

# INTRODUCTION

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## City of Hutchinson Comprehensive Plan

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## COMMUNITY SETTING

Hutchinson is a city of just over 13,000 people located in northeastern McLeod County in central Minnesota. Hutchinson is roughly 53 miles south of St. Cloud on Highway 15 and 65 miles west of the Twin Cities on Highway 7 (Figure 1). The city currently covers approximately eight (8) square miles. The city contains a wealth of natural resources including the Crow River, streams, lakes, fertile agricultural land, wetlands, and wooded areas.

Hutchinson was settled in 1855 by John, Asa and Judson Hutchinson - the Hutchinson Family singers. The area chosen by the brothers overlooked the beautiful Hassan River Valley. From the start of the town there has been a tradition to plan for the future. Upon settling the claim, 15 acres were set aside for a park and eight lots for educational purposes. Additionally, women were given the right to vote as part of the town organization – again a testament to the progressive nature of Hutchinson’s founding fathers.

Over the course of its history, Hutchinson has experienced steady population growth – much of it tied to the expansion of the local business economy and the evolving role of Hutchinson as a regional center. During the 1990s, the city began to grow at a more rapid pace due to the rising trend of people desiring to live in a small town rural setting that is in close proximity to a metropolitan area. Now, the city largely functions as a complete stand-alone community and as a bedroom community for many people working in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The city has recognized its unique position and has capitalized on its location and economy.

Hutchinson lies on the South Fork of the Crow River and on the shores of Otter Lake and Campbell Lake reservoir. The downtown lies just south of the River and near the abandoned railroad line – now the Luce Line Trail. The downtown remains vibrant despite traffic and congestion problems. The Community lies at the intersection of the major east-west and north south roads in Central Minnesota. Trunk Highway 7 connects western Minnesota with the Twin Cities and has become a major commuting route to the job market in the west metro area. Highway 15 is the major north south route connecting the St. Cloud regional center with southern Minnesota.

The working relationship between Hutchinson and the surrounding townships is a model of cooperation that unique among cities and townships in Minnesota. The groups have recognized the need to work together to effectively plan for the growth of the city of Hutchinson in a way that is sensitive to the needs of rural areas. Since 1998, the city and townships have managed the Hutchinson Joint Planning Board that is charged with the enforcement of regulations within the Hutchinson Joint Planning District. See Figure 2 for current Hutchinson Joint Planning District Boundaries.

The city has a progressive history that is unique among communities this size. The city currently operates the public Library, gas and electric utilities, hospital, liquor store and cemetery. Where the city has seen a community need, it has responded and continues to respond. The city recently opened a compost site and shares the joint state, county and Municipal Transportation Maintenance facility – H.A.T.S. (Hutchinson Area Transportation Services).

