02. COMMUNITY CONTEXT

"A Beautiful Summer"
Photo submitted by: Alice Fahey

This chapter of the Le Sueur Comprehensive Plan is intended to take a brief look back at the history of Le Sueur and the major influences that shaped what it has become today. It also takes a snapshot of what Le Sueur is today by providing an inventory of existing conditions using a combination of available data sets (local, regional, and national), on the ground observations, and community sentiment. The pages that follow contain a snapshot of the most relevant pieces of information. A more extensive inventory and data report is available as a separate stand alone document. The community context includes:

- A brief history of Le Sueur,
- Location analysis,
- Key demographic trends,
- Economic trends,
- Existing land use,
- Transportation and infrastructure,
- Natural Resources; and,
- A brief summary of past planning initiatives.

Evolution of Green Giant's iconic logo

Original City Platting

A Brief History of Le Sueur

Named in honor of the French explorer, Pierre Charles Le Sueur, the City of Le Sueur was founded in 1852 on the banks of the Minnesota River, and was one of the first towns to be established in Le Sueur County. The City began as part of a group of three small, competing settlements: Le Sueur, Middle Le Sueur, and Le Sueur City. The Minnesota Legislature united the three settlements in 1867, and the resulting City of Le Sueur was designated as the county seat of Le Sueur County until 1875.

William Worrall Mayo began his medical practice in Le Sueur in 1859, where he treated patients from his home on Main Street. Mayo later moved his practice to Rochester where it became the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, but his home in Le Sueur stands tribute to him as a museum and is one of the several Le Sueur homes on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Another home on the NRHP was owned by Carson H. Cosgrove, who was part of the group of fourteen local merchants that capitalized on the valley's rich soils and the Minnesota River's connection to several larger cities to create the Minnesota Valley Canning Company in 1903. In 1925, the company introduced an unusually large pea that was more tender and sweet than the original variety; they were named "Green Giant Great Big Tender Peas" and the iconic Jolly Green Giant became their icon. Due to the popularity of the Jolly Green Giant advertising campaign, the company changed its name to Green Giant in 1950. Green Giant began investing twice as much in research and development than the average food company to ensure their continued success, which flourished until the company was sold to Pillsbury in 1979. The company's headquarters were moved to Minneapolis immediately, and by 1995 the processing plant was entirely closed, taking 27 full-time and 430 seasonal jobs with it. Presently, only the research center remains operational in the company's hometown.

