

# Land Use Policy Analysis

## For the Cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena

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Region Five Photos at <http://s1184.photobucket.com/home/mnregionfive>

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## Introduction

The following document analyzes Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena city policies relating to Land Use. This document is one piece of a larger analysis that addresses the five cities' policies regarding topics of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, parks, trails, open space, and recreation, water and natural resources, intergovernmental coordination, and healthcare. To ensure clarity, each topic is analyzed separately in its own document. Research and analysis was undertaken to provide the Region Five Development Consortium with a clearer understanding of how current policies relate and differ from each other across the cities. The following analysis will be helpful for workgroups to develop regional policies and recommendations, which will be adopted by the full consortium to guide the future growth and development of Region Five in a sustainable manner.

## Methodology

The following policies were taken from the most recent comprehensive plans from the cities of Long Prairie, Little Falls, Walker, Brainerd, and Wadena. This document addresses the similarities, differences, and potential conflicts between city policies regarding land use. Due to the uniqueness of each plan, not all cities addressed similar issues around the topic at hand. For this reason, policies were only included if at least two of the five cities addressed the issue. Additionally, each city's policies are written at a different level of specificity making it difficult to compare/contrast a detailed policy with a vague policy. For the purpose of this analysis, policies were considered similar to each other even when they differ on the level of detail.

For this analysis, sub-topics were created to guide the reader throughout the document. For example, this document contains sub-topics of orderly growth and annexation, residential land use, commercial and industrial land use and so forth. Under each sub-topic, similarities, differences, and conflicts between city policies on an issue were analyzed and grouped into categories. Categories are listed as follows: Very Similar, Similar, Somewhat Similar, Unique/Potentially Conflicting, and Unique. Policies in the Very Similar category are ones that relate to each other at a clear level of specificity; policies under the Similar category are ones that relate in vision but not in detail; policies under the Somewhat Similar category relate to each other more similarly than uniquely; policies under Unique/Potentially Conflicting category are in potential disagreement with other policies pertaining to the same issue; and policies that are considered unique have some relationship to the issue at hand but are not similar to each other. Due to policies relating to more than one sub-topic, it is possible that the same policy will be included across sub-topics and categories. It is also possible that not all categories were used in this document, depending on how city policies relate to each other.

To make it clear to understand, each policy has been assigned a color that corresponds with a city. The county color code can be seen in the footer of each page. Additionally, text that is

bolded and highlighted signifies the relationship between policies under a category. Furthermore, a sources list is included below in this methodology section to provide readers with links to each city's most updated comprehensive plan.

## Sources

### 1) Long Prairie 1999 Comprehensive Plan:

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/100569548/Long%20Prairie%20Comprehensive%20Plan.pdf>

### 2) Little Falls Comprehensive Plan 2006-2020

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701381/Little%20Falls%20Comp%20Plan0001.pdf>

### 3) Walker Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2010)

[http://www.communitygrowth.com/asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan\\_Final\\_050310.pdf](http://www.communitygrowth.com/asset/ldkjz5/Walker-Plan_Final_050310.pdf)

### 4) Brainerd Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2004)

<http://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/planning/docs/compplan.pdf>

### 5) City of Wadena Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1986)

<https://r5dcscrp.basecamphq.com/projects/7032816/file/101701382/Wadena%20Comp%20Plan.pdf>

## Findings

### I. Orderly Growth and Annexation

Long Prairie and Brainerd approach the topic of orderly growth and development very similarly. Both communities seek to support the orderly growth of all urban development, specifically mentioning commercial, industrial, and residential areas. Additional policies reinforce the idea of orderly growth in commercial and industrial development, as well as residential development, and are included in the policy analysis. Long Prairie and Wadena include similar policies. Long Prairie's policy is broader, seeking to develop an orderly plan for any future development. Wadena, however, includes more detailed policies, seeking to establish a land use plan specifying appropriate and orderly land utilization and intensity, as well as promoting planned developments of commercial, industrial, and residential growth.

