

# Cook County Plan

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## Guiding Principles

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This plan cannot and does not attempt to make every future decision today. Instead, it is a guide, a constitution of sorts, providing a consistent framework within which future Cook County policy and decision makers can address issues. The first section of this chapter presents the Goals and Policies for guiding decision making. The second section identifies indicators with which to measure progress toward achieving the stated goals.

### GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals translate the desired future conditions for Cook County into terms of specific land use related topics. As such, the goals represent desired end results. Under each goal are policies intended to guide ongoing decision making to achieve those goals. These goals and policies must be used in conjunction with the statements on sense of place and desired future condition.

These goals and policies must be applied with a **sense of balance**, noting that simultaneous full achievement of any two goals may not be possible. Decisions using these statements must establish a balance between them that is appropriate for the context in which the decision is being made.

#### Overall Goal

**Goal:** To achieve a pattern of land use in Cook County that reflects the Sense of Place and Desired Future Condition statements of this plan.

#### Policies:

1. The Sense of Place and the Desired Future Condition statements of this plan shall be explicitly considered and discussed by the County when making land use decisions, investing in public infrastructure, evaluating impacts of projects and programs, and considering other pertinent matters.
2. Land use planning and management decisions will incorporate an ecosystem-based management approach that:
  - a. recognizes the interrelatedness of natural resources and focuses management on the sustainability of whole ecological systems as the best way to do the most good for the greatest number of species;
  - b. recognizes the economy, the community, and the environment are interrelated and that solutions to issues must reflect that economic prosperity and lasting livelihoods depend upon healthy ecosystems; and
  - c. requires that government and people at the community, regional and state levels work together to face problems, identify opportunities, and find common solutions.
3. The County shall establish a set of indicators to use in biennial evaluations of change within the county relative to the land use plan. The evaluations shall evaluate the degree and nature of change, review the ability of the plan

to manage this change in an appropriate and desired manner, and identify an appropriate course of action through the plan and related processes to deal with the change and its impacts.

## **General Land Use**

**Goal:** To have an inventory of land suitable and appropriately located for the anticipated types of land uses, compatible with natural resources, and proximity to existing infrastructure.

**Goal:** To protect non-compatible land uses from one another.

### **Policies:**

4. The predominant use of undeveloped or remote areas, particularly areas not served by maintained roads or school bus service, should be forest management, recreation, and wild life habitat areas.
5. Rezoning of land must consider the existing quantity of land available at the appropriate locations and at that time for a given purpose.
6. Up-to-date economic, natural resource use and population information should be used to adjust the amount and location of individual land use (zoning) designations to provide a variety of living and working situations.
7. Land uses with compelling location-specific requirements (such as an industry's need to be adjacent to water and highway for shipping, special commercial facilities such as ski hills, golf course or resorts, or uses utilizing existing structures or sites with extraordinary limiting features) must be evaluated in light of those unique requirements or features and the use's potential adverse impacts on adjacent property and uses.
8. Land ownership should not be a sole determining factor in the development or non-development of land. Overall development patterns of adjacent areas, the ability to economically provide needed public services, natural features, the land's importance or potential importance to larger ecosystems, impacts on the local economy, and other such intrinsic factors must be considered as well..
9. Agricultural activities are recognized as a valid land use and will be encouraged to continue where appropriate.
10. The County recognizes and supports the existence of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, existing State Parks and other Federal and State lands for appropriate uses within Cook County.
11. Potentially incompatible adjacent land uses shall be buffered from one another. Means to accomplish this may include open space, berming, plant material, building design, hours of operation, noise control, or other means.
12. Review of conditional uses or rezonings must evaluate impacts on but not limited to: relationship to land use plan, benefit to the overall community, adjacent use, air and water quality, traffic generation, public safety and health, area aesthetics, and economic impact on area.
13. Redevelopment of already developed lands is generally preferred over the development of undeveloped land.

14. Underground utility lines are preferred wherever feasible and utility providers are encouraged to allow the growth of woody vegetation along rights-of-ways to serve as visual screen zones where corridors intersect public roads and trails, and as water course protection zones. Further, utility providers are encouraged to maintain rights-of-way in a manner that reduces fire hazards.
15. Cook County may acquire and manage lands to provide recreation areas, open space, green areas, timber management, and access to public lands and lakeshore.

