

City of Litchfield, 1900

Chapter One: Community Profile and Introduction to the Litchfield Comprehensive Plan

This document establishes a Comprehensive Plan for the City of Litchfield. The primary purpose of the Plan is to provide a guide for growth and development. This Plan accomplishes this in two ways. First, this plan establishes the City's Goals, Objectives and Policy Guidelines. These describe how land use decisions should be made on a day-to-day basis. Second, a future land use map is included in Chapter Six to show what type of land use is desirable both within the City's current corporate boundary and inside the City's urban growth area. The Plan is written using a 20-year time-frame, although the Plan will be implemented until it is either revised or ultimately replaced. The following information is included in this Plan:

Community Profile – Chapter One provides a profile of Litchfield, including sections on the City's history, social-demographics and future population estimates.

Natural Resources – Chapter Two introduces the natural resource base of the area. The Chapter includes sections on the area's water resources, soils and wellhead protection.

Current Land Use – Chapter Three examines Litchfield's existing land use, including sections on zoning, transportation, housing and public facilities.

Planning Issues – Chapter Four identifies a number of key current and emerging planning issues facing the community.

Goals, Objectives, and Policy Guidelines – Chapter Five establishes the City's Goals, Objectives, and Policy Guidelines, to be used by the City to help guide land use decisions.

Implementation – Chapter Six contains specific implementation tools, including a Future Land Use Map and a temporary work plan.

The Planning Process

In November 2005, the Litchfield City Council made the decision to write a new Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The City contracted with the local Regional Development Commission, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC), to help facilitate and write the new Plan. The City's Planning Commission was primarily used to draft the plan, with a number of public meetings held to gather ideas and generate community-wide ownership. The following meetings took place :

- March 14, 2006 – Communitywide public meeting held at Civic Arena
- October 10, 2006 – Communitywide public meeting held at City Hall
- November 14, 2006 – Communitywide public meeting held at City Hall
- November 17, 2006 – Meeting with MnDOT on Transportation Plan
- March 23, 2007 – Comprehensive Plan Task Force Meeting
- March 30, 2007 – Comprehensive Plan Task Force Meeting
- June 25, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- July 23, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- July 30, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- August 13, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- September 10, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- October 15, 2007 – Planning Commission Ordinance Meeting
- November 13, 2007 – Public hearing on the revised Zoning Ordinance
- March 10, 2008 – Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Meeting
- August 11, 2008 – Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Meeting

