

First Impression Report

Generated for: City of Buhl, MN



CEDA

Community and Economic
Development Associates

Introduction



The purpose of this First Impression Report is to provide the City of Buhl with information on assets and opportunities as observed by an objective, first-time visitor.

This report does not constitute a proposed work plan and may include items that the City has previously discussed or declined to move forward. The report should instead be viewed as first-hand observations and suggestions ascertained and conveyed by visitors through a community development lens.

This report was authored by Joshua Schuetz. The date of the community visit was 4/16/2024.

About CEDA: CEDA was created in 1986 as a private, 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation then called the Southeastern Minnesota Development Corporation. In 2010, the agency became Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) as a result of increased interest and inquiries received from communities outside of the agency's original service area of southeast Minnesota. The name change reflects CEDA's commitment to provide services that fit the needs of any rural community. CEDA provides ongoing and/or project based economic/community development, grant writing, and planning services to rural communities and counties. Our team brings with it over 200 years of collective development experience.

Community Demographics



The subsequent section of this report outlines demographic data on the City. This is relevant because it provides perspective as it relates to population density, resources, location, and more.

Beyond typically viewed data such as median household income and population, this analysis offers workforce information such as major industries, commute times and flow, primary jobs, etc. Because workforce augmentation and retention is a major part of community and economic development efforts, this information is useful and timely.

All data acquired for the creation of this section was collected from the US Census Bureau's Data and On the Map tools. Population numbers will be pulled from the State Demographer's office to offer a more current and accurate portrayal.

Community Demographics

Buhl, MN



Population

Population in City: 952

Population in County:

Households in City: 418

St. Louis County: 200,916

Location

Buhl is located in the center of St. Louis County, between the cities of Chisholm and Virginia and 71 miles from Duluth.

Transportation

U.S. Highway 169 runs east & west on the southern side of Buhl. The highway connects Buhl to the nearby cities of Chisholm and Virginia. Arrowhead Transit provides bus service in the City.

Other

Median Household Income: \$55,923

Median Home Value: \$113,000

Median Gross Rent: \$1,021

Workforce Analysis

Age Groups of Workers:

29 and younger:	28.0%
30 - 54:	50.5%
55 and older:	21.4%

Workers by Earnings:

\$34,999 or less:	16.4%
\$35,000- \$74,999:	55.1%
\$75,000 or more:	28.5%

Workers by Education Level:

Less than High School	6.0%
High School Diploma or Equivalent:	43.8%
Some College, No Degree:	20%
Associate's Degree:	12.0%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	16.2%
Graduate or Professional Degree:	2.0%

Workers by Sex:

