

# 1

## Introduction



**Wadena**

Comprehensive Plan & Transportation Plan

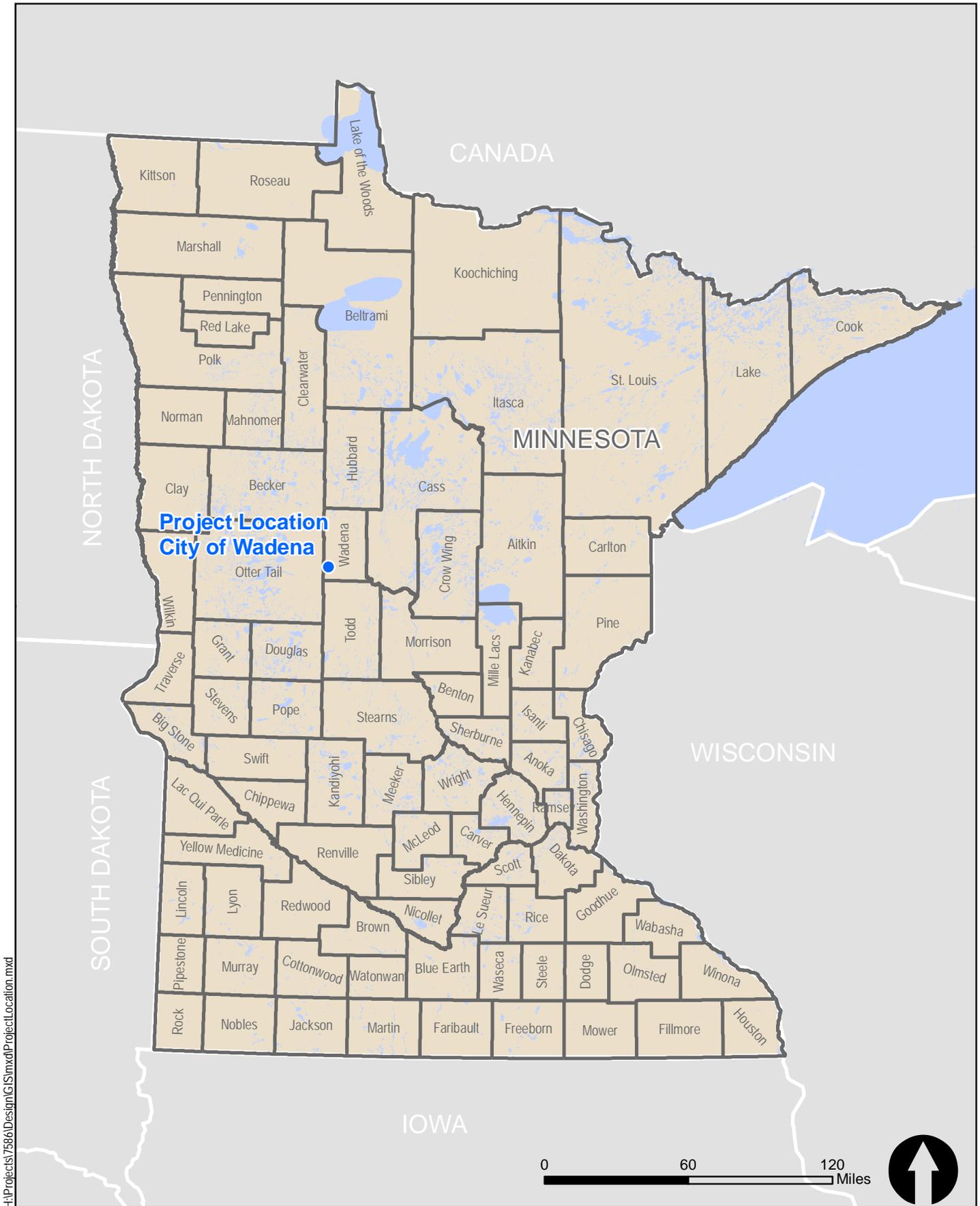
## 1.1 OVERVIEW

The City of Wadena is located in Wadena and Otter Tail Counties in Central Minnesota (See Figure 1-1). Two US Highways (US 10 and US 71) intersect in the center of the community, providing connections to destinations within the region. Noted as the gateway to Lake Country, Wadena experiences year round tourism for hunting, fishing, boating, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

This chapter provides an introduction to the comprehensive plan and the existing conditions of Wadena.

