

City of Forada Comprehensive Plan

Introduction

Located midway between the cities of Alexandria and Glenwood approximately 3 miles east of the intersection of Minnesota Highway 29 as the Soo Line Railroad crosses County Highway 4 is the City of Forada. This small municipality in Douglas County with about 200 residents encompasses 345 acres including 1.25 miles of shoreline along Maple Lake. The City is bordered on three sides by Hudson Township. Forada is part of a broader agricultural region with a variety of natural amenities that include woodlands, prairies, lakes and wetlands that provide excellent recreational opportunities.

The City Council with input from its residents is guiding the creation of this first ever long-term comprehensive plan. The plan, contained herein, lays the groundwork for desired land uses and future growth for the next 10-20 years. The long range plan for Forada will serve to facilitate future growth and maximize the community's potential while limiting the negative impacts of unplanned development. The goals and implementation strategies prepared with this comprehensive plan precede and help inform zoning, subdivision regulations, and ordinances, the tools for implementing the comprehensive plan.

The Planning Process

The planning process began in September 2018 with a survey and an initial community meeting which invited participation from residents, business owners, and government officials. Resulting meetings facilitated by Hometown Planning began taking place in January of 2019 focusing on the creation of a vision, goals and strategies for the future of Forada.

In creating this Comprehensive Plan the following basic principles are acknowledged:

1. That growth and change affecting the City of Forada is often due largely to broader local, regional, national and global influences over which it has little direct control;
2. That unplanned, scattered growth without a vision of where the community is heading results may result in conflict, increased taxes and uninformed public expenditures, lost opportunities and ultimately less satisfaction;
3. That the city has a responsibility to its residents and property owners to find an appropriate balance in land use issues that makes efficient use of public resources, preserves Maple Lake and other sensitive natural resources, respects the cultural and social character of an area, provides landowners with reasonable use of their

property, and protects property values by minimizing conflict between various land uses, and;

4. That the city will ensure that its land use planning efforts are conducted in a manner that is open, accountable, and consistent so that residents, landowners and others can invest in their properties with a reasonable certainty that those investments will not be negatively affected by what happens around them.

This Comprehensive Plan and the associated information base will allow decision-makers to evaluate and guide proposals benefiting the residents of Forada consistent with a clearly defined set of goals and objectives. While the Plan is intended to serve as a 20-year guide, it should be reviewed periodically and adjusted as necessary to adequately address development and changes within the community as they occur.

In evaluating the City's historic context, demographic and land use trends, service infrastructure, and role among other governmental entities and its stakeholders, this Plan will define from a vision of what the City of Forada strives and prepare decision making for future years with a set of goals, policies and implementation strategies consistent with that vision.

Historic and Current Trends

As the City of Forada explores the influences, issues and trends that it can expect to have an impact over the next twenty years or more, it is needful to consider what has been occurring in the recent past with the City itself, the surrounding townships and other nearby cities. Since the trends affecting Forada and Hudson Township are occurring largely on a regional basis, it is essential for the city's leaders and residents to understand that what occurs in the City of Forada is not only affected by what is occurring within its borders, but also beyond its borders. This analysis will review what has been occurring in Douglas County and the nearby cities and townships, and how they compare with what is occurring in the City of Forada.

There are three primary demographic characteristics that are especially important to consider in helping the City decide how best to plan for its future. These are:

1. How many people will be living in the City in the future?
2. What type of characteristics will that population have and how it may impact the type and amount of infrastructure and services demanded?
3. What will be the source of employment and income for the City's population?

Knowing the answers to these questions is not an exact science by any means, but it is possible to make reasonable predictions that will help to provide the basic information necessary to plan ahead for the various infrastructure and service needs of the community as well as guide development in ways that preserve and enhance the unique resources within the city.

Area History and Growth

The formation of Forada was preceded by the settlement and emergence of a farming community in the mid-1800s that grew into the area that would be organized as Hudson Township in 1867. The original name given to the township was Maple Lake. This was changed to Roslyn in 1869 and then to Hudson Township in 1872.

Small cities in west-central Minnesota were to emerge largely due to the influence of railroad companies and the rail lines they built. The City of Forada began in 1903 when the Soo Line Railroad purchased a 75 acre site in what was Hudson Township along the line that ran between Alexandria and Glenwood. The city was originally intended to be named Ada for the spouse of its first surveyor and developer, Cyrus A. Campbell. Another Minnesota town of that name already existed, so adding the prefix “for”, the new city incorporated in 1905 became known officially as Forada.

