

CHAPTER NINE



Illustration of Proposed Improvement to Veterans' Park from the Downtown Design Plan.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

It is imperative that the themes, guiding policies, and implementing policies outlined in this document, nurture a vital community and reach out to all segments of the population. While community development is supported by policies throughout this document, its importance is attested to by providing a separate chapter focused on the needs for community services. This chapter establishes policies to provide for more affordable housing, enhance economic opportunities and human services, and provide adequate public services, such as libraries, schools, fire and police protection, parks, recreational centers, and open space for all residents of the City. The following themes relate to this chapter.

THEMES

- **Urban Form.** Promote a compact urban form that encourages sensitive/compatible infill development.

- **Mixed Use.** Provide a mix of land uses and housing densities and types in all areas of the City.
- **Community-Oriented Downtown.** Enhance and maintain community activities in the downtown area.
- **Transportation Alternatives.** Maintain and promote alternative modes of transportation.
- **Economic Diversity.** Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to increase job opportunities, maintain a diverse economy, and promote arts and small businesses.
- **Housing.** Actively participate in the creation of affordable housing.
- **Quality of Life.** Enhance the quality of life of the community and ensure the availability of community services for residents.
- **Intergovernmental Cooperation.** Maintain a cooperative intergovernmental perspective with the towns, counties, and state, and work with private and governmental entities toward that goal.



Illustration of Mixed Housing Units.

9.1 HOUSING

River Falls has prospered as a family-oriented community with a small-town friendly atmosphere. The quality, variety and appearance of our housing stock provides a positive image that shows River Falls cares about its sense of place. The extent to which our residents are adequately housed and that housing choices are available to all levels of income is a crucial factor in the City's overall well being. The challenge is to provide a variety of housing options to meet diversified needs at costs within reach of citizens who work in River Falls.

Throughout the public hearing process, citizen concerns about the provision of reasonably priced housing have been consistent and citywide. It is recognized that the cost of housing exceeds the income of many of the residents. The location of the River Falls area adjacent to Minnesota and the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis is a key factor in our escalating real estate prices. Increased building costs have priced some residents out of the home-buying market. Middle-income families find housing opportunities limited; as well as low-income families and the elderly. As land values have increased, the existing housing market costs also increased.

River Falls is committed to preserving the best elements of the past while striving to ensure the affordability of decent housing for all citizens.

Affordable Housing and Work Force Housing is defined as follows:

AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

The annual cost of a rental unit should not exceed 30% of a median household income within the City of River Falls. In 2004 the adjusted **median household income** was \$46,182.00. A rental unit at 30% would be \$13,530.00 per year or \$1,154.00 per month.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The cost to purchase a home should not exceed three times the median family income in the City of River Falls. In 2004 the adjusted **median family income** was \$67,563.00. A home at three times would be \$202,689.00.

WORK FORCE HOUSING

Workforce housing is defined as "housing available to and within financial reach of City of River Falls entry level and **moderate-income wage earners** ranging from blue-collar workers, skilled laborers and professionals such as teachers, police officers, and nurses."

Households that fall within this category earn at or below 80 percent of the median family income. In 2004, 80 percent of the median family income was \$54,050.00. Under this scenario the cost of Work Force Housing unit is approximately \$162,150.00

9.1.1 Hard Costs of Building

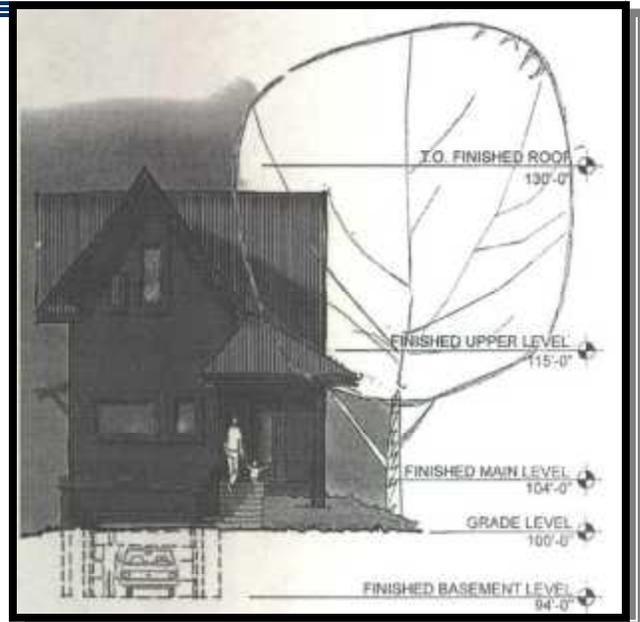
Hard costs include the labor and materials required for projects. There is a greater demand for higher end housing. The efforts of the community's building delivery system have been redirected towards meeting the needs of those who can most afford them, thereby leaving the needs for lower income households unmet.

9.1.2 Building Sites

There is a growing need for work force housing and building sites for the City of River Falls workforce. Raw land cost for suitable residential development is high. In 2004 developed lots were selling from \$45,000 to \$150,000. Current lot prices make it extremely difficult to develop housing for sale on the open market to meet the demand of this segment of our community. Currently in the City there is land zoned for approximately 2,300 housing units. The current market may not bear the land prices. Some of this land is presently being served by existing infrastructure while other areas have not yet developed the infrastructure to their sites.

The cost of "turning" (resale) the development and placing the infrastructure and its carrying cost contribute to the cost of the end product. The cost of living in River Falls is higher than the national average, as is the cost of housing. Some families are priced out of the home buying market. As a result, the ratio of homeowners to renters is less. Many residents pay 50% or more of their income for housing, thus reducing discretionary income.

There is an ongoing housing need for low and moderate (workforce) income residents, the elderly, single persons, and single-parent families. There is a growing gap between the number of housing units for all persons of low and moderate income and the supply availability. The cost, size, and type of housing units being built and expected to continue to be built may not meet the future workforce housing needs of the expanding population.



This "small lot" house design is for a 30 feet wide and 91 feet long lot without an alley.

There is no assured source of financial assistance to provide housing subsidies to workforce-income residents who may need them. Housing is a problem not only for River Falls' citizens, but also for River Falls businesses and the overall economy. High housing costs make it difficult for businesses to attract and keep employees. Companies are often discouraged from locating where their employees cannot find housing that is within their means; thus, the business and industrial community needs to join with the City to become an advocate for workforce housing.

9.1.3 Regulations

Comments received from the development community indicate that approximately 10–20% of the cost of new homes can be attributed to government regulations—some of it necessary and some of it outmoded due to older codes and process. For instance, the review process is often duplicated and lengthy so that the developer may be required to be reviewed by numerous committees or commissions before approval of their project meanwhile the developer pays the cost of waiting. A reduction in processing time can result in significant cost savings by reducing the carrying cost for the project and by limiting the inflationary spiral for labor and materials that occur during the process of development.

