Mountain Iron Comprehensive Plan Update 2016
Public Hearing Meeting Summary
October 27, 2016 – 6:00 p.m.
Mountain Iron City Hall/Community Center

Welcome and Project Overview

The public hearing began at 6:00 p.m. in the Mountain Iron City Hall/Community Center with Jarrett Valdez and Justin Otsea from the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) welcoming the Planning Committee members and the public in attendance. Valdez reviewed and highlighted information regarding what is a Comprehensive Plan, the required chapters (land use, transportation, housing, etc.), and the project's scope of work which includes the piloted health component that ARDC initiated. The finalized Vision Statement was read as followed:

> "In the future, the City of Mountain Iron is growing, well connected and excited community with a great business climate; providing opportunities for visitors and residents to live work, shop, and eat. It is a safe walkable/bikeable, healthy and inviting community that is supported by a wide variety of recreational activities. Mountain Iron will continue to be a city in which tourists will want visit and where residents are proud to call home."

Draft Goal and Recommendation Review

Valdez proceeded to review each planning chapter's goal, recommendations, and action steps. The meeting attendees were provided the opportunity to comment on each of the following items:

Housing

Goal: The City of Mountain Iron will strive to provide housing that offers a selection of affordable and sustainable options that include varying lot sizes, with rental and ownership opportunities for residents of all ages; creating equitable housing options with access to facilities that can contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

Recommendations:

- H 1: Address the elimination of blighted or problematic structures.
  - H 1.1: Inventory properties throughout the City that are considered as blight or problematic (beyond city scope of restorative efforts) and enforce the City's blight ordinance.
  - H 1.2: Research and apply for IRRRB Commercial Redevelopment and/or Residential Redevelopment grants as appropriate (https://mn.gov/irrrb/grant-resources/community-programs.jsp). If blighted properties and historic structures, the Minnesota Historic Society's funding may be applicable for restoration efforts.
  - H 1.3: Review and update the City's existing blight ordinance every 6-12 months.
- H 2: Maintain and improve the quality of safe and affordable housing throughout the neighborhoods in Mountain Iron.
  - H 2.1: Promote rehab and preservation of public and subsidized housing stock. This provides stability to lower-income families by ensuring their access to quality and safe, affordable housing.

  - H 2.2: Investigate and pursue development of new senior-friendly housing opportunities throughout the City.
  - H 2.3: Conduct a housing survey of the community to determine current numbers and demographics of residents who own their home or rent in Mountain Iron.
- H 3: Promote maintenance of the existing housing stock in Mountain Iron.
  - H 3.1: Advertise existing loan/grant programs for homeowner improvements through the use of social media (and local newsletter), the website, or other means as a way to promote additional improvements and celebrate successes by other homeowners throughout the community.
  - H 3.2: Collaborate with existing organizations/grant programs to create incentives for home maintenance.
    - Potential resources include: Community Development Block Grant, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) Housing Department, St. Louis County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, and others for a variety of improvements including home maintenance, energy efficiency, exterior improvements, and others.
- H 4: Maintain the existing character of established neighborhoods.
  - H 4.1: Ensure that new commercial and industrial development is buffered from residential areas and will minimally impact commercial/industrial traffic in Mountain Iron's residential neighborhoods.
- H 5: Explore the feasibility of creating and annually reviewing a 'Housing Indicator Report' which utilizes annual statistics regarding housing to provide a snapshot of where the community is currently, and indicators of trends moving forward to help spur private sector development and new housing.
  - H 5.1: Components of a 'Housing Indicators Report' can include: demographics (past and projected); employment/labor force trends; home ownership trends; rental indicators (survey). The Survey should address:
    - Rental rates
    - Vacancy rates
      - Derive: average rent (# of bedrooms/utilities paid vs. not paid)
      - Housing production (*amount and costs of sales/*foreclosures)
    - Number of building permits issued (new builds, additions, plats approved)
      - Affordability analysis
      - Annual income necessary to afford particular rent/buy a dwelling
      - % of income designated to take care of housing costs
- H 6: Research and consider adopting housing development and/or subdivision incentives to encourage design for future residential units and lots that encompass lifestyles for users of all ages and abilities (including vacation and short-term housing), as well as 'Age in Place principles'. Aging in Place is a tool designed to help local governments plan and prepare for their aging populations (http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/plan/planning/aging-in-place-a-toolkit-for-local-governments-aarp.pdf).
  - H 6.1: Design elements may include: development of smaller, affordable housing units in compact multi-house developments or allowing accessory dwelling units, supported by facilities (commercial, pharmacy's, etc.) accessible by walking/biking or transit.