Businesses that would benefit from this important railroad stop soon started up and Forada became a growing active community. Most of these early enterprises were associated with the needs of the surrounding farming community. The rail line through Forada distributed agricultural products grown around Alexandria, Glenwood, Osakis, and Sauk Centre to larger markets in Fargo/Moorhead, St. Cloud and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Among early businesses in Forada were two grain elevators, a potato warehouse, a working creamery, two grocery stores, a blacksmith shop, lumber yard, bank and a local church. Over the years many of these businesses were discontinued with new ones often taking their place. These new businesses would also cater to the needs of those who frequented the fishing and boating opportunities offered by the new seasonal resorts around Maple Lake.

After the invention of the personal automobile, and with steadily improving road networks, the residents of Douglas County and Pope County began to enter a period of new freedom and mobility. Farmers became much more connected to emerging cities for their daily needs and social interactions. They began to spread out into the planned cities and residential areas further from the railroad lines.

In 1922, Douglas County working together with Hudson Township established what is now known as County Road 4. Also established at this time was Minnesota State Highway 29. With the emerging highway transportation system, steady growth around the lakes of Alexandria and Glenwood quickly followed. Forada was advantageously located between the two cities, though a few miles off of the main route taken by Highway 29. In the period from 1920 to 1960, Douglas County would grow by about 1,300 people. Shaped by both the railroad and the creation of this new network of roads, small businesses and residential neighborhoods took shape in Forada and Hudson Township.

The greater trend with the continued improvements to the road system and the ability of people to move about with their own automobiles was a growing number of people choosing to live and work in the Alexandria and Glenwood lakes area due to the wide variety of services and amenities becoming available. With increased mobility came the rapid subdivision of lakeshore areas. For Forada and Hudson Township, Maple Lake became more accessible to people looking to make use of seasonal cabins and investors seeking to build with the lake's recreational offerings. Through the 1950s, an active retail economy had been created in Forada with a grocery store, hardware store, municipal liquor, community center, a pool hall, other businesses.

The area around Forada was also changing. In the period from 1960 to 1980, an additional 6,500 people became residents of Douglas County with the bulk of this growth occurring in the 1970s, much of it in the City of Alexandria. By 1960 Hudson Township would grow to a population of 426, while in Forada, the population remained relatively stable at between 90 and 100 people. A significant growth spurt occurred from 1960 to 1970, when residential neighborhoods expanded and the population grew by more than 60 percent from 98 to 152. The City continued to grow from 1970 to 1980, then the population again stabilized at just under 200 residents where it has remained relatively constant since.

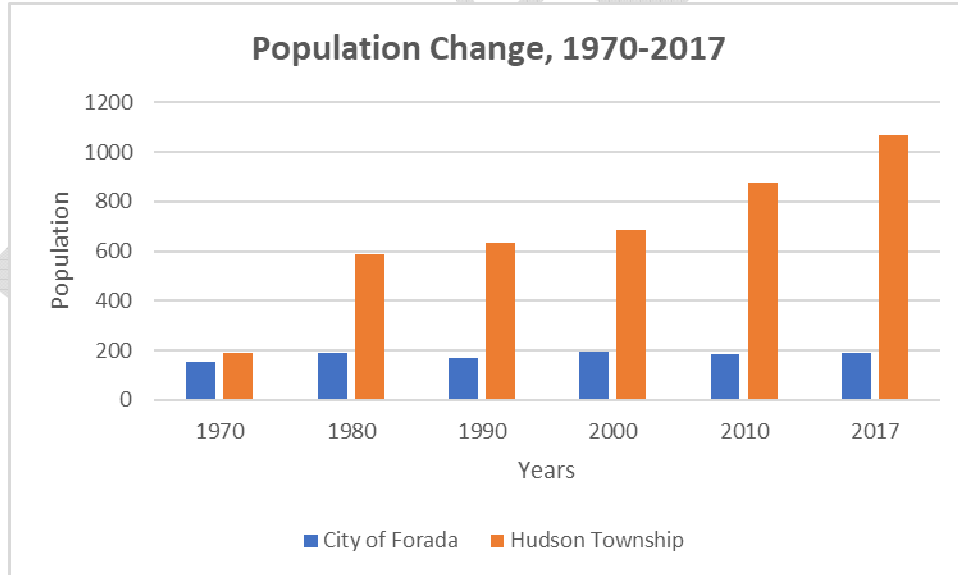
From 1970 onward to today, nearby Alexandria and Glenwood began to see rapid changes in development pressures and patterns. Lakeshore properties that just 20 years before had seemed unfeasible or undesirable for development were now generating significant demand. The closing or consolidation of farming operations that began largely in the 1980s, coupled with increased demand for housing, resulted in converting more agricultural land to new housing developments. The rising cost of lakeshore property, combined with low interest rates, increased the pace of remodeling projects that converted seasonal cabins to larger year-round homes as well as the construction of homes on more affordable "second tier" lots across the road from lakeshore lots. All of these factors combined to add nearly 10,000 people to Douglas County from 1980 to today of which 90 percent of that total were added since 1990.

