

# Taylor's Falls Comprehensive Plan



## *A Plan of Conservation and Development*

*Approved by City Council July 10, 2006*

*Amended January 28, 2008*

*Amended April 14, 2008*

*Amended August 8, 2011*



## Credits

*A sound direction for the future can only be forged with the considered input of the people of a community and their dedication to finding common ground and the will to move forward. For this plan, many people were engaged in the process, and their contributions can never be fully measured. In particular, the commitment of these individuals has been instrumental in defining a clear vision for the future of Taylors Falls:*

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*Taylors Falls Toboggan Club, 1887. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

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*Cover photograph: View of Taylors Falls from the east, 1869. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

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Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.

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St. Croix River from Summit Rock in Interstate State Park, date unknown. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.

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Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society

## *Prologue*

*Sometimes, if we care to listen,* there are voices that speak to us about our place. They speak from the primeval basalt that forms the bluffs, from the splendor of the valley, from the calm beauty of the countryside. They speak from the stone foundations and timber frames of our homes and churches. They speak from the currents of the river and in the rustle of leaves on the trees that grace the hillsides. And they tell us—or probably just remind us—that this place is special.

*And we listen, because we care to listen.*

*This plan is how we speak. In it, we share our hopes and aspirations, our dreams for building a community that resonates with this place—that responds to those voices. If we choose not to listen, our spirit dims. If we embrace the message these voices carry, our lives are enriched, our sense of history comes alive, and our bond with nature is ever more firmly rooted.*

*So we seek to plan in new ways—NO, it's really in the old way. We seek harmony, beauty and a sense of balance that can only be achieved if we hear the great natural scenic beauty of the St. Croix River Valley and the spirit of our historic small town.*

This, then, is our plan for Taylors Falls.





Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society

## Chapter One

# Hope and Memory

*The path to our future* cannot be guided by rules alone. In fact, the rules that would typically guide a community's evolution do not reflect that kind of community we would choose for ourselves. Instead, we begin by framing a vision that we have defined for ourselves, with the knowledge that it reflects the spirit and character of the place, just as it echoes our desires and values. It offers us a means of achieving stability while allowing for the kinds of change we determine are necessary for Taylors Falls. Most important, it allows all of us to share in what we have determined to be our common future.

Our vision is more than words. We see it as a key tool for the decisions we will face. It will be an anchor during conflict; a way of looking forward with new insights to our community's future; a new common language for us to speak as we consider what we will become. It will be a source of inspiration for us; a way of renewing ourselves as we continue to shape a community in ways that respect the land we cherish.

Together, our vision and guiding principles form a kind of manifesto—a declaration of the kind of place we want Taylors Falls to be, not just for ourselves, but for future generations that choose to make this community their home. This, then, is our vision:

When we try to pick out anything by itself,  
we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.

*John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra (1911)*

So it should be with Taylors Falls, *a place where the patterns of nature and settlement are intertwined, interconnected, and seemingly in perfect balance. This is a place where the river, a small town, and the countryside come together to form community, but each still retains its special character and, more important, each suggests how it should be treated. This is a place of integration of the river with a small town and the surrounding countryside, a place of unique natural and scenic splendor, of history and small town character, and of the calm beauty of the countryside. Boundaries are seamless. The parts fit "naturally" into their settings—whether in downtown, newly developing areas, or the more wild reaches of the community.*

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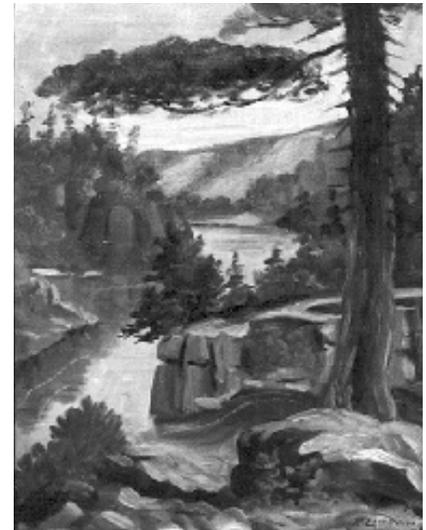
*We envision downtown as the “gateway” to Interstate State Park, where the park experience of thousands of visitors is enhanced by their experience in a small town. We envision the creation of business opportunities that take advantage of the unique setting and conditions of our community—opportunities based not only in tourism, but also in the commitment of those special enterprises that are attracted by what Taylors Falls offers. We envision places to live that celebrate the history and character of a small town, or that strive to touch the spirit of nature in the countryside. We envision residents and visitors coming together in a place that celebrates our heritage and our environment. We envision processes based in fairness, where decisions are based on our sensibilities as much as legislation. And we envision a community that not only meets the basic needs of its citizens, but challenges them to live here in ways that increase their respect for the place.*

*As we envision this future, we embrace the river as a source of great beauty, as the great primeval force that shaped the valley and now shapes us as we inhabit this special place. We recognize that we cannot change these forces without damaging our spirit, so we seek instead to live in harmony with the gifts the river offers us.*

*We will forge relationships that challenge us to think, not in our old ways but in ways that are uniquely appropriate to Taylors Falls. Every step we take must be seen as leading to a more complete whole, as an opportunity to bring nature and settlement closer, and an attempt to “re-hitch” ourselves to the Universe.*

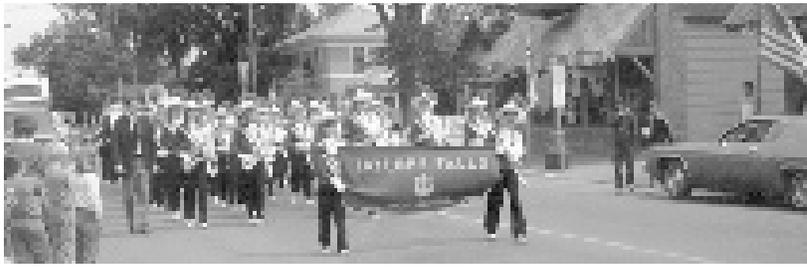
Our vision is supported by a set of principles that offer further guidance for creating the community we desire. They provide us with additional insights about the kind of community we are shaping for ourselves and our children. These principles are not rules, because they cannot be changed without diminishing the ideals we hold for Taylors Falls. They are, in a sense, truths. They will be the primary “filter” we use in community decision making, comparing proposals for change to these principles before employing more traditional tools like ordinances. These principles, like our vision, provide us with a common language to speak as we consider the evolution of our community:

- ▶ Development and conservation, as suggested in the title of our plan, are not mutually exclusive in Taylors Falls.
- ▶ The Taylors Falls community welcomes change if it respects the special qualities of this place and if we view the change as both enduring and endearing.
- ▶ Small town historic character and great natural scenic beauty are the building blocks of our community.
- ▶ Nature has shaped the St. Croix Valley, so it is only natural that those patterns shape how we inhabit our place.
- ▶ Nothing prevents a new addition to Taylors Falls from becoming historic; nothing can replace a truly historic feature.
- ▶ Walkability should be encouraged for the health and enjoyment of the community.
- ▶ Taylors Falls is best experienced as a pedestrian.
- ▶ Taylors Falls will evolve according to new models in order to effectively deal with the challenges we are facing.
- ▶ Activities occurring beyond our community’s boundaries force us to be creative in the partnerships and directions we forge.
- ▶ No one else will take on our vision for Taylors Falls; we who live here today have an obligation to participate in defining and guaranteeing the community’s future.
- ▶ We inhabit Taylors Falls for only a short period of time. Our legacy will be the place we leave for our children and our children’s children.



*“Dalles of the St. Croix,” 1923. Painting by Axel Lindahl. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*





Courtesy Taylor Falls Historical Society

Chapter Two

## Coming Together

*We've learned that we can do more* as a community than we can do alone. Over the past fifteen or more years, we've engaged in a series of projects and processes that have helped us to better understand each other and what we desire for our common future. We know that we need to talk, and sometimes argue, but we know that through this process, we gain deeper understanding. In 1644, the English poet John Milton wrote:

Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.

*John Milton, The Areopagitica, 1644*

So when we plan, we've determined that our success can be found in real engagement, where the dialog might be contentious at times, but where we arrive at a point of greater knowledge. This planning process was founded on those same ideals: that the people of Taylors Falls have everything to say about their common future, and that they will be given the opportunity for their voices to be heard. The methods of reaching to the community included:

▶ Task force guidance

A Comprehensive Plan Task Force was charged by the City Council with guiding the development of a new comprehensive plan for Taylors Falls. The group met nearly a dozen times during the eight month planning period, providing direct access to the work of the plan by local stakeholders. This group also coordinated and reviewed the input provided by the community at events that occurred throughout the planning process.

▶ Photograph survey

Task Force members and other members of the community were asked to record their thoughts about Taylors Falls in photographs, with comments provided for each photograph they submitted. It was not an inventory, although the



Photographer from a camera club picnic in Taylors Falls, 1941. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

photographs provide a compelling and somewhat comprehensive picture of Taylors Falls today. It was really more of an essay, a way of initiating a dialogue about what is good and bad about the community, and to record more heart-felt feelings about what the observers who took the photographs see in Taylors Falls.

▶ Community workshop

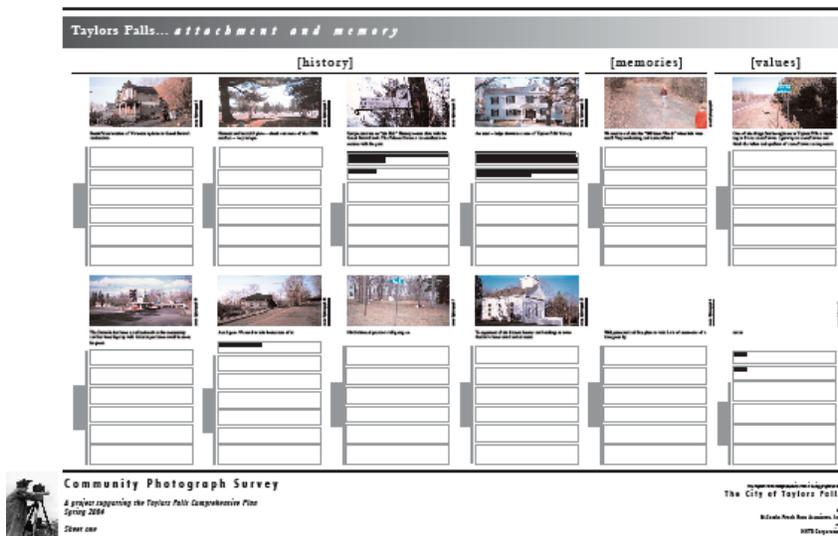
One of the first opportunities for input to this process was a Saturday morning community workshop. More than thirty people gathered, not only to share their ideas about directions for the future of Taylors Falls, but also to discuss their thoughts about the community's past, and how that might help characterize its future.

▶ Open house

Once an initial direction had been established and reviewed by the Task Force, an open house was conducted. Here, people had the

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*Community Photograph Survey, Summary Sheet, 2004.*

opportunity to see the work while it was still in progress, and offer their further insights about how it could be better tailored to the community, and confirm directions they felt were on target.

► **Charrettes**

During the course of planning, the Comprehensive Plan Task Force participated in a charrette—an intensive, design-focused session directed at generating ideas for a particular topic. Their charrette dealt with building an understanding of the patterns of use we see in Taylors Falls today, and beginning to articulate patterns of use that would be desirable for the future.



*Community members at PRC charrette, 2005.*

A charrette was also conducted with representatives of the Economic Development Commission as a part of this planning process. Here, the focus was on traffic, and particularly traffic at the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street. Significantly, the EDC reached out to representatives of the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, so that the thoughts developed during the charrette would have the basis in reality needed to create the possibility of real change.

- The Park and Recreation Commission pursued a similar interactive workshop with community members as they began framing directions for parks and trails in the community. Strikingly similar desires and concepts were articulated, all of which provide a solid foundation for the work of the PRC.

What is truly amazing is the consistency of thought and vision the people of our community have for their future. Disagreements were focused on details, not on concepts. Thoughts

that were discussed by the Task Force and the community only got better as a result. A vision statement and guiding principles best articulate the sentiments of the people of the community, but what is really important is the fact that we came together, in a spirit of community, to forge these directions.

What we have set in motion is a tradition of planning based on direct community input. Ideas were sought from the people who have a stake in what happens here, directions were vetted in public, and challenges to, and confirmations of, those directions were encouraged. As we move forward, it's this spirit of community that will ensure the qualities of community are maintained, not the words on these pages. So, as we come together, we need to find ways of continuing the debate, honing the directions, and forging new community knowledge from the opinions we each hold.

At the same time, community members who participate in shaping the vision for the future need to recognize that they are making decisions for a broader constituency. Visitors, tourists, relatives, friends and others will also benefit from and have a stake in what we do to retain our remarkable scenic character and our community character. For all of these, those who live here now, for those who only visit, and for future generations, today's community has a deeply important stewardship role.



*Vounteer planting at overlook garden along the planned Riverwalk, 2003. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*





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### Chapter Three

## Foundations of Community

*No plan can project a fair vision* of the future without knowledge of the past. In Taylors Falls, the conditions that exist—that have existed for ages—are not just the basis for this plan; they are the foundations of our community. We are keenly aware of our history and the unique features of our environment and, as we look forward, we seek to shape a plan that not only recognizes these qualities, but uses them as building blocks for the future.

There is no single feature that dominates the story of Taylors Falls. We instead see threads of connected elements and events, and we see our lives in Taylors Falls as somehow woven into that same fabric. The story is indeed a rich one, and we cannot tell it entirely here. But we can suggest how the significant threads begin to come together and how they will influence the part of the story that is yet untold.

### Geologic Origins and the Natural Landscape

The geologic history of the St. Croix River Valley is, without question, the foundation of the area's beauty. The Valley has its origins in earthquakes and lava flows that occurred over a billion years ago. Basalt (the hard black rock we see in the area today) from the lava flows formed the Dalles of the St. Croix and the river bottom. Meltwaters from glacial lakes carved the broad St. Croix River Valley; the basalt, being more resistant to the forces of this water, allowed the creation of the Dalles, potholes, and cliffs. The landscape of Taylors Falls includes terraced floodplains in areas along the river,

resistant basalt domes, and forests of hard maple, oak, and pine. The area is important biologically as well; there are many species that find a habitat in the small creeks, springs, and ravines that lead to the river.

But what we are really seeking is an understanding of how geologic history shaped Taylors Falls' natural setting and the development of our community. In our view, this is a critical perspective on how we think about the future of our community—we cannot be sensitive to the environment without gaining an understanding of the processes that shaped the landscape, and how the landscape is now shaping us. It's a great story, and it is central to our plan.

There are three major geologic "chapters" that formed our landscape; the first and last spectacular, massive episodes occurring a billion years apart. First, a great lava outpouring 1.1 billion years ago from fissures along a several hundred mile long rift cooled to form layer upon layer of basalt rock, tens of thousands of feet thick. The fact that these highly resistant flat layers now dip in a westerly direction about 15° has left its imprint on the shape of the Valley and the contrasting land surfaces on which Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls are built. The lava, shrinking as it cooled, developed many criss-crossing vertical cracks or joints visible today, a built-in cleavage that give the Dalles rock formations their distinctive verti-



cal cliff faces and “squared off” blocky shapes. An especially intense east-west zone of jointing at the Dalles allowed subsequent weathering processes to create a right-angle bend in today’s St. Croix River, its location aptly marked by “Angle Rock.” To get a bit ahead of our story, water was the principal agent of erosion creating the current channel: long periods of alternate freezing and thawing of water in the geometric cracks and joints while the basalt was exposed to the atmosphere, and other long periods below the surface of flowing water that poured down the Valley with enormous force as glaciers melted to the north.



*Angle Rock, St. Croix Dalles, 2001. Courtesy Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.*

Missing chapters form a great “unconformity,” a half-billion-year gap in the geologic record leaving little or no remnant on today’s basalt outcrop surfaces. But geologic evidence from other areas tells the story of a long sequence of advancing and retreating seas, of covering by marine deposits and uncovering by erosion of whatever sediments had been deposited on the basalt. That gap in the record ends, for the Dalles area and farther south, about 550 million years ago in “Cambrian” time with the beginning of fossil-bearing sand layers in a shallow,

encroaching sea on top of a weathered and broken up basalt surface of that day. The present day northern extent of these flat-lying sandstone layers, which show prominently in the bluffs above the Lower Park area of Interstate State Park, ends at the basalt dome landform along the south margin of Angel Hill. There, physical evidence can be seen of intermingling between the newly deposited sands and weathered boulders on the ancient basalt surface. Given the name “Mill Street Conglomerate” to that contact. That piece of ancient evidence, clearly marking the “great unconformity,” has drawn generations of naturalists and geologists to view it because, a Minnesota DNR paper reports, “there are only a few exposures in North America” where this unusual type of contact representing so great a time span occurs.

Finally, the most recent chapter occurred. Great torrents of glacial melt water, which had ponded behind the northward retreating continental glaciers, roared southward in several episodes with awesome force. The last of these happened about 11,000 years ago. All the fine details of today’s landforms that mark the present St. Croix Valley and the Dalles were shaped within the past 10,000 to 15,000 years. These landforms, in turn, have had substantial influence on Taylors Falls’ history and development.



