

ADOPTED PLAN  
January 21, 2020





# Acknowledgements

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## City of International Falls

- » Bob Anderson, Mayor (to September 20, 2019)
- » Harley Droba, At-Large Councilor (Mayor, September 30, 2019)
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- » Brian Briggs, former East Ward Councilor
- » Keysha M. Pearson, former Center Ward Councilor
- » Ken Anderson, City Administrator
- » Kelly Meyers, Zoning Administrator / Building Official

*We dedicate this Comprehensive Plan to the memory of Mayor Bob Anderson, who initiated the effort for creating this future vision for the City of International Falls.*



*We recognize his love for our city, our community and our people, and present this Plan as a tool to achieve the improvements in prosperity, quality of life and happiness he envisioned.*

## Neighborhood and Community Partners

- » Backus Community Center
- » Coffee Landing Cafe
- » Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA)
- » Menards Stores
- » Stewart's Super One
- » Voyage Forward

## Project Steering Team

- » Paul Nevanen, Planning Commission
- » Matthew Gouin, Planning Commission
- » Pam Oveson, Island View Realty
- » Rick Bolstad, rental property owner
- » Wyatt LaVigne, Rainy Lake Medical Center
- » Lori Lyman, Packaging Corporation of America

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## 1.1 Purpose

The International Falls Comprehensive Plan is a tool and resource to guide the efforts of citizens, elected officials, and staff as they work together, harnessing trends and change, toward realizing a shared vision for their city's future.

Change is a constant in the life of cities. Economies fluctuate, populations move, businesses ride the fortunes of larger trends.

A comprehensive plan is a tool that helps orient the priorities and policy decisions of a community as it rides the sometimes challenging conditions of larger trends to steer toward its citizens and leaders' envisioned destination.

This Comprehensive Plan for the City of International Falls provides a set of recommendations - developed from a community-led and community-centered vision and set of values - to guide the evolution of the city. The plan outlines specific objectives and policies to improve community vitality, quality of life, and success.

The plan's recommendations provide guidance for the city's current and future investments, and its growth and development over the next twenty years, with the understanding that these recommendations must be reviewed and updated in cycles of five to ten years so they remain relevant to the actual conditions existing at that time and to the citizens' desires and vision. The plan's overall goal is to improve the daily experience and quality of life for all who live in, do business in or visit International Falls, and to ensure a thriving community well into the future.



*Moving with gusto toward the same goal is nothing new to residents of International Falls. Image: at the annual "Freeze Yer Gizzard" Blizzard Run.*

*"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."*

*~ John F. Kennedy*



## 1.2 Future vision

The plan's vision is a statement describing the future of International Falls after the plan's recommendations are implemented. It was developed from the comments and ideas gathered through the plan's community engagement process, and refined through work with the plan's Project Steering Team.

### **Our aspirational vision statement:**

*International Falls is an innovative, prosperous, and family-friendly community where all residents can access economic opportunity and stable jobs, a wide variety of housing options, safe and walkable neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, and unparalleled natural areas and recreational spaces.*

*The city is a vital and attractive place, filled with opportunities for individuals and organizations - from aspiring entrepreneurs to artists to laborers and knowledge workers to multi-national corporations. It is a thriving year-round destination and renowned for the prosperity, happiness, and high quality of life that its residents enjoy.*



## 1.3 Community goals

The list of community goals (what International Falls residents wish their community to be, do or offer) were derived from the comments and ideas gathered through the plan's community engagement process:

### High quality of life

A healthy, safe, attractive and happy community that welcomes and develops new ideas and opportunities while offering year-round beauty, connection and enjoyment. Its high quality of life keeps current residents and businesses here, and attracts new residents, visitors and economic opportunity.

### A thriving economy

Living in International Falls means the opportunity to have a good job and to build a prosperous, healthy life through hard work. The city fosters entrepreneurship, and traditional industries like timber, tourism, and cold weather testing thrive alongside new and innovative technology, manufacturing, and other start-ups.

### A complete, self-sufficient community

International Falls offers a full range of retail and service options that make daily life convenient for its residents and businesses, and keep and recirculate dollars in its local economy, building the foundation for continued prosperity.

### Family-friendly neighborhoods

The city offers healthy, safe and family-friendly neighborhoods which are well connected to schools, parks and businesses by roads, trails and sidewalks. Young people have consistent access to engaging and constructive community-based activities. Residents have access to high quality facilities and amenities which provide year round use and enhance their quality of life.

### Affordable, attractive and available housing

A variety of attractive, safe and affordable housing options are available for individuals and families, and all residents can find and afford the housing they need through the different stages of their lives.

### Preserving our community's heritage

The city and its residents value its history, culture and assets, including its natural environment, its heritage of settler and native cultures, its urban landscape and its industrial history. The community works to preserve this history and heritage for the benefit of residents, visitors and future generations.

### Land use for community prosperity

Land use decisions are evaluated for their long-term prospects for building community prosperity. Land is used efficiently and sustainably to support high quality of life. Land uses are thoughtfully allocated to foster a variety of housing options and attractive development, business-friendly land uses that support economic development, and to improve access to the city's natural assets.

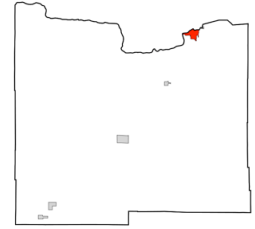
### Transportation for community success

Transportation serves residents' needs by providing multiple options, including walking and biking, to reach daily destinations. Commercial users are served by efficient networks for cargo transport that foster their connection to markets and success.

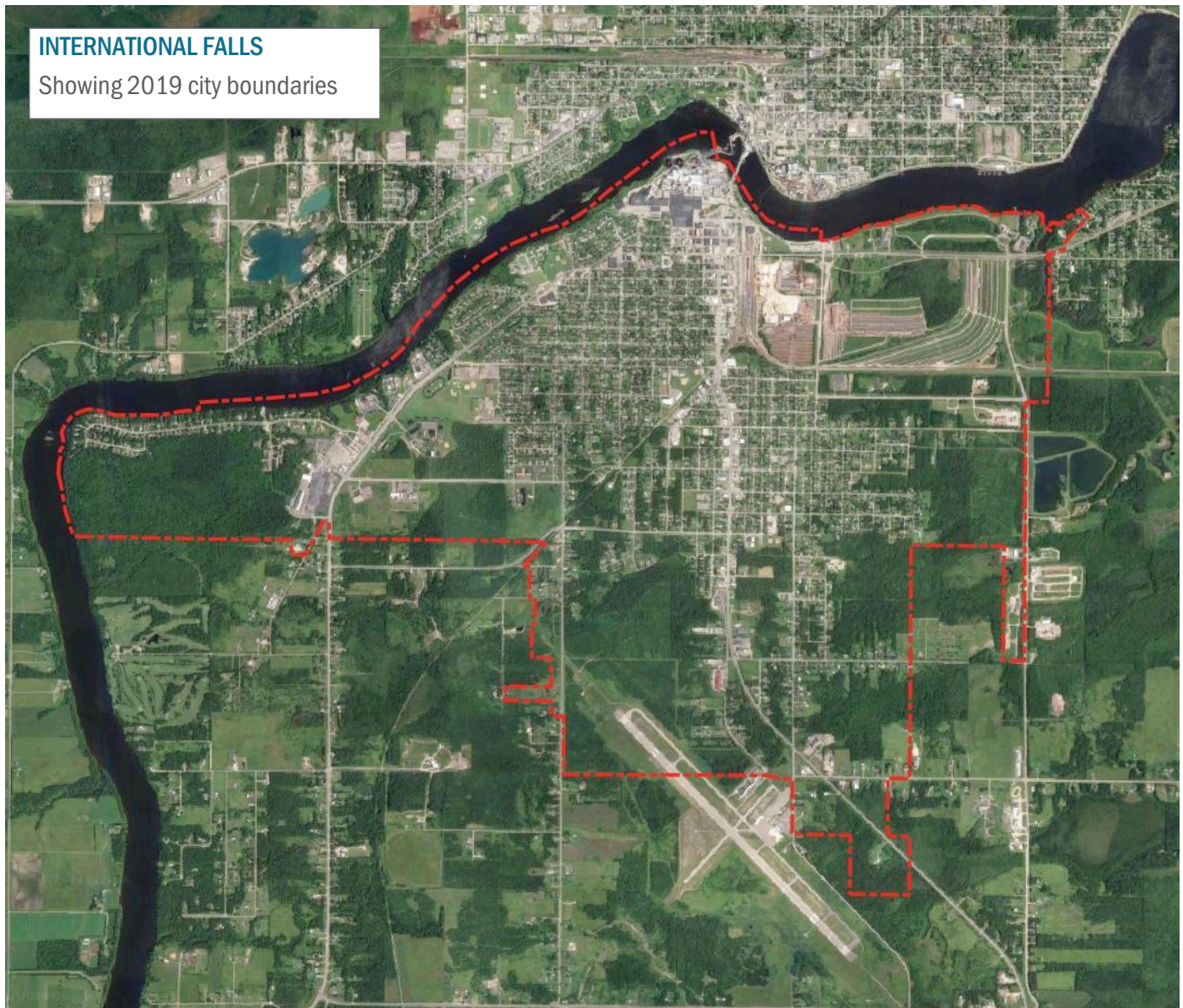


## 1.4 Geographic area

Located in the northeast corner of Koochiching County, International Falls is the largest city in the county (both in population and land area) and holds the county seat. It sits along the Rainy River, which forms part of the northern border between the United States and Canada. Known for its natural resources, forest products industry, and tourism destinations, it includes a land port of entry and is adjacent to the second-busiest international rail port in the United States.



*View of the county's location within the state, and of the city's location within it (in red).*



## 1.5 Community history

International Falls has experienced many changes throughout its history. Understanding its trajectory can help to more clearly see its assets and opportunities for the future.

### Beginnings

What is now International Falls was first inhabited by indigenous Native American peoples as early as two thousand years ago. By the mid-1600s the area became known to explorers, voyageurs and missionaries. In 1895 the area of the city was platted and named “Koochiching” (“at the place of inlets”). Koochiching village was incorporated in 1901, and in 1903 its name was changed to International Falls in recognition of the falls located there and the village’s proximity to Canada. In 1909, International Falls was incorporated as a city.

### The arrival of industry

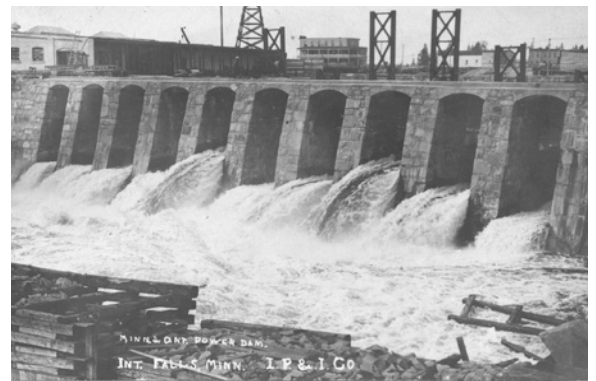
Sensing opportunity in the area’s abundant timber resources, industrialist E.W. Backus, president of the Minnesota and Ontario (“Mando”) Paper Company and the Ontario & Minnesota Power Company, began construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Rainy River in 1905 to provide electricity for the area and power his company’s mills. In 1910, the paper mill began operations and brought employment, commerce and population growth to the area. The International Bridge, connecting the city to the town of Fort Frances, Ontario, was constructed in 1912 and helped cement the city’s role and position.

In the following years, other industries related to forest products sprang up in the city: from other lumber operations to mills and manufacturers like Insulite (making home insulating materials from sawdust and paper pulp).

The city’s northern location and vigorous winters also led to the establishment of cold-weather testing facilities for a variety of industrial and manufactured products.



*International Falls in 1912. The photo includes the caption “The City of Destiny.” Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).*



*The hydroelectric dam in 1915. Image courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).*



## Economic challenges

As a small town with a handful of large employers and a location that is remote to other major centers in the state, the city has experienced large shifts in economic fortunes as a result of larger trends and consolidation in its main industries.

In 1965, local ownership of the paper mill ended when Mando was sold to Boise Cascade Corporation. In 1985, the Insulite mill (also owned by Boise) was closed, ending approximately 800 jobs. In 2013, 265 jobs were ended at the paper mill prior to its sale to Packaging Corporation of America.

## Growing through annexation

By 1980, the city's population had been decreasing since the 1960s (from a peak of 6,778 residents at the 1960 Census). Seeking to weather the economic challenges brought on by the Insulite mill closing (which had also greatly affected the fortunes of the adjoining city of South International Falls) both cities saw opportunities to reduce costs and gain a more stable financial footing by consolidating as a single entity.

In January 1989 International Falls and South International Falls became one city. The consolidation increased the city's geographic area and population (8,324 residents in the 1990 Census). Underlying issues, however, continued to drive population decline and by 2000 the newly consolidated city's population had declined by about 20% to 6,700 residents.

## Diversifying the economy and looking to the future

Nurturing the relationship with key industries and employers like the paper mill while also vigorously working to diversify the local economy, improve quality of life and support aspiring entrepreneurs has yielded many successes and helped to reduce the loss of employment and population.

Success stories like the recruitment of Optum/UnitedHealth's billing center (150 jobs), local start-ups (like Greentech Manufacturing or more recently, Swanky Sweet Pea, which started out of downtown and now has nationwide sales), and civic initiatives like Voyage Forward point to the great potential to successfully navigate the city's future.



*The Insulite mill (behind the bandshell) in the 1950s.  
Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).*



*The International Falls area offers a wealth of opportunities to entrepreneurs who are ready to capitalize on the area's many assets. Image: Greentech Manufacturing, a family-owned business making industry-leading outdoor furnaces, air handlers and unit heaters - selling worldwide and based right in the city.*

## 1.6 Previous and current planning documents

A thorough review of applicable current and previous city and county planning documents was completed as part of the preparation of this plan. Taken together, these documents provide a foundation for understanding current conditions and potential strategies for International Falls and the surrounding area.

### Comprehensive Plan (1966)

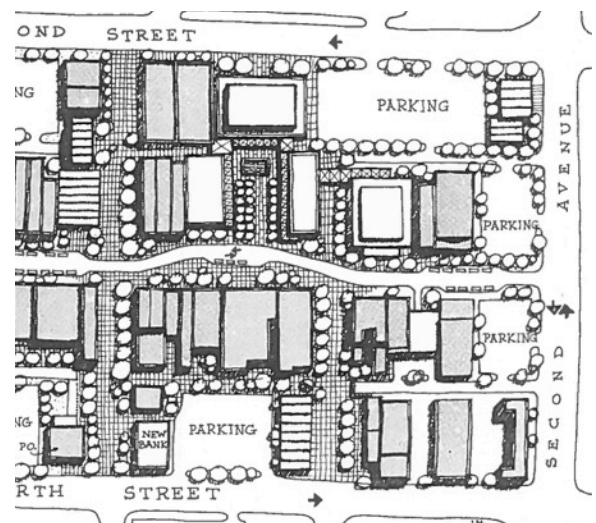
The city's most recent comprehensive plan was completed in 1966. It provided guidance for land use, traffic circulation and transportation, community facilities, community appearance, downtown area revitalization, and for a capital improvement program.

The plan was completed by the firm of Aguar Jyring Whiteman Moser, under the direction of Charles Aguar, a prominent planner who played a key role in most of the major planning and zoning activities in northeastern Minnesota in the 1960s.

Though it was completed more than fifty years ago, many of its observations, key goals and recommendations are still relevant for the city and its future.

Some of the issues noted in the 1966 plan included:

- » International Falls' privileged position and competitive advantage as "the only community in extreme northern Minnesota which is developed as a complete shopping and trade center"
- » Negative impact of growing "sprawl" development outside of the downtown, and recognition of the increased costs for servicing and accessing these locations
- » Negative traffic safety implications of strip development along heavily traveled roadways due to conflicting turning movements to and from these businesses, as well as negative impact to the roadways' traffic carrying capacity
- » Identification of substandard housing conditions as a key issue for the city - the plan considered that about 13% of all



*Plan for the city's downtown, from the 1966 Comprehensive Plan.*

#### Did you know?

When the 1966 Comprehensive Plan was completed, International Falls was at the peak of its population trajectory, with 9,250 residents within its immediate area.

Based on previous growth, the 1966 plan anticipated almost 15,000 residents by 1980. Because of larger trends affecting the region, the actual population that year was about 8,400 residents.

Today, the city's population is about 6,100 residents.



area housing units were in “bad or dilapidated” condition warranting demolition, with an additional 7% noted as “deteriorating” and requiring repair

- » Identification of parks as an opportunity for economic development and as a driver for quality of life, with recognition that access to community parks in the city was “far below ... other cities” - the plan recommended providing an indoor (year-round) recreational facility as well as small playgrounds throughout the city (“tot-lots”)
- » Need for an indoor (year-round) recreation facility for the community (it recommended locating a new hockey arena and indoor sports center “just south of 15th Street, near Industrial Avenue”)

## Key goals

Key goals from the 1966 plan include:

- » Provide a wide range of housing choices and development of new residential neighborhoods to offer a high quality residential environment
- » Improve the appearance of the central business district and focus commercial development into compact centers
- » Diversify the city’s economic base and reserve land for industrial and manufacturing job opportunities
- » Improve quality of life by providing public/semi-public sites for use as educational, cultural, and health facilities
- » Offer an integrated network of circulation for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods
- » Preserve the beauty of the city’s area and work to make the urban landscape more attractive
- » Integrate local urban planning with county-wide planning

## Economic Adjustment Strategy for Koochiching County and International Falls (2015)

Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF) is one of the nation’s most respected economic development and commercial real estate advisors.

In 2014 NGKF was hired by the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) and Koochiching County to complete an Economic Adjustment Strategy for Koochiching County and the City of International Falls.

The study, completed in 2015, included deep consideration of demographic, industry, marketing and economic trends relevant to the region, and was also based on numerous interviews with commercial interests and operators.

The study provided action step recommendations and an accompanying implementation plan. Its recommendations (which are a prominent component of this plan’s Economic Development chapter) were organized into the following categories:

- » Structure and Operations
- » Business Retention and Expansion
- » Marketing
- » Infrastructure and Recruitment Readiness
- » Workforce Development
- » Entrepreneurship and Small Business
- » Professional Development
- » Business Recruitment
- » Cross Border Partnerships

The study provided some key insights for International Falls, including an exhaustive list of tactics and strategies for each of the identified categories. Below is a selection of important insights and strategies from the study.

## Education

The study identified a gap in skills needed for important potential industries like logistics and information technology. Rainy River Community College was also identified as a key retention tool for 18 to 24 year olds. By developing attractive, local career opportunities through the affordable community college system, more local youth could be retained. There is currently a significant out-migration of young adults from the city.

## Labor Shed

For every person who arrives to work in Koochiching County, 1.75 people leave the county for work. Developing and retaining economic activity within the County for current residents is an important goal, as this will help keep and recirculate dollars in the local economy and build prosperity.

## Development / redevelopment opportunities

Twelve development sites were identified within International Falls, 10 of which were rated as locations with high or medium-high potential for development.

## Trade and Economic Development

- » The Koochiching County Foreign Trade Zone no. 257, coupled with the Multi-Modal Distribution Center site are key opportunities as both have rail service capability.
- » Work ethic in the City and County are rated highly in the study based upon feedback from the community and business leaders.

The Economic Development chapter of this plan includes key recommendations from the study.

Functions & Tactics	Priority
Form a new non-government, cooperative regional economic development partnership	● ● ● High
Join the Local Chambers Grow Minnesota BRE meetings and develop a robust BRE program within the new Regional EDP	● ● ● High
Conduct a minimum of 60 (5 a month) face-to-face meetings with existing industry	● ● ● High
Renew membership and continue to attend the Minnesota Marketing Partnership's site selector events to develop and strengthen relationships with these recruitment allies and attend trade shows and marketing events	● ● ● High
Establish an expedited development process	● ● ● High
Begin participation in the ACT Work Ready Communities program including the National Career Readiness Certificate testing	● ● ● High
Continue to groom potential entrepreneurs and small businesses through the Koochiching Economic Gardening Program	● ● ● High
Attend all local Minnesota Marketing Partnership meetings and events	● ● ● High
Work with Ft. Frances on cross border job fairs and business expos to determine the skill levels of their workforce. Adding their numbers to Koochiching County's data demonstrates a larger workforce availability and diversified skill set along with buying power, educational training providers, and other key socio-economic statistics that help tell the region's story	● ● ● High
Emphasize the proximity of Voyageurs National Park, which is a unique and important tourism asset for the entire cross-border region	● ● ● High

*The "Top 10 Recommendations and Implementation Indicators" from the 2015 Koochiching County & International Falls Economic Adjustment Strategy.*

*The highest-priority recommendation, a new Regional Economic Development Partnership (EDP), would consolidate economic development and marketing functions across city, county and state agencies and work jointly with other partners (including Fort Frances) to market the region.*

## Voyage Forward (2013 to today)

Voyage Forward is a remarkable and ongoing effort joining resident participation and leadership with city and county agency support for the goal of furthering prosperity across the cities of Koochiching County, including International Falls.

The initiative was first begun in 2013 to explore opportunities for responding to job reductions and plant closings in the region while growing the area's economy and building community resilience and leadership.

The initiative received initial funding from the City of International Falls and Koochiching County along with a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce. Citizens were at the core of the effort, with numerous community surveys, in-person "community listening" events and focused engagement with young people. Ten key objectives ("Destiny Drivers") were developed summarizing the goals and priorities collected through these efforts,. The Destiny Drivers are intended to focus the direction of the city and county going forward.

The Destiny Drivers are an integral part of the community's actions moving forward, and their guidance is included as part of the ongoing work of the Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA), International Falls Chamber of Commerce, and the International Falls - Ranier and Rainy Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau. For example, the chamber pursues business retention and expansion efforts through their "Grow Minnesota" visits, community events, retail promotion, and monthly business lunch and learn activities. KEDA has also developed a strategic plan for cold weather testing operations and growing jobs through assisting entrepreneurs in the Small Business Development Center and the KoochCo Loan Program.

Citizen participation remains a key component of the ongoing efforts, with an active and engaged core team of "Destiny Driver Champions" working to coordinate and implement work related to each Driver.



*Voyage Forward is an effort of residents and government to propel the region forward.*

### Voyage Forward's "Destiny Drivers"

- » Quality of Life: Create a quality of life environment which provides for a healthy and engaged community for residents in all phases of life
- » Attract and retain people
- » Develop a skilled, trained, and educated workforce that meets the needs of the area
- » Expand the Voyage Forward and KEDA marketing partnership
- » Grow and diversify businesses and jobs
- » Invest in and maintain quality infrastructure
- » Create a uniformly attractive county and a means to explore it
- » Position the region as a quality tourism destination
- » Develop an organizational framework to facilitate, communicate, and sustain the work and mission of Voyage Forward
- » Maximize opportunities for cooperation with Fort Frances and other Canada connections

More at [www.voyageforward.org](http://www.voyageforward.org)



## Housing study (2019)

On behalf of the Koochiching County Housing Collaborative, the Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA) commissioned a study of the housing needs and conditions for the county overall and for the individual cities in the county, including International Falls. The study, completed by Community Partners Research, Inc., includes a highly detailed analysis of the city's current housing stock and future needs.

The study:

- » Provides updated demographic data
- » Provides an analysis of the current housing stock and inventory
- » Determines gaps or unmet housing needs
- » Examines future housing trends that the cities in the county and Koochiching County can expect to address in the coming years
- » Provides a market analysis for housing development
- » Provides housing recommendations and findings

The recommendations included in this plan's Housing chapter reflect the conditions and recommendations included in the study. The chapter of the 2019 housing study pertaining to International Falls is included as Appendix 4 of this plan.

## Zoning and land use regulations

The city's current zoning and land use regulations were developed in 1979 and have been modified as needed over the years. **A new set of land use regulations have been developed as part of the project to develop this Comprehensive Plan.** The new regulations work in concert with the recommendations of this document and provide the legal framework to make its recommendations a reality. They are included as Appendix 1 of this plan.

## Coordination and consistency with the Koochiching County Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2001)

The county's current Land Use Plan was prepared by the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) in 2001. The plan is intended to guide land use decisions made by the County Board, County Planning Commission, and County Officials until 2025, and to provide a planning framework for the cities located within it.

Key goals and objectives of the county plan include:

- » Focus on economic growth and diversification of employment and industry
- » Maintain and enhance quality of life within the county
- » Strengthen where possible local control of the county's resources and promote intergovernmental cooperation
- » Address changing needs of the county's population as it decreases overall and ages
- » Leverage "slow growth" if / as it occurs

According to Minnesota Statute 462.3535, a city's plan must be consistent with its county comprehensive plan.

In turn, and according to Minnesota Statute 394.432, if the city's plan is deemed consistent, then it can be included into the county's comprehensive plan.

Recommendations in the International Falls 2019 Comprehensive Plan have been reviewed for consistency and agreement with goals and stipulations of the 2001 Koochiching County Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

## Other important planning documents

Several other planning documents contribute information and recommendations to this plan. Among these are:

### Voyage Forward Market Area Profile (2016)

A comprehensive retail analysis for International Falls and its surrounding area, including Fort Frances, Ontario and a small portion of St. Louis County. The study was conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality and was commissioned by Voyage Forward and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC).

### Economic Impact of Rainy River Community College on Koochiching County (2017)

A study conducted by the University of Minnesota Duluth on the economic benefit of the Rainy River Community College (RRCC) on the local economy. The study found that RRCC provides a significant positive impact on the county's economy through its annual operations and student and visitor spending.

In 2016, the total impact of all RRCC operational expenditures and those related to its students and visitors was estimated to have supported, either directly or indirectly, 99 jobs and contributed to more than \$8 million in local economic activity.

### Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Koochiching County Profile (2014)

A housing and general demographic profile of the county, including International Falls and other cities. The study was developed by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA).

### Safe Routes to School Plan (2016)

Recommendations for walk/bike connectivity in the city are informed by the recommendations in this study, which focuses on safe connections to city schools and parks. Route and intersection recommendations from the SRTS plan are included as Appendix 4 of this plan.

### Which businesses do we grow?

#### Recommendations from the Voyage Forward 2016 Market Area Profile

Three types of activities or store formats were the most highly ranked in the study:

- » General merchandise: Sales tax and business mix analysis show a gap in general merchandise; local resident survey shows the demand. The primary store category residents are patronizing in other communities is general merchandise.
- » Clothing: This is the second highest demanded store type. Customers are shopping at clothing stores frequently when in other communities; sales tax data shows that the community is losing clothing sales to other cities.
- » Tourism Attraction: The business community ranked tourism attraction or tourism-based business second after industrial development, recognizing the importance of visitor dollars to the community. Business owners report over 40% of their sales coming from tourists or seasonal residents. Local residents also suggested that the community build on its strength with visitors, focusing retail development on types of businesses which would be appreciated by locals and visitors alike.

Download the complete report at  
<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/198815/Voyage%20Forward%20MAP%20with%20Appendix%203.7.16.pdf>

Population characteristics and trends offer an indication of a community's future needs and provide a foundation for recommendations affecting land use, housing, transportation, and parks and public facilities, among others.

Projections for future households, for example, are used to determine a community's future needs for new housing units - and for the new land that will be needed to accommodate it.

The need for new housing (and new land) then guides and provides impetus for changing existing land uses into types that accommodate those housing needs, or for annexing lands adjoining the community where housing can be located.

In turn, these projections for population and households help guide investment decisions for school facilities, water and wastewater services, and other services provided by the city.

Because of the key role population projections play in committing a city's financial resources to meet future demand, it is important to carefully study current conditions and historical trends, and consider two or three potential scenarios - typically selecting the most conservative scenario to avoid overcommitting resources too far ahead of the actual need.

Careful consideration of population trends and projections is even more important in a community like International Falls, where consistent decreases in population have been evident for several decades. This decrease has led to a steady erosion of the city's tax base, and forces a disciplined approach for avoiding or reducing potential future obligations while working to address other population-related issues (general aging of the city's population, lack of adequate housing) and, - most importantly of all - for steadily improving quality of life for present and future residents so population loss can be stabilized and eventually reversed.



*Development in a community responds to growth in population and households.*



*One of the key tasks of a comprehensive plan is to provide direction for future actions based on a realistic, evidence-based understanding of likely future conditions - and based on that understanding, to develop frameworks that allow for "best case" outcomes to occur.*



## 2.1 Population trends

### Historical trends

Koochiching County's population has been generally declining since its peak in 1960 (18,190 people) to an estimated 2018 population of 12,440 people (a decrease of 32% since 1960).

In this same timeframe, the population of the state of Minnesota has grown from 3.4 million (1960) to 5.7 million (2018 estimate) - an increase of 68%.

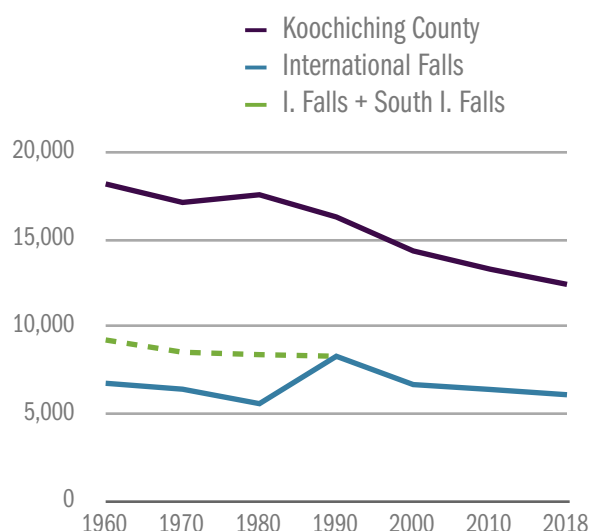
As the principal city in Koochiching County, International Falls's population trends mirror the county's: its 1960 population was 6,778 people (not including the adjoining community of South International Falls, which it annexed in 1989) to a peak of 8,324 following annexation and decrease to 6,121 in 2018.

### Population by year, 1960 to 2018

Year	Koochiching Co.	International Falls	South International Falls
1960	18,190	6,778	2,479
1970	17,131	6,439	2,116
1980	17,571	5,611	2,806
1990	16,299	8,324	N.A.
2000	14,355	6,703	N.A.
2010	13,311	6,424	N.A.
2017	12,776	6,121	N.A.

Data source: US Census Bureau Decennial Census and ACS 2017

Population trends in Koochiching County and International Falls, 1960 to 2018



Population trends in Koochiching County and International Falls, from 1960 to 2018.

It is important to note that the population increase shown for International Falls in 1990 is due to the annexation of South International Falls, which occurred in 1989 and which added to the city's geographic extent and to its population count.

A more accurate picture of the city's population decrease emerges when considering that the combined population for International Falls and South International Falls (shown in the chart as the dashed green line pre-annexation, with the same geographic extent as today) in 1960 was 9,257 people - and exhibits a continuous decrease in population of 34%, starting in 1960, to today's 6,121 residents.

## Future trends

Given previous population trends, what can be expected to occur over this plan's planning horizon (the next twenty years)?

According to the Minnesota Demographic Center (MnDC), the county's population is expected to continue to decrease over the next twenty years and beyond:

	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Koochiching	13,311	11,931	10,570	9,489	8,597

Source: Minnesota Demographic Center

MnDC has not currently published population projections for International Falls. However, estimates at the county level are available, and can be used to derive projections for the city based on the city's historical share of the total population of the county. In addition, linear and exponential functions can be fitted onto population counts for the city (including South International Falls for figures before annexation) to develop additional estimates.

Applying a city population factor of 50% to the county estimates, and linear and exponential projections based on 1960 to 2010 census figures, the following estimates can be prepared:

### Projected population for International Falls

Projection method	2020	2030	2040	2050
City / county share	5,966	5,285	4,745	4,299
Linear	5,990	5,400	4,850	4,300
Exponential	6,050	5,600	5,200	4,850

\* Derived using projection method 1 described in this section

All three projections are within a few percentage points of each other. The "Linear Projection" method is selected for providing a realistic potential scenario for the development of this plan's recommendations and for quantifying future needs and potential solutions.

### Ratio between city and county population, 1960 to 2018

Year	Koochiching Co.	International Falls + South I Falls	Ratio city / county
1960	18,190	9,257	0.51
1970	17,131	8,555	0.50
1980	17,571	8,417	0.48
1990	16,299	8,324	0.51
2000	14,355	6,703	0.47
2010	13,311	6,424	0.48
2017	12,776	6,121	0.48

Data source: US Census Bureau

Since 1960, the International Falls / South International Falls area has represented about 50% of the county's population.

### What the population projections mean

Given current regional trends and conditions, the population of International Falls is anticipated to continue decreasing over the next thirty years.

Fewer people and households will result in decreased tax revenues for the city, a reduced labor force, loss of skills and reduced business opportunities.

A decrease in resources and investments may also result in decreased quality of life for residents, and additional incentive to migrate out.

**Working to improve quality of life will help retain existing residents and attract new ones. Focusing on this approach may help address population trends.**

## 2.2 Current population and economics

### Population and households

Population	International Falls		Koochiching County	
	Count	%	Count	%
Total population	6,121	100%	12,776	100%
» Children (all persons under 18)	1,238	20%	2,445	19%
» School age children, teenagers and young adults (ages 5 to 24)	1,493	24%	2,784	22%
» Senior adults (persons over 65)	1,258	21%	2,839	22%
Households	2,660	100%	5,629	100%
» Family households	1,625	61%	3,606	64%
» Non-family households	1,035	39%	2,023	36%
<i>Data source: US Census ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>				

### Census household or family?

- » A “household” is a person or group of people occupying a housing unit
- » A “family household” consists of a householder (the person who owns or rents the housing unit) and one or more people living together in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption
- » A “non-family household” is a person living alone or a householder who shares the home with non-relatives only

### Ethnicity

Population	International Falls		Koochiching County	
	Count	%	Count	%
Total population	6,121	100%	12,776	100%
White	5,744	94%	12,129	95%
Black or African American	115	2%	129	1%
American Indian	290	5%	623	5%
Asian	45	1%	68	1%
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%
Other race	0	0%	173	1%
Hispanic / Latino of any race	0	0%	20	0%
<i>Data source: US Census ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>				

### Key population findings

- » The city’s population, mirroring regional trends, is expected to continue to decrease over the next thirty years
- » According to 20-year projections from the Minnesota State Demographer, Koochiching County will lose 20% of its current population by 2040
- » Even while the overall population decreases, the number of residents who are 65 and older is expected to increase by 22%.



## Income

Economics	International Falls	Koochiching County
Individual (per capita) income	\$23,430	\$26,804
Median household income	\$41,241	\$47,131
Median family income	\$53,420	\$61,463
Persons living in poverty	25%	17%
Families living in poverty	17%	12%
Children in poverty	35%	24%
<i>Data source: US Census ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>		

Per capita income in the city is about 90 percent of the amount in Koochiching County, and about two-thirds of the amount in Minnesota. Similarly, median household income is about 90 percent of the amount in Koochiching County and about three-fifths of the amount in Minnesota.

Poverty in the city is much higher than in the county and the state overall, with the rate of people living below the poverty line running about 1.5 times the rate in Koochiching County and more than double the rate in Minnesota.

About 35% of all children living in the city experience poverty - about 1.5 times the rate in the county and more than two times the rate in the state overall.

## Employment

Employment	International Falls
Population 16 years and older	5,063
In labor force	3,013
Employed	2,732
Unemployed	281
Unemployment rate	9%
<i>Data source: US Census ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>	

## Occupations

Sector	Count	%
Total civilian employed population	2,732	100%
Management, business, science, and arts	833	30%
Service	475	17%
Sales and office	753	28%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	214	8%
Production, transportation, and material moving	457	17%
<i>Data source: US Census ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>		

This is a brief selection of employment and economics data - **please consult the Housing and the Economic Development chapters of this plan to view additional data relevant for those topics.**

## 3.1 Overview of engagement activities

Community engagement was a key part of the process for developing the comprehensive plan. A cross-section of the city’s residents participated in pop-up workshops, listening sessions, and online tools. Community ideas and aspirations were used to serve as the foundation for the plan and inform its policy directions and recommendations.

### Types of engagement activities completed

Four main types of activities were used to gather community ideas for the plan:

- » In-person engagement at community locations and events
- » Online engagement
- » Engagement from related initiatives
- » Engagement with the Project Steering Team (PST)

### In-person engagement

Seven in-person engagement events were conducted, including pop-up sessions and listening sessions where the project team “took the meeting to the people” by going to community locations and special events.

Pop-up events engaged over 200 residents. Events included:

- » Pop-up engagement sessions at Stewart’s Super One, Coffee Landing Cafe, Backus Community Center, and Menards
- » Listening session with the Voyage Forward Coalition
- » Presentation and listening session with the Koochiching Economic Development Authority



### By the numbers

#### In-person events

- » 7 events
- » Approximately 200 participants

#### Online engagement

- » Website: active for eighteen months
- » Online survey: 330 respondents

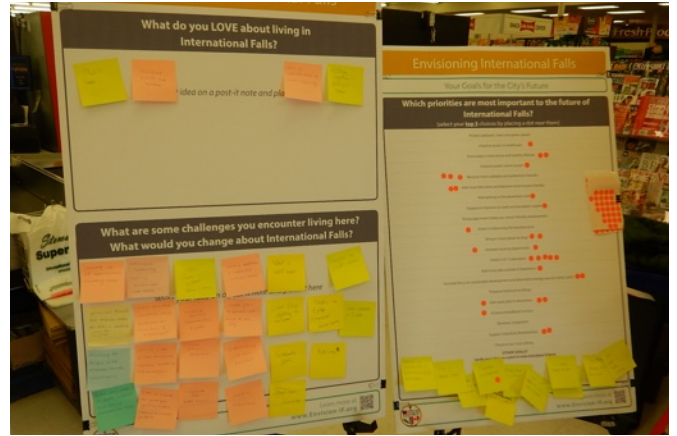
#### Over 500 people participated in this plan’s engagement activities

The plan also includes ideas and comments from 1,000 students and residents gathered by Voyage Forward

## Photos from in-person engagement activities



Community conversation at Backus Community Center.



Boards with comments gathered at Stewart's Super One.



At a meeting with Voyage Forward. Information gathered by that community initiative helped expand this plan's engagement.



During pop-up meeting at Coffee Landing Cafe.



Project Steering Committee members providing their ideas at a March 2017 meeting.



At the October 27 2017 meeting of the Project Steering Committee.



## Online engagement

A robust online component helped to increase the reach of the project by making it easier and more convenient for more people to stay informed and contribute ideas to the plan - simply by connecting to the plan's engagement materials from their computer or mobile device, on their own schedule and without needing to attend a meeting or event.

Two main types of online engagement activities were completed as part of this project:

## Project website

The project website was available at [www.envision-IF.org](http://www.envision-IF.org) throughout the duration of the study. The website served as a central repository for information and updates for the project, and provided access to the study's online engagement tools.

The website was visited by about 2,000 unique visitors during the plan's engagement phase.

## Online survey

This comprehensive, 30-question survey was available through the International Falls website, and promoted through in-person engagement efforts as well. The survey was available for two months.

The survey asked a variety of questions related to the goals and priorities to be addressed by the plan. A total of 333 people provided responses to the survey, with 240 of those respondents completing a survey all the way to the end.

Nearly 90 percent of all respondents live within International Falls, and more than 95 percent of all respondents live within Koochiching County.



### Community Vision and Values for the future of International Falls

After a robust community engagement process, a Community Vision and set of Community Values statements were developed. These statements will serve as the foundation for the International Falls Comprehensive Plan, guiding goals and strategies. You can download the vision and values statements with the link below.

[Vision + Values Download File](#)

### What is this project about?

The City of International Falls is working with you to develop a comprehensive plan for the future of the city. The City wants your opinion on questions like:

- What do you value in International Falls today?

*The project website received about 2,000 unique visitors during the plan's engagement phase.*



### Residential Development

2. Which types of housing are most needed in International Falls?  
Please select up to three of the provided choices.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-family dwellings   | <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-built (modular) housing                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing for Seniors  | <input type="checkbox"/> More affordable housing                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lodging for visitors   | <input type="checkbox"/> Single-family detached housing               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Programs to help homeowners improve or maintain their home's condition       | <input type="checkbox"/> Townhomes / Attached single-family housing   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Residential units above storefronts or offices (i.e., mixed use development) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Please tell us: <input type="text"/> |

3. Where is additional housing most needed?  
Please select one of the following options.

- ☐ In the downtown area
- ☐ In town but not necessarily in the downtown area

*The online survey received 333 responses.*

## Envision International Falls

[www.envision-IF.org](http://www.envision-IF.org)

Visit the comprehensive plan website for more information, and to learn how you can get involved!



*Business card-sized fliers with the project website were distributed at several events and locations to invite visitors to the online tools.*

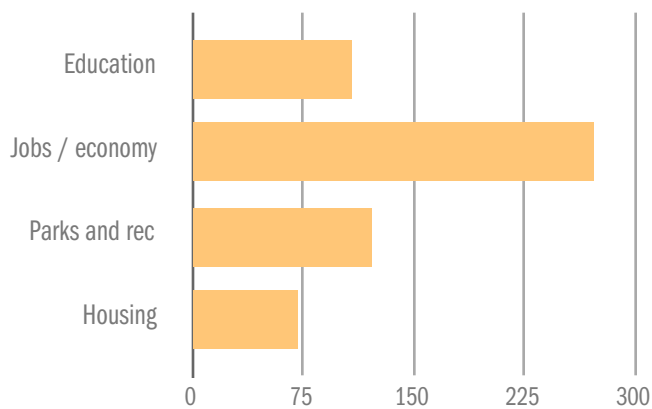
## 3.2 Guidance received: what we learned

The plan’s in-person and online engagement activities provided a wealth of data and insights to the project team. This chapter highlights some of what we learned.

This is a brief selection of responses received during the plan’s community engagement process. **Please consult Appendix 3 of this plan to view all questions and comments received.**

### Main issues

#### Top priorities for the city (grouped)

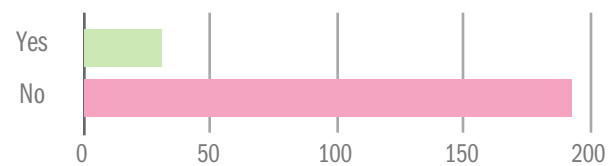


The key issues identified by participants in the plan’s public engagement process were:

- » Economic development, including availability of careers and well-paid employment opportunities
- » Investing in housing, including developing new housing units, and developing and supporting programs to help homeowners improve or maintain their home’s condition
- » Investing in education, from K-12 to college opportunities
- » Expanding and improving the city’s park and recreation system, and improving walking and biking in the city

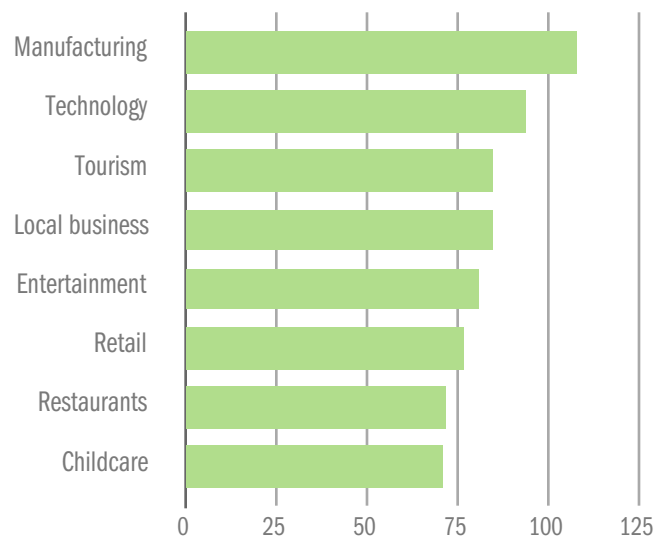
### Economic development

#### Does International Falls offer adequate employment opportunities?



Participants expressed strong dissatisfaction with the range of employment options they could find in the city.

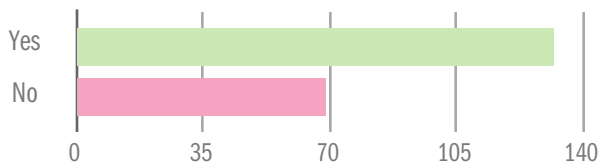
#### Top industries or businesses desired for the city (top 8)



Participants identified a variety of options for the top responses. “Any industry that offers higher-paying jobs” was the most popular answer. Availability of childcare as a contributor for parents’ opportunity to seek and maintain employment was also noted.

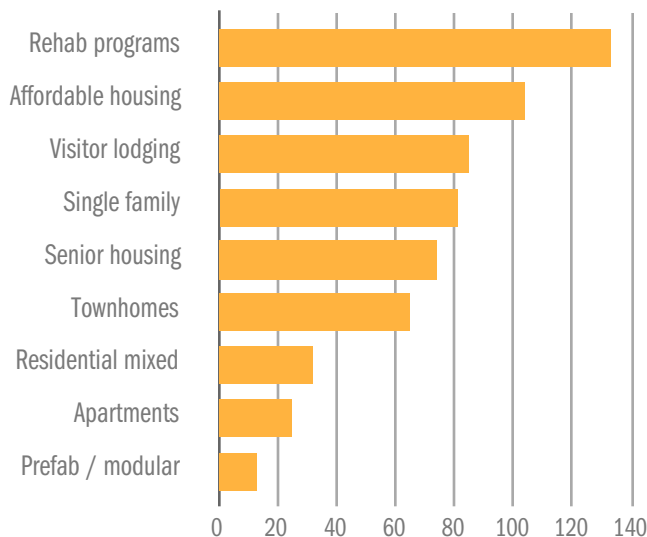
## Housing

**Were you able to find adequate housing the last time you moved in the city?**



A significant portion of respondents (about one third) answered that they were not able to find adequate housing, indicating a need to develop additional options. A typical comment received states “*major difficulties finding quality, mid-range single-family home for a working, middle-class married couple*”. Similar comments were received from young adults looking for apartment housing.

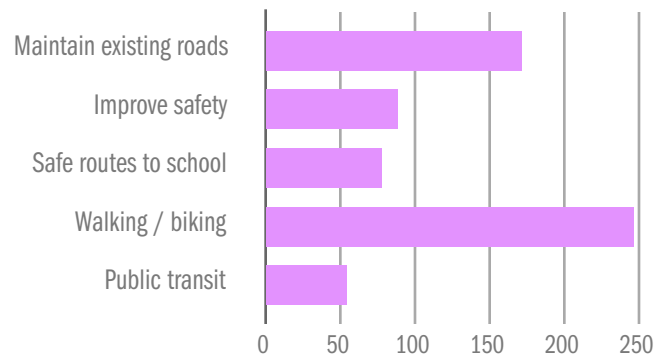
**Which housing improvements are needed?**



Housing rehabilitation programs to help homeowners improve or maintain their home’s condition were the top response, closely followed by requests to expand the supply of affordable housing in the city.

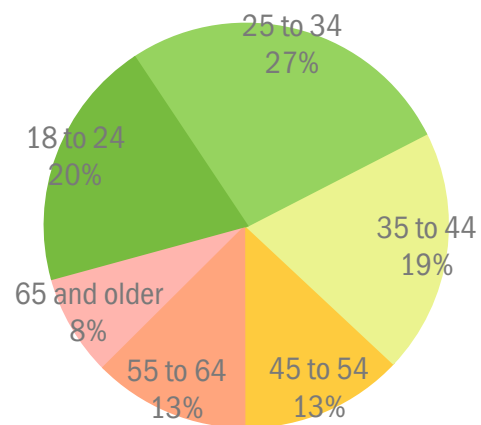
## Transportation

**Which should be the city’s transportation priorities? (grouped)**



Participants strongly prioritized maintaining existing roads and infrastructure before constructing new facilities. Walking and biking investments, including Safe Routes to School improvements were also strongly supported by participants.

## Survey participation



The survey was well-distributed and received good participation from all age ranges of city residents - and was successful in capturing comments from the young adult demographic (18 to 24, and 25 to 34) that will be a key audience for and shaper of city initiatives if the long-running population trends noted in Chapter 2 are to be improved.



The purpose of the International Falls Comprehensive Plan is to serve as a tool to facilitate improvement in the quality of life, enjoyment, and opportunity its residents, businesses and visitors experience.

The city's comprehensive plan is based on a framework that:

- » Recognizes the city's many existing assets, and leverages them as part of the plan's foundation for future success,
- » Responds to the different conditions, contexts and opportunities that exist in specific locations within the city,
- » Listens to, considers and responds to residents' and leaders' visions and aspirations for the future, and
- » Moves toward implementation in sustainable, incremental steps that offer stable improvement and a platform for next actions.

## How the plan's recommendations are organized

This chapter presents recommendations for policies, systems and actions that are within the purview of the city and partner agencies, and where the city can lead, support or convene the work needed to implement the plan's vision. The plan's recommendations address:

- » Land use and zoning
- » Housing
- » Transportation
- » Economic development
- » Parks and recreation
- » The arts
- » Environmental and cultural resources, including community and historic assets
- » Utilities
- » Civic engagement



*City vitality, resident quality of life and community success are the key purpose of the plan.*

## The plan's vision

This is what the plan is intended to achieve over the next twenty years:

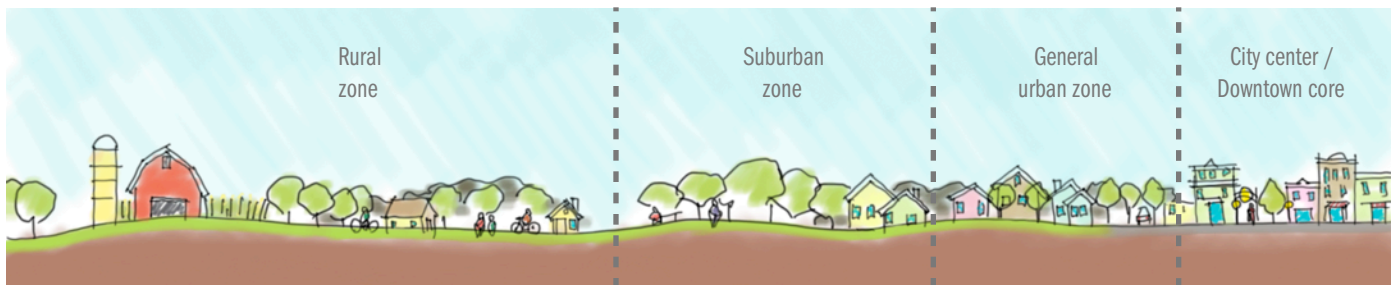
*International Falls is an innovative, prosperous, and family-friendly community where all residents can access economic opportunity and stable jobs, a wide variety of housing options, safe and walkable neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, and unparalleled natural areas and recreational spaces.*

*The city is a vital and attractive place, filled with opportunities for individuals and organizations - from aspiring entrepreneurs to artists to laborers and knowledge workers to multi-national corporations. It is a thriving year-round destination and renowned for the prosperity, happiness, and high quality of life that its residents enjoy.*

## 4.1 Framework

The comprehensive plan addresses several inter-related systems. This chapter presents a brief framework for the plan’s policy recommendations.

### Conditions, contexts and opportunities



*The International Falls transect.*

Activities and land uses vary across a city’s landscape. Structures, opportunities and assets are not uniformly distributed, and sometimes share certain characteristics depending on where they are located. For example, buildings in a city’s downtown have more in common with each other (in materials, uses and how they are sited) than with buildings in the same city’s suburban locations.

Recommendations that respond to the specific conditions and contexts of the place where they apply within a city can be more useful. A tool for describing the changes in conditions in a city is called a transect.

Each transect zone presents a similar type or intensity of land use. Because their settings and contexts are different, and the activities and roles that each zone plays in the overall function and experience of the city is different, a recommendation that may be helpful and appropriate in the downtown core may not be as helpful in suburban residential areas of the same city. Similarly, a recommendation that may be helpful when thinking about residential development in a suburban zone may not work or fit with overall plan goals if applied in the downtown.



*In the International Falls downtown core.*



*In the urban zone.*



*In the International Falls suburban zone.*



*In the rural zone - mostly located outside of current city boundaries.*

## City districts

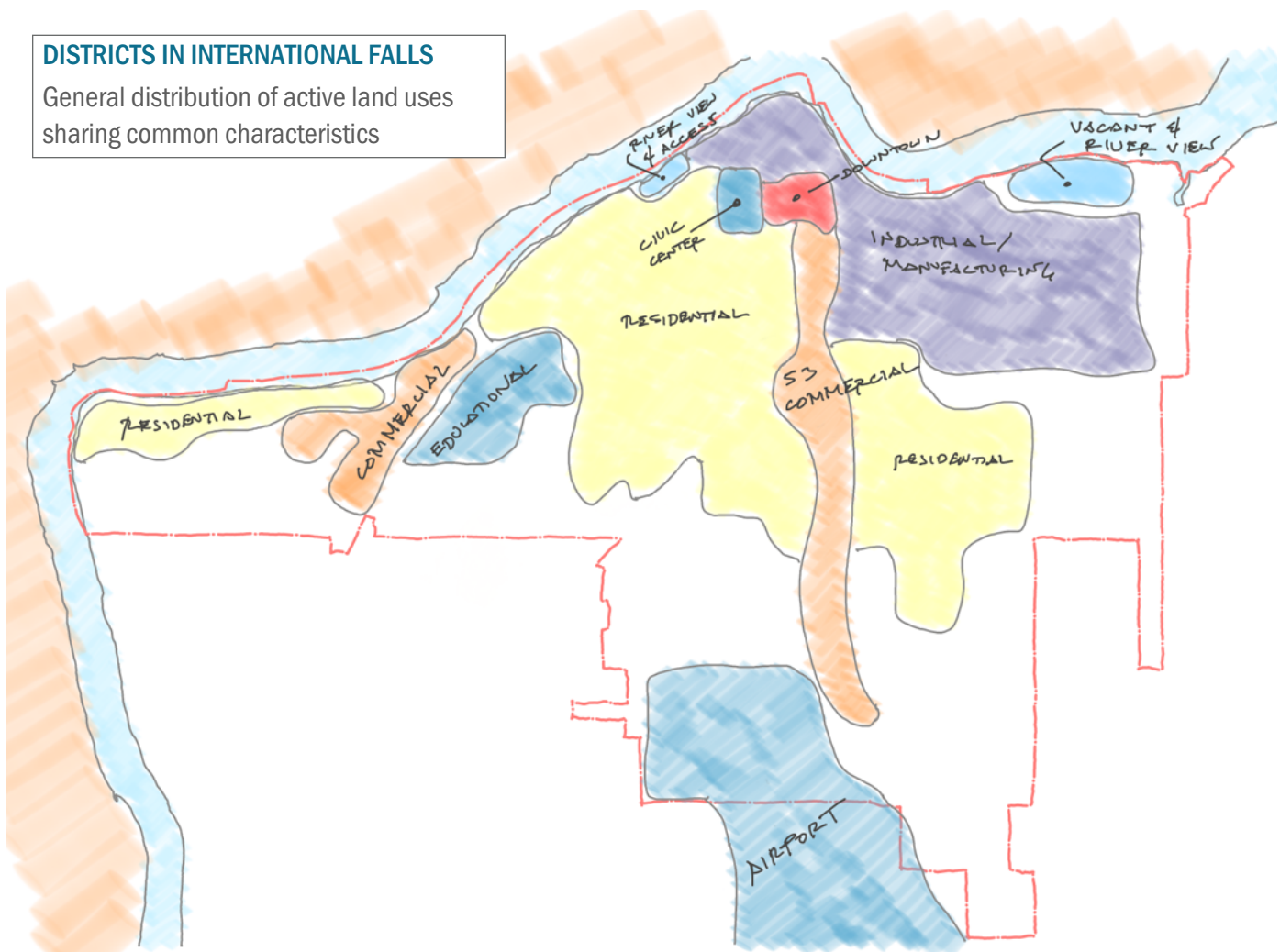
Another way of understanding the characteristics of a city is to look at it from a bird's eye perspective (rather than through a cross-section) to identify districts within it.

Just like with the transect, the districts themselves don't have to be exactly defined, but rather reflect some common characteristics that can help organize recommendations and thinking toward future action.

A framework of simplified districts can be helpful when thinking about next locations for development, or types of development that may be sought in specific areas of the city. This framework can also help orient more specific changes in the city's future land use and zoning regulations.

### DISTRICTS IN INTERNATIONAL FALLS

General distribution of active land uses sharing common characteristics



General distribution of identifiable, active land uses in the city.



## Planning in the context of population decrease

Most comprehensive plans and city planning processes are premised on the steady growth of a community's population - new residents and households grow the need for new housing, expanded community facilities, intensified land use, and annexation of adjoining land. This growth, in turn, increases tax base and revenues collected, and allows the community to grow its services and improve quality of life for its residents.

The situation in International Falls is quite different. As explained in Chapter 2 ("Demographic profile") the decline in population in International Falls is not a recent phenomenon nor a statistical blip - it is an established trend that has gone on uninterrupted since 1960 (sixty years ago) and is projected to continue well beyond 2050.

First, it is important to understand that this is in fact part of much larger trends affecting the county (Koochiching County's population shows the same trajectory) and the region overall. Distance to markets and larger cities, outmigration to larger urban centers, and the shifting role of manufacturing and the natural resource industries that the region and county depend on have all affected the county's fortunes and the city's as well.

This does not mean, however, that the city is without recourse or resources, that residents have to give up on their expectations of a continually improving city, or that it lacks assets which it could leverage to improve quality of life for its residents and achieve the vision they aspire to.

Rather, it means that the city must, first of all, carefully and dispassionately absorb the meaning and potential impact of those population projections:

- » Population will continue to decrease for at least the next thirty years
- » Property tax revenues can't be expected to significantly increase over that time
- » The population decrease is due to larger trends and factors outside of the city's control or influence

Those basic facts, as difficult to contemplate as they may be, are useful as a foundation for the city's next steps because they clarify, using the best information available, what the city can realistically expect in terms of growth and revenue over the next several years.

Far from reducing the city and its residents to passive inaction, this clarity empowers each and every one of the residents of International Falls to take stock of their community's many assets and work with their fellow citizens to craft the uniquely local and responsive approaches and solutions that will help the community become what its residents have envisioned.

## Leveraging assets

All communities have assets in place that provide a foundation for improvement and can help them achieve their vision.

Recognizing assets, however, can sometimes be difficult because, since they currently exist and are part of the community's everyday background, they can be easily overlooked and go unnoticed.

International Falls has numerous assets in place - many of which are recognized by its residents and visitors, but also many others which may be less noticeable because they include familiar elements in combination with other city characteristics, or with larger trends and conditions.

For example: International Falls' "small town feel," walkable downtown and health and educational institutions are familiar elements to current residents and perceptive visitors. What may be less apparent is that this specific combination is attractive to developers who are building new compact and walkable development in smaller cities throughout the country - and are, in the process, helping to revitalize local economies.

As baby boomers age, they are seeking places where they can remain active, enjoy close-knit communities, and access cultural opportunities and lifelong learning. Smaller college towns have become the ideal setting for the compact, mixed use apartments sought by seniors. This is bringing new vitality to downtown districts, improving cities' tax bases, and reinforcing the walkable, pedestrian-oriented qualities that make downtowns and nearby residential neighborhoods attractive for a wide range of households.

What are some of International Falls' community assets? Here's a brief list, compiled from comments



*Small cities are attracting new development. Image: new mixed-use development in St. Joseph (pop. 6,800) near St. Cloud.*

from community engagement for the plan, from the comparative economic analysis that was part of the NGKF study, and from Voyage Forward:

- » Family-friendly neighborhoods
- » Wide variety of activities and public events
- » Beauty and serenity of the natural environment
- » Many cultural and arts programs
- » Abundance of natural and wildlife resources and hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation; Voyageurs National Park
- » Active industry and manufacturing, Foreign Trade Zone and available land for commercial and industrial development
- » Access to road, air and rail transportation
- » High quality city services
- » Strong educational systems with quality opportunities from pre-school through college; Rainy River Community College
- » Businesses that provide friendly, quality service
- » Opportunities as border community and strong relationship with Fort Frances
- » Opportunities for community involvement, including Voyage Forward

## 4.2 Land use

Land use refers to the activities that take place on the parcels that make up a community's land area. Changing over time, land uses respond to market forces and to directions set forth in the city's land use planning policies, including its comprehensive plan, zoning regulations, and other policy documents - and also reflect larger economic, social and structural trends.

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

Land use policies and practices support lasting prosperity and quality of life for residents and visitors. Compact and efficient land use provides a variety of conveniently located and accessible housing options; industry and business have access to the space they need to grow and thrive; downtown is vital and prosperous; natural and open spaces are protected, and the uses of land are arranged and intermixed to support beautification, development, and the health and well-being of the community.

#### Goals

- » Strengthen the vitality, attractiveness and prospects of the city's downtown
- » Create the conditions to make an array of housing options and employment opportunities possible
- » Address distribution of city services and consider annexation and municipal expansion where financially sustainable
- » Encourage flexible, connected, and efficient management of growth
- » Improve the city's overall urban image, and implement the Highway 53 corridor urban design guidelines
- » Preserve and enhance general quality of life with thoughtful land use decisions



*Aerial view of land uses in the city.*

#### About this chapter

This section provides guidance for the city's future land use and development decisions so they match community vision and values, and includes a future land use map, showing uses that are anticipated to change in the future.

In some cases, future uses are different from what occurs today. The transition of these properties from their current use to the depicted use is expected to occur over time, in response to market demands, as property owners voluntarily sell, develop, or change the use of their land. Other recommendations will be implemented through planning, zoning and subdivision ordinances, public improvements, and public and private partnerships.



## Existing conditions

### Urban form and development patterns

Due to its pattern of development, presence of natural barriers and prominent role of industry, International Falls presents a somewhat unusual arrangement of land uses with a variety of conditions even within its relatively small size.

The papermill occupies the northernmost and most prominent location in the city - along the Rainy River, adjacent to the city's downtown and separating one from the other. The downtown, a relatively compact (but proportionate to the city's size) business district, includes a variety of handsome and recently-rehabilitated buildings as well as a number of vacant buildings and empty lots.

A civic core (which includes City Hall, the library, the County Courthouse, and Smokey Bear Park) is located just west of downtown. Several churches and the Backus Community Center are located immediately southwest of this civic core.

There are two main residential areas in the city: the first area is principally south and west of the downtown (within 3/4 of a mile from City Hall). The second area is principally south and east, begins at a distance of about 2/3 of a mile from City Hall, and extends for about another 2/3 mile - this area corresponds to what was previously the city of South International Falls (which was annexed in 1989). The two residential areas do not overlap, as they are separated by Highway 53, a major transport and commercial corridor into the city, and by an abandoned railroad line which is now used as a recreational / snowmobile trail (the Voyageur / Blue Ox Trail).

Industrial uses are predominant in the city's landscape - around one third of the city's land hosts industry and manufacturing uses. In addition to the papermill located in the northernmost area of the city, extensive railyards, lumber storage, and trucking storage and staging areas form a boundary for eastward expansion of residential or commercial



*Downtown International Falls.*



*View north into downtown.*



*Residential district in South International Falls.*

uses (especially from the downtown and the first residential area) and block access to the river.

The two main roadways in the city (Highway 53 and MN11/US71) provide the organizing structure for the city's commercial uses.

Highway 53 is the principal north-south access into the city, bringing visitors and trade to the city itself and into Canada. In addition, it connects to MN11, which runs east to provide access to Ranier and Voyageurs National Park. A variety of auto-oriented retail, including fast food, motels, gas stations, auto-parts and similar businesses line Highway 53 into the city. Arrangement of structures is oriented to automobile access (parking to the front of the lot, larger lot sizes, little architectural detail or landscaping), and structures are generally not in good condition. The land use pattern becomes somewhat more compact when closely approaching downtown's main street (Third Street).

MN11/US71 moves generally southwest from the city's downtown. Closer to downtown, it hosts some medium-large commercial and institutional uses (Backus Community Center, Stewart's Super One Foods and Cine 5) as well as some larger-lot / lower density residential uses. Continuing southwest past 11th Street, the road is lined by larger institutional and commercial uses, including the city's High School and athletic fields, Rainy Lake Medical Center, the AmericInn Hotel, and the county's wastewater treatment plant - as well as Rainy River Community College, and the "big-box" retail district that includes Kmart (scheduled to close December 2019), Menards and County Market stores. A frontage road at this location, and the large and prominent parking lots included as part of these larger uses accentuate the automobile-oriented pattern of development in this part of the city and which is only about 1.5 miles from the downtown.

Notably, the city's 1966 Comprehensive Plan (the most recent plan available) identifies the challenges (and potential growth) of areas of "considerable sprawl, or uncontrolled, scattered development ... found along major highway routes leading southward."



*Approaching the city from the south on Highway 53, approximately 1.25 miles from downtown.*



*Traveling on Highway 53 northbound, about 2/3 mile from downtown.*

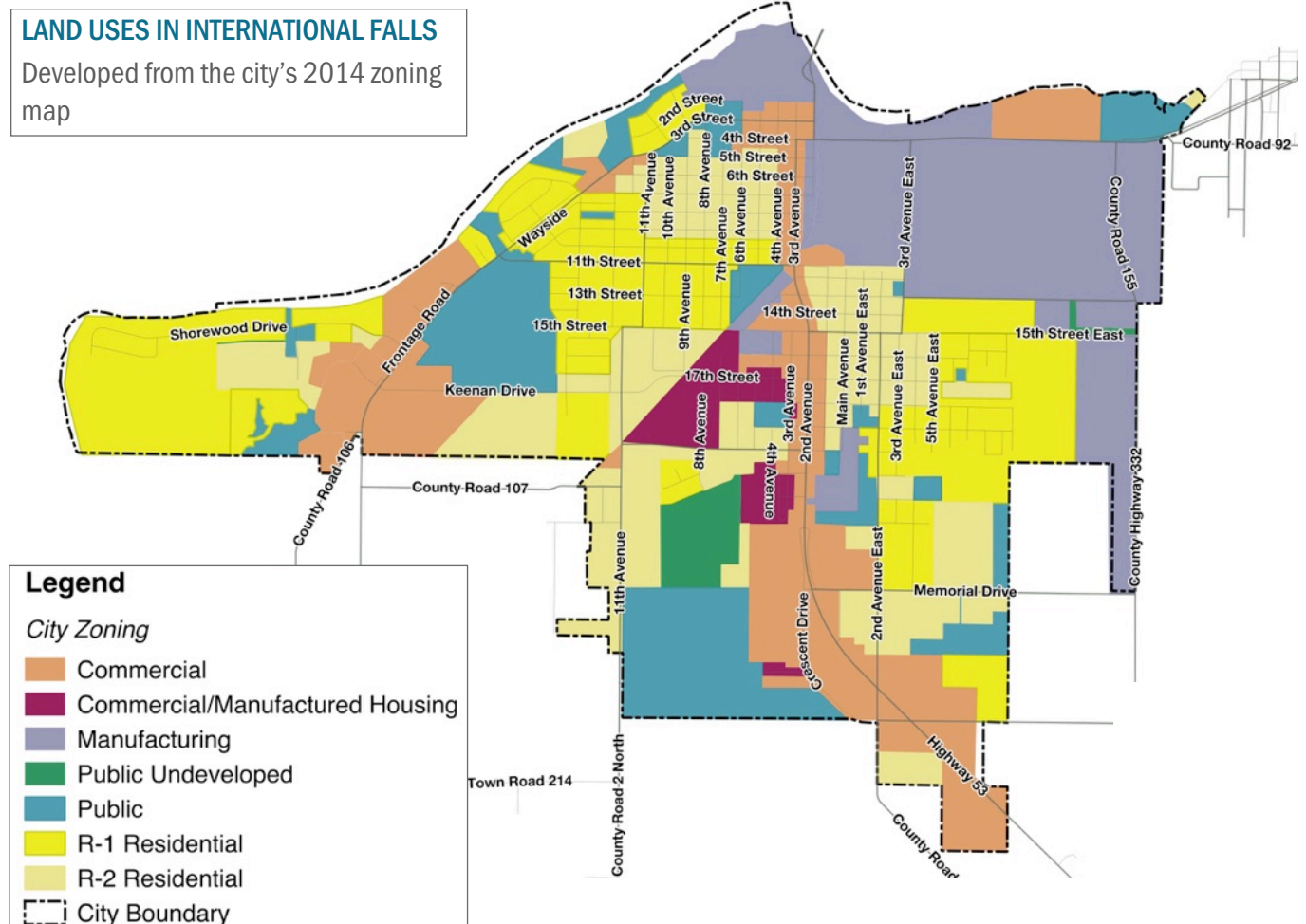


*View of parking lot and stores in the city's "big-box" district along MN11/US71.*

## Current land uses

About a third of the city's land parcels are occupied by manufacturing/industrial uses, with commercial corridors extending through the middle of the city along Highway 53, and along the western entrance to the city on MN11/US71. Single family residential land use is found throughout the city, with areas containing both single and multi-family uses being similarly scattered. Public uses include schools, parks and the site of Rainy River Community College.

The most recent land use plan is from the city's 1966 Comprehensive Plan. The most recent zoning map, which describes the current distribution of land uses, was updated in 2014.



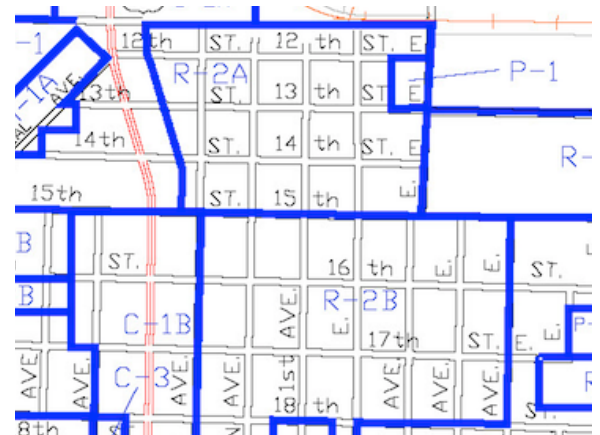


## Current zoning

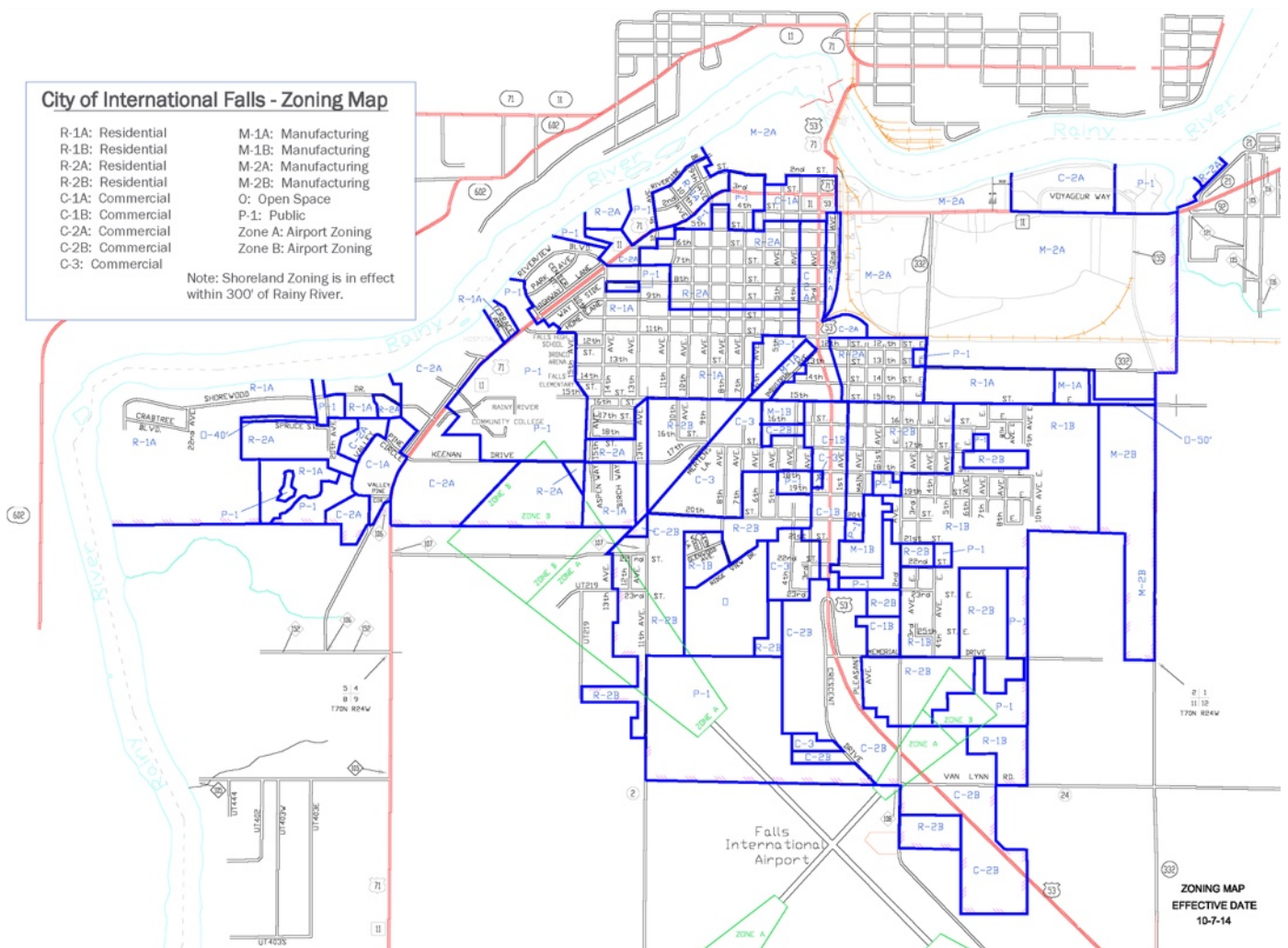
Land uses in the city closely align with the zoning districts established in the Land Use Regulations and Zoning Map of 1979 and amended as needed since then (the Zoning Map was most recently updated in 2014). The Zoning Ordinance is being updated as part of this comprehensive plan.

## A and B zoning categories

The “A” and “B” zoning categories used to describe Residential, Commercial and Manufacturing uses in the Zoning Map reflect the annexation of South International Falls in 1989. All “B” zoning categories reflect South Falls zoning that was relatively equivalent to that of International Falls, denoted as “A”.



Detail from the Zoning Map showing “A” and “B” categories for a residential district in the city.



The city's 2014 Zoning Map.



