uses include highways, airports, railroads, and other modes of moving people and goods.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department	BOC, Planning Commission, Zoning Staff	Ongoing	County Staff will consider environmental factors when locating new transportation facilities.
11	Coordinate County policies with the adopted policies of the cities for extension of their development into the rural areas, and review plans and ordinances of cities as they are proposed and adopted.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff will review city and township Comprehensive Plans and amendments, orderly annexation agreements, and other ordinances to ensure they are consistent with the County Plan regarding extension of development into rural areas.

## CHAPTER TWO

Agricultural Policies	Protect and preserve prime agricultural land throughout the County by limiting development in agricultural areas, unless identified for development under city capital improvement plans or city comprehensive plans.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County Staff will review city and township Comprehensive Plans and amendments, orderly annexation agreements, and other ordinances to ensure they are consistent with the County Plan regarding development in unincorporated areas.
	Promote County and state legislation which will sustain and promote agriculture as significant economic activity and land use in the County.	Long-term	BOC	Planning Commission	Ongoing	
	Encourage governmental units to avoid locating major public facilities, roads, and developments in good agricultural land areas.	Long-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	

Agricultural Policies	Encourage farmers to adopt and maintain sound soil erosion control practices.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission, SWCD	Ongoing	
	Carefully control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement areas in the County to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Ordinances should be reviewed and updated periodically in regards to feedlots and CAFOs.
	Clarify what is and is not allowed for lot splits within the County zoning ordinance.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, EDA, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Work to educate the public on the zoning rules. Steps to take can include creating application guides, FAQ's, and revising ordinance language.
Natural Resource Policies	Promote sustainable land management practices that protect the natural resources in the County, including wetlands and sloughs, bluffs, woodlands, and prime agricultural areas.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	
	"Protect the woodlands and hardwood forests in the County by carefully regulating the location and density of development and by prohibiting the clear-cutting of the woodlands. Woodlands need to be protected for the following reasons: 1. To absorb stormwater in order to minimize stormwater runoff and the consequent soil erosion. 2. To serve as a continuous source of lumber and firewood. 3. To serve as vegetation in order to retain a proper balance of nature."	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County staff will periodically review ordinance requirements pertaining to tree removal and clear cutting of wooded areas.
	Protect existing wetlands and sloughs in the County by prohibiting development and adversely altering of these areas.	Long-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County staff will periodically review ordinance requirements pertaining to development in shoreland and wetland areas.
	Promote the preservation and improvement of all rivers and trout streams in an unpolluted state.	Long-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Support local and regional partners on implementation of projects such as the Root River One Watershed, One Plan and the WinLaC One Watershed, One Plan.
	Promote soils conservation and erosion control practices in the County.	Long-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Ordinances should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure proper erosion control practices are implemented during development projects.

Natural Resource Policies	Encourage development to conform to the natural limitations presented by topography and soils, so as to create the least potential for soil erosion.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County staff can alert landowners during the pre-application process of development strategies.
	Control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement areas in the County to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Ordinances should be reviewed and updated periodically in regards to feedlots and CAFOs.
	Regulate the location of waste management activities to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.	Long-term	Environmental Services Staff	BOC, Cities, La Crosse County, Townships, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Work with local and regional partners to continue managing and disposing of waste and recycling.
Housing Policies	Encourage the location of residential subdivisions and major developments near existing cities where urban services can easily be provided.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Review and update the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map periodically to ensure areas near cities and urban services are guided for development instead of agricultural and natural areas.
	Discourage scattered and “leap-frog” residential development in commercial agricultural areas.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff can discuss issues of scattered development with landowners and applicants during the pre-application process.
	Encourage the use of natural resource information such as soils, topography, groundwater, etc., in residential site designs.	Long-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff can discuss natural resource information with landowners and applicants during the pre-application process.
	Prohibit the location of rural housing with septic tanks and drainfields in areas of steep slopes, high bedrock or water table to minimize pollution problems.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County Staff can periodically review and update ordinances pertaining to septic systems.
	Use soils and other-natural resources information as a basis for establishing minimum lot sizes for rural housing with septic tanks and drainfields.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County Staff can periodically review and update requirements for different zoning districts.
	Encourage the location of manufactured home parks in urban residential or mobile home residential districts which are served by central sewer and water services	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff can periodically review and update zoning ordinance language and requirements regarding manufactured home developments.
	Only allow the location of multi-family residential development in areas where community sewer and water facilities are available.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff can identify existing multi-family uses in unincorporated areas, and can periodically review zoning ordinance language to ensure such uses are located where sewer and water is available.



