



CITY OF NOWTHEN

ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA



2019

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



GUIDING LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT THROUGH 2040

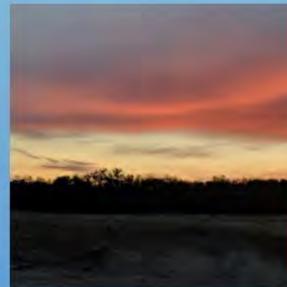


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INTRODUCTION

The City of Nowthen has initiated an update of its Comprehensive Plan in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 473.864, Subd. 2. The 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity to review the community's established development related goals and policies to ensure continued orderly, managed growth through the year 2040. The 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan must also respond to the regional system statements affecting Nowthen outlined as part of the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Regional Development Framework. Although the emphasis is on land use, the Comprehensive Plan is comprised of several interrelated elements addressing the natural environment, land use, transportation and community facilities and infrastructure. To this end, the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan is comprised of the following separate documents:

- 2019 (2040) Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- 2011 Parks and Trails System Plan (currently being updated by Park and Recreation Committee)
- 2009 Water Management Plan (waiting on URRWMO to adopt their Plan)
- 2013 Viking Blvd. Frontage Road Plan (7 quadrants)



To ensure the integration of these various components, the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan identifies current issues to be considered as part of the planning process and establishes broadly defined development related goals and policies of the community in response to continued rural residential growth and business expansion. The specific Land Use Plan chapter of this document addresses not only existing and future land use, but also provides direction as to the interrelated management of natural resources, housing, economic development, transportation and community facilities in anticipation of forecasted growth. The other documents of the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan are derived from and support the policy foundations and plans outlined herein. The documents of the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan are to be used collectively by City officials, residents, business owners and developers as a guide for the continued growth that is to occur in Nowthen to the year 2040 and beyond.

BASIS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The primary function of municipal government is the provision of an orderly, safe and enhanced living and working environment. While this encompasses social, physical and economic opportunities and issues, the City of Nowthen primarily influences the quality of life for its residents through the physical environment. Nowthen has been progressive in planning for the development that has occurred over time. A comprehensive plan was first adopted in 1980 when the community was a rural township, followed by preparation of comprehensive plans in 1993, 1999 and most recently in 2009. Reference to these past planning efforts is critical to understanding the direction and evolution of many of Nowthen's established goals and policies.





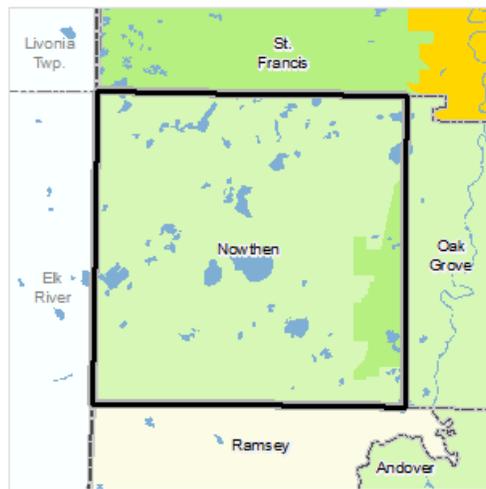
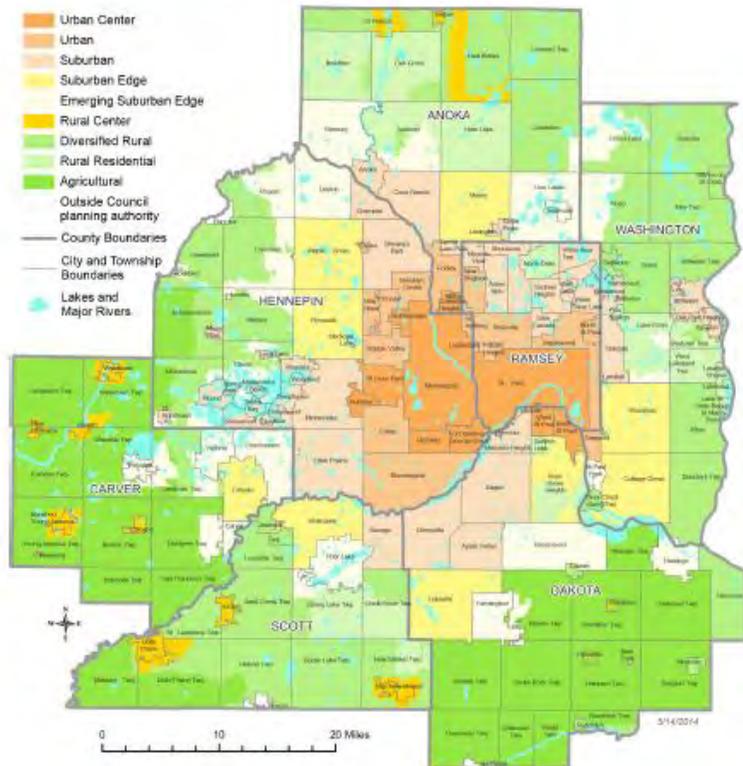
INTRODUCTION

