

VOLUME I: INTRODUCTION
Draft Plan





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I. 2045 Comprehensive Plan Overview

A comprehensive plan is a guide to a community's future, including desirable future growth patterns, that is prepared with the involvement of residents, businesses, non-profits, and public agencies, and reflects their issues and concerns. The principal purpose of comprehensive planning is to assist the public and decision-makers with setting goals and objectives for the future that can be met through a series of strategies or actions.

In 2022, the Board of Minidoka County Commissioners and the Mayor and City Councils of the Cities of Rupert and Paul agreed to join forces to support one comprehensive planning process to ensure maximum participation from all citizens. The result is three unique plans for each community under one umbrella document. Each plan has its own volume and shares an overview volume (with the private property rights and population components) and a volume of appendices; each plan can be referred to on its own.

This plan includes unincorporated Minidoka County and the Cities of Rupert and Paul, ~~excluding The Cities of Burley and Heyburn and their Impact Areas, as they have~~ adopted comprehensive plan updates in 2013 and 2022, respectively. The majority of the City of Burley land area lies in Cassia County, with a small area referred to as North Burley along the southern edge of Minidoka County.

2045 Comprehensive Plan Contents and Organization

In order to prepare this Comprehensive Plan, the 2013 version of the Minidoka County and City of Rupert Comprehensive Plan along with the 2007 Updated City of Paul Comprehensive Plan were referenced. With the addition of the City of Paul to this planning effort, this plan is organized in 5 volumes:

- I. 2045 Comprehensive Plan Overview (this volume)
- II. Minidoka County Comprehensive Plan
- III. City of Rupert Comprehensive Plan
- IV. City of Paul Comprehensive Plan
- V. Appendices

Minidoka County and the Cities of Rupert and Paul share much of the same environment, economy, and community resources. They rely heavily on one another for housing, employment, transportation, and other public facilities, along with amenities, and recreational areas. Many residents of unincorporated Minidoka County, Acequia and ~~Minidoka City~~ commute to Rupert, Paul, Heyburn and Burley ~~along with other area towns,~~ to work and to shop. Acequia ~~and Minidoka,~~ a small incorporated ~~cities,~~ are addressed in the Minidoka County Comprehensive Plan. These interconnected communities work together to provide residents with the quality of life that they have enjoyed for so long.

As required by the Idaho Code Section 67-6508, each of the three comprehensive plan volumes consider "previous and existing conditions, trends, desirable goals and objectives, or desirable future situations." Each volume is sorted into 4 chapters (Environment, Economy, Community) and each chapter has 3 sections:

1. Today (existing conditions)
2. Tomorrow (future trends to 2045)
3. Goals, Objectives, and Strategies



A. Setting and History

“The county has unique topography and elevation. Its southern portion runs along the Snake River and was originally part of the riverbed; its northern portion runs over a somewhat higher tableland called the Northside Project; and its extreme northern and eastern boundaries consist of lava flows. Although the surface structure is varied, there is only 180 feet difference in elevation from its lowest point at the southwest corner, 4180 feet elevation, and its highest point in the northeast corner, 4360 feet.”¹

Minidoka County consists of 763 square miles of which approximately 5 square miles is water. Located on the eastern edge of Idaho’s Magic Valley, it is bordered by Blaine County to the north and east, Jerome and Lincoln Counties to the west, and Cassia County to the south (refer to Figure I.1). Towns in Minidoka County include Acequia, Heyburn, Minidoka, Paul and Rupert, along with a small portion of Burley north of the Snake River. Minidoka is a rural county, well-known for its strong agricultural economy dominated by production of sugar beets and potatoes.

The City of Rupert consists of approximately 2 square miles, it is the county seat of Minidoka County and is the largest city with a population of 6,082 at the 2020 census. Rupert is located 45 miles east of Twin Falls, Idaho, 160 miles from Boise, Idaho and 180 miles from Salt Lake City, Utah. Interstate 84 (I-84) is 4.5 miles south of the city center and is accessible via State Highways 24 and 25. These highways provide two separate access points to I-84.

