

# **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**CITY OF HOUSTON, MINNESOTA**

**2009**

**FINAL PLAN**

Public Hearing on June 4, 2009  
Adopted by the Houston City Planning Commission on June 4, 2009  
Adopted by the City Council on August 10, 2009



Resolution



July 17, 2009

Chairperson and Members of the City of Houston Planning Commission  
Chairperson and Members of the Houston Economic Development Authority  
Honorable Mayor and Members of the Houston City Council

Ladies/Gentlemen:

Davy Engineering Co. is pleased to present this Comprehensive Plan to the City of Houston, Minnesota. A valuable part of this planning process was the joint planning approach involving the Planning Commission, the Economic Development Authority, and the very helpful city staff.

Your Comprehensive Plan is a forward-looking policy document. This Plan recommends some new city development concepts and actions designed to maintain a sustainable community well into the future. The Plan recommends the development of a series of implementation tools and follow-up actions to bring planning recommendations into reality. Keep in mind that elements of this Plan can be amended at any time as new issues and opportunities arise.

Davy Engineering wants to thank the City of Houston for retaining us to assist you with this planning program.

Sincerely,

DAVY ENGINEERING CO.  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS

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William J. Burke, AICP  
Community Planner



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Connie Edwards, Mayor

### **City Council**

Cheryl Sanden-Beth, Acting Mayor  
Joe Krage  
Eric Jerviss  
Tony Schultz

Larry Jerviss, City Administrator  
Audrey Hegland, Administrative Assistant  
Randy Steinfeldt, Zoning Administrator  
Bob Borowiak, City Superintendent

### **City Planning Commission**

Richard Carr  
Jim Edwards  
Dawn Henk  
Joe Krage  
Lyle Peterson  
Randy Steinfeldt, ex-official

### **Economic Development Authority**

Krin Abraham-Berg, President  
Bill Hoskins, Vice President  
Connie Edwards  
Tony Schultz  
Bob Carlson  
Nancy Forsyth  
Melanie Jore  
Larry Jerviss, Admin. Support

## **PLANNING AND DESIGN ASSISTANCE:**

Davy Engineering Co.

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# Introduction

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The Houston City Council has determined that the community is in need of a Comprehensive Plan to establish goals and programs to provide for the future welfare of the community.

To proceed with this effort, the City Council decided on August 13, 2007 to begin the process of developing a Comprehensive Plan.

This Planning process was to focus on the needs and strategies to provide for residential growth and economic development.

The City has prepared this Comprehensive Plan under the authority of Sections 462.351 to 462.364 of Minnesota State Statutes. Municipal Planning under these statutes has the general purpose of “promoting the health, safety and general welfare” of the community. More specifically, the State Planning Legislation, S.462.351, describes the policy and purpose of municipal planning as:

The Legislature finds that municipalities are faced with mounting problems in providing means of guiding future development of land so as to insure a safer, more pleasant and more economical environment for residential, commercial, industrial and public activities, to preserve agricultural and other open lands, and to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare. Municipalities can prepare for anticipated changes and by such preparations bring about significant savings in both private and public expenditures. Municipal Planning, by providing public guides to future municipal action, enables other public and private agencies to Plan their activities in harmony with the municipality’s Plans. Municipal Planning will assist in developing lands more wisely to serve citizens more effectively, will make the provision of public services less costly, and will achieve a more secure tax base.

This Comprehensive Plan was developed according to the professional standards of the American Institute of Certified Planners. In addition, the State of Minnesota’s planning guidebook entitled, *Under Construction, Tools and Techniques for Local Planning*, was used as a resource for this project.

The City of Houston, Minnesota is located in the north central portion of Houston County, Minnesota. The map in **Figure 1** illustrates the regional location of the City which is in southeastern Minnesota near the Mississippi River. The La Crosse, Wisconsin metropolitan area is the closest metro area, about twenty miles northeast of the city.

State Statutes enable the City’s planning to extend into its extraterritorial planning area two miles outside the city limits. Houston County also has a planning and zoning function which extends into this two mile jurisdiction. Other county planning affecting the City of Houston includes the Houston County Water Plan and the county All Hazards Mitigation Plan. There is no multi-county regional planning jurisdiction covering southeastern Minnesota including Houston County.

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# **City Vision and Planning Goals**

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## **Community Vision**

The City of Houston envisions itself as a community with pride in its human and environmental resources and building on these resources for the future. This vision is focused on goals to identify those potentials which are a key to sustaining the community. Houston's vision and its implementing goals identify potentials which can sustain the city throughout the future. Accomplishing these goals will require leadership, continuous planning, and a variety of resources.

## **Overall Community Planning Goals**

Houston's vision for a prosperous future includes a long-term dedication to goals, policies and Plans to implement projects agreed to in its Comprehensive Plan. A city government's planning goals are structured within the powers and limitations of municipal government. A city cannot propose to do things beyond the laws that govern its activities. However, a city can set wide-ranging goals for any of its established municipal functions. City plans can make recommendations for how non-municipal organizations and individuals can partner with the city to achieve goals and projects beyond the normal powers of city government and thereby achieve a shared vision for the community that ordinarily would not be possible.

The following overall goals were developed within these guidelines and understandings.

1. Growth & Sustainability of the City
  - A. Build on the natural assets of the area, including city connections to the Root River and its relationship to the Root River trail, and use the scenic landscape south of the city for controlled growth.
  - B. Expand utility services to enable growth at feasible locations
  - C. Mitigate high ground-water impacts in site planning and building design.
2. Identify & Implement Needs and Opportunities For the Expansion of Housing and Business
  - A. Add lands to the City to accommodate housing growth throughout the future.
  - B. Extend utilities to accommodate private business investment.
  - C. Positive economic development environment to facilitate partnering between the city and business.
3. Hazard Mitigation
  - A. Improve the drainage of storm waters out of the city.

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# **Demographic Analysis and Projections**

The following demographic analysis for Houston County has been extracted from the 2007 semi-final draft of the Houston County Land Use Plan. Parts of this county analysis have been edited for length. All demographic statistics in this Plan are reported from the U.S. Census records or from the Minnesota State Demographic Services Center.

## **Population Demographics and Growth Projections from County Land Use Plan**

*(The Figures referenced here appear only in the County Land Use Plan document)*

1. **Population** – *The general magnitude of growth in Houston County can be seen from the county’s population and housing unit projections. Such projections are a component of a land use planning process. Figures 4 and 5 identify the state’s population projections for Houston County to the year 2030. The Minnesota State Demographic Center’s official population projections for Minnesota counties indicates a year 2030 population for Houston County of 23,060, compared to a year 2000 population of 19,718. This is an increase of 3,342 persons, a gain of 16.9%, or a growth rate of about one-half (0.5)% per year. Much of this population growth will be within the county’s seven cities. These are only projections; they are based largely on historic growth records. It is possible they may underestimate the increase in growth radiating out from the La Crosse metropolitan area adjacent to Houston County.*

*Recent demographic studies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that an increasing proportion of metropolitan population growth is locating in the counties adjacent to the metropolitan counties. This new finding could be expected to produce greater population growth in Houston County than official state projections. Also, this 30 year planning period may see a new population component in the form of a retirement population from the Twin Cities and Rochester metro areas. Residents from these metro areas have been establishing recreational and seasonal housing in Houston County, and there are well established trends of such housing becoming permanent housing for retirement purposes. This kind of population growth would not be reflected in official population projections. Additional discussion of this trend is contained in the Seasonal and Recreational Housing section below.*

2. **Economy** – *The third and fourth pages of Figure 2 and the Census of Agriculture information at the end of Figure 2 describe the economic structure of Houston County. This Land Use Plan is not intended to provide a Comprehensive analysis of the county’s economy nor proposals for economic development. There are other programs and organizations that are active in this area. Economic development is a conventional element of a total county Comprehensive Plan.*
3. **Housing Units** – *The Demographic Center’s projection of housing units for Houston County indicates 10,270 households in the year 2030, compared to 7,633 in the year 2000. This is an increase of 2,637 households or a gain of 34.5% over 30 years. This increase averages out to 88 new households per year, with many of them being located in the cities. County households increased at the rate of 10.3% from 1990 to 2000, for a 10-year gain of 789 households, or 79 households per year.*

*According to Minnesota Demographic Center’s projections, 63.8 percent of the county’s population growth to the year 2030 will take place in the cities in the county. This leaves*

1,141 new people added to the rural parts of the county to the year 2030. To get an general idea of the amount of new rural housing to be added during this period, its estimated that 456 new homes will be needed to house this new rural population, and at an assumed average of two acres per housing unit, there would be a projected need for about 40 acres of land to accommodate this new rural housing to the year 2030. Of course, some of this housing will be located on much larger parcels, but the basic amount of land area needed for the housing and directly related facilities would tend to be similar for most if not all new housing.

