

Information on
Geographic Planning Areas for
Land Use Advisory Committee Meeting
on January 17, 2013

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Introduction

The purpose of examining geographic planning areas is to provide background information, research and analysis to support discussion of geographic planning areas and help provide solid grounds for the Metropolitan Council (Council) to make decisions on the planning areas for Thrive MSP 2040.

Over the Council's history, geographic planning areas have been an important means of defining and implementing strategies tied to each of the overarching goals in the *Regional Development Framework* and previous regional plans. While the broader goals are developed to set the path for our region, strategies for the geographic planning areas specify how they are applied and what they mean for communities that range from rural to urban. Planning areas are used in planning for the Council's regional systems, and are part of setting expectations for growth, development, redevelopment and investment.

Analysis of the Council's geographic planning areas is intended to give the Land Use Advisory Committee information to provide critical feedback and ideas on concepts and criteria for defining geographic planning areas. The Land Use Advisory Committee's input will then be shared with the Thrive MSP 2040 Working Group and the Committee of the Whole. The short time frame for this project is driven by the goal of sharing feedback and ideas with the Thrive MSP 2040 Working Group on January 22, 2013, in advance of a Committee of the Whole meeting on January 30. The objective is to bring geographic planning areas into policy discussions that will have major implications for implementation.

The Land Use Advisory Committee is being asked to give input on geographic planning areas because its members have knowledge of land use issues and experience implementing Council policies at the local level, given that half of committee members are locally elected officials. Moreover, committee members are eager to make tangible contributions to Thrive MSP 2040.

Sources and Organization of Information

Information in this analysis primarily came from analysis completed by a core staff team led by Local Planning Assistance within the Community Development Division. Another inter-divisional staff group reviewed draft information and improved content.

Analysis of geographic planning areas first covers the history of the Council's geographic planning areas. Current definitions of the geographic planning areas appear next. Third are maps of other geographic areas, such as service areas for long-term wastewater treatment service and transit service, with brief explanations of criteria used to define them. Fourth, the four main policies in the *Regional Development Framework* and an overview of the Council's statutory authority provide context. Last, a few policy questions are included to promote discussion, along with several preliminary ideas and suggestions for defining geographic planning areas.

History of Geographic Planning Areas

Decisions on geographic planning areas will have a significant impact on communities in the region. In the *Regional Development Framework (Framework)* and previous Metropolitan Development Guides, geographic planning areas have been pivotal in planning and implementing policies and strategies. The seven-county metropolitan area includes a diversity of communities, and the Council has implemented different strategies to ultimately implement its goals for different types of areas.

The following information describes the evolution of geographic planning areas over the course of the Council's planning history. This includes how areas were defined and the role of urban service provision in those definitions.

Metropolitan Development Framework, 1975

The *Metropolitan Development Framework (MDF)* divided the region into two major service areas: the Urban Service Area and the Rural Service Area, and then built off of the service areas to develop "Generalized Policy Areas." The Metropolitan Development Guide refers to urban and rural services in general policy guidance and specifies how development and redevelopment should be carried out with the Generalized Policy Areas to be consistent with metropolitan goals and policies.

The methodology to determine the Urban Service Area first involved dividing the region outside of the central cities into eight planning sectors, in order to ensure that a sufficient supply of land with public services is planned in all directions from the central cities, permitting people and businesses the opportunity to choose their general location within the region. Then the amount of land needed for urbanization between 1973 and 1990 was forecasted for each sector, and expansions to the Urban Service Area were proposed in those sectors where sufficient vacant land was not available. The following criteria were used to define the Urban Service Area:

1. The Urban Service Area in each sector should have enough developable land to accommodate the forecasted demand for urbanization.
2. The Urban Service Area in each sector should at all times include enough extra developable land for an additional five years of urbanization. This oversupply of land is thought to be needed to allow for locational choice within sectors, to accommodate slight variations in the projected growth rates, to provide adequate lead time for planning and construction of public services, and to dampen any tendencies toward inflation of land prices caused by shortages of developable land.
3. The Urban Service Area in each sector should permit reasonable economy in the provision of metropolitan services. It should maximize the use of existing investments in sewers, highways, parks, transit, and other metropolitan and local services. It should also minimize the cost of providing additional services.
4. The Urban Service Area should be defined in terms of time, and the boundaries should be expanded periodically to 1990 to meet forecasted need.
5. Areas with soils that present severe constraints to urban development should not be considered part of the potential supply of land for urban development.

6. Agriculture should be recognized as an important land use which is particularly vulnerable to urban pressures. Land well suited for commercial agriculture should not be considered part of the potential supply of land for urban development.

Urban and Rural Service Areas

The *Metropolitan Development Framework* defines the Urban and Rural Service Areas as follows:

- **Urban Service Area:** the portion of the Metropolitan Area in which governmental agencies should plan to support urban development and redevelopment. The Urban Service Area is further subdivided into the following:
 - *Existing Urban Service Area* – this portion of the Metropolitan Area has metropolitan sewer service available, has good highway access, transit service, and most municipal services. Development and redevelopment in this well-served area are of high priority.
 - *Additions to the Urban Service Area, 1975-1990* – These areas are planned to receive metropolitan system improvements, particularly transportation and sewer service, during the latter half of the decade.
 - *Additions to the Urban Service Area, 1980-1990* – These areas are contiguous to the built-up area and are the next logical place for urban development to take place. They will require investment in metropolitan sewer and transit service and in highway facilities, as well as substantial investments in municipal and school district facilities and services.
 - *Freestanding Growth Centers* – These are small cities that have been designated as growth centers so that metropolitan investments can be concentrated in a limited number of rural centers that can potentially absorb urban growth. These small cities offer an alternative to traditional large city and suburban living, as well as scattered housing tracts in rural areas.
- **Rural Service Area:** the portion of the metropolitan area that is not planned to receive major urban services, such as sewers, train, and highways during the 1975-1990 planning period. But metropolitan investments will be made to the extent necessary to maintain rural standards of public services and inter-regional transportation links. This area is divided into the following:
 - *Commercial Agriculture Regions* – Within this general area, the long-term preservation of agriculture will be encouraged. Designation of more specific regions will be based on several factors including prime agricultural soils, economic strength of the farms in the area, and the present absence of urban influences.
 - *Rural Centers* – These are rural trade centers that are generally smaller than Freestanding Growth Centers or lack a sizable employment base. They will not receive metropolitan investments for urban services, but those that have public utilities and services can accommodate modest residential and commercial developments.
 - *General Rural Use Regions* – This area contains a variety of uses including agriculture, parks, hobby farms, and residences. It also contains extensive areas of wet soils poorly suited for agriculture and residential use. Commercial farms should be encouraged to remain in the area. No new urban services will be provided for 1990, but the Urban

Service Area may be expanded into the transitional area after that. Standards for the installation and maintenance of permanent on-site sewage disposal systems should be rigorously enforced. Low-density residential land use may be suitable in general rural use regions if the local governments, including school districts, certify that the development will not require additional public services or harm natural resources.

Generalized Policy Areas

As mentioned earlier, the Policy Areas direct how development and redevelopment should occur consistent with metropolitan goals and policies. As stated in the Metropolitan Development Guide, “in order to meet different and distinct needs, the region has been divided into five policy areas which differ in terms of age, condition, type, and intensity of present development pattern.”

