



City of Motley
Comprehensive Plan

2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City of Motley acknowledges the dedication and volunteerism of its residents in updating this plan. This plan update represents the dedication of many community members who have invested their time, thoughts, and energy toward the future success of Motley. This plan was directly developed by the following Planning Committee members, including elected leaders, and city staff:

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Vision Statement

A small town with a big heart, where you are the “U” in community and every resident belongs.

Introduction

The City of Motley wanted to be intentional about creating a plan for making Motley even more prosperous. Through community engagement, surveys, and outreach, the plan represents a shared vision for the future and a strategic roadmap to achieve it.

The plan provides broad recommendations to guide and manage growth and development. These broad recommendations come in the form of goals and action items that express the city’s aspirations for the future. Efforts to implement the plan’s vision, goals, and strategies began upon adoption.

This living document should be used as a guide for the day-to-day activities of city council members and staff. This plan should be easily accessible to elected and appointed officials, city council members, staff, Motley residents, and visitors. Comprehensive plans are intended to provide direction for a 10 to 15-year time horizon. However, plans are most effective when reviewed annually and updated every five years.



How to Use This Plan

City of Motley’s Comprehensive Plan Update is divided into the following broad sections:

- Built Assets – Housing, Transportation, Community Facilities
- Environmental Assets
- Individual Assets – Access to Health & Wellness
- Social Assets – Community Services, Childcare, Eldercare, Safety
- Policies – Land Use, Zoning
- Cultural Assets – Welcoming Communities, Opportunities for Innovation

Each section provides background information and goals developed based on community input. These goals are intended for a wide range of audiences and end users including city council, elected decision-makers, business owners, developers, permanent residents, seasonal residents, tourists, and prospective residents. We have tried to streamline this document as much as possible for the casual reader while providing enough specific information for the city council.

To further describe the multi-faceted nature of this plan, the following list describes each of the users and how they might use this plan:

1. GUIDE CITY OFFICIALS AND STAFF IN:
 - a. Communicating the vision for the future.
 - b. Establishing regulatory changes and permitting.
 - c. Acquiring and use of land.
 - d. Planning for capital improvement.
 - e. Development and infrastructure decisions.
2. GUIDE BUSINESSES, PROPERTY OWNERS, AND RESIDENTS IN:
 - a. Determining potential property use.
 - b. Understanding possible land use changes in the surrounding areas.
 - c. Establishing reasonable land use expectations.
 - d. Understanding future infrastructure improvements.
 - e. Improving and investing in property.
3. GUIDE DEVELOPERS WITH PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND THE COORDINATION OF PLANS WITH CITY GOALS, REGULATIONS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS.
4. ASSIST AND COORDINATE WITH NEIGHBORING JURISDICTIONS WITH ISSUES AND TOPICS OF MUTUAL INTEREST.

Authority to Plan

The State of Minnesota grants its communities the legal authority to adopt a Plan under the Municipal Planning Act (Minnesota State Statutes Sections 462.351 to 462.364). The Municipal Planning Act establishes a single, uniform procedure applicable to all cities. The Comprehensive Plan provides the legal framework to enact land use control and other municipal actions to implement long-term growth and development regulation strategies. The city’s land-use (zoning) ordinances and official zoning map should be updated to conform to the Comprehensive Plan following its adoption.

Planning Process

In March of 2024, the City of Motley contacted Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) to request a proposal for professional technical assistance to help guide the planning process and facilitate meetings to update the city's Comprehensive Plan. In July 2024, the City Council adopted a resolution to proceed with updating the Comprehensive Plan. The proposal was presented in August 2024 and approved by the City Council in September 2024.

At the end of 2024, the R5DC Team worked with city staff and officials to establish a local planning team to guide the planning process, attend regular planning meetings, and provide key insights and expertise. The team ensured that a process was implemented to gather community input and develop goals and strategies based on that input.

Public Informational Kickoff Meeting – February 20, 2025

A public informational Visioning Session meeting was held at Motley's United Methodist Church on Thursday, February 20th, 2025, and included a presentation from R5DC staff regarding what comprehensive planning is, the purpose of comprehensive planning, how it can benefit communities, an asset mapping exercise, and a call to action to join the local planning team.

Local Planning Team

Following the public informational meeting, R5DC and the City of Motley staff members requested volunteers to participate on the local planning team. Some members responded via this call to action, and others responded based on what they heard at the public informational meeting in February. Once the local planning team was established, the group began meeting bi-monthly according to the timeline laid out by R5DC staff.

Dedicated Comprehensive Plan Update Webpage

With an emphasis on public and community engagement, the local planning team (LPT) directed staff to develop a webpage that would be easily accessible and dedicated to the comprehensive plan update. Here, residents unable to attend the local planning team meetings could stay informed about the planning process and access all meeting agendas, handouts, summaries, surveys, and outcomes. You can access this webpage at www.regionfive.org/motley.

Community Survey

One of the Local Planning Team's (LPT) first orders of business was to review the community survey and asset mapping exercise from the kickoff meeting. The LPT and R5DC staff carefully reviewed the individual responses to the 15-question survey that provided valuable community input for the planning team.