The above projection is for the year-round population which is counted as official county residents, but there will be additional land requirements for recreational and seasonal housing which may even exceed the amount of land area needed for year-round housing, depending on the area of the county.

4. **Seasonal and Recreational Housing** – Not all housing being built in Houston County is for year-round living. An increasing proportion of housing is being built for seasonal and recreational living, and most, if not all, of this housing is being built in the rural part of the county. U.S. Census Bureau records indicate significant growth in this form of housing in Houston County. These records indicate the presence of 84 seasonal and recreational housing units in Houston County in 1990, and 262 such units in 2000. This is an increase of 212% in 10 years. This rate of increase would produce 1,666 new seasonal and recreational units by the year 2030, or an average of 55 such housing units per year. This form of housing could have greater impacts on the landscape and on governmental services than year-round housing.

A quote from the book *Miles from Nowhere*, by Dayton Duncan, helps explain national seasonal and recreational housing trend that is already present in Houston County and can be expected to continue. The quote is: “Tourism, now the number one industry in much of the west, is another manifestation of the Syndrome of Open Spaces. With three-quarters of the nation’s population living in urban areas, places without people are increasingly becoming metropolitan America’s playground.” There are economic benefits to be taped in servicing this tourism and seasonal living trend in Houston County.

5. **Age Structure, Retirement, and Increased Health Needs** – The aging population is one of the most significant demographic trends that will affect community planning and land use over the next 30 years or so. Starting about 2008, and lasting to about 2030, the “baby-boom” population will enter retirement. This will affect social and health services, accessibility needs, housing patterns and local economies. Figure 5 illustrates the upward movement of the baby boom population into the upper age levels during the next twenty five years. For example, seasonal housing may become year-round housing. It is expected there will be greater needs for such wellness facilities as sidewalks and walking trails. The largest Houston County age group in 2030 is projected to be the 65 to 74 age range. The 85 + age group will increase significantly during this period as well. The growth rate of the working age population will slow. There is projected to be shortages in the labor force for the filling of certain kinds of jobs. However, some demographic projections speculate that many persons of retirement age will continue working. Migrant labor is also a factor in dealing with labor shortages.

(End of demographic section extracted from Houston County Land Use Plan)

## **City of Houston Demographic Characteristics and Analysis**

1. **Existing Population** – The City of Houston’s 2006 population is estimated at 1,010, compared to a year 2000 population of 1,020, and a 1990 population of 1,013. These numbers indicate the city’s population is stable or perhaps experiencing a slight loss. State estimates could be in error, so the year 2010 U.S. Census count should be relied upon for actual population trend levels.
2. **Population Projections** – The Minnesota State Demographic Center projects the City of Houston’s population to be 1,021 for the year 2010; 1,025 for the year 2015; 1,028 for the year 2020; 1,029 for the year 2025; and 1,028 for the year 2030.

These projections essentially indicate a near no-growth population outlook for the city. However these projections are derived from a state-wide projection formula in which the state’s total projection of population is broken down into regions, counties, and local governmental units. This projection formula is based largely on past population numbers and trends. State projections are not based on a City’s growth plans or growth potentials. Pro-active planning and use of growth resources can result in population growth that exceeds state population projections.

3. **Age** – The median age of the city’s population was 44.1 years in 2000, compared to 38.8 years for Houston County, and 36.8 years for the state. The aging population is one of the most significant demographic trends that will affect communities and land use over the next 30 years or so. See the description of issues related to the aging population in the Houston County demographic section above.

The city’s 65+ age group consisted of 293 persons in 2000, or 28.7 percent of the population. This compares to 16% of the county population, and 12.14% of the state population.

The city’s 85+ age group consisted of 85 persons in 2000, or 8.3% of the city population. This compares to 2.6% of the county, and 1.96% for the state.

4. **Income** – The City of Houston’s median household income in 2000 was \$29,236, compared to \$40,680 for the county and \$54,023 for the state in 2006.

41.3% of city households had social security income in 2000, compared to 30.7% at the county level.

There were 99 individuals, or 10.9% of the population, below the poverty level in 2000, compared to 6.5% for the county, and 7.9% for the state. 24% of the local school students were eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program.

16.9% of the city’s 65+ age group was below the poverty level in 2000, compared to 11.2% for the county.

5. **Employment** – The greatest occupational employment categories of Houston City residents included:

Production, transportation, and material moving	27.9%
Management, professional, and related occupations	23.7%
Sales and office occupations	22.5%

The type of industry that City residents worked for included:

Manufacturing	23.7%
Educational, health, and social services	21.9%
Retail trade	11.8%

These employment patterns are at similar levels as for Houston County.

The two largest employers in the City of Houston are the Houston School District, with 170 employees, and Ace Telephone with 60 employees.

41% of city residents were not in the labor force in 2000, compared to 29.9% county-wide.

The mean travel time to work for city residents was 26.1 minutes in 2000; this compares to a county average of 20.7 minutes. About 65% of the employed residents of the city drove alone to work, and 19.1% carpooled. This compares to 75.6% and 9.8% for the same categories of commuting county-wide.

6. **Housing** – The City of Houston had 434 occupied housing units in 2000, consisting of 68.4% owner occupied and 31.6% renter occupied, compared to 81% and 19% respectively for the county, and 76.3% and 23.7% for the state. There were 25 vacant housing units in the city.

61.2% of city housing units were constructed before 1959. 59% of housing units have a mortgage, with a median mortgage payment of \$618. The median value of homes in the City was \$62,200 in 2000, compared to \$88,600 county-wide.

The median rent was \$393, with 49.6% rental households paying more than 25% of their household income for rent, and 38.3% of households paying more than 30% of their household income for rent.

The average household size in the city was 2.19 persons, and the average family size was 2.85 persons.

The projection of new housing units, based on the state's population projections, would indicate a growth of only 6 to 8 new homes in Houston by the year 2030. However, as pointed out in the population projection section above, there are reasons the city should not totally rely on state population projections as a basis for projecting new housing growth. For example, there were over thirty residential lots being developed for new housing as the Comprehensive Plan was being prepared.