Urban Service Areas

- **Metropolitan Centers:** consist of the central business districts of Minneapolis and St. Paul and the adjacent residential, commercial, and institutional developments. They include Cedar-Riverside, the University of Minnesota, and the Capitol area. These are the largest and most diverse activity centers in the Metropolitan Area and are also important governmental and financial centers for the Upper Midwest. They have highly developed shopping areas and are regional centers for government, medical services, finance, office space, entertainment, and the arts. These are the most intensive areas of capital investment and have some of the best highway and transit access.
- **Fully Developed Area:** consists of the suburbs in which there is little land left for development and the part of the central cities outside of the Metropolitan Centers. The age and condition of development in this area varies considerably. The planning emphasis in the Developed Area is to maintain existing public and private resources rather than extend new public services.
- **Area of Planned Urbanization:** the developing suburban communities in the path of urban growth. This area either has been, or will be, provided with metropolitan services, and most of the growth in the region between 1973 and 1990 will occur here. Considerable development has already occurred in this area, and there are thousands of acres of vacant lots and large tracts of unused land. Most of this land is provided with a wide range of urban services, and, as a result, there is a large capital investment in underutilized public facilities.
- **Freestanding Growth Centers:** small cities in the region that provide a rural living environment by economically accommodating growth which would otherwise occur as scattered rural subdivisions lacking adequate public services. Freestanding Growth Centers have been designated so that metropolitan investments can be concentrated in a limited number of centers that can potentially absorb the major portion of rural growth based on the following criteria:
 - The community provides a basic set of public services.
 - The community has schools.
 - The community is an economic center and provides an acceptable level of employment and convenience-type shopping facilities serving a limited trade area.

Rural Service Areas

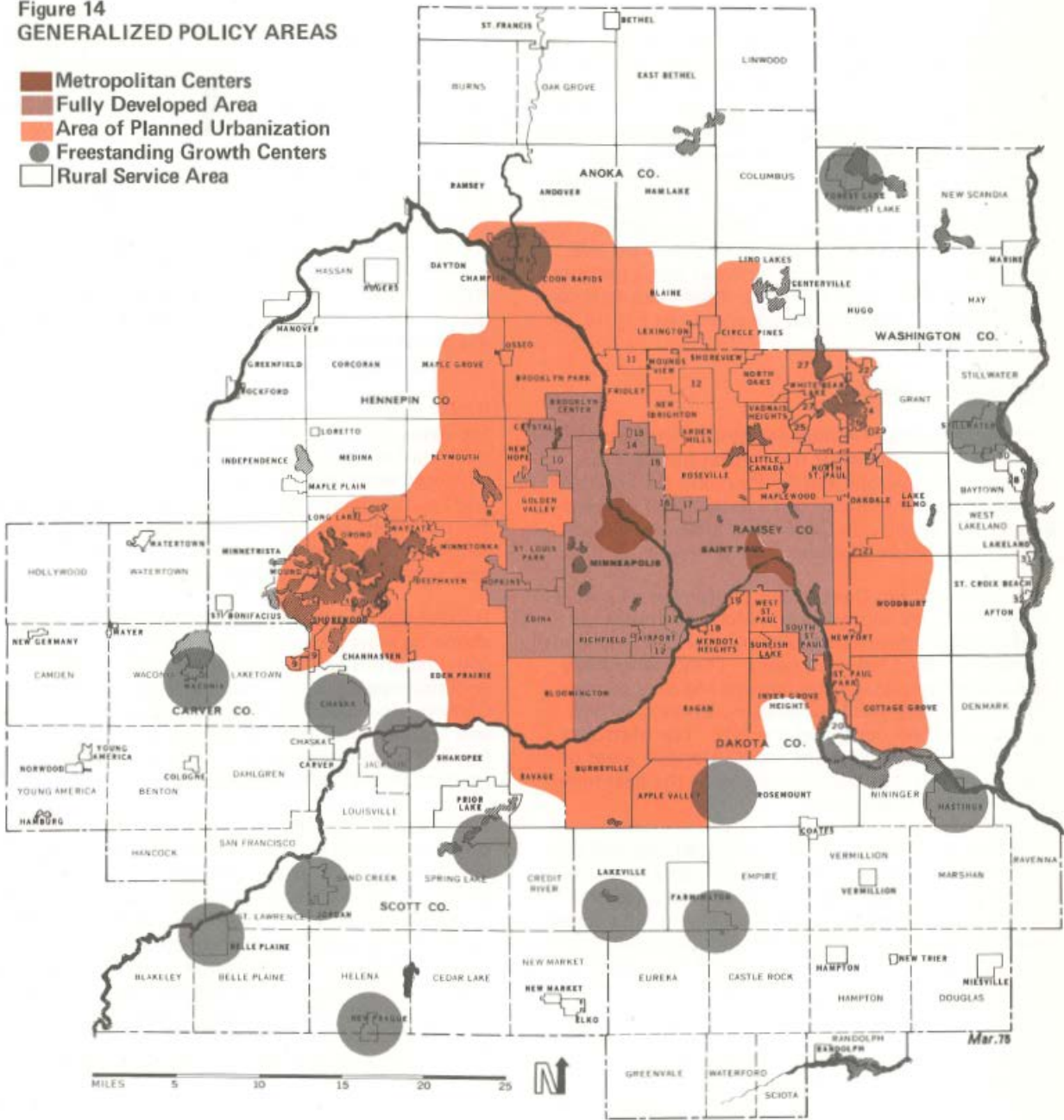
- ***Rural Centers***: other small cities in the region that also provide a rural living environment but do not fulfill the criteria established for Freestanding Growth Centers. Rural Centers are typically smaller in size, including rural hamlets, have a small population base, and an even more limited trade area.
- ***Commercial Agriculture***: this area contains some of the best agricultural land. In this area, the local employment base is heavily dependent upon farming, food processing, and other agribusiness, and the agricultural economy generally remains strong.
- ***General Rural Use Area***: the remainder of the Rural Service Area, in which agriculture should be given first priority, but it must be anticipated that quasi-urban land uses such as recreation areas, hobby farms, and horse stables will continue to expand. These areas are rural lands that are not the best for large-scale agricultural production. Land in this area is not needed for urbanization before 1990, and metropolitan services should not be extended into the area before then.

Figure 1 shows the Geographic Policy Areas in the MDF.

Figure 1

Figure 14
GENERALIZED POLICY AREAS

- Metropolitan Centers
- Fully Developed Area
- Area of Planned Urbanization
- Freestanding Growth Centers
- Rural Service Area



- | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 SPRING PARK | 9 VICTORIA | 17 FALCON HEIGHTS | 25 GEM LAKE |
| 2 ORONO | 10 ROBBINSDALE | 18 MENOTA | 26 BIRCHWOOD |
| 3 MINNETONKA BEACH | 11 SPRING LAKE PARK | 19 LILYDALE | 27 WHITE BEAR |
| 4 TONKA BAY | 12 U. S. GOVT | 20 GREY CLOUD | 28 BAYPORT |
| 5 EXCELSIOR | 13 HILLTOP | 21 LANDFALL | 29 WILLERIE |
| 6 GREENWOOD | 14 COLUMBIA HEIGHTS | 22 DELLWOOD | 30 OAK PARK HEIGHTS |
| 7 WOODLAND | 15 ST. ANTHONY | 23 PINE SPRINGS | 31 LAUREL SHORES |
| 8 MEDICINE LAKE | 16 LAUDERDALE | 24 MAHTONEDI | 32 ST. MARY'S POINT |

- ANOKA — County Boundary
- ORONO — Municipal Boundary
- CAMDEN — Township Boundary

Metropolitan Development and Investment Framework, 1986

The *Metropolitan Development and Investment Framework* (MDIF) reaffirms the urban/rural service area concept detailed in the Metropolitan Development Guide and extends the metropolitan urban service area to the year 2000. The process to extend the metropolitan urban service area (MUSA) involved a review of the land supply and forecasted growth for each community along the urbanizing fringe. In that review, the Council typically found that the current land supply was more than sufficient to meet forecasted needs through the year 2000. In a small number of cases, the Council found that communities needed to add land to their 1990 service area to meet year-2000 demands.

