



NORTH BRANCH

—Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt
Chair

Steve Cich
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2026 @ 6:30 PM
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH
BRANCH, MN 55056**

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. OATH OF OFFICE

- a. Oath of Office - Steve Cich

VERBAL
UPDATE

4. ROLL CALL

5. 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.

6. AGENDA APPROVAL

- a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

7. ELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE CHAIR

- a. Elect Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair for 2026

ACTION

8. 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 January 6, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes

ACTION

9. PUBLIC HEARINGS

- a. Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition
b. Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific

ACTION

ACTION

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| c. | Variance for Lot Width reduction at PID 16.00482.10 | ACTION |
| d. | Hemingway Meadows Minor Subdivision | ACTION |
| e. | Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-855 Surfacing | ACTION |

10. REPORTS

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| a. | Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan - MN Bolt & Screw LLC | ACTION |
| b. | Comprehensive Plan Update | INFO |

11. NEXT MEETING - March 3, 2026, 6:30PM

12. ADJOURNMENT



Prepared By:

Presenter:

Date: 01/14/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Oath of Office - Steve Cich

The City Council appointed Steve Cich to the Planning Commission at the January 13, 2026, meeting.

The oath of office will be administered at the meeting.

The appointment is a 3-year term and expires on December 31, 2029.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Presenter: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Date: 01/30/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Elect Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair for 2026

Overview / Background

City Code requires the Planning Commission to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair at its first meeting of the year.

Staff Recommendation

Appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for 2026.

Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for 2026.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options **Simple Majority**



Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Presenter: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Date: 01/06/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Approval of January 6, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



NORTH BRANCH —Minnesota—

Steve Cich
Chair

Nathan Ehalt
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Gary Shaefer
Commissioner

Open
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 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, January 6, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Steve Cich called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Steve Cich led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. OATH OF OFFICE

a. Oath of Office - Kelly Maurer

ACTION

The oath of office was administered to Kelly Maurer as the new Planning Commission Commissioner.

The appointment is a 3-year term and expires on December 31, 2026.

4. ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioner Steve Cich, Commissioner Nate Ehalt, Commissioner Kelly Maurer

Absent: Commissioner Ross Otto

Remote:

Others Present:

Notes:

5. 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.

Steve Stelter, Tom Buck, and Michael Connor signed up for Public Comment.

6. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

Motion to add 9d under Reports for Planning Commission applications.

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

7. 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 December 2, 2025 Minutes

ACTION

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

8. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Conditional Use Permit - Wireless Communications Tower

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Conditional Use Permit - Wireless Communications Tower. Vertical Bridge (Applicant) has requested approval for a Conditional Use Permit to install a Wireless Communications Tower at PID 11.00223.00. A Conditional Use Permit is required for any antenna or other receiving or transmitting device exceeding a height of 75 feet from ground level. The tower is proposed to be roughly 180 feet in height. The purpose of the tower is to fulfill an increase in network demand for Verizon Wireless and to improve life/emergency service reliability in the area. The owner of the tower/compound is Vertical Bridge, while Verizon Wireless will have its equipment installed on the tower to provide the service. The parcel is currently vacant, with no existing homes or structures, and is owned by Earl and Deanna Halley. Vertical Bridge has a lease agreement with the parcel owners to place the tower/compound on the property.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses
2. Site Improvements
3. Sec 66-935 Towers - Requirements
4. Conditional Use Permit

Public Hearing was opened at 6:48 PM

Alex Truman, representing Vertical Bridge, spoke to the Planning Commission, explaining that they need to provide the necessary coverage and capacity that the Community relies on, and that this location has been deemed to be optimal for Verizon in order to be able to provide the best coverage or increase coverage and capacity possible. Chair Cich asked what the length of the lease is, and Alex replied that it is a 50-year lease initially.

Public Hearing was closed at 6:52 PM

Motion to recommend approval/denial to City Council, for a Conditional Use Permit for a Wireless Communication Tower at PID 11.00223.00 with the following conditions of approval.

1. The applicant shall comply with all applicable city, state, and federal regulations, including but not limited to building, electrical, fire, FAA, and FCC requirements. All required permits shall be obtained prior to construction.
2. No exterior lighting shall be installed except lighting required by FAA or FCC regulations. Tower lighting shall be oriented or shielded to minimize glare and prevent direct visibility of light sources from public streets and nearby properties.
3. Signage shall be limited to safety, identification, and regulatory compliance signs as allowed under Section 66-821. No advertising signage is permitted.
4. Any future modification that increases tower height, adds additional carriers beyond permitted loading parameters, or alters site layout beyond the approved compound footprint shall require review by the City and may require an amended Conditional Use Permit.
5. All conditions of approval are subject to modification by the City if necessary to protect public safety, health, and welfare or to meet future code requirements.