Long Prairie and Brainerd also include similar policies regarding orderly annexation. Both cities will work with adjacent units of government (i.e. townships) to develop orderly annexation plans. Long Prairie incorporates a unique policy in its plan, seeking to work with Long Prairie Township to pursue annexation when a project is presented and commercial and industrial needs cannot be met in city limits.

## **II. Residential Land Use**

Long Prairie and Brainerd are the only cities to address residential land use in the goals and policies portion of their comprehensive plans. All policies are unique, but address the sub-topic of residential development location. Long Prairie will encourage residential development in appropriate areas within the city, and specifically mentions encouraging multi-family residential development in areas designated for such use in the Land Use Plan. Brainerd addresses housing densities, encouraging well-designed subdivisions at urban densities in designated growth areas. The policy goes further, stating that high density developments should be located adjacent to other high density developments and should have an adequate transportation infrastructure to support such development. Finally, Brainerd encourages the development of low and high density family housing in those areas designated in the Land Use Plan. It should be noted that many of these policies are included in the Housing Policy Analysis as well.

## **III. Commercial and Industrial Land Use**

Brainerd and Wadena include policies regarding the location of commercial and industrial development. Policies from both communities focus on locating commercial and industrial development in areas planned for such development (Brainerd specifically references the adopted Land Use Plan). Similarly, Long Prairie seeks to encourage light industrial development in appropriate areas of the city. Long Prairie includes additional unique policies, seeking to promote commercial development expansion east of the city and pursuing annexation if commercial and industrial needs cannot be met within the city.

The sub-topic of commercial and industrial development near residential areas is addressed multiple times within the comprehensive plans for Long Prairie and Brainerd. Both communities seek to locate and design commercial or industrial developments to avoid routing truck traffic through residential areas. Though these are the only two policies included in this sub-topic, the same policies are repeated throughout the comprehensive plan, only occasionally reworded.

The sub-topic of buffering commercial and industrial development is somewhat similarly addressed by Brainerd and Wadena. The former seeks to buffer commercial and industrial developments from environmentally sensitive and residential areas. The latter promotes the planned commercial and industrial development and includes buffering as part of this planning. Long Prairie is more unique in its policy regarding commercial and industrial development buffers. The policy specifically addresses outdoor storage in business parks, requiring the periphery to have landscape buffers.

The final sub-topic includes the access to adequate transportation infrastructure for commercial and industrial development. Brainerd and Wadena both address this sub-topic, with Brainerd encouraging locating commercial and industrial development to provide adequate access to roads

and Wadena encouraging such development in areas where major transportation routes are available.

#### **IV. Parking**

Parking is somewhat unique to the comprehensive plans of the cities and is often addressed in either the transportation or downtown portions of the plans. Long Prairie, Little Falls, and Brainerd approach the topic of parking similarly and all policies are in reference to the downtown area. Though worded differently, the three communities seek to promote the improvement or expansion of parking downtown. Long Prairie includes two additional policies seeking to examine the expansion of off-street parking downtown to ensure the highest possible utilization and to work with downtown businesses to encourage the utilization of off-street parking. Little Falls includes a final, broad policy seeking to continued monitoring and providing a system of municipal parking lots.

#### **V. Incompatible Land Uses, Conflicts, and Transitions**

Brainerd and Wadena both seek to promote compatible land use while minimizing conflicts and include similar policies regarding the sub-topic. Brainerd's policies focus on minimizing conflicts ensuring desirable land use patterns while the wording of Wadena's policies orients more towards promoting compatible land uses. Additionally, Wadena is the only comprehensive plan to include policies which reference avoiding strip or spot development.

Long Prairie and Brainerd include similar policies addressing the idea of transitions between different land uses. Both communities seek to require transitions between different or incompatible land uses. Brainerd is more specific, however, stating that it will require said transitions through appropriate land use planning and zoning.

One specific transition addressed in the comprehensive plans is that between rural and urban land uses. This is one of the few land use goals included in the Walker comprehensive plans. The community seeks to manage the rural/urban transition area by ensuring that growth is coordinated and builds on the strengths of the area. Brainerd, somewhat similarly, seeks to strengthen the distinction between rural countryside and urban city with well-planned and coordinated services that address the needs of each area.

