

LAND USE/GROWTH MANAGEMENT ELEMENT

September 2017



**Chisago County Comprehensive Plan
2017**

Land Use

Introduction

The existing land use and land use trends are important factors in developing policies and preparing a future land use plan for Chisago County. Land use is a major factor as it determines the physical and economic characteristics of the County as well as determining the level of public services that agencies need to provide.

The Chisago County Land Use Plan describes how the County will guide growth in the unincorporated areas. The Land Use Plan is an official document, adopted by the Chisago County Board. It sets the broad policy that guides decisions about the physical development of the County. The Land Use Plan is the legal basis for land use controls.

The Land Use Plan is general and long-term while the zoning ordinance and zoning map are short-range and precise. The Land Use Plan sets the general guidelines and policies for reviewing and evaluating development proposals, the zoning map and ordinances are tools to implement the general guidelines and policies. The Land Use Plan delineates the general land use areas by type. The Zoning Ordinance and map define the zoning districts; special management overlay districts, the permitted, conditional and interim uses and requirements for each use within specific land use zones.

The Land Use Plan provides for logical development patterns that preserve the existing natural resources, respects the existing character of the county and provide a high quality of life. The planned development attempts to meet current needs without placing environmental, economic and social burdens on future generations to meet their needs.

Chisago County administers several ordinances that control land use and protect the unique and varied natural resources of the county. All County ordinances are enforceable only in the unincorporated areas. Cities are responsible for establishing and enforcing ordinances within their boundaries. Townships may adopt ordinances that are as restrictive as or more restrictive than County regulations.

The overall vision of the Chisago County Land Use Plan is to accommodate the county's projected population growth of 13,778 people (an increase of about 25 percent to a total of 68,071 residents) by 2030 while incorporating sustainable growth and preserving the natural, cultural and historic characteristics of the County.

Existing Conditions

Chisago County's diverse land use patterns include historic towns and villages, rural fringes, exurban residential communities and growing suburban-style cities. These areas are interspersed with rivers, natural areas, wetlands, lakes, bluffs and agricultural areas. The variety of developed and open space areas provides a mixture of visual landscapes unique to Chisago County.

A majority of land in Chisago County remains largely undeveloped, primarily in agricultural use, woodlands or wetlands. However, from 1990 – 2007, development occurred at a rapid rate. More recently, development slowed during the recession of 2008 – 2012 and but the rate of new development increased in the years 2013 – 2016. The majority of development has occurred in the southwest area of the County and along I-35 on the western side of the County and the Northern Lakes Area.

The lakes area around Wyoming, Lindstrom, Chisago City and Center City has attracted significant residential development over the past 20-30 years. This part of the County continues to be an area of growth, given proximity to employment centers in the eastern Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Development also continues to occur along I-35, north to the County border.

Commercial development is found primarily within incorporated cities in the County. Unincorporated centers, such as Almelund, Rush Point, Sunrise and Stark also have a limited amount of commercial uses. Increased interest in commercial sites has occurred over the past several years along Interstate 35 and along Highway 8, primarily in Wyoming, Chisago City and Center City.

In total, there are 283,422 acres in Chisago County. Chisago County includes 68,555 acres of protected lakes, waters and wetlands (24% of the total county area). There are 91 lakes in Chisago County. In addition, there are 70,272 acres in incorporated cities (24.8%) and 213,150 acres in townships (75.2%).

State-owned land accounts for a significant portion of land (16,825 acres – about 6 percent of the County) in the County. Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area consists of about 8,740 acres, Wild River State Park 7,000 acres, Interstate State Park 295 acres, Chengwatana State Forest 250 acres and Janet Johnson Wildlife Management Area (WMA) with 540 acres.

Factors Influencing Land Use

The land use situation in the county has not been static but has been constantly changing, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Over time, a multitude of factors have shaped and changed land characteristics, affecting and altering policies and decisions. The present situation has been influenced by characteristics of population, culture, geographical location, natural resource base and many other factors. A brief review of some of the major influences is presented here to summarize their relationship to land use.

