

# Comprehensive Plan

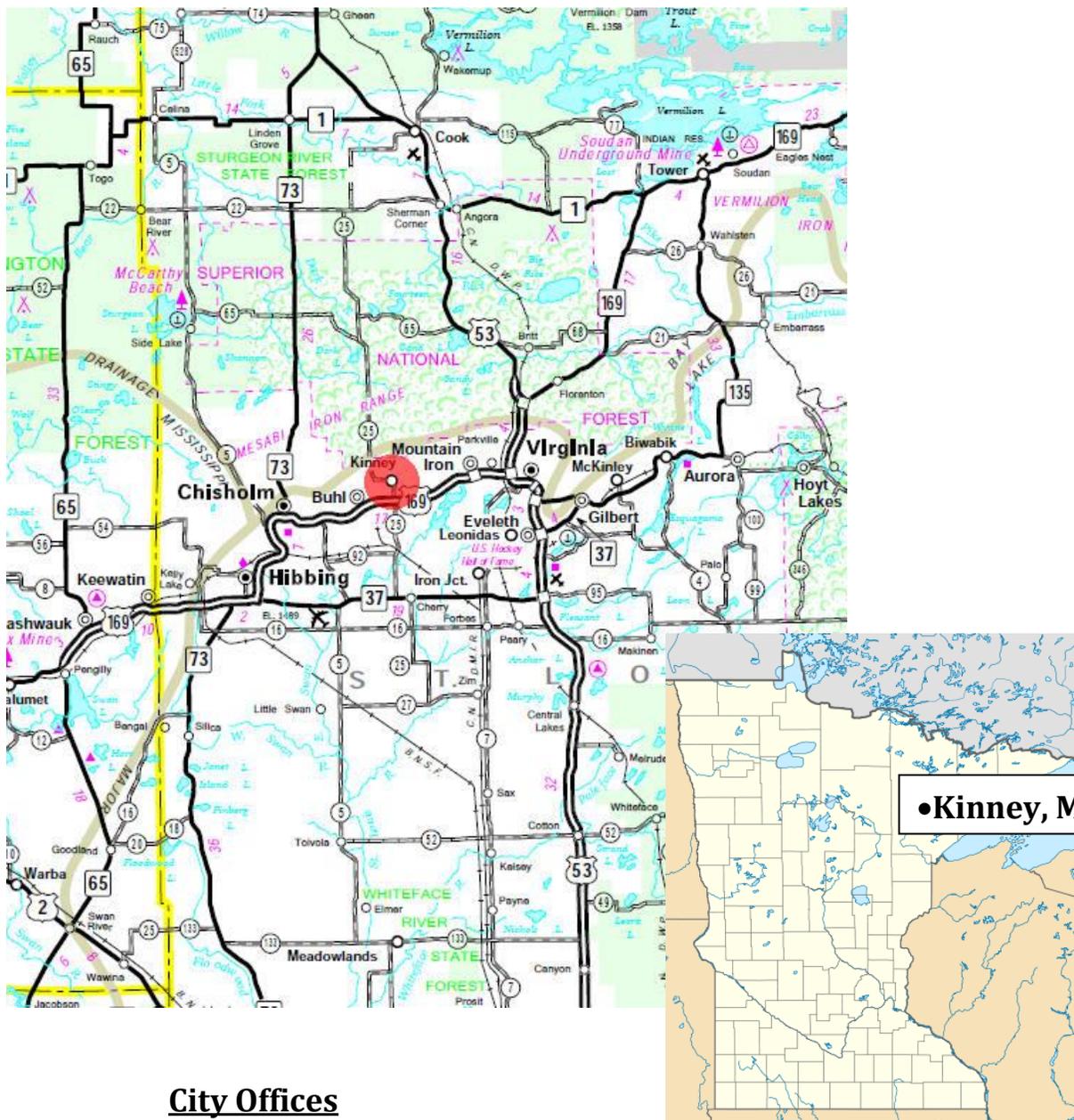
City of Kinney (St. Louis County, MN)

*Preliminary Draft – February 2026*



This document was prepared by:  
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## Prepared for City of Kinney, MN



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## Acknowledgements

On behalf of the City of Kinney, the City Council would like to thank our residents for their contributions to the development of this Comprehensive Plan. Your participation in the survey process, Community Visioning Sessions, and discussions have helped to reaffirm our community's vision and values and articulate a complex but viable plan for our future. We have valued your ideas and input and will do our best to serve and honor them as we carry this plan forward. In appreciation, the Board would also like to acknowledge Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation for its financial contributions and support for this project and U.S. Steel MinnTac's communication and engagement in the process.

### Kinney City Council Members, February 2026

Pat Haley, Mayor

Shirley Agnoli, Council Member

Sandy Daniels-Milton, Council Member

Tara Starc, Council Member

Gage Rautio, Clerk

Britta Simonson, Treasurer

## Plan Adoption

The Kinney City Council will vote on a resolution to adopt this Comprehensive Plan on **XXXX, 2026**, at the monthly City Council Meeting.

Never doubt that a small  
group of thoughtful,  
committed citizens can  
change the world. Indeed,  
it's the only thing that  
ever has.

*- Margaret Mead*

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## INTRODUCTION

### History of Kinney

In the late 1800's, mining and timber industries spurred mass migration to northeastern Minnesota and dramatically changed the demographic and economic landscape in the region. Immigrants from 43 different nations, mostly European, settled in the undeveloped frontier along the Cuyuna, Mesaba, and Vermilion iron ranges in pursuit of greater opportunities for their families and a better life. Many of these immigrants found work in the underground mines located near Kinney and settled there hoping to establish a community that would support their families and provide for their needs.



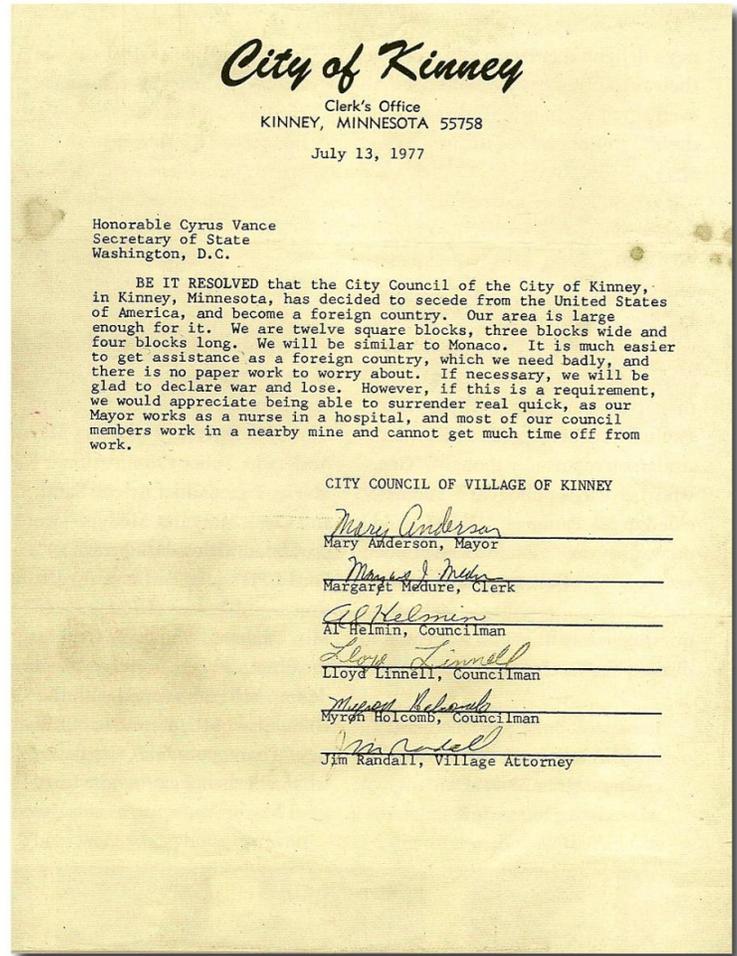
**Kinney Mine, Kinney, MN 1920's**

Named after O. D. Kinney, an explorer that discovered the site's mining potential, the Kinney mine opened in 1902 as a shaft mine and eventually became an open pit mine. The Kinney mine was just one of many mines operating in the area including Grant, Thorne, Sharon, Shiras, Woodbridge, Itasca, Cavour, Yates, Dean, Wade, Deacon, Wanless, Seville, Whiteside and Frantz. In 1911 alone, these mines produced nearly 1.5 million tons of taconite combined.

The Village of Kinney was incorporated on November 11, 1910, after the Village of Mountain Iron which incorporated in 1892, the Town of Great Scott in 1896, and the Village of Buhl in 1901. The Village of Spina near Kinney, with a population of 237, incorporated in 1913 but eventually was annexed and became part of Kinney in 1974. Kinney's population nearly quadrupled from 367 residents in 1909 to 1,200 residents in 1920. The population count surpassed Buhl which had 1,005 residents at that time. "In its prime, the bustling community of Kinney was completely independent. Five grocery stores, a bank, a show house, a livery stable, a candy kitchen, two hardware stores, a red-light district, two butcher shops, and two barber shops were present to meet the needs of Kinney's citizenry" (The Great Scott Township Centennial Book, 1996). A Finish Evangelical Lutheran Church and Catholic Church were built in addition to the Wilson School in Kinney, Hartley School in Spina, and Anderson School located 8 miles north of Kinney.

Kinney's flourishing community and economy in the early 1900's peaked but the boom did not last. Over the next 50 years, the population declined and many businesses closed. By 1970, Kinney's population had dropped to 325 residents. However, a \$450 million U.S

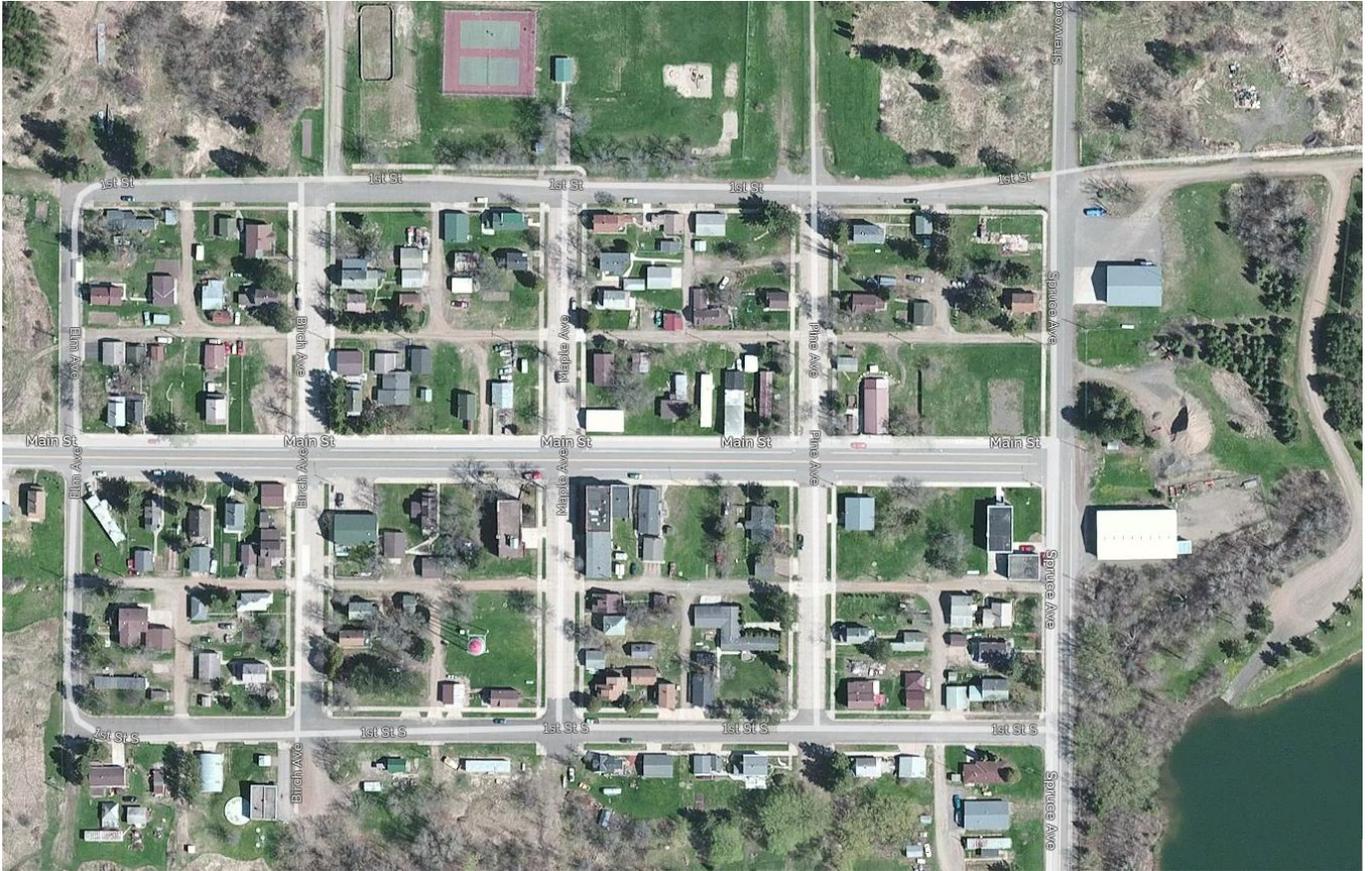
Steel- MinnTac Mine expansion in 1970 spurred an increase in population which nearly doubled to 600 by 1976. While the population boost was a welcome relief to its diminishing tax base, Kinney struggled with its aging and corroding utility infrastructure. “Like other mining locations scattered across the Iron Range, Kinney had been established near the edge of a mine solely to serve the interest of the mining company. Built between 1901 and 1903, it was intended to be a temporary site with an approximate lifespan of 25 years” (Kuzma, *A Retrospective on the Kinney Secession*, 2010). Mayor Mary Anderson and Kinney’s City Council pursued federal, state, and local aid and support for the city’s necessary water system repairs but were repeatedly unsuccessful in their attempts. Feeling frustrated and neglected, city leaders began to meet at the mayor’s family business, Mary’s Bar. They decided to take extraordinary measures and began the process of pursuing the city’s secession from the United States.