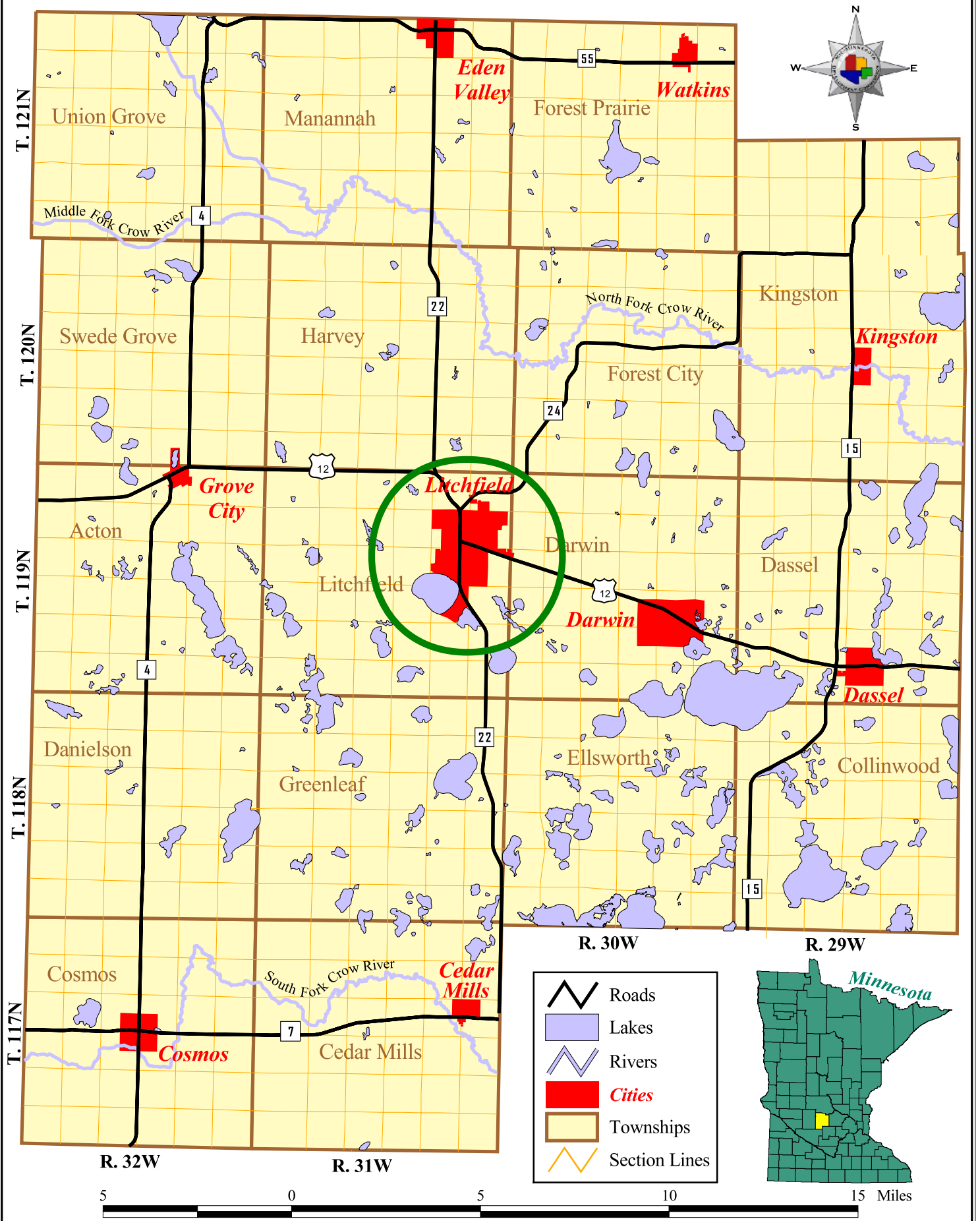
The Planning Commission recommended the approval of the Plan on September 8, 2008. The Litchfield City Council began the public review period in December 2008, and officially adopted the plan on April 6, 2009.

Location of Litchfield

The City of Litchfield is located in west-central Minnesota, approximately 65 miles west of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area (please refer to Map 1A found on page 3). The City is the County Seat for Meeker County, which neighbors Kandiyohi, Stearns, Wright, McLeod and Renville Counties. West-central Minnesota is well known for its numerous lakes, rolling topography, and strong agricultural base. The City of Litchfield is the leading edge of Minnesota's prairie lands. The City is partially located along the shores of Lake Ripley, which covers 558 acres. Main highways, frequent rail service, local municipal airport, new medical facilities and infrastructure, and new or newly-remodeled schools are some of the community's attractions. In 1996, Litchfield's main street was officially declared the Litchfield Historic Commercial District. The City is also surrounded by Litchfield Township and is growing to the east. For more information regarding the City of Litchfield, visit the City's official website at:

www.ci.litchfield.mn.us

Map 1A: City of Litchfield in Meeker County



The History of Litchfield

In 1856, Ole Halverson Ness, Henry Halverson, Ole Halverson Thoen, Amos Nelson Fosen, Nels Hanson, Colberg and Gunder Olson came to the township. The Congressional township was named Ness in 1858, and the lake was named for Dr. Frederick Noah Ripley, who was found frozen to death on the shores of Lake Ripley in the winter of 1855-56. This name was taken from the name of the election or church district of Norway, where Halvorson came from in July 1856. Heindrick Halverson built the first house and Ole H. Ness built the first barn. Sarah Jane Daugherty was the first white birth in the township in July 1856.

