Residents' Ideas for the Next Twenty Years
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WHY THIS PROJECT? WHY NOW?

What if you asked every resident, "What one wish do you have for the future of Cottage Grove?"

That’s precisely what My Future Cottage Grove set out to do.

The document you’re reading summarizes thousands of Cottage Grove residents’ ideas — from middle school children to fifth generation families — who shared their dreams, fears, and hopes for Cottage Grove’s future. In person and online they responded to questions like:

“What one wish do you have for Cottage Grove?”

“What should the city start doing, to be a great place for the next generation? What should the city stop doing?”

“What do you want the next generation to say about living, working, and playing in Cottage Grove?”

This isn’t just a feel-good exercise. Every ten years, all cities in the Twin Cities metro must submit an updated comprehensive plan.
What is a comprehensive plan?

A comprehensive plan is a ten-year plan that spells out where roads and bridges will be built, how land will be used, e.g. agriculture, housing, parks, etc. among other things. The comprehensive plan is a blueprint for how a city’s physical environment will change over time. And that matters to residents who will live with those choices every day.

In some communities, the comprehensive plan is designed with little or no input from residents. But not in Cottage Grove. The Cottage Grove City Council launched *My Future Cottage Grove* to get residents’ input about the kind of city they want to have before updating the comprehensive plan. This was the first time the city took on a process like this. And the community responded!

The recommendations in this document spring from two sources of input:

1. Residents’ input about what they want to see in Cottage Grove in the next ten and twenty years, and

2. Critical trends that will affect the city in the future, identified by the *My Future Cottage Grove* steering committee.
But as anyone who’s designed a long-term plan knows, conditions change. And as Cottage Grove grows — as it inevitably will - it must adapt. These recommendations, provided in 2017, provide a direction — a compass point for how the city can plan its next decade.
Although *My Future Cottage Grove* used many methods to reach residents — in-person meetings, Facebook Live, and social media — the most popular method of engagement was an online survey.

Seven hundred twenty-six (726) people completed the online survey, providing a good sample of residents at all life stages. The following key findings are based on the online survey unless otherwise noted.
1. COTTAGE GROVE GROWS INTO ITSELF

Cottage Grove is at an inflection point of growth. It’s still “rural enough” that long time residents remember when it was just land and farms, while newer residents wonder why it doesn’t have more retail. And some residents, who moved to Cottage Grove for an acreage and no neighbors, feel that the lifestyle they want is being squeezed to the side. These growing pains are natural, and in the next ten years, the City Council and staff will have to balance longtime residents’ concerns with the inevitable growth that’s coming.

The Met Council projects that Cottage Grove will grow to 47,000 residents (from its current population of 34,689) and to 17,300 households (from 11,542) by 2040. (See maps on the following page.) Growth is inevitable but the quality of growth is something that the city is committed to maintain. And most residents support Cottage Grove’s growth. For example, the majority of surveyed residents confirm that they are willing to trade more traffic for more retail.
Figure 2: Population and household growth for Cottage Grove, Washington County and Twin Cities metro through 2040.

Source: Met Council Regional Forecast, metrocouncil.org/forecasts
2. MOST RESIDENTS WANT RETAIL, RECREATION AND HOUSING

When asked to rank the amenities they’d like to see in Cottage Grove in the future, “retail”, “recreation”, and “housing” were the top themes. Residents rated the following amenities from 1 (best) to 10 (worst). Their overall ranking is noted below. The top votes were cast for:

1. Local restaurants (3.29 - Theme: Retail)
2. Community center with a pool (3.42 - Theme: Recreation)
3. Chain restaurants (4.15 - Theme: Retail)
4. Recreation center (4.61 - Theme: Recreation)
5. Local retail (4.98 - Theme: Retail)
6. More bike paths (5.85 - Theme: Recreation)
7. Community center without a pool (6.02 - Theme: Recreation)
8. Affordable rentals (6.58 - Theme: Housing)
9. Senior housing options (7.03 - Theme: Housing)
10. Fewer bike paths (8.42 - Theme: Recreation)

How can residents want BOTH “More bike paths” (ranked 6th overall) and “Fewer bike paths) ranked #10 overall? That’s because all respondent ranked ALL TEN of these issues, and the list summarizes the top ten in rank order. Another way to read this would be to say that “More bike paths” are more important to more people and “Fewer bike paths” are least important to most people.