*First bridge connection at Taylors Falls, 1865. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

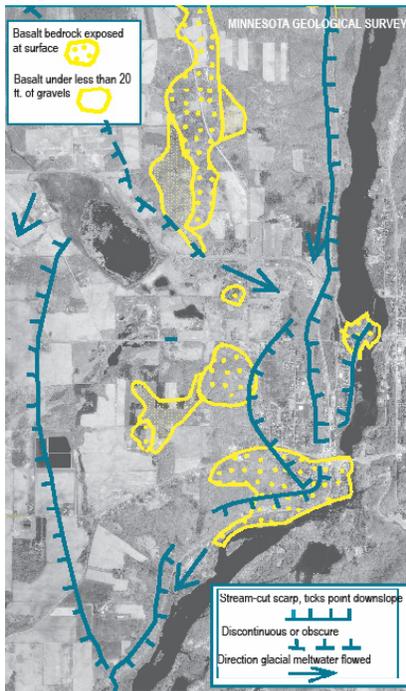
### Impact on settlement and development patterns since the 1700s

While the basalt lava outpourings from a long, narrow rift zone can be traced hundreds of miles from east of Lake Superior southward to Kansas, in terms of today’s bedrock exposure, the Taylors Falls area represents a unique “island” where the basalt bedrock characteristics figure heavily into the landscape. The basalt rock is most dramatically and most scenically exposed today in the near-vertical cliffs and rock formations that line the narrow Dalles gorge, extending upward in places some 80 feet or more above the river surface, and extending vertically downward more than 100 feet below the river level in places. Tourists and visitors have been drawn to see these natural wonders almost since Taylors Falls was founded in the early 1850s, many traveling by steamship up the St. Croix at that time.



*View of the St. Croix Valley from the basalt dome, 1995. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*





Basalt dome bedrock exposures and some landform effects of glacial meltwater river flows in the Taylors Falls area. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.

A north-south trending ridge largely made up of basalt surface outcroppings marks topographic high points that form the west rim of the St. Croix Valley through much of Taylors Falls. The ridge exposes a series of “basalt domes” (which are illustrated in the diagram above).

The westerly dip of basalt layers and the extreme hardness and resistance to ordinary weathering processes has resulted in several relevant landform features:

- ▶ A slightly sawtooth pattern in east-west profile, with riverward edges higher than downward sloping land immediately to the west. This

pattern is clearly relevant to development patterns on the lower and upper “benches” where much of the town was built, but is particularly noticeable toward the north end of the City with more numerous, smaller scale expressions of this effect like that illustrated in the stylized cross section drawing in the figure below.

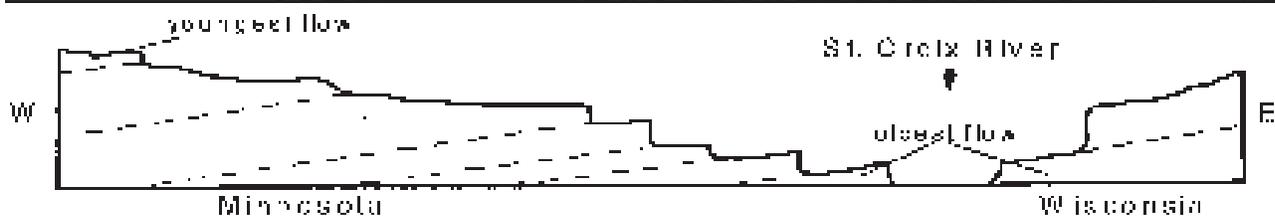
- ▶ This unusual “reverse slope” effect shaped the direction of southward flowing creeks along the upper and lower benches by confining the stream to flow for some distance southward before finding a ravine to plunge downward to the St. Croix River:
  - o The “upper bench” includes Cherry Hill area, Colby Flat, and Angel Hill. On that bench, Spring Creek arises from the

north slope of the hills of Bryant Environmental Lab and flows through the Moberg wetlands and Colby Flat to find its way down to the St. Croix River in an eastward draining ravine along First Street.

- o The “lower bench” includes downtown, the Bench Street neighborhood, and the River Street neighborhood. Cascade Creek arises from springs near the north end of the second bluff above Bench Street, flows southward past today’s Drive-In, and drops east to the river where the water-powered grist mill/ carding mill was located near today’s St. Joseph Church.
- ▶ In the eighteenth century, Spring Creek, as a small tributary flowing into the St. Croix, may well have



View of the second and third bluffs looking west, c. 2004. Courtesy C. W. Nelson



Generalized profile of lava flows in the St. Croix Valley at Interstate State Park. Source: “Surficial Geology of Interstate State Park, Minnesota

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drawn the French trappers from the St. Croix River banks, through the Moberg wetlands, to discover the historic massive beaver dam at the southeast margin of Colby Lake, and to then build some sort of post or encampment near the Cherry Hill area.

- ▶ The basalt dome in Interstate State Park near the south end of Taylors Falls (on the shoulder of which the Angel Hill neighborhood was built) held a number of early residences built directly on the basalt outcrop along the margin of Angel Hill. They could dig no basements or wells of course, but the sites apparently proved serviceable under standards and conditions of the nineteenth century. For some period of time there was a single well (at the Folsom house property) that served a large area on Angel Hill. In the early twentieth century, when City water and sewer lines were developed, other parts of Angel Hill, where layers of river sand and gravel covered the basalt bedrock sufficiently, were amenable to excavation and pipe laying, but the houses built directly on the basalt could not be served. As the more “modern” services became standard in most other Taylors Falls homes, the bedrock houses were gradually abandoned, marked today only by a few found-



*An 1880 House on Bench Street, c. 1980. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

ation stones or other remnants as a reminder they were once here.

The many surface exposures of the layers of basalt also contributed to Taylors Falls’ development story. Several attempts were made to exploit commercial alternatives often associated with basalt as a business investment opportunity. The Taylors Falls area basalt layers are related to other regional occurrences around Lake Superior, whose “mafic” composition, (meaning loaded with heavier, darker minerals carried by the lavas from deep molten sources) is sometimes associated with metals such as nickel, copper, chromium, and even gold. During the 1850s and 1860s, test shafts were dug in search of copper in the basalt dome area near present day City Hall, and along Spring Creek near the St. Croix River. No commercially exploitable deposits were found.

The physical characteristics of basalt—its extreme hardness and durability—have made it attractive for use as ballast, rip-rap, crushed rock, and aggregate for railroad and highway work and other uses. In the early 1900s, a trap rock crushing plant was installed just south of Angel Hill and operations to quarry basalt rock were begun. Protests about the effects of blasting on nearby residences brought an early end to that venture, and the owner relocated to a quarrying site at Dresser, Wisconsin, a quarry operation

which continues to this day.

The fact that great thicknesses of sandstones and related sedimentary rock were deposited over the whole region but erased completely by later periods of erosion only in present day Taylors Falls north of the Dalles, left an accumulation of sandstone surface rock in increasing depth southward from Taylors Falls. That difference in surface rock layers had a significant impact on navigability of the river in historic times. Left in place for the post-settlement history of Taylors Falls were:

- ▶ a zone of resistant basalt bedrock at and near the surface forming rapids in the Dalles area and northward; and,
- ▶ soft, readily eroded sandstones and other sediments forming broad valleys southward from the Dalles.

That geologic happenstance set the northward limit to St. Croix River steamboat traffic at the point where Taylors Falls was developed. Southward from Taylors Falls, the more accommodating river channel made possible smooth passage for large steamboats. During the mid-eighteenth century, the St. Croix River provided the best and most economical highway for



*The “Gracie Kent” at Taylors Falls in 1875. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

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transport of materials and passengers to the upper St. Croix from most other regions. Taylors Falls became a key hub for loggers and lumberjacks heading for and returning from the pineries to the north, for immigrants, many of them Swedes, and other early settlers heading to the Chisago Lakes area and beyond, and for the merchants who supplied



*Log jam on the St. Croix River at Taylors Falls, c. 1865. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

them.

The same geologic circumstances during the recent ice ages that weathered and eroded the intensely fractured east-to-west zone in the Dalles area and formed the unique right-angled bend in the river gorge, also set the stage for the frequent log jams in the nineteenth century, some drawing worldwide press attention to Taylors Falls.

Torrents of southward rushing melt water, subject to its own regimes of cyclically lower and higher water levels (at times the river surface was 200 feet above its current level) had other significant influences on the landforms that helped shape what our predecessors have done, as well what we can do in the post-settlement era. Significant examples include:

- ▶ Parts of the first, second, and even third bluffs were shaped as river-cut banks when the river level was much higher than today, according to geological field survey evidence (The map on page 8 shows some locations of “fossil” river bank edges field surveys have found).
- ▶ A now-vanished alternate (or coexisting) river bed a mile or more west of the present valley appears to have fed a shallow sediment-filled trough in which Colby Lake sits today. Some of the flow continued southeastward, wearing its way over and through a portion of the preexisting north-south basalt ridge to create a slight sediment-covered gap between the present-day basalt dome expression near Angel Hill, east of City Hall, and the basalt dome just south of the Bryant Environmental School Laboratory.
- ▶ The torrent of glacial melt water, pouring through and helping create the high-walled basalt gorge in the Dalles area, formed eddies whose swirling waters spun boulders, rocks and sand to drill the world famous potholes. Those products of glacial water flow were in turn a key basis for the successful efforts near the end of the nineteenth century to protect and preserve the area and its natural wonders as a state park. The potholes, possibly the largest in the world, have been a significant draw for tourists and visitors coming to see these rare natural features.
- ▶ The westward shooting torrents of glacial melt waters, careening out of the right-angle westward jog in the

river channel in the Dalles, sculpted the Cambrian sandstone rock layers that form the river bluff southward from that kink in the river, and carved out a near river-level crescent-shaped flat area. That area provided suitable land for Taylors Falls early “industrial park” (sawmills, boat works, other wood based manufacturing) and, after 1895, land for the lower park area of Minnesota Interstate State Park (campgrounds, picnic grounds, canoe rental, trails).

### Environmental Preservation Efforts

In the 1800s, the threat of mining the St. Croix Dalles prompted leaders from Minnesota and Wisconsin to preserve the Dalles of the St. Croix River. Senator George Hazzard noted in the legislation that created Interstate State Park that this area contained the most picturesque and attractive scenery in the state of Minnesota. Working together, the first interstate (Minnesota and Wisconsin) park in the nation was established. The Minnesota Legislature established the park in 1895; the Wisconsin Legislature followed in 1900.

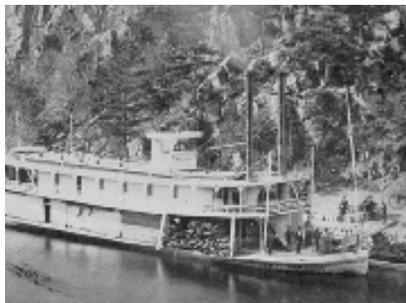


*Canoers on the St. Croix National Wild and Scenic River, 2003. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*



In 1968, Congress created the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1271-1287) in an effort to protect certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. The intention of the law was that these rivers would be preserved in a free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments would be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Upper St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which includes its major tributary, the Namekagon, was established in 1968 as one of the original eight rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, 52 miles of river below the Taylors Falls Dam, was added to the system in 1972. The mission for the Lower St. Croix River was defined to “maintain the outstanding remarkable scenic, recreational and geological resources of the Riverway, while the mission set for the Upper St. Croix River has the wording “maintain and restore.” Taylors Falls is uniquely situated, joining both the Upper and Lower Riverways. Minnesota’s Wild & Scenic Rivers Act was established in 1973 to protect Minnesota’s outstanding river resources, essentially reinforcing at a state level what was happening nationally.



*The “Nellie Kent” at Taylors Falls about 1875. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

## Local History

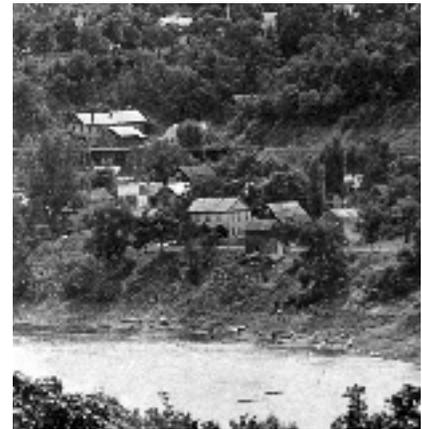
Now well known for its scenic, historic, and recreational assets, Taylors Falls was once known as a prominent river boat and logging community. First established in 1838, at the head of steamboat navigation, Taylors Falls became a vital supplier of provisions and building materials for the inland communities and surrounding logging camps. Taylors Falls was named for one of its earliest settlers, Jesse W. Taylor, and the falls (actually a series of rapids)



*Native American group at Wannigan Point, c. 1876. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

at this point in the St. Croix River.

Prior to 1838, this region was inhabited by the Dakota (Sioux) and Ojibway (Chippewa). Many battles between these two rival groups were fought amidst the cliffs of the Dalles, and the Ojibway were the last to occupy the present site of Taylors Falls. During the early 1700s, the French maintained a fur-trading settlement at what is now Taylors Falls. They first explored the St. Croix River in the early 1680s, and were responsible for the river’s name. The French named the river in honor of a Frenchman by the name of Sainte-Croix, who drowned and was buried at the river’s mouth where it enters the Mississippi River.



*St. Croix River, Bench Street and Angel Hill, c. 1901. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

Although most of the surrounding countryside was settled by Swedish immigrants, the early population of Taylors Falls was mainly of New England heritage. This heritage is reflected in the early architecture of Taylors Falls, much of which has been preserved. About one-third of the structures in Taylors Falls were built over a century ago, with a great many dating back to the 1850s. Most of the older residences are to be found in the historic areas of Bench and River Streets, and the Angel Hill Historic District. In addition, unique 1930s stone buildings in Minnesota Interstate State Park close to downtown Taylors Falls are on the National Historic Register.

Originally known as Government Hill (because the hill was the site of the early Government Road, now West Government Street), the neighborhood later became better known as Angel Hill. It was a derisive term applied by outsiders to the hilltop neighborhood, in the shadow of the Methodist Church, where residents looked askance on the goings-on below as the loggers returned from long winter stays in the north woods. Like the other older sections of town, Angel Hill was settled by people from New England, New York State, and Pennsylvania, who were attracted to the area in the 1850s and 1860s by the vast stands of north-





*Depot Corner, woodcut by Alexander Massey, 1932. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

ern white pine. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Angel Hill neighborhood contains one of the region's most intact collections of relatively unchanged examples of mid-nineteenth century architecture.

### Small Town, Historic Character

Taylors Falls' character is not the result of its natural scenic beauty alone; the small town, historic character of the settlement has become an important aspect of community character. If one could imagine contemporary Taylors Falls without its traffic, a favorable comparison could be made to Taylors Falls in 1900. The character of buildings, the scale of the town, and its compactness are reasonably consistent.

Other features are important, like the traffic impacts on downtown



*Potholes at Interstate State Park, c. 1920s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

and pedestrian movements, the recent growth in population, and the number of tourists that visit the town and Interstate State Park. But if Taylors Falls' small town, historic character is diminished, or the beauty of the St. Croix River Valley is in any way compromised, the significant character of Taylors Falls is lost.

In the early 1900s, Taylors Falls residents planted small gardens in the pothole area of what was to become Interstate State Park. Today, the park is restoring these gardens for visitors to enjoy.

### Local Architecture

The architectural styles are similar to those found in rural New England. In New England, so in Taylors Falls, the predominant style was Greek Revival. Buildings were typically covered with white painted clapboard siding. Each section of double hung window sash was typically divided into six panes of hand-blown glass, the largest pieces of glass economically available at that time. In place of contemporary storm windows, shutters (usually painted green) further protected window openings against weather and sun. Greek Revival doorways, surely one of the distinctive features of even the most modest of early Taylors Falls houses, are identified by glazed sidelights and transoms surrounding the front door. The Gothic Revival style, while popular, was less prevalent in 19th century New England and Taylors Falls. Here,

it most frequently appeared as applied decorative trim around the eaves of otherwise Greek Revival houses. Technically referred to as vergeboards (or bargeboards), such detail is today best known as "gingerbread."

### Development



*Greek Revival architecture, built 1854 (Munch/Roos House), 1994. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

Land use patterns are straightforward, as it should be for a small town. Downtown is nestled along the lower bench above the first bluff, and is limited by Interstate State Park to the south and wetlands to the north. Neighborhoods have evolved north of downtown, and on areas of the upper bench above the second bluff. A few industrial uses exist, but there is no particular concentration of industrial activity, and those that exist have little or no impact on nearby housing. The corporate limits are quite large, with most of the City's land being undeveloped, in agricultural production, or, increasingly, developed as large lot residential uses. In essence, there are constrained areas for growth below the third bluff, and concerns for impacts on viewsheds and the natural environment for areas prominently exposed on river-facing slopes of the third bluff.

There is little extraterritorial growth around Taylors Falls. Nearby communities, particularly St. Croix Falls in Wisconsin, provide many of the





*Development patterns in downtown Taylors Falls, 1990. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

goods and services not available locally. Chisago County's intentions for development in township areas indicate that "urban" development will be directed to cities, and areas outside of cities will be reserved for agriculture and large lot residential uses.

Taylors Falls has a very limited commercial and industrial tax base. Most of the community's economic activity is concentrated in downtown, which is advantageous for a small town. There is no sprawl here. But the lack of commercial and industrial enterprises



*Rural road near Taylors Falls, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

affects the community's ability to provide for the needs of its citizens. While a focus on tourism is warranted, diversification should also be considered.

