

# DRAFT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## Land Use

- 1. Protect the County’s rural character and agricultural heritage.** Mountrail County has a longstanding tradition on living off the land. Agriculture dominates the rural setting of the county, with farming and ranching the primary activities. Other uses should be complementary to agriculture and should be compatible with the rural landscape.

### Objectives

- A. Residential lot sizes and densities are consistent with a rural setting, at no less than 5 acres per dwelling.
- B. In areas designated “Agricultural” on the future land use map, the County should seek to limit residential density to four residences per legal quarter-section (160 acres, defined as NE ¼, NW ¼, SE ¼, or SW ¼). The count of residences per quarter section should include existing habitable residences as well as any lots – whether improved or unimproved – that are entitled to a residence. Such residences or lots may be located anywhere within each quart-section as allowed per the county’s subdivision resolution and zoning ordinance.

- 2. Facilitate orderly and efficient development.** County residents bear infrastructure costs in the form of property taxes and use fees. In very low-density areas, the per capita costs of capital improvements and public services are relatively high. Efficient development ultimately helps reduce private landowner costs. When development is orderly, it is more predictable and manageable. County residents understand where residential, commercial, and industrial development is expected to occur, and at what scale. This predictability lessens the risks for private investment.

### Objectives

- A. Issue variances on a limited basis. If variances become commonplace, the Zoning Ordinance needs to be amended to make use of the ordinance more practical.
- B. Ensure that road access, water supply, and other necessary utilities are readily available or can reasonably be provided to platted, yet still undeveloped residential lots.
- C. Encourage the siting of residential subdivisions close to available infrastructure and existing development to reduce infrastructure costs and preserve contiguous farmland and open space.
- D. Confirm buffers between conflicting uses are established and enforced to protect agricultural businesses and residents.
- E. Do not extend community infrastructure and services into areas which are not intended for further development.
- F. Direct future permanent development (e.g. rural residential, industrial, etc.) towards the Development Focus Areas as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

- 3. Conserve and sustain productive farm and ranch lands.** Land is the County’s most valuable long-term resource. The conservation of farm and ranch lands for continued use of future generations is key to the sustainability of the county’s economy and rural way of life.

### Objectives

- A. Promote best practices for soil conservation and water management. Encourage voluntary action from private landowners through education, outreach, and connection to funding resources.
- B. Review existing agricultural zoning to ensure that regulations discourage incompatible development.
- C. Property subdivision and development avoids fragmentation of valuable agricultural areas, with the aim to preserve areas that are contiguous and of sufficient size to remain viable for farming and

ranching. “Stranded acres” of limited size or irregular shape that might remain from project development or subdivision should be avoided.

- 4. Protect and enhance the quality of natural resources and recreation areas.** Mountrail County is home to a wealth of high quality natural resources and recreational areas associated with those resources. These resources and recreational areas are not only limited to Lake Sakakawea and its long shoreline but includes other assets such as a large section of the prairie pothole region and associated wildlife areas.

#### Objectives

- A. Maintain, to the most viable extent, the integrity of areas designated as constrained open space (i.e. wetlands, streams, steep hills, etc.).
- B. Discourage development from occurring on the edge of bluffs and ridges in the County and utilize development setbacks to promote bluff stability and reduce landslide risk to development.
- C. Ensure grading and site prep work respects the natural terrain and is discouraged where slopes exceed 20 percent
- D. Safeguard significant natural assets (e.g. Federally and State protected wetlands, Lake Sakakawea, etc.) by closely scrutinizing and only approving neighboring uses of minimal intensity such as agricultural, rural residential, or recreational-type uses.

- 5. Promote a positive visual perception of the County and active property maintenance.** Community aesthetics are a public interest. Promoting aesthetics is a valid public purpose of County government. It is especially important to consider aesthetics along major highway corridors, such as US Highway 2, which represents the face of the County to prospective property owners, investors, regional travelers and tourists, and County residents.

#### Objectives

- A. Ensure the provision of resources to properly enforce permit conditions and minimize noxious weed problems, responding proactively to citizen complaints.
- B. Development that occurs along community gateways and key corridors contributes to the aesthetic quality of the County and local communities.
- C. Connect land owners with gravel pits, stockpiles, and other disturbed areas to resources that help to inform them on how to properly restore and maintain pits and other disturbed areas.
- D. Rural residential lot owners are aware of the responsibility to control noxious weeds on their property and resources available to control the spread of noxious weeds.

- 6. Protect the quality and supply of the County’s water resources.** The County’s extensive system of wetlands and watercourses, as well as Lake Sakakawea are integral to the health and preservation of agriculture, recreation, and local communities. How the County manages land use is critical to the quality and supply of these resources.