Comparison data on recent growth trends are provided in the table and figure below, Hudson Township has experienced significant gains in population since 1970. From 1990 to 2017, the township has grown in population by 436 residents, nearly 70 percent. During the same time frame, the City of Forada has seen only a marginal change in its population. According to the Census data, there were more people living in Forada in the year 2000 than in the year 2017. Also shown in Table 1 is the change that has occurred in the City of Alexandria and Douglas County as a whole.

Table 1 - Population Growth, 1970 – 2017

Unit of Government	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2017	Growth 1970-1990	Growth 1990-2017	% Change 1990-2017
City of Forada	158	191	171	197	185	190	+32	+19	11%
Hudson Township	191	585	632	686	876	1,068	+441	+436	69%
City of Alexandria	6,973	7,608	8,029	8,820	11,017	13,203	+1,056	+4,383	55%
Douglas County	22,892	27,839	28,839	32,821	36,009	37,575	+5,947	+8,736	30%

Figure 1 – Population Change, Forada and Hudson Township



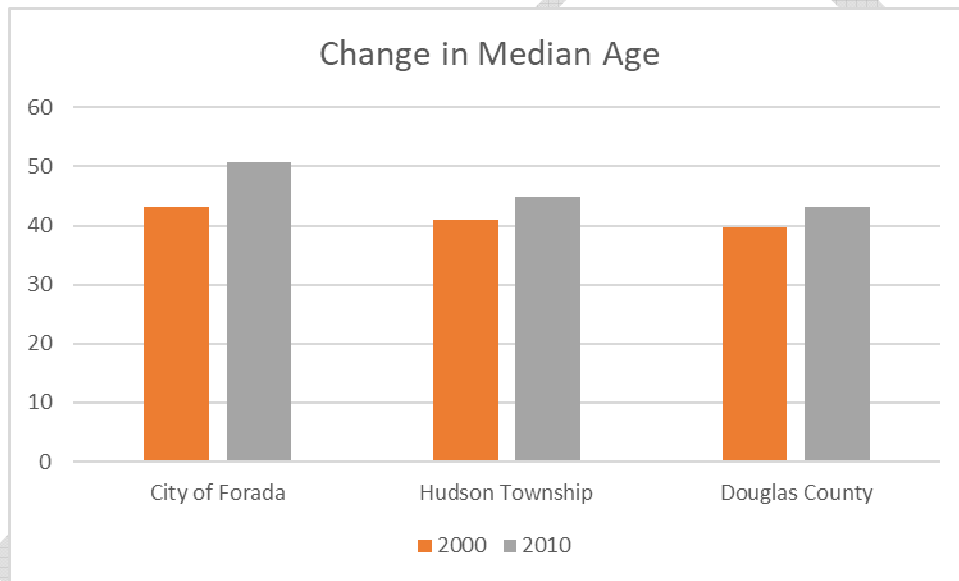
Source: US Census, MN Demographer

Population and Housing Characteristics

Age Structure

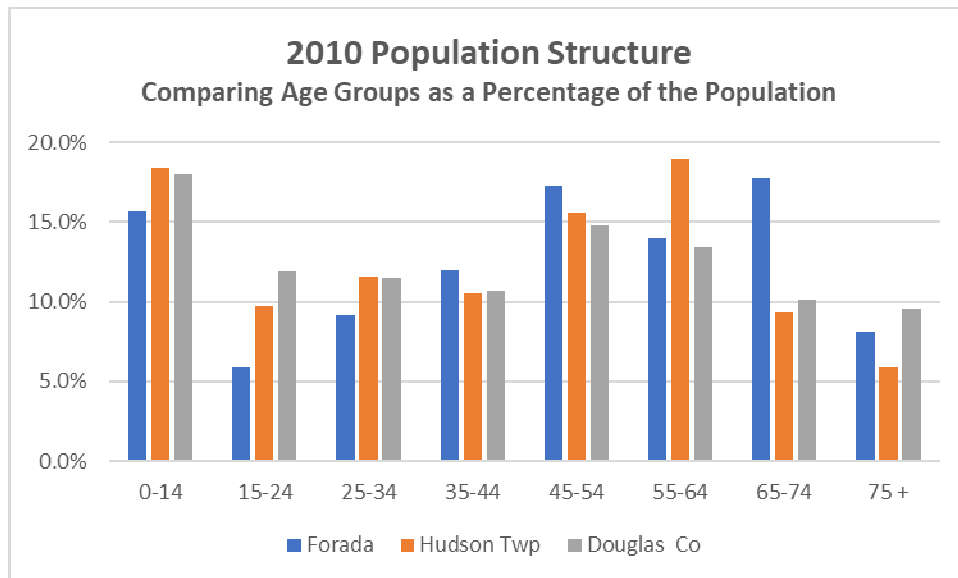
Comparatively, the City of Forada has a population that as a whole is much older than the area surrounding it. In Douglas County, the median age (the age at which half of the population is above and half is below), increased from 37.4 years in 1990 to 43.1 years in 2010, reflecting a national trend of an aging population. The median age in Hudson Township from the 2010 Census is near to that at 44.8 which contrasts with the significantly higher median age in the City of Forada of 50.8 years. Figure 2 shows the change with this growth in the median age and how this compares with that of Hudson Township and Douglas County.

Figure 2 - Median Age 2000 – 2010



There are also noticeable differences in population structure between Hudson Township, the City of Forada, and Douglas County (Figure 3). The most recent Census figures reveal that the 65 to 74 age group is significantly higher in the City of Forada as compared to the Township or the County.

Figure 3 - Population Structures



Amenities such as lakeshore property and relatively affordable off-lake housing, as well as the advances in healthcare, have been a driving force behind this increase in the percentage of older age groups. This trend can have a significant impact on the community as they tend to contribute significantly to the local economy through their relatively high disposable income, their higher demand for health care services and, in some cases, by moving their businesses and associated jobs to the community from metropolitan areas. On the other hand, people in these age groups tend to be less supportive of public expenditures on education and other public services that younger families tend to demand due to their status as “empty-nesters.”