RESULT: **Passed**
MOVER: **Nate Ehalt**
SECONDER: **Steve Cich**
AYES: **None**
ABSENT: **Ross Otto**
NOTES:

b. Fairway Field - Preliminary Plat and Variance for Lot Depths ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Fairway Field — Preliminary Plat and Variance for Lot Depths.

Larry Beach Construction, Inc. (Applicant) has submitted a request for Preliminary Plat and Variance approval for a new residential subdivision known as Fairway Field, located generally at the intersection of 412th Street and Flink Avenue. The Subject Property is currently undeveloped and is guided and zoned for Rural-Residential.

The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of 13 residential lots (each exceeding 1 acre in lot size), new public streets, stormwater facilities, and associated utilities. Access to the subdivision is provided via 412th Street with two new internal public roadways, including Fairfax Lane and Fairway Court, as shown on the Preliminary Plat and Site Plans.

The applicant has also applied for a variance from the required lot depths for lots within Block 2 of the plat.

The applicant has submitted a complete application, including preliminary plat drawings, grading and erosion control plans, utility plans, landscaping, and tree preservation. Final Plat approval is subject to

City Council action and completion of all required conditions.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use and Zoning
2. Proposed Preliminary Plat
3. Plat Standards and Variance
4. Engineering - Public Streets, Utilities, and Stormwater
5. Landscaping and Tree Preservation

Public Hearing was opened at 7:02 PM

During the open public hearing, concerns raised during public comment included the potential impact of the development on local water tables; the fairness of changing lot size requirements over time; the location of septic systems and their possible effects on neighboring properties; long-term plans for extending City water and sewer services; and the accuracy of property lines, including how any potential changes could affect adjacent properties.

Public Hearing was closed at 7:33 PM

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council approving the preliminary plot for Fairway Field with the following conditions, 1- 3.

1. The Applicant shall address and comply with the City Engineers memo dated December 2, 2025.
2. All public improvements shall be constructed in accordance with City of North Branch standards.
3. A Development Agreement shall be executed prior to Final Plat approval.

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

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council approving the variance to reduce the lot depths for Fairway Field with the following conditions: the minimum lot depths in block 2, Lots 5, 6, and 7 must be at least 200 feet.

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

9. REPORTS

- a. Text Amendment - Surfacing Requirements

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Text Amendment - Surfacing Requirements to the Planning Commission. City staff has been reviewing the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or misleading. One section that has repeatedly come up in discussions with developers is the surfacing

requirement in Section 66-855, particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial developments shall be paved. As currently written, the surfacing section only specifies paving requirements for residential properties that are two acres or smaller. The code should more clearly state that parking areas and driveways for commercial and industrial zoned properties are also required to be paved. Clear surfacing standards help manage stormwater runoff, reduce dust and debris, and promote safe, organized parking and traffic circulation.

Sec 66-855 Surfacing currently reads as follows:

“All areas used for parking and driveways on residential lots 2.0 acres or smaller shall be hard-surfaced with bituminous or concrete pavement or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director.”

City staff suggests this section be amended as follows:

“All areas used for parking and driveways on residential lots 2.0 acres or smaller, and on all commercial and industrial zoned lots, shall be hard-surfaced with bituminous or concrete pavement or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director.”

City staff strongly supports the proposed text amendment, as the benefits to the City outweigh the potential drawbacks. Clarifying and expanding surfacing requirements will promote orderly development, reduce long-term maintenance and enforcement issues, and better protect public infrastructure and overall community quality.

Motion to recommend approval of holding a public hearing to address parking requirements.

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

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Administrator Matthew Hill presented the Comprehensive Plan Update. Sections 2 and 3 of the Comprehensive Plan is included in the agenda packet. It is highly encouraged that everybody take a look at the language within there. In a couple of months, we want to have a solid plan from this commission and anybody else that is participating in those sections to provide feedback and provide recommendations for the City Council.

c. 2026 Meeting Schedule

ACTION

Motion to accept the 2026 Meeting Schedule with rescheduling of November 3rd, 2026. meeting to November 4th, 2026.

RESULT: **Passed**
MOVER: **Nate Ehalt**
SECONDER: **Steve Cich**
AYES: **Steve Cich, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer**

ABSENT: Ross Otto

NOTES:

d. Planning Commission Applications

ACTION

An application was received for the Planning Commission Commissioner. It is a 3-year term. The Commission's past practices, commissions make recommendations to the City Council on applications that are received.

