



## 2013 Community Development Department Annual Report

### I. Annual Summary

The Lake Elmo Community Development Department is submitting its annual report for consideration by the City Council and Planning Commission. 2013 marked a year of transition for the City as much of the workload for the Planning Commission and Planning Department focused on preparing for future growth and development. As a result of these planning efforts, the City saw its first major preliminary plat in seven years in the Savona Subdivision, which also represents the City's first sewered residential development. These planning efforts have also led to the project currently underway to extend sanitary sewer service into the Village, a project that has been in the works for over a decade.

The most important accomplishment for the Planning Commission in 2013 has been the completion of two major updates to the Lake Elmo Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the City Council was able to implement the I-94 Corridor Land Use Plan and Housing Chapter updates upon approval of these plan amendments by the Metropolitan Council. Early in the year, the Planning Commission also recommended an amendment concerning the Village Planning Area that was also adopted by the City Council. The Village Plan is expected to be approved by the Metropolitan Council in December, which will signify the end of a very long process to create a unified vision for the Village.

While working on these major updates to the Comprehensive Plan, the City also approved an amendment to the waste water chapter of the plan that brought this section into conformance with the land use chapter revisions. In addition, the City undertook a joint project with the City of Oakdale to bring sanitary sewer service to a small number of lots on the western shore of Lake Olson. The waste water plan was further revised to identify a future sewer service area in this portion of the community.

In order to implement the newly updated Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission has been working on significant amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. Rather than tackling this work as one large project, the Commission has been reviewing and recommending code amendments on a section by section basis. This has allowed the Commission to focus on smaller segments of the Code while keeping existing regulations in place. In 2013, the City Council adopted 14 such amendments ranging in size and scope from a driveway ordinance to a new Village mixed use district. The Zoning Map was also updated in 2013 to incorporate the transitional zoning that will facilitate the rezoning of parcels guided for future sewered development. The 2014 work plan will include the additional amendments that must be drafted to complete the Zoning Ordinance update project.

In preparing for future growth and development, one of the critical projects that was undertaken during the year was the creation of a design standards and guidelines manual. The approved manual replaces the City's outdated zoning design standards. With assistance from the City's Communications Coordinator, the Planning Department has produced a document that should provide potential developers with a clear and concise description of the City's vision for new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family housing projects. Additionally, the City partnered with Damon Farber Associates to prepare a community Theming report that will help guide the appearance of public right-of-way and other public lands. This document is being shared with all future developers in the City to further clarify the City's expectations concerning the expected character of new developments.

Throughout the year, the Community Development Department has spent a large amount of time preparing for new development, both in terms of meeting with potential developers to discuss the City's review and application process and working on various applications. The City received three subdivision sketch plans in 2013, and based on recent discussions with potential developers, Staff expects that there will be a minimum of five more such reviews over the course of the next several months. Furthermore, based on the reviews conducted in 2013, there will be at least five major residential projects under construction in 2014 with the potential for new commercial development on the horizon as well.

Towards the end of 2013, the Planning Commission was able to direct some of its attention to the City's rural planning areas, which have not been subject to any significant discussion since before the 2005 Comprehensive Plan update. These areas are seen as critical to helping maintain the open space character of the City well into the future, especially with the changes that will be occurring with the new sewer development areas.

Consistent with the theme of change in 2013, the City successfully negotiated an amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding between the City and the Metropolitan Council. With the release of the preliminary 2040 forecast numbers from the Met Council (with numbers much lower than the 2030 forecast amounts), the City also expects to continue working with the Met Council at a quantitative easing of the City's REC unit mandates. Based on conversations and meetings with the Met Council that were conducted in 2013, it appears that the elimination of the MOU in its entirety is not out of the realm of possibility for 2014.

On a staffing level, the Community Development Department added a Planning Program Assistant in 2013 who has provided much needed clerical and administrative support to the entire department. The Building Official continues to make substantial progress at improving the City's Building Inspection department by implementing a consistent application and review process for builders and by developing a series of work books for specific permits. The City's code enforcement activities saw a significant increase in the number of cases that were not only investigated, but also resolved by the Building Official.