The MDIF carries forward the Geographic Policy Areas outlined in the Metropolitan Development Guide:

Urban Service Area

- **Metropolitan Centers:** these consist of the central business districts of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The MDIF further defined the geographic boundaries of these areas according to the U.S. Census definition at that time.
- **Regional Business Concentrations:** these are areas with a large employment base and/or large sales volumes. They contain a diverse mix of offices, hotels and motels, retail facilities and industry, and they constitute the most important concentrations of economic activity outside of the Metropolitan Centers. This designation replaces the MDF concept of the major diversified center. These areas are defined as areas of contiguous business development with an employment of at least 10,000 persons and/or sales of at least \$100 million.
- **Fully Developed Area:** the part of the Urban Service Area where the level of, or need for, maintenance, upgrading, rehabilitation, and redevelopment has surpassed the level of new development. It is comprised of those communities that were more than 85 percent developed at the end of 1984 and are contiguous to one another.
- **Developing Area:** the portion of the region that is in the path of urban growth, where most of the residential growth in the region will occur through the year 2000. It includes the communities beyond the Fully Developed Area up to the MUSA boundary.
- **Freestanding Growth Centers:** larger urban centers located within the rural portion of the region. They originated as outlying trade centers, and some include large areas of open land as a result of annexation from former townships.

Rural Service Area

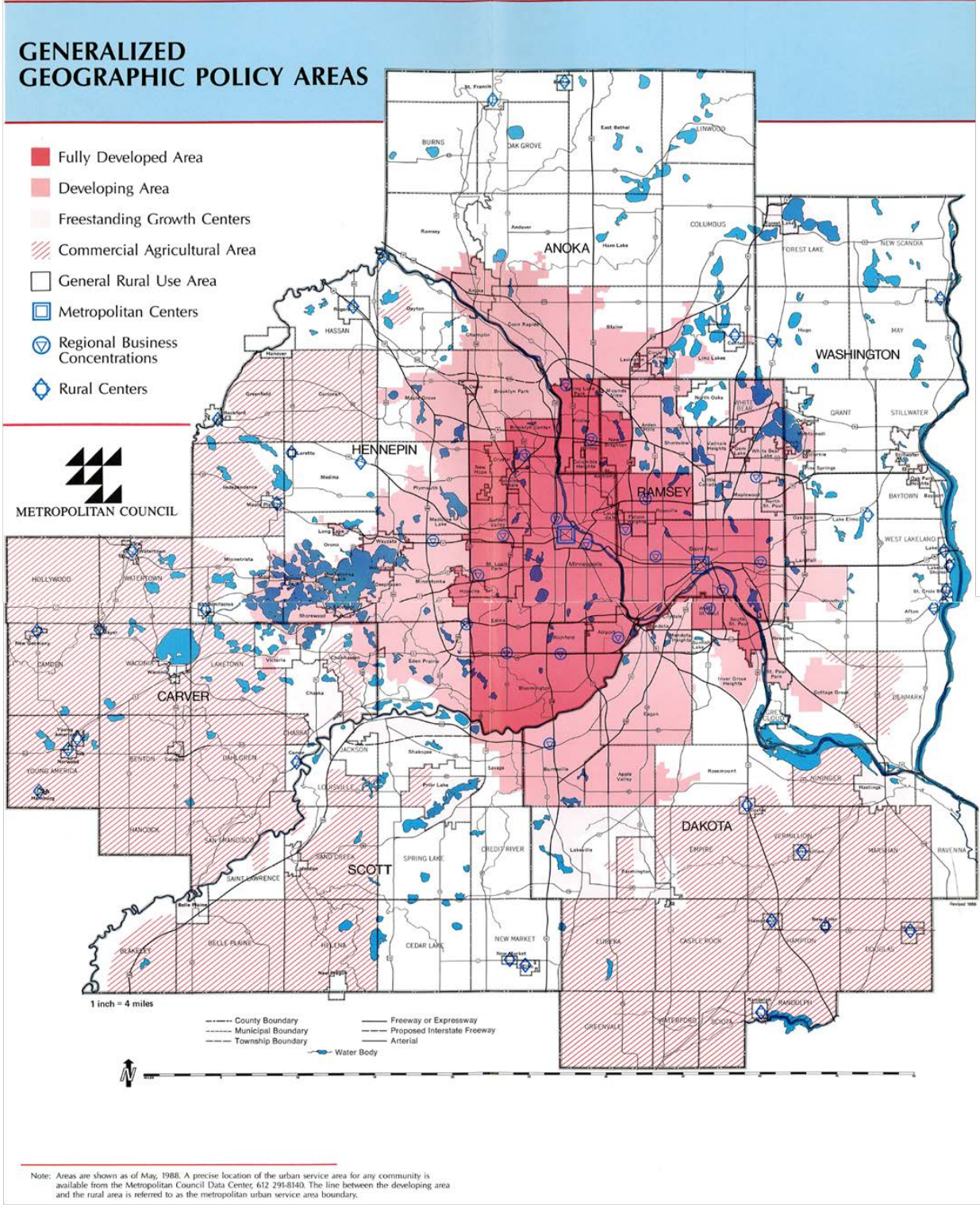
- **Commercial Agricultural Area:** those lands certified by local governments as eligible for agricultural preserves under the 1980 Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Act. This approach places the responsibility for defining agricultural lands on the local governments. This definition also allowed for fluidity in the areas designated as Commercial Agricultural, with an annual review of lands certified as of March of each year. The MDIF also recognized the need for a second level of agricultural designation to cover those agricultural lands that had not yet formed agricultural preserves.
- **General Rural Use Area:** the area outside of the urban service area that is not designated for commercial agriculture. Over 40 percent of the land in the region falls into this category. The

area includes four major types of uses: general farmland, rural residential development, existing urban-density development, and urban uses (those that require isolated and spacious locations but primarily serve the urban public).

- **Rural Centers:** these are areas that have historically served as retail service centers and transportation centers for surrounding rural areas. However, changes in agriculture and rapid urban expansion have changed the traditional rural service roles of many of these small centers to residential areas for urban people and locations for industries with little tie to local agriculture.

Figure 2 shows the Geographic Policy Areas in the MDIF.

Figure 2



Regional Blueprint, 1996

The *Regional Blueprint* continues the concept of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area and further defines the boundary as the maximum long-term service area for regional services between the time of adoption and the year 2040. Land outside of the 2040 urban reserve boundary will remain permanently rural or permanently agricultural. The *Regional Blueprint* defined the geographic policy areas as follows:

Urban Area

- ***The Urban Core***: has the highest concentrations and density of urban activity, both jobs and housing. It is where the highest levels of regional services are available, particularly for transit service and highway facilities. The Urban Core contains the region's largest and most diversified centers of commerce, government, and education: Downtown Minneapolis, Downtown St. Paul, and the University of Minnesota.
- ***The Urban Area***: development will be focused in this area. Most of the Urban Area consists of one large, connected area (as shown on the Regional Growth Strategy Policy Areas map), but also includes the Stillwater-Bayport, Oak Park Heights urban area and the Hastings area.
- ***Urban Staging Areas***: the areas where communities along the current 2000 MUSA line will plan for cost effective, staged, contiguous 2020 urban staging areas as part of the Urban Area. The Council committed to working with communities in these areas to identify which parts of the Urban Reserve are planned to urbanize before 2020.

