

## **COMMUNITY BACKGROUND**

# **CHAPTER 1 COMMUNITY BACKGROUND**

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### I. PREFACE TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chaska's 2030 Comprehensive Plan guides the direction of the City in several major areas: land use, transportation, environment, parks and trails, and public facilities. Each of these areas is examined in a *comprehensive* manner, in order to take advantage of opportunities, avoid problems, and work toward building a stronger community.

This Comprehensive Plan is a *general policy document*. It reflects Chaska's value system and philosophy, and acts as an overall framework for the future. As a *guiding tool*, it provides a system for measuring progress, gives direction for both everyday and more complex decisions, and helps set financial priorities.

Chaska's Comprehensive Plan is intended to be flexible and responsive to changing conditions. It needs to be continually referenced, updated, and used as a guide. It functions as an overall course or path, and is intended to provide direction, rather than dictating specific activities or precise decision-making. The Plan helps city leaders in developing policies, programs, ordinances, capital improvement plans, and budgets. These more specific implementation tools will take into account current circumstances and financial priorities, along with the long-range outlook and goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

### II. DEVELOPMENT / HISTORY / TRENDS

#### A. EARLY HISTORY

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 1900s, Chaska's population level held around 2,000 persons.

#### B. RECENT HISTORY

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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. (See Chapter 2.) 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 1990s, 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

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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.

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### III. NATURAL FEATURES

The Minnesota River Valley and two of its tributaries - East and West Chaska Creeks, have shaped Chaska's primary natural features. The watershed boundary of East Chaska Creek is generally coincident with Chaska's municipal boundary, which was purposely established as such during the large-scale annexations of the 1960s. This provided a logical gravity sewer service area for the Metropolitan Council's pumping station, located on the Minnesota River near the Carver County Courthouse. The recently annexed area in southwest Chaska (former Chaska Township) is located within the West Chaska Creek watershed, which is proposed to be served by municipal sanitary sewer as the area develops over the next twenty years.

The main and tributary channels of East and West Chaska Creeks have formed an extensive wooded ravine system throughout most of the City. The steep, wooded Minnesota River bluff line is very apparent as it rises about 100 feet from the wide river valley and floodplain below. In addition to the wooded ravines and bluffs, significant stands of upland hardwood forest are scattered through the City and the planned western annexation areas. These woodlands which were never cultivated are remnants of the "Big Woods Region" located between the "Great Prairie" in southwest Minnesota and the Coniferous Forest in north/northeast Minnesota.

Chaska contains a wide variety of wetlands including lakes, ponds and marshes. Several federal, state and local agencies have regulatory powers for protection of these resources. The Minnesota DNR has classified four lakes in Chaska as "public waters, which are Lake Bavaria, Hazeltine Lake, Chaska Lake, and Courthouse Lake. The Minnesota River and the main channels of East and West Chaska Creeks are also designated as public waters. East Chaska Creek includes Lake Grace, Jonathan Lake, McKnight Lake, and Big Woods Lake. In addition to protecting disruption to these waters themselves, the DNR also regulates land development within delineated shorelands adjacent to the waters.

The City's topography is characterized by level to gently rolling land within the Minnesota River Valley lowlands, with rolling to hilly terrain above the bluff. In relative terms, Eastern Carver County including Chaska is not regarded as a prime agricultural (cropland) area due partly to its irregular terrain and its creek and wetlands systems. The central and western parts of Carver County contain more prime agricultural land than the east portion. Several active farms and a

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significant inventory of prime cropland still exist within Chaska, primarily in the recently annexed land in southwest Chaska (former Chaska Township) and the West Chaska Creek watershed.

Like most older communities along the Minnesota River, Chaska has suffered substantial property damage from periodic floods within the river valley. The City constructed a levee around the historic downtown area after the major flood of 1952 but five feet of water overtopped that levee in 1965. Congress authorized a major flood control project in 1976 but construction did not start until 1989 with the final stage being completed in 1998. This new levee and related creek diversion projects protected the City from damage during the major floods of 1993 and 1997. Properties previously located in the floodplain no longer need flood insurance, and State and Federal restrictions on expanding and remodeling buildings have been lifted.