## Current zoning categories

Zoning District	Lot Area	General Description
R-1A	7,000 sq.ft.-1st unit; 4,000 sq. ft.-2nd unit	Single and two-family residences. Other community-oriented land uses (parks, churches, schools) permitted.
R-1B	9,000 sq.ft.-1st unit; 5,000 sq. ft.-2nd unit	Single and two-family residences. Other community-oriented land uses (parks, churches, schools) permitted.
R-2A	4,600 sq.ft.-1st unit; 2,000 sq. ft.-2nd unit; 1,500 sq. ft. each added unit	Multi-unit residences including apartments, townhomes, etc.
R-2B	6,000 sq.ft.-1st unit; 3,000 sq. ft.-2nd unit; 2,000 sq. ft. each added unit	Multi-unit residences including apartments, townhomes, etc. District intent is residential.
C-1A	No minimum	Compact shopping area for general offices and retail sales. Also allows all R-2A uses.
C-1B	No minimum	Compact shopping area for general offices and retail sales. Also allows all R-2B uses.
C-2A	No minimum	Areas intended for businesses that serve the motoring public. Also allows for all C-1 uses.
C-2B	No minimum	Areas intended for businesses that serve the motoring public. Also allows for all C-1 uses.
C-3	6,000 sq.ft.-1st unit; 3,000 sq. ft.-2nd unit; 2,000 sq. ft. each added unit	Commercial and multiple dwelling residence district suitable for the location of multiple dwelling structures as well as mobile home parks and single-family mobile homes located on private lots.
M-1A	10,000 sq.ft.	Industrial uses that do not adversely affect adjacent businesses or residences.
M-1B	10,000 sq.ft.	Industrial uses that do not adversely affect adjacent businesses or residences.
M-2A	15,000 sq. ft.	To create industrial areas to accommodate a wide variety of industry which may operate to their maximum advantage.
M-2B	15,000 sq. ft.	To create industrial areas to accommodate a wide variety of industry which may operate to their maximum advantage.
O	2.5 acres	Protects and enhances vital natural resources, maintains a buffer between incompatible land uses or restricts development in areas not yet suitable or capable of sustaining development.
P-1	No minimum	Public services, intended to promote the general health and welfare of the citizens.

## Opportunity: New land use plan and zoning map and ordinance

Development of this new Comprehensive Plan offers the opportunity to update the city's land use policy documents, including the city's land use plan, its zoning map and ordinance, and its subdivision regulations so they more accurately reflect current conditions and guide future decisions toward the vision described by its citizens and leaders.

Completing these updates simultaneously, as the city is doing, provides the opportunity to coordinate goals and efficiently use all of these tools to move toward the plan's vision. This includes:

### Assessment of existing land uses

The city's land use map identifies the present location and distribution of the residential, commercial and public activities (the "land uses") that take place within its boundaries.

### Determination of future land uses

The Future Land Use Plan makes recommendations for how the type and location of land uses should change over the next twenty years to respond to and make possible the vision the community has set out for itself.

In some cases, future land uses on a parcel are different from what occurs today. The transition on these parcels from their current use to their desired future use is expected to occur over time, in response to market demands, as property owners voluntarily sell, develop, or change the use of their land. Other recommendations will be implemented through planning, zoning and subdivision ordinances, public improvements, and public and private partnerships.

### Land use vs. zoning

- » **Land Use** identifies the preferred end result of development and redevelopment over the next 20 years. The Future Land Use Map shows the long-range desired future for the City. Land Use is policy and aspirational.
- » **Zoning** identifies the permitted, conditional, interim and prohibited uses and regulation for development and redevelopment for each geographic area in the City. The zoning map shows what are permitted uses and designated districts for developers and landowners. Zoning is Regulation and Law.

The new land use plan also provides an opportunity for optimizing land use categories so they reflect the types of uses desired and the existence of districts or other focus locations in the city. For International Falls, this is also an opportunity to harmonize land use categories from previous consolidations or annexations.

### Zoning ordinance

The zoning ordinance is the city's legal instrument for regulating and enforcing land uses within the city, and for establishing specific districts or focus areas.

The zoning ordinance defines how property in specific areas of the city can be used - for example, where housing or industry can be located, and for establishing development characteristics like lot size, and the siting and height of structures.

The zoning ordinance is informed by the future land use plan and is a key tool for its implementation.

### Zoning map

The zoning map is developed from the zoning ordinance and shows the location of permitted uses and designated districts.

## Updated land use categories

These are the updated land use categories in the new Land Use Plan and the city's new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map:

Zoning District	Name / Type	Purpose / Description
R-1	Large-lot Residential	To provide suitable areas within the community for the location of large-lot residential dwellings of single- and two-family occupancy.
R-2	Residential	To provide suitable areas within the community for residential dwellings of single- and two-family occupancy.
R-3	Multi-family Residential	To provide a multiple-dwelling residential district suitable for the location of apartment buildings, townhouses, condominiums, and other rooming or residential structures.
R-R	Rural Residential	To allow for relatively large lot single-family residential areas, which have been or will be developed without municipal sanitary sewer and water services and that permit some form of hobby farms or agricultural uses.
R-M	Manufactured Home Park	To allow manufactured or mobile home communities in appropriate areas of the City.
C-1	Downtown	To recognize the existing Downtown area of the City and to stabilize, maintain, and enhance the unique commercial character of downtown, which is characterized by small lot sizes with no setbacks and historic buildings, and contains small business, retail and restaurant oriented uses.
C-2	Highway 53 Commercial	To focus improvement on the Highway 53 corridor establishing suitable areas within the City for the location and/or expansion of businesses providing highway-oriented retail goods and services.
C-3	General Commercial	To provide for a variety of commercial uses, including more intensive uses not permitted in the Downtown Business District. This district is intended to permit a wide variety of commercial uses designed to cater to the needs of the entire community and surrounding areas.
LI	Light Industrial	To create industrial areas that are acceptable to the City and that do not adversely affect adjacent business or residences. Uses will not create any offensive noise, dust, heat, smoke, odor, or other objectionable influences to adjacent property owners. In the interest of general health, residential uses are not permitted.
IN	General Industrial	To create industrial areas to accommodate a wide variety of industry which may operate to their maximum advantage.
P-1	Public / Semi-public	To provide land areas within the City for the establishment of public services, utilities, city, federal, state, school district and religious uses that are necessary for the health and welfare of the citizens.

## Future land uses / proposed zoning map

The future land use map organizes the plan's land use recommendations - including location of housing, industry and commerce - within the city's extent.

The future land use map is the foundation for the city's zoning map. As both maps are being prepared at the same time, their recommendations, in terms of distribution and location of land uses, are identical. The new Zoning Ordinance provides additional details about the characteristics of each of the uses depicted on the map, including allowed, prohibited and conditional activities for the land uses shown.

**Please consult this plan's Appendix to review the Zoning Ordinance.**

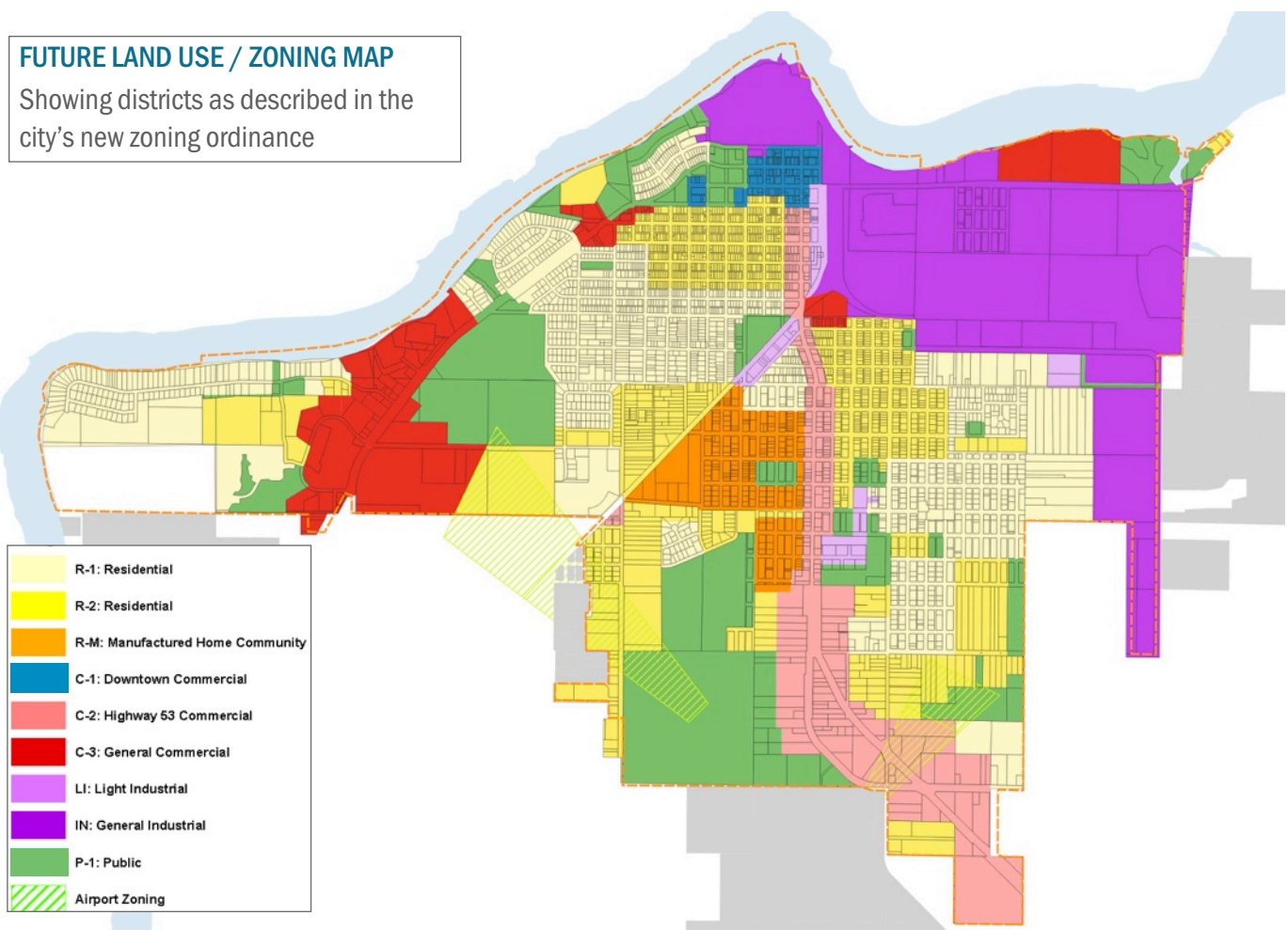
## Implementation of future land uses

The map on this page summarizes the guidance offered by this comprehensive plan for the city's future land uses and development.

In some cases, future uses are different from what occurs today. The transition of these properties from their current use to the depicted use is expected to occur over time, in response to market demands, as property owners voluntarily sell, develop, or change the use of their land. Other recommendations will be implemented through planning, zoning and subdivision ordinances, public improvements, and public and private partnerships.

### FUTURE LAND USE / ZONING MAP

Showing districts as described in the city's new zoning ordinance





## Opportunity: Annexation of adjacent lands and parcels

The city is exploring annexation of land parcels to the south and east of International Falls. Annexation would allow the city to grow its taxable land, but it would also increase the city's maintenance and service obligations.

This plan recommends completing these steps before any annexation action:

- 1) Completing a financial cost-benefit analysis on the implications of the proposed annexation
- 2) Coordination with Koochiching County
- 3) Communication with the affected land owners

The city currently owns several land parcels immediately outside its boundaries, including portions of the airport, and has been working to annex them. The plan recommends completing the steps outlined above and then proceeding to annexation if warranted. The timeline recommended for completion of this process is within the next two years (by December 2021).

In addition, there are several locations along MN11 between the city boundary and MN332 (the "Papermaker" neighborhood) where city water has already been provided. The plan recommends completing the steps outlined above and then proceeding to annexation if warranted. The timeline recommended for completion of this process is within the next six years (by July 2026).

City leaders have also expressed an interest in completing annexation of other lands generally north and east of MN332 to the Rainy River. Many parcels in this area are already served by city services and have agreed to proceed with annexation. The plan recommends completing the steps outlined above and then proceeding to annexation if warranted. The timeline recommended for completion of this process is within the next ten years (by July 2030).

### Provision of services outside city limits

In some cases, the city has extended water and/or sanitary sewer service to parcels outside of its current jurisdictional boundaries. In these cases, the city has increased its maintenance and service obligations without increasing its tax base. To maintain a stable and sustainable ratio of obligations to income, this plan strongly recommends against provision of city services to locations outside its boundaries (unless these are contracted for and sold for a price that allows the city to recover its costs, including capital costs).

In general, the plan proposes this process for responding to requests for providing city services outside of current city boundaries:

- 1) Complete a cost-benefit analysis on the implications of the annexation of the parcels where services are sought
- 2) Annex the parcels if the cost-benefit analysis shows it to be beneficial to the city
- 3) Once the parcels are annexed, provide full city services

In specific cases, providing city services may be warranted if:

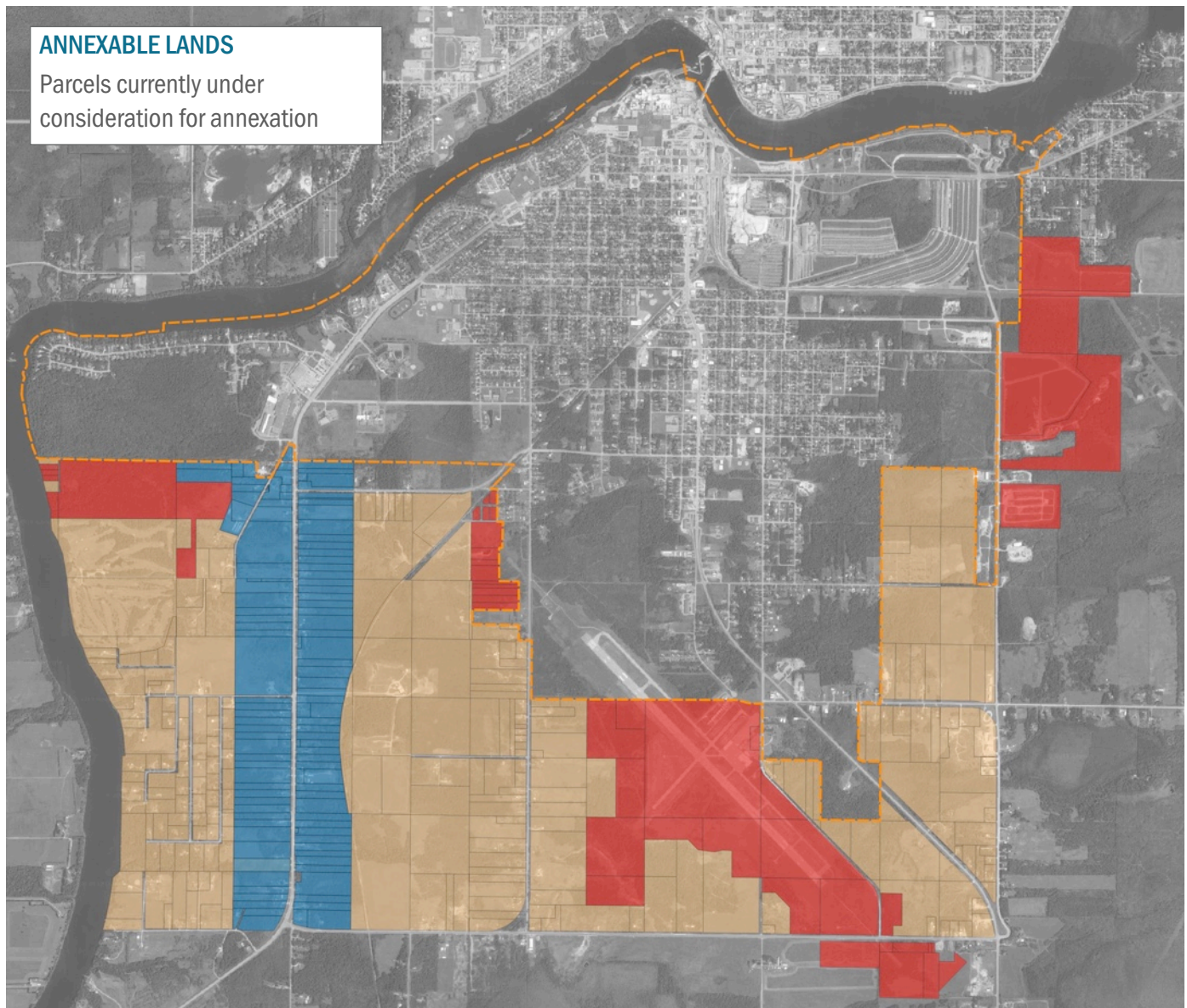
- 1) A detailed analysis on the cost of providing the services is performed
- 2) An agreement for providing those services to the other party at a cost that allows the city to recover all its expenses, including applicable capital costs, is accepted by both parties

The plan recommends the city develop and enforce a strict policy requiring the annexation of parcels to be served by city water or sewer services before the infrastructure to provide those services is developed.

## Potentially annexable lands and parcels

These are the areas under potential consideration. They include:

- » Group 1 (shown in red): The majority of these are lands currently owned by the city. They total 952 acres, equivalent to approximately 25% of the city's current land area. An annexation process has been ongoing for several years. Timeline for potential annexation: July 2021.
- » Group 2 (shown in blue): These lands are currently outside the city, but most have city water services. The city does not collect property tax on these lands. Timeline for potential annexation: July 2025.
- » Group 3 (shown in light orange): Many parcels have access to city water and sewer services. The city does not collect property tax on these lands. A significant portion of land uses are agricultural. Timeline for potential annexation: July 2029.



## Recommendations for the annexation process

- » Develop process to annex parcels which are currently served by city services but are located outside of the city's limits.
- » Develop cost-benefit analysis for any potential annexation that weighs the long-term obligations to be incurred (including maintenance of infrastructure for streets, water and other provided services) vs. potential tax revenue gains.
- » Develop a strict policy requiring the annexation of parcels to be served by city-provided services before the infrastructure to provide those services is provided.
- » Consider the impact of expanding the city's geographic boundary vs. efforts to concentrate economic activity, development and vitality in the city's core areas.
- » Consider long-term prospects for servicing an expanding geographic area in view of population projections that anticipate a continuing decrease in the city's population.

## Strengthening coordination with the county

City leaders have noted that there are opportunities for better coordination with the county regarding limiting residential development in areas outside the city. Closely working with the county to adopt a unified stance will help reduce potential future requests for provision of services outside the current service area, and will help protect the area's agricultural and natural assets.

## Other potential annexation or merger opportunities

In the past, city leaders have considered working with Rainier to explore a process for potentially merging the two cities. This plan recommends more formally exploring that possibility, including developing a detailed economic analysis that outlines potential costs and benefits for each city and their residents, and considering short, medium and long-term gains and costs associated with that possibility.

## Opportunity: Re-valuing the center

A city's downtown (which is often also called its "center") is one of a community's key assets. It's a foundational piece for a city's identity and a repository of its architectural legacy, of the development of its business community, and of its history since the time of its settlement.

An active, attractive, healthy and vital downtown has a powerful impact on a community - from the pride and connection its residents feel, to the convenience it affords to those looking for goods and services, to the opportunities it offers aspiring entrepreneurs, to the pull it exerts on travelers and tourists visiting a city for the first time.

International Falls' downtown has many unique assets and well-preserved buildings and is conveniently located but suffers from relatively low visitation and vitality.

Though there are some notable draws and successes in downtown there are also many opportunities for leveraging downtown's assets, reactivating local business development, attracting visitors and helping downtown reclaim its rightful place as an active, attractive and vital destination in the region.

### Downtown's assets

Some of downtown's current assets include:

- » Walkable and historic grid development pattern
- » Connection with and proximity to city's civic core, Smokey Bear Park, and County Courthouse and offices
- » Existing cafes, restaurant-bars, professional offices and services
- » Decorative sidewalks, planters and street trees
- » Convenient supply of parking



*The city's downtown holds a rich and varied architectural legacy - but it also has many vacant spaces and lacks activity.*

### Current issues

- » Low levels of pedestrian activity, commercial activity, and general feeling of vitality
- » Lack of "draw" or anchor stores bringing people into downtown with regularity - like a grocery or hardware store
- » Empty / underutilized storefronts
- » Some buildings in need of rehabilitation
- » Several large off-street surface parking lots working against walkability and visual interest

### Opportunities

Leveraging downtown's existing assets can help reactivate it and position it as an economic driver for the city's future success. Some actions may include:

- » Focus on a "placemaking" strategy for bringing people, activity and interest back downtown
- » Application for registration as a Historic District
- » Participation in the National Main Street program
- » Development of a downtown master plan
- » Development of urban design standards for downtown as well as other commercial districts
- » Intentional steering and encouragement of development and business toward the downtown



## Opportunity: Rehabilitation of Highway 53

The Highway 53 corridor is the main entryway into the city. Functional and maintenance concerns have prompted MnDOT to develop a rehabilitation project for the corridor. This \$13 million project is currently in the concept finalization phase and is expected to begin construction in 2020.

The roadway and streetscape investments included in the project offer a great opportunity to support improvements in land use and economic development along the corridor.

Parcels along the corridor have great visibility and traffic access for business or other commercial use. Coordination of setbacks and landscape types can improve the corridor's inconsistent aesthetics. Mixed-use development with residential and commercial uses can be established closer to downtown, focusing and densifying growth.

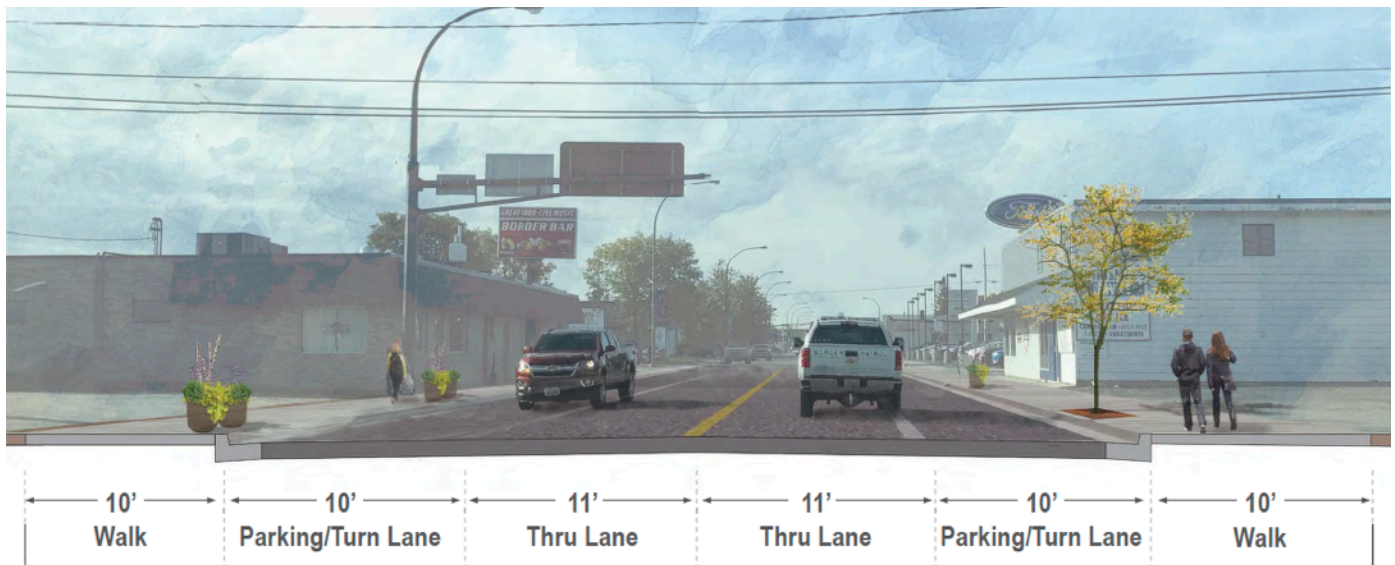
The city's new zoning ordinance includes a new "Highway 53 Corridor" district to support the location and/or expansion of businesses providing retail goods and services. This zoning district, in addition to focused overlay districts or incentive zones could also be used to encourage intensification of land use and improvement of the corridor's image and function.



*Mid-rise mixed-use development, includes apartments over a supermarket, Minneapolis.*

### What we heard: from the plan's engagement

*"One of my biggest pet peeves is ... 53 coming into town ... the entrance to our town is not appealing at all!"*



*View of the proposed reconstruction near the city's downtown. Expanded sidewalks and plantings would be provided. Image courtesy of MnDOT.*

## Opportunity: Redevelopment sites and new Federal Opportunity Zone

The Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA) and the city have identified several potential redevelopment sites in and near area of the city. These sites are zoned primarily for commercial or industrial uses. Five of the sites are publicly-owned while the remaining eight are privately-owned.

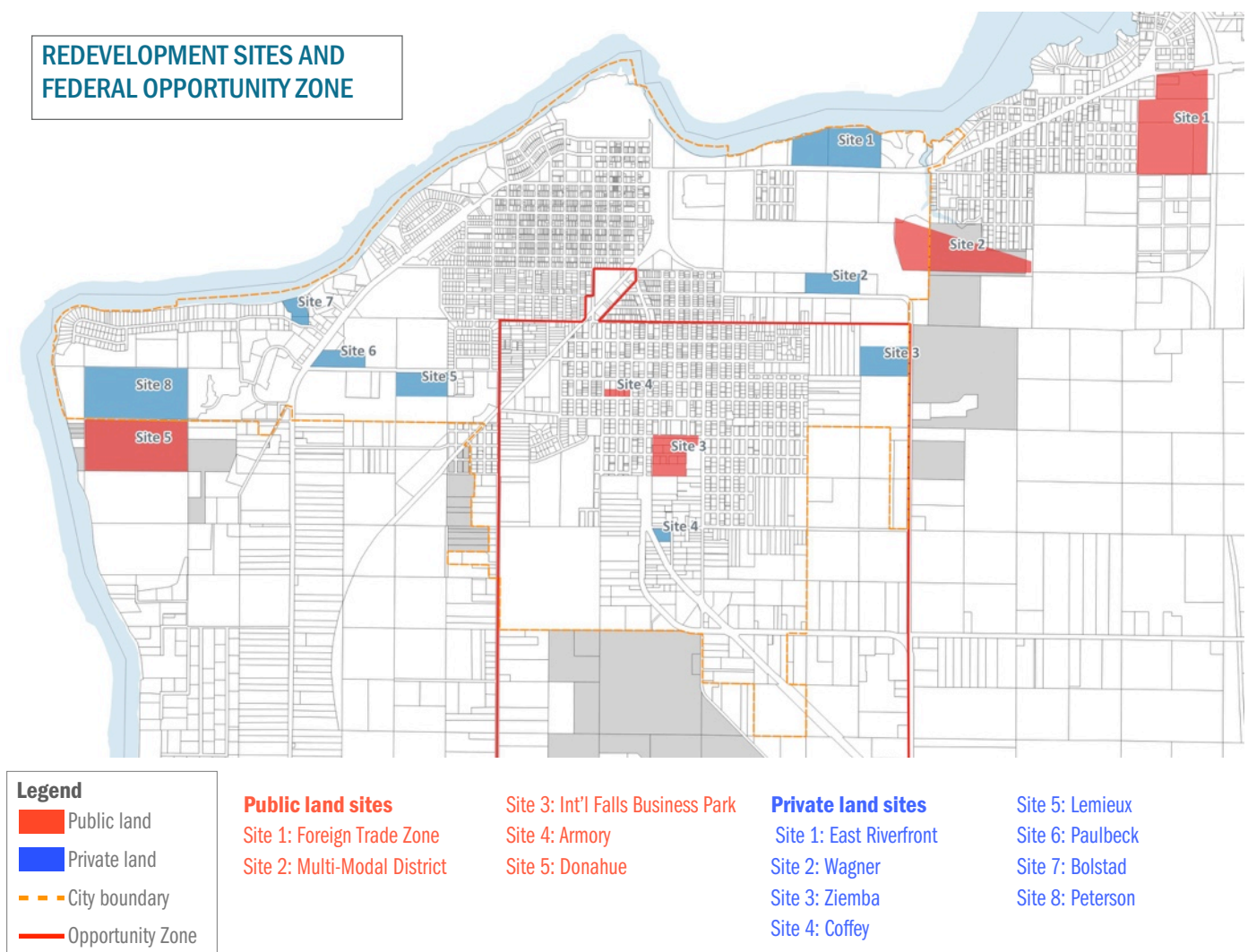
In addition a new **Federal Opportunity Zone** has been designated for the city.

There may be cases where the zoning classification for individual sites or for locations within the city may need to be modified to make them consistent with

city goals and increase their attractiveness to potential investors.

Several of the sites include lands which are currently outside of the city's boundaries. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, annexation of those parcels should occur *before* provision of services to those locations.

**A detailed description of the redevelopment sites and the Opportunity Zone is provided under the Economic Development chapter of this plan.**





## Opportunity: Addressing winter through urban design and planning

Winter is a big part of International Falls's identity, and is a long part of the year in the Minnesota / Ontario borderland.

Cold temperatures and early nightfall can sometimes feel like difficult barriers to overcome when working to increase public life, community vitality and feeling of year-round quality of life - which are important for attracting new residents and businesses to a community.

Planning and design can play an important role in orienting development, design and programming priorities so public life can continue and even grow through the winter.

### An example from Canada: the Edmonton Winter Design Guidelines

The City of Edmonton, in Alberta, Canada, has recently developed a Winter Design Guide that aims to guide planning, development and maintenance practices in that city. As Edmonton's winter climate is similar to that of International Falls, many of those recommendations may be applicable to the city's planning and development practices.

According to the guide, the five main principles of planning and design for winter cities are:

- » Incorporate design strategies to block wind, particularly prevailing winds and downdrafts
- » Maximize exposure to sunshine through orientation and design
- » Use color to enliven the winter landscape
- » Create visual interest with strategic use of creative lighting
- » Design and provide infrastructure that supports desired winter life and improves comfort and access in cold weather

The guide is available for download at [www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/PDF/WinterCityDesignGuidelines\\_draft.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/WinterCityDesignGuidelines_draft.pdf)



*Snowshoe races as part of Icebox Days in downtown.  
Image: International Falls Chamber of Commerce.*



*Active uses and spaces attract people year-round.  
Image: Edmonton Winter Design Guidelines.*

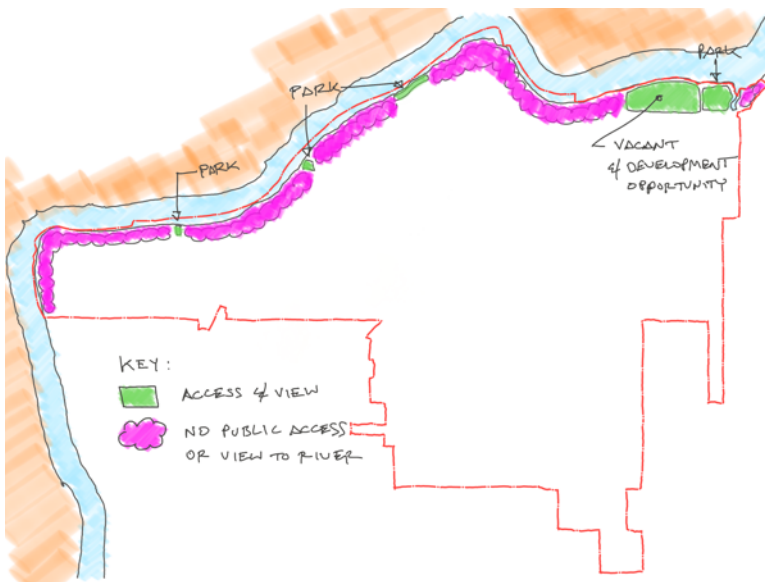


*Walkability and compactness are useful qualities for vitality. Image: Edmonton Winter Design Guidelines.*

## Opportunity: Reconsidering the river

One of the city's best assets is its proximity to the beautiful Rainy River. Yet the river is relatively difficult to view or access within the city limits.

About one third of river-fronting land in the city is dedicated to industrial uses and is not accessible to residents or tourists traveling through the city, especially near the downtown. About another third of river frontage is part of single-family residential land and is similarly inaccessible. Of the remaining third, about one half is part of large scale commercial or institutional uses and also inaccessible.



*Current conditions: most of the city's riverfront is not accessible for views or public access from the city.*

As uses along the riverfront change over time, it will be important to consider the need for and benefit of expanding public access to the river - either through new recreational opportunities like walking paths and trails, or through opportunities for development that leverage the city's spectacular setting to attract tourism, boost business and expand economic opportunity.

Most importantly, connecting to the river will provide social and environmental benefits that will accrue to all residents and increase the city's attractiveness and quality of life.



*The Rainy River, seen from Riverside Drive. Image courtesy of Eric and Noelle at Blogspot.com.*

### What we heard: from the plan's engagement

*"I'd remove all the trailers from the riverside on 11/53 and turn it into a walking /biking park ... Ft. Frances has a gorgeous river bank, with docks and benches ... [we have] semi-trailers ..."*



*Along the Fort Frances riverfront trail, La Verendrye Parkway.*



## Opportunity: Land Port of Entry

The US General Services Administration (GSA) is planning to reconfigure the current US Customs and Border Protection facility at the US-Canada border. The current facility, built in 1993, will be replaced with a new and expanded facility to accommodate increased cross-border traffic, additional staffing and services, and new technologies.

Though the project presents an opportunity for the city to benefit from increased cross-border traffic and improved cross border connectivity for businesses and visitors, the proposed configuration would impact operations for Packaging Corporation of

America and the Minnesota, Dakota, and Western Railway, while also permanently restricting access to the Rainy River at this location.

Construction was originally planned to start in 2021, but in summer 2019 GSA advised the city that plans were being put on hold.

This plan recommends the city's continued engagement in the update process for the feasibility study, and exploration for opportunity for expanding walking / biking and recreational access to the Rainy River at this location.



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Strengthen the vitality, attractiveness and prospects of the city's downtown

- » Strategy 1.1: Placemaking and activation
  - Develop a “placemaking” strategy, including inexpensive programming and “tactical urbanism” measures for bringing people, activity and interest back downtown
- » Strategy 1.2: Leverage downtown's assets
  - Apply for registration as a Historic District (please see <https://savingplaces.org/stories/10-steps-to-establish-a-local-historic-district> and <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm> )
  - Join and participate in the Minnesota and National Main Street programs
- » Strategy 1.3: Downtown planning and design
  - Develop a Downtown Master Plan
  - Develop urban design standards for downtown (as well as other city districts)
- » Strategy 1.4: Refocus development toward downtown
  - When development and business opportunities arise, work with proposers to consider downtown as first location
  - Work with KEDA / Economic Development Partnership / Chamber of Commerce to actively market downtown spaces and locations
  - Develop a downtown business incentive plan to encourage businesses to locate within downtown instead of outer locations
- » Strategy 1.5: Streetscape and walkability
  - Continue to invest in maintenance and upkeep of lighting, paving, seating, landscaping, and plantings

- » Strategy 1.6: Activate housing in the district
  - Work with building owners to support rehabilitation of living spaces above storefronts

### Goal 2: Facilitate industrial and commercial development to grow employment opportunities

- » Strategy 2.1: Market the city's unique development opportunities and advantages
  - Publicize and disseminate information about the identified redevelopment sites
  - Highlight redevelopment sites within the newly designated Opportunity Zone in the city
- » Strategy 2.2: Maintain flexibility to expand industrial and manufacturing opportunities and attract development and investment while protecting quality of life
  - Work creatively with developers to respond to their needs regarding land uses while keeping in mind the purpose of investment is to support increases in quality of life for the city's residents
  - Provide ease and flexibility for potential industrial and manufacturing companies to occupy appropriate areas of the city
  - Land uses should remain compatible with adjoining residential and local land uses
- » Strategy 2.3: Strategic commercial development
  - Promote commercial development that serves regional, cross-border, and local markets
  - Provide opportunities for diverse commercial land uses that support the needs of residents and tourists
  - Leverage cross-border partnerships to achieve superior commercial services

### Goal 3: Consider annexation and municipal expansion where financially sustainable

*Work to maintain a well-planned and fiscally sound community by carefully considering annexations that are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan*

- » Strategy 3.1: Annexation of already-served parcels
  - Develop and follow a process to annex parcels which are currently served by city services but are located outside of the city's limits
- » Strategy 3.2: Process for potential annexations
  - Develop a cost-benefit analysis for any potential annexation that weighs the long-term obligations to be incurred (including maintenance of infrastructure for streets, water and other provided services) vs. potential tax revenue gains
  - Develop a strict policy requiring the annexation of parcels to be served by city-provided services before the infrastructure to provide those services is provided
  - Consider the impact of expanding the city's geographic boundary vs. efforts to concentrate economic activity, development and vitality in the city's core areas, including downtown
  - Consider long-term prospects for servicing an expanding geographic area in view of population projections that anticipate a continuing decrease in the city's population

### Goal 4: Encourage flexible, connected, and efficient management of growth

- » Strategy 4.1: Smart Growth principles
  - Follow Smart Growth principles ( <https://smartgrowth.org/smart-growth-principles/> ) when considering the city's growth or intensification of land uses

### Goal 5: Encourage development of housing and increase the livability of residential districts

*Enhance residential livability by encouraging mixed-use development, expanding the variety of housing types, and supporting neighborhood identity initiatives*

- » Strategy 5.1: When residential development proposals are received ensure that:
  - They respond to the goals and needs noted in the Comprehensive Plan and the 2019 Housing Study
  - They consider a variety of housing types, including elder facilities, workforce housing options, multi-family, townhome and accessory housing options while retaining distinct neighborhood character
- » Strategy 5.2: Invite housing development
  - Connect with non-profit and for-profit housing developers to invite their consideration of the city as a market for their services
- » Strategy 5.3: Enforcement of city ordinances
  - Maintain livability of residential districts by communicating and enforcing city ordinances
- » Strategy 5.4: Neighborhood identity
  - Identify, designate and name distinct neighborhoods within the City to provide a sense of localized community identity, recognize distinct architectural identities, and promote residents' sense of place within their neighborhood
  - Develop a role for neighborhood organizations to contribute to programming or engagement efforts and inform city policies or actions
  - Identify and provide initial funding to support neighborhood organizations
  - Improve neighborhood amenities to improve neighborhood quality of life

## 4.3 Housing

More than simply shelter, homes, whether rented or owned, are the places where individuals and families rest, regroup, grow and connect - and where the bonds that build communities spring from.

Housing is a key building block of household and community economic development, work force policy, wellbeing, and quality of life. Housing is one of the principal uses of a city's land area, is an important consumer of city services, and a key source of local tax capacity.

Access to quality housing shapes a person's and a family's quality of life. For a community, the availability of a range of housing options in attractive neighborhoods is a key consideration for young people's decisions to stay in town, for new residents to consider moving into that community, and for businesses seeking to relocate or grow.



*International Falls has many attractive homes and neighborhoods.*

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

International Falls offers a variety of attractive, safe and affordable housing options for individuals and families. All residents can find and afford the housing they need through the different stages of their lives.

#### Goals

- » Ensure all International Falls housing meets or exceeds standards established in City ordinances
- » Strive for a variety of housing types and styles
- » Ensure a wide array of quality workforce housing options for current and future community members

#### Koochiching County Housing Study (KCHS, 2019)

On behalf of the Koochiching County Housing Collaborative, KEDA commissioned a study of the housing needs and conditions for the county overall and for the individual cities in the county, including International Falls.

The study was completed by Community Partners Research, Inc. and includes detailed analysis and recommendations for the city's current and future housing.

**Information from the report is extensively referenced in this section of the plan. The report is included as Appendix 4.**



## Existing conditions

To understand the housing situation in a community - including how it matches with current needs and what is needed for the future - it's important to know data and trends about the housing stock itself (the number and type of units, its condition and price) and about the population that relies on that housing for its residential needs.

In this section information about the International Falls housing stock is presented along with demographic data and projections that supplement the information found in Chapter 2 ("Demographic Profile") in this plan.

### Total number of housing units

There are 3,085 units of housing in International Falls. This is about 40% of all of the housing units in the entire county (7,903 units total).

### Housing occupancy

Type	Number	Percent of total
Occupied	2,660	86%
Vacant	425	14%
TOTAL UNITS	3,085	100%

*Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates*

About 86% of the 3,085 existing housing units (ownership and rental) are occupied. This is about 20% higher than the rate in the county. The vacancy rate is about half of the county rate.

### Occupancy type for occupied housing units

Type	Number	Percent of total
Owner occupied	1,840	69%
Renter occupied	820	31%
TOTAL UNITS	2,660	100%

*Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates*

Of the 2,660 occupied housing units, about 70% are occupied by owners (about 9/10 of the county rate, and similar to the state rate) and 30% by renters (about 1.5 times higher than the county rate).

### Vacancy rate by year and housing type

*"Decent and affordable apartments at my age (21) are hard to find with my wage. Every apartment I looked at that I could afford was very run down ... very old with utilities that don't work well or at all."  
~ Participant in the plan's engagement*

Type	2012	2017
Vacancy rate for owner-occupied units	3%	9%
Vacancy rate for renter-occupied units	2%	0%

*Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates*

Over the last five years, the vacancy rate for rental housing has decreased to zero (this is according ACS 2017 data, which has a margin of error of +/- 2%).

Industry standards indicate that a healthy rental housing vacancy rate (meaning there is enough availability so people have choices in where they live, but not so much availability that landlords have trouble finding tenants) is 5 to 7 percent. Even given

the margin of error of the current estimate, the vacancy rate is below an advisably healthy rate.

Over the same five years, the vacancy rate for owner-occupied units has increased to 9 percent.

## Pricing and affordability of housing

### For rental housing

<u>Monthly rent as percent of household income</u>	<u>Number of households</u>	<u>Percent of total</u>
< 15%	65	9%
15% to 20%	26	3%
20% to 25%	60	8%
25% to 30%	98	13%
30% to 35%	127	17%
> 35%	371	50%
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	747	100%
<i>Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>		

Two thirds (67%) of all city households living in rental housing spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rental costs and are thus considered to be cost-burdened.

Households whose housing costs exceed this 30% threshold of affordability are likely to struggle to pay for other basic needs, forcing difficult trade-offs - including dropping health care coverage, doing without child care, or skipping meals to save on costs - which may result in negative outcomes in their wellbeing.

The 2017 median monthly rent in the city was \$574.

### For ownership housing

Of the city's 1,840 owner-occupied units, approximately 55% (1,018 units) have a mortgage, while the remaining 45% (822 units) are paid for and no longer have a monthly mortgage payment.

For the owner-occupied units which still have a mortgage payment, monthly mortgage costs as a percentage of household income are:

<u>Monthly mortgage as percent of household income</u>	<u>Number of households</u>	<u>Percent of total</u>
< 20%	592	58%
20% to 25%	151	15%
25% to 30%	90	9%
30% to 35%	31	3%
> 35%	154	15%
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	1,018	100%
<i>Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates</i>		

About one fifth (18%) of all city households living in ownership housing with an active mortgage spend more than 30% of their monthly income on mortgage costs and are cost-burdened.

The 2017 median monthly mortgage cost in the city was \$862.

The 2017 median value of owner-occupied housing units in the city was \$86,500, about 80 percent of the value in Koochiching County (\$108,300) and about two-fifths of the value in Minnesota overall (\$199,700).

## Types of existing housing



*Single family homes in the Riverside neighborhood, east of downtown.*



*24 unit apartment building near Shorewood Drive..*



*Mobile home park.*



*Living space above storefronts in the downtown.*



*Multi-family apartment building in the southern side of the city.*



*Home along Shorewood Drive, east of downtown..*

## Housing units per type of housing structure

Type	Number	Percent of total
1 unit, detached	2,074	67%
1 unit, attached	55	2%
2 unit structure	102	3%
3 or 4 unit structure	243	8%
5 to 9	73	2%
10 to 19	82	3%
20 to 49	93	3%
50 or more	96	3%
Mobile home	259	8%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	8	0%
<b>TOTAL UNITS</b>	<b>3,085</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates*

Single-family housing makes up the majority of the units of housing in the city at almost 70%. Multi-unit housing (two or more units in a structure) makes up about 22% of the housing units (about twice as much as in Koochiching County, and similar to the state rate).

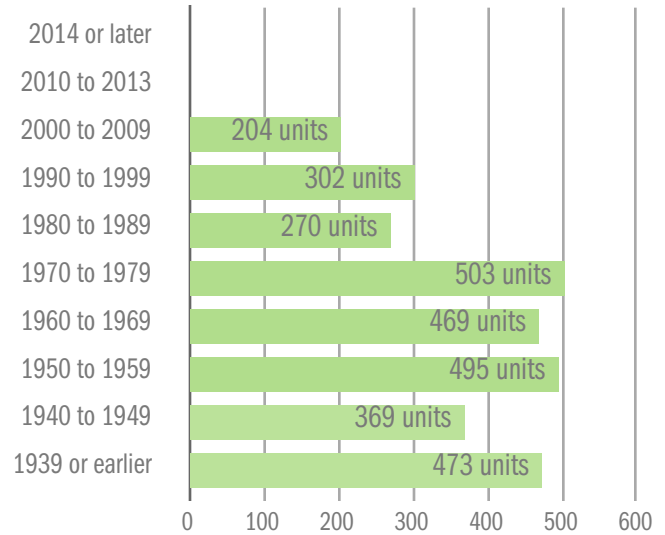
About 13% of housing units are provided in multi-unit buildings of “Middle Size” configuration (duplexes, fourplexes, and apartments provided in buildings similar in size to a large house, often integrated into blocks with primarily single-family homes).

About 11% of all housing is provided in apartment complexes larger than 10 units.

Mobile homes make up about 8% of the housing units in the city, about 4/5 of the rate in the county but more than twice the state rate.

## Age of housing stock

### Year built



*Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates*

The age of a city’s housing stock has an impact on the condition of housing and its desirability in two key ways:

- » As homes age they can be expected to require more maintenance. If adequate maintenance is not provided, their functional and aesthetic qualities can be expected to degrade.
- » The types of housing options available (size, configuration and location) may differ from current needs, and may not match the needs of age or demographic groups looking for housing in the city.

Slightly more than 40% of the city’s housing stock was built before 1960 (sixty years ago). About one quarter of the city’s housing stock was built after 1980. No new housing has been built in the city since 2010.

By comparison, Minnesota’s overall housing stock is much newer, with over 40 percent built after 1980.



The lack of relatively newer development in the city means that the types of housing options are limited, and that housing in many parts of the city (especially in the older core districts) is in need of investment and rehabilitation, with conditions in some cases in violation of city ordinances.

## Condition of housing

*“As a young adult and recent graduate with a bachelors degree, I find that the housing stock is limited. The houses up for rent are in very poor condition ... it deters young people and families from coming to this community to work and live.”*

~ Participant in the plan’s engagement

Issues related to the condition of housing were frequently brought up by city leaders and by participants in the plan’s engagement.

Types of issues frequently discussed range from light cosmetic and repair issues to larger structural repairs, including:

- » Overall appearance
- » Structural condition
- » Type and condition of housing exterior
- » Yard appearance (existence of outdoor storage)

The recently completed Koochiching County Housing Study (2019) included a visual survey of single family / duplex homes in International Falls.

Houses in two city neighborhoods were inspected by visual means, and then rated on a four point scale:

- » **Sound:** House is in good, ‘move-in’ condition, with only minor code violations, if any.
- » **Minor Repair:** House is in generally good condition and requires less extensive repair, such as one major improvement. Houses in this condition are good candidates for rehabilitation programs.

- » **Major Rehabilitation:** House needs several major improvements such as roof, windows, sidings, or structural/foundation repair. Houses in this condition may or may not be economically feasible to rehabilitate.
- » **Dilapidated:** House needs major renovation to become safe and sanitary housing. Some properties in this category may be abandoned and may be candidates for demolition and clearance. This was the lowest rating used.

The two neighborhoods studied were:

- » **Neighborhood #1:** Between 6th Street on the north and 10th Street on the south, and 3rd Avenue on the east and 9th Avenue on the west.
- » **Neighborhood #2:** Between 6th Street on the north and 10th Street on the south, and 9th Avenue on the east and 13th Avenue on the west.



Location of the neighborhoods surveyed for the housing conditions inventory.

These are two of the oldest neighborhoods in the city and the 552 houses reviewed represent about one quarter of all single family / duplex houses in the city.

Although the study’s findings may not be equally applicable for the totality of houses in the city, the study points out general trends and important

existing issues as well as potential strategies for addressing them.

### Condition of housing units reviewed

Condition	Number	Percent
Sound	136	25%
Minor repair	239	43%
Major rehabilitation	150	27%
Dilapidated	27	5%
<b>TOTAL UNITS SURVEYED</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Koochiching County Housing Study (2019)*

Some of the key findings from the observations are:

- » 75% of houses surveyed require at least one major repair
- » At least 40% of the houses surveyed would be good candidates for housing rehabilitation programs
- » At least 5% of the houses surveyed may be considered to be beyond repair



*Interior of the Good Samaritan Society's facility in International Falls., providing housing and related services for older adults. Image courtesy of Pope Architects.*

### Meeting the housing needs of older adults

Slightly more than 20 percent of the International Falls population is currently over the age of 65. That proportion is projected to grow over the next 20 years as baby boomers age.

Housing opportunities will need to evolve to match the needs of this growing demographic group. For example, it will be important to provide options for housing units that are smaller and easier to maintain than traditional single-family homes. It will also be important to develop related “wraparound” health and assistance services, including meals, housekeeping, transportation, and health care options.

As the population ages and as retirees who grew up in the area return from larger metropolitan areas, there may be an increased demand for alternative, age-appropriate living arrangements. Ensuring that these options are ready and available when people need them will require close coordination between the city, for-profit and nonprofit developers, healthcare service providers, and community service agencies.

## Assessment of strengths for housing development

*Adapted from the 2019 Koochiching County Housing Study by Community Partners Research, Inc.*

- » **Regional center:** International Falls offers employment opportunities, retail and service options, health services, professional services, governmental services and recreational facilities for the areas that surround it.
- » **Affordable housing stock:** The city has a large stock of affordable, existing houses. Median home value in the city is approximately \$78,450. This existing stock, when available for sale, provides an affordable option for home ownership.
- » **Diverse housing stock:** The city has a mix of housing options, including rental housing units for various household types, owner-occupied homes and senior housing with a variety of services.
- » **Desirable location for seniors and retirees:** The city is an attractive option for seniors as a retirement location. With health care, specialized housing, and retail and government services, the city offers attractive amenities for seniors.
- » **Educational system:** The city offers a public K-12 school system and access to Rainy River Community College.
- » **Health facilities:** Excellent health facilities including clinics and a hospital, as well as nursing home and senior housing with services.
- » **Infrastructure:** Water and sewer infrastructure can accommodate future expansion.
- » **Commercial development:** The city's commercial district is adequate to meet daily needs.
- » **Backus Community Center:** Backus offers area residents access to art and cultural opportunities, meals, exercise and fitness options, programs and events, volunteer opportunities, among others.
- » **City and County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities:** The International Falls and Koochiching Housing and Redevelopment Authorities provide and administer affordable housing opportunities in the city and county, including Woodland Park Apartments and the Housing Choice Voucher Program.
- » **Commuters:** More than 1,600 workers commute into the city each day. These commuters are a potential market for future housing construction.
- » **Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA):** KEDA is active in addressing economic development, community development and housing needs.
- » **KOOTASCA Community Action:** KOOTASCA is the designated Community Action Agency for Koochiching County and is a certified Community Housing Development Organization (CHODO). It is active in addressing the area's housing needs and in funding for housing projects and programs.
- » **Koochiching County Housing Collaborative:** Facilitated by KOOTASCA Community Action and Backus Community Center, the Housing Collaborative is a coalition of more than 30 local stakeholders, community organizations, government units, businesses and community members working to address housing needs in International Falls and Koochiching County.
- » **Natural amenities:** Surrounded by lakes and forest, the city includes numerous amenities.
- » **Ports of Entry:** There are three international Ports of Entry in the city's market area, including the International Bridge, the Ranier Rail Port, and the Falls International Airport. Many tourists and vacationers travel through the city to enter Canada and other locations through these Ports.
- » **Voyageurs National Park:** Vacation and tourism destination that provides numerous recreational and educational opportunities.

## Assessment of barriers or limitations for housing development

*Adapted from the 2019 Koochiching County Housing Study by Community Partners Research, Inc.*

- » Age and condition of the housing stock: While the existing stock is very affordable, some of it is in need of substantial improvements to meet expectations of potential buyers.
- » Lower incomes limit housing choices: Household and family incomes for International Falls are lower than statewide medians. While this income level matches up well with prices for existing ownership and rental housing in the city, it does not match well to the prices needed for new housing construction.
- » Lower paying jobs: Many jobs in the city are at the lower end of the pay scale and these workers have limited housing choices.
- » Value gap deters new owner-occupied construction: Recent residential sales indicate that the median priced home in the city is valued at approximately \$78,450. This is below the comparable cost for new housing construction, which will generally be around \$175,000 or more for a stick-built home with commonly expected amenities. This creates a “value gap” between new construction and existing homes which can work against speculative building and deter customized construction (unless owners are willing to accept a potential loss on their investments).
- » Low rent structure: The city’s rent structure / rental pricing is low, which makes it difficult to construct new rental housing.
- » Limited land availability: The city is largely landlocked, which limits residential development opportunities.
- » Competition with rural and lake lots: Attractive rural and lake lots and acreages are easily available outside of city limits.
- » Lack of new housing construction: New housing construction has been limited over the past several years.
- » Lack of buildable lots: There are only a few remaining buildable lots available for new housing construction inside the city.
- » Distance from large regional centers: The closest large regional center (Duluth) is 163 miles from the city. Some households desire or need to be close to a large regional center for employment, medical services, etc.
- » Job losses: The city’s largest employer has significantly fewer employees than it had at peak employment.
- » Population and household losses: The city is projected to continue to lose population and households over the foreseeable future, continuing a long-term pattern.
- » Weather: The city is perceived by some to experience cold weather. This may be a deterrent for some households.



## Opportunity: Rehabilitation of existing housing

Improving the condition of housing in the city is an important priority for renters, owners and city leaders.

Housing rehabilitation programs to help homeowners improve or maintain their home's condition were the top response received in the plan's engagement to questions regarding housing priorities.

The 2019 Housing Study (which included a Housing Conditions Survey that reviewed approximately one

quarter of all single family / duplex houses in the city) indicates that:

- » 75% of houses surveyed require at least one major repair
- » At least 40% of the houses surveyed would be good candidates for housing rehabilitation programs

This plan recommends expansion of existing programs and partnerships (including with KOOTASCA Community Action, Koochiching County HRA, International Falls HRA, KEDA, USDA Rural Development, MN Housing and others) to increase the availability and reach of rehabilitation programs and funds.

### Examples: Effective rehabilitation programs



*All images courtesy of KOOTASCA Community Action.*

## Opportunity: Allowing development of accessory (“carriage”) housing units

An accessory housing unit (“ADU”), also known as a “carriage house” or a “granny flat,” is an additional unit of housing - with its own cooking, sleeping, and sanitation facilities - located on the same lot as a single- or two-family home.

An ADU can be housed within a separate structure (typical for a carriage house), or within the primary structure on the lot (as in a duplex). There are generally two restrictions governing development of ADUs:

- 1) **Homesteaded property:** The property owner must reside in either the main house or in the ADU as their primary residence
- 2) **Size:** The ADU must be smaller in area compared to the main dwelling to which it is accessory

Allowing the construction of ADUs on owner-occupied lots and with appropriate siting and architectural controls, can accomplish several goals:

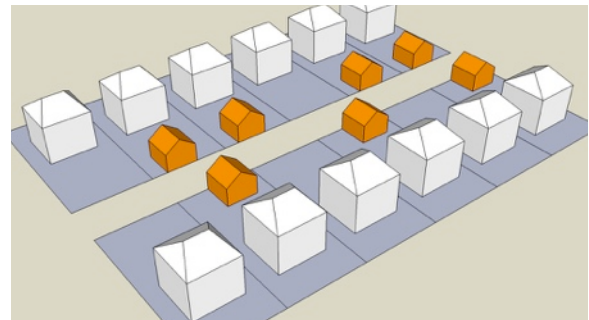
- » Increase housing opportunities by providing an increased number of apartment rental units
- » Increase homeownership opportunities by providing potential homeowners with an additional source of income that lowers their effective mortgage payments
- » Increase safety in area neighborhoods by providing additional “eyes on the street,” especially along alleys
- » Bring more residents to a community, helping support existing and potential businesses
- » Provide attractive housing options for area residents who no longer need a full-sized home but would like to continue to live in their neighborhoods

For these reasons, ADUs are strongly supported by organizations working to increase housing options like the Family Housing Fund and AARP.

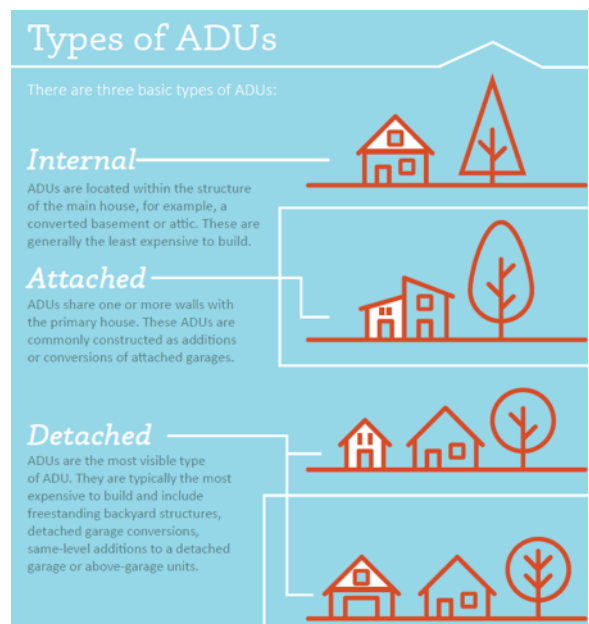
ADUs are currently not allowed in International Falls. This plan recommends including them as a new housing option.



Living unit above a detached garage in Portland, Oregon. Image courtesy of AARP.



Carriage housing (shown in orange) along an alleyway.



Types of ADUs. Image courtesy of Family Housing Fund.

## Opportunity: Recommendations from the 2019 Koochiching County Housing Study (KCHS)

The 2019 Housing Study, completed by Community Partners Research, Inc., includes detailed analysis and recommendations for improving rental and ownership housing conditions and development.

Content in this section is adapted from the KCHS study. The study is included as Appendix 4 of this plan.

### General recommendations, strategies and approach for housing opportunities

- » Maintain realistic expectations for housing development: Large-scale residential growth has not occurred in the recent past and is not likely to occur in the near future. The scale of activities proposed for the future should be comparable with and match the area's potential for growth.
- » Proactive community involvement: New home and apartment construction is more likely to occur if there is proactive support from the city and local, regional and state housing agencies, economic development agencies and the private sector.
- » Maintain and protect the existing housing stock: The city's future prospects are heavily dependent on the city's appeal as a residential location. The condition of the existing housing stock is a major factor in determining the city's long-term viability. Rehabilitation efforts are needed to preserve the city's existing housing stock, one of its major assets.
- » Maintain and protect other existing city assets and resources: The city has numerous assets including its K-12 school system, the community college, its downtown and commercial district, its parks, library and museum, trails and recreational and tourism opportunities, health facilities including clinics and a hospital, and large and midsize employers and work opportunities, among others. These are strong assets that help make the city a desirable place to live, and are key components to its long-term success and viability. These assets must be publicized, protected and improved.
- » Develop a realistic action plan with goals and time lines: The City of International Falls should prioritize its housing issues and establish goals and time lines to achieve success in addressing its housing needs.
- » Access all available resources for housing: The City of International Falls has resources to draw on including the Koochiching County HRA, International Falls HRA, KEDA, USDA Rural Development, MN Housing, and others. These resources should continue to be accessed as needed to assist with housing activities.

## Summary of recommendations for improving rental and ownership housing conditions and development

*Adapted from the 2019 Koochiching County Housing Study by Community Partners Research, Inc.*

### Rental housing development

- » Develop 20 to 24 general occupancy market rate rental units
- » Promote the development / conversion of 8 to 10 affordable market rate rental housing units
- » Develop 18 to 20 subsidized / moderate rent housing units
- » Preserve the existing supply of subsidized housing
- » Develop 14 to 16 additional senior with services units
- » Develop a mixed-use commercial/housing project
- » Continue to use the Housing Choice Voucher Program
- » Student Housing: work with college as needed

### Home ownership

- » Utilize and promote all programs that assist with home ownership
- » Consider the development of a purchase / rehabilitation program

### New construction

- » Lot availability and lot development
- » Strategies to encourage residential lot sales and new home construction
- » Promote townhouse and twin home / duplex development
- » Coordinate with agencies/nonprofits that develop affordable housing
- » Strategies to develop new affordable homes

### Housing rehabilitation

- » Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs
- » Promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs
- » Develop a Neighborhood Revitalization Program
- » Develop a Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program

### Other housing initiatives

- » Encourage employer involvement in housing programs
- » Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- » Strategies for downtown redevelopment
- » Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- » Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies
- » Housing assistance programs for homeless and hard to house populations
- » Develop mobile home programs and policies

#### Restarting a housing supply idea from recent time

*"We should also get the High School Building Trades program started again as they built one new home in Int'l Falls every year. It gave skills to the kids and provided affordable new housing for the people that were selected. Win, Win, Win. Tax base, affordable housing, and new stock!"*



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Adopt the recommendations of the 2019 Housing Study

- » Strategy 1.1: Use the recommendations of the Housing Study as a foundation for City actions to address and improve housing supply and conditions

### Goal 2: Ensure all housing meets or exceeds standards established in City ordinances

- » Strategy 2.1: Building code enforcement
  - Work collaboratively with property owners, including landlords and homeowners, to bring all residential properties up to code
  - Includes increased inspection enforcement at point of sale, increased rental housing inspection, and creating individual property owner plans to address violations and achieve code-appropriate property standards
- » Strategy 2.2: Housing preservation and rehabilitation
  - Identify city homes in need of rehabilitation and preservation, and work with owners and tenants to promote access to the Rehabilitation Loan/Emergency and Accessibility Loan Program provided by MN Housing, which provides rehabilitation loans up to \$27,000 on up to 15-year terms

### Goal 3: Encourage development of a variety of housing types and styles

- » Strategy 3.1: Flexible zoning for supply, diversity, and density
  - Administer the newly updated land use plan, zoning ordinance and zoning map to support development of a variety of housing types throughout all areas of the community

- Adopt the land use plan map and policies presented in this comprehensive plan, which will guide the community toward a range of housing types and densities.
- » Strategy 3.2: Housing for the aging and elderly
  - Partner with the Koochiching Economic Development Authority, the HRAs, and the Rainy River Medical Center to identify and partner with a developer of specialty age-appropriate housing for the elderly
- » Strategy 3.3: Allow development of accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
  - Consider modifying zoning ordinance to allow development of accessory dwelling units
- » Strategy 3.4: High School Building Trades
  - Work with ISD 361 to explore the restart of the High School Building Trades program

### Goal 4: Ensure a wide array of quality workforce housing options

- » Strategy 4.1: Support the development and preservation of affordable housing
  - Recent data shows that more than two-thirds of all renters are cost burdened, meaning there is a need for strategies that improve affordability for all community members
  - Work with the ARDC, the Koochiching County HRA, the International Falls HRA, and private developers to ensure that there are sufficient units accessible at a range of price points for all current and future residents
- » Strategy 4.2: Ensuring non-discrimination
  - Review and update rental license permitting language as needed to ensure non-discrimination against individuals and families seeking housing

## 4.4 Transportation

Mobility (“the ability to move freely and easily”) offers a useful perspective for thinking about transportation issues and decisions. In International Falls, this means looking at transportation through two lenses: through the lens of resident mobility, and through the lens of commercial and industrial needs and infrastructure.

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

The International Falls transportation system ensures safe and efficient movement for all kinds of users - from residents and visitors who walk, bike or drive to industrial operators who rely on the efficient movement of freight and commodities. The city supports active living and active transportation, adapts its infrastructure to an aging population, maintains its existing infrastructure, and is efficiently connected to road, rail and air networks to expand its reach and connection with people and markets.

#### Goals

- » Develop a comprehensive, integrated plan for infrastructure investment to create a connected network for all modes of transportation.
- » Institute a maintenance and repaving program for aging roads.
- » Establish a mutually beneficial partnership between International Falls and the railroads, particularly Canadian National Railroad, and the Minnesota Dakota & Western short-line railroad.
- » Ensure the long-term regional and international significance of the Falls International Airport



*Walkability and access are important for residents and business districts. Image: Northfield, Minnesota.*



*Cargo mobility is a key consideration for manufacturing, agriculture and forest products industries.*

## Existing conditions

### Pedestrian network

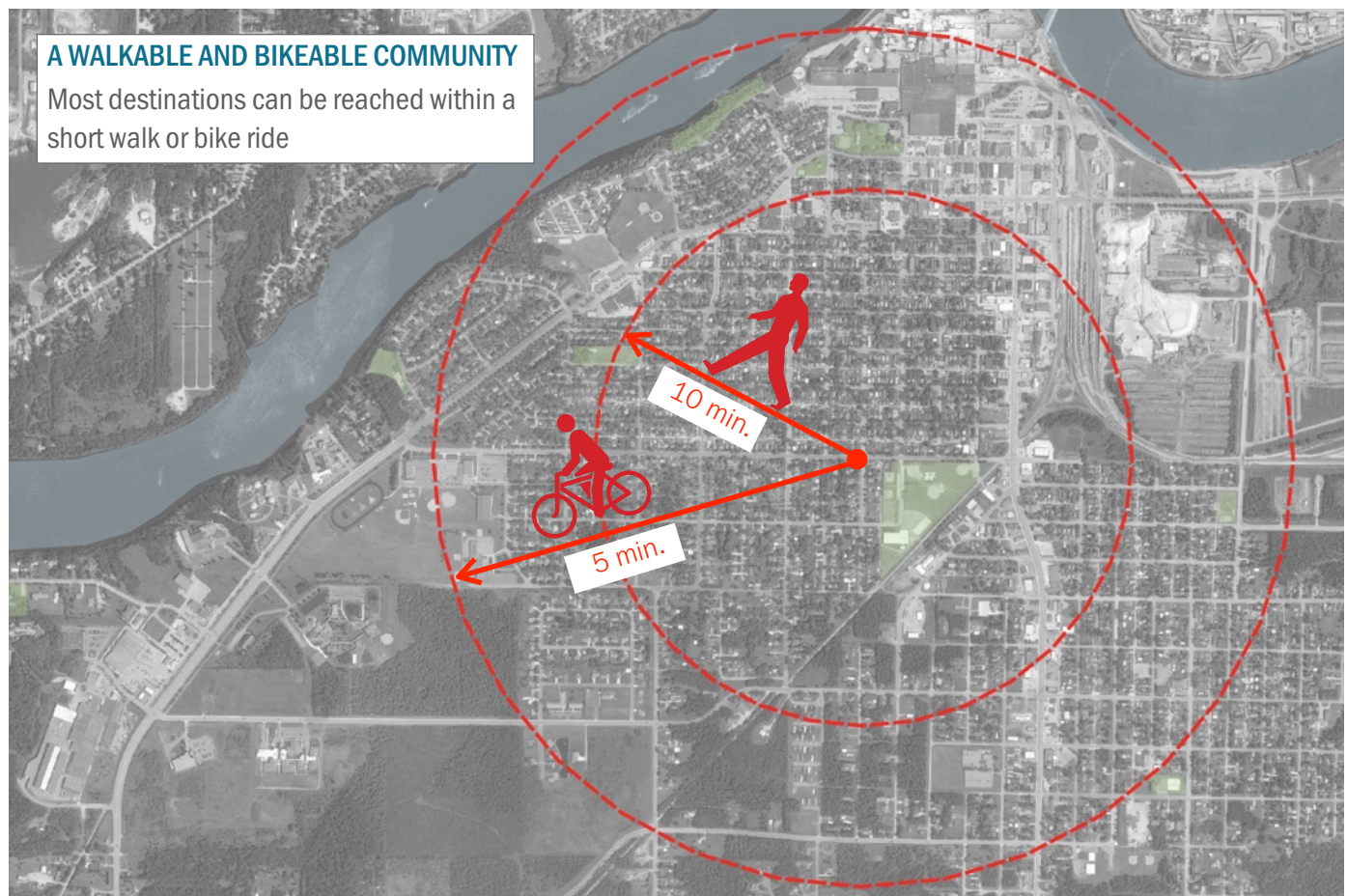
Walking is the most elemental form of transportation, free and accessible for people through the widest range of ages, incomes, and physical abilities. It is also a foundation for individual health and well-being.

International Falls has, for the most part, a well-developed pedestrian network. Sidewalks exist in the majority of the older parts of the city, though in some recently-developed areas they are not provided. Some International Falls neighborhoods and commercial areas present difficult conditions for walking due to long crossing distances, high speed traffic and disconnected land uses.

### Bicycle network

Bicycling is a useful, healthful and affordable transportation option offering mobility and connectivity for residents of all ages. In a city the size of International Falls, it can provide practical connection to everyday needs.

International Falls does not currently have a bicycle network connecting local destinations; however, it does offer two important regional trails (the Rainy Lake Recreation Trail - a paved trail connecting the city to nearby Ranier, and the Voyageur / Blue Ox trail - an unpaved facility on a former railway corridor), as well as a new trail along MN332.





## Transit system

Public transit is an essential component of mobility for individuals and households who do not have access to an automobile or who are not able to drive.

Public transit in International Falls is provided by Arrowhead Transit, a service of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC). It includes dial-a-ride and regular weekday and weekend bus service. The dial-a-ride service averages between 2,000 to 2,500 passengers per month.

Arrowhead Transit provides scheduled service to Bemidji every Wednesday. Service to Duluth is also available but only runs if at least five people sign up to ride.

No other intercity routes or service to or from International Falls is available (i.e., no Jefferson Line or Greyhound bus service). This poses barriers to out of town travelers, and especially to students attending Rainy River Community College from other Arrowhead communities. Arrowhead Transit offers free rides to college students during the first month of school each year to entice ridership.

## Roadway network: Motor vehicle and truck cargo

Three major highways provide regional connectivity for International Falls: US Highway 53, US71/MN11, and MN11 East. These highways gather the majority of automobile and truck traffic into and through the city, and also lead and connect to the International Bridge and land port of entry into Canada. The city's 34 miles of streets include County State Aid Highways (CSAH) and Municipal State Aid (MSA) streets.

Generally, traffic volumes in the city's major roadways are moderate, with no roadway exceeding 8,500 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), and the majority of roadways in the city being well below that level. Generally, a two-lane roadway (one direction each way) is considered adequate for carrying up to 10,000 motor vehicles per day.

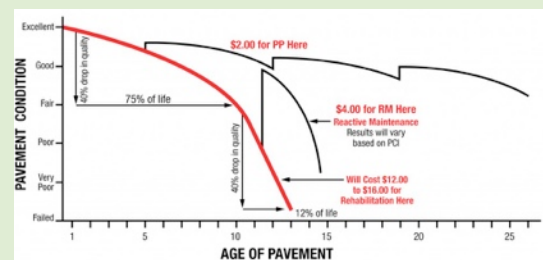
Maps showing traffic volumes and roadway classification are provided over the next two pages.



Arrowhead Transit providing service in International Falls.

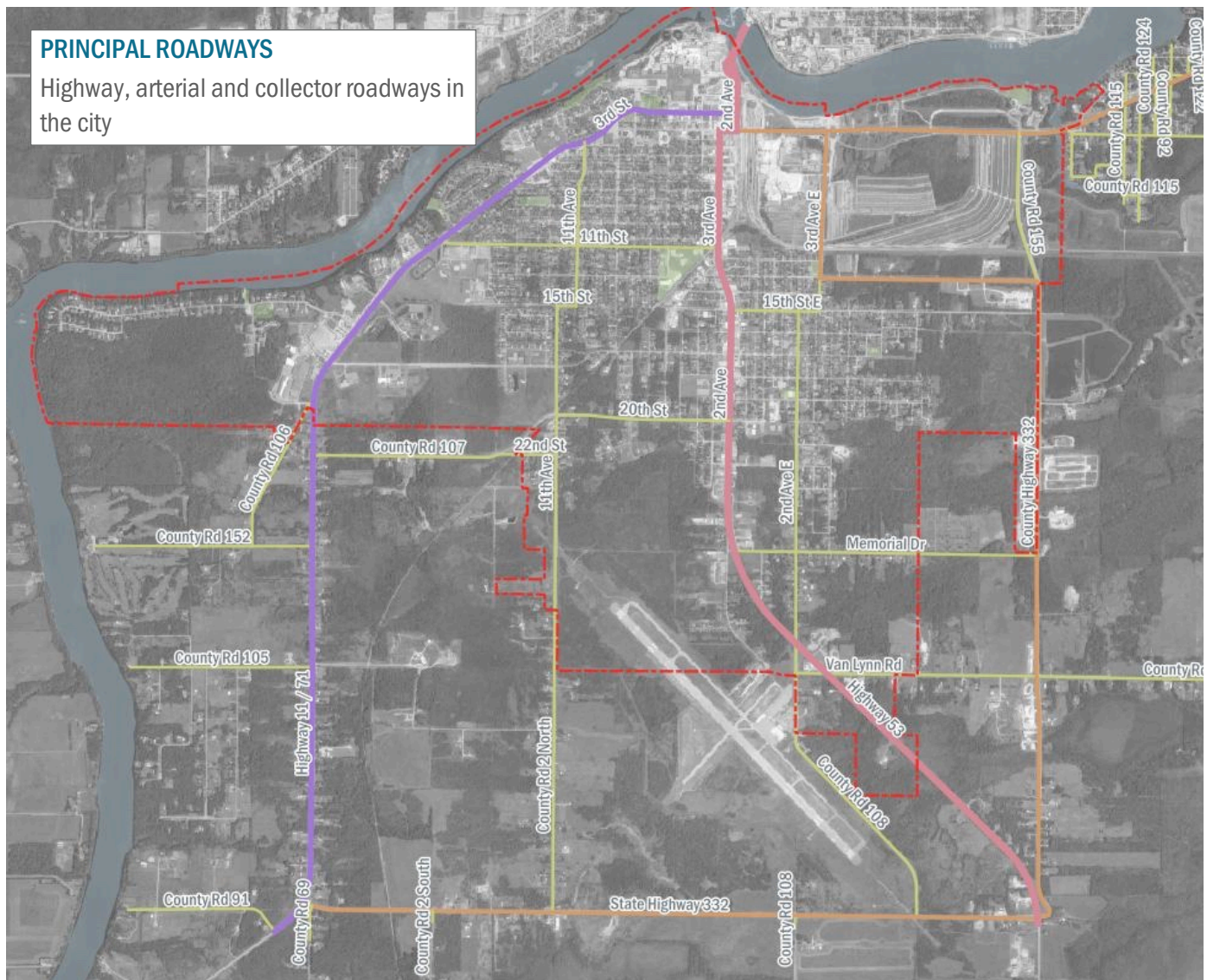
## Assessing and improving the condition of International Falls streets

Engineering consultant Widseth, Smith, Nolting (WSN) was hired to analyze street conditions in the city. About ten miles, or more than one quarter of all roadways in the city were classified as being in need of the most attention. Repairs are estimated to cost about \$4,272,000.



Costs for pavement preservation (in black) vs. reactive maintenance (in red). Timely repairs save money in the long-term by extending pavement life and enhancing safety, appearance, and maintaining pavement quality.





## Highway 53 (US53)

Highway 53 is the primary route for vehicle traffic coming from the south. Carrying visitors into the city, it also connects to the Land Port of Entry and Canada. Highway 53 also connects visitors to MN11, which runs east towards Voyageurs National Park. Currently the route hosts a variety of adjacent land uses, including commercial, industrial, open space, and residential.