The review and approval process should be consistent, timely, accountable, and clear. The City's standards and policies should be applied in a manner that balances the needs of the community, the requirements of law, and the concerns of the development community. Regulations should be reviewed and amended, where applicable, to ensure consistency with this policy.

9.1.4 Financing

One of the primary strategies to promote housing is to make money available on reasonable terms to qualified people. There are several avenues that address this issue, including negotiation for more flexible terms with the lending institutions, City participation in the form of a bond issue, and private foundation funding. Other strategies that may be used to address the financial aspect of housing are a financial consultant program, use of Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and the possible use of Tax Increment Financing support for a down payment assistance program, and the use of sweat equity and owner built programs. Regulations and ordinances may need to be reviewed and amended to provide these types of assistance.

9.1.5 Land Use

The most important element of planning to reduce the cost of housing is higher density. Along with higher density is the need for design and development guidelines to help create and maintain a quality development. Issues regarding aesthetics, health and safety, and general livability are important regardless of the cost of housing.

A proactive role is needed to ensure that an adequate supply of land is available and that there are no artificial constraints on easily developable land. Overarching policy initiatives would include a policy that ensures a supply of developable land for all housing types. Incentives should be enacted to ensure that properties approved for development are in active use.

9.1.6 Administration and Management

Providing or preserving housing options for our current and future residents will be an on going issue. Public-private partnerships are a proven way to increasing efforts for housing.

Federal programs that support housing have been dramatically cut. Public-private partnerships will help fill the gap left by the loss of public funding by creating mechanisms to provide housing, including the actual development of units. Overhead costs for development could decrease through the solicitation of volunteer efforts, including professional assistance of engineers, architects, planners, contractors, and support services such as title insurance companies. Coordinated efforts with the Housing Authority and the City have provided affordable housing. Taking advantage of the most cost-efficient building techniques, materials, floor plan layouts, and management systems will help reduce costs. Cooperating agencies could provide services through a land trust, with the value of the service being exchanged for lease land. A large emphasis should be placed on home ownership, housing rehabilitation and rental rehabilitation programs.

9.1.7 Training, Marketing, and Communication

The housing issue is complex, and the efforts of many persons eventually result in providing housing for a household. Many view the process as cumbersome or inefficient and have sought methods to facilitate the process. The complexity of the housing issue requires the communication and cooperation of all participants in the production/provisions of housing. This is not always possible, as goals of one entity may be dramatically opposed to the goals of another. Coordinating the efforts of the community will minimize the impact on a particular group or individual.

9.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

9.2.1 Existing Employment

The Wisconsin Department of Labor reports employment and job statistics for each county annually. These statistics include total employment as well as unemployment rates. The employment figures are grouped according to major sectors of the economy, which includes manufacturing, mining, agriculture, construction, transportation, public utilities, wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate, services, government, and miscellaneous.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Labor, a typical St. Croix or Pierce County establishment employs eight persons, and over 60% of all businesses have fewer than five employees, not including self-employed individuals. The small business orientation of the local economy creates a need for small business assistance, and affordable sites and spaces. A mix of land uses that provides sites for business activities within, or in conjunction with, residential neighborhoods and that accommodates home occupations would be potential ways to encourage small businesses in the City.

Since 1995 approximately 5,048 jobs have been added to St. Croix and Pierce County, for a total of 53,678 in 2000. The service sector (medical, education, etc.) represents nearly 11,050 jobs (20.1% of all jobs). Government employment includes 7,008 (13.1% of all jobs), and retail and wholesale employment represent 9,043 jobs (16.8% of all jobs). It was estimated that in 2000 the City of River Falls contained 7,774 jobs. The high ratio of civilian labor force to wage and salary jobs shows that there are a large number of St. Croix and Pierce County (including residents from the City of River Falls) residents who work outside the City and County, or are self-employed. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis confirms this characteristic of the economy. Major single employers in the City of River Falls include the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, the River Falls School District,

the River Falls Area Hospital, and the City of River Falls. However, retail and wholesale employment represents the second largest number of jobs, and the largest gain in employment over the last two decades generated below average earnings. The economic growth goals of the public as expressed through public meetings are to diversify the local economy by providing better paying jobs.



Bio Diagnostics and O'Keefe Company located at Whitetail Ridge Industrial Park.

9.2.2 Unemployment

One measure of economic health and vitality of a region is the unemployment rate—people actively searching for but unable to find a job. The unemployment rate for St. Croix and Pierce Counties in 2002 was 5.9%, which was near the national rate of 5.8% and Wisconsin's rate of 5.5%. The "labor force participation rate" is the percentage of the population 16 years of age or older who are either employed or unemployed but actively looking for a job. This percentage is often in the range of 50–55% of the total population. In River Falls the labor force participation rate was 78.2% during the 2000 Census. The unemployment rate is a percentage of those in the labor force who are looking but unable to find work. St. Croix and Pierce Counties contained approximately 105,124 residents in 2002, just over half were employed (58,567) and 3,608 (5.9%) people were unemployed and looking for work during any given month.



Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park .

9.2.5 Economic Development Strategy

An important economic development strategy is proactive; it anticipates and responds to future growth perspectives. Besides ensuring that adequate sites are available for future commercial and industrial development, the City needs to take a comprehensive look at all aspects of the local economy. The broader policy issue is: How involved should the City be in economic development; should this include planning and technical assistance, or direct financial assistance? The strategies outlined in this chapter include a number of specific programs as well as policies intended to improve the overall business climate and establish positive working relations with the private sector.

This strategy is intended to protect and enhance existing businesses and nurture new start-ups; work with businesses, education, and service providers to enhance the skills of the labor force; target the industries that will diversify River Falls' economy and provide good wages; and improve access to affordable housing and local-servicing retail. A Economic Development Plan is needed to address local and regional relationships in the context of River Falls' economy, to identify existing industries with potential for development, to develop goals and effective action to achieve these goals, and to create opportunities for economic development.

There are many "players" interested in River Falls' economic development, including the City, St. Croix and Pierce Counties, the adjacent towns, the State of Wisconsin, River Falls Economic Development Corporation, the River Falls Chamber of Commerce, numerous professional and business organizations, land-owners, lending institutions, Chippewa Valley Technical College, UWRF, the River Falls School District, and many others in addition to the general community. The policies outlined in this document respect the roles of these groups and seek to establish partnerships that leverage each group's knowledge and skills to make economic development efforts more successful.

