

# LITTLE PINE TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## **Introduction**

Located in the northeast corner of Crow Wing County, Minnesota, Little Pine Township is part of Minnesota's Central Lakes Region and home to a diversity of lakes, streams, wetlands and heavily forested areas. Little Pine Township has had a small, stable population ranging from 80 – 110 citizens since 1910. Although the township hasn't experienced significant population growth during that time, growth pressure within the Central Lakes Region is likely to make its way into the area in the future. Due to the size of its current population, even a small addition of 40 people would increase the township by 50%, leading to new demands and unexpected challenges.

In order to accommodate future growth with minimal negative impacts to Little Pine Township, residents came together over the summer of 2002 to create a long-term comprehensive plan. The plan, contained herein, lays the groundwork for desired land uses and future growth for the next 10 – 20 years. Review and updating of the plan will be ongoing, with annual review by the Town Board. The plan precedes – **and takes precedence over** – zoning, subdivision regulations, and ordinances, which are tools for implementing the comprehensive plan.

## **Sustainable Development**

The plan is based on the concept of “Sustainable Development”. Sustainable Development is a planning tool that balances what are often perceived to be conflicting goals: preserving the natural environment and quality of life while improving the economic situation of the community. In Little Pine Township, these goals are critically interrelated. The economic health of the community is dependent on preserving the natural quality of the environment and the quality of life. Sustainable Development encourages diversification and development of the economy in a way that provides stability and prosperity for the community.

To implement Sustainable Development, three objectives must be met:

1. Expand, diversify and improve income and job opportunities.
2. Sustain and enhance resource productivity and improve environmental qualities.
3. Enhance the quality of life of each resident.

This concept depends on the active involvement and participation of all citizens to find solutions to problems, identify opportunities, and create the type of community that meets their needs and those of future generations. Citizens involved in creating the plan were asked to operate within the Sustainable Development framework and develop the comprehensive plan using the following principles:

- 1) Think long-term about the quality of life of our children and grandchildren.
- 2) Respect the opinion of others; everyone has something to contribute.
- 3) Balance competing interests; economy, environment, and quality of life.
- 4) Think globally but act locally. How do world trends impact Little Pine Township?

## **The Planning Process**

The planning process began in the summer of 2002 with a Town Hall meeting held in June, followed by a second meeting in July and a final meeting in September. Community residents were invited to participate in joint planning process along with the City of Emily. Citizens were asked to contribute their ideas, impressions, knowledge and expertise on Little Pine Township, where it is today, how it has changed and how it should develop and function in the future. They completed the following tasks at the Town Hall meetings:

**Town Hall Meeting I:** Identify strengths and weaknesses with respect to land use and quality of life in the Little Pine Township.

**Town Hall Meeting II:** Create goals to address issues identified at the first Town Hall meeting.

**Town Hall Meeting III:** Develop and prioritize strategies to meet the goals created at the second Town Hall meeting.

Many citizens volunteered to be on special committees that met between the Town Hall meetings. These committees formed around the topics of economic development, environmental issues, parks and recreation, and zoning and land use. An additional committee was formed to focus solely on Little Pine Township. Citizens were given information packets on their topics and worked diligently to refine and expand on the work done at the Town Hall meetings.

## **History**

Little Pine Township was organized on May 5, 1903. Prior to its organization, only eight residents and several transient settlers inhabited the township. Being one of the last townships to be logged off, settlers weren't attracted to the area until 1901, when the timber industry was strongest in the area and the Little Pine River was used for lumber drives. By 1910, 97 people called Little Pine Township home. School District 69 was organized in 1901 and settlers built two log schools, one that is still standing on Section 28 and another, the Paul Held School on Section 8, burned down during a forest fire in 1912. In 1902, a third school was constructed for the newly organized District 103. Settlers also established a post office in 1906, as well as Bethlehem Evangelical Church, which was constructed in 1915 and later became the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1917.

### **A Land-Based Economy Since 1900**

Logging in Little Pine Township occurred during the 1890's and early 1900's, at the tail end of "the golden era of lumbering in Minnesota."<sup>b</sup> Little Pine and its surrounding townships provided valuable pines for building construction in the Twin Cities and across the United States. As mature pine trees disappeared, however, the lumber industry in Minnesota declined and logging companies shifted operations to the Pacific Northwest and the South for timber. Today, small-scale logging operations persist in the Little Pine Township, primarily for cordwood, pulp, paper, and manufactured building materials. In 2000, logging provided \$X,XXX.00 in sales to the area, although mostly from logging occurring on publicly owned land, which constitutes XX% of Little Pine Township's land base.

Farming helped homesteaders provide food and income for their families and continues to support citizens living there today. However, a short growing season and wetland soils characterized by poor drainage and high acidity have kept crop farming from becoming a stronghold of the local economy. With state and nation-wide shifts away from small, family-run farms to large commercial operations, agriculture is declining in the area.

Harvesting of other natural resources besides timber, particularly plant and animal species, has provided area residents with the means for making a living for nearly 100 years. Deer, waterfowl, and other game species have always been bountiful. Peat mining from area wetlands, initially done for use as chinking newly built cabins, has witnessed resurgence for use in landscaping. Blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, cranberries, mushrooms, and wild rice grew in abundance in area woods and wetlands and were commonly harvested by settlers. Wild rice was so plentiful that, in the 1950's, a wild rice plant was established in the neighboring City of Emily. Reportedly, it was "the best equipped, and only completely modern, processing plant in the state of Minnesota."<sup>ii</sup> Today, wild rice is disappearing as development and wetland drainage negatively impact the riparian systems that support it. Other harvesting activities are done primarily for recreation rather than for subsistence. These activities, coupled with the scenic beauty of the area, have drawn visitors from far and wide to local resorts and campgrounds for nearly a century.

