



# Wadena County Comprehensive Plan

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## INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive plans are intended to anticipate and plan for change--not merely reflect it. Change, whether in a county, township or city, can be subtle and slow to emerge, or it may be rapid and dramatic. In either case, a well crafted Comprehensive Plan should foresee where and how the community is changing, as well as be responsive to change as it occurs during the life of the Plan.

This Plan provides for growth and development of Wadena County, but only if such growth is not injurious to the overall health of the County's agricultural, recreational, and community areas. This plan encourages stability by acknowledging that growth is constrained by physical resources of the County and the demands and preferences of the marketplace. This plan encourages the long term sustainability of Wadena County by recognizing the long term consequences of present actions and the interrelatedness of decisions. This plan strives to give the citizens of this County an opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the development of the County by providing open, adequate and accurate information. And, this plan strives to protect the integrity of the natural environment by recognizing wetlands, the Crow Wing watershed, and other natural features as an

important consideration in land use decisions.

The purpose of the Wadena County Comprehensive Plan is to serve as a guide for the future development of Wadena County. It is to be an extension of the needs and wants of the citizens. Public meetings were held to gather input and determine what the County's greatest strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities are. The ideas and data gathered through these measures are the basis for the goals, policies, and implementation sections of this plan.

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*Prepared by:  
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# **P**UBLIC PARTICIPATION

## **PLANNING GOAL**

*Develop a broad, implementable, community-owned action plan that will truly serve the whole community.*

All communities in Minnesota exist in a changing economic and social environment. Within this challenging framework, communities must work particularly hard to stay strong. A comprehensive plan for the future is an important part of this effort. Through a plan, members of a community work together to establish goals and to create a vision of what their community should be. Public participation is considered one of the most important components of the Wadena County Comprehensive Plan process because local citizens have a broad range of attitudes toward growth and development. A broad-based and meaningful citizen participation program is an essential part of the total planning process. By facilitating ongoing citizen participation, including a workshop and monthly public planning meetings, it is the County's hope to create a strong sense of ownership and support for the final Plan. To begin the citizen participation process, the County held a public workshop to gain the citizen's perspective on the issues facing Wadena County. This workshop has helped to shape the goals and objectives found throughout this Plan. Wadena County citizens were asked their opinion on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Wadena County. The consensus of the responses were grouped into themes. Following is a summary of the workshop outcome.

### **STRENGTHS**

**Quality of Life**-including good school system & higher education, good place to raise children/low crime rate, rural atmosphere, health care/elderly facilities, neighborhood support, work ethic, lack of traffic congestion, many churches, large variety of people.

**Government**-including comprehensive planning, local/county law enforcement cooperation, one-on-one political access, low taxes, snow removal, emergency 911 system.

**Environment**-including clean water, fresh air, land diversity.

**Economic Development/Commercial Resources-** including good road access, technology, University Experiment Station, family farms, rural agriculture-economic support, University partnership-tourism/agriculture/natural resources, strong employment, work force availability, industries.

**Recreation-** including parks, rivers, and lakes.

### ***WEAKNESSES***

**Economic Development-** including lack of good jobs, lack of larger shopping, no truck stop.

**City Government/Services** – including lack of zoning enforcement/shoreline, over work load on some county employees, no protection against outside forces, not enough solid waste sites, expense of disposal, county relies too heavily on federally funded programs, not enough law enforcement, more home health funds, lack of funds for Meals On Wheels.

**Quality of Life-** including crime/kids-lack of direction, lack of recreation/funds to maintain, too much welfare, lack of cultural activities.

**Housing** – including lack of housing, services for seniors/housing and transportation.

**People/Attitudes-** including lack of communication between town/individualism, fear of change.

**Appearance** – including lack of property upkeep.

### ***OPPORTUNITIES***

**Economic Development** – including available work force, promotion of rivers, lakes, parks, recreation, training opportunities, specialty farming/logging/forestry, advanced technology for job opportunities, bring jobs into area with decent pay for high school graduates, have major highway truck stop, funding and information on more tourism.

**Quality of Life**—including small town atmosphere for retired, networked medical facilities, neighborhood watch areas, funding for the arts, preserve historic buildings and culture, youth, spiritual community, active civic/service organizations.