#### **VI. Land Use and Protection of Natural Resources**

Brainerd and Wadena both include policies which reference the preservation or protection of natural resources or environmentally sensitive areas through land use and types of development. The communities include policies which are somewhat similar, with Brainerd seeking to identify areas of significant natural resource benefit and protect them from premature or incompatible development. Wadena will regulate development consistent with accepted environmental standards to protect natural resources and the natural environment of the city. Both communities include additional policies, somewhat similar to those outlined above. Brainerd will preserve and enhance natural resources to maintain the integrity and character of the community, while Wadena will provide a land use plan encouraging land uses which are complimentary with natural features.

Brainerd continues to support natural resource preservation throughout the land use plan (as well as other portions relating to land use), including several unique policies. The city seeks to create a “Community Resource Master Plan” which will identify environmental resources (among others) and establish preservation guidelines that allow for adaptive re-use or redevelopment. Brainerd will also conduct an environmental review of lands in growth areas to better understand the impact development may have on these areas. The city will amend the Comprehensive Plan if necessary to account for these impacts. A third policy included states that Brainerd seeks to buffer industrial and commercial development from environmentally sensitive areas. Finally, the city seeks to coordinate transportation development with land use planning and environmental protection. (It should be noted that this policy was included in the transportation portion of the plan as well as the Transportation Policy Analysis, but because it relates land use planning and environmental protection, was included in this topic of the Land Use Policy Analysis).

## **VII. Supporting Development through Land Use**

Both Long Prairie and Brainerd seek to support development through land use planning and city ordinances. The cities include very similar policies in the first sub-topic, as both seek to plan (or continue to plan) for land uses which support their respective community’s ability to attract quality development. The trend of including very similar policies continues in the second sub-topic, as both communities will review all applicable ordinances to ensure they do not deter desirable development. An additional Long Prairie policy is categorized as somewhat similar, as it states that the city will promote highway commercial development by updating the City Zoning Ordinance to allow for more industrial and commercial expansion.

Brainerd includes a unique policy placed in its own sub-topic. The policy states that Brainerd will support and enhance its ability to attract development by identifying quality building sites which provide efficient infrastructure, particularly in growth areas.

## **VIII. Parks, Open Space, and Land Use**

The topic of Parks, Open Space, and Land Use is not addressed extensively in the comprehensive plans of the cities. Brainerd and Wadena, however, do include unique policies acknowledging the need for open space. Brainerd’s policy relates more to residential development, stating that the city should encourage the development of open spaces in new residential developments with “points of interest” destinations. Wadena’s policy is less broad, as it states that the city should provide for continued development of parks at the community and neighborhood level to fit the needs of residents.

## **IX. Agricultural Land Use**

While policies included in only one comprehensive plan are generally not addressed in the policy analysis, the topic of agricultural land use is significant enough that it was included despite the fact that it only appears in Long Prairie’s comprehensive plan. The policy states that the city will explore the types of agricultural facilities to improve the region’s economy and identify areas of prime agricultural benefit in the Land Use Plan to ensure their viability.



## **X. Intergovernmental Coordination**

Intergovernmental coordination is not discussed as extensively in the comprehensive plans for the cities and is divided into two sub-topics: adjacent governments and nongovernment agencies. Long Prairie and Brainerd are the only two plans which address any form of intergovernmental coordination in the land use goals and policies portion.

Long Prairie and Brainerd include somewhat similar policies addressing the need to work with adjacent units of government. Long Prairie seeks to recognize common issues and work with Long Prairie Township to develop orderly annexation agreements, as well as joint planning and other cooperative measures. Brainerd also seeks to develop orderly annexation plans through coordination with adjacent governments for areas that may become urban in character.