1. Geographical Location

The county is located in the glaciated east-central area of Minnesota, bounded on the east by the St. Croix River. The river was a major transportation route at the time of original settlement because it was navigable by steamboat to Taylors Falls. The county lies roughly one-hour drive from the center of the Twin Cities on Interstate 35, which also is the route to Duluth.

2. Cultural Influences

The original settlers of Chisago County came from predominately an agricultural background. Subsistence agriculture on homesteads set the pattern for farm size, which has altered little in later years despite influences such as increased land prices, types of crops grown, and combining of smaller farms into larger landholdings or breaking up of large farms through inheritance or sale.

3. Population Characteristics

The population of the county was relatively stable until the last 20 years when it showed a rather marked increase and a continuing increase in population is expected. With more people coming into the county there has been a corresponding increase of demand on agricultural and open lands for urban and residential uses.

4. Natural Resource Base

The soil quality of Chisago County ranges from very good to unsuitable for agriculture and/or development. Originally, much of the land was covered by forest or oak savannah. There are several areas of poorly drained or steeply sloping land that owners cannot use for agriculture or residential development. The county has little mineral wealth, but has adequate supplies of water resources, that attracted both early settlers and more recently, new residents.

5. Residential Development Patterns

The major development corridors in the county are located around the northern lakes (Rush Lake, Goose Lake, Fish Lake and Horseshoe Lake), adjacent to Interstate 35, in the southern lakes area and along Highway 8. In addition, new home construction is distributed throughout the county.

Some factors affecting land use in the county in the past that are still affecting land use in the county today include:

1. Population Increase

Perhaps the single most important factor affecting land use in Chisago County today and in the near future is the growing population. In-migration of new families has created a demand for more residential areas and support services, leading to conversion of agricultural and open space lands to suburban and urban uses. By 2030, the State is estimating the County population will grow another 25 percent to 68,071 residents.

2. Transportation System

Interstate 35, in conjunction with the remaining highway network within the county, has increased the accessibility of county residents and businesses to the Twin City

Metropolitan Area. People now find it quite feasible to commute to a job in the Twin Cities and still reside in a relatively uncrowded ex-urban/rural environment.

4. Zoning Laws

Past and present zoning laws have had the goal of protecting agricultural lands from urbanization. Scattered small acreages have been developed for residential use.

5. Recreational Demand

Chisago County has the potential for providing recreational uses of the land and on the waters; uses which have increased in importance in recent years. The Wild River State Park and Interstate State Park have become important influences on the area as a major recreational area. There are several important water resources in the County: The St. Croix River, the Sunrise River, the Chisago Lakes in the southern part of the county and lakes in the northwest part of the county including Rush Lake that are all important recreation amenities.

Land Use Regulations

Chisago County provides for the orderly growth and renewal of the county by regulating land uses in the unincorporated areas. Chisago County administers several ordinances that regulate land uses and development. All ordinances are enforceable only in the unincorporated areas of the County. Cities and Lent Township are responsible for establishing and enforcing their own ordinances and implementing their own comprehensive and land use plans.

The following is a summary of the Chisago Land Use Codes and Ordinances:

Zoning Ordinance

The County's zoning ordinance protects the health, safety and welfare of residents and allows wise use of the land, while protecting and conserving its natural resources, its ecological systems and its economic stability.

Subdivision Ordinance

The subdivision ordinance establishes procedures and standards for the division of land in the townships in which the County administers plat and land split review.

Shoreland Ordinance

Through the shoreland ordinance (as mandated by the DNR), the County regulates the subdivision, use and development of shorelands of public waters in the county. These regulations are to preserve and enhance the quality of surface waters, conserve the economic and natural environmental values of the shorelands and provide for wise use of waters and related land resources.

Special Management Overlay Districts

Chisago County has several overlay zoning districts as part of the County zoning ordinance. These include the Upper St. Croix Overlay, Lower St. Croix Overlay, Sunrise River Overlay, Carlos Avery Overlay, Highway 8 Overlay and Sunrise Lake Overlay. It is the purpose of each of these overlay districts to identify extraordinary standards and requirements desirable for the protection of special or unique resources in Chisago County.