Proceeding to establish as an independent country (The Republic of Kinney), the city gained the political attention it needed to secure funding for its deteriorating water system. Kinney’s attempt to secede also raised public awareness of the little city that had experienced decades of decline and had been rendered somewhat insignificant to others outside of the city limits. While some criticized Kinney for being unpatriotic and publicity-seeking in seeking secession, others viewed the unconventional move to reflect a strong, brave, and resilient community that was willing to fight and do whatever it took to survive.



With a current population of 152 residents and no existing businesses in the community, Kinney still maintains the same fiery spirit to do what it can to sustain and ensure a promising future for its residents. Developing a solid comprehensive plan is just one of the city’s strategic moves to do so.

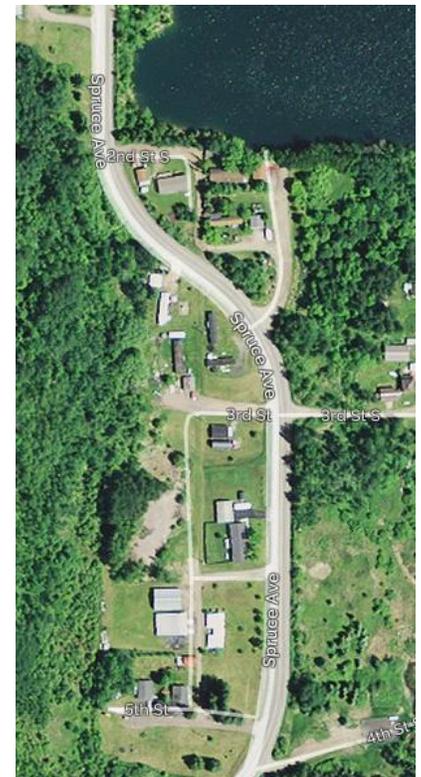


## City Geography and Map

The City of Kinney is in St. Louis County in northeastern Minnesota and covers a territory of 4.83 square miles, with 4.62 square miles of land and 0.21 square miles of water. With a population of 161 people (2023), it has a density of about 33 people per square mile.

The four-lane U.S. Hwy 169 runs east and west a little over a mile south of Kinney. County Hwy 25 serves two main entrances into Kinney; one from U.S. Hwy 169 from the south, and the junction of County Highway 25 and County Highway 125 which connects into Buhl. The highway runs through Kinney becoming Spruce Avenue (north and south) and Main Street (east and west).

The adjacent map shows the city's street system and geography of the area, including the location of Kinney Lake (a.k.a. the Kinney Mine Pit) which is located on the east side of Kinney.



The following St. Louis County plot map shows another aerial view of Kinney and Spina (which was annexed by Kinney in 1974), and property parcels surrounding them.



## Community Demographic Profile

According to the U.S. Census 2000, U.S. Census 2010, U.S. Census 2020, American Community Survey 2023 (of 5-year estimates), and current observable counts, Kinney's demographic profiles from 2000-2025 show the following:

| Demographic   | U.S. Census 2000   | U.S. Census 2010  | U.S. Census 2020 and ACS 2023 5-year Estimates  |
|---|--|---|---|
| Population  | 199  | 169   | 152   |
| Median Age  | 41.5   | 40.1  | 41  |
| Race/Ethnicity  | White: 188<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 4<br>Two or more: 7 | White: 167<br>Black/African American: 1<br>Amer Indian/Alaska Native: 2<br>Asian: 1 | White: 131<br>Black/African American: 1<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 5<br>Two or more: 11<br>Hispanic or Latino: 4 |
| Employment (of pop. age 16 or older)                    | Employed: 50.7%<br>Unemployed: 9.7%                              | Employed: 59.3%<br>Unemployed: 8.1%   | Employed: 49.2%<br>Unemployed: 6.4% (2025)  |
| Educational Attainment (high school graduate or higher) | 78.8%  | 95.7%   | 93.4%   |
| Median Household Income                                 | \$25,000   | \$63,000  | \$53,438  |
| Poverty (below poverty level)                           | Individuals: 13.6%<br>Families: 9.4%                             | Individuals: 14.5%<br>Families: 7.7%  | Individuals: 14.5%  |
| Housing Units   | 88   | 83<br>70 (connected to city utilities in 2017)                                      | 62 (zip-code related in 2020)<br>52 (connected to city utilities in 2025)   |

Kinney has shown a 24% decline in overall population over the past 20 years compared to St. Louis County which in the past five years has shown a slight increase in population. It has a median age of 41 which is comparable to St. Louis County at 41.3, both of which are older than the average Minnesotan at 38.6 years of age. In terms of population by age, St. Louis County already has an older population but is also growing in the percentage of older populations as the Baby Boomer generation is now moving through the 62-80 range at a rate of 21% at age 65 or older. Kinney and the State of Minnesota are somewhat reflective of this with 18% of their populations at age 65 or older. Over the next decade, while St. Louis County's overall population is expected to decrease, the number of people age 65 or older will continue to increase.

The number of housing units between 2010 and 2025 in Kinney decreased substantially. Kinney removed eight structures as part of a demolition project in 2015, but a more significant influence on the count has been MinnTac’s mining expansion into Kinney and the company’s purchasing of properties and clearing of housing structures in recent years. The drop from 70 houses in 2017 connected to city utilities down to 52 in 2025, an 8-year timespan, signifies a profound 26% decrease in occupied housing. This has had an impact on the city’s budget in terms of tax revenue and on households who bear the increasing costs of utilities as burdens are reappropriated and assessed to the remaining households.

Kinney’s average household size (2.45) is slightly lower than the state average (2.5), while its average family size (3.26) is slightly higher than the state average (3.0). Ratios of males to females mirror that of Minnesota with a nearly even split. However, the median age of males and females is quite different with Minnesota males and females having median ages of 29.1 and 30.3 versus Kinney’s median ages of 35.4 and 43.5.

Educational attainment levels have noticeable fluctuations over the past twenty years, particularly between 2000 and 2010. An estimated 93.4% of Kinney residents age 18 or older have at least a high school diploma. This is slightly lower than St. Louis County at 94.6% but higher than Minnesota at 93.2%. In populations age 25 and older, 38.9% of Minnesota residents and 32.5% of St. Louis County residents have bachelor’s degrees or higher compared to 17.2% of Kinney residents. However, the percentage of residents having some college but less than a bachelor’s degree is higher in Kinney. The table below compares educational attainment levels of populations age 25 and older in Kinney, St. Louis County and the State of Minnesota:

|                     | Kinney | St. Louis County | Minnesota |
|---------------------|--------|------------------|-----------|
| <b>Some College</b> | 41.9%  | 37.2%            | 31.5%     |
| <b>Bachelor’s</b>   | 16.2%  | 20.7%            | 25.3%     |
| <b>Post-grad</b>    | 1%     | 11.8%            | 13.6%     |

In 2023, median household income in Kinney was \$53,400; a modest increase from \$46,600 in 2020. Median household income is lower than St. Louis County (\$69,455) and lower than the state of Minnesota (\$87,556). The cost of living for a family of four in St. Louis County is about \$56,954 which is more than \$14,000 over Kinney’s median household income. Median income in 2000 was only \$25,000, an amount almost half of median income levels in Minnesota (\$47,000), and less than the county’s median income of \$36,000. Kinney appears to be on a positive trend of closing the gap between median household income levels of its residents and those in the county and state.

### **Comprehensive Planning History and Purpose**

Like many other small towns, the City of Kinney operates with limited human capital and financial resources. The city elects six residents to serve on the City Council, manage the annual budget, address any issues that arise, and make decisions on behalf of the city.

Kinney has a small number of paid staff including a part-time clerk, part-time treasurer, part-time public works employee, and two full-time public works employees. In comparison, larger municipalities have access to more employees, economic development associations, and sources of public and private community support. While it can be difficult for small communities to have resources to address anything beyond day-to-day demands, the City of Kinney sees the comprehensive plan process to engage residents, identify opportunities and challenges and make informed decisions as it works to protect the interests of its residents and address the needs of the community.

Kinney's first and most recent comprehensive plan was developed in 2016 and adopted in January 2017. At the time, city residents contemplated the fate of the community without thoughtful strategic planning. They aligned with Yogi Berra's thought that, "If you (we) don't know where you are going, you (we) will probably end up somewhere else". Without having a comprehensive plan in place, city residents also recognized that failing to plan may leave the community vulnerable to others who might otherwise make plans for it.

Life in Kinney and the direction of the small city has been anything but normal since the completion of the 2017 plan. The decades long speculation that the local mining industry would someday expand into Kinney finally came to pass as U.S. Steel-MinnTac began to purchase residential properties and the only remaining business property in the city over the last few years. At the launch of this comp plan project, the company owned 22 lots within the city, and the number has continued to grow over the course of this project. This change in the city's landscape and outlook initiated the city's drive to update its comprehensive plan.

In July 2025, the City of Kinney submitted a request for grant funds from the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) to support its comprehensive plan update project. Once funding was secured in August 2025, Kinney officially initiated the project with the first Community Comp Plan Launch Meeting taking place on October 15, 2025, and the community surveys were disbursed in late October. Two other Community Visioning Sessions were held to revisit the city's vision and values, discuss survey results and community data, and redefine goals and action plans using these findings. A preliminary draft of the Comp Plan document was shared with key stakeholders to solicit any further input/feedback prior to its final drafting. These stakeholders included Kinney administration/leadership and residents as well as with Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation, U.S. Steel-MinnTac and the MN Department of Natural Resources. The final draft is expected to be prepared, presented, and proposed to the Kinney City Council at its council meeting in XXXX.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

### Community Participation

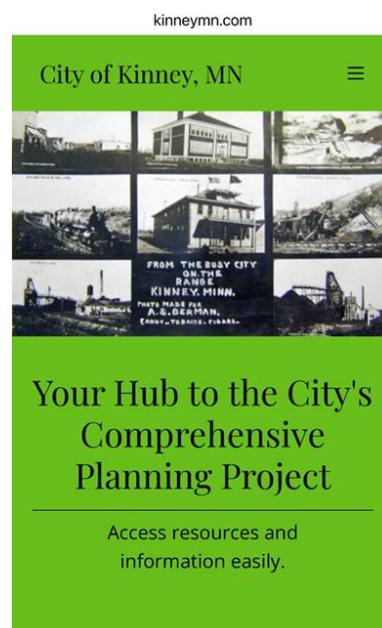
As effective comprehensive planning relies on community participation, a variety of methods were used to communicate with residents and collect data, ideas, and feedback.

**Community Survey:** An extensive in-depth community survey was developed to collect responses on common comprehensive planning topics and to solicit feedback on areas of interest unique to Kinney. The 2025 community survey questions were reflective of questions asked in the 2016 survey to support comparative data analysis and feedback while also including new questions focused on MinnTac's expansion into the city. **(See Appendix A)** The community surveys were hand-distributed to all households in Kinney in paper format, at the request of the committee. Of the 53 households in the community, twenty households responded and returned completed surveys. The American Customer Satisfaction Index reports that response rates for paper-based surveys are about 10% (and less for lengthy surveys like Kinney's), and the response rates for web-based surveys average between 5%-15%. In comparison, this year's comp plan community survey return rate was about 38%, significantly exceeding typical survey participation rates.

