



# RANIER COMMUNITY PLAN



17 May, 2022

## Ranier Community Plan

Adopted by:

City of Ranier

2022 Council Members:

*Dennis Wagner, Mayor*

*JoAnn Kellner, Councilor*

*Todd Coulombe, Councilor*

*Jennifer Lahmayer, Councilor*

*Ron Wilcox, Councilor*

*Sherril Gautreaux, City Administrator*

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The City of Ranier is located in Northeast Koochiching County along the northern Minnesota Border with Canada. The city is located on Rainy Lake and surrounds the railroad that spans the source of Rainy River. Ranier's economy is largely based on tourism, especially businesses that utilize Rainy Lake, one of the most popular lakes in Minnesota.

### **Background**

In May 2008, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) staff spoke with the Ranier Mayor and City Clerk, as well as representatives of Koochiching County, regarding land use planning in and around the City of Ranier. The City and County officials asked ARDC to prepare a proposal for facilitating a Community Plan process for the Ranier area. ARDC prepared a proposal to complete the planning process which was approved by Ranier and work began in July 2008. The end result was the development of the 2009 Community Plan.

In October 2021, the Ranier Council formed a citizen committee to review the transportation plan and identify those projects which require capital investment. The initial committee consisted of two Councilors, City Administrator, Public Works Manager, Liquor Store Manager, and a facilitator. The team reviewed the 2009 Community plan including the transportation plan.

Without proper funding already in place, the team recommended the Council approve an established amount to be set aside annually during the budget process for transportation expenses. In November 2021, the Council formally approved a measure to set aside funds for transportation projects.

*Although the cost has changed, the city should continue to use the 2012 Transportation Plan (attached) developed in cooperation with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission as a reference.*

The Committee saw value in increasing the scope of the Capital Improvement Plan and completed a comprehensive review of the 2009 Community Plan.

The process for completing the 2022 Community Plan followed this format:

- Review existing plans for accuracy
- Incorporate changes into draft plans
- Identify citizen committee members
- Form full committee to review and develop recommended changes
- Open meeting(s) for public for comment
- Incorporate changes into draft plans
- Make recommendations to the Council for implementation
- Finalize Plan for Council approval
- Implement Plan

The Committee members involved during this process were:

Sherril Gautreaux (City Administrator)  
Nick Hagan (Public Works Supervisor)  
Edith Jenkinson (Citizen Representative)  
Jennifer Lahmayer (Councilmember)  
Mark Lessard (Citizen Representative)  
Jenn Seegert (Liquor Store Manager)  
Tammy Toratti (Citizen Representative)  
Mike Wellcome (Facilitator)  
Ron Wilcox (Councilmember)

## **Vision**

During the development of the 2009 Community Plan, a vision statement was developed and remains in effect today:

*In the future, Ranier will continue to be a unique community with a small-town feel and a strong sense of its history and identity. The area will be a great place to raise families, with many recreational opportunities, clean air, quality public access to Rainy Lake, and increased activities and park facilities.*

*Ranier will have a strong economy that utilizes Rainy Lake and has business opportunities. The area will have critical service entities that meet the residents' needs. The community will be an international business center and will have several transportation opportunities connecting the region.*

*The City of Ranier will be able to provide essential, affordable services and infrastructure and will be financially stable and well-staffed. Ranier will be a well-planned community which works closely with neighboring entities to protect the area's integrity.*

This vision, coupled with the Core Values will be the foundation for all future development in Ranier.

## **Core Values**

Core values are the driving forces that form our community. They are the cornerstone of future development. They define who we are and who we want to become. Core Values define *us*.

Our community will change, grow, and redefine itself. ***Change is inevitable but how we change is up to us.*** We believe the following factors define our community and should be the drivers of change. We will:

- Advocate to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and local industry the need for continued and proactive water protection of Rainy Lake and air quality monitoring.
- Partner with regional Governments and Canadian First Nations to communicate with CN Railroad the need for allowing access underneath the rail bridge.
- Continue the dog licensing program and make any adjustments or changes as issues may arise.
- Hold celebratory events that gather residents and attract visitors into the city.
- Maintain and utilize the Community Building for providing a place for residents to meet and recreate.
- Anticipate potential capital investment and/or negotiations with CN Railroad/U.S. Department of Homeland Security with the planned updated railway expansion project. Noise and light pollution and/or quality of life features should be a priority.
- Maintain walking facilities throughout town and continue the connection to the Rainy Lake Bike Trail.
- Evaluate the services that the citizens need and work to balance those needs with reasonable taxes.
- Operate the Municipal Liquor Store as a profitable revenue generating business.
- Support the efforts of connecting the Foreign Trade Zone property with proper road improvements and infrastructure.
- Continue to accommodate business expansion and growth that reflects Ranier's current character, and work with the Koochiching Economic Development Authority in assisting new business start-up.
- Communicate with the owners of historic facilities the importance of keeping the history of the community intact.
- Maintain the Ranier Welcome Sign and Big Vic Statue.

