

# CITY OF BUFFALO LAKE **ACTIVE** **LIVING PLAN**



## Chapter One: Introduction to the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan.

### Introduction:

The Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan represents a local commitment to promote outdoor recreation and physical activity in the city of Buffalo Lake, Minnesota. The goal of this plan is to create an environment for healthy living within the community, by ensuring residents and visitors can safely walk, roll (travel by wheelchair or similar means), and bicycle throughout the community. This includes the incorporation of walking, rolling, and biking into residents' day-to-day routines whenever practical. In other words, this plan is designed to ensure that walking, rolling, and bicycling become and remain viable and safe options for local transportation as well as for leisure and fitness.



The development of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan was facilitated by Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) with financial assistance and significant input from the Kandiyohi & Renville County Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). With encouragement and leadership from the Buffalo Lake Economic Development Authority, the City contracted with MMDC to develop the plan. The City also identified local community leaders to participate in the Buffalo Lake Active Living Committee. This dedicated group of residents and stakeholders provided input into the planning process to ensure plan validity and usefulness.

### Chapter Overview:

The Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan consists of the following chapters:

**Chapter One** introduces the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan. This chapter includes sections that describe the benefits of active living plans, outlines the planning process, and provides an overview of the plan's key stakeholders.

**Chapter Two** profiles the Buffalo Lake community, sharing demographic information, maps, and an overview of the City's existing infrastructure.

**Chapter Three** provides an assessment of the Buffalo Lake community. It outlines strengths, challenges, and possibilities identified via a city-wide survey and Active Living Committee discussion. This chapter serves as a foundation for strategy development.

**Chapter Four** describes a long-term strategy for the Buffalo Lake community to incorporate improvements that will enhance and promote active living. Goals, objectives, and action steps are described.

**Chapter Five** Establishes the recommended implementation plan. It identifies the Buffalo Lake community's priority active living projects and discusses potential timing and funding sources.

### What is "Active Living?"

Put simply "Active Living" is the incorporation of physical activity into our daily lives. It is well known that a lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for many preventable diseases. This stagnation also has a detrimental effect on our mental well-being. The City of Buffalo Lake's goal is to create a community that supports active living by ensuring all residents and visitors can safely and conveniently participate in daily physical activity. This could include safely walking, rolling, or biking for leisure, exercise, or transportation to destinations of interest (e.g., parks, social engagements) as well as destinations of necessity (e.g., workplace,

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post office). This plan will identify various opportunities, including infrastructure improvements, policies, and programs that will ensure efficient and effective active transportation options for residents of Buffalo Lake.

### The Benefits of Active Living Plans

#### Health Benefits

The most important reason for anyone to partake in active living is the positive impact even moderate physical activity has on one's health. Physical activity has been shown, time and time again, to be one of the most important things a person can do to improve their health. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota's adult obesity rate is on the rise and two thirds of our state's adults are either overweight or obese. This is nearly identical to the national average.<sup>1</sup> The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases is one of many organizations that reports a multitude of complications closely associated with obesity. These include but are not limited to heart disease, stroke, some cancers, pregnancy complications, fertility and sexual problems, and mental health problems.<sup>2</sup>

Creating a more natural and inviting environment for walking, rolling, biking, and even playing will be an effective way for the Buffalo Lake community to increase the amount of physical activity incorporated by its residents. This will help residents:

- Control their weight
- Reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduce their risk of type 2 diabetes
- Reduce their risk of some forms of cancer
- Strengthen their bones and increase or preserve muscle mass
- Help residents maintain flexibility and balance as they age
- Improve their mental health and mood
- Increase their chances of living longer, healthier lives



#### Economic Development Benefits

While it may not be immediately obvious, the City of Buffalo Lake can actually enhance economic vitality through the promotion of active living. In this digital age there are often more opportunities for many types of workers, especially “white collar” professionals to work remotely. This means many workers now enjoy greater freedom to choose communities further away from their employers’ headquarters as their home base. Other workers will think nothing of a relatively lengthy daily commute, provided it is also relatively free of traffic. By focusing on livability, a small, rural community can give themselves a competitive edge and attract workers and their families. Providing and maintaining quality parks, walkable/rollable and bikeable neighborhoods, and a variety of inclusive and welcoming community activities will be an excellent way to show prospective residents that Buffalo Lake is a great place to enjoy a high standard of living. This sort of community development may also attract the attention of site selectors, who are employed to evaluate communities when determining suitable locations for possible business expansion.

#### Fairness and Equity Benefits

Due to advanced age or disability, a percentage of Buffalo Lake's residents rely on mobility devices as their primary mode of transportation. Rather than walk, they tend to roll. The needs of these residents, and others who need or choose to walk or bike to destinations rather than drive, should be supported with transportation infrastructure that safely provides for their needs. By providing safe and equitable walking, rolling, and biking

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<sup>1</sup> [https://data.web.health.state.mn.us/obesity\\_basic](https://data.web.health.state.mn.us/obesity_basic)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/adult-overweight-obesity/health-risks>

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infrastructure, Buffalo Lake will ensure these residents have the opportunity to participate, remain active in, and contribute to their community, alongside their car-driving neighbors.

### Sense of Community

By encouraging more walking, biking, and playing, the City of Buffalo Lake will increase human interaction. This will help to spur neighborly conversation and support increased familiarity and the formation of more meaningful community relationships.

### Project Scope and Planning Process

To ensure various aspects of active living transportation planning are considered, this plan has been guided by the “Six Es” planning process. The Six Es include **E**ngineering, **E**ducation, **E**ncouragement, **E**nforcement, **E**valuation, and **E**quity. Each of these will be addressed within this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan.

#### The Six Es - Explained:

**Engineering:** Creating safe and convenient places and infrastructure for walking, rolling, and bicycling.

**Education:** Giving people of all ages the ability, the skills and confidence to ride and walk safely, by teaching all users the “rules of the road”.

**Encouragement:** Creating local enthusiasm and a stronger community culture that welcomes and promotes walking and biking.

**Enforcement:** Implementing enforcement measures that will help to ensure safe roads, paths, and sidewalks for all users.

**Evaluation:** Creating a plan to monitor usage and areas of concern to inform decision makers so they can support future improvements and expansions.

**Equity:** Utilizing all the above activities to ensure the entire transportation system is safe and accessible for all residents, regardless of race, ability, socioeconomic status, gender, age, etc.



### Key Stakeholders

For any active living plan to come to fruition and realize progress, there are multiple stakeholders who must be involved and supportive at various times and to various extents. In Buffalo Lake, these stakeholders include:

**Buffalo Lake City Council:** The City of Buffalo Lake has a four-person council and a mayor. The purpose of this group is to establish a vision for the City and implement this vision as a group, using the powers granted to the City by the state. The City Council must work closely with City staff to conduct business and carry out their

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determined work plans.<sup>3</sup> While Buffalo Lake's mayor is elected to a four-year term, City Council members are elected to two-year terms. The Buffalo Lake City Council holds regular meetings, typically on the fourth Tuesday of each month, at the Buffalo Lake City Hall.

**City of Buffalo Lake Public Works Department:** The City of Buffalo Lake's Public Works Department will have a large role in determining the success of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Transportation Plan. Public Works staff will be in charge of repairing existing and establishing new sidewalks and trails, making ADA upgrades, and the maintenance of current pedestrian infrastructure. This work may be done directly by Public Works staff or the Public Works Department may provide oversight of an engaged contractor. These City staff may also interface and serve as a liaison with state or county workers, as these entities make changes to infrastructure under their purview within community borders.

It will be important for Buffalo Lake's Public Works Department to be familiar with this active living plan and understand what needs to be evaluated and/or completed on a regular basis. In some cases, prescribed improvements will be made as part of larger street and/or community developments, to promote efficiency and cost-effectiveness.



**Renville County Public Works:** The Renville County Public Works Department will be a valuable partner for the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan. Ultimately the County Board will need to support any proposed infrastructure changes that occur along any County roads that pass through the community.

**Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT):** The State of Minnesota, and specifically MnDOT, can be integral to the success of any local active living plan. Any proposed road infrastructure improvements that are to occur on MnDOT-owned roads must be reviewed and approved by MnDOT staff. MnDOT planners and engineers can provide technical assistance by helping to identify which infrastructure improvements are most feasible along state roads.



**Buffalo Lake Police Department:** While many of Minnesota's smaller rural communities no longer enjoy a local police presence beyond their County's Sheriff's Office, Buffalo Lake is fortunate to have its own police department. This department responds to emergencies and works to ensure safety, not only via enforcement but also via the education that occurs through conversations with Buffalo Lake's residents. As appropriate, the Buffalo Lake Police Department collaborates with the Renville County Sheriff's Office as well as the City's fire, emergency services, and other departments.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lmc.org/topics/city-council/#:~:text=The%20city%20council%20is%20a,business%20and%20administer%20its%20policies.>

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**Renville County Sheriff's Office:** The Renville County Sheriff's Office provides a full range of law enforcement services for all unincorporated areas of Renville County. Additionally, they provide contracted law enforcement services for a number of Renville County Communities. The Renville County Sheriff's Office operates with a strong community-oriented policing philosophy and strives to form and maintain alliances with other emergency services agencies as well as with the citizens of Renville County. This includes collaborating with local community law enforcement, including the Buffalo Lake Police Department, as appropriate, to ensure public safety.



**Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP):** To support community-driven solutions to expand opportunities for active living, healthy eating, and commercial tobacco-free living, the Minnesota Department of Health administers the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership. Included within their active living mission is the support of communities interested in increasing opportunities for walking and biking. In addition to guidance, SHIP can, at times, provide financial support to help communities achieve healthy outcomes. It is notable that SHIP is a significant funder of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Planning process.

### Kandiyohi - Renville County

# SHIP

MINNESOTA STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP



Minnesota's SHIP staff currently represent 41 Community Health Boards, covering all 87 of our state's counties in addition to the cities of Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield; the City of Minneapolis, and the City of St. Paul.<sup>4</sup> Local SHIP staff serve the combined area of Kandiyohi and Renville County. To learn more about SHIP, visit: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ship/contacts.html>.

**Buffalo Lake Economic Development Authority (EDA):** When considering infrastructure and other developments that have potential to increase pedestrian traffic and/or restrict or alter motor vehicle traffic, it is important to ensure the needs of the local business community are considered. It is also important to ensure Buffalo Lake remains an attractive location for current and prospective businesses to maintain operations. The Buffalo Lake EDA can, on an ongoing basis, provide guidance to local decision makers to ensure all incorporated Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan strategies balance the needs of local businesses with the needs of local residents.

**Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC):** Mid-Minnesota Development Commission works to improve quality of life throughout the four rural Minnesota Counties of Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville. They provide technical assistance to communities, businesses, and local organizations who may not have the staff or expertise required to achieve their specific planning or other improvement-related goals. As such, MMDC is often involved with the development of active living and other plans (e.g., Safe Routes to Schools Plans) related to pedestrian infrastructure. Additionally, MMDC works with MnDOT, under a longstanding service agreement, to provide additional transportation-related technical assistance to its regional stakeholders.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ship/contacts.html>

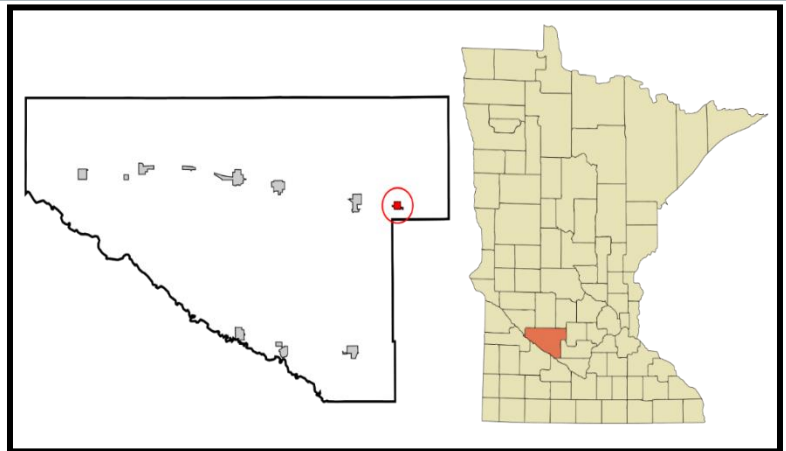
## Chapter Two: City of Buffalo Lake Profile

The City of Buffalo Lake is a small community located on the eastern edge of Renville County, approximately 80 miles west of downtown Minneapolis. The community is situated along U.S. Highway 212 which runs from the western suburbs of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area to and beyond the South Dakota border, eventually terminating in Montana. Buffalo Lake was platted in 1881 and was named after a nearby body of water.

### Population:

An important aspect of developing any Active Living Plan is the determination of community population trends. It is important for planners to understand if a community's population, expected to increase, decrease. It's also important to know the makeup of the population, especially with regard to age, ability, household size, and income, as these characteristics are often indicators of mobility. Any significant change within a community's resident population will impact planning and development efforts.

