

## St. Croix County Draft Vision 2035

In the year 2035, St. Croix County is an economically vibrant, scenic, clean, healthy and safe place to live, work, and proper. It is a place that recognizes its history and agricultural heritage. St. Croix County has committed to maintaining a high quality of life for its residents through education, viable economic opportunities that includes agricultural services and manufacturing. There is plenty of recreational opportunities, a full complement of natural resources, and efficient and effective transportation.

The county and towns allow rural development with minimal impact on the overall land use by focusing development along multi-modal transportation corridors that maximize mobility, connectivity, livability, and economic development throughout the county.

Each of its vibrant cities and villages has maintained their small town charm and are proud of their heritage and many community events. The cities and villages cooperate to provide municipal services to the citizens and they use tools, such as cooperative boundary and service agreements to save operating expenses.

### **Land Use**

St. Croix County values its historic roots in farming and other natural resource based activities and desires to maintain its rural character or feel. We have achieved a rural feel by ensuring that there are ample amount of open space between cities and/or villages by restricting commercial and industrial development adjacent to cities and villages and limiting subdivision development outside of city and village limits. The open space is a mix of farming and natural resources including parks, trails, natural areas, river ways, hunting land, woods and wetlands. In addition, historic barns have been preserved and restored as part of the open views. However, the western side of the county needs a different approach to open space and housing than the eastern side which has less pressure to develop.

### **Agriculture**

The farms and agricultural enterprises operate efficiently and effectively, and the farmers are good stewards of the land, preserving it for future generations. St. Croix's agricultural sector is particularly important to its residents. We work to maintain farming as an occupation for families and as an active land use. We support both small and large farms by using agricultural zoning to identify prime agricultural soils to limit development and encourage all sorts of farms from hobby to buffalo to corn and soybeans.

### **Housing**

St. Croix County has maintained a stock of affordable and moderate income housing for its residents. In particular, the County has paid attention to the need for affordable and appropriate housing for its aging population. The County has aimed to control sprawling residential development. When and where possible, the County encourages development into cities and villages or in conservation subdivisions in rural areas where shared septic systems are allowed. In addition, the County has created incentives for homeowners and developers who use the LEED process to build new homes.

## **Government operations**

St. Croix County operates in a clean and transparent manner and is responsive and accountable for decisions. The county continues to provide a high quality of life through an efficient and open government, which includes a fair, thought out and reasonable tax structure.

## **Intergovernmental Cooperation**

The County, municipal and schools have developed and maintained a way to communicate about all sorts of issues, particularly those that generate controversy. We keep collaboration and cooperation as a part of our everyday communication. The County has taken the lead to establish a dialogue with all St. Croix municipalities to discuss cost sharing and tax base sharing arrangements, to decrease the level of duplication of services, and to increase the number of shared community facilities especially among towns and cities. In addition, the County has worked with all St. Croix municipalities to make sure policies are consistent. When issues that concern the entire county need to be addressed such as utilities (siting) or wildlife corridors, the County works at cross-jurisdictional cooperation.

## **Utility and Community Facilities**

St. Croix County has worked with the utility companies to ensure appropriate utility corridors for electrical transmission, fiber optics, and future technological possibilities. The County has worked with the DOT in Minnesota and Wisconsin to identify future lands appropriate for different types of public transportation, such as rail. The County is leading the way for its residents by making sure its existing buildings are energy efficient and use a LEED process in any new county construction of buildings. The County has reworked its rules to allow for solar and wind generation for private residences and have ensured the right to solar and wind access from adjacent properties.

By 2035, St. Croix County has community and cultural centers that provide programs for all residents in particular older retirees and youth, and promote ways that active seniors can give their time and knowledge to their communities. The County works with St. Croix's municipalities to make sure that a range of community services are both available and accessible within a reasonable distance of municipal boundaries. The County has worked with municipalities to create a county-wide bicycle path that is useable in many sections in all seasons.

## **Education**

By 2035, St. Croix County is known for its strong UWRF and WITC campuses as well as the K-12 school districts. These institutions are known for their innovative teachers and for providing exceptional educational opportunities for all.

The schools produce well educated students who are good citizens and involved in many community issues.

## **Transportation**

By 2035, St. Croix County has a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation network recognizing and responding to auto and that includes demand transit available between all villages and cities. St. Croix County consistently maintains and improves the county road system. The County has worked with St. Croix municipalities to identify safe roads to establish bike lanes. The County works with municipalities to plan for residential growth and transportation access in tandem. The County continues to explore transportation options from high speed rail to light rails to buses. The County is exploring options for encouraging more public transportation and increase bike riding and discouraging automobile use and purchasing

more than one car per adult. The County also works with all vested interests on the Stillwater bridge project. The County needs to ensure its ready for a bridge crossing in terms of land use and transportation issues.

### **Economic Development**

By 2035, St. Croix County has innovative, productive, well paying jobs in both our municipalities (i.e., cities/villages/hamlets), and our rural farms with animal production, fruits vegetables, fish, etc. St. Croix County has worked with cities, villages and towns to limit commercial uses to areas where services are available. This discussion has happened in tandem with tax base sharing. The County through the EDC works to encourage dialogue among communities to discuss the costs and benefits of economic development. That county effort has resulted in new industries such as artisan food processors and other food processing, an increase in knowledge workers residing and opening businesses in the county while maintaining the agricultural sector as a strong part of the local economy.

### **Natural Resources**

By 2035, St. Croix County has maintained and enhanced its natural resource base. The water quality for drinking and recreation is excellent. The streams, rivers and lakes are clean and vibrant with healthy fish and recreational opportunities. The air quality is excellent in part because green energy is produced by solar, wind, and geothermal.

St. Croix County has a healthy diversity of natural land resources – lakes, rivers, streams, woods, wetlands, prairie – that contributes to the quality and abundance of wildlife and to the beauty of the county. The County has conducted a natural resources inventory to provide a basis for exploring new policies such as preservation and transfer of development rights. The County works to maintain the lake and river water quality in particular in the St. Croix River, Willow, Apple and Bass watersheds, and to preserve and enhance wildlife corridors along streams and rivers and through woods and prairies. Enhancing water quality has occurred through preventing contaminated runoff from agricultural lands, and impervious surfaces like highways and driveways. The County has worked to give the public access to many of these natural areas for walking, nature study and quiet contemplation in coordination with the DNR and in some cases private landowners. The County has promoted the use of purchase of development rights through a land trust, has considered incentives to preserve viewsheds and openspaces, and continues to examine new techniques as they are created.

The County has identified a network of natural resource corridors that provide various activities like hunting, fishing, and walking when appropriate. The County has identified in conjunction with these corridors a network of bike trails and other recreational opportunities.

### **Cultural Resources**

St. Croix County has an interesting history and local traditions, unique architecture and historical sites in part represented by Baldwin's windmill??, old train depots, barns, churches, and the Octagon. The County has worked with appropriate organizations to work at funding and marketing St. Croix's cultural resources to its residents and others including its Native American and pioneer roots. The County has worked with local units of government to maintain their unique local character whether through buildings and events (both art and cultural). The libraries throughout the County are important resources for our children and adults as are community centers and 4-H programs.