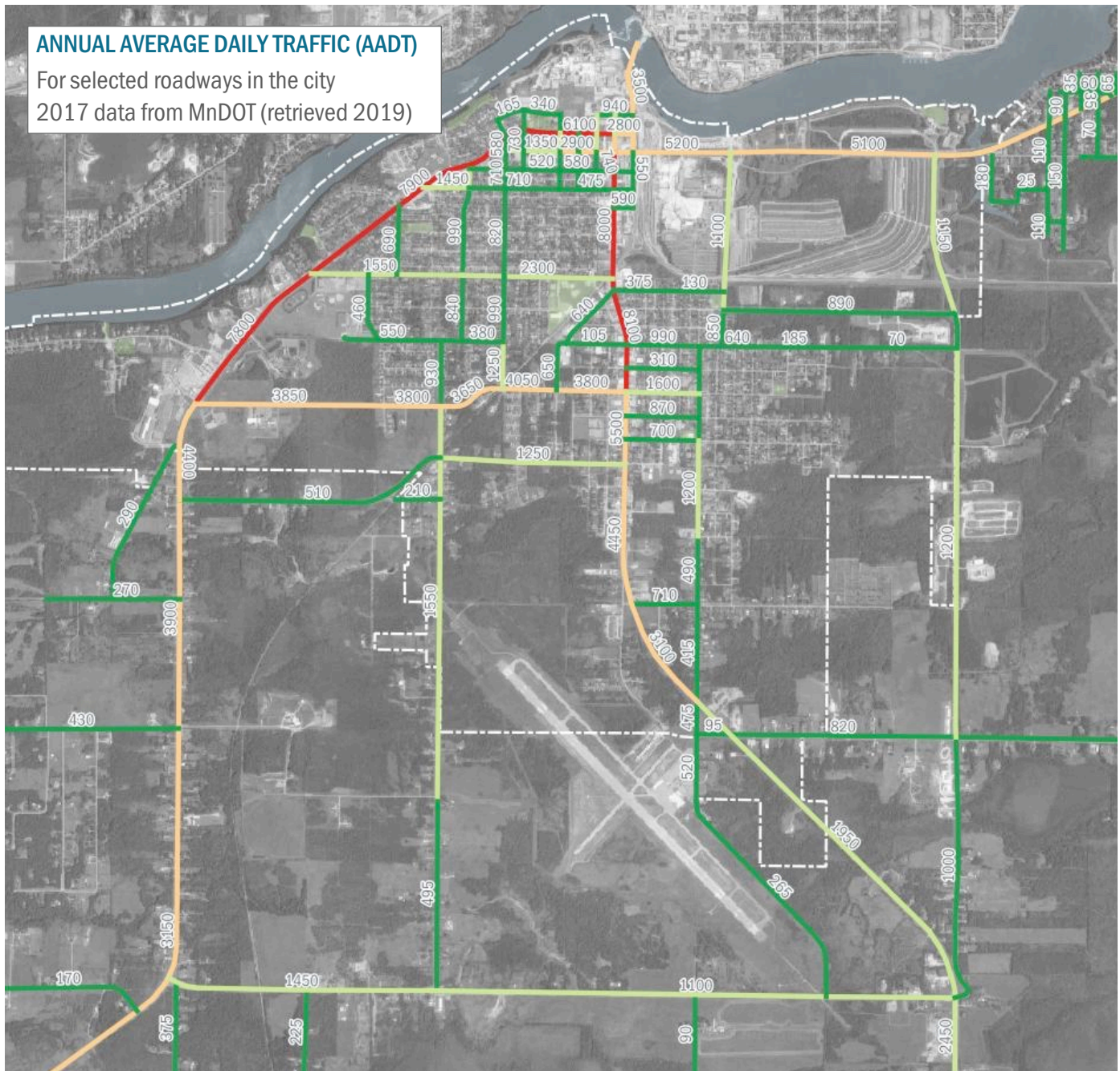
There is limited uniformity in landscaping and design across building lots. A MnDOT project to develop

Visual Quality Standards for rehabilitation of the road is currently ongoing, with the goal of improving the visual appeal and traffic flow along the corridor.

## Highway 71 (MN11/US71)

Highway 71 is a primary arterial roadway serving a variety of businesses including Stewart's Super One, Menards, AmericInn, Kmart, County Market, Hardees, and Border State Bank. Institutions and organizations along Highway 71 include Falls High School, Rainy River Community College, Rainy Lake Medical Center, and the International Falls Journal.

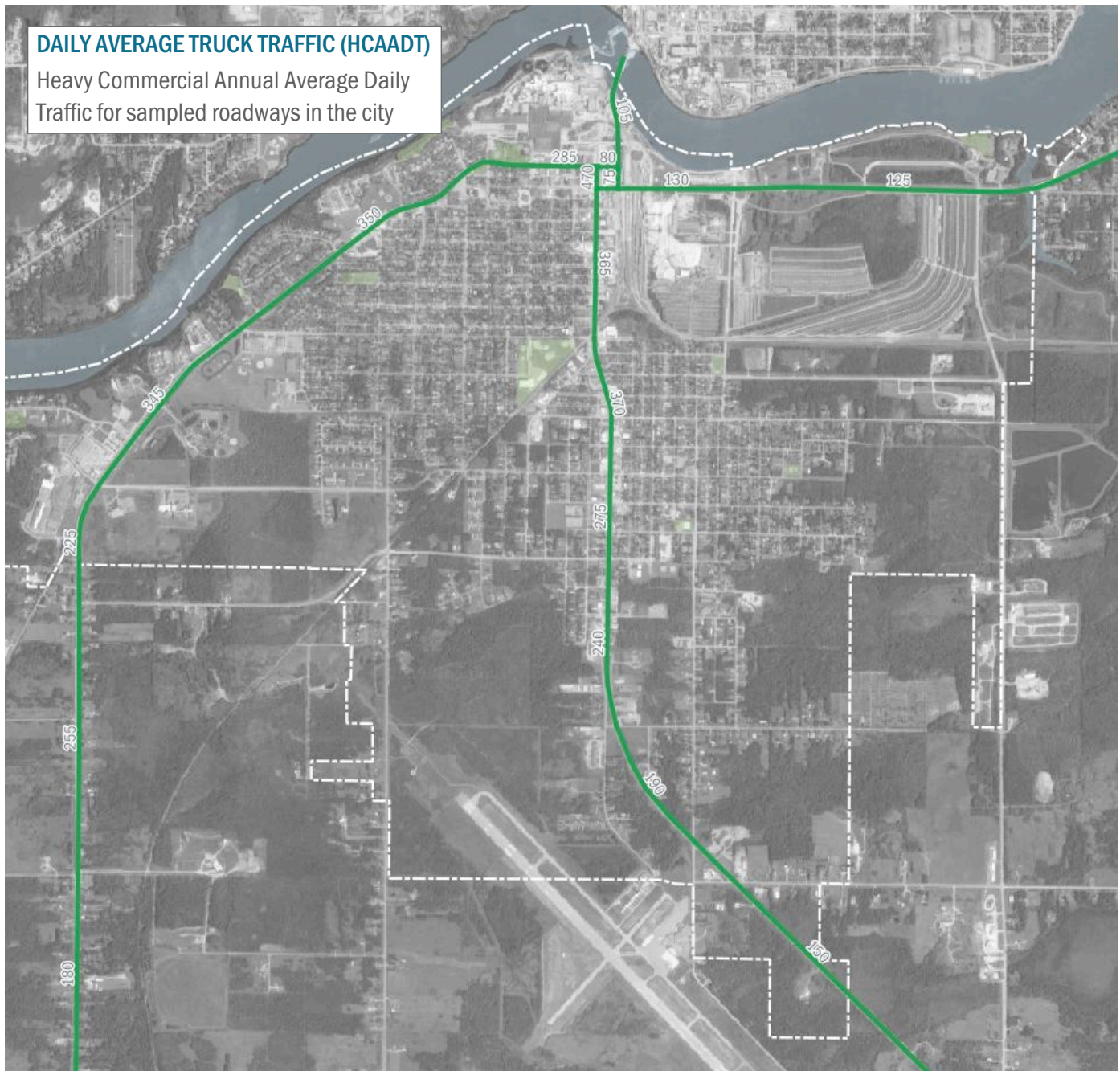




Maps showing annual average daily traffic (AADT) for roadways in and around International Falls. Lower volume roadways are shown in deeper green, higher volume roadways in red. In general, most roadways in the city have low to moderate volumes of traffic. Highways 53 (AADT 8,100) and 11/71 (AADT 7,100) carry the highest level of traffic in the city. A two lane roadway section (one lane each direction) can easily carry 10,000 AADT.







Map showing annual average daily traffic (AADT) for roadways in and around International Falls. Lower volume roadways are shown in deeper green, higher volume roadways in red. In general, most roadways in the city have low to moderate volumes of traffic. Highways 53 (AADT 8,100) and 11/71 (AADT 7,100) carry the highest level of traffic in the city. A two-lane roadway section (one lane each direction) can easily carry 10,000 AADT.

## Railway network

The Minnesota, Dakota & Western (MD&W) Railway (a subsidiary of PCA) is a short-line railroad serving the paper industry between International Falls and Fort Frances by providing rail service across the International Bridge. It connects to the Canadian National (CN) Railroad that passes through Ranier.

The railway switches pulpwood, chemicals and other raw materials used in the papermaking process and moves finished paper products for interchange with CN. MD&W has a fleet of 2,000 freight cars, four locomotives and four miles of track, as well as an International Falls car and locomotive shop staffed by 30 employees. In 2018, the railway handled approximately 10,000 railcar loads of materials.



*View of the MD&W locomotive shop and facility, located in International Falls.*

## Air transport system

Falls International Airport (Einarson Field, INL) is operated by the city and county under a joint powers agreement. The airport is included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems for 2017–2021, and is categorized as a primary commercial service airport with more than 10,000 enplanements per year.

The airport is one of nine key airports in the state of Minnesota and is an international port of entry with customs and immigration services available.

The airport offers daily commercial air service to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) and offers a 1.4 mile main runway with Instrument Landing System (ILS) and Visual Approach Slope Indicator (VASI) landing systems. The airport also operates a seaplane base on the Rainy River.

The airport recently underwent a two-phase, four year renovation of the Terminal Building costing over \$18 million to provide improved facilities and services for domestic and international passengers. A \$44 million, four phase, four-year project to reconstruct the main runway and adjoining taxiway is currently underway and is set for completion for 2022.



*The recently-upgraded interior of Falls International Airport.*



## Opportunity: Biking in International Falls

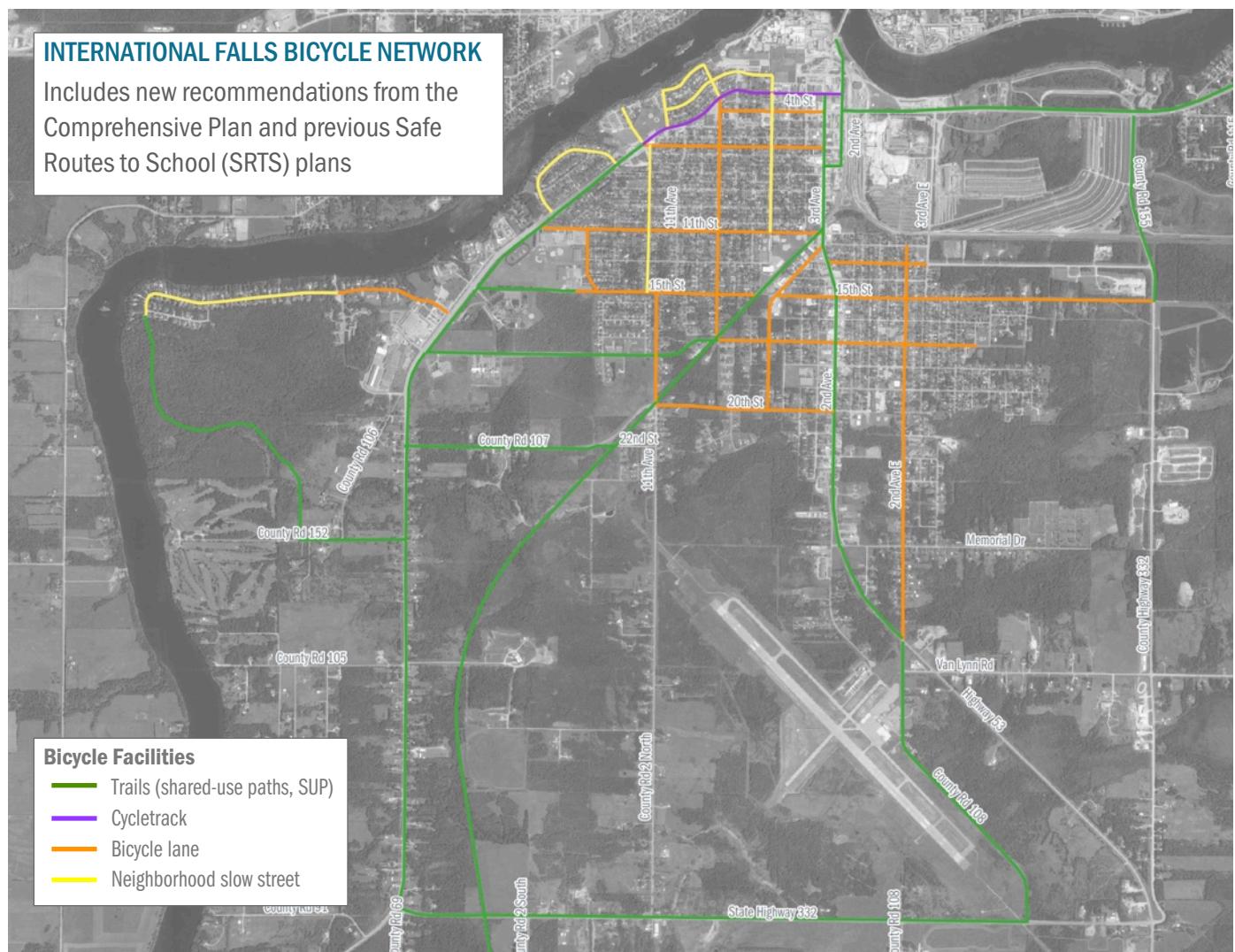
Two key regional trails, the Voyageur (Blue Ox) Trail and the Rainy Lake Recreation Trail, connect to International Falls. In addition, extensive Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning activities were completed by ARDC.

There is a great opportunity to better connect the existing trails and the planned SRTS infrastructure through the city and use these assets as a backbone for a high-quality network of routes that connect residents to schools, parks, businesses and other destinations, and attract bicycle tourists, and enhance quality of life year-round.



*Trails provide a great opportunity for residents to stay healthfully active and connect to destinations throughout their community.*

## Potential bicycle network



## Components of the city's bicycle network

The city's future bicycle network would be made up of the following types of facilities:

### Shared-use paths

A shared-use path (SUP, often also known as trail) provides a shared space for people walking and biking that is separate from motor vehicle traffic. Shared-use paths work better when they include fewer intersections with motorized traffic.

Shared-use paths are often provided along busier roadways where on-street bicycle facilities would be less comfortable or not feasible, and at locations along streams and railroads, and through parks. SUPs provide increased separation from motor vehicle traffic and are also used at parks and natural assets to provide more scenic routes.



*The MN I I trail is a shared-use path that provides space away from traffic for people walking and biking.*

### Neighborhood Slow Streets

Most residential streets in International Falls feature low traffic volumes and speeds. Neighborhood Slow Streets (also known as Neighborhood Greenways or Bike Boulevards) are designated residential streets that are lightly modified to calm motor-vehicle traffic and prioritize bicycle travel.

Neighborhood Slow Streets use some or several types of traffic calming elements (bump-outs, traffic circles, speed tables, or others) to make walking and biking easier and safer by reducing motor-vehicle speeds and improving safety for users of all modes. Route signs and pavement markings help highlight the street as a bikeway.



*Most residential streets can be easily and inexpensively converted into Neighborhood Slow Streets.*

### Bicycle lanes

Bicycle lanes designate a portion of the roadway for preferential use by bicycle riders. Lanes are defined by barriers, striping, pavement markings and/or signage. Bike lanes separate bicyclist and motorist travel flows and increase bicycle rider and driver comfort.



*A cycletrack (or protected bike lane) is a bike lane that is physically separated from automobile traffic.*



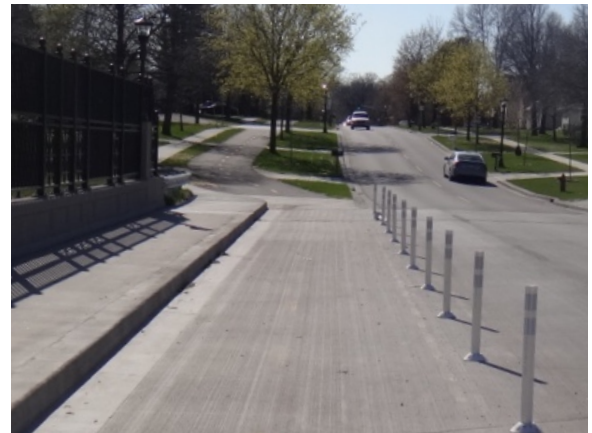
Two types of bicycle lane facilities are recommended for consideration in the city:

- » Cycletrack, or separated / protected bicycle lanes
- » Conventional bicycle lanes

### Separated / protected bicycle lane

Separated / protected bike lanes are on-street facilities that offer a designated space for bicycles and that are separated from motor-vehicle travel lanes by a buffer distance and by vertical elements like bollards, planters, or concrete walls.

This type of facility offers the highest level of traffic separation and user comfort, and invites greater use of bicycling by a wider range of the population.

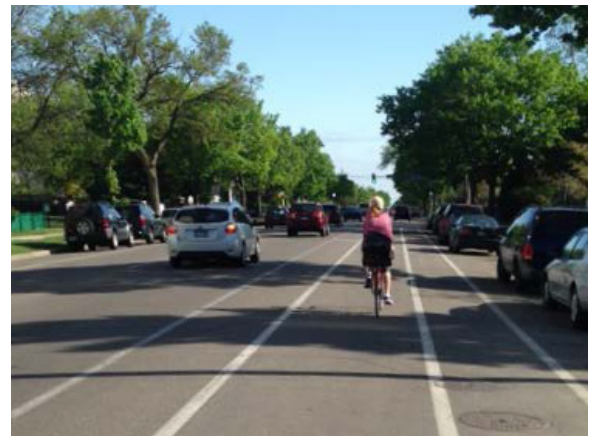


*Separated / protected bicycle lanes can be quickly and inexpensively deployed using plastic bollards and paint.*

### Conventional bicycle lane

Conventional bicycle lanes are on-street facilities that offer a designated space for bicycles and that are adjacent to motor-vehicle travel lanes.

Bicycle lanes can be made more comfortable by increasing their distance from motor-vehicle travel lanes through the addition of a buffering space. When provided next to on-street parking, they sometimes also include a buffer space between the bicycle lane and parked cars.



*Bicycle lane that includes a buffer space on each side of the rider.*

## Other network components

### Bicycle parking

Visible, secure bicycle parking is essential for making bicycling a viable travel option to destinations around the city. The two best options for bicycle parking are the “Inverted U” and “Post and loop” types.

Parking areas should be visible and prominent, located near a building’s main entry, and located clearly and conveniently along a bicycle riders’ natural path to access a site.

Key locations include schools, parks, and neighborhood commercial nodes. Destinations near bicycle trails should include bicycle parking.



*“Inverted U” bicycle parking rack.*

## Wayfinding

A comprehensive and user-friendly wayfinding system is an key component of successful pedestrian and bicycle networks. Fortunately, a working wayfinding system can be deployed quickly and inexpensively.

Wayfinding elements include signs, markings and maps and informational kiosks. They help make a bicycle network more easily understandable and usable, and encourage residents and visitors to use the walking and biking facilities that are provided to connect to local destinations, including businesses and parks. Over the long term, a comprehensive identity for the trails and bikeways in International Falls can be used to brand the city's system and communicate its attractiveness to travelers.



*Wayfinding sign with direction, destination and distance information.*

## Economic benefits of investing in biking

### Stimulates local economies and creates jobs

- » Walkable, bikeable places attract bicycle tourists and other travelers who spend on average \$18-\$80 per day in the community.
- » Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects create 8 to 12 jobs per \$1 million of spending. By comparison, road infrastructure projects create 7 jobs per \$1 million of expenditures.

### Improves recruitment of talent and workers

- » Over 75% of millenials say it is important for their city to offer opportunities to live and work without relying on a car.
- » CEOs recognize that bikeable places attract top talent. Companies are relocating their offices to more bikeable areas to better attract the well-educated 25 to 35-year-olds they seek to hire.

### Increases sales for retail businesses

- » Retail revenue per hour of occupied parking is higher for bike parking (69¢ per square foot) than for auto parking (19¢ per square foot).
- » People who walk or bike to businesses spend less per visit but visit more often, resulting in more money spent overall each month compared to customers who arrived by car.

### Increases commercial and residential property values

- » Reducing traffic speeds by 5–10 mph can increase residential property values by approximately 20%.
- » In communities across the United States, a one-point increase in Walk Score (which assigns a value to addresses based on walkability) is associated with a \$700-\$3,000 increase in home values.

*Source: Regional Active Transportation Plan for Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright Counties, Minnesota.*



## Opportunity: Mobility hub

Shared-use mobility is an approach to transportation that improves travel options for a community's residents by providing access to transportation options that are shared among users - including carshare, bikeshare, public transit, scooters, carpools, taxis and app-based ride-hailing services, shuttles and more.

Shared-use mobility systems decrease total transportation costs for individual users, and help support the growth of pedestrian and bicycle-oriented facilities and uses in communities.

Shared-use mobility systems are not just for large cities: smaller communities and travel destinations like college towns, national parks, tourist destinations and small towns, can be successful locations for these innovative options.

A Mobility Hub is a transportation facility that brings together all the elements of the shared-use mobility model: convenient access to multiple modes of transportation, walkability, and density of uses and destinations. International Falls, with its compact size, attractive downtown, border location, and high number of visitors, is well suited for this transportation model.

Exploring the development of a Mobility Hub, or at the very least inviting providers of shared-use mobility options (bikeshare, scooters, carshare and ride-hailing apps) to offer some of their options in the city could help make travel in and around International Falls easier and more convenient - for both residents and visitors.

Access to a Mobility Hub could also help city households keep more of their income - for example, by helping a three-car household become a two-car household, or helping a two-car household become a one-car household.



*Bikeshare systems and scooter rentals are some of the options included in the shared-use mobility model.*



*A mobility hub brings car-sharing, ridesharing, public bikes and scooters and electric vehicle charging to a single location that is convenient to a community's residents. Image courtesy of Sophia von Berg.*

### Electric vehicle (EV) charging

Availability of electric vehicle charging stations can be a tool to attract travelers to specific locations in a community.

Working with mobility providers to offer charging infrastructure in or near the downtown (especially if combined as part of other travel services in a Downtown Mobility Hub) may be a useful strategy to increase visitation and potential customers to local businesses.

## Opportunity: Improving and/or relocating the International Bridge

For many years, area residents have expressed interest in making improvements to the current International Bridge connecting International Falls with Fort Frances and the rest of Canada.

The future relocation of the Land Port of Entry provides an opportunity to plan for a publicly-owned International Bridge that would maintain the existing traffic patterns that are important for local businesses while providing a safer, more attractive, and toll-free International Boundary crossing.

Issues with the current International Bridge include:

- » Expense of tolls (which total over one thousand dollars per year for some households and work against closer employment, shopping and economic integration between International Falls and Fort Frances - and which also makes the crossing less attractive for tourists)
- » Location of the crossing: initially sited to facilitate movement between the paper mills, the current configuration complicates cross-border movement and customs operations, forcing all international traffic to drive through the paper mills area, creating congestion and unsafe conditions for people driving, walking or bicycling
- » Potential capacity and maintenance issues for the existing bridge facility

The closing of the Fort Frances mill opens up opportunities to reconsider the location of the International Bridge and for acquiring right-of-way to facilitate development of a new crossing that also provides opportunity for improving the configuration of the US Customs Land Port of Entry facility that was initially planned in 2011 but which was recently (in summer of 2019) placed on hold.



*Potential location for the new International Bridge.*



*The new bridge and associated facilities could become a tourist attraction in their own right.*

A location directly across from the former Resolute mill may offer substantial benefits to both the International Falls and the Fort Frances communities. In addition, the structure itself, as well as trails and visitor center developed around it could become a signature facility in the area and a prominent tourist attraction.

Coordination between Federal, State, Provincial and Local governments would be needed to acquire the land and begin work for future funding to build the bridge. This may also be an opportunity to eliminate the need for tolling and the barrier to cross-border integration it presents.

## Opportunity: Connecting to the continent's rail transportation network

*(Adapted from the NGKF recommendations)*



The rail crossing at International Falls / Ranier is the busiest rail crossing on the US northern border, and a key component of CN Rail's network connecting ports in western Canada with Chicago and Texas.

Nearly 20% of U.S. imports cross at this location, including containerized goods from Asia and bulk goods from Canada.

Local short-track railroad Minnesota Dakota & Western (MD&W) provides a proven option to move freight from truck to rail and then interconnect with CN Rail on a daily basis.

Currently, MD&W's largest customer is the PCA mill but they also provide service to smaller industrial customers in the city. The company currently puts 18 cars on and takes 18 cars off of the CN Rail line at the switch in Koochiching County every day.

This conduit to the CN line could accommodate more customers who need short-track access to the "hook and haul" service provided by CN in order to gain access to the entire continent by rail.

## Opportunity: Falls International Airport / Einarson Field

*(Adapted from the NGKF recommendations)*



Falls International Airport is a US Port of Entry with customs clearance and the 2nd longest runway in Minnesota at 7,400 feet in length.

The airport receives a federal annual operating subsidy through the Essential Air Services (EAS) program. SkyWest, a Delta Airlines partner, flies one daily flight two days a week and two flights daily five days a week to the Minneapolis - St. Paul airport (MSP).

Although there are no scheduled international flights it is a "24/7" international airport giving it an advantage over MSP, which can only receive and clear international flights during daytime hours.

Freight is not currently handled at the airport. Duluth International is the nearest airport with scheduled air cargo service. Small package freight is a current opportunity for the airport, especially for high-value and/or time-sensitive goods.

This international airport with an extra long runway and US Customs clearance is a competitive advantage for the city.



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Develop an integrated and connected multimodal network

- » Strategy 1.1: Adopt a Complete Streets policy
  - Calming traffic, decreasing intersection crossing distances, and expanding pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure will help create a more healthy, livable and attractive community
- » Strategy 1.2: Pedestrian, Bicycle and Trails plan
  - Develop a comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan for the city
  - Integrate trail connectivity to key bike, ATV and snowmobile trails in the surrounding area
- » Strategy 1.3: Wayfinding
  - Develop one or several trails kiosks downtown and near main access points to help residents and visitors connect to trails and destinations in and around the city
- » Strategy 1.4: Increase transit options
  - Work with Arrowhead Transit and Rainy River Community College to enhance transit service
  - Work with bus and transit companies to activate bus service to the city
- » Strategy 1.5: New International Bridge
  - Work with partners to explore opportunities for developing a new bridge at a new location

### Goal 2: Institute a maintenance and repaving program for aging roads

- » Strategy 2.1: Implement a proactive, preventative approach to roadway maintenance
  - Follow the recommendations of the WSN report
  - Use the Street Assessment and Evaluation Report to begin implementation of road reconstruction projects

### Goal 3: Coordinate partnership with area railroads

- » Strategy 3.1: Short-line rail access
  - Coordinate with MD&W to leverage short-line rail access and expand connection of local firms to global transportation networks

### Goal 4: Coordinate partnership with area hauling, trucking and logging services

- » Strategy 4.1: Collaborate for efficient transportation
  - Work closely with trucking companies to ensure operational issues are promptly resolved and services can proceed efficiently

### Goal 5: Ensure the long-term regional and international significance of the Falls International Airport.

- » Strategy 5.1: Airport upkeep and enhancement
  - Continue to pursue funding opportunities for airport upkeep and enhancement, including FAA's Airport Improvement Program (AIP), private funding, and MnDOT Office of Aeronautics (continuing partnerships for airport planning and state and local funding of non-eligible costs)
- » Strategy 5.2: Cargo / freight operations
  - Work with air cargo operators to market the potential for operations, especially small package freight for high-value and/or time-sensitive goods

## 4.5 Economic development

A prosperous economy is part of a community's foundation for a high quality of life for its residents. Business opportunity, access to employment and good-paying jobs, and both local startups and established industries all contribute to a healthy economy.

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

Living in International Falls means having multiple options for stable and well-paid employment, and building a prosperous, healthy life. Doing business in International Falls means having access to a well-educated and hardworking workforce, to the land and space needed for thriving businesses and industry, and to a transportation network that efficiently connects with markets and suppliers. Being an aspiring entrepreneur in International Falls means having support and access to resources that can help turn an idea into a real startup and growing it to success.

#### Goals

- » Support the growth and development of existing local businesses
- » Establish and expand affordable, high capacity, fast technology infrastructure
- » Invest in local economic incubation
- » Strengthen the industrial/manufacturing sector by attracting new businesses



*The International Falls area offers a wealth of opportunities to entrepreneurs who are ready to capitalize on the area's many assets. Image: Greentech Manufacturing, a family-owned business making industry-leading outdoor furnaces, air handlers and unit heaters - selling worldwide and based right in the city.*

*"80% of all economic growth in a community comes from its existing business base and it costs 100 times more to recruit new business, making the retention and expansion of existing businesses a top priority for any economic development initiative"*

*~ from the NGKF Report*

## Existing conditions

### Employment and industry

According to US Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) figures, there were approximately 3,644 jobs in International Falls in 2015 (the most recent year available). In the same year, the total number of jobs in Koochiching County was 4,791. Approximately 3/4 of all jobs in the county are located in the city.

### Principal employers

The principal employers in the county (those with twenty or more employees) are:

Business	Number of employees
Packaging Corporation of America	582
School District 361	250
Local governments (County and City)	207
Rainy Lake Medical Center	181
United Health Group	150
US Customs and Border Protection	150
Good Samaritan	100
Menards	85
Littlefork Medical Center	67
County Market Grocery & Liquor	66
Wagner Construction	69/100 seasonal
Rainy River Community College	59
Kmart	58
Voyageurs National Park	51/100 seasonal
Essentia Health	53
Northstar Publishing	30
Keep Enterprises	30
Shannon's Plumbing & Heating	23

*Data source: City of International Falls*

Major employers in the city include Packaging Corporation of America, School District 361, local government, and the Rainy Lake Medical Center.

### Employment by business sector

Industry sector	Number of employees	% of all jobs in the city
Manufacturing	695	22%
Trade, transportation, utilities	722	23%
Information	74	2%
Professional and business services	97	3%
Education and health services	339	11%
Leisure and hospitality	353	11%
Other services	87	3%
Public administration	375	12%
Miscellaneous	352	11%
TOTAL, ALL SECTORS	3,094	100%

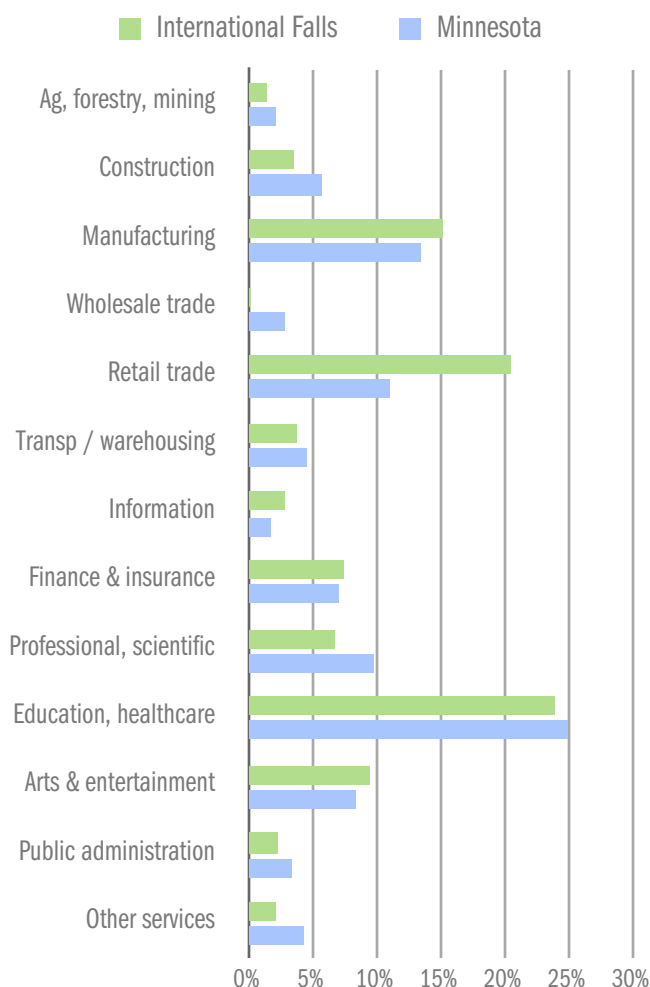
*Data source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2016*

Employment in International Falls rests primarily on two business sectors: the manufacturing sector, and the trade, transportation and utilities sector.

Together, these two business sectors make up nearly 1/2 of all jobs in the city. International Falls provides the majority of employment opportunities for almost all the major industry sectors in the county, especially for the manufacturing, information, and public administration sectors.



### Employment by business sector in comparison to Minnesota overall (percentage of workers per industry)



Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates

US Census data (ACS 2017 table DP03) can be used to compare employment in business sector between the city and Minnesota overall (the totals differ from MnDEED tables because of how industries within sectors are grouped).

Generally, retail trade (with its generally lower wages) is more strongly represented in the city's economy than the state overall. Manufacturing is slightly more represented, while construction industries, wholesale trade, and professional sectors are less represented.

### Total annual wages earned per business sector

Industry sector	Annual wages
Manufacturing	\$50,307,453
Trade, transportation, utilities	\$17,516,757
Information	\$2,462,725
Professional and business services	\$2,333,678
Education and health services	\$16,507,970
Leisure and hospitality	\$4,629,755
Other services	\$1,054,181
Public administration	\$19,464,466
Miscellaneous	\$15,362,263
TOTAL, ALL SECTORS	\$129,639,248

Data source: Mn DEED Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) 2016.

The manufacturing sector, and trade, transportation and utilities sector account for slightly more than 1/2 of all the wages earned in International Falls. Education and health services, and public administration are also high generators of employment wages. Leisure and hospitality, and professional and business services are relatively smaller contributors to wages in the city.

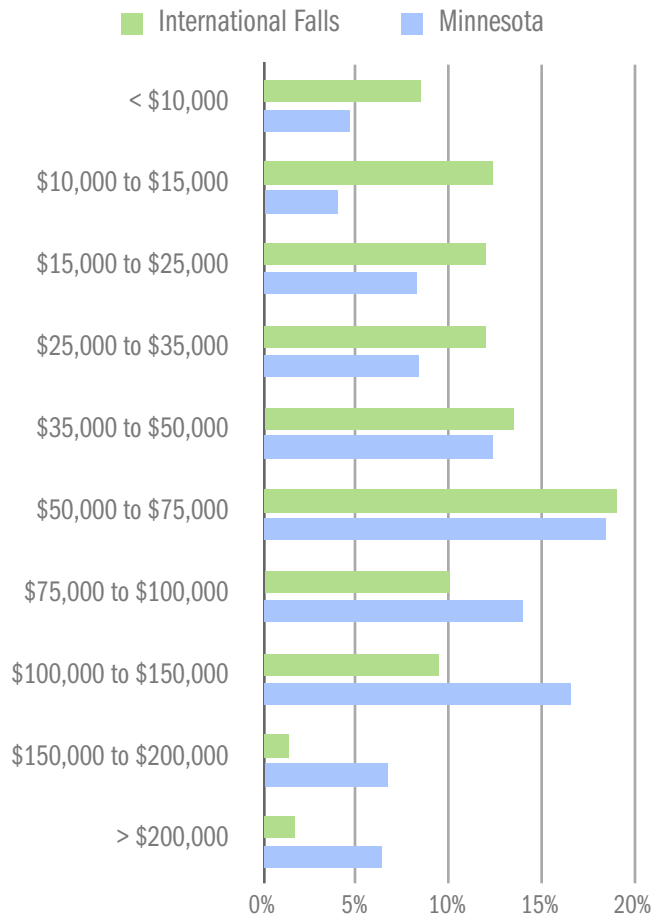
### Type of employment

Type	Number	Percent of total
Private wage and salary worker	2,252	82%
Government worker	347	13%
Self employed	133	5%
Unpaid family worker	0	0%
TOTAL WORKERS	2,732	100%

Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates

## Income: workers and households

Income per **HOUSEHOLD** (percentage of households at each level)

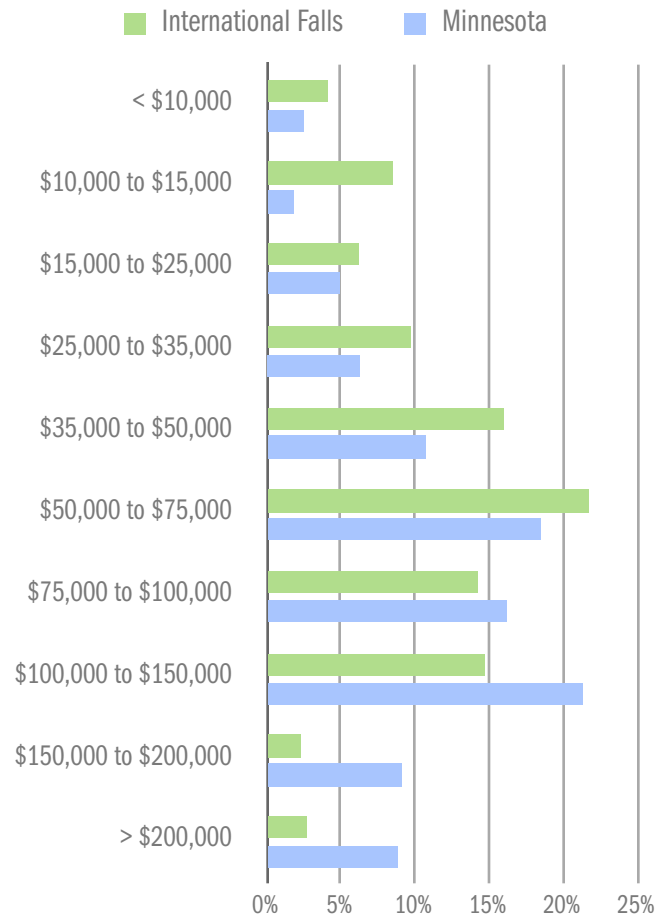


Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates

The city's median household income is \$41,241, about 90 percent of the amount in Koochiching County (\$47,131) and about three-fifths of the amount in Minnesota (\$65,699).

Households include both "family households" (two or more people living together in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption) and "non-family households" (a person living alone or two or more unrelated people living in the same housing unit).

Income per **FAMILY** (percentage of families at each income level)



Data source: US Census Bureau ACS 2017 5-year estimates

The city's median family income is \$53,420, about 85 percent of the amount in Koochiching County (\$61,643) and about two-thirds of the amount in Minnesota (\$82,785).

Poverty in the city is much higher than in the county and the state overall - about 37% of all families with children (more than one out of three families) living in the city experience poverty - about 1.5 times the rate for the county (26%) and more than three times the rate in the state overall (11%).

## Economic development SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

(Adapted and condensed from the NGKF study)

### Strengths

- » Family-friendly neighborhoods
- » Wide variety of activities and public events
- » Beauty and serenity of the natural environment
- » Many cultural and arts programs
- » Abundance of natural and wildlife resources and hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation; Voyageurs National Park
- » Active industry and manufacturing, Foreign Trade Zone, available land for commercial and industrial development
- » Access to road, air and rail transportation
- » High quality city services
- » Strong educational systems from pre-school through college; Rainy River Community College
- » Businesses that provide friendly, quality service
- » Opportunities as border community
- » Opportunities for community involvement, including Voyage Forward

### Weaknesses

- » Community brand as “Icebox of the Nation”
- » Geographic location & distance from major cities
- » Declining and aging population
- » Lack of regulated/licensed, flexible child care options
- » Lack of economic growth and new job creation
- » Shortage of skilled and post-secondary educated workers, shortage of appropriate job skills training
- » Need quality housing options at all price points
- » No ready-to-occupy, existing & available commercial and industrial buildings
- » Lack of economic development policies and incentives guidelines
- » Lack of quality hotel options
- » Wetland constraints on growth & costs to remediate
- » Lack of retail offerings
- » High timber pricing

### Opportunities

- » Improving educational systems and learning options, - Rainy River College (Vo-Tech: law enforcement, cosmetology, welding), explore four-year programs
- » Voyage Forward initiative & resident support of economic development and diversification
- » Supporting local entrepreneurship and nurturing existing local businesses
- » Tourism, Arts, Culture, Community Events & Activities - better and increased promotion
- » Healthcare facilities and availability of services
- » Increasing exports to Canada (products and services)
- » Diversification of jobs, skill levels and union/non-union jobs
- » Strengthening business retention / enhance workforce development and planning
- » Stargazing/Research Telescope!

### Threats

- » Contraction or loss of PCA and the associated satellite industries
- » Over-reliance on a single industry, lack of diversity in industry and business
- » Wage disparities between PCA and other employers
- » Loss of hunting, fishing or opportunities for outdoor recreation (from natural disasters, inadequate management, disease, etc.)
- » Canadian currency exchange rate fluctuation
- » Reduction or loss of tourism
- » Loss of essential air service subsidy, downsizing of service to airport
- » Loss or reduction of policy or funding support from state or federal government
- » Aging of population profile (natural aging plus loss of youth population)
- » Health and sustainability of forest / wood resources
- » Harmful regulations re forest management practices



## Opportunity: Focusing on “target industries” for economic growth

The Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF) study identifies two general types of targets for economic development efforts in Koochiching County:

### Target Group 1: Local opportunities and economic gardening

First implementation priority

Sectors that should be **grown organically** and locally through

- » Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)
- » Small Business Growth
- » Entrepreneurship

### Target Group 2: Recruitment of outside businesses

Sectors that are worth **pursuing through investment attraction**

- » Marketing and Recruitment
- » Business Development
- » National and International Initiatives

The target list and strategies were developed through extensive research and were based on the specific conditions presented by the county’s unique local economy. As the county’s principal location for economic activity and employment (approximately 3/4 of all jobs in the county are located in International Falls) the recommendations from the study are particularly applicable to the city’s economic development efforts.

The recommendations are selected from the entirety of potential options, and respond to:

- » How well they align with existing local industries and with potential opportunities to develop / grow economic clusters
- » How they fit within the existing local capacity (in term of existing assets and resources)
- » How they match existing local labor in terms of headcount, skills, and education
- » Matching between industry skill requirements and available training resources
- » Geographic and supply chain adequacy
- » Expected cost and business climate suitability

A summary of the target industry recommendations are presented here.

Industry / sector target: <b>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing &amp; Hunting</b>	
Local focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Greenhouse, Forest Nursery &amp; Floriculture Production</li> <li>» Aquaculture and/or Aquaponics</li> <li>» Other Animal Husbandry</li> <li>» Timber Tract Operations (Small and Mid-Sized Operations)</li> </ul>
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Timber Tract Operations (Small and Mid-Sized Operations)</li> <li>» Forest Nurseries &amp; Gathering of Forest Products</li> </ul>
Subsector for recruitment	<i>Timber and Forestry   in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing &amp; Hunting sector</i>
Rationale for recruitment in this subsector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The county's strongest industry cluster and knowledge base</li> <li>» Raw material available for certain standing species and all tops and limbs</li> <li>» Maximizes use of available resources while diversifying employment base with other small and mid-sized employers</li> </ul>
Industry / sector target: <b>Manufacturing</b>	
Local focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Fruit &amp; Vegetable Preserving &amp; Specialty Food Manufacturing</li> <li>» Other Wood Product Manufacturing</li> <li>» Bakeries &amp; Tortilla Manufacturing</li> <li>» Other Food Manufacturing (Spices, Ice, etc.)</li> <li>» Cutlery &amp; Handtool Manufacturing</li> <li>» Printing &amp; Related Support Activities</li> <li>» Furniture &amp; Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturing</li> </ul>
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Food &amp; Beverage Manufacturing</li> <li>» Other Wood Product Manufacturing</li> <li>» Converted Paper Product Manufacturing</li> <li>» Cutlery &amp; Handtool Manufacturing</li> <li>» Boiler, Tank &amp; Shipping Container Manufacturing</li> <li>» Basic Chemical (Bio / Cellulosic) Manufacturing (** with PCA collaboration)</li> </ul>
Subsector for recruitment	<i>Wood Products   in Manufacturing sector</i>
Rationale for recruitment in this subsector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The county's strongest industry cluster and knowledge base</li> <li>» Select raw material available</li> <li>» Maximizes use of available resources while diversifying employment base with other small and mid-sized employers.</li> <li>» Large products are a good candidates for rail freight</li> </ul>

<i>Subsector for recruitment</i>	<i>Hand Tools   in Manufacturing sector</i>
	» Wood is used as a key component for many hand tools
<i>Rationale for recruitment in this subsector</i>	» Excess wood and alternative tree species can be used from the nearby wood basket
	» A low volume, premium product opportunity within a growing industry
<i>Subsector for recruitment</i>	<i>Food &amp; Beverage Manufacturing   in Manufacturing sector</i>
	» Capitalize on the high water quality and abundant supply
<i>Rationale for recruitment in this subsector</i>	» Large advantage to bottling at the source
	» Premium product opportunity by leveraging Minnesota water source and offsetting any cost disadvantages

<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Professional, Scientific &amp; Technical Services</u></b>	
Local focus	» Scientific Research & Development Services ("Cold Box 2.0")
Recruitment	» Scientific Research & Development Services in Cold Weather Testing
<i>Subsector for recruitment</i>	<i>Cold Weather (Lab) Testing   in Professional, Scientific &amp; Technical Services</i>
	» Makes use of existing climate conditions
<i>Rationale for recruitment in this subsector</i>	» Opportunities to expand beyond vehicles and grow the types of non-destructive testing that could be performed

<b>Industry sector target: <u>Tourism, Hospitality &amp; Food Services</u></b>	
	» Travel Accommodations (Bed & Breakfast)
	» Recreational Vehicle (RV) Parks & Recreational Camps
Local focus	» Scenic & Sightseeing Transportation Services (Water, Air, Land)
	» Non-scheduled Air Transportation (Flight Schools; Tourism; etc.)
Recruitment	» Travel Accommodations (Hotels & Motels)
	» Recreational Vehicle (RV) Parks & Recreational Camps
<i>Subsector for recruitment</i>	<i>Travel Accommodations   in Tourism, Hospitality &amp; Food Services</i>
	» Focus on the natural beauty of the area, Voyageurs National Park, and recreational opportunities
<i>Rationale for recruitment in this subsector</i>	» Focus on hospitality companies accustomed to the seasonality of the Minnesota weather, and experience with both hotels and campgrounds
	» Include companies who handle vacation hotels rather than business hotels

<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Wholesale Trade</u></b>	
Local focus	» Transportation Industry Training (Rail, Truck) » Batch Manufacturing for Electronic Shopping & Mail-Order
Recruitment	» Transportation Industry Training (Rail, Truck)
<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Other Commercial Services</u></b>	
Local focus	» Commercial & Industrial Machinery & Equipment Repair & Maintenance » Additive ("3D") Printing to Mail Order
Recruitment	» Commercial & Industrial Machinery & Equipment Repair & Maintenance
Subsector for recruitment	<i>Commercial Equipment &amp; Machinery Build, Service and Repair   in Other Commercial Services sector</i>
Rationale for recruitment in this subsector	» Build on small manufacturing requirements in the region and across the Midwest. The region is still an agricultural and manufacturing hub with diverse equipment and machinery needs » Import/Export is important so the border presence and FTZ status are advantages
<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Public Administration</u></b>	
Local focus	» Expanded Program Offerings via Rainy River Community College - Academic - Technical - Athletic
Recruitment	» Field Offices for State of MN Departments & Agencies
<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Construction</u></b>	
Local focus	» Highway, Street & Bridge Construction
Recruitment	» none recommended
<b>Industry / sector target: <u>Media, Arts, Entertainment &amp; Recreation</u></b>	
Local focus	» Amusement Parks & Arcades (Go-Karts; Paint Ball; etc.)
Recruitment	» Motion Picture & Video Industries » Gambling (** State and/or First Nation collaboration)
Source: Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF)	



## Opportunity: Federally designated Opportunity Zone sites

Opportunity Zones are a new community development program established through the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017 to encourage long-term investments in low-income and urban communities nationwide.

International Falls has been designated as an Opportunity Zone, with a very large (3,200 acre) area that includes significant portions of the Highway 53 Corridor, the airport, previously-identified redevelopment sites, residential locations, and areas currently under consideration for annexation.

### Why Opportunity Zones are attractive to investors

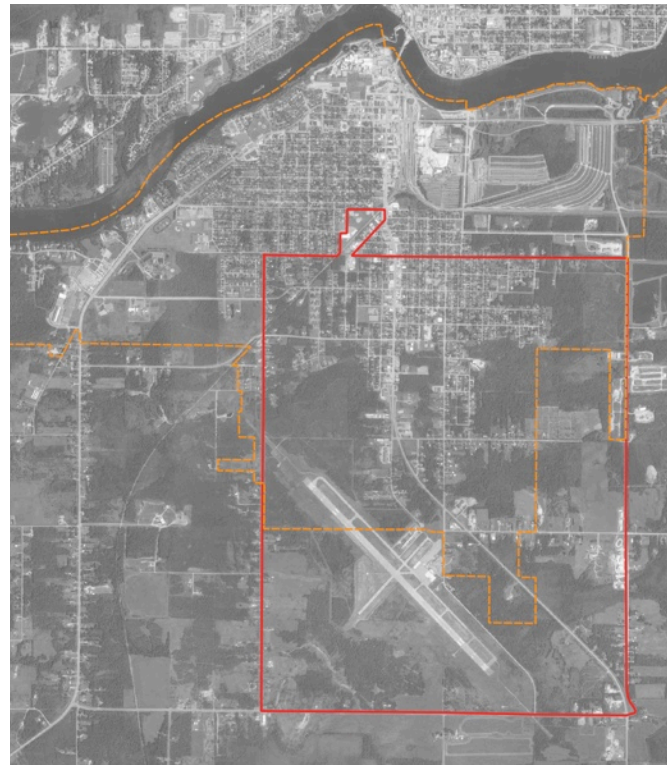
When an investor sells an asset they generate a capital gain on which they must pay taxes.

If the investor reinvests that capital gain within 180 days into a designated Opportunity Zone, they are eligible - depending on the amount of time they keep their investment in place - to reduce their initial capital gains obligation by 15%, and the tax on gains from their Opportunity Zone investment to \$0.

The longer an investor leaves their money in place within an Opportunity Zone, the more their capital gains tax liability is reduced:

- » After five years: reduction of taxes by 10%
- » After seven years: reduction by 15%
- » After 10 years no taxes due on gains from their Opportunity Zone investment

Investments can be used for virtually any type of development or business activity - including business startup, rehabilitation of housing, development of



*View of the city's federally designated Opportunity Zone (outlined in red).*

distribution centers or warehouses, development of workforce housing, and other potential opportunities.

### Potential benefits to International Falls

Investors and brokers describe Opportunity Zones as one of the most beneficial tax reforms in decades for their interests - which means that there could be significant potential to attract new investment to International Falls and other communities that are part of this program.

Vigorous marketing of the city and its many assets might attract new investment opportunities. It may also be useful to consider implications from the Opportunity Zone designation in the city's conversations regarding annexation.

## Opportunity: Redevelopment sites

The Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA) worked with the city to identify and track potential redevelopment sites in and near the area of the city. These sites are zoned primarily for commercial or industrial uses, and were also reviewed by the NGKF study.

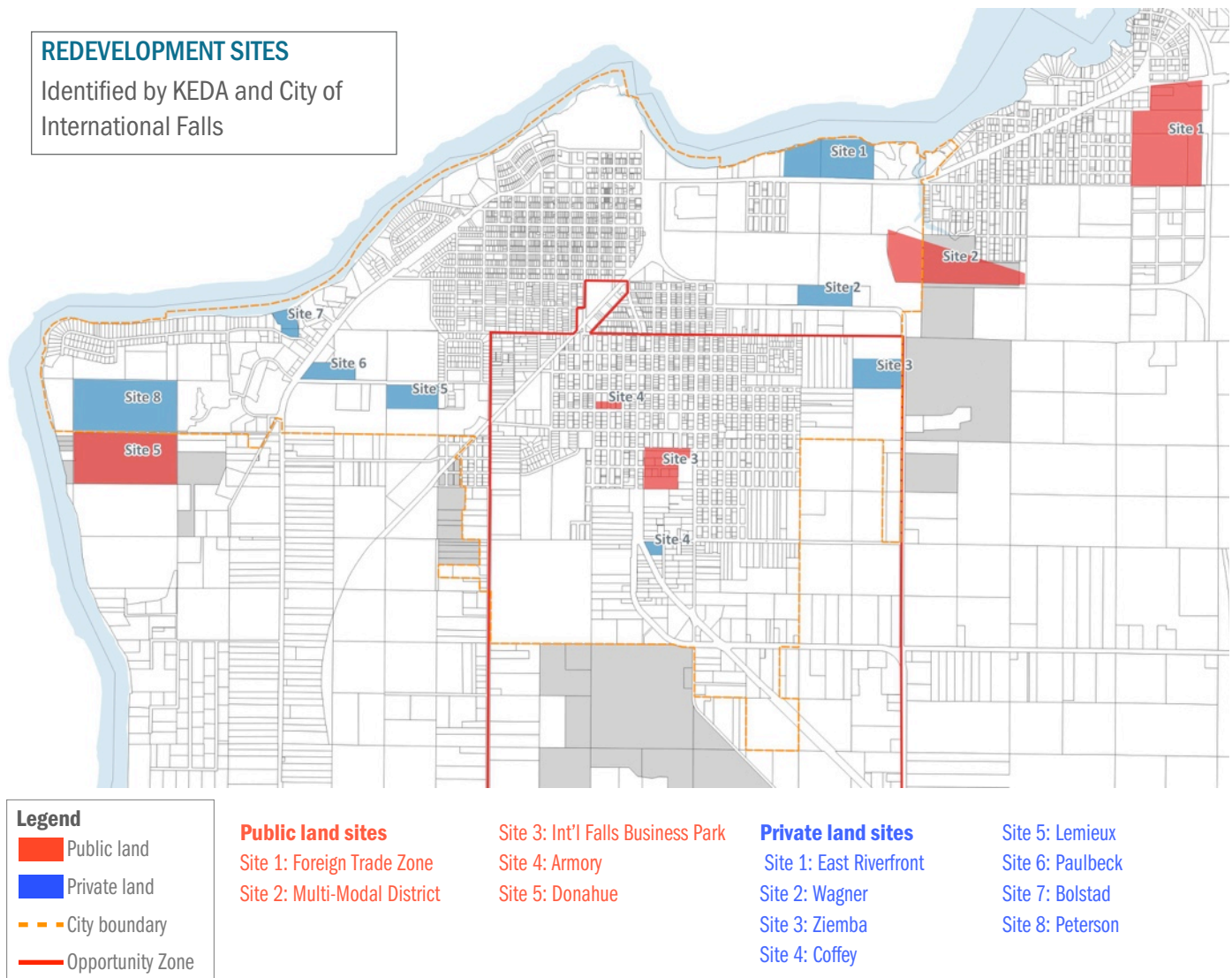
Development sites fall into two categories: publicly-owned and privately-owned. There are five publicly-owned parcels and seven privately-owned sites.

### Marketing the redevelopment sites

*“A detailed and branded Property Feature Sheet should be developed for every available site. It should be available in a handout and digital copy as well as placed on the Economic Development Partnership’s website and other regional and state websites.”*

~ from the NGKF study

## Map of redevelopment sites





## Publicly-owned sites

There are five publicly-owned redevelopment sites in and around International Falls.

### Public site #1: Foreign Trade Zone site



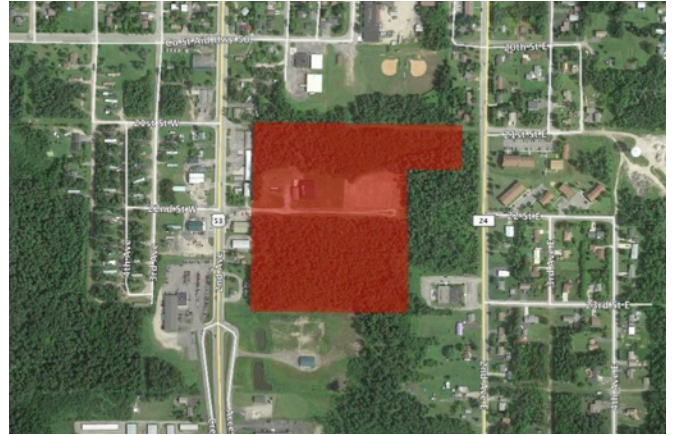
Large (100 acre) site adjacent to CN Rail main line, siding and access road. Though outside the city, its development as a trade hub could have important implications for the city. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently jointly owned by the city and county.

### Public site #2: Multi-modal Distribution Center



Large (64 acre) site owned by the International Falls EDA and partially within the city. Sits along Highway 155 / 332 and includes a rail spur into the property. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned M2-A manufacturing.

### Public site #3: Business Park site



The business park site is owned by KEDA and is located within the city's federal Opportunity Zone, near the airport and along Highway 53. It is four acres of greenfield and includes utilities. It is zoned M1-B Manufacturing.

### Public site #4: Armory site

The site of the former Armory is envisioned as an ideal location for a data center or other similar technology use and is within the city's federal Opportunity Zone.

### Public site #5: Donahue site



Large (74 acre) site located near the river and straddling the city's present boundary at its western end. Undeveloped / greenfield site. Scheduled for annexation by 2021, and zoned as residential.

## Privately-owned sites

There are eight privately-owned redevelopment sites in and around International Falls.

### Private site #1: East Riverfront site



Large private site (48 acres) adjacent to and with Rainy River / Lake access, served by a walking and biking trail connecting to the city's downtown and eastward to Ranier. Next to Irv Anderson Park and amphitheater. Ideal for a residential and restaurant / entertainment / hotel development. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned C-2 commercial.

### Private site #2: Wagner site



This 30 acre site is located near Highway 332. Conversations with the current owner indicate potential for either commercial or manufacturing uses. Ensuring that this site retains flexibility for both

will support developer interest and investment in the area. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned M2-A manufacturing.

### Private site #3: Ziemba site

Large site (22 acres) adjacent to Highway 332. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned M2-B manufacturing and located within the city's federal Opportunity Zone.

### Private site #4: Coffey site

Former restaurant site on Highway 53, four acres and zoned C-2 commercial. Utilities already sited and located within the city's federal Opportunity Zone. Conversations with the current owner indicate interest in potential development of a corner store and pizza shop, with additional area used for recreational boat storage.

### Private site #5: Lemieux site

Eighteen acre site located on Keenan Drive. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently under Airport Zone B.

### Private site #6: Paulbeck site

Twelve acre site located on Keenan Drive. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned C-2 commercial. Utilities available.

### Private site #7: Bolstad site

Small (7 acre) site located near the city's big-box commercial district and Rainy River Community College, with views to river. Undeveloped / greenfield currently zoned C-2 commercial.

### Private site #8: Peterson site

Large (94 acre) site along the Rainy River. Undeveloped / greenfield site currently zoned R-1 residential.



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Retain, attract and grow business

- » Strategy 1.1: Adopt the recommendations of the NGKF study
  - Use the study's recommendations to coordinate business development and recruitment
- » Strategy 1.2: Develop a "shop local" campaign
  - A strong local economy will attract new companies and businesses, and support the ongoing vitality of the city
- » Strategy 1.3: Support and enhance existing businesses
  - Seek opportunities to learn about and solve barriers to retention of businesses like a Business Mentorship Program or Business Retention Program.
- » Strategy 1.4: Develop and distribute key informational resources, such as guidelines and best practices, to support decision-making and viability of existing businesses
- » Strategy 1.5: Directory of locally-owned businesses
  - Work with the Chamber of Commerce to expand the function of the current directory of local businesses to allow residents and other businesses to easily find what they need from their local shops. For an example, please see [www.ppna.org/shop-powderhorn](http://www.ppna.org/shop-powderhorn)
- » Strategy 1.6: Support focused redevelopment in downtown
  - Development in the downtown area should be consistent with the area's existing character, emphasize a pedestrian-oriented scale for development, and link to existing pedestrian and bicycle networks
- Downtown redevelopment should include retail, professional services, arts and entertainment, and housing
- Mixed-use developments are recommended for incorporating multiple uses and creating a people-centered environment
- » Strategy 1.6: Support the redevelopment of the Highway 53 area
  - Rehabilitation and redevelopment of the Highway 53 area will increase commerce and tourism, as well as efficient transportation across the city
  - Rehabilitation will also prioritize safe mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists
- » Strategy 1.7: Attract larger businesses
  - Use the recommendations from the NGKF study to create strategic plans to attract large businesses that require a large employee base
  - If possible, businesses should consider brownfield sites to revitalize existing urban areas
- » Strategy 1.8: Develop a pipeline of trained interns and potential new staff into existing and new businesses
  - Partner with Rainy River Community College to connect students and recent graduates with local employers, and support the staffing needs of new and growing businesses
- » Strategy 1.9: Support the development of business incubators for local start-ups
  - Business incubator spaces provide small spaces that are affordable to start-up businesses
  - Work with local developers and property owners to develop a business incubator in the walkable downtown area of the city (attractive to software or tech start-ups), as well as in the

industrial areas of the city (attractive to manufacturing start-ups)

## Goal 2: Focus on competitiveness

- » Strategy 2.1: Establish and maintain public and private partnerships
  - Collaborate with private entities, when possible
- » Strategy 2.2: Provide business incentives
  - Consider comprehensive incentives to support healthy growth of existing businesses and encourage them to remain in the city, and to attract new businesses
- » Strategy 2.3: Review land use and zoning standards
  - Zoning standards should reflect current needs of community while creating new opportunities for residential and commercial growth
- » Strategy 2.4: Attract technology innovation
  - Partner with technology companies to provide additional resources for existing businesses, and attract new businesses and professionals
- » Strategy 2.5: Seek grant opportunities
  - Public community-based projects should be partly funded by outside grants
- » Strategy 2.6: Market redevelopment and investment opportunities
  - Widely advertise and publicize the city's Opportunity Zone and the identified redevelopment sites
  - Develop information sheets and disseminate widely through the development and investment community
- » Strategy 2.7: Coordinated marketing campaign
  - Develop a focused and compelling marketing campaign that provides a unified message and presents a dynamic image of the city

## Goal 3: Provide a high quality life

- » Strategy 3.1: Preserve community character
  - Increase the use and vitality of downtown
- » Strategy 3.2: Encourage community pride
  - Public events and art, vibrant open spaces, City marketing efforts, conservation of natural resources, and preservation of “small-town” character should focus on developing strong community pride
- » Strategy 3.3: Invest in a high-quality education
  - Support opportunities within public and private entities to provide young people with positive professional experiences
  - Continue to partner with the School District and Rainy River Community College

## Goal 4: Retain and attract residents

- » Strategy 4.1: Accommodate a variety of housing types
  - Accommodate housing for all ages, including a variety of housing types, including single-family, multi-family and mixed-use developments.
- » Strategy 4.2: Recruit a variety of businesses
  - Seek opportunities to recruit a variety of businesses in a range of industries - for example, including technology businesses to create new employment opportunities and attract outside professionals
  - Follow the recommendations of the NGKF study
  -

## 4.6 Parks and recreation

Parks, trails and opportunities for recreation are a key component for quality of life in a community. Stewardship of the city's current assets, and planning for their improvement, are important steps for the city's future success.

Parks and trails play a vital role in the social, economic, and physical well-being of a community's residents. They provide access to recreational opportunities, increase property values, spur local economies, improve safety, and mitigate stormwater runoff and other environmental threats.

Parks and trails bring beauty, connection, and health into a city's everyday life, and are powerful tools for improving quality of life and building more vibrant communities.



*On the trail along State Highway 11, connecting International Falls and Ranier.*

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

International Falls plans, maintains, and operates a parks and recreation system that welcomes and engages residents and visitors through abundant beauty, recreational opportunities, social connection, and fun and learning for all people. The parks and recreation system is connected to the city's neighborhoods, daily destinations and natural assets, and meets the needs of individuals, families, and the community.

#### Goals

- » Maintain a sufficient amount of public land to meet the recreational needs of existing and future residents
- » Assure that private development will adhere to City standards for open space and for environmental sustainability
- » Offer the community a citywide interconnected trail system with access to parks and regional trails that meet recreation and transportation needs

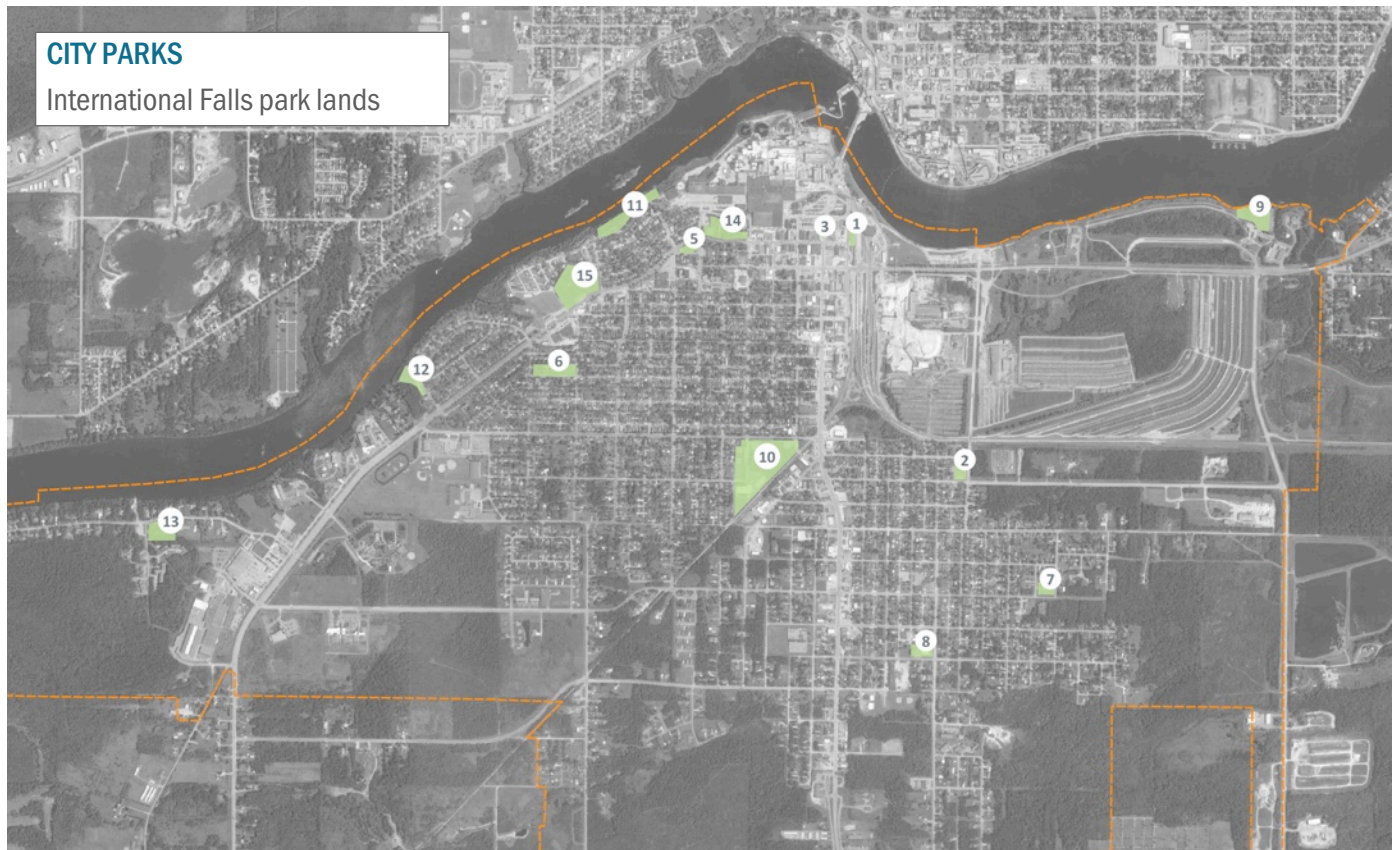
#### Assets in the city

The opportunities for recreation that a community offers are an important component of the enjoyment and quality of life that its residents can access.

International Falls offers numerous parks, walking, biking and snowmobile trails, opportunities for boating, fishing and hunting, and numerous natural and woodland areas in its immediate vicinity.

These are also a great asset for inviting visitors into the city and building economic activity and employment.

## Existing conditions



### City parks

The city owns and operates twelve parks within the city limits. One additional park (City Beach) is located east of the city. The city also owns and operates two boat launches providing public access to the Rainy River.

Different activities and opportunities are distributed through different parks - e.g., playground equipment is provided at some but not all parks, some are green spaces only, and programming and organized sports opportunities are provided at specific locations.

City parks include:

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| 1) Burlington Park                        | 12) Riverview Park   |
| 2) Carson Lupie                           | 13) Shorewood Park   |
| 3) Centennial Park                        | 14) Smokey Bear Park |
| 4) City Beach                             | 15) Tony Rizzo Field |
| 5) Eighth Avenue Park                     |                      |
| 6) Eighth Street Park & Rink              |                      |
| 7) Green Acres Park                       |                      |
| 8) Holler Rink, Fields & Basketball Court |                      |
| 9) Irvin N. Anderson Amphitheater         |                      |
| 10) Kerry Park                            |                      |
| 11) Riverside Park                        |                      |

It should also be noted that the ISD 361 schools campus offers park facilities for the use of neighboring families when school is not in session. However, these facilities are not owned, maintained or programmed by the city.



## Gaps in parks access

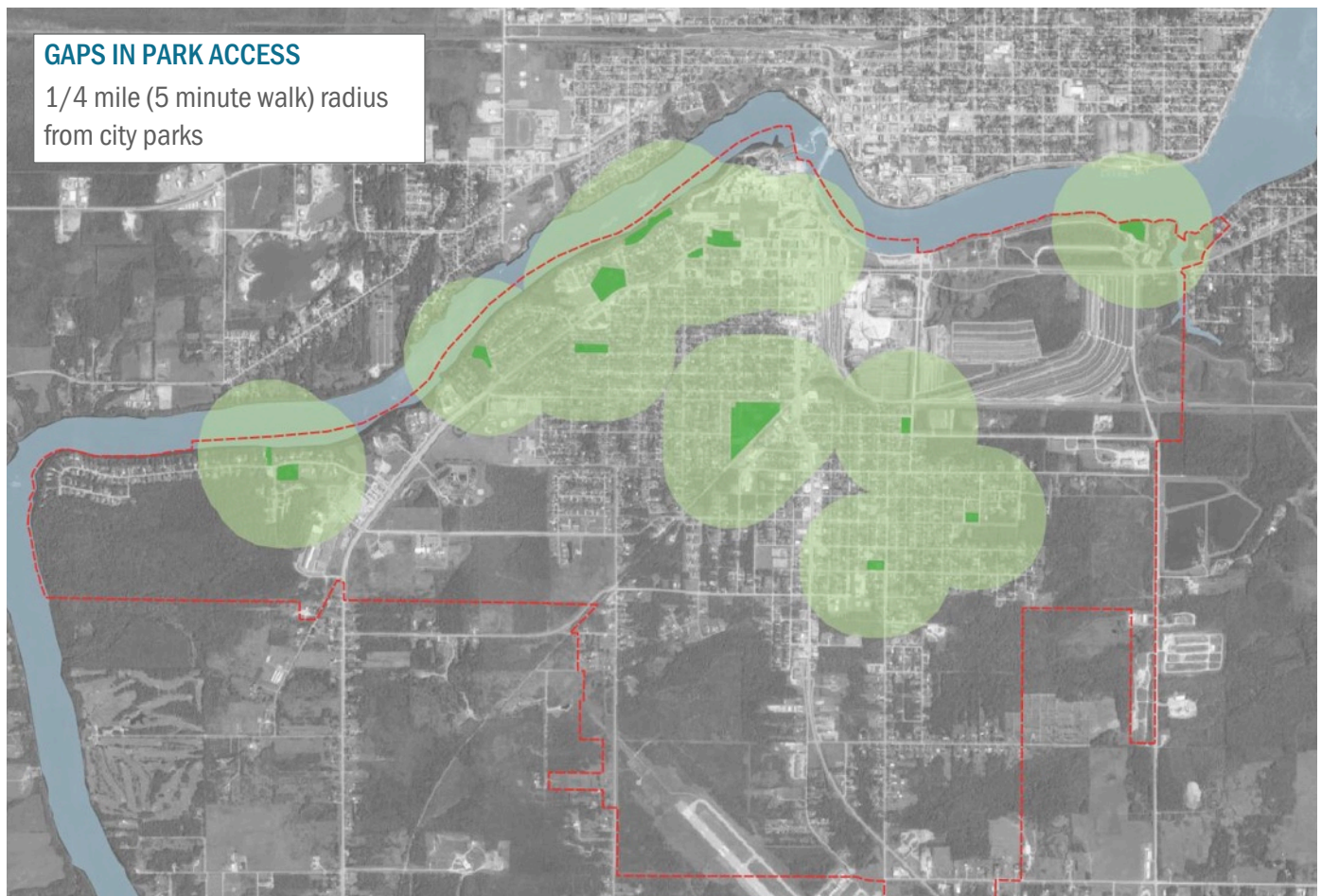
There are some gaps in park access in the city, where parks are farther than a five minute walk from residences.

Generally, a five minute (1/4 mile) walk distance to parks is desired by families walking to nearby residential playgrounds. Ready access to neighborhood recreational amenities is an important component of resident satisfaction and of real estate valuation for residential districts.

The map below provides a view of those areas, though it does not take into account the differences in equipment (for example, playground equipment) that may or may not be available at each location. Developing such a summary as part of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan may be helpful for future planning of programming and playground equipment and conditions inventories.



*At a concert at the Smokey Bear Park bandshell.*



## Opportunity: A sports center for year-round use

Numerous residents and city leaders have discussed the possibility of developing a sports and fitness complex that includes indoor facilities and could be used year-round.

The facility would serve as a sports hub for local residents and families and also as a draw for hosting regional high school and collegiate tournaments. The center could capitalize on International Falls' renown and tradition for winter sports, and also provide for other activities and recreational opportunities for the rest of the year.

This idea was discussed as far back as the city's 1966 Comprehensive Plan, which noted that parks are an important driver for residents' quality of life and economic development and that access to community parks in the city was "far below ... other cities."

That plan recommended providing an indoor (year-round) recreational facility including a new hockey arena and indoor sports center.

Many other communities, including Fort Frances, offer similar facilities to their residents. In the case of Fort Frances, their Memorial Sports Center offers:

- » Two ice surfaces
- » 25 meter (75 ft) length pool
- » Two glass back squash courts
- » Weight room with universal and free weights
- » Fitness room with treadmills, steppers and bikes
- » Community auditorium
- » Conference room

### An example from another Minnesota city

Grand Marais (population 1,360) developed a new 38,000 s.f. YMCA year-round facility in 2015 by partnering with Cook County, the Cook County School District and the YMCA of Duluth.