Located six miles due west of Rupert, at the intersection of State Highways 27 and 25, the City of Paul is home to 1,400 people. With the development of I-84 (located 2.5 miles south of Paul), Paul’s prominence as a highway stop diminished, yet it retains a commercial and business presence



Water tank in Rupert Square, 1905.

to serve the surrounding agricultural lands and enterprises, and residents. Land within the city limits comprise less than one square mile.

Minidoka County is located in the Snake River Basin which has been traditionally used by the Shoshone and Bannock tribes as the original people to call this area home. Euroamerican contact began with the fur trade and continued through westward expansion on the Oregon Trail. It wasn’t until 1882 that the Oregon Short Line Railroad line was built, and settlers began making their way into modern day Minidoka County. The winding path of the Snake River was the route of the early pioneers heading west. By the 1900s, government- owned land was made available for settlement through homesteading. None of the dry land

¹ Minidoka County and City of Rupert Comprehensive Plan (2013)



homesteads remained because of a lack of rainfall and other hazards such as frost, wind, weeds, and pests. Those lands that could be irrigated, from the Snake River, were critical to a burgeoning agricultural economy.

On June 17, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Reclamation Act, which created the Minidoka Project resulting in the Minidoka Dam. The Minidoka Dam was built in 1904 and delivery of water to the land, through an expansive system of laterals, canals and drains, began in 1907. With the availability of water for irrigation came an influx of settlers to the area. The Minidoka Project was ultimately responsible for the construction of the towns of Rupert, Heyburn and Minidoka. Due to advertising around the world of new land to be opened with irrigation water, all of the homesteads were taken by January 1905.

Rupert became a village in 1904. It was originally called Wellfirst because it had the only well within miles and people traveled long distances to get their supply of water from the well, which was located in the middle of the Historic Rupert Square Park. Rupert was designated the County Seat in 1913.

Paul was built from the homesteads of James Ellis and Tom Clark in 1910. The town was named Paul in honor of Charles H. Paul, supervising engineer of the Minidoka Project (1909 – 1911). Paul then became the site of the Amalgamated Sugar Factory which has been a staple of the local economy ever since. In 1919 the original water tower was constructed offering water service to the town. However, Paul did not incorporate until 1967.

It wasn't until 1952 that Minidoka County Commissioners issued an order incorporating the village of Acequia². The townsite of Minidoka is not incorporated.

² Acequia "Our Past May Surprise You"



B. The Planning Process (2022 – 2024)

A Comprehensive Plan guides the future of each County and City. While the focus of a Comprehensive Plan is to develop the framework for planning and zoning decisions, the scope of the Plan is much broader. It serves as a road map, encompassing many issues that impact residents including housing, land use, natural resources, and public services among others. This Plan was prepared with the involvement of residents, businesses, nonprofits, and other public agencies. It reflects the issues and concerns of the community.

Public participation was a priority for Minidoka County and the Cities of Rupert and Paul. The public was involved in every step of the planning process, and community feedback was welcomed and encouraged by City and County staff and planning consultants. **Appendix A** provides results of the multiple and varied public involvement activities associated with the Comprehensive Plan update.

The following outreach methods served to both educate the public and other stakeholders on the elements of comprehensive planning and provide multiple avenues for two-way communication and community input. Specific methods used to achieve meaningful citizen engagement included the following activities.



A Minidoka County road and agricultural field



Community Advisory Committee

Working closely with planning consultants, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed to ensure that the interests of the community would guide the planning process. The CAC met three times throughout the process and received communication between meetings. Additionally, key community representatives were interviewed early in the process to gather input and local perceptions regarding conditions in the county and to ensure that the plan was tailored to address concerns and achieve desired outcomes. ~~The planning process was delayed in early 2024 during the state legislative session, where some planning initiatives were considered.~~ In May 2024, the CAC and members of the three Planning and Zoning Commissioners joined for a workshop in which they read through a draft of the Plan and worked together to make further changes and recommendations.



