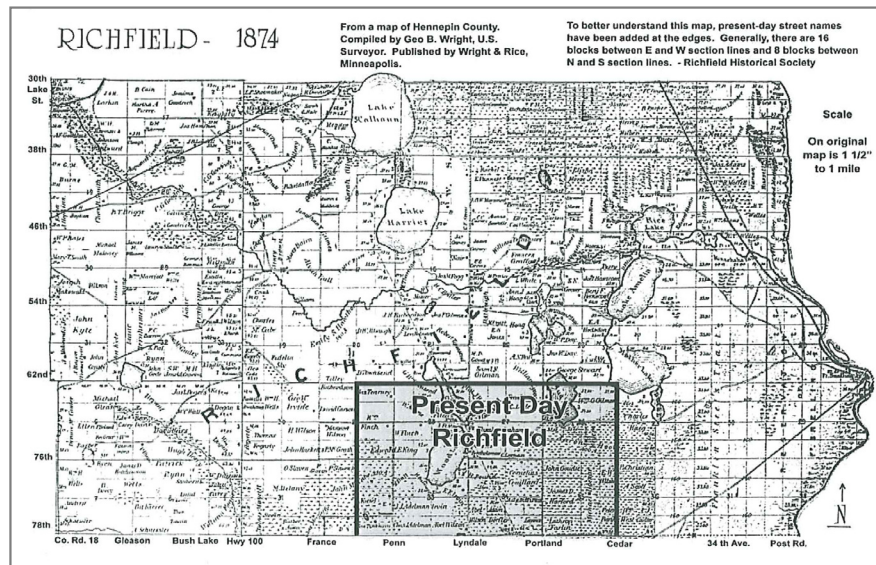


# 1 Introduction

## History

Richfield's origins date back to 1858. Named after the rich farmland that underlies the houses, streets, offices, parks and schools of today, Richfield officially became a City in 1908 by adopting a president/trustee form of government. The original boundaries took in much of what is currently downtown Minneapolis extending west to Lake Minnetonka and south and east to the

Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. A series of annexations by Minneapolis eventually reduced Richfield to its present size. By 1927, the City was seeing significant new growth when the New Ford Town area was developed, the beginning of a trend of suburbanization that would last more than 50 years.



Primary pre-World War II settlement occurred along Lyndale Avenue and 60th Street. Richfield's premier business was Bachman's, located along Lyndale Avenue. The Academy of the Holy Angels was established in the area in 1930 to offer expanded educational opportunities.

Richfield experienced a population boom following World War II. As a first-ring Minneapolis suburb, Richfield quickly became a popular home for returning war veterans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Statistics show that from 1940 to 1960, Richfield's population grew from under 10,000 to over 42,000. The City's population topped out at almost 50,000 in 1970. From 1970 to the present, Richfield's population has declined, primarily due to decreases in average household size, expansion of the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport and expansion of the regional highway network.

Today, Richfield has a population of almost 35,000 living within seven square miles of neighborhoods, parks and shops. In order to remain vital, the community is focusing on commercial and residential redevelopment, taking advantage of its location near major freeways.

Despite being largely fully developed, Richfield retains its small town flavor. Attractive residential neighborhoods, a strong local school system and amenities like Wood Lake Nature Center continue to make Richfield an attractive place to live.

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## Comprehensive Planning

In Minnesota, authority for land use planning and regulation is vested primarily in local governments. Comprehensive Plans are one of the primary tools used by local governments to regulate the use of land. The Metropolitan Land Planning Act requires local governments in the Twin Cities to prepare and adopt Comprehensive Plans. In accordance with the Act, communities are required to update their plans every 10 years.

Richfield has a history of Comprehensive Planning that pre-dates the legislative requirement. In 1970, the first "real" Comprehensive Plan was prepared using funds from the HUD 701 program. That plan established goals for orderly growth by providing a wide range of land uses. It also encouraged diversification of travel modes geared to the needs of all residents. Specific policies were developed that focused on maintaining Richfield's residential quality and character through housing rehabilitation, further defining boundaries of non-residential uses, and planting street trees throughout neighborhoods.

