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Message from the Community Development Director

On behalf of the dedicated staff in the Community Development Department, I am pleased to present our 2020 Annual Report. This document highlights the extraordinary work that was done over the last year - a time of numerous challenges and setbacks, but also a time of unexpected opportunities, organizational learning and re-imagining the way we deliver services.

Like many organizations, our team had to pivot several times to the constantly changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. From equipping staff with the right technology for working remotely to redesigning workflows; from ensuring the continuity of daily operations to the vigilance in keeping employees and customers safe, our staff met the challenges head on. Moreover, our team continued to find creative ways to provide services to our residents, businesses, contractors, developers, non-profits, schools, faith communities and other community groups. In addition, our staff worked closely with the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment & Appeals to ensure that those bodies could continue their work.

While the local economy did slow down, construction and development activity did not stop completely. In fact, we witnessed the groundbreaking for several new commercial and residential developments. In addition, we were encouraged to see a number of new projects in the pipeline for construction in 2021 and beyond. Many residents chose to re-invest in their homes and neighborhoods, taking advantage of record low interest rates and the City’s innovative programs, like Front Door and Homes for Generations-II. And at year’s end, the Community Development Department took on an expanded role in helping lead the City’s sustainability efforts. We are excited about those opportunities and working with the Sustainability Commission.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the professionalism and dedication of our staff in finding solutions to the problems we faced in 2020. While recovery from the pandemic will take time, we are prepared for the long haul. Among the lessons learned is the need to be more flexible, adaptable and resilient in delivering services, which will benefit the community well into the future.

Sincerely,

Grant Fernelius

Grant Fernelius
Community Development Director
Business Development

To help small businesses and nonprofits survive during the pandemic, the City created the Coon Rapids Business Relief Grant Program and the Coon Rapids Nonprofit Relief Grant Program. In mid-2020, the City of Coon Rapids received $4.8 million in funding through the Federal CARES Act. A total $1.4 million of this allocation was provided to 70 businesses and four nonprofit organizations to cover COVID-19-related expenses.

*rms Company* was awarded a Minnesota Job Creation Fund grant for an expansion project on Evergreen Boulevard. The manufacturing business, which produces components for the medical device and aerospace industries, plans to add at least 80 jobs as part of a 60,000 square foot expansion. Construction began in late 2019 and continued in 2020.

Notable new and expanding businesses included: Starbucks at 3188 Northdale Blvd., Rose Garden Event Center at 1927 Coon Rapids Blvd., Metro Storage at 3021 124th Ave., and Golden Valley Distributing at 9534 Foley Blvd.

Construction began on New Creations Child Care, a new day care facility near Gateway Drive and Hanson Boulevard, as well as a new multi-tenant retail building on an adjacent site.

Construction continued on a new Starbucks-anchored multi-tenant retail building on the southwest corner of Main Street and Northdale Boulevard, as well as a bank-anchored retail development on the northeast corner of Main Street and Northdale Boulevard.

Housing Development and Redevelopment

A new transit-oriented apartment development opened next to the Riverdale Transit Station on Northdale Boulevard. This new development, known as Riverdale Station, includes two buildings - “Nova”, a 71-unit mixed-income building, which opened in October 2019 and “Lyra”, a 180-unit market rate building, which opened on early 2020.

Coon Rapids-based *Centra Homes* began construction on 136 one-level and two-level detached townhomes as part of the Port Riverwalk redevelopment. The City’s Housing and Redevelopment Authority sold the site to Centra Homes in February 2020 and the City led construction of new public infrastructure throughout the construction season. The City and Anoka County made several infrastructure improvements along Coon Rapids Boulevard in the area. The work included utilities, sidewalks and trails, lighting, new lane configurations, asphalt replacement, and curbs and gutters.

*St. Paul-based Real Estate Equities* continued construction on the Spring House Apartments near 94th Avenue and Springbrook Drive. The 168-unit complex will feature several amenities including an outdoor patio with fire pit, bocce ball court, fitness center, tot lot, dog run, underground parking, solid surface countertops, stainless steel appliances and in-unit laundry.

Construction began on a small-format *Caribou Coffee* store that will include a drive-through and outdoor seating area on the southwest corner of Coon Rapids Boulevard and Egret Boulevard in the Port Riverwalk area. The City’s Housing and Redevelopment Authority sold the site to Caribou’s developer in September 2020.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REDEVELOPMENT

Marketing and Outreach

Many of the City’s economic development efforts centered on response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including dissemination of emergency resources for businesses and enhanced economic development email communications and social media outreach.

