

Edge of the Wilderness Comprehensive Plan

Thank you for
participating.

Purpose: Validate what
we've heard to help finish
the comprehensive plan.

Your feedback directly
influences priorities and
actions.

Plan Review Exercise

This exercise has two main parts. The first part is the Key Issues section, which points out the most important items the Northern Itasca Joint Powers Board believes are needed to move the community toward its long-term goals. This section helps direct early efforts where they will have the biggest impact.

The second part is the Goal-by-Goal Implementation Framework. It looks more goal and objectives in the plan and explains the steps needed to carry them out.

Together, these two parts give both a clear focus on the top priorities and a full guide for putting all parts of the plan into action.

Directions

Follow the cues on the following slides.

Email comments or questions to Josh Bergstad at jbergstad@ardc.org by 4:30 on Friday, June 19.

Small-Group Activity

1

Visit each theme station.

2

Review draft actions and add missing ideas.

3

Identify partners and validate priorities.

Guiding Questions

Does this reflect what matters most to you?

What is missing or needs adjusting?

Who should be partners?

What should be top priorities?

Report-Back

Top 3 confirmed ideas.

Top 3 additions or corrections.

Key partners.

Any tradeoffs or disagreements.

Three Top Priorities

Main Street &
Economic Vitality

Housing

Rural Character &
Community Identity

Key Priority: Main Street Revitalization & Economic Vitality

Actions

- Support reuse and improvement of vacant/underused buildings (E19).
- Promote and expand year-round tourism (E1–E2).
- Strengthen marketing of community assets using social media and traditional media (E5).
- Encourage business attraction and retention activities (E3).
- Connect businesses with regional supports (IEDC, SBDC, Northspan, IRRR) (E4, E8, E10).
- Encourage local governments to provide utilities and infrastructure to support commercial activity (E9).

Potential Outcomes

- Reduced commercial vacancies and more business activity on Main Streets.
- Increased local jobs and diversified business base.
- More stable year-round revenue for local businesses.
- Improved physical appearance and community pride in business districts.

Measures of Progress

- Number/percentage of vacant storefronts filled.
- Number of new businesses started or expanded.
- Commercial property reinvestment levels.

Next Steps

- Conduct inventory of vacant and underutilized buildings.
- Develop a Main Street improvement strategy (façade, pop ups, reuse).
- Begin coordinated business outreach with regional partners.
- Create a year-round tourism marketing plan aligned with existing recreation assets.
- Identify funding sources for Main Street improvement (IRRRB, DEED, foundations).

Key Priority: Housing

Actions

- Encourage rehabilitation of older or substandard housing (H1).
- Collaborate with Itasca County HRA based on 2024 housing study (H2).
- Support senior/assisted living development near hospital (H3).
- Advocate for practical workforce housing initiatives (E13).
- Coordinate zoning practices to support rural character and housing (LU1–LU4).

Potential Outcomes

- Improved housing quality and reduced blight.
- Greater availability of workforce and senior housing.
- Housing that enables workers, families, and seniors to remain in the community.

Measures of Progress

- Number of homes rehabilitated.
- Number of new workforce or senior units built.
- Decrease in number of blighted or unsafe structures.
- Housing vacancy and affordability trends.

Next Steps

- Complete a housing condition survey.
- Work with HRA and partners on coordinated projects.
- Identify potential sites for infill housing.
- Develop partnerships with Habitat, land trusts, and regional partners.
- Pursue grant programs supporting housing development and rehab.

Key Priority: Rural Character & Community Identity

Actions

Key Priority: Rural Character & Community Identity

- **Actions**
- Promote development patterns preserving rural and scenic character (LU1).
- Encourage reinvestment in community centers and corridors (LU2).
- Balance recreation, forestry, housing, and tourism needs (LU3–LU4).
- Strengthen community identity through Scenic Byway and public spaces.

Potential Outcomes

- Protected scenic landscapes and rural feel.
- More reinvestment in existing town centers.
- Balanced growth that supports economic vitality and conservation.
- Improved community pride and identity.