### Great Chaska Floods



1881



1909



1944

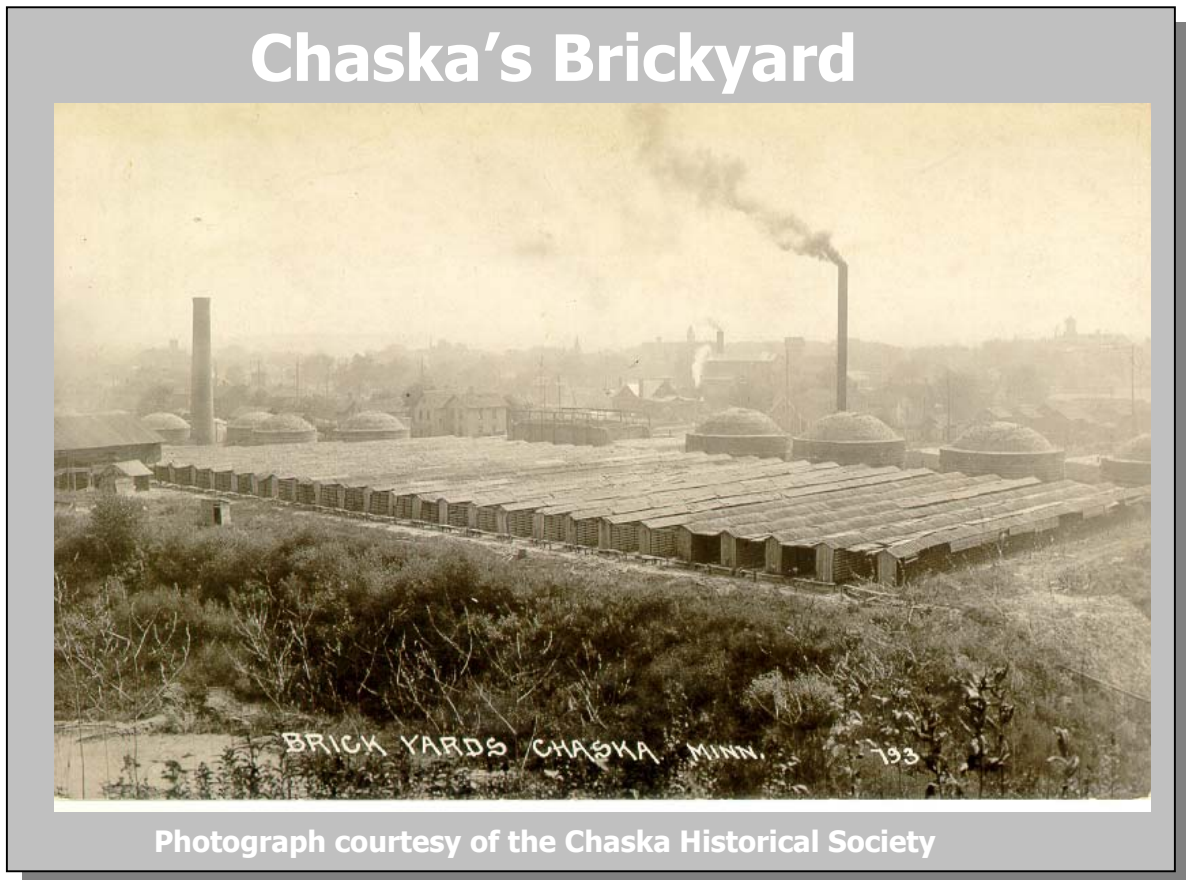


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### IV. CHASKA'S BRICK HERITAGE

One of the area's natural features that led to a thriving brick making industry in the latter 1800s was an abundance of high quality clay. From 1857 to 1895 brick production was a major industry in Chaska with up to 11 brickyards in operation. The severe depression in the early 1890s closed most of the yards, but the Klein brickyard continued operating until the early 1970s. The leading characteristic of Chaska brick is its buff, yellow color.

The City's brick making heritage is most notably evident in Chaska's downtown area but also throughout Carver County. Chaska bricks were also transported by boat and railroad to other parts of the region including Minneapolis and St. Paul for use in many of its early buildings. Another reminder of the early brick industry is the several "clay holes" in lower Chaska, which are now filled with water and serve as valued visual and recreational amenities.



