



WILLMAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025 @ 5:00 PM
COMMUNITY CENTER
624 US-71 BUS - WILLMAR, MN 56201

AGENDA

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Proposed Additions or Deletions to Agenda
5. Regular Business
 - A. "WITH WILLMAR" Comprehensive Plan
6. Adjourn



City Council Action Request

Council Meeting Date:	May 1, 2025	Agenda Item Number:	5.A.
Agenda Section:	Regular Business	Originating Department:	Planning and Development
Resolution:	No	Prepared By:	Christopher Corbett, Planning and Development Director
Ordinance:	No	Presented By:	Christopher Corbett, Planning and Development Director
Item:	"WITH WILLMAR" Comprehensive Plan		

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

This is a joint work session, no action is required from City Council members or Planning Commissioners.

OVERVIEW:

This forward-thinking plan serves as a 20-year roadmap for the city’s growth, addressing current needs while outlining strategies to achieve long-term goals that will shape future decision-making. The draft plan is the culmination of extensive public engagement, including over 20 community events, open houses, online surveys, and workshops. Its vision statement reads:

“Willmar is a city of possibility and opportunity — diverse, thriving, and resilient — a desired place to Work, Innovate, Thrive, and call Home.”

The plan focuses on key goals such as Safety, Economy, Infrastructure, Community, Housing, Recreation, and Engagement, all guided by the principles of Sustainability, Inclusivity, Innovation, and Resilience. It identifies over 40 actionable strategies, with emphasis on critical areas including Land Use, Arts and Culture, Mobility, Housing, Economic Opportunities, Parks and Open Spaces, and, above all, Implementation.

Today’s meeting is an opportunity to review the “WITH WILLMAR” Comprehensive Plan and engage in a detailed discussion about its elements and recommended strategies.

AGENDA

- Intro – Corbett
- Parks + Open Space – Chris Fran on behalf of Baumgam
- Natural Resources + Resiliency – DeLeeuw
- Land-use + Housing – Corbett

- Arts + Culture – Obregon
- Implementation – Corbett
- Final Q&A – All

BUDGETARY/FISCAL ISSUES:

0.00

ALTERNATIVES TO CONSIDER:

Please review the document on the City of Willmar’s website willmarmn.gov and share your feedback by emailing planning@willmarmn.gov.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Slides for May 1 Joint Work Session
2. WITH WILLMAR Comprehensive Plan DRAFT

WITH 
WILLMAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

JOINT WORK SESSION

City Councilmembers + Planning Commission

Willmar Community Center

Wednesday, May 1, 2025

5:00 PM

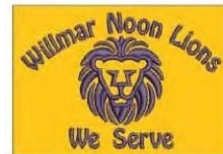
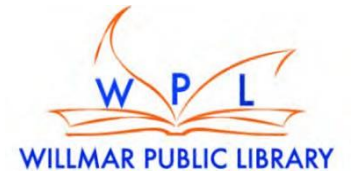
MAYOR + CITY COUNCILMEMBERS

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS

CITY OF WILLMAR STAFF MEMBERS

Special Thanks to: Residents, Visitors, Business Owners, and Organizations!



COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

- A Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document for a community's growth for the next twenty years.
- The Plan explores existing needs to establish long-range goals that will inform decision-making for years to come.
- The planning process utilizes public input and analysis of existing conditions to understand the current opportunities for the city.
- At its core, the Comprehensive Plan shall address policies and recommendations on land use within the community

STATE STATUTE §462.351

- Comprehensive Plans are required by Minnesota State Law (Minnesota Statute §462.351), for any community wishing to adopt and implement official controls (e.g., zoning regulations, land-use, planning processes).
- According to State Statutes, the plan should include a combination of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social and economic development of the community.

WITH 
WILLMAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

QUICK REVIEW

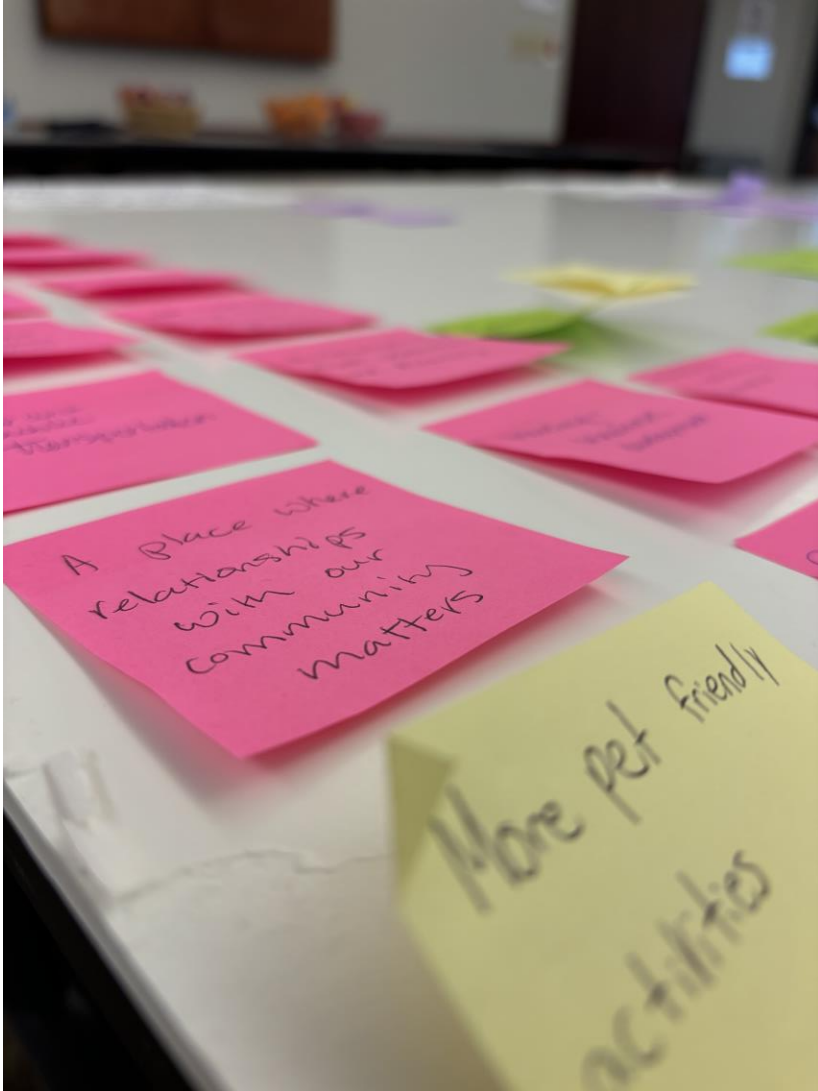
WITH WILLMAR

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

	DATE	EVENT
✓	3/18	Draft Document Released; Public Comment Period Opened
✓	3/24	First Joint Work Session
✓	4/11	Public Comment Period Closes
✓	5/1	Second Joint Work Session starting at 5 PM
	5/19	Briefing and Call for Public Hearing at City Council
	5/21	Planning Commission (Recommendation to Adopt)
	6/16	Consideration to Adopt by City Council

 Completed
  Pending

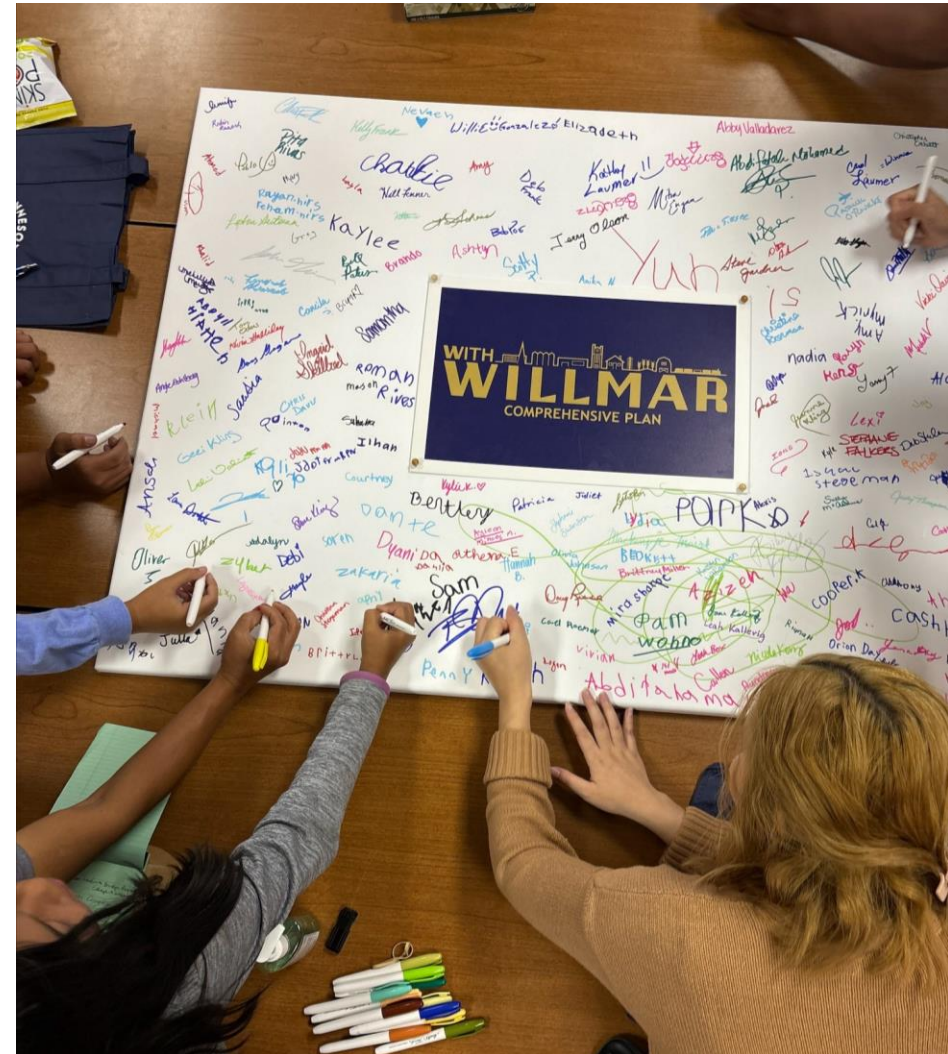
JOINT WORK SESSION | MARCH 24, 2025



- The plan is organized by 9 plan elements, focusing on the current conditions and future strategies for each topical section.
- The individual chapters identifies planning needs for each element and their alignment with the community's identified goals.
- Future users: residents, business owners, partners, city staff, and city council.

JOINT WORK SESSION | MARCH 24, 2025

- **MOBILITY CHAPTER** – is an analysis of the ability to move and access transportation throughout the City of Willmar.
 - SAFE STREETS FOR ALL (SS4A)
 - PEDESTRIAN, BIKE, + TRAILS PLAN



CHAPTER

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

 	Chapter 1: Willmar Today	Analysis of the City of Willmar, including the history, demographics, data trends, and future projections of our community.
 	Chapter 2: Vision + Goals	Established by public input, the vision statement, key goals, and guiding principles will inform decision-making.
 	Chapter 3: Land Use + Development	Outlines a vision, policies, and regulations for how land within the city will be used and developed to promote sustainable growth.
 	Chapter 4: Arts + Culture	Highlights strategies and initiatives to support and enhance the arts, and cultural activities, throughout the city.
 	Chapter 5: Mobility	An analysis of the ability to move and access transportation throughout the City of Willmar.

 Completed  Pending

CHAPTER**WHAT IS INCLUDED?**


		Chapter 6: Housing	Exploration of the availability, quality, and affordability of housing options for all residents, addressing current needs and planning for future growth.
		Chapter 7: Economic Opportunities	Assessment of policies and programs for economic growth in order to attract businesses, create jobs, and boost the overall economy of Willmar.
		Chapter 8: Natural Resources + Resiliency	Overview of existing natural resources and strategies to conserve and protect them into the future.
		Chapter 9: Parks + Open Space	Summary of current parks and recreational facilities and opportunities to support future investments.
		Chapter 10: Public Facilities	An analysis of Willmar's public facilities, identifying existing conditions and planning needs. This chapter will be added during the Public Comment period.
		Chapter 11: Implementation	A plan for action and implementation of the strategies identified throughout the plan.



Completed




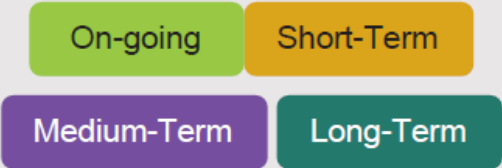


Pending

Who?	Example of Interest Area	
	Residents	What is the planned use for the vacant lot next to my new home?
	Business Owners	What economic development tools and resources are available to expand my business?
	Government Partners	What is the city's approach to managing natural resources?
	City Staff	What are the actions we need to take to achieve the community's goals and what are the priorities?
	City Council	What is the long-term policy guidance and how does it inform my decision making?



CHAPTER ELEVEN: IMPLEMENTATION

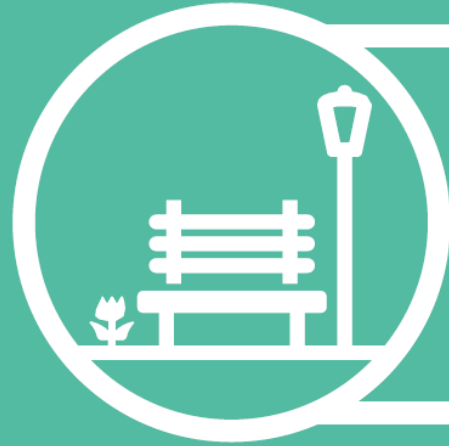
The implementation plan proposes specific regulatory, programmatic, and planning actions, as well as general strategies. Each action relates to one or more of this plan's core themes: ***Work, Innovate, Thrive, and Home.***

Plan Category	Description	How is this displayed?
Plan Element / Supporting Elements	Defines the plan element that the recommendation or action connects to. May include more than one supporting element.	Plan element icons: 
Recommendation	Describes the recommendation or action to be completed.	Narrative description.
Timeline	Identifies a general timeline for completion of the action. Timelines include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-going: Continuation of current actions Short-Term: 1-2 years Medium-Term: 3-5 years Long-Term: 6+ years 	
Complexity	Indicates the overall complexity for accomplishing each action. Factors that inform a low, medium, or high level of complexity include cost, coordination with partners, and the completion of additional studies.	Low, medium, or high level of complexity: 
Benefit	Identifies the general benefit of the action for the community. Factors that inform the benefit include those that directly support progress of the Plan and increase the city's capacity for success.	Overall benefit identified in narrative.
Partners	Identifies key community partners who can support implementation of the action.	Potential partners have been identified by name.
Measures of Success	Metrics or specific actions that can be used to assess or measure the impact of the action or recommendation.	Measures have been listed.
With Willmar Alignment	Relationship to core themes of this plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> W: Work with Willmar I: Innovate with Willmar T: Thrive with Willmar H: Home with Willmar 	With Willmar icons: 



CHAPTER NINE:

PARKS + OPEN SPACE



CHAPTER NINE:

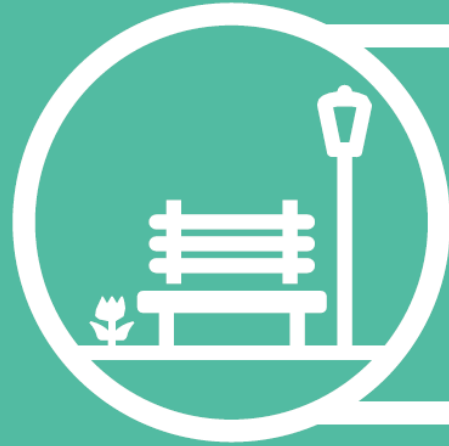
PARKS + OPEN SPACE

NEEDS

Equitable Access:

Physical access related to needs, underrepresentation, multimodal connections, and amenities.

Climate and Resiliency: Prepare for potential climate, weather, and economic uncertainty.



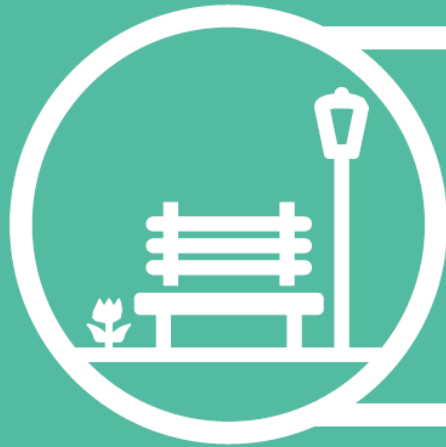
CHAPTER NINE:

PARKS + OPEN SPACE

STRATEGIES

Future Amenities: Innovative and sustainable playgrounds for 21st Century.

Green: Greenspace could provide climate resilience.



CHAPTER NINE:

PARKS + OPEN SPACE

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

HOW PARKS CAN SUPPORT

Sustainability

Willmar can encourage sustainability in its parks by preserving greenspace and existing trees.

Inclusivity

Willmar can ensure inclusivity in its parks by providing amenities that cater to a wide variety of residents, regardless of their age or ability.

Innovation

Willmar can support innovation by working with local organizations and community members to bring new and desired amenities to its parks.

Resilience

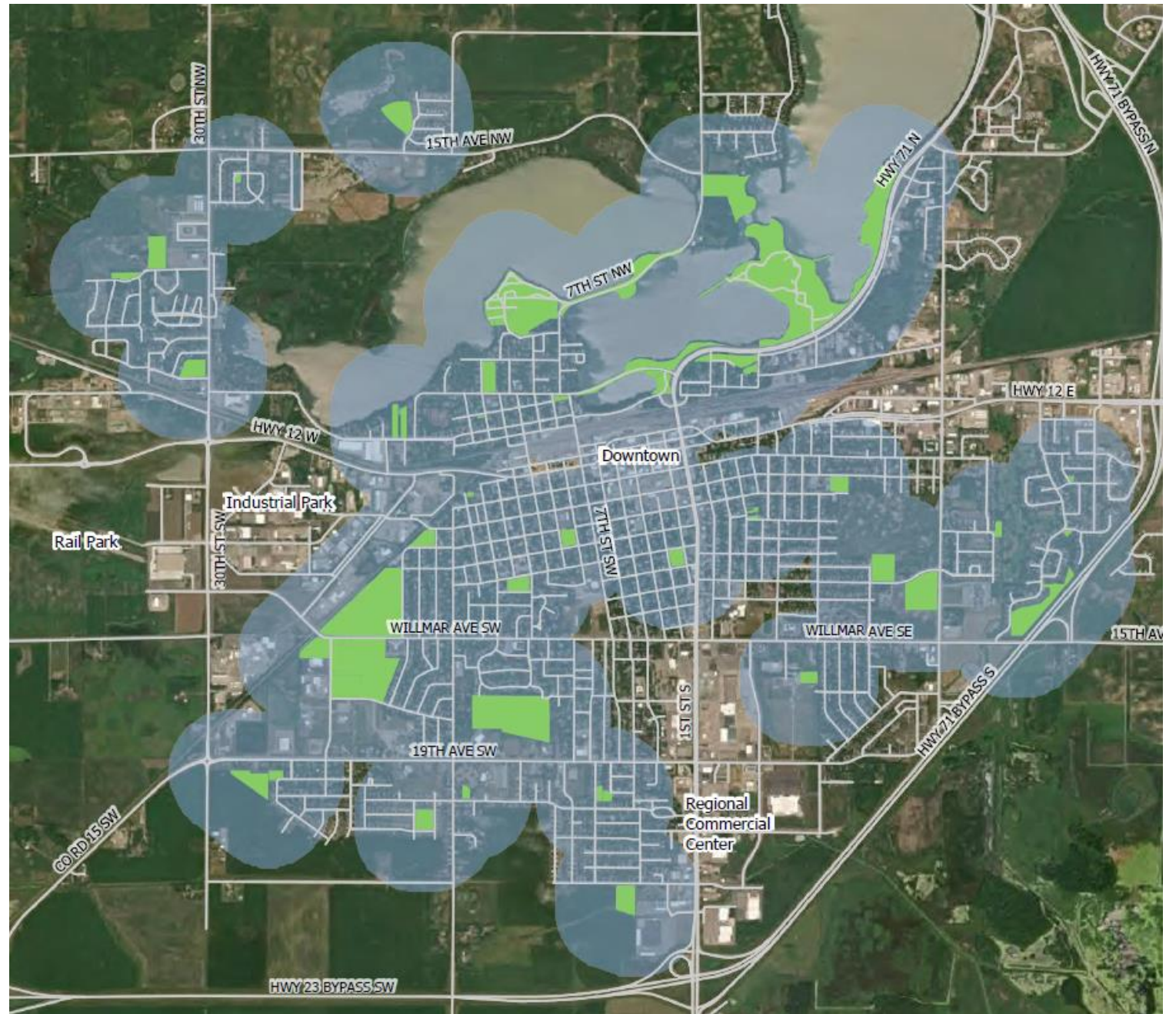
Willmar can preserve greenspace in its parks to increase pervious surface in extreme weather events and flooding.

Walkshed Map

City Parks

Existing Parks

5-Minute Walk (1/4 Mile) from a Park



STRATEGIES

Parks and Recreation Plan: Update and maintain master parks plan.

- **Timeline:** Medium-Term
- **Complexity:** ●●○
- **Benefit:** Provides a comprehensive inventory of community facilities, assessment of existing and future needs, and strategies for park system development.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Parks and Recreation Department
- **Measure of Success:** Completion and maintenance of master parks plan, followed by development or improvement of park facilities that cater to the desires of the community.



STRATEGIES

Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage: Expand wayfinding and/or interpretative signage for public water access, parks, and trails.

- **Timeline:** Long-Term
- **Complexity:** ●●●
- **Benefit:**
 - Supports regional tourism.
 - Supports local artists and businesses.
 - Promotes awareness of resource value and resource enhancement efforts.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Parks and Recreation Department, Kandiyohi County
- **Measure of Success:** Installation of signage.



STRATEGIES

Public Buildings: Continue to update public facilities to comply with modern ADA standards. Explore new indoor amenities based on community priorities and interest.

- **Timeline:** On-going
- **Complexity:** ●●○
- **Benefit:**
 - Ensures accessibility of community facilities for all residents.
 - Promotes community identity.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Public Works Department, State agencies, Kandiyohi County
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Updated community facilities.
 - Evolving amenities within Willmar's public buildings.






































STRATEGIES

Funding: Pursue state and federal grant funding programs for competitive park and trail projects.

- **Timeline:** On-going
- **Complexity:** ●●○
- **Benefit:** Increases city capacity to design and construct large capital projects.
- **Partners:** Parks and Recreation Department, Kandiyohi County
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Solicitation of funding as opportunities arise.
 - Number / amount of grants awarded.



Parks and Open Space

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Parks and Recreation Plan: Update and maintain master parks plan.	Medium-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a comprehensive inventory of community facilities, assessment of existing and future needs, and strategies for park system development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion and maintenance of master parks plan, followed by development or improvement of park facilities that cater to the desires of the community. 				
  	Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage: Expand wayfinding and / or interpretive signage for public water access, parks, and trails.	Long-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports regional tourism. Supports local artists and businesses. Promotes awareness of resource value and resource enhancement efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of signage. 				
 	Park Dedication: Review requirements for public open space dedication and cash-in-lieu. Amend development regulations if needed.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides parkland set-aside or program funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated acreages or funding are sufficient to meet ongoing needs. 				
  	Public Buildings: Continue to update public facilities to comply with modern ADA standards. Explore new indoor amenities based on community priorities and interest.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures accessibility of community facilities for all residents. Promotes community identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Public Works Department State agencies Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated community facilities. Evolving amenities within Willmar's public buildings. 				
 	Funding: Pursue state and federal grant funding programs for competitive park and trail projects.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases city capacity to design and construct large capital projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicitation of funding as opportunities arise. Number / amount of grants awarded. 				
	Regional Coordination: Continue to coordinate with Kandiyohi County and state agencies to advance regional parks and tourism opportunities.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns state and regional goals and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County State agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings with state and regional partners. 				



CHAPTER EIGHT:

**NATURAL RESOURCES +
RESILIENCY**



CHAPTER EIGHT: NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY

NEEDS

Water Quality

The water quality of Willmar's lakes, rivers, and groundwater has the potential to be negatively impacted by the growth of the city, including new industrial, commercial, and residential properties.

Climate Change Concerns

The impacts of pollution, climate change, and extreme weather events may degrade the quality of Willmar's natural resources. Steps should be taken to ensure that Willmar's natural resources are protected and improved for future generations to enjoy.

STRATEGIES

Sustainable Development

Willmar could incentivize new developments, including both infill and expansion, to implement sustainable features that can protect Willmar's natural resources from harm. These may include certifications, green roofs, stormwater catchment systems, or carbon-neutral material usage.

Conservation Policies

Development on property directly adjacent to natural resources may need to be limited, favoring smaller developments and greenspace to preserve natural resources.



CHAPTER EIGHT: NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

HOW NATURAL RESOURCES CAN SUPPORT

Sustainability

Willmar should protect its natural resources and ensure growth does not compromise the quality of its lakes, creeks, and soil.

Inclusivity

Willmar should promote the access of its natural resources to all residents and visitors.

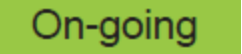

Innovation

Willmar should research and implement new strategies to further protect and preserve natural resources.

Resilience

Willmar should strengthen the durability and adaptability of policies that protect natural resources against extreme events.

Community Resilience: Continue to support and promote local hazard mitigation planning efforts.

- **Timeline:**  On-going
- **Complexity:**  Complexity icon consisting of three circles, the first two are red and the third is white.
- **Benefit:** Supports mitigation and preparedness for fire, extreme heat, winter weather, and other hazards.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Kandiyohi County, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.
- **Measure of Success:** City involvement in hazard mitigation plan update.



STRATEGIES

Renewable Power: Explore the development of solar and / or wind energy systems (accessory or community- scale).

- **Timeline:** Short-Term
- **Complexity:** ● ○ ○
- **Benefit:**
 - Develops resiliency and redundancy of power supply.
 - Reduces energy costs.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Utility providers, Residents, Business Owners.
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Adoption of zoning amendment(s) allowing by-right approval.
 - Community interest.



Natural Amenities: In the subdivision and site planning processes, incorporate and maintain natural amenities, and promote public access to these areas.

- **Timeline:** On-going
- **Complexity:**
- **Benefit:**
 - Promotes active recreation and social activity.
 - Improves aesthetics and property values.
 - Supports stormwater management.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Developers.
- **Measure of Success:** Creation, retention, and dedication of natural areas.









STRATEGIES

Green Infrastructure: Promote nature-based strategies for stormwater management, including stormwater retention areas, bioswales, rain gardens, etc.

- **Timeline:** On-going
- **Complexity:**
- **Benefit:**
 - Reduces cost of stormwater management.
 - Improves development aesthetics.
 - Improves water quality.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Developers, Planning Commission, Minnesota DNR
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Expanded use of nature-based solutions.
 - Creation of educational materials for developers and landowners.



Natural Resources

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
  	Green Infrastructure: Promote nature-based strategies for stormwater management, including stormwater retention areas, bioswales, rain gardens, etc.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces cost of stormwater management. Improves development aesthetics. Improves water quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers Planning Commission Minnesota DNR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded use of nature-based solutions. Creation of educational materials for developers and landowners. 	●	●	●	●
	Urban Forests: Support continued planting and maintenance of boulevard trees and other forested areas.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects against infestation. Improves / maintains property values. Provides numerous ecosystem services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tree diversity, health, and abundance. 			●	●
 	Shoreland Regulations: Monitor changes to the DNR's model shoreland ordinance and update shoreland zoning as needed to conform with state standards.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes appropriate use and development of shoreland areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigates development impacts to shoreland Ensures consistency with state standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Minnesota DNR Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendment of shoreland ordinance Shoreland properties comply with regulations 			●	●



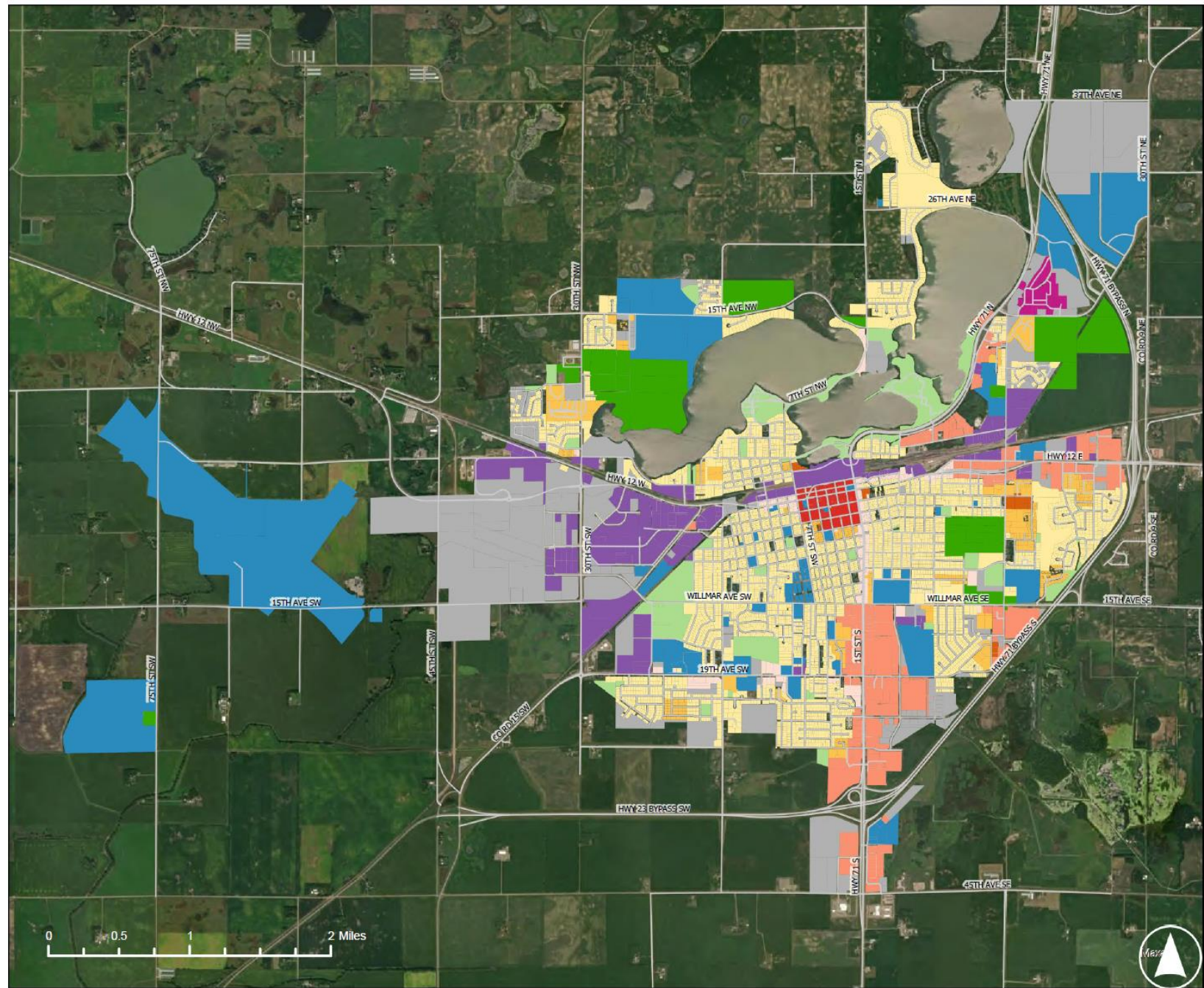
CHAPTER THREE:

**LAND-USE +
DEVELOPMENT**

Existing Land Use

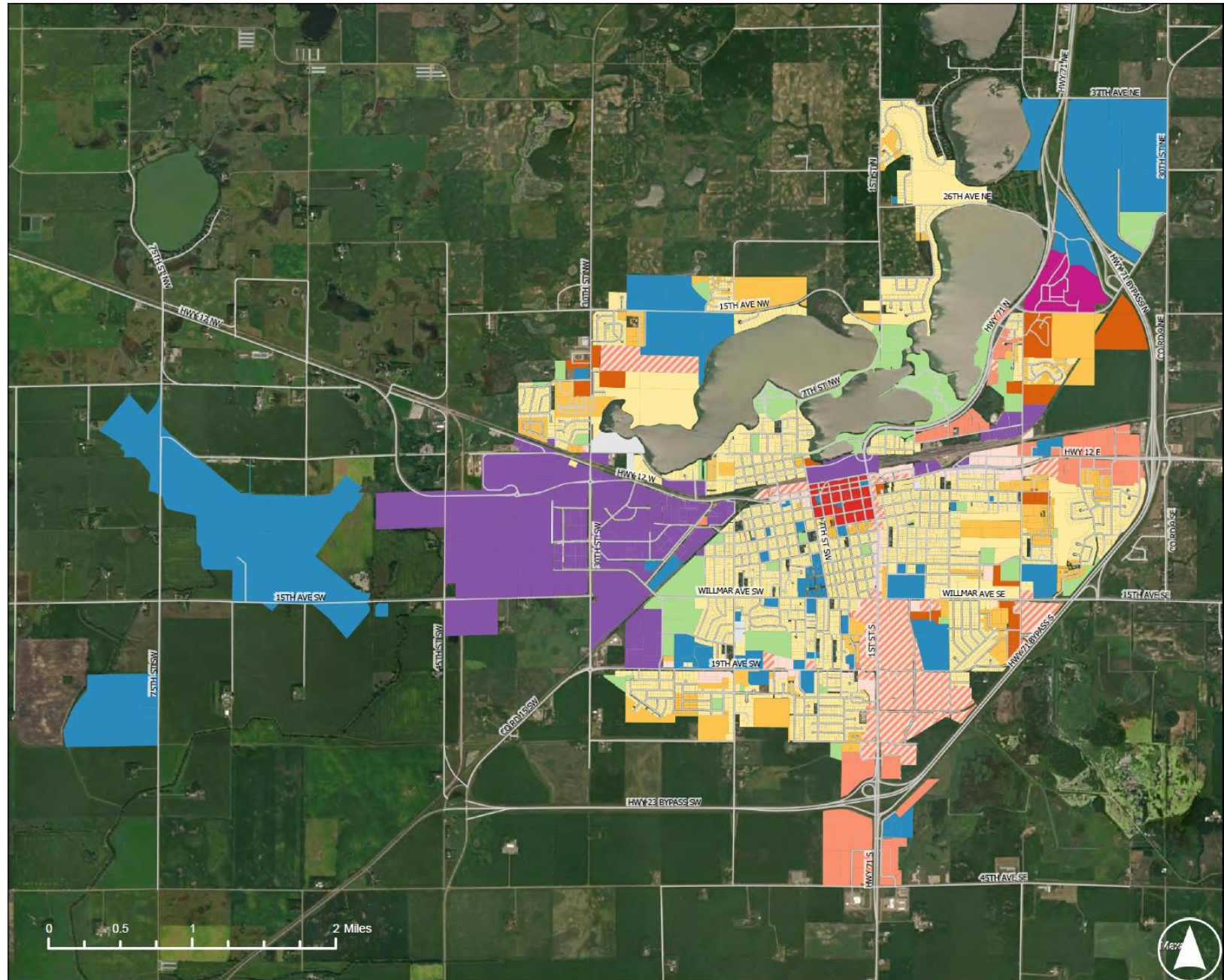
Existing Land Use

- Agricultural
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Downtown
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Parks and Open Space
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Technology District
- Vacant



Future Land Use

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Downtown
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Parks and Open Space
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Technology District
- Mixed Use
- Cemetery



LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Land-use can promote sustainable developments, reduce activities that generate excessive pollution, and shape development patterns that minimize reliance on automobiles.
- The Land-use Plan can promote mixed land uses that encourage multimodal transportation, supporting a diverse array of businesses and ensuring inclusive access to businesses, housing, and jobs.
- Land-use can shape policies that foster innovative districts dedicated to innovation, like the established Technology District.
- The Land-use Plan can promote a diverse range of uses throughout the city, enhancing the resiliency and adaptability of Willmar's economy.



LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT

URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY

1

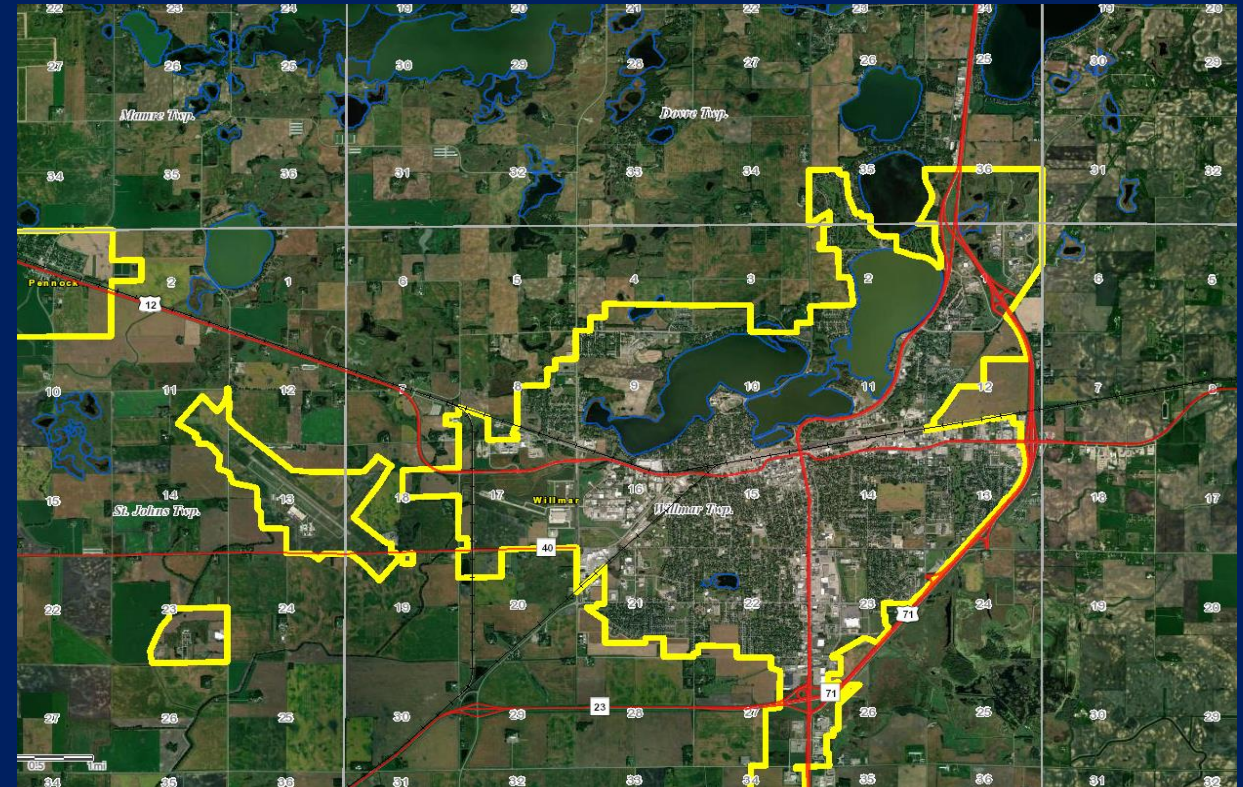
The Land-use Plan can promote mixed land uses that encourage multimodal transportation, supporting a diverse array of businesses and ensuring inclusive access to businesses, housing, and jobs.