What’s the difference between a “recreation center” and a “community center?”

The simple answer is that recreation centers are built primarily for year-round exercise and recreation – think basketball courts, weight rooms, and exercise equipment. “Community centers” include some room dedicated to exercise, but also have a lot of flexible meeting space that can be used for recreation (yoga classes?) or for general community use, e.g. community meetings or rental for weddings, family reunions, etc.
Most respondents are interested in increased moderate sized housing (56.0%) or increased large sized housing (28.6%). Most people (77.8%) responded that they would be willing to trade increased traffic for increased retail opportunities.

In addition to the general preferences among all survey respondents noted above, we dug deeply into four specific audiences for these reasons:

- **Residents over age 55** — older adults are one of Minnesota’s fastest growing age groups. In the coming years, Cottage Grove’s over 55 population will continue to grow. And as Americans live longer, our older and retired residents will be in the community for twenty, thirty, or more years.

- **Families with school-aged children** — This group has historically been drawn to Cottage Grove for the quality of its schools. This will continue to be a core demographic for Cottage Grove’s future.

- **Young people without children** — This group historically has not chosen Cottage Grove, but they may begin to move to Cottage Grove as it develops more retail and quality of life amenities.

- **Cottage Grove’s promoters** — Every community has promoters (and detractors). What do promoters say when they’re recommending Cottage Grove as a great place to live to a family member or friend?
3. RESIDENTS AGE 55+ PREFER RESTAURANTS AND A COMMUNITY CENTER WITH A POOL

Ninety-nine (13.6%) respondents said they were over 55. A large proportion (78%) describe themselves as “empty nesters” (41.6%) and as retirees (37.2%). A large proportion were also married with adult children (12.4%). This group is much more likely to be transplants from other communities when compared to younger survey takers (82.8% vs 68.4%).

Overall, residents aged 55 and older:

- Are more likely to recommend Cottage Grove as a “great place to live” to a friend.
- Are more likely to want moderate housing (61.5%) and high density owned living spaces (21.9%). No senior respondents were interested in more rental properties.
- Prefer these future changes to Cottage Grove:
  1. More local restaurants
  2. Fewer bike paths
  3. Community center with a pool
  4. More chain restaurants

Compared to all survey respondents, residents aged 55 and over least prefer a community center without a pool and having more bike paths.
4. PARENTS WITH SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN WANT A COMMUNITY CENTER WITH A POOL AND MORE RETAIL

As a reflection of Cottage Grove itself, more than half of all survey respondents (56.9%) have dependent K-12 children. Respondents with children are more likely to have a higher household income (ranging from $51k to $175k) compared to the rest of respondents ($25k to $125k). Respondents with school-aged children were slightly more likely to be transplants to Cottage Grove (72.6% vs 67.4%) and are less likely to be homegrown (19.7% vs 22.0%).

Families with school-aged childrens’ top preferences:

1. A community center with a pool
2. More local restaurants
3. More local retail

Their lowest preference is for fewer bike paths and more senior housing.
When responding to open ended questions, respondents in this group are more likely to refer to Cottage Grove as "great" when asked why they would recommend Cottage Grove. When asked about housing, this group was more likely to use the word "housing", "family", "larger" and "options" than the rest (see Figure 3). When asked what they like about Cottage Grove, married residents with kids seem to be carrying the predominance of the word "community".

Figure 3: Word Cloud of Parents with School Aged Children, “What do you like about Cottage Grove?”
5. HEARING FROM THE NEXT GEN: RETAIL, COMMUNITY CENTER WITH A POOL...AND RENTALS

We often think of Cottage Grove as a “great place for families” - and it is. Yet, as growth continues, Cottage Grove will experience increasing diversity including more young people and singles who don’t have children in school.