9.2.3 Employment Perspectives

Jobs are a high priority for River Falls' residents. Residents are concerned that although the work force is highly educated and many workers could fill higher skilled positions, the jobs being created are in the low-paying service sector, such as those related to retail and visitor service and activities. Paralleling national trends, the majority of new job growth over the next 20 years is also likely to be in the service sector. While the River Falls' community and educated work force are assets, the high cost of land and housing deters many prospective employers.

9.2.4 Employment Growth

Employment growth for the Urban Area Boundary is estimated based on the population increase that would occur with residential development envisioned for the future. The distribution of jobs across the various sectors is expected to reflect growth projections and a balanced land use/housing program. Retail, services, education, medical, and government are likely to be the leading employing sectors.

9.3 COMMUNITY SERVICES

Community services are a vital sector of the community. This service sector meets many of the needs of the community by providing human services, libraries, and other services to the arts community, children and youth, and seniors. This section focuses on services that have a physical planning dimension.

9.3.1 Arts

River Falls is fortunate to have a wide variety of professional and nonprofessional, for profit and nonprofit, art organizations, artists, and businesses offering a wide range of art forms. Artists and art organizations contribute significantly to the quality of our community's life; they are a resource that could not be replaced and provide the community with cultural opportunities. Art energizes and inspires to such a degree that many think the lifestyle and environment are art forms in themselves. In turn, excellence in artistic endeavor of all kinds is encouraged through the relationship of the community with its artists. The history, spirit, and character of the community are expressed through the applied and living arts. Artists contribute to the quality of our communities.

Recognizing the arts enhances the life of our City and the lives of our citizens in many ways. Policies need to be pursued that support the arts in a manner that citizens and visitors all benefit from their interaction with the arts. There is a need to take the initiative to encourage excellent standards of design and to bring artists and the wider community together. The community needs to strive to ensure that there is a positive stance towards the artist and artistic institutions. The support of the arts provides an economic multiplier that benefits the community as a whole. A long-range policy and action plan will assist in providing direction and support of the arts and cultural affairs.



Future Heritage Park Performance Space.

9.3.2 Children and Youth

River Falls takes pride in its strong sense of community by providing programs for children and youth. The City has taken several steps to assert its commitment to children and youth. These steps include the River Falls Youth Advisory Council.

A City Councilor, community leaders, and young people from throughout the community serve on this Council. They meet biweekly to discuss issues and concerns regarding the young people of the community and develop programs and projects. Some of the ongoing projects under discussion are a water park, skateboard park, battle of the bands, and other activities for young people and the community throughout the year.

- **Partnership.** A full partner in the education of its people, the City provides activities, programs, and services for young people through the Park and Recreation Department.
- **Apprenticeship On-the-Job Training.** To better prepare high school and college students for job opportunities after they graduate, the City provides an internship program.



A Conceptual Rendering of an Aquatic Park .

- **Future Facilities.** Provisions for future facilities with space for childcare programs, health and mental health resources, recreational activity, and youth development programs should be considered when planning for land use. For example:

- Buildings or portable buildings in parks to serve as centers and meeting rooms,
- Public schools and churches as community centers,
- Art centers for youth, including performance space and exhibition space,
- Space for summer and after-school programs throughout the City,
- Family resource centers in neighborhoods,
- Spaces for youth and family activities.
- Tutoring sites,
- Health clinics,
- A recreational center,
- More pools,
- Parks in neighborhoods,
- Ecology programs,
- Wetlands and gardens in the City parks and public schools,

- Spaces that encourage the integration of children, youth, and adults, such as parks designed for young children, including those with disabilities,

Keep in mind the idea of designing for children, youth, and families when designing public spaces so that a more family and child friendly City will be created. Information from children, youth, and families should be solicited as new developments are planned.

9.3.3 Human Services

There will be an ever-increasing demand for human services over the next 25 years. Fewer public funding resources and increased competition for the remaining dollars will result in dramatic change in the human services landscape. Major changes in the local health care system, such as managed care and health maintenance organizations, will alter the affordability, accessibility, and availability of health services for citizens of the entire community. There will be a greater emphasis on developing networks of comprehensive health and human services for adults and young people to ensure continuity in prevention, treatment, and crisis services.



River Falls Public Library.

9.3.4 Public Library

Library service has existed in River Falls since 1906, when the Tuesday Club set up a couple of shelves of books in City Hall. The Library later moved to a house in the area where City offices now stand, and again in 1958, to a portion of the City Hall building at 115 East Elm Street. Finally, in 1997 it moved into the current 26,000 sq. ft. building at the corner of Union and Main. The new building was partially funded with private donations totaling \$1.7 million.

In 2000, the River Falls Public Library joined the MORE library consortium, which spans eight counties and provides a shared library catalog of each library's holdings, allowing cardholders to use the same library card at any member library. This web-based system allows patrons to view the catalog, check their records, and reserve or renew materials from any computer with an Internet connection.

Resources

The Library maintains 19 public access computers with high-speed Internet connections, as well as six dedicated library catalog stations, and five stations with educational games for children.

The library's collection contains nearly 70,000 books and 210 periodical subscriptions. Other collections include:

- Audio books on cassettes 2,500
- Audio books on CDs 210
- Videocassettes 3,500
- DVDs 500
- Music CDs 1,200
- Software on CD-ROMs 165

The Library also loans audio-visual equipment including video projectors and digital cameras.

Circulation of Materials

Year	Circulation
2000	202,913
2001	213,240
2002	231,413
2003	265,760

Note: These figures represent a 9% increase in circulation each year.

Meeting Rooms and Community Space

Construction of the library’s lower level was completed in September 2003. The lower level has two large rooms that can be used for a variety of purposes, including large meetings, art or historic displays, speakers, seminars, library programs, and musical performances. The main level meeting room off the library lobby was used an average of 50 times each month in 2003. In 2003, there were 164 programs, including story time for preschoolers and toddlers, computer classes, a summer reading program, and author visits. The library also sponsored a communitywide book discussion and 13 art, history, and community displays in the library and lower level gallery.

Future Library Needs

While the facility does meet current standards and provides excellent service, it is near capacity in a number of ways. Areas of greatest need for expansion include:

- **Children’s Room**
 - Increase in programming space (currently there is one 10-x-30 foot room that includes counter and closet). The meeting room is so busy that there is difficulty in finding open dates for larger programs.
 - Shelving area needs to be increased for nonfiction, juvenile chapter book collections, and audio-visual reference. All are currently at capacity. Any addition of shelving will reduce seating and circulation space.

