

# PUBLIC SERVICES ELEMENT

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## PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

### County Administration

Mower County has a total of approximately 180 full-time, 35 part-time and 14 shared employees housed in the Government Center, which includes the Court House and Law Enforcement Center; the Health and Human Services Building; the Recycling Building and the County Highway Department headquarters. The number of employees by department follows:

County Board/Administration	7
Auditor	4
Treasurer	3
Assessor	6
Recorder	3
Courts	15
Veterans Services	2
County Sheriff/Jail/Emergency Management	42 (14 shared with City)
Human Services (nursing)	17 (35 part-time)
Social Services	52
Highway Department	29
Extension	2
Recycling	2
Environmental Health	2.5
Planning	1.5
Housing Authority	2.5
Data Processing	2

Problems currently facing the County include compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the removal of asbestos from older buildings and wiring for telecommunications linkages. Remodeling of the Government Center, including the courts, is programmed for 1993-1995.

Not unlike most Counties, Mower has a relatively large number of departments all of which may not be necessary or supportable given dwindling resources. The County needs to consider the combining of departments, wherever possible. It also needs to study the potential for service consolidation with other governmental agencies.

### District Courts

The Courts are located in the County Government Center in downtown Austin. They have a total of 8,352 square feet, excluding shared hallways, and employ two full-time judges, one part-time judge, two court reporters, one law clerk, an administrator and nine staff. The County has plans for court remodeling but no funding has been appropriated to date.

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Courtrooms, chambers, witness waiting, conference and jury rooms are nonexistent or inadequate to satisfy the caseload. There is no secure holding area or passage from the jail to the Courtroom. There is no State mandated juvenile detention area outside of the jail and the Court House working environment is deficient. If the current judicial delivery system remains unchanged, the courts will need to be improved to satisfy service demands and State mandates. The absence of financial resources is a serious impediment to making these improvements.

A number of courts pilot projects are currently in progress around the State of Minnesota. The State has taken over the 8<sup>th</sup> District Court and the cause for jury and public defender responsibilities for all Districts. Several counties are also experimenting with shared court administrators. The results of these pilot projects may be available by the end of 1992 or early 1993.

Without extensive study, it is impossible for the County to make decisions on how to provide the most efficient and cost effective District Court service. One thing is sure, the County will not be able to continue to deliver the current level of judicial services without either further investing in facility improvements or investigating alternative servicing models. Costs, as compared with service efficiencies and losses, will need to be evaluated before the consolidation of roles and/or whole systems is initiated. However, the door must be left open to study a variety of new delivery systems.

### **Public Schools**

Public education is under great stress especially in rural communities where there is a high incidence of obsolete school facilities combined with small and shrinking enrollments and too few dollars to commit to quality education. These characteristics are evident in Mower County.

The County is served by nine independent school districts with 1990 enrollments ranging from 268 to 4,056. All but two of the eight districts providing enrollment information, lost students between 1980 and 1990 paralleling the general decline in population. Much more significant enrollment shrinkage occurred during the late 1970's.

While the County plans no role in the organization, decision-making or management of the public schools that serve its children, it does have a concern for the quality of education that can be delivered by exceptionally small school districts. It is concerned that the existing educational system may not be preparing the next generation of children adequately for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is also concerned that the present configuration of small districts is less than efficient and may result in extraordinary future costs to Mower County residents.

To these ends, the County pledges its support to the consideration of new models and configurations, which will give first priority to quality education at an affordable cost. Children and their education are among the County's top priorities.

Wherever possible, school districts in rural areas should be expected to service an area within a radius of 15 miles or 40 to 50 minutes travel time from a high school and have a minimum K-12 student enrollment of 1,500 to 2,000 students. This translates to many less districts than the nine that currently serve Mower County.