Among online survey respondents under age 35, 49 (6.7%) were single without children and 36 (5.0%) were married without children. More young, married respondents were likely to be male (33.3% vs 26% on average). As might be expected, young single people had much lower annual household incomes (ranging predominantly from $25k to $100k), than young married people ($51k to $125k) and those under 36 years old who did not identify as single or married (perhaps they’re in a committed relationship but not married) also have higher household income ranges ($51k to $175k).

Young single people are most likely to be homegrown in Cottage Grove (51.0%) while young married people (55.6%) and other respondents (73.6%) are more likely to be transplants to the area.

What does the next gen want from Cottage Grove

1. More local restaurants are most highly prioritized
2. Young singles prioritize chain restaurants and having a community center with a pool
3. Young marrieds prioritize the community center with a pool and more local retail
4. More moderate sized housing - but young married people are looking for larger homes (38.9%) at higher rates than other groups. Young, single people are looking for rentals at a higher rate (8.2%) than other groups.
Both young singles and young marrieds rank the following as low priorities: less bike paths and increased senior housing.

Compared to other groups, the word "community" was used less when describing Cottage Grove. Perhaps young singles and marrieds don't feel as connected to the community yet, because the schools provide most residents with their connection to Cottage Grove? However, this group was more likely to use the word "character" to describe Cottage Grove. It may be that younger people are valuing something unique that makes Cottage Grove stand out, in both Cottage Grove itself and in their homes.

Figure 4: Word Cloud: Young singles without children when asked to describe Cottage Grove.
6. WHO ARE COTTAGE GROVE'S PROMOTERS, AND WHAT DO THEY VALUE?

Every community has its cheerleaders, the people who promote the community to their friends and family. Here's what we know about those who promote Cottage Grove most rigorously:

They are your neighbors; they are very similar in gender, age and income as the rest of survey respondents.

They aren't only lifelong residents. They are very similar in the distribution of homegrowns (those who were born and raised in Cottage Grove and who continue to be residents), transplants (those who moved to Cottage Grove intentionally, but were raised in a different community) and boomerangers (those who were born or raised in Cottage Grove, left, and then moved back).

Promoters want the same things as most survey respondents. Their top three preferences matched survey respondents overall: they want local and chain restaurants and a community center with a pool.

What’s striking is this: fewer promoters are married with K-12 children (44.6% v 50.9%) and more promoters identify as single with no kids, empty nesters, and retirees. In other words, those most likely to promote Cottage Grove don't have kids in South Washington County’s schools.

How did we determine Cottage Grove’s “promoters”?

We asked all survey respondents, “On a scale of zero to ten, how likely are you to promote Cottage Grove as a great place to live to a friend or family member?”

Those who answered with a 9 or 10 are Cottage Grove’s promoters.¹

¹ Based on the book The Ultimate Question by Fred Reichheld. Learn more: http://www.theultimatequestion.com/theultimatequestion/home.asp
People who highly recommend Cottage Grove use words like “great”, “nice” or “good” and “community.” “Schools”, “family” and “love” were in the secondary tier of words they use to describe Cottage Grover. [For those who were less likely to recommend Cottage Grove, “Restaurants” was the predominant word. Also statistically significant: promoters more likely to mention “family”, “community” and “larger” when discussing future homes.]

Figure 5: Promoters' responses to “How do you describe Cottage Grove?”
what trends will impact cottage grove's future?

In addition to gathering residents' input about their hopes and wishes for the future, My Future Cottage Grove’s Steering Committee analyzed 44 trends that could have an impact on Cottage Grove’s future.

UNDERSTANDING TRENDS — THE FOUR FORCES

If you asked a dozen people, “What trends will impact Cottage Grove in the next twenty years?” you’d get hundreds of answers. Some of those responses might be data-driven trends, but many would be people’s opinions.