Location Analysis

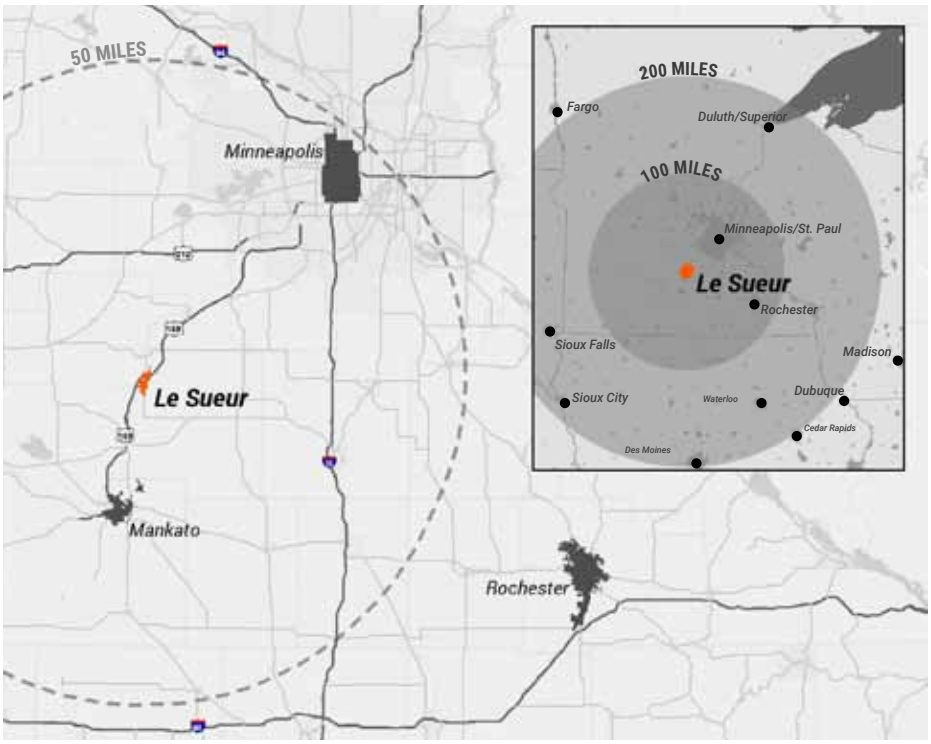
Regional Context

Le Sueur is well situated between several major population centers, with over ten metropolitan areas within 200 miles. The City's adjacency with Minnesota State Highway 169 provides an easy route for residents looking to travel to Mankato, the Twin Cities, and the Interstate Highway System.

Local Context

Le Sueur is considered part of Le Sueur County, but lies on the intersection of Le Sueur and Sibley and has land within both counties. The City shares jurisdictional boundaries with four different townships: Henderson, Lake Prairie, Ottawa, and Tyrone. The nearest city is Henderson, which is about 6 miles north of Le Sueur. St. Peter and Le Center are both within 15 miles of the City, and lie to the south and southeast respectively.

Figure 2.1 Regional Context

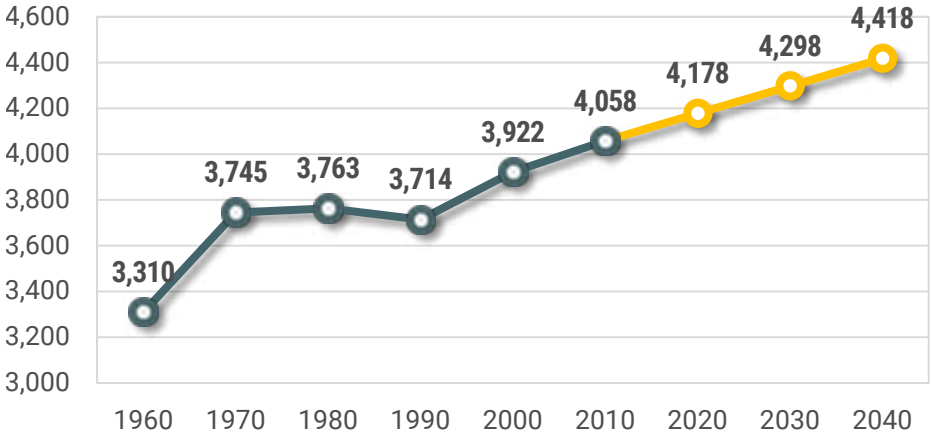


Demographics

Historic Population Growth

Le Sueur's population has experienced continued growth over the past 50 years, as shown in Table 2.1. According to a combination of projections generated by the State Demographer, ESRI, and past planning efforts, it can be assumed that this growth will continue moving forward. It is estimated that Le Sueur will gain about 120 people by 2020, and another 240 people by 2040.

Table 2.1 Historic Population



Population Characteristics

Le Sueur's demographic information was obtained from the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey. Figures from 2000 and 2010 were compared to gain an understanding of how the community is changing and what future needs could arise. Highlights from this analysis are as follows:

» Population increased by over 100 residents
  - Growth occurred in the youngest and oldest age cohorts