The facility has proven to be a fantastic success and great asset to the community. Facilities include a full court gymnasium, a pool and aquatics center, multipurpose meetings spaces, weights and cardio areas, and an aerobics studio.



Image courtesy of JLG Architects.

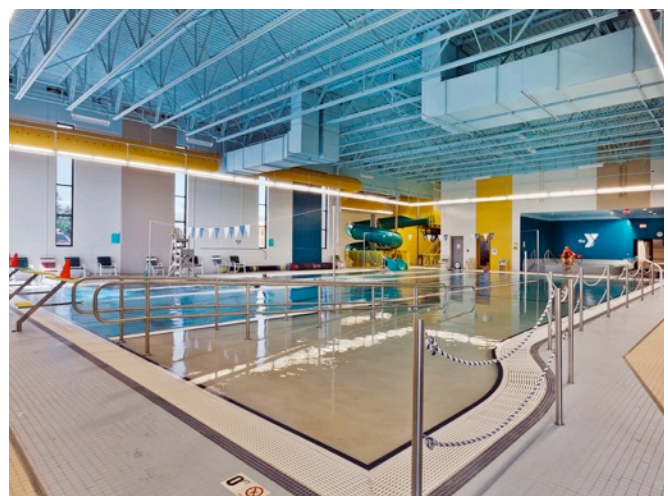


Image courtesy of JLG Architects.

## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Park system planning

- » Strategy 1.1: Develop a Master Park Plan to ensure adequate parks, facilities, open spaces, and trails are provided for the community
  - Use the Master Park Plan to guide implementation of any proposed projects
  - Study the potential of public / private partnerships to establish and operate facilities and programs

### Goal 2: Provide parks and indoor / outdoor recreation areas

- » Strategy 2.1: Enhance quality of life for current and future generations by providing adequate parkland, natural areas, and indoor / outdoor recreation areas to fulfill future needs
- » Strategy 2.2: Use the existing and future park and natural areas to shape future land use and development decisions
- » Strategy 2.3: Develop a year-round indoor arena to provide access to sports and community activities for children, young people and families
- » Strategy 2.4: Review condition of existing facilities and develop updates as needed
  - Consider addition of splash pad / spray facilities at local parks
  - Review condition of Kerry Park and explore upgrades to Kerry Park Arena

### Goal 3: Create and maintain an interconnected trail and sidewalk system for recreation and transportation

- » Strategy 3.1: Develop a pedestrian and bicycle plan that summarizes existing walk / bike issues and offers strategic guidance and solutions for improving user safety, comfort, convenience and

connectivity and growing use of walking and biking for everyday travel in the city

- » Strategy 3.2: Provide a trail and sidewalk system that emphasizes a connection with the natural environment while also providing connection to urban and suburban areas in the city
- » Strategy 3.3: Tie the various parks into the interconnected trail system effectively and link the trail system to those of the adjacent area and any regional park and trail systems

### Goal 4: Provide for the conservation and preservation of natural resources

- » Strategy 4.1: Preserve natural resources as valuable open space and an important aspect of the city
- » Strategy 4.2: Ensure that natural environments and ecological systems are protected and well-managed within the city

### Goal 5: Provide residents with activities and programs throughout the City

- » Strategy 5.1: Establish a plan to communicate and inform residents about issues pertaining to the parks system
  - Promote active interaction with residents to ensure recreational programming and appropriate facility development
- » Strategy 5.2: Promote ongoing volunteer opportunities through athletic, youth and civic organizations to assist in maintenance and programming in city parks



## 4.7 Natural and cultural resources

International Falls' natural environment and the history and culture of the peoples who have inhabited it are an asset for its future.

Nature and history are the foundation of place. International Falls' environmental resources - including the Rainy River, Rainy Lake, and surrounding forest land - are what first brought people to the area. The city's history intertwines a heritage of logging, milling and fishing that began in the late 19th century with the history of Native people who lived on this same land for centuries.

Through time, people's activities have left physical marks on the city and its surrounding area - buildings, structures, paths, and numerous archaeological sites are fragile, valuable remnants of a past that is important to the identity of International Falls. Protecting these natural and cultural assets are important priorities in the plan.

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

International Falls values its natural environment, resources and heritage, and works to preserve them for the benefit of current and future residents and visitors.

#### Goals

- » Identify, preserve and promote important cultural resource sites throughout International Falls
- » Assure that private development will adhere to City standards for open space and for environmental sustainability



*The natural environment and the resources it provides are a key reason for the city's development. The beauty and access to recreation that it offers residents is a key reason why they stay.*



## Existing conditions

### Environmental resources

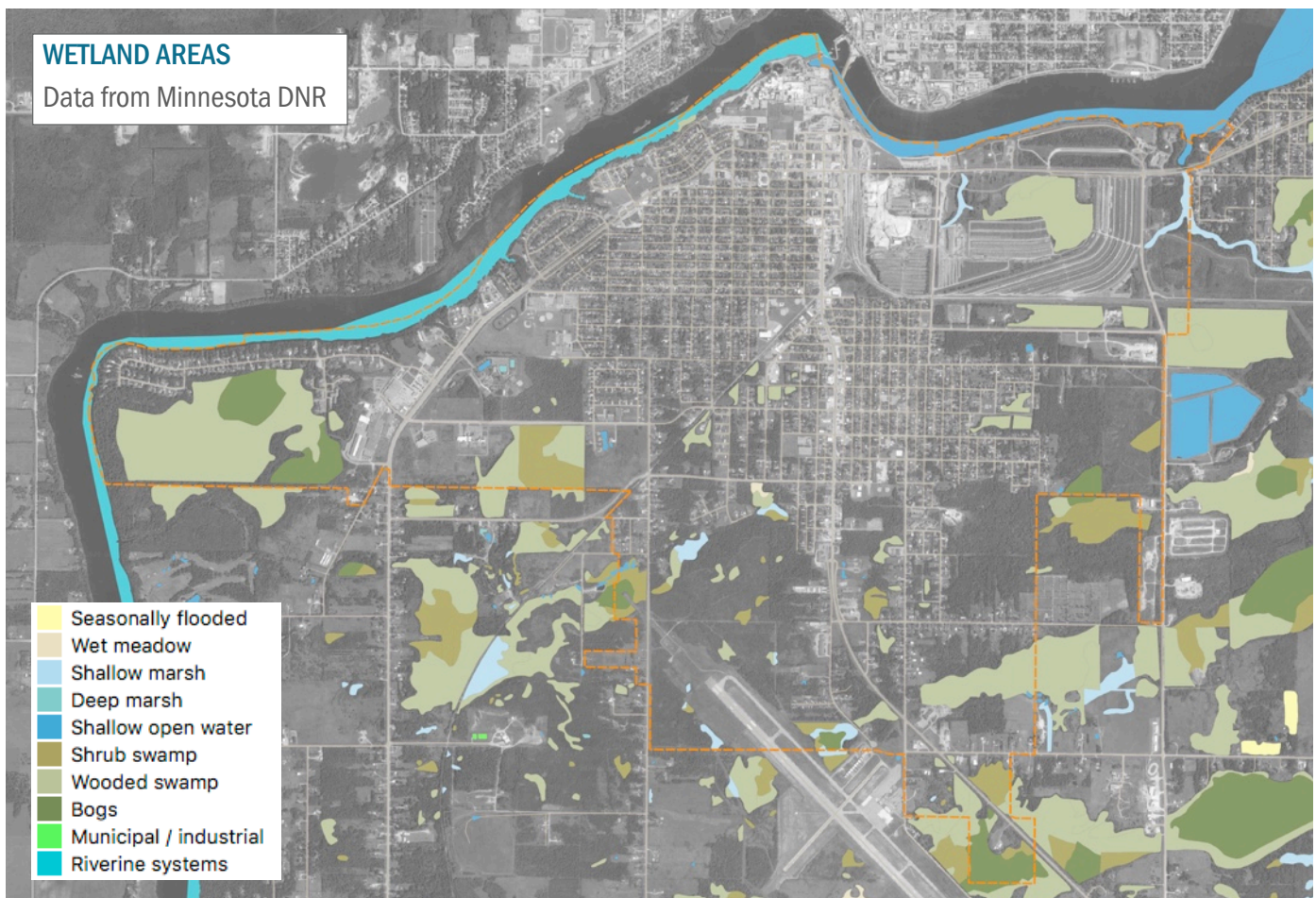
The state of a city's natural environment has implications for how land use decisions are made, and for how preservation and development are balanced. International Falls has thrived because of its ability to make use of its natural resources. Over a century ago, using the water fall and dam to power a paper mill that worked with the products derived from its forests was the key to the region's success.

The city includes low-lying marshes and swamp land, which makes some areas within and just outside the city difficult to develop. Much of the city's land is designated as wetland depressions, requiring that almost all new development go through additional approval processes.

### Wetland designation areas

In January of 2014 the City of International Falls adopted a Comprehensive Wetland Protection and Management Plan. The purpose of the plan is to assist the City in more efficient and effective utilization of land within its boundaries.

The plan recommends a mechanism that balances the need for economic growth with a strategy for wetland preservation. The field inventory provided in the plan identified 344 acres of forested wetland and 322 acres of "scrub shrub" wetland, as well as 73 acres of "emergent" wetland for a total of 739 acres of wetland (out of a total 6.4 square miles / 4,100 acres of land for the city).



The wetland plan proposes that impacts on wetlands of less than 10,000 square feet (0.23 acre) would not require a Local Government Unit permit but would require a US Army Corps of Engineers Pre-Construction Notification. Projects over the minimum square footage would require both a Local Government Unit permit and a US Army Corps of Engineers permit.

## Cultural resources

Cultural resources are those features, structures, objects, or locations that are deemed by the community to have historical and cultural value.

Cultural resources may include buildings associated with specific events or people who had an impact on the area's development. Examples could include homes where notable people grew up, location of Native American artifacts or sites, geologically-notable sites, and other resources that help to maintain and enhance International Falls' historic character.

Cultural resources in the city include the Backus Community Center (formerly the E.W. Backus Jr. High School, 1937), the Alexander Baker School (1914), the City Band Shell, Sports Stadium, City Hall, the City Library, and the US Post office. Two of these buildings (Backus and Alexander Baker) are on the National Register of Historic Places since 2004.

All of these buildings, (except for Alexander Baker) are examples of "New Deal" Public Works projects, and several feature examples of 1930's Art Deco design and art work. The Post Office features the WPA mural "Logging in Koochiching" by Lucia Wiley and the Sports Stadium a raised-relief sculpture by Evelyn Raymond. The Backus Building, designed by Nairne Fisher, is the most prominent example of Art Deco architecture in the area.



*Detail from a mosaic on the exterior of the Alexander Baker School. Image courtesy of Backus Community Center.*

## Identified cultural resources

Cultural resources in and around International Falls include:

- » Historic buildings currently on the National Register of Historic Places, including: the Paper Mill Administration Office, the Koochiching County Courthouse, the Alexander Baker School and the Backus Community Center.
- » The city's downtown has many attractive and well-preserved buildings. The downtown may be eligible for designation as an Historic District.
- » The International Falls Public Library is an anchor building in the city's civic core.
- » Prehistoric burial mounds, including Grand Mound (located about 15 miles southwest of the city).
- » Notable homes throughout the city. Homes would need to be identified and discussed by a cultural resources commission. Many are located in the five-block Riverside neighborhood, which may be eligible for designation as an Historic District.
- » Notable International Falls residents, including: Bronko Nagurski, other former NHL Players, former town leaders, business leaders, and other notable figures.
- » The Koochiching Museums, including the Historical Museum and the Bronko Nagurski Museum, both located in the city's civic core.

## Opportunity: Adaptive reuse

Many communities and downtown areas struggle with how to maintain the historic buildings which often define the historical memory of their citizens and the community's sense of place.

Adaptive reuse is the practice of reimagining and implementing new uses in a community's historic buildings so they may continue to contribute to their community's sense of place and quality of life.

### A regional success story

Backus Community Center, located in the former E.W. Backus Jr. High School, is the city's best example of the adaptive reuse of a historic building.

Built in 1914 and designed by noted St. Cloud architect Nairne Fisher in the Art Deco style, the building served as the city's junior high school until 1988. Soon after, discussion on what to do with the structure tended toward demolition.

In 1994, a group of concerned citizens began working to save the buildings and reimagine their role and possibilities as continuing assets for the International Falls community.

In 2002, after eight years of hard work, the citizens were able to convince the school district to sell them the building complex rather than demolish it.

Since then, the community has worked to rehabilitate and improve the building's character and assets. Backus Community Center is now a regional asset that retains all of the building's original historic features including its 1,000-seat auditorium.

### Contributing to the arts and quality of life

Today, Backus presents performing arts series featuring artists in varied genres including dance,



*View of the upcoming adaptive reuse project for the Alexander Baker building. Image courtesy of SJA Architects.*

music, drama, and comedy. The center's gallery hosts art exhibits throughout the year while the center itself is home to a dance studio, art society, community orchestra, band and community theatre company (the multi-generational "Borealis Bards").

Backus also presents an annual summer arts program for children, hosts art classes, community gatherings, events, sports, recreation, banquets and workshops. Over 15 tenants lease space in the building and offer a wide-range of community services. Almost 60,000 adults and children visit the building annually.

### A new housing opportunity

Backus has now partnered with KOOTASCA Community Action to implement a new adaptive reuse project that will develop housing at the Alexander Baker School (built in 1914).

The project will convert the building into 26 units of affordable housing. When completed, this project will be the first multi-family housing development in the city in almost 40 years, and will offer apartments which will be affordable to about 1/2 of all county residents and almost 85% of current renters.



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Support the continuing role of timber and forest industries in the local economy

- » Strategy 1.1: Balance industry and ecosystem needs
  - Develop and work with partners to ensure the needs of timber processors and producers are met while balancing the need to retain the integrity of the natural resource base
- » Strategy 1.2: Collaboration with forest industries
  - Work with established and prospective forest industry partners to ensure that the development and maintenance of public infrastructure needed for successful operations is adequate for industry's needs
- » Strategy 1.3: Manage forest resources
  - Use the city's influence and work with partners to support ecologically responsible forest management and timber practices in and around the city's area
- » Strategy 1.4: Employment and training
  - Continue to work with local industry and educational institutions, including Rainy River Community College, to increase access to job training and create a pipeline to employment with local forest industries

### Goal 2: Identify, preserve and promote cultural resource sites

- » Strategy 2.1: Establish a cultural resources / historic preservation commission
  - Create a cultural resources / historic preservation commission tasked with identifying, cataloging, and supporting the preservation of key cultural resources in the city

- » Strategy 2.2: Landmark identification
  - Work with the city's new cultural resources / historic preservation commission (listed above) and with state and federal landmark preservation programs (including the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office - SHPO) to identify, protect and publicize buildings, statues, and other places as culturally and historically relevant.
- » Strategy 2.3: Adaptive reuse
  - Commit to the principle of adaptive reuse to ensure that architecturally and historically-significant resources can continue to support economic activity in the city while preserving their cultural integrity
- » Strategy 2.4: Education around cultural resources
  - Work with community organizations including the city's public schools, St. Thomas Aquinas Church and School, Backus Community Center, Rainy River Community College, the Koochiching Museums, and others to provide cooperative educational efforts regarding cultural resources
- » Strategy 2.5: Marketing and promotion
  - Work with Minnesota Tourism, the city's Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development partners to publicize and promote visitation to the city's cultural resources



## 4.8 The arts

The arts and artistic activity can play an important role in connecting people with each other, in building economic activity, and in building community vitality and excitement.

The arts reflect the culture and interests of a community's residents, assert and express their identity, and announce their contributions to the places where they live. The arts and the artistic process increase awareness, connection and engagement between people.

Artistic activity is hopeful because it helps people see themselves as producers (of culture, art, ideas) rather than simply as consumers. While "consumers" lack power - they use what others make, "producers" create and can make change in the places where they live, bringing improvement that addresses their needs and aspirations.

That change in thinking and attitude is one of the most important benefits the arts and culture bring communities, and goes beyond the now widely acknowledged (and important) role that artistic activity has in spurring economic activity, tourism, and engagement.

### Goals

- » To recognize, support and promote artistic activity already taking place around the city
- » To attract new artists and artistic activity to the city and make International Falls an active, arts-infused center for arts and culture in the region
- » To make artistic activity accessible to artists and non-artists alike
- » To use art-making as a tool for connection between people - regardless of ethnic, cultural, or generational differences - using arts-based community development ("ABCD") strategies to improve and enhance the environment of the city for the benefit of all residents, businesses and people in the area



*"Autumn," a metal and glass sculpture in the city's civic center by Eric "Erickson" Kulig. This piece as well as several other pieces nearby are a notable addition to the city's civic core.*

### What we heard: from business engagement

*"Our walls are covered from head to toe with artwork from local artists. And the best part, they're ALL for sale! Come grab one for yourself and bring a piece of International Falls into your home!"*

*~ Coffee Landing Café*

## Existing conditions

International Falls hosts a large number of art venues and events for a city of its size.

### Arts centers and institutions

**Backus Community Center**, housed in the city's former junior high, is the city's preeminent arts institution, hosting a variety of arts-related programs and workshops - including arts and painting classes, a 1,000 seat Art Deco auditorium, year-round programming, and theater and writing workshops. Receiving over 60,000 visits by adults and children during the year, Backus is a home for the arts, culture, youth programs and community services. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

**ISD 361** (the city's public school district) offers numerous arts, music and performance classes as part of its curriculum for kindergarten through Grade 12 students. In addition, the district offers a broad range of opportunities for adults interested in exploring arts and crafts through its Community Education program.

### Art events and galleries

The city's **Arts and Crafts Fair** is held yearly in August and in conjunction with the International Falls Bass Championship (IFBC), which brings visitors throughout the US and Canada to the city. About 2,500 daily visitors stroll through the approximately fifty vendor booths to view and purchase a variety of handcraft and fine arts items, including sculpture, painting and photographs. The fair lasts for the duration of the Bass Championship event (three days) and features many local artists and performances.

**Coffee Landing Café** in the city's downtown provides display and sales space for numerous works by area painters and photographers, as well as display space for books written by local authors. In addition, musicians regularly perform in the shop's stage. Other local businesses that highlight local art include **Chocolate Moose** and **Kantor Electric** which hosts an art gallery in its building in the city's downtown.



*From the 2017 production of Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory by Borealis Bards, staged at Backus Community Center. Image courtesy of Borealis Bards.*



*Backus Community Center, housed in the city's former junior high, is one of the region's preeminent arts institutions. Image courtesy of Backus.*



*Duluth band Paper Parlor performing at Coffee Landing Café. Image courtesy of Coffee Landing Café.*

## Opportunity: Positioning International Falls as an arts destination

It is now well established that the arts and artistic activity help bring new visitors, activity and economic development to places, and that they improve residents' access to enrichment, educational opportunities, and overall quality of life.

Many communities throughout Minnesota have benefitted from highlighting, encouraging and supporting local artists and arts communities - from Grand Marais (population 1,360) to Ely (pop. 3,460), Lanesboro (pop. 750), and many others.

International Falls, with its strong arts and cultural institutions, its beautiful setting, role as a regional destination, and location as a border community and gateway into the world-renowned Voyageurs National Park, is well positioned to grow its potential as a regional arts destination if the right catalyst is found.

### An example from Maine

The city of Monson, Maine (population 610), provides a useful example of the kind of change that the arts can catalyze in a community and of the kind of partnerships and programs that can help make those changes happen.

By 2010 Monson, which had been declining in population and commerce for decades, lost its biggest employer (a long-standing furniture maker with more than one hundred employees), and its local school.

City leaders and foundation partners took stock of the town's assets, noting its role as a key stopover for the Appalachian Trail and its siting along scenic Lake Hebron, as well as its potential to benefit from drive-through traffic if it could offer a compelling



*Massachusetts artist Anna Hepler working on a sculpture at the Monson Arts studio. Image courtesy of Down East Magazine.*

experience for visitors to stop, see the town, and potentially stay to eat, shop and spend the night.

The city and its partners settled on an arts-centered strategy as a key driver to build visitor interest and rebuild economic activity in the community.

Working with the Libra Foundation, the city set up the Monson Arts Center, which brings in artists from throughout the country for month-long stays where they create art and share it with the wider community and with visitors who now come for the chance to see and purchase original art. As part of its contribution to the wider community, the center also hosts exhibits, lectures, and film screenings, and workshops for area high school students.

In addition, the city has worked with Libra to invest about \$10 million in funding to purchase, rehabilitate and put into operation several key buildings in its downtown. The changes have been dramatic and have brought a renewed sense of optimism (as well as new businesses, activity and prosperity) to the community.

### For more information:

- » Overview: <https://downeast.com/our-towns/monson-maine/>
- » Monson Arts Center: <https://monsonarts.org/>



## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Raise the visibility of the city's arts assets and artistic activity taking place in the city

- » Strategy 1.1: Arts and architecture walks
  - Work with partners to establish tours of the city's arts and architecture assets
- » Strategy 1.2: Publicize the arts production of city residents
  - Support local art fairs, work with businesses with high tourist and traveler visitation to highlight work of local artists (Coffee Landing Café currently does this)
- » Strategy 1.3: Encourage public art
  - Support projects that directly involve young people and area residents in the creation and installation of art in the public realm of the city
  - Support opportunities for arts-making activities, festivals and celebrations. Include public arts-making workshops as part of improvements or investments to the public realm

### Goal 2: Establish a high-visibility arts center

- » Strategy 2.1: Work with Backus and other partners to seed the startup of a high-visibility arts practice, showroom and instruction space in the downtown to increase engagement, visitation and vitality in the city's core
  - Work with foundations to seek funding
  - The venue would be a permanent art space for community workshops, shows, and residencies, which could host artists from across the world, show work all year round, and host community conversations

### Goal 3: Serve the housing needs of artists

- » Strategy 3.1: Encourage the development of artist housing
  - Live-work spaces that include connected residential and commercial (gallery or storefront) uses within a single unit are typically favored by artists
  - Availability of these spaces can help attract artists and artistic activity to the city



WPA mural at the city's post office by renowned artist Lucia Wiley. Image courtesy of LivingNewDeal.org



"Winter," one of several sculptures by Eric Kulig in the libraries sculpture garden.



Mural commemorating the former Border Theater on its site in the city's downtown. Image by Explore Mn.



## 4.9 Utilities

High quality utility and public infrastructure systems are key requirements for a city that provides high quality of life for its residents and supportive conditions for business startup and success.

A strategic plan to manage sewer, water resources, and other systems ensures a community is able to meet its current and future needs without compromising quality of service or degrading its natural environment. Achieving a sustainable development pattern requires that public water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer and other systems be well-managed.

### Vision and goals

#### Future vision

International Falls plans and maintains its facilities and public utility systems to efficiently and cost-effectively provide services to its residents, supporting high quality of life, protecting its assets and building value for the community. Public facilities and utility systems are located, designed and programmed to meet the needs of all citizens.

#### Goals

- » Continue to provide excellent utility services to residents and businesses
- » Proactively maintain existing infrastructure
- » Ensure environmentally sustainable water and stormwater management
- » Consolidate sewer collection across the region



*Utilities and infrastructure systems - whether municipal, like water, or private, like telecommunications and broadband - have great impact on both quality of life and economic development.*

## Existing conditions

Utility services in International Falls are at an important time in their trajectory. A shrinking population, increased regional water service demands, considerations related to annexation, ongoing maintenance, and necessary infrastructure upgrades are all issues that need to be carefully considered in the coming years. Adequate planning will ensure that the utility system continues to provide excellent service to current and future residents.

### Water treatment plant

The city's water treatment plant produces, stores and delivers the city's drinking water. The water plant has capacity to produce up to 2 million gallons of water per day. It currently runs at under one third of its capacity, producing 600,000 gallons per day. Daily production has been reduced to match decreased local demand as the city's population has decreased and as new water saving measures in homes have been implemented, including modern appliances and plumbing systems. According to Water Treatment Plant Chief Operator Bruce Wilson, at the height of its use the plant produced about 1.2 million gallons per day on hot summer days.

The plant has ample capacity to accommodate more than twice the current need and use. A project to paint and upgrade the existing 500,000 gallon ground storage water tank at the water treatment plant was completed in 2017.

### Sale of water outside International Falls

International Falls sells its water to other municipalities and to individuals living outside of International Falls with cisterns, including the City of Ranier, MN, and to residents of unincorporated areas of Koochiching County. City water officials estimate that International Falls is not currently receiving sufficient revenue from its sale of water to cover necessary system upgrades and deferred maintenance.



*Interior of the city's water treatment plant.*

### Did you know?

In a blind taste test sponsored by the American Water Works Association (AWWA):

- » Water from the International Falls water plant won "Champion" in the Great Minnesota State Fair Tap Water Taste Test in 2013.
- » At the national water competition, International Falls' water came in second place.

## Sanitary sewer system

The wastewater treatment facility is operated by the North Koochiching Area Sanitary District (NKASD). NKASD treats wastewater from International Falls, Ranier, and the East Koochiching Sanitary Sewer District (EKSSD). Currently, the sanitary sewer treatment plant offers a treatment capacity of 3.0 million gallons per day (mgd) in wet weather and 1.34 mgd in dry weather. The ten year average annual flow through the plant is 383 million gallons, or 1.05 mgd.

## Inflow and infiltration

Inflow and infiltration refers to the excess flow of clear water into the city's sewer collections system from outside sources like sump pumps or leaks into the system from cracked pipes or other deteriorating infrastructure. Significant inflow and infiltration can cause problems as they may, when added to normal sewer load, exceed a city's treatment capacity.

In International Falls, high inflow and infiltration levels pose risks for potential sewer backups, increased costs, and environmental contamination. The city is working to assess this issue through consistent monitoring, including measuring how the sanitary sewer system is affected during heavy rains, and will continue to work with the NKASD, MPCA and other partners to minimize inflow and infiltration.

## Electric service

Electric service in International Falls and its surrounding area is provided by Minnesota Power (a private company that is a division of Allete, Inc.). The company operates the regional power system that provides electricity for a 26,000-square-mile electric service area in northeastern Minnesota, and supplies retail electric service to 145,000 customers and wholesale electric service to 16 municipalities.



NKASD wastewater treatment facility. Image courtesy of Widseth Smith Nolting.

## Broadband

High-speed Internet access is readily available in the city, providing opportunity for high-tech businesses and start-ups to consider locating in the area.

Four firms supply broadband services in International Falls: Frontier Telephone Company, Paul Bunyan Communications, MidContinent Communications, and the Northeast Service Cooperative. Fiber lines are located around and throughout the city. While the city itself is now served by broadband, most of the of county is unserved.

### Preparing for EVs (electric vehicles)

As the number of electric vehicles increases, availability of charging stations may help serve residents and attract travelers to specific locations in the city.

Working with electric service and mobility providers to offer EV charging in or near the downtown (especially if combined as part of other travel services in a Downtown Mobility Hub) may be a useful strategy to increase visitation and potential customers to local businesses.

## Recommendations

### Goal 1: Ensure environmentally sustainable water and stormwater management

- » Strategy 1.1: Improve storm water facilities
  - Provide adequate storm water facilities for conveyance, flow control, and pollution reduction
- » Strategy 1.2: Resources and natural systems
  - Manage stormwater as a resource for watershed health and public use, while protecting stormwater management capacity of natural resources
- » Strategy 1.3: On-site stormwater management
  - Encourage on-site stormwater management through facility investments and land use decisions
- » Strategy 1.4: Partnerships
  - Coordinate partnerships across municipalities to enhance stormwater practices and watershed health

### Goal 2: Cost-efficient, sustainable utility services

- » Strategy 2.1: Review sanitary sewer system needs and costs before considering annexation
  - Prepare financial and operational studies to determine cost implications of extending services to potential land annexations
- » Strategy 2.2: Utility connections
  - Do not provide sewer or water connection to properties outside of the city's municipal boundary
  - Require that properties currently served by city utilities but outside of city boundaries agree to a) annexation into the city, or b) pay full cost of

connection to the city's systems, including capital costs

### Goal 3: Prepare for electric vehicles

- » Strategy 3.1: Investigate electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure
  - Work with partners to investigate potential service models and locations for electric vehicle charging infrastructure
  - Determine locations and configurations that can serve to attract travelers to downtown

### Goal 4: Expand high-speed internet opportunities

- » Strategy 4.1: Work with private sector partnerships to enhance broadband and fiber deployments
  - Maintain information on fiber-optic internet locations to identify areas that need connection or improvement to high-speed service
  - Review status of service to areas located within the city's Opportunity Zone and redevelopment sites



## 4.10 Community participation and engagement

Residents who are active and engaged members of their community are more likely to stay, invest in their neighborhoods and start businesses. Growing participation, engagement and communications is an important city goal.

Resident perception that city policies and actions respond to community priorities is a component of quality of life. Engaging residents and businesses helps to grow feelings of ownership and investment, and supports city efforts in providing quality services, facilities and programs.

International Falls seeks to grow resident participation and involvement in community conversations to ensure decisions enjoy community support and lead to better results for all.

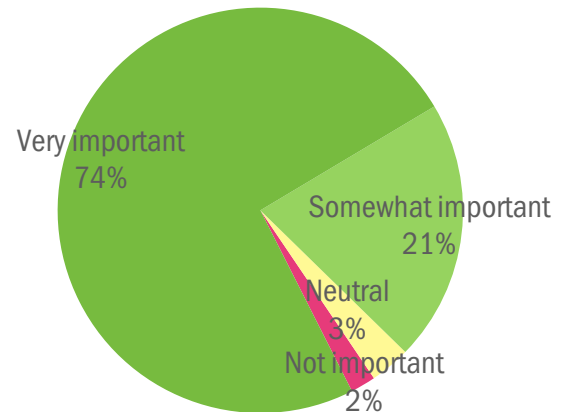
The city will work collaboratively with community partners, including civic organizations, public and private schools, and businesses to support and increase engagement and communication throughout the community and grow participation by a broader cross-section of residents.

### Recommendations

#### Goal 1: A proactive, responsive and accessible city

- » **Strategy 1.1:** Invest in technology to improve communication and provide efficient and responsive services and high quality customer service - for example, to submit applications and permit requests online, adding an online property search tool/interactive map to the city website, providing a “shop local” web resource, or developing an events calendar (in addition to the existing city meetings calendar).
- » **Strategy 1.2:** Ensure city documents and online information are easily located and available to the public - for example, for marketing of available properties and buildings online, and maintaining planning documents and information, like economic development resources and plans.

**From the online survey: How important is it to include the public in planning for the city?**



*About 85% of all participants in the plan's engagement thought that including the public in the city's planning was important or very important. By contrast, only 5% of participants thought that it was neutral or not important.*

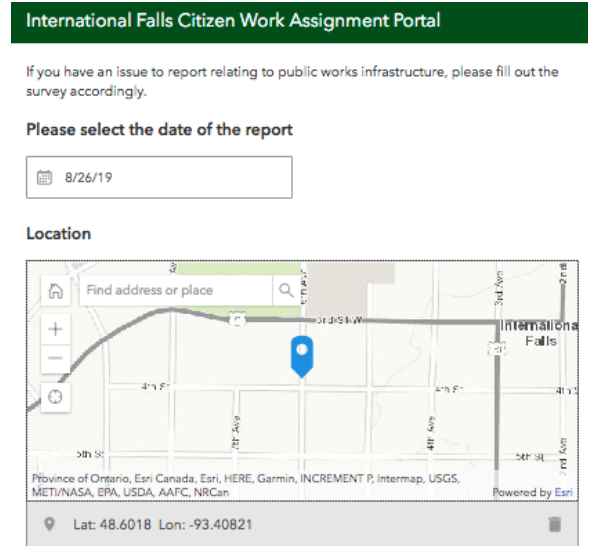
- » **Strategy 1.3:** Continue to proactively build and maintain trust between city government/police and the community through activities like annual bike rodeos or walk/bike to school events
- » **Strategy 1.4:** Expand information on community events, city council activities, and other news as part of regular communications with residents, and continue to publicize them through the city's social media platforms. Work with the International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce to develop a consolidated online event calendar.

## Goal 2: Expand opportunities for civic participation

- » **Strategy 2.1:** Actively publicize opportunities to serve on city advisory committees and boards to expand resident participation on development of city policies, programs and procedures.
- » **Strategy 2.2:** Partner with the local business community, local schools, faith based organizations, and student and community organizations to increase awareness of opportunities to serve on city advisory committees and boards.
- » **Strategy 2.3:** Expand the use of social media to share information regarding current city initiatives and opportunities to serve on city advisory committees and boards.

## Goal 3: Invite young people to participate

- » **Strategy 3.1:** Collaborate with local schools and organizations to expand opportunities for young people to participate in city advisory committees and boards. Work with ISD 361 to develop civic participation as a requirement for graduation from high school.
- » **Strategy 3.2:** Provide city internship opportunities for young adults that result in meaningful participation in city government.
- » **Strategy 3.3:** Develop a “Young People’s Advisory Board” to advise the city on issues relevant to the city, including retention of 18 to 24 year olds. Seek youth participation on other steering/advisory committees and city boards.



*The city's current “report a problem” tool allows residents to easily bring issues to the city's attention.*

### Building good habits of civic engagement

*“Fort Frances High School requires all students to complete at least 40 hours volunteering with recognized civic activities or organizations. Working with ISD 361 we can help setup similar activities that build volunteerism, civic pride and good habits and experiences for developing good people and citizens.”*



*Young people are often eager to participate in planning for their city's future.*

The process to develop the International Falls Comprehensive Plan engaged hundreds of residents, businesses, and visitors in a broad and deep conversation about the future of the community. Once the Plan is finalized and approved, the work of implementing its recommendations will become the key component for success.

This chapter of the comprehensive plan provides a process and direction for:

- » Establishing accountability for implementation
- » Monitoring progress towards implementation goals
- » Updating the plan's contents and recommendations
- » Developing regulations and procedures when needed
- » Involving the community in the work of making the plan a reality

The chapter includes the following sections:

- » **Using this plan in the city's daily business:** Summary of basic actions to ensure the plan is being used as part of the city's process of decision-making and action.
- » **Updating the plan:** Outline of a process to be used to help the plan stay responsive to changing trends and circumstances, including criteria to consider when evaluating potential changes to the plan.
- » **Implementation actions:** Recommendations for goals and actions to setup the framework for implementation of the plan.
- » **Implementation matrix:** A set of tables listing implementation goals and strategies, as well as priorities and involved parties, for each of the recommendation subject areas of the plan.



*The purpose of plans is action. Setting up a good implementation framework will help the plan achieve its vision.*

## What do the plan's Goals and Strategies mean?

**Goals** are the short and long term aims that a Comprehensive Plan sets out for a city to achieve. Each goal is a broad statement that encompasses a desired outcome in general terms.

**Strategies** are the projects, programs, or policies that are needed to achieve each goal.

Each goal in this plan includes a list of potential strategies that should be considered in working to achieve each goal.

The purpose for each goal and strategy? To help achieve the vision and dreams of International Falls citizens and leaders.

## 5.1 Using the plan in the city's daily business

The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be a living document. To help it fulfill its role in guiding the city's future actions, it needs to be included in the city's daily work.

The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be used on a daily basis as decisions are made regarding land use, development / redevelopment / intensification, capital improvements, and other situations affecting the community.

The Plan can be used in the following ways:

### Budgets and work programs

City departments and administrators should consult the plan when preparing work programs and budgets. Many of the plan's strategies can be implemented through this process.

### Development approvals

Development approval of proposals, such as rezoning and subdivision plats, are a key means of implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

### Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The Capital Improvement Plan should align with the goals of the plan's land use policies and infrastructure recommendations.

### Economic incentives

Economic incentives considered as part of other plans and initiatives should be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with the land use recommendations.



*Making the plan a daily guide for the city's actions will help achieve the community's vision.*

### Private development decisions

Property owners should have an understanding of the Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use Plan when submitting proposals to the city. City decision-makers will be using these documents to guide their deliberations and approvals.

### Future interpretation

In the event that a major item of the Plan is not clear, the Planning Commission will provide a written interpretation of the item. The Planning Commission can call upon outside experts for their advice.



## 5.2 Updating the Plan

This plan is envisioned to guide the evolution of the city over the next twenty years. Although much care has been taken to respond to community ideas and anticipate trends, it is likely that as the city evolves and conditions change the plan will require some modifications over its intended lifespan.

The following recommendations are presented to help make the process of update and modification easier and more transparent and accessible.

### Key parties

- » City Administrator
- » City Planning Commission (PC)
- » City Council

### Process

The Comprehensive Plan should be reevaluated every two years to ensure that implementation of its recommendations is proceeding as planned, and to review opportunities for making updates or improvements to its recommendations. The Zoning Administrator, City Administrator and the Chair of the Planning Commission should maintain responsibility for this process, and determine the appropriate level of response to requests for potential changes.

Generally, three main processes are contemplated for updating the Comprehensive Plan:

- » Updates resulting from the plan's periodic re-evaluation
- » Updates recommended or requested by the Planning Commission or City Council
- » Updates recommended or requested by city residents or business owners



*A community's plan needs to remain flexible to accommodate new opportunities and priorities.*

## Decision-making and incorporation into plan

Depending on the origin of the recommendations as described above, these are the steps that are recommended for gaining approval and adopting changes to this document:

### Updates resulting from the plan's periodic re-evaluation

The Planning Commission (PC) manages the process of re-evaluation of the entire plan every two years. If the PC or City Council determines that an update may be needed, it brings the proposed changes to a vote within its body. If approved, the proposed changes are brought to the City Council for their consideration and approval. If the City Council approves, the changes are made to the plan and included as an Addendum.

### Updates recommended or requested by the Planning Commission

The Planning Commission agenda for all future meetings will include a recurring item for "Updates to the Comprehensive Plan." Changes to the plan can be brought forward by any member of the Planning Commission. The proposed change is introduced and discussed at the initial meeting, and the discussion and vote are finalized at the next meeting of the Planning Commission. If approved, the proposed change is brought to the City Council for their consideration and approval. If the City Council approves, the change is made to the plan and included as an Addendum.

### Updates requested by residents

The Planning Commission reviews the change proposed by the public. After research and deliberation, it brings the proposed change to a vote within its body. If approved, the proposed change is brought to the City Council for their consideration and approval. If the City Council approves, the change is made to the plan and included as an Addendum.

## Criteria to consider when evaluating potential changes to the plan

- » The change is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.
- » The change does not create an adverse impact on public facilities and services that cannot be mitigated. Public facilities and services include roads, sewers, water supply, drainage, schools, police, fire and parks.
- » Development that would result from the proposed change does not create an adverse impact that cannot be mitigated on surrounding properties. Such development should be consistent with the physical character of the surrounding neighborhood or would upgrade and improve the area.
- » The change allows a more viable transition to the planned uses on adjacent properties than the current land use.
- » The change does not create a significant adverse impact on the natural environment including trees, slopes and groundwater that cannot be mitigated by improvements on the site or in the same vicinity.
- » There is a change in city policies or neighborhood characteristics that would justify a change.
- » The change corrects an oversight or error made in the original plan.
- » There is a community or regional need identified for the proposed land use or service change.
- » The change helps the city meet its life-cycle and affordable housing objectives.
- » The change does not create adverse impacts on landmarks or other historically significant structures or properties that cannot be mitigated.

## 5.3 Implementation tasks and timeline

Implementing the plan will require setting up committees and task groups to help prioritize goals and build community participation and momentum.

### Goal 1: Engage a broad cross-section of residents, business owners, and visitors as part of the implementation process

- » Strategy 1.1: Establish a “Plan Implementation Committee” made up of local residents, businesses, employees, advocates, young people and seniors to advise the city on implementation priorities and phasing.
- » Strategy 1.2: Establish an ongoing communication program to provide information to the public about the Plan. The public should have opportunity to become familiar with ongoing opportunities to implement the Plan and understand their role in the process. The City’s website, Facebook and other social media pages can be excellent channels for information.
- » Strategy 1.3: Ensure that copies of the final Comprehensive Plan are available online, at the public library and at community destinations. The purpose is to make the plan available to residents and businesses so property owners can familiarize themselves with the plan elements and recommendations, and tailor their proposals to better fit the community’s vision.



*A plan implementation committee can work with the city to provide guidance on priorities.*

### Goal 2: Monitor and evaluate the implementation process

- » Strategy 2.1: Prepare annual reports that summarize the implementation actions completed. City staff prepare the report, highlighting key strategies completed over the course of the year. Reports can also identify areas of delay that need to be addressed. Any potential changes or additions to the plan can also be identified in this report.
- » Strategy 2.2: Provide a summary of the annual report to the general public. Information regarding the status of plan

elements will be summarized and available for the public on the city's website.

- » Strategy 2.3: Create press releases and social media blasts that highlight and acknowledge significant accomplishments relative to the plan and its strategies.

### Goal 3: Provide resources to implement the Plan

- » Strategy 3.1: Update the Capital Improvement Plan to ensure that it matches the recommendations outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.
- » Strategy 3.2: Prepare departmental budgets and programs that reflect the goals and strategies of the Comprehensive Plan.
- » Strategy 3.3: Secure funds for the strategies listed as high-priority. Funding can come from, but does not have to be limited to, the City, external agencies or other governmental sources, taxes, or private sector investment. This strategy should take place alongside annual budget cycles and should maximize non-municipal resources.

### Goal 4: Require future decisions in the community regarding development, capital improvements, and budgeting to coincide with the Comprehensive Plan

- » Strategy 4.1: Require approvals of zoning requests to follow the policies in the Comprehensive Plan and the updated Zoning Ordinance.
- » Strategy 4.2: Include reference to the plan in all staff reports related to policy, programs, and budgets.
- » Strategy 4.3: Establish a line of communication between the Planning Commission and the City Council regarding the Comprehensive Plan. Communication must be clear and frequent. Ensuring that interpretation of the plan is consistent will be critical to the plan's implementation.

### Goal 5: Update the Plan

- » Strategy 5.1: Use the process outlined in Section 5.2 of this plan to update the Comprehensive Plan. Provide support to the Planning Commission as needed to gather and allocate the necessary resources for completing plan updates.
- » Strategy 5.2: Convene a "Comprehensive Plan Update" task force as needed to focus on addressing specific topics or initiatives not currently included in the plan.
- » Strategy 5.3: Plan review and update
  - Review the entire Comprehensive Plan every two years, and update specific sections or content as needed
  - Update the entire Comprehensive Plan every ten years



## Contents

The following appendices contain documents and information referenced in plan chapters or recommended for adoption as part of the Comprehensive Plan

- » Appendix 1: New zoning and land use regulations (2019)
- » Appendix 2: New subdivision ordinance (2019)
- » Appendix 3: Community engagement report
- » Appendix 4: Housing study

## Appendix 1: New zoning and land use regulations (2020)

(In process of final review and adoption)

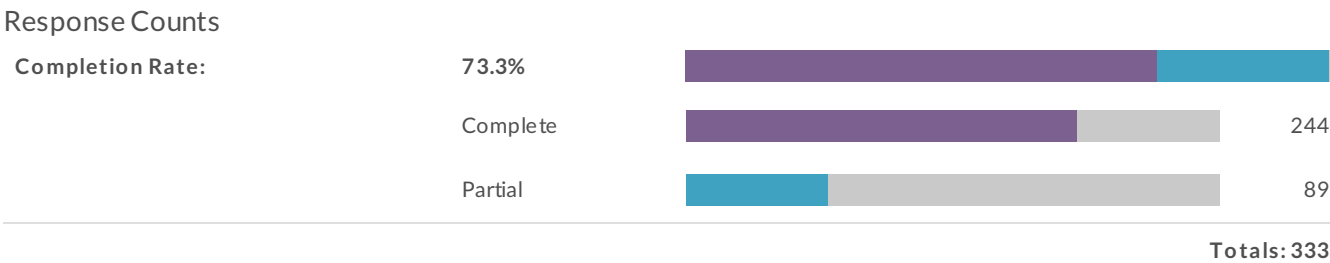
## Appendix 2: New subdivision ordinance (2020)

(In process of final review and adoption)

# APPENDIX 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

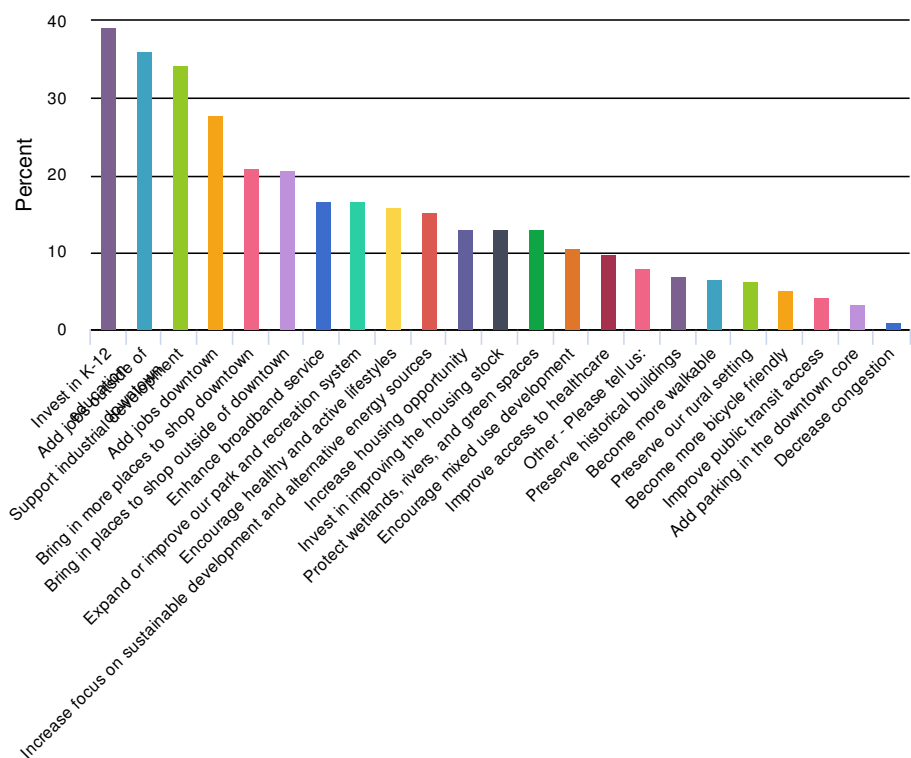
## Summary Report - Online Survey for International Falls Comprehensive Plan













Please note: Data and comments are shown as received. Where specific individuals are named or other information is included that could be used to identify specific persons, that information has been removed.





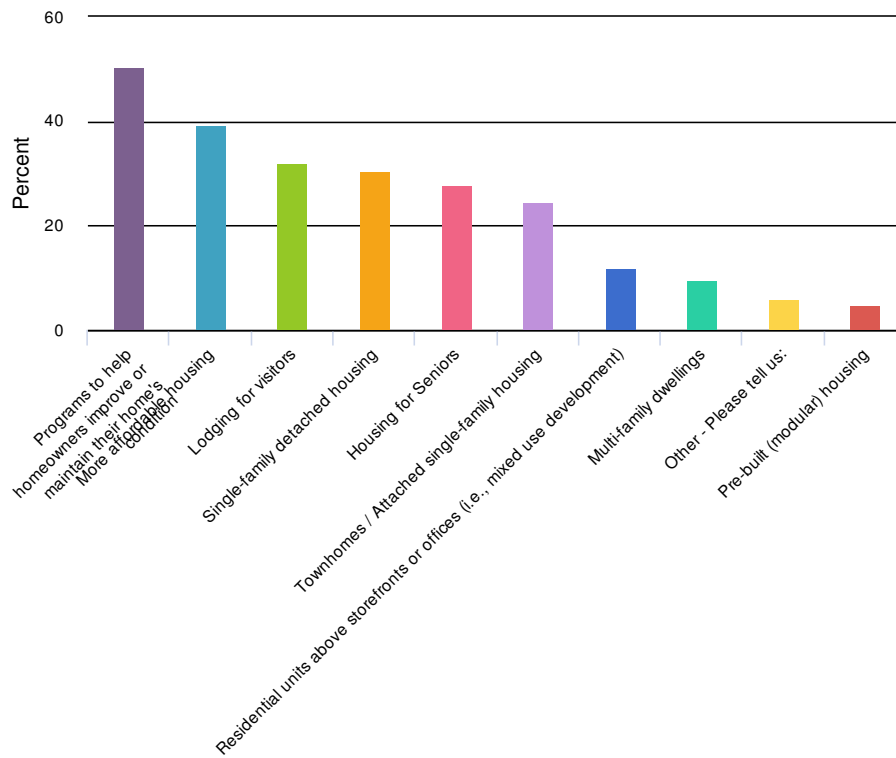
Which priorities are most important to the future of International Falls? Please select up to three priorities for International Falls.













Value		Percent	Responses
Invest in K-12 education		39.1%	108
Add jobs outside of downtown		36.2%	100
Support industrial development		34.4%	95
Add jobs downtown		27.9%	77
Bring in more places to shop downtown		21.0%	58
Bring in places to shop outside of downtown		20.7%	57
Enhance broadband service		16.7%	46
Expand or improve our park and recreation system		16.7%	46
Encourage healthy and active lifestyles		15.9%	44
Increase focus on sustainable development and alternative energy sources		15.2%	42
Increase housing opportunity		13.0%	36
Invest in improving the housing stock		13.0%	36
Protect wetlands, rivers, and green spaces		13.0%	36
Encourage mixed use development		10.5%	29
Improve access to healthcare		9.8%	27
Other - Please tell us:		8.0%	22
Preserve historical buildings		6.9%	19
Become more walkable		6.5%	18
Preserve our rural setting		6.2%	17
Become more bicycle friendly		5.1%	14
Improve public transit access		4.3%	12
Add parking in the downtown core		3.3%	9
Decrease congestion		1.1%	3

Other - Please tell us:	Count
Better pay	1
Blight control on main roads	1
Blight is as bad as ever!	1
Bring in more indoor recreational activities	1
Bring in more young adult activities	1
Community Center	1
Develop and support new program opportunities to grow food locally.	1
GOOD JOBS!	1
Higher Education Accessibility	1
Increased services for people in recovery from substance use disorders (sober living, halfway house, residential treatment program)	1
Invest in higher education, and add jobs (of any kind - downtown or outside of down town)	1
Many houses need to be condemned in Int'l Falls and torn down; they are habitable.	1
Number 1-Invest in higher learning--Rainy River Community College	1
Plow better during winter months	1
Sorry to say it, but I. Falls is an ugly, ugly city. It is surrounded by beauty. I wish the city would spend money to make the town nicer - flowers, trees, banners, something. 53 is a really nasty looking section of road when you enter town.	1
Three options is not enough. There are several items that are listed that need to happen.	1
Transportation for elderly	1
We need to bring in a company that is going to bring people from outside of Ifalls. This will help our town grow.	1
Without new businesses to help stablize the employment market, people will leave the area.	1
expand on tourism marketing	1
focus on youth activities and opportunities	1
more things for our youth to do such as a YMCA or youth center	1
Totals	22

Which types of housing are most needed in International Falls? Please select up to three of the provided choices.

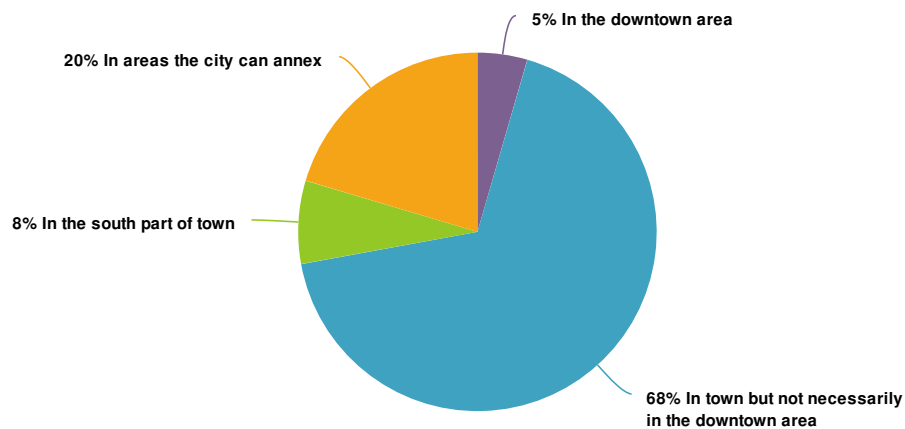


Value		Percent	Responses
Programs to help homeowners improve or maintain their home's condition		50.4%	133
More affordable housing		39.4%	104
Lodging for visitors		32.2%	85
Single-family detached housing		30.7%	81
Housing for Seniors		28.0%	74
Townhomes / Attached single-family housing		24.6%	65
Residential units above storefronts or offices (i.e., mixed use development)		12.1%	32
Multi-family dwellings		9.5%	25
Other - Please tell us:		6.1%	16
Pre-built (modular) housing		4.9%	13



Other - Please tell us:	Count
New stock homes in the 150-200k range. There is an oversupply of 'old stock' sub-100k houses on small lots in town.	2
Apartment complex	1
Apartments	1
Apartments or more rentals for college students who prefer to live off campus.	1
Clean up all the trash houses in town	1
Housing near Rainy River Community College for non-traditional students outside of I Falls area	1
Improvements to current rental stock	1
Need jobs with above poverty wages before we need more housing	1
New streets, new housing developments	1
Rentals that are pet friendly! And pride it tourist housing is severely lacking.	1
Stronger oversight on the low-income housing to improve conditions and wuality	1
Transitional services-sober living	1
Update current hotels/motels	1
a complex of lake/river homes in an association with access to shared ammenities like a fitness center/club house/recreation area	1
skilled, dependable, workers to help with routine home maintenance for families who do not have the skills/tools to do these projects. no one wants to do the "little jobs" in this town.	1
Totals	16

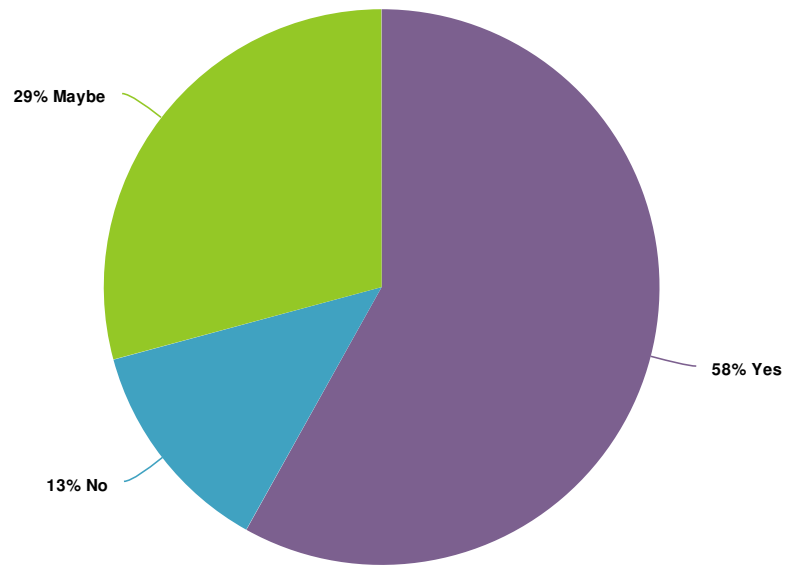
Where is additional housing most needed? Please select one of the following options.



Value		Percent	Responses
In the downtown area		4.5%	9
In town but not necessarily in the downtown area		67.7%	136
In the south part of town		7.5%	15
In areas the city can annex		20.4%	41

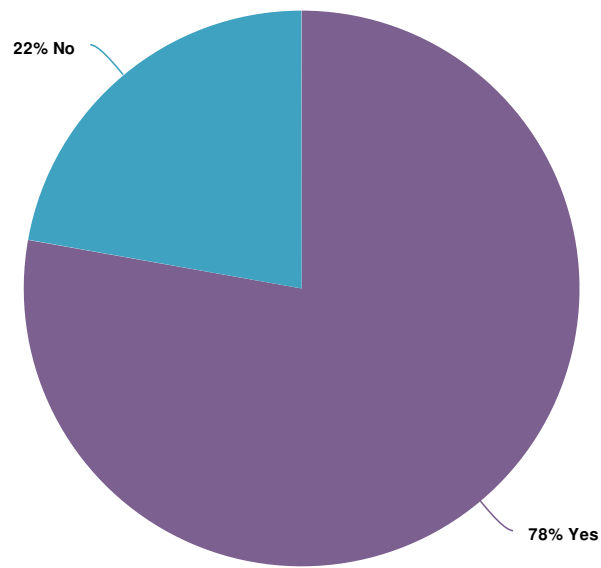
Totals: 201

Should the City pursue an orderly annexation plan? That is, should the City look into making additional land part of International Falls for future development and expansion?



Value		Percent	Responses
Yes	<div><div style="width: 58.1%;"></div></div>	58.1%	155
No	<div><div style="width: 12.7%;"></div></div>	12.7%	34
Maybe	<div><div style="width: 29.2%;"></div></div>	29.2%	78
Totals: 267			

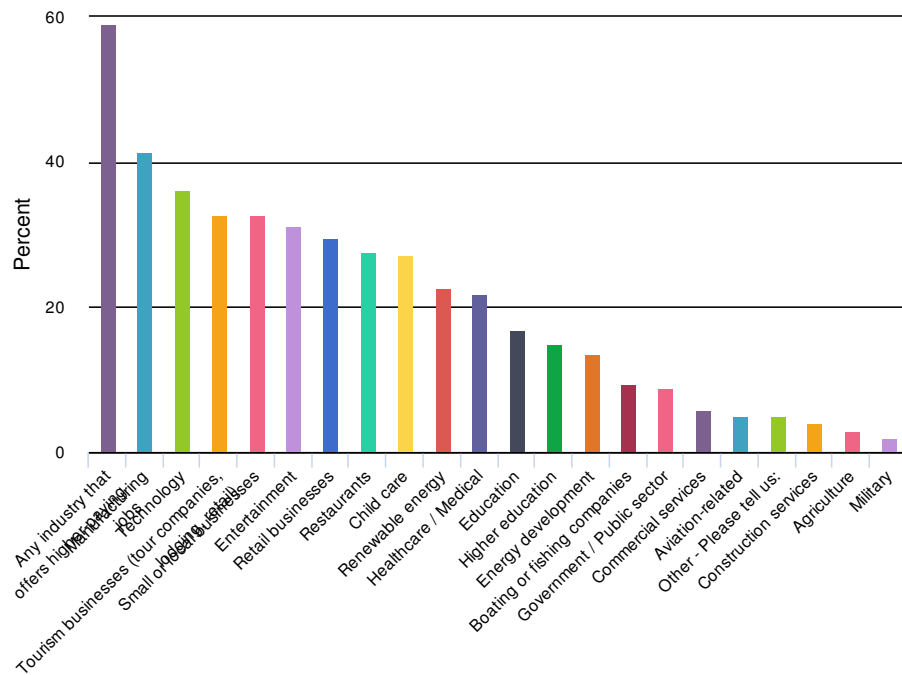
Should the City pay to have utilities and other infrastructure extended to future annexed areas?

























Value		Percent	Responses
Yes	<div><div></div></div>	77.8%	196
No	<div><div></div></div>	22.2%	56
Totals: 252			



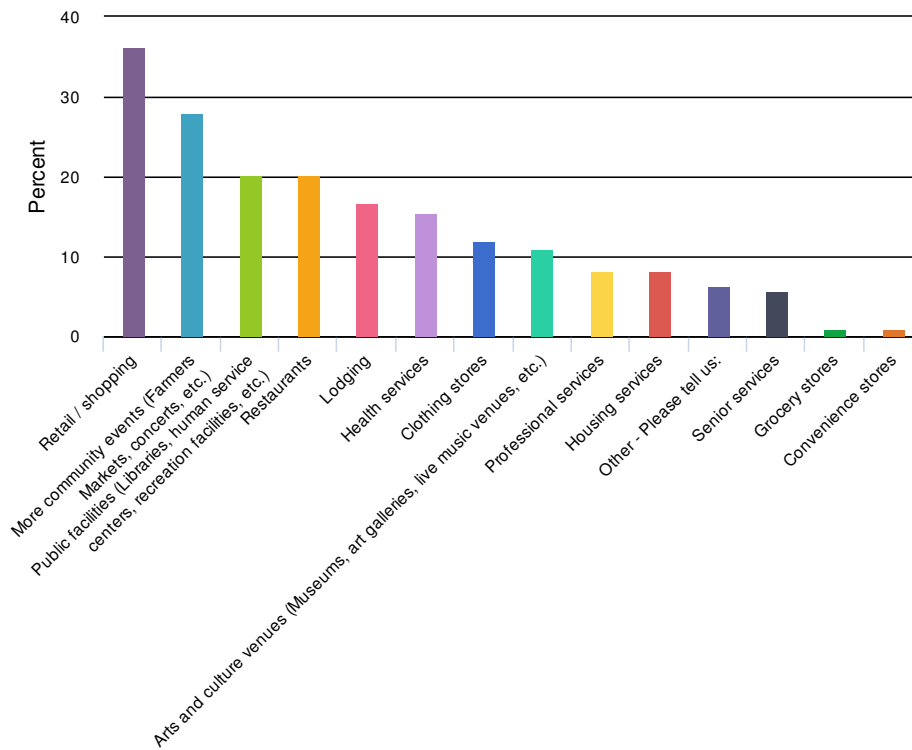
What are the top five industries or businesses you would like to see more of in International Falls? Please select up to five of the choices provided.

















Value		Percent	Responses
Any industry that offers higher-paying jobs		59.2%	154
Manufacturing		41.5%	108
Technology		36.2%	94
Tourism businesses (tour companies, lodging, retail)		32.7%	85
Small or local businesses		32.7%	85
Entertainment		31.2%	81
Retail businesses		29.6%	77
Restaurants		27.7%	72
Child care		27.3%	71
Renewable energy		22.7%	59
Healthcare / Medical		21.9%	57
Education		16.9%	44
Higher education		15.0%	39
Energy development		13.5%	35
Boating or fishing companies		9.6%	25
Government / Public sector		8.8%	23
Commercial services		5.8%	15
Aviation-related		5.0%	13
Other - Please tell us:		5.0%	13
Construction services		4.2%	11
Agriculture		3.1%	8
Military		1.9%	5

Other - Please tell us:	Count
Activity based businesses	1
Brewing	1
Department store other than kmart	1
Family resorts	1
Heritage/Cultural tourism is the fastest growing and most sustainable market over natural resource tourism!	1
Hospital built by Essentia Health	1
Natural Resources	1
Recreation - hiking, boating, paddling and other outdoor sports	1
Walmart or Target	1
Wish the downtown looked better and had interesting stores. So that people would want to shop and eat and not just head for the lake. Too many empty lots and storefronts, and all very ugly and sad looking.	1
Wood pellets	1
health care for our Vetreans	1
telecommuting	1
Totals	13

Which type of businesses or services are most needed in International Falls? Please select up to two of the choices provided.

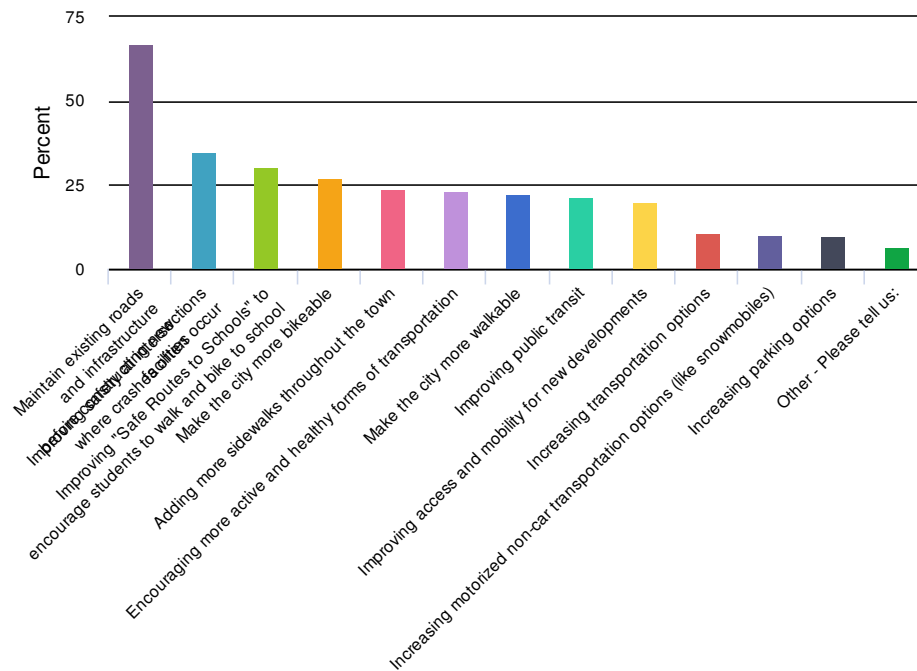















Value		Percent	Responses
Retail / shopping		36.3%	70
More community events (Farmers Markets, concerts, etc.)		28.0%	54
Public facilities (Libraries, human service centers, recreation facilities, etc.)		20.2%	39
Restaurants		20.2%	39
Lodging		16.6%	32
Health services		15.5%	30
Clothing stores		11.9%	23
Arts and culture venues (Museums, art galleries, live music venues, etc.)		10.9%	21
Professional services		8.3%	16
Housing services		8.3%	16
Other - Please tell us:		6.2%	12
Senior services		5.7%	11
Grocery stores		1.0%	2
Convenience stores		1.0%	2



Other - Please tell us:	Count
A call center, factories that are smaller but have decent paying jobs e.g. eye glass a machine shop a parts factory that will help PCA get repair parts faster,	1
Company Jobs that are going to bring people into our town.	1
Higher Education	1
Like [REDACTED] mentioned in the meeting today,we need services for veterans as well as for seniors with the growing number of seniors living in the area. We need services that match seniors with the community and veterans with purposeful livening.	1
Mental health services	1
Most restaurants serve the same terrible food. Only good place is Sandy's Cafe. The rest, even out at the lake, are bad. Sometimes you'll get a good cook but other times, the food is terrible.	1
Sports tourism	1
get rid of all the trash motels	1
higher education-agricultural	1
indoor recreation.	1
special needs children/adult services	1
technology/internet	1
Totals	12

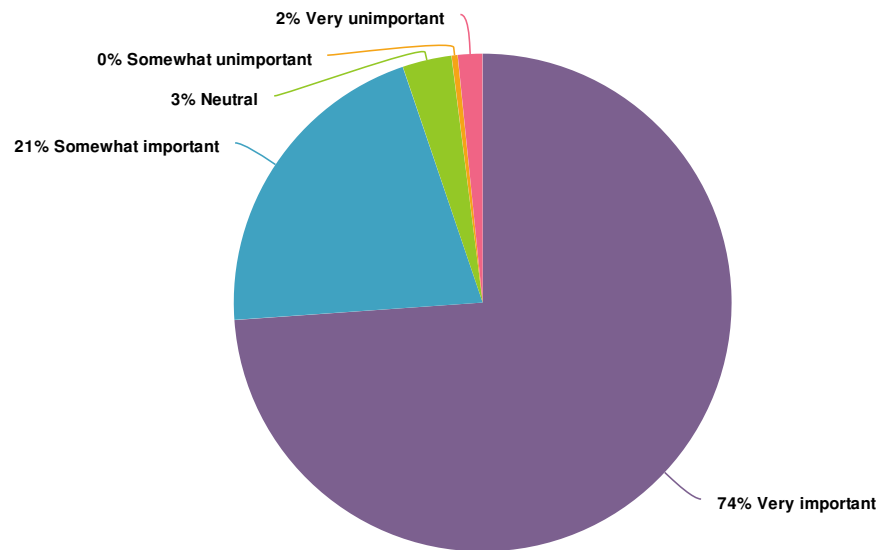
What should International Falls' transportation goals be for the near future? Please select up to four of your top goals.



Value		Percent	Responses
Maintain existing roads and infrastructure before constructing new facilities		67.2%	172
Improving safety at intersections where crashes often occur		34.8%	89
Improving "Safe Routes to Schools" to encourage students to walk and bike to school		30.5%	78
Make the city more bikeable		27.0%	69
Adding more sidewalks throughout the town		23.8%	61
Encouraging more active and healthy forms of transportation		23.4%	60
Make the city more walkable		22.3%	57
Improving public transit		21.5%	55
Improving access and mobility for new developments		19.9%	51
Increasing transportation options		10.9%	28
Increasing motorized non-car transportation options (like snowmobiles)		10.2%	26
Increasing parking options		9.8%	25
Other - Please tell us:		6.6%	17

Other - Please tell us:	Count
2-lane freeway TO Int'l Falls from the east, south and west.	1
4Wheelers need consideration.	1
Buy the bridge so there's no longer a fee to drive back and forth to Canada	1
By actually enforcing snow removal the streets aka sidewalks will be more available to walk on rather than watching people walk on the streets and avenues.	1
Fixing current sidewalks!	1
Improve accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities	1
Improving safety at intersections with children at play	1
Improving snow removal	1
Rebuild all the streets in town.	1
Take better care of what we have now	1
There is a lot in this town that is not handicap accessible.	1
bring back busing such as Greyhound to connect us with Duluth/Minneapolis on a regular basis	1
bring back/maintain/remove snow from the sidewalks in town	1
bus transportation to International Falls from Bemidji, Duluth, and Mpls	1
enforce dog leash	1
fix the potholes & existing roads	1
paving streets that are currently just gravel	1
Totals	17

How important is it to involve the public in the development of long-range plans for International Falls?



Value		Percent	Responses
Very important	<div><div></div></div>	73.9%	184
Somewhat important	<div><div></div></div>	20.9%	52
Neutral	<div><div></div></div>	3.2%	8
Somewhat unimportant	<div><div></div></div>	0.4%	1
Very unimportant	<div><div></div></div>	1.6%	4
Totals: 249			



Imagine you were King or Queen for a day: What is your "top #1 thing" you would do for International Falls?



ResponseID	Response
5	I would want to create more jobs, especially higher paying jobs in our community. These jobs would bring more people to our area, which then would increase the economy, would help our local school districts and athletics programs, and help to restore pride in our community as we could increase the value of the area through growth.
6	Add either bus or train service to town and reduce the cost of flying in and out of our local airport.
7	Remove certain politicians from office. Why would a business start a business in this town with the current political climate?
11	Find a way to bring the city together aka work together for a future
12	Tourism development.
13	Invest in our youth and the future of our community through the creation of good paying jobs and better use of our natural resources.
17	Bring in manufacturing jobs
20	Bring in another high employment company or make the city we have beautiful.
21	I would find a way to make the area from across Essentia health clinic into an area either for a business or housing I hate driving by there on Keenan drive and it to me just looks like useful unused space
23	Fix/add sidewalks
24	Bring new businesses to our city, so more young people will stay in the area.
26	We need campgrounds that are next to the lake.
30	Bring in more industrial/manufacturing jobs.
31	Develop a 24/7, affordable daycare center that also had a social worker on site to process/assist with child care applications and case management. The daycare center would be on or near an assisted living/elderly housing so they could be party of running/volunteering at the center in an age-to-age facility.
32	Stop it from dying.
33	Bring in businesses that would attract people to want to stay in international falls for the long haul (ex:Target, year round recreation centers for young kids, or GOOD chain restaurants)

## ResponseID Response

37	Use the natural resources for bringing in jobs. Water, trees, electricity etc. Have to have employable people to fill jobs also, bring people in
38	International Falls currently is not highly marketed as a tourist destination in much of the state. If you go to popular rest areas in Duluth and along I 35 you can get tourism pamphlets on northern Minnesota that essentially leave out International Falls. It's a shame! And needs to be corrected. I Falls needs a strong tourism marketing strategy moving forward.
39	Id clean the town up make it more appealing and Id build a play area at smokey bear park.
41	Make city services more accessible for Deaf families like mine and technology-friendly.
43	I would give every teacher in International Falls a pay raise.
47	Bringing more family/kids activities, programs for after school
50	For myself..I'd like see International Falls utilize the natural beauty of Rainy Lake and Rainy River better...It seems like every plan falls thru...and we need better jobs to keep our young leaders stay put whether manufacturing jobs or something involving renewable energy.This city really has nothing for myself anymore unless if I get into PCA.
51	Make it more inviting for outside businesses to come to the Falls such as: Target, roller skating rinks, anything that gives people a reason to stay here
52	Hire a marketing group/company to develop a comprehensive city marketing plan for I Falls, and set higher minimum education requirements for city/county positions to help ensure we are hiring the most qualified candidates (rather than the most popular or those with the most connections) for these positions.
53	Family aimed recreation, ymca, public pool, less access to drugs and alcohol
56	Bring a workforce and manufacturing plant to the community that pays well and doesn't compete with existing industry.
60	Open a child care center that is open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. A place that is safe and friendly, so you can go to work and know that your child is receiving a high level of care.
63	Improve infrastructure. I also want to state the importance of Backus. The City should increase funding for Backus - it is the heartbeat of our community.
64	Active life center, e.g. Community center
66	Bring in industry that would create high paying jobs, therefore increasing the city's population and cash flow to the city.
68	Improve broadband access - I know people who can work remote who would love to move back.
71	Take away the negativity. This community has a lot to offer, and if our own people are critical, how do we expect to be viewed by others?
72	Focus on making International Falls attractive for new businesses and keeping young people here as well as welcoming new members to the community: expanding childcare, investing in recreational facilities/infrastructure, and focusing on issues of poverty/chemical dependency-lets support our citizens in being healthy and productive
73	Reach out to companies that require resources our area has to offer and come up with some type of stimulus for these organizations to appea to their needs.
74	Street repair and maintenance. This winter was the worst that I can ever remember for snow removal on the roads and this spring the roads are the worse I have ever seen.
75	My priority is investing time, talents and money to RRCC to sustain the excellent programs, faculty, staff, administration, and to expand to meet the needs of higher learning in our community and beyond. In addition consideration should be given to programs that might bring more students, and provide education for certifications in ,areas where jobs are available.

## ResponseID Response

78	A variety of higher paying jobs.
79	Improve existing infrastructure and buildings to make the town look better
80	I would create a facility that has more activities for kids to be able to do.
81	Work on bring more businesses to the city for all types of workers from all skill levels.
82	Get rid of [REDACTED]
83	Make a mall with all the important stores. Make a Walmart or Sams club
84	Over throw the dictatorship of [REDACTED]
86	I would like to improve the housing stock. As a young adult and recent graduate with a bachelors degree, I find that the housing stock is limited. The houses up for rent are in very poor condition and the blight poses a problem. If homes are not in a good condition and blight continues to be a problem, it deters young people and families from coming to this community to work and live.
87	[REDACTED] riverside [REDACTED] develop with apartments and condos
88	Bring in more businesses
89	Fix the streets and clean up the city
90	Invest in housing stock.
93	Develop a five-to-ten year plan to bring jobs back to the City as well as the population. When a family of four moves out that is four people who no longer buy groceries, power, internet, pay taxes here, and etc. That is happening far too much to remain sustainable here.
94	Renovate or replace Kmart.. We need businesses that people want to shop at and don't dread going to. Ordering online is great, but it also takes away from our community.
97	Bring more industrial type companies to the town, bring more engineers and technological type people to the town.
98	Bring more sustainable jobs to town.
100	Water/Sewer improvement
104	Court a big (but environmentally responsible) business the size of what Boise-Cascade was in their heyday to come into the city and create lots of new, high paying career positions.
105	Bring the Rainy Lake Clinic and Essential back to one healthcare provider!
108	Make the river front property look like Fort Frances or the duluth Lake Walk. Very nice walking/running path.
109	I would bring in something to keep tourism here. So often they pass through to Canada or to the resorts. Splash park, more camping, resort closer to town...
111	Bring in more jobs that would allow for a better standard of living.
112	Plow the streets better in the downtown area since winters are long and sometimes brutal in this area.
116	I work as a professional counselor and many of my clients are homeless while in treatment for substance use disorders. They are from the area and have nowhere safe to live, which increases the rate of relapse and recidivism following discharge. If people had a safe place to transition to and safe housing for up to a year, help with getting a job, and continued access to sober support services I believe those who return to I'Falls would be a part of the solution and not return to be part of the problem. Other areas are creating programs like this and finding success. Projects like Project Clean Start out of the Grand Rapids area, for example.