Discussion of Issues and Barriers

After many community discussions, the visioning session, subsequent LPT meetings, and equipped with the community survey responses, the LPT focused on identifying community issues and barriers. R5DC facilitated a few LPT meetings dedicated solely to the topic of identifying issues. The LPT spent considerable time assessing the issues and barriers to appropriately identify solutions to the challenges they identified throughout the planning process. The LPT set aside time to meet with MnDOT professionals to discuss Highway 10 issues as well as Central MN Housing Partnerships to discuss housing questions, both of which were open to the public to attend and ask questions.

Development of Goals and Strategies

After collecting as much information as possible through the public informational meeting, the development of a dedicated comprehensive plan webpage, the development of a local planning team, and the administration of a community survey, the LPT began to apply this information productively by developing goals and strategies to address the identified issues and barriers.

The LPT held a series of meetings to identify goals and strategies. The first meeting involved brainstorming to generate a wide range of ideas, resulting in a large list of projects. The second meeting focused on evaluating these projects for feasibility and actionability, leading to a shorter, more practical list. Additionally, projects were categorized into topic areas like Built and Social. The next meetings focused on the shortened list of actionable goals for each topic area. Through this process, the LPT developed a categorized, prioritized, and actionable plan aligned with earlier community engagement, ready for presentation to the community and city council.



Community Character

Overview

Motley’s development along a major railroad corridor in the early 1870s helped shape its long-standing identity as a connected, hardworking, and resilient community. Early ties to transportation, industry, and natural resources continue to influence the city’s character today, reflected in its strong sense of community, local businesses, and pride in its small-town roots.

Motley quickly emerged as a hub for the region’s thriving lumber economy. By the late 1870s and early 1880s, large mills operated by H.B. Morrison and by Curtis and Lawrence created significant local employment and attracted new residents to the area. As the workforce grew, so did the community: retail businesses, schools, churches, and civic amenities that shaped the village’s early character.

As Minnesota’s lumber industry declined in the 1920s, Motley adapted by embracing new economic opportunities, including fur farming and later turkey production. The establishment of the Morey Fish Company marked a major shift in the local economy, positioning Motley as a long-standing center for seafood processing – an industry still present today through Rich Products Corporation and Trident Seafoods.

Motley’s strategic location at the intersection of U.S. Highway 10 and 210, along with access to the Long Prairie and Crow Wing Rivers, has supported both commerce and recreation for generations. These natural and transportation assets, paired with the community’s history of resilience and innovation, continue to shape Motley’s small-town character and quality of life. [1]

The City of Motley has a population of 680. [2]

This plan seeks to use the best and most current information available. The most widely used sources in this plan include the 2020 US Census Bureau, the Minnesota State Demographers’ office, and a variety of other local sources. The types of information gathered included general demographic information for community planning, including but not limited to: General Population (current and past), age, race, ethnicity, income levels, education attainment, transportation volume, transportation costs, transportation counts, among others.



The LPT’s desired approach was not to discard past planning efforts but to build on them and continue where they left off. Therefore, staff and the LPT emphasized the review and use of the 2014 comprehensive plan to the extent possible and where appropriate. For example, a review of past goals was conducted to determine which had been accomplished, remained relevant, and should be included in this update, or were no longer relevant.

This document continues the ongoing planning process in Motley. The city has used this planning process to evaluate and reinforce existing growth and development policies and to review prior planning efforts to update and reinforce decisions that remain valid. A major premise of this Plan, therefore, is to utilize portions of the previous comprehensive plan whenever applicable.

History

Origins and Founding

Motley’s origins trace back to the early 1870s with the arrival of the Lake Superior and Puget Sound Railroad, which established a key east–west route through the region. The community’s first known settler, Calvin Priestly, arrived in 1872 to support railroad operations, marking the start of permanent settlement. The railroad helped attract early businesses, residents, and services, laying the foundation for Motley’s growth as a regional center.

The village grew quickly as major lumber mills opened in the late 1870s and early 1880s, bringing jobs and attracting new families. Businesses, churches, and a school soon followed, establishing the basic structure of the community.

When Minnesota’s lumber industry declined in the 1920s, Motley adapted by shifting toward new industries such as fur farming and turkey production. The founding of the Morey Fish Company further shaped the city’s identity, positioning Motley as a seafood processing center—a role still present today.

Motley’s early growth was strongly tied to its transportation access and natural resources. Located at the crossroads of what are now Highways 10 and 210, near the Crow Wing and Long Prairie Rivers, the community’s origins continue to shape its character and role in the region. [1]

Population

This table shows the changes in population from 2016 to the 2023 census for the City of Motley, the surrounding cities, Morrison County, and the State of Minnesota. [2]

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Motley	608	600	603	577	556	606	632	593
Staples	2,891	2,953	2,949	2,997	3,014	2,984	3,033	3,035
Pillager	457	461	478	480	513	513	522	521
Wadena	4,052	4,063	4,079	4,096	4,343	4,336	4,341	4,331
Morrison County	32,907	33,075	33,098	33,329	34,014	34,079	34,237	34,250
State of Minnesota	5,525,360	5,569,283	5,608,762	5,640,053	5,706,494	5,717,968	5,714,300	5,737,915

Built Assets –Transportation, Community Facilities, Housing

A well-designed built environment provides the foundation for Motley’s long-term growth, safety, and quality of life. Investment in housing, infrastructure, and community facilities ensures that residents have access to essential services, safe mobility, and vibrant spaces for civic and recreational activity. This section focuses on improving public infrastructure, expanding housing opportunities, and supporting transportation safety through coordinated planning and partnerships.

