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. Community designations help tailor planning guidance, define development expectations, and ensure that urban and rural areas grow in a sustainable, efficient, and equitable manner.

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. The Met Council expects jurisdictions in the MUSA to plan for and build at higher densities that economically support those regional services. Compact development also reduces the pressure on agricultural land areas, decreases the impact of development on natural systems, mitigates and helps adapt to climate change, and manages the region's land supply consistently and more effectively. Community designations support the planning of local policies that reflect regional goals such as climate resilience, equity, and efficient infrastructure use.

Minimum Average Net Density Requirements

Community Designation	Minimum Net Density (units per acre)
Urban	25
Urban Edge	14
Suburban	7
Suburban Edge	3.5
Rural Center	3

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.

Urban

Urban communities are the most densely developed and centrally located areas in the region. These cities were largely built before or shortly after World War II and shaped by the historic streetcar system, resulting in a compact urban form with high levels of walkability and connectivity. Their housing stock is older, with much of it constructed before 1965, and neighborhoods are often mixed-use, blending residential, commercial, and cultural uses. Urban areas are well-served by high-frequency transit and present significant opportunities for redevelopment at high densities. They also face environmental challenges such as urban heat islands and aging infrastructure, prompting the need for cooling strategies, greening efforts, and resilience planning.

Local governments with an Urban community designation include Columbia Heights, Hilltop, Hopkins, Minneapolis, Richfield, Robbinsdale, South St. Paul, St. Louis Park, Saint Paul, and West St. Paul.

Urban Edge

Urban Edge cities are immediately adjacent to Urban areas and experienced their most significant growth between the post-WWII era and the early 1970s. Their development was influenced by the rise of the automobile and the expansion of the highway system, leading to a more widespread, car-centric layout. These cities tend to have concentrated job centers—such as commercial, industrial, and institutional areas—and exhibit relatively high street connectivity, which supports public transit access and redevelopment potential. Despite being less dense than Urban cities, they face similar environmental concerns, including warming surface temperatures and risks to water quality, requiring coordinated infrastructure and environmental management strategies.

Local governments with an Urban Edge community designation include Anoka, Bloomington, Brookly Center, Crystal, Edina, Falcon Heights, Fridley, Golden Valley, Lauderdale, Maplewood, New Brighton, New Hope, North St. Paul, Osseo, Roseville, St. Anthony, and White Bear Lake.

Suburban

Suburban communities primarily developed during the 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in a landscape dominated by residential subdivisions, medium-density housing, and auto-oriented design. Though some Suburban cities have historic cores or downtowns with more urban characteristics, the prevailing development pattern emphasizes vehicular access, low intersection density, and separation of land uses. Many of these communities have park-and-ride facilities to connect residents to regional transit. As earlier developments age and greenfield land becomes limited, Suburban areas are beginning to focus on infill development and redevelopment, often at higher densities than their original patterns. Planning efforts must address rising surface temperatures and increased demand for sustainable water and resource management.

Local governments with a Suburban community designation include Apple Valley, Arden Hills, Bayport, Birchwood Village, Brooklyn Park, Burnsville, Champlin, Circle Pines, Coon Rapids, Eagan, Eden Prairie, Excelsior, Gem Lake, Hastings, Landfall, Lexington, Lilydale, Little Canada, Long Lake, Mahtomedi, Maple Plain, Mendota, Mendota Heights, Minnetonka, Mound, Mounds View, Newport, Oak Park Heights, Oakdale, Plymouth, Savage, Shoreview, Shorewood, Spring Lake Park, Spring Park, St. Paul Park, Stillwater, Vadnais Heights, Wayzata, White Bear Township, and Willernie.