The similarities end there, however, as the remaining intergovernmental coordination policies are unique. Long Prairie seeks to continue to work with Todd County and Long Prairie Township to identify prime agricultural areas (Long Prairie is the only plan of the five which mentions agriculture in the land use goals and policy portion). Additionally, Long Prairie will also pursue annexation in cooperation with Long Prairie Township when a plan is presented and commercial/industrial needs cannot be met within city limits. Brainerd seeks to work with various other townships, the neighboring community of Baxter, and the County to identify growth areas. Brainerd will also work with townships and the County to maintain low residential densities in growth areas and efficiently extend public utilities.

Long Prairie is the only plan to address coordination with nongovernment agencies, seeking to work with “appropriate agencies” to develop the best strategy to encourage the construction of new residential subdivisions.

## **Policy Analysis**

### **I. Orderly Growth and Annexation**

#### **A. Orderly Growth**

##### **1. Very Similar**

- a) **Support the orderly growth of all urban development, including residential, commercial, and industrial areas**
  - i. **Plan for the orderly and efficient growth of commercial and industrial development in the City**
  - ii. **Plan for the orderly and efficient growth of residential development in the City**

- b) **Support the** efficient and **orderly growth of all urban development, including residential, commercial and industrial areas.** Strengthen the distinction between the urban city and the rural countryside with well planned and carefully coordinated services appropriate to the distinct needs of each
    - i. **Plan for the orderly,** efficient and fiscally responsible **growth of commercial and industrial development in Brainerd**
    - ii. **Plan for the orderly,** efficient and fiscally responsible **growth of residential development in Brainerd**
2. **Similar to Above (IA1)**
- a) **Develop an orderly plan for any future development within the City limits**
  - b) **To provide a land use plan which specifies appropriate land utilization and intensity of uses which is** consistent, **orderly** and complimentary with natural features, adjacent land uses, and public facilities
  - c) **To promote planned developments of residential, commercial and industrial growth** within designated areas of the City. This should provide a unified and controlled relationship to traffic patterns adjoining uses and services, and the provisions of transitional intensity of usage and buffering

## **B. Orderly Annexation**

### **1. Similar**

- a) **Recognize common issues by working and cooperating with Long Prairie Township through the use of orderly annexation agreements,** joint planning, and other cooperative measures
- b) **Work with adjacent units of government to develop orderly annexation plans** for areas that are urban or are about to become urban in character located within the city's planned growth areas, as services can be provided to those properties. Work cooperatively with the adjacent townships, the county, and property owners to encourage orderly growth and development

### **2. Unique**

- a) Encourage the best possible use of existing sites within the City. **When a plan is presented and commercial and industrial needs cannot be met within the City limits, the City shall contact Long Prairie Township to cooperatively pursue annexation**



## II. Residential Land Use

### A. Location of Residential Development

#### 1. Unique

- a) Encourage residential development in appropriate areas in and around the City
- b) Encourage development of multiple family housing units in those areas designated on the adopted Land Use Plan
- c) Encourage well-designed residential subdivisions at urban densities in the designated growth areas of the city. Locate higher density residential developments in areas adjacent to higher density development and major transportation systems to efficiently address traffic volumes
  - i. Only place high-density developments in areas with adequate transportation infrastructure
- d) Encourage development of low density and high-density family housing units in those areas designated on the adopted Land Use Plan

## III. Commercial and Industrial Land Use

### A. Location of Commercial and Industrial Development

#### 1. Similar

- a) Encourage the development of additional commercial and industrial areas within the city in accordance with the land use plan
- b) The City of Wadena will encourage industrial development in areas specifically planned for such and where community facilities, utilities, and major transportation routes are available
- c) To promote planned developments of residential, commercial and industrial growth within designated areas of the City. This should provide a unified and controlled relationship to traffic patterns adjoining uses and services, and the provisions of transitional intensity of usage and buffering

#### 2. Similar to Above (IIIA1)

- a) **Encourage the creation of light industrial and commercial development in appropriate areas of the City**

**3. Unique**

- a) **Promote commercial development expansion east of the City**
- b) **Encourage the best possible use of existing sites within the City. When a plan is presented and commercial and industrial needs cannot be met within the City limits, the City shall contact Long Prairie Township to cooperatively pursue annexation**