## **Implications and Conclusions from Demographic Analysis**

- The City of Houston has not experienced population growth in recent years, and this has influenced state projections to indicate little population growth to the year 2030; however this state projection is based mostly on past trends.
- City growth has been significantly limited by the widespread presence of floodable lands and related drainage problems, although this limitation has been significantly reduced by flood levies built in the mid 1990's.
- An aggressive economic development program and new housing opportunity areas have the potential to stimulate population and job growth. The extension and/or enlargement of infrastructure are essential to the success of such a program.
- The city's population and economic growth is significantly dependent on the principal economic base elements of the school system, Ace Telephone, and the agricultural service industry which are the major employers in the city. Tourism has the potential to increase its economic stature and become a key economic base element which can help sustain and grow the community.
- City population growth will also be significantly dependent on attracting more employers and the availability of customary shopping and service businesses. Also important, will be the continued availability of local medical and wellness services to keep pace with an aging population.
- Existing population levels are partially maintained by the commuting of city residents to job centers within commutable distances.
- The city's population is significantly older than county and state norms.
- The income levels of city residents are significantly lower than county and state norms. A significant proportion of city residents are not job holders—over 40% of residents were not in the labor force in 2000.
- The city's housing stock is older than the norm for the county, and average housing values are lower than the county housing values.
- A tightly focused economic development program, supported by essential public infrastructure has the potential to stimulate population and job growth.
- Identifying and tapping newer components of community growth may yield greater benefits compared to the traditional economic underpinning of the city. Such components that have emerged as newer sources of community growth include resources such as: the area's scenic and open space environment, recreation, tourism, and diversified agricultural services.
- It will be necessary for the city to target its growth areas very well in light of the growth limitations posed by the significant amount of lands unavailable for development due to drainage and flooding and the confining growth boundary of the flood levy.

- Providing a healthy population and economic base for the future will be significantly dependent upon taking advantage of the natural resource benefits of the area, such as the esthetic appeal of the hills, and tapping the natural resource and tourism potential of the lands and waters in the Root River corridor.

# **Natural Resource Inventory, Capabilities, and Limitations**

The information presented here is limited to the purposes of municipal planning and does not contain a complete analysis of the following subject areas. More complete information of these and other natural resource subjects is available in the Houston County Water Plan, the Houston County Land Use Plan, the Houston County Hazard Mitigation Plan and various materials of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

1. **Soils** – Most of the City of Houston is located on flood plain soils which fall into the general soils association known as the Plainfield-Rowles-Minneska Association. There are four specific soil types in the city. These are generally silty-loam soils, with some sand and gravel at deeper depths. The Houston County Soil Survey classifies these soils as having wetness and flooding characteristics. They are rated as being “severe for development”. Three of the four soil types are rated as having a high water table. All these soils also fall into the soil survey classification as “prime farmland” soils. The city is surrounded on the west, north and east by these prime soils, and these lands are intensively used for field cropping.
2. **Ground Water** – Most of the City of Houston is underlain by a high ground water table. This condition may be due, in part, to the sub-surface presence of ground water in an old river channel under part of the city. The high ground water is also due to the soil types as reported above and the flat gradient of the topography extending back from the nearby Root River. The city has experienced the sub-surface flooding of basements due to periodically rising ground water.
3. **Streams and Surface Waters** – The Root River and its South Fork are the principle water resources in the City of Houston area. The Root River is a major river in the State of Minnesota with a drainage area of approx. 1,500 sq. miles. The city is located on the south side of the Root River, just upstream from the mouth of the South Fork of the Root River. The Root River at Houston also has the status as Judicial Ditch No. 1, for the purpose of eliminating extreme natural meandering of the natural channel. There are several surface water ponds and drainage channels in and around the city. The city has no actual frontage on the shorelines of either of these streams. These two rivers have created wide valley flood plains which have confined the expansion potential of the city.
4. **Flood Plain Areas and Drainage** – The City of Houston has historically been seriously impacted by flooding potential from the Root River. More recently, there have been secondary impacts associated with flood protection and drainage measures intended to protect against flooding. Prior to the mid 1990’s there were several areas within the city which were indicated on FEMA flood insurance rate maps as being subject to the 100 year floods. The flood levies have removed most of these flood prone lands from the regulated flood plain. **Figure 2** locates the extent of the flood prone lands in and around the City of Houston. A series of levies now provide protection against 100 year flood levels. These levies also have the potential to restrict city growth. **Figure 3** locates the flood levy which encloses much of the city and its relationship to the city’s developed uses. The current levy system was designed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers and built in the mid 1990’s. Highway 76 on the east side of the city provides flood protection from the South Branch. The levy system contains two outlet structures to release ponded

water from inside the levy, and one pump station to pump out ponded water that would accumulate within the levy system. There are a series of interior ponding areas to absorb surface water drainage within the city. There are eight such ponding areas within the city, with most of them on the west and southwest sides of the city. These ponding areas need some dredging to maintain their long term function. **Figure 2** illustrates the amount of land within the city that is set aside for flood control, either for levies or for ponding; this is a significant amount of area for a City of Houston's size. The Land Use Section of this plan describes a long range alternative use of some of the flood plain lands between the levy and the Root River. This alternative involves the transformation of these lands from intensive agriculture to a mix of low-impact recreation and conservation with a functional link to the Houston Nature Center and Root River Trail.

5. **Wetlands** – There are wetland zones on the west, south and east sides of town formed, in part, by the flat landscape and the accumulation of storm water which has no ready means of flowing to the adjacent rivers. These areas present a direct limitation to development.
6. **Economic Resources** – There are some rock or non-metallic mineral resources being industrially quarried in the City of Houston. There may be sand or gravel deposits in the flood plain, but these lands are currently in agricultural use. Timbered hills border the south side of the city; however, there is no known commercial tree harvesting on these lands adjacent to the city.
7. **Topography and Landscape** – The City of Houston is influenced by two extremes in topography; the flat plain of the Root River, and the irregular steep hills rising from the south side of the city. The hills rise up approximately 400 to 500 above the city to an elevation of approximately 1,180 feet above sea level. This hilly topography is the source of significant surface drainage down into the town's flat lands, and thus contributes to the accumulation of surface waters, some of which is directed to the ponding areas reported above or contribute to the wetland areas within town. Except for the areas of steepest slope gradient, this hilly topography has reasonable development capability, subject to environmental site development standards and open space maintenance. The city owns about eighty acres of woodlands outside the city limits which was acquired through a parks grant; this land is referred to as South Park.
8. **Environmental Contamination** – The natural resources in or adjacent to the City of Houston are not known to be contaminated in any significant manner. Areas of traditional concern include the affect of agricultural and household chemicals on surface and ground waters, non-point pollution form soil and water run-off, and stream sedimentation. The only point source of urban water discharge is from the city's waste water treatment plant, and the chemical quality of its discharge is within the limits imposed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The Root River and its South Branch are not known to be classified as contaminated water bodies, although siltation is likely present. Stream bank erosion has been an historic problem along the Root River, although none of this shoreline is within the City of Houston.
9. **Other Resources** – There are no known threatened or endangered species in or near the City of Houston that would pose a development limitation to the community.

## **Implications and Conclusions from Natural Resources Analysis**

Limitations to growth and development due to natural conditions:

- Most of city is location on historic flood prone lands
- City is enclosed by a flood levy which protect against flooding and also inhibits city growth to some extent
- Surface drainage problems and soil wetness
- A significant amount of the city is unavailable for development due to surface water impacts
- Surface water facilities inhibit the accommodation of school facilities and circulation
- High ground water table for much of city
- Surface water drainage off the hills into the flat lands of the city thereby contributing to the wetness and drainage problems in town
- Any potential benefits to the city from the Root River (recreation & tourism) are substantially denied to the city due to the physical barriers of the levy and intensive agricultural use.

Capabilities for growth and development related to natural conditions:

- Good soil characteristics for development
- Protection against flooding afforded by the levy system
- Flat land within town is less costly to prepare for development
- Good drainage and buildable soils on the hills to the south of town
- Scenic and timbered lands on south and west of the City are conducive to City expansion.
- A scenic natural environment in a scenic rural valley.
- The city's South Park natural area is a natural resource asset which has the potential to compliment a residential environment designed according to "green" design principles. This ridge top landscape would be conducive to a "sky-line" trail system with significant views to the north and south over the Root River.

The city's natural resources planning strategy is based on the above analysis.

