



Little Falls *Township*

2020

Little Falls Township Comprehensive plan.

A Comprehensive Plan states the goals, policies, and standards, which guide a township in its growth and development. The comprehensive plan is the primary planning document for a community and is the plan on which all related ordinances are based, including zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. In Little Falls Township's case, Morrison County provides for current zoning administration. Little Falls Township (LF TWP), relinquished planning and zoning jurisdiction to Morrison County in approximately 1998. However, LF TWP does intend to use this living document to state the Township's Goals, Policies, and Standards for future growth and development.

The comprehensive planning process considers and reviews all aspects of a township's life and sets policies to follow as new development or redevelopment opportunities arise. The plan attempts to identify a township's needs and desires and then establish the basic framework to accomplish its goals.

Little Fall Township (LF TWP) finds its jurisdiction from the Minnesota Constitution. The establishment of township government in Minnesota is based on Minnesota's Constitution. Under Article 12, Section 3 of the Constitution, the Legislature is authorized to "provide by law for the creation, organization, administration, consolidation, division and dissolution of local government units and their functions..." It is through this authority the Legislature has created cities and towns. Towns are public corporations; Minn. Stat. § 365.02. Both cities and towns are considered general purpose local governments because they, unlike special districts created for a specific purpose, have been granted the authority to serve the broad-based needs of their residents. The Minnesota Constitution not only provides for the establishment of local governments, but it also allows the Legislature to provide, by law, their "functions." The Legislature instructs local governments what they may, may not, and must do. Local governments do not have any inherent authority. The Legislature dictates all local government authority; thus, the courts refer to local governments as "creatures of the Legislature."

MISSION STATEMENT

Little Falls Township (LF TWP) is a rural residential community located in Morrison County, Minnesota. It has beautiful hills, lakes, streams and a portion of the Mississippi River. Farms and homes on large acreage are the primary land use in the Township.

Little Falls Township will continue to actively support the rural residential lifestyle to preserve an alternative to city development. The Township promotes and encourages lifestyle and land use practices that protect the natural environment and rural character of the area, and works diligently to ensure that agriculture, scenic views, wildlife and water resources are preserved. This will be accomplished through careful land development and stewardship, as well as continuing to provide a responsive government and cost-efficient rural services. This is accomplished with the participation of and express needs of Township residents.

The Core Missions of Little Falls Township are to Establish and Maintain Roads, Provide for Fire Protection, and provide for the Conduct of Elections.