Floodplain Ordinance

Chisago County regulates flood hazard areas within the unincorporated areas that are subject to periodic inundation. The floodplain ordinance regulates new development as well as the extension, conversion or structural alteration of buildings in the floodway, flood fringe or general floodplain districts. These regulations prevent or limit building or expanding structures in floodplains in order to protect the public health, safety and general welfare and to conserve and enhance natural resources by preserving the capacity of floodplains to carry and discharge regional floods.

Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) Ordinance

This ordinance regulates the design, installation, use and maintenance of community and subsurface sewage treatment systems. In addition, this ordinance helps provide for the orderly development of areas that do not have access to central public wastewater systems. Please see the Infrastructure Element for more details about this ordinance.

Land Use/Growth Management Goals & Policies

Overall Growth Management & Land Use Statements

Goal: Establish a comprehensive growth management strategy for Chisago County that promotes orderly and efficient growth of residential, commercial and industrial development while preserving the county's rural character.

Policies:

1. Recognize and respond proactively to internal and external growth pressures.
2. In the land use plan, select locations for types of uses based on transportation needs and availability and the best economic development potential, making these inter-supportive of each other.
3. Encourage an integrated approach to land use, transportation and natural resources, including development review for: a sufficient level of supportive services (i.e. schools, jails, emergency services, etc) and infrastructure, compatibility of land use and natural features, and economic viability of the land use.

4. Work towards minimizing conflicts between different and/or incompatible uses by establishing standards, such as, physical barriers, landscape screening and/or setbacks to provide buffers between districts/uses.
5. Define growth management in terms of “public service areas” where growth will be expected, allowed or limited due to the availability of services. These service areas are especially important in the two miles around cities where state law encourages extra-territorial planning of roads and subdivisions.
6. Recognize the importance of gateways to the community. Land uses along the corridor should be closely considered, as they will reflect upon the community’s image. (Hwy 8, Hwy 95, I-35 Interchanges).
7. Identify and preserve viewshed corridors along heavily traveled routes. Some options may include additional setbacks, and/or plantings in these areas.
8. Create a plan to restore or convert improperly used land by using incentives that will compensate for conversions. An example would be converting marginal land along a creek or ditch into a grass buffer strip to reduce run off into the surface water or using alternative reduction strategies for non-point source pollution such as rain gardens or vegetated swales.
9. Promote the proper management of natural and cultural resources for future generations.
10. Preserve the natural and open landscapes of the county’s unincorporated areas.

Goal: Recognize the challenges and compatibility of present and future land use and strive for the most harmonious balance.

Policies:

1. Coordinate plans and work with all local governments and agencies responsible for the regulation of land use.
2. Promote opportunities to communicate with the citizens of Chisago County concerning land development and resource management.
3. Develop an outreach strategy to inform citizens of land use related educational opportunities.
4. Encourage compatible land uses along bordering jurisdictions.
5. Where there is conflict between zoning district standards and the standards in special management overlay districts, the County seeks to have balance in the goals and standards between underlying zoning and management overlay districts.

Residential Development Statements

Goal: Plan for the orderly and efficient growth of residential development in the County.

Policies:

1. Encourage non-farm residential development to be clustered on small lots in and around unincorporated rural village centers, areas that are considered marginal for agricultural use and in locations with adequate road service.
2. Encourage density transfers and clustering techniques for non-farm rural residential development to preserve agriculture and environmentally sensitive areas.
3. Encourage higher residential densities and multiple family housing alternatives to be located in areas serviced by public sewer and water or in areas with community utility systems.
4. Provide a variety of rural housing opportunities, consistent with the natural amenities in the County and the protection of environmental systems.
5. Provide for the orderly development of safe and efficient housing opportunities in the County.
6. Preserve and/or enhance the character of established rural residential neighborhoods (homes on parcels 2 acres or larger with septic systems and wells) that are not planned for public sanitary sewer service. Use incentives for private property owners to preserve trees and maintain lower-density development to maintain rural character.
7. Encourage cluster developments to create appealing, low environmental impact rural neighborhoods.
8. Support compatible agricultural and rural residential development in the County.
9. Develop and adopt provisions in development ordinances that encourage innovative site and housing unit designs.
10. Maintain and encourage sustainable agriculture as a land use and a viable economic activity in the county.
11. Promote land uses throughout the county that encourage active and sustainable living.
12. Encourage land uses throughout the County that promote a full spectrum of life-cycle housing types for all incomes, ages and races.
13. Rural residents and developments can reasonably expect agricultural, forestry and mining activities within the vicinity of their homes. The County should add Right to Farm language in its ordinances and develop a handbook of what newcomers might expect in the rural areas of Chisago County.
14. Encourage cities in the County to carefully study and plan for their possible expansion and future development within 2 miles of their boundaries as allowed by State Statute 462.358. The townships and property owners should recognize and consider protecting these areas from premature development or subdivision in coordination with or at the request of the nearby cities.