Measures of Progress

- Amount of development occurring in designated reinvestment areas.
- Tracking reinvestment or redevelopment projects.
- Resident surveys related to rural character perceptions.

Next Steps

- Update zoning ordinances aligned with rural character.
- Identify priority reinvestment corridors.
- Develop Scenic Byway-supportive projects and branding.
- Partner with community groups on identity-building initiatives.

Jobs, Workforce, and Business Expansion

Actions

- Promote workforce training programs with schools and employers (E12).
- Expand childcare capacity through local partnerships (E14).
- Improve broadband to support remote work and businesses (E11).
- Encourage diversification in healthcare, forestry, remote work, and entrepreneurship (E19).

Potential Outcomes

- More reliable year-round employment.
- Stronger workforce retention and attraction.
- Improved employer satisfaction and business stability.
- Growth of sectors beyond tourism.

Measures of Progress

- Participation levels in workforce training programs.
- Number of childcare slots created.
- Broadband adoption and speed improvements.
- Employer retention and satisfaction rates.

Next Steps

- Engage employers to identify skill gaps.
- Develop new training pathways with schools and workforce development providers.
- Support childcare providers in expansion.
- Identify areas lacking broadband and coordinate upgrades.

Infrastructure: Sewer, Roads, Facilities, and Transportation

Actions

- Support wastewater and septic improvements (R17–R20).
- Advocate for Hwy 38 reconstruction and shoulder improvements (T1–T3).
- Identify and prioritize local road improvements (T4–T6).
- Evaluate community or regional shuttle systems (T8–T9).
- Modernize community facilities, parks, utilities, and broadband (PF1).

Potential Outcomes

- Improved wastewater and septic systems.
- Greater safety and mobility on key transportation corridors.
- Enhanced access to healthcare and services.
- More resilient and modern community facilities.

Measures of Progress

- Number of infrastructure projects completed.
- Funding secured for transportation and facility upgrades.
- Transit ridership and shuttle usage.
- Reduction in failing septic systems.

Next Steps

- Develop local road improvement list.
- Work with MnDOT on Hwy 38 planning.
- Meet with transit and healthcare and services partners to assess demand.
- Apply for federal and state infrastructure grants.

Healthcare, Hospital, EMS & Essential Services

Actions

- Support expansion of hospital services and senior housing (C7).
- Support EMS, fire, and emergency services (C6).
- Improve healthcare transportation options (PF2, T8–T9).
- Maintain emergency facilities and readiness.

Potential Outcomes

- Strong access to quality healthcare.
- Improved emergency response capabilities.
- Stronger senior housing options.
- Higher community confidence in safety and services.

Measures of Progress

- EMS response times.
 - Hospital transportation usage.
 - Volunteer firefighter and EMS recruitment.
 - Frequency of specialist or clinic services.
- **Next Steps**
 - Identify EMS equipment and training needs.
 - Explore shuttle expansion with transit partners.
 - Expand telehealth supported by broadband improvements.

Schools, Youth, and Community Life

Actions

- Support Bigfork and Deer River Schools (C3).
- Support arts, culture, and programming through Edge Center (C1–C2).
- Support recreation assets and facility modernization (PF1).
- Encourage youth engagement in community and educational programs.
- Support the multi-use sports complex in Bigfork.

Potential Outcomes

- Stronger school enrollment and youth opportunities.
- Higher levels of arts and recreation participation.
- Improved quality of life and community cohesion.
- Long-term youth retention in the region.

Measures of Progress

- School enrollment trends.
- Participation in arts and recreation programs.
- Youth program participation data.

Next Steps

- Work with schools on facility and program needs.
- Coordinate with Edge Center for expanded programming.
- Build partnerships for youth activities and programs.
- Develop a concept plan for the multi-use sports complex in Bigfork

Next Steps



INCORPORATE
MEETING FEEDBACK.



DRAFT PLAN
REFINEMENTS.



PUBLIC HEARING.



FINAL ADOPTION.



THANK YOU.