## II. Annual Review: Major Projects

Major accomplishments for the Community Development Department in 2013 include the following projects:

**Comprehensive Plan Updates.** The City completed work on several significant updates to the Comprehensive Plan in 2013, including:

- *I-94 Land Use Plan and Housing Chapter.* These elements of the plan were adopted in late 2012 by the City Council, but authorized for implementation by the Met Council in early 2013. The final adoption for these land use plan amendments have allowed several projects within the I-94 Corridor planning area to begin moving forward.
- *Village Planning Area.* The Village Area amendment to the Land Use Chapter was approved by the City Council in the first half of 2013, but due to airport zoning issues and updates needed to other portions of the Comprehensive Plan, the final review has only recently been completed by the Met Council. This plan is expected to be approved on December 11, 2013 and can then be implemented by the City Council.
- *Waste Water Chapter.* The City was required to update the Waste Water section of the Comprehensive Plan before the Met Council was able to complete its review of the Village Land Use Plan. An updated plan was approved by the City and forwarded to the Met Council to consider during its review of the Village Plan.
- *Olson Lake Trail Sewer Area Amendment.* The City created a new sewer service area comprised of approximately 15 properties along the western shoreline of Lake Olson that will be served via a joint project with the City of Oakdale. The project is being viewed as a pilot project for potential future cooperation between Oakdale and Lake Elmo to address sewer issues in the Tri-Lakes area.

**Metropolitan Council – MOU.** The City successfully negotiated an amendment to the 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Lake Elmo and Met Council that implemented the previous flexibility that was granted to account for the housing downturn that began around 2007. The update MOU now reflects the City's population and household growth forecasts that were adopted as part of the I-94 Land Use Plan update. The City received preliminary 2040 forecast numbers from the Met Council, and has drafted a response to the forecast that will guide future conversations on this subject.

**Design Standards and Guidelines Manual.** The City Council adopted a Design Guidelines and Standards Manual that will be used to guide new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family housing developments throughout the community. This manual was completed after a lengthy public review process and involved the coordination and cooperation of several City departments.

**Land Use Applications.** Through the support of the Planning Commission, the Community Development Department worked on 40 land use applications/projects in 2013, including but not limited to amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, conditional use permits, zoning text amendments, and variances. The most common application processed were zoning text amendments, most of which were directly related to the larger Zoning Ordinance Update project. The City reviewed the first major subdivision to be submitted in seven years.

**Building Permits.** The City of Lake Elmo processed 306 building permits, not including plumbing and mechanical permits, in 2013. The number of permits issued in the past year is very consistent with amount of building activity over the past 5 years. In terms of new single family homes, the City has issued permits for 32 new homes in 2013 to date, which represents the highest number in almost 10 years . With the addition of 32 single family homes and demolition of four homes, the City experienced a net increase of 28 dwelling units.

**Staffing.** Over the course of the year, the City of Lake Elmo added one new position to the Community Development Department. The new employee is Joan Ziertman, filling the role of Planning Program Assistant. With this full-time addition to Staff, the City is better positioned to handle the expected growth in the coming years.

**Airport Zoning.** Planning Staff conducted a series of meeting with the Metropolitan Airport Commission, MnDOT Aeronautics Division, Metropolitan Council, Washington County, and impacted land owners to begin the process of drafting an airport zoning ordinance. This process led to some minor modifications to the Village Comprehensive Plan amendment in order to account for the existing runway safety zones. The Planning Department has established a goal to have an airport zoning ordinance adopted in 2014.

**Railroad Crossing Study.** The Planning Department conducted a meeting with the Union Pacific Railroad to begin the process of created a new railroad crossing for the Village Parkway roadway.

**Comprehensive Planning Workgroups.** With the completion of major updates to the Comprehensive Plan in 2013, the I-94 and Village Planning Work Groups stopped meeting in 2013.

