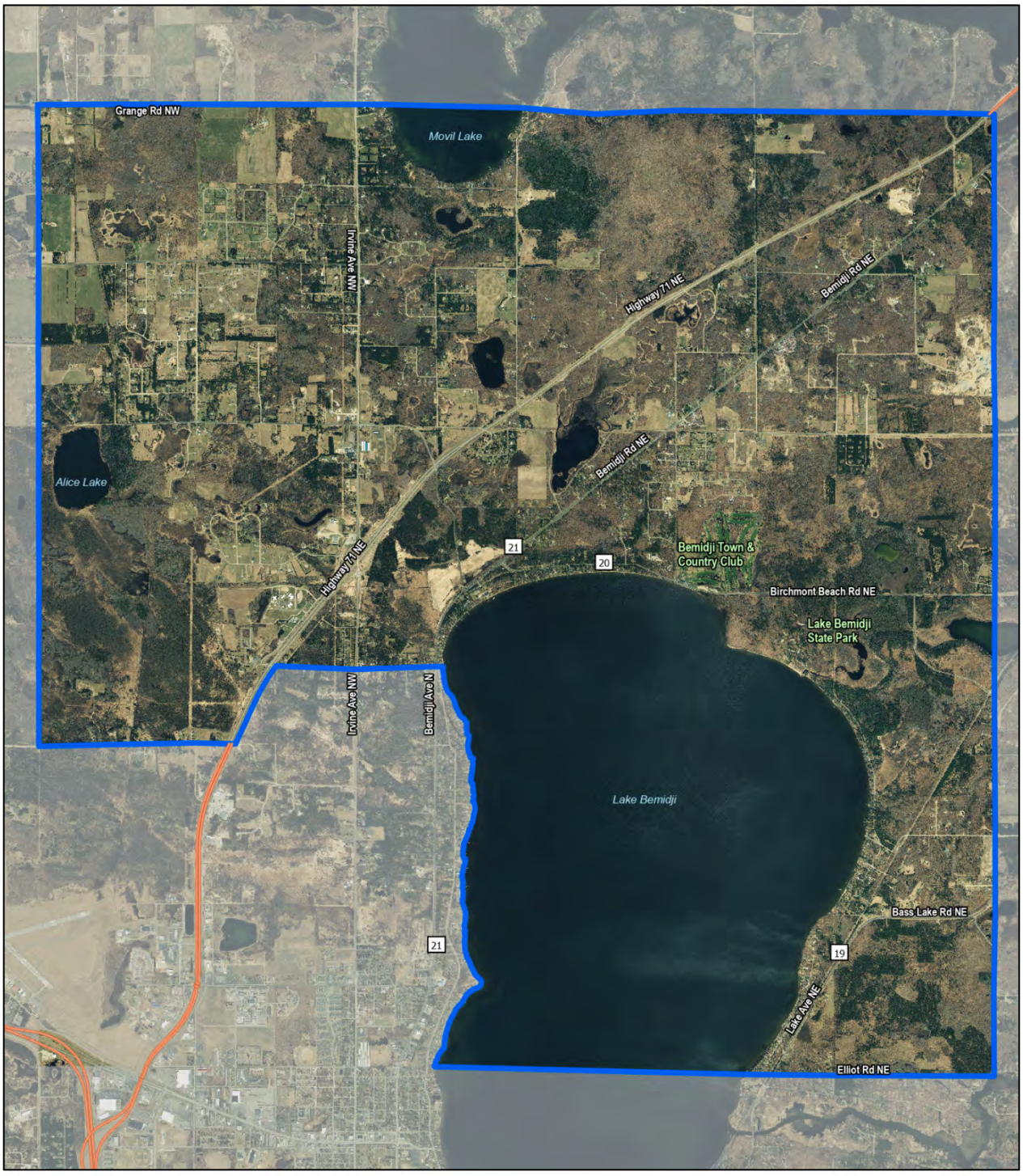
NORTHERN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Northern Twp Boundary

0 0.5 1 2 3 Miles

FREEBERG & GRUND
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NORTHERN TOWNSHIP
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

This document contains the Comprehensive Plan for Northern Township. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan for Northern Township is to provide:

- An essential legal basis for land use regulation, such as zoning growth control; and
- A picture of Northern Township's future by presenting a unified vision as a result from goals and objectives from Northern Township's citizens.

The Comprehensive Plan establishes specific goals and policies to fulfill its vision and will be crucial as challenges related to economic vitality, accessible housing, community safety, and environmental preservation affect the future character of Northern Township.

Authority to Plan

The power to create and employ a comprehensive plan comes from State Law. Minnesota Statutes (MINN. STAT.), Sections 462.351 to 462.364, contain the planning powers granted to Minnesota municipalities. Specifically, MINN. STAT., Section 462.353, Subd. 1 authorizes the municipality to "carry on comprehensive municipal planning activities for guiding the future development and improvement of the municipality and may prepare, adopt and amend a comprehensive municipal plan and implement such plan by ordinance or other office measure."

The comprehensive plan is the foundation on which regulatory tools, such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement programs are developed. Once in place, future development and redevelopment in a community should be evaluated on whether it is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Use of the Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan presents a vision for the future of Northern Township and a clear direction for community action. It is based on locally established visions, goals, and policies derived through public participation. The individual chapters outline in more specific terms the goals and policies to ensure Northern Township grows in a way that:

- supports the values of the community, enhances economic vitality;
- promotes maintenance and enhancement of existing neighborhoods and commercial districts
- provides quality housing for all ages, income levels and groups; and
- determines and reinforces approaches for protecting natural resources and open spaces.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a dynamic document used to:

- **Guide local officials and staff** to assist with development and infrastructure decisions, acquisition and use of land, budget capital improvements, and establish regulatory changes.
- **Guide residents, businesses, and property owners** to assist in determining property use, understanding possible land use changes in Northern Township, establish reasonable land value expectations, understand future infrastructure improvements, and make improvements and investments to their own properties.
- **Guide developers** in property acquisitions and coordination of development plans with the goals, policies, and regulations outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

As the foremost guide for community growth and development within Northern Township, the Comprehensive Plan influences many other decisions. It is intended to be a dynamic document that is regularly reviewed and updated.

Public Participation

The Northern Township Comprehensive Plan was originally created through a public participation process, in conjunction with the City of Bemidji for the purposes of shared planning and zoning throughout the Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board boundary, which has since been dissolved in 2023. The process was designed to offer a range of opportunities for the Northern Township community to provide input on issues, opportunities, and any concerns related to future planning. To that end, residents' ideas, thoughts, and opinions are considered throughout the planning process and development of this plan.

Since the initial start of the Comprehensive Plan in 2012, public input from citizens, subcommittees, township staff, and elected officials has been an integral part of the planning process. Topics were selected, in part, as a result of community discussions, comments from those community discussions, planning cases, a community survey, and a general understanding of Northern Township and the City of Bemidji. The topics selected were identified as the key challenges facing Northern Township.

In August of 2016, a Steering Committee was appointed to disseminate what had been gathered previously, guide the planning process and Comprehensive Plan development moving forward, and make recommendations. The work of this steering committee has been modified to present herein only that portion pertinent to Northern Township.

Throughout the course of the Comprehensive Plan development, the Steering Committee reviewed and updated Northern Township's vision, created goals and policies, reviewed and recommended chapter content, and developed implementation action items.

The Steering Committee sought public engagement through open houses, and a public meeting in November of 2018. The Steering Committee reviewed past goals and policies from several public input meetings and sub-committee meetings to better understand issues related to the Comprehensive Plan and to create a document of objectives and strategies that can be used to guide future growth and development. These goals, objectives, and strategies were developed and refined to create this document.

In 2023, dissolution of the GBAJPB was agreed upon by the two entities. This document was then first revised and updated to reflect Northern Township, as a standalone entity, at the time of the dissolution at the end of December 2023. In the fall of 2024 through early 2025, through a comprehensive review process involving the Township Board, Planning Commission, and a public hearing, Northern Township formally updated and approved the current Comprehensive Plan. This second revision ensures the plan aligns with the Township's independent planning and zoning authority, community goals, and ongoing development needs.



Photo Credit: Northern Township

Organization of the Comprehensive Plan

The Plan has been organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** introduces the comprehensive planning process and acknowledgements of those instrumental to its development.
- **Chapter 2: Values, Vision, and Present Day** provides the core values, vision, and mission of Northern Township with a snapshot of present day conditions.
- **Chapter 3: Community Overview** provides a summary of the social, economic, and physical features that are influencing land use and community development patterns at the time the Comprehensive Plan was developed.
- **Chapter 4: Land Use** describes Northern Township's desires for future land use and development patterns. This chapter establishes objectives and strategies related to growth, land use, redevelopment, development trends, and economic growth/development.
- **Chapter 5: Community Facilities & Services** describes existing and future community needs to accommodate demand for new services. Community facilities consist of the structures, infrastructure, facilities, and services administered by the public and semi-public organizations that provide for the day-to-day functions of Northern Township.
- **Chapter 6: Housing** provides a summary of existing housing characteristics, promotes increased housing availability and affordability, promotes maintenance and enhancement of existing neighborhoods, and provides objectives and strategies for future development relative to needs and demand.

- **Chapter 7: Transportation** describes the current transportation network, including the trail system; evaluates current and future transportation needs; and provides objectives and strategies for attaining Northern Township's transportation vision.
- **Chapter 8: Active & Healthy Community** summarizes current park and recreation facilities and identifies objectives and strategies to expand and improve the system in Northern Township to provide a wide range of recreational activities for people of all ages and interests.
- **Chapter 9: Natural Resources** identify areas of high environmental and natural resource value. These features will often influence what kind of adjacent land use may occur and the intensity of any given use.
- **Chapter 10: Implementation** provides guidance and direction to ensure programs, objectives, and strategies addressed within the Comprehensive Plan are carried out by the decisions that Northern Township staff make daily.

Introduction

Northern Township is proud of its unique character and cultural assets. This section will explore the community's cultural assets.



Photo credit:
Tony Webster from Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States

Core Values

The following values are important to residents of Northern Township, and, along with the Comprehensive Plan, provide a guide for developing implementation strategies:

Northern Township is a community that values its culturally rich history;

Maintaining and enhancing our **northwoods character** is vital to preserving our unique sense of place as the community prepares for growth;

Northern Township will promote **opportunities** for quality housing, transportation, employment, leisure, and lifestyle choice for all residents;

Natural Resources are invaluable, so Northern Township will promote **resource conservation** efforts to make sure these resources will be used in a way that they remain healthy for future generations;

There will be **equity** in planning; the distribution of resources, the improvement and expansion of infrastructure, and the decision-making process will be fair and just for all residents;

As we look to the future, **respect** of our culture and history, respect for our opportunities, respect for our challenges, and respect for all residents of Northern Township will be imperative as we prepare for growth;

The improvement of overall **health and wellness** of Northern Township residents, through direct initiatives and strategic partnerships, will be a top priority, the improvement of physical health and mental well-being of all residents will ensure a vibrant and healthy community; and

Sustainability will be a continuous and ongoing endeavor as the community expands. This includes promoting healthy economic development, ensuring fair land use decisions for all, and enhancing the overall wellness of our people and environment to ensure future generations receive equal or better opportunities for success.

Vision

The vision of Northern Township is to be "A Model for Resiliency—Upholding Our Northwoods Character—With Respect for our Citizens and Environment."

Mission

The mission of Northern Township is "Responsible Growth with Northwoods Character, preserving our history and providing diverse opportunities for success."



Photo credit: Trip Advisor

Sustainability and Smart Growth

This plan has been developed with sustainability and smart growth in mind. One of the most often quoted definitions of sustainability is from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

As Northern Township is anticipated to continue to grow into the future, it is imperative that this plan identifies how the community wishes to grow.



Photo credit: Pixabay

Present Day Northern Township Strengths

Northern Township is a place people are proud to call home due to its unique and vibrant community as well as the following strengths:

- The area has a strong entrepreneurial culture that continues to grow.
- The area is a place of opportunity for those looking for a northwoods lifestyle.
- There are numerous state and federal agencies located within the area as well as offices for all Beltrami County services.
- There is an abundance of parks, including Lake Bemidji State Park on the north shore of Lake Bemidji.
- The area is home to the fourth busiest airport in the State of Minnesota.



Photo credit: Bemidji Pioneer

Present-Day Northern Township Challenges

- Providing adequate public infrastructure.
- Recognizing and managing fiscal responsibility through times of growth and change in a manner that is fair and equitable throughout the township.
- Facilitating business growth.
- Transition into consistency within current zoning districts
- Promote the revitalization and maintenance of properties and various uses that require improvement to enhance the overall appearance, safety, and livability of the community.
- Preserving Township boundaries and tax base
- Encouraging development while maintaining rural character and Northwoods identity
- Balancing ordinances needed for orderly growth without unnecessary infringement on private property rights.

Introduction

This section of the Comprehensive Plan includes information and data that provide a foundation for understanding the current conditions within the Northern Township community. Specifically, the overview discusses the community's location, history, and demography.

Location

Northern Township is in north central Minnesota and covers roughly 22.7-square miles of geographical area (see **Figure 1)**.

Figure 1: Location Maps

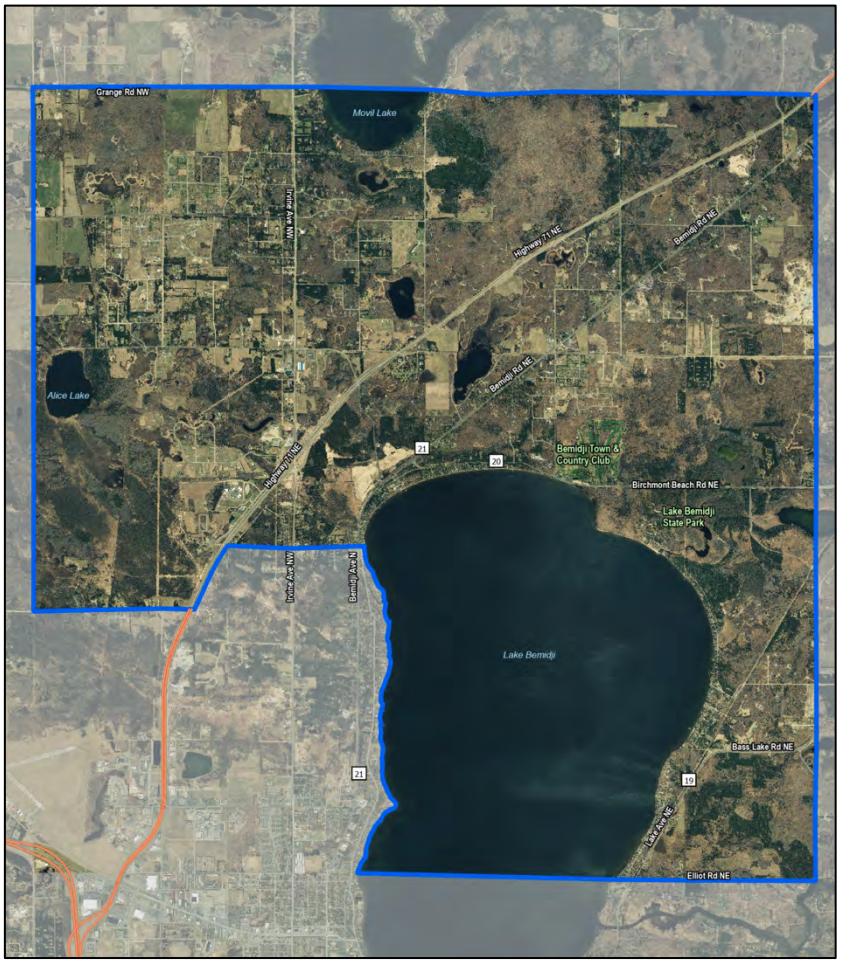


Photo Credit: Freeberg & Grund 2023

History of Northern Township

Northern Township was settled by ancestors of the Dakota Native Americans, Ojibwe Native Americans, Euro-Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic groups that sought to live in this wonderful place. This rich cultural diversity has helped shape Northern Township into what is it today.

How did it start?

Native Americans were the first settlers of the area.
In the 1700's the Ojibwe people migrated westward, forcing the Dakota people to move west and south of Northern Township. By the end of the 1700's, the Ojibwe people were established in Northern Township. During this same time, early American settlers migrated into Northern Township to capitalize on the fur trade. The Ojibwe people played a role in this movement, trading fur, food, and other amenities.

In Comes the Railroad, Logging and Sawmills, and Great Depression

By 1900, the railroad served by the Minnesota and International Railroad Company connected the area to Brainerd and Minneapolis. By 1910, the Soo Line connected the area to Duluth. By 1915, five different railroad companies were shipping goods to and from the area.

Opportunities for the logging industry was created in the northern region of Minnesota with the advent of railroads. John Pillsbury, the cofounder of the Pillsbury Company and eighth Governor of Minnesota, owned many large white pine stands in the area. In 1903, Crookston Sawmill #1 was built by Thomas Shevlin and Elbert Carpenter, and by 1910 it was labeled the second largest sawmill in the nation. The Crookston Lumber Company had thirteen logging camps in the area supplying the sawmill. The end of the logging era in the area slowed throughout the 1910's and ended in the 1920's due to a series of sawmill fires and the area being nearly logged out.