The following data illustrates demographics of survey respondents:

- Age & Number of Responders: 26-44 (42%), 45-64 (16%), 65 or older (42%)
- Employment: Full time (35%), Part time (20%), Retired (45%)
- Household Income: Under \$25K (17%), \$25-50K (28%), \$50-75K (22%), \$75-100K (28%) Over \$100K (5%)
- Years in the City: <1 (0%), 1-5 (10.5%), 6-12 (16%), 13-20 (10.5%), 20+ (63%)
- Ownership: Own home/live in Kinney (100%), Rent home/live in Kinney (0%)
- School-aged Children: Yes (35%), No (65%)

**Website:** The <http://kinneymn.com> website was created to keep residents informed on the comprehensive planning process and progress. Announcements for public meetings were posted along with updated vision and values statements and access to the old 2017 Comprehensive Plan document. The new Comprehensive Plan was also posted with an invitation and avenue for community and stakeholder feedback. The website was made available in both desktop and mobile formats, and the link was shared with all households and hand-delivered via the cover letter attached to their Comprehensive Plan Community Survey.



**Community Visioning Sessions:** Residents were encouraged to participate in three Community Visioning Sessions for Kinney that were held at the Kinney City Hall. Announcements were made about meetings at city council meetings and through the city's Facebook page. Each Community Visioning Session/Meeting included an agenda/formal presentation, interactive activities, handouts, and discussions. Attendance was taken, materials were distributed, and refreshments were served at the two longer Visioning Sessions. The meeting dates, times and goals accomplished at each session were as follows:

**Community Comprehensive Planning Meeting I:** October 15, 2025; 5:00 p.m.

**Goals Accomplished:**

- Comprehensive planning history and purpose was explained
- Proposed comprehensive planning process was shared and discussed
- Previous 2016 Comp Plan survey was shared and discussed
- Survey disbursement/collection plan was made
- Future Community Visioning Session dates/times/location were set

**Community Visioning Session II:** December 10, 2025; 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

**Goals Accomplished:**

- Provided overview of the project plan, process, and progress
- Shared and discussed survey results, current Kinney demographics, and data comparisons and considerations
- Revisited and revised community values
- Revisited and revised common vision
- Discussed Kinney's unique history and opportunities to capture it
- Introduced Healthy Communities approach

**Community Visioning Session III:** January 21, 2026; 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

**Goals Accomplished:**

- Discussed Healthy Communities approach to planning
- Reviewed and updated goal areas
- Identified and prioritized plans and projects
- Encouraged continued resident participation in reviewing the draft plan, supporting the city's adoption of the plan, and participating in carrying out the plan's action items, as appropriate

## COMMUNITY VISION, VALUES, AND PLANNING APPROACH

### Community Vision Statement

Kinney residents used Community Survey responses and Community Visioning Session discussions to develop the following vision statement:

*“Known for its history and strong sense of community, Kinney is a small rural city where people are friendly, feel safe, know their neighbors, and are willing to step up to help each other and get involved. Residents and visitors feel welcome and connected with family and friends as they gather in the city’s public spaces, enjoy the park and recreational areas, and participate in the many events and celebrations held each year.”*

### Community Values

Residents affirmed the following values as representing who they are and what they want the community to be:

**Friendly people:** *Kinney is full of kind, friendly people who are willing to get involved in activities that benefit the community.*

**Small-town:** *Kinney provides a quiet small-town atmosphere where neighbors know each other and are willing to help each other.*

**Family-oriented:** *Kinney is a great place to live and raise a family as family values are strong.*

**Safe:** *Kinney provides a safe place to live where crime rates are low, and neighbors look out for one another.*

**Governance:** *Kinney has a small-town governance structure that keeps residents and stakeholders informed and engages them in discussions and decision-making processes.*

**Affordable:** *Kinney offers affordable small-town living and has fiscally responsible leadership that effectively manages the city’s assets, resources, and development.*

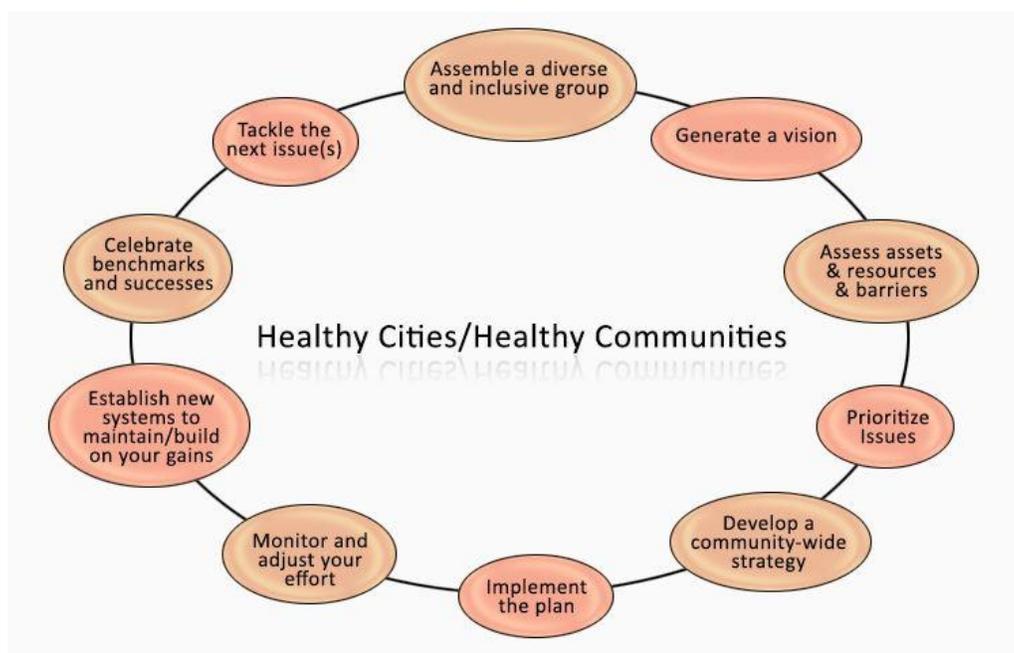
**Gathering Spaces:** *Kinney offers social and recreational spaces where residents and visitors can gather.*

**Community Events:** *Kinney partners with other entities to provide a variety of events and activities that help build a sense of community among residents and neighboring communities.*

## Healthy Communities Model Approach

The City of Kinney chose to use the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities model to provide an overall framework for developing its comprehensive plan. The Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities model was introduced in the 1980's in Canada and has since been used all over the world to provide “a theoretical framework for a participatory process by which citizens can create healthy communities” (Community Toolbox, 2016). The model initially launched with a specific focus on how community elements impact individual and community health and development. Since then, the loosely defined adaptable strategy has been used by hundreds of cities and municipalities of all sizes for assessing, planning and developing healthier communities and engaging their community members in the process.

Comprehensive planning requires the inclusion of stakeholders, developing a vision, assessing issues and opportunities, devising strategies, implementing plans, and ongoing monitoring/adjusting. A comprehensive plan is meant to be a living, working document that can be altered as needs and opportunities arise. The following diagram describes the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities strategy which aligns perfectly with Kinney's process for establishing, evaluating, and revising its comprehensive plan:



The City of Kinney dissected the community in seven different focus environments as defined by the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities model. While the city used defined focus areas to guide discussions and planning, it also altered them to better suit the city's situation, composition and aspects to be addressed. These adaptations are further described in the individual Goal Areas sections of the Comprehensive Plan. The Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities focus areas include:

- **Natural Environment:** Laws and regulations that restore and/or preserve clean air and water; preservation and creation of open space, natural beauty, and wilderness; restrictions on the use and disposal of toxic substances; conservation of natural resources, including plants and animals.
- **Built Environment:** People-friendly designs of buildings and spaces (human scale, with pedestrian passageways, gathering places, views, attractiveness, etc.); handicap access; preservation of historic and cultural heritage; cleanliness; safety (lighting, building design, long views, traffic patterns, bans on the use of toxic materials); good public transportation; traffic-free paths to encourage walking, jogging, and bicycling.
- **Economic Environment:** A healthy economic environment is one where there is work for everyone capable of working, where workers are treated as assets and are paid a living wage, where there is equal economic opportunity for all, where those who can't work are supported, and where money doesn't buy political power or immunity from the law.
- **Work Environment:** The work environment should be a source of stimulation, rather than stress. Respect for employees, good safety precautions and procedures, firm rules forbidding harassment or abuse, adequate pay and/or other compensation, humane and fair production expectations and treatment—all contribute to work environments that nurture creativity and enthusiasm, and improve, rather than detract from, both production and workers' quality of life.
- **Leisure Environment:** The work and home environments can provide time for leisure. The community can provide recreational and cultural opportunities to use in that leisure time—museums, parks and beaches, cultural and sports events, libraries, etc.
- **Social Environment:** A healthy community encourages social networks, provides gathering places where people from all parts of the community may mingle, nurtures families and children, offers universal education and other services, strives to foster non-violent and healthy behavior, invites familiarity and interaction among the various groups that make up the community, and treats all groups and individuals with respect.
- **Political Environment:** In a healthy community, all citizens have a say in how and by whom their community is governed and have easy access to the information necessary to understand political situations and to make informed political decisions. Political decisions, opinions, and speech are protected. Citizens feel they have the power in the community—that they own it and can and should control its direction.

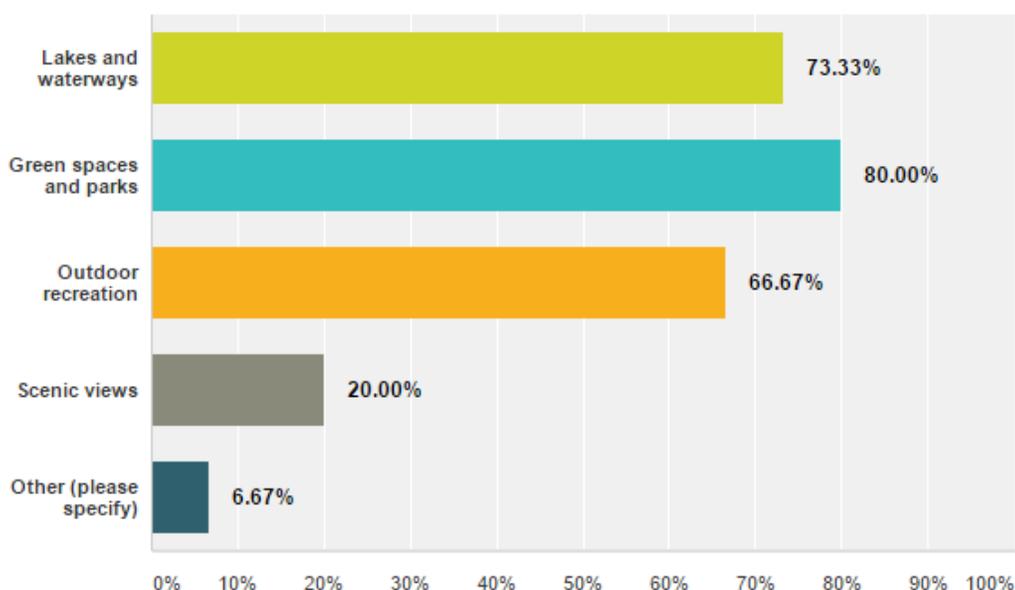
## **FOCUS AREAS, GOALS AND ACTIONS**

## **FOCUS AREA 1: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

***Natural Environment:*** Laws and regulations that restore and/or preserve clean air and water; **preservation** and creation of open space, natural beauty, and wilderness; restrictions on the use and disposal of toxic substances; **conservation** of natural resources, including plants and animals. **Land use** regulations and **mining** activities are relevant to the Natural Environment (NE) focus area and are included in this section.

### **Preservation and Conservation**

In the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, when asked about the city’s natural resources and which they felt were most important, about 8 out of 10 residents (80%) reported that green spaces and parks were most important while 73% felt lakes and waterways were important. About 67% appreciate Kinney’s outdoor recreation spaces, while only 20% believe that scenic views are an important feature in Kinney.



To help protect the natural environment, Kinney participates in St. Louis County’s Environmental Services Recycling Program and provides a drop off location at the Kinney-Great Scott Township Fire Hall. Three out of four households reported that they recycle with nearly all stating that the Fire Hall location is their preferred drop-off site. Regarding hazardous household materials, 35% of respondents were not aware of where to go for disposal of them. St. Louis County offers two hazardous household waste collection sites; one located in Virginia and the other in Hibbing. A list of recycling drop-off locations, contact information and hours of operation, and a list of acceptable hazardous waste materials can be found in **Appendix F**.

## Kinney Lake (Kinney Mine Pit)

Kinney's primary natural space within its city limits is Kinney Lake (also known as the Kinney Mine Pit). Kinney Lake is 51 acres in size and about 160 feet deep at its deepest point. Species of fish contained in Kinney Lake include green sunfish, northern pike, rainbow trout, splake walleye, yellow bullhead, yellow perch, white sucker, common shiner, creek chub, fathead minnow, golden shiner, mottled sculpin, northern redbelly dace, and rainbow smelt. Through support from the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Kinney Lake is stocked with about 2,400 Rainbow Trout each year.



Passed in 1969, the Mineland Reclamation Act was established to provide, "regulatory authority for reclamation of areas subject to mining, such as open pits, waste rock and surface material stockpiles, tailings basins, buildings and equipment, and infrastructure no longer needed for any other use. It also requires revegetation of disturbed ground, and mitigation of impacted wetlands"



([https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lands\\_minerals/mineland\\_reclamation/index.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lands_minerals/mineland_reclamation/index.html), 2026).