For the immediate future, as the baby boomer generation continues to age, it is expected that the aging trend will continue. The plan for the City of Forada should consider how to best accommodate the needs of a diverse but relatively older population while also seeking to attract residents of younger ages.

Housing Characteristics

The current housing stock in Forada is primarily single-family, owner-occupied housing and became increasingly so between 1990 and 2000. In 2010, about two-thirds of the estimated 125 housing units were owner occupied, compared to 70 percent in 2000. The median household income in 2010 was \$51,250 and is estimated to be about \$60,000 in 2018, close to the median income level in Douglas County. The declining number of younger families, coupled with the increasing population of retirement-age persons suggests that the high percentage of single-family housing will likely be a continuing

trend for the City of Forada and that the demand for rental housing will be relatively minor.

Forada Today

Culturally, the City of Forada provides a strong “small town” and “rural” character that is becoming increasingly attractive to those seeking to escape the traffic congestion, noise and dense housing of larger urban areas. A survey of community residents identified this small town feel as a primary advantage for the city and a feature to be continued.

Today Forada is also home to a professionally trained and effective volunteer fire department, a source of much community pride. Businesses include a popular supper club, a successful bar/restaurant, lake resorts and a new bank. The Lions Club and other community service organizations help to keep the community and the area around the lake attractive for the residents and its many visitors. Enthusiastic residents and volunteer groups also contribute to an annual festival, “Forada Days,” celebrating the community, its history and all it has to offer.

The City of Forada provides many services to its residents including contractually provided street maintenance and maintaining a municipal park and playground area popular with families. Other municipally maintained properties include a baseball park, the fire hall, and the city hall area.

Forada also relies on other service providers. The city’s homes and businesses were connected to the Alexandria Lakes Area Sanitary District (ALASD) in 2009. High speed internet service, vital to the success of today’s businesses, relies on the services of available independent private providers.