- The children’s library houses several special collections (themed unit kits for preschools, daycares, etc.; book and puppet sets), which are not being added to because there is not enough storage space for them.
- **Staff Work Space**
 - Increased staff size
 - Resource sharing among libraries has increased the interlibrary loan load. Additional space is needed for sorting and processing materials sent to and received from other libraries. Last year, the library sent out and received 63,000 items.
- **Meeting Rooms**
 - The current meeting room is used an average of 50 times per month. Groups have to be turned away. Research shows that there is a lack of other meeting spaces in the community. Increased population will increase the number of groups/people interested in using the room. The library board meeting room is being scheduled as a secondary space for small group meetings. The periodical area and the children’s program room have been used for meetings when the meeting room is occupied.
- **Space for Audio-Visual Items**
 - This includes videos, DVDs, music CDs, software, audiocassettes, and whatever the next innovation might be. These collections are getting increasingly heavy use; traffic in the audio-visual area is awkward because of lack of shelving space.
 - This area is past capacity. Staff had to make do by adding shelving, placing travel videos and nonfiction audiocassettes in nonfiction book shelves, moving children’s and young adult audiocassettes to the children’s library shelving and young adult area, and placing some media on book carts.



In 2001 a 270,000 square foot River Falls High School was built to house 1,200 students.

Increased Space for Computers

- The computer room is at capacity. Public access Internet computers (17 total available) had 26,500 uses in 2003. This does not include two email stations, children’s game computers, or online catalogs (OPACs). Increased population will bring increased use. The library consortia are continuing to add electronic databases for public use on these terminals.

- **History Room**

- History room shelves are full.

Library staff is concerned about losing circulation/seating space in the main library. Even after weeding the collection, the library will be adding shelving to the ends of some of the rows this year, which will pull space out of circulation square footage and reduce seating. This could be problematic with projected increases in demand for titles and building use. All of these issues will increase in significance as the service area population grows.

In order to meet the informational and educational needs of the community and improve access to resources, the library will need to add or construct a new facility to meet the growing population and demand. No site has been selected, and funding is not currently available. Future library book drop-off locations would assist and should be considered in newer developments, along with possible new locations for a future library or an addition to the existing library.

9.4 SCHOOLS

Maintaining the high quality of schools and increasing the opportunities for youth are high priorities for community residents. The provision of schools is under the purview of the River Falls School District, this Plan sites schools and other educational facilities to foster close relationships between the residents, transit, and bicycle and pedestrian trails.



River Falls High School logo.

9.4.1 Current Facilities

The River Falls area is served by the River Falls School District, which currently operates three elementary schools (grades K-5), one Montessori Charter Academy (grades K-4), one middle school (grades 6-8), one high school (grades 9-12), and one Renaissance Alternative Charter Academy (grades 9-12). The River Falls High School opened in 2002 and the Meyer Middle School moved to the former high school on Ninth Street. The River Falls Academy is now located in the former middle school building, the site of the original River Falls Academy in 1856. The Renaissance Charter Alternative Academy and the Montessori Charter Academy are located in the River Falls Academy building along with studios for various area artists. Overall, the district student population has increased by approximately 120 students (based on the Friday September count) from the 1995–1996 school year to the 2003–2004 school year. Based on the 2003–2004 enrollment report (September 2003) and increasing the enrollment total by 2% per year, the district has adequate space through 2015–2016. The District Administration Building and all schools are located within the City, while the School District encompasses four surrounding Towns.

9.4.2 Enrollment

The September 2003–2004 enrollment was 2,992. Of these, 984 were enrolled in the high school (9-12) that was built for approximately 1,200 students. The middle school (6-8) that has a capacity of 1,000 had an enrollment of 609. The elementary students (K-5) had an enrollment of 1,184, located in three buildings with a total capacity of 1,349. The 2003–2004 Renaissance Charter Alternative Academy (9-12) enrollment was 76 and the Montessori Charter Academy (K-3) was 46. These two schools are located in the River Falls Academy Building, which provides room for future growth.

9.4.3 Capacities

Enrollment projections, along with projections for future growth, are established for all new school construction. As noted above, the new high school was built with the capacity for 1,200 students with room to house an additional 216 students. The middle school can house 1,000 students, thus it could handle another 391 students. The capacities of each of the elementary buildings are as follows: Greenwood - 405, Rocky Branch - 472, and Westside - 472. Based on 2003–2004 enrollments, the three elementary schools combined could house an additional 165 students. The district chose to retain the former middle school building (River Falls Academy Building) when the new high school was built. This facility provides sufficient space to house not only the current Renaissance Charter Alternative Academy and the Montessori Charter Academy, but also an entire elementary school of 450 students when the need arises. With the recent annexations of Sterling Ponds, Boulder Ridge, and High View Meadows developments, there is a need to begin planning for the future by purchasing land for anticipated schools.

9.4.4 Future School Needs

With a 2.5% growth rate for a 20-year buildout, the School District could serve an area that may increase by approximately 8,000 residents, for a total population of approximately 21,000. Although this buildout is for 20 years, planning for future locations is important at this time. Based on 2003–2004 enrollment ratios, this will result in the increase of 1,832 students in the School District of River Falls in 20 years. This includes 752 elementary students, 424 middle school students, and 656 high school students. The district would likely be able to house this increase without additional buildings if the remaining 22 rooms at the River Falls Academy Building (not including Montessori or Renaissance) would be converted to a fourth elementary school. A few additional rooms would be necessary at both the middle school and high school in order to house the increased students for these two levels.

New elementary students	752
2004	$1230 \div 13,000 = .094\%$
Future	$8,000 \times .094\% = 752$
New middle school students	424
2004	$690 \div 13,000 = .053\%$
Future	$8,000 \times .053\% = 424$
New high school students	656
2004	$1060 \div 13,000 = .082\%$
Future	$8,000 \times .082\% = 656$

NOTE: These projections are for a 2.5% growth for 20-years.

With total buildout within the future growth area, infill and approved development as of 2001 the School District could serve an area that may increase by 33,477 new residents, for a total population of approximately 47,776 at total buildout. Although this may not occur for a long period of time, planning for future locations is important at this time. Based on current enrollment ratios, this will result in an increase in enrollment in the River Falls School District by 7,666 students in total buildout and 1,832 students within 20 years.

For a total buildout this would include 3,147 elementary students, 1,774 middle school students, and 2,745 high school students. This translates into a need for approximately eight new elementary schools, two new or one new and one expanded middle school, and two new or one new and one expanded high school. Site locations for new elementary schools, new or redeveloped middle schools, and new or redeveloped high schools need to be identified in consultations with the School District. Sites and distribution will need to be considered upon availability of vacant land and the location of existing schools. As of 2003, the area serviced by the School District of River Falls (within the City limits) had an approximate population of 13,000. School district enrollment figures for 2003–2004 were 2,992 K-12 students.