The Kinney Mine Pit was one of the projects selected to receive funding from the Mineland Reclamation Program. With funding from the IRRRB through the Mineland Reclamation Program, a park was created along the lake with picnic areas and a cement slab boat landing. In 2018, funding through the program was secured to update the Kinney Mine Pit park area including the addition of a floating dock/fishing pier and a covered picnic shelter. While Kinney conveyed the Kinney Pit park to Great Scott Township, the two communities share the public space, and Kinney residents are eager to grow community use of the space as described in the Leisure Environment section of this plan.

## Land Use and Zoning

St. Louis County may only regulate lands within its jurisdiction. Therefore, the County Comprehensive Land Use Plan emphasizes lands within county jurisdiction. Non-jurisdictional areas include incorporated municipalities, tribal lands, state and federal lands, and townships which choose to exercise their own zoning authority. As an incorporated city, Kinney administers its own municipal zoning code, rather than using St.

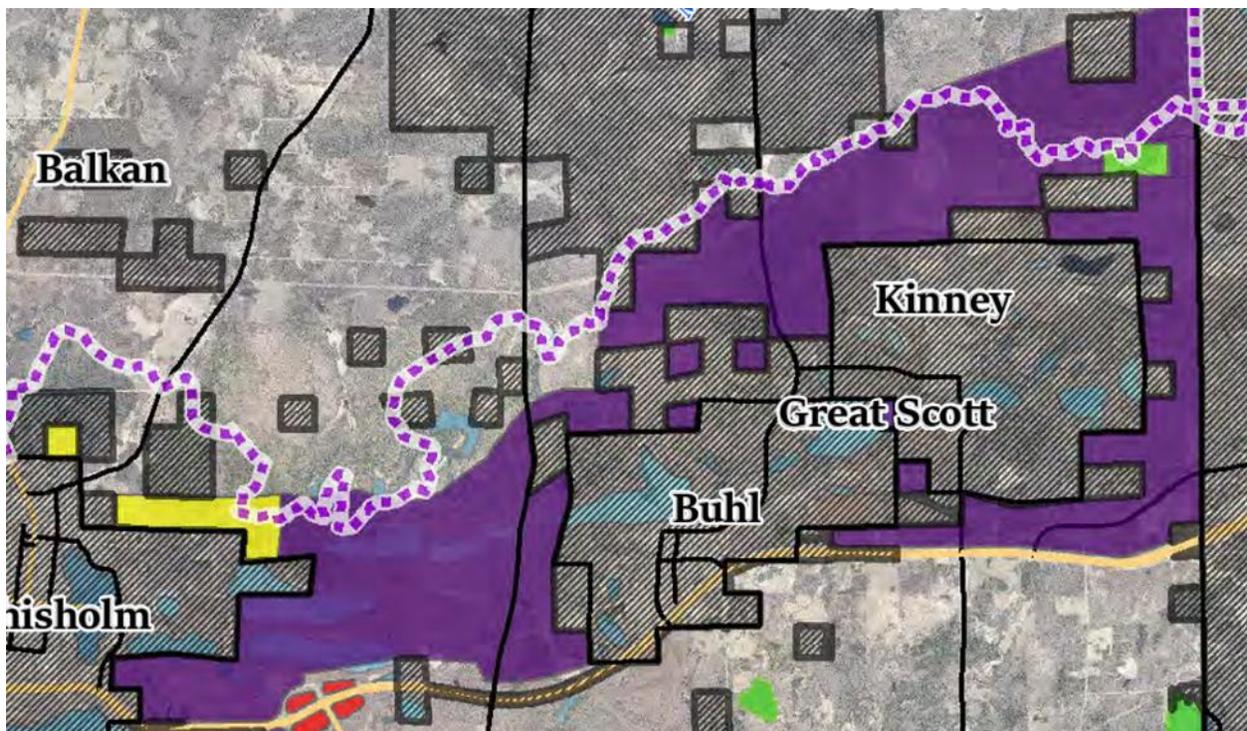
Louis County’s zoning ordinance, but it must still comply with Minnesota municipal zoning law and county-wide land-use frameworks.

### ***Governance structure***

- Kinney is listed by St. Louis County as a city that “administers” zoning itself, meaning the county does not apply its own zoning ordinance inside city limits.
- As a Minnesota statutory city, Kinney’s zoning powers and procedures must follow [Minnesota Statutes section 462.357](#), which governs how cities adopt zoning ordinances, maps, districts, and amendments.

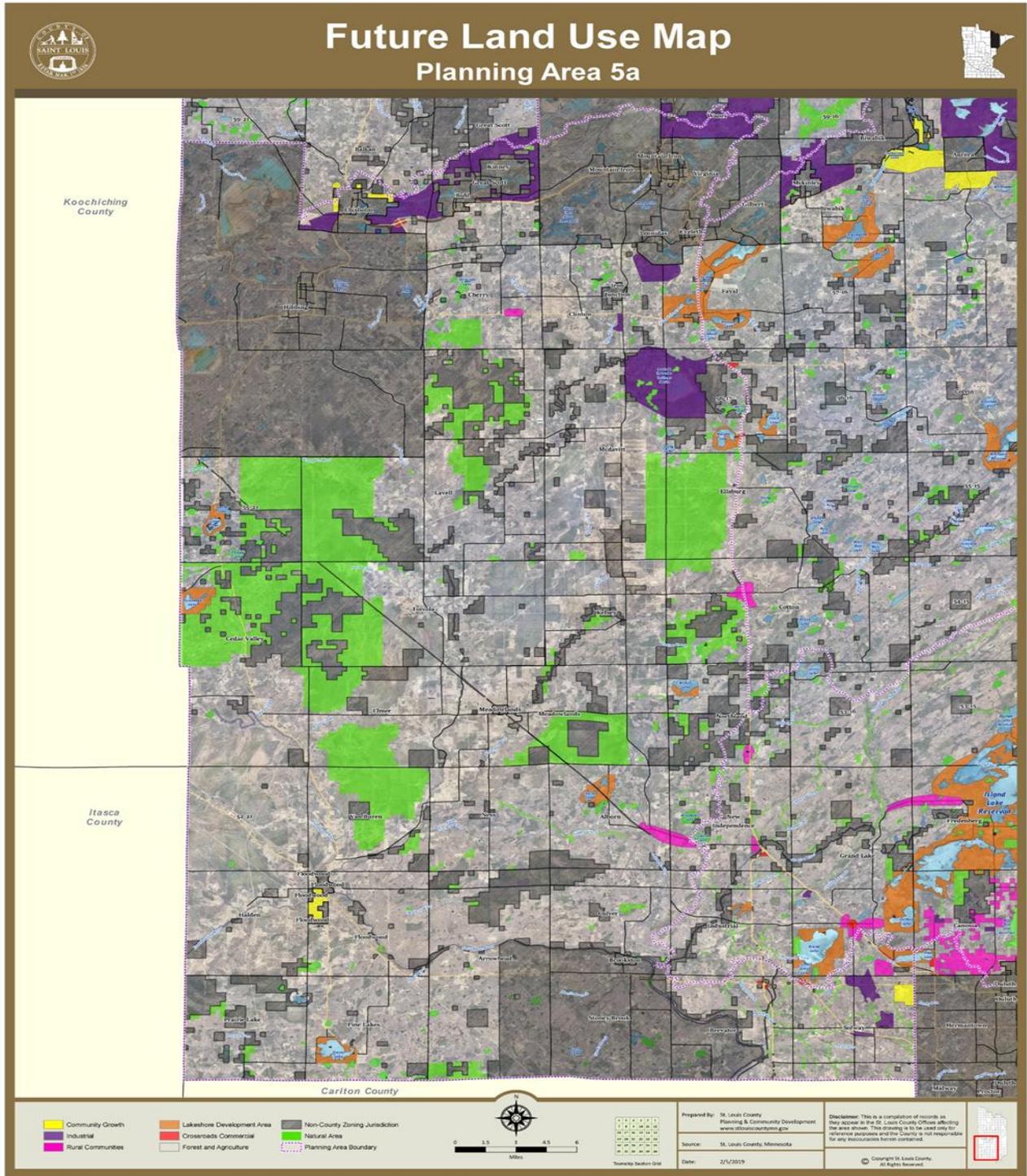
### ***Relationship to St. Louis County***

Adopted in January 2019, [St. Louis County’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan](#) (see Appendix C) explicitly states that the county’s legally binding zoning applies only “where the county maintains zoning jurisdiction,” which excludes cities that run their own zoning, such as Kinney. These cities are grayed out on all land use maps. According to the county’s Land



Use Plan, “Industrial is shown as purple on the Future Land Use Maps. This designation consists of actively mined lands, ancillary operations to mining (such as actively used slag piles), and industrial businesses that may or may not support mining operations. This designation prohibits less intense uses such as retail sales and service, restaurants, and so forth that would be incompatible in an environment with heavy industrial land uses. Limited office use may be acceptable (for example, corporate offices in conjunction with a mining or trucking operation).” St. Louis County’s Future Land Use Map 5a shows the St.

Louis Watershed- West area that includes Kinney and designates the area surrounding Kinney as industrial for future land use. While some of these areas could be new industrial development, other portions including those closest to Kinney represent anticipated future expansion of industry, and in this case, mining.



County land-use and transportation planning still provide the broader policy context (e.g., development patterns, conservation priorities) that Kinney’s zoning is expected to align with, but the specific district rules inside the city are local.

### ***Core state-level zoning requirements Kinney must follow***

Under [Sec. 462.357 MN Statutes](#), Kinney’s zoning ordinance must, at minimum:

- Be adopted by ordinance, with regulations embodied in text plus an official zoning map.
- Define zoning districts (residential, commercial, industrial, etc.) and specify permitted and conditional uses in each.
- Follow statutory procedures for public hearings, referrals to any planning commission, and council votes (including supermajority thresholds for some residential-to-commercial/industrial changes).
- Provide for amendments initiated by the city, planning agency, or affected property owners via petition.

### **Mining**

Northeast Minnesota’s mining industry has been an integral part of Kinney’s history and continues to be a driving force in the community and local economy. As of a December 2023 U.S. Steel fact sheet, Minnesota Ore Operations (MinnTac + Keetac) employ more than 1,800 people directly, with an annual payroll of about 252 million dollars. The same report notes that these operations supported an estimated 5,284 Minnesota jobs in FY2022 (1,865 direct and 3,419 indirect and induced), meaning each direct job supports roughly 1.5 additional jobs in the wider economy. In FY2022, U.S. Steel’s Minnesota operations generated about 1.8 billion dollars in total economic impact, including 911.9 million dollars in direct activity and 865.4 million dollars in indirect/induced effects, and produced about 141 million dollars in state and local tax revenues; MinnTac is a principal contributor to these figures as the larger of the two taconite operations.

Kinney’s mere existence is because of mining, and the city’s residents recognize the many opportunities mining has provided including support for communities, high-paying jobs, work for their families, strong public schools, and lower taxes. These sentiments were shared in the comprehensive plan survey and discussions. For decades, Kinney residents have speculated that a day might come when the mining company near Kinney would expand into the city and consume the properties within it. While many residents owned their lotted properties, they acquired their properties with the caveat that they did not own the minerals below them. And for a century or so, residents never thought much about it. However, as mining operations continued to expand and move closer to Kinney, residents began to question whether the community’s future was at stake.

Conversations in 2016 with MinnTac reassured the community that the company was on a 25-year plan timeline; that anything they were currently planning would take 25 years before it would come to fruition, and they had no plans for Kinney at that time. Nevertheless, something changed between that conversation and the actions that have been taken in Kinney since. In the last five years, U.S. Steel- MinnTac has acquired 22 properties in Kinney, 21 of which were residential and one that was the sole business left in the city. For a community as small as Kinney and the generations of families that have lived there, the loss of these homes and residents has had a negative effect on the community physically, financially, socially, and emotionally. While the burdens are real, there is a level of understanding and support for U.S. Steel MinnTac's mining expansion and what it means for the region. As the expansion continues to consume the city, Kinney's elected officials are committed to communicating with U.S. Steel- MinnTac and doing what they can to monitor the city's budget, sustain operations, and advocate for the community and residents they serve. The Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation agency provides guidance **(see Appendix B)** for cities engaging in comprehensive planning as they consider areas for growth and development. Given the mining expansion into Kinney, the city's comprehensive plan does not include plans for any new developments as the City of Kinney community is already slated for future mining operations.

The map below shows an aerial view of Kinney and its proximity to the MinnTac open-pit mining property (rock structure areas) north of Kinney.



## Natural Environment Goals and Actions

**NE Goal 1:** Kinney will promote its natural spaces and work to keep them clean and safe.

**Action NE 1.1:** Identify opportunities for beautifying the Main Street area of Kinney including green public spaces, flowerbeds or flowerpots along sidewalks, and small gardens.