Housing Policies	Develop and adopt provisions in development ordinances which encourage energy-efficient and sustainable site and housing unit designs.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff can periodically review and update zoning requirements pertaining to site design and building standards.
	Encourage programs that promote the rehabilitation of existing older homes.	Long-term	EDA, Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Connect landowners to organizations and agencies that specialize in housing rehab.
Economic Development Policies	Encourage programs that will promote diversified economic development in the County, such as industrial, retail, trade, healthcare, ag-oriented, and service industries.	Long-term	EDA	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Encourage industrial development in such a way as to enhance the tax base and increase employment opportunities while at the same time placing minimal demands on the environment.	Long-term	EDA, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Encourage major industrial developments to locate in or near existing cities where public services (such as city sewer and water) can easily be extended and near places of adequate transportation systems.	Long-term	EDA, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Encourage major commercial developments to locate in or near existing cities where public services (such as city sewer and water) can easily be extended and near places of good accessibility.	Long-term	EDA, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Carefully consider unplanned, scattered, and strip commercial development in unincorporated areas that may have an adverse effect on existing commercial centers.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
Land Use Policies - Unincorporated Communities	Recognize unincorporated communities as urban type densities and apply appropriate land use controls.	Short-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Unincorporated communities have historically been developed and subdivided differently than agricultural areas; as such they are zoned differently. County Staff will periodically review the language for zoning districts and regulations for these areas.
	Require new development in unincorporated communities to install septic systems that meet the requirements of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Houston County.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff will continue to monitor and inspect septic systems in the County.

Land Use Policies - Unincorporated Communities	Require all new development to conform to the land use classifications permitted in each zoning district, as established by the County.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	A proposed use that is not permitted in the zone a parcel is within would require a rezoning, or a zoning ordinance amendment.
	Permit existing lots of land that are not meeting minimum lot standards or density requirements to be developed, provided they can meet minimum standards for disposal of onsite sewage.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Existing lots that are unable to meet minimum standards for on-site sewage disposal cannot be developed, unless a variance is granted.
Land Use Policies - Urban Expansion Areas	Carefully regulate urban expansion in the areas around incorporated cities to minimize scattered development from occurring.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff will review city and township Comprehensive Plans and amendments, orderly annexation agreements, and other ordinances to ensure they are consistent with the County Plan regarding extension of development into rural areas.
	Develop a review procedure between the cities and the County for all development proposed in this area.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	TBD	County staff, townships, and cities can create a review procedure to discuss potential developments and expansions.
	Allow urban development in an area only if the area is included in the City's Capital Improvements Program, or identified in their Comprehensive Plan, as areas to provide public services such as sanitary sewers and highways.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Plan future urban expansion areas around the cities on projected land use needs as determined by proper planning.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	County Staff will review city and township Comprehensive Plans and amendments, orderly annexation agreements, and other ordinances to ensure they are consistent with the County Plan regarding extension of development into rural areas.
Alternative Energy Policies	Review and explore standards and permitting requirements for alternative energy systems used for personal use, or by individual residences or businesses.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission	Ongoing	Ordinances should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure current and latest standards are considered.