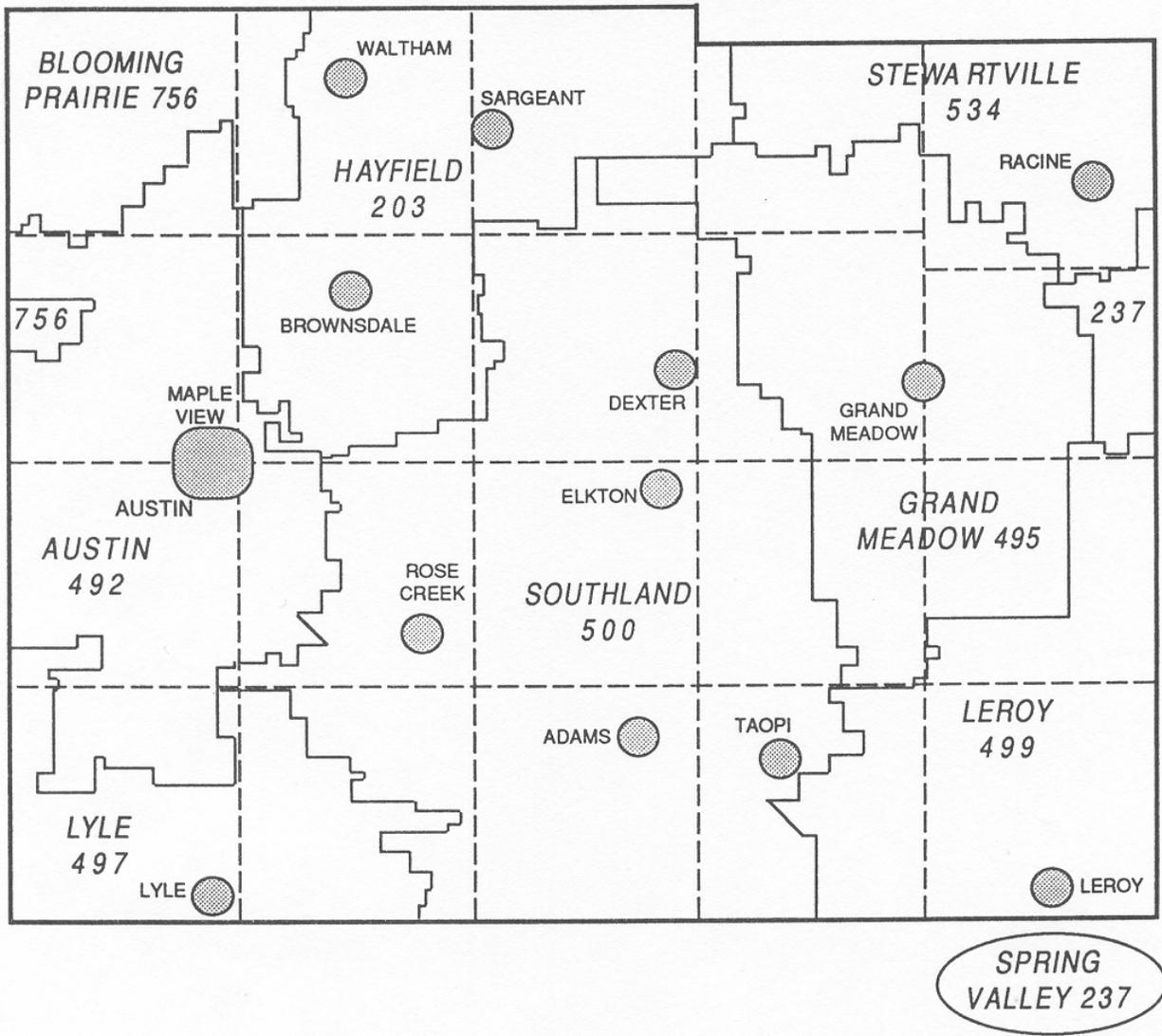
**TABLE 29  
PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS**

DISTRICT	NAME	1975	1980	1985	1990	% CHANGE 80-90
203	Hayfield	N/A	1,054	968	1,025	-2.8
492	Austin	6,613	4,786	4,211	4,056	-15.3
497	Lyle	330	322	269	268	-16.8
499	Leroy/Ostrander	N/A	375	378 <sup>1</sup>	383 <sup>2</sup>	+2.1
500	Southland	1,073	794	680	627	-21.0
534	Stewartville	1,841	1,784	1,667	1,636	-8.30
756	Blooming Prairie	1,219	963	963	1,051	+9.1
495	Grand Meadow	514	427	377	416	-2.6
237	Spring Valley	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-

<sup>1</sup> 1983

<sup>2</sup> 1987

**MOWER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS**



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## **County Highway Department**

The County Highway Department maintains the County State Aid Highway (CSAH) and local County road system. It has maintenance facilities in several locations and employs a total of 30 personnel in the maintenance and engineering departments. In addition to its 11-acre headquarters at Eighth Avenue and Eleventh Street in Austin, it has small maintenance stations in Adams (sand truck and motor grade), Dexter (motor grader), Grand Meadow (sand truck and motor grader) and Leroy (sand truck).