New elementary students	3,147
2004	$1230 \div 13,000 = .094\%$
Future	$33,477 \times .094\% = 3,147$
New middle school students	1,774
2004	$690 \div 13,000 = .053\%$
Future	$33,477 \times .053\% = 1,774$
New high school students	2,745
2004	$1060 \div 13,000 = .082\%$
Future	$33,477 \times .082\% = 2,745$

NOTE: These projections are for the Urban Area Boundary only.

9.4.5 Ancillary and Service Program Space Needs

Enrollment projections provide only a partial picture of future space needs. In the last several years, the district has experienced demand on existing school facilities from ancillary and service program needs. These programs have supplanted regular classroom use, thus decreasing the number of classrooms available for regular use. Thus, while enrollment numbers have not increased dramatically, the number of available classrooms has decreased.



9.5 PARKS, RECREATION, AND CONSERVANCY

Parks and recreation facilities serve an important role in maintaining quality of life. Some parks provide opportunities for a broad range of activities, such as hiking, mountain biking, and nature study, while others are gathering places where neighborhood residents can relax, contemplate, and take in the beautiful views. Recreation facilities can range from athletic fields for soccer and baseball, tennis courts, and golf courses to tot-lots.

Whatever the level of service, facilities need to be accessible. In addition to the City facilities, residents have access to county, state, federal, and town parks and trails, which provide plentiful opportunities for active recreation. Many traditional trails are being lost due to the lack of planning and development.

There are a limited number of trails and developed parks. As a result, residents are forced to rely on the City's already limited park resources. At community meetings, residents frequently commented on the need for more neighborhood parks as well as more recreational facilities, such as ice skating rinks, bicycle and pedestrian paths, swimming pools, soccer fields, and skateboard ramps.

The existing county plans outline county, state, and federal parks within the adjacent St. Croix and Pierce Counties. The existing Town of Troy Growth Management Plan also outlines the need for neighborhood parks and playgrounds. The Pierce County Land Management Plan states that pressure is being placed on towns and/or the county to build their own athletic fields, hockey rinks, etc. rather than relying on the City's. The towns and cities, especially River Falls and Prescott, operate a variety of public athletic fields, trails, campgrounds, and small natural areas for the benefit of their residents.

9.5.1 Park Classifications

Regional Parks generally range from 50 to 100 or more acres in size. They serve the entire region and can support natural outdoor recreation, large-scale sports activities, golf courses, and any of the amenities otherwise found in smaller parks.



Over 5.1 Miles of Pedestrian/Bike Trails in the City.

Figure 9-1 School Sites and Property.

Figure 9-2 Park and Conservancy Land.

Community Parks are oriented toward active recreational activities. They are typically 20 to 50 acres in size and support amenities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, organized adult and youth sports, gymnasiums or recreation centers, and other elements typically found in smaller parks. Their service area is about a 1.5-mile radius.

Pocket Parks/Conservancy Open Space Pockets are primarily for passive use, serving limited populations. They are typically less than an acre in size. Pocket parks may contain amenities such as mini-playgrounds, picnic tables, benches, sculptural elements, fountains, and landscaping. Open space pockets provide small infill open space in developed areas and are used for informal recreation.

Special Use Parks are historic parks, interpretive or educational parks or trails, Veteran’s Park or walkways serving the entire City.

Open Space Parks, serving the entire City, are primarily used for informal recreation, viewing, or contemplation. Open space parks may be minimally developed to allow for hiking, bicycling, interpretive or educational trails, or specialized outdoor sports. They also feature wildlife habitat.

Linear Parks (Parkways) are typically located along rivers and riparian corridors and connect to other parks. They include open space and paths or trails for multiple uses.

Trails are for hiking, walking, bicycling, jogging, or horseback riding. They vary in size and some serve single neighborhoods while others serve the entire City.

Recreational Facilities support parks and recreational programs as well as provide for other City services. Recreational facilities consist of community recreation centers, swimming pools, and sports complexes. Facilities for recreational purposes serve residents within a 1.5-mile radius.

Conservancy The conservancy designation includes natural RPAs, such as bluffs and steep slopes (20% or greater) and areas within 100-year flood zones or areas recognized for their importance.

9.5.2 Park Inventory

See Appendix D for an inventory of existing facilities and parks, park names, and amenities and deficiencies; see Figure 9-2 for locations.

9.5.3 Current Plans

The City of River Falls has drafted numerous plans regarding parks and recreation, such as the Outdoor Recreation Plan of 1971, the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan of 1989, and the most recent Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan of 1995, which seeks to identify the needs of the present community but also seeks to estimate the needs of the community for the next five years. These documents assist in applying for federal and state funding and as a basis for local capital improvement budgeting.

The Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan of 1995 suggests and promotes ways and means to provide recreation for all the citizen groups. It states, “Our public lands express loudly and clearly the community goals and values.” The City Code requires parkland dedication fees or parcels of land equal to 10% of the gross area for annexation, subdivision, and development of land. The City categorizes its existing parks and recreational spaces as community parks, linear parks that are trail systems, neighborhood parks, special use parks such as Veteran’s Park, and quasi-public parks that are school and university parks or recreational facilities. Figure 9-2 shows the existing park, recreation, and conservancy lands within the Urban Area Boundary.



A freestanding public transit shelter located at public parks conveys the attitude that transit is a high public good.

9.5.4 Standards

This document maintains the City’s standards for community and neighborhood parks at ten acres per 1,000 residents. Standards for park size and service radii are outlined in Table 9.1.

9.5.5 Future Needs and Parkland Provision

During the comprehensive planning process and public meetings, input for the parks, recreation, and conservancy section of the Plan, residents expressed many of the same priorities for providing adequate facilities for the community. Residents encouraged

the City to provide easily accessible parks, particularly in future growth areas with trails leading to the trails along the river and a regional park for the community. Residents also wanted more recreation facilities, such as ice-skating rinks, an Olympic size swimming pool, soccer fields, and bike paths and trails. The need for future parks within the future growth area of the Urban Area Boundary is determined by applying distribution standards to the expected population increase at build out of the Comprehensive Plan. Table 9.2 summarizes the demand for additional parkland that would result.

Table 9.1 City of River Falls Park Standards.