**Housing** – including land availability for housing/business, could raise taxes on new housing.

**Services** – including strengths are opportunities, more wayside rests.

### ***THREATS***

**Economic Development**- including changes in farming (more commercial farms, less family farms, high cost of operation, high taxes on farmland), monitoring of super corporations, change in marketing/volume, buying & selling, too much control of jobs, estimated market value, market change-corporate control, absentee landowners.

**Government** – including unplanned development, tax increase/assessment, development-conflicting groups/AG, residential/tourists/natural resources, DNR-land accumulation, apathy-too much reliance on honorary members (county commission), government policies-imports, free trade, no mill limit on taxes, DNR has too much control in some areas & not enough in other areas.

**Environment** – including water pollution/including from other counties, mismanagement of water resources, bring old septic systems up to code, crop spraying.

**Quality of Life/Community** – including decline of the family, gangs, racial tension.

# WADENA

## COUNTY EARLY HISTORY

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Wadena County with its vast geographic differences was long overlooked as a source of abundant agricultural wealth. The Indians used it as a hunting grounds, the French and British saw it as a land rich with fur bearing animals, and even the logging industry used only the northern and northeastern portions of the county for harvesting the rich, white pine they sought. Even after Minnesota was organized as a state and Wadena County was plotted in 1858, few white people had settled the land. It would take over three decades before the true agricultural wealth of Wadena County would take its place of prominence in Minnesota's agricultural economy.

Wadena County was established by the state legislature in June of 1858. Although this act was passed in 1858, it was not until February 21, 1873, that the county was officially organized. The city of Wadena was established as the county seat.

The completion of the Northern Pacific railroad through the county gave rise to the genesis of many communities along its right of way. One of the earliest hamlets to begin growing was Aldrich, which was settled about 1871. The laying of track reached Aldrich in 1872 and gave such a tremendous flourishing to the burg that between 1872, and 1883, the population of the site grew to over one hundred.

By the early 1880's only six townships had been populated enough to allow formal organization of the areas into townships, and they were Wadena, Leaf River, Bullard, Wing River, Aldrich, and Thomastown. The northern portions of the county remained sparsely populated except for isolated pockets of settlers. In 1885, the settlers in and around Shell City petitioned the county for recognition as a township. As the population of the county continued to grow, other townships sought organization. Red Eye Township was organized on January 15, 1889, Rockwood organized on July 8, 1893, North Germany on December 18, 1893, Lyons on January 7, 1896, Meadow on March 13, 1896, Blueberry around 1888, Huntersville around 1898, and Orton in September 1898. The population of the county, which was listed as six by the Federal Census in 1870, showed a tremendous growth to over 2,000 inhabitants by 1880.

Within the next decade the population had reached just over 4,000, and by the turn of the century there were over 7,900 settlers.

With increasing population growth came the genesis of other communities throughout the county. Wadena, Verndale, and Aldrich came into existence with the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Shell City and Nimrod came into existence as a result of logging operations and wheat growing as these industries spread northward into the county by 1880. The construction of the Wadena-Park Rapids railroad in 1891, brought into being the communities of Sebeka and Menahga, with other smaller communities such as Blue Grass and Central springing up around 1905. (Taken from "*Silhouettes of Time: A History of Wadena County Focusing on Shell City and Nimrod, MN*")

Wadena County was on one of the original trapper-trader routes connecting Pembina to Fort Snelling. Later this route was to become the northern Red River oxcart trail so heavily used before the coming of the railroad. Though Wadena County was included in the 1855 Indian land cession, it remained unsettled until the superior prairie land further west had been taken and the railroads made the territory more accessible.

During the late 1800's, large number of northern Europeans migrated to Minnesota. The northern part of Wadena and adjoining sections of Becker and Otter Tail Counties gained large numbers of Finnish settlers. The east central portion of the County around Nimrod was strongly German, with Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and English occupying the southern townships. Much of the evidence of ethnic ties are still apparent on the landscape and in the names, especially in the Finnish areas.

With the railroads came increased numbers of farmers and service towns along the lines. Compared to southern Minnesota, the farms, especially in the north, were small and the farmers supplemented their incomes with forestry.