The Highway Department has plans to expand its Leroy facility in 1992. Plans call for the purchase of three to four acres of land, a three-stall truck station and a salt/sand shed. Expansion of the Adams facility will also be necessary in three to five years because the existing building is deficient.

The County highway system is in need of substantial reconstruction/rehabilitation (not new roadways) to bring it up to accepted State Aid standards but this will not require the addition of significantly expanded or new maintenance facilities. Existing facilities will, however, have to be repaired and improved periodically to meet the standard of service expected by Mower County residents and businesses.

The greater problem is that of correcting very costly bridge and County highway deficiencies. The County will have to consider whether all bridges are necessary and whether bonding and/or special assessments should be employed as means to augment the funding of needed improvements.

## **County Sheriff's Department**

The Mower County Sheriff's Department was established in the 1850's and has grown from a one-man department to a one of 28 full-time and two to five part-time employees including deputies and civilian personnel. The County also shares 15 dispatchers with the City of Austin. The Sheriff is elected.

The County Sheriff's Department shares the Law Enforcement Center with the City of Austin Police Department. The Center is operated by the Law Enforcement Center Commission and is scheduled for limited upgrading/renovation in 1992/93. In addition to Austin, most of the small Cities also provide police service.

The occupancy of the County jail has doubled over the past ten years to approximately 80%. It was remodeled in 1991/92 and will require expansion within two years if occupancy continues to grow. It is currently licensed to house 45 prisoners.

Due to a relatively stable population, the County anticipates no increases in police personnel. The County has recently accepted a six-month test project during which it will assume welfare fraud investigations. If the workload warrants, up to two additional personnel have been authorized by the County Board to carry out this function.

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While no major problems have been identified related to the delivery of police services to County residents, there is considerable service duplication between Austin and Mower County in spite of the cooperation that is in evidence in the form of shared facilities and services. And, while the small Cities may provide a more visible and responsive police service, training is likely deficient attributable to insufficient resources.

The County and Cities will not likely be able to deliver the current duplicative level of police protection indefinitely without experiencing service deterioration. More than sufficient economic and other evidence already exists to suggest that new ways will have to be found to provide police services in a more efficient manner in the future.

### **Fire and Rescue Services**

Fire protection is provided by the Mower County Cities of Adams, Austin, Brownsdale, Dexter, Leroy, Lyle, Grand Meadow and Rose Creek (see Figure 29). It is also serviced by several non Mower County Cities including Stewartville, Spring Valley, Blooming Prairie, Hayfield and Ostrander. All of these departments service the surrounding Townships via mutual aid agreements. Townships pay for fire service on a per incident flat fee basis. All are volunteer departments.