Community Profile and Background

The City of Mountain Iron is located in west central St. Louis County. The total area of the City is 71.31 square miles (76 km²). 68.52 square miles (177.47 km²) is land and 2.79 square miles (7.23 km²) is water. The City had a 2010 Census population of 2,869 and a 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) estimate of 2,847. U.S. Trunk Highway 169 runs through the community, and links the City with U.S. Trunk Highway 53 which provides service south to Duluth. Mountain Iron's residents value their community's location and character. Along with the cities of Virginia, Eveleth, and Gilbert, Mountain Iron is Part of the group of cities commonly referred to as the Quad Cities.

Community History

The northeastern region of Minnesota was forested and mainly populated by Native Americans until the discovery of iron ore in the late 1890s. By 1900, the Minnesota iron ranges, including the Mesabi Range, led the North American iron ore industry. The rapid establishment of a major raw materials industry in a relatively remote region populated and industrialized the region quickly with over 100 town sites and mining locations being established. Immigrant populations from the northern and southern areas of Europe provided the bulk of a labor needed for underground and open pit mining operations. These pioneering towns were either established independently or by mining companies.



One of these early town sites was Mountain Iron which is centrally located on the Mesabi Range. In 1890, iron ore was discovered in Mountain Iron by the Merritt brothers and has been known as the birthplace of iron ore mining on the Mesabi Iron Range. The following are excerpts from the *"History of Mountain Iron, Minnesota (through 1922)"*, which can be found at Zenith City Online:

> *Through the Merritts, it was at Mountain Iron that the first iron ore mine of the Mesabi Range was brought into operation; the first Mesabi mine reached by railway was the Mountain Iron, entirely through the dogged persistence of the Merritts; and Mountain Iron will always hold the unique position as being the place where at the first shipment of ore from the Mesabi Range was made. When the railway was brought to the mines, it seemed to be the triumphant consummation of an almost hopeless undertaking, and one can well imagine how proud those seven sons were when, after overcoming all obstacles and bringing the railway to the mines in 1892 they had taken their aged mother to the iron mines, and in their strong arms carried her to the top of the mound that she might look down to see the work of her children.*
>
> *The first development work on the Mountain Iron mine was done in 1891-1892, by Captain A. P. Woods. A shaft was sunk, and from this in 1892, the first ore for*

shipment was raised. At the Biwabik mine, which had been subleased by the Merritts to Kimberly and Jones, a steam shovel had been introduced in the spring of 1892, with indifferent success, at first, and although it was early decided by Captain Cohoe, who succeeded Captain Woods at Mountain Iron, that stripping was to be done there, the work was given out to Donald Grant, a railway contractor. He began the stripping at Mountain Iron early in 1893, using scrapers, teams, and dump cars. This equipment soon gave way to a steam shovel, Mr. Grant having brought one he had used in the construction of the Missabe Road.

During 1889 and 1890, Mountain Iron was, of course, but a "prospector's camp in a bleak wild spot," almost "beyond the fringe of civilization." Wilbur Merritt was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the camp store, and in 1891, when the Merritts were exploring at Biwabik, two townships to the eastward; he had charge of that store and office also. And all the supplies they needed had to come in from Tower, or from Mesabi station, a week's trip over an Indian Trail. Albert Merritt wrote: "No one who has not gone through the hardships and discouragements of keeping a camp going, so far from the base supplies, can realize what one has to contend with". However, no matter what the discouragement, the principal explorers were resolved to bear them, as they were confident they were going to find the ore; and the Mountain Iron camp soon lost its temporary aspect, settling into a permanency. In 1890, of course, they discovered ore, and thereafter the little community constantly swelled in size and in importance.



Mountain Iron, as it appeared in its incorporated mining town. Photo from the MN Historical Society

Still, the residents of Mountain Iron were bent more upon the mining of iron than the planning of a village. Other communities, of later establishment than Mountain Iron, had gone ahead of that place in the matter of incorporation. Mesaba Station, the nearest point on the railway (D. & I. R.) to the new mining field, had grown almost overnight into a place of fifteen hotels and some very active and comprehensive general stores, which endeavored to supply the demand of the countless bands of explorers delving into the range into the range 422 to the westward, had been granted the dignity of corporate government in July, 1891; and the village of Merritt, at which place no prospectors had started operations until 1891, became an incorporated place almost before Mountain Iron town site had even been platted. And the villagers of McKinley and Biwabik had both held their initial elections upon the question of incorporation before a petition for incorporation of Mountain Iron had been passed upon by the county commissioners.