2

Economic Development: Consider how annexation can promote economic growth, attract businesses, and create job opportunities. This includes assessing the potential for commercial and industrial development.

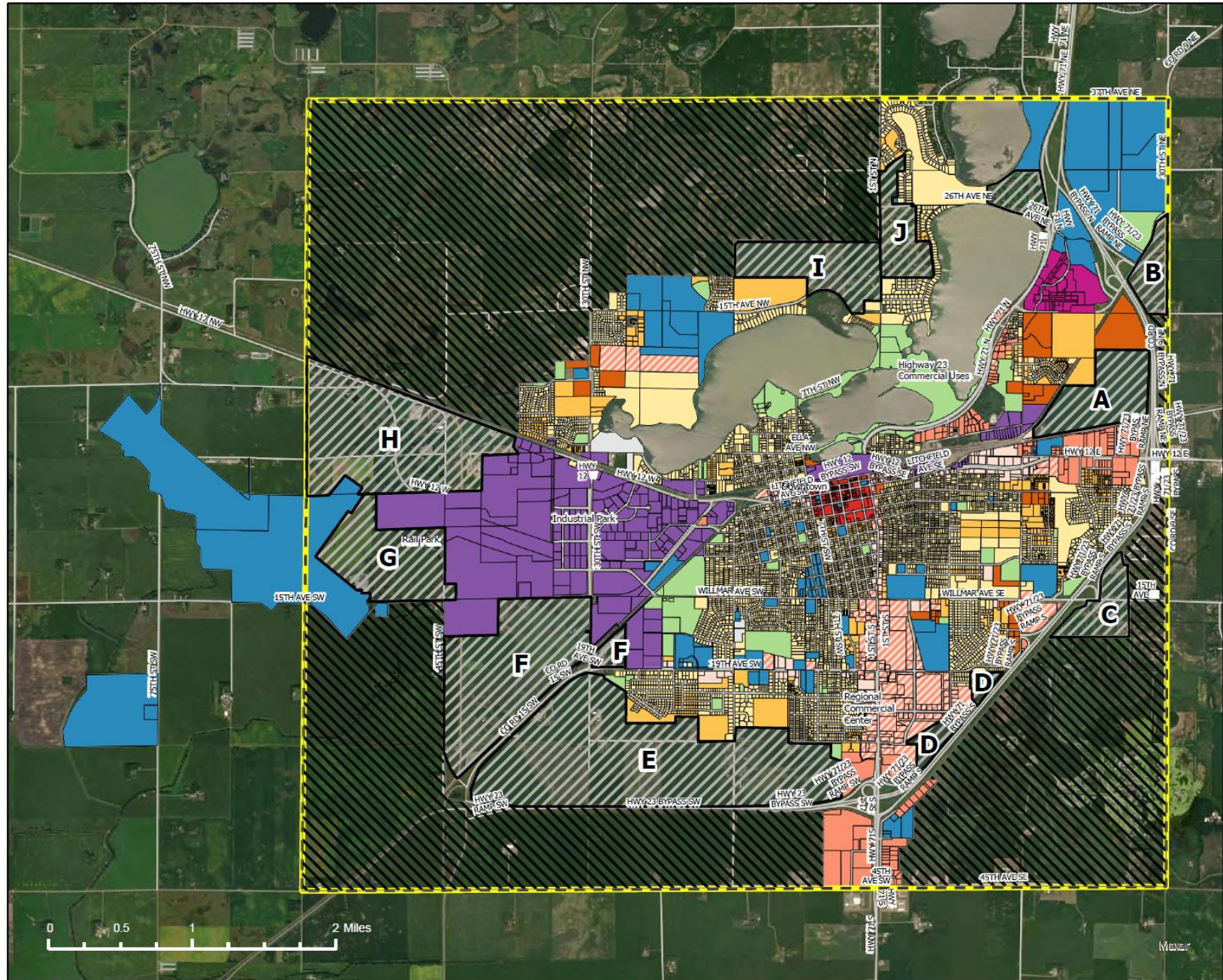
3

Environmental Impact: Evaluate the potential environmental impact of annexation, including effects on natural resources, wildlife habitats, and green spaces.




Urban Growth Boundary

-  Urban Growth Boundary Development Areas
-  Urban Growth Boundary Reserve
-  Urban Growth Boundary
- Future Land Uses
 -  Low Density Residential
 -  Medium Density Residential
 -  High Density Residential
 -  Downtown
 -  Neighborhood Commercial
 -  Regional Commercial
 -  Parks and Open Space
 -  Industrial
 -  Institutional
 -  Technology District
 -  Mixed Use
 -  Cemetery
 -  Roads





STRATEGIES

1994 Zoning Code: Eliminate barriers to housing development, and address inconsistencies

- **Timeline:** Short-Term
- **Complexity:** 
- **Benefit:** Development standards are practical, enforceable, and transparent.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Developers; Residents and Landowners; Business Community; Consultant
- **Measure of Success:** Adoption of a new zoning ordinance reflecting the vision of the Comprehensive Plan and the needs of the community.



STRATEGIES

Overlay Districts: Establish overlay districts that encourage development in key gateway areas of the city.

- **Timeline:** 
- **Complexity:** 
- **Benefit:** Encourages strategic growth and economic activity in key gateway areas, attracting new businesses and investments
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Willmar Municipal Utilities; Developers; Residents
- **Measure of Success:** Track increases in business openings and investments in the overlay districts, indicating successful stimulation of development



STRATEGIES

Fund for Future Annexation: Plan for the financial implications of annexing new land, ensuring they can provide necessary services without straining their budget.

- **Timeline:**  Short-Term
- **Complexity:** 
- **Benefit:** Provides a thorough fiscal impact analysis to estimate any cost associated with annexation.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Kandiyohi County; Developers; Residents; Townships
- **Measure of Success:** Compare the costs associated with annexation to the budget of the annexation fund. Efficient use of funds and staying within budget are key success indicators.

STRATEGIES

Mixed-Use Development: Create zoning and design standards that promote regional and neighborhood commercial and mixed-use development, ensuring alignment with the community vision

- **Timeline:**  Short-Term
- **Complexity:** 
- **Benefit:** Improves neighborhood accessibility, cohesion, and character; Improves development flexibility and zoning transparency.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Developers; Residents and Landowners; Stakeholders
- **Measure of Success:** Establishment of mixed-use zoning / design standards; New mixed-use development; New neighborhood commercial development

STRATEGIES

Implement DTW Pilot Program: Evaluate strategies from previous downtown plans to promote investment, beautification, innovation, and traffic calming initiatives.

- **Timeline:** Medium-Term
- **Complexity:** ● ● ○
- **Benefit:** Encourages innovative approaches to urban design and infrastructure to enhance the overall appeal and functionality of downtown. Programing can attract new businesses and investors, boosting economic growth and revitalizing the area.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Downtown Community; Residents; Developers
- **Measure of Success:** Establish Economic Metrics to track the number of new businesses, investments, and job creations within the downtown



CHAPTER SIX:
HOUSING

HOUSING

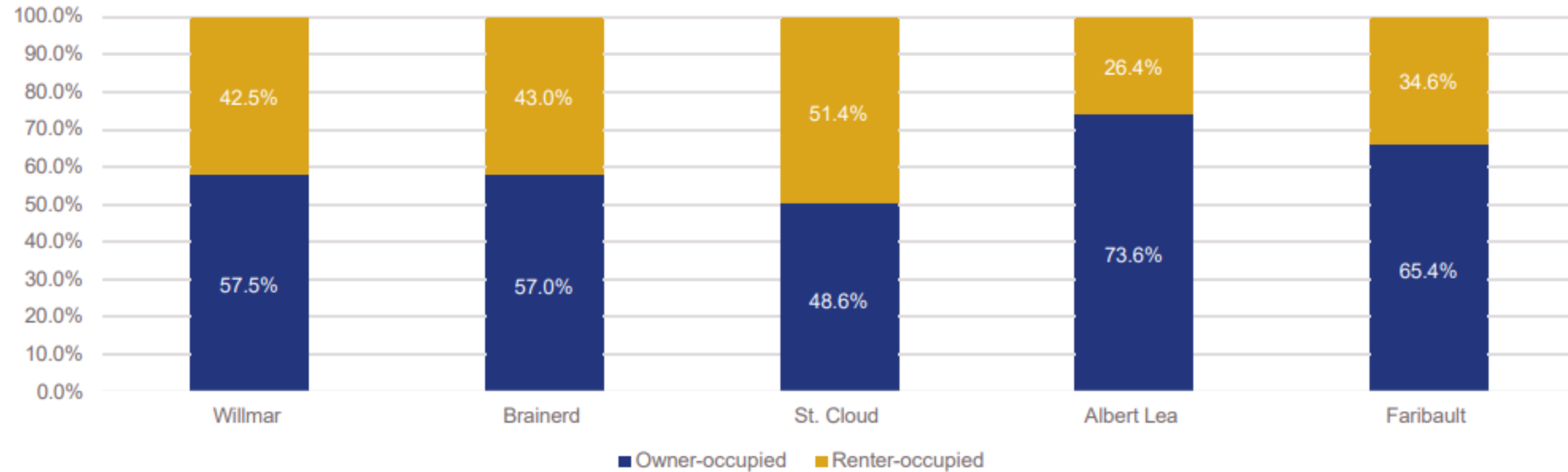
GUIDING PRINCIPLES



- Willmar can encourage sustainability by promoting housing practices that push environmental stewardship, resource efficiency, and the long-term well-being of the community.
- Willmar can support inclusivity by fostering the development of a wide variety of housing for residents of all ages, cultures, and abilities.
- Willmar can support innovation by exploring incentives for housing developments that address a documented issue within Willmar in a new, sustainable manner.
- Willmar can promote resiliency in housing by integrating policies that enhance the adaptability and durability of the community during extreme weather events.

HOUSING

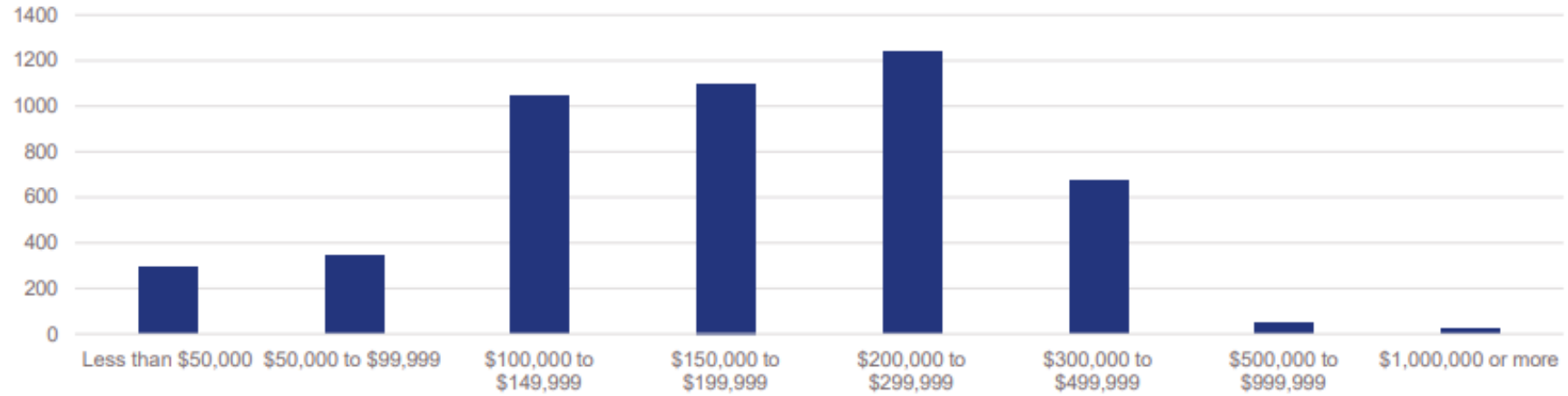
Figure 6-1. Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Housing



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

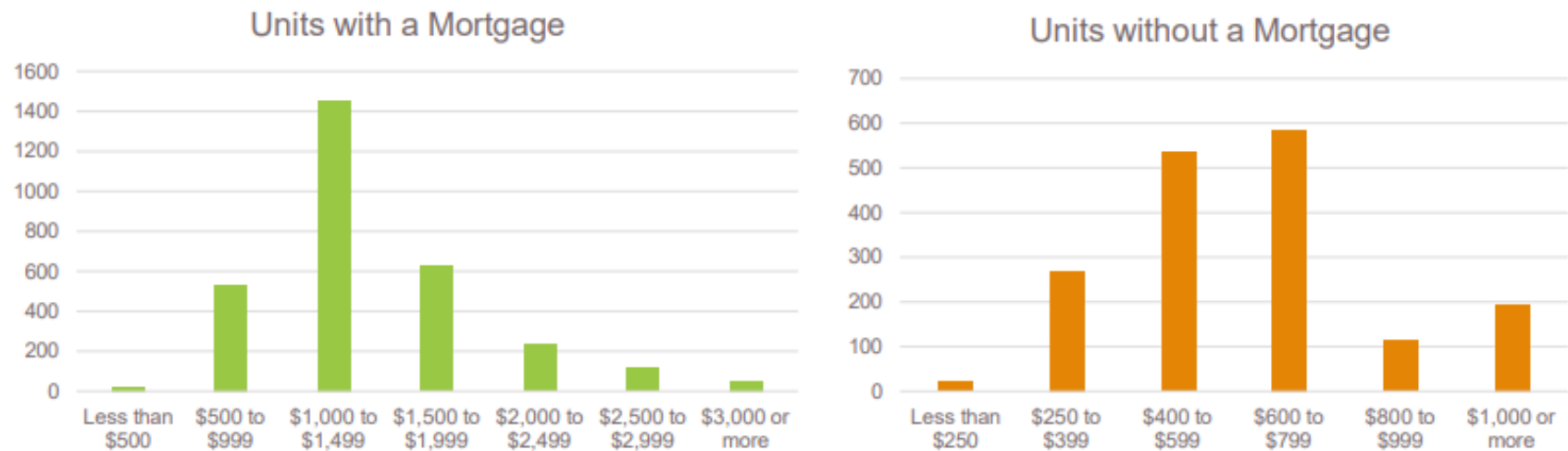
HOUSING

Figure 6-3. Owner-occupied Housing Value, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

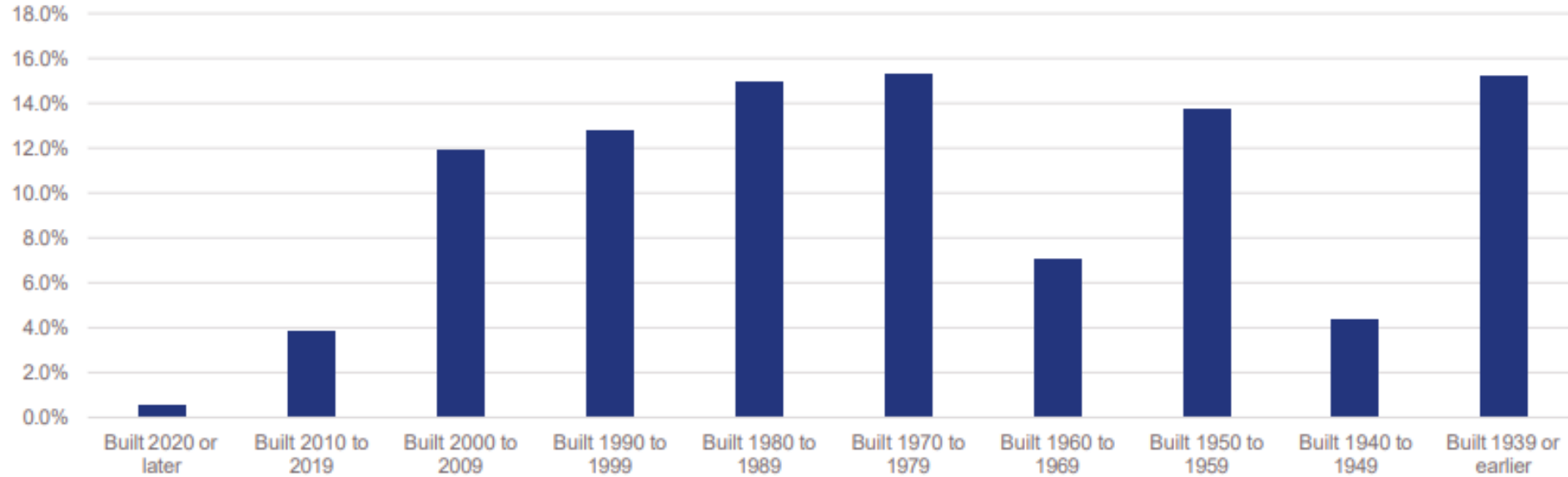
Figure 6-4. Owner-occupied Average Housing Costs, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

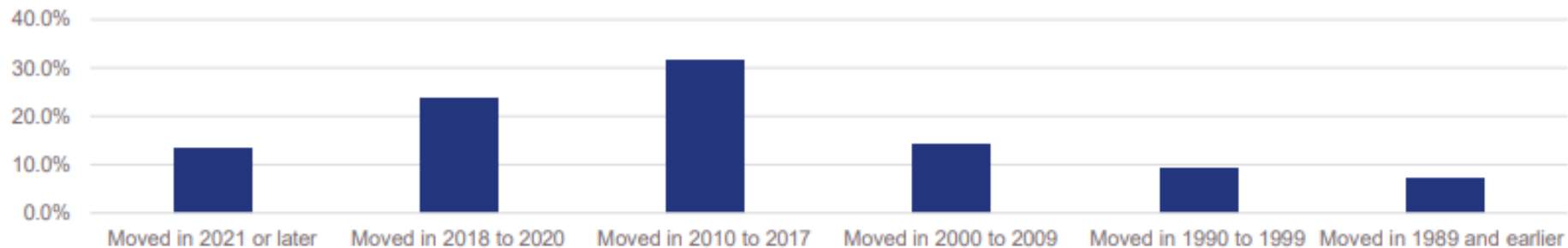
HOUSING

Figure 6-6. Year Housing Built, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Figure 6-7. Year Household Moved into Unit, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Diversify Housing Stock: Promote the need to increase housing types to add a range of styles, floorplans, and price points.

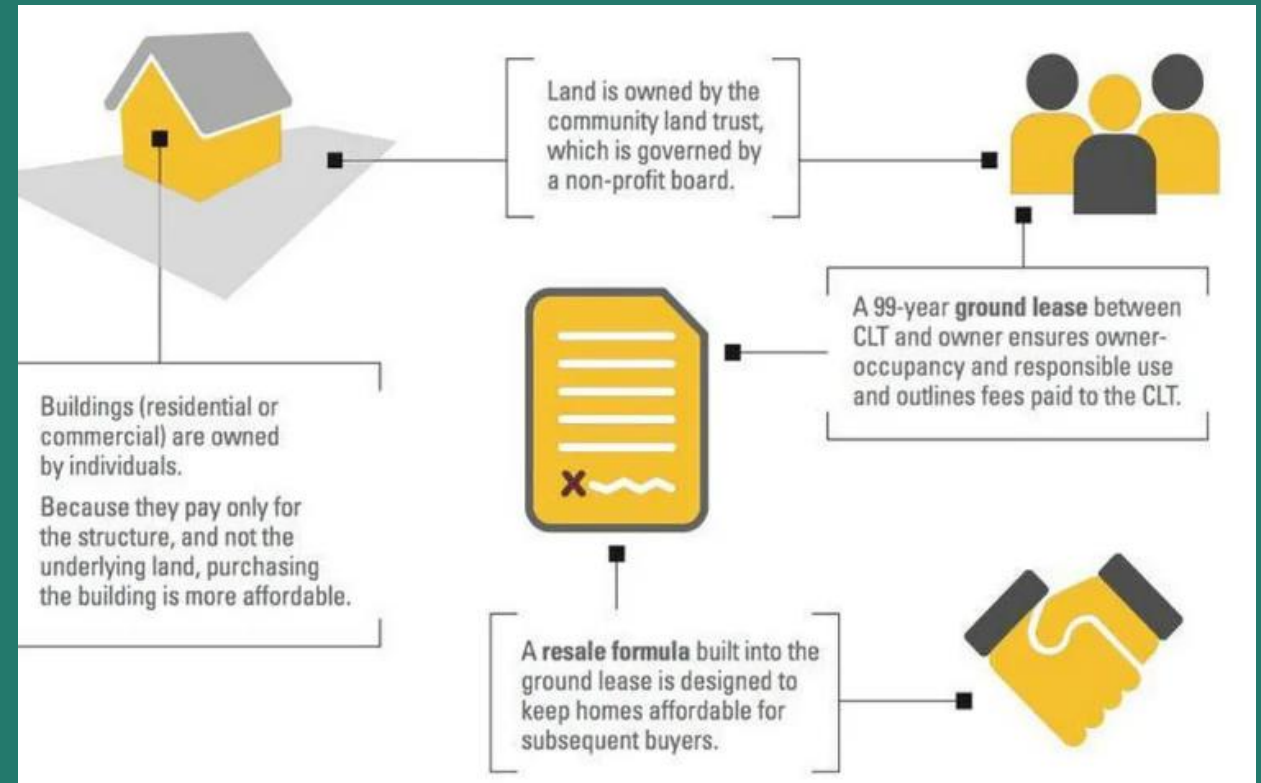
- **Timeline:**
- **Complexity:** On-going
- **Benefit:** ● ○ ○
 - Increases housing inventory for homebuyers and renters.
 - Expands stock of market-affordable homes.
 - Supports workforce recruitment and retention.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Community Housing Resource Center; Developers; City Council
- **Measure of Success:** Number of units / building permits for alternative housing types, including single-family attached, small multifamily, mixed-use, etc.



STRATEGIES

Affordable Housing: Establish, finance, and implement a Community Land Trust or Land Bank to acquire and develop permanent affordable housing options.

- **Timeline:** Short-Term
- **Complexity:** ● ● ○
- **Benefit:** Ensures the development and preservation of permanent affordable housing options, making housing more accessible to residents.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Kandiyohi County Housing Redevelopment Authority; Willmar Area Community Foundation
- **Measure of Success:** Track the number of affordable housing units developed and maintained by the land trust.




STRATEGIES

Rental Housing Program: Update the 1990 Rental Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Ordinance to conform with modern industry standards and best practices of neighboring municipalities.

- **Timeline:** Short-Term
- **Complexity:** ● ○ ○
- **Benefit:**
 - Promotes consistent and fair regulations across the region, benefiting both tenants and landlords.
 - Ensures higher quality and safer rental housing for residents.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Residents; Landlords; Kandiyohi County; Minnesota Housing
- **Measure of Success:** Track the number of rental units meeting updated safety and maintenance standards.

STRATEGIES

Housing Needs Assessment: Complete a housing needs assessment to understand market trends, demographic needs, and housing gaps

- **Timeline:** Medium-Term
- **Complexity:** 
- **Benefit:** Provides valuable information to developers and decision makers; Increases awareness of community housing challenges.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar; Community Housing organizations; Kandiyohi County EDC
- **Measure of Success:** Completion of housing needs assessment and Implementation.



CHAPTER FOUR:

ARTS + CULTURE



CHAPTER FOUR: ARTS + CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

When envisioning Willmar's future, one can't help but think of the city's landmark art installations and its celebration of diverse cultures. Willmar is filled with possibilities for art that tells a story of evolution and progress. Through intentional planning, the city desires to enhance its aesthetics, highlight community gatherings, amplify perspectives, and strengthen its identity. As a regional hub, Willmar's arts and culture activities attract residents and visitors that support the economy.





CHAPTER FOUR: ARTS + CULTURE

PLANNING NEEDS

ACCESSIBILITY

Priorities:

- Emphasize traditions to bolster a more welcoming community for all.
- Offer diverse arts and culture learning opportunities to highlight Willmar's global society, ensuring that people of all ages and backgrounds can engage with and benefit from these experiences.

ADVOCACY

Priorities:

- Identify and partner with the creative silos within our community and connect them to resources and support, for a more collaborative and interconnected creative environment.
- Strengthen creative resources to increase participation in arts and culture, ensuring that artists and cultural organizations have the support they need to thrive.

COMMUNITY

Priorities:

- Identify, develop, and promote Creative Overlay Districts that serve as hubs of artistic and cultural activity, drawing residents and visitors alike.
- Design the use of public facilities and provide affordable spaces for creative work, ensuring that artists and cultural organizations have the physical resources they need to succeed.

INVESTMENT

Priorities:

- Establish clear goals and objectives for the fund. Identify the types of projects and initiatives to be supported, such as public art installations, cultural events, educational programs, and more. Implement measurable outcomes to track the impact of the fund.
- Stimulate the local economy by attracting tourists, businesses, and residents. Cultural events and institutions create jobs, generate revenue, and stimulate economic activity in related sectors such as hospitality and retail.



CHAPTER FOUR: ARTS + CULTURE

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

HOW ARTS + CULTURE CAN SUPPORT

Sustainability

Arts and Culture based initiatives can engage communities to identify and find solutions to local, national, and worldwide problems.

Inclusivity

Arts and Culture can serve as a bridge to connect our diverse cultures and promote events.

Innovation

Arts and Culture provide unique perspectives and innovation for community problem solving.

Resilience:

By sharing, integrating, and strengthening our local cultures, our city can continue to develop its diverse identity and remain welcoming and strong in times of change.

STRATEGIES

Public Art Standards: Establish guidelines to promote and support a wide range of public art and creative placemaking projects across Willmar.

- **Timeline:** Short-Term
- **Complexity:**
- **Benefit:**
 - Supports placemaking and community aesthetics.
 - Develop community identity.
 - Supports local artists.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Willmar Area Arts Council, Southwest Minnesota Arts Council, Willmar Education and Arts Center
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Adoption of public art standards
 - Community reception
 - Number of public art projects.



STRATEGIES

Activate Underutilized Spaces: Utilize underused spaces for arts and cultural activities.

- **Timeline:** On-going
- **Complexity:**
- **Benefit:**
 - Supports placemaking and revitalization.
 - Encourages low-cost, productive use of available spaces.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Arts and Culture non-profits, Developers, Stakeholders
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Number of events, demonstration projects, or redevelopment initiatives
 - Community reception



STRATEGIES

Artist in Residence Program: Establish a Residency Program to enhance the aesthetics of public spaces, creating a sense of place and identity.

- **Timeline:** Medium-Term
- **Complexity:** ●●○
- **Benefit:**
 - Supports local artists
 - Promotes art and cultural activities
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Willmar Area Arts Council, Southwest Minnesota Arts Council, Willmar Education and Arts Center, Ridgewater College
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Establishment of program.
 - Increase in Public Art Installations and events



STRATEGIES












Streetscape Design: Develop and implement streetscaping guidelines.







- **Timeline:** Medium-Term
- **Complexity:** ●●○
- **Benefit:**
 - Supports placemaking and revitalization.
 - Supports innovative approaches to stormwater management.
- **Partners:** City of Willmar, Developers, Business Owners, Residents
- **Measure of Success:**
 - Incorporation of streetscaping guidelines into zoning ordinance, corridor studies, or downtown study.
 - Completion of street-scaping demonstration projects.



Arts + Culture

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	Public Art Standards: Establish guidelines to promote and support a wide range of public art and creative placemaking projects across Willmar.	Short-Term	● ○ ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports placemaking and community aesthetics. Develop community identity. Supports local artists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Willmar Area Arts Council Southwest Minnesota Arts Council Willmar Education and Arts Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of public art standards Community reception Number of public art projects. 	●	●	●	●
 	Wayfinding & Gateway Signage: Install gateway signage within highway entry corridors.	Medium-Term Long-Term	● ● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports placemaking and community aesthetics. Develop community identity. Enhances wayfinding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts and Culture non-profits Willmar Area Art Council City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of gateway signage Community reception 		●	●	
  	Activate Underutilized Spaces: Utilize underused spaces for arts and cultural activities.	On-going	● ● ● ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports placemaking and revitalization. Encourages low-cost, productive use of available spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Arts and Culture non-profits Developers Stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of events, demonstration projects, or redevelopment initiatives Community reception 	●	●	●	
 	Artist in Residence Program: Establish a Residency Program to enhance the aesthetics of public spaces, creating a sense of place and identity	Medium-Term	● ● ● ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports local artists Promotes art and cultural activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Willmar Area Arts Council Southwest Minnesota Arts Council Willmar Education and Arts Center Ridgewater College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of program. Increase in Public Art Installations and events 	●	●	●	●

Arts + Culture

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	Streetscape Design: Develop and implement streetscaping guidelines.	<div style="background-color: #6a3d9a; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Medium-Term</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports placemaking and revitalization. • Supports innovative approaches to stormwater management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Willmar • Developers • Business Owners • Residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of streetscaping guidelines into zoning ordinance, corridor studies, or downtown study. • Completion of street-scaping demonstration projects. 		<div style="background-color: #f0c000; border-radius: 50%; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">I</div>	<div style="background-color: #4caf50; border-radius: 50%; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">T</div>	
 	City Art: Develop both an inventory and acquisition plan to properly manage publicly owned art assets such as paintings, sculptures, photographs, etc.	<div style="background-color: #66bb6a; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; border-radius: 5px;">On-going</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage maintenance plans for publicly owned art • Grow the inventory of publicly owned artifacts that reflect Willmar's history and culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Culture non-profits • Willmar Area Art Council • City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Inventory of publicly owned art • Designated funding to source and maintain assets 		<div style="background-color: #f0c000; border-radius: 50%; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">I</div>	<div style="background-color: #4caf50; border-radius: 50%; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">T</div>	



WITH WILLMAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

DATE	EVENT
✓	3/18 Draft Document Released; Public Comment Period Opened
✓	3/24 First Joint Work Session
✓	4/11 Public Comment Period Closes
✓	5/1 Second Joint Work Session starting at 5 PM
	5/19 Briefing and Call for Public Hearing at City Council
	5/21 Planning Commission (Recommendation to Adopt)
	6/16 Consideration to Adopt by City Council



WILLMAR
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

DISCUSSION



WITH 
WILLMAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



WITH 
WILLMAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

OUR VISION:

Willmar is a city of possibility and opportunity — diverse, thriving, and resilient — a desired place to Work, Innovate, Thrive, and call Home.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MAYOR + CITY COUNCILMEMBERS

Douglas E. Reese

Mayor

Thomas Gilbertson

Councilmember, Ward 1 (*January 2025*)

Steve Gardner

Councilmember, Ward 2 (*January 2025*)

Audrey Nelsen

Councilmember, Ward 4

Carl Shuldes

Councilmember, Ward 1

Vicki Davis

Councilmember, Ward 2

Justin Ask

Councilmember, Ward 3

Tom Butterfield

Councilmember, Ward 4

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Julie Asmus

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League of Women Voters

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Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce

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Corky Berg

Kandiyohi County Commissioner

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Freelance Writer

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Kyle Box
Director of Operations

Frank Hanson
Fire Chief

Michael Holme
Interim Police Chief

Christopher Frank
City Planner

Dave Hillenbrand
Communications & Multimedia Technician

Jared Voge
Engineer

Pablo Obregon
Director of Community Growth

Leslie Valiant
City Administrator

Tom Odens
Director of Finance

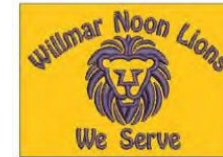
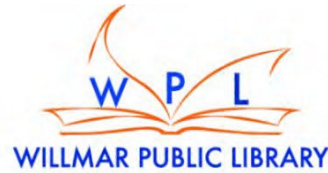
Justin DeLeeuw
Director of Public Works

Rob Baumgarn
Director of Parks + Recreation



WITH WILLMAR

We extend our gratitude to the entire community for their invaluable input and active participation in defining a vision With Willmar. Your insights, feedback, and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in shaping a Comprehensive Plan that truly reflects our collective aspirations and goals. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to making our community a place for everyone to *work*, *innovate*, *thrive* and call *home*.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dear Neighbors,

As Mayor, it is my honor to introduce the "With Willmar" Comprehensive Plan, a visionary guide for the future of our beloved city. This plan represents our collective efforts, shared aspirations, and unwavering commitment to creating a community where everyone can thrive.



Our comprehensive plan focuses on several key areas that are essential to our city's growth and prosperity:

- **Affordable Housing:** Ensuring that everyone in Willmar has access to safe, quality, and affordable housing.
- **Economic Development:** Fostering a vibrant economy by supporting local businesses, attracting new investments, and creating job opportunities.
- **Sustainability:** Promoting environmental stewardship and sustainable practices to preserve our natural resources for future generations.
- **Community Well-being:** Enhancing the livability for all residents by improving public services, recreational facilities, and community programs.
- **Infrastructure and Transportation:** Modernizing our infrastructure and transportation systems to support the needs of our growing population.

Together, we will work towards a future where Willmar is not only a great place to live and work but also a community that embraces innovation, inclusivity, and resilience. This comprehensive plan is more than just a document; it is a promise to each one of you—a promise to build a brighter, more prosperous future for our city.

I encourage you to stay engaged, provide your feedback, and join us on this exciting journey. Your continued support and participation are vital to the success of "With Willmar."

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to our community. Together, we can achieve great things.

Doug Reese, Mayor of Willmar



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Executive Summary	E-1
	Chapter 1: Willmar Today	1-1
	Chapter 2: Vision + Goals	2-1
	Chapter 3: Land-Use + Development	3-1
	Chapter 4: Arts + Culture	4-1
	Chapter 5: Mobility	5-1
	Chapter 6: Housing	6-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Chapter 7: Economic Opportunities

7-1



Chapter 8: Natural Resources + Resiliency

8-1



Chapter 9: Parks + Open Space

9-1



Chapter 10: Public Facilities

10-1



Chapter 11: Implementation

11-1



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document for a community's growth for the next twenty years. The Plan explores existing needs to establish long-range goals that will inform decision-making for years to come. The planning process utilizes public input and analysis of existing conditions to understand the current opportunities for the city. The plan explores strategies and investments in city systems, plans for future growth and development, influences future land use regulations, and establishes a plan for implementation. Topics addressed in the Comprehensive Plan include land use, natural resources, economic opportunities, parks, mobility, arts and culture.

STATE STATUTES AND PURPOSE

Comprehensive Plans are required by Minnesota State Law (Minnesota Statute §462.351), for any community wishing to adopt and implement official controls (e.g., zoning regulations, subdivision process). According to State Statutes, the plan should include a combination of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social and economic development of the community.

At its core, the Comprehensive Plan shall address policies and recommendations on land use within the community. These elements are then used to ensure future decisions align with the long-range vision for the community. Additional topics may be included in a Comprehensive Plan as identified by the community to help support future decision making, including economic development and transportation.

Beyond the requirements of State Statutes, the Comprehensive Plan's policy guidance should support future investment in the community that maintains and enhances access to a high livability for all. Long-range planning can help to:






- Preserve key environmental and social features
- Welcome the public into continued decision making
- Respond to and forecast future change
- Foster a healthy economic climate
- Protect individual property owner rights and investment
- Facilitate collaboration with local and regional agency partners

WHO USES THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The Comprehensive Plan establishes a vision for physical, social, and economic development within the City of Willmar for the next 20 years. The Plan should be referred to regularly by city staff, boards and commissions, and by all members of the community, including residents, business owners, and regional stakeholders. Additionally, it can be used by regional partners and prospective residents and business owners to understand the city's long-term plans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Who?	Example of Interest Area	
	Residents	What is the planned use for the vacant lot next to my new home?
	Business Owners	What economic development tools and resources are available to expand my business?
	Government Partners	What is the city's approach to managing natural resources?
	City Staff	What are the actions we need to take to achieve the community's goals and what are the priorities?
	City Council	What is the long-term policy guidance and how does it inform my decision making?

HOW WAS THE PLAN CREATED?

The Comprehensive Plan was created over a 12-month planning process using input from many stakeholders. These included the Comprehensive Plan Focus Group, City of Willmar staff, local and regional stakeholders, and community members.