1. BACKGROUND

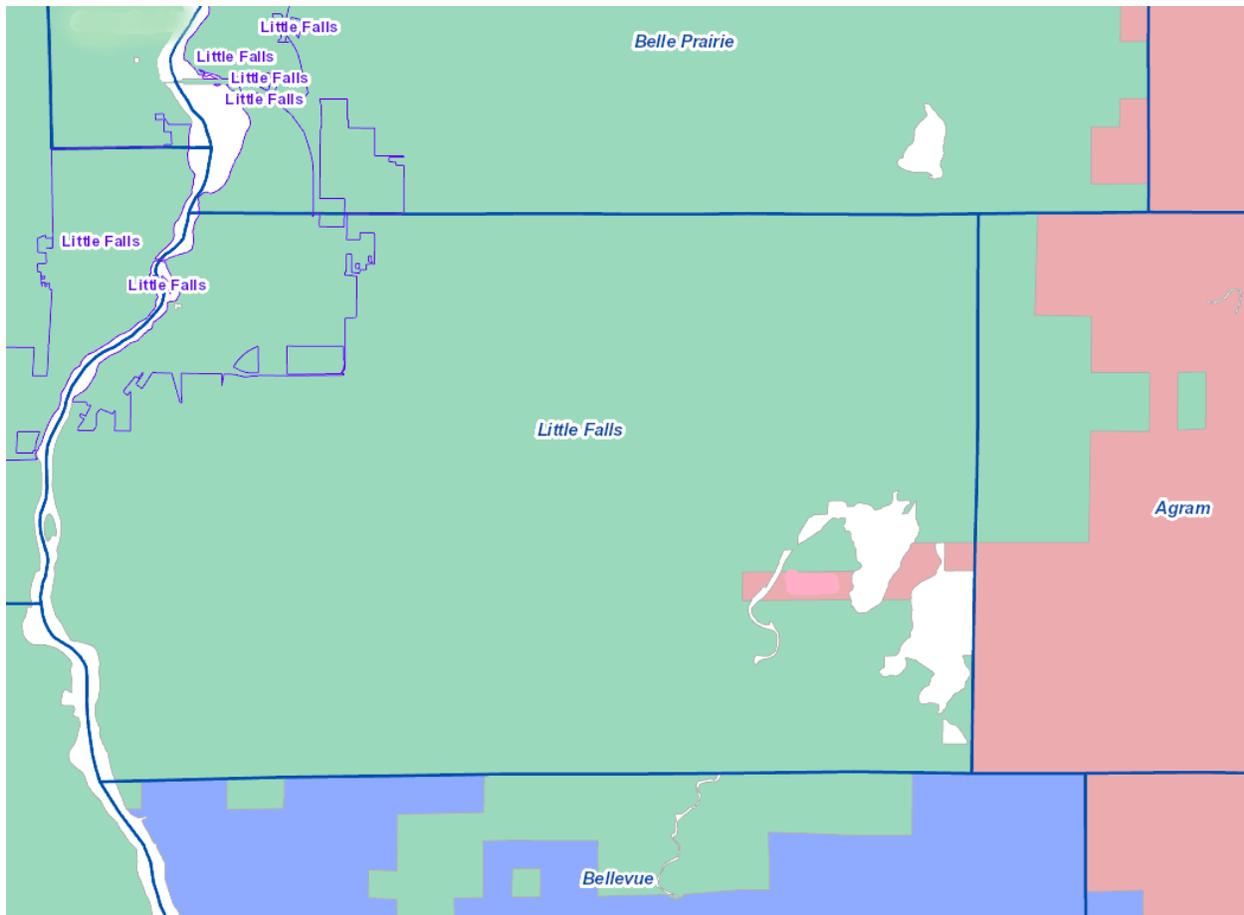
Prologue: At the time of the approval of this Comprehensive plan, 2020 was a year of events not known in this Century. In 2020, the United States and Minnesota was inflicted with the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, which became to be known as the COVID-19 virus. On February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan China. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, 'CO' stands for 'corona,' 'VI' for 'virus,' and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV". By the near end of 2020, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Morrison County has recorded less than ten (10) deaths. The Morrison County website (10 December 2020) reported 268 active cases, 143 hospitalizations and the downward trend continues of those battling COVID-19 (Little Falls zip code at 115 cases). The State Report on the same day reported 3,523 new cases and 89 new deaths linked to the virus.

The COVID-19 virus essentially changed the way we live, work, play, eat, celebrate and educate to name a few. This virus has wreaked havoc in many differing ways touching every aspect of our lives throughout the year, and should be noted within the context of the 2020 LF TWP Comprehensive Plan.

Township Context. **Little Falls Township** is a Township in [Morrison County, Minnesota](#), United States. The population was 1,682 at the 2010 census. The most recent Census was conducted in 2020, however, the results will not be published until 2021. LF TWP will use established estimates when possible within this Comprehensive Plan to provide the best insight towards the current state of the Township.

Geography. According to the [United States Census Bureau](#), the township has a total area of 36.3 square miles (94 km²), of which 34.7 square miles (90 km²) of it is land and 1.6 square miles (4.1 km²) of it (4.54%) is water. It lies to the east of the [Mississippi River](#).

Little Falls Township is bordered by the Mississippi River to the West, City of Little Falls to the northeast, Bell Prairie Township to the north, Agram Township to the east, and Bellevue Township to the south.



The Township will retain its form of government and rural character for the foreseeable future. Little Falls Township (LF TWP) defines this to mean:

- Provide necessary basic rural services in a cost-efficient manner
- Preserve the rural character of the area
- Retain a simple, approachable, unencumbered government
- Maintain the Town Hall as a symbol of grass roots government
- Preserve the integrity of Township's current land, natural resources, amenities, and borders in a responsible manner.

Little Falls Township values and protects its unique place and lifestyles in the larger Morrison County Community. It offers a rural atmosphere that contrasts with and compliments the adjacent urban areas of the City of Little Falls, Minnesota. The Township's Mission Statement describes its long-range goals for the Township.