Commercial/Industrial Development Statements

Goal: Plan for the orderly, efficient growth of commercial and industrial development in the County.

Policies:

1. Encourage new commercial and industrial development that requires public sewer and water to locate within the county's cities in accordance with their Comprehensive Plans.
2. Encourage limited commercial developments that do not need public sewer and water to locate in areas with adequate road service within rural village centers.
3. Promote commercial and industrial development in planned clusters such as business parks and mixed-use developments where adequate public infrastructure is available.
4. Allow for home occupations, rural retail tourism and limited rural businesses on homesteads in agricultural areas as well as small, community-based retail in the county's unincorporated rural village centers.
5. Clearly define and regulate or limit the type of commercial and industrial uses that can be operated under the definition of a farm/agricultural use.
6. Indicate in the land use plan and zoning ordinance areas designated for commercial and industrial development, such as locations adjacent to I-35 and other areas near primary transportation routes that provide the best use of the land and where there is adequate infrastructure in place.
7. Consider the I-35 corridor as a location for commercial/industrial land uses.
8. Strive to provide land for commercial development to meet a standard of 5% to 6% (14,000 – 17,000 acres) of the total developed land in the county. Future locations for commercial development will primarily be based on the transportation system.
9. Support land use patterns that efficiently connect housing, jobs, transportation and retail and commercial centers.
10. Establish performance standards for commercial and industrial development that promotes quality new development site design.
11. Allow for commercial and industrial districts where public services are available and where land use conflicts between commercial/industrial and residential uses will not impede commercial and industrial growth.
12. Commercial recreation, home occupations and rural retail tourism opportunities should be allowed in the Agricultural district as long as performance standards are established and met.

Growth Management Strategy

Descriptions, Purposes and Intent

Rural Village Center

- Rural centers (unincorporated areas) that have been historically formed shall be encouraged to add new housing units and businesses, if such growth is consistent with their historic character; is located as a contiguous extension of the existing village center; and can be feasibly supported by on-site or feasible community provided public infrastructure and services.
- New homes will be supported provided on-site sanitary sewer and water standards are met. Under a conditional use process, smaller lot sizes may be allowed if clustered/community septic and wells are used. Desirable design criteria shall be determined based upon a review of the community's pattern of houses, lots, streets, major building views, open spaces, trees and hills.
- These centers are intended to be areas of multiple uses to serve the local public that have a historic basis for their existence. These areas are defined as Almelund, Stark, Rush Point, Sunrise, Palmdale and the I-35/County Road 17 Center in Lent Township.
- The village centers are planned to evolve as a small, self-contained town center and as an alternative to urban sprawl.

Rural Transit Center

- Provide appropriate and centralized support facilities and retail and service businesses adjacent to Interstate 35/County Road 17 interchange.
- Permitted uses include uses such as single family dwellings, public parking and transit facilities, local government administration and service buildings, agriculture uses, farm drainage systems, flood control and watershed structures and erosion control devices, temporary or seasonal stands for sale of agricultural products, greenhouses or nurseries, forestry and sod farming, wildlife areas, forest preserves, public parks and other open space uses and daycare centers.

Rural Residential Areas

- Such areas are to accommodate and acknowledge existing residential development and those areas that are located outside of any identified growth or expansion area of a municipality. Examples of such areas include existing

residential development near the Chisago, Rush and Goose chain-of-lakes, Almelund and Sunrise.

