

# Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting Date: May 1, 2023

## Topic

Regional Growth Scenarios: Opportunities and Challenges

<b>District(s), Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Policy/Legal Reference:</b>	Metropolitan Land Planning Act (§473.145)
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<b>Division/Department:</b>	Community Development/Regional Planning

## Proposed Action

There is no proposed action. This item is presented for information and discussion purposes only.

## Background

At the Community Development Committee (CDC) meeting on April 17, 2023, Council staff expanded on previous conversations about the scenario planning tool and shared the land use findings that emerged from that analysis. The [information item](#) and [presentation](#) are linked for reference.

As discussed previously, the Council is using scenario planning to explore multiple future development scenarios. As part of this analysis, Council staff identified opportunities and challenges associated with each potential future. This exercise is the baseline for exploring how policy makers can take advantage of these opportunities and mitigate the challenges of different futures in order to be better prepared for all possible circumstances.

The location and extent of regional growth are important uncertainties from a regional planning perspective. Aside from the business-as-usual scenario, which explores the future if current growth trends continue, these uncertainties may generate four different futures:

- a rapidly growing region developing in compact ways;
- a rapidly growing region developing in a dispersed pattern;
- a slowly growing region developing in compact ways; and
- a slowly growing region developing in a dispersed pattern.

This scenario planning exercise compares these four scenarios with the business-as-usual scenario to examine what happens if the region moves away from current growth trends to any of the other four scenarios. Using insights from subject matter experts in each policy and system area, Council staff evaluated the opportunities and challenges of the regional growth scenarios through the lens of the four cross-cutting issues: Equity, Climate, Natural Systems, and Public Health, Safety, and Well-Being. These cross-cutting issues provide the foundation for the current working draft of the 2050 Regional Development Guide Vision Statement, which the Metropolitan Council endorsed at the Committee of the Whole meeting on February 1, 2023. The [information item](#) and [presentation](#) are linked for reference.

The following memo provides an overview of the findings from the evaluation of opportunities and

challenges. Council staff qualified the opportunities and challenges by using words such as “less” and “more” to indicate the comparison made between each scenario and business-as-usual. At the May 1, 2023, CDC meeting, Council staff will discuss the opportunities and challenges presented by these five regional growth scenarios. CDC members will use this information to explore additional opportunities and challenges associated with each scenario and discuss regional policies to help achieve desired outcomes.



## Cross-Cutting Issue: Natural Systems

The Metropolitan Council endorsed the following working vision statement regarding natural systems for the 2050 Regional Development Guide: *“Our region has world class parks and abundant natural resources. We envision a future where natural systems are increasingly protected, integrated, and restored to ensure a high quality of life for our growing region.”*

During the analysis of opportunities and challenges related to natural systems in the region, staff identified two recurring themes: 1) preservation and/or degradation of natural resources, and 2) impacts to water quality and availability.

### High Growth & Compact Development

#### Opportunities

- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces the demand for greenfield development.
- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces the need for new impervious surfaces to accommodate growth, including new roadway capacity.
- **Preservation:** Compact development promotes better preservation of high-quality and contiguous natural areas, including wetland systems that naturally facilitate water infiltration and storage.
- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces premature development pressure on areas dedicated to agricultural production which reduces the amount of agricultural land lost to development.
- **Water:** Compact development puts less pressure on vulnerable groundwater sources in accommodating growth, by using surface water in the region’s core.

#### Challenges

- **Degradation:** High growth puts more pressure on park system expansion for recreational use rather than natural resource conservation.
- **Degradation:** High growth puts more stress on water resources for recreational use, especially on higher heat days.
- **Degradation:** High growth and compact development increases parks usage within already developed areas, requiring additional investment to protect natural resource quality in those areas.
- **Water:** High growth requires more impervious surface to accommodate development which causes more rapid water degradation, especially in water resources in the region’s core.
- **Water:** Compact development leads to less water recharge in the region’s core.
- **Water:** High growth increases water demand and vulnerability in times of drought, which may cause communities supplying water from surface water sources, such as the Mississippi River, to be more susceptible to challenges associated with drought and climate-related water quality concerns such as harmful algal blooms.

### High Growth & Dispersed Development

#### Opportunities

- **Water:** Dispersed development reduces pressures on water resources in the region’s core.