Beginning in 1929 and into the late 1930's, the United States was affected by the Great Depression. During this time, the American economy failed forcing millions of people into unemployment. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC),

a work relief program as part of the New Deal, put millions of young men to work over a nine-year period. Northern Township benefitted from the CCC with thousands of young men employed to replant and build the infrastructure for the national forests we have today. This program was a big step in pulling Northern Township out of the Great Depression because local businesses thrived off the influx of employees providing goods and services.



Photo Credit: Minnesota Historical Society

Historic Renovation

Beltrami County Historical Society

The Beltrami County Historical Society (BCHS) was founded in 1952. The mission of the Beltrami County Historical Society is to provide connections to county history through public archives, collections, interpretive exhibits, and programs that educate, invite dialogue, and inspire self-reflection. The National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. **Table 1** shows NHRP within Northern Township.

Table 1: National Register of Historic Places—Northern Township

Name	Lake Bemidji State Park CCC/NYA/Rustic Style Historic Resources
Nation Register Information System ID	89001674
Year added to the Registry	October 25, 1989
Location	Off Co. Hwy. 20 NE of Bemidji
Historic Significance	Entertainment/Recreation/ Politics/Government/ Architecture
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Multiple
Architectural Style	Other
Period of Significance	1925-1949
Owner	Public-State
Historic Function	State Park
Current Function	State Park

Events and Activities

The area contributes over 400 lakes within a 25-mile radius as a year-round destination for fishing.

Outdoor activities available in the area are as diverse as its seasons. The area is recognized for the available facilities, trails, and parks as well as its focus on encouraging active living and promoting numerous activities of physical recreation for all ages and interests, including:

- Biking
- Walking and hiking
- Bird watching
- ATV/OHV
- Skateboarding
- Disc golf
- Golf
- Hunting/Fishing
- BSU Outdoor Program Center (OPC)
- Water Sports
- Downhill skiing and Snowboarding
- Snowmobiling
- Snow Tubing
- Ice Fishing
- Snowshoeing
- Winter biking
- Cross country skiing
- Ice skating
- Hockey

The following is a sample of facilities, activities, and parklands within the area:

- Lake Bemidji State Park offers recreational activities year-round, including swimming, boating, fishing, birdwatching, hiking, camping, biking, picnicking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and year-round naturalist-led activities.
- Movil Maze, County and State Lands, hunting, fishing, trail networks, restaurants and beaches abound, proving physical and recreational activities, year-around.
- The Paul Bunyan State Trail is the longest paved trail in the United States, which is 115 miles long, connecting many communities including Bemidji, Brainerd, Park Rapids, and Cass Lake. This trail offers multiple opportunities for biking, walking, and snowmobiling.



Photo Credit: Bemidji Pioneer

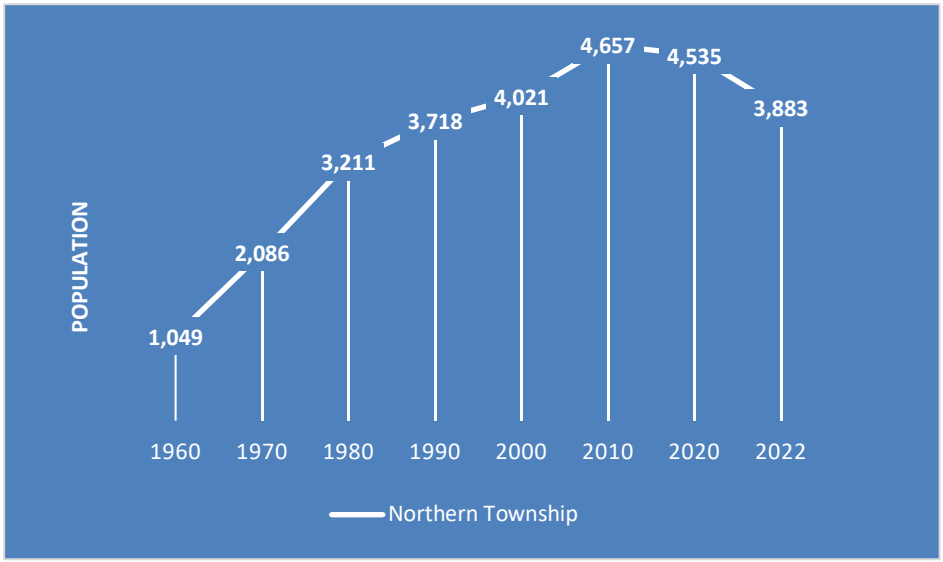
Demographics

A study of demographics is included in the Comprehensive Plan and provides information as to whether a community is growing, identifies the range of age and gender status of the population, and identifies trends that can help a community plan for its future. Income, as well as workforce statistics, were identified in development of the Comprehensive Plan, breaking down education attainment, labor force, commuting, and employment by industry.

Northern Township Population Growth

Northern Township has experienced steady and managed growth over the past century. Since 1980, Northern Township has experienced steady growth. According to the 2010 census, the population for Northern Township was 4,657, increasing by 15.8% since 2000. **Chart 1** breaks down the population per decade for Northern Township. Note, there were 3 rounds of annexation of Northern Township properties into the City of Bemidji starting in 2010. This is the reason for the 16.6% decrease in population from 2010 to 2022.

Chart 1: Population of Northern Township, 1960-2022



Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, Minnesota State Demographic Center 2022)

Chart 1: Population of Northern Township Area, 1960-2015

Population Growth Comparison

Table 2 compares population trends of Northern Township to Beltrami County, the State of Minnesota and the United States. Northern Township experienced a growth increase of 15.8% between 2000-2010. The growth rate increase of Northern Township is higher than the growth increase of Beltrami County for these time frames. Conversely, the State of Minnesota's population increase of 7.8% between 2000 and 2010 is substantially less. Between 2010-2020 Northern Township experienced a 2.6% decline due to annexation.

Table 2: Northern Township, County, and State Population Comparison, 2000-2020

	2000	2010	2000-2010		2020	2010-2020	
			Change	% Change		Change	% Change
Northern Township	4,021	4,657	636	15.8%	4,535	(122)	(2.6%)
Beltrami County	39,650	44,442	4,792	12.1%	46,228	1,786	4.0%
Minnesota	4,919,479	5,303,925	384,446	7.8%	5,706,494	352,569	6.6%
United States	281,421,906	308,745,538	27,323,632	8.8%	331,449,281	22,703,743	7.4%

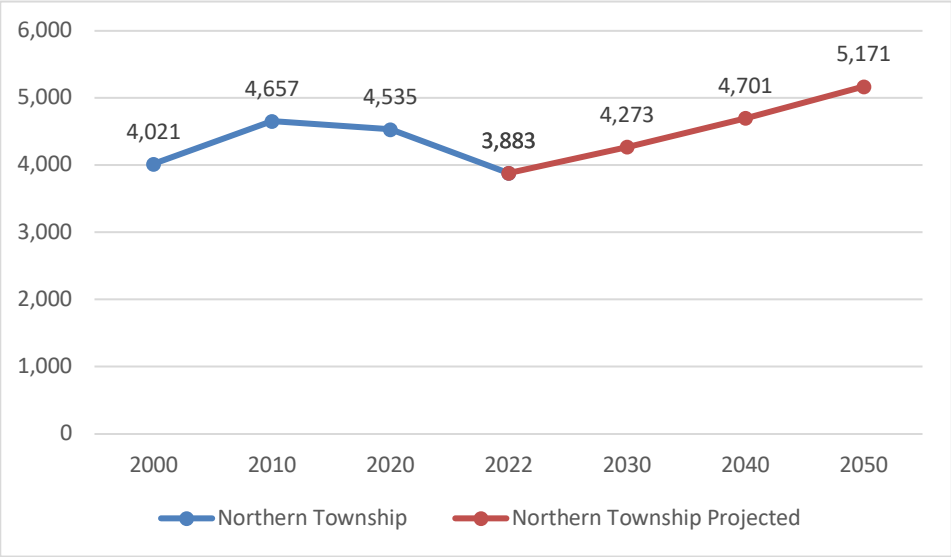
Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2020); (Minnesota State Demographic Center)

Population Projections

Population projection statistics can be impacted by several factors, including culture, infant mortality, quality of health care, life expectancy, and more. Future populations can be predicted through several methods that may or may not take these components into account.

Chart 2 illustrates population projection for the years 2030, 2040, and 2050. Between 2010 and 2022 there was a decrease in population primarily due to annexation by the City of Bemidji. The simple compound growth rate calculates a conservative population growth estimate for Northern Township.

Chart 2: Population Projections, Northern Township



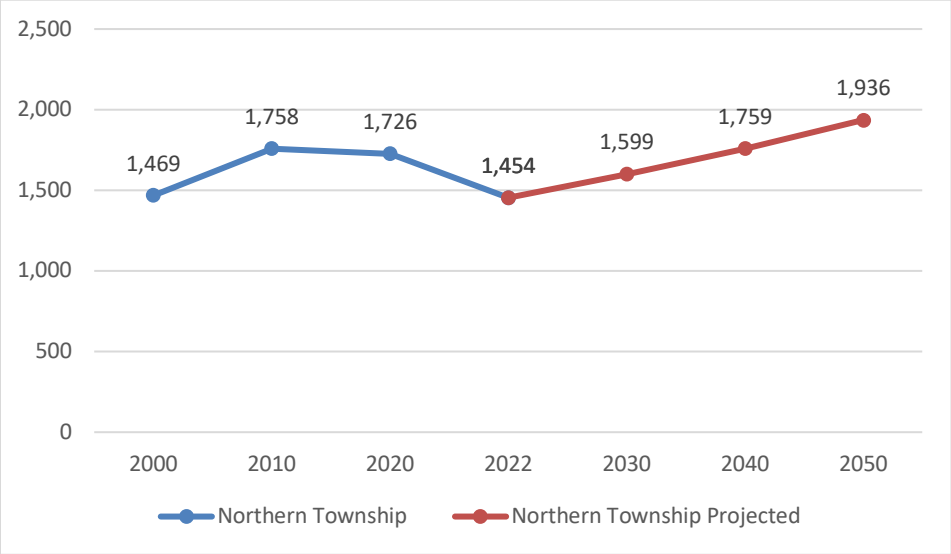
Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, Minnesota State Demographic Center 2022)

Household Projections

Household projection statistics can be impacted by several factors, including culture, infant mortality, quality of health care, life expectancy, and more. Future household projections can be predicted through several methods that may or may not take these components into account.

Chart 3 illustrates household projection for the years 2030, 2040, and 2050. Between 2010 and 2022 there was a decrease in households primarily due to annexation by the City of Bemidji. The simple compound growth rate calculates a conservative household projection estimate for Northern Township.

Chart 3: Household Projections, Northern Township



Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, Minnesota State Demographic Center 2022)

Income, Education, and Employment

Economic and educational statistics provide key insights into the characteristics of Northern Township's population. These factors influence local economic development, workforce readiness, and community planning efforts.

Table 3 compares Northern Township's median household income, educational attainment, and employment rate to Beltrami County and the State of Minnesota. The Township has a significantly higher median household income and percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to both the county and state. However, its employment rate falls slightly below the state average but remains higher than the county's. These figures highlight Northern Township's relatively affluent and well-educated population while indicating potential workforce dynamics.

Table 3: Northern Township income, education, and employment comparison, 2000-2020

	Median Household Income	% of Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Employment Rate
Northern Township	$98,049	59.8%	63.0%
Beltrami County	$55,910	30.4%	59.6%
Minnesota	$77,720	38.9%	65.0%

Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2020); (Minnesota State Demographic Center)

Introduction

This section examines the existing land use patterns and proposes a future land use scenario for Northern Township. A primary purpose of land use planning is to protect existing conforming properties and future development from incompatible uses. This protection benefits residents, landowners, developers, and investors alike.



Photo credit: S&J Development

The principles and standards for implementing the Future Land Use Plan will need to be specifically defined in the Northern Township's land use plan as well as in the zoning and subdivision regulations. Land development regulations are the foremost means of implementing the guidelines in this comprehensive plan and controlling land use in Northern Township.

Current Land Use

The current land use in Northern Township reflects past development decisions and tells the story of the area's development history and trends. The planning process helps ensure coordinated land use decisions enhance the overall quality of life of Northern Township by mitigating the impacts of undesirable uses next to neighborhoods. This process begins with examining the types and locations of existing land uses within Northern Township and determining how and where new growth and development may best be accommodated.

An assessment of the current land use in the area was performed at the beginning of this comprehensive plan study to identify existing development patterns. **Table 4** and **Chart 8** break down the total land use acreage within the area.

Table 4: Land Use Acreage as of 2017

Land Use Type	Percent
Single-Family Residential	38.1%
Multi-Family Residential	0.3%
Manufactured Home	0.2%
Residential Unimproved	4.0%
Commercial	3.6%
Public/Open Space	36.0%
Agricultural	10.8%
Rural Vacant Land	7.0%
Total Acreage	**100%**

Source: MN Department of Revenue (Classification Rates for Assessment Year 2024), Freeberg & Grund 2023

Residential

Residential use is the predominant land use in Northern Township, accounting for 42.6% of the total land area. Residential uses are classified into the following categories:

- Single-Family Residential (38.1%)
- Multi-Family Residential (0.3%)
- Manufactured Homes (0.2%)
- Residential Unimproved (4.0%)

Existing residential uses have been mapped according to the number of residences on a property. Single-family residential is based on primarily one home per parcel. Multi- family residential includes multiple units per parcel such as townhomes, apartments, condominiums, etc.

Commercial

Commercial land use makes up 3.6% of the total land area in the area. Commercial land uses offer a wide variety of goods and services and are primarily located along major transportation corridors, which serve both regional and community needs.

Public/Open Space

Public/Open Space is land owned by the township or county for public use, town hall, or other governmental centers. Open Space applies to permanent open space intended for recreational or resource conservation uses. Included are neighborhood, community, and regional parks. This category also includes parks & rec/forestry/protected open space and quasi-public uses such as the hospital, schools, churches, cemeteries, and other publicly owned social service providers. Public/Open Space makes up 36.0% of the total land area in Northern Township.



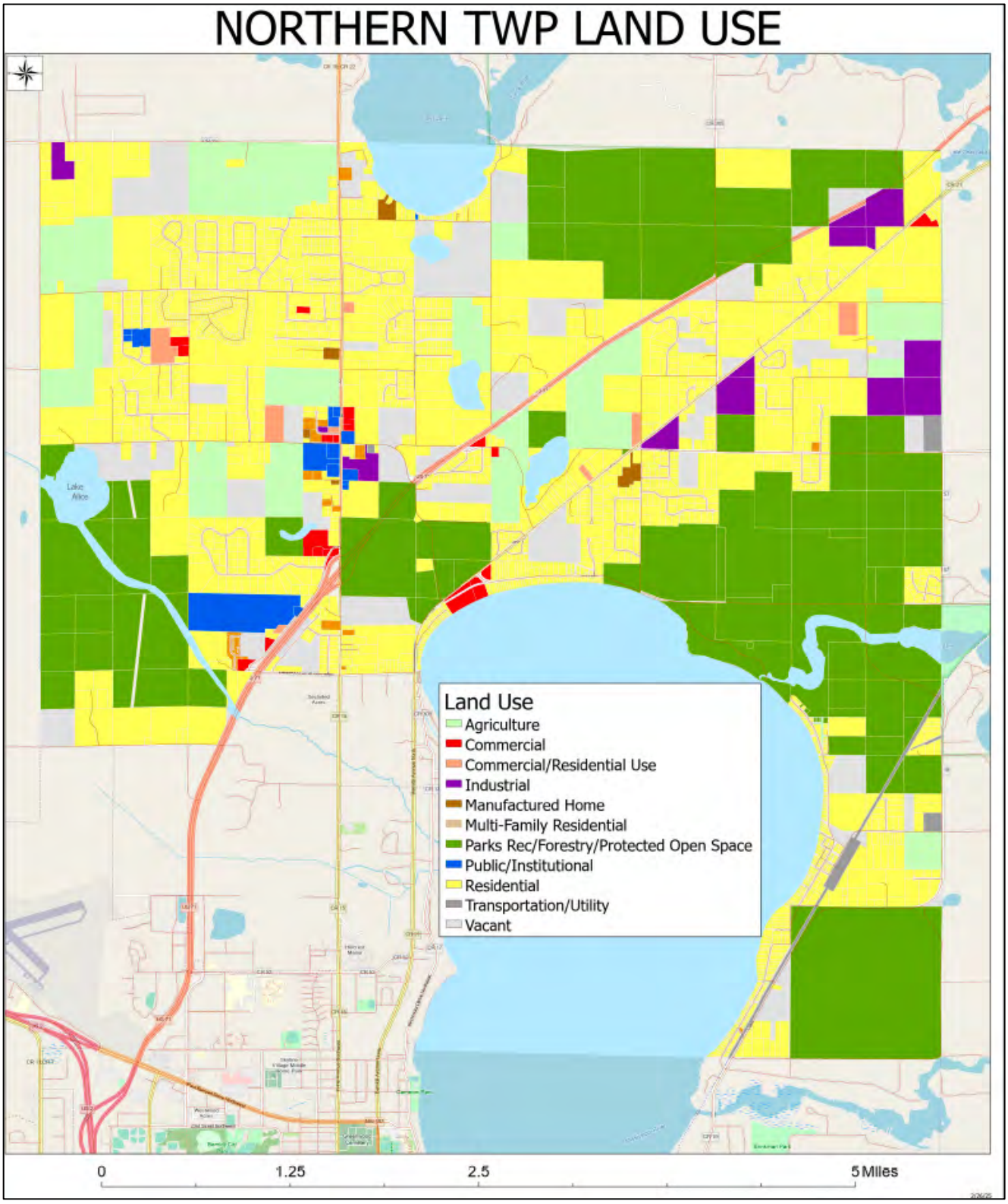
Photo Credit: Ruttger's Birchmont Lodge Facebook

Agricultural

Agricultural land is used for farming, dairying, pasturage, horticulture, forestry, animal and poultry husbandry, and the necessary accessory uses for treating and storing produce. Agricultural land in Northern Township covers roughly 10.8% of the region.

