

Community Background

Excerpt from Chaska's 2030 Comprehensive Plan pages 3-5

The original townsite of Chaska was surveyed and platted in 1854 but was not incorporated as a Village until 1871, and later as a City in 1891. Chaska's early development was tied to steamboat traffic on the Minnesota River and later to agricultural development of the surrounding area. Brickyards and breweries were important early industries followed by the pickle and sugar factories after the turn of the century. The two rail lines that were installed in 1871 and 1877 influenced the growth of the community and its industrial expansion. Thus, the Village evolved from a river port to a dual role as an agricultural trade / service center and industrial center. During the latter part of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900's, Chaska's population level held around 2,000 persons.

In the second half of the 20th century, the City's population started to increase as the influence of metropolitan area growth began to be felt. The 2000 census reported a population of 17,603 persons in Chaska, and the 2007 count is estimated at 23,775 persons.

Chaska's population growth since 1950 has been induced by local and southwest suburbs' job opportunities coupled with a high quality of life tradition within the community. Large-scale annexation of surrounding township areas in the 1960s was responsible for part of the population increase during that decade. Chaska's first rapid growth period was in the early 1970s as a result of the development of Jonathan New Town and two sizable manufactured home parks. The community also experienced a relatively long period of rapid growth from 1985 to 2006, with the biggest growth period being 2000-2004.

The City started to pursue industrial development in 1985 primarily through the use of tax increment financing assistance. During the ensuing years, many new companies, mostly with international markets, have been developed on about 500 acres of land focused primarily in northeast Chaska. From 1986-1996, approximately 2.4 million square feet of industrial space was added within the community, which represented growth of more than 100 percent and increased industrial space from approximately 2 million square feet in 1986 to 4.4 million square feet in 1996. As a result, about 2,500 jobs were added within the community in the 1980s and another 3,000 jobs in the 1990s. As of 2007, Chaska had more than 5,000 employees in the manufacturing sector with a total employment of 12,700. In 2007, Chaska's jobs-to-households ratio was 1.47 which means there were about 1.5 jobs per each household in Chaska. This healthy balance of households versus jobs serves as an indicator of Chaska's history as a complete community rather than a suburban bedroom community. This jobs-to-households ratio is about the same as that of the overall metro area, which was 1.45 in 2007.

The impact of metro area expansion together with local economic activity was primarily responsible for rapid housing growth, which averaged 200 housing starts per year from 1985 through 1999. In the latter 1980's and early 1990's, developers were passing over

Eden Prairie and Chanhassen for lower cost land in Chaska on which starter homes were developed. In the mid-1990s land prices escalated, due largely to a decreasing land supply, more upscale homes became the dominant new home construction activity in the latter 1990's. Nonetheless, since 2000, housing growth escalated to an even higher rate with an average of 350 housing starts per year with about an even split between single-family and multi-family housing types.

More recently, the presence of a sizable and growing customer base in Chaska was recognized by commercial developers and the construction of new commercial facilities has increased significantly. The biggest growth period for commercial development occurred in the 1997-2001 time period during which more than 500,000 square feet of new commercial space was developed in the community, primarily in the Chaska Commons commercial area at Highway 41 and Pioneer Trail. These significant population, employment, and commercial development gains are transforming the City's image from a slow paced small town to a thriving community complete with traffic congestion and other growing pains common to developing communities. Such growth, however, has not changed Chaska's basic goal of maintaining a strong sense of community with small town values and characteristics.