Two factors play a role in Taylors Falls' attraction for tourists. The combination of Interstate State Park, which highlights the area's natural and scenic qualities, along with the community's proximity to the Twin Cities (easily within an hour of most of the Twin Cities' population), make Taylors Falls a prime day trip. More than 370,000 visitors come to Interstate State Park annually, and other recreational opportunities bring thousands more to the area.

### Traffic

With tourists come traffic, but



*Minnesota Interstate State Park, postcard, c. 1930. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

tourists are not the only reason that the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street is congested. U.S. Highway 8 provides the most direct river crossing for a large area of Minnesota and Wisconsin, and traffic converges on Taylors Falls from a four-lane highway in Wisconsin to a two-lane roadway in Minnesota. The long, steep downhill gradient from Wisconsin encourages higher speeds entering Taylors Falls; in fact, there have been instances where trucks have lost their brakes coming into Taylors Falls; thus so far, without loss of life. A current disparity between gasoline prices in Minnesota and Wisconsin caused primarily by the difference in state gasoline taxes also seems to draw automobile owners to this same congested intersection, where two gas stations are located.

Nearly 15,000 cars per day cross



*Highway 8 entrance to Taylors Falls from St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, 1994. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*



*Holiday traffic on Bench Street, 2001. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

## *A Plan of Conservation and Development*



the bridge at Taylors Falls on a typical July day; more than 5,000 cars per day travel on Bench Street (State Highway 95). The confluence of this traffic is the location of the entry to Interstate State Park, adding congestion to an already busy condition. Tourists often cross this intersection between the park and downtown, resulting in even more conflicts and the potential for serious accidents.

A recent change in U.S. Highway 8 in Wisconsin may result in a positive change in Taylors Falls. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation reduced the speed limit on the highway approaching St. Croix Falls to 45 miles per hour. This change won't eliminate the need for more carefully considering the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street, but the slower speeds are entirely appropriate for the community and landscape context of the highway. Highway traffic noise has been identified as an issue adversely affecting the out-of-doors ambience of the Down-

town and Upper Park public areas that needs to be addressed.

Taylors Falls is a gateway to Minnesota and as such the City's efforts to maintain and improve the quality of the image it conveys to visitors entering Minnesota warrant particular State attention and support.

### Demographics

Taylors Falls has had a relatively steady increase in population since 1980. The most recent census information suggests a continuation of that trend; the 2004 population is 1,043, and the community's population grew by an estimated 37 percent in the last decade. The rapidity and scope of recent outward urban expansion from the Twin Cities metropolitan center spells growing pressures for Taylors Falls in the near-term future, as proposals for large residential developments are extended to our doorstep. An indication of recent momentum can be seen in a comparison of current and recent

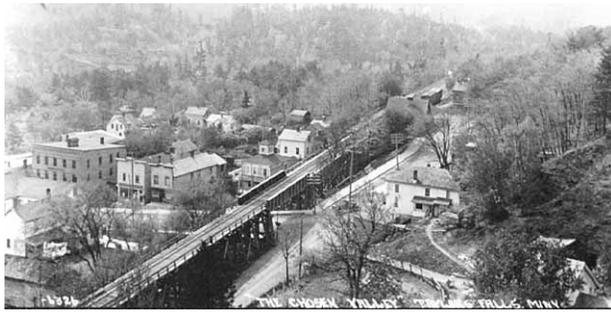
years' maps shown in successive annual Parade of Homes brochures.

Ultimately, the implications of this growth could be significant: if people continue to seek to move to Taylors Falls and the immediately surrounding countryside. Uncontrolled development of new housing, or development that fails to recognize local character, could adversely impact the natural resources that are the attraction for tourists and "quality-of-life" amenities for residents.



*Kabbakong Cemetery—established in 1855. As translated from the Ojibway, the name means “Falls” Cemetery. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey, 2004*





Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.

## Chapter Four Goals

*A comprehensive plan* is, at its core, a body of policy used to guide the evolution of a community. While many communities place a strong emphasis on growth and development, our plan seeks greater balance between the ideas of development and conservation. It's wise to define these terms, but dictionary definitions may not do justice to our cause.

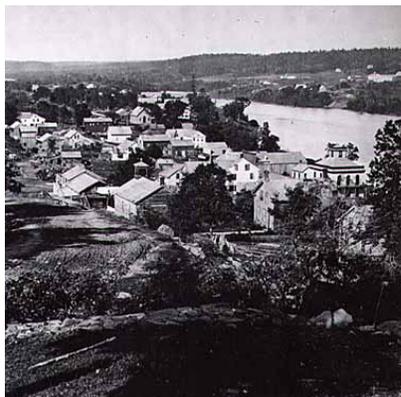
Development, in the world of community planning, is a term most often applied to the process of creating new residential, commercial or industrial uses on land otherwise unencumbered by more intensive human activity. The problem is that it often disregards the appropriateness of land for development; the capacity of the land to support development if it is appropriate; modern construction methods allow just about any piece of land to somehow support any kind of use. But in Taylors Falls, we believe the intrinsic qualities of the land offer a suggestion about what the best land use might be. Most significantly, in Taylors Falls, land in cultivation or land in its natural state is a reasonable use of the land: in fact, those uses might be the most suitable development for that ground.

While development is a common term in plans like these, conservation is rare. Aldo Leopold, an internationally noted scientist and conservationist, suggests this definition of conservation:

When the land does well for its owner and the owner does well by his land—when both end up better by reason of their partnership, then we have conservation. When one or the other grows poorer, either in substance, or in character, or in responsiveness to sun, wind, and rain, then we have something else, and it is something we do not like.

*Aldo Leopold, The Farmer as a Conservationist, 1939 speech*

Our plan of conservation and development focuses first on a set of goals which we have defined as being important to the qualities of our community. Each goal is supported by a series of policies, which demonstrate how the goal might be best implemented in Taylors Falls. For the community's planning efforts, these goals directly impact our ability to move toward our vision and, when coupled with the translation of this plan into a map, they constitute definitive directions for important parts of our community.



*Taylors Falls and St. Croix River, view northward from Government Street, 1869. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

### 1.0 A place of balance...

Taylors Falls is not an artifact. It's not a museum. It's a place that is changing, just as it's been evolving for eons. Now, we can look down the road and see change coming. But we desire change on our terms: we want development that fits the unique qualities of this place, development that doesn't compromise the character of our town or our history. We believe that it is possible to accommodate development without harming our place. Therefore, it is our goal to:

*A Plan of Conservation and Development*





*Paddlewheelers on the St. Croix River, 1947. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

Balance development opportunities with the need for conserving Taylors Falls' small town historic character and its great natural scenic beauty.

To support our goal for balance as we consider the future patterns of our community, we establish the following policies:

*General Development*

- 1.1 Maintain, through this plan and its derivative ordinances and procedures, Taylors Falls' small town historic character and its natural scenic beauty for the benefit of the community and for future generations.
- 1.2 Organize development in Taylors Falls to fall into three zones:
  - ▶ a "River" zone, where only limited development would occur, and where it does, it would respect fully the primeval forces that shaped the St. Croix River Valley and the unique natural heritage we enjoy as a result;
  - ▶ a "Small Town" zone, where the landscape has been shaped through time into patterns and features that are recognizably human, and where impacts on the landscape have resulted in cherished histori-

cal and cultural resources, and will continue to do so in the future; and,

- ▶ a "Countryside" zone, where human activity may impact the landscape, but only with a great sense of stewardship, and where neighborhoods would be formed based on a sense of connection to the land and a sense of community.

- 1.3 Preclude new development where it may compromise Taylors Falls' small town historic character, its natural scenic beauty, the patterns of animal or water migration, the function of natural systems on the landscape, air or water quality, or low ambient night-time light and noise levels at all times.
- 1.4 Apply the same zones (River, Small Town, and Countryside) to future expansions of the City as a way of perpetuating Taylors Falls small town historic character and natural scenic beauty.
- 1.5 Limit development requiring centralized sewer and water service to the Small Town zone, a portion of the Countryside zone (as established in the June 9, 2003 Trunk Sewer and Trunk Water Main Area Fee Ordinance), areas in the Countryside zone that if developed would utilize an Open Space Design technique or other

City approved methods, and not scattered through otherwise undeveloped parts of the community.

- 1.6 Reserve lands amounting to 40 to 80 acres for the creation of a "high tech" industrial park in the portion of the Countryside zone served by municipal sewer and water. Arrange activities in this area to reflect and respect the character of the landscape in the Countryside zone, with an emphasis on open space and vegetation.
- 1.7 Encourage conservation design practices for new residential development projects in the Countryside zone and River zone, using methods such as Conservation Design (Open Space Design) requirements to balance higher density built-area development with preservation of significant landscape features, natural amenities or visual quality features as permanent common or public open space comprising a majority of the land on each project site as a whole. Overall site density for projects using conservation design models should be sufficiently greater than standard underlying maximum unit densities for the zone in question in order to provide incentives to developers to make conservation design models a more attractive alternative than conventional small lot platting.
- 1.8 Identify significant natural features (such as mature trees, forests and woodlands; steep slopes and bluffs; wetlands, streams, shoreline areas



*Strollers on River Street, c. 1910s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*



and other surface water features; significant biodiversity areas; rock outcroppings and other geologic features; and other features that characterize the natural environment unique to Taylors Falls), environmentally sensitive sites, and preferred areas for future community trails and parks that warrant being classified as special preservation areas and designated as priority sending areas. Consider density bonus system where determined appropriate. A density bonus would allow the developer a specified increase in permissible total number of units and would serve as an instrument to compensate landowners in designated preservation areas via private markets, reduce future public acquisition costs for such preferred sites from which development rights have been sold, and enhance incentives for developer use of conservation design projects.

*Character*



*Basil Street, c. 1865. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society, S.S. Hamilton photograph.*

1.9 Require proposals for development to demonstrate that their design, organization, placement, and appearance will be compatible with the community's small town historic character and natural scenic beauty. Request prospective developers to provide three-dimensional depictions of the proposal from public and private viewpoints

to aid in the review of such proposals.

- 1.10 Encourage the preservation of agricultural uses, particularly in the Countryside zone, because they form a key part of Taylors Falls' character.
- 1.11 Encourage rehabilitation or remediation of elements, in both the public and private realm, which are considered by the community to be incongruous with its desire to maintain its small town historic character and its natural scenic beauty.
- 1.12 Support patterns of land use and development that allow all generations of Taylors Falls residents to live healthy, dignified lives with the spirit of a caring small town.
- 1.13 Seek an equitable balance between individual property owner rights and the needs and rights of the public, including neighboring property owners, in land use decisions. If the rights of a property owner are subordinated, that should only occur when a clear and obvious public benefit has been identified, and fair compensation for any resultant loss of property value has been established.

*Walkability*

1.14 Walkability is essential to small



*River Street walker, c. 1920s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

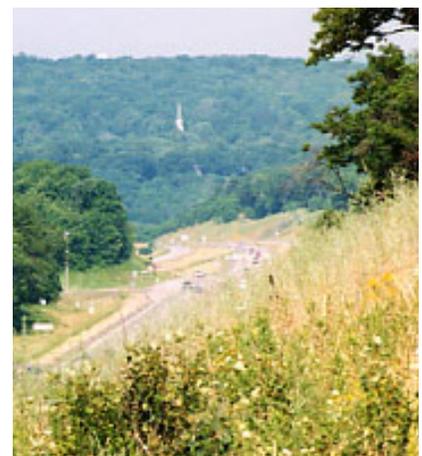
town character and should be determined by the Parks and Trails Master Plan developed by the Park and Recreation Commission.

1.15 Consider pedestrian ways and non-motorized trails to be equally as important as other more traditional elements of community infrastructure.

*Economics*

1.16 Require analysis of capital and operating costs to the City of new developments and any related fiscal impacts during the evaluation of proposal, and invite the school district and county to comment on development proposals and analyze impacts to their facilities. No project should be approved that does not pay its appropriate share of increased public service needs or capital expenditures related to implementation. Although difficult to quantify in economic terms, the City should weigh the impacts of development on the unique character of Taylors Falls, in particular its small town historic character and its natural scenic beauty. The City should recognize that this analysis may, at times, be the determining factor in the decision to approve or disapprove a proposal. In some circumstances, a professional consulting analysis, funded by the development proponent, may be in our community's interest.

1.17 Encourage development subsidized



*Taylors Falls, the bluffs and the Lutheran Church steeple, 2004. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*



through use of public economic or other incentives only when the community derives a significant public benefit from the development, and only when the proposed development coincides with the patterns and policies outlined in this plan of conservation and development.

*Stewardship*

1.18 Honor Taylors Falls' role of stewardship of the St. Croix River as a National Wild and Scenic River through action in particular to:

- ▶ conform to federal and state legislation that mandate land use rules as a part of the Riverway District;
- ▶ extend viewshed protection of the St. Croix Valley, outside of the Riverway District and sympathetic to the goals of the legislation and the Lower and Upper St. Croix Management Plans;
- ▶ establish a policy to protect the scenic integrity of the St. Croix Valley and preserve the natural appearance of the Valley facing slopes and lands that represent the scenic views.
- ▶ recognize the standards established by other jurisdictions, particularly the rules establishing definitions and development restrictions for slope preservation zones, bluff lines, and bluff line setbacks, to



*Street and sidewalk in Angel Hill, 2004. Photograph taken as a part of the Community Photograph Survey.*



*Colby Flat farm fields on the upper bench, 1916. Courtesy Carol Lynn Lyttle.*

create consistent conservation and preservation standards for areas along and adjacent to the St. Croix River.

neighborhoods that are fulfilling for their inhabitants, we establish the following policies:

*“Small Town” Neighborhoods*

2.0 Neighborhoods...

We see great value in the kind of neighborhood pattern we see in Angel Hill. It exudes the very real charm of our community, and it has truly stood the test of time: it may be even more valued today than it was when it was founded. It is a place that feels like a neighborhood, a place to raise children, and a place to grow old. We see neighborhoods in other places that have none of this kind of character; we see them in towns near Taylors Falls, and we know that these are not the kinds of places that will fulfill the lives of people who seek Taylors Falls as a home.

Therefore, it is our goal to:

Create neighborhoods as living places that reflect small town historic character, that become an integral part of Taylors Falls' scenic beauty, and that form a real sense of community through their design, orientation, and connection, without regard to density or location.

To support our goal for creating

2.1 Develop, in the “Small Town” zone, residential uses as neighborhoods that complement existing residential areas near downtown, especially with the kinds of architectural and visual quality found in Angel Hill.

2.2 Include, in residential uses in the “Small Town” zone, any combination of dwelling types arranged in compatible layouts and connected to municipal urban services. The primary architectural form of all dwellings in the “Small Town” zone should be reflective of a single family dwelling.

2.3 Expand municipal sewer and water services only to serve new residential developments within the “Small Town” zone and portions of the Countryside zone. The portions of the Countryside Zone where these services are appropriate are areas that if developed, utilize an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods, and the “Near Countryside” Zone. Please refer to the map on page 28 to identify the boundaries of this area.



### *River and Countryside Neighborhoods*

- 2.4 Employ, in residential uses in the “River” and “Countryside” zones, clusters of homes focused on a neighborhood-centered amenity, with each dwelling provided with direct physical and uninterrupted visual connections to the landscape in which it is located, and resulting in the preservation of a minimum of forty percent of the site’s developable land area as wooded or open natural landscape, the continuation of agricultural uses, passive recreational uses, and active recreational uses as approved by the City.
- 2.5 Arrange clusters on adjacent projects to result in a sense of connected open space, with preference to open space arrangements that preserve significant natural features, and spaces that preserve routes of water and wildlife migration.
- 2.6 Include, in residential uses in the “River” and “Countryside” zones, any combination of dwelling types arranged in compatible layouts, with water and wastewater services connected to municipal sewer and water or provided on site. The use of constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment may be allowed as an alternative to municipal sewer. Dwelling units should be oriented to a common open space feature. The primary architectural form of all dwellings should be reflective



*View southward along Bench Street, 1907. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

of a single family dwelling, or local examples of agricultural buildings in the “Countryside” zone, and of a single family dwelling, or forms and materials, consistent with the more natural setting in the “River” zone.

### *Character*

- 2.7 Require the front door to be the primary feature visible from the street for residential uses in all zones. Sidewalk connections should be made from the front entry of the dwelling unit to the nearest public street or public walkway.
- 2.8 Provide access to residential uses in all zones via publicly accessible streets and public walkways. There should be no “gated” neighborhoods in Taylors Falls (a development where access is controlled with fences, monitored gates, or gates accessed with key codes, proximity readers or remote controls).
- 2.9 The character of front yards, in any zone, should be as a transition from public to private space. The view to the primary structure should not be obscured by fencing or introduced plantings in an area forward of the principal façade of the primary structure.

### *Infrastructure*

- 2.10 Design streets in the “Small Town” zone to the scale of the development, with accommodations made for on-street parking on at least one side of the street, boulevard trees on both sides of the street, and public sidewalks on at least one side of the street. Streets in areas of residential use in the “Small Town” should be as narrow as possible, keeping focus on the character of buildings, homes and yards. These streets should be paved with hard surface paving, and should utilize concrete curb

and gutter, except where the use of curb and gutter conflicts with the historic integrity of the area.

- 2.11 Design streets in the “River” and “Countryside” zones to the scale of the development, with accommodations made for on-street parking on at least one side of the street, and public sidewalks or trails on at least one side of the street. Streets in areas of residential use in the “River” and “Countryside” zones should be narrow to keep focus on the natural character of these zones.
- 2.12 Connect all residential areas of the City with routes that provide safe passage for pedestrians and bicycles between the residential area and the river, parks, schools, downtown, and other significant community destinations.