Rural Vacant Land

Rural vacant land is developable areas that are not currently developed. Roughly 7.0% of the land in Northern Township is undeveloped or classified as vacant.



Source: Freeberg & Grund 2024

Zoning

Figure 3 illustrates the current arrangement of zoning districts. An approximate statistical breakdown of the amount and proportion of land zoned for various uses is provided in the following table. **Table 5** provides a description of all zoning districts.

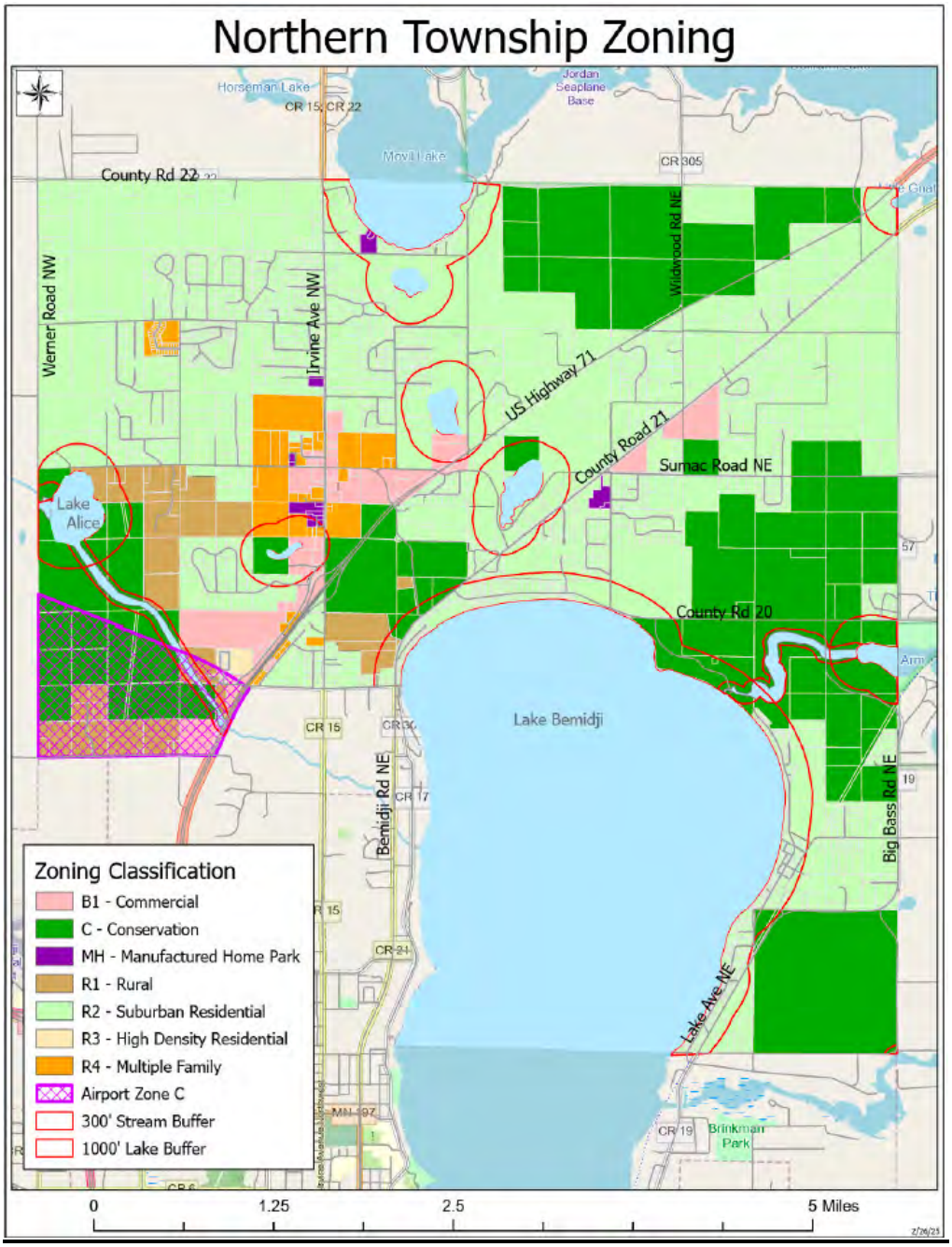


Figure 3: Northern Township Zoning Map

Source: Freeberg & Grund 2024

Table 5: Zoning Classifications & Acres

Zone	Description	% of Zoned Land	Acres
C	Conservation	31.8	4,690
R-1	Rural	4.9	715
R-2	Suburban Residential	56.1	8,261
R-3	High Density Residential	0.2	30
R-4	Multiple Family	2.8	419
MH	Manufactured Housing Park	0.4	55
B-1	Commercial	3.8	559
Total		**100**	**14,729**

Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

Zoning Districts

Zoning districts are created to promote orderly land development within Northern Township, including the shoreland of its public waters. Northern Township is divided into the following zoning districts:

- **Commercial (B-1)**

Provide areas for the placement of commercial establishments, including service, retail, and wholesale providers as well as uses complimentary to such uses in areas where central services are not available.

- **Conservation (C)**

Provide areas of low intensity uses and development in order to preserve wildlife habitat and protect sensitive natural resources.

- **Manufactured Home Park (MH)**

Provide areas for the placement of manufactured homes in an approved manufactured home park.

- **Rural (R-1)**

Provide areas of low-density development and low-intensity uses to preserve a predominantly rural residential character.

- **Suburban Residential (R-2)**

Provide areas for suburban residential development and other compatible uses at a density that will encourage the provision of centralized sewer or water services.

- **High Density Residential (R-3)**

Provide areas for residential development and compatible uses at a density that promotes an efficient delivery of central services.

- **Multiple Family (R-4)**

Provide areas for multiple family residential development and compatible uses in both urban and suburban settings.

Overlay District

- **Shoreland Overlay (SH)**

The Shoreland Overlay District will overlay zoning districts established by Northern Township so that any parcel of land located within shoreland will also lie in an established zoning district.

- **Airport Protection Overlay (AP)**

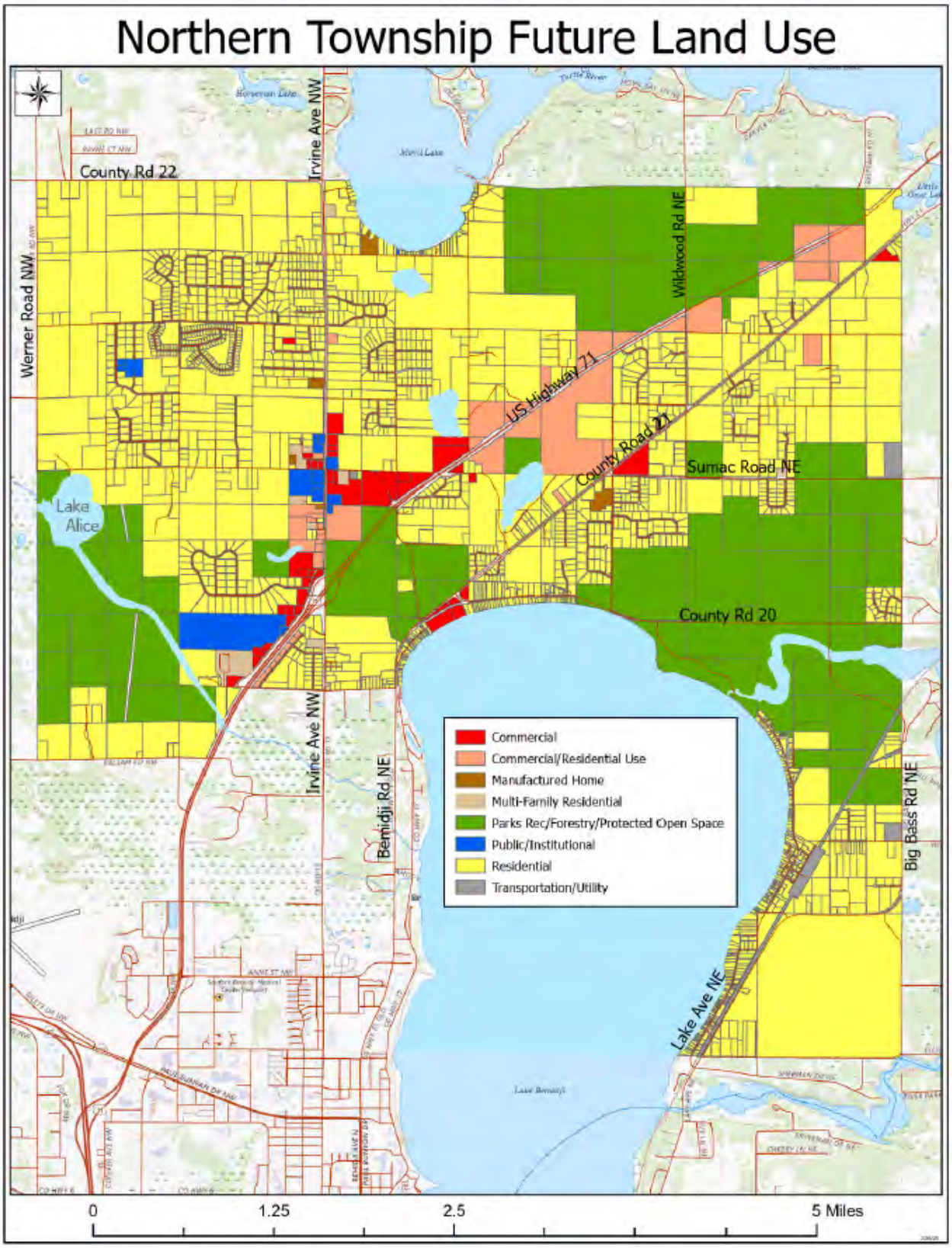
Protects the character of airport operations, airport safety, and development in the airport safety zones at the ends of the runways.



Photo credit: Northern Township

Future Land Use

Figure 4: Future Land Use Map is a guide for Northern Township's zoning ordinance and map, which is the official regulating document for land use. The land use map should be used in conjunction with the policies from this chapter. Northern Township has developed the Future Land Use Map to guide decisions regarding future growth and development. The property owner can initiate any land use changes, although Northern Township has the ability to rezone properties on the land use map to rezone properties as appropriate as the part of a zoning ordinance update.



Source: Freeberg & Grund 2024

Land Use Strengths

It is important to identify the current land use strengths of Northern Township to ensure that future land use decisions are building on these strengths and not hindering them. Current land use strengths include:

- Recent history demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving open space and sensitive landscapes.
- Sense of place and uniqueness built around the shores of Lake Bemidji and Northwoods character of other areas of Northern Township.
- Increase in residential subdivision development in rural areas.



Photo Credit: Bemidji Pioneer

Land Use Challenges

- Surface water and wetlands comprise approximately 36% of land area within Northern Township.
- Lack of defined spaces for commercial use.
- Several neighborhoods with legally non-conforming lots.

Land Use Objectives & Strategies

Objective 4.1: Preserve the Quality Residential Neighborhoods

Thriving neighborhoods are important to a growing community as well as ensuring that existing neighborhoods continue to evolve in a manner that supports the community's needs and overall well-being. It is also important to allow existing non-conforming residential areas to be redeveloped.

1. **Review and update the land use ordinances and zoning map on a regular basis.** It is important to review current land use patterns to ensure neighborhoods are being preserved. It is anticipated that multi-family and commercial development will continue to increase. It is imperative to ensure this increase will not impact existing neighborhoods with increases in traffic, noise, or other factors associated with intensified development.
2. **Promote "mixed-use" areas to improve the transition of residential land use to other land uses.** Mixed-use areas can provide an excellent transition from residential areas to commercial or highly developed areas. Gradually intensifying the uses on the fringe of neighborhoods or along high-traffic corridors that have been traditionally residential will mitigate impact to existing neighborhoods.
3. **Identify specific redevelopment opportunities and promote revitalization while maintaining character.** Mapping of existing neighborhoods can provide a clearer boundary to ensure preservation.
4. **Allow flexibility with site design standards to ensure high-quality development.** Allowing for greater flexibility of zoning ordinances or density requirements for meeting site development criteria, such as increased live landscaping, stormwater retention areas, active recreation amenities, or park area, can provide a benefit to developers while

ensuring a high-quality neighborhood is being designed or redeveloped.

5. **Promote pedestrian-scale designs to increase sense of place and improve active transportation in new developments or redevelopments.** It is important to ensure high-density residential areas are designed with active transportation in mind, where applicable. Pedestrian-scale design of roadways and buildings can allow for a safe and inviting walkable environment.



Photo Credit: Northern Township

Objective 4.2: Preserve and Promote Commercial or In-Fill Development Where Appropriate

Land use planning can preserve existing developed areas and ensure land is available as well as compatible for increased development.

1. **Promote flexibility for commercial redevelopment and encourage in-fill development.** Allowing for in-fill development and redevelopment of existing commercial areas will ensure the current commercial areas remain vibrant.
2. **Identify areas where commercial uses should be located, specifically adjacent to highways with controlled access where noise, odor, dust, and glare will have minimal impact.** When reviewing new commercial land uses, ensuring these areas are appropriate and compatible with opportunity to be successful.

3. **Utilize overlay zoning districts to address emerging issues.** The creation of overlay districts can allow for increased zoning restrictions or flexibility in areas that are suitable for development or redevelopment. Allowing for a decrease in zoning regulation can ensure in-fill development in already developed areas, while increasing regulation can ensure that already developed areas remain healthy.

Objective 4.3: Promote Land Use Decisions that Protect the Natural Environment through Smart Growth and Sustainable Practices

When reviewing increases of land uses through subdivisions or large-scale commercial developments, resource conservation measures and sustainable land use practices will be reviewed.

1. **Utilize guidelines for land use practices conserving natural landscapes and allow zoning flexibility for implementation.** Zoning flexibility can be initiated for development to ensure protection and conservation of natural landscapes on a site such as bluffs, steep slopes, trees, or wetlands, lakes, and streams.
2. **Preserve existing natural habitat connections.** Preserve the existing natural habitat and large wetland complex within its boundaries to ensure native habitat for animals and an ample amount of open space exists.
3. **Use natural hazard and wildfire risk assessment information to make informed land use decisions.** To continue to protect the health of the area, risk to the public and properties from natural hazards will be taken into consideration when making land use decisions.

Objective 4.4: Protecting Water Quality on Lake Bemidji and the Mississippi River

Ensuring the health of Lake Bemidji and the Mississippi River is vital for the environmental sustainability, recreational opportunities, and quality of life within Northern Township. The township is committed to implementing measures that prevent water contamination and preserve water quality for future generations.

1. **Introduce and promote the benefits of the new wastewater treatment plant.** The construction of the new enclosed mechanical wastewater treatment plant represents a significant step forward in protecting the area's water quality. This state-of-the-art facility will treat wastewater to a much higher standard than individual septic systems, significantly reducing nutrient runoff, contaminants, and pathogens entering local water bodies. This addresses key environmental concerns like nuisance algae blooms and preserves aquatic habitats.

2. **Enhance land use practices that protect water resources.** Development near sensitive water areas, such as shorelands or wetlands, will incorporate zoning flexibility to prevent harmful runoff. The township will prioritize best practices for stormwater management, including rain gardens, retention basins, and buffer zones, in new developments.

3. **Monitor and assess water quality.** As part of the wastewater project, groundwater monitoring will be conducted at the treatment site to ensure there are no adverse impacts to local aquifers. The township will also evaluate the facility's performance to confirm that treated wastewater meets or exceeds the established environmental standards.

Introduction

Community facilities and services are the buildings, land, and programs that provide desired and essential services to the public, such as parks, schools, police and fire protection, and health care facilities.

Northern Township, along with private and nonprofit community agencies, maintains several community facilities for residents.

Township Services

Northern Township provides a higher level of administrative services than most townships, with a full-time Administrator, Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Treasurer, Planning Commission, and Road Supervisor. The Township also operates a Town Hall and Land Use Office with regular business hours, ensuring accessible services for residents and efficient local governance.

Township Hall

Northern Township Hall

Northern Township Hall is located along Town Hall Rd NW just off Irvine Ave NW. (call 218-751-4989). Northern Township currently employs



Photo: Northern Town Hall



Photo: Fire Station #4

Fire Department

Northern Township is part of the Bemidji Area Rural Fire Association, consisting of 18 local government units, that contracts with Bemidji Fire Department through a mutual agreement. The Bemidji Area Fire Department is made up of full-time and paid on-call fire fighters serving the area. Full-time staff are members of the International Association of Firefighters Union, Local #2302, and work a nationally recognized 24-hour shift schedule. The Bemidji Area Fire Department has four locations, including fire station #4 that is located in Northern Township.