### **Current Trends**

Today, Little Pine Township is a testament to the past. It has not changed much since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, still possessing a wealth of uninterrupted, high quality natural areas and open space and an abundance of wildlife species. The timber industry, agriculture, and home-based businesses continue to support local residents. The majority of Little Pine Township's 82 residents is elderly and has lived in the township for many years. The township has not experienced a population increase since 1930.

Despite a stable and relatively unchanging population for over 70 years, Little Pine Township is located in the Central Lakes Region, the fifth fastest growing region in Minnesota. People are drawn to this area for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is its natural beauty. As such, land speculation is on the rise as people become aware of the high quality of life in Little Pine Township.

Many factors are driving this phenomenon. First, advances in technology, such as personal computers, cell phones, e-mail, fiber optics, and the Internet, have severed ties to central offices and larger cities by enabling people to stay connected to their jobs from remote locations. Second, improvements in transportation have enabled people to live farther from away from jobs and services and provided easier access to tourists and weekend vacationers. The expansion of Highway 169 and improvements to State Highway 6 have made travel to Little Pine Township easier and safer for people in the Twin Cities. A drive that used to take four hours twenty years ago now takes two. Lastly, the baby boomer generation – those individuals born in the years immediately following World War II - are nearing retirement age. With years of accumulated wealth, this generation has the ability to enjoy the flexibility that technological advances provide. As quality of life becomes the deciding factor for relocation, many will opt for the beauty and serenity of Minnesota's Central Lake Region, including Little Pine Township. Little Pine Township, with its wealth of forests, lakes, wetlands, and rolling hills, is a prime target for future development, especially as neighboring communities become congested and lose their natural appeal.

What will this potential growth mean for Little Pine Township? One need only look to the neighboring city of Emily to see the impacts. In Emily, new residents are converting lakeshore property to affluent residential areas. Here, the value of old cabins is dwarfed by the value of the land that they sit on. This disparity is a prime indicator of redevelopment potential. As a result of these high land values, lake lots are purchased primarily by wealthy individuals or families who establish new homes that tend to be larger than the older cabins and homes in the area. Landscaping accompanying these new homes is suburban in character, typified by the clearing of trees, removal of shoreline vegetation, and the addition of turf and sandy beaches. This sort of redevelopment can be very traumatic to the character of the area and to the ecological health and function of its natural systems. In Little Pine Township, property likely to be redeveloped in this manner is located around lakes and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) that are attractive because they will never be developed.

Current trends in growth and development in the Central Lakes Region, if they continue to Little Pine Township, will likely lead to:

- All developable lakeshore being subdivided and built upon.
- Most older, small lake cabins being expanded or replaced by larger, more expensive homes.
- Off-lakeshore land adjacent to roads and land with views of water and forested valleys will be developed.
- Areas of old and blighted housing.
- County Highway 1 becoming a commercial strip from Emily.
- The natural, rural character of Little Pine Township will be changed.

Given the choice, many people would choose to live in a beautiful area like Little Pine Township. Advances in technology and transportation as well as rising affluence among Americans have provided more opportunities for people to choose where they want to

live. As technology continues to advance, areas like Little Pine Township should expect to see accelerated development pressures.

## **The Future**

### **A Natural Heritage Worth Preserving**

Little Pine Township's natural amenities are its strongest assets. As such, current land uses and natural resources were mapped to provide a baseline for future land use decisions. These maps identify significant natural amenities that are particularly susceptible to development. By preserving these areas and targeting future development in more suitable areas, Little Pine Township seeks to grow in a sustainable manner so as to preserve its natural heritage for future generations to use and enjoy.

Lakes and wetlands constitute **XX%** of the land cover in Little Pine Township, providing many recreational opportunities and habitat for aquatic plants and animals. Wetlands act as water storage areas to prevent flooding, filter nutrients and sediments from runoff, and provide wildlife habitat for many rare species. They support a higher degree of species diversity and higher individual species populations compared to upland landscapes<sup>iii</sup>.

Forests constitute **XX%** of land cover. Large tracts of inner-forest areas also exist throughout Little Pine Township, with the potential to support many rare plant and animal species that can only survive in undisturbed interior forest cores, such as songbirds, wolves, and pine martens. Smaller forest tracts and areas on the outskirts of large cores are considered edge forest and provide habitat for many game species.

Because **XX%** of wetlands and forested areas in Little Pine Township are publicly owned, residents have no control over their management, especially with respect to logging practices. Clearcutting is of particular concern to area residents, who worry about erosion and sedimentation in the watershed, loss of tree species and age diversity, aesthetics, and disruption to and degradation of wildlife habitat caused by this practice.

The remaining **XX%** of land in private ownership in Little Pine Township is subject to future development. Because the township is so small, zoning and the issuance of building permits and subdivision approval has historically been done by Crow Wing County with little or no input from the township. By establishing a stronger relationship with the county and creating a vision for its future, Little Pine Township hopes to gain more control of its destiny.