### **City Goals** – Natural Resources

1. Minimize surface water flows from upland areas into the city.
2. Maintain designated water ponding areas to enable their flood control function.
3. Consider the use of the scenic lands near the city for housing environments.
4. Capitalize on the untapped potential of the natural lands around the city for natural resource restoration, environmental appreciation, and community sustainability.

### **City Policies** – Natural Resources

1. Require storm water retention for developments in the uplands draining into the city.
2. Require structural developments to take mitigating measures against the highest ground water areas in the city.

3. Maintain a good collaborative relationship with the Corps of Engineers for the maintenance of the levy system and the flood gates in the system.
4. Develop a collaborative plan for promoting natural resource enhancement associated with the scenic upland hills and other natural resource areas accessible to the city.
5. Support the policies and recommendations of the Houston County Mitigation Plan.

**City Action Program** – Natural Resources

1. Add storm water retention standards to the city zoning and platting ordinances.
2. Exercise plat review for developments within the city's extraterritorial plat review jurisdiction for the purpose of enforcing the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan, particularly street locations and drainage measures.
3. Develop a capital improvement program which includes the availability of municipal infrastructure to the upland areas south of the city.
4. Develop and implement measures for the dredging and maintenance of all designated ponding areas with additional consideration for esthetics and safety.
5. Annex the city owned South Park property
6. Collaborate with the land owners in the vicinity of South Park to develop a "green neighborhood" concept design which integrates the advantages of the South Park lands and still preserves its environmental qualities and park goals.
7. Communicate and cooperate with land owners in the Root River corridor for the possible reestablishment of selective parts of the flood plain to natural resource uses.

## **Economic Development**

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The engine of growth for a community is its economy. The demographic analysis section of this Plan describes the City of Houston's basic economic characteristics. This section of the plan was developed in close collaboration with the Houston Economic Development Authority.

A city's economic development status and potential revolves around six important factors and how they interrelate for a given community. These factors are: location, land development capability, the area's economic outlook, access advantages or problems, the living preferences of the population, and the ability to tap economic trends. In short, a good location, good land, jobs, highways, social structure, and adjustment to trends. In evaluating these factors, a community must focus on the core principal of economic development; which is, to build on the assets you have and to tap the potential you have.

**Location** – The City of Houston is located in a rural region of Houston County, with several small communities being ten to twenty miles away. There is a low population density within this region. The nearest urban area is the La Crosse metropolitan area located approximately twenty five miles away. The City of Winona is about twenty miles away, and the county seat of Caledonia is about fifteen miles away. The market area and economic potential of the City of Houston is largely dependent on its size and proximity to other communities. The La Crosse-La Crescent metropolitan area and the City of Caledonia are significant locational factors which likely have a depressing affect on Houston's retail economy, but convey economic benefits to Houston because they provide jobs to city residents enabled by the feasibility of commuting.

**Good Land & Infrastructure** – In general, the land available for development within the existing boundaries of the City of Houston for development is quite limited in quantity due to the confining flood levy and the numerous surface ponding areas. Drainage issues are important to the development capability in the City of Houston. The flood levy permits surface waters to drain out of the city at only three flood gates fed by a series of drainage ditches and ponding areas which are subject to filling-in with sediment. Good flow through this system is currently inhibited and maintenance is needed. It is also important for municipal development that there be developable lands with gravity flow for sewage to the waste treatment plant, and that be adequate water infrastructure to serve new developments and meet fire protection standards. The willingness and feasibility for a city to expand its boundaries is also important.

**Jobs** – Jobs are the principal foundation of population and economic growth for most communities; bedroom communities tend to be an exception to this. The City of Houston has a fairly limited commercial and industrial job base. The city has substantial benefit from the 170 employee job base at the local Houston School District. Much of the city's population is dependent on the jobs in other cities which are within commuting distance of Houston. Presently, the City has a limited resource base for significant job development due, in part, to the city's industrial park having limited potential due to infrastructure needs and drainage issues, and there is little readily available or planned retail expansion space.

**Highways** – The City of Houston is well served by Highways 16 and 76, although Interstate Highway 90 has diverted some the historic regional traffic that went though Houston on Highway 16. Highway 76 provides a direct connection to Interstate Highway 90 today. Highway 76 both north and south of town has a limited level of service due to its irregular

alignment in hilly terrain, and corresponding reductions in speed limit. The intersection of state highways is typically a growth point for a community, however, the City of Houston does not have this advantage since the lands around the intersection of Highways 16 and 76 is not conducive to development due to flooding, levy location, and agricultural lands.

**Social Structure** – This is a general term to describe some of the intangible values and preferences of the public regarding living environments. The preferences of the public for home locations had a direct bearing on where the population will be growing. There has been a strong national preference for rural, open-space living in recent years. Cities still remain the primary job centers; however, a large proportion of the urban labor force is increasingly choosing to reside within twenty to forty miles of their jobs, with population concentrations tending to locate in nearby rural communities and on scenic rural lands near major highways. Many families willingly trade-off higher commuting costs for the qualities of small town and rural living. It has been found that the increased costs for these home locations because of commuting are often mitigated by families rearranging expenditure priorities, with additional mitigation being a lower cost of living and lower taxes. Census findings and actual building records are indicating that communities accustomed to population loss or just holding their own have been growing, largely due to people desiring small town living and accomplishing it by commuting. The feasibility of this pattern is dependent upon an economically feasible commuting distance between the job community and the home community. An additional sociological factor is the strong preference of families to live in a school district that meets their goals for their children, including such elementary benefits as being able to walk or bike to school.

**Tapping Economic Trends and Potentials** – A significant component of community economic success is recognizing and capitalizing on economic and societal trends. Care is necessary in this process, to accurately pursue those trends that are a right fit of a giver community and do not bring with it negative impacts. Some economic growth sectors can be accompanied by social, environmental and unexpected infrastructure costs.

Those economic sectors which have been nationally projected to contain substantial growth throughout the future include: health care, tourism, the environment, technology and energy. A common thread throughout these sectors is the provision of a product or service that cannot be outsourced. Tapping these economic sectors requires compatibility with and support of the other six economic factors identified above. Private entrepreneurial ideas and investment is an important component of economic growth. However, public sector innovation can also yield substantial benefit, as in the case with the Houston school system which has increased its job base and its enrollment base through aggressive use of an open enrollment and on-line learning program which has 1,100 students state-wide. This program is growing at about 30 percent annually. Often such ideas and investments require public sector partnering with private individuals and incentives to be realized, particularly considering the reality of the competition between communities which often affects business decisions. A SWOT analysis is an important tool in starting to compose an economic development plan for accomplishing specific economic betterment projects in the City of Houston, mostly for the long-term sustainability of the community.

Tourism is a well-established economic trend which has become the economic base for some communities in this scenic hills and valley landscape region. This economic sector cannot be out-sourced. Tourism economies that capitalize on trails and other “silent sports” activities are becoming one of the most successful economic components for many cities. Houston’s existing Nature Center and its connections to the Center for Biological Diversity and

the Global Owl Project, in combination with the city's existing Festival of Owls, can be the catalyst for additional economic underpinning of the city. The city's Trail Head Park and its connection to the Root River Trail is an economic asset with significant future economic opportunities for the city.

As an example of trail related "silent sports" economic benefits, the City of Lanesboro, further west on the Root River Trail, realized an increase in lodging revenue from \$232,000 in 1989 to \$2,500,000 in 2005; and trip spending associated with trail use added another \$1,524,000. Also, 76% of tourists said that the Root River Trail was very important in their decision to visit Lanesboro. Further promotion of Houston as the east trail head community, with additional lodging capacity, would likely tap significant unrealized economic development potential of this local trail facility. Tapping the full potential of trails or touring routes requires the linking of other attractions to the trail to produce a "network" of attractions centered on the trail. The full realization of the Root River trail network for the City of Houston will require the linking of this trail to the Mississippi River with signed linkages to the Elroy-Sparta Trail and the Great River Trail which interconnect at La Crosse, WI and the Mississippi River Trail at Highway 26.