Issues we’ve heard:

1. Transportation & Safety:

- Safer crosswalks, updated sidewalks, and street lighting, particularly along Highway 10.
- Need for biking and walking trails, ideally connecting parks or even extending to Staples
- Several noted that speed and visibility issues along Highway 10 make accessing local businesses difficult and unsafe.

2. Housing & redevelopment

- Residents identified a need for more housing options, especially senior housing, townhomes, and market-rate homes.
- Many commented on vacant or underutilized lots and expressed a desire to develop city-owned land or reuse brownfields.

3. Community Facilities:

- Strong community desire to redevelop the old school into a multi-use facility
- Residents noted that City Hall lacks space and accessibility – parking and facility upgrades.

4. Aesthetics & infrastructure

- Request for improved curb appeal and landscaping along Highway 10
- Suggestions to update public signage, add welcome signs, and enhance gateway features.

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents value Motley’s existing assets, such as Highway 10 access, parks, and Crow Wing River.
- The community appreciates having public facilities like City Hall and the fairgrounds, which serve as recognizable gathering spaces.
- There is enthusiasm for the redevelopment potential of the old school, viewed as a centerpiece for future community use.
- Residents are supportive of maintaining Motley’s small-town character, while making it more walkable and connected.

Transportation

Overview

A safe, connected transportation system is essential to Motley’s livability and long-term success. Streets, sidewalks, trails, and highways all play a role in how residents move through the community and access daily destinations such as homes, businesses, schools, parks, and services. Transportation is not only about moving vehicles efficiently, but also about ensuring safety, accessibility, and comfort for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers of all ages. As Motley continues to grow and evolve, thoughtful transportation planning will focus on improving safety, enhancing walkability, and strengthening connections between neighborhoods, community assets, and regional corridors.

Input & Data

As in most cities, the network of roads is a partnership between several jurisdictions, including the State of Minnesota, Morrison County, and Motley. When discussing highways and roads, functional classification is the grouping of streets and highways into classes or systems according to the character of service they are intended to provide. At the heart of this process is the recognition that most travel involves movement through a network of roads. Functional classification defines the role that any road or street plays in serving the flow of trips through an entire network.

Federal, State and Local Programs, Plans and Planning

The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan is Minnesota’s highest-level policy plan for transportation. It is a 20-year plan based on “Minnesota GO”, a vision of a transportation system that maximizes the health of people, the environment, and our economy. The plan is for all types of transportation and all transportation partners. It covers more than just roadways and applies to more than just the Minnesota Department of Transportation. It evaluates the status of the transportation system, what is changing, and how we will move forward over the next twenty years. The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan was updated as of January 2017. You can read the plan at <https://minnesotago.org/final-plans/smtf-final-plan-2017>



10-Year Capital Highway Investment Plan (CHIP)

The 10-year Capital Highway Investment Plan details MnDOT’s capital highway investments for the next ten years on the state highway network. The CHIP is updated yearly to remove projects that are being constructed, adjust the timing of existing planned projects, and add new planned projects. The primary purpose of the document is to communicate programmed and planned capital highway projects over the next 10 years. The document serves as a check to ensure that MnDOT is meeting the investment levels and performance outcomes identified in MnDOT’s 20-year State Highway Investment Plan, MnSHIP, and explains any change in direction or outcomes from the investment direction. [3]

4-Year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

The STIP is a federally required public document that lists Minnesota’s four-year transportation improvement program. The STIP includes all state and local transportation projects that use federal highway and/or federal transit funding, as well as state transportation projects that use 100% state funds. The STIP includes the cost, schedule, and funding sources for the identified projects. The STIP is developed annually and updated throughout the year to reflect significant changes in the program. In addition to federal highway and transit projects, the STIP includes rail and port projects for informational purposes. [4]

Goals and Strategies

1. Improve local transportation safety, connectivity, and multimodal access throughout the community.

This looks like:

- a. Partner with MnDOT to address Highway 10 safety concerns, future traffic patterns, and opportunities for improved pedestrian, bicycle, and multimodal access.
- b. Conduct a local traffic and pedestrian safety assessment to identify priority areas for improvements such as crossings, sidewalks, signage, and traffic calming measures.
- c. Improve street lighting to enhance safety, visibility, and nighttime use of public spaces, while supporting community branding and special events.
- d. Continue exploring opportunities to expand trail connections and improve parks and key community destinations.

Community Facilities

Overview

Community facilities serve as the backbone of civic life in Motley, providing spaces for public services, recreation, social connection, and community events. Accessible, well-designed facilities help foster engagement, support essential services, and strengthen a sense of belonging among residents. As community needs change over time, facilities must be flexible and capable of serving multiple functions and age groups. Planning for the future of community facilities will focus on maximizing existing assets, evaluating redevelopment opportunities, and ensuring that public spaces remain welcoming, functional, and responsive to community needs.

