Metropolitan Council

Metropolitan Urban Service Area

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MUSA: A tool for orderly growth

The Metropolitan Urban Service Area, or "MUSA," is the area in the seven counties in which the Metropolitan Council ensures that regional services and facilities, such as sewers and major highways, are provided or planned. The Council oversees provision of these services to metro-area communities under the authority of the Metropolitan Land Planning Act in state law.

A planning concept developed in the 1970s, the MUSA was designed to achieve orderly, economic and contiguous growth by directing development, primarily, to areas where roads and sewers already exist. The objective was to get the most use out of existing infrastructure and create efficiencies that save taxpayer dollars.

There are approximately 670,000 acres in the approved 2020 MUSA.

The MUSA is not a growth boundary. Rather, the goal is to synchronize urban growth with the provision of infrastructure needed to accommodate growth. As developing communities grow and plan for growth they often request "MUSA expansions," so that regional infrastructure is available to support their anticipated development. Those requests are reviewed by the Council for consistency with regional plans and policies.

The MUSA debate

As the region has continued to grow in recent years, the MUSA has been a subject of intense debate.

Some say the Council should establish a "hard line" and prohibit MUSA expansions so, theoretically, growth would occur in areas where there is already urban and suburban development and costly urban sprawl would be halted or minimized.

Others warn against holding the line "too tight," arguing a no-growth policy encourages leap-frog development outside the urban service area. Holding the line, the argument goes, exacerbates sprawl and drives up the cost of serviced land by restricting supply.

The Council continues to support a balanced approach—one that plans for expansion of the service area as growth occurs and supports land uses that promote efficiency and better connections between housing, jobs and other destinations. Current policy embraces flexibility with respect to the MUSA, encouraging developing communities to stage growth and maintain a 20-year rolling supply of land.

Policy promotes flexibility

The *2030 Regional Development Framework* is the Council's premier planning document. It states that Council policy will "provide growing cities the flexibility to decide where development occurs within broader areas that are planned and staged for development, consistent with regional perspectives."

The *Framework* further states, "Achieving connected land use patterns that can be served efficiently and economically with urban services will be more important than adherence to regulatory requirements such as making new growth contiguous with existing development.

"Decisions to extend regional infrastructure for Developing Communities will be made based on evidence of efforts to mix and connect land-use patterns at appropriate densities."

When all is said and done, it's all about balance:

- Safeguarding local decision-making and public preferences, while also achieving regional objectives of efficiency and cost-effective growth.
- Providing capacity for growth, without building too much or not enough infrastructure.
- Accommodating growth while also preserving and protecting the natural environment.

For more information

- To learn more about the Council's services, including planning assistance: http://metrocouncil.org/services/services.htm

  -Or call 651-602-1000.

- Related fact sheets:
  - 2030 Regional Development Framework
  - Comprehensive Planning
  - About the Council

- See the 2020 MUSA map.

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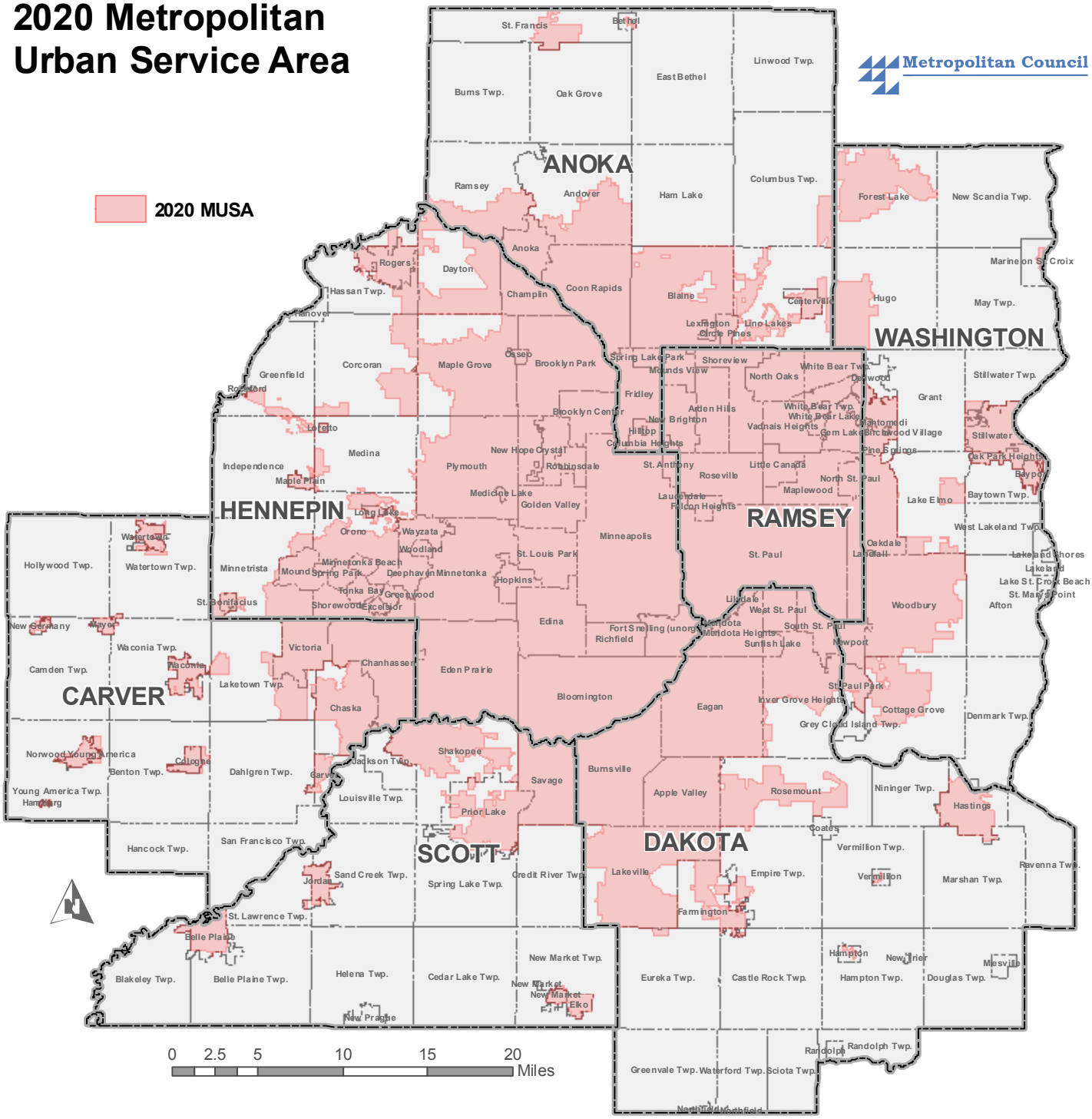
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