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TOP STORY

Growing Scott County begins work on 2040 comprehensive plan

By Andrew Hazzard ahazzard@swpub.com Apr 24, 2016



Logo courtesy of Scott County.

Scott County officials have two years to plan for the next 22.

On Tuesday last week, Planning Manager Brad Davis presented the County Board with the initial outline of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which the county must complete and submit to the Metropolitan Council by December 2018.

“Today I feel we can finally say we are beginning this process,” Davis said.

Scott County is among 200 Twin Cities communities that will submit plans to the Met Council. It also remains the area's fastest growing county. Scott County's population grew by 9 percent from 2010 to 2015, leaping from 129,298 people to 141,660. By 2040, Davis projects the county will have 209,000 residents. The growth is expected to concentrate in cities throughout the county; rural populations should remain steady.

In the county's sixth comprehensive plan since 1972, Davis said the focus will be on five categories: housing; economic competitiveness; planning for resiliency, with a focus on keeping up aging infrastructure; planning for an aging and diverse population; and improving transit.

"I think housing is a topic we will spend more time at both at the city and county level," he said. "Looking at making sure we have a full range of housing options, so that's looking at our existing stock. What kind of housing do we have? What's the condition of that housing? Where's it located? What are the price points? A lot of that work is happening this year."

The Met Council has asked all communities to examine their economic competitiveness and report how many development sites are available.

With regard to infrastructure, the county will focus on making sure it can withstand challenges from floods and other weather threats.

The county will have to prepare for an older and more culturally diverse population by 2040. Between now and 2030, the senior population is expected to grow 20 percent, according to the Scott County Community Development Authority. Davis emphasized that above all else, comprehensive planning is a people issue.

Part of planning for a more diverse population is reaching out to those people and involving them in the process, something Davis told the board will be a priority.

"I think there's more of a focus this time around to engage populations that may not be typically involved in these types of conversations," he said.

County Public Health Director Lisa Brodsky said her department and the planning department will be working in sync to develop the 2040 plan to reach those communities. She believes public health's work with at-risk populations, diverse populations including seniors, low-income and limited-English residents can help solicit some feedback.

The county will be communicating more with all members of the community via online forums such as email newsletters, social media and YouTube videos. There is a noted community engagement plan this time around, Davis said. Youth outreach is going to be a part of the process, too; the county will invite local children and adolescents to design the cover art for the plan and participate in surveys.

While planning for the future, Davis said the county will implement more ways to track how effective its staff is.

"We want to have a lot more focus on performance measures," he said. "When we set out some recommendations in the 2040 plan, we want to be real clear on how we're going to measure our progress toward those recommendations, and maybe use that as a way to communicate the progress of the plan after the plan is adopted."

County Commissioner Jon Ulrich of Savage said it would be ideal to track what parts of the plan are motivated by county studies, the Metropolitan Council or the Thrive MSP plan.

Commissioner Michael Beard of Shakopee cautioned against over-reliance on long-term plans. He said bringing in old plans for 2000 to see what the plan was and what's actually transpired would be ideal.

"Not to denigrate planning at all, that's not the point, the point is some folks really get wrapped around the axle about 'this is where we want to be, darn it' and then life gets in the way," Beard said.

He also questioned the Metropolitan Council's population projections, which he said are often overblown and questioned when housing became a government system. Davis said this was the first time the Metropolitan Council had included housing policy in its plan.

The plan will be done in phases over the next two years. In 2017, county staff will begin drafting sections of the plan. The community will have a chance to review and discuss the plans during public hearings in 2018 and open houses throughout the process. The county is now in the process of studying and gathering data to form the plan.

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