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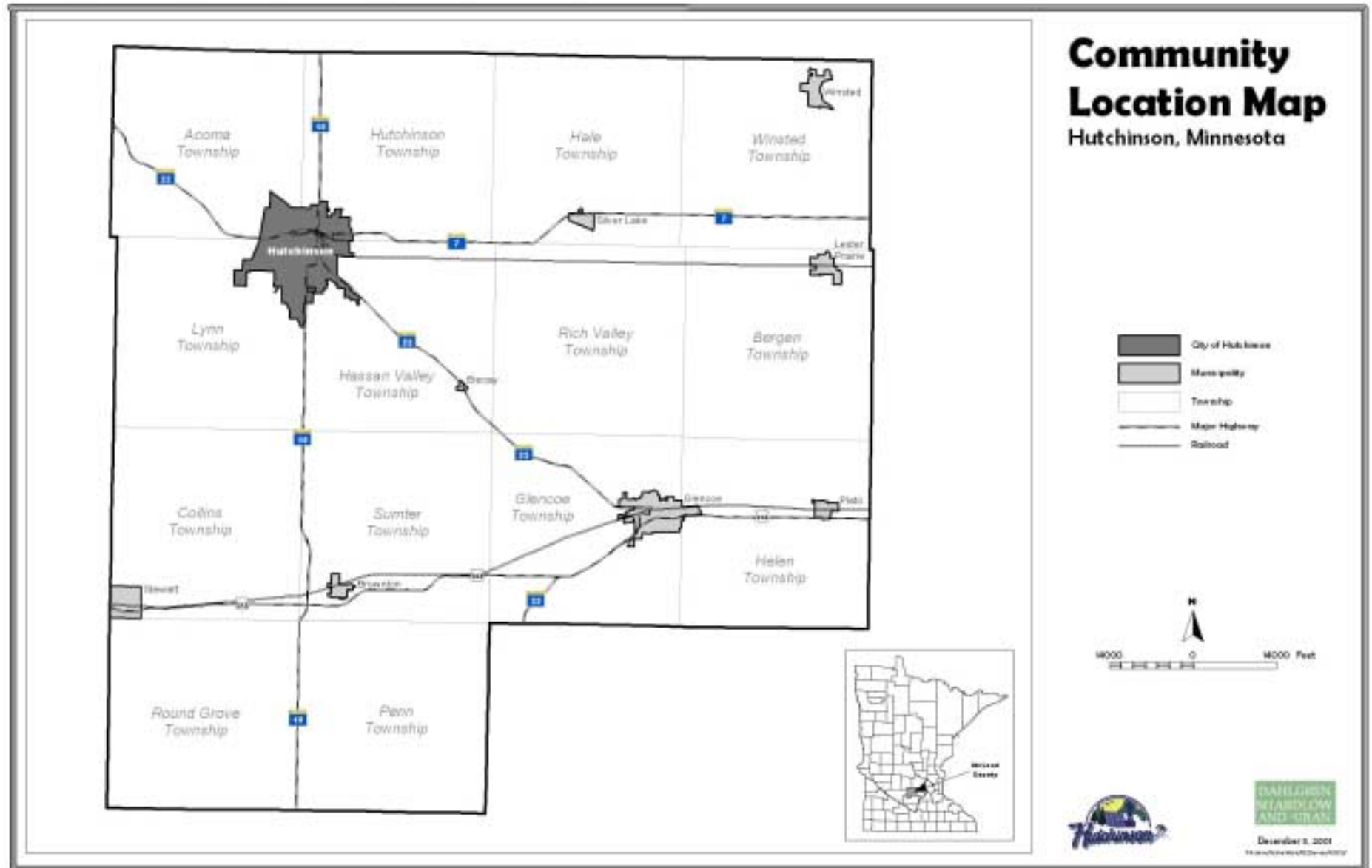
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Hutchinson's beautiful setting, progressive nature and prime location make it a community with great potential for growth and change over the next 20 years.



