

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The context for this Comprehensive Plan is based on the reality that East Bethel is on the brink of significant change. Presented with a tremendous opportunity to proactively address new growth, the community and its leaders are committed to shaping the future of the community in a way that compliments the existing important features and characteristics the City has to offer, yet provide for a strong economic base and amenities residents and business owners desire.

A future City Center development, implementation of municipal water and sewer services, and other major growth opportunities have prompted residents and leaders within the community to develop a long-term “vision” for what the City of East Bethel should look like into the future, and how the community can best allow and manage development without jeopardizing the core values and important features the City has to offer. Examples of these features include:

- Significant parks and open spaces with a vast portion of the community consisting of natural wetlands.
- Rural setting with large residential lots.
- Undeveloped land attractive to new development opportunities.
- Strong community interest in helping to shape growth and create a sense of place and identity within the community.

The challenge becomes clear that in the face of new development opportunities and potential implementation of major infrastructure, the community must determine how it can best manage change while maintaining and preserving these and other unique features. The revised Comprehensive Plan lays out a number of strategies designed to assist the community in making decisions based on clear, thoughtful, and consistent policies and guidelines.

DEFINING A COMMUNITY

The City of East Bethel is currently classified as a “Diversified Rural” and “Rural Center” geographic planning area under the Metropolitan Council’s Thrive MSP 2040 plan. As mentioned above, the community is

pursuing a number of opportunities including the implementation of municipal sewer and water services, a City Center development, and other growth strategies that indicate East Bethel is transitioning into a “Rural Center.”

Diversified Rural communities, as defined by the Metropolitan Council, are considered to provide for the widest variety of farm and non-farm land uses of all community classifications within the seven-county metropolitan area. (These uses typically include a mixture of limited large-lot residential and clustered housing, with facilities and services, including agricultural, that require or are best suited to a rural location.) More specifically, Diversified Rural communities are expected to accommodate growth in a manner that does not exceed one unit per ten acres, and that does not require the provision of regional urban services. Further discussion and examples of Diversified Rural growth strategies are provided in subsequent and respective chapters.

Rural Centers are first considered “Rural Centers” that provide basic services to consumer and community activities. Typically, they are small towns established many years ago to serve the needs of farm areas. Rural Centers are located throughout the Rural Area and those interested in growing are considered “Rural Centers.” Growth strategies for Rural Centers include providing for the preservation of low densities in rural areas while accommodating orderly expansion (for example, maintaining one unit per ten acres in Diversified Rural Areas). Additional strategies call for improvements to regional infrastructure that would support growth at densities of three to five-plus units per acre, as well as acquiring and operating wastewater plants/services if doing so is cost effective and efficient. Further discussion that supports East Bethel transitioning into a Rural Center is provided in subsequent areas of this updated Comprehensive Plan.

HISTORY

The City of East Bethel was originally home to the Chippewa Nation. Settlement of this area by Europeans occurred first in the 1850s following the purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States in 1837. Settlers originated primarily from Sweden, Norway, England, Ireland, and New Brunswick. Most of the land was prairie and ready for cultivation and some farms were started as a result of land grants to Civil War veterans. Many early

settlers established homesteads near Cedar Creek; lumber for homes came from nearby virgin white cedar trees in Cedar Creek Swamp.

Bethel Township was organized in 1858 – the same year Minnesota became a state. The Township included all of what is now Linwood Township until 1871 when Linwood Township was organized. According to local history, the name of the City was inspired by the Bible and was suggested by early settler James Cooper. The Bethel Post Office was first established in 1863 but was later moved to a site along the newly constructed Great Northern Railroad. This site became part of the City of Bethel which incorporated prior to East Bethel's incorporation.

The unusually large size of East Bethel (nearly 48 square miles) originated with lobbying efforts of Minnesota settlers who lived just to the north of what was the original extent of Anoka County. These settlers, who usually conducted business in the County, lobbied the State legislature to include an additional two rows of sections in the County. Bethel Township was granted 12 additional sections, Linwood Township was shifted 2 miles to the north, and Columbus Township was given the southern 2 tiers of sections of Linwood Township. The balance of the additional land to the west became St. Francis Township.

Early roads in the Township followed native trails or the paths of animals. The problem of crossing swamps had been solved by laying trees and logs crossways and covering them with dirt. Such roads were called corduroys. Desiring an easier way of marketing their produce, residents of Bethel met with then Senator J.T. Elwell to plan a better and more direct route to Minneapolis. Working with townships to the south, Central Avenue was created in 1900-01, which later became State Highway 65. This road was graded in 1923-24, blacktopped in 1931, widened in 1951, paved in 1952, and became a divided highway in 1969-70.