- Land that is suitable for residential but not commercial/industrial uses.
- The long-term predominant use of these areas is intended to be large-lot, low-density residential development. However, long or short-term temporary uses may include crop production, animal husbandry not involving new feedlots, forest management, other agricultural uses and sand and gravel operations within the vicinity of residences.

Commercial/Limited Industrial Area

- Areas where there are legally existing commercial and/or industrial uses already in place.
- Minimum lot size dependent on use and area needed for water and on-site sewage treatment system.
- New development or redevelopment in this area must provide buffer from residentially zoned land and existing residential development.
- All new commercial/industrial development sites must be served by adequate transportation infrastructure including roads, highways or railroad facilities.

Agricultural and Resource Protection Areas

- These are areas in Chisago County outside of highly developed areas that will remain more rural in nature.
- Includes areas intended for exclusive resource related use: areas intended primarily for agriculture and other resource uses, with limited rural residential development; recreational commercial and other resource related business uses; rural retail tourism uses; natural resource areas protected by easement or acquisition or limited due to site constraints; and areas which will accommodate a very limited amount of subdivision activity.
- Both traditional agriculture and larger hobby farms will be encouraged. Some residential development in this area will be allowed but it will be limited to a base density of 1 per 5 acres. Clustering will be encouraged, preserving most of the land area in larger parcels (20+acres) for agriculture, hobby farms, or open space.