Goals & Strategies

1. Improve and modernize civic and recreational infrastructure to support community services, events, and economic vitality.

This looks like:

- a. Explore the feasibility of acquiring and repurposing the former school building for multi-use civic facilities such as City Hall, recreation space, and youth or senior programming.
- b. Conduct a community-driven space-needs assessment to determine public facility priorities and guide long-term investment decisions.
- c. Coordinate with public facility planning with highway corridor improvements to enhance visibility, accessibility, and support for local businesses.
- d. Partner with local and regional economic development entities to support small business facade improvements and complementary streetscape enhancements.

Housing

Overview

Over time, Motley has experienced limited housing growth, resulting in fewer options to meet the needs of residents at different life stages. Housing accessibility, quality, affordability, and availability play a critical role in supporting the city’s sense of place and overall quality of life for both homeowners and renters. A diverse and balanced housing supply is also essential to economic vitality, as businesses consider housing options when evaluating relocation or expansion opportunities. Housing is not a one-size-fits-all solution; needs evolve as households age, grow, or downsize. As Motley plans for the future, expanding and diversifying housing options—while maintaining the community’s small-town character—has emerged as a key priority.

Input & Data

A city’s housing landscape and needs can be determined by its population and current housing availability. Motley’s current housing landscape and data include:

- A median age of people in Motley of 50.4 years, compared to 39.2 for the State of Minnesota. [5]
- A median value of owner-occupied units of \$100,000 – \$150,000 [5]
- A majority of residents in Motley are owner-occupied with 60.3% of the residents owning their homes, compared to 71.6% for the State of Minnesota. [5]



Goals and Strategies

1. Establish a clear understanding of Motley’s current and future housing needs to guide long-term housing development and investment.

This looks like:

- a. Conduct a comprehensive housing study to evaluate existing housing conditions, affordability, and gaps in the current housing supply.
 - b. Assess current and projected housing needs across all life stages, including affordable housing, senior housing, workforce housing, and market-rate options.
 - c. Use housing study findings to inform future land use decisions, zoning updates, infrastructure planning, and housing development priorities.
 - d. Coordinate housing planning efforts with regional partners, housing authorities, and developers to align local needs with available resources and funding opportunities.
3. Expand and diversify housing options to meet the needs of current and future residents.

This looks like:

- a. Support development of a range of housing types, including workforce housing, senior housing, and market-rate homes, to address varying household needs and life stages.
- b. Prepare city-owned land, including approximately 20.37 acres for future residential development through site planning, utility coordination, and zoning readiness.
- c. Collaborate with developers, housing authorities, and regional partners to advance housing projects that align with community needs and market demand.
- d. Encourage redevelopment of brownfield and underutilized sites to support infill housing and mixed-use development opportunities where appropriate.

Social Assets – Access to Childcare, Community Services, Safety, and Eldercare

The social well-being of Motley’s residents depends on strong community services, safe environments, and accessible support systems for all ages. This section focuses on enhancing quality of life through investments in youth development, senior engagement, childcare access, and emergency preparedness. By strengthening these core areas, Motley can remain a connected, family-friendly, and resilient community where residents feel supported and engaged.

Issues we’ve heard:

- Strong demand for a centralized community gathering space, such as a community center, was the most consistently identified need.
- Residents expressed a desire for expanded childcare options and more affordable youth-focused programming.

- There is interest in senior-focused spaces and services, including a Senior Center and access to public meeting areas.
- The need for a public storm shelter or designated safe space during severe weather events was identified as a community priority.
- Residents noted that community events could occur more frequently and better engage a broader cross-section of the community

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents expressed pride in Motley’s strong police and fire departments and reported a strong sense of safety within the community.
- Existing parks, riverfront access, and family-friendly amenities were identified as valued spaces that bring residents together.
- Motley’s tight-knit community, volunteerism, and small-town atmosphere were consistently highlighted as key strengths.



Access to Childcare

Overview

Reliable and affordable childcare is essential to supporting working families and maintaining a stable local workforce. Access to quality childcare influences where families choose to live, work, and invest, making it an important component of community and economic development. Childcare needs can vary widely based on household structure, work schedules, and affordability. As Motley looks ahead, addressing childcare availability will involve understanding local demand, supporting providers, and exploring partnerships that help expand options while strengthening workforce stability.

Goals and Strategies

1. Improve access to affordable and reliable childcare for working families.

This looks like:

- a. Conduct a childcare needs assessment to identify current capacity, demand, and barriers to access.
- b. Collaborate with regional economic development organizations and childcare providers to expand licensed care options.
- c. Explore public-private partnerships or incentives to support new childcare facilities or home-based providers.
- d. Support workforce development initiatives that recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators.

Community Services

Overview

Strong community services contribute to Motley's close-knit character and help ensure residents feel supported and connected. Services such as recreation programming, community events, communication tools, and volunteer opportunities play a vital role in building social cohesion and civic engagement. As expectations and needs evolve, community services must remain adaptable and inclusive. Planning for community services will emphasize collaboration, accessibility, and expanded opportunities for residents to gather, participate, and stay informed.