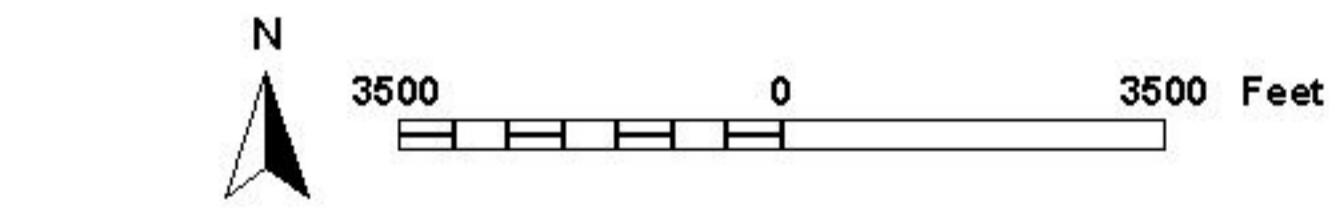
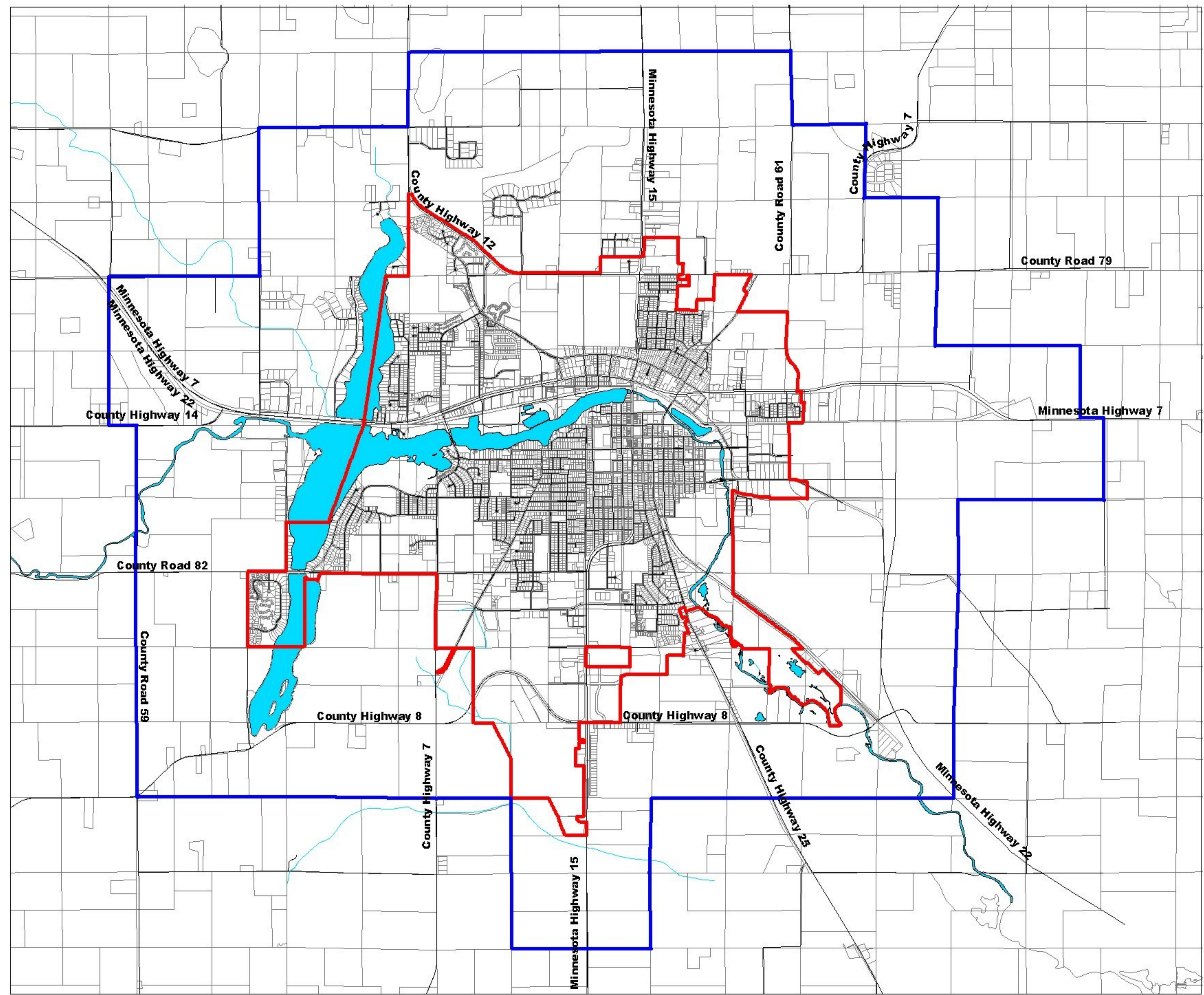
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Figure 1. Community Location Map



# Community Base Map/ Joint Planning District Hutchinson, Minnesota

- Major Road
- City Boundary
- Urban Bondary
- Open Water



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## PLANNING PROCESS

The community planning process was divided into three primary phases:

1. Inventory and Analysis,
2. Goals and Strategies Development, and Plan Preparation,
3. Plan Refinement, and Adoption.

The city appointed a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) that was charged with managing and commenting on the research and reviewing the draft Comprehensive Plan. A listing of the PAC membership is included in the Acknowledgements.

Public involvement was an important component of the Hutchinson Comprehensive Plan process. The planning process began in May of 2001 with the Project Kick-off Session. At this meeting many community members participated and brought important opinions to the table – literally the Hutchinson Middle School cafeteria table. At the Kick-off meeting Hutchinson citizens had the opportunity to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the community, define the issues the city should address in the plan, and discuss community-wide goals. The strengths and opportunities were used to form the major focus points of the Plan.

## STRENGTHS/OPPORTUNITIES

Although the listed strengths and opportunities cover a broad spectrum of issues, the issues that elicited the most agreement can be grouped into four main themes. A detailed report of the Strengths/Opportunities is located in Appendix A.

**Small Town Community Spirit.** Many residents felt that the sense of community in the Hutchinson area is important to its health and vibrancy. The Community is defined in many ways by its residents, community groups and work ethic.