HOW TO USE THE PLAN

This plan is organized by plan elements, focusing on the current conditions and future strategies for each topical section. The individual chapters also review planning needs for each element and their alignment with the community’s identified goals. The following chapters are included within this document:

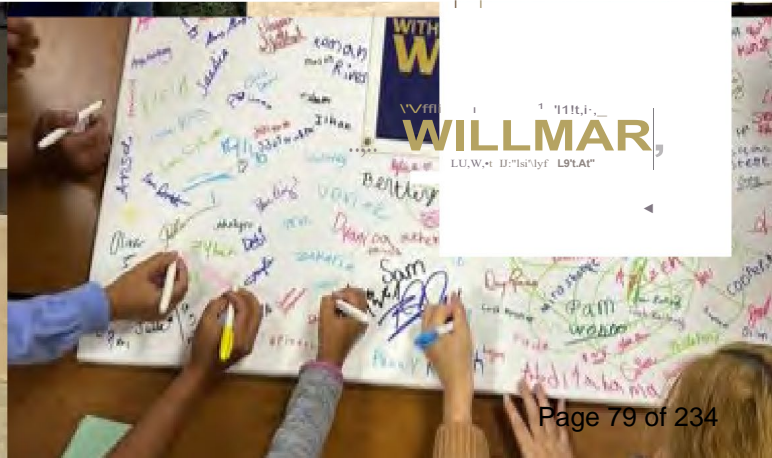
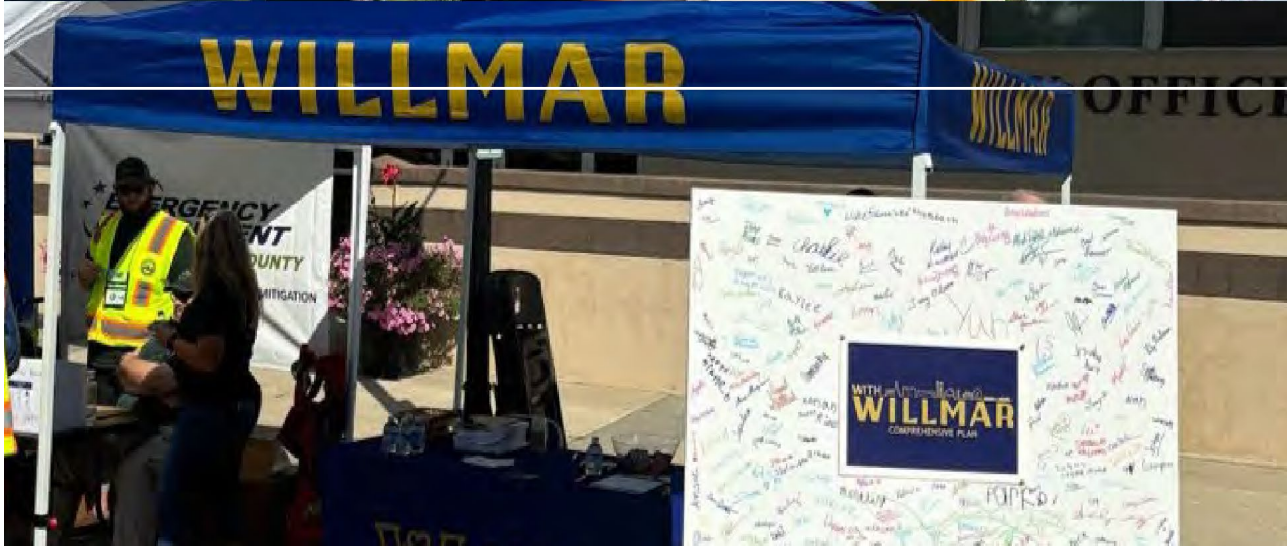
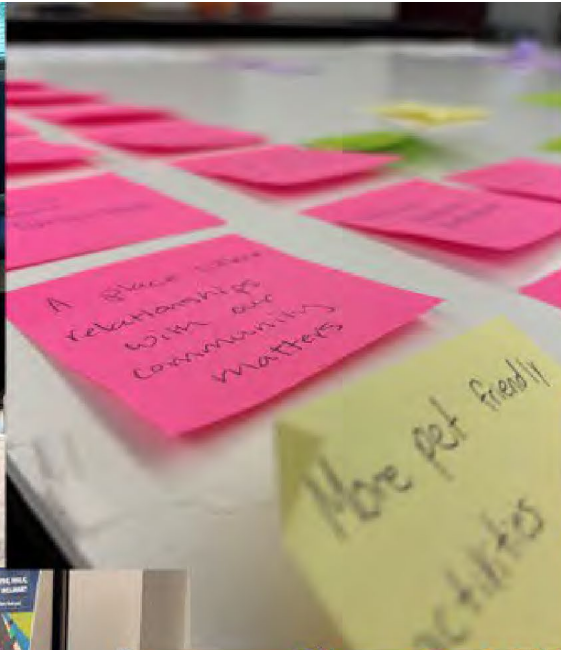
CHAPTER	WHAT IS INCLUDED?
	<p>Chapter 1: Willmar Today Analysis of the City of Willmar, including the history, demographics, data trends, and future projections of our community.</p>
	<p>Chapter 2: Vision + Goals Established by public input, the vision statement, key goals, and guiding principles will inform decision-making.</p>
	<p>Chapter 3: Land Use + Development Outlines a vision, policies, and regulations for how land within the city will be used and developed to promote sustainable growth.</p>
	<p>Chapter 4: Arts + Culture Highlights strategies and initiatives to support and enhance the arts, and cultural activities, throughout the city.</p>
	<p>Chapter 5: Mobility An analysis of the ability to move and access transportation throughout the City of Willmar.</p>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CHAPTER	WHAT IS INCLUDED?
 Chapter 6: Housing	Exploration of the availability, quality, and affordability of housing options for all residents, addressing current needs and planning for future growth.
 Chapter 7: Economic Opportunities	Assessment of policies and programs for economic growth in order to attract businesses, create jobs, and boost the overall economy of Willmar.
 Chapter 8: Natural Resources + Resiliency	Overview of existing natural resources and strategies to conserve and protect them into the future.
 Chapter 9: Parks + Open Space	Summary of current parks and recreational facilities and opportunities to support future investments.
 Chapter 10: Public Facilities	An analysis of Willmar’s public facilities, identifying existing conditions and planning needs. This chapter will be added during the Public Comment period.
 Chapter 11: Implementation	A plan for action and implementation of the strategies identified throughout the plan.





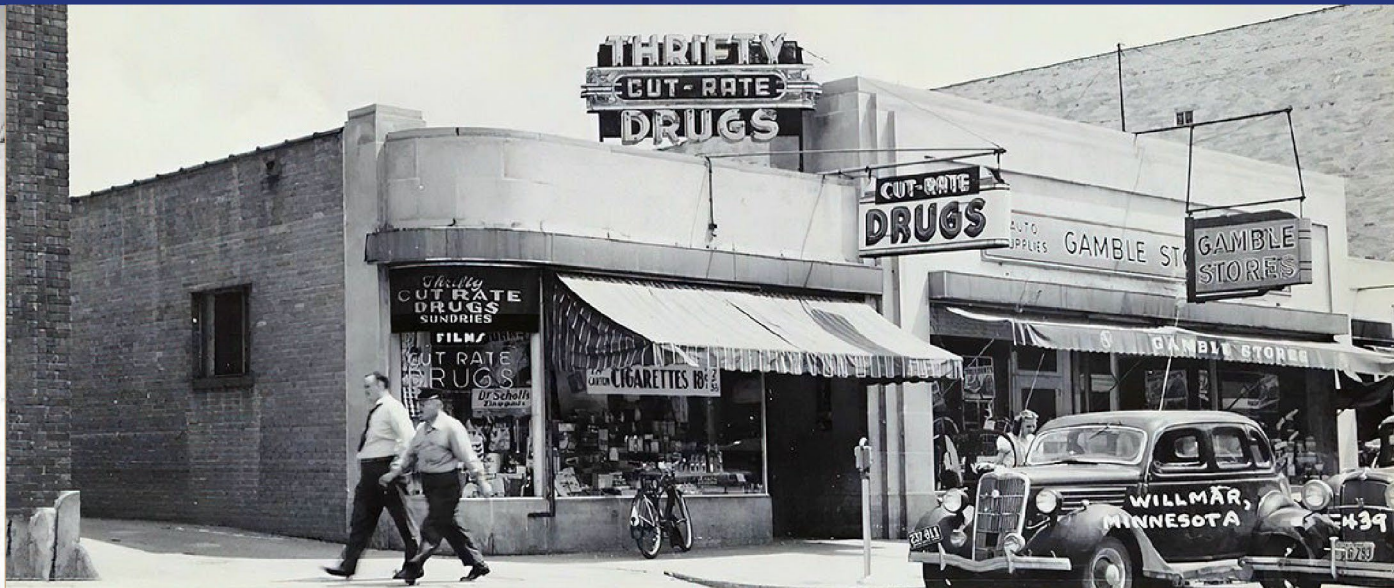


“Together, we will work towards a future where Willmar is not only a great place to live and work but also a community that embraces innovation, inclusivity, and resilience. This comprehensive plan is more than just a document; it is a promise to each one of you—a promise to build a brighter, more prosperous future for our city.”

- Mayor Douglas E. Reese

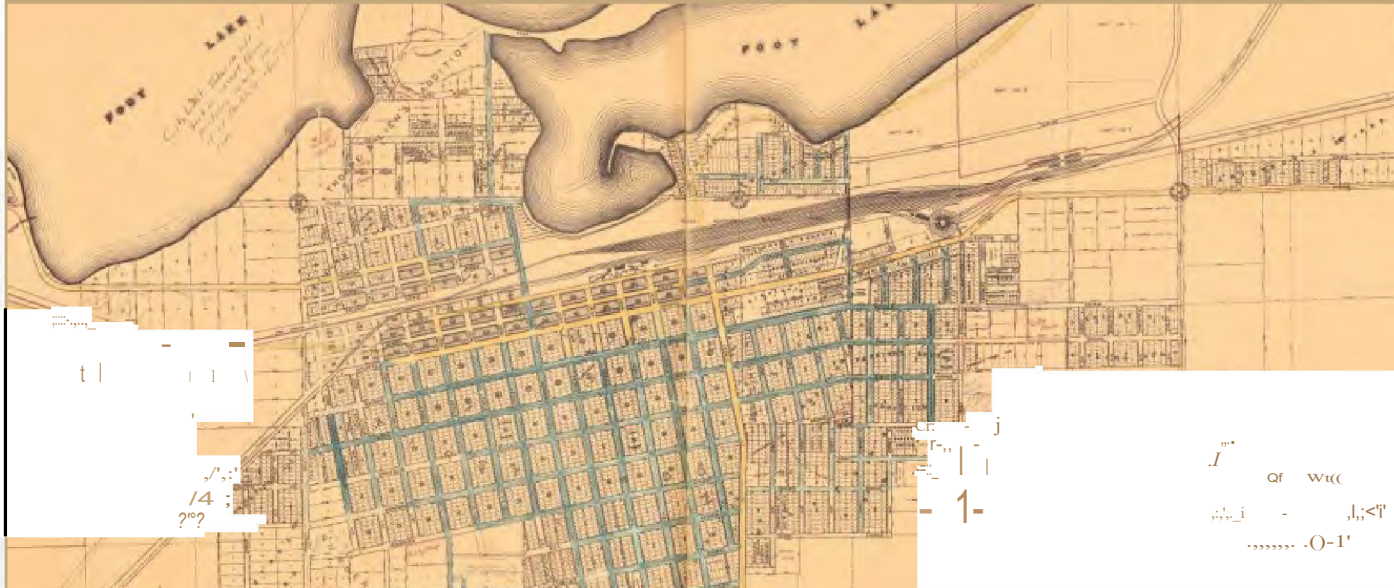
GRASSHOPPER WARRANT

Willmar own. J ip.
 Road District No. *014*
J. A. Jaeb Overseer
 I hereby certify the within to be a true and correct copy of the original on file in my office. *Madison* 187
R. G. Anderson - To on, Olerk.



This Warrant is a true and correct copy of the original on file in my office. I hereby certify the within to be a true and correct copy of the original on file in my office. *Madison* 187

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WITH WILLMAR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



CHAPTER ONE:
WILLMAR TODAY



INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Willmar has been a diverse and thriving regional hub for employment, population, and the demand for goods and services. Since the 1930s, the city's population has steadily increased, resulting in a diverse workforce for regional employers in research and development, manufacturing, processing, and retail. By understanding current and future trends, city decision-makers are better equipped to address the evolving needs of residents and employers. This chapter highlights key features of Willmar's demographics, with other key existing conditions detailed within each plan element chapter.



CentraCare - Rice Memorial Hospital Willmar, Minnesota



HISTORY

In 1868, surveyors for the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad selected a route to the western plains which passed just South of our Foot Lake. While nobody yet lived in the area, the village of Willmar was soon home to settlers who followed the railroad. By the end of 1870, Willmar was filled with residents speaking several different European languages and would boast a regional grain elevator, hotel, lumberyard, jewelry store, and more than 20 other businesses. This foundation would lead to Willmar growing into the regional hub.

Willmar has a rich history of immigration beginning with the original European settlers coming from a wide range of countries and expanding to immigrants from Hispanic, East-African, and Asian origin.



Willmar, Minnesota Great Northern Depot Early 1900's

According to US Census data, Willmar has continued to grow every decade since 1930. The highest growth occurred between 1930 and 1950, and again between 1960 and 1980, averaging 23.5% growth per decade. Conversely, the City's slowest decade occurred between 1990 and 2000, when the city grew by 4.7%. Willmar also has a large segment of the population which is mobile (only lives in Willmar for part of the year). Willmar maintained growth of 6.9% from 2000-2010, and 7.2% from 2010- 2020. While the growth has been slower over the past 30 years, it has continued during a period where many nearby cities have seen their growth stagnate and populations decline. The City of Willmar continues to grow and estimates its current population at nearly 21,335 as of 2023.

From the 1980's onwards, the introduction of the Willmar Jennie-O Turkey Plant was a major attraction for immigrant workers from not only Latin America, but also East-African countries, such as Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. Willmar is at the center of the largest turkey producing region of the United States and factory work in food processing plants has long been a source of employment for first-generation immigrants in Willmar. A significant portion of our Somali population was attracted for the jobs offered by the Jennie-O plant in the City of Willmar. The African American population of Willmar has grown to 10.5% of the population according to 2023 US Census data.

CHAPTER ONE – WILLMAR TODAY

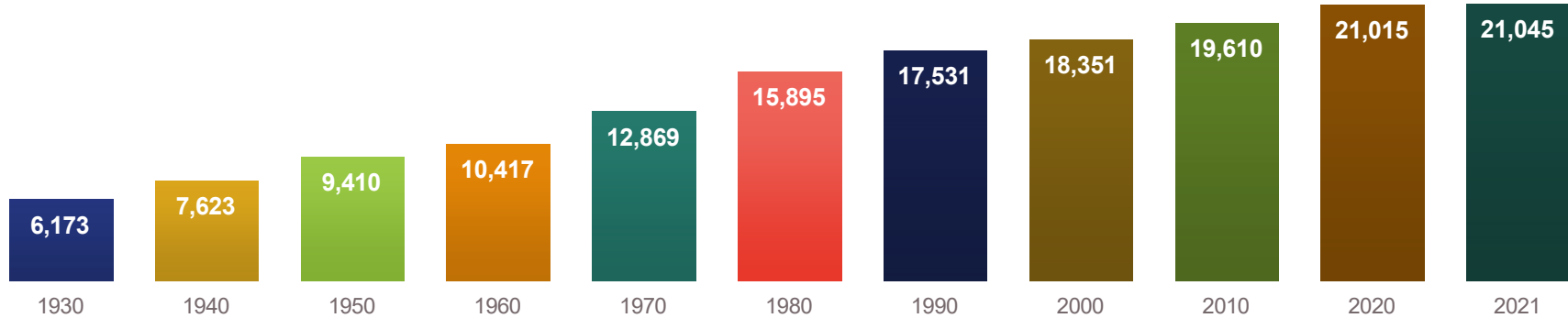


Albert H. and Jennie C. Sperry House 228 Porto Rico Street Willmar, Minnesota

CHAPTER ONE – WILLMAR TODAY



Figure 1-1. Willmar Population by Decade



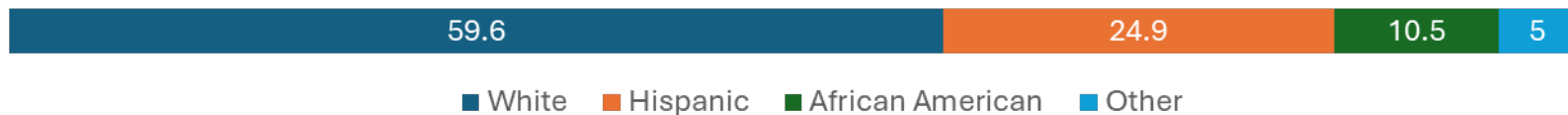
Source: US Census, 1930-2020; American Community Survey Estimate, 2021

DEMOGRAPHICS

DIVERSITY

Willmar has seen a steady trend over the past decade towards racial and ethnic diversity. The White population remains the majority at 59.6%, while the Hispanic population has grown to 24.9%, and the African American population has increased to 10.5%. Along with smaller, but significant Asian and Native American populations, Willmar has become the epitome of a multicultural community.

Figure 1-2. Willmar Population by Ethnicity



Source: US Census, American Community Survey

CHAPTER ONE – WILLMAR TODAY



At a time when many cities, nearby and nationwide, are struggling with population decline and lack of workers for employment, Willmar's diversity growth has given our city a competitive advantage over other cities. Our diversity is pivotal to our continued maintenance and growth of our employment base and small business entrepreneurship.

The City of Willmar is committed to being a welcoming and growing community where everyone feels respected and has equal access to resources and opportunities. In 2018, the Willmar City Council passed a "welcoming city" resolution stating all residents are welcome in Willmar no matter their race, religion, sexual orientation, and country of origin. Willmar's City leadership and staff want to turn the vision of welcoming into a reality and have put an emphasis on trying to understand both what works and barriers that still exist.

This Comprehensive Plan will examine growth opportunities that can support our entire diverse community, which include affordable and suitable housing, living wages and career growth, childcare affordability, health and wellbeing, lifelong learning, and welcoming and belonging. Willmar's community strength is determined more by what we do, than by what we say. Our actions will make Willmar a stronger and more welcoming community.



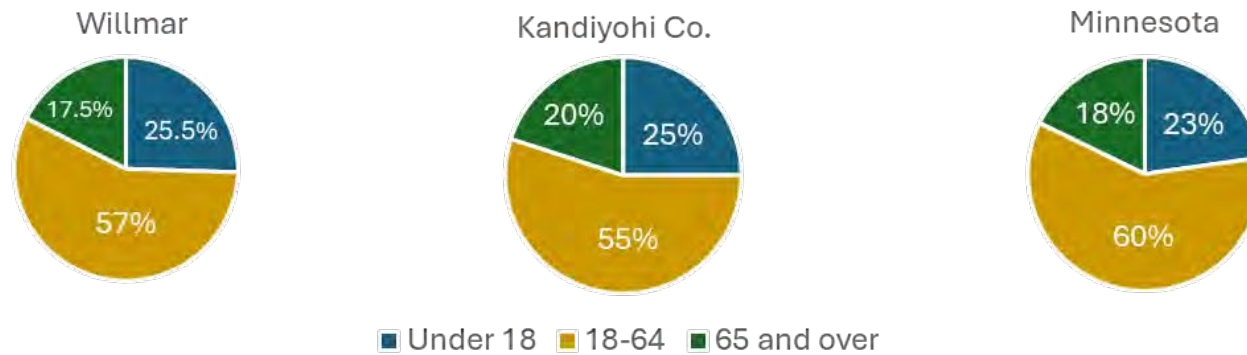
Attendees at Willmar Fest



AGE

A decade ago, Willmar’s age breakdown resembled an aging population that would eventually see a decline in population. However, widely thanks to the above-discussed influx of diverse immigration, Willmar’s 19 and under population has grown almost 33% since 2010, according to US Census data. The median age of Willmar is 35.6, compared to 39.8 for Kandiyohi County, and 39.1 for the State of Minnesota, according to US Census data for 2023.

Figure 1-3. Population Age Distribution



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 2023

This local trend is pointing to more growth for the community than expected. Willmar has the largest share of children in its population than any other town in the region. The population trend for the rest of the region shows very slow growth or stagnant growth in their child populations.

Nationally, the country is seeing a hefty portion of the populace reach retirement as the baby boomer generation ages. Willmar is no exception with 17% of the population being 65 or older, according to US Census data. Willmar has seen significant investment in infrastructure for its aging population. Assisted and independent living facilities along with other forms of senior housing have become major trends in development as our population ages.

According to our US Census data, Willmar’s working age residents (20yr – 64yr) have seen a slight decline since 2010 but have held steady at around 54%. Other cities in our region share similar population breakdowns with their working age residents being the bulk of their populations along with declining birth rates and increasing retirees. What makes Willmar stand out is that the city has continued to grow due to the influx from immigration.

CHAPTER ONE – WILLMAR TODAY



The aging population will need new planning strategies to accommodate their housing, transportation, health and wellbeing needs. Senior housing could help to alleviate housing issues by freeing up homes on the market and public transportation improvements could enhance transit for all residents in the city. Meanwhile, our working age residents and their families will need planning strategies for getting them into those freed up homes and other types of innovative housing to ensure we continue to build a strong workforce core that is dedicated to Willmar.

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Household size is the average of how many people reside in each household in Willmar. Like most of the country, Willmar’s household size had been on a steady decline over the last few decades but has seen a recent increase since the 2020 census. This may correlate to the increase in diverse immigration and their younger residents as well. Nationally, decreasing household sizes have been common over the past few decades. This reflects an ageing population and changes in marital status.

Table 1-1. Population and Households

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Population	12,869	15,895	17,531	18,351	19,610	20,993	21,335
Households	4,103	5,775	6,717	7,302	7,536	7,957	8,271
Household Size	3.1	2.75	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.4

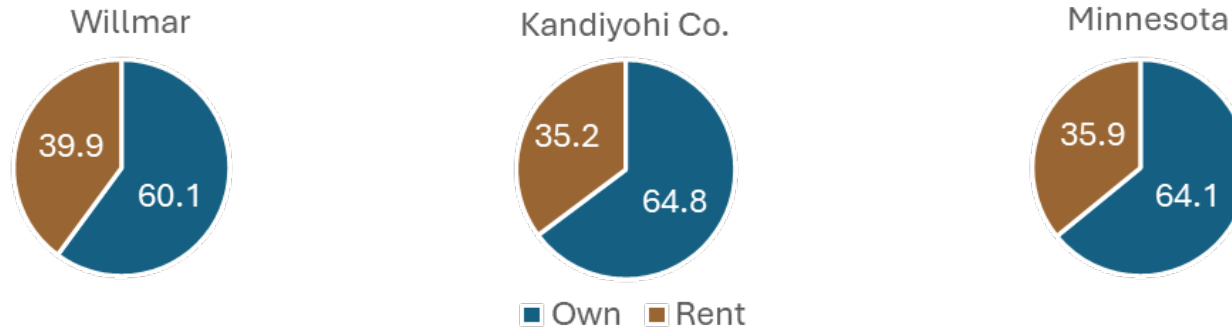
Source: US Census, American Community Survey

More housing stock and a greater variety of housing types are needed to accommodate the growing population and changing household demographics, including smaller units geared toward one- and two-person families.



HOUSEHOLD DISTRIBUTION

Figure 1-4. Home Ownership vs. Rent



Source: US Census, American Community Survey

In 2023, Willmar contained about 8,271 housing units, approximately 60% of which were single-family. Most homes are owner-occupied (60.1%), but that leaves almost 40% of residents as renters. Willmar has seen the percentage of multi-family grow recently with several large multifamily apartment complexes completed in the last few years. However, since most of the multifamily units are concentrated in a relatively small number of larger buildings, a substantial majority of residential land in the city remains as single family.

Willmar’s housing stock spans around a century of construction. Nearly 60% of the buildings in Willmar were built before 1979. New residential construction remained relatively steady until the 2008 recession, since having experienced a sharp decline. In 2000 – 2009 Willmar saw an average of 87 homes constructed a year. In 2020, the number of homes constructed decreased to 33. This decline has continued, and the city has seen less housing built each year since 2020, in large part due to the lasting economic effects of the pandemic.

Housing affordability and availability remains a consistent challenge, especially for first-time homebuyers and seniors. Planning strategies for different types of housing, including medium density and mixed-use housing may need to be utilized into the future to combat these problems.

While Willmar’s current zoning ordinance accommodates a range of housing types, there is need to develop a new zoning ordinance and map as follow-up to this plan to address current needs of both a growing community and incentivize housing construction.

CHAPTER ONE – WILLMAR TODAY



MEDIAN INCOME

According to estimates from the US Census Bureau for the years 2019-2023, Willmar’s median household income has risen to \$63,368. This lags behind the 2019-2023 Minnesota average of \$87,556 and the 2023 national average of \$80,610. A lower income is expected given our rural location and lower cost of living, but we strive to continue that upward momentum. Willmar’s poverty rate has risen to 15.2%, which is higher than the Minnesota average of 9.3% and the national average of 12.5%.

EDUCATION

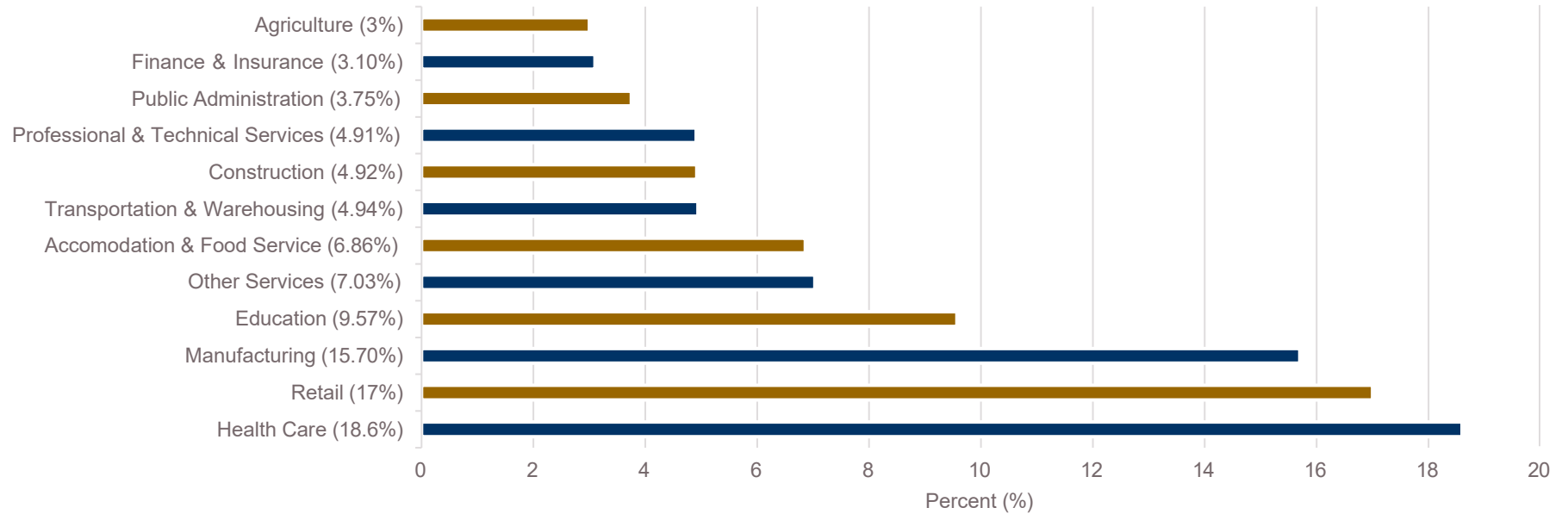
Willmar’s educational attainment is on par with the region when it comes to obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher but is behind the national average. The percentage of adults in Willmar over the age of 25, who have bachelor’s degrees is 24.5%, compared to the national average of 34.2%. Conversely, Willmar’s High School graduation numbers are the lowest in the region, which may be correlated to additional challenges faced by non-English speakers and the difficulty of assimilating to a new area.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment by industry in Willmar is summarized in the table below. The industries with the largest employment in Willmar are health care, retail, manufacturing, and education. The fastest growing business sectors include health care and social assistance, and technology companies. Industries with recent declines in employment include professional and technical services.



Figure 1-5. Employment by Industry



Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey Estimate, 2022



CHAPTER TWO:

VISION + GOALS



INTRODUCTION

The With Willmar Comprehensive Plan serves as the community’s guiding document for future decision-making specific to development, investment, and policy direction. The guidance included within the plan is rooted in a vision statement, key goals, and principles established by input from the public and the key themes identified in this chapter.

ESTABLISHING A VISION WITH WILLMAR

The vision statement is an overarching set of principles that the comprehensive plan seeks to encourage through future planning practices, policymaking, and implementation. The vision statement was developed in collaboration with the community through public engagement efforts. Each of the four WITH statements reflects a closely held community value that was reflected throughout the planning process.

VISION STATEMENT

Willmar is a city of possibility and opportunity — diverse, thriving, and resilient — a desired place to *Work, Innovate, Thrive,* and call *Home*.

WORK WITH WILLMAR

Willmar is a strong ever-evolving regional hub for Southwest Minnesota. The city provides resources to supply a diverse workforce with new opportunities.

INNOVATE WITH WILLMAR

Our success builds on local and regional collaborations. Strong relationships with stakeholders elevate the culture of opportunity.

THRIVE WITH WILLMAR

Residents and visitors benefit from a clean, healthy, and energy-efficient Willmar. Collaborations improve air quality, preserve lands, and protect natural resources. Our parks and greenways provide safe environments for residents to enjoy.

HOME WITH WILLMAR

Willmar is home. Our neighborhoods are diverse, accessible, and safe with housing and service offerings for individuals and families. A network of sidewalks, trails, and transit enhances mobility among the city’s vibrant neighborhoods and businesses.



KEY GOALS

The key goals of the plan reflect more detailed themes that the comprehensive plan seeks to address throughout the chapters of the plan. Implementing the key goals will assist Willmar to thrive for future generations.

KEY GOALS	Safety:	Prioritize community safety, ensuring a secure environment for residents, businesses, and visitors.
	Economy:	Foster a diverse and resilient economy, providing quality jobs, supporting local businesses, and encouraging innovation.
	Infrastructure:	Invest in modern and sustainable infrastructure, including roads, transportation, and public spaces, to enhance accessibility and livability.
	Community:	Preserve Willmar's unique identity while embracing opportunities for growth and development, creating a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere.
	Housing:	Provide a variety of housing options to meet the needs of all residents, pursuing affordability, accessibility, ownership, and quality living spaces.
	Recreation:	Offer diverse recreational opportunities, including parks, trails, and cultural activities, promoting health, well-being, and community engagement.
	Engagement:	Foster a collaborative and transparent environment, encouraging active participation from residents, businesses, and community partners in shaping Willmar's future.

CHAPTER TWO – VISION + GOALS



WITH WILLMAR PRINCIPLES

Each chapter is guided by the following four principles. These principles reflect the vision and key goals of the plan and tie each chapter back to the WITH Willmar overall vision.

PRINCIPLES	Sustainability:	Embrace sustainable practices to protect our natural resources and ensure a healthy environment for future generations.
	Inclusivity:	Value diversity and promote inclusivity, ensuring all residents feel welcome, respected, and can thrive.
	Innovation:	Encourage innovation and creativity to drive progress and adapt to the changing needs of our community.
	Resilience:	Build a resilient community, prepare to face challenges and embrace opportunities for growth and improvement.

Willmar is a city of possibility and opportunity — diverse, thriving, and resilient — a desired place to *Work, Innovate, Thrive, and call Home.*





CHAPTER THREE:

**LAND-USE +
DEVELOPMENT**



INTRODUCTION

One of the most powerful tools a city has is the creation and maintenance of land-use guidance, which all stakeholders must follow when developing a parcel. This guidance comes in three forms: existing land-use, future land use, and zoning.

EXISTING LAND-USE

Existing land-use maps provide a current snapshot by capturing how land is presently developed within the city. They serve as the foundation for future planning, helping cities identify prevalent uses and make informed decisions about prioritizing land-use categories moving forward.

FUTURE LAND-USE

Future land-use maps outline an ideal vision for the city's development priorities over the plan's lifespan. They guide the use of all developable parcels within the city, whether residential, industrial, commercial, or mixed-use. As part of future land-use planning, municipalities can establish urban growth boundaries to direct development and prevent sprawl.

ZONING

After a comprehensive plan is finalized, a zoning amendment or ordinance update is typically undertaken to align zoning code standards with the comprehensive plan. Zoning codes leverage the city's authority to ensure parcels conform to specific, allowable land use, as defined by an officially approved zoning map. The current zoning map for the City of Willmar is included in this chapter. Within the comprehensive plan, the Land-Use and Development chapter provides a framework for directing the location and timing of development and serves as a guide for updating zoning and development policies.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

EXISTING LAND-USE

The exploration of existing land-use aimed to understand the current development fabric and identify opportunities for growth and reinvestment throughout the community. The land-use categories outlined in this chapter's future land-use section were used to define current land uses (see **Table 3-1**). Existing land use was identified using the previous comprehensive plan as a baseline, incorporating zoning and land-use changes made since the adoption of the previous plan in 2009.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



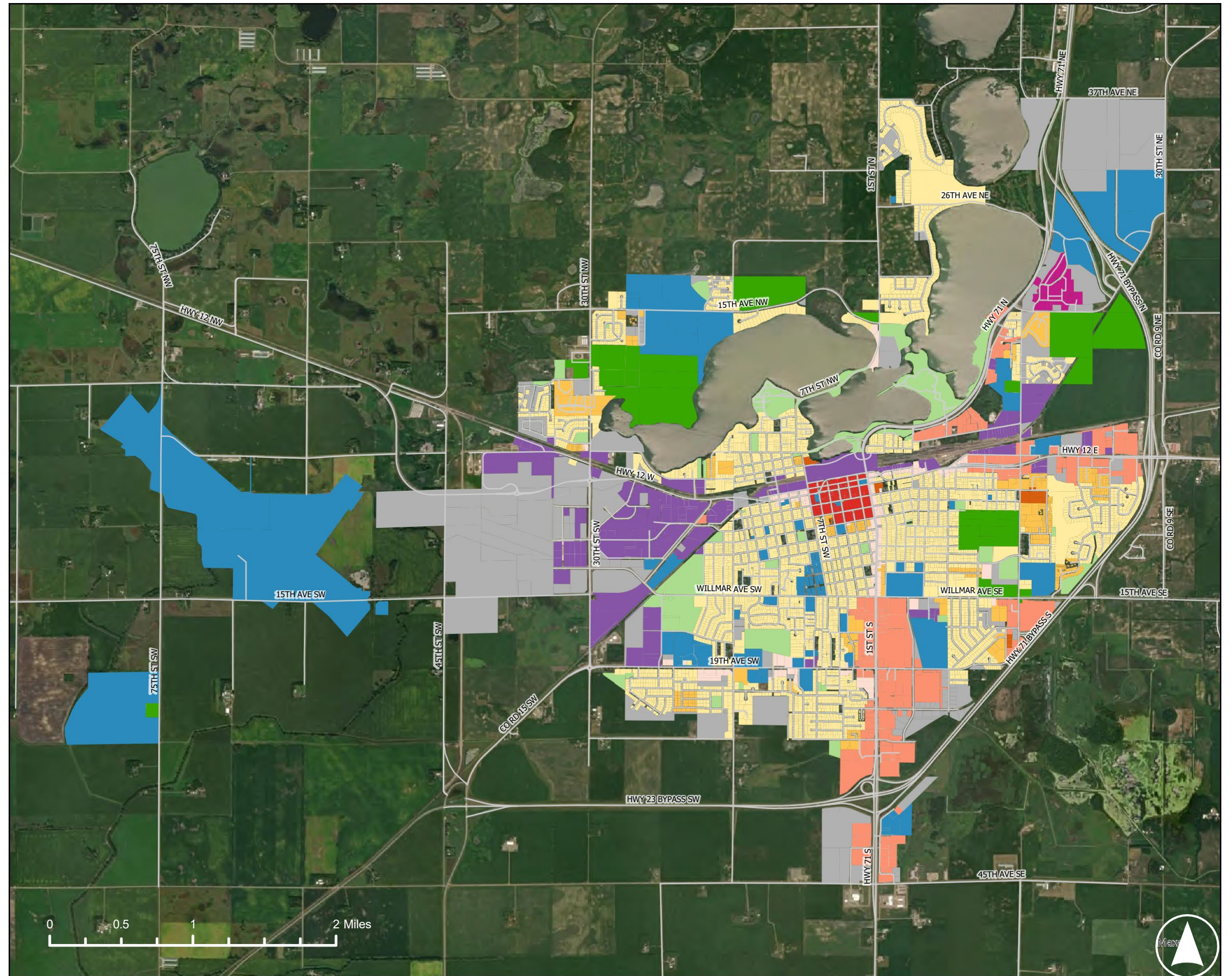
Table 3-1. Existing Land Uses

Land Use Category	Acres	Percent
Agricultural	577.8	7.8%
Low Density Residential	1,824.0	24.7%
Medium Density Residential	268.9	3.6%
High Density Residential	17.6	0.2%
Downtown	51.8	0.7%
Neighborhood Commercial	112.9	1.5%
Regional Commercial	555.7	7.5%
Technology District	47.7	0.6%
Industrial	572.2	7.8%
Parks and Open Space	380.8	5.2%
Institutional	1,477.8	20.0%
Vacant	1,494.8	20.2%

Existing Land Use

Existing Land Use

- Agricultural
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Downtown
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Parks and Open Space
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Technology District
- Vacant



CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



CITY OF WILLMAR ZONING DISTRICTS

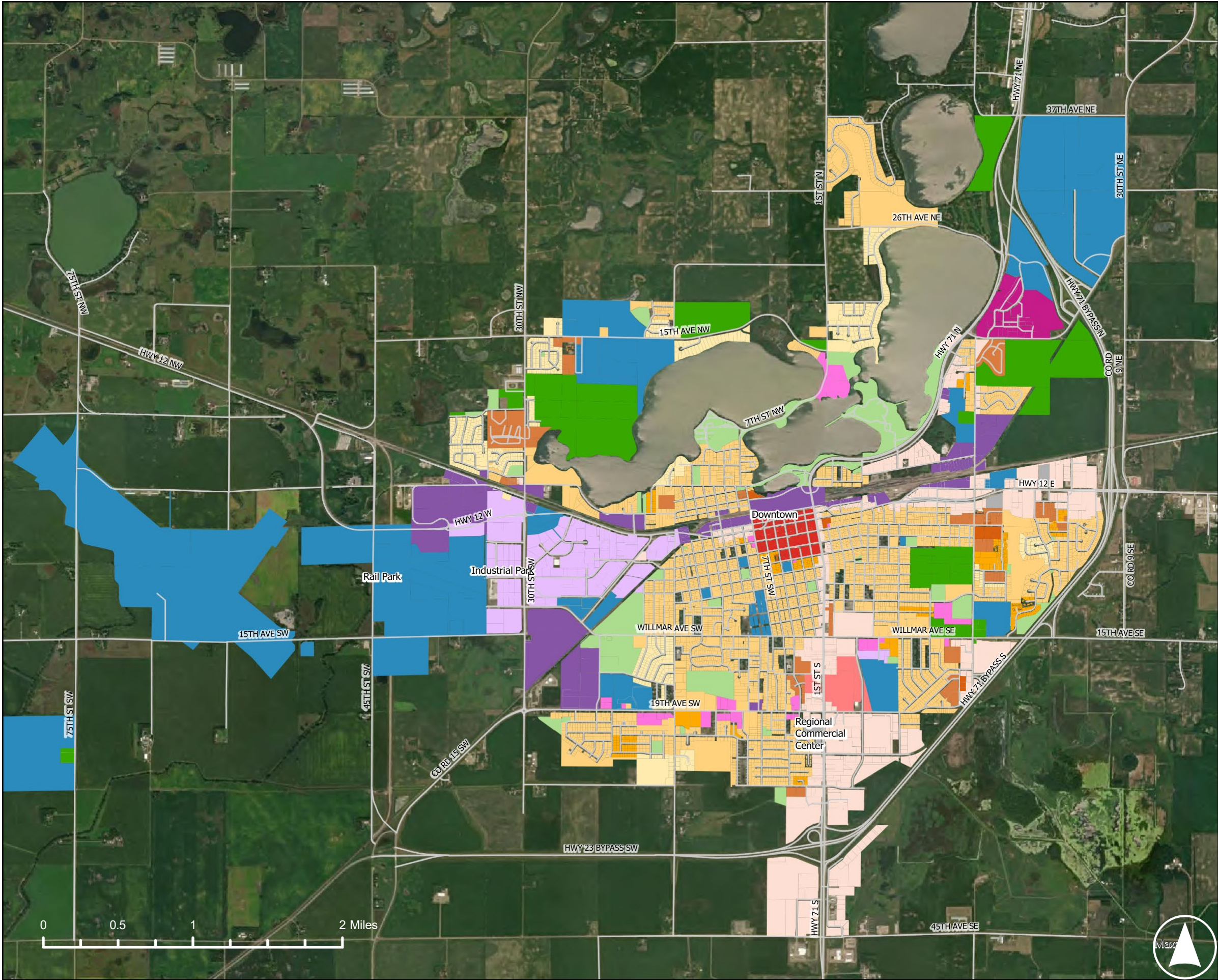
The City of Willmar Zoning Ordinance encompasses 15 zoning districts that regulate development throughout the community. The largest zoning district by land area is the G – Government/Institution District, covering 30 percent of the total land area. This district includes Willmar Airport, one of the city's largest properties, contributing significantly to this high percentage. The second largest zoning district is the R-2 – One- & Two-Family Residential District, representing 22 percent of the total land area. (see [Table 3-2](#)).