**Action NE 1.2:** Maintain the open spaces and preserve the scenic views in the Kinney Community Park.

**Action NE 1.3:** Meet with MinnTac quarterly to communicate on mining activities affecting Kinney including acquisitions of permits and properties and plans for expansion.

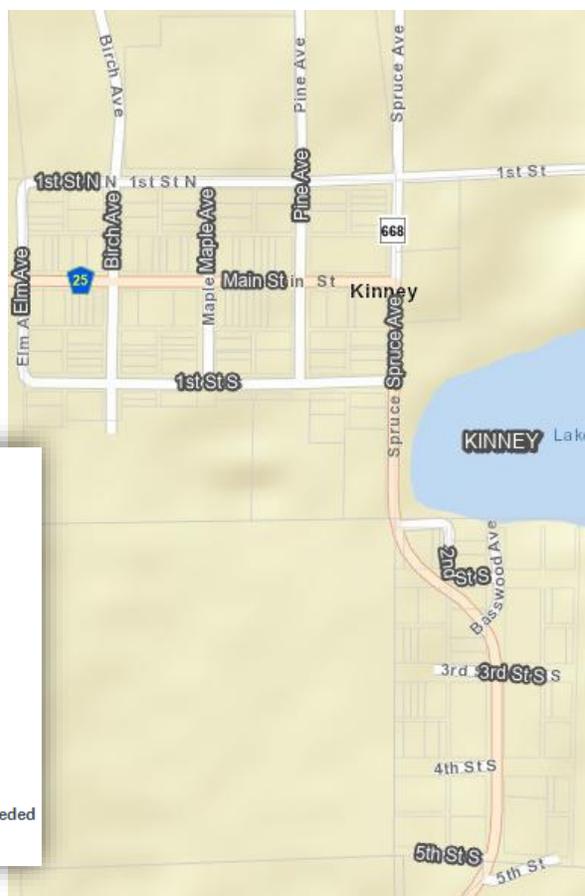
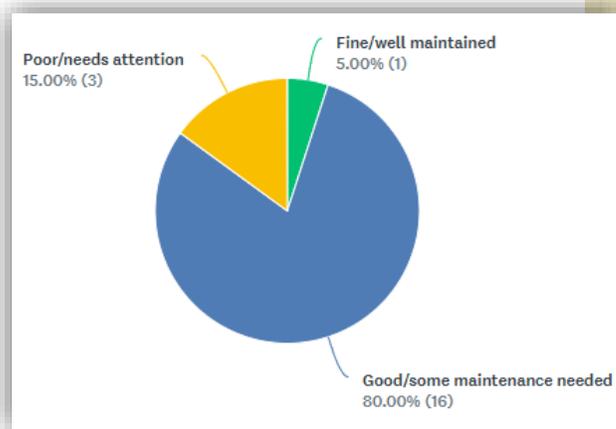
## **FOCUS AREA 2: BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

***Built Environment:*** People-friendly designs of buildings and spaces (human scale, with pedestrian passageways, gathering places, views, attractiveness, etc.); handicap access; preservation of historic and cultural heritage; cleanliness; safety (lighting, building design, long views, traffic patterns, bans on the use of toxic materials); good public **transportation**; traffic-free paths to encourage walking, jogging, and bicycling. **Community facilities, utilities, and housing** are included topics in the Built Environment (BE) focus area.

### **Transportation**

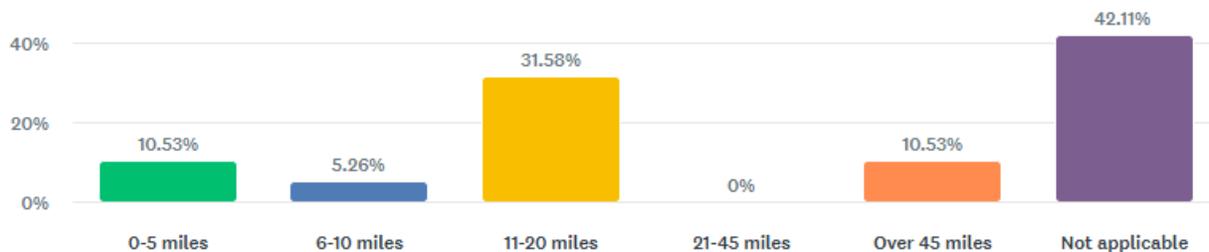
Kinney covers an area of approximately 5 square miles. It has twelve city streets including Elm Avenue, Birch Avenue, Maple Avenue, Pine Avenue, Spruce Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> Street North, Main Street, 1<sup>st</sup> Street South, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South, 4<sup>th</sup> Street South and 5<sup>th</sup> Street South.

Kinney maintains its own city streets, alleys and sidewalks. Community survey responses indicate that most residents (85%) believe that streets in Kinney are in generally good condition with some maintenance needed. Fifteen percent responded that the city's streets were in poor condition and needed attention.



Living in such a small city, Kinney residents rely on personal vehicles to access services and businesses and travel to work. While Arrowhead Transit provides public bus services in

larger cities in the area, they do not currently offer transportation for Kinney residents. Uber, Lyft, and local taxi services are available, but services are costly and not always readily available. Based on 2023 Census data, employed Kinney residents have a slightly longer than average commute time (31.3 minutes) compared to the national average. Survey respondents reported traveling the following distances for work:



Census data shows that Kinney households have an average of two cars per household. When traveling for work, between 80-90 percent of residents drive alone while the remaining residents either carpool or walked to work.

Kinney has easy access to the Range Regional Airport, which is owned and operated by the Chisholm-Hibbing Airport Authority and is located only 13 miles from Kinney. The Range Regional Airport provides commercial airline services, charter airline services, and general aviation. Growing and expanding to meet area needs and demands, the airport opened a new \$11.6M terminal in 2015, quadrupled in the number of passenger enplanements from 2024 to 2025, and contributes about \$36M to the local economy according to a MN Department of Transportation study in 2021.

## Community Facilities and Utilities

**Fire Department:** Established in 1945, the Kinney-Great Scott Volunteer Fire Department serves the fire and emergency response needs of the City of Kinney and Great Scott Township and regularly provides mutual aid to five other area fire departments located in the region. The fire department maintains three fire stations, two of which are in the northern and southern parts of the service area which spans approximately 70 square miles. The third station, the main fire hall, is centrally located in the City of Kinney which is surrounded by Great Scott Township. The three fire stations are strategically equipped with emergency vehicles and equipment at each site. This allows the department to provide the most rapid response to the variety of calls they receive within their large primary response area and those from neighboring fire departments requesting mutual aid.

The Kinney-Great Scott Volunteer Fire Department's mission is “to protect and serve the people in the City of Kinney and Great Scott



Township to minimize suffering, loss of life, and loss of property incurred by fire, accidents, disasters, and medical emergencies. We place great value on quality training, safety, and equipment maintenance to provide the best protection for our members, service to our residents, and assistance to our local fire departments in serving their communities." Despite the small population which makes volunteer recruitment difficult and elevates the risks and challenges involved in the job, seventeen members of the community currently serve on the volunteer fire department. With a small annual operating budget of about \$19,000, the Kinney-Great Scott Fire Department strives and struggles to ensure that each member is equipped with compliant protective gear and appropriately trained to respond in emergency situations.

***Kinney City Hall:*** In 1921, Kinney constructed a city hall where city offices were located, meetings were held, and records were kept. Over the years, with a declining population and tax base, Kinney could no longer afford to operate in the inefficient building (in terms of both space and energy), and city offices were moved to the current City Hall location. While the building was vacant, the roof leaked and caused extreme damage and unsafe conditions in the building. As a result of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, the city took action and removed the old building. The old Kinney City Hall



site remains vacant with the only change being the addition of a small shelter for students waiting for the school bus.

All city meetings, business, records, and clerk and treasurer offices are in the current Kinney City Hall location. The library also used to occupy space in the building but closed recently, and residents have been encouraged to use the Buhl Public Library.



***City Garage:*** In 1939, St. Louis County was awarded a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant resulting in the construction of a County Garage in Kinney. The WPA provided employment, mostly construction projects, for millions of unemployed people suffering from effects of the Great Depression. The County Garage was eventually turned over to Kinney to serve as the City Garage which continues to be used today. Despite being an 87-year-old building, three public works employees work out of the building as it continues to effectively serve the city's needs.



**Drinking Water and Storm Water:** Kinney has a municipal water treatment plant that manages its drinking water and storm water systems. Both systems have mechanical and general aging infrastructure issues. The city contracted with Bollig and their team of engineers to evaluate the municipal systems, identify and suggest options for addressing issues, and assist in securing grant funding to support costs. Their findings are reflected in this section.

The drinking water system includes two municipal wells and well houses, a water treatment plant, a water tower, and a water distribution system. One of the city's wells (built in 1988) is not in good working order, the distribution system (built in 1979) is old, and the city is experiencing increased watermain breaks. The fifteen-year-old water meters are also failing to provide accurate readings or any readings at all. The water treatment plant is at the end of its useful life as the building and many of its mechanical components are aging, deteriorating, and malfunctioning, with some not working at all.



Constructed in 1938, the storm water system has also been determined to be at the end of its useful life. While the city has resorted to flushing the system regularly to help sustain it, the system is losing its ability to effectively convey stormwater through town. This is causing flooding, heaving, and safety issues for residents and those traveling through the city.

Considering the findings and options, Bollig suggested the most viable options for Kinney would be to:

- regionalize with the City of Buhl for its drinking water source and treatment,
- perform select improvements to the existing water tower,
- replace select portions of the watermain in the distribution system, and
- replace brick manholes and a portion of the storm sewer system

The total project cost for this option is \$8.4M and includes \$1.3M in street improvements that would need to be made due to repairing and replacing infrastructure located under existing city streets and sidewalks. Grant requests have been submitted to the Minnesota Department of Health and St. Louis County through its Community Development Block Grant program. The United States Department of Agriculture may also become a future possibility if it appropriates more funding into its Rural Development program. Kinney's project has been difficult to fund. Feedback from potential funding agencies has revealed that they empathize with Kinney's infrastructure issues but are also aware of the mining expansion into Kinney and the likelihood that the city is operating on borrowed time. When grant resources are limited, funders are prioritizing projects that have long-term benefit, and Kinney's volatile future is preventing them from being able to compete.

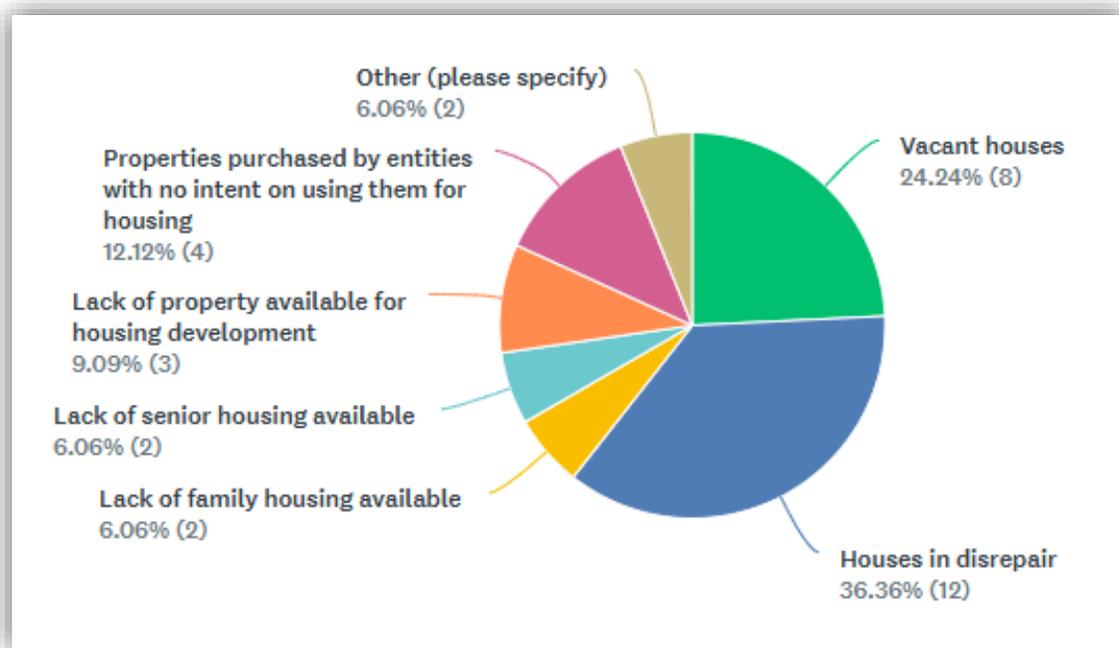
**Waste Water:** Along with Chisholm, Buhl, and Great Scott Township, Kinney is part of the Central Iron Range Sanitary Sewer District (CIRSSD) which launched the CIRSSD Wastewater Treatment Facility in 2013 to serve the needs of its member communities. CIRSSD is a regional public utility created to provide advanced wastewater services for multiple Iron Range communities. It was established to collaboratively convey and treat wastewater from member communities rather than having them bear the cost of constructing, managing, and upgrading their own facilities. The project replaced multiple older systems with one modern facility that was intended to be more cost-effective and meet strict environmental standards while supporting local growth and environmental protection.