Suburban Edge

Suburban Edge communities are the newest developing areas on the fringe of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA), with most growth occurring after 1990. These cities are characterized by lower density subdivisions, cul-de-sacs, and large tracts of undeveloped or lightly developed land, some of which is guided for future residential, commercial, or industrial use. Street connectivity is often limited, impacting transit accessibility and traffic circulation. Planning challenges in Suburban Edge areas include accommodating growth while protecting natural systems, improving connectivity, and promoting sustainable development. These areas often include a mix of rural and suburban characteristics and may have multiple designations based on varying development patterns.
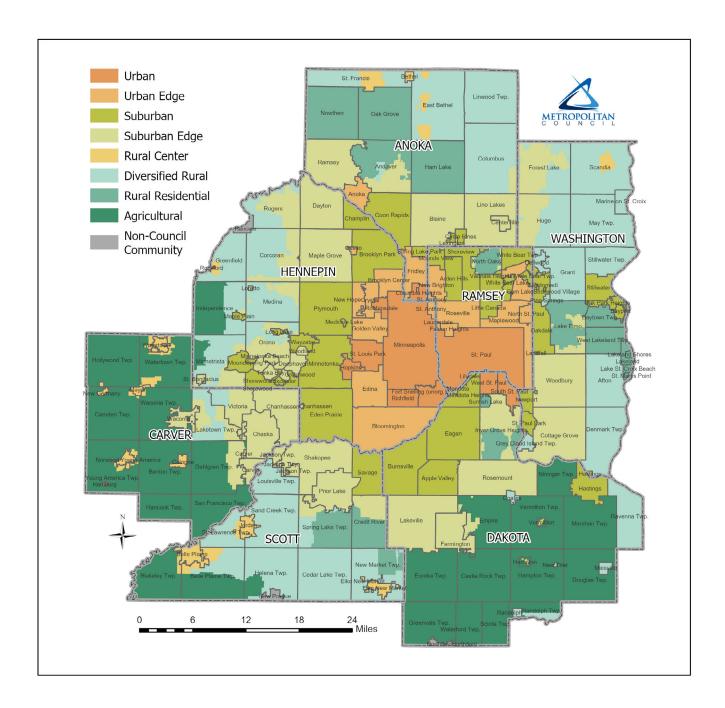
Local governments with a Suburban Edge community designation include Andover,* Blaine, Carver, Centerville, Chanhassen, Chaska, Columbus,* Corcoran,* Cottage Grove, Credit River,* Dayton, Deephaven, Dahlgren Twp.,* Empire,* Farmington, Forest Lake,* Greenwood, Hugo,* Independence,* Inver Grove Heights,* Jackson Twp.,* Lake Elmo,* Lakeville, Laketown Twp.,* Lino Lakes, Loretto, Maple Grove, Medicine Lake, Medina,* Minnetonka Beach, Minnetrista,* North Oaks,* Orono,* Prior Lake, Ramsey, Rogers,* Rosemount, Shakopee, Spring Lake Twp.,* St. Bonifacius, Tonka Bay, Victoria,* Waconia, Woodbury, and Woodland.

Rural Centers

Rural Centers are smaller-scale cities that serve as local hubs for surrounding agricultural and rural areas. They often have a historic downtown or main street core with denser development, surrounded by lower density residential neighborhoods. These communities typically contain less than 5% prime agricultural land and operate their own water and wastewater services, which supports modest urban-level development. Development in these cities occurred primarily before 2000, and they feature relatively high intersection density compared to their rural surroundings. Rural Centers face the challenge of managing growth while preserving rural character, and they play a critical role in supporting local economies and providing services to adjacent rural townships. Some may also have multiple designations to reflect annexation areas or planned future growth zones.

Local governments with a Rural Center community designation include Belle Plaine, Bethel, Blakeley Twp.,* Cologne, East Bethel,* Elko New Market, Greenfield,* Hamburg, Hampton,* Jordan, Mayer, New Germany, Norwood Young America, Scandia,* St. Francis,* Vermillion,* Watertown, Watertown Twp.,* and Young America Twp.*

*More than one community designation

Map Legend:
- Urban
- Urban Edge
- Suburban
- Suburban Edge
- Rural Center
- Diversified Rural
- Rural Residential
- Agricultural
- Non-Council Community

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Local Planning Handbook for more information.