The My Future Cottage Grove project was committed to looking at data-based trends. For guidance we used The Next Big Things which identifies forty-four trends likely to affect U.S. cities in the next twenty years. The trends are organized into four categories, listed here in priority order: resource trends; technology trends; demographic trends; and governance trends.2

From these 44, the My Future Cottage Grove steering committee identified nine trends that they believe will have a large impact on Cottage Grove’s future in the next 20 years.

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<th>DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS</th>
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<td>The availability of resources is most closely tied to survival, so it is the most important force. Resources include the food, water, air, habitat, and other material nature offers. Especially important are the resources that enable energy production. Trends and resource drivers related to this force include: climate, ocean, space, energy, minerals, water, land, food, animals and forest. 3</td>
<td>Technology includes the tools and knowledge we use to extract and transform resources into new products and capacities that make our lives more comfortable and convenient, or to develop capabilities beyond our physical bodies that allow us to go places and discover new realities. Trends and drivers related to this force include: genetics, robotics, information, nanotechnology, health care, education, collaboration, virtual reality, games, telephony, manufacturing, infrastructure, and capital formation.</td>
<td>Demographics are the “who” behind society’s changes. People are producers. We produce through our physical and intellectual labor, so “who” is producing matters, e.g. does your community have enough working people to support your very young and very old; do you have the right ratio of women to men; is there enough social cohesion among groups to ensure the good of the community? Trends and resource drivers related to this force include: population growth, the developing world, industrialization, immigration, multiculturalism, multilingualism, nationalism, and conflict.</td>
<td>Distribution and management of society’s assets—resources, technology and people—are administered through the rule of law and the rule of markets. Of all the forces, governance is the most reactive, i.e. changes in resources, technology and people often run ahead of government’s capability to deal with them. Trends and drivers related to this force include: tribalism, market drivers, values, interests, beliefs, online communities, personalization, polarization, and identity politics.</td>
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3 The four forces model and the descriptions for each force outlined in this document are based on the book *Think Like a Futurist* by Minnesota-based Cecily Sommers
1. ENERGY GRID DISRUPTION — WHAT’S OUR PLAN B?

The United States’ energy grid is the most complicated machine ever built by man. We rely on it every day to charge our smart phones, power our refrigerators, operate our lights, and heat and cool our homes. But the grid’s transformers and substations were not designed to be protected from physical attack. Many of them sit idly in rural areas, protected by little more than a chain-link fences and guarded by a camera.

“Just how vulnerable is the grid? In 2003, trees hit transmission lines and caused a cascade of blackouts affecting 50 million people in the Eastern U.S. and Canada for days. And with increased storm intensity, it’s possible that something like this will happen again, disrupting financial transactions, public safety, emergency medical response, access to food, and mobility.

“In April 2013, Pacific Gas & Electric announced that its San Jose substation was attacked by people who cut communication cables and fired over 100 rifle bullets, knocking out 16 of 23 transformers. Although PG&E was able to route power to its customers from nearby utilities, it took 27 days to get the substation operational. Sixteen months later, the same substation was attacked again. This highlights the fragility of our grid, and its susceptibility to national or international terrorism. Many communities, and the entire state of New York, are investigating local grid development to ensure more reliable energy sources.”

The City of Cottage Grove currently has backup generators for critical infrastructure like sewers. The electrical utility, Xcel, is responsible for residential and business customers in case of an energy grid disruption.

In response, many municipalities have invested in backup grids or alternative energy sources that are not dependent on the national grid, to ensure that local residents and businesses can maintain operation if the grid is attacked or if a solar flare causes an electromagnetic pulse that would impact the energy grid.
2. DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IMPACTS HOW RESIDENTS INTERACT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

How can the City adapt to next generation technology and citizens’ use of it?

Already, citizens use Amazon Prime to bring products to their doorstep and Netflix and Hulu to bring digital programming on-demand to their smartphones. How will these digital preferences transform how the City of Cottage Grove solicits input and conducts business?