## CHAPTER THREE

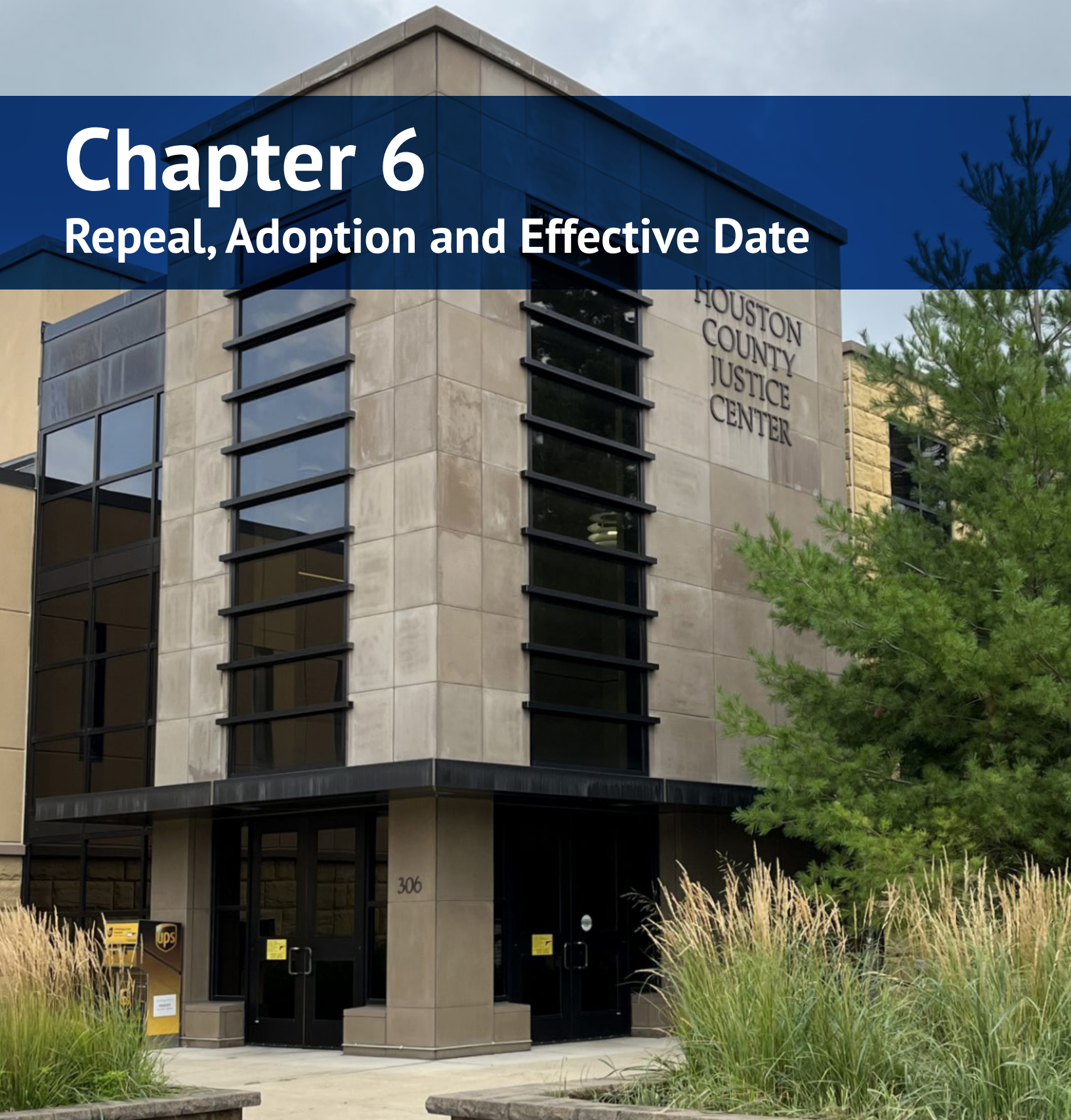
Transportation Policies	Develop a transportation system which reinforces the County's growth policies.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department	BOC, Cities, Townships	Ongoing	
	Coordinate land use, airport master plans, and transportation plans to minimize adverse effects of transportation systems (noise, air pollution) on adjacent development.	Short-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Townships	Ongoing	Work towards implementing the 2020 Airport Master Plan and Layout Plan.
	To the extent possible, avoid placing transportation facilities (such as roads, bridges, airports, park and rides, maintenance shops) in locations that adversely affect the natural resources and prime agricultural areas of the County.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department	BOC, Cities, MnDOT, Townships	Ongoing	
	Encourage the development of a transportation system that properly balances considerations of safety, accessibility, environmental protection and cost.	Long-term	County Engineer	BOC, Cities, MnDOT, Townships	Ongoing	
	Regulate land use development at transportation intersections and interchanges in order to avoid compromising safety, accessibility, and functions of highways.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, MnDOT, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Review and update the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map periodically in regards to zones and uses near and around transportation intersections.
	Encourages the development of a transportation system which properly integrates the various types and levels of highways (state, County, and local) to maximize safety and accessibility.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department	BOC, Cities, MnDOT, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Carefully review the location of pipelines and high voltage transmission lines in the County in order to minimize impacts.	Long-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	