A town site of 80 acres was platted in April, 1892, the territory embraced in the town site of sw.-sw. of section 3, 58-18, and the nw-nw. of section 10, 58-18. The plat was marked as "Plat of Grant," and filed with the Register of Deeds, at Duluth, on April 16, 1892. In October, 1892, a petition was circulated among the residents of the town site. It was addressed to the St. Louis County Commissioners," and asked "that a time and place be set when and where the electors residing upon lands described as sw.-sw. section 3, t. 58 n., r. 18 w., and nw.-nw. section 10, t. 58 n., r. 18 w., might vote for or against the incorporation of such lands into the Village of Mountain Iron," under the authority of chapter 145 of Laws of Minnesota 1885 compilation. The petition came before the county commissioners on October 26, 1892, and met their approval. They ordered an election to be held, to decide the question of incorporation, on November 28, 1892. A majority of the electors having voted in favor incorporation, an election of officers for the village of Mountain Iron followed, that event occurred on December 13, 1892, establishing the first village administration. The village was administered under the charter granted in 1892 until 1913, when the residents sought to be brought under the powers and privileges of the Revised State Laws, 1905, compilation. An election was held on June 2, 1913. 27 of 36 votes cast then being in favor or re-incorporation.

In April 1909, a petition was presented the village council by residents upon certain land contiguous to Mountain Iron, the signers being mainly employees of the Iroquois mine. They wished their location brought within the village boundaries. It was resolved to hold an election on May 1, 1909. The election showed that a majority of the electors were in favor of the proposed annexation, sixty-five of the seventy-two votes cast being in favor of the proposition. Then in 1918, a petition signed by C.M. Van Pelt and others sought to bring within the village limits an immense acreage in townships 58 and 59 n., r. 18 w., in all 7,368.23 acres. An election held on January 31, 1918 brought only 22 voters to the poll, but all votes cast were in favor of annexation.

At one time, it was expected that Mountain Iron was destined to become the metropolis of the Mesabi Range. When the railway project was crystallized, it was expected that Mountain Iron would be the northern terminus of the road, the Duluth Missabe and Northern.

Population Demographics

The City of Mountain Iron demographics were gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau and the ACS. Information about the City of Mountain Iron was gathered in the following categories: Population, Housing, Employment, Income, and Transportation with specific tables/information found in their respective chapter. The Census data is both from the U.S. Decennial census, which is collected every ten years, and the American Community Survey, which provides estimates from the interim years (provided 1-5 years,

varying on community size). More information about the census data can be found online at http://www.census.gov/.

Mountain Iron Population Key Findings (U.S. Census 2010 and ACS 2012)

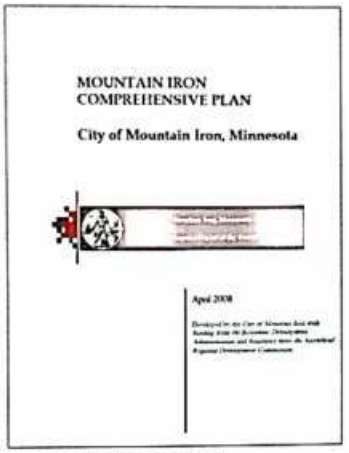
- According to the 2010 Census, the City of Mountain Iron had a population of 2,869.
- There is a slightly higher population of females (50.2%) than males (49.8%).
- The City is predominantly Caucasian (98%) with the next largest racial groups of people that are two or more races (2%) and American Indian and Alaska Native (0.7%).
- Since the 2000 U.S. Census, Mountain Iron's previous population was 2,999 and has decreased by 4.3%.
- The median age is 45.4 years old (Males – 43.6 and Females – 47.3)
- The top four largest age groups in Mountain Iron:
    - 55 to 59 years of age (11.1% of population)
    - 50 to 54 years of age (8.4% of population)
    - 60 to 64 years of age (6.9% of population)
    - 45 to 49 years of age (6.6% of population)

Past and Relevant Plans

As previously mentioned in regards to the City of Mountain Iron Comprehensive Plan Update process, ARDC reviewed existing documents and plans that are relevant to the City. Primary documents that were reviewed included:

- 2008 Comprehensive Plan
- 2010 Mountain Iron Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- 2012 Mountain Iron Strategic Plan Update

