



City of Grand Forks

Staff Report

Committee of the Whole –February 9, 2026

City Council – February 17, 2026

Agenda Item: Adoption of preferred growth rate for the City of Grand Forks

Submitted By: Teri Kouba, Senior Planner, The Forks MPO

Staff Recommended Action: Adoption of 0.8% annual growth rate for the City of Grand Forks.

Committee Recommended Action: Motion by Osowski, second by Berg to move staff recommendation to City Council with a recommendation to approve. Motion carried unanimously.

Council Action:

Motion by Sande, second by Fridolfs to approve the recommendation.
Motion passed unanimously.

BACKGROUND:

Before the Forks MPO starts work on the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), we gather the data needed to support the development of the MTP. A foundational piece of data is the population and job growth in the MPO planning area between the base year and the final year of the MTP. The upcoming MTP will have a base year of 2025 and a final year of 2055. Staff is recommending that the City Council adopt the 0.8% annual growth rate for this study.

In October 2025 the MPO contracted with SRF and Praxis to help with the analysis of growth in the MPO Planning Area. We have invited local experts who work closely with job growth and economic development to be part of a steering

committee. We have held several focus group conversations to obtain input from a broader range of subject matter experts, to obtain a robust perspective in the community. SRF and Praxis have collected data from the Census and other sources to establish existing job and household conditions.

A range of growth rate estimates have been identified including Low, Baseline and High rate of growth. The Baseline annual growth rate of 0.8% population growth per year, resulting in 72,818 persons in the City of Grand Forks by the year 2055 is the most likely to occur based on past growth trends, comparisons of projections in North Dakota and Minnesota, and the consultant’s analysis consultation with area industry experts.

The adopted growth rate will be used to establish housing, population, and employment projections for the years 2040 and 2055 which will be incorporated into a travel demand model for the region. This model is used in part to determine future transportation needs in the forthcoming MTP. This plan will identify a financially constrained list of transportation needs out to the year 2055 for the region, qualifying them for federal transportation funds. Given the plan is financially constrained having a most likely to occur growth rate is important. Projecting population too low and it may reflect not enough demand for transportation projects in the future, however projecting too high can be equally as counter productive as it may identify transportation needs that may not be needed taking funding away from other projects that are more likely to occur.

Historical Growth Rates for Cities and States

Period	Average Annual Growth Rate			
	Grand Forks ¹	East Grand Forks ¹	North Dakota ²	Minnesota ³
1991-2024	0.58%	0.07%	0.66%	0.86%
2001-2024	0.82%	0.63%	0.91%	0.72%
2011-2024	0.88%	0.26%	1.23%	0.70%

Source:

1. Average percentages derived from decennial Census counts and ACS estimates.
2. Average percentages derived from single-year estimates produced by the North Dakota State Demographer / State Data Center.
3. Average percentages derived from single-year estimates produced by the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

The next steps will be to use the established land uses to divide the growth into Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs) so the data can be used in the MPO’s traffic demand model.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF FACT:

- The 2025 estimated population for Grand Forks City is 59,405.
- The growth rates that the analysis finds reasonable are:

Forks Area Population Change 2025 - 2055

Area	Annual Change			Total Change		
	Low	Baseline	High	Low	Baseline	High
MPA	0.5%	0.7%	1.2%	14%	22%	35%
MSA	0.1%	0.3%	0.6%	2%	8%	18%
Grand Forks City	0.5%	0.8%	1.2%	14%	23%	36%
East Grand Forks City	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%	14%	19%	26%
Grand Forks County	0.3%	0.5%	0.9%	9%	16%	28%
Polk County	-0.4%	-0.3%	-0.2%	-13%	-10%	-6%

Source: SRF Forecast Model

- Forks Area Population Forecasts

Area	2025	2055		
		Low	Medium	High
MPA	70,382	80,464	86,000	94,842
MSA	104,424	106,763	113,195	123,190
Grand Forks City	59,405	67,823	72,818	80,763
East Grand Forks City	9,113	10,428	10,831	11,505
Grand Forks County	73,340	79,755	85,299	93,877
Polk County	31,084	27,008	27,896	29,313