REGIONAL PLANNING DESIGNATION

The Metropolitan Council has adopted the 2040 Regional Development Framework to ensure orderly, economical development of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area in relation to regional infrastructure for transportation, water resources (including waste water collection and treatment) and regional parks and open space. The 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan must address not only local issues and opportunities but is also required by Minnesota Statutes 473.175 to be consistent with benchmarks included as part of the 2040 Regional Development Framework for population, household and employment growth, land use, transportation, housing and natural resources.

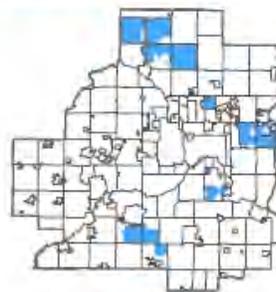
The 2040 Regional Development Framework designates the City of Nowthen as a Rural Residential and Diversified Rural community, however, based on the recent legislation passed (see Historic Regional Issues section which follows) Nowthen has removed the Diversified Rural Designation from its 2040 Land Use Plan. The community had been notified by Metropolitan Council in 2015 that the municipality was removed from the Long-Term Service Area of the Regional Wastewater System.

Community Designations

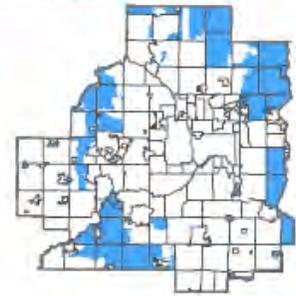


Nowthen, Community Designation Map

Rural Residential



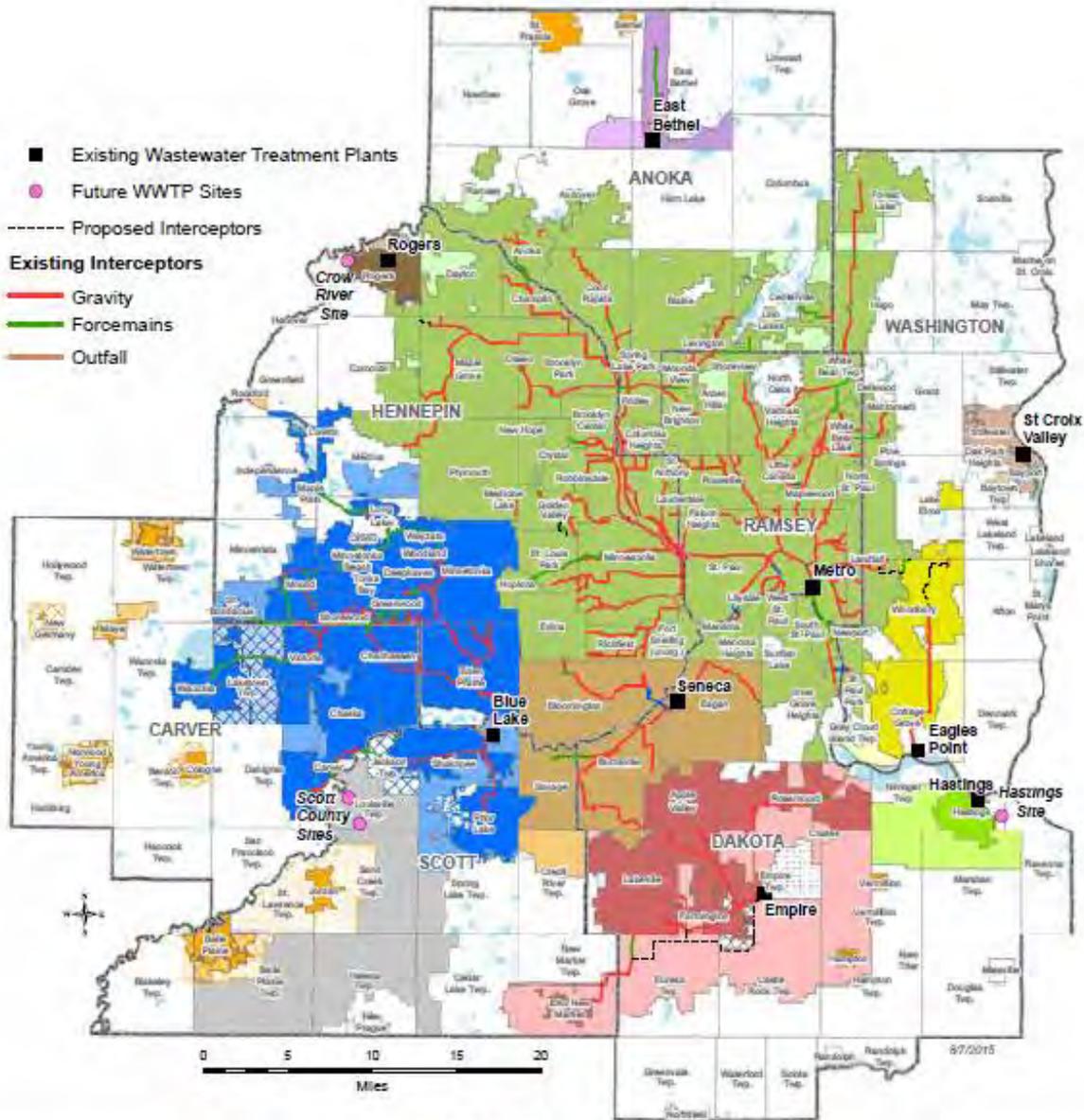
Diversified Rural





INTRODUCTION

LONG-TERM SERVICE AREAS OF THE REGIONAL WASTEWATER SYSTEM



Long-Term Service Areas





PLANNING PROCESS

The City initiated significant work on the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan update in 2017. The intent of the planning process for the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan is to update the existing planning documents as needed to address current community circumstances and comply with the Regional Development Framework. As this effort follows the City's successful petition for incorporation earlier in 2008, there has been much study of the community already completed which will be updated and included herein.