2008 Comprehensive Plan


MOUNTAIN IRON
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

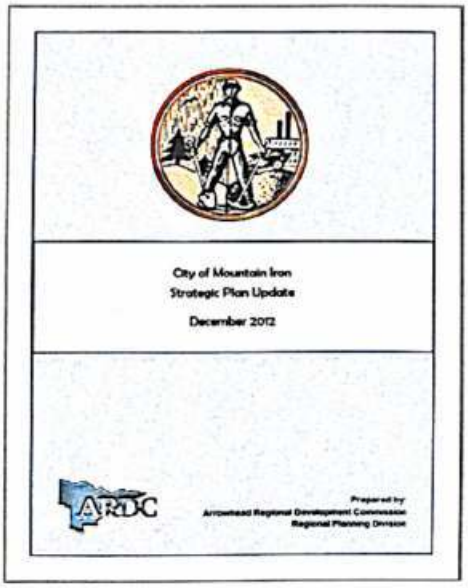
City of Mountain Iron, Minnesota

April 2008

In 2008, Mountain Iron and the ARDC produced the *2008 Mountain Iron Comprehensive Plan*, which too was an update of a previous plan. At the time, the City needed a new comprehensive plan to drive the community's land use and development goals in a direction that was more reflective of current prospects. Issues that drove the plan included: New housing developments in the City; changing conditions of the local and regional economy related to taconite mining and processing; and several large industrial projects. Ultimately, the plan addressed land use decisions as they affected transportation and community and economic development. Also addressed were procedures for the implementation and administration of the Plan's recommendations and everyday responsibilities of the City's Planning and Zoning Commission.

2010 Mountain Iron Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

The *Mountain Iron Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* was completed in 2010 with assistance from ARDC. The Plan combined local non-motorized trail planning with a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) element. Overall, it focused on expanding existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the City of Mountain Iron to provide a safe, well-designed network that connects popular destinations and is accessible to everyone in Mountain Iron, especially students. Also addressed was walking and bicycling education and promotion to the Mountain Iron-Buhl School District students.



2012 Mountain Iron Strategic Plan Update

In 2012, the City of Mountain Iron and ARDC undertook an initiative to update the City's Strategic Plan which was last completed in May 2002. That document was complimentary to some of the other existing plans at the times, such as the *2002 Old Town Plan, 2008 Comprehensive Plan, 2010 Economic Development Strategy,* and *2012 Mountain Iron Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*. The updated plan addressed the areas of Housing, Economic Development, and Community Infrastructure and Service's Needs, and recommends strategies and action steps for implementation of prioritized projects.

2013 St. Louis County Hazard Mitigation Plan

Completed in 2013, the *St. Louis County Hazard Mitigation Plan* was developed to determine how to reduce or eliminate the loss of life and property damage resulting from natural and human-caused hazards. The plan was first adopted in 2005 and was reviewed and updated in 2012 in preparation for approval by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 2012. The plan encompasses all natural, technological, and human-caused hazards rather than only focusing on one type of hazards. St. Louis County followed the guidelines and handouts that FEMA has created and any resources provided by Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM). Local governments, including representatives from the City of Mountain Iron, participated in the planning process by attending meetings and providing feedback towards the development of the plan.

Public Participation

Public Visioning Session

ARDC staff worked with the Planning Committee and the City of Mountain Iron to hold a Public Visioning Session at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 10th, 2016 at the Mountain Iron Community Center/City Hall.

The Public Visioning Session provided the residents of Mountain Iron as well as public health attendees a chance to participate in the process by helping to set community goals. The meeting included a review of the planning process, key health information and statistics, and public engagement exercises. Citizen participation in the Visioning Session is critical to the success of the Comprehensive Plan. Residents, elected officials, and other stakeholders from the community were encouraged to attend and healthy refreshments were served to over 11 meeting attendees.

After a brief presentation on both comprehensive planning and health indicators, ARDC led the meeting attendees through a pair of exercises to gather input on community values and priorities. First the attendees were asked to work as small groups at tables to mark assets and community issues on a map. Each table then reported their findings, which were documented by ARDC. A brief description of the captured is below:

- Physical Assets: For example, attractions, gatherings places, city sidewalks and campground.
- Other Assets: For example, an asset not seen on the map could include annual community events, friendly atmosphere, etc.
- Future Assets: Desired assets in the future.
- Concern Identification:
  - Identify Physical Concerns/Threats/Issues
  - Identify "Unseen" Concerns/Threats/Issues
  - Identify Future Concerns/Threats/Issues to be avoided



The second exercise focused on crafted a Vision Statement for the City of Mountain Iron. Keeping the list of newly created assets in mind, participants were asked to think about how they would finish the statement below.