Source: SRF Forecast Model

- Forks Area Population Change Forecasts

Area	2025	2055		
		Low	Medium	High
MPA	70,382	+10,082	+15,618	+24,460
MSA	104,424	+2,339	+8,771	+18,766
Grand Forks City	59,405	+8,418	+13,413	+21,358
East Grand Forks City	9,113	+1,315	+1,718	+2,392
Grand Forks County	73,340	+6,415	+11,959	+20,537
Polk County	31,084	-4,076	-3,188	-1,771

Source: SRF Forecast Model

SUPPORT MATERIAL:

Presentation

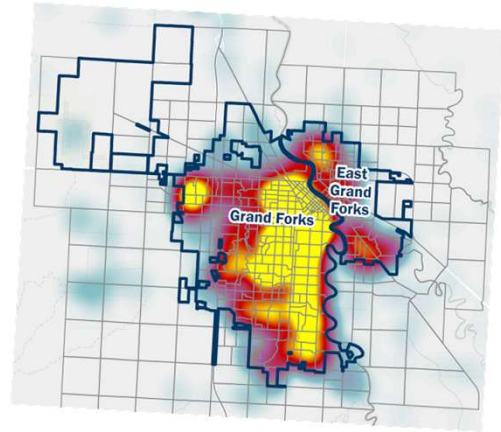
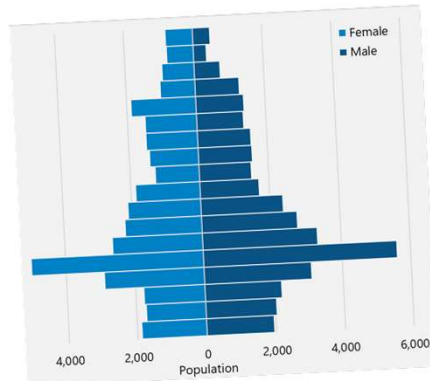
Project webpage:

https://www.theforksmo.org/plans_projects/2055_socioeconomic_study

Socioeconomic Study

Grand Forks Committee of the Whole

February 9, 2026



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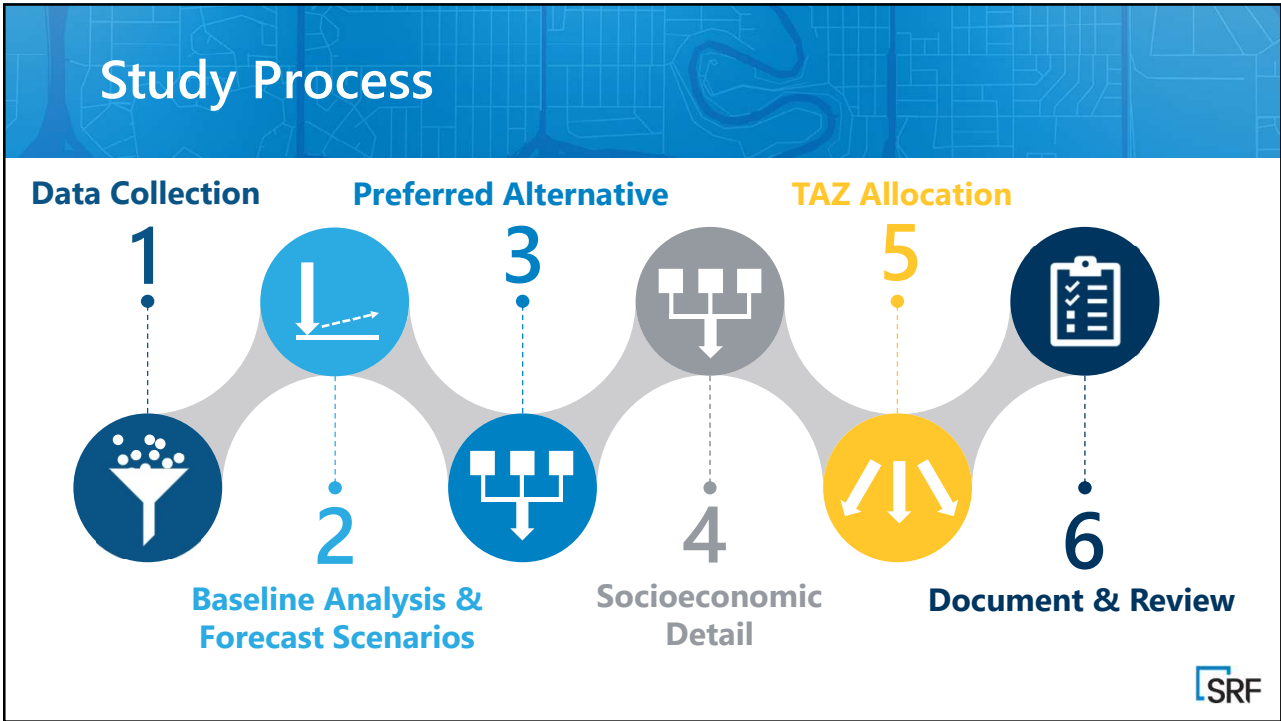
Tonight's Goal