Table 2.2 Employment Inflow & Outflow

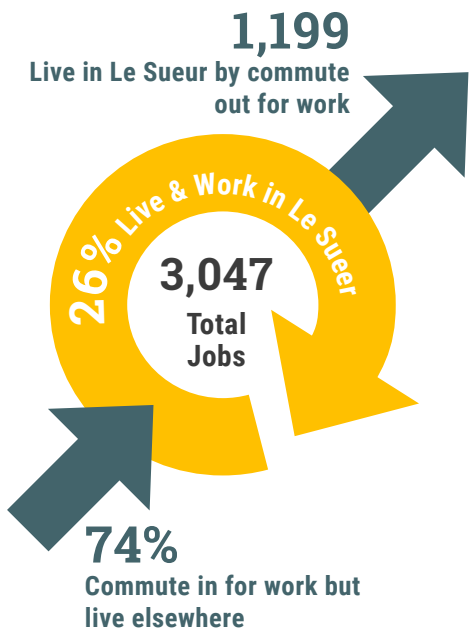
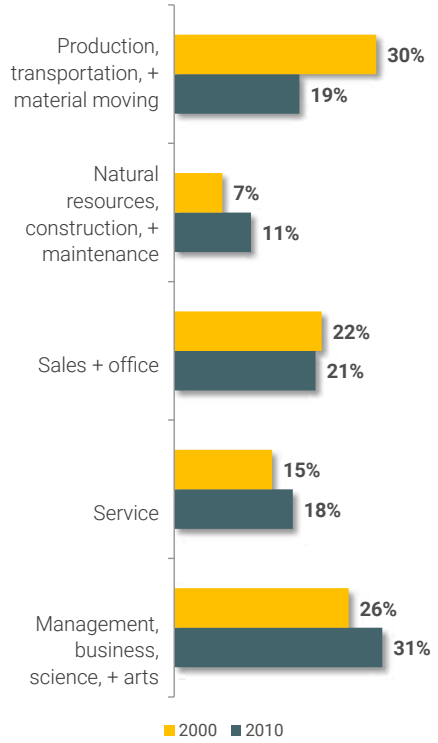


Table 2.3 Occupation Sectors



- The population is predominantly white (85.2%) with almost 12% of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino
- The number of non-family households grew in relation to family households
- Median income levels increased for both families and households, with the majority of residents reporting in the $50k to $75k range
- Educational attainment increased, with 87% of residents 25 or older holding a high school diploma or higher

Employment Conditions

Jobs in Le Sueur

According to the US Census Bureau, there are 3,063 people employed in the City of Le Sueur. Of these people, 2,194 (72%) are coming to work from outside the city limits. 869 People live and work in the City of Le Sueur, filling 28% of the jobs in the city. Jobs in Le Sueur attract 199 people from St. Peter, 117 from New Prague, and 110 from Mankato. The majority of labor inflow arrives from the south.

Manufacturing represents the largest job sector in the city, with 48.7% of all the jobs in the city (1,493 total). Following up manufacturing, are jobs in education (8.4%), health care (7.3%), management (5.8%) and public administration (4.5%) amoung others.

Labor Force

According to the US Census Bureau, 2,197 residents of Le Sueur are employed in some kind of work. Of those, 39.6% work in the City of Le Sueur. This means that 60.4% of workers from Le Sueur are leaving the city to work. Popular destinations include St. Peter (8.2%) and Mankato (7.3%). Also of note, 25.8% of Le Sueur workers are travelling over 25 miles to the Northeast, presumably to the Twin Cities and suburbs.

Existing Land Use

It is important to understand the development patterns that shaped the City's existing conditions. Figure 2.2 provides a snapshot of the existing land use distribution of Le Sueur's 3,036 acres as of Winter 2015/2016. This land use pattern was determined through an analysis of current tax classification, parcel data, existing zoning designations, ownership data, an evaluation of aerial photos, and limited field observation.

The City of Le Sueur is composed of just under 3,000 acres. While 24% of City land is classified as undeveloped, much of this land is located within the Minnesota River floodway rendering it undevelopable. The City's largest development type is residential, with 20% of the Le Sueur devoted to single family detached housing.

