

City of Forada Comprehensive Plan

I. 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, which provide excellent recreational opportunities.

The City of Forada is governed by a 5-member elected City Council representative of its residents. Somewhat unique among Minnesota cities, one voting member of the City Council also serves as City clerk and treasurer. The City Council manages the City budget and expenditures. The Council also provides funding and oversight for the Forada Fire Department. Procedures regarding issuance of building permits, new platting and other regulation of land use development are defined by the City's zoning ordinance. Zoning districts are identified within the city to allow for the location of residential and commercial uses. A volunteer planning and zoning commission reviews and makes recommendations on permitting to the City Council which is the final authority over any land use decisions.

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, which are the tools for implementing the comprehensive plan.

II. 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. A series of meetings responding to this input facilitated by Hometown Planning began taking place in January 2019 to focus 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 a vision of what the City of Forada strives to achieve and prepare a set of goals, policies and implementation strategies consistent with that vision.

III. 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 transpires in the City of Forada is not only affected by what is happens within its borders, but also beyond its borders. This analysis will review what has been occurring in Douglas County and the township and how this compares with what what has developed 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 this impacts 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.

IV. 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 emerged 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. With the proximity of 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 utilize 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, converting many seasonal cabins to larger year-round homes, and to 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 about 90 percent of that total were added since 1990.

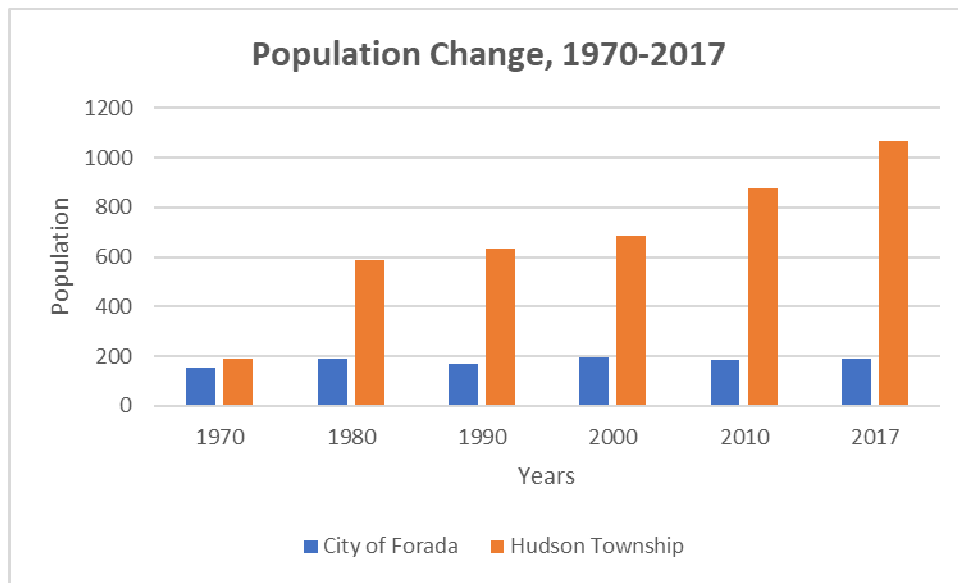
Comparison data on recent growth trends are provided in the table and figure below, Hudson Township has experienced significant gains in population since 1970. From 1990 to 2017, the township has grown in population by 436 residents, nearly 70 percent. During the same time frame, the City of Forada has 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