**B. Commercial/Industrial Development and Residential Areas**

**1. Very Similar**

- a) **Design and locate industrial and commercial developments to avoid routing truck traffic through residential areas**
- b) **Locate and design industrial and commercial developments to avoid the routing of traffic through residential neighborhoods**

**C. Buffering of Commercial and Industrial Development**

**1. Somewhat Similar**

- a) **Buffer commercial and industrial developments from environmentally sensitive areas and residential areas within the community**
- b) **To promote planned developments of residential, commercial and industrial growth within designated areas of the City. This should provide a unified and controlled relationship to traffic patterns adjoining uses and services, and the provisions of transitional intensity of usage and buffering**

**2. Unique**

- a) **In new commerce areas (business parks) allow outside storage only under highly controlled basis limiting the types of materials stored and requiring the periphery to have landscape buffers**

**D. Access to Adequate Roads/Transportation System**

**1. Somewhat Similar**

- a) **Locate and design industrial and commercial developments to provide good access and road service**, while avoiding the routing of traffic through residential neighborhoods
  - i. **Require new commercial and industrial developments to have access to adequately sized and designed public roads**
- b) **The City of Wadena will encourage industrial development in areas specifically planned for such and where** community facilities, utilities, and major transportation routes are available

## IV. Parking

### A. Parking Downtown

#### 1. Similar

- a) **Assist the downtown area in planning and providing off-street parking**
- b) **For efficiency, promote joint or shared parking facilities downtown and at other locations (Note: Downtown is served by 8 municipal parking lots)**
- c) **Promote and improve parking for the Downtown**

#### 2. Somewhat Similar to Above (IVA1)

- a) **Examine the possibility of expanding downtown surface parking facilities to ensure the highest possible utilization**
- b) **Work with downtown businesses to encourage greater utilization of existing off-street parking sites**
- c) **Continue to provide and monitor the system of municipal parking lots**

## V. Incompatible Land Uses, Conflicts, and Transitions

### A. Promoting Compatible Land Use and Minimizing Conflicts

#### 1. Similar

- a) **Plan land uses and implement standards to minimize land use conflicts**
- b) **The City of Wadena will promote compatible land uses within appropriate areas to avoid** spot development and other **conflicting land uses**

**2. Similar to Above (VA1)**

- a) **Prepare and adopt a land use plan that designates land use areas and guides development to appropriate areas in order to** ensure desirable land use patterns and **minimize conflicts**
- b) **Compatible land uses shall be encouraged, to avoid scattered, strip or spot development**

**3. Somewhat Similar to Above (VA1)**

- a) **To provide a land use plan which specifies appropriate land utilization and intensity of uses which is** consistent, orderly and **complimentary with** natural features, **adjacent land uses**, and public facilities

**B. Transitions**

**1. Similar**

- a) **Require adequate transitions and other mitigation measures between incompatible land uses** and promote architectural/site aesthetics that are compatible with community standards
- b) **Require adequate transitions between different land uses through appropriate land use planning and zoning standards**

**2. Similar to Above (VB1)**

- a) **Manage the rural/urban transition area surrounding the city to ensure new growth is coordinated to build on the strengths of the area**
- b) Support the efficient and orderly growth of all urban development, including residential, commercial and industrial areas. **Strengthen the distinction between the urban city and the rural countryside with well planned and carefully coordinated services appropriate to the distinct needs of each**

## **VI. Land Use and Protection of Natural Resources**

**A. Protection and Preservation of Natural Resources**

**1. Somewhat Similar**

- a) **Identify areas of significant natural resource benefit and protect these areas from premature or incompatible development**

- b) **The City of Wadena will regulate development consistent with accepted environmental protection standards to protect the natural environment and resources in the community**

## 2. Somewhat Similar to Above (VIA1)

- a) **Protect and enhance important historical, cultural and natural resources as a means to maintain the integrity, heritage and local character of Brainerd's natural and built environment**
- b) **To provide a land use plan which specifies appropriate land utilization and intensity of uses which is consistent, orderly and complimentary with natural features, adjacent land uses, and public facilities**