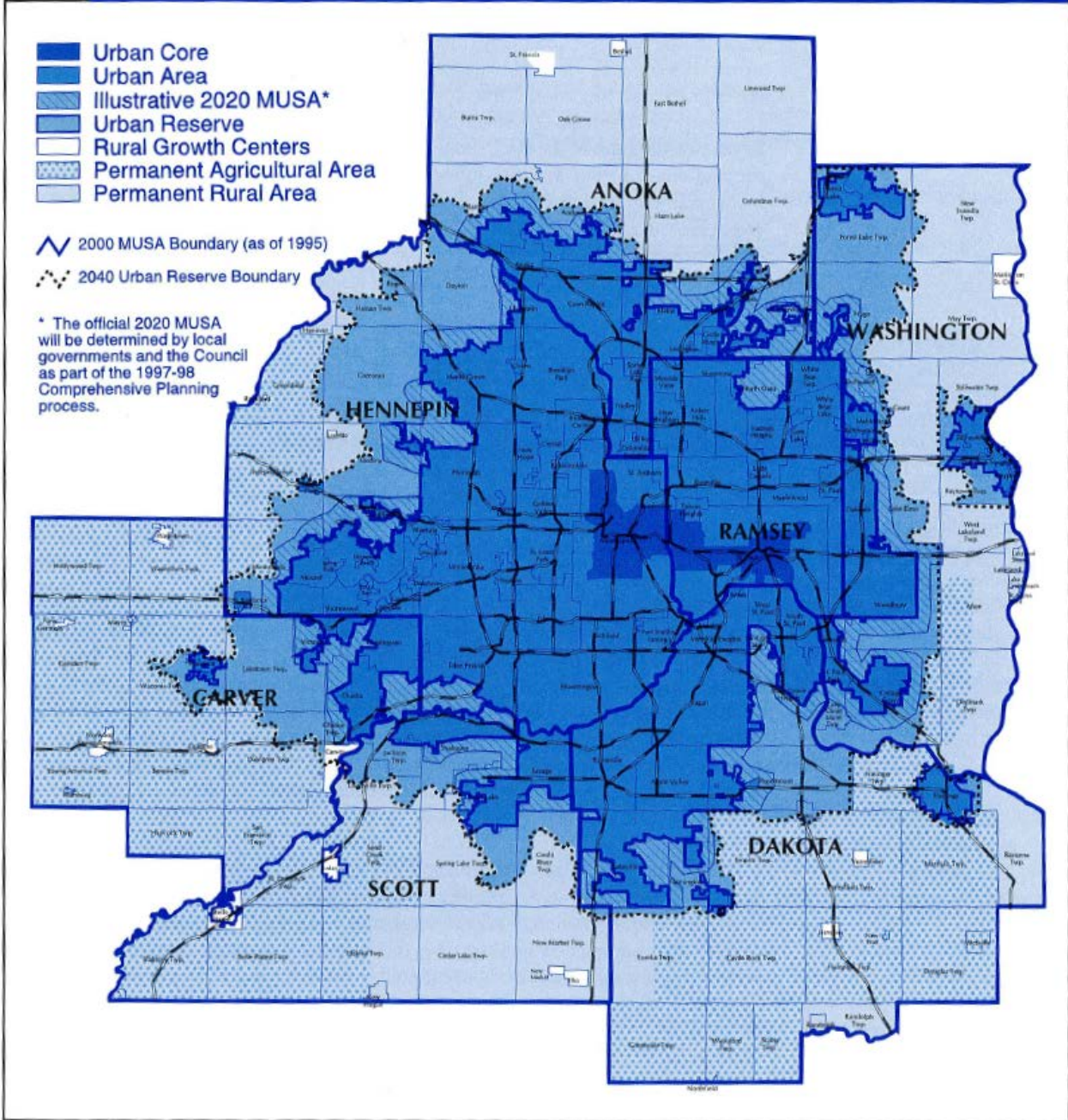
Rural Area

- ***Urban Reserve***: the parts of the region that are considered temporarily rural. These are communities that are not currently receiving regional sewer service, but should plan and implement a post-2020 holding zone for future urban service and development.
- ***Rural Growth Centers***: the small cities in the Rural Area that have central sewer service systems. They currently have many residents who work in the urban area and many industries with few ties to agriculture.
- ***Permanent Agriculture Area***: this area includes agricultural preserve land under the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Act that is certified by local governments as eligible for the program, along with two additional levels of agricultural protection based on existing farm uses and suitable soil types.
- ***Permanent Rural Area***: land outside the urban reserve boundary that has a wide variety of land uses, including farms, very low-density residential development, and facilities that mainly service urban residents, such as regional parks.

The Growth Strategy Policy Areas defined in the *Regional Blueprint* are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Figure 7
Regional Growth Strategy Policy Areas, December 1996



Definitions of Geographic Planning Areas in the Framework

The *Framework* continued the split between urban and rural service areas. It directed 91 to 95 percent of new growth to the urban area, with the rest (five to nine percent) expected in the rural area, particularly in small towns designated as rural growth centers. Wastewater treatment service is a driver of growth management in the *Framework*. One of the main differences among geographic planning areas is the density at which they develop, which is tied to efficient regional sewer service. Unlike previous regional plans, the *Framework* does not identify metropolitan centers, regional business concentrations, or something similar, linked with specific policies or strategies.

Geographic planning areas are currently defined for developed communities, developing communities and types of rural areas. A community may have more than one designation. Examples include developing communities located on the edge of the planning area, such as Hugo and Forest Lake. Rural planning areas include Rural Centers, Rural Growth Centers, Rural Residential Areas, Diversified Rural Areas and Agricultural Areas.

Figure 4 shows the geographic planning areas in *Framework*. The map reflects changes to planning area designations following review of 2008 comprehensive plan updates. Planning area designations changed from developing to developed for eight cities. One community changed from a Rural Growth Center to a developing community. Three communities changed from the Developing Area to a rural area designation (two changed to Diversified Rural and one changed to Rural Residential). Comprehensive plan reviews also triggered numerous requests to change designations of Rural Centers and Diversified Rural Areas to better reflect existing land use and development patterns, or future wastewater service and urbanization. Eight Rural Centers changed to Rural Growth Centers, and 15 Diversified Rural communities changed to Rural Residential.