## **Natural Features and Environmental Concerns**

**Goal:** To maintain and enhance the quality of natural resources and other natural features within the county and to sustain and enhance the biological diversity and ecological function of native ecosystems within the county.

**Policies:**

16. Adverse impacts on air quality, surface and ground waters, wildlife habitat, ecological systems, and other natural features must be evaluated and minimized in land use decisions.
17. Visual impact of altering the landscape and of new development must be measured and considered in local land use decisions.
18. The value of natural features as the basis for economic activity in the county should be maintained and enhanced.
19. Encourage the conservation and preservation of unique or distinctive natural features and systems (e.g., lakes, land areas or other features of scientific, natural history or archeological significance) in recognition of the irreplaceable character of such resources and their importance to the quality of life in Cook County.
20. The goals, objectives, and policies of the Cook County Comprehensive Water Management Plan are included within this plan by reference.
21. Views from public roads, especially Highway 61, are to be dominated by the natural setting with most forms of development to be unobtrusive and secondary to the view.
22. Cumulative effects of land use decisions regarding natural features and systems, including the function of riparian ecosystems and the permanent conversion of land, shall be evaluated on watershed and ecoregion scales.
23. Noise and night lighting shall be specifically considered in all land use decisions with the intent to minimize adverse impacts on the enjoyment of other properties or on other land uses.
24. Maintain the function and health of the county's hydrologic cycles by protecting wetlands, riparian areas, and streambeds.
25. Land use decisions shall insure that there is no net loss of wetlands, as measured by area, in Cook County.

26. In land use decisions the health and existence of natural systems shall be considered to have inherent value apart from their value as resources for human use.
27. In order to participate in the effort to conserve, protect, and enhance natural features affected by global processes (such as atmospheric change, air born contamination, loss of non-renewable resources), Cook County will move toward an ideal of sustainability by conserving energy, reducing waste, and reducing pollution in land use practices and in the delivery of County services.
28. Encourage cooperative forest management between Federal, State, Tribal, private and County authorities to solve common problems, review each others' plans, develop common goals and management practices, and work with common resource data bases.
29. Encourage forest management plans and practices that insure sustainable and biologically diverse forest ecosystems and provide merchantable levels of timber for harvest at a rate of consumption that is within the capacity of the forest for renewal.

## **Residential**

**Goal:** To provide a range of residential options with respect to cost, density of development, and locations within the county.

### **Policies:**

30. Residential density should be greatest near areas of concentration of commercial and public services and employment opportunities.
31. Within Cook County there should be opportunities for a variety of residential development densities ranging from low densities in remote areas to village-like densities in the community centers and for a variety of residential types including single family homes (including manufactured housing), duplexes, triplexes, quads, larger multiple-family structures, and manufactured home parks.
32. Areas not served by public services (e.g., utilities and roads), but in a "next tier" location where service might be logically extended in an orderly way that would not pass over or "leap frog" other suitable lands should be made available for recreational residential or year around residential uses that do not require public services.
33. Residential uses will be allowed in the remote unserved areas of the county only if the property owner accepts a waiver that relieves the County of the obligation to provide services to those uses.
34. Areas designated primarily for residential use should be located so as to be free of any detrimental effects from commercial or industrial uses.
35. Encourage and support efforts by other entities (private for-profit, private non-profit, public) to provide an adequate supply of quality housing with prices affordable to the work force of Cook County.
36. Residential areas should have ready and convenient access to public parks, open areas or green space.