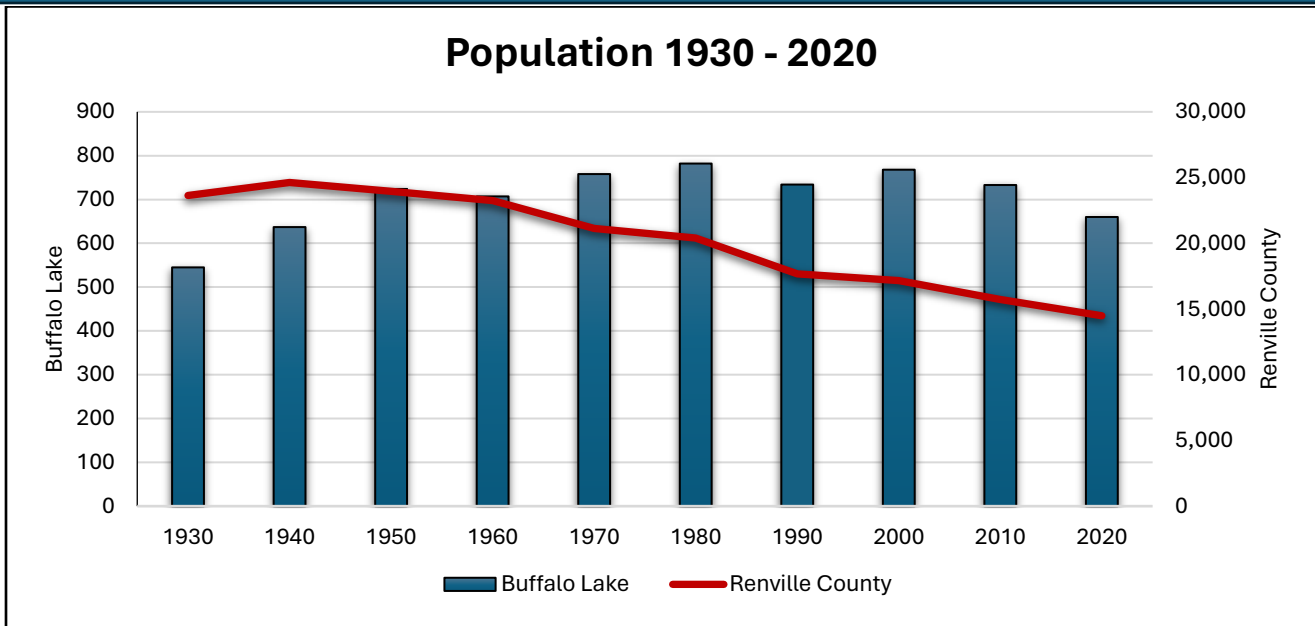
The following table shows population statistics for both the City of Buffalo Lake and Renville County dating back to 1930.



City of Buffalo Lake and Renville County Population Since 1930 (US Census) <sup>1</sup>						
Decade	City of Buffalo Lake	Quantity Change	Percent Change	Renville County	Quantity Change	Percent Change
1930	545	N/A	N/A	23,645	N/A	N/A
1940	637	92	14.4%	24,625	980	4.0%
1950	724	87	12.0%	23,954	-671	-2.8%
1960	707	-17	-2.4%	23,249	-705	-3.0%
1970	758	51	6.7%	21,139	-2,110	-10.0%
1980	782	24	3.1%	20,401	-738	-3.6%
1990	734	-48	-6.5%	17,673	-2,728	-15.4%
2000	768	34	4.4%	17,154	-519	-3.0%
2010	733	-35	-4.8%	15,730	-1,424	-9.1%
2020	660	-73	-11.1%	14,487	-1,243	-8.6%
<b>Average</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>20,206</b>	<b>-1,018</b>	<b>-6%</b>

This information can also be displayed graphically, as shown below.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffalo\\_Lake,\\_Minnesota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffalo_Lake,_Minnesota)



From this information, we can see that Buffalo Lake gradually grew in size until the 1980s and has since experienced a modest decline in the number of residents. This is in slight contrast to Renville County as a whole, which has experienced a more consistent population decline since the 1940s. The gradual population drop can likely be attributed to a number of factors. Families have gotten smaller over the years, as more women have entered and remained in the workplace. Farms have also declined in number, as they increased in size, throughout many rural areas, including Renville County. With this change, farm equipment has gradually gotten larger and activities like planting and harvesting now require fewer workers. Additionally, as with other rural areas and as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, both Renville County's and Buffalo Lake's population is aging. As this occurs, households are becoming smaller, on average. The fact that Buffalo Lake's population has declined more slowly than the surrounding county may, in part, be due to the fact the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center provides housing for up to 49 individuals. This facility also provides numerous jobs for area residents, which may buoy the local population to some extent.

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### Age:

It is important to consider a city's age makeup when the community is in the process of formulating an Active Living Plan. The needs of all age groups must be considered when formulating plan goals to ensure maximum plan effectiveness. For instance, young people need to have areas, such as parks and playgrounds, to play and interact with one another. It is also imperative that they can safely navigate to and from these local destinations. On the other hand, older residents may want or need to walk, roll, or bike to work, a local store or restaurant, places of worship, or social gatherings. They also require a safe and accessible pedestrian infrastructure.

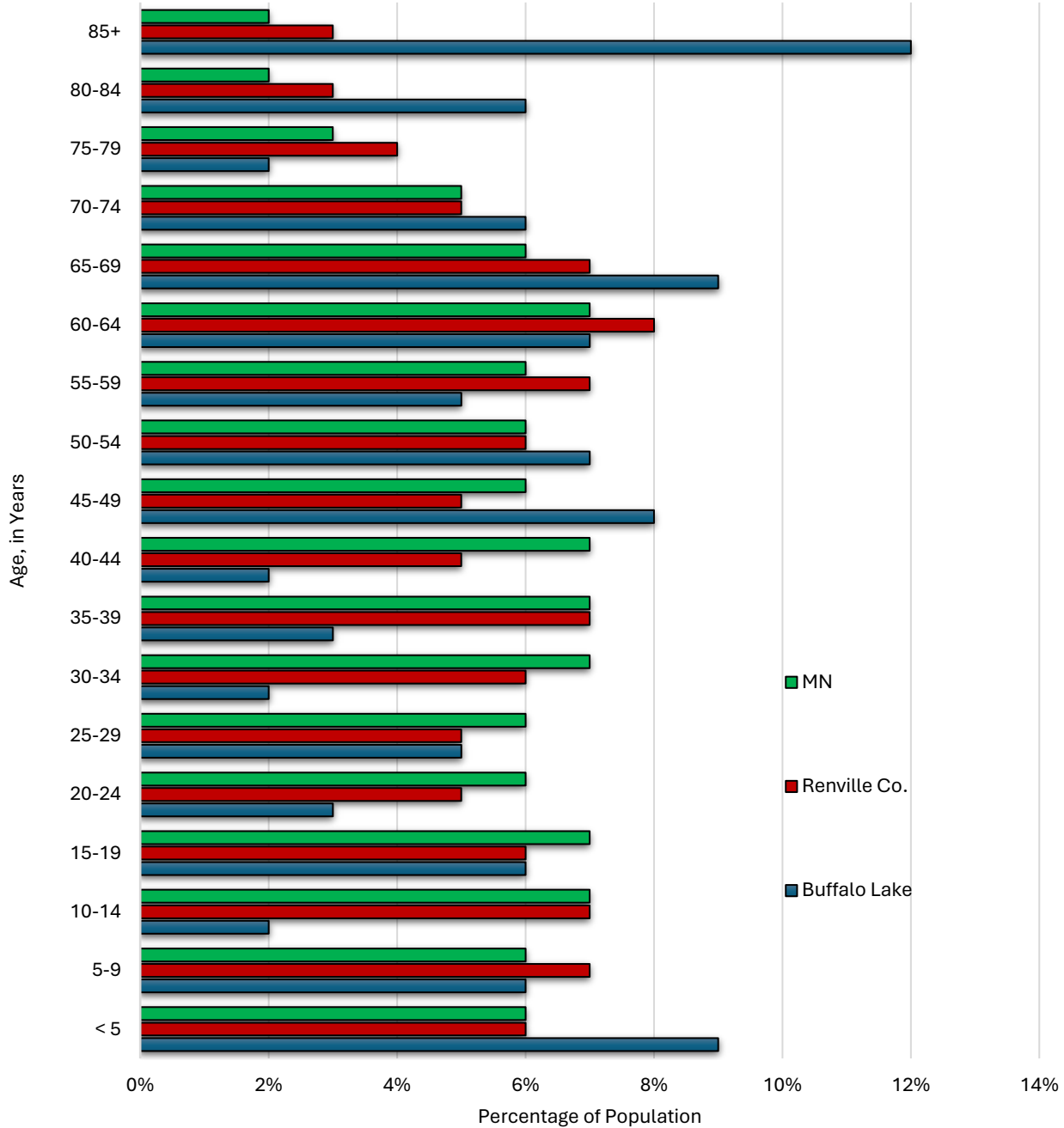
To the right is information intended to provide readers with an accurate understanding of the Buffalo Lake community's age makeup, as compared with Renville County and the State of Minnesota as a whole.

A graphic depiction of this same information can be found on the following page.

<b>Buffalo Lake, Renville County, and Minnesota Population by Age Group (2020 American Community Survey)<sup>2</sup></b>			
<b>Age group</b>	<b>Buffalo Lake</b>	<b>Renville County</b>	<b>State of Minnesota</b>
<b>Under 5 years</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>5 to 9 years</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>10 to 14 years</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>15 to 19 years</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>20 to 24 years</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>25 to 29 years</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>30 to 34 years</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>35 to 39 years</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>40 to 44 years</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>45 to 49 years</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>50 to 54 years</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>55 to 59 years</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>60 to 64 years</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>65 to 69 years</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>70 to 74 years</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>75 to 79 years</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>80 to 84 years</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>85 years and over</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0101?g=160XX00US2708488>

### Percentage of Population, by Age, in 2020 (Buffalo Lake, Renville County, and State of Minnesota)



When comparing Buffalo Lakes age group data with the same information from Renville County and the State of Minnesota, we can see there are some interesting distinctions. The most obvious difference is that Buffalo Lake has a much higher representation of people ages 80 and older. This is, in large part, attributed to the presence of the 49 bed Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center, which provides a variety of services and living options, ranging from apartment settings to long-term care/nursing assistance. A full 35% of Buffalo Lake’s population is age 65 or older, compared to 22% for Renville County and just 18% for the State of Minnesota as a whole.

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With just one exception, the 45 to 49 age bracket, Buffalo Lake has a smaller or equal percentage of population for every category of working age residents, when compared to Renville County or the State. Buffalo Lake also has a significantly smaller combined percentage of young people, ages 5 to 14. However, the City does enjoy a healthy population of young children under the age of 5.

This data supports the idea that younger people often tend to leave their small hometown after they've graduated, to join the workforce and experience larger communities. However, there is also good potential for these individuals to eventually return if Buffalo Lake works to ensure that remains an attractive prospect by supporting the amenities residents need and/or desire.

This data also suggests that the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan must carefully address the needs of older adults as well as those who would like to visit them from time to time (e.g., grandchildren).

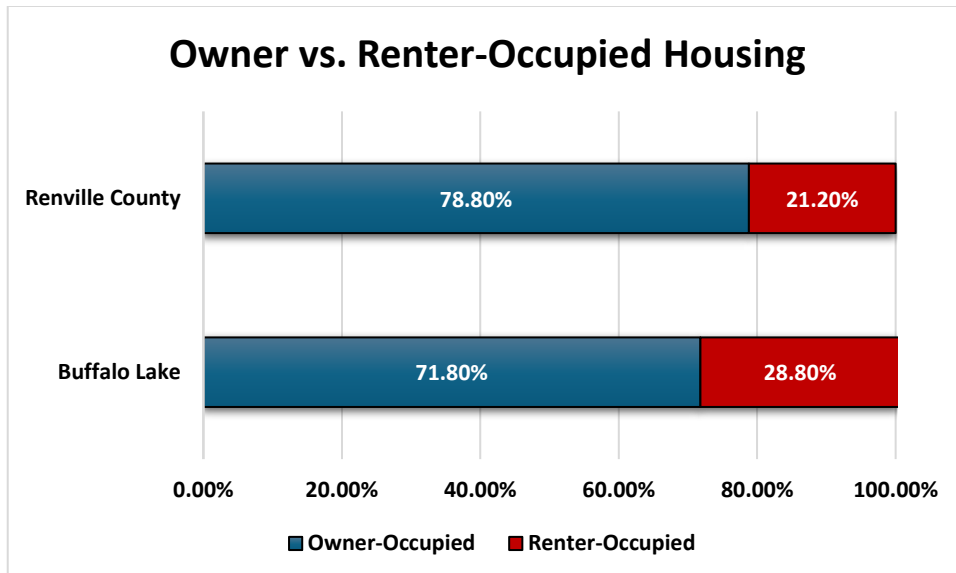
### Housing

By examining a community's housing details, a community can predict the stability of resident tenure. If a city has a higher than normal rate of renter-occupied units, it might indicate that residents of those units are less invested in the community and may be more inclined to stay on only a temporary basis.

However, in the case of Buffalo Lake, a number of rental units can be attributed to the presence of the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center. This facility caters to older renters who may be less likely to leave the community. As their care needs increase, they may receive assisted living services or transition to long-term care units.

Housing Data for Buffalo Lake and Renville County		
	Buffalo Lake	Renville County
<b>Housing Units</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>5,876</b>
<b>Owner occupied</b>	<b>71.80%</b>	<b>78.80%</b>
<b>Renter occupied</b>	<b>28.80%</b>	<b>21.20%</b>
<b>Family Size</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>3.05</b>

### Owner vs. Renter-Occupied Housing



According to the data from the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) the City of Buffalo Lake is home to 125 families with an average of 3.11 people per family. For the purposes of this observation, the definition of family is "A group of members who maintain kinship with each other while living in the same dwelling or different dwellings." Of Buffalo Lake's 125 families there 46 were home to children under the age of 18.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1101?g=160XX00US2708488>

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### Employment and Income Characteristics

Having some general knowledge of the income levels of a community's residents is helpful when planning for active living, as this information can help determine if limited finances might pose significant barriers to those who would like to take part in healthy activities.