Block Pattern

Traditional development within Le Sueur contains a gridded road and block pattern that is oriented to match the angle of the two original transportation corridors; the railroad and the Minnesota River. Generally, the blocks that conform to the traditional development pattern contain dimensions of 320' wide by 400' long with a central alley running lengthwise.

Figure 2.2 Existing Land Use

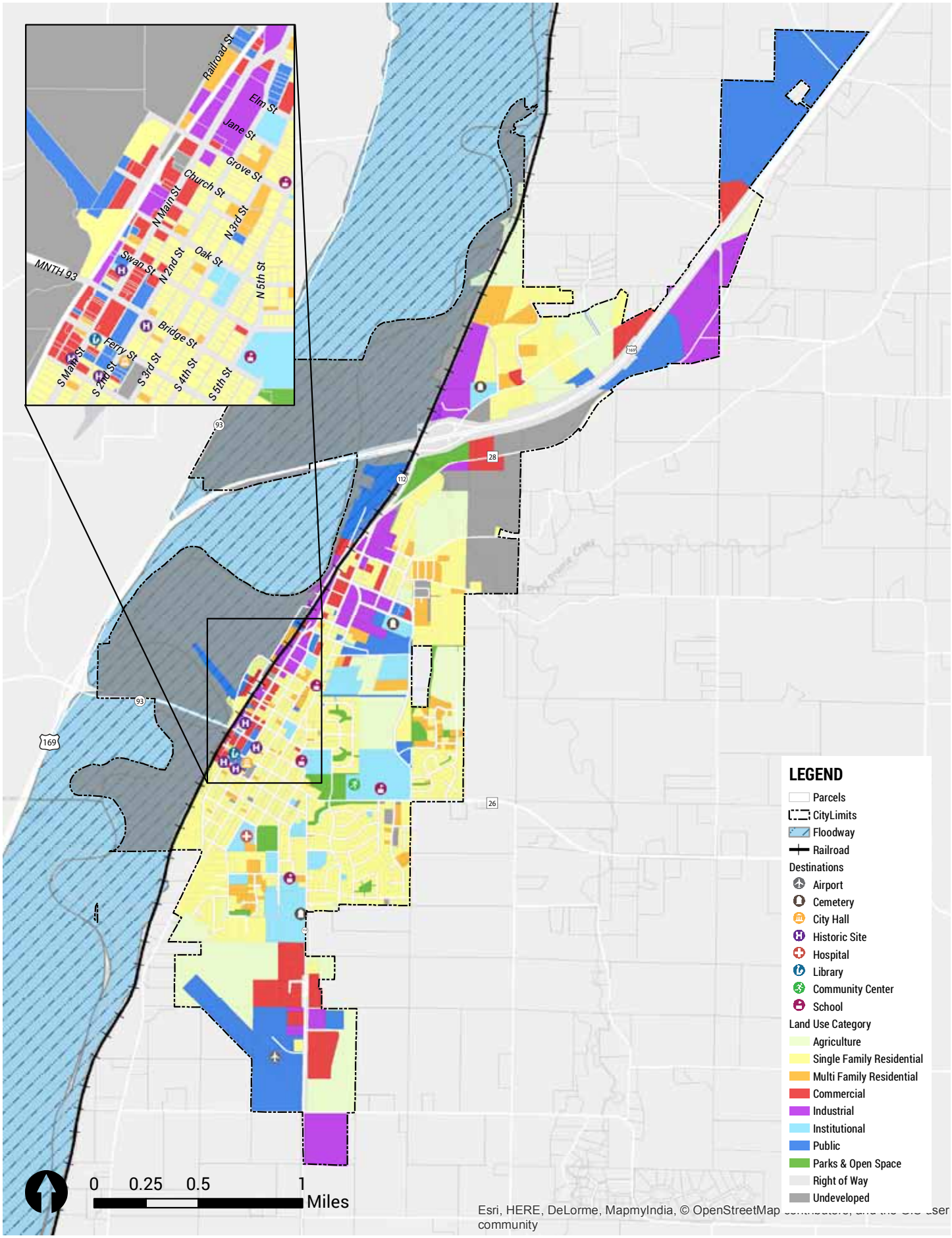
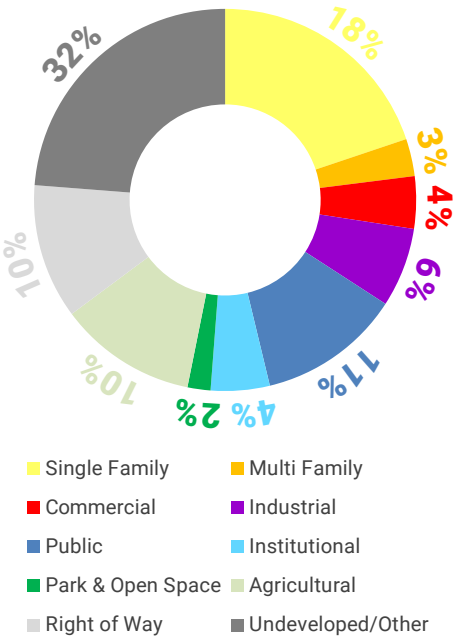