## **Commercial**

**Goal:** To provide commercial facilities to meet the needs of residents and visitors.

**Policies:**

37. The traditional commercial service centers of Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais, Hovland, and Grand Portage should be strengthened rather than allow the addition of new centers.
38. Expansion should be provided for all commercial centers without adversely impacting residential or open space districts.
39. Location-specific commercial uses such as solid waste disposal areas, airports, radio towers, and gravel pits must be sited on an individual basis with accompanying standards to protect adjacent land uses.
40. Specialized commercial activity (e.g., resorts, campgrounds, ski hills, marinas, etc.) that depends on and requires specific site conditions can co-exist with residential and other land uses through the application of standards regarding screening from adjacent uses, traffic conditions, size and scope of the activity, and other similar concerns.
41. Commercial fishing on Lake Superior is an activity that should be encouraged by allowing small-scale fish houses, ramps, and boat houses along the shore provided that adjacent non-commercial property is not adversely affected.
42. Home occupations and home businesses are appropriate uses in all districts permitting residences provided that pertinent standards are applied to protect surrounding residences, foster development of desired commercial areas, insure appropriate scale and intensity of the use, minimize adverse impacts on roads, and preserve the overall intent of the portion of the county in which the uses are located.
43. Small scale farming that provides products for local use shall be encouraged.

## **Industrial**

**Goal:** To provide for industrial operations in the county in a manner that protects the health, safety and general welfare of Cook County residents and the integrity of the natural environment.

**Policies:**

44. The general siting standards for industry shall be:
  - a. General heavy industry shall be limited to the immediate area of Taconite Harbor and to the City of Grand Marais and its immediately surrounding areas, but in neither case along the shore of Lake Superior.
  - b. As a means to encourage light industrial development, the County can designate areas for such development. The first consideration for such areas is to be locations within or adjacent the community centers. In all cases, consideration will be made to minimize adverse impacts on adjacent land through combinations of building design and construction, site configuration and design, and operations.

45. Standards and conditions will be considered when evaluating proposals for the exploration for and/or excavation of minerals, including gravel, building stone, and gemstones:
  - a. Standards for mining of gravel shall be developed which protect gravel resource areas from conflicting use, assure a future supply, protect the environment, protect the public health, safety and welfare, and provide for reclamation of mined areas.
  - b. Standards for mineral exploration or mining shall be developed which are compatible with the general land use of the county, protect the environment, and for which a public benefit is demonstrated.

## **Design and**

## **Scale of Development**

**Goal:** To insure that any public or private development utilizes place-specific design to create a built environment that:

- respects natural features, landform and vegetation;
- reinforces local character, sense of place and image of Cook County; and
- reflects the context of the site.

### **Policies:**

46. Wherever desirable and for all types of uses (residential, commercial, industrial, mixed) the County will require the consideration of the concept of "conservation subdivision" or cluster development as a means to achieve the goals of this plan, increase the amount of undeveloped land, and reduce the cost of land development while maintaining the designated development density of the affected area.
47. Develop sign standards which control size, number, color, location of signs, and other features and allow the opportunity for effective communication while protecting the visual amenities of the area. These standards should assure compatibility of signs with surrounding land uses, protect property values, and be consistent with desired future conditions.
48. For ridgeline land parcels, locations for buildings should be downgrade from the summit to reduce the visible profile on the horizon. Allowable building heights should be calculated weighing the height of the down-slope elevation.
49. Design standards should be developed and utilized in consideration of Planned Unit Developments and Conditional Uses. Standards to be developed should address concepts such as:
  - building height, massing and scale;
  - materials and color;
  - vegetation removal;
  - design specific to the particular site and function rather than generic design; and
  - cost to implement.
50. Designation of Design Districts may be initiated by local areas within the county, which districts would devise design standards for development taking into consideration the elements stated in Policy 49 and others as may be appropriate.

## **Recreation**

**Goal:** To provide a variety of opportunities for recreational activity for the residents of and visitors to Cook County.

**Policies:**

51. Recreational opportunities and facilities should be based upon the area's natural assets, generally being of a type and scale that blend with Cook County's image as a wild, uncrowded, natural, and unspoiled place.
52. Encourage the development of public recreational facilities which residents want for their use and enjoyment.
53. Cook County recognizes the general need to separate motorized and non-motorized recreational uses especially with regard to high use trails. Efforts are to be made to provide corridors, combining compatible uses when possible, and limiting the number of trails in an area to minimize adverse impacts on residents, affected property owners, and the natural environment.
54. Cook County recognizes and supports the existing system of State and Federal parks and recreational facilities as an integral part of Cook County's recreation and open space system.
55. In areas with dense residential development such as community centers, and in areas along Highway 61 and Lake Superior, provision for developed recreation areas and access to undeveloped open space, public land, Lake Superior, and similar areas should be made.
56. The County will encourage some natural areas in which recreational opportunities are available without any developed facilities such as trails, roads, boat landings, parking lots and the like.
57. Limit recreational boating marinas to Taconite Harbor, Grand Marais, and Grand Portage.