The Village of Litchfield, the County Seat of Meeker County, was not even a dot on the map until 1869, when the St. Paul and Pacific Railway (Great Northern) established its right-of-way through Meeker County and the railroad station was erected and named in honor of three brothers from London, England, (Electus Darwin Litchfield, Egbert E. Litchfield, and Edwin Clark Litchfield) all contractors and heavy stockholders in the railway company.

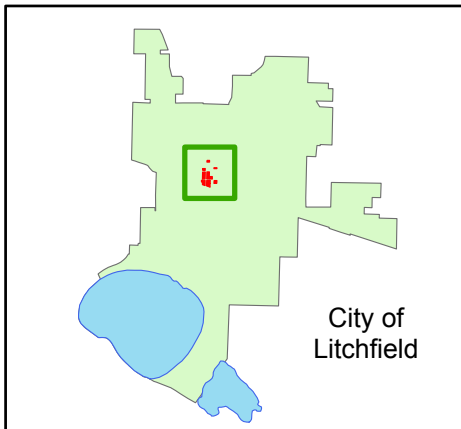
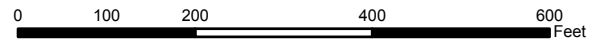
The first plat was filed July 16, 1869, and lots were placed on the market at a reasonable price. Lots on Sibley Avenue in the business section sold as low as \$100 for a 25-foot frontage. A county seat contest between Forest City and the embryo villages of Litchfield and Darwin was inaugurated at the general election Nov. 2, 1869. Litchfield won over Forest City by a plurality of 82 votes. Very few homes had been erected prior to this time. The establishment of the county seat at Litchfield caused a rapid influx of a substantial class of business and professional men. The business buildings and homes located in Forest City were placed on skids and hauled to Litchfield. A few of these buildings remain to serve as historical landmarks of this eventful period.

The National Register of Historical Places lists one historic district and three buildings in Litchfield. These appear on Map 1B and include the following listings:

1. Litchfield Commercial Historic District
2. Grand Army of the Republic Hall
3. Litchfield Opera House
4. Trinity Episcopal Church

In addition to these listings, Meeker County has a number of historic sites and buildings throughout the area. Appendix C contains a list of the ones found on the National Register of Historic Places.

Map 1B: City of Litchfield Historic Districts



City of Litchfield - Parcels
 Litchfield Historic Districts

1. Litchfield Commercial Historic Downtown
2. Grand Army of the Republic Hall
3. Litchfield Opera House
4. Trinity Episcopal Church

***City of Litchfield History Timeline:
Community Highlights***

- 1855-56 Dr. Noah Ripley was the first white man to arrive in what is now Litchfield. He was found frozen to death on the shores of Lake Ripley.
- 1858 The Ness Township was formed (currently Litchfield Township).
- 1869 The railroad was constructed and the Village of Litchfield was platted (July 16).
The first building was erected.
Litchfield became the County Seat of Meeker County.
The first general store was opened by Heard and Ward.
The first church (Luthern) was built.
The Post Office served 695 families.
- 1870 The Meeker County News began print and circulation by Frank Belfoy.
The First lumberyard, law office, and butcher shop opened.
- 1872 The Village was chartered on February 29 and Jesse V. Branham Jr. was elected President (“Mayor”).
The Litchfield Roller Mill opened as the first independent elevator of its kind along the railroad.
- 1874 The Litchfield Town Hall was built.
The first bank was opened by Harrington and Lyons.
- 1885 Meeker County Courthouse and Jail was built on Sibley Ave. in Litchfield at a cost of \$20,000.
GAR Hall was built and opened and housed the first public library.
- 1889 Brightwood Beach House and Resort was built on south side of Lake Ripley by Greenleaf and Branham.
- 1900 Litchfield Opera House was built on the site of the old town hall; opening night was Nov. 8th.
- 1904 The Litchfield Public Library (a Carnegie Library) opened on May 17th.
- 1909 The first hospital was built by Dr. Robertson.
- 1914 Litchfield and Meeker County “went dry”. No alcoholic beverages could be bought, sold, or consumed.
- 1920 The First District Association started Land-O-Lakes.
- 1922 The Litchfield Golf Course was created.
- 1935 The current Post Office building was built.
- 1943 The Village of Litchfield became the City of Litchfield.
- 1956 The present site of the Meeker County Fair (established in 1871) was built.
- 1964 Current Litchfield High School was built.
- 1996 Downtown Litchfield designated a “historical” site by the national register.
- 2005 The new City Hall was built.