Community development staff called over 50 businesses in the City as part of a business outreach effort in order to check in during the first few months of the pandemic.

The City continued a partnership with the Metro North Chamber of Commerce to host its Coon Rapids Business Council meetings, which help build relationships between the City and business community. Presentation topics included Allina Health’s new Customer Experience Center on Evergreen Blvd., a legislative panel, labor market trends, and a State of the City presentation by the mayor.

In collaboration with Anoka County Regional Economic Development, the City of Coon Rapids sponsored the Minnesota Real Estate Journal’s virtual North Metro Real Estate Summit in September, which featured panelists from Centra Homes, Sherman Associates, and CommonBond Communities who highlighted recent projects in Coon Rapids before a regional audience.

City Economic Development Coordinator Matt Brown provided a presentation on suburban economic development at the International Economic Development Council’s Upper Midwest Basic Economic Development Course and Minnesota Economic Development Academy in October.

The City participated in the Anoka County Regional Economic Development Initiative, which provides economic development marketing and branding on a regional basis. In 2020, the initiative focused on emergency resources for businesses in Anoka County and distributing federal funding to businesses affected by the pandemic.

The City participated in the fifth annual Upriver Commercial Real Estate Summit in December, which included a presentation on rms Company’s expansion projects in Coon Rapids and use of State economic development tools. Over 70 real estate professionals participated in the virtual event, which was intended to promote economic development in Anoka County.
2020 saw continued work on the “Fit for the Future” projects at Coon Rapids High School where phase 2 of the new atrium construction continued. This project links the fieldhouse side of the school, adds a new fitness center, and music room. It also includes the remodeling of several classrooms. At the L.O. Jacob Learning Center, a large classroom addition is being constructed and a number of special education improvements are being done to existing spaces. If you recall the “Fit for the Future” plan was backed by voters in November of 2017. The goal was to create safe and secure learning environments for the district. It focuses on replacing all portable classrooms with classroom space inside the building. The Anoka-Hennepin School District is striving to create quality classrooms at every building in the district, and address class sizes at all levels.

### Top 10 Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>River Trail Learning Center</td>
<td>$10,094,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coon Rapids High School</td>
<td>$8,523,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro Storage</td>
<td>$8,428,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN Oncology</td>
<td>$5,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR Self Storage</td>
<td>$3,520,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCC Library &amp; College Services</td>
<td>$3,298,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allina Women’s Health</td>
<td>$3,164,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>$1,832,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunker Beach</td>
<td>$1,510,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New 6 Unit Townhome</td>
<td>$1,458,876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Building Permit Valuation

- 2015: $60,900
- 2016: $108,400
- 2017: $115,000
- 2018: $143,800
- 2019: $126,600
- 2020: $99,200

### Number of Permits Issued

- 2015: 6,224
- 2016: 6,859
- 2017: 12,272
- 2018: 9,495
- 2019: 8,614
- 2020: 7,594
The corner of Main Street and Northdale Boulevard saw three projects start in 2020 which will change the look of the area. The first one was the demolition of Famous Dave’s restaurant. This building is being replaced with 2 smaller retail buildings. Also in the area, Menards broke ground on the expansion of the garden center. This project included constructing a large underground storm water treatment system under a portion of the parking lot and creating additional outdoor lumber storage. This project is expected to be complete by early 2021 just in time for spring planting. Finally, the construction of a new three-story storage building across from Menards also went up. Metro Storage will provide close to 900 new spaces ranging in size from 5 foot by 5 foot to 10 foot x 40 foot. This project is expected to be complete in early 2021.

Spring House apartments located near Highway 10 and Coon Rapids Boulevard are close to being completed with a partial opening to the public on spring of 2021.
Property Maintenance

The Property Maintenance Division is tasked with handling residential and commercial code enforcement, long grass and weed inspections, monitoring and securing vacant properties, water waiver program and chicken licensing. Code enforcement concerns are addressed through City Code 2-1100 – Administrative Procedures and Penalties.

In April 2020, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Property Maintenance Division began using Courtesy Notices along with educational materials as the first contact to notify residents of code violations. If there is not compliance with the Courtesy Notice, an Administrative Citation is issued with educational and informational materials. Inspections in 2020 were conducted using a complaint-based approach and complaints are typically responded to in 24-48 hours.