### **Accomplishments since 2009:**

There were a number of action items developed during the 2009 planning process that were incorporated in the 2009 Community Plan. We have made great strides to accomplish those tasks. Arguably, the most important was the annexation of French, Jameson, and Brennen Beach Additions increasing the population almost three-fold since the development of the 2009 Community Plan. Furthermore, we have:

- Developed a way-finding system that will direct visitors and residents to the public waterfront area. Identified and adequately marked public water areas with signs.
- Worked with the DNR and International Voyageurs Snowmobile Club to educate snowmobilers about safe areas to access Rainy Lake by snowmobile.
- Worked with U.S. and Canadian Customs to get a check-in point in Ranier.
- Worked with U.S. Rural Development in order to fund major water main replacement project in French and Jameson Additions.
- Developed a Land Use Planning and Zoning Ordinance.
- Worked with Koochiching County to develop an alert system that will give emergency vehicles more warning about trains blocking Spruce Street/CSAH 20.
- Advocated that U.S. Department of Homeland Security activities, including the scanning equipment and other property be screened, so as not to disturb surrounding properties.
- As a way to share the history of the city, worked with Koochiching Historical Society and Koochiching County to install historical kiosks along the bike trail and at Big Vic.
- Worked with Ranier Recreation Club to develop a conceptual plan for improvements to Ranier Park.

## SECTION 2: RECREATION

Ranier is located at the source of the Rainy River on Rainy Lake, which is one of the most popular lakes in Minnesota. The lake forms the border between Canada and the United States, and is well known for its sport fishing. A large part of Rainy Lake is located within the boundaries of Voyageurs National Park and attracts houseboat and camping enthusiasts. Ranier has areas where residents and visitors can enjoy the lake or picnic facilities including the Ranier Beach and Ranier Park. Ranier also has access to the Rainy Lake Bike Trail that stretches from International Falls along Highway 11 East to Voyageurs National Park's Rainy Lake Visitor Center. The recreation assets of Ranier provide for a strong tourism influence within the City.



### **Public access to waterfront**

One of the recommendations in the 2009 Community Plan was to seek funding or materials for maintaining the dock system and identify the need for expansion. Since then, finger extensions have been added to the existing Duluth Street dock and there are plans to develop a boat launch near Seven Oaks Park which will be completed in 2022.

Additionally, there are ongoing plans to construct a Safe Harbor Pier at Spruce Street Landing. Although funding is already in place for much of the project, the city continues to seek to identify funding for the entire project.

- Goal

Continue to work on funding for the entire Safe Harbor Pier project at Spruce Street Landing.

Develop a usage structure to ensure maintenance of the Safe Harbor Pier project is funded.



## **Parks and recreational areas**

Currently the City of Ranier has many recreational opportunities. More than fishing and camping, Ranier provides access to other amenities including; a swimming beach, small parks for barbecuing and picnicking, ice rinks, and other recreational opportunities.

While these facilities are a great asset to Ranier, there is a cost to keep them maintained at a safe and usable level. The parks are in need of continued maintenance.

- Goal:

Continue to seek affordable upgrades and volunteers to help with maintaining the parks, as use dictates. When maintenance and upgrades are performed the impact on surrounding residences should be considered and limited. To continue to draw visitors into the city, Ranier should continue to maintain and upgrade facilities that are being utilized. These facilities are also excellent amenities for the residents in Ranier.

Ranier has limited parking available. We will continue to monitor parking and traffic and address issues related to congestion and pedestrian safety.

Continue to partner with Ranier Recreation Club in funding recreational facilities that benefit youth.

## SECTION 3: COMMUNITY LIFE

The character and feel of Ranier keeps residents content and visitors returning. The small-town and close-knit feeling is a trait for which many communities strive.

Established in the early 1900's, Ranier has continued to keep the image of a port and water-based community. We are the busiest rail port in the United States.