Motion to recommend Steve Cich to the North Branch City Council to remain on the North Branch Planning Commission.

RESULT: Passed

MOVER: Nate Ehalt

SECONDER: Kelly Maurer

AYES: None

ABSENT: Ross Otto

NOTES:

10. NEXT MEETING - February 3, 2026 - 6:30 PM

11. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting at 8:03 PM.

RESULT: Passed

MOVER: Nate Ehalt

SECONDER: Steve Cich

AYES: Steve Cich, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer

ABSENT: Ross Otto

NOTES:



Prepared By: Ryan Saltis, City Planner, Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Presenter: Ryan Saltis, City Planner, Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Date: 01/28/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition

The purpose of the proposed plat is to consolidate and reconfigure existing lots, outlots, and public right-of-way areas to allow for the development of a large-scale manufacturing facility. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of a 120-acre lot intended to accommodate a future LP Siding manufacturing facility, along with additional industrial lots, outlots, drainage and utility easements, and associated right-of-way adjustments. The subject property consists of approximately 220.14 total acres.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council, approving the Preliminary Plat request for Essby Business Park 5th Addition, with the conditions of approval listed in this report.

Overview / Background

The North Branch Economic Development Authority (EDA), has submitted a request for a Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition. The site is located within the City's established industrial park area, generally west of CSAH 30, east of I-35, and south of 410th Street.

The purpose of the proposed plat is to consolidate and reconfigure existing lots, outlots, and public right-of-way areas to allow for the development of a large-scale manufacturing facility. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of a 120-acre lot intended to accommodate a future LP Siding manufacturing facility, along with additional industrial lots, outlots, drainage and utility easements, and associated right-of-way adjustments. The subject property consists of approximately 220.14 total acres and is zoned I-Industrial.

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 **LUI**, per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned **I – Industrial**.

Industrial uses, including manufacturing and associated facilities, are permitted within the zoning district.

The proposed preliminary plat is intended to support the development of a large-scale manufacturing facility and related industrial parcels, which is consistent with the City's long-term land use planning goals, economic development objectives, and the established industrial character of the surrounding area.

Staff finds the proposed plat to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and zoning district standards.

2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition proposes to reconfigure portions of the existing North Branch Industrial Park and prior Essby Business Park additions to create a cohesive plat layout capable of supporting a large manufacturing operation.

Key components of the proposed plat include:

- Creation of Lot 2, Block 1, totaling approximately 120.57 acres, intended for the future LP Siding manufacturing facility
- Additional industrial lots ranging in size to accommodate future development
- Designation of Outlots A and B for drainage, utility, and stormwater management purposes

- Proposed vacation of underlying drainage and utility easements and portions of Fletcher Ave right-of-way that are no longer necessary due to the revised lot configuration
- Dedication of new drainage and utility easements as shown on the Preliminary Plat

The proposed layout provides logical lot boundaries, efficient access to existing and planned public streets, and flexibility for phased industrial development while maintaining compliance with City Code requirements.

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. The I-Industrial zoning district does not impose maximum lot size limitations and is intended to accommodate large format industrial uses.

The lots created through this platting process are required to meet the following:

Type	Lot Standards		
	Area (sf)	Width	Depth
I – Industrial	10,000 sf	100'	100'

PLAT AREAS

Proposed Plat areas are as follows:

Lot 1, Block 1 = 266,318 Square Feet or 6.114 acres
 Lot 2, Block 1 = 5,252,029 Square Feet or 120.570 acres
 Lot 3, Block 1 = 87,251 Square Feet or 2.003 acres
 Lot 4, Block 1 = 89,430 Square Feet or 2.053 acres
 Lot 5, Block 1 = 54,485 Square Feet or 1.251 acres
 Lot 6, Block 1 = 87,600 Square Feet or 2.011 acres
 Lot 7, Block 1 = 869,198 Square Feet or 19.954 acres

Lot 1, Block 2 = 1,757,645 Square Feet or 40.350 acres
 Lot 2, Block 2 = 439,193 Square Feet or 10.082 acres

Outlot A = 348,634 Square Feet or 8.004 acres
 Outlot B = 94,046 Square Feet or 2.159 acres

410th Street ROW = 5,000 Square Feet or 0.115 acres
 Goodview Avenue ROW = 30,369 Square Feet or 0.697 acres
Fletcher Avenue ROW = 208,035 Square Feet or 4.776 acres
Total Area = 9,589,233 Square Feet or 220.139 acres

Based on review of the Preliminary Plat, all proposed lots meet or exceed the minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements of the zoning district.