<b>Income, Employment, and Poverty for Buffalo Lake and Renville County<sup>4</sup></b>		
	<b>Buffalo Lake</b>	<b>Renville County</b>
<b>Median Income</b>	<b>\$51,597</b>	<b>\$66,313</b>
<b>Employment over age 16</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>Below poverty level</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>37.0%</b>

The table to the left indicates that the median income for Buffalo Lake residents is significantly lower than the median for Renville County. This is likely attributed to the fact Buffalo Lake is home to a number of nonworking seniors, including residence of the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center. This may also help to explain why Buffalo Lake has a slightly higher percentage of residents living at or below the poverty line.

As of February 2024, the unemployment rate in Renville County stands at 5.4% compared to 3.9% nationally.<sup>5</sup> While slightly higher, a 5.4% unemployment rate is considered, by most economists, to be relatively healthy. It is possible that the elevated rate is, at least in part, due to a higher percentage of workers employed on a seasonal basis. One might expect that this rate, outside of winter months, would be lower. It is important to remember that employment statistics will vary over the course of time due to external factors ranging from weather events, political decisions, the overall business climate, and a number of other factors. However, by creating an attractive, welcoming atmosphere with the amenities current and prospective residents enjoy, including pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, Buffalo Lake has an opportunity to attract business development, which could bring more jobs to town.

It is also helpful to have some understanding of how residents get to and from their work and play destinations. Barring poor weather, residents who work in the same small town in which they reside, in this case Buffalo Lake, should be encouraged to walk, roll, or bike to work to the extent practical. However, those who work beyond the City's borders will also benefit from quality active living infrastructure. This amenity will be available to them when they run local errands or when they just require a bit of fresh air and exercise.

<b>Commuting Data for Buffalo Lake and Renville County<sup>6</sup></b>		
	<b>Buffalo Lake</b>	<b>Renville County</b>
<b>Commute to work alone</b>	<b>76.40%</b>	<b>80.25</b>
<b>Commute to work carpool</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>5.70%</b>
<b>Public transportation</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0.60%</b>
<b>Walk</b>	<b>5.10%</b>	<b>3.10%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.80%</b>
<b>Work from home</b>	<b>17.40%</b>	<b>8.60%</b>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.census.gov/table?t=Income%20and%20Poverty&g=160XX00US2708488>

<sup>5</sup> <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MNRENV9URN>

<sup>6</sup> <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0801?g=160XX00US2708488>

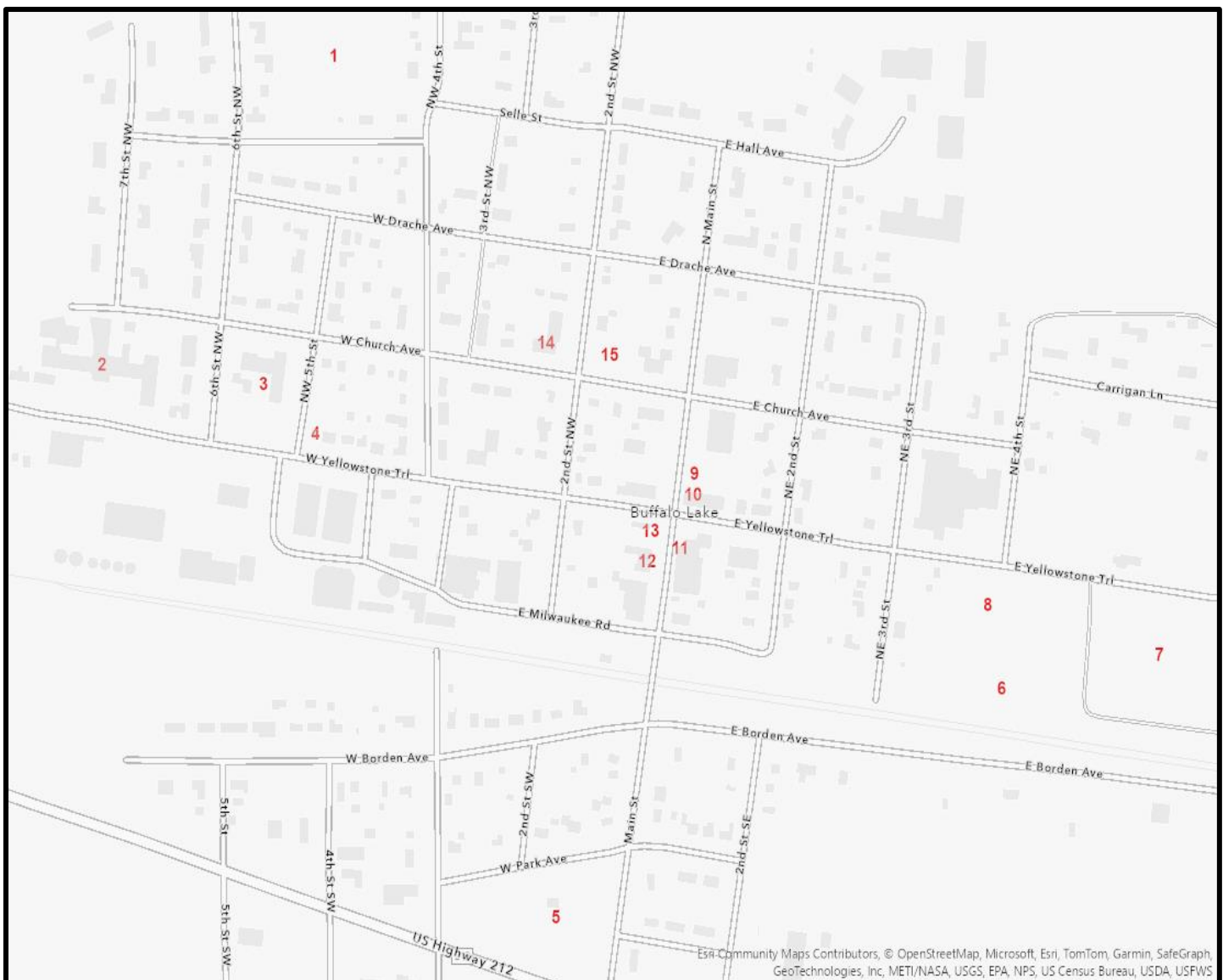
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### Key Destinations

Determining key local destinations is an important step within the Active Living planning process. Many residents will choose to walk or bike to these areas provided there are suitable pedestrian routes in place to accommodate safe and easy walking, rolling, and bicycling. While Buffalo Lake may be a small community it is not without destinations of interest. Some of these key destinations that have observable barriers to those that wish to walk, bike, or roll include:

1. Krumrey Park
2. Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center
3. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
4. Buffalo Lake community garden
5. Gaines Park
6. Buffalo Lake Baseball Field
7. Buffalo Lake cemetery
8. Buffalo Lake City Park
9. Little Stangs Learning Center
10. Buffalo Lake community center/city hall
11. Lakers Fitness
12. The Buffalo Range
13. Post Office
14. Zion Methodist Church
15. Tornado Park

Additionally, just north of Buffalo Lake lies Lake Allie County Park and the Oakdale Golf Club.





Many of Buffalo Lake's city streets are in relatively good condition. However, sidewalks are few and, in many cases, are in ill repair. An exception is along much of the City's Main Street corridor (above). These sidewalks were recently updated as part of a larger road construction project and are now fully-compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. However, as pedestrians depart this thoroughfare, sidewalks become scarce. Many that do exist are narrow, require maintenance, and are out of compliance with the ADA.



The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) provides an overview of ADA standards at the following link: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/ada/pdf/mndot-ada-standards.pdf>.

The **Buffalo Lake Baseball Field** and **Buffalo Lake City Park** are in good condition and are frequently used by residents. The park boasts newer playground equipment and three sand volleyball courts with some bleacher-style seating for spectators. It is important for communities like Buffalo Lake to regularly invest in these spaces. These locations are often the spaces where young people learn to enjoy being active and outdoors and this has potential to impact health outcomes for the duration of their lives.

While Buffalo Lake should be commended for investing in their park area, it is notable that the facility's entire driveway and parking area is gravel. This can create a mobility barrier for those who use wheelchairs, walkers, or mobility scooters.





The **Buffalo Lake Cemetery** is located adjacent to the City's ballpark and has similar gravel pathways running through it. As with the City's park/ballpark, this creates a barrier to those with mobility issues.

Serving as an additional shared greenspace, **Krumrey Park** (pictured here) is an attractive, tree-shaded area in the center of a large residential block in the northwest quadrant of the community. This location has no playground or exercise equipment and park entrances are not well marked or paved.



On Buffalo Lake's south side, at the corner of Main Street and U.S. Highway 212, **Gaines Park** has a mix of older and newer playground equipment as well as a large, covered picnic shelter and a disused tennis court. However, due to its Main Street location, the sidewalk running from the center of town to the northeast corner of the park is newer and fully ADA compliant. However, while there is an ADA compliant curb cut at this park corner, the sidewalk does not continue.

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Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center sits on the western edge of the Buffalo Lake community. While this 67 unit facility (49 skilled nursing, 18 assisted living) is highly-rated and known to be a quality employer, it lacks sidewalk or trail connectivity to other parts of town. The lack of sidewalk connectivity along this roadway creates a pedestrian barrier, both for residents of the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center and for other community members who may wish to work or visit the facility.

This is aggravated by the fact that, across the street from the south side of the facility, where its main entrance is located, is a large grain elevator. This means that the roadway is frequented by large trucks, often driven by local farmers. While many of these drivers may be excellent and safety conscious, most will not have gone through a driver's training and commercial licensing process, as farm vehicles and drivers are exempt from federal regulations regarding Commercial Driver's License standards, requirements, and penalties.<sup>7</sup> Some, particularly during harvest season, may be exhausted from working long hours, increasing the chance of a collision.

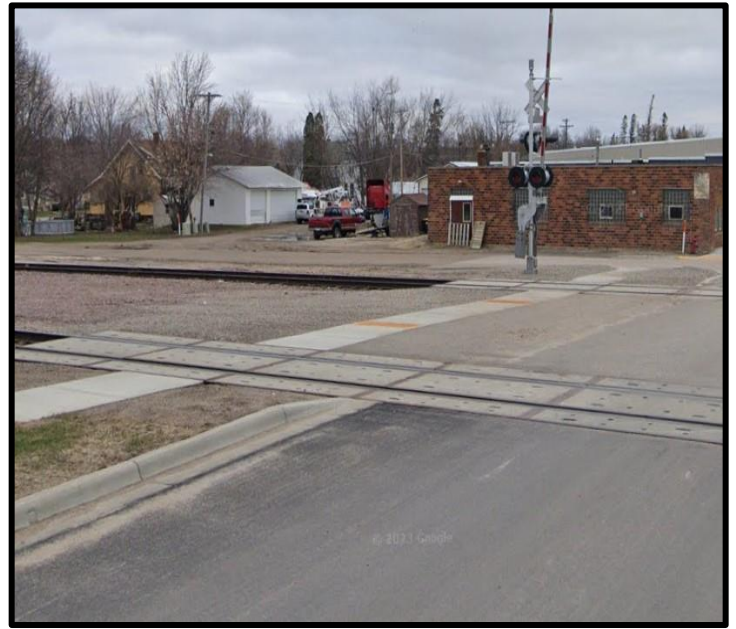
Just to the east of the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center sits a small **community garden**. This location gives residents a place to grow both flowers and produce, which can be sold or shared via the small produce stand also located on the grounds. While this location provides an excellent venue for City residents to enjoy the outdoors, it also lacks sidewalk and/or trail connectivity. This, combined with the previously mentioned grain elevator traffic, could make the community garden an unsafe or otherwise less enticing destination for



<sup>7</sup> <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/msp/commercial-vehicles/Documents/MAP21%20Self%20Certification%20-%20small%20-%20revised.pdf>

## Chapter Two: City of Buffalo Lake Profile

While much of the City's Main Street corridor and business district is complemented with a newer, ADA-compliant sidewalk, travel along this street does come with an additional pedestrian concern. Most city residents traveling along this sidewalk, by foot, bike, or other means, must cross the railroad tracks. While this crossing does have proper crossing arms, railroads always provide justification for some level of concern. There is always a small possibility a person navigating by wheelchair or mobility scooter could inadvertently find themselves stuck on the tracks. Railroads can also be a lure to curious and/or less attuned youngsters and this may cause parents to deny permission for trips to places like Gaines Park without direct adult supervision.



The downtown business corridor is home to a number of other key destinations within Buffalo Lake. The Little Stangs Learning Center offers daycare and pre-school services and offering a playground, a creative curriculum, and a locked facility for the safety of the children. The post office is also located downtown and provides residents with all of their postal and shipping needs.

### SWOT Analysis

SWOT stands for **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats. It is an analytical process often used to help a community, organization, or business identify both internal and external influences. When these potentially impacting factors are identified, this information can be applied to aid planning and decision making.

For the development of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan, the Buffalo Lake Active Living Team conducted a SWOT analysis. Discussions, surrounding community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were informed by a community-wide survey. The process involved consideration of a variety of bicycle, pedestrian, and other related topics. The results of this analysis, listed in this chapter in no particular order, should be used to help guide active living-related decision making for the foreseeable future.