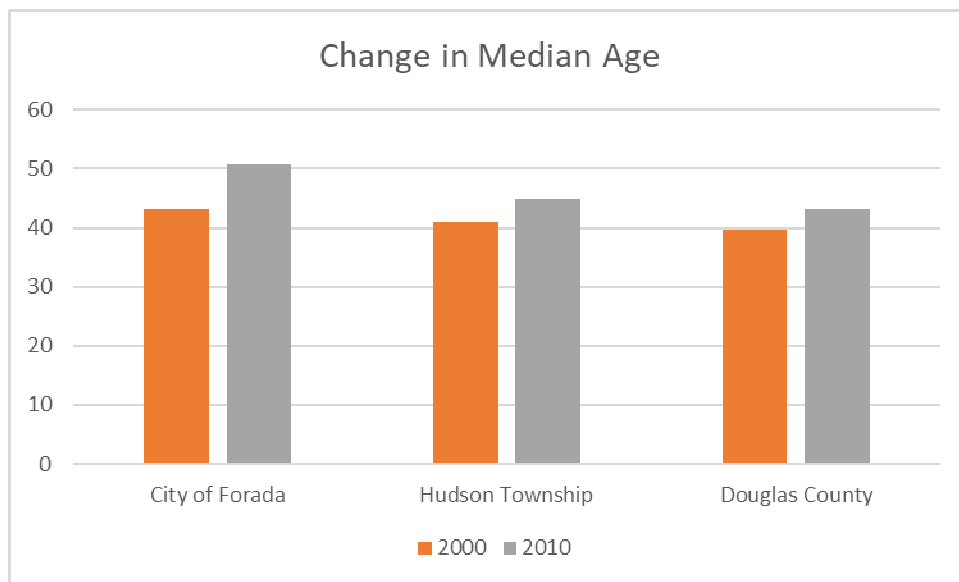
Source: US Census, MN Demographer

V. Population and Housing Characteristics

A. Age Structure

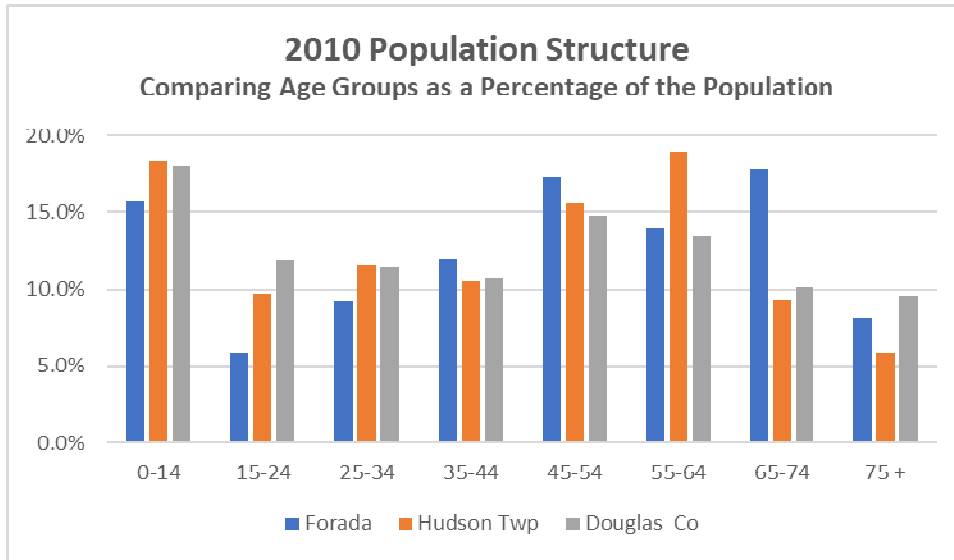
Comparatively, the City of Forada has a population that as a whole is much older than the area surrounding it. In Douglas County, the median age (the age at which half of the population is above and half is below), increased from 37.4 years in 1990 to 43.1 years in 2010, reflecting a national trend of an aging population. The median age in Hudson Township from the 2010 Census is 44.8. This contrasts with the significantly higher median age in the City of Forada of 50.8 years. Figure 2 shows the change from this growth in the median age and how the median age 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 those aged 65 to 74 are as a group significantly higher in the City of Forada as compared to the Township or the County.

Figure 3 – Age Groups, 2010



Amenities such as lakeshore property and relatively affordable off-lake housing, as well as new 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 will consider how to best accommodate the needs of a diverse but relatively older population while also seeking to attract and retain residents of younger ages.

B. Housing Characteristics

The current housing stock in Forada is primarily single-family, owner-occupied housing with much of the newer housing coming between 1990 and 2000. According to 2017 Census estimates, there are 92 occupied housing units. Of these, 85 are owner occupied and the remainder are rental units. There are 59 family households, 24 of them with children. The median household income from the 2010 Census was \$51,250, estimated to be about \$60,000 in 2017 which is 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.

VI. 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 crowded 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.

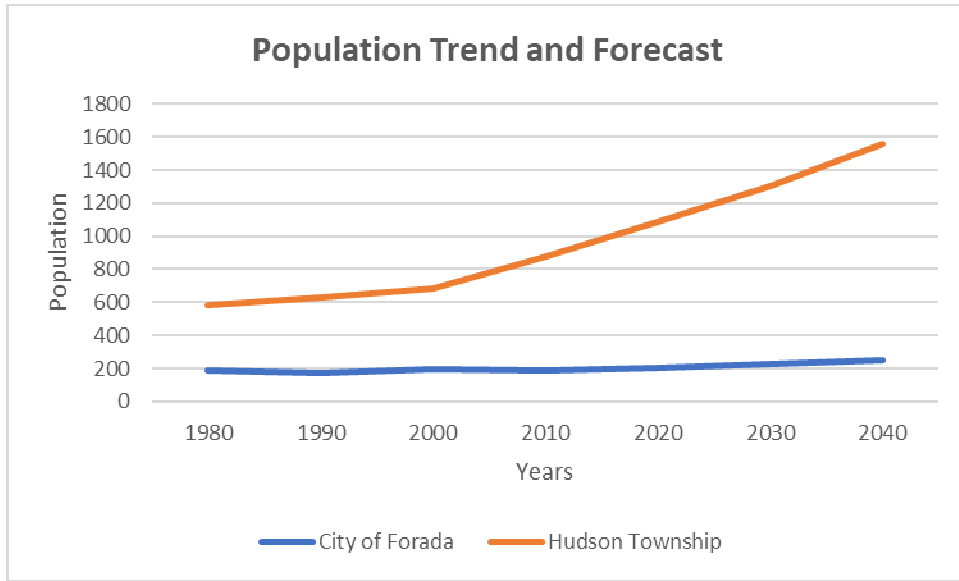
The 2018 community survey indicated a high degree of satisfaction with what the city currently provides, though it does show an interest from residents in attracting additional small businesses, improving street maintenance, and providing better public safety. Many also expressed the desire to keep their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

VII. Future Trends and Issues

With transportation and technological advances, the pace of change and development with which the City of Forada and the surrounding region has had to adapt 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, and shows 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 on 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. Figure 5 shows the current city limits and the zoning.

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 regarding 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.