**Lake Elmo Theming Manual.** Upon completion of a public input process led by Damon Farber Associates (and attended by members of the Village Planning Work Group and Planning Commission), the City Council adopted a Theming Manual for Lake Elmo. Whereas design guidelines are intended for the private realm, the Theming project is geared towards the public spaces of the community, such as roads and public gathering spaces. The final document is comprised of a 'Kit of Parts' that includes various color palettes, site amenities, and other designs that are reflective of the Lake Elmo theme.

**Form Based Codes.** The Planning Commission discussed the benefits and drawbacks of adopting a form-based code and directed Staff to begin work on such a code amendment. Staff met with two planning firms to consider the process and steps necessary to implement a form-based code.

**Permit Works Implementation.** The City installed and began using a new software program called Permit Works to track building permits. The new system allows permit to be issued through the electronic system and can be accessed by all employees within the department. This software has helped create a substantial improvement in Staff efficiency by improving access to and reporting of building permit information.

**Savona EAW.** The Lennar residential subdivision (Savona) was large enough that it required a mandatory Environmental Assessment Worksheet. Although the document was prepared by the developer's consultants, City Staff was involved in the processing and review of the document.

**Village Sewer Policy.** Through the efforts of the City Administrator, the City Council adopted a sewer policy for existing septic systems within the Village Planning area. This policy, which was reviewed and accepted by Washington County, provides flexibility for property owners whose treatment systems are unable to meet current county septic requirements. This relief will be important for ensuring a smooth transition to public sanitary sewer when it is made available to Village property owners.

**Rural Area Discussion.** The Planning Commission began discussing the future of the City's rural development areas. The adoption of the 2040 regional development forecast by the Met Council is seen as a crucial next step in determining the appropriate level of development within these areas. The rural area discussion will be a major component of the Commission's 2014 plan of work.

**Park Planning Review.** Planning Staff reviewed several subdivision sketch plans with the Park Commission in order to solicit their feedback concerning new parks and trails in the community.

**Trail Planning.** The Planning Department assisted the Park Commission Trail Subcommittee in its work to identify a preferred trail alignment that will connect portions of Lake Elmo to the Stillwater Area High School and to the trail system in adjacent communities.

**Buberl/Nass Detachment.** Staff continued to provide support in the City's efforts to appeal the decision to detach property in the northeast portion of the City to Stillwater Township. Do date, the City has been unsuccessful in overturning this decision.

**Subdivision Files and Records.** With the recent acquisition of a large format plotter and scanner, Staff has been able to create electronic scans of all subdivisions within the City. This work has resulted in a substantial time savings for all City Staff that can now access every plat in the City from their desks. The scanning of older address and project files is expected to continue into 2014.

**Policy Success Loops.** The Community Development Department has created a policy document that has been used to improve (and measure the success of) the City's application completeness reviews. Staff will be looking to make similar improvements to other aspects of the land use review and approval process.

**Creation of Escrow Fee System.** The City Council adopted a new fee schedule in 2013 that requires the submission of an escrow deposit for larger land use applications. Staff has started tracking its time against certain projects in 2013, and this time is now being reimbursed by developers.

**Gateway Corridor Technical Committee.** Staff continues to participate as part of the Gateway Corridor Technical Advisory Committee. The committee has begun working on the required environmental analysis and review of alternatives for this process.

**Annual State Planning Conference.** The Community Development Director and City Planner attended the State Planning Conference in Rochester, MN in September of this year. The theme for the conference was Operation Plan: Prioritizing Community Vitals.

