

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</b> <b>Robert A. Graham, City Planner</b></p>
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**SUMMARY**

The mission of the division of Community Development is to guide and lead the preservation and growth of the community in accordance with an established sustainable vision and Comprehensive Plan. This division assists and supports the activities of the City Council through the City Manager's Office, the City's Advisory Planning Commission, Heritage Preservation Commission, Land Between the Lakes Action Team, various citizen subcommittees for specific interest groups, and citizens of the community through the public hearing and forum process.

This division is responsible for City Planning and Community Development activities. The staff supports the City, interested developers, and citizens by providing professional planning assistance, counseling, site plan development and review, interagency and interdepartmental coordination, subdivision and administrative plat development, zoning interpretation, development alternatives, and financial loan and grant counseling. Special emphasis is placed on a coordinated development review process that assists the development community in reaching mutual city and developer objectives.

The staff manages loan programs and grant funds provided through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the City's Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), the Southeast Minnesota Initiative Fund, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public and private entities.

Assistance is provided to the City Manager's office, Planning Commission, Economic Development Agency, Housing Authority, Heritage Preservation Commission, County Planning Office, various citizen groups, and developers in the collection of data and the preparation of plans and strategies, and recommends policies to take advantage of future opportunity and to manage change to generally improve the community.

**STAFF**

The Community Development Division consists of a two person staff. City Planner Bob Graham has a degree and 39 years of experience in professional city planning, economic development, housing administration, and grants management. He is a certified Grants Manager, Certified Economic Development Finance Professional, and a Certified Housing Manager. The City Planner manages the Community Development Division.

Staff Assistant Wendy Flugum has several years of experience in financial and public administrative support services including loan management, scheduling, budgeting, research, and office management. Wendy assists with the management and coordinates various commissions and study groups such as the Planning Commission, Heritage Preservation Commission, Land Between the Lakes Action Team, various citizen committees, prepares documents such as the Capital Improvements Program and promotional materials, prepares and closes loan documents, processes acquisition and relocation payments, monitors wage requirements (Davis –Bacon) oversees document publication, and is the primary public contact for the division.

**DEVELOPMENT CONTACT POINT**

The Community Development Division is the primary contact point for the development community. The division works closely with building inspection, engineering, parks, county offices, utilities and the City Manager to coordinate proposals and lead developers and citizens through the planning process in an efficient and friendly manner.

**DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Development Review Committee is an informal organization of city staff that reviews proposed developments to assist the developer in understanding ordinances and community objectives and in overcoming any problem areas. Twenty-two projects were reviewed in 2005.

## **GENERAL PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Interest in private development from within and outside of the community increased this year. The staff worked with 75 representatives of the development community that resulted in 27 projects. The development community is seeking strong market communities that are progressive, easy to work with, and show growth stability.

## **NEW DEVELOPMENT**

The division reviewed new development proposals that resulted in Starbucks, Love's Travel Center, Accentra Credit Union, Farmers Bank and office building, Jane Adams offices, expansion of Sundance Subdivision, Tiger Hills Subdivision, Fountain Lake Point expansion, Lofts at Lea Center, Trails Service Center and others.

## **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)**

This program plans capital expenditures for five years and is updated each year by the planning staff. The document was prepared by Wendy Flugum and coordinated through department heads and the City Manager.

## **FREEBORN BANK BUILDING (The VAULT)**

The Freeborn Bank Building and Jacobsen Apartments are located at the original 100% corner of downtown Albert Lea and are in the National Historic Commercial District. The staff worked with potential developers during the year and anticipates development during 2006.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The Planner worked with the Director of Public Works, County Engineer and a consultant to collect data and project land use and traffic volumes for the consultant to use in the Bridge Avenue corridor study and for the East Main Street improvements as a result of interchange area development.

## **HOUSING**

The City Planner continued to serve on the Housing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. This committee organized a task group of City, County, HRA, non-profit, and private interests to prepare a community housing survey. Results of the study are expected in early 2006.

In other housing activities, the Lea Center project completed construction in October and provides 37 Low and Moderate Income apartments. In addition, construction was started for a 50-unit housing cooperative, an assisted living project was approved for the Good Samaritan Center, three residential subdivisions were approved for the construction of a total of 200 dwelling units, preliminary action was taken to develop 24 townhomes in Phase II of the Pickrel Park Townhomes and an additional 24 unit assisted living project, and 102 residential units were under construction or completed during the year.