Some of the most interesting history of East Bethel involves gangster activity. The Ma Barker gang lived in a house near Cedar Creek on Highway 65 for some time. They posed as painters wearing paint-splattered overalls and came and went at regular business hours. They left Bethel Township just prior to the FBI discovering their hideout. (They were later caught in Iowa.) There is also a cabin located on the south shore of Coon Lake where some claim John Dillinger hid out one winter.

The process of becoming a village took nearly two years. On May 8, 1957, residents presented a petition to incorporate the Township into East Bethel Village. The Anoka County Board of Commissioners approved the petition and a Township election resulted in a vote of 232 in favor and 161 in opposition to incorporation. However, four residents took the issue to court which resulted in the incorporation being declared invalid. The court found that the Township was neither suburban in character nor likely to be so in the near future (which were criteria for granting village status). Shortly after the beginning of the 1956 State Legislature, Senators Ralph Johnson and John Nordin, who represented the Township, introduced a bill recognizing the incorporation of the village. Only one legislator voted in opposition and the bill became law with the signature of Governor Freeman. East Bethel became a legal municipality with a unanimous vote for incorporation by the Town Council on April 27, 1959. The population at that time was 1,286.

Much of the information contained in this section of the Comprehensive Plan is taken from "*The History of Bethel Township and East Bethel Village That Became the City of East Bethel, From 1848 to 1974*," by Louise Lyon. This narrative (available at City Hall) includes detailed and local accounts of numerous township and personal histories.

POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD GROWTH

General population growth, in addition to increases in mobility, has made the City an attractive and affordable area for new rural homesteads. Table II-1 indicates population changes, household growth, and changes in the average size of households between 1970 and estimates through the year 2004.

East Bethel first experienced large growth in new residents in the 1960s and a growth increase of 156 percent during the 1970s. Anoka County's growth during the 1960s leveled off in the mid 20 percent range by 1980 and remained there until 2000. Similar growth in the number of households is also evident. Overall the City has grown from just over 700 households in 1970 to an estimated 4,155 in 2016, an increase of 488 percent in 46 years.

The number of persons per household in East Bethel has dropped from 3.66 in 1970 to an estimated 2.84 in 2016. Anoka County has seen a more dramatic reduction in persons per household from 3.90 in 1970 to an estimated 2.72 in 2016. These tendencies indicate that although steady growth

in population continues, the density of residents per household is consistent with the national trend of smaller family size.

TABLE 1-1. POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS

<i>Population</i>	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2016
<i>East Bethel</i>	2,586	6,626	8,050	10,941	11,626	11,788
<i>% Increase</i>		156%	21%	36%	6%	1%
<i>Anoka Co.</i>	154,712	195,998	243,641	298,084	330,844	348,652
<i>% Increase</i>		27%	24%	22%	11%	5%

<i>Households</i>	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2016
<i>East Bethel</i>	706	1,955	2,542	3,607	4,060	4,155
<i>% Increase</i>		177%	30%	42%	13%	2%
<i>Anoka Co.</i>	39,688	60,716	82,437	106,428	121,227	128,135
<i>% Increase</i>		53%	36%	29%	14%	6%

<i>Persons per Household</i>	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2016
<i>East Bethel</i>	3.66	3.39	3.17	3.03	2.86	2.84
<i>Anoka Co.</i>	3.90	3.23	2.96	2.80	2.73	2.72

Source: U.S. Census; Metropolitan Council

TABLE 1-2. AGE OF POPULATION

	East Bethel	Percentage	Anoka County	Percentage
<i>Under 5 years</i>	774	6.7	21,540	6.4
<i>5 to 14 years</i>	1,383	11.9	47,538	14.0
<i>15 to 19 years</i>	771	6.6	22,635	6.7
<i>20 to 29 years</i>	1,274	11.0	41,064	12.1
<i>30 to 39 years</i>	1,617	13.9	45,364	13.4
<i>40 to 49 years</i>	1,678	14.4	50,782	15.0
<i>50 to 59 years</i>	2,459	21.2	52,391	15.5
<i>60 to 74 years</i>	1,405	12.1	42,711	12.6
<i>75 and older</i>	264	2.3	14,739	4.4