The 2018 community survey indicated a high degree of satisfaction with what the city currently provides, though it does show an interest from residents in attracting additional small businesses, improving street maintenance, and providing better public safety. Many also expressed the desire to keep their local taxes and costs down as the City considers how to best provide for future services.

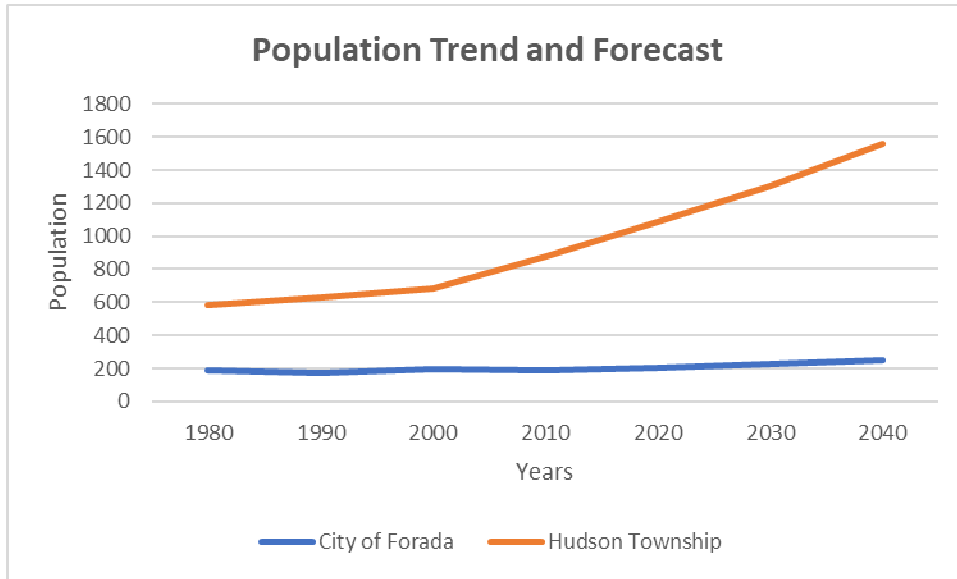
Future Trends and Issues

With transportation and technological advances, the pace of change and development for which the City of Forada and the surrounding region has had to adapt has increased remarkably. The growth trend for Douglas County and the communities in and around Alexandria and Glenwood is expected to continue at a steady yet significant pace.

Looking to the future, Hudson Township can also expect continued increases in population growth. The Minnesota Demographer’s Office projects Hudson Township to follow its growth trend through 2035, also showing a significant increase in population

growth for Douglas County as a whole. Considering the past trend, future population growth for the City of Forada is uncertain. Figure 4 indicates future population growth that can be expected for Forada and Hudson Township based on current trends.

Figure 4 - Population Forecasts



Except for a limited area designated for commercial use along County Road 4 and Fourth Street, the zoning ordinance and map adopted by Forada in 2007 identifies all other areas as appropriate for residential use. There is no anticipation of future industrial use and the zoning ordinance does not identify any industrial district.

The intent of the zoning ordinance to accommodate modest yet progressive commercial and residential growth may not however be sustainable in the current context. The continued inability to attract new and diverse types of homeowners or desirable businesses to Forada also makes it increasingly difficult to maintain the City's tax base and continue the level of service provided to current properties and residents.

Opportunities for future development will also be dependent on available services that may be outside the control of the City such as the cost and capacity provided by the regional sanitary district, road maintenance on State and County roads and public safety enforcement.

Environmental protections and other community interests also depend to some extent on the nature of decisions on land use and development beyond the city boundaries. As privately owned wells continue to be the community's water source, maintaining water quality will also be of paramount significance. Other environmental protection needs will include maintaining the soil quality, vegetative and natural features and protecting Maple Lake and the lakeshore community from harmful runoff and contaminants.

Goals, Policies and Strategies

Having developed a list of preliminary goals to address issues of significance to the City of Forada, specific policies and strategies are suggested to provide direction to City officials and property owners as they confront these issues and make land use decisions in the best interests of its residents and stakeholders. The policies and strategies here identified are intended to provide the means to promote needed land use and development, more knowledgeable and effective local planning, improved intergovernmental coordination and continued assurance of essential community services.