-	Male: 44.5%
	Female: 55.5%

Workforce Analysis

Workers by Occupation

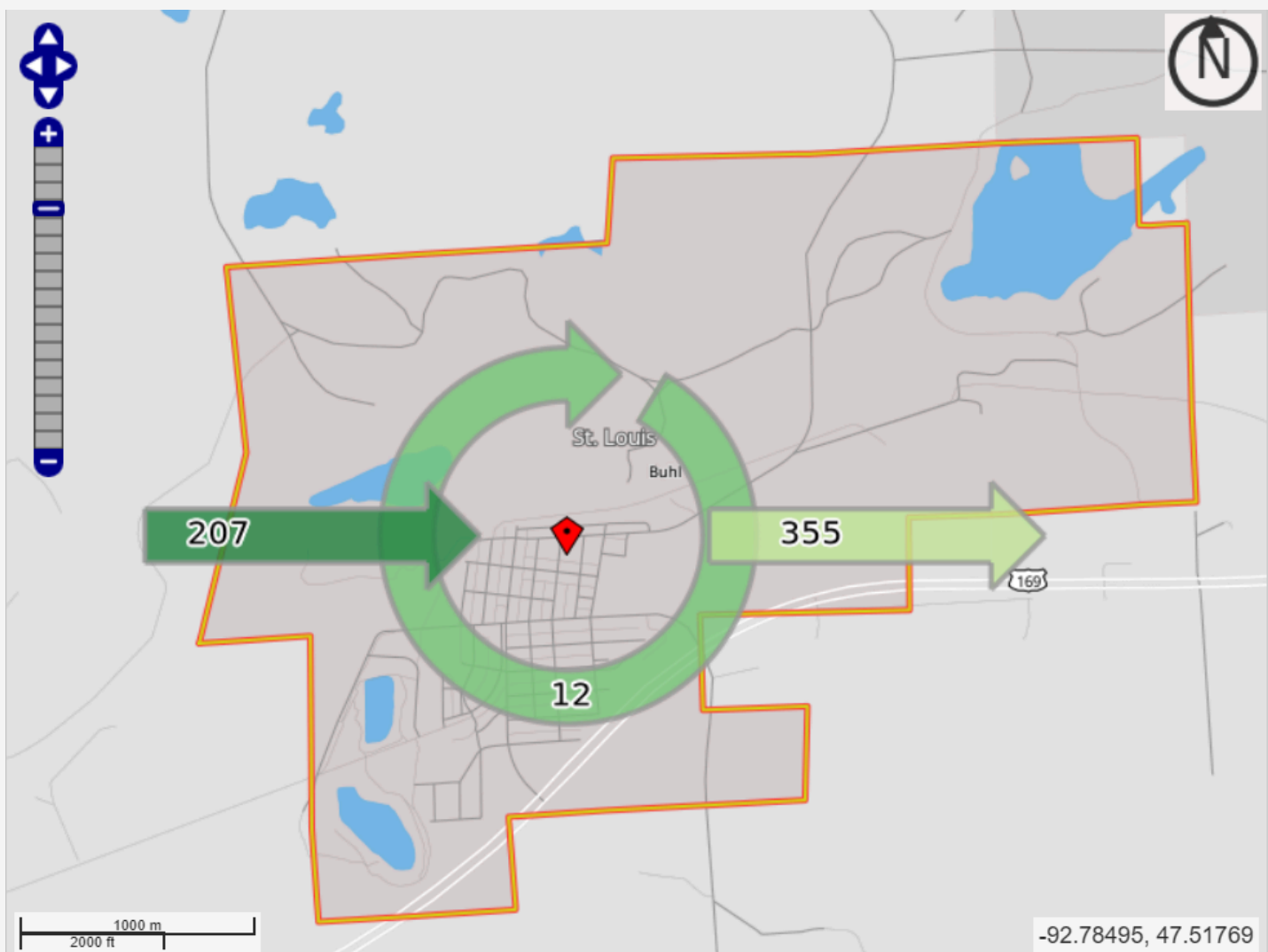
Industry Sector	Number of Workers	Percentage of Workers
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	17	3.4%
Construction	7	1.4%
Manufacturing	86	17.2%
Wholesale trade	12	2.4%
Retail trade	90	18.0%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	8	1.6%
Information	0	0.0%
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	7	1.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	18	3.6%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	171	34.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	40	8.0%
Other services, except public administration	17	3.4%
Public administration	26	5.2%

In-Flow/Out-Flow Analysis

The map below shows that the City of Buhl has jobs filled by non-residents, residents leave the City for work and residents live and work in the community.

As depicted below, approximately 207 people work in Buhl but commute in from other communities. ~12 people live and work in Buhl, and ~355 individuals live in Buhl but commute elsewhere for work.

Inflow/Outflow map from the U.S Census on the Map:



Online Presence

In today's society, many prospective and current residents and businesses are seeking information on communities through online channels. It is imperative that communities have a robust and easy to navigate website and social media presence to provide ease of access to information. Below, a summary of the City's online presence is articulated.

Website:

General summary of the City's web presence.

The homepage of the City's website is clean and organized. The photos on the front page are eye-catching and relevant. Videos of the most recent City Council meetings are present on the front page. City information is categorized in an organized manner. Information regarding City Council meeting times and agendas are accessible. Contact information for City officials and office hours for City Hall are accessible.

Location of Information: Information is divided according to City department and topic. These categories are easily understood.

Under Economic Development, no information is provided about site locations. Providing such information, even if it is a statement that no sites are available would increase accessibility.

No information is provided on the Planning and Zoning page.

Permit applications for buildings and pets instruct the user to call City Hall. Having templates of these permits, accompanied by policy guidelines could make these processes more accessible and reduce time spent by City staff on answering questions related to these policies.

Functionality and Accessibility: The website is functional and accessible. The City has an online bill payment system for utilities, building permits and animal permits. All links to individual site pages are functional.



Online Presence

Social Media:

The City of Buhl has a limited social media presence, although it does have high-quality online videos of City Council meetings available for the public via a YouTube Channel. To further engagement with the public and promote the community, City officials and council members may consider creating social media accounts on Facebook and other commonly-used platforms.

