

# Rural Conservation

## Introduction

Minnehaha County expresses at least two very different styles of character. The City of Sioux Falls provides a strong urban atmosphere because of its size and regional status, and the unincorporated area and small town centers have remained strongly rural in character. Agriculture trends and increasing populations are, however, changing the rural area. Large parcels of row crops, pastures, and family farmsteads are still a common sight in the country while many of the county's natural areas provide habitat for wildlife and recreation for visitors. Small towns and service centers still cater to the rural lifestyle with various amenities and gathering places. The rural area of Minnehaha County

includes a wide range of qualities that distinguishes the character of the landscape. The history of the county is as diverse as the people living in it. The natural character of the county is becoming increasingly important as urban and rural development encroach on what is remaining. The family farm is changing as hobby farms, agricultural tourism, and acreages continue to expand in quantity and significance. The growth and density of residential houses change the county's landscape and character. Preserving and enhancing the rural character of the unincorporated area of Minnehaha County benefits everyone now and into the future.



## Historic Preservation

Historic resources, like living objects, require thoughtful care and maintenance to enjoy a long, useful life. Each historic object is a reflection of a specific time in history. Over time, a collection of these specific resources can define an area's social, stylistic, cultural and economic heritage. The historic buildings, sites, districts, and objects of a place weave together to form a fabric that connects multiple generations, provides sense of place, and creates a community. The obvious historic resources are highly visible including sites of historic events, historic town sites, historic gathering places such as churches and public buildings, cemeteries and burial mounds, etc. Many more pieces of history, however, are used in daily life such as houses, barns, and storage structures for grain or equipment. These historic places form a base for the rural character of the county. The county should support the preservation of all types of historic places.



Historic Images Source: Siouxland Heritage Museums



Tri-State Marker—Original placed in 1859, this stone pillar marked the junction of Minnesota, Iowa, and Dakota Territory by the Federal Land Office survey of Minnesota's western boundary.



Every year many historic structures such as houses and barns are neglected as lifestyles and methods of farming evolve. Sound preservation planning and implementation offer benefits in a variety of ways. Fewer natural resources are needed to renovate an existing structure rather than tearing down and replacing the building. The architecture of existing buildings provide interaction between the past and present that creates a sense of place for area residents. There are economic benefits associated with increased real estate values and tourism of historic buildings and sites. Educational benefits follow when historic sites provide meaning and animation for the lessons of past lifestyles and stories.



This 1888 Barn, located at Arrowhead Park, has lasted generations and will continue to last because of careful and continual preservation

One of the primary methods of maintaining historical structures is the adaptive reuse of buildings. This means that an existing building, especially one that is historical or architecturally significant, is converted to a use other than the original intent while the exterior of the structure retains its integrity. This strategy also allows new uses of the land to be more compatible with surrounding existing land uses.

This carefully preserved privately owned barn has an aesthetic quality that maintains the agricultural heritage of the county while still providing function for the current landowner.

## Natural Character

The land cover of Minnehaha County is dominated by agriculture and the developed land of incorporated municipalities. This does not, however, diminish the importance of the natural and semi-natural landscapes within the county. These landscapes can be found in the un-farmable wetland areas, slopes, and floodplains. Other natural areas take the form of shelter belts around farmsteads and publicly owned land for parks and preserves.

These natural landscapes provide a variety of benefits through what is known as “ecosystem services”. Native plants and animals utilize these spaces as habitat and corridors for migration. Recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, boating, and nature watching can be found along rivers and multiple public lands and parks within the county. As more people from Sioux



Falls and surrounding area look to escape the ‘concrete jungle’, the need to preserve and possibly create more natural areas such as parks and trails will grow.

