

CHAPTER 1: Issues & Opportunities

1.1 Background

This is the first of nine chapters that make up the City of Wisconsin Rapids Comprehensive Plan. This plan replaces the previous plan adopted in 1981. The City of Wisconsin Rapids is located in southern Wood County. Wisconsin Rapids is the county seat and has an estimated population of 18,500, which is about 24 percent of the total county population. There are several smaller incorporated communities in the area, including Biron, Nekoosa, and Port Edwards. A locational reference map displays the City and surrounding communities. See Map1-1.

A. Planning Context

Planning and zoning has been a function of local units of government for over 50 years in Wisconsin. Over the years almost every city, village, and county has developed various plans, from land use plans to master plans to development plans. Existing authority for planning is provided in state statutes, including ss. 59, 60, 61, and 62. Recently, however, at the national level, there has been concern over the effects of extensive development patterns (“sprawl”) that have become prevalent in both urban and rural areas. Many causes ranging from government policies, such as the construction of the interstate highway system, to trends within the economy, such as increased reliance on trucks for the transportation of goods, and consumer preference for suburban housing, have been blamed for this phenomenon. Whatever the causes, many of the effects – traffic congestion, loss of open space, abandonment of central cities, degradation of air and water quality, and increased reliance on the automobile as the only viable transportation alternative – have become increasingly troubling. These issues have led to a discussion on land use planning.

At the state level, as early as the 1960s and early 1970s, several study committees and commissions were created to examine the need for land use reform. Of particular importance were the Tarr Task Force, the Knowles Commission, and the Wallace Commission.

The Tarr Task Force was the first to look at the state’s planning laws in-depth. It reviewed state statutes and problems related to municipal boundary changes, regional planning, and area wide service provision. They developed several recommendations in the area of boundary review and annexation.

The Knowles Commission found the state's land use laws to be complex and outdated. The report summarized that "a steady rise in population, a pattern of urbanization and sprawling subdivisions, an increased appetite for the outdoors, and economic expansion continue to consume our land resources." It went on to conclude that "land use regulation is basically a local matter, and that only certain resources and uses were of wider significance. The model proposed was that state and regional planning would set the framework within which local decision-making would take place.

The Wallace Commission was a broad study that reviewed many issues, including education and health care. It also touched on some planning issues. This report recommended changes in the area of incorporation, annexation, and consolidation. It concluded that a flexible system was needed to deal with local issues.

Although these efforts and their recommendations were never incorporated at the time, they were not forgotten and would influence later changes.

Years later, another major statewide discussion occurred again. In the early 1990s, the issues of urban sprawl, redevelopment, and "smart growth" were being discussed at the national level. During this same period, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources each developed independent Task Forces to study land use issues. The reports of both agencies identified strategies and policies for future decision-making at the state level in relation to land use.

These reports and all the previous study efforts, as well as the national discussion related to planning, spurred then Governor Thompson to create the State Interagency Land Use Council and the Wisconsin Strategic Growth Task Force in 1994. The Land Use Council was to set guidelines for state involvement in land use issues, while the Task Force was to recommend ways for coordinating state agencies, local governments, and local private groups when deciding land use issues. The Task Force presented their findings in 1995 to the Interagency Land Use Council with a report entitled "Land Use Issues Facing Wisconsin." The report identified trends, intergovernmental relationships, public attitudes, and the strengths and weaknesses of Wisconsin's land use policies. Wisconsin was compared to other states, and a number of recommendations were given to address the land use issues at hand. The most important issue to be identified in the report was the need for a revision of the state's planning enabling legislation.

The Interagency Land Use Council delivered its report “Planning Wisconsin: Report of the State Interagency Land Use Council” to the Governor in 1996. The report offered land use goals, ways to improve local land use planning efforts, what should be included in a comprehensive plan, and how citizen participation in land use planning could be enhanced. It is these studies and reports and the comments and criticisms that followed, that laid the foundation for the State’s Comprehensive Planning Legislation.

Across the nation over this same period, under the banner of “Smart Growth” a number of state and local governments have undertaken a unified approach to addressing these same issues. Oregon is generally acknowledged to be the leader in this area. Beginning in 1973, the State required that all cities and counties in the state adopt comprehensive land-use plans. Washington State enacted legislation in the early 1990s and later amended it, requiring certain jurisdictions, based on size and growth rate, to enact comprehensive plans.