## **GRANTS**

The division continues to be responsible for the management of grants for Community Development programs.

- Funding under the MHFA First Time Homebuyers program was awarded in the amount of \$325,298 and a total of \$391,088 was actually distributed through mortgage companies for lower income first time homebuyers in 2005. Since 1995 this program has yielded \$4,468,101 or an average of \$406,191 to assist first time homebuyer mortgages.
- A grant was administered in the amount of \$600,000.00 from DEED for assistance in the redevelopment of the Lea Center building. The construction was started at the end of December 2004 and completed in October 2005. Administration included extensive Davis-Bacon monitoring. The grant was monitored with no findings and will be closed out early in 2006.
- A grant in the amount of \$250,000.00 was administered for the Albert Lea Select Foods development. This grant will be closed out in early 2006. Construction of Albert Lea Select Foods was started in the fall of 2004 and operations began in July 2005.

- Urgent Need Flood Area Mitigation Grant: Funding was received in November 2005 from DEED and the Department of Natural Resources in the total of \$1,050,000. Agreements were completed with two property owners and the remaining three agreements are expected to be completed early in 2006.
- An application in the amount of \$600,000 was submitted to DEED for Phase II of the Pickerel Park Townhomes. A decision on the application is expected in March 2006.
- An application for a \$15,000 grant was submitted to the Kiwanis International Foundation to assist with the purchase and installation of playground equipment at Frank Hall Park.

### **BLAZING STAR LANDING**

Farmland Foods and its predecessors, Seaboard Farms, Farmstead Foods and Wilson Co. Inc., slaughtered and processed meat products on this site from 1916 until the plant was destroyed by fire in 2001. This 55 acre site was cleared of all buildings and turned over to the City in 2004. The site was the focus of one of the Albert Lea Area Listens groups; a concept for the site was previously prepared by the staff and a second concept was introduced by the Minnesota Design Team. The site was renamed “Blazing Star Landing.” A focus team continues to review options for the site. This team is supported by the planning staff.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REVOLVING FUND**

This fund is used to make loans to local industry to assist with new development and expansion. It is a leverage program intended to fill the financing gap that banks don’t cover, often 20% of a project. The funding for this program comes from the repayment of loans made to industry through State grants to the City. The City is permitted to keep the repayments and is expected to revolve the funds. The staff manages this program including review of applications, preparation of loan documents, closing, monitoring repayments, and reporting to the state on the use of funds. A loan in the amount of \$250,000 was provided for Alliance Benefit Group.

### **JOBZ**

The staff continued to assist the Economic Development Agency and consultant in packaging applications for the JOBZ program. This assistance consisted of coordination of parcel information, maps, and meetings. Two projects were approved in 2005. The intent of this program is to create economic development and jobs. The program produces additional economic activity such as housing, retail, and support services such as truck and travel fueling centers.

### **LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES ACTION TEAM**

This team is an ad hoc citizen organization established to be a catalyst in the implementation of concepts from Albert Lea Area Listens and the Minnesota Design Team. Staff secretary Wendy Flugum continues serving as administrative support to the LBTL Action Team by providing minutes, agendas, communications, and coordination with committee co-chairs and team volunteers. The team and staff met with several agencies to suggest the adoption of the Design Team “principles” and facilitated the display of Design Team drawings at several locations.

### **MINNESOTA DESIGN TEAM RE-VISIT**

In December, an invitation from The Land Between the Lakes Action Team was sent to consultants from the Minnesota Design Team requesting a follow-up visit to Albert Lea. Staff coordinated scheduling details and an itinerary for consultants Michael Schroeder, Michael Fischer, and Jason Aune to visit Albert Lea in early 2006.

### **PLANNING COMMISSION**

The staff assists the Planning Commission in the review of applications for zoning changes, conditional uses, and subdivisions, as well as special studies and long range planning. Specific cases are listed under “Summary of 2005 Data.” This year the Planning Commission worked through changes in the Zoning Ordinance and one request for rezoning that was approved. Significant activities included the East Main Comprehensive Plan and rezoning of a portion of the Government Acres Subdivision.

