

**GRANT COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
2014**

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INTRODUCTION

Existing County Comprehensive Plan

Grant County has been guided by a comprehensive plan entitled The Grant County Comprehensive Plan since 1998. During this 34-year period the county experienced a significant population decline like other rural areas of North Dakota. The county is now confronted with growth and development issues in the agriculture and energy sectors. The increased scrutiny of the cost of public services, changing economic trends, growing concern about the effects of land consumption, and possible energy development has resulted in a decision to update the Comprehensive Plan.

Purpose of Updating the Comprehensive Plan

Communities and counties make a decision to update their comprehensive plans for a variety of reasons. Typically, everything that is addressed in a comprehensive plan is meant to guide policy-makers in their decisions-making process with respect to the physical nature of the land in their jurisdiction, and the manner in which those decisions affect public services. Times change, the issues and values that once drove certain land use decisions may no longer be valid and new issues and community values become more prominent. When county leaders make a decision to update a comprehensive plan, they are acknowledging these changes and are laying the groundwork to take advantage of new opportunities to guide the future of their county. The reasons for updating the Grant County Comprehensive Plan have been identified as follows:

- Effectively plan for and manage growth
- Efficient use of public lands
- Retain the viability of agricultural activities
- Identify and promote economic opportunities
- Identify, preserve and promote the wise use of natural resources
- Protect and enhance the environment
- Partner with the cities, state and federal governments in the provision of recreational opportunities
- Ensure consistency with other planning processes
- Ensure adequate provision of public facilities and services
- Preserve historic, cultural, and archaeological resources

Grant County Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan serves as a basis for making decisions on long-range development. It indicates in a general way the thoughts the people and local decision-makers have about their county and its communities and the way they want to develop over the next years. It is not a binding document, but rather an ongoing process designed to be flexible and dynamic – subject to periodic updating and changes as needs dictate.

The plan consist of two parts: Part I contains background information on the human, economic and natural resources and land characteristics of the county or the cities; Part II presents the plan itself through a series of Goals, Objectives and Implementation Strategies as recommended by the Grant County Zoning Board based on input received from the public and the conclusions of the various characteristics and problems as determined through an analysis of the background information and subsequently adopted by the Board of County Commissioners.

Definitions

Goal: Broad general concept that an individual, a community, or a society wishes to attain in the future.

Objective: A more specific, measurable step to be taken toward achieving a goal.

Implementation Strategies: (Policies) A particular and coordinated action which is designed to achieve the goal and objectives.

VISION

Grant County is located in the south central region of North Dakota. It is bordered by Morton County to the North; Hettinger County, Stark County and Adams County to the West; Sioux County to the South and East. The County was settled by farmers, ranchers, and tradesmen in the 1890's and early 1900's. There are four incorporated communities within the County: New Leipzig, Elgin, Leith, and Carson. Agriculture traditionally has been and remains the backbone of the local economy.

The goal is to maintain the quality of place currently enjoyed by the residents; maintaining the agrarian ideal; protecting the integrity of the rural communities; and continuing the stewardship of the land, all while reaping the benefits of development. The county is focused on building new opportunities for the future.

The vision of Grant County is to be a place where agriculture remains the primary use of land, but will coexist with alternate uses which complement agriculture. This vision will be realized by initiatives in several areas including:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Health, schools, taxes, traffic, the environment, public service, economic growth – are all affected by development decisions. Growth presents a tremendous opportunity for progress in Grant County. At the same time growth pressures trigger a struggle to maintain farmland or natural landscapes, small town traditions, and rural character while still benefitting from development. Economic development focuses on:

- 1) Governmental policies and programs directed at elements of the economy expanding the tax base;
- 2) Policies and programs designed to provide high quality transportation systems, public safety, housing, health and work-force training;
- 3) Policies and programs directed at job creation and retention, higher wage levels, and real estate development.

Goal: Enhance and diversify Grant County's economy.

