

# Executive Summary

## Methodology

The City of Battle Lake commenced the preparation of its first comprehensive plan in February 2004. That plan was adopted by the City Council on April 12, 2005, updated in 2012, and updated again in 2024. The initial 2005 plan was developed over the course of nearly one year in a collaborative effort facilitated by the Community Growth Institute, planning consultants, and involving an appointed Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC); city staff members and elected officials; and over 75 residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in the City of Battle Lake and surrounding Everts and Clitherall townships. The six-step planning process included extensive research and analysis, four CPC meetings, two community workshops, 20 special topic group meetings, and one public hearing. Citizen outreach, involvement and education were integral components of the process (*Figure 1*). All educational materials, research and analysis, meeting notes, and draft reports were made available to the public at City Hall and by posting them on the internet throughout the entire planning process.

Participants in the CPC meetings, community workshops, and smaller special topic meetings developed visions, goals and strategies around seven special topic areas, which make up the action plans featured in this Comprehensive Plan:

- Community Character
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Recreation and Open Space
- Natural Resources
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Orderly Growth

## Comprehensive Plan Update, 2024

The City of Battle Lake updated the Comprehensive Plan in 2024 from the previous 2012 version with assistance from Hometown Planning. Various meetings with the Mayor, members of the City Council, and the Planning Commission were held to review and update the goals and strategies of each of the subsequent sections. The charts and graphs throughout the plan were also updated using the most recent United States Census data. The updated Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the City Council on \_\_\_\_\_.

## Common Themes

While this plan is divided into separate sections for each special topic area, it is important to note the common themes and overlap that emerged across all special topic areas. These themes are apparent in complimentary goals and strategies found in the sections on community character, housing, economic development, recreation and open space, natural resources, and transportation and

infrastructure. Common themes focused on connections, diversification, education, quality, collaboration, and natural amenities and character.

### ***Connections***

Battle Lake is a compact city with a large number of parks, shops, restaurants, lakes, and proximity to a wealth of natural areas and open spaces. Steps have been taken over the last ten years to improve foot and bicycle traffic options within the community. Highway 78 is a busy State highway that bisects the town. It also presents a safety hazard to downtown shoppers. Sidewalk improvements were made in the downtown area, a trail was installed between the City and Glendalough State Park and various trails and sidewalks were added in the last 10 years. Additional plans are important to continue to link the growing community to both commercial and residential districts. This plan focuses on continuing efforts at connecting:

- parks and open spaces through a network of trails and greenways,
- downtown businesses across Highway 78 to each other and to area amenities,
- neighborhoods with parks, schools, lakes, and local businesses,
- people to places, landmarks, and organizations they value in the community, and
- residents and visitors with the goods and services they need.

### ***Diversification***

People want more choices. Battle Lake residents and business owners want to strengthen Battle Lake as a destination with choices to suit many interests, ages, and income levels. They want to ensure that people who currently live in the area can stay here as their needs change, and that people interested in moving to the area can find the types of housing, jobs, goods and services, recreational activities, and community involvement opportunities to suit them. This plan focuses on diversifying:

- parks and recreational activities for all ages, interest levels, and abilities,
- the local economy to provide more goods and services year-round,
- housing choices for all ages, incomes, and family sizes,
- the special places and civic organizations in the community, and
- modes of transportation for residents and visitors.

### ***Education***

Many residents are not aware of all of the parks, businesses, and services and programs that currently exist within the area. Increasing the awareness of residents and visitors about community amenities and services will help strengthen the community and keep people from having to look elsewhere for them. Educating residents about the impacts of landscaping practices, construction activities, and land use changes will also help to minimize any negative impacts to the lakes and native plant and animal communities. This plan focuses on educating people about:

- area parks, trails, amenities, and recreation opportunities through signs, maps, and kiosks,
- local businesses and the goods and services they provide,
- financing, remodeling, and maintenance programs for housing,
- landscaping and construction practices and their impacts on natural systems,

- the unique places, landmarks, natural features, and organizations within the community, and
- growth and development issues and getting involved in land use decisions.

## ***Quality***

Battle Lake is a quality community with excellent parks, well-maintained homes, reputable local businesses, healthy resources and natural environment, strong sense of community, and good roads and city services. Residents wish to sustain these qualities. This plan focuses on ensuring high quality:

- parks, trails, and recreational activities for individuals and families,
- businesses, jobs, and storefronts (including signs and landscaping),
- housing construction and safe, well-maintained neighborhoods,
- ground water, lakes, air, and native plant and animal communities,
- growth and development that does not detract from the character of the area, and
- roads and services provided in an efficient and orderly manner.

## ***Collaboration***

Many organizations, businesses, schools, government agencies, and residents within Battle Lake and the surrounding townships see the value of cooperating to share resources and achieve commonly held objectives. This will be imperative to implementing the goals and strategies in this plan and ensuring its long-term success. This plan encourages collaboration among:

- private and public facilities and landowners to provide a variety of recreational activities,
- business owners, chamber organizations, and city government to improve communication, networking, and cooperation,
- the city, developers, land trusts, and housing agencies to provide a mix of housing,
- managers, property owners, and city officials to protect and enhance natural resources,
- civic groups and organizations to foster community pride and involvement, and
- Battle Lake and surrounding townships to ensure orderly, planned growth.

## ***Natural Amenities and Character***

Across all topic areas, the lake and other natural amenities emerged as the pride and joy of Battle Lake residents, and as the major component that identifies the character of the City and contributes to the well-being of the community. Ensuring the protection of and access to the lake and other natural amenities is crucial to the future of Battle Lake as a destination and as a great place to live. This plan focuses on natural amenities and character to:

- make Battle Lake a destination for recreation, shopping, and living,
- attract outside investment,
- maintain the strength and appeal of Battle Lake's neighborhoods,
- protect the resources unique to Battle Lake and make them accessible to everyone (with special emphasis on West Battle Lake),
- ensure high quality of life for residents, and
- serve as green infrastructure to reduce infrastructure costs.

## Purpose

This comprehensive plan will guide future growth and development in the City of Battle Lake and land within two miles of its borders. The plan creates a vision for the community and provides a policy framework for all future land use decisions and regulations to help the City to attain that vision. The plan is designed to project a 30-year timeframe with the understanding that adaptations will be needed in the future to accommodate changing conditions.

## History

The City of Battle Lake sits on the western shore of West Battle Lake and extends to the southeast shore of Silver Lake and the southwest border of Glendalough State Park. It is one of many small towns along the Otter Tail Scenic Byway. The city lies within the basin of the ancient glacial Lake Agassiz and is surrounded by a belt of rugged moraine from the last period of glaciation nearly 11,000 years ago. The landscape is characterized by a beautiful patchwork of prairies, hardwood forest remnants, ponds and potholes, lakes, and farmlands.

The City of Battle Lake and the lake it borders got their names from the historic battles that occurred along the lakeshore between the Dakota and Ojibwe (also known as Anishinaabe) tribes. In 1795, after being defeated by a Dakota war party, the Ojibwe tribe, led by Chief Wenonga, renamed the lake “Ish- quan-a-de-win-ing”, which means “where but few survived”<sup>1</sup>. Local historical lore says that the large statue of Chief Wenonga overlooks the battle site, and the female statue with the inscription “Mitayukase– We are all relatives,” marks the area where many perished. Both statues celebrate the area’s rich Native American heritage and serve as landmarks for the community. Numerous burial grounds and archeological sites exist in Battle Lake and its surrounding townships. Glendalough State Park has an extensive number of archeological sites.

French and British fur traders were drawn to the area in the early 1800s. In 1871, the Northern Pacific Railroad was constructed through the northeast corner of Otter Tail County, and by 1897 the Minnesota Northern Railroad ran through the City of Battle Lake and connected to the Northern Pacific to the north. The railroad brought in more European settlers who were drawn to the area’s prairies and farmlands<sup>2</sup>. Immigrants from Sweden and Norway settled small farmsteads in what are now Battle Lake, Everts Township, and Clitherall Township. In 1865, a small group of Mormons from Iowa settled on the shore of Clitherall Lake in what is now Clitherall Township. There, they located their homesteads on the lake and engaged in farming and raising cattle.

In 1881, the City of Battle Lake was platted, and in 1891 it was incorporated, encompassing 420 acres and home to 231 inhabitants. By the turn of the 20th century, it emerged as a small agricultural trade center for the area. Grain elevators still stand at the railroad station and several of the original buildings still line Highway 78, which serves as the City’s Main Street.

Other industries ensued over time. In the early 1900s, steamboats constructed by local builders transported up to 150 passengers at a time across West Battle Lake. From 1915 to 1935, ice was harvested from Battle Lake. The ice blocks weighed 700 pounds and were hauled away on horse-drawn carts. By the 1920s, Battle Lake had also emerged as a tourist destination. Tourists arrived on

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<sup>1</sup> From the Fergus Falls Chamber of Commerce, [www.visitfergusfalls.com](http://www.visitfergusfalls.com).

<sup>2</sup> History of Otter Tail County, Volume I, 1916.

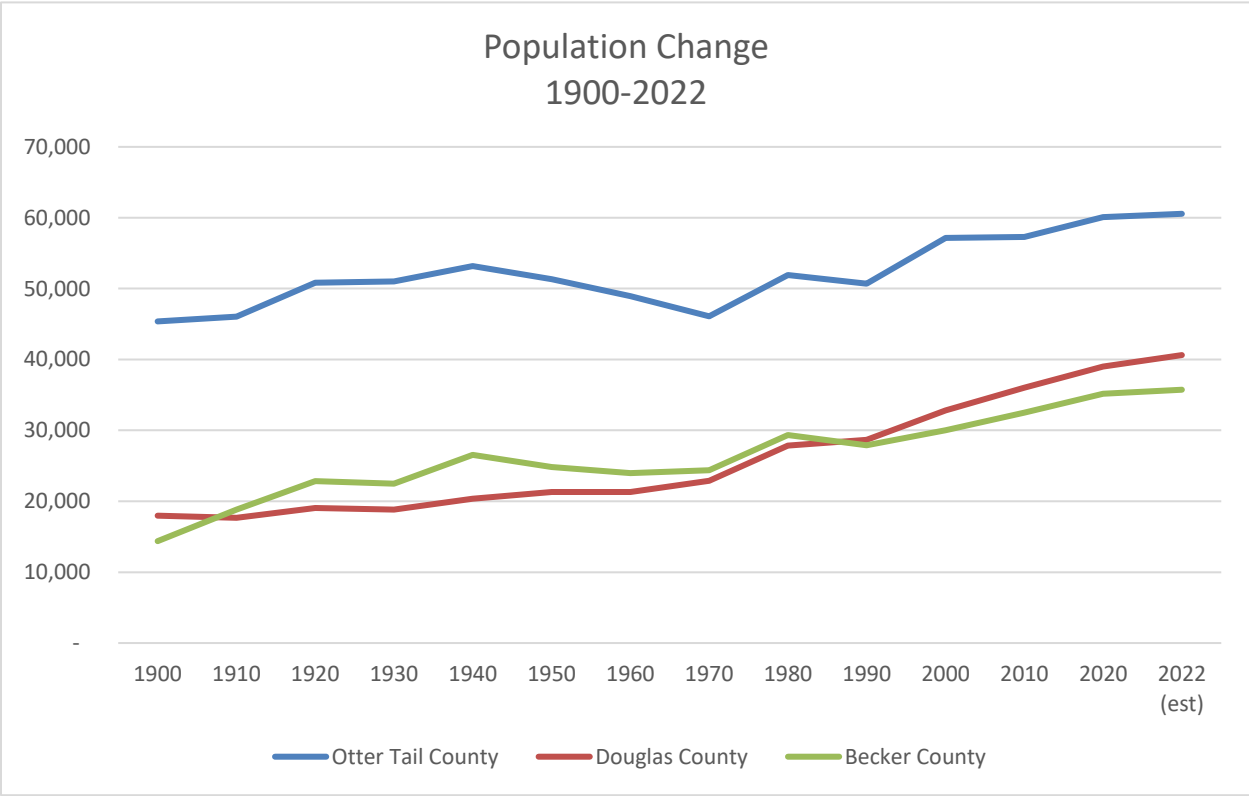
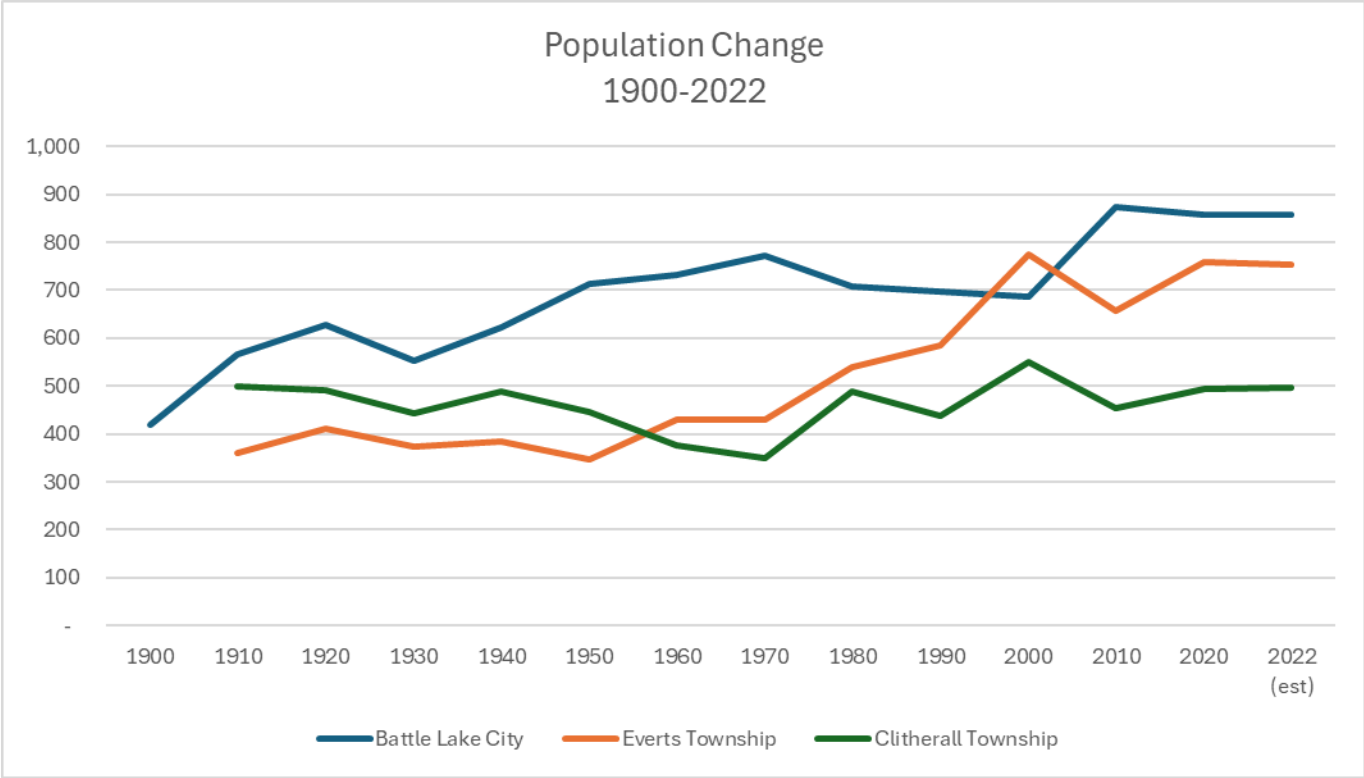
trains and development began to occur along lakeshore property close to the railroad station. By the early 1920s, small cabins began sprouting up along area lakes. The advent of automobiles and improvements to Interstate 94 and Highways 210 and 78 brought even more tourists, and by the late 1960s, most of the available lakeshore properties in the area were developed with seasonal cabins.

Today, Battle Lake has evolved from an agricultural trade center to a service-based community. Farming in the region has been replaced by education and health facilities as the dominant employment industries. Tourism-based businesses including retail sales and restaurants have remained stable over time and continue to help support the local economy.

### ***Current Demographics***

As Battle Lake plans for its future, it must consider what is happening outside its borders to ensure that all future growth and development is in line with needs and values of the community as a whole. Battle Lake does not exist in a bubble; it is impacted by growth and development in the immediate area, and by regional trends over which it has no control. This plan takes into account what is happening within a two-mile radius of the Battle Lake's municipal boundaries, an area in which the State of Minnesota grants cities the right to zone to ensure orderly growth and development, the efficient provision of services, and the preservation of valued community resources and connections.