This section of the plan addresses the following elements:

- Basis for Planning
- Purpose for Updating the Comprehensive Plan
- Current Events
- Planning Process



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**Project Location**  
**Wadena Comprehensive Plan**  
**City of Wadena, Minnesota**

Figure 1-1

## 1.2 BASIS FOR PLANNING

City governments are specifically created and governed through state law. State enabling legislation provides the power for municipalities to regulate land within their municipal limits as well as a defined area outside of city borders. These powers are conferred to cities through Minnesota State Statutes (as updated in 2006). The State of Minnesota created a policy statement to explain the conveyance of such powers to cities, which provides a good explanation of the importance and necessity of planning. The policy states,

“The legislature finds that municipalities are faced with mounting problems in providing means of guiding future development of land so as to insure a safer, more pleasant and more economical environment for residential, commercial, industrial and public activities, to preserve agricultural and other open lands, and to promote the public, health safety, and general welfare. Municipalities can prepare for anticipated changes and by such preparations bring about significant savings in both private and public expenditures. Municipal planning, by providing public guides to future municipal action, enables other public and private agencies to plan their activities in harmony with the municipality’s plans.”

### STATE OF MINNESOTA LEGAL BASIS FOR PLANNING

The City of Wadena, like all Minnesota cities, receives its power to prepare plans, subdivide land, and zone properties in a single body of law found in Chapter 462 – Housing, Redevelopment, Planning, and Zoning. Specifically, Chapter 462.364 Subdivision 1 states,

“A municipality may 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 and other official actions in accordance with the provisions of sections 462.351 to 462.364 (Minnesota State Statutes).”

The provisions of the sections listed at the bottom reference the enumeration of the individual powers conveyed to municipalities as well as regulations for using them. A provision of Subdivision 1 of Chapter 462.57 - Official Controls explains that zoning ordinances grant municipalities the ability to extend land controls a distance of two miles in any direction beyond its municipal limits, when certain criteria are met. The City of Wadena has employed an extraterritorial boundary in order to influence decisions beyond its border that may impact the city. A map of this boundary can be found in the Existing Conditions section of this plan.

The entirety of Chapter 462 – Housing, Redevelopment, Planning, Zoning, provides the rational basis for planning whereas Chapter 473.859 – Comprehensive Plan Content, details the specific elements of a comprehensive plan in order to adequately address all functions of municipalities and therefore be legally binding. Some of the parts of a comprehensive plan as outlined in this statute are a land use plan, public facilities plan, and implementation program. All of the elements required by this state statute have been represented in this plan to adequately and legally apply planning functions to areas within and surrounding the City of Wadena.

### 1.3 PURPOSE FOR UPDATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Every so often municipalities, not unlike individuals, must evaluate the decision making paradigms that have led to the current situation in which they find themselves. A comprehensive planning effort allows municipalities to get a broad overview of current conditions as they relate to desired outcomes based upon community goals. These current conditions are then analyzed against the goals and objectives set forth by the municipality to determine future courses of action.

Municipalities are affected by many forces both from within their borders and from outside as well. Regional, national, and global trends can greatly impact the direction of individual areas for better or for worse. A recent example has been the economic situation dubbed “The Great Recession.” Many municipal governments have struggled with providing services to residents due to the elasticity of municipal revenue generators like sales taxes that have dipped because, in general, people are not spending as much money as they once were. In addition, many cities have dealt with issues such as newly platted lands that are vacant, foreclosed properties, empty storefronts, and high unemployment. As a result of these issues, they are unable to fully staff departments to address these concerns. This has left municipalities scrambling to readjust goals and plans to cope. Even though this example was hard to predict, municipalities with sound contingencies and courses of action based upon planning efforts have been the most successful in dealing with these unforeseen problems. Even municipalities that have experienced positive outcomes must also plan to avoid future problems and to adequately allocate resources to priorities.

Comprehensive plans contain a few basic elements that act like a guide for future decision making. A major component that most recognize as a prime function of municipal government is designating how land can be used. Municipalities program lands in order to best organize the environment for future conditions and to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens. In this plan, land uses are detailed in the form of maps which are explained within the sections of this comprehensive plan. Some of the figures included in this document display current land uses, current zoning,

and future land uses. These figures are for planning purposes only and do not impact the current zoning of individual properties. Future land use maps put forward a scenario showing the potential for future development or redevelopment of properties, and are not meant to subtract from the rights of any land owner to freely use their property as it exists. These maps are prepared to accommodate for the orderly growth of Wadena and to show a clear example of where certain uses should be located so that informed and consistent decisions can be made for the future of Wadena.