In 1982, Richfield updated its Comprehensive Plan in response to the Planning Act. That plan continued many of the former plan's goals and focused on the rehabilitation of substandard housing. The 1982 plan also contained new land use goals to encourage land use compatibility.

This Comprehensive Plan is an update to the plan completed and adopted in 1997. The 1997 plan continued many of the goals and directives of the previous planning efforts but contained more detail on land use types and infrastructure. It defined a series of sub-areas, many of which became the sites of redevelopment projects completed between 1995 and 2005.

## Required Elements

The Metropolitan Land Planning Act requires that municipal Comprehensive Plans include the following sections:

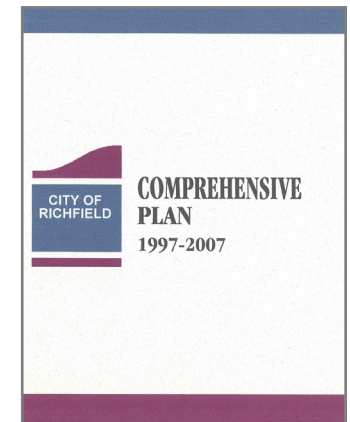
- Background Section
  - Basis of the plan – vision, objectives and forecasts
- Land Use Section
  - How land is to be allocated – includes land use and housing plan
- Public Facilities Section
  - Transportation, water resources and parks
- Implementation Section
  - Local controls to ensure the viability of the elements of the plan

## Organization of the 2008 Richfield Comprehensive Plan

In many ways, the 2008 Richfield Comprehensive Plan builds on prior planning efforts. It includes directives for maintaining strong residential neighborhoods, it emphasizes the importance of parks and open space and it seeks to maintain quality infrastructure. It also contains new ideas and directions intended to position Richfield for the next 10 to 20 years.

The 2008 Richfield Comprehensive Plan is written with a focus on meeting local community needs within the regional framework established by the Metropolitan Council. Accordingly, this plan contains all of the required plan elements but presents them in a format and framework that meets Richfield's needs. The plan is organized as follows:

1. “Introduction” sets the stage for the plan by providing general background information and an overview of the planning process. Up front, it also identifies some of the challenges likely to be faced by Richfield in the next 10 to 20 years.
2. “Demographic, Social and Economic Trends” provides a statistical overview of Richfield's people and households. Past trends are used to help frame future issues.
3. “Community Direction” summarizes the community's thoughts about the future of Richfield that were tabulated



1997 Richfield Comprehensive Plan

from responses at a variety of public meetings held during the planning process.

4. “Land Use Planning and Community Facilities” describes Richfield’s desired land use and development patterns and states goals and policies related to land use.
5. “Housing” contains Richfield’s housing plan including goals, policies and initiatives designed to strengthen the existing supply of housing and create new housing opportunities in specified redevelopment nodes and corridors.
6. “Transportation” describes the network of roads, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities that provide local and regional mobility as well as goals and policies related to transportation.
7. “Parks” summarizes the key elements of the more detailed Richfield Park and Trail Plan and contains goals and policies to help guide future park and recreation investments.
8. “Public and Private Utilities” describes plans and policies for Richfield’s water supply system. Also, this chapter identifies the drainage patterns of the community and establishes policies that protect the function of the regional drainage system and describes plans and policies for Richfield’s sanitary sewer system.
9. “Community Character” addresses the physical form and aesthetics of the community.
10. “Implementation” identifies how the plan will be implemented to achieve the identified goals and policies by addressing both public and private actions.

In addition to the primary plan chapters, the appendix section contains additional information on transportation and infrastructure.

## Community Challenges - The Next 10 to 20 Years

Past Comprehensive Plans have addressed challenges facing the City. The 1997 plan stated, “The forces presently affecting Richfield have changed considerably since the last plan update in 1982. Richfield is no longer a growing suburb at the edge of the metropolitan area. It is now caught between the decline and increasing densities of the inner-city and the flight of those inner-city residents to the outer-ring suburbs.