Kinney is scheduled to pay off its portion of the loan for the sewer in 2034 and is currently assessed a base service fee of a little over \$2K/month. The city has covered the base fee with city funds until recently when it was monitoring expenses and discovered other cities passed the base fee on to residents. In November 2025, the Kinney City Council voted to pass the fee on to residents adding it to their variable monthly sewer usage fees. The fee (about \$40) is assessed equally to all connected households with the amount set to vary based on the number of connected households. As the number of households continues to decline, the apportioned fee will increase accordingly to cover the cost. City residents weighed in on this fee assessment in the Community Survey with most residents expressing discouragement and feeling the pinch of rising costs to live in Kinney. Some mention frustrations related to the depletion of paying households due to the mine expansion while others said they are willing to pay if it will somehow “keep Kinney alive”.

## **Housing**

Kinney is a small city with a population of 152 residents occupying its inventory of a current hand count of 53 homes (52 of which are connected to city utilities). The number of housing units between 2010 and 2025 in Kinney decreased substantially. Kinney removed eight structures as part of a demolition project in 2015, but a more significant influence on the count has been MinnTac’s mining expansion into Kinney and the company’s purchasing of properties and clearing of housing structures in recent years. The drop from 70 houses in 2017 connected to city utilities down to 52 in 2025, an 8-year timespan, signifies a profound 26% decrease in occupied housing. This has had an impact on the city’s budget in terms of tax revenue and on households who bear the increasing costs of utilities as burdens are reappropriated and assessed to the remaining households.

The 2020 U.S. Census reported Kinney having 73 housing units; 69 were occupied (owner or renter), and 4 were vacant (for rent, for sale, or unoccupied). ACS 2023 5-Year Census data reported that of Kinney's occupied housing units in 2023, 90% were owner-occupied and 10% were occupied by renters. It also identified that about 95% of homes were occupied with 5% being vacant. The Community Survey asked residents to provide input on topics affecting and related to housing in Kinney. When asked about what they believe are problems related to housing in Kinney, respondents responded in the following ways:



Four survey respondents reported owning vacant lots in Kinney; three stated that they have no plans to develop them while one said they would like to find a way to stay in Kinney and develop them.

The City of Kinney has a blight ordinance in place that provides guidelines for qualifying blight conditions and the process the city will take in addressing them. Reports from city officials indicate that blight continues to exist in the community, but the ordinance is difficult to enforce as the City of Kinney no longer contracts for law enforcement services.

The estimated median value of a home in Kinney in 2023 was \$100,000 compared to the median home value of 208,500 in St. Louis County and \$305,500 in Minnesota. About 16% of Kinney's occupied homes had values of less than \$50,000, and 34% were valued between \$50K-\$100K. Approximately three-quarters of homes in Kinney were built before 1980, with roughly a quarter or more built before 1940. Most are single-unit detached homes, and at least 30-40% of them are occupied by owners who have lived there since 1989 or prior, likely owning them free and clear (without a mortgage).

With the future of Kinney in question, any future development in housing is highly improbable, and the city's housing stock will likely continue to decrease. Existing homes will likely be occupied by those who currently own them unless or until owners decide to sell their homes—likely to U.S. Steel – MinnTac. Four survey respondents reported owning vacant lots in Kinney; three stated that they have no plans to develop them while one said they would like to find a way to stay in Kinney and develop them. Seventeen survey respondents (85%) purchased their Kinney home with the intent of living there long-term while only two (10%) mentioned buying their home for the purpose of investing and anticipating a future buyout.

When asked about their plans, 75% of survey respondents plan to live in Kinney until they are no longer able to live there while 25% reported they were not actively looking for new housing but probably would within the next 3-5 years. About 79% said they are not looking forward to possibly having to sell/leave their home and move while the remaining 21% are either looking forward to moving or feel indifferent about having to sell or move. As U. S. Steel – MinnTac continues to consume housing properties in Kinney, the pressure on homeowners to digest the idea of selling their properties and preparing to move is likely to grow.

With such low home values and the length of time they have lived in the community, residents have valid concerns and feelings about the very real possibility of having to sell their homes and move from their community. Eighty-three percent of respondents said it will be difficult to move away from their friends and neighbors in Kinney, and if they had to move, 47% would try to find a place less than 10 miles away. Others reported concerns in the event they couldn't keep their home in Kinney as shown in the adjacent table. City leaders and community members have taken note of these concerns and are proposing an action plan to find ways to provide resources and support for those who would struggle if they had to move.

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| I am concerned that I won't be able to afford a comparable home elsewhere.               | 34.3% |
| I am concerned that I won't be able to find a comparable home elsewhere.                 | 31.4% |
| I do not have a plan for where I would move in the event I can no longer stay in Kinney. | 20.0% |
| I already have a plan for where I would relocate.  | 8.6%  |
| N/A - I have no concerns.  | 2.9%  |

## Built Environment Goals and Actions

**BE Goal 1:** Kinney strives to ensure that built structures and infrastructures are safe.

**Actions BE 1.1:** Address the issues of holes, cracks and heaves in sidewalks, potholes and deteriorating curbs on city streets, and cemented areas in the park that are unsafe or in need of immediate repair. Develop a schedule for when these issues will be addressed and establish a plan and budget to pay for them.

**Action BE 1.2:** Continue to pursue USDA and MN Dept of Health grant funding to address drinking water and storm water issues.

**Action BE 1.3:** Research and identify alternatives to reliance on existing water systems to support Kinney households that may sustain beyond the provision of city utilities.

**Action BE 1.4:** Develop a budget forecast of CIRSSD costs and cost distributions to households based on number of households scenarios.

**Action BE 1.5:** Identify, budget for, and address necessary short-term repairs and upgrades for City structures/facilities.

**Action BE 1.6:** Help recruit volunteer firefighters and emergency medical response technicians for the fire department.

**Action BE 1.7:** Collaborate with Great Scott Township and other fire departments to support the fire department's mission in recruiting volunteers and having appropriate gear, training, and equipment to safely and effectively respond to emergencies.

**Action BE 1.8:** Continue to promote recycling and inform residents on locations and acceptable items for hazardous waste disposal.

**BE Goal 2:** Kinney will work to protect its housing inventory and maximize its use of property.

**Action BE 2.1:** Inventory the city's housing stock including vacant homes and identify opportunities for occupancy.

**Action BE 2.2:** Enforce the city's ordinance on blight and pursue removal of uninhabitable vacant structures if they are causing immediate harm or danger to area residents.

**Action BE 2.3:** Explore the implementation of a land use policy or ordinance to ensure that Kinney's limited residential property (and corresponding tax base) is maximized within the limits of the law.

**Action BE 2.4:** Develop and carry out a plan for providing resources and services to help residents with planning and preparing for the potential sale of their homes, financing new homes, and relocation services and support.

## **FOCUS AREA 3: ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

***Economic Environment:*** A healthy economic environment is one where there is work for everyone capable of working, where workers are treated as assets and are paid a living wage, where there is equal economic opportunity for all, where those who can't work are supported, and where money doesn't buy political power or immunity from the law. Profiles of Kinney's economic base, employers, and labor force are included, and **economic development** opportunities are discussed in the Economic Environment (EE) focus area.

### **Employment Profile**

Kinney's labor force is small, with roughly half of adults working, a small number unemployed, and the rest not in the labor force, with employment concentrated in service and production/transportation-type jobs at modest wage levels.

#### ***Labor force and unemployment***

- Labor force population 16+: about 123 residents.
- In the labor force: 62 people (about half of those 16+).
- Employed: 58 people (about 47% of those 16+). Unemployed: 4 people.
- Unemployment rate: about 6.5% (4 unemployed out of 62 in the labor force)  
\*This is based on very small counts so year-to-year percentages can swing sharply.
- Not in labor force: 61 people (about half of those 16+)  
\*This could include retirees, students, homemakers, and people with disabilities.

#### ***Employment rate and participation***

- Overall employment-to-population ratio for residents 16+ is roughly in the high-40% range, compared with a Minnesota employment rate around the mid-60% range in recent ACS data.
- Labor force participation (share of 16+ who are either working or looking for work) is about 50% in Kinney, versus substantially higher statewide, reflecting the city's older age profile and a relatively large not-in-labor-force group.

#### ***Industries and occupations***

Kinney's employed residents are concentrated in a narrow range of blue-collar and service roles, consistent with the broader Iron Range labor market.

- Service occupations and production/transportation/material moving jobs together account for roughly 70% of employed residents.
- Other occupations (management, professional, sales, office) are present but make up the minority of jobs, based on a very small, employed population.

## Economic Base

Kinney is a small city that is primarily residential and has no commercial economic base. There are no private businesses within the City of Kinney. The only employer is the City of Kinney which has two full-time employees, three part-time employees, and seasonal part-time summer youth. The City of Kinney relies heavily on its residents to provide a viable tax base to cover the city's budget. The cost of living in Kinney is overall lower than the U.S. average due in part to the significantly lower cost of housing as shown in the Cost-of-Living Index below. The city has a low overall cost index, especially those related to housing and transportation compared to St. Louis County and the U. S. average. Groceries, utilities, and health care costs are slightly under/above but are near average County and U.S. averages.

| <b>Category</b>              | <b>Kinney Index<br/>(vs. U.S. = 100)</b> | <b>St. Louis County<br/>Index</b> |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Overall Cost Index           | 82                                       | 90                                |
| Index of Grocery Cost        | 96                                       | 98                                |
| Index of Housing Cost        | 40                                       | 70                                |
| Index of Utility Cost        | 92                                       | 95                                |
| Index of Transportation Cost | 78                                       | 88                                |
| Index of Healthcare Cost     | 102                                      | 100                               |
| Index of Miscellaneous Cost  | 88                                       | 92                                |

Modeled cost-of-living data for Kinney, MN (ZIP 55758) and St. Louis County, MN, 2025 estimates.  
Index values where 100 = U.S. national average.

Statewide, Minnesota's median property tax bill is \$3,300-\$3,400/year for a median value home when the average in St. Louis County is about \$1,982. Most households in Kinney pay less than \$800 in property taxes each year.

For rural Minnesota counties, the average cost of utilities is about \$250-\$300 for a modest household. Given Kinney's small, older housing stock and incomes well below the state median, the city's households likely experience utility burdens that are comparable to nearby communities but represent a larger share of their income than for the average Minnesota household.

## Economic Environment Goals and Actions

**EE Goal 1:** Kinney will be fiscally responsible and keep its small-town living affordable.

**Action EE 1.1:** Contemplate any major projects or significant expenses the city may incur over the next 2-year, 5-year, and 10-year terms.

**Action EE 1.2:** Develop a budget forecast of CIRSSD costs and cost distributions to households based on number of households scenarios over the next years.

**Action EE 1.3:** Develop a city annual operating budget for each of the next 5-10 years reflecting anticipated fluctuations in income and expenses.

**Action EE 1.4:** Determine reasons for uninhabited homes in the city and take steps to promote occupancy if it supports tax and utility income.

**Action EE 1.5:** Meet with MinnTac quarterly to communicate on mining activities affecting Kinney including acquisitions of permits and properties and plans for expansion.

**Action EE 1.6:** Explore the establishment of a Task Force of city leadership and professionals who specialize in finance, community development, planning, municipalities and law, legislative representation, etc. and meet quarterly to discuss City progress, challenges, and need for support.

## **FOCUS AREA 4: WORK ENVIRONMENT**

***Work Environment:*** The work environment should be a source of stimulation, rather than stress. Respect for employees, good safety precautions and procedures, firm rules forbidding harassment or abuse, adequate pay and/or other compensation, humane and fair production expectations and treatment—all contribute to work environments that nurture creativity and enthusiasm, and improve, rather than detract from, both production and workers’ quality of life. Kinney’s City Council and city employees are the focus of the Work Environment (WE) focus area.

Kinney has a small team of individuals who serve on its behalf. Six residents are elected to serve on the Kinney City Council which is comprised of the mayor, three council members, a clerk, and treasurer. The city also employs two full-time and one part-time Public Works employees, a part-time treasurer, and part-time clerk. City Council members receive a small monthly wage for their service, and the employees receive wages with full-time employees also receiving benefits.

### **Best Practices**

Employers and human resource managers agree that one of the best practices in creating a healthy and productive work environment is to set clear expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries. This includes providing employees with rules, regulations, policies, and procedures. The League of Minnesota Cities offers three helpful publications on their website that support city operations and work environments. These include:

“START WITH GOOD PEOPLE, LAY OUT THE RULES, COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES, MOTIVATE THEM AND REWARD THEM. IF YOU DO ALL THOSE THINGS EFFECTIVELY, YOU CAN’T MISS.”