## 1986 WADENA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The previous comprehensive plan for the City of Wadena was adopted in August of 1986 – an update to the previously adopted 1970 plan. The plan was written at a time when the most recent census (1980) recorded a population of 4,699. The population would decline to 4,131 in the next census. The 1986 plan had a design time of fifteen years: 1985 to 2000. A four-step planning process was used for the development of the plan, which included:

1. Collection and analysis of background data such as population, employment, industry, housing, and environment.
2. Issue identification for the existing and future condition of the city by reviewing background data.
3. Cultivation of policy plans and goals that focus on the issues identified in Step 2.
4. Development of an implementation process for the plans and goals outline in Step 3.

The four main focus areas of the plan were land use, housing, community facilities, and transportation. The plan included goals and policy guidance for all four sections, which were used as the basis for the development of goals and objectives within this document.

## DECISION TO UPDATE PLAN

As time has passed, many conditions have changed; therefore, the City of Wadena is now updating its plan to reflect current conditions, evaluate development trends that have occurred to this point, and prioritize goals to address modern concerns.

The process that was undertaken is very similar to that of past plans. Conditions are forecasted over a time frame of 25 years, which is the design life of this plan. Projecting conditions out to this extent encourages more time for long-term trends to manifest and allows Wadena to anticipate and respond to major changes that could occur in the city, the region, or even the national level.

## 1.4 CURRENT EVENTS

As of the drafting of this plan in 2012, the nation is experiencing the lasting effects of a recession that started in 2008 and is said to have been caused by the collapse of the so called “housing bubble.” This led to a nation-wide crisis of foreclosure and unemployment.

Much has transpired over the course of the last 30 years, including personal home computing, the internet, and cellular phones. When the current 1986 plan was written, many of these technologies were in their infancy. Portable phones weighed around 5 pounds and were usually mounted in cars. Today, cellular phones are tiny computers having more functions than any of the computers of the 1980s, weighing ounces rather than pounds, and are generally discouraged from being used while driving.

The new technologies mentioned above have significantly changed the way people live and work. With the introduction of these new technologies, employees now have the ability to work in other locations, such as at home, satellite offices, and on the road. Because information is readily available, businesses and customer service have reached heightened expectations in terms of swiftness, reliability, and satisfaction. For example, prior to these technologies, an attorney’s response to his client would generally take days. Now, a client expects a response from his or her attorney within hours. As another example, correspondence in the business world occurs through email rather through the mail – a much faster way of communicating information. Similarly, these new technologies have changed the way people live. With the internet, people are able to buy products online rather than traveling to the local retail store. Furthermore, people are able to travel easier, not worrying about booking a hotel the day they arrive in a location or finding activities/restaurants.

Conditions in Wadena are not to the extreme as found in other places in the U.S. As a contrast to the 1980s, farmers, which are the foundation of the local economy, have seen a dramatic increase in grain prices. The price of grain has been impacted by the use of corn to make ethanol, a fuel added to gasoline. The price of corn then rose, causing farmers in climates that could support the crop to plant it instead of other small grains like wheat. This in turn greatly impacted small grain prices, the predominant crop planted in central and northern Minnesota, due to short growing seasons. Also as a contrast, dairy producers of the 1980s were on the brink of bankruptcy. Now milk is garnering around \$20 per hundred pounds, far exceeding past rates.

This economic situation is in recovery and continues to have fiscal ramifications at the local, state, and national level. Wadena and the entire State of Minnesota have been affected by the economic crisis as well as the gradual recovery.