The Bemidji Area Fire Department serves an estimated permanent population of 48,000 residents. Seasonal increases show an estimated 65,000 residents (statisticalatlas.com).

The fire department provides these services:

- Fire Suppression/Rescue
- Fire Prevention/Education
- Fire Code Inspection and Enforcement
- Vehicle Rescue/Extrication
- Basic Life Support/Emergency Medical Services
- Water and Ice Rescue
- Confined Space Rescue
- Hazardous Material Operations
- CPR and First Aid Instruction
- Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting
- Rope Rescue
- Trench Rescue
- Structural Collapse Rescue
- Wildfire Mitigation

Law Enforcement

The Beltrami County Sheriff's Department is in the Law Enforcement Center located at 613 Minnesota Avenue NW. The Sheriff's Department is responsible for patrolling roughly 3,000 square miles in Beltrami County and protecting over 43,000 county residents.



Photo credit: Beltrami County

Health Care Services

The Area prides itself on having an excellent health care system. Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is the largest hospital in the region, with educational services, health care, and social assistance. Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is also a one of the largest employers within the

Area. Currently, Sanford Health employs more than 1,500 staff members, 130 physicians/advanced practice providers, and 500 volunteers. It is projected that more than 6,500 people are admitted to the hospital each year. It is important for any growing community to demonstrate an excellence in health care opportunities.



Photo credit: Sanford Health

The Area also has many healthcare clinics, as well as dental, eye care, and chiropractic offices.

There are numerous existing mental health centers and continue to expand.

Schools

Bemidji State University

Bemidji State University (BSU), originally known as Bemidji Normal School, began its first school year in 1919 with approximately 38 students. By 1921, Bemidji Normal School became Bemidji State Teachers College and started offering four-year degrees. In 1957, the school was renamed Bemidji State College, in 1975 it was renamed Bemidji State University. BSU now hosts more than 5,300 undergraduates and graduate students annually.



Northwest Technical College

In 1965, Northwest Technical College (NTC), then known as Bemidji Area Vocational Technical Institute, began serving as a two-year college with two programs, carpentry, and automotive mechanic. Over the past 50 years, the college has grown by including several new programs and increasing its enrollment. NTC now houses more than 1,600 students annually.



Photo credit: Greater Bemidji

Independent School District 31

Independent School District 31 is one of the largest school districts in Minnesota. Independent School District 31 serves Northern Township, the City of Bemidji, other communities, and rural areas. Students include those from the cities of Solway, Tenstrike, Becida, Turtle River, Wilton, Puposky, and portions of Cass Lake. The following Area Schools are part of the Independent School District 31 located in the Area:

- J.W. Smith Elementary
- Lincoln Elementary
- **Northern Elementary**
- Horace May Elementary
- Gene Dillon Elementary
- Paul Bunyan Center
- Solway Elementary
- Bemidji Middle School
- Bemidji High School
- Lumberjack High School (ALC)
- Bemidji Alternative Education Center (AEC)
- Bemidji BYLaW
- First City School (NMJC)
- Oshki Manidoo Center

Public Charter Schools

The following charter schools are located in the Area:

- Trek North Charter High School
- Voyageurs Expeditionary High School
- Schoolcraft



Photo credit: Lakeland PBS

Private Schools

The following private schools are located in the Area:

- Bemidji Baptist Christian School
- Heartland Christian Academy
- St. Mark's Lutheran School
- St. Philip's Catholic School



Photo credit: St. Philip's Bemidji

Event and Convention Facilities

BELTRAMI COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

Beltrami County Fairgrounds is a Fairground & Park situated in Northern Township. Events held at the venue include consumer fairs, carnivals, conferences, exhibitions and tradeshows. Other activities such as auctions, wedding receptions, graduation ceremonies and non-profit events also take place at the Beltrami County Fairgrounds.

SANFORD CENTER

The Sanford Center broke ground in April of 2009 and officially opened doors in October of 2010. Our building is the home of the Men's and Women's Bemidji State University Beaver Hockey Teams. Attached to the building, you will find the George W. Neilson Convention Center. Between the Arena and Convention Center we have hosted a number of different events: hockey games, concerts, wedding receptions, expos, conventions, meetings, rodeos and graduation ceremonies.



Public Infrastructure and Utilities

Public infrastructure and utilities provide essential services to Northern Township. Services including electricity, natural gas, communications, waste, recycling facilities, and future municipal wastewater collection and treatment facilities around Lake Bemidji in Northern Township are integral to a high quality of life. This section identifies and evaluates existing infrastructure and utilities serving Northern Township. Understanding the location, use, and capacity of infrastructure and utilities is important when planning for the future.



Photo credit: TJA Drone Services

Solid Waste Services

Beltrami County is served by transfer stations as well as rural recycling sites placed at strategic locations and operated by Waste Management. There is also a local private refuse collection services for commercial and residential construction and hazardous waste recycling. It is important for the Area to continue its efforts to promote and enhance recycling opportunities. No residential or commercial on-site pickup for recycling currently exists.

Community Facilities and Services Strengths

- The continuous growth of health care facilities and services.
- Minnesota Department of Transportation District 2 Headquarters is located in the area.
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Northwestern Region Headquarters is located in Northern Township.
- Minnesota Department of Health Northwest Region Headquarters is located in the area.
- Federal Government Services in the area, including Beltrami County Administration Building, Judicial Building, Jail, Law Enforcement Center, Community Service Center, County Fairground, and Highway Department. Having all of these buildings located in the Area provides for excellent opportunities for public service.
- Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College campuses located in the area.
- Four fire stations located in the Area serving Northern Township as well as surrounding rural communities and townships. Mutual aid agreements with surrounding townships allow expansion of emergency services.
- Independent School District #31 and a variety of Charter Schools and private schools that serve the region.

Community Facilities and Services Challenges



- Independent School District #31 is one of the largest school districts in Minnesota, making transportation a challenge.
- Expanding municipal township utilities. Geographic obstacles such as wetlands and development densities, along with distances to serve residents, add to this challenge.
- Development request for high-density residential development where it would be cost prohibitive to expand municipal township services.
- Development around lake shore is best served by municipal township owned and managed utility systems.

Community Facilities and Services Objectives and Strategies

Objective 5.1: Preserve and Enhance our Public Services and Private Utilities

Cooperation is important when planning for public or private expansion of services, encouraging private and public entities to work together on major improvements and promote reasonable expansion projects while supporting the maintenance of existing facilities.

1. **Plan for expansion of public service facilities through partnerships in planning with adjacent communities.** Continue to support initiatives that expand public service facilities to surrounding areas that are not currently adequately served where appropriate, while being mindful of the capacity of the provided service to not strain resources.
2. **Encourage cooperation connecting governmental agencies and utility companies to continue expansion and maintenance of all utility infrastructure.** When making infrastructure or land use decisions, encourage cooperation between all entities, including private and public services, to reduce the social and environmental impact on utility projects.

Objective 5.2: Preserve and Enhance Area-Wide Stormwater Treatment Systems for All Public and Private Development and Educate Public on Importance of Stormwater Management

Land use decisions need to promote the stormwater management plan, meeting or exceeding local and state regulations will continue to protect water.

1. **Enhance drainage systems to reduce or eliminate stormwater backups and street flooding.** Support projects that will enhance drainage systems to protect existing stormwater infrastructure from being overloaded, which causes street flooding and increased sedimentation runoff into area lakes and streams.
2. **Allow flexibility for private development providing enhanced on-site stormwater retention and treatment facilities.** Providing an enhanced stormwater facility that meets or exceeds the minimum local and state regulations can enhance the overall stormwater system.
3. **Promote low-impact development practices and native plants for stormwater management.** Incorporate stormwater management practices such as raingardens, vegetated swales, tree filters, bioretention, permeable pavement, and others throughout Northern Township.

Objective 5.3: Enhance Public Safety Response Time

Land use planning can improve public safety response time. Development that negatively impacts the transportation system can reduce response times.

1. **Plan for high risk hazardous materials emergencies.** High-risk hazardous materials can threaten public safety; land use decisions that present a risk for hazardous materials emergencies need to be reviewed to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and agencies.
2. **Coordinate with Beltrami County Emergency Management when planning for natural hazard events.** Land use decisions that concentrate a dense population or buildings together increase the threat to public safety during a natural hazard event more so than low density development. High-density development should comply with any natural hazard mitigation measures currently recommended by Beltrami County Emergency Management.
3. **Utilize land use planning to preserve and enhance life safety response time.** Land use decisions will involve emergency personnel to ensure adequate space for emergency vehicles and access for emergencies.



Photo credit: KFGO

Objective 5.4: Improve Sustainable Waste Management Practices, Including Recycling, in Northern Township.

Improving opportunities for sustainable waste management initiatives with development can provide an ease of access for residents to recycle or exercise sustainable waste management practices.

1. **Support educational initiatives in the community on existing recycling opportunities and improve accessibility.** Increasing education and making decisions that improve access to recycling is in keeping with the sustainable values of the community.
2. **Support educational initiatives in the community on the benefits of composting.**

   Northern Township will encourage residents to learn about the benefits that composting can have by improving waste management efficiency, reducing the amount of waste that needs to be hauled and placed in landfills.
3. **Support educational opportunities for businesses or institutions on implementing recycling programs.** When recycling programs are implemented, it can increase the amount of overall recycling in the community, recycling practices that become habit at work can become habit in people's daily lives.

Objective 5.5: Assess Infrastructure Vulnerabilities to Natural Hazards for All Public and Private Development

1. **Map critical infrastructure to plan for protection from natural hazards.** Infrastructure that is vulnerable to natural hazards can exponentially increase dangerous situations in a natural disaster situation including a wildfire. Accurate mapping of critical infrastructure will reduce risk, improve public safety, and aid in hazard mitigation planning.

Introduction

Housing characteristics are indicative of the social and economic conditions of a community and are an important element of a comprehensive plan. Information in this section provides data about the current housing stock as well as identifies significant changes in the number of housing units and other housing characteristics. The ability of a community to provide an adequate housing supply for all persons and income levels is integral to its economic prosperity and the wellbeing of its inhabitants.

Existing Housing Characteristics

Occupancy Characteristics

Northern Township's predominant type of housing is the single-family home. **Table 10** provides general housing information from the 2010, and 2020 Census counts. There were 2,017 housing units in Northern Township as of the 2020 Census, with a vacancy rate of about 14.4%.

Table 10: General Housing Information for Northern Township

Statistics	2010	2020
Total Persons	4,657	4,535
Total Housing Units	2,049	2,017
Occupied	1,758	1,726
Vacant	291	291
Vacancy Rate	14.2%	14.4%
Persons Per Occupied Housing Unit	2.27	2.25

Source: US Census, Decennial Census, 2020; State Data Center of Minnesota, n.d.

Table 11 provides a comparison of the total number of housing units between Northern Township, the county, and the state. Northern Township experienced a slight decline due to annexation while Beltrami County and the State of Minnesota experienced an overall increase of housing units between 2010 and 2020.

Table 11: Number of Housing Units in Selected Areas

Areas	2010	2020	% Change, 1990-2010
Northern Township	2,049	2,017	(1.56%)
Beltrami County	20,527	21,271	3.62%
State of Minnesota	2,347,201	2,485,558	5.90%

Source: US Census, Decennial Census, 2010-2020

Table 12 compares the percentage of rental occupied housing units in Northern Township, the county, and state. The Northern Township's percentage of rental occupied housing is approximately half as much as the county and the state in 2020.

Table 12: Percentage of Rental Occupied Units for Northern Township

Areas	2015	2020
Northern Township	10.1%	17.9%
Beltrami County	30.9%	32.2%
State of Minnesota	28.3%	28.1%

Source: US Census, Decennial Census, 2015-2020

Housing Permits Issued

Table 13: New Single-Family Building Permits Issued in Northern Township, 2012-2022

Areas	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Northern Township	23	28	10	15	17	18	31	26	8	15	14

Source: GBAJPB, 2012-2022

Table 14: New Multi-Family Building Permits Issued in Northern Township, 2012-2022

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Northern Township	2	1	3	1	3	2	4	0	0	0	0

Source: GBAJPB, 2012-2022

Value Characteristics

Table 15 shows values have steadily increased since the 2010 census.

Table 15: Value of Owner-Occupied Single-Family Dwelling Units in Northern Township

Unit Value Ranges	2015	2020
	Percent	Percent
Less than $50,000	8.6%	3.1%
50,000-99,999	8.4%	4.2%
100,000-149,999	14.7%	17.5%
150,000-199,999	26.7%	32.3%
200,000-299,999	25.7%	25.2%
300,000-499,999	11.5%	16.0%
500,000 or more	4.4%	1.7%
Median Value	$177,100	$188,600

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS, 2015-2020

Table 16 shows that Northern Township has a slightly higher median value of specified owner-occupied units than Beltrami County and the State of Minnesota.

Table 16: Median Value of Specified Owner-Occupied Units in Selected Communities

Community	2020
Northern Township	$188,600
Beltrami County	$147,200
State of Minnesota	$185,200

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS, 2015-2020

Age Characteristics

One factor that assists a community in understanding potential housing needs and issues is the age of its existing units. **Table 17** compares the age of existing housing units by percentage of total housing units of Northern Township, Beltrami County, and the State of Minnesota.

Table 17: Age of Housing Units

Year Unit was Built	Northern Township Area	Beltrami County	State of Minnesota
2014 or Later	6.4%	4.4%	3.3%
2010-2013	10.5%	4.6%	2.4%
2000-2009	18.6%	18.8%	13.7%
1990-1999	13.6%	14.6%	13.5%
1980-1989	10.9%	13.6%	12.6%
1970-1979	20.0%	15.8%	14.8%
1960-1969	11.5%	8.4%	9.4%
1950-1959	5.4%	5.2%	9.7%
1940-1949	1.1%	5.5%	4.5%
1939 or Earlier	2.0%	8.9%	16.1%

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS, 2016-2020

Housing Projections

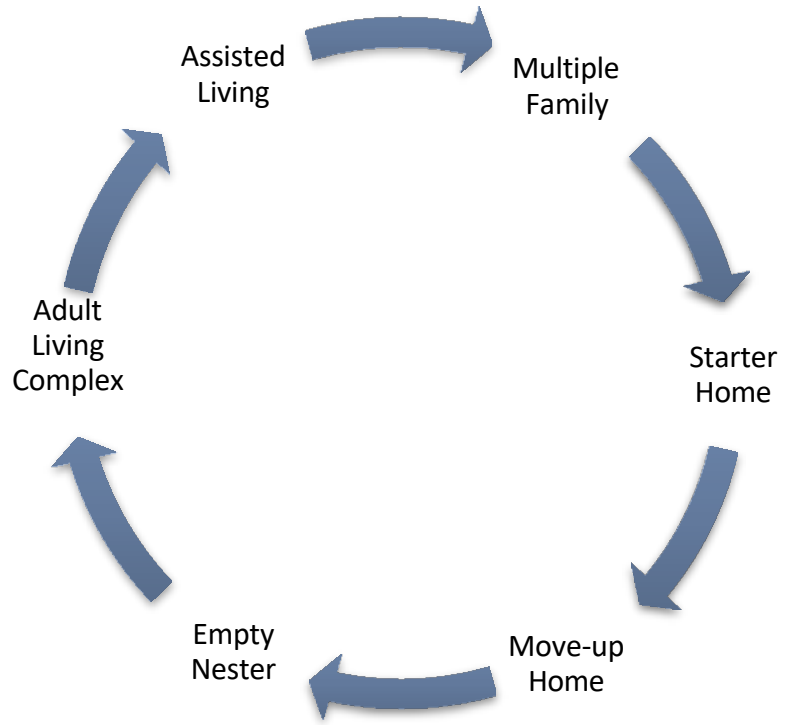
Housing Opportunities and Choices

A range in housing options is important to ensure that "full-life cycle" housing (**Chart 10)** is available to enable residents to stay within the community throughout their lives, even as housing desires change. Smaller starter homes, larger homes, apartments, townhomes, and retirement facilities are important to ensure adequate housing for young adults, families with children, empty-nesters, and retirees.

Affordable and Accessible Housing

Housing affordability is an important consideration for a community and its residents. Affordable homes can attract and retain employees to the community. This can be a selling point and a competitive advantage for area employers. Affordable homes also support the local workforce so they can live closer to their jobs. A healthy mix of housing options ensures opportunities for all individuals to improve their economic situation and contribute to their communities.

Chart 10: Full Life Circle



Source: GBAJPB, 2012-2017

Housing Programs

Residents in Northern Township have access to several federal and state housing programs. The Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Beltrami County HRA) is a municipal corporation created by the Beltrami County Board over 30 years ago, under the authority granted in Minnesota Statues. The following list identifies several housing assistance programs available to the residents that are administered through regional agencies (Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Housing Programs).

Down Payment Assistance

The Beltrami County HRA administers a down payment assistance program designed to promote home ownership. Through this program, the Beltrami County HRA offers loans that are deferred with no interest for five years. Repayment of the principal begins after five years at 4% interest. **Table 18** shows the income limit that households must meet.