#### The Buffalo Lake Community's Strengths

- A robust park system;
- Relatively calm traffic levels throughout most of the community (exception is U.S. Highway 212);
- Support for Active Living planning and progress among City leaders;
- Support for Active Living planning and progress among Buffalo Lake residents;
- Presence of a local fitness center (Lakers Fitness), which is available to members on a 24/7 basis;
- A new, high-quality, ADA compliant sidewalk system, throughout Buffalo Lake's central/downtown business district;
- A community garden, which provides another venue for activity that supports physical and mental health;
- Annual town festival (Buffalo Lake Days), which provides additional motivation for residents to get out and about on foot and encourages community interaction;
- Centrally-located childcare center (Little Stangs), which can easily be reached on foot by most residents, at least on fair-weather days;
- Buffalo Lake's local fire department enhances the community's ability to react to emergencies and provides a source of community pride.



#### The Buffalo Lake Community's Weaknesses

- An incomplete and, in some locations, neglected network of sidewalks beyond Buffalo Lake's central/downtown business district;
- Poor street lighting in many locations throughout the community, which reduces pedestrian safety when interacting with motor vehicles and could put walkers and bikers generally ill at ease;
- Little to no ADA compliance (i.e., accessibility for those with physical limitations) on existing sidewalk system, aside from the newer sidewalks found in Buffalo Lake's central/downtown business district;

- The tennis court located in Gaines Park is largely unused;
- The playground equipment in Gaines Park is showing its age and would benefit from upgrades;
- Some public areas, specifically the Buffalo Lake Cemetery and ballpark, have gravel driveway and paths, which can cause difficulty for those with mobility issues and can become less appealing in springtime or during other wet periods;
- Buffalo Lake residents currently have a vehicle-focused mindset (this is common in many Greater Minnesota communities);
- Some residents must cross the Twin City and Western Railroad to access most community businesses and other amenities.

### **Opportunities for the Buffalo Lake Community**

- Buffalo Lake could convert the existing and little-used tennis court into a pickle ball court to encourage enjoyable physical activity;
- The City could work, over time, to improve sidewalk and trail connectivity to key destinations beyond Buffalo Lake's central/downtown business district;
- The City could strategically add public restrooms (permanent or portable) in locations with higher foot/bike traffic;
- Buffalo Lake could do more to encourage active living via promotion and education activities (e.g., group walks/rides, active living-focused contests);
- Multi-use trails could be added to improve connectivity to the Hector community, Lake Allie County Park, and Oakdale Golf Club;
- The existing school building could be converted into housing and/or other shared community space that accommodates year-round physical activity.

### **Threats to the Buffalo Lake Community**

- Higher speed traffic and high traffic volume along U.S. Highway 212. This includes significant heavy truck traffic and may also include vehicles operated by those who are inattentive, impaired, or otherwise unsafe;
- Twin City and Western Railroad and crossing infrastructure, while in apparent good condition, comes with inherent safety hazards;
- Limited housing options for new residents, including limited "walkable" housing.
- More numerous opportunities for active living in neighboring communities may be more attractive to would-be Buffalo Lake residents.

### **Local Policies and Practices**

A purposeful inventory of local policies and practices will help to ensure ongoing community support for and the prioritization of active living. Through the incorporation of thoughtful land use policies, housing and subdivision ordinances, and zoning the City may positively impact residents' ability to broadly incorporate active living into their daily lives. At minimum, City leadership should work to ensure no policies or practices work counter to active living. An example of a policy that may run counter to the support for active living could be the prohibition of roller or in-line skating within Buffalo Lake's central/downtown business district, though doing so in a careless, reckless, or negligent fashion could still be prohibited.

### Characteristics of a Walkable and Bikeable Community

To create and maintain a strong active living culture, key characteristics should be addressed. Following is a list of items that should be considered when any City weighs plans or ordinance changes:

- **Coherence** (i.e., Logic): There should be an organized, clear, and understandable sidewalk, trail, street, and land-use system, consistent with the scale and function of the surrounding environment. Sidewalks and trails should link the community's key destinations.
- **Safety:** Pedestrian and bicyclist safety must always be considered when designing new or updating existing roadways and when planning for major residential, commercial, industrial, or other construction projects.
- **Continuity:** A pattern of design and usage that unifies the pedestrian system should be incorporated in City planning.
- **Equilibrium:** A balance among transportation modes should be ensured to accommodate and encourage bicycle and pedestrian usage (including pedestrians traveling via wheelchair or mobility scooter/device).
- **Comfort:** Well-maintained surfaces, negotiable crosswalks, unobstructed passage at corners, and well-timed crossing signals, where demanded by traffic volume, are needed to ensure pedestrian safety and comfort.
- **Accessibility:** ADA compliance is necessary to ensure ample opportunity for all to benefit from the walking, rolling, and bicycling environment to the fullest possible extent.
- **Sociability:** A tone of hospitality and friendliness should be encouraged to promote neighborly interaction. A variety of amenities and activities (e.g., benches, outdoor exercise equipment) should be considered along sidewalks and trails.
- **Efficiency:** Simplicity in design and function will support cost-effectiveness and minimize route improvement delays, as will timing active living infrastructure improvements so they can occur in conjunction with other construction projects.
- **Attractiveness:** The environment for walkers, rollers, and bicyclists should be clean, comfortable, and efficient. Surroundings should be well-maintained. To the extent possible, shade trees should be placed along sidewalks, trails, and other locations of interest. Amenities, such as benches and bicycle racks, and trash receptacles should be strategically placed throughout the community, along pedestrian routes.

### Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

A complete active living plan should include policy recommendations that do, in fact, support the incorporation of daily physical activity. The following recommendations support improved walker, roller, and biker access and safety as well as the thoughtful growth and improvement of Buffalo Lake's pedestrian network:

- Upon completion, the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan should be adopted by the Buffalo Lake City Council to ensure continued guidance to current and future leaders.
- Active transportation design features should be considered and, as appropriate, incorporated into any new housing or other neighborhood developments.
- To ensure good street connectivity, a preference for a grid-like pattern of development with smaller block sizes should be maintained.
- Connections throughout and between neighborhoods should be scaled to accommodate walkers, rollers, and bicyclists.
- Planning should be balanced and include consideration for each of the Six E's: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, Evaluation, and Equity.

- Roadway changes and improvements should be rooted in the concept of creating “complete streets”, which support all modes of transportation including walking, biking, and public transit, as well as other motor vehicles.
- Activities that promote walking, rolling, and biking should be used to help the Buffalo Lake Community achieve a greater balance between motor vehicles and walkers, rollers, and bicyclists.
- Pedestrian infrastructure will be prioritized and given the same level of consideration as motor vehicles.
- The safety of pedestrians will be prioritized with specific actions taken and improvements made (e.g., lighting, highly-visible crosswalks) to reduce the likelihood of collisions, injuries, and fatalities.

### **Ordinance Recommendations**

Ensuring that zoning, subdivision, and general ordinances are written with an emphasis on pedestrian access and safety will have a positive impact on Buffalo Lake residents' ability to participate in active living. Following are ordinance recommendations that will support the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan and the more general incorporation of physical activity into daily living.

#### **Zoning Ordinances:**

- Buffalo Lake's zoning should include a section on the design standards for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Buffalo Lake's ordinance should provide a reference to this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan.
- An explanation of how the Buffalo Lake community's staff and leadership (e.g., zoning official) will decide if bicycle and pedestrian access requirements have been met should be included within the City's code of ordinance.
- A description of the conditions under which the City may waive requirements for bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be incorporated into City ordinances. For instance, indicating that requirements may be waived if a new development occurs along existing infrastructure which will remain unaltered.
- An explanation of the process by which land or facilities may become City-owned public right-of-way should also be incorporated into City ordinances.
- The City of Buffalo Lake should consider adding language directing City officials on how to address and support bicycle and pedestrian-related topics and initiatives. This can include provisions related to pedestrian access, safety, amenities, easements, right-of-way, enforcement, and ADA compliance.

#### **Subdivision Ordinances:**

- The City of Buffalo Lake should ensure that there is subdivision ordinance language that centers specifically on bicycle and pedestrian access and activities. Developers of any new subdivisions should be required to ensure bicycle and pedestrian connectivity through the inclusion of pedestrian facilities (sidewalks or trails) that are integrated into roadway design or provided as standalone amenities.
- Developers of new Buffalo Lake subdivisions should, as part of any traffic impact analysis, analyze any existing or potential bicycle and pedestrian activity and facilities.
- To reduce the number of short-distance motor vehicle trips, new subdivision plans should be required to demonstrate connectivity to key Buffalo Lake destinations (e.g., the downtown/central business district) for bicycles and pedestrians.
- The City of Buffalo Lake should allow and encourage the use of conservation or cluster development for new subdivisions, as this will encourage access and open space while incorporating compact land use patterns that support active living.

- The City of Buffalo Lake should consider a dedication requirement policy that reserves a significant percentage of the City's land for parks and recreation use. This policy should also include specific verbiage that allows trails as an allowable use.

### General Ordinances:

- Buffalo Lake's elected officials should, at least annually, consider the assessment of property taxes to ensure sustainable development, maintenance, and ADA compliance of the community's pedestrian infrastructure. This assessment, or lack thereof, should be considered at least annually, to ensure Buffalo Lake Active Living plan recommendations are adequately supported without putting an undue burden on property owners.
- The City of Buffalo Lake's ordinances should include clear language pertaining to trees/tree maintenance. This language should include direction to place and maintain trees in such a way that they do not damage curbs and sidewalks away or interfere with street lighting.
- All modes of pedestrian transportation including bicycles, skateboards, roller/inline skates, and mobility scooters should be allowed on all streets and sidewalks, provided they are used in a safe and responsible manner. Doing so encourages the use of these modes of transportation throughout the Buffalo Lake community.
- Buffalo Lake should enforce ordinances surrounding the timely removal of snow and ice from all sidewalks to support year-round active living.
- Lighting on City streets should be reviewed annually to ensure that all Buffalo Lake streets are properly lit to support safety and accessibility.
- Language addressing trail maintenance should be added to Buffalo Lake's code of ordinance before any new trail segments are constructed.
- The City of Buffalo Lake should consider adopting a "complete streets" policy. Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to facilitate safe use and support mobility for all users, including drivers, walkers, or bicyclists of all ages and abilities. The Complete Streets concept incorporates multiple approaches to planning, design, and operation, both on roadways and within the right-of-way, with a focus on safety and efficiency.



### Existing Conditions

The sidewalk infrastructure found in Buffalo Lake's central business district/downtown area is well developed and connected. However, in other Buffalo Lake neighborhoods beyond the downtown area, the sidewalks are scarce or in ill repair. This forces walkers and bicyclists to compete with motorists for roadway space.

Although sidewalks are likely not practical along every Buffalo Lake roadway street, the strategic addition of north-south and east-west sidewalks would provide safe and comfortable pedestrian connections to the City's existing central sidewalk network.

The map found on the following page provides an illustration of Buffalo Lake's existing sidewalk network. Highlighted in blue are the City's relatively new sidewalks. These are currently in good condition and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Highlighted in red are sidewalks that are either in disrepair, fail to comply with ADA requirements, or both.

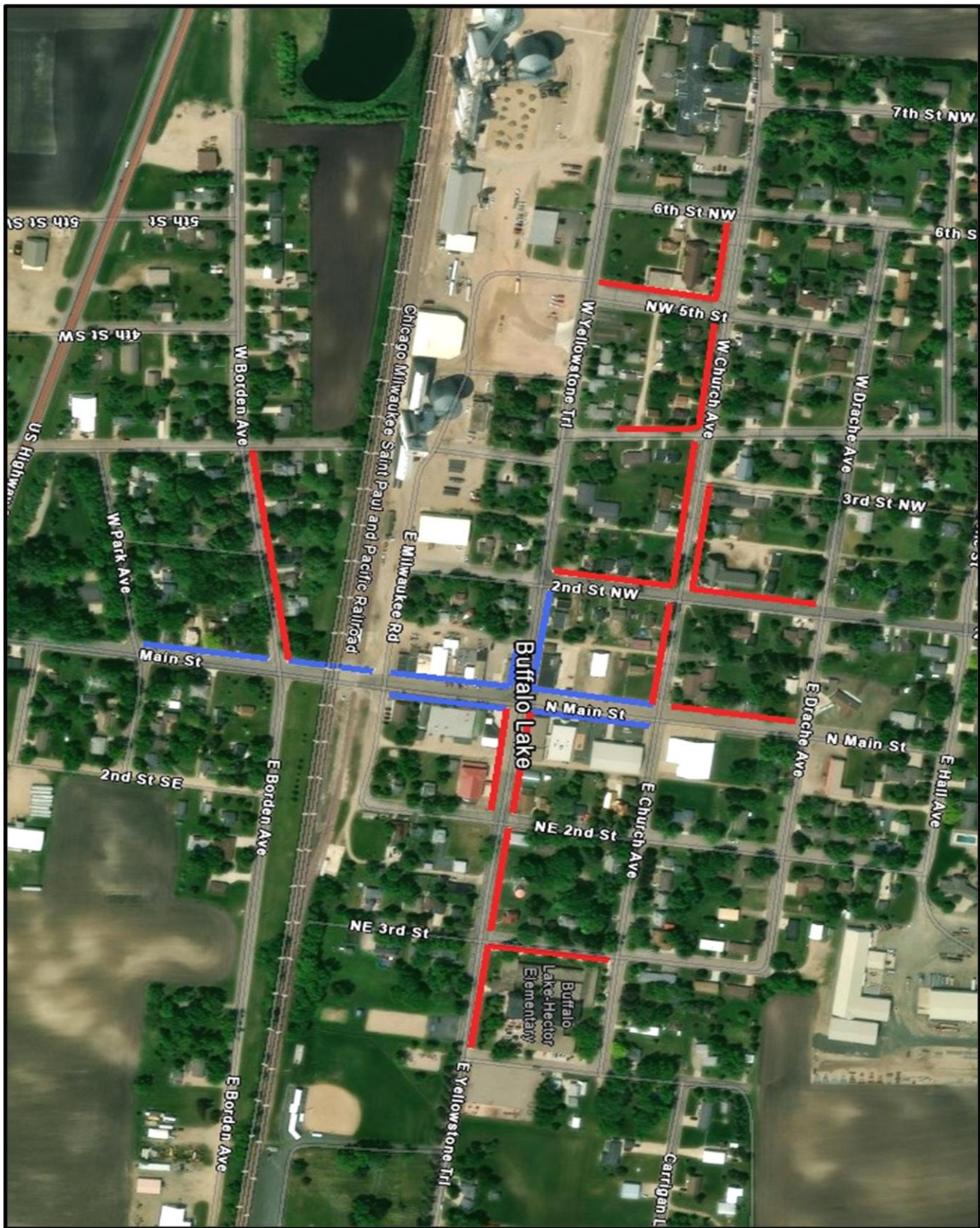
It is recommended that the City of Buffalo Lake regularly review the current condition of all community sidewalks to identify where repairs may be needed. This review should include the identification of any large cracks, lips, buckles or other unevenness that could cause trips or falls that may result in injury. Additionally, these sidewalk assessments should identify any overhanging tree limbs and/or shrubbery that has potential to interfere with pedestrian traffic or fall upon passersby. Finally, sidewalk review should include an assessment of ADA compliance, and the measures needed to attain it. The ADA requires that Buffalo Lake "give priority to walkways serving state and local government offices and facilities, bus stops and transportation services, private businesses offering goods and services to the public, and employees, followed by walkways serving residential areas."