## **Transportation**

**Goal:** To provide for the safe, economical movement of people, goods and services through and within the County minimizing adverse impacts on natural features and people.

**Policies:**

58. Maintain close cooperation between the Minnesota Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, US Forest Service and local government to insure the actions of each are not in conflict with each other regarding roads, construction, designation, use, and maintenance.
59. Encourage and support alternate methods and/or routes for the shipment of goods going through, but not serving, the county by truck.
60. Generators of heavy traffic, such as major commercial and industrial centers, should be located along or close to the Highway 61 corridor.
61. The County will support actions that retain Highway 61 as a two-lane highway with the following general characteristics:
  - a. Adequate shoulders for safety and maneuvering.

- b. Reduced speed zones in developed areas.
  - c. Ditching that adequately controls drainage but are small enough to minimize clearing.
  - d. Roadside vegetation that reduces attraction of deer to roadside.
  - e. Paths for bicycling, in-line skating, walking and similar means of transportation are provided within the corridor, usually the right of way, but not along the roadway proper or the shoulder.
62. Provide a County road network that appropriately provides access to development and use areas, facilitates safe and free-flowing travel, can be maintained within reasonable budget limits, and coordinates with Federal, State, Tribal and Town road systems.
63. Known hazardous areas for vehicles or pedestrians should receive priority for corrective action by the county, state or other responsible jurisdiction.
64. In general, the County will not accept ownership of or responsibility for new or existing roads whose primary function is to serve local or abutting residential, commercial or industrial uses. The County may consider accepting ownership of or responsibility for new or existing roads whose primary function is to serve as collector or arterial traffic routes and whose inclusion would result in areas of additional development potential that were consistent with all aspects of the Land Use Plan. Those new or existing roads for which the County does accept ownership or responsibility must meet all appropriate design standards.
65. Private roads, not including driveways, over which it is reasonably expected that public (e.g., school buses) or emergency vehicles will travel are to be built to a minimum acceptable standard.
66. The County will work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to encourage planning, improvements and maintenance of Highway 61 that will:
- maintain safety;
  - identify, inventory and protect view corridors both landward and lakeward from the corridor;
  - recognize the aesthetic experience of driving this corridor as an economic asset of the County; and
  - reinforce the urban and community centers.

Similar concerns will be considered on major County roads.

67. Support the design and construction of roads, especially in rural areas, that tend toward lower design speeds, unpaved surfaces, narrower rights-of-way, and narrower corridors cleared for road surface, shoulder, ditches and banks.
68. Support current level of air transportation facilities in Cook County and as may be appropriate in the future, consider expansion of airport facilities and services at existing and/or new sites.

## **Public Facilities and Services**

**Goal:** To provide quality public facilities and the delivery of public services that meet the needs of residents and visitors, that are justifiable in terms of cost effectiveness, and are within the County's ability to pay for them.



**Policies:**

69. Land use decisions will be made that support the ability to provide cost effective public infrastructure, utilities and services or, where appropriate, comparable privately provided services.
70. The County will not undertake and will discourage others from taking actions that would encourage permanent development in areas designated by the plan as being remote rural, low density or otherwise worded low intensity development. This includes giving low priority for public road construction and maintenance and the provision of non-emergency public services in such areas.
71. Lands with ecological or cultural values worthy of protection should be retained in public ownership. Those public lands that are better suited to private ownership in all respects should be offered for sale.
72. Public facilities such as maintenance garages, landfills, gravel pits, etc. should be sited with care so as to provide locations convenient to the need for such facilities but also in a manner that respects adjacent land uses and is a good example for private land uses.
73. The adequacy and economics of public services in the review of specific rezoning proposals or conditional use permits, is a valid part of their consideration and should be evaluated in every case.
74. Support reduction, recycling and reuse as the appropriate approach to solid waste issues.