Table 3-2. Existing Zoning Districts

Zoning District	Acres	Percent
R-1 One Family Residential	345.4	4.7%
R-2 - One & Two Family Residential	1,637.0	22.1%
R-3 - Low Density Multiple Family	99.6	1.3%
R-4 - Medium Density Multiple Family	184.4	2.5%
R-5 - High Density Multiple Family	17.6	0.2%
LB - Limited Business	90.2	1.2%
GB - General Business	784.6	10.6%
SC - Shopping Center	56.9	0.8%
CBD - Central Business District	51.8	0.7%
T - Technology District	99.3	1.3%
I-1 - Limited Industry	371.5	5.0%
I-2 - General Industry	448.2	6.1%
P - Park District	380.8	5.1%
G - Government/Institution District	2,243.5	30.3%
A - Agricultural	595.9	8.0%

Existing Zoning

- A - Agricultural
- CBD - Central Business District
- G - Government/Institution District
- GB - General Business
- I-1 - Limited Industry
- I-2 - General Industry
- LB - Limited Business
- P - Park District
- R-1 One Family Residential
- R-2 - One & Two Family Residential
- R-3 - Low Density Multiple Family
- R-4 - Medium Density Multiple Family
- R-5 - High Density Multiple Family
- SC - Shopping Center
- T - Technology District
- N/A
- Roads





PLANNING NEEDS

Land-use and development are crucial responsibilities of city government. To encourage growth, the City of Willmar must address several needs. There are opportunities for future growth and development within the city to support infill development and align with the vision for "With Willmar."

NEEDS

Utility Expansion

As the city of Willmar annexes parcels and new development is constructed outside of existing city limits, utilities will need to be expanded to accommodate the growth. This includes water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, landline, and emergency services such as Fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Law Enforcement.

Accessibility of Urban Expansion

Residents of developments on the outskirts of cities are often car-dependent for access to everyday necessities. These developments can be inaccessible to those who cannot or choose not to drive. However, they also offer the opportunity to create more accessible areas with mixed land uses, pedestrian infrastructure, and ADA-accessible facilities.

STRATEGIES

Future Land-Use

The future land-use plan serves as a guide for the type and intensity of citywide development. While it doesn't provide the detailed specifics found in the zoning code, it offers overarching guidance to shape development and land use patterns, ensuring consistency with the comprehensive plan during the city's regulatory and enforcement process.

As a developed community in a rural setting, Willmar's future land-use plan may see significant changes from year to year. The city's boundaries are expected to expand over the next decade, allowing for growth beyond its current borders and enabling the redevelopment and renewal of targeted areas within the city.

One notable development is the westward expansion of Willmar Industrial Park, anticipated to progress over the next decade with the completion of Willmar Rail Park. Currently situated on the western edge of city limits, the Rail Park is expected to drive substantial growth, potentially leading to an expansion of the city limits to Willmar Municipal Airport.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



Commercial Development Needs

There are two major forms of commercial development within the community today – regional commercial and neighborhood commercial. Regional commercial uses include those that serve the Willmar community and regional visitors. Neighborhood commercial uses include those that serve the local community and are generally smaller in scale. Both forms of commercial development have opportunities to thrive in the community; however, each type has varied needs that should be considered with future development opportunities.

Regional Commercial	Development Considerations	Neighborhood Commercial
Frontage along busy or higher volume roadways to provide visibility of use	Frontage	Varied frontage can range from busy to neighborhood streets
Generally, larger lot sizes are needed to support larger building footprints and parking areas	Lot Size	Lot sizes can vary depending on the use as building footprints may be smaller with reduced parking needs
Larger parking lots are typically needed with regional commercial uses to support patrons from a wider service area	Parking Needs	Parking needs may be reduced with neighborhood uses, especially with proximity to street parking or multimodal infrastructure
Uses tend to desire direct access points to support the development, particularly along higher volume roadways. Some uses request multiple access points.	Access	Access points are generally fewer and can come from any street type
Regional uses are well served in commercial areas with surrounding similar uses.	Adjacent Uses	Neighborhood commercial uses can be supported by a variety of surrounding uses, including similar commercial and residential neighborhoods.

Downtown Willmar

Downtown Willmar has experienced ongoing investment and change, transforming it into a destination that supports residential, commercial, and institutional uses. Continued focus on investments and improvements in Downtown Willmar will increase opportunities for the community and visitors to grow and thrive. The city aims to further enhance the vibrancy of downtown, encouraging it to become a gathering place for everyone.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Each of the four guiding principles can be integrated into land-use regulations within the City of Willmar. By considering these elements in future decisions, the city will be better positioned to achieve its overall vision.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW LAND-USE CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Land-use can promote sustainable developments, reduce activities that generate excessive pollution, and shape development patterns that minimize reliance on automobiles.
Inclusivity	The Land-use Plan can promote mixed land uses that encourage multimodal transportation, supporting a diverse array of businesses and ensuring inclusive access to businesses, housing, and jobs.
Innovation	Land-use can shape policies that foster innovative districts dedicated to innovation, similar to the established Technology District.
Resilience	The Land-use Plan can promote a diverse range of uses throughout the city, enhancing the resiliency and adaptability of Willmar's economy.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land-Use Map outlines the desired use and intensity of development throughout the city. At their core, these categories describe how land is currently utilized, regardless of its existing zoning. In the context of the Future Land-Use Map, they indicate the preferred use for the future. Each parcel is assigned a category based on development patterns and the preferred intensity. All parcels within the current city limits and logical growth areas are assigned a Future Land-Use Category. Parcels located outside the existing city limits but within an Urban Growth Area are also assigned a future land-use category.

For parcels within the city limits, the identified uses will guide city policy for any future rezoning requests. For parcels outside the existing city limits, the property should be zoned and developed according to the use identified on the Future Land-Use Map upon annexation.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



The Future Land-Use Map is intended to be a living document and can be amended as needed to support zoning changes consistent with the overall vision of this plan. The plan includes 13 land-use categories that provide a connection to the zoning ordinance.

The Future Land Use Categories are as follows (**Table 3-3**):

Table 3-3. Future Land Use Categories

Category	Description	Typical Uses/Building Form	Density
Agricultural	Large tracts of land devoted to crop production or the rearing of animals to provide food and products. May include agricultural homesteads.	Homestead, barns, and agricultural structures	0 to 0.5 units per acre
Low Density Residential	Areas of housing consisting of detached single-family homes with larger lot sizes. May include twin-homes in R-2 districts.	One-dwelling residential, Duplex, Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	0.5 to 5 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	Areas of a mix of housing styles, including small-lot detached single-family homes, attached twin-homes, rowhomes, and townhomes	One-dwelling residential, Townhomes, Row Housing, Fourplex, Small Apartments, Mobile Homes	6 to 12 units per acre
High Density Residential	Areas of housing consisting of apartment buildings and condominium complexes.	Apartments, Condos	12 or more units per acre
Downtown	Dense, generally mixed-use developments with street-facing commercial uses on lower levels and high-density residential above.	Office, Retail Sales and Service uses, High Density Residential, Public Institutions	12 or more units per acre
Mixed Use	Areas that support a combination of commercial and residential uses. Uses may include vertical mixed use with commercial on the ground floor and apartments or condos above or horizontal mixed uses with separate commercial and residential buildings.	Office, Retail Sales and Service Uses, High Density Residential, Public Institutions	12 or more units per acre

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



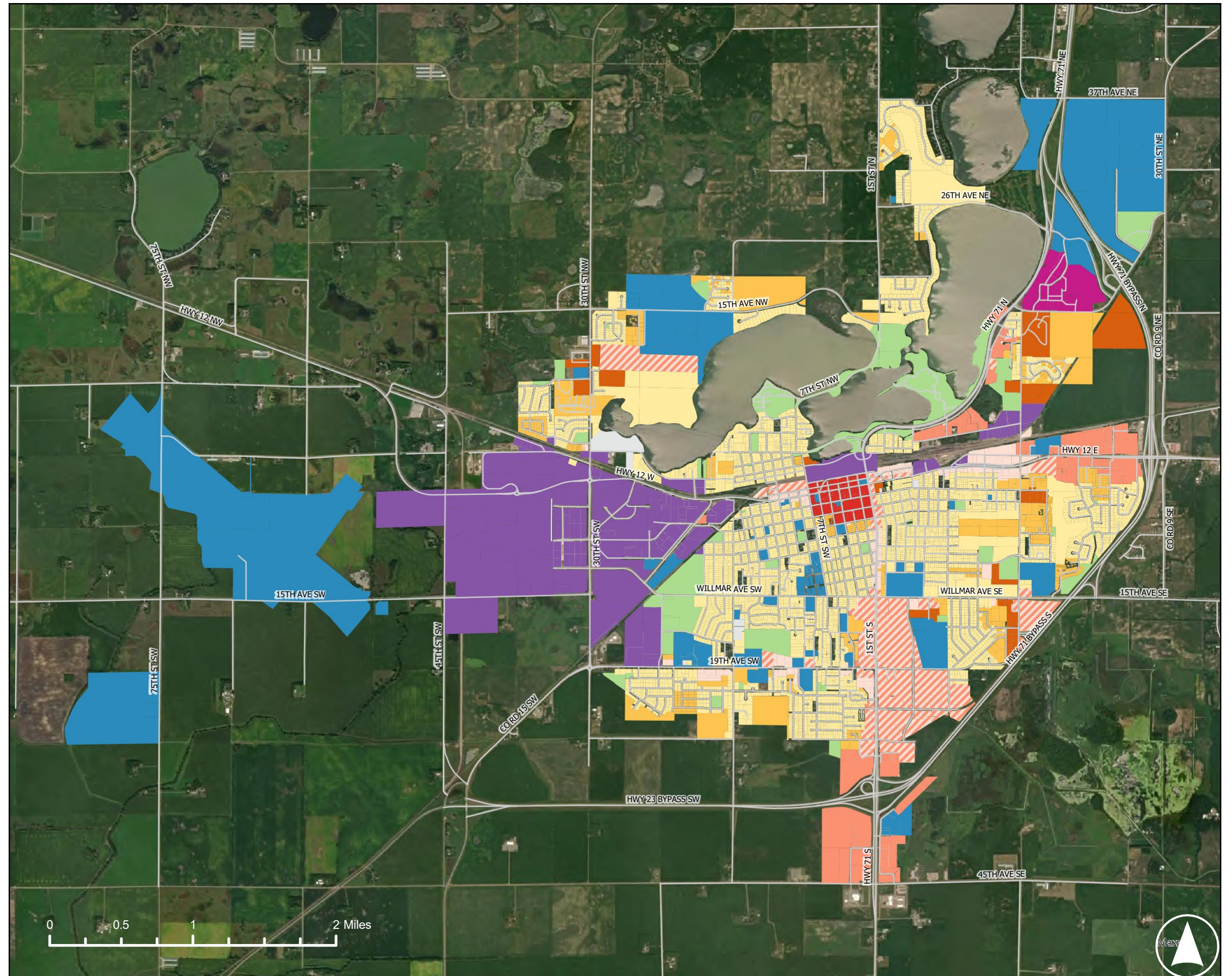
Category	Description	Typical Uses/Building Form	Density
Neighborhood Commercial	Areas of small commercial developments that cater to the surrounding neighborhood.	Small-format grocery stores, coffee shops, restaurants, taprooms, laundry facilities, gas stations/ convenience stores, and small medical clinics, etc.	N/A
Regional Commercial	Areas of large commercial developments that draw people in from outside the city.	Big-box retail, shopping malls, restaurants, office complexes, car dealerships, medical clinics, lodging, etc.	N/A
Industrial	Areas utilized for the production and storage of goods, the logistical management of goods, or other similar intensive facilities.	Manufacturing, warehouses, offices, research, repair and service, lumber yards, truck terminals, processing, etc.	N/A
Institutional	Areas consisting of community-oriented services. Uses may include but are not limited to government facilities and places of worship.	Schools, Places of Worship, Cultural Center, Government Facilities	N/A
Technology District	Areas that incentivize the creation and innovation of technological products.	Research activities, manufacturing, warehouses, office	N/A
Parks and Open Space	Areas of publicly owned land that includes recreational amenities and/or necessary environmental infrastructure.	Recreational parks, golf courses, open spaces	N/A
Vacant (existing only)	Parcels of land subdivided for development with no current structure or use.	N/A	N/A

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



Future Land Use

- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Downtown
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Parks and Open Space
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Technology District
- Mixed Use
- Cemetery



CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



The future land-use map depicts changes in land uses within city limits and identifies new land uses outside of city limits. **Table 3-4** below outlines the acreage allocated for each future land-use category and the percentage change from the existing map.

Table 3-4. Future Land Use Acreage

Land Use Category	Acres	Percent
Agricultural	0.0	0.0%
Low Density Residential	1926.3	27.6%
Medium Density Residential	581.9	8.3%
High Density Residential	206.1	3.0%
Downtown	49.2	0.7%
Neighborhood Commercial	127.1	1.8%
Regional Commercial	368.9	5.3%
Technology District	99.3	1.4%
Industrial	1240.2	17.8%
Parks and Open Space	475.5	6.8%
Institutional	1864.6	26.7%
Cemetery	41.4	0.6%

GROWTH AND REDEVELOPMENT AREAS

The plan focuses on directing growth to key areas for new development or redevelopment, categorized as follows:

Infill and Redevelopment Areas

The city should explore existing developed areas where opportunities may exist to increase densities, or change uses to reflect desired development patterns. Each location offers redevelopment opportunities that align with the Future Land-Use Map.



CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT

New Development Areas

In areas within the city limits that have not been previously developed, opportunities exist for development consistent with the city's desired development patterns. Most of these areas are near the city's edge, identified as agricultural or vacant, and are guided for new uses in the future.

Urban Growth Boundary

Areas outside the city limits within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) are available for future development opportunities. Most of these areas are not currently served by city infrastructure and would require annexation to support development. While specific future land uses have not been identified for this area, general guidance for future development is discussed in the Strategies section.

STRATEGIES

This section will outline various strategies that can be used to help achieve the goals and vision of the plan. In addition, emerging and anticipated trends will be discussed here.

URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY

In partnership with Kandiyohi County, the City of Willmar has established an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to limit future urban growth. Some parts of the city limits extend to the UGB, while other areas are a mile or more away. Based on the UGB boundaries defined at the time of this plan, key future growth opportunities include the northwest, southwest, and southeast. The Urban Growth Boundary can be found on page 3-18.

While the need for expansion into the UGB is not anticipated in the near term, property owners may pursue annexation into the City Limits to support development. Numerous vacant or underutilized sites suitable for redevelopment should be considered before annexing new areas. This approach supports the use of existing infrastructure and provides development options within the existing community fabric.

The future land-use plan does not extend into the UGB to prioritize development within city limits. However, the city may support annexation of areas within the UGB for development, provided the following considerations are met positively:

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



1	Financial Feasibility: Assess the cost of extending services such as water, sewer, roads, and emergency services to the annexed area. This includes evaluating the city's budget and potential revenue from the annexed area.
2	Economic Development: Consider how annexation can promote economic growth, attract businesses, and create job opportunities. This includes assessing the potential for commercial and industrial development.
3	Environmental Impact: Evaluate the potential environmental impact of annexation, including effects on natural resources, wildlife habitats, and green spaces.

Urban Growth Boundary Land Use Guidance

The Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) encompasses over 30 square miles (about the area of Cleveland, Ohio) around the perimeter of Willmar. Full development of this area is not anticipated within the planning horizon of this plan. Based on the future land-use plan outlined in this chapter, the city has explored potential growth areas within the UGB (see Table 3-4). The UGB is divided into two development phases: Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Phase 1 UGB areas may be considered for future development if they meet the city's needs and align with the specified land uses.

Phase 2 areas are unlikely to be needed for development within the planning horizon of this plan (2050).

The following guidance provides an overview of the uses that should be supported in each UGA area and should be used to inform decision-making regarding future development outside the existing city limits.

Table 3-5. Urban Growth Area Land Use Guidance

UGB Area	Description	Future Land Use Guidance	Considerations
Area A	Agricultural land to the west of US 71 north of the railroad tracks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industrial Low, Medium & High Density Residential 	The proximity to the railroad tracks and industrial uses to the west would support future industrial development near the railroad. The northern portion of the site could support residential extending the guidance of the future land use plan.
Area B	Remaining UGB in the southeast corner of the US 71 and Civic Center Dr interchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Commercial Institutional 	Future regional commercial uses could serve the existing institutional campus and uses to the north. The visibility along US 71 could also support commercial development. The area could also support future expansion of the institutional campus.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



Area C	The only identified growth area to the south of US 71 at the CR 23/Willmar Avenue Interchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Commercial • Residential Uses 	The interchange creates opportunities for this area to become a future growth area. Regional commercial or higher intensity residential uses should be supported to serve as the initial development opportunity in this area.
Area D	The two pockets to the west of US 71 that are not currently within city limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Commercial • Mixed Use 	This is a logical area for the continued expansion of development that is like the surrounding context.
Area E	The undeveloped area between the southern edge of city limits to Highway 23 Bypass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low, Medium & High Density Residential • Neighborhood and Regional Commercial • Parks and Open Space 	This area is a logical growth area for future residential development with proximity to adjacent development and transportation connections. With the Highway 23 Bypass serving as the southern boundary of this area, higher densities should be considered as appropriate to limit future needs to extend development over the bypass. Additionally, the proximity to the two interchanges creates opportunities for regional commercial development. Areas of neighborhood commercial should also be explored due to the overall size of the development area to provide new neighborhoods with access to local goods and services.
Area F	Area south of the Industrial and Rail Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial • Regional Commercial • Residential 	The proximity of the area to the industrial park and rail park creates an opportunity for further industrial expansion but also creates opportunities for residential and commercial development that could support existing industrial development (e.g., housing for employees).

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



















Area G	The area between city limits and the airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industrial• Open Space	The area between the rail park and airport provides an opportunity for future industrial expansion, while considering airport and runway buffers and needs.
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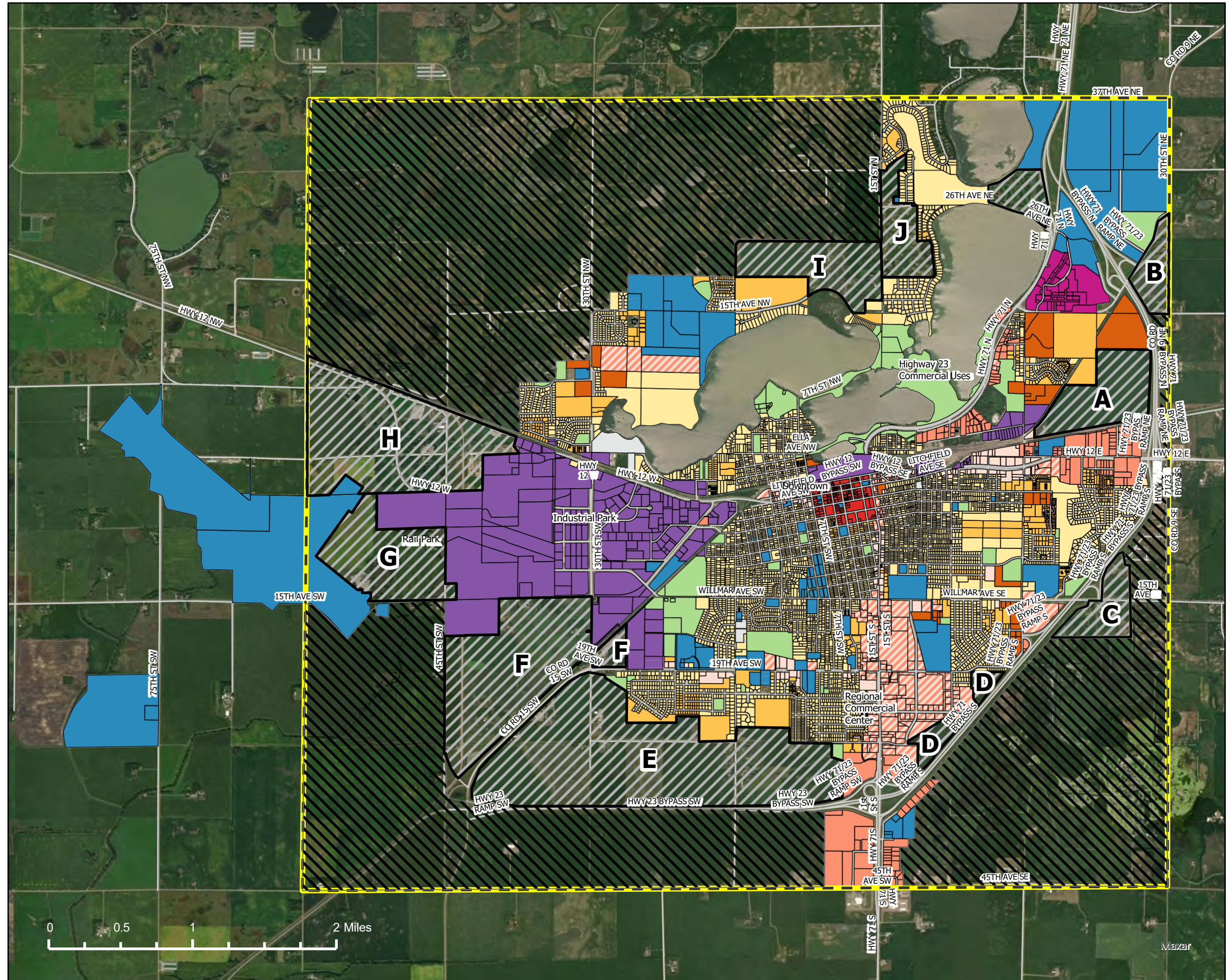
CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



Area H	The area north of the existing rail park, south of Highway 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial • Regional Commercial • Residential 	Similar to Area F, the proximity to adjacent industrial uses and Highway 12 creates opportunities for industrial and regional commercial development. Residential development that supports employee housing could be considered, but the distance to other services and needs within the community should be considered.
Area I	This area is north of Foot Lake, west of 1 st Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low, Medium & High Density Residential • Neighborhood Commercial 	A variety of residential uses within this development area should be considered to align with surrounding uses. Opportunities for neighborhood commercial development should also be explored to provide neighborhoods with access to goods and services.
Area J	Area west of Willmar Lake,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low, Medium & High Density Residential • Neighborhood Commercial 	Similar to area I, a variety of residential uses within this development area should be considered to align with surrounding uses. Opportunities for neighborhood commercial development should also be explored to provide neighborhoods with access to goods and services.

Urban Growth Boundary

-  Urban Growth Boundary Development Areas
-  Urban Growth Boundary Reserve
-  Urban Growth Boundary
- Future Land Uses
-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  High Density Residential
-  Downtown
-  Neighborhood Commercial
-  Regional Commercial
-  Parks and Open Space
-  Industrial
-  Institutional
-  Technology District
-  Mixed Use
-  Cemetery
-  Roads





CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

While the Future Land Use Map and future land use categories serve as the legal guide for land use and zoning decisions, there are several other factors that should be considered in the decision-making process. Those considerations, which are consistent with the WITH Willmar Vision and Goals from **Chapter 2**, will help to ensure that Willmar grows to support the desired community vision.

Housing and Residential Development

The maintenance and development of a healthy, diverse, and affordable housing stock is important for the long-term sustainability of the community. The City of Willmar strives to support the development of a variety of housing types that are accessible to all current and future residents. Accommodating growth requires a corresponding increase of housing units, including ensuring that housing type meets the needs and wants of the community. Increasing the amount of housing in a city comes from one of two sources: 1) New development in areas that previously were undeveloped; and 2) redevelopment that increases the residential density of the area.

The future land use plan provides options to meet the city's development needs. First, some areas within the city are identified as desired development densities that exceed the existing densities. If those areas are ever redeveloped, residential density should be increased. Secondly, undeveloped areas within the city are identified for residential development.

Commercial Development

Land and buildings that support commercial development and reinvestment are highly desirable in the community today. To support future growth and investment of commercial properties, the city should maintain and understand the characteristics desired for various types of development to assist with development siting. For example, commercial development needs vary by the type of use, some requiring access from a high-volume road, and others requiring little to no parking.



CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT

Mixed-Use Development

Future land uses support growth specifically within Downtown Willmar. Mixed-use development includes development with two primary uses, many times including commercial and residential uses. As is common in many cities, due to its similarity to traditional downtown development, Downtown Willmar was identified for a vertical mix of commercial and residential uses. Other mixed-use development may be considered in the community, with changes to the zoning ordinance and implementation guidance. For example, neighborhood-mixed use could be allowed within Neighborhood Commercial areas to allow both residential and commercial use in areas along key transportation corridors and transitioning out of downtown.

Mixed-use does not always require residential development to be included. Commercial/industrial mixed use can be explored to serve as a transition from low intensity neighborhoods into the industrial portions of Willmar. Updates to the City's zoning code will likely be needed to facilitate these types of mixed-use development.

Sense of Place

As discussed above, development and land use patterns and the built environment play a significant role in a community's identity and sense of place. Through development activities, the community can establish policies and regulations to continue to engage in the sense of place and identity. The opportunities identified within the [Arts and Culture Chapter \(Chapter 4\)](#) are initial opportunities that could assist in this effort.

Flexible Policies and Standards

The Future Land Use Map and categories are designed to provide a structure to land use and development planning while maintaining flexibility and allowing the plan to respond to changing circumstances. This plan strives to allow growth and land use change that supports living, working, and playing in the city. Having land use policies that are flexible enough to adjust to change will help to facilitate that goal.

Utilities and Infrastructure

As Willmar grows, attention should be paid to ensure that the high-quality system of infrastructure and utilities is maintained. As new areas are developed, utilities will need to be extended to serve the development. Development should be designed such as utility and infrastructure

Vertical vs. Horizontal Mixed Use

There are two common types of mixed-use development, vertical and horizontal. While the core concept for each is to allow varying types of uses, the built form that each takes is different.

Vertical mixed-use development typically has differing uses located within the same building. The most common type includes commercial on the first floor and residential above.

Horizontal mixed-use development typically allows differing uses located in different structures or on neighboring lots.

CHAPTER THREE – LAND-USE + DEVELOPMENT



extension is fiscally responsible for the city. Similarly, as areas within the city redevelop at higher densities, care should be taken to ensure the existing utility system can adequately serve the new development, without reducing the level of service provided to other areas.

Downtown “DTW”

Downtown Willmar continues to be a priority and focus area for the community, including changing land uses as well as businesses and residential redevelopment. Efforts, such as the Downtown Streetscape Plan, have established policies and guidance to inform investment within the downtown; however, additional planning for the downtown could support additional new investment. Establishing a Downtown Plan can help guide development to meet the vision and goals of the city and the Comprehensive Plan. A downtown plan should consider addressing the following topics:

- Mixed-use downtown core zoning and land use
- Multimodal infrastructure gaps, barriers, and improvements
- Access and crash analysis
- ‘Sense of place’ architectural themes and downtown design
- The establishment of specific downtown ‘districts and associated strategies
- Wayfinding signage and public art
- Block-by-block analysis of investment and redevelopment opportunities



Downtown Willmar Minnesota Banners

The Downtown Plan also addresses specific implementation actions that can be achieved to improve the downtown neighborhood and increase the sense of community within the city. Willmar can adopt similar principles and strategies to help increase the utilization of downtown, bringing more people to the core area



A Future Land Use map is one of the most valuable tools a city can utilize. By updating Willmar's Future Land Use, the city can shape where development occurs and establish zoning and development policies accordingly.



CHAPTER FOUR:

ARTS + CULTURE

CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE



INTRODUCTION

When envisioning Willmar’s future, one can’t help but think of the city’s landmark art installations and its celebration of diverse cultures. Willmar is filled with possibilities for art that tells a story of evolution and progress. Through intentional planning, the city desires to enhance its aesthetics, highlight community gatherings, amplify perspectives, and strengthen its identity. As a regional hub, Willmar’s arts and culture activities attract residents and visitors that support the economy.



Rockin' Robbins Summer Concert Series

CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

During the engagement phase of the WITH Willmar Comprehensive planning process, participants emphasized the need for a more comprehensive approach to public spaces and how arts and culture can foster a sense of belonging and enrich the individual experience throughout the city.

By integrating arts and culture into its comprehensive plan, Willmar seeks to further explore the intersection of creativity and economy. The goal is to infuse innovation and creativity throughout the city and its various sectors, producing a climate that benefits the regional economy and enhances the overall livability for its residents. The comprehensive plan's arts and culture goals are designed to build on this foundation, ensuring that Willmar continues to promote creativity and progress.

Downtown Willmar Minnesota Selvig Park



Flags of Honor Memorial Willmar Minnesota



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE



CURRENT EFFORTS

Through public-private partnerships and area organizations, Willmar has made significant strides in infusing arts and culture into the city. The existing initiatives provide diverse benefits, such as:

- Building community identity and pride.
- Activating spaces where people are connected.
- Increasing the sense of welcome and promoting cultural diversity.
- Attracting businesses and increasing economic investment.

Willmar proudly serves as a regional hub for creative and innovative concepts. Its dynamic expression of arts, music, and social practices attracts businesses, stakeholders, entrepreneurs, and visitors from near and far. This cultural scene has created an environment where ideas thrive, and creativity flourishes, making Willmar a sought-after destination for artistic and economic growth.



These goals and priorities are not just the vision of a few but are rooted in extensive data collected through the With Willmar community engagement. By actively involving residents in the planning process, Willmar ensures that its cultural and economic strategies are reflective of the community's needs and aspirations. This collaborative approach paves the way for a more inclusive and innovative future.

PLANNING NEEDS

The WITH Willmar Arts and Culture goals provide a framework to build upon an inclusive, vibrant, and thriving community through the following key areas:

ACCESSIBILITY

Goal: Ensure that everyone has access to arts and cultural learning at all stages of life, contributing to a welcoming community with a strong appreciation for the arts.



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE

Priorities:

- Emphasize traditions to bolster a more welcoming community for all.
- Offer diverse arts and culture learning opportunities to highlight Willmar’s global society, ensuring that people of all ages and backgrounds can engage with and benefit from these experiences.

ADVOCACY

Goal: Increase arts and culture participation among creatives by strengthening the message and advocacy efforts that highlight the value of arts and culture.

Priorities:

- Identify and partner with the creative silos within our community and connect them to resources and support, for a more collaborative and interconnected creative environment.
- Strengthen creative resources to increase participation in arts and culture, ensuring that artists and cultural organizations have the support they need to thrive.

COMMUNITY

Goal: Reimagine public spaces throughout the city that encourage innovation, enhance livability, elevate aesthetics demonstrating design standards and accessibility.

Priorities:

- Identify, develop, and promote Creative Overlay Districts that serve as hubs of artistic and cultural activity, drawing residents and visitors alike.
- Design the use of public facilities and provide affordable spaces for creative work, ensuring that artists and cultural organizations have the physical resources they need to succeed.

INVESTMENT

Goal: Secure and develop funding for arts and culture to ensure the sustainability and growth of programs, ultimately benefiting the entire community.

CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE



Priorities:

- Establish clear goals and objectives for the fund. Identify the types of projects and initiatives to be supported, such as public art installations, cultural events, educational programs, and more. Implement measurable outcomes to track the impact of the fund.
- Stimulate the local economy by attracting tourists, businesses, and residents. Cultural events and institutions create jobs, generate revenue, and stimulate economic activity in related sectors such as hospitality and retail.

By focusing on these key areas, the WITH Willmar Arts and Culture goals supports a dynamic, inclusive, and thriving community where creativity and innovation are celebrated.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW ARTS + CULTURE CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Arts and Culture based initiatives can engage communities to identify and find solutions to local, national, and worldwide problems.
Inclusivity	Arts and Culture can serve as a bridge to connect our diverse cultures and promote events.
Innovation	Arts and Culture provide unique perspectives and innovation for community problem solving.
Resilience:	By sharing, integrating, and strengthening our local cultures, our city can continue to develop its diverse identity and remain welcoming and strong in times of change.

STRATEGIES

Art and culture strategies are essential for fostering vibrant and connected communities. They serve as powerful tools to celebrate diversity, preserve heritage, and strengthen local identities. These strategies stimulate economic development by attracting tourism, supporting creative industries, and encouraging innovation. Additionally, integrating art and culture into urban planning and public spaces enhances livability, making communities more appealing and livable. They also inspire dialogue, creativity, and critical thinking, addressing social challenges and



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE

fostering understanding. By investing in art and culture strategies, cities and organizations can unlock their full potential, uniting people and driving sustainable growth.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Develop public art ordinance and policies to encourage and support diverse offerings of public art and creative placemaking projects throughout Willmar.

A public art ordinance can provide numerous benefits to a city, enhancing its cultural, social, and economic landscape. A public art ordinance promotes the integration of art into public spaces, enriching the cultural experience for residents and visitors. It shows local talent and reflects the city's identity and heritage. Art installations can create landmarks and focal points that define a city's character and sense of place. They contribute to a unique and memorable identity for the city.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; Willmar Area Arts Council; Southwest Minnesota Arts Council; Willmar Education and Arts Center
- **Timeline:** Short-term
- **Resources:** City of Saint Paul, MN; Golden City, CO Arts and Culture Strategic Master Plan; Jefferson City, MO Cultural Arts Master Plan; National Civic League
- **Benefit:** An ordinance for public art can significantly enhance the livability for residents, stimulate economic growth, and create a more vibrant, connected, and culturally rich community.
- **Measure of Success:** Adoption of public art ordinance; Community support; Annual review that shows an increased number of public art projects.

Utilize Underused Spaces for Arts and Cultural Activities

Identify existing underused spaces that can be repurposed for trials, presentations, creation, and exhibitions. Locations such as parks, public facilities, and other institutions may serve as ideal venues for activities. Developing partnerships to encourage low-cost access to space is essential. Additionally, implementing an incentive program will assist nonprofits in establishing and utilizing these venues.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; Arts and Culture non-profits, Developers, Stakeholders
- **Timeline:** Medium-term
- **Resources:** City owned properties; Parks; Property Owners; Annual Event Organizers
- **Benefit:** This approach offers the benefits of easy space identification and the flexibility to design these spaces for various creative uses.



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE

- **Measure of Success:** Utilizing underused spaces provides support for revitalization efforts and reduces the cost barrier for artists to contribute to the region.

Establish an Artist in Residence Program

Artists-in-residence can introduce innovative ideas and approaches, inspiring new ways of thinking and problem-solving. This can benefit various sectors, including education, business, and urban development. Public art projects and community collaborations can enhance the aesthetics of public spaces, creating a sense of place and identity. These projects can transform underused or overlooked areas into vibrant, welcoming environments.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; Willmar Area Arts Council; Southwest Minnesota Arts Council; Willmar Education and Arts Center; Ridgewater College
- **Timeline:** Medium-term
- **Resources:** Lanesboro Artist Residency Programs; Minneapolis Creative City
- **Benefit:** Establishing an artist-in-residence program can bring a myriad of benefits to a community.
- **Measure of Success:** An artist-in-residence program involves evaluating both qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

Incorporate Urban Design Standards in Streetscapes

Incorporating a design standard in streetscapes is essential for Downtown Willmar and Unified Developments (*see Land-use Chapter*) to create cohesive, attractive, and functional urban environments. A well-defined design standard ensures uniformity in elements such as lighting, signage, street furniture, landscaping, and paving, contributing to a visually appealing public realm. An Urban Design Standard will also promote safety and accessibility by providing clear and intuitive pathways for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Design standards can help preserve the unique character and identity of a city while fostering a sense of pride and belonging among residents.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; Developers, Business Owners, Residents, Stakeholders
- **Timeline:** Short-Medium term
- **Resources:** National Capital Planning Commission; Carmel, IN Arts and Design District; Chaska, MN; Alexandria, MN
- **Benefit:** Implementing a thoughtful approach to streetscape design can significantly improve the quality of spaces, making Willmar more livable, enjoyable, and resilient.
- **Measure of Success:** Pilot programing and research into how Urban Design standards may stimulate economic growth by making commercial areas more inviting and attractive to businesses, customers, and tourists.



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE

Wayfinding & Gateway Signage

Wayfinding and gateway signage are essential tools for enhancing navigation and creating a welcoming identity for cities. Wayfinding signage provides clear and consistent guidance, helping residents and visitors easily navigate and locate key destinations, such as parks, landmarks, businesses, and public services. Gateway signage, on the other hand, serves as an entry point, offering a visually striking and cohesive first impression that reinforces the community's identity, culture, and pride. Together, these systems create a user-friendly and attractive environment while supporting economic and social development.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar, Kandiyohi County, Chambers of Commerce, Accessibility Advocates, Artists; Willmar Convention Bureau
- **Timeline:** Short-Medium term
- **Resources:** Cleveland Heights Gateways & Wayfinding Signage Plan; St. Helens Wayfinding Master Plan; Brooklyn Park Wayfinding Program Development
- **Benefit:** Simplifying navigation for residents and visitors while enhancing the community's identity with visually impactful signage. These systems support economic growth by attracting tourism and boosting local businesses, while also promoting accessibility through inclusive design principles. Additionally, they encourage environmentally friendly travel methods, such as walking, cycling, and public transit, by providing clear and effective guidance.
- **Measure of Success:** Analyzing feedback from user experiences gathered through surveys and public forums, alongside increased foot traffic to local attractions and businesses. Economic growth, reflected in higher revenue and tourism, will further indicate the effectiveness of navigation and branding improvements. Additionally, accessibility compliance and active stakeholder engagement will serve as key benchmarks for the strategy's overall impact.