Table 18: Household Income Limits for Down Payment Assistance

Household Size	Annual Income Limit
1-4	$61,900
5	$66,850
6	$71,850
7	$76,800
8	$81,750

Source: Headwaters Regional Development Commission, 2016

Housing Rehabilitation

The Beltrami County HRA administers an owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program to assist low and moderate-income households throughout Beltrami County, make essential home repairs, and correct health and safety concerns. The in-house loan program provides up to $15,000 at 3% interest to eligible borrowers.

Home Buyer and Financial Services

The Beltrami County HRA supports the Home Buyer Education, Coaching, and Financial Literacy services provided in the County by the Headwaters Regional Development Commission. Home Buyer Education is provided through the Home Stretch Program.

Mobile Home Replacement Pilot Program

The Beltrami County HRA is working on a pilot program to replace dilapidated mobile homes on private land with newly constructed modest homes. The program is a partnership with the Blackduck School District's Building Trades Program, which constructs a home on school grounds that is then moved to its permanent location upon completion. If the pilot program is successful, we hope to be able to replicate it in other areas of the Headwaters Region.

Affordable New Construction

The Beltrami County HRA has reinstituted the affordable new construction program to construct modest homes available for sale to low and moderate-income households in Beltrami County. The homes are currently being constructed by private contractors.

Housing Strengths

- Strong market rate multi-family development increasing the available workforce housing.
- Available land for future housing development.

Housing Challenges

- Cost of land, construction, interest rates, and infrastructure for housing.

Housing Objectives and Strategies

Objective 6.1 Preserve and Enhance the Quality of Housing that is Affordable, Safe, and Energy Efficient

Having affordable and safe housing options available for all residents is imperative to improving quality of life, and for successful community growth. Energy efficient homes can improve affordability for the occupant.

1. **Identify areas to allow flexibility when renovating existing old housing stock while preserving the character of existing neighborhoods.** Flexible zoning standards can be implemented into shoreland neighborhoods where lot size and setbacks are not able to be met. This will allow for redevelopment and modernization of properties that cannot currently expand and allow for increased redevelopment opportunities in shoreland neighborhoods.
2. **Improve the quality of housing with energy efficient building upgrades.** Ensuring that residents know what resources are potentially available to them to make energy efficient building.

Objective 6.2 Promote and Encourage Diversity with New Housing Developments

Housing developments that include a diverse amount of housing options can help ensure all residents have housing, diverse housing can and should provide market rate and affordable opportunities.

1. **Promote a variety of housing options based on market and need.** It is important to support all forms of housing developments and to promote diversity and choice of housing for all residents. Market rate housing or workforce housing should be promoted based on market trends, affordable or supportive housing should be promoted based on the needs of the community.

Objective 6.3 Promote Opportunities for Successful Homeownership.

1. **Promote educational opportunities to support successful homeownership training.** Training and supportive efforts for successful home ownership initiatives help to ensure residents understand the responsibilities of owning a home. Successful homeownership is an important part of building healthy and resilient neighborhoods.



Introduction

Transportation networks support community economies. They provide access to resources and connection to other communities, forming a critical link for continued development and growth. Maintenance and repair, in addition to periodic additions and enhancements to this system, are essential for preserving that connectivity for residents, visitors, and businesses. Keeping pace with changes in transportation trends and network use is important for communities to anticipate needed improvements and potential additions to their transportation network. Transportation facilities in Northern Township range from township roads to state, county, and US Highways as well as trails and sidewalks.

Roadway Jurisdictional Classification System

Jurisdiction over the system of roadways in Northern Township is shared among three levels of government (state, county, and township). Roadway jurisdiction is important because it affects a number of critical organizational functions and obligations, including regulatory, maintenance, construction, and financial commitments. **Figure 6** depicts the existing jurisdictional classification for all roadways within Northern Township. This includes the trunk highway system, managed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT); the County State Aid Highway (CSAH) and County Road system, managed by Beltrami County; and township roads, managed by Northern Township.

In general, the following relationships regarding jurisdictional designations are observed:

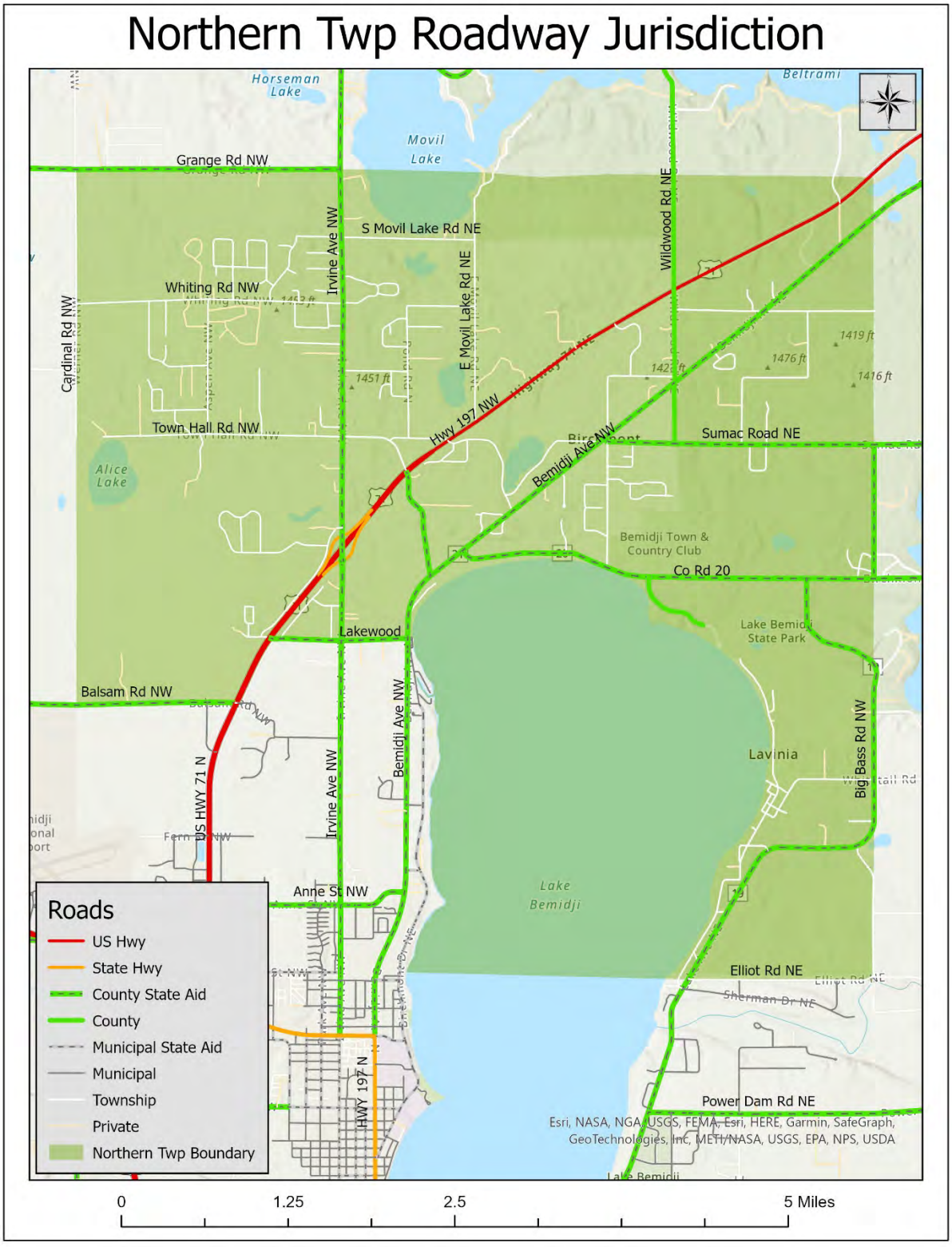
- Roadways that serve regional, inter-county, or state-wide travel needs are typically owned and maintained by MnDOT.
- Roadways that serve sub-regional needs generally qualify as CSAHs or county roads and are owned and maintained by Beltrami County.

- Roadways that primarily serve local trips and property access are owned and maintained by Northern Township.

Roadway Functional Classification

- Functional classification is a system that groups roadways according to the function they are intended to serve. It is understood that for this process to work individual roadways do not function on their own because most travel involves movement along a network of different functional types of roads.
- In simplistic terms, “functional classification” involves determining what role (level of mobility versus property access) each roadway should perform prior to determining its design features, such as street widths, design speed, and intersection control. Functional classification is an important consideration in developing local land use regulations. The mobility of higher classified roadways should be protected by careful management of site development and access spacing standards. Common transportation problems are typically due to inconsistencies between land use demands and the design and management of roadways.

Figure 6: Northern Township Roadway Jurisdictional Classification System



Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 first established the functional classification concepts, procedures, and criteria that are still being utilized today. The following four basic functional classification categories are typically used for transportation planning:

- Principal Arterials;
- Minor Arterials;
- Collectors (Major/Minor); and
- Local Streets.

Principal Arterials

Principal arterials usually have the highest volume capacity, level of service, and speeds for the longest uninterrupted distance. This type of roadway is intended to connect larger cities as well as major business centers. The functional emphasis is on mobility rather than land access. The nature of land uses adjacent to principal arterials is typically of a higher intensity than on other roadways. US Trunk Highways 71, is classified as principal arterial roadways (see **Figure 7**).

Minor Arterials

Minor arterials are intended to connect important locations both inside and outside of Northern Township. This type of roadway is intended to serve moderate length trips at a somewhat lower level of mobility than principal arterials. However, minor arterials should continue to have a greater focus on mobility instead of providing land access. Minor Arterials generally connect to principal arterials, other minor arterials, or major collectors. They are commonly important to the region because they relieve traffic on, or substitute for, principal arterials when necessary.

Collectors

There are usually two types of collector roadways within a functional classification system that provide a balance between land access and mobility—Major and Minor. Major collector roadways are designed to serve shorter trips that occur primarily within Northern Township and collect and distribute traffic from one part of the community to another, such as from employment centers to the arterial system. These roadways can be part of the county highway system as well as the township road system.

Minor collector roadways collect and distribute traffic to the major collector and arterial networks. These roads are generally shorter and less continuous than major collectors, but serve to supplement those roadways. Minor collectors are also typically part of a municipal street and county road systems (see **Figure 7**).

Local Roadways

All other public roadways within Northern Township (township roads) are classified as local roadways. Examples of local roadway characteristics include:

- The highest level of direct property access.
- Typically carry lower traffic volumes at slower speeds (30 mph or less).
- Serving trips that range from one city block in urban areas to less than 2 miles in rural areas.
- Roadways spaced as needed.

Township Roads

Northern Township maintains 48.9 miles of roads, including 27.9 miles of primary classification roads that receive full Township maintenance. Of these, 36.2 miles are blacktopped, reflecting a commitment to high-quality infrastructure.

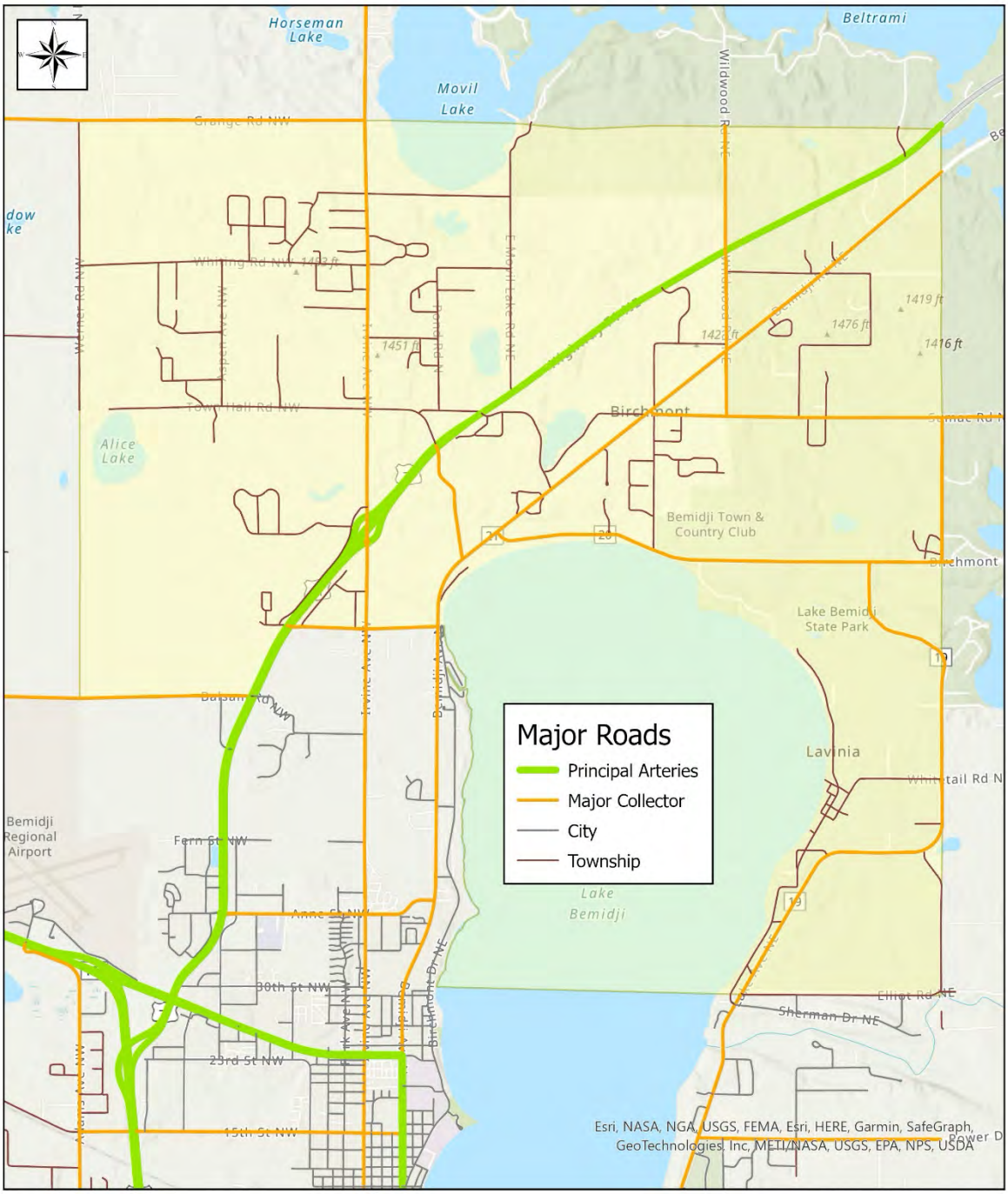
Primary township roads serve as key thoroughfares, supporting higher traffic volumes and essential connections across local jurisdictions. The Township fully funds blacktop and overlay projects of Primary Roads, with 0% assessed to landowners, ensuring fair and equitable road improvements.

A dedicated Road Supervisor oversees maintenance, guided by established road standards and a long-term road plan. This structured approach ensures safe, well-maintained roads that support residential growth while preserving Northern Township's rural character.

Traffic Volumes

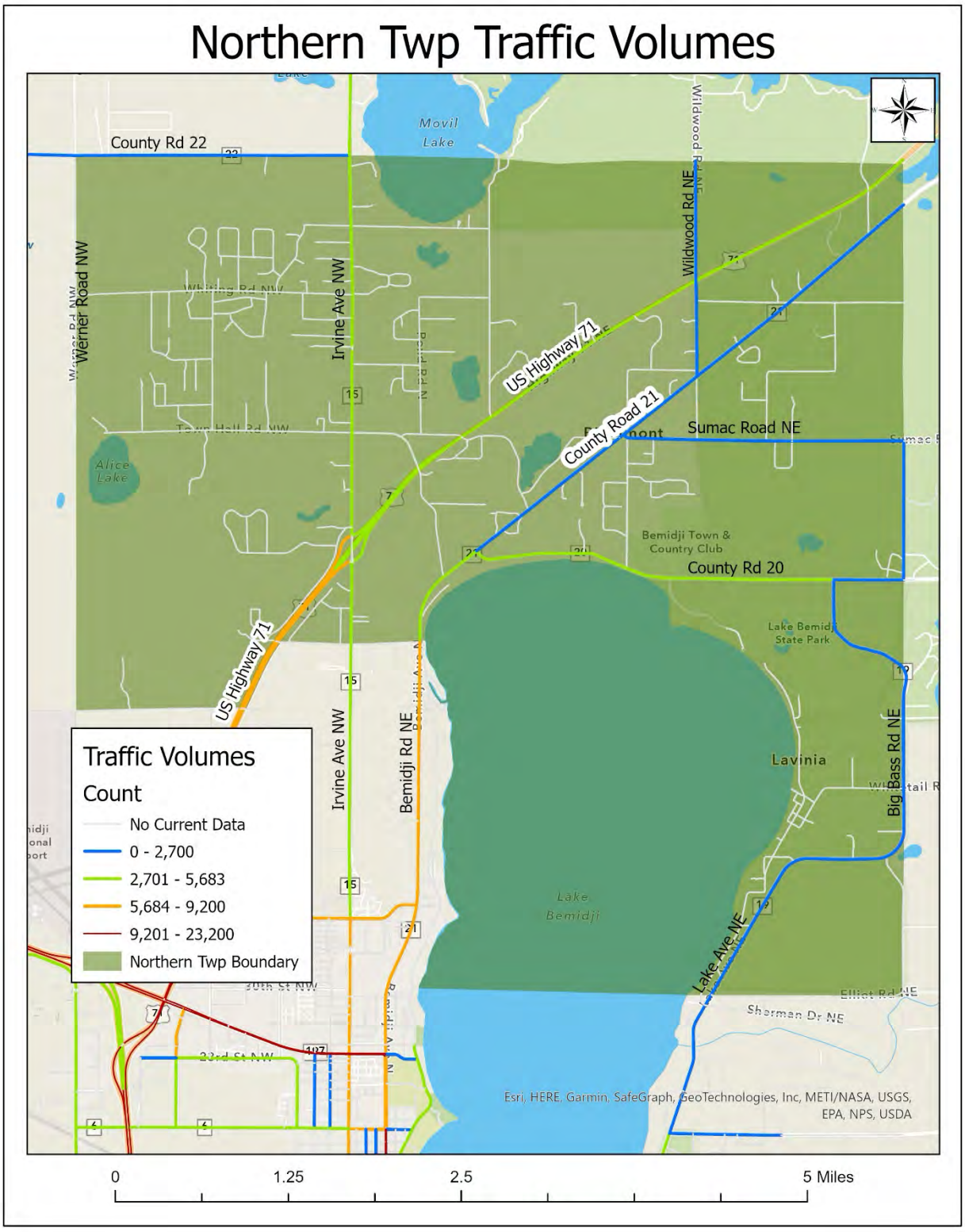
Tourism traffic in Northern Township is responsible for increased traffic volumes during the Spring through late Fall. Existing average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes on the most significant roads in Northern Township are portrayed on **Figure 8**. The existing AADT volumes represent the total traffic gathered by MnDOT on an average 24-hour day.