Rainy Lake is a great asset and many of the businesses and residents have located in the area because of this magnificent resource.

While generations grow older, the history of the area could be lost without efforts to preserve it. There are historic places in the area that are privately owned (Finstad's Auto-Marine Shop) that are assets and would be greatly missed if lost. The City does not currently have a historical center or readily available place to learn about the history of the city.

Since the 2009 Community Plan, Ranier was successful in having the Ranier Community Building listed on the National Historic Registry. Its history is preserved in the National Historic Registry Assessment Report available for public review.

### **Maintain a small-town atmosphere**

Ranier has many qualities that residents appreciate that are not always present in larger cities. These include qualities such as having active volunteers, holding community events, and the absence of dog leash laws. Ranier has a Community Building that is in good condition and serves as a place for community members to meet and hold events. The building was recently updated and will continue to be a great asset for years to come. As indicated in our Core Values, we will:

- Continue the dog licensing program and make any adjustments or changes as issues arise.
- Continue to hold celebratory events that gather residents and attract visitors.
- Maintain and promote the Community Building as a place for residents and visitors to meet and recreate.



- Goal

Identify funds which can be used to modernize and update the city website to include historical information.

*Big Vic* has become a signature of the area and is important to the history and identity of the city. Interpretation panels with historical information will be installed in 2022.

## SECTION 4: INFRASTRUCTURE

The City currently provides water service to the entire City as well as the surrounding communities. Ranier currently purchases water from the City of International Falls. Wastewater is managed by the East Koochiching Sanitary District. Ranier manages their own roads and performs maintenance on them as needed.

Ranier is a small community with many amenities that are within walking distance. This is a great asset to the community as

residents can walk rather than use their vehicles to travel to local establishments. Also connected to the Ranier sidewalk system is the Rainy Lake Bike Trail that stretches from International Falls to Voyageurs National Park along Highway 11 East. This allows residents and visitors to easily connect to that system for extended bicycling or walking in a scenic environment.



### Maintain Essential Services

Catastrophic pipe breaks in the aging water system could put the City in a financial bind and could result in increasing the city's debt. The City maintains two miles of water lines that require considerable time, money, and effort to maintain.

Additionally, Ranier has numerous roads and alleys which require continued maintenance. While there is limited funding which may be available through various agencies, the City has implemented a process to have a dedicated transportation fund.

- Goal

Currently water repairs are paid for by an escrow fund which does not have a balance to cover a catastrophic break. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) discusses increasing the escrow fund to set aside funds for capital outlay and maintenance of the water distribution system.

- Goal

Maintain the recently implemented Transportation fund and seek additional funding to maintain the existing roads. In the interim, an inexpensive fix is to fill cracks and repaint the existing curbs and lines as required by law.

## Taxes and Assessments

Ranier has minimal debt and is able to keep taxes relatively low for the residents. Ranier should evaluate services that citizens need and work to balance those needs with reasonable taxes through transparency and citizen involvement.

- Goal

The attached Capital Improvement Plan addresses city facilities, including water main breaks, transportation, and public works. When implemented, the CIP may require a review of the current tax rate.

## Municipal Liquor Store

Since 1948, Ranier has operated a municipal liquor store which generates revenue for the city and is a valued asset for residents and visitors. Since 2014, the Liquor Fund has transferred over \$200,000 to governmental funds. Those dollars supplement the local government aid provided through state funds and help to keep resident taxes lower and fund services. In simple terms, the Liquor Store is a cash cow for the City.

- Goal

The Municipal Liquor Store building, equipment, and parking lot are in need of upkeep, repair and updating. The CIP identified projects which require funding to maintain the liquor store as a revenue generator for the City.

## Annexation

Ranier provides water service to a number of properties that are not within the city limits. Unfortunately, this greatly restricts the amount of funding available. Most infrastructure funding sources require the money be used within the recipient's boundaries. In 2010, Ranier annexed Jameson and French additions, as well as Brennen's Beach, which enabled the City to access funding sources to maintain the water system to those localities.

When considering annexation, a community needs to look at not only how it will change physically, but also socially and aesthetically. *Citizen involvement early in any annexation process is key to success.* Annexing areas will mean increased duties for city employees.

- Goal

In the event Ranier pursues additional annexation or is presented with a petition to annex, it is critically important to involve all stakeholders early in the process. Transparency and planning are key to success.