Goals and Strategies

1. Provide safe and supportive spaces for youth engagement and development.

This looks like:

- a. Explore opportunities to establish a Youth Center offering structured activities, mentoring, and recreation.
- b. Partner with local schools, churches, and nonprofits to coordinate youth programming and events.
- c. Pursue state, federal, or foundation grant funding to support development and operations of youth programs.
- d. Create a Youth Advisory Council to encourage civic participation and leadership among Motley's younger residents.

Eldercare

Overview

As Motley's population ages, providing opportunities for seniors to remain active, engaged, and supported within the community becomes increasingly important. Facilities, services, and programs that promote accessibility, social connection, and wellness help residents age in place and maintain independence. Eldercare is not only about meeting immediate needs, but also about planning proactively for demographic shifts. Future efforts will focus on improving accessibility, strengthening partnerships, and creating spaces and services that support older adults as valued members of the community.

Goals and Strategies

1. Expand services and facilities that support aging residents and social well-being.

This looks like:

- a. Identify or develop a Senior Center for community gatherings, recreational programs, and social activities.
- b. Partner with regional area agencies on aging and local organizations to coordinate supportive services such as transportation, wellness programs, and educational workshops.
- c. Evaluate existing facilities for accessibility improvements to support aging in place.
- d. Seek funding through aging and community wellness grants to enhance programming and facility improvements.



Safety

Overview

A safe community is foundational to quality of life, economic stability, and resident confidence. Public safety includes not only police and fire protection, but also emergency preparedness, infrastructure design, and community awareness. As climate patterns, development, and community needs change, safety planning must evolve accordingly. Motley’s approach to safety will build on existing strengths, enhance preparedness, improve infrastructure, and ensure residents have access to clear information and safe spaces during emergencies.

Goals and Strategies

1. Strengthen public safety and community resilience through emergency preparedness.

This looks like:

- a. Develop a public storm shelter plan identifying suitable locations, design needs, and estimated costs.
- b. Pursue state or federal hazard mitigation and emergency preparedness grants to fund shelter construction.
- c. Establish partnerships with schools, churches, and civic facilities to serve as designated backup shelter sites.
- d. Provide regular community outreach and education on emergency procedures and severe weather safety.



Individual Assets – Health & Wellness

Ensuring that Motley residents have reliable access to essential goods and wellness opportunities is key to maintaining a healthy, active community. This section emphasizes improving food access, healthcare convenience, and opportunities for physical well-being through local partnerships and strategic development.

Issues we’ve heard:

- The community identified a need for more consistent access to health and wellness services.
- Interest was expressed in the development of a wellness and recreation space that supports physical activity and overall well-being.

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents value existing healthcare access through the local clinic and view it as an important community asset.
- The local food shelf was identified as a critical resource supporting food security for residents in need.

Overview

Access to health and wellness resources is fundamental to maintaining a healthy, active, and resilient community. Convenient access to essential services – such as healthcare, prescriptions, nutritious food, and opportunities for physical activity – supports residents across all ages and abilities. Health and wellness are influenced not only by medical care but also by the availability of supportive spaces, programs, and infrastructure that encourage healthy lifestyles. Future planning efforts will focus on strengthening access to services, supporting preventative care, and integrating wellness considerations into community facilities and public spaces.

Health & Wellness

Goals and Strategies

1. Promote active lifestyles and community wellness.

This looks like:

- a. Invest in indoor and outdoor wellness spaces such as gyms, walking trails, or fitness rooms within community facilities.
- b. Partner with regional health organizations and schools to offer wellness programs, health screenings, and fitness events.
- c. Incorporate wellness and accessibility considerations into future park and recreation planning.

Cultural Assets – Opportunities for Innovation, Welcoming Communities

Motley’s cultural identity is rooted in its small-town character, civic pride, and commitment to inclusivity. By fostering spaces and events that celebrate diversity, creativity, and shared community values, the city can continue to strengthen its sense of belonging while encouraging innovation among residents of all ages.

Issues we’ve heard:

- Residents expressed strong interest in better marketing and promotion of existing community amenities and assets.
- There were requests for enhanced visual beautification, including banners, flags, planters, and a new community marquee to improve event promotion and community visibility.
- Community members called for improved communication, such as more frequent newsletters and stronger publicity for local events.
- Residents expressed a desire for expanded community events and cultural programming that bring people together beyond seasonal activities.

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents are proud of Motley’s small-town charm, strong volunteer base, and longstanding community events such as the fair and June Fest.
- A clear sense of local pride and appreciation for the city’s friendly, close-knit atmosphere were consistently identified as key community strengths.

Opportunities for Innovation

Overview

Innovation in a small community like Motley often takes the form of creative problem-solving, collaboration, and adaptive use of existing resources. Innovation supports resilience by helping communities respond to changing needs, economic conditions, and demographic trends. Whether through new partnerships, reimagined spaces, or resident-led initiatives, innovation can enhance services and quality of life without sacrificing community character. Motley’s approach to innovation will emphasize practical, community-driven solutions that align with long-term sustainability and local values.

