



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt  
Chair

Steve Cich  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2026 @ 6:30 PM  
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH  
BRANCH, MN 55056**

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
3. ROLL CALL
4. PUBLIC COMMENT  
*Provides an opportunity for the public to address the Council on items that are not on the Agenda. Please raise your hand to be recognized. Please state your name and address for the record. This section is for the express purpose of addressing concerns of City services and operations. It shall not be used to clarify individual's views for political purposes.*
5. AGENDA APPROVAL
  - a. Approve Agenda ACTION
6. CONSENT AGENDA  
*All matters listed under Consent Agenda are considered routine and/or non-controversial and will be approved by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Councilmember or citizen so requests, in which case the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the Agenda.*
  - a. Approval of May 5, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes ACTION
7. PUBLIC HEARINGS
  - a. Zoning Text Amendment - Residential Interior Side Setbacks ACTION
  - b. Zoning Text Amendment - R-3 Maximum Density ACTION
  - c. Zoning Text Amendment - Design Standards ACTION
8. REPORTS
  - a. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) INFO
  - b. Central Business District - Zoning Boundaries INFO
  - c. Flink Ave - Flex Business Zone INFO
  - d. Comprehensive Plan Update INFO

9. NEXT MEETING - July 7, 2026 - 6:30PM

10. ADJOURNMENT



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

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**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026 @ 6:30 PM  
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH  
BRANCH, MN 55056**

### MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORTH BRANCH IN THE COUNTY OF CHISAGO AND IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

#### REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Nathan Ehalt called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

City Staff led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

**Present:** Commissioner Steve Cich, Commissioner Ross Otto, Commissioner Nate Ehalt,  
Commissioner Kelly Maurer, Liason Patrick Meacham

**Absent:**

**Remote:**

**Others Present:**

**Notes:**

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

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5. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

**ACTION**

**RESULT:** Passed

**MOVER:** Steve Cich

**SECONDER:** Kelly Maurer

**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer

**ABSENT:**

**NOTES:**

6. CONSENT AGENDA

*All matters listed under Consent Agenda are considered routine and/or non-controversial and will be approved by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Councilmember or citizen so requests, in which case the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the Agenda.*

a. Approval of April 7, 2026 Planning Commission minutes ACTION

**RESULT:** Passed

**MOVER:** Kelly Maurer

**SECONDER:** Steve Cich

**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer

**ABSENT:**

**NOTES:**

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition - Preliminary Plat and Variance ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Sherwood Pine 2nd Addition-Preliminary Plat and Variance. Make Properties LLC. (Applicant) has submitted a request for Preliminary Plat and Variance approval for a new residential subdivision known as Sherwood Pines Second Addition, located generally to the east of 417th Street and Flink Avenue. The variance request is due to the inability to meet the required 300-foot lot depths for Lots 1-4 of Block 1 and Lots 1-3 of Block 2 based on the unique parcel boundaries and engineering standards for the internal roadway.

The undeveloped Subject Property consists of approximately 30.11 acres and is guided and zoned for Rural-Residential. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of 17 single-family residential lots (each exceeding 1 acre in lot size), organized into 2 blocks and 1 outlot. The development includes new public roadway infrastructure, stormwater management features, and individual well and septic systems. Access to the subdivision is provided via Flink Ave and includes an internal roadway and cul-de-sac.

The applicant has submitted a complete application, including preliminary plat drawings, grading and erosion control plans, utility plans, and stormwater management documentation.

**Analysis of Issue(s)**

1. Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Property is guided LURR, per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned RR – Rural Residential. The Subject Property is guided for low-density residential development under the City’s Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with the RR – Rural Residential zoning district. The proposed subdivision aligns with the City’s long-term land use vision by providing large-lot single-family development. The density of approximately 0.60 gross units per acre is consistent with rural residential expectations. The proposed subdivision layout, density, and lot configuration are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and zoning district requirements. Land Use and Zoning standards are satisfied.

2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat proposes 17 residential lots ranging in size from approximately 1.1 acres to 2.38

acres, as illustrated on the Site Plan. The subdivision is designed around a new internal public roadway system, consisting of approximately 2,050 linear feet of bituminous roadway with a cul-de-sac.

Each lot includes:

- Designated building pads
- Primary and secondary septic areas (5,000 sq ft each)
- Drainage and Utility Easements

The layout provides efficient circulation while maintaining rural lot characteristics. A stormwater infiltration basin is centrally located to manage runoff.

### 3. Plat Standards

Lots created by plat are required to meet minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements as established by City Code for the applicable zoning district. City Code requires a minimum lot depth of 300 feet and a minimum lot width of 110 feet within the Rural Residential (RR) zoning district. Based on the review of the proposed preliminary plat, all lots meet or exceed the minimum lot width requirement. However, several lots do not meet the minimum required depth of 300 feet. A variance application has been submitted and is analyzed in Section 4: Variance – Lot Depths of this report. All lots exceed the required area of 1 acre buildable.

### 4. Variance – Lot Depths

A variance from the required lot depths of 300 feet includes Lots 1 through 4 of Block 1 and Lots 1 through 3 of Block 2, with proposed depths ranging from approximately 177 feet to 278 feet. All remaining lots comply with the minimum depth requirement.

The purpose of the reduction of lot depths is in part due to other city regulations and imperative design decisions, such as the placement of the new internal roadway lining up directly with the existing 417th St across from Flink Ave. Additionally, engineering requirements for road sizes and Right-Of-Way widths would prevent lots on both sides of the proposed road due to the unique shape of the property and only having 521 feet of frontage along Flink Ave. City staff would support the decision to grant a reduction in lot depths in this scenario.

In considering all requests for variances, appeals, amendments, or conditional use permits, the planning agency and the city council shall make a finding of fact. Its judgment shall be based upon, but not limited to, the following factors:

1. Relationship to the city's comprehensive plan;
2. The geographical area involved;
3. The character of the surrounding area;
4. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;
5. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;
6. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;
7. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;
8. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;
9. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety;
10. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

### Sec 66-65 Conditions On Approval

- (a) The planning commission and the city council may not permit, as a variance, any use that is not

permitted under this division for property in the zone where the affected person's land is located.

A variance is a modification or variation of the provisions of this zoning code as applied to a specific piece of property. Variances shall only be permitted:

- When they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance, and
- When the variances are consistent with the comprehensive plan. Variances may be granted when the applicant for the variance establishes that there are practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance.

"Practical difficulties," as used in connection with the granting of a variance, means that:

- a. The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance;
- b. The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner; and
- c. The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties. Practical difficulties include, but are not limited to, inadequate access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems.

## 5. Engineering – Public Streets, Utilities, and Stormwater

The Preliminary Plat proposes a new public street designed to City of North Branch standards, including pavement width, right-of-way dedication, and implementation of a cul-de-sac. All streets will be dedicated to the City upon Final Plat approval.

Lots will be served by a private well and septic system as the parcel boundary is located outside the city's designated Urban Service Area. Stormwater management is addressed through drainage easements and an onsite infiltration basin located on Outlot A. All public improvements are subject to review and approval by the City Engineer and will require a Development Agreement. The Engineering report for this project is attached to this report.

The developer of the site is expected to enter into a Development Agreement with the City to meet these standards and specifications for the new Right-Of-Way.

## 6. Environmental Features and Site Constraints

The subject site is a former evergreen tree farm, and extensive tree clearing will be required. The Tree Preservation Plan for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition identifies areas of existing woodland to be preserved and areas to be cleared to accommodate development, including building pads, septic areas, roads, and grading. The plan designates specific tree save areas, tree removal areas, and existing off-site tree areas, with construction limits clearly shown to guide where disturbance can occur. Tree removal is primarily concentrated within proposed lot areas, building envelopes, road alignments, and septic locations, while preservation areas are generally located around the site perimeter and in less disturbed interior sections. In total, the plan indicates approximately 13.15 acres (572,942 sq. ft.) of trees to be preserved and 6.07 acres (264,356 sq. ft.) to be removed, out of a total wooded area of 19.22 acres. This reflects a majority of the existing tree cover being retained, with clearing focused on necessary development areas.

The plan also incorporates topographic contours, wetland areas (Outlot A), and delineates building and septic locations, ensuring that tree removal is coordinated with site constraints. Overall, the document demonstrates an effort to balance site development with preservation of significant wooded areas, though substantial clearing will still be required to establish lots and infrastructure.

Overall, the proposed development meets City standards related to landscaping, buffering, and

preservation of existing natural features.

The Public Hearing opened at 6:40 PM.

There was a question regarding if it made a difference where the house is put on the lot, or if the houses have to be on one side, so there's room for another mound system if needed? City Planner Ryan Saltis responded that there is still a need for setbacks. Typically, we see separate site surveys come in for each individual lot at the time of the building permit application. We review it to make sure that these setbacks and then the septic area is approved by our building department.

There was a question regarding how many driveways are going to be able to come out to Flink? City Planner Ryan Saltis responded that there will be 3, because one is a shared driveway between two lots.

The Public Hearing closed at 6:46 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council for the Preliminary Plat for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition, based on a preliminary review of the submitted plans.

**RESULT:** Passed  
**MOVER:** Steve Cich  
**SECONDER:** Kelly Maurer  
**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer  
**ABSENT:**  
**NOTES:**

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council, approving the Variance to reduce lot depths for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition.

**RESULT:** Passed  
**MOVER:** Steve Cich  
**SECONDER:** Ross Otto  
**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer  
**ABSENT:**  
**NOTES:**

b. Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment - PID 11.00458.00 ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment — PID 11.00458.00. A request has been proposed for a Comprehensive Plan/Map Amendment and Rezoning from Rural Residential (RR) to Agricultural District (AG) at PID 11.00458.00. The applicant, Johnathon Sanders, intends to rezone the parcel from RR to AG to operate a Farm Winery on the property. The parcel is currently zoned RR – Rural Residential, where crop production is permitted; however, a Farm Winery is not an allowed use. Farm Wineries are permitted within the AG – Agricultural zoning district. A Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment from RR to AG would allow the winery use by right and enable the project to proceed. The applicants have also indicated plans to construct a barn (Agricultural Building) to support a vineyard and wine production activities. Agricultural structures of this type are permitted in the AG district; however, in the RR district, such a building would not be allowed without a principal residential structure on the property.

At the April 7th Planning Commission Meeting, City staff and the prospective applicant presented two options for consideration. The first is to amend the permitted uses table to allow Farm Wineries as a Conditional Use within the RR district. This approach would require both a text amendment and subsequent review and approval of a Conditional Use Permit, including the establishment of specific standards for such operations. The second option is to rezone the parcel to AG, which would allow the winery use by right and enable the project to proceed more immediately. Planning Commission members preferred to have the applicant move forward with a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Rezoning.

### Analysis of Issue(s)

#### 1. Land Use & Zoning

The 16-acre vacant parcel located at PID 11.00458.00 is currently zoned Rural Residential (RR) and is surrounded entirely by Rural Residential properties. The intent of this request is to rezone to Agricultural (AG) and regulate the Land Use of this parcel as Agricultural (LUAG). The parcel is located east of North Branch off of HWY 95, in which all properties directly off of this roadway are currently zoned RR – Rural Residential. The subject property is just south of land designated as AG, designated in white on the above zoning map excerpt.

Properties immediately adjacent to the north and east of the site have historically been used for farming and agriculture. The proposed rezoning of this 16-acre parcel seems to fit the surrounding area and uses, while being over the 10-acre minimum for AG-zoned properties. The proposed comprehensive plan amendment would remove the area guided as Rural Residential by approximately 16 acres and increase the guided area as Agricultural by the same amount. When considering comprehensive plan amendments, it is important to consider the overall mix of uses, compatibility of uses, and future development potential before and after the change.

#### 2. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility

Analysis of the Rural Residential (RR) and Agricultural District (AG) are provided below. Comments from city staff are italicized and bolded:

#### DIVISION 9 RR RURAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

##### Sec 66-447 Purpose

The purpose of the RR rural residential district is:

- a. To prevent scattered non-farm uses from developing improperly.
- b. To allow suitable areas of the city to be retained and utilized in open space and/or agricultural uses.
- c. To promote orderly development and secure economy in government expenditures for public utilities and service.

##### Sec 66-384 Purpose

The purpose of the AG agricultural district is to preserve, promote, maintain, and enhance the use of land for agricultural purposes and to protect such land from encroachment by non-agricultural uses.

The use of the parcel is intended to initially be a Farm Winery with crop plantings and an Ag building for wine production. A single-family residence is proposed for a future phase and fits the purpose of both the RR Rural Residential District and AG Agricultural District. These zoning districts are similar in purpose; the permitted uses for each district differ. Based on the Zoning District Use Table, Agricultural zoned parcels show more permitted uses than parcels zoned Rural Residential. Permitted uses in Agricultural

Zoned parcels that are not permitted in Rural Residential include the following:

- Ag building accessory structures
- Farm Wineries

Approving the rezoning of the parcel would allow the above operations on this site and should be considered by the Planning Commission.

After reviewing minimum lot depths, lot widths, and lot sizes, the parcel would meet the requirements for rezoning to AG.

The Land Use & Growth section of the 2018 North Branch Comprehensive Plan addresses distinctions between zoning districts and gives direction for land uses. The Agriculture and Rural Residential District from the Land Use & Growth section of the Comprehensive Plan is described below:

#### Agriculture (AG1 and AG2)

Over one-third of the city's land area (37.6%) is currently used for agricultural purposes. Housing densities are low, and this zoning is characterized by active farms, hobby farms and homes on large lots. The Northeast corner of the city is the historic river bottom of the St. Croix River and is framed by the historic river bluff line. Soils are well-suited for sod farming and the production of produce. By maintaining a low density of development, it is the City's intent to preserve and protect the many natural resources found in this part of North Branch, including lakes, streams, wetlands and woodlands.

#### Rural Residential (RR)

Rural Residential makes up 9,961 acres or 43% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is largely characterized by single-family residences set on larger lot sizes to accommodate onsite sewage treatment systems. Some of these areas are located within the city's designated Urban Service Area, and no new development is allowed within this zoning district without connecting to municipal services. Areas located outside of the Urban Service Area must meet a minimum buildable acre standard so as to ensure that there is sufficient land area with the appropriate soil separation to support both a primary and a future secondary onsite sewage treatment system.

The Planning Commission should examine these distinctions between zoning districts when considering the rezoning of the subject parcel from RR Rural Residential to AG Agricultural. The parcel and existing uses shall be considered whether or not they fit into the definition and guided land use of the Agricultural District.

#### Sec 66-64 Findings of Fact

In considering all requests for variances, appeals, amendments or conditional use permits, the planning agency and the city council shall make a finding of fact. Its judgment shall be based upon, but not limited to, the following factors:

1. Relationship to the city's comprehensive plan;
2. The geographical area involved;
3. The character of the surrounding area;
4. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;

5. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;
6. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;
7. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;
8. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;
9. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety.
10. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

Public Hearing opened at 6:55 PM.

Public Hearing closed at 6:56 PM.

Motion to approve the proposed comprehensive plan map amendment to regard the subject property, from the land use rural residential to land use agricultural with conditions of finding of fact and approve the rezoning of the subject property itself from rural residential to agricultural with the conditions and findings of fact prese

c. Westside Commons 3rd Addition - Preliminary Plat

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Westside Commons 3rd Addition - Preliminary Plat. GS2 LLC, with Westwood Professional Services acting as the applicant, has submitted a request for a Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition. The subject property is located at the south-west corner of Highway 95 and Falcon Ave and is legally described as Outlot A, Westside Commons 2nd Addition. The purpose of the proposed plat is to subdivide the existing outlot to accommodate future development, including a senior living facility and associated infrastructure improvements. The Preliminary Plat includes the creation of one buildable lot, public right-of-way, and outlots for drainage and future development.

The subject site contains approximately 27.9 acres and is guided for B-Business within the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use and Zoning
2. Proposed Preliminary Plat
3. Plat Standards
4. Engineering and Infrastructure

Analysis of Issue(s)

1. Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Property is guided LUB – Land Use Business per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned B – Business.

Senior Communities for Independent or Assisted Living is a Permitted Use in the B-Business Zoning District. This is consistent with the nearby Boka Haven development. The proposed preliminary plat supports the development of a senior living facility and associated site improvements, which is consistent with the City’s Comprehensive Plan and the evolving character of the Highway 95 corridor.

Staff finds the proposed plat to be generally consistent with the City’s land use guidance and

development objectives for this area.

## 2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition proposes the following:

- Creation of Lot 1, Block 1, intended for a future senior living facility (building footprint shown on plan)
- Dedication of public right-of-way for the 386th Street extension
- Creation of Outlot A for drainage and stormwater management
- Creation of Outlot B for future development
- Dedication of drainage and utility easements throughout the site

The layout provides a logical configuration that supports both the proposed development and future expansion of the surrounding area. The plat also ensures connectivity to existing roadways and utilities.

## 3. Plat Standards

Lots created by plat are required to meet minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements as established by City Code for the applicable zoning district.

Based on review of the Preliminary Plat:

- The proposed lot exceeds minimum area requirements for the B – Business Zoning District
- Lot dimensions appear adequate to support the intended development
- Out lots are appropriately designated for drainage and future use

Staff finds that the Preliminary Plat generally meets the applicable subdivision standards of the City Code.

## 4. Engineering and Infrastructure

### Streets & Access

The development includes the construction of the 386th Street extension, which will provide primary access to the site.

Key roadway elements include:

- Approximately 85-foot right-of-way with a 49-foot face-to-face roadway section
- Typical urban street section including curb and gutter, boulevard, and sidewalk
- A temporary cul-de-sac is proposed to accommodate phased development

This extension improves connectivity and supports future development in the Westside Commons area.

### Utilities

- 12-inch water main extension along 386th Street
- Sanitary sewer extensions, including approximately 350 linear feet of 10-inch sanitary sewer
- Hydrants and gate valves are placed throughout the site

Utility plans will be subject to detailed review during final engineering.

## Stormwater & Drainage

Stormwater Management is addressed through:

- Construction of proposed stormwater pond
- Installation of storm sewer infrastructure, including:
  - 24-inch storm sewer lines
  - Catch basins and manholes
  
- Designated drainage out lots and easements

Detailed stormwater calculations and final design will be reviewed during final plat and site plan approval.

## Grading & Erosion Control

The plans include erosion control measures such as:

- Silt fence and inlet protection
- Construction entrance to prevent tracking
- Erosion control blanket and temporary stabilization measures

All erosion control measures must be installed prior to construction and maintained throughout development.