### **Creating a Long Term Vision**

Over the course of three community workshops and interim special committee meetings, residents of Little Pine Township created a vision of a well-informed community making good decisions in an open and inclusive government system. They seek a balance of regulations and taxation, with policies that are clear, consistent, and fair to all citizens while ensuring the good of the community as a whole.

They also identified issues important to them and to the future of their community. These issues centered on the township's lack of ability to govern itself and forge its own future. As a rural community with no governing body of its own, residents of Little Pine Township face unique challenges as they strives to improve their quality of life and shape the future of their community. Of special concern is the township's relationship to Crow Wing County; preservation of the natural beauty and diversity of its forests, lakes, and wetlands; long term maintenance of its roads; regulation of all terrain vehicles; and the aesthetic, financial, and environmental impacts of future development. These five issues, along with information collected on demographics and land use in the Township, formed the basis for dialogue during the planning process and led to a framework of goals and strategies to guide future policy and decision-making in Little Pine Township.

## **GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

Through a series of three community workshops and over twenty special committee meetings, Little Pine Township residents developed goals for their community. After goals were developed, the groups worked to develop strategies to implement those goals.

### **GOAL 1: WORK WITH CROW WING COUNTY TO INCREASE LOCAL INFLUENCE OVER LAND USE DECISIONS IN LITTLE PINE TOWNSHIP.**

With only 82 residents, Little Pine Township is govern by a town board. In the State of Minnesota, townships are extremely weak forms of government. Land use decisions for Little Pine Township are made and administered by Crow Wing County. Unfortunately, the citizens of Little Pine Township often feel uninformed and have little say in what types of developments are permitted in the township. Since it is the township that must ultimately bear the burden of dealing with conflicts and pay for infrastructure and services for new development, township residents wish to have a stronger voice in land use decisions.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Adopt a zoning map for the Township that reflects the desired pattern of development.
- Develop land use and subdivision ordinances to implement the Comprehensive Plan and the zoning map.
- Present Crow Wing County with the Comprehensive Plan, land use and subdivision ordinances and request the authority to administer these documents locally.
- Seek an agreement with the City of Emily for day-to-day administrative services of Little Pine Township's land use and subdivision ordinances.

### **GOAL 2: MAINTAIN LOGGING PRACTICES IN A MANNER THAT IS NOT DETRIMENTAL TO THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC SAFETY, OR WELL-BEING OF RESIDENTS.**

Recognizing that not all logging practices are detrimental to the environment, citizens wish to ensure a balance of clear-cutting and selective cutting practices on public and private land to prevent same-age, single-species stands. They also wish to be notified of and involved in planning for logging activities.

- Work with public land managers to inventory, identify, and plan for the protection and restoration of undeveloped public land for wildlife habitat, focusing especially on ecologically significant areas such as inner forests or rare plant communities.
- Manage logging activities to reduce impacts by setting minimum standards and requiring permits.
- Require property owner to submit a coordinated forest management plan prior to obtaining a permit for logging.
- Request that all public agencies inform the township before logging activities take place.

- Require coordination among state and county agencies that harvest timber within the township limits.
- Require a biologist's report prior to issuing a permit for logging activities. Prohibit detrimental logging practices in areas with threatened and endangered species.
- Require a balance of clear-cutting (where appropriate) and selective cutting.
- Where clear-cutting occurs, require reforestation. The property owner is responsible for the costs of reforestation.
- Work with volunteer and school groups to re-establish native vegetation in clear-cut areas.

**GOAL 3: MAINTAIN ADEQUATE ROADS TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS IN LITTLE PINE TOWNSHIP.**

Residents expressed concern about road damage resulting from logging trucks, the costs of which are borne by citizens in the township, not the logging companies or state and county agencies that permit the logging. Residents want a fair road maintenance system that is paid for by those who create the most damage. Citizens were also concerned about building occurring within the road right of way.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Develop a regular schedule for maintaining roads.
- Require loggers and property owners where property is logged to pay for road maintenance.
- Require notification when loggers are using the roads. Inspect the condition of the roads before and after logging activities.
- Cost-share with landowners who request dust-control.
- Work with the state and the county to obtain money that is supposed to go towards road maintenance within the township.

**GOAL 4: REGULATE ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES (ATV) SO THAT THEY ARE COMPATIBLE WITH THE COMMUNITY.**

Many concerns emerged around the damage caused by misused motorized vehicles such as ATVs, personal watercraft, and snowmobiles. Residents hope to accommodate ATV enthusiasts with well-planned and mapped trail systems that do not negatively impact delicate ecosystems, private roads, or public enjoyment of peace and tranquility.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Communicate with law enforcement officials to identify offenders.
- Provide all residents with the phone number to call to report illegal ATV use.
- Research options for designating someone local with the authority to write tickets to violators.

- Develop a hand-out educating people on the damage caused by ATV's and the cost of that damage to taxpayers.
- Require that ATV's not ride in the ditch but instead ride on the road surface. Require ATV operators to meet all vehicle regulations when riding on public roads.
- Designate ATV trails within the township.

**GOAL 5: ENSURE THAT DEVELOPMENT OCCURS WHERE IT FITS WITH THE AREA, RESPECTS THE ENVIRONMENT AND DOES NOT OBLIGATE CURRENT TAXPAYERS TO FUTURE EXPENSES.**

Residents value the rural, natural feel of the area. While many wish to control or stop development altogether, they realize that this cannot be accomplished without excessive use of regulation and negative consequences for current residents. Thus, they opt to manage future growth by preserving significant natural areas and encouraging development in areas where it is most suitable. The costs of new development will be borne by developers and future residents so as not to place an unfair burden on existing residents.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Zone for larger lot sizes and do not allow variances for smaller lots.
- Any new roadways must be constructed, including bituminous surfacing, as part of the development.
- Zone land based on the land characteristics.
- Establish a minimum buildable area for each lot. Buildable area would exclude wetlands, steep slopes and other marginally developable property.