4. Engineering and Infrastructure

Streets & Access

The plat relies on existing and proposed public streets, including Fletcher Ave, Goodview Ave, and access connections to 410th Street and CSAH 30. The proposed vacation of a portion of Fletcher Ave right-of-way reflects the revised circulation pattern.

Utilities

The Subject Property is located within the City's Urban Service Area and is intended to be served by municipal water, sanitary sewer, stormwater infrastructure, and other public utilities. Existing and proposed drainage and utility easements are shown on the Preliminary Plat.

Final utility design, sizing, and service connections will be reviewed and approved as part of future site plan, final plat, and engineering plan submittals.

Stormwater & Drainage

Stormwater management will be addressed through designated outlots and drainage easements. Detailed stormwater plans, grading, and erosion control measures will be required and reviewed at the time of final plat and/or site plan approval.

Staff Recommendation

City staff recommends approval of the Preliminary Plat request for Essby Business Park 5th Addition with conditions as stated.

Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval to City Council, approving the Preliminary Plat for Hemingway Meadows, with the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall submit and obtain approval of a Final Plat that is consistent with the approved Preliminary Plat, City Code, and Minnesota Statutes.
2. The applicant shall submit detailed engineering, utility, stormwater, grading, and erosion control plans for review and approval.
3. All required permits, fees, development agreements and financial obligations shall be satisfied prior to the recording of the Final Plat.

SCALE: 1" = 200'
DRAWN BY:
SURVEY BY: TH
CHECK BY:

REVISIONS

NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS SURVEY, PLAN, OR REPORT WAS PREPARED BY ME OR UNDER MY DIRECT SUPERVISION AND THAT I AM A DULY LICENSED PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYOR UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA.

Jeremy R. Honga
DATE: 01/26/2026 LIC. NO: 58013

Preliminary Plat

Essby Business Park 5th Addition
PID No. 11.01072.02, 11.01072.10, 11.01072.13
11.01072.25, 11.01072.26, 11.01072.24, 11.01072.33
City of North Branch, Minnesota

WSB PROJECT NO.
033098-000

SHEET

1 OF 3

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Lot 1, Block 2, North Branch Industrial Park, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 1)

and

Outlot C, Essby Business Park, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 2)

and

Outlot F, Essby Business Park, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 3)

and

Outlot A, Essby Business Park 3rd Addition, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 4)

and

Outlot B, Essby Business Park 3rd Addition, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 5)

and

Lot 1, Block 1, Essby Business Park 3rd Addition, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 6)

and

Outlot A, Essby Business Park 4th Addition, Chisago County, Minnesota. (Tract 7)

and

Fletcher Avenue, as dedicated on the plat of Essby Business Park 3rd Addition, Chisago County, Minnesota, and later vacated per document no. _____.

PROPERTY SUMMARY

1. Subject property's addresses are:

Tract 1: 6247 410th St
Tract 2: Unassigned
Tract 3: Unassigned
Tract 4: Unassigned
Tract 5: Unassigned
Tract 6: 40275 Fletcher Ave
Tract 7: Unassigned

2. Subject property's property identification numbers are:

Tract 1: 11.01072.02
Tract 2: 11.01072.10
Tract 3: 11.01072.13
Tract 4: 11.01072.25
Tract 5: 11.01072.26
Tract 6: 11.01072.24
Tract 7: 11.01072.33