Further tapping of the Root River environment can involve the facilitation of canoeing on the Root River. The example of the canoeing economy in many communities along the Kickapoo River in Wisconsin and in communities along Upper Iowa River in Iowa are models to emulate. Tapping these kinds of local natural assets can underpin Houston's retail economy and help sustain the community without costly landscape development and infrastructure investments associated with other kinds of economic development.

**SWOT Analysis** – One of the components of an economic development Planning program is a strategic analysis of a city's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, known as a SWOT analysis. The City of Houston has undertaken this analysis with the assistance of the city's Economic Development Authority (EDA). This analysis was developed in 2007 and 2008 and should be updated regularly.

**Strengths:**

- Flood levy provides protection from 100 yr flood
- City has developable, high lands within city limits
- A progressive K-12 school system, with strong open enrollment & on-line studies program
- Ace Telephone headquarters; approx 60 employees at the Houston office
- Full range of core services; new motel and three B & B's
- The Root River valley scenic environment, with its natural resource base & river access
- The Root River trail and Nature Center and trail extension potential
- A wide Main Street with ample parking and esthetic street lighting
- Eighty acres of scenic, city owned land on the south edge of town
- Good library
- Hoedown Days celebration and the International Owls Festival
- A core of civic activists

**Weaknesses:**

- Few job opportunities
- Tax base not growing
- Only basic retail and service businesses, including uncertainty of clinic services

- Surrounded by farm land unavailable for development
- Much land in town reserved for drainage mitigation and water ponding
- Confined by the levy, and needs for better internal drainage through the levy
- Close-in levy location on the west side permanently confines city expansion to the west
- No water lines over 8 " diameter
- Insufficient water volumes and pressure on east side of town.
- The west side fire station is not on the city water & utility systems
- Industrial park and some other west side properties not served by sanitary sewer; this weakness diminishes the potential success of this industrial park.
- No lift station on west side of town
- Frequent, strong flooding on the Root River is a barrier to city development opportunities
- Much of land within flood levy not protected from flood levels above 100 yr flood
- Buildings in much of town are subject to high ground water impacts
- More lodging would likely be needed for expanded business and tourism activity
- The present Highway 76 barrier to the extension of the Root River Trail

#### **Opportunities:**

- Greater trail usage, and trail extension to Mississippi River trails
- Expanding the Nature Center into a National Birding Trail
- Connection of the Nature Center to the Center For Biodiversity
- Historic Bluff Country program and potentials from the Hwy. 16 National Scenic Byway
- A connection to the Root River from the Nature Center to a wetland and nature diversity environment with boardwalk access and Root River canoe access, all based on a constructive and willing relationship with the land owners in the area (funding is available). This effort may contain the opportunity for a land swap involving the South Park to enable City expansion in that area.
- Greater benefits from diverse family living if it were promoted more
- The uplands south of the City are conducive to housing growth
- East lift station capable of serving large open areas to SE in and out of city
- Building lots are available
- Commercial property is available
- Some scenic and wooded upland are located within the city and other such lands which are conducive to housing are located adjacent to the city.
- The large parcel of city owned lands south of town could contribute to a conservation-type residential development.
- Desire to work with the private sector to partner on economic development.

#### **Threats:**

- Extreme flood events could compromise the levy system
- Problems with maintaining the flow of storm water out of the retention ponds and through the designated channels out to the flood gates in the levy
- Any possibility for the loss of any part of the school system which includes two online, open enrollment programs and one alternative school program
- Any possibility that Highway 76 would become a permanent barrier to the eastward extension of the Root River Trail in the absence of methods to deal with bike/pedestrian conflicts with highway traffic

- Continued viability of the grocery store, clinic and other retail
- Competition from other communities

## **Economic Development Strategy**

This strategy is produced from the evaluation of the above SWOT analysis by the city's consultant and the Economic Development Authority (EDA). Upon adoption by the City of Houston, this strategy is intended to be implemented by both the City and the EDA.

### **City Goals – Economic Development**

1. Enlarge the job base by tapping potentials for commercial, industrial, and tourism businesses and related jobs.
2. Work to add growth areas to the city, particularly for new housing
3. Provide the maximum feasible levels of social, educational, health, leisure time, and public infrastructure necessary to attract and retain business and residents, and visitors.

### **City Policies – Economic Development**

1. Continued support for the Economic Development Authority and integration of their priorities into City implementation programs.
2. Apply tax increment finance programs where necessary and feasible
3. Plan for the extension of sanitary sewer and water services to the west side industrial park.
4. Apply for and utilize economic development and infrastructure assistance from county, state, and federal sources and provide local matching funds as required.
5. Provide incentives for development in the east and west side lift station service areas
6. Develop Plans and projects to provide the quality of living necessities required by a local labor force, such as: new housing locations, leisure time facilities, wellness resources, and a clean and scenic community environment
7. Enlarge the regional visibility and visitor attraction of the Nature Center which is a unique city resource. Support the Center's Global Owl Project.
8. Use the principles of hazard mitigation in Planning for all city development
9. Support the extension of the Root River trail to the east end of the city and eastward to Hokah and La Crescent to connect with the Mississippi River Trail.
10. Work with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota DNR and the Root River Initiative of the Nature Conservancy to promote and develop the Root River environmental corridor as a valuable environmental resource in its potential to become a new underpinning of the local economy.
11. Support efforts to strengthen and expand downtown business activity through infrastructure improvements and beautification measures.
12. Annexation of lands for housing and business development
13. Support the organization and activities associated with the Hoedown grounds
14. Continue to use tax increment finance (TIF) districts to facilitate economic development. The City has developed seven TIF project areas in four TIF districts, and one of these district programs has been completed.

15. Maintain an active relationship with Tri-County Electric to access business financing assistance.
16. Maintain full broadband communications capabilities for business and residents

### **City Action Program – Economic Development**

1. Develop Plans and financing arrangements to extend sewer and water services to the Westside Industrial Park, or as an alternative, investigate options for future industrial development at a more conducive location.
2. Expedite projects to clean out the storm water drainage channels
3. Seek willing annexers of land south and southwest of the City.
4. Place a sign identifying the industrial park, with contact information
5. Work with land owners and developers to complete existing housing project areas and plan for future housing expansion areas on lands free of development limitations.
6. Initiate a task force effort to work with the DOT and other state and federal officials to extend the Root River Trail under Highway 76, and continue the trail's extension through the city. Work with the Houston County EDA Trails Group and funding sources for the continued eastward extension of the trail to Hokah.
7. Initiate efforts by the city's Nature Center and Owl Center to develop a regional birding network that would enlarge the visibility of these centers and attract more visitors to the community and trail system. This network would include the Global Owl Project. Other birding centers and events that could compose parts of such a network include: the Alma Swan Watch, the Prairie du Chien Bald Eagle Appreciation Days, Effigy Mounds Hawk Watch, the Lansing Rivers & Bluffs All-Birding Festival, the Wabasha Eagle Days, and other such regional locations. Houston's International Owls Festival is an existing asset in promoting this birding network.
8. Investigate opportunities to retire flood prone lands in the Root River corridor through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement Program in support of other resource-based economic development recommendations.
9. Fund, and aggressively promote Houston as a trail head city, and plan for additional lodging development as a part of tourism development
10. Identify projects for application to the County Revolving Loan Fund.
11. Identify projects for application to state economic development programs, such as: Minnesota Job Opportunity Building Zone (JOBZ) program, the Minnesota Business Development Infrastructure program, the Minnesota Redevelopment Grant program, the state's Strategic Entrepreneurial Economic Development initiative or SEED, and Minnesota's environmental and outdoor recreation improvement program.
12. Develop a task force with the school system to plan and develop joint facilities which further enhances the sustainability of this school system; such as esthetic features and pedestrian linkages between school facilities and between the school and the community, and other actions that further strengthens the school system as a critical element in Houston's economic base.