- Recommend a preferred Year 2055 forecast and annual growth rate to adopt for Grand Forks.

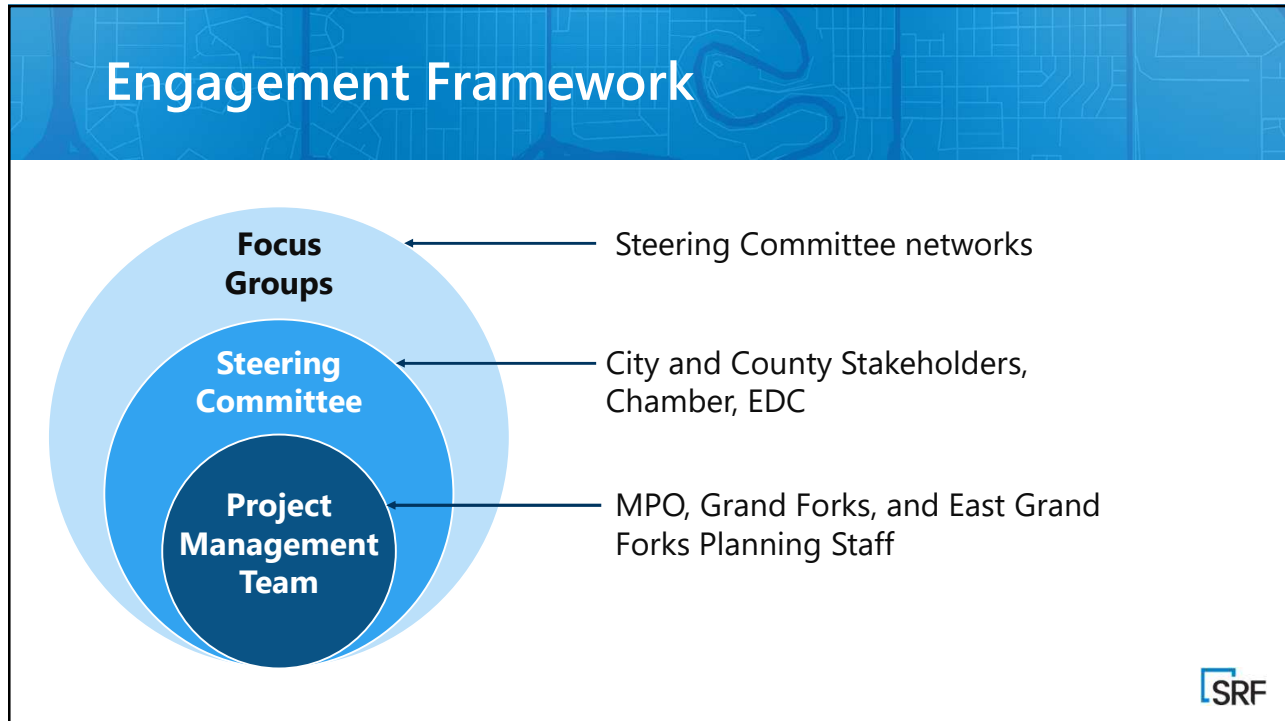
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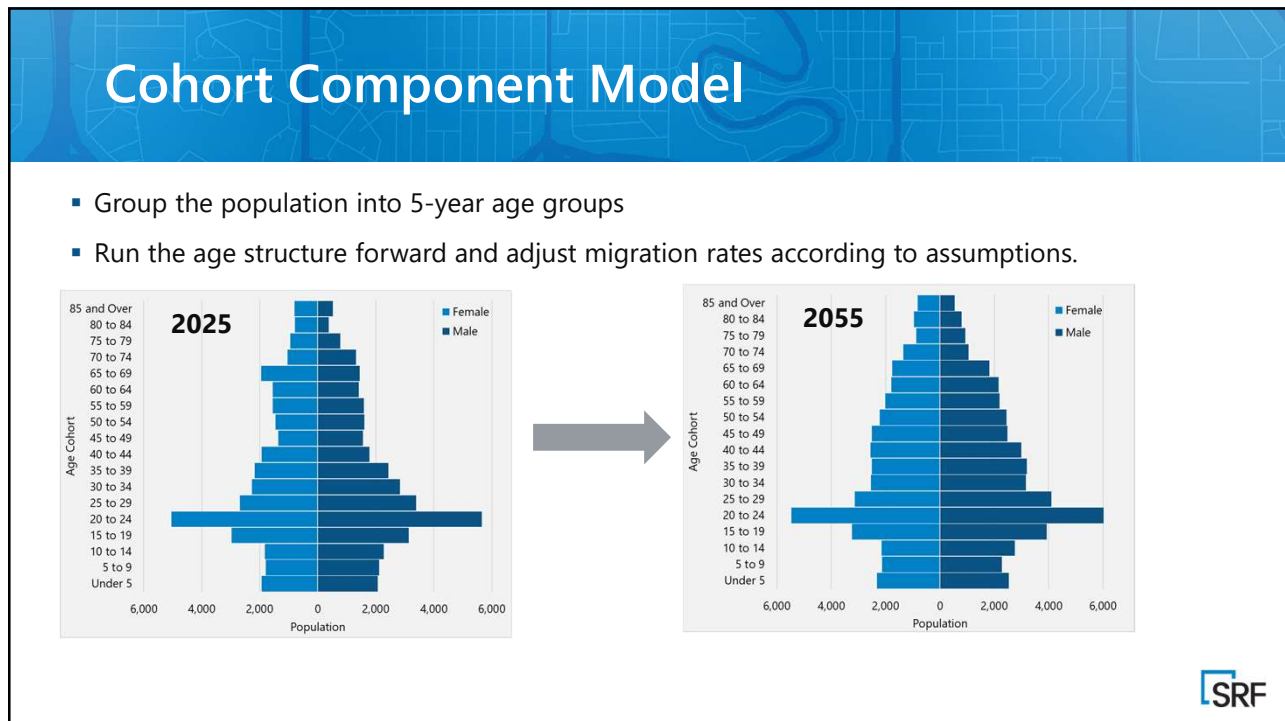
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Historical Population Trends