A powerful example of digital citizenship occurred during the My Future Cottage Grove project. For the first time ever, the City of Cottage Grove hosted a town hall meeting live via video feed on Facebook Live. From his or her homes, anyone with Facebook who followed the city could participate. Facebook Live generated the most views of any of our outreach efforts.

Cottage Grove is fortunate to have digitally connected citizens (the online survey results are one indicator) whose preferences for using digital tools to interact with city government — and governing — are likely to increase.
3. NANOTECHNOLOGY IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TELEHEALTH

Nanoscience and nanotechnology are the study and application of extremely small things and can be used across all the other science fields, such as chemistry, biology, physics, materials science, and engineering.\(^5\)

Nanotechnology impacts many things already - how our homes are heated, cooled, and monitored, and health care technology. How could this impact Cottage Grove? As its over-55 population increases, Cottage Grove could become a living laboratory for telehealth — healthcare delivered remotely from the Twin Cities’ best medical teams and monitored remotely by nanotechnologies that are injected or take in pill form. Nanotechnology, aging populations and a shortage of skilled medical professionals combine to push toward more home care delivery options.

\(^5\) Source: https://www.nano.gov/nanotech-101/what/definition
4. TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS SHOULD BE MADE MINDFULLY

Because Cottage Grove is growing, its infrastructure needs will also grow. These basic needs, coupled with more freeze-and-thaw cycles due to climate change, will have a large impact on road and infrastructure costs and conditions.

Building roads, bridges and sewer lines is only one part of the cost; ongoing maintenance can be up to 60% of the initial capital investment. Recent research also indicates that suburbs with large lots and low density may have a harder time paying for infrastructure upgrades.6 These cost factors may help Cottage Grove make a strong financial case for smaller lots, or even rental and higher density housing, a top request by young singles and young couples without children.

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6 “Is the Infrastructure ‘Time Bomb’ Beginning to Blow? Study Finds Low-Density Housing Can’t Pay the Bills” by Mary Glindinning, October 26, 2016, Sustainable City Network
5. COTTAGE GROVE’S ELDER POPULATION IS GROWING

The fastest growing age group in Washington County is the population aged 65 and older. In Washington County, this age group is projected to increase by 290 percent from 2010 to 2030 which is two and a half times faster than the statewide rate.\(^7\)

This is on par with the state: “Starting in 2020 and lasting through 2030, for every one person of “working age” added to the Twin Cities metro area population, there will be 21 people added over the age of 65, according to Metropolitan Council data.”\(^8\)

The largest demographic wave impacting Cottage Grove is that its residents are living longer and therefore the city’s population as a whole is getting older.

![Population over age 65, 1990-2040.](source)

**Figure 6: Population over age 65, 1990-2040.**
Source: 2013 Washington County Health Assessment, U.S. Census Bureau, Minnesota Demographic Center forecasts.

Cottage Grove must consider this demographic bulge as it budgets, plans its land use, and develops programs for the city.

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6. RURAL V. URBAN RESIDENTS’ PREFERENCES

Many longtime residents of Cottage Grove reminisce about the days when their neighbors lived an acre or a mile away. They aren't pleased with Cottage Grove’s growth or increasing density.

On the other hand, many of the new families who are moving to Cottage Grove — attracted by its schools and quality of life — expect more urban amenities. These two viewpoints — those who want to keep Cottage Grove the way it was and those who want the city to grow and attract a balance of retail and amenities — may be at odds in the coming years.

7. BONUS: INCREASING ETHNIC AND RACIAL DIVERSITY

Although it wasn’t explicitly noted by the My Future Cottage Grove steering committee, Cottage Grove will also be affected by increasing diversity:

"Anoka, Scott and Washington counties more than doubled their respective shares (of people of color) over the past 13 years. In 2000, about one in fourteen residents in each were people of color. By 2013, it was closer to one in every seven residents."


![Figure 7: Growth in people of color by county in the Twin Cities Metro, 2000-2013.](source: Metropolitan Council staff calculations based on Council’s 2013 Annual Population Estimates and U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2011-2013 American Community Survey)
8. **Trust in Government**

Surveys show that trust in national government is at an all time low, while trust in local government has rebounded to the same levels as before the Great Recession.