Litchfield's Demographics

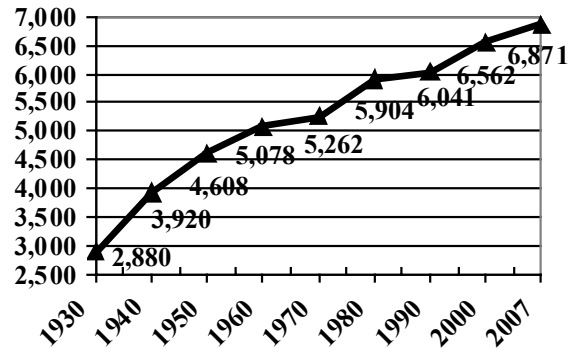
The following sections provide information on Litchfield's population. For more information on Litchfield's Demographics, see Appendix A or visit the www.census.gov

Population Profile

Litchfield's population data is presented in Figure 1A, beginning with the year 1930.

The Figure shows that Litchfield has consistently gained new residents over the last 77 years to its 2007 population of 6,871 residents (estimated by the State Demographer). Notice that Litchfield's population somewhat leveled off between 1980 and 1990, but increased by over 500 people during the 1990s. Overall, the community has nearly tripled in size since 1930, gaining 3,991 residents.

Figure 1A: Historic Population Levels



One of the best ways to judge the City's rate of population growth is to compare the growth rates experienced by similar communities. Table 1A does this for some of Litchfield's neighboring communities.

Table 1A: Population Data for Litchfield and Neighboring Communities since 1970

Location	1980	1990	2000	2007*	27-Year Change	Percent Change
Dassel (12 miles)	1,066	1,082	1,233	1,333	267	25%
Hutchinson (15 miles)	9,244	11,523	13,080	14,021	4,777	52%
Litchfield Township	817	745	808	841	24	3%
City of Litchfield	5,904	6,041	6,562	6,871	967	16%
Paynesville (25 miles)	2,140	2,275	2,267	2,299	159	7%
Willmar (25 miles)	15,895	17,531	18,351	19,040	3,145	20%
Meeker County	20,594	20,846	22,644	23,371	2,777	13%
State of Minnesota	4.1 Mil	4.4 Mil	4.9 Mil	5.3 Mil	1.2 Mil	29%

* 2007 Population Estimates as provide by the State Demographer

The statistics that appear in Table 1A show that, since 1970, Litchfield has grown in population by 16 percent. This rate was above average when compared to Meeker County (13%), and below average when compared to the State (29%). Furthermore, Litchfield outpaced Paynesville (7%), but was behind some of the surrounding larger communities (Hutchinson 52% and Willmar 20%). These statistics help to justify planning for the City to steadily continue to gain population in the future.

Population by Age Groups

Table 1B compares Litchfield and Minnesota’s population by age groups according to the 2000 Census. Notice that Litchfield’s population has 9 percent more seniors than the Statewide average. Also notice that Litchfield overall had fewer younger people and more older people than the Statewide average. Minnesota Planning projects the percent increase in elderly population will continue to grow at a larger rate than that of the total population over the next 30 years.