Objectives:

- A. Strive for a well-rounded, stable economic foundation for the county.
- B. Encourage workforce development and training efforts to retain a viable workforce for economic growth.
- C. Preserve the importance of the agriculture sector in the county.
- D. Coordinate plans to ensure an adequate supply of industrial and commercial land in appropriate locations.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to economic development, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports collaborative planning efforts with all jurisdictions in the County and with economic development organizations directed at identifying the need for future commercial/industrial land.
- 2) Grant County supports efforts made toward economic development that results in good stewardship of natural resources.
- 3) Grant County supports economic development efforts that result in a majority of living wage jobs rather than a majority of jobs that do not provide employees with adequate income levels.

- 4) Grant County supports the land use and zoning designation of an adequate supply of commercial and industrial land as needed to attract quality business and industrial and energy development within the County.
- 5) Grant County supports efforts to promote tourism and the County's recreational potential.
- 6) Grant County supports research, processing and utilization of agricultural products and by-products.
- 7) Grant County supports research, utilization, processing and conversion of energy resources and related by-products by local industries.
- 8) Grant County supports and promotes the ideal of the family farm/ranch as an economically viable way of life.
- 9) Grant County supports economic development through the development of community amenities which make the County an attractive place to live, work, and play.

GOVERNMENTAL

While philosophies over time differ as to the role of government or the size of governmental administrative agencies, government on the county and local level, at a minimum, is charged with the task of providing for the health, safety, and welfare of the general public. As county government attempts reasonable management of beneficial growth, it must find a balance between the interest of industry, commerce, and the general public, while at the same time maintaining and protecting the rural character of the county.

Grant County should establish governmental policies, practices, and priorities that protect the public health and welfare and balance the needs of both the public and growth interests.

Goal: Enhance the administration of county government for the betterment of Grant County and its residents.

Objectives:

- A. Provide for improved levels of communication and coordination between the county and the cities within Grant County.
- B. Provide for public involvement in the decision-making process.
- C. Provided for a cost-effective and efficient method of governmental administration and services.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to governmental administration, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports coordination with state, federal and regional agencies and companies and associations involved in energy development to ensure appropriate planning.
- 2) Grant County supports working for the development of consistent and complementary zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and annexation procedures between Grant County and the cities within the County.
- 3) Grant County supports proportionate increases in distribution of state oil/gas and coal severance taxes relative to the energy producing counties.
- 4) Grant County supports maintaining a close working relationship between the County and the communities within Grant County.

- 5) Grant County supports the cooperation and communication on a regular basis with the neighboring county commissions of southwestern North Dakota.
- 6) Grant County supports the development of active and creative local leadership.
- 7) Grant County supports the solicitation, consideration, and utilization of citizen input and suggestions when making public decisions.
- 8) Grant County supports the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology and data analysis in the decision-making process where appropriate.
- 9) Grant County supports the periodic review of county codes and ordinances to ensure their current relevancy.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Grant County is blessed with abundant natural resources with the potential for future development. It also has a delicate watershed system and soils conducive to erosion. The stewardship of natural resources often results in polarized opinions. All acknowledge the need to protect our natural resources. Technologies need to be developed that meet human population and economic needs in such a manner that allows the environment to sustain and regenerate its resources.

Goal: Encourage the wise and proper use or development of the county's natural resources.

Objectives:

- A. Recognize the potentials and capabilities of the land and its uses, particularly in regard to natural resource development.
- B. Maintain Grant County's clean and favorable environment.
- C. Promote the appropriate use of productive agricultural land.
- D. Preserve adequate quantities and quality of ground and surface water supplies.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to natural resource development and conservation, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports the establishment of county natural, recreational or historical preservation areas.
- 2) Grant County supports proper planning for impacts resulting from coal, oil, natural gas, wind, or other natural resource development.
- 3) Grant County supports the prohibition of mining activities within a two-mile radius of the jurisdictional limits of any incorporated city within the County.
- 4) Grant County supports an inventory and reclamation program aimed at abandoned coal mines and barrow pits in the county.
- 5) Grant County supports the preservation of open spaces and natural features in private and public developments.
- 6) Grant County supports the identification of and protection of available and potential sources of surface and groundwater.