Once existing issues are identified, sidewalk repairs and tree/shrub trimming should be scheduled. Action steps and a timeline for ADA compliance measures should

also be developed. Sidewalk investments should be included in the City's annual budget until all sidewalk issues are resolved. The City should also establish a means by which community members can easily request an assessment of ADA compliance as well as the implementation of appropriate remedies at specific intersections or on specific walkways frequented by people with disabilities.



# Chapter Four: Existing Conditions, Recommendations



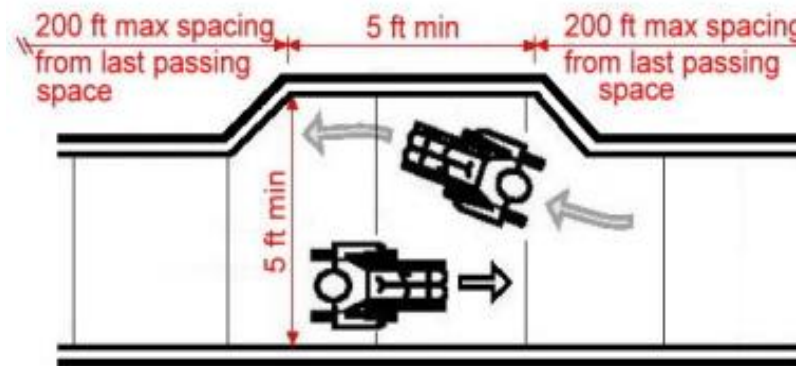
-  Sidewalk in Good Condition and ADA Compliant
-  Sidewalk in Disrepair and/or Not ADA Compliant



### Sidewalk Standards

As sidewalks are constructed and/or reconstructed within the community, efforts should be made to bring them to current width standards. Within residential areas, sidewalks should be at least five feet (60 inches) wide and include buffer zones between the sidewalk and the roadway. In areas where sidewalks fail to meet standards, the ADA requires a minimum of four feet (48 inches) in width. To address ADA requirements in areas where a significant length of sidewalk is less than five feet wide, passing spaces, intended for people using wheelchairs or other mobility

1 devices, should be incorporated, with spacing no greater than 200 feet apart. These passing spaces should be at least five feet by five feet (60 inches X 60 inches). While not the focus of this plan there are other sidewalk design considerations, such as grades and cross-slopes that must be considered and followed.



Additionally, ADA requirements include requirements for curb cuts and detectable warning truncated domes, similar to the ones pictured (at left).

Within business districts the sidewalks should be considerably wider than in residential areas. The sidewalks in the Buffalo Lake downtown business area are currently of sufficient width. Care should be taken, when installing sidewalk furniture or other obstructions, to ensure that there is no less than four feet (48 inches) of continuous width at all times throughout all sidewalk locations.

### Trail Development

Trail development and use has become increasingly popular as communities embrace the multiple benefits that come with quality trail networks. Ideally, trail segments should be 10 feet (120 inches) wide, paved, and prohibited to motor vehicles, beyond motorized wheelchairs, mobility scooters, e-bikes/scooters, and those vehicles used to maintain the trail during snow removal activities, etc.. This plan section highlights some of the benefits of incorporating trails into community development and active living plans.

- **Recreational Opportunities and Healthy Lifestyles:** Trails provide excellent opportunities for recreation and promote healthy living. Increased physical activity has long been associated with numerous health benefits, including the prevention of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and depression. Furthermore, trails provide a means for exercise, and reduce the instance of obesity and its negative health impacts.
- **Transportation Options:** In many communities, trails are used by residents as a means of transportation. Although walking and biking to or from work or school are not viable options for everyone, providing access to trails is a simple way to support walking and biking to daily destinations. The existence of a 'safe network of trails' can be a key factor for commuters considering whether to walk or bike, rather than drive.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Publications/Manuals/fulltext/m0000/ADA\\_Field\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Publications/Manuals/fulltext/m0000/ADA_Field_Guide.pdf)

## Chapter Four: Existing Conditions, Recommendations

- **Tourism and Economic Benefits:** A well-established trail network increases opportunities for residents and visitors to spend locally. During Minnesota's warm weather months, nearly 1.6 million cyclists, inline skaters, and walkers use the state's nationally-recognized city, county, and regional trails<sup>2</sup>. In some cases, trails can also be used to attract a variety of tourists, including bird watchers, amateur botanists, photographers, or other visitors.

A well-designed Buffalo Lake sidewalk and trail system would encourage residents to walk, roll, and bike for commuting, exercise, and leisure. The following map illustrates recommended trails locations/routes.



This recommended sidewalk/trail system, which could be developed over time capitalizes on existing sidewalk infrastructure and connects key locations in each Buffalo Lake neighborhood. It also incorporates trails that completely encircle the Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center, Buffalo Lake Baseball Field, and Gaines Park. This sidewalk/trails system would give all pedestrians improved connectivity and access to many of the community's most popular destinations. Ideally, longer-term plans would include the incorporation of longer trails, connecting Buffalo Lake to destinations like the neighboring Hector Community, Oakdale Golf Club, and Lake Allie County Park.

<sup>2</sup> [https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/recreation/dnr\\_state\\_trail\\_visitor\\_study\\_2019\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/recreation/dnr_state_trail_visitor_study_2019_final_report.pdf)

### U.S. Highway 212

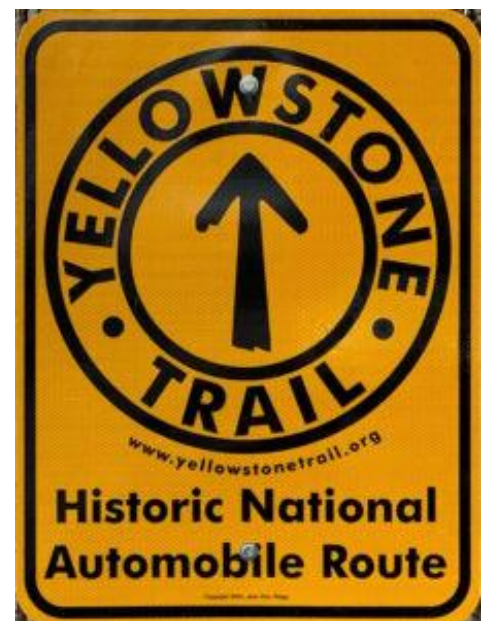
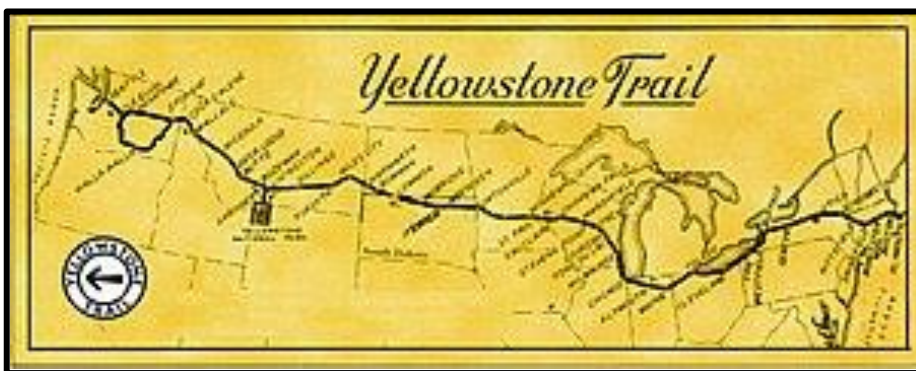
There are many logistic advantages that come with Buffalo Lake's location along U.S. Highway 212. This rural highway provides easy access to the community for commercial, agricultural, and residential interests. It is the primary route of travel between Buffalo Lake and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.



2021 traffic counts, which occurred during the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, indicated that almost 5,000 vehicles per day traveled along U.S. Highway 212 through Buffalo Lake.<sup>4</sup> The route is designated both as a “principal artery” and as an “interregional corridor”. These designations signal that the State of Minnesota will support maintained traffic flow along the corridor, with limited stops and slowdowns.

All indications are that traffic, generated both by general motorists and by commercial vehicles, will gradually increase in the coming years. Some of this increase may be attributed to the fact that stretches of U.S. Highway 212 have been improved in areas east of Buffalo Lake, toward the Twin Cities. By the conclusion of 2024 construction season, the highway will be continuously divided and support four lanes of traffic between an area west of Glencoe, MN and the metropolitan area. With this improvement, travel and commute times to and from the Twin Cities will be diminished while motorist safety improves. This may encourage growth among the communities located in close proximity to the highway.

It is also notable that U.S. Highway 212 has historical significance, as it runs along what is known as the Yellowstone Trail. Stretching from Washington State in the west to Massachusetts in the east, the Yellowstone trail was the first transcontinental automobile highway through the upper tier of the United States. Several organizations are now using the highway's historical significance to lure visitors to this area of the state.



<sup>3</sup> [https://www.google.com/maps/@44.7343167,-94.6235689,3a,75y,75.02h,117.4t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1slqV3l79VXfqBm\\_R9QQteXQ!2e0!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu](https://www.google.com/maps/@44.7343167,-94.6235689,3a,75y,75.02h,117.4t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1slqV3l79VXfqBm_R9QQteXQ!2e0!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu)

<sup>4</sup> <https://mndot.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7b3be07daed84e7fa170a91059ce63bb>

While Highway 212 does offer significant benefit to the Buffalo Lake community, it comes with its own associated challenges. While only a small portion of the community lies south of the highway, the high volume of traffic moving at a high rate of speed does present safety challenges for anyone, motorist or pedestrian, who wishes to cross from north to south or vice versa. As community growth dictates and as the need for pedestrian crossings becomes more frequent, the Buffalo Lake community may need to consider the incorporation of a dedicated crosswalk with incorporated visibility enhancements (e.g., improved lighting, signage, pavement markings). Should Buffalo Lake experience more dramatic growth south of the highway, then it may be necessary to consider the incorporation of a grade-separated pedestrian crossing (i.e., pedestrian overpass or underpass). However, this magnitude of growth is not anticipated south of U.S. 212 in the foreseeable future.



### Railroad Pedestrian Improvements

The Twin Cities and Western Railroad passes through the City of Buffalo Lake, just north of Borden Avenue. As crossing railroad tracks poses some inherent risks, opportunities to improve pedestrian safety should be considered.

There are several ways pedestrian safety can be improved at railroad crossings through the selective use of passive and/or active devices. Passive devices include fencing, channelization, swing gates, pedestrian barriers, pavement markings and texturing, and making walkways level with the top of the rail at the crossing point. Active devices include flashers, audible warning devices, automated pedestrian gates, pedestrian signals, variable message signs, and blank-out signs. What's appropriate for one crossing may not be appropriate for another. Therefore, any crossings being considered for safety improvements should be reviewed by a diagnostic team. An engineering study should be conducted to select the most appropriate warning devices.



All pedestrian railroad crossings should be designed to minimize the time required for pedestrians to cross, with emphasis on avoiding entrapment of pedestrians on or between sets of tracks. In addition, rail safety laws that prohibit dangerous actions around rail crossings should be enforced. It will be important to work with the Twin Cities and Western Railroad's administration when considering any pedestrian improvements along the railway.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.faribaultcountyregister.com/news/local-news/2023/10/29/new-crossing-guards-installed-in-be/>

### Signage and Street Paint

Pedestrian signage is a key component to a well-organized, safe transportation network. Some of the Buffalo Lake Community's existing signage needs replacement due to rust and fading. New, highly-visible signage will be crucial, for both safety and wayfinding, along all proposed sidewalks and trails. Street paint and markings will also allow for better understanding and promote communication between motor vehicles and pedestrians. On city streets, drivers will be more aware of pedestrian crossings and infrastructure when proper street markings, painted crosswalks in particular, are present.