At about the same time, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) studied land-use practices from the perspective of their effect on environmental quality. Acknowledging that many agencies were responsible for land-use decisions, the DNR Land Use Task Force addressed many of the same questions brought up in the WisDOT report, including the lack of consistency and enforcement mechanisms in land-use decision-making. The report issued in June of 1994 advocated a more “holistic” approach to land-use questions by DNR and the need to adjust certain aspects of its internal policies, and to increase the amount and availability of data. It also strongly recommended a coordinated interagency approach to the problem, “...there is no statewide land use policy or vision. Inconsistent interagency coordination...can lead to decisions that harm both the economy and the environment.”

In order to address just this problem, Governor Thompson appointed the State Interagency Land Use Council in 1995. In its 1996 report, the Council acknowledged, “the structure of Wisconsin’s current land use system...can best be characterized as a fragmented process with each level of government responsible for specific goals.” Among its recommendations, the report proposed the creation of a permanent interagency Land Use Council as a means of coordinating policy on the state level, and a statewide Land Information System. In the section headed “How can county and municipal planning be improved?” the report recommends requiring counties to adopt comprehensive plans, voluntary adoption of comprehensive plans by municipalities, and a requirement that land use ordinances “be consistent with adopted land use plans. Land uses that conflict with adopted county and/or

municipal plans could not be approved unless the plan is amended.” The report also recommends steps to foster cooperation among local governments, a review of the role of regional planning commissions, and the requirement for public hearings as part of any land-use planning process.

In the spring of 1999, a definition of a comprehensive plan was included in the Governor’s Budget Bill. Several groups developed the definition by working together, including the Wisconsin Realtors Association, the Wisconsin Builders Association, the 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin, the League of Municipalities, the Wisconsin Towns Association, and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Planning Association. The University of Wisconsin-Madison facilitated the effort.

In October of 1999, the Governor signed into law Wisconsin Act 9, the Budget Bill, containing substantial revisions of statutes governing comprehensive planning. A grant program was established as well. The law has been revised by the signing of two additional bills into law. The first is AB 872, containing “technical revisions,” which was signed May 10, 2000. The second bill, signed April 13, 2004, is AB 608, which reduced the number of items that must be consistent with the plan to three; these are official mapping, subdivision ordinances and zoning ordinances (both general and shoreland). Taken together, these bills represent the most sweeping revision of the State’s planning enabling laws in half a century.

The law (ss. 66.1001) requires all jurisdictions within the state that exercise control over land-use to prepare a comprehensive plan by 2010. It lays out the nine required elements of the plan and requires a public participation process. Jurisdictions that do not have a comprehensive plan in place by the deadline may not engage in actions that impact land-use. The statute outlines the requirements that must be satisfied, specifically for those that utilize the State grant program to develop their plan. In addition, fourteen state planning goals are suggested. These goals, however, are not mandates for specific provisions that must be included in the comprehensive plan, but criteria on which the planning grant applications will be judged.

Also included in the law is the creation of a Smart Growth Dividend Aid Program, which provides credits to jurisdictions that have adopted a comprehensive plan and have in effect zoning and subdivision ordinances. Applications will be judged based on the number of new housing units built at a density of at least four to the acre, and the number of housing units sold at 80 percent or less of the median price within the county, thus furthering the goals of compactness and

affordability. As of yet, there has been no funding established for this program.

The new comprehensive planning law is significant in many ways. The law creates for the first time a definition of a comprehensive plan; it requires that almost all local units of government have a plan and it requires public participation. Most importantly, the law maintains that the process be locally driven so all local units of government decide their own future.

B. Previous Plans

This planning effort examines the relevant previous plans completed for the city and the surrounding area. These plans are discussed below:

1. Wisconsin Rapids Comprehensive Plan, 1981

Although this plan is titled a comprehensive plan, it was adopted prior to the 1999 Comprehensive Planning Law, and does not discuss many of the now required components. The plan includes four basic sections covering some general goals, objective and polices, land use, transportation, and implementation. This plan is referenced in some of the later chapters.

In addition, several plans have been developed for the City, such as the Outdoor Recreation Plan, Tax Incremental Finance District Plans, and the Sewer Service Areas. Each Chapter will provide more details on these plans as they relate to that topic.

2. Wood County Comprehensive Plan

The county planning department has been tasked with the development of the county comprehensive plan. The plan is currently in draft form, and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. In addition, the county is providing assistance to several towns throughout the county, including the Town of Grand Rapids, to complete town plans.