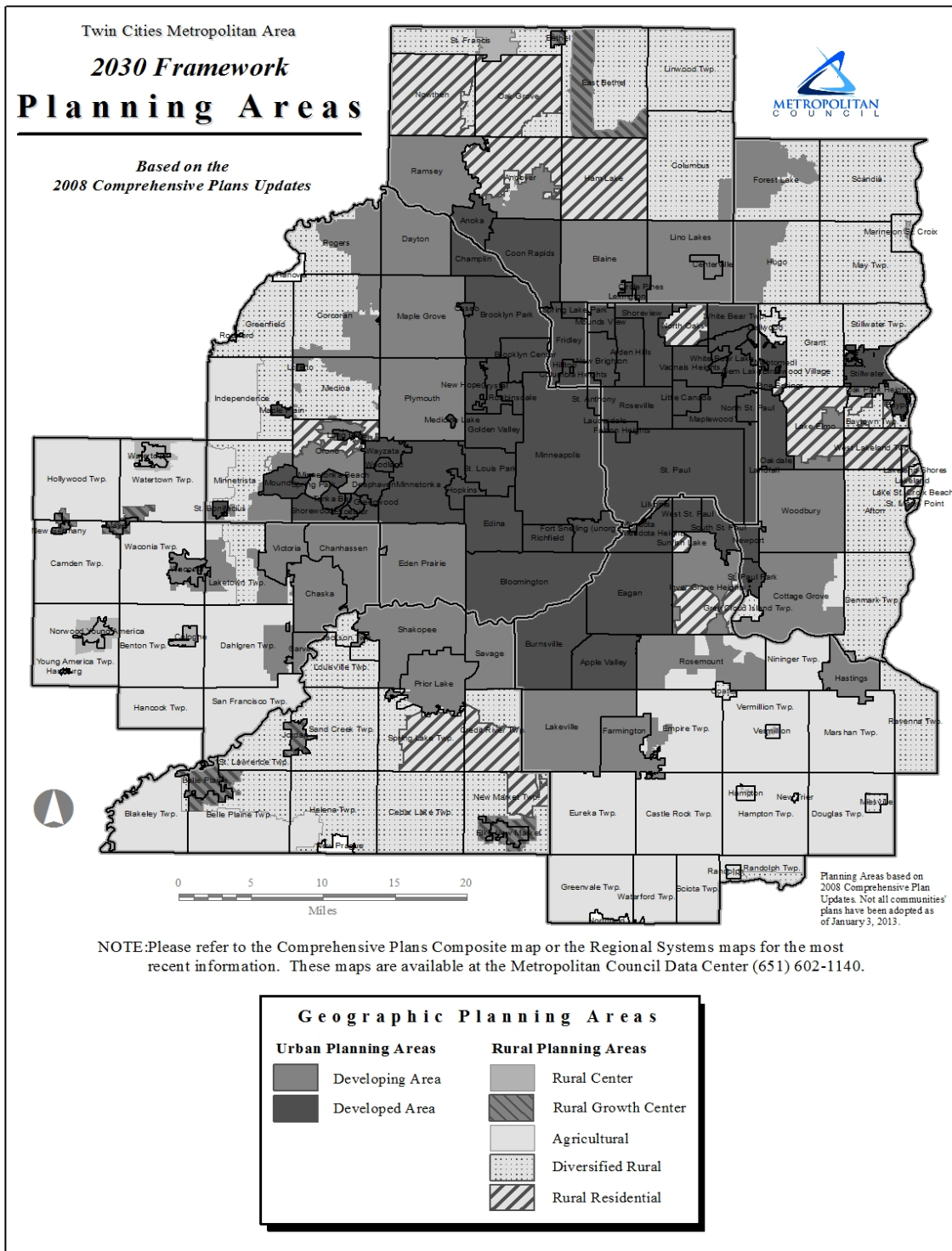
Urban Areas

- **Developed Area.** Developed communities are cities where more than 85 percent of the land is developed and infrastructure is well established. In the *Framework*, about 30 percent of the region's new households and about half of new jobs through 2030 were forecast to occur in these communities. Efforts to accommodate growth in developed communities focus on infill and redevelopment, and efforts must go toward keeping infrastructure in good repair.
- **Developing Area.** The most substantial amount of new growth was forecast in developing communities, about 60 percent of new households and 40 percent of new jobs. When the *Framework* was written, local comprehensive plans for developing communities already designated sufficient land to accommodate forecasted growth through 2020. Recent comprehensive plan updates concentrated on expected changes from 2020-2030 and accommodating that growth with sufficient land. Communities planned for extending urban services and staging development within a rolling 20-year land supply.

Rural Areas

Rural areas make up about half of the 3,000 square miles in the region. In the *Framework*, five to nine percent of new growth was forecasted for rural areas. Rural land uses range from farms to scattered or

Figure 4



NOTE: Please refer to the Comprehensive Plans Composite map or the Regional Systems maps for the most recent information. These maps are available at the Metropolitan Council Data Center (651) 602-1140.

clustered homes to small towns, and rural areas include many of the region's remaining natural resources.

- **Rural Centers and Rural Growth Centers.** Rural centers are small towns located throughout the rural area. Rural Growth Centers are centers with the interest in and potential for growth. Most of new growth in rural areas was forecast to occur in Rural Growth Centers, where existing infrastructure provides an alternative to individual wells and septic systems.
- **Rural Residential Areas.** Rural Residential Areas are developed at one housing unit per 2 to 2½ acres or less and have many individual sewage treatment systems, with no plans to provide urban infrastructure, such as centralized wastewater treatment.
- **Diversified Rural Areas.** Diversified rural communities are sparsely developed areas with a wide variety of agricultural, large-lot residential and clustered housing, and other uses requiring a rural location.
- **Agricultural Areas.** Agricultural Areas are large contiguous land areas planned and zoned to maintain agriculture as the primary land use. They are mostly located in Dakota, Scott, and Carver Counties. These areas also include lands that are enrolled in the Agricultural Preserves program. Unlike previous regional plans, the *Framework* does not identify varying levels of protection for agricultural lands.

Regional Service Areas, TOD Areas and Regional Parks

Information in this section is intended to broaden discussion of geographic areas to acknowledge regional service areas for wastewater treatment and transit, new transit-oriented development (TOD) areas, and the regional parks and trail system based on natural resources. Looking at the different areas and the criteria used to determine those areas helps point out connections to geographic planning areas and explain differences. Maps show service areas for wastewater treatment and transit, as well as TOD areas.

Both geographic planning areas and regional services have essential roles in the effective implementation of strategies and efficient use of regional services. The geographic planning areas have been used as an implementation tool for the spectrum of the Council's overarching policies, including guiding development and redevelopment, resource protection, and accommodating growth. The service area maps represent areas where specific metropolitan services are provided. While there are similarities among the service provision maps and the geographic planning area maps, they are not a one-to-one match, nor are they meant to be, given their different purposes.

In the past, urban service areas had been defined based on the provision of metropolitan wastewater treatment services due to the substantial capital investment needed to support urban development. Transit services were provided to serve connected urban development patterns, but rather than being a pre-cursor to urbanization like sewers, transit followed urbanization. Since the development of the *Framework*, transit services have expanded with fixed transitways and significant infrastructure investments.

Wastewater Treatment Service Areas

Service areas for regional wastewater treatment in the region are directly tied to the definition of geographic planning areas. For example, efficient expansion of the regional wastewater treatment plans is tied to sewer development at a minimum density of three units per acre or greater. Over the Council's history, investments in wastewater treatment plants have been a major driver in managing growth, especially in rural areas. This is shown in the evolution of planning area definitions from previous plans.

The wastewater system includes a specific plan to serve the region's projected 2030 growth and a general plan to serve the region's growth well beyond 2030. The wastewater system plan has a longer planning horizon than local comprehensive plans because sewers have a useful life of 80 years or longer and high capital costs.

Figure 5 shows the long-term service areas for the regional wastewater system. The service areas were determined by estimating the capacity of each treatment plant, estimating the potential developable area that could be served by the plant, and analyzing costs and capacity for the most cost-effective service area. The long-term wastewater service areas show the 2020 Metropolitan Service Area (MUSA) and 2020-2040 Reserve area from the 1998 local comprehensive plan updates as areas where regional wastewater service is committed, although capacity may not be fully in place.

