

Chapter 8. County Facilities and Services

Introduction

Community services and facilities provide an important means for community development and the enhancement of the quality of life for citizens. The primary services provided by Stearns County include:

- Maintaining County roads;
- Enhancing and maintaining the public health and social welfare of the County;
- Providing law enforcement and related administration of criminal justice services;
- Managing and maintaining County solid waste facilities and waste facility planning;
- Providing information to local communities and coordinating sanitary sewer treatment and disposal;
- Providing information and aid in the planning and expansion of public water and sanitary sewer extensions.

Critical to the success of providing County services in Stearns County is the balancing of rural and urban service accessibility. This includes the convenient location of important County services and the expansion of services as needed. Currently the majority of citizens feel County facilities and services adequately meet their needs. The continued success of these services will rely on careful analysis and attention to citizen needs and desires that may warrant expansion of County services.

Existing Business Services and Facility Locations

Major locations of community facilities, including law enforcement and administrative services, human services, public works and maintenance, multi-county services, and related agency facilities are shown on Figure 8.1 and described below.

Law Enforcement and Administrative Services

Courthouse Square, located in downtown St. Cloud, is the headquarters for County legal and administrative services. The square consists of four buildings: the Administrative Center, the historic Courthouse, the Courts Facility Building and the Law Enforcement Center.

The Stearns County Courthouse, 725 Courthouse Square, is an historic landmark constructed in 1921 that houses the State Department of Court Administration. Directly across the street, 815

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Courthouse Square, is the Courts Facilities Building where all of the County's trials and legal proceedings occur.

Located at 807 Courthouse Square is the Law Enforcement Center. This building, constructed in 1987, is a shared facility housing the County Sheriff's Department and the City of St. Cloud Police Department. This building also houses the Office of Emergency Management.

Finally, the County's Administrative Center is located at 705 Courthouse Square. This building, constructed in 1991, houses the following departments:

- Administration
- Assessor
- Attorney
- Auditor-Treasurer
- Building Facilities
- Environmental Services
- Human Resources
- Human Services and Public Health
- Information Services
- Purchasing
- Recorder

Human Services and Environmental Services

To better serve residents in the western part of the County, a satellite office is located at 546 5th Avenue North, Melrose. Twice a week, Environmental Services staff is available to offer assistance with issues pertaining to environmental service policies, procedures and sewage treatment and construction site permitting.

Public Works and Maintenance Facilities

A total of five County Public Works facilities exist within the County to ensure the proper maintenance and operation of County roads. The five facility buildings include:

- Main Office: 455 28th Avenue South, Waite Park
- Albany Shop: 34587 County Road 10, Albany
- Belgrade Shop: 640 Adrian Street, Belgrade
- Richmond Shop: 22384 State Highway 22, Richmond
- Sauk Centre Shop: 39842 County Road 186, Sauk Centre

Park Department

In 2006 the Stearns County Park Department moved from the main Public Works office to Quarry Park, located at 1802 County Road 137, Waite Park.

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

FIGURE 8.1 County Facilities

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Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

Multi-County Services

Tri-County Solid Waste. Located at 601 North 20th Avenue in St. Cloud is the Tri-County Solid Waste Administrative Building. The Tri-County Waste Management Commission is responsible for identifying and working toward the solution of solid waste management issues within Stearns, Sherburne and Benton Counties (see discussion in Chapter 9, Intergovernmental Cooperation).

Stearns and Benton County Employment and Training Council. Stearns and Benton counties have established an employment and training center located at St. Cloud Technical College, 1540 Northway Drive, St. Cloud. This center works to serve Benton and Stearns County residents in the improvement and identification of employment and training opportunities.

Other County Facilities

License Center West, located at 3335 West St. Germain, Suite 107, St. Cloud, was opened in January 1997 and is intended to make it easier for rural residents to conduct County business. The Center provides motor vehicle registration and sporting licenses, birth certificates, passports and death certificates. A probation reporting center is also located at 3335 West St. Germain in Suite 108.

The **University of Minnesota Extension Service**, Stearns County branch, is located at 3400 First Street North, Suite 400, in the Midtown Plaza Building, St. Cloud. Extension services include community assistance, education and outreach on a wide variety of topics, most notably agricultural and horticultural issues.

Planned Facilities and Services

In the spring of 2007, the County Board authorized the purchase of a 12-acre property located near Mills Fleet Farm, along the Sauk River and adjacent to Miller Landing, a County park.

Stearns County pursued this spot because of its location. In contrast to the downtown office, most Stearns County residents should be within a 20-minute driving distance of this site, located on the west side of St. Cloud and close to I-94. This building will be much more accessible; and the 12 acres will allow ample space for parking.

Construction plans call for a one-story building of 45,000 square feet but the building will be designed and built to handle multiple floors in case more space is needed in the future. Stearns County also purchased enough land to allow for another 45,000 square foot building to be added to the south if needed in the future.

The specific county departments that will be located at the new building have not yet been determined. Plans are to break ground for

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the new building in the spring of 2008 and to open the service center in 2009.

Emergency Services

Emergency services in Stearns County can be divided into three categories: police, medical (ambulance) and fire department jurisdictions. Most areas of Stearns County outside major cities are served by the Patrol Division of the Stearns County Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office also contracts with six cities (St. Stephen, Rockville, Freeport, Holdingford, Pleasant Lake and Brooten) to provide additional law enforcement services.

Ambulance service is provided by mainly volunteer medical response teams, covering six large service areas. Fire departments cover service areas centered in major cities; the largest service areas are the Sauk Centre, Melrose and Elrosa districts. All emergency service communications are provided by the Sheriff's Office Communications Division, also known as the 911 Center. The Center dispatches for 30 fire and rescue departments, 17 police departments, and six ambulance services.

Solid Waste Plan

Stearns County has adopted a plan for managing solid waste within the County, the *County of Stearns 2005 Solid Waste Management Plan Update*. The solid waste plan, among other things, is designed to protect surface water and groundwater resources from degradation. The proper management and disposal of solid waste will protect natural resources. For a detailed description of waste management activities, please refer to the *Solid Waste Management Plan Update*.

Issues and Challenges

Providing Services to Western Stearns County. Stearns County is one of the largest counties in Central Minnesota, and its largest population center is located at its eastern edge. The County's 53-mile length from east to west makes it difficult for residents of Western Stearns County to access services within St. Cloud. The planned new service center will alleviate this problem to some degree by enabling citizens to avoid areas of traffic congestion in St. Cloud. However, it may present obstacles for transit-dependent populations and those with limited mobility.

Ensuring Adequate Emergency Service Response Times. As residential development increases in the more rural areas of Stearns County, emergency service response times can lengthen due to distance and congestion on rural roads. While this issue has not yet been identified as a problem, it should be considered as part of the review of proposed residential subdivisions and other large-scale development outside cities.

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives are intended to address the facilities needs identified during the planning process and to guide the continued provision of county services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Goal 1. Provide County services and facilities that benefit the residents of the County in a cost-effective manner.

- Objective 1. Maintain a high level of quality in existing and future services.
- Objective 2. Ensure reasonable access to County services and facilities, including access for transit-dependent populations.
- Objective 3. Plan for the future expansion of County facilities and services by monitoring growth trends and demographic and socioeconomic indicators.
- Objective 4. Coordinate provision of services with other agencies and jurisdictions to maximize efficiency. Utilize private sector service providers where appropriate.
- Objective 5. Recognize and consider existing or planned County facilities during the subdivision review process to assess the ability to provide services to new development.
- Objective 6. Evaluate and assess emergency services response times as a factor in evaluating rezoning requests or land use plan amendments.