The City has held numerous meetings with residents, property owners, businesses and interested persons to discuss current opportunities and issues in Nowthen. Metropolitan Council staff and officials also made presentations at multiple community meetings since 2017 to provide information regarding the policies of the 2040 Regional Development Framework that would affect the directives of the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan, particularly with regards to land use.

Following these public meetings, the Nowthen Planning Commission and City Council reviewed draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan in preparation for another community meeting on January 22, 2019 to receive input prior to moving to adopt the 2019 Draft Nowthen Comprehensive Plan on January 24, 2019. Additional community-wide open houses will be held over the next six months while surrounding and affected government agencies are reviewing the draft Plan.

On _____, the Nowthen Planning & Zoning Commission held a public hearing to consider adoption of the comprehensive plan update and recommended approval to the City Council. Nowthen received notice of Metropolitan Council approval on _____ and the City Council formally adopted the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan on _____.





HISTORIC REGIONAL ISSUES

In September 2005, the Metropolitan Council issued System Statements to Nowthen (then Burns Township) outlining the regional requirements for the 2009 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan consistent with the 2030 Regional Development Framework. Most significant of these was designation of Nowthen as a Diversified Rural community in anticipation of regional sanitary sewer being potentially available after 2030. This development policy is/was in conflict with the past allowances in Nowthen of residential development densities of one dwelling unit per five gross acres with zoning requirements for minimum net density of one dwelling unit per 2.5 acres having at least one acre of contiguous developable land for building sites.