#### Challenges

- **Degradation:** High growth puts more pressure on park system expansion for recreational use rather than natural resource conservation.
- **Degradation:** High growth and dispersed development increases the need for new impervious surfaces to accommodate development, including new roadway capacity.
- **Degradation:** High growth puts more stress on water resources for recreational use,



- especially on higher heat days.
- **Degradation:** Dispersed development leads to increased fragmentation of natural resources.
- **Degradation:** Dispersed development with high growth puts greater pressure on development of agricultural land and results in more unsewered rural residential development.
- **Water:** Dispersed development leads to less land area for water infiltration resulting in decreased water recharge, increased erosion, etc.
- **Water:** Dispersed development may worsen water quality issues by increasing impervious surfaces leading to swifter water flow paths and increased pollutant loads.

## Low Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **Preservation:** Compact development promotes better preservation of high-quality and contiguous natural areas, including wetland systems that naturally facilitate water infiltration and storage.
- **Preservation:** Low growth creates the opportunity to better address maintenance gaps due to less intense demand for natural resources and recreation areas.
- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces the demand for greenfield development.
- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces the need for new impervious surfaces to accommodate growth, including new roadway capacity.
- **Preservation:** Compact development reduces premature development pressure on areas dedicated to agricultural production which reduces the amount of agricultural land lost to development.
- **Water:** Low growth leads to less demand for water resources, which allows for better water supply recharge.
- **Water:** Low growth allows for the current capacity of drinking water sources to meet future demand, specifically surface water from Minneapolis and St. Paul.

### Challenges

- **Degradation:** Low growth decreases the availability of funding for the parks system due to lower tax base.
- **Water:** Compact development leads to increased drinking water vulnerability in times of drought, particularly in areas served by the Mississippi River.
- **Water:** Compact development increases pollution risk to water bodies near the most compact areas.

## Low Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- **Preservation:** Low growth creates the opportunity to better address maintenance gaps due to less intense demand for natural recreation areas.
- **Water:** Low growth leads to less demand for water resources, which allows for better water supply recharge.
- **Water:** Low growth allows for the current capacity of drinking water sources to meet future demand, specifically surface water from Minneapolis and St. Paul.
- **Water:** Low growth with dispersed development may minimize the increased runoff from new development for individual water bodies.
- **Water:** Low growth puts less pressure on water resources.

### Challenges

- **Degradation:** Dispersed development leads to increased fragmentation of natural systems.



- **Degradation:** Low growth decreases the availability of funding for the parks system due to lower tax base.
- **Water:** Dispersed development leads to less land area for water infiltration resulting in decreased water recharge, increased erosion and pollutant loads, etc.

## Cross-Cutting Issue: Equity

The Metropolitan Council endorsed the following working cross-cutting regional vision statement regarding equity for the 2050 Regional Development Guide: *“Our quality of life is high by national standards but not all communities share in this. We envision a future where inequities and injustices have been eliminated and all residents and newcomers feel welcome, included, and empowered.”*

Equity is a crucial issue that cuts across all policy areas. During the analysis of opportunities for and challenges associated with the issue of equity in the region, four recurring themes emerged: 1) housing, 2) transportation, 3) parks, and 4) water.

## High Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **Housing:** Higher density creates more potential for affordable housing development.
- **Housing:** Higher density creates more opportunities for a more diverse housing stock that provides life-cycle housing options such as townhomes, apartments, senior living facilities, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- **Transportation:** High and compact growth supports expansion of high-frequency, full-service transit network, which is especially important for low-income residents who depend on transit.
- **Transportation:** Compact development benefits low-income and aging residents by making transit more viable and promoting walkability.

### Challenges

- **Housing:** High growth increases housing demand, which puts an upward pressure on housing prices, especially in already-developed areas of the region where many BIPOC and low-income residents live.
- **Housing:** High growth may lead to increased homelessness and increase the need for publicly funded housing.
- **Housing:** High growth may lead to accelerated displacement and gentrification in historically disinvested areas and of disempowered communities.
- **Transportation:** High growth generates more congestion and leads to longer travel times for transit users, especially in the absence of dedicated transit lanes.
- **Transportation:** More congestion contributes to air quality problems, often concentrated in areas where BIPOC and low-income residents live.
- **Parks:** BIPOC and low-income residents living in the region’s core are disproportionately impacted by degradation of parks and open spaces due to increased use.
- **Water:** High/compact growth may require increasing the capacity of the wastewater infrastructure in the developed portions of the region. The cost of increasing the capacity of existing wastewater infrastructure will disproportionately impact low-income residents.
- **Water:** High/compact growth puts more usage stress on urban waters that provide heat refuge for urban residents that cannot afford to travel to recreation waters.