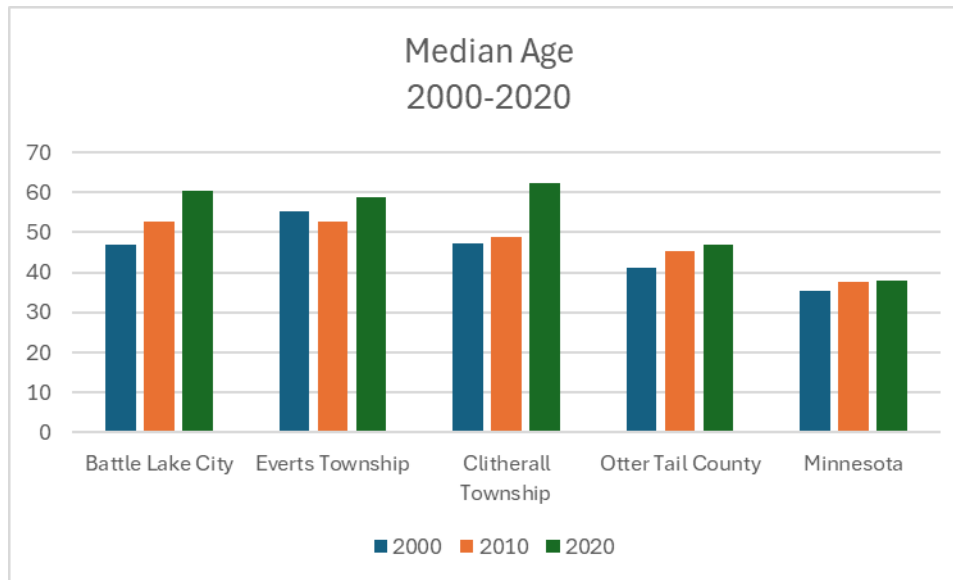
According to figures from the United States Census Bureau, the population in Battle Lake has steadily increased over the past 100+ years, interrupted by a slight decline from 1970 to 2000. Between 2000 and 2010 the City experienced its most rapid growth period rising from 686 persons to 875, which included significant new housing development on the southeast side of town. The population has remained relatively steady since that period. Everts Township has also generally increased in population over the same time period rising from 360 persons in 1910 to an estimated 753 persons in 2022. Clitherall Township, by contrast, has an almost identical population in 2022 as it did in 1910 – although there were periods of both decline (1940-1970) and increase (most notably from 1990-2000) within that period of time. This inconsistency in population growth between the City and its surrounding townships is not surprising considering that Battle Lake is almost fully developed and has only significantly increased its population historically through annexation, while the rural townships have large expanses of undeveloped area that allow for a greater number of new homes.



	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2022 (est)
Battle Lake City	420	567	628	552	623	714	733	772	708	698	686	875	857	857
Everts Township		360	411	373	384	348	430	429	539	586	774	658	759	753
Clitherall Township		499	492	443	488	445	377	349	488	437	549	455	495	497
Otter Tail County	45,375	46,036	50,818	51,006	53,192	51,320	48,960	46,097	51,937	50,714	57,159	57,303	60,081	60,555
Douglas County	17,964	17,669	19,039	18,813	20,369	21,304	21,313	22,892	27,839	28,674	32,821	36,009	39,006	40,625
Becker County	14,375	18,840	22,851	22,503	26,562	24,836	23,959	24,372	29,336	27,881	30,000	32,504	35,183	35,738

	Pct Change 1910-1970	Pct Change 1970-2000	Pct Change 2000-2020
Battle Lake City	36.2%	-11.1%	24.9%
Everts Township	19.2%	80.4%	-1.9%
Clitherall Township	-30.1%	57.3%	-9.8%
Otter Tail County	0.1%	24.0%	5.1%
Douglas County	29.6%	43.4%	18.8%
Becker County	29.4%	23.1%	17.3%

The general trend of growth in the Battle Lake area, like throughout much of the United States, coincides with an aging population. According to Census estimates, the median age in Battle Lake has increased from 46.9 years in 2000 to 60.3 in 2020, from 55.2 to 58.8 in Everts Township and from 47.1 to 62.3 in Clitherall Township over that same period. These numbers differ dramatically from the median age in Otter Tail County where the median age has increased from 41.1 to only 46.8 and in the state as a whole which has increased from only 35.4 to 38.1.



	2000	2010	2020
Battle Lake City	46.9	52.6	60.3
Everts Township	55.2	52.6	58.8
Clitherall Township	47.1	48.8	62.3
Otter Tail County	41.1	45.3	46.8
Minnesota	35.4	37.5	38.1

The increasing percentage of people 65 and older is reflective of an aging baby boomer generation and a growing number of retirees moving to their previously “seasonal” lake homes permanently. The decline in the number of young adults is reflective of nation-wide trends toward smaller family

sizes and the migration of youth from rural areas to urban areas in pursuit of education and job opportunities. The trend of young adults leaving and not being replaced by those in the same age groups could be due partly to the lack of a wide variety of housing and employment options to meet the needs of young singles and growing families. There is a possibility, however, that the increasing ability and desire of people to work from home for employers who can be almost anywhere in the world could help reverse this trend if the area is able to provide the types of amenities that younger families seek.

### ***Future Trends***

Future growth at these rates is likely to continue for a number of reasons. First, Battle Lake is located in a fast-growing region. From 2000 - 2020, adjacent Becker (Detroit Lakes area) and Douglas (Alexandria Area) counties grew at a rate of 17.3 and 18.8% respectively, while Otter Tail County increased by a more modest 5.1% (*Table 1*). The relatively rapid growth of Becker and Douglas counties indicates increasing demand for homes in the region, particularly in and around high amenity communities like Detroit Lakes, Alexandria and more locally Fergus Falls. The growth is not just due to cities, however, as townships – particularly those with significant lakeshore – are also contributing to the growth trends.

Even though young adults, usually of college age, are leaving the area, population growth within Battle Lake and the surrounding area is likely to increase over the next decade. One component of that growth can be the return or migration of young singles and young families to the area, typically after the completion of post-secondary education. These young adults, particularly those with young children, will be seeking homes with room to accommodate growing families. They will also be seeking higher-paying jobs, which often require higher education. Younger people may also be drawn back to the area as Fergus Falls continues to grow as a regional job center and as ever-changing technology allows people to sever their geographic ties to larger urban areas and work more frequently and effectively from home located anywhere that has fast internet service. The availability of relatively affordable and diverse housing options may also provide opportunities for young singles and starting families to relocate in the area.

Another component of the population growth will continue to be the aging baby boomer population. Baby boomers are getting older, meaning that the age groups 60 and up will keep growing. They are also living longer thanks to advances in healthcare and technology, which means that age groups 75 and greater will also grow. Furthermore, as the baby-boomer generation reaches retirement age and seeks to settle in high amenity areas with lakes and recreational opportunities, more seniors will be drawn to the area. The conversion of seasonal homes to permanent homes along lakeshore properties on West Battle and Silver lakes is testament that this trend is already underway. People are also retiring at a younger age than they had in the past, and many new, young retirees seek out part-time jobs or join community groups. These young retirees contribute more to the local economy than one would expect and more than is shown in the Census figures. Finally, Battle Lake offers quality retirement facilities and assisted living accommodations, which are also likely to attract a growing number of seniors.

These growth trends will have real impacts on the future of Battle Lake. With a land area of only 1.44 square miles, Battle Lake must adapt its land use practices ensuring that future growth and development in and around the City will not adversely affect its tax base and detract from the existing



sense of community, but rather will preserve natural, scenic and recreational amenities; ensure long-term economic development; and improve the quality of life and level of services for current and future residents. The City must work closely with the surrounding townships to accommodate future growth in a manner that benefits the entire community.

# Community Character Action Plan

The character of a community is perhaps the most abstract, yet important, concept to define when creating a future vision. For many, there is no reason to plan for change if it will mean losing the aspects of their community that they have grown to enjoy, or which define the community. It is critical that those defining components of our character not only be identified but be preserved and enhanced as part of any strategy for future growth and development. This is the most critical component of our plan.

## **The Elements of Battle Lake's Community Character**

### ***The Lakes***

West Battle Lake is the City's namesake - and is its most prominent feature. The central business district and residential neighborhoods are aligned along its western shore, providing residents and vacationers with a wealth of private shoreline and public beaches and boat launch areas. Residents and visitors value the lake for its clean water, natural beauty, and for its quietness. Numerous other lakes are located within a two-mile radius of the City, including the Silver Lake chain of lakes, Clitherall, Elbow, Molly Stark, Annie Battle, and Blanche lakes. Most of these lakes have retained large stretches of natural vegetated shoreline and provide some of the area's best fishing and wildlife watching opportunities.

### ***The People***

Battle Lake has a strong sense of community. Residents represent a broad array of backgrounds, interests, and education levels and respect each other for their differences. Volunteerism and appreciation for the arts and natural resources are integral components of community life, and residents are active in a variety of civic groups and local clubs, including the Lions, Network Battle Lake, Art of the Lakes, church organizations and many more.

### ***The Location***

Battle Lake is situated just north of Highway 210 and about a 20-minute drive from Interstate 94, which provides residents and tourists with access to larger market areas such as Fargo/Moorhead (75 minutes), Brainerd/Baxter (75 minutes), St. Cloud (110 minutes), yet it is just far enough off the beaten path that it does not experience the heavy congestion and traffic that many communities close to large highways do. The City is located within 20 miles of Fergus Falls, a regional job center providing quality jobs and services to residents of Battle Lake and within 30-40 miles of cities like Perham, Wadena, and Alexandria, which provide additional employment, service and retail opportunities. It is also located close to numerous recreational amenities including state parks, historic sites, and waterfowl production areas.

## ***The Beauty***

People take pride in their homes and businesses, which is apparent in the care with which commercial and residential properties are maintained. Heading north on Highway 78, which also serves as the City's thoroughfare, the downtown area greets people with tasteful, quality shops, service businesses, an art gallery, museum and other businesses. The completion of the reconstruction of Highway 78 through the City in 2014 has helped improve the attractiveness and accessibility of downtown businesses for motorists and pedestrians alike. The City does not have excessive signage or tourist traps common in other lake communities. Upon leaving the downtown, Highway 78 curves toward an open vista looking over West Battle and framed with wrought iron railings, old-fashioned light fixtures, and trees. The rolling landscape surrounding the City features beautiful forests and prairies, unique glacial formations, and picturesque farmsteads.

## ***Social Institutions***

Residents have strong connections to the City's churches, retirement homes, and in particular the Battle Lake School. The Battle Lake school district encompasses several townships and small cities. The school is strongly integrated into the community and team sporting events are widely attended by area residents, including those with and without children enrolled at the school. In many ways, the strong team spirit of the school reflects the community spirit. A fine arts auditorium was completed in 2001, not only adding to the sense of pride that community members feel, but also providing a high-quality venue for music and theatre performances. The Battle Lake Area Childcare Center helps to ensure access for city residents to safe and nurturing care for children. The small class sizes and quality education provided at the school also benefit the community.

The Art of the Lakes art gallery and its Creative Arts Center has also been an important social institution, having transformed itself to an active group within the community that also connects with local school students. Art of the Lakes, at its Creative Art Center, offers art classes for area residents, school students and actively participates in local community events.

## ***The Tranquility***

Residents feel that the tranquility of West Battle Lake sets it apart from other lakes in the area, many of which they feel are loud and over-used. They value the low crime rate and how peaceful and quiet the neighborhoods and downtown are. Numerous local parks throughout the City, as well as Glendalough State Park to the northeast, offer nearby places for relaxation and reflection. These are the places that enhance the quality of life in Battle Lake and the surrounding area.

## ***Sense of Place***

Battle Lake has a rich history, which is celebrated in statues and historic buildings located throughout the City as well as archeological, scenic and significant sites located in the surrounding area. The City has retained its ties to the past, and has kept its small town, rural feel. Although the census states the population of Battle Lake as 857 in 2020, we estimate that over 3,000 people consider Battle Lake to be their home for at least a portion of the year. They have come together for community events, school functions, and special occasions like the City's 125<sup>th</sup> year celebration and opportunities like the Governor's Design Team. In 2022, public history students at North Dakota State University produced a documentary film depicting the history of the Battle Lake area as a resort

area and highlighting the activities of the city's early European settlers. The City also retains strong ties, through various landmarks and archaeological sites, to the presence of Dakota and Ojibwe tribes in the area.

## Goals & Strategies

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 1: Strengthen the bonds that make the people who live, work and come to Battle Lake identify with the community.** There is a lot to be proud of in Battle Lake, but in a City where the pace is quickening and several of the City's residents are seasonal in nature, it is sometimes difficult to feel connected to the community. New residents, seasonal residents and visitors need to be welcomed by the City's year-round residents and introduced to those things that are valued in Battle Lake. We all need to find ways to stay connected to our City so that our appreciation will inspire us to keep our community strong.

**Goal 2: Preserve Battle Lake's history, landmarks, quality of life and the community's sense of place.** The history of Battle Lake is something that residents feel proud of and connected to. In an area where the year-round and seasonal population is growing and changing rapidly, the people of Battle Lake want to remember the history of their community and to pass those memories on to new people and new generations. Maintaining the area's various landmarks and historical and archaeological features will help the City to maintain the quality of life residents enjoy.

**Goal 3: Protect the area's lakes from damage and degradation.** The area's lakes are perhaps its most defining feature. Visiting one of those lakes is often the way outsiders first become aware of Battle Lake. It is also the reason many chose to come back, permanently or otherwise. The lakes are subject to increasing pressure from growth and development. Protecting this resource is critical to the long-term health of the entire community.

**Goal 4: Work to enhance opportunities for residents and visitors to interact with the area lakes.** As more and more shoreline is developed and the prices of lake property continues to increase, the opportunities for accessing area lakes are diminishing. Enjoying the lakes is an important component of life in Battle Lake, one that has both cultural and economic benefits. We need to make sure that the City, its year-round and seasonal residents and its visitors continue to feel a connection to the lakes. Even so, the City needs to be thoughtful as to how to integrate public and private access points into the fabric of the City without negatively impacting the ecological and social characteristics that make the area lakes such a draw.

**Goal 5: Work to retain the charm of the downtown commercial and residential areas and the natural beauty of the surrounding areas, while encouraging a compatible and responsible transition between them.** Part of the excitement of Battle Lake is the walkable downtown, a natural gathering place for social and economic transactions. The character of this area, as well as its economic vitality, is threatened by growth and sprawl throughout the surrounding environment. Battle Lake needs to stay a neighborhood of activity in the center of beautiful and natural region, not simply another non-descript stop along the highway.

**Goal 6: Maintain support for the area's social institutions to enhance pride and a sense of community.** Like much of the rest of the country, the pace of life in Battle Lake is quickening and the limitations that tie us to a specific place are disappearing. The community's social institutions are strong, but in a changing world those pillars of life in Battle Lake are going to experience pressure. The Battle Lake School and the extra-curricular activities supported by the fine arts auditorium and the athletic fields not only benefit the students but also serve as a center of the community. It is important to maintain these institutions through support activities, such as booster clubs, in order to ensure the quality of these institutions.

**Goal 7: Work to keep Battle Lake a safe and tranquil place to live.** Part of the reason people are drawn to the area is the small-town atmosphere; a feeling of knowing neighbors, the knowledge of community, and the peaceful serenity that life in rural Minnesota has to offer. This atmosphere defines the character of the community, and it is critical that it be maintained.

**Goal 8: Preserve Battle Lake's quality of life and seek to capitalize on the community's sense of place and destination.** Many people who do not live within the City limits still consider themselves from Battle Lake. This sense of place, that Battle Lake is a distinct destination, is something that needs to be preserved and built upon. As development options are presented in the future, it will be tempting to grow in ways that erode this sense and make Battle Lake more like other sprawling highway communities. To maintain the economic advantage of the City's current land use pattern, future development needs to enhance the community's sense of place.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Work proactively with Mn/DOT on additional traffic calming and on maintaining an aesthetically attractive downtown to maintain and improve downtown as a destination environment attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists as well as motorists.
- Develop a web site and/or community bulletin board highlighting volunteer opportunities that exist throughout the community.
- Promote awareness of local landmarks and historic buildings and landmarks by distributing city- and privately-created brochures, maps and interpretive information.

***Mid-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

- Create an activities newsletter for people around town, potentially on the City web site.
- Continue to develop and implement sidewalk/trail plans, such as the Safe Routes to School program, and similar to that of the City's pavement plan. The plan should improve the safety of the sidewalks and trails within the City.
- Work with Battle Lake schools, local nurseries, the Soil & Water Conservation District, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and others to encourage the planting of native trees to maintain and restore the natural beauty of the City.
- Continue to develop and implement strategies to provide continuous engagement with residents through online platforms.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Work with local organizations to encourage neighborhood gatherings and social activities.

- Maintain and improve downtown landscaping as appropriate to enhance the sense of place and the destination effect of the downtown area.
- Provide opportunities for Art of the Lakes to continue to involve youth and the broader public in public art projects.
- Continue to draw on the knowledge and experience of local residents to help identify and document the history of Battle Lake.
- Continue to work with the school or another organization to promote theater in the park or another live theater venue. Possibly bring in a traveling group from outside for occasional special events.