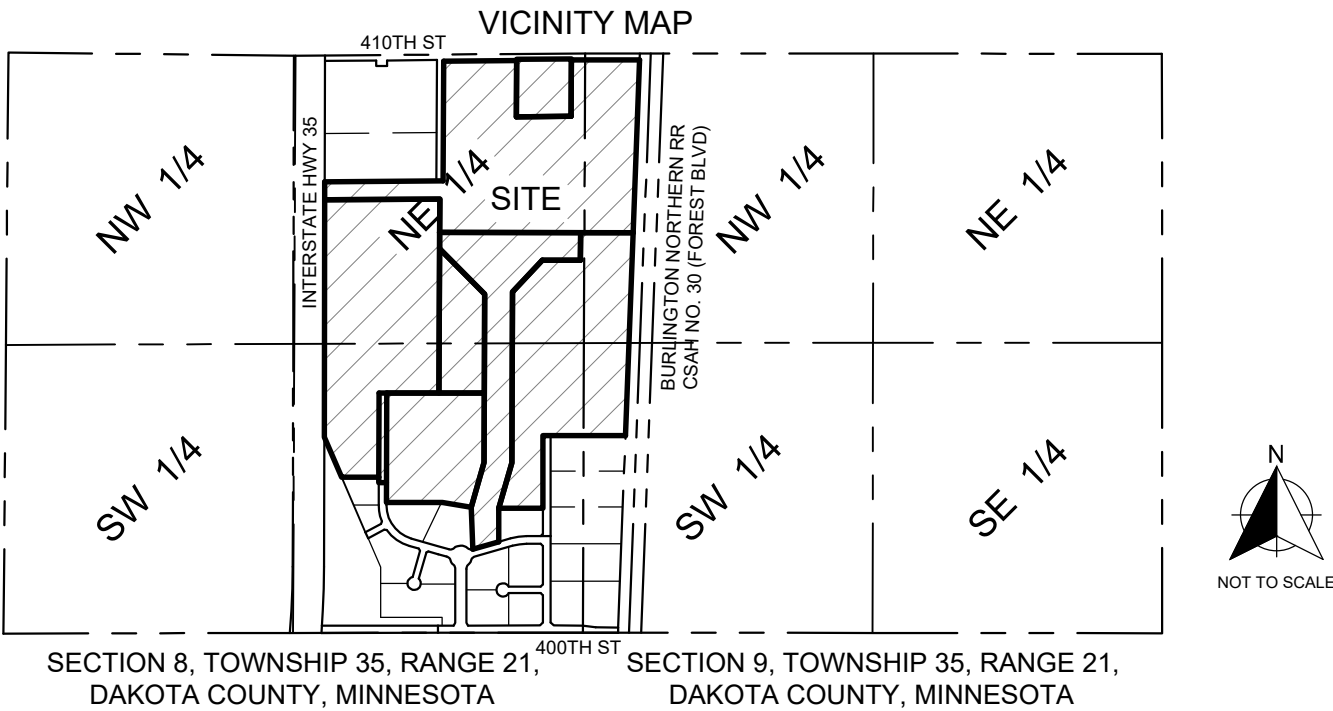
3. The subject property is zoned I - Industrial, per the City of North Branch Zoning Map, dated August 2025.

SURVEYOR NOTES

- The bearing system is based on the recorded plats of North Branch Industrial Park, Essby Business Park, and Essby Business 4th Addition, having an assumed bearing of S02°09'58"W for the East line of said plats.
- Due to substantial snow cover, some features may not have been visible at the time of survey and may not be shown on this survey. Undersigned is not responsible for failing to show items buried under snow and to which he was not made aware of.
- Location, sizes and types of underground utilities shown are a combination of observed evidence and plan information, together with field markings by those utility locators that responded to Gopher State One Call Ticket Nos. 253110319 and 253170435. However, lacking excavation, the exact location of underground features cannot be accurately, completely, and reliably depicted. WSB makes no guarantee that the utilities shown comprise all of the utilities in the area. Where additional or more detailed information is required, the client is advised that excavation and/or a private utility locate request may be necessary. Pursuant to MS 216.D contact Gopher State One Call at 651-454-0002 prior to any excavation.
- Field work was completed on 12/19/2025.

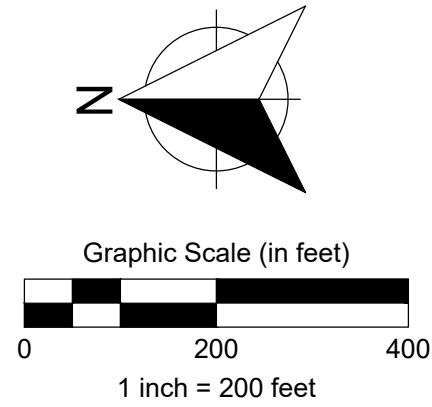
NOTES

-  ALL OF FLETCHER AVENUE RIGHT OF WAY, DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION IS PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
-  ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF NORTH BRANCH INDUSTRIAL PARK WHICH ARE WITHIN LOT 1, BLOCK 2, SAID NORTH BRANCH INDUSTRIAL PARK, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
- AND
- ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 2ND ADDITION WHICH ARE WITHIN OUTLOT A, SAID ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 2ND ADDITION, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
- AND
- ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION WHICH ARE WITHIN LOT 1, BLOCK 1, AND OUTLOT A, AND OUTLOT B, SAID ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.