## High Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- No opportunities identified.

### Challenges

- **Housing:** High growth increases housing demand, which puts an upward pressure on housing prices. This price pressure reduces overall housing affordability, especially impacting low-income residents.
- **Housing:** Commuting costs may increase due to people choosing to live further from the center of the region.
- **Housing:** High growth may lead to increased homelessness and increase the need for public housing subsidies.
- **Transportation:** High growth generates more overall congestion.
- **Transportation:** Dispersed growth is less conducive to the expansion of a high-frequency, full-service transit network, which is important to residents who depend on transit.
- **Transportation:** Dispersed growth reduces job accessibility for transit-dependent low-income residents much more than drivers.
- **Water:** High/dispersed growth would require expanding the footprint of wastewater infrastructure. The cost of expanding wastewater infrastructure will disproportionately impact low-income residents.

## Low Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **Housing:** Lower growth potentially puts less pressure on housing prices.
- **Housing:** Higher density creates more potential for affordable housing development.
- **Housing:** Higher density creates more opportunities for a more diverse housing stock that provides life-cycle housing options such as townhomes, apartments, senior living facilities, and accessory dwelling units.
- **Transportation:** Fewer trips and potentially lower congestion implies better access to amenities for BIPOC and low-income residents.
- **Transportation:** Compact development benefits low-income and aging communities by making transit more viable and promoting walkability.

### Challenges

- **Housing:** Low tax base associated with low growth may mean fewer locally funded resources for affordable housing subsidies.
- **Water:** Low tax base makes it challenging for smaller cities with local treatment facilities to maintain their infrastructure.
- **Water:** Low tax base makes it challenging for outer ring watershed organizations to implement and maintain stormwater infrastructure and water improvement projects.

## Low Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- **Housing:** Lower growth potentially puts less pressure on housing prices.

### Challenges

- **Housing:** Low tax base associated with low growth may mean fewer resources for affordable housing subsidies.



- **Transportation:** Dispersed growth is less conducive to the expansion of a high-frequency, full-service transit network, which is important to residents who depend on transit.
- **Transportation:** Dispersed growth reduces job accessibility for transit-dependent low-income residents much more than drivers.
- **Water:** Low tax base makes it challenging for smaller cities with local treatment facilities to maintain their infrastructure.
- **Water:** Low tax base makes it challenging for outer ring watershed organizations to implement and maintain stormwater infrastructure and water improvement projects.

## Cross-Cutting Issue: Climate

The Metropolitan Council endorsed the following working vision statement regarding climate for the 2050 Regional Development Guide: *“Our region leads on the critical issue of climate change. We envision a future where we have eliminated or mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure that our communities and systems are resilient.”*

During the analysis of opportunities and challenges associated with the issue of climate change in the region, staff identified two recurring themes: 1) greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; 2) environmental quality and preservation of natural areas impacting the urban heat island effect.

### High Growth & Compact Development

#### Opportunities

- **GHG:** Shorter travel distances reduce GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Compact development is more conducive to walkability and multi-modal transportation, which reduces GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Denser housing developments can result in more efficient building energy use, which reduces GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Compact development helps preserve natural areas allowing for carbon sequestration that mitigates climate change.
- **Environmental quality:** Denser developments reduce the need for new impervious surfaces.

#### Challenges

- **GHG:** Larger population growth, greater energy needs, and more freight travel increase GHG emissions.
- **Environmental quality:** Increased density can increase the urban heat island effect.

### High Growth & Dispersed Development

#### Opportunities

- **Environmental quality:** More sparsely built developments, dispersed throughout the region, contribute less to an urban heat island effect.

#### Challenges

- **GHG:** Larger population growth and greater energy needs increase GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Longer travel distances to reach goods and services result in increased vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and therefore, increased GHG emissions.



## Low Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **GHG:** Shorter travel distances reduce GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Compact development is more conducive to walkability and multi-modal transportation, which reduces GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Lower population growth reduces GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Compact development helps preserve natural areas allowing for carbon sequestration that mitigates climate change.
- **Environmental quality:** Denser developments reduce the need for new impervious surfaces.

### Challenges

- **Environmental quality:** Increased density contributes to increased urban heat island effect.

## Low Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- **GHG:** Lower population growth reduces the number of trips, which then lowers GHG emissions.