2. GOVERNANCE GOALS AND POLICIES

- Strengthen the Township as an independent governing body
- Remain simple, non-bureaucratic, unencumbered government
- Be responsive and respectful to Citizens
- Partner with State, County and surrounding governmental jurisdictions to provide services to Residents cooperatively and efficiently
- Preserve and enhance the rural character of the Township

Implement Governance Goals through the following policies:

- Encourage citizen involvement and participation
- Preserve the Town Hall as a symbol of grass roots government
- Collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions on matters of area-wide significance
- Strive for cost-efficiency in providing rural services
- Township planning should originate from local position, not a regional perspective

At the beginning of 2020, Little Falls Township Board embarked on updating its Comprehensive Plan. The Board solicited from Township Residents both people willing to participate as part of a Steering Committee, as well as any wishing to provide any and all input towards the update of the Comprehensive Plan. The Town Board established a Steering Committee and began the task. Soon thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic picked up momentum and put a constant and continuous damper on the update process, making it less viable to hold Citizen "in-person" sessions for input and feedback. Consequently, during 2020, to further progress in soliciting input from Residents, the LF TWP Board, coupled with the assistance of the Steering Committee conducted a survey of twenty (20) questions to solicit input from our Citizens regarding the future vision of Little Falls Township. There were 735 surveys sent out to Residents and property owners. 198 surveys were returned and compiled (27% return rate). Results of the survey are provided throughout the Comprehensive Plan and will be provided as an attachment in 2021.

3. PLANNING DEFINITIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

- Employment
- Future forecast trends

Demographics. As of the [census^{\[1\]}](#) of 2010, there were 1,682 people, 572 households, and 553 Occupied Housing Units comprised of 446 Family Households and 107 Nonfamily Households residing in the Township (MN Compass). The [population density](#) was 48.5 people per square mile (18.1/km²). There were 572 housing units at an average density of 16.5/sq mi (6.1/km²). Current US Census Bureau estimates for Population from 2010-2019 for LF TWP are:

Population Estimate - US Census Bureau Statistics for Little Fall Township									
Census	Census Population Estimate								
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1682	1699	1692	1683	1684	1685	1692	1703	1711	1726

According to the estimates from the Minnesota State Demographic Center (SDC) through 2019 for LF TWP, our Resident population has held relatively steady for the last ten years, but have grown by over 100 people and 89 households in the last 20 years (2000-2019), while the persons per household (PPH) have decreased slightly during the same time:

Population Estimate - US Census Bureau Statistics for Little Fall Township										
Census Population Estimate										
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Population	1682	1679	1668	1653	1655	1649	1636	1654	1658	1667
Households	615	618	615	611	613	613	610	616	619	622
PPH	2.73	2.71	2.70	2.70	2.69	2.68	2.67	2.68	2.67	2.67

Also, there were 533 households, out of which 35.1% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 70.2% were [married couples](#) living together (MN Compass). 10.7% of all households were made up of individuals, and 3.2% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 3.02 and the average family size was 3.23. The racial makeup of the township was 95.6% [White](#), 2.5% of Color, and 1.4% from two or more races (.05% information suppressed).

In the Township the population was approximately spread out, with 0.08% under the age of 24, 30.0% from 25 to 44, 51.3% from 45 to 64, and 17.9% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was approximately 50 years, indicating the increasing age of Township Residents since 2010 (MN Compass).

The median income for a household in the Township was \$61,847 (Morrison County interpolated), and the median burden by income for Residential Homestead Property Tax for the Central Region is 2.4% versus 2.5% for the Statewide Median.

It is anticipated that as the 2020 Census information becomes available, the US Census Bureau information will be updated with current information, as will further estimates. As stated before and differing from the previous Comprehensive Plan, LF TWP does intend to use this living document to be updated as the Township's Goals, Policies, and Standards for future growth and development change, as well as needed with regards to changing Federal, State and County rules and regulations, rules, ordinance and standards change.