**Economic  
Considerations**

**Goal:** To encourage the development of a strong local economy featuring diversity, potential for sustainability, a range of economic opportunities, and an efficiently serviceable development pattern.

**Policies:**

75. A capital improvement priority list should be maintained and observed for the maintenance and replacement of county facilities.
76. Support economic development concepts, strategies and specific projects that maintain or enhance economic opportunity and community well-being, that specifically consider land use relationships, and that protect, restore, enhance or otherwise sustain the social, economic, and natural environments upon which the County's economic livelihood depends.
77. Support the development of private and non-County public recreational facilities and systems designed primarily to serve tourists so long as such facilities and systems are in keeping with the general intent of this plan.
78. Support a diversification of the local economy through land use decisions that lessen dependence upon tourism. Businesses are to be encouraged that are small scale, locally owned, minimally polluting, and based on local resources.

## **Administrative and Intergovernmental**

**Goal:** To integrate land use concerns into all appropriate ongoing administrative actions.

**Policies:**

79. The adopted land use plan should represent a tool for public and private decision making regarding land use.
80. Land use related decisions shall recognize the need to duly consider the rights and responsibilities of the general public good with the corresponding rights and responsibilities of the individual.
81. The process by which land use related decisions are made is to incorporate the following principles for open and civil discourse:
  - a. Accept controversy. Controversy is the heart of spirited debate. It is the opposite of conflict, not disagreement.
  - b. Let the other person speak. Listen to what they say. Ask questions to clarify their position, not debate it. Each person is to have his or her say.
  - c. Debate is to be depersonalized. People can disagree with each other and still respect each other. Argue the issues, not the people supporting one side or another.
  - d. Focus on the process. View the process as child rearing not winning vs losing. Child rearing is a process that has its ups and downs but no precisely defined wins and losses. We can celebrate successes, but the success and the celebration are part of community building, not a win over somebody else.
  - e. Look for common ground. The first and most important step is to find or create areas that we share in common. When we have disagreements, we can return to this common foundation to begin building mutually acceptable solutions.
82. County involvement in and/or support of land exchanges between units of government or between government and private parties will be guided by the following:
  - a. The County should seek to exchange County-owned land with state and/or federal land so as to: consolidate existing County lands and acquire land with potential to serve County needs.
  - b. Lands acquired by the County should be reviewed for any potential public use. If no public use is present or anticipated in the future, these lands should be offered for sale or leased to the public if they are in an area where the land use plan specifies private development.
  - c. The County will only acquire land from private land owners for the purposes of achieving the goals of this plan from willing sellers. This policy does not apply to condemnation proceedings to remove unsafe structures, construct roadways, provide essential infrastructure and services, or similar efforts.
  - d. The County will encourage and where necessary facilitate the exchange of federal and state owned land for privately owned land where the net exchange enhances the land use patterns, desired future conditions, and stated land use plan objectives which overall

- insure an adequate amount of appropriate private land for development.
- e. The County, where appropriate, will encourage and facilitate the transfer of federal and state owned land currently being leased by private parties to those private parties.

- 83. The various levels of government having land use jurisdiction in the county such as the US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of the Interior, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, should be made aware of the county land use plan and incorporate its content into their planning, management and decision making regarding land use issues in the county.
- 84. The County will cooperate with Grand Portage Reservation to guide the use of private, non-Tribal lands within the Reservation in a manner that supports both County and Reservation policies.
- 85. Because Cook County's relatively large amount of remote, hard to reach areas hinders appropriately quick response times for emergency services, the County supports the training of residents to provide basic emergency skills to augment professional providers.

## **Education**

**Goal:** To encourage the development of a well educated populace and the concept of life-long learning through support for academic institutions as well as recognition of the educational opportunities presented within the community itself.

**Policies:**

- 86. Encourage and support the continued presence of viable public schools in Tofte, Grand Marais, and Grand Portage as means to provide education and sustain dynamic communities.
- 87. Encourage programs to increase the amount and level of information available to residents in Cook County as a means to create a more informed populace regarding land use and community issues.