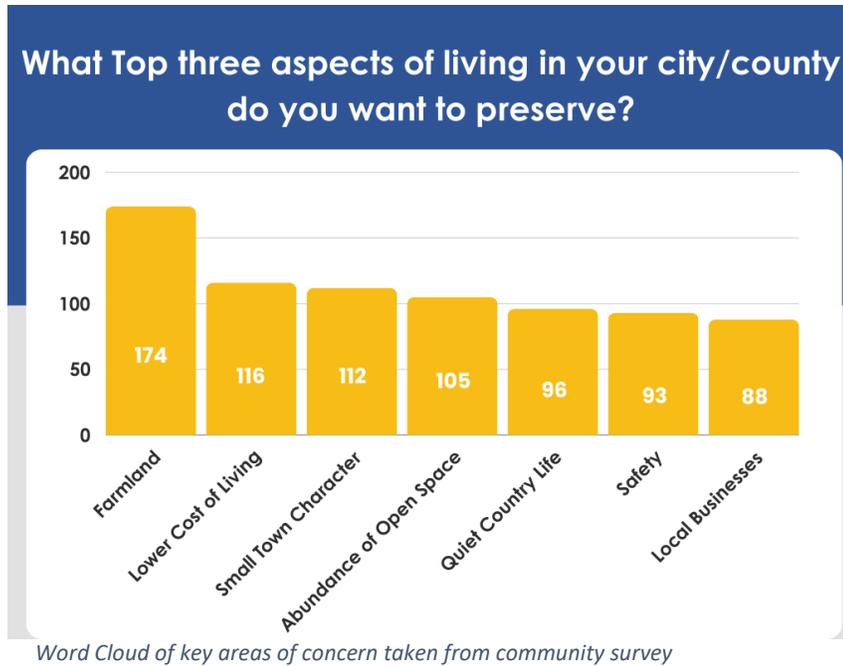
Community Advisory Committee meeting at the Wilson Theater

Community Survey

On April 24, 2023, a ~~bilingual~~ community survey was opened to the public to gather input and opinions concerning various topics in Minidoka County, Rupert, and Paul. The survey was available in both Spanish and English and it remained open until May 22, 2023, giving residents substantial opportunity to participate. The survey received 346 total responses. Of the total respondents, 30.35% live in Rupert, 13.01% in Paul, and 37.57% live outside of City Limits but within Minidoka County.



Word cloud from generated from Survey responses



Public Open House

Minidoka County and the Cities of Rupert and Paul hosted a public open house to share information about the Comprehensive Plan Update. The open house was held Monday, September 11, 2023, at the Minico High School Library. The public was invited to learn about the comprehensive planning process, share key issues, and offer input and provide feedback. Project staff were available to answer questions and address concerns. The open house was attended by 41 people.

Public Hearings

Early in 2025 the Planning and Zoning Commissions held public hearings to consider the Draft Comprehensive Plan. Following the Commissions recommendations, the Cities of Rupert and Paul, and the Board of Minidoka County Commissioners conducted public hearings to consider and approve the updated Comprehensive Plan. **Table IC.1** provides hearing dates and resolutions.

Table IC.1: Plan Approval Hearing Dates

	P&Z Commission Recommendation	City Council	Board of County Commissioners	Resolution Number
Minidoka County				
City of Paul				
City of Rupert				



C. Idaho Code Compliance

Idaho Cities and Counties must prepare and maintain a current comprehensive plan in accordance with *Idaho Code Section 67-6508*. The plan must consider “previous and existing conditions, trends, desirable goals and objectives, or desirable future situations” within 17 separate planning components.

The code allows for the addition of other components as well as removal or grouping of components, provided any such action is explained in the plan. For example, the following components were not included in this plan as they do not apply within Minidoka County: National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors and Public Airport Facilities.

Other plan components were grouped depending on the complexity of the topics. For example, community design and housing were combined with Land Use in all 3 plan volumes. The population and private property rights components appear in this volume as both components apply to all 3 plan volumes. The implementation component appears as Chapter D in all 3 plan volumes. [Table IC.2](#) depicts where each plan component may be found.