Goals and Strategies

1. Strengthening Motley’s identity through community marketing, beautification, and communication.

This looks like:

- a. Develop a community branding and marketing plan to highlight local amenities.
- b. Partner with local businesses and civic groups to install seasonal banners, flags, and improved streetscape decor.
- c. Explore grant opportunities for downtown facade or storefront improvements along Highway 10.
- d. Replace or enhance planters and street landscaping through partnerships with garden clubs or civic organizations.
- e. Coordinate with the Fire Department and city staff to replace the community marquee sign for event announcements.
- f. Expand city newsletter frequency or integrate a digital newsletter for more timely updates and event promotion.

Welcoming Communities

Overview

A welcoming community is one where residents feel a sense of belonging, pride, and connection. Motley’s small-town character, volunteerism, and community traditions form a strong foundation for inclusivity and civic engagement. Welcoming communities are built through shared spaces, effective communication, and opportunities for residents of all backgrounds and ages to participate. Future efforts will focus on strengthening community identity, improving communication, and fostering inclusive environments that reflect Motley’s values and sense of pride.

Goals and Strategies

1. Promote a welcoming, inclusive, and innovative small-town culture.

This looks like:

- a. Incorporate diversity and inclusion principles in community programming and city communications.
- b. Support intergenerational and multicultural events that foster community cohesion.
- c. Encourage youth and resident-led innovation (art, sustainability, community services).
- d. Highlight local values – such as religious freedom, volunteerism, and civic pride through public engagement efforts, storytelling, and city-sponsored events.

Policies – Zoning, Land Use

Effective land-use and regulatory policies help ensure that Motley grows in a way that reflects the community’s vision while remaining adaptable to new opportunities. Clear, predictable zoning and permitting processes support local businesses, housing, development, and redevelopment projects that contribute to the city’s long-term success.

Issues we’ve heard:

- Zoning regulations may not fully accommodate emerging or non-traditional business types, limiting opportunities for local economic growth.
- Vacant or underutilized properties – particularly along the Highway 10 corridor – present challenges related to community appearance and reinvestment but also offer opportunities for redevelopment.
- Some residents expressed concern that regulatory or permitting processes can slow business development, indicating a need for continued evaluation of efficiency and clarity within approval processes.

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents generally view Motley’s zoning and permitting processes as straightforward, accessible, and easy to navigate.
- City leadership is recognized for transparency, approachability, and a willingness to engage residents in planning and decision-making.
- There is a strong foundation of trust between the city and community members, supporting collaborative problem-solving and future planning efforts.



Land Use

Overview

Land use planning provides the framework for how Motley grows, redevelops, and adapts over time. Clear and flexible land use policies help ensure development aligns with community values while remaining responsive to new opportunities. Thoughtful land use decisions support housing diversity, business growth, and the reinvestment of underutilized properties. As Motley plans for the future, land-use strategies will focus on aligning regulations with the community vision, encouraging redevelopment and infill, and maintaining predictable, transparent processes that support sustainable growth.

Goals and Strategies

1. Align land use regulations with community vision and future growth.

This looks like:

- a. Consider updating zoning ordinances to allow and appropriately regulate cannabis businesses within city limits.
- b. Consider adjusting zoning and land use designations to support new housing on city-owned land.
- c. Streamline permitting for infill and brownfield development to encourage infill development and the reuse of brownfield sites.
- d. Regularly review and update the Comprehensive Plan and zoning map to ensure alignment with changing community needs and regional development trends.

Environmental Assets

Motley’s natural environment contributes greatly to the city’s character, quality of life, and long-term resilience. Preserving natural resources, improving community aesthetics, and planning for responsible stormwater management will ensure that future growth supports both environmental health and visual appeal.

Issues we’ve heard:

- Residents expressed interest in expanding walking and biking trails, improving sidewalks, and enhancing beautification efforts – particularly near parks and along the Highway 10 corridor.
- There is strong community support for improving and expanding river access, including additional amenities, improved signage, and potential space for community gatherings or performances.
- Requests were made to improve landscaping, cleanliness, and visual appearance of Highway 10 medians and other prominent public spaces.
- As development increases, residents emphasized the importance of proactive stormwater management and the protection of river and groundwater resources.

Positives we’ve heard:

- Residents consistently expressed appreciation for Motley’s natural beauty and outdoor environment.
- The community recognizes ongoing efforts to maintain clean water and air quality.
- Many residents expressed pride in local parks, riverfront areas, and green spaces, viewing them as important assets to community identity and quality of life.



Community Beautification

Overview

Motley’s natural environment and visual character are central to the community’s identity and quality of life. Parks, riverfront areas, landscaped corridors, and well-maintained public spaces contribute to community pride, economic appeal, and overall well-being. Environmental stewardship and beautification efforts go hand in hand, supporting both ecological health and aesthetic value. As Motley plans for future growth, emphasis will be placed on enhancing public spaces, protecting natural resources, and incorporating sustainable practices that improve the community’s appearance while preserving its environmental integrity.