Facility	Standard (Per 1,000 Residents)	Typical Size	Service Area
Regional Parks	–	50–100+ acres	City
Community Parks	10 acres (combined for Neighborhood and Community Parks)	20-50 acres	1.5-mile radius
Neighborhood Parks	(see Community Parks standard)	2–19 acres	.5-mile radius
Pocket Parks/ Open Space Pockets	–	Less than 2 acres	–
Open Space Parks	–	Varies	City
Trails and Linear Parks (pedestrian, bicycle, and bridle)	–	Varies	Neighborhood and City

NOTE: Standards are for net usable recreation area (that is, exclusive of flood plains, and other rights-of-way).

Table 9.2 Community and Neighborhood Park Needs.

Facility	Acres Needed at Buildout	Existing Acreage	Additional Acreage Needed	No. of Parks Needed
Community Parks	250	132.30	117.70	3–4
Neighborhood Parks	250	110.25	139.75	13

Note: Based on a buildout study area population of up to 50,000.

Regional Parks. No specific standards for per capita needs are established in the Comprehensive Plan. The Park and Recreation Board has been discussing the need for a regional park to be planned and constructed in the future. The park would contain softball, soccer, baseball fields and other recreational facilities for the community, which would help relieve the overuse of the current recreational facilities. This document proposes the possibility of one or two regional parks within the urban area, to be located to the north and south of the existing City limits but within the future growth area of the Urban Area Boundary.

Community and Neighborhood Parks. Community parks with an average size of approximately 25 acres will be needed to serve future residents within the River Falls Urban Area Boundary. Some of these parks will be located within the TND Overlay Zone. Presently one community park will be located to the north and adjacent to Highway 35 within the Sterling Ponds development. These community and neighborhood parks are shown on Figure 9-2. They are located to maximize residents' accessibility to them.

Pocket Parks/Conservancy Open Space Pockets. With an average size of less than two acres, these parks are too small to be shown on the Future Land Use Map (Figure 3-6). They will be shown, however, in a Master Plan prepared for new neighborhoods in the City. Opportunities to provide neighborhood parks in many existing neighborhoods are limited because they are built-out. Figure 9-2 depicts neighborhood parks in areas where sites are available.

Linear Parks/Trails. Linear parks and trails are being proposed along all major riparian corridors to form a necklace of conservancy space. Trails will be provided along some of the linear parks for activities such as hiking, walking, bicycling, jogging, and horseback riding. Detailed planning of linear parks and trails is to be done as part of the master planning process.

9.6 FIRE AND POLICE PROTECTION

9.6.1 Fire and Emergency Protection

The City began tracking response times to calls for fires and EMS during 2000 using a new computer-aided dispatch system. This system allows the City to analyze their responses to calls for help. Response time is a very useful indicator for fire/EMS departments nationwide (Figure 9-3). It is recommended that 85% of all calls for fire/EMS assistance be responded to within six minutes. In many cases, help during this first six to seven minutes is necessary to prevent the death of a critically ill or injured person and/or major property loss.

Table 9.3 Number of Fires Responded to from 1992–2002.

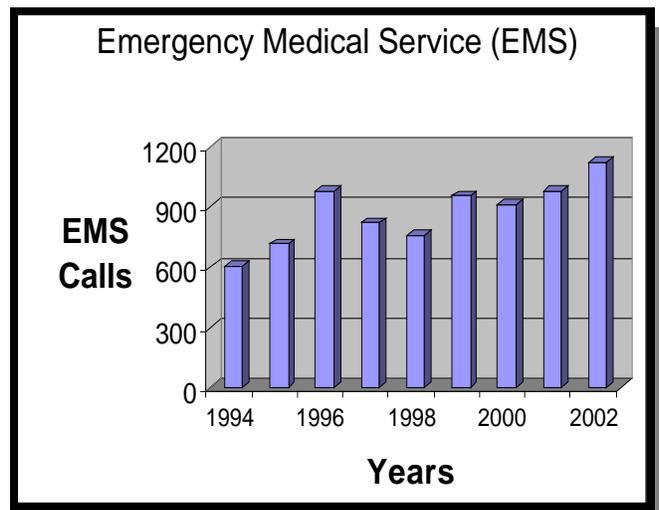
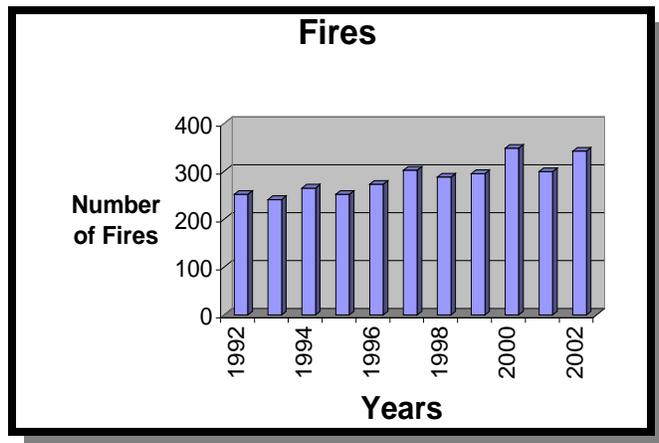


Table 9.4 Emergency Medical Response.

The City intends to report on annual response time statistics. Tracking these figures and comparing them against an “85% in six minutes” goal will be a useful way to measure the City’s emergency response performance. During 2002, the volunteer fire department responded to 342 calls, and the City experienced 15 total structural fires.



City of River Falls EMS Station.

Emergency medical response comprises the vast majority of calls responded to by fire department emergency services. During the 1990s, there was an average of nearly 772 EMS calls per year within the River Falls region. This equals an average of 2.2 calls each day. During 2003, the EMS department responded to 994 calls (2.8 per day) for emergency medical assistance, of which 22% were traffic accidents requiring medical attention. The EMS and Volunteer Fire Department provides fire protection service for the City and areas within the adjacent four towns. The fire department operates four engines while the EMS operates three paramedic units. The EMS has an on-duty staff commander.

As the community grows more staff will be needed for EMS and fire protection. The fire department would like to achieve between 1.5 to 2.0 firefighters per 1,000 of population. A move from an all-volunteer fire department to

one with limited supplemental staff may be needed for the future.

The existing facilities, staffing, and equipment are now only marginally adequate based on population served, travel distance, and call volume. Current plans call for construction of a second fire station to better service the community’s north side. There may be a need for an additional station in the west or the south; determination of the needs and locations of future stations will be based upon modeling to be performed by City staff.

9.6.2 Police Protection

The City’s changing demographics and the number of visitors pose significant challenges to policing. Recognizing the rapid changes occurring around us, it is incumbent upon the community to develop a police agency that has the flexibility and adaptability to respond when necessary and to anticipate, where possible, the needs of the community. This requires collaboration between the police, other City agencies, the school system, and the public. As part of the concept of traditional neighborhood community, the City may also take steps to establish neighborhood substations. In addition to the neighborhood substation, the City has established many other programs to strengthen policing and foster closer ties between law enforcement and the community. These include:



City of River Falls Police Patrol Car.