Table 2.4 Existing Land Use Acreage

Use	Acreage
Residential	706
Single-Family	*609*
Multi-Family	*97*
Commercial	136
Industrial	207
Public	371
Institutional	153
Park & Open Space	60
Agricultural	358
Right of Way	350
Total Developed	**2,341**
Undeveloped/Other	**1,106**
Total Land Area	**3,466**

Table 2.5 Percent of Total Land Use



Le Sueur's newer subdivisions contain curvilinear roads that define longer blocks than those found in areas of traditional development. The newer areas do not align with the river/railroad corridor, but instead generally orient to surrounding roads running north to south.

Blocks intended for industrial usage are, in general, much larger than the rest of the City's platting. Larger blocks can more easily accommodate large-scale buildings and the increased truck traffic and loading that is often necessary for industry.

Natural Resources & Environment

Minnesota River

The Minnesota River has been flowing through the valley since long before settlement was occurring at the present day location of Le Sueur. Massive amounts of water cut the Minnesota River Valley, defining much of today's floodplain.

Following the settlement of the City of Le Sueur, the river was used to transport agricultural goods, and hosted riverboat trips from St. Paul to Mankato.

Today the river at Le Sueur is used primarily for recreational purposes.

Geology

The rushing waters of Glacial River Warren helped shape the City of Le Sueur. At the lowest elevation, the Minnesota River continues to run north, providing fishing and boating for residents. Within the valley, especially at it's lower elevations, the floodplain has made development unfeasible, but this means a natural buffer has been left as an asset for the City. Moving up to an intermediate elevation, still within the valley, but beyond the reaches of typical flooding, downtown and the older neighborhoods sit where they have for a hundred years. As the City grew it expanded into, and then up the hill where newer developments have sprouted up, along with the farms that are still producing the food that made Le Sueur famous.

Streams + Tributaries

There are two tributaries that run near Le Sueur to feed into the Minnesota River: Rush River and Le Sueur Creek. The Rush River runs through Rush River County Park and reaches the Minnesota River at the northwestern edge of Le Sueur's boundary. Forest Prairie Creek feeds into Le Sueur Creek just before it crosses Le Sueur's eastern border. Le Sueur Creek then continues through the City until meeting up with the Minnesota River just north of Le Sueur's downtown. These streams have carved out ravines on their path downhill to the Minnesota River.

Woodlands + Habitat

Le Sueur county lies within the southern portion of the Big Woods area. Prior to settlement, the area was primarily covered by hardwood forests with species including sugar maple, black walnut, aspen, white and black ash, and cottonwood. Notable areas that were naturally devoid of woodland included the Le Sueur Prairie and the limestone terrace around Kasota.