Period	Grand Forks	East Grand Forks	North Dakota	Minnesota
1991-2024	0.58%	0.07%	0.66%	0.86%
2001-2024	0.82%	0.63%	0.91%	0.72%
2011-2024	0.88%	0.26%	1.23%	0.70%

*Source: Decennial Census, ACS (5-Year), single-year estimates from ND State Data Center and Minnesota State Demographic Center



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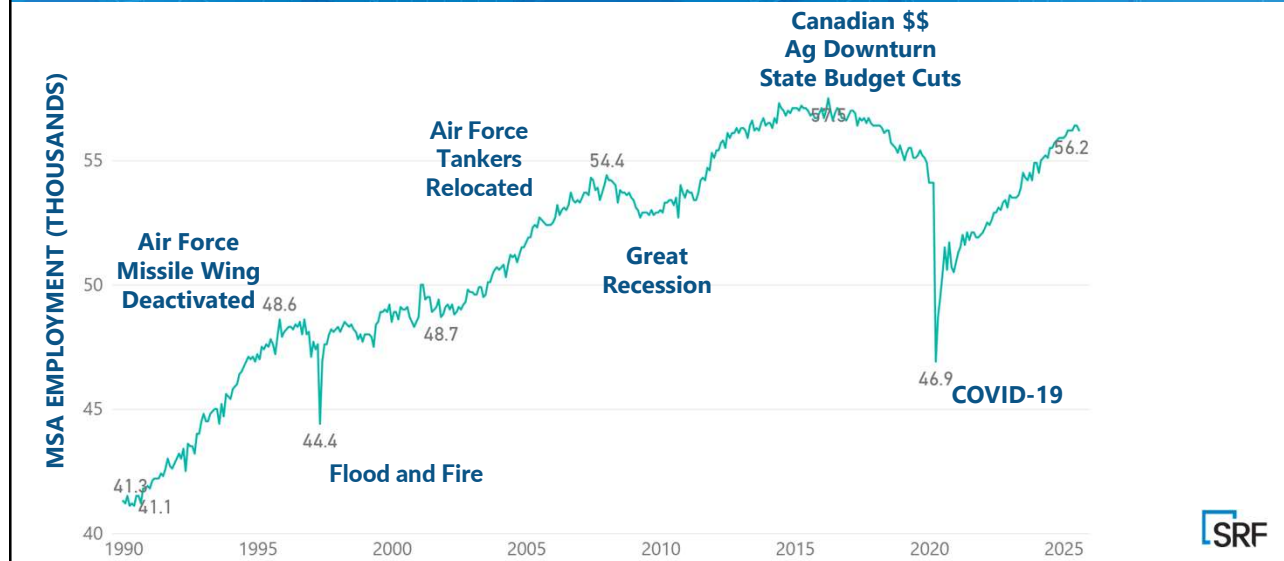
Contextual Factors