School Resource Officer Program. The intent of this program is to help address current concerns, including truancy and violence. An officer is assigned to the public school system with the agreement and cooperation of the school.

Citizen Police Academy. This is a program in which members of the community are taught methods for crime reduction by law enforcement officers; collaboration would occur to solve community problems.

9.7 NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

This document outlines the process for both community and neighborhood level planning. It proposes development of a program to allow a neighborhood plan within distinct neighborhood boundaries. The intent is to allow groups to be formed to discuss the common issues and ideas that concern people living alongside each other. These *neighborhood plans* allow for the development of plans that may provide specific design guidelines and standards for the conservation and enhancement of their neighborhoods. Also the development of a *community area plan* would provide greater planning detail for neighborhood needs, including land use, zoning, and infill development issues. *Neighborhood state - ments or improvement plans* may be completed for smaller neighborhood areas in order to address specific issues. All neighborhood and community plans shall have authority upon adoption by the City Council and shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. These plans will call for enhanced citizen input and participation in the development review process, the review of the land use code, and the creation of informational materials explaining the overall process.

9.7.1 Neighborhood Plans

A neighborhood plan is an overlay zone that is developed through analysis of the issues in an area and recognition of the qualities that may need to be protected or enhanced through an overlay of regulatory restrictions or allowances. This kind of district would be effective for neighborhood groups that are concerned about changes in community character and the effect that infill and increased urban density may have on their neighborhood. These overlay districts may have regulatory power, but also require considerable community consensus and planning efforts to develop and implement.

The neighborhood plans do not change the underlying zoning; rather, they develop a set of regulations that overlie the base zoning and conform to the Comprehensive Plan. These regulations are developed to address the specific needs of the neighborhood and to govern such aspects as building height, bulk and massing, lot area requirements, and the uses of land that are compatible and consistent with the neighborhood character. The neighborhood plan regulations may supersede existing land use regulations and be either more or less restrictive. Figure 9-4 represents possible boundaries for future neighborhood associations. The names and boundaries represent existing subdivisions.

Community consensus is required for the initiation of a neighborhood plan. Property owners and residents would then work together to create the plan. Agreement of the majority of the property owners in the area and approval of the City Council are required for adoption of the plan. The districts would be highlighted on the zoning map and would refer the reader to the district document. The neighborhood plan document may contain the specific overlying regulations. It also acts as a reference document and a description of the neighborhood's future character for consideration when making decisions regarding the neighborhood.

9.7.2 Community Area Plans

This document calls for the development of a program for creating long-range detailed plans for community areas throughout the City. The preparation of these Community Area Plans will be an essential part of implementing the Comprehensive Plan (see Table 9.5). Community Area Plans provide more detailed land use information for specific areas of the City and serve as a framework for evaluating subdivisions, site plans, or current planning proposals.

In order to arrive at solutions to community problems, neighborhoods and City staff must work together to address issues at the community level. Community Area Plans will be based on the Comprehensive Plan and will be consistent with the Plan, providing greater detail and specific policies. Community Area Plans will be done for community planning areas, which may consist of a cluster of neighborhoods and adjacent areas not covered by neighborhood associations. The planning area will be defined through collaboration of citizens, City staff, and officials. The focus of the planning will be to arrive at workable solutions that reflect community needs. These plans will look at system issues—traffic congestion, community service provision, impacts of development, affordable housing—on a community and Citywide scale. Site-specific issues—local streetscapes, potential infill sites, parking problems, crime and safety issues, and pocket parks—will be addressed on a neighborhood scale. Existing neighborhood plans and other applicable policy and plan statements—such as open space, bike trail, urban design, and historic preservation plans—will be reviewed and ideas evaluated according to current concerns and the Comprehensive Plan.

Community area planning is a means to evaluate the advantages of infill and neighborhood development and redevelopment. Through this process,

neighborhoods and the City can work together to resolve issues. With education, evaluation, and discussion, neighbors may better understand the benefits to the neighborhoods and to the community at large. Implementing an infill policy within the Urban Area Boundary may be positive for River Falls when:

1. Infill effectively works as a tradeoff for growth outside the City;
2. Neighborhood and communitywide open space needs are addressed;
3. There is meaningful neighborhood participation; and
4. The resultant infill developments are site sensitive and respect the character of existing neighborhoods.

Along with identifying potential infill sites in existing neighborhoods, the City shall work with the community to determine overall needs in terms of open space and parks, infrastructure, traffic and circulation, schools, libraries, community, daycare and senior centers.

The community area planning process will be used to locate and design compatible infill in established neighborhoods. Working with neighborhoods to develop Community Area Plans, vacant parcels can be identified and evaluated for their appropriateness for infill development, open space, or other appropriate uses.

Prior to the development of a community area plan program, the City will develop a neighborhood association process. The process will encourage associations to consistently notify and involve a high percentage of the residents within their area to ensure that equitable representation is attained. All existing residential groups, however, whether formally recognized or not, will clearly be defined within each community planning area and will be included in the planning process.

9.7.3 Neighborhood Statements and Improvement Plans

Neighborhood associations will be encouraged to develop neighborhood statements and neighborhood improvement plans. Associations will be responsible for creating an organizing committee, setting tentative planning area boundaries, and preparing a work plan. The City will help provide technical support as needed. The City will develop an outreach program to assist neighborhoods in initiating neighborhood plans. The City will also encourage neighborhood groups to join together to create a limited number of planning bodies that are truly representative of their members and that can gain the support of local groups. The City will maintain effective communication with neighborhood associations so that the resulting plans are consistent with the Community Area Plans.

The Neighborhood Statement is intended to allow some neighborhood individuality within each Community Area Plan and to address topics that are of concern to the neighborhood. This could take the form of a brief one page statement, a map of the neighborhood, and neighborhood vision and issues, or it could be a more complex listing of the specific guiding and implementing policies of each neighborhood.

Neighborhood Improvement Plans outline the specific needs of the neighborhood for such things as infrastructure and services. They may propose actions to be undertaken by the City, by other community entities, and by neighborhood citizens and the neighborhood association itself to address specific neighborhood improvements.

9.7.4 Community Involvement in Development Review

This document supports the enhancement of the development review process to better facilitate community involvement and

encourage public input on development proposals. For example: The adoption of an **Early Neighborhood Notification Ordinance** as part of the City Code would help to improve the process for public notification, early involvement of the public with project applicants and staff and public input throughout the review process. The Comprehensive Plan also proposes development of a Public Participation Handbook that will explain the development review process and the stages and methods for public input.



