



COOK COUNTY'S PROSPERITY AGENDA

READER'S GUIDE

Go Cook County is a shared vision and process for stewardship and prosperity in Cook County. It is a long-range, continuous, ambitious, community driven plan of action for creating a stronger, more vibrant community by the year 2025.

Cook County's Prosperity Agenda is the result of more than a year's work by the Go Team – 22 private, public, and non-profit community stewards from all parts of the county. Go Cook County developed an in-depth situation analysis of the county that included face-to-face interviews with 90 private, public, and non-profit leaders and officials, an open online community perceptions survey that received 400 responses, and a detailed economic analysis of the county's economy. We uncovered alarming trends based on the data and then looked in the mirror and asked the broader community how are we really doing and what's important to us. We talked about what we need to be, what we value and don't want to change, as well as what we value and recognize that change is inevitable to support jobs and a sustained quality of life. How can we guide and facilitate that change while respecting and retaining what we value most? This has been the challenge, we're not done yet and need your help in setting a vision and course of action we can all get behind and make happen.

The following framework consists of an overall vision and values statement and five priority areas as an initial strategy to drive action. These are a draft for discussion. Are there other major priorities? We don't have all the actions figured out yet but do have some pretty sound ideas based on the conversations and input we've had thus far. This starting framework is in place for us to consider, add to and finalize in the coming months.

Shared Vision for Prosperity 2025 is what we aspire to be by the year 2025. It employs a comprehensive point of view of our community's quality of life and what's valued that helps guide our actions and achieve desired outcomes over time.

Prosperity Priorities are the key areas around which we focus our efforts in achieving our shared vision for the future. Each Prosperity Priority is interlinked with the others. They are not listed in order of importance. As we address one priority we must ask how our actions impact or advance progress towards other priorities. Each Prosperity Priority contains the following:



- A vision statement that describes how the Cook County Community will have evolved in relationship to each priority by 2025.
- A set of values that represent what is important to our community and guides our work.
- A description of why each priority was chosen. The Go Cook County process revealed many opportunities, challenges, and needs. The five Prosperity Priorities were selected because, separately and together, they represent the issues that the Go Team felt could render the most positive change when addressed.
- A section outlining objectives and possible actions that will help us achieve our goals and vision.

The Shared Vision and Prosperity Priorities are not final but a starting point for more dialogue and more detail on how we can achieve desired success. This is not a sprint but a marathon. Incremental, strategic doing and tangible, positive change is the real outcome. It will take time and a concerted effort to effect positive change and turn around some of the trends that have been seriously affecting our economy and threatening our long-term prosperity that could have significant ramifications for generations.

Cook County's Prosperity Agenda can only be successful if it is widely supported and its vision and priorities are incorporated into the planning and actions of residents, businesses, and public and non-profit organizations. Can we continue to learn and build on the recent collaborations that are evolving in Cook County today? We call on the community to take ownership of this shared vision for Cook County.



COOK COUNTY'S PROSPERITY AGENDA

The Cook County Community values and is a steward of the natural environment, balancing the need for development, jobs and a sustainable population with the need to respect and sustain a quality natural environment.

The community is remote, rural in character and offers an extraordinary place to raise a family, retire, continue lifelong learning, pursue a career, invest and make a business commitment, and share in a "sense of place" that is unique and differentiates us from other places.

We are fortunate to experience and thoroughly enjoy an amazing rural quality of life that we value, protect and share with tourists, seasonal residents, friends and family. To sustain this lifestyle we need a healthy, more diversified economy which: balances and embraces development that fits our culture and values; supports and sustains a more diverse population of all ages, families and retirees, and celebrates and protects the cultural and natural amenities that make this community special.

We have a shared vision for prosperity that recognizes change is inevitable and that we have challenges to address and overcome to sustain this lifestyle. We can control our destiny by balancing a strong sense of independence and self-reliance with the need to collaborate and focus together on a shared vision we can support and work toward. Alignment of limited resources and a commitment to some growth and balanced change can make a significant difference in meeting current and future challenges. In this spirit, we believe that Cook County Community's better days are ahead of it, and we resolve to work toward and sustain a more prosperous economy and quality environment for future generations.



SHARED VISION FOR PROSPERITY 2025

Cook County is a vibrant, sustainable and prospering rural community of 6,500 people. Our “sense of place” drives social and economic prosperity that’s based on our strengths, competitive advantages and natural amenities, smart growth, a sustainable environment and the family values we share.