*Perpetual Strategies:*

- Ensure that a calendar of social and community events and volunteer opportunities is made available to the public and updated on a continuous basis.
- Provide regular and ongoing enforcement of maintenance standards for properties located within the downtown area and the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Continue to work with local merchants to have seasonal music and to promote opportunities for live entertainment from local and regional musicians.
- Encourage local businesses, the city, and community groups to participate in developing and maintaining informational brochures, websites and other forms of communication.

# Housing Action Plan

## **Vision**

Battle Lake continues to be a desirable place to live with a variety of housing options for all age and income groups, and neighborhoods that are integrated with area amenities.

## **Background**

Battle Lake's residential neighborhoods are among its strongest assets. Main issues of concern raised by residents include the general lack of housing available for people wanting to move to the area, providing housing options for all income groups and ages (including senior citizens wanting to stay in the area), ensuring that new housing development doesn't degrade the lakes or make them less accessible to everyone, and maintaining high quality neighborhoods.

## ***Housing Availability***

Numerous families that have recently moved to the area have expressed difficulty in finding available housing within the City or the immediate vicinity. Local residents are also concerned that there is not enough land available for new residential development with services located within the City boundaries.

The people moving to Battle Lake are coming for a variety of reasons. Many are transplants from Fergus Falls or other nearby communities that wish to live in a small town with a good school system. Many are retirees returning to the area because of its natural beauty and recreational opportunities, while others have family in the area. Still others are finding that non-lakeshore properties in town provide an affordable summer cottage alternative.

Development within the City is driven by the availability of utilities. Currently, areas with utilities are almost completely developed. The type of housing that is most in demand – shoreline and family housing - is in short supply within the City limits. Most of the area's new home construction is occurring in the adjacent townships where there is more shoreline available for redevelopment than in the City and where off- lake, undeveloped tracts of land tend to be less expensive than within the City limits.

About 7.8% of the housing units in the City have been built since 2010. Of the 506 housing units within the City limits, 387 are considered occupied with the balance (23.5%) seasonal or empty<sup>3</sup>. According to the 2022 Census estimates, 77.3% of all housing units in Battle Lake were built in 1999 or earlier.

Currently, the City has approximately 250 acres of undeveloped land, some of which could be used for additional residential development. The City must continually review its zoning ordinances to ensure that it allows for the types of housing that will meet the needs of those seeking to live in the

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<sup>3</sup> 2020 Census data, 2022 American Community Survey

City. It must also continue to assess the demand for municipal water and sanitary sewer services in surrounding townships and encourage future development and expansion that meets the needs of the entire community. Finally, it is important to assess the density associated with new housing development given that low-density residential development patterns that have been more prevalent in recent decades (as compared to those from previous decades) consumes larger quantities of land, provide fewer homes, and increase infrastructure expenses for the City<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Life-Cycle Housing Options***

Many residents feel that Battle Lake does not have a broad mix of housing options for people at various stages of their life cycle. They worry that, as a result, people who would like to settle in the area will look elsewhere for a community with more housing choices.

Battle Lake has a predominance of single-family homes suited for growing families, but also has a number of high-quality apartments and multiple-family housing units. In Battle Lake and the surrounding townships, single-family homes account for the great majority of all available housing in the area. Multiple family housing units, including duplexes, townhouses, and apartments are in relatively short supply, accounting for a much lesser percentage of all available housing in the area. According to 2022 Census Data, about 77.7 percent of homes are single-family while 22.3% are multiple-family units (both vacant and occupied units combined).

This situation is comparable to that in Otter Tail County, in which 90.2 percent of homes are single-family, and only 10.8 percent are multiple-family units. Within the entire state of Minnesota, 77 percent are single family and 23 percent are multiple-family units<sup>5</sup>. In comparison to these numbers, Battle Lake has a shortage of multiple-family housing units and is not likely serving the needs of young adults, single professionals, couples, single-parent families, empty-nesters, retirees, seniors, or low-income households. This lack of diverse housing options for people in various stages of their professional and family life- cycles could lead to prospective residents looking outside of Battle Lake for housing, or existing residents having to move outside of the City when their current housing situation no longer meets their needs. Providing a more diverse housing stock would allow the City to better meet the changing needs of people who want to live in Battle Lake throughout their lifetime.

### ***Meeting the Needs of Seniors***

Senior citizens in Battle Lake expressed that they would like to be able to live their entire lives within the community but are concerned that they won't have the assistance they need to stay in their homes - or have transitional housing units available to them when they can no longer maintain a large home.

The number of senior citizens in and around Battle Lake is growing and is likely to continue growing as baby-boomers age and retirees return to the area full-time. Existing senior living facilities within Battle Lake may not be able to handle the greater demand for health services and assisted living. Residents would like to see more congregated care facilities, which are new housing systems that allow seniors to age in place in a continuum. Many senior citizens would also like to stay in their homes or find smaller homes or apartments with skilled care that are located close to medical

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<sup>4</sup> According to Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, Building Better Neighborhoods (2001). See [www.gmhf.com](http://www.gmhf.com)

<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 5-year estimates.



facilities, shops, and other amenities so that they can continue to live independently. Providing additional senior housing would have the added benefit of freeing single-family homes for families wanting to move to the area. Furthermore, many of the aging baby-boomer population would like to see housing that features close proximity to parks, trails, and shopping, as well as planned activities.

### ***Housing Prices***

A high priority concern expressed by residents is the need to provide more high quality housing options within the City for all age groups and income levels. Residents are also concerned that existing low-income housing is concentrated into one area.

Habitat for Humanity has previously constructed a number of new affordable homes, all of which are located in the southwest part of town near the mobile home park, which also provides low-income housing to area residents. All of these sites were donated by the same developer, which is the reason they are concentrated in one area. While donations of land help to keep home prices affordable, studies have shown that concentrating low income families into one area can be detrimental to a community, leading to perceptions of separation and detachment. Furthermore, affordable housing mixed with other higher-end housing types tends to grow in value along with the rest of the neighborhood and leads to stronger social ties and community pride.

Many residents are also concerned about the rising costs of housing. Housing affordability will continue to be a growing concern, particularly as the population ages. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development generally considers housing to be at an affordable level if a family is paying less than 30 percent of its monthly household income to either a mortgage or rent<sup>6</sup>. In 2000, 67 percent of all households in Battle Lake were living at an affordable level. In 2010, this number decreased to 53 percent. The continued elevation of housing values throughout the West Central Region of Minnesota and in most parts of the country has largely continued to the present time and is likely to be of concern into the foreseeable future.

### ***Shoreland Development***

Citizens are concerned about potential negative impacts of residential development within the shoreland area of West Battle Lake and other area lakes such as Silver Lake. A large portion of the City is within 1,000 feet of these two lakes, which is the State-designated Shoreland Area. This designation places minimum standards on the type of new development that can occur. Most prime lakeshore property within the Battle Lake City limits has already been developed, which puts increasing development pressure on marginal lakeshore lands that may feature wetlands, steep slopes, or poor soils. It also creates demand for second-tier lakeshore property. Additionally, as people continue to retire to the area many seasonal lake cottages are being converted to permanent homes. The proportion of seasonal homes to permanent homes decreased from 1990 – 2020, indicating that such conversions are taking place within the City. In 2020, 25 percent of all homes in Battle Lake were found to be seasonal in use.<sup>7</sup> Conversions of this type tend to occur along lakeshore property and are characterized by the replacement of small summer lake cabins with larger year-round homes.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (2024)

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/affordable\\_housing\\_barriers](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/affordable_housing_barriers)

<sup>7</sup> According to US Census Bureau, 2000 US Census. The Otter Tail County Assessor's Office estimates that nearly 25 percent of all parcels in Battle Lake are used for seasonal, residential purposes.

This redevelopment trend is occurring in lakeshore communities throughout Minnesota. Where the value of the buildings or improvements on a parcel is low and the value of the underlying land is high, as is often the case with older lakeshore cabins, a disparity arises. Under those conditions, there is a market incentive to buy the land, remove the low-value improvements and redevelop the property. This condition is called redevelopment potential.

Generally, a new single-family home will be worth three times more than the land on which it is built. This means that the ratio of improvements (I) to land (L) is three ( $I/L=3$ ), which translates into a very low redevelopment potential. Any value lower than three indicates some redevelopment potential and any value lower than one indicates high redevelopment potential. Within Battle Lake, improved, seasonal residential parcels generally have a high redevelopment potential. On the other hand, homesteaded, non-agricultural improved residential parcels have a value of 2.82, which is low redevelopment potential.<sup>8</sup> Clitherall and Everts Townships exhibit similar conditions, which indicate that future redevelopment of seasonal properties will likely occur.

Redevelopment of this nature can force existing lakeshore residents out of their homes if they can no longer afford to pay the property taxes. It can also dramatically impact water quality and the appearance of lakeshores due to increased impervious coverage and the replacement of natural shorelines with landscaped lawns, sandy beaches, and rip-rapped shores devoid of native trees and shrubs, which often results when properties are redeveloped. Full time, permanent residents also have different demands for businesses and services as compared to part-time, seasonal residents, which has implications for the local economy.

### ***High Quality Neighborhoods***

Citizens are proud of the fact that Battle Lake has beautiful neighborhoods featuring well-maintained homes and yards, historic old houses, parks, tree-lined streets, and excellent City services. They feel that strong neighborhoods are among the City's biggest assets and are integral to its future growth and vitality.

Many factors make Battle Lake a desirable place to live. Although the City has many older homes, they are well-kept, and residents help to keep their neighborhoods clean and safe. In 2002, the City obtained a grant from the Small Cities Development Program to rehabilitate 30 homes, which has helped in assisting those who cannot afford to maintain their homes. The City is finishing another Small Cities Grant (2024) that has rehabilitated several more homes. No significantly blighted areas currently exist, and residential neighborhoods within the City and surrounding areas are generally attractive. Residents wish to build on this strength by investing in existing neighborhoods and encouraging and supporting people in the ongoing maintenance of their homes

Battle Lake is also a relatively compact city with a network of grid-pattern streets connecting residential areas to the central business district, the lake, numerous area parks, and the school. It is surrounded by areas of natural beauty, historical significance, and great recreational value. The City does not have to deal with problems associated with sprawl, unlike many communities that have undergone rapid growth in recent decades. This fact puts Battle Lake in a unique position to encourage new growth that fits in with existing development patterns, ensures access to the lakes and

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<sup>8</sup> According to Otter Tail County Assessor, 2004.

the provision of parks and open space for all residents, preserves open space in new developments, and builds on community cohesion and sense of place.

## Goals & Strategies

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 9: Actively continue to work to increase the availability of housing in Battle Lake for all ages and income groups.** Citizens wish to provide more housing options for people in all stages of their life-cycle and at all income levels by diversifying the existing housing stock with more multi-family housing units and providing new housing within the community.

Providing senior housing for the growing number of retirees and baby-boomers in the area is also a concern. Seniors who currently live in Battle Lake would like to stay within the community as they age. They would like the option of staying in their homes as long as they are able to live independently, or of moving to a retirement or assisted living facility within the City. Providing sufficient transitional housing options for seniors will meet this need while having the added benefit of opening existing single-family homes for people wishing to move to the community.

**Goal 10: Assure that residential growth is orderly and that public infrastructure keeps up with demand for new housing within city limits.** One of Battle Lake's strengths is that it is a relatively compact city with neighborhoods that are located in close proximity to the lake, the school, area parks, and the downtown business district. The neighborhoods are also serviced with good roads, police and fire protection, and water and sewer service. To meet the demand for high quality neighborhoods with services, citizens wish to ensure that an adequate number of lots can be developed within city limits. Low-density housing developments decrease the number of potential lots and lead to high infrastructure costs. Citizens wish to encourage new residential development within city limits in a manner that builds off of existing neighborhood development patterns, provides a mix of housing options commensurate with the needs of current and would-be residents, does not exceed the capacity of city sewer and water systems, and does not increase costs for existing residents. With the City's current infrastructure, it is estimated that the City can add an additional 150 homes or 384 people without exceeding its capacity.

It will also be important for the City to be proactive in anticipating growth and development to ensure that adequate and efficient services can be provided. Population growth in the surrounding townships is increasing at a faster rate than growth within the City, which could lead to greater demand for housing with city services in the future. The City must monitor growth in the surrounding townships, particularly on land that is directly adjacent to city boundaries, to ensure that it can efficiently provide services if needed in the future. The City should work closely with neighboring townships to target potential residential growth areas and ensure that new residential development is in line with the City's vision for the future.

**Goal 11: Encourage the dispersal of low-income housing throughout town.** Many residents expressed concern that concentrating low-income housing in one area of the city could potentially lead to a perceived blighted, poorly maintained, and unsafe part of town. It could also lead to feelings of isolation and separation of low-income families who do not feel as though they are a part of the community. In the future, low-income housing should be better integrated into all areas of the

community by working closely with Habitat for Humanity and other similar organizations or housing developers as they consider locations and types of housing development.

**Goal 12: Maintain and improve the character of all aspects of the lake with respect to future residential lakeshore development.** Citizens value the quality and beauty of West Battle Lake and other area lakes. A major benefit of living in Battle Lake is the close proximity to the lake from all existing neighborhoods. Given the lack of any large tracts of land remaining in the City for lakeshore development and the increasing demand for marginal lakeshore property, more of the shoreline will be privatized and access to the lake by non-lakeshore property owners will be reduced. Additionally, there is the potential over time for less valuable lakeshore properties to experience redevelopment pressures. Review of new housing developments or redevelopment on lakeshore property should take public access and the existing character of the community and housing into account.

Citizens worry about detrimental impacts resulting from the redevelopment of existing residential lakeshore lots and new construction on marginal lakeshore and second-tier lakeshore properties. Of primary concern is the loss of water clarity from increased impervious coverage and landscaping practices, and the loss of natural beauty from the removal of native trees and vegetation along the shoreline. New housing and residential development should address these concerns so as not to degrade this valuable city resource.

**Goal 13: Encourage the community to keep homes and neighborhoods in a well-maintained condition to keep Battle Lake a desirable place to live.** Citizens take care of their homes and neighborhoods, and the City wishes to continue this sense of pride throughout the town by encouraging residents to maintain their yards and homes and by providing assistance where necessary. Upholding existing building and land use standards with new housing construction and existing housing will also help to ensure high-quality homes in beautiful neighborhoods with minimal nuisances or conflicts between property owners.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Lead an effort with the Planning Commission to identify opportunity sites for encouraging infill and redevelopment of new housing of varied types and affordability levels throughout the community. Develop and maintain a map showing these opportunity sites and share it with area developers and builders.

***Mid-term Strategies (between 2 and 5 years):***

- Update the housing market survey by age and income and include the area outside of the borders of Battle Lake to determine the regional geographic market for different housing types. Share the results with developers and builders.
- Explore opportunities for keeping housing affordable through community land trusts and programs through the Greater Minnesota Housing Finance Authority or other similar programs on an on-going basis.
- Use home-improvement grants and loans to help keep homes in the City well maintained.
- Explore opportunities to maintain and expand opportunities for safe pedestrian and bicycle access within existing neighborhoods and connecting residents to the area's businesses, schools and social institutions.

- Seek opportunities to integrate low-income housing units into existing and future multi-family buildings to create mixed-income buildings, similar to that of the Summit Village apartments.
- Perform an assessment of walkability in the downtown area and throughout the surrounding neighborhoods to determine areas of high and low pedestrian mobility and identify priority corridors for mobility improvements. Focus particularly on areas that connect residential areas to commercial properties beyond the core downtown area, such as the Highway 78 corridor from downtown to the south, where sidewalks or pathways would improve accessibility and safety for area residents.
- Work with MNDOT to explore the creation of a safe crossing of Highway 78 south of the core downtown area.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Explore the continued use of tax increment financing, tax abatement or other public incentives to fund new multi-unit housing projects.

***Perpetual Strategies:***

- Encourage developers to provide recreational trail connections and wildlife corridors in new residential subdivisions where appropriate and consistent with City plans for parks and recreational opportunities.
- Require developers to provide water, sanitary sewer, and connecting streets in new developments by ordinance. Before accepting the new infrastructure, ensure that it will provide a positive financial return to the City over multiple life cycles. Carefully review street design requirements to ensure that development is not conducted in a “one-size-fits-all” manner (for instance, curb and gutter may not always be the best option when rural ditch designs may be appropriate and more cost-effective).
- Support and maintain ongoing shoreland zoning and enforcement, including:
  - requiring on-site stormwater retention and erosion-control plans for all new lakeshore development/redevelopment to ensure that stormwater runoff and sedimentation does not enter the lake.
  - ensuring that new development, landscaping, or other alterations on lakeshore properties maintains and enhances native trees and vegetation along the shoreline to ensure natural beauty and aquatic habitat.
  - requiring best management practices as outlined in *Shoreline Best Management Practices* on all new lakeshore developments to prevent erosion and sedimentation.
  - limiting the amount of grading and filling in the shoreland area.
- Support and maintain ongoing zoning and enforcement throughout the City as a whole.
- Support local citizen groups that organize annual “home and garden” tours to promote pride in the community and encourage residents and landlords to increase the visual appeal of properties.
- Continue to educate people on the range of senior housing and services available in Battle Lake, including in-home services.
- Identify and reduce regulatory barriers to the modification/remodeling of existing homes to promote single-level living and allowances for seniors to remain in their homes for as long as they are able.