**GOAL 6: EXERT INFLUENCE OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS IN ORDER TO BUFFER DEVELOPMENT, MAINTAIN WILDLIFE HABITAT, ENHANCE PASSIVE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND PRESERVE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.**

Nearly XX% of the land within Little Pine Township is publicly owned, providing a valuable but relatively untapped recreational resource. Local, county, state and federal governments manage it with little collaboration among the agencies. This land is critical because it serves many important environmental functions and provides residents with open space, natural beauty, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for recreation. . Residents wish to be informed of future management activities on public lands and, more importantly, want to be involved in management decisions to ensure that public lands aren't over-logged or developed.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Designate a person or committee to attend Crow Wing County meetings and maintain regular communication with other county and state public land managers and policy makers.
- Secure township representation on County commissions and advisory boards that deal with parks and public lands.
- Obtain copies of state and county land management plans. Coordinate local decisions between Little Pine Township’s Comprehensive Plan and state and county land management plans.
- Get on mailing lists for state and county decision-making processes. Create, publish, and circulate a township-adopted statement recognizing the importance of wildlife habitat and preservation of the natural environment.
- Require a biologist’s report prior to issuing a permit for logging activities and prohibit logging in areas with threatened and endangered species.
- Seek ways to use public lands for trails and other recreational activities.
- Create links between public lands and provide a connection in downtown Emily.
- Ensure that public lands are not bottled off and remain easily accessible to citizens.
- Create buffers around public lands to protect them from encroaching development.
- Establish a visitor center to inform people about the abundance of public land and educate them about its ecological importance

**GOAL 7: PRESERVE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE LAKES, WETLANDS AND FORESTS.**

As Little Pine Township grows, there will be pressure to alter the natural shoreline and clear and develop more forests. Both dramatically change the natural, open appearance of the area. “Suburban –style development” – characterized by the clearing of native vegetation, draining of wetlands, and replanting with turf and ornamental landscaping – poses the biggest threat to natural beauty in the area. Other factors detracting from natural aesthetics include litter and roadside dumping, debris on private and public property, poorly maintained properties, and building structures that clash with the natural environment. Citizens wish to retain the natural appearance and scenic value of the lakes and forests for future generations to enjoy.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Require natural buffers on lakes, rivers, along roads, and surrounding existing forests in new developments or in redevelopment situations.
- Encourage properties that are currently developed to reestablish natural buffers around lakes, wetlands, rivers, roads and forests.
- Establish shoreline preservation standards to limit clearing of vegetation along the shorelines of lakes, wetlands and rivers.
- Educate current landowners and newcomers about the benefits of preserving natural shorelines.

- Collaborate with area lake associations, businesses, real estate companies, schools, and environmental groups on education and restoration activities.
- Work with the DNR to make public accesses an example of how to manage for environmentally friendly shoreline areas.
- Prohibit new water oriented accessory structures and other structures within the shoreline setback zone unless there are no other reasonable alternatives.
- Develop “natural” and “scenic” standards along major roads.
- Establish design standards to ensure that new home sizes fit in with the character of the existing neighborhoods.
- Prohibit clear-cutting in all buffer zones and establish a minimum tree density for residential lots.
- Manage growth to maintain rural character by zoning with a mix of larger lot sizes, clustered developments with designated natural open-spaces, and a higher density downtown. (See Sidebar on High Density & Cluster Developments.)
- Examine and, if feasible, implement voluntary growth management strategies such as Purchase of Development Rights, Conservation Easements and Transfer of Development Rights or Land Acquisition (See Sidebar on Land Preservation Policy Tools).
- Recognize and reward private shoreline restoration activities.

**GOAL 8: PROTECT THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES OF THE AREA’S LAKES, STREAMS AND RIVERS AND WORK TO IMPROVE THOSE THAT HAVE SUFFERED DAMAGE.**

The removal of native vegetation, introduction of invasive plant species, pollution from septic systems, increased use by boats and personal watercrafts, increased stormwater runoff from impervious surface, and damming and channeling streams and rivers all negatively impact the riparian systems in Little Pine Township. Citizens wish to preserve current water quality, fishing opportunities, and shoreland habitat and work to negate damage that has already been done.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Require natural buffers on lakes, rivers, roads and forests in new developments or in redevelopment situations.
- Identify the watershed in which new developments lie and regulate development impacts based on the sensitivity of the water body.
- Manage stormwater run-off in new developments and on road projects to prevent runoff into water bodies.
- Identify ditches and pollution point sources that discharge to water bodies. Take infrared photos of all the lakes in Little Pine Township to determine where sewer contamination is occurring. Target faulty systems for updating and work to eliminate these sources of pollution.
- Encourage currently developed properties to reestablish natural buffers on lakes, wetlands, rivers, roads and forests.