Wastewater Policies	Discourage development in areas where on-site sewer systems may not function properly due to soil characteristics.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County Staff can alert landowners and applicants to potential issues during the pre-application process.
	Apply the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's standards for on-site sewer systems.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	Ongoing	County staff will periodically review and update ordinances to ensure adherence to current MPCA standards.
	Encourage the extension of public utilities in accordance with local comprehensive plans in order to achieve orderly growth and infrastructure that is economical to construct and maintain.	Long-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
	Concentrate major residential, commercial, and industrial land uses near cities which have access to existing municipal water and sewer systems, or to areas identified in plans for extension of municipal water and sewer systems.	Long-term	Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Review and update the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map periodically to ensure areas near cities and urban services are guided for development instead of agricultural and natural areas.
Water Supply Policies	Prioritize groundwater impacts in policy development.	Long-term	BOC, Planning Commission	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	Ongoing	
	Encourage policies that positively impact the drinking water in the County.	Long-term	BOC, Planning Commission	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	Ongoing	
Surface Water Management Policies	Support the Root River One Watershed One Plan, the WinLac One Watershed One Plan, Crooked Creek Watershed District, and the Houston County local water plan.	Long-term	SWCD, Zoning Staff, Watershed District	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Collaborate with local, regional, and state partners on implementation and updates to these plans.

Solid Waste Policies	Update solid waste management plans and ordinances in accordance to state law.	Long-term	Environmental Services Staff	BOC, Planning Commission	TBD	County staff can review and periodically update plans and ordinances.
	Continue to provide waste management facilities for residents and businesses.	Long-term	Environmental Services Staff	BOC	Ongoing	
	Continue to partner with other regional agencies on addressing waste materials and disposal.	Long-term	Environmental Services Staff	BOC, Cities, La Crosse County, Townships	Ongoing	Work with local and regional partners to continue managing and disposing of waste and recycling.
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>						
1	Maintain County Parks to a level that compliments State Parks, and meets the demands of citizens in the County.	Short-term	County Engineer	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
2	Encourage the creation of new parks as they are needed and desired by the citizens of the County.	Long-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Review and update park dedication requirements in Zoning Ordinance.
3	Provide sufficient recreation facilities within County parks to maximize the use of the parks.	Long-term	County Engineer	BOC, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	
4	Protect high-quality natural resource areas (wetlands, floodplains, forests, bluffs/steep slopes) and encourage passive and active public recreation uses.	Long-term	County Engineer, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Periodically review and update the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map to identify and protect high-quality natural resources areas from development. Work with cities, towns, and other partners on recreation opportunities in natural resources areas.
5	Encourage establishment of trails for use by pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users.	Long-term	County Engineer, Highway Department, Zoning Staff	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Ongoing	Consider addition of trails in road ROW during road construction and improvement projects. Collaborate with local and regional partners on establishment of new trails.
6	Connect Root River Trail to Caledonia and La Crescent	Long-term	BOC, Cities, Planning Commission, Townships	Community Groups, DNR, MnDOT, County Engineer, Zoning Staff	TBD	Collaborate with local, regional, and state partners to extend the Root River Trail.

# Chapter 6

## Repeal, Adoption and Effective Date



## Chapter 6 – Repeal, Adoption and Effective Date

### 6.1 REPEAL

The Houston County Land Use Plan, adopted December 8, 1998, is hereby repealed upon the adoption and publication of the Plan presented in this document. Any other plans or parts of plans of the County of Houston in conflict with the provisions of this Plan are hereby repealed.

### 6.2 PUBLIC HEARING AND PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Houston County Planning Commission, after proper notice and publication, held a public hearing on the adoption of this Plan on July 25, 2023, at the Houston County Courthouse. After hearing public testimony and with due deliberation, the Planning Commission voted six ayes and zero nays to recommend adoption of this Plan to the Houston County Board of Commissioners.

### 6.3 ADOPTION

The Houston County Board of Commissioners, after proper notice and publication, held a public hearing on the adoption of this Plan on June 13, 2023, to hear public testimony. A second public hearing on the adoption of this Plan was held July 25, 2023, at the Houston County Courthouse and with due deliberation, the Houston County Board of Commissioners voted five ayes and zero nays to adopt this Plan.


### 6.4 EFFECTIVE DATE

This Plan shall be in full force and effect from and after July 25, 2023.

Adopted: July 25, 2023

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Houston County  
Board of Commissioners

Attest:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Houston County Auditor