Ranier has developed the following Annexation Statement:

*The City of Ranier will consider annexation of surrounding properties when: those areas are already served by Ranier water service, those areas are being considered to receive Ranier water service, or the areas have petitioned for annexation and it is economically viable for the city to annex the areas. Ranier should make annexation decisions that reflect the Community Plan.*

## SECTION 5: ECONOMICS

There are several businesses in Ranier that offer a variety of products, hospitality and other services. This includes providing needed services to the residents, attracting visitors to the area, and providing jobs. A healthy economy contributes to vitality and longevity of small cities. Ranier and surrounding areas are served by the Koochiching Economic Development Authority (KEDA) that provides assistance to businesses and entrepreneurs that are interested in starting a new business or relocating in the area.



A Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) has been established by KEDA. The FTZ is an asset to the surrounding areas because it can help facilitate and expedite international trade, encourage further exporting, assist with economic development efforts which could in turn create employment opportunities.

### **Support Economic Development**

The local businesses and small business owners in Ranier is what gives the area its character and charm. The businesses increase our tax base, provide services to the residents and surrounding areas, and attract visitors into the city.

- Goal

The FTZ was annexed into the Ranier city boundaries in 2010. Currently, there is not an adequate road connecting the FTZ which is a requirement to realize the full potential of the area. The City should continue to work with KEDA and other partners to connect the FTZ with proper road improvements and infrastructure.

- Goal

Continue to accommodate business expansion and growth that reflect Ranier's character, and work with KEDA to assist in new business start-up.

## SECTION 6: IMPLEMENTATION

The Committee used the spreadsheet included in the 2009 Community Plan to guide our work during the review process. The spreadsheet was then separated into four distinct categories.

Accomplishments since 2009 are listed on page 5, Core Values are included in the introduction section, projects that did not meet the capital improvement threshold (\$5,000) and projects that require capital investment.

### Recommendations for funding

During the development of the Capital Improvement Plan, there were several items that did not meet the \$5,000 criteria to be considered capital improvement.

While these projects don't require a capital investment, they are the cornerstone for achieving the goals of Ranier. They are included in sections two through five and for easy reference, in the following table.

ITEM	ACTION
Seek funding or materials for maintaining the current dock system and identify the need for expansion	Address maintenance and equipment update needs for current and future docking needs.
Seek affordable upgrades and volunteers to help with maintaining City parks.	Conduct an annual review of the public facilities and determine what upgrades or maintenance are necessary.
Monitor parking and traffic to address issues related to congestion and pedestrian safety.	Conduct a review of parking and traffic and determine whether traffic control or signage is necessary to direct traffic and acknowledge the public.
Market the Community by sharing the history of the city with residents and visitors. We need to 'tell our story'.	Modernize and update the city website to include historical information. Research the historical past of Ranier to share with residents and visitors.
Identify costs for updating the water distribution system, obtain funds, and identify strategies	The current monthly escrow collected is \$11.55. Increase the water escrow fund by \$2.45 for a total of \$14.00 per month. This increase will set aside \$13,000 annually for maintenance (note)



Note:

The water distribution system maintained by Ranier services both residents and non-residents. Unfortunately, this arrangement results in the limited availability of funding. Most funding organizations will only provide funding for properties which reside within the city limits.

Recommendation:

To make the system equitable, the City should increase the existing escrow cost to \$14.00 per user and create a Water Maintenance Fund. This results in an overall increase of \$2.45 per month per user. This small increase will result in an annual deposit of roughly \$13,000 in the Water Maintenance Fund. Once the city has determined there is enough in the fund to cover anticipated water needs, excess funds can be used to pay down the bonds.

Justification:

Much like the establishment of a dedicated road fund, the increase in escrow allows the city to dedicate funding specifically for the water distribution system.

The current escrow amount of \$11.55 per month barely covers the existing bonds for the water distribution system. There is nothing in escrow to cover water main breaks or any maintenance.

Another option is for non-residents to request annexation. Doing so would increase the tax base and allow the city to access funding sources for the entire water distribution system.

Understandably, this is a very arduous and drawn-out process which would certainly affect the look of the city, increase maintenance requirements, and the fiscal responsibilities of Ranier. If this option is presented, the City MUST look at the pros/cons and make an informed decision. As always, citizen input during the early stages is critical.