**Economy / Location.** The Community is blessed with many economic and geographic advantages that will help to ensure a positive future for Hutchinson. Not the least of which was the location of the community in relation ship to the Twin Cities and the presence of solid local employers.

**Parks / Open Spaces.** Hutchinson can be viewed as an oasis within the prairie and farm fields. Much of the beauty of the area is represented by the amount of open space, parks and natural beauty. The South Fork of the Crow River as well as Campbell and Otter Lakes make for an enjoyable backdrop to the vibrant city.

The city will need to address maximizing the utilization of the existing open space and designing appropriate additional parks and recreational facilities for the future.

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**City Services.** The city of Hutchinson is a progressive community with significant investments in public infrastructure. The city is responsible for the maintenance of city streets, sanitary sewer, flood control, and police and fire. In addition the city operates a health care facility, public library and liquor store. The community appears to be satisfied and pleased with the services and facilities that are available. The comprehensive plan will help to set forth goals and policies that continue to allow for the provision of adequate services for the residents.

The community needs to not only recognize its assets, but also its shortcomings. The weaknesses and threats to the future health of the community were noted at the Kick-off Session.

## WEAKNESSES/THREATS

Although the listed weaknesses and threats also cover a broad spectrum, the issues that elicited the most consensus can be grouped into four main themes. A more detailed report of the Weaknesses/Threats is located in Appendix A.

**Transportation.** By far the greatest concern expressed by the group was the inadequate traffic flow and transportation to Hutchinson and within the community. Adequate transportation infrastructure hinders economic development efforts and cause “small-town road rage”. The impacts of congestion on downtown were also noted as a major concern for the future health of the community.

**Growth Management.** The Community is concerned that growth is not managed in an appropriate manner. Participants recognize that the costs of growth are significant both to the developer and to the community. The city must also address environmental issues as it sees additional growth. The comprehensive plan will address these issues as it examines future growth boundaries capital improvements and an Urban Assessment Review of future City Improvement Projects.

**Social Concerns.** Nothing is so constant as change. As the community celebrates its successes, it must also address new social concerns. The community recognizes the changing demographics for most Minnesota Communities and desires to address it. The community also recognizes the inter-relationship between community development and an effective educational system.

**Downtown and Commercial Development.** The residents recognize the need to provide a variety of economic opportunities, including pedestrian and automobile oriented commercial development for large and small businesses. There is interdependence between a healthy downtown and a vibrant retail community. The residents also desire more opportunity and choices when it comes to specific retail services that are available in Hutchinson. The plan will work to further define these local needs and establish action steps for the city.

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In addition to the Kick-off meeting, the Planning Advisory Committee conducted five Focus Topic meetings where residents from the city and the surrounding townships, City Council members, Planning Commission members, and EDA members learned about community issues, gave input into resolving the issues, and discussed goals and strategies to address the issues in the Comprehensive Plan. The Focus Topic Meetings were well attended and a list of participants is located in the Acknowledgements. A concerted effort was made to make the public meetings accessible to the broadest spectrum of citizens – meetings were scheduled during the day and during the early evening.

Once the Focus Topic meetings were complete, a draft comprehensive plan was prepared and reviewed by the Planning Advisory Committee and Planning Commission.

## COMMUNITY-WIDE VISION STATEMENT

The vision for the city of Hutchinson is a compilation of ideas expressed by its citizens during public Kick-off and vision sessions. The vision statement is a broad position statement used as a guide for the development of more specific goals and policies.

Hutchinson will be...

### **A Place Where Development is Compatible with the Environment**

Most residents see growth and change as continuing through the next decades. Residents also recognize the need to ensure that “growth for the sake of growth” does not become the theme for the community. The community must remain mindful of the need to balance growth and environmental preservation.

### **A Place With Economic Opportunity**

Hutchinson has seen economic prosperity for the past decade and the city is a major employment center in the county. The community supports local efforts to expand and diversify the economic base of the city.

### **A Place with a Strong, Diverse and Growing City Core**

The city center has historically been the place where the community congregated to worship, conduct business and create the sense of community that made Hutchinson a regional center. The Downtown and surrounding area must strive to be the focal point of community activities, commerce and recreation.

### **A Place that is Aesthetically Pleasing**

Development should not only be sensitive to the natural surroundings, but also the impact it has on the built environment. The community desires to improve the quality of development through careful consideration of building materials, signage and scale, landscaping and vegetation and attractive streetscapes.