## Land Use

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The characteristics of Houston's land usage are quite typical for a city of this size. The map in **Figure 3** illustrates the city's land use in 2007. The city's development has consumed much of the city's developable land area. There are some sizable tracts of farm land and other wet lands which have been unavailable for city expansion. Some lands in the city are outside the flood levy making them unavailable for urban use. The city has no shoreland frontage on the Root River. The city owns eighty acres of park land which is currently outside the city, and the wastewater treatment plant is also outside the city.

The city's land use measured by the county's assessment values is as follows:

Agriculture	\$ 518,000.00
Residential	\$ 30,908,100.00
Commercial	\$ 5,639,700.00
Industrial	\$ 0.00
Apartments	\$ 300,000.00
Recreational Land	\$ 10,000.00
Other	\$ <u>102,000.00</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 37,478,000.00</b>
Exempt lands	\$ 10,907,000.00 (Approx.)

These figures reveal that Houston County does not calculate and land values in the City used for industrial use. Single family residential land use dominates the City's land use values at 82 % of total values; and with apartments, the total residential land use values is 83.3% of total city land values. These values represent full-value as an estimate of market value. These are not the taxable values since various credits and other deductions are not subtracted from the full value figures.

The benefits and limitations of the flood levy constitute the most unusual feature related to land usage. Included in this feature is a significant amount of land used as storm water ponding areas and several related drainage channels. The generally high water table also has an effect on land use development.

Limited portions of the agricultural and other open lands are conducive for future urban development within the present city boundaries. Surface drainage and high ground water issues remain problematic for city growth in several areas. The redevelopment of existing developed lands is an additional growth option for the city. Such redevelopment typically occurs on commercial, industrial and residential parcels which have obsolete and inefficient uses and have good locations and access and available infrastructure.

### Residential

The city's residential area is relatively compact, with most housing lying south of the central business district. Residential use does not extend outside the city limits due mostly to the flood levy, and other flooding plain and drainage limitations. Development within the city extends mostly to the limits of the city's sewer and water system, without much expansion potential as of 2007. The residential area began an expansion to the east in 2007 enabled by

the new sanitary sewer lift station. This east side lift station is sized to accommodate a population equivalent of 578 persons. This includes an estimated 146 single family homes, or approximately 365 people. Much of the potential service area of this lift station is outside the city as of 2007. Housing use is beginning to extend into the higher lands south of the city. These lands are free of the drainage and high water table limitations in much of the rest of the city. Also, the housing on these higher lands enjoys scenic and wooded environment. This is a priority area for continued city housing expansion.

## **Commercial**

The city's commercial land use is concentrated in the central business district along Highway 16. This commercial core is relatively confined by residential and industrial land use and the flood levy a short distance to the north. This commercial use consists of a normal range of small community businesses and service uses. The map of existing land uses illustrates the extent of commercial uses in the community. One of the principal commercial service uses in the community is the headquarters office of Ace Telephone Company located in downtown Houston. This company is a significant employer in the area, with about sixty employees in the Houston area in 2008.

The city's recent commercial expansion has occurred mostly on the east side of town along Highway 16, where a new motel and auto dealership have located. These developments are located outside the city limits and are serviced by on-site utilities.

## **Industrial**

Houston is home to a variety of agricultural service uses including the Farmers Cooperative Elevator and the Houston Feed and Farm Supply.

The city has a west side industrial park which is home to Best Way, Inc. and Flex Craft; however, much of the area remains undeveloped due, in part, to the lack of centralized sewer and water services and high ground water and drainage limitations.

## **Public and Institutional Lands**

The City of Houston has a normal compliment of public lands and institutional uses for a community its size. The largest public user of lands is the Houston school district which maintains school and athletic facilities for grades K to 12. Associated facilities and services include: a virtual academy facility, an on-line learning center, a creative visions teaching academy and an early childhood center. The school system occupies 34.5 acres, with 9.3 acres occupied by storm water flowage areas. The school's K-6 and 7-12 building centers are about two blocks apart with pedestrian access somewhat limited. The district's softball and tennis physical education activities are inadequate.

The Houston Nature Center is located in the eighteen acre Trailhead Park on Plum Street. This facility has a visitor center and functions as the east trailhead for the Root River Trail. The City Lions Club recently funded a new band shell at the center which diversifies the potential for expanded use of the Center. The Center is surrounded by wetlands, prairie Plantings and considerable open space designated for drainage overflow and storm water storage. This Center is a unique public facility and is a regional destination attraction for tourist and visitors.

Central Park is a one square block city park in the center of town. It is an esthetic, open space facility with no active play fields. The city's South Park is a 118 acre woodland parcel adjacent to the city limits on the bluff lands south of town. About 80 acres of this land is outside the city. This land was obtained through a federal parks and open space grant several years ago and has some trail areas, but remains mostly undesignated for other uses, although primitive camping is allowed. A top-of-the-ridge trail system in this park, and perhaps extending through future developments adjacent thereto could elevate the value of residential environments on this scenic land to become one of the most valuable living environments in the region.

Other public lands include the lands occupied by the wastewater treatment plant, and the city wells and water reservoir on the south side of town, and the City Library and City Hall and senior citizens facility. The county government has a road department sand storage site a short distance east of town along Highway 16. The Houston Hoedown grounds are located on the north border of the downtown area adjacent to the Nature Center. Other institutional uses include four churches, a nursing home and clinic complex and the city fire and rescue facility.

The City has a substantial amount of its area designated as storm water storage ponds related to the flood levy system around the city. The map in the Public Facilities section illustrates the magnitude of these lands which will remain permanent open space in the city. The utility function of these lands is further described in the Public Facilities Chapter. Some of the city-owned ponding area on the east side of town is planned for a ball field complex.

## **Zoning of Lands**

**Figure 4** is the city's official zoning map as of 2008. These zoning patterns should be evaluated to affirm that they reflect the actual and intended uses of land. For example, the Nature Center area should have a zoning district other than Agricultural, such as a conservation or natural resources district zoning district; the city's large tracts of public lands should not be zoned residential. A new resource conservation district should be added to the zoning ordinance and reflected on the zoning map. The map of existing land use in **Figure 3** should be used as a guide to amend the existing zoning map.

## **The City of Houston's land use planning strategy is as follows:**

### **Goals** – Land Use

1. Promote the most economical and environmentally appropriate use of lands.
2. Maximum feasible compatibility between adjacent land uses.
3. Respect for property rights and protection of community rights.
4. Facilitate city housing growth on lands free of drainage and ground water problems, including the housing potential of the scenic uplands south of the city.
5. Place within the city limits all developed uses which rely on city services.

### **Policies and Programs** – Land Use

1. Cooperate with all interested land owners and developers to provide lands for residential development, including the scenic upland areas south of the city.
2. Develop a plan for phased housing growth into the uplands south of the city, including design concepts for South Park which would maximize the value and

appeal of housing to the features of this parcel of public land. This planning process should be a joint undertaking with property owners. A concept that should be explored here is the swapping of some or all of the South Park lands for other lands that would be of equal public value. The grant authorities that funded South Park indicate that this concept is a possibility. This concept would enable the development of a comprehensive housing development throughout the future. A partnership with private land owners in the area would also be necessary to the success of this concept. The greatest housing potential of this area, under the land-swap concept, would involve the retention of some of these South Park lands to be integrated into a master-planned housing development since its well established that proximity to park land increases the marketability and value of adjacent or nearby housing. It's recommended that the city explore the possibility of partnering with land owners in this area to discuss this idea. A helpful tool for such in this regard would be a concept drawing of various options illustrating what a master planned development would look like. If done well, such a development in this scenic landscape overlooking the Root River could be the premier living environment in southeast Minnesota.