### Challenges

- **GHG:** Increased VMT and travel distance to reach goods and services increases GHG emissions.
- **GHG:** Lower density of new development is less conducive to efficient building energy use, which increases GHG emissions.

## Cross-Cutting Issue: Public Health, Safety, and Well Being

The Metropolitan Council endorsed the following working vision statement regarding healthy and safe communities for the 2050 Regional Development Guide: *“The wellbeing of our region depends on the strength and inclusiveness of our economy as well as the quality, safety, and reliability of our public infrastructure and services. We envision a future where all our region’s residents can live healthy, productive, and rewarding lives with a sense of security, agency, and wellbeing.”*

During the analysis of opportunities for and challenges associated with the issue of Public Health, Safety, and Well Being in the region, staff identified three recurring themes: 1) safety, including personal and collective safety; 2) access to goods and services, including emergency services and grocery stores; and 3) health, including physical and mental health, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

## High Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **Safety:** More people and compact development can lead to more activity with uses that serve the population throughout the day, which puts more "eyes on the street" and creates safer neighborhoods.
- **Access:** Compact growth produces better access to jobs both for drivers and transit riders.
- **Access:** Compact development is more conducive to mixed use developments (commercial uses next to housing developments), which allow more people to live in proximity to goods and services such as grocery stores.
- **Access:** Compact development means more people live in proximity to transit, which





increases access to public services such as healthcare.

- **Health:** Compact development promotes transit, biking, and walking and reduces vehicle miles traveled (VMT) resulting in improved mobility, health, and safety outcomes.
- **Health:** More people living in greater proximity to one another can result in stronger social support network.
- **Health:** Compact development enables treating drinking water and returning wastewater to the environment without much expansion of the water conveyance system.

### Challenges

- **Access:** High population growth leads to more congestion which inhibits and delays access to emergency services.
- **Health:** Greater proximity to other people creates more risk of spreading disease.
- **Health:** High population growth increases housing demand and puts an upward pressure on housing prices. As a result, finding affordable housing can become challenging and potentially increase housing instability, which impacts job security, mental health, and more.
- **Health:** High population growth creates more stress on water resources and increases the cost of water treatment services.

## High Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- No opportunities identified.

### Challenges

- **Safety:** Longer travel distances and car-dependency may cause an increase in traffic accidents and result in more safety risks, particularly for pedestrians.
- **Access:** High population growth leads to more congestion which inhibits and delays access to emergency services.
- **Access:** Dispersed growth reduces job accessibility for both drivers and transit riders.
- **Access:** Dispersed development makes it more difficult to connect the growing number of residents to community resources, which also disproportionately impacts already underserved communities.
- **Health:** Dispersed development is less conducive to creating walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly communities.
- **Health:** Dispersed development may increase contamination risks by creating new sources of potential contamination.
- **Health:** New dispersed development means more developments on individual SSTS, and therefore a greater potential for failure of sewer systems and contamination risks.
- **Health:** High population growth creates more stress on water resources and increases the cost of water treatment services.

## Low Growth & Compact Development

### Opportunities

- **Safety:** More compact development may create busier and safer streets by increasing opportunities for mixed use neighborhoods that promote a flow of people throughout the day.
- **Access:** Compact growth produces better access to jobs both for drivers and transit riders.
- **Access:** Compact development is more conducive to mixed use developments (commercial uses next to housing developments), which allow more people to live in proximity to goods and services such as grocery stores.
- **Access:** Compact development means that more people live in proximity to public services



such as healthcare and transit. The cost of these public services may potentially be lower due to efficiency and density.

- **Health:** Compact development promotes transit, biking, and walking and reduces VMT resulting in improved mobility, health, and safety outcomes.
- **Health:** More people living in greater proximity to one another can result in stronger social support networks.
- **Health:** Compact development enables treating drinking water and returning wastewater to the environment without much expansion of the water conveyance system.

### Challenges

- **Health:** Greater proximity to other people creates more risk of spreading disease.

## Low Growth & Dispersed Development

### Opportunities

- No opportunities identified.

### Challenges

- **Safety:** Longer travel distances and car-dependency may cause an increase in traffic accidents and result in more safety risks, particularly for pedestrians
- **Access:** Dispersed growth reduces job accessibility for both drivers and transit riders.
- **Access:** Dispersed development makes it more difficult to connect the growing number of residents to community resources, which also disproportionately impacts already underserved communities.
- **Health:** Dispersed development is less conducive to creating walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly communities.
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