

Record of Meeting

Date & Time

April 1, 2019 (6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.)

Location

Wakefield Town Hall (22295 Frostview Road, Cold Spring MN 56320)\

Attendance

Committee Members: George Fiedler, Jerry Jennissen, Heidi Stalboerger, Jason Kron, Jason Weinerman, Jeff Bertram, Jeff Mergen, Jim Bartelme, Joe Perske, Ken Massmann, LeRoy Gondringer, Mike Williams, Richard Blenkush, Steve Notch, Tom Schneider

County Staff: Angie Berg, Chelle Benson, Jennifer Buckentine, Heidi Winskowski, Michael Williams

Planning Consultant: Lance Bernard and Jesse Thorsen

Meeting Materials

<https://shapestearns.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/April-1-2019-SC-Meeting-1-Agenda-1-compressed.pdf>

Presentation

<https://shapestearns.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/April-1-2019-SC-Meeting-1-Presentation-compressed.pdf>

Meeting Recap

- 1. Presentation:** The first Steering Committee meeting served as an opportunity to introduce members of the committee to the planning process and project goals. Lance Bernard and Jesse Thorsen from HGKi provided an overview of the project's work plan, schedule, and community engagement activities. Comments received during this presentation include:
 - Make sure to actively engage the townships and rural parts of the county.
 - Utilize public outreach methods to engage those who do not have access to the internet.
 - Consider a public engagement event (pop-up) at "Breakfast on the Farm."
- 2. Group Discussion:** HGKi facilitated a brief discussion on some of the emerging trends and changing demographics that are shaping Stearns County. Demographic data was summarized by the clustering of census block groups. This information is included in the presentation (see link above). The Steering Committee discussed the following items:
 - Demographic trends related to an aging population, smaller household size, poverty rates, and racial/ethnic diversity.
 - Evolving economics (e.g., larger commercial farms) and technology (e.g., broadband, solar, wind, and autonomous vehicles).

Additional data/maps that may help facilitate these discussion in the future include:

- Map of non-residential farms
- Broadband coverage

- 3. Group Activity:** The Steering Committee broke into four groups to answer questions about the future of Stearns County (see attachment). The questions focused on six different parts of the county, known as clusters. The clusters help better define the county's characteristic and mirror census block group lines.

This exercise was intended to give County staff and the planning consultant a better understanding of the county's strengths, issues, and opportunities. General findings from this group activity are summarized below.

Common words used to describe the County:

- Rural
- Agricultural
- Natural
- Stable
- Lakes
- Diverse (pertaining to the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area)
- Young (pertaining to the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area)

Agricultural Themes

- Farms have become larger in scale over the last twenty years. This trend has presented challenges in how to balance rural residential homes with larger farming operations (e.g., sights, sounds, and smells).
- The western part of the county is viewed as some of the best areas for farming, because of its high quality soils (Clusters 1 & 3).
- Cluster 3 has struggled from an economic development perspective. This area may lack a diversity of crops. In turn, this area can struggle when the markets are down.
- The County will need to address it's identity over the next twenty years in respect to agriculture and farming.

Housing Themes

- People enjoy living in the rural parts of the county. However, these land uses need to be carefully balanced with the natural environment to ensure these features are protected.
- The Chain of Lakes continues to be a regional destination for recreational purposes. Homes along these lakes are transitioning from seasonal use to year-round homesteads.
- There is a significant shortage in workforce housing. Workforce housing is needed in proximity to rural jobs (e.g., production facilities and farming operations) and services (e.g., daycare and medical). Areas of need may include Clusters 1 and 3.

Growth/Land Use Themes

- Not much change has occurred in Cluster 5 (status quo).
- The St. Cloud Metropolitan Area continues to grow, while attracting younger families and more diverse population.
- There is a need to better define the transition areas between urban, suburban and rural land uses. For example, Cluster 2 may face challenges in the future as growth from the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area encroaches into the rural/agricultural areas.
- Cluster 1 has a little bit of everything (e.g., farming, industry, services, and urban centers).

Infrastructure Themes

- Sustainable energy sources, such as solar and wind will continue to be a topic of discussion.
- Broadband is a priority for helping rural parts of the county achieve economic prosperity.
- Existing and future traffic volumes along Highway 23 are a concern.
- Highway 71 is well-maintained, but struggles to be an economic development generator like Highway 15 and Highway 23. Cluster 3 needs more services and housing options to attract people.
- The timing of autonomous vehicles may be unknown; however, they will dramatically shape our communities - especially along Interstate 94, Highway 15, and Highway 23.
- Major transportation corridors (e.g., Interstate 94, Highway 15, and Highway 23) have played an important role in supporting development over the years. These corridors are viewed as assets to the county.

County Services

- As the County's population gets older, the demand for rural transit services will increase.
- Residents value the County's parks, trails, and recreational opportunities.
- The County's is viewed as a leader in providing a well-balanced parks system. The local and regional trail system is an important asset in attracting people (residents and visitors) to the county. Specific examples included Quarry Park and the Lake Wobegon Trail.