## ResponseID Response

118	Bring more small businesses to town, and have more folks shop in town.
119	improve the quality of older/existing private and rental units
120	Bring in an indoor play area- that is staffed with people trained in CPR/First Aid and child care. Ball pit, trampolines, jungle gym, a safe place for kids to play.
121	get rid of all wetlands within 5 miles of town
124	Increase high paying jobs for young professionals to entice young families to live here.
126	ask for help from other regional cities. Support downtown development and mix used development as well as multimodal transportation.
127	Stabilize population loss with job creation and diversification
128	I would try to bring in another big company, such as Polaris. I believe this would bring in more jobs and people from out of town. This would make it so our town does not strictly rely on Boise
129	Bring in more businesses and tourist attractions. These draw in people and I feel as though this town needs a boost!
131	I would develop and produce massive marketing plan and support the expansion of how we cater to our tourists; making International Falls more than just primarily a summer destination. Putting International Falls back on the map and in the forefront of people's minds as a destination regionally, nationally, and internationally! Capitalizing and welcoming unique ideas that entrepreneurs and creative minds want to bring or develop locally, and supporting them to help those ideas come to fruition. Including launching more interactive activities for all ages, making our attractions more accessible, and providing more avenues to adventure and explore our amazing community and natural area!
139	Create more things to do for all ages.
142	Improve all roads and bring in a target and get rid of kmart
144	Replace [REDACTED] with someone who is actually fair and follows the MN laws and statutes without bias or preferential treatment to people he knows.
146	The town must be cleaned from head to toe before we can expect any improvements.
147	Open this area to more industry to supply jobs. Industry provides growth, but I know this can be difficult given our location. Secondly, we need to shift our focus from promoting this area for tourism based solely on natural resources. These types of tourists, statistically spend less money here even though they may be here several days. People who visit areas pushing cultural and heritage tourism are in a higher income bracket, spend more despite staying fewer days, and this type of tourism is more sustainable. Our area is a history rich mecca, with some of the oldest rock in the nation, and oldest culture. We need to be embracing our development and sharing our strength in our past, as well as promoting our beautiful 4 seasons!
149	fix the roads.
150	Bring more high paying jobs to the city, both professional and labor related. If good jobs are available, people will move and live here. This will benefit our schools, current businesses, and provide a need for new businesses. Jobs is the key to growth.
151	Fix uncontrolled intersections or add something other than Kmart to shop for household items and other such things
152	Create jobs.
153	Put the voices of people 25-40 years old into action of what needs to happen with the city instead of the "baby boomers" or elder generation make decisions that may not be in the best interest of the future for the younger generation in fear of change and tax increases.



## ResponseID Response

162	We need to utilize our title, "Icebox of the nation." We should have amazing snowmobile trails, ski trails, ice fishing, snowshoeing. We need a pull for tourists to spend their money. Have an "eel pout" in International Falls. Have a snowmobile race weekend (better organized than Tbird, but location is great), advertise for voyageurs ski and snow shoe. A nice lodge to support tourists. Nice restaurants besides the small handful we have. We need to accept more businesses to bring in more income to our area to support all of these ideas!
163	Try to get another industrial company to come in and get some more high paying jobs around.
164	I would build more stores to shop for clothes that would lead to more jobs. And some how do something about the big drug problem we have in his town the people that get put behind bars for drugs get a slap on the hand and that's it there needs to be a bigger punishment for those who bring drugs into this town!
165	I would open up an improved retail store other than Kmart. Maybe a target or Walmart.
166	Fund an amazing program for our students where money isn't an option, and learning and opportunity comes first.
167	Add a hotel with a water park.
170	Find and implement higher paying jobs to bring more families to or community! We must creat jobs that. Pay enough to sustain and increase more families to live here. It helps our community, our schools, and generates more tax money to improve our infrastructure!! We have to move forward, not stay in the past!
171	Bring in more options for young adults/teens. Including retail shops, restaurants, and entertainment
175	Increase job options and resources for young people and young families looking to stay in the area.
178	Bring in more jobs/industries to grow our community's job market.
179	More higher paying jobs in this area to keep our youth here
181	Create jobs... good jobs
182	Open more businesses that have hours that are better for single parents who can't afford child care. 2.) Get more things for today's youth to do
183	Improve things for our youth
184	Provide a place for the younger (18-25) crowd that doesn't revolve around alcohol.
188	Bring in stable, well-paying jobs--emphasis on "stable."
189	Tourism is a major industry here. I understand that some tourist areas charge 8% tax. That is too low. It should be at least 2% higher to improve roads and help promote the city. From what I can see the City of International Falls has been missing out on hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants and deferred loans to improve the City. I would look at cities such as New Prague and Stillwater to see how they have improved their downtown area and made it a destination rather than a stopover. With the price of gold now the City should set up some sort of promotion detailing the history of Rainy Lake City and its Gold Rush era. It seems our fair city has excellent fishing and I watch guides promoting fishing products in other cities. We should have a Rainy Lake Expo which should bring in a lot of locals to town for added revenue. I recall Kerry Arena used to have Expos but due to a lack of interest in setting them up it has stalled.
192	Let a manufacturing company in here for people like me so that we can make a living!!! And instead of 3 dollar stores with the same options and Kmart you can't get nothing from!! bring a Walmart or another business in here that you could actually get good clothes and other things from for a reasonable price!!!!!!
193	Restore mainstreet(update)
194	Build some Falls as a way to drum up tourism.

## ResponseID Response

195	Bring in businesses or activities to pull people to our area. Ely, for example, is a small town in the middle of nowhere, but they bring in a ton of tourists. They have a cultural feel that appeals to many.
201	Increase opportunities for health care such as a special rehabilitation facility that provides physical, occupational, speech, recreation and vocational therapies and services.
203	Improve the economy so good jobs are plentyfull with that retail will prosper
204	Food and housing for the homeless
205	I would create a place for children and teens to get together and have something to do aside from being destructive and turning to drugs.
206	There are so many problems and issues we have that I would have a difficult time but I do believe we have let our infrastructure become old, failing and just plain go to hell. Our past city administration didn't appear to believe in preventive maintenance and didn't seem to understand that infrastructure maintenance was economic development. We have a lot of catching up to do with very limited amounts of funds.
207	Bring in more high paying jobs
209	Better paying jobs to many people right now stuck with jobs that have no future increase or very little if we get better paying jobs that will help out everyone more money being spent in the community
213	Improve education for our students including opportunities as well as bringing the community into the schools
222	I would improve the sidewalks because many are degraded and in need of repair. I would also ensure they are properly maintained in the winter. I have noticed the publicly maintained sidewalks are often not salted/sanded and do not often receive snow removal services, making them hazardous for users.
223	Give more money to our local Police department
224	Promote winter activities. We do a decent job of bringing in tourism in the summer but what about the winter? It's still a beautiful place yet most of our resorts close down. I would think we could have lots of snowmobile groups of we promoted it better.
225	Work to get more business here so we re not so limited as to where we can get a good payable job with benefits. Secondly would be to fix our city streets! Many of them are in terrible shape!
227	Replace the city council, [REDACTED] with people who think outside the box and are willing to take our city forward with new thinking and ideas
228	Actually focus on improving/maintaining our city. Supporting people who try to make it better regardless of who they are. Focus on the community not personal interests.
229	Make an ordinance for businesses that they must have a sign within 60 days of opening a business. There are many businesses that don't have correct or proper signage. It's a minor thing that would improve the look of the town and help visitors looking for their services.
230	Bring in a company that requires people outside of our town to come in and take those positions. This will help our town grow.
231	Bring better jobs to the community.
233	We need more "liveable" wage employment options in our community and this needs to be done without all the drama within the city council and between the county board and city council.
236	Get more "new business" going. There's no place to shop. Everyone goes out of town. And the ones here, don't put the customer first they don't go above and beyond to help people

## ResponseID Response

237	Since I'd only have a day, I'd make a plan to fix all the sidewalks in town. They are absolutely horrible. Next would be a plan to address the rundown storefronts on 53 and draft an ordinance to fine the owners until things are cleaned up. Then I'd order inspections of all properties of our two slum-lords in town and not allow them to rent to anyone else until they fix all their property. That would be followed by an ordinance prohibiting any city funds, or any other grant, to be given to the slum lords for any reason. If they can't maintain what they have, they shouldn't get free money to fix it.
238	The commercial buildings need to be more inviting and in town highways need to be easily maneuverable for tourists with boats/trailers. If we were able to create a bottleneck through town that you could still maneuver through quickly and "Line up" for the border more efficiently, we could capitalize on the amount of people that travel through town. Part of the issue is that tourists don't stop in town because they don't know how long they are going to need to wait to get across the border... If we were able to take that guess work away and expedite the border crossing time we would benefit.
239	International Falls needs jobs with a minimum annual salary of 30000/year. Younger people with families need to be able to support them instead of struggle with their everyday living. We need more opportunity. If there was more opportunity, there would be more people!
240	Improve the public school system
241	Bring in business to help current residents obtain higher paying jobs. The more your residents make the more they support other business in town.
242	Improve education for k-12 and offer more recreational programs.
244	I'm not sure how to answer this question I feel like so many people struggle to stay afloat with bills, health, and stable income I feel when people are health and happy it contributes to our community and towns wellbeing more revenue may be the answer but I don't clam to know all the answers just want to see our community thrive
248	Work to bring in additional manufacturing jobs that pay a living wage (e.g. Digi-Key). Provide them incentives to move here such as tax abatement and low price on city owned property.
250	Make improvements for the youth in our area
251	Get rid of the "good old boys" network. We need new, innovative ideas to improve our town, and we need to get rid of "dead wood" politicians that seem to make their decisions based on old grudges rather than what is best for our community.
252	I would order all businesses along 53 to clean up their messy facades and use a new, interesting theme for signage, I'd add landscaping and banners downtown, and upgrade all the store fronts to a uniform theme - perhaps art deco like the stadium and library and bandshell. Smokey Bear Park would be re-landscaped, and the Band Shell re-done. I'd remove all the trailers from the riverside on 11/53 and turn it into a walking/biking park, all the way to the Park Service Headquarters. Ft. Frances has a gorgeous river bank, with docks and benches and I.Falls has ugly semi-trailers along its river. They would be gone during my domain. And then the Falls would become a center for winter olympic sport training. We would build a bobsled run, and ski jump and encourage athletes from all over the world to come and train. It would draw people to the town to watch the athletes. They would stay in the motels and spend money in restaurants. So I'd add another Sandy's, and make it serve healthy, fresh, home-made food 24/7.
254	Repair the roads that need to be repaired like 9th Avenue, 17th Street, and 15th Street.
256	Get rid of Kmart and bring in target
257	Fix all the roads in town. Going into town, downtown, and all the streets/avenues around town are in desperate need of repair.
260	I would love to see a YMCA type of facility. One that offers activities for children, as well as adults. This would be a way to encourage a healthier lifestyle for all.
261	Bring in a Food Co-op store. With more healthy organic food. Like they have in Virginia, Bemidji, Duluth Etc...

## ResponseID Response

262	Clean it up! Make sure that every kid growing up here has the opportunity to be gainfully employed here and be able to raise their family here near their own extended family... if that is what they choose. They have no choice but to leave now. Our most valuable export is our children ..they leave and for the most part cannot return.
267	Recreation center, especially in the winter. An accessible basketball court, pool, etc. etc. Would go a long way to making the winters more bearable in this part of the world. Also, some people can't afford gym memberships, a more affordable option would go a long way.
268	More positive marketing
269	Pursue technology employers
270	We need structured growth, we don't want to become a large city but we do need to do things to grow and still stay charming resort city as well as new employment opportunities. We need to listen to what our younger generation is saying. There are some young business owners and college students that have moved back into town or want to move back home that have innovative ideas we need to give them a chance to see what they can teach us. We also need some mainland camping in the park. I deal with tourist and get asked regularly where they can park their Rv or camper.
271	I would like to see more job opportunities and something fun for kids to do, like a water park/putting green area that would actually DRAW families back to International Falls and make it makes sense for them to want to live here.
273	Add a mall
275	Fix the issues cause by certain elected officials in the city.
276	Clean our city up and let our city grow with new businesses, hotels, restaurants and activities. Our city with the river and lake has huge potential to be so much more then what it is. Let's utilize it!!!!
277	Bring in more clothing /shopping. That way we could stay and shop local. Maybe a new mall
278	Multiple #1 things. Continuous construction and reconstruction of our roads, sidewalks, and bike paths. Develop a state of the art sport complex for our k-12 athletes. Remodel our Schools, parks, and places of recreation so our children can be raised in a safe, healthy, and successful first class community.
279	Construction on FES and FHS to combine into one campus that houses an indoor track/rec center, a daycare facility, and extra classrooms that are needed at the elementary level.
281	I would invest in renewable energies in hopes to help the town become more self sustainable and to possibly provide factory jobs producing the tools for renewable energy. Many townships and cities have taken this into consideration, and have succeeded.
284	Capitalize on tourism.
286	Bring in at least two large manufacturing businesses with priority on companies which would offer a large number of entry level or paid training positions that offering a starting pay ABOVE minimum wage.
287	Repair every road and street, Avenue and alley
290	You could review the "Voyage Forward" "4 Questions" for numerous answers to this question directly related to International Falls.
291	Have all the potholes fixed immediately.
292	Try to improve its retail market.
294	Add expanded services from the transfer station. 1 example mulch from chipped branches and compost from leaves and "wet" garbage
295	International falls community appreciation day



## ResponseID Response

296	I would recruit and make deals with larger commercial development & other industries (even if it isn't union) to create more jobs and opportunities for the people of I-Falls and potential new residents.
297	Bring in new stores to shop
298	Bring talented, educated people to town for high quality jobs.
300	clean up all the "white trash" housing in town..get the housing inspector to get to do the job...
302	make more job opportunities and more "accepting", equal opportunity jobs.
303	Increase jobs for the white collar worker
311	Improve working relations of elected officials and take all voices into consideration - not only those who have been in office forever!
312	Elect leadership that is forward-thinking, transparent, and competent. The current elected leadership [REDACTED] [REDACTED] are significant impediments to improving International Falls because this group lacks a strategic vision for the city and governs by personal agendas, not by what would be best for the city and its residents. Two examples of this would be the waste of public funds on an unnecessarily expensive airport upgrade that will suit largely unused once we lose scheduled air service and the fact that [REDACTED] put himself or an obvious crony on way too many local boards.
313	Annex and also add a sales tax and franchise tax on utilities to raise the revenue needed to make the infrastructure improvements and add the cultural social and recreational amenities that the younger generations expect
314	Improve the existing housing stock and create more housing options - single-level duplex units, townhouse and condominium units with associations for maintenance and upkeep purposes.
316	Remove all blighted/abandoned/unoccupied commercial and residential buildings.
317	Encourage more industry (tech, alternative energy, international commerce, tourism) that would encourage the development of related business (restaurants, education, museums, etc.) Additionally, recognize the river in the community as a quality of life asset.
318	Add more restaurants
319	Work together with other entities to attract more viable business
321	Clean up / fresh paint.
322	Clean up the community! The commercial Blight on Hwy 53 coming into town is embarrassing.
325	Install solar and wind on all city buildings
326	Be a leader and center of excellence for higher education in food production in the northland.
327	Educate leadership
328	Bring in more decent paying jobs
329	Strategic investment in job growth opportunities
330	Condemn and tear down dilapidated houses and build new homes on the same footprint if possible.
331	Grow and retain good paying jobs.
333	End infighting among community leaders

## ResponseID    Response

334	<p>To be honest, the most shocking thing that I see in this town is the needles in public areas. On my way to pick up my child 2 weeks ago at St.Thomas I found a needle in the alley way of 7th Ave less than a block away from the police station. The solution in my eyes would be a safe needle exchange program for our growing meth and heroin problem. This is probably the 10th one I have seen this year. Unfortunately, they are dropped in the most unpleasant places. The majority of them, I find near or at parks where my child is supposed to play. What can one be expected to do with that? I'm not picking that up, not with my child in tow. Give them some place to bring them, get clean ones (that they need to return to get more to the number) with no criminalized attitude. Because I would rather know they were not leaving them everywhere AND free of IV use pathos and not being locked up because they don't want to leave needles in parks. Or just think of the horrific image of a toddler with a needle hanging out of her toe because a kid took off her shoes. It's what I worry about everytime I go to one with my own daughter.</p>
335	<p>I would tell Kooch County that as the largest tax base for them, they need to invest more into the city itself. Then I'd compile all of our groups we've made for bettering the city and ask them to disband and join into one group. It almost seems like our different groups are working against each other and never get anything done.</p>

What would you like to see in the future for City Beach?



ResponseID	Response
5	Possibly some camping/tent areas. It is mostly a great beach. We need a camping area along Rainy Lake that you do not need a boat to travel to.
6	make it more user friendly. Concession stands, public activities, etc.
9	Allow more camping
11	Food and drinks available during the day/peak times. Larger beach
12	Add dock and diving board back.
13	Camping!
17	A public park that is better managed
20	Playground or more water slides, etc
21	Make it more family friendly to go there
23	Keep it
24	more transportation to bring young kids there anymore activities for them to do while there.
30	Improved facilities.
31	Innovative ways to increase use for all citizens
32	Nothing, maintain or let it go, while focusing on the city.
33	Larger beach area
37	Hook ups for more campers and r.v.s and advertise it
38	Maintain or improve facilities,
39	keep it clean
41	Burn it.
43	I think city beach is wonderful as is.

ResponseID	Response
47	City Beach is least of my concerns
50	Maybe A Resort..
52	Expanded camping opportunities of space allows
53	City beach is last on my list
55	Moved
56	More enhancements. Playground, equipment, etc.
57	Dock to walk out on, cleaner bathrooms (fresh paint on walls & floors), fresh pain on basketball court, camping lots for visitors, open 24/7.
60	A family fun facility that has things like laser tag, mini golf, etc.
62	RV Parking
63	Keep it staffed.
64	Continue to invest in. Becoming a great place. Add a splash park for smaller children or those with physical disabilities that are not able to swim.
66	More improvements to infrastructure/ more play equipment for children
68	A clean, welcoming beach, with consession hours, shower, changing area, lifeguards, swimming lessons, volleyball and basketball leagues and lessons, church services, picnic and grilling areas, boat parking spots, possibly organized kids programs/activities (day camps)
70	more activities for the kids
71	Improved restroom/shower area
72	I would love to see it be more like the beach/park in Crosby MN-it is beautiful and welcoming!
73	More community programs in that area
74	docks for boats to park so you can access it by water
77	buildings and facilty better maintained
78	a busy public beach with scheduled activities for various age groups
79	camping area
80	More activities held there
81	trash cans and picnic tables
82	Advertise for the camping and add more campsites
83	More beach less parking
84	AIAllow overnight camping and RV sites
86	I would like to see City Beach used for more events and attractions maybe a summer beach bash event. Promote the beach and keep it clean and enjoyable.



ResponseID	Response
88	Water obsticals
89	More activities to draw people
90	A new building, with concessions, lockerrooms/bathrooms and a useable banquet area with a kitchen that the City could rent out for events such as Grad parties, weddings and family reunions.
93	More lighting for persons there past dark.
94	A community volleyball league, or other programs to get people out there and active
97	Could care less
98	Dog park area for dogs to swim and play
99	Develop it with shops.
100	concessions
105	Make it usable and maintain it for the kids!
106	Life guards that actualy watch instead of ones that just visit with there friends.
108	Exercise equipment and more water toys for the kids
109	Growth in recreation
112	less seagulls and nicer sand
116	uncertain
118	It's not worth spending more money on.
119	more accessible
120	More activities for families
121	outdoor event facilities for weddings, reunions, etc.
122	Keeping it updated, rural in nature.
124	Enhanced facilities
126	it to become the place to be for outdoor celbrations and outdoor entertainment.
127	More camping areas/RV's
128	More slides or little toys for kids to play in the sand with.
129	I would love for it to stay around. Add more options to it.
131	Organized activities and intramural or recreational leagues utilizing the grounds we already have established!
134	A birthday party area that you can rent for parties
138	Nothing
139	More activities

ResponseID	Response
142	A better playground
144	More trash cans.. A working bathroom that is clean
146	Movies at the beach and other community activities in general at the beach.
147	I think improvements could be made to city Beach facilities for starters, as they are in need of some updating. I'm not sure what other issues they have there and would need more information to comment.
149	cleaner beach
150	Keep it well-maintained and accessible to public. New and full concessions also.
151	Being open a little later (like 9pm or until it gets dark) and more recreational activity areas
152	Lifeguard on duty
153	It cleaned up, potential camper parking, updated play equipment.
155	More coordinated and planned events and activities to bring together the community
159	Life guards and free use of pavillion
160	Improve it so that there is more use.
161	Expansion bike paths walking from beach to local community promote more tourism for local eateries and waterholes for ppl to enjoy the area better
162	Updated play/camping area
163	Pickle ball court
164	Bigger beach area
165	I would like dogs to be allowed there. And improved bathrooms.
166	Camper sites, fire pits, rental cabins
167	Some floating trampolines or slide etc.
170	If it doesn't increase the numbers using it, we should develop it into a destination for development. Restaurants, lodging, entertainment, and recreation!
171	Regular upkeep with volleyball and basketball court
173	Updated facilities. Clean up.
175	Improved grass around the beach
178	Overall upkeep and added features to attract tourists.
181	Paddle boat and canoe rentals. Nice playground
182	Bring back the cantina
184	Some rental options would be nice! Something like paddleboats, kayaks, canoes, etc.
187	Showers

ResponseID	Response
188	Consistent maintenance. Playscape for children.
189	With the TriAthlon why not have a sand volleyball tournament. If I recall there used to be buses that would pick up people to go to the beach.
192	Concession stand and or a dock
193	Keep active and improve. Have community building events(Fhs, etc)
194	Refined beaches
195	Snack shop, possibly. Better life guarding (I feel they could pay better attention).
201	Chairs and umbrellas for guests.
203	Campsites
204	Campground for rv's
205	A better park and restoration of the awning and changing facilities.
206	Keep it open to the public!!!!!! Not everybody has a boater lake property or access!
220	A concession stand
222	I would like to see City Beach maintained and remain open and usable to the public. Increasing the number of trash cans or placing cigarette receptacles near the changing rooms could decrease the amount of littering.
224	Keep it going! it's a great place for the family.
225	What's wrong with it now? Seems fine to me but I don't use it so maybe shouldn't speak
227	new play structure for kids
229	Recreational opportunities, rentals for paddle boards, paddle boats, canoes, kayaks, etc.
230	I believe city beach needs more campground for campers.
231	Nothing
233	Camping should not be allowed. Make it more kid friendly, use sentence to serve to clean and maintain...clean and update the bathroom area!!!
234	Unknown
236	Nicer picnic area where you could drive up and get the stuff out of your car like they did "years ago"
237	Nothing really.
238	Awesome place, updated it and advertise it! Hidden Gem!
239	Camping spots/ tents/rvs
241	Concessions
242	Maintain city Beach
244	Kayaks and paddle boats

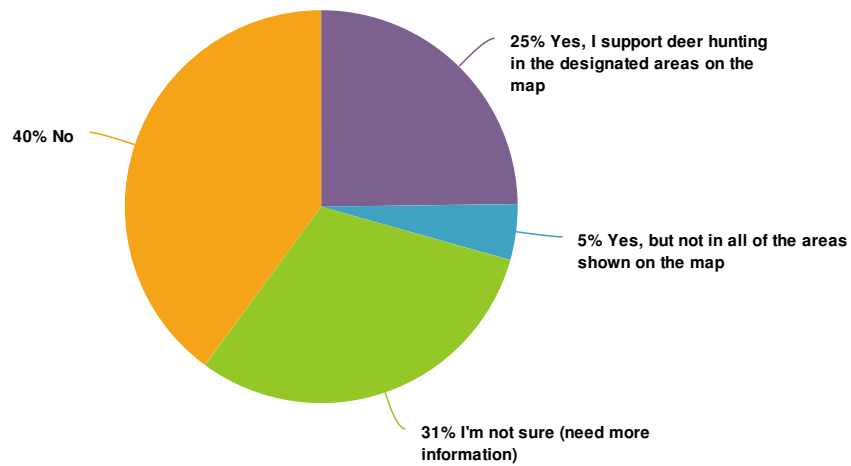
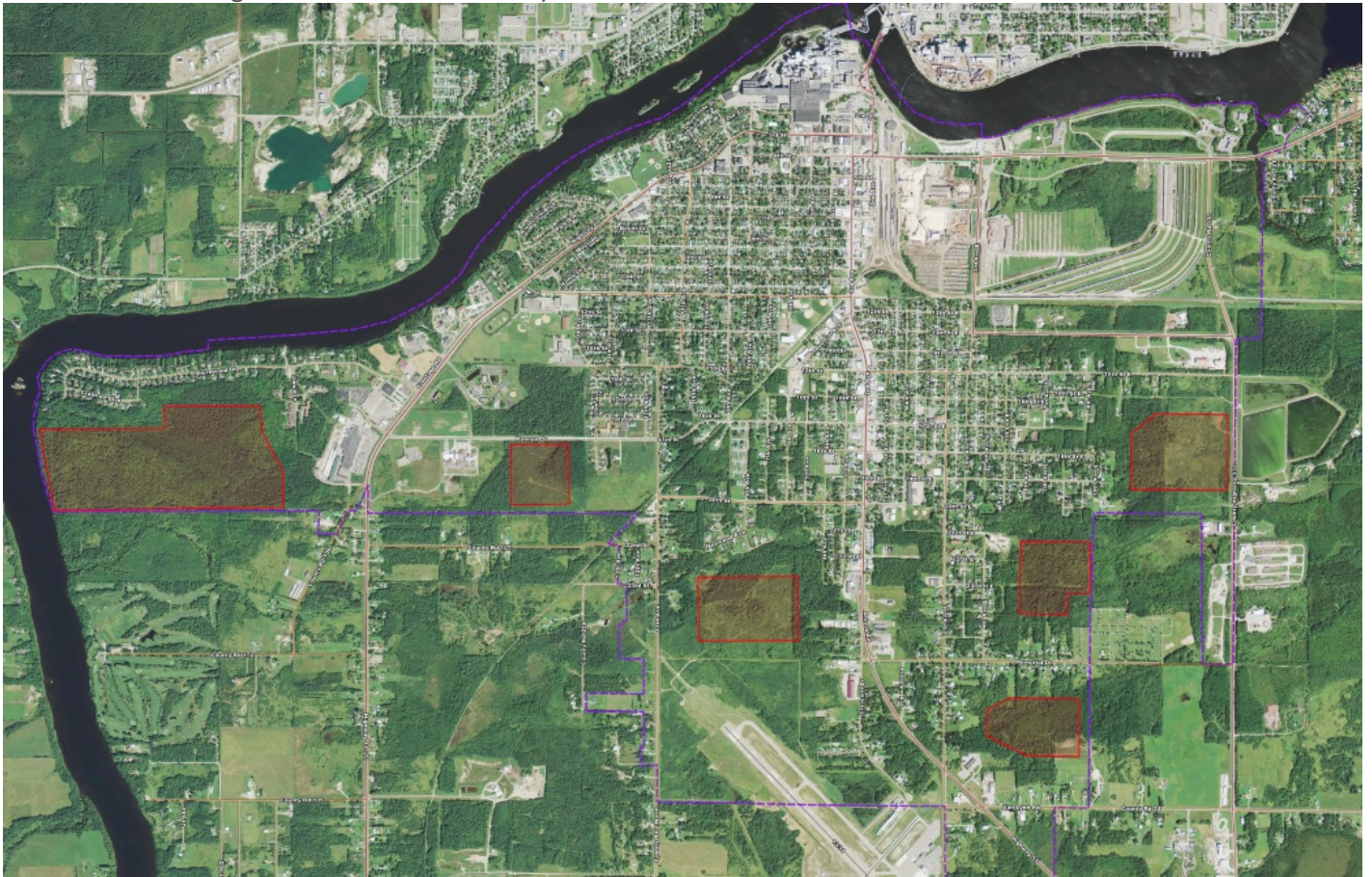
ResponseID	Response
245	Continued support
248	Events to promote its use
250	play structure, available food.
251	Make it a complete, full service campground. There are very few draws for tourists in our community, and the beach is a gem, that if managed correctly, could be a money maker for our city. Those that come here to camp could also bring money to local businesses. It is also important to keep the beach as a public use area for our families and children.
252	Love the area. Wish it still had concessions. And events to draw people there. Maybe some kind of pokeman tournament. Volleyball, mini triathalons. It is very beautiful with the river on one side and the birch trees behind. So I hope the city just preserves its beauty.
253	RV Parking Spots
256	That it stays open and maintained
257	A playground and more water items for kids like trampolines that go in the water.
260	I am not sure how feasible an idea, but have some sort of a restaurant or a cafe on or near the beach would be wonderful!
261	More camping, concession to buy drinks or a food stand
262	A beautiful community building for weddings etc. beach should remain public but maybe build condos and rent or sell them.
266	Better life gu
267	No opinion, growth is always good.
268	Public events
270	Parks and recreation programs
271	The beach area improved a LOT, which is nice. I think it should continue to be maintained and a safe place for kids to go and actually have some fun!
273	Nothing
274	More amenities
275	Bigger area to host parties/events
276	Clean it up and have more activities for our youth!
277	Nothing
279	The beach is wonderful for our community. I'd like to see it maintained for future generations.
281	an expansion on the recreational options.
284	Vending machines
286	Bring the concessions back!
287	More and better playground equipment along with more picnic tables
290	Perhaps more picnic tables. Promoting use of the beach. Are swim lessons still held at the beach?





## ResponseID Response

291	Get new sand.
294	City beach is a great resource for the area. If the costs are adding up perhaps there could be a small fee \$2 bucks a day per person or cap it at \$10 a family. maybe season passes. it would be nice to have more seating and places to grill. you can go out and want to grill and not find a place. if kids are swimming it is hard to watch them and set up a pick nic
295	Little business"stands"... Ice cream, hot dogs, who covers, etc.
296	I have never been to City Beach.
297	Idk
298	Community events
300	promote the beach..its a gem
302	concession stand
303	concession stand available once again
311	Increased tourism use.
312	It seems to be a valued and well used public amenity.To the extent that is true, it should be maintained and enhanced.
313	A public sauna
314	New pavement and striping for the parking lot.
316	It's fine the way it is for now. It should not be a priority.
318	More slides, cleaner beach
321	Update/ green up
322	A first class resort is a no brainer!
325	Educational programs about the water and pollution
327	Maintained
328	Continued open use for the community
329	overnight camping and motor home options
330	Maintain it as it is; maybe update.
331	Transportation from town to the beach
334	More.....Fun.
335	Don't care
336	Nothing



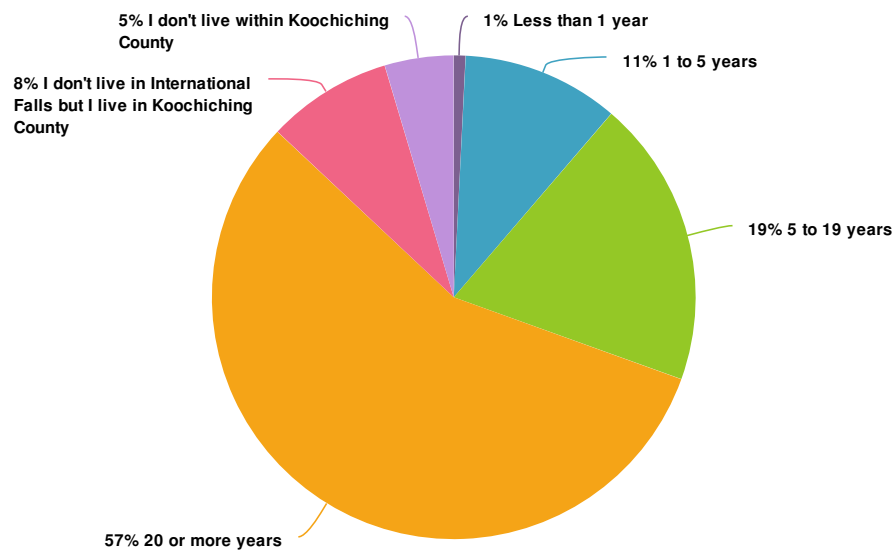
The City is considering an ordinance to allow Deer hunting in designated areas (shown in the map below). Should Deer hunting be allowed within the city limits?



Value		Percent	Responses
Yes, I support deer hunting in the designated areas on the map		24.8%	59
Yes, but not in all of the areas shown on the map		4.6%	11
I'm not sure (need more information)		30.7%	73
No		39.9%	95

Totals: 238

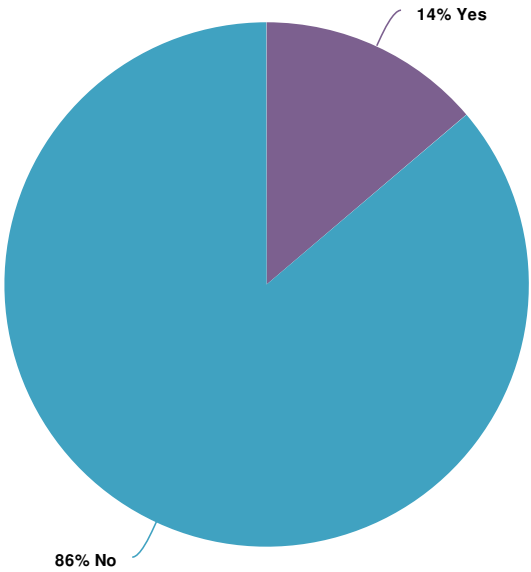
## How long have you lived in International Falls?



Value		Percent	Responses
Less than 1 year	<div><div></div></div>	0.8%	2
1 to 5 years	<div><div></div></div>	10.5%	25
5 to 19 years	<div><div></div></div>	19.2%	46
20 or more years	<div><div></div></div>	56.5%	135
I don't live in International Falls but I live in Koochiching County	<div><div></div></div>	8.4%	20
I don't live within Koochiching County	<div><div></div></div>	4.6%	11

Totals: 239

Does International Falls have adequate employment opportunities?



Value		Percent	Responses
Yes	<div><div></div></div>	13.8%	31
No	<div><div></div></div>	86.2%	193
Totals: 224			

Please provide more information on what type of employment you have found or why suitable employment was difficult to find by writing in the space below.



ResponseID	Response
5	I work in human services. I find that employment is difficult to find here because often times it is who you know. Also, there are many lower paying jobs, however this forces a person to have 2 or more jobs to get by until something better opens up. The problem with that is that many people are in the same situation, so when the better jobs open up, it is very competitive. Not that we don't want the best person for a job, but we may lose skilled or qualified individuals who cannot make enough and are lured to areas with more high paying jobs.
6	We need more living wage employment opportunities.
11	There isn't adequate high salary jobs
14	I work at home for a company outside of the area
21	I drive truck at Mannco trucking and I'm lucky to be working there so close to where I live but I feel like the only other jobs in town that are good paying either require education or a person has to jump through all sorts of hoops to get a job like PCA
31	We need more information on our available workforce before we can entertain new industry or investment. Int'l Falls has a number of job postings on a daily basis but they range from entry level to advanced, specifically health care.
32	Talk to Trump.
33	As a nurse(BSN), which is normally a profession that provides you with many options of employment, I found 1 option, the hospital. While this worked for me, that is not appropriate for any town.
38	I grew up in Intl Falls but no longer live there. I moved back temporarily with my husband in 2014 hoping to find work there but ultimately had to move to the Twin Cities for work. Moving back doesn't seem like a possibility at this point.
41	Equal opportunities are not given to those who are Deaf.
43	Employment has been difficult to find due to a very small selection of jobs paying more than minimum wage. Most employment opportunities center around 2-3 companies, leaving little room for variation.
50	I work in retail...which is unstable especially in January-May...I wish we had more choices with better pay...but till we get an increase in population and younger people that will never happen.
52	There seems to be very few professional opportunities outside of healthcare or government work.
53	If you don't have a degree or work in the mill, you can go work at mcd.



ResponseID	Response
57	I worked as a CNA & in a group home for disabled individuals as well. For younger men & women, it's tough to find a good paying & career building job that'll support you to get out on your own two feet.
60	I am employed in the human service field.
64	Telecommuter. Broad band access important. Demand better flight times from SkyWest,
66	Employment in itself is not difficult to find, but employment with high wages to allow one to support a family is. Aside from PCA, the opportunities for people to find these types of wages are few and far between. I was lucky enough to find a job that would allow me to telecommute so I could stay in International Falls, but this is a rare opportunity.
68	I have found suitable employment, but when I try to help others, the jobs available are low paying jobs that a family could not live off of (CNA, sandwich artist, etc.
71	My husband and I both have bachelor degrees, however, a good paying job is hard to come by, especially when we need to pay off student loans.
72	There are very few higher paying jobs available- (\$20/hr )
73	Employment is hit and miss. Some jobs are specialized and most are bottom jobs. There needs to be coverage for job availability in this area that is not covered i.e. Mid level jobs.
75	International Falls has provided me a "magnificent" teaching job at all levels, and in every public and private school, for the past 43 years, Although I moved here for a one year adventure, I stayed for a lifetime, and one factor kept me here--the people who have embraced me in every style. This community, and the caring and committed folks who call this home are in their own league. I have traveled all over our wonderful world, but International Falls is HOME.
78	Luckly for me I have been employed for over 20 years. There are not enough high level/high paying jobs to make our children want to stay in Int'l Falls.
79	I have a full-time job in my field.
80	We just don't have as many options in town and if you have education nine times out of ten when you try to get hired here for anything you are over qualified and can't get hired.
81	Not for myself, but for younger not as skilled worker that needs a part-time job while attending school.
82	Need to bring in more manufacturing type jobs that will bring in more people to this town.
83	I have had three jobs here in International Falls. I have worked for the college as a receptionist, the movie theater as a manager and the county as summer help. There is a lot of opportunities I fell if you know the right people.
86	I work for City government. It is difficult to find jobs in the accounting/business field in this area as there are few and far between. Majority of the jobs in the area are lower end retail or lower end restaurants that pay near minimum charge. Many of the area are educated, therefore it is hard to find adequate jobs in the area that fit their skillset.
87	City jobs, PCA, railroad, government jobs available. High tech jobs not available.
89	I am a Paramedic, not a lot of job opportunities
93	There are not enough career opportunities present in the City, new ideas should be explored to reverse the declining population and opportunities here.
94	Many places only hire a limited number of people
97	Engineering.
109	I work in the health care system at entry levels working my way up.
111	Not enough business/industry that provide decent paying jobs.

## ResponseID Response

112	I had planned on getting a job in the new year and I did, thanks to Tim Hortons coming to here, otherwise, I'm not so sure if I would have a job at this time.
116	I have heard that there are not very many good paying jobs. I do not know this personally, only word of mouth.
118	I found long term employment here in 1965 but I think the chances of doing that today are slim.
119	(I work with the low-income in IF) there is a need for more employment opportunities for those with more "challenges" in their lives - and child care to aid many of them as they actually go to work.
122	Too many minimum wage jobs.
124	I work in healthcare. My job is stable and provides a good income. However, it is difficult for spouses to find good paying jobs unless they work at the mill or in the healthcare field. Options are limited.
128	For people who do not have a higher education the only opportunities kids have are fast food. Most of the time there is age limits for kids to be hired which restricts them.
129	I found that there's always employment open and you can find really nice jobs to work at in good environments.
131	I have full time employment with a great benefits package. However, my place of work is facing a major financial crisis and the opportunity to move up is not an option - leading for me to be searching for other opportunities. This may lead to me looking out of town as the opportunities that have a wage to support a comfortable lifestyle in the area are fairly narrow. Unless, one was to go back to school and receive another degree or specialize in another area, starting back at square one..
132	As a tourist and also have family members that live in international falls, my husband and i were looking to move up that way and the only place to make a good living is at the mill or the laser shop up there and nobody had immediate openings. Also with a staffing/hr and medical background history myself, there are no jobs for myself. So we chose not to move that way as of now. Jobs are limited up there unless you know people.
138	The mill
139	Any employment is difficult to find due to limited daycare.
142	Not enough good paying jobs to own your own home for single families
147	I am a Historian and Museum Professional, so I am employed by the Museum, but there are no other options for my field here currently beyond that or the park service. I have worked other jobs here in the past, prior to finishing my degree, but they are not jobs one can live above the poverty line on.
149	jobs requiring higher education
150	I am actually an employer and I find the problem of lack of suitable workforce more applicable.
151	Lack of higher paying jobs for people who don't necessarily have anything higher than an associates degree. It seems the only thing you can find are places like united health care if you don't have a lot of college experience.
152	Manufacturing, Restaurants
153	There are several positions available in the city of various levels, but don't often offer the best pay and benefits. We need more variety verses the typical retail employment opportunities.
154	For people my age, roughly 20s there is not much for jobs besides the food industry which for me is fine for now but if it weren't I'm not sure what I would do for work
158	I have a college degree. Very tough to find work beyond the degree area.
159	2 higher paying employers in town. Need more competitive jobs here to keep people here.

## ResponseID Response

161	I am in a lucky position to be very good in a specific background that the area was lacking and I am grateful to the community that does have growth for me
165	I found a homemaker job at the nursing home and also a job at the movie theater. I had to get two jobs since one job didn't provide me with enough hours and money.
166	We need more opportunities for employment, who pay more than minimum wage.
167	I have found good employment and currently work two jobs.
170	Let's be honest, our community has tried to live in the past. We have passed up job creating opportunities to not change for the good or future! We have to be open to new ideas, and take a chance for a better community!
171	I have a part-time job in a retail store, which was somewhat easy to find.
175	I had to move out of town because there were no job openings and the ones that were available couldn't support my family
178	My husband has a good job with transportation. But living wage jobs are hard to find in I Falls unless you drive truck or work at PCA, I would like to see more living-wage jobs.
179	COLA jobs that would keep our youth in this area
182	To find a job that has decent hours with decent pay to be able to live without being paycheck to paycheck is near impossible. Their should be jobs (other than Kmart) that you can get in town.
184	I was lucky and had connections for my job but I know a lot of people who need jobs, especially for the younger crowd. Also more career type jobs instead of dead end/ lower wage (fast food, kmart, etc.) jobs.
188	The employment opportunities I've found either pay too little or aren't in my field of expertise.
189	For employment opportunities I believe we would need to find out what goods and services the city is missing. I would hope that is one of the questions in this survey. If not then it does not really address the needs of the city or its citizens. The City can boast it has the best water and yet we do not bottle it and sell it. Not even locally. It can not only be distributed locally but also other cities. Every successful city has something to sell to other cities with its own brand. Look at big box stores. They have their own brand. Even Super One and County Market have their own brand. The City should also be able to do so.
192	I've tried to get a job at Boise since I graduated in 1989 you ask them!! Let marvins or others to come here for people like me can make a living! This towns been dying ever since late 80s and early 90s and it's like you guys don't care our sports can't even compete anymore cause you guys are too stubborn to fix it!
193	I am a young adult with a college degree and would love to have an option to stay in town. Unfortunately many of my friends and myself are forced to look elsewhere
194	There are not enough manufacturing jobs.
195	It is very difficult to find quality jobs to apply for. I've also noticed there have been instances of hiring based on who you know or connections people may have.
204	There are no jobs
205	There are too many minimum wage jobs and not enough jobs that give a substantial living or career expansion opportunities.
206	There simply isn't the businesses here to provide employment here. People can't live on minimum wage jobs!
213	Jobs that involve an advanced degree can be difficult to find
220	There's not a lot of high paying jobs. Most families have to get two jobs in order to pay the bills.

## ResponseID Response

222	Suitable employment has been difficult for me to find, in part because of my chosen career as a biologist, but also because few jobs outside of Boise PCA pay an adequate living wage.
224	We grew up in Int'l Falls and lived there for a while after college but career advancement took us away from the community. We still have a home on the lake that we plan to move back in retirement. We come back to the Falls regularly on weekends.
225	I don't know specific types of jobs but ones that pay well and has good benefits, i.e. Health care, etc.
227	I have always had an adequate job in the 20 years I have been living and working here
229	We moved here for a job, and I started a business that is profitable. A co-working space or a small business incubator would be the easiest to promote entrepreneurship and give better visibility to those starting businesses.
231	Jobs in general do not pay enough in International Falls.
233	Liveable wage employment.
234	As someone who moved here, I found it very difficult to find employment due to the fact that many places do not hire people from outside the community. I worked at Wells Fargo in Minneapolis and applied 3 times at the Wells Fargo here and never even got an interview. That is just one example of failed employment opportunities. I was lucky to find employment working for someone who also had moved to the community.
237	Limited opportunity for skilled work. The Mill seems to only hire local families instead of people that move here from out of town.
238	Creating living wage (regular day hour) jobs for spouses of people that get jobs elsewhere (Health Care, PCA, education, etc.) Our young people want to stay or come back but can't and there are young people who move here who don't have a means of meeting like aged/generation people. (Provide BYP with funds to facilitate this for you)
239	I feel like there are not many career opportunities here.
241	I have a degree that this area does not support. Spouse works for PCA. Constant forced overtime allows for no family time and very poor moral. Sadly, there is nothing else in this area that offers the wages that PCA does. What happens to this community if PCA were to shut down?
244	I'm self employed hairstylist it was not hard for me to find work but I feel we need mid level jobs
245	We need more living wage jobs
248	Living wage employment is difficult to find unless you have an advanced college degree.
250	There is a limited industry in our town for which to select jobs.
251	There seems to be a great number of unemployed in our community.
254	It's hard to find a variety of jobs available for high school students.
256	Jobs that help maintain a good salary to be able to live well and not on the system . People who could work, should work
257	There are not many jobs for well educated people in this community and there are not many higher paying jobs. This is partially why many people end up having two jobs to support their family.
260	I work in education. I feel that there is a decent amount of employment in certain fields. I think that certain degree areas (nursing, certain trades) allow some people to find immediate employment. I think that RRCC should focus on some of those areas in the degrees or certifications that they offer. We have many people that don't look elsewhere for education, and an AA degree from a local community college is not going to open a ton of opportunity for a person in International Falls.

## ResponseID Response

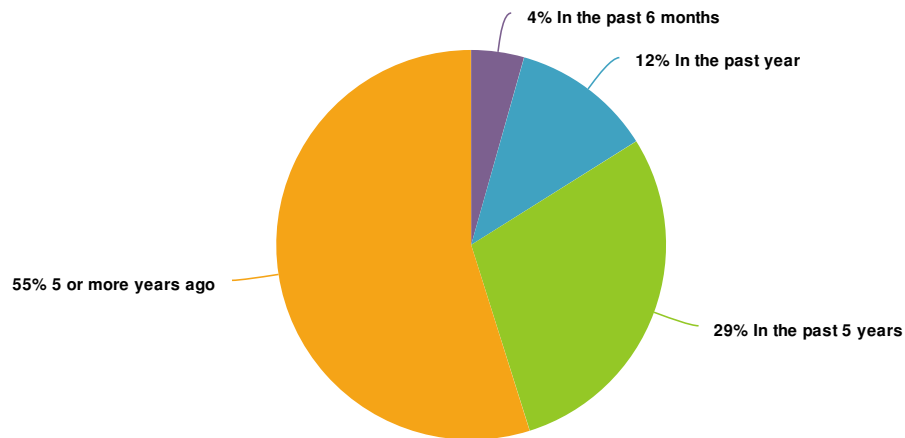
261	Not all listed in the newspaper. Job place not noticeably recognized when it's in the college.
262	I am employed by the City Water Plant. There are a limited number of high quality employment opportunities. Most people get a decent job and hang on to it, new opportunities only come when something new comes to the area or when someone retires or dies. No real growth in opportunities!
267	I think it's clear, the numbers speak for themselves. You are losing citizens faster than you are gaining them. You need to bring in more opportunities. Big part of that is if you aren't lucky enough to get into the paper mill or work in the medical field here...it is very hard to raise a family with the job opportunities offered here in town.
270	We need to be more innovative with some of the businesses we have in town. There are small businesses who struggle with hiring employees because all the extra expenses we incur strangles the small business owners. AND there should be opportunities to help match small businesses owners with students, veterans, displaced labor, to see if they have interests in industries that already exist. For example, the mechanics in town here are ageing, how about the shoe repair shop, sewing and mending, there's small businesses that may have to close because once they want to retire there is no one to replace them. And their businesses are so needed in town. We are overlooking the hands on technical jobs in town when it comes to jobs. I can also see more need for handyman services in town do to the aging community and people are less and less capable of doing practical repairs. There are students in our school that just aren't college students but they have these sort of interests. I have a son who is one of them. The school kept showing him college courses, he went for one semester and felt it wasn't the education he fit into. He's a hands on learner and didn't want an indoor job.
277	No good paying jobs. I am moving to St. Cloud with my children for better job opportunity
281	Aside from Boise the most available jobs are at restaurants and retail. This has to change or the youth will continue to leave in high capacity
284	Employees need to be skilled. Lack of skilled employees lowers ability to bring in more high paying jobs.
287	The pay scale and benefits for most jobs in the falls needs to be better, so turn around is not so high and people won't have to get more jobs to survive.
291	Needs more non-union jobs for high schoolers.
292	What jobs are available , not everyone who applies is given equal consideration.
294	Upon researching the prospects for employable people I have found that in Koochiching county that out of the 12,000 some people only about 3,00 to 4,000 are employable. That makes it hard to bring industry in. given that fact the job opportunities are about right.
296	I am an Adjunct Instructor at RRCC. I work part time for RRCC and Substitute Teach K-12. I fill a critical need at RRCC, but I will likely never be full time. This makes it difficult to pursue additional careers in the area due to available time. These two jobs work, but are not ideal for benefits, retirement, stability, or for career advancement.
300	retired...and this should be a major long term goal for IFalls: keep and add to the retirement community (even if they are snowbirds) - a lot of retirees have a lot of money...
302	more job opportunities for people with lower education, job history etc.
303	Education. There are a very limited number of jobs to draw young people with college educations to this area. Because of the lack of higher end jobs, the majority of the school population is lower end (free/reduced school lunches for instance). It would be nice to once again have a balanced mix of students.
311	One industry which can only employ a definite amount of people
312	We are a dying mill town that continues to allow the mill, now owned by PCA, to bully the town in ways that hurt or future. Their opposition to the wood pellet proposal is just one example of this bullying behavior.
313	I am retired but was a teacher and financial officer for a bank. I was able to find jobs but the economy was stronger back then.



## ResponseID Response

314	NA
316	I work remotely for a company with a presence in town, however my job is unrelated to the local office. 10 years ago relocating here would have been impossible. But thanks to the opportunity that broadband internet provides, I'm able to live here and work a job that traditionally would be unavailable. Likewise, if the opportunity went away, my family would be required to move.
317	I'm unfamiliar if IFalls has adequate employment. I was going to leave the above question blank.
319	limited decent paying administrative positions with benefits
321	Professional employment. Not a friendly place to new people.
325	Professional licensed position and it was difficult to move to Ifalls and find rental housing if you have a pet
328	employed by ISD 361
330	Too many of the job opportunities appear to be low-paying service jobs.
331	Found a government job. Not many other choices for white collar workers.
333	Not much beyond Boise and low-paying tourism
334	CNA work and housekeeping. Suitable employment for a family (assuming this town still wants them) to me, means something that rings in at \$15. The housekeeping job was short lived. Most jobs without paid incentive to stay are.
335	Hiring only locals discourages others from moving here for work.

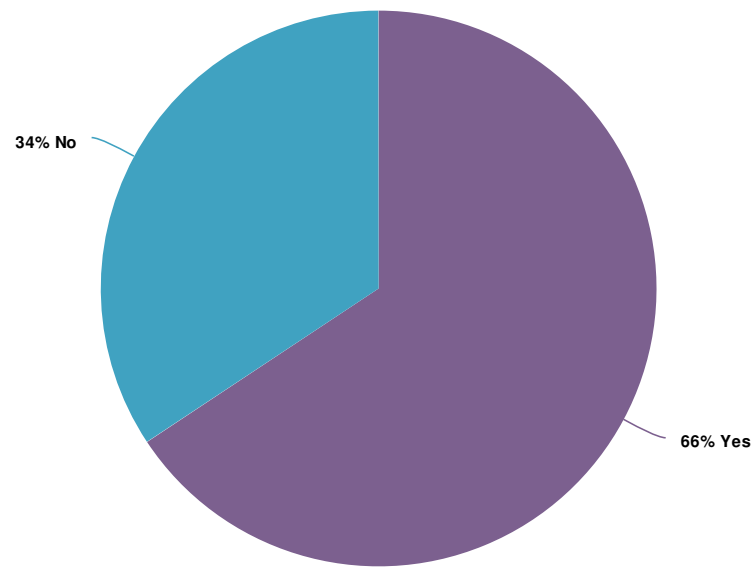
## When did you last move or change housing?



Value		Percent	Responses
In the past 6 months	<div><div></div></div>	4.4%	9
In the past year	<div><div></div></div>	11.7%	24
In the past 5 years	<div><div></div></div>	29.1%	60
5 or more years ago	<div><div></div></div>	54.9%	113

Totals: 206

Were there adequate housing choices to meet your needs the last time you moved?



Value		Percent	Responses
Yes	<div><div></div></div>	65.7%	132
No	<div><div></div></div>	34.3%	69
Totals: 201			



## ResponseID Response

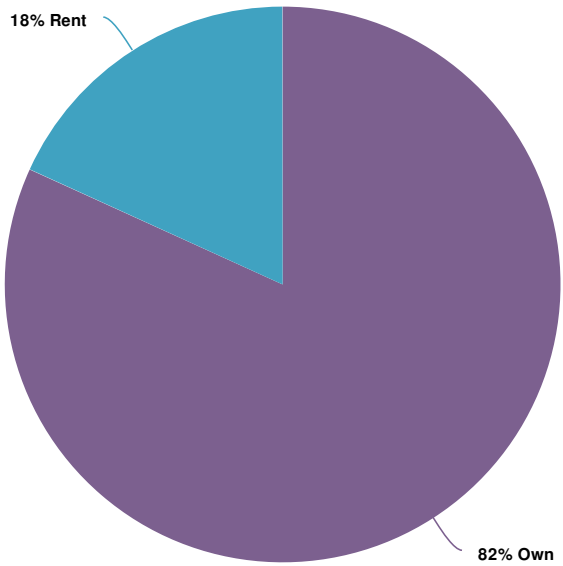
120	Being a single mother of 2- working, going to college, and everything else- finding affordable housing is extremely hard that isn't insanely expensive. We need more affordable rentals.
124	Housing in our area is, in general, very outdated which much work that needs to be done. The prices are very high when looking at a comparable home in other areas.
127	It was during Mill expansion.
131	For a person that does not want to live in low income housing, the options for rental are fairly unappealing and rundown.
138	To much junk unless you wanted to put up six figures
144	██████████, ██████████, ██████████ and ██████████ are all slumlords. I do not wish to live like filth and refuse to rent from any of them. On top of that, most units are overpriced and in sketchy neighborhoods. That leaves ██████████ Apartments as the last resort. My neighbors all do drugs while living off welfare and neglecting their children. I would like to buy a house but there is not much on the market at this time.
146	The is very little new construction. I understand that there is great expense with new construction, however this happens it creates a domino affect. While looking for homes there was very little to choose from that had been maintained between 75,000 and 150,000.
147	No country housing available at the time.
151	Decent and affordable apartments at my age (21) are hard to find with my wage. Every apartment I looked at that I could afford is very run down, smells bad, and/or is very old with utilities like sewer and water that don't work well or at all.
158	Only few people to rent from. High rent.
181	Run down houses
188	At the time, the economy was stable, so homes were hard to come by and expensive.
189	After being gone for over 30 years the housing situation was abysmal to say the least. Anything affordable was so run down that it would cost more than it would be worth to repair. Fortunately for me I was able to find a place that was decent due to a relative. In talking to people who have transferred here for work the rental situation is horrible. The lack of enforcement of Rental Licenses shows. One person who moved here asked about a property and found it was run by certain rental agency and they said No Thank You. It seems our lack of control of the rentals in town spreads far and wide. Another professional who moved here rented from a contractor and their first Winter here they had to use two heaters in the bedroom just to keep it warm enough to sleep. With 800 rental units in town and at a rate of \$40 per inspection that would create \$32,000 in revenue and you would be able to hire a person to do inspections and do the reports and provide a much better rental opportunity. In other words the rental properties here are running the city rather than the other way around.
192	I don't make enough money to afford good housing and I make too much to get help!!
195	We looked at many houses that were sub-par for the price or blight in surrounding area was undesirable.
205	Not enough renters who allow pets. Especially dogs that weigh more than 30lbs. A lot of the cheaper apartments are smoke damaged and grimy.
207	Price ranges
209	Working 40 hours a week and I can barely make them ends meet if it wasn't for a friend that moved and being able to rent his place cheap I wouldn't be able to make it
229	When we moved to International Falls, we were almost not able to move because we could not find safe and temporary housing for our family. We purchased a home and received help from a landlord to find a short-term rental. Had this not happened, we would have been in a tough situation. This may have caused us not to move here at all.



## ResponseID Response

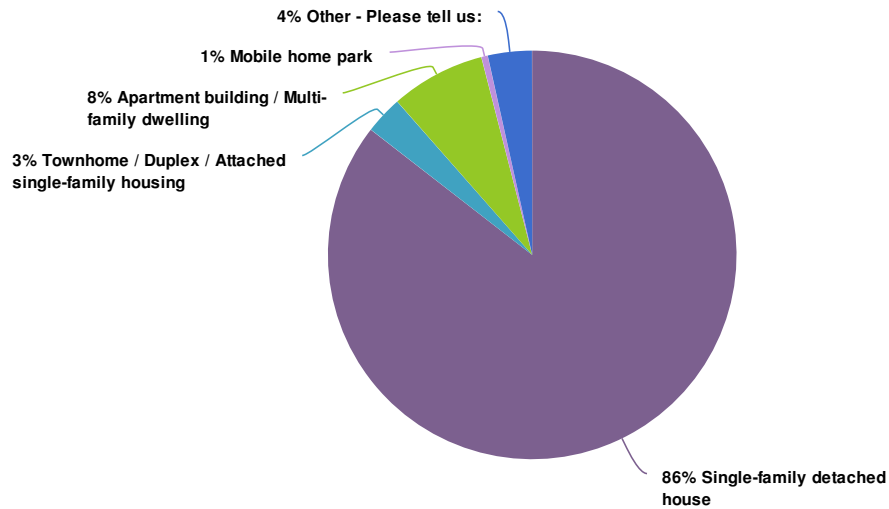
238	Need affordable housing (under \$300,000) on the lake. That's the incentive for getting people to stay in the community.
244	Hard to find housing within 95,000.00 - 140,000.00 very few to pick from
250	The amount of space for a yard seemed inadequate.
267	The price to rent is outrageous, and buying a home in a town that is slowly dying is risky in the best case scenario.
282	required handicap accessible housing
294	Many houses are not to code and or are very old and have choppy small floor plans
311	The majority of alternative housing is government subsidized.
312	The housing stock is small and generally of low to medium quality.
314	Not a lot of options other than existing single family homes for rent or purchase or apartments for rent.
317	Many of the houses required extensive work. Not many houses in the \$80k - 200K range that did not require work. Not many houses in that range in general. Many were well below, requiring extensive work or well above and out of my families price range.
322	Something modern
325	Had to move to country, landlord is horrible and has broken sewer system and emptying it into ditch right outside of town. But I recently moved now
330	The houses that are habitable are over-priced for the economy of the area.
331	Mid-range housing stock \$90-180,000 is very limited. Low priced housing stock in dumpy neighborhoods is prevalent.
335	Only could find rentals from the slum lords in town. Refused to live in substandard housing renting from landlords that don't reinvest their money back into the houses they own. So I had to buy instead.

Do you own your housing or rent?



Value		Percent	Responses
Own	<div><div></div></div>	81.8%	162
Rent	<div><div></div></div>	18.2%	36
			Totals: 198

## What type of housing do you live in?

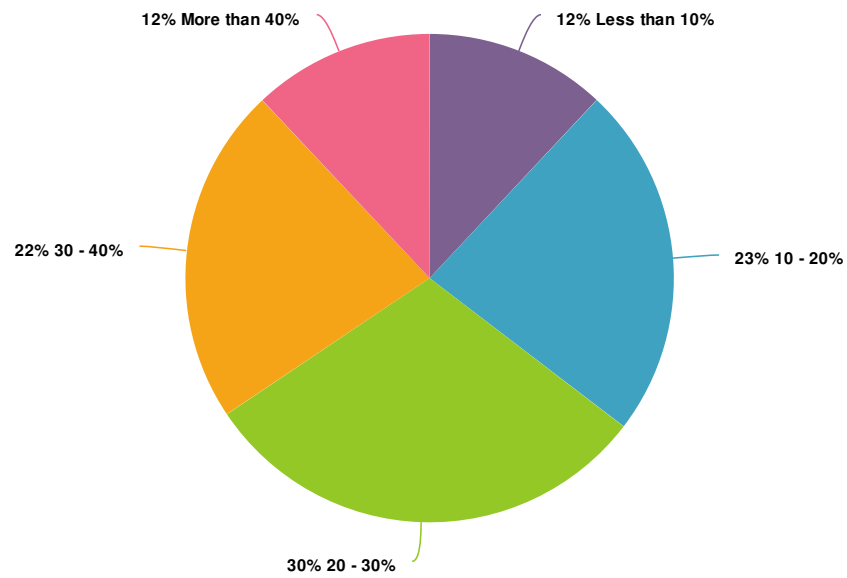







Value		Percent	Responses
Single-family detached house	<div><div></div></div>	85.6%	172
Townhome / Duplex / Attached single-family housing	<div><div></div></div>	3.0%	6
Apartment building / Multi-family dwelling	<div><div></div></div>	7.5%	15
Mobile home park	<div><div></div></div>	0.5%	1
Other - Please tell us:	<div><div></div></div>	3.5%	7

Totals: 201

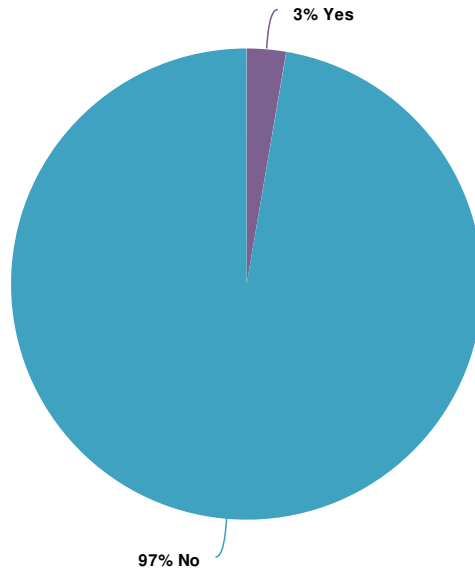
Other - Please tell us:	Count
(advocate) ALL types	1
4 bedroom, 3 bathroom two floor house	1
I am currently living with a family member until I find a house to purchase.	1
Manufactured home, country/acreage - outside of city limits	1
Single family dwelling in the country.	1
We live in organization owned housing.	1
family home in the country	1
Totals	7

Approximately what percentage of your income do you spend on housing? (This includes housing cost plus utilities).



Value		Percent	Responses
Less than 10%		12.0%	23
10 - 20%		23.4%	45
20 - 30%		30.2%	58
30 - 40%		22.4%	43
More than 40%		12.0%	23
Totals: 192			

My housing is subsidized / I receive partial or full economic aid to pay for my housing (This includes public housing, housing vouchers, Section 8 programs and others).



Value		Percent	Responses
Yes	<div><div></div></div>	2.7%	5
No	<div><div></div></div>	97.3%	183
Totals: 188			



What brought you to live in International Falls?



ResponseID	Response
5	I grew up here.
6	I was born here
9	born here
11	Ex husbands job
31	Born and raised here, love the family community and the outdoors - hunting, fishing, exploring, etc.
32	Hometown.
33	My husband's job.
37	Job
39	Not sure yet
41	Voyageurs National Park's snowmobile trails.
43	When I was a child my family moved to International Falls.
50	I have lived here pretty much my entire life other than the 4 years that I was in the military.
51	Parents moved here
52	I moved my family to I Falls to accept an offer for a government position.
53	Family
56	Job
57	I was born here as well as my parents.
60	My husband and I are originally from Int'l Falls, and wanted to be close to family.
63	Love.

## ResponseID Response

66	I've grown up in International Falls. My entire family as well as my spouse's family lives here. It has a low crime rate, aside from drug issues, and is a relatively safe place to raise children. This town has a lot of potential to grow and be a great place for others to come to live as well. But the first most important thing is to bring in industry with high income potential so current residents and new residents can support families. Without higher paying jobs, people can't come to live here and those who are already here can't always stay. We need to work toward increasing the population again, rather than continuing to allow the slow leak of population that has been the trend for the last few decades. Without the population, other businesses, like restaurants, retail, and entertainment facilities can't be supported enough for growth.
68	Rainy Lake
69	work
71	I wanted to move back to my hometown in an area where I knew it would be safe to raise my children and be surrounded by friends and family.
72	I moved back to the area after college when I was offered a job
74	Raised here
75	A teaching jHS
78	born and raised
79	Employment
81	A good job.
83	My mom had gotten married and my dad has lived his whole life here.
86	I was born and raised here. I have lived here all my life.
93	My family moved here when I was young.
94	grew up here
97	Work
98	Being close to family and employment opportunity at PCA
105	Lived here all of my life!
106	born here
108	Born and raised
111	To care for my family.
112	Rainy River Community College
114	School
120	born here
122	Raised here.
124	Family. My husband and I both grew up here and our families are here. We wanted our children to grow up around their family like we did. A very close second is Rainy Lake. There is nothing else like it
127	Grew up here - opportunity to move back to raise a family

## ResponseID Response

128	I was born and raised here
129	I was born here.
131	I am an International Falls Native - who grew up loving our amazing community and having a great appreciation for Rainy Lake and rural lifestyle. I left to go to college, and for a short period post graduation while doing an internship in the metro area. I took an opportunity to move home when I accepted my current job. I would love to stay here, continue to be an active resident and invest in our community, raise a family in the same supportive atmosphere and have the naturally beautiful area at our fingertips as I did growing up.
137	Jobs
138	I was born here
139	Lived here my whole life.
142	Family
144	I don't make enough money (even working a full time and part time job, both above minimum wage) to travel to discover where else I may want to live. This town is a black hole that traps you indefinitely if you don't get out while you are young enough. Unfortunately I'm one of the people that missed my deadline to get out.
146	It is home.
147	I returned home after graduation as my significant other is gainfully employed in PCA.
149	I grew up here/family
151	I grew up here.
152	Born here
153	Born and raised here. Lived in Brainerd for 6 years after high school but came back to be closer to family.
154	Born here, moved and then moved home to be close to family
158	We came here to own a fishing resort 30 years ago.
161	Life
162	Family
163	Family, life long resident
165	My family that live around here.
166	Born and raised here
167	Born here. Love it and Rainy lake.
170	Lived here for almost 3/4 of my life. Born and raised here!
176	The mill
178	I grew up here, and wanted my children to grow up here.
179	Was born here
182	Lived here my whole life.

ResponseID	Response
184	My parents
187	Family
188	Husband's job.
189	Death in the family
192	I was born here!!!!
193	Family
194	My wife said from here.
195	My husband grew up here
201	My father's job
202	The paper mill
204	Lifetime resident
205	I was born in international falls.
206	Family
207	Born and raised
213	Family
220	I grew up here and wanted to raise a family in a small town
222	I was raised in International Falls.
223	Our family was born and raised here our children and grandchildren as well its a great place to live
225	Needed a change
226	job offer
227	family
229	A job.
231	Wife's family.
234	My husband works for the border patrol
236	Family
237	A federal job
238	Career
239	Born/raised
240	School
244	Was raised in Ranier and international falls moved away for 5 years then moved back I love my home town

ResponseID	Response
245	From here
250	Family
251	Family, small town setting
252	Born in Ft. Frances, family moved here when I was young.
254	Family was born here.
257	I came here to work for Boise Paper, until they had the large lay off of workers.
260	I was born and raised here and was lucky enough to find a job in my field immediately after graduating college. I love the small town community, Voyageurs National Park, and Rainy Lake.
261	My husband
262	Opportunity brought both sets of grandparents to the area. Plenty of jobs and opportunities kept my parents here. I grew up here and returned after college to find gainful employment so I could close and help my parents stay in the house I grew up in. My children live 5 blocks from my parents.
267	Born and raised. ( Born in duluth technically lol)
270	Come back home,where life has more meaning then fast pace living.
271	Born here
276	Born and raised
277	Family
278	Job opportunity. Rainy Lake. Rainy River.
279	Family, small town living
281	I was born there
282	job for spouse. there was limited job opportunity for me.
284	Beautiful area - perfect for raising family. Safety and security.
287	Born and raised
290	Born and grew up here. Always wanted to return.
294	A job
295	Family
297	I raise and born here
300	Inexpensive housing and low taxes...great outdoor area with lots of opportunities
302	I've resided here my whole life
303	jobs
312	Certainly nothing intrinsic to the city. I came because of Rainy Lake and Voyageurs National Park.



ResponseID	Response
313	Marriage
317	Job opportunity with government.
319	born & raised here
325	Job
327	Roots
329	Love of the area
331	Beautiful scenery of the area, small town peace and quiet.
334	Birth
335	Federal employment

Is there something we missed? Are there other ideas you'd like to discuss?



ResponseID	Response
5	We need to find a way to get kids involved in our local athletics programs. Bronco hockey and football used to be things that were a source of pride in our community, however these days we struggle with numbers. We need things to be proud of in our community instead of just being the Icebox of the Nation.
26	I think a roller skating rink with music and lights would be a big hit.
31	We have public transportation but it is minimal. Currently Rural Rides assists for outside normal routes and times but that is a temp grant. What happens after this runs out. Also, daycare continues to be an issue.
32	That datacenter project should be funded. It's a start.
33	The absense of indoor winter activities available in the community is alarming and disappointing. You can only go to McDonald's, menards, and Kmart so many times with 2 children under 2 to get out of the house in the winter. Also Kmart is ridiculous and should be closed and replaced with an appropriate, consumer friendly store.
37	Without livable paying jobs the local businesses will not keep going. If we have jobs, the shopping stores will come and most of all people. With people come new houses and tax dollars. Have heard from several businesses that it is extremely hard to find dependable and knowledge people to hire.
38	Tourism still is and will always be a staple to the community. Improve both the quality of the lodging facilities (haveyou read the trip advisor reviews for [REDACTED] ? Holy smokes it's bad) and the abundance of them. Make people all over the state think of the area when trip planning with better marketing campaigns. Loved the "queen for a day" question Harley!
39	Clean the town up. Smokey bear park needs a park. Why isn't there a community center. Why are we spending millions on a airport and don't have cheap or well planned flights. This community has nothing for the middle class families. Stop with the [REDACTED] plan of creating a retirement community and do what the middle class families would like to see
41	Equal opportunity employer programs!!!
43	Most concerns were well covered. The only one I feel could be addressed further was ways to attract not only more tourists but more families that want to make International Falls their permanent home.
50	I hope by completing this survey something gets done soon....
57	I'd love to see this city grow & make something of it's self. Get a new upgraded water park hotel on the lake with stuff to be rented out for the water. A Walmart or target would be amazing instead of Kmart. Clean up the playgrounds around town. Look into new restaurants such as a "Johnny's Pizza House", "Cracker Barrel", "McCallister's", "Five Guys", "Taco Bell" or "Taco John's". Also a CVS or Walgreens. All things to eventually make International Falls into something bigger. Things to get people to move there & to offer more jobs.

## ResponseID Response

63	I am embarrassed by [REDACTED] the City Council. They are not interested in progress just furthering [REDACTED] agenda. The old boys club is alive and well in our city. How are we supposed to make progress when Women do not have a place at the table.
68	General "clean up" replace cracked sidewalks, trim branches hanging over sidewalks so bicyclists don't have to duck under, power wash store fronts, just make driving into I-Falls more beautiful/attractive so the first impression is - what a beautiful, clean town! The flowers the City hangs and waters are gorgeous and very inviting. Keeping the banners and flags crisp and clean is important too.
75	Concise and complete survey--Good luck
78	We also need more activities in town for physically disabled people. We have things for mentally disabled people, but nothing for physically disabled folks.
81	I have experienced so many near collisions in my car driving in the city due to the lack of stop signs. I witnessed my friend's daughter in a collision that totaled her car on the block that I live. Please, put stop signs in town. Snowmobiles in town are dangerous loud and polluting, and should not be allowed in the town.
82	Impeach [REDACTED]
83	Nope.
86	The City of International Falls needs a revitalization and a new vision. Aside from an influx of cash to drive the economy, the residents of International Falls need to have a vision they can feel proud of and can get behind and support. Right now a large part of the community is on welfare and jobless (some by choice). We need to figure out how to get people back to work and motivated.
93	Thank you for creating this survey.
97	What is the town going to do about the declination of technical jobs?
112	Nope :)
118	This is a great place to retire, quality of life here is the best in the state.
119	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
122	Need to update our aging infrastructure. Our government buildings need attention- inadequate space in all areas of local government
124	We have so many different groups working on development but nothing seems to come of anything. There are rumors of businesses coming but it never comes to fruition. One key area I think we need to capitalize on is Rainy Lake. We need more resorts, restaurants, lodging on the lake. I feel very luck to have VNP here but there is so much park and not enough ways to enjoy it and entice visitors here.
131	With the college being in a major economic crisis and recognizing the information that was just published about the role it plays in our community, is there any discussion or action being taken to explore how the community/city/county/etc. can support the challenge RRCC is currently facing? It is a major employer in our area; it houses other organizations on campus and provides spaces for many events, meetings, and extracurricular activities; and it brings in many non-residents to our community who are spending money at our local business, bringing in knowledge, experience and vitality, creating diversity and expanding culture, and are potential employees to fill our workforce gaps such as in the healthcare sector.
137	Riverview Blvd could definitely use a facelift. Pot hole city!
138	More industry
139	No.