## 3. Unique

- a) **Develop a "Community Resources Master Plan" that identifies unique environmental, cultural and architectural sites within the community. Establish preservation guidelines that allow for adaptive re-use, or redevelopment**
- b) **Conduct an environmental review of lands within the planned growth area to assess potential impacts that may occur from the growth and development of the community. Amend the Comprehensive Plan to address identified impacts, if necessary**
- c) **Buffer commercial and industrial developments from environmentally sensitive areas and residential areas within the community**
- d) **Coordinate transportation with land use planning and environmental protection**

# VII. Impact of Land Use Choices on Development

## A. Land Use and Quality Development

### 1. Very Similar

- a) **Plan for land uses which support and enhance Long Prairie's ability to attract and direct quality development**
- b) **Continue to plan for land uses to support and enhance Brainerd's ability to attract quality development, by providing adequate quality areas for new business development**

## 2. Unique

- a) **Support and enhance Brainerd's ability to attract new development by identifying quality building sites that provide efficient infrastructure, specifically in growth areas**

## B. Impact of Ordinances on Development

### 1. Very Similar

- a) **Review all applicable ordinances and policies to ensure that they do not deter development**
- b) **Review all applicable ordinances and policies to ensure that they do not deter desirable, self-supporting development**

### 2. Somewhat Similar to Above (VIIA1)

- a) **Provide for the expansion of highway commercial development by updating the City Zoning Ordinance to allow additional commercial and industrial opportunities**
- b) **Plan for industrial growth with land acquisition and zoning. Designate new and expand current industrial areas along Highway 71 north of the City**

## VIII. Parks, Open Space, and Land Use

### A. Parks, Open Space, and Land Use

#### 1. Unique

- a) **Encourage the development of trail systems and open spaces in new residential developments with "points of interest" destinations**
- b) **To provide for the continued development of park and recreational facilities on a neighborhood and community level to serve the needs of present and future residents**

## IX. Agricultural Land Use

### A. Agricultural Land Use

#### 1. Unique



- a) **Explore the developments of other types of agricultural-related facilities in the area that would benefit the area’s agricultural background and economy**
- b) **Work closely with Todd County and Long Prairie Township to identify prime agricultural areas and develop effective strategies to ensure their preservation and viability. These prime agricultural areas may be designated in the officially adopted Land Use Plan**

## **X. Intergovernmental Coordination**

### **A. Adjacent Governments**

#### **1. Similar**

- a) **Recognize common issues by working and cooperating with Long Prairie Township through the use of orderly annexation agreements, joint planning, and other cooperative measures**
- b) **Work with adjacent units of government to develop orderly annexation plans for areas that are urban or are about to become urban in character located within the city’s planned growth areas, as services can be provided to those properties. Work cooperatively with the adjacent townships, the county, and property owners to encourage orderly growth and development**

#### **2. Unique**

- a) **Work closely with Todd County and Long Prairie Township to identify prime agricultural areas and develop effective strategies to ensure their preservation and viability. These prime agricultural areas may be designated in the officially adopted Land Use Plan**
- b) **Promote an ongoing relationship among all local units of government—City, Long Prairie-Grey Eagle School District, Todd County, Long Prairie Township, and other communities—in all matters related to planning and the provision of public services**
- c) **Encourage the best possible use of existing sites within the City. When a plan is presented and commercial and industrial needs cannot be met within the City limits, the City shall contact Long Prairie Township to cooperatively pursue annexation**
- d) **Work with Baxter, Crow Wing Township, Long Lake Township, Oak Lawn Township, Unorganized Territory and the County to identify growth areas**

- e) **Work with the County and adjacent townships to maintain low residential densities in planned growth areas to promote the efficient extension of public utilities**
- f) **Recognize the legitimate issues and concerns regarding jurisdictional issues by working and cooperating with surrounding communities through this planning process and outside this process**

## **B. Nongovernment Agencies**

### **1. Unique**

- a) **Work with residential developers and appropriate agencies to develop the best strategy to encourage the construction of new residential subdivisions**