Land Use and Development

While other nearby communities have undergone significant growth and development over the past fifty years, the City of Forada has had only a marginal increase in population and housing and not much change its commercial makeup over the same span of time. There continues to be an expectation that the City will remain small in size and this reflects the desire of its residents who enjoy the character of a small close-knit rural community.

Among the issues to be addressed is to be more effective in attracting a larger number of younger families to live in Forada. An increase in the amount of quality affordable housing will encourage people to live locally and increase the tax base. There will be efforts to retain existing retail and commercial enterprises while also bringing in new businesses, especially of the type that would provide products and services that are lacking and for which residents have to go to other communities to find.

Housing Development:

***Goal:** Provide more and better housing opportunities to meet the needs of current residents and attract new residents and homeowners.*

***Goal:** Support varied types of housing options and economic opportunities that will be attractive to young families.*

The City of Forada will continue to provide for single-family residential housing opportunities though may allow attached town home, condominium and other multi-family housing options that will allow for residents of various life stages and income levels within appropriate areas.

Policies and Strategies:

- Sustain current residential areas by encouraging property owners and developers to replace or rebuild older homes as needed.
- Expand areas within the city that will allow a quality mix of new housing options for all types of new residents.
 - Identify and rezone areas appropriate for new housing development.

- Acquire vacant land as may be available for new residential development.
- Allow for and encourage varying densities and designs of housing developments.

Commercial Development:

Goal: Support the area business community and provide opportunities to maintain and grow the City’s commercial tax base.

Goal: Attract and retain new retail and other businesses as necessary to adequately serve residents and to maintain and enhance the City’s commercial tax base.

The City of Forada will retain and support the efforts of existing retail businesses and commercial enterprises while encouraging new commercial uses that complement existing businesses in the area and promote further economic development throughout the region.

Policies and Strategies:

- Support the means to sustain current businesses by helping to keep the costs of operating businesses affordable, with low taxes and low interest rates.
- Seek to fill existing vacant commercial locations with new businesses and provide other commercially zoned areas as may be suitable.
- Identify the types of retail or other commercial establishments that would be desirable and complement existing businesses and provide marketing strategies to attract those businesses.
- Identify impediments that may be preventing new businesses from choosing to locate in Forada and how these impediments may be mitigated and appropriate incentives provided.
- Seek methods to better market and advertise the assets and amenities that Forada has to offer.

Planning and Coordination

Keeping the City’s basic planning tools including a current future land use map, zoning map and land use ordinances are essential for any city pursuing a sustainable development strategy. A plan which guides future land use helps establish a stable economic environment necessary to attract outside investment. This also serves to help the city make wise capital improvement decisions when available funding is limited. Strengthening these land use planning tools will also build more effective relationships with neighboring jurisdictions, Douglas County and other State and local agencies.

Plans and Ordinances:

Goal: *Provide effective internal planning tools and policies, updating City plans and ordinances as may be needed.*

The City of Forada will develop in an orderly manner that maximizes the use of existing infrastructure and services and provides new infrastructure and services in an efficient, well-planned manner. The City will seek input and comments from public and semi-public service providers in locating areas for development and to determine whether new development can be adequately served.

Policies and strategies:

- Establish a future land use map that will project future areas of land use and growth.
 - Work with Hudson Township in developing an orderly annexation policy.
- Update the City zoning map to direct the location of varying types of land use within the city.
- Update the City zoning ordinance and platting procedures in response to land use goals and policies.
- Educate and provide training for staff and elected official in implementing effective planning processes.

Intergovernmental Coordination:

Forada's City Council values its role in representing and communicating the interests of the city's residents and the business community. While Hudson Township, Stearns County and other public entities have effectively cooperated with the City of Forada on some projects of mutual interest, there remains a concern that others may not recognize or be supportive of plans and policies that would be in the best interest of the city. It is therefore essential for city officials to be fully informed and have a knowledgeable voice in policy decisions that may affect the City of Forada and the opportunity to make their positions known.

Goal: *Provide a responsive and effective voice in land use and development decisions from other jurisdictions as may they affect City of Forada and its long-range plan.*

Goal: *Seek mutually productive relationships with Hudson Township, Douglas County and other public partners consistent with the goals and interests of the City of Forada.*

Policies and strategies:

- The City Council will be proactive in becoming knowledgeable about and addressing land use issues that may be of significance to the community.
- The City of Forada will form a policy position on land use applications or proposals that may affect or impact the City or its residents.