### 3.0 Downtown...

In many ways, our downtown is as much a spiritual center of our community as its natural setting. It has strived to serve the needs of Taylors Falls residents since the days of logging and steamboats. Contemporary commercial development threatens the vitality of what we have, either by supplanting existing businesses with new development at the periphery of the community, or by failing to recognize how it fits into our lives as Taylors Falls residents. Therefore, it is our goal to:



*Downtown Taylors Falls, 1985. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*



Limit commercial development in and around Taylors Falls to the existing downtown area or a logical expansion of the existing downtown, with a focus on serving local needs, architectural and site development appropriate to this community, and mobility for pedestrians.

To support our goal for focusing commercial activity in our historic downtown, we establish the following policies:

*Bench Street District*

- 3.1 Concentrate commercial development in a single, pedestrian-oriented district focused on Bench Street and extending a distance no greater than a five minute walk from the center of the district.
- 3.2 Mix uses in the district, with vertical mixed use developments encouraged, especially where residential uses would occupy the upper floor(s) of a commercial structure.

*Character*

- 3.3 Focus the aesthetics of development on the historic patterns and qualities of downtown, without preference to or mimicking a particular existing architectural style,



*Downtown Taylors Falls and the St. Croix River Valley, 2004. Courtesy Wade Vitalis.*



*Taylors Falls Library, a historic structure, and Coffee Talk, a residential structure converted to commercial use, 1995. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

- unless the design and construction of the development will utilize design details and construction methods authentic to the architectural style. New development should be sympathetic to historic styles, reflecting a design, materials, and construction methods of their time and use, with an orientation to quality and durability. Building sizes, in terms of footprint and bulk, should be compatible with nearby development.
- 3.4 Reflect Downtown’s historic character and visual quality in non-residential structures in Downtown, especially in terms of a building’s architecture, including placement, scale, mass, fenestration, detail, color, and signage.
- 3.5 Provide pedestrian orientation and architectural treatments for Bench Street and River Street facades of commercial structures.
- 3.6 Limit the re-conversion to residential use of a structure that has been converted to commercial use to a dwelling occupied by no more than two families.

*Infrastructure*

- 3.7 Maintain street parking in downtown to the greatest degree possible; encourage joint-use parking in off-street parking.

- 3.8 Connect Downtown to surrounding residential areas and local destinations via pedestrian and bicycle facilities in addition to roads and streets. Public walkways should be located on both sides of downtown streets and designed to encourage pedestrian activity and mobility.

*Economics*

- 3.9 Encourage businesses in downtown as local enterprises, owned and operated by people from Taylors Falls and immediately surrounding communities. The City should encourage downtown property owners and business owners to live in the community.
- 3.10 Give preference, when considering development incentives or assistance, to those proposals that support a community purpose.

4.0 Commerce...

Ours is a small town with an environment that is, in many ways, sensitive to the kinds of industrial development we see in other places. At the same time, we recognize that our community benefits from the creation of opportunities for employment. But it needs to happen in ways that will not compromise the greater good we derive from this special place. Therefore, it is



our goal to:

Promote growth in our local employment base by encouraging businesses that are “high tech” and “high touch” (those activities requiring greater skill in their trade), and to integrate those uses with a “light touch” into the patterns of the Taylors Falls community and its landscape.

To support our goal for growing employment opportunities that only lightly touch the environment, we establish the following policies:

#### *Location*

4.1 Make available an area for employment uses in a location that is within a reasonable walking and bicycling distance of downtown, and then ensure safe routes exist for those connections. A 40 to 80 acre site in the Countryside zone served by municipal sewer and water is preferred.

#### *Economics*

4.2 Work to expand our local employment base. Preference for business

and commercial development should be for those uses and activities that offer high technology jobs, those that employ people with unique skills, crafts, or trades, and governmental facilities, particularly those with missions related to our natural environment.

#### *Character*

4.3 Design and organize development to fit the natural patterns of the land and incorporate features that reflect the native and natural landscape of Taylors Falls. Development should utilize best practices available to create low impact development patterns that share infrastructure, including parking and service drives. Development should be designed and placed to limit the need for noise or visual mitigation with surrounding uses. On-site wastewater treatment systems may be an alternative to municipal sewer services, as long as such system is appropriate for the planned use and the land characteristics (topography, soils, etc.) can support this type of system.

4.4 Strong preference should be given to the concept of a fully landscaped business park, where emphasis is placed on environmentally sensitive and compatible businesses and operations.

#### *Infrastructure*

4.5 Encourage a state-of-the-art communications and data infrastructure that is supportive of the kinds of uses and activities desired for this district and eventually reaching all part of our community.

#### 5.0 Intrinsic character...

We can never replace what nature has provided us, nor can it be suitably replicated or mitigated with development. It is better, we believe, to work with our great natural assets, shape development to rest lightly upon the land, and preserve those features from which its real character springs. Therefore, it is our goal to:

Ensure that unique or notable features become the “building blocks” of the community by limiting development near significant intrinsic features, or sensitively integrating those elements into the patterns of development.

To support our goal for maintaining the integrity of intrinsic features of our community, we establish the following policies:

#### *Preservation, conservation and protection*

5.1 Require that developers perform an inventory of significant intrinsic features of the development site (such as mature trees, forests and woodlands; steep slopes and bluffs; wetlands, streams, shoreline areas and other surface water features; significant biodiversity areas; rock outcroppings and other geologic features; and other features that characterize the natural environment unique to Taylors Falls; as



*Aerial view of Taylors Falls and the St. Croix River Valley with Highway 95 north from the community completed, c. 1950s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*



well as historic features characteristic of the community), as well as any off-site features that may be impacted by the proposed development. Development plans should demonstrate the methods feasible to the developer of avoiding negative impacts to those features deemed by City to be central to Taylors Falls small-town historic character and natural scenic beauty, or in the case of impacts to these features, propose and implement mitigation measures acceptable to the City.

- 5.2 Preserve the natural tree-cloaked appearance and scenic beauty of the St. Croix Valley viewed as our community's major legacy to future generations.
- 5.3 Recognize our obligation, and the obligation of developers and the projects they propose, to protect the water quality of the St. Croix River, noted nationally as one of best major rivers in terms of quality. Bluff slope and bluff setback preservation, protection of vegetation, requirements that new developments provide natural runoff control, and other requirements for land development in sensitive areas should ensure water flowing into the St. Croix River is at least as clean after development as before. To ensure continuity in water quality flowing through Taylors Falls, the City should seek inter-jurisdictional agreements

aimed at controlling the water quality in those water features.

- 5.4 Consider, as development proposals are brought to the City for review, some of the currently undeveloped bluff edge land for acquisition as City park, park preserve lands, and future trails and pathways.
- 5.5 Recognize the environmental qualities of significant wetland areas and effect special protection or conservation measures for areas such as the Moberg wetlands in the area bounded by West Street, Maple Street, Chestnut Street and Walnut Street, and Colby Lake, which lies outside of, but adjacent to, the current corporate limits of the City.
- 5.6 Recognize the major occurrences of basalt dome outcroppings as significant, natural resource areas complementing and helping explain the key features of the City's geological history already protected and accessible to the public in the Dalles area along the river, and take steps to limit development in these areas or shape development in ways that preserve the incidence and expression of the resource.

*Scenic Byway*

- 5.7 Recognize the 2004 designation of Highway 95/Highway 16 through Taylors Falls and beyond as a Minnesota Scenic Byway and take into account the objectives of the state



*Folsom House, c. 1970. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

designation in zoning, signage, and development rules. Should the local byway organization decide to pursue nomination of the byway as a National Scenic Byway, the City should support the nomination and designation in accordance with a corridor management plan that aligns with the vision, policies, and goals of this comprehensive plan.

*Economics*

- 5.8 Consider alternatives for funding the public acquisition of critical conservation areas, lots or parcels in those cases necessary for environmental, scenic, or public amenity goals.
- 5.9 Encourage landowners and developers to preserve areas of land that are environmentally and scenically significant by using conservation easement or other methods of private conservation.



*Basalt outcroppings in Minnesota Interstate State Park and the scenic St. Croix River Valley, c. 1995. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*



6.0 A legacy received... and passed on...

We recognize that a significant part of our community's character and pride is derived from its history, and that this is truly a legacy that we have received, and that it is our obligation to pass it on. Therefore, it is our goal to:

Encourage the preservation, protection, perpetuation, and use of the areas, places, buildings, structures, and other objects having a special historical, community or aesthetic interest or value; and in newly forming areas or elements of the community, to encourage their design and development so that they become worthy of preservation, protection, perpetuation and use as they age.

To support our goal for maintaining our special place and for perpetuating opportunities for creating new special features for our community, we establish the following policies:

*Compatibility in new development*

6.1 Recognize that a small town has buildings from all eras of its development, that these buildings share a type of construction, scale, and design vocabulary that enables them to form a compatible ensemble. Insist that new



*Old Trusty at the Taylors Falls Depot, 1915. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

development continue this pattern in compatibility in scale, massing, siting, and materials, while obviously being an admirable example of contemporary design.

*Preservation, conservation and protection*

- 6.2 Safeguard the heritage of Taylors Falls by designating the sites and districts that reflect significant components of the community's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history.
- 6.3 Protect, promote, and enhance, where possible, the community's historical and cultural features for the enjoyment and education of residents and guests, and as a stimulus to an economy based, in part, on the attraction of those

6.4 Encourage the recognition that a place-specific built environment is analogous with small town historic character, that the design and arrangement of buildings matter, and that certain types of development better support the type of small town social environment desired in Taylors Falls.

6.5 Require excellence in design and construction with the intent of adding properties to the community that might become designated heritage preservation sites in the future.

*Elements*

- 6.6 Recommend that the Heritage Preservation Commission explore new models for their work and demonstrate the significance of components of the community, such as the night sky and views, and develop new ways to encourage their preservation.
- 6.7 Extend to the Heritage Preservation Commission the ability to comment officially on proposals for development and the impacts that such development would have on recognized historic features and the long term historic character of the community.

7.0 Community...



*Bench Street, c. 1960. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*



Taylors Falls is not just a collection of historic buildings or the unique beauty of the St. Croix River Valley. It's the way we live here. We seek ways of creating a fulfilling life for residents, ways that allow them to embrace the qualities of our community, and ways that allow for the needed services and facilities to be maintained and improved over time. Therefore, it is our goal to:

**Provide public services and facilities that support Taylors Falls' small town historic character and great natural scenic beauty.**

To support our goal for creating a community that serves the needs of its citizens, we establish the following policies:

#### *Infrastructure*

- 7.1 Provide, where physically and economically feasible, municipal sewer and water service in the "Small Town" zone, the Near Countryside subzone, and areas in the Countryside zone that if developed, utilize an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods. Support alternative methods of providing these services to areas beyond the "Small Town" zone only where their construction and use will not degrade the community's small town historic character or its natural scenic beauty.
- 7.2 Develop a transportation infrastructure for Taylors Falls, recognizing that walking and bicycling are important transportation modes for the community.
- 7.3 Provide a transportation infrastructure that serves pedestrians and bicyclists, not just drivers. Altern-



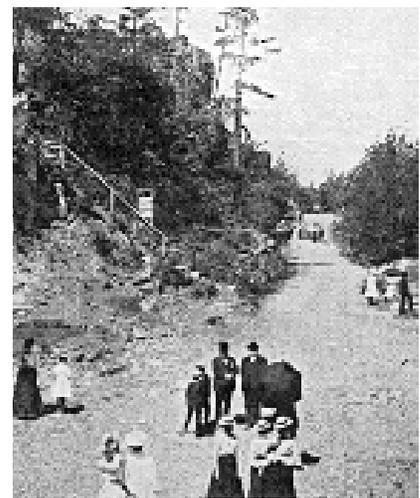
*Lions Park, 2004. Photograph taken as a part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

tive modes may be accommodated on streets or off-street trails, and they should be planned to provide connections between residential areas and other significant community destinations as "safe routes" for users of all ages and abilities.

- 7.4 Promote transportation infrastructure that best exemplifies Taylors Falls small town historic character and its natural scenic beauty, focusing particularly on the ability to comprehend these features at pedestrian speeds and scales.

#### *Public space*

- 7.5 Provide parks, recreation facilities, and other public facilities in locations that are accessible and visible to the community, with an emphasis on providing safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists. These facilities, in aggregate, should accommodate a full range of active and passive uses for the benefit of the community, allowing each facility to be developed in ways that are most sensitive to its immediate environment and surrounding neighborhoods. The City should maintain its investment in these facilities, particularly for those facilities that are central to the community's small town historic character and natural scenic beauty.
- 7.6 Focus each neighborhood on a park, historic element or natural feature, with each such area being developed as a publicly accessible space with facilities that support its use by the community. The City should encourage a park system that is well distributed and well-connected through the community.



*Minnesota Interstate State Park, postcard, 1900. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

- 7.7 Encourage the connection of a local trail network with trails and paths in the two Interstate State Parks and Bryant Environmental School Laboratory.
- 7.8 Explore mutually beneficial opportunities between the City and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for a coordinated expansion of City Parks, particularly for expansions that would help to preserve significant natural resources and scenic areas for the benefit of the community and the people of Minnesota.
- 7.9 Establish park dedication requirements consistent with the desire to obtain lands for public park use and to develop them in a manner that encourages public enjoyment of those park resources.

#### *Community services*

- 7.10 Provide police and fire protection to residents and businesses in all parts of the community. The City should encourage development that affords a high degree of safety in the design and organization of the site, the arrangement and design of buildings on the site, and the relationship of the development to adjacent and nearby properties.





Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

## Chapter Five Scale

*If we begin with the notion* of Taylors Falls as a small town, the question of scale needs first to be resolved. Is there a size beyond which Taylors Falls will no longer be small? To be sure, part of the answer is best addressed in the minds and attitudes of the people of the community. A threshold might be crossed when they no longer recognize their neighbors as they stroll the community, or when their children no longer are able to play in their yards or parks without their parents fearing for their safety, or when their birthdays are no longer published in the town calendar. But, is it possible to assign an actual dimension to the size of a small town?

In fact, a small town might be thought of as being historic, close to nature, with a small town feel. While the geographic size of Taylors Falls is measured in absolute terms by considering its legal boundary, it is important that we consider the experiential size of the community. There are several methods for measuring the scale of the community.

For the purposes of providing direction for scale of the City we consider:

Walkability is essential to small town character and should be determined by the Parks and Trails Master Plan and City's sidewalk system. Implementing the trail plan included in the Parks and Trails Master Plan incorporates all future land use zones and reaches of corporate city limits, while providing connections needed to facilitate a pedestrian-friendly environment. Neighborhoods should be connected to improve walkability.

A well-planned, efficient, and fiscally sound community will be derived from considering scale in development proposals. The location of development proposals and



*Rural road near Taylors Falls, absent pedestrian or bicycle accommodation, 2004. Photograph A Plan of Conservation and Development*



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how infrastructure is utilized should influence land use decisions.

The Future Land Use Map on Page 28 and Chapter 6 of the Plan establishes future land use patterns. These patterns provide guidance for the scale of the community.





Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

## Chapter Six Patterns

### *If we begin with the experience*

a person might have in our community, there are three broad patterns that can happen in Taylors Falls, and they break with the modern traditions of planning. This plan orients to the notion that real community results from a connection with the place and the past, and that to move forward, new patterns must be defined that allow for both development and conservation. The patterns of this plan are not based on use, but rather on their intrinsic character and their capacity to support development. By focusing on the river, the small town, and the countryside, the landscape features of the St. Croix Valley and the town of Taylors Falls might maintain a sense of connection to nature and small town.

#### ► River

The St. Croix River, the streams, coulees, ravines, wetlands, backwaters, the basalt dome; where only very limited development would occur, and when it does, it would respect fully the primeval forces that shaped the St. Croix River Valley. The River zone, in essence, includes the three bluffs wherever their aspect faces the direction of the St. Croix River Valley. The River zone is the “face” of Taylors Falls viewed from the other side of the Valley along horizontal sight lines and it appears as a unified wooded slope, though it actually consists of three narrow, steep bluff areas separated by the two developed “benches.” Structures penetrating the wooded canopy of

this Valley face occur mainly in the downtown, where they appropriately and visibly reflect the small town historic character of the com-

munity, and in very limited cases elsewhere, such as church steeples and the City water tank, which are still consistent with that character.