3. Annex all lands outside the city which are connected to city utility services or which impede the annexation of other properties in the area or which would end up being islands of unincorporated lands.
4. Comply with the recommendations of the Houston County All Hazards Mitigation Plan regarding land use planning and development within the City of Houston.
5. Require Developer Agreements for private developments involving public utilities and streets intended for dedication to the city.
6. Work with the school district to implement school campus public needs such as sidewalks and other interconnectivity needs.
7. Implement necessary drainage improvements within the city, such as dredging of retention ponds and outlet channels. Work to obtain Corps of Engineers and FEMA to assist with this work.
8. Develop drainage improvements and a pumping station on Hwy. 76 to facilitate favorable housing environments on the east side of the City.
9. Update the zoning map to reflect actual land use patterns and development intentions.
10. Plan for city expansion away from flood prone drainage lands and high ground water zones and onto uplands to the south as a viable long term city expansion alternative.
11. Support the long term Root River flood plain reclamation for environmental and recreational use. Efforts as a part of this Comprehensive Plan involving a land use alternative of reestablishing the natural flood plain and wetland environment of the Root River flood plain on the city's north border was examined and found to be infeasible for the foreseeable future due to the destructiveness of frequent flooding and due to landowner resistance. This alternative was based on

concept of establishing an environmental education, recreation, and wetland reserve area which could provide economic and tourism benefits to the city and area. The velocity of flood flows at this location does significant damage to the land surface through eroding of the land surface and depositing large quantities of soil and debris, with some of this damage possibly due to the flood flows being pinched-in north of the city. This flood plain reclamation concept would be consistent with, may well qualify for funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement Program; the conservation Innovation Grant program of the Natural Resource Conservation Service; the Root River Partnership program of the Nature Conservancy; the Root River program of the Upper Mississippi conservation Plan of the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and programs of the Root River Soil and Water Conservation Board of Houston County. These sources of assistance could be targeted to the reestablishment of natural flood plain landscape for the public benefits described above.

12. It's the city's policy to implement the city's Land Use Plan as illustrated in **Figure 5**. The controlling factors which shape this plan include the flood levy limiting growth to the west, north and east, the presence of high ground water in much of the city, and the growth opportunities on the higher lands on the south border of the city which are free of the other growth limitations.

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## Transportation

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The City of Houston's transportation services has experienced significant transformation since its founding. Transportation factors are vital to the growth, competitiveness, and overall success of a community.

The City of Houston's earliest commercial transportation was steam boat service on the Root River from the Mississippi River up until the 1870's. Railroad travel and transport then became the city's important mode of transportation up till the railroad line was abandoned in the 1970's. Much of that rail bed in the Root River Valley was converted to a recreational trail through the national rails-to-trails program shortly after the rail abandonment. Even though this trail is secondary as a mode of transportation, its continuity as a regional recreational facility to the Mississippi River makes it a world-class facility and will be vital to the future of the City of Houston throughout the twenty first century. The trail's eastward extension is currently blocked by the need for an alternative to safely cross Highway 76. An at-grade crossing where the trail currently meets the highway is not desirable due to highway speeds at this location. This plan recommends that a grade separation facility be constructed to permit the extension of the trail under the highway, as is often done to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian movement.

For the latter half of the twentieth century and after the termination of rail travel, State Highway 16 was the city's principal transportation connection up until the advent of the Interstate Highway System. Highway 16 was the principal arterial highway extending through southern Minnesota. Much of the arterial traffic on this route was rerouted to Interstate Highway 90 in the 1970's. Highway 16 still remains a vitally important transportation connection for the city. Highway 16 is the principal commuter route to many job holders in the La Crosse-La Crescent metropolitan area. Highway 16 is classified as a National Scenic Byway. State Highway 76 is also an important north-south highway route which directly connects the city with Interstate Highway 90 about fourteen miles north of the city. Highway 76 also provides the city's connection to the county seat community of Caledonia, about fifteen miles to the south.

The closest commercial and passenger air transportation services are available at the La Crosse Municipal Airport. There is a public airport runway twenty miles away south of Caledonia, Minnesota. Rail transport and Amtrak passenger service is available in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Other rail transportation service is available at La Crescent, Minnesota, seventeen miles east of the City of Houston. Commercial barge transportation is available at several terminals on the Mississippi River in the City of La Crosse, Wisconsin. Barge transportation is not available during winter months.

Transportation internal to the City of Houston centers on its municipal street system. County Highway 13 does extend into the City of Houston from the west. There are no new streets or new street corridors planned by the City at the present time. New streets should be planned to achieve interconnectivity and regulate driveway spacing on major streets. Public streets planned as a part of private developments are the responsibility of those developers. The city will assume permanent responsibility for those streets if they are pre-approved and constructed according to city street standards. It is a goal and policy of the City of Houston that when streets are planned for reconstruction, that all underground utilities will also be evaluated and reconstructed at the same time if judged necessary.

There is no significant state or county highway changes planned in the state highway network affecting the City of Houston. There are no highway bypasses planned.

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# **Public Utilities**

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## **Municipal Water Services**

### **Goals and Policies**

1. Maintain a public water system which:
  - Delivers a healthy water supply meeting all regulatory standards
  - Has an adequate number of wells and storage facilities to deliver an adequate volume and storage of water for existing and future city growth
  - Meets the applicable standards for full fire protection for the city
2. Maintain a capital improvements program for the funding of water system needs
3. Increase the size of water lines when streets are repaired.

### **Inventory of facilities and capacities:**

1. Wells – number of wells and pumping capacities
  - Well No.1, 1948 – 200 gallons per minute
  - Well No. 2, -- abandoned 1987
  - Well No. 3, 1981 - 250 gallons per minute
2. Water storage
  - Hill top reservoir storage capacity is 150,000 gallons. This is an old reservoir which was rehabilitated in 1981.
3. Distribution system (many 4" lines, no lines over 8" except from reservoir)
  - The water system is well looped for continuous water circulation
  - Water lines are mostly cast iron
  - The Fire Department on the west side of town is not on the city water system and obtains its water supply from an on-site well
  - There many 4 inch lines, with no lines over eight inches except from the Reservoir
4. Total water use: the total water usage in the City of Houston was 32,674,000 gallons in 2007, with the peak daily water usage of 311,000 gallons. The largest water users in the city include the school system and the nursing home.

### **Water system needs and recommendations:**

1. Annex all properties outside the city having city water service
2. Replace all four inch water lines through an annual improvement schedule
3. Provide complete water services to the industrial park
4. Increase water capacity to the east side of town, including the nursing home.
5. In general, improve water supply and distribution system to meet fire fighting standards
6. Provide a larger water line to the nursing home
7. Develop a new fire department well
6. Provide an additional water reservoir and/or replace the existing water reservoir
7. Improve and/or replace well house No. 1.
8. Regularly review and upgrade the water use ordinance to assure adequate operating revenues and an adequate reserve account.

## **Sanitary Sewer System**

### **Goals and Policies**

1. Maintain a sanitary sewer system which:
  - Meets all regulatory standards
  - Provides service to all developed properties in the city
  - Has adequate size sewer mains for efficient flow
  - Has a waste water treatment plant capable of serving the future growth of the city
2. Maintain a capital improvements program for the funding of sanitary sewer system needs.

### **Inventory of facilities and capacities**

1. Waste water treatment plant
  - Age of plant and type of treatment – The plant was built in 1975. The type of treatment is activated sludge, with UV disinfection installed in 1998 and samplers installed in the 1990's. Two pumps were replaced and one pump was repaired after the 2007 flood. Various metal components associated with the clarifier were replaced in 2004.
  - Permit compliance – The plant is in compliance with all required permits
  - Design capacity of the plant – 250,000 gallons per day
  - Average daily volume – 100,000 gallons per day
  - Expansion potential – The facility is on a confined site
2. Lift station
  - Pumping capacity and expandability – 80 GPM expandable to 150 GPM
  - Size of service area – Potentially eastward to Hwy 76 and south into the upland area. Much of the area that the present treatment plant could handle is outside the city.
3. Sewer collection system
  - The collection system is composed mostly of eight inch lines. This system does not extend into parts of the west side of town including the industrial park.