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It is interesting to note that the present channel of East Chaska Creek below the Minnesota River bluff was man made by diverting the flowage from what is now Assumption Creek in Chanhassen to serve Chaska's early brick making industry. In 1997, the channel was again diverted as part of the Corps of Engineers' flood control project to carry heavy flowage directly to the Minnesota River thereby bypassing lower Chaska's former floodplain area.

Arguably, the most notable legacy of Chaska's early years is its brick making industry which is clearly evident in numerous residential, business and public buildings in the City and surrounding area. Awareness of the importance of this heritage has increased in recent years by both City officials and residents. Preservation and rehabilitation of Chaska brick buildings has been encouraged by the City and restoration of numerous Chaska brick downtown commercial buildings have also been financially assisted by the City. Several new structures including the City Hall have been designed to reflect downtown Chaska's historic character including the use of brick that resembles or complements the original local product.

### **V. CHASKA'S PLANNING HISTORY**

Although there was a certain amount of planning involved in platting the original town site in 1854, the first formal comprehensive plan was adopted by the City in 1967. The impetus for that plan was two-fold: 1) the general country-wide trend toward city planning that started in post World War II years and that resulted in federal financial assistance to communities coming out of the Housing Act of 1954, and 2) the large scale annexation that occurred in Chaska during the 1960's.

The first zoning ordinance and map were adopted in 1961, preceding the initial comprehensive plan. At that time the corporate limits of the City was largely restricted to lower Chaska below the bluff. Today, a community's comprehensive plan is prepared first and the zoning ordinance is then structured to help implement the plan's policies and objectives.

The second comprehensive plan came about as a result of the 1976 Land Planning Act, which required Metro communities to prepare or update their plans to be consistent with Metro Council's new Metropolitan Development and Investment Framework. To be sure, there was a local need for updating the plan anyway as a result of the initiation of Jonathan New Town in the latter 1960s and early 1970s. This second plan was adopted in 1982 and was labeled "Chaska

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1990 Comprehensive Plan". That document was updated in the early 1990s and re-titled "Chaska 2000 Comprehensive Plan". In 2000, the next update of the Comprehensive Plan took place, as required by State statute, and was re-titled "Chaska 2020 Comprehensive Plan".

Finally, the document contained herein represents the latest update and targets the year 2030 as the future planning horizon. The reasons for this latest planning effort is similar to the City's second plan — a mandate from Metro Council to make local plans consistent with its updated Regional Development Framework which was adopted in January 2004 and amended in December 2006, coupled with Chaska's rapid growth and changing conditions.

Theoretically, a community should update its comprehensive plan at least every 10 years and more often if it is undergoing rapid development. In general, Chaska has updated its basic development guide in a timely manner through the years.

### **VI. REGIONAL SETTING**

Chaska is located about 18 miles southwest of downtown Minneapolis (as the crow flies) on the Minnesota River. Its primary roadway connections to the metro area proper are new U.S. Highway 212 through central Chaska, CSAH 61 (old Highway 212) through lower Chaska, State Highways 5 and 7 to the north of the City, and U.S. Highway 169 south of the Minnesota River. County Highway 14 (Pioneer Trail) also serves as a secondary metro connector. State Highway 41, the primary north/south route through Chaska, connects to all of these highways.

Until recently, Chaska was considered to be poorly served by regional highways because none of the roadways directly serving Chaska were four lane facilities and most of these roadways were congested during peak hours. The completion of new Highway 212 as a full freeway in 2008 through central Chaska, which provides a regional freeway link to the I-494/694 beltway, dramatically changed this situation. Chaska has three access points to new Highway 212 with full interchanges at Highway 41, Engler Boulevard, and County Road 11/147 (at the City's border with the City of Carver).

