

Chapter 2 - Goals strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

Goals of the City of Hopkins

The following statements are the goals of the City of Hopkins that guided the preparation of this update to the Comprehensive Plan. The City will refer to the Comprehensive Plan in establishing spending and action priorities.

Protect the Residential Neighborhoods

Hopkins is primarily a residential community, and its people are its strength. The City has established neighborhoods with well-maintained single and multi-family homes, mature vegetation and decades of personal commitment. The effects of time, physical deterioration, changing tastes, market competition and, not least, the influence of traffic and nearby businesses may erode the quality of these neighborhoods and irrevocably change the nature of the community. The key elements protecting the residential neighborhoods are as follows:

- In new developments, efforts should be made to preserve as many residential structures as possible.
- Residential rehabilitation programs to preserve strong, well-maintained neighborhoods and protect investments in property should continue to be offered.
- The housing maintenance code should continue to be enforced.

This goal is addressed by all Comprehensive Plan elements.

Protect and Enhance Downtown Hopkins

The downtown area is loosely described as the B-2 and B-3 districts on Mainstreet from the block east of Fifth Avenue to Shady Oak Road.

It is rare to discover a distinctive, pedestrian-scale, commercial area set in the heart of a small suburban community, but Hopkins has one.

Downtown Hopkins and Mainstreet give the City a strong central focus and sense of place, or identity, that many other communities find very difficult to recreate. Major improvements have been made downtown in recent years through public-private cooperative efforts. The key elements to improve the commercial downtown are as follows:

- Efforts should be made to retain existing downtown businesses and attract new specialty retail, entertainment and restaurant businesses to Mainstreet.
- The downtown business climate should be monitored continually.
- Residents should be encouraged to shop locally and support Hopkins businesses.
- Efforts should be made to enhance the Mainstreet experience. Design features such as white lights, public art and plantings should be encouraged.
- Development efforts should continue with an emphasis on the private sector and less public financing involvement.

Both the Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan for Economic Development address this goal.

Identify and Assist In the Redevelopment of Blighted or Obsolete Structures

- Improvement of industrial and commercial businesses should continue to be encouraged to ensure that the limited amount of non-residential land in Hopkins can be used to its full potential.
- Rehabilitation should be encouraged in multi-family structures built at approximately the same time that lack many amenities found in more recently constructed, multi-family structures.

The Comprehensive Plan and the East End Study address this goal.

Bolster the Image of the Community and Promote Hopkins As a Destination

Hopkins has many assets and unique qualities that set it apart from other communities. These assets include Mainstreet, the regional trail head, the Center for the Arts and small-town convenience. The perception of Hopkins outside of its boundaries varies with many people in the west metro and greater metro areas, who are unaware of its draw.

Businesses, civic groups and residents will benefit from an improved image and exposure. This can be accomplished through implementing the “Think Hopkins” marketing plan.

All comprehensive plan elements address this goal.

Maintain Fiscal Health and An Acceptable Balance Between Service Quality and Property Tax Rates

Residents and business people have traditionally supported this aim. Demonstrating responsibility in fiscal matters, while having obvious local benefits, would also aid the City in its public relations with prospective residents and business owners. The methods to maintain fiscal health and an acceptable balance among City service provided, quality of life and property tax rates are as follows:

- Pursuit of redevelopment, which adds to the tax base, should be continued.
- Efforts should be made to continue to foster stability and growth of existing businesses, while encouraging new businesses to locate in Hopkins.
- Investment in infrastructure should continue.

All comprehensive plan elements address this goal.

Influence Transportation

Transportation in the 21st century does not include just building and improving roads. The Southwest LRT is becoming more of a reality for Hopkins. The Alternative Analysis has been completed, and the environmental study is underway. The most optimistic date for construction of this line is 2015.

Since the last Comprehensive Plan update, Excelsior Boulevard has been improved with landscaped medians, signage, and lighting. Upkeep of this road is important for the image of Hopkins. The elements to influence transportation are as follows:

- Efforts among Hopkins, Minnetonka and Hennepin County should continue for the improvement of Shady Oak Road between Excelsior Boulevard and State Highway 7. This road is scheduled for upgrading in 2014.
- Efforts should be made to improve Blake Road from Excelsior

Boulevard to Highway 7. These improvements should include signage, special paving, landscaping, lighting and sidewalks.

- Efforts should continue to support the Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT).
- Three LRT stations are proposed for Hopkins. One at Shady Oak Road, a second at Eighth Avenue along Excelsior Boulevard and a third near Blake Road. Redevelopment around all three stations will occur. The Station Study supports these stations and the redevelopment around the stations.
- The link between Mainstreet and Excelsior Boulevard along Eighth Avenue from the regional trail (now) and proposed LRT station (future) should be improved.
- Efforts should be made in cooperation with the County to finish the improvement of Excelsior Boulevard from Blake Road to Meadowbrook Road.

All comprehensive plan elements address this goal.