LAND USE

Planners strive to find the best and most efficient use of land. This goal is tempered by competing use values. Agriculture has historically played a dominant role in the local economy. Multiple generations of families have owned and operated the land. Any land use plan must take into account this rural heritage and the rural values it has fostered over the years. Cultural and historical resources as well as competing industrial and commercial demands must be considered in the development of any land use plan.

Goal: Assure that the use of land is properly planned and compatible with adjacent land uses.

Objectives:

- A. Encourage the wise use of agricultural land.
- B. Strive to protect the agricultural integrity of rural areas.
- C. Ensure orderly and desirable energy development.
- D. Provide for proper growth management practices.
- E. Avoid conflicts between land uses.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to land use regulation, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports limiting structural development in floodplain areas.
- 2) Grant County supports uniform land use regulations.
- 3) Grant County supports ensuring that lot or subdivision development programs do not create runoff, siltation, or conflicting uses for adjacent property owners.
- 4) Grant County supports the prohibition of the approval of spot zoning except at established farmsteads or other sites which meet the county's requirements.
- 5) Grant County supports the utilization of defined growth management sectors within the county for planning and decision-making purposes.
- 6) Grant County supports the prohibition of residential or commercial subdivisions on problem soils areas.

- 7) Grant County supports the assessment of existing utility corridors and discouraging developments that are not readily accessible to utility services.
- 8) Grant County supports analyzing the ability of the county and local entities to provide increased public services (fire protection, police, roads, schools, etc.) to new development areas.
- 9) Grant County supports ensuring that adequate water and waste disposal is available prior to subdivision approval..
- 10) Grant County supports commercial development in homogeneous locations.
- 11) Grant County supports the prohibition of uses that depreciate land values of adjacent properties.
- 12) Grant County supports the development of standards for the construction of and maintenance of roads in subdivision developments.
- 13) Grant County supports the clustering of residential, commercial, and light industrial development within the extraterritorial limits of the County's communities, to the degree possible and practical.
- 14) Grant County supports the use of existing utility corridors and discouraging developments that are not readily accessible to utility services.
- 15) Grant County supports subdivision designs that are compatible with the environmental characteristics of the site, as well as complement the location.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

County government is charged with the task of providing services and facilities for public use. These benefits are designed to protect the general health and welfare of the citizenry and to improve the general quality of life. Grant County is on the threshold of experiencing development in unincorporated areas. This presents concerns not only of whether the county is capable of meeting new demands but that the cost of providing these services often exceed the revenue generated from taxes in these areas. Public services and facilities involve law enforcement, ambulance services and road maintenance.

Goal: Plan, develop, provide and maintain adequate and efficient public facilities and services.

Objectives:

- A. Keep abreast of needs as they change throughout the county.
- B. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of county operations and services.
- C. Ensure safe and healthy living conditions for the residents of the county.
- D. Provide a means by which the county and its cities can direct future growth and development.
- E. Ensure that land is available to provide for economical and efficient construction, operation, and maintenance of the public facilities and services in both existing and future developments.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to the county's needs for public facilities and service, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports examining the feasibility of combining city and county governmental services and facilities through intergovernmental cooperation and joint-exercise-of-powers agreements for cooperative ventures, thus avoiding duplication of services and facilities and minimizing tax expenditures.
- 2) Grant County supports ensuring that the costs of additional services and facilities are equitably distributed among actual users, developers without undue stress upon general taxpayers.
- 3) Grant County supports the continual update of departmental manpower and equipment needs assessments, priorities, fiscal impact analysis and capital improvement programs.