Goals and Strategies

1. Enhance Motley’s natural environment and community aesthetics.

This looks like:

- a. Collaborate with local garden clubs and volunteer groups to beautify entrances, parks, and public corridors.
- b. Identify and pursue grant opportunities for green space improvements
- c. Evaluate stormwater management needs and infrastructure as development expands, ensuring compliance with state and federal environmental standards.
- d. Encourage low-impact development (LID) techniques, such as rain gardens, native plantings, and permeable surfaces, in both public and private projects.

In 2022, the City of Motley completed an Energy and Environment Plan that provides detailed strategies related to energy efficiency, sustainability, natural resource protection, and environmental stewardship. This Comprehensive Plan recognizes the Energy and Environment Plan as a guiding document and incorporates its vision and recommendations by reference. Environmental goals and action items within this plan are intended to complement and support the implementation of the 2022 Energy and Environment Plan, rather than duplicate its policies.

References

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Survey Results

Question 1: What would make it easier to get around Motley (by car, bike, walking, or internet access)?

- Walking
- Updated sidewalks, potentially a bike path somewhere.
- Sidewalks
- public transportation, bus or some form that can take you to Brainerd and Little Falls. Many in area do not drive, especially elderly
- Cross walk by the silo and DG
- Would be nice to have bike/walking/ATV/UTV trails. Even better if they connected w/ our surrounding communities....Staples, Lincoln/Cushing (the lakes area), Pillager. If lake visitors could ride their bike/ATV into town to get groceries, gas, stuff from the hardware store would allow more convenience/options to get around and enjoy the scenery
- Walking/biking path over the highway so people can safely cross over the highway.
- Walking trails, internet, better cell service.
- Bike, Walking, Car
- Whatever is cheapest
- Safer sidewalks, better crosswalks

Question 2: What types of housing options do you think Motley needs in the future?

- Apartments
- New/updated apartments.
- Single family housing with large yards
- additional townhomes or housing do not have to worry about a lot of the maintenance
- Affordable living for seniors
- Retirement/townhomes/single family homes
- Low income
- Affordable apartments or townhouses income based.
- Assisted living by Lakewood, low income apartments.
- 55 and older community
- More affordable housing!
- Senior Living, Income Based Tiny House’s
- Lower regulations and elimination of zoning rules to allow the market to easily build homes
- Affordable multifamily housing

Question 3: How could public spaces and community buildings be improved or expanded?

- Maintained Public park
- I see that the old “Always Available” building just a block north of the Dairy Queen has been sitting abandoned for a long time now. Is there anyway that land could be sold so a new business could be put there? Driving through town and seeing a run down building is not always a welcoming sight.
- I like what we have just needs to be available more. Maybe add splash pad
- Old school house needs to be revamped and separated into sections. Historical society section, community center, kitchenette and dining area, multi-use meetings spaces
- Do some updates
- Improvement is needed. If could help with the facilities at the fair grounds/the old school to utilize for the public would provide more options for activities and being active.
- Turn the old school into apartments or something for the community to utilize
- Children’s parks on both sides of the highway.
- Would love building that people can hang out in. Big gym to play basketball, volleyball. Walk, indoor play ground. Indoor zero gravity pool. Darts, pool. Etc.
- I think the old school should be recycled as apartments, daycare, group home, assisted living, etc.
- Open 5 days
- As long as they don’t burn down, or collapse under the snow, they’re likely fine
- Updated city hall, community center

Question 4: How can Motley better protect and enjoy its natural spaces (parks, trees, lakes, rivers)?

- Make them known more!!
- Limit development along and nearby the river.
- Walking paths,
- Al Yoder does a great job of protecting our parks, etc. More amenities at the Crow Wing access point. Parking, camping, day trips
- Provide options to get there and enjoy...bike/atv trails
- Not sure
- Benches to look at the nature
- Keep weeds out of swimming areas
- The Dnr River Access Park taken care of better, Maybe a swimming area?
- Continue to let the DNR do their job, and let the current state laws be the standard.
- Build a park at river access

Question 5: What environmental improvements would make Motley a healthier place to live?

- Plant more trees within the city.
- Stay small so people can afford to keep their yards and stuff clean and taken care of.
- Housing, community center or park improvements.
- A building to exercise in.
- Walking/Biking Trails, Community center with Exercise equipment, Pool??
- Make sure the sewage treatment plant isn’t leaching into the ground water, and that current septic systems meet standards to not leech into our ground water.
- Walking trails

Question 6: What would make it easier for people in Motley to access healthy food and healthcare?

- Nothing comes to mind.
- Maybe if the Dollar General carried fruits and vegetables. And have an affordable option
- Have a pharmacy at the Lakewood Clinic. No close pharmacies.
- Farmers market
- transportation for the elderly
- Shuttle services similar to friendly rider. More evening hours for the food shelf. Talk to local farmers about donations.
- Volunteer driver/ taxi to help with transportation to healthcare appointment. Walking path to the clinic / grocery store so people are safe walking.
- Farmers market. The local grocery store is expensive and has small selection and very short hours of operation. The people who cannot get a ride to go grocery shopping anywhere else are the ones who suffer.
- Drug Store, Fitness center
- Lower property taxes and business taxes to incentives grocery stores to come to our community
- Public Transportation

Question 7: What would help improve overall well-being and a sense of community for Motley?