**City Code Amendments.** In 2013 the Planning Commission reviewed 14 major City Code Amendments, including the following (and all of which were adopted by the City Council):

- LDR District Standards Amendment
- Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance
- Rural Development Districts
- I-94 and Rural Transitional Zoning Map Amendments
- Parking Standards
- Village Mixed Use District
- Specific Development Standards
- Sign Ordinance Update
- Administrative and Enforcement
- Fence Ordinance
- Landscape Requirements
- Design Review Ordinance Amendments
- Driveway Ordinance
- Subdivision Ordinance Amendments (Public Land Dedication)

**Land Use Applications.** In 2013, Staff processed nine (9) land use applications, including the following:

- Valley Branch Watershed District CUP – Raleigh Creek Culvert Removal
- Country Sun Farms Interim Use Permit Renewal and Amendment
- Sketch Plan Review:
  - Hammes Estates Subdivision
  - Ryland Homes (Landucci Property) Subdivision
- Savona Preliminary Plat
- Boulder Ponds PUD Concept Plan
- Comprehensive Plan Amendments:
  - Olson Lake Trail Sewer Service Area

- Landucci Property (Ryland Homes)
- Dietrich/Reider Property (Pratt Homes)
- 10689 60<sup>th</sup> Street North
- Minor Subdivision/Lot Line Adjustments:
  - Christ Lutheran Church Minor Subdivision
  - Lennar Lot Line Adjustment
  - Boyle (32<sup>nd</sup> Street) Lot Line Adjustment
- Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School District PUD Amendment and CUP

**Board of Adjustment Actions** . Planning Staff processed four (4) variances in 2012:

- Lot Area Variance – Christ Lutheran Church
- Building Setback Variance: Brink – Olson Lake Trail
- Holding Tank Variance: Brink – Olson Lake Trail
- Lot Size Variance: Dworak – Hill Trail North
- Sign Size Variance: Lake Elmo Event Center

**Building Inspections Process Improvements.** The Building Official undertook several initiatives in 2013 to improve the processing and review of building permits, which included: updating the City’s website, creating commercial plan review workbooks, developing a residential homebuilder workbook, hosting builder’s meetings at City Hall, developing standard operating guides for various components of the permit review process, and implementing a new scheduler for tracking the building inspectors’ time.

**Building Code Updates.** Several ordinance updates related to building inspections were updated, including codes concerning: electrical inspections, contractor licensing, fees, and the property maintenance code.

### III. Statistical Information

#### A. Planning Commission Meetings

1. Regular Meetings: 22
2. Workshop Meetings: 1
3. Public Hearings: 33

## B. Planning and Zoning Permits

2013 Planning and Zoning Applications					
Planning Applications	Approved	Denied	Pending	Amended	Total
Comprehensive Plan Amendments	5	1			6
Zoning Map Amendments	1	1			2
Zoning Text Amendments	14				14
City Code Amendments			1		1
Conditional Use Permits	2				2
Interim Use Permits				1	1
Sketch Plans	2*				2
Concept Plans			1		1
Preliminary Plats	1				1
Final Plats					0
Minor Subdivisions	2				2
Lot Line Adjustments	2				2
Variances	5				5
Vacations					0
Sign Permits	8				8
Appeals					0
Other	1				1

\*Sketch Plan reviews do not require formal action by the City.

## C. Building Permits: 5-Year Summary

Building Permits Issued (by type): 5-Year Summary								
Year	SF Dwellings - Remodel/Repair	Demo	Manufactured Homes	Multi-Family	Commercial/Ind Remodel/Repair	New Commercial	Single Family	Total
2009	338	4	12	0	32	0	29	415
2010	265	10	6	0	20	0	26	327
2011	320	2	0	0	24	0	24	370
2012	250	3	8	0	19	0	31	311
2013	254	4	0	0	16	0	32	306
Total Units	1427	23	26	0	111	0	142	1729
Average	285.4	4.6	5.2	0	22.2	0	28.4	345.8



**D. Housing Starts: 5-Year Summary**

<b>Housing Starts in Lake Elmo: 5-Year Summary</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>Single Family</b>	<b>Multi-Family</b>	<b>Manufactured Homes</b>	<b>Dwellings Demolished</b>	<b>Net Increase in Dwelling Units</b>
2009	29	0	9	4	34
2010	26	0	1	8	19
2011	24	0	0	0	24
2012	29	0	8	3	34
2013	32	0	0	4	28
Total Units	140	0	18	19	139
Average	28	0	3.6	3.8	27.8

Respectfully Submitted,

Kyle Klatt  
 Planning Director