4. INTERGOVERNMENTAL INTERACTION

Little Falls Township works with many partner organizations for:

- **Roads.** State of MN (MN DOT), Morrison County Public Works Department, City of Little Falls, Agram, Belle Prairie, and Bellevue Townships
- **Land use.** U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State of Minnesota DNR and PCA, Morrison County Land Services and Morrison SWCD
- **Environmental Protection.** State of MN Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Department of Natural Resources, Morrison County, and Morrison Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

5. LANDS USE

The land use goals will be implemented through the following policies:

- Promote a rural lifestyle through low-density development
- When considering land development requests, promote stewardship of landscapes and rural character
- Promote agricultural endeavors on the most productive land
- Encourage residential development to blend in with the natural landscape to minimize visual impacts
- Review annexation and urban growth with input from Residents of the Township
- Encourage agricultural activities

The Township has been affected by growth in the surrounding area in recent years. Development has resulted in a pressure that affects the rural lifestyle that residents want to maintain. The primary sources of the negative pressure comes from the expansion and annexations conducted by the City of Little Falls, coupled with tertiary pressures created by the expansion of the Little Falls/Morrison County Township Airport, development pressures from residential and commercial growth, and the impact to the Township due to the proximity of State Highways 10 and 27, as well as the railway and gas line systems throughout the Township. Consequently, emphasized by the Township Survey, our residents have expressed that the LFTP Comprehensive Plan should contain strong language voicing our independence as described in our Charter from the Minnesota Constitution (89.7% of respondents).

Further, when asked within the Township Survey to indicate if they agree or disagree with the City of Little Falls plans to incorporate the fringe areas of bordering Townships to increase the tax base of the City, 94.1% of those responding indicated when addressing initiatives towards Annexation, that the LF TWP board should take deliberate measures and actions to preserve the landscape of the township, and be allowed to vote to decide the outcome. The LF TWP Board will take whatever measures possible to prevent unwarranted annexation of LF TWP land.

Conversely, some growth is welcomed within the borders of the Township as is experienced in a growing business area at the south central area of the Township adjacent to State Highway 10, coupled with the historic businesses in and around Highway 27 in the north.

Growths of these businesses are significant building blocks toward the economic base of the Township. These businesses, coupled with many existing commercial and agricultural businesses on the edge of the City limits and throughout the Township have provided a significant market value basis for the Township. LF TWP will maintain support for this economic development via awareness of any negative impact initiatives may have on the livelihood of businesses, such as adverse transportation or zoning planning.

Little Falls Township is the host for both the Little Falls/Morrison County Airport and the Morrison County (MC) Solid Waste Management Facility (SWMF). While considered assets in many respects, these facilities also contribute to the growth pressures experienced in Little Falls Township due to Annexation (or ownership), taking land value out of the Township Market Value, as well as and Road Maintenance throughout.

- From 1969 until approximately 1997, Little Falls Township executed its own planning and zoning. The Township first considered developing a Comprehensive Plan prior to the transfer of its planning and zoning responsibilities to Morrison County, as a means to provide: (1) a guide for planning decisions by the Town Board; (2) a guide for Morrison County for considerations in zoning administration within Little Falls Township; as well as, assisting the Town Board in making decisions in the future on road improvements, capital improvements, land use decisions, and etc. The Plan provides direction for the Township in pursuing its goals.
- City growth pressure threatens rural life style. City growth usually equates to Annexation for LF TWP. LF TWP intends to protect the Township from threats of annexation as much as possible.
- Annexation and threats to Mission Statement. Little Falls Township will continue to actively support the rural residential lifestyle to preserve an alternative to City development.
- Preserve Rural Character. The Township promotes and encourages lifestyle and land use practices that protect the rural character of the area, and works diligently to ensure that agriculture, scenic views, wildlife and water resources are preserved.
- Support a rural lifestyle. Little Falls Township will continue to actively support the rural residential lifestyle to preserve an alternative to city development.
- Protect natural environment. Little Falls Township is the confluence of two (2) watersheds.
- Maintain and encourage agricultural land use.
- Provide a safe and healthy setting for our Township Community.
- Encourage protection of historic and cultural resources of the Township.