Figure 7: Northern Township Roadway Functional Classification



Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

Figure 8: Northern Township Traffic Volumes



Source: Freeberg & Grund, 2023 (MnDOT)

Public Transportation

Paul Bunyan Transit provides public transportation for Northern Township residents within a service area of a 10-mile radius around Bemidji City Hall.

Bemidji Bus Line provides motor coach transportation to any destination in the United States and Canada, offering 47 and 55 passenger deluxe motor coaches to its customers. School buses are also provided for group transportation.

Jefferson Bus Line is one of the top bus companies in the country, connecting people to destinations across 13 states in the United States with connections to Canada and Mexico. Each of the Jefferson Bus Line charters are 55 passenger deluxe motor coaches. Jefferson Bus Line arrives and departs from the Paul Bunyan Transit depot.

First City Taxi is an additional professional transportation service providers in Northern Township. They are licensed, insured, and are handicapped accessible.



Photo credit: Bemidji Pioneer

Aviation

The Bemidji Regional Airport is the regional travel hub for the northern Minnesota business and recreation center. In 1931, the City of Bemidji Civic and Commerce Association (Association) purchased roughly 160 acres of wooded land northwest of Bemidji for an airport.

The Association presented the property to the City of Bemidji in 1932 and the airport began operations with an all-way field. By 1941, the airport included over 150 cleared acres and a hangar. The land comprising the airport at that time is in what is now the southeast corner of the airport. By 1944, the airport had grown significantly to the northwest, increasing the total size to nearly 1,600 acres.

The US Government designated the field as a “secondary defense airport” and embarked on a series of improvements. The all-way field was replaced with two paved and lighted 5,700-foot runways, a 4,000-foot turf runway, and a 2,500-foot turf runway.

Commercial air service began in 1952 with the arrival of flights operated by North Central Airlines. Commercial service continues to the present day. The turf runways were abandoned by the late 1970s and in December of 1981 the official airport name was changed to the “Bemidji/Beltrami County Airport." In 2005, the name was changed to the “Bemidji Regional Airport” to better reflect its role in serving the entire region.



Photo Credit: Bemidji Pioneer



Photo Credit: PowrTek Engineering, Inc.

From 2006 to the Fall of 2008, the airport underwent a major upgrade. This included:

- The complete removal and replacement of all the runways and taxiways;
- Upgrade of the weather reporting system;
- Installation of additional Instrument Landing system for Runway 25; and
- The planning and acquisition of a very high frequency (VHF) omnidirectional radio range (VOR) for the airport by the state to replace a decommissioned federal system.

In 2009, the airfield electrical systems were completely replaced and new back-up generation systems were installed.

Effective January 1, 2009, the airport transitioned from being jointly owned and operated by the City of Bemidji and Beltrami County to ownership and operation by an Airport Authority with its own tax levy and funding responsibilities. This was done to provide additional visibility of the airport financial structure and cost to the communities it supports.

The airport recently completed a ramp rehabilitation project as a part of the federal recovery program. The airport is planning for a rehabilitation and modernization project of the 20-year-old terminal, which will include substantial energy improvements. It is currently undergoing a major renovation of the terminal and aircraft rescue and firefighting facility (ARFF), which is funded by the Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Improvement Program. Once completed, this three-phase project is estimated to amount to approximately $8 million in improvements.

Current Airport Services

The Bemidji Regional Airport (BJI) is a significant transportation hub for the region:

- It's the 4th busiest passenger terminal in Minnesota
- Approximately 30,000 people fly in and out of Bemidji annually
- The airport serves as a regional travel hub for Northern Minnesota

Commercial Air services

The Bemidji Regional Airport is served by Delta Airlines with two daily roundtrip flights to and from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Infrastructure:

The airport boasts robust infrastructure, including:

- Two runways measuring 7,004 feet and 5,700 feet, respectively
- Precision instrument approaches available on three of the four runway ends
- Over 1,880 acres of airport land, supporting current and future operations

Terminal Facilities:

The terminal encompasses 28,738 square feet and includes:

- A security checkpoint
- Baggage screening system
- Gate hold seating
- Passenger boarding bridge
- Ticket counters

Ground Transportation:

Visitors and residents have access to various ground transportation options, including:

- **Car Rentals:** Alamo, National, Avis, and Enterprise
- **Taxi Services:** 1st City Taxi
- **Public Transit:** Paul Bunyan Transit, offering local transit services

Rail Transportation

The BNSF Railway, a Class I Railroad, is the only active rail line that currently crosses through the area. The BNSF Railway is one of the largest freight railroad networks in North America, consisting of approximately of 32,500 miles of railways across 28 states (see **Figure 9**); primarily hauling multimodal freight and bulk cargo. The former James J. Hill Railroad Depot was recently restored by the Beltrami County Historical Center as a museum.

Figure 9: BNSF Railway System Map



Source: Wikipedia, 2015

Transportation Strengths

- The intersection of US 2 and US 71 provides excellent transportation opportunities for residents as well as an economic opportunity for business.
- Continued improvement of multimodal transportation opportunities through reconstruction projects.
- Multiple trail improvement and expansion projects in recent years.
- Continued expansion of the airport for corporate and general aviation purposes.
- Bemidji Regional Airport has fourth most enplanements out of all Minnesota airports.
- Cooperation of multiple road authorities to improve the transportation system, including expanding multimodal opportunities.

Transportation Challenges

- Minimal multi-use trail systems exist in Northern Township.
- Rising costs for roadway construction and maintenance.
- Existing road and right-of-way limitations for reconstruction.
- Multi-township jurisdiction roads.

Transportation Goals and Strategies

Objective 7.1 Design and Construct Transportation Facilities

An effective transportation system can be accomplished through many objectives, including interconnectivity of other land uses, increasing safety for users, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

1. **Promote cooperation among all road authorities**. Cooperation of all road authorities in transportation planning and redevelopment projects will ensure resources are being used efficiently and that planning for transportation network improvements can happen on a united front.
2. **When planning transportation projects, increase multimodal opportunities wherever possible.** When reviewing transportation systems, it will be important to ensure that reconstruction has provisions for expanding multimodal transportation throughout the community. Expanding opportunities for multimodal transportation will continue to promote healthy lifestyles.
3. **Develop traffic safety policy and guidelines to protect the transportation system.** Development can impact the transportation system in positive and negative ways. It is imperative that traffic impacts are properly studied in coordination with development requests, and whenever possible development should improve the transportation system. Negative impacts such as increased vehicular traffic congestion can in turn create barriers for multi-modal transportation, when roadways become unsafe to share with vehicle traffic. Continue to develop a transportation grid system that considers all forms of multi-modal transportation.

Objective 7.2 Encourage an All-Season Multimodal Transportation System

Encouraging the development of an all-season, safe, and transportation system can promote healthy lifestyles and increase opportunities for transportation alternatives.

1. **When reconstructing intersections, promote safety enhancements for all transportation.** It is important to ensure intersections are designed appropriately for any potential uses.

2. **Develop accurate usage statistics for all transportation types.** When planning for transportation, it is important to have data to prioritize development as well as ensure opportunity for all types.
3. **Promote new trailheads to increase multimodal transportation.** Development of new trailhead locations will provide opportunities for not only increased recreational transportation, but also increased opportunities for regional commuters to park vehicles and use alternative transportation modes.

Introduction

Northern Township provides an interconnected web of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors that afford passive and active programing, which promotes healthy lifestyles, a sense of place, and fun and enjoyment. Active and healthy community includes basic outdoor recreation and sports, indoor recreation and sports, local foods, and good initiatives.



Photo Credit: John Andringa

Natural Open Spaces and Parks

The region around Northern Township is fortunate to have outstanding natural open spaces and parks that give the area much of its character and appeal. Many of these areas are publicly owned by the DNR and are available for public use in a variety of ways.

Other publicly owned natural open spaces that are instrumental to Northern Township's system include the following:

- Bemidji State Park (Northeast Side of Lake Bemidji)
- State Park Land (East Side of Lake Bemidji)
- DNR Land (Northeast Side of Lake Bemidji)
- Movil Maze Recreation Area (North Side of Northern Township)
- 4,950 acres of public land in Northern Township

Special Use Parks

Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose uses—such as a nature center, historic sites, aquatic centers, campground, golf course, etc.



Photo Credit: National Geographic

Trails

Northern Township also offers several trails in the region that may be utilized year-round for hiking, biking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, woodland strolls, and inline skating.

The Paul Bunyan State Trail is the longest paved trail in the United States (115 miles) and connects with the Heartland Trail that connects many communities including Bemidji, Brainerd, Park Rapids, and Cass Lake. The trail runs through the east side of Northern Township along Lake Bemidji with available DNR parking along Wild Plum Rd.

Recreation and Natural Resources

Northern Township maintains its natural and recreational assets assuring long-term amenities for the general public.

Several lakes in the area, such as Lake Bemidji, Lake Movil and others, offer abundant opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the area's natural resources. Fishing and boating are supported by the availability of fishing piers and boat launches.

Northern Township Lake Accesses



Northern Township owns and maintains an improved boat landing on the South side of Lake Movil and the east side of Lake Bemidji.

In addition, the Township has many unimproved public access, sixteen on Lake Bemidji and one on Lake Movil.

Active and Healthy Community Strengths

- Existing public facilities, including regional park and trail systems.
- Independent School District #31 Community Education offers classes and programs to all ages of the public to promote healthy lifestyle choices to improve quality of life.
- Active user groups maintain area trails and provide educational opportunities.
- The local population has a commitment to clean air, water, and environmental quality. This commitment helps ensure active outdoor recreation and local agriculture remain possible.
- Undeveloped public access points could be developed further while already allowing for walk-in access, canoe and kayak launches, and winter walk-on access without requiring full-scale boat launches.

Active and Heathy Community Challenges

- Limited places to rest along recreational trail corridors, making it difficult for some to use trails.
- Lack of paved bike trail around north end and northwest end of Lake Bemidji.
- Retaining public ROWs and avoiding vacation requests.
- Better public signage so residents know they can use ROWs.



Photo: Beach Ln Boat Access

Active and Healthy Community Objectives and Strategies

Objective 8.1 Promote Active Living and Healthy Community Initiatives

When managing growth and future development, healthy lifestyle opportunities for the entire community, including indoor and outdoor active recreation, local food programs, and educational programs will help increase the overall quality of life.

1. It is vital to promote healthy lifestyle choices as a community. Programs that broaden the opportunities for all citizens to engage in healthy lifestyles are encouraged.
2. Active recreation trends are constantly adapting and new trends are becoming popular, it is important to adapt and have diverse opportunities for active recreation.
3. An active, healthy community is best when all members of the community can have the opportunity to live a healthier lifestyle. Neighborhood schools that teach about active lifestyles, including walking and cycling, at a younger age can create healthy habits.



Photo credit: Life in Minnesota

Objective 8.2 Promote All Forms of Recreational Activities

Recreational activities are a key part of the community. These activities can consist of local, regional, national, and even international events that bring the community and visitors together to participate in a wide array of healthy and active events. Events are a great way to promote recreational activities; however, it is important to maintain and increase opportunities for recreation that are not event-related.

1. **Promote awareness of available recreational opportunities.** Supporting endeavors aimed at creating awareness of all recreational opportunities can help community residents make healthy lifestyle choices. Informing the community on parks and trail connections throughout the area.
2. **Promote and encourage active recreation as a part of any community development or redevelopment.** Active and healthy opportunities provided by developers should be supported and encouraged. Opportunities for active living within developments are becoming the norm and will be looked upon favorably as development and redevelopment projects are implemented.
3. **Engage the community on public recreation projects and encourage private development.** Transparency on recreation projects is key to ensure that the needs of the community are being met.
4. **Promote health and enhancement of water-oriented recreational opportunities offered to the community.** Water-orientated recreational activities are becoming increasingly available. Appropriate developments should provide access to water- orientated recreation opportunities. Public access to water needs to be preserved and increased where appropriate.
5. **Support education about environmental stewardship and the impacts of human activity on the natural environment.** While increasing outdoor recreational activities and overall usage, it is important for the resiliency of the natural environment to have well-educated citizens be its stewards and care takers.

Objective 8.3 Promote Active Recreation and Healthy Living Year Round

Harsh winters can be a challenge; encouraging a culture supporting outdoor opportunities to stay healthy and active year-round is important for sustaining and improve the overall quality of life in the community.

1. **Promote the development of an outdoor gathering space for farmers market or indoor market to be used year-round.** Northern Township community supports efforts for providing access to local goods and food year-round.
2. **Preserve and maintain outdoor recreational opportunities.** Outdoor winter activities such as cross country skiing, winter biking, and ice fishing are important to northern Minnesota culture. Access to these activities should be maintained for active winter recreation.

Objective 8.4 Preserve and Enhance Existing Local Goods and Foods Initiatives

Opportunities for locally crafted merchandise or locally grown food are important to the community. Generally, the nutrients are much richer in locally grown food, providing a great health benefit.

1. **Support the development of a local food hub.** A local food hub would support local farmers and producers to market and distribute products regionally as well as allow for regional producers to access a larger market. This development is important for ongoing efforts to become a more sustainable, healthy, and resilient community.
2. **Encourage responsible urban agriculture as well as partnerships to promote the growth of urban and sustainable farming practices.** When done responsibly, urban agriculture can benefit the community in multiple ways: increasing the amount of quality healthy good grown locally, community building through community gardening projects, and improving food security for families. Cooperation of local groups could provide a

bigger impact through education of responsible practices, growing community gardens, and overall increasing urban agriculture opportunities.



Photo Credit: Exploration Vacation

Introduction

This section consists of inventory and analysis of the natural resources in and near Northern Township. Within the following narrative, various components of the community's natural resources base are examined at a broad level to provide the community with the necessary information to make informed decisions about future growth and development.



Photo credit: John Andringa

Climate

Northern Township's climate is characterized by four distinct seasons with wide variations in temperature and precipitation throughout the year. Temperatures range from an average low of -3°F in January to an average high of 79°F in July. Total annual average precipitation is 25.1 inches. The highest recorded temperature was 101°F in 1975, and the lowest recorded temperature was -50°F in 1950 (The Weather Channel, 2016). **Table 21** shows the average temperatures and precipitation amounts for each month.