- Census has historically undercounted this market with its interim population estimates
- Age structure and birth/death rates are basis for a positive growth projection
- Current housing market trends suggest growth pressure and in-migration recently
- Over past decade "primary" sector industries have outperformed "consumer" sector
- Steady growth in the face of economic shocks over the past 30 years



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Historical Shocks



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Future Economic Inflection Points

- Can manufacturing continue to drive growth?
- Can continued enrollment growth at UND sustain the region?
- Is Autonomous, Defense, and Space Systems the next growth lever?
- Does Health Care flip from a headwind to a tailwind?
- Will future Air Force missions spur growth?
- Will community attractiveness and quality of life assets be an attractant force in the future?

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Focus Groups

- Four meetings
- 26 participants
- Format
 - ▢ Assessment of recent growth or decline
 - ▢ Identifying key trends pushing favor of and against the region's growth along with key opportunities for growth
 - ▢ Impressions about the region's hospitability for growth
 - ▢ A point-in-time rating of the region's growth potential

Participants: Where do you live?

Location	Percentage
Grand Forks	45%
East Grand Forks	41%
Grand Forks County outside of Grand Forks city	5%
Outside of Grand Forks and Polk County	5%
Polk County outside of East Grand Forks	5%

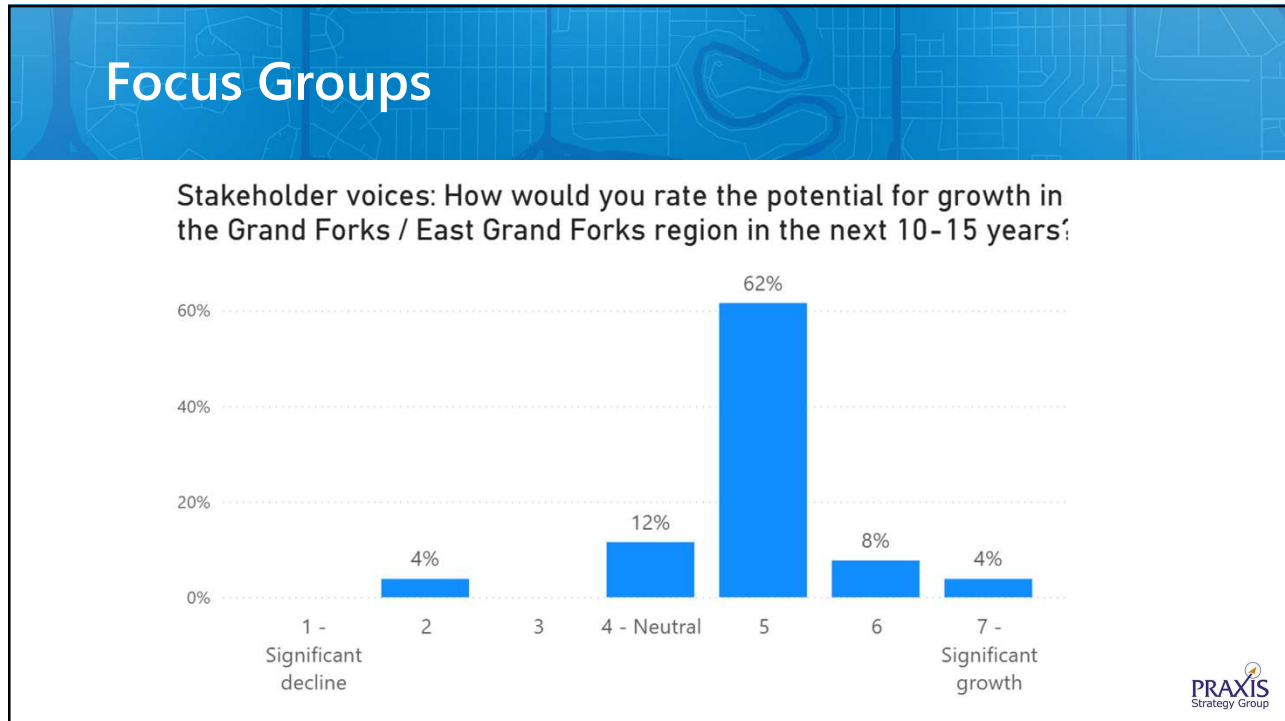
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Focus Groups