The fourth category are projects that meet the capital improvement threshold. These projects were separated into six major areas:

- Municipal Liquor Store
- Community Building
- Parks and Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Water/Sewer
- Maintenance Projects

A complete list of Capital Improvement Projects is included in the appendix. Of the 20 projects, six were identified for near-term funding. While the total cost may seem daunting, using multiple funding sources, implementation should be completed within five years. In priority order, they are:

Priority	Item	Estimated Cost	Funding Source & Notes
1	Liquor Store Parking Lot	\$40K - \$80K	ARPA Funds
1a	Maintenance Building	\$60K	General Fund (note)
2	¾ Ton Pickup with Plow	\$55K	General Fund (note)
3	Dump Trailer	\$13K	General Fund (note)
4	Community Building	\$100K	Grants (see spreadsheet)
5	Liquor Store Patio	TBD	Liquor Store Funds

Note:

The cost of the pickup/plow/dump trailer will alleviate the annual cost incurred through the existing non-county contract for snow removal. Over time, this is an investment that will pay long-term dividends.

Presently, the city has no adequate storage or maintenance space for equipment. Purchasing a building will allow for in-house maintenance and a heated space for expensive equipment.

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Upon adoption of the 2022 Community Plan, the City should begin implementation of the recommendations. City Council and staff should review the plan during each budget cycle to identify funding requirements for the proposed projects. Ranier should continue to keep the Community Plan implementation on the City Council agenda, so that progress is made on achieving the recommendations.

# Capital Improvement Plan

ASSETS	RECOMMENDATION	COST	FUNDING	CITY'S ACTION STEPS
MUNICIPAL LIQUOR STORE	MLS1: Parking Lot Reconstruction or Resealing	\$40-80,000	Use ARPA funds	Get measurements of parking lot area and road. Mill and overlay asphalt.
	MLS3: Construct an Outdoor Covered Patio	TBD	Liquor Fund	Construct patio on west side aligning with south door. Some sort of privacy fence. Tables and chairs.
	MLS2: Walk-In Cooler Compressor Replacement	\$8,000	Seek KCDA Grant of \$5,000	Work with contractor to replace compressor. Explore other grant options.
COMMUNITY BUILDING	CB1: To resurface the exterior of the Ranier Community Building	\$60-80,000	SEEK OTTO BREMER GRANT	Find someone to give an estimate.
	CB2: To assess physical structure and needs for Ranier Community Building	\$10,000	MNHS GRANT	Seek a grant from Minnesota Historical Society to have a structural review of Community Building
	CB3: To replace air conditioning units	\$6-7,000	General Fund	Get estimates from local contractors
	CB4: To refinish wood flooring in Hall	\$6-7,000	General Fund	Find someone to give an estimate.
PARKS AND RECREATION	PR2: Seek funding or materials for maintaining the current dock system and identify the need for expansion	\$2.8 Million	LCCMR GRANT, Capital Bonding	Track progress with LCCMR grant for Safe Harbor project. \$762,000 funded through LCCMR. Seeking additional funding. Seeking \$2.1M from LCCMR and Capital Bonding.
	PR1: To improve Ranier Park	\$200,000-750,000	Seek Grants	Conceptual plan developed from engineering recommendations with community input. Grant can be sought for improvement plan to Ranier Park
	PR3: Ranier Rink			Expand parking area using millage from tennis court resurfacing
TRANSPORTATION TRAFFIC	S1: Crack sealing of streets and curb painting		General Fund or Road Improvement Fund	Identify streets for crack sealing and set up annual plan.

	S2: Signage for French and Jameson Additions	\$5,000	General Fund	Change street names from County Roads in French and Jameson additions. Order and replace all signs with new street names to be completed by Aug 2023.
	S3: Transportation Plan	TBD	Road Improvement Fund	Annually review existing Transportation Plan. Annually fund the Road Improvement Fund.
	S4: Pedestrian Overpass			Keep options open with CN and funding.
WATER/SEWER	WS1: CCTV inspection on gravity sewers	\$20-25,000	Cash in Sewer CD	Develop schedule for CCTV inspection
	WS2: To suggest a separate Water Maintenance Fund for Water Main Breaks		Waterline Repair Fund	Set up separate Water Maintenance Fund to annually deposit money for repairs. Consider increasing monthly escrow amount to set aside for water breaks.
OTHER MAINTENANCE PROJECTS	M1: To build a heated work shop for public works department	\$60,000	General Fund	Design, cost estimate
	M2: Purchase/lease work truck & snow plow	\$55,000	General Fund	4x4 3/4 ton truck new or used and v-plow
	M3: Dump Trailer	\$12,999	General Fund	
	M4: Sweeper attachment for Bobcat	\$5,995	General Fund	