*The Dalles of the St. Croix, 2004. Photograph taken as a part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

*A Plan of Conservation and Development*



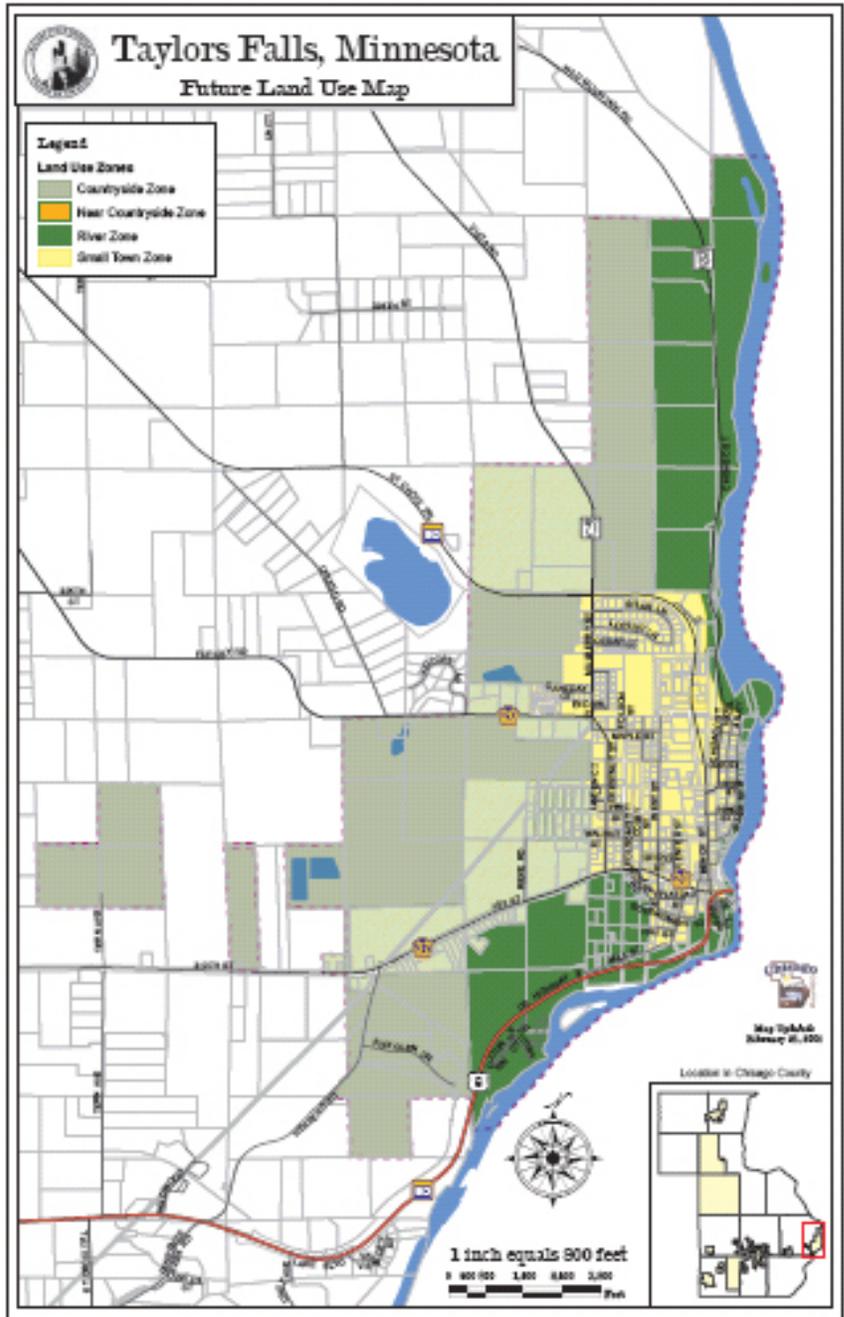
► **Small Town**

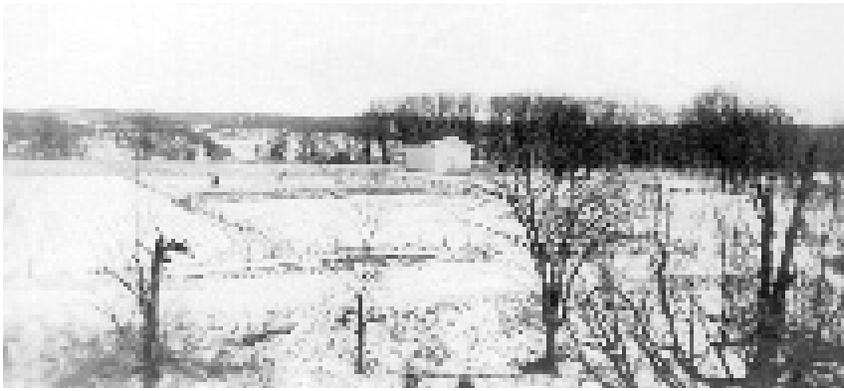
Downtown, Angel Hill, and other neighborhoods; where the landscape has been shaped through time into patterns and features that are recognizably human; and where human impacts on the land have resulted in cherished historic and cultural resources, and will continue to do so in the future. The Small Town zone occupies the two relatively level benches and so, in plan view, consists of two separate areas divided by the second bluff. Because of their relative flatness, both locations were inviting locations to begin town development, and both levels were actively built upon from the 1850s on. In fact, most of the early building on the upper bench concentrated at the south end, in and around Angel Hill, through which was routed the 1853 Military Road to the downtown.



*Taylor's Falls viewed from Angel Hill, c. 1869. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

*River, Small Town, and Countryside zones defined for Taylor's Falls. These patterns aim to preserve the qualities so valued by the people of Taylor's Falls as it evolves as a community. The dotted area indicates areas of the Near Countryside subzone where municipal services might be extended, given development practices that embrace other goals of the Countryside zone*





*Farm fields, rolling topography and woods near Colby Flat, typical of the Countryside zone, 1916. Courtesy Carol Lynn Lytle.*

► **Countryside**

The old fields and wooded areas, a handful of farms and farmsteads; where human activity impacts the land, but with a great sense of environmental balance; where neighborhoods would form based on a sense of connection to the land and to a community. The Countryside zone is the remaining land area not directly included in the River Zone or the Small Town Zone. It lies mainly to the north of the Small Town zone (defined in terms of walking distance from downtown on both upper and lower benches) and to the west of the upper (third) bluff line, a bluff line defined by a basalt dome ridge that marks the western rim of the St. Croix Valley. To the north, particularly north of Minnesota Highway 95 and Kahbakong Cemetery, the upper bench appears only as limited fingers of land between a sequence of deep ravines open eastward to the St. Croix, and so is closely intermingled with, and in places dominated by, the River zone. To the west of the basalt dome ridge, much of the land in the Countryside zone slopes away from the River Valley and toward the Lawrence Creek drainage, which reaches the St. Croix River through the old town of Franconia.

It's probably fair to frame a fourth zone that occupies the southerly end of Taylors Falls, namely Minnesota Interstate State Park. It stands on its own, not because of its geologic or natural context, but because it will be defined by a different set of rules about development, rules established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

**River**

**Conservation**

It is not the River alone, but also those features of the Taylors Falls landscape that would have formed during the same time and by the same



*Bluff washout at Walnut Street, 1879. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

*A Plan of Conservation and Development*



processes that created the river. It is a landscape that is, essentially, ageless; we have an extraordinary need to both embrace its qualities and exercise great care as we introduce human activities. Here, development has the potential of harming the very landscape that we hold so dear, but that does not mean that development should not happen here. In order to maintain the qualities of this "district," the use of conservation design development approaches and special viewshed and slope protection rules are critically important:

► *Tree preservation*

A view of the Valley not only reveals the dramatic topography and basalt outcroppings, but a series of hillsides covered with trees. Maintaining this green mantle of trees is critically important in the River zone, where these trees offer habitat, runoff filtration and soil protection, and great scenic beauty.

► *Bluff protection*

In some areas, the bluffs of the St. Croix are formed of erodible gravels, while in others the bluffs are composed on ageless basalt; the bluffs can be quite sensitive to development. But from a river view, the bluffs can offer a sense of being in wilderness, remote from civilization even as one is a short drive from a major metropolitan area. Development encroaching on the bluffs can quickly change the quality of the river experience, and the National Park Service recognizes this in their regulations for development in the Wild and Scenic River zone. In either case, the bluffs of the River zone are worthy of our protection efforts.

► *Stream and wetland protection*

The River district is not just the St. Croix. Water bodies in the River district provide habitat for a variety of species, and as tributaries to the



*St. Croix River and landscape, typical of the River zone, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

St. Croix River, the quality of their water is critical. Development that reaches too close may cause excessive erosion, carry more unfiltered runoff, or intrude unduly upon wildlife that relies upon the water bodies for habitat or migration. It seems that the health of these systems bears directly upon the health of our community, and the continued presence of vital streams and wetlands in the River zone will continue to be one of our priorities.

▶ *Viewshed protection*

Our experience in Taylors Falls is built first upon what we see, be it the dramatic beauty of the Valley or the intimate scale of our town. Over time, our experience broadens to include less tangible features of the community, like the individual character of our buildings or the history of our existence here. But it begins with what is seen, and we are obligated to act as stewards of these views in the River zone so that they are maintained for future generations of residents and visitors.

In order to protect views, a viewshed analysis should be submitted by the developer as a part of a site plan review process. The analysis should document in photographs views of bluffs from vantage points

in St. Croix Falls and Taylors Falls, in both public and private areas. The City of Taylors Falls should also prepare a baseline viewshed analysis, using sites and vantage points that will demonstrate the current character of key views and viewsheds. If a proposal for development alters the visual quality of a view or viewshed, the proposal for development should indicate remedial measures, with such measures subject to the approval of the City.

▶ *Wildlife migration route protection*

We believe the ability for wildlife to thrive in the River zone is a strong indicator of the health of the ecosystem. The routes wildlife use for movement in the River zone should be protected from

disturbance and encroachment, allowing the natural patterns of the River zone to maintain their integrity for wildlife.

▶ *Minimum disturbance*

Whatever the need or desire for development in the River zone, we recognize that it has the great potential to change the way the land has worked for ages. We begin consideration of any project in the River zone by asking a simple question: does it demonstrate the least possible disturbance of the environment and the smallest possible interruption of the natural patterns of the land?

### Development

Development in the River zone should not be precluded. It affords an unusual opportunity to live or work close to nature. So, we might expect that people would choose to live in the River zone, and some businesses may determine that this zone is attractive for their particular enterprise. Residential and business uses eligible elsewhere in Taylors Falls are possible activities in the River zone, save those kinds of uses that would be better directed to areas along Bench Street (refer to Small Town zone). But the burden of demonstrating consistency with the intrinsic qualities of the River zone should remain on the developer. It must be demonstrated



*The St. Croix River Valley, viewed from basalt outcroppings in Interstate State Park, 1995. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*



that the development will not denigrate the great natural scenic beauty of the St. Croix River Valley, that it will not harm surface or below grade flowages, and that it will have no negative impact on the habitation or movement of wildlife.

It is important for future development in the River zone to ensure structures and site work remain visually inconspicuous viewed from the direction of the valley in leaf-on conditions. That will require developers to preserve undisturbed natural vegetative screening on the riverward faces of developments, or where existing natural vegetative screening is insufficient, to include a plan for tree plantings that provide such screening in summer leaf-on conditions within reasonable time. It will also require that riverward slopes be protected, with blufflines protected and development set back from blufflines sufficient to protect the adjacent slope from erosion and degradation.

Development in the River zone will be required to follow a conservation design model with bonus density incentives awarded for developments that include the bluff slopes and adjoining bluff top lands as part of the preserved in-common ownership or publicly dedicated open space amenity around which the project is designed.

The components of development in the River zone are important to its integrity. Roads should be sized for the volume and type of traffic they are



*Kabbakong Cemetery, c. 1997. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

expected to carry, but not be oversized to accommodate the largest vehicle that might ever travel the road. Stormwater should be managed in basins that reflect the character of natural stormwater treatment basins—wetlands. Buildings should be designed and placed to reduce their impact on the landscape, and the landscape of a site should be considered largely an extension of the natural environment, carving out only the smallest of areas for introduced vegetation and lawns, and sufficiently set back from bluffs to protect riverward slopes.

It is worthwhile noting that development that might actually take place in the River zone is small relative to other zones defined in this plan. Not only is the area of the zone small relative to the Small Town and Countryside zones, large portions of the zone are unbuildable due to steep slopes and other limitations.

#### Small Town

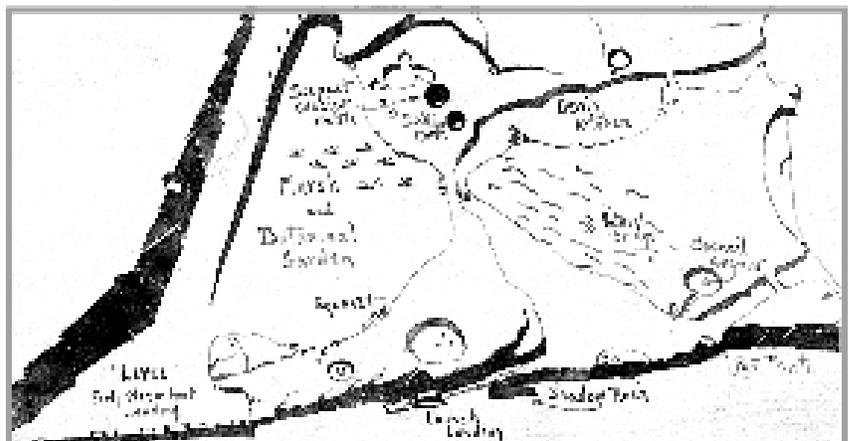
#### Conservation

As our community has grown, it has carved out from the landscape a settlement that is both simple and functional. It might be in these ideas that the town of Taylors Falls finds its real qualities. The people who came here

first sought out a place for a town, and found a “bench” where their activities could be founded. They built homes, businesses, and churches, but they were not elaborate; importantly, the small details and ornament they added have become treasured today.

The patterns of the community were straightforward as well. Early plats show a typical grid of streets and blocks, which reveal little practicality for the dramatic topography found here. Still, the grid was largely implemented, and where topography demanded, roads and development simply stopped. And herein lies our best lesson: where we cannot simply extend these patterns, we find nature. If we determine to extend those patterns without regard for nature, we stand to lose those qualities that we so highly value.

So, the first settlers found themselves a home on the first “bench” above the river—now known as Bench Street. As their settlement grew, they moved up the slopes to the next most logically developed piece of ground, and Taylors Falls grew along a second “bench”—this time with a greater focus on homes. As we look to the future, there are logical limits that we will set, in part based on our ability to expand our town without compromising nature, but in part based



*Map of gardens at Interstate State Park, a break from the grid of the town's layout, c. 1920s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

#### *A Plan of Conservation and Development*



on how big Taylors Falls—as a small town—ought to be.

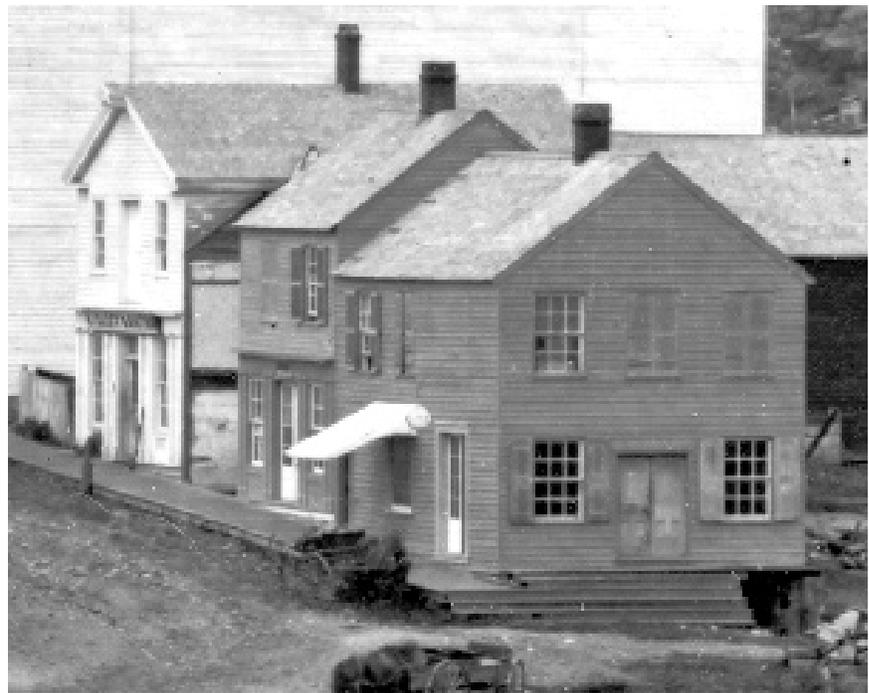
Certainly, features of the landscape shape the limits of the Small Town. But other factors play here as well: more heavily traveled roads, which are more difficult to cross, might set a natural boundary; respecting the walking distances suggests both a sense of compactness and a preferred way of experiencing our community; and, maybe most important, our cognitive map—the way we think about Taylors Falls—offers us guidance. In this last respect, Kahbakong Cemetery has traditionally been the “mentally mapped” northern edge of town and Chestnut Street at the base of the third bluff, and its continuation to the north, Mulberry Street, has been the western edge of town. While not definitive on their own, in aggregate they suggest a “natural” size for the Small Town zone.

## Development

In the Small Town zone, we can take cues from what has happened along Bench Street since the beginnings of Taylors Falls. What would often be considered to be conflicting activities have found a way of existing in harmony; homes were located next to (or sometimes above) stores and entertainment establishments, and places of work were placed next to churches and homes. And it worked.

As we consider development in the Small Town zone, it might be that nearly any activity could occur anywhere in the zone. The key is the issue of compatibility, so we consider:

- ▶ Adjacent activities and the potential for disrupting neighbors or the impacts on the value of what the neighbor already has invested in their property;
- ▶ Visual quality, not focusing



*Early Bench Street buildings and wooden walk, c. 1869. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

solely on the “looks” of a particular activity, but also how it fits its immediate context;

- ▶ Impacts on the natural environment, particularly how sensitive the activity is in preserving or maintaining any remnant elements of the natural landscape (including vegetation, topography, surface waters, or wildlife).