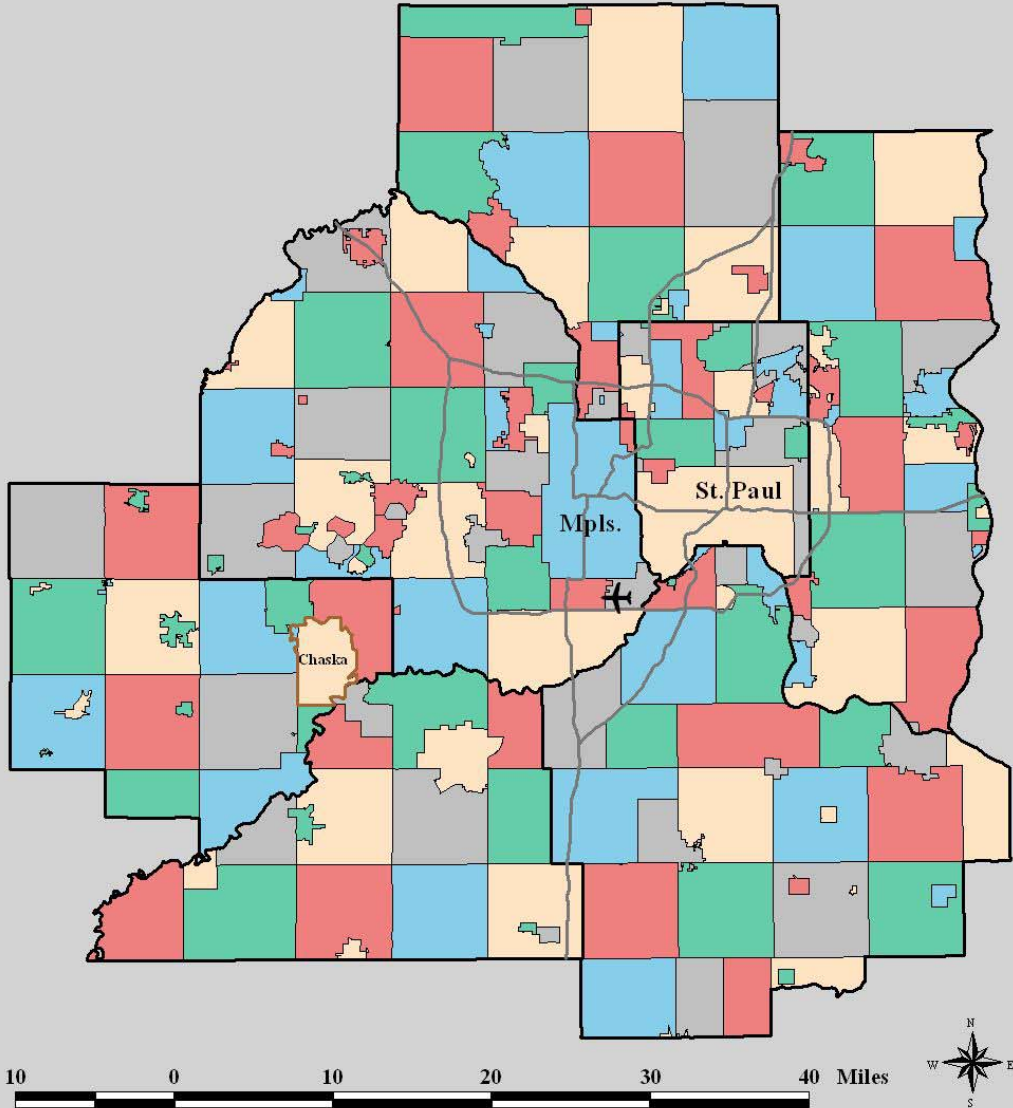
Chaska continues to be a developing community at the edge of the Twin Cities' metro area expansion, as was noted earlier. Technically, it is a "third ring suburb" but the City's primary goal is to "maintain its unique, historic, small town

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image, and sense of community while supporting well planned, orderly growth. In short, Chaska recognizes and supports its membership in the larger metropolitan community, but places its individual identity, strong sense of community and small town character at the core of its Mission Statement and Core Strategies presented on the following pages.

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# Twin Cities Metropolitan Area



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### VII. MISSION STATEMENT

#### **To be the "Best Small Town in Minnesota"**

The primary mission of the City of Chaska is to enhance and maintain the high quality of life of its "share holders", the citizens of Chaska, which has been nurtured in the community since its inception in 1854. Consistent with its mission the City will strive to maintain its unique, historic, small town image and sense of community while supporting well-planned, orderly growth. The mechanism for obtaining these objectives is through the use of proper community planning, enforcement of local ordinances and State statutes, economic development, and provision of quality municipal services.