Table 21: Northern Township's Average Climate

Month	Average High	Average Low	Average Precipitation
January	16°F	-5°F	0.7 inches
February	23°F	0°F	0.7 inches
March	35°F	14°F	1.1 inches
April	51°F	27°F	1.8 inches
May	65°F	42°F	3.1 inches
June	73°F	52°F	4.4 inches
July	77°F	57°F	4.0 inches
August	75°F	55°F	3.2 inches
September	65°F	45°F	3.1 inches
October	52°F	32°F	2.5 inches
November	34°F	18°F	1.4 inches
December	20°F	3°F	0.8 inches

Source: US Climate Data 2023

Watersheds and Surface Waters

Watersheds are divided and sub-divided into subsequently smaller numeric units (i.e., Hydrologic Unit Code, or HUC). Each HUC is given an eight-digit number. Northern Township is located in the Mississippi River Headwaters Watershed (#07010101), which is in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

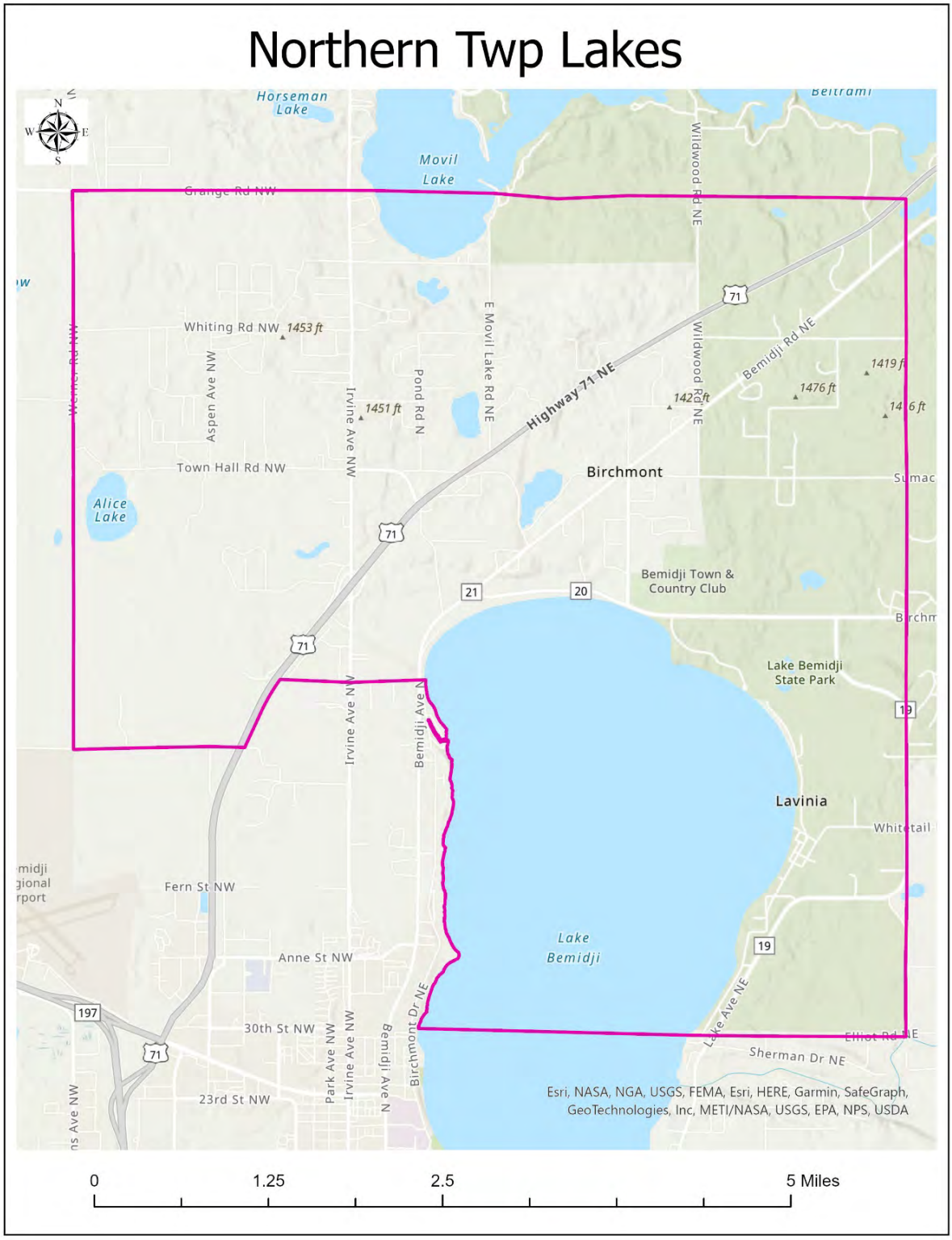
Surface waters in Northern Township include Lake Bemidji, Lake Movil, and several other smaller lakes, ponds, and wetlands.

Lakes/Shoreland Areas

There are roughly 400 lakes in a 25- mile radius. In Northern Township alone, there is around 4,850 acres of bodies of water and 29.9 miles of shoreland that is regulated. Lake Bemidji, a major regional waterbody, has 64% of its total water area and 41% of its shoreline located within Northern Township.

Other public waters in Northern Township are classified according to criteria found in Minnesota Rules, Part 6120.3300, the MHB Plan and the Protected Waters Inventory Map for Beltrami County, Minnesota. The other public waters are classified as either general development lakes, recreational development lakes, sensitive area lakes, special protection lakes, scenic and transition river segments, forested river segments, or tributary river segments. All properties in the shoreland areas are required to meet the requirements of the regulations for the zoning district in which the property is located in. Figure 10 shows all the bodies of water across the area.

Figure 10: Northern Township Bodies of Water



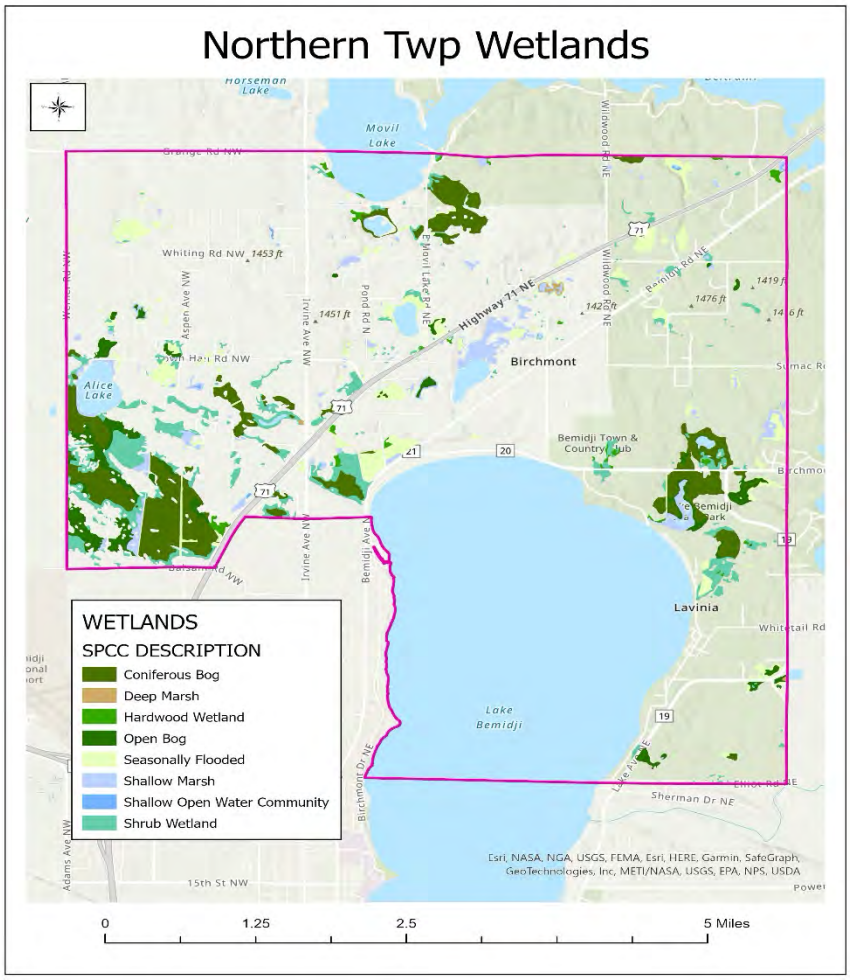
Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

Wetlands

Wetlands are defined as lands that have: a predominance of wet soils; are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support the frequency of hydrophytic vegetation (e.g., cattails) typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions; and under normal circumstances, support a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation.

Not counting open water or lakes, there are approximately 2,204 acres of wetlands in Northern Township. These wetlands account for 14.3% of the land area. Open water/lakes occupy 31.5% of the total area. **Figure 11** shows the distribution of wetlands across Northern Township.

Figure 11: Northern Township Wetlands

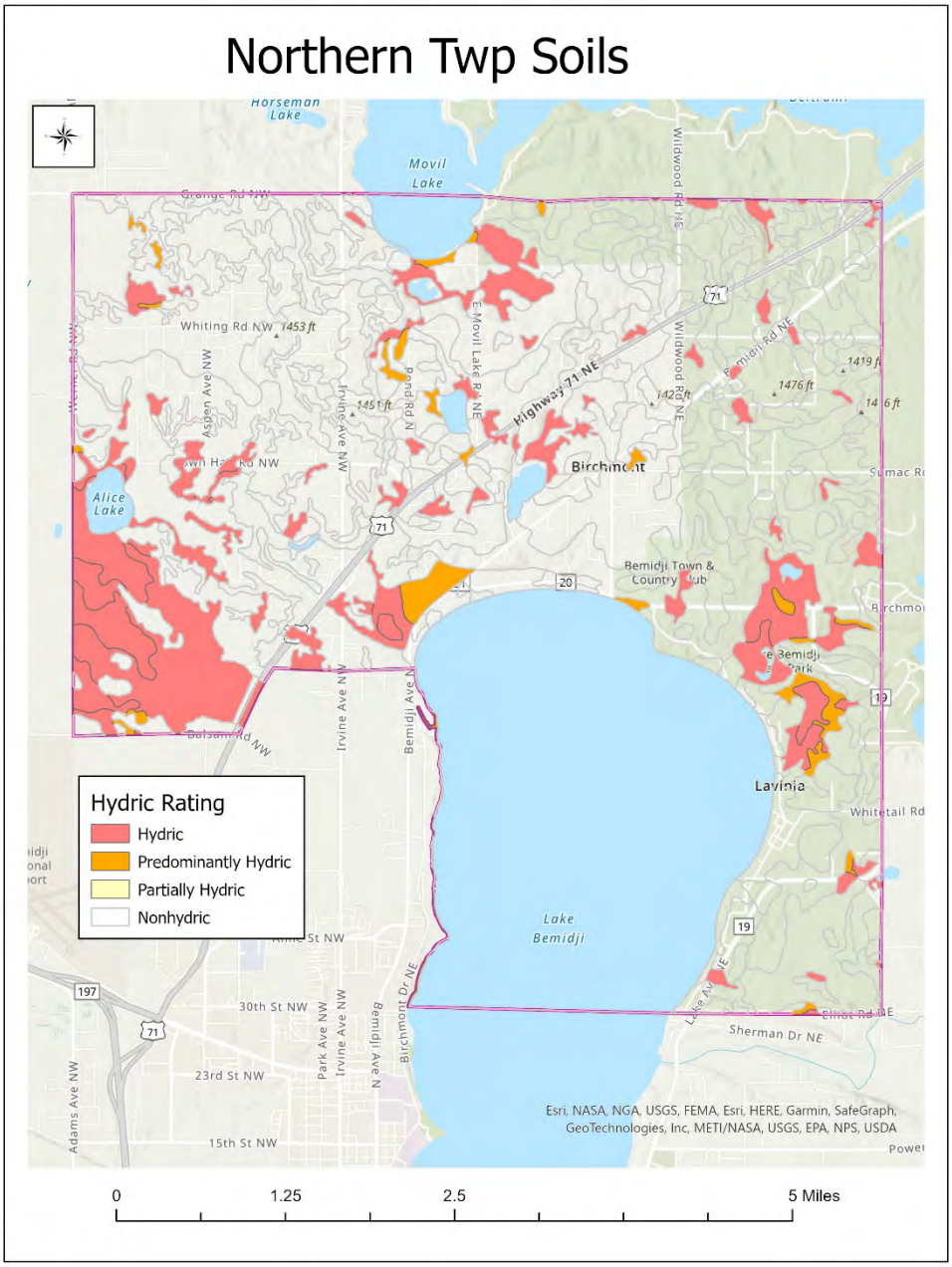


Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

Soils

In 1986, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) completed a detailed soil survey in Beltrami County that identified approximately 107 soil types in the southern part of Beltrami County, including Northern Township.

Figure 12: Northern Township Soil Types



Source: Freeberg & Grund 2023

Wildfire Hazards

In 2017, the City of Bemidji worked with the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW) program to receive technical planning assistance to address the growing threat of wildfire to Northern Township. As part of this process, the CPAW team met with local stakeholders to discuss local wildfire challenges and opportunities.

One of CPAW's findings was that previous land use planning documents did not include any reference to wildfire hazard. However, the Beltrami County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2013) listed wildfire as one of its top five priority hazards in the county. As a result, CPAW provided recommendations to the Area to address wildfire hazard through land use planning opportunities— many of which have been incorporated into appropriate chapters of this Comprehensive Plan.

Birds and Pollinators

Birds, bees, and butterflies have several things in common – they all depend on native plants; they play an important role in pollination; and all face increasing pressures from intensified land-use, diseases, and non-native invasive competitors. Both birds and pollinators encounter the nighttime dangers of illuminated structures and street lighting. Mortality from increased use of glass in buildings poses a distinct threat to birdlife. Streetscape vegetation, waterfront business districts, and other urban green patches are important resources for birds and pollinators. Bird-safe building strategies can reduce collision hazards, enhance and restore habitat and conserve energy.

Natural Resources Strengths

- High-quality, clean air and water
- Surrounded by natural areas for recreation and tourism as well as economic benefit.
- Large amount of lakes, 400 considered fishable within a 25-mile radius.
- 64% of Lake Bemidji is in Northern Township.
- 41% of Lake Bemidji Shoreline is in Northern Township.
- Many opportunities for wildlife viewing.
- Great access to public lands, including township, state, and county lands.
- Lake Bemidji State Park and Beltrami County parks.
- Strong relationships with state agencies, such as

the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, to assist in wildfire mitigation, prevention, and response.

Natural Resources Challenges

- Increasing light pollution.
- Human-caused hazards.
- Educating the public about the risks associated with natural hazards.
- Emergency routes in response to a natural hazard event, such as wildfire.
- Protecting all natural resources.
- Water quality protection with highly developed shorelines.
- Preserving Lake Bemidji as a shared natural resource and popular statewide destination.



Photo Credit: Minnesota Northwoods

Natural Resources Objectives and Strategies

Objective 9.1 Preserve and Enhance Our Air Quality

A strong connection to the environment is important to Northern Minnesotans, and it is increasingly important that the natural resource environments thrive on this connection.

1. **Support the flexibility for green building construction or increased landscaping and vegetation with new or redevelopment projects.** Support projects that increase landscaped area, use green building techniques, reduce impervious surfaces, increases energy efficiencies, and have an overall lower impact on the environment than what is existing or allowed will have a positive impact on air quality.
2. **Promote awareness of ecosystem-based fire management.** Ecosystem-based fire management can reduce the negative effects of wildfire, which can result in significant ecological and environmental challenges to the public and visitors.

Objective 9.2 Preserve and Protect Water Quality

The protection of water quality is becoming increasingly important in all-natural resource environments. In an area that thrives on a strong connection to water, water quality protection is key to preserving and improving a high quality of life standard that is so attractive to residents and visitors.

1. **Support the development of a comprehensive wastewater system around Lake Bemidji.** Expanding municipal sewer services to the entire lake would reduce nutrient pollution, preserve long-term water quality, and protect one of Northern Minnesota's most valued natural resources.
2. **Encourage educational opportunities and inspections for aquatic invasive species.** Aquatic invasive species are continuing to threaten the water quality of northern Minnesota. Encouraging efforts that support the safety of our lakes, rivers, and streams.
3. **Encourage shoreland restoration on public and private property to increase natural shoreland.** Shoreland restoration projects could potentially reduce shoreland variances. Displaying the benefits of shoreland restoration can increase awareness and understanding of the process that could result in a positive impact on shorelands.

4. **Maintain partnerships and enhance protection efforts of the Upper Mississippi River corridor.** It is important to work with other organizations such as the Mississippi Headwaters Board on initiatives to protect the fragile headwaters.
5. **Promote awareness of natural hazards, which can affect water quality.** Natural hazards, such as overland flooding or wildfires, can cause erosion concerns by negatively changing the soil and vegetation structure and/or negatively altering sediment, flow and temperature regimes of lakes, rivers, and streams. Increasing the overall awareness of potential natural hazards and their effects on the ecosystem can help mitigate potential damage.



Photo Credit: KAXE

Objective 9.3 Promote the Preservation of the Night Sky throughout Northern Township

Northern Township will continue to support efforts to decrease light pollution, following the International Dark-Sky Association best management practices.

1. **Reduce nonconforming lighting.** Replacing nonconforming lighting can offset the potential increase in light pollution as growth continues.
2. **Promote regulation that decreases light pollution but maintains overall safety.** When managing light pollution with the growth it is important to protect our dark sky, but it is also critical to ensure that areas requiring lighting are effectively lit to provide safety for vehicle traffic, pedestrians, and property.

Objective 9.4 Encourage a Resilient Urban Forestry System with High-Quality Wildlife Habitat

Retain Northwood's character and high-quality wildlife habitat through urban forestry planning and management to increase landscaping tree cover, preserve significant wooded areas, and preserve existing significant trees.

1. **Encourage private forestry management planning.** When developing wooded areas, encouraging developers to work with private forestry management professionals in lieu of clear cutting for development will help maintain a healthy urban forest.
2. **Preserve and enhance high-quality wildlife habitat where appropriate.** The presence of undeveloped land that is poorly suited for future development presents an opportunity for a connected network of high-quality wildlife habitat. High-quality wildlife habitat presents an opportunity for a connected network of management area.
3. **Promote cooperation between local, county, state, and federal agencies who manage conservation land, as well as private landowners with interest in conservation.** Partnerships between conservation management professionals could result in high level management planning specialized for ecosystems and habitat.
4. **Promote resilient natural forest through public and private partnerships for tree planting initiatives.** Continuous tree planting efforts through partnerships will be supported to improve urban forest and habitat.
5. **Promote and expand capacity to educate, prevent, and implement wildfire mitigation activities.** Collaborate with partners to develop outreach materials to educate residents and the development community on wildfire prevention and mitigation best practices.