Neighborhood Meeting on the Comprehensive Plan at the River Falls High School.

Early Neighborhood Notification (ENN)

The development of a early neighborhood notification process will provide for an exchange of information between the prospective applicant and the affected neighborhood(s), property owners, concerned citizens and organizations (registered with the city) before plans become too firm to respond meaningfully to community input and before changes in plans might require major financial losses by the applicant. **Appendix G** outlines an ENN process that will save time, money and protect natural resources for the city, applicant and general public.

Table 9.5 Neighborhood and Community Planning.

Type of Subarea Plan	Scale of Subarea Plan	Purpose of Subarea Planning	Involvement of Citizens in Subarea Planning
Neighborhood Plan	<p>Neighborhood District.</p> <p>A neighborhood, or a portion of a neighborhood, that wishes to conserve aspects of their common physical and/or social charter.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Neighborhood Plan may become a zoning overlay district. 2) These districts do not change the underlying zoning. 3) These regulations may govern aspects such as building heights, the uses of land and structures, etc. They may supersede some land use regulations and may be either more or less restrictive. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Neighborhood Plans are initiated by citizens with approval of a majority of neighbors and the governing body. 2) Citizens may work with City staff to develop the Neighborhood Plan. 3) Requires strong commitment from the neighborhood. 4) The Neighborhood Plan must be approved by a majority of the residents/owners in the district and by the City Council.
Community Area Plan	<p>Community Planning Area</p> <p>Larger than a neighborhood, containing a few to several entire neighborhoods.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Details and guidelines for social, economic, and land use development in the community planning area. 2) The plan must include an implementation component. 3) The Community Area Plan must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. 4) The plan may suggest changes to City policy or ordinances. 5) The Community Area Plan must be adopted by the governing body. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Community planning areas are defined by the City with input from the public. 2) All citizens in an area are involved in initial idea development and later review of the Community Area Plan through public meetings and workshops. 3) A broad-based citizen team is closely involved with staff in developing the Community Area Plan, through research, writing, and review stages, and approval by the governing body.
Neighborhood Statements or Neighborhood Improvement Plans	<p>Neighborhood</p> <p>Area defined by boundaries of a Neighborhood or Association</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Neighborhood Statement expresses the concerns, interests, and proposed actions of a specific neighborhood. 2) The Improvement Plan will contain an assessment of the physical improvement needs of the neighborhood. 3) Both may be included as a component of the Community Area Plan and adopted by the City Council. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Neighborhoods are defined by neighborhood groups with approval of the City. 2) Neighborhood members create the Neighborhood Statement or Improvement Plan with help from City staff.

Figure 9-3 Fire Stations & Emergency Response Areas.

Figure 9-4 Neighborhood Association

GUIDING POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

9-G-1 Promote the affordability of residential owner occupied and rental housing within the Urban Area Boundary.

9-1-I-1 Provide leadership in public, private and cooperative efforts to maintain a balanced inventory of sites and houses for all income levels within the Urban Area Boundary.

9-1-I-2 Encourage redevelopment, infill development and new development at housing densities and in locations that increase affordability by making efficient use of both existing and future infrastructure and public improvements.

9-1-I-3 Provide leadership in public, private and cooperative efforts to maintain the quality of existing housing stock to achieve housing affordability.

9-1-I-4 Provide leadership in public, private and cooperative efforts to increase the affordability of new housing.

9-G-2 Promote the development of a strong, diverse economy that serves the needs of residents, businesses and their employees.

9-2-I-1 Support business development by providing assistance for startup or expansion of those businesses that further the City's goals, including:

- Those with high growth and/or export potential;
- Those that are technology or biotechnology based.
- Those that pay above-average wages;
- Those that add value to the region's agricultural products;
- Those that use River Falls' natural resources sparingly and responsibly; and
- Those that will support employee training and development.

9-2-I-2 Cooperate with industry and both public and higher education providers to promote worker/employee education and development.

9-2-I-3 Maintain a balanced inventory of sites within the Urban Area Boundary that meet the needs of a broad spectrum of commercial users including retail, wholesale, manufacturing, professional services and other businesses.

9-G-3 Cooperate with federal, state, county, and town government agencies and institutions in developing community-wide programs that meet the cultural, educational, and developmental needs of all segments of our population.

9-3-I-1 Cooperate with community groups in the planning and development of arts programming for the benefit of residents of the City and region.

9-3-I-2 Partner with public and private agencies, entities, and groups to provide high quality facilities and programming to meet the needs of the City's residents with a special focus on the needs of children, youth and senior citizens.

- 9-3-I-3** Engage in multiple partnerships with the county, state, and federal government, grant makers; schools; colleges, and private entities to improve the delivery of health and human services to City residents.
- 9-3-I-4** Cooperate with other agencies and groups to develop and support an accessible, citywide library based information system.
- 9-3-II-5** Collaborate with the educational institution in planning for future facilities and in making efficient use of existing joint-use facilities.
- 9-G-4** Ensure community and neighborhood involvement in the development of long term plans and the review of new and infill development.
- 9-4-I-1** Collaborate with residents, property owners and business owners in developing "neighborhood" plans that would guide capital improvements, changes to infrastructure, infill development and redevelopment in residential neighborhood and commercial areas.
- 9-4-I-2** Ensure that public input is obtained on capital improvements, infill development, redevelopment and new development in the City by a public process that includes early notification and participation by affected groups in all aspects of the design and review of such projects.
- 9-G-5** Cooperate with the counties and towns to develop and maintain an integrated park and trail system linked to the city and its downtown and residential neighborhoods that protects environmentally sensitive areas and meets recreational needs.
- 9-5-I-1** Develop and utilize a comprehensive park and trail system plan to guide parkland acquisition, development and usage.
- 9-5-I-2** Acquire and develop land for trails, neighborhood, regional and conservation parks via donations, the park land dedication requirement, cooperative agreements with townships, counties, state and direct purchase.
- 9-G-6** Cooperate with the counties and towns to minimize the loss of life and property resulting from the hazards of fire, medical and rescue emergencies, hazardous material incidents, and disaster response and recovery by providing quality, effective, and efficient safety services for City residents and back-up support for Pierce and St. Croix counties and local towns.
- 9-6-I-1** Cooperate with state, county and township governments and agencies in planning for training opportunities and programs.
- 9-6-II-2** Ensure that infrastructure, equipment, facilities and fees are in place to provide speedy and efficient safety services to residents of the area.