Attendees at the Comprehensive Plan's Public Open House, 2023



Table IC.2: Planning Component Matrix

Volume	I Introduction	II Minidoka County	III City of Rupert	IV City of Paul
Idaho Code Components¹	Chapter			
Population	D			
Private Property Rights	E			
School Facilities & Transportation		C	C	C
Economic Development		B	B	B
Land Use		C	B	B
Natural Resources		A	A	A
Hazardous Areas		A	A	A
Public Services, Facilities, & Utilities		C	C	C
Transportation		B	B	B
Recreation		A	A	C
Special Areas or Sites		A		A
Housing		C	B	B
Community Design		C	B	B
Agriculture		B	A	B
Implementation		D	D	D

¹Idaho Code Section 67-6508



D. Population

At the outset of this planning process, Minidoka County commissioned a socio-economic report to consider four planning components – Population, Housing, Agriculture and Economic Development – in detail. That report is provided as **Appendix B** in volume V of this plan.

Growth is a common area of concern; the demographics of a region affect the size and composition of the labor force and the overall economy. Stagnant population growth can weaken the area's economic base and create skill shortages, whereas accelerated growth can cause strains on community infrastructure and development but provide opportunity for business and talent attraction.

As of 2021 (latest data available), there were roughly 21,400 people living in Minidoka County with approximately 6,000 residing in the city limits of Rupert (the county seat and largest city in the County) and approximately 1,400 in Paul. The other cities situated in Minidoka County (Heyburn, Acequia and Minidoka) account for 3,910 residents, leaving the balance of the County at 10,090 people who live outside any city limits.

Table ID.1: Demographic Data

	Minidoka County	Rupert	Paul	Idaho
Historical Population Change (2016-2021)	5.2%	5.1%	2.3%	2.6%
Median Household Income (U.S. \$69,021)	\$56,140	\$45,227	\$54,375	\$63,377
Poverty Rate	18.0%	28.6%	10.5%	11.4%
Median Age	35	31	38	37

Until 2021, Minidoka County consistently witnessed gradual growth at approximately 1%, equivalent to an annual increase of around 120 residents. However, in 2021, this pattern shifted, resulting in the addition of 580 people, with a net gain of approximately 520 new residents when accounting for births and deaths.

Over the past decade, the population growth of the City of Paul has experienced significant fluctuations, primarily due to its smaller population size. The most notable expansion occurred between 2011 and 2016, with a remarkable surge of nearly 43% (rising from 959 residents in 2011 to 1,367 by 2016). More recently, the annual growth rate has moderated to about 2.3%. Notably, there is an unusual data point in the records, as there was a substantial increase of 223 people in 2020, followed by a decrease of 144 individuals in 2021.



Household income includes income of all people aged 15 and older occupying the same housing unit. Income levels in Minidoka County are 13% lower than the state and 24% lower than the nation.

Poverty rates are measured to gauge the health of regional economies because of the correlation between economic, employment, and income growth. Using federal poverty guidelines, 18% of residents in Minidoka County are living in poverty. The rate has risen in the past decade from 15% in 2011. The City of Rupert struggles with persistent poverty levels.

Table ID.2 shows the percentage of people experiencing poverty in Minidoka County, the cities of Rupert and Paul, and the state of Idaho from 2016-2021. While Idaho's poverty status has dropped in 5 years, Minidoka County, Rupert, and Paul have stayed largely the same.

Table ID.2: Poverty Status 2016-2021

Poverty Status	2016	2021
Minidoka County	17.8%	18.0%
City of Rupert	27.4%	28.5%
City of Paul	10.9%	10.5%
Idaho	15.2%	11.0%

The Metts Group, 2023

E. Private Property Rights

The residents of Minidoka County deeply value private property rights, therefore a central principle while preparing this plan was to protect, and otherwise avoid negative impacts to, private property rights.

The plan itself is not regulatory in nature and should not "adversely impact values or create unnecessary technical limitations on the use of property." (Idaho Code Section 67-6508 (a)). This document does include recommendations regarding land use policies and programs, and so if future regulations, restrictions or conditions ensue during the implementation of this plan, the Office of the Attorney General's checklist for private property rights should be referenced (see **Appendix C**).

Each Planning and Zoning Commission should undertake a periodic review of this comprehensive plan and all applicable land use regulations to ensure that no private property rights are violated and that the plan continues to protect the community's health, safety, and welfare.