### **Sewer system needs and recommendations:**

1. Annex the waste water treatment plant into the city.
2. Annex all properties outside the city having sanitary sewer service.
3. Develop a lift station on the west side of town; various engineering concepts for this improvement have been developed over the years.
4. Regularly review and upgrade the sewer rate ordinance to assure adequate operating revenue including an adequate reserve account.
5. Need to replace some treatment plant equipment which has been identified from engineering studies.
6. Upgrade and renovate the treatment plant during this 20 year planning period

## **Electric Service**

Electric service is provided by Tri-County Electric. They Plan to terminate the downtown electric substation in 2009 and sell off that parcel of land. They are rebuilding the distribution system in the City at present, upgrading from 2400 volts to 7200 volts.

Electric service comes into town comes from a Dairyland Power 69 KV transmission line on the east side of the community. Tri-county's distribution service comes into town along the levy and is partially underground. Tri-county has provided automatic meter readers for electric and water meter reading. The city has purchased new water meters, and Tri-county does combined electric and water bills and collects billings and sends to city.

## **Telephone**

Ace provides state-of-the-art tele-communications system. The City has access to fiber optics services and complete property hook-ups is an ongoing goal. Cable TV is also provided by Ace and Mediacom.

## **Gas**

Natural gas service is provided from Minnesota Energy Resources

## **Storm Drainage**

The City of Houston has significant storm water issues. The map is **Figure 2** illustrates the importance of storm water collection and discharge to the welfare of the City of Houston. A goal of the city is to obtain assistance from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and perhaps others to clean out drainage ditches to facilitate the outward flow of storm waters which accumulate within the city. There is also a need for associated mosquito control in the area of the storm water ponds.

It's also a goal of the City of Houston to replace flood gate at Highway 76 with a pumping station and enlarged ponding areas and drainage channels to facilitate drainage on the east side of town.

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## **Community Facilities and Services**

The City of Houston has a complete system of community facilities and services. These include:

1. Schools – The Houston School System maintains Comprehensive educational services in the City of Houston. These services include: the Houston High School, Houston elementary school which provides an official Core Knowledge Curriculum, Minnesota Virtual Academy with K-8 students throughout Minnesota in a home based on-line educational program, the Summit Learning Center – an alternative learning center for at-risk students, the Minnesota Center of Online Learning for students throughout Minnesota and the Houston community education program for lifelong learning for all age groups. This includes the Houston early childhood center.
2. The school campus is composed of 34.5 acres, which 9.3 acres in storm water ponding areas. There is a need to improve accessibility between the various separated areas of the campus lands, including sidewalk connectivity. Other needs include tennis and softball facilities.
3. Park and recreational facilities and needs are described in the Land Use Section of this Plan. Two additional ball fields and related facilities are being planned for the city lands on the east side of the city.
4. Four churches
5. The Houston Nature Center, featuring a state-of-the-art nature center facility featuring the regional Owl Center, and 18 acre native prairie, and serving as the trail head park for the root river trail.
6. The Houston Fire Department is located in a new facility in the city's industrial park. This department provides area wide services to five townships. It currently does not have city sanitary sewer or water services at this facility; however, this plan recommends the extension of these services as soon as feasible. The department currently obtains its bulk water supplies at its former facility in the downtown area.
7. The city has a community swimming pool organization, PRO Inc., advocating a new city swimming pool. A site near or at the Trail Head Park has been suggested as a location to investigate.
8. The Valley View Nursing Home provides state-of-the-art elder care for the city and area. The nursing home provides a 31 unit senior citizens apartment complex and an 18 unit Heritage Court assisted living complex.
9. A new clinic is attached to the nursing home.
10. The City Library is located on Cedar Street. This facility is limited in space and can be expected to require more space in the foreseeable future.

11. Social services – The South East Minnesota Community Action Council, SEMCAC, provides a meal site and bus transportation for its client base.
12. Houston County provides a recycling center in the City of Houston.

**The Goals and Policies** for the city's community facilities and services is to continue providing the full complement of community facilities and services represented by the above inventory, and to plan to implement the needs and projects identified in the description of these facilities and services.

# **Implementation**

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## **Goals, Policies, and Recommendations**

1. Planning Priority List - Develop an annual priority list of planning recommendations to work on, this task to be done by the Planning Commission.
2. Zoning - Update zoning ordinance and zoning map to be consistent with Comprehensive Plan recommendations.
3. Infrastructure Plan – Develop Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) to set priorities and calculate estimated costs and schedules for the implementation of the public works recommendations approved in this Comprehensive Plan.
4. Subdivision Ordinance – Review the subdivision ordinance to assure that it reflects how the city wishes the cost of development infrastructure to be assigned between the city and developers or property owners. Exercise the review of plats within the city’s extraterritorial plat review area for relationships to the city’s planned growth areas.
5. Annexation – Annex all properties with city services currently outside the city, this would also include the city’s wastewater treatment plant and South Park.
6. Impact Fee Ordinance – Develop an ordinance which enables the city to collect impact fees related to developments of a certain scale to help off-set the direct and indirect cost of city services related to such development.
7. Sewer Main Extensions – Begin planning sewer service to the west side industrial park.
8. Fire Station – Provide city sewer and water services to the fire station
9. Fire Protection and Water supply – Need improved water supply to east side of town, provide a looped trunk line water distribution system, and enlarged capacity water storage.
10. Dredging of Ponds and Channels - Initiate steps to request assistance from the Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and others to clean out storm water ponds and drainage channels within and adjacent to the city.
11. Root River Trail - Actively support the extension of the Root River Trail through the city and eastward to Hokah. Request the MN Dept. of Transportation to place a bike/pedestrian underpass under Highway 76 to eliminate safety concerns and to enable the trail to continue its eastward extension through the city. Apply for DOT enhancement funds under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and coordinate with the Corps of Engineers.
12. Nature Center – Support and assist the development of the Trail Head Park, including its Nature Center and its North American Owl Center. Support the

Center's affiliation with the Center for Biological Diversity and the Global Owl Project.

13. Proceed to develop the ball field complex on city lands on the east side. Develop a volunteer structure and funding contribution program to implement this project.
14. Planned Residential South of the City - Work with land owners and others to facilitate a residential development south of the city. Develop a "green neighborhood" concept plan which integrates housing expansion with South Park in a way that maximizes the benefits of permanent park land to a housing environment. This concept plan could illustrate ideas to enable land owners and the city to envision possible options for the use of these scenic uplands south of the city. A land-swap potential involving South Park should be investigated. Develop a housing site plan design for this area, including a development plan for those lands in South Park that would be active public use areas. Because of the steep hillsides in some of this area, slopes of 18 % or greater should be protected from development impacts, and public streets should not exceed 12%. A full range of other development standards and storm water mitigations would also be considered in any development in this hilly area.
15. Downtown Development - Develop a tightly focused action plan for the development of new businesses in the downtown area while reinforcing the strength of existing businesses. The Central Business District should be enhanced as the core retail area for pedestrian shopping and public/institutional services. The city's zoning standards for its Central Commercial zoning district should include design and development standards that reinforce this goal. In addition, retail shopping intended for the retail core area should not be permitted uses in the highway commercial zoning district.
16. Evaluation and Updating – The Plan Commission should evaluate and revise these Implementation goals and policies annually, and recommend a yearly action program to the City Council for implementation.
17. Transmit a copy of this Comprehensive Plan to Houston County authorities for their review regarding the plan's relationship to the planning activities of the county and of adjacent units of government.