Establish an Entertainment Arts District Overlay

Entertainment district overlay zoning is a specialized zoning tool designed to encourage and regulate the development of vibrant, mixed-use areas that focus on entertainment, dining, arts, and cultural activities. This zoning overlay supplements the existing base zoning by introducing additional regulations or incentives tailored to the unique needs of an entertainment district. It aims to create a lively and pedestrian-friendly environment while balancing the interests of businesses, residents, and visitors. Key features often include extended operating hours, relaxed noise ordinances, signage allowances, and design standards that promote aesthetic cohesion and accessibility.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; Business Owners; Residents; State of Minnesota; Willmar Convention Bureau
- **Timeline:** Short-term
- **Resources:** City of Santee, CA; Columbia Missouri's North Village Arts District; Northeast Minneapolis Arts District
- **Benefit:** Implementing an entertainment district overlay zoning brings significant benefits, such as boosting economic growth by attracting businesses, tourists, and events that generate revenue and create jobs. It enriches the community's culture by fostering a



CHAPTER FOUR – ARTS + CULTURE

hub for arts and entertainment while enhancing residents' livability with diverse, walkable options. Additionally, it increases property values by making the surrounding areas more appealing and desirable.

- **Measure of Success:** Evaluating increased business revenue, property values, and tax contributions, reflecting strong economic performance. Higher foot traffic and attendance at events indicate strong visitor engagement, while positive feedback from residents and businesses highlights community satisfaction. Additionally, effective enforcement of regulations and minimal complaints about noise or disruptions demonstrate successful compliance and safety within the district.





CHAPTER FIVE:
MOBILITY



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

INTRODUCTION

Mobility, defined as the ability to move or be moved freely and easily, is an imperative aspect of a comprehensive plan to address existing conditions and future transportation needs. This chapter will analyze the community's ability to move and access transportation throughout the City of Willmar. Mobility is essential for a modern, thriving community to connect residents to opportunities, services, and experiences. Willmar desires to create a transportation network that prioritizes safety, accessibility, and equity for our community. This chapter will outline goals and strategies to guide decision-making in all modes of transportation, including walking, biking, public transit, and automobiles.

FREIGHT SYSTEM

Willmar got its start as a hub for moving freight along the Great Northern Railway. Railroad freight and regional transportation are still intrinsic to Willmar's character today. The main railroad line runs east and west along Highway 12 splitting the city into two. In addition to the railroad, there are three other highways that pass through or start in Willmar. US 71 spans from Louisiana, through Willmar, on the way to Canadian. Trunk Highway 23 runs through Willmar on its way from Sioux Falls, SD to Duluth, MN. Minnesota State Highway 40 starts in Willmar and goes to the western Minnesota border. Finally, U.S highway 12 spans from Michigan to Washington State with a stop in Willmar.

MAJOR ROADWAYS

The City of Willmar is traversed by the major roadways of US Highway 12 and 71, and Minnesota State Highway 23 and 40. Willmar is also intersected by Kandiyohi County Roads 5, 15, 23, and 41. The major artery through town is US Highway 71 which is also our 1st St and main commercial thoroughfare through the city.

ROADWAY JURISDICTION

The roadway network within the community includes roadways owned and maintained by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT), Kandiyohi County, and the City of Willmar. Most roadways are managed and maintained by the City of Willmar. Additionally, towns have jurisdiction over the local roads outside of city limits. The agency with jurisdiction over the roadway is typically responsible for the overall maintenance and operations of the roadway, completing any upgrades or maintenance work needed to support mobility along the corridor. See **Figure 5-1** to see the roadway system map.

The City of Willmar has a jurisdiction of Business Highway 71 through the city, while the State of Minnesota maintains jurisdiction for US Highway 12 and Kandiyohi County maintains jurisdiction of the County Roads running through the city.



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

SAFE STREETS FOR ALL (SS4A) PLAN

The Safe Streets for All (SS4A) program provides federal funding support for planning initiatives to prevent death and serious injury on our streets. The City of Willmar was awarded a grant from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in February of 2023 to conduct a SS4A study. Bolton & Menk was awarded the bid for the project and began a comprehensive Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Action Plan to help prevent and eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries within the city limits. This foundational plan highlights concerns about roadway safety and steps the city can take to proactively improve it.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to identify high crash locations, to engage with the community to receive their input, and recommend intersections and roadway segments that could be modified in accordance with the Vision Zero Program. Vision Zero is a traffic safety approach focused on eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries, while improving access to safe, sustainable, and equitable mobility for everyone.

As part of the study, Bolton & Menk worked in tandem with Willmar City employees to engage the public for their input, including pop-up events at popular community events, such as Rockin' Robbins and the County Fair, and held a public seminar at Willmar Public Library. Bolton & Menk compiled a map of underserved communities around the city, identifying areas that have historically been underserved.

Between 2014 and 2023, there were 48 fatal and serious injury crashes on Willmar streets, averaging five per year. Each one of those people involved was a part of the Willmar community. Future injuries, deaths, and crashes could be prevented.

The SS4A plan produced: 1) A detailed crash analysis on all roadways within the City of Willmar, including a review of trends and contributing factors to fatal and injury crashes; 2) A transportation equity analysis to understand and acknowledge the communities most impacted by traffic crashes; 3) An action plan with policy recommendations and future study needs; 4) A prioritized list of project areas with potential improvements to address traffic safety; and 5) A toolbox of crash mitigation strategies.

The final SS4A plan can be found as **Appendix ##** to this plan.

BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION

Willmar is a small town with relatively short distances from end to end. A person would be able to bike to most of their destinations in a reasonable amount of time. However, much of the workforce in Willmar drive to work alone. The average commute time in Willmar is roughly 5-15 minutes. Given Willmar's small footprint and topography, a significant portion of car trips could be replaced by biking with the implementation of proper infrastructure and planning.

The residents choice to replace small car trips or change commuting patterns isn't just an individual choice, but is influenced by other transportation factors

Replacing short car trips and commuting patterns isn't just an individual choice as mode of transportation can be influenced by many factors. The strongest three factors are income, convenience, and safety. The convenience and safety of biking can be heavily influenced by our



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

infrastructure. Relevant bicycle Infrastructure can include Vertical & Horizontal Separation from Car Traffic, Designated and Protected Bicycle Lanes, Functional Bike Parking, Cleared and Maintained Bicycle Infrastructure, and Engineered Traffic Calming. Biking as transportation could have a major impact on the number of cars trips an individual has to make to live comfortably. Replacing car trips with bike trips would have a significant impact on an individual's health and carbon footprint.

TRAILS

Willmar is home to several regional destinations, such as: Robbins Island Park, Willmar & Foot Lake, and the Glacial Lakes State Trail. The Glacial Lakes State Trailhead is on the northeast side of town and follows Highway 23 northeast to Paynesville. This regional destination brings cyclists from all over to enjoy various stops along the trail in New London, Spicer, and Willmar. There is also a newly completed trail that goes from the Glacial Lakes State trailhead to Eagle Lake. With Willmar being in a rural area, there are plenty of gravel roads that connect to scenic byways all around the city.

Willmar has a well-connected grid pattern that goes all over town. With most posted speed limits in these areas at 30mph, some of the less busy streets are acceptable roads for bikers but could benefit from additional bicycle specific infrastructure. Willmar has some bicycle tracks along roads and trails throughout town, but they are not connected enough for bikers to use them exclusively when going places around town. Therefore, the grid of low traffic speeds and low traffic volumes are essential for cyclists looking to fully navigate the city.

WILLMAR BIKE SHARE

Willmar has a bike share program, run through the City's parks and recreation department, that provides 40 bikes across 11 docking stations around town. This program was crafted to provide low-cost bicycle access to residents and visitors. The bike share program utilizes an app that unlocks the bikes at a rate based on time rather than distance. The bikes are set up with a basket to provide a modicum of utility as well. The bike share program is seasonal and typically runs from the middle of June to the middle of October.

BIKE, PEDESTRIAN, AND TRAILS PLAN

The City of Willmar has also embarked on a Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan with the purpose of guiding non-vehicular transportation improvements in Willmar. This plan will draw on residents' experiences with local biking and walking systems along with technical analysis to prioritize improvements that will have the greatest positive impacts for Willmar residents. The Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan also conducted community engagement and worked with the comprehensive plan team to integrate their plan as much as possible with the SS4A and comprehensive plan. The Bike, Pedestrian, and Trail Plan will help to improve connectivity within the community, aligning with the comprehensive plan's aim to ensure neighborhoods are accessible and linked by nonmotorized routes, and to make sure all residents have access to the city's amenities. The plan will analyze these routes for improvements ranging from separate bike lanes to paved road shoulders. The Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plans will be completed in early 2025 alongside the comprehensive plan.

The final Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan can be found as **Appendix ##** to this plan.



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT (CCT)

Willmar has a public transit option named Central Community Transit. This is a regional system that serves Kandiyohi, Meeker, and Renville counties. This rural transit system evolved as a method for seniors in the region to get to appointments in the city from smaller towns in the region. CCT has fixed routes around Willmar that serve the public, as well as a dial and ride option, allowing people to request specific pick-up and transport to a specific destination. People in Willmar can get anywhere in town on the bus, and they can get a ride to most towns within the three counties listed for a fee.

PLANNING NEEDS

TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS

As part of the completion of the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) plan, Willmar will begin applying for additional funding for projects identified by the SS4A plan to improve traffic safety and flow. This may include conducting pilot programs on certain roads and intersections to gauge effectiveness and community feedback before making improvements permanent.

COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining streets that enable safe access for all people who need to use them, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Unfortunately, most residents still feel the need to use their personal vehicle for transportation around Willmar. While Willmar has improved sections of bike trails around the city, they are not fully interconnected, making it difficult to travel from one trail area to another through the city. Most people also find walking or biking to businesses difficult due to the distance or safety concerns, especially in high traffic areas, such as 1st Street. The recent Bike, Pedestrian, and Trail Plan identified areas throughout the city that are difficult to navigate for non-vehicle users. This provides the city with the opportunity to focus on these areas to create a more “complete streets” system for non-vehicle users to improve their access, safety, ease of use, and enjoyability. These improvements can include different forms of lane separation and other improvements for bikes and pedestrians that provide additional safety. Linking the entire city with our many beautiful surrounding trails would promote the expansion of bike and pedestrian travel, reducing the burdens of vehicle traffic and promoting the health and enjoyment of Willmar’s residents.

RAILROAD CROSSING IMPROVEMENTS

Willmar continues to work with BNSF, the operator of our railyard and rail network, to improve safety and livability improvements at rail crossings. Willmar and BNSF will be conducting studies to focus on safety, security, accessibility, and multimodal transportation improvements at rail crossings for all modes of transportation.



WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Willmar’s overall goals of being a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and resilient community are reflected in the guiding principles of the Mobility chapter. By addressing issues identified by residents and professional studies, Willmar can achieve the city’s overarching vision of ensuring that all residents, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to safe and reliable transportation options.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW MOBILITY CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Willmar should: (1) Promote active transportation by investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to create complete streets and trails to navigate the city as a whole; (2) Enhance public transit by expanding and improving networks; and (3) Reduce emissions by implementing traffic calming measures and promoting a walkable environment.
Inclusivity	Willmar should: (1) Promote accessible transportation services and infrastructure to ensure accessibility to people with disabilities, older adults, and other vulnerable populations; (2) Provide equitable access to transportation by addressing disparities in underserved communities; and (3) engage with the entire community to ensure feedback is gathered from all segments of the population and diverse community members are included in the planning and decision-making process.
Innovation	Willmar should: (1) Utilize data analytics and new technologies to improve transportation planning and decision-making; and (2) Test new mobility solutions through pilot programs to evaluate effectiveness.
Resilience:	Willmar should: (1) Diversify our transportation options to promote systems that are less reliant on personal vehicle travel; and (2) develop transportation plans for emergency and disaster response.



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

STRATEGIES

Recent activities and studies that have focused on mobility provide an understanding of the issues and opportunities that will make the community moving forward. The following recommendations and strategies should be considered as future action steps to promote safe and efficient movement for community members and visitors.

EMPHASIZE SAFETY

Reducing accidents and making streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers should remain a top priority.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; MNDOT; Kandiyohi County; FHWA; Parks and Recreation; BNSF; Willmar Bikes.
- **Timeline:** Long-term (1-25 Years)
- **Resources:** Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan; Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan.
- **Benefit:** Infrastructure improvements for vehicle transportation on roadways, intersections, and high traffic areas; Creation and improvement of trail networks for both bicycle and pedestrian traffic to allow navigation of the entire city in an efficient and safe manner.
- **Measure of Success:** Analysis of ongoing serious injury and crash data to ensure the city continues to move toward or maintain the aim for zero deaths on Willmar roadways.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL RESIDENTS

Accessibility is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, ability, or income, can get around easily. It means thinking about sidewalks, public transit, and options for people who can't drive.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; MNDOT; Kandiyohi County; FHWA; Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes; CCT; Local Taxi Services; Volunteer Driver Services; Local Senior Care Providers.
- **Timeline:** Long-term (1-25 Years)
- **Resources:** Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan; Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- **Benefit:** Providing transportation to seniors, people with all abilities, and all those who need assistance in transit to ensure they attend to their needs, including medical appointments, food, public services, and other necessities in the city.
- **Measure of Success:** Measuring the capability of our residents to access essential services to ensure that nobody is neglected due to their inability to find transportation.

TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY

Minimizing traffic congestion and travel times is key for a smooth-running city. Good transportation connections are essential for businesses to thrive and for people to access jobs. Efficiency involves improving traffic flow, public transit, and promoting alternative modes of transportation.



CHAPTER FIVE - MOBILITY

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; MNDOT; Kandiyohi County; FHWA; Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes; CCT; Local Taxi Services.
- **Timeline:** Long-term (1-25 Years)
- **Resources:** Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan; Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- **Benefit:** Efficient travel will reduce stress on drivers, time spent in vehicles, pollution into our environment, and improve safety.
- **Measure of Success:** We must continue to evolve studies that inform road improvement projects that increase efficiency and safety to the public and periodically interact with the public to determine the effectiveness of said improvements.

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Encouraging walking, biking, and public transit helps reduce air pollution and promote healthier lifestyles.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; MNDOT; Kandiyohi County; FHWA; Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes; CCT; Local Taxi Services.
- **Timeline:** Long-term (1-25 Years)
- **Resources:** Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan; Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- **Benefit:** Our community would benefit from a healthier population that emphasizes walking and biking, when possible, as well as benefit from reduced air pollution, which could lead to happier lifestyles and less healthcare costs.
- **Measure of Success:** As we roll out initiatives that promote community health, we must continue to interact with the public to determine the effectiveness of the initiatives to determine their effectiveness on our health.

EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT

Construction and improvement of road dedications and additional trails into functioning lanes for road users will expand the options and availability for navigating the city.

- **Partner(s):** City of Willmar; MNDOT; Kandiyohi County; FHWA; Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes, BNSF.
- **Timeline:** Long-term (1-25 Years)
- **Resources:** Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Plan; Bike, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- **Benefit:** Expansion of infrastructure into future road dedications could allow for additional housing and can be done in a fashion that would allow greater access to a complete road and trail network.
- **Measure of Success:** As Willmar expands, we must engage with residents of new developments to ensure ease of access to our roads and trails.



**CHAPTER SIX:
HOUSING**



INTRODUCTION

Housing and residential neighborhoods provide a core part of the identity of Willmar for its residents, in terms of its role in providing basic shelter; community character; livability; a means of wealth creation; and proximity to jobs, services, and amenities. Likewise, housing policy for the city has shaped how housing has increased in supply, what it looks like, how property is valued, and even who lives here.

Although the housing patterns throughout Willmar have been largely established for decades, they are not static. The high land values that characterize this community have attracted continued investment in properties – from extensive renovation to teardowns to larger scale infill development. This reflects the changing needs and preferences of residents, as well as the need for thoughtful guidance for change. The housing vision for Willmar guides policies related to housing affordability, choice, quality, and community context.

Even as the city contemplates changes to the housing stock to meet existing and future housing needs, it is important to note that the majority of residential neighborhoods in Willmar are guided to remain predominantly single-family housing. Growth and change will be directed to designated areas, as described in the Land Use Chapter. Future housing policy will strike a balance between maintaining existing housing and adding needed new options.

This chapter provides an overview of existing housing conditions, issues and opportunities related to housing, aligning housing with Willmar's vision, and trends and strategies that can be utilized to improve housing within Willmar.

- Addressing changing needs and preferences in Willmar regarding housing type, size, style, and location will have implications both in areas of change and areas of stability citywide.
- Affordability may remain a central issue and challenge for Willmar in the coming years, as the community's range of housing options align with the needs of Willmar residents at all life stages and income levels.
- There is a need to provide housing for a broad range of people who wish to live, work, and attend school in Willmar. The city intends to preserve, create, and maintain an equitable community that promotes racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.

THE ROLE OF PLANNING IN HOUSING

Housing can impact on several aspects of a community, including sustainability and the community's liability and financials. As sustainability becomes more of a pressing issue for municipalities, land use has come under more scrutiny. Housing can play a huge role in advancing or threatening sustainability. For example, denser housing located along a transit line is seen as an ideal location for cities looking to reduce car trips and overall traffic in their community. This has also given rise to mixed use developments that may have street level commercial uses with 3-5 stories of residential above. There has also been an effort to diversify uses in traditional neighborhoods, so more services and goods do not require a car trip. These trends are an effort to increase the efficiency of developed land.



CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

Often, it is more cost effective for a city to serve denser infill development than to extend services from its current network. The availability of these services influences the livability for residents as well. The condition and quality of housing stock reflect what it is like to live in a community or neighborhood.

Planning is also responsible for helping guide development in a manner that best serves the public. This means matching the economic development pursuits with the housing available or future development. Identifying sites that would be good for infill development or finding new opportunities in the market that can be solved through thoughtful ordinance changes. Allowing accessory units to serve as residential dwellings has been a huge shift to mitigate unaffordable housing and help seniors age in place. Planning seeks to help match the housing to the community in the present and the future.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Due to traditional land use decisions, housing tends to be the predominant land use in most small communities. Figuratively, housing forms the character and feel of a place becoming a defining characteristic of the community. A community's housing stock should reflect who lives and works in the community. Therefore, housing is such a crucial part of all communities. There must be a balance between employment and housing, or there will be a demand to reach that equilibrium. For example, a push to pursue high wage employment centers will require market-rate or luxury housing. The same happens when communities pursue low-wage employment centers, and they lack affordable housing. However, a growing national problem is the lack of medium-density housing, including townhomes, rowhomes, and duplexes. The lack of medium-density housing has forced workers to get innovative with their housing and commute times. "Drive until you can afford it" has become the unofficial housing slogan for many Americans. This trend has led to sprawling housing stock and has created bedroom communities across the country. Willmar is no exception with its predominant housing options being single- and two-family homes throughout the community.

PRECEDENCE

Housing is undeniably a complicated issue with many facets and complications, so Willmar has conducted several studies to help inform the City of the best practices for housing and what strategies can help lower housing costs and increase supply.

2022 Housing Task Force

In 2022, convened a taskforce of stakeholders across the community to help address the ongoing housing crisis in the city. This taskforce was made up of private businesses, non-profits, retired professionals, business owners, and local government officials. The objective of the taskforce was to review data and personal stories in these industries to try to develop a collaborative approach to address the housing issue in Willmar. The focus of the committee was to examine why single-family homes were not built in Willmar at the rate of other types of housing. Multiple remedies were explored such as Land Trusts, waiving permit fees, rehabbing dilapidated houses, HRA- led development, and streamlining classes with Ridgewater College to provide labor. Ultimately, the recommendation from the taskforce was to create a joint board made up of the County and City that would continue to explore options for prioritizing new construction of single-family housing.

2015 Housing Study and Multi-Family Development

There was a housing study conducted in 2015 by Community Partners Research Inc. that highlighted some of the gaps in Willmar's housing stock. The study revealed a dearth of multi-family housing options in the city. Willmar needed to add 175 units to keep up with the growing demand for housing. There had been no large multi-family housing developments for over ten years in Willmar. This left the rental market incredibly strained without the flexibility to accommodate new growth.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



From 2017 to 2022, Willmar saw an increase in large multi-family housing projects. Over the last five years, Willmar has been able to add 469 multi-family units to the housing stock. The bulk of the units have been at market rate, but some of the projects have been TIF-funded and require a minimum of 20% of the units to be affordable.

2022 Housing Study

This Housing Study was conducted to update the work of the previous study done in 2015. The 2022 housing study outlined several housing needs that must be addressed to keep pace with demand through 2030. Willmar is projected to grow by roughly 2,700 people by 2030. As a regional hub, new construction can entice commuters to Willmar for work. Senior housing is projected to be the greatest need in the community for the next several years, but the consistent growth across all age groups will create housing demand across the spectrum for all housing types. New subdivisions for detached single-family homes along with townhomes will be needed to keep up with demand. A growing hole in the Willmar housing market is large dwelling units with more than three bedrooms. Willmar will need roughly 50 units with three or more bedrooms to fill this need. Willmar will also need to add 100 units of market rate senior housing. In total, Willmar will need to add roughly 195 units each year to meet demand for the projected growth across the community.



HOUSING AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Willmar has limited rental housing options and availability has been the issue with most complexes being full. New developments on the northwest and southeast sides of the city have opened options to better serve the rental housing market. These developments are geared towards market rate. There are roughly 4,000 registered rental properties in Willmar dispersed throughout the residential zones in the community. In total, 701 rental units are in the one- and two-family zoning districts of Willmar.



CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

Housing development in Willmar needs to keep pace with Willmar's growing workforce. Employment in Willmar grew 32% from 2010 to 2018, with much of that growth occurring in the manufacturing, and healthcare/social services sectors. A slight majority of Willmar residents are also employed in the community, representing 53.3 percent of residents. However, over 8,000 people commute to Willmar to work, compared to the 4,300 Willmar residents that also work in the community. Housing growth has not kept up, and a broad range of housing is needed.

Housing Tenure

Housing tenure refers to the status of owning vs. renting. Many households own their property, whether free and clear, or are paying off a monthly mortgage. Owning a home is one of the biggest investments a household will make. Ownership provides an incentive to invest in one's property and retain property value. In addition, owners benefit from a fixed 30-year mortgage in that monthly payments are fixed over time. Throughout the U.S., the value of owner-occupied homes has risen significantly (along with costs) due to limited supply and increasing demand. Owner-occupied homes include traditional detached single-family homes, attached single-family homes (e.g., townhomes). Other arrangements provide an opportunity to own a housing unit independent of the land (e.g., condominiums and manufactured home parks).

Many homeowners start out as renters. Renting is typically a lower-cost option than owning but does not provide the opportunity to build equity. In addition, renting households do not benefit from federally subsidized mortgages and can be impacted by rent increases as markets change. Renting allows for greater mobility but provides less stability than owning. Renting households are not incentivized to maintain their property. Without reinvestment, aging rental properties can fall into disrepair.

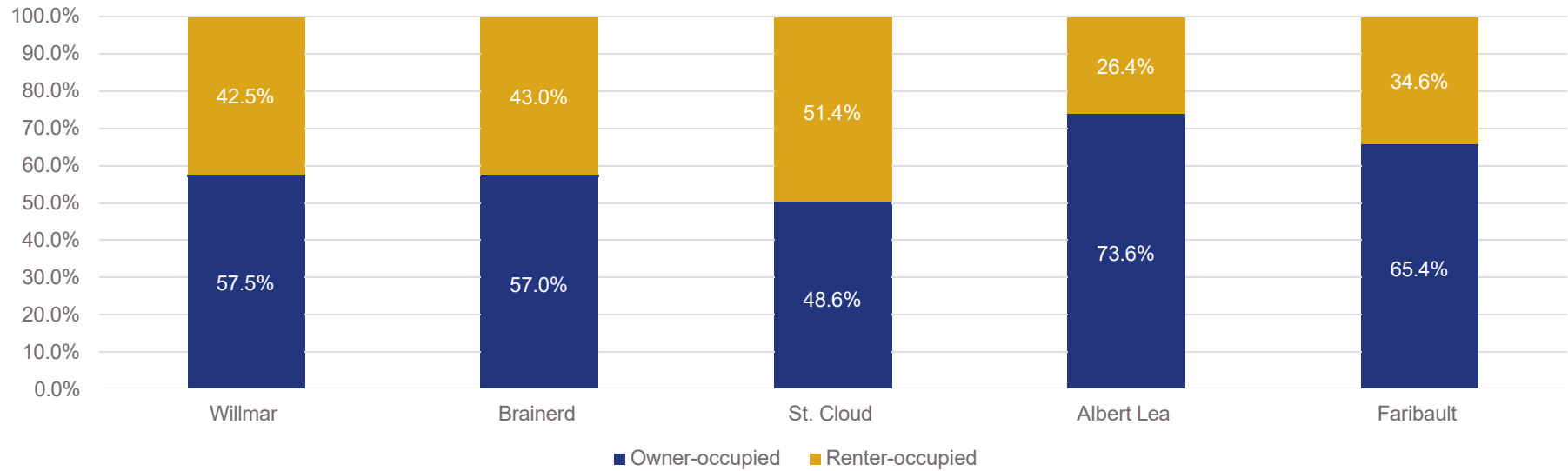
Generally, a healthy rental vacancy rate is between 5 and 10 percent. A vacancy rate below 5 percent suggests high demand, which can lead to higher rents. A vacancy rate above 10 percent suggests oversupply, which can lead to lower rental prices and potential financial losses for landlords. Vacancy rates for rental housing stock are generally much higher than vacancy rates for owner-occupied homes, given the nature of short-term lease agreements and higher household mobility.

According to 2023 American Community Survey estimates, the City of Willmar's housing stock is 57.5 percent owner occupied. This ratio is similar to other regional centers throughout the state (see [Figure 6-1](#)).

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



Figure 6-1. Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Housing

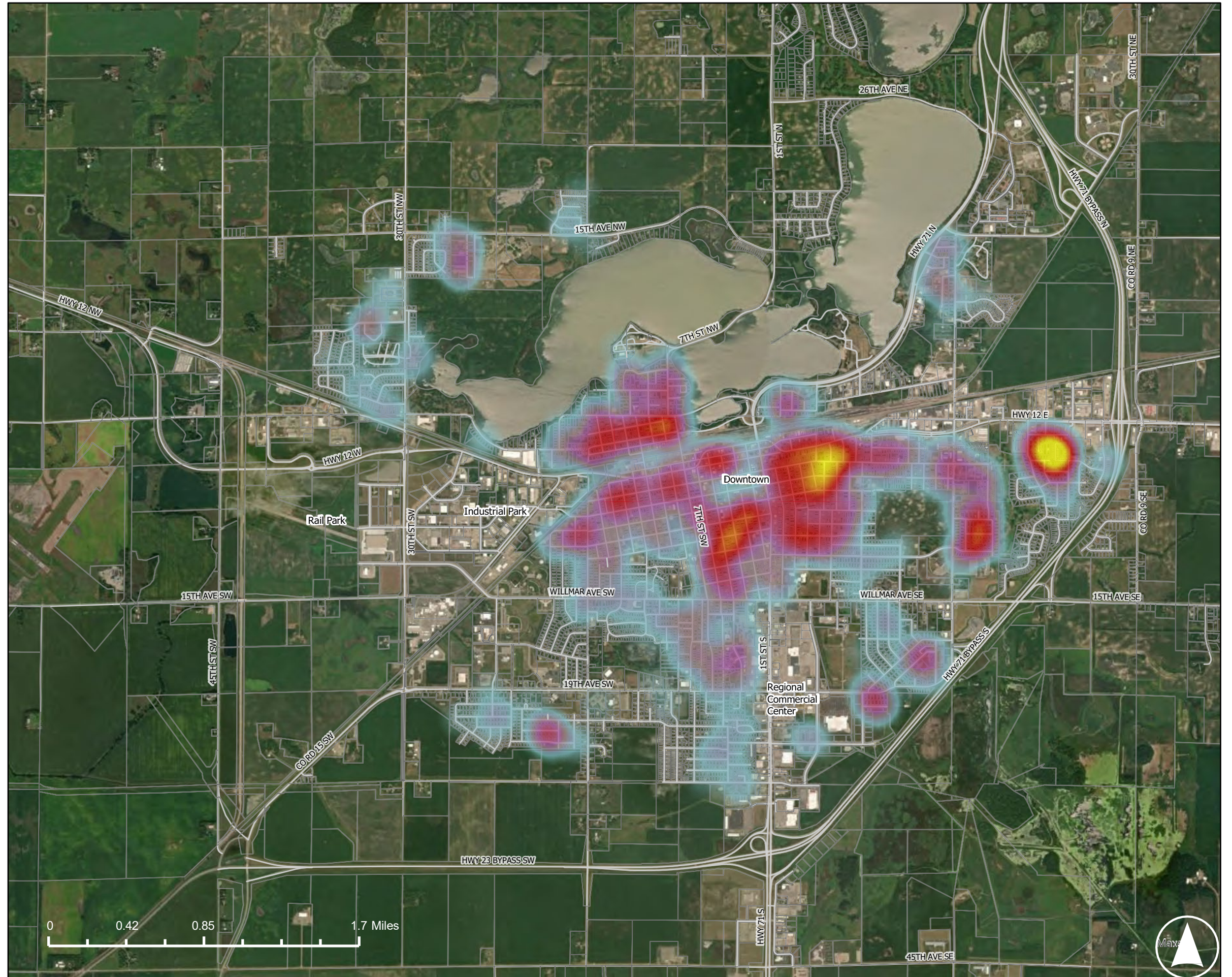


Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Rental Unit Density

The distribution of rental properties within a city is important to consider when planning for new community amenities and opportunities for growth. **Figure 6-2** showcases the density of rental properties within Willmar. In general, rental properties are dispersed around the community, with a few concentrations located near the intersection of Highway 71 and Highway 12, downtown Willmar, and directly surrounding downtown. These areas have increased density and are likely to be able to support additional community amenities, including new businesses and public facilities.

Rental Unit Density





CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

Ownership Statistics

Roughly 57.5% of residents in Willmar live within an owner-occupied residence as of 2023. A variety of factors influence a person's choice to own a home, including housing prices, amenities, and lifestyles.

Affordability

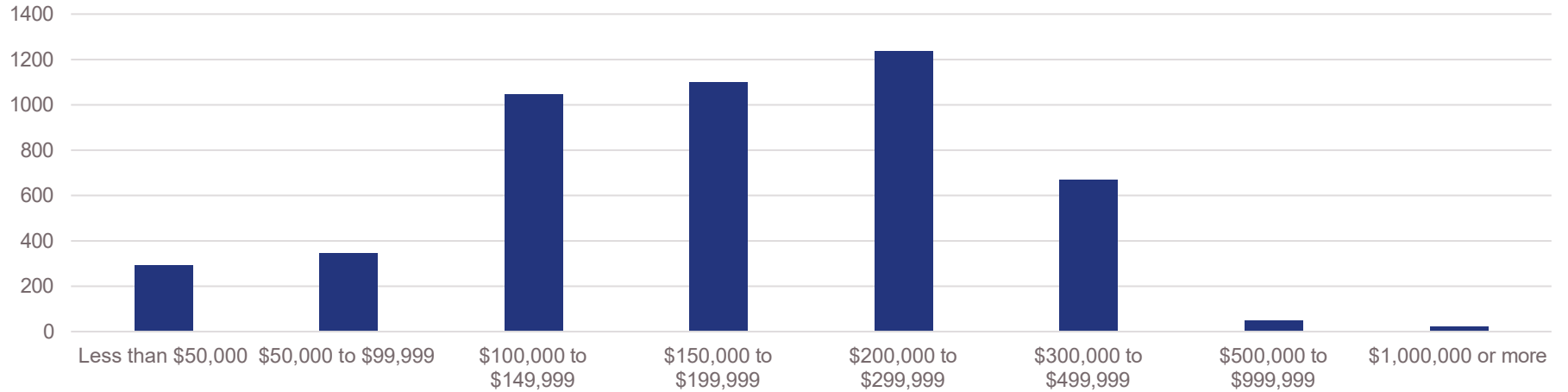
Willmar's housing market is similar to other regional cities, with most houses that go to the market being sold quickly. The average value of a home in Willmar is estimated to be \$186,000 according to the 2023 American Community Survey estimate (see [Figure 6-3](#)). Of the 4,757 owner-occupied units in the community, nearly 64 percent currently have a mortgage. Owner-occupied homes with a mortgage have an average monthly housing cost of \$1,346, while the average housing cost of those without a mortgage is \$609 (see [Figure 6-4](#)).



CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

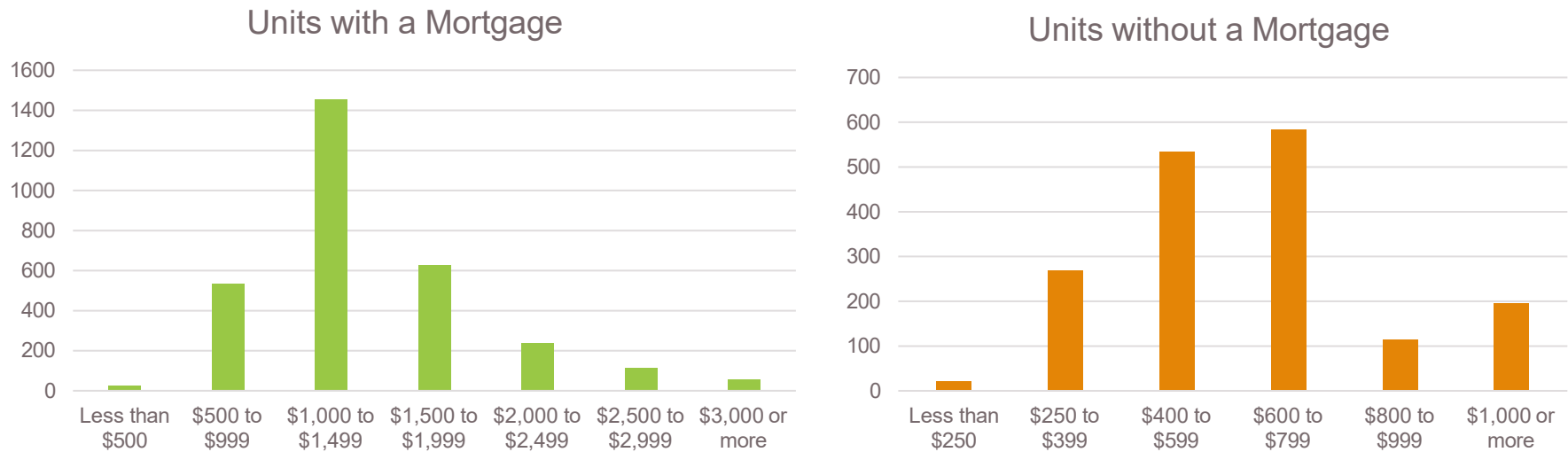


Figure 6-3. Owner-occupied Housing Value, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Figure 6-4. Owner-occupied Average Housing Costs, 2023



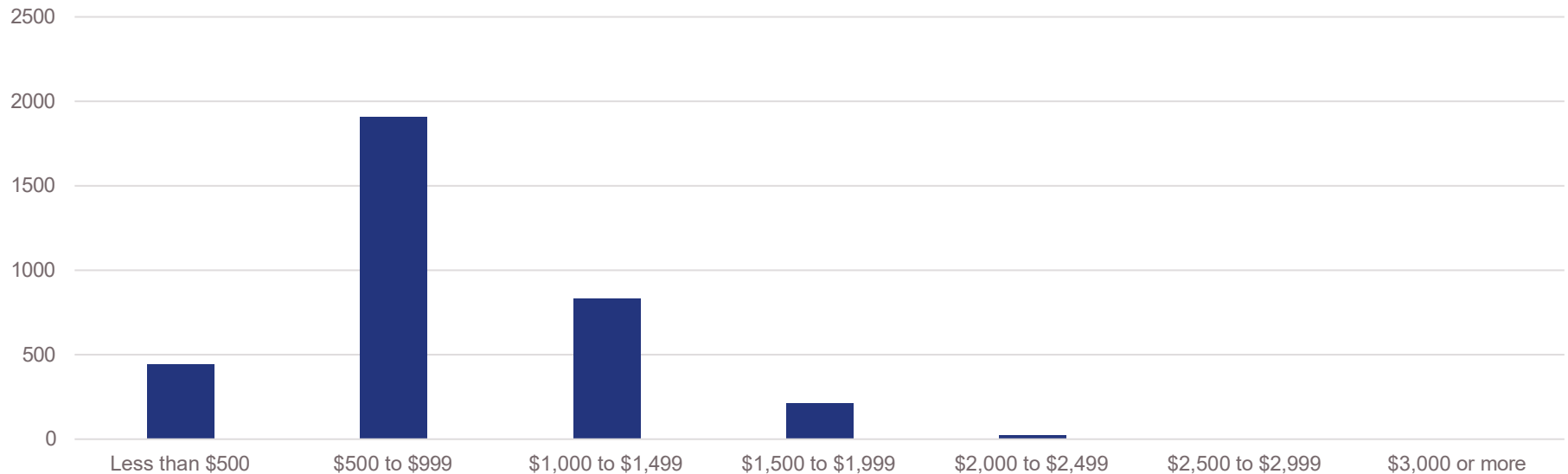
Source: American Community Survey, 2023

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



There are 3,422 occupied units in the community that pay an estimated over \$830 per month in rent. Based upon the American Community Survey estimates, there are no units within the community that pay more than \$2,500 per month (see [Figure 6-5](#)). For a \$830 monthly payment to be considered affordable (approximately 30 percent of total income), the household will have to earn at least \$33,200 annually. As of 2023, reports show that 9.2 percent of Willmar's households paying rent spend 30 to 34.9 percent of their total income on rent and 26.9 percent spend more than 30 percent of their total income on rent.

