

X. Community Identity

Organization

- A. Overview
- B. Goal
- C. Key Findings
- D. Objectives and Strategies

Purpose

The purpose of the Community Identity Chapter is to address how the community can enhance and strengthen its rural character atmosphere, which is its defining characteristic.

A. Overview

This chapter address the community's identity, including the physical environment and the activities, institutions and culture that produce Ham Lake's character. It provides guidance for the preservation and enhancement of the community's identity.

The community is recognized for its abundant wetlands and attractive large lot neighborhoods dispersed in and around the wooded, wetland landscape. Residents have a very positive image of Ham Lake, describing it as a friendly community that offers a convenient rural environment characterized by large lots and natural open space. Residents have a strong interest in, and take an active role in issues affecting development and quality of life. The community has a strong desire to maintain its large lot rural character. This desire implies that future development should be considerate of the elements that perpetuate the character including existing wetlands and vegetation, a one acre minimum lot size, individual well and septic systems and an existing development pattern that responds to wetland and soil conditions.

Much of the commercial development on Highway 65 contrasts with the character and quality of the city's residential development. Much of this development is relatively low intensity auto oriented commercial development and has relocated to Ham Lake from locations closer in on Highway 65. The lack of municipal sewer service affects property values and makes land on Highway 65 relatively attractive to low intensity businesses.

The land use concepts including the goals, objectives and policies outlined in the Land Use Chapter provide a baseline for development practices that will foster and strengthen the community's rural character identity throughout the city. These land use concepts are supplemented by the concepts presented in this chapter.

B. Goal

A goal is a policy statement that states a desired outcome in general terms. The goal was developed by considering key principles, and integrating public input generated as part of the Plan update. The goal for community identity is provided below.

The rural character of the community should be projected throughout all new development that reflects the city's physical landform, wetlands and environmentally significant resources to create a distinctive sense of place.

C. Key Findings

Information was compiled from a variety of sources including existing plans, input from several public meetings, and the visual quality assessment photo exercise completed by the Task Force. Outlined below is a summary of key findings related to Ham Lake's identity.

Sense of Place & Identity Connected to the Natural Environment: The City offers a diverse natural environment including lakes, creeks, wetlands, woodlands, and active sod fields that contribute to the aesthetic open space of the City. The natural environment and abundant wildlife are viewed by many as the main contributor to the City's rural character and why they chose to live in Ham Lake.

Autonomy, independence and small efficient government: Residents feel a sense of independence and autonomy that is supported by large lots and individual septic and water systems. Protection of individual property rights and autonomy are important values affecting land use and growth. Residents are proud of their local government and generally happy with its cost effective and limited delivery of services.

Neighborhood and home as quiet refuge: Neighborhoods are safe, quiet and dark. The large lots with ample "elbow room" provide a quiet and welcoming refuge to most residents who work outside the city and enjoy coming home to the relaxed atmosphere of Ham Lake. The lack of street and commercial lighting provides a dark sky at night that contributes to a sense of relaxation and well-being.

Highway 65 Conflicts with Identity: There is general recognition that the Highway 65 corridor contributes to some negative impressions of Ham Lake. The many aging commercial buildings, large exposed parking areas and lack of landscaping or vegetation fail to strengthen the community's rural character. (include photos here from photo project)

Range of Community Entrances: The community gateways provide a range of experiences when entering the community. The main north-south gateways along

Highway 65 are characterized by low intensity commercial uses and do not provide a feeling of entrance into some place unique. Most other entrances are characterized by low density residential neighborhoods integrated into and around wetlands and wooded areas. In general the borders of Ham Lake are transparent and it is difficult to know when one has entered the City.

Highly Rated Physical Characteristics: Members of the Planning Task Force took many photos of highly desirable physical elements that describe Ham Lake or what Ham Lake should look like. They evaluated these photos to identify those images the best conveyed the desired character for future development. The knowledge from this visual quality assessment helps to identify specific physical elements that contribute to the desired physical character of the community. The results of this exercise follow and may be used to visually communicate desired physical character to prospective developers and to evaluate proposed developments.

Highly Rated Physical Characteristics include:

- Abundant, expansive, open green space.
- Views of water
- Travel corridors with significant vegetation and few or no structures.
- Ample space between structures
- Natural landscapes.
- Human created landscapes that are well maintained
- Human scaled contemporary architecture with quality materials and architectural detailing.
- Site design that provides good pedestrian and vehicle circulation.

(Insert highly rated photos and summaries)

D. Objectives and Strategies

The following objectives indicate a specific policy direction and help organize strategies, while the strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete and objective such as a program, regulation or a project.

Objective 1: Continue the existing development pattern and enhance the City's rural character.

- CI 1.1 Guide new residential development to be compatible with existing residential development patterns.
- CI 1.2 Guide new commercial and industrial development patterns to be complementary to residential patterns and increase the use of natural vegetation and/or landscaping to create substantial buffers and improve overall visual quality.
- CI 1.3 Develop exterior lighting policies and regulations to protect the dark sky qualities and to prevent light intrusion into neighborhoods from new commercial and industrial development.
- CI 1.4 Preserve the scenic quality of the rural landscape by defining the edge of the community and maintain the rural character of roadways throughout the community.
- CI 1.5 Evaluate development proposals as to how they impact community character and require the addition of physical design elements needed to meet community standards for character.

Objective 2: Improve the entry points (gateways) into the community.

- CI 2.1 Introduce attractive signage and landscaping at identified gateways.
- CI 2.2 Introduce overlay zoning districts targeted at gateways and the Highway 65 corridor to create a defined rural character streetscape.
- CI 2.3 Develop landscaping standards for the Highway 65 corridor.