

Chapter 2

Vision & Guiding Principles

Purpose

The Comprehensive Plan's Vision for the Future and Guiding Principles are intended to embody our community's desires and priorities for its long-term future. The vision and guiding principles are oriented toward a 2030 time horizon or twenty years into the future.

We formed our vision and guiding principles based upon current community input, as well as insights gained from previous community planning efforts. Community input was received during stakeholder listening sessions and community visioning sessions that took place in November 2010 and January 2011.

Our community vision for 2030 describes in general how we would like the community to evolve over the next twenty years. Our vision builds upon our community's existing assets, identified challenges, and perceived future opportunities. This vision provides the foundation and inspiration for the Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies relating to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, public facilities, and public services.

Our guiding principles are intended to support and provide additional clarity for our community vision. These guiding principles provide a means of guiding and evaluating key elements of the Comprehensive Plan's vision and future efforts to achieve the vision.

The vision and guiding principles are intended to serve as conceptual yardsticks against which the community can assess future development and projects. While the plan will evolve over time, it is important that the spirit and intent of the vision and guiding principles be upheld.



Vision for the Future

Community for a Lifetime

Building upon our unique location at the headwaters of the Red River of the North in the heart of the famous Red River Valley, Wahpeton aspires to be a great hometown for its residents, businesses and institutions as well as the southeast gateway to North Dakota. Wahpeton is a thriving, welcoming and well-maintained community that balances its traditional midwest town character with its wealth of regional hub attractions. In partnership with Breckenridge, Wahpeton will always strive to enhance the Twin Towns as a joint community that offers a high quality of life in a traditional midwest town environment for residents, businesses and visitors of all ages. As a larger share of our community's population will enter the senior citizen age groups over the next twenty years, it is particularly important that our community become more senior-friendly in its design, services and access. Toward this goal, we envision Wahpeton evolving into a "Community for a Lifetime", a great place to grow up and grow old.

Regional Hub, Jobs & Attractions

Wahpeton will continue to be a regional agricultural center in one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the country. In addition to its traditional midwest town character, Wahpeton's future success as a vibrant community and regional hub is strongly linked to its strong roots as a regional agricultural and business hub, river town, college town, and the county seat. In partnership with Breckenridge, MN – our "Twin Town" across the river, our community serves as the civic, economic, employment, educational, cultural and recreational hub for the Richland and Wilkin Counties region. Our educational, recreational and cultural attractions are major community assets as well as regional destinations. We strive to continuously preserve, maintain, and improve our wealth of community and regional assets.

Traditional Midwest Town Character

As a traditional midwest town, downtown is the heart of Wahpeton with its traditional "Main Street" commercial environment - Dakota Avenue, valued historic buildings, and its civic core of city and county facilities. Adjacent to downtown, our traditional small town neighborhoods offer a mix of housing options, a traditional street grid, and convenient access to recreation, shopping, services, and civic amenities. Our newer neighborhoods extending north and west are designed with strong connections to our traditional neighborhoods and downtown. Wahpeton strives to strengthen and grow its business districts in a complementary manner, including its two industrial districts and two commercial districts – downtown and Highway 210/16th Ave. Wahpeton's ability to offer a full menu of community services and amenities makes it truly a desirable community to live, work, and play in.

Community Visioning Input

Representatives from the following groups participated in the stakeholder listening sessions and community visioning sessions that took place in November 2010 and January 2011:

- *Wahpeton City Council*
- *Wahpeton Planning Commission*
- *Economic Development Commission (EDC)*
- *Community Development Corporation (CDC)*
- *Wahpeton Breckenridge Area Chamber of Commerce*
- *Wahpeton Rotary Club*
- *Three Rivers Arts Council*
- *Wahpeton Golf Board*
- *Wahpeton Parks Board & staff*
- *Wahpeton Library Board & staff*
- *Wahpeton School District*
- *North Dakota State College of Science, Alumni/Foundation, AAUW*
- *Circle of Nations Indian School*
- *Richland County Board*
- *Richland County Health Department*
- *Richland County Social Services Department*
- *Southeast Senior Services*
- *St. Catherine's Living Center*
- *United Way of Richland Wilkin*
- *Richland County Historical Society*
- *Bagg Bonanza Farm Historical Preservation Society*
- *Twin Towns Gardeners' Market*
- *Churches*
- *Medical services*
- *Utility companies*
- *Manufacturing businesses*
- *Commercial businesses*
- *Realtors*
- *Bankers*

High Quality of Life for Everyone

Looking into the future and the potential changes that may impact our community, our primary goal is to maintain and strengthen our community's high quality of life for existing and new residents, businesses and institutions. Our vision for continuously improving our community encompasses three types of planning and investment strategies: preservation and maintenance, reinvestment and redevelopment, expansion and extension. We will strive to take care of what we have and invest our resources in a cost-efficient manner, rather than expand in a manner that is not cost-efficient and inconsistent with our community character and values. This effort will be most effective by working in partnership with the City of Breckenridge to identify and coordinate shared services where appropriate. Our goal is not to focus on controlling the pace or amount of community growth in the future, but rather to guide the location and type of growth to be consistent with our future vision.