Figure 6-5. Monthly Rent Estimates, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

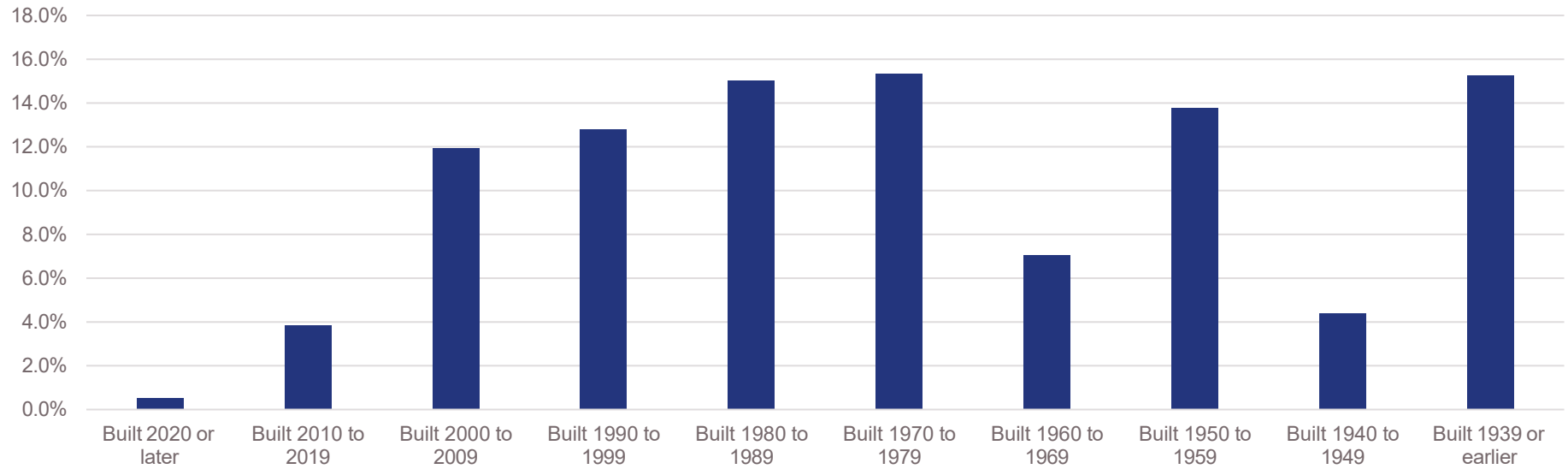
Housing Stock Age

Willmar's housing stock is relatively diverse in age with 55% of the homes being built before 1980 (Figure 7-5). There has been a push with new construction in some neighborhoods, but the older homes in the established neighborhoods give Willmar its cozy small-town charm.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

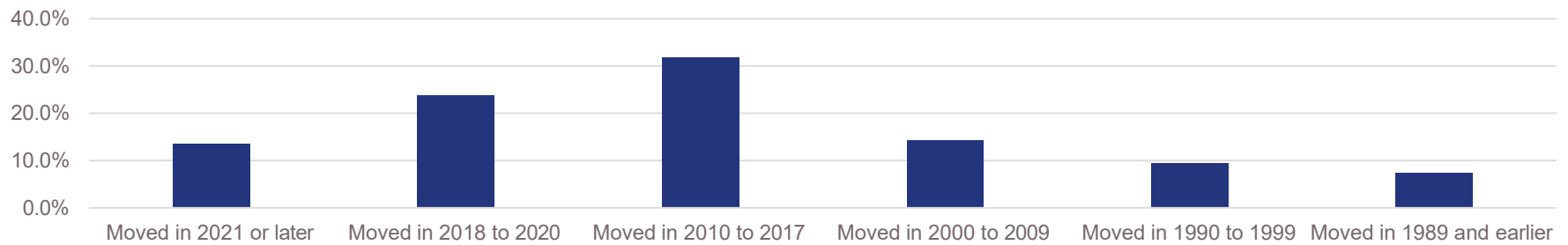


Figure 6-6. Year Housing Built, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Figure 6-7. Year Household Moved into Unit, 2023



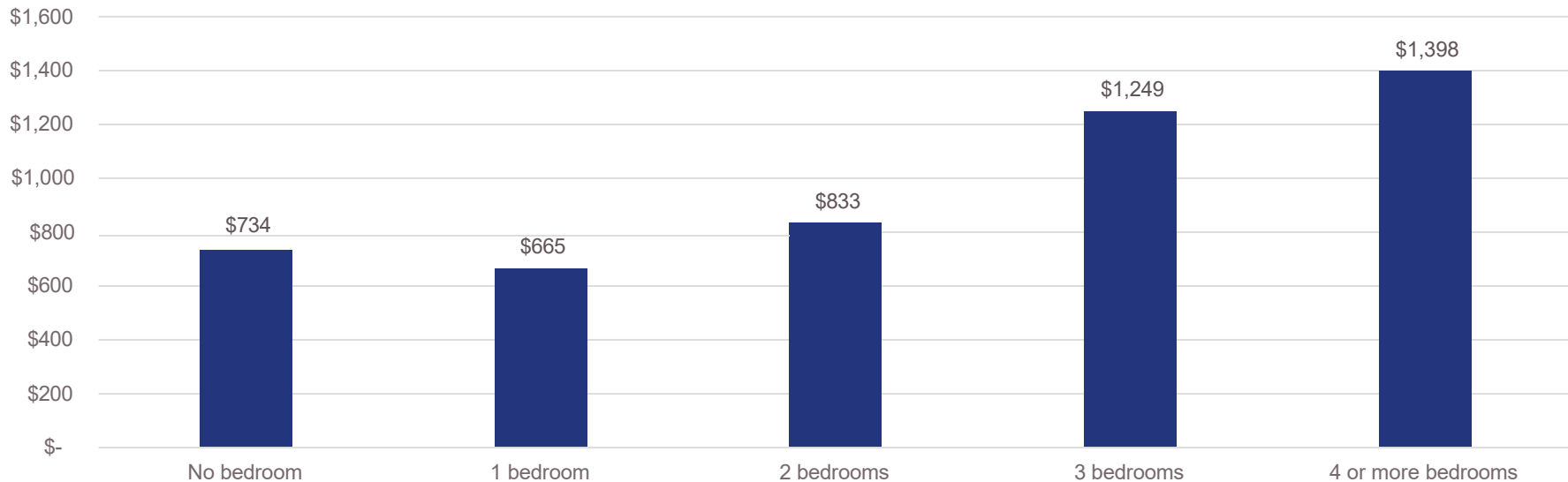
Source: American Community Survey, 2023

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING Renter Statistics



Since 2017, Willmar has introduced 469 rental units to the housing market. These units are disbursed along the northwest and southeast corners of Willmar, with the Block 25 Lofts constructed in the central business district. 48% of these units have one bedroom, 40% of these units have two bedrooms, and the remaining 12% have 3 bedrooms. The average household size of Willmar’s rental population is 2.4. The average rent increases with the number of bedrooms per rental unit – from \$665 for a one-bedroom to \$1,398 for four or more bedrooms (see **Figure 6-8**). The city recognizes that many of these newer units cost more than the median reported by the latest census survey data. The medians for one- and two- bedroom units are estimated to rise over \$1000 by the time official data becomes available.

Figure 6-8. Median Rent by Number of Bedrooms, 2023



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Luxury and Affordable Apartments

In Willmar, a high amount of large multi-family developments are affordable housing with income restrictions. Availability is strained, so it might be necessary to study if more units are needed to accommodate this segment of the populace. However, there is a noticeable hole in Willmar’s housing stock for market rate/luxury multi-family housing. Several newer multi-family buildings on the northwest and southeast sides of Willmar, and Block 25 downtown, have completed and aim to fill this need. Before this project, single family homes as long-term rentals and luxury duplexes were the only options for this demographic.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



PLANNING NEEDS

The issue of housing presents several planning-related needs for the City of Willmar. In particular, the supply of medium density housing between apartments and single-family homes is not keeping up with demand, presenting problems for affordability.

ISSUES

Medium-Density Housing

Like most cities, Willmar greatly lacks medium density housing, which includes townhomes, row homes, duplexes, and multifamily (2-12 unit) apartments.

Density

Willmar lacks dense housing, which can promote sustainability and inclusivity by removing the need for a car, encouraging multi-modal means of travel.

OPPORTUNITIES

Sustainable Housing Developments

Denser housing developments which use sustainable construction methods and materials and guidelines such as LEED can reduce carbon emissions and increase resiliency and sustainability in the community. However, these design standards increase the cost of housing construction and must be balanced with affordability goals.

Townhomes and Generational Housing

Willmar can prioritize new building typologies that are inclusive to all residents, including more affordable townhomes, apartments, and 5 to 7-bedroom generational housing.

WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Willmar's overall goals of being a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and resilient community are reflected by the guiding principles of the Housing chapter. By addressing issues identified by residents, Willmar can achieve the city's overarching vision.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW HOUSING CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Willmar can encourage sustainability by promoting housing practices that push environmental stewardship, resource efficiency, and the long-term well-being of the community.
Inclusivity	Willmar can support inclusivity by fostering the development of a wide variety of housing for residents of all ages, cultures, and abilities.
Innovation	Willmar can support innovation by exploring incentives for housing developments that address a documented issue within Willmar in a new, sustainable manner.
Resilience	Willmar can promote resiliency in housing by integrating policies that enhance the adaptability and durability of the community during extreme weather events.

STRATEGIES

The housing needs of the community have changed considerably since the last Comprehensive Plan update. Several trends have emerged that have shifted consumer preferences in the wake of housing stock and affordability issues, and the advent of smart home technology. Willmar can implement strategies to align its housing with the goals of the community and the plan.

TRENDS

Aging in Place

As adults age, their housing needs may shift. Increasingly, older adults are choosing to remain in their homes rather than moving to an assisted living facility as they get older. These adults prefer single level living to avoid staircases as their mobility decreases. Willmar community members believe that there is a need for additional senior housing options within the community. Communities can implement policies and programs that will provide opportunities for older adults to age in place or move into a housing option that appropriately meets their needs. Willmar can prioritize and incentivize the construction of senior-focused housing, which includes single-level homes, assisted living facilities, and active 55+ communities. In addition, Willmar could implement programming and planning level efforts to help their older population safely

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



and independently age in place. Programming can assist with home maintenance or needed upgrades, such as accessibility improvements, and planning can ensure that housing is near goods and services and has access to public transportation.

RESOURCES	SOURCE	DETAIL
<u>Aging in Place Toolkit</u>	Community Housing Resource Center	Toolkit for government decision making to support aging in place.
<u>Aging in Place Report</u>	AARP	Report identifying livability policies and practices to support aging in place.

Addressing Housing Diversity

Local governments are increasingly aware of a lack of housing diversity within their communities, which includes duplexes, townhomes, rowhomes, and apartments with between 3 and 12 units. These housing options provide ownership opportunities for homebuyers who may not be able to afford a single-family home or want the amenities common in apartment and townhome communities. Lower density multifamily housing also provides increased opportunities for rental units, which helps provide a variety of housing at a variety of prices within a neighborhood.

To address medium-density housing, local governments have taken a variety of steps to increase construction and/or allow for the construction of new housing. One solution commonly taken by communities is allowing medium-density housing to be constructed in single-family neighborhoods. Since these housing types are built at a scale and form that is consistent with single-family neighborhoods (up-down duplexes, side-by-side rowhomes), they can be incorporated into the existing community without drastically changing the feel of the area. This will allow Willmar to increase residential densities while protecting the character of the existing community.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



STRATEGIES

Alternative Construction Materials

Innovative, sustainable construction methods and materials are becoming increasingly common to help cities offset carbon emissions and lower their carbon footprint. Alternative building materials take a variety of forms, and new products are released frequently. Willmar can encourage alternative construction materials by expanding allowable building materials to include sustainable, innovative materials, such as those shown below.

Table 6-1. Example Alternative Building Materials

Material	Description and use
Reclaimed wood	Reclaimed wood is wood previously used in structures that have since been demolished. Reclaimed wood can be used to offset deforestation and is commonly seen in new construction as accent walls, non-load bearing walls, hardwood floors, and furniture.
Reclaimed bricks	Reclaimed bricks are bricks that were previously used in a structure that has since been demolished. Reclaimed bricks add historic character to a new construction and reduce the need for new bricks. Reclaimed bricks can be used for veneers and accent walls.
Recycled steel	Steel that has been salvaged from demolished buildings can be melted down, purified, then reused in new construction such as load-bearing beams and columns, non-load bearing walls, and other building metalwork. Recycled steel decreases the necessity of mining new material, increasing sustainability.
Precast concrete	Precast concrete is produced in a factory setting, then brought to a work site for use as load-bearing walls, foundations, and floors. Precast concrete increases the efficiency of the construction process, produces less waste, and uses less water than site-cast concrete.

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



Material	Description and use
Hempcrete	Hempcrete is an innovative building solution that is lightweight and sustainable than traditional concrete. Hempcrete is made from hemp shives, lime, crushed aggregate, and water. This material can be used for non-load bearing walls, provides some insulation, and is a carbon sink.

Alternative Housing Typologies

New housing typologies are crucial to support a diverse and inclusive community within Willmar. Many families prefer housing that varies from standard single-family or apartment homes. Willmar can support and incentivize the construction of alternative housing typologies, which can both increase the stock of housing and allow for a diverse array of options for new and existing community members. Many of these typologies are not generally allowed by current zoning. Implementation of these typologies will require a zoning amendment or new zoning ordinance.

Table 6-2. Alternative Housing Typologies

Typology	Description
Multigenerational housing	Housing that accommodates large families, which include several generations of family members (grandparents, parents, cousins, children, etc.) is becoming increasingly sought after by the community. Multigeneration housing requires an increased number of bedrooms, bathrooms, and gathering spaces. Willmar can support the construction of 5–7-bedroom homes to accommodate multigenerational living situations, providing more options for the community.
Tiny homes	Tiny homes are generally less than 400-500 square feet and provide homeownership opportunities to individuals and/or couples who would not be able to afford a traditional single-family home. Tiny homes are often sustainable, being constructed of natural or recycled materials. They can increase the housing stock of Willmar while not significantly increasing the footprint of the city.
Prefab homes	Prefabricated housing is constructed off-site, then brought to a parcel and attached to utilities and a foundation. Prefab homes are often modular and customizable, offering a variety of options for potential homeowners. They are cheaper to construct than traditional homes, providing a more affordable option for the community. It should be noted that prefab homes are a different housing typology than mobile homes.
ADUs	Accessory Dwelling Units, also known as ADUs, are secondary housing units located on a single-family property. ADUs can take the form of many housing typologies, including a rentable basement, a tiny or prefab home, or a

CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING



Typology	Description
	separate structure located on a property. Cities are increasingly allowing ADUs to increase the housing stock of their established neighborhoods. Willmar can remove barriers to ADU construction, which can provide homeowners supplemental income, provide space for a caretaker or family to live, or provide a smaller more accessible space to downsize into.

Supporting Increased Density

One solution commonly utilized by communities to increase the housing stock without sprawling outward is allowing middle housing to be throughout the community. Since these housing types are built at a scale and form that is consistent with single-family neighborhoods (stacked duplexes, side-by-side rowhomes), they can be incorporated into the existing community without drastically changing the feel of the area. This will allow Willmar to increase residential densities while protecting the character of the existing community. Several homes in Willmar’s established core neighborhoods are denser than single-family homes but do not detract from the character of the neighborhood. Potential changes to ordinances will simply bring these homes into compliance and allow for the construction of more of this typology. Zoning strategies can be implemented to encourage the development of denser housing, including:

- Allowing single-family housing, duplexes, and triplexes in districts that support the lowest residential development
- Implementing form-based code in neighborhoods near downtown
- Lowering or removing parking minimums

In addition, financial incentives can be provided to facilitate the development of medium-density housing in both new neighborhoods and established ones.

Housing Stock Preservation

Preserving the existing housing stock is a common strategy that communities adopt to help maintain their supply of affordable housing. In many cases, preserving an existing home is more financially effective than building new housing because new construction costs more, more materials are needed, and takes time to build. Naturally affordable housing is often offset by the loss of existing housing through deterioration or abandonment. Funding opportunities exist that can allow a local community to support housing preservation efforts, including USDA Housing Preservation Grants.

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing consists of older multifamily rental properties that meet affordability standards but are not subsidized by federal programs. Many of these properties were built between 1940 and 1990 and are at risk of being lost to deterioration or conversion



CHAPTER SIX - HOUSING

to less affordable housing. Willmar can combine its housing preservation efforts with the identification of these properties to ensure that they are maintained in good condition as affordable housing units.

A variety of financial tools can be utilized by the city to support the preservation of the housing stock and maintenance of the local housing stock. Federal grant dollars are available through programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), HOME grants, and Community Development Block Grants. Local programs may also be established.

Housing Needs Assessment

Monitoring housing needs and gaps helps to provide a community with current information to inform actions and investments. The City of Willmar should prepare regular housing assessments to monitor housing related progress and continue to identify needed investments and policy revisions.

Housing and residential neighborhoods provide a core part of the identity of Willmar for the community.





**CHAPTER SEVEN:
ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES**



INTRODUCTION

Willmar’s local economy provides access to goods, services, and entertainment for not only residents and visitors, but for the greater region. Willmar plays an important role in the regional economy, as an employment center for high wage industries and as a regional hub that supports a robust medical, advanced manufacturing, agricultural businesses, biosciences, and a variety of support services. Willmar contributes to the region’s economic diversity and strength and attracts talent to the region through its excellent health care, broad variety of housing options, great schools, shopping, recreation, dining, entertainment and other amenities important for having a high livability.

The Willmar community competes for talent and quality employment opportunities, not only with other regions in Minnesota, but also with communities across the Upper Midwest. The central Minnesota region ranks highly among its peers for several factors including job opportunities, educational attainment, livability, multi-modal transportation accessibility, recreation and business friendliness. In 2023, Willmar was ranked as the top Micropolitan community in Minnesota and 66th in the country. A vibrant local economy must strike a balance of a capable workforce, local services, and a growing demand. These are all considerations for the tools and resources that should be available in the community. In this plan, the Economic Development Chapter explores the role of economic development in the city’s long-range planning. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the data points and resources that should be referenced to support a thriving economy.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Willmar’s local economy provides a wide variety of jobs for a wide variety of people. Many industries operate within the City, including tech, manufacturing, retail, shipping, and warehousing. This diverse business community provides resilience to economic shocks, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

EMPLOYMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

An important indicator of future growth and development in a community is its economic base. Community population growth patterns are largely determined by the employment opportunities provided in a city. Although Willmar has a diversified economic base, agricultural production and agri-business are the chief industries of the City and surrounding area. Willmar has also established itself as a regional center for medical/professional/financial services, education, government, transportation, and wholesale and retail trade.

Overall

A total of 18,531 employees or Willmar based jobs were identified in the City in 2020, representing an increase of 33.4 percent from the 2010 Census.

CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Table 7-1. Employee Trends

Year	Employed Persons	Increase	Percentage Growth
1990	12,421		
1995	14,740	2,319	18.7%
2000	16,143	1,403	9.5%
2005	16,769	626	3.9%
2010	13,891	-2,878	-17.2%
2015	17,381	3,490	25.1%
2020	18,531	1,150	6.6%
2023	16,963	-1,568	-8.5%

Source: US Census, American Community Survey

Industrial

Below are the major Industrial employers within the City of Willmar.

Table 7-2. Major Industrial Employers

Company	Product/Service	Employees
Jennie-O Turkey Store	Animal Slaughtering & Processing	5,000 to 9,999
Gurley Foods	Other Snack Food Mfg.	100 to 249
Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad	Rail Transportation	100 to 249
RELCO	Dairy Technology Manufacturing	100 to 249
FedEx	Freight Logistics	100-200

CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



West Central Steel/Central MN Fabricating	Fabricated Metal Product	50 to 99
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Source:

DIVERSE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Kandiyohi County is home to a diverse and skilled set of companies with global reach. Historical roots in agriculture have made Kandiyohi County an Agricultural Technology hub. The Advanced Manufacturing industry originating here reaches hundreds of companies in dozens of countries on six different continents. Kandiyohi County is a regional medical epicenter, with the state’s largest community-owned hospital serving 14 counties. There are numerous clinics offering superior medical care in more than 40 specialties. With the area lakes drawing thousands of visitors each year, Kandiyohi County has developed into a major retail and dining hub, pumping nearly \$800 million into the county’s economy every year.

Developers continue to add value with new retail and services in Willmar’s commercial districts. Likewise, many commercial properties are being renovated to reposition their stores and office buildings in their market. This has been done through façade renovations, interior remodeling, new businesses moving into Willmar, and existing businesses moving to newly built facilities. Some improvements are a result of spin-off companies redefining their management, sales and technology, production and warehousing functions into new locations and buildings that work well for their emerging operations. These transitions expand employment opportunities to undeveloped areas and converted buildings.

Willmar employment opportunities are primarily concentrated along arterial roads, such as: 1st Street (Business HWY 71/MN HWY 23), Highway 12, 19th Avenue, and County Road 5. Employers value locations that give them access to a regionally diverse talent pool.

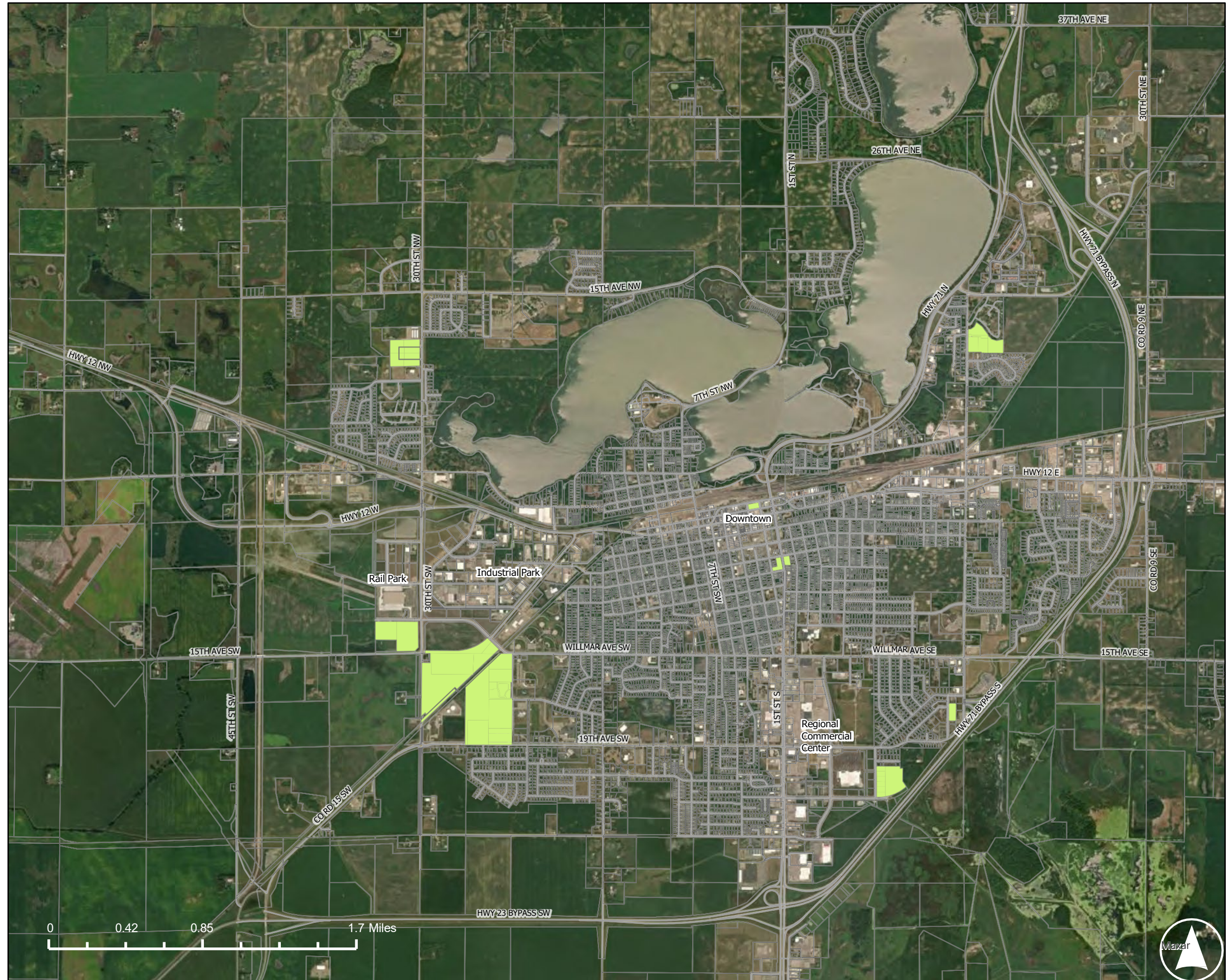
Willmar continues to see a steady increase in the number of workers aged 20-44 years, and Latino and East African working populations increasingly contribute to the city’s workforce. “The way this community has embraced its growing workforce, its immigrant workforce, and is navigating those challenges is really a model for the rest of the state,” stated Steve Grove, MN DEED Commissioner.

TIF Districts

To encourage new and infill development, Willmar operates several TIF districts which offer incentives for developers. As new priorities emerge, new TIF districts can be added to encourage development. The most recent TIF district was added in October 2024, facilitating the development of a new affordable assisted living facility. Other TIF districts include commercial and industrial properties. TIF Districts must be used strategically to avoid abuse and minimize financial risk.

TIF Districts

 Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



INDUSTRIAL

The American economy has been shifting away from manufacturing and has decentralized once massive urban industrial land-uses. This has left cities with massive mills, smokestacks, plants, etc., outlasting the industry that built them. Some cities have taken a historic preservation approach to preserve the buildings and update the uses with coworking spaces or housing. This has given rise to a nationwide brownfield redevelopment effort in places with obsolete industrial sites. Brownfield sites have some form of pollution from past use, and it requires rehabilitation in some capacity before it can be repurposed. When this is done correctly, cities can maintain their historic identity through repurposing the old to embrace the new.

Site selection is a major part of locating industrial uses. The main factors are access to highways/interstates and utilities. Governments at every level recruit big industry to come to their region to boost employment, but the key factors will always be affordable power, access to water, and access to a reliable transportation network. Nationally, 90% of industrial parks are located within 2 miles of a major highway system. Most of the industrial development within Willmar is in the vicinity of the former airport. These industrial areas are located north of the former airport and south of U.S. Highway 12, south of the former airport along Willmar Avenue and 22nd St. SW, and northeast of the airport where the 200-acres Willmar Industrial Park is located. U.S. Highway 12, MN Highway 23, MN Highway 40, and the Burlington Northern- Santa Fe Railroad provide transportation access to this area. The completion of the new airport in 2006 freed up the old airport for industrial park expansion.

Other areas of industrial development are along the BNSF railroad directly west and east of downtown, and west of Lakeland Drive. Scattered industrial uses exist at various locations throughout the city. Scattered parcels of undeveloped land exist within the developed portions of the city, as well as in the fringe areas. Undeveloped lands include those currently vacant or used for agriculture. These areas are zoned for agricultural, industrial, commercial, residential or open space uses.

CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Shovel-Ready Industrial Sites

In 2016, the City of Willmar and the Economic Development Commission pursued the Shovel-Ready Site Certification from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). The Shovel-Ready certification serves as an indicator that a site on the market is suitable for development upon purchase and approval. Developers of these lots are provided with readily available land surveys, soil analysis, environmental studies, and infrastructure engineering. The Shovel-Ready sites serve as an incentive for industrial development to occur in Willmar’s industrial park. The Shovel-Ready sites are located on the former airport property along County Road 5.



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH

The MinnWest Technology Campus is a Willmar business community located in the heart of Minnesota lakes country. Home to approximately 30 companies, where innovation creates a collaborative network of talent and expertise in the areas of agribusiness, bioscience, and technology. Among them are national and global leaders in their industries.

COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL

The U.S. retail sector has been transforming as consumers increasingly shop online and enjoy free home delivery. Consequently, onsite retailers are forced to rethink their role and explore new ways to successfully diversify their sales strategies. These changes are expressed in higher vacancies and turnover in the retail sector.

From a real estate perspective, technology and other trends may have the following impacts:

- As online sales increase, onsite retail stores may become less prevalent
- As onsite purchases diminish, there will be fewer retail jobs
- Wellness facilities may see growth in size, quality and options
- Retail and leisure may unite at cinemas, restaurants, bars, and recreation centers
- Consumers may trend towards product and service “experiences”

Willmar’s retail offerings are anchored by national & regional chains with local businesses filling out the balance of the retail sector. Most of the retail in Willmar provides products and services for the average household. Higher-end services and retail exist in limited scope and of small size. Retail is slowly adapting to better serve customers as online shopping, teleworking and online education expand. Willmar’s commercial retail sectors are clustered at the major corridors of Highway 12, Highway 23 and 1st Street.

Small Commercial

Willmar’s small commercial businesses provide services and conveniences to area residents that enhance a sense of community. These businesses are often family-owned and contribute to a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, such businesses can experience challenging transitions when owners retire, sell, or pass businesses or properties to the next generation of family and/or business partners, or new owners. Programs, such as KCED’s Elevate Community Business Academy, are critical to support the small business community.

Reinvestment in real estate varies significantly, most often in relation to owner goals or market demands. In some cases, commercial and retail uses are no longer as viable or competitive as online shopping, teleworking and online education increase. Some examples include:

- Transition of downtown sites to new mixed use (housing, retail and small commercial)



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- Redevelopment of 1st Street and Minnesota Ave to a line of retail (New Caribou and Dominos locations).
- Traditionally, churches, schools, and parks have been the primary neighborhood services, but there is an appetite to amend our Zoning Code to allow neighborhood commercial nodes that provide services and retail closer to people’s homes.

Collaboration

Maximizing engagement to vet and gain ideas with commercial property owners is critical to developing a regular and effective marketing schedule, promote and incentivize correct development and continuously enhancing business opportunities in Willmar. Because change is occurring on so many fronts at once – demographic, transportation, housing, technology, and the growing transitions to online shopping, teleworking, and distance education – is especially important for businesses and multifamily housing owners to share information and strategies for the community to continuously and successfully adapt over time.

Well organized and supported business and property owner associations could expand several vital functions to maintain economic vitality in the various commercial communities across Willmar. Key functions might include:

- Clarifying annual vision and monthly strategy for each commercial neighborhood, including strategic housing goals for each area in support of local businesses
- Collaboration with commercial property stakeholders for event sponsorship and participation
- Strengthening design and appearance standards for new and renovated development
- Establishing a weekly marketing and promotion program on television, radio and newspaper that showcases individual and community events, amenities, and new happenings
- Coordinate shared parking, interior parking, shared vehicle, multi-modal and other transportation strategies that strengthen Willmar’s mixed-use districts
- Support business development through targeted marketing strategies with partners, such as Kandiyohi County, KCED, Chamber of Commerce, and others.

HEALTHCARE

The healthcare sector is one of the fastest growing segments of the national economy. There are currently over 4,000 healthcare jobs in Kandiyohi County, making it the area’s top industry. Growth is expected to continue as the “Baby Boom” generation creates increased demand for medical services. Kandiyohi County’s 65+ population, which typically accounts for the highest per capita health care spending, is expected to grow by 11% between 2020 and 2030.

Some notable trends that have recently occurred in this sector include:

- Many specialty clinics, medical offices and other facilities now prefer proximity to hospital campuses



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- In addition to an aging population, investment in new technology is driving facility renovation and new construction
- Cost containment is driving a trend to lower cost delivery settings, including medical office buildings, urgent care and day-surgery facilities
- New payment systems favor medical office space that creates opportunities for collaboration to help providers minimize costs and maximize outcomes
- Patient recovery in hotels is becoming increasingly commonplace. Located near medical campuses, these small hotels remove patients from high-cost hospital beds, while allowing them to conveniently access medical services. Such hotels can also serve family members of hospitalized patients. Several such facilities have been created in the MSP metro area in recent years, including Hilton hotels near Abbott Northwestern and TRIA Orthopedic in Bloomington and a Marriott Courtyard near TRIA Orthopedic in Woodbury. For these reasons, and the lack of a downtown hotel in Willmar, there appears to be a need for a hotel that is connected to CentraCare (formerly Rice) Hospital.

Medical offices can also generate a significant tax base and diverse employment opportunities, while providing important services to residents of Willmar and West Central Minnesota. As the retail footprint shrinks and changes, the growth of the healthcare sector presents an important opportunity for the community.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Minnesota cities receive their authority to cooperate with other units of government from state law. The Joint Powers Act provides broad authority for intergovernmental cooperation. In addition, other statutes authorize cooperation between cities and other units of government for specific projects and programs. Under the Joint Powers Act, any city may enter into an agreement with one or more governmental units to cooperatively exercise powers that are common to all parties. For the purposes of the Act, the term “governmental unit” includes:

- Cities
- Counties
- Towns
- School districts
- Service cooperative under Minn. Stat. § 123A.21
- Independent nonprofit firefighting corporations
- Other political subdivisions of this or another state
- Other states
- Federally recognized Indian tribes
- The University of Minnesota
- The Minnesota Historical Society
- Licensed nonprofit hospitals
- Certified rehabilitation facilities and extended employment providers
- Certain licensed day and supported employment services
- Any agency of the state of Minnesota
- Any agency of the United States
- Any “instrumentality of a government unit having independent policymaking and appropriating authority”



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Below are two of the City of Willmar’s key Intergovernmental relationships:

Economic Development Commission (EDC)

The City of Willmar works closely with Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (KCED) to promote economic development activity by attracting new businesses, assisting with expansion, retaining existing businesses, and promoting rehabilitation and/or redevelopment of areas. The KCED plays a critical role in advising and making recommendations on all economic development matters in Willmar and Kandiyohi County. KCED’s mission is to be a catalyst for economic growth for Kandiyohi County.

From the KCED’s website:

Willmar has the fastest growing population of diverse individuals outside of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Located in the heart of West Central Minnesota, the City of Willmar has connections to the busiest north/south and east/west railway. The City boasts not only an expansive shovel-ready industrial park, but also a thriving technology park on a historic campus. Willmar has a diversified economic base of agricultural production and agri-business that create a synergy of related industrial and technology companies that form the chief industries of the City and surrounding area. Willmar has also established itself as a regional center for medical, financial, education, government, transportation, wholesale and retail trade. There is also a diverse small business and retail community throughout the City. Willmar was designated an All-America City in 2005 and is a designated Main Street community. The City has supported a Renaissance Zone and Opportunity Zone to encourage development in specific corridors.

Orderly Annexation

Intergovernmental cooperation also includes orderly annexation agreements. The City of Willmar shall seek an orderly annexation agreement with surrounding townships. The city and townships generally agree that City governments most efficiently provide government services in areas developed for residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental uses. Agreements recognize that orderly urban development using city services in a responsible, controlled and environmentally sound manner is in the best interest of the entire community and region. The City of Willmar and township also recognize that orderly annexation and development of areas designated in annexation-agreements are effective in ensuring the public health, safety, and welfare by providing for logical community development and extension of city services as urban development occurs.



PLANNING NEEDS

With changing economic conditions and consumer preferences moving away from physical stores, several planning-related needs arise that challenge the economic landscape of Willmar. It will be important to continue to diversify Willmar's economy to prevent any economic uncertainty from harming the community.

PLANNING NEEDS

Maintaining Economic Competitiveness

With shifting consumer preferences and changing economic conditions, it is important that Willmar work to diversify its economy to allow for fluctuation without hurting the local economy. In addition, Willmar will need to continue competing with nearby regional hubs for jobs and residents.

Access to Jobs for All

Housing and jobs are generally separated into different areas within the city of Willmar. This creates issues for those who cannot drive or do not live near job centers.

Innovative Technology

Technology is rapidly innovating the economy and Willmar should stay at the forefront of new technological trends to maintain competitiveness with other cities.

Rail Park Expansion

The relocation of Willmar airport poses new opportunities for development in the expanded rail park.

Industrial Park Growth

The growth of the warehousing industry provides an opportunity to attract new industrial businesses to Willmar that can bring new jobs and services to the community.

CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Highway 12 Extension

The Willmar Wye (Highway 12) was completed in 2022, realigning Highway 12, Highway 40, and the railroad tracks, providing new opportunities for industrial uses along the corridor between the existing railroad and the new Highway 12.

WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Willmar’s overall goals of being a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and resilient community are reflected by the guiding principles of the Economic Development chapter. By addressing issues identified by residents, Willmar can achieve the city’s overarching vision.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Willmar should encourage carbon-friendly economic developments that can help mitigate the impacts of climate change on the community.
Inclusivity	Willmar should ensure that all residents have access to jobs and services, regardless of their choice of transportation.
Innovation	Willmar should continue to attract a diverse array of businesses to support the regional growth and changing economy.
Resilience	Willmar should build a diverse economy that includes a variety of industries that support the regional and state economy that can respond to state and federal policy and economic status changes.

STRATEGIES

Willmar’s economic development industries are affected by various trends, particularly as technology continues to innovate and consumer preferences change. Willmar can use several strategies to create a resilient and adaptive economy, less likely to be affected by economic downturn or obsolescence.



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES STRATEGIES

Autonomous Freight/Rail Innovation

Innovative technologies are being developed and released that have the potential to reshape the entire freight and logistics industry. Autonomous vehicles, including autonomous freight trucks, can increase efficiency but require improvements to infrastructure in order to operate. Willmar should monitor trends in autonomous vehicles and update infrastructure to support the growth and development of autonomous trucking in Willmar.

Rail freight has also seen technology innovations over recent decades with the increase in technology. Potential innovations on rail have implications within Willmar as the city seeks to expand the industrial rail park and create new rail-focused industrial properties.

Artificial Intelligence and Data Centers

A recent technological innovation has been the creation of consumer-focused artificial intelligence (AI). These powerful AI tools require immense amounts of data to operate, which is stored in data centers all over the world. Willmar could establish a data center ordinance regulating the construction of new data centers. Because Willmar is a regional hub for central Minnesota, it is possible that developers may propose data centers within the city. These data centers use a large amount of energy, potentially producing negative environmental impacts. They also produce excess amounts of noise from generators and electrical utilities. Further research should be conducted to determine potential adverse effects of data centers in Willmar, and these effects should be weighed against potential benefits.

