



# PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND SENSE OF PLACE

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### Vision Statement

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

### Values

The following values guide our work:

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

### Why is this a Priority?

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

Policies to protect natural assets and increase and diversify access to the outdoors can enhance efforts to grow tourism, attract new residents



and grow the Cook County brand. At the same time, investments in housing, broadband, commercial development sites and other forms of infrastructure are needed to support growth.

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

#### How to Get There

- Implement fair and consistent land use policies for conservation, recreation and development.
- Support diversification of recreational activities including non-motorized and motorized activities and handicap accessibility where reasonably feasible by establishing a system that allows different uses to coexist without degrading one another or the environment.
- Adopt economically feasible leading practices in land use, infrastructure provision, construction and site design to protect natural resources and sense of place.



## PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

### ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY

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#### Vision Statement

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

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

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

#### Values

The following values guide our work:

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



### Why is this a Priority?

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

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

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

### How to Get There

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



- Use investments and policies to help fully realize broadband’s potential to improve existing businesses, expand markets, and create new business opportunities. Market the economic and social advantages of the county’s fiber to the premise system.
- Link the tourist economy with efforts to diversify the economy and grow new businesses.
- Continue to develop and collaboratively market a County brand that reflects its status as a first class tourism destination and a welcoming place for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

## PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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#### Vision Statement

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

#### Values

The following values guide our work:

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



#### Why is this a Priority?

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

#### How to Get There

- A county administrator is needed to align and provide effective and efficient leadership of county services and regulations to support economic development.
- Go Cook County’s vision and strategic priorities are integrated into all local government functions.
- The Cook County/Grand Marais Economic Development Authority and Cook County Chamber of Commerce play active roles in implementing Go Cook County’s vision and strategic priorities.
- Local government and its authorities commit necessary resources and build partnerships with local, regional, state, and national agencies and organizations, leading and supporting where necessary.
- Local government works with the private sector to make critical and strategic investments and public policy decisions that support retention and development of new businesses and an expanded tax base while retaining the natural beauty, environmental integrity, and amenities we value.
- The provision of basic services and regulations are reviewed and amended periodically to reflect changing conditions and priorities. Service and regulation encourages development consistent with our values and goals.



- Land use decisions meet reasonable concerns about sustainability by combining leading practices for zoning, infrastructure provision, site design and other public policies.
- Economic development programs are periodically reviewed for consistency with Go Cook County’s vision and strategic priorities and effectiveness. Funding decisions are linked to strategic priorities.

## PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

### EDUCATION AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

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#### Vision Statement

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

#### Values

The following values guide our work:

- Education and training is a lifelong pursuit.
- Education and training is available to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Training offers the opportunity for career advancement.
- The spirit of entrepreneurship is instilled in everyone.
- All high school graduates have the necessary skills to enter the local workforce, complete advanced training or go on to earn a college degree.
- Our schools are an asset that attract and retain young families and quality education professionals.
- Workers and students have access to and knowledge of current technologies.



### Why is this a Priority?

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

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

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

### How to Get There

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

## PROSPERITY PRIORITIES

### HOUSING

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## Vision Statement

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

## Values

The following values guide our work:

- Housing needs to be available and affordable to all permanent residents, with special consideration given to the elderly and young people just entering the housing market, as well as those working in important service capacities.
- Seasonal student workers, visiting artists, and other temporary residents that warrant special consideration need to have livable, affordable housing options. Affordable housing needs to fit the character of the community.
- Affordable, safe and livable housing is a cornerstone of personal, family, and community stability.

## Why is this a Priority?

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

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

Action by local government with stakeholders is necessary to lower barriers to affordable housing and home ownership for the following reasons:



- Lack of affordable, livable housing is a barrier to attracting and retaining young families and residents. This leads to population stagnation, declining school enrollment, increased job turnover, lower productivity, and increased business and social costs.
- Home ownership is many people's dream. Housing choices and opportunities are necessary to develop and maintain a strong, stable workforce and population.
- Communities need residents to attract and retain year-round businesses and services.

#### How to Get There

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