- Base density will not necessarily mean the minimum lot size. Building eligibilities deriving from base density may be transferred from contiguous parcels under

common ownership. Density transferred may not be used more than once for any piece of land.

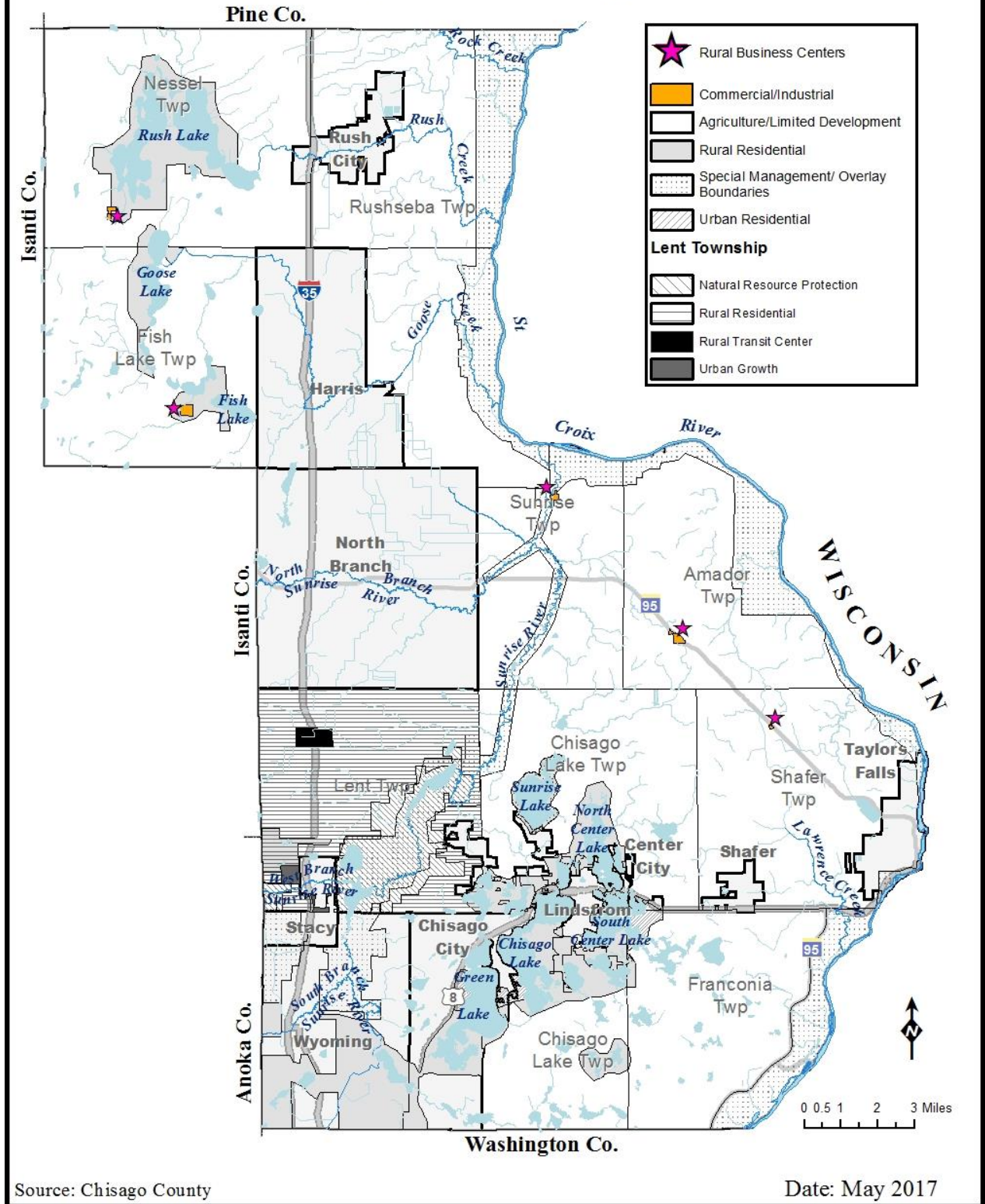
- Any clustered subdivisions will require approval of a conditional use permit. The conditional use process will consider whether the development is sited and designed in a manner to protect rural view sheds and to have minimal impact to adjacent agricultural uses, forestland, special or unique natural resources or other natural resources. Conditions should be attached to minimize impact to surrounding land uses, natural resources, historical resources, natural corridors and the environment. Such conditions may consist of landscaping criteria, buffering and minimizing visual intrusion caused by the new development.
- Anyone building in this District should accept and understand the rural environment as it is found. Anyone building or living in this district also should be aware that residential development is not the primary or sole purpose of this district. Chisago County intends and allows a wide-variety of land uses and activities in this District including farming and livestock operations, rural retail tourism, animal kennels, renewable energy resources and commercial recreation. The County does not consider farm or agricultural activities public nuisances provided those activities do not violate any State statute or rule or any other laws or ordinances.
- Allow other uses – essential services/public services, large scale land uses requiring a location in a unique rural land area and small-scale home occupations.