LEE IACocca

- **Handbook for Minnesota Cities** assists City Council Members with understanding their roles and laws affecting Minnesota city governments. It also includes information on governmental structures of cities, elections and meetings, personnel management, regulatory and development functions of cities, liability, budgets and finances, and reporting and records management. <http://www.lmc.org/page/1/handbook-for-mn-cities.jsp>
- **HR Reference Manual** provides extensive guidance on personnel policies, compensation, labor relations, and other topics. <https://www.lmc.org/news-publications/publications/hr-reference-manual/>
- **Minnesota Mayors Handbook** assists mayors with their roles including everything from laws and procedures for conducting city business and meetings to the mayor’s role, ethics and code of conduct, and responsibilities and relationships related to city employees. <https://www.lmc.org/resources/minnesota-mayors-handbook/>

## Work Environment Goals and Actions

**WE Goal 1:** Kinney is committed to providing a work environment that is healthy, safe, productive, and free from harassment or abuse.

**Action WE 1.1:** Develop a comprehensive employee handbook that includes policies and procedures, employee rights and obligations, workplace policies, leave policies, compensation and employee benefits, and supervision procedures.

**Action WE 1.2:** Provide annual performance reviews that compare employer expectations (job description) with job performance, provide positive feedback, and address any issues of concern.

**Action WE 1.3:** Establish an appropriate procedure for residents to follow if they have complaints about City Council Members or city employees.

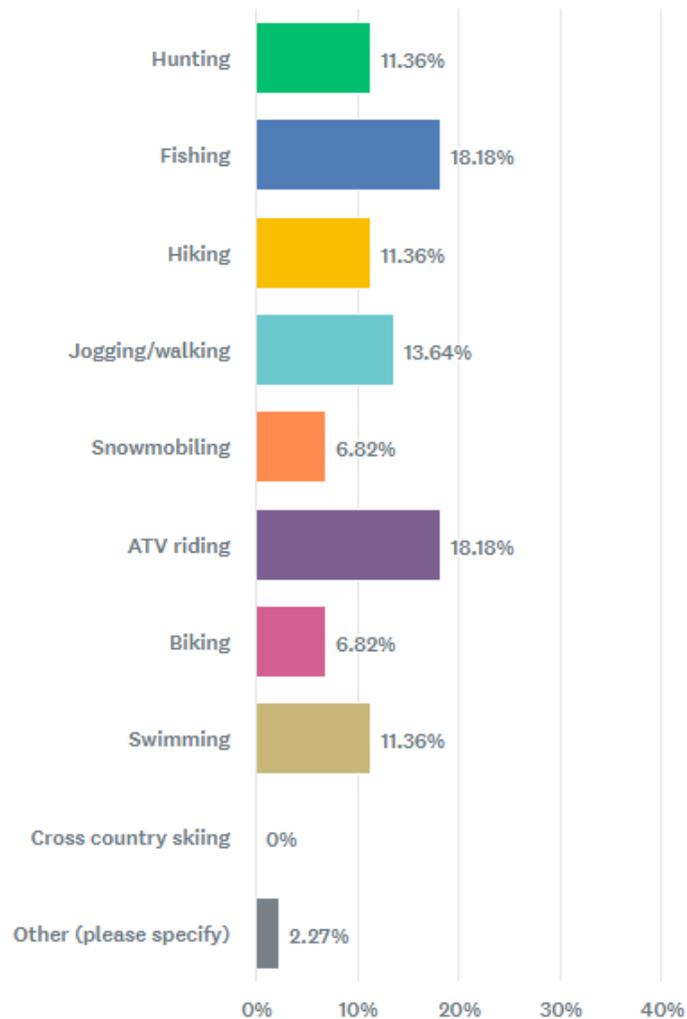
**Action WE 1.4:** Keep a current copy of the Handbook for Minnesota Cities (developed by the League of Minnesota Cities and updated regularly) readily available for City Council Members. Chapters of the handbook can be individually downloaded at: <http://www.lmc.org/page/1/handbook-for-mn-cities.jsp>.

## **FOCUS AREA 5: LEISURE ENVIRONMENT**

***Leisure Environment:*** The work and home environments can provide time for leisure. The community can provide **recreational** and **cultural** opportunities to use in that leisure time—museums, parks and beaches, cultural and sports events, libraries, etc. Kinney could also pursue opportunities to share its recreational assets and community events with neighboring communities, families, and friends. The city’s historical and cultural object assets are also considered in the Leisure Environment (LE) focus area as they could support leisure activities.

### **Outdoor Activities**

Kinney’s leisure activities are mainly outdoors and recreational in nature. According to the Community Survey, 70% of Kinney residents participate in outdoor recreation in or near Kinney. This figure is down from 80% of residents surveyed eight years ago. About 88% of survey responders believe that recreational activities are important to the city. Participation rates for activities were reported as follows:



**City Park:** Established in 1978, Kinney Community Park is located on the north side of the city and resides on the former Wilson School site. The Kinney Community Park is comprised of a ball field, skating rink, sheltered picnic area, and a playground that has been upgraded in recent years. It is also the site where many of Kinney's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration activities place. The following photos further illustrate the park's amenities:



The park also has an old tennis court that is no longer operational. While the city has considered removing it, recent discussion has been to preserve resources and focus on other city priorities needing attention. There are ongoing issues with sink holes developing in the section of the park where the old Wilson School structure once stood. According to resident accounts, when the school was demolished, the basement walls and foundation were left in place. After the building structure was removed, the hole left behind was backfilled, including the walls, foundation, and potentially other items discarded from the school. The city attributes the current sink holes to shifting and decomposition of the known and unknown buried materials. As this continues to be an ongoing and urgent safety issue, the city is committed to addressing sink holes and any other necessary repairs in the park as needed.

**Kinney Lake (Kinney Mine Pit):** Kinney Lake (a.k.a. Kinney Pit) is a 51-acre lake that was formed out of the old Kinney Mine Pit. Stocked with fish every year by the MN Department of Natural Resources, the lake offers a variety of fish. The property surrounding nearly all the lake is uninhabited and belongs to the State of Minnesota. In 2019, Kinney conveyed the Kinney Pit Public Access/Recreation Area to Great Scott Township. The township was able to secure grant funding and St. Louis County approval to update the public access area which added a floating dock/fishing pier, constructed a picnic shelter, and replaced the washed-out boat launch with a safer concrete slab. These upgrades have generated increased community use of the public access and will provide



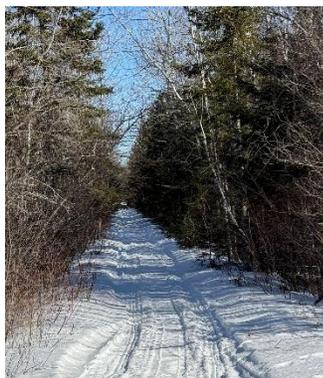
potential opportunities for leisure activities in the future including those suggested by Kinney residents such as community gatherings, fishing contests, picnics, etc. Swimming is still not considered safe and is not allowed due to the vertical walls from the old mine pit that pose dangerous and deep drop-offs in the water. Funding for the recent Kinney Pit Public Access project came from the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources through the Mine Reclamation Program.

**Mesabi Trail:** Kinney is an identified access point to the Mesabi Trail which currently spans over 150 miles and connects 28 communities in NE Minnesota. Running from Grand Rapids, MN to Ely, MN, the trail is one of the longest paved recreational trails in the United States. It provides recreational activities such as biking, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, and even snowmobiling in some locations. It also connects Kinney to other communities that offer opportunities to explore Iron Range history, artifacts, and scenic views. The Mesabi Trail is a popular pathway as approximately 270,000 people used it in 2025, according to electronic trail counters. The [www.mesabitrail.com](http://www.mesabitrail.com) website provides maps, points of interest, food and lodging suggestions, etc. and includes information on the Kinney access point located in Great Scott Township.



## Tourism

The number of outdoor recreation activities in and surrounding Kinney and the history of Kinney naturally draw visitors to the small city. It is connected to or located near miles of trails that are used for ATV riding, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. Snowmobile associations and ATV clubs have organized to promote their activities and raise funds for trail funding and safety programs. They are a powerful influence on the local economy as they draw in visitors to the region, develop maps that link trail systems throughout Northeast Minnesota, and market businesses and amenities located along them. Some area clubs and associations include the Range Trail Committee, Ranger Snowmobile/ATV Club, Hibbing/Chisholm Path Blazers, Northern Traxx ATV Club, and the Minnesota Trail Riders Association. With no remaining businesses in the city, Kinney's interest in tourism is not a financial one but rather one rooted in benevolence. Kinney residents are proud of their little city, its history, and the generations of families and friends who have established roots and made memories in its time. Even in the comprehensive planning process and considering the seemingly imminent sunset of the city, residents are insistent on sharing what they have and opening their community to anyone wanting to visit and take advantage of the activities and resources it has to offer while they still can.



## Historical and Cultural Assets

Kinney's only remaining historical structure is the City Garage which was constructed under the Works Progress Administration Program. The old City Hall which served as the city's fire hall and was a WPA project, fell in disrepair, became a safety hazard to the community, and was demolished in 2018. The city's old maps and documents which could be potential historic archives or artifacts were removed from the old City Hall and are housed in the current City Hall building. Proper care of these items is critical to preserving them for future generations who want to understand the history and significance of Kinney and its people. The Minnesota Discovery Center and the Minnesota Historical Society are two local organizations that can offer professional guidance and assistance to ensure historical and cultural items are taken care of appropriately. As Kinney contemplates its future, the city will benefit from careful and planful decision-making in the care and protection of these assets.



In the 2017 comprehensive plan, residents supported an action item to discuss the idea of a landmark to be *in* Kinney that would provide information on its historically significant secession story. While that item never came to fruition, residents would like to establish something similar *near* Kinney—a landmark that celebrates and commemorates the city's establishment and history; a landmark that will remain even if the city no longer does.

## Leisure Environment Goals and Actions

**LE Goal 1:** Kinney will develop attractive leisure opportunities and improve existing spaces to engage residents, enhance their quality of life, and attract visitors.

**Action LE 1.1:** Form a task force of residents and youth who can identify and work on projects to make the city more attractive to residents and visitors.

**Action LE 1.2:** Pursue opportunities to improve or increase leisure and recreational activities using the following suggestions from city residents:

- Use the Kinney Pit more for community activities (camping, fishing)
- Host fishing contests
- Recruit more volunteers
- Increase resident participation and support

**Action LE 1.4:** Address the old Wilson School site sink hole situation and any other deteriorating components and equipment in the Kinney Community Park.

**Action LE 1.5:** Identify other public spaces where picnic tables, park benches, small playground units, gardens, and other attractive leisure spaces could be integrated. One suggestion was the property between the Kinney Library and Great Scott Township Hall.

**Action LE 1.6:** Form relationships with organizations and groups that promote outdoor recreation such as the Mesabi Trail, ATV and snowmobile clubs, etc., and can promote opportunities for Kinney residents.

**LE Goal 2:** Kinney will protect its historical and cultural assets and preserve them for future generations to have and enjoy.

**Action LE 2.1:** Inventory, document, and discuss City historical and cultural assets to determine how to best protect and preserve them.

**Action LE 2.2:** Discuss the idea of a landmark located somewhere near Kinney that would provide information on Kinney's history and significance.

## **FOCUS AREA 6: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

***Social Environment:*** A healthy community encourages social networks, provides gathering places where people from all parts of the community may mingle, nurtures families and children, offers universal education and other services, strives to foster non-violent and healthy behavior, invites familiarity and interaction among the various groups that make up the community, and treats all groups and individuals with respect. The Kinney hosts events and partners with other communities on services and activities. It is also served by the Mountain Iron – Buhl School District which contributes to the Social Environment (SE) through its pre-K through high school education and community education opportunities.

When asked about the quality of life in Kinney, 85% of survey respondents rated it either “Good” or “Excellent”. Residents were also surveyed to rate various characteristics of the city, including what they value most about it and reasons why they choose to live there. The highest scoring responses included the sense of community (95%) and that the city was safe and had low crime (94%). These top scoring characteristics are reflective of Kinney’s vision statement and values where the city takes pride and strives in being “small-town” and a “safe” place—one “where people are friendly, feels safe, know their neighbors, and are willing to step up to help each other and get involved.” Several other characteristics were rated high as being important or somewhat important, with most of them

|   | Important or Somewhat Important | Value of Importance Comparison 2016/17 |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Small Town Feel                         | 84%                             | 87%                                    |
| Historic Character                      | 75%                             | 40%                                    |
| Grew Up Here                            | 44%                             | 33%                                    |
| Housing Cost                            | 89%                             | 73%                                    |
| Proximity to Work                       | 59%                             | 33%                                    |
| School District                         | 50%                             | 53%                                    |
| Sense of Community                      | 95%                             | 60%                                    |
| Safe/Low Crime                          | 94%                             | 80%                                    |
| Lack of Zoning/Reduced Regulations      | 75%                             | 47%                                    |
| Investment Opportunity                  | 25%                             | 7%                                     |
| Proximity to Recreational Opportunities | 69%                             | 57%                                    |
| Affordable Taxes                        | 81%                             | 57%                                    |

increasing in importance since the 2017 comprehensive plan as shown in the adjacent table. Some trends to note are how nearly every category increased including those related to costs, taxes, and investments. Throughout the planning process, residents have been hyper-focused on where Kinney is headed with the looming expansion of MinnTac into the community. When asked how they will feel if they must leave their friends and neighbors

in Kinney, more than 83% of residents said it will be difficult. Kinney residents have been grasping and gripping the things they love and appreciate about Kinney while grappling with the erosion of their (and city's) stability as the very things that are important to them become increasingly threatened and challenged.