Involve and Inform Residents, Employees and Business Owners

- Communication tools, including the newsletter, City website and e-newsletter should be expanded and improved.
- All residents and business owners, including those under-represented groups such as renters and new residents, should be encouraged to be engaged.

Protect and Enhance Green Space, Park Environments and Sustainability

- Our natural environmental assets should be protected.
- Green development should be encouraged. Work should continue on trail connections and updating parks. Developers should be encouraged to incorporate more green space in projects. Additional revenue sources to support this goal should be identified.

Strengths-Weaknesses- Opportunities-Threats

To properly frame a strategy for moving the community toward the future, it is important to understand its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. For the current update to the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission reviewed this information, incorporated components of the Hopkins Strategic Plan and made appropriate modifications. The community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were subsequently reviewed by the public during the preparation and review of the plan. The recommended updates are summarized below.

Strengths of Hopkins

Sense of Community

Hopkins exudes a sense of community that is found in few metropolitan area communities by virtue of its population size, geographic size, stable and cohesive residential areas, identifiable downtown retail and civic areas, community celebrations (notably the Raspberry Festival) and residents. The school district is geographically focused on Hopkins. A sense of pride and identity exists.

Identifiable Downtown

Downtown Hopkins is one of a small number of established central shopping districts in metropolitan area communities. It remains well-known and identifiable on a small scale and a focus of the community. Several private and public improvements have occurred in recent years, and a successful balance of land uses and business types has allowed it to remain stable in various market conditions.

Employment Base

Hopkins has a high number of jobs representing a wide variety of employment sectors for a community of its size.

Location

Hopkins is strategically located relative to the City of Minneapolis and other western suburbs.

Access

The City has excellent access via federal, state and county roadways, freight railroads, a trail system for both walking and biking, accessible sidewalks throughout the community, and the planned light-rail transit system. Hopkins is easy to access from outside and easy to navigate within.

Variety of Housing Types

Hopkins has a wide variety of housing for people in every stage of the life cycle and every income category.

Variety of Development Types

The community is composed of several types of housing, retail and service businesses, industry, and public and private recreational facilities.

Attractive Residential Neighborhoods

There are a number of distinct and identifiable residential neighborhoods defined by roadways, golf courses, parks and creeks.

Strong School District

The school district has a strong reputation and is a compelling reason to live in the City.

Good Municipal Service Delivery

Community opinion surveys have typically indicated a high level of satisfaction with the delivery of municipal services such as snowplowing, parks, police and fire protection and trash collection. Survey updates occur on a regular basis.

Excellent Community Facilities

Hopkins offers an excellent array of public facilities from parks to special uses. The Hopkins Center for the Arts, The Depot, Hopkins Activity Center, Third Lair Skate Park and the Hopkins Pavilion are other examples of facilities that meet the needs of residents as well as metropolitan area residents and visitors. The City's collaboration with the school district and the City of Minnetonka in the Lindbergh Center is an example of the City's ability to partner with adjacent communities to provide unique amenities to the public. Shady Oak Beach and Williston Fitness Center are also examples of collaborations with the City of Minnetonka.

Active Citizen Participation

Hopkins' government actively involves the people of the community. The City includes citizen participation in the establishment of policy and the assembly of specific plans. Examples include the assembly of the East End Study and the Shady Oak Road Corridor Plan. Citizens Academy offers citizens an opportunity to learn about the internal workings of City government.

A Tradition of Community Events

Hopkins gathers every year to celebrate the Raspberry Festival. This highly-successful event fosters a sense of community pride and enhances the image of the community. Other recurring community events include Music in the Park, Heritage Days, Farmers Market and Mainstreet Days.

Weaknesses of Hopkins

Aging Housing Stock

Most of the Hopkins housing stock was built prior to 1960 and some of it prior to 1930. The city has a significant number of small, post-war houses that lack many features and amenities that families and individuals desire in the contemporary market. As these structures age, their desirability may continue to decrease. Property owners may not be eager to reinvest in aging housing stock because their potential is limited by their size, floor plan, garage and lot area.

Downtown in Need of Continued Improvement

In recent years, downtown Hopkins has made great strides in re-establishing its sub-regional prominence as a commercial and entertainment center. To see continued improvement, downtown Hopkins will need to continue to promote a stable mixture of retail and service businesses, offices, government offices, entertainment and attached housing.

Major Roadway and Industrial Areas Divide the Residential Community

The community is divided by TH 169, Excelsior Boulevard (County Road 3), and TH 7. In addition, the industrial area along Excelsior Boulevard separates two major residential neighborhoods from the rest of the community.

Image of the Community In the Minds of Non-Residents

Non-residents have inconsistent and sometimes negative perceptions of the City.