In Cottage Grove, the majority of surveyed residents are very satisfied with Cottage Grove’s levels of service and performance. This is a cherished asset to maintain, especially in light of some of the urban v. rural attitudinal concerns that could emerge as the community grows. Maintaining resident satisfaction and trust will require consistent focus on citizen engagement, reporting and accountability.

![Figure 8: Trust in State and Local Government](source: Gallup)
9. DIRECT DEMOCRACY — HOW CAN RESIDENTS HAVE MORE SAY IN DECISIONS?

In the age of social media and real time digital communication, some residents are calling for more direct democracy. In the U.S., the use of ballot initiatives is a traditional form of direct democracy, but the development of new technologies has expanded the possibilities. Experiments with participatory budgeting, for example, have blossomed from cities in Brazil, to countries around the world. In the U.S., this has included Chicago, New York, Boston, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Vallejo and Long Beach, CA.

According to Karen Mossberger and Yonghong Wu, technology can make it easier to create conditions for direct democracy — providing information and participatory opportunities, including the use of social media or online town halls to discuss issues, and platforms to rank or rate ideas, which have been used by some cities in their budgeting processes.9

Related to Citizen Engagement (Trend #2), Direct Democracy is about engaging citizens in real time decision making. Imagine polling voters by district on the night that an important vote is cast. This "direct democracy" is seen as preferable to many, who bemoan that the people who attend city council meetings are often the same cast of characters, and sway decisions disproportionately.

A suite of technologies are emerging to give more residents a greater say in how their cities are run...and to quell the "vocal minority" who sometimes have a disproportionate impact on city decisions.

The following recommendations are designed to:

- Build on Cottage Grove’s strengths: its sense of community, a strong school district, high quality park and trail system, and responsive city government

- Respond to residents’ wishes, as captured on pages 5-15

- Be proactive about trends facing the city, as noted on pages 16-26

1. **ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY CENTER TASKFORCE TO STUDY RESIDENTS’ PREFERENCES AND DEVELOP OPTIONS FOR A COMMUNITY CENTER**

Among all groups studied in this initiative — residents age 55+, Families with school-aged children, and the next generation — a community center with a pool was among the top three wishes for the future of the city.

As Cottage Grove grows, this is an amenity that can serve as a gathering and convening space, a sort of “town hall” for the community. In addition, it will be a place where all residents can find — or create — opportunities to be active year-round and enjoy the companionship of their families, friends and neighbors. In some communities, the community center can also recover some revenue if it has sections that can be rented and used for weddings or private functions.

The biggest question in Cottage Grove seems to be: should our community center have a pool or not? In 2011, an increase in the levy to pay for a community center wasn’t approved residents. In the future, the taskforce may need to undertake a feasibility study and/or construct a clear, compelling case to voters.
2. LAUNCH A FOOD AND FUN FESTIVAL TO INTENTIONALLY CELEBRATE THE COMMUNITY’S DIVERSITY AND NEXT GENERATION

During the community engagement period of My Future Cottage Grove, consultants and City of Cottage Grove staff made a point of talking with and listening to children, those who would be the beneficiaries of plans that would come to fruition in the next 10 and 20 years.

Park High School students poignantly observed that although there is a great deal of diversity in their school, they don’t see it reflected in the community. Students of colors and those from other countries feel that the community could do more to celebrate diversity.

How diverse are the South Washington County Schools?