### Categories of Ecosystem Services

- **Supporting Services**
  - underlying natural processes such as the water cycle and soil creation
- **Provisioning Services**
  - harvestable products such as food and timber
- **Regulating Services**
  - moderation of the natural environment such as pollination, erosion control, and water purification
- **Cultural Services**
  - human experiences of the natural environment including recreation, spiritual, and cultural

## Farming & Community

The country lifestyle, is often associated with hard work, land stewardship, and sense of community. This is especially applicable among the family run farms that fill the rural area. Over the years the business of farming has changed, causing the many farm operations to either consolidate or shrink. Since 1997, the number of farms larger than 2,000 acres and smaller than 70 acres have greatly increased; while the number of farms between 100 to 1,000 acres have noticeably decreased (USDA 2012 Census of Ag). Small farms remain possible because the growing popularity of ‘hobby farms’ that are owned by operators who simply want the farm lifestyle and by increasing use of agricultural tourism. Both of these farm types are influenced by the

increasing population and proximity of Sioux Falls. It is important to recognize the changes in rural lifestyles and farming to ensure the viability of modern agricultural land uses.

Agricultural production is a vital part of the rural character. It also produces dust, smoke, noise, odors, and uses pesticides, fertilizers, odd hours of operation, and other items that may be considered offensive to residents not well acquainted with life in the rural area. In order to inform property owners of this potential conflict, the Right-To-Farm Notice covenant has been required for all new houses since 2006 and continuation of this requirement is important for future growth.



The residents of rural communities utilize small towns and rural service areas as gathering spots, employment, and convenience shopping. The character of these service areas contribute to the rural sense of place through local activities, gathering places, and community pride. Rural service areas are changing as commercial and industrial districts expand services to attract customers from Sioux Falls and the larger region.

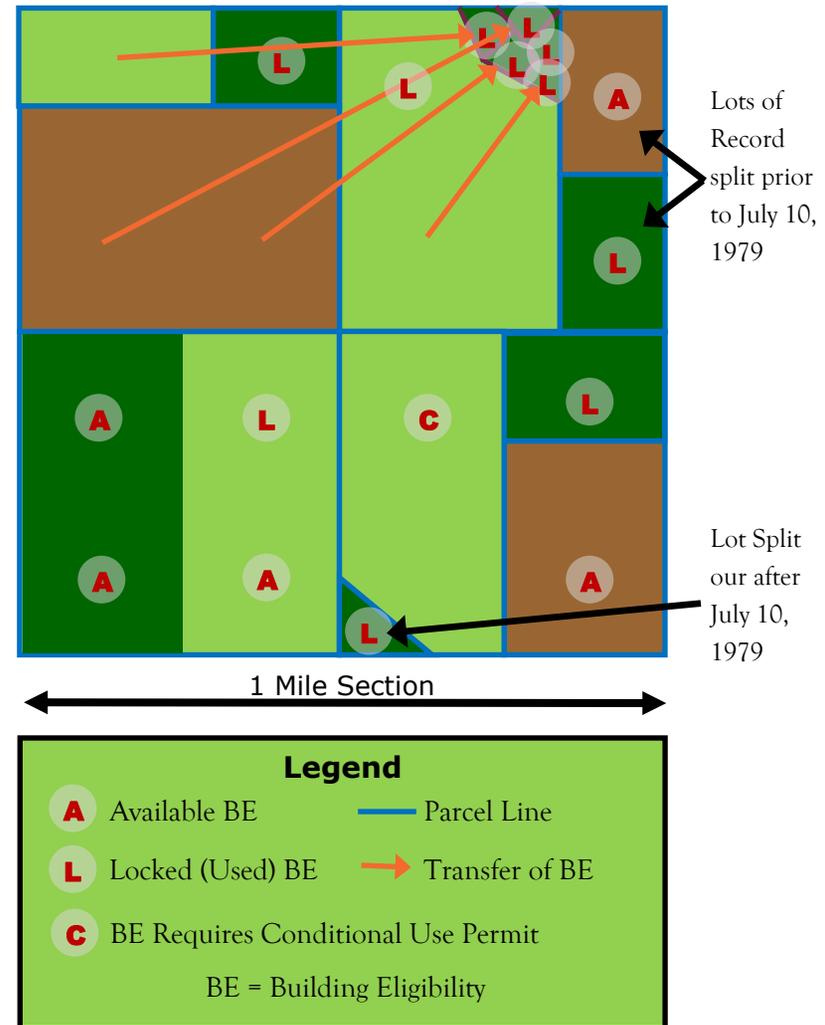
Expansion of these service areas and towns will occur and the Comprehensive Plan should assist in the orderly development of these important places of rural character. Several rural service areas have populations greater than small incorporated towns. Homeowners in these service areas increasingly desire more urban like amenities such as roads, sewer, and nuisance enforcement. Regulations and ordinances should be evaluated as to their appropriateness and effectiveness for town-like areas.