In 2020, Property Maintenance Inspectors issued 573 Courtesy Notices with a 71% compliance rate. There were 327 Administrative Citations issued with an 79% compliance rate. Junk (inoperable and/or unlicensed) vehicles remained the number one violation for 2020 followed by parking of vehicles off pavement and prohibited exterior storage. If a property remains in violation after the citation compliance date, and the violation can be abated, a contractor is used to abate the violation. In 2020 there were only 14 abatements (70 in 2019), mostly prohibited exterior storage and junk (inoperable and/or unlicensed) vehicle violations.

Each year the top complaint through the summer months continues to be long grass and weeds. Because of the number of long grass complaints, a dedicated long grass inspector works seasonally April through September. In 2020 the number of long grass complaints was down significantly. The long grass inspector inspected 277 (388 in 2019) properties finding 133 (248 in 2019) of them in violation. Like with all other violations, Courtesy Notices were used as the first contact with residents for long grass and weed concerns. Administrative Citations were issued for properties remaining in violation of the Courtesy Notice. There was an 83% compliance rate on the Courtesy Notices issued for long grass and because of the significant compliance, there were only 5 (25 in 2019) long grass abatements, which is down significantly over the last four years.
Board of Adjustment and Appeals

The Property Maintenance Coordinator is the staff liaison to the Board of Adjustment and Appeals. The role of the Board is to conduct hearings to consider variances of the building or zoning ordinances, consider appeals for special assessment objections and to consider appeals of the decisions made by the Building Official or Zoning Administrator. The Board meets the first Thursday of each month if there is business to conduct. In 2020, the Board of Adjustment and Appeals met three times. The Board heard one appeal of the Building Official’s decision, one variance request and ten special assessment objections. The Board is made of up five volunteer residents of the city that are appointed by City Council. There is currently one vacant seat on the Board.

Vacant Properties

The number of vacant properties in Coon Rapids continues to decrease annually. In 2020, the number of vacant properties has been hovering around 85. All vacant properties are inspected twice each year to verify they are still vacant and to make sure there are no exterior health or safety concerns. Water services are typically disconnected to vacant properties to protect the City water supply as well as the property itself. A water waiver can be applied for to keep water service on and currently there are 36 vacant properties with a water waiver on file. From time to time, vacant properties are found unsecure, either by law enforcement or by inspectors conducting routine inspections. In 2020, there were three properties that required staff to secure them. Property secure services are provided by a contractor.

Chickens

In 2016, an ordinance was passed to allow for the keeping of chickens on residential properties. There are currently 47 residents in Coon Rapids that have been approved for a permit to keep chickens, including 10 new applications in 2020. Since 2016, staff receive an average of 6 chicken related complaints each year. In 2020, there were 9 complaints related to the keeping of chickens and 3 of them resulted in enforcement action.

Top 10 Violations of City Code Property Maintenance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation Description</th>
<th>Violations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-601.5 Junk Vehicles on Residential Property</td>
<td>136</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-601.10(2) Exterior Storage</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-603.2(7)(i) Parking and Drives</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-204(1) Collection Service Required</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-206(4) Location of Containers and Yard Waste</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-309(5) Accessory Structures</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-206(3) Location of Containers and Yard Waste</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-601.3(1)(e) Major Recreational Equipment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-205(1) Containers</td>
<td>9</td>
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Rental Licensing

The city’s Rental Licensing Ordinance (City Code Chapter 12-900) continues to encourage and ensure safe and viable rental housing options in Coon Rapids. In 2020, there were 85 new rental licenses issued. Of the 85 new rental licenses, 56 of them were properties that had been converted from owner-occupied to rental. There are now a total of 5,700 licensed rental units in the city which is down slightly over the past 5 years.

Due to the City’s COVID-related policies, inspections of rental properties halted in March of 2020. They resumed in September of 2020 after modifying protocols and safety measures. Since September, the housing inspectors and support staff have been doing a remarkable job to get all of the rental properties inspected and rental licenses issued. Despite doing zero inspections for six months (March - September), the housing inspectors have still managed to perform 446 rental inspections in 2020! These efforts have meant that the backlog of inspections and issuing of rental licenses was almost entirely gone by the end of December.

Number of Licensed Rental Units at Year End

Includes apartment units, single family, town and twin homes

Rental unit counts as of December 31 are as follows:
- Apartments: 3,936
- Single Family: 589
- Townhome: 937
- Twin Home: 238
- Total rental units: 5,700

This chart shows all rental units over the years (beginning in 2009 with the new rental ordinance).

The Community Engagement Committee of the Innovation Team made some fairly significant changes to the format of the Summer in the City events in 2019. Unfortunately, due to COVID, the Summer in the City events did not take place in 2020.