The map on page 9-14 depicts the Growth Management Plan for Chisago County and the map on page 9-15 shows the possible local city extraterritorial subdivision/land use protection areas.

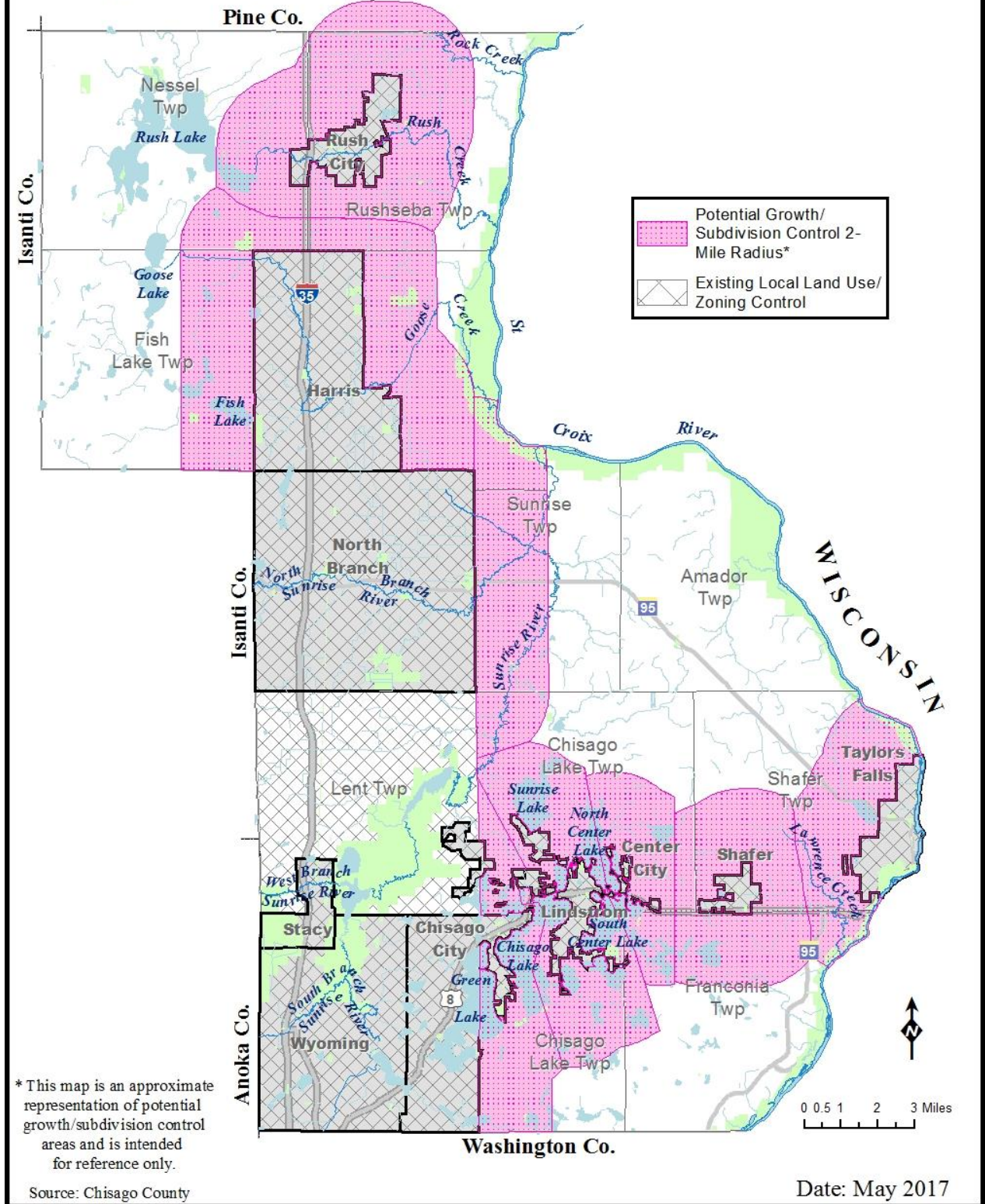
Growth Management Strategy

District	Description	Base Density	Minimum Lot Size	Clustering	Transfer of Development Credits	Receiving or Sending Area
Rural Village Center	Historic unincorporated area and/or transit centers. Mixed use corresponding to historic nature of community. Growth is encouraged in these areas.	2 acres with incentives or density increases for clustering	To be determined by historic nature of community and wastewater needs being met	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	Receiving
Commercial/Limited Industrial	Includes some existing commercial areas and some areas that may be reserved for future commercial uses.	Dependent on use and area needed for water and wastewater needs	Dependent on use and area needed for water and wastewater needs	N/A	Allowed	Receiving
Rural Residential	Accommodates existing residential areas as well as other areas in townships that is planned for large lot, low density residential development.	2 acres platted	2 Acres or less if clustering used to increase density	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	Receiving
Ag. and Resource Protection	Areas outside rural residential areas and other more highly developed areas that will remain more rural in nature. Areas intended to be primarily agriculture and other resource use with limited residential development.	1 per 5 acres platted	5 acres platted unless cluster option used or 20 acres by metes and bounds split	Allowed but no direct density increase, other incentives provided for clustering (consider adding density increase incentives for clustering)	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	Sending (and adding Ag areas as receiving)
Rural Transit Center	Provide appropriate and centralized support facilities and retail and service businesses adjacent to Interstate 35/County Road 17 interchange	Dependent on use and area needed for water and wastewater needs	Dependent on use and area needed for water and wastewater needs	Allowed and greatly encourage with incentives	Allowed and greatly encouraged with incentives	N/A

Chisago County Growth Management Plan



Chisago County Potential Growth/Subdivision Control Areas



* This map is an approximate representation of potential growth/subdivision control areas and is intended for reference only.