- Establish shoreline preservation standards to limit clearing of vegetation along shorelines. Make the issuance of permits contingent on meeting these standards and make sure people are aware that permits are needed for construction along shorelines.
- Collaborate with lake associations and the DNR to provide education to people about the environmental benefits of preserving natural shorelines. Educate people through real estate offices as property is sold. Provide a welcome packet containing environmental information to new lake property owners.
- Inform lake associations when new development is proposed within the watershed of their lake.
- Ban phosphorus in fertilizers within the township limits.
- Develop lake management plans for each lake in the township in collaboration with area lake associations.
- Protect fish populations by educating people about exotic species and encouraging responsible fishing practices such as catch and release, barbless hooks, using non-lead sinkers, and using native bait species. Collaborate with the DNR and lake associations to establish a volunteer program to monitor boats going into the lake for exotic species and to provide education to boaters during peak fishing times. Install signs at public access points promoting responsible fishing practices.
- Support and help draft laws that limit fish catch size and numbers.
- Coordinate volunteers to help the DNR stock lakes where needed.
- Provide drug enforcement on the city's lakes, including during the ice-fishing season to eliminate meth labs in ice houses.
- Zone buffers around lakes where logging would not be allowed.

## **GOAL 9: PROTECT AND MAINTAIN AREA WETLANDS AS A CRITICAL WATERSHED RESOURCE.**

Citizens are concerned with fluctuating water levels and flooding of tamarack and aspen swamps, agricultural land, and residential areas. As mentioned in Goal 8, they are also concerned about the ecological balance of area lakes, streams and rivers. Wetlands are highly valued for their function in maintaining water levels, filtering run-off before it enters riparian systems, providing habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, and their scenic value. Residents wish to protect them from future drainage or development.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Enact more stringent rules that make it more difficult to destroy wetlands through dredge and fill.
- Create larger buffer distances around wetlands.
- Require wetland management and preservation strategies as part of new developments.
- Do not count wetlands as buildable areas when computing minimum lot sizes.

- Sponsor watershed management and wetland restoration workshops for local residents. Get technical assistance from federal and state agencies and non-profit groups.

**GOAL 10: MAINTAIN ABUNDANT, HEALTHY AND DIVERSE POPULATIONS OF AREA WILDLIFE.**

Citizens in Little Pine Township enjoy wildlife watching and hunting. Habitat fragmentation, pollution, disease, invasive species, and increased interactions with people pose serious threats to local wildlife populations and could lead to localized extinction of many species. Citizens want to protect, connect, and enhance existing ecosystems to maintain stable populations of both game and non-game wildlife species well into the future.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Create corridors between large habitat areas and restore and maintain buffers around this habitat to enhance it and make it easier for species to disperse and migrate.
- Encourage voluntary conservation easements, transfer of development rights, and/or purchase of development rights from private landowners to maintain and restore buffers and corridors. Work with the state and county governments, as well as non-profits, to establish conservation easements on a city, county and regional level.
- Work with the DNR to obtain a local species inventory and use the DNR species inventory to identify and provide for food, cover, and breeding needs for area wildlife.
- Involve citizens and non-profit groups in the management of area wildlife.
- Zone adequate habitat buffers around endangered and threatened species.
- Provide education on the importance of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

**GOAL 11: SUSTAIN EDGE AND INNER FORESTS WITH A DIVERSITY OF NATIVE PLANT SPECIES AT VARIED STAGES OF MATURITY.**

Little Pine Township is heavily forested with a diversity of cover types ranging from conifers to mixed hardwoods. Citizens wish to protect and, where possible, connect large, uninterrupted tracts of forested land. They want to preserve the diversity of trees, shrubs, and ground cover vegetation at different stages of succession. They wish to minimize fragmentation of forested land caused by development.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by the Little Pine Township:

- Conduct or obtain a species inventory to determine the current diversity.
- Using the results of the species inventory and working with different levels of government, create a forest management plan.

- Manage logging activities to reduce impacts by setting minimum standards and requiring permits.
- Require coordination among state and county agencies that harvest timber within the township limits.
- Work with volunteer groups (i.e. school groups or community builders) to replant areas that have already been clear-cut.
- When reforestation, work to restore the native plant diversity at the ground, shrub, and tree cover levels.
- Proactively work with private landowners to preserve forested lands through management programs such as those contained in the Forest Stewardship Act and statewide Best Management Practices.
- Inventory, map, and protect rare plant species. Educate citizens about the diversity of species in their background by labeling plant species in parks, along trails, and in other areas where rare species occur.

### **GOAL 12: PROTECT THE QUALITY OF GROUNDWATER.**

Although Little Pine Township currently has clean groundwater, faulty or poorly maintained septic systems and deep-hole mining practices threaten the quality of this resource. Citizens wish to protect their wells and groundwater from future contamination.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Do not permit mining operations that allow chemicals to enter the groundwater.
- Collect and analyze well logs and water quality data for all new wells.
- Identify problem septic systems and work to bring all individual sewage treatment systems (ISTS) up to code.
- Educate citizens about the problems ISTS and private land use practices (like landscaping and fertilizing) pose to watersheds and groundwater.

