

**City of Paynesville
Comprehensive Plan**

Introduction

Community Setting

Paynesville is a city of 2,267 people located in Stearns County in Central Minnesota. Paynesville Township surrounds the community and consists of an additional 1,400 people. As a tight-knit community, the Paynesville area, for the purpose of this comprehensive plan consists of the City and Township. The city lies roughly 30 miles west of St. Cloud and 30 miles northeast of Willmar. Highways 4, 23 and 55 link the area to the rest of the state and access to Interstate 94 is 25 miles from the city limits. The city currently covers approximately 1.51 square miles. Paynesville contains numerous natural features such as wetlands, the North Fork of the Crow River that meanders through the community and many area lakes including Lake Koronis located south of the city and within Paynesville Township. Other area lakes include Rice and Long Lakes.

Community History

Paynesville's history was provided by the Paynesville Historical Society and taken from a publication titled "Paynesville-Year 125 Where the Heart Is", published by the Paynesville Historical Society.

"As we came out of the woods on the hills of the trail southwest from Richmond one day in the fall of 1857, and looked across the valley of the Crow River, where Paynesville has since been built, it seemed to me that I had never seen a finer sight, nor a better looking country. We were not used to such country back in Pennsylvania. I then thought it the best on earth, and after living here for fifty years, I am inclined to think that I was just about right that day back in 1857." These are the words of one of the earliest settlers in Paynesville, A.L. Elliot, who lived here from 1857 until his death in 1913.

From the time of Hennepin and the other early French explorers who visited Minnesota in 1680 until the middle of the nineteenth century this region was known principally as a fruitful area for traders who dealt with Native Americans for fur trade.

In the early 1800's, hundreds of settlers began to move into Minnesota. The biggest land rush into this area came during the 1850's when people with an eye for the rich soil awaiting them poured into the country from eastern states and northern Europe. The first known attempt to settle in Paynesville came in 1856 when a party of settlers under the leadership of William B. Reed came out of St. Cloud. This group, originally from Hastings, Minnesota, located a town site in the center of the township and was called "Onawa". However, the settlers left the area and failed to file a claim under the Town Site Act.

The second attempt to locate a town site in what is now Paynesville came later the same year (1856). Making the attempt was John McCormack and M.I. Bullard. They located in much the same area as the original company. Again, this attempt failed.

Finally, in 1857 a successful attempt to establish a town site was completed by the Paynesville Townsite Company officered by James Phillips as President, C.S Synder as Vice President, M.I. Bullard as Treasurer and Edwin E. Payne as Secretary and Agent.

Paynesville was the name given to the town in honor of Edwin E. Payne, Secretary and Agent for the company. The plat of Paynesville bears the date “April, 1857” and was acknowledged by Mr. Phillips as President and Mr. Payne as Secretary on August 19, 1857.

In 1857, a big influx of settlers began moving into the area, establishing homes and farmsteads. Many names recorded are still in use in Paynesville today as their descendants still live in the town they settled 125 years ago.

FIGURE 1 – COMMUNITY BASE MAP

PLANNING PROCESS

The community planning process was divided into three primary phases:

1. Inventory and Analysis,
2. Goals and Strategies Development and Plan Preparation,
3. Plan Refinement, and Adoption.

The city secured the services of a professional consulting firm to facilitate the planning process. The city also appointed a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of area citizens, City officials and Township officials representing many interests and perspectives in the community. The PAC was charged with providing input on the background research and other work products prepared by the consultants. The group was particularly focused on developing a set of goals and policies for inclusion in the plan, future land use designations and reviewing the plan document. A listing of the PAC membership is included in the *Acknowledgements*.



Public involvement was an important component of the Paynesville Comprehensive Plan process. The planning process began in May of 2002 with the Project Kick-off Session. At this meeting community members and the PAC participated and brought important opinions to the table. At the kick-off meeting Paynesville citizens had the opportunity to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the community, define the issues the city should address in the plan, and discuss community-wide goals. The strengths and opportunities were used to form the major focus points of the plan.

STRENGTHS / OPPORTUNITIES

Although the listed strengths and opportunities cover a broad spectrum of issues, the issues that elicited the most agreement can be grouped into four main themes.

Small Town Community Spirit. Many residents feel that the sense of community in Paynesville and the Paynesville area has propelled the community to success. The community is defined in many ways by its heritage, residents, the faith community, volunteerism, and most important the Paynesville area has a “home town feel”.

Economy / Location. The community is blessed with many economic and geographic advantages that will help to ensure a positive future for Paynesville, not the least of which was the location of the community in relationship to the St. Cloud and Willmar metro areas.

Three major highway systems (Highways 4, 23 and 55) link the community to surround economic centers. This provides the community with access to a larger workforce, efficient transportation of goods and services and marketing opportunities. The Paynesville community also has strong business leaders and the ability to grow a local business base.