Objective 9.5 Encourage Awareness of Sustainable Natural Resource Management

The use of natural resources will need to be managed sustainably and increasing awareness throughout the community is critical to resilient natural resources.

1. **Encourage cooperation among interest groups dedicated to environmental stewardship and sustainable best management practices for**

natural resources. Support ongoing and new community efforts to increase awareness of sustainable natural resource planning practices.

Objective 9.6 Encourage Bird and Pollinator Friendly Practices for New and Existing Buildings and Landscapes



Northern Township will continue to support birds, bees, & butterflies by creating habitat, reducing threats, and engaging citizens in the conversation as well as the outdoor recreation.

1. **Promote planting of native wild flowers, shrubs and trees to benefit birds and pollinators.**
   This can be accomplished through means such as establishing demonstration gardens, developing educational materials, conducting workshops, and partnering with local nurseries and greenhouses to increase awareness and use of native plants in local landscapes and gardens.

Introduction

The section explains how the Comprehensive Plan will be implemented to achieve the desired goals as set forth by Northern Township. The Comprehensive Plan addresses many important components critical to sustaining a healthy community while preserving the area's natural resources and history. As change is inevitable, the plan may need to be amended to appropriately reflect those changes.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

Intergovernmental cooperation involves working with Northern Township, City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, neighboring communities, school districts, and other agencies to understand how future planning and development activity may impact other jurisdictions or where joint efforts can be pursued. Generally, this involves sharing plans and goals that may conflict or coincide with neighboring jurisdictions and local agencies to allow for cooperation that results in an optimum implementation process.

Governmental Collaboration

1. **Local Partnerships**
   Several organizations within Beltrami County work together to provide services desired by Northern Township residents and businesses. Various departments within county government are valuable to the region as Northern Township works to maintain a high quality of life for residents.



2. **Regional Partnerships**

   Regional partnerships can also benefit Northern Township, and several have been identified throughout this document. Key regional agencies that can help implement strategies in this plan include the Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC).

3. **State Partnerships**

   The following is a list of state agencies whose departments and areas of expertise could assist Northern Township as it moves forward with the implementation of this plan:

   a. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
   b. Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)
   c. Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Public Engagement

In addition to important intergovernmental collaborations, promoting additional public engagement in Northern Township area activities will be beneficial in the implementation of The Comprehensive Plan. Informing and involving the public is an essential part of providing transparency in governance. Northern Township understands that getting good results in community development depends on the support of its residents. Northern Township will continue to look for ways to promote its activities and decision-making process in building more productive resident engagement.

Intergovernmental Collaboration Summary

Both intergovernmental cooperation and public engagement share the core requirement of effective communication. Collaboration and public engagement are important ways to make the most efficient use of the Northern Township area's limited resources and ensure fair and equitable decision-making processes.

Northern Township Plans and Documents for Reference in Planning

- Bemidji Regional Airport Master Plan (Draft)
- Bemidji Regional Airport AUAR
- 2012 Beltrami County Housing Study
- Beltrami County Forest Health Management Plan
- Beltrami County Local Water Plan
- Beltrami County Local Water Plan Priority Concerns
- Beltrami County Recreational Facilities Plan
- Beltrami County Recreational Trail Plan
- Amendment to Beltrami County Forest and Recreational Plan
- Beltrami County Ordinance No. 6 Shoreland
- Mississippi Headwaters Board Comp Plan
- MnDNR Shoreland Ordinances

Official Controls

Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance

The uncontrolled use of land within Northern Township affects the public health, safety and general welfare not only by contributing to pollution of land and waters, but also by impairing the local tax base.

The Minnesota Legislature, through enabling legislation, has delegated responsibility to local units of government in Minnesota to conduct planning, regulate the subdivision of land, and enact official controls for the development and use of land within their jurisdictions. This includes shoreland regulation of public waters and wetlands in Northern Township. This responsibility is hereby recognized and embraced by Northern Township and will be accomplished through the enactment and enforcement of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance and this Comprehensive Plan.

Community Action Plan

The Community Action Plan is laid out in a table format for easy reference by township leaders and stakeholders. Each strategy identified within this plan is assigned a potential time frame, an agency or agencies responsible for ensuring that the strategy is carried out, and the general resources required to implement each strategy.

Potential Partnerships

Northern Township understands that accomplishing the objectives of the community action plan will be a community effort comprised of elected officials, community leaders, foundations and development partnerships, and other local, county, regional, and state government agencies to be successful.

Elected Officials

Elected officials working together to accomplish objectives that will have a positive impact on Northern Township as well as their local constituents will continue the recent successes of this growing community.

Community Leaders

Community leaders have the potential to get the community rallied around new development, a healthy initiative, or other objectives to better the community.

Typically, community leaders are volunteer citizens passionate about bringing positive change or new development into the community.

Foundations/Development Partners

These partners have the potential to fund projects or team up with staff support to work on an objective.

Government Agencies

Local, County, Regional, and State government agencies will need to work together as Northern Township continues to grow. Combining efforts for land use, environmental, transportation, as well as other items requiring additional planning for growth will be important to the success of Northern Township.

Northern Township Area Action Plan Table

Chapter 4: Land Use

Objective 4.1: Preserve the Quality Residential Neighborhoods of Northern Township

Strategies:

1. Review and update the land use ordinances and zoning map on a regular basis.
2. Promote "mixed-use" areas to improve the transition of residential land use to other land uses.
3. Identify specific redevelopment opportunities and promote revitalization while maintaining character.
4. Allow flexibility with site design standards to ensure high-quality development.
5. Promote pedestrian-scale designs to increase sense of place and improve active transportation in new developments or redevelopments.

Potential Partnerships:

• Local Residents • Headwaters Regional Development Commission	• Bemidji City Council • Beltrami County HRA • Local Developers and Contractors

Objective 4.2: Preserve and Promote Commercial and Industrial Redevelopment or In-Fill Development Where Appropriate

Strategies:

1. Promote flexibility for commercial and industrial redevelopment and encourage in-fill development.

2. Identify areas where commercial and industrial uses should be located, specifically adjacent to highways with controlled access where noise, odor, dust, and glare will have minimal impact.
3. Utilize overlay zoning districts to address emerging issues and increase connections and transition of land uses.

Potential Partnerships:

- Bemidji Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Bemidji, Inc.
- Headwaters Regional Development Commission
- Northwest Minnesota Foundation

Objective 4.3: Promote Land Use Decisions that Protect the Natural Environment through Smart Growth and Sustainable Practices

Strategies:

1. Utilize guidelines for land use practices conserving natural landscapes and allow zoning flexibility for implementation.
2. Preserve existing natural habitat connections.
3. Use natural hazard and wildfire risk assessment information to make informed land use decisions.

Potential Partnerships:	
• Bemidji State University Sustainability Office • City of Bemidji Parks and Recreation Department • Beltrami County Environmental Services • Beltrami County Natural Resource Management	• Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Northwest Clean Energy Resource Team • Beltrami County Emergency Management • Local Naturalist Organization
Objective 4.4: Protecting Water Quality on Lake Bemidji and the Mississippi River	
Strategies:	
1. Introduce and promote the benefits of the new wastewater treatment plant. 2. Enhance land use practices that protect water resources. 3. Monitor and assess water quality	

Potential Partnerships:	
• Minnesota Pollution Control Agency • Environmental Protection Agency • Mississippi Headwaters Board • Friends of Lake Bemidji • Beltrami County Natural Resource Management	• Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Local Naturalist Organization • Residents

Chapter 5: Public Infrastructure and Services

Objective 5.1: Preserve and Enhance Our Public Services and Private Utilities

Strategies:

1. Plan for expansion of public service facilities through partnerships in planning with adjacent communities.
2. Encourage cooperation connecting government agencies and utility companies to continue expansion and maintenance of all utility infrastructure.

Potential Partnerships:

- Township Boards
- Beltrami County Engineering
- Beltrami Electric
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Ottertail Power Company
- Minnesota Energy
- MidCO Communication
- Paul Bunyan Communications
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR)

Objective 5.2: Preserve and Enhance Area-Wide Stormwater Treatment Systems for All Public and Private Development and Educate Public on Importance of Stormwater Management

Strategies:

1. Enhance drainage systems to reduce or eliminate stormwater backups and street flooding.
2. Allow flexibility for private development providing enhanced on-site stormwater retention and treatment facilities.
3. Promote low-impact development practices and native plants for stormwater management.

Potential Partnerships:	
• Township Boards • Public Housing Development Authorities	• Beltrami County Engineering • Beltrami County Environmental Services
Objective 5.3: Enhance Public Safety Response Time	
Strategies:	
1. Plan for high risk hazardous materials emergencies. 2. Coordinate with Beltrami County Emergency Management when planning for natural hazard events. 3. Utilize land use planning to preserve and enhance life safety response time.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Beltrami County Emergency Services • Beltrami County Sheriff Department • City of Bemidji Police Department • Bemidji Ambulance Service	• Sanford Health • City of Bemidji Fire Department • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • First Responders
Objective 5.4: Improve Sustainable Waste Management Practices, Including Recycling, in Northern Township	
Strategies:	
1. Support educational initiatives in the community on existing recycling opportunities and improve accessibility. 2. Support educational initiatives in the community on the benefits of composting. 3. Support educational opportunities for businesses or institutions on implementing recycling programs.	

Potential Partnerships:	
• Beltrami County Solid Waste and Recycling • Local Sustainability Advocacy Groups	• Private Waste Management Contractors
Objective 5.5: Assess Infrastructure Vulnerabilities to Natural Hazards for All Public and Private Development	
Strategies:	
1. Map critical infrastructure to plan for protection from natural hazards.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Beltrami Electric • Ottertail Power • Paul Bunyan Communications • Midco Communication • Beltrami County Emergency Services	• Beltrami County Sheriff Department • Bemidji Fire Department • Bemidji Public Works

Chapter 6: Housing
Objective 6.1 Preserve and Enhance the Quality of Housing that is Affordable, Safe, and Energy Efficient
Strategies:
1. Identify areas to allow flexibility when renovating existing old housing stock, while preserving the character of existing neighborhoods. 2. Improve the quality of housing with energy efficient building upgrades and through using renewable energy resources.
Potential Partnerships:

• Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority • Rental Association • Local Utility Companies • Local Builders Association	• Headwaters Regional Development Commission • Northwood's Habitat for Humanity

Objective 6.2 Promote and Encourage Diversity with New Housing Developments	
Strategies:	
1. Promote a variety of housing options based on market and need. 2. Allow flexibility when affordable housing units are part of a new development.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority • Headwaters Regional Development Commission	• Northwood's Habitat for Humanity • Headwaters Housing Development Corporation

Objective 6.3 Promote Opportunities for Successful Homeownership
Strategies:
1. Promote the development of smaller affordable single-family homes in compact developments. 2. Promote educational opportunities to support successful homeownership training.
Potential Partnerships:

• Headwaters Regional Development Commission • Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority • USDA Rural Development	• Local Mortgage Lenders • Local Home Inspector • Title Companies

Chapter 7: Transportation

Objective 7.1 Design and Construct Transportation Facilities with Livability in Mind

Strategies:

1. Promote cooperation among all road authorities.
2. When planning transportation projects, increase multimodal opportunities wherever possible.
3. Develop policy with flexibility to incorporate a diverse transportation system when redevelopment occurs.
4. Develop traffic safety policy and guidelines to protect the transportation system.

Potential Partnerships:

• Bemidji Regional Airport Authority • Beltrami County Engineering	• Headwaters Regional Development Commission

Objective 7.2 Encourage an All-Season Multi-modal Transportation System that Serves a Diverse Population

Strategies:

1. When reconstructing existing intersections, promote safety enhancements for all transportation.
2. Encourage a multi-modal transportation study.
3. Develop accurate usage statistics for all transportation types.
4. Promote new trailheads to increase multimodal transportation.
5. Use informative signage policies to ensure the community is informed of all modes of transportation as well as the safest routes around the community.

Potential Partnerships:

- Beltrami County Engineering
- Active Transportation User Groups
- Headwaters Transportation Network
- Bemidji Schools/ISD #31 School District
- Headwaters Regional Development
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Trails and Waterways Division
- Paul Bunyan Transit
- Private Transportation Services
- Public Transit Users

Chapter 10: Active and Healthy Community

Objective 8.1 Promote Active Living and Healthy Community Initiatives

Strategies:

1. Promote programs for individuals that need additional services or opportunities to be active.
2. Encourage activities and programming for alternative and emerging recreational trends.
3. Promote high-density residential development near schools and services with access to multimodal transportation opportunities.

Potential Partnerships:

- Local Active Recreation Event Planners
- Bemidji State University Outdoor Program Center
- Beltrami County Parks and Recreation
- Bike Bemidji
- Local Trail User Groups and Clubs

Objective 8.2 Promote All Forms of Recreational Activities

Strategies:

1. Promote awareness of available recreational opportunities.
2. Promote and encourage active recreation as a part of any community development or redevelopment.
3. Engage the community on public recreation projects and encourage private development.
4. Promote health and enhancement of water-oriented recreational opportunities offered to the community.
5. Support education about environmental stewardship and the impacts of human activity on the natural environment.

Potential Partnerships:

• Local Active Recreation Event Planners	• Beltrami County Parks and Recreation • Trail User Groups and Clubs • Bemidji State University Outdoor Program Center

Objective 8.3 Promote Active Recreation and Healthy Living Year-Round

Strategies:

1. Promote the development of an outdoor gathering space for farmers market or indoor market to be used year-round.
2. Preserve and maintain outdoor and indoor ice facilities, as well as curling facilities and other outdoor winter sites.
3. Preserve and enhance trails including cross country skiing and snowmobiling.

Potential Partnerships:

• Local Active Recreation Event Planners • City of Bemidji Parks and Recreation • Bemidji Community Arena (BCA)	• Beltrami County Parks and Recreation • Trail User Groups and Clubs

Objective 8.4 Preserve and Enhance Existing Local Goods and Foods Initiatives

Strategies:

1. Support the development of a local food hub.
2. Encourage responsible agriculture as well as partnerships to promote the growth of sustainable farming practices.

Potential Partnerships:	
• Farmers Market Managers • Community Garden Managers • Food Shelf	• Harmony Food Co-Op • Local Garden Clubs
Chapter 9: Air, Water, and Our Natural Resources	
Objective 9.1 Preserve and Enhance Our Air Quality	
Strategies:	
1. Support the flexibility for green building construction or increased landscaping and vegetation with new or redevelopment projects. 2. Promote awareness of ecosystem-based fire management.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Sustainability Committees	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Objective 9.2 Preserve and Protect Water Quality	
Strategies:	
1. Support the development of a comprehensive wastewater system around Lake Bemidji. 2. Encourage educational opportunities and inspections for aquatic invasive species. 3. Use shoreland restoration incentives and demonstrate success on public and private property to increase natural shoreland. 4. Maintain partnerships and enhance protection efforts of the Upper Mississippi River corridor. 5. Promote awareness of natural hazards, which can affect water quality.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Sustainability Committees • Minnesota Pollution Control Agency • Environmental Protection Agency	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Mississippi Headwaters Board
Objective 9.3 Promote the Preservation of the Night Sky of the Northern Township Area	
Strategies:	
1. Reduce nonconforming lighting. 2. Promote regulation that decreases light pollution but maintains overall safety.	
Potential Partnerships:	

• Sustainability Committees	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Objective 9.4 Encourage a Resilient Urban Forestry System with High-Quality Wildlife Habitat	
Strategies:	
1. Encourage private forestry management planning. 2. Preserve and enhance high-quality wildlife habitat where appropriate. 3. Promote cooperation between local, county, state, and federal agencies who manage conservation land, as well as private landowners with interest in conservation. 4. Promote resilient natural forest through public and private partnerships for tree planting initiatives. 5. Promote and expand capacity to educate, prevent, and implement wildfire mitigation activities.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Sustainability Committees	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Objective 9.5 Encourage Awareness of Sustainable Natural Resource Management	
Strategies:	
1. Encourage cooperation among interest groups dedicated to environmental stewardship and sustainable best management practices for natural resources.	

Potential Partnerships:	
• Sustainability Committees	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Objective 9.6 Encourage Bird and Pollinator Friendly Practices for New and Existing Buildings and Landscapes	
Strategies:	
1. Promote the use of Minnesota Department of Administration Buildings, Benchmarks & Beyond (B3) Bird-Safe Building Guidelines to limit the risk of built environments to birds. 2. Promote planting of native wild flowers, shrubs and trees to benefit birds and pollinators.	
Potential Partnerships:	
• Sustainability Committees • Minnesota Headwaters Audubon Society • Bemidji Garden Club • Watermark Art Center • Leech Lake Tribal Extension Service • Bemidji State University Sustainability Office • Minnesota Master Gardeners	• Beltrami County Natural Resource Management • Minnesota Department of Natural Resources • Bemidji Area Nurseries and Garden Centers • Minnesota Master Naturalists – Bogs & Logs Chapter

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