- Asian: 12.2%
- Black: 10.2%
- Hispanic: 7.6%
- Native American: >.5%
- White: 69.3%

Park High School students up-voted these ideas for the future of the Cottage Grove:

1. Be more environmentally responsible, e.g. increase recycling and increase eco-friendly transportation options

2. Build and invest in things that youth will use, e.g.
   - Movie theater
   - Gyms or recreation centers for sports teams, e.g. Ice arena and new turf for existing sports fields
   - YMCA/Community Center
   - Arcade
   - Water park/pool
   - Art/Dance/Music Studios
   - Talent improvement center
3. **AMBITIOUSLY PROGRAM JOSEPH LA BATHÉ SETTLER’S ISLAND AND THE ADJACENT (NON-ISLAND) GREENSPACE FOR ALL AGES**

Settler’s Island has potential to be transformational for Cottage Grove. It will serve the recreational interests of residents and, as importantly, attract guests from out of town, who can help boost demand for restaurants and retail. Cottage Grove has already invested in bike and hike trails throughout the city and Settler’s Island is one more jewel to add to that collection of natural amenities. What’s more, there is a growing interest in time in nature and outdoors as an antidote to our always-on, digital lifestyles.

As Settler’s Island is developed, it will be important to program it — and the greenspace that accesses it with activivites and amenities that appeal to all ages, e.g.

- a park
- enhanced river access, e.g. a canoe or kayak rental or boat launches
- park benches and water fountains

4. **DEVELOP A HOUSING PLAN THAT REFLECTS WHAT COTTAGE GROVE IS BECOMING**

Cottage Grove has been a traditional suburb with single family homes on large lots for a long time. Now, with changing demographics, the housing mix needs to include:

- Higher density housing for Cottage Grove’s rapidly growing senior citizens
- Smaller homes or high density housing (or rental units) for young singles and young married couples without children
- Traditional medium to large single family homes
5. IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND CONNECTION TO PARKS

Currently, every Cottage Grove resident is within one quarter mile of a public park. This is higher than the national standard and should be celebrated — access to parks is a quality of life amenity that all residents enjoy.

One other quality of life amenity — complete streets (see box below) — should also be added to the City’s growth plan. Together, complete streets and connection to parks, make the community feel accessible to all residents and increase the city’s livability for all ages and abilities.

What are “Complete Streets”?

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.

Creating Complete Streets means transportation agencies must change their approach to community roads. By adopting a Complete Streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network better and safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists—making your town a better place to live.

Source: Smart Growth America
6. CONTINUE TO TEST AND USE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLS WITH RESIDENTS

*My Future Cottage Grove* demonstrated that residents are engaged! As the city moves forward, engaging residents in novel ways and with new technologies will continue to be important. The City’s communications department is ahead-of-the-curve in many areas and will be a trusted partner in this process of ongoing citizen engagement.

Some digital engagement tools that the City of Cottage Grove may consider:

- Participatory budgeting (see box below)

- Social media like Facebook Live for just-in-time community input on specific issues

- Live webcasting city council meetings and enabling remote participation from residents. Two groups that might benefit from this: shut-ins who can’t drive themselves or find transportation to city council meetings and residents who work out of town on city council nights

- Online community polling like PolCo.com, which enables residents to respond to real-time issues that City Council or departments want feedback on.

### What is participatory budgeting?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget. Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritize public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent. As Cottage Grove grows, processes like PB can help residents make important funding decisions.
7. **Engage Residents to Attract and Launch Retail and Restaurants**

More retail and more restaurants are among the top wishes from residents for the future. Unfortunately, until Cottage Grove reaches a greater population, it won’t be on the radar screen for most national chains. This creates an opening for locally-owned or niche retailers. This will not be easy, but there are some things that residents and the community can do to promote local retailers and restaurants.

- Develop a retail plan. This can be done by an economic development professional or firm — they’ll assess the business and retail climate, determine which stores are a natural fit for Cottage Grove, and develop a plan to attract them.

- Rally residents to “shop locally” and keep their dollars in Cottage Grove. This demonstrates to current retailers your commitment to them, and increases their positive references to the city.

- Take a trip to St. Paul and identify small local retailers who might be willing to open another location in Cottage Grove. Make sure it’s the right fit for Cottage Grove. Invite those retailers to visit and roll out the red carpet!