The cities of Andover, Anoka and Coon Rapids typically host the Annual North Suburban Home Improvement Show in March each year, but unfortunately, this event was also canceled due to COVID.

The Home Remodeling Tour typically takes place each May, but was also canceled in 2020 due to COVID.
Home Improvement Programs

After 40+ years, the Coon Rapids Mortgage Assistance Foundation d.b.a. the Coon Rapids Home Improvement Foundation (CRHIF) had to dissolve due to new accounting laws. The Governmental Standards Board Statement No. 84 did not allow the City to account for the Foundation’s funds as a stand-alone entity, and for this reason, the Foundation and the Board started the dissolution process at the end of 2020. The funds still remain and are under the City Council’s review which means the City’s home improvement and down payment assistance programs will continue. The City will be working to create an advisory Commission to the Council in 2021. This Commission will provide similar recommendations for the City’s housing needs as did the CRHIF Board.

Despite COVID-19, homeowners were very busy with home improvements in 2020:

**Home for Generations II Program.** This program offers various incentives (grants, building permit rebates, architectural consultations, and low-interest loans) to homeowners planning to make large, value-added improvements to the interior of their home. There are no income limits for this program.

In total, there have been 454 applications submitted and 171 projects subsidized through this program (2013-2020), leveraging just over $11.9 Million worth of home improvements! In 2020 alone, there were 49 applications, 60 architectural consultations, 23 recipients of the grants and rebates portion of this program and 3 recipients of the low-interest loan, totaling $1.92 Million worth of home improvements!

**Other City Loans Originated.** In addition to all of the activity originated from the Home for Generations II program and the Front Door Grant Program, the City originated many other loans to homeowners in 2020:

- 14 Down Payment Assistance Deferred Loans = $70,000
- 5 Low-Interest Loans = $53,155
- 3 Deferred Loans = $40,216

**Remodeling Advisor Visits.** Coon Rapids contracts with the Center for Energy and Environment (CEE) to provide Remodeling Advisor Visits for its homeowners. This service assists homeowners in identifying and prioritizing improvements and is also a good source of objective remodeling advice. The service is free to all Coon Rapids homeowners. In 2019, Remodeling Advisor Visits were performed for 30 Coon Rapids homeowners by CEE’s team of experienced construction professionals.

**Front Door Grant Program.** Focused on increasing curb appeal to the homes in Coon Rapids, nearly 300 Front Door Grant applicants were considered in the March lottery. A total of 80 applicants were selected to continue in the process and 25 additional applicants were selected to be on a wait list should anyone withdraw from the program. Several applicants did withdraw and all applicants on the wait list were activated. In all, 79 residents received a grant through this program to make exterior improvements to their home totaling $1.14 Million worth of increased curb appeal!
The role of the Planning Commission is to review land use applications, then make decisions, or recommendations to the City Council, regarding those applications. The Commission meets the third Thursday of every month; this year there were nine meetings. The Commission is appointed by the City Council and is made up of seven volunteer city residents.

In 2020, the Commission considered 16 planning cases during 9 regularly scheduled Commission meetings. The Commission’s review included 4 site plans. The site plan applications included:

- A 7,900 square foot multi-tenant commercial building at 1805 Gateway Drive in Gateway Commerce Center
- A 13,000 square foot childcare center at 1825 Gateway drive in Gateway Commerce Center
- A six unit townhome building at 2403 109th Avenue
- A Caribou Coffee at 10122 Egret Boulevard

The Commission also reviewed five subdivisions, three preliminary plats, one registered land survey and one lot split. The Commission approved two conditional use permits, a zone change and land use plan amendment.
In 2020, staff began discussions about re-organizing the City's sustainability programs and services under the Community Development Department. Previously these functions were managed by the Recycling Coordinator, who is housed within the Public Works Department.

The re-designed approach to sustainability will build on the work previously done, including oversight of the City’s Green Step program and liaison duties to the Sustainability Commission, but expand on education, outreach and policy development.

In addition, there will be a greater emphasis on promoting sustainability and resilience across departments, including improved coordination between staff who have responsibility for zoning, planning, engineering, inspections, parks, and facilities management. The goal is to create greater awareness of sustainable best practices from environmental protection and climate change; to alternative energy systems and green building technology; to making the community more walkable and pedestrian-friendly. The City hired a full-time Sustainability Coordinator in late 2020 and began working in January of 2021.
Coon Rapids
Community Development

11155 Robinson Drive NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55433

763-755-2880 / coonrapidsmn.gov