The only exception for locating activities in the Small Town zone would be for commercial or retail businesses. An essential quality of Taylors Falls’

small town historic character is the presence of a vital “downtown.” To the extent that we can aggregate commercial and retail activity into our downtown, we can strengthen the core activities of our downtown and be assured that these kinds of uses do not populate the larger natural landscape of our community. We believe that retail and commercial businesses should be aggregated along Bench Street, or certainly be visible from Bench Street, and that this “district” encompasses only those properties that immediately abut Bench Street. At its greatest size, commercial and retail activities would stretch from



*First Street in downtown Taylors Falls, 1919. Courtesy Carol Lynn Lyttle.*

## *A Plan of Conservation and Development*





*Contemporary housing in Taylors Falls, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

the intersection with Highway 8 to no further than Maple Street. And there would still be a place for homes (as singular structures or above storefronts), just as there always has been.

In the Small Town zone, pattern goes hand-in-hand with built character. Along Bench Street, commercial buildings should take on the form of small town “store and loft” buildings, where commercial activities would occur at street level and homes or offices would occur above. Importantly, storage is not an activity; buildings along Bench Street should not be used for storage, except for storage necessary to support the primary activity of the building. Parking, a necessary component of any downtown, should not dominate, but rather occur in smaller scaled parking



*Historic Angel Hill, noted only by a small sign in the trees, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

areas, and along streets.

Neighborhoods will exist within the Small Town zone as a finer grained application of character. But they will form based on their orientation and unique qualities, not those ascribed by a “brand.” Think of how well Angel Hill holds together as a neighborhood, even though there is no entry monument. Along River Street, the neighborhood is formed largely by its orientation to the river, not by a set of arbitrarily defined standards for form and color. While there are neighborhoods, the town is seamless; while there are no signs announcing a neighborhood, we certainly sense the differences between them. And this is our goal.

Attention must be directed to character in neighborhoods as well. Streets should generally be narrow, but permit parking on at least one side. On the occasion when cars would meet on a neighborhood street where it might be too narrow to easily pass, it’s very “small town” for one car to pull to the side to allow the other to pass. The narrowness of the road can be seen as directly supporting the idea of experiencing our community as a pedestrian (or in this case, at pedestrian speeds), at the same time that it enhances the safety of our neighborhoods. Coincidentally, the width (or the narrowness) of our roads offers benefits beyond

speed:

- ▶ We have a limited supply of land on which to develop and it is, perhaps, better that it be used for homes, parks, or other spaces for people than for roads;
- ▶ Wider roads promote heat gain, increase runoff, and are more difficult for some animals to pass, and our ability to implement narrow roads might be seen as having real and quantifiable environmental benefits; and,
- ▶ Narrower roads are less costly to construct and less costly to maintain, saving dollars in materials, equipments, and fuel (all of which might also be viewed as sustainable).

The character of our streets is enhanced by boulevard plantings. While we are surrounded by great natural beauty, the orderly pattern of a well-planted boulevard is characteristic of a small town, and it forms a connection to the larger landscape. Even where boulevards do not exist, the landscape of individual parcels of land will contribute to the character of the street. A well-formed canopy of trees, as well as a variety of deciduous and coniferous trees (particularity cedar trees) helps lend a sense of maturity to a neighborhood and will aid in creating a sense of seam-



*Typical street in Angel Hill, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*





*Valued aesthetics, organization and forms of existing housing in Taylors Falls, 2004. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

less Small Town zone.

Architectural character in neighborhoods should take cues from the highly valued forms of houses that exist in Taylors Falls today, but also look to new forms that might someday hold similar value. Significantly, while houses should face the streets on which they are located, there may not be a specific setback for houses along a street (although general consistency is desirable). Lot sizes should be generally consistent in the Small Town zone, just as they have been through the years of development in Taylors Falls. House sizes, like lots, might also be generally consistent, allowing for an individual to purchase more than one lot for their home if they desired, and, thereby, creating a richer and more diverse fabric for the neighborhood based on the land, not on buildings.

Architectural styles might vary through the Small Town zone, but be generally consistent within a neighborhood. This should not be construed as encouraging uniformity, but a neighborhood might strive for unity in the basic scale, form and materials of its homes. While the historic styles of Taylors Falls (Greek Revival, Italianate, Bungalow, and Cape Cod, as well as

those more vernacular styles found from our early days) might be referenced, they should not be copied. We seek integrity in our neighborhoods, and we can only find it through well-designed and crafted structures that are authentic to contemporary materials and methods of construction and designed in ways that are true to their own time.

Like most places, ours is a town where a variety of housing opportunities must be provided for current and future residents. Locations for multi-family housing in the Small Town district will not be restricted by zone, but rather encouraged throughout the district to enrich the diversity of neighborhoods. But like other ele-



*Countryside landscape, 2005. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

ments that define compatibility in the Small Town zone, the character of multi-family housing must be sensitive to its neighbors. Does its scale echo the scale of nearby homes? Does it feel like a natural fit? Do the materials and details of the structure reflect positively on the neighborhood as a whole? If questions like these cannot be answered affirmatively, multi-family housing may not be appropriate in the location in question. Nor would it be appropriate if functional requirements related to the multi-family structure, things like parking, overwhelm its site.

## Countryside

### Conservation

While directions for maintaining our small town historic character are best exemplified by the Small Town district, and directions for maintaining the great natural scenic beauty of the St. Croix Valley are best exemplified by the River district, the surrounding countryside has its own dominant character that needs to be respected in any new development. It comprises, perhaps especially as we consider growth, the most significant potential for change in Taylors Falls. But if we allow the kinds of development to occur here that we see creeping toward us along the Highway 8 corridor, much of what we value will be lost. We believe this area—our Countryside—can at once allow for



development, but still conserve its tranquility and beauty.

In Taylors Falls, the countryside includes open fields, forested slopes and wooded areas, wetlands, streams, ponds, and small lakes, and land that has been cultivated for generations. We also see people choosing to live here for the expanse of space that seems to be available. But competition between these uses can result in the loss of the sense of countryside, especially if homes consume farms and lawns replace fields. We value farmland for the lifestyle it signifies, for the historic continuity of use, and the pleasing visual quality it affords us. We strive to maintain tree cover, even as the woods become yards. And we recognize that the health of the St. Croix River—and our personal health when we use it for recreation—depends, in part, on how we treat the waters that are tributary to it, waters that, in many cases, pass through this countryside.

Our strategy for the Countryside zone is predicated on the continuance of what we see here today, to the greatest degree possible. Knowing that this area is attractive for development suggests that we find ways to accommodate it without compromising its essential character. Conservation of the fields, wetlands, and woodlands only stands to enhance our small town historic character and the great natural beauty of the valley.

## Development

In the Countryside, we seek balance. We know that people will want to live in Taylors Falls, and we know that, over time, they simply will not “fit” into the Small Town. So we need to find a way for the Countryside to evolve, to accommodate new residents, but not force the underlying character and use of the land to become little more than artifact. Homes, here,



*Woodland landscape of the Countryside zone, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

might be best classified as occurring on farmsteads or in clusters using a conservation design model. As a farmstead, it would be surrounded by a sense of connection to agriculture, active or otherwise, but the home would stand as an integral feature of a landscape composed of barns, outbuildings, fences, and fields. In a cluster, the home would be a part of a neighborhood, with yards perhaps sized similar to those found in the Small Town district, with an architecture that creates a sense of connection with neighboring homes, and an orientation to a feature that finds common ground for those who choose to live here.

The surrounding land is left “undeveloped,” owned publicly or in com-

mon, to the benefit of the neighbors and the community. The remaining land is not really undeveloped; it could continue its use as agricultural land, it could be transformed into a golf course or other land-based amenity, or it could remain a largely untouched woodland. But the pattern that becomes evident is not one of endless tracts of homes, it is one that suggests settlement in concert with the calm beauty and openness of the countryside.

The Countryside zone may be further subdivided into a second subzone: Near Countryside. The Near Countryside subzone is identified as the areas in which sewer and water utilities exist or are planned. This is based on the June 9, 2003 Trunk Sewer and Trunk



*Alternative wastewater treatment using constructed wetland technology, Fields of St. Croix, Lake Elmo, Minnesota. Courtesy North American Wetland Engineering, LLC.*





*Countryside character visible along County Road 37, 2005. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

#### Water Main Area Fee Ordinance.

Development in this subzone may have characteristics or requirements for such things as larger lot sizes, increased buffers and setbacks as compared with the Small Town Zone. Essentially, this subzone will have requirements to have a more rural feel than the Small Town, yet maintain the ability to develop at a density that is cost effective for the City and Developers. This subzone appears as the orange stippled zone on the future land use map (p 28).

Significantly, this pattern interacts directly with the patterns found in the River zone and Small Town zone. It would be awkward, we think, to protect the River zone as we have described only to have development creep to the very edges of the streams, forests, and slopes we are attempting to preserve. Protecting steep slopes and existing natural vegetative screening is integral to the pattern of development we seek. Likewise, the suburban patterns of neighborhood development we see in other communities would surely denigrate our small town historic character if allowed to grow ever outward from town. The clarity of each zone and the development that might happen in each only reinforces the unique qualities of Taylors Falls, and serves to maintain a special place for anyone who chooses this community as his or her own.

Questions of scale become important in the Countryside zone. So do issues relating to the visual quality of the countryside. The suggestion of building in the patterns of farmsteads offers some insights about the kind of development that might actually work here. Farmsteads were clusters of buildings centered around a common work area; our clusters might be homes centered on a common space created for the benefit of the residents of the cluster. Most of what one sees in a drive through the countryside is not farmsteads, but land. In Taylors Falls Countryside, most of what we desire to see is not homes, but land. The land we see on our drive is not composed mostly of well-tended lawns, but rather the woodlands and croplands, and the

lawns are reserved for the areas more immediately surrounding the homes in the cluster and occupy much less land surface. So we envision “pockets” of development in the Countryside, with the landscape we see today held largely intact.

Most important, perhaps, is the idea that the Countryside is a part of our community, but only a portion of it is served by municipal sewer and water service. Where sewer and water services do not exist, development might be best measured for its fit to the land by understanding how it is served by this kind of infrastructure. In a way, this might suggest a capacity for the land, much like we have described for the River zone. If there is no other way of adequately dealing with sewer and water service than connecting it to the municipal system, then the development proposed may simply be too much. In areas of the Countryside zone where sewer and water service exist, the character of development should be framed to reflect the greater character of the Countryside zone.

The chart that follows lends greater clarity to the zones by comparing the quantitative and qualitative aspects of development and character:



*Conservation design development with open space and woodlands preserved, and shared driveways. Courtesy Center for Rural Massachusetts (<http://www.umass.edu/ruralmass/images.html>).*



	River Zone	Small Town Zone	Countryside Zone
<b>Area</b>			
	Approximately 240 acres, or about 10 percent of the total land area of the City	Approximately 590 acres, or about 25 percent of the total land area of the City	Approximately 1540 acres, or about 65 percent of the total land area of the City
<b>Location</b>			
	The River zone, in essence, includes the three bluffs wherever their aspect faces the direction of the St. Croix river valley. The River zone is the “face” of Taylors Falls viewed from the other side of the valley along horizontal sight lines and it appears largely as a unified, wooded slope, though it actually consists of three narrow, steep bluff areas separated by the two developed “benches.”	The Small Town zone occupies the two relatively level benches and so, in plan view, consists of two separate areas divided by the second bluff and connected at the south end of Downtown along Government Street (which ties a part of Angel Hill to Downtown).	The Countryside zone is the remaining land area not included in the River Zone or the Small Town Zone. It lies mainly to the north of the Small Town zone (defined in terms of walking distance from downtown on both upper and lower benches) and to the west of the upper (third) bluff line, a bluff line defined by a basalt dome ridge that marks the western rim of the St. Croix valley. To the north, particularly north of Minnesota Highway 95 and Kahbakong Cemetery, the upper bench appears only as limited fingers of land between a sequence of deep ravines opening eastward to the St. Croix.
<b>Setting</b>			
	The St. Croix River, the streams, coulees, ravines, wetlands, backwaters, the basalt dome; where only very limited development would occur, and when it does, it would respect fully the primeval forces that shaped the St. Croix River Valley and maintain existing scenic integrity.	Downtown, Angel Hill and other neighborhoods; where the landscape has been shaped through time into patterns and features that are recognizably human; and where human impacts on the land have resulted in cherished historic and cultural resources, and will continue to do so in the future.	The old fields and wooded areas, some of them hilly, the farms and farmsteads; where human activity impacts the land, but with a great sense of environmental balance; where neighborhoods would form based on a sense of connection to the land and to a community sensitive to protecting its natural amenities.
<b>Activity (Use)</b>			
Residential	Individual homes on lots or cluster development of homes compatible with maintaining existing scenic integrity of the St. Croix River Valley viewshed. No limits are placed on the type of residential development, except that issues of compatibility between varying housing types must be addressed by the new development.	Block and lot residential for single and multi-family dwellings; upper story residential along Bench Street. No limits are placed on the type of residential development, except that issues of compatibility between varying housing types must be addressed by the new development.	Individual homes on large lots that preserve significant features and “countryside” character, or cluster development of homes using conservation design models for development that preserve a significant portion of the developable land as common open space, preserved landscape, agricultural use, city parks or trails. No limits placed on type of residential development, except that compatibility between housing types must be addressed in new development Development in the “Near Countryside” subzone (Countryside areas in which sewer and water utilities exist or are planned) will have a more rural feel than the Small Town zone (such things as larger lot sizes, increased buffers and setback) yet maintain the ability to develop at a density that is cost effective for the City and Developers. This subzone appears as the orange stippled zone on the future land use map (p 28)



	River Zone	Small Town Zone	Countryside Zone
Commercial	Not permitted, except those uses that focus on river recreation	Permitted along and generally abutting Bench Street between Highway 8 and Chisago County Road 16	Not permitted
Industrial/ Employment	Permitted with conditions	Permitted with conditions	Permitted with conditions; development should be designed for minimal impact on natural systems and the environment, visually inconspicuous from public rights-of-ways and trails and from any existing development. Development should be clustered if the project includes or anticipates more than one building, and should be connected to public trails from the principal entry of each building.
Institutional	Permitted with conditions	Permitted	Permitted with conditions; development should be designed for minimal impact on natural systems and the environment, visually inconspicuous from public rights-of-ways and trails and from any existing development. Development should be clustered if the project includes or anticipates more than one building, and should be connected to public trails from the principal entry of each building.
<b>Services</b>			
Sewer	On-site wastewater treatment system or municipal sewer service	Municipal sewer service extended through zone	Municipal sewer service extended through a limited portion of the zone and areas that if developed, utilize an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods; on-site wastewater treatment system, constructed wetland wastewater treatment systems may be an alternative to areas not served by municipal sewer
Water	Individual wells or municipal water service	Municipal water service extended through zone	Municipal water service extended through a limited portion of the zone and areas that if developed, utilize an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods; individual wells in areas not served by municipal water
<b>Density</b>			



	River Zone	Small Town Zone	Countryside Zone
	Defined by the capacity of the land to support development without municipal services (excluding land developed utilizing an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods), but not to exceed a base maximum development density set for the River District. Base maximum density is subject to bonus density increases that may be awarded to development projects meeting performance standards as defined by ordinance schedule for developments adhering to requirements under conservation design ordinance (Open Space Design).	Defined as being comparable to the existing density in surrounding areas within a one-minute walk [see Note 1]	Defined by the capacity of the land to support development without municipal services (excluding land developed utilizing an Open Space Design technique or other City approved methods), but not to exceed a base maximum development density set for the Countryside District. Development in the “Near Countryside” subzone will have a more rural feel than the Small Town zone yet maintain the ability to develop at a density that is cost effective for the City and Developers. This subzone appears as the orange stippled zone on the future land use map (p 28)
<b>Development pattern</b>			
Viewshed aspect	New development should maintain vegetative screening when viewed from the St. Croix River Valley	New development should maintain vegetative screening when viewed from the St. Croix River Valley	New development should maintain vegetative screening when viewed from the St. Croix River Valley
Streets, roads and alleys	Fit to the contour of the land and aligned to avoid intersecting significant features of the land; if road cuts into a bluff are necessary, the alignment should traverse the slope at angles preserving vegetative screening or buffer toward the valley	Extensions of the originally platted grid of streets in Taylors Falls, terminating at locations where grade or features dictate, but significantly, terminating in ways other than cul-de-sacs	Fit to the contour of the land and aligned to avoid intersecting significant features of the land
Structure orientation	Variable, with structures within a cluster generally oriented with principal facades toward other structures	Oriented with the primary façade generally parallel to the principal street abutting the lot	Variable, with structures within a cluster generally oriented with principal facades toward other structures
Lot size	Variable	Comparable to lot size for existing lots of similar use in surrounding areas within a one-minute walk [see Note 2]	Variable
Structure setback	Variable, with reasonable consistency between structures developed in a cluster	Comparable to structure setbacks for existing lots of similar use in surrounding areas within a one-minute walk [see Note 3]	Variable, with reasonable consistency between structures developed in a cluster; increased setbacks between development and collector or arterial roadways in areas serviced by municipal sewer and water
Use	Uses clustered by type without mixing, except for home-based businesses	Uses mixed along Bench Street, with predominantly residential uses in all other areas	Uses clustered by type without mixing, except for home-based businesses
Pedestrian accommodation	Designated space for on-street trails along major local routes and for roadways providing connections to other communities ; off-street trails take advantage of natural features (with appropriate buffers for environmentally sensitive areas)	Predominantly sidewalks, with on-street trails provided where limited space for sidewalks exist; connections created to link neighborhoods, downtown, parks, the school and other significant community locations	Designated space for on-street trails along major local routes and for roadways providing connections to other communities ; off-street trails take advantage of natural features (with appropriate buffers for environmentally sensitive areas)