Public Hearing opened at 7:04 PM.

Trent Olson asked how this was originally zoned. Community Development Director Nate Sondrol answered that it is zoned business, and it's guided for high-density residential.

Public Hearing closed at 7:07 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council approving the preliminary plat for West Side Commons, 3rd edition.

**RESULT:**           **Passed**  
**MOVER:**           **Ross Otto**  
**SECONDER:**       **Kelly Maurer**  
**AYES:**            **Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer**  
**ABSENT:**  
**NOTES:**

## 8. REPORTS

### a. Side Setbacks in Residential Zoning Districts

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Side Setbacks in Residential Zoning Districts. City staff has prepared this report to facilitate discussion regarding a potential amendment to the Zoning Code to increase minimum interior side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet in zoning districts where a 6-foot setback is

currently permitted.

As shown in the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table, several residential zoning districts—including portions of R-1, R-2, and R-3 districts currently allow 6-foot interior side setbacks, particularly for single-family and certain attached housing types.

At this time, no formal application or ordinance is under consideration. This report is intended to provide an overview of potential impacts, benefits, and challenges to assist the Planning Commission in determining whether further study or direction is warranted.

The potential amendment would increase the minimum interior side yard setback to 10 feet, aligning these districts more closely with others that already require larger setbacks. The following sections outline key considerations when analyzing impacts to residents, developers/builders, and the city. Cost considerations are also analyzed further.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Increased Privacy:** Additional distance between homes may reduce noise and visual impacts between neighboring properties.
- **Improved Access & Maintenance:** Larger side yards provide more space for maintenance, drainage, and utility access.
- **Enhanced Light and Air:** Greater spacing can improve natural light and ventilation between structures.
- **Fire Safety:** Increased separation may improve fire protection and emergency response access.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Buildable Area:** Particularly on smaller lots, increased setbacks may limit home size or placement options.
- **Existing Development Pattern:** Established neighborhoods with narrower spacing may not reflect the proposed standard.
- **Nonconformities:** Existing homes built under the 6-foot standard would likely become legal nonconforming structures.

### Impacts to Developers & Builders

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Marketability:** Wider spacing between homes may appeal to buyers seeking lower-density residential character.
- **Consistency:** Standardizing setbacks across districts may simplify zoning interpretation and development review.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Lot Yield:** Larger setbacks may decrease the number of buildable lots or require larger lot sizes.
- **Design Limitations:** Standard building plans may need modification to fit within narrower building envelopes.
- **Plat Revisions:** Concept plans or undeveloped subdivisions designed with 6-foot setbacks may require redesign.

### Impacts to the City

### Potential Benefits

- Community Character: Increased setbacks may support a more open and spacious residential environment.
- Stormwater & Drainage: Additional pervious area between structures may improve drainage conditions.
- Infrastructure Coordination: Greater spacing may reduce conflicts with utilities and easements.

### Potential Challenges

- Housing Affordability: Larger setbacks may increase development costs, which could impact housing prices.
- Land Use Efficiency: Reduced density may affect efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- Administrative Considerations: Managing nonconformities and transition standards may require additional staff review.

### Cost Considerations

#### Developers:

- Increased cost per unit due to reduced density
- Potential redesign costs for site layouts and building plans

#### Homeowners:

- Possible increase in home prices
- Potential long-term value benefits associated with increased spacing

#### City:

- Possible reduction in tax base efficiency on a per-acre basis
- Limited direct fiscal impact, but potential increase in administrative review complexity

### Planning Considerations

- The current zoning table reflects a mix of 6-foot and 10-foot side setbacks, depending on district and housing type .
- The 6-foot standard is most commonly associated with more compact residential development patterns.
- Consideration may be given to:
  - Whether a uniform standard is appropriate across all districts
  - Whether different standards should apply based on lot size or zoning district
  - How to address existing platted lots and nonconformities

### Summary

Increasing side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet presents a range of potential benefits related to privacy, safety, and neighborhood character, while also introducing considerations related to housing density, cost, and development flexibility. Larger setbacks may contribute to a more open development pattern and improved long-term livability, particularly in lower-density residential areas. However, the change could also reduce buildable area on individual lots, potentially impacting lot layout efficiency and limiting design options on narrower parcels.

Additionally, the amendment may have broader implications on housing affordability by increasing land

costs per unit and reducing overall development yield in affected districts. The existing mix of setback standards across zoning districts reflects differing development intensities, and modifying these standards may alter how those districts function over time. Consideration should also be given to how such a change would apply to existing platted lots and whether flexibility or exemptions may be appropriate. Overall, the potential amendment involves balancing community character objectives with practical development considerations, and further direction from the Planning Commission would help determine whether additional analysis or ordinance drafting is warranted.

The discussion included potential impacts on residents, developers, builders, and the city, as well as the need for standardization across all districts. Commissioner Ross Otto expressed concerns about the impact on existing homes and the ability to build garages and other structures. Chair Nate Ehalt emphasized the need for objective data and the potential impact on legal non-conforming uses and insurance. The commissioners discussed the importance of balancing long-term planning goals with practical development realities and the need for further research and data collection.

b. Maximum Density - R3 Zoning

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Maximum Density - R3 Zoning. City staff has been asked to evaluate a potential text amendment to the City Code that would establish a maximum base density within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district. Currently, the Dimensional and Design Standards Table identifies the R-3 district as allowing “6+ units per acre” with no defined upper limit. The proposed amendment would revise this standard to a defined density range of 6 to 18 units per acre.

This report is intended to outline potential impacts, benefits, and considerations of establishing a maximum density cap. No formal action is requested at this time; this is for discussion and policy direction only.

The R-3 zoning district is intended to accommodate higher-density residential development, including town homes, apartments, and multi-family housing.

As shown in the Dimensional and Design Standards Table, R-3 districts already include development controls such as:

- Maximum building height of up to 3 stories or 50 feet
- Impervious surface limits up to 70-75% depending on housing type
- Minimum lot size and building coverage limitations
- Setbacks and design requirements

While these standards regulate building form and site design, the absence of a maximum density allows for potentially high unit concentrations if other standards are met.

Proposed Amendment

Current Standard:

- Max Base Density: 6+ units per acre (no cap)

Proposed Standard:

- Maximum Base Density: 6 to 18 units per acre

This would introduce a clear upper limit on residential density within the R-3 district.

The following analysis outlines the potential impacts of establishing a maximum density of 18 units per acre within the R-3 zoning district. This amendment would influence how residential developments are

designed and how they function within the community. The impacts are evaluated from multiple perspectives, including residents, developers, infrastructure, and overall land use planning, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with implementing a defined density cap.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- Greater predictability in neighborhood character and intensity
- Reduced concerns related to overcrowding, parking demand, and traffic congestion
- Improved compatibility with adjacent lower-density zoning districts

#### Potential Challenges:

- May limit availability of diverse and more affordable housing types
- Could reduce opportunities for compact, walkable development patterns
- Potential upward pressure on housing costs due to constrained supply

### Impacts to Developers

#### Potential Benefits:

- Provides clear expectations and certainty for project planning
- Aligns density with infrastructure and site design constraints
- May reduce community opposition by limiting perceived over development

#### Potential Challenges:

- Reduced flexibility in site design and yield optimization
- Lower overall unit counts may impact project feasibility and return on investment
- Could discourage higher-density or mixed-use style developments

### Infrastructure and Service Impacts

#### Potential Benefits

- Helps ensure density levels remain consistent with available infrastructure capacity
- Reduces strain on utilities, roadways, and public services
- Easier long-term planning for schools, parks, and emergency services

#### Potential Challenges

- Lower densities may result in less efficient use of existing infrastructure
- Could increase per-unit cost of infrastructure expansion or maintenance

### Cost Considerations

#### Developers:

- Fewer units per acre may increase per-unit land and development costs
- Potential need for higher sale or rental prices to offset reduced density

#### City:

- Lower densities may reduce tax base potential per acre
- Lower residential density may reduce overall demand on public infrastructure systems; however, it may also decrease cost efficiency as infrastructure serves fewer households

## Planning Considerations

- A maximum density aligns R-3 zoning with common planning practices that define both minimum and maximum thresholds
- Helps reinforce transitions between zoning districts
- Supports long-term comprehensive planning goals if density targets are defined

However:

- May limit the City's ability to accommodate future housing demand
- Could reduce flexibility in responding to market conditions

## Key Policy Considerations

When evaluating this amendment, decision-makers may wish to consider:

- Whether 18 units per acre appropriately reflects the desired intensity of R-3 zoning
- If different density caps should apply to different housing types (apartments vs. townhomes)
- How this change aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan and housing goals
- Whether additional design standards could achieve similar outcomes without limiting density

Chair Nate Ehalt and Commissioner Steve Cich discussed the historical context of the density cap, mentioning that it was previously 18 plus seven. Commissioner Steve Cich suggested that 25 units could be a reasonable number, considering the height restrictions and the desire to keep a rural look. Chair Nate Ehalt raised concerns about the compatibility of higher-density areas with lower-density rural or single-family home areas.

### c. Design Standards

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Design Standard and Building Material Requirements review. City staff has been directed by the Planning Commission, Economic Development Authority (EDA), and City Council to evaluate the City's existing design standards under Section 66-943 of City Code. This review intends to determine whether current regulations are overly restrictive and whether modifications could improve development flexibility, reduce construction costs, and enhance the City's competitiveness for commercial and industrial investment.

The City of North Branch currently utilizes a three-zone design overlay system that establishes varying exterior building material requirements based on visibility and location within the community. These standards are intended to promote architectural quality, ensure cohesive design, and protect long-term property values. Recently, the City has taken steps to modernize these standards. Most notably, Insulated Metal Panels were added as a permitted Class II material through Ordinance No. 397-25, reflecting a shift toward accommodating newer construction materials while maintaining design intent. This report provides a comprehensive review of existing standards, summarizes how North Branch compares to surrounding communities, and outlines potential options for amending material percentage requirements and zoning applicability. This item is for discussion and policy direction only. No formal action is requested at this time.

## Potential Amendment Options

Based on the analysis, several potential modifications could be considered:

### *Material Percentage Adjustments*

- Reduce Zone 1 requirement from 65% to approximately 50% Class 1 Materials

- Reduce Zone 2 requirement from 50%
- Maintain flexibility in Zone 3

#### *Façade-Based Standards*

- Focus higher-quality material requirements on street-facing facades only
- Allow greater flexibility on side and rear elevations

#### *Expanded Material Allowances*

- Continue allowing modern materials such as insulated metal panels
- Shift focus toward design quality rather than strict material classifications

#### *Design Overlay Zone Modifications*

- Simplify or reevaluate the current three zone structure

#### Cost and Development Considerations

##### *Developers*

- Reduced material requirements may lower construction costs
- Increased flexibility may improve project feasibility
- Could encourage a broader range of commercial and industrial development

##### *City*

- Increased development activity may expand tax base
- More flexible standards may improve competitiveness with neighboring cities
- Lower material standards could result in long-term maintenance concerns if not carefully balanced

The City's current design standards have been effective in promoting quality development but may benefit from targeted updates to improve flexibility and reduce development costs. Recent amendments, including the addition of insulated metal panels, demonstrate a shift toward modernization. Adjustments to material percentage requirements, increased flexibility for non-visible façades, and potential revisions to the design overlay zones could help the City remain competitive while maintaining its desired architectural character.

Commissioner Steve Cich proposed reducing material requirements to 50% for street-facing sides and maintaining flexibility for non-street-facing sides. Commissioners Cich and Otto discussed the potential impact of reducing material requirements on the overall design and competitiveness of buildings. Chair Ehalt and Commissioner Cich discussed the appropriateness of the current design standards zones, particularly along the I-35 and Highway 95 corridors. Chair Ehalt suggested that the zones may need to be re-evaluated to ensure they are appropriate for the specific areas they cover. Chair Ehalt and Commissioner Cich discussed the potential impact of changing the zones on the overall design and competitiveness of buildings.

#### d. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). At the April 7 Planning Commission meeting, a resident raised the possibility of adopting regulations to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) as an additional housing option within residential zoning districts. ADU's are

smaller, secondary residential units located on the same lot as a principal dwelling and may be either attached or detached. ADU's have gained increased attention as a planning tool to expand housing supply without large-scale development, support multi-generational living arrangements, and provide supplemental income opportunities for homeowners.

Currently, the North Branch City Code does not explicitly permit ADU's in residential zoning districts. As a result, the establishment of a secondary dwelling unit on a single parcel would require code interpretation or approval of a variance.

Nearby jurisdictions, including Chisago County, Minnesota, and Isanti County, Minnesota, allow ADU's (often referred to as "Accessory Apartments" or "Guest Houses") under specific conditions, typically within agricultural or rural zoning districts. These ordinances provide a useful framework for evaluating how ADU's could be regulated within the City of North Branch. This item is presented for informational purposes only, and no action is requested at this time. Planning Commission members are asked to review the attached ordinances from Chisago and Isanti Counties in advance of a more detailed discussion at the June Planning Commission meeting. That discussion will focus on whether the City should consider incorporating ADU regulations into its zoning code and how such regulations may be structured.

As the Planning Commission reviews the concept of allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), several policy and implementation considerations should be evaluated. These considerations are intended to guide future discussion on how ADU's could be incorporated into the City of North Branch zoning code in a manner that balances housing flexibility with neighborhood compatibility.

e. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis gave a Comprehensive Plan Update. Staff will be taking a deeper dive into the Comprehensive Plan and revising the language we discussed at the last meeting, along with making some minor tweaks to wording, numbers, and possibly updating some data depending on how in-depth we decide to go. Since a full comp plan review is planned in a couple of years, we're also weighing what's worth addressing now versus later.

The main topics from the last meeting were housing, transportation, utilities, and public safety. Housing and land use are likely the biggest areas where the planning commission may want to review and provide suggestions. If you read through the update and notice anything you think should be changed right away, feel free to send us your suggestions. The City is shooting to have a draft available to the City Council for their review and ultimate approval at the 2nd meeting in June.

9. NEXT MEETING - June 2, 2026; 6:30 P.M

10. ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission Meeting was adjourned at 8:58PM.

## Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-210 Design Standards Chart amending minimum interior side yard setbacks from six (6) feet to ten (10) feet within applicable residential zoning districts.

## Overview / Background

City staff has prepared this report to facilitate discussion regarding a potential amendment to the Zoning Code to increase minimum interior side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet in zoning districts where a 6-foot setback is currently permitted. As shown in the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table, several residential zoning districts—including portions of R-1, R-2, and R-3 districts currently allow 6-foot interior side setbacks, particularly for single-family and certain attached housing types.

This topic was discussed at the May 5, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting. During the discussion, Planning Commission members reviewed the potential impacts of increasing minimum interior side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet and provided initial feedback regarding neighborhood character, buildable area, and impacts to existing properties.

Staff is seeking official motion whether to recommend/deny approval of the text amendment.

## Issues to Consider

- Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-210 - Residential Interior Side Yard Setbacks

## Analysis

The potential amendment would increase the minimum interior side yard setback from 6 to 10 feet, aligning these districts more closely with others that already require larger setbacks. The City's current Design Standards Chart establishes varying minimum interior side yard setback requirements depending on zoning district and housing type. Several residential zoning districts currently permit six (6) foot side yard setbacks for single-family and attached residential dwellings.

The proposed text amendment would revise the minimum interior side yard setback requirement from six (6) feet to ten (10) feet within applicable residential zoning districts.

The proposed amendment is intended to:

- Increase spacing between residential structures
- Improve privacy and access between homes
- Enhance consistency between zoning districts
- Support neighborhood character and lower-density development patterns

The following chart is an excerpt from the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table. The full table is attached to this report. The text amendment proposes to change all residential zoning district interior setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet.

Use	R-1 Single Family	R-1 Two-Family Dwellings (Per Unit)	R-2 Single Family	R-2 Two-Family Dwellings (Per Unit)	R-2 3-6 Attached Units (Per Townhouse)	R-3 Two-Family Dwellings (Per Unit)	R-3 3-6 Attached Units (Per Townhouse)	R-3 7+ Attached Units & Condominiums	R-3 Detached Single Family
Side Setback – Interior Lot (ft)	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	10	6

The following sections outline key considerations when analyzing impacts to residents, developers/builders, and the city. Cost considerations are also analyzed further.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Increased Privacy:** Additional distance between homes may reduce noise and visual impacts between neighboring properties.
- **Improved Access & Maintenance:** Larger side yards provide more space for maintenance, drainage, and utility access.
- **Enhanced Light and Air:** Greater spacing can improve natural light and ventilation between structures.
- **Fire Safety:** Increased separation may improve fire protection and emergency response access.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Buildable Area:** Particularly on smaller lots, increased setbacks may limit home size or placement options.
- **Existing Development Pattern:** Established neighborhoods with narrower spacing may not reflect the proposed standard.
- **Nonconformities:** Existing homes built under the 6-foot standard would likely become legal nonconforming structures.
- **Additions:** Future additions or expansions to an existing principal structure may be required to meet the proposed 10-foot setback requirement rather than the existing 6-foot standard, which could limit the ability for some homeowners to expand their homes on narrower lots.

### Impacts to Developers & Builders

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Marketability:** Wider spacing between homes may appeal to buyers seeking lower-density residential character.
- **Consistency:** Standardizing setbacks across districts may simplify zoning interpretation and development review.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Lot Yield:** Larger setbacks may decrease the number of buildable lots or require larger lot sizes.
- **Design Limitations:** Standard building plans may need modification to fit within narrower building envelopes.
- **Plat Revisions:** Concept plans or undeveloped subdivisions designed with 6-foot setbacks may require redesign.

## Impacts to the City

### Potential Benefits

- Community Character: Increased setbacks may support a more open and spacious residential environment.
- Stormwater & Drainage: Additional pervious area between structures may improve drainage conditions.
- Infrastructure Coordination: Greater spacing may reduce conflicts with utilities and easements.

### Potential Challenges

- Housing Affordability: Larger setbacks may increase development costs, which could impact housing prices.
- Land Use Efficiency: Reduced density may affect efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- Administrative Considerations: Managing nonconformities and transition standards may require additional staff review.