Community growth is to be emphasized in the area of quality industrial and commercial development. Quality, balanced residential development is also encouraged consistent with local demands.

Orderly growth should promote expansion of the City's tax base, supply employment opportunities, and provide for reasonable diverse shopping opportunities.

The City will strive to provide quality, basic municipal services in the areas of Police, Fire, Public Works, Utilities and Parks & Recreation while maintaining an average to below average property tax level. Although the City will generally not look to provide "luxury municipal services", it will seek to provide all services in the most cost effective mode and administer these services to the citizens of Chaska fairly and equitably. The City will attempt to structure service delivery in order to allow that those benefiting from various services also assume the financial responsibility. When economically feasible the City will support innovative and creative service concepts.

In pursuing these goals the City Council will attempt to be pro-active and strive to initiate policy consistent with these objectives. Citizens will be viewed as customers of City services and a priority will be given to obtaining feedback and communicating with our customers. Quality professional staff will be encouraged to implement on a day-to-day basis the overall mission and goals established by the City Council.

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### VIII. CORE STRATEGIES

#### A. CHASKA'S HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE IS ENHANCED

- Diverse leisure opportunities are available, including artistic, cultural, and sporting events.
- A variety of housing and employment opportunities are provided, permitting residents to live and work within the community.
- A quality educational system is supported.
- Natural resources, open spaces, and parks are improved and protected, and environmental preservation is a commitment.
- Residents experience the positive aspects of both a small town and the readily accessible cosmopolitan offerings of the Twin Cities.
- Citizen efforts to maintain and strengthen their neighborhoods are encouraged.
- Residents have a sense of security; crime is not perceived to be high.

#### B. TAXPAYERS PERCEIVE THEY ARE GETTING QUALITY COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICE

- Quality, basic, municipal services are provided.
- City property taxes are in the lower 25% of Twin Cities' communities.
- Municipal services are provided in an innovative cost-effective manner.
- City services are structured so that those benefiting from a service assume its financial responsibility.
- The City recognizes that quality, effective services are provided by committed, professional employees who are encouraged to actively participate in decision-making and are given adequate resources to complete their job.
- Chaska's Electric Utility meets its mission of providing reliable electric service, with competitive rates and contributes profits to reduce property tax levels.
- Customer opinions and ideas are surveyed regularly and are valued.

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### C. WELL PLANNED AND ORDERLY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS A PRIORITY

- New residential and industrial development is planned so that it has a positive impact on the community's quality of life and supports Chaska's small town values.
- Older housing and commercial uses are maintained, renewed, or developed.
- A quality, corporate community is aggressively promoted, resulting in a strong employment and tax base.
- New development is consistent with Chaska's 2030 Comprehensive Plan and balanced with the capacity of the community's infrastructure.
- A priority is placed on developments that enhance community interaction.
- Standards are enforced to improve the quality and appearance of buildings and open spaces.
- Public infrastructure is well maintained and future capacity expansions are anticipated.

### D. A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SMALL TOWN VALUES ARE MAINTAINED

- Residents have reasons to be proud of Chaska.
- Chaska's community values are supported and practiced.
- Citizens are provided opportunities to meet and interact with each other through both formal and informal activities.
- Citizens and businesses have opportunities for involvement in the community and in the local decision making process.
- Chaska's history is preserved and understood.
- Citizens actively participate in civic, religious, and other volunteer activities.
- An emphasis on family, neighborhood, and intergenerational interaction is nurtured.
- Meaningful communication with municipal customers and citizens is a priority.

### E. COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

- Long range, strategic planning is a priority in all areas.
- Decision makers are proactive, as opposed to reactive, with an action orientation.
- An organizational environment, which encourages entrepreneurship and risk taking, is supported.

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- Continual efforts are made to cooperate and coordinate services and planning with the Chaska School District, Carver County, and neighboring communities.
- Quality customer service is a key priority.
- Employees are empowered to provide quality service.
- Positive relationships among elected officials are maintained within and outside the community.
- Employees are recognized as the organization's key resource.