#### Objectives

- A. Ensure that potential impacts on wellhead protection areas are consideration by the Planning and Zoning Board and County Board decisions affecting land use, such as with conditional use permit, subdivision, or zone change applications.
- B. Develop robust criteria for the County’s consideration of applications that involve temporary water lines.
- C. Engage the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality and the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association for assistance in evaluating the viability of the County’s wellhead protection areas

and developing appropriate action steps to ensure sustainability.

- D. Establish development setbacks from the County's surface water resources, including wetlands, lakes, and streams.

**7. Support the operations of the United States military and preserve the integrity of military facilities and operations in Mountrail County.** Land use and development should not interfere with U.S. military facilities or operations, including operations associated with missile alert facilities, missile launch facilities, and military training activities.

**Objectives**

- A. No habitable structures are constructed within the 2,500' radius evacuation zones around military facilities.
- B. Ensure notification of development applications for property located within 2 miles of military facilities.
- C. Existing habitable structures within federal easements are classified as non-conforming uses. As such, they cannot expand or modify their use.
- D. Work with the military and ND One Call to ensure a notification system is in place to protect underground military infrastructure from damage by any ground disturbing activity.
- E. Large structures and infrastructure which may interfere with military operations are sited and designed appropriately in coordination with Minot Air Force Base.
- F. Provide disclosure to property owners about the rules and risks of living and working near military facilities.

**8. Encourage ongoing communication and cooperation between different governmental entities within Mountrail County.** Mountrail County cannot achieve the aims of this plan acting alone. Only by actively working with other governmental entities, including the MHA Nation, local cities, and local townships can the goals and objectives of this plan be accomplished.

**Objectives**

- A. Pursue communication and cooperation between the County, local government, and the MHA Nation throughout any revision of the Comprehensive Plan.
- B. Coordinate with local cities to require sufficient right-of-way and utility easements for subdivisions within the cities' extraterritorial areas, so that they can readily receive urban services in the future (i.e., city sewer, curb and gutter).
- C. Direct higher density urban development, such as multifamily housing, to cities within the County that can more appropriately handle needed infrastructure and services.

## Transportation

**1. Develop and maintain a transportation system that promotes the safety of all users.** Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of injury-related death in North Dakota. The reality is that crashes can be reduced through several measures. The County has the opportunity to influence the rate of crashes on its own road and bridge system. The management of land uses also indirectly impacts the safety of the entire County transportation system.

**Objectives**

- A. Continue to implement safety improvements in coordination with the NDDOT, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, local government partners, and the development community on existing and new county roads and bridges to minimize serious injuries and fatalities.

- B. In local communities, work with local government agencies and the MHA Nation to ensure that transportation improvements address safety and operation needs beyond those for vehicles, including pedestrians and bicyclists.
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- C. Continue to actively manage access onto county and township roads to ensure property access points are located to maximize safety and traffic flow.

**2. Develop a transportation system that is sustainable, maintains a state of good repair, and explores low-cost/high-benefit solutions to satisfy the public’s transportation priorities.** The traveling public expects a road and bridge system that provides safe travel and provides access to important local and regional areas. However, the public also expects that funding for transportation improvements be utilized efficiently and in a transparent manner.

**Objectives**

- A. Maximize the useful life of existing county infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, culverts, drainage facilities) through a sound preservation program.
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- B. Provide transparency, accountability, and effective engagement to residents and stakeholders (especially the oil and gas industry) when planning and implementing transportation improvements.
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- C. When planning for road projects, consider the need to serve development areas as identified in the Future Land Use Map of the Comprehensive Plan.

**3. Effectively and efficiently use available transportation funding.** Limited funding for transportation improvements means that projects need to be prioritized. Prioritization should be based on clear and reasonable rationale. Such rationale should also be leveraged to seek further funding for important projects.

**Objectives**

- A. Invest, as first priority, in safety and preservation improvements to the County’s road and bridge system.
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- B. Invest in new or additional road mileage and new road alignments only as financial resources allow and when proven by a clear and significant need.
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- C. Coordinate with NDDOT and State legislators to secure additional funding.
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- D. Maintain a rational, performance-based, transparent project prioritization system that can withstand public scrutiny and is flexible to account for changes to applicable rules and regulations and other external factors.

**4. Maximize intergovernmental cooperation and coordination to improve the transportation system.** County residents, workforce, and visitors travel throughout the County regardless of the jurisdictional responsibility (i.e. state highway, county road, or township road) for the facility that is used. Therefore, the County most actively work with other local, state, and tribal authorities to ensure improvements are well-coordinate across the entire transportation system.

