Introduction

In July 2016, Rice County launched a survey to gather information on land use and development issues for the 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update. The Comprehensive Plan contains components relating to economic development, land use, agricultural/natural resource preservation, infrastructure and resource development, housing, recreational opportunities, cultural/historic preservation and other issues of community development. It contains implementation strategies in the form of goals and objectives to achieve the collaborative vision of the county’s future and serves as a guide for development decisions over the next twenty years.

Objectives

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan update begins with a civic engagement process in which all community members – citizens, landowners, townships, cities, agencies – are encouraged to participate in developing a shared vision of the county’s future. The survey sought input from community members on key environmental, land use, business development and transportation issues facing the county. Over 1,300 residents and landowners in Rice County responded to the survey. Results from the 23 survey questions are presented and summarized below.
Results

Question 1.

The majority of respondents reside in one of the 14 townships or either Northfield or Faribault. “Other” responses included Holden Township in Goodhue County owning land in Richland and Walcott Township, Rural Northfield, New Prague, Le Center, Medford and live in Lonsdale but operate a business in Nerstrand.

Where do you live?

- Other (please specify)
- Wheeling Township
- Wheatland Township
- Wells Township
- Webster Township
- Warsaw Township
- Walcott Township
- Shieldsville Township
- Richland Township
- Northfield Township
- Morristown Township
- Forest Township
- Erin Township
- Cannon City Township
- Bridgewater Township
- City of Morristown
- City of Nerstrand
- City of Faribault
- City of Northfield
- City of Dundas
- City of Lonsdale
- City of Dennison
Question 2.

What best describes your primary place of residence in Rice County?

Approximately 75% (985 responses) of respondents reside in an owner-occupied non-farm residence.
Question 3.

How long have you lived or owned land in Rice County?

Over 55% (725 responses) of respondents have lived or owned land in Rice County for more than 20 years. The second largest group was from respondents who have lived or owned land in Rice County from 1 to 5 years.

Question 4.

Do you work in Rice County?

53% (686 responses) respondents reported that they work in Rice County.
72% (949 responses) of respondents are 50 years old or older. Whereas 1% (16 responses) of respondents are under the age of 25.
Question 6.

How important are the following cultural resources to you? (Sum of % for Very Important and Somewhat Important Responses)

91% (1168 responses) of respondents indicated that Historic Preservation, Historic Structures & Museums are very or somewhat important cultural resources to them. Likewise, 91% (1164 responses), 90% (1147 responses) and 91% (1165 responses) indicated that Libraries, Community Events & Festivities and Community Centers, respectively, are very or somewhat important cultural resources to them.
Question 7.

Almost half of the respondents (48%, 618 responses) strongly agree that preserving existing agricultural land should be a planning priority for Rice County. Another 38% (485 responses) of respondents agree with the above statement. Only 8% (110 responses) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement.
Question 8.

Over half of respondents (55%, 716 responses) strongly agreed that local food production is important to the future of Rice County. Another 36% (473 responses) agreed with the above statement. Only 4% (57 responses) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement.
Question 9.

As the county continues to grow, maintaining Rice County's rural character and small town feel is important to the future of Rice County.

Half of respondents (51%, 658 responses) strongly agree that maintaining Rice County’s rural character and small town feel is important to the County’s future. Another 35% (458 responses) agree with the above statement.
Question 10.

With continued population growth projected for Rice County, what types of development/growth would you like to see in the county?

In general, respondents would be in favor of developing parks and nature preserves (77%, 998 responses), single-family residences (67%, 861 responses) and family farms (65%, 845 responses). Conversely, respondents would be least in favor of developing large corporate farms (3%, 39 responses), heavy industry (22%, 285 responses) and large retail (23%, 300 responses).
96% (1230 responses) of respondents feel that agricultural related businesses are very important or somewhat important for the needs of Rice County. Similarly, respondents feel that commercial/retail (93%, 1179 responses), service industry (92%, 1150 responses) and technology related (91%, 1154 responses) businesses are very important or somewhat important for the needs of the County. Home-based businesses (81%, 1026 responses) appear to be the least important for the needs of the County.
Question 12.

69% (887 responses) of respondents strongly agree or agree that tax dollars should be used to recruit new businesses and industries to Rice County.

Question 13.

94% (1192 responses) of respondents strongly agree or agree that growth in urban areas should focus on employment. Likewise, respondents strongly agree or agree that education (93%, 1171 responses), parks, open space, natural land (89%, 1113 responses) and recreation (87%, 1082 responses) should be focus’ of urban growth.
Question 14.

93% (1155 responses) of respondents strongly agree or agree that growth in rural areas should focus on agricultural production. Likewise, respondents strongly agree or agree that parks, open space, natural land (85%, 1057 responses), recreation (80%, 981 responses) and employment (76%, 935 responses) should be focus’ of rural growth.
Question 15.