Fearful of the rural residential character of Nowthen being compromised, the City reluctantly complied with the 2030 Regional Development Framework by setting aside 1,260 acres along Highway 47 and the City's eastern border as a Long-Range Urban Service Area which limited residential development density to one dwelling unit per 10 acres. Under this scenario, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan was adopted and the Diversified Rural Designation remained in effect until after system statements were released by Metropolitan Council in 2015.

On September 16, 2014 the City of Nowthen was notified by the Metropolitan Council that they would be revising their Long-Term Wastewater Service Area Plan and eliminating the urban service area from within the Nowthen City limits. Because of less regional growth than originally anticipated, the interceptors would not be extended to include (provide future service to) Nowthen.

Even though Nowthen's Diversified Rural Designation was a stand-alone island, not adjacent to any other planned urban service areas or land designated as Emerging Suburban Edge, the Metropolitan Council required the land to remain at the one dwelling unit per 10 acres density. Convinced that the land area did not stand out as an area with different land use characteristics than the remainder of Nowthen and without definitive plans from Metropolitan Council for extension of future urban services, Nowthen reached out to local government representatives.

Thereafter, in May of 2018 the Minnesota Legislature passed a special law specifically governing the Nowthen Comprehensive Plan (Laws of Minnesota 2018, Legislative Session 90 (2017-2018), Chapter 214, House File 4425, the Omnibus Bonding Bill, Section 46, Lines 100.6 to 110.16 entitled "Nowthen; Comprehensive Plan"). The special legislation states in relevant part as follows:





Sec. 46. NOWTHEN; COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

Notwithstanding any law, metropolitan system plan, or the 2015 system statement for the City of Nowthen, the Metropolitan Council shall conform its metropolitan development guide, system plans, and the system statement for the City of Nowthen to implement any changes requested by the City of Nowthen relating to the Council's designation of part or all of the City for purposes of the metropolitan development guide, systems plans and statements, and the City's comprehensive plan.

Pursuant to the authority granted by the special legislation, the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan reflects Nowthen's decision to eliminate the Diversified Rural Designation from its 2040 Land Use Plan and the Long-Range Urban Service Area from its zoning district map.

LOCAL ISSUES

The general feedback from the community meetings was positive with regard to continuing the City's past planning efforts. The majority of the concerns identified during the public meetings focused on maintaining the City's rural character and promoting new businesses in the vicinity of existing business nodes by expanding lands available for commercial or industrial development. The current planning effort focused on refinement and expansion of the goals, policies and plans previously adopted.





Community perspectives play a large part in setting a unified vision of the residents and governing body which guide land development through 2040. The Comprehensive Plan contains goals for growth and land development that will guide how and where growth will occur over the next ten years. The document reflects the changes happening in Nowthen as they relate to housing, land use, economic development, transportation, community facilities, and environmental/natural resources. The Comprehensive plan is a method of translating the community's values and unified vision into specific actions.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The natural setting of Nowthen is an important amenity and a significant attraction for the community making protection of these resources a priority:

- **Soils.** Development is limited in Nowthen by the suitability of soils to accommodate building sites, on-site sewage treatment and infrastructure.
- **Wetlands.** Nowthen has extensive wetlands and areas susceptible to wetland formation during years with above normal precipitation. Protection of these areas is required by Federal law and is a priority for their value in stormwater management, flood management, wildlife habitat and rural aesthetics.
- **Shorelands.** There are 12 lakes within Nowthen subject to protection from encroachment by intensive development. As a city, Nowthen is required to adopt local shoreland management ordinances consistent with Minnesota Rules regulating land use in these sensitive areas.
- **Erosion.** Loss of topsoil from wind or water erosion within Nowthen is an issue related to continued agricultural uses as well as rural development within the community.
- **Stormwater Management.** Nowthen utilizes a natural system of drainageways for stormwater treatment and management within the City. These natural systems must be preserved and supplemented by construction of facilities accompanying continued rural development to provide for necessary treatment, storage and rate control consistent with Upper Rum River Watershed District requirements.