The County's settlement resulted in the clearing of much of these hardwood forests to make room for agriculture and development. The City of Le Sueur's remaining woodlands primarily exist in areas that are within the floodplain or ravines or on steep slopes, due to the unfavorable development conditions. Similarly, various soils that are ill-suited for farming or development have also allowed for the preservation of natural features and habitat.

Agricultural Lands

The City of Le Sueur is characterized by soils of the glacial upland, and is generally composed of a combination of Lester soils, Dorchester soils, and mixed alluvium. Areas that are classified as "not prime farmland" are generally within the floodway or on steep slopes.

The agricultural business is an important component of both Le Sueur's economy and history. Much of the land surrounding Le Sueur is devoted to agricultural uses, which resulted as a response to the Minnesota River Valley's fertile soils, as well as the ease of transportation resulting from the Minnesota River and the railroad and the Green Giant canning industry that was once headquartered in the City. This reliance on agriculture shaped Le Sueur as a rural, farming community; a character that remains evident to this day. Presently, the major crop and livestock species produced in Le Sueur County are corn, soybeans, hogs, beef, poultry, and dairy.

Conceptual diagram of the approximate extent of Glacial River Warren at present day Le Sueur

Truck traffic in the middle of Le Sueur's downtown

Existing Water Tower

Transportation

The City currently applies state roadway design standards in combination with City ordinances for new subdivisions. These state standards follow a federally defined system of "functional classification." The system is based on how particular roadways function in relation to the community and metro area. Functional classification information has limited application to Le Sueur, and is explored more extensively later in the plan.

While the Union Pacific Railroad and the Minnesota River were historically utilized for transportation purposes, they no longer have station stops in Le Sueur.

Infrastructure

Potable Water

The water system in Le Sueur consists of a water treatment plant constructed in 1995, 36 miles of distribution including 4 towers/storage facilities, and 5 wells drawing from the Jordan (3), Franconia (1), and Mount Simon (1) aquifers. The plant currently provides 1 million gallons of water per day and the maximum capacity is 2 million gallons per day. A wellhead protection program went into effect in 2015 to protect groundwater around wells.

Sanitary Sewer

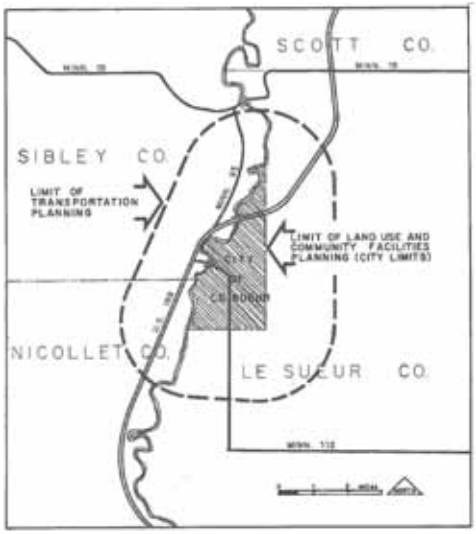
The sanitary sewer system in Le Sueur is made up of the current sewage treatment plant which currently accommodates 1 million gallons per day for both Le Sueur and Henderson, with a capacity of 2 million gallons per day. The treatment plant was built in 2007, replacing the sewage ponds on the west side of the Minnesota River. There are 30 miles worth of collection system and 6 lift stations that facilitate the movement of waste. The system serves the residents of Le Sueur, while most land outside of the city limits is currently on septic systems. After treatment, the cleaned waste water is discharged into the Minnesota River.

One issue in any sewer system, but especially pronounced in older systems is inflow/infiltration. Inflow is the introduction of water to the sanitary sewer system from inappropriate sources, such as sump pumps, roof drains, or cellar drains. Infiltration is the introduction of groundwater to the sanitary sewer system through defective or broken pipes and joints. In both cases, the water entering the system is still generally clean and adding it to sanitary sewer costs the community money to clean water that does not need it.