### **GOAL 13: MAINTAIN THE PEACE AND SERENITY OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND UPHOLD THE RELAXED, QUIET WAY OF LIFE IN LITTLE PINE TOWNSHIP.**

People are attracted to Little Pine Township because of the peace and quiet it offers – a stark contrast to the noise and chaos of urban areas. They enjoy the sounds of nature, but increasingly those sounds are being drowned out by motorized recreational vehicles including ATVs, boats, and personal watercraft. Increased traffic and congestion also detracts from the serenity of the area. Citizens don't want Little Pine Township to lose its quiet appeal. Too many people actively using a resource for recreational purposes can lead to destruction of the resource. For example, ATVs, snowmobiles, and personal watercraft, when used at high speeds and in the wrong areas, can destroy vegetation, shorelands, and increase run-off and sedimentation in watersheds (especially from ripped up ditches and trails that run through wetlands and small streams). They are also noisy and disruptive in residential and natural areas. Most citizens appreciate the enjoyment

associated with motorized recreational vehicles, but are concerned about those who abuse their rights to use them. Citizens wish to encourage responsible usage in order to alleviate the negative impacts these vehicles can have. Citizens also wish to eliminate trash and debris often left behind by users.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Ensure zoning is consistent with peace and quiet by separating or buffering conflicting uses and nuisances.
- Utilize public lands as a buffer from development.
- Work with lake associations to develop lake management plans for each lake in the township. Lake management plans would include lake-specific regulations on items such as boat speeds, time-of-day restrictions on jet skis, motorized and non-motorized uses and no-wake zones.
- Work with ATV and snowmobile clubs to consolidate trail systems that won't interfere with residential or environmentally sensitive areas and educate users of these active recreation devices on ways to reduce conflicts and improve safety.
- Develop ATV regulations to control the time and locations that ATVs can be used.
- Post rules for water conduct at public access points and at rules for ATV and snowmobile conduct at trailheads.
- Partner with neighboring cities and townships to provide more police enforcement and increase the law enforcement presence.
- Work with local neighborhoods to establish Neighborhood Watches.
- Create more opportunities to mix age groups in order to foster pride and understanding, and to create a sense of community.

#### **GOAL 14: ENSURE AN INFORMED PUBLIC AND AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT.**

Citizens in Little Pine Township feel uninformed and often ignored when it comes to decisions made by the local government. They don't want decisions made behind closed doors with little or no regard for public opinion or concerns. They wish to be involved earlier in the decision-making process and want their input to have more weight than it currently does. As the new comprehensive plan is adopted and implemented, citizens wish to be more involved in land use decisions and the interpretation of its goals and strategies.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Provide a newsletter that is distributed to all property owners.
- Establish a bulletin board in a public place to display meeting agendas and public notices.
- Schedule open forums at times when people can attend.
- Allow for public input during discussions and before votes, but follow Robert's Rules of Order and provide a time limit for public comments.

- Seek creative ways to involve all age groups, especially youth, in government decision-making processes.
- Encourage public attendance at all meetings, at “meet the candidate” events, and at voting stations.

**GOAL 15: ALLOW HOME-BASED BUSINESSES THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS AND HAVE MINIMAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, PROMOTE START-UP INDUSTRIES, AND PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC.**

Home-based businesses are beneficial to communities as long as they do not conflict with surrounding residential areas or negatively impact the environment. Little Pine Township wishes to encourage small home-based businesses that exist in harmony with their surroundings.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Use a large-lot zoning strategy so that home-based business operations can operate without causing a nuisance or worry of encroachment from neighbors.
- Make it easier for established home occupations to obtain operating permits.
- Provide clear definitions to determine whether or not a home occupation is suitable and work with local business owners to ensure business practices compatible with neighboring uses.
- Establish clear criteria to guide the establishment of all new home-based businesses, providing merit for businesses that provide Little Pine Township with badly needed services.

**GOAL 16: MAINTAIN THE LOW LEVEL OF CRIME IN LITTLE PINE TOWNSHIP.**

Although crime isn’t currently a serious concern in Little Pine Township, problems associated with youth drug and alcohol abuse are increasing. Traffic violations, loitering, and vandalism are also on the rise. As the area grows, citizens wish to retain the low crime level.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Partner with neighboring cities and townships to provide more police enforcement and increase the law enforcement presence.
- Work with local neighborhoods to establish Neighborhood Watches.
- Create more opportunities to mix age groups in order to foster understanding and create a sense of community.
- Create more organized activities for young people.

**GOAL 17: MINIMIZE CONFLICTS BETWEEN TRAFFIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND WORK TO IMPROVE SAFETY WITHIN THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.**

The most popular recreational activity listed by citizens was walking and hiking along roadsides. Increased traffic associated with urban growth makes walking more dangerous for pedestrians, decreases pedestrian access across town, and detracts from the enjoyment of walking. Citizens want to improve pedestrian safety by calming traffic along the main roads and highways through town, maintaining connections across roads and highways for walkers and bikers, and providing tree buffers for aesthetics and screening. Citizens also wish to limit detrimental ATV use along road shoulders.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Designate and/or establish more off-road trails and walkways.
- Develop signs and maps showing appropriate places for ATV uses.
- Use traffic calming techniques on residential roads to reduce speeds and increase safety.
- Develop traffic sign standards to be implemented throughout the township.

**GOAL 18: RECOGNIZE THE BENEFIT OF AND MAINTAIN SUPPORT FOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ON PRIVATE LAND.**

Privately owned land is often overlooked as a recreational resource in many communities. Private land can serve as a vital link between public lands and trailways, and can provide habitat for wildlife watching opportunities in the area. Many private landowners are hesitant to open their land to public use due to concerns with loss of property rights, liability, lack of privacy, and abuse of their land by the public from high use, litter, and vandalism.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Identify opportunities for recreation on private land (areas between or bordering public lands, in close proximity to existing trails, etc.).
- Work with private property owners to provide public access to private lands and to public lands that are blocked off by private property. Educate them about available tax incentive programs and conservation easements.
- Make sure that accesses to private land are well designated and controlled.
- Offer incentives to private landowners to allow public use for recreation and seek to purchase private land where it is a vital link.
- Create and uphold rules of conduct for people using private land and give private landowners a list of organizations and contacts to assist in regulation and handling complaints.
- Work with recreation advocacy groups to find ways to have users be responsible for maintenance and upkeep.