The regional economy is shifting and is no longer focused on downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul. Major subareas have appeared along I-494 and within western and southern suburbs. Despite the broadening of economic concentration, traffic and transportation continue to be a major concern in the metropolitan area’s population expands.”

Over the next 20+ years, the general challenge facing the City of Richfield is remaining competitive with other communities as a desirable place to live, work and play. The Metropolitan Council has designated Richfield as a “developed community.” Unlike other communities in the

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metropolitan area, Richfield will not see the development of new housing and businesses on former agricultural and vacant tracts of land. That opportunity has not been present in Richfield for almost 30 years.

In seeking to maintain a competitive edge, Richfield will need to continue its decade long course of strategic investments that promote redevelopment in selected areas while broadly promoting policies and programs that improve neighborhoods and business areas.

The characteristics that define Richfield today present challenges that can be interpreted as either assets or liabilities. The chapters in this Comprehensive Plan seek to ensure that Richfield's characteristics continue to be assets and that policies, plans and programs can further enhance the attractiveness of the City. Some of Richfield's defining characteristics include:

*Convenient Transportation:* Richfield is surrounded by freeways. I-35W, I-494, Cedar Avenue and Crosstown 62 make it easy to get to and from Richfield. Richfield residents have great access to jobs in downtown Minneapolis and along the I-494 corridor. This same network of freeways that promotes convenient mobility also poses a threat to the City. The noise and pollution associated with hundreds of thousands of vehicles on these routes daily impacts the quality of life and limits the location of residential uses. Congestion on major roadways can easily spill over onto local routes. People have a propensity to leave the freeway

network during peak times and use local routes to access their destinations. Both the transportation and land use sections of this plan address transportation in and around Richfield.

*Homogenous Housing Stock:* Much of Richfield's housing was built about the same time and in the same configuration. Most of the housing is single-story with attached or detached one and two-car garages. Richfield's current housing stock lacks some of the amenities that buyers look for today. Larger numbers of bedrooms and bathrooms, walk-in closets, and higher ceilings are not characteristics of the housing in most Richfield neighborhoods.

Richfield's single-family housing supply also has a number of things in its favor. Affordability is one. The fact that Richfield's housing tends to be generally more affordable allows young families to purchase homes and over time, expand and improve them to meet their needs. In order for that to occur, people need to want to stay in Richfield rather than moving out to more contemporary housing in other communities. By emphasizing housing maintenance that promotes strong neighborhoods, encouraging strong schools, protecting neighborhoods from unwanted traffic and maintaining a high quality park system, the City of Richfield can establish an environment that helps promote investment and the retention of residents.

Being largely one story structures, housing in Richfield is also conducive to seniors. Smaller homes with one-

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story living spaces allow seniors to age in place, as long as the necessary network of support services is provided. Richfield's housing issues are discussed in detail in the housing chapter of the plan.

*Convenient Shopping:* Richfield residents have unparalleled access to shopping. The Mall of America and Southdale are two of the region's retail giants. While both of these facilities offer a broad mix of retail and commercial services, they have a constraining impact on future retail development in Richfield. The market can only support a certain amount of retail development. Richfield's land use plan is sensitive to this fact and addresses the issue by providing three tiers of commercial use categories that range from regional uses along high-volume roadway corridors to neighborhood retail areas that are intended to serve the needs of local residents.

*Transit Service:* Richfield is well served by the existing bus system; in fact, 66th Street is one of the Metropolitan Transit Commission's busiest routes. In the future, I-494 is likely to be a bus rapid transit route (BRT) which will further enhance bus mobility. Because of its location; however, Richfield is not likely to ever be served by light rail. Bus will remain as the primary mode of transit. Future transit is addressed in the transportation chapter of the plan.

*Changing Demographics:* Like many inner ring suburban communities, Richfield saw a significant shift in its

population from 1990 to 2000, trends that the next census is likely to show as continuing. Richfield's Black, Hispanic/Latino and Asian populations are growing along with the proportions of these populations that are non-English speaking. This shift in both population and culture is likely to impact everything from housing choices to recreation participation.