- **Land Filling/Excavation.** Nowthen has very few aggregate resources. However, low areas have been proposed to be excavated to mine black dirt and/or to provide fill for development within the site or transported to other projects. This activity creates potential impacts to protected natural resources, compatibility issues with surrounding land uses and unanticipated wear of City streets.
- **Vegetation.** Due to the natural characteristics and agricultural history of Nowthen, there are few significant tree massings within the community. Those that do exist should be preserved as a natural resource amenity that enhances Nowthen’s rural character. The City may wish to consider a tree preservation and planting ordinance.
- **Pollution.** With development comes potential for increased levels of noise, air and light pollution especially related to commercial and industrial uses and increasing traffic on area roadways.
- **Groundwater Contamination.** Development in Nowthen is served entirely by on-site individual sewage treatment systems and private wells. The City Code regulations as well as the City’s land use management program for the maintenance of septic systems aims to prevent groundwater contamination. While there are no known contamination issues, it is critical for the City to continue regular monitoring of these systems to prevent risks to public health and safety.

LAND USE

Nowthen is evolving from an agricultural area to a rural residential community. This on-going pattern of development puts pressures on the natural environment and creates demands for government services and facilities. Nowthen must give increased attention to planning for a continuation of community growth to identify and address potential issues related to this change.

- **Rural Character.** Preservation of Nowthen’s established rural character is a primary environmental, land use and social-economic issue for the community. The natural resources, land use activities and development pattern that make Nowthen a desirable community must receive special consideration as part of the planning process to maintain this quality of life.





- **Residential Development.** Within the context of preserving rural character there are options available to the City to consider in allowing various types and densities of continued rural residential development. The City's established policy is allowance of residential development at densities of one dwelling unit per five acres with minimum requirements for net buildable land imposed as part of the Zoning Ordinance. Rural development is considered to be all parcels one (1) acre and greater, however the ability to accommodate primary and secondary septic sites and meet the City's lot buildability requirements typically necessitates larger lots.



The City will continue to evaluate various options for defining and controlling residential growth. The City has considered options in the past for allowing flexible residential development to provide for preservation of permanent open space and an alternative land use pattern. In 2018, an annexation petition of +/-500 acres in the southeast portion of the City resulted in a settlement allowing two (2) acre lot sizes. This area creates a transition between the 2.5 acre lots in Oak Grove, the one acre lots within the Rogers Lake area and balance of large lot development further north and west. The transition area is contained and separated from the remainder of Nowthen by physical features such as Highway 47, CSAH 22 (and the adjacent commercial land uses) as well as Ford Brook.





- **Commercial Development.** Nowthen has developed basic retail and service businesses within the City which will continue to expand as the population within the City and within surrounding communities grows. The City seeks to continue development of commercial uses in high visibility locations, in accordance with the land use studies completed in 2007 identifying commercial centers at Viking Boulevard (CSAH 22) / Nowthen Boulevard (CSAH 5) and Viking Boulevard (CSAH 22) / St. Francis Boulevard (TH 47). Issues related to commercial development include the range of allowed uses and performance standards applicable to building and site design. Development of a City Center or Central Business District will be the focus over the next ten years, to give Nowthen an identity, enhance streetscape elements and improve pedestrian access.



Burns Auto





COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

- **Industrial Development.** Industrial uses in Nowthen are limited given the lack of public utilities, although the City provides a niche for smaller, start-up businesses. The City is looking to expand the industrial park, which has reached capacity in recent years. Areas for limited manufacturing uses were identified as part of a 2007 land use study at Viking Boulevard (CSAH 22) / Nowthen Boulevard (CSAH 5) and Viking Boulevard (CSAH 22) / St. Francis Boulevard (TH 47). Issues related to industrial development include the need



for additional development sites, larger lots and the establishment of frontage roads to ensure long-term, convenient access to/from collector and arterial corridors.





- **Extended Home Occupations.** Business uses located on residential properties five acres or greater within rural residential areas are allowed within Nowthen through approval of an Interim Use Permit. Home extended occupations have potential to create compatibility issues with surrounding properties, especially those involving outdoor storage and/or other industrial type businesses with regular on-site activity. While home extended occupations are attractive to residents for cost and convenience reasons, they create unfair competition with planned locations zoned for industrial uses and benefit from residential versus industrial tax rates. The issuance of Interim Use Permits serves to establish specific parameters/conditions for operation and state the terms for termination due to non-compliance or sale of the property.