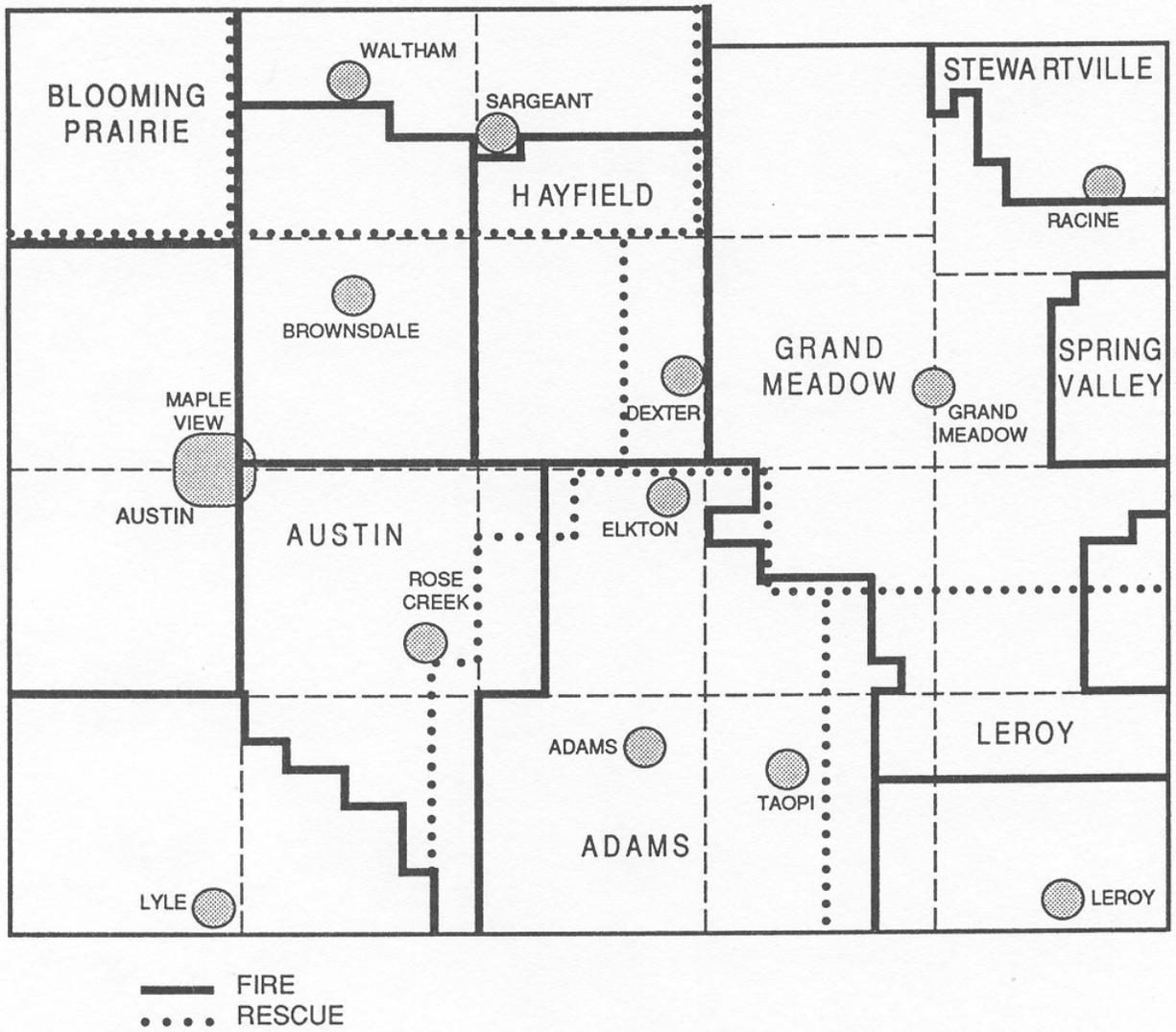
The County is served by six emergency rescue services (see Figure 29) including Austin, Adams, Blooming Prairie, Hayfield, Grand Meadow and Leroy. All are volunteer services and most have problems with the recruitment and paging of volunteers, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement and delinquent payments. All are having difficulties with cost containment and several are in need of costly new equipment. The need most often identified is countywide paging of volunteers.

Existing fire protection is considered to be acceptable for rural areas. Stations must be located where volunteers are most readily available, which is in the Cities, and distances to remote incidents are necessarily lengthy. Except for Austin, fire insurance ratings are generally in the seven to nine range attributable in part to the absence of public water service beyond City limits.

Virtually every department serving Mower County perceives the need for improved facilities, but all have limited resources with which to undertake such improvements.

Fire and rescue services are, by nature, exercises in cooperation in rural areas but even more needs to be done to increase efficiency and improve training. The County may appropriately play the roll of facilitator in streamlining fire and rescue services to insure a cost effective level of protection for all of its residents.

## FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE AREAS



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## **Public Libraries**

The Austin Public Library comprising 11,300 square feet and over 81,000 titles is located in Austin. It has branch libraries in the Cities of Grand Meadow, Leroy and Brownsdale. The Austin/Mower County Bookmobile operates from the Austin Public Library and services the entire County. Lyle also has a small library (3,500 volumes) that is unrelated to the Austin system.

The Austin system has both space and maintenance problems. It lacks computer linkages, which would provide greater local and regional library access. The county currently plays no role in the administration of the Austin Public Libraries but it does provide substantial financial support for this countywide service. It is the County's intent to continue to support this important service.

## **Parks, Recreation and Trails**

The County currently has no parks and provides no public recreational programs. It relies for the most part on its Cities to provide these services. It does maintain an extensive countywide snowmobile trail system consisting of approximately 200 miles of State approved groomed trails.