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Growth is real but deliberate. 2. Housing is the primary constraint on growth. 3. Grand Forks and East Grand Forks are on divergent trajectories. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Defense, autonomous systems industries, and space are the strongest growth engines. 5. For growth, quality of life framing matters more than raw population. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Demographic headwinds are real but understood. 7. Constraints on infrastructure is becoming a potential growth risk.

In a Nutshell: The Grand Forks–East Grand Forks region is experiencing steady, resilient growth constrained primarily by housing and infrastructure capacity, with Grand Forks capturing most near-term gains and East Grand Forks facing structural headwinds.

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Grand Forks Growth Scenarios

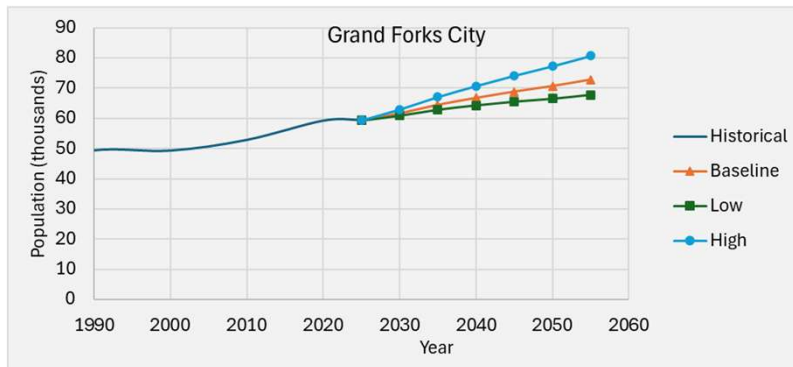
Period	Grand Forks City Migration Rate	Average Annual Growth Rate	2055 Population	30-Year Change	30-Year Percent Change
Low	2.6%	0.5%	67,823	+8,418	14%
Baseline	3.7%	0.8%	72,818	+13,413	23%
High	5.4%	1.2%	80,763	+21,358	36%

2025 Population Estimate: 59,405

SRF

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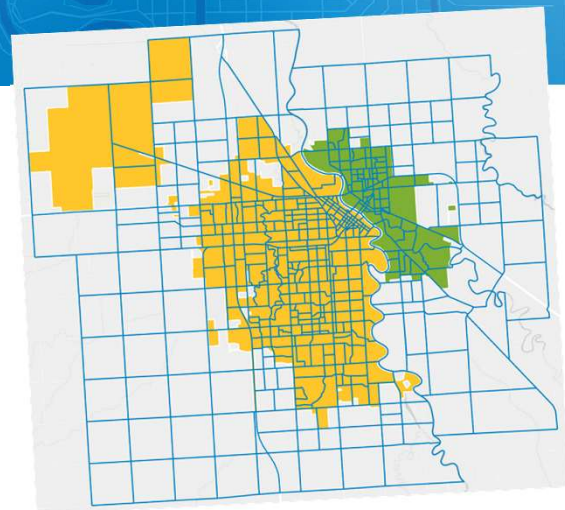
Grand Forks Growth Scenarios



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Discussion

1. Adopted forecast could be baseline, low, or high, or a modified growth rate.
2. Adopted forecast will impact the MTP travel demand model and future roadway improvements.



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