- More community gathering opportunities
- Nothing comes to mind.
- Love the community events that we have. Keep them free or cheap so everyone can go.
- More year-round activities and more people involved to help spearhead these activities.
- an overall facelift to make the town more inviting. Clean up some of the old buildings along the highway
- Community events that do not include alcohol. Having a community center.
- The motley fair board and June fest to be one and support each other
- A community center for activities, Fitness area, Pool, Swimming area on the river
- By doing as little as possible and letting people's already established community organizations such as churches, the legion or Even private businesses do the community building.
- More community events/gatherings

Question 8: What services (like childcare, senior support, or safety programs) do you think Motley needs more of?

- Childcare
- Nothing comes to mind.
- Lower taxes so people can stay home with their children and also help out the elderly.
- Based on the meeting senior support is needed.
- All of the above.
- A small strip mall that offers groceries, healthy living options, clothes essentials needs all in one area at low cost.
- Senior care, Senior Income based Housing, and Senior activity's
- Motley needs more child care but that is more of an issue with the state licensing requirements than it is with what the City of Motley could do.
- Public transportation, access to healthy food, affordable housing

Question 9: What could make Motley feel like a more welcoming and inclusive place for everyone?

- Affordable housing to bring in new community members and help Motley grow.
- Updated businesses along the highway; making sure all lots are utilized to their full potential. Having that makes the town feel more welcoming and vibrant.
- Invite more people to spearhead activities
- Get rid of that old motel. It's an eye sore!!
- Having more ignite events such as parades or dinners, music in the park, having a nice park, tear down the nasty old motel next to the Eastwood in.
- News letters of what's happens..how's on the board, what's being discussed. Saturday pot lucks at the park or fire hall/city hall
- It would be nice to have a place for kids to go like a rec-center, skating rink, bowling alley, etc. someplace safe for kids to hang out with other kids that don't want to be part of the "druggie crowd".
- Just Keep it Clean and inviting , Better care of Fair ground, Barn Looks Great already!!, More Inviting River Park, w/ tables, N grills Better Access/Signage
- By letting the community organizations lead the way and keeping the city government out of it
- More community events

Question 10: What type of businesses or job opportunities would you love to see in Motley?

- Restaurants, clothing shops
- Grocery store.
- Coffee shop,
- Fast food joint
- More small businesses that have opportunities to thrive and take advantage of the highway traffic.
- Community center/fitness center
- Office space. Lakewood opportunities, soup& sandwich shop,
- The main place for employment in Motley is a factory job.
- Decent priced grocery store
- Maybe more Retail, Eating options
- I would love to see any entrepreneur who feels that they can run a profitable business come to our community. I want our community be a selected site because of low regulation, and low taxes
- Healthy food options/restaurant

Question 11: How can Motley grow while keeping its small-town character?

- Collaborating more with staples!!
- It can grow by adding businesses.
- Small business not corporate ones.
- It has a long way to go
- Support local small businesses and encourage them to come to motley.
- Support local businesses, try to help keep cost low.
- Keep the trees and sidewalks
- Need more businesses that actually hire people, not the 2 plants but other business
- Maybe more Retail, Eating options
- By lowering regulations and keeping taxes low and when people want to build, keep government out of their way

Question 12: If you could change one thing about Motley to make it better for future generations, what would it be?

- Affordable housing
- Adding businesses for future generations.
- A public area down by the river for everybody to enjoy.
- Find an entity to revamp the school house and have it open to the community for activities and to rent/utilize its space, care for it and share in the utility expenses.
- Make it more inviting with trails. There is no way to get around on a bike/foot/other with out riding on the roads. if you leave city limits there are not shoulders on the roads and no one slows down or moves over when they see bikers/runners/walkers.
- Keep small business in town, don't sell out to corporations that kill small businesses.
- More family activities. Motley clean up, bright color signs.
- Get the drugs out of town
- Choices, restaurants, grocery stores, an actual fair like they used to have
- More History, Making the school into Community Center, With some housing units??
- lower regulations
- Hold more community events, getting the residents involved with each other to build a sense of community

Question 13: Who should be part of this planning process? (Please enter name and email address)

- Staples-motley schools
- All Motley City Council members.
- Anyone that has time and cares about our town.
- The town
- City council, Lakewood health. I feel people would come help with ideas but people don't feel welcome to come to meeting or know when they are.
- Mike Stevens mgsscs@brainerd.net
- Jeremie.vanek@gmail.com

Question 14: What else should we know about Motley?

- Motley has a large rural community.
- With taxes high on property and other areas I don't think we should do anything that's going to increase taxes. If anything we should be doing stuff to help people stay in their homes not being taxed out of them by improving things in town to make it look nicer
- Motley is stuck in the past and doesn't seem willing to invest to keep the city up to date. Not realizing if you invest you will get the \$ back by bringing more into the community and getting more to stop and support local business.
- It's better than Staples ;)
- I think the old school is a perfect opportunity for an assisted living. Office space. Big gym, walking track, pool, indoor activities. Something like wadena wellness center or perham PACC.
- Some houses look abandoned, could they get cleaned up?
- Emphasize more of the River's and Lake's,
- It's a great community.



City of Motley

Comprehensive Plan

2026