### **Community Activities and Events**

Kinney invests in community activities and events recognizing that these give residents the opportunity to get to know each other and build a sense of belonging—two important elements in a healthy community. When asked if they participate in city-sponsored activities, 60% of residents reported that they do. This figure is down from eight years ago when 70% of residents responded that they participated. One of Kinney's biggest events is its 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration. Sixty percent of respondents mentioned attending the 4<sup>th</sup> of July event in Kinney. The event consists of a parade down Main Street and a variety of family activities in the Kinney Community Park. Kinney also partners with Great Scott Township and more recently, with Buhl to coordinate Halloween and Christmas parties for kids in the three communities. While Kinney does not have a senior center of its own, the city contributes to the Buhl Senior Center where some of Kinney's seniors tend to gather. Kinney also no longer has a library, and some residents have asked for the library to reopen. Others are using the Buhl Public Library.

Through the survey and at community meetings, residents were asked to provide input on community activities they would like to have in the city. Some of their ideas included:

- Street Dances
- Fishing Contests
- BBQs and Picnics
- Community Feeds and Potlucks
- Food Pantry

Residents also weighed in on ways that Kinney could better support and promote community activities. Their suggestions included adding more family and children's activities, hosting more events, and polling the community specifically regarding activities they would like to see. Some community responses articulated the need for more volunteers and ways for encouraging community members to participate and get involved. As Kinney's population continues to decrease, soliciting volunteers and recruiting resident participation will continue to be a growing problem. Identifying other local opportunities for social engagement and making residents aware of them could help fill the gap. As the city continues to partner with neighboring communities for services and social gatherings, community members have also expressed an interest in the city researching the possibility of coordinating public transportation for residents to be able to access them.

### **Mountain Iron – Buhl School District**

Kinney is part of the Mountain Iron – Buhl School District. Mountain Iron built its first school in 1892 followed by the construction of the Mountain Iron High School in 1911 and

the Mountain Iron Grade and Athletic School in 1919. Reflective of the local economic boom in the mining and timber industries, schools in Buhl, Kinney and Great Scott Township were also added in the early 1900's to meet the substantial increases in student enrollment. When mining jobs started to decline during the mid-1900's, so did student enrollment which led to some of the area schools closing including the Wilson School in Kinney, Hartley School in Spina, and Anderson School north of Kinney. The Mountain Iron and Buhl school districts merged in 1985 to form one Mountain Iron-Buhl School District which covers an area of about 140 square miles and includes the cities of Buhl, Kinney and Mt. Iron as well as Great Scott Township and the unorganized territory of Leander Lake.

The district's mission is to "provide a quality education through shared responsibility in a safe supportive environment for all students to meet the challenges of a global society". Students in Great Scott Township can enroll in the MIB School District or open enroll in other area school districts. The district currently serves about 583 students in grades K-12, employs between 60-70 teachers and staff, works collaboratively with other school districts using technology and sharing coursework and staff (including superintendent), and provides early childhood and community education opportunities.



Groundbreaking for a new high school took place in the spring of 2017 after District voters, including residents of Kinney, passed a \$29 million referendum to replace the old high school. The former building was constructed in the 1920's, had serious infrastructure problems, and would have cost over \$19M to renovate. The decision to build new rather than renovate was deemed more cost-effective, far better for the students educationally, and much less expensive for taxpayers long-term. Approximately 80% of the total construction funding (\$23M) came from Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation while the remaining balance was from local bonding and district contributions (\$4-\$4.5M) and the State of Minnesota (\$1.4-\$1.6 million). Construction was completed and the new 77,000 sq/ft Mt. Iron-Buhl High School officially opened for students in the fall of 2018.

## Social Environment Goals and Actions

**SE Goal 1:** Kinney will work to sustain and grow its current activities and events.

**Action SE 1.1:** Invite community members (including area youth and representatives from partnering communities) to form a social activities committee to help plan and facilitate activities and events in Kinney or neighboring communities.

**Action SE 1.2:** Continue to grow the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration and continue to collaborate with neighboring communities on coordinating Halloween and Christmas parties for community youth.

**Action SE 1.3:** Use technology including social media, community calendars, and the city's public boards to announce community activities. Continue to also use the utility bill to communicate with residents and encourage their participation in events.

**SE Goal 2:** Kinney will develop new social events and services for youth, adults, and seniors.

**Action SE 2.1:** Form resident committees and/or clubs to determine the feasibility, interest and support for new social activities suggested by township residents including summer BBQ's, fishing contests, street dances, bingo, etc. and implement them.

**Action SE 2.2:** Explore the possibility of coordinating public transportation for residents to travel to local senior centers, grocery stores, churches, shopping centers, casinos, and other social environments.

**Action SE 2.3:** Develop a list of local clubs and organizations that residents could participate in and distribute it to residents via online and in paper form.

**Action SE 2.4:** Connect with the Mountain Iron – Buhl School District and explore opportunities to provide community education workshops or courses in the library, at the Great Scott Township Hall, or at outdoor leisure and recreational sites. These could be done in partnership with the township or other neighboring communities.

**Action SE 2.5:** Continue to hire youth to work for the city in summer months.

## **FOCUS AREA 7: POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

***Political Environment:*** In a healthy community, all citizens have a say in how and by whom their community is governed and have easy access to the information necessary to understand political situations and to make informed political decisions. Political decisions, opinions, and speech are protected. Citizens feel they have the power in the community—that they own it and can and should control its direction. As it represents the vision, values and goals, the **implementation of the comprehensive plan** is addressed in the Political Environment (PE) focus area.

### **Governance**

In Minnesota, the primary difference between a city and a town (often referred to as a township) lies in their legal incorporation, governance structure, and scope of services. Cities are fully incorporated municipalities with city councils providing broad services, while Minnesota towns are generally unincorporated, smaller, and governed by a town board of supervisors. Kinney is currently and legally identified as a city. Kinney first incorporated as a **village** in 1910. However, Minnesota Statue 412.016 enacted that any villages that existed in Minnesota as of January 1, 1974, would become statutory cities. Therefore, the Village of Kinney is officially and legally recognized as a city.

Of the three types of Minnesota statutory cities, the City of Kinney is a Standard Plan statutory city. The League of Minnesota Cities describes a Standard Plan statutory city as one that operates with a weak mayor-council. “The standard Plan city council consists of the elected mayor, an elected clerk, and three to five elected council members. The treasurer is an elected position, but not a member of the council,” as noted in their [Handbook for Minnesota Cities](#) which was recently updated in September 2025. The clerk and treasurer positions may be combined into one elected position.

Kinney elects six residents as council members to serve on the City Council. These positions include a mayor, clerk, treasurer, and three council members with all but the treasurer having voting authority. State law sets the date for city general elections as the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each even-numbered year (or odd-numbered year, if passed by city ordinance). Kinney’s elections are held on even-numbered years.

The Kinney City Council typically holds regular meetings every month on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday. The City of Kinney also holds annual Year-End Meetings in December. It can also have the following meetings, as needed (as described LMC’s Handbook for Minnesota Cities):

- ***Special Meeting:*** meeting held at a time or place different than the council’s schedule of regular meetings

- *Emergency Meeting*: meeting called by the council due to circumstances that, in its judgment, require immediate council consideration
- *Closed Meeting*: meeting of a public body that the public is not allowed to attend and meets specific requirements, allowing it to be closed
- *Adjourned Meeting*: also known as a recessed or continued meeting, an adjourned meeting is postponed for lack of a quorum, for convenience, or to complete pending business from a regular meeting

## **Citizen Participation**

While some cities struggle to engage residents in public activities, Kinney has strong and active resident participation in public meetings and events. Through the comprehensive planning process, however, residents confidentially expressed concern about city council meetings and uncomfortable interactions between the council and those in attendance, including city workers.

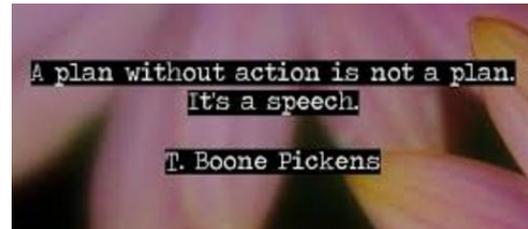
The League of Minnesota Cities encourages citizen participation in public meetings and gives specific guidance in how these meetings are to be conducted and clear protocols for interacting with those in attendance. To protect and encourage residents to participate in city meetings, Kinney would benefit from ensuring the following protocols from the League of Minnesota Cities Handbook are implemented and followed:

1. Any person may observe council meetings. In fact, the council should encourage citizen attendance to help raise awareness of the city's problems and help create support for programs suggested by the council.
2. Citizens must be able to hear the discussion at a meeting and must be able to determine who votes for or against a motion.
3. One copy of any printed materials relating to the agenda items of the meeting that have been distributed or made available to all members of the council must be made available to the audience unless doing so violates the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.
4. Although anyone can attend council meetings, citizens cannot speak or otherwise participate in any discussions unless the mayor or the presiding officer recognizes them for this purpose.
5. The decision to recognize speakers is usually up to the mayor or presiding officer, but the council can overrule this decision. The council can, through a motion, decide to hear one or more speakers from the audience.
6. Participation in council meetings can be intimidating for the average citizen. Councils should make sure citizens are invited to participate when appropriate and listened to with courtesy. Individual council members should not argue with citizens. Citizens attend council meetings to give information for the council to consider. Discussions or debates between individual council members and citizens during council meetings are inappropriate and may reflect badly on the decision-making process.

## Plan Implementation

The League of Minnesota Cities describes a comprehensive plan as “an expression of the community’s vision for the future and a strategic map to reach that vision”. Once comprehensive plans are adopted, a map has been created and the journey to accomplish the vision, goals and action plans set forth truly begins.

Kinney is committed to the implementation of its Comprehensive Plan. Respecting the ideas and input of residents, the City Council will invest resources and work toward accomplishing the action plans, goals, and ultimately the shared community vision. As a working document, the plan may need to be amended or adjusted as situations change or opportunities arise. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to monitor progress and propose amendments as needed. It will also be updated every five years to ensure that it contains up-to-date information and continues to be a current and accurate representation of Kinney’s vision and goals.



## Political Environment Goals and Actions

**PE Goal 1:** Kinney is committed to a governance structure that is accessible, keeps residents informed, encourages resident participation, and engages residents in decision-making.

**Action PE 1.1:** Keep public boards current and updated with information on times, dates, agendas and minutes of public meetings, community activities and events, emails and phone numbers to contact the city, and general information relevant to city residents. Have city records and reports accessible and available for public view at the City Hall.

**Action PE 1.2:** Review and implement public participation in meetings protocols as prescribed by the League of Minnesota Cities in their Handbook for Cities.

**Action PE 1.3:** Review and report on the city's progress on the comprehensive plan at the annual year-end meeting in December to maximize the greatest number of residents in attendance.

**PE Goal 2:** Kinney values partnerships with other communities and organizations and will continue to seek opportunities to share resources, collaborate on activities, and form alliances that support the progress of the township.

**Action PE 2.1:** Organize a meeting with Great Scott Township and Buhl to identify and discuss opportunities for more collaboration and partnership.

**Action PE 2.2:** Identify and form relationships with other municipalities, organizations, and agencies that could help promote city activities and goals.

**PE Goal 3:** Kinney will implement the adopted comprehensive plan, use it to guide decision-making, allocate resources to support it, track progress toward achievement of goals, and amend and update the plan every five years or when major changes occur within the community.

**Action PE 3.1:** Invest resources (human and financial) to support the achievement of the comprehensive plan's goals and action plans.

**Action PE 3.2:** Review the comprehensive plan, monitor progress, and make necessary amendments on an annual basis.

**Action PE 3.3:** Update Kinney's comprehensive plan every five years to ensure that it contains up-to-date information and continues to be a current and accurate representation of the city's vision and goals.

## **APPENDIX A – Community Survey**

## **APPENDIX B – Iron Range Comprehensive Plans & Mining**

**APPENDIX C – St. Louis County Comprehensive Land Use Plan**

## **APPENDIX D – MinnTac Mine Lands & Minerals Map**

## **APPENDIX E – St. Louis County Recycling Program**

## **APPENDIX F – Resolution to Adopt the Comprehensive Plan**