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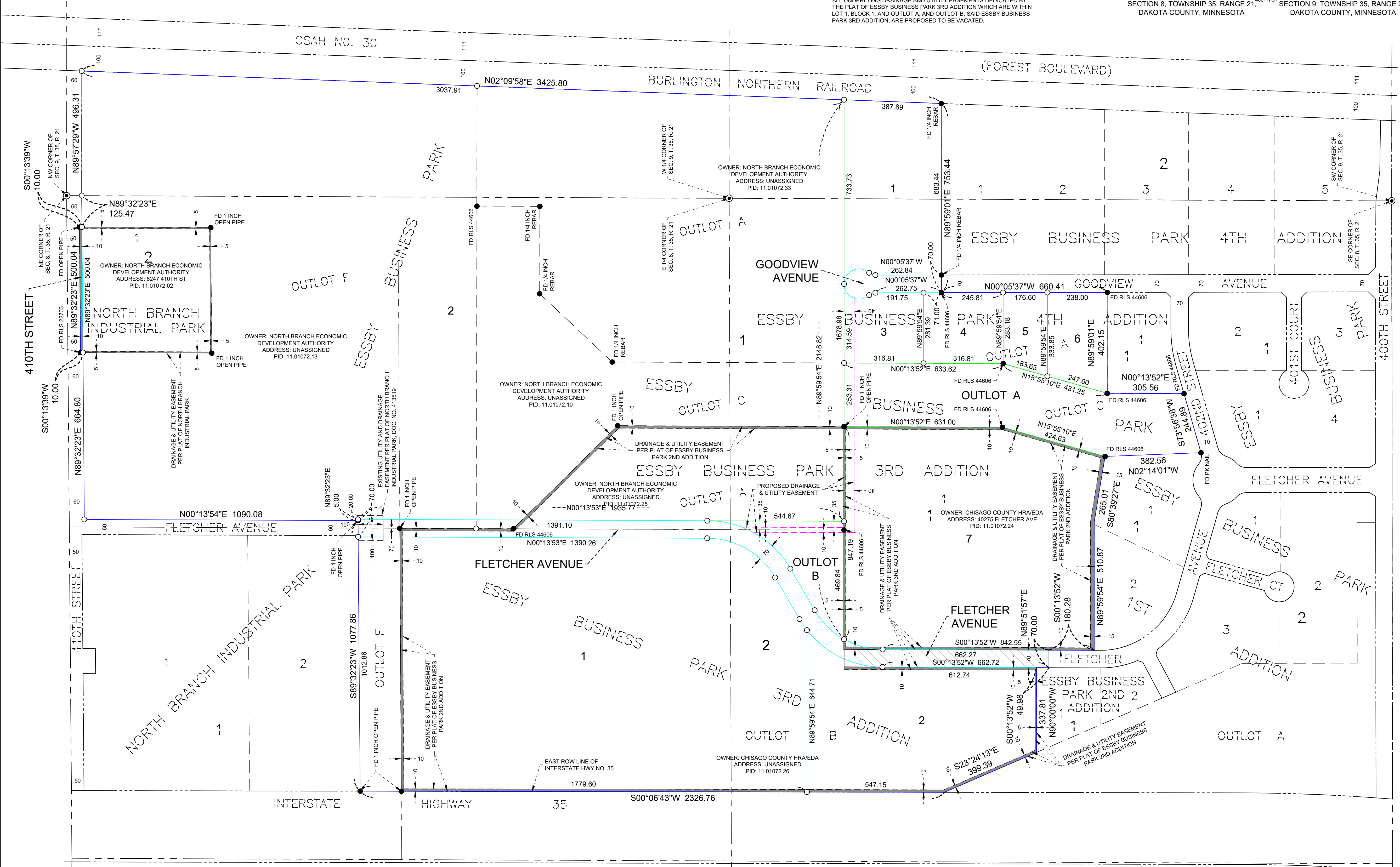
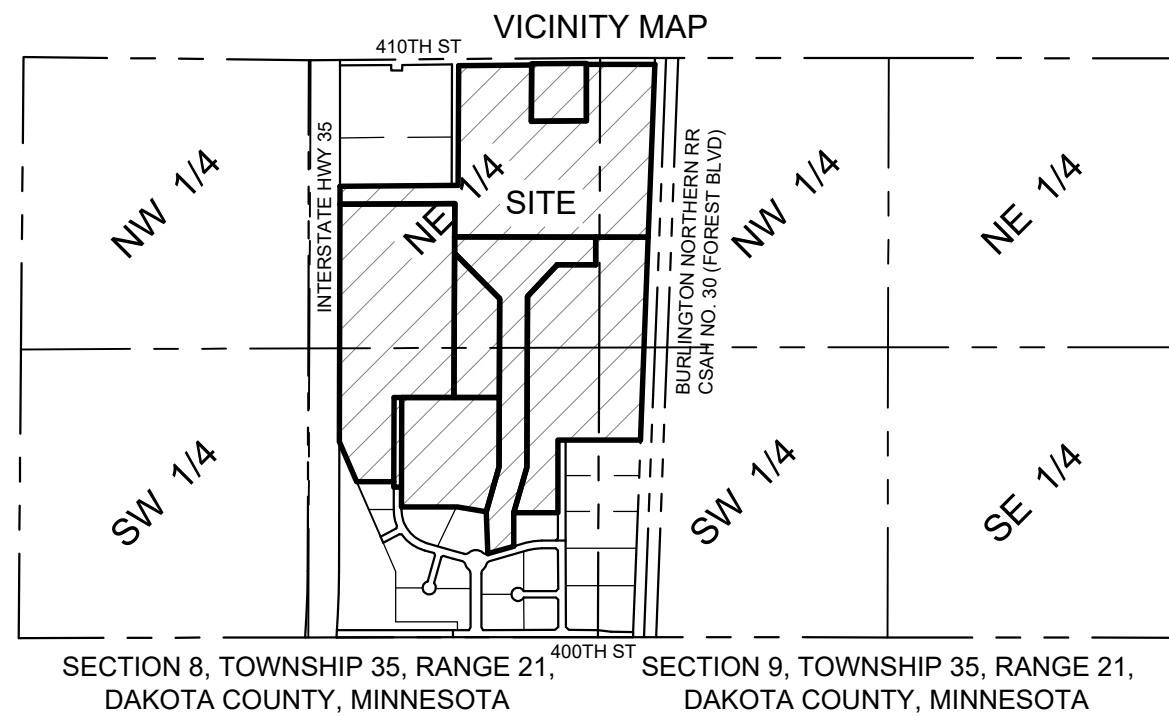