There is, however, a growing demand for public trails, such as the Austin/Lyle Conservation Corridor Trail, which traverse multiple jurisdictions. The County has agreed to accept the trail and participate on an in-kind basis in trail development. Future trails may also warrant County involvement.

## **Utilities**

The County plays no role in the provision of public utility services (sewer and water) to residents. All of the municipalities within Mower County have public water systems with the exception of Taopi where private wells are shared. All but Taopi also provide a public sanitary sewer service. Because urban densities require public utilities, the County is concerned only that the Cities provide such services in the most efficient and cost effective manner consistent with the needs to protect the public's health and welfare, the environment, commercial agriculture and the rural lifestyle.

The County is directly responsible for the regulation of private on-site utilities in all unincorporated areas of the County and it intends to exercise its regulatory authority in a manner that will limit development in areas that are generally unsuitable for on-site utilities in an effort to protect the public's welfare.

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## **PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES PLAN**

### **Objectives**

1. Delivery of appropriate levels of public services to meet the needs of rural residents.
2. Continuing evaluation and reevaluation of new, more efficient and cooperative ways to provide public services in the best interests of County residents.
3. Delivery of public services in the most environmentally responsible fashion.
4. Guidance of urban development through the prudent extension of public utilities
5. Protection of the natural environment, especially water resources, from contamination.

### **Plan Elements**

This Comprehensive Plan does not purport to have all of the answers to Mower County's future public servicing needs. What it does suggest is that public services are a growing problem that are in immediate need of reevaluation and that servicing issues are sufficiently complicated to warrant an in depth study of alternative ways to deliver public services in the future and their respective costs.

### **Policies**

The following are the County's policies for Public Services:

1. To support the continuing study of shared public services as a means to improve service deliveries and eliminate duplication.
2. To appoint a public services task force to study the sharing/consolidation of public services countywide and with neighboring Counties.
3. To support new educational models which are better targeted at educational excellence for Mower County's young people.
4. To continue to provide financial support for the Austin Public Library system.
5. To minimize the County's involvement in the delivery of park and recreation services in deference to City programs but participate, on a project by project basis, in the development of Count-wide trail system plans as needs and financial capability warrant.
6. To continue to maintain a countywide snowmobile trail network.
7. To support the continuation of fire protection by Cities to the rural areas of Mower County.

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8. To support the extension of public water only if sanitary sewer service is also available.
  9. To support annexation as a condition of extending public utilities.
  10. To encourage all Cities to provide both public sewer and water services and fire protection as the appropriate level of municipal public services.
  11. To encourage the extension of public utilities as a tool to foster contiguous rather than leapfrog urban development.
  12. To avoid the extension of public utilities into environmentally sensitive areas.
  13. To require that all water wells be constructed in accordance with the County's approved well construction methods and criteria dated December of 1991.
  14. Beyond urban service areas, to require that lot sizes be based on the capacity of soils to accommodate on-site utilities and the ability to provide two wastewater drain fields.
  15. Require inspection and upgrading of on-site sewer systems to conform with MPCA standards whenever any property is sold or ownership is otherwise transferred. Inspections must be conducted by a state certified inspector. Inspections can be waived if a new system has been installed in the past 5 years or an existing system has been inspected in the past 3 years.
  16. Require the identification of any wells of record and sealing of abandoned ones whenever any property is sold or ownership is otherwise transferred.
  17. Require siting of development in rural areas at locations where tests indicate that soils are suitable for on-site treatment systems over the long run.
  18. Continue to support as financially feasible the revolving loan fund for County residents to upgrade individual sewage treatment systems.
  19. Explore funding options for wetland banking program.
  20. Develop an emergency operations plan for flood events that sets forth administrative and operational procedures for preparedness, mitigation, evacuation, immediate recovery and other necessary provisions.
  21. Explore the development of an ongoing program to purchase properties in the floodplain as they become available for sale.
  22. Work to ensure that appropriate and adequate services and facilities are provided to meet the needs of the County's senior population.
  23. Develop a countywide directory of services for seniors.

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24. Explore the option of establishing an advisory commission to the County Board to assist in the decision-making process on issues dealing with the elderly community.
  25. Explore funding options to assist small cities within the County with upgrading sewer and water infrastructure.