	River Zone	Small Town Zone	Countryside Zone
<b>Bluff land impacts</b>	No construction should occur in a bluffline setback or slope preservation zone to minimize bluff erosion or washout potential; for tracts or parcels which include bluff slopes, bluff lines and bluff setback zones, development should use Conservation Design principles and include bluff related elements in the open space areas which should be mapped and confirmed before the layout of clustered housing is designed		
<b>Public open space</b>	Provided through the process of clustering new development and in accordance with directions and goals for park and recreation facilities in the community	Provided by city park and trail corridors, school land, public reserve and public common space, and in accordance with directions and goals for park and recreation facilities in the community	Preserved farmlands, wetlands, natural features resulting from conservation development, and in accordance with directions and goals for park and recreation facilities in the community
<b>Development character</b>			
<b>Streets, roads and alleys</b>	Streets as narrow as possible, rural section roadways (no curb and gutter)with boulevard trees on each side	Streets as narrow as possible with parking on at least one side; sidewalks on both sides, with boulevard trees on each side; streets paved with bituminous or concrete	Streets as narrow as possible; rural sections roadways (no curb and gutter) to preserve the sense of a “country road”,with boulevard trees on each side
<b>Structure</b>	Form, scale, materials, color consistent with natural environment	Form, scale, materials, colors derivative of, but not mimicking, historic structures	Form, scale, materials, colors derivative of vernacular farm buildings
<b>Structure height</b>	Development not visible above tree canopy, and generally of limited height, with the exception of steeples or other unique building elements consistent with Taylors Falls small town historic character, or buildings or parts of buildings requiring exceptional height for their purpose (such as silos); structures that demonstrate a functional need and exceptional design quality may be allowed to exceed the height limitations defined herein if other requirements for visual quality of the Valley are respected [see Note 4]	Comparable to the heights of existing structures of similar use in surrounding areas within a one-minute walk, except that structure height should not be visible above tree canopy, with the exception of steeples or other unique building elements, or buildings or parts of buildings requiring exceptional height for their purpose (such as silos); for buildings along Bench Street, a structure height that allows for three stories should be allowed where the development is shown to be compatible with the scale of buildings within a one minute walk [see Note 5]	Development not visible above tree canopy from valley viewshed perspective, and generally of limited height, with the exception of steeples or other unique building elements, or buildings or parts of buildings requiring exceptional height for their purpose (such as silos); structures that demonstrate a functional need and exceptional design quality may be allowed to exceed the height limitations defined herein if other requirements for visual quality of the Countryside are respected [see Note 6]
<b>Structure footprint</b>	Primary structure sized to maintain a significant proportion of the site in open space, and without overwhelming the lot or dominating a viewshed or view corridor [see Note 7]	Comparable to structure footprints of existing structures of similar use in surrounding areas within a one minute walk [see Note 8]	Primary structure sized to maintain a significant proportion of the site in open space, and without overwhelming the lot or dominating a viewshed or view corridor [see Note 9]
<b>Outbuildings, ancillary structures</b>	Located to the rear of a line coincident with the principal front facade	Located to the rear of lot, except that “garden” structures (such as a gazebo) may be located in the front yard	Located to the rear of a line coincident with the principal front facade



	River Zone	Small Town Zone	Countryside Zone
Parking	Parking contained on the development site	Street parking permitted in order to reduce on-site parking required (to be calculated according to street frontage available for parking)	Parking contained on the development site
Stormwater management	Constructed rain gardens to control lawn and impervious surface runoff for single and multiple unit developments, which are designed to retain sediments and lawn chemicals.	Connected to the city's stormwater collection system, and encouraging construction of private rain gardens on individual properties to improve the quality of stormwater runoff entering Spring Creek and Cascade Creek before discharging into the St. Croix River.	Use natural or constructed stormwater detention methods and rain gardens to retain and cleanse/filter stormwater resulting from development
Utility lines	Electric, cable and telephone lines to new multiple developments should be underground, with all equipment suitably screened from public views	Underground facilities are highly encouraged as a means of maintaining the visual character of the Small Town zone	Electric, cable and telephone lines to new multiple developments should be underground, with all equipment suitably screened from public views
Exterior lighting	Maintain visibility of the night sky through the application of Dark Skies principles, including reducing illumination where possible, using light sources that reduce or eliminate glare, directing light sources downward and eliminating any upward cast of illumination, and shielding light sources from residential areas		

### Accommodation of building blocks

Small town historic character	Design and develop structures that will be worthy of historic consideration in 50 years	Design and develop structures that will be worthy of historic consideration in 50 years; priority for re-use and restoration of worthy structures	Design and develop structures that will be worthy of historic consideration in 50 years
Great natural scenic beauty	Consideration of intersections between nature and development places greater priority on conservation of nature, with appropriate buffers as protective measures for natural features. Standards for slope preservation zones, bluff line setback, structure height and vegetation management ensure new development will be visually inconspicuous from the valley in leaf-on conditions.	New development on bluff edge parcels in the Small Town zone should maintain the existing scenic integrity of the St. Croix River Valley viewshed. Along margins where the Small Town zone and River zone meet, new development observes standards to ensure it is visually inconspicuous from the valley.	Consideration of intersections between nature and development places greater priority on conservation of nature or perpetuation of agricultural character, with appropriate buffers as protective measures for natural features and agricultural uses.

Notes to table:

- Note 1 Comparable density as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not greater than 1.25 times the average density of parcels within a 250 foot radius as of the date of this plan."
- Note 2 Comparable lot size as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not greater than 150 percent of the average lot size within a 250 foot radius as of the date of this plan."
- Note 3 Comparable setback as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not less than 90 percent or greater than 110 percent of the average setback of structures on parcels within a 250 foot radius as of the date of this plan."
- Note 4 Limited height as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "two stories or 35 feet." Methods of measurement would follow city ordinance.
- Note 5 Comparable height as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not higher than 125 percent of the average height of primary structures within a 250 foot radius as of the date of this plan."
- Note 6 Limited height as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "two stories or 35 feet." Methods of measurement would follow city ordinance.
- Note 7 Footprint size as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not greater than 5,000 square feet for residential uses and 20,000 square feet for non-residential uses, except as allowed by conditional use."
- Note 8 Comparable footprint as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not greater than 150 percent of the average footprint of primary structures on parcels within a 250 foot radius as of the date of this plan."
- Note 9 Footprint size as envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force was defined to be "not greater than 5,000 square feet for residential uses and 20,000 square feet for non-residential uses, except as allowed by conditional use."





Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

## Chapter Six Connections

*It's not just about cars* moving from one place to another: Taylors Falls offers the opportunity for a drive to be a real experience, not just a convenience. And the scale of our town, especially in the Small Town zone, actually allows people to see driving their cars as an alternative way of getting around: knowing that their preferred experience is walking or biking. There are problems of traffic here, even as small as we are. It's not easy to get around on foot, even if the landscape invites us to do so. But it's a part of the experience we seek for ourselves, so we need to define directions that help us resolve congestion, enhance our small town character, and create streets and roads that are seams for building community, not barriers to it.

### Highway 8 and Bench Street

One of the thorniest problems we face as a community is the conflict between traffic and our sense of small town character. While we recognize society's reliance on the car, vehicles often choke Bench Street on busy days, trucks exiting Highway 8 block the intersection, interstate gas price differences invite Wisconsin residents to buy gas here and then leave, and, most important, pedestrians take great risk crossing between downtown and Interstate State Park. We've been looking for solutions to these problems for a long time, and we have taken steps to resolve some of them. Mn/DOT reconstructed the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street in 1995, which helped to organize traffic. The Underpass was built to provide a safe alternative for pedestrians



Highway 8 and Bench Street, downtown Taylors Falls, 1997, Courtesy C. W. Nelson.

trying to move between downtown and Interstate State Park. And a process was initiated by Mn/DOT to study the future of Highway 8.

The Highway 8 process did not, however, come to any conclusions about the problems that most directly affect Taylors Falls. A Study Advisory

Group was formed to get closer to an answer, and as a part of this plan, an intensive design work session—a charrette—was organized. Its particular purpose was to study the issue of traffic movement in the area of Highway 8 and Bench Street, and lay out a new direction that would recognize our goals while respecting the need for

*A Plan of Conservation and Development*





*Pedestrian underpass at Highway 8 along the St. Croix River, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

reasonable through-traffic movement. All of the parties that have a stake in a solution were represented: Mn/DOT, the Department of Natural Resources, and representatives of the Taylors Falls city and community. What resulted is a concept that seems to resolve many of the issues, at least in a longer term view, without compromising Taylors Falls' small town historic character and the great natural beauty of the St. Croix River Valley. In fact, the concept may enhance these features of our community.

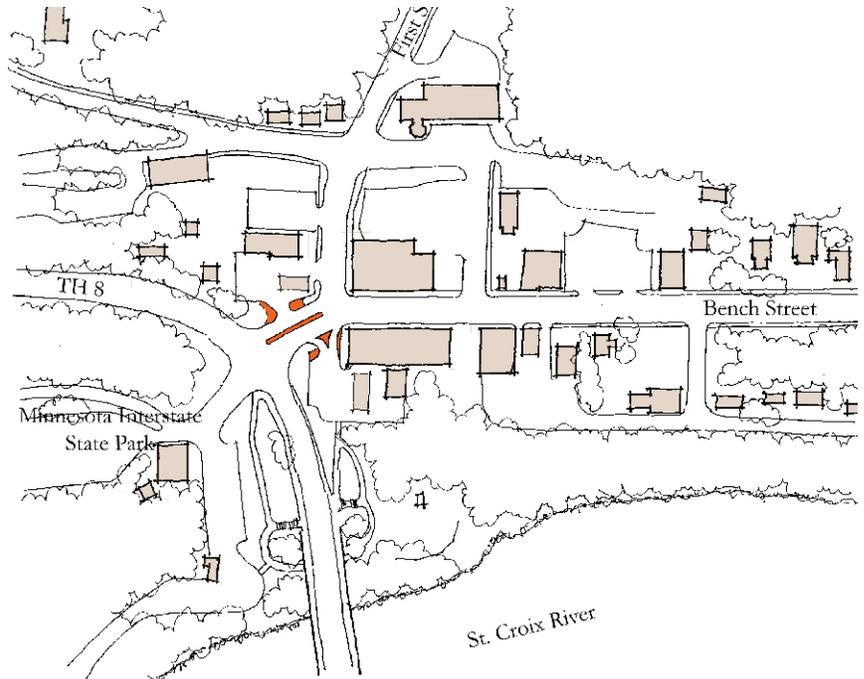
The basic idea involves the configuration of streets near the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street. Turning movements often clog the intersection of First Street and Bench Street. In essence, this intersection is too close to Highway 8 to allow traffic to move efficiently, and perhaps, safely. During the SAG charrette, ideas were posed that would relocate the intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street to a location slightly to the south along Highway 8, just below the Memorial Community Center. This approach would allow for a large area of pavement to be reclaimed as community space near the existing intersection, presenting a better face for our community for those arriving from Wisconsin. The new entry to downtown would lead to Second Street, and Bench Street would be either "dead-ended" or use a future

River Street for circulation.

This possible solution provides greater stacking distance (one measure of efficiency used by traffic planners) and removes conflicting intersections near Highway 8 (allowing for greater ease of traffic movement). However, it changes the basic patterns of movement in our downtown in dramatic ways. No longer is Bench Street a through route, and it really doesn't feel much like

our "Main Street" as a result. Ultimately, this change is at odds with one of our fundamental directions: that we would use small town historic character as one of the building blocks of Taylors Falls.

While it wasn't the right solution, the underlying ideas gave us something to work with. The intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street may not be as much of a problem as the intersection of First Street and Bench Street. It's here, in town, that we can focus some attention and begin to solve the problem. By eliminating a full access intersection at First Street and Bench Street - essentially limiting movements on to or off of Bench Street - traffic movement patterns are clarified and a part of the problem is resolved. A possible solution, at least for the short term, would be to introduce a "pork chop" on First Street east of Bench Street, limiting access into the General Store from Highway 8 and egress to northbound Bench Street. Because Bench Street remains as the primary



*Modifications to Highway 8 and Bench Street, with roadway and driveway narrowing and median on Bench Street, currently under discussion, 2004. Courtesy TH 8 Study Advisory Group.*





*Traffic congestion on Bench Street near Highway 8, near the pedestrian route between downtown and Interstate State Park, 2003. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*

street in downtown, its historic qualities remain intact and the change could be supported by the idea of history as a building block.

In the longer term, possible improvements to Bench Street would also include narrowing of the intersection in key locations and narrowing private driveway entrances to reduce the expanse of pavement in the intersection area. Encouraging less traffic intensive uses near this entrance to Taylors Falls would also be a benefit for the pedestrian environment along Bench Street.

At the north end of Bench Street, the issue involves the ways in which people who have missed their destination in downtown get redirected toward downtown again. The introduction of a traffic roundabout at Bench Street and Highway 16 facilitates traffic redirection while it signals the north end of Bench Street and our downtown. It also provides a clear signal of the transition between a highway and our “Main Street,” where cars should be moving more slowly to accommodate vehicles turning from Bench Street, on street parking and pedestrian crossings.

During the Economic Development Commission’s strategic planning effort, a concept was articulated to

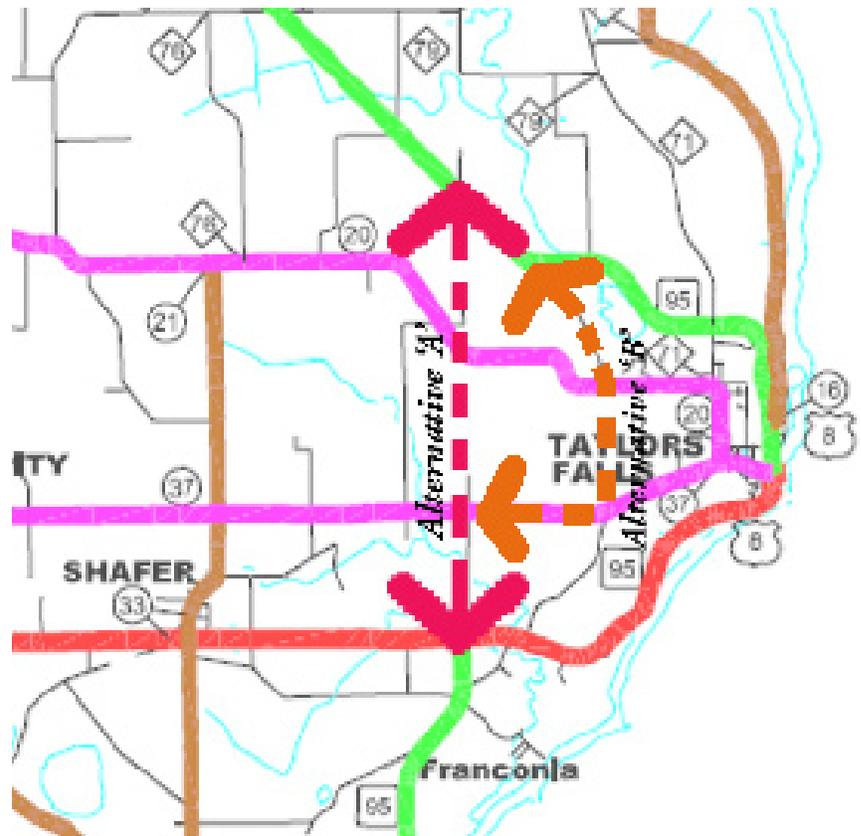
provide another connection between downtown and Interstate State Park. Near the Memorial Community Center, a footbridge with a character reflecting the first bridge spanning the river to Wisconsin would link to the park. It would, beyond creating another connection to the park, provide a loop in the local footpaths between the community and the park.

### Highway 95

This change alone is not enough. Trucks using Bench Street are just as problematic for our downtown. They have difficulty negotiating the turn and often block traffic as they maneuver through the tight intersection of Highway 8 and Bench Street. Eliminating turns onto Bench Street does nothing to improve this situation. Our goal, however, is to remove tractor-trailer trucks altogether from our downtown.

In order to do this, we need to establish a new direction for Highway 95. By realigning Tern Avenue with Highway 95 south of Highway 8 (perhaps with a roundabout), we can define a continuous route for Highway 95—one that doesn’t use Bench Street and one that doesn’t require that trucks move through downtown. Trucks entering Minnesota on Highway 8 would continue up the hill to Highway 95 turning north to continue their route.

The change would be completed by a turn-back (transfer of jurisdiction of the roadway between government entities) of the existing alignment of Highway 95 between Highway 8 in downtown and County Road 16 to Chisago County. Once turned back, the roadway might be modified to better fit the character of downtown. With a narrower roadway, sidewalks could be widened to better accommo-



*Alternatives for the potential extension of Highway 95, avoiding downtown and Bench Street, 2004. Courtesy TH 8 Study Advisory Group.*



date the numbers of pedestrians that will be in downtown as they begin their visit to Taylors Falls and Interstate State Park.

