

Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting Date: December 16, 2024 - Revised

Topic

Imagine 2050 Land Use Policy: Suburban Edge Supplemental Information

District(s), Member(s): All
Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.175
Staff Prepared/Presented: Angela R. Torres, Senior Manager, Local Planning Assistance (651) 602-1566
Division/Department: Community Development/Regional Planning

Proposed Action

This is an Information Item only. No action is proposed at this time.

Background

On [December 2, 2024](#), the Community Development Committee (CDC) reviewed the [public comments on land use policy](#). A specific point of discussion is the Suburban Edge minimum density expectation currently proposed in the draft Imagine 2050 at 4 units per acre. The expectation in Thrive was 3-5 units per acre for similarly designated communities. The Committee will continue the discussion at the December 16th CDC meeting. To inform the discussion, additional information specific to the Suburban Edge communities is provided in this memo.

Local governments currently designated as Suburban Edge in Imagine 2050 include:

Thrive Designation: Suburban (7)	Thrive Designation: Suburban Edge (8)	Thrive Designation: Emerging Suburban Edge (25)	
Deephaven*	Blaine	Andover	Lake Elmo
Greenwood*	Chaska	Carver	Lino Lakes
Loretto*	Cottage Grove	Centerville	Medina
Medicine Lake*	Inver Grove Heights	Chanhassen	Minnetrissa
Minnetonka Beach*	Lakeville	Columbus	North Oaks
St. Bonifacius*	Maple Grove	Corcoran	Orono
Woodland*	Shakopee	Credit River	Prior Lake
	Woodbury	Dayton	Ramsey
		Empire	Rogers
		Farmington	Rosemount
		Forest Lake	Victoria
		Hugo	Waconia
		Independence	

**These communities represent reductions in density expectations for small cities with constrained land supply.*

Communities designated as Suburban Edge in Imagine 2050 have an average planned net residential density in 2040 Plans of 4.0 units per acre. The same approach was used for density recommendations in Urban, Urban Edge, and Suburban community designations. The analysis in this memo has been updated based on proposed changes to community designations as part of the response to public

comments as discussed at the December 2, 2024, Committee meeting. The planned average minimum density in each of these communities ranges from 1.0 to 12.1 units per acre. In the 2030 Plans, this range was 1.0 to 6.37 per acre. Some communities did not have planned residential growth during the planning period which means that they were not required to revise land use plans to reflect minimum density requirements.

- The overall average 2040 planned net residential density is 4.0 units per acre.
- 10 of 40 communities (25%) are planning for 4 units per acre or higher.
- 14 of 40 communities (35%) are planning for 3.5 units per acre or higher.
- 35 of 40 communities (88%) are planning for 3.0 units per acre or higher.
- 5 communities didn't have a planned net residential density since they had no residential growth changes within the 2040 planning period.

When looking at all development in a community, these cities have an average 2020 net developed overall density of 2.16 units per acre with developed average densities ranging from 0.6 to 3.53 units per acre. This is shared only to reflect that the regional sewer system provides service to all existing (historic) developments whether those are very low densities or, more recently, higher density developments.

Plat Monitoring Program

Communities participating in the Plat Monitoring Program submit information on sewer residential developments to the Met Council annually. Of the 40 communities designated as Suburban Edge under Imagine 2040, 29 are current participants in the Plat Monitoring Program.

Using data from all years provided (year 2000 or upon the year of enrollment), reported plats reflect the following developed/developing density:

- The overall average net residential density of plats is 3.62 units per acre.
- 8 of 29 communities (28%) reported 4 units per acre or higher.
- 17 of 29 communities (59%) reported 3.5 units per acre or higher.
- 22 of 29 communities (76%) reported 3.0 units per acre or higher.
- 7 of 29 communities (24%) reported less than 3 units per acre.

As an example, the information below demonstrates one possible programmatic change which considers revising the lookback period in the Plat Monitoring Program from the year 2000 or the year of enrollment. Using data from 2019 – 2023 to represent implementation of 2040 Plans, reported plats for the 27 communities reflect the developed/developing densities detailed below. Two communities, albeit enrolled in the Plat Monitoring Program, did not have data reported for that time period. This demonstrates that more recent plat approvals reflect higher density development.

- The overall average net residential density is 4.66 units per acre since 2019.
- 14 of 27 communities (48%) reported 4 units per acre or higher since 2019.
- 18 of 27 communities (67%) reported 3.5 units per acre or higher since 2019.
- 24 of 27 communities (89%) reported 3.0 units per acre or higher.
- 3 of 27 communities (11%) reported less than 3 units per acre since 2019.

