

Thrive MSP 2040 Policy Discussion Outline

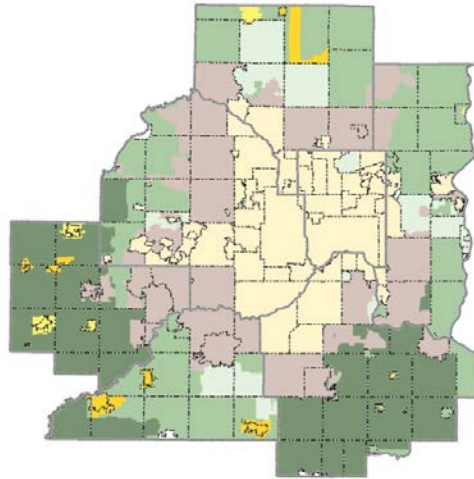
Agricultural and Rural Policy Issues

Scope and geography of the discussion

This topic discusses the large areas shown here in green, roughly half of the 3,000 square miles of the Metropolitan region. Rural land largely not served by sewer is currently in the geographic planning areas of:

- Agricultural;
- Diversified Rural;
- Rural Residential.

(For more information, see pages 25 through 29 of the [2030 Regional Development Framework](#).)



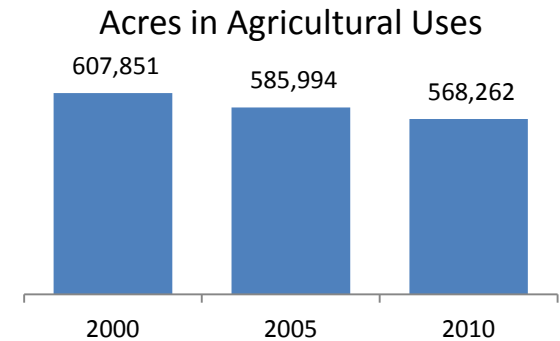
Rural centers and rural growth centers will be discussed in a future topic. Today's discussion will focus on what policies affecting rural areas should be, not the geography of where they should be applied.

Today's issues are strongly connected to future discussions on

- Natural resources;
- Water supply;
- Provision of wastewater services;
- Metropolitan Urban Services Area; and
- Geographic Planning Areas.

Facts and trends: Past changes and future challenges

Acres in agricultural uses are declining in the region. From 2000 to 2010, nearly 40,000 acres – an area the size of Saint Paul and West Saint Paul combined – were converted from active agricultural uses to development or parkland.



Enrollment in the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program reflects the changing demands for agricultural land over the previous decade. Enrollment was at 200,295 acres in 2000, declined to 179,898 acres in 2009, and rose to 207,897 acres in 2012. Current trends suggest that agricultural uses are strong, and prices are rising for agricultural land. While pressures to develop are currently low, regional population forecasts anticipate adding 458,000 households by 2040. Local comprehensive plans are already guiding 492,789 acres to be in agricultural uses in 2030, suggesting that communities are planning uses other than agriculture for more than 70,000 acres currently under cultivation. (Agricultural uses do exist in other land use designations but are generally surrounded by non-agricultural uses.)

Between 2000 and 2010, rural households increased from 48,505 to 59,504 (11%). Half of these (5,924) were in Rural Growth Centers – which the Framework intended to accommodate growth as an alternative to scattered rural development.

Thrive Principles

Stewardship
Equity
Integration
Collaboration
Accountability

Agricultural and Rural Policy Issues

Existing and previous policy direction

The Framework directs rural areas planned as Agricultural to maintain low density (1 unit in 40 acres max), provide regional transportation that “provides market access to agribusiness needs” and expect base-level transit service (i.e., dial-a-ride).

Rural areas planned for future sewered development (Diversified Rural) are required to maintain an overall density of 1 unit per 10 acres until urban services are provided. The Diversified Rural Area Group, convened in 2007-2008, developed [Flexible Residential Development Ordinance Guidelines](#), to more clearly outline development expectations prior to future sewered development.

Rural Residential areas, where the Council does not plan to provide sewer service, are “discouraged” from further 1 unit per 2.5 acres development.

Prior Regional Development Guides provided more explicit strategies for rural and agricultural areas, including a “Permanent Agricultural” designation, enhanced descriptions of development form, and more natural system protections. Policies were simplified following extensive discussion in a Rural Issues Work Group in 2001-2002.

Questions for discussion

- ❖ Should the long-term preservation of prime agricultural land be a regional responsibility or local responsibility? Previous development guides outlined a stronger regional role in agricultural land preservation while the 2030 Regional Development Framework defined a stronger local role. This tension emerged when the Council authorized Scott County to put its 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update into effect in 2009. (See the [Committee Report](#).)
- ❖ What should the Council’s policies around development patterns be in rural areas of the region where there is no expectation of future urban services? This question arose when the Council authorized Greenfield to put its 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update into effect in 2013. (See the [Committee Report](#).)
- ❖ Small-scale farming is often organic, located in Diversified Rural areas, and linked with local food production and farmers markets. These uses can add to the quality of life of the region and provide economic opportunities – particularly for immigrant farmers. However, parcels are generally too small to qualify for the Agricultural Preserves program, and this smaller-scale farming can require higher levels of infrastructure (transportation, water supply and sewage) than large-scale agriculture. Are there any regional issues that the Council wants to address?
- ❖ The Council’s agricultural policies are currently embedded within its Agricultural Planning Area designation. Is there a need for agricultural land use policies in other planning areas to recognize more urban farming patterns?
- ❖ The Council’s policies indicate that rural areas should receive a rural level of services – including transportation. At what point, if any, should the Council provide additional transportation to serve emerging scattered development in rural areas?
- ❖ The current 1 unit in 10 acres density policy in Diversified Rural Areas causes conflicts with orderly and economical future regional wastewater service. The 10-acre parcels that current policy allows frequently prevent effective assembly of parcels for efficient sewer expansion. Clustered development is encouraged, but not required. What approach, prior to development, does the Council want to take to protect land for future urbanization?