# Economic Development Action Plan

## **Vision**

Battle Lake will be a vital residential service center and destination with an appropriate balance of year-round and seasonal businesses that meet the needs of residents, business owners, and visitors; that promote a variety of living-wage employment opportunities; and that build on the City's natural amenities and small town appeal.

## **Background**

The City of Battle Lake emerged as an agricultural trade center during the railroad era in the late 1800s. Until the late 1960s, agriculture was the most important economic activity in the area. During the 1950s agricultural employment in Otter Tail County began to decrease, while the value of agricultural production increased as small farms were consolidated and made more efficient<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, tourism and service-oriented industries emerged as important sectors in the regional economy. Battle Lake has followed these trends and has evolved from an agricultural economy to a service economy that is heavily reliant on summer tourism.

Today, Battle Lake is a neighborhood service center that is part of the larger Otter Tail County regional economy. It is also influenced by and connected to varying degrees with sub-regional job centers such as Fergus Falls, Wadena, Perham, Detroit Lakes, and Alexandria. As a neighborhood service-center, Battle Lake plays an important role in the regional economy by providing high quality living in a small town atmosphere with jobs and services aimed primarily at meeting the needs of residents and visitors. In order to thrive in the future, the City must strengthen its place and further define its niche in the regional hierarchy. This means building on its high quality residential neighborhoods, ensuring that residents and visitors can find the goods and services they need in town year-round, collaborating rather than competing with other area job centers, and promoting an environment of innovation and entrepreneurship to encourage a more diversified economy that provides living wage jobs and is not as dependent on summer tourism. Battle Lake must build on its strengths and be poised to make the most of opportunities as they arise.

## ***Location and Amenities***

The City is conveniently located at the intersection of Highway 210, running west to Fergus Falls and east to Brainerd/Baxter, and Highway 78 running north toward Perham and Detroit Lakes and south to Interstate 94. Many employed residents in Battle Lake work in Fergus Falls, Perham, Alexandria and Wadena although this is perhaps becoming less the case with the increase in people working remotely from home. Of the labor force living in Battle Lake, several residents drive to work in one of the above locations and more and more people have the option of working remotely. Within Battle Lake, the Battle Lake School and Good Sam provide approximately 44% of the jobs in the area with food service industries also providing a substantial portion of jobs within the City.

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<sup>9</sup> Otter Tail County, *Economic Analysis and Population Study*, 1966

Battle Lake has become known as a “bedroom community”. It can provide a vibrant community with strong neighborhoods serviced by local businesses that will attract workers in Fergus Falls and other regional communities to live in and around Battle Lake. Past studies by the League of Minnesota Cities indicate that residential uses contribute the most to the tax base in small cities and are in fact increasing in proportion to commercial uses as the primary contributor. Other studies have shown that when deciding where to live, families choose schools, neighborhood appeal and quality of life over proximity to jobs. High amenity areas – those with lakes, forests, rolling landscapes, stable residential areas, good schools, and strong community character - tend to attract professional workers and retirees. Subsequently, retail businesses and medical services tend to follow these people in growth areas. Residents feel that ensuring strong residential communities, protecting the natural beauty of the lakeshore and surrounding areas, and enhancing the rural character that defines Battle Lake will promote future economic vitality.

### ***Making Battle Lake a Year-Round Destination***

Residents and business owners would like to make Battle Lake a destination for shopping, outdoor recreational activities, and high quality residential neighborhoods. They are concerned that new low-density commercial and residential development occurring outside of the existing central business district will drain business from the downtown, consume land inefficiently, bottle off lakes and scenic areas, and degrade the small town feel and amenities that attract people to the City in the first place. They wish to encourage local businesses that sell a variety of goods and services to locate downtown in order to broaden the mix and support a critical mass of shops and restaurants to draw people in. Rather than dispersing commercial areas, residents and business owners would like to maintain a compact, well-defined commercial downtown area that is pedestrian-friendly and allows for a varied and convenient shopping experience. To strengthen this, they would like to encourage high density residential development in and around downtown to provide residents with easy access to shops and services.

Several challenges exist to making this happen:

- Highway 78 runs right through the middle of downtown making access and crossings sometimes difficult and unsafe, although the reconstruction project with MNDOT helped improve the situation significantly.
- Parking availability is adequate, but motorists are not always aware of the availability or perceive available parking as inconvenient when it is not directly adjacent to their desired destination.
- Many stores have irregular hours.
- The City’s trail system has greatly improved in the last 10 years, linking the state park with commercial and residential districts in the community.
- There is growing competition for local retailers from nearby big-box retail in Fergus Falls and in larger regional centers such as Fargo-Moorhead and Brainerd-Baxter. Along with people purchasing items online.

The number of resorts in the area is also declining, which impacts both seasonal and year-round local businesses. Otter Tail County once had the second largest number of resorts in the state, but it continues to lose resorts at a dramatic pace. With the loss of resorts, many vacationers have chosen to use private home vacation rentals as an option. It is estimated that a person vacationing will spend seven times as much as a person who owns a cabin on a lake. Battle Lake currently has one resort - First Resort. The Battle Lake Inn is another lodging option for vacationers. Even still, there are

limited lodging facilities for visitors, especially at peak times. Recent trends have made private rental of single-family shoreland homes (i.e. “vacation rentals”) more frequent in many areas of the state, but this method of bringing vacationers to an area can also create significant conflict with nearby landowners. The City has implemented regulations to help minimize these impacts while still allowing for some landowners to make use of properties in this way.

Although Battle Lake businesses have seen an “extended season” beyond the typical Memorial Day to Labor Day tourist season. There is still a time when some retail shops and a few restaurants close in the winter and those that stay open see a quieter business but many of them have specials or do events to attract people to Battle Lake. Whatever the season, Battle Lake has become the “foodie” destination of the area. Many local businesses rely on the income they make during the peak summer season to carry them through this time. There are times when residents are unaware of which businesses are open in winter and which are not. With the use of social media, it has become easier for businesses to advertise their hours and events in a timely manner

Building a strong, well-defined, year-round central business district can pay off for small rural communities. A 2003 survey of trends in America’s older Main Street commercial districts found that successful Main Streets showed increases in both highly specialized businesses and shops and in community gathering places<sup>10</sup>. The same survey indicates that major improvements to infrastructure, festivals and special events, a commitment from major institutions to stay (such as government offices and stable long-time businesses), landscaping and trails, and the rehabilitation of significant buildings resulted in the greatest increases in business and commercial occupancy year round.

Recent studies have shown that shoppers have moved from “big-box” stores to online sales and small specialty stores. Smaller retailers are emphasizing convenience and service and are performing better than the larger retailers.

### ***Quality Jobs***

One of the biggest concerns expressed by residents is a lack of available living wage jobs. This concern stems from the fact that many young adults are leaving Battle Lake in pursuit of skilled, high-paying jobs elsewhere, and that residents who work outside of the City also tend to spend their money and do their business outside of the City. Additionally, residents worry that the proliferation of minimum wage jobs typically associated with tourism hurts the community and would like to see a greater diversity of employment opportunities.

In reality, people living in Battle Lake are employed in a variety of jobs that range considerably in skill levels and salaries. In 2022, it was estimated by the American Community Survey that 30.5% of working persons were employed in education, health care and social services, followed by about 11 percent working in professional, scientific, management jobs and the same amount in recreation and food services. More broadly, about 11.5 percent of people living in Region 4 were employed in the office and administrative support – the largest share of all categories. Other high sources of

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<sup>10</sup> National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, *2003 National Main Street Trends Survey*, 2003



employment include Production (9.3%), Food Preparation and Serving (9.0%), Sales and Related (8.9%), Transportation and Material Moving (8.5%) and Education, Training and Library (7.2%) (*Figure 7*).

The largest employers within Battle Lake continue to be the school system and retirement and health care facilities. The growing senior population and increasing demand for medical facilities and health care services will likely continue this trend. Retirees who have transplanted from urban areas and established permanent residences on area lakes also want the services that have always been available to them, which will also contribute to increased demand for these services.

Tourism-related industries and retail trade – which includes small shops, restaurants, resorts, arts and entertainment, and recreation –also continue to play an important role in the economy of Battle Lake. Tourism-related industries generate an estimated \$13.1 billion in gross sales statewide and \$2.2 billion in state and local tax revenue per year in the State of Minnesota, offering a high rate of return in tax revenue for every dollar invested<sup>11</sup>. Employment in these industries grew slightly from 1990-2000. While these jobs do not tend to pay as well as most other jobs and also tend to be more seasonal in nature, they are still valuable in providing entry-level jobs and training for young adults, and flexibility for young families and retirees wanting to supplement their incomes or stay involved in the community.

The relatively high percentage of persons in professional services in the City tend to be mid- to high-level jobs in administration, accounting, and other specialized services. They are also well-suited for home occupations. People working at home need support services such as computer support, telecommunications, printing, shipping, and office supplies. The City of Battle Lake has had computer and networking businesses for over a decade, and encouraging similar businesses will help to strengthen the City as a desirable location for professional service companies and home occupations.

Efforts to bring new industrial development to Fergus Falls or other regional cities (including small manufacturers within Battle Lake) may lead to an area-wide increase in employment in the manufacturing sector, while construction related to new residential and commercial development will likely increase to provide housing and services for the growing population. Jobs in transportation and utilities will also likely increase to meet the needs of the growing population.

Another indicator of livable-wage jobs is median household income. The median annual household income in Battle Lake in 2022 was estimated at \$57,917, which is substantially less than that of surrounding townships (Everts - \$98,696; Clitherall - \$73,958), Otter Tail County (\$67,990), and the State of Minnesota (\$84,313) (*Figure 9*).

Occupations in management provide the highest wages with an average hourly wage of nearly \$41, followed by professional occupations in computers and mathematics, legal occupations, architecture and engineering, and business and financial operations averaging \$30-35 per hour. Occupations in healthcare can range from an average of \$16-36 per hour for support occupations, healthcare practitioners, and technical occupations, and occupations in education and training average about the same. All of these jobs require higher education and technical training. Other jobs providing living wage salaries in the area include installation, maintenance and repair occupations; office and

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<sup>11</sup> Explore Minnesota, The Minnesota Visitor Economy, 2022

administrative support; production and transportation of materials; protective services; arts, design, and entertainment; community and social services; and construction and extraction occupations<sup>12</sup>.

### ***Attracting High Quality Professional Businesses***

Residents agree that new business development is important for the future of Battle Lake, but are concerned about encouraging the “right” type of development that will not detract from the character of the community. Many residents do not want heavy industrial or large-scale commercial uses. These uses already exist in Fergus Falls and, if located in Battle Lake, could potentially damage the natural environment and the character of the community. Light commercial and industrial uses, combined with skilled laborers and telecommuters, would provide a healthy and stable employment base.

Attracting professional level cottage industries requires certain infrastructure and amenities for successful, sustained economic growth. These generally include a skilled labor force, venture capital, proximity to a research institution, and high-speed internet access<sup>13</sup>. Of those over 25 years old currently living in Battle Lake, approximately 64.4 percent have attained an education beyond the high school level. 14.2% have attained an associate’s degree, 22.9 percent have attended some college, and 18.1 percent have attained a bachelor’s degree with 9.2% having a graduate or professional degree<sup>14</sup>. New and existing businesses in Battle Lake can build on the area’s skilled labor force and close proximity to the Minnesota State Community/Technical College in nearby Fergus Falls to attract more of these types of jobs and to provide internships and placement opportunities for recent graduates. Retiring baby boomers also often have skills needed to begin businesses and can provide mentorship to young people. Many seasonal lake owners are retired professionals with experience, expertise, and venture capital. These people have the potential to serve as a great resource for the local businesses and entrepreneurs, providing guidance and mentorship, connecting people to other resources within their professional networks, and providing financial backing for new or expanding businesses.

Battle Lake also has infrastructure supportive of a variety of business types and home occupations, including high speed internet service, municipal sanitary sewer and water systems, and good roads. Otter Tail Power provides dependable power, and Arvig Communications provides cellular phone service and high speed internet access to Battle Lake, all of which are crucial for meeting today’s business needs. The installation of this infrastructure in the future should be planned into all new residential and commercial developments to ensure the efficient provision of these services. Other existing local businesses provide support services that are needed for businesses, including the post office, but more will be needed if professional-level businesses and home-occupations are to be served by the community.

Business owners and residents have expressed a need for expanded facilities for visitors, particularly those with meeting rooms and rental facilities for conducting meetings. The lack of these facilities makes it difficult for prospective businesses and workers looking to locate in the area to conduct local research and arrange meetings and conferences. While the City has public Wi-Fi and meeting rooms available, other support and delivery options in the community would be useful. They are also concerned that the City does not have enough year-round day care facilities for working families.

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<sup>12</sup> Minnesota DEED, *Labor Market Information for Northwest Minnesota, OES First Quarter, 2004*

<sup>13</sup> MN Planning, *Growing Rural Economic Success, 2001*

<sup>14</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimate (2022).

It is important to note that a key consideration for any business is whether or not its investment will be protected by strong zoning standards<sup>15</sup>. While many cities do not wish to be overly restrictive in zoning regulations, those that are not restrictive enough often attract the “lowest common denominator” – low quality commercial strip development, damaging manufacturing companies, or poorly planned residential neighborhoods that detract from the beauty and character of the area, degrade natural resources, or could lead to a drain on the tax base. Often the long-term costs of dealing with low quality development far outweigh any benefits generated in the form of jobs and anticipated tax base.

### ***Promoting Collaboration***

There continues to be a strong need for communication between entities such as local businesses, Network Battle Lake, the Battle Lake Economic Development Authority, Art of the Lakes, the Battle Lake Community Fund, the Lakes Area Community Fund and other entities.

Residents and business owners would like these entities to continue to work together to achieve common goals and to better coordinate activities and special events such as city rummage sales, festivals, retail promotions, fall events, and arts and craft shows that happen throughout the year. They would also like to forge stronger relationships with other nearby communities to plan for the future with a more regional approach to attract businesses that would benefit the entire area and connect residents with jobs.

### **Goals & Strategies**

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 14: Make Battle Lake a year-round outdoor recreational destination for residents and visitors.** Battle Lake is currently a destination because of its healthy lakes, natural beauty, recreational activities, and small town charm. Protecting these resources will attract people wanting to vacation in the City, as well as people wishing to live in an area featuring natural amenities and high quality of life. Enhancing the downtown area and connecting it to other amenities via trails and greenways will help to identify Battle Lake and set it apart from other area destinations. While tourism helps to support the local economy, residents and business owners do not want to rely solely on it and would also like to see a more well-rounded business community that increases the number of businesses that can succeed year-round. They also want to attract tourism that is geared more toward high quality outdoor recreation rather than tacky entertainment and tourist traps. Enhancing the parks and open spaces will serve as an important economic development tool in this regard. Encouraging facilities such as lodging, trails, public accesses to the lakes, and restrooms is also important to economic development.

Ensuring year-round businesses and facilities will also be important if Battle Lake is to be a year-round destination. Local businesses in Battle Lake suffer during the winter months and many

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<sup>15</sup> Edward McMahon, Planning Commissioners Journal #23, *All Development is Not Created Equal*, 1998

residents and visitors may not be able to find the goods and services they need in town during this time. Increasing winter recreational activities such as cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, fishing, snowshoeing, and winter festivals, and providing winterized lodging facilities will help to attract visitors year-round. Encouraging seasonal shops to stay open longer throughout the year will also help to keep the downtown lively and thriving all year round.

**Goal 15: Maintain a concentrated retail center.** Downtown Battle Lake has the potential to be a thriving central business district and care should be taken to prevent scattered commercial development. This area can be strengthened by encouraging infill with a greater variety of stores downtown and better establishing its boundaries as a compact, walkable shopping area. Improving pedestrian access across Highway 78 to make walking safer; encouraging additional signage and store-fronts that are attractive and well-maintained; and managing parking will help to make the downtown a prime retail area. Efforts should be made to promote and facilitate a balance of commercial activity on both sides of Highway 78.

**Goal 16: Enhance cooperation, communication, and networking among businesses, service organizations, and City government.** Businesses need support from other businesses by informing customers about where they can find the goods and services they are looking for within the community. Local businesses need to work together and form a more cohesive business environment by keeping hours that are complimentary to each other and by planning special sales events. They also need help from the city government in terms of having a central location for meetings and information, in obtaining grants and technical assistance, and in sharing information with everyone via a common website or commerce stand.

**Goal 17: Maintain and improve existing businesses.** Residents feel that the best approach for addressing the lack of living wage jobs and job diversity in the area is to support existing businesses that are locally owned and that directly serve the residents and visitors. This support will entail educating residents about home occupations and local businesses they may not know currently exist in town and promoting programs like “Battle Lake Bucks” that support local businesses. Training programs and financial assistance will help businesses to continue and expand within the community. Assisting businesses in diversifying the goods and services they provide to both permanent and seasonal lakeshore residents will also help to further this goal.