TRANSPORTATION

The transportation system in Nowthen is comprised primarily of City streets and Anoka County roads. Without significant local commercial and industrial development, most residents must travel outside the City for employment connecting the community to regional transportation issues.

- **Classification.** County Roads and Trunk Highway 47 are the backbone of the City's collector and arterial street system and means of access within the community. Within this existing system, there is a need to provide for connections between individual developments to facilitate traffic movement and ensure access for public safety. Establishment of a functional classification system will define the necessary components of the future City street system related to function and design in advance of development.





- **Design and Construction Standards.** The City should review its Subdivision Ordinance to provide for design and construction standards for new City streets consistent with the functional classifications system. The City has also initiated work on a street maintenance plan to identify maintenance and capacity issues within the existing street system allowing for a long-term improvement plan to be prepared.
- **Street Connections and Elimination of Dead-Ends.** This document contains a map showing development constraints within the City, including dead-end streets and flag lots or private access easements. To some extent, the prolific number of wetlands and poor soils make street construction difficult or impossible. However, past Burns Township practice of allowing lot splits via a 33-foot access, without full-width lot frontage on public streets, has made right-of-way extensions difficult, if not impossible, for future street access and subdivisions. The City has recently updated its subdivision regulations to prohibit dead-end streets and flag lots except in very limited situations where through street access is not an option.





- **Assessment Policy.** A component of the street maintenance plan is a review of City assessment policy for the costs of planned improvements. The goal of the policy is to establish an equitable means of funding planned improvements to benefiting properties. Nowthen needs to reevaluate the assessment policy in relation to what recent procedures have been and should be. The City should also continue to require that new development pay all costs related to construction of new streets or upgrades of existing streets needed to serve these projects.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Cities provide facilities and services for the purpose of protecting public health and safety and enhancing the quality of life within the community. It is through these facilities and services that City government has its most direct contact with constituents and most impact on the character of the community. Community facilities and services in Nowthen have been limited in the past due to the township form of government and rural character of the community. However, as development continues into the future, Nowthen will experience growing demand for expanded facilities and levels of service.

- **Parks and Trails.** The City adopted a Parks and Trails System Plan in 2004, updated it in 2011 and is currently updating the Plan again to address local recreation needs as Nowthen grows. This Plan will continue to be implemented as part of the 2019 Nowthen Comprehensive Plan. Updated maps contained herein replace those in the 2011 Parks and Trails System Plan.



Nowthen Memorial Park Ballfields





Nature trail in
Morton Farm Preserve

Twin Lakes Park



- Government Buildings.** The City will need to monitor the adequacy of current office and meeting facilities, storage and other spatial needs as development within the community continues over time and plan for expansion of existing buildings or construction of new facilities as part of a capital improvement plan.



Cold storage building and Council
Chambers/Community Building (above)

City Hall (left)





- **Public Safety.** The City Council will need to continually evaluate the level of police and fire protection as development occurs within the City. This issue is especially significant as it relates to commercial and industrial businesses, which may have unique demands or issues for public safety services.



Fire Hall

- **Administration.** Continued development creates demands for additional office and maintenance personnel to carry out the functions of City government. The primary issue related to adding staff is the costs for salaries and benefits. To the extent possible, the City should adopt policies and mechanisms to pass through the costs for services to benefiting users. A fundamental "users pay" policy will be critical in the future for maintaining cost effective government in Nowthen.
- **Development Regulations.** Nowthen must review its zoning and subdivision ordinances regularly to ensure that they adequately regulate land uses and land development consistent with community goals. As development occurs and the range of land uses within the community expands, the Zoning Ordinance must be updated to provide necessary definitions, administrative procedures, current performance standards and distinct zoning districts consistent with existing land uses and the land use plan.
- **Communication.** On-going communication by City officials with residents, property owners, businesses, developers and other interested agencies or stakeholders is critical for effective governance of the City. Providing opportunities for input as part of the City Council's decision-making processes directly or through the various advisory committees is a positive way to gain support for City initiatives and actions.