Figure 5

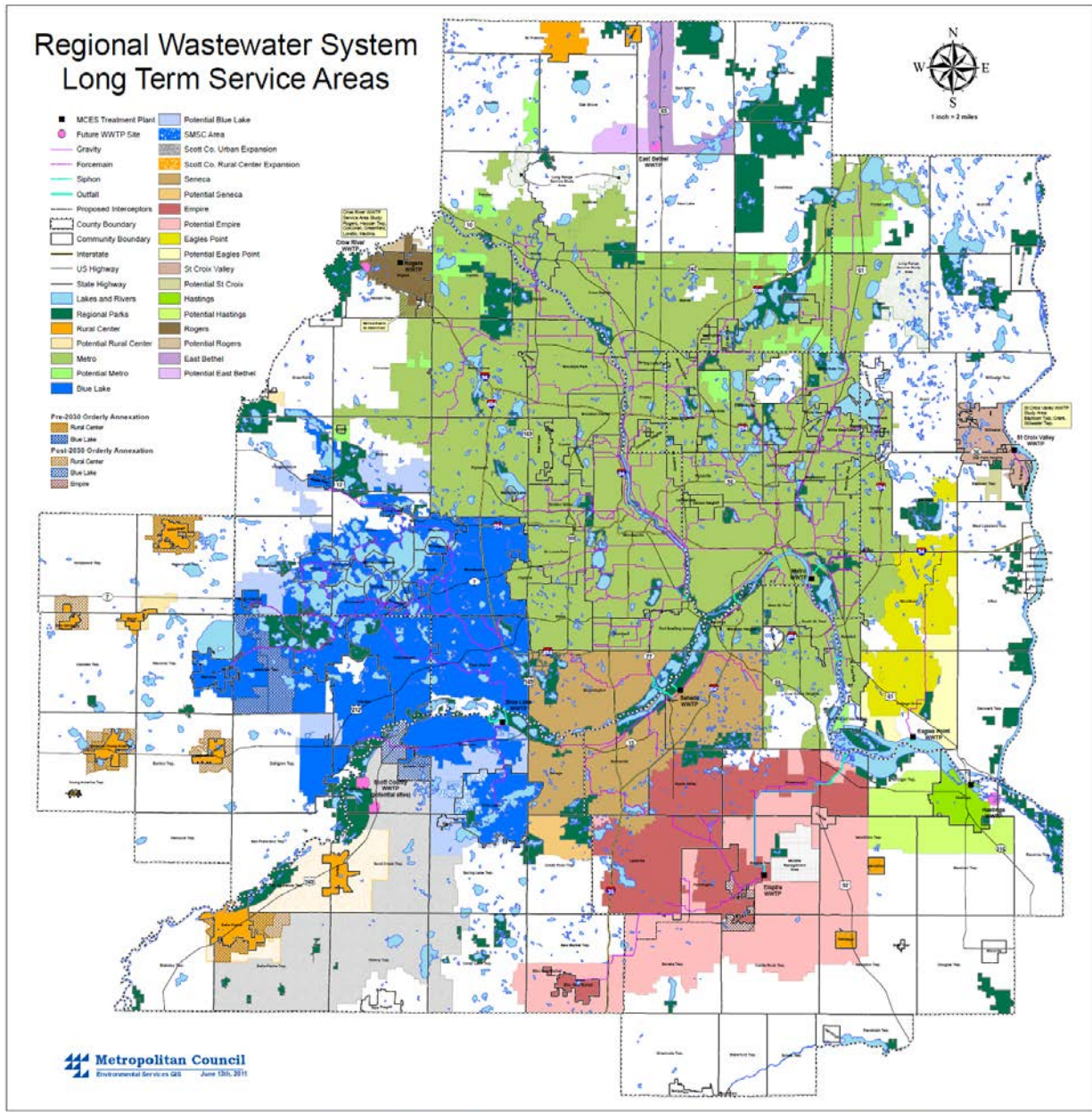
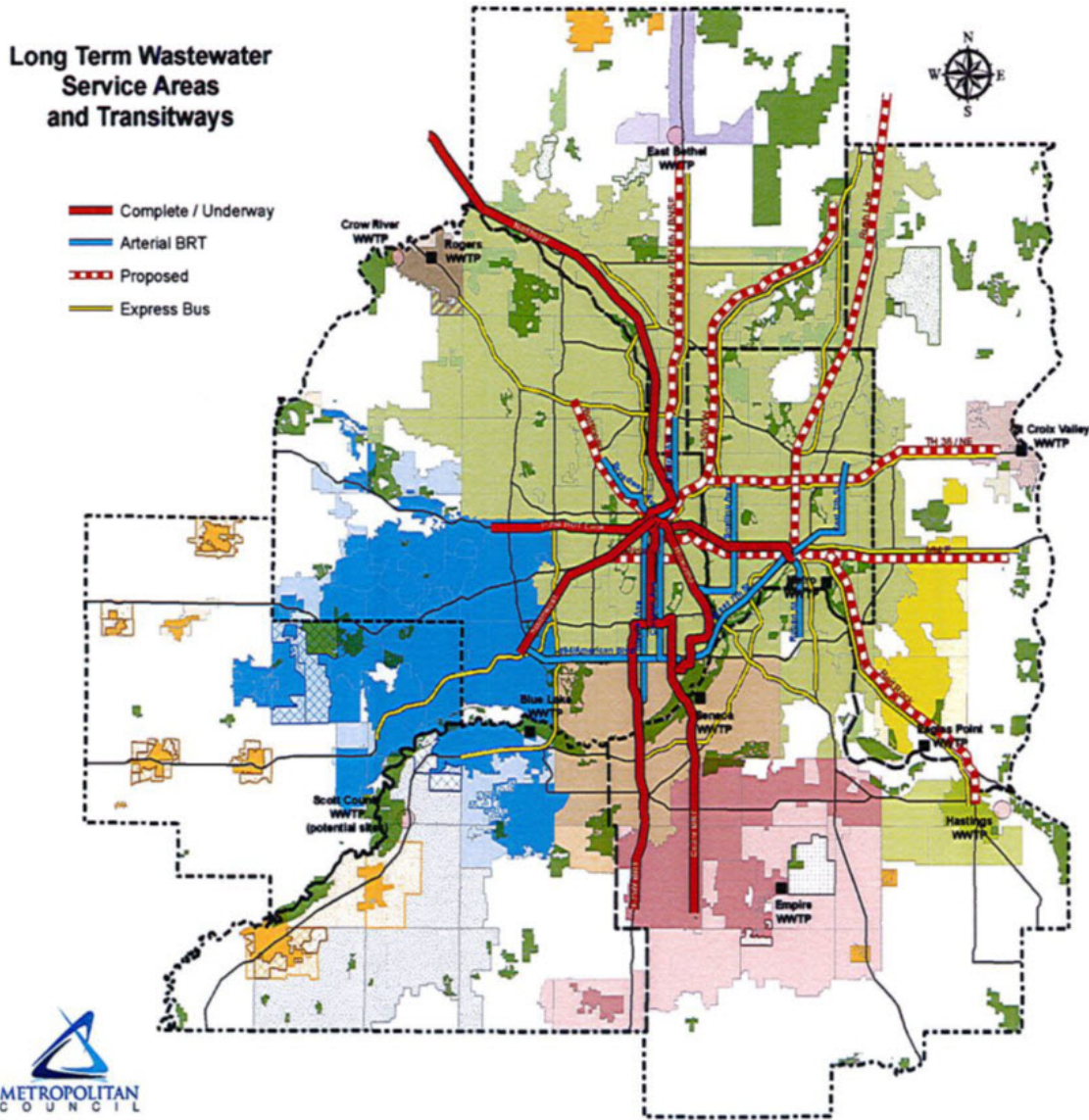


Figure 6 overlays the Council's transitways on long-term wastewater service areas. This information was produced to show connections between the two regional services and how they differ by area.