An overview of the City of Buhl's social media presence is provided below:

Facebook: The City of Buhl does not have a Facebook account, but an unofficial Facebook page exists providing information about the City.

Instagram: The City of Buhl does not have an Instagram account.

X: The City of Buhl does not have an X (formerly known as Twitter) account.

LinkedIn: The City of Buhl does not have a LinkedIn account.

Other: The City does have a YouTube page on which City Council meetings are released. The account's title does not indicate affiliation with the City of Buhl, so it is unclear whether the videos are from an official source. These videos are available on the City's website. All videos of council meetings are of high video and audio quality.

Signage

Signage:

Signage is important in community development. It can not only welcome people into/out of your City, but also signage can aid in directing people to some of the most prominent (or tucked away!) assets, amenities, and features your community has to offer. Signage encourages a welcoming and uncomplicated experience.

Buhl's signage marks amenities, such as the Mesabi Trail, and points of historical interest. Given the rich history of certain City amenities, such as its public library, adding signage that provides context to such historical markers and amenities may be a way to capitalize on tourists and visitors from other communities, maintain community pride, and encourage greater appreciation for the community in new residents.



Housing

Housing/Residential:

In order to grow population and attract businesses of varying types, communities need to have ample housing stock to suit the needs of their residents. This section analyzes the observations surrounding housing in the City of Buhl.

Roughly 74.7 percent of Buhl residents are homeowners. The median home value is \$113,000 and the median rent is \$1,021. Only one home was for sale at the time of this report's drafting, indicating a shortage of housing in the City.

Most of the City's housing stock was built prior to 1950. Over the last three years, the City has added new lots to the Burnett Park and Stubler developments.



Education

Education:

Many individuals and families are concerned with the quality and accessibility of education when making decisions about where to live and work. As such, it is important to have a foundational understanding of perceptions about the City's educational options.

School District(s): The City of Buhl is served by the Mountain Iron-Buhl School District, headquartered in Mountain Iron, MN. The district offers K-12 education and Early Childhood/Community Education classes. The district has a student-teacher ratio of 17.6-1 and 48.9% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Academically, the district is ranked in the top 25 percent of all school districts in the state of Minnesota.

Childcare: The City of Buhl has one licensed family child care provider within City limits, with a capacity of 12 children. There are no licensed child care center programs within City limits, and the Buhl-Mountain Iron School District does not currently offer preschool.

Data indicates that the City's child care needs are currently supported by licensed family and center programs in larger nearby cities, such as Virginia or Hibbing.



Services

Services:

Based on a limited visit and cursory online research, community members may be evaluating the services that your City offers to residents. As such, this section is included.

Emergency Services (incl. Fire/Police): The City contracts with Essentia EMS to provide ambulance services within City limits. The Buhl Volunteer Fire Department provides fire rescue services to the City and police services are provided through a contract with the Chisholm Police Department.

Healthcare: Buhl does not have any primary healthcare providers or hospitals, and residents must travel outside of City limits to receive care. Two assisted living facilities, Cornerstone Villa and Carefree Living Buhl provide skilled nursing and other care services to their residents.

Utilities: Municipal utilities are provided by the City and are reasonably priced. Utility rates are publicly available and accessible on the City's website.

Library: The Buhl Public Library serves the residents of Buhl-located within City limits, the library has the distinction of being the first publicly-funded library in Minnesota. The library also offers a museum and communal space for small events.

Downtown

Downtown:

In small communities, the downtown corridor is an important facet of the City. CEDA staff worked to understand the downtown structure and make up to offer observations and suggestions.

Downtown Buhl was severely impacted by the relocation of Minnesota Highway 169, which formerly went through downtown.

Retail/Commercial: Downtown Buhl has two bars, both of which are popular community gathering spaces.

Building Aesthetics: Both bars are well-maintained, with clear and visible signage. There are few other buildings in the downtown area, with the former First National Bank of Buhl building, currently vacant, across the street from one of the bars.

Parking: There seems to be sufficient parking for both businesses.