The City may also choose to incorporate bike sharrows and painted bike lanes will help drivers and bikers navigate without conflict. To ensure continued visibility, the City should budget for fresh street paint every two years.



**Bike sharrows, such as the one pictured at right, help to remind motorists of their need to share the road.**

### Street/Sidewalk Lighting

Well-lit areas, and especially intersections, enhance pedestrian safety at night by improving visibility and decreasing unintentional concealment. As with many rural communities, the City of Buffalo Lake is only minimally lit and would benefit from additional lighting infrastructure. The City should conduct an assessment and prioritize lighting improvements. Possible remedies could include the strategic addition of streetlamps, trimming of tree limbs that screen existing lights, encouraging residents to incorporate more and more efficient outdoor lighting into their landscapes, or other means.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Amenities

Buffalo Lake currently has minimal bicycle infrastructure. What does exist would benefit from an upgrade. Opportunities for improvement could include the addition of **bike racks**.<sup>6</sup> These would allow riders to secure their bikes while keeping the sidewalks and streets organized. Bike racks should be strategically placed in key destinations (e.g., United States Post Office, City Hall & Community Center) to encourage residents to bike for short, in-town errands and other trips



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.keystoneridgedesigns.com/products/ProductDetail.aspx?prodid=1135>



**Bike repair stations**<sup>7</sup> can prove to be another convenient and useful community amenity, for both local and visiting bicyclists (e.g., those who might choose to bike the Yellowstone Trail). Bike repair stations typically include a manual air tire pump, the basic hand tools needed to adjust brakes and derailleurs, and other simple maintenance items. Good locations for a Buffalo Lake bike repair station could include the community's parks, especially where they might intersect with a future bike trail.

In addition to providing a venue for walking, rolling, running, and biking, a quality pedestrian network can provide spaces for the incorporation of **outdoor fitness equipment**.<sup>8</sup> This equipment, such as can be found adjacent to the South Grove Senior Living facility, in Grove City, MN, can be used to help residents, especially but certainly not limited to older residents, maintain and increase muscle tone, range of motion, and balance. By focusing on wellbeing in these areas, residents will have the potential to maintain independence and remain in their own homes much longer than if they allow their bodies to atrophy. Placing these installations in public areas ensures that even those with limited financial means have some opportunity to participate in fitness-focused activities. This strategy also allows for the incorporation of fresh air and a more relaxed fitness environment, which can reduce anxiety and have an overall positive effect on one's mental health.



<sup>7</sup> [https://outdoorworkoutsupply.com/products/dero-fixit?variant=41165820231889&currency=USD&utm\\_medium=product\\_sync&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_content=sag\\_organic&utm\\_campaign=sag\\_organic&gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pdhl4WyxOTnfAlMDFH81LDIUeEYwpM9WUEojo6Egz72sKMimEaqdixoCIAkQAvD\\_BwE](https://outdoorworkoutsupply.com/products/dero-fixit?variant=41165820231889&currency=USD&utm_medium=product_sync&utm_source=google&utm_content=sag_organic&utm_campaign=sag_organic&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pdhl4WyxOTnfAlMDFH81LDIUeEYwpM9WUEojo6Egz72sKMimEaqdixoCIAkQAvD_BwE)

<sup>8</sup> <https://outdoorworkoutsupply.com/pages/what-are-the-benefits-of-outdoor-exercise-equipment-for-seniors>

## Chapter Four: Existing Conditions, Recommendations

There are a number of other, rather simple amenities that the Buffalo Lake community could incorporate to add benefit for all residents and visitors, regardless of whether they are intentionally engaged in physical activity. These may include things like **park benches**<sup>9</sup> that give people an opportunity to sit, rest, and converse with other members of their Buffalo Lake Community. The availability of **strategically-placed public restrooms**, either permanent or portable, can also make walking, rolling, and biking more appealing to residents, especially older residents or residents with young children. **Water stations**<sup>10</sup> also provide access to pedestrian hydration, which is especially important in warmer months. **Trash and recycling**



**receptacles** and simple **animal waste stations**<sup>11</sup> make it easier for trail users to keep the community's shared assets clean and user-friendly. **Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs)** are another important amenity being considered and incorporated with increased frequency in recent years. While these can be installed in indoor public settings, such as a community center or post office, outdoor installations are now also available, providing access 24 hours per day and seven days per week.



<sup>9</sup> <https://www.commercialsitefurnishings.com/product/oglethorpe-park-bench-5ft>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.globalindustrial.com/p/global-industrial-rotomold-outdoor-bottle-filler-w-bi-level-drinking-fountain-pet-station-stone->

[f?infoParam.campaignId=T9F&gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pdR4UUNCStjnczQj7xfjhAkVeQ4GqeLt1J-Evw1A96pNY3jdFYehoCPFcQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.globalindustrial.com/p/global-industrial-rotomold-outdoor-bottle-filler-w-bi-level-drinking-fountain-pet-station-stone-f?infoParam.campaignId=T9F&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pdR4UUNCStjnczQj7xfjhAkVeQ4GqeLt1J-Evw1A96pNY3jdFYehoCPFcQAvD_BwE)

<sup>11</sup>

[https://www.petwasteeliminator.com/e46.html?gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pS250JaMryOMAouami0m\\_Us1FXwkhZawOhc4csWECluNUwjyPWZBoCkdkQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.petwasteeliminator.com/e46.html?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw88yxBhBWEiwA7cm6pS250JaMryOMAouami0m_Us1FXwkhZawOhc4csWECluNUwjyPWZBoCkdkQAvD_BwE)



12



13

It is important to note that, while the construction and improvement of pedestrian infrastructure will likely be an expense shared by the Buffalo Lake community, with possible assistance from state or other grantors, these other pedestrian amenities can often be funded by private individuals, local community groups, and even businesses. Should the City of Buffalo Lake determine there is interest in accessing private donations to fund these amenities, a “wish list” of items should be developed. It may also be wise to determine specific amenities desired (e.g., specific type of bench), recognition measures (e.g., a standard style of placard to acknowledge any donation) and determine associated design standards (e.g., requiring placement of benches on concrete slabs or gravel pads to ensure ease of mowing maintenance). By thinking through these items ahead of time, the City will reduce future maintenance and other challenges).



<sup>12</sup> [https://www.picnictables.com/the-city-series-square-pedestal-ada-picnic-tables?sku=1CI2627-GN&st-t=ptgoogshop&gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwrcKxBhBMEiwAIVF8rE54NDBgHqzEr8I3UkS4WjEb62IPAMbcihix7y5rI4OVt8KbjWnlCRoC8LcQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.picnictables.com/the-city-series-square-pedestal-ada-picnic-tables?sku=1CI2627-GN&st-t=ptgoogshop&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwrcKxBhBMEiwAIVF8rE54NDBgHqzEr8I3UkS4WjEb62IPAMbcihix7y5rI4OVt8KbjWnlCRoC8LcQAvD_BwE)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nhpr.org/nh-news/2022-09-02/how-nh-towns-are-trying-to-make-life-saving-aeds-more-accessible-in-public-outdoor-spaces>

## Chapter Five: Strategies and Implementation

This Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan chapter presents suggested strategies for successful plan implementation. Recommendations have been developed after consideration of information gathered and discussed in previous chapters. Special attention has been given to the “Six Es of Transportation Planning” – Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, Evaluation, and Equity.

### Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan Goals

1. Provide essential infrastructure that encourages the integration of physical activity into daily living by making active transportation an easy, accessible, and enjoyable option.
2. Raise the Buffalo Lake community's awareness of the benefits associated with active living to encourage physical activity and improve the overall health and wellbeing of our residents.
3. Promote and implement policies and practices that support a more active Buffalo Lake community, both by increasing the practicality of nonmotorized transportation and by improving access to recreational facilities and activities.

### Objectives and Strategies

The objectives outlined below describe *what* could be done to support active living transportation within the Buffalo Lake community to attain the goals listed above. Associated strategies outline *how* each active living objective could best be accomplished.

#### Objective 1

Generate community-wide support for active living and collaborate with key partners to lead this effort throughout the community.

**Strategy 1.1** - An Active Living Committee takes the lead role in promoting and educating citizens about this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan, working to increase resident buy-in. The committee formed to steer the development of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan would be well-suited for the successful implementation of this strategy and it is possible that this roster could be used as a starting point, with other willing and interested community members added to the group, as appropriate.

**Description** – The Buffalo Lake Active Living Committee, with assistance from City staff, are in the best position to understand the benefits and proposed goals of this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan. They will reach out to the community's elected officials, businesses, organizations, and residents to garner support to move the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan forward. Promotional work/community education efforts will be key to increasing the number of walking, rolling, and bicycling community members. Helping these community members incorporate walking and bicycling into their daily routine, to support a healthy lifestyle, is essential.

Examples of possible tasks intended to help the Buffalo Lake Active Living Committee successfully execute their strategy are:

1. Providing the local newspaper with prepared articles on active living benefits or efforts;
2. Creating an Active Living page on the City's existing website;
3. Sharing and celebrating local active living infrastructure improvements;
4. Creating and distributing simple brochures that include maps depicting preferred routes for walking, rolling, and bicycling. These materials may also include safety tips as well as point-to-point mileage/distance information;

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5. Incorporating events, such as “Bike to Work Day” or community bike-rides should also be considered as an additional event to draw awareness and develop a sense of community around active living.
6. Workplace wellness programs can also be promoted by the Buffalo Lake Active Living Committee to encourage business participation. Even small businesses can implement workplace wellness programs with only minimal expense. Information on simple workplace wellness program ideas could be compiled and distributed to new and existing employers. The local Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), accessed via Renville County Public Health, may be able to assist with this activity.

**Strategy 1.2** – Collaborate with other interested partners and community organizations who can assist with Active Living Plan strategy implementation.

**Description** – There are some individuals and organizations who have already shown their support for active living and others who would likely join the effort after learning more. The Active Living Committee should continue to collaborate with local **SHIP** and **other public health-focused workers. Health networks** operating in close proximity to Buffalo Lake (e.g., CentraCare Health, Health Partners), **and their local foundations** could also be good promotors and even financial sponsors of activities that improve health, wellness, and safety.

The **Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)** and **Renville County’s Highway Department** have jurisdiction over several roads within the community. As such, any plans for adding or improving walking and bicycling infrastructure along these routes will require their collaboration. **Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC)** may also provide assistance, as they serve as a regional liaison to MnDOT under a longstanding service agreement. This gives MMDC the ability to provide technical assistance with trail-related grant applications, provide input into pedestrian-focused plans, assist with active living-related events, etc.

The **Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart Public School District** may also have interest in collaborating on active living efforts that enhance their students’ health and safety. Likewise, the **Little Stangs Learning Center** may have a similar interest in efforts that create a safer outdoor environment for children, as may other **home-based childcare providers**.

The **Buffalo Lake Police Department** and **Renville County Sheriff’s Office** should also be included with Active Living Transportation efforts. These entities may be able to provide enforcement assistance when and where needed (e.g., to address problem areas and/or to ensure additional safety during active living events). This sort of participation can also be used to develop and nurture positive relationships with community members, not just in times of emergency or stress but also during times of fun and leisure.

**Local media** should be involved with active living initiatives, as should any moderators of **local social media** pages (e.g., local Facebook groups). These entities have established platforms whereby active living-related information can be shared. Similarly, the **Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center** regularly distributes information to residents of their community. They should, therefore, be provided with and encouraged to share any active living information that may be relevant to their community members.

**Local service clubs and organizations**, both secular and nonsecular, can be recruited to help promote, manage, and enhance various events or activities that support healthy living. As new trails are constructed in the community, these same organizations may be willing to adopt trail sections to assist the City with routine maintenance or even donate dollars toward the purchase of desired trail amenities (e.g., benches, bike racks, and/or outdoor fitness equipment).

Where no organizations exist, the Active Living Committee can support the formation of new, ad-hoc groups to tackle various aspects of this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan. For example, **local bicycle**

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**enthusiasts** may be interested in organizing regular community rides. **Employers** could be encouraged to offer small incentives to workers or patrons who walk or bike to their establishment.

### Objective 2

Provide safety education to residents to help ensure that risks associated with walking and bicycling can be minimized.

**Strategy 2.1** – Increase residents’ pedestrian and bicycle skills and safety knowledge.

**Description** – Residents of all ages should be educated in safety to ensure they understand potential pedestrian hazards as well as the “rules of the road”. Relevant information (e.g., state and local laws related to walking, rolling, and biking) and other safety information should be made easily accessible on the City’s website, via a dedicated Active Living webpage. Safety and education-focused articles can also be written and shared with the local newspaper for publication.

The Active Living Committee could reach out to the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota, which works to train bicyclists of all ages on the topic of bicycle safety. Through the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota, there may be an opportunity to organize community education-style classes. The Active Living Committee could assist with logistics (e.g., meeting location), promotion, and class recruitment. More information on the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota can be found at: <https://www.bikemn.org/>.



“Bike rodeos” can also be held. These are meant to teach children and, by extension, their parents the basics of bike safety in a fun, non-threatening way. These events can also provide an opportunity to ensure young riders have properly-fitted helmets. A bike rodeo planning guide is available via the Minnesota Safety Council. This guide can be found at the following link: <https://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/bicycle/programs/rodeo/intro.cfm>. Civic organizations can be encouraged to provide helmets to youngsters in need or support in some other way. These groups should always be recognized and celebrated for their contributions.