Current zoning regulations/restrictions in place to protect public health, safety & welfare; preserve agricultural land; conserve natural resources and promote orderly development are:

- 45% (565 responses) agree that current zoning regulations/restrictions are adequate to protect public health, safety & welfare, preserve agricultural land, conserve natural resources and promote orderly development.
- 21% (273 responses) believe that regulations/restrictions are not strict enough.
- 16% (208 responses) believe that they are too strict.
- 18% (216 responses) have no opinion.

45% (565 responses) of respondents agree that current zoning regulations/restrictions are adequate to protect public health, safety & welfare, preserve agricultural land, conserve natural resources and promote orderly development. 21% (273 responses) believe that regulations/restrictions are not strict enough versus 16% (208 responses) that believe that they are too strict.
**Question 16.**

78% (1001 responses) of respondents feel that increasing alternative modes of transportation is very or somewhat important to the future of Rice County.

**Question 17.**

Respondents felt that river/streams (85%, 1074) and lakes (82%, 1046) need the most attention in order to improve or maintain the quality of life in Rice County. Followed by woodlands (62%, 795) and wetlands (61%, 781).
Question 18.

69% (882 responses) of respondents would like to see most new housing development occur in urban areas.

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MOST NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT OCCUR IN RICE COUNTY?

Urban areas
Both urban and rural areas
Rural areas

Question 19.

How important are the following types of housing in Urban areas? (Sum of % for Very Important and Somewhat Important Responses)

94% (1173 responses) of respondents feel that single-family housing is very important or somewhat important in urban areas. Likewise, 93% (1166 responses) and 84% (1058) feel that senior housing complexes and affordable housing, respectively, are very important or somewhat important in urban areas. Condos and duplexes appear to be the least important.
84% (1052 responses) of respondents feel that single-family housing is very important or somewhat important in rural areas. 60% (734 responses) of respondents feel that affordable housing is very important or somewhat important in rural areas. Condos and duplexes appear to be the least important.
Question 21.

Renewable energy production, such as wind and solar energy, is important to the future development of Rice County.

59% (757 responses) of respondents strongly agree that renewable energy production is important to the future development of Rice County. 84% (1080 responses) of respondents either strongly agree or agree with the above statement.
Question 22.

**How would you rate existing community partnerships and intergovernmental cooperation in Rice County?**

![Bar graph showing the distribution of responses to the question.]

36% (468 responses) of respondents feel that the existing community partnerships and intergovernmental cooperation in Rice County is good. While 26% (338 responses) of respondents feel that current intergovernmental cooperation and community partnerships are fair.

Question 23.

Any additional comments as it relates to future growth and development in Rice County?

There were 400 responses received for this question. Five distinct categories of comments were identified while reviewing the data. The categories are as follows:

- Preservation of the environment (soil, water, air, etc.), green and open spaces
- Preservation of farmland
- Growth in urban areas (higher density growth)
- Alternative transportation/improved roads
- Taxes
- Development of trails (biking, walking, running, etc. in urban areas and connecting cities, i.e. Mankato to Red Wing)
Conclusions

Over 1300 residents and landowners in Rice County responded to the survey. The majority of respondents reside in one of the 14 townships or either Northfield or Faribault. Approximately half of respondents have lived or owned land in Rice County for over 20 years and 72% of respondents are 50 years old or older. Overall, survey participants are long standing residents and/or landowners of the County.

Survey participants feel that the following cultural resources are most important to them:

- Historic preservation, historic structures and museums
- Community centers
- Libraries
- Community events and festivities

Overall, respondents wish to preserve the County’s history and build community.

As the county continues to grow, survey respondents would favor the following development/growth types:

- Parks and nature preserves
- Single-family residential
- Family farms

Survey respondents would be in least favor of the following developments:

- Large corporate farms
- Heavy industry
- Large retail

Survey participants would like growth in urban areas to focus on the following:

- Employment
- Education
- Parks, open space and natural land
- Recreation

The majority of respondents would like to see most new housing development occur in urban areas and believe the following housing types are the most important in urban areas:

- Single-family
- Senior housing
- Affordable housing

Survey respondents would like growth in rural areas to focus on the following:

- Agricultural production
• Parks, open space and natural land
• Recreation
• Employment

The following housing types were cited as the most important in rural areas:

• Single-family
• Affordable housing

Respondents feel that the following natural resources need the most attention in order to improve or maintain the quality of life in the County:

• Rivers/streams
• Lakes
• Woods
• Wetlands

Overall, survey respondents strongly favored preserving existing agricultural land, local food production and maintaining Rice County’s rural character and small town feel. In addition, survey participants would like to see growth concentrated in urban areas to include growth and preservation of parks, open space, natural land and recreation.

Our thanks to everyone who took the time to respond to this survey – the results will help guide the development of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.