Source: Metropolitan Council – Community Housing Profiles

DEMOGRAPHICS

As indicated in Table II-2, the age breakdown of East Bethel’s residents is only slightly different than Anoka County. The greater presence of families is identified by more than double the number of children (ages 0 to 19) than

elderly (age 60 and higher) in East Bethel. The remaining percentages in the age groups are similar between the City and County statistics.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Employment in the City of East Bethel reflects the rural nature and small population base of the community. Table II-3 provides a summary of employment in the City and the County. The employment base is fairly diverse with construction the largest employment sector in the City. Total construction jobs increased from 23 percent in 1997 to about 26 percent in 2016. Wholesale and retail trade job percentages have decreased indicating a greater diversification of employment in the community.

TABLE 1-3. EMPLOYMENT

	East Bethel	Percent	Anoka Co.	Percent
<i>Administrative and Waste Services</i>	43	3.1	5,700	4.9
<i>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting</i>	24	1.7	465	0.4
<i>All Other Industries</i>	298	21.6	14,438	12.3
<i>Construction</i>	354	25.7	8,155	7.0
<i>Education Services</i>	219	15.9	10,193	8.7
<i>Finance and Insurance</i>	22	1.6	2,428	2.1
<i>Health Care and Social Assistance</i>	59	4.3	17,004	14.5
<i>Manufacturing</i>	85	6.2	22,959	19.6
<i>Other Services, Ex. Public Admin</i>	58	4.2	4,826	4.1
<i>Professional and Technical Services</i>	13	0.9	3,522	3.0
<i>Public Administration</i>	57	4.1	4,950	4.2
<i>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</i>	0	0.0	1,376	1.2
<i>Retail Trade</i>	80	5.8	15,616	13.3
<i>Wholesale Trade</i>	65	4.7	5,612	4.8
Total	1,377	100.0	117,244	100.0

Source: U.S. Census; Metropolitan Council

GROWTH PROJECTIONS

The Metropolitan Council’s Thrive MSP 2040 plan, adopted in May 2014 forecasts growth in population, housing, and employment for East Bethel as identified in Table 1-4. The forecasts are used by the Council to plan its regional systems. These long-range forecasts take into consideration the

impacts of the City becoming a rural growth center with sewer development, as well as significant new proposed developments such as a city center. These estimates will need to be revisited as major projects are completed and development levels increase. As an example, the projected growth of a city center at full build-out could likely result in an additional 1,400 housing units and an increase in population of 2,950 persons.

TABLES 1-4

Forecast Year	Population	Households	Employment
2010	11,626	4,060	1,123
2020	12,400	4,700	1,700
2030	15,400	6,000	1,950
2040	18,400	7,400	2,200

Source: Metropolitan Council and City of East Bethel – assumes implementation of municipal services.

The projections in Table 1-4 were calculated by the Metropolitan Council in cooperation with the City of East Bethel. The total population is expected to reach more than 18,000 by the year 2040.

Household and population calculations correlate based on persons per household: 2010 calculations utilized an average of 2.8 persons per household. In 2020 the number changed to 2.7, and in 2030 it was 2.6.

The City of East Bethel believes these population estimates may be conservative given the potential growth and development opportunities municipal services will provide to the extent that at full build-out sometime beyond the year 2050, the total population of East Bethel could reach more than 40,000.

2040 PLAN VISION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On January 12, 2017, the East Bethel held a public visioning session in two parts at the Senior Center. The afternoon session was focused towards the Chamber of Commerce and the evening session was focused towards the general public, but both sessions were open to the public and anyone could attend and participate. A number of interactive exercises were conducted and the results of these exercises were discussed with the City Council and the Planning Commission. From those discussions, the following Vision Statements were established to guide the development of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

East Bethel 2040 Comprehensive Plan Guiding Vision Statements	
1	East Bethel is uniquely distinguished by its vast and diverse natural spaces.
2	East Bethel is committed to the preservation of its open spaces, wildlife, and rural character. The community considers these qualities to be an integral part of the character of East Bethel.
3	East Bethel prioritizes improving access to civic, retail and medical services that serve the basic needs of the community.
4	East Bethel supports increasing development along its Highway 65 corridor, focusing on key locations and intersections that are feasible for development.

5	East Bethel values citizen engagement and is committed to fostering a culture of involvement.
6	East Bethel must be an attractive and viable community for all stages of an individual's life.
7	East Bethel is in favor of residential development that will support commercial development.