Past Planning Initiatives

1965 Comprehensive Plan

The 1965 Comprehensive Plan was prepared under the auspices of the Urban Renewal Program and the Housing Act of 1956. It was a nearly two year process funded with assistance from State and Federal grants and led by the Le Sueur Planning Commission. The Planning Commission was created for the purpose of preparing the comprehensive plan, with the assistance of a professional planning consulting firm. The Plan includes two report documents which analyze existing conditions, identify anticipated planning trends, and establish plans for land use, transportation, and community facilities.



1965 Comprehensive Planning Area

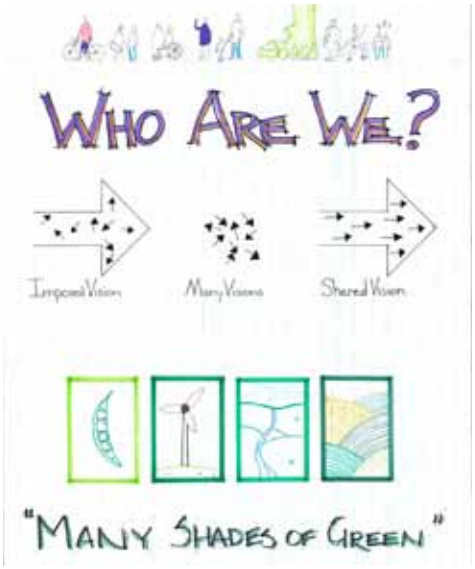
1995 IMAGE AND STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN

This study identified issues that hampered the image of the city. Focused by the vision of "Country Living, City Style," the plan strives to improve the way visitors and residents experience Le Sueur. This included recommended updates and upgrades to the central business district (CBD) and the entry corridors (the bridge, Commerce Drive/Main Street and Kingsway Drive).

1965 Central Business District Plan

2007 Minnesota Design Team

The Minnesota Design Team is an AIA Minnesota committee that sends a team of multidisciplinary volunteers to rural communities where they provide planning and design services in an effort to improve the communities' built environments. Volunteers bring a diversity of skill sets to the community including Architecture, Planning, Landscape Architecture, Community Organizing, Housing, and Economic Development among others. The MDT's 2007 visit included a pre-visit to set the stage and promote the project, and then a three day workshop that included stakeholder interviews, a public visioning sessions, MDT work-session, and a public presentation culminating the event.



2007 Minnesota Design Team Document Cover

2013 Active Living Plan

The Le Sueur Community Trails and Pedestrian Walkway Committee was created in February of 2013 to advise the City Council where and how Le Sueur could benefit from improved pedestrian pathways after the community's first trails grant was approved along Kingsway Drive. The committee created an Active Living Plan with an overarching goal to "promote development of the built environments that offers the opportunity to integrate physical activity into daily life."

2014 Safe Routes to School Plan

Safe Routes To School (SRTS) is a national program which assists communities and schools districts in enabling and encouraging children to walk and bike to school by making it a safer, healthier, and more appealing transportation option. The planning process completed by the City of Le Sueur consisted of establishing a vision and goals for the process, collecting and analysing information, determining barriers and challenges to walking and biking, determining strategies, and creating an action plan to implement the identified strategies.

2014 Housing Study

Le Sueur's Economic Development Authority (EDA), in collaboration with Community Partners Research, Inc., conducted this Housing Study to provide an inventory and analysis of Le Sueur's existing housing stock and identify future housing needs. The study conducted an in-depth analysis of demographic and economic conditions in the City of Le Sueur, relying on a combination of industry data, site survey work, and technical analysis.

2015 MVHC Community Health Needs Assessment Community Engagement Report

In September-October 2015 Minnesota Valley Health Center (MVHC) convened a group of community members and partners to 1) develop a vision of a healthy community, 2) come to a common understanding of the current health status of their community, and 3) identify key opportunities to help move the community from the current status to the vision.