Further, several plans have been developed at the county level and those that relate will be discussed in later chapters, such as the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Land & Water Conservation Plan and the All Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Town of Saratoga has recently completed a comprehensive plan with a consultant, and the Town of Sigel is working on a comprehensive plan with the NCWRPC. Currently, none of the other surrounding communities are working on a comprehensive plan.

3. Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2002-2020

The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) titled “A Framework for the Future,” was adopted by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2003, and is an update and expansion of a plan adopted by the NCWRPC in 1981. The RCP is an advisory document that was developed to provide suggestions for growth in the region.

The RCP covers things from a regional perspective, and includes information on all ten counties in the North Central Region. It examines general trends within the region, and provides a variety of background information for local planning efforts. Some of the background information is taken from this document.

The city is included in the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) service area. The NCWRPC is one of nine regional planning commissions in the State of Wisconsin. The North Central region includes ten counties, loosely following the upper Wisconsin River Valley. The NCWRPC is a voluntary association of local governments tasked with the mission of providing planning assistance to the communities throughout the region.

1.2 Demographics

The review of the demographic and economic trends in the city, in comparison with the surrounding communities and the county, is important to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future. Below we review total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment, and income levels. All of these will be examined in some detail using U.S. Census information.

A. Population

In 2000, 18,435 people lived in the City of Wisconsin Rapids, which is about a 1.1 percent increase since 1990. Both the county and the state outpaced the city over that same timeframe, posting growth rates of 2.7 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively. Overall, the city added over 190 new residents over that ten-year period.

Table 1 displays total population for the city, each local unit of government (minor civil division) surrounding the city, the county, and the state. Although the city has grown, that growth is not evenly distributed to the local units. The Town of Grand Rapids had over a ten percent population increase, while the Town of Sigel lost population.

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	18,245	18,435	1.1%	190
Town of Grand Rapids	7,071	7,801	10.4%	730
Town of Rudolph	1,180	1,161	1.7%	-19
Town of Seneca	1,133	1,202	6.1%	69
Town of Sigel	1,192	1,130	-5.2%	-62
Village of Biron	794	915	15.3%	121
Village of Port Edwards	1,848	1,944	5.2%	96
Wood County	73,605	75,555	2.7%	1,950
State of Wisconsin	4,891,769	5,363,675	9.7%	471,906

Source: U.S. Census

According to the Wisconsin Department of Administration, the 2007 population estimate for the city was 18,500, while the county estimate was 76,839. The Land Use Chapter further examines population, including population projections.

B. Age Distribution

Population distribution is important to the planning process. In particular, two groups are examined, the 17 years of age and younger group, and the 65 and older population group. These are often referred to as dependent populations, and both have very different needs. The younger group requires schools and playgrounds, while the older group requires health care and related needs. Comparing these groups over time to both the county, and the state, demographic changes in the city and surrounding towns are identified.

During the last decade, the percentage of 17 and younger persons declined in all of the area communities and the County, except Biron and Port Edwards. Overall, the city had a loss of 34 persons in this category, while at the county level; the decrease was over 1,100 persons. Statewide, there was an increase in this population group. Table 2 displays the changes in this group for all of the area communities.

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	4,593	4,559	-0.8%	-34
Town of Grand Rapids	2,235	2,229	-0.3%	-6
Town of Rudolph	355	303	-14.7%	-52
Town of Seneca	349	346	-0.9%	-3
Town of Sigel	364	273	-25.0%	-91
Village of Biron	180	198	10.0%	18
Village of Port Edwards	446	519	16.4%	73
Wood County	20,532	19,385	-5.6%	-1,147
State of Wisconsin	1,288,982	1,368,756	6.2%	79,774

Source: U.S. Census

During the same ten-year period, the 65 and older group increased in every community and the county, as well as the State. Over 172 persons were added in this category in the city, while over 1,100 were added in the county, which is roughly equal to the decrease in the younger group. Table 3 displays the changes in this group for all of the area communities.