LEGEND

- FOUND MONUMENT
- SET MONUMENT
- SECTION CORNER
- PLAT BOUNDARY
- PROPOSED LOT LINE
- PROPOSED RIGHT OF WAY
- - - PROPOSED D and U EASEMENT

NOTES

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REVISIONS

NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS SURVEY, PLAN, OR REPORT WAS PREPARED BY ME OR UNDER MY DIRECT SUPERVISION AND THAT I AM A DULY LICENSED PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYOR UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA.

Jeremy R. Honga

DATE: 01/26/2026 LIC. NO: 58013

Preliminary Plat

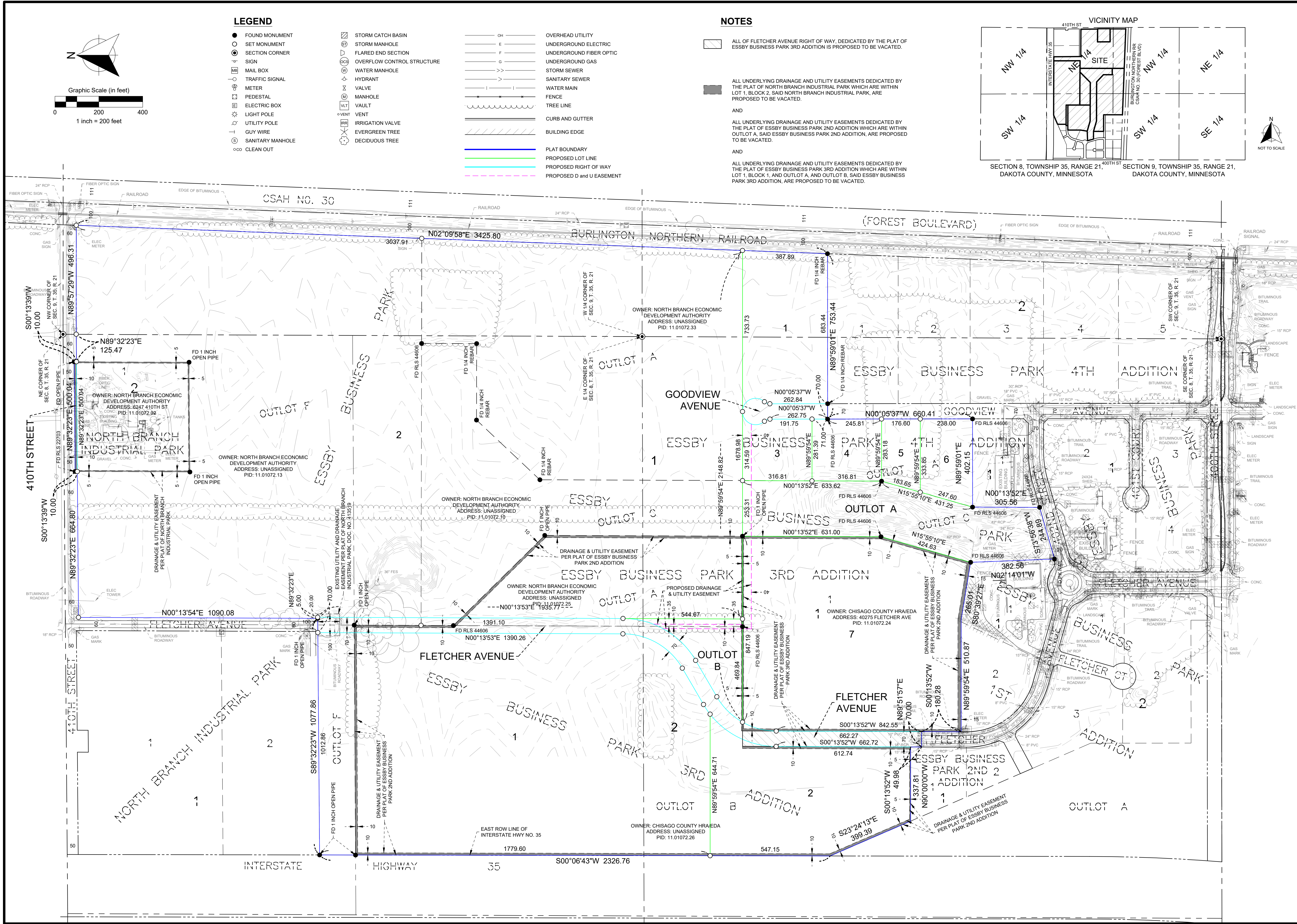
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PID No. 11.01072.02, 11.01072.10, 11.01072.13
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City of North Branch, Minnesota