## Cost Considerations

### Developers:

- Increased cost per unit due to reduced density
- Potential redesign costs for site layouts and building plans

### Homeowners:

- Possible increase in home prices
- Potential long-term value benefits associated with increased spacing

### City:

- Possible reduction in tax base efficiency on a per-acre basis
- Limited direct fiscal impact, but potential increase in administrative review complexity

## Planning Considerations

- The current zoning table reflects a mix of 6-foot and 10-foot side setbacks, depending on district and housing type .
- The 6-foot standard is most commonly associated with more compact residential development patterns.
- Consideration may be given to:
  - Whether a uniform standard is appropriate across all districts
  - Whether different standards should apply based on lot size or zoning district
  - How to address existing platted lots and nonconformities
  - How existing homes are impacted and limited when looking to expand home

## **Summary**

Increasing side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet presents a range of potential benefits related to privacy, safety, and neighborhood character, while also introducing considerations related to housing density, cost, and development flexibility. Larger setbacks may contribute to a more open development pattern and improved long-term livability, particularly in lower-density residential areas. However, the change could also reduce buildable area on individual lots, potentially impacting lot layout efficiency and limiting design options on narrower parcels.

Additionally, the amendment may have broader implications on housing affordability by increasing land costs per unit and reducing overall development yield in affected districts. The existing mix of setback standards across zoning districts reflects differing development intensities, and modifying these standards may alter how those districts function over time. Consideration should also be given to how such a change would apply to existing platted lots and whether flexibility or exemptions may be appropriate.

Overall, the potential amendment involves balancing community character objectives with practical development considerations.

### **Planning Commission Action**

1. Motion to recommend approval/denial of the proposed text amendment to City Code Sec. 66-210 amending minimum interior side yard setbacks from six (6) feet to ten (10) feet within applicable residential zoning districts.

**Dimensional & Design Standards Table**

Use	R-1 single family	R-1, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-2, single family	R-2, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-2, 3-6 attached units, per townhouse	R-3, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-3 3-6 attached units - per townhouse	R-3: 7+ attached units and condominiums (see below for apartment standards) <sup>H</sup>	R -3 detached single family	RR	AG	Public	CBD	B1	BN	I1	I2	Flood plain	Shoreland
Front yard setback- interior in ft - at lot line or ROW	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	40	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA	See Division 18	See Division 19
Lot Width - corner - in ft at front set-back line	80	50	80	50	150	50	150	150	50	110	300	NA	25	50, 300 outside of USA	50	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Lot Width - in ft - at front set-back line	80	50	80	50	150	50	150	150	50	110	300	NA	25	50, 300 outside of USA	50	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Ditch easement - in ft	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
Rear yard setback- interior lot - in ft	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Rear-yard setback corner lot - in ft	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	30	15	15	50	15	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Side set-back- interior lot - in ft	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	10	6	10	50	6	0	10, 0 if attached, 50 outside USA	10	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Side setback- corner - in ft	30	30	30	20	30	30	20	30	30	30	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Lot Depth - minimum in ft	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	300	500	NA	100	100, 300 outside of USA	100	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Minimum Lot Size - sq ft	12,000	7,500	12,000	6,500	2,000	6,500	2,000	Not more than 35% of the lot shall be covered by all buildings.	6,500	1 acre buildable	10 acres	NA	2,500	5,000 in USA, 10 acres outside USA	5,000	10,000, 10 acres outside of USA	10,000, 10 acres outside of USA		
Maximum base density	1-4 units per acre	1-4 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	1 house per buildable acre	1 SF home	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA		
Minimum Principal building size sq ft - main floor, per dwelling <sup>C</sup>	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	NA	~	~	~	~	~		
Apartment -Minimum sq ft																			
Efficiency/studio	NA	NA	NA	NA	400	NA	400	400	NA	NA	NA	NA	400	400	NA	NA	NA		
1 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	650	NA	NA	NA	NA	650	650	NA	NA	NA		
2 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	750	NA	NA	NA	NA	750	750	NA	NA	NA		
3 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	850	NA	NA	NA	NA	850	850	NA	NA	NA		
Principal Structure - Min Width <sup>J</sup> - in ft	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	NA	NA	NA	~	~	~		

Garage - sq ft	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	if provided, 200 <sup>E</sup>	~	400	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	NA	~	~	~	~	~
Wetland natural buffer /structure setback	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Building height - in ft	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	3 stories or 50' <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>
Impervious surface - maximum	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	70%	75%	70%	50%	50%	NA	na	90%	90%	90%	90%
Floor elevation (lowest)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	NA	3	3	3	3	3
Floor elevation (lowest) - 100 yr flood - in ft	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	2	2	2	2	2
Foundation Requirements	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>
Driveway Surfacing	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>
Landscape Requirements	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>
Sign Requirement	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>
Off-Street Parking Requirements	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>

**All buildings shall comply with State of MN Building Code. Provisions for decks shall be shown on original plans when a sliding glass door, patio door, etc. is installed. Provisions for decks must be shown on original plans when a sliding glass door, patio, door, etc. are to be installed**

- A. Height Exceptions - building height limits shall not apply to belfries, cupolas, domes, spires, monuments, airway beacons, radio towers, flag poles, chimneys or flues; nor to elevators, watertanks, poles, towers and other structures for essential services; nor to similar structures extending above the roof of any building and not occupying more than 25 percent of the area of such roof.
- B. Rear or side yard or attached garage required.
- C. Foundation Requirements -Permanent full perimeter footings; with foundation walls of concrete, concrete block, wood or any other approved material or method. Decks and porches are allowed on pier type footings.
- D. Residential - See Section 66-855. All zoning districts: shall be concrete or bituminous, unless stated otherwise.
- E. See Article 10- Landscaping Requirements; except Ag, see Section 66-390.
- F. See Article 6 - Sign requirements
- G. See Article 7 - Off Street Parking Requirements.
- H. Setbacks measured from outside walls or the edge of private condo spaces including ground level decks and yard spaces.

## **Planning Commission Action**

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Zoning Text Amendment to the Design Standards Chart in City Code Section 66-210 to amend the Maximum Base Density for R-3 zoned properties.

## **Overview / Background**

At the May 5, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting, the Planning Commission discussed the potential for a text amendment to the City Code that would establish a maximum base density within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district.

Currently, the Dimensional and Design Standards Table identifies the R-3 district as allowing “6+ units per acre” with no defined upper limit. The proposed amendment would revise this standard to establish a defined density range of 6 to 18 units per acre.

During the May 5th discussion, concerns were expressed that establishing a maximum density cap of 18 units per acre may significantly impact the financial feasibility of future apartment and multi-family developments within the City. Discussion included how reducing potential unit counts could further tighten development margins due to increasing land costs, construction costs, infrastructure costs, and financing challenges associated with higher-density residential development. It was noted that many multi-family developments rely on increased unit counts to spread development costs across additional units in order to remain financially viable. Overall, the Planning Commission suggested that capping the maximum number at 18 units might be too low but would be open to other max density caps.

The Planning Commission discussed the importance of balancing neighborhood compatibility and infrastructure considerations with the City’s long-term housing supply, housing diversity, and economic development goals.

The R-3 zoning district is intended to accommodate higher-density residential development, including apartments, townhomes, and other multi-family housing types. Existing standards within the zoning district already regulate development intensity through controls such as:

- Maximum building height of up to three (3) stories or 50 feet
- Impervious surface limitations
- Minimum lot area requirements
- Setbacks and building coverage limitations
- Parking requirements
- Landscaping and site design standards

While these standards regulate building form and site layout, the current code does not establish a maximum residential density threshold if all other standards are met.

### *Proposed Amendment*

#### Current Standard

- Maximum Base Density: 6+ units per acre (No maximum cap)

## Proposed Standard

- Maximum Base Density: 6 to 18 units per acre

## Analysis

The following chart is an excerpt from the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table. The full table is attached to this report. The text amendment proposes to change all R-3 Max Base Densities from "6+ units per acre" to "6-18 units per acre".

Use	R-3, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-3 3-6 attached units - per townhouse	R-3: 7+ attached units and condominiums	R-3 detached single family
Maximum Base Density	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre

The following analysis outlines the potential impacts of establishing a maximum density of 18 units per acre within the R-3 zoning district. This amendment would influence how residential developments are designed and how they function within the community. The impacts are evaluated from multiple perspectives, including residents, developers, infrastructure, and overall land use planning, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with implementing a defined density cap.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- Greater predictability in neighborhood character and intensity
- Reduced concerns related to overcrowding, parking demand, and traffic congestion
- Improved compatibility with adjacent lower-density zoning districts

#### Potential Challenges:

- May limit availability of diverse and more affordable housing types
- Could reduce opportunities for compact, walkable development patterns
- Potential upward pressure on housing costs due to constrained supply

### Impacts to Developers

#### Potential Benefits:

- Provides clear expectations and certainty for project planning
- Aligns density with infrastructure and site design constraints
- May reduce community opposition by limiting perceived overdevelopment

#### Potential Challenges:

- Reduced flexibility in site design and yield optimization
- Lower overall unit counts may impact project feasibility and return on investment
- Could discourage higher-density or mixed-use style developments

### Infrastructure and Service Impacts

#### Potential Benefits

- Helps ensure density levels remain consistent with available infrastructure capacity
- Reduces strain on utilities, roadways, and public services

- Easier long-term planning for schools, parks, and emergency services

#### Potential Challenges

- Lower densities may result in less efficient use of existing infrastructure
- Could increase per-unit cost of infrastructure expansion or maintenance

#### Cost Considerations

##### Developers:

- Fewer units per acre may increase per-unit land and development costs
- Potential need for higher sale or rental prices to offset reduced density

##### City:

- Lower densities may reduce tax base potential per acre
- Lower residential density may reduce overall demand on public infrastructure systems; however, it may also decrease cost efficiency as infrastructure serves fewer households

#### Planning Considerations

- A maximum density aligns R-3 zoning with common planning practices that define both minimum and maximum thresholds
- Helps reinforce transitions between zoning districts
- Supports long-term comprehensive planning goals if density targets are defined

##### However:

- May limit the City's ability to accommodate future housing demand
- Could reduce flexibility in responding to market conditions

#### Key Policy Considerations

When evaluating this amendment, decision-makers may wish to consider:

- Whether 18 units per acre appropriately reflects the desired intensity of R-3 zoning
- If different density caps should apply to different housing types (apartments vs. townhomes)
- How this change aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan and housing goals
- Whether additional design standards could achieve similar outcomes without limiting density

#### **Summary**

The proposed text amendment would establish a maximum residential density of 18 units per acre within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district. The amendment is intended to provide additional predictability and control regarding residential development intensity within the City.

Discussion at the May 5, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting identified concerns from both Planning Commissioners and developers regarding the potential impact the proposed density cap could have on development feasibility, housing supply, and future apartment construction in North Branch. Specifically, concerns were raised that reducing allowable density may further constrain already challenging development economics associated with higher-density residential projects.

While a maximum density cap may assist with neighborhood compatibility and infrastructure planning, it may also reduce development flexibility and limit the City's ability to accommodate future housing demand and housing diversity goals.

### **Planning Commission Action**

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Zoning Text Amendment to the Design Standards Chart in City Code Section 66-210 to amend the Maximum Base Density from "6+ units per acre" to "6-18 units per acre" for R-3 zoned properties.
- Recommend approval with modifications

**Dimensional & Design Standards Table**

Use	R-1 single family	R-1, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-2, single family	R-2, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-2, 3-6 attached units, per townhouse	R-3, 2 family dwellings, per unit	R-3 3-6 attached units - per townhouse	R-3: 7+ attached units and condominiums (see below for apartment standards) <sup>H</sup>	R -3 detached single family	RR	AG	Public	CBD	B1	BN	I1	I2	Flood plain	Shoreland
Front yard setback- interior in ft - at lot line or ROW	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	40	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA	See Division 18	See Division 19
Lot Width - corner - in ft at front set-back line	80	50	80	50	150	50	150	150	50	110	300	NA	25	50, 300 outside of USA	50	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Lot Width - in ft - at front set-back line	80	50	80	50	150	50	150	150	50	110	300	NA	25	50, 300 outside of USA	50	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Ditch easement - in ft	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
Rear yard setback- interior lot - in ft	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Rear-yard setback corner lot - in ft	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	30	15	15	50	15	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Side set-back- interior lot - in ft	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	6', 0' for attached portion of unit	10	6	10	50	6	0	10, 0 if attached, 50 outside USA	10	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Side setback- corner - in ft	30	30	30	20	30	30	20	30	30	30	50	30	0	15, 50 outside USA	15	20, 50 outside of USA	20, 50 outside of USA		
Lot Depth - minimum in ft	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	300	500	NA	100	100, 300 outside of USA	100	100, 300 outside of USA	100, 300 outside of USA		
Minimum Lot Size - sq ft	12,000	7,500	12,000	6,500	2,000	6,500	2,000	Not more than 35% of the lot shall be covered by all buildings.	6,500	1 acre buildable	10 acres	NA	2,500	5,000 in USA, 10 acres outside USA	5,000	10,000, 10 acres outside of USA	10,000, 10 acres outside of USA		
Maximum base density	1-4 units per acre	1-4 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	1-6 units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	6+ units per acre	1 house per buildable acre	1 SF home	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA		
Minimum Principal building size sq ft - main floor, per dwelling <sup>C</sup>	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	800	NA	~	~	~	~	~		
Apartment -Minimum sq ft																			
Efficiency/studio	NA	NA	NA	NA	400	NA	400	400	NA	NA	NA	NA	400	400	NA	NA	NA		
1 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	650	NA	NA	NA	NA	650	650	NA	NA	NA		
2 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	750	NA	NA	NA	NA	750	750	NA	NA	NA		
3 bedroom	NA	NA	NA	NA	800	NA	800	850	NA	NA	NA	NA	850	850	NA	NA	NA		
Principal Structure - Min Width <sup>J</sup> - in ft	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	NA	NA	NA	~	~	~		

Garage - sq ft	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	if provided, 200 <sup>E</sup>	~	400	400 <sup>B</sup>	400 <sup>B</sup>	NA	~	~	~	~	~
Wetland natural buffer /structure setback	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Building height - in ft	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	3 stories or 50' <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	35 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	50 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>	75 <sup>A</sup>
Impervious surface - maximum	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	70%	75%	70%	50%	50%	NA	na	90%	90%	90%	90%
Floor elevation (lowest)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	NA	3	3	3	3	3
Floor elevation (lowest) - 100 yr flood - in ft	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	NA	2	2	2	2	2
Foundation Requirements	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>	Yes <sup>C</sup>
Driveway Surfacing	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>	Yes <sup>D</sup>
Landscape Requirements	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>	Yes <sup>E</sup>
Sign Requirement	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>	Yes <sup>F</sup>
Off-Street Parking Requirements	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	NA	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>	Yes <sup>G</sup>

**All buildings shall comply with State of MN Building Code. Provisions for decks shall be shown on original plans when a sliding glass door, patio door, etc. is installed. Provisions for decks must be shown on original plans when a sliding glass door, patio, door, etc. are to be installed**

- A. Height Exceptions - building height limits shall not apply to belfries, cupolas, domes, spires, monuments, airway beacons, radio towers, flag poles, chimneys or flues; nor to elevators, watertanks, poles, towers and other structures for essential services; nor to similar structures extending above the roof of any building and not occupying more than 25 percent of the area of such roof.
- B. Rear or side yard or attached garage required.
- C. Foundation Requirements -Permanent full perimeter footings; with foundation walls of concrete, concrete block, wood or any other approved material or method. Decks and porches are allowed on pier type footings.
- D. Residential - See Section 66-855. All zoning districts: shall be concrete or bituminous, unless stated otherwise.
- E. See Article 10- Landscaping Requirements; except Ag, see Section 66-390.
- F. See Article 6 - Sign requirements
- G. See Article 7 - Off Street Parking Requirements.
- H. Setbacks measured from outside walls or the edge of private condo spaces including ground level decks and yard spaces.

## **Planning Commission Action**

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Zoning Text Amendment to City Code Section 66-943 relating to development design standards and amendments to the design overlay district map

## **Overview / Background**

City staff has been directed by the Planning Commission, Economic Development Authority (EDA), and City Council to evaluate the City's existing design standards under Section 66-943 of City Code. The intent of this review is to determine whether current regulations are overly restrictive and whether modifications could improve development flexibility, reduce construction costs, and enhance the City's competitiveness for commercial and industrial investment.

The City of North Branch currently utilizes a three-zone design overlay system that establishes varying exterior building material requirements based on visibility and location within the community. These standards are intended to promote architectural quality, ensure cohesive design, and protect long-term property values.

Recently, the City has taken steps to modernize these standards. Most notably, Insulated Metal Panels were added as a permitted Class II material through Ordinance No. 397-25, reflecting a shift toward accommodating newer construction materials while maintaining design intent.

This item was previously discussed by the Planning Commission at the May 5th, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting. Discussion at that meeting generally focused on potential modifications to the Design Standards Map and whether portions of the community currently located within Design Zone 1 should instead be placed within Design Zone 2. Areas specifically discussed included properties located along Flink Avenue and portions of the I-35 corridor where commissioners discussed whether the current Zone 1 standards may be more restrictive than necessary for the type of commercial and industrial development anticipated in those areas.

The Planning Commission also discussed whether additional ordinance language should be considered to focus higher architectural standards on portions of buildings most visible to the public and neighboring residential areas.

Specifically, commissioners discussed:

- Applying enhanced design standards primarily to street-facing building facades
- Requiring building elevations immediately adjacent to residentially zoned or guided properties to meet higher design standards
- Allowing greater flexibility on rear or non-visible building elevations

No formal direction or recommendation was made by the Planning Commission regarding these concepts.

## **Analysis**

### Existing Standards

Design standards apply to:

- Commercial, Central Business, and Industrial Zoning Districts

Design standards do not apply to:

- Agricultural (AG)
- Rural Residential (RR)
- Park/Open Space districts

### Design Overlay Zones

#### *Zone 1 – Primary Corridors & Gateways*

- Minimum 65% Class 1 materials
- Highest Architectural Standards
- Applies to high-visibility corridors such as I-35, Highway 95, and Main Street

#### *Zone 2 – Transitional Areas*

- Minimum 50% Class 1 materials
- Moderate flexibility in design
- Serves as a transition between high-visibility and industrial areas

#### *Zone 3 – Industrial / Low Visibility Areas*

- No minimum material percentage requirements
- Requires use of at least two materials or colors on visible façades
- Greater flexibility for industrial and rear-facing development

### Potential Design Standards Map Modifications

During the May 5th Planning Commission discussion, commissioners reviewed whether portions of the existing Design Standards Map should be adjusted to better reflect current development patterns and future land use expectations. Discussion primarily focused on areas along Flink Avenue and portions of the I-35 corridor that are currently within Design Zone 1.