Parks & Open Spaces / Visual Appeal. Paynesville is located in the midst of prairie lakes and farm fields. Much of the beauty of the area is represented by the amount of open space, parks and natural beauty. Koronis, Long and Rice Lakes provide an opportunity for recreational opportunities and enjoyable backdrop to the Paynesville area. In addition, the North Fork of the Crow River meanders through the community. Other amenities such as recreational trails, hunting, fishing and golf have proven to be major assets for the community.

The city will need to address maximizing the utilization of the existing open space and designing appropriate additional parks and recreational facilities for the future.

Community Services. The city of Paynesville is a progressive community with significant investments in public infrastructure. The city has a strong government administration and staff committed to the betterment of the community. The educational and health care systems in the community ranked the highest among the community's strengths.

The community needs to not only recognize its assets, but also its shortcomings. The weaknesses and threats to the future health of the community were noted at the Kick-off Session.

WEAKNESSES / THREATS

Although the listed weaknesses and threats also cover a broad spectrum, the issues that elicited consensus can be grouped into four main themes.

Economic Opportunity. The residents recognize the need to provide a variety of economic opportunities. There is interdependence between a healthy downtown and a vibrant retail community. The residents also desire more opportunity and choices when it comes to specific retail that is available in Paynesville. The participants also felt that the community lacked professional job positions at a higher pay scale. Specifically, the community stressed the need to market the community to the health care industry. Other issues such as taxes, limited phone service and loss of area income from resident "snowbirds" have contributed to economic development struggles.

Transportation. The concerns focused on the development of the community as it relates to the Highway 23 reconstruction. Planning efforts are currently underway to determine the possible relocation of Highway 23. Over the next year, the City and Township will be an active participant in the planning process.

The obstacle that faces the area is to determine future land use and growth patterns for the community with this unknown.

Growth Management. The community is concerned that growth is not managed in an appropriate manner. Participants recognize that the costs of growth are significant both to the developer and to the community. The city must also continue to enhance, for the better, a relationship with Paynesville Township and environmental preservation as the area experiences additional growth. The Comprehensive Plan will address these issues as it examines future growth boundaries, annexation and land use.

Social/Community Needs. The community needs to better address the concerns of an aging population. The nation as a whole will experience a tremendous population boom within the 65 to 75 age category in the next decade. Paynesville will not be immune to this issue. Additional housing and health care needs will be magnified and the community needs to consider additional services. Affordable housing is another issue for the community, as construction costs continue to increase and local wages remain low for the area. Declining enrollment and financial constraints for the educational system will continue to be ongoing issues for the community.

In addition to the kick-off meeting, the Planning Advisory Committee conducted four (4) Focus Topic meetings where residents from the city and the township, City Council members, Planning Commission members and EDA members learned about community issues, gave input into resolving the issues, and discussed goals and strategies to address the issues in the Comprehensive Plan. A concerted effort was made to make the public meetings accessible to a broad spectrum of citizens and the meetings were scheduled during the early evening to make them more accessible to the greatest number of people.



Once the Focus Topic meetings were complete, a draft comprehensive plan was prepared and reviewed by the Planning Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission.

COMMUNITY-WIDE VISION STATEMENTS

The vision for the city of Paynesville is a compilation of ideas expressed by its citizens during public visioning sessions held in 2002 during the Comprehensive Planning Process. The vision statement is a broad position statement used as a guide for the development of more specific goals and policies.

Paynesville will be...

A Place that is inviting and has a “Home Town Feel”.

Paynesville must be a place that promotes community pride and preserves the quality of life for all parts of the city, a place to raise a family within strong neighborhoods. Paynesville shall be a place to call home for all ages that is safe, secure and where its residents live, work, play, serve and worship.

A Place that is Growing and Sustainable

Paynesville shall promote the growth of the community in an orderly and sustainable fashion by providing for new housing and commercial and industrial growth. Growth areas shall be well planned to ensure city services will meet the needs of the community and to ensure cooperation between the City and Paynesville Township.

A Place with Economic Opportunity

Paynesville’s location along Highways 4, 23 and 55 have made the city a major employment center in the county. The community must continue to strive to diversify its economic base via enhanced technology, training and education. The community will create planned commercial and industrial growth along growth corridors and the airport, while maintaining a connection to the downtown district and Highway 23 through proactive planning to ensure a continued retail base in the community.

A Place with Strong Community Facilities through Cooperation.

Paynesville must continue to support the educational opportunities within the community by promoting growth of the K-12 Paynesville School District to ensure all young people are well educated. Paynesville must ensure that the health care system (hospital, clinics, dental and assisted living) continues to have a strong and viable presence in the community. Paynesville shall continue to have a strong local government that is responsive to the community residents and will work cooperatively with Paynesville Township.

A Place of Recreational Opportunities

The city will strive to create a community with abundant trails, walking paths, parks and activities for people of all ages. The city will strive to utilize existing facilities and create connections to new areas that provide recreational opportunities locally and regionally.

Where Development is Compatible with the Environment

Most residents see growth and change as continuing through the next decades. Residents also recognize the need to ensure that “growth for the sake of growth” does not become the theme for the community. The community must remain mindful of the need to balance growth and environmental preservation.