Figure 6



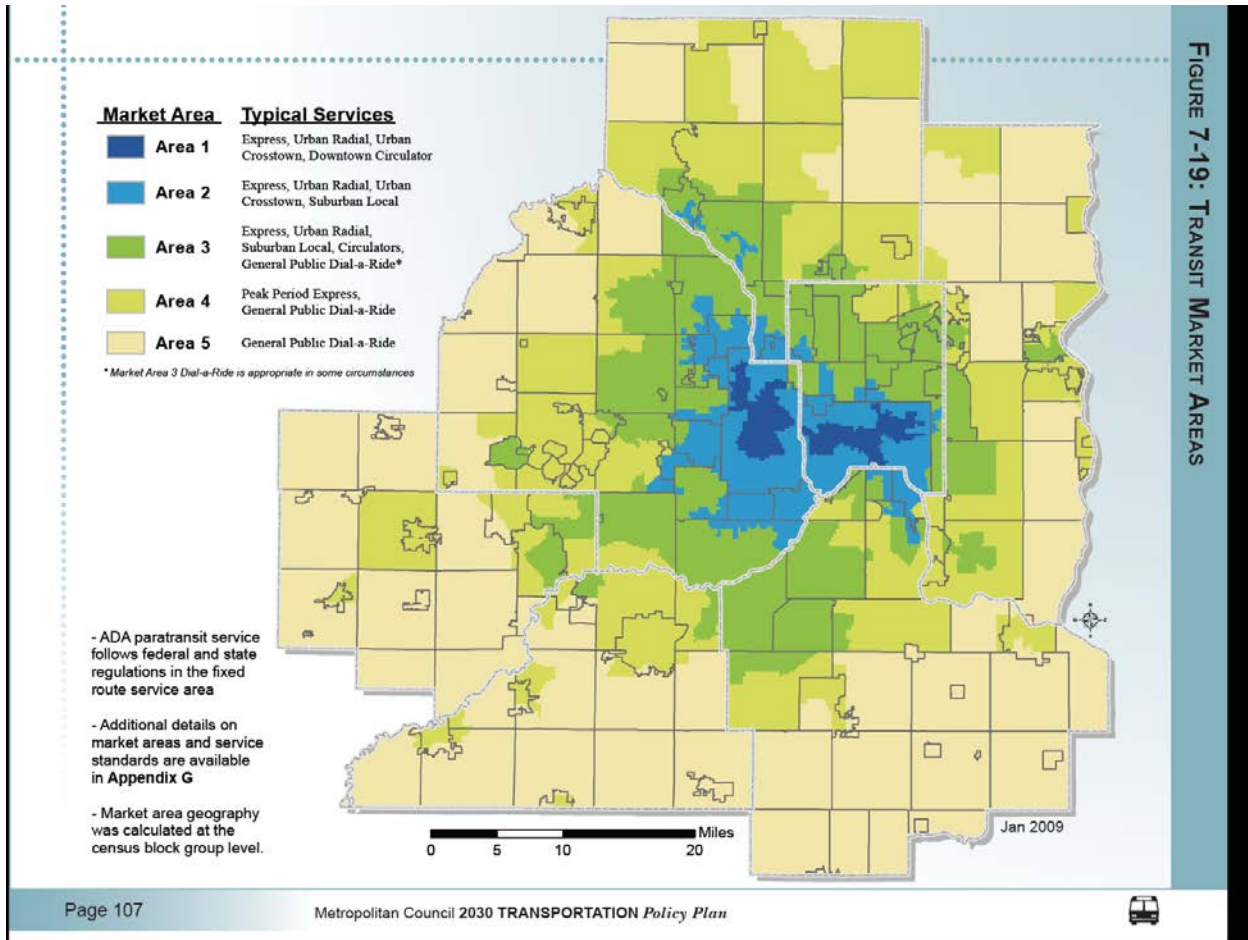
Transit Market Areas

A proposed goal for Thrive MSP 2040 is to provide multimodal transportation choices for reliable and timely access. The transit service area has changed since the *Framework* was adopted, with investments in fixed guideways (light rail transit and commuter rail) that differ from buses.

Transit serves two primary markets: commuters, which are the largest group, and multipurpose riders. In the *Transportation Policy Plan*, the Council has identified five transit market areas that the transit system will respond to. These transit market areas are defined by population, employment density and the number of people who depend on transit. The transit market areas are helpful in discussions with cities and developers about what could reasonably be expected for transit demand, and then service – particularly at the transition between market areas and those in market areas 2, 3 and 4. The Council is

currently working on updating the transit market areas. Transit market areas are shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7



TOD Areas

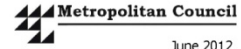
The Council's new Livable Communities Act Transit Oriented Development (LCA TOD) grants catalyze development around light rail transit, commuter rail, and high-frequency bus transit stations. Figure 8 shows the TOD-eligible areas. The following criteria describe how the LCA TOD grants focus on proposals that are:

- In a Transit Improvement Area (TIA) designated by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). These areas are within ½ mile of light rail, commuter rail or bus rapid transit stations along transitways operational by 2020;
- In TIA-eligible station areas;
- Within ¼ mile of any spot along high-frequency local bus lines; or
- Within ½ mile of bus stops or stations on high-frequency express routes with significant passenger infrastructure.