We can be self-reliant and at times fiercely independent but have learned that collaborative, committed leadership, aligned with shared responsibility throughout the community brings us better outcomes and personal growth. We are about entrepreneurship and risk taking, creating wealth and reinvesting, and competing in a changing regional and global economy.

We value lifelong learning, creativity and innovation, and a healthy lifestyle for all ages. Our love for Lake Superior, the beauty and amenities offered by the North Shore, Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters support our outdoor-based lifestyle and a major part of our economy. Our vibrancy is enhanced by the arts, music and cultural amenities, history and preservation, and a commitment to attracting and retaining young adults and families.

The Cook County Community demonstrates collaborative leadership in many ways and at many levels. As elected officials, volunteers, business owners and landowners, educators and artists, retirees and young families, we all share in a vision that embraces:

- Retention and attraction of young workers and families who can afford to live in community.
- New residents who have chosen to retire here and engage in this lifestyle.
- A first class tourist destination with key niches, facilities, accommodations and amenities that are branded and marketed collaboratively.
- A vibrant four-season tourism base that offers diverse recreational opportunities and eco-tourism in appropriate locations; unique amenities,



events and attractions, and competitive facilities and accommodations that meet diverse needs, respect the environment and support year-round employment opportunities.

- A diverse mix of small businesses in the arts, light manufacturing, retail, services and professional enterprises taking advantage of our location, inherent strengths and existing business clusters, high speed broadband, and the creativity, skills and talents of our workforce and entrepreneurs.
- Quality, affordable housing of all types for workers, families and the elderly that blends into the community, takes advantage of limited land availability and infrastructure, and is energy efficient.
- A thriving rural arts, music, heritage and cultural center where we celebrate creativity and creative enterprises.
- An affordable high-speed broadband infrastructure to the premise, offered throughout the community, which enhances education, healthcare, safety, competitiveness and productivity, and supports new economic opportunities as we evolve with technology advancements and lifestyle expectations.
- Students and a workforce prepared and trained to support our economy's needs with quality career and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Local government that is responsive, organized and efficient, and plays an important role in supporting the provision of public services and needed investments in critical infrastructure aligned with our strategic priorities.
- Environmental stewardship, balancing the need for jobs and growth with the capacity of the resource to sustain a quality environment and sense of place.
- People who take pride in their homes, businesses and public spaces and support investment in public amenities.



PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

NATURAL RESOURCES AND SENSE OF PLACE

Vision Statement

The Cook County Community recognizes that the health of our natural resources and cultural heritage are critical to the success of our communities, businesses and residents. The Cook County Community has integrated a balanced approach to conservation and development into all aspects of community and economic development. The Cook County Community welcomes and supports new businesses, residents and visitors that share this sense of stewardship.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- Our activities do not degrade our resources.
- Development occurs in an environmentally sound manner.
- Our communities should retain authenticity and traditional character.
- We embrace progress that is consistent with our vision of natural and cultural stewardship.
- We take pride in our homes, businesses and public spaces.
- We welcome a diversity of recreation opportunities and work to increase public access.
- Natural and cultural assets are a key part of growing our population and strengthening the economy.

Why is this a Priority?

The Cook County Community recognizes that the county's advantages as a place to live, work and visit flow from high quality natural amenities and rural culture. Nature- and culture-based economic development should create mutually beneficial relationships between conservation and growth that inherently protect the natural and cultural resources that such development depends upon.



Policies to protect natural assets and increase and diversify access to the outdoors can enhance efforts to grow tourism, attract entrepreneurs and grow the Cook County brand. At the same time, investments in housing, broadband, commercial development sites and other forms of infrastructure are needed to support growth.

In attempting to preserve the qualities that attract residents and visitors the Cook County Community must guard against over-regulation that could slow desirable growth. The challenge of creating sustainable development is to maximize benefits while minimizing costs by developing planning and management approaches that are environmentally sound, economically viable, and fit our culture and values.

How to Get There

- Implement fair and consistent approaches to allocating land for conservation, recreation and development.
- Support diversification of recreational activities including passive and active pursuits. Establish a system that allows different uses to coexist without degrading one another or the environment.
- Adopt economically feasible leading practices in land use, infrastructure provision, construction and site design to protect natural resources and sense of place.



PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY

Vision Statement

Cook County has a sustainable year-round economy where residents can lead economically successful lives. A strong tourism economy is complemented by a diverse mix of locally grown businesses and organizations that serve world markets and provide services to the county's residents and visitors.