## ResponseID Response

144	There are tons of IV drug users in this town and I can think of countless people with hep c. I fully support substance abuse recovery but these people need to stop getting just a slap on the wrist and be shown that there are serious consequences for their actions and decisions. I believe the court system in this area is incredibly biased and unfair. If you do drugs you get all kinds of sympathy and 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th chances. But if you obey the law and are a good citizen, nobody cares what you have to say.
147	Not at this time.
153	The high school should add more specialized courses geared towards college. Such as nursing, heavy equipment, construction etc and make the school district stronger. Help promote the college and possibly make it more of and industrial college to help sustain the programs. Clean up the blight and tear down vacant falling down business and help home owners clean up their run down homes. Enforce the blight and prevent it from getting out of hand.
158	Need to bring in better families. We are getting many to this area that do not work and only are here for the assistance.
161	I would like to see some kind of discussion on the topic of herbal pain clinic yes medical marijuana in our community!!!! I have many legit opinions for that topic that should be at least talked about
165	No, thanks.
167	It would be great to get more industry in town and bring people here for jobs rather than seeing our kids leave and go work other places because of lack of employment.
175	International falls needs to move out of the idea that it is a senior city. Young people want to stay but often can't because there are limited jobs and what jobs there are are highly competitive. In addition to that, it is hard to stay in an area that has (to be polite) a horrible staff of emergency doctors. For people with complicated health needs, it's nearly impossible to stay in the area.
179	Daycare
184	I think you did a good job starting the conversation that needs to be started!
188	We need more for families. A rec center or facilities for families with young children are needed.
189	What kind of business opportunities do you believe that could survive in our environment? How can the City better utilize the industry it has already? Do you know what other cities have done to increase population and also create new jobs? What events would you like to see occur in this City to promote our Tourism Industry? What can be done with the Amphitheater to make better use of it and therefore make this a destination rather than a stopover to Canada? How can we make International Falls a destination point?
192	More higher paying jobs and get rid of at least 2 of the damn dollar stores one is plenty!!!
194	Partnerships with Essentia Health and the hospital to increase the quality of Healthcare in our community.
206	We need to be open minded and our leaders need to start cooperating for the betterment of all of us. This has been going on for many years and contrary to some beliefs it didn't just begin in recent years. I remember my uncle talking about the fighting and disagreeing attitude of leaders 15 years ago. When you read about our inability to work together, be proactive, or think progressively why would any business want to open here or why would anybody want to relocate here? Shame on Us!
223	No
225	No
229	Housing is a big issue for people moving to town. There are jobs, we just need to make it easier for someone to live here. Also, by allowing people to rent out their non-commercial residences, we could attract a larger audience of people looking for a vacation home. Allow Air BnB! Thank you!
237	Less bickering from the city council. Disagreement is fine, but they act like children sometimes.

## ResponseID Response

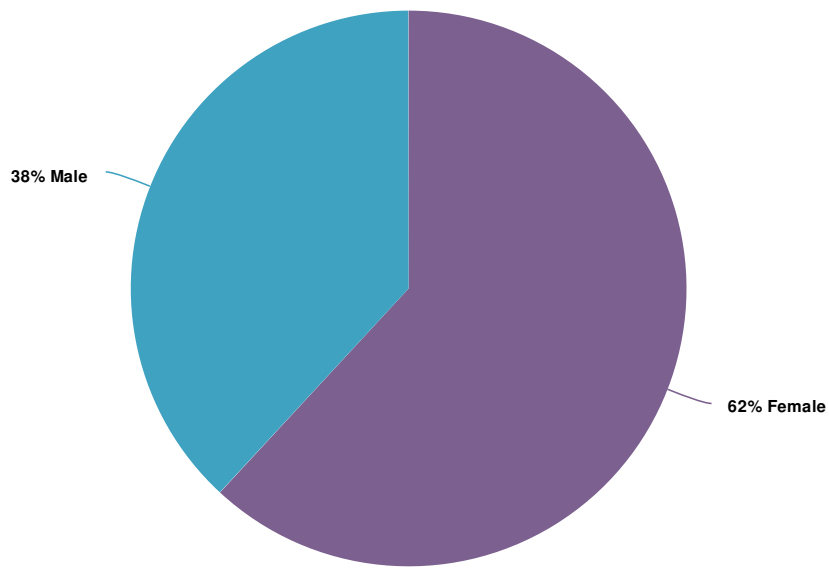
238	Look into Major Annexation down the Van Lynn rd. and on the lake. Also for more accurate numbers, look into how many people work in town but receive their pay checks form external entities. Many people either work from home for outside agencies or organizations have "satellite offices" in I-Falls but their checks are coming from outside Koochiching County.
239	An arcade would be great for kids/teens. A planet pizza or chuck e cheese would give the kids somewhere to go :)
245	Unsure
252	Just wish people in town could get behind a special one-time tax or something to raise funds to beautify the city center. Guidebooks praise the Park but tell people to skip the town because it is a hot mess. There are really fine areas like Community Center/Library, Smokey Bear, Backus and Riverside, down to the High School. Money spent developing an art deco theme for the whole town would be an attraction and reason for people to come visit and not just go fishing.
254	The sidewalks need to be assets. If not the sides of road for bikers or walkers
261	Brewery pubs have berms huge success . Actually the number one answer. We have the best tasting water around!!! Do something about it!! Bottle it with or without CocaCola. Look at Buhl water they didn't hurt Coca-Cola in Virginia. When there are running activities instead of plastic water bottles promote I-Falls and their good tasting water in re-useable bottles.
262	We need new, young ideas. We need a reason to stay here
267	Jobs. Places and activities to entertain your population through the brutal winters. Spend less time worrying about being the "ice box of the nation" and more time worrying about how to improve and save this town. PLEASE. I like it here my family is here I don't want to have to move because the jobs aren't enough to raise a family on.
269	Make city more attractive to employers. Leverage RRCC--grow school with employable programs
270	We need to get fresh perspective From our younger generations.
271	One of my biggest pet peeves is how horrible 53 is coming into town. Not only is the pavement itself terrible, but the sidewalks are not maintained at all! When tourists come to town, they walk a lot of the time...I'm truly embarrassed by how little we keep up with pulling weeds and maintaining what people see when they arrive here. It's awful. Hwy. 53 and the entrance to our town is not appealing AT ALL!
276	Fix our roads!!! Raise taxes if that is what needs to happen. Our band-aid fixes are only going to last so long!! We need to take pride in our community appearance! Give people a reason to come here and stay here.
278	Improve the schools, parks, and recreational areas while providing some average paying middle class jobs, will help International Falls flourish while maintaining the small town feel that we all enjoy.
279	Our town has a shortage of child care options. Many people are unable to work because they can't find reliable daycare. A daycare center would create jobs and send some parents back into the workforce.
281	the idea of hunting in town concerns me greatly. It is not necessary seeing as we all live two minutes from the woods. What a ridiculous and unnecessary risk to consider taking.
290	Review the Voyage Forward "4 Questions" and "Survey" items that relate to International Falls. Much input from citizens has already been collected in the area of community and economic development related to the Falls.
292	We need to attract new business to the area.
295	No
296	Thank you for providing this survey. [REDACTED] the College, housing needs and public transportation are very important and, at times, frustrating for our students. I also would like to see economic development in this area - while distant from many places, we could have much to offer.



## ResponseID Response

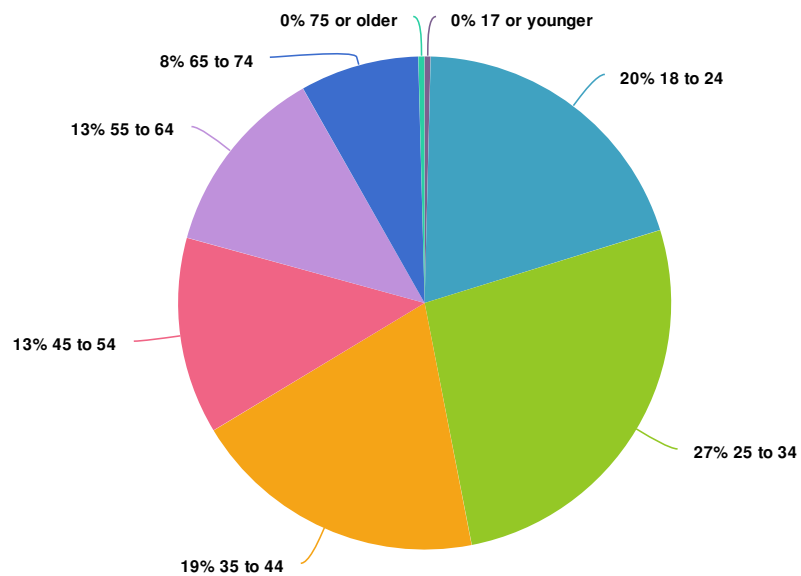
300	do something about all the noisy/illegals pickup truck mufflers...they are a nuisance and just contributes to the "white trash" mentality that lots of folks strive on...these trucks wud be fined anywhere else in minnesota....
311	Why do we need another entity studying this topic when Voyage Forward has been completed?
316	I feel as remote working becomes more available it will allow people to live where they want to live, rather than live where their jobs are. This is a big opportunity for the Falls, with its low cost of living and surrounding desirable assets. What if everyone from the Twin Cities that uses this area for recreation could live here and maintain their standard of living?
317	Mentioned earlier, would like to mention again. Consider the river in the community as an asset to quality of life and see how development might improve around the river.
325	Get employers to be trained in healthy management to treat people better so new people stay.
326	This community needs to require its legislators to push for support for the community college in a new area for food production in the northland.
327	Recreational/cultural facilities for all ages may be seen as a means to attract and retain people.
329	We cannot maintain our level of infrastructure without job growth and more people. Job growth has to be priority number 1.
330	No.
334	I would like to see something done with all of the houses everyone is tearing down in primarily low income areas. It's kind of as if tearing down houses, that are called "blights" by neighbors only old, greedy and crabby enough, who are looking to hike up their market values and because they are not maintained structurally (and nobody is willing to help people unless they make under 20k) ; and then the City not moving forward to make GOOD and affordable housing use out of it - is causing less families to stay here, move here and work here because there isn't anywhere affordable, that you don't need to own, to live here. Do something with the empty lots in the lower income/lower cost areas. Families aren't welcome in any "apartments" for less than \$700 and there is little to no renting options for houses.
335	Develop grants for people who want to become landlords, NOT for the existing slum lords in town. Use the grants to assist with rehab of the poor housing now to improve housing options for renters. Also, this is beginning to look like just another "feel good" project that someone decided to do but there will never be any action on. There hasn't been an update on the envision-if.org website for over a month now. How are citizens supposed to take this seriously if we never see any action taken? Especially not even an update!

I am



Value		Percent	Responses
Female	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	61.9%	143
Male	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	38.1%	88
			Totals: 231

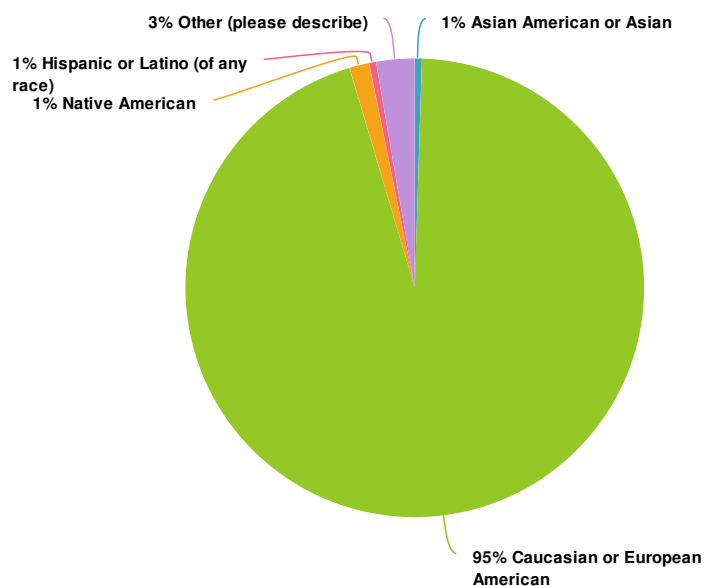
What is your age? Please select one of the ranges below.



Value		Percent	Responses
17 or younger	<div><div></div></div>	0.4%	1
18 to 24	<div><div></div></div>	19.8%	46
25 to 34	<div><div></div></div>	26.7%	62
35 to 44	<div><div></div></div>	19.4%	45
45 to 54	<div><div></div></div>	12.9%	30
55 to 64	<div><div></div></div>	12.5%	29
65 to 74	<div><div></div></div>	7.8%	18
75 or older	<div><div></div></div>	0.4%	1

Totals: 232

How would you describe your ethnic / cultural heritage? Please select one category.

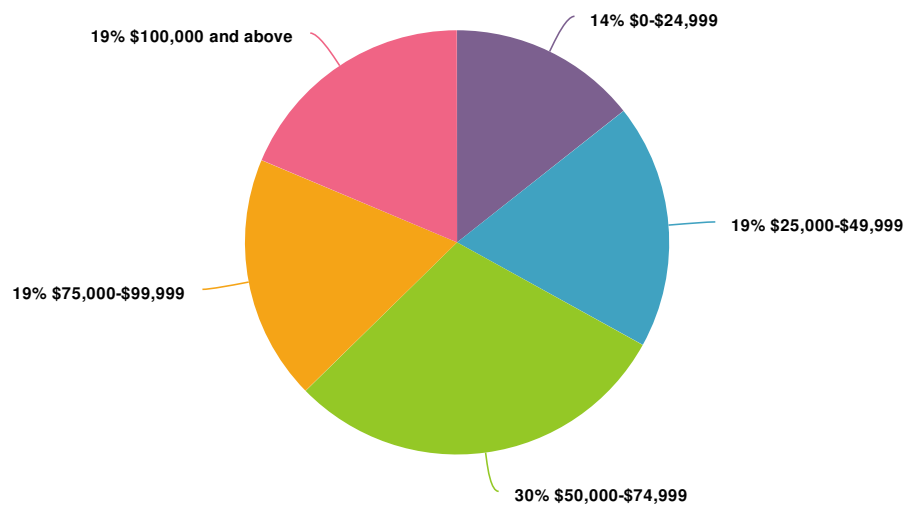


Value		Percent	Responses
Asian American or Asian	<div></div>	0.5%	1
Caucasian or European American	<div></div>	95.0%	209
Native American	<div></div>	1.4%	3
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	<div></div>	0.5%	1
Other (please describe)	<div></div>	2.7%	6

Totals: 220

Other (please describe)	Count
American	1
American cultural heritage	1
Native born American from scotch, german and Finnish stock	1
U.S. Citizen	1
White	1
Totals	5

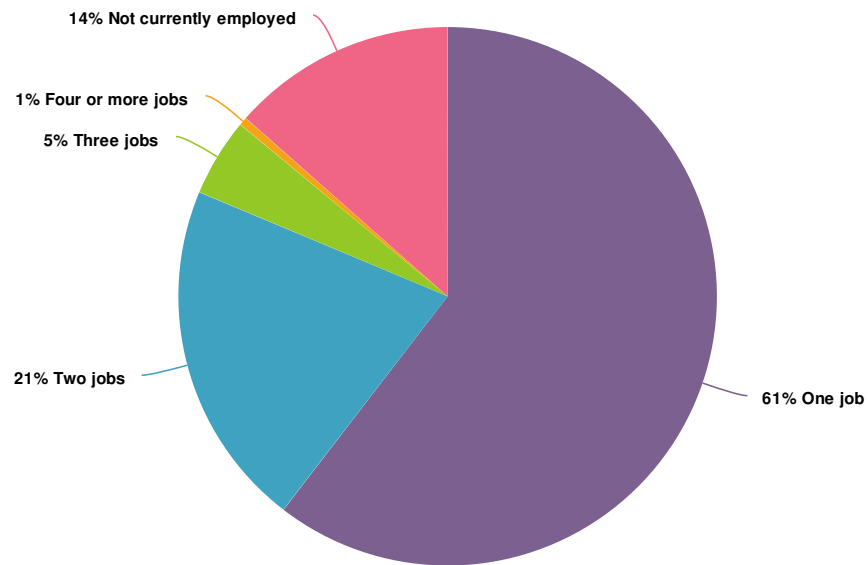
For the year 2015, approximately what was your household's total yearly income from all sources? Please select one category.



Value		Percent	Responses
\$0-\$24,999	<div><div></div></div>	14.4%	30
\$25,000-\$49,999	<div><div></div></div>	18.7%	39
\$50,000-\$74,999	<div><div></div></div>	29.7%	62
\$75,000-\$99,999	<div><div></div></div>	18.7%	39
\$100,000 and above	<div><div></div></div>	18.7%	39
Totals: 209			



How many jobs (part-time or full-time) do you currently work?

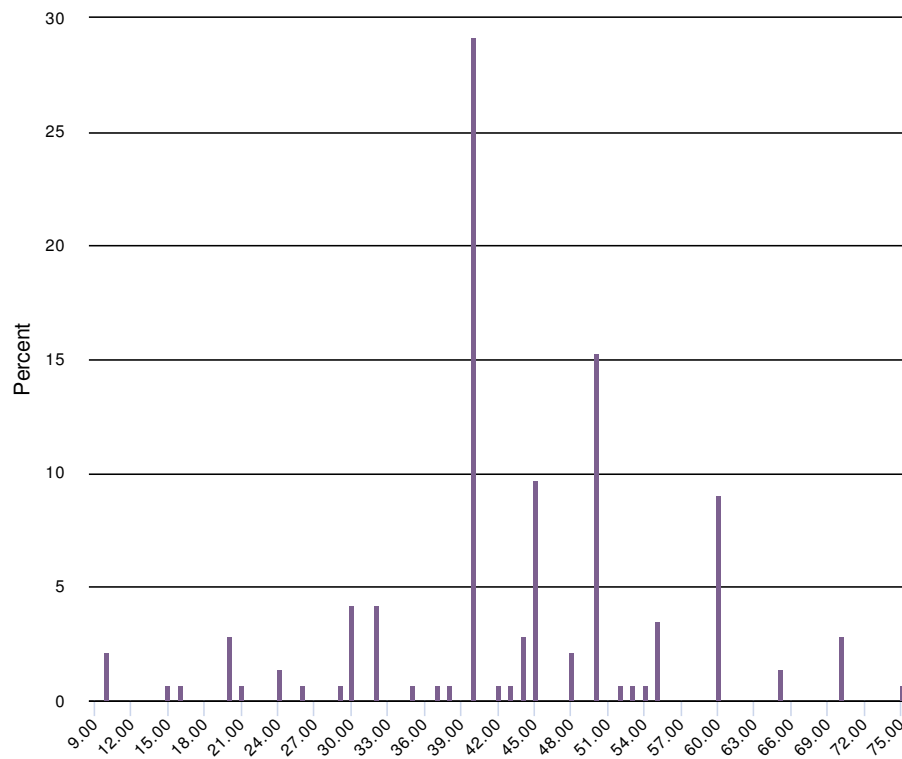


Value		Percent	Responses
One job	<div><div style="width: 60.5%;"></div></div>	60.5%	130
Two jobs	<div><div style="width: 20.9%;"></div></div>	20.9%	45
Three jobs	<div><div style="width: 4.7%;"></div></div>	4.7%	10
Four or more jobs	<div><div style="width: 0.5%;"></div></div>	0.5%	1
Not currently employed	<div><div style="width: 13.5%;"></div></div>	13.5%	29
			Totals: 215

On average, how many hours do you work in one week? Please include all hours from all part-time or full-time employment.

Filter: #30 Question "On average, how many hours do you work in one week?"

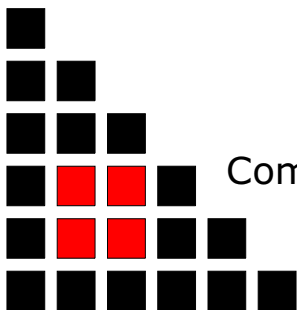
Please include all hours from all part-time or full-time employment." is less than "100"



# **Koochiching County COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING STUDY**

January 2019

An analysis of the overall housing needs  
of Koochiching County and the Cities in the County



Community Partners Research, Inc.

Faribault, MN

(507) 838-5992

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# Introduction

## Overview

Local elected and public officials are often held responsible for conditions and circumstances over which they have limited control. This is particularly true of housing. A majority of the housing units in Koochiching County are privately owned and were constructed with private funds. On an increasing scale, however, the public is demanding that public officials control what happens in this largely private housing market by eliminating blight, protecting individual investments, and generating new housing growth to meet economic development needs.

Community Partners Research, Inc., was hired by the Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA) to conduct a study of the housing needs and conditions of Koochiching County and the individual cities in the County.

## Goals

The multiple goals of the study include:

- ▶ Provide updated demographic data
- ▶ Provide an analysis of the current housing stock and inventory
- ▶ Determine gaps or unmet housing needs
- ▶ Examine future housing trends that the cities in the county and Koochiching County can expect to address in the coming years
- ▶ Provide a market analysis for housing development
- ▶ Provide housing recommendations and findings

## Methodology

A variety of resources were utilized to obtain information for the Housing Study. Community Partners Research, Inc., collected and analyzed data from June to December, 2018. Data sources included:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- American Community Survey
- Esri, Inc., a private data reporting service
- Records and data from the individual cities in Koochiching County
- Records and data maintained by Koochiching County
- Minnesota State Demographer



- Interviews with City officials and staff
- Area and State housing agencies
- Interviews with housing stakeholders
- Rental property surveys
- Housing condition surveys

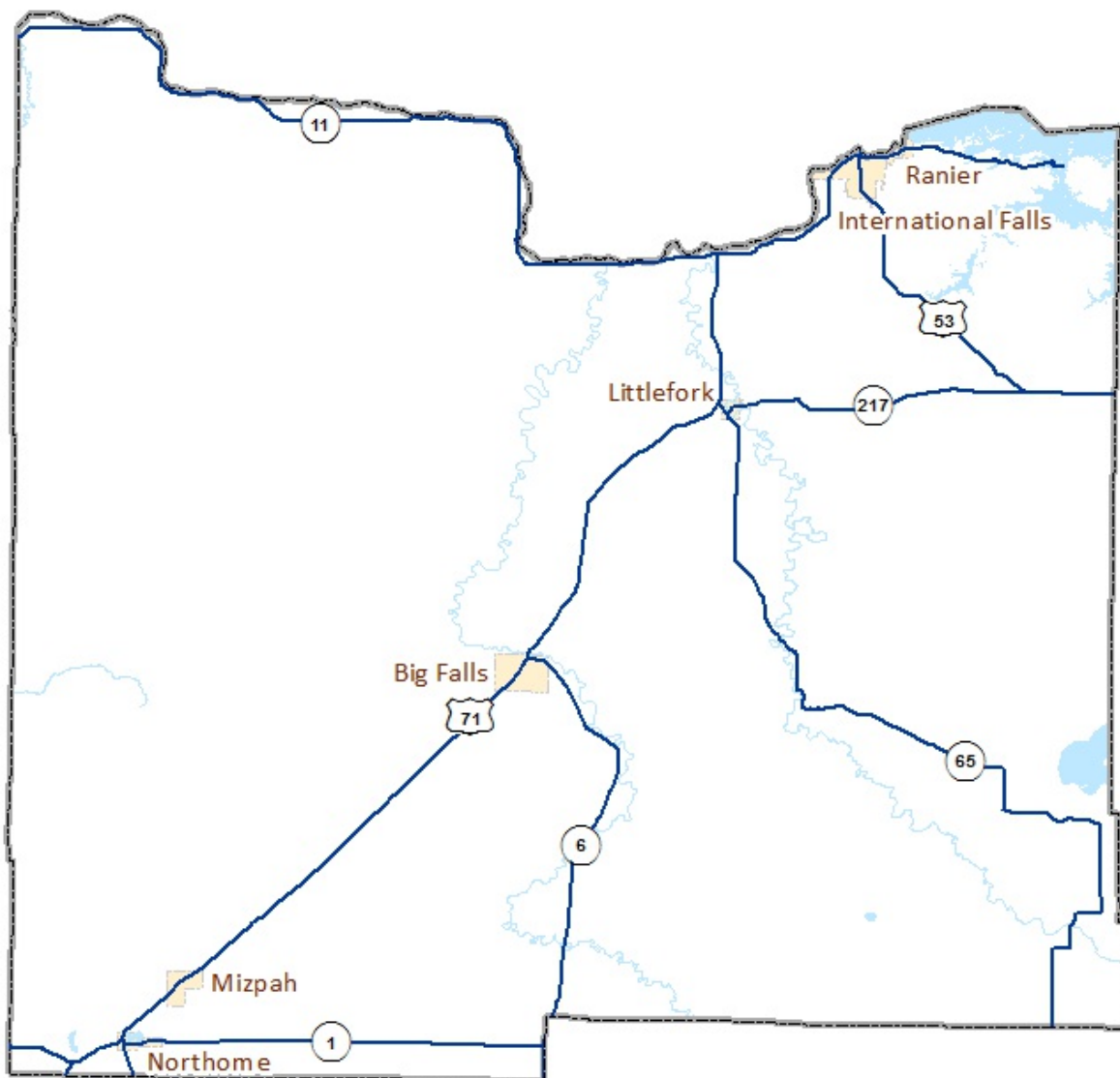
### **Limitations**

This Housing Study represents an analysis performed with the data available at the time of the Study. The findings and recommendations are based upon current solutions and the best available information on future trends and projections. Significant changes in the area's economy, employment growth, federal or State tax policy or other related factors could change the conclusions and recommendations contained in this Housing Study.

This study was prepared by:

**Community Partners Research, Inc.**  
**Faribault, MN**  
**(507) 838-5992**  
**cpartners@charter.net**

## Koochiching County



# **Koochiching County Summary**

January 2019

## **Introduction**

The Koochiching County Comprehensive Study was conducted in 2018. The study can be utilized by housing and economic development agencies, Koochiching County, the cities in the County, and the private sector as follows:

- ▶ Provides demographic and housing data and findings and recommendations to develop a master housing implementation plan
- ▶ Identifies housing needs and gaps in the housing stock
- ▶ Supports programs and projects that address housing needs
- ▶ Publicizes housing needs
- ▶ Provides information for agency/county/city decision-making process
- ▶ Assists in identifying the public sector's role in housing
- ▶ Identifies existing housing agencies, programs and projects
- ▶ Assists in obtaining grants/funding
- ▶ Provides housing strategies and recommendations
- ▶ Mobilizes developers, builders and housing agencies

This section provides the following information and data for Koochiching County:

- ▶ Summary of demographic and housing data
- ▶ Summary of housing recommendations for Koochiching County cities
- ▶ Housing recommendations for the rural portions of Koochiching County (unorganized territories)

# **Summary of Demographic Data**

## Koochiching County Demographic Data Summary

The following table provides a summary of the population, household, housing tenure and income data for Koochiching County and the cities in Koochiching County. Information was obtained from the 2010 U.S. Census, 2016 American Community Survey and Esri, Inc., for 2018 demographic data.

Koochiching County Demographic Data Summary							
City	Population 2010/2018	Households 2010/2018	Average Household Size 2000/2018	Population Projections 2018 to 2023	Household Projections 2018 to 2023	Household Tenure 2010 (owner/% renter/%)	Median Household Income 2016
Big Falls	236/247 4.7%	130/136 4.6%	1.97/1.81	247 to 245 -2	136 to 134 -2	94/72.3% 36/27.7%	\$31,131
International Falls	6,424/5,956 -7.3%	2,903/2,678 -7.8%	2.20/2.18	5,956 to 5,654 -302	2,678 to 2,534 -144	1,946/67.0% 957/33.0%	\$38,750
Littlefork	64/622 -3.9%	258/246 -4.7%	2.37/2.43	622 to 592 -30	246 to 234 -12	180/69.8% 78/30.2%	\$36,953
Mizpah	56/59 5.4%	28/29 3.6%	2.52/2.00	59 to 58 -1	29 to 29 0	26/92.9% 2/7.1%	\$25,250
Northome	200/210 5.0%	89/93 4.5%	2.21/2.25	210 to 208 -2	318 to 315 -3	64/71.9% 25/28.1%	\$29,583
Ranier	145/503 246.9%	70/238 240%	2.30/2.11	503 to 484 -19	238 to 228 -10	56/80.0% 14/20.0%	\$54,750
Koochiching County	13,311/12,864 -3.4%	5,874/5,454 -7.2%	2.33/2.22	12,864 to 12,397 -467	5,645 to 5,426 -219	4,551/72.5% 1,323/22.5%	\$44,929

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Esri

\* Please note that the population and household growth in Ranier is based on an annexation.



# **Summary of Housing Recommendations for Koochiching County Cities**

Following is a summary of the housing recommendations that have been made for each of the cities in Koochiching County. The recommendations are divided into five categories:

- ▶ Rental housing development
- ▶ Home ownership
- ▶ Single family new construction
- ▶ Housing rehabilitation
- ▶ Other housing initiatives

Readers are encouraged to review the detailed recommendations contained in each city section to better understand the specific findings and research that were used in making these recommendations.

## **Rental Housing Development**

In recent decades, it has been difficult to produce new rental housing units that are viewed as “affordable” when compared to existing rental housing. A number of factors including federal tax policy, state property tax rates, high construction costs and a low rent structure, have all contributed to the difficulty in developing rental housing in most Minnesota communities.

Demand for new rental housing units is typically generated from three factors:

- ▶ Growth from new households
- ▶ Pent-up demand from existing households
- ▶ Replacement of lost units

The following table provides a concise summary of the rental housing development recommendation made for each of the cities in Koochiching County.

<b>Rental Housing Development</b>							
	<b>Big Falls</b>	<b>International Falls</b>	<b>Littlefork</b>	<b>Mizpah</b>	<b>Northome</b>	<b>Ranier</b>	<b>Total</b>
Develop market rate units	3-4	20-24	6-8	0	3-4	8-10	40-50
Develop subsidized/moderate rent units	0	18-20	0	0	0	0	18-20
Affordable market rate conversion units	2-3	8-10	3-4	1-2	2-3	3-4	19-26
Develop senior with services units	0	14-16 (light services)	0		6-8 (light services)	0	20-24
Develop a mixed-use downtown project	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	N/A
Monitor MHFA Opt-Out List and preserve existing project-based subsidized housing as needed	yes	yes	yes	N/A	yes	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>5-7</b>	<b>60-70</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>11-15</b>	<b>11-14</b>	<b>97-120</b>

## **Home Ownership**

Expanding home ownership opportunities is one of the primary goals for most cities. High rates of home ownership promote stable communities and strengthen the local tax base.

In all six Koochiching County cities, we are recommending the utilization and promotion of home ownership programs including first-time home buyer assistance, down payment assistance, low interest loans, home ownership counseling, etc.

In all of the Koochiching cities, with the exception of Mizpah, we are recommending participation in a purchase/rehab program. A purchase/rehab program promotes home ownership and rehabilitates homes in the community.

## **Single Family New Construction**

The cities in Koochiching County experienced minimal single family home construction from 2010 to 2018. However, with a coordinated effort by housing stakeholders, the availability of buildable lots, and a marketing strategy, a modest number of houses can be constructed in the cities in the County over the next five years.

The single family new construction recommendations for each city are as follows:

### **Big Falls**

- Inventory the vacant lots and parcels in the City to determine their availability
- 3-4 new housing units from 2019 to 2024
  - 1-2 affordable homes
  - 2 twinhome units
  - Develop strategies and incentives for new home construction

### **International Falls**

- Develop 14 to 16 lots
- 15-19 new housing units from 2019 to 2024
  - 4-5 higher and medium price homes
  - 5-6 affordable homes
  - 6-8 twinhome/townhome units
- Develop strategies and incentives for new home construction
- Coordinate with nonprofits and housing agencies to develop affordable homes

### **Littlefork**

- Inventory the vacant lots and parcels in the City to determine their availability
- 5-7 new housing units from 2019 to 2024
  - 1-2 higher and medium price homes
  - 2-3 affordable homes
  - 2 twinhome units
- Develop strategies and incentives for new home construction

### **Mizpah**

- 1-2 new affordable housing units from 2019 to 2024

**Northome**

- Inventory the vacant lots and parcels in the City to determine their availability
- 4-6 new housing units from 2019 to 2024
  - 1 higher or medium price home
  - 1 affordable home
  - 2-4 twin/town homes
- Develop strategies and incentives for new home construction

**Ranier**

- Inventory the vacant lots and parcels in the City to determine their availability
- 12-16 new housing units from 2019 to 2024
  - 2-3 higher or medium price homes
  - 2-3 affordable homes
  - 8-10 twin/townhome units
- Develop strategies and incentives for new home construction



## Housing Rehabilitation

The Koochiching County cities have an asset in their existing housing stock. Existing units now and in the future, will represent the large majority of the affordable housing opportunities. Investment in housing rehabilitation activities will be critical to offering affordable housing opportunities in the future.

Following is the condition analysis for each Koochiching County city:

<b>Windshield Survey Condition Estimate - 2018</b>					
	Sound	Minor Repair	Major Repair	Dilapidated	Total
<b>International Falls</b>					
Neighborhood #1	74/23.4%	141/44.6%	84/26.6%	17/5.4%	316
Neighborhood #2	62/26.3%	98/41.5%	66/28.0%	10/4.2%	236
Total	136/24.6%	239/43.3%	150/27.2%	27/4.9%	552
<b>Littlefork</b>					
Neighborhood #1	48/56.4%	27/31.8%	9/10.6%	1/1.2%	85
Neighborhood #2	56/47.9%	43/36.8%	12/10.2%	6/5.1%	117
Total	104/51.5%	70/34.6%	21/10.4%	7/3.5%	202
<b>Ranier</b>					
Ranier Neighborhood	27/31.4%	34/39.5%	15/17.5%	10/11.6%	86
<b>Big Falls</b>					
Big Falls	24/28.6%	23/27.4%	22/26.2%	15/17.8%	84
<b>Mizpah</b>					
Mizpah	11/45.8%	8/33.3%	2/8.4%	3/12.5%	24
<b>Northome</b>					
Northome	28/43.1%	24/36.9%	11/16.9%	2/3.1%	65
<b>Combined Total</b>					
Total - All Cities	330/32.6%	398/39.3%	221/21.8%	64/6.3%	1,013

Source: Community Partners Research, Inc.

The specific housing rehabilitation recommendations that have been made for the cities in Koochiching County are as follows:

**Big Falls, Littlefork, Mizpah, Northome, Ranier**

- Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs
- Promote owner-occupied housing programs

**International Falls**

- Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs
- Promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs
- Develop a neighborhood revitalization program
- Develop a Rental Registration and Inspection Program

## **Other Housing Initiatives**

In addition to the rental housing development, home ownership, new single family construction and housing rehabilitation recommendations, additional housing initiatives have been recommended for each Koochiching County city.

### **Big Falls**

- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies

### **International Falls**

- Promote employer involvement in housing programs
- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Strategies for downtown redevelopment
- Develop mobile home programs
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies
- Housing Assistance for the homeless and hard to house
- Develop mobile home programs

### **Littlefork**

- Encourage employer involvement in housing programs
- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Strategies for downtown redevelopment
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies

### **Mizpah**

- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies

### **Northome**

- Encourage employer involvement in housing programs
- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- Strategies for downtown redevelopment
- Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies

**Ranier**

- Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
- Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
- Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies

# **Housing Recommendations for Rural Koochiching County (Unorganized Territories)**

## **Demographic Data**

The following demographic data is for Rural Koochiching County, which includes all of the County that is not in the six cities.

### **Population**

- 2010 Population - 5,603
- 2018 Population - 5,267
- 2010 to 2018 - Population loss of 336
- 2023 Population Projection - 5,156
- 2018 to 2023 - Projected Population loss of 111

### **Households**

- 2010 Households - 2,396
- 2018 Households - 2,225
- 2010 to 2018 - Household loss of 171
- 2023 Household Projection - 2,175
- 2018 to 2023 - Household loss of 50

\* Note: The City of Ranier annexed over 350 people and 165 households into the City. Therefore, minus the Ranier annexation, Ranier actually added population and households from 2010 to 2018.

## **Rural Koochiching County Recommendations**

### **1. Rental Housing Development**

The Cities in Koochiching County are the preferable locations for rental housing development. Cities have the infrastructure and services to accommodate rental housing.

Therefore, we are not recommending the construction of any rental housing in rural Koochiching County. The only exceptions are seasonal rental housing for tourists/vacationers and for seasonal work force housing.

### **2. Home Ownership**

We encourage rural households to utilize home ownership programs including first-time home buyer assistance, down payment assistance, low interest loans, home ownership counseling, etc. These home ownership assistance programs assist households with buying a home and becoming home owners.



### **3. New Housing Construction**

From 2010 to 2018, more than 80 single family homes have been constructed in rural Koochiching County. This is an average of approximately 10 homes annually. From 2010 to 2018, a total of only 15 single family homes were constructed in the six Koochiching County cities. Therefore, a significant majority of the new homes in the County are being constructed in rural Koochiching County. Many of these new homes are being constructed on lakes, rivers and on acreages.

We recommend that Koochiching County continue to encourage new housing construction in the rural areas of the County in a manner that is compatible with the environment and the County's natural amenities.

### **4. Housing Rehabilitation**

There are over 4,000 housing units in rural Koochiching County. A majority of these homes are over 40 years old and many of these homes need rehabilitation.

We encourage rural county households to utilize existing housing rehabilitation programs to rehabilitate their homes. KOOTASCA Community Action administers the housing rehabilitation programs in Koochiching County.

### **5. Seasonal Homes**

Koochiching County is a vacation and tourism destination. There are approximately 1,433 seasonal homes in rural Koochiching County.

We recommend the continued development of seasonal (vacation) homes. Also, we recommend that the County continue to provide and expand employment opportunities, retail/commercial options, educational opportunities, health care facilities, recreation and cultural opportunities, broadband internet, etc.

A small percentage of seasonal homes in rural Koochiching County convert to permanent residences annually. As the area continues to develop its amenities, it is probable that some seasonal homes will continue to convert to permanent homes. Based on past patterns, it is also probable that more seasonal/recreational houses will be constructed in the County over the next five years.

## **6. Marketing**

We recommend that Koochiching County continue to market home ownership and new construction opportunities in rural Koochiching County. Rural Koochiching County has the natural amenities and housing options to attract households to the area. Marketing activities and strategies should include:

- Identify the County's strengths and competitive advantages and heavily promote them
- Continue to create marketing materials that can be distributed regionally (including internet, TV, radio, etc.)
- Work closely with employers to provide employees (especially new employees) with housing opportunities in Koochiching County
- Work with housing agencies to provide down payment assistance, low interest loans, home owner education and home owner counseling programs
- Work with builders to make the construction of a new home a very user friendly process
- Continue to work on the creation of jobs and the development of retail, commercial, service and recreational opportunities
- Identify attractive lots and parcels that are available for a variety of home sizes, styles and price ranges
- Preserve and improve the quality of the Rural County's housing through the rehabilitation of substandard housing and the demolition of dilapidated structures that are beyond repair
- Review the County's building policies and fees to assure that they are user-friendly, fair and reasonable for developers, builders and households.
- Develop a coordinated housing plan with area housing agencies.

## **7. Koochiching County's US/Canada border location**

Based on research conducted for this Study, it has been determined that the impact Canadian households have on housing in Koochiching County is limited. Housing stakeholders reported that, probably due to employment regulations and federal immigration laws, Canadians seeking housing in Koochiching County is minimal, as is Koochiching County households seeking housing in Canada.

However, it appears that Canadians do have a significant impact on commercial/retail and services in Koochiching County. Canadian households shop and utilize services offered on the U.S. side of the border (primarily International Falls).

Also, with three ports of entry in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, tourists, vacationers, people conducting business, etc. pass through these ports of entry in both directions. This provides an opportunity for Koochiching County.

Koochiching County should continue to develop retail, services, and tourism opportunities that maximize the County's border with Canada.

## **8. Develop a Housing Plan**

We recommend that Koochiching County coordinate with the cities, the HRAs, KOOTASCA Community Action, KEDA, local financial institutions, developers and builders, realtors and all other housing stakeholders to develop a Housing Implementation Plan. The plan should prioritize housing needs and develop a coordinated approach to addressing the County's housing needs.

# **City of International Falls**

January 2019

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# Demographic Data Overview

## Sources of Data

The following pages contain demographic data for the Cities of International Falls, Little Fork, Ranier, Big Falls, Northome and Mizpah; the Northwest, International Falls/Ranier, Littlefork/Big Falls and Northome/Mizpah Market Areas and Koochiching County.

Koochiching County was divided into four Market Areas. The jurisdictions located in the Market Areas are as follows:

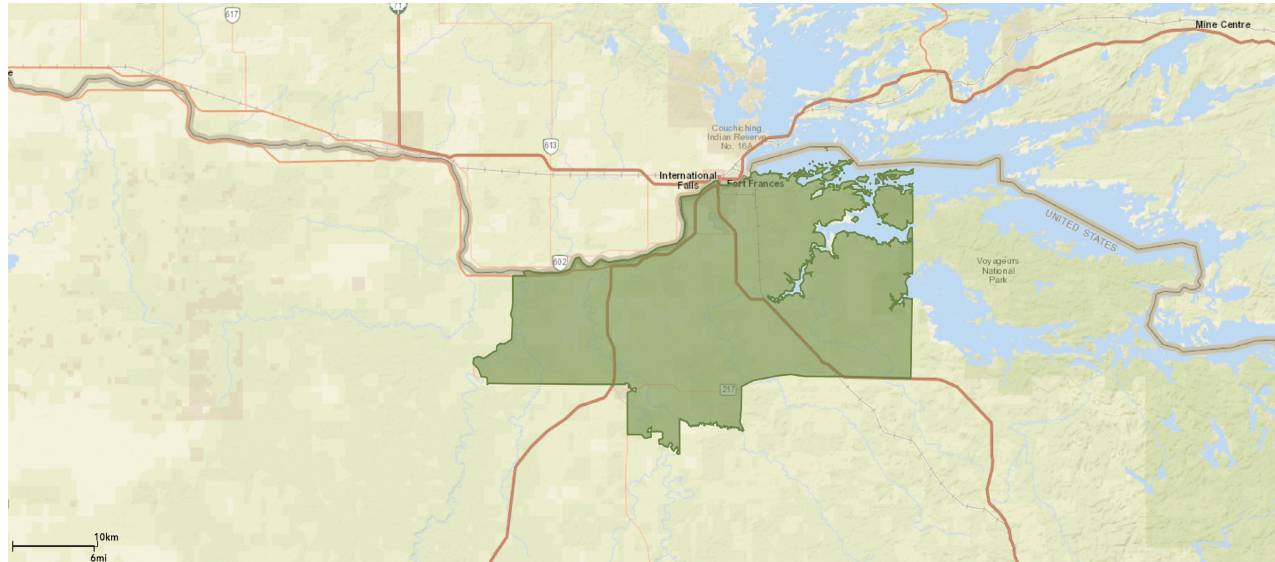
- ▶ ***Northwest Market Area*** - Northwest Koochiching Unincorporated Territory
- ▶ ***International Falls/Ranier Market Area*** - International Falls, Ranier, Rainy Lake Unincorporated Territory
- ▶ ***Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area*** - Big Falls, Littlefork, Nett Lake Unincorporated Territory, East Koochiching County Unincorporated Territory, South Koochiching County Unincorporated Territory
- ▶ ***Northome/Mizpah Market Area*** - Northome, Mizpah, Northome Unincorporated Territory

The demographic data was obtained from a variety of local, state and national sources. At the time that research was completed for this Study, both the U.S. Census Bureau and the Minnesota State Demographer's Office had released basic demographic estimates for the year 2017. However, these annual estimates are generally limited to basic counts, such as population and household levels.

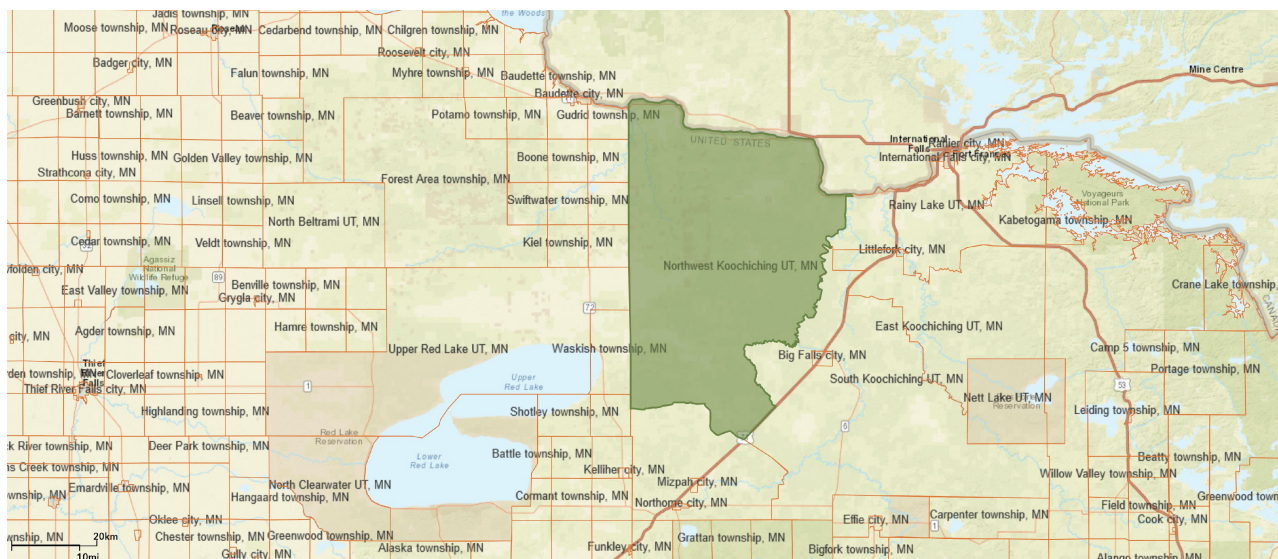
For some detailed demographic variables, the 2010 Census is still viewed as the most reliable data source. To supplement the decennial Census, the Census Bureau has created the American Community Survey, an annual sampling of households. The American Community Survey does provide detailed demographic characteristics. However, because the American Community Survey is an estimate, based on sampling data, there is a margin of error that exists for each estimate. The following tables incorporate the American Community Survey data, when it is viewed as reliable.

The frequency of American Community Survey estimates vary depending on the size of the jurisdiction. The 2016 estimates were the most current at the time of this Study. They were derived from sampling that was done over a five-year period, between 2012 and 2016.

Additionally, Community Partners Research, Inc., has obtained information from Esri, a private company based in California that generates demographic and projection data. Esri estimates are included in this demographic data section.



**International Falls/Ranier Market Area**



**Northwest Market Area**

## Population Data and Trends

Esri, a private data reporting service, has issued demographic estimates for 2018 which are included in the table below. Other estimates from the MN State Demographer and the Census Bureau for 2017 are discussed in the text that follows.

<b>Table 1 Population Trends - 1990 to 2018</b>						
	1990 Census	2000 Census	% Change 1990-2000	2010 Census	% Change 2000-2010	2018 Estimate Esri
International Falls	8,325	6,703	-19.5%	6,424	-4.2%	5,956
Littlefork	838	680	-18.9%	647	-4.9%	622
Big Falls	341	264	-22.6%	236	-11.9%	247
Ranier	199	188	-5.5%	145	-22.9%	503
Northome	283	230	-18.7%	200	-13.0%	210
Mizpah	100	78	-22.0%	56	-28.2%	59
International Falls/Ranier MA	12,872	11,360	-11.7%	10,617	-6.5%	10,147
Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area	1,954	1,650	-15.6%	1,528	-7.4%	1,509
Northome/Mizpah Market Area	879	804	-8.5%	703	-12.6%	738
Northwest Market Area	594	541	-8.9%	463	-14.4%	470
Koochiching County	16,299	14,355	-11.9%	13,311	-7.3%	12,864

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

- ▶ Esri has released 2018 population estimates for each city and market area and for the entire County. The State Demographer and the Census Bureau have released 2017 estimates for each city and the County.
- ▶ Esri estimates that International Falls, Littlefork, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, the Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area and Koochiching County all had population losses from 2010 to 2018. Esri estimates that Big Falls, Ranier, Northome, Mizpah, the Northome/Mizpah Market Area and the Northwest Market Area each had small population gains from 2010 to 2018.
- ▶ The State Demographer and the U.S. Census Bureau's population estimates for 2017 showed population losses in all of the cities and in Koochiching County with the exception of Ranier. Ranier had substantial population gains due to an annexation.
- ▶ Esri's 2018 population estimate for International Falls is 5,956 people. In comparison, the State Demographer's 2017 estimate for the City was 5,970 people, and the Census Bureau's 2017 estimate was 5,992 people in the City. All three sources show a relatively similar number of people living in International Falls.
- ▶ According to the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census, all of the cities and market areas and all of Koochiching County lost population from 1990 to 2000 and from 2000 to 2010.
- ▶ Koochiching County's population is primarily White and non-Hispanic/Latino. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 94.6% of the City's residents were White, 0.6% were Black or African American, 2.3% were American Indian and 0.3% were Asian. Additionally, 2.1% of the Koochiching County population identified themselves as some other race or two or more races. Also, 1.1% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

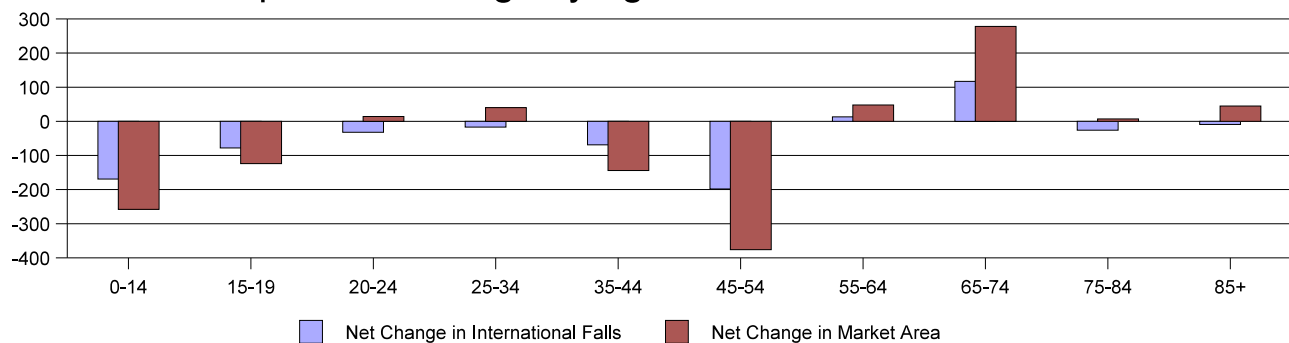
## Population by Age Trends: 2010 to 2018

The release of 2018 demographic information from Esri allows for some analysis of the changing age patterns for International Falls and the International Falls/Ranier Market Area. The following table compares population by age in 2010 and 2018, along with the numeric changes.

Table 2 Population by Age - 2010 to 2018						
Age	International Falls			International Falls/Ranier Market Area		
	2010	2018	Change	2010	2018	Change
0-14	1,161	992	-169	1,803	1,545	-258
15-19	432	354	-78	720	596	-124
20-24	364	332	-32	492	506	14
25-34	727	710	-17	978	1,018	40
35-44	715	646	-69	1,248	1,104	-144
45-54	924	726	-198	1,720	1,344	-376
55-64	829	842	13	1,624	1,672	48
65-74	599	716	117	1,056	1,334	278
75-84	468	442	-26	688	695	7
85+	205	196	-9	288	333	45
Total	6,424	5,956	-468	10,617	10,147	-470

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

Population Change by Age Between 2010 and 2018

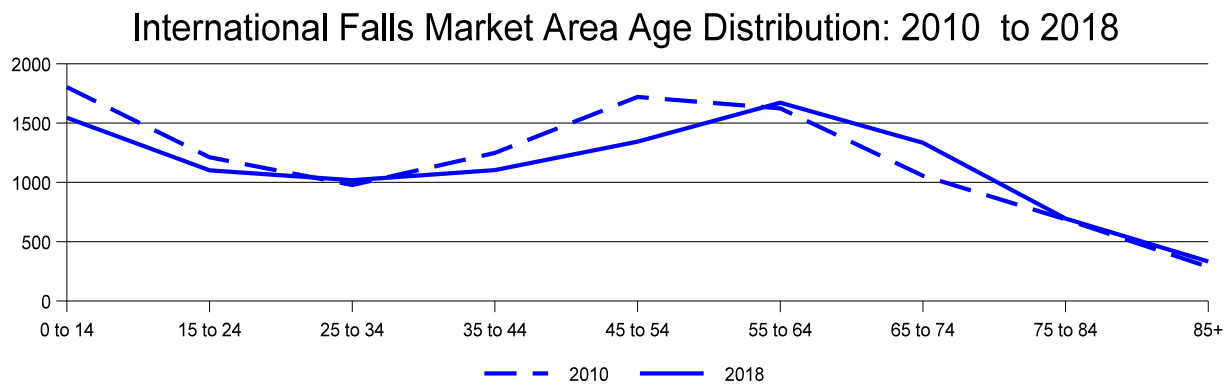


For many years, demographic analysts have been talking about the impact that is occurring as the large “baby boom” generation moves through the aging cycle. This trend has been evident in International Falls and the International Falls/Ranier Market Area.

Between 2010 and 2018, International Falls had a gain of 130 people and the Market Area had a gain of 326 people in the age ranges between 55 and 74 years old. In 2018, nearly all of the baby boomers were within these age ranges. International Falls only had population gains in the 55 to 74 age ranges. International Falls had a loss of 563 people in the 54 and younger age ranges and a loss of 35 people in the 75 and older age ranges.

In addition to the population gain in the 55 to 74 age ranges, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area also had a gain of 54 people in the 20 to 34 age ranges and a gain of 52 people in the 75 and older age ranges. The International Falls/Ranier Market Area had a loss of 382 people in the 0 to 19 age ranges and a loss of 520 people in the 35 to 54 age ranges.

The aging trends for International Falls can be traced back over the current decade to see the advancing “wave” created by the movement of the baby boom generation through the aging cycle. One other noticeable trend is the decreased population of younger residents in 2018, age 19 and under.





## Population Projections

The following table presents population projections generated by Esri for the cities, the market area's and Koochiching County.

<b>Table 3 Population Projections Through 2023</b>				
	2010 Census	2018 Esri Estimate	2023 Esri Projection	Change 2018-2023
International Falls	6,424	5,956	5,654	-302
Littlefork	647	622	592	-30
Big Falls	236	247	245	-2
Ranier	145	503	484	-19
Northome	200	210	208	-2
Mizpah	56	59	58	-1
International Falls/Ranier MA	10,617	10,147	9,744	-403
Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area	1,528	1,509	1,457	-52
Northome/Mizpah Market Area	703	738	731	-7
Northwest Market Area	463	470	465	-5
Koochiching County	13,311	12,864	12,397	-467

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

- ▶ Esri projects that all of the cities, market areas and the County will lose population from 2018 to 2023.
- ▶ Esri projects that from 2018 to 2023, International Falls will lose 302 people, Littlefork will lose 30 people, Big Falls will lose two people, Ranier will lose 19 people, Northome will lose two people and Mizpah will lose one person.
- ▶ Esri projects that Koochiching County's population will decrease by 467 people from 2018 to 2023.

## Household Data and Trends

<b>Table 4 Household Trends - 1990 to 2018</b>						
	1990 Households	2000 Households	% Change 1990-2000	2010 Households	% Change 2000-2010	2018 Estimate Esri
International Falls	3,126	2,959	-5.3%	2,903	-1.9%	2,678
Littlefork	303	268	-11.6%	258	-3.7%	246
Big Falls	156	134	-14.1%	130	-3.0%	136
Ranier	76	76	0%	70	-7.9%	238
Northome	103	87	-15.5%	89	2.3%	93
Mizpah	34	31	-8.8%	28	-9.7%	29
International Falls/Ranier MA	4,746	4,809	1.3%	4,686	-2.6%	4,452
Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area	747	691	-7.5%	674	-2.5%	664
Northome/Mizpah Market Area	312	310	-0.6%	305	-1.6%	318
Northwest Market Area	220	230	4.5%	209	-9.1%	211
Koochiching County	6,025	6,040	0.2%	5,874	-2.7%	5,454

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

- ▶ Esri has released 2018 household estimates for the cities, market areas and Koochiching County. The State Demographer has released 2017 household estimates for the cities and Koochiching County. The U.S. Census does not provide household estimates.
- ▶ Esri estimates that International Falls, the Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area and Koochiching County had household losses from 2010 to 2018. Esri estimates that Big Falls, Ranier, Northome, Mizpah, the Northome/Mizpah Market Area and the Northwest Market Area had household gains from 2010 to 2018.
- ▶ The State Demographer estimates that from 2010 to 2017, International Falls, Big Falls, Northome and Koochiching County had household decreases. The State Demographer estimates that Littlefork, Ranier and Mizpah had household increases from 2010 to 2017.
- ▶ Esri estimates that International Falls had 2,678 households in 2018, down by 225 four households from the 2010 Census count. The estimate from the State Demographer showed 2,868 households in the City in 2017, down by only 35 households from the 2010 Census.
- ▶ The U.S. Census reported that from 1990 to 2000, Ranier had no change in its number of households, and the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, the Northwest Market Area and Koochiching County had household gains. The remaining jurisdictions all had household losses.
- ▶ The U.S. Census reported that from 2000 to 2010, all of the jurisdictions in Koochiching County had household losses with the exception of Northome, which had a gain of two households.

## Average Household Size

The following table provides decennial Census information on average household size.

<b>Table 5 Average Number of Persons Per Household: 1990 to 2018</b>				
	1990 Census	2000 Census	2010 Census	2018 Esri
International Falls	2.45	2.20	2.16	2.18
Littlefork	2.63	2.37	2.33	2.43
Big Falls	2.19	1.97	1.82	1.81
Ranier	2.62	2.30	1.83	2.11
Northome	2.16	2.21	2.20	2.25
Mizpah	2.94	2.52	2.00	2.00
International Falls/Ranier MA	N/A	N/A	2.22	2.23
Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area	N/A	N/A	2.20	2.22
Northome/Mizpah Market Area	N/A	N/A	2.29	2.31
Northwest Market Area	N/A	N/A	2.22	2.23
Koochiching County	2.58	2.33	2.23	2.22

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

- ▶ Esri estimates that from 1990 to 2018, all of the cities in Koochiching County, with the exception of Northome, had a substantial decrease in average household size.
- ▶ Esri estimates that Northome's average household size has increased from 1990 to 2018.
- ▶ Esri projects that the four market areas remained relatively stable from 2010 to 2018.

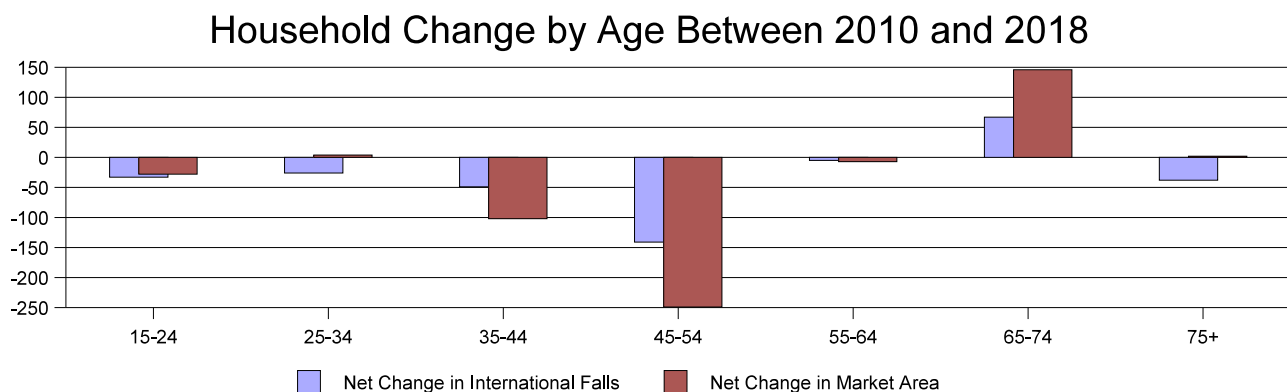
## Household by Age Trends: 2010 to 2018

The 2018 Esri age data allows for some analysis of International Falls and the International Falls/Ranier Market Area's changing age patterns. The following table compares households by age of householder in 2010 and 2018, along with the numeric changes.

Table 6 Households by Age - 2010 to 2018						
Age	International Falls			International Falls/Ranier Market Area		
	2010	2018	Change	2010	2018	Change
15-24	143	110	-33	158	130	-28
25-34	377	351	-26	476	480	4
35-44	406	357	-49	682	580	-102
45-54	575	434	-141	1,010	761	-249
55-64	524	519	-5	992	985	-7
65-74	391	458	67	688	834	146
75+	487	449	-38	680	682	2
Total	2,903	2,678	-225	4,686	4,452	-234

Source: U.S. Census; Esri

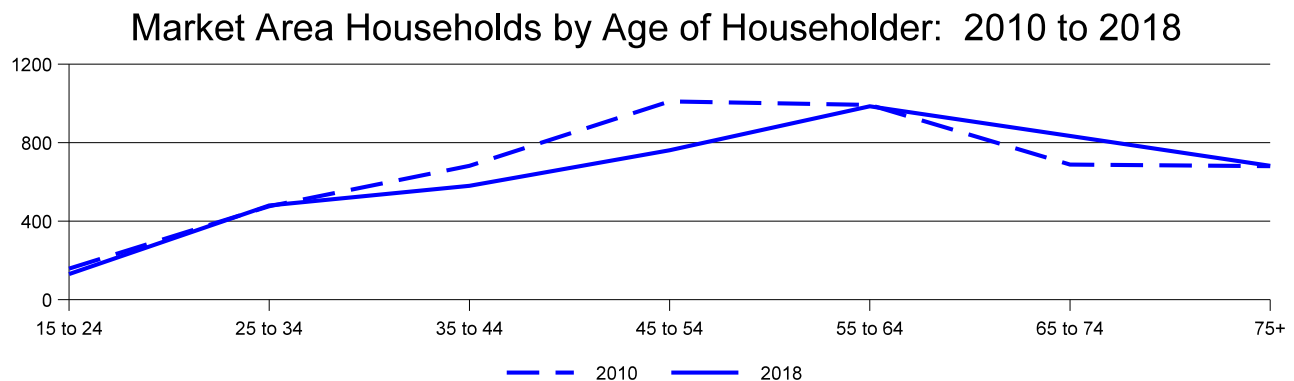
Consistent with the population by age data presented earlier, the household patterns show much of the change occurring in the baby boomer age groups. International Falls had an increase of 67 households and the International Falls/Ranier Market Area had an increase of 146 households in the 65 to 74 year age range.



International Falls had household losses in all of the other 10-year age groups. International Falls had a loss of 254 households in the 64 and younger age ranges, and a loss of 38 households in the 75 and older age range.

In addition to the household gains in the 65 to 74 age range, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area had a gain of four households in the 25 to 34 age range and a gain of two households in the 75 and older age range. The Market Area had a loss of 28 households in the 15 to 24 age range and a loss of 358 households in the 35 to 64 age range.

As with the longer-term patterns for population, it is possible to track the “wave” progression of the baby boomer households over the current decade in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area using information by the age of householder.





## Household Projections

The following table presents household projections generated by Esri for the cities, market areas and Koochiching County.

<b>Table 7 Household Projections Through 2023</b>				
	2010 Census	2018 Esri Estimate	2023 Esri Projection	Change 2018-2023
International Falls	2,903	2,678	2,534	-144
Littlefork	258	246	234	-12
Big Falls	130	136	134	-2
Ranier	70	238	228	-10
Northome	89	93	92	-1
Mizpah	28	29	29	0
International Falls/Ranier MA	4,686	4,452	4,261	-191
Littlefork/Big Falls Market Area	674	664	642	-22
Northome/Mizpah Market Area	305	318	315	-3
Northwest Market Area	209	211	208	-3
Koochiching County	5,874	5,645	5,426	-219

Source: US Census; Esri

- ▶ Esri projects that all of the cities, market areas and all of Koochiching County, with the exception of Mizpah, will have household losses from 2018 to 2023. Esri projects that Mizpah's number of households will not change.
- ▶ Koochiching County is projected to lose 219 households from 2018 to 2023 and the largest city in the county, International Falls, is projected to lose 144 households.

## International Falls Household by Age Projections: 2018 to 2023

The International Falls household by age projections were created by Esri.

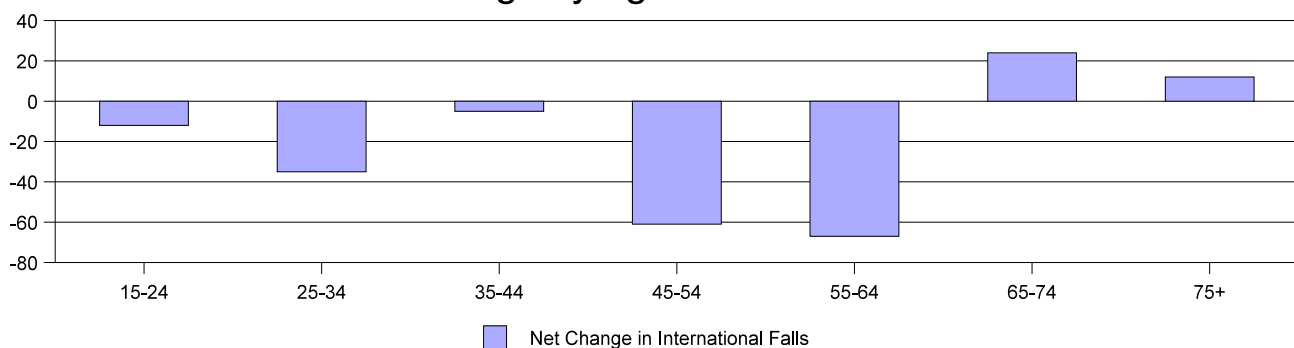
<b>Table 8 International Falls Projected Households by Age: 2018-2023</b>			
Age Range	2018 Estimate	2023 Projection	Change 2018 to 2023
15-24	110	98	-12
25-34	351	316	-35
35-44	357	352	-5
45-54	434	373	-61
55-64	519	452	-67
65-74	458	482	24
75+	449	461	12
Total	2,678	2,534	-144

Source: Esri

Esri is projecting a loss of 144 households in International Falls from 2018 to 2023. From 2018 to 2023, Esri projects a gain of 36 households in the 65 and older age ranges.

Conversely, from 2018 to 2023, Esri estimates a loss of 47 households in the 15 to 34 age ranges and a loss of 133 households in the 35 to 64 age ranges.

Household Change by Age Between 2018 and 2023



## International Falls/Ranier Market Area Household by Age Projections: 2018 to 2023

The International Falls/Ranier Market Area household by age projections were created by Esri.

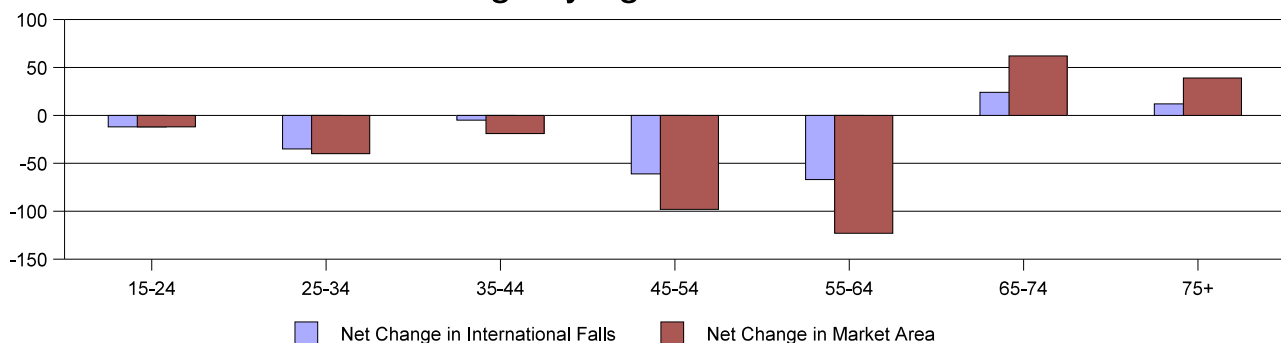
<b>Table 9 Market Area Projected Households by Age: 2018-2023</b>			
Age Range	2018 Estimate	2023 Projection	Change 2018 to 2023
15-24	130	118	-12
25-34	480	440	-40
35-44	580	561	-19
45-54	761	663	-98
55-64	985	862	-123
65-74	834	896	62
75+	682	721	39
Total	4,452	4,261	-191

Source: Esri

The International Falls/Ranier Market Area is expected to lose 191 households from 2018 to 2023, Esri projects a gain of 101 households in the 65 and older age ranges.

Conversely, from 2018 to 2023, Esri is projecting a loss of 292 households in the 64 and younger age ranges.

Household Change by Age Between 2018 and 2023



## Households by Type

The 2010 Census can be compared to statistics from 2000 to examine changes in household composition. The following table looks at household trends within the City of International Falls.

<b>Table 10 International Falls Household Composition - 2000 to 2010</b>			
	2000 Census	2010 Census	Change
Family Households			
Married Couple with own children	517	376	-141
Single Parent with own children	299	336	37
Married Couple without own children	784	760	-24
Family Householder without spouse	151	173	22
Total Families	1,751	1,645	-106
Non-Family Households			
Single Person	1,080	1,087	7
Two or more persons	128	171	43
Total Non-Families	1,208	1,258	50

Source: U.S. Census

Between 2000 and 2010, International Falls experienced a net loss of 106 family households. The net loss was due to a decrease of married couples with and without children. The other household types gained households.

The City had a 50-household increase in “non-family” households. This was due to an increase of seven single person households and an increase of 43 households with unrelated individuals living together.

## Housing Tenure

The 2010 Census provided data on housing tenure patterns. The following table examines tenure rates for the cities, Koochiching County and the State of Minnesota.

<b>Table 11 Household Tenure - 2010</b>				
	Number of Owners	Percent of all Households	Number of Renters	Percent of all Households
International Falls	1,946	67.0%	957	33.0%
Littlefork	180	69.8%	78	30.2%
Big Falls	94	72.3%	36	27.7%
Ranier	56	80.0%	14	20.0%
Northome	64	71.9%	25	28.1%
Mizpah	26	92.9%	2	7.1%
Koochiching County	4,551	77.5%	1,323	22.5%
State of Minnesota	-	73.0%	-	27.0%

Source: U.S. Census

According to the 2010 Census, the ownership tenure rate for Koochiching County cities ranged from a low of 67% in International Falls to a high of 92.9% in Mizpah.

Koochiching County's ownership rate was 77.5% in 2010.

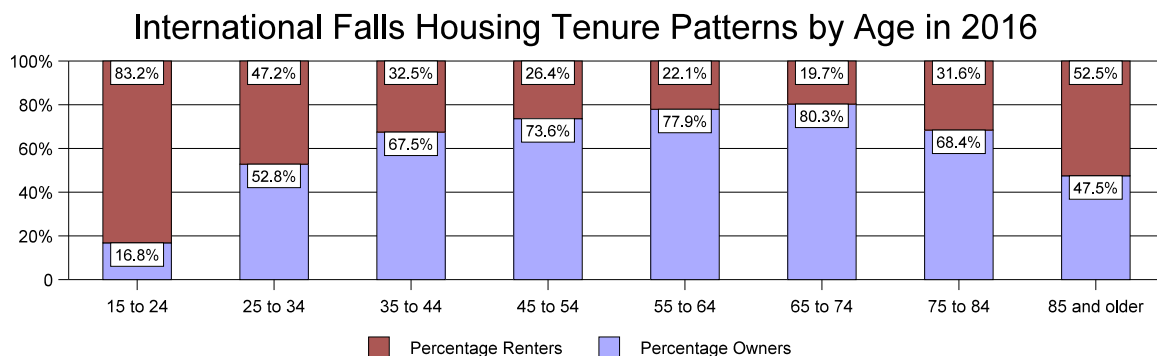
In 2010, International Falls, Littlefork, Big Falls and Northome all had rental tenure rates above the State of Minnesota's rental rate of 27%.

## International Falls Tenure by Age of Householder

The 2016 American Community Survey provided information on the tenure distribution of households within each defined age range. The following table examines the number and percentage of renters and owners in each age group in the City of International Falls.

<b>Table 12 International Falls Tenure by Age of Householder - 2016</b>				
Age	Owners		Renters	
	Number	Percent within age	Number	Percent within age
15-24	24	16.8%	119	83.2%
25-34	199	52.8%	178	47.2%
35-44	274	67.5%	132	32.5%
45-54	423	73.6%	152	26.4%
55-64	408	77.9%	116	22.1%
65-74	314	80.3%	77	19.7%
75-84	238	68.4%	110	31.6%
85+	66	47.5%	73	52.5%
Total	1,946	67.0%	957	33.0%

Source: American Community Survey



Within the defined age ranges, typical tenure patterns were present, with the households in the youngest and oldest age ranges showing a high percentage rental occupancy, while middle-aged and older adult households were primarily home owners. Approximately 83% of households age 24 and younger, 47% of households in the 25 to 34 age range and 53% of the households age 85 and older rented their unit. Home ownership rates for each of the 10-year age cohorts between ages 35 to 84 were approximately 68% or higher.

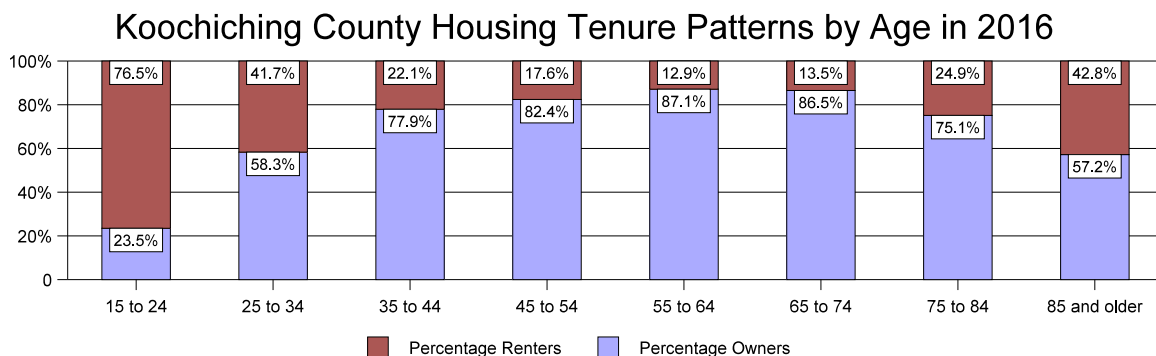


## Koochiching County Tenure by Age of Householder

The 2016 American Community Survey provided information on the tenure distribution of households within each defined age range. The following table examines the number and percentage of renters and owners in each age group in Koochiching County.

<b>Table 13 Koochiching County Tenure by Age of Householder - 2016</b>				
Age	Owners		Renters	
	Number	Percent within age	Number	Percent within age
15-24	44	45.6%	83	65.4%
25-34	372	57.9%	270	42.1%
35-44	528	67.2%	258	32.8%
45-54	961	89.1%	117	10.9%
55-64	1,192	88.5%	155	11.5%
65-74	815	90.0%	91	10.0%
75-84	466	74.2%	162	25.8%
85+	167	76.6%	51	23.4%
Total	4,545	79.3%	1,187	20.7%

Source: American Community Survey



Within the defined age ranges, households in the youngest age ranges showed a high percentage rental occupancy, while middle-aged and older adult households were primarily home owners. Approximately 65% of households age 24 and younger and 42% of households in the 25 to 34 age range rented their unit. Home ownership rates for each of the 10-year age cohorts age 35 and older were approximately 67% or higher.

## 2016 Income Data

Household and family income estimates are available at the City, County and State level through the 2016 American Community Survey. No median income information exists for the Market Areas.

Household income represents all independent households, including people living alone and unrelated individuals together in a housing unit. Families are two or more related individuals living in a household.