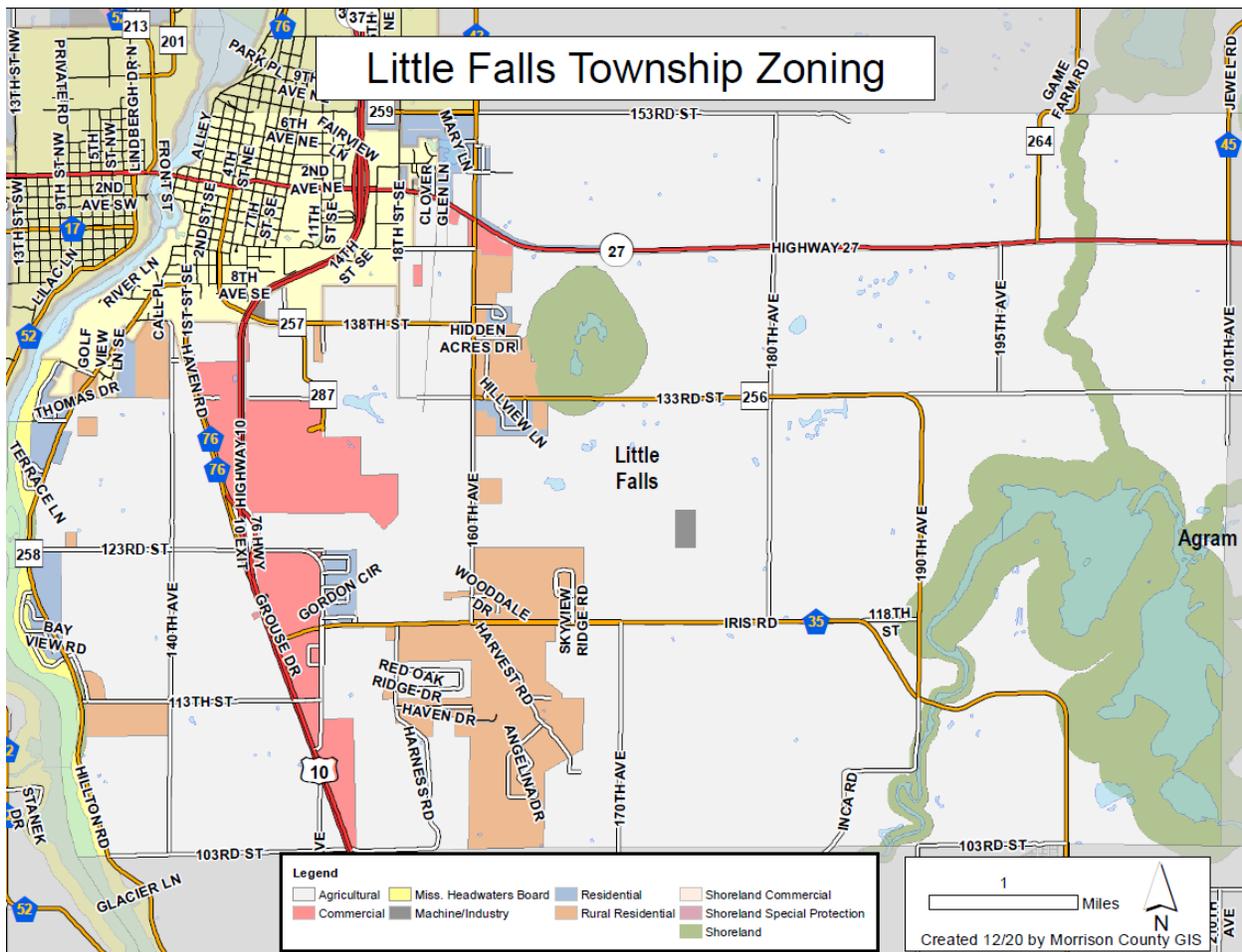
6. LAND USE CATEGORIES

For the purpose of this Comprehensive Plan, outside of the incorporated areas, is identified by the following districts:

- Agriculture (AG). The purpose of this district is to promote and protect areas which have high quality agricultural lands and are essentially rural in nature. Within this district agricultural activities shall be given precedence over other land uses.

- Rural Residential (RR). The purpose of the Rural Residential district is to promote and protect areas which have low density, generally residential development and are essentially rural in character. It is intended to allow traditional rural activities such as agriculture, forestry, home businesses and occupations in manners that do not degrade the rural character of the area.
- Urban Fringe (UF). The purpose of the Urban Fringe District is to provide opportunities for urban type development to occur in the rural areas in close proximity to existing incorporated urban centers in Little Falls Township where urban services are either available or will be available in the future.
- Residential (R). The purpose of the Residential district is to provide areas for moderate density single family residential development generally near or adjacent to incorporated areas or other areas of the county with such levels of development.
- Commercial (C). The purpose of the Commercial district is to promote and protect areas which currently are active commercial areas or meet the comprehensive plan guidelines for future or desired commercial development.
- Manufacturing/Industry (MI). The purpose of the Manufacturing/Industry district is to promote and protect areas which currently are active manufacturing or industrial areas or meet the comprehensive plan guidelines for future or desired manufacturing/industrial development.
- Shoreland (S) The purpose of this district is to identify land uses that are compatible with the protection and preservation of shoreline resources in order to conserve the economic and environmental values of shoreland and sustain water quality.
- Shoreland Commercial
- Shoreland Special Protection (SSP Overlay). The SSP Overlay applies to shoreland areas with limited potential for development and/or recreation due to land suitability and access constraints.
- Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB). The Mississippi Headwaters Management Plan, as adopted and amended from time to time by the Mississippi Headwaters Board, is incorporated herein by reference, and shall be the minimum standard for the MHB zoning district. Where the SR, SC or SSP standards are stricter, those standards shall prevail.