#### Potential amendments discussed included:

- Reclassifying select commercially or industrially guided areas from Zone 1 to Zone 2
- Reducing the extent of Zone 1 requirements in areas less visible from primary community gateways
- Maintaining Zone 1 standards within the Highway 95 corridor, downtown core, and highly visible gateway areas.
- Expanding flexibility for industrial style developments while maintaining overall architectural quality

#### Potential Façade-Based Standards:

The Planning Commission also discussed whether the ordinance should place greater emphasis on specific building elevations rather than applying uniform standards to all sides of a structure.

Examples of potential ordinance language concepts could include:

## Street Facing Elevations

- Building elevations facing a public street shall be required to meet the applicable Class 1 material percentage requirements for the applicable design zone.
- Side or rear elevations not visible from a public street may be permitted to have reduced Class 1 material percentages or additional flexibility in material selection

## Residential Adjacency Standards

- Building elevations immediately adjacent to residential zoning districts or residentially guided properties shall be required to meet the applicable Class 1 material standards regardless of visibility.
- Additional landscaping, screening, or architectural treatments may be required when commercial or industrial buildings abut residential uses.

## Visibility-Based Standards

- Elevations visible from Interstate 35, Highway 95, Main Street, or other designated gateway corridors shall be subject to enhanced architectural standards.
- Rear elevations screened from public view or adjacent industrial properties may be permitted greater material flexibility.

The following analysis evaluates the City's current design standards and the potential impacts of modifying material percentage requirements and zoning structure. This review considers impacts to development feasibility, community character, and long-term planning goals.

### *Overall Evaluation*

North Branch's design standards are generally consistent with surrounding communities in intent; however, the City's material percentage requirements—particularly in Zone 1—are slightly more restrictive than many comparable cities. While these standards support high-quality development, they may also contribute to increased construction costs and reduced development flexibility.

### *Comparison to Surrounding Cities*

A review of neighboring communities indicates several common themes:

- Most cities require high-quality materials on street-facing facades, but allow flexibility elsewhere
- Typical requirements range from 50% to 75% high-quality materials
- Many cities allow modern materials such as metal panels when integrated into the design
- Greater emphasis is placed on architectural articulation and overall appearance, rather than strict percentage requirements

### *Impacts of Current Standards*

#### Benefits

- Promotes consistent architectural quality throughout the City
- Enhances key corridors and gateway areas
- Supports long-term property values and community aesthetics
- Encourages durable, long-lasting materials

#### Challenges

- Higher material requirements may increase construction costs
- Limits flexibility for developers, particularly for industrial and commercial projects

- May discourage smaller-scale or cost-sensitive developments
- Requires periodic amendments to accommodate new materials

## Potential Amendment Options

Based on the analysis, several potential modifications could be considered:

### *Material Percentage Adjustments*

- Reduce Zone 1 requirement from 65% to approximately 50% Class 1 Materials
- Reduce Zone 2 requirement from 50%
- Maintain flexibility in Zone 3

### *Façade-Based Standards*

- Focus higher-quality material requirements on street-facing facades only
- Allow greater flexibility on side and rear elevations

### *Expanded Material Allowances*

- Continue allowing modern materials such as insulated metal panels
- Shift focus toward design quality rather than strict material classifications

### *Design Overlay Zone Modifications*

- Simplify or reevaluate the current three zone structure

## Cost and Development Considerations

### Developers

- Reduced material requirements may lower construction costs
- Increased flexibility may improve project feasibility
- Could encourage a broader range of commercial and industrial development

### City

- Increased development activity may expand tax base
- More flexible standards may improve competitiveness with neighboring cities
- Lower material standards could result in long-term maintenance concerns if not carefully balanced

## Text Amendment Options:

The proposed amendments (underlined below) would revise the City's Design Standards regulations to focus architectural and building material requirements on street-facing building elevations and facades adjacent to residentially zoned properties, while providing greater flexibility for side and rear elevations not visible from public roadways. Additional amendments may include modifying the Design Standards Map by transitioning select properties along Flink Avenue and portions of the I-35 corridor from Zone 1 to Zone 2 to better align design requirements with development patterns and economic development objectives.

(k) Street-Facing Facades

1. For purposes of this section, a street-facing façade shall mean any building elevation visible from and oriented toward a public street, public roadway, Interstate 35, Highway 95, Main Street, or other designated gateway corridors identified by the Design Standards Map.
2. Street-facing facades shall comply with the minimum exterior building material requirements applicable to the Design Standards Zone in which the property is located.
3. Building elevations not visible from a public street may utilize any combination of approved Class I and Class II materials, provided the overall architectural character of the building remains consistent and cohesive.
4. Corner lots shall be considered to have two street-facing facades and both elevations shall comply with the applicable material standards.

(l) Residential Adjacency Standards

1. Any parcel subject to the provisions of this Section that immediately abuts a residential zoning district shall comply with the minimum exterior building material requirements of the applicable Design Standards Zone on all sides of the building, regardless of visibility from a public roadway.

(m) Design Standards Map Adjustments

The City Council may periodically amend the Design Standards Map to reflect changing development patterns, gateway corridors, land use transitions, and economic development objectives. In evaluating amendments to the map, consideration shall be given to roadway visibility, corridor prominence, adjacent land uses, and the overall character of the area.

(n) Visibility-Based Building Materials

Where a building contains facades that are visible from Interstate 35, Highway 95, Main Street, or other designated gateway corridors, the Planning Commission and City Council may require enhanced architectural treatment on those facades regardless of the minimum standards otherwise applicable within the Design Standards Zone.

## **Summary**

The City's current design standards have been effective in promoting quality development but may benefit from targeted updates to improve flexibility and reduce development costs. Recent amendments, including the addition of insulated metal panels, demonstrate a shift toward modernization.

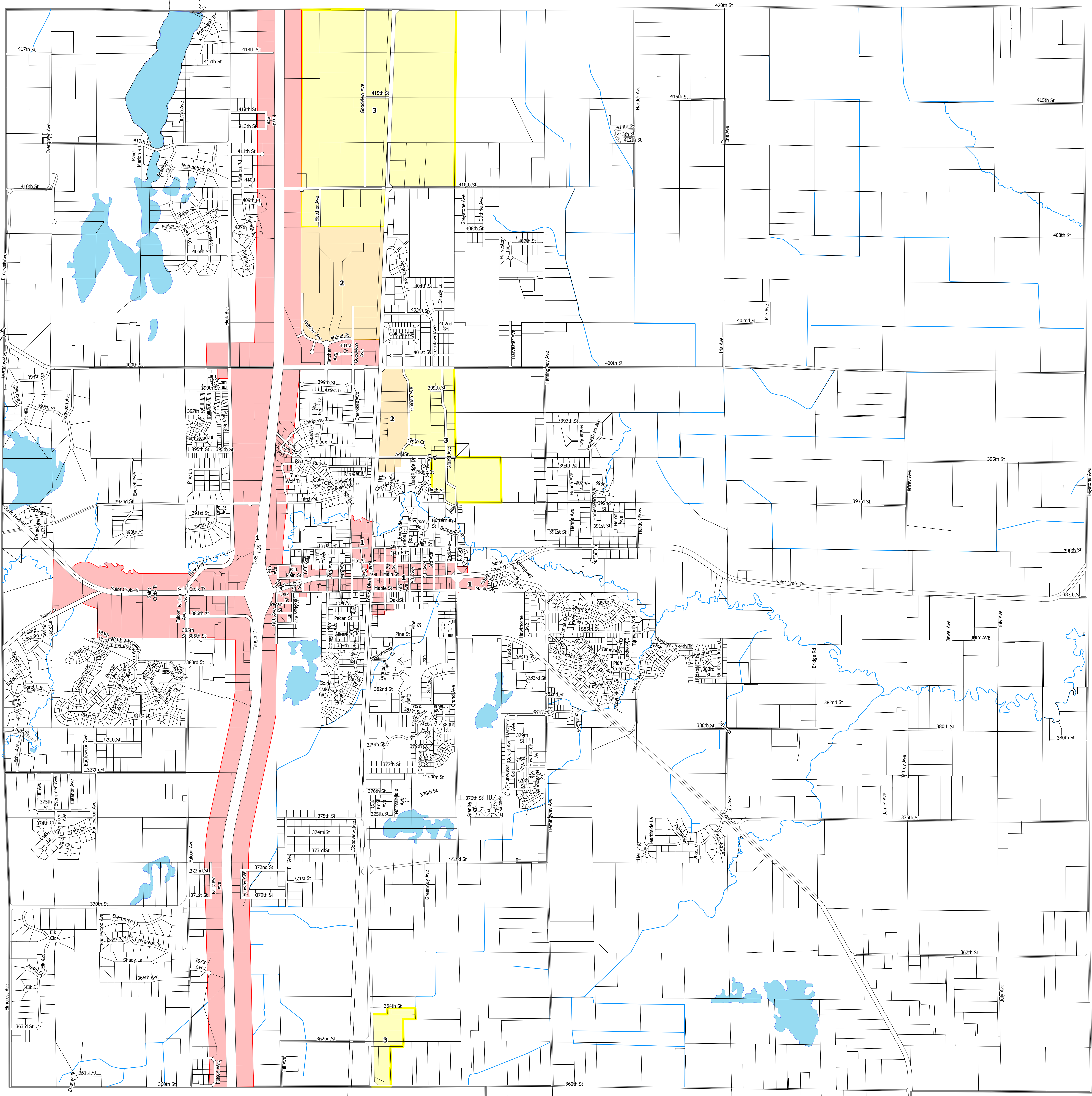
Potential updates discussed by the Planning Commission include reevaluating portions of the Design Standards Map, focusing higher architectural standards on street-facing and residentially adjacent elevations, and providing greater flexibility on non-visible building facades. These concepts could help the City remain competitive while maintaining its desired architectural character.

### **Planning Commission Action**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the discussion items presented within this report and provide formal direction regarding potential amendments to Section 66-943 of City Code related to design standards and building material requirements.

Potential motions for consideration may include:

- Motion directing staff to draft ordinance amendments modifying the Design Standards Map, including evaluating portions of Flink Avenue and the I-35 corridor for transition from Zone 1 to Zone 2
- Motion directing staff to prepare façade-based design standards focused on street-facing elevations
- Motion directing staff to prepare additional standards requiring enhanced building materials for elevations adjacent to residentially zoned or guided properties
- Motion directing staff to maintain the existing design standards with no additional amendments
- Motion providing alternative direction as determined appropriate by the Planning Commission



Design Standards Zones

- 1
- 2
- 3

## **Sec 66-943 Design Standards**

a) The zones set forth in this Section are defined in the design overlay [district map](#) on record with the City Clerk.

b) Architectural Standards. The requirements contained within this Division shall not apply to any structure in the Agricultural, Rural Residential or Park/Open Space districts. It shall apply to all structures used for commercial purposes in Single-Family Residential, Medium Density Residential, and High Density Residential, all structures in the Central Business, Commercial, and Industrial Districts.

These standards are intended to ensure coordinated design of new and existing building exteriors, including additions and accessory structures, in order to prevent visual disharmony; minimize adverse impacts on adjacent properties from buildings which detract from the character and appearance of the district; and aid in improving the overall economic viability of the district. These standards are further intended to prevent use of materials that are unsightly, subject to rapid deterioration or which contribute to depreciation of property values or cause urban blight. It is not the intent of this Section to unduly restrict design freedom when reviewing and approving project architecture in relationship to the proposed land use, site characteristics and interior building layout. While the City of North Branch has not established a theme or particular style of architecture that must be adhered to, a general goal of creating a professional appearance with architectural appeal associated with a small city atmosphere is desired within the City of North Branch.

- (1) Architectural plans shall be prepared by an architect or other qualified person (as determined by the Zoning Administrator) and shall show the following:
  - (a) Elevations of all sides of the building.
  - (b) Type and color of exterior building materials.
  - (c) Typical floor plans.
  - (d) Dimensions of all structures.
  - (e) The location of trash containers and of exterior electrical, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment.
  - (f) Utility plans including water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer.
  - (g) Additional plans deemed necessary by the Zoning Administrator.
- (2) Exterior building materials shall be subject to Zoning Administrator approval and the following:
  - (a) Zone 1: Structures must provide a cohesive architectural appearance reflecting its functional purpose and must be composed of at least sixty-five percent (65%) Class I materials; not more than thirty-five percent (35%) percent Class II materials.

- (b) Zone 2: Structures must provide a cohesive architectural appearance reflecting its functional purpose and must be composed of at least fifty percent (50%) Class I materials; not more than thirty-five percent (35%) Class II materials.
- (c) Zone 3: Structures must provide a cohesive architectural appearance reflecting its functional purpose. Structures in this zone are not subject to material composition requirements by Class. All other design standards in this Section apply unless otherwise listed.
- (d) Classes of materials. For the purposes of this subdivision, exterior materials shall be divided into Class I and Class II categories as follows:

1. Class I consisting of:

- i. Brick,
- ii. Natural stone (or similar appearing, high quality manufactured stone),
- iii. Glass curtain wall,
- iv. Copper,
- v. Other comparable or superior materials, or
- vi. New materials that meet the intent of the preamble above.

2. Class II consisting of:

- i. Specialty concrete block such as burnished, textured or rock face,
- ii. Architecturally precast concrete panels having an exposed aggregate, light sandblast, acid etch, form liner, smooth as cast, tooled, natural stone veneer, brick face and/or cast stone type finish,
- iii. Masonry stucco,
- iv. Fiber-cement exterior siding,
- v. Other comparable or superior materials,
- vi. New materials that meet the intent of the preamble above. vii. Exterior finish installation system (EFIS),
- viii. Opaque panels,
- ix. Ornamental metal,

- x. Smooth concrete block,
  - xi. Scored concrete block,
  - xii. Smooth concrete tilt-up panels,
  - xiii. Glazed block,
  - xiv. Glass block,
  - xv. Ceramic,
  - xvi. Other comparable or superior materials, or
  - xvii. New materials that meet the intent of the preamble above.
- (e) A distinctly different color of brick may be considered as a second Class I material, however, minor blended color combinations shall not be considered as a separate material.
  - (f) Buildings may be constructed primarily of one (1) specific Class I material provided that the design fits the purpose of the building and is obviously superior to the general intent of this Division to provide visual interest, variation in detailing, and eliminate long wall sections without windows.
  - (g) Buildings constructed in Zone 3 shall have a minimum of two complementary color tones or two materials incorporated on all sides of the building. This can be completed through wainscoting, columns, pilasters, or other ornamentation as determined by the Zoning Administrator.
  - (h) Garish or bright accent colors for awnings, trim, banding, walls, entries or any portion of the building shall be minimized, but in no case shall such coloring exceed five percent (5%) of each wall area.
  - (i) In Zones 1 and 2 exposed roof materials shall be similar to, or an architectural equivalent of a high quality asphalt shingle (300# or better), wood shingle, standing seam metal roof, or better.
  - (j) In Zone 3, roof materials shall be of a finished material and all fasteners and connectors shall be the same color as the roof material.
- (3) The overall architectural character shall have a consistent architectural expression on all sides of the building and be compatible with its surroundings.
  - (4) Windows or simulated windows shall be used on the ground level of any wall parallel to or nearly parallel to a street.

- (5) All structures, including parking ramps shall be designed to be architecturally integrated into the overall site and be made of comparable materials and decorative elements.
- (6) All façade treatments shall be maintained so as to not be unsightly in appearance or in a state of disrepair, nor shall harmful health or safety conditions be present for the life of the project.
- (7) Prohibited Exterior Materials in Zone 1 and 2:
  - (a) Vinyl Siding.
  - (b) Metal Siding, except as provided above.
  - (c) Formed Metal Panels with exposed fasteners.
  - (d) Pre-engineered post-frame structures with agricultural grade metal wall and roof panels, commonly called “pole barns” are not permitted.
- (8) Prohibited Exterior Materials in Zone 3:
  - (a) Unfinished steel on walls or roofs.
  - (b) Unfinished aluminum on walls or roofs.
  - (c) Reflective materials.
- (9) Exceptions – The following exceptions to the exterior building material requirements may apply:
  - (a) The use is an essential service as defined by this Division; or
  - (b) The applicant shall have the burden of demonstrating that:
    - 1. The proposed building maintains the quality in design and materials intended by this Division,
    - 2. The proposed building design and materials are compatible and in harmony with other structures within the district,
    - 3. The justification for deviation from the requirements of this section shall not be based on economic considerations.
  - (c) Sides of a building which are not visible from any public road may use any combination of Class I or II materials, if approved by the Planning Commission and City Council. The applicant must be able to demonstrate that said side of building is not visible from any public road.

- (d) Garage doors, window trim, flashing, accent items and the like, shall not constitute required materials that make up the exterior finish of a building for the purposes of this section.
  
- (e) Building Additions. Properties zoned I - Industrial and I2 - Heavy Industrial may be excepted from the minimum exterior building material standards for additions onto existing buildings. This exception only applies to additions of not more than 75 percent of the gross floor area of the initial principal building constructed on the property. The type and percent composition of the material(s) on the new addition(s) must be equal to or greater than the material(s) on the existing principal building. Additions exceeding 75 percent are required to meet the minimum exterior material standards for that Zone. In this case, the property owner may opt to satisfy the minimum standards on both the addition(s) and existing building. This exception does not apply to new secondary buildings and accessory structures on the property, if permitted by zoning.

## Report

Discussion of Potential Text Amendment – Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

### Overview / Background

At the April 7 Planning Commission meeting, a resident raised the possibility of adopting regulations to allow **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)** as an additional housing option within residential zoning districts. ADU's are smaller, secondary residential units located on the same lot as a principal dwelling and may be either attached or detached. The topic of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) was also discussed at the May 5, 2026 Planning Commission meeting. During that discussion, Planning Commission members expressed interest in further evaluating the potential impacts, benefits, and regulatory considerations associated with allowing ADU's within the City of North Branch.

ADU's have gained increased attention as a planning tool to expand housing supply without large-scale development, support multi-generational living arrangements, and provide supplemental income opportunities for homeowners.

Currently, the North Branch City Code does not explicitly permit ADU's in residential zoning districts. As a result, the establishment of a secondary dwelling unit on a single parcel would require code interpretation or approval of a variance.

Nearby jurisdictions, including Chisago County, Minnesota and Isanti County, Minnesota, allow ADU's (often referred to as "Accessory Apartments" or "Guest Houses") under specific conditions, typically within agricultural or rural zoning districts. These ordinances provide a useful framework for evaluating how ADU's could be regulated within the City of North Branch.

City staff is requesting that Planning Commission members review and analyze the questions and policy considerations identified within this report to provide staff with direction on how a potential ordinance amendment could be drafted. Planning Commission members are also encouraged to review the attached Chisago County and Isanti County ADU ordinances and identify provisions, standards, or processes they support or oppose. Feedback from the Planning Commission will assist staff in determining appropriate zoning districts, approval processes, development standards, and operational requirements that may be incorporated into a future ADU ordinance for consideration.

### Things to consider

As the Planning Commission reviews the concept of allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), several policy and implementation considerations should be evaluated. These considerations are intended to guide future discussion on how ADU's could be incorporated into the City of North Branch zoning code in a manner that balances housing flexibility with neighborhood compatibility.

#### Zoning Districts

- Should ADU's be permitted in all residential districts or limited to specific zoning classifications (ex: RR or R-1)

### Approval Process

- Should ADU's be permitted administratively or require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to allow for case-by-case review?

### Unit Type and Location

- Should both attached and detached ADU's be allowed?
- Should restrictions be placed on placement? (rear yard only?)

### Size Limitations

- Should ADU's be limited by square footage (ex: 800-1,200 square feet) or as a percentage of the principal dwelling?

### Owner Occupancy Requirements

- Should either the primary dwelling or ADU be owner-occupied to maintain property oversight and neighborhood character?

### Parking Requirements

- Should additional off-street parking be required for ADU's?

### Utilities and Infrastructure

- Are existing water, sewer, and stormwater systems adequate to support increased density?

### Design and Compatibility Standards

- Should ADU's be required to match the architectural style or materials of the principal dwelling?

### Number of Units

- Should there be a limit of one ADU per parcel?

### Enforcement and Administration

- What level of staff resources would be required to administer and enforce ADU regulations?



#### 4.10 Accessory Dwelling Units

- A. An accessory dwelling unit is a detached or possibly attached structure adhering to principal structure setbacks or an attached accessory use with a dedicated separate entrance from the principal structure as defined in Section 3. An internal stairwell may be connected to the dedicated separate entrance.
- B. An accessory dwelling unit is only permitted on parcels with an established principal dwelling.
- C. An accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed seven hundred eighty (780) square feet or larger measured at the foundation/footprint.
- D. The maximum footprint of the accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed the principal dwelling footprint.
- E. The accessory dwelling unit must be compatible in materials and appearance to the principal dwelling.
- F. Dedicated on-site parking to meet the needs generated by the accessory dwelling unit is required.
- G. The accessory dwelling unit shall meet the residential standards of this Ordinance including but not limited to building requirements in Section 4.07.
- H. Accessory dwelling units are permitted in the AG and RR Districts. Accessory dwelling units shall require a Conditional Use Permit in the AP, UFR, and RVC Districts.
- I. Accessory dwelling units shall be prohibited in the CLI and PAT Districts. Land containing both a principal dwelling and an accessory dwelling unit cannot be subdivided unless both dwellings and the land adhere to all specified dimensional standards.
- J. At least one (1) of the dwellings on the property must be owner occupied.
- K. Accessory dwelling units are not permitted on land which has been developed with a duplex or townhome.

**A514908**

Fees: \$0

Pages: 4

Isanti County Office of

Recorder/Registrar of Titles

Certified, Filed, and/or Recorded on:

April 11, 2022 1:12 PM

Isanti County Recorder

Well Cert. ( ) Rec'd ( ) Not Req'd

Received from: ISANTI COUNTY ZONING

Returned To: ISANTI COUNTY ZONING  
555 18TH AVE SW  
CAMBRIDGE, MN 55008

**NOTICE IS HERBY GIVEN** that the Isanti County Board of Commissioners took action at a public hearing on March 15, 2022 to make the following amendment to the Isanti County Zoning Ordinance as it relates to Accessory Dwelling Units.

The ordinance as amended will read as follows:

1. General Provisions

a. Findings

i. There are many benefits associated with the creation of legal accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on parcels that are otherwise limited to single-family dwellings. Those benefits include:

1. Providing a means for adult children to give care and support to a parent in a semi-independent living arrangement;
2. Increasing the supply of affordable housing without government subsidies;
3. Providing a cost-effective means of accommodating development by making better use of existing infrastructure and reducing the need to provide new infrastructure;
4. Benefiting older homeowners, single parents, young home buyers, and the disabled;
5. Integrating affordable housing uniformly within the community;
6. Providing homeowners with extra income to help meet rising home ownership costs;
7. Reducing the incidence of housing deterioration and community blight by preventing absentee ownership of properties; and
8. ADUs provide the opportunity for increased security and companionship for older and other homeowners who fear crime and personal accidents.

b. Purposes and Intent.

i. It is the policy of Isanti County to promote and encourage the creation of ADUs in a manner that enhances residential areas in order for the people of Isanti County to meet their housing needs and to realize the benefits of ADUs.

- ii. It is not the purpose of this ordinance to alter the density restrictions outlined in Isanti County's Comprehensive Plan and implemented in Isanti County's Zoning Ordinance. Accordingly, to the extent that the Comprehensive Plan identifies limits to the number of dwelling units within particular areas of land, it is the intent of the County Board that a principal dwelling unit accompanied by an accessory dwelling unit shall be deemed to constitute a single dwelling unit for the purposes of provisions in the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance that address density. In addition, it is the intent of the County Board that it shall not require an additional building right for a property-owner to add an accessory dwelling unit to their property in conformity with the requirements for such an addition given below.

c. Definitions.

- i. "Accessory dwelling unit" (ADU) means a residential living unit on the same parcel as a single-family dwelling. The ADU provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons. It may take various forms: a detached unit; a unit that is part of an accessory structure, such as a detached garage; or a unit that is part of an expanded or remodeled primary dwelling.
- ii. "Detached ADU" means a type of ADU that is a house built or placed permanently on the same parcel as a single-family house. An accessory detached ADU is not built within the existing house.
- iii. "Accessory" means that the ADU serves single-family dwelling purposes, rather than meaning that an ADU must necessarily be subordinate to or smaller than the principal dwelling unit on a single-family parcel, other than as set forth in the additional requirements for ADU's given in Isanti County's Zoning Ordinance.
- iv. "Dwelling unit" means a residential living unit that provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons. It shall include permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation.
- v. "Living Area" means the interior habitable area of a dwelling unit, including basements and attics, but does not include a garage or any accessory structure.
- vi. "Zoning Administrator" means the local official who is responsible for processing and approving or denying applications to develop or legalize ADUs.

2. Permits: Eligibility and Application

a. Authorization for ADUs by Zoning District.

- i. An ADU may be permitted in the Agriculture/Residential zoning district if it meets all the requirements of this ordinance.

b. Approval Process.


- i. A total of one ADU is permitted per parcel.

- ii. An ADU may be permitted in the agriculture/residential district, provided the Zoning Administrator first approves the proposed ADU as complying with the standards of Isanti County's Zoning Ordinance.
    - iii. An ADU shall require a building permit that may either be applied for concurrently with the application for a building permit for construction of the principal structure on the parcel, or after construction of the principal structure.
  - c. Continuing Authorization.
    - i. Authorization for an ADU shall expire if the ADU does not conform to the Zoning Ordinance.
- 3. ADU Standards
  - a. Homestead Status.
    - i. The parcel on which the ADU is located must have received and maintain homestead status.
  - b. Parcel Standards – Minimum Size.
    - i. ADUs may be developed on parcels meeting the minimum parcel size in the agriculture/residential district where it is located.
    - ii. A property may not be subdivided or otherwise segregated to provide separate ownership of an ADU.
  - c. Parcel Standards – Setbacks.
    - i. The setbacks applicable to ADU's shall be the same as those applicable to single-family dwelling units in the agriculture/residential zoning district where the ADU is located.
    - ii. A detached ADU shall be located at least 10' from the principal dwelling on the lot.
  - d. Unit Building Standards – Existing Dwelling Unit, Existing Structure, or New Dwelling Unit
    - i. An ADU may be incorporated in an existing dwelling unit, an existing structure, or a new dwelling unit.
  - e. Unit Buildings Standards – Size of Detached ADU
    - i. The living area within a detached ADU may not be larger than the living area within the associated principal dwelling unit.
  - f. Unit Building Standards – Compliance with the Building Code
    - i. The ADU must satisfy the requirements of the Minnesota State Building Code.
  - g. Parking and Traffic
    - i. In order for an ADU to be approved, an applicant must demonstrate to the Zoning Administrator that there are sufficient parking spaces available on the parcel to prevent the need for residents to park on adjacent streets.
    - ii. One driveway access allowed per parcel for the ADU and principal dwelling on the parcel, *unless otherwise approved by the road authority.*
  - h. Public Health
    - i. ADU applicants must demonstrate to the Zoning Administrator that the water supply and sewage disposal facilities are adequate to satisfy all state laws and applicable Minnesota Pollution Control Agency regulations.

- i. An ADU will be issued an address in accordance with the enhanced emergency 911 system to provide for emergency vehicles, and the address will be issued by the Isanti County Zoning Department.

Adopted by the Isanti County Board of Commissioners on the 15th of March, 2022

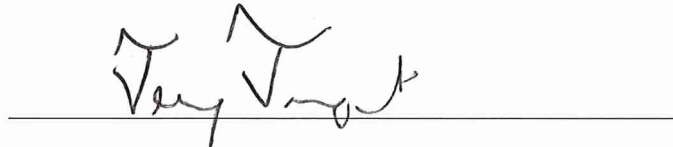
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Julia Lines

Isanti County Administrator



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Terry Turnquist

Isanti County Board of Commissioners, Chairperson

### **Recommended Planning Commission Action**

1. Motion to recommend discussion and direction regarding potential amendments to the Central Business District (CBD) zoning boundaries within the downtown area.
2. Motion to direct City Staff to prepare potential zoning amendment options, including evaluation of rezoning to an existing zoning district or creation of a new transitional zoning district.

### **Overview / Background**

The City of North Branch has begun evaluating the long-term future of several properties currently zoned Central Business District (CBD) within the downtown area. The discussion area generally includes properties located between approximately 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue extending from Maple Street south toward Elm Street, as outlined in pink on the attached zoning map excerpt.

The CBD zoning district was originally established to support a traditional downtown development pattern consisting of commercial storefronts, offices, retail services, mixed-use buildings, and pedestrian-oriented activity. Over time, portions of the identified area have transitioned toward predominantly residential land uses with limited commercial redevelopment activity occurring on several blocks.

As part of ongoing zoning and code discussions, the City is evaluating whether the existing CBD zoning district remains appropriate for these properties or whether portions of the area should transition into another zoning classification better aligned with existing land use patterns and future redevelopment goals. A previous discussion chart prepared for zoning topics identified the possibility of removing a section of properties from the CBD district between 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Maple Street extending to Elm Street.

Potential options discussed include:

- Maintaining the current CBD zoning district
- Rezoning portions of the area into an existing residential zoning district such as R-2 or R-3
- Creating an entirely new zoning district intended to serve as a transitional downtown residential or mixed-use district.

This discussion is intended to gather Planning Commission feedback prior to any formal zoning alignment process.

### **Issue(s) to Consider**

1. Existing Land Use & Zoning
2. Existing CBD District Purpose
3. Potential Rezoning to Existing Residential Districts
4. Potential Creation of a New Transitional Zoning District
5. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility

## Analysis of Issue(s)

### 1. Existing Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Properties are currently zoned **CBD – Central Business District**. The outlined area primarily contains a mixture of:

- Single-Family Homes
- Duplexes and smaller multifamily structures
- Older residential lots
- Limited commercial activity
- Properties adjacent to the downtown core

Subject Properties Map:



Several of the properties within the identified area have historically functioned more as residential neighborhoods than active downtown commercial properties. While the zoning remains CBD, portions of the district no longer reflect traditional downtown development patterns.

The current CBD district permits a wide range of commercial, service, office, and mixed-use activities intended to support a downtown core. However, the existing development pattern in portions of the outlined area

consists largely of residential structures and uses that may be more compatible with residential or transitional zoning districts.

The Planning Commission should consider whether the current zoning accurately reflects:

- Existing Land Uses
- Future Redevelopment Goals
- Housing Needs
- Downtown Commercial Expansion Opportunities

## **2. Existing CBD District Purpose**

Section 66-503 of North Branch City Code states the purpose of the CBD commercial business district is:

- a) To provide for high intensity commercial activity within a compact central area stressing the pedestrian function and interaction of people and businesses; and
- b) To provide a local retail, service and civic center for the community

While portions of the downtown core continue to function in this manner, several of the outlined blocks have evolved into lower-intensity residential areas over time.

The Planning Commission should consider whether the intent and purpose of the CBD zoning district continue to align with the existing development pattern and future vision for this portion of downtown.

## **3. Potential Rezoning to Existing Residential Districts**

One option would be rezoning portions or all of the area into an existing zoning district such as:

- R-2 Medium Density Residential
- R-3 High Density Residential

### Potential Benefits:

- Better alignment between zoning and existing residential uses
- Reduction in nonconforming residential structures
- Increased predictability for homeowners and developers
- Additional housing opportunities near downtown services
- Encouragement of residential reinvestment

### Potential Concerns:

- Reduction of future commercial redevelopment opportunities
- Potential weakening of the downtown commercial core
- Increased residential density impacts on parking and traffic
- Potential conflicts with nearby commercial operations

An additional consideration when evaluating rezoning of the subject area is the potential creation of nonconforming lots and structures. Many of the existing parcels within the downtown area were originally platted with smaller lot dimensions than what is currently required within modern residential zoning districts.

Rezoning portions of the CBD district into an existing residential zoning district may result in parcels becoming nonconforming with respect to:

- Minimum lot area

- Lot Width
- Setbacks
- Parking Requirements
- Building Placement Standards

While legal nonconforming lots and structures are permitted to continue under the City Code, creation of additional nonconformities may impact future redevelopment flexibility, additions to existing structures, lot combinations, and property investments.

The Planning Commission should consider whether maintaining future commercial flexibility is more important than aligning zoning with current residential land use patterns.

#### **4. Potential Creation of a New Transitional Zoning District**

Another option would be creation of a new zoning district specifically intended for downtown transition areas. This district could function as a buffer between the downtown commercial core and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Potential characteristics of a new district could include:

- Residential and limited commercial uses
- Townhomes, apartments, and upper-story residential units
- Small-scale office or neighborhood commercial uses
- Flexible parking standards
- Downtown-compatible design standards
- Reduced commercial intensity compared to the CBD district

#### Potential Benefits:

- Preserves redevelopment flexibility
- Encourages mixed-use reinvestment
- Creates a gradual transition between downtown and residential neighborhoods
- Maintains some commercial opportunities while supporting housing growth

#### Potential Concerns:

- Requires development of an entirely new zoning district
- Additional ordinance drafting and administration
- Potential uncertainty during implementation
- Need for carefully crafted use standards and design requirements

The Planning Commission should consider whether a transitional district would better achieve the City's long-term redevelopment goals than the existing CBD zoning district.

In considering amendments to zoning districts and zoning maps, the Planning Commission and City Council shall evaluate, including but not limited to, the following:

1. Relationship to the City's Comprehensive Plan;
2. The geographical area involved;
3. The character of the surrounding area;
4. Existing and future land use patterns;
5. Whether the amendment would depreciate surrounding properties;
6. Whether the amendment would place an undue burden on City services or infrastructure;
7. Whether the amendment supports orderly development patterns;
8. Whether the amendment is consistent with the spirit and intent of the zoning ordinance;

9. Long-term redevelopment opportunities within the downtown core;
10. Compatibility between residential and commercial land uses.

## **5. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility**

The Planning Commission should consider whether the current CBD boundaries continue to align with the long-term vision identified within the Comprehensive Plan below:

“The Central Business District is a unique classification intended to provide for a planned, unified development of the City’s historical downtown area. This zoning classification makes up 43 acres or .18% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. Permitted uses include service based businesses, office uses, retail uses, apartments and hotel uses, among other things, in close proximity to one another to promote pedestrian movement between businesses. The area offers a mix of street and lot parking, with the parking lots being located behind buildings at various locations throughout the district. The existing land use is primarily commercial buildings, many of which are vacant and in need of rehabilitation. The area is dotted with existing single family homes which were intended to be phased out of use and converted to commercial uses over time. The area is adjacent to TH95, with sidewalks that provide pedestrian passage, but pedestrian movement across TH95 is difficult and poses a significant challenge to the goal of this area being an inviting public space offering a “range of retail and civic experiences” as hoped by the authors of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.”

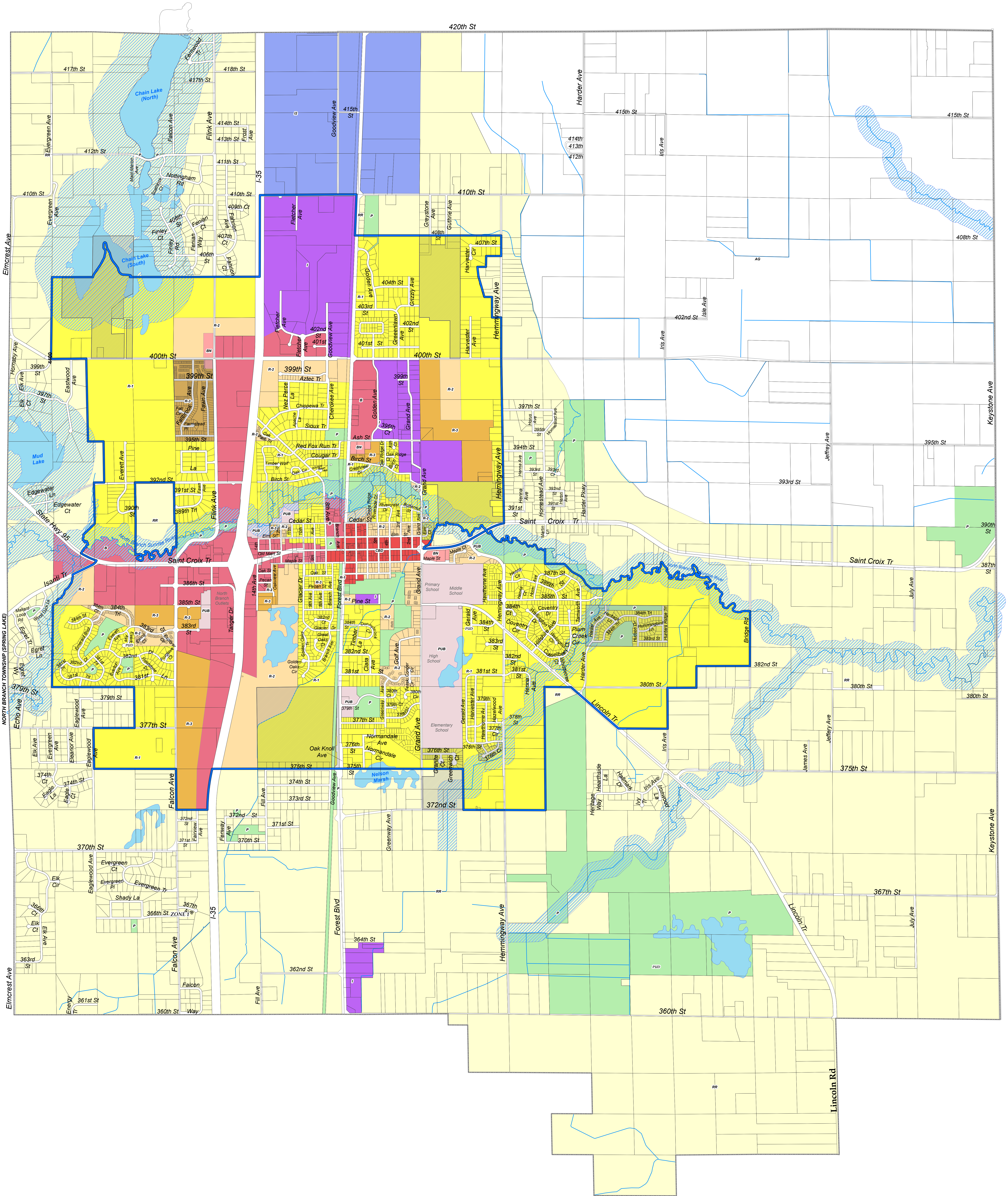
Important considerations include:

- Downtown economic development goals
- Housing availability near downtown services
- Neighborhood compatibility
- Preservation of traditional downtown character
- Long-term redevelopment potential
- Infrastructure and parking impacts

The City should also evaluate whether portions of the district are likely to redevelop commercially in the future or whether residential and mixed-use redevelopment is more realistic based on current market conditions.

### **Planning Commission Action**

1. Motion to recommend discussion and direction regarding potential amendments to the Central Business District (CBD) zoning boundaries within the downtown area.
2. Motion to direct City Staff to prepare potential zoning amendment options, including evaluation of rezoning to an existing zoning district or creation of a new transitional zoning district.



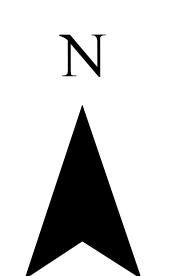
420th St

NORTH BRANCH TOWNSHIP (SPRING LAKE)



# Zoning Map

Legend			
Zoning	CBD - Central Business District	R-1 Single Family Residential	PUD Planned Unit Development Overlay
AG - Agricultural	I - Industrial	R-2 - Medium Density Residential	SL Shoreland Overlay District
B - Business	I2 Heavy Industrial	R-3 - High Density Residential	Water
BN - Business Neighborhood	P - Park/Open Space	RR - Rural Residential	Urban Service Area Boundary
PUB - Public/Semi-Public			



Scale: 1:12000

Disclaimer: The City of North Branch provides this data "as is" without warranty or any representation of accuracy, timeliness or completeness. The data does not represent a survey. No liability is assumed for the accuracy of the data delineated hereon, either expressed or implied.

August 2025

### **Recommended Planning Commission Action**

1. Motion to recommend discussion and direction regarding the potential creation of a new Flex zoning district within the Flink Ave / Interstate 35 corridor currently zoned B-Business.
2. Motion to direct City Staff to prepare potential zoning amendment options, including evaluation of permitted light industrial uses, development standards, and district boundaries for a future Flex Zoning District.

### **Overview / Background**

The City of North Branch has begun evaluating the long-term future of several properties currently zoned B-Business located generally along the corridor east of Flink Ave and west of Interstate 35, starting north of 392<sup>nd</sup> St.

The B-Business zoning district was originally established to accommodate commercial development including retail, office, restaurant, and highway-oriented business uses. Over time, portions of the corridor have evolved into a mixture of commercial, contractor, service-oriented, and undeveloped properties with increasing interest from businesses seeking flexible commercial and light industrial development opportunities.

As part of ongoing zoning and economic development discussions, the City is evaluating whether the existing B-Business zoning district remains appropriate for this corridor or whether creation of a new "Flex" zoning district would better support future development patterns and business needs.

Potential uses discussed for a future Flex District may include:

- Contractor shops and offices
- Showroom / Warehouse combinations
- Light industrial operations
- Warehousing and storage
- Equipment sales and service
- Small-scale manufacturing
- Trade businesses
- Commercial service operations
- Flex commercial-industrial buildings

The intent of a Flex district would be to bridge the gap between traditional commercial zoning and heavier industrial zoning while maintaining development standards appropriate for a highly visible interstate corridor.

Potential options include:

- Maintaining the current B-Business zoning district
- Rezoning portions of the corridor into an existing industrial zoning district
- Creating an entirely new Flex zoning district intended to accommodate commercial and light industrial uses

This discussion is intended to gather Planning Commission feedback prior to any formal zoning ordinance amendment process.

## Issue(s) to Consider

1. Existing Land Use & Zoning
2. Existing B-Business District Purpose
3. Economic Development Opportunities
4. Potential Creation of a Flex Zoning District
5. Interstate Corridor Appearance & Compatibility
6. Traffic, Infrastructure & Operational Impacts
7. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility

## Analysis of Issue(s)

### 1. Existing Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Properties are currently zoned B-Business. The outlined area primarily contains a mixture of:

- Commercial properties
- Highway-oriented businesses
- Contractor and service businesses
- Undeveloped parcels
- Storage and operational business activities

### Subject Properties Map:



Several of the properties within the identified corridor already function similarly to flexible commercial of employment-oriented areas rather than traditional retail-focused commercial districts.

The current B-Business district primarily emphasizes commercial retail and service uses. However, portions of the corridor have experienced increasing demand for businesses requiring warehouse space, contractor storage, fleet operations, light assembly, and mixed office/shop uses that may not fit cleanly with existing zoning classifications.

The Planning Commission should consider whether the current zoning accurately reflects:

- Existing land use patterns
- Interstate corridor development trends
- Future employment opportunities
- Economic development goals
- Demand for flex-space development

## **2. Existing B-Business District Purpose**

The purpose of the B-Business district is generally intended to accommodate commercial development including retail, office, service, and highway business activities.

While portions of the corridor continue to function in this manner, several properties have transitioned toward service-oriented and operational business uses that may require greater flexibility than currently permitted under the district regulations.

The Planning Commission should consider whether the existing B-Business district continues to align with the long-term vision for the Interstate 35 corridor or whether a separate zoning classification may better support evolving development patterns.

## **3. Economic Development Opportunities**

A Flex zoning district may improve the City's ability to attract and retain businesses that do not fit within traditional retail commercial zoning but still provide significant employment and tax base benefits.

Potential benefits include:

- Increased employment opportunities
- Expanded commercial-industrial tax base
- Accommodation of modern business models
- Greater flexibility for redevelopment
- Support for contractor and trade businesses
- Additional investment along the I-35 corridor

Many businesses seek flexible building types combining office, showroom, storage, and operational space within a single development. Existing zoning districts may not adequately accommodate these uses.

Potential concerns include:

- Increased truck and fleet traffic
- Outdoor storage impacts
- Reduced retail-oriented development opportunities
- Potential conflicts between commercial and operational uses
- Need for stronger buffering and performance standards

The Planning Commission should consider whether providing additional flexibility within this corridor would strengthen the City's long-term economic development strategy.

#### **4. Potential Creation of a Flex Zoning District**

Another option would be the creation of a new zoning district specifically intended for business flex and light industrial uses.

##### Potential characteristics of a new district could include:

- Contractor shops and offices
- Warehouse/showroom combinations
- Limited light manufacturing
- Indoor storage and distribution
- Commercial service operations
- Limited screened outdoor storage
- Flexible building layouts
- Interstate-oriented employment uses

##### Potential Benefits:

- Preserves economic development flexibility
- Encourages reinvestment and redevelopment
- Creates opportunities for employment growth
- Provides zoning clarity and predictability for businesses
- Bridges the gap between commercial and industrial zoning

##### Potential Concerns:

- Requires development of an entirely new zoning district
- Additional Ordinance drafting and administration
- Potential uncertainty during implementation
- Need for carefully crafted operational standards
- Need for buffering and screening requirements

The Planning Commission should consider whether a Flex district would better achieve the City's long-term redevelopment and employment goals than the existing B-Business district.

In considering amendments to zoning districts and zoning maps, the Planning Commission and City Council shall evaluate, including but not limited to the following:

1. Relationship to the City's Comprehensive Plan
2. The geographical area involved
3. The character of the surrounding area
4. Existing and future land use patterns
5. Whether the amendment would depreciate surrounding properties
6. Whether the amendment would place an undue burden on City services or infrastructure
7. Whether the amendment supports orderly development patterns
8. Whether the amendment is consistent with the spirit and intent of the zoning ordinance
9. Long-term economic development opportunities
10. Compatibility between commercial and light industrial land uses

## **5. Interstate Corridor Appearance and Compatibility**

The Interstate 35 corridor serves as a highly visible gateway into the City of North Branch. As a result, corridor appearance and development quality remain important considerations.

Potential standards that may need to be evaluated include:

- Architectural design requirements
- Enhanced landscaping
- Outdoor storage screening
- Building material standards
- Lighting limitations
- Noise and operational performance standards

The Planning Commission should consider how a Flex district can balance business flexibility while maintaining a high-quality corridor appearance.

## **6. Traffic, Infrastructure & Operational Impacts**

Flex and light industrial uses may generate different traffic patterns than traditional commercial development including:

- Increased truck traffic
- Fleet vehicle storage
- Delivery operations
- Employee shift traffic

The City may need to evaluate whether future roadway, access, or infrastructure improvements would be necessary if the district is implemented.

The Planning Commission should also consider whether operational impacts such as outdoor storage, loading activities, and noise should be limited through district performance standards.

## **7. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility**

The Planning Commission should consider whether creation of a Flex zoning district aligns with the long-term vision identified within the Comprehensive Plan related to:

- Economic development
- Employment growth
- Interstate corridor development
- Commercial tax base expansion
- Land use compatibility
- Highway-oriented business development

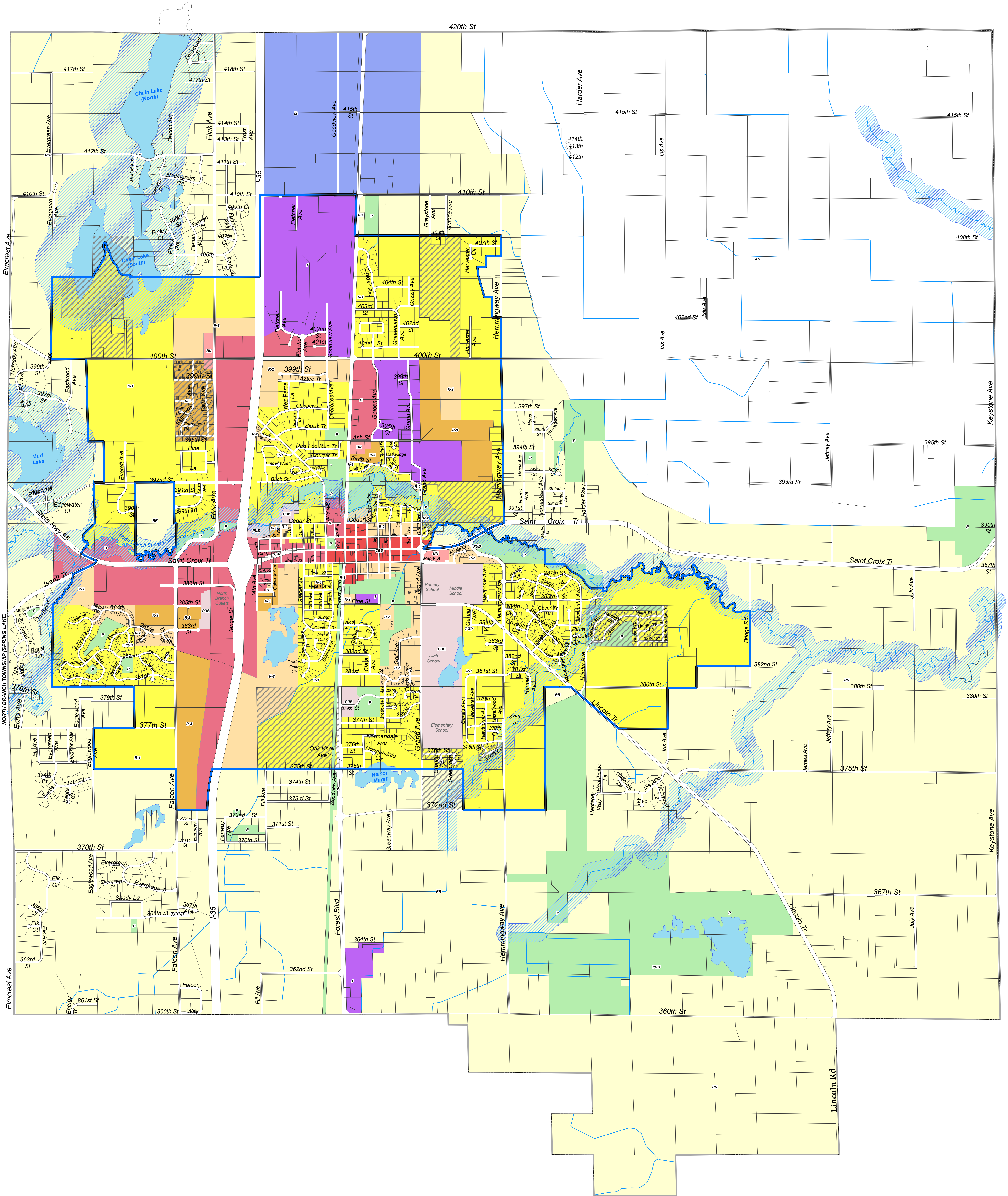
Important considerations include:

- Long-term redevelopment potential
- Corridor appearance
- Market demand for flex-space development
- Infrastructure capacity
- Compatibility with surrounding uses

The City should also evaluate whether portions of the corridor are more likely to redevelop as flexible employment-oriented uses rather than traditional retail commercial developments based on current market conditions and regional development trends.

**Planning Commission Action**

1. Motion to recommend discussion regarding the potential creation of a new Flex zoning district within the Interstate 35 corridor currently zoned B-Business.
2. Motion to direct City Staff to prepare potential zoning amendment options, including evaluation of permitted light industrial uses, development standards, and district boundaries for a future Flex zoning district.



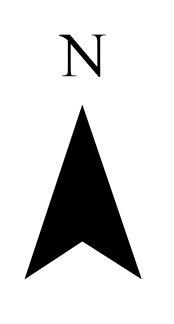
420th St

NORTH BRANCH TOWNSHIP (SPRING LAKE)



# Zoning Map

Legend			
Zoning	CBD - Central Business District	R-1 Single Family Residential	PUD Planned Unit Development Overlay
AG - Agricultural	I - Industrial	R-2 - Medium Density Residential	SL Shoreland Overlay District
B - Business	I2 Heavy Industrial	R-3 - High Density Residential	Water
BN - Business Neighborhood	P - Park/Open Space	RR - Rural Residential	Urban Service Area Boundary
PUB - Public/Semi-Public			



Scale: 1:12000

Disclaimer: The City of North Branch provides this data "as is" without warranty or any representation of accuracy, timeliness or completeness. The data does not represent a survey. No liability is assumed for the accuracy of the data delineated hereon, either expressed or implied.

August 2025



**Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director**

**Presenter: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director, Matthew Hill, City Administrator**

**Date: 05/28/2026**

**Board & Commission: Planning Commission**

**Subject: Comprehensive Plan Update**

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The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee requests that the Planning Commission review two specific sections of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan:

- **Section 2: Values and Vision (all groups will review this section)**
- **Section 3: Land Use and Growth**

Your focused review is vital as we move toward the final revision of the plan. This should include a thorough overview of the current language, and listing any changes that the group feel necessary due to the changes and growth of the City.

We are establishing the following timeline for the process:

The committee met on February 18, March 18 and April 15 and discussed the following items:

- *Urban Service Area Boundary*
- *Types of Housing/Demand*
- *ADU's: Where are they acceptable and identified a Goal for placing regulations*
- *Short Term Housing*
- *Redevelop and Repurpose opportune areas*
- *CBD is emphasized for only holding .18% of total land in city*
- *Analyze planned transportation routes and review zoning accordingly*
- *Update acreages, numbers, facts, data within Comp Plan*
- *Ecological Preservation*
- *Goal: Design Standards*

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20 at 6pm at City Hall.

- **April 15 2026:** Housing, Transportation, Utilities, Public Safety - .

- **May 20 2026:** Presentation of the Comprehensive Plan review results to the Planning Commission for public hearing and consideration, and Council approval in June.

Supporting documents are attached, including: Sections 2 and 3 of the Comprehensive Plan, and a link to the entire document

- <https://www.northbranchmn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/216/2018-Comprehensive-Plan-PDF>

- Summary of the feedback forms from the community questionnaires

Staff are in the process of compiling comments and updates and will have them provided prior to the meeting.

**Requested Action**

To provide input on Sections 2 and 3 of the comprehensive plan

**Voting Requirements:**

**Voting Options**      **Simple Majority**

# 3

## LAND USE & GROWTH

### Introduction

The Land Use & Growth Management Chapter is a roadmap that helps guide City officials and staff on how to make policy decisions related to land use and future growth. These policies may influence the type, location and density of future development within the community. This chapter is intended to result in orderly and efficient development that utilizes land efficiently and makes the most of the community's resources. It offers guidance on key initiatives for the community which is consistent with the City's vision and goals.

In this chapter is a description of existing land use patterns, as well as an overview of how the City anticipates land will be used and developed in the future. It accommodates growth and applies the desired qualities of the community.

Another important aspect of this chapter is that it also serves as the foundation for reviewing the City's Zoning Ordinances, Zoning Map, Subdivision Regulations and other implementation tools. Implementation of the Land Use Plan produces several important implications:

#### USES

Every parcel is placed into a specific land use category. Each category includes a description of the type of land use or uses intended for that category. This description should match with the types and forms of development currently found in North Branch and desired for the future.

#### RELATIONSHIPS

Much like a jigsaw puzzle, the true picture comes from how each piece fits together into a whole. The Land Use Plan guides how elements of the built and natural environment come together in North Branch. These relationships will determine how North Branch will look, function and feel.

#### ACTIONS

The Land Use Plan sets the framework for public actions and investments. Utilities, streets, parks, and facilities are all influenced by the form and pace of development.

### Figure 3-1: Existing Land Use

Identifies the location, amount, and types of existing land uses in the City of North Branch in 2018. The inventory as conducted as part of this planning process reflects general development patterns and is intended for general planning purposes only.

*The City of North Branch is a complete community that provides a well-balanced and wide range of places to live, work, shop and play.*

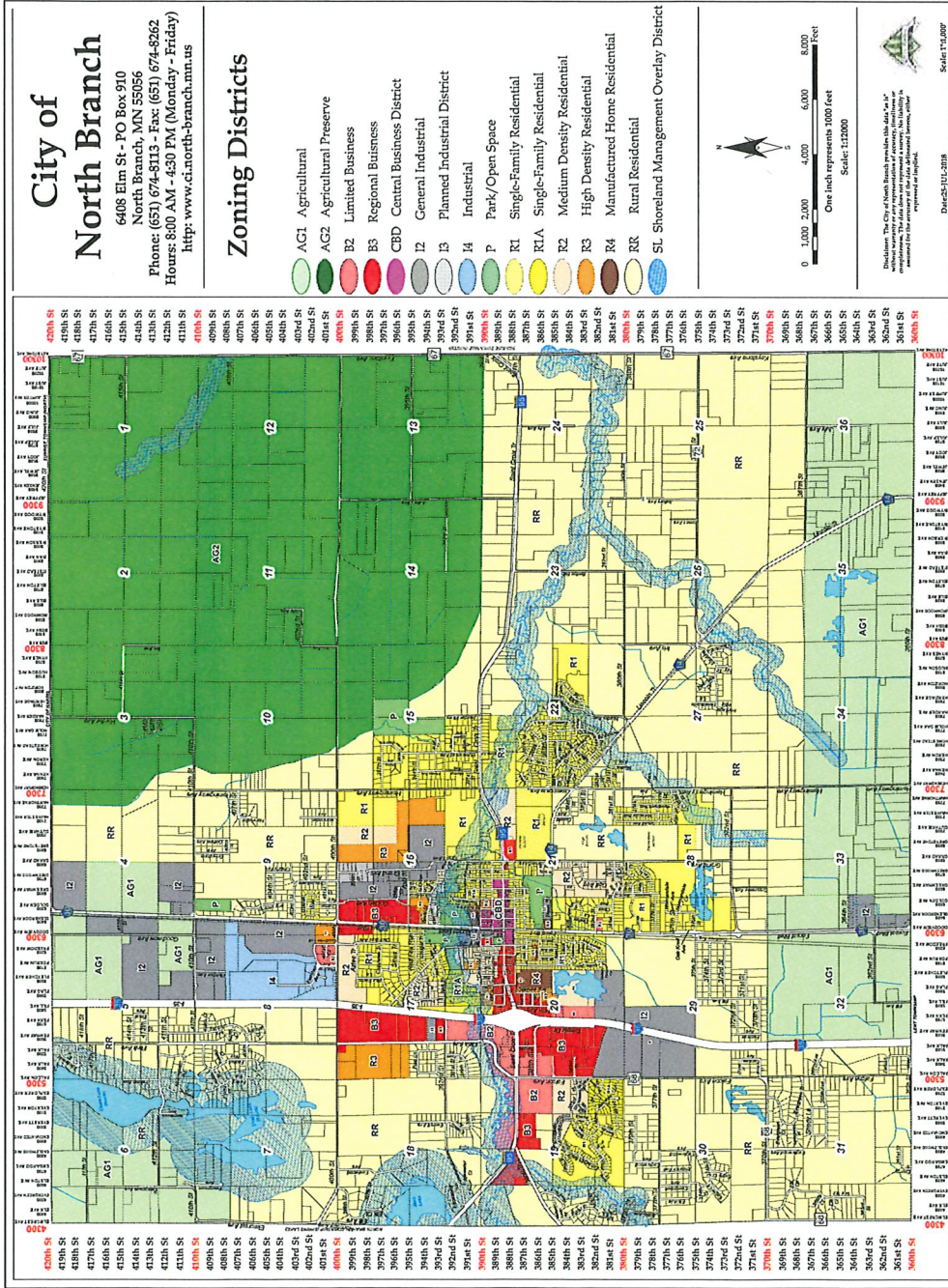


Table 3-A: Summary of Existing Land Use - 2018 summarizes the amount and type of existing land uses designated (whether or not fully developed) in North Branch.

<b>Table 3 - A: Summary of Existing Zoning 2018</b>		
<i>Existing Land Use Designation</i>	<i>Gross Acres*</i>	<i>Net Percent of City</i>
<i>Agriculture (AG1 and AG2)</i>	<i>8,680.2</i>	<i>37.6%</i>
<i>Rural Residential (RR)</i>	<i>9,961</i>	<i>43%</i>
<i>Low Density Residential (R1 and R1A)</i>	<i>1,869.7</i>	<i>8.1%</i>
<i>Medium Density Residential (R2)</i>	<i>403.4</i>	<i>1.7%</i>
<i>High Density Residential (R3)</i>	<i>216.6</i>	<i>.9%</i>
<i>Manufactured Home Residential (R4)</i>	<i>27.2</i>	<i>.11%</i>
<i>Central Business District (CBD)</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>.18%</i>
<i>Limited Business District (B2)</i>	<i>214.8</i>	<i>.9%</i>
<i>Regional Business District (B3)</i>	<i>437.3</i>	<i>1.9%</i>
<i>General Industrial District (I2)</i>	<i>858.1</i>	<i>3.7%</i>
<i>Planned Industrial District (I3)</i>	<i>21.6</i>	<i>.09%</i>
<i>Industrial District (I4)</i>	<i>158.6</i>	<i>.7%</i>

\*Gross acres of use determined by GIS mapping data.

Figure 3-1:  
Existing Zoning



## *Existing Zoning*

### **Agriculture (AG1 and AG2)**

Over one-third of the city's land area (37.6%) is currently used for agricultural purposes. Housing densities are low, and this zoning is characterized by active farms, hobby farms and homes on large lots. The northeast corner of the city is the historic river bottom of the St. Croix River and is framed by the historic river bluff line. Soils are well suited for sod farming and the production of produce. By maintaining a low density of development, it is the City's intent to preserve and protect the many natural resources found in this part of North Branch, including lakes, streams, wetlands and woodlands.

### **Rural Residential (RR)**

Rural Residential makes up 9,961 acres or 43% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is largely characterized by single family residences set on larger lot sizes to accommodate on-site sewage treatment systems. Some of these areas are located within the city's designated Urban Service Area and no new development is allowed within this zoning district without connecting to municipal services. Areas located outside of the Urban Service Area must meet a minimum buildable acre standard so as to ensure that there is sufficient land area with the appropriate soil separation to support both a primary and a future secondary on-site sewage treatment system.

### **Low Density Residential (R1 and R1A)**

Low Density Residential makes up 1,869.7 acres or 8.1% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is largely characterized by single-family homes with densities of 1 to 4 dwelling units per acre in those areas served by municipal utilities. Older areas of the city were platted before municipal utilities were established, resulting in larger lot sizes to accommodate on-site sewage treatment systems. The city has a limited inventory of older, historic homes that are located primarily in the one square mile area that had been the original city of North Branch. The areas around the historic center feature homes built approximately 50 years ago, with new development happening neighborhood by neighborhood since that time. 2017 marked the start of a new housing boom with new single family homes being constructed on existing lot inventory and multiple developments platted for the purpose of constructing even more single family homes. The new development that is planned or in process as of the writing of this plan is intended to provide the city with a more diverse mix of housing styles and at a wider range of price points.

### **Medium Density Residential (R2)**

Medium Density Residential makes up 403.4 acres or 1.7% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. Medium Density Residential is characterized by single family homes on smaller lots that required for R1, townhome style development, and two-family attached homes densities of 1 to 6 dwelling units per acre.

### **High Density Residential (R3)**

High Density Residential makes up 216.6 acres or .9% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. High Density Residential is characterized by land use that consists of all forms of multi-family attached housing units such as two-family attached homes, townhomes and apartment buildings.

High density residential has densities of up to 18 dwelling units per acre.

#### **Manufactured Home Residential (R4)**

The Manufactured Home Residential zoning classification only exists for the benefit of the four established manufactured home parks. It currently makes up 27.2 acres or .1% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. Changes in Minnesota laws now allow manufactured homes in any zoning district that allows twin homes, subject to all applicable lot standards, such as lot size, frontage, road widths, etc. The new land use map and updates to the zoning map will include areas previously zoned at R4 within either an R2 or R3 zoning class.

#### **Central Business District (CBD)**

The Central Business District is a unique classification intended to provide for a planned, unified development of the City's historical downtown area. This zoning classification makes up 43 acres or .18% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. Permitted uses include service based businesses, office uses, retail uses, apartments and hotel uses, among other things, in close proximity to one another to promote pedestrian movement between businesses. The area offers a mix of street and lot parking, with the parking lots being located behind buildings at various locations throughout the district. The existing land use is primarily commercial buildings, many of which are vacant and in need of rehabilitation. The area is dotted with existing single family homes which were intended to be phased out of use and converted to commercial uses over time. The area is adjacent to TH95, with sidewalks that provide pedestrian passage, but pedestrian movement across TH95 is difficult and poses a significant challenge to the goal of this area being an inviting public space offering a "range of retail and civic experiences" as hoped by the authors of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

#### **Limited Business District (B2)**

The Limited Business District makes up 214.8 acres or .9% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is characterized by business uses and services, lodging, and retail that are also permitted in the CBD, but that are dependent on automobile traffic. Additionally, the area is intended to serve as a transition zone between the CBD and the Regional Business District (B3).

#### **Regional Business District (B3)**

The Regional Business District makes up 437.3 acres or 1.9% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is characterized by business uses and services, lodging, and retail that are also permitted in the CBD and B2, but also provide for the location of commercial activities that serve primarily regional or nonlocal market. The lot sizes are larger so as to provide the area needed for retail and commercial activities that require very large buildings.

#### **Light Industrial/Office District (I1)**

The Light Industrial/Office District is defined as a region characterized by office, manufacturing and warehousing uses, but currently no part of the city is zoned for this use.

### **General Industrial District (I2)**

The General Industrial District makes up 858.1 acres or 3.7% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is characterized by manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, storage, showrooms and contractor shops.

### **Planned Industrial District (I3)**

The Planned Industrial District is similar to I1, and makes up 21.6 acres or .09% of the total acreage in the city.

### **Industrial District (I4)**

The Industrial District makes up 158.6 acres or .7% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is characterized by manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, storage, showrooms and contractor shops as can be found in I2, but its location adjacent to I35 makes this area highly visible and is subject to stricter design standards. Currently, over 200 acres in the I2 and I4 zoning classifications are vacant but ready for development in the industrial park owned by the City through its Economic Development Authority.

### **Overlay Districts**

Sensitive areas, such as those adjacent to bodies of water or within a designated flood plain or flood fringe are managed by the City in accordance with applicable Minnesota Statutes. Setbacks, design standards and other restrictions on use within the overlay district are imposed so as to limit ecological impact and loss.

### ***Analysis of Existing Land Use***

With over 36 square miles of land, an analysis of the existing land use illustrates several important issues about current and future development:

**The largest land use category in terms of area in the City is agriculture.** Followed by the rural residential land use category. It is anticipated that the agricultural areas will continue to be used for agricultural production due to its geologic characteristics and the community's desire to support its rich agricultural heritage and industry. The rural residential areas, which are served by private wells and septic systems, will also have agricultural or hobby farm uses. The total land areas for these two uses will not likely change, but development within these areas will occur at a much slower pace than the low density residential uses served by municipal utilities.

**The second largest residential land use category is low density residential.** It is anticipated that expanded development within this zoning classification will continue to grow throughout the life of this plan, resulting in greater intensity of the use without increasing the overall land area designated for this use. The three primary residential categories (R1 and R2) account for 9.8% of the total land use in the City.

**The Central Business District is characterized by a development style common among other older downtowns.** It is pedestrian oriented in nature with buildings built to the sidewalk. Parking for these uses is typically on street, in the rear of buildings, or shared among several users. The transition from residential uses to commercial uses did not occur as anticipated when the zoning district was created. There are numerous vacant buildings and the area is ripe for redevelopment.

**The City, through its Economic Development Authority, owns over 200 acres of land zoned for industrial uses.** Until this land is sold and developed, no additional industrial zoned land is needed within the Urban Service Area. If the city were to allow for heavy industrial uses, consideration should be given for compatibility with adjacent land uses. Controls should be in place that protect against negative impacts to neighboring property.

**The nation's third largest solar farm is partially located within the City's limits.** Other smaller solar installations are located entirely within the City. The solar installations feature native plantings intended to re-establish prairie habitat and support pollinator species, such as the Monarch butterfly.

**The City benefits from existing park facilities, trails and open spaces.** Approximately .6% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch is utilized as city owned park and open space uses. The City is also home to the Janet Johnson WMA, owned and managed by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Sunrise Prairie Regional Trail and other city sidewalks and trails serve the city's goal of being walkable and bikeable, but it is the goal of the city to expand those opportunities and consideration should be given to identify areas for preservation for these purposes.

**There are significant residential development opportunities in the northwest portion of the city.** Large tracts of land are currently undeveloped and the opportunity exists to establish traffic corridors without the need for redevelopment.

## *Vision for Land Use*

The City of North Branch is a complete community that provides a well-balanced and wide range of places to live, work, shop and play. Land uses make efficient use of existing infrastructure, contribute to a strong local economy, preserve natural resources and contribute to a high quality of life.

### **RESIDENTIAL USES**

A diverse housing stock allows people at any stage in their life to be able to find a home in North Branch, which may include housing options suitable to multigenerational households. Older housing is well maintained while new development expands housing options to complement existing neighborhoods.

### **COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL USES**

A significant amount of commercial and industrial uses can be found within the City that allow residents to work in North Branch, while also being able to meet all of their day-to-day needs. Commercial and industrial uses are compatible with their surrounding land uses.

### **PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL**

Public and institutional uses are viewed as valued resources to the community and contribute to making North Branch a better place to live and do business.

### **PARKS, OPEN SPACES AND TRAILS**

Quality parks and open space are within close proximity to all residents, providing recreational opportunities to encourage an active lifestyle. A wide variety of community facilities are provided to serve a range of interests. The City of North Branch has a proposed trail system that will allow bicycle and pedestrian access to most of the major pedestrian generators within the city, including schools, shopping areas, and parks. Many of the proposed trails are destinations in themselves, offering scenic walks or rides around many of the city's scenic views. With recreational activities such as running, bicycling, and walking increasing in popularity, the city's trail system will not only offer a recreational opportunity in itself, but will also help to connect the community's parks with the neighborhoods.

# GOAL 1

*Maximize the use of land within the City of North Branch in a way that strengthens the local economy, preserves natural resources, and ensures a high-quality of life for all residents.*



## **Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

The following is the primary goal for land use followed by a series of objectives and policies intended to influence future land use decisions in a direction that is aligned with the Vision Statement.

### **OBJECTIVE 1.1**

**PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE SMALL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT OF THE DOWNTOWN.**

#### *Policy 1.1.1*

*Encourage and promote the renovation and rehabilitation of existing buildings within the downtown.*

#### *Policy 1.1.2*

*Connect businesses with façade improvement grants and loans.*

#### *Policy 1.1.3*

*Make infrastructure improvements that enhance the pedestrian realm such as lighting and seating and gathering places for community activities.*

### **OBJECTIVE 1.2**

**USE LAND IN A MANNER THAT STRENGTHENS THE ECONOMY OF NORTH BRANCH.**

#### *Policy 1.2.1*

*Strive for a balance of areas guided for industrial uses and areas guided for commercial uses.*

#### *Policy 1.2.2*

*Continue to identify all areas prime for redevelopment and analyze the best use for each property. Work to re-zone these properties and amend this plan as appropriate.*

#### *Policy 1.2.3*

*Increase the number of residential housing units in the City to attract new residents to increase the workforce and thereby improve the local market for commercial and industrial opportunities.*

#### *Policy 1.2.4*

*Actively work to infill vacant land within the Urban Service Area that will be connected to municipal services, while preserving a network of functional ecologic areas.*

*Policy 1.2.5*

*Allow for mixed uses within some zoning districts to accommodate commercial, retail and residential uses.*

*Policy 1.2.6*

*Discourage “leapfrog” patterns of development on municipal utilities.*

**OBJECTIVE 1.3**

**PROTECT AND PRESERVE NATURAL RESOURCES FOR LONG TERM ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENJOYMENT OF RESIDENTS.**

*Policy 1.3.1*

*Work with landowners and other governmental entities to either obtain property or ensure protection of natural areas with high ecological value.*

*Policy 1.3.2*

*Discourage patterns of development that would stress existing infrastructure and ecosystems.*

**OBJECTIVE 1.4: USE LAND IN A MANNER THAT ENSURES A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS.**

*Policy 1.4.1*

*Expand parks, trails, sidewalks and other amenities as the City’s population continues to grow.*

*Policy 1.4.2*

*Review and encourage methods of development which promote linkages among residential, civic, commercial, industrial and recreational facilities using trails and sidewalks for safe and enjoyable pedestrian uses and provides pedestrian connections between complementary land uses.*

*Policy 1.4.3*

*Review and encourage street and sidewalk designs to provide for easy access by police, fire and ambulance services, school buses, and plowing.*

## Land Use Plan

The land use plan provides the framework for the growth and development of the City. The land use plan serves as a guide for the character and intensity of development and will be supported by other land use controls and public actions taken pursuant to the Comprehensive Plan.

The land use map appears in Figure 3-2: Future Land Use. The plan illustrated by this map evolved from inputs and evaluations received through the planning process. The Plan builds on the existing community pattern to achieve the desired vision for the future of North Branch. Where the Future Land Use map guides property for something different than the existing zoning, zoning approvals such as variances and conditional use permits should not be considered inconsistent with the comprehensive plan if otherwise deemed appropriate.

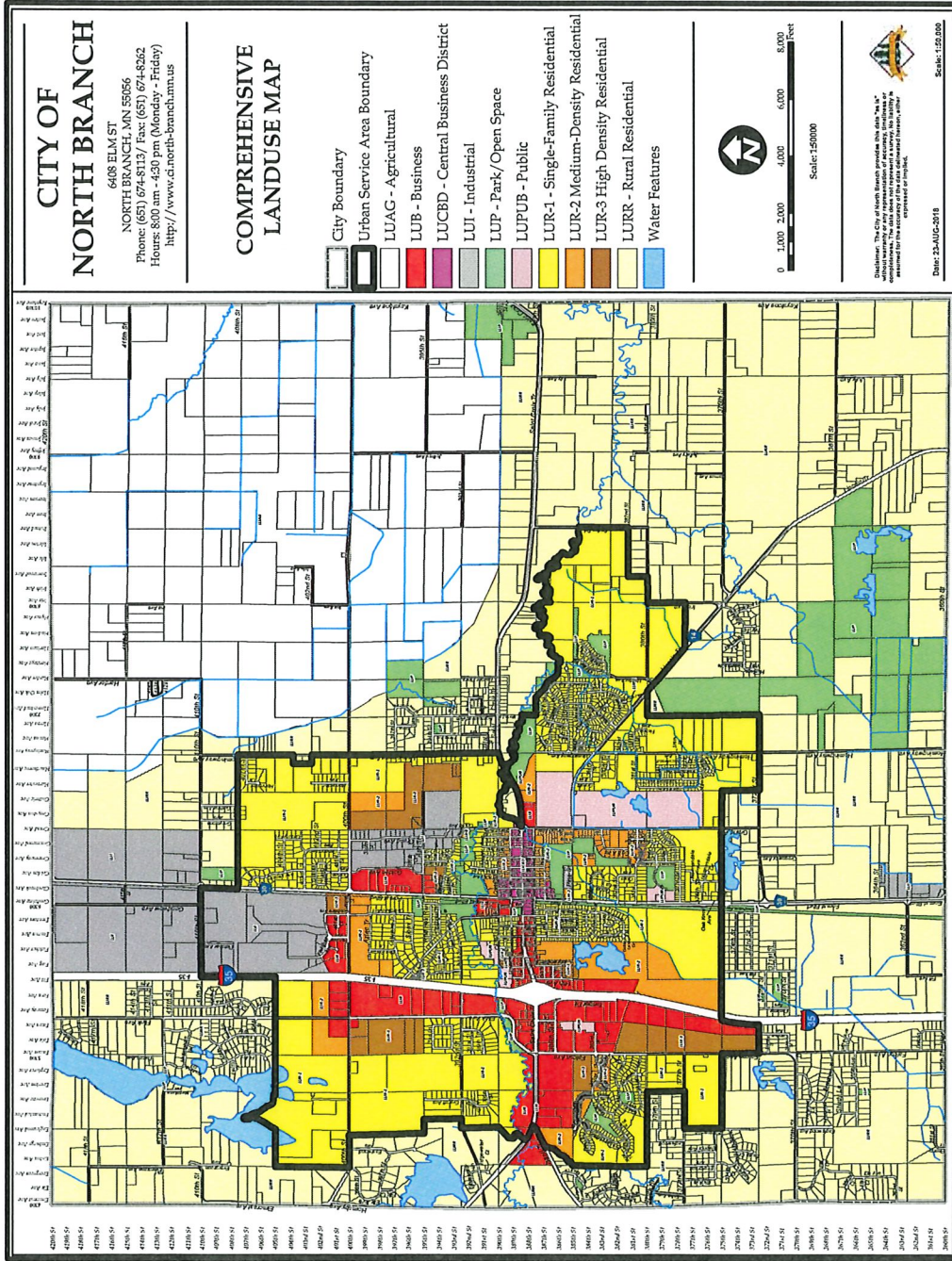
**Table 3 - B: Summary of Future Land Use**

Future Land Use by Designation	Gross Acres*	Net Percent of City
Agriculture (AG)	5,271.4	22.9%
Rural Residential (RR)	9,992.6	43.3%
Low Density Residential (R1)	3,492.5	15.1%
Medium Density Residential (R3)	577.2	2.5%
High Density Residential (R3)	330.8	1.4%
Central Business District (CBD)	71.4	.3%
General Business District (B)	802.2	3.5%
Industrial District (I)	1,123.7	4.9%

\*Gross acres of use determined by GIS mapping data and does not include public and institutional areas which are separately defined under the proposed land use map.



Figure 3-2:  
Future Land Use



## *Residential*

### **Rural Residential**

The land use in this category is hobby farms and homes on large lots. The area is outside of the designated Urban Service Area and will be served by wells and individual septic systems. Individual lots must be a minimum size of one acre buildable, and the presence of wetlands and other natural features may result in actual lot sizes much larger than one acre in order to achieve the required one acre buildable standard. This lowest density of residential development is intended to reduce demands on the rural roads and protect the natural resources found in North Branch. The primary zoning district that would generally correspond to this land use designation would be the LURR Rural Residential District.

### **Low Density Residential**

The land use in this category is single-family detached homes served by municipal utilities. This plan anticipates that this is where the majority of new housing units will be added over the next 20 years. One of the biggest strengths of the City of North Branch is its attractiveness to young families. Part of this attraction is due to the anticipated development of quality affordable single-family homes, and the existing parks and trails system, school district and proximity to the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Continuing to add new housing units will provide more opportunities for all families to locate in North Branch, while making older housing more affordable. Densities targeted in this category are limited to no more than 4 dwelling units per acre. The primary zoning district that would generally correspond to this land use designation would be the LUR-1 Single Family District.

### **Medium Density Residential**

Medium density residential uses are typically in the form of single family homes on smaller lot sizes, townhomes, duplexes, and small scale apartment and condo buildings and served by municipal utilities. Advantages of these types of housing are that less property maintenance may be required since yards are smaller and some medium density developments may have associations that handle lawn care and snow removal. As a result, these types of housing tend to be very attractive to seniors and professionals. Densities targeted in this category are up to 6 dwelling units per acre. The primary zoning district that would generally correspond to this land use designation would be the LUR-2 Medium Density District.

### **High Density Residential**

The High Density Residential land use category consists of multiple family attached housing oriented in a vertical fashion, more commonly referred to as apartments and condominiums and served by municipal utilities. Housing units may be owner or renter occupied. High density housing is an efficient land use because it contains more dwelling units per acre than other residential uses.

High density residential uses are located in places with compatible adjacent land uses and where the local street system will accommodate the traffic. Ideally, they are located near commercial uses or employment centers to maximize the number of people who can walk or use alternative modes of transportation.

The densities targeted in this category are over 6 dwelling units per acre. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUR-3 High Density Residential.

### *Agriculture*

#### **Agriculture**

The city’s strong agricultural heritage is clearly visible in the farm fields located in the northeast corner of the city. The fields, bordered by the historic St. Croix River bluff line, are dotted with artesian wells, have deep pockets of organic soils generally not conducive to development, and are linked by a series of more traditional farm style roads. Single family homes are present and seem accessory to the commercial operations of the farms. Non-agricultural uses will be limited and densities targeted in this category are no more than one dwelling unit per 10 acres. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUAG Agriculture.

### *Commercial*

#### **Downtown Business**

Although a number of single family homes currently exist in the Central Business District, new residential development should be part of a mixed use plan with a balance of housing and commercial uses within a single building or complex. Replacing single family homes with mixed use structures and redeveloping existing commercial buildings will help support a healthy business environment and allow more people to be able to walk to their destinations.

Buildings should be located close to the street but with ample space for sidewalks. Parking should generally remain in the rear of the property when on-premise parking is offered. Streetscape improvements that enhance the pedestrian realm, such as planters, hanging baskets, street trees, outdoor seating, public art, street lighting, should be prioritized here. The City should continue to work with business owners and encourage façade improvements by connecting them to grant and funding opportunities. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUCBD Central Business District.

#### **General Business**

The General Business guiding designation allows a wide variety of uses including those for convenience oriented, neighborhood-oriented, community-oriented and bulk retail-oriented markets and consumers. These areas provide a wide range of goods and services to serve many of the shopping and dining needs of people who live, work in or visit the City. Certain commercial uses, such as those devoted to motor vehicle-oriented retail or service activities (e.g., vehicle service and fuel sales, drive-through businesses and sales of motor vehicles) depend on access to major transportation routes and often have characteristics that are incompatible with residential areas. Other commercial uses, such as those involving wholesale and retail trade of large volume or bulk commercial items with on-site storage and warehousing, may have both commercial and industrial characteristics.

This guiding designation also allows a variety of uses including professional offices, administrative offices, research and laboratory facilities, wholesale showrooms, service facilities (e.g., conference

centers, lodging and reception halls), and business uses having limited contact with the general public. These areas may provide for limited retail sale of convenience-type products and services for the immediate surrounding area.

Commercial uses in this classification are expected to develop with the highest standards of design and performance, with a higher level of amenities such as landscaping, preservation of natural features, architectural controls, pedestrian trails and other features. Office parks and campus-style developments are encouraged in these areas. Commercial office uses can also serve as, and provide for, an orderly and progressive transition between higher and lower intensity land uses. Locations adjacent to the Central Business District, TH95 and I35 may be subject to stricter design standards so as to achieve an attractive, inviting and high quality retail shopping and commercial services in areas of high visibility and sensitivity to surrounding uses. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUB General Business District.

### **Industrial**

Industrial uses include all forms of businesses with manufacturing, distribution, warehousing or other industrial uses that may have consequences typically associated an industrial activity such as noise, odor, dust or low quality aesthetics. As a result, when these uses are in close proximity to residential, park and open space uses, additional restrictions may be appropriate. These uses may generate truck traffic and may involve outdoor storage. Locations adjacent to residential uses, I35, TH95 or other high visibility areas may be subject to additional design standards. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUI Industrial District.

### **Public/Institutional**

Public, semi-public or institutional uses are comprised of churches, schools, city offices, public works facilities, fire stations, public utilities, and other governmental or non-profit entities. This use may also include parks, designated open spaces and regional storm water management, such as publicly maintained storm water management ponds. This land use classification is intended to differentiate these sites as providing a common amenity or service and not land that is intended to be developed. The primary zoning district that would correspond to this land use designation would be the LUPUB Public/Institutional District.

### ***Required Zoning Changes***

The City has adopted zoning regulations for the purpose of carrying out the policies and goals of the land use plan element of the Comprehensive Plan. The application of zoning districts and the specific regulations should support the objectives of the Plan. As a result, an outcome of adopting the plan will be the review and modification of the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map as necessary.

The land use plan provides the basis for guiding zoning decisions that will be made by the City and private property owners. Minnesota Statutes Section 462.357 states that “.....the planning agency shall study and propose to the governing body reasonable and practical means for putting the plan into effect. Subject to the limitations of the following sections, such means include, but not limited to, zoning regulations, for the subdivision of land, an official map.....” This statute anticipates that the

zoning regulations will be reviewed and updated to ensure implementation of the land use plan. In a broad sense, this review of the zoning ordinance should examine the following:

- The regulations for each zoning district should be reviewed to determine if they fit with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Zoning districts should be examined in relationship to the land use designation. Changes in zoning districts may be needed to match zoning with land use.
- The City will need to thoroughly review and update its Ordinances to address inconsistencies and conflicts to integrate the concepts described in this Comprehensive Plan. Updating the Zoning Ordinance will be a large undertaking that will require significant input, time and energy.

One of the policy decisions the City will need to make is how to implement the land use plan through the zoning map. Unlike the Metropolitan Land Planning Act (Minnesota Statutes Section 473), which requires consistency between the land use plan and zoning in cities within the Twin Cities metropolitan area, North Branch may choose to take a number of implementation strategies. Each has varying implications for existing property uses and current zoning. The strategies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Keep current zoning in place until such time as the use terminates or redevelopment is initiated.
- Rezone property to a zoning district compatible with a land use plan category.
- Develop an interim strategy to address current use situations as they relate to long term objectives.



# 2

## VALUES AND VISION

### Values

Residents and other stakeholders were asked what they loved about North Branch at the Community Expo, at a chamber meeting, and at the first community café. The values expressed most often were:

**THE STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

**A HOME TOWN FEEL**

**THE CITY'S COMMITMENT TO ITS PARKS AND TRAILS**

**A COMMUNITY THAT ENCOURAGES BIKING AND WALKING**

**QUALITY SCHOOLS**

These values were reiterated at each of the other three community cafes and served as the foundation for the vision statements expressed below.

### *Vision for North Branch in 10 years .....*

North Branch is a growing and safe community with outstanding natural and recreational amenities and opportunities for all, and well maintained infrastructure, vibrant business districts and neighborhoods, and provides residents with an excellent quality of life.

### *Vision for Land Use*

The City of North Branch is a complete community that provides a well-balanced and wide range of places to live, work, shop and play. Land uses make efficient use of existing infrastructure, contribute to a strong local economy, preserve natural resources and contribute to a high quality of life.

#### Residential Uses

A diverse housing stock allows people at any stage in their life to be able to find a home in North Branch. Older housing is well maintained while new development expands housing options to complement existing neighborhoods.

#### Commercial and Industrial Uses

A significant amount of commercial and industrial uses can be found within the City that allow residents to work in North Branch, while also being able to meet all of their day-to-day needs. Commercial and industrial uses are compatible with their surrounding land uses.

#### Public/Institutional

Public and institutional uses are viewed as valued resources to the community and contribute to making North Branch a better place to live and do business.



*North Branch is a growing and safe community with outstanding natural and recreational amenities and opportunities for all, and well maintained infrastructure, vibrant business districts and neighborhoods, and provides residents with an excellent quality of life.*

### Parks, Open Spaces and Trails

Quality parks and open space are within close proximity to all residents, providing recreational opportunities to encourage an active lifestyle. A wide variety of community facilities are provided to serve a range of interests. The City of North Branch has a proposed trail system that will allow bicycle and pedestrian access to most of the major pedestrian generators within the city, including schools, shopping areas, and parks. Many of the proposed trails are destinations in themselves, offering scenic walks or rides around many of the city's scenic views. With recreational activities such as running, bicycling, and walking increasing in popularity, the city's trail system will not only offer a recreational opportunity in itself, but will also help to connect the community's parks with the neighborhoods.

### *Vision for Economic Development*

A strong business community is the cornerstone of a vibrant city. Economic development encompasses the policies and activities that improve the long term economic and social wellbeing of the community. Communities with strong economies have financial resources to support the levels of service that their residents need and desire. Successful communities realize that economic development is about bringing together social, natural, infrastructure, and economic assets in the community to sustain the "whole" community.

### *Vision for Municipal Utilities*

The City of North Branch, individually and in collaboration with the North Branch Water & Light Utility, has a significant investment in its existing public utilities systems (water, wastewater and stormwater). The continued expansion and development within the Urban Service Area will require the extension of public utilities. In general, the existing infrastructure system is well-positioned and of adequate size to support expansion. However, coordination will be required between community development and the required expansion of the utility system. In some cases, the cost of providing utility service may dictate where and when future growth will occur.

### *Vision for Transportation*

North Branch is located at the cross roads of I35 and TH95, providing for ease in and out of the city. Within the city limits, however, these features will require a coordinated approach to providing movement of traffic through the city to local destinations, safe pedestrian and bike corridors, and improved intersections to safely serve the increasing number of commercial vehicles passing through North Branch.

### *Vision for the Environment and Sustainability*

Natural infrastructure includes all systems that relate to natural resources and contribute to an improved public life. Natural infrastructure considers the full range of natural resource uses including economic, environmental, health, cultural, and aesthetic. This broad view leads us to include surface water, groundwater, stormwater, wastewater, drinking water, geology, topography, soils, natural areas, open space, green spaces, urban forest, habitat, vegetation, scenic views, and parks and trails in natural infrastructure.

Natural infrastructure is a key element in planning where development should or should not take place within a city. This element is important to communities and development as it avoids certain development hazards, provides health benefits to citizens, protects ecological systems and enhances biological diversity, and offers communities unique quality of life components. Consideration of natural infrastructure ensures that homes are built upon stable dry soils, provides clean drinking water, accounts for resource based economic activities, provides scenic views and open spaces, and plans development that respect the integrity of natural systems and incorporate natural features into development.

### *Minnesota GreenStep City*

In 2018, the Mayor and City Council approved a resolution to make North Branch a GreenStep City through the MPCA and League of Minnesota Cities' program. Minnesota GreenStep Cities is a voluntary challenge, assistance and recognition program to help cities achieve their sustainability and quality-of-life goals. This free continuous improvement program, managed by a public-private partnership, is based upon 29 best practices. Each best practice can be implemented by completing one or more actions at a 1, 2 or 3-star level, from a list of four to eight actions. These actions are tailored to all Minnesota cities, focus on cost savings and energy use reduction, and encourage civic innovation. North Branch is currently a Step 1 City. As North Branch plans for the future, it will continue to consider GreenStep City Best Management Practices as they relate to the goals and objectives of this comprehensive plan.



# Comprehensive Plan Questionnaire: Key Patterns and Trends

## 1. Community Strengths and Identity

Across the early sections of the questionnaire (pages 2–3), respondents consistently highlight:

- A strong sense of community pride and belonging.
- The small-town feel and safety that make the area family-friendly.
- Deep appreciation for natural spaces, recreation, and access to the outdoors.
- Recognition that schools and local events form the heart of community identity.

**Trend:** The community’s greatest strength lies in its cohesion and shared values. Schools, local partnerships, and volunteerism serve as anchors of civic pride and engagement.

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## 2. Transportation and Accessibility

From the middle portion of the survey (around page 6), respondents discuss:

- A strong desire for safe biking and walking routes, particularly for students and families.
- Concerns about traffic flow near schools and main corridors.

**Trend:** Participants want more walkable, connected routes—aligning with health, safety, and sustainability goals. There is clear community interest in making it easier to move around town without a car.

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## 3. Education and Workforce Alignment

Later responses (pages 7–8) show widespread recognition of:

- Education quality as a defining strength of the community.

- Calls for more career-connected learning, technical training, and real-world skills.
- Alignment with the district’s goal of ensuring students graduate with a plan, not by chance.

**Trend:** The community supports educational innovation—especially programs that bridge academics with career readiness and local workforce opportunities.

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#### **4. Economic and Environmental Balance**

Responses from pages 9–10 highlight the desire to:

- Support small businesses and encourage local job creation.
- Promote sustainable growth that balances targeted industry development with environmental preservation.
- Explore renewable energy and responsible land use; Maintain and protect natural resources and open spaces.

**Trend:** Residents value a balanced approach—advancing economic opportunity while safeguarding the environment and rural character that define the community.

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#### **5. Community Engagement and Governance**

The final sections (page 11 and beyond) emphasize:

- Appreciation for transparent communication from local leaders.
- Calls for inclusive planning that welcomes voices from all age groups, especially youth and families.
- Recognition that civic collaboration is essential for moving forward.

**Trend:** There is strong appetite for collaboration and communication—people want to be informed, involved, and part of shaping the community’s future.