Industrial

Industrial Development:

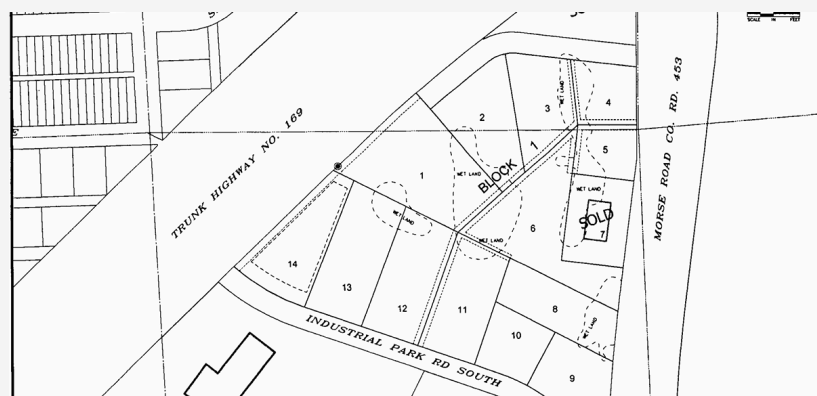
This section seeks to describe the industrial development in the City. CEDA team members drove through the community and did some online research to determine types and levels of industrial businesses operating in the community.

Buhl has two industrial parks: Whiteside Industrial Park on the northeast side of the City, and the Buhl Business Block (BBB), formerly known as South Industrial Park, located on the south side of Highway 169.

Land/Building Availability: In Whiteside Industrial Park, there is no land available; all parcels are owned by the Economic Development Authority, which has chosen to retain ownership for the time being. In the BBB, there are approximately 21 acres available, currently being reconfigured into around 22 parcels that will eventually be put up for sale.

Amount/Diversity of Industry: The parks host a variety of businesses including manufacturing, service and repair, maintenance shops, storage, and distribution businesses. Future plans aim to promote heavier industrial use at Whiteside Industrial Park, while the BBB will be geared towards general commercial or business activities, as its proximity to US Highway 169 and existing topography render it less desirable for industrial operations.

Business Retention and Expansion: City and EDA officials are actively promoting the availability of space and land. These promotional efforts are expected to continue and potentially increase as further development occurs.



Recreation

Recreation:

Cities of all sizes are striving to offer entertainment and recreational opportunities to their residents and visitors. This report outlines the perceived recreational opportunities and suggestions for continued growth of the amenities.

City Parks: Burton Park is the primary City park in Buhl and is located just off Old Minnesota 169, in the southwest portion of the City. The park includes a disc golf course, ballcourts and a skatepark.

Trails: The Mesabi Trail, a 132 mile bike and walking trail connecting Ely and Grand Rapids winds through Buhl and is a major recreational space for the City. The City has signage promoting the Mesabi Trail.

Camping: The Stubler Beach and Campground, located just west of Burton Park, offers lakeside beach recreation space and camping space. The site has a swimming area, restrooms and changing space, a swimming area and two fishing docks. The campground has eight sites with fire pits, elevated tent pads and picnic tables. The Mesabi Trail runs by the campground.

Events: Buhl has Music in the Park events during the summer, community classes hosted at the library and community festivals that take place in Spring and Winter. The City has a very active and engaged Recreation Board dedicated to furthering recreation in the City.



Community Promotion

Community Promotion:

Whether they're looking to attract residential growth, industrial companies, or more commercial businesses, cities need to promote themselves effectively. This section of the First Impression Report outlines some general perceptions of the City's marketing efforts (internal and external).

Internal Marketing: The City's website is its primary source of marketing internally and externally. The Buhl Public Library also has its own website and Facebook Page. Creating social media pages for the City itself and distributing a newsletter on a quarterly or monthly basis could serve as ways of engaging residents.

External Marketing: Buhl's location on the Mesabi Trail and proximity to Hibbing and Virginia make it a good location for tourists. Buhl markets its water as the "Best Water in America" and this has helped raise the City's profile statewide and nationally.

The City could create a tourism brochure to attract visitors. The brochure could feature points of interest, local businesses and recreational amenities, as well as Buhl's public library and famous water.



Conclusion

Some highlights from this report include:

Highlight 1

- The City of Buhl has a variety of marketable features, such as trail amenities, campgrounds and its famous water.

Highlight 2

- The lack of a central business district may make it difficult to attract amenity-based and service industries to town.

Highlight 3

- The City's shortage of child care may make it difficult for young families to move to the City.

Conclusion: The City's natural resources, culture and unique marketable features make it a good place to live and visit. To attract new residents, Buhl can focus on attracting developers to build housing and establish a child care center in the City. To create more service businesses, Buhl can work on establishing a central business district as part of its long-term economic development planning.

Contact Us:

Our team is happy to discuss this report in depth or to talk about potential next steps.

Our contact information is provided below, so please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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