Currently Morrison County (MC) may be planning for stricter agricultural and residential zoning than the Little Falls Township might recommend for land use within Little Falls Township. When residents were queried within the Township Survey, where County planning conflicts with the intent and desired end-state of the Township Comprehensive Plan, 95.4% of our respondents indicated the Township board should take deliberate measures and actions to preserve the substance and intent of the Township Comprehensive Plan in order to protect the planning measures within the Township. The Little Falls Township Board intends to work closely with the MC Land Services Department to influence decisions and recommendations that closely match the goals and objectives of the Township and meet the vision and intent of the Little Falls Township Mission statement.



7. LAND DEVELOPMENT

- Special Care will always be taken in regard to rezoning land in the Township. Residential areas will be platted areas in logical areas and Rural Residential areas will be 5 acre and greater plats, both of which considering proximity to commercial and agricultural areas. Transitional zoning will be the focus for mitigating friction between potential zoning conflicts. Spot zoning will be avoided as much as possible.
- One such question addressed the LF TWP adheres to 2.5 acre development in rural residential zoning and 5+ acres development in areas zoned agriculture. In your opinion should Little Falls Township maintain the current zoning and development status?
- The Township will urge more care in preserving the lifestyle in the Mission Statement

8. EXISTING AND FUTURE GROWTH

- Current growth areas. The map above shows the current zoning and primary land use. Most notable is agriculture areas are weighted on the eastern half of the Township and platted areas are weighted on the western side of the Township. Commercial areas are located in proximity of County Highway 76 and State Highways 10 and 27.
- Potential growth areas. As stated previously, agriculture areas are weighted on the eastern half of the Township and platted areas are weighted on the western side of the Township, with Commercial areas located in proximity of County Highway 76 and State Highways 10 and 27. This would be assessed to remain the general framework for areas of growth as well, and would be the direction the supported by the constituency and the LF TWP Board.
- Concerns for encroachment on mission statement. Little Falls Township Board will vigilant in oversight of, and actively support the rural residential lifestyle in order to preserve an alternative to city development.
- Housing divisions current and future
- Maintain Rural values to growth
- Resident input on subdivisions and future growth
- Growth must promote the rural character

9. TRANSPORTATION

The Little Falls Township Board objectives for the Transportation System are:

- Continuously improve public safety on the Township Transportation System
- Plan for long range maintenance of roads and bridges
- Consider transportation impacts on the mission statement

The network of roads, including those under Township, County and State jurisdiction make up the majority of the transportation system in Little Falls Township. Rail is also part of Little Falls Township's transportation system. In addition, the Township is adjacent to the City of Little Falls/Morrison County Airport. This section provides an overview of the transportation system within Little Falls Township.

Roads are the major mode of transportation within Little Falls Township. The maintenance and improvements on 40.3 miles of Township roads are the major responsibility of the Township. The Township also has one (1) bridge under its jurisdiction, which is located over Rice Creek (1.25 miles east of the junction of 133rd Street and County Road 256).

Two highways, 10 and 27, which serve a regional or intercounty function, pass through Little Falls Township. These highways are principal arterials which serve a major north-south and east-west routes. These highways are located in the north and western parts of the Township. U.S. Highway 10 - U.S. Highway 10 runs in an arc through the western part of the Township. This four-lane divided stretch of Highway 10 includes the Little Falls Bypass, which is a limited access freeway north of CSAH 76, as well as limited east west access into the Township. Highway 27 is located in the northern third of the Township and is a two-

lane highway running directly into the center of the City of Little Falls providing one of the Mississippi River crossings in the Little Falls area. Highway 27 provides direct access into the City Center, County Courthouse, business district, and school campuses. Future and continued access to these highways is crucial to the economic development of Little Falls Township.