## Housing Density

Rural character with its country lifestyle and natural landscapes attract many people to live in the unincorporated area of the county; however, the continual development of new houses threatens to diminish the very aspects of rural character that many residents seek. Once farm and natural land is converted to a higher intensity use, such as residential housing, it is highly unlikely to return to its previous farm or natural use. The primary tool that Minnehaha County uses to limit development and maintain rural density and prevent sprawl is density zoning standards. These standards that have been in place since 1988, allow one residential building eligibility (BE) per 40 acres or per lot of record at the time of the law. Low densities of residential houses maintain the visual character of the rural area. It also preserves large tracts of farmable land rather than fragmented segments between residential parcels.

Density zoning restricts the total number of residential houses allowed in the county. The limiting of residential dwellings has caused each BE to be regarded as a highly valuable 'commodity' for land owners. There are still approximately 9,295 building available eligibilities within the unincorporated areas of the county. If the average development rate continues as it has in the last 25 years, then 1,813 new housing units will be built through the year 2035.

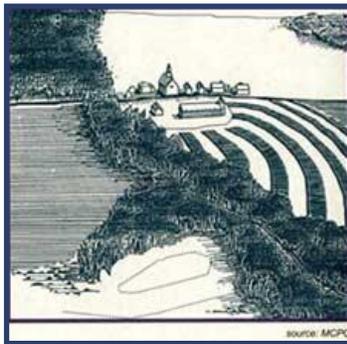


**Figure 4.1** - Density Zoning Diagram: This diagram demonstrates the building eligibility assignment for a fictional county section including lots of record and transfers to create a cluster of building eligibilities.

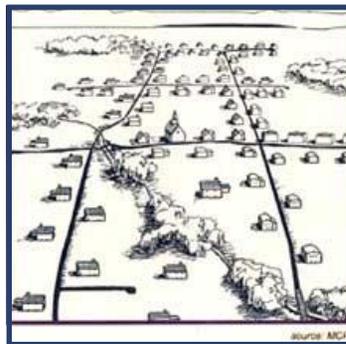
Although density zoning prevents over development considerably well, the placement of one house on every 40 acres can create its own set of problems. Randomly placed residential sites can fragment farmland, cause houses to locate nearer to conflicting land uses such as CAFOs, and require costly extensions from rural services. When residential units are clustered together the houses create a micro-community, and this prevents much of the undesirable effects of spread out development. These housing clusters may not appear “rural” because of close proximity to one another. Despite the aesthetics of housing clusters, the transfer and clustering of residential building eligibilities should be encouraged when development is pending because of the benefits that clustering provides.

Even at a low density, the loosely defined pattern of growth can create unnecessary and costly sprawl. Conversely, further growth in some areas of the county is welcome and desirable. One option for satisfying both of these requirements may be permitting the transfer of development rights (TDR).