COVID-19 Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic uprooted economic development and changed the way people purchased goods. More people working remotely, shopping online, and staying home led to a rapid increase in products being delivered from warehouses to homes. As Willmar is a regional hub for central Minnesota, many products are produced, stored, and shipped from the city. However, this translated to fewer people traveling to regional hubs for shopping, leading to a decline in brick-and-mortar retail stores. Because Willmar is a regional hub, its retail sector has had a negative impact due to the pandemic. Strip malls and shopping centers around the country are struggling, which could provide opportunities for redevelopment into mixed-use retail, housing, and office use. Manufacturing uses, such as those at Jennie-O, have seen declines due to outsourcing, economic challenges, and outside issues such as the avian influenza outbreak. Hormel, Jennie-O's owner, shifted production at the smaller Plant-1 in Willmar to Research & Development/Storage and a Wisconsin facility from turkey processing to value-added products. It is important that both retail and industrial uses are diversified to account for the decline of any sector. This will increase the adaptability and resiliency of Willmar's community.



CHAPTER SEVEN – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Strengthening a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce

Willmar’s community is proud of its diversity and inclusivity. This pride should be reflected in the city’s workforce, as a place of opportunity for people from all backgrounds. Willmar should actively and continually engage with diverse communities to determine their workforce needs and enact policies that work to achieve their needs.

Broadband Infrastructure

Increasing access to broadband infrastructure has been shown to increase economic growth, especially in rural communities. Broadband infrastructure is increasingly required as businesses become more reliant on the internet for daily needs. Partnering with telecommunications companies to increase broadband infrastructure within Willmar will provide businesses with new growth opportunities and give Willmar an edge over other small regional hubs.

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) maintains the [Minnesota Broadband Map](#), identifying locations served or underserved by broadband. As of December 2024, many residential and businesses throughout the community are served by broadband at a speed of at least 100 Mbps. There are many sites within the Industrial and Rail Parks that are identified as underserved, with speeds of less than 25 Mbps. There are several sites outside of the community that are also served at this level. Some of these areas may be eligible for funding programs for the construction of broadband infrastructure.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

To facilitate economic development expansion, Willmar can form new relationships with other governments at the local, county, regional, state, and federal level. These relationships can create key economic opportunities for new and existing businesses in the City. Willmar already has an established Economic Development Commission, but additional partnerships should be explored as needs arise.

Industrial Rail Park

Willmar’s expanded industrial rail park provides a plethora of new economic opportunities for the community. With potential new rail spurs, rail-oriented industrial developments should be prioritized to maximize the use of the new industrial park.



CHAPTER EIGHT:

**NATURAL RESOURCES +
RESILIENCY**



INTRODUCTION



The physical environment is crucial to a community’s sense of place and identity. Lakes and rivers serve as recreational havens for residents; wetlands provide homes for birds, reptiles, amphibians, and aquatic species; and rain water hydrates crops, grasses, and trees within and around the city. The natural resources of a city are among the most crucial factors that make residents proud of their community and willing to further invest in its betterment. It is the role of the city to work to conserve and maintain the natural resources that exist within its boundaries, so that future generations can continue to enjoy them. The physical environment can be easily damaged by the growth and change of cities: urban sprawl, the use of fertilizers, impervious surface runoff issues, and air/ground pollution are all factors that can negatively affect a city’s natural resources. This plan outlines the natural resources within Willmar and offers recommendations to improve the conservation and protection of the physical environment within the city.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Willmar’s physical environment is a major factor in why people choose to take pride in the community. Its climate, weather, lakes, and wetlands are all spaces that offer natural beauty and unique amenities to the city, which should be conserved and protected. Residents love Willmar’s abundant natural resources, which are outlined in this section.



CLIMATE AND PRECIPITATION

Because of its location near the center of North America, the City of Willmar is subject to a variety of air masses that affect the amount of precipitation that falls within the area. During the winter months, cold, dry continental polar air dominates the region. Hot, dry continental tropical air masses from the desert southwest, along with warm, moist maritime tropical air masses that originate over the Gulf of Mexico, are common during the summer months. Spring and fall serve as transition periods with various fluctuations in temperatures and precipitation. Monthly average precipitation recorded by the National Weather Service ranges from 0.62” to 5.16” (see **Table 8-1.**). Willmar has a recorded average annual precipitation of 28.21 inches. The temperature range for the community is also tracked on a quarterly basis by the National Weather Service.

Table 8-1. Monthly Precipitation Averages and Temperature Ranges (1971-2000)

Month	Average Precipitation (inches)	Temperature Range (°F)
January	0.82	0 to 19
February	0.62	--
March	1.54	--
April	2.13	34 to 55
May	3.22	--
June	5.16	--

Month	Average Precipitation (inches)	Temperature Range (°F)
July	3.76	61 to 86
August	3.78	--
September	2.80	--
October	2.17	36 to 58
November	1.55	--
December	0.66	--

WATERSHEDS AND TOPOGRAPHY

Willmar is between two major watersheds: the Hawk Creek Watershed to the north and west and the South Fork Crow River Watershed to the south and east (see Figure 9-1).

Hawk Creek Watershed

The Hawk Creek Watershed covers approximately 254 square miles of southwestern Kandiyohi County and is characterized by a gently twisting till plain formed during the advance of the Des Moines Lobe. Groundwater flows southwestward. Cretaceous sandstone aquifers are

CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



present over most of this area, but yields in many places are minimal. Aquifers are less than ten feet thick. The cities of Blomkest, Pennock, Prinsburg, and Raymond are in this watershed, along with the northern and western parts of the City of Willmar. Elevations are flat within the watersheds ranging from 1,070 to 1,130 feet above sea level. The elevation of Willmar is approximately 1,126 feet above sea level.

The Hawk Creek – Middle Minnesota Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was adopted in November 2021, establishing goals and strategies for managing the watershed.

South Fork Crow River Watershed

The South Fork Crow River Watershed covers approximately 217.7 square miles of southeastern Kandiyohi County. Groundwater flows west to east. The topography of this watershed is characterized by a gently rolling plain. This plain has a mantle of silty lake deposits. Cretaceous sedimentary rocks are present in the western two-thirds of the watershed, while Cambrian sedimentary rocks underlie the remaining eastern portion. The cities of Kandiyohi and Lake Lillian are in this watershed, along with the southern and eastern portions of the City of Willmar. Like the Hawk Creek Watershed, elevations are flat within the South Fork Crow River Watershed.

The South Fork Crow River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was completed in 2024 and includes projects and strategies for the watershed, some directly tied to activities in Willmar. For example, the Uptown Willmar Stormwater feasibility study was completed in 2023 to identify and prioritize best practices that may be implemented through 2034.

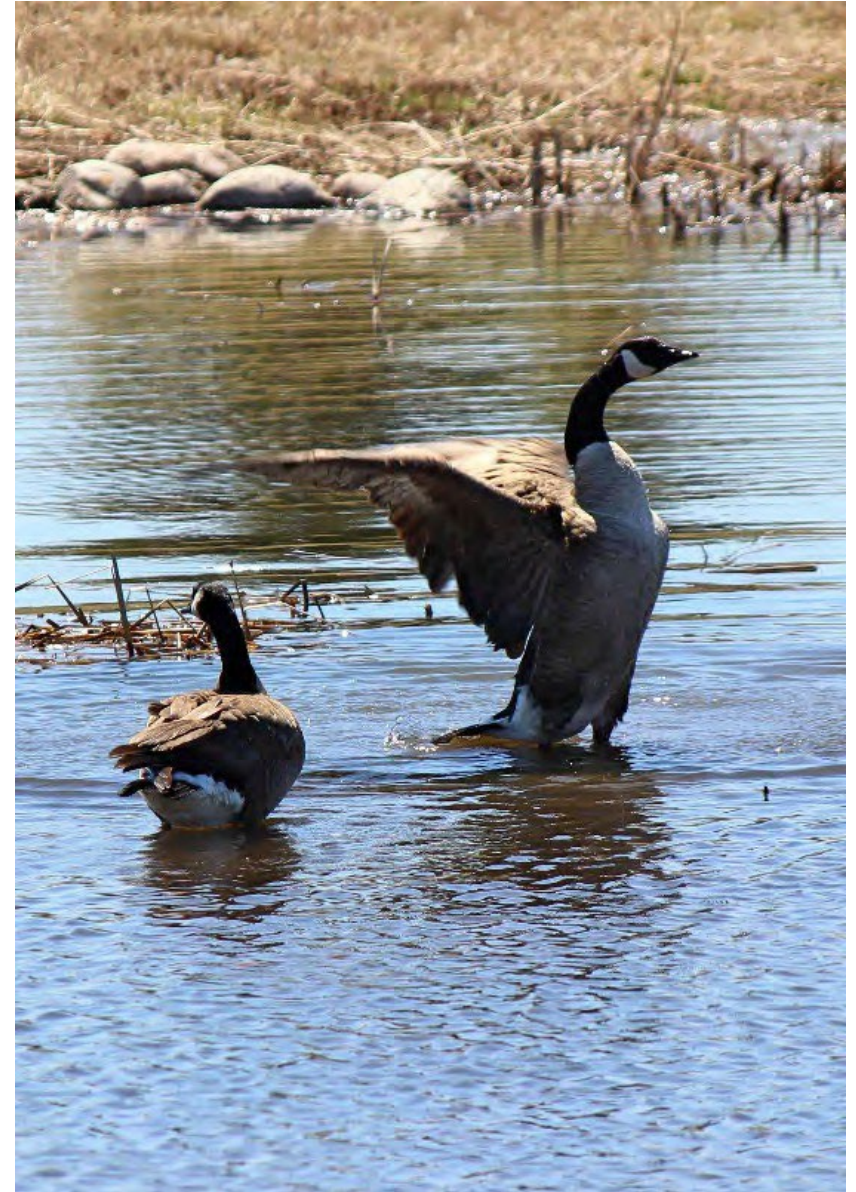
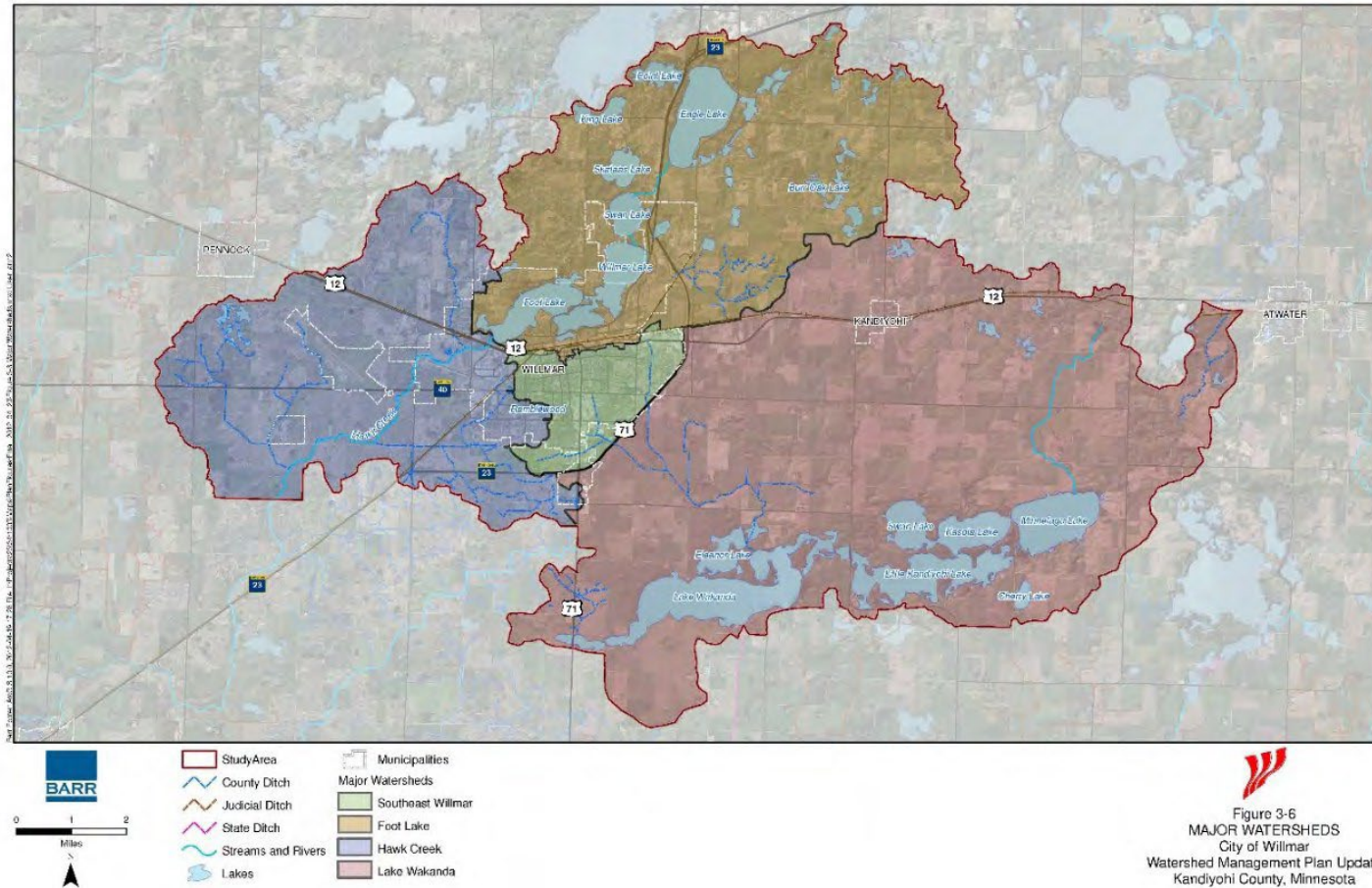




Figure 8-1. Major Watersheds



SOILS

An analysis of the environmental elements of the Willmar area is necessary to be aware of sensitive areas and physical assets before considering future development. Certain soil types are more conducive to development than others due to their physical properties; however, it is important to note that many soil types can support development with proper engineering considerations. Also, some soils are prime farmland and should be carefully evaluated prior to development. The loss of prime farmland to other uses puts more pressure on marginal



CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY

lands which may be erodible and less productive.

WATER

The importance of groundwater and surface water must be considered when planning for future development. Recognizing the importance of our water resources includes monitoring its quality and quantity, and preventing degradation from erosion, runoff, pollution and overuse. Potential sources of pollution are both urban and rural in nature and affect surface and ground waters alike. Likely sources of pollution include chemicals from highway snow and ice removal, erosion from agricultural and construction sites, herbicides and pesticides, and fertilizers.




LAKE

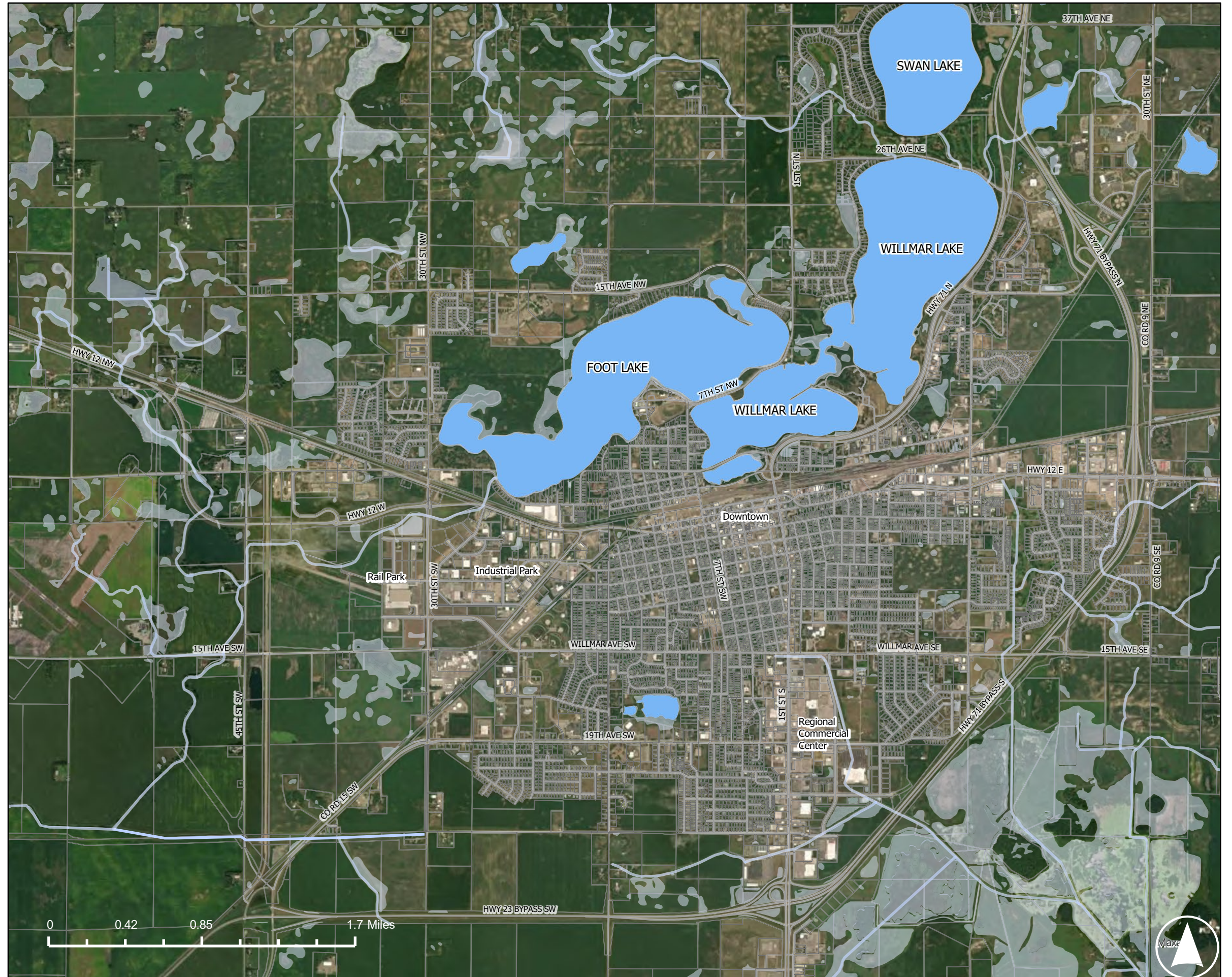
Before the settlement and development of Willmar today, the water basins in Willmar were very different. At one time, Foot Lake, Willmar Lake, and the Ella Avenue slough were all a single body of water containing two islands. The need for improved transportation routes resulted in the construction of streets and highways that separated the original body of water into the four basins that exist today.

Today, two lakes are located within the corporate limits of Willmar - Foot Lake and Willmar Lake. Both Foot Lake and Willmar Lake are mostly developed with limited frontage remaining to be developed in the future. Municipal sewer and water serve the developed areas on Foot and Willmar Lake. Past lakeshore development has threatened the natural aesthetics of shoreland areas and future development should be strictly regulated via the Shoreland Management Ordinance to ensure protection of the water resource.

In addition, there are two lakes partially within the city limits - Swan Lake and Oslo Lake. Growth near Willmar is further impacted by these and other lakes just north of the city which are undergoing residential development. Discussion has occurred regarding the potential for annexing certain lands around the lakes. Any future annexation in this area will be dependent upon property owner demand and the ability of the city to provide municipal services in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Lakes and Water

-  Lakes
-  Wetlands
-  Waterways



CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



Foot Lake

Foot Lake is 503 acres in areas that is fed with two distinct basins (northwest and southeast) bisected by a road and connected via several culverts. Foot Lake is also connected to Willmar Lake via an upstream shallow channel. Foot Lake has two public access sites with one site on each basin. In addition, Robbins Island Park is located along the east side of the lake. The northwest basin has a maximum depth of 6 feet with abundant submergent vegetation (coontail, northern milfoil) and moderate water clarity. The southeast basin has a maximum depth of 24 feet with sparse submergent vegetation (sago pondweed) and poor water clarity (secchi disk clarity at 3 feet). The Foot Lake outlet is considered the headwaters of Hawk Creek, although there are several shallow lakes upstream connected via ditches and inlets to Willmar Lake. Foot Lake has been a popular fishing lake for black crappie, walleyes, northern pike, bluegill, and largemouth bass in recent years. The lake is aerated in the winter months.



CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



Willmar Lake

Willmar Lake is 636 acres in size and has a maximum depth of 14 feet. A large golf course borders the north shore area and Robbins Island Park is along the south shore. Residential development occurs primarily along the west shore.

Willmar Lake is connected to Foot Lake via an outlet channel along the southwest portion adjacent to the city park. Willmar Lake is also connected to several shallow lakes and Eagle Lake via inlets along the north shore. Water clarity is often stained (coffee colored) throughout the summer months. Blue-green algae blooms are common on Willmar Lake. Aquatic vegetation is limited to sago pondweed in the lake proper and cattails along the south portion. Willmar Lake contains a variety of fish, including walleye, channel catfish, and black crappie, including being stocked for walleye every other year.

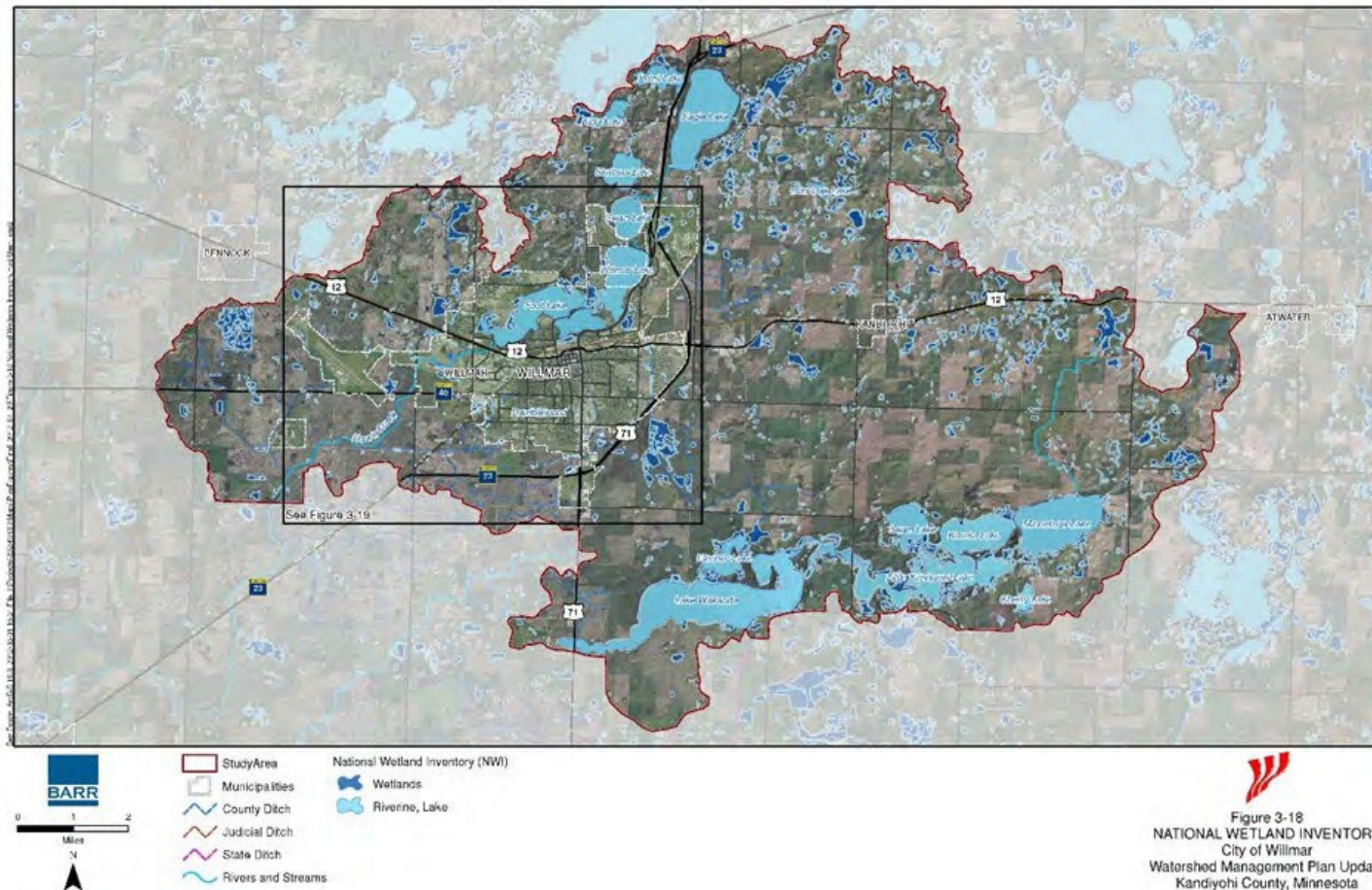




WETLANDS

Several smaller wetland areas exist throughout the Willmar area as defined by the National Wetlands Inventory, completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (see **Figure 8-2**). State and Federal law (primarily the Wetlands Conservation Act) provide for mitigative action if wetland basins over a certain size are disturbed or destroyed by development. Aside from the environmental benefits of wetlands, the aesthetic value should also be considered when developing land in or near these areas.

Figure 8-2. National Wetland Inventory





PLANNING NEEDS

Several challenges face Willmar’s natural resources in the future. The City should be prepared to enact policies that safeguard and preserve the natural beauty of the city for generations to come.

NEEDS

Water Quality

The water quality of Willmar’s lakes, rivers, and groundwater has the potential to be negatively impacted by the growth of the city, including new industrial, commercial, and residential properties.

Climate Change Concerns

The impacts of pollution, climate change, and extreme weather events may degrade the quality of Willmar’s natural resources. Steps should be taken to ensure that Willmar’s natural resources are protected and improved for future generations to enjoy.

STRATEGIES

Sustainable Development

Willmar could incentivize new developments, including both infill and expansion, to implement sustainable features that can protect Willmar’s natural resources from harm. These may include certifications, green roofs, stormwater catchment systems, or carbon-neutral material usage.

Conservation Policies

Development on property directly adjacent to natural resources may need to be limited, favoring smaller developments and greenspace to preserve natural resources.



WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Willmar’s overall goals of being a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and resilient community are reflected by the guiding principles of the Natural Resources chapter. By addressing issues identified by residents, Willmar can achieve the city’s overarching vision.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW NATURAL RESOURCES CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Willmar should protect its natural resources and ensure growth does not compromise the quality of its lakes, creeks, and soil.
Inclusivity	Willmar should promote the access of its natural resources to all residents and visitors.
Innovation	Willmar should research and implement new strategies to further protect and preserve natural resources.
Resilience	Willmar should strengthen the durability and adaptability of policies that protect natural resources against extreme events.



STRATEGIES

Willmar’s natural resources are important to the community and it is important that Willmar utilize strategies that preserve and protect these natural resources.

TRENDS

Climate Change

Cities and towns play a unique role in both the prevention and cause of global climate change. A large portion the carbon emissions driving climate change come from cities, be it transportation, industrial uses, or the construction of new structures and infrastructure. In central Minnesota, the daily average winter minimum temperature has increased by 6°F from 1895 to 2021. Lakes have lost an average of 10- 14 days of ice since the 1970’s. Intense storms and flooding have occurred more frequently than any time on record, increasing the need for adaptive and resilient infrastructure. The effects of climate change are being felt by the city of Willmar today, making it crucial for the future of the city to be sustainable, innovative, inclusive, and resilient. Natural resources are fragile, and any changes to the climate can have catastrophic consequences for them.

RESOURCES	SOURCE	DETAIL
<u>National impacts of Climate Change</u>	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)	Information and data resources from national climate change research.
<u>Statewide impacts of Climate Change</u>	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)	Information and data resources from state climate change research.

STRATEGIES

Combatting Climate Change

As previously mentioned, cities and towns play a unique role in the prevention of climate change. Policies that counter the effects of climate change can help to mitigate future harm to natural resources. Small cities and towns around the world have found success in implementing policies that encourage renewable energy production, agricultural biodiversity, and policies that restrict waste.

CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



RESOURCES	SOURCE	DETAIL
<u>Carbon-Neutral Towns</u>	Earth Day	Details of actions taken by smaller communities throughout the world.
<u>Protecting Drinking Water</u>	Minnesota Department of Health	Resources and tools for protecting drinking water.
<u>Climate Change Impacts on Agriculture and Food Supply</u>	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Resources and research on the connection of climate change and agriculture and food supply.

Sustainable Development

Increasing sustainability in developments can help offset potential climate change impacts and increase the resiliency of the community in extreme events. Willmar can implement various strategies in public construction near valuable natural resources and enact policies that encourage private developers to do the same.

TOOL	DESCRIPTION AND USE
Rainwater Catchment	Rainwater catchment systems capture rainwater from buildings, store it, then repurpose the rainwater to water landscaping or for another use when potable water is not necessary.
Pervious Pavers	Previous pavers can be used in place of concrete or asphalt paths and driveways to increase previous surface and reduce strain on stormwater management systems in extreme weather events.

CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



Green Infrastructure	Green infrastructure includes green roofs; connected systems of parks, forests, and wetlands; community gardens; and native landscaping in place of manicured lawn.
Tree Preservation	Preserving mature trees and planting new trees can help reduce the urban heat island effect while increasing the natural beauty of a community.
Sustainable Materials	Sustainable materials can be encouraged throughout the city, especially near wetlands.

RESOURCES	SOURCE	DETAIL
<u>Guidance on Managing Runoff</u>	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Resources and concepts for the management of runoff.

Protection of Lakeshore

The development of lakeshore has the potential to severely degrade the quality of both the lakeshore and the waters of the lake. Lakeshore can be degraded by several factors, including varying water levels, wave energy, natural erosion, mowing to the water's edge, and the movement of ice. The Kandiyohi Soil and Water Conservation District and the Hawk Creek Watershed Project offer programs for grants and technical assistance to homeowners to restore the natural shoreland.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources classifies lakes and water basins to provide general development guidance to reduce impact and preserve these important water resources. Three of the four lakes are classified as general development lakes, while Oslo Lake is classified as a natural environment lake (see [Table 8-2](#).) The DNR can provide a model ordinance to align with the DNR's requirements and guidance for the management of development within 1,000 feet of the Ordinary High Water Level of each lake. This ordinance and updates have been used by the City of Willmar to define shoreland management ordinances. Additionally, the DNR provides guidance on landscaping near lakeshore and has several tools for homeowners to track the quality of their shore.

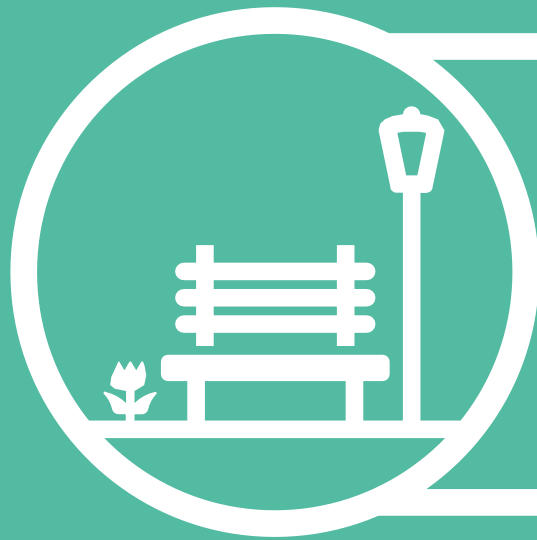
CHAPTER EIGHT – NATURAL RESOURCES + RESILIENCY



Table 8-2. DNR Lake and Basin Classifications

Lake	Classification	Definition
Foot Lake	General Development	Large, deep lakes or lakes of varying sizes and depths with elevated levels and mixes of existing development. These lakes often are extensively used for recreation and, except for the exceptionally large lakes, are heavily developed around the shore. The second and third development tiers are common. The larger examples in this class can accommodate additional development and use.
Willmar Lake	General Development	
Swan Lake	General Development	
Oslo Lake	Natural Environment	Generally small, often shallow lakes with limited capacities for assimilating the impacts of development and recreational use. They often have adjacent lands with substantial constraints for development such as high-water tables, exposed bedrock, and unsuitable soils. These lakes, particularly in rural areas, usually do not have much existing development or recreational use.

RESOURCES	SOURCE	DETAIL
<u>Restore Your Shore</u>	Minnesota DNR	Tools and resources for shoreland restoration activities.
<u>Shoreland Management Model Ordinance</u>	Minnesota DNR	Model ordinance and guidance information.
<u>Prior Lake, MN Lakeshore Preservation</u>	City of Prior Lake	Example preservation program.



CHAPTER NINE:

PARKS + OPEN SPACE



INTRODUCTION

Parks and open spaces provide opportunities for people to connect, recreate, and engage with nature - from playing sports or games to going outside and interacting with nature. Parks help people relax, exercise, and have fun with friends and family. In a comprehensive plan, parks and open spaces create a network of amenities, programs, and facilities that cater to diverse interests and population groups. This section will outline what parks Willmar currently operates, issues and opportunities that face its parks, and what strategies can be implemented to guide Willmar toward its vision.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The City of Willmar has over 30 parks spread throughout the community, each with a wide variety of opportunities for residents to participate in. Major park and recreation areas in Willmar include Robbins Island, Swansson Field, Dorothy Olson Aquatic Center, two golf courses, and other parks/playgrounds.

These parks and recreational areas provide different roles for the community, from the community members they serve, their size, and the amenities provided. All parks have been organized into six (6) different park types described in the following pages. These tables describe each park type and list the park location, the total size and amenities provided.

REGIONAL PARK AREAS

Regional Parks are large multi-use spaces that attract people from neighboring communities throughout the region. They offer a wide selection of amenities for all people, regardless of their age or ability. There is one regional park within Willmar.

Table 9-1. Regional Parks

Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Robbins Island	Between Foot and Willmar Lakes in northeast Willmar	55 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public swimming beach • Fishing • Hiking and nature trails • Picnic shelters • Soccer fields

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Softball field • Nine-hole disc golf course • Playground
--	--	--	--

MAJOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Major Recreational Facilities in Willmar serve the entire community and visitors, providing indoor facilities and community parks dedicated to specific sports. These facilities are destinations for the community and offer a wide variety of amenities, including swimming, baseball, and softball.

Table 9-2. Major Recreational Facilities

Name	Location	Size	Amenities
North Swansson Field	Willmar Avenue and 18 th Street SW	30.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighted baseball field • Lighted softball fields • Unlighted baseball diamond • Shelter
South Swansson Field	South of Willmar Avenue, near North Swansson Field	30 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighted baseball field • Soccer fields • Playground • BMX track • Tennis courts • Bike/recreational path
City Auditorium	311 6 th Street SW	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gymnasium • Universal gymnasium

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Civic Center Arena	Civic Center Drive, Northeast Willmar	27,000 sq. ft. (1,800 seats)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 sheets of ice • Pickleball courts • Tennis courts • Basketball courts • Playground • Locker rooms • Meeting rooms
Dorothy Olson Aquatic Center	15 th Avenue SW and 22 nd Street SW	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six-lane pool • One-meter diving boards • Water slides • Zero-depth wading pool • Restrooms • Enclosed shelter • Picnic area

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood Parks are spaces that serve the neighborhood they are located within. These parks offer a variety of amenities for a variety of age groups, including walking trails, playground equipment, and picnic shelters. Neighborhood Parks are the most abundant category in Willmar, with a total of 24 parks.

Table 9-3. Neighborhood Parks

Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Sperry Park	Homewood Avenue NE and N Highway 71	7 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Softball fields • Pickleball courts • Shelter • Basketball courts

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Rice Park	Kandiyohi Avenue and 2 nd Street SW	2.24 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighted tennis courts • Shelter • Playground • Splash pad • Basketball court • Sand Volleyball court • Horseshoe pits
Jaycees Park	NW 7 th Street and Ella Ave NEW	6.5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Name	Location	Size	Amenities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball court
Northside Park	Ella Avenue NW and 12th St. NW	4 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Baseball field • Basketball court • Shelter • Ice skating/hockey area (2)
Bjorsell Park	Johanna Avenue SE and 4th St. SE	1.5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Bocce ball court • Basketball court
Lincoln/Eastside Park	Trott Avenue SE near Lincoln Elementary School	5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter • Ice skating and hockey rinks (2) • Playground • Lighted baseball field • Basketball court
Miller Park	Kandiyohi Avenue SW and 11 th Street SW	3.2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Shelter • Basketball court • Baseball diamond • Lighted tennis courts
Hilltop Park	8 th Street SW between Parkview Road and Richland Avenue SW	3 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter • Tennis court • Skating area • Playground • Basketball court • Horseshoe pits
Minnegasco Park	Trott Avenue and 16 th Street SW	2.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Pleasant View Park	14 th Avenue SE and 9 th Street SE	3 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Covered shelters • Tennis courts

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Name	Location	Size	Amenities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball courts
Vos Park	1 st Avenue NW and 30 th Street NW	4.29 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Basketball court • Shelter
Welshire Park	19 th Street SE and 7 th Avenue SE	1.21 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Gesch Park	12 th Street SE and Olena Avenue SE	6.7 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Basketball court • Baseball field
Cardinal Park	20 th Avenue SW and 25 th Street SW	2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Basketball court
Southfield Park	28 th Avenue SW	5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Shelter • Softball field • Basketball court
Valley Side Park	7 th Avenue NW	6.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter • Playground • Basketball court • Backstop
Ramblewood Park	Southwest Willmar	34 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball court • Playground • Crushed granite trail
Hanson Park	North of Ridgewater College	6.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Open shelter • Nature area
Sunrise Park	Willmar Ave SE and 23 rd Street SE	11.64 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Bike path • Baseball field

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Name	Location	Size	Amenities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball court • Horseshoe pit
Lions Park	Near South Swansson Field	5.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic shelter
Hedin Park	West side of Willmar Lake		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Walking paths
East Willmar Park	13 th Street SE and Pleasant View Dr SE	4.2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Thompson Park	Ella Avenue NW near Foot Lake		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic area

MINI-PARKS

Mini-Parks are spaces that serve unique needs of a specific area or community. These are generally up to 1 acre in size and offer unique amenities.

Table 9-4. Mini-Parks

Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Canigo Park	12 th Street NW and Lake Avenue NW	0.2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Rainbow Park	24 th Street SE and 5 th Avenue SE	0.36 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Collegeview Park	13 th Avenue NW and 28 th Street NW	0.2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Shelter • Basketball court
Richland Park	Richland Avenue SW and Richland Drive SW	1.09 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tot playground
Wellin Park	14 th Street SW	0.34 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tot playground



SCHOOL-NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYGROUNDS

Parks in this category are located within a school complex but are open to the public for use. These are small parks that contain a variety of amenities, generally catering to younger school-age children.

Table 9-5. Neighborhood Playgrounds

Name	Location	Amenities
Garfield School	Monongalia Ave SW and 8 th Street SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighted hockey and ice-skating rink • Shelter and warming house • Playground
Washington School	Willmar Avenue SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground • Baseball field • Basketball court • Skateboarding area
Roosevelt School	19 th Avenue SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseball diamond • Soccer field • Playing field

SCHOOL-RECREATION FACILITIES

Parks in this category are located within a school complex but are open to the public for use. These are larger parks that contain a variety of amenities, generally catering to older school-age children and adults.

