

# COMMUNITY DESIGNATIONS & DENSITY REQUIREMENTS: RURAL SERVICE AREAS

## LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

Community designations are a foundational element of the Metropolitan Council's Imagine 2050 plan. Community designations are assigned based on shared community characteristics, and they are used to inform forecasted growth, infrastructure planning, and land use policy.

Rural community designations in the Metropolitan Council's Imagine 2050 plan are required to guide growth to protect agricultural land, preserve rural character, and protect natural systems. Assigned based on shared characteristics, these designations limit residential density to reduce pressure on farmland, safeguard water resources, and avoid premature infrastructure costs, while reserving space for long-term regional growth where urban services may be provided in the future.

### DENSITY REQUIREMENTS

Residential density requirements are based on adopted community designations for both the rural and urban services areas. Local governments and land within the urban service area (MUSA) receive a higher level of regional services and investments than those in the rural service area. Unlike communities in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA), and Rural Centers that have minimum density requirements, communities in the Rural Service Area have maximum density limits to preserve agricultural land, protect natural resources, and avoid premature demand for regional infrastructure. Some rural communities may have multiple designations to reflect a mix of historic development and planned future uses.

#### Maximum Average Net Density Requirements

Community Designation	Minimum Net Density (units per acre)
Diversified Rural	4 units per 40 acres
Rural Residential	1 unit per 2.5 acres where existing, 1 unit per 10 acres where possible maximum
Agricultural	1 unit per 40 acres

### COMMUNITY DESIGNATIONS DEFINED

The Metropolitan Council assigns community designations based on factors such as the age of infrastructure, planned residential density, and intersection density, which together reflect a community's development pattern, connectivity, and capacity to support growth. Other considerations include the extent of urban infrastructure (e.g., within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area), forecasted population and employment growth, historical development trends, and existing or planned land uses.

**Community Designations Defined** continued on the next page.

## Diversified Rural

Diversified Rural communities contain a mix of farms, prime agricultural land, and large-lot or clustered housing. Much of their development occurred prior to 2000 at lower residential densities, and portions of these areas are in the Council's Long-Term Service Area for potential future urban infrastructure. To support orderly growth, urban-level residential development is discouraged, as are subdivisions that would prevent future urbanized development. These areas are managed to balance rural character with long-term development potential.

Local governments with a Diversified Rural community designation include **Afton, Andover,\* Belle Plaine Twp.,\* Cedar Lake Twp., Coates, Columbus,\* Corcoran,\* Dellwood, Denmark Twp., East Bethel,\* Forest Lake,\* Grant, Greenfield,\* Grey Cloud Island Twp., Helena Twp.,\* Hugo,\* Independence,\* Laketown Twp.,\* Linwood Twp., Louisville Twp., Marine on St. Croix, May Twp., Medina,\* Miesville, Minnetrista,\* New Market Twp.,\* New Trier, Orono,\* Pine Springs, Randolph, Randolph Twp.,\* Ravenna Twp., Rogers,\* Sand Creek Twp., Scandia,\* Spring Lake Twp.,\* St. Francis,\* St. Lawrence Twp., Stillwater Twp., and Victoria.\***

## Rural Residential

Rural Residential communities feature larger lot developments—often averaging 1–2.5 units per acre—built primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. Rural Residential communities plan for minimal growth while preserving natural features and accommodating environmental constraints. These development patterns are not well-suited for future regional wastewater service and are inconsistent with the Council's goal of orderly, economical growth. The Met Council discourages any expansion of this community designation.

Local governments with a Rural Residential community designation include **Andover,\* Baytown Twp., Credit River,\* Ham Lake, Inver Grove Heights,\* Lake Elmo,\* Lake St. Croix Beach, Lakeland, Lakeland Shores, New Market Twp.,\* North Oaks,\* Nowthen, Oak Grove, Spring Lake Twp.,\* St. Mary's Point, Sunfish Lake, and West Lakeland Twp.**

## Agricultural

Agricultural communities are dominated by farming and typically contain more than 50% prime agricultural land. They are planned and zoned for long-term agricultural use, and non-agricultural development is discouraged. These areas play a key role in supporting the region's economy, food production, and environmental health. Many are enrolled in preservation programs such as the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves and Green Acres Program. Protecting water quality and implementing sustainable farming practices are essential priorities.

Local governments with an Agricultural community designation include **Belle Plaine Twp.,\* Benton Twp., Blakeley Twp., Camden Twp., Castle Rock Twp., Dahlgren Twp., Douglas Twp., Empire,\* Eureka Twp., Greenvale Twp., Hampton,\* Hampton Twp., Hancock Twp., Helena Twp.,\* Hollywood Twp., Independence,\* Marshan Twp., Minnetrista,\* Nininger Twp., Randolph Twp.,\* San Francisco Twp., Sciota Twp., Vermillion,\* Vermillion Twp., Waconia Twp.,\* Waterford Twp., Watertown Twp.,\* and Young America Twp.**

\*More than one community designation