Density in practice

There has been significant discussion of the practical implications of shifting minimum average net residential densities in Suburban Edge communities from 3 to 4 units per acre. From a land use planning and implementation standpoint, any change in minimum density is important as it ensures more efficient use of land as communities plan to accommodate their forecasted growth, particularly when considering the aggregated regional impact. The minimum density calculation is an average of planned development across the community and can include a mix of both higher and lower densities based on community goals. In practical terms, the built form of 3 or 4 units per acre are very similar



single-family development patterns. These subdivision examples from the region provide a visual sense of what densities around 3 and 4 units per acre look like and represent existing developments within Suburban Edge communities.

Unit density is only one aspect of the environment we experience. The general feel and look of an area, and the ratio of buildings to open space, is far more heavily affected by the amount of land for roadways, publicly-owned outlots, and natural features, some of which are exempted from density calculations. The details of *how* that density is built is just as critical; that is the local government's role. The Met Council is committed to supporting their work with resources, funding opportunities, planning services, and technical assistance.

Image 1: Net density of 3.03 units per acre



Image 2: Net density of 3.7 units per acre



Image 3: Net density of 4.37 units per acre

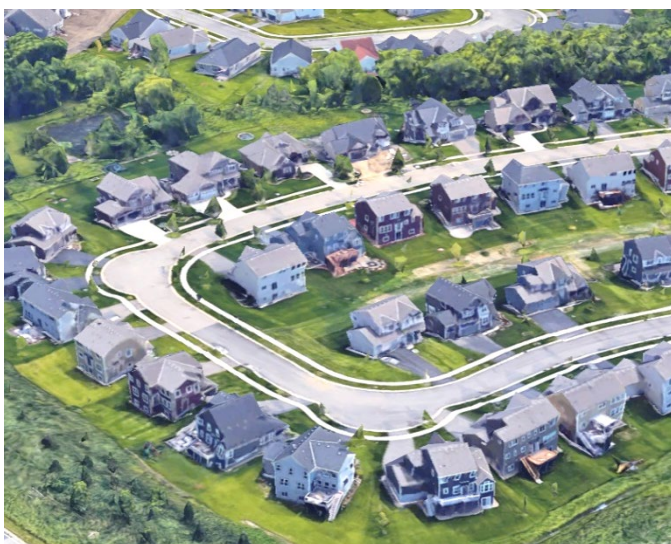


Image 4: Net density of 4.07 units per acre



* Image 4 above has been replaced with an image of a different neighborhood in the Twin Cities that more accurately reflects the net density of 4.07 units per acre.



As an example, the image below shows a subdivision that was developed in phased “Additions.” Plat monitoring data provides a layout and density for each addition. The additions outlined below range in density from 2.5 to 4.7 units an acre in a Suburban Edge community. The subdivision is interspersed with significant open areas of wetlands and roadways. If the area had fewer natural features and narrower roadways, the subdivision might feel more dense, despite having the same densities for the addition.



Local Government Engagement

The memo provided for the [December 2, 2024, CDC meeting](#) identified the Met Council committee spaces where land use policy was discussed between July 2023 – November 2024. While that was reflective of opportunities for Council members and advisory committee members to discuss regional policy, the land use policy team has intentionally engaged local governments in a variety of ways about community designations, land use, and density policy.

Long-term efforts like the Regional Planning Advisory Group established in partnership with Metro Cities began in April of 2022. Additionally, staff organized multiple special focus groups for community



designations, forecasts, regional policy generally, and land use policy specifically. Each effort included a series of meetings over several months. All efforts always included a geographic representation of communities from across the region.

Sector Representatives remain the most consistent point of contact (by design) for local government partners to reach out to when they have questions, need clarification, or want more information. While not an exhaustive list, engagement regularly occurs through the course of this work. The list below includes examples of regular outreach that Sector Reps provided:

- Regular district meetings with local government representatives
- Sector Rep 1:1 individual local government outreach via phone/email at the 60% draft stage
- Sector Rep 1:1 individual local government outreach via phone/email at the 90% draft stage
- Community designation follow-up to discuss potential changes or concerns
- Topic-specific in-person meetings (many) with local staff/elected officials (as requested/needed) often in collaboration with Council members and other technical staff
- A concerted effort in both the Spring and Fall to schedule face-to-face meetings (annually with each local government twice/year minimum, as local staff permit)
- Responses to specific questions, reminders, and regular updates (daily/weekly)
- PlanIt Newsblast emails (periodically as needed/monthly)

Local government representatives are on Council committees like the Land Use Advisory Committee as well as the Transportation Policy Plan Technical Work Group and Advisory Work Group, where staff engaged in discussions on land use policy. Region-wide conversations were held this summer to talk specifically about density and in addition to events like these, staff always respond to invitations to speak to organizations with particular interest in regional and land use policy like we did for the League of Minnesota Cities, Metro Cities, and others.

Local governments were well-represented as part of the statutory process as well, providing testimony at the public hearing and through formal submittal of letters/emails during the public comment period.

Please note that the engagement with residents, community members and organizations, youth residents, the American Indian Advisory Council, rural/agricultural partners, and many other initiatives are not discussed here. These efforts were also substantial and involved many local community partners and organizations.