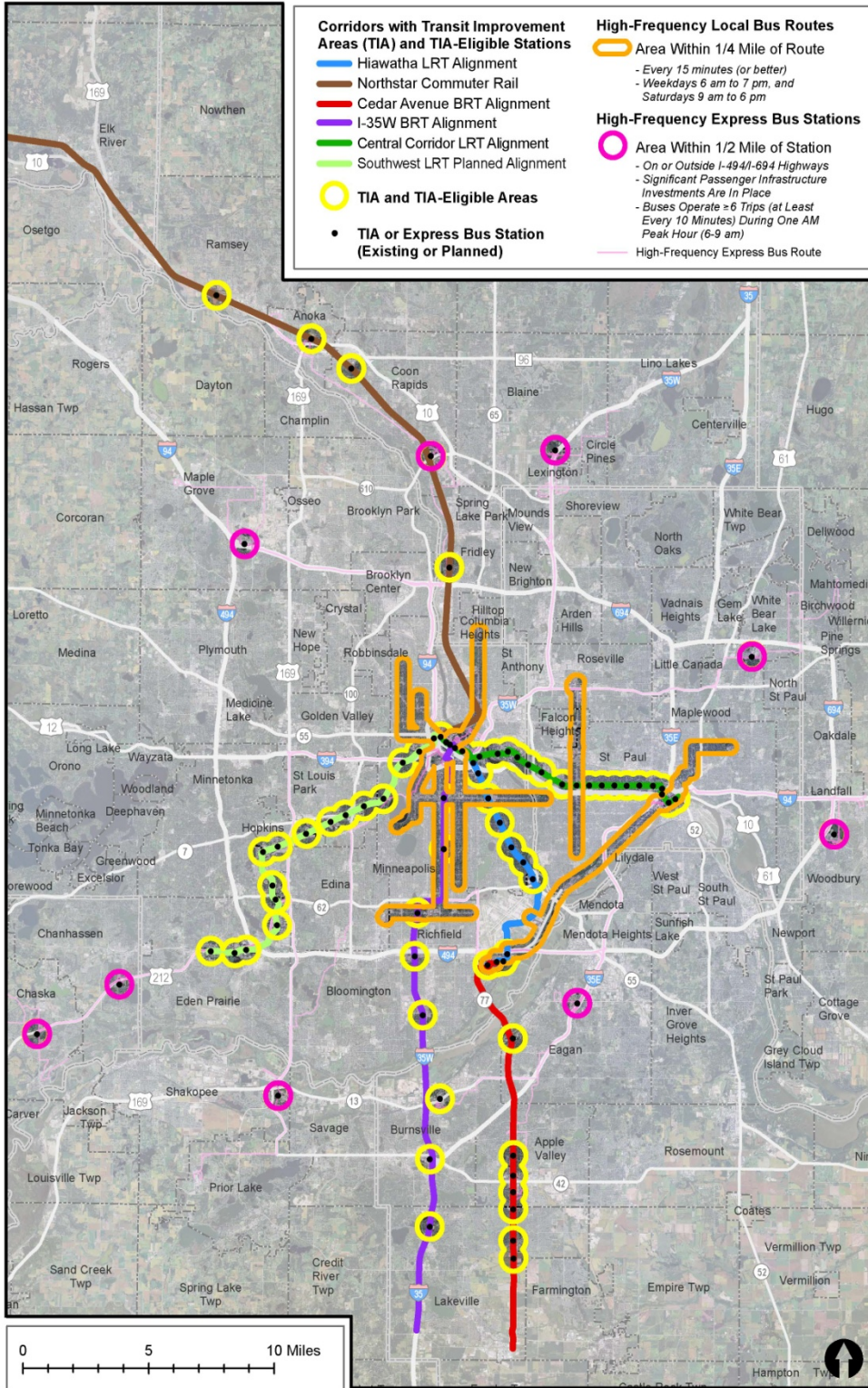
Figure 8

Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

LCA TOD Eligible Areas



June 2012



Regional Parks and Trails

The regional parks system is a natural resource based system focused around areas of high-quality natural resources and water bodies, so strategies in the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* are not based on geographic planning areas. Strategies do acknowledge different areas of the region, however. Large park reserves and destination regional trails/greenways are typically located in the less developed areas of the region where undisturbed areas of high-quality natural resources generally exist. Regional parks and trails in the urbanized areas typically serve heavier recreation use.

Context

Background information on four main policies in the *Framework* and an overview of the Council's statutory authority provide context, both for understanding the basis for implementing strategies through geographic planning areas and for thinking of potential changes to planning areas.

Four Main Policies in the Framework

The Council's policy directions and strategies are organized around four policies adopted in the *Regional Development Framework*:

Policy 1: Work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner.

Policy 2: Plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices, based on the full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region's economic needs.

Policy 3: Encourage expanded choices in housing location and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities.

Policy 4: Work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources.

Statutory Authority

The Metropolitan Council has statutory authority to shape the future growth of the seven-county metropolitan area and implement policies established in the *Regional Development Framework* and its policy plans for regional systems. Key policy implementation is based on:

- **Metropolitan Land Planning Act.** The Metropolitan Land Planning Act directs the Metropolitan Council to prepare and adopt a comprehensive development guide that consists of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development, public and private, of the metropolitan area.
 - **Comprehensive plans.** Under the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, local communities are required to adopt comprehensive plans at least every 10 years that: (1) are consistent with Council policies; (2) conform with the Council's policy plans for the four metropolitan systems of transportation, aviation, water resources management, and regional parks; and (3) are compatible with plans of adjacent and affected jurisdictions.
 - **Consistency with Council policies.** Council policy requires consistency with forecasts, housing, the *Framework* and land use, the subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS) program and water supply.
 - **Density and water resources management.** Reviews of comprehensive plans for consistency with the *Framework* and land use included analysis of planning area density, tied to the *Water Resources Management Policy Plan* and efficient use of investments in the region's sewer system.

- *Metropolitan significance.* The Council may require the modification of any comprehensive plan if the Council concludes that the plan is more likely than not to have a substantial impact on or contain a substantial departure from metropolitan system plans.
 - *System statements.* The Council must provide each affected local governmental unit a metropolitan system statement after the Council updates or revises its Comprehensive Development Guide. This is done in conjunction with the decennial review of comprehensive plans and when the Council amends or modifies a metropolitan system plan. The system statement includes core information from the *Framework* and communicates what a community needs to include in its comprehensive plan.
 - *Forecasts.* The system statement includes population, employment, and household forecasts, which are used as a basis for metropolitan system plans.
- ***Capital investments and federal requirements.*** The Council is responsible for guiding capital investments in the four regional systems, which are supplemented by federally-mandated integrated planning for wastewater and stormwater and transportation and air quality.
- ***Incentive programs.*** The Council’s incentive programs provide grants to communities seeking to expand housing choices, promote connected development, support Transit Oriented Development (TOD) projects, and clean up contaminated land for redevelopment.
- ***Planning assistance.*** The Council offers local communities planning assistance through its *Local Planning Handbook*, reviews of comprehensive plan updates and amendments, reviews of local sewer plans, Sector Representatives, the Land Use Advisory Committee, and a planning assistance fund.

Policy Questions and Preliminary Concepts

The policy questions below are included to prompt thinking about a broad range of different policies that relate to geographic policy areas or regional service areas. While the questions are not comprehensive, they illustrate the type of policies that may be implemented through geographic policy areas. Additional questions lead into preliminary concepts or ideas that focus on potential changes to the definition of geographic planning areas.

Policy Questions

- *Growth and transitways.* The history of the geographic planning areas reflects the primary importance of wastewater system as the Council's primary leverage for directing future growth. In the future, what will be the impact of the expanding role of transitways in attracting growth and supporting regional competitiveness? What are the implications for defining geographic planning areas?
- *Development and redevelopment.* How might geographic planning areas differ to support parts of the region that are primarily greenfield development compared to parts of the region where the majority of development is infill and redevelopment?
- *Density.* How should geographic planning areas support parts of the region where higher or lower densities (residential or commercial) are appropriate and desirable to support efficient regional services and investment?
- *Connecting policy to service delivery.* What may be the relationship, if any, between the geographic planning areas, the transit market areas and expectations of transit service?
- *Funding and infrastructure replacement costs.* To what degree, if any, should geographic planning areas define or inform funding priorities? How might infrastructure replacement costs differ by geographic planning areas?
- *Impacts outside Council's jurisdiction.* How might the Council address growth, natural resources protection and other issues outside of its jurisdiction?

Preliminary Ideas for Reconsidering Geographic Planning Areas in Thrive MSP

Several points come to the forefront when contemplating changes to geographic planning areas. The following questions and initial suggestions are intended to further discussion of geographic planning areas in Thrive MSP 2040:

- Geographic planning areas reflect the diversity of communities in the region. How can policies be tailored to fit geographic planning areas and consider sub-regional conditions?
- How will geographic planning areas relate to regional service areas, support investment priorities, and reinforce integration of policies across systems and policy areas?
- How will impacts of policies, including costs, differ across geographic planning areas?
- Rural areas make up half of the region's land area. If policies in Thrive MSP 2040 focus on the urban core, what role will rural areas play in the region? How would policies be implemented through geographic planning areas?
- What is the role of transit in the rural area and how is that reflected in geographic planning areas?

Initial Suggestions for Defining Geographic Planning Areas

- *Modify existing geographic planning areas.* The Council could continue using geographic planning areas, but make changes to reflect new priorities and improvements.
 - *Developed area.* Definitions could be changed to differentiate among types of communities in the fully developed area. Developed communities currently range from Minneapolis to Loretto.
 - *Rural area.* Planning areas could be simplified to draw fewer distinctions among rural communities.
- *Overlay of centers and corridors.* An overlay of centers and transportation and transit corridors could be added to broader geographic planning areas covering the entire region. Further work would be needed to define overlays, decide policies, and determine how they could be integrated with geographic planning areas.
 - Centers could differ not only by geography, but also by function, such as employment centers and activity centers.
 - Overlays for transit hubs or stations could be structured to additionally support transit-oriented development (TOD). This concept could be further detailed in the *Transportation Policy Plan*.
- *Overlay of areas to protect water resources and natural resources.* Overlays of areas to protect or protected area rules could be developed. Or some other means may reach the same goals. As in the bullet above, more work would be needed to further develop this concept.