The Commission took its annual tour in June that included specific stops at MF Technologies, Agilis, and the Government Acres Subdivision. This gives the Commissioners an opportunity to see, as a group, the implementation of the plans they have approved. A second workshop/tour was conducted in December to understand the dynamics in the development of a potential “mega church.”

#### **HISTORIC DISTRICT / HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

The downtown National Historic Commercial District was expanded in 2004 and provides an opportunity for developers to use Historic Tax Credits to assist in financing the rehabilitation of historic properties. In 2005 a Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) was formed and the Commission was certified by the National Historic Trust of the Department of Interior as a Certified Local Government.

The staff provides services to the HPC. A photo survey of current property in the Historic District was prepared and old photos are being researched to be able to demonstrate original design and intent of buildings. The HPC recommended an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to allow signs on retractable awnings in the Historic District and the amendment was adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council. The commission reviewed building codes as they relate to heritage districts, toured the Freeborn Bank Building, and adopted a Regulatory Policy and Development Guidelines. At the end of the year an interpretation of the guidelines was being prepared and plans were underway for a heritage district open house and reception.

#### **OTHER ACTIVITY**

The City Planner continued to chair the Freeborn County Family Services Collaborative Board of Directors for the ninth year. This is a joint-powers organization established to facilitate and be a catalyst for the collaboration of services to families with children. The Planner also serves on the Chamber of Commerce Housing Committee, the State Job Services Advisory Committee, the Citizen Planner’s Education Team of the Minnesota Planning Association, was reelected to the Board of Directors of the State Chapter of the American Planning Association, and is a 24-year member of the Daybreakers Kiwanis Club.

Staff Assistant Wendy Flugum has an active role in the Sesquicentennial planning and serves on the August theme month, Faith Community.

#### **SUMMARY OF 2005 DATA**

- **ADMINISTRATIVE PLATS**

1. RLS No. 11: Lots 7 & 8, Blk 28, Shoreland Heights
2. Lot 3, Blk 2, Community Development Plat No. 4
3. Lot 4, Subd of the SE ¼, Sec 2-T102N-R21W

- **PLANNING COMMISSION**

##### **Workshops & Special Meetings**

1. 2005 Projects Tour
2. Review of Blazing Star Trail System
3. Review of Landscape Ordinance
4. Wal-Mart Wetlands
5. Building Design Standards Workshop
6. Comprehensive Plan & Zoning Workshop
7. Crossroads Church: Tour & Review of Growth Plans

##### **Conditional Use Permits**

1. Love’s Travel Stops
2. St. Theodore’s Church
3. Village Cooperative
4. Pickerel Park Phase II

**Preliminary & Final Plats**

1. Wells Federal Bank Addition
2. Love's Subdivision
3. Village Cooperative
4. Tiger Hills Subdivision
5. Port Authority Plat No. 2
6. ShopKo Addition
7. Summerdale Townhomes 1<sup>st</sup> Subdivision
8. Registered Land Survey No. 12
9. Revision to Port Authority Plat No. 2

**Interstate Development District Reviews**

1. Landscape and Garden Center building on Plaza Street.

**Rezoning**

1. Albert Lea Medical Center Expansion (old high school)

**Ordinances**

1. Zoning Ordinance amended to include Landscape Guidelines
2. Sign Ordinance amended to allow retractable awnings in the CBD

• **STAFF STUDIES / REPORTS & REVIEWS**

1. Landscaping & Design
2. Signs & Billboards
3. Annexation Report
4. Land Utilization

• **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LOANS**

**City Revolving Loan Funds (State/Federal grants)**

<b><u>Ongoing Administration:</u></b>	<b><u>Loan Balance 11/30/05</u></b>	
1. Rink Systems	\$ 32,679.81	
2. Safe Air Repair, Inc.	0.00	(Pd in full 2004)
3. NorthAire Fabrication	0.00	(Pd in full 2004)
4. ABA Properties	0.00	(Pd in full 2004)
5. Alliance Benefit	0.00	(Pd in full 2004)
6. Scott Knutson	\$ 37,758.71	
7. D.J. Development Co.	\$126,040.05	
8. Superior Corrugated	\$ 62,500.00	(Defaulted)
9. ALBDC	\$ 29,000.00	
10. Daisy Blue Naturals LLC	\$ 35,466.39	
11. MetroPlains	\$600,000.00	
12. ABG Properties	\$250,000.00	(New)