Photo by Dr. Duane Strand

The Comprehensive Plan's guiding principles include:

- Reinforce our traditional midwest town character
- Offer housing options for all stages of life
- Provide convenient connections to destinations
- Revitalize downtown as the civic, commercial and cultural heart of our community
- Grow and diversify our economy and job opportunities
- Enhance our community institutions, gathering places and entertainment opportunities
- Create a senior-friendly community
- Provide high quality and cost-efficient public services

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles

Reinforce our traditional midwest town character

Our community values its rural small town heritage and character as a key element of its sense of identity. As a traditional midwest town, agricultural center, river town, college town and the county seat, Wahpeton has “good bones” that it can build upon in the future. Wahpeton’s traditional midwest town character can be strengthened through improvements to our community’s developed areas as well as future expansion areas. Traditional small town patterns encourage the integration of compatible land uses rather than the separation of different land uses, which can make essential services more convenient and accessible for a broader sector of residents. As our community grows and expands in the future, the scale, pattern and character of new development should reflect Wahpeton’s traditional midwest town environment. In line with the character of traditional midwest towns, Wahpeton should prioritize the Twin Towns downtowns as its civic, commercial and cultural core, provide community gathering places, and create a definable town edge. New residential neighborhoods and commercial districts should be designed with strong connections to the existing community patterns, streets, public facilities and services, parks, recreational facilities, and trails.



Offer housing options for all stages of life

To meet the changing needs and preferences of existing and future residents, the City should encourage developers and property owners to create a broader range of housing options. New types of housing will be needed to meet changing housing needs driven by residents’ lifecycle stage, demographic shifts, and affordability needs. Both new and rehabilitated housing opportunities should be considered for creating new types of housing options. Over the next twenty years, it will be particularly important that the City offers broader senior-friendly housing options for our growing number of senior residents.



Revitalize downtown as the civic, commercial and cultural heart of our community

Downtown is the heart of our community where civic, commercial, and cultural activities come together to create a unique place and experiences. Returning a broad variety of vibrant businesses and community institutions to Dakota Avenue – “Main Street” – and the civic green will create a desirable shopping and entertainment destination for the community and the Twin Towns region. Downtown should become, and be positioned as, the social gathering place and hub of the Twin Towns region. Businesses and institutions that serve the community-at-large should be retained in Downtown. Downtown should be the focus for new establishments and the relocation of existing establishments that are currently located outside of Downtown. Commercial districts outside of Downtown should be complementary, not competitive. To support Downtown as “the place to go”, greater care and more pride are needed for the Downtown environment, including buildings, streets, sidewalks and open spaces.

Provide convenient connections to destinations

The provision and maintenance of a good transportation system is a key element of our community’s high quality of life. Our system of streets, highways, sidewalks and trails should provide convenient connections to destinations within the community. The system should also ensure driving, walking, and biking are safe, comfortable, and enjoyable. Areas planned for redevelopment or new development should be considered for improvements to the transportation network as well, such as street extensions, sidewalk gaps and trail loops. In particular, our community’s quality of life will improve with convenient connections for neighborhoods to shopping districts, essential services, public facilities and parks. Over the next twenty years, it will be particularly important that the City provides more senior-friendly transportation options.





Create a senior-friendly community

As a larger share of our community's population will enter the senior citizen age groups over the next twenty years, we strive to create a more senior-friendly community or a "Community for a Lifetime." Our community will strive to improve our physical, service and social infrastructure to be more senior-friendly. Physical infrastructure improvements include applying universal design principles to housing, parks, trails and streets; increasing the variety and affordability of housing; and improving mobility through better transportation options. Service infrastructure improvements include increasing the availability of essential community services, recreational options, cultural opportunities, and affordable support services for senior residents. Social infrastructure improvements include increasing paid/volunteer opportunities, improving physical/mental health and safety, strengthening informal social networks, and creating opportunities for intergenerational interaction.

Grow and diversify our economy and job opportunities

Wahpeton will continue to diversify its economy from its original agricultural dominance to a more balanced and sustainable mix of agriculture, manufacturing, services, retail, and tourism. As technological and other changes occur, it is critical that the community continuously adapt its economy to identify specific gaps and niches that it can fill, drawing on its locational advantages. The community also needs to strike a balance between recruiting new businesses from outside the region and fostering Wahpeton's existing strong entrepreneurial spirit. Growth and diversification of our economy will provide greater job opportunities in the community, which will enable us to retain and attract more residents to the community.



Enhance our community institutions, gathering places and entertainment opportunities

A major element of Wahpeton's high quality of life is our wealth of major community institutions, public gathering places and entertainment opportunities. To maintain our high quality of life, optimize our economic development potential, grow regional tourism, and attract new residents and businesses, we must continue to enhance our existing community assets. In addition, we strive to add entertainment opportunities that are desirable for improving the quality of life for existing and future residents. These unique community assets include our community schools, city library, ND State College of Science, Circle of Nations Indian School, Richland County Vo-Tech Center, Chahinkapa Zoo, Chahinkapa Park, Prairie Rose Carousel, Prairie Rose Chapel, Bois de Sioux Golf Course, Richland County Historical Museum, Stern Sports Arena, Stern Cultural Center, Blikre Activities Center/Werre Arena, Kidder Dam Recreation Area, Red River levee trail/greenway, City Hall, County Courthouse, Community Center, and others.



Provide high quality and cost-efficient public services

With the aging of Wahpeton's public infrastructure comes the need for significant maintenance and upgrading of the City's water, sanitary sewer, stormwater management and flood protection/levee systems. Wahpeton is committed to providing a full range of high quality public services for the long-term benefit of our community. Our public services should be planned and constructed in the most cost-efficient manner without sacrificing the quality of the services. The reinvestment needs in existing developed areas must be balanced with accommodating future expansion areas. This effort will be most effective by working in partnership with the City of Breckenridge to identify and coordinate shared services where appropriate.

