QUALITATIVE DENSITY ANALYSIS
A supplement to the Imagine 2050 Density Analysis Report
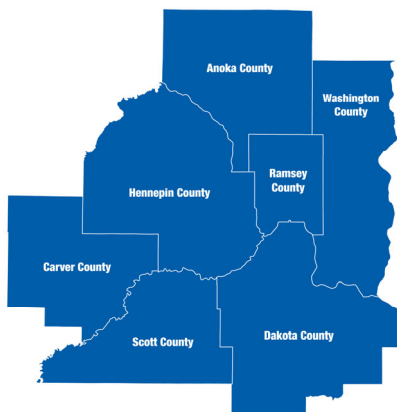

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

June 2024

The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Met Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Met Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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A supplement to the Imagine 2050 Density Analysis Report

Qualitative density analysis supports increased densities and compact development patterns.

While quantitative data demonstrates the state of development across the region, it does not reflect the current or future needs of the community members in the region. The Young Leaders and Community Leaders Collaborations took place between January 2023 and March 2024. Participants identified topics and carried out peer interviews in their communities to create a set of recommendations for the Council.

A key takeaway from the Young Leaders and Community Leaders Collaboration, emphasizes the need for dense and compact development across the region to preserve and restore green and open spaces, for equitable development and housing affordability, to foster community connections, and to provide efficient and safe transportation options for those who do not have access to a vehicle.

Community Collaboration Findings

Preservation and Restoration of Green and Open Spaces: Health and Community and Cultural Connections

As the region continues to grow, efficient land development is essential. Community members from inner and outer ring suburbs have expressed their concerns over the loss of green and open spaces in their communities to large single-family developments. Community engagement participants recommend dense and compact development to contribute to the restoration and protection of the region's natural systems and farmland. Green spaces and open spaces are also critical to mental and physical health as these spaces are used to connect oneself with nature and excellent spots for exploration.

Lastly, dense and compact development can also set the stage with the creation of "third spaces" (spaces other than the home or workplace) for communities to gather and connect. These spaces provide the opportunity for placemaking to strategies to reflect community members' cultures. The table below identifies the main takeaways from the Young Leaders and Community Leaders Collaboration with supporting quotes.

Community Recommendations	Quotes
1. **Efficient land development is valued for the potential to preserve green and open space through more dense housing.**	• "Cookie cutter houses and houses on large lots are not an efficient use of undeveloped land. Encouraging more dense development, keeping housing and businesses in one area, and making areas more walkable" are desired goals." (4H final presentation)
2. **Development prioritizes the efficiency of land use by preserving and restoring natural systems in the region: water, greenspaces, and farmland.**	• "I believe that people preserve land to keep natural wonders, instead of having it be taken by corporate buildings" (4-H). • "In the future I would like to learn more about trees in our city, I think learning more about how we can protect our trees and what the overall forest ecosystem is" (ESI). • "I think our city is lacking a lot of biodiversity, there's so much development and such little trees" (ESI). • "For building you can out townhouses or fourplexes, instead of using more land" (4H).
3. **Dedicated open spaces and greenspaces for communities to gather and placemaking in open/public spaces to cultivate community connections.**	• "Ikran has seen many outdoor social gatherings in her neighborhood, such as birthdays/graduation parties, and much more. She hopes to see more gatherings occur because it's important to take advantage of the current green spaces we have." (Community Resource Center) • "It didn't take me long to look for a job, because I had and made acquaintances, we talked and [they helped me find a job through word of mouth]." (COPAL) *Translated from Spanish to English*

Equitable Development and Affordability

More compact development patterns across the region will provide the opportunity to expand housing choice within communities. Expanding housing options can better accommodate cultural norms, multigenerational households, large families, and provide more affordable housing options across the region.

Currently, housing options do not fully meet the needs of the region's residents. Across various cultures, living with multiple generations in a household is culturally important. Oftentimes, older family members are taken care of by younger family members. Additionally, large families may also opt to live together to reduce housing costs when affordable housing options are not available to them.

Community Recommendations	Quotes
1. **Multigenerational housing and housing for large families is important for many families in the region.**	• "I grew up with a lot of family members in my household. There's me, my four siblings, my siblings kids, my grandparents; so there was always a lot of people at my house. So I feel like if I go to a different household, I would also enjoy that madness of having a bunch of people in it … just because that's how I'm used to" (Raices interviews) • "Not being able to afford where you live takes a lot of time and money. And especially bringing kids into that. I know like in Minnesota, in most African households, we do have a lot of kids. … Adding that in the mix makes it harder." (EU story session) • "I lived in a one-bedroom house with 8 people, it was hard for my sister and I because we were going back and forth in houses—because my parents couldn't understand nor afford living here. (EU packet) • "Let's say a lot of people come to the US at once; most won't have a job at first and will have to live in a small house with only one or two bedrooms. This is a challenge for immigrants in finding houses." (EU workshop 4)
2. **Cultural norms, wealth building opportunities, and housing affordability in multifamily housing**	• "We need the kinds of affordable housing that fit our families. Some of us want to live in multigenerational housing with parents and grandparents" (WYC). • "Youth are more likely to live with their parents because of the cost. Not everyone has a job or a career that's enough for people to be able to afford rent themselves. Young people often stay with their parents for cultural reasons too. One of them may be helping out around the house whether it be physical labor or helping with rent" (WYC).

Expansive and Efficient Transportation Network: Fostering Inclusive, Safe and Connected Communities

Transportation and transit infrastructure and investments are most cost-effective when paired with compact land uses and dense developments while simultaneously increasing accessibility to various parts of the region for more residents. The region is more difficult to navigate without a vehicle. An efficient and expansive transportation and transit network would provide those without a vehicle (such as: young people, older people, those who cannot afford a vehicle) with suitable options.

Previous community engagement findings also highlight the lack of transportation infrastructure (sidewalks, bicycle and walking trails, etc.) within their communities that have led to safety concerns. This is particularly concerning for young people and others who do not have access to a vehicle in car dependent communities. Dense and compact development set the stage for pedestrian and bike-friendly environments that are most often surrounded by higher density, mixed-use areas to provide people with more destinations to access.

Lastly, such pedestrian and bike-friendly environments are more conducive to social interactions that can play key roles in increasing community and cultural connections, expanding social networks that may lead to economic and academic opportunities, and feelings of safety.

Community Recommendations	Quotes
1. **Need for improving transit network to have more access to work, school, and recreation areas.**	• "I wasn't able to get places because the adults in my life were always working, and the only option I had was public transportation. But in order to even get to public transportation, I had to walk at least one hour." • "…It [Richfield] seems close together. People know each other and it seems connected. Bloomington is getting there, but it doesn't have public transportation for everyone."
2. **Lack of pedestrian and cyclist safety due to inadequate transportation infrastructure.**	• "I got hit by a car in a crosswalk before. This was because of a driver with a blind spot not paying attention. This could have been prevented by a more visible sidewalk and teaching drivers to pay attention." • "A lot of friends live on the border between Shakopee and Prior Lake. When they want to hang out and do that, it's unsafe because they have to bike on the road."
3. **Community leaders desire walkable and pedestrian-friendly communities with dense and mixed use commercial and residential development within urban and suburban communities.**	• "The Council can encourage more dense development, keeping housing and businesses in one area, makes areas more walkable, which we support" (4-H). • "Having a walkable city is good for basically everything it reduces the carbon footprint of the city. It increases the use of transportation. Having places that are walkable is good for the health of the citizens" (4-H)