### “Right-sized” Streets

One of our priorities has been the creation of a truly pedestrian-friendly environment: a way for people to move about comfortably and safely without their cars. Recognizing that road widths are one of the primary determinants of speed, and remembering that Taylors Falls is best experienced as a pedestrian, providing roadways that are “right sized” is critical. We intend to make every street accommodating to pedestrians, but not at the expense of adjacent properties. Rights-of-way are already sufficient to accommodate vehicle traffic and pedestrian facilities. For most streets, a five foot walk on both sides of the street would be desirable; in downtown, sidewalks with a minimum width of ten feet would be desirable.

Roadway widths in neighborhoods should be narrow, with allowances for parking on one side and sufficient lane width for reasonable traffic movement. In downtown, streets might also be narrow, with eight foot parking lanes on both sides and drive lanes defined in accordance with MnDOT’s policies for context sensitive design. The intent here is not to define street widths, but rather to suggest that the width of streets bears directly on the experience of our community. In addition, narrower streets are less costly to construct, repair, and maintain, consume fewer resources, and have lesser impacts on the environment. And they encourage people to drive at speeds that allow them to appreciate the character of our town, and make it safer for people to walk.

### Trails

There is, in Taylors Falls, every reason to get out of our cars and walk through the community. We can, in just a short distance, experience the drama of the St. Croix River, be a part of a historic river settlement, and enjoy the tranquility of the countryside. But we need to better accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, perhaps by considering the facilities they need to be central pieces of our community’s infrastructure.

We often see streets and pipes as the only infrastructure in our communities. We often take these assets for granted, never really considering the thought it must have taken to ensure their utility, or the care that must be exercised to ensure their function. We spend a great deal of time and energy, perhaps, thinking about pavement for cars and pipes for sewage. Where these necessary pieces of infrastructure serve our needs, they don’t really fulfill our spirit. We desire engagement of our historic and natural resources, and we can’t get it from a car, and we can’t get it from a pipe. So the creation of a network of trails and sidewalks becomes important, and it allows us to gain that connection to nature and our history. It allows us to gain that connection to each other that will maintain the spirit of our small town.

Taylors Falls has taken great leaps in creating safe connections between downtown and Interstate State Park. The underpass project, now more than a decade old, created the first link. The Riverwalk project will extend that link upstream with a connection to River Street. And with that change, buildings that currently face Bench Street in downtown are provided with the very real opportunity to engage the St. Croix River as an amenity and an attraction. Most important, perhaps, it opens Taylors Falls to the River by capturing a

dramatic landscape immediately within downtown and making it accessible to the public, and it reclaims a neglected public right-of-way as an important piece of our public realm.

Recently, discussion has focused on the creation of a more comfortable, and potentially more spectacular, connection between the two Interstate State Parks. An effort to link both sides of the river using a more pedestrian-friendly walkways on the T.H. 8 Bridge would provide a pedestrian route that is separate from traffic, with more dramatic views of the river. The idea has merit not only from the perspective of pedestrian movement and safety: it might be an important complement to the newly initiated scenic byway, and ultimately create a more expansive network for walking that truly links Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls.

It should be noted that the existing bridge will not support a walkway positioned underneath. According to MnDOT, a new bridge constructed in the next 20 - 40 years would make a walkway possible.





Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society

## Chapter Eight Features

*The fabric of our community* is woven from both the private and public realms, and while we are striving to shape the ways that individuals treat the landscape as they build for themselves, we recognize our responsibility to shaping a sensitive and healthy public realm. The impressions and activities of residents and visitors are founded in the ways we deal with the spaces we share, so we need to establish directions for those features that will be consistent with the language of this plan of conservation and development.

The changing role of the 1902 Northern Pacific Depot, from an active functioning railroad depot serving the arrival and departure of tourists and immigrants, to the Taylors Falls Memorial Community Center, was made possible by a gift from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company to the village of Taylors Falls, has created a two-fold reason to care for this building and the area around it. It is a designated historic site, and that in itself carries an obligation to perpetuate the building. It is also a memorial to five Taylors Falls servicemen killed in World War II, which carries another layer of community identity with it. The building serves a very tangible purpose as a meeting and event space, so it needs to be serviceable, functional, and solid. It serves our spiritual needs as well: it recalls our history, it marks our arrival as a town, and it celebrates the lives of a few individuals who represented Taylors Falls as they served our country. Looking to the future, the Strategic Guide vision for the depot site and building to serve also as a trail hub connecting several proposed bicycle trails that



*Taylors Falls Memorial Community Center (former Northern Pacific Depot), 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.*

would meet in Taylors Falls would add a new layer of function, one that needs to honor its history and earlier public designations.

Downtown has been studied by the Economic Development Commission for years. This area is the economic engine of Taylors Falls, but it is integrally tied to our building blocks of great natural scenic beauty and small town historic character—in many ways, it lies at the intersection. The EDC considered the evolution of downtown,

the kind of place that it might become, the attraction it holds for existing and new businesses, and the role it plays in our local economy. They also explored what a public space means, and how its evolution must be consistent with the principles of this plan, even though the EDC's work preceded this plan by several years. Those ideas are shaped by the same notions of conservation and development that are the foundation of this plan, and now, this plan looks to the EDC's work as guiding policy for downtown.



The EDC created concepts for the evolution of downtown. While preliminary in nature, they suggest patterns for downtown that are wholly consistent with the directions for the larger community, and they create places for community to occur.

The Park and Recreation Commission is undergoing a master planning process of their own. The PRC's goals are long term, and focus on the recreation needs of the community. But they have also framed directions for the creation of trails that link various

neighborhoods in Taylors Falls to its park facilities, and that form connections for the community as a whole. Their plan envisions parks not solely as recreation features, but also as a means of celebrating Taylors Falls' small town historic character and its great natural scenic beauty. The PRC master plan articulates a series of broad goals that align with the tenets of this plan:

1.1. Create a comprehensive direction for the development of parks and trails that serve the Taylors Falls community.

- 1.2 Respect Taylors Falls' small town historic character and great natural scenic beauty in the community's park and trail facilities
- 1.3 Develop parks that serve the full range of needs for the community.
- 1.4 Establish parks as focal points in the community.
- 1.5 Establish methods of funding capital and operations costs of a complete park system.

The PRC's plan is included as an appendix to The Plan of Conservation and Development.



*View of the St. Croix River from the "Underpass" linking downtown Taylors Falls to Interstate State Park, a project constructed with the active support of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2005. Courtesy C. W. Nelson.*





Courtesy Taylor Falls Historical Society.

Chapter Nine

# Creating Our Common Future

*Taylor Falls, we believe,* will be a place characterized largely in qualitative terms, not quantitative ones. We want a community that is defined more by our sensibilities than by legislation. So as we explore patterns that promise to help us achieve both conservation and development, we recognize that we must be active in defining the processes we might use to achieve our vision. Many of these methods we already use; some are new. But they all depend upon the active and continuing engagement of the people of Taylor Falls. The methods we will use include:

► **Character zoning**

Most zoning is based on a “numbers” approach specifying a wide range of maximum and minimum dimensions pertaining to the lot, the structure and its positioning; “recipes” for quickly determining what would be permitted in a zoning district. But it essentially establishes a formula, and we know that we cannot achieve our goals through formula. In a character zoning approach, compatibility is defined by what surrounds the development, and attempting to create a more cohesive overall pattern by building upon what already exists.

Character zoning makes sense for areas that are largely developed with a sense of positive character. The question of character for newly evolving parts of the community remains: What should a new neighborhood in the Countryside zone look like? Existing character is the openness, woods, fields, farmlands, wetlands, and

a few basalt outcrops. Character zoning in the Countryside zone calls for retaining these varieties of undeveloped space as the organizing central amenities in conservation design developments, with no less than 40 percent of their total buildable site area directed to preservation of these types of spaces.

In essence, character zoning would require a developer to demonstrate the character for the development and its consistency with Countryside character, and then establish guidelines for any construction

within the project. Conservation design clustering need not repeat a built character if separated by a distance that suggests an obviously free-standing neighborhood. But clusters more proximate to one another merit the application of a similar built character to maintain a stronger sense of continuity.



Neighborhood street in Angel Hill, 2004. Photograph taken as part of the Community Photograph Survey.



► **Community meetings**

We have made significant progress in defining directions for a number of projects in Taylors Falls by working together to define projects and directions. We believe it has also helped to more strongly define ourselves as a community: a group of people held together by common vision. As projects are proposed in our community, we believe that, as a small town, we all need to be aware and involved, and that together we can define the very best direction by continuing to work together.

Timing of community meetings is critical. In many communities, the rules demand that a developer prepare a proposal to a very high level of detail, almost to the point where changes would be resisted. And the review would occur in a very formal setting, usually a public hearing.

In Taylors Falls, we favor more informal reviews occurring in a more informal setting than the council chambers, while the plans are in a more formative stage. We prefer the initial reviews to be at a more conceptual level, recognizing that by working with a developer, the proposal can be refined in ways that ensure its fit with our community and its remarkable landscape.

► **“Experience” basis for reviews**

All too often, we depend upon an extremely limited and unrealistic portrayal of a project when we are asked to consider its merits. We are asked to base our review on a set of architectural or engineering drawings: a technical review. But what we really want to understand is how it will feel: how it will fit Taylors Falls and what it will be like to walk past it. Prospective developers must prove that their



*Park and Recreation Commission charrette, 2004.*

proposals are consistent with our vision, and then demonstrate what the project will really look like, in context, from an eye level, and from a public space.

► **Design review committee**

The process of understanding the character of the built environment is difficult, probably just as difficult as understanding the impacts of development and conservation on the patterns of our community. A body charged specifically with review of the built character of projects (building and site design) will allow for greater consistency with our vision, and will permit other elected and appointed officials to deal with issues beyond color, form, and materials that can often bog the process down.

► **Parcel character inventory**

We know that what we have is special, but the base of knowledge is not consistent, nor is it recorded. As we have defined a plan that relies upon the intrinsic character of the land and buildings of the community, it is worth spending time noting the specific

points of character of parcels and buildings, including features of the land. This becomes an important component of character-based zoning, as it signals to a developer that there are key parcels, land features, and buildings that must be respected.

The creation of a parcel character inventory for the entire community is a significant undertaking. Modern tools like Geographic Information Systems allow for attributes of individual parcels to be categorized and mapped, but someone still has to establish the baseline character for the parcel. Those parcels that appear most likely to evolve from their current use might be the first to be photographed and cataloged, along with those that contain significant character defining features.

► **Full build out representations**

As developments are proposed, it is important that the community understand the full impact of the proposal. Too often, we see the initial proposal, but fail to recognize its larger impacts. In fact, it is the cumulative impacts of development that concern us most, not the impacts of a single home or a



*Spring beauties on the second bench, a small but critical element of community character, 2004. Courtesy C. W. Nelson*



single road. Representations, both graphic and narrative, that allow us to better understand the “big picture” of a proposal will help us define measures that truly conserve those resources and assets that we value as a community.

► Commission training requirements

We count on our elected and appointed representatives to implement our vision on a day-to-day basis. Some have been engaged in the creation of this plan, but others have not. There will be differing levels of understanding of this plan, and of planning processes and requirements in general. Providing training for those individuals who give their time to shape the future of their community should be viewed as an investment: a way of providing them with the necessary skills and expertise to function in their duties, and allow them to contribute more fully to the refinement of our common vision.

► Vision statement

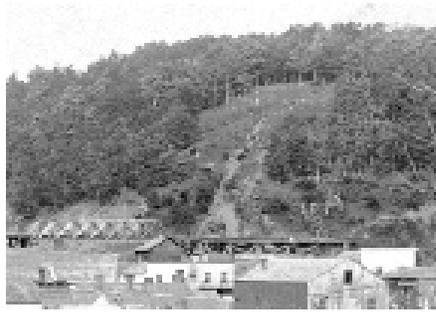


*Highway 8 approaching Taylors Falls, c. 1930s. Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.*

This plan of conservation and development is guided by a vision that has been articulated and refined through a series of meetings for this plan, as well as through the processes of several other community initiatives. It is worth reviewing it on an annual basis, perhaps at a joint meeting of the City Council and the various boards and commissions of our

community, allowing it to remain at the forefront of our community’s evolution.





Courtesy Taylors Falls Historical Society.

Chapter Ten

# Partnerships and First Steps

## *Our challenge is significant,*

and our commitment is very real. But does not exist as an island, so we need to invite others to understand our plan, our vision, and the directions we have framed. That may not be enough. Taylors Falls We need to get the idea across to others that consistency in regulation and procedure is necessary for our work to be successful. As we move forward, we will advocate for those ideals that are central to our idea of community, of conservation and development, and living in harmony with the land we share. But as our principles tell us, our path will not rely on the old rules:

*Taylors Falls will evolve according to new models in order to effectively deal with the challenges we are facing.*

We have demonstrated a great ability to bring our community together to plan. Now we need to share our plan with others in the same way: not telling people that this is the way things have to be done, but inviting them to share in our efforts, to understand what we have in common, and to build a mutually supportive and sustainable future. As we move forward, we recognize that our partnership is broad, and that it holds great potential if we can build from a common vision. We might consider, at the outset, forming real partnerships with:

- ▶ National Park Service
- ▶ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- ▶ Minnesota Department of Transportation
- ▶ Minnesota Interstate State Park
- ▶ Chisago County
- ▶ City of St. Croix Falls
- ▶ City of Shafer
- ▶ Shafer Township
- ▶ Franconia Township

- ▶ Minnesota Scenic Byway Commission
- ▶ St. Croix Scenic Byway Corridor Management Organization
- ▶ Lower St. Croix Commission
- ▶ Upper St. Croix Commission
- ▶ TH 8 Study Advisory Group (SAG)
- ▶ Southern Chisago County Highway 8 Task Force
- ▶ Wisconsin State Interstate Park
- ▶ Minnesota Historical Society
- ▶ Taylors Falls Historical Society
- ▶ Taylors Falls Lion's Club
- ▶ Taylors Falls Women's Civic League

Issues will certainly continue to arise as we implement our plan of conservation and development. An initial list of priorities includes:

### Development control

- ▶ Creation of supportive zoning ordinances and development review procedures

### Bench Street

- ▶ Introduction of short term traffic

control methods

- ▶ Promote reorientation of downtown Bench Street businesses and adjoining public space toward the River

### Highway 95

- ▶ Establishment of alignments for a potential Highway 95 bypass, to ensure that development does not preclude a logical route for a new road
- ▶ Control of the land use in the area of a potential Highway 95 bypass to prevent arbitrary and intrusive commercial development in the Countryside zone

### Extraterritorial growth

- ▶ control of development between Taylors Falls and Shafer to encourage development and conservation according to the directions of the Countryside zone

### Character definition

- ▶ Creation of a graphic and narrative



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definition of the character that exists in various part of our community

- ▶ Definition of key elements should be an initial priority, focusing on views and viewsheds worthy of preservation, the natural, cultural or geologic character of significant parcels, and other features that bear directly on the community's small town historic character and great natural scenic beauty



*Cover photograph: View of Taylor Falls from the east, 1869. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*





Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society

## Epilogue

*A hundred years from now,* will any of this matter? Will the policies and actions we advocate in this plan make a difference? What others did more than a hundred years ago to set aside and preserve the Dalles area of the St. Croix shared by the two states and the two communities should give us encouragement. We know that what they did matters greatly to us today, to our quality of life, and we thank them for it. We know that what we do today can equally make a difference for our children's children. And they will thank us for it.

As we worked to assemble this plan, we looked at other places and saw patterns that, if implemented in Taylors Falls, would harm what we have. While other places may not enjoy the great natural or historical assets we have, we don't see the patterns they are creating as being wholly beneficial for those who choose to live there, as preserving those things that might be really important, or as building a real sense of community. And we believe the tools they have created to guide them are a part of their problem. We have chosen a different path to our future.

People have, for a long time, recognized what we value today. When writing in William J. McNally's column "More or Less Personal," author Sinclair Lewis recognized the same things we see today:

*I've been exploring my native state, and with considerable chagrin over my ignorance, I have, this past six weeks, discovered that much of the renowned beauty of New England, to which I have so long and idiotically been enslaved, is to be found here in Minnesota... But now I have seen, and have fallen as much in love with Minnesota as ever I did with Vermont or Connecticut. It is hard to choose among them, hard to set them down in order, but I think these are my favorite discoveries: The St. Croix Valley, in particular the sensational view as you start to descend, on Route 8, to Taylors Falls...*

Years later, in his column "Once Over Lightly" in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, Paul Light wrote:

*Ray Sevens asked his companion, "What is the prettiest spot in the world?" The response was: "I've been an advance man for Ringling Brothers' Circus for years. Been all over the world and do you know what is the most beautiful spot in the world?" Ray waited in silence. "A little place I once ran into quite by accident," said the companion. "We were scheduled to appear in the Twin Cities in Minnesota and on my way back east I crossed over a river call the St. Croix, near a town called Taylors Falls. Gentlemen," he continued, "that is without doubt the most beautiful spot on earth, bar none."*

*It's not just us. So many people have been able to share this special place, a place that is unique in the ways that the patterns of nature and settlement come together. We have become its stewards, and assume the responsibility of sustaining a sense of balance as we move toward our future, and toward the futures of our children and our children's children. We have crafted a plan that is our testament to maintaining the integrity of the sense of conservation and development we seek. We have created a new tool to guide our efforts. It's different...because it has to be.*

So, will any of this matter? We believe it has to.

*A Plan of Conservation and Development*