- Cultivate entrepreneurs within Cottage Grove. Cottage Grove has an “Open to Business” initiative that helps residents who have business ideas launch them. How can this program be expanded?
Things we learned

The following two issues were raised repeatedly throughout the My Future Cottage Grove process.

WHICH COMES FIRST, RESIDENTS OR RETAILERS?

“Retail” was one of the top themes that emerged from My Future Cottage Grove. But to get more retail — including restaurants — Cottage Grove needs more residents.

“Retail follows rooftops” is the standard phrase. Chain restaurants generally won’t consider opening in a community with fewer than 50,000 people because experience proves it’s difficult to make money in smaller markets. And because Cottage Grove is a bedroom community — a place where most residents leave the city to work in other communities — the argument to national chains is even harder to make.

The good news is that as Cottage Grove grows, it will become very attractive to many of the chain restaurants that residents requested, and it will also become a viable option for more local or regional “mom and pop” shops that don’t carry as much overhead as national chains.

IS “DENSITY” A DIRTY WORD?

Many people equate density with low quality apartments. But throughout the United States, high quality and attractive multi-family housing is taking shape. What’s more, a dense community is more tax-payer friendly. It’s expensive to maintain all the streets and sidewalks that connect neighborhoods of large lots; it’s more efficient to provide road repair and road maintenance services in neighborhoods with smaller lots, or more families per unit. Cottage Grove is already experimenting with some senior housing developments that are more dense and attractive, which will likely help allay residents’ concerns.
Residents took advantage of dozens of opportunities to have their say in *My Future Cottage Grove*: online, through social media, at various meetings around town, and more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Online Survey</td>
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<td>One Wish Chalkboards</td>
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<td>Highway 61</td>
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<td>Senior Citizen Focus Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Focus Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Community Comments</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,729</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9: Number of ideas and reach generated by various forms of My Future Cottage Grove community engagement.*
The City of Cottage Grove’s communications department did an outstanding job posting questions of the week, like these:
ABOUT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

726 people responded to this survey. Overall, self-identified females were most likely to respond (70.1%), males second (26.6%), people who choose not to identify third (2.2%) and transgender fourth (0.6%). Younger people were more likely to take the survey than older people, 34.4% of respondents were between 24 and 35 and that percent decreased by 4-10% with each increase in age group. The largest household income bracket represented earners between $76-100k annually and distribution across household incomes followed a relatively normalized bell-curve, except for a skewed tail of respondents earning over $200k annually (adding income brackets above $200k may smooth this out for future surveys). The majority of respondents were married (82.0%) and most other respondents said they were single (11.7%). About half (47.9%) of respondents were married with K-12 children. Seven respondents (1.0%) chose to take the survey in Spanish.
THANK YOUS

So much energy and so many hours went into this project. We owe the following residents and stewards of Cottage Grove our thanks:

The My Future Cottage Grove Steering Committee was selected by the City Council to make sure the project stayed on track, was responsive to community needs, and resulted in actionable recommendations. Thank you to:

- Regina Boston
- Jess Davison
- Suzanne Elliott
- Bart Fischer
- Erik Holtan
- Melissa Jungbauer
- Joe Kovarik
- Michael Laverdure
- Lisa Maxwell
- Jennifer Nedry
- Tod Oswald
- Eric Radel
- Sandi Scott
- Lisa Studiner
- Dan Sullivan
- Jessica Vadnais
The Cottage Grove City Council encouraged this process and participated in the kick off meeting and several online and in-person meetings. They include:

Mayor Myron Bailey and Council members Steve Dennis, Wayne Johnson, La Rae Mills and Dave Thiede.

Rebecca “Becky” Ahlvin, the Management Assistant for Administration, was the City’s liaison for this effort and did a lot of the heavy lifting. She coordinated many local meetings, organized all the steering committee meetings, and was the main contact for the City Council and to the City staff.

Phil Carlson of Stantec generously shared his firm’s research in Cottage Grove.
The team at NEXT Generation Consulting was privileged to work with residents, city staff and the steering committee on My Future Cottage Grove. Reach out anytime: