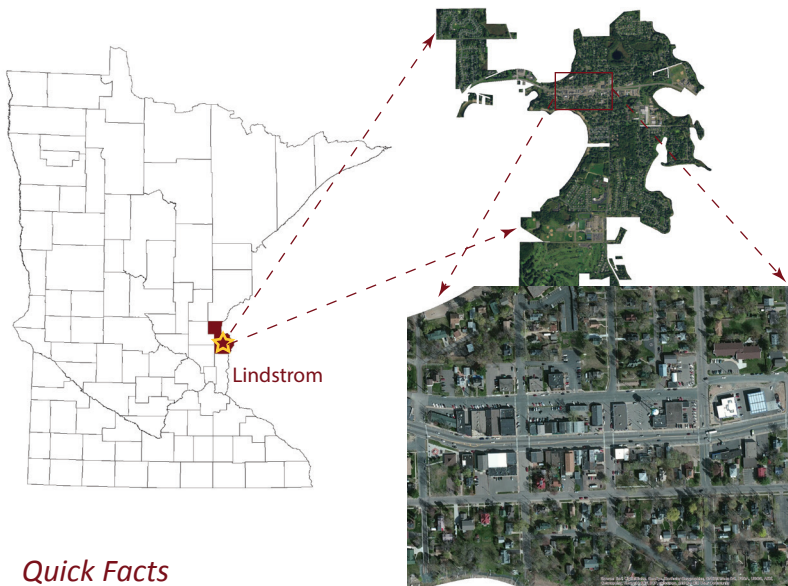


Lindstrom, Minnesota



Downtown Lindstrom. Photo by J Stephen Conn, Licensed under Creative Commons

Quick Facts

Population: 4,405 Housing Units: 2,147 Median Household Income: \$63,882 Median Age: 46.1

An Introduction to Lindstrom

Lindstrom, Minnesota, also known as “America’s Little Sweden,” is one of five small communities that make up the Chisago Lakes region about 40 miles outside of the Twin Cities. Though Lindstrom has a population of less than 5,000, the entire Chisago Lakes Region itself (Chisago City, Shafer, Taylors Falls, and Center City) has a population of more than 12,000. Highway 8, which is a major transportation route in the region, runs through all five Chisago Lakes communities and downtown Lindstrom.

The community is surrounded by lakes and waterways and is named after Swedish immigrant Daniel Lindstrom who settled in the area in 1853. Commemorated in Vilhelm Moberg’s novel *The Emigrants*, Lindstrom’s immigrant history continues to attract tourists and adventure seekers to the area.

Lessons for Success

1. Take advantage of environmental assets and location.
2. Recognize the value and support local champions.
3. Strive to collaborate, cooperate, and compromise.

The Chisago Lakes area is one of eight finalists in the America’s Best Communities (ABC) competition, which recognizes communities across the nation that are connected to a sense of place and committed to economic vitality. The five communities of Chisago Lakes have achieved tangible economic impact in the following areas: arts/culture/tourism, broadband connectivity, economic development, and quality of life. Now, community leaders are implementing strategies to highlight their revitalization efforts in the previous four areas. These strategies include developing branding and marketing, improving workforce development, creating energy for economic development, and promoting health and recreation tourism.

Lindstrom's Story

Regional Collaboration

Lindstrom gains several benefits by partnering with neighboring communities. For example, Chisago City and Lindstrom have a joint police department. The arrangement allows each community to save on the cost, while also providing a comprehensive police department. Other joint public services include sewer service, the library, a compost site, and cable TV.

Lindstrom also collaborates with regional communities through recreation and tourism opportunities. Some of the region's greatest assets are its striking geography, lakes, and recreational spaces. By working together, Lindstrom and neighboring communities can capitalize on their potential as a regional recreational and tourism area.

Four large lakes and numerous smaller ones exist between the communities of Chisago City, Lindstrom, and Center City. This natural resource will create the Chisago Water Lakes Trail, a canoe and kayak trail consisting of recreational and tourism opportunities that span the lakes and connect visitors to the three communities. The Swedish Immigrant Regional Trail is another recreational offering for visitors. The 20-mile, multi-use corridor connects Wyoming to Taylors Falls and attracts tourists interested in Swedish history and outdoor recreation.

The Lakes Improvement District is a leadership body that provides cooperative planning for the 19 lakes included in the Chisago Lakes region. Members include representatives from each of the five communities surrounding the lakes. Without this collective collaboration, the environmental and recreational resources available in each community would be limited.

Social Media and Branding

Lindstrom community leaders recognize that branding is critical to the success of its marketing plan. As part of the ABC competition, Lindstrom is now included on a regional website and within an area marketing plan

Social media training allows neighboring communities to support one another through various online platforms. Lindstrom intentionally engages community members online through initiatives such as "Picture-a-Day," which asks residents to submit photos that depict what the Chisago Lakes area means to them. Lindstrom's Chamber of Commerce blog is also used as a way to keep the public informed about community activities and plans.

A Service Oriented Community

The residents' strength of character is celebrated by Lindstrom's community leaders as one of the town's greatest assets. These characteristics are attributed to residents' Swedish-German culture, and their faith, hard work, and honesty is credited for much of what gets done in Lindstrom. Volunteer community champions are also touted as the reason why so many initiatives are accomplished in Lindstrom. These champions are driven by a need to serve, and they often develop innovative ideas to revitalize the community. While these individuals have emerged somewhat naturally for Lindstrom, it would behoove other communities to also encourage and nurture local champions to lead major projects.