**Table 1B:
City, County, and State
Population by Age Groups in 2000**

Age Group	Litchfield		Meeker County		Minnesota Percent	City’s Percent Difference
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Under 18	1,649	25%	6,109	27%	26%	-1%
Ages 18-24	554	8%	1,666	7%	10%	-2%
Ages 25-44	1,676	26%	5,968	26%	30%	-4%
Ages 45-64	1,330	20%	5,202	23%	22%	-2%
65 & Over	1,353	21%	3,699	16%	12%	+9%
Totals	6,562	100%	22,644	99%	4.9 Mil	N/A

Median Age

The City of Litchfield's median age is another way to compare the City's population with Meeker County and the rest of the State. Table 1C shows that Litchfield's median age was 38.5 in 2000. This was an increase of 5.1 years over the community's median age of 33.4 in 1980. This trend closely trailed the County's average of 7.1 and the State's average of 8.6. This information highlights the well-known fact that people's median age continues to grow as number of quality-of-life indicators improves.

**Table 1C:
City, County, and State Median Age since 1980**

	1980	1990	2000	Change
Litchfield	33.4	36.2	38.5	+5.1
Meeker County	31.3	34.9	38.4	+7.1
State of Minnesota	29.2	32.5	35.4	+8.6

Source: *U.S. Census*

Household Numbers

An increase in a city's population usually means an increase in the number of households. Table 1D shows that the City of Litchfield has increased by 814 households since 1970 (a household is defined as an occupied housing unit). Knowing the total number of people and households is important because an average household size can be determined (i.e., the average number of people living in each household). Notice that between 1970 and 2000, the average household size in Litchfield decreased by 0.72 people per household, going from 3.1 to 2.38 people. This trend is important because it shows that even more housing units will be needed in the future to accommodate Litchfield's growing population. Decreasing household sizes have been fairly common throughout most of the Country over the past few decades.

**Table 1D: Litchfield Population,
Household Numbers, and Household Size since 1970**

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	+ / -
Population	5,262	5,904	6,041	6,562	+1,300
Households	1,810	2,283	2,406	2,624	+814
Household Size	3.1	2.49	2.42	2.38	-0.72

Population and Household Projections

The information presented up to this point in the Chapter helps to pinpoint a reliable range of population and household projections for the City. Table 1E shows 2007 estimates and 2010, 2015, and 2020 projections. The first category is based on the State Demographer’s estimates. This office produces estimates using a number of variables (age-based, growth patterns, etc.). The second set of projections are based on the City’s actual rate of growth since 1960. The third category is based on above average or “fast” annual rates of growth. This growth rate is basically twice the level of growth the City experienced since 1960.

**Table 1E:
Population and Household Projections
for the City of Litchfield**

City of Litchfield	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Population	5,078	5,262	5,904	6,041	6,562
Households	1,655	1,810	2,283	2,406	2,624
Population Projections	2007	2010	2015	2020	Increase
State Demographer Estimates	6,871	7,072	7,338	7,579	+709
Projections Based on Last 40 Years	6,871	6,933	7,119	7,304	+433
Fast Growth Projections	6,871	7,304	7,675	8,046	+1,175
Households Based on 2.50 People	2007	2010	2015	2020	Increase
Based on the State Demographer	2,810	2,829	2,935	3,032	+222
Projections Based on Last 40 Years	2,810	2,773	2,848	2,922	+112
Fast Growth Projections	2,810	2,922	3,070	3,218	+408

The information presented in Table 1E suggests that Litchfield would grow by approximately 433 people and 112 houses by 2020 if it simply experienced the same percentage of growth as it has since 1960. The State Demographer’s estimates are slightly higher, with 709 new people living in 222 new houses. Finally, the fast growth projection suggests that Litchfield could grow by as many as 1,175 people and 408 new households. The last two projections take into account that Litchfield will start experiencing accelerated growth due to its proximity to many of the State’s fastest growing regions, such as St. Cloud, Hutchinson, and Willmar.