**Goal 18: Facilitate a climate of entrepreneurship in Battle Lake.** Tapping into the growing number of professional seniors and retirees in the area through mentorship programs has helped to foster a sense of entrepreneurship and promote the starting of new businesses. Maintaining and strengthening connections to local schools and regional higher education and technical colleges to draw young professionals to the area and spur creativity and innovation will also be important in creating an entrepreneurial climate.

**Goal 19: Build on residential development and maintain a strong sense of community as a driver of the economy.** Lakeshore properties and residential neighborhoods are perhaps the most important contributor to the economy of the community and to the local tax base. It will be important to keep Battle Lake a desirable place to live by fostering a sense of unity and common purpose for all of the City’s residents and businesses and promoting good design and amenities such as parks and high-speed internet access in new residential developments. The City must also protect all aspects of the lakes and build on the strong school system, religious and civic organizations, local parks and recreation opportunities, and the sense of community.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Review and consider amendments to City zoning regulations to regulate or prohibit self-storage facilities and outdoor storage facilities (i.e. dock and boat lift storage, boat storage, etc.) in new residential developments.
- Better market Battle Lake by:
  - incorporating area lakes into a theme for marketing the city,
  - capitalizing on the city's location in the lakes region,
  - continue working with the Scenic Byway Committee to broaden the publicity for the Scenic Byway in other communities,
  - continue advertising outside of Battle Lake to attract new residents, visitors and businesses, and
  - improving and updating the advertising for local festivals and events. Target advertising to people who aren't already familiar with the events or the City and its many amenities.

***Mid-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

- Increase and encourage a network of interconnected trails, greenways, scenic byways, and open space tying the downtown to rural outlying areas using green gateways and consistent signage and kiosks.
- Promote existing and expanded year-round recreational activities such as trails for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and sledding.
- Explore ways to encourage additional winter festivities including a winter carnival or ice fishing contests. Seek funding and information sources for winter activities.
- Explore ways to attract and retain year-round businesses.
- Promote existing goods and services, trades, businesses, and home occupations that residents may not know exist in town. Seek creative ways to attract businesses that can fill gaps in the local economy.
- Create a brochure to promote local businesses and have a feature in the newspaper that highlights such businesses on a monthly basis.
- Partner with senior organizations to build a catalog of skills and professional expertise and services available through area retirees and business owners.
- Encourage downtown businesses owners to develop living units above existing businesses located on Lake Avenue South.
- Develop a downtown master plan that will:
  - create a unified and complementary vision for the downtown area;
  - consider unique architectural features such as an arch pedestrian bridge or rural skyway that distinguishes downtown and also provides safe crosswalks for pedestrians (work with Art of the Lakes and Mn/DOT to explore ideas);
  - develop a well-defined gateway to attract people downtown off of Highways 210 and 78;
  - explore options with Mn/DOT to further calm traffic and make Highway 78 and the downtown friendlier and safer for pedestrians – especially when attempting to cross Highway 78 outside of the core downtown area.

- offer downtown parking that fits within the context of a charming, walkable, and historic shopping district. (Examples include diagonal parking, managing parking with churches and city hall on week-ends, and encouraging “green” parking lots.)
- build on connections among local stores and shops through common marketing themes,
- encourage high-density infill of commercial and live/work buildings downtown; and
- promote front and back entrances for buildings.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Host a holiday light parade around town.
- Support the community fund to continue the efforts of the downtown decoration committee in decorating the downtown for Christmas and other holidays year round.
- Ensure that all new neighborhoods incorporate parks and open space.
- Ensure high speed internet access and advanced telecommunications in all new developments and in all areas of the City as internet technologies change over time.
- Provide opportunities for local businesses to leverage capital through the use of public funds such as tax increment financing (TIF) and tax abatement.

***Perpetual Strategies:***

- Encourage businesses to inform their customers about other businesses in the area.
- Encourage consistency in business hours and local event dates and times.
- Annually encourage seasonal businesses to maintain an aesthetically pleasing storefront year round so that downtown doesn't look vacant during the winter.
- Promote awareness of how goodwill towards visitors and friendly customer service benefits the entire business community.
- Promote parks and preserve open space in and around the City as an economic development tool.
- Encourage health-related stores and services for locals.
- Encourage environmentally responsible cottage industries and specialty shops.
- Support home occupations that help the community and allow people to work from home.
- Maintain support for a strong school system.
- Promote the provision of high quality modern lodging facilities year-round.
- Support existing daycare facilities for working families in the area and identify ways to reduce barriers for the provision of new daycare options.
- Maintain a “vintage” look downtown (i.e. First National Bank).
- Build on existing festivals and recreational activities such as creating activities for deer-hunters' significant others. Businesses need to work with civic and service organizations to coordinate festivals and special events in a manner that draws people downtown to local businesses and enhances the visitor experience.
- Ensure that information is available at City Hall for newcomers and residents in the community regarding civic groups, community services, amenities, and businesses in and around Battle Lake.

\*\*\* *Indicates strategies for which there was strong support by a large number of residents, but serious concerns from others.*

# Recreation and Open Space Action Plan

## **Vision**

Battle Lake provides a diversity of recreation opportunities to residents of all ages through an interconnected system of parks, trails, and open spaces.

## **Background**

The City of Battle Lake offers a wide range of recreation opportunities, from boating and beach access to snowmobile trails, biking and walking trails and scenic byways. Nestled between the western shore of West Battle Lake, the southeastern shore of Silver Lake, and Glendalough State Park just to the north, Battle Lake attracts people who enjoy scenic beauty and outdoor recreation facilities. Preserving and enhancing the quality of these recreation opportunities is of utmost importance to the residents of Battle Lake in maintaining the high quality of life in the area, strong neighborhoods, and economic activity. The key elements the City should focus on include trails, parks, open spaces, winter recreation, unique features, and recreational activities.

## ***Trails***

Residents of Battle Lake would like to have an improved network of walking paths and trails throughout the City. Trails and scenic byways could provide significant recreation opportunities that are currently limited in Battle Lake such as biking, hiking, in-line skating, and cross-country skiing. They can also provide connections among area parks, lakes, and other area amenities. Currently, the city has several walking paths and trails that run along the lakeshore and Highway 78 and ultimately connects to Glendalough State Park. A couple of walking paths have been designated in other parts of the community to encourage residents to get active. Many existing neighborhood sidewalks were removed and not replaced during past road construction activities throughout town. As a result, the current sidewalk and trail system is somewhat disconnected, leaving many areas in Battle Lake without walking paths or even sidewalks. Residents of these areas either have to drive, walk alongside the road, or risk crossing Highway 78 to reach other parts of Battle Lake. The City has made progress in adding trails, sidewalks and walking paths over the last 10 years with continued plans for new systems in the near future. The Otter Tail County-Wide Trail Master Plan also includes indications that a connection between the Glendalough Trail system to the Central Lakes Trail in Ashby is being considered.

Many residents would like to enhance the trail system in and around Battle Lake by improving the landscaping in some parts of the system, such as along the lakeshore, and by connecting the system to other natural features in the area, like the wetlands in the southwestern part of the City. At the present time, the trail from the school to Halverson Park is the only trail that does not follow a street.

## ***Parks***

Battle Lake is home to several small parks located throughout the City. Many of these parks have been improved in the last 10 years with new restroom facilities at Halverson and Lions parks and new playground equipment at Lions Park. Within Battle Lake, there are recreational facilities available at Lions Park with a public beach, Halvorson Park with the statue of Chief Wenonga, Railroad Park, and Sand Bay Park. The Battle Lake public school system also has playground equipment and team sports facilities that are used extensively by area residents. Many residents attend high school sporting events and feel that the team spirit reflects the strong community spirit.

Residents also are concerned that the parks are not accessible to everyone, including disabled residents and visitors, and that neighborhoods should be linked to the parks by sidewalks or trails. The majority of the parks lie in the northern part of the City, while the southern part of the city may rely mostly on the public school grounds for recreation facilities close-by. Some residents and many visitors may not even be aware that some of the smaller parks exist. Information kiosks, maps, and signs around the City would help to guide residents and visitors alike to parks in and around the area. Residents would also like to encourage the creation of new parks in developing residential areas so that all residents have access to parks without having to drive.

Within the City of Battle Lake, there is a public boat launch and four local parks and beaches along West Battle Lake, providing the only lake access points within the City boundaries. These access points are restricted during the summer months since Highway 78 cuts through the large city park on the north side of town and separates Halvorson Park from the lake. During the summer months, traffic congestion on Highway 78 can make crossing the road to the lake unsafe. The other three city parks are located on the eastern side of Highway 78, between the road and the lake, and are not easily accessed by people living on the western side of the highway.

Glendalough State Park, a great asset to the Battle Lake community, is located a short distance to the north of town. Just two miles from Battle Lake, Glendalough State Park boasts more than nine miles of undeveloped shoreline and is home to Annie Battle Lake, an undeveloped, non-motorized lake and one of the state's few Heritage Fisheries. The park provides Battle Lake residents and other visitors with opportunities for fishing, camping, hiking, swimming, canoeing, and wildlife observation. Residents were thrilled to see the construction of the Glendalough Trail between the City and the state park. Other nearby parks include Maplewood State Park, Inspiration Peak, and Phelps Mill Park. During the summer months, bicyclists, hikers, and visitors to the area enjoy of the proximity of the state park and the recreation, lodging, and eating facilities available in Battle Lake.

## ***Open Spaces***

Residents of Battle Lake feel that open spaces are a crucial component of the quality of life in Battle Lake by providing natural beauty and contributing to the character of the community. While there are a limited number of open spaces available within the city limits, residents wish to see lands that are important to native plant and animal communities or are otherwise un-developable preserved as open space, being used for parks, community gardens, or stormwater management. Residents would also like to preserve views from hills and in scenic areas, especially since these areas tend to have high development pressures. These pressures often change the appearance of these unique areas and limit the number of people who can access them.



A few local residents and companies own one or several properties that total more than 120 acres in size. These lands are identified as large privately held tracts, and also provide potential opportunities for recreation. A few of these lands are in the Conservation Reserve Program, while others may be used for agriculture or other private uses. Coordination with private landowners is necessary to provide a network of recreation opportunities in the area, including trail systems and lake access points.

Residents also feel that the Otter Tail Scenic Byway is an important asset to the area and would like to see that corridor preserved and improved where possible. Coming into town from the east along Highway 210, the Otter Tail Scenic Byway turns north and passes through Battle Lake along Highway 78. The scenic byway preserves the natural beauty along the corridor and draws tourists into Battle Lake who enjoy the rolling landscape unique to glacial moraine and dotted with prairie remnants, forest stands, and small farms. In addition to the Byway, Highway 78 is part of the Fall Color Tour in Otter Tail County, further encouraging preservation of the scenic beauty of the area and drawing tourists after the peak recreation season. Residents feel that the Byway and the Fall Color Tour should be enhanced to create a green gateway into town.

### ***Winter Recreation***

Residents of Battle Lake wish to increase and diversify winter recreation opportunities available in and around the City. They feel that doing so would satisfy existing recreation demand and would also attract visitors during the winter months, after the typical tourist season ends. Residents feel that certain recreation activities could be promoted by the City and local businesses to draw visitors to the area including ice fishing and snow shoeing. Residents also wish to see opportunities for cross-country skiing improved by providing groomed trails in the area. These trails could run alongside or overlap the walking paths in the City and could run along roads outside the City. Residents also wish to see the development of skating rinks and sliding hills, recreation facilities that would appeal to youth.

Currently, Battle Lake and the surrounding area contain an extensive snowmobile trail system maintained by the Otter Country Trail Association, the Lake Runners Trail Association, area landowners, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Part of the snowmobile trail network runs along the south side and the west side of Battle Lake but are not allowed to use city streets or state highways. These trails are part of the Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Trail Program administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The GIA program assists local government units and local trail associations in creating and maintaining a system of trails for off-highway vehicles that might not otherwise exist. Residents feel that snowmobile trails are well-developed, but they would like to ensure that snowmobiles stay in the appropriate areas and do not conflict with walking trails. An improved crossing for snowmobilers across Highway 78 would be viewed as a positive development. And while providing trails to bring snowmobilers to the area's restaurants would provide an economic benefit, the noise associated with doing so would present nuisances for nearby residents.

### ***Unique Features***

The Battle Lake area is home to many unique features including scenic glacial landmarks, archaeological and historical sites, and a strong Native American history. Residents wish to preserve and draw attention to these areas since they are all vital components of the community's identity.

Rolling hills, valleys, and pocket wetlands left from the glaciers over thousands of years ago exist throughout the surrounding Everts and Clitherall townships. Nearly 30 Native American archeological sites exist in the southern portion of Glendalough State Park and in various locations throughout the City and surrounding townships. Several state-designated historical sites also exist within the City, including GTA elevators, Prospect House Museum, First Baptist Church, First National Bank, Everts House, Chief Wenonga, the Albertson House, and several other historic homes.

Residents of Battle Lake would like to see a more respectful interpretation of local Native American history presented in the City. This history is an important part of the heritage and identity of the community and should not be overlooked. Appropriate historical interpretive areas in the City's parks, particularly at Halvorson Park near the Chief Wenonga statue, would educate visitors and residents while enhancing recreational opportunities and celebrating Battle Lake's Native American history.

### ***Recreational Activities***

The many lakes and wetlands in and around Battle Lake are assets to the community that provide scenic vistas and opportunities for recreation. These assets are ideal places for more passive outdoor recreation activities such as canoeing, bird watching, sunbathing, open space enjoyment, and walking paths among other types of use. Residents would like to see these recreation opportunities increased and diversified by improving the trail system connecting different parts of the City and by diversifying the types of activities available at City parks. Residents would like to see each park geared toward a different theme rather than all the parks offering the same, standard playground equipment.

Lake Avenue, which serves as "Main Street" in Battle Lake, also offers a variety of shops and restaurants frequented by residents and visitors. The top recreational activity in Minnesota is shopping<sup>16</sup>, and visitors enjoy shopping at unique small-town stores that cannot be found anywhere else. Downtown Battle Lake is just minutes from many parks and West Battle Lake. Residents feel that shopping in Battle Lake should be tied to recreation activities present in the City. Information kiosks should show trails, parks, and shopping and restaurant facilities in and around the City.

## **Goals and Strategies**

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 20: Continue to improve the network of trails to create a more walkable community and connect people to area amenities.** Residents of Battle Lake would like to be able to walk the short distances to downtown shops, the lake, or to local parks. Current trails provide access to the school, Glendalough State Park, along Lake Shore Drive and other areas of Battle Lake but there are areas that need improvement. Walking and biking trails would also serve the added benefit of getting

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development, 2000

people outside to exercise, which would help to address the growing problems with obesity in young adults<sup>17</sup>.

**Goal 21: Continue to ensure that parks are safe and available to everyone and that existing parks are maintained or improved where needed.** Residents are concerned that not everyone lives nearby to up -date, well-maintained parks, or even a park at all, especially in the newer residential developments in the southern parts of the City. Residents would also like to see continued improvements in local parks so that they are all accessible to disabled persons and residents of all ages, and that all park facilities continue to be maintained. Parks should also be safe to access. Those that lie along Highway 78 can be particularly dangerous to reach on foot, especially during the summer months when traffic is much higher.

**Goal 22: Provide a greater variety of recreational activities that are appropriate for each park (create a theme for each park).** Residents wish to see historic, geological, and other unique features in the area integrated within the recreation system of Battle Lake. Residents would like to improve the historic and interpretive activities available at Halvorson Park to create an area that celebrates Native American history and is respectful to all peoples. Fishing, swimming, and lake access should be improved at Sand Bay and the public beach access so that all residents have opportunities for lake-oriented recreation. Nature trails and wildlife watching activities should be incorporated in the wetland area near the south of town. Residents also wish to see artistic activities integrated into the recreational opportunities available. Local artisans are a strong part of the Battle Lake community, and residents would like to see more public art displays and have art activities more widely available to residents and visitors.

**Goal 23: Preserve and enhance open space and manage it in an environmentally-sound manner.** Residents feel that open spaces in and around Battle Lake should be preserved for their scenic, environmental, recreational, and functional benefits. However, these areas cannot just be preserved without active management to maintain and enhance the environmental integrity of these spaces. Residents would like to target scenic areas, lowlands, areas with views and vistas, and native plant communities for inclusion in an open space system. Residents would also like to use the open space system to promote and enhance the abundant bird-watching and wildlife-viewing opportunities.

**Goal 24: Increase awareness of recreational systems and unique features within and around the community.** Residents feel that the City could capitalize on its proximity to Glendalough State Park and on the summer visitors by providing information and maps of the area detailing the variety of parks, open spaces, trails, and other recreational facilities available in the area. This information should be available to visitors and residents alike.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Create new or improved crosswalks across Highway 78 to link parks on either side of the highway and improve safety for pedestrians who are often difficult for motorists to see because they are blocked by parked vehicles.