- 4) Grant County supports providing adequate law enforcement services and equipment throughout the county.
- 5) Grant County supports providing for the needs of the county's senior citizen population.
- 6) Grant County supports providing adequate emergency services throughout the county and training for emergency medical and para-medical personnel.
- 7) Grant County supports providing for the park and recreational needs of all county residents, increasing facilities and service where warranted by population densities.
- 8) Grant County supports upgrading existing facilities and services to meet state and federal standards.
- 9) Grant County supports ensuring that social service programs are available and managed in a cost-effective manner.
- 10) Grant County supports the sustainability of adequate medical facilities within the county.
- 11) Grant County supports the establishment of a county-wide Geographic Information System (GIS) incorporating all jurisdictions.
- 12) Grant County supports upgrading its current website for the use and benefit of the citizens of the county and to take advantage of technological advances for information dissemination.
- 13) Grant County supports the development a public facilities and services plan to determine land needs and location requirements for public facilities.

TRANSPORTATION

An adequate transportation system is essential to the continued economic growth and development in Grant County. This is the case both for agricultural and commercial interests. Grant County currently enjoys vehicular and truck (freight) service. The County does not have regularly scheduled public bus, air, or train service. Commercial or energy development impacts will stress the county's transportation systems and networks.

Goal: Provide and maintain an adequate transportation system within Grant County.

Objectives:

- A. Provide reliable routes for the transfer of goods and products to markets.
- B. Integrate County road improvements with land use needs and public service areas.
- C. Ensure the long-term viability of the existing transportation services in the County.

Implementation Strategies:

- 1) Grant County supports safe access by county residents to necessary facilities, services and public transportation systems.
- 2) Grant County supports determining snow removal and maintenance capacities within the county on a need basis.
- 3) Grant County supports developing a road improvement and bridge replacement program.
- 4) Grant County supports developing a preferred heavy traffic road network.
- 5) Grant County supports the use of low water crossings as an alternative to over-designed bridges and structures where appropriate.
- 6) Grant County supports establishing and implementing right-of-way needs for future roadway network improvements.
- 7) Grant County supports locating rural subdivisions in areas presently serviced by arterial roads and which can accommodate the additional traffic load.
- 8) Grant County supports the use of local airport facilities.

RECREATION

Grant County promotes a wide array of recreational opportunities throughout the County. Hunting, fishing, water-based sports, golf, hiking, and rodeos represent but just a few of the assets and activities available to the user. These activities also support a growing tourism trade within the area.

Goal: Optimize the County's recreational assets.

Objectives:

- A. Recognize, develop, promote and maintain the quality of recreational assets of the county.
- B. Encourage tourism development through promotion of the County's recreational assets.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to recreation, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County supports the development and maintenance of parks and recreational sites and activities for all County residents and visitors.
- 2) Grant County supports the expansion of facilities and services when warranted by population densities and opportunities.
- 3) Grant County seeks to coordinate with city programs and facilities to meet the needs of the County's residents.
- 4) Grant County supports efforts to promote tourism and the County's recreational potential.

HOUSING

Adequate housing is a concern in Grant County. Anticipated growth increases the pressure on existing housing developments and demands new solutions to the problem.

Goal: Promote an adequate housing supply for the existing and future residents of Grant County.

Objectives:

- A. Promote a wide range of housing options and desirable housing for all socio-economic and age groups within Grant County.
- B. Encourage the improvement of the quality of the housing supply.

Implementation Strategies:

With respect to housing, Grant County adopts the following policies:

- 1) Grant County encourages housing development in areas with adequate infrastructure.
- 2) Grant County supports rural housing development when it is located within close proximity of the primary county road system, and is designed and constructed in a manner which ensures utilities match those available in existing cities.
- 3) Grant County supports the development of a land use plan and zoning districts that provide for a variety of housing styles.
- 4) Grant County supports the creation and maintenance of aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods.
- 5) Grant County supports the requirements for buffer areas and “transitional land uses” between residential districts and industrial and commercial developments to ensure land use compatibility in and around neighborhoods.
- 6) Grant County supports the development of housing facilities which minimize negative impacts on the County.