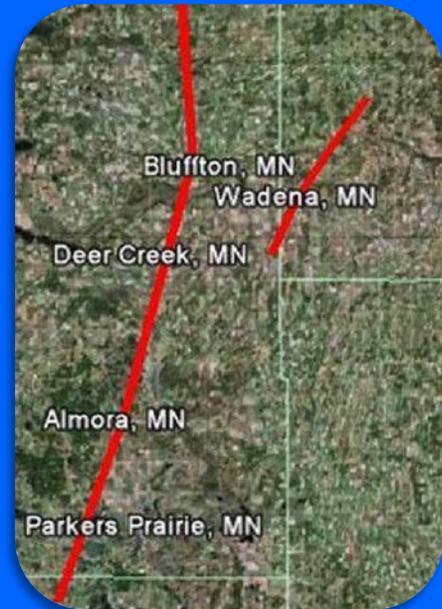
On June 17, 2010, the City of Wadena was hit by an EF-4 tornado that demolished many homes and buildings, including the Wadena High School. As of the writing of this plan, many of the lots that were affected by the tornado are still vacant. The high school, which was a total loss, has been rebuilt in a new location. Multiple tornados struck the area; the paths are shown in the image to the right. The tornado swept a path through existing residential areas leaving remnants of houses in its wake. Pictures show the devastating effects the tornado had on the high school. Many community facilities were destroyed in this single event. According to a March 24, 2011 article in the Wadena Pioneer Journal entitled Wadena seeks aid as tornado forces out residents, businesses, many businesses and people have moved out of Wadena due to the lack of amenities that were once available but destroyed in the tornado. These facilities, such as the public pool, have not been rebuilt because funding is not available. It is important that facilities destroyed in the tornado, as well as new amenities, are built in order to attract and retain businesses and residents.

In September of 2012, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) announced the winners of DEED Awards Capital Grants, which included the City of Wadena. The award of \$4,200,000 would assist in the design, construction, and furnishing of a 50,000 square foot health and wellness facility. The estimated total cost of the project is \$10,000,000. The new Wellness Center will employ approximately 110 people – 100 during construction and ten full-time equivalent jobs. Also in the fall of 2012, the new Wadena Middle School and High School

Tornado Devastation



Tornado Path



Wadena Public School



was completed. The completion of this facility marks an important milestone in Wadena's recovery from this devastating event.

## 1.5 PLANNING PROCESS

The comprehensive planning process began in October of 2011, running parallel to a transportation planning effort. Generally, comprehensive plans will include transportation elements, including existing conditions and policy recommendations. Due to the nature of the tandem planning processes, many of the standard transportation elements are addressed to in the transportation plan.

The process to complete the comprehensive plan includes six phases. The entire process was completed in sixteen months.

### PHASE 1 – DATA COLLECTION

Phase 1 began with the collection of existing conditions and historical information. To gain a better understanding of the community, the data collected included demographics, housing, employment, and natural features. This information was presented to the Project Management Team for concurrence as the process moved into the next phase.

### PHASE 2 – ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Phase 2 reviewed the data collected in Phase 1, in combination with public involvement efforts, to identify current and future issues within the community. Public involvement efforts during this phase consisted of a public meeting and survey. An open house style public involvement opportunity took place in February 2012. At this meeting, the information collected in Phase 1 was presented along with information relating to the transportation plan, and then a survey was conducted. The survey was aimed at gathering residents' perspectives on items within the community, including aesthetics, transportation, quality of life, commerce, and city services. A total of thirty-nine surveys were completed during the open house. In an effort to collect a greater number of responses, every household within the city was mailed an updated survey that contained the two additional questions, and also provided a web address containing the updated survey.

### PHASE 3 – GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PLAN STRATEGIES

Phase 3 involved the transition from issue identification in Phase 2 to the creation of goals, objectives, and policy guidance to address the issues. These goals and objectives were reviewed by the Planning Commission, Study Review Committee, and Wadena Residents. A public meeting was held in November of 2012, which allowed residents to review the plan strategies and provide comments.

#### **PHASE 4 – FUTURE LAND USE PLAN**

During Phase 4, using existing zoning and land use data and historic population and housing trends, future land use scenarios were developed. These scenarios were presented to both the Study Review Committee and Planning Commission. A preferred land use alternative was developed from the discussion with both groups.

#### **PHASE 5 – GROWTH PHASING**

Using historical growth data, an expected rate of growth over the next 25 years was established in Phase 5. This population growth was used to develop anticipated land use consumption for residential, commercial and industrial land uses. These assumptions were integrated with the preferred future land use plan to create a growth phasing plan which identified preferred growth areas for the next 25 years.

#### **PHASE 6 – PLAN ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

On January 29, 2013, an open house and public hearing was conducted with the Wadena Planning Commission.

To be completed after plan adoption.