Technology and Broadband

Chisago Lakes leaders recognize the importance of regional broadband access and the economic imperative to connect urban and rural parts of the area through high-speed Internet. This technology is important to business success and is also necessary for effective intra-regional communication. Broadband advancement is a major element of the ABC competition application, and Lindstrom plans to use improved Internet access to allow employees to telecommute and to offer online educational courses. Better broadband will also help the

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Coffee Pot Water Tower. Photo by Tony Webster, Licensed under Creative Commons

community be more competitive in home sales, as it is becoming increasingly important to access the Internet for school, work, and entertainment.

Additionally, community leaders have proposed the construction of a Community Technology Center—a physical space for entrepreneurs, technology workers, and others that need access to advanced technology to contribute to the regional economy. The community center would also help overcome rural connectivity issues and help attract higher-paying employers within the Chisago Lakes area.

Downtown Lindstrom

Physical changes to downtown Lindstrom have improved the community's attractiveness. For example, while the town has maintained its historic buildings, it has also provided access to natural areas and nearby housing. A major challenge the community faced was the presence of Highway 8 in downtown Lindstrom. While important as a major regional transportation route, traffic would back up, causing congestion on the single, 30 mph street downtown. In response to this situation, Lindstrom officials worked with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to increase the capacity of the highway by implementing a one-way pair with roundabouts at either end of downtown. They also made the area more walker-friendly, which increases the community's business opportunities.

Workforce Development for Youth

Lindstrom and its neighboring communities are home for many people employed in the Twin Cities where earning potential and employment opportunities are higher. City officials see this as one of their primary challenges—how to

encourage job growth and high earning potential within Chisago County and expand Lindstrom's reputation beyond that of a bedroom community. To address this issue, Lindstrom initiated a workforce development program specifically targeted toward young people. Through the program, youth receive on-the-job training outside of the classroom and with the support of adult mentors. The program has received commitment and support from a variety of companies representing diverse industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, food, and finance.

Energy for Economic Development

Lindstrom, and the Chisago Lakes area in general, has sought to capitalize on the economic advantages of energy and resource efficiency. Following a study to determine the potential for green energy usage in the region, community leaders discovered that the Chisago Lakes area and greater Chisago County has the capacity to generate 100% of its electricity needs from locally-sourced, renewable energy sources by 2025. It was found that solar energy, in particular, would be particularly well-suited for the region. The total net economic impact for such a venture could exceed \$40 million by 2025. The community has presented a proposal for a Clean Energy Hub, which would preserve the region's environmental assets while also attracting new capital investments and reducing energy costs for existing businesses and residents. Implementing this initiative could make Chisago Lakes a national model for solar energy use.

Investing in Health

Healthy living has been a priority for Lindstrom's community leaders. They have implemented plans that encourage active transportation and socializing as part of everyday life. Community gardens, healthy restaurants, health forums, and farmer's markets are also a part of Lindstrom's community landscape.

City officials perform "walking audits" to determine what areas of town are truly walkable and what areas need improvement. Additionally, the city of Lindstrom partners with the Lakes Improvement District and the Water Conservation District to improve lake conditions, reduce sewer around lakes, and implement rain gardens, all of which contribute to the ecological health of Lindstrom.

Lessons from Lindstrom

Take Advantage of Environmental Assets and Location

Every region and locality has its own riches and assets to offer in the form of environmental landscapes and seasonal conditions. In the Chisago Lakes area, these assets exist in the myriad lakes, waterways, and wooded areas. Not only do these environments improve quality of life for residents, they also offer an invaluable opportunity for tourism and recreation-based economic development. Furthermore, they provide a locus around which community members organize. Keeping the lakes clean and maintaining the riches of the natural environment become activities that bring people together as stewards of the land.

Recognize the Value of Local Champions

Lindstrom is made up of volunteers and community members who love their neighborhood and want to contribute to its success. A culture of service is evident in Lindstrom, and community leaders believe the key to ensuring this type of culture is to maintain activities on a volunteer basis. While there are pros and cons to this approach, volunteers in Lindstrom invest their time and



Statue of Karl and Kristina Oskar. Photo by Tony Webster, Licensed under Creative Commons

energy without any expectation of personal gain. Celebrating these community champions not only recognizes their effort but also encourages other residents to invest their time and resources in the community.

Strive to Collaborate, Cooperate and Compromise

In addition to local champions and volunteers, Lindstrom's city council and public officials also contribute to the community's success through compromise and cooperation with one another. A community is only as strong as the relationships upon which it is based. In Lindstrom, different organizational bodies work closely with the municipality to accomplish important goals: the Lions Club provides funding for parks; the Lakes Improvement District funds camp sites; the Water Conservation District builds rain gardens. These non-governmental organizations have been essential to the city's success.

Furthermore, Lindstrom's success happens by partnering with its four surrounding communities in the Chisago Lakes Region. The towns recognize the importance of their interconnectedness and interdependence and have

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collaborated with each other to become the Chisago Lakes Region, one of the finalists in the America's Best Communities competition. Had each community focused only on its own economic and community development rather than working together, the region as a whole would be far less successful.

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