- The City requests notice of relevant meetings concerning proposed uses for sites within or in close proximity to Forada in order to have the opportunity to provide input into discussions regarding such issues.
- The City requests notice of relevant meetings concerning major transportation-related investments by other levels of government that would be within or in close proximity to Forada.
- The City will work cooperatively with other government jurisdictions on matters of planning and development as needed to assure mutually satisfactory outcomes.

Community Services:

To a large extent, the City of Forada relies on the services of other governmental, private and non-profit providers to work together with the City Council and others to meet the needs of the community. The businesses and residents of the City of Forada receive their sanitary sewer service from the Alexandria Area Sanitary Sewer District (ALASD). While receiving some operating support from the city, the Forada Fire Department functions as an independent non-profit entity to provide emergency management and fire protection services. The city contracts with local service providers in the continuing maintenance of city streets and relies on Douglas County to address the maintenance of roads under its jurisdiction. The city also has service contracts for the maintenance of its community buildings and the city park. The City Council does retain a primary role in prioritizing and assigning public funds for city service needs, though dependent on local taxes and a limited amount of other available funding.

Goal: *Prioritize needs within the means of the city budget and the cost of city services, assign funding as appropriate and develop alternative funding resources and programs to address essential community service needs, to include:*

- *Programming for essential road maintenance, resurfacing and snow removal needs.*
- *Improving community park and playground facilities.*

Goal: *Actively partner and support in the efforts of other service providers to improve services for essential community needs.*

Policies and strategies:

- Cooperatively support ALASD in providing adequate sewer services for current and future development.
- Support and promote public and private recreational opportunities for Forada and the Maple Lake community.
- Participate in the means to obtain grants, loans or other methods for adding and improving telecommunications and broadband services.

- Participate in the continued funding, training and recruitment for the volunteer fire department.
- Support the efforts of State and County law enforcement in assuring public safety needs.
- Support the Minnesota DNR and other state and local agencies in providing environmental protections and safe water quality.

Implementation

Implementation is perhaps the most important step within a Comprehensive Plan process. Extensive time and effort has been put into developing a vision statement for the City as well as in identifying the goals and policies of the Township. However, if nothing is done to move toward accomplishing these goals and vision, there is little value to the Plan.

While the ability of the City of Forada to address the ambitious goals that have been identified may be limited to a certain degree, there is much that the City can do to achieve the goals and strategies identified earlier in this Plan. The City Council seeks the support of residents, businesses, service providers and other planning jurisdictions to implement the long-range planning goals through a work program to include priorities as follows:

Land Use and Development

- 1. Study options for facilitating more housing opportunities for new residents and where within the City different types of life-cycle housing options may be appropriate.**
- 2. Identify the types of new businesses that would be of benefit for the City of Forada to attract and the means to have them established.**
- 3. Work to lower costs for new businesses and maintain an economic environment that will retain and support Forada's existing and new businesses.**

City Planning and Governance

- a. Update the City zoning ordinance and map consistent with planning and development policies and strategies.**
- b. City Council to become informed and formulate positions on planning or development proposals in or outside the City that may impact the City of Forada and its residents.**

- c. **Attempt to be as proactive as possible to address land use and other issues before they become problems. When issues generating significant public participation arise, use those opportunities to educate the public about the importance of becoming involved as early as possible to share their input.**
- d. **Maintain an ongoing process of open communication of ideas and information on planning, development and service issues with city residents and other community interests.**

Planning Coordination

1. **Review land use and development proposals from nearby jurisdictions relative to possible impacts to the City of Forada.**
2. **Work with relevant governmental agencies and organizations to ensure that future planning and potential development is compatible with the City of Forada and community interests.**
3. **Foster information exchange and integrated planning efforts with Douglas County and Hudson Township including notice of and the opportunity to be included in planning discussions.**
4. **Work with Hudson Township to develop an annexation policy to include guidelines for when a property would be annexed and circumstances that would create the need for City annexation.**

Community Services

1. **Coordinate and prioritize community service needs and the response to these needs with public and private service providers.**
2. **Establish a process to communicate with and solicit comments from local service providers to help ensure that adequate infrastructure and services are available to serve the current population and as development occurs.**
3. **Prepare a Capital Improvement Program and develop funding opportunities for priority street maintenance needs and community park facilities.**
4. **Work with the Alexandria Area Sanitary Sewer District (ALASD) to assure the provision of sanitary sewer service adequate for the needs of new development.**