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<sup>17</sup> Trails and sidewalks are important for addressing childhood obesity and the many health problems associated with it according to the Otter Tail County Public Health Department, 2004

- Explore options for better lighting and crosswalk delineation as well as crosswalk safety patrols for morning and afternoon school traffic – particularly in the areas by the Hidden Meadows development.
- Continue to get young people involved in community meetings and planning initiatives through student memberships and/or other organizations.
- Maintain existing information kiosks and wayfinding signage around the community and regularly review to ensure they are as helpful to visitors as possible. Kiosks should have a consistent theme that ties in with other signage and interpretive exhibits around town to make them more easily recognizable, including the sign to Glendalough and existing signage at Halverson Park. Better define park entrances and gateways through sign improvements. Integrate historic and geologic features within the recreation system by including information about historic activities at Halvorson Park.

***Medium-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

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- Provide nature activities at a new park in the wetland areas south of town.
- Locate places for youth activities that is not on the highway or that would conflict with pedestrian-ways.
- Identify and consider improvements to existing parks, or the creation of new parks, that provide recreation opportunities sought after by residents and visitors and that are not currently provided – basketball, pickleball, ice skating, etc.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Develop partnerships with townships, Otter Tail County, the DNR, USFWS, and the Scenic Byway to create a regional trail system to surrounding natural areas, parks, and amenities. Also seek funders and partners to develop local trail plans.
- Plan for new parks in future development areas and require the dedication of parks and open space in new residential developments.
- Provide a venue designated for culture, art, and theater.
- Map and preserve scenic areas, lowlands, views and vistas, and native plant communities through easements, covenants, dedications, or acquisition.
- Restore and improve existing natural areas by partnering with local, state, and federal experts such as local gardeners, Otter Tail County Land and Water, Minnesota Land Trust, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the US Department of Agriculture, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Encourage local groups to get involved in park maintenance using an “Adopt-a-Park” program.

***Perpetual Strategies:***

- Continue to encourage the local master gardeners and other volunteers to work with local volunteers and service organizations to create and maintain community flower gardens and landscaping in parks.
- Seek to link all new parks and all existing parks by a trail network.
- Maintain a budget for updating and maintaining playground equipment, restrooms, trails, and other facilities. Also continue to implement and update the park plan on a regular basis.
- Continue to maintain a city website that highlights local facilities, activities and recreational opportunities and links to other community sites.

- Provide better definition of the crosswalks along major streets. Monitor to ensure they are maintained as needed.
- Update out-of-date park equipment.
- As park facilities are updated and maintained, ensure that new improvements meet ADA standards.

# Natural Resources Action Plan

## Vision

Battle Lake is home to vibrant, integrated plant and animal communities, clean air, and high quality water resources, with West Battle Lake as the centerpiece of the community.

## Background

Natural resources in and around Battle Lake provide the foundation for maintaining a healthy environment, high quality of life, and growing sustainably. Battle Lake's natural resources are one of its greatest assets, from the City's location on West Battle Lake to its forests and scenic vistas. Preserving natural resources will not only continue to provide a base for recreation but will also help to support the local economy by providing high quality resources from which to draw. Because of increasing affluence and people's growing desires to vacation and reside in areas with high scenic amenities, it is imperative that Battle Lake plan for the protection of its natural resources. Maintaining and enhancing these resources will help to protect the very reason that many residents and visitors come to Battle Lake. Efforts should be directed toward wetlands and water resources, soils and geology, slope and topography, wildlife and rare species, natural scenery, forests, prairies, and native plant communities.

### *Green Spaces and Native Plant Communities*

Located on the border of the Eastern Broadleaf and Prairie Parkland biomes, Battle Lake and its surrounding area is home to a variety of native plant communities including deciduous forests, wetlands, and prairies. Prior to European settlement, the area was covered mostly in prairie and oak barrens with big woods featuring oak, maple, and basswood forests in the east and the west. Minnesota was home to more than 18 million acres of prairie, part of the largest ecosystem in North America.<sup>18</sup> European settlement in the area resulted in the majority of the prairie and oak barrens being converted to agricultural uses, with few remnants of prairie remaining. This is not only true for Minnesota, but also for most of the country where prairies once thrived. Now, only one percent of the pre-settlement prairies in this country remain. Because of this loss of habitat, many native prairie species are rare or endangered.

Many residents of Battle Lake have expressed the need to protect and link remnant plant communities and native plant communities. Most of the prairie remnants and forested areas are owned by private landowners. Since its opening, Glendalough State Park has worked to reestablish prairie grasses that were native to the area. Educating private property owners about the plant communities on their property and encouraging them to work together to manage these communities would benefit the City and the environment.

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<sup>18</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2004). "Native Prairie Bank Program." Online: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/prairierestoration/prairiebank.html>.

Residents have also expressed the need to improve and enhance publicly-owned lands within the City. Many of these properties are either too small in size or are otherwise undesirable for development, and so sit empty or unused scattered throughout the community. These properties could be used to improve and connect green spaces in Battle Lake through community gardening, greenways, and more trees and plants along walking paths and streets. The management of these remnants could also be tied to management efforts on private property.

## ***Wetlands***

Many residents of Battle Lake recognize the fundamental role that wetlands play in cleaning and filtering stormwater and controlling flooding. There are several wetlands in the City of Battle Lake and many more outside of the City's boundaries, including shallow marshes located along the edges of the lakes, along with some deeper marshes and a few shrub and wooded swamps.

Residents have expressed concern about lakeshore development pressure and the impacts on wetland quality, particularly those wetlands that lie along the shore of West Battle Lake. Because of their relationship to the lakes and the pressures for lakeshore development, many of the wetlands may face negative impacts that would degrade their quality. While wetlands face negative impacts similar to those for lakes, wetlands are more likely to be viewed as marginal lands and be destroyed. More than half of Minnesota's wetlands have been lost.<sup>19</sup> In the past, most of the loss has been attributed to agriculture, but over the last ten years, wetlands have been increasingly lost to residential and commercial development pressures.<sup>20</sup>

## ***Ground Water Quality***

Battle Lake has been ranked first in Minnesota twice in the last 20 years for having the best tasting water through a contest conducted by Minnesota Rural Water. Nearly 95 percent of homes within the City boundaries are serviced with municipal water. The ground water quality is currently quite high and drinking water tastes good because it needs few chemicals to treat it. Residents desire to keep it that way. Currently, the City only adds small amounts of fluoride to treat drinking water. But with increasing lakeshore development pressures and desires to increase commercial and industrial sectors, many residents are concerned that their clean ground water will become threatened.

The quality of ground water is affected by several factors, not just the threats that residents are concerned about. One important factor is the type of soil overlying the groundwater aquifer. The last glacier to cover west central Minnesota deposited large amounts of soil in the form of glacial drift, end moraines, and outwash plains over the area where Battle Lake is now located. Today, most of the soils within Battle Lake are sandy loams interspersed with sands, regular loams, and other combinations of sand and loam. The sandy loams and loams are suitable for development, but the sandier the soil, the greater the potential is for ground water contamination. Of particular concern are the areas that are located on sand in the western part of town. The City must protect these areas, and

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<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. (2004). "Wetlands." Online: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us>.

<sup>20</sup> Dahl, Thomas. (2000). "Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States 1986 to 1997." U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wetlands Inventory: Washington, D.C., 82 pp.

in particular the well-head protection area, from development or land uses that have the potential to cause contamination.

## **Lakes**

Clearly, one of Battle Lake's greatest natural resources is West Battle Lake itself, the centerpiece of the community. This lake, along with a multitude of nearby lakes, provides residents and visitors with scenic vistas, fishing, boating, and other recreation opportunities. West Battle Lake ranks well above average as one of the healthiest lakes in the North Central Hardwoods Ecoregion<sup>21</sup>.

Residents of Battle Lake have expressed the need to ensure that water quality of West Battle Lake remains high and are concerned that inappropriate lakeshore development, certain landscaping practices, and increasing impervious surfaces threaten that water quality. Because the shoreline within the City has been almost entirely developed with homes, cabins, and resorts, the health of the lake could be negatively impacted. Development on lakeshores has been shown to increase nutrient levels in the lake and increase shoreline erosion which leads to an increase in algae blooms and suspended sediments, thereby decreasing water clarity and degrading habitat for many of the species of fish found in West Battle Lake. Development-related activities that contribute most to degradation of the lake include removing aquatic and terrestrial vegetation along the shore, increasing impervious surfaces, nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizers, using rip-rap and other harmful landscaping practices, and compacting the soil<sup>22</sup>.

Many residents have also expressed concern that many citizens, including off-lakeshore property owners, may not be aware of how their landscaping practices or construction projects affect the water quality of West Battle Lake. The entire downtown and most neighborhoods of Battle Lake are located within the West Battle Lake Watershed, but many residents might not even know that the water from their property flows into the lake because they are not directly on the lakeshore. For this reason, many residents also feel that stormwater runoff needs to be managed throughout the entire City.

The suitability of the soil for different land uses can help the City of Battle Lake to direct future development appropriately. Other soil characteristics, such as erosion susceptibility, can also aid in this process. The *Otter Tail County Comprehensive Local Water Plan Update* identified soil erosion to be of utmost concern because of its potential to impact surface and groundwater quality. The plan indicates that highly erodible lands and lands around lakes, streams and wetlands should be protected to reduce negative impacts. There are several areas within the City of Battle Lake that contain highly erodible soils, and there are several more areas that have potentially highly erodible soils. By directing growth to areas that would protect critical soils and would place development in suitable areas, Battle Lake can plan for future development while protecting the water quality in the area.

## **Wildlife Habitat**

Many residents of Battle Lake enjoy the abundance of wildlife viewing in the area. The City of Battle

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<sup>21</sup> Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. (July 2003). "Comparison of typical Minnesota water quality conditions." Water Quality/Surface Water, #1.02.

<sup>22</sup> According to *The Water's Edge*, published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and University of Minnesota, 2003



Lake and its surroundings are home to a variety of wildlife species including white-tailed deer, bald eagles, coyotes, fox, loons, eagles, and raccoons among a host of other wildlife. Because of its location on the border of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest and the Prairie Parkland biomes, Battle Lake and the surrounding area are home to a diverse group of wildlife ranging from prairie birds to wetland turtles, to forest mammals. The Battle Lake area is also home to an endangered species of lichen, *Buellia nigra*. Lichens grow very slowly, often less than a millimeter over a year, so they can take a long time to recuperate from any type of disturbance. Since they are sensitive to air pollutants and waste, lichens are a valuable indicator of air quality.

Because of the abundance of wildlife, many residents feel that wildlife and their habitat are taken for granted. They are concerned that vital habitat needed to sustain these species is threatened by suburban-style landscaping practices and a misunderstanding of native habitats. Increasing development pressures along the lakeshore threaten vital shoreland habitat for many species including certain fish species and many nesting birds.

There is also a concern that many Battle Lake citizens may not be aware of how their actions affect wildlife or of the appropriate ways of interacting with wildlife in their own backyard. Some residents may trap or poison so-called “nuisance” animals such as woodchucks or may attract other animals such as raccoons or skunks by feeding them or not properly storing trash. Both of these practices are inappropriate ways of dealing with wildlife, but lack of education or awareness prevents residents from acting otherwise.

Residents have also cited issues with the feral cat population in the area. Feral cats can reproduce rapidly, can out-compete some native species of animals for food sources, and can also have a detrimental impact on other species that do not otherwise face such high levels of predation such as certain nesting bird populations. Because the nearest animal shelter is in Fergus Falls, keeping the cat population under control by spaying and neutering pets is the easiest step in reducing these impacts.

## ***Environmental Health***

The air quality and environmental health in Battle Lake was another issue of importance to residents, who enjoy the fresh air in the area and appreciate trees, gardens, and native vegetation as being necessary to maintain this cleanliness. Residents are also proud of the trees in Battle Lake, and they wish to protect these trees, not only for their appearances, but also for their role in providing shade, intercepting stormwater, and maintaining high air quality.

Residents have also expressed concern about visual pollution, particularly along the lakeshore. Residents feel that lighting should not detract from the views of the lake at night, citing towers, bright lights, and blinking lights as nuisances. Residents also feel that commercial and industrial lighting should not detract from existing residential areas. New advances in alternative lighting designs can reduce glare and concentrate light on-site: direct the light downward, minimize the lighting wattage, shield the light, and lower the height of the light pole. Not only do these lighting designs prevent light pollution, but they are also more cost effective and energy efficient – light is directed where it is needed and excess lighting is reduced.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lockwood, Charles. (March 2004). “Let there (not) be light.” *Planning*. Vol. 70, No. 3. 22-4.

Residents would also like to maintain the small town atmosphere of Battle Lake by reducing noise pollution. They value the peace and tranquility of the lake and the community itself. The City has noise ordinances in place, but citizens would like to ensure that noise does not cause nuisances to residents in the future.

## Goals and Strategies

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 25: Preserve existing native plant and animal communities.** Residents would like to prevent the destruction, degradation, and fragmentation of native plant and animal communities by protecting them from the negative impacts of development, regulating pesticide and herbicide use, and encouraging more responsible landscaping practices. The native plant and animal communities to be targeted include those under new development pressure as well as those that currently exist on already-developed land.

**Goal 26: Connect and manage existing and newly created plant and animal communities.** In order to maintain sustainable, healthy, functioning plant and animal communities, they need to be connected, not fragmented and isolated. This connection would occur through green corridors, riparian buffers, and other methods, and could possibly overlap with trails and walking paths. Residents feel that active management including invasive species removal, prescribed burning, and integrating private and public management efforts, is necessary to preserve and improve the ecosystem quality and complex inter-relationships that exist within the ecosystem.

**Goal 27: Ensure high water quality and ecological balance of West Battle Lake and other area lakes.** With West Battle Lake as the centerpiece of the community, residents take pride in the health of the lake and would like to ensure that this health continues well into the future. Of utmost importance is ensuring high water clarity, the ecological balance of the lake, and the natural beauty of the shoreline by encouraging appropriate landscaping and allowing native species of plants and animals to flourish, particularly within the highly sensitive shore impact zone. Preserving the ecological balance of the lake not only helps to maintain the water quality, but it also has the added benefits of limiting shoreline erosion and damage from ice heaves.

**Goal 28: Maintain the high level of ground water quality.** Battle Lake is home to clean, great tasting drinking water. Residents wish to prevent the pollution of their great drinking water resource by limiting the overuse of landscaping and agricultural chemicals in and around Battle Lake and by ensuring that development that poses potential risks to ground water is properly placed on suitable soils and outside of the well-head protection area.

**Goal 29: Preserve and protect wetlands of all types.** Residents of the area recognize the importance of wetlands and wish to prevent any further loss or damage to all that remain. Certain types of wetlands are not protected by State or Federal law, but residents feel that these wetlands should not be developed and wish to afford them protection as well.

**Goal 30: Maintain the environmental health of the area.** High air quality and the prevention of noise and visual pollution are important to the overall environmental health of the Battle Lake area.

Not only do these factors help sustain native plant and animal communities, but they also promote healthy lifestyles and add to the quality of life in and around Battle Lake.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Study and identify options for addressing PFAS chemicals in groundwater and include strategies within the wellhead protection plan.

***Medium-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

- Partner with Glendalough State Park and the school district to create an education program which focuses on the importance of wildlife and preservation of wildlife habitat.
- Encourage City-wide recreational activities and programs to encourage youth and adults to exercise and stay physically fit.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Maintain and implement the existing stormwater management ordinance in collaboration with Clitherall Township and area lake associations. Seek to develop a stormwater management agreement with Everts Township.
- Work with other local, state and federal agencies to educate and publicize options for private property owners to manage and restore existing wetlands on their property and allow vegetation to grow naturally in these areas rather than being mowed.
- Use the wetland owned by the city on the south side of town as an educational demonstration site for managing and restoring wetlands.
- Increase public awareness of environmentally sensitive landscaping, including “lakescaping” and construction practices throughout the entire community, not just along lakeshore property. Assist landowners with any available incentive programs.
- Maintain native shoreland and aquatic vegetation at City-owned beaches that are not swimming beaches to serve as education and demonstration sites for the public.
- Encourage property owners to restore native vegetation within the shore impact zone and littoral zone of the lakes and to reduce impervious coverage on their lots using alternative “porous” systems, rain gardens, and other stormwater management devices. Continue to allow for administrative impervious credits for the use of pervious/porous paver systems.

***Perpetual Strategies:***

- Regularly review and maintain the wellhead protection plan and focus on developing compatible land uses within the protection area, creating ordinances for protection, and cooperating with surrounding townships.
- Encourage native vegetation buffers along shorelines, streams, and rivers to help connect tracts of wildlife habitat.
- Regulate projects that have the potential to create erosion in environmentally sensitive areas.
- When the Battle Lake Ordinances are updated, the following strategies should be included:
  - develop stormwater management standards to be applied to individual parcels as they are developed or redeveloped.
  - do not count wetlands as buildable areas in new developments.
- Continue to provide education on lake water quality and shoreline ecology and support ongoing, wide-spread education with regard to protection of lake quality.