As on-road routes and offroad trails are added to Buffalo Lake’s infrastructure, it will be important to inform residents of proper trail protocol. Bicyclists, runners, and other pedestrians should be reminded to wear highly-visible, reflective gear and clothing, especially at dusk and at night, and all bicyclists should be educated on the importance of properly-fitted helmets. Signage, reminding bicyclists and other trail users of proper trail etiquette, should be incorporated.

**Strategy 2.2** – Educate local motor vehicle users on laws and proper etiquette related to interactions with both pedestrians and bicyclists.

**Description** – Work with local law enforcement and the Renville County TZD (Toward Zero Deaths) Safe Roads Coalition to educate drivers on laws that pertain to pedestrian and bicycle interaction. This Information can be compiled and distributed to all local drivers.

Education on the hazards of distracted driving is also important, as distraction is a key factor in many accidents. Drivers should be reminded that bikes are allowed to use any community but also made aware of any preferred, “share the road” routes for bicyclists, where more frequent interactions may occur. In addition, local driver education courses will educate new drivers on the laws and best practices related to motor vehicle-pedestrian/bicycle interaction. More information on Minnesota’s Toward Zero Deaths work can be found at: <https://www.minnesotatzd.org/>.



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### Objective 3

Improve and enforce Buffalo Lake's city ordinances and use planning documents to support and guide the creation of a culture of active living throughout the community.

**Strategy 3.1** – Encourage and adopt suggested changes to various plans and city ordinances to improve the current and future pedestrian and bicycle environment.

**Description** – In Chapter 3, this Buffalo Lake Active Living plan includes suggested changes to City ordinances and planning documents. If implemented, these changes will improve the pedestrian and bicyclist environment throughout the community. The City should carefully consider these suggestions and provide the necessary document updates, when possible. In some cases, the City may wish to adjust suggested language prior to adoption. This is permitted and in fact encouraged, as it is important that any approved changes be tailored to the needs of the community in order to be effective over the long-term.

**Strategy 3.2** – Educate residents on key active living-related ordinances, especially those related to sidewalk accessibility, and enforce these ordinances.

**Description** – The City of Buffalo Lake has plans and ordinances in place that will be useful when implementing this Buffalo Lake Active Living Transportation Plan. However, these will only be helpful if they are used and enforced. The City should be diligent and consistently adhere to approved plans and policies to create and maintain a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment.

Existing and future sidewalks and trails should be well-maintained. Education and, to some degree, enforcement will be necessary to keep sidewalks and trails from being blocked by parked vehicles, debris, or other items. Low-hanging trees, bushes, and shrubbery must be trimmed, so as not to impede sidewalk use. Property owners should be reminded that some users may have poor eyesight and or mobility issues, and that items left in the sidewalk can pose safety hazards. In winter, City rules surrounding snow and ice removal should be enforced.

It is important to note that, often times, these issues can best be addressed via a friendly conversation, rather than a fine. These conversations may reveal underlying problems of or barriers for the resident. For instance, there may be cases when a resident is ill or injured, unable to shovel their sidewalk. In these situations, local volunteers may be called upon to provide the needed assistance.

To encourage resident support for sidewalk expansion, the City should revisit resident obligations for sidewalk repairs and maintenance within residential areas. The City should also work closely with any new developers to ensure new subdivisions address the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists. When major rehabilitation or reconstruction occurs, the City should ensure plans support active living transportation. Additionally, residents should be encouraged to report sidewalks that are unsafe or in need of repair so they can be restored.

### Objective 4

Make physical infrastructure improvements to address the needs identified in this Active Living Plan and improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, while also encouraging more physical activity.

**Strategy 4.1** – Provide infrastructure that supports improved pedestrian and bicycle access to identified key destinations (e.g., City offices, downtown businesses, parks).

**Description** – Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is typically added over the long-term. The construction of additional sidewalks, offroad trails, and other identified improvements (i.e., “big ticket items”) will likely need to be implemented in stages. More expensive infrastructure projects will need to be prioritized and included within any Buffalo Lake Capital Improvement Plan. Work should be coordinated with other construction projects (e.g., street improvements) whenever possible to

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maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness. When projects involve MnDOT, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and/or County rights-of-way, these units must also be consulted.

The City should include funds within the annual budget to ensure continued progress with active living-related projects. Competitive grant dollars, such as those provided by the MnDOT Transportation Alternatives Program, may be available to help supplement City funds and mitigate costs. However, in almost all cases, some local matching dollars will be required.

**Strategy 4.2** – Improve crosswalk infrastructure in several community locations.

**Description** – There are several locations where a need for crosswalk improvements can be identified. It is imperative that all crosswalk improvements include proper curb cuts and high-visibility paint. This will improve safety in areas where pedestrian-motor vehicle interaction is expected.

**Strategy 4.3** – Improve pedestrian safety for those crossing the Twin Cities and Western Railroad tracks.

**Description** – Efforts to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the railroad tracks should be considered a major infrastructure priority of this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan's. Improvements could include the incorporation of various safety devices to improve visibility and minimize pedestrian and bicyclist time within the tracks. Signage and community education, especially the education of young children, could offer additional solutions. All improvements should be made in cooperation with the Twin Cities and Western Railroad.

**Strategy 4.4** – Regularly inventory Buffalo Lake's existing sidewalks to determine present condition and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, and then develop a plan to address problem areas.

**Description** –Chapter 4 of this plan includes discussion of ADA requirements. Curb cuts at intersections and other sidewalk requirements are explained within the ADA. City staff should regularly evaluate the community's sidewalk network to determine any need for ADA-related modifications. Community volunteers should take part in this process, when practical. After this evaluation has taken place, an implementation plan should be developed. This plan should identify projects, show steps toward continuous improvement, and project full ADA compliance within a reasonable timeframe. An Inclusive Walk Audit Facilitator's Guide can be found at: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/physicalactivity/docs/walkaudit.pdf>. AARP has also developed a Walk Audit Tool Kit that can be accessed at: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/aarp-walk-audit-tool-kit.html>. Additionally, the organization has developed an AARP Bike Audit Tool Kit, available at: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/aarp-bike-audit-tool-kit.html>. These resources can be referred to, as needed, whenever the Buffalo Lake Community evaluates its pedestrian infrastructure. It is recommended that full evaluations occur at least every three years with City staff evaluating on a more frequent, ongoing basis.

**Strategy 4.5** – Determine locations where bicycle racks, benches, and other bicycle/pedestrian amenities would be most beneficial and practical, and then work toward completing these installations.

**Description** – Bicycle racks are an important feature to consider and include when working to encourage active living and bicycle use. In addition to allowing bicyclist to secure their bikes, they also serve to keep bicycles from cluttering sidewalks and other areas.

Benches, placed in key locations, will aid those who require a place to rest when walking to and from community destinations. This may be a particularly important feature to consider for Buffalo Lake's older community members. Furthermore, benches will provide a space for conversation, giving residents a chance to develop and nurture relationships with their neighbors. Local individuals, organizations and businesses should be encouraged to sponsor the purchase and/or fabrication and

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donation of these amenities. Other organizations, such as SHIP may also have the ability to provide financial assistance.

**Strategy 4.6** – To provide a safe network for community-wide bicycle travel, key bicycle routes should be identified and signage and paint (e.g., sharrows) should be incorporated to encourage their use.

**Description** – City streets will continue to be the primary means of bicycle transportation for the foreseeable future. Chapter 4 highlights the need to designate a network of streets that bicyclists can use as primary routes of travel. These routes will require proper signage to guide bicyclists and caution motorists of the additional bicycle traffic.

The City may decide to go a level beyond simple bike route designation by designating some streets as “sharrow” routes. These routes would have stenciled sharrow markings directly on the roads to make motorists more aware of the fact they must share the road with bicyclists. Bike route signs and paint are relatively affordable improvements that can be made in the near term to provide an immediate, positive impact on bicycle safety in a relatively-easy way. This would be an excellent opportunity to generate additional Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan interest and establish momentum.

**Strategy 4.7** – Establish a plan to evaluate and address street lighting.

**Description** – The City of Buffalo Lake should conduct a study to determine sites for new or improved lighting infrastructure, as well as related tree maintenance. This study may be done in conjunction with the previously mentioned sidewalk evaluation/walk audits. The City’s power provider may prove to be a valuable partner when determining where new streetlights should be installed to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. Trees should be adequately trimmed to ensure existing lighting isn’t impeded by foliage.

## Implementation

The purpose of this section is to discuss how the City of Buffalo Lake can best approach goal implementation, policy development, and strategies associated with this Buffalo Lake Active Living Transportation Plan. The City’s Active Living Committee should be called upon to champion the implementation of the Active Living Plan. In addition to the Active Living Committee, both City staff and the City Council will play a large role.

The Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan also includes a variety of other partners (current and potential) who should be engaged to ensure plan success. In particular, it will be important for the City and the Active Living Committee to maintain a close partnership with SHIP, the Renville County Highway Department, and local law enforcement. The Mid-Minnesota Development Commission will also be available to connect the City and Active Living Transportation Committee with resources and provide guidance, as needed.

Active Living Plan implementation should include the following five strategies:

1. **Preparation & Collaboration:** Success requires that continuous effort be put forth to maintain existing and develop new partnerships that effectively support active living. The Active Living Committee cannot hope to achieve the goals of the Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan without additional support. Collaboration, with both public and private players, will be necessary for goal achievement. The assessment of existing conditions and resources is another necessary preparation component.
2. **Promotion and Programming:** Buffalo Lake supports a variety of programs and events that encourage activity among residents. This should continue. New programs that provide incentives for healthy living and environments should be explored and fostered where possible. Promotion and communication are also essential to the success of any active living initiative, as this can encourage wide resident support for physical/infrastructure improvements.

The City and Active Living Committee should promote their vision and advocate for actions that can advance active living goals. Working with local media and other influencers (e.g., locals with large social

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media platforms) to highlight activities and share success should be considered a high priority. To generate momentum and a positive buzz amongst residents, it may be prudent to first focus on smaller, easier projects considered to be “low-hanging fruit”. All successes should be publicly celebrated, as this will help to garner support for larger projects.

3. **Policy:** Chapter 3 of this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan discussed opportunities for the City to improve current policies and implement healthy living strategies. In addition to implementing these recommended changes, other components of this healthy living initiative will help to create an environment where healthy living activities come more naturally.
4. **Education and Awareness:** This activity is closely tied with promotion. The public should be fully informed of the City’s healthy living initiatives and understand the benefits of active living. Motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians must learn how to share space and safely interact with one another at street level. These education and awareness efforts must be inclusive of all residents (e.g., youth, seniors, English-language learners, the business community).
5. **Physical Projects:** One of the primary outcomes of this Active Living Plan is to make physical/infrastructure improvements to the built environment to support more active living. Strategies 1 through 4, if well-implemented, will help to create political and public will for these investments. The City should begin making physical activity living-focused improvements as soon as possible, beginning with less expensive investments (e.g., painting high visibility crosswalks, and adding signage and paint to identify preferred bicycle routes).

When implementing the above strategies, it will be important to maintain flexibility so that Buffalo Lake can capitalize on opportunities as they arise. For instance, if a group or entity wishes to champion a desired Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan-identified project or activity, it will be important to give them sufficient latitude to proceed. When no champion emerges on certain projects, the Buffalo Lake Active Living Committee may need to take that leadership role. Without project champions, there will be little likelihood of progress.

### Implementation Matrix

The implementation matrixes shown on the following pages are intended to guide the efforts of the City and Active Living Committee. The matrixes are split between physical infrastructure improvements and non-infrastructure strategies (Preparation & Collaboration, Promotion & Programs, Education & Awareness, and Policy).

Under each strategy the matrix provides a level of priority, suggests responsible parties, and designates a short-, mid-, or long-term timeline. Short-term strategies are intended to be started within one year with a goal of completion within three years. Mid-term projects should be completed within three to six years. Long-term projects are typically completed within ten years. Some strategies are intended to be ongoing and will continue for as long as the Buffalo Lake community makes active living a priority, hopefully indefinitely.

It is advised that the Active Living Committee and City identify projects that could be “quick wins” and start on these within three to six months of this Buffalo Lake Active Living Transportation Plan’s adoption. This will demonstrate to the community that the intent is not to let this plan sit on a shelf. Rather, that it is to be used as a working document. Tackling these smaller projects will also provide some of the momentum required for larger projects.