Physical Appearance Along Certain Major Traffic Corridors

Excelsior Boulevard has been reconstructed from Shady Oak Road to Blake Road. The abutting land use on the north side of Excelsior Boulevard from the railroad tracks to Blake Road needs redevelopment. The redevelopment of this area is addressed in the East End Study. Shady Oak Road is also in need of widening and redevelopment. Because the areas abutting these corridors are the dominant images that many people have of the community, this impression takes away from the many positive aspects of the community.

Tax Base Constraints

Because the City is nearly fully developed, there is little opportunity to expand the tax base without redeveloping property.

Mainstreet Visibility

Mainstreet is not visible from major corridors.

Opportunities for Hopkins

Access Via Light-rail Transit

Three light-rail stations are planned to serve Hopkins. The three station sites are proposed in the areas of Shady Oak Road, Eighth Avenue and Blake Road. The rail line will pass through Hopkins roughly parallel to Excelsior Boulevard. In order to preserve future options, the Comprehensive Plan update will continue to plan for the proposed three stations. The light-rail system, at the earliest, is projected to be constructed in 2015. Light rail transit would bring many people into Hopkins daily and improve access not only from Hopkins to Minneapolis but also from Minneapolis (and other locations) to Hopkins.

A Resurgent Downtown

Downtown Hopkins has accomplished several changes in its economic structure, physical design and administrative organization and appears

ready to take the next steps toward revitalization. Destination shopping and continued marketing efforts should strengthen the Downtown's role in the region.

The Future of the Retired Landfill in Southwest Hopkins

The landfill is a large parcel of undeveloped land, but the expense of cleaning the contamination for re-use will be great. Re-purposing the site will require strategic partnerships with the MPCA and other funding agencies, which may require that the end use have some public good, such as "green" uses that create alternative energy.

Improvement of the Excelsior Boulevard/Shady Oak Road/Blake Corridors

The reconstruction of Shady Oak Road offers the City redevelopment opportunities along this corridor. This redevelopment also could offer a partnership with Minnetonka for redevelopment of properties on the south side of Excelsior Boulevard from Hopkins Tech Center to Shady Oak Road.

Capitalizing on Hopkins' Self-contained, Small-town Image

This image is, perhaps, Hopkins' strongest long-term asset and opportunity, as it is a characteristic of which few other communities can boast.

East End Redevelopment

The East End has the potential for redevelopment in the next 10 years. The East End Study is in place to guide the area, and the Comprehensive Plan will continue to plan for improvements in the Blake Road Corridor.

Growing Diverse Population

Hopkins has a growing diverse population. This population has the potential to bring new ideas, entrepreneurial spirit, and changing needs to the City.

Compact Size With Identifiable Neighborhoods

Hopkins has many unique and identifiable neighborhoods. This characteristic offers these neighborhoods the opportunity to organize and improve their sense of community and quality of life in Hopkins.

Unique Public Facilities That Are Under-utilized

The Depot, The Hopkins Center for the Arts and the Pavilion are unique public facilities. The Depot has formed a partnership with Three Rivers Park District, and has the opportunity to expand the services of the facility. The Hopkins Center for the Arts has recently been restructured in a way that will increase utilization. There is the potential for the Pavilion to add events during the year.

Large Corporate Presence Not Being Tapped

SuperValu, The Blake School, Walser Automotive, Hopkins Honda, and Cargill have a large corporate presence in Hopkins. The City has the opportunity to partner with these corporations to increase their contribution to the community.

Opportunity to Expose Natural Corridors

Minnehaha and Nine Mile Creek run through Hopkins. These creeks have the potential to be stronger amenities for the City through increased visibility and access.

Community Confidence

A recent survey indicated that residents have strong community confidence.

“Think Hopkins”

The marketing effort “Think Hopkins” is promoting a positive image of the City.

Improvement in Transit Use

Hopkins is fortunate to be served with adequate bus routes and transit stops, but there are opportunities to increase ridership through improved transit stops and access.

Threats to Hopkins

Industrial and Multi-family Building Obsolescence

A few of Hopkins’ industrial and multi-family sites are aging, have obsolete buildings and/or have physical site constraints such as contamination. These sites may need public financing to make redevelopment a possibility.

Consumer Retail Trends

Downtown Hopkins is experiencing steady improvement, but the threat remains that retail trends and market forces may negatively impact the business climate, leading to decline.

Demographic Changes

Desire for larger living space and modern amenities, coupled with a large post-WWII housing stock that can be cost-prohibitive to remodel, could contribute to a loss of families living in Hopkins. This loss of families, combined with decreasing average household size and an aging population, may negatively impact businesses, schools and the community as a whole.

Aging of Public Infrastructure

Hopkins is over 100 years of age, and most of its streets and sewer and water lines were constructed many decades ago. There is a need for continuing investment in infrastructure.

Light Rail Transit (LRT)

Although Hopkins is not proposed to be the end of the LRT line, the realities of federal funding may prohibit the line from extending into Minnetonka. The end of the line would require a larger park and ride facility and possibly the maintenance facility. These facilities are considered not the best use of Hopkins' valuable land.