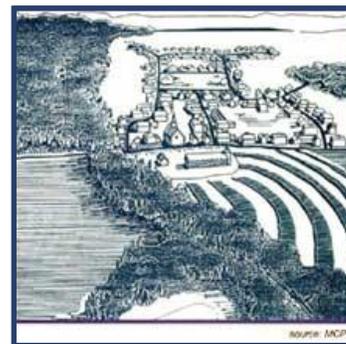
A TDR process would allow a building eligibility to be transferred (sold) from a sending zone (productive farmland, environmentally sensitive land, etc.) to a receiving zone (growth area usually with a certain level of infrastructure). The total number of county wide residential houses would not increase, while agricultural land and character will be preserved in the sending zone. This and other land preserving techniques should be explored for potential feasibility and public support.



Existing Rural Village / Rural Service Center



Conventional Pattern of Development



Development Pattern with TDR

Figure 4.2 - Transfer of Development Rights Examples

Source: Massachusetts Smart Growth / Smart Growth Toolkit

## Historic Preservation - Goals & Actions

### Goal 1. Recognize and promote Minnehaha County's history and historical character.

- Action 1.1 Expand the County's website for educational purposes to include information on historical places and structures.
- Action 1.2 Integrate historic preservation values into county planning, land use, and other policies.
- Action 1.3 Develop cultural and heritage tourism opportunities through various means including driving tours and online experiences.
- Action 1.4 Develop a program to recognize outstanding preservation work of individual historic buildings and places including barns and farm houses.
- Action 1.5 Support and encourage museum activities/ programs and exhibits that preserve, display, analyze, and educate on Minnehaha County's history.

### Goal 2. Make use of a broad range of preservation tools and strategies to permanently protect the county's historic assets.

- Action 2.1 Promote the adaptive reuse of historic structures for public and private uses.
- Action 2.2 Create a historic resource inventory and integrate it into the county's information systems including Geographic Information System (GIS).
- Action 2.3 Support the development, preservation, and interpretation of efforts of local museums and historic organizations.
- Action 2.4 Work with the cemetery board to develop a website to promote the history and genealogy of local cemeteries.



## Natural Character - Goals & Actions

**Goal 1. Recognize and promote the use and preservation of places with natural character throughout the county.**

- Action 1.1 Lead by example, by utilizing natural landscaping, buffers, lake front restorations, and green construction where appropriate on county-owned land and parks.
- Action 1.2 Provide education opportunities about the natural environment and its benefits with signs and brochures at the county parks.
- Action 1.3 Encourage new residences to plant trees and naturalized landscaping as an alternative to extensive areas of turfgrass.

## Farming & Community - Goals & Actions

**Goal 1. Support the country lifestyle including all aspects of agricultural operations.**

- Action 1.1 Preserve the rural aesthetic through minimum landscape standards for new housing starts and subdivisions.
- Action 1.2 Continue to require the Right-to-Farm Notice Covenant for new housing starts and support farm operators with expansion requests where expansion is appropriate.
- Action 1.3 Prevent the development of conflicting neighboring development by limiting commercial and industrial development to highway intersections and residential subdivisions in rural service areas.

## Housing Density - Goals & Actions

### Goal 2. Support rural service areas as an essential and interconnected part of the rural economy and character.

- Action 2.1 Encourage expansion, updates, and repair of special purpose districts such as roads and sewer districts to allow for reasonable growth in rural service centers.
- Action 2.2 Support festivals and events to promote community spirit in rural service centers and towns.
- Action 2.3 Allow and support the orderly growth of rural service centers including growth in commercial, industrial, and residential development.

### Goal 1. Maintain and strengthen low density residential standards in the agriculture district.

- Action 1.1 Continue to maintain accurate records of location and quantity of used and available building eligibilities.
- Action 6.2 Encourage residential eligibilities to be placed on the least productive agriculture ground and cluster eligibility developments when possible.
- Action 6.3 Work with property owners to encourage eligibilities, lots, and houses to be clustered together when developed.
- Action 6.4 Develop a feasibility study and draft for a transfer of development rights program.
- Action 6.5 Utilize tougher residential building restrictions and standards within high agricultural production areas.
- Action 6.6 Encourage the annexation of fringe developments located adjacent to municipal boundaries.