**GOAL 19: LAND USE APPROVALS SHOULD BE MADE TO PROVIDE EFFICIENT USE OF THE LAND SO AS TO NOT OBLIGATE THE TOWNSHIP TO INCREASING EXPENDITURES IN THE FUTURE. DEVELOPMENT SHOULD PAY FOR ITSELF.**

Residents are extremely concerned about ever-increasing property taxes. Development that does not pay for itself obligates future residents to an even higher tax burden. Currently, costs for road maintenance comprise the largest portion of the township's budget. Even where developers construct the roads within their developments, the increased tax revenue from the new lots often does not pay the costs to provide long-term maintenance and services to the properties in the development. This forces existing property owners to pick up the slack, increasing taxes for all and providing an unnecessary subsidy for developers. This is especially true where density is low and development patterns are dispersed.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- The township should do cost-benefit analysis on each development, factoring in environmental value and worth.
- Limit new road development unless it can be justified through a cost benefit analysis. Zone to have additional development use existing roadway infrastructure.
- Require stormwater management within each new development to contain stormwater runoff impacts both within and outside of the development.
- Zone for higher (clustered) density where infrastructure is in place or planned and lower density where it is not.
- Develop an assessment policy to be applied to all future public improvements.
- Educate developers and residents on the hidden costs of development.
- Work with state and county representatives to limit the amount of property valuation increases.

**GOAL 20: ENSURE THAT ELECTED LEADERS AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS KNOW AND UNDERSTAND GOALS AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

Many residents and concerned individuals have volunteered a great deal of time working on the details of this Comprehensive Plan. There has been some skepticism throughout the entire process that the work would be in vain, that elected and appointed officials will choose to not follow the plan as soon as it becomes difficult to do so. Residents want to make sure that the plan is not discarded but is repeatedly referred to. The Comprehensive Plan needs to be the driving vision behind the decisions that are made locally.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Have an annual briefing for local leaders where the Comprehensive Plan is reviewed.
- Monitor the plan annually to measure the progress made.
- Prepare a briefing book on the Comprehensive Plan for candidates.

- Work to keep citizens and local groups involved as advocates.
- Officials should not feel rushed but should slow down and conduct research before making decisions.
- Get professional help when needed to make informed decisions.

**GOAL 21: THE TOWNSHIP SHOULD WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND FORGE ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIPS.**

The township cannot accomplish everything on its own. It takes many volunteers and a lot of hard work to maintain a healthy city. Committed individuals and stakeholders already exist in organizations within the area. The township should partner with these organizations as a way to be more effective and maximize valuable resources.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented by Little Pine Township:

- Work with lake associations for education and reporting of violations.
- Work with the snowmobile club to watch/monitor/maintain trails and identify areas where new trails should be established.
- Work with local ATV clubs to provide education and reduce conflicts.
- Identify local non-profit groups and find ways to work with them to implement the plan.
- Hold periodic forums separate from regular meetings in order to deal with specific issues.
- Educate people through real estate offices as property is sold. Provide a welcome packet to new property owners.

## ZONING MAP

The bridge between the Comprehensive Plan and the local ordinances is the Zoning Map. The Zoning Map lays out in a graphic format the long-range vision of the community. Once established, it is intentionally difficult to change.

To enact the vision contained in this Comprehensive Plan, the following land use classifications should be established in Little Pine Township:

1. Open Space - A zoning classification for preservation of sensitive areas, unique resources and designated non-developable property. Areas such as wetlands, bluffs, threatened and endangered species habitat, historic sites and lands set-aside as part the development process should be zoned as Open Space.
2. Forest Preservation - A zoning classification for sustainable management of forested areas and limited residential development. Minimum lot size in this zone would be one dwelling per 40 acres.
3. Water Resource - A zoning classification for water bodies classified by the State of Minnesota.
4. Shoreline Residential – A zoning classification for riparian residential properties. Minimum lot sizes would be consistent with shoreland management act standards.
5. Rural Preservation – A zoning classification that provides low density, rural development not serviced by municipal sewer and water. Minimum lot size in this zone would be 10 acres with a maximum allowable density of one dwelling unit per acre.

The names of the zoning classifications are intentionally descriptive so they reflect the intention behind the classification.

There are also places in the City where added development standards are needed. For these areas, the following overlay zones should be established:

1. **Highway Overlay Zone** – An overlay zone along County Road 1 and County Road XX outside of the downtown area. The overlay should add performance standards to developments in these areas to minimize the visual impacts of sprawling development so as to maintain the rural, forested and up-north character of the area.
2. **Critical Species Overlay Zone** – An overlay zone buffering areas identified as habitat for threatened and endangered species. Performance standards should be established so that development in these areas does not damage critical habitat areas.

3. **Historic Preservation Overlay Zone** – An overlay zone buffering areas identified as having a cultural or historic significance. Performance standards should be established so that development in these areas does not destroy or degrade significant cultural or historic sites.
  