Cook County is a first class tourist destination. Tourism has expanded into a four-season, diversified economy that serves more needs than ever before, respects the environment and supports year-round employment opportunities.

Entrepreneurs attracted to the quality of life, and fostered by local economic development strategies, have created a vibrant mix of small businesses in the arts, innovative manufacturing, retail, services and professional enterprises.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- We embrace tourism as an economic cornerstone.
- We embrace entrepreneurship. We celebrate the successes and understand failure is sometimes a part of creation.
- Broadband is a tangible opportunity to enhance and diversify our economy.
- Our natural resources, rural culture and quality of life can be used to help grow and diversify our economy.
- A healthy community relies on a diverse economy.



Why is this a Priority?

Tourism dominates Cook County's economy. The county's abundance of natural and cultural resources, established tourism businesses and recognized brand mean that tourism will continue to have a large impact on the local economy. A healthier tourist economy is necessary for a healthier overall economy and community. Investments to expand the duration of the tourist season and attract new customers are necessary to ease the seasonal drop-off in the economy and adapt to changing tourism demands.

Investments in fiber-optic broadband and other infrastructure can be combined with engagement of entrepreneurs and small businesses to leverage the county's remarkable quality of life and natural amenities to create business opportunities, attract investment income and draw new people to the community.

Enhancement and diversification will create a resilient and vibrant local economy that can support more year round employment, diversify career opportunities, and sustain families.

How to Get There

- Enhance tourism through capital investments, diversifying activities and services, expanding the season and attracting new customers.
- Develop the county's tourism product by promoting investment in marketing, customer service and other supporting skills and training, quality initiatives, accommodations, festivals, events and visitor attractions, and by providing advisory support and training for tourism businesses so collectively we have a reputation as a destination that exceeds the expectations of the tourist.
- Make public investments in entrepreneurship and local business development. Engage directly with entrepreneurs and growing small companies. Offer tools and solutions that are tailored to specific needs and consistent with our culture and values.
- Make public investments in infrastructure to leverage the county's quality of life, culture and natural amenities.
- Use investments and policies to help fully realize broadband's potential to improve existing businesses, expand markets, and



create new business opportunities. Market the economic and social advantages of the county's fiber to the premise system.

- Link the tourist economy with efforts to diversify the economy and grow new businesses.
- Develop and collaboratively market a County brand that reflects its status as a first class tourism destination and a welcoming place for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Vision Statement

Local government provides strong, decisive and inspired leadership that is collaborative and leverages public and private resources in support of the county's economic development activities. All parts of local government work to implement a shared vision for sustainable growth, a population of 6,500 year round residents, while maintaining our environmental and cultural values. Local government embraces a public role that is entrepreneurial to transform and solve difficult problems. Local government is committed to the success of families, small businesses and innovative community endeavors.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- Local government is part of the solution.
- County government connects the Cook County Community.
- The Cook County community embraces public entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation in local government.
- Local government leads by example, helping to make things happen when and where others are not ready or able to move on their own.
- Local government encourages development consistent with our values and goals.



Why is this a Priority?

Implementing Go Cook County's economic development vision requires the strategic marshaling of limited resources. It will require balancing investments in basic infrastructure, housing, environmentally sound development, education and workforce training, multiple business sectors, and the creation of new programs and policies. Leadership by local government, especially county government, is critical to build and maintain required partnerships and set priorities across a broad spectrum of strategies and interests.

How to Get There

- A county administrator is needed to provide effective and efficient leadership of county services and regulations to support economic development.
- Go Cook County's vision and strategic priorities are integrated into all local government functions.
- The Cook County/Grand Marais Economic Development Authority and Cook County Chamber of Commerce play active roles in implementing Go Cook County's vision and strategic priorities.
- Local government builds partnerships with local, regional, state, and national agencies and organizations, leading and supporting where necessary.
- Local government works with the private sector to make critical and strategic investments and public policy decisions that support retention and development of new businesses and an expanded tax base while retaining the natural beauty, environmental integrity, and amenities we value.
- The provision of basic services and regulations are reviewed and amended periodically to reflect changing conditions and priorities. Service and regulation encourages development consistent with our values and goals.
- Land use decisions meet reasonable concerns about sustainability by combining leading practices for zoning, infrastructure provision, site design and other public policies.



- Economic development programs are periodically reviewed for consistency with Go Cook County’s vision and strategic priorities and effectiveness. Funding decisions are linked to strategic priorities.

PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

EDUCATION

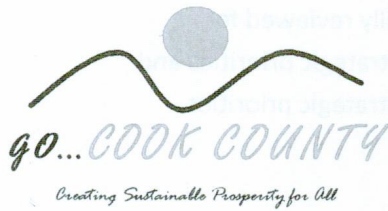
Vision Statement

Cook County’s students and residents have the skills necessary to contribute to the local economy through careers and business enterprises that allow them to live successful lives in Cook County. Education, government, business and non-profits work closely to contribute to the long term success of the county’s economy by creating workforce training programs driven by the diverse needs of these sectors of the economy. Our schools and students are central to our prosperity.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- Education and training is a lifelong pursuit.
- Education and training is available to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Training offers the opportunity for career advancement.
- The spirit of entrepreneurship is instilled in everyone.
- All high school graduates have the skills necessary to enter the local workforce, complete advanced training or go on to earn a college degree.
- Students who do not attend college have the skills needed for skilled, living wage jobs.
- Our schools are an asset that attract and retain young families and quality education professionals.



Why is this a Priority?

Economic prosperity and business growth require workers with the right skills and talent. Cook County's challenges include a shrinking workforce and a mid-career (30 to 45 years old) population that lags behind the state average in education and skill achievement.

The county's education and workforce training efforts need to be enhanced to provide residents of all ages and backgrounds with the skills necessary for gainful employment. These efforts should be primarily focused on the needs of local employers. Improving resident's access to and skills with computer and internet technology must also be a priority so that economic opportunities can be expanded. Education and workforce training must provide the opportunity for career advancement.

A system that makes employees and businesses more productive and innovative will help raise the standard of living and attract and retain residents.

How to Get There

- Education, government, business and non-profits work together to develop, fund and promote workforce training tailored to the needs of local employers.
- Build partnerships with local, regional, state and national agencies and organizations.
- Make education and workforce training cost effective for businesses, students, and education providers.
- Workers and students have access to and knowledge of current technologies.
- Leverage broadband technology to improve education and training.
- Invest in the school system to offer curricula, extracurricular activities, and student support programs of the first tier.
- Insure that all students have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to the community.



PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

HOUSING

Vision Statement

Cook County has a diverse stock of safe, livable and affordable housing that helps sustain the economy, schools and community by meeting the needs of workers, families and the elderly.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- Housing needs to be available and affordable to all permanent residents, with special consideration given to the elderly and young people just entering the housing market, as well as those working in important service capacities.
- Affordable housing needs to fit the character of the community.
- Affordable, safe and livable housing is a cornerstone of personal, family, and community stability.

Why is this a Priority?

Cook County's popularity as a tourism, second home and retirement destination, and its limited supply of developable land combine to create a shortage of affordable housing. When the workforce and long-time residents are priced out of the housing market it becomes difficult to build a vibrant economy, fill jobs, retain families, accommodate visitors and satisfy the needs of the community.

Cook County's affordable housing challenges are daunting. The County's median inflation adjusted home price increased 78 percent, from \$107,000 to \$240,000, between 2000 and 2010. (Cook County's median home price is consistently amongst the five highest counties in the state and by far the highest among rural counties.) At the same time, population and economic growth stagnated.

Action by local government in partnership with other stakeholders and interests is necessary to lower barriers to home ownership for the following reasons:



- Lack of affordable, livable housing is a barrier to attracting and retaining young families and residents. This leads to population stagnation, declining school enrollment, increased job turnover, lower productivity, and increased business and social costs.
- Home ownership is most people's dream. They view it as essential to family stability.
- The county needs a strong, stabilized workforce. Housing choices and opportunities are necessary to develop and keep it.
- Communities need residents to attract and retain year-round businesses and services.

How to Get There

- Implement a variety of programs that address the needs of young people entering the workforce, families, seasonal workers and the elderly. This means having options for rentals, starter homes, retirement living and seasonal dwellings.
- Housing livability and safety need to be addressed along with affordable options.
- Affordability programs must address long-term ownership and operating costs.
- Programs must address supply and demand.
- Creatively employ land use, infrastructure, construction, financing, redevelopment and legal tools to bring down the cost of housing and leverage private interest and investment.
- Support economic and workforce training strategies that increase economic opportunities to improve resident's ability to afford quality housing.
- Ensure the character of the community is preserved in addressing affordable housing challenges.
- Study strategies used successfully by other rural recreation and tourism communities such as land trusts, down payment assistance and incentive zoning, to name a few.