Implementation Matrix

Implementation Matrix, Non-infrastructure					
Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party		Timeline	
		Lead	Support	ST/LT	Notes
Hold regular meetings of the Active Living Transportation Committee and develop subcommittees or ad hoc committees as needed.	High	ALC	City staff, SHIP, MMDC, and other identified contributors as needed.	ST	Ongoing
Develop close partnerships with SHIP, Renville County, and local businesses and service organizations so these entities may better support opportunities for physical activity.	High	ALC	All parties highlighted with the strategy.	MT	Ongoing
Sidewalk condition/ADA review and planning.	High	City Staff	ALC, MMDC, Local Volunteers	ST	Ongoing
Develop marketing and education materials and employ use of City website for information distribution.	High	ALC	City staff, SHIP, off-the-shelf materials from State and other entities.	ST	Ongoing
Provide opportunities for local bicycle safety education.	Moderate	ALC	SHIP, City staff, City organizations, Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota	ST	Ongoing
Work with local businesses to implement employee wellness programs that include an active living component.	Low	ALC	SHIP	MT	Ongoing
Organize an annual (or more frequent) "alternative mode of transportation to work" day or other walking, rolling, and bicycling community event.	Moderate	ALC	City staff, SHIP	LT	
Apply to become a Bicycle Friendly Community.	Moderate	ALC	City staff, SHIP, County Tourism Bureau, MMDC.	MT	

Abbreviates used: ST = Short-term, MT = Mid-term, LT = Long-term  
 ALC = Active Living Committee

Implementation Matrix - Infrastructure					
Strategy	Priority	Responsible Party		Timeline	
		Lead	Support	ST/LT	Notes
Make railway safety improvements across Twin Cities and Western Railroad line along Main Street.	High	City	TC&W Railroad, MnDOT, SHIP, MMDC	LT	Railway study likely needed
Develop multipurpose trails encircling Buffalo Lake Baseball Field, Gaines Park, and Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center.	Moderate	City	City, ALC, MnDOT	MT	Grant funding likely needed
Develop a more robust sidewalk/trail system providing improved connectivity to Buffalo Lake Baseball Field, Buffalo Lake Healthcare Center, Gaines Park, and Krumrey Park.	Moderate	City	City, ALC, MnDOT, property owners	MT	Grant funding likely needed
ADA planning and sidewalk repairs.	Moderate	City	ALC, City	MT	
Install bicycle amenities (e.g. bike racks, bike repair station).	Moderate	City	City, SHIP, ALC	ST	Donation or small grant opportunity
Improve pedestrian signage	Low	City and County	County and City	ST	
Add or refresh street paint for improved pedestrian crossings, etc.	Moderate	City and County	City, ALC	LT	Ongoing
Develop a multipurpose offroad trail or on-road route (wide highway shoulder) to Lake Allie Park and/or Hector.	Low	City and County	City, SHIP, MnDOT	LT	Grant funding likely needed
Conduct study to determine opportunities for street lighting improvements.	Moderate	City	Power provider	LT	City could partner with a consultant

Abbreviates used: ST = Short-term, MT = Mid-term, LT = Long-term  
 ALC = Active Living Committee

## Funding

While a variety of worthwhile projects are discussed within this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan, each comes with a cost. Non-infrastructure activities may be inexpensive but are likely to require volunteer and/or City staff time. Infrastructure costs range from relatively inexpensive (e.g., paint or signage) to quite costly (e.g., new trail or sidewalk developments). The community of Buffalo Lake will need to find funds that can be dedicated toward projects over time. Identifying or creating local funding sources that can be used as matching funds for available grants will help to stretch the City’s local investment. Conversations will need to be had, among City leaders and staff and with resident input, surrounding the need to determine how to fund needed sidewalk expansion as well as the need for ongoing sidewalk maintenance (e.g., Who will pay and/or be responsible?).

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When determining whether to fund projects, the City will need to consider all benefits and costs, beyond construction, maintenance, and land use. Health impacts, sprawl, the sense of community, and the City's ability to attract businesses, residents, and visitors must also be considered.

The availability of outside funding tends to ebb and flow. The City and its residents will need to remain vigilant so the community can capitalize on opportunities when they do come available. The following list includes examples of commonly accessed funding sources. This list is not all-inclusive:

### **Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) – Transportation Alternatives Program:** [www.dot.state.mn.us/ta/](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/ta/)

MnDOT's District 8 Transportation Alternatives Program has annually awarded over \$1,000,000 to improve the pedestrian environment. Eligible Transportation Alternatives Program projects include construction, planning, and design of on-road and offroad trail facilities intended for non-motorized transportation, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming measures, lights and other safety related infrastructure, ADA compliance, and conversion of abandoned railroad corridors for trail use. State rules prohibit the use of these funds for engineering activities and for the purchase of rights-of-way.

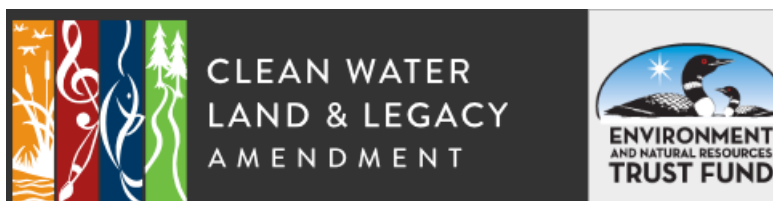
As the funds originate with the federal government, there are federal requirements attached. Transportation Alternatives Program applications for cities with less than 5,000 residents must be sponsored by their county. Because counties may also apply for this funding, it may be in Buffalo Lake's best interest to collaborate with Renville County to achieve common goals. As these federal projects require more capacity for grant administration, this can prove to be a good arrangement for small cities. Typically, counties will ask the involved cities to contribute by providing required matching funds, though this may vary.



The minimum local match is no less than 20 percent of total project costs. However, larger local matches will strengthen any grant application. Transportation Alternatives Program projects are awarded four years prior to project commencement. However, in order to accelerate a project, communities typically have an option to pay all of the associated costs up-front, with the understanding that the grant award would reimburse the City later. The Transportation Alternatives Program application process begins in the fall of each year with a request for letters-of-intent. Final applications are normally due in early-January. Mid-Minnesota Development Commission serves as a liaison and technical assistance provider for this process. They should be contacted by any City interested in accessing MnDOT Transportation Alternatives Program funding.

### **Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission – Greater Minnesota Legacy Grants:** [www.legacy.leg.mn/funds/parks-trails-fund](http://www.legacy.leg.mn/funds/parks-trails-fund)

Greater Minnesota Legacy Grants are funded as a result of the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, which was passed by voters in 2008. This amendment increased the state's sales tax by .375 percent and dedicated 14% of new revenues to a Parks & Trails Fund. A portion of this Parks & Trails Legacy Fund supports regional park and trail development throughout Greater Minnesota. Greater Minnesota Legacy Grants are available to assist with the acquisition, development, improvement, or restoration of regionally significant parks and trails outside of the seven-county metropolitan area (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington).. As such, any local unit of government outside the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is eligible to apply.



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There is no minimum or maximum amount for funding requests and applicants are not required to provide a match. However, projects that include non-state cash contributions will receive additional consideration. Past grants have ranged from \$20,000 to \$1.5 million. The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission receives, reviews, and evaluates all applications. Projects are selected based upon criteria in the Parks & Trails Legacy Plan, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Strategic Plan and Funding Program, the availability of a non-state cash match, and the project's overall quality, readiness, and design.

As projects must be within a designated Greater Minnesota regional park or trail, such a designation, perhaps justified by the historic significance of the Yellowstone Trail, would likely need to occur before Buffalo Lake pursues funding from this source. However, a conversation with the grantor may be appropriate when exploring the possibility of a regional trail designation.

### **MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Regional Trail Grant Program:**

[https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails\\_regional.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_regional.html)

The DNR's Regional Trail Grant Program serves to accelerate the acquisition and development of long-distance, regionally significant trails outside of the seven-county metropolitan area. Priority is given to projects that develop trails of significant length, projects involving trails that are expected to see high usage, and projects that provide unique and interesting connections to the outdoors. Any local unit of government, outside of this area, is eligible. Trail organizations and/or user groups may also apply, but only in coordination with a local unit of government.

Eligible funding uses include land acquisition from willing sellers; trail construction and/or restoration; permanent trailside improvements (e.g., drainage, parking, bathrooms); ADA compliance-related improvements; contracted maintenance; and bridge construction and restoration. Projects lying within state park boundaries or in state trail corridors are not eligible for funding.

Grants may range from \$5,000 to \$250,000, though grants between \$100,000 and \$170,000 are common. Funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis and the grantee must fund at least 25% of the total project cost. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reviews all applications and makes final funding decisions.

Regional Trail Grant Program grants are primarily funded by the Minnesota State Lottery. Each year, the State Lottery returns a small portion of gross sales to the state as a payment in lieu of sales tax. From these proceeds, state law dictates that a small, prescribed portion (2.2%) is to be spent on local trail grants. These dollars are divided between the Local Trails Connection Program and the Regional Trail Program. In some years, state bond sales and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund have also been used to fund local trail grant programs.



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### PeopleForBikes Industry Community Grants

<https://www.peopleforbikes.org/locations/minnesota>

The People For Bikes Industry Community Grant Program provides funding to support infrastructure that improves a community's City Ratings score by building connections in low-stress bikeway networks or by improving opportunities for close to home recreation. Grants should support the material costs of infrastructure construction or non-material costs directly related and necessary to getting infrastructure built. PeopleforBikes Industry Community Grants range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and the organization's priority is to support efforts where grants of that magnitude make a difference, especially in support of communities impacted by historic disinvestment.

Nonprofit organizations, local or state government agencies, federal agencies working locally, and small businesses, such as bicycle retailers and community-oriented businesses that serve historically disadvantaged communities are eligible to apply.

PeopleForBikes' Industry Community Grants program is funded through employee pro purchases, which collect donations from individuals who work in the bike industry and take advantage of pro-pricing discounts on new bikes and equipment.

### Advocacy Advance Grants

[www.advocacyadvance.org/grants](http://www.advocacyadvance.org/grants)

Advocacy Advance Grants help state and local organizations take advantage of unexpected opportunities to win, increase, or preserve funding for biking and walking. These REI-supported grants are fund short-term campaigns that will increase or preserve investments in active transportation, in communities where program decisions on how to spend federal, state, and local funding are being made. Average grants range from \$1,000 to \$10,000, with no local match required.



**ADVOCACY ADVANCE**  
Bike and Walk Advancement

### Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Active Transportation Program Grant

[www.dot.state.mn.us/active-transportation-program/](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/active-transportation-program/)

Active Transportation (AT) Program grants are available to communities who wish to make walking, biking, and rolling better. The grant aims to increase the number of people walking and biking via both non-infrastructure and infrastructure projects. This grant requires no match and can be a great option for funding more expensive projects.

### Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Safe Routes to Schools Infrastructure Grant

<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/about.html>

The Safe Routes to Schools Grant is available, statewide, to communities to construct infrastructure that improves access and safety on prioritized routes to and at schools. Past grants have included sidewalks to schools, trails along state highways, and improved crossings on school walking routes. An SRTS plan is recommended to apply, no funding match required. Mid-Minnesota Development Commission is the Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart District's contact for the development of such a plan.



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### AARP Community Challenge Grant

<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/>

The AARP Community Challenge provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages.

In AARP' flagship Community Challenge grant program, grants have ranged from several hundred dollars, for smaller, short-term activities, to tens of thousands of dollars for larger projects. Since 2017, AARP has funded projects ranging from \$500 to \$50,000, with an average grant amount of \$11,900 (83 percent of grants have been under \$20,000). They accept applications for projects that benefit residents, especially those age 50 and older, in several categories, including but not limited to the following active living-related efforts:



## AARP COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

Grants to make communities livable for people of all ages

- Creating vibrant **Public Places** that improve open spaces, parks and access to other amenities;
- Delivering a range of **Transportation** and **Mobility Options** that increase connectivity, walkability, bike-ability and access to public and private transit;
- Improving **Community Health** and **Economic Empowerment** to support residents' financial well-being and improve health outcomes.

### Other Funding and Educational Resources

**The Kandiyohi – Renville County Statewide Healthy Improvement Partnership (SHIP)** program may be a source of funding to help Buffalo Lake implement low-cost infrastructure projects, such as bicycle racks, paint and signage for bicycle routes. To learn more, visit: [https://www.renvillecountymn.gov/departments/public\\_health/healthy\\_living/ship.php](https://www.renvillecountymn.gov/departments/public_health/healthy_living/ship.php).

Kandiyohi - Renville County

# SHIP

MINNESOTA STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP



At times, **Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Minnesota** has funds available to support active living-focused projects. For more information, visit: <https://www.bluecrossmnfoundation.org/funding-opportunities-2/>.



**BlueCross  
BlueShield**  
Minnesota

The **Minnesota Bicycle Alliance** ([www.bikemn.org](http://www.bikemn.org)) is a great source for educational assistance and materials. They also are the organization to contact if Buffalo Lake is interested in pursuing a "Bicycle Friendly Community" designation.

**bike.MN**  
BICYCLE ALLIANCE OF MINNESOTA

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The **America Walks** organization (<https://americawalks.org>) offers both education and funding opportunities.



The **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center** ([www.pedbikeinfo.org](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org)) can also be a helpful information resource.



While it may be difficult to include local walking and bicycling focused infrastructure projects, the **Minnesota State bonding** bill should be considered as a possible funding source. Local State senators and representatives may be able to help determine if state bonding is possible and, if willing, provide sponsorship.

### Plan Maintenance

For the goals and strategies of this Plan to be successfully implemented, the Active Living Committee will need to remain actively engaged after this Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan is adopted. The Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan should be considered a living document. This means it should be periodically updated as conditions and needs change. Addendums may simply be added to show plan progress and highlight newly-identified projects and priorities.

The City Council should also be provided with a regular update from the Active Living Committee. Key partnerships should be formed and cultivated to advance projects. While nurturing current collaborations, the Committee should always seek to forge new partnerships as opportunities present. Goals will be more easily achieved with wide and diverse participation. Dedication to flexibility and to strong collaborations between the Active Living Committee, the City of Buffalo Lake, Renville County, the State of Minnesota, local walking/bicycling groups, civic organizations and service clubs, individual residents and businesses, and others will likely be the best way of achieving Buffalo Lake Active Living Plan success.