**Objectives**

- A. Work with adjacent counties, local cities, and townships to ensure that the County is given notification of proposed development and transportation projects that may impact County roads and bridges.
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- B. Continue to advise and work with local cities, townships, and utilities (public and private) to ensure that County road and bridge projects are well-coordinated.
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- C. Reach out to and coordinate the County’s road and bridge plans with the MHA Nation, NDDOT (Minot and Williston Districts and Local Government Division), local cities, and local townships so that plans can be harmonized where possible.

- D. Promote education about road jurisdiction to help county residents understand which agency maintains which roads throughout the county.

## Infrastructure Services

1. **Promote efficient extensions, connections, upgrades, and maintenance for water, gas, electric, and other infrastructure to serve development.** Infrastructure and utilities should not be over-extended in order to minimize costs to local taxpayers and consumers.

### Objectives

- A. Periodically engage regional rural water and wastewater providers to provide regular map updates of utility systems as these systems are modified and expanded.
- B. Establish an open line of communication with local electric utilities and energy transmission companies in order to coordinate the location of new infrastructure to minimize the cumulative impact infrastructure corridors have on the usability of agricultural lands. Continue to work with other agencies to overlap easements where possible.

2. **Development is served by rural water providers to the greatest extent feasible.** Multiple rural water providers serve Mountrail County. Use of rural water limits the need for individual water wells and ensure a high level of water quality.

### Objectives

- A. Rural water providers must provide verification regarding whether or not the provider can service the proposed development at build-out.
- B. The cost of additional rural water capacity necessary for new development should be borne solely by the developer.
- C. Existing development currently served by individual wells is encouraged to be added to a rural water system.
- D. Support the efforts of the Western Area Water Supply Authority to increase system capacity and further expand into Mountrail County.

3. **Development is served by adequate fire protection, law enforcement, schools, emergency, and non-emergency medical services.** Infrastructure and utilities alone are not sufficient to properly serve new development. The County has a responsibility to ensure the provision of public services, such as law enforcement and fire protection, are reasonably provided to development throughout the county.

### Objectives

- A. Ensure that new development provides fire suppression capabilities in coordination with the rural water provider and meets the needs of the proposed development.
- B. For new development that cannot be reasonably serviced by local fire protection or emergency response service providers, the developer shall prove that the proposal includes measures to mitigate the risk of emergencies, such as fire mitigation and emergency access provisions.
- C. Require the provision of at least two points of access to new major subdivisions and other developments of significant size.

4. **Collaborate with the State agencies to ensure proper wastewater disposal.** As with other rural areas, many residents and businesses rely on either individual septic or larger private wastewater systems. The County can help make available educational resources and help health agencies best provide services locally.

## Objectives

- A. Increase engagement with the Upper Missouri District Health Unit and First District Health Unit to encourage compliance with state regulations of individual septic systems and residents' long-term care of individual systems.
- B. Enhance coordination with the State Department of Health to ensure that all private wastewater disposal systems (defined by NDCC as serving 25 persons or more) are effectively regulated to protect local groundwater and private property.

## Economic Development

1. **County core industries – agriculture and energy – continue to drive economic growth and development.** The County's economy relies heavily on these basic industries, not only for the direct employment and wages they create, but for indirect employment and earnings that spread across other sectors. Most regulation for agriculture and energy is determined by the State; for example, through the North Dakota Industrial Commission. Nonetheless, the County serves a key role in supporting regional economic development goals.

## Objectives

- A. Reserve the best farmland in Mountrail County for agriculture and compatible uses which do not diminish agricultural value.
- B. Partner with the North Dakota Industrial Commission to support industry development goals and leverage industry expertise.
- C. Buffer development under county zoning jurisdiction from active oil and gas development and related oil and gas land uses.
- D. Partner with regional education institutions to develop and apply agricultural science research and advanced technology in the field and continue to develop the next generation of farmers.
- E. Help connect County residents with available local and regional resources to support individuals and families interested in pursuing small-scale agriculture as a business.
- F. Increase awareness of existing agriculturally-focused youth development opportunities, such as 4H Club and other opportunities through the NDSU Extension office and other regional and local organizations.

2. **Align economic development goals with land use and infrastructure planning.** Mountrail County can support local and regional economic development activities through long-range and current planning. The Comprehensive Plan provides the foundation for long-range land use planning and infrastructure planning, which sets the stage for economic development. Land use policies should support the development and expansion of industries that contribute to economic growth. Current planning includes zoning and development review.

## Objectives

- A. Ensure the Future Land Use Plan identifies an adequate supply of commercial and industrial land in appropriate locations to attract private investment and support economic growth.
- B. Where possible, focus intense industry under County planning and zoning control toward cities with capacity to provide supportive infrastructure.
- C. Provide a clear, easy-to-follow process and timely review of development proposals.
- D. Coordinate with government agencies, private utilities, and industry to efficiently plan, finance, and integrate infrastructure systems.

- 3. Actively support regional economic development efforts.** Mountrail County’s economy operates within a regional context. Its industry makeup, resource opportunities, labor needs, and growth trends are largely consistent across the Bakken. Its interests and actions also intersect with those of the MHA Nation. As such, the County’s approach to economic development should be broadly integrated with regional interests and program development.

#### Objectives

- A. Maintain active dialog with the North Dakota Department of Commerce, which coordinates financial packages and tax incentives for special industries and planning areas.
- B. Coordinate technical assistance, such as GIS expertise and planning services, for communities as needed.
- C. Encourage private industry to invest in local communities to support a growing permanent workforce.
- D. Enhance the county’s workforce by strengthening supportive infrastructure, such as daycare, permanent single-family housing, parks and recreations, and local schools.

- 4. Promote sufficient permanent housing for a growing labor force.** To provide an adequate housing supply, housing demand must be identified, and there must be sufficient land zoned and ready for residential development. It is critical to engage with cities, which have capacity to support multiple housing types more efficiently than the County.

#### Objectives

- A. Continue to track building permits, occupancy rates, housing prices, and other indicators of housing demand. Coordinate with higher education and State agencies as needed to develop projections of housing need.
- B. Coordinate with utility service providers to identify potential system issues that might limit the location, density, or timing of residential development in both the cities and unincorporated County.
- C. Examine the role that multifamily units, accessory housing units, and temporary housing should play in areas under the County’s zoning jurisdiction and update the Zoning Ordinance if needed.
- D. Encourage cities to zone and prepare land to support housing alternatives based on population needs.

- 5. Promote regional linkages between suppliers, producers, and end consumers.** County industries which produce goods for export create community wealth. However, additional value can be captured by involving more local producers and suppliers before final products leave the County’s borders. Developing clusters of supportive industries also builds community resilience, which helps support the County during economic downturns.

#### Objectives

- A. Focus on value-added businesses, including operations that support oil and agriculture and associated product processing. Identify associated industry segments (i.e., refining, transmission, implement manufacturing, fertilizer manufacturing) which could be strengthened.
- B. Connect local and regional businesses with one another to discuss business supply chains and explore potential partnerships.
- C. Encourage businesses and residents to buy local.

- 6. Encourage the expansion of technical jobs and match workforce training programs to suit these jobs.** Economic growth is increasingly driven by technological improvements. Technological innovation and automation cause some jobs to be lost, while creating new employment opportunities that demand a

different a set of workforce skills. To compete in a globalized economy, Mountrail County must continue to encourage innovation and expand the technical capacity of businesses and workers.

### Objectives

- A. Support deployment of new technologies in the field to create new job opportunities and expand productivity. Actively encourage research demonstration projects in the County.
- B. Promote STEM education and computational skills in local schools.
- C. Promote regional vocational-based training institutions to help support local industry.

7. **Encourage the expansion and enhancement of outdoor recreation opportunities.** The County's natural resources and recreation areas are a source of tourism, which forms a part of the economic base. The proximity to hunting, camping, and fishing areas is also a selling point to people who may consider moving to the County. Enhancing access to natural areas, while maintaining the quality of these resources, are goals which can be integrated with land use planning, infrastructure planning, and economic development.

### Objectives

- A. Coordinate with USACE to enhance and better advertise public access to Lake Sakakawea.
- B. Coordinate with the County Park District, city parks districts, and nonprofit visitor and recreation organizations to develop, enhance, manage, and advertise County recreational facilities.
- C. Where possible, coordinate with MHA Nation to align tourism strategies and actions.

8. **Promote increased access to high-speed broadband and wireless communication.** Internet infrastructure is essential for business expansion, recruitment, and retention. It provides critical support to deploy technology and develop data systems. Access to the internet through direct broadband systems and wireless connections can be a significant factor in attracting business and workers to Mountrail County. In Mountrail County, 91 percent of the population has access to broadband speeds of 25 megabits per second (mbs). The goal should be to increase coverage to 100 percent. Long-term, the service target should be set to 100 mbs, which will become the standard for service within the decade.

### Objectives

- A. Work with local providers to increase overall access to broadband and wireless service networks. Encourage wireless expansion to areas with limited broadband service.
- B. Work with local providers to increase service speeds and prioritize improvements accordingly
- C. Encourage development in locations which are already served by, or can be served by, reliable broadband services and wireless communication networks.
- D. Ensure that broadband service is available to new development. Encourage internet service agreements prior to approval of County preliminary plats.
- E. Coordinate with wireless companies to identify appropriate sites for wireless communication towers. Encourage collocation of wireless tower facilities.