4. **Habitat Migration Overlay Zone** – An overlay zone designed to reduce or eliminate fragmentation of habitat areas. Performance standards should be established in these zones so that development in these areas does not limit the ability of wildlife to disperse and migrate.

Using these classifications and overlays, lands within Little Pine Township should be designated as per the *Future Land Use* map contained in this plan. When implemented, this zoning strategy will provide for a maximum population of 5,649 as shown in the following table:

	Square Feet	Acres	Minimum Lot Size (s.f.)	Base Density (Units)	Maximum Density (Units)
Forest Preservation	428,570,628	9,839	1,742,407	246	984
Open Space	388,838,026	8,926	-	-	-
Rural Preservation	142,666,894	3,275	435,602	328	1,310
Shoreline Residential	4,783,380	110	80,000	60	60
Water Resource	<u>35,112,054</u>	<u>806</u>	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>999,970,981</b>	<b>22,956</b>		<b>633</b>	<b>2,354</b>
			<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>1,520</b>	<b>5,649</b>

(Note: Population is based off of 2.4 people per unit.)

At current growth rates, this development strategy will provide room for growth and development indefinitely into the future.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Preparing the Little Pine Township Comprehensive Plan document has accomplished two important aspects for planning the township's future. First, it serves as an **organizing tool** that says who the citizens of Little Pine Township are and expresses their passion on the issues and challenges affecting the quality of life in Little Pine Township. It provides background information on the township's environmental, social and economic assets as the basis for future policy and decisions.

Second, it provides a **community vision**, a look into the future at the kind of community citizens seek, focusing on what kinds of improvements need to be made, and providing a framework for how and where these improvements should occur.

The third piece of this plan that is crucial to its ultimate success is the **implementation system**. Implementation of the plan is going to take hard work and commitment, not just from community leaders, but from other government units (including Crow Wing County and the State of Minnesota), local citizens, and a wide variety of volunteers and interest groups. Because there are too many strategies in this plan for the township to implement on its own, cooperation among these stakeholders must happen to implement the plan and make the community vision a reality.

To create this plan, 122 volunteers from Little Pine Township and the City of Emily worked at Town Hall meetings and as members of various committees, many of whom have expressed interest in forming community volunteer groups to carry out the strategies of this plan. There are many more people in Little Pine Township who would be willing to volunteer their time to the community if they knew their efforts would not be wasted. With a large number of retired and semi-retired individuals in the township, there is a lot of wisdom and knowledge available. There are also quite a few working-age people who have a vested interest in the area. The township needs to organize these people, and mobilize and support them to do great things.

This comprehensive plan is a long-term vision and framework for action for Little Pine Township. As such, the Township Board should update it periodically, recommending minor changes when aspects of the plan no longer reflect the will of the community. Such changes will require a public hearing in order to take effect and should not be done half-heartedly. A community-wide review of the Comprehensive Plan should be done at least every five years.

The plan, once adopted, becomes the guiding document for township policy. It takes precedence over other planning documents and other rules, ordinances and policies. The only way to make sure that the plan is implemented is for concerned citizens to stay involved.

This plan will only be as effective as the people it serves.

## **CONCLUDING VISION STATEMENT**

Change is difficult. Any time that change is made, even if it is broadly accepted as being necessary, there are some who will feel disenfranchised. Indeed, it is the imminent growth and expected change that prompted many to engage in this planning process in the first place.

Once ideas are put on paper, they quickly become a target. The goals and strategies in this document will be no different. The participants in this process have laid out a bold vision for the future of Little Pine Township. There are major changes being proposed in some areas of the plan. The plan will not be adopted or implemented without controversy. The following is an attempt to address some of the questions and concerns that will likely arise during the adoption of the plan and implementation of goals and strategies.

### **How can you tell me what I can do with my property?**

This plan provides a broad array of tools, some regulatory, but most voluntary, to encourage people to use their land in a way that benefits all of the township's residents.

### **This is going to cost us more money.**

One of the overriding concerns the planning committees received from the public was the desire to keep taxes down. The committees identified increases in property values, development costs passed on to the public and poor planning as the major contributors to increasing taxes. This plan is designed to deal with all three of these issues and help keep taxes from increasing.

**With the larger lot sizes, you are going to have to be rich to live in Little Pine Township.** The proposed zoning map allows for a total population of 5,649, which is 60 times the current population of Little Pine Township. The plan will not limit the availability of developable land.

### **With the larger lot sizes, my property is going to be worth less than it is today.**

Existing residents stated that ever-increasing property values and taxes are driving them out of town. The current ordinances and zoning map facilitate widespread land speculation that has helped drive up the price of land throughout the area. This plan should moderate the excesses in most areas. The market will value some property in the City higher than others. Properties that are accessible – on existing roads – are more developable and will likely be valued higher. The proposed zoning map reflects the accessibility in an attempt to encourage development in areas where infrastructure is already in place and it will, therefore, not increase expenses to other property owners.

**This is going to allow too much growth.** Although the plan does allow for increasing growth, the plan focuses that growth into areas where there are existing roads. Development in these areas will either be large lot or will need to meet performance standards which should include increased setbacks and screening from adjacent properties. Under this plan, it is likely that the vast majority of Little Pine Township will not be developed in the next fifty years.

Appendix A: Glossary of terms

Appendix B: Results from Town Hall Meeting #1 (Visioning Session)

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<sup>i</sup> Minnesota Historical Society

<sup>ii</sup> Zumault, 1950's

<sup>iii</sup> Marsh, 1998