Table 3: Persons 65 Years of Age and Older

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	3,404	3,576	5.1%	172
Town of Grand Rapids	470	666	41.7%	196
Town of Rudolph	122	159	30.4%	37
Town of Seneca	109	134	23.0%	25
Town of Sigel	135	163	20.8%	28
Village of Biron	123	219	78.1%	96
Village of Port Edwards	368	425	15.5%	57
Wood County	10,438	11,596	11.1%	1,158
State of Wisconsin	651,221	702,553	7.9%	51,332

Source: U.S. Census

Taken together, with the identified decrease in the 17 and under group and the increase in the 65 and older group, there is a clear trend of aging of the area population. This is confirmed by the increase in median age, from 34.6 in 1990 to 37.6 in 2000. Both the county and state experienced an increase over that same period, from 33.3 to 38, and from 32.9 to 36, respectfully.

C. Households

A household is defined as all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. The household trend in the city reflects the national trend of fewer people living within the same household, and fewer persons per household. As more people decide to live alone and more couples are having fewer children or no children at all, the number of households has increased faster than the population as a whole. All towns, the city, the county, and the state gained population, but the average household size for all have decreased over the last decade.

Table 4 displays household information for the area. The number of households within the city has grown by 421 units over the last decade, about a 6 percent increase. That rate of change is smaller than compared to the surrounding towns with increases of 18, 15, and 11 percent.

Table 4: Total Households

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	7,549	7,970	5.6%	421
Town of Grand Rapids	2,348	2,788	18.8%	440
Town of Rudolph	381	423	11.1%	42
Town of Seneca	369	408	10.6%	39
Town of Sigel	376	410	9.1%	34
Village of Biron	333	384	15.4%	51
Village of Port Edwards	660	706	7.0%	46
Wood County	27,473	30,135	9.7%	2,662
State of Wisconsin	1,822,118	2,084,544	14.4%	262,426

Source: U.S. Census

Decreasing average household size will continue to be a trend that is likely to continue over the next twenty years. Overall, the average household size has decreased from 2.38 in 1990 to 2.26 in 2000. Both the county and state have decreased as well, from 2.65 to 2.47, and from 2.61 to 2.5, respectfully. The Housing and Land Use elements further examine how these population and household trends will affect the number of housing units, and how the units may be placed on the land.

D. Educational Levels

High school educational attainment improved between 1990 and 2000. Table 5 displays education attainment. Over the last decade, the number of high school graduates of those over 25, increased in the city from 9,466 in 1990 to 10,160 in 2000, over a 7 percent increase. All of the surrounding towns had increases as well.

In terms of percentage, in 2000, about 82.5 percent of the population in the city had a high school degree or higher, compared to 84.8 percent at the county level, and 85.1 percent at the state level. For comparison, in 1990, about 78.4 percent of the city population had a high school degree or higher, 78.3 percent at the county level, and 78.6 percent at the state level.

Table 5: Persons 25 and Over Who Have Completed Four Years of High School or More

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	9,466	10,160	7.4%	694
Town of Grand Rapids	3,814	4,899	28.5%	1,085
Town of Rudolph	546	673	23.3%	127
Town of Seneca	554	679	22.6%	125
Town of Sigel	566	660	16.6%	94
Village of Biron	467	505	8.2%	38
Village of Port Edwards	1,026	1,164	13.5%	138
Wood County	36,639	42,597	16.3%	5,958
State of Wisconsin	2,432,154	2,957,461	21.6%	525,307

Source: U.S. Census

College educational attainment improved in all communities, except the Town of Sigel. See Table 6. Over the decade, the number of college graduates 25 or older increased in the city from 1,500 in 1990 to 1,851 in 2000, over a 23 percent increase. Most of the surrounding communities had increases as well. In percentage terms, in 2000, about 15 percent of the population in the city had a college degree or higher, compared to 16.9 percent at the county level, and 22.4 percent at the state level. For comparison, in 1990 about 12.4 percent of the city population had a college degree or more, 13.5 percent at the county level, and 17.7 percent at the state level.

Table 6: Persons 25 and Older Who Have Completed Four or More Years of College

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	1,500	1,851	23.4%	351
Town of Grand Rapids	834	1,428	71.3%	594
Town of Rudolph	45	90	100.0%	45
Town of Seneca	65	76	17.0%	11
Town of Sigel	60	49	-18.4%	-11
Village of Biron	65	103	58.5%	38
Village of Port Edwards	213	303	42.3%	90
Wood County	6,315	8,486	34.4%	2,171
State of Wisconsin	548,970	779,273	42.0%	230,303

Source: U.S. Census

Taken together, these two education indicators show a city with an improving overall education level, but with a gap with the college or higher group. As the economy changes, it is critical to capture more college graduates.