- Maintain and enforce ordinances pertaining to groundwater protection.
- Cooperate with Ottertail County, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), local lake associations and others to prevent the spread of invasive species to or from area lakes.
- Support lakes associations with establishing a program where County staff monitor boat landings for invasive species.

# Infrastructure and Transportation Action Plan

The City's transportation system and infrastructure network is the foundation upon which the City will grow. These components shape the physical form of the community and will serve to promote or limit growth, depending on their quality and management. Battle Lake has been proactive in creating a well-planned and properly maintained infrastructure network. This has given the City many positive options for the future. The transportation system, in contrast, has been defined for the City, initially by the railroad and more recently by Mn/DOT. These systems provide a healthy, yet challenging, base from which to build.

## Issues

Through the planning process, residents identified issues and opportunities regarding future transportation and infrastructure in and around the City of Battle Lake. They are listed in order of priority in the following paragraphs:

**Uncontrolled Growth.** A major concern for area residents is that of future population growth and the expansion of City limits. Although population growth has slowed and annexation talks have simmered in recent years, the city will undoubtedly experience population growth and expansion in the future. Many people worry that the future growth of the City will not happen in an orderly manner and most prefer slow, controlled growth. Areas around Battle Lake, particularly the trailer court southwest of the city limits and along the shores of West Battle Lake in Everts, Clitherall, and Girard Townships, are areas where annexation may be a consideration. These areas are currently not on City water and sewer systems and people living there have mixed feelings about annexation. If annexed, the City would need to work closely with residents and elected officials in these areas and incorporate them into the general infrastructure plan for the City.

**Continuing to Provide Affordable Services.** There is growing concern among citizens that the City must be able to provide services – including transportation, road maintenance, sanitary sewer, municipal water – to a growing population without greatly increasing the tax burden of existing residents. The city currently has service rates that are comparable to surrounding communities. The demand for services and close proximity to medical facilities and nearby shopping by the aging senior population will also grow over time, and citizens are concerned that the City will not be able to meet this demand.

**Lack of Transportation Options.** Residents feel that more trails and sidewalks are needed for alternate modes of transportation such as hiking, biking, and skating, and to attract more pedestrian activity within the city. Not all streets have sidewalks and crossing the highways can be dangerous during high traffic times.

**Maintaining Water Quality.** Residents value the surrounding lakes as a rich part of the region's character, and a healthy aquifer that provides great tasting drinking water for future residents and tourists. Issues related to this are the increasing amount of impervious coverage

associated with new development and handling stormwater runoff from entering West Battle Lake and surrounding lakes, as well as the potential for groundwater contamination caused by new residential and commercial development.

## Opportunities

**Major Transportation Connections.** Battle Lake's proximity to Interstate 94 and direct access to Highway 210 and Highway 78 allow residents to easily travel to neighboring communities for work and shopping opportunities. These highways also make it easier for tourists to patronize shops and restaurants in Battle Lake. Maintaining and enhancing these corridors will help keep Battle Lake competitive and accessible. The airport provides quick access to areas well outside the normal Battle Lake traveling range and may help stimulate the local tourism economy.

**Communications Infrastructure.** With high-speed internet in Battle Lake, the city is able to offer the infrastructure needed for information and service-oriented jobs and home occupations that do not depend on location. High speed internet also makes it possible to telecommute and offers educational opportunities.

**Green Infrastructure.** Green infrastructure techniques – including using trees to intercept stormwater and lowland plants to absorb and store stormwater - can be used to handle stormwater and runoff in an ecologically friendly way while enhancing the aesthetics of the city. Using green infrastructure techniques to store and treat stormwater on-site can eliminate the need for expensive, underground stormwater sewer systems while protecting water quality, reducing drainage and flooding problems on adjacent properties, and offering numerous other benefits.

**Sewer and Water Capacity.** The city is currently not using the full capacity of the sewer and water systems, which makes it easier to incorporate areas outside of the city into the city and connect those areas into the city water and sewer system. Expansion must be done in an orderly manner so that demand does not exceed capacity.

## Background

As Battle Lake developed in the early 1900s, the transportation system evolved along with the city. Starting with gravel roads and railroad access, the City has matured to mostly paved city streets and major highway access points. The City of Battle Lake is well-connected to its neighbors via Interstate 94, Highway 210, Highway 78, county roads, local roads, and the airport. Located three hours northwest of the Twin Cities and less than 20 minutes from Fergus Falls, Battle Lake is in a position to realize growth serving both these areas as a tourist destination and as a bedroom community. The expanding telecommunications network may allow Battle Lake to attract more information-based occupations.

### ***Municipal Sewer and Water Services***

The municipal water system was installed in 1931 and the sanitary sewer system was established in 1952. The sewage treatment system became overloaded and outdated and was replaced in 1989. The

City replaced the water tower and the majority of the water and sewer mains in 2003-04. Additional mains were replaced in 2020 and 2021, making most of the water and sewer infrastructure in fairly updated condition.

When the sewage treatment system was replaced in 1989, it was designed to accommodate 1400 people. It is currently operating at approximately 75% capacity.

### ***Existing Road and Highway Network***

Battle Lake is crossed by two major highways, Highway 210 and Highway 78. Approximately 20 miles south on Highway 78 is Interstate 94, which connects directly to the Twin Cities in the southeast and the Fargo-Moorhead area in the northwest. Highway 210 connects Battle Lake to Fergus Falls in the west.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation does not currently have any major plans to reconstruct these roadways.

The Pavement Management/Street Reconstruction plan lays out a ten year plan for reconstructing, repaving, and sealing for the city's streets to keep them in good condition. Several streets were assessed and given ratings ranging from critical to fair condition and placed on a schedule for maintenance or reconstruction as necessary.

### ***Walking and Biking Trail Network***

In 1989, the Governor's design team visited Battle Lake to help plan for the future. From these design sessions, several items related to transportation and infrastructure were discussed. Ideas included installing sidewalks, installing street furniture, enhancing landscaping, and creating continuous curb cuts. Although these ideas are more aesthetic, it was hoped that these enhancements would increase the quality of life in the City and provide more modes for transportation other than the automobile.

### ***Stormwater Management***

The City of Battle Lake adopted shoreland and stormwater regulations in 1999 to reduce uncontrolled runoff into lakes and wetlands. The ordinance regulates setbacks, impervious surfaces, lot size, density, and shoreland alterations to control the amount of stormwater runoff and the flow of stormwater runoff.

Rather than building an underground stormwater collection system, the regulations allow for "green" infrastructure. Green infrastructure encourages using existing drainage ways, wetlands, and vegetated soil surfaces to store and treat stormwater on-site to reduce the rate of flow and volume of runoff into lakes.

### ***Complete Streets***

In order to provide multi-modal transportation options throughout Battle Lake, the city adopted a "Complete Streets" policy in 2011. The policy ensures that when streets within the city are being designed, the safety, convenience and comfort of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians are considered.

It also promotes the integration of sidewalks, bike facilities, transit amenities and safe crossings into the initial design of street projects. The primary goal of the complete streets is to improve the access and mobility for all users of streets in the community by improving safety through reducing conflict and encouraging non-motorized transportation and transit, which will enhance the promotion of active living as a means to improve the health of the community residents and improve environmental conditions, including air quality.

### ***Traffic Congestion***

While traffic levels are not much of a problem in Battle Lake during the winter months, traffic increases during the summer months with the influx of tourists. The increased traffic can lead to safety issues for pedestrians trying to cross Highway 78 as well as for pedestrians trying to access local parks and trails.

A significant percentage of working residents in Battle Lake, Everts Township, and Clitherall Township travel outside the community for employment, with most working in Fergus Falls. Residents have indicated that traffic is increasing on Highway 210 to Fergus Falls due to residents traveling in single occupancy vehicles to and from work. There may be room for public transit to reduce congestion and make it possible for more people to access employment opportunities outside of Battle Lake and the neighboring townships.

### ***Public Transit***

Although there is not a public transit program, there are some county-wide private transit options that primarily serve senior citizens and disabled citizens for a fee. Unfortunately, these services center primarily on Fergus Falls and can be relatively expensive for county residents outside of Fergus Falls. Moreover, there are no public transit options for all other citizens without vehicles. In total, 64 Minnesota counties have instituted some form of county-wide transit service, including Dial-a-Ride programs that allow people to schedule transit trips ahead of time—Otter Tail does not yet have one of those programs.

### ***Airport***

The local airport serves only non-commercial uses and is open from May 1st to November 1st. The runway is not paved and is nearly 3,000 feet long. Although the city's public works department maintains the airport, airport usage is not tracked. The airport is mostly for recreational purposes by those who lease hanger lots.

## **Goals & Strategies**

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goals:

**Goal 31: Growth of the City must be done in a planned and orderly way so as to reduce land use conflicts and encourage investment in the community.** A well-planned community is a strong and healthy community. It is important to provide ample room for growth and development, but to do so in a way that does not create future conflicts between different types of development and does not limit the ability of the City to grow in the future. People seeking to invest in Battle Lake will be more confident doing so knowing their investment is protected by thorough planning.



**Goal 32: Continue to provide municipal services in the most cost effective and efficient way.** Battle Lake has a track record of being proactive with their municipal services. Recent improvements have been made that enhance the existing system and provide for future growth. The City needs to continue their dedication to maintaining their infrastructure systems and planning for their ultimate repair, replacement or upgrade.

**Goal 33: Encourage transportation options within the City and the surrounding areas.** The highways running through town along with the local streets provide excellent vehicular access to and around Battle Lake. For residents who cannot drive, mainly the old and the young, this transportation system provides little benefit. To continue a high quality of life with a population that is both aging and increasing in numbers of youth, there will need to be other transportation and mobility options available in the Battle Lake area, including a more widespread and coordinated network of sidewalks, trails or other methods for safe pedestrian movement throughout the City, exploration of options for public transit and promotion and expansion of volunteer-based programs to help seniors and other residents without vehicles to access needed services and goods.

**Goal 34: Proactively manage stormwater and protection of the wellhead.** The City's water resources are critical, not just for the recreational and social opportunities they provide but also for the health of the community. Managing stormwater is important to protecting the areas lakes and wetlands as well as preventing conflicts between properties. It is important to maintain and enforce the City's Wellhead Protection Plan and monitor existing and newly understood pollutants (such as PFAS chemicals) to protect the City's wellheads, ensure a safe drinking water supply and to prevent any unforeseen capital expenses involved in relocating a well.

**Goal 35: Ensure that municipal infrastructure is adequate not only for year-round residents and businesses but that it also meets the needs during peak seasonal times.** Planning and designing infrastructure in seasonal areas is a challenge due to the peak demands placed on the systems. For example, studies have shown that demand for sewer and water systems are four to eight times greater during the summer than during the off-seasons. Everything from parking spaces to public restrooms is in higher demand during the summer months. It is a challenge to meet these demands on a tight budget, keeping in mind that somehow costs need to be fairly distributed in an environment where often those generating the greatest demands (visitors) are not paying local taxes.

**Goal 36: The long-term expense of infrastructure expansion and the corresponding assumptions for induced growth and enhanced tax base need to be evaluated prior to every project that adds new infrastructure for taxpayers to maintain.** When projects are funded with outside dollars (grants, low-interest loans or direct private-sector investment in a project), the City needs to consider the long- term obligations of infrastructure maintenance, instead of focusing solely on the potential short-term gains from increases in tax base. As infrastructure completes its life cycle, projected maintenance and/or replacement costs – which are typically a city obligation – can grow to unaffordable levels. Before an additional obligation is added, it is critical that the City analyzes the long-term budget impact of accepting these responsibilities.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- Identify City zoning ordinances that are inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan and correct them.
- Continue to follow a maintenance schedule as outlined in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), so contracted work can be coordinated and commit money to implement the needed maintenance.
- Continue to work collaboratively with Clitherall Township to implement and maintain stormwater management and wellhead protection plans.
- Review the city's land use and development regulations to:
  - encourage growth in areas with existing infrastructure;
  - increase awareness of allowances already in city zoning regulations allowing for multi-family housing in mostly single-family areas;
  - promote creative designs for residential developments through planned unit development regulations; and
  - promote building designs that will make future modifications and alterations easier to respond to changes in housing demands and needs.
- Maintain and improve the pedestrian environment downtown with additional trees, large windows and doors fronting the sidewalks, benches, awnings, and other landscaping. Expand similar streetscaping efforts as new commercial areas are created.

***Mid-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

- Consider improvements to both existing and new infrastructure to improve access and safety for bicyclists and pedestrians to connect between neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- Manage the existing parking supply (i.e. provide signage directing people to available parking) and identify additional areas that can be converted to parking.
- Continue police enforcement for speeding, parking, and other moving violations.
- Establish a sidewalk, path, and trail plan and integrate it with the City's Capital Improvement Plan.
- Establish and maintain open communication with Clitherall and Everts Townships regarding orderly growth and development.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Monitor the need for additional signalized intersections along Lake Avenue (in addition to the one installed near Halvorson Park).
- Carefully develop a 40-year growth plan and consider annexation based on the plan as necessary. Focus annexation efforts primarily on undeveloped "greenfields" rather than existing developed neighborhoods.
- Consider options to influence development/subdivision designs and patterns in Townships near the City's boundaries. Work to negotiate agreements with Township or County authorities before pursuing more aggressive controls such as enforcing City subdivision regulations within two miles of the city boundaries.
- Educate area township officials as to why the City of Battle Lake has an interest in influencing development patterns adjacent to the city and seek opportunities to develop mutually beneficial strategies in coordination with townships.
- Consider the construction of traffic improvements at appropriate intersections in or near the City.

***Perpetual Strategies:***

- Continue to update the City's Future Land Use Map as necessary.
- Continue to review and maintain the City's capital improvements and replacement/repair budget that integrates parks and recreation, sidewalks and trails and stormwater improvements as well as street and water/sewer improvements.
- Continue to manage commercial stormwater parcel by parcel as requests are made for permits and explore more regional approaches that may include involvement of the City, townships and/or the County.
- When planning, designing and constructing streets within the city, ensure the "complete streets" concept is considered and implemented where appropriate.
- Use traffic calming devices and intersection designs/practices downtown in order to slow down traffic through town.
- Provide better definition of the crosswalks along major streets. Monitor to ensure they are maintained as needed.

# Orderly Growth Action Plan

## **Vision**

Battle Lake will grow in an efficient and responsible manner, both within its boundaries and through orderly growth and annexation outside of the existing Battle Lake city limits.

## **Background**

While the population within the city limits of Battle Lake has remained stable over the last 100 years, the population in the townships surrounding Battle Lake has grown dramatically. Should these growth rates continue, the Battle Lake area can expect the overall population to increase by 50 percent, adding 1,092 people. However, many of these new residents and businesses will not move into Battle Lake's current city limits; instead, they will purchase or build their homes and businesses in Clitherall or Everts Townships. To facilitate healthy growth within the community and to achieve the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Battle Lake will consider annexing land adjoining its current boundaries.

## ***Why Annex Land?***

Providing additional land within City boundaries for commercial development may allow the city to create a more concentrated commercial district. Annexation could also provide additional land within the City for new residential development. Annexation would give the City room to grow and prevent the City from being fenced in by a ring of large-lot, inefficient development.

Without annexation, the expected growth that is likely to occur outside of Battle Lake will occur without City standards for such things as sewage treatment systems, stormwater management, impervious surface, consistent road layouts, and environmental protection. The land outside of the City boundaries is subject to State and County regulations; however, these regulations set a low standard and then only within 1,000 feet of a lake. The City has the authority to apply more aggressive regulations in order to protect local resources and encourage more efficient and responsible development.

It is more economically feasible to promote higher density properties within the City. The cost would be excessive for the City to extend utilities to low-density properties that would otherwise go unserved by city water and sewer. Providing water and sewer to properties in the Battle Lake area is important because it helps to protect environmental resources. Furthermore, City utilities can help prevent lake and wetland pollution by reducing the number of individual septic treatment systems (ISTS or septic system) that have the potential to leak or to fail. City water and sewer will also help protect wellheads and increase drinking water quality by reducing the possibility of pollution.

Finally, annexing land into the City may help keep rural land from being fragmented by low density, suburban style development that detracts from the character of the region. Allowing a mix of urban and rural densities provides for more housing options for a wider variety of people of all ages and incomes.

## ***How to Annex Land***

State guidelines allow three methods for a City to annex land:

- Annexation by Ordinance
- Orderly Annexation
- Annexation by Petition

Each of these procedures can be used, but only one may apply in any given situation at one time.

### **Annexation by Ordinance**

The City could pursue Annexation by Ordinance should the land to be annexed be urban in character as defined by Minn. Stat. § 414.033. The law defines land as being urban in character if it satisfies one of the following conditions:

- The city owns the land to be annexed.
- The land is completely surrounded by land already within city limits.
- The land abuts the city and the area to be annexed is 60 acres or less, not presently served or capable of being served by available public sewer facilities and all the landowners petition the city for annexation.
- The land is within two miles of the city and has been approved for platting after August 1, 1995, and the platted lots average 21,780 square feet or less.