<b>Table 14 Median Income - 2010 to 2016</b>						
Households				Families		
	2010 Median	2016 Median	% Change	2010 Median	2016 Median	% Change
International Falls	\$30,214	\$38,750	28.3%	\$53,848	\$52,045	-3.3%
Littlefork	\$43,409	\$36,953	-14.9%	\$51,154	\$54,500	6.5%
Big Falls	\$30,833	\$31,131	1.0%	\$40,625	\$46,250	13.8%
Ranier	\$41,250	\$54,750	32.7%	\$61,458	\$64,000	4.1%
Northome	\$38,036	\$29,583	-22.2%	\$43,958	\$38,750	-11.8%
Mizpah	\$25,750	\$25,250	-1.9%	\$19,167	\$25,500	33.0%
Koochiching Co.	\$39,571	\$44,929	12.4%	\$57,963	\$62,976	8.6%
State of Minnesota	\$57,253	\$63,217	10.4%	\$71,307	\$79,595	11.6%

Source: American Community Survey

Income information contained in the 2016 American Community Survey shows household income growth from 2010 to 2016 in International Falls, Big Falls, Ranier and Koochiching County. The remaining jurisdictions had a decrease in their median household income levels.

Littlefork, Big Falls, Ranier, Mizpah and Koochiching County all had family median income growth from 2010 to 2016. The remaining jurisdictions had a decrease in their median family income levels.

The Cities' and County's median household and family incomes were all lower than the Minnesota median household and family incomes in 2016.

Family household incomes tend to be higher than the overall household medians, as families have at least two households members and potentially more income earners.

Using the commonly accepted standard that up to 30% of gross income can be applied to housing expenses without experiencing a cost burden, a median income household in International Falls could afford approximately \$969 per month for ownership or rental housing in 2016. A family at the median income level for the City could afford approximately \$1,301 for housing costs.

Although households at or near the median levels do have some buying power for housing, the overall medians can be somewhat deceptive. In general, renter households tend to have incomes that are well below the overall median levels, while home owners tend to be above the medians for households or families.

In 2016, the median income level for owner households in Koochiching County was \$54,507. At 30% of income, a median income owner household could apply approximately \$1,367 to a mortgage without experiencing a housing cost burden.

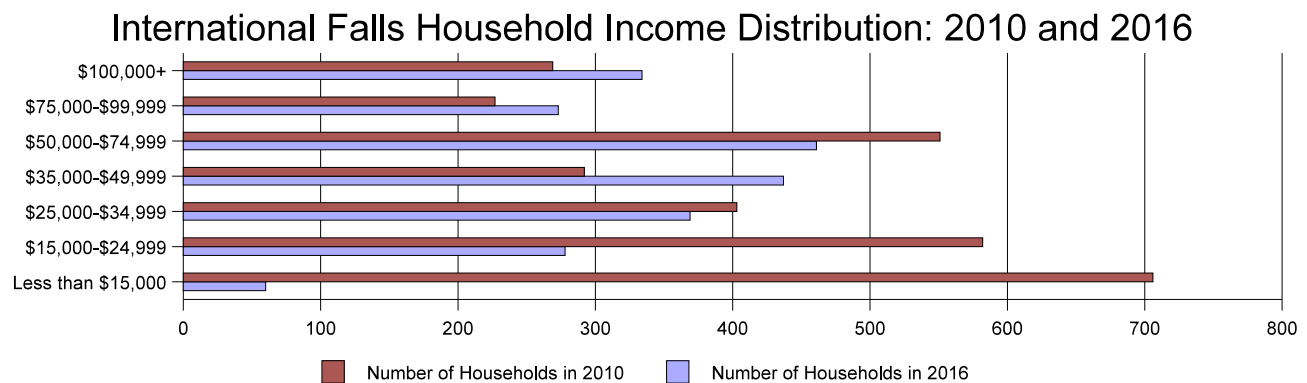
In 2016, the estimated median household income for renters in Koochiching County was approximately \$18,092. At 30% of income, a median income renter in the County could apply approximately \$452 to gross rent without experiencing a housing cost burden.

## International Falls Household Income Distribution

The 2016 American Community Survey household income estimates for the City of International Falls can be compared to the same distribution information from 2010 to examine changes that have occurred from 2010 to 2016.

<b>Table 15 International Falls Household Income Distribution: 2010 to 2016</b>			
Household Income	Number of Households 2010	Number of Households in 2016	Change 2010 to 2016
\$0 - \$14,999	706	60	-101
\$15,000 - \$24,999	582	278	-304
\$25,000 - \$34,999	403	369	-34
\$35,000 - \$49,999	292	437	145
\$50,000 - \$74,999	551	461	-90
\$75,000 - \$99,999	227	273	46
\$100,000+	269	334	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,030</b>	<b>2,757</b>	<b>-273</b>

Source: American Community Survey



The 2010 American Community Survey provides data on 3,030 households in International Falls. The 2010 U.S. Census reported 2,903 households in the City. However, it is still a good indicator of household income distribution.

According to income estimates contained in the 2016 American Community Survey, household incomes have improved in International Falls. When compared to the 2010 American Community Survey, there was a net increase of 166 households with an income of \$35,000, or more. Conversely, there was a decrease of 439 households with incomes below \$35,000. However, there were still 338 households in International Falls that had an annual income below \$25,000 in 2016. This is approximately 12% of all households in the City of International Falls.

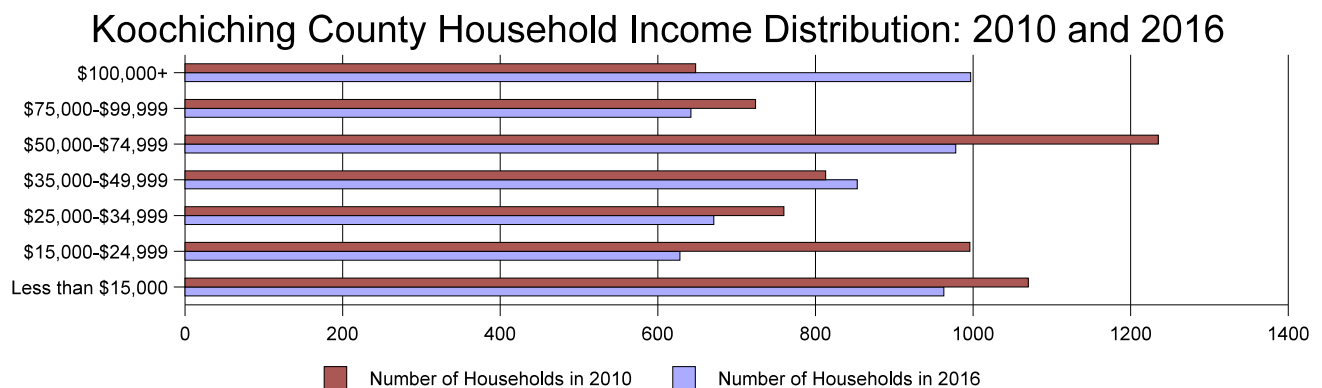
## Koochiching County Household Income Distribution

The 2016 American Community Survey household income estimates for Koochiching County can be compared to the same distribution information from 2010 to examine changes that have occurred from 2010 to 2016.

<b>Table 16 Koochiching County Income Distribution - 2010 to 2016</b>			
Household Income	Number of Households 2010	Number of Households in 2016	Change 2010 to 2016
\$0 - \$14,999	1,070	963	-107
\$15,000 - \$24,999	996	628	-368
\$25,000 - \$34,999	760	671	-89
\$35,000 - \$49,999	813	853	40
\$50,000 - \$74,999	1,235	978	-257
\$75,000 - \$99,999	724	642	-82
\$100,000+	648	997	349
Total	6,246	5,732	-514

Source: American Community Survey

The 2010 American Community Survey provides data on 6,246 households. The 2010 U.S. Census reported 5,874 households in Koochiching County. Therefore, it appears that the American Community Survey overestimated the number of households. However, this source still represents the best available information on household income distribution.





According to income estimates contained in the 2016 American Community Survey, household incomes have improved in Koochiching County. When compared to the 2010 American Community Survey, there was a net increase of 50 households with an income of \$35,000, or more. Conversely, there was a decrease of 564 households with incomes below \$35,000. However, there were still 1,591 households in Koochiching County that had an annual income below \$25,000 in 2016. This is approximately 28% of all households in Koochiching County.

## International Falls Income Distribution by Housing Tenure

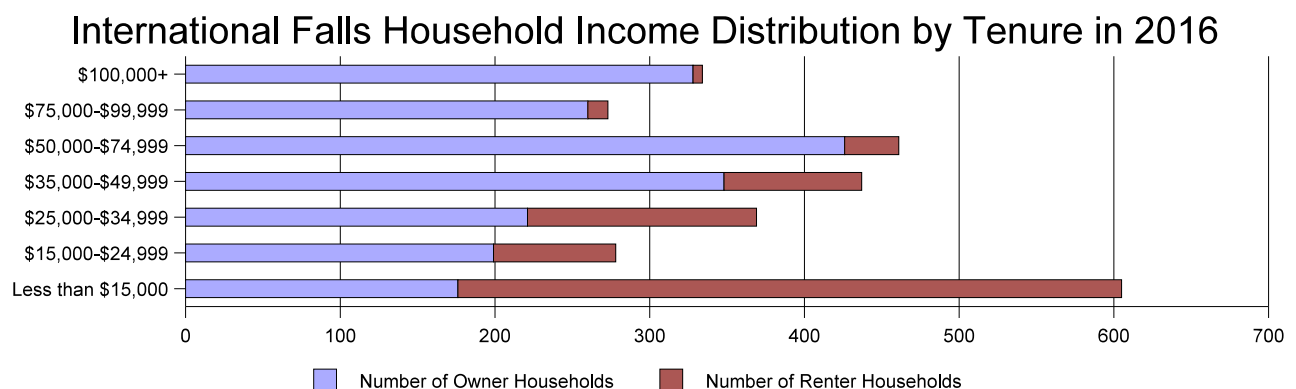
The 2016 American Community Survey provides an income estimate by owner and renter status. The following table examines income distribution within the City of International Falls.

<b>Table 17 International Falls Household Income by Tenure - 2016</b>			
Household Income	Number of Owner Households	Number of Renter Households	Total Households
\$0 - \$14,999	176/29.1%	429/70.9%	605
\$15,000 - \$24,999	199/71.6%	79/28.4%	278
\$25,000 - \$34,999	221/59.9%	148/40.1%	369
\$35,000 - \$49,999	348/79.6%	89/20.4%	437
\$50,000 - \$74,999	426/92.4%	35/7.6%	461
\$75,000 - \$99,999	260/95.2%	13/4.8%	273
\$100,000+	328/98.2%	6/1.8%	334
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,958</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>2,757</b>

Source: American Community Survey

It appears that the 2016 American Community Survey has undercounted the number of renter households in International Falls. However, it is still a good indicator of renter household income distribution.

Income and housing tenure are linked for most households, with home owners generally having higher annual income levels, and renters having lower incomes.



In 2016, approximately 82% of all renter households in International Falls had an annual income below \$35,000. At 30% of income, these households would have \$875, or less, that could be applied to monthly housing costs.

Conversely, a majority of the owner households had a substantially higher income level. Approximately 52% of all owner households had an annual income of \$50,000 or more. At 30% of income, these owners could afford approximately \$1,365 or more per month for housing costs.

## Koochiching County Income Distribution by Housing Tenure

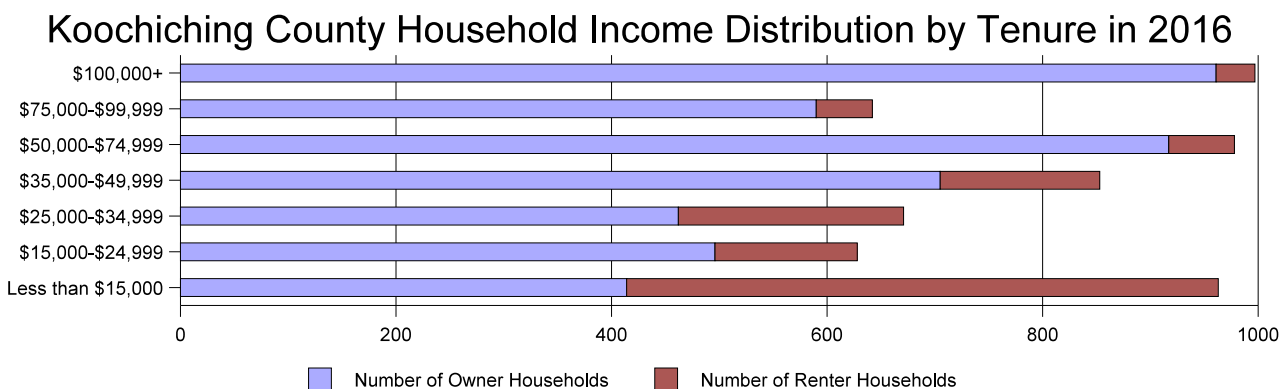
The 2016 American Community Survey provides an income estimate by owner and renter status. The following table examines income distribution within Koochiching County.

<b>Table 18 Market Area Household Income by Tenure - 2016</b>			
Household Income	Number of Owner Households	Number of Renter Households	Total Households
\$0 - \$14,999	414/43.0%	549/57.0%	963
\$15,000 - \$24,999	496/79.0%	132/21.0%	628
\$25,000 - \$34,999	462/68.9%	209/31.1%	671
\$35,000 - \$49,999	705/82.6%	148/17.4%	853
\$50,000 - \$74,999	917/93.8%	61/6.2%	978
\$75,000 - \$99,999	590/91.9%	52/8.1%	642
\$100,000+	961/96.4%	36/3.6%	997
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,545</b>	<b>1,187</b>	<b>5,732</b>

Source: American Community Survey

It appears that the 2016 American Community Survey has undercounted the number of renter households in Koochiching County. However, it is still a good indicator of renter household income distribution.

Income and housing tenure are linked for most households, with home owners generally having higher annual income levels, and renters having lower incomes.



In 2016, approximately 75% of all renter households in the Koochiching County had an annual income below \$35,000. At 30% of income, these households would have \$875, or less, that could be applied to monthly housing costs.

Conversely, a majority of the owner households had a substantially higher income level. Approximately 54% of all owner households had an annual income of \$50,000 or more. At 30% of income, these owners could afford approximately \$1,365 or more per month for housing costs.

## 2016 Estimated Income and Rental Housing Costs - International Falls

The American Community Survey also collected information on housing costs. The following table provides data on the number of renter households that are paying different percentages of their gross household income for housing in the City of International Falls.

<b>Table 19 Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income - 2016</b>			
Percent of Income for Housing	Households Age 64 and Younger	Households Age 65 and Older	Total
Less than 20%	61/9.9%	24/13.2%	85/10.6%
20% to 29.9%	143/23.2%	26/14.3%	169/21.2%
30% to 34.9%	59/9.5%	70/38.4%	129/16.1%
35% or more	317/51.4%	36/19.8%	353/44.2%
Not Computed	37/6.0%	26/14.3%	63/7.9%
Total	617/100%	182/100%	799/100%

Source: American Community Survey

According to the American Community Survey, approximately 60% of all renters in the City were paying 30% or more of their income for rent. The large majority of these households were actually paying 35% or more of their income for housing. Federal standards for rent subsidy programs generally identify 30% of household income as the maximum household contribution. When more than 30% of income is required, this is often called a “rent burden”. When more than 35% is required, this can be considered a “severe rent burden”.

Although a housing cost burden could be caused by either high housing costs or low household income, in International Falls it was primarily due to low income levels for renters. The majority of the renter households with a housing cost burden had an annual household income below \$25,000. To avoid a cost burden, these lower income households would have needed a unit with a gross monthly rent of \$625 or less.

Senior citizen renters (age 65 and older) represented approximately 22% of all households with a rental cost burden. Households in the age ranges between 15 and 64 years old represented approximately 78% of all households with a rental cost burden.



## 2016 Estimated Income and Rental Housing Costs - Koochiching County

The American Community Survey also collected information on housing costs. The following table provides data on the number of renter households that are paying different percentages of their gross household income for housing in Koochiching County.

<b>Table 20 Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income - 2016</b>			
Percent of Income for Housing	Households Age 64 and Younger	Households Age 65 and Older	Total
Less than 20%	161/18.2%	43/14.1%	204/17.2%
20% to 29.9%	194/22.0%	41/13.5%	235/19.8%
30% to 34.9%	62/7.0%	79/26.0%	141/11.9%
35% or more	391/44.3%	68/22.4%	459/38.7%
Not Computed	75/8.5%	73/24.0%	148/12.4%
Total	883/100%	304/100%	1,187/100%

Source: American Community Survey

According to the American Community Survey, approximately 51% of all renters in the County were paying 30% or more of their income for rent. The large majority of these households were actually paying 35% or more of their income for housing. Federal standards for rent subsidy programs generally identify 30% of household income as the maximum household contribution. When more than 30% of income is required, this is often called a “rent burden”. When more than 35% is required, this can be considered a “severe rent burden”.

Although a housing cost burden could be caused by either high housing costs or low household income, in Koochiching County it was primarily due to low income levels for renters. The majority of the renter households with a housing cost burden had an annual household income below \$25,000. To avoid a cost burden, these lower income households would have needed a unit with a gross monthly rent of \$625 or less.

Senior citizen renters (age 65 and older) represented approximately 24% of all households with a rental cost burden. Households in the age ranges between 15 and 64 years old represented approximately 76% of all households with a rental cost burden.

## 2016 Estimated Income and Ownership Housing Costs - International Falls

The American Community Survey also provided housing cost estimates for owner-occupants. The following table provides estimates of the number of households in the City of International Falls that are paying different percentages of their gross household income for housing costs.

<b>Table 21 Ownership Costs as a Percentage of Income - International Falls</b>		
Percentage of Household Income for Housing Costs	Number of Owner Households 2016	Percent of All Owner Households 2016
0% to 19.9%	1,395	71.2%
20% to 29.9%	299	15.3%
30% to 34.9%	41	2.1%
35% or more	223	11.4%
Not Computed	0	0%
Total	1,958	100%

Source: American Community Survey

Most owner-occupants, which would include households with and without a mortgage, reported paying less than 30% of their income for housing. However, approximately 14% of all home owners reported that they paid more than 30% of their income for housing. The majority of these households were paying more than 35% of income for housing costs.

As would be expected, most of the cost-burdened home owners had a mortgage on their home.

## 2016 Estimated Income and Ownership Housing Costs - Koochiching County

The American Community Survey also provided housing cost estimates for owner-occupants. The following table provides estimates of the number of households in Koochiching County that are paying different percentages of their gross household income for housing costs.

<b>Table 22 Ownership Costs as a Percentage of Income - Koochiching County</b>		
Percentage of Household Income for Housing Costs	Number of Owner Households 2016	Percent of All Owner Households 2016
0% to 19.9%	2,877	63.3%
20% to 29.9%	852	18.8%
30% to 34.9%	179	3.9%
35% or more	601	13.2%
Not Computed	36	0.8%
Total	4,545	100%

Source: American Community Survey

Most owner-occupants, which would include households with and without a mortgage, reported paying less than 30% of their income for housing. However, approximately 17% of all home owners reported that they paid more than 30% of their income for housing. The majority of these households were paying more than 35% of income for housing costs.

As would be expected, most of the cost-burdened home owners had a mortgage on their home.

## **New Housing Construction**

Based on information provided by the City of International Falls, seven single family homes were constructed in International Falls from 2010 to 2017.

No single family attached (twinhome/townhome) units or multi-family rental units were constructed in International Falls from 2010 to 2017.

## **Koochiching County Housing Condition**

Community Partners Research, Inc. representatives conducted a visual 'windshield' survey of a total of 1,013 single family/duplex houses in International Falls, Littlefork, Ranier, Big Falls, Mizpah and Northome. All of the houses in Littlefork, Big Falls, Mizpah and Northome were surveyed. The houses in two of International Falls' oldest neighborhoods and one neighborhood in Ranier were surveyed. Except for International Falls, mobile homes were excluded from the analysis. Structures with more than two units were also excluded from the survey.

The boundaries of the two neighborhoods surveyed in International Falls are as follows:

- ▶ Neighborhood #1: North - 6<sup>th</sup> St.  
South - 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
East - 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.  
West - 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- ▶ Neighborhood #2: North - 6<sup>th</sup> St.  
South - 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
East - 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
West - 13<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- ▶ The Ranier neighborhood that was surveyed includes all of the houses north of County Road 11. Although all of the houses in Littlefork were surveyed, the City was divided into two neighborhoods, north and south of Main St.

Houses that appeared to contain three or more residential units were excluded from the survey. Houses were categorized in one of four levels of physical condition, Sound, Minor Repair, Major Repair, and Dilapidated as defined below. The visual survey analyzed only the physical condition of the visible exterior of each structure. Exterior condition is assumed to be a reasonable indicator of the structure's interior quality.

Dilapidated was the lowest rating used. These houses need major renovation to become decent, safe and sanitary housing. Some Dilapidated properties may be abandoned and may be candidates for demolition and clearance.

Major Rehabilitation is defined as a house needing multiple major improvements such as roof, windows, sidings, structural/foundation, etc. Houses in this condition category may or may not be economically feasible to rehabilitate.

Minor Repair houses are judged to be generally in good condition and require less extensive repair, such as one major improvement. Houses in this condition category will generally be good candidates for rehabilitation programs because they are in a salable price range and are economically feasible to repair.

Sound houses are judged to be in good, 'move-in' condition. Sound houses may contain minor code violations and still be considered Sound.

<b>Table 23 Windshield Survey Condition Estimate - 2018</b>					
	Sound	Minor Repair	Major Repair	Dilapidated	Total
<b>International Falls</b>					
Neighborhood #1	74/23.4%	141/44.6%	84/26.6%	17/5.4%	316
Neighborhood #2	62/26.3%	98/41.5%	66/28.0%	10/4.2%	236
Total	136/24.6%	239/43.3%	150/27.2%	27/4.9%	552
<b>Littlefork</b>					
Neighborhood #1	48/56.4%	27/31.8%	9/10.6%	1/1.2%	85
Neighborhood #2	56/47.9%	43/36.8%	12/10.2%	6/5.1%	117
Total	104/51.5%	70/34.6%	21/10.4%	7/3.5%	202
<b>Ranier</b>					
Ranier Neighborhood	27/31.4%	34/39.5%	15/17.5%	10/11.6%	86
<b>Big Falls</b>					
Big Falls	24/28.6%	23/27.4%	22/26.2%	15/17.8%	84
<b>Mizpah</b>					
Mizpah	11/45.8%	8/33.3%	2/8.4%	3/12.5%	24
<b>Northome</b>					
Northome	28/43.1%	24/36.9%	11/16.9%	2/3.1%	65
<b>Combined Total</b>					
Total - All Cities	330/32.6%	398/39.3%	221/21.8%	64/6.3%	1,013

Source: Community Partners Research, Inc.

- ▶ Approximately 33% of the houses in the six cities surveyed were sound, 39% need minor repair, 22% need major repair and 6% are dilapidated and beyond repair.



## **International Falls Mobile/Manufactured Home Housing Condition**

Community Partners Research, Inc. representatives conducted a visual 'windshield' survey of 97 mobile and manufactured homes located in four mobile and manufactured home parks in the City of International Falls.

Mobile homes were categorized in one of four levels of physical condition, Sound, Minor Repair, Major Repair, and Dilapidated as defined below. The visual survey analyzed only the physical condition of the visible exterior of each structure. Exterior condition is assumed to be a reasonable indicator of the structure's interior quality.

Dilapidated was the lowest rating used. Dilapidated mobile homes need major renovation to become decent, safe and sanitary housing. Some Dilapidated properties may be abandoned and candidates for demolition and clearance.

Major Rehabilitation is defined as a mobile home needing multiple major improvements such as roof, windows, sidings, structural/foundation, etc. Houses and mobile homes in this condition category may or may not be economically feasible to rehabilitate.

Minor Repair mobile homes are judged to be generally in good condition and require less extensive repair, such as one major improvement. Mobile homes in this condition category may be good candidates for rehabilitation programs because they are in a sellable price range and are economically feasible to repair.

Sound mobile homes are judged to be in good, 'move-in' condition. Mobile homes may contain minor code violations and still be considered Sound.

**Table 24 Windshield Survey Condition Estimate - 2018**

	Sound	Minor Repair	Major Repair	Dilapidated	Total
Riverside Trailer Court	8/20.5%	12/30.8%	14/35.9%	5/12.8%	39
Riverview Mobile Home Park	8/24.2%	13/39.4%	12/36.4%	0/0%	33
3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave. W Mobile Home Park	3/30.0%	5/50.0%	2/20.0%	0/0%	10
Crescent Drive Mobile Home Park	6/40.0%	6/40.0%	3/20.0%	0/0%	15
Total	25/25.8%	36/37.1%	31/32.0%	5/5.1%	97

Source: Community Partners Research, Inc.

- ▶ The mobile/manufactured homes in International Falls are in fair condition. Approximately 37% of the mobile homes need minor repair and 32% need major repair. Approximately 26% are sound, with no required improvements.
- ▶ Five mobile homes were dilapidated and possibly beyond repair.

## **Home Sales**

The Koochiching County Assessor's Office maintains annual residential sales records. For the following analysis, sales were reviewed for each calendar year, dating back to the year 2010. Information for 2018 is partial-year.

For each year, only "qualified" sales were included. Qualified sales are considered to be "arms length" transactions, and exclude certain sales such as sales between relatives, forced sales and foreclosures, and estate transfers that are not available on the open market. The Assessor's Office makes the determination of qualified sales for their annual sales ratio study.

In some defined 12-month periods, the number of good sales that occur within the City may be limited, and may not be a good indicator of the typical home value. However, the annual sample does provide insight into units that become available for purchase.

The County's qualified sales data primarily look at existing homes. The information maintained by the Assessor is based on the comparison of taxable valuation to actual sales price. Since newly constructed houses do not generally have a prior value, they are not typically included in the sales sample.

The sales records reviewed were for improved residential parcels with less than four units. While it is possible that some structures had more than one living unit, such as a duplex, it is assumed that the large majority of the sales are single family houses.

The sales price that has been used reflects an "adjusted" price which removes any personal property or seller contributions that are included in the final sale, such as financial contributions to closing costs, etc. These adjustments are made by the County Assessor.

## Home Sales in International Falls

International Falls has the largest number of annual transactions of any City in Koochiching County. The following table provides information for each year dating back to 2010.

<b>Table 25 Residential Sales in International Falls: 2010-2018*</b>				
Year	Number of Sales	Median Price	Highest Price	Lowest Price
2018*	27	\$69,250	\$214,900	\$22,300
2017	75	\$78,450	\$190,500	\$15,000
2016	66	\$74,675	\$223,000	\$18,500
2015	67	\$71,500	\$173,500	\$18,250
2014	79	\$59,100	\$282,000	\$16,500
2013	67	\$63,000	\$201,900	\$11,000
2012	86	\$71,000	\$235,000	\$10,000
2011	75	\$83,500	\$315,000	\$10,000
2010	63	\$56,800	\$195,500	\$10,000

Source: Koochiching County Assessor; Community Partners Research, Inc.

\* Partial-year

Excluding partial-year information for 2018, there have been more than 60 good sales in each of the other years reviewed. Over this time, the annual median has ranged from a low of \$56,800 in 2010, to a high of \$83,500 in 2011. Although the median price has varied from year to year, it has been above \$71,000 since 2015, and the partial-year information for 2018 also shows a median of approximately \$70,000.

The table above also includes information on the highest annual sale prices. In each of the years reviewed, at least one house has sold for more than \$173,000. In most years, sales above \$200,000 have been recorded.

Some lower-valued sales also occur annually, and excluding 2018, at least one house has sold each year for less than \$20,000.

An alternate home value estimate is available from the 2016 American Community Survey. This source places the midpoint owner-occupied house value at \$84,100, higher than the median sale price that year of nearly \$75,000.

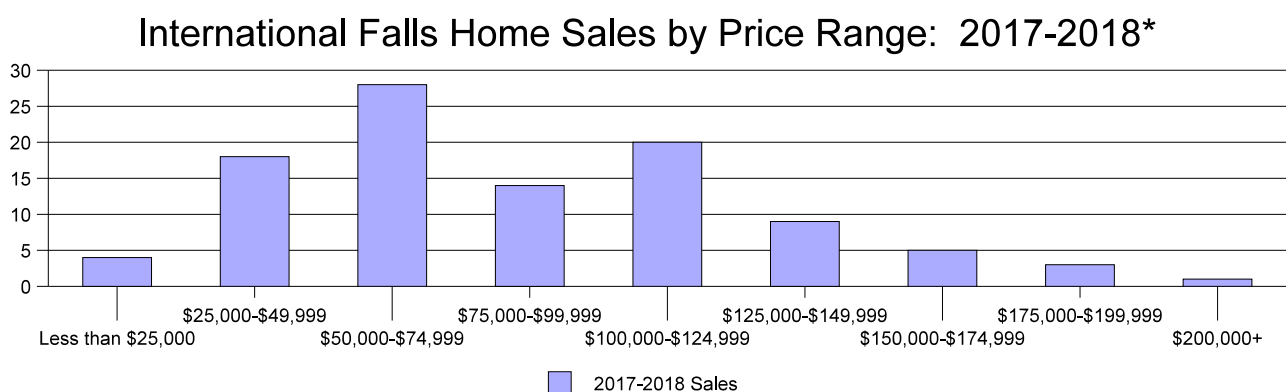
## Home Sales by Price Range

The following table looks at single family houses that have been sold in 2017 and 2018 (partial-year) in International Falls.

<b>Table 26 International Falls Home Sales by Price Range: 2017-2018*</b>		
Sale Price	Number of Sales	Percent of Sales
Less than \$25,000	4	3.9%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	18	17.6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	28	27.5%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	14	13.7%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	20	19.6%
\$125,000 - \$149,999	9	8.8%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	5	4.9%
\$175,000 - \$199,999	3	2.9%
\$200,000+	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Koochiching County Assessor; Community Partners Research, Inc.

\*2018 sales are partial-year



A large majority of the home sales in International Falls have occurred in the price ranges below \$125,000. Overall, fewer than 18% of recent home sales were for \$125,000 or more.

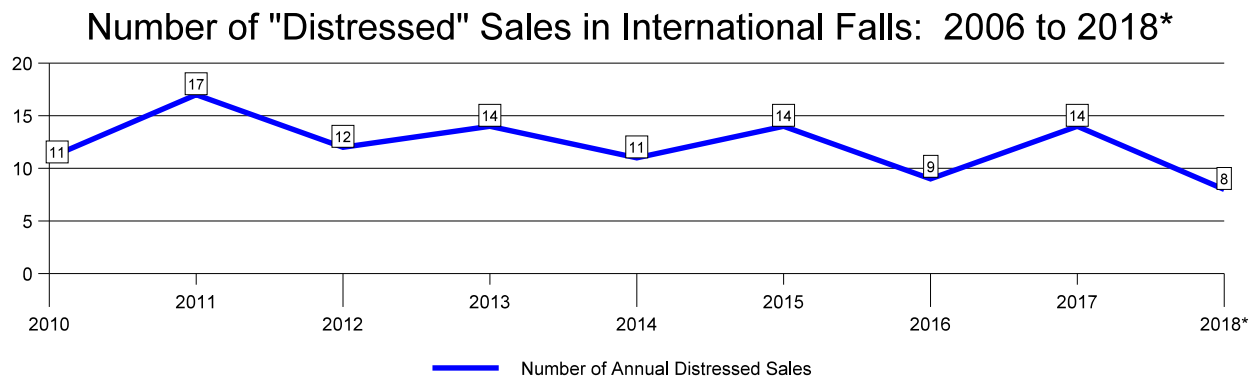
## Bank-owned Sales

The records obtained from Koochiching County also included information on rejected sales, including “distressed” transfers. These included bank-owned sales, government sales and other forced sale transactions, often the result of prior foreclosure activity. In many parts of the State, distressed property sales had a negative impact on home values, as these sales often were completed at below-market pricing.

In International Falls, there were:

- ▶ 11 distressed sales in 2010
- ▶ 17 in 2011
- ▶ 12 in 2012
- ▶ 14 in 2013
- ▶ 11 in 2014
- ▶ 14 in 2015
- ▶ 9 in 2016
- ▶ 14 in 2017
- ▶ 8 year-to-date in 2018

In most communities, the number of distressed sales has been decreasing, after peaking earlier in this decade. But in International Falls, the volume of transactions has remained relatively stable over time.





## Occupancy Status of Housing Units - 2010

The following table provides data on the occupancy status of housing units including units utilized for seasonal use. Data was obtained from the 2010 U.S. Census as this data was determined to be the most reliable. Data is provided for the cities, unorganized territories and all of Koochiching County.

<b>Table 27 Occupancy Status of Housing Units - 2010</b>						
	Occupied Units		Vacant Units			
	Owner	Renter	For Rent	For Sale	Seasonal Use	Other Vacant
International Falls	1,946	957	62	55	31	106
Big Falls	94	36	9	1	28	13
Littlefork	180	78	14	2	18	4
Mizpah	26	2	0	1	14	2
Northome	64	25	6	2	4	3
Ranier (prior to annexation)	56	14	11	2	3	3
South UT	87	10	0	2	275	11
Rainy Lake UT	1,575	138	12	31	618	89
Northwest UT	190	19	0	6	233	20
Northome UT	171	17	0	3	154	9
Nett Lake UT	19	17	0	0	0	0
East UT	143	10	0	4	153	12
Rural Koochiching Co. (outside of Cities)	2,185	211	12	46	1,433	141
All of Koochiching Co.	4,551	1,323	106	88	1,531	272

Source: U.S. Census

- At the time of the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 1,531 seasonal use housing units including 98 seasonal units in the cities and 1,433 units in rural Koochiching County (the unorganized territories).

- ▶ There were also 272 vacant units in the County that were not for sale or for rent. Of this total, 131 units were in the cities and 141 units are in rural Koochiching County.
- ▶ Ranier's occupancy status data is based on the 2010 U.S. Census. Since the Census, Ranier has annexed additional housing into the City. It is estimated that in 2017, Ranier has approximately 19 seasonal housing units and 14 vacant housing units.

## **Rental Housing**

### **U.S. Census Inventory**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 957 occupied rental units and 62 vacant rental units for a total estimated rental inventory of 1,019 units in International Falls. The City's rental tenure rate in 2010 was 33.0%, above the Statewide rental rate of 27%.

At the time of the 2000 Census, International Falls had 878 occupied rental units and 112 vacant rental units, for a total estimated rental inventory of 990 units. Between the 2000 Census and the 2010 Census, the City added 79 renter households and 29 rental units to the total inventory.

From 2010 to 2018, no market rate or subsidized rental units were constructed in International Falls. However, 24 assisted living units were constructed in 2013. It is estimated that in 2018, there are approximately 1,042 rental units in International Falls.

Based on the information that is available, no new rental housing construction has occurred in International Falls, or elsewhere in the County in recent decades. The last new project that can be tracked in the County was probably built in the early 1980s.

### **Rental Housing Survey**

As part of this housing study, a telephone survey was conducted of multifamily rental buildings in the City. The survey focused on larger rental projects with six or more units. However, we also collected some information from other rental properties, such as single family homes, mobile homes, duplexes, small rental buildings and units in mixed-use buildings. Information was collected in September and October, 2018.

Several attempts were made to contact each building. Information was tallied separately for different types of rental housing, including market rate units, subsidized housing, and senior housing with services facilities.

There were 668 rental housing units of all types that were contacted in the survey. This represents approximately 64% of the rental units in the City. The breakdown of units surveyed is as follows:

- 317 market rate units
- 257 subsidized units for general occupancy
- 94 senior housing with services units

A 54-bed skilled nursing home was also surveyed. The findings of the survey are provided below.

## **Market Rate Summary**

Usable information was obtained on 317 market rate rental units in large rental projects, small rental buildings, mixed-use buildings, duplexes, single family homes and mobile homes.

### **Unit Mix**

We obtained bedroom mix information on 135 market rate rental units. The bedroom mix is as follows:

- 2 efficiency (1.5%)
- 39 one-bedroom (28.9%)
- 67 two-bedroom (49.6%)
- 26 three-bedroom (19.3%)
- 1 four-bedroom (0.7%)

### **Occupancy / Vacancy**

We found approximately 13 vacant units in the 317 market rate units that we surveyed. The 13 units represented a vacancy rate of 4.1%.

At the time of the survey, Shorewood Estates had four vacancies and South Falls Apartments/Townhomes and Robb Ross Apartments both reported no vacancies. The 246 units in single family homes, mobile homes, mixed-use buildings and small rental buildings had approximately 9 vacancies.

In many cases, the units attributed as vacant were due to recent turnovers and/or unit renovations, as existing tenants had moved and the units had not yet been released.

## Rental Rates

Rental rates in the market rate segment are generally moderate. Most of the market rate rental properties in the City are 30 or more years old.

Some of the units include the primary utility payments with the rent, while in other cases, the tenant pays the major utilities in addition to rent. We have attempted to estimate tenant paid utilities into a gross rent estimate for the following rent ranges:

	<u>Unit Type</u>	<u>Rent Range</u>
▶	Efficiency	\$370-\$400
▶	One-bedroom	\$400-\$800
▶	Two-bedroom	\$465-\$850
▶	Three-bedroom	\$510-\$950

There is a wide rent range based on the quality, size and age of the units.

## Tax Credit Summary

We did not identify any tax credit rental units in International Falls.

## Subsidized Summary

There are six federally subsidized rental projects in International Falls. Combined, these projects have 265 units of subsidized rental housing. The six subsidized projects are all general occupancy, however, one project, Woodland Park Apartments with 80 units, was a senior/disabled project, but has converted to general occupancy.

The six subsidized International Falls projects include:

- ▶ **Woodland Park Apartments** - Woodland Park Apartments includes 80 general occupancy HUD Public Housing units. The project includes 78 one-bedroom and two two-bedroom units. The project is owned and managed by the International Falls HRA.
- ▶ **West Falls Estates** - West Falls Estates is a Section 8 HUD 80-unit general occupancy project. The project has 57 one-bedroom, 17 two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units.

- ▶ **Fairview Horizon** - Fairview Horizon includes eight USDA Rural Development general occupancy units. The project has four one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units. This project is owned and managed by KOOTASCA Community Action.
- ▶ **Hampton Court** - Hampton Court is a 28-unit USDA Rural Development general occupancy project that includes 18 one-bedroom and 10 two-bedroom units.
- ▶ **South Falls Apartments and Townhomes** - South Falls Apartments and Townhomes is a 33-unit HUD Section 8 project. There are 27 one-bedroom, four two-bedroom and two three-bedroom units. The project also has 37 market rate rental units.
- ▶ **Falls South Apartments and Townhomes** - Falls South Apartments and Townhomes is a 36-unit general occupancy subsidized HUD Section 8 Project. There are 16 one-bedroom units, eight two-bedroom units and 12 three-bedroom units.

### **Occupancy / Vacancy**

We found eight vacancies in the 265 subsidized units at the time of the survey. This is a 3.0% vacancy rate. Falls South Apartments and Townhomes had three vacancies, Woodland Park Apartments had four vacancies, and Hampton Court had one vacancy. South Falls Apartments and Townhomes, West Falls Estates and Fairview Horizon were fully occupied.

### **Unit Mix**

The bedroom mix of the 265 subsidized units is as follows:

▶ One-bedroom -	200 (75.5%)
▶ Two-bedroom -	45 (17.0%)
▶ Three-bedroom -	<u>20 (7.5%)</u>
▶ Total -	265

### **Rental Rates**

The subsidized units have access to project-based rent assistance. These units charge rent based on 30% of the tenant's household income up to a market rate.



## **Subsidized Unit Gains and Losses**

Some subsidized projects around the State have met their contractual obligations to provide affordable housing and have been converting to market rate housing. We are not aware of any subsidized projects that have converted from subsidized to market rate or that have started the process of opting out of their subsidy program.

## **Tenant-Based Rent Assistance**

In addition to these subsidized projects, Koochiching County has approximately 111 households being assisted with HUD Housing Choice Vouchers (formerly Section 8 Existing Program). Approximately 103 of the 111 households are in International Falls.

Housing Choice Voucher assistance is issued to income-eligible households for use in suitable, private market rental housing units. With the assistance, a household pays approximately 30% of their income for their rent, with the program subsidy paying any additional rent amounts. The Housing Choice Voucher Program is administered by the Koochiching County HRA. Currently, there is approximately a 10-month waiting list for local households that apply for a Housing Choice Voucher.

## **Senior Housing with Services**

The International Falls/Ranier Market Area has the following senior with services projects:

- ▶ **River's Edge Villas** - River's Edge Villas is a 27-unit independent/light services project. The project is part of the Good Samaritan campus. The project includes one-bedroom, one-bedroom plus den and two-bedroom units.
- ▶ **Northwinds Assisted Living** - Northwinds Assisted Living is a 24-unit assisted living project that was constructed in 2013. All of the units have one-bedroom. The project is part of the Good Samaritan campus.
- ▶ **Good Samaritan Skilled Nursing Care** - Good Samaritan Skilled Nursing Care is a 54-bed skilled nursing facility that was constructed in 2013. The skilled nursing home is part of the Good Samaritan campus. The facility includes long-term and short-term rehab beds.
- ▶ **Ranier Roost** - Ranier Roost is located in the City of Ranier and is a 23-bed secure assisted living memory care facility. The facility opened in 1987.
- ▶ **Papermakers Place** - Papermakers Place is an eight-bed assisted living facility located in rural International Falls. The facility provides the full array of assisted living services.
- ▶ **Ridgeview Assisted Living** - Ridgeview Assisted Living is a 12-bed assisted living facility located in International Falls. The facility opened for occupancy in 2005.

## **Occupancy / Vacancy**

At the time of the survey, River's Edge Villas and Papermakers Place had one vacancy. Northwinds Assisted Living, Ranier Roost and Ridgeview Assisted Living had two vacancies.

Good Samaritan Skilled Nursing Care operates at an average 90% occupancy rate.

## **Student Housing**

Rainy Hall is a 23-unit student housing project located on the Rainy River Community College Campus. There is a capacity of 92 students, however, the Housing Director prefers a 77-person capacity, which allows for some single rooms. Students pay \$1,790 for a single room and \$2,475 for a double room per semester. The units are fully occupied during the school year.

**Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory**

Name	Number of Units /Bedroom Mix	Rent	Vacancy/ Wait List	Tenant Mix	Comments
<b>Market Rate</b>					
BD Rentals	efficiency 1 Bedroom 2 Bedroom <u>3 Bedroom</u> 65 Total Units	\$350 \$400 \$500-\$600 \$700 +utilities	No vacancies	General occupancy	BD Rentals includes approximately 65 units in single family homes, duplexes, and several small apartment buildings. Approximately 50 units are in duplexes and apartment buildings and 15 units are single family homes. The rents in the apartment buildings are approximately \$350 for an efficiency, \$400 for a one-bedroom and \$500 for a two-bedroom. Rent includes heat and electricity. The single family home rents are approximately \$600 for a two-bedroom house and \$700 for a three-bedroom house. Tenants pay all utilities. At the time of the survey, BD Rentals had no vacancies.
Hausmann Rentals	Efficiency 1 Bedroom 2 Bedroom 3 Bedroom <u>4 Bedroom</u> 102 Total Units	\$350 \$450 \$550 \$650 \$750 +utilities	Average 4% vacancy rate	General occupancy	Hausmann Rentals includes approximately 102 rental units in a variety of buildings in single family homes, mobile homes, duplexes, tri-plexes, 4-plexes and larger multi-family buildings. The rentals include efficiency units and 1 to 4 bedroom options. The rents listed are typical for the unit size but can vary by size and quality of the unit. In most units tenants also pay utilities. The owner reports an average 4% vacancy rate.
Jensen Rentals	4 - 2 Bedroom 4 - 3 Bedroom <u>1 - 4 Bedroom</u> 9 Total Units	\$450-\$550 +utilities	Two vacancies	General occupancy	Jensen Rentals includes nine single family homes. The nine homes include four two-bedroom, four three-bedroom and one four-bedroom unit. The rents range from \$450 to \$550 plus utilities. The owner reported two vacancies, however, the houses are usually fully occupied.

**Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory**

Name	Number of Units /Bedroom Mix	Rent	Vacancy/ Wait List	Tenant Mix	Comments
<b>Market Rate</b>					
O'Hara Homes Property Management	1 - 1 Bedroom <u>5 - 2 Bedroom</u> 6 Total Units	\$500 \$425-\$725 +utilities	1 vacancy	General occupancy	O'Hara Homes includes a one-bedroom home, a two-bedroom homes and a 4-plex. The rent is \$425 for the one-bedroom home and \$540 for the two-bedroom home. The rent on the 4-plex units is \$425 for three units and \$725 for a large unit. Tenants also pay utilities. The owner reported one vacancy at the time of the survey.
Pollywog Enterprises	2 - Efficiencies 19 - 1 Bedroom 20 - 2 Bedroom <u>8 - 3 Bedroom</u> 49 Total Units	\$350 \$420-\$600 \$500-\$600 \$650-\$750 + some utilities	Two vacancies	General occupancy	Pollywog Enterprises includes 49 units in 22 single family homes, duplexes and apartment buildings. Rents are \$350 for an efficiency, \$420 to \$600 for a two-bedroom unit and \$650 to \$750 for a three-bedroom unit. Utilities vary from tenants paying limited utilities to paying all utilities. The owner reported two vacancies at the time of the survey.
Robb Ross Apartments	12 - 2 Bedroom <u>12 - 3 Bedroom</u> 24 Total Units	\$690-\$740 \$715-\$765 +electric	No vacancies	General Occupancy	Robb Ross Apartments is a 24-unit market rate general occupancy project constructed in 1980. There are 12 two-bedroom and 12 three-bedroom units. The rent includes a garage. Tenants pay electricity in addition to rent. The rent range is due to some units having been renovated. The owner reports no vacancies at the time of the survey, however, the project usually has vacancies.
Shorewood Estates	2 - 1 Bedroom <u>18 - 2 Bedroom</u> 20 Total Units	\$750 \$770-\$780 +electric	Four vacancies	General occupancy	Shorewood Apartments is a 20-unit market rate project. The 20 units include two one-bedroom and 18 two-bedroom units. Rent is \$750 for a one-bedroom and \$770 to \$780 for a two-bedroom unit. Tenants also pay electricity. The manager reported four vacancies at the time of the survey.

<b>Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Units /Bedroom Mix</b>	<b>Rent</b>	<b>Vacancy/ Wait List</b>	<b>Tenant Mix</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Market Rate</b>					
South Falls Apartments & Townhomes	17 - 1 Bdrm Apts 8 - 2 Bdrm TH <u>2 - 3 Bdrm TH</u> 27 Market Rate +33 Subsidized listed separately	\$400 \$465 \$510	No vacancies	General occupancy	South Falls Apartments and Townhomes includes 27 market rate and 33 subsidized HUD Section 8 subsidized units. The 27 market rate units include 17 one-bedroom apartments, eight two-bedroom townhomes and two three-bedroom townhomes. The rent includes utilities. At the time of the survey, the manager reported no vacancies.
Wickstrom Rentals	2 Bedroom <u>3 Bedroom</u> 15 Total Units	\$500-\$600 \$700-\$775 +utilities	No vacancies	General occupancy	Rental units are in 13 single family houses and one duplex. All units have 2 or 3 bedrooms. Tenants pays utilities in addition to rent. Rents can vary based on size and condition. Owner reported no vacancies.

**Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory**

Name	Number of Units /Bedroom Mix	Rent	Vacancy/ Wait List	Tenant Mix	Comments
<b>Subsidized</b>					
Fairview Horizon	4 - 1 Bedroom 4 - 2 Bedroom 8 Total Units	\$492 \$552 30% of Income	No vacancies	General occupancy	Fairview Horizon is an eight-unit USDA Rural Development Project constructed in the 1970s. The project is owned and managed by KOOTASCA Community Action. Tenants pay 30% of their income up to the maximum rent. The manager reported no vacancies at the time of the survey.
Falls South Apartments & Townhomes	16 - 1 Bdrm Apts 8 - 2 Bdrm TH 12 - 3 Bdrm TH 36 Total Units	\$636 \$745 \$853 30% of Income	3 vacancies	General occupancy	Falls South Apartments and Townhomes includes 36 subsidized Section 8 rental units. The units include 16 one-bedroom apartments, eight two-bedroom townhomes and 12 three-bedroom townhomes. Tenants pay 30% of their income up to the market rent. The market rents are \$636 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$745 for a two-bedroom townhome and \$853 for a three-bedroom townhome. At the time of the survey, the manager reported three vacancies.
Hampton Court	18 - 1 Bedroom 10 - 2 Bedroom 28 Total Units	\$550-\$580 \$610-\$640 30% of Income	1 vacancy	General occupancy	Hampton Court is a 28-unit general occupancy USDA Rural Development Project constructed in the 1980s. There are 18 one-bedroom units and 10 two-bedroom units. Thirteen tenants have rent assistance and pay 30% of their income up to the maximum rent. Tenants without rent assistance pay 30% of their income, but not less than the minimum rent or more than the maximum rent. The manager reported one vacancy at the time of the survey.
South Falls Apartments	27 - 1 Bdrm Apts 4 - 2 Bdrm TH 2 - 3 Bdrm TH 33 Subsidized +27 Market Rate listed separately	\$540 \$660 \$918 30% of Income	No vacancies	General occupancy	South Falls Apartments and Townhomes includes 33 subsidized HUD Section 8 units and 27 market rate units. The units include 27 one-bedroom apartments, four two-bedroom apartments and two three-bedroom townhomes. Tenants pay 30% of their income up to the market rents. The market rents are \$540 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$660 for a two-bedroom apartment and \$918 for a three-bedroom townhome. At the time of the survey, there are no vacancies.



<b>Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Units /Bedroom Mix</b>	<b>Rent</b>	<b>Vacancy/ Wait List</b>	<b>Tenant Mix</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Subsidized</b>					
West Falls Estates	57 - 1 Bedroom 17 - 2 Bedroom <u>6 - 3 Bedroom</u> 80 Total Units	\$710 \$690-\$861 \$767 30% of Income	No vacancies, waiting list	General occupancy	West Falls Estates is an 80-unit General Occupancy HUD Section 8 Project. The 80 units include 57 one-bedroom and three two-bedroom apartment units and 14 two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units. Tenants pay 30% of income up to a maximum rent. The manager reported no vacancies and a waiting list.
Woodland Park Apartments	78 - 1 Bedroom <u>2 - 2 Bedroom</u> 80 Total Units	30% of Income \$495 maximum rent	4 vacancies	General occupancy	Woodland Park Apartments is an 80-unit Public Housing Project owned and managed by the International Falls HRA. There are 78 one-bedroom and two two-bedroom units. The project was constructed in 1969. At the time of the survey, there were four vacancies. The manager reported that the project has a very high occupancy rate. The project was a senior/disabled project, but it has converted to general occupancy. However, approximately 75% of the tenants are senior/disabled.

**Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory**

Name	Number of Units /Bedroom Mix	Rent	Vacancy/ Wait List	Tenant Mix	Comments
<b>Senior with Services</b>					
Good Samaritan Home International Falls	<u>54 beds</u> 54 Total Beds	Based on level of services	90% occupancy rate	Skilled nursing home	The Good Samaritan skilled nursing home was constructed in 2013 and is part of the Good Samaritan campus. There are 54 beds and includes beds for long-term care as well as short-term rehab care. The facility operates at approximately a 90% occupancy rate.
Northwinds Assisted Living International Falls	<u>24 - 1 Bedroom</u> 24 Total Units	Based on level of services	2 vacancies	Assisted living	Northwinds Assisted Living was constructed in 2013 and is part of the Good Samaritan campus. The project has 24 one-bedroom units. The project provides the full array of assisted living services including 24-hour staffing, medication management, bathing, medication management, housekeeping, laundry, social activities, etc. At the time of the survey, there were two vacancies.
Papermakers Place International Falls	<u>6 Rooms w/8 Beds</u> 8 Total Beds	Based on level of services	1 vacancy	Assisted living	Papermakers Place is a six-bedroom/eight-bed assisted living facility. The facility opened in 2003 and is located in rural International Falls. The facility provides the full array of assisted living services including 24-hour staffing, meals, laundry, medication management, etc. At the time of the survey, there was one vacant bed.
Ranier Roost Ranier	<u>23 Beds - private/semi-private rooms</u> 23 Total Beds	Based on level of services	2 vacant beds	Memory care	Ranier Roost is a 23-bed assisted living memory care facility that opened in 1987. The facility is located in Ranier. The facility is secure and provides 24-hour staffing, meals, laundry, medication management, social activities, etc. There are private and semi-private beds. At the time of the survey, there were two vacant beds. The facility usually operates at a very high occupancy rate.
Ridgeview Assisted Living International Falls	<u>12 Beds</u> 12 Total Units	Based on level of services	2 vacant beds	Assisted living	Ridgeview Assisted Living includes 12 beds. The facility opened in 2005. The facility provides the array of senior services including meals, laundry, 24-hour staffing, medication management, etc.

<b>Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Units /Bedroom Mix</b>	<b>Rent</b>	<b>Vacancy/ Wait List</b>	<b>Tenant Mix</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Senior with Services</b>					
River's Edge Villas International Falls	1 Bedroom 1 Bdrm+den <u>2 Bedroom</u> 27 Total Units	Based on type of unit and level of services	1 vacancy	Housing with services	River's Edge Villa's is part of the Good Samaritan campus and includes 27 units with one, one-bedroom plus den and two-bedroom units, with 9 different floor plans. The project is independent, light services and includes a noon meal, housekeeping, social activities, etc. At the time of the survey, there was one vacancy, however, the Administrator reported that the units were usually fully occupied and there is a waiting list.

<b>Table 28 International Falls Multifamily Rental Housing Inventory</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Units /Bedroom Mix</b>	<b>Rent</b>	<b>Vacancy/ Wait List</b>	<b>Tenant Mix</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Student Housing</b>					
Rainy Hall	<u>23 - 2 Bedroom</u> 23 Total Units	\$1,790 for single \$2,475 for a double per semester	Fully occupied during school year	Students	Rainy Hall is a 23-unit student housing project located on the Rainy River Community College Campus. There is a capacity of 92 students, however, the Housing Director prefers a 77-person capacity, which allows for some single rooms. The project is totally occupied during the school year.

Source: Community Partners Research, Inc.

## **Findings on Growth Trends**

### **Population**

As part of this Study, Community Partners Research, Inc., has examined growth patterns for the City of International Falls, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area and Koochiching County over the past few decades. The primary data sources had differing opinions about recent changes since 2010.

Esri, estimates that the City had a loss of 468 people over an eight-year period from 2010 to 2018. This source showed the biggest reduction in the City's population so far this decade. In comparison, the State Demographer's estimate showed a loss of 454 people from 2010 to 2017, and the Census Bureau showed a loss of 432 people from International Falls during the same time period.

Although there are minor differences between these sources, all show a declining population for the City since 2010. If viewed as an annual average, the City has lost between 59 and 65 people per year.

Esri estimates that the International Falls/Ranier Market Area had a loss of 470 people and Koochiching County had a loss of 447 people from 2010 to 2018. There are no comparable estimates for the Market Area from the State Demographer or the Census Bureau, since these sources do not provide annual estimates for the individual Unorganized Territories. However, both of these sources also do issue County estimates. The State Demographer showed the County's population decreasing by 671 people between 2010 and 2017, while the Census Bureau showed a reduction of 783 people. Both of these sources were tracking larger losses than Esri so far this decade.

The estimated loss of population in the area is a continuation of longer-term trends. International Falls, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area and Koochiching County all had population losses from 2000 to 2010. The City's population decreased by 279 people, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area's population decreased by 743 people and Koochiching County's population decreased by 1,044 people.

## **Households**

There are also differences in the household estimates. The 2018 Esri estimate shows International Falls losing 225 households from 2010 to 2018, while the 2017 State Demographer estimate shows International Falls losing only 35 households.

Esri estimates that from 2010 to 2018, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area had a loss of 234 households. Esri estimates that Koochiching County had a loss of 420 households from 2010 to 2018, but the State Demographer estimates the County had a loss of only 54 households from 2010 to 2017. It is not clear why the differences exist between these data sources.

International Falls, the Market Area and all of Koochiching County each had household losses from 2000 to 2010. The City of International Falls had a loss of 56 households. The Market Area had a loss of 123 households and the County had a loss of 166 households during that decade.

## **Findings on Projected Growth**

The Minnesota State Demographer's Office has not produced any recent projections for population or household growth. As a result, no useful information is available from this source.

However, Esri does provide 5-year demographic projections. Esri projects that International Falls will lose 302 people and 144 households from 2018 to 2023. Esri projects that the International Falls/Ranier Market Area will lose 403 people and 191 households from 2018 to 2023. Esri projects that Koochiching County will lose 467 people and lose 219 households from 2018 to 2023.

Esri's projections to the year 2023 are generally consistent with their belief that there has been a decreasing number of residents in the area since 2010. However, it is very possible that Esri has overestimated the recent losses, and therefore has generated overly pessimistic projections going forward.

Although the analysts have reviewed the available projections, in the recommendations that follow it has been assumed that the losses will not be as large as projected by Esri. However, there is also no information that would indicate that the area will actually add population or households over the next five years.

## **Summary of the International Falls Projections by Age - 2018 to 2023**

The Demographic section of this Study presented projection information on anticipated changes in the City of International Falls from 2018 to 2023. This information can be informative in determining the housing changes that may be needed due to age patterns of the City's population.

The age-based projections from 2018 to 2023 in International Falls expect a loss of 47 households in the 15 to 34 age ranges and a loss of 133 households in the 35 to 64 age ranges. There is a projected gain of 36 households in the 65 and older age ranges.

The following forecast shows the expected net change in the number of International Falls households in each 10-year age cohort between 2018 and 2023.

<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Projected Change in Households 2018 to 2023</u>
15 to 24	-12
25 to 34	-35
35 to 44	-5
45 to 54	-61
55 to 64	-67
65 to 74	24
75 and Older	<u>12</u>
Total	-144

As stated previously, these projections may be overly pessimistic, but they do provide some useful indications of the age-based changes that can be expected.



## **Findings on Unit Demand by Type of Housing**

Based on the household by age projections presented earlier, the changing age composition of International Falls households from 2018 to 2023 will have an impact on demand for housing.

***Age 24 and Younger*** - The projection used for this Study expects a loss of 12 households in the 15 to 24 age range from 2018 to 2023. Past tenure patterns indicate that approximately 83% of the households in this younger range in the City will rent their housing. A small loss in the number of households in this age range should mean that rental demand from younger households will decrease slightly during the projection period.

***25 to 34 Years Old*** - The projection shows a loss of 35 households in this age cohort by 2023. Within this age range, households often move from rental to ownership housing. A loss of households within this age range will result in a decrease in demand for both first-time home buyer and rental opportunities in this age range.

***35 to 44 Years Old*** - This 10-year age cohort has a projected loss of five households between 2018 and 2023 in International Falls. In the past, this age group has had a relatively high rate of home ownership in the City of approximately 68%. Households within this range often represent both first-time buyers and households looking to trade-up in housing, selling their starter home for a more expensive house. Household losses in this age cohort would result in a decrease in overall demand for owner-occupied housing.

***45 to 54 Years Old*** - By 2023, this age cohort will represent the front-end of the “baby bust” generation that followed behind the baby boomers. This age group represents a much smaller segment of the population than the baby boom age group. For the City, the projection shows a decrease of 61 households in this age range. This age group will often look for trade-up housing opportunities. With a significant household decrease in this age group, the demand for trade-up housing from this age range will decrease through the year 2023.

***55 to 64 Years Old*** - The projection shows a loss of 67 households in this 10-year age range by the year 2023 in the City. This age range has traditionally had a high rate of home ownership at approximately 78%. Age-appropriate housing, such as town house or twin home units, is often well suited to the life-cycle preferences of this age group, as no maintenance/low maintenance housing has become a popular option for empty-nesters.

***65 to 74 Years Old*** - Most of the baby boom generation will be in this age range in 2023. A gain of 24 households is expected in the City within this age range by the year 2023. While this group will begin moving to life-cycle housing options as they age, the younger seniors are still predominantly home owners. Approximately 80% of households in this age range owned their housing in the City. Preferences for age-appropriate units should increase from the substantial household growth within this age cohort.

***75 Years and Older*** - There is a projected gain of 12 households in the City in this age range between 2018 and 2023. In the past, households age 75 and older, have had a rate of home ownership that is lower than the younger age ranges. An expansion of other housing options for seniors, including high quality rental housing, should appeal to this age group. In most cases, income levels for senior households have been improving, as people have done better retirement planning. As a result, households in this age range may have fewer cost limitations for housing choices than previous generations of seniors.

These demographic trends will be incorporated into the recommendations that follow later in this section.

## **Summary of the International Falls/Ranier Market Area Projections by Age - 2018 to 2023**

The Demographic section of this Study presented projection information on anticipated changes in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area from 2018 to 2023. This information can be informative in determining the housing changes that may be needed due to age patterns of the area population.

The age-based projections from 2018 to 2023 in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area expect a loss of 52 households in the 15 to 34 age ranges and a loss of 240 households in the 35 to 64 age ranges. There is a projected gain of 101 households in the 65 and older age ranges.

The following forecast shows the expected net change in the number of International Falls/Ranier Market Area households in each 10-year age cohort between 2018 and 2023.

<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Projected Change in Households 2018 to 2023</u>
15 to 24	-12
25 to 34	-40
35 to 44	- 19
45 to 54	-98
55 to 64	-123
65 to 74	62
75 and Older	<u>39</u>
Total	-191

# **International Falls - Strengths and Barriers for Housing Development**

## **Strengths for Housing Development**

The following strengths of the community were identified through statistical data, local interviews, research and an on-site review of the Community's local housing stock.

- ▶ **International Falls serves as a regional center** - International Falls provides employment opportunities, retail/service options, health services, professional services, governmental services and recreational facilities for a geographical area that surrounds the City.
- ▶ **Affordable priced housing stock** - The City has a large stock of affordable, existing houses. Our analysis shows that the City's median home value based on 2017 sales is approximately \$78,450. This existing stock, when available for sale, provides an affordable option for home ownership.
- ▶ **Diverse housing stock** - The City has a mix of housing options, including rental housing units for various household types, owner-occupied homes at various values and senior with services housing.
- ▶ **Desirable location for seniors and retirees** - International Falls is an attractive option for seniors as a retirement location. As a provider of health care, specialized housing, and retail and government services, the City has amenities that are attractive for seniors as they age.
- ▶ **Educational System** - The City has a public K-12 school system and Rainy River Community College is located in International Falls.
- ▶ **Health facilities** - The City has excellent health facilities including clinics and a hospital, as well as a nursing home and senior housing with service projects.
- ▶ **Infrastructure** - The City's water and sewer infrastructure can accommodate future expansion.
- ▶ **Commercial Development** - The City's commercial district is adequate to meet daily needs.

- ▶ **Backus Community Center** - The Backus Community center offers area residents art and cultural opportunities, meals, exercise/fitness options, programs and events, volunteer opportunities, etc.
- ▶ **International Falls and Koochiching County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities** - The International Falls and Koochiching Housing and Redevelopment Authorities provide affordable housing opportunities in International Falls and Koochiching County, including Woodland Park Apartments and the Housing Choice Voucher Program.
- ▶ **Commuters** - More than 1,600 employees are commuting into International Falls daily for work. These commuters are a potential market for future housing construction.
- ▶ **Koochiching and International Falls Economic Development Authorities** - Both International Falls and Koochiching County have Economic Development Authorities that are active in addressing the City's economic development, community development and housing needs.
- ▶ **KOOTASCA Community Action** - KOOTASCA Community Action is the designated Community Action Agency for Koochiching County and is a certified Community Housing Development Organization (CHODO). KOOTASCA Community Action is active in addressing the area's housing needs and in providing funding for housing projects and programs.
- ▶ **Natural Amenities** - International Falls is surrounded by lakes and forest, which provide excellent building sites and numerous recreation opportunities.
- ▶ **Ports of Entry** - International Falls is located at the border of the United States and Canada. There are three international Ports of Entry in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, including the International Bridge, the Ranier Rail Port, and the International Falls International Airport. Many tourists and vacationers enter Canada through these Ports. Also, Canadians often come to International Falls and Ranier for shopping, entertainment, services, etc.
- ▶ **Voyageurs National Park** - Voyageurs National Park is a vacation and tourism destination that provides numerous recreational and educational opportunities.

## **Barriers or Limitation to Housing Activities**

Our research also identified the following barriers or limitations that hinder or prevent certain housing activities in the City of International Falls.

- ▶ **Age and condition of the housing stock** - While the existing stock is very affordable, some of the housing is in need of substantial improvements to meet expectations of potential buyers.
- ▶ **Lower incomes limit housing choices** - Household and family incomes for International Falls are lower than the Statewide medians. While this income level matches up well with prices for existing ownership and rental housing in the City, it is not as well matched to the prices for new housing construction.
- ▶ **Lower paying jobs** - Some jobs in International Falls are at the lower end of the pay scale and the employees with these jobs have limited housing choices.
- ▶ **Value gap deters new owner-occupied construction** - Based on market values for recent residential sales, we estimate that the median priced home in International Falls is valued at approximately \$78,450. This is below the comparable cost for new housing construction, which will generally be above \$175,000 for a stick built home with commonly expected amenities. This creates a value gap between new construction and existing homes. This can be a disincentive for any type of speculative building and can also deter customized construction, unless the owners are willing to accept a potential loss on their investments.
- ▶ **Low rent structure** - The City's rent structure is low, which makes it difficult to construct new rental housing.
- ▶ **Limited land availability** - International Falls is largely landlocked, which limits residential development opportunities.
- ▶ **Competition with rural and lake lots** - Attractive rural and lake lots and acreages are available outside of the city limits of International Falls.



- ▶ **Lack of new housing construction** - New housing construction has been limited over the past several years.
- ▶ **Lack of buildable lots** - The City has only a few remaining buildable lots available for new housing construction.
- ▶ **Distance from a large regional center** - International Falls is located 163 miles from Duluth, which is the closest large regional center. Some households desire or need to be close to a large regional center for employment, medical services, etc.
- ▶ **Job losses** - International Falls' largest employer has significantly fewer employees than it had at peak employment.
- ▶ **Population and household losses** - International Falls is projected to lose population and households over the next five years, continuing a long-term pattern.
- ▶ **Weather** - International Falls has a perception for cold weather. This may be a deterrent for some households.

# **International Falls - Recommendations and Opportunities**

## **Recommendations, Strategies and Housing Opportunities**

Based on the research contained in this study, and the housing strengths and barriers identified above, we believe that the following recommendations are realistic options for International Falls. They are based on the following strategies.

- ▶ **Be realistic in expectations for housing development** - Large-scale residential growth has not occurred in the recent past and is not likely to occur in the near future. The scale of activities proposed for the future should be comparable with the area's potential for growth.
- ▶ **Proactive community involvement** - New home and apartment construction will more likely occur in International Falls if there is proactive support from the City and local, regional and state housing agencies, economic development agencies and the private sector.
- ▶ **Protect the existing housing stock** - The future of International Falls will be heavily dependent on the City's appeal as a residential location. The condition of the existing housing stock is a major factor in determining the City's long-term viability. The existing housing stock is a major asset, however, rehabilitation efforts are needed to preserve the housing stock.
- ▶ **Protect the existing assets and resources** - International Falls has several assets including a K-12 school, a college, a commercial district, recreational and tourism opportunities, health facilities including clinics and a hospital, employment opportunities, etc. These are strong assets that make International Falls a desirable community to live in, and are key components to the City's long-term success and viability. These assets must be protected and improved.
- ▶ **Develop a realistic action plan with goals and time lines** - In the past, the City has been involved in housing issues. The City should prioritize its housing issues and establish goals and time lines to achieve success in addressing its housing needs.
- ▶ **Access all available resources for housing** - The City has resources to draw on including the Koochiching County HRA, KEDA, USDA Rural Development, MHFA, etc. These resources should continue to be accessed as needed to assist with housing activities.

## Summary of Findings/Recommendations

The findings/recommendations for the City of International Falls have been formulated through the analysis of the information provided in the previous sections and include a total of 26 recommendations divided into the following five categories:

- ▶ **Rental Housing Development**
- ▶ **Home Ownership**
- ▶ **Single Family New Construction**
- ▶ **Housing Rehabilitation**
- ▶ **Other Housing Initiatives**

These recommendations are based on the analysis of the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, and the Northwest Market Area, defined earlier in this document.

The findings/recommendations for each category are as follows:

<b>Findings and Recommendations for the City of International Falls</b>	
<b>Rental Housing Development</b>	
1.	Develop 20 to 24 general occupancy market rate rental units
2.	Promote the development/conversion of 8 to 10 affordable market rate rental housing units
3.	Develop 18 to 20 subsidized/moderate rent housing units
4.	Preserve the existing supply of subsidized housing
5.	Develop 14 to 16 additional senior with services units
6.	Develop a mixed-use commercial/housing project
7.	Continue to utilize the Housing Choice Voucher Program
8.	Student Housing Recommendation

**Findings and Recommendations for the City of International Falls****Home Ownership**

9. Utilize and promote all programs that assist with home ownership
10. Consider the development of a purchase/rehabilitation program

**New Construction**

11. Lot availability and lot development
12. Strategies to encourage residential lot sales and new home construction
13. Promote town house and twin home development
14. Coordinate with agencies/nonprofits that develop affordable housing
15. Strategies to develop new affordable homes

**Housing Rehabilitation**

16. Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs
17. Promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs
18. Develop a Neighborhood Revitalization Program
19. Develop a Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program

**Other Housing Initiatives**

20. Encourage employer involvement in housing programs
21. Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures
22. Strategies for downtown redevelopment
23. Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies
24. Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies
25. Housing Assistance for the Homeless and Hard to House
26. Develop mobile home programs and policies

# **International Falls - Recommendations Rental Housing Development**

## **Rental Housing Development**

**Overview:** In recent decades it has been difficult to produce new rental housing units that are viewed as “affordable” when compared to existing rental housing. A number of factors, including federal tax policy, state property tax rates, high construction costs and a low rent structure, have all contributed to the difficulty in developing rental housing in most Minnesota communities.

From 2010 to 2018, based on City data, no market rate or subsidized rental units have been constructed in International Falls. However, a 24-unit senior with services project was constructed.

Based on the information that is available, no new rental housing construction has occurred in International Falls, or elsewhere in the County in recent decades. The last new project that can be tracked in the County was probably built in the early 1980s.

Demand for new rental housing is typically generated from three factors:

- Growth from new households
- Replacement of lost units
- Pent-up demand from existing households

Esri’s household projections expect a loss of 144 households in International Falls, a loss of 191 households in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, and a loss of three households in the Northwest Market Area from 2018 to 2023.

These projected losses are much larger than would be indicated from other data sources. However, even though the State Demographer’s Office has a more optimistic view of recent trends, they too are still showing some loss of households for the City and Market Areas. Therefore, we are projecting no demand for rental housing due to household growth over the next five years in International Falls.

Demand created by replacement of lost units is more difficult to determine, but the best available evidence suggests that International Falls will lose approximately five to seven rental units per year. As a result, approximately 25 to 35 units will be needed over the next five years to replace lost units. In some cases, this unit replacement will be necessary as existing units are removed from the inventory through demolition. In other cases, this replacement is due to the deteriorating condition of older, substandard rental housing that is removed from the occupied stock as it is no longer habitable. Also, it is projected that some of the single family homes that converted to rentals will convert back to owner-occupied homes.



As part of this study, a rental survey of rental units in International Falls was conducted. In total, 574 International Falls market rate and subsidized rental units were contacted and surveyed. Also, 94 senior with services units/beds were surveyed. The survey found a 4.1% vacancy rate in the general occupancy market rate units and a 3.0% vacancy rate in the subsidized units. Also, the senior with services projects each had one or two vacancies.

Based on our research, the vacancy findings and local interviews, we have identified pent-up demand for new high quality rental units, affordable rental units and senior independent/light services rental units.

These demand generators, after factoring current vacancy rates, show a demand potential for 60 to 70 rental units over the projection period. Based on the factors stated above, we recommend the development of the following new rental units over the next five years, from 2019 to 2024.

▶ General Occupancy Market Rate	20–24 units
▶ Affordable/Conversions	8-10 units
▶ Subsidized/Moderate Rent	18-20 units
▶ Senior with Services	<u>14-16 units</u>
(Independent/Light Services)	
Total	60-70 units

## **1. Develop 20 to 24 general occupancy market rate rental units**

**Findings:** The entire rental inventory in the City includes approximately 1,042 total units in 2018. Approximately 70% of the rental housing in International Falls can be classified as general occupancy market rate housing. These units are free of any specific occupancy restrictions such as financial status, age, or student enrollment. Market rate housing does not have any form of rent controls, other than those imposed by the competitive marketplace.

Of the 317 market rate rental units we surveyed in International Falls, we found 13 vacant units at the time of the survey, which is a 4.1% vacancy rate. The majority of the International Falls rental projects we surveyed reported that they typically have low vacancy rates.

Although some of International Falls's multi-family rental projects have vacancies and the number of households in International Falls is projected to decrease, the construction of new market rate units provides many benefits including:

- ▶ Addressing pent-up demand for certain housing types
- ▶ Upgrading the overall quality of the housing stock
- ▶ Increasing the City's rental rates
- ▶ Addressing gaps in the City's rental stock
- ▶ Addressing new households housing needs

Also, more than 1,600 employees are commuting into International Falls daily for work. Some of these employees would potentially move to International Falls if additional housing was available.

The gross rents for market rate rental units in International Falls are approximately \$400 to \$800 for a one-bedroom unit, \$465 to \$850 for a two-bedroom unit and \$465 to \$850 for a three-bedroom unit.

From 2010 to 2018, we are not aware of any market rate rental units that were developed in International Falls. No new rental housing has been created in the City in recent decades, other than some specialized housing for seniors. However, some single family homes have converted from owner-occupied to rental units.

Many of the housing stakeholders that were interviewed for the study stated that there is a significant need for additional high quality rental housing.

**Recommendation:** As stated earlier in this section, rental housing demand is based on household growth, pent-up demand and replacement of housing units that have been demolished or vacated.

Based on this combination of demand generators, we believe that it is reasonable to plan for the production of 20 to 24 market rate general occupancy rental units over the next five years, from 2019 to 2024.

Based on our research, there is a need for rental units of all sizes, thus, the new units constructed over the next five years should include one, two and three-bedroom units.

Town home-style units or high quality apartment buildings are both options in addressing the need for market rate housing. The projects, to be successful, should have 'state of the art' amenities, such as attached parking, in-unit laundry, secured entrances, multiple bathrooms, etc.

New units could be constructed in smaller project phases. This strategy allows the new units to be successfully absorbed into the market.

There are two market rate rental segments in International Falls. One segment is seeking a high quality unit and can afford a higher rent. The second segment is seeking work force housing and a more modest rent. This segment may not qualify for subsidized or tax credit rental units, but affordability is still an issue.

There is a need to construct both types of market rate rental housing, thus, there is a relatively wide rent range in the following table reflecting the two segments. To construct the workforce housing and charge affordable rents, land donations, financial assistance, tax increment financing, tax abatement and other resources may be needed.

The first option to develop market rate rental housing would be to encourage private developers to construct market rate rental housing. If private developers do not proceed, KEDA or a regional housing agency, such as KOOTASCA Community Action, could potentially utilize essential function bonds or similar funding sources to construct market rate rental housing.