E. Employment

In 2000, 8,225 city residents were employed. This reflected a 7.5 percent increase in the city’s employed population since 1990. Over that same period, the county increased by about 9 percent and the state by about 15 percent. Table 7 displays employment information for the area. Note that these Census statistics are based on a person’s place of residence rather than the location of the actual job. Therefore, these jobs could be located anywhere.

Table 7: Total Employed Persons (16 and over)

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	7,655	8,225	7.5%	570
Town of Grand Rapids	3,571	4,299	20.4%	728
Town of Rudolph	533	601	12.8%	68
Town of Seneca	528	604	14.4%	76
Town of Sigel	588	553	-6.0%	-35
Village of Biron	381	366	-4.0%	-15
Village of Port Edwards	756	729	-3.6%	-27
Wood County	34,173	37,345	9.3%	3,172
State of Wisconsin	2,386,439	2,734,925	14.6%	348,486

Source: U.S. Census

The Economic Development and Land Use Chapters further examine employment, including employment projections. In those chapters, data is used from the State’s Department of Workforce Development, which is more current and keeps information based on the county location of the job. The only drawback is that this information is only aggregated at the county level.

F. Income levels

Median Household Income and Per Capita Income are two major indicators of income. The city median household income increased about 36 percent over the ten-year period, compared to about 40 percent at the county level, and almost 49 percent at the state level. See Table 8.

Table 8: Median Household Income

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	\$25,759	\$34,956	35.7%	\$9,197
Town of Grand Rapids	\$41,811	\$62,515	49.6%	\$20,704
Town of Rudolph	\$36,630	\$50,852	38.9%	\$14,222
Town of Seneca	\$35,812	\$54,118	51.2%	\$18,306
Town of Sigel	\$35,441	\$49,226	38.9%	\$13,785
Village of Biron	\$36,923	\$42,557	15.3%	\$5,634
Village of Port Edwards	\$35,590	\$48,850	37.3%	\$13,260
Wood County	\$29,735	\$41,595	39.9%	\$11,860
State of Wisconsin	\$29,442	\$43,791	48.7%	\$14,349

Source: U.S. Census

Meanwhile, over the same decade, the city per capita income increased by approximately 35 percent, compared to the county at 54 percent, and the state increase of 60 percent. See Table 9.

Table 9: Per Capita Income

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Net Change
City of Wisconsin Rapids	\$13,106	\$17,723	35.3%	\$4,617
Town of Grand Rapids	\$15,091	\$25,331	67.9%	\$10,240
Town of Rudolph	\$12,353	\$20,284	64.2%	\$7,931
Town of Seneca	\$14,060	\$21,833	55.3%	\$7,773
Town of Sigel	\$12,451	\$19,676	58.1%	\$7,225
Village of Biron	\$17,629	\$19,293	9.5%	\$1,664
Village of Port Edwards	\$15,579	\$20,750	33.2%	\$5,141
Wood County	\$13,130	\$20,203	53.9%	\$7,073
State of Wisconsin	\$13,276	\$21,271	60.2%	\$7,995

Source: U.S. Census

Although there has been growth in both of these indicators, that increase has lagged behind the surrounding communities and the county, as well as the state. This is a critical area to address for the long-term health of the community. (Note that this information has not been adjusted for inflation since it is being used for comparison purposes).

G. Race

In 2000, nearly 95 percent of the city residents were categorized as White. The largest minority group identified was “Asian,” with 3.6 percent, followed by “American Indian” with 1.3 percent. Hispanic origin is not considered a separate race, but it is identified in the U.S. Census. About 1.3 percent of the population lists a Hispanic background.

Overall, there has been little change in the population make-up over the 1990 to 2000 time period. In 1990, about 97 percent of the residents were categorized as White.

1.3 Issues & Opportunities

A variety of issues and opportunities were identified throughout the planning process. Many of these were taken from existing documents, some were taken from public meetings, and others were identified from the county level survey of the cities.

A. Issues

A variety of issues were identified during the planning process, and taken from other plans, as well as the Open House and Public Hearing. Some are listed below, in no particular order, and others are identified in the following chapters.