"In the future, the City of Mountain Iron..."

For example: *...has a good business environment*

...is well connected to area recreational assets

These 'Vision Nuggets' were documented by ARDC, and then utilized with the Planning Committee in crafting the community Vision Statement associated with this plan. The Vision Statement projects the values the community would like to see preserved into the future of the City.

Community Survey

To further engage the Mountain Iron community during the comprehensive planning process, ARDC suggested administering a community survey. Developed by the Planning Committee and ARDC, it was made available both online and in paper format. The survey was answered by 36 respondents between February and July 2016. A few results of important qualities/assets and issues and opportunities are listed below:

Important Qualities and Community Assets	Current/Future Issues and Opportunities
• Place to live, work, retire, and raise children	• Road repairs needed within the City. County Highway 102 and Mineral Avenue is not a good design
• Sense of Community and opportunities to participate in community matters and issues	• Decline of mining. Need for different industries and new business opportunities in Mountain Iron
• Educational opportunities	• Preserve and maintain green space for recreation opportunities
• Access to markets, farms, health and affordable food	• Safe biking and walking paths. More trails and sidewalks. Public transportation options
• Street and sidewalk/maintenance	• Need for a new main street. Where will the new city center be at due to the decline of Old Town?
• Access to affordable quality health and child care	• Preservation of Old Town
• Openness and acceptance towards people with diverse backgrounds	• Mountain Iron-Buhl School District should build a school that is centrally located
• Snow removal	• Loose animals. Need leash enforcement
• Availability of paths, trail and sidewalks that connect to destinations	

For a thorough summary of survey responses, a full break-down of survey questions and responses, refer to the *City of Mountain Iron Community Survey Results Summary* and *City of Mountain Iron Community Survey Results* in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively.

Housing

Housing is an important part of Mountain Iron's community development and economic development efforts. Challenges include protecting existing neighborhoods, stimulating new housing construction, increasing the customer base for local utilities, balancing natural resource protection with desired development, and providing quality and affordable housing across the range of residential needs. Providing quality, affordable housing for the workforce and an aging population will become especially important over the next decade.

The Center for Disease Control defines "aging in place" as the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, and income, or ability level. Design elements including single level homes with ADA accessibility, shared maintenance services and opens space, and smaller lots/homes within close proximity to services and transit options should be included when making decisions on future housing to assist with the City's/region's aging population and to allow residents to spend their entire life within the community they love and cherish.

Housing Indicator Report

A Housing Indicator Report is an ongoing process to track current and past housing marketing trends within the city and provides a snapshot of existing conditions. The report provides information to private businesses, housing developers, property owners, banking institutions and private and public community decision makers.

Statistics/Indicators can include population trends/projections building permits issued, number of foreclosures, median sales price, rental rates, rental vacancy rates, affordable housing rates, home/rental property surveys, among others.



Housing Demographics

The following Housing Key findings were developed using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS). According to the 2010 Census, the City of Mountain Iron had approximately 1,442 total housing units. Other key findings from the review of housing are listed below.

Mountain Iron Housing Key Findings (U.S. Census 2010 and ACS 2014)

- The City has 1,442 total housing units, which include 1,336 (92.6%) occupied units
- There is an estimated 106 vacant housing units (7.4% of total, comprising of most of these units that are categorized "all other vacant" (2.5%); while the next highest percentage is "for rent" (2.1%)
- Of the total amount of occupied units, approximately 67.8% are owner occupied, while approximately 32.2% is renter occupied
- The average household size is 2.14 while the average family size is 2.72

Housing Goal and Recommendations

Goal: The City of Mountain Iron will strive to provide housing that offers a selection of affordable and sustainable options that include varying lot sizes, with rental and ownership opportunities for residents of all ages; creating equitable housing options with access to facilities that can contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

Recommendations:

- H 1: Address the elimination of blighted or problematic structures.
  - H 1.1: Inventory properties throughout the City that are considered as blight or problematic (beyond city scope of restorative efforts) and enforce the City's blight ordinance.
  - H 1.2: Research and apply for IRRRB Commercial Redevelopment and/or Residential Redevelopment grants as appropriate (https://mn.gov/irrrb/grant-resources/community-programs.jsp). If blighted properties and historic structures, the Minnesota Historic Society's funding may be applicable for restoration efforts.
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