The City would simply write and pass an ordinance describing the area to be annexed. The ordinance would be filed with the Minnesota Department of Administration, the city clerk, the county auditor, and the secretary of state. This particular method is easy to do when the City works with the township, and the township is friendly toward annexation.

### **Orderly Annexation**

Battle Lake could also annex land by using the Orderly Annexation procedure. This procedure emphasizes negotiation and agreement wherein the City and the township from which the land is to be annexed pass a joint resolution designating the unincorporated land to be annexed. The joint resolution is submitted to the Minnesota Department of Administration for approval. This is often the preferred method of annexation because it encourages cooperation between the City and township over the long-term.

### **Annexation by Petition**

The third procedure available for acquiring land is Annexation by Petition. This procedure is only utilized if the City cannot annex land using either of the first two procedures. The City would pass a resolution to file a petition with the Minnesota Department of Administration to annex the land in question. Sometimes the landowner includes a request to be annexed into the City, which the township can still contest. Should the annexation be contested, the Minnesota Department of Administration would require that the City and the contesting party meet three times over a 60-day period to resolve any disputes. Should these meetings fail to resolve the contestation, the Department of Administration can require the City and the contesting party to enter mediation and arbitration.

Since Annexation by Petition is often considered a hostile form of annexation and can be lengthy, the City should pursue Annexation by Ordinance or Orderly Annexation whenever possible.

Annexation by Petition is not a common method of annexation, and the Minnesota Department of Administration recommends proceeding with one of the two aforementioned methods, using Annexation by Petition only as a last resort.

Annexing land is one important tool for managing growth in and outside of Battle Lake. While it is important to provide for a variety of lot sizes and land uses in and outside of the City, annexation is important for guiding efficient land use and extending City services in the most cost efficient manner.

## Goals & Strategies

Our vision for Battle Lake is to accomplish the following goal:

**Goal 37: Ensure that Battle Lake has the ability to grow outside of its boundaries and develop in an orderly manner.** As the region develops, it will become more and more necessary to expand City services outside of the current City limits to protect the environment and to provide a wider variety of housing and commercial options than what low-density, rural zoning can offer. Allowing unplanned, small-lot development to occur outside of the City's boundaries could prevent the City from being able to grow beyond its current boundaries, because the small-lot development would block the City from expanding its boundaries. Extending municipal services, particularly water and sewer, through land that has already been developed or subdivided into small lots would incur large costs to the City and to landowners.

To accomplish our goals, we will seek to implement the following strategies:

***Short-term Strategies (within 1 year):***

- None

***Medium-term Strategies (between 1 year and 5 years):***

- Work internally at the City to identify the most appropriate/likely areas for future growth around the City.
- Focus any efforts at annexation on undeveloped land ("greenfields") more so than existing developed neighborhoods.
- Establish open communication with Clitherall and Everts Townships about growth and annexation issues affecting the area.
- Have annual meetings with the surrounding townships to establish an on-going dialogue on annexation issues. Initiate meetings with the surrounding townships to explain the benefits of annexation.
- Work with the surrounding townships to develop a 40-year growth management plan that would include "friendly" joint annexation agreements and guidelines for annexing.
- Work with Clitherall and Everts Townships to develop an orderly growth plan for existing higher-density development outside of the City. There are already certain areas outside of the City limits that are developed at urban densities. As these areas are connected to City services, they should be annexed into the City. It is important to encourage existing developments to connect to City services as they upgrade their individual sewage treatment systems.
- Work with Clitherall and Everts Townships to develop an evaluation program to determine when a property should be annexed into the City. Although there is vacant land available within the City, higher density developments are likely to occur outside of the City limits as

development pressure increases. Higher density developments that have access to City services should be annexed into the City if they meet a certain threshold. Part of the evaluation process should include determining if the properties to be annexed want to be annexed into the City.

***Long-term Strategies (5+ years):***

- Develop an orderly growth and annexation plan with Clitherall and Everts Townships. It is imperative that the City and the Townships work in cooperation to ensure that orderly growth occurs in the region and to keep friendly working relationships between the City, County, and Townships. The City should focus primarily on *orderly annexation* rather than the other procedures. The orderly growth and annexation plan should include provisions for property owners that petition to be annexed into the City.

# Integrated Growth Plan

The physical pattern of residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and other public infrastructure dictates how we relate to the resources around us. Citizens of Battle Lake wish to protect the natural and cultural amenities that define the community and ensure that new development does not negatively impact the lakes, community character, environment, high amenity neighborhoods, and quality of life. This integrated growth plan combines the critical features of all action plans into one physical and regulatory model that conveys the future vision of Battle Lake. It provides the bridge between the Comprehensive Plan and the ordinances and zoning map and serves as a guideline for future land use decisions.

The following analysis, which stems directly from action plans contained in this plan, was used in creating the Integrated Growth Plan:

- Agricultural uses were an important component of the emergence of Battle Lake as a neighborhood service center. Farmland surrounding the City should be developed from the City limits out as infrastructure becomes available. Farmland on the outskirts of the City's two-mile area of influence should be preserved for farming, open space or low-density residential until infrastructure can be provided.
- Deciduous forests, oak savannahs, and prairies are unique physical features that provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities in the area. Once gone, they cannot be replaced. They need to be protected from encroaching development.
- Lakes, wetlands, and steep slopes are non-developable properties. They serve as unique environmental and recreational features of the land that must be preserved.
- Demand for lakeshore property is high. New residential development along lakeshores must be at densities that are compatible with the water body. It must not significantly alter the natural appearance, health, or function of the lakeshore.
- Off-lake, non-urban residential development should occur in areas that do not excessively add to the service burden of the City. New development in these areas should occur along or very near existing roadways and should be designed to retain rural character.
- The downtown area has the potential to provide destination shopping that is highly accessible to residents and visitors. To reach its full potential, the downtown should be landscaped, pedestrian-friendly, expanded outward, and should retain a high density of shops and restaurants.
- The majority of Battle Lake is served by municipal utilities (sewer and water). The City will continue to maintain higher densities and seek to infill this area with new commercial and residential development where appropriate.
- The rural townships that surround Battle Lake feature low-density residential development, high quality natural areas and open space. The City should work to retain this area's rural character within the two-mile influence area.
- The undeveloped areas within City limits and those areas immediately adjacent to the city – which constitutes the urban/rural transition zone - will serve as the City's primary growth area. This zone is located close to existing infrastructure and is well-suited for future expansions.
- High quality residential neighborhoods with municipal services and parks are needed to keep Battle Lake a desirable neighborhood service center.



- New and diverse commercial development, featuring a mix of pedestrian-oriented and auto-oriented (but non-sprawling) uses, shall be encouraged and provided with City utilities.
- The quality of life and recreational opportunities in the Battle Lake area should be promoted to encourage the expansion of high-tech, cottage, and tourism-related industries within the City.
- The continued provision of parks and greenways providing access to area lakes and recreational facilities throughout the community is important for enhancing the quality of life for residents and for attracting tourists and visitors to the area.

Using this analysis, ten future land use categories and one overlay category were developed. These categories describe the desired future pattern of development within the City.

**Agricultural Preservation** – The pattern of development provided for in this area consists of large lot residential/agricultural uses (20-40 acres) including family farms and similar low-scale operations.

**Prairie/Woodland Preservation** – The pattern of development provided for in this area would be very large lot residential (20-40 acres) to preserve prairies and forests and manage them for habitat and timber production.

**Downtown Mixed-Use** – This land use category will feature a central shopping district featuring pedestrian-friendly, high-density shops, restaurants, office spaces, live/work units, multi-family housing, and other commercial uses to support a critical mass of businesses and people downtown.

**Commercial** – This category provides for medium to high-density commercial uses serviced with municipal utilities and scaled to automobiles and pedestrians. It would also allow for high-tech cottage industries and light manufacturing uses that will not adversely affect community character or the health, safety, and welfare of residents.

**Urban Residential** – Development patterns in this area are a medium to high-density residential that enhance and expand the traditional grid style of development. Walk-able neighborhoods that connect to other urban areas and recreational areas are facilitated. These areas are served, or will potentially be served, by municipal utilities.

**Urban/Rural Transition** – This category will constitute the targeted growth areas for the expansion of municipal utilities to service future medium to high - density residential uses that are designed to transition from urban to rural areas.

**Rural Residential** – Development patterns in this area will feature low-density residential uses that will not be served by municipal utilities and in which new roads and future development will be designed to preserve rural character.

**Recreational** – These areas consist of existing and potential parks, trails, public access points, and natural areas of varying size and function. They are distributed equitably throughout the urban, rural, and transition areas.

**Open Space** – This is designated non-developable property consisting of wetland areas, unique geologic features, and steep slopes.

**Water Resource** – The area’s lakes are set aside for public recreational enjoyment.

**Shoreland Overlay** – The pattern of development in these areas is consistent with state shoreline development standards.

These categories are not current zoning classifications, although the integrated growth plan should be referenced when making future land use and zoning decisions.

# Implementation Strategy

## Partnerships & Collaboration

This Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document for future city decisions and actions. The City Council and staff will be responsible for implementing the strategies contained in the plan through direct leadership, organizing, monitoring, and additional long-term planning; however, they will need the continued involvement of concerned citizens to make all of the strategies a reality. The increasing number of retired and semi-retired individuals in the area provides a solid base of experience and knowledge to draw upon. Many young and working-aged people also have a vested interest in the area and are looking for opportunities to make a difference in the community.

In order to achieve the goals contained within this plan, the City shall work closely with local civic and volunteer groups, the surrounding townships, cities, Otter Tail County, and other public and private partners to ensure success. The City needs to mobilize these stakeholders to do great things through the following committees that either currently exist or that need to be created as outlined in this plan:

- Planning Commission
- Lakes Area Development Association
- Park Advisory Committee
- Network Battle Lake
- Battle Lake Community Fund

The City Council must delegate implementation of specific strategies in this plan to each committee, with City staff providing support and reporting back to the City Council on their progress. Each committee should prepare an annual report detailing their progress in accomplishing the goals and implementing the assigned strategies of this plan.

## Parcel Mapping

Parcel mapping combines property and tax information with digitally mapped outlines of surveyed lots, parcels, and platted subdivisions. This information helps public officials to efficiently track growth and development over time, analyze and select sites suitable for different uses, review properties during the subdivision process, and generate more targeted maps. Otter Tail County has established parcel mapping for the entire County. The City of Battle Lake should continue to work with the County on keeping the parcel data up to date.

## Review & Update Land Use Ordinances

An important step in implementing this Comprehensive Plan will entail close review and updating of the City's current Land Usage Ordinances to ensure that all shoreland management regulations, subdivision controls, stormwater management code, zoning code, and zoning map are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Components of the updated Ordinance should include:

- A rural/urban transition zone targeted for future residential and commercial growth and the expansion of infrastructure to support it.

- Higher density development closer to town where current infrastructure exists.
- More options for multi-family housing units and redevelopment of existing housing.
- Natural vegetation buffers around lakes and other significant natural resources.
- Requiring open space dedications, exactions, or impact fees in all new developments.
- Ensuring interconnected natural and recreational systems in all new developments.

New land use ordinances can be strengthened through an integrated system of voluntary guidelines, best management practices, development rights programs, conservation easements, tax-incentive programs, density bonuses, and City-land purchase strategies.

## **Capital Improvement Projects & Diversifying Funding**

The City of Battle Lake must identify actions and projects requiring capital budget improvements. It must prioritize and phase potential projects including, but not limited to:

- Major transportation and infrastructure investments.
- Park and recreation enhancements, including multi-use trails, new playground equipment, an ice skating rink and greenways.
- Streetscape improvements along Highway 78 and downtown Battle Lake.

Not all actions can be funded by the capital improvements budget, so the City must also identify and prioritize projects to be funded through other options such as grants, tax increment financing, revolving loans, and private-public partnerships. The City should build relationships with surrounding cities and townships and Otter Tail County to seek funding for projects from regional, state and federal agencies. The City should also collaborate with outside experts from both private and non-profit organizations to improve opportunities for obtaining grants, engage in training, and secure other resources. Key partnership projects should include:

- Restoring and protecting natural features and wildlife habitat.
- Providing regional transportation systems such as shuttle services and multi-use trails.
- Rehabilitating old and constructing new multi-family and low-income housing.
- Maintaining and enhancing existing neighborhoods.
- Attracting commercial growth and cottage industries that enhance the community's assets and make Battle Lake a destination.
- Connecting residents and visitors to local and regional parks and recreational facilities.
- Developing social and civic programs that build on Battle Lake's rich heritage.

## **Long-Term Planning Efforts**

The City Council must monitor the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and work to update it periodically when aspects of the plan no longer reflect the will of the community. It is important for the City of Battle Lake to remember that this Comprehensive Plan provides a long-term vision and framework for action based on broad community input and support, and local and regional trends. All future planning should involve members of the community and other regional stakeholders. All changes will require public hearings. A community-wide review of the Comprehensive Plan should be done every five to ten years.

# Appendix A: Completed Strategies from Previous Comprehensive Plans

## Community Character

- Conduct a study to determine if a community center is needed and, if so, what type of facility would provide the greatest cost benefit for the area.
- Work with community groups and volunteers to bring back bike racing, softball games, and other activities in conjunction with a summer festival.
- Provide benches for sitting downtown and along trails. (Work with Art of the Lakes)
- Host a Battle Lake 5K Walk/Run.
- Encourage the school to start a Parent Teacher Association.
- The “Community Calendar” was created and has been maintained by City staff and the Lakes Area Community Center. Any event can be added to the calendar.
- New events and activities have been added to the City’s Festival along with several new programs and events throughout the year.
- Several new benches, art projects and other amenities have been added to the downtown area and along the Glendalough Trail.
- The City maintains and regularly updates their website and works with other organizations to distribute a yearly calendar/coupons flyer that is widely distributed throughout the area.

## Housing

- Create a “helping hands” volunteer network to provide assistance for seniors to stay in their homes if they choose through community-based services.
- Educate people on the range of senior housing with services available in Battle Lake.

## Economic Development

- Create a cooperative economic development authority (CEDA) with representation from all service organizations, the Civic and Commerce Association, the Economic Development
- Authority, local businesses, city government, schools, and the surrounding townships. CEDA should establish a presence and an office in a central location in town. It should host quarterly meetings beginning with a kick-off meeting the first year to develop a common vision and mission for future joint activities. Based on this shared framework, CEDA should work together to:
  - investigate sources for market information and research to determine what people want and need in the area, pursue grants and technical assistance from outside agencies such as the Minnesota Office of Tourism and Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development to attract tourists, enhance recreational activities, and spur economic growth, host an annual business walk each spring, explore programs and administer funds and resources, offer training to local business owners and employees on customer service, goods and services provided by other businesses, and community awareness. The theme should be “Community Businesses without Walls” and oversee downtown revitalization efforts and other economic development strategies contained within this plan.

- Create a city website with links to all economic development activities, civic and commerce groups, recreational activities, and local businesses and resorts in and around Battle Lake. Also provide information on the site to:
  - connect business owners and entrepreneurs with resources for grants, funding, and technical assistance,
  - educate people about the current ordinances regarding maintenance, noise, junk, and pets to keep Battle Lake an attractive place to live and retain the value of residential neighborhoods and provide information on a referral network for local construction and landscaping businesses and trades.
- Create a better snow removal system downtown. Snowbanks inhibit pedestrians and create standing water and slush.
- Provide public restrooms downtown.

## Recreation and Open Space

- Create better crosswalks across Highway 78 to link parks on either side of the highway.
- Explore options for better lighting and crosswalk delineation as well as crosswalk safety patrols.
- Appoint a parks advisor/coordinator, volunteer if need be, to coordinate activities and events and resurrect the parks advisory committee.
- Strive to make all parks ADA compliant. As park facilities are updated and maintained, ensure that new improvements meet ADA standards.
- Enhance fishing, swimming, and access to the lake at Sand Bay.
- Provide fishing piers at the public lake accesses where appropriate.

## Natural Resources

- Require stormwater runoff management for all land parcels.
- Enact and enforce a runoff and erosion control ordinance.
- Work with Otter Tail County Health Department to develop a city policy banning smoking at public sporting events and city parks.

## Infrastructure and Transportation

- Develop a future land use map.
- Create more municipal parking/ make old city hall into parking.
- Look at ways to accommodate golf carts for the elderly. Make sure that laws don't restrict using golf carts or other similar modes of transportation such as scooters or mopeds.
- Create a municipal pier for public use with or without a water taxi.
- Complete Phase II of the City's Wellhead Protection Plan.
- Work with MnDOT to improve pedestrian crossings along the highway.
- Provide public restrooms near downtown.
- Provide bike racks at key areas of downtown and the City to encourage increased bike usage.