- ✓ Connect with the riverfront, especially in the downtown area
- ✓ Minimize the sprawl along 8th Street and E. Grand
- ✓ Reuse of some empty retail buildings
- ✓ A “By-Pass” for Highway 54 with limited access
- ✓ Need to address housing needs for rental and elderly
- ✓ Recreational areas need to be developed

B. Public Meetings

Below is a list of the public meetings and discussion topics held over the planning process. All meetings were held at city hall unless otherwise stated.

Meeting 1: May 19, 2008

- Overview planning process and role of committee
- Public participation plan
- Present draft Issues & Opportunity chapter
- Identification of major planning related issues
- Review schedule

Meeting 2: July 21, 2008

- Follow up from last meeting
- Present draft Natural Resources chapter
- Present draft Housing chapter
- Identify and discuss issues

Meeting 3: September 15, 2008

- Follow up from last meeting
- Present draft Utilities and Community Facilities chapter
- Present draft Transportation chapter
- Identify and discuss issues

Meeting 4: November 17, 2008

- Follow up from last meeting
- Present draft Economic Development chapter
- Review community planning survey

Meeting 5: January 19, 2009

- Follow up from last meeting
- Present draft Land Use chapter
- Develop draft Future Land Use Plan Map
- Survey update

Meeting 6: March 16, 2009

- Follow up from last meeting
- Present community planning survey results
- Review FLUP Map
- Review revised draft Land Use chapter
- Present Intergovernmental Cooperation chapter

Meeting 7: May 18, 2009

- Follow up from last meeting
- Review all revised draft chapters 1 to 8
- Present Implementation chapter and recommendations
- Set schedule for final meetings and adoption

Meeting 8: June 22, 2009

- Future Land Use Plan changes
- Review of chapter goals, objectives, and policies

An Open House was held on August 10, 2009

A community meeting to get input on the draft plans goals, text, and maps. This event was held at the McMillan Memorial Library and about 20 persons attended the event.

Meeting 9: August 10, 2009

- Follow up from comments from the Open House
- Review Future Land Use Map
- Set dates for plan adoption process

Meeting 10: September 24, 2009

- Final plan review
- Plan Commission passes resolution to recommend adoption

The City Council held both the Public Hearing and adopted the plan by Ordinance on January 5, 2010.

C. Public Participation

The city adopted a Public Participation Plan for the planning process. A copy of the plan can be found as an attachment at the end of the plan. The complete survey instrument and full results can be viewed in the Planning & Development Department at City Hall.

A cornerstone of this plan was a community survey that was conducted over the winter of 2008-09. Survey responses were collected in a variety of ways, including direct mail, online, and from various community locations. In all, about 315 responses were received; about 70 percent were via mail. Over 86% of respondents were city residents, and of those, over 90 percent owned their own home. The majority (68%) have lived in the city ten years or more, and about 70 percent of respondents were 50 years of age or older.

In all, there were about 30 questions asked along with some open-ended questions. A summary of some of those is provided below:

One question asked, “Why do you live here?” The responses were “Near family and friends” (30%), followed by “Low crime” (16%), and “Housing” (14%).

When asked, “Do you work in the city?” The respondents were split about 50/50. A related question was, “Are there good jobs in town?” Only 13% responded yes; the rest (87%) said no. Responses were more positive to the question, “Do you see good jobs in the future?” Over 38% identified as, while 61% said no. The types of employment needed were industrial (37%), commercial (24%), and office (19%). Over 81% support the use of tax dollars to attract business to the city, and about 63% support the use for retention of local business.

Two questions were asked related to growth, one about the geographic size and the other about the population size. About 50% of respondents want the city to grow larger physically, and about the same want it to grow in population (49%). Respondents identified growth and expansion areas all around the city, including the Woodlands area (19%), West area (19%), and Rapids East area (18%).

The survey indicated that the majority of respondents (nearly 70%) agree or strongly agree that there should be more biking and walking trails throughout the city. Only 13% of respondents stated that there was a need for more parks.

1.4 Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Each of the following comprehensive plan chapters will conclude with a set of goals, objectives and policies, which will be used to guide the future development of the community.

For purposes of this planning process, goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

Goals: Broad statements that express general public priorities about how the community should approach development issues during the next 20 years. These goals are based on key issues, opportunities, and problems that affect the community.

Objectives: More specific than goals and are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. The accomplishment of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal.

Policies: Rules or courses of action used to ensure plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. Policies are intended to be used by decision-makers on a regular basis.

In addition, some of the following chapters will have a listing of various programs that are available from county, regional, state, and federal sources.