10. NATURAL RESOURCES

Little Falls Township is fortunate to have a wide variety of natural resources which include hills, views, the Mississippi River, lakes, ground water wetlands, wildlife and streams. Preserving and retaining these resources for the future is an important core value of the Township residents:

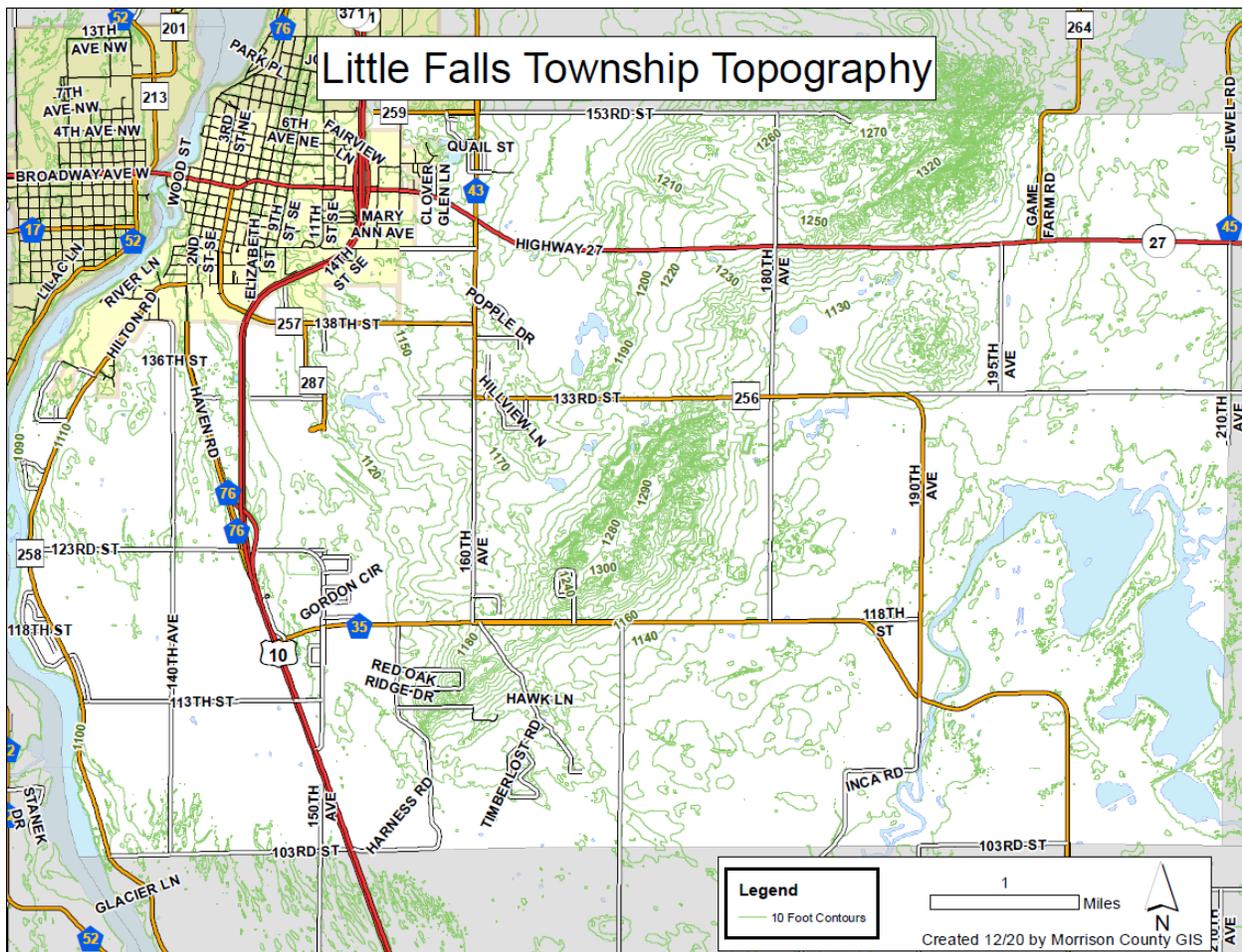
- Protect and preserve the natural environment
- Place a priority on protecting high-quality natural resource areas
- Promote and encourage land stewardship
- Promote sound agricultural practices
- Utilize open space development and preserve natural resources
- Promote soil conservation
- Preserve natural drainage and wet lands
- Promote waste reduction and encourage recycling participation

The natural resources with Little Falls Township enhance the quality of life for its many Residents. These natural resources include rivers and streams, lakes, wetlands, soils, forests and wildlife. The protection of these natural resources is important factor in maintaining the quality of life that has brought people to this area. Information has been gathered from a variety of sources, so that the township can incorporate natural resource protection into its long range planning efforts.