**Recommended unit mix, sizes and rents for the International Falls  
Market Rate Housing Units:**

<u>Unit Type</u>	<u>No. of Units</u>	<u>Size/Sq. Ft.</u>	<u>Rent</u>
One Bedroom	3-4	650 - 800	\$750 - \$850
Two Bedroom	14-16	850 - 950	\$875 - \$1,150
Three Bedroom	3-4	1,050 - 1,150	\$975 - \$1,350
Total	20-24		

**Note:** The recommended rents are gross rents including all utilities. The rents are quoted in 2018 dollars.

It would be advantageous to have the rents for some of the units at or less than the fair market rents for the Housing Choice Voucher Program, thus, the units would be affordable for more households. The fair market rents for Koochiching County currently are:

- ▶ 1 bedroom - \$573
- ▶ 2 bedroom - \$746
- ▶ 3 bedroom - \$936

**2. Promote the development/conversion of 8 to 10 affordable market rate rental housing units**

**Findings:** The previous recommendation addressed the market potential to develop high quality rental units in International Falls. Unfortunately, these units would tend to be beyond the financial capability of many International Falls renter households. Many of the City's renter households have an annual income below \$25,000. These households would need a rental unit at \$650 per month or less.

There is evidence that International Falls has lost some rental housing over the years and will continue to lose units due to deterioration, demolition, or from units converting from renter to owner-occupancy. Therefore, there is a need for additional rental units in International Falls to provide for unit replacement. Unfortunately, most of the lost units are probably affordable, and new construction will not replace these units in a similar price range.

There are still some programs for affordable housing creation for moderate income renters. The federal low income housing tax credit program is one available resource. However, competition for tax credits is very difficult, and few awards have been made to small cities for small rental projects.

**Recommendation:** We would encourage the City of International Falls, KEDA and KOOTASCA Community Action to promote the development/conversion of more affordable units. A goal of eight to 10 units over the next five years would help to replace affordable housing that has been lost.

It is difficult to create units through new construction. It is often more practical to work on building renovation or conversion projects that can create housing. This opportunity often arises in commercial/mixed-use buildings or vacant homes. Our experience in other cities has indicated that there is a demand for downtown rental housing.

It is our recommendation that gross rents for the converted units should be below \$650 per month, which would help to expand the choices available to many of the City's renter households.

It is probable that the proposed rent structure for the units could only be obtained with financial commitments from other sources such as tax increment financing or tax abatement from the City and other financial resources from funding agencies such as the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, the Federal Home Loan Bank and SCDP funds. Also, financial assistance would expand the number of buildings that would be financially feasible to convert to rental units.

### **3. Develop 18 to 20 subsidized or moderate rent/general occupancy rental housing units**

**Findings:** There are six federally subsidized rental projects in International Falls. The six federally subsidized projects have a combined 265 units. All six projects are general occupancy.

The six subsidized projects are as follows:

- ▶ **Woodland Park Apartments** - Woodland Park Apartments includes 80 general occupancy HUD Public Housing units. The project includes 78 one-bedroom and two two-bedroom units. The project is owned and managed by the International Falls HRA.
- ▶ **West Falls Estates** - West Falls Estates is a Section 8 HUD 80-unit general occupancy project. The project has 57 one-bedroom, 17 two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units.
- ▶ **Fairview Horizon** - Fairview Horizon includes eight USDA Rural Development general occupancy units. The project has four one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units. This project is owned and managed by KOOTASCA Community Action.
- ▶ **Hampton Court** - Hampton Court is a 28-unit USDA Rural Development general occupancy project that includes 18 one-bedroom and 10 two-bedroom units.
- ▶ **South Falls Apartments and Townhomes** - South Falls Apartments and Townhomes is a 33-unit HUD Section 8 project. There are 27 one-bedroom, four two-bedroom and two three-bedroom units. The project also has 37 market rate rental units.
- ▶ **Falls South Apartments and Townhomes** - Falls South Apartments and Townhomes is a 36-unit general occupancy subsidized HUD Section 8 Project. There are 16 one-bedroom units, eight two-bedroom units and 12 three-bedroom units.

The subsidized units have access to project-based rent assistance. These units can charge rent based on 30% of the tenant's household income up to a maximum rent.

Of the total 265 units in the subsidized projects in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area, more than 92% are one and two-bedroom. Approximately 8% of the units are three-bedroom.

The rental survey identified only eight vacancies in the 265 general occupancy units at the time of the survey. This is a 3.0% vacancy rate. Also, most of the subsidized general occupancy units in International Falls are more than 30 years old.

Based on the 2016 American Community Survey, approximately 482 renter households in the City reported that 30% or more of their income was required to pay housing costs. At that time, most of these households had annual incomes of less than \$25,000, and needed a very affordable unit to avoid a housing cost burden.

The Backus Community Center has developed preliminary plans to convert the former Alexander Baker School into affordable rental housing.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City of International Falls, the Backus Community Center, the Koochiching Economic Development Authority and KOOTASCA Community Action look for opportunities to expand the supply of affordable general occupancy rental housing. Although the need is greater, a realistic goal would be the construction of 18 to 20 general occupancy subsidized or moderate rent/affordable units over the next five years. It may be feasible to construct a mixed-income building that has both market rate and affordable rental housing.

The need for additional subsidized/moderate rent units is greater than the number of new units recommended, however, the large subsidized housing production programs of the past are no longer available, and it remains very difficult to produce new units for low income renters.

It is our recommendation that the Alexander Baker School conversion project should be pursued. The building is adjacent to many social services and is in close proximity to commercial/retail options, governmental services and job opportunities.

This former school building is conducive to a conversion to rental units. There are preliminary plans for a 16-unit project on the upper two floors, including nine two-bedroom and seven one-bedroom units.

In developing the conversion project, we recommending the following:

- ▶ Rents should be affordable at \$650 or less.
- ▶ As many two-bedroom units as is feasible should be constructed.
- ▶ The units should be high quality and have 'State of the Art' amenities.
- ▶ The project should have a community room, a limited access security system and ample storage space.
- ▶ To develop the rental project with affordable rents, various subsidies will need to be layered. Potential funding sources include tax credits, DEED workforce housing funds, Greater Minnesota Housing funds, MHFA, Federal Home Bank funds and local funds.
- ▶ The City of International Falls could assist with reduced water and sewer hookup fees, reduced permit fees, bonding, etc.

#### **4. Preserve the existing supply of subsidized housing**

**Findings:** The City of International Falls has six "deep subsidy" rental housing projects with a total 265 units that allow tenants to pay rent based on 30% of income. These projects were constructed when the federal government was actively involved in producing low income housing.

The subsidized housing represents the most affordable option available to lower income households. Since most of these units charge rent based on income, even extremely low income households can afford their housing.

One "deep subsidy" rental housing project is owned by the International Falls HRA and one project is owned by KOOTASCA Community Action. Four projects are privately owned. In some communities, privately owned subsidized housing has been lost as owners have the ability to opt-out of subsidy contracts after their original obligations have been met. Subsidized housing that is lost cannot be cost-effectively replaced with the low income housing production resources that are available today.

**Recommendation:** The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency tracks subsidized housing in Minnesota that is at risk of being lost. Owners of subsidized housing that are considering the option to drop their subsidy contract must notify MHFA and the tenants prior to taking any action. At the time of this Study, no International Falls subsidized projects were on the MHFA list.



Local and regional housing agencies should check with MHFA on an ongoing basis to determine if any subsidized housing projects are considering the option to drop their subsidy contract. In some communities, public or nonprofit agencies have been able to purchase projects that are at risk of being lost, to preserve their affordable housing resources.

## **5. Develop 14 to 16 additional senior housing with services units**

**Findings:** The International Falls/Ranier Market Area has six specialized senior housing with services facilities with a total of approximately 148 beds, serving residents as they move through the aging cycle. The 148 beds include 54 skilled nursing, 44 assisted living, 23 memory care and 27 independent/light services beds. The six existing senior housing with services options are:

- ▶ **River's Edge Villas** - River's Edge Villas is a 27-unit independent/light services project. The project is part of the Good Samaritan campus. The project includes one-bedroom, one-bedroom plus den and two-bedroom units.
- ▶ **Northwinds Assisted Living** - Northwinds Assisted Living is a 24-unit assisted living project that was constructed in 2013. All of the units have one-bedroom. The project is part of the Good Samaritan campus.
- ▶ **Good Samaritan Skilled Nursing Care** - Good Samaritan Skilled Nursing Care is a 54-bed skilled nursing facility that was constructed in 2013. The skilled nursing home is part of the Good Samaritan campus. The facility includes long-term and short-term rehab beds.
- ▶ **Ranier Roost** - Ranier Roost is located in the City of Ranier and is a 23-bed secure assisted living memory care facility. The facility opened in 1987.
- ▶ **Papermakers Place** - Papermakers Place is an eight-bed assisted living facility located in rural International Falls. The facility provides the full array of assisted living services.
- ▶ **Ridgeview Assisted Living** - Ridgeview Assisted Living is a 12-bed assisted living facility located in International Falls. The facility opened for occupancy in 2005.

Based on 2018 estimates from Esri, there are approximately 1,072 older senior citizens, age 75 and above, residing in the International Falls/Ranier and Northwest Market Areas. The projections contained in this Study anticipate a gain of approximately 43 older seniors in these combined Market Areas from 2018 to 2023.

**Recommendation:** Based on the research completed for this Study, we recommend the development of an additional 14 to 16 independent/light services senior units over the next five years from 2019 to 2024. Also, the need for additional living and memory care beds should be monitored.

Older seniors tend to represent the primary target market for specialized senior housing. The older population, age 75 and above, is expected to increase slightly through the year 2023. There is growth expected within the younger senior ranges, age 65 to 74, indicating growing demand for specialized housing after the year 2023.

**Skilled Nursing Home** - The research for this Study points to a decreasing alliance on nursing homes as a long-term residence option for older senior citizens. Over time, the nursing homes have tended to use more beds for rehab/recovery stays, or other specialized uses. There has also been a long-standing moratorium that limits expansion in most cases. No recommendations are offered for this type of specialized housing. International Falls has a well-established provider with 54 beds that serves this section of the market. The skilled nursing home operates at an average 90% occupancy rate.

**Light Services/Congregate Housing** - River's Edge Villas has 27 independent/light services units. At the time of the survey, River's Edge Villas had one vacancy. To totally occupy all of the units, an approximate absorption rate of 3% of the seniors 75 and older is required. This is below the absorption rate that is typically recommended. Therefore, with the limited number of existing independent/light services units and the high occupancy rate of the River's Edge Villas, we are recommending the development of 14 to 16 independent/light services units over the next five years.

**Assisted Living** - The International Falls/Ranier Market Area has 44 assisted living beds in three projects. At the time of the survey, there were five vacancies in the 44 beds, which is an 11.4% vacancy rate. To totally occupy all 44 beds, an absorption rate of 4.6% of the seniors age 75 and older in the International Falls/Ranier Market Area not in a nursing home or memory care facility would be required. This is within the absorption rate range that is

typically recommended. Also, there are vacancies in the existing assisted living facilities. Therefore, assisted living appears to be addressing the Market Area's demand for this form of housing. However, the need for additional assisted living beds should be monitored. We are projecting that additional beds will be needed after 2023 as the baby boom generation ages.

**Memory Care Housing** - The International Falls/Ranier Market Area has 23 memory care beds in one facility, Ranier Roost. This facility provides a secured environment. Also, all of the assisted living facilities have residents in the earlier stages of dementia. With these options, it is our opinion that there is an adequate number of memory care beds. However, the need for additional memory care beds should be monitored.

The purpose of the senior with services recommendation is to provide general guidance to potential developers. A developer or existing senior with services facility planning a specific project should have a project-specific study conducted.

## **6. Develop a Mixed-Use Commercial/Housing Project**

**Findings:** The development of a mixed-use rental housing/commercial project would complement the City's efforts to enhance the City's commercial and housing opportunities.

New mixed-use projects have been developed in several Minnesota cities. Some of these projects were developed because of market demand, while others were developed to enhance commercial areas, to introduce a new product to the market or to serve as a catalyst for redevelopment.

**Recommendation:** We recommend the development of a mixed-use building in Downtown International Falls. There are several potential sites in the downtown area for a mixed-use project. The site could be a vacant parcel, or a dilapidated structure or structures could be demolished to provide a site. We recommend commercial space on the first floor and rental units on the upper floors.

The rental units should be primarily market rate units, but could be mixed-income, with some moderate income units. The units should be one and two-bedroom units. Please note that these units are not in addition to the units recommended in the first and second recommendations of this section. If a mixed use building was constructed, the number of units recommended previously should be reduced.

Ideally, a private developer would construct and own the building. The City and the County and City EDAs and others may have a role in the project by providing tax increment financing (TIF), tax abatement, land at a reduced price and other funds.

## **7. Continue to utilize the Housing Choice Voucher Program**

**Findings:** The Housing Choice Voucher Program provides portable, tenant-based rent assistance to lower income renter households. The program requires participating households to contribute from 30% to 40% of their adjusted income for rent, with the rent subsidy payment making up the difference. Tenants may lease any suitable rental unit in the community, provided that it passes a Housing Quality Standards inspection, and has a reasonable gross rent when compared to prevailing rents in the community. Although the federal government provides almost no funding for subsidized housing construction, it has provided new Housing Choice Voucher allocations over the last two decades.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is a popular form of subsidized housing. Because of the flexibility offered through the program, eligible households often prefer the portable rent assistance to other forms of subsidized housing that are project-based, and can only be accessed by living in a specific rental development.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program in Koochiching County and International Falls is administered by the Koochiching County Housing and Redevelopment Authority. Currently, 111 households in Koochiching County have a Housing Voucher, approximately 103 of which live in International Falls.

Despite the Vouchers that are available there are still approximately 482 International Falls renter households that are paying more than 30% of their income for rent, which is considered a housing cost burden. Therefore, there remains unmet demand for Vouchers. This is also evident in the Voucher Program's 10-month waiting list.

**Recommendation:** From a practical standpoint, the Housing Choice Voucher Program is the single best way that International Falls can provide affordable housing. HUD does not make new incremental assistance available every year, but when new allocations are authorized, the Koochiching County HRA should be encouraged to continue to apply for additional Vouchers.

Also, the Koochiching County HRA should continue to publicize the Housing Choice Voucher Program in International Falls to assure that City households have access to and are aware of the Program.

## **8. Student Housing Recommendation**

**Findings:** Rainy River Community College is located in International Falls. Rainy River Community College's student enrollment has been declining. However, the College has a goal to increase enrollment from 300 to 375.

Rainy Hall is a 23-unit student housing apartment building. All of the units are two-bedroom and the building has a capacity of 92 students. Although, the Housing Director would prefer a reduced capacity of 77 students to allow for some single-occupancy rooms. Rainy Hall is located on the campus.

Rainy Hall is fully occupied during the school year. The College has considered the development of a second building, however, funding has not been secured. The number of students that live off-campus in International Falls apartments is limited.

**Recommendation:** The City and College should continue to monitor enrollment and housing vacancy rates to assure that adequate housing is available. If College enrollment significantly increases, there may be a need to develop additional student housing in the future. We recommend that the City support the College if it determines additional on-campus housing is needed.

Additionally, the implementation of a rental inspection and registration program, will assure safe and sanitary living conditions for students who live off-campus.

# **International Falls - Home Ownership Recommendations**



## **Home Ownership Recommendations**

**Findings:** Expanding home ownership opportunities is one of the primary goals for most cities. High rates of home ownership promote stable communities and strengthen the local tax base.

The median owner-occupied home value in International Falls is estimated to be \$78,450. With approximately 50% of the homes in International Falls valued less than \$78,450, International Falls has opportunities for first-time home buyers and households seeking moderately-priced homes.

While many International Falls households already own their housing, those households that have not been able to achieve the goal of home ownership may need the assistance of special programs to help them purchase their first home.

To assist in promoting the goal of home ownership, the following activities are recommended:

### **9. Utilize and promote all programs that assist with home ownership**

**Findings:** We believe that affordable home ownership is one of the major issues facing International Falls. Home ownership is generally the preferred housing option for most households and most communities. There are a number of strategies and programs that can be used to promote home ownership in International Falls. The area's housing agencies and financial institutions can assist with this effort.

First time home buyer assistance, down payment assistance, and low interest loans help to address affordable housing issues. With the City's median home value at approximately \$78,450, there are lower valued houses in the community that appeal to first time buyers. Currently, KOOTASCA Community Action is administering a Downpayment Assistance Program in Koochiching County. Some International Falls's households have utilized this program. Additionally, the Federal Home Loan Bank has funds available for closing costs and down payment assistance.

Also, home ownership counseling and training programs are available to households and these programs can play a significant role in helping marginal buyers achieve home ownership.

While individual home ownership assistance programs may not generate a large volume of new ownership activity, the combination of below market mortgage money, home ownership training, credit counseling, and down payment assistance may be the mix of incentives that moves a potential home buyer into home ownership.

**Recommendation:** The City of International Falls, local financial institutions and KOOTASCA Community Action should continue to utilize all available assistance programs to promote home ownership. The community, along with other Koochiching County cities, should also explore the possibility of obtaining specific program set-asides from some of the home ownership programs offered through the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency. Specific set-asides will offer multiple advantages, including a dedicated pool of funds, the opportunity for higher participation limits for income and purchase price, and the flexibility for more local design and control.

The City should continue to work with KOOTASCA Community Action to develop and provide programs that provide financial assistance for households to purchase a home. Local financial institutions should also have a significant role in assisting households with purchasing a home.

Potential funding sources for home ownership programs include USDA Rural Development, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the Federal Home Loan Bank, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund and the Small Cities Development Program.

## **10. Consider the development of a Purchase/ Rehabilitation Program**

**Findings:** International Falls has a large stock of older, lower valued homes, some of which need repairs. Approximately 82% of the single family homes in International Falls are more than 40 years old and some of these homes need repairs. As some of the lower valued homes come up for sale, they may not be attractive options for potential home buyers because of the amount of repair work that is required.

In the past, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency had provided funding for the Minnesota Urban Homestead Program (MURL) Program. Under the program, the City or an area housing agency purchased an existing home that needed rehabilitation, rehabilitated the home, sold the home to a low income family and provided a mortgage and a monthly payment that was affordable for the family.

The MURL Program accomplished many community goals, including the promotion of home ownership for lower income people, and the repair of substandard housing units. KOOTASCA Community Action utilized the MURL Program in Koochiching County. However, MHFA is no longer providing funding for the MURL Program.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City of International Falls and KOOTASCA Community Action, along with other Koochiching County Cities, consider the creation of a rehab/purchase program for existing houses that is similar to the previous MURL Program. KOOTASCA Community Action could purchase homes that need rehabilitation, rehabilitate the homes and sell the homes. Housing agencies and financial institutions could assist by offering some rehabilitation assistance in conjunction with first-time buyer programs to make the City's older housing a more attractive option for potential home buyers. The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the SCDP Program, the Federal Home Loan Bank and the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund are potential funding sources.

Also, a program could also be developed to provide mortgage funds directly to households for the purchase and rehabilitation of existing substandard homes. Local financial institutions may provide mortgage funds to purchase a home and to make repairs to the home. Also, USDA Rural Development provides mortgage funds to purchase a home and to make repairs to the home. This program would not require intermediate KOOTASCA Community Action ownership of the homes. Additionally, the City and KOOTASCA Community Action could assist private contractors with purchasing, rehabbing and selling houses.

A local church is considering the implementation of a Purchase/Rehab Program. They would have a goal of purchasing and rehabbing one home per year.

Attitudinal surveys that we have conducted in other cities have found that purchase/rehabilitation programs are appealing to people who are currently renting their housing. In some similar sized communities, more than 80% of survey respondents who were renters indicated an interest in buying a home in need of repair if rehabilitation assistance was also available.

A purchase/rehabilitation program will achieve several goals. The program will encourage home ownership, prevent substandard homes from becoming rental properties, convert rental properties back to owner-occupancy, and rehabilitate homes that are currently substandard. A Purchase/Rehabilitation Program can also be an integral part of a Neighborhood Revitalization Program.

# **International Falls - New Housing Construction**

## **New Housing Construction**

**Findings:** International Falls experienced limited single family owner-occupied housing construction. According to City records, from 2010 to October 2018 there were seven single family owner-occupied units constructed in International Falls, which is an average of approximately one new housing unit annually.

The attractiveness of the area, the area's natural amenities, the availability of affordable lots and efforts by local stakeholders, should result in the construction of new owner-occupied housing units over the next several years.

International Falls is projected to lose 144 households, the International Falls/Ranier Market Area is projected to lose 191 households, and the Northwest Market Area is projected to lose three households from 2018 to 2023. However, International Falls is projected to gain 36 households and the combined Market Areas are projected to gain 111 households in the 65 and older age ranges. Households in these age ranges tend to be predominantly home owners, and form a market for higher priced, trade-up housing and low maintenance housing such as town homes and twin homes.

It is our opinion that if the City of International Falls, KEDA, developers and builders, and local and regional housing agencies are proactive, a total of 15 to 19 owner-occupied housing units could be constructed in International Falls from 2019 to 2024 to address demand. This is an average of three to four new units annually. Our projection for owner occupied single family housing starts includes homes built in the newer subdivisions and on infill lots, and includes single family attached housing units, such as twin homes and town houses. The breakdown of our projection of 15 to 19 new owner-occupied housing units is as follows:

▸ Higher & medium price homes	4-5 homes
▸ Affordable homes	5-6 homes
▸ Twin homes/town homes	<u>6-8 units</u>
Total	15-19 homes/ units

## **11. Lot availability and lot development**

**Findings:** As part of this Study, we attempted to identify the inventory of available residential lots for single family housing construction in the City of International Falls. Currently, there are approximately 10 to 12 lots available in the Stenberg and Aspen Way Subdivisions.

There are also many miscellaneous infill lots scattered around the city that we did not attempt to count. We do not know the availability of some of these infill lots. Also, there are a substantial number of dilapidated homes in the City. If these homes are demolished, some of the cleared lots could be pooled and may be sites for new construction.

**Recommendation:** We use a standard that a 2 ½ year supply of lots should be available in the marketplace based on annual lot usage. With projections that three to four new owner-occupied housing units could be constructed per year, the City should have approximately eight to 10 residential lots available to meet the expected demand. Part of this demand would be for attached unit construction.

With approximately 10 to 12 available buildable lots, plus infill lots, the City currently has an adequate supply of lots to meet expected demand over the next two years. However, if projected demand comes to fruition, it will be necessary to develop additional lots later in the five-year projection period.

To achieve the level of new home construction potential that as been identified, we would recommend the development of 14 to 16 additional residential lots over the next five years. In developing the lots, the following should be considered:

- ▶ If possible, the site(s) for lot development should have land available for future lot development phases.
- ▶ The lots could be developed on several sites
- ▶ To keep development costs as low as possible, sites with easy access to existing infrastructure should be considered.
- ▶ The lots must be as aesthetically acceptable as possible and include high quality amenities.

- ▶ The lots should have covenants that assure quality development. However, the covenants should not be so restrictive that they eliminate the target market's ability to construct a home.
- ▶ The lots should accommodate a variety of home designs and home prices.
- ▶ All stakeholders should be involved in promoting and publicizing the lots.
- ▶ To be successful, the homes must be available to households with as wide an income range as possible.
- ▶ Some lots should be available for twin home/ town home development
- ▶ Successful lot development will need the cooperation of financial institutions, funding agencies, employers, home builders, developers, the City of International Falls and KEDA. Financial assistance such as tax increment financing, deferment of assessments, tax abatement and land donations or write downs, may be necessary to make the development of lots feasible.
- ▶ It may be advantageous to develop the lots in phases.
- ▶ Lots should be available for twinhome/townhome development

## **12. Strategies to encourage residential lot sales and new home construction in International Falls**

**Findings:** Over the past nine years from 2010 to October 2018, seven single family homes have been constructed, which is an average of one housing unit annually.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City of International Falls, KEDA, developers, builders, realtors and other housing stakeholders coordinate efforts to promote lot development, lot sales and housing development.

Our recommendations to promote lots sales and housing development include:

- ▶ ***Competitive pricing*** - To stay competitive, International Falls should continue to offer lots at a very competitive price.



- ▶ ***Plan for long-term absorption*** - The research completed for this Study expects limited annual absorption of lots in International Falls. We are projecting the construction of three to four housing units per year. It is necessary to view lot sales and housing development as a long-term plan.
- ▶ ***User-Friendly*** - The lot purchase and home building process must be 'user friendly.' This includes the construction of spec homes, builders that are readily available to build custom homes and city regulations that are fair and reasonable. The entire process must be as 'user friendly' as possible to encourage home construction.
- ▶ ***Consider developing an exclusive builder(s) relationship*** - A block of lots could be sold to a builder(s). Momentum can be created when a builder has access to several lots. This allows for marketing opportunities and efficiencies in the home building process. Builders are more willing to enter a market when the lots are attractive and very affordable. Selling a block of lots available to an exclusive builder or developer should be explored.
- ▶ ***Lot availability for twin home/town home development*** - It is our opinion that there will be a demand for twin homes/town homes over the next five years. Lots should be available for a twin home/town home development.
- ▶ ***Range of house prices*** - Lots should be available to as wide a range of home sizes and prices as possible, without compromising the subdivisions. This broadens the lot buyer market. Also, smaller infill lots with fewer amenities could be marketed for affordable homes.
- ▶ ***Marketing*** - The City of International Falls, KEDA, and all stakeholders including developers, realtors, financial institutions, builders, employers, etc., should develop a marketing strategy to sell available lots. In addition to marketing the lots, the City of International Falls and its amenities should be marketed.
- ▶ ***Incentives*** - The City of International Falls, along with the County and City EDAs should consider providing an incentive package for households who build or purchase a new home in International Falls. The incentives can include reduced lot prices, reduced water/sewer charges, tax abatement, cash incentives, etc.

- ▶ ***Generate initial activity*** - Recent construction activity has been limited. To stimulate new construction, proactive efforts, such as the reduction of hookup and permit fees or other incentives, could be provided if the buyer agrees to build a home of a certain quality and style within a specified time period. This will help create some momentum for more houses to be built.
- ▶ ***Manufactured/Modular homes*** - Manufactured and modular homes can provide affordable housing opportunities for moderate income households. Lots should be available for this type of affordable housing.
- ▶ ***Consider partnerships that share and split financial risk to construct spec homes*** - Spec houses could potentially attract a buyer that is not interested in going through the home building process, but instead wants a turnkey unit. A spec home can also serve as a model, allowing potential home buyers to examine specific floor plans and features in the home before committing to buy. In an attempt to spur spec home construction, some communities have formed partnerships with private home builders to share the financial risks. For example, subdivision owners have been willing to defer the payment for the lot until the spec home is sold. Another builder incentive is for the City to waive any water/sewer hook up fees, special assessment payments and building permit fees until the home is sold. A more aggressive approach is to become directly involved in helping cover the payments on a home builder's construction loan, if the house does not sell within a reasonable period of time. A community risk pool would need to be established for this type of activity. These types of approaches would somewhat reduce the builder's risk, by lowering the up-front development costs.

### **13. Promote town house and twin home development**

**Findings:** International Falls had no owner-occupied attached housing development from 2010 to October 2018. Many communities over the past two decades have seen attached housing take an increasingly large share of new construction. In cities the size of International Falls, 20% to 25% of the housing starts are typically twin homes/town homes.

Attached housing provides desirable alternatives for empty nesters and seniors to move out of their single family homes, thus, making traditional single family homes available for families. In 2018, based on Esri estimates, there are 997 households in the City of International Falls and 2,003 households in the combined Market Areas with a head of household in the 55 to 74 year old age ranges.

It is important for the City to offer a range of life-cycle housing options as many of these households will be seeking to downsize into low maintenance housing options.

**Recommendation:** It is our projection that six to eight new twin homes or town houses could be built over the next five years in International Falls. However, lots must be available for twinhome/townhome development.

We recommend a twin home/town home development and for the development to be successful, the following should be considered:

- ▶ Senior friendly home designs
- ▶ Maintenance, lawn care, snow removal, etc. all covered by an Association
- ▶ Cluster development of a significant number of homes which provides security
- ▶ Homes at a price that is acceptable to the market

The public sector's role in any owner-occupancy attached housing development may be limited, as the private sector can often meet this housing need if a demand exists. The city's role should include assuring that adequate land is available for development and that zoning allows for attached housing development. Potentially, infill lots could be pooled for twinhome/townhome development.

It may be advantageous to meet with a group of empty nesters and seniors who are interested in purchasing a twin home or town home to solicit their ideas.

#### **14. Coordinate with agencies/nonprofits that develop affordable housing**

**Findings:** With the difficulty of producing new housing units that are affordable to lower income people, it is important to take advantage of opportunities presented by housing agencies and nonprofit groups such as KOOTASCA Community Action and Habitat for Humanity. These sources can help generate new homes for moderate income families in International Falls.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City and the EDAs coordinate with housing agencies, nonprofit groups and private sector builders to produce housing units for moderate income ownership. At this time, it is very difficult to construct new affordable homes because of the value gap between existing homes and new homes. The City and the EDAs may be able to contribute to the project through land donations, TIF, tax abatement, or project coordination activities.

Also, some existing infill lots could be utilized for affordable home development. Additionally, if dilapidated homes are demolished, some of the cleared lots may be suitable for redevelopment and these infill lots may be good sites for this type of new construction activity.

## **15. Strategies to develop new affordable homes**

**Findings:** It is difficult to develop homes that are considered affordable 'under \$200,000'. Land and development costs, the cost of materials and labor, new building requirements, etc. are all factors which make most new homes out of reach for most households.

Often, developers and builders have little incentive to address the affordable home market, as they are busy addressing the higher priced home market which generates higher profits.

**Recommendation:** We have recommended the construction of six to seven affordable homes in International Falls from 2019 to 2024. To accomplish this, the City of International Falls and the EDAs may have to take an active role in developing new affordable housing including tax increment financing, tax abatement, land donations, etc.

Successful affordable home development strategies include:

- ▶ **Available lots** - Lots should be available for affordable homes including manufactured homes and modular homes.
- ▶ **Manufactured/modular homes** - Manufactured and modular homes can provide affordable housing opportunities for moderate income households.
- ▶ **Infill lot Home Development** - Infill lots in existing neighborhoods are often affordable and have existing City services. Some housing agencies and nonprofits develop affordable homes on infill lots.

- ▶ **Land Trust** - A land trust provides an affordable permanent new home option by taking the cost of the land out of the purchase price of the home. The land is placed in the stewardship of a land trust and the homeowner leases the land from the land trust through a 99-year renewable lease.
- ▶ **Affordable Housing Financing** - KOOTASCA Community Action and state agencies may have financing and housing programs available to assist developers, builders and home buyers.
- ▶ **City codes and regulations** - The City of International Falls should review its codes and regulations to assure that the codes and regulations are still relevant and are not impeding affordable home construction or unnecessarily adding to the cost of construction.
- ▶ **Develop an affordable design** - The City of International Falls and the EDAs could work with builders to develop a home design that would be affordable and compatible in existing neighborhoods and on small infill lots.
- ▶ **Publicly owned subdivision** - Private developers often have little incentive to develop lower-priced lots and houses. A possible approach is to develop a publicly-owned subdivision, which could offer lower-priced lots for affordable homes.

# **International Falls - Housing Rehabilitation**

## **Housing Rehabilitation**

**Findings:** The City of International Falls has an asset in its existing housing stock. Existing units, both now and into the future, will represent the large majority of the affordable housing opportunities. Existing units generally sell at a discount to their replacement value. Units that are not maintained and improved may slip into disrepair and be lost from the housing stock. Efforts and investment in housing rehabilitation activities will be critical to offering affordable housing opportunities.

Housing options for households will largely be met by the existing, more affordable housing stock. As this existing stock ages, more maintenance and repair are required. Without rehabilitation assistance, the affordable stock will shrink, creating an even more difficult affordability situation.

The following specific recommendations are made to address the housing rehabilitation needs.

### **16. Promote rental housing rehabilitation programs**

**Findings:** Based on U.S. Census data, the City of International Falls has approximately 1,042 rental units. The rental units are in multi-family buildings, small rental buildings, mixed-use buildings, town homes, twin homes, single family houses and mobile homes. Many of the City's rental units could benefit from rehabilitation as approximately 82% of the rental structures are more than 40 years old and some rental units are in poor condition.

The need to rehabilitate the City's rental housing stock was identified as a priority by most of the housing stakeholders that were interviewed. The rehabilitation of older rental units can be one of the most effective ways to produce decent, safe and sanitary affordable housing. However, it is often difficult for rental property owners to rehabilitate and maintain their rental properties while keeping the rents affordable for the tenants.

**Recommendation:** The City of International Falls and area housing agencies should continue to seek funds to rehabilitate rental units. For a rental rehabilitation program to be workable and successful, the funds should to the extent possible, allow for program design flexibility.



Potential funding sources include Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) funds, the Federal Home Loan Bank, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, low income tax credits, USDA Rural Development and local funds. MHFA has initiated a program known as the Rental Rehabilitation Loan Program (RRLP).

It would be advantageous for the City to promote this program to the City's rental property owners. Several rental property owners that were surveyed indicated their willingness to participate in a rental rehabilitation loan or grant program.

Also, housing agencies such as KOOTASCA Community Action have purchased older market rate and subsidized rental projects in several cities and utilized funds from a variety of sources to rehabilitate and preserve these projects.

## **17. Promote owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs**

**Findings:** The affordability of the existing housing stock in International Falls will continue to be the major attraction for families that are seeking housing in the area. Investment in owner-occupied housing rehabilitation activities will be critical to offering affordable housing opportunities.

Approximately 82% of the owner-occupied homes in International Falls are more than 40 years old and some of these homes need minor or major repairs.

Our housing condition survey of 552 homes in two of International Falls's oldest neighborhoods found 239 homes that need minor repair and 150 homes that need major repair. Without continued rehabilitation assistance, the affordable housing stock in International Falls will shrink.

KOOTASCA Community Action administers the housing rehabilitation programs in the City of International Falls and Koochiching County. Housing rehabilitation programs include the SCDP Program, MHFA Programs and the Weatherization Program.

KOOTASCA Community Action has recently administered an SCDP owner occupied housing rehabilitation program in International Falls.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City of International Falls continue to utilize available funding sources to rehabilitate homes in International Falls. The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, the Federal Home Loan Bank and SCDP funds are all potential funding sources.

## **18. Develop a Neighborhood Revitalization Program**

**Findings:** The City of International Falls has several neighborhoods that are on the bubble. These neighborhoods have a significant number of homes that need rehabilitation or should be demolished. These neighborhoods also have a significant number of low/moderate income households. Also, the neighborhoods have a significant number of rental single family homes. The neighborhoods could deteriorate or could be revitalized to continue to be strong vital neighborhoods.

**Recommendation:** Over the years, there has been housing and neighborhood revitalization projects in the neighborhoods including housing rehabilitation, the demolition of dilapidated housing and public facility improvements. We recommend that the City of International Falls select a neighborhood and develop and implement a Neighborhood Revitalization Program.

Redevelopment strategies and opportunities should be identified including:

- ▶ A plan for each parcel in the neighborhood
- ▶ Owner-occupied rehabilitation
- ▶ Rental Rehabilitation
- ▶ Demolition of dilapidated structures
- ▶ Infill new construction including single family homes and attached housing
- ▶ Land pooling for larger town home and attached housing projects
- ▶ Purchase/Rehabilitation Programs that rehabilitate homes and provide home ownership for low/moderate income households
- ▶ Public projects (streets, utilities, parks, etc.)
- ▶ Consider re-zoning, variances and/or re-platting to make areas and parcels more desirable for redevelopment
- ▶ Programs that encourage energy conservation
- ▶ Other projects identified through the planning process

The Neighborhood Revitalization Program should include time lines, responsible City Department or Housing Agency, funding sources, etc. The Program should be evaluated on an ongoing basis as opportunities and potential projects may change priorities. As a neighborhood is revitalized, a new neighborhood can be selected for revitalization.

It must be noted that neighborhood revitalization can result in the loss of affordable housing. Redevelopment projects, infill construction and other affordable housing projects in the community should assure that there are overall net gains in the affordable housing stock.

## **19. Develop a Rental Housing Inspection and Registration Program**

**Findings:** A Rental Inspection and Registration Program can be a valuable tool in improving the quality of a City's rental housing stock. There are approximately 1,042 rental units in International Falls.

Neighborhood deterioration, lower property values and unsafe rental units are often prevented when a Rental Inspection and Registration Program is successfully implemented.

The need for a Rental Registration and Inspection Program includes the following:

### **Health and Safety**

- There is a need to provide tenants with safe, sanitary, and standard living conditions and to eliminate life threatening hazards.

### **Age of Housing Stock**

- Approximately 82% of the existing rental housing stock in International Falls is more than 40 years old.
- Older housing needs continued rehabilitation and maintenance.
- Older housing often has difficulty complying with current codes.

### **Conversions**

- Some of the rental buildings were originally constructed for uses other than rental residential such as owner-occupied single family homes, and commercial buildings. In conversion, owners often do the work themselves and have inadequate or faulty mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and heating systems. Also, constructing an apartment in the basement often results in a lack of natural lighting, ventilation and proper egress.

### **Trends of Conversions**

- Today's buyers want more amenities and conveniences, and less maintenance. They are less likely to purchase older homes, which results in the continuation of conversion of older homes to rental units.

### **Maintenance Efforts**

- A large number of rental property owners are providing standard housing and reinvesting in their rental properties. However, some rental property owners do not maintain their buildings. Ongoing maintenance is necessary for older housing as buildings with continued deferred maintenance become unsafe and substandard.

**High Number of Rental Property Owners**

- International Falls has a significant number of rental property owners and many of these rental property owners do an excellent job. However, some rental property owners do not reinvest in their properties and create a need for the rental registration program.

**Neighborhood Stabilization**

- Rental units need to be maintained to keep the integrity of the neighborhood and stabilize property values. Deferred maintenance has a negative impact on the neighborhood.

**Zoning and Codes**

- Illegal apartments such as inappropriately constructed basement apartments may be unsafe and a violation of zoning regulations.

**Substandard Units Removed From Rental Stock**

- Rental units that are substandard and cannot cost effectively be brought into compliance with codes are removed from the rental housing stock.

**Coordination**

- A Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program provides an accurate record of rental units and owners. The program provides a better opportunity for coordination of city programs and codes.

**Recommendation:** We recommend the development and implementation of a Rental Registration and Inspection Program to assure that all rental units in International Falls comply with housing laws and codes. The Rental Registration and Inspection Program assures that International Falls rental units are safe and sanitary, thus, removing blighted and unsafe conditions.

# **International Falls - Other Housing Initiatives**

## **Other Housing Initiatives**

### **20. Encourage employer involvement in housing**

**Findings:** The connection between economic development and housing availability has become an increasingly important issue as local employers have the need to attract new workers to the community. Housing for new employees is a concern for employers. It may be advantageous for employers to become involved in housing.

**Recommendation:** We recommend an ongoing effort to involve employers as partners in addressing the City's housing needs. Several funding sources have finance programs that include employers. The funding agencies often view applications favorably that include employers in the problem solving process.

Employer involvement can include direct assistance to their employees such as a grant, loan, forgivable loan, deferred loan, down payment assistance, loan guarantee, etc. In many cases, employers do not wish to provide assistance to specific employees, but are willing to contribute to an overall city project, such as work force oriented rental housing, an affordable home ownership program or a new subdivision.

### **21. Acquire and demolish dilapidated structures**

**Findings:** Approximately 82% of the single family houses in International Falls are more than 40 years old. Some of these homes are dilapidated and too deteriorated to rehabilitate. Some of these homes are also vacant.

Our housing condition survey of 552 single family houses/duplexes in two of International Falls's oldest neighborhoods identified 27 houses that were dilapidated and viewed as too deteriorated to rehabilitate. We also identified 150 houses as needing major repair and some of these homes may be too deteriorated to rehabilitate. It is probable that some additional deteriorated houses exist in other neighborhoods that were not surveyed.

The City of International Falls has been working with property owners to demolish dilapidated houses. The City pays the cost of the home demolition. Over the last four years, 69 structures have been demolished, including some houses, garages and other accessory buildings.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the City of International Falls continue to take an aggressive approach to demolishing dilapidated structures. The City is enhanced when blighted and dilapidated structures are removed. Also, some of the cleared lots can be utilized for the construction of new affordable housing units.

The City could develop partnerships with housing agencies and private developers to construct new housing on cleared parcels. Tax increment financing, Greater Minnesota Housing Funds, MHFA funds, SCDP funds and local funds are potential funding sources for this initiative. Funding may be available for both acquisition/demolition and new construction activities.

We also recommend that the City of International Falls maintain an inventory of structures that may be candidates for future demolition. An inventory of infill lots for future development should also be maintained.

## **22. Strategies for Downtown Redevelopment**

**Findings:** International Falls' Downtown has buildings that have been renovated and have high quality commercial and/or housing space. There are also buildings that have not been maintained and are substandard. This recommendation provides an outline for additional actions that could be taken to continue to redevelop the downtown, to maximize the usage of downtown buildings, to promote new downtown businesses and to identify and implement renovations/conversions for housing.

**Recommendation:** We are also recommending the following actions for downtown International Falls:

- ▶ Interview downtown property owners to develop a database and to determine their future plans (expanding, selling, renovations, etc.)
- ▶ Develop an overall plan for the downtown (potential new businesses, address parking needs, develop an overall theme, art and cultural opportunities, etc.)
- ▶ Develop a mini-plan for each downtown property and each downtown block. This may include:



- ▶ Commercial building rehab and renovations
- ▶ Facade work
- ▶ Rental unit conversions or rehab
- ▶ Building demolition
- ▶ New construction
- ▶ Recruiting new businesses
  
- ▶ Identify funding sources
  - ▶ SCDP funds
  - ▶ Property owner funds
  - ▶ City, EDA and HRA funds
  - ▶ Federal Home Loan Bank
  - ▶ Tax increment financing
  - ▶ Tax abatement
  - ▶ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
  - ▶ MHFA funds
  - ▶ KOOTASCA Community Action funds
  
- ▶ Work with stakeholders to identify roles, secure funding, develop and implement programs and projects
  - ▶ Property owners
  - ▶ City of International Falls
  - ▶ KEDA
  - ▶ International Falls Chamber of Commerce
  - ▶ KOOTASCA Community Action

### **23. Create a plan and continue coordination among housing agencies**

**Findings:** The City of International Falls, the Koochiching Economic Development Authority, the Koochiching County HRA and KOOTASCA Community Action are all active in addressing housing and community development needs in International Falls. The City also has access to the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. These agencies provide funding for housing and community development programs.

**Recommendation:** The City of International Falls is fortunate to have access to several agencies that can address housing needs. It is our recommendation that the City work with the housing agencies to prioritize the recommendations of this Study and to develop a plan to address the City's housing needs. The Plan should include strategies, time lines and the responsibilities of each agency. While there has traditionally been a degree of staff interaction between these agencies, it will be important that a coordinated approach be used to prioritize and assign responsibility for housing programs.

It will also be important for the City to look for opportunities to work cooperatively with other surrounding cities to address housing issues. With the number of cities in the County, and limited staff capacity at both the City and County level, cooperative efforts may be the only way to accomplish certain projects. Cooperative efforts will not only make housing projects more practical, but they will often be more cost-effective and competitive.

#### **24. Develop home ownership and new construction marketing programs and strategies**

**Findings:** Cities that invest in marketing have an advantage. Opportunities to buy or construct a home are sometimes limited because of the lack of information and awareness of financing and incentive programs, homes and lots on the market, local builders, etc.

This is especially evident for new households moving into the area. The home buying/home building process can be very intimidating for first-time buyers and builders. It is important for the home buying or home building process to be user-friendly.

**Recommendation:** The City of International Falls, KEDA and the International Falls Chamber of Commerce have been active in promoting and marketing housing and the City, and we recommend the continuation or initiation of the following activities:

- ▶ Identify the City's strengths and competitive advantages and heavily promote them
- ▶ Continue to create marketing materials that can be distributed regionally (including internet, TV, radio, etc.)
- ▶ Work closely with employers (International Falls and the Region) to provide employees (especially new employees) with housing opportunities in International Falls
- ▶ Work with housing agencies to provide down payment assistance, low interest loans, home owner education and home owner counseling programs
- ▶ Work with builders to make the construction of a new home a very user friendly process
- ▶ Continue to work on the creation of jobs and the development of retail, commercial, service and recreational opportunities that make the City a "full service" community
- ▶ Provide attractive lots at an affordable price for a variety of home sizes, styles and price ranges
- ▶ Preserve and improve the quality of existing neighborhoods through the rehabilitation of substandard housing and the demolition of dilapidated structures that are beyond repair
- ▶ Develop new housing choices that serve life-cycle housing needs, such as new rental housing, twin homes, senior-designated housing, etc.
- ▶ Develop incentives and strategies to encourage builders and households to buy lots and to build and buy new homes.
- ▶ Review the City's building policies and fees to assure that they are user-friendly, fair and reasonable for developers, builders and households.
- ▶ Develop a coordinated housing plan with area housing and economic development agencies.

## **25. Housing assistance for the homeless and hard-to-house**

**Findings:** The City of International Falls has an excellent delivery system to address the housing needs of the homeless/hard to house. However, although this delivery system exists, there typically is inadequate funding for programs and projects to address all of the needs of the homeless/hard to house populations.

The agencies and nonprofits included in addressing the homeless/hard to house issues in International Falls include:

- ▶ KOOTASCA Community Action
  - ▶ Crisis Rent Assistance
  - ▶ Transitional Housing (2 units)
  - ▶ Rapid Re-Housing
  - ▶ Homeless Prevention Program
- ▶ Servants of Shelter
  - ▶ Emergency Shelter (30 days)
  - ▶ 3 units and two efficiency rooms
  - ▶ Assists with securing emergency nightly housing - Hotel stays
  - ▶ Assists with securing long-term housing
  - ▶ Refers individuals and households in crisis to resources
- ▶ Koochiching County HRA
  - ▶ Housing Choice Voucher Program
  - ▶ Applied for Bridge funds
- ▶ Salvation Army
  - ▶ Emergency Lodging
  - ▶ Utility payments and HeatShare
- ▶ Koochiching County Human Services
  - ▶ Information and Referral
- ▶ Friends Against Domestic Abuse
  - ▶ Assists with securing safe temporary shelter
  - ▶ Information and referral services

**Recommendation:** We recommend the following to continue to address the City of International Falls and Koochiching County homeless/hard to house issues:

- ▶ **Continue to seek additional funds for current homeless/hard to house programs** - The current programs provided by the agencies and nonprofits are excellent programs that typically do not have adequate funds to address the needs of the homeless. The agencies should continue to aggressively seek funds to preserve and expand these programs to adequately address the needs.
- ▶ **Develop additional emergency supportive and transitional housing** - Many homeless/hard-to-house households need the services and housing that these housing options provide with the ultimate goal of securing permanent housing. If new affordable housing is constructed, potentially several units could be reserved for supportive housing.

- ▶ **Continue coordination between agencies and organizations** - The service providers in International Falls coordinate with each other, both formally and informally. It is beneficial to the consumer, the public, and the service providers to continue to define available services, eligibility guidelines, etc.
- ▶ **Continue to develop subsidized and affordable housing** - The City of International Falls and area housing agencies should continue to develop subsidized and affordable housing as discussed in the previous recommendations.
- ▶ **Rental Property Guarantee Program** - Some households are in the 'Hard to House' category for a variety of reasons. These households are often screened out by rental property owners. The rental property owners are concerned that 'Hard to House' homeless households will be poor tenants and/or they will not pay their rent or will damage the unit. Some housing agencies have negotiated an agreement with selected rental property owners. The rental property owner will rent to the 'Hard to House' homeless if the household completes a renter education class and the agency has funds set aside to cover the financial losses the rental property owner may experience.

## **26. Develop mobile home programs and policies**

**Findings:** International Falls has approximately 97 mobile homes in four mobile home parks. Our condition survey identified 36 homes that needed minor repair and 31 homes that need major repair. Five homes were dilapidated and beyond repair.

Mobile homes are an affordable option for many households and International Falls is an excellent location for households seeking a modular or mobile home as a housing option.

**Recommendation:** It may be appropriate for the community to initiate programs to encourage households to locate a mobile or modular home in International Falls.

Some of the innovative programs that have been used in other communities to address mobile home conditions and mobile home park issues include:

- ▶ ***Down Payment Assistance Program*** - Develop a Down Payment Assistance Program that assists households with the purchase of a mobile home.
- ▶ ***Operation Safe Mobile Home Park*** - Owners of substandard mobile homes are given the option of voluntarily selling their substandard mobile home to the City or an area housing agency for a fixed minimum price. The mobile homes are then removed from the park and demolished/salvaged. The owner can then use the funds from the sale to help purchase a new home. Mobile home dealerships have sometimes participated by buying the salvaged homes.
- ▶ ***Time of Sale/Rent Inspection Program*** - This inspection program is designed to provide safe living conditions through the identification and elimination of basic life/safety hazards in older mobile homes. Mobile homes are subject to inspection prior to their sale or rental. All identified safety hazards must be corrected before the unit is sold, rented and/or occupied.
- ▶ ***Age of Mobile Homes Moved into the City*** - Some cities have implemented an ordinance which stipulates that a mobile home must have been manufactured after a designated year to be moved into the City. This prevents older units from being moved into the City.

# **Employment and Economic Trends**

January 2019



## **Employment and Economy**

While many factors influence the need for housing, employment opportunities represent a predominant demand-generator. Without jobs and corresponding wages, the means to afford housing is severely limited. Employment opportunities are provided by a broad range of private and public business sectors. Jobs are available in manufacturing, commercial services, agriculture, and other industries. The type of employment, wage level, and working conditions will each influence the kind of housing that is needed and at what level of affordability.

### **Major Employers**

The larger employers in Koochiching County include the following:

- ▶ Packaging Corporation of America
- ▶ School District #361
- ▶ Local Governments (including Koochiching County)
- ▶ Rainy Lake Medical Center
- ▶ United Health Group
- ▶ Good Samaritan
- ▶ Menards
- ▶ Super One
- ▶ Wagner Construction
- ▶ Littlefork Medical Center
- ▶ County Market
- ▶ Rainy River Community College
- ▶ Kmart
- ▶ Essentia Health
- ▶ Voyagers National Park
- ▶ Keep Enterprises
- ▶ NorthStar Publishing & The Journal
- ▶ Shannon's Inc.

Source: Koochiching Economic Development Authority

## Employment and Wages by Industry

The following table shows the annual employment and average annual wages by major employment sector for 2017, the last full year of data. It is important to note that the major employment sectors listed do not represent all employment in the County. Some groups, including self-employment, are not represented. This information is only for all of Koochiching County.

<b>Table 1 Koochiching County Average Annual Wages by Industry: 2017</b>		
Industry	Employment	Average Annual Wage
Total All Industry	4,449	\$40,300
Construction	176	\$49,348
Manufacturing	683	\$76,024
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	946	\$27,300
Information	61	\$33,540
Financial Activities	181	\$45,864
Professional and Business Services	123	\$24,388
Education and Health Services	955	\$40,560
Leisure and Hospitality	645	\$17,732
Other Services	104	\$11,908
Public Administration	446	\$50,544

Source: MN Department of Employment and Economic Development

The average annual wage in Koochiching County for all industry in 2017 was \$40,300. The highest paying wage sector was Manufacturing at more than \$76,000. Manufacturing was also the third largest industry sector for the number of employed people.

The City's largest employment sector, Education and Health Services, had an average wage of \$40,560 annually, very similar to the Countywide average.

There were two employment sectors in the County, Leisure and Hospitality, and Other Services that had average annual wages below \$20,000 in 2017.

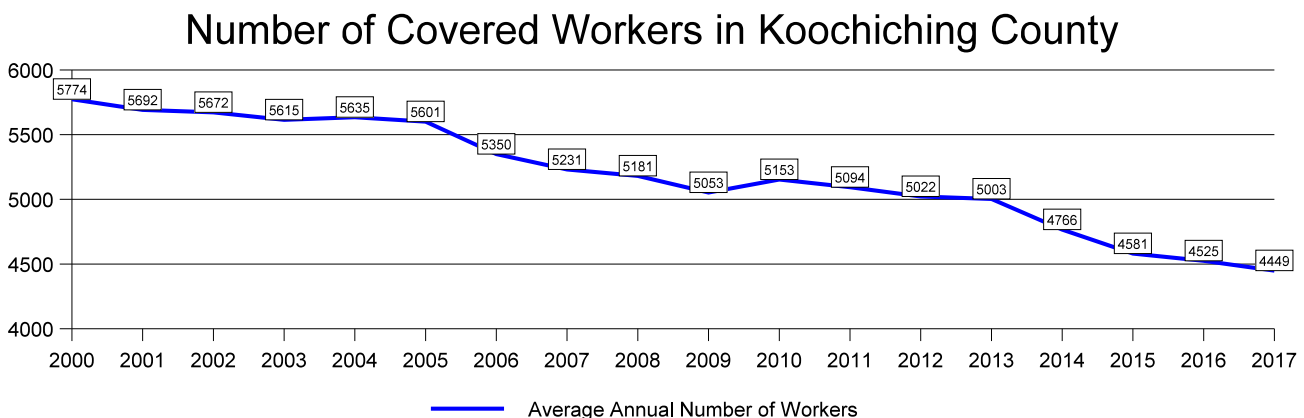
## Annual Covered Employment

Since the Quarterly Census of Covered Workers (QCEW) tracks employees covered by unemployment insurance by location, it is possible to examine longer-term patterns in the employment level. The following table displays the total number of workers reported in Koochiching County back to the year 2000.

Table 2 Koochiching County Average Annual Employment			
Year	Total Covered Employment	Year	Total Covered Employment
2000	5,774	2009	5,053
2001	5,692	2010	5,153
2002	5,672	2011	5,094
2003	5,615	2012	5,022
2004	5,635	2013	5,003
2005	5,601	2014	4,766
2006	5,350	2015	4,581
2007	5,231	2016	4,525
2008	5,181	2017	4,449

Source: QCEW - MN Dept. of Employment and Economic Development

When viewed over a longer-term there has been a gradual loss of employment in the County, as tracked by unemployment compensation. If 2017 is compared to the year 2000, there had been a decrease of more than 1,300 jobs. It is important to note that not all employment is covered by unemployment insurance, including people that are self-employed.



## Labor Force, Work Force and Unemployment

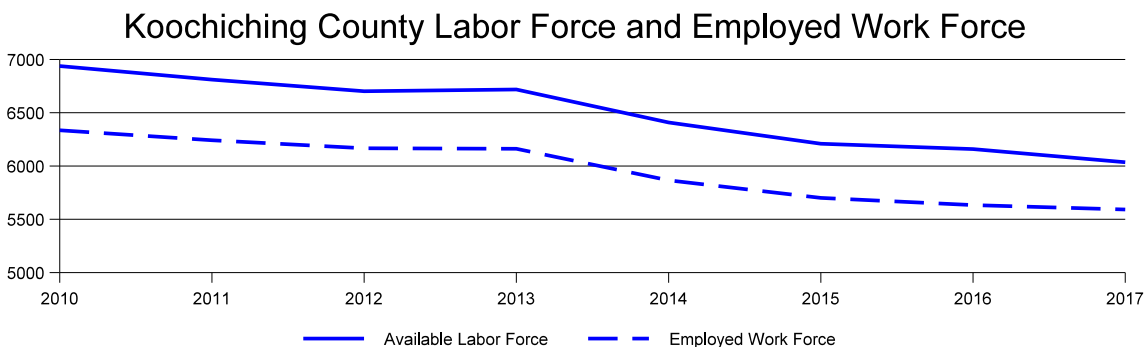
The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development provides employment information for Counties in the State. The following table looks at statistics since 2010. This information tracks the status of people that live in the Koochiching County, regardless of the location of their job.

<b>Table 3 County Labor Force and Employment: 2010 to 2017</b>						
Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate - City	Unemployment Rate - MN	Unemployment Rate - US
2010	6,938	6,336	602	8.7%	7.4%	9.6%
2011	6,811	6,242	569	8.4%	6.5%	8.9%
2012	6,702	6,167	535	8.0%	5.6%	8.1%
2013	6,718	6,162	556	8.3%	5.0%	7.4%
2014	6,409	5,866	543	8.5%	4.2%	6.2%
2015	6,209	5,701	508	8.2%	3.7%	5.3%
2016	6,159	5,634	525	8.5%	3.9%	4.9%
2017	6,036	5,592	444	7.4%	3.5%	4.4%

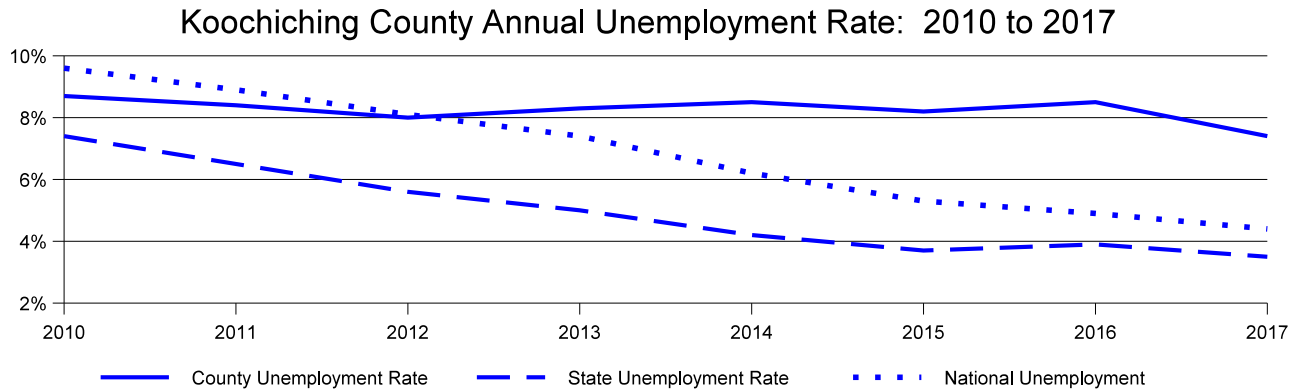
Source: MN Department of Employment and Economic Development

There has been a gradual decrease in the size of the County's available labor force so far this decade. When comparing 2017 to 2010, the resident labor force decreased by 902 people, or 13%.

There has also been some decrease in the employed resident work force, but that has declined at a slower rate. When comparing 2017 to 2010, the number of employed County residents had decreased by 744 people, or 11.7%. As a result, the unemployment rate has dropped over the past eight years, from 8.7% in 2010 to 7.4% in 2017.



The County's unemployment rate has remained well above the Minnesota average since 2010, and has remained above the national rate since 2013.



## Commuting Patterns - International Falls

Information is available on area workers that commute for employment. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of International Falls. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home.

Based on other data reviewed in this section, the City of International Falls is the location for most of the jobs that exist in Koochiching County. Using the unemployment compensation information, approximately 69% of all jobs in the County are in International Falls.

<b>Table 4 Commuting Times for International Falls Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	1,637	62.4%
10 to 19 minutes	763	29.1%
20 to 29 minutes	107	4.1%
30 minutes or more	116	4.4%
Total	2,623	100%

Source: American Community Survey

The large majority of International Falls residents were working locally in 2016. Overall, more than 91% were commuting less than 20 minutes to work. Presumably, most residents were working within the City limits.

The American Community Survey also identifies travel time by location of employment. For people that worked in International Falls, the following travel times were identified.

<b>Table 5 Commuting Times for International Falls Employees - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	1,955	53.0%
10 to 19 minutes	1,215	32.9%
20 to 29 minutes	260	7.0%
30 minutes +	261	7.1%
Total	3,691	100%

Source: American Community Survey

For people that worked in International Falls, only 14.1% traveled 20 minutes or more. Overall, nearly 86% traveled 19 minutes or less, including people that both lived and worked within International Falls.

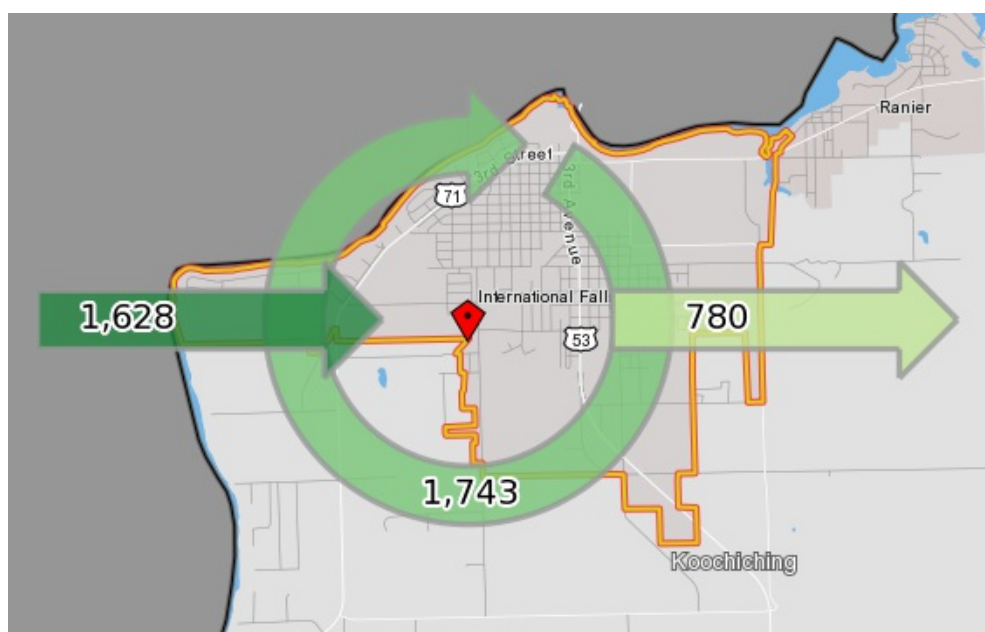
## Census On the Map - International Falls

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns.

According to this source, there were 3,371 people that were employed within International Falls in 2015. Most of these city-based employees were also living in the City. Overall, nearly 52% of the city-based jobs were filled by residents.

However, there were 1,628 people were commuting in to fill jobs in the City. Overall, more than 48% of the jobs were filled by people not living in International Falls. The primary locations to the City were Rainy Lake UT, Ranier, Littlefork and East Koochiching UT. Most of the commuters to the City lived in Koochiching County.

There were also a number of City residents that left International Falls for employment. There were 780 people that worked outside of the City. Among the primary destinations were Rainy Lake UT, Littlefork, Duluth, Bemidji and Hibbing.





## Commuting Patterns - Ranier

Information is available on area workers that commute for employment. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of Ranier. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home.

This table only examines the travel times for Ranier residents. Due to the City's small size and limited employment opportunities, no similar information exists for inbound commuters that may work in the City.

<b>Table 6 Commuting Times for Ranier Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	90	51.1%
10 to 19 minutes	72	40.9%
20 to 29 minutes	2	1.1%
30 minutes or more	12	6.8%
Total	176	100%

Source: American Community Survey

The large majority of Ranier's residents were working locally in 2016. Overall, 92% were commuting less than 20 minutes to work. Presumably, most residents were working in Ranier or International Falls.

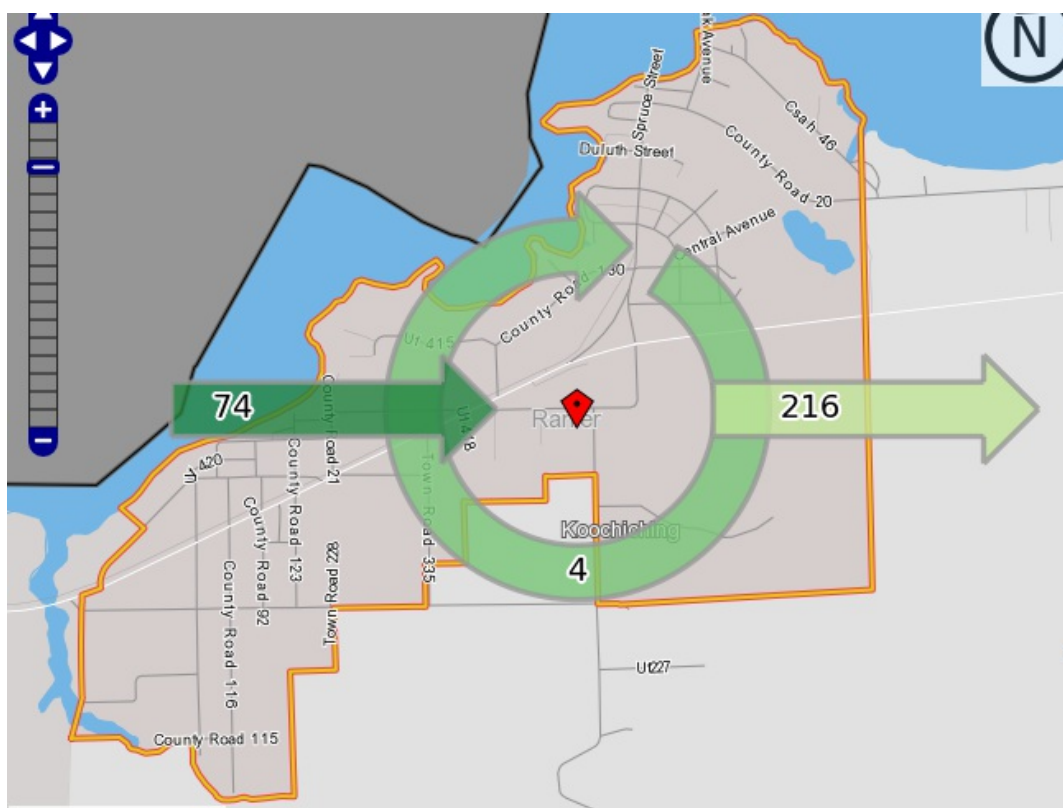
Although the limited sampling that is used for the American Community Survey can result in a wide margin of error, this source shows very few residents commuting longer distances for their primary job.

## Census On the Map - Ranier

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns.

According to this source, there were 78 people that were employed within Ranier in 2015. However, very few of these city-based employees were also living in the City. Overall, nearly 95% of the city-based jobs were filled by people that did not live in Ranier. The primary residence locations for people working in Ranier were International Falls and Rainy Lake UT. Most of the commuters to the City lived in Koochiching County.

According to this source, most City residents left Ranier Falls for employment. There were 216 people that worked outside of the City. Among the primary destinations were International Falls, Duluth, Littlefork and Rainy Lake UT. But most outbound commuters were working in International Falls.



## Commuting Patterns - Littlefork

Information is available on area workers that commute for employment. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of Littlefork. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home. The first table examines travel times for City residents.

<b>Table 7 Commuting Times for Littlefork Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	91	44.8%
10 to 19 minutes	27	13.3%
20 to 29 minutes	58	28.6%
30 minutes or more	27	13.3%
Total	203	100%

Source: American Community Survey

A majority of Littlefork residents were working locally in 2016. Overall, more than 58% were commuting less than 20 minutes to work. However, the City also had a number of residents that were traveling 20 minutes or more to their job.

The American Community Survey also identifies travel time by location of employment. For people that worked in Littlefork, the following travel times were identified.

<b>Table 8 Commuting Times for Littlefork Employees - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	143	42.9%
10 to 19 minutes	72	21.6%
20 to 29 minutes	65	19.5%
30 minutes +	53	15.9%
Total	333	100%

Source: American Community Survey

For people that worked in Littlefork, nearly 65% traveled 19 minutes or less, but nearly 16% were traveling 30 minutes or more.

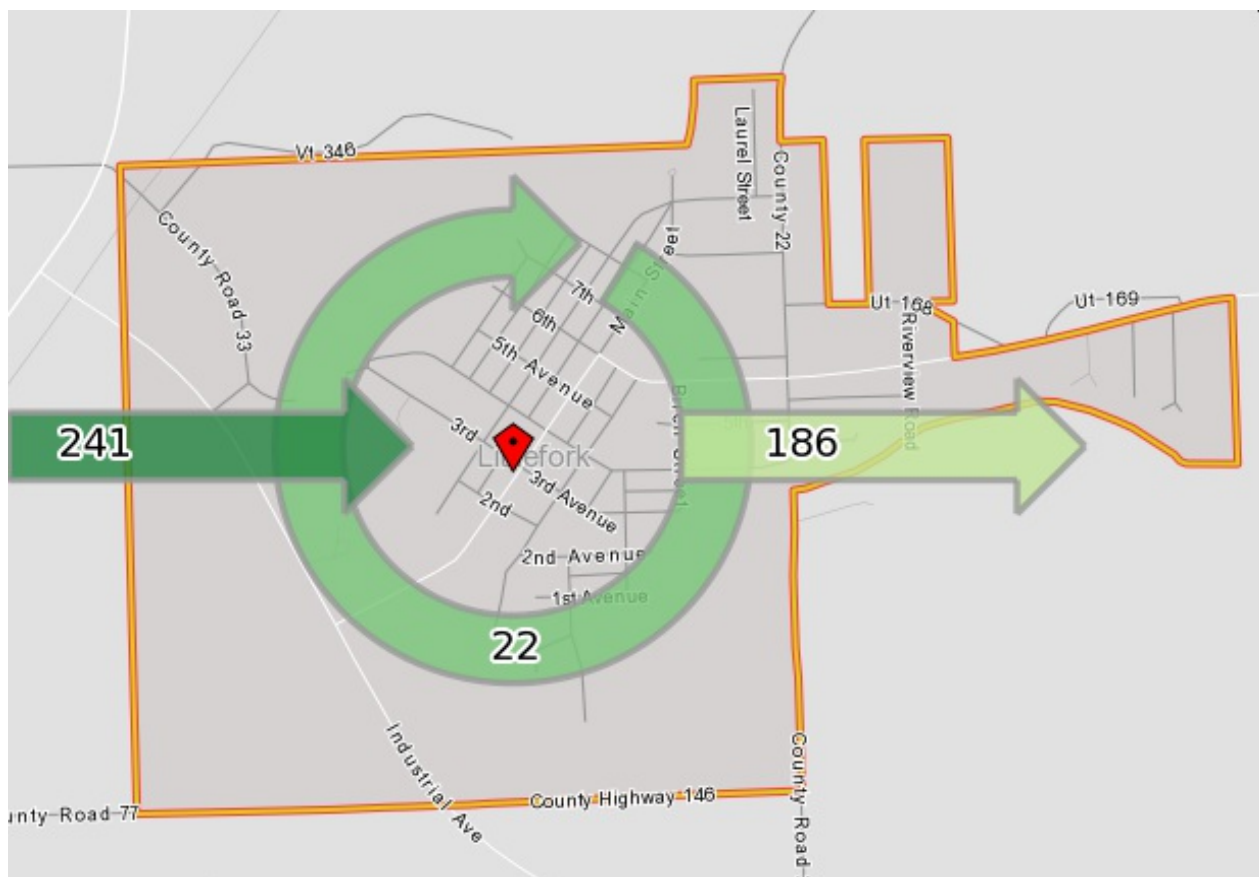
## Census On the Map - Littlefork

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns.

According to this source, there were 263 people that were employed within Littlefork in 2015. Most of these city-based employees did not live in the City. Overall, this source estimates that fewer than 10% of the city-based jobs were filled by residents.

There were 241 people that were commuting in to fill jobs in the City. The primary locations supplying workers to the City were Rainy Lake UT, International Falls, Northome UT and Ranier. Most of the commuters to the City lived in Koochiching County.

There were also a number of City residents that left Littlefork for employment. There were more than 200 people that worked outside of the City. Among the primary destinations were International Falls, Rainy Lake UT and Ranier.



## **Commuting Patterns - Big Falls**

Information is available on area workers that commute for employment. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of Big Falls. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home. The first table examines travel times for City residents.

<b>Table 9 Commuting Times for Big Falls Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	39	34.8%
10 to 19 minutes	5	4.5%
20 to 29 minutes	7	6.3%
30 minutes or more	61	54.5%
Total	112	100%

Source: American Community Survey

A majority of the residents of Big Falls were commuting greater distances in 2016. Overall, nearly 61% were commuting 20 minutes or more to work, and most were actually traveling 30 minutes or more. However, nearly 35% were working locally and traveling less than 10 minutes.

Due to the limited employment within the City, the American Community Survey did not show any information on inbound commuters into Big Falls.

## **Census On the Map - Big Falls**

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns. However, due to the small size of the community, no usable information was available for Big Falls from this source.

## Commuting Patterns - Northome

Information is available on area workers that commute for employment. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of Northome. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home. The first table examines commuting patterns for City residents.

<b>Table 10 Commuting Times for Northome Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	39	53.4%
10 to 19 minutes	12	16.4%
20 to 29 minutes	1	1.4%
30 minutes or more	21	28.8%
Total	73	100%

Source: American Community Survey

While a majority of Northome residents were working locally in 2016, those that did commute often traveled 30 minutes or more. Overall, more than 53% were commuting less than 10 minutes to work. But nearly 29% were traveling 30 minutes or more.

The American Community Survey also identifies travel time by location of employment. For people that worked in Northome, the following travel times were identified.

<b>Table 11 Commuting Times for Northome Employees - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	124	52.1%
10 to 19 minutes	68	28.6%
20 to 29 minutes	17	7.1%
30 minutes +	29	12.2%
Total	238	100%

Source: American Community Survey

For people that worked in Northome, only 12.2% traveled 30 minutes or more. Overall, nearly 81% traveled 19 minutes or less, including people that both lived and worked within Northome.

## **Census On the Map - Northome**

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns.

According to this source, there were only 70 people that were employed within Northome in 2015. This number is substantially lower than other sources, and is viewed as unreliable for people working in the City.



## Commuting Patterns - Mizpah

Given the small size of Mizpah, there is very limited information that exists for worker commuter patterns. The best information is from the 2016 American Community Survey, and has been examined for the City of Mizpah. This table only examines people that commuted, and excludes people that work at home.

The only available information is for the travel times for Mizpah residents.

<b>Table 12 Commuting Times for Mizpah Residents - 2016</b>		
Travel Time	Number	Percent
Less than 10 minutes	5	8.9%
10 to 19 minutes	22	39.3%
20 to 29 minutes	7	12.5%
30 minutes or more	22	39.3%
Total	56	100%

Source: American Community Survey

Given the small number of jobs within Mizpah, most residents were commuting for employment. Fewer than 10% were able to drive nine minutes or less to their job. The majority of Mizpah residents were commuting 20 minutes or more to work in 2016. Most of these were actually commuting 30 minutes or more.

Due to the limited employment within the City, the American Community Survey did not show any information on inbound commuters into Mizpah.

## Census On the Map - Mizpah

The Census Bureau also produces commuter reports through its Center for Economic Studies division. This information is based on reports for the year 2015, and provides a further breakdown of worker movement patterns. However, due to the small size of the community, no usable information was available for Mizpah from this source.

# **Agencies and Resources**

January 2019

## **Agencies and Resources**

The following agencies administer programs or provide funds for housing programs and projects in the Region:

### **Koochiching County Housing and Redevelopment Authority**

12060 Main St.  
Northome, MN 56661  
(218) 897-5242

### **KOOTASCA Community Action**

2232 E. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave.  
International Falls, MN 56649  
(218) 283-9491

### **USDA Rural Development**

3217 Bemidji Ave. N  
Bemidji, MN 56601  
(218) 751-1942

### **Koochiching Economic Development Authority**

405 3<sup>rd</sup> St.  
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