Table 9-6. School Recreational Facilities

Name	Location	Amenities
Ridgewater College	2101 15 th Avenue NW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis courts • Baseball diamonds

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Name	Location	Amenities
Kennedy Elementary School	824 7 th Street SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis courts • Practice athletic field • Football stadium • All-weather track
Willmar Junior High School	201 Willmar Avenue SE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis courts • Softball fields • Practice athletic field • Indoor swimming pool
Willmar Senior High School	2701 30 th Street NE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis courts • Softball diamonds • Practice athletic fields • Indoor swimming pool

OTHER RECREATION/PARK FACILITIES

Several parks within Willmar are unique and do not fit into a specific category. These are generally dedicated to one use but can feature additional amenities for the public.

Table 9-7. Other Recreational Facilities

Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Flags of Honor Park	North Business Highway 71 / 23 near Willmar Lake		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic areas • Shelters • Angel of Hope • Walking path • Tribute to the Civilian Conservation Corp.
Bike paths	Throughout the city		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On and off-street paths and trails throughout the community

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



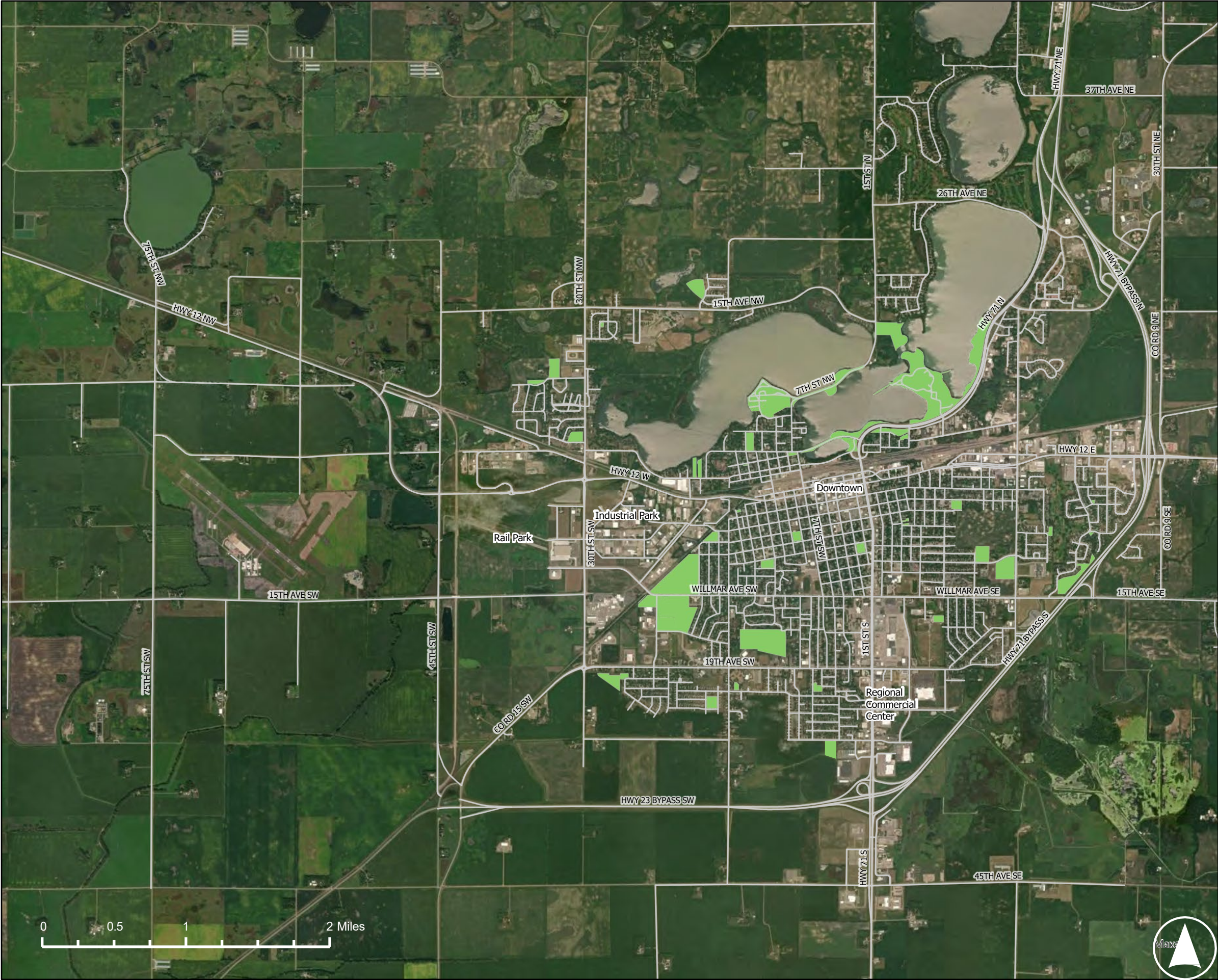
Name	Location	Size	Amenities
Bergquist Nature Area	Gorton Avenue near 19 th Street NW	5.6 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail
Rau Park	7 th Street NW on Foot Lake	2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scouting area • Fishing • Picnic area
Selvig International Park	4 th Street SW and Becker Avenue SW	0.7 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flagpole • Benches • Fountain
Valley Golf Course	Southeast Willmar		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public nine-hole golf course
Eagle Creek Golf Club	Overlooking Willmar and Swan Lakes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-private 18-hole golf course

DISTRIBUTION OF PARKS

In many communities, parks are not evenly distributed for all residents to access. A walkshed analysis (**Figure 9-2**) was completed to determine if Willmar’s parks are dispersed evenly or if there are locations where residents cannot easily walk to a park. The analysis found that most homes within Willmar are located within a quarter mile of a park. However, there are a few locations where homes are not within a convenient walking distance to a park. The Regional Commercial Center along 1st St S and surrounding neighborhoods do not have convenient access to parks. Additionally, new neighborhoods in northeast Willmar do not have convenient access to parks. When setting up new parks, the city should prioritize locations that do not currently have access to parks to encourage a more equitable distribution of community amenities.

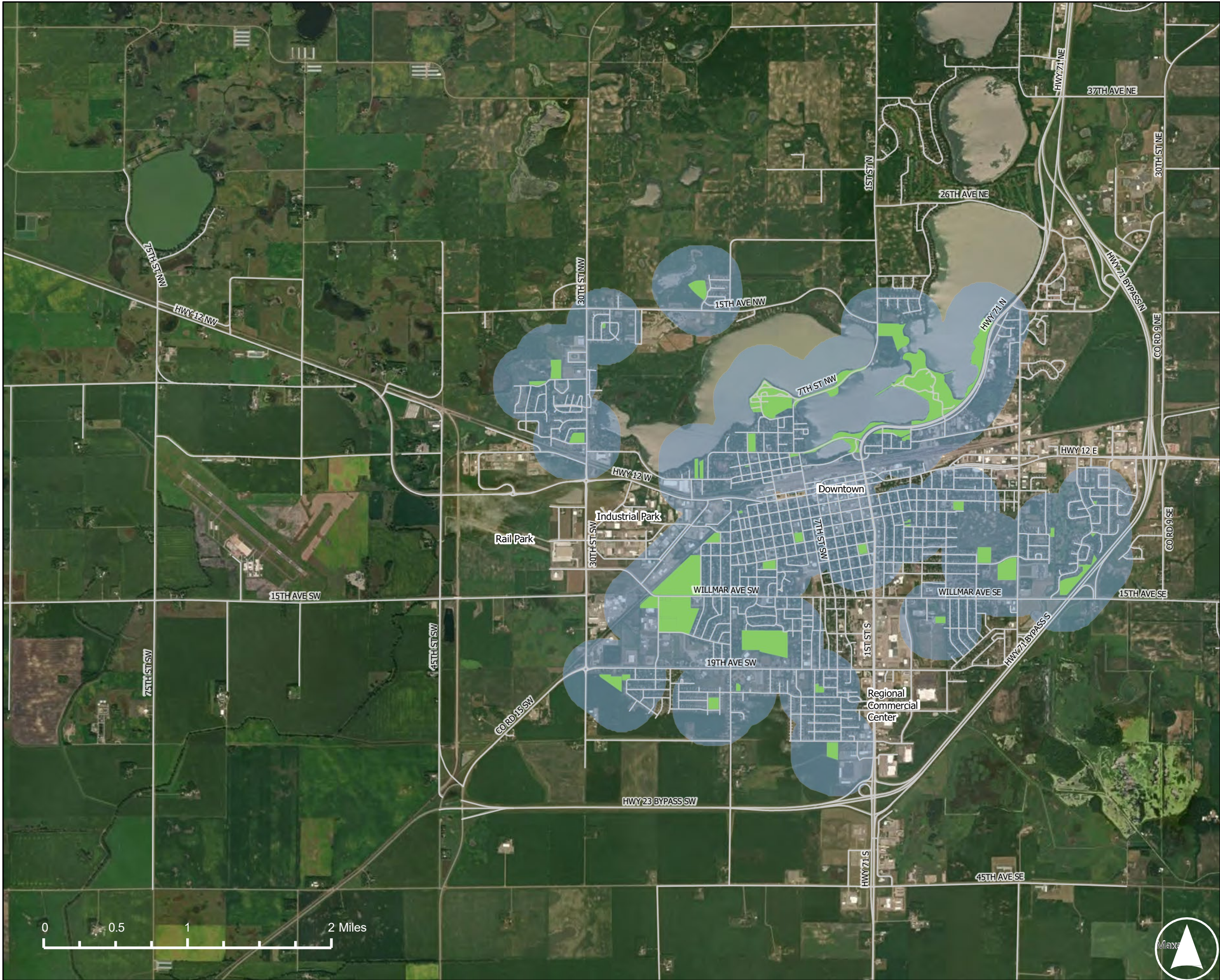
Willmar Parks

City Parks
Existing Parks



Walkshed Map

- City Parks
- Existing Parks
 - 5-Minute Walk (1/4 Mile) from a Park





INDOOR FACILITIES

The City of Willmar has a variety of indoor facilities for year-round recreational use.

City Auditorium

The City Auditorium offers space for a variety of leisure and competitive activities for residents of the community and the surrounding areas. Programming and Activities at the Auditorium are managed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

City Auditorium History

The City Auditorium was built between the years 1936 and 1937 by the Works Progress Administration. Artistic sculpture panels on the front facade of the building and a Memorial Room have secured the building into the list of the National Register of Historic Places.

War Memorial Room

Located on the main level of the City Auditorium just inside the main entrance, the

The War Memorial Room was designed for visitors to reflect and honor veterans who served our country with bravery. This Austere Room is located on the first floor of the Willmar City Auditorium. It was completed in 1937 as a WPA project. Engraved stones from each state line the walls, an effort initiated by the American Legion to honor Minnesota veterans.

Civic Center

The Willmar Civic Center is one of the largest outstate facilities with a seating capacity of 2,200 (hockey season) and 4,000 people for dry floor shows.





CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

With a full concession stand and 12 locker rooms, the Civic Center has two regulation sheets of ice located in the Cardinal and Blue Line Arenas, which house both hockey and curling.

Numerous dry floor events, expos, concerts and more take place inside the facility each year including; KWLM Spring Show, Rebel Camper Show, Quilt Show, West Central Tribune Garage Sale, Shrine, and Jose Cole Circus, West Central Builders Show, Willmar Ag Show, and Ridgewater College Graduation.

Community Center

Community Center Dining

Lutheran Social Services provides daily activities from morning coffee to dancing/music on Friday afternoons. Senior Dining is available for Older Adults (age 60+) and their spouses have a meal on Monday through Friday at 12:00 pm at the Willmar Community Center. Meal pick-up is also available between 11:30a-12:30p.

Woodshop

The Community Center features a woodshop for all ranges of ability from beginner to advanced craftsmen. The Willmar Community Center has a shop with a variety of power and hand tools for use by members of the public.



PLANNING NEEDS

While Willmar features a robust park system with many amenities available to residents, there are several planning-related needs that face the community. These challenges create opportunities to improve the park and recreation offerings, including equitable access to the parks and the potential impacts of climate change on greenspace. There are also several opportunities that can be implemented by the City to address issues and create a park system that aligns with Willmar’s overall vision.

NEEDS

Equitable Access

Not all parks are physically accessible by all community members due to the lack of multimodal connections (i.e., trails and sidewalks). In addition, amenities are not spread equally.

Climate and Resiliency

Willmar’s parks have the potential to be impacted by the changing climate, extreme weather events, and economic uncertainty.

STRATEGIES

Future Amenities – 21st Century Parks

Innovative and sustainable playgrounds and other park amenities are beginning to gain popularity across the country and could be implemented within the City of Willmar.

Greenspace Preservation

An increased amount of greenspace could be preserved for parks, increasing pervious surfaces and trees as a guard against climate-related concerns.



WITH WILLMAR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Willmar’s overall goals of being a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and resilient community are reflected by the guiding principles of the Parks and Open Space chapter. By addressing issues identified by residents, Willmar can achieve the city’s overarching vision.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	HOW PARKS CAN SUPPORT
Sustainability	Willmar can encourage sustainability in its parks by preserving greenspace and existing trees.
Inclusivity	Willmar can ensure inclusivity in its parks by providing amenities that cater to a wide variety of residents, regardless of their age or ability.
Innovation	Willmar can support innovation by working with local organizations and community members to bring new and desired amenities to its parks.
Resilience	Willmar can preserve greenspace in its parks to increase pervious surface in extreme weather events and flooding.

STRATEGIES

Willmar’s parks and recreational facilities are subject to many emerging trends that are actively shifting the community’s needs and desires. Several strategies can be utilized to help align Willmar’s parks with both these trends and the goals of this plan.



TRENDS

New Park Amenities

Parks are an ever-evolving space that is built to reflect the needs and desires of all age groups. The needs and wants of the community change over time, and Willmar’s parks should be altered as necessary to reflect the shift in community need. Willmar is already adapting to community desires, for an example the installation of an inclusive playground and outdoor fitness court at Robbins Island Regional Park. In addition, pickleball continues to be an emerging trend and Willmar has installed several pickleball courts at Sperry Park. Other trending amenities include natural playgrounds, physical fitness equipment along trails, curling courts, and amphitheaters/bandshells for events. Willmar should continue to evaluate the needs of the community and adjust the amenities of parks within the city to align with those needs.



Sustainability

Sustainability in park design is becoming an increasingly common trend in new and renovated park systems. Parks and open space serve a vital role in regulating carbon emissions and often serve as “carbon sinks” – places where carbon is absorbed by green spaces. Park design that seeks to reduce impervious surfaces and increase greenspace, especially tree coverage and native landscaping supports sustainable design. When parks are renovated, native grass can be added in place of unused open fields or near water bodies. Additionally, buildings can be constructed with rainwater catchment systems that can water plants during short periods of drought.

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Community Gardens

Community and allotment gardens allow the community a place to grow healthy fruits, vegetables, and other plants. Community gardens are operated by a group of people who all can harvest the garden if they've put in a certain amount of work. In an allotment garden, each person is given their own space to grow fresh produce and harvest from themselves. Both options offer those who do not have a private lawn the chance to garden and supply themselves and others with fresh produce. Community and allotment gardens are a good option for neighborhood parks and do not require significant maintenance from the city, as they are community-run. Willmar currently has a community garden at the Willmar Community Center and an allotment garden at the United Methodist Church. Additional garden locations could be placed in an equitable manner so that everyone has the option to access a community or allotment garden.

STRATEGIES

Recreational Tourism

Willmar's parks play multiple roles within the community, including support of economic development. Existing parks and amenities draw visitors to the community from a broader region to enjoy lakefront parks and amenities such as Robbins Island. When these visitors come into the community for recreation, they may also visit restaurants, shops, or other amenities in the community, supporting other uses. The community's parks and recreation opportunities should be leveraged to assist and enhance tourism and economic development efforts. Strategies to leverage Willmar's parks include providing connections and wayfinding between recreational areas and community destinations, community events that connect visitors to amenities, and the location of new recreational areas within new growth and investment areas.

Park Investments

Existing and future park and recreation investments by the City of Willmar will require on-going maintenance and investment to maintain existing infrastructure and support needed upgrades and investments. Historically, the process of identifying these investments and the identification of funding has occurred through the annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process for the city. Through this process, city departments identify their project and funding needs and establish budget and priorities for each system. Creating a scoring and prioritization process for future park investments would support this CIP process while prioritizing investments that support community, site, and environmental needs and considerations. The following criteria may be explored to establish the Investment Priority Ranking for City of Willmar Parks.

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Table 9-8. Park Investment Needs Scoring Metrics

Need Type	Category	Possible Score	Scoring Metric	Purpose
Community Needs	Race and Poverty	100	Percent of the Census Blocks within a quarter mile that identify as extreme poverty and non-white	Identify investments to benefit minorities and lower income communities.
	Youth and Seniors	100	Percent of the Census Blocks within a quarter mile that identify youth and seniors	Identify investment to benefit youth and seniors.
	Neighborhood Condition	100	Percent of the Census Blocks within a quarter mile with high vacancy and high crime rates	Identify investments to support struggling neighborhoods.
	Resident Health	100	Percent of the Census Blocks within a quarter mile that identify with major medical issues	Identify investments to support community with medical issues.
Community Needs Score		400	Sum of the four categories to create the full Community Need Score	
Site Needs	Site Condition	100	100 pts = poor 66.6 pts = fair 33.3 = good 0.00 = excellent	Identify investments that benefit parks in poor condition
	Investment Need	100	100 pts = highest need 66.6 pts = average 33.3 = low 0.00 = low need	Identify investments where current infrastructure is in need of highest repair.
Site Needs Score		400	Sum of the two categories multiplied by 2.	

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Need Type	Category	Possible Score	Scoring Metric	Purpose
Environmental Overlay	Black Carbon	100	Highest average black carbon levels by walkshed	Identify investments and opportunities with higher carbon levels.
	Tree Canopy	100	Lowest percent tree canopy by walkshed	Identify investments where tree canopy can be improved.
Environmental Overlay Score		200	Sum of the two categories	

Park Master Plans and System Wide Planning

The City of Willmar completed a Parks and Recreation Master Plan in 2015 to review the condition of existing parks and infrastructure and explore future needs and investments. This plan has served as an investment and vision tool for the last 10 years, including the definition of 10-year Capital Improvement Program needs and park improvements. Many of these investments have been made, though needs and system conditions have changed over the ten years of implementation. An update to the master plan would provide a refreshed analysis of the current system condition and identification of future needs and goals from a community perspective.

Regional Park and Recreation

The City of Willmar includes regional parks and destinations that serve not only the Willmar Community but visitors and the regional community. Similarly, there are nearby regional park and recreation destinations that may be regularly used by Willmar residents. The Prairie Wood Environmental Learning Center is a prime example. Continued partnerships with the Prairie Woods team and other regional recreation destinations may support future programming and investment opportunities.

CHAPTER NINE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Additional Strategies

In addition to the strategies defined within this chapter, park and recreation investment opportunities should continue to be explored as infrastructure and programming enhancements are made. The following opportunities should be explored as investment decisions are made.

Opportunity	Description
New Pocket Parks	Look for opportunities to purchase and develop smaller parcels of open space for recreational use. Pocket parks are generally developed as the opportunity arises through other development activities. These smaller park areas also create great opportunities to support the Arts and Culture strategies identified within this Plan.
Passive Recreation Enhancements	Create additional opportunities for passive recreation throughout the park and trail system, such as benches for sitting, picnic tables, and wildlife viewing opportunities.
Sidewalk and Trail Connections	Look for opportunities to develop new sidewalk and trail connections to support multimodal movement throughout the community. These connections may improve connectivity to existing parks and trails or to high traffic locations throughout the community.

Willmar's parks are a valuable community asset that will be preserved and protected for generations to come.





CHAPTER ELEVEN:

IMPLEMENTATION



INTRODUCTION

The Implementation chapter emphasizes the future actions and investments defined through the WITH Willmar planning process. The recommendations and actions identified within this chapter provide guidance for the city to achieve the goals and priorities identified in this process. This guidance includes actions, policies, and initiatives for each plan element to guide implementation efforts for years to come. Over the next twenty years, staff, elected and appointed officials, and the community should reference this section when evaluating potential policies, investment actions, growth scenarios, and development proposals.

The actions identified in this chapter were built from community input, staff recommendation, focus group feedback, and plan analysis. While actions and recommendations are identified for each plan element, the list is not all-inclusive. Future actions and activities will arise through future planning and policy as well. This chapter can help the city track its progress toward achieving the goals and objectives identified in the plan and should be reviewed by city staff, elected officials, and appointed officials on a regular basis.






IMPLEMENTATION PLAN STRUCTURE

The actions and recommendations presented in the following pages are organized by plan element (i.e., housing, transportation, etc.). The implementation plan proposes specific regulatory, programmatic, and planning actions, as well as general strategies. Each action relates to one or more of this plan’s core themes: **Work, Innovate, Thrive, and Home**.

Plan Category	Description	How is this displayed?
Plan Element / Supporting Elements	Defines the plan element that the recommendation or action connects to. May include more than one supporting element.	Plan element icons:
Recommendation	Describes the recommendation or action to be completed.	Narrative description.
Timeline	Identifies a general timeline for completion of the action. Timelines include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-going: Continuation of current actions Short-Term: 1-2 years Medium-Term: 3-5 years Long-Term: 6+ years 	
Complexity	Indicates the overall complexity for accomplishing each action. Factors that inform a low, medium, or high level of complexity include cost, coordination with partners, and the completion of additional studies.	Low, medium, or high level of complexity:
Benefit	Identifies the general benefit of the action for the community. Factors that inform the benefit include those that directly support progress of the Plan and increase the city’s capacity for success.	Overall benefit identified in narrative.
Partners	Identifies key community partners who can support implementation of the action.	Potential partners have been identified by name.
Measures of Success	Metrics or specific actions that can be used to assess or measure the impact of the action or recommendation.	Measures have been listed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN - IMPLEMENTATION



Plan Category	Description	How is this displayed?
<p>With Willmar Alignment</p>	<p>Relationship to core themes of this plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W: Work with Willmar • I: Innovate with Willmar • T: Thrive with Willmar • H: Home with Willmar 	<p>With Willmar icons:</p> 















Land-Use and Development

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	1994 Zoning Code: Review and identify outdated zoning regulations, eliminate barriers to housing development, and address inconsistencies to ensure alignment with the Comprehensive Plan.	Short-Term	●●●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development aligns with the vision of the Comprehensive Plan Development standards are practical, enforceable, and transparent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers Residents and Landowners Business Community Consultant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of a new zoning ordinance reflecting the vision of the Comprehensive Plan and the needs of the community. 	●	●	●	●
	Process Improvement: Streamline permitting processes to focus on centralizing and digitizing applications, simplifying requirements, and standardizing forms.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guarantees efficiency, reduces delays, reduces development cost, and improves customer satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers Willmar Municipal Utilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced application processing times, lower error rates, and higher staff productivity. Implement survey and gather feedback; track application volume. 		●	●	
	Overlay Districts: Establish overlay districts that encourage development in key gateway areas of the city.	Short-Term	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages strategic growth and economic activity in key gateway areas, attracting new businesses and investments. Enhances aesthetics, functionality, and community involvement while supporting infrastructure upgrades in these important locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Willmar Municipal Utilities Developers Residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track increases in business openings and investments in the overlay districts, indicating successful stimulation of development. Collect feedback from residents and businesses on the improvements in the gateway areas 	●	●	●	
	Growth Management: Apply Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) guidelines to guide decision-making for development interests beyond city limits.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limiting development outside the UGB will promote the efficient provision of public services and facilities and preserve growth areas for future urban development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County Developers Residents and Landowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track and evaluate the concentration of new development within the UGB versus outside of it. Assess the density and efficient use of space, reduced sprawl, and better preservation of greenfield and 		●	●	●

















Land-Use and Development

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
						agricultural lands outside the boundary.				
 	Fund for Future Annexation: Plan for the financial implications of annexing new land, ensuring they can provide necessary services without straining their budget.	Short-Term	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a thorough fiscal impact analysis to estimate any cost associated with annexation. Funds should be used for: Utility extensions, Road Improvements, Legal expenses, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County Developers Residents and Landowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare the costs associated with annexation to the budget of the annexation fund. Efficient use of funds and staying within budget are key success indicators. 		●	●	
	Supportive Infrastructure. Coordinate with Engineering to ensure development can be adequately served by municipal facilities.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures city services have capacity to provide for additional growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity of public facilities. Infrastructure costs. 	●	●	●	●
  	Development Tracking: Implement an annual report of development activity that illustrates building permits, housing density, and other major development indicators.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that the location, type, and timing of development are aligned with Comprehensive Plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing units Redevelopment projects Cost of Services City Revenue 		●	●	
  	Plan and Acquire Property: Create a list of potential properties for development opportunities; evaluate site alternatives, costs, and development capacity.	Short-Term	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes leadership to make informed decisions that maximize the potential of acquired properties. Ensures that resources are used efficiently, and the selected sites align with long-term development goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County EDC Kandiyohi County Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess how well the acquired properties and subsequent developments align with the goals and objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. Monitor the progress of development projects on acquired properties. 	●	●	●	●
  	Mixed-Use Development: Create zoning and design standards that promote regional and neighborhood commercial and mixed-use development, ensuring alignment with the community vision.	Short-Term	●●●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves neighborhood accessibility, cohesion, and character Improves development flexibility and zoning transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers Residents and Landowners Business Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of mixed-use zoning / design standards New mixed-use development New neighborhood commercial development 	●	●	●	●



Land-Use and Development

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
  	<p>Implement DTW Pilot Program: Evaluate strategies from previous downtown plans to promote investment, beautification, innovation, and traffic calming initiatives.</p>	<p>Medium-Term</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages innovative approaches to urban design and infrastructure to enhance the overall appeal and functionality of downtown. Programing can attract new businesses and investors, boosting economic growth and revitalizing the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Downtown Community Residents and Landowners Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Economic Metrics to track the number of new businesses, investments, and job creations within the downtown 				
 	<p>Rail Corridor: Assess the impact of the BNSF corridor on Willmar's downtown economy, multimodal transportation, and pedestrian experience, while addressing concerns related to noise, lighting, and safety.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> better utilization of rail corridors, reduced traffic congestion, and environmental benefits provides valuable insights for informed decision-making and long-term planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar BNSF Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased economic activity, higher usage of multimodal transportation, and improved pedestrian experience. Reduced noise levels and enhanced lighting quality, along with effective infrastructure improvements, will demonstrate successful mitigation of noise and lighting concerns in Willmar's downtown 				













Arts + Culture

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Public Art Standards: Establish guidelines to promote and support a wide range of public art and creative placemaking projects across Willmar.	Short-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports placemaking and community aesthetics. • Develop community identity. • Supports local artists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Willmar • Willmar Area Arts Council • Southwest Minnesota Arts Council • Willmar Education and Arts Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of public art standards • Community reception • Number of public art projects. 	W	I	T	H
	Wayfinding & Gateway Signage: Install gateway signage within highway entry corridors.	Medium-Term Long-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports placemaking and community aesthetics. • Develop community identity. • Enhances wayfinding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Culture non-profits • Willmar Area Art Council • City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of gateway signage • Community reception 		I	T	
	Activate Underutilized Spaces: Utilize underused spaces for arts and cultural activities.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports placemaking and revitalization. • Encourages low-cost, productive use of available spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Willmar • Arts and Culture non-profits • Developers • Stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of events, demonstration projects, or redevelopment initiatives • Community reception 	W	I	T	
	Artist in Residence Program: Establish a Residency Program to enhance the aesthetics of public spaces, creating a sense of place and identity	Medium-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports local artists • Promotes art and cultural activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Willmar • Willmar Area Arts Council • Southwest Minnesota Arts Council • Willmar Education and Arts Center • Ridgewater College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of program. • Increase in Public Art Installations and events 	W	I	T	H

























Arts + Culture

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	<p>Streetscape Design: Develop and implement streetscaping guidelines.</p>	<div style="background-color: #6a3d9a; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Medium-Term</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports placemaking and revitalization. • Supports innovative approaches to stormwater management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Willmar • Developers • Business Owners • Residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of streetscaping guidelines into zoning ordinance, corridor studies, or downtown study. • Completion of street-scaping demonstration projects. 				
 	<p>City Art: Develop both an inventory and acquisition plan to properly manage publicly owned art assets such as paintings, sculptures, photographs, etc.</p>	<div style="background-color: #6aa84f; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">On-going</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage maintenance plans for publicly owned art • Grow the inventory of publicly owned artifacts that reflect Willmar's history and culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Culture non-profits • Willmar Area Art Council • City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Inventory of publicly owned art • Designated funding to source and maintain assets 				





Mobility

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Safe Streets for All: Implement and prioritize safety improvements in planning for streets, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, working towards a goal of reducing fatalities on our roadways.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces the incidence and severity of injurious crashes. Promotes active transportation and reduces car-dependency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar MNDOT Kandiyohi County FHWA Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of fatal and serious injury crashes. Number of safety improvements completed. Integration of safety into all aspects of transportation planning and facility design. 				
	Accessible Facilities: Continue working to fill sidewalk gaps and ensure pedestrian facilities and transit programs are accessible to those with disabilities.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves accessibility for children, people with disabilities, and all residents. Promotes healthy lifestyles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar; MNDOT Kandiyohi County Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes CCT Local Senior Care Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Sidewalks added/improved Number of non-compliant ADA facilities Adoption of plan, policy, or program focused on sidewalk installation / maintenance. 				
	Align Transportation Priorities: Integrate strategies and priorities from the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Plan and the Safety Action Plan into capital improvement plan, corridor studies, and facility design.	On-going		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures plan consistency and encourages implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar; MNDOT Kandiyohi County Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan integration and project completion. 				
	Innovative Design: Implement traffic calming treatments and other innovative design solutions to ensure safety is priority for multi-modal	Long-Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes traffic calming and safer streets. Reduces maintenance costs. Improves traffic flow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar MNDOT Kandiyohi County FHWA Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful completion of priority project. 				










Mobility

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	<p>Connected Community: Establish and improve multimodal access within and between neighborhoods, over barriers, and between major destinations and recreation areas.</p>	<p>On-going</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves system coverage and reduces travel times. Improves opportunities for walking and biking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar MNDOT Kandiyohi County FHWA Parks and Recreation, Willmar Bikes CCT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects completed. Travel times. 				






















Housing

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Aging in Place: Develop policies and programs that expand housing options for aging in place,	Short-Term	● ○ ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps residents continue to thrive as they age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar AARP Community Housing Resource Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of programs or funding that support accessible housing. Expansion of housing stock that accommodates aging-in-place Development / improvement of senior living communities. 	W	I	T	H
 	Diversify Housing Stock: Promote the need to increase housing types to add a range of styles, floorplans, and price points.	On-going	● ○ ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases housing inventory for homebuyers and renters. Expands stock of market-affordable homes. Supports workforce recruitment and retention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Community Housing Resource Center Developers City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of units / building permits for alternative housing types, including single-family attached, small multifamily, mixed-use, etc. 	W	I	T	H
 	Residential Zoning: Expand residential zoning for the allowance of more housing types such as: factory-built homes, duplexes, townhomes, etc.	Medium-Term	● ● ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases housing choice for homebuyers and renters. Expands stock of market-affordable homes. Supports workforce recruitment and retention. Supports aging in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning staff Planning Commission City Council Residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of zoning amendment(s) 	W	I	T	H
 	Affordable Housing: Establish, finance, and implement a Community Land Trust or Land Bank to acquire and develop permanent affordable housing options.	Short-Term	● ● ○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures the development and preservation of permanent affordable housing options, making housing more accessible to residents. Promotes community stability, reduces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County Housing Redevelopment Authority Willmar Area Community Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track the number of affordable housing units developed and maintained by the land trust. Gather feedback from residents and stakeholders on the availability and quality 		I	T	H





Housing

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
				displacement, and enhances residents' livability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable Housing Organizations 	of affordable housing options.				
 	Rental Housing Program: Update the 1990 Rental Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Ordinance to conform with modern industry standards and best practices of neighboring municipalities.	<div style="background-color: #ffc107; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Short-Term</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes consistent and fair regulations across the region, benefiting both tenants and landlords. Ensures higher quality and safer rental housing for residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Residents Landlords Kandiyohi County Minnesota Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track the number of rental units meeting updated safety and maintenance standards. Gather feedback from tenants regarding their living conditions and overall satisfaction. 		  		
 	Housing Maintenance: Leverage available programs and explore alternative local options to provide financial assistance for housing maintenance and rehabilitation.	<div style="background-color: #6f42c1; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Medium-Term</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves housing conditions for owners and renters. Helps revitalize core neighborhoods. Supports aging in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Community housing organizations State housing agencies Local lending institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased utilization or establishment of program providing funding or incentives for housing maintenance. 				
	Regional Collaboration: Collaborate with Kandiyohi County and regional housing partners to support and implement housing programs; establish regional housing committee.	<div style="background-color: #6c757d; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">On-going</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes alignment of community goals and resources. Improves planning efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County Housing developers Housing agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formation of committee with regular meetings. 				



Housing

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	<p>Housing Needs Assessment: Complete a housing needs assessment to understand market trends, demographic needs, and housing gaps.</p>	<div style="background-color: #5d3a7d; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">Medium-Term</div>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides valuable information to developers and decision makers. Increases awareness of community housing challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Community Housing organizations Kandiyohi County EDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of housing needs assessment. 	<div style="background-color: #1a522d; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">W</div>	<div style="background-color: #d4ac3d; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">I</div>	<div style="background-color: #76923c; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">T</div>	<div style="background-color: #e67e22; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 20px; height: 20px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">H</div>















Economic Opportunities








Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Small Business Support System: Create and implement tools and programs for existing and future small businesses.	Medium-Term	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fosters local entrepreneurship. Expands variety of local goods and services. Strengthens community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County EDC Businessowners Community organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of small business support organizations and programs Increasing number of small businesses in Willmar 	W	I	T	
	Community Partnerships: Continue to collaborate with the EDC to implement programs and policies that support a thriving Willmar economy.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes alignment of community goals and resources. Improves planning efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County EDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recurring meetings with the EDC Establishment or expansion of regional economic development programs. 	W	I	T	
	Supportive Infrastructure: Continue working to expand and improve utilities and services for businesses and workers, including broadband and wireless communication networks.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports existing businesses and business growth. Supports remote work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Regional utility providers State and federal agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion / improvement of utilities. Available shovel-ready sites. 	W	I	T	H



Economic Opportunities

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	<p>Industrial Parks: Continue to promote development and investment in the Willmar Rail Park and Industrial Park.</p>	<p>On-going</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalizes on available land and infrastructure. Expands local tax base. Builds on existing industry strengths. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County EDC Businessowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available shovel-ready sites. Increased industrial development 				
	<p>Workforce Training: Develop technical workforce training and continuing education programs.</p>	<p>On-going</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects workforce skills with local business needs. Opens new career pathways for local workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County EDC Business Owners Job placement programs Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program utilization. Increased hiring and business development. 				



Natural Resources										
Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
 	Community Resilience: Continue to support and promote local hazard mitigation planning efforts.	On-going	●●○	Supports mitigation and preparedness for fire, extreme heat, winter weather, and other hazards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Kandiyohi County Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City involvement in hazard mitigation plan update. 	W	I	T	H
  	Renewable Power: Explore the development of solar and / or wind energy systems (accessory or community-scale).	Short-Term	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops resiliency and redundancy of power supply. Reduces energy costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Utility providers Residents Business Owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of zoning amendment(s) allowing by-right approval. Community interest. 	W	I	T	H
 	Natural Amenities: In the subdivision and site planning processes, incorporate and maintain natural amenities, and promote public access to these areas.	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes active recreation and social activity. Improves aesthetics and property values. Supports stormwater management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation, retention, and dedication of natural areas. 			T	H



Natural Resources

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	<p>Green Infrastructure: Promote nature-based strategies for stormwater management, including stormwater retention areas, bioswales, rain gardens, etc.</p>	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces cost of stormwater management. Improves development aesthetics. Improves water quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Developers Planning Commission Minnesota DNR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded use of nature-based solutions. Creation of educational materials for developers and landowners. 	W	I	T	H
	<p>Urban Forests: Support continued planting and maintenance of boulevard trees and other forested areas.</p>	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects against infestation. Improves / maintains property values. Provides numerous ecosystem services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tree diversity, health, and abundance. 			T	H
	<p>Shoreland Regulations: Monitor changes to the DNR's model shoreland ordinance and update shoreland zoning as needed to conform with state standards.</p>	On-going	●○○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes appropriate use and development of shoreland areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigates development impacts to shoreland Ensures consistency with state standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Minnesota DNR Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendment of shoreland ordinance Shoreland properties comply with regulations 			T	H



Parks and Open Space

Supporting Elements	Recommendation	Timeline	Complexity	Benefit	Partners	Measure of Success	W	I	T	H
	Parks and Recreation Plan: Update and maintain master parks plan.	Medium-Term	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a comprehensive inventory of community facilities, assessment of existing and future needs, and strategies for park system development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion and maintenance of master parks plan, followed by development or improvement of park facilities that cater to the desires of the community. 		●	●	●
	Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage: Expand wayfinding and / or interpretive signage for public water access, parks, and trails.	Long-Term	●●●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports regional tourism. Supports local artists and businesses. Promotes awareness of resource value and resource enhancement efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of signage. 	●	●	●	
	Park Dedication: Review requirements for public open space dedication and cash-in-lieu. Amend development regulations if needed.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides parkland set-aside or program funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated acreages or funding are sufficient to meet ongoing needs. 		●	●	●
	Public Buildings: Continue to update public facilities to comply with modern ADA standards. Explore new indoor amenities based on community priorities and interest.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures accessibility of community facilities for all residents. Promotes community identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Public Works Department State agencies Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated community facilities. Evolving amenities within Willmar's public buildings. 	●	●	●	●
	Funding: Pursue state and federal grant funding programs for competitive park and trail projects.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases city capacity to design and construct large capital projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicitation of funding as opportunities arise. Number / amount of grants awarded. 		●	●	
	Regional Coordination: Continue to coordinate with Kandiyohi County and state agencies to advance regional parks and tourism opportunities.	On-going	●●○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns state and regional goals and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Willmar Parks and Recreation Department Kandiyohi County State agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings with state and regional partners. 		●	●	