Surface water resources include lakes, rivers, creeks and wetlands. Protected lakes include Rice Lake, Skunk Lake, and Popple Lake, with are classified as Natural Environment Lakes. This is the most restrictive classification with goal of protecting these areas from development. Each of these lakes are also part of wildlife management areas. The major river running through the township is the Mississippi. Other rivers include the Platte River and Skunk River.

Little Falls Township also has a number of wetlands including Mud, Stud and Bullhead Lakes. Wetlands are important because they filter out pollution. In addition, they provide habitat for wildlife and hold storm-water. Wetlands are protected by the Wetlands Conservation Act (WCA), which is administered by the Morrison County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Original vegetation in Little Falls Township included aspen and oak located along the Mississippi River. Much of the aspen-oak land has been lost to agricultural and residential uses.



Little Falls Township is also the home to a portion of Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, 2,000 acres of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, and wetlands with dense stands of wild rice that was established in 1992. It features a unique sand plain wetland/upland complex with a rich mosaic of healthy sedge meadow, shallow lake, oak savanna, prairie, shrub-land and forest habitats. It encompasses a large wetland system at the confluence of four tributaries that feed high quality water to Rice and Skunk Lakes and the Platte River. The Rice-Skunk Lakes complex features one of the largest unaltered sedge meadow wetlands in Minnesota. This complex provides critical habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and Sandhill cranes.

11. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Where the Township came from (TBP)
- Cultural entities that brought the Township into existence (TBP)
- Define historic resources (TBP)
- Define cultural resources (TBP)
- Historic land marks (TBP)
- Historic buildings (TBP)

As stated before, the COVID-19 pandemic picked up momentum and put a constant and continuous damper on the LF TWP Comprehensive Plan update process. Consequently, the LF TWP Board will need to consider further updates in the very near future, potentially already in 2021. There are portions of the Comprehensive Plan that will need to be published as well as a number of areas that can be enhanced both with greater explanation and visual products. This will be extensively true for incorporation of the greater Survey data available.

Invariably, Little Falls Township will continue to actively support rural character as an alternative to city life and strive to meet the vision and intent of our Mission Statement. Little Falls Township will encourage and promote lifestyles and land use practices that bring great value to the rural experience. This will be accomplished through careful land development and stewardship, as well as continuing to provide a responsive government and cost-efficient rural services.

The Little Falls Township Board would like to thank the Steering Committee for their commitment, personal time and investment in the accomplishment of the 2020 update of the Little Falls Township Comprehensive Plan during what will be remembered as a very contentious and taxing year when compared to the lifestyle and environment we've grown to have been accustomed and enjoyed. The 2020 Steering Committee:

Rich Kliber
Kelly Theis

Greg Smith
Gene Young

Randy Tabatt

Your Little Falls Township Board:

Bonnie Bieniek
John Theis

Charles Parins
Joann Sowada

George Sandy III

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. A SWOT analysis is a compilation of an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The primary objective of a SWOT analysis is to help organizations develop a full awareness of all the factors involved in making decisions. Perform a SWOT analysis before you commit to any sort of organizational action, whether you are exploring new initiatives, revamping internal policies, considering opportunities to pivot or altering a plan midway through its execution. Use your SWOT analysis to discover recommendations and strategies, with a focus on leveraging strengths and opportunities to overcome weaknesses and threats.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Position Substantial Commercial Businesses Access to Transportation Systems Proximity to the City of Little Falls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to the City of Little Falls Annexation Legislation Planning and Zoning Jurisdiction No Infrastructure beyond Roads
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial Development Transportation Enhancements Proximity to the City of Little Falls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annexation – Large and Small Scale Transportation Restrictions Rail crossing and Roadway closures Freeway vs 4-Lane Roadway (Hwy 10)