WSB PROJECT NO.
033098-000

SHEET
2 OF 3

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DRAFT - 2026-01-26



LEGEND

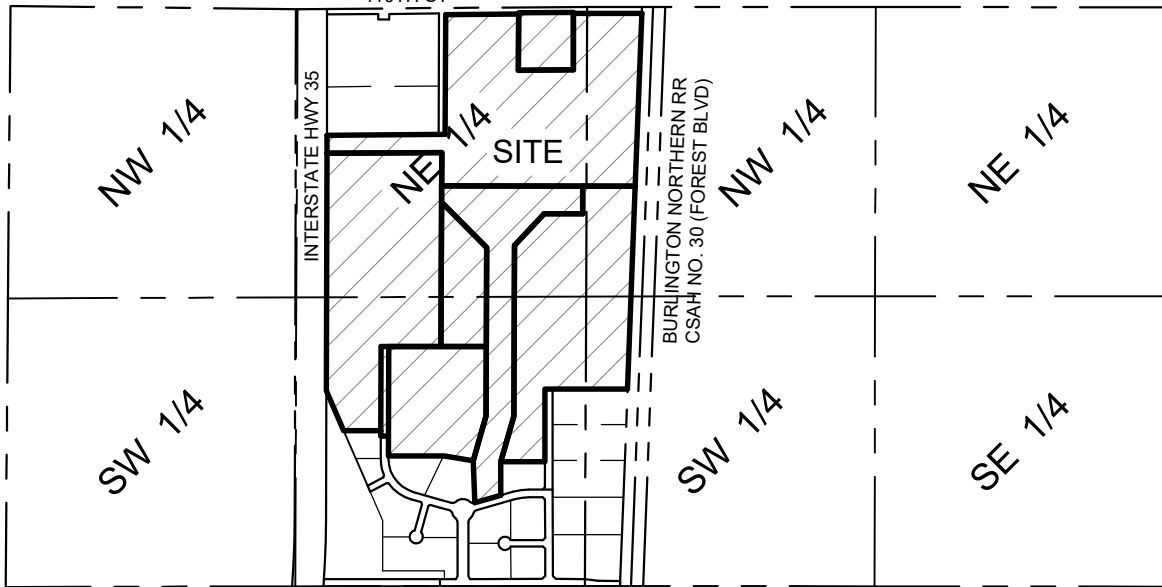
- FOUND MONUMENT
- SET MONUMENT
- SECTION CORNER
- SIGN
- MAIL BOX
- TRAFFIC SIGNAL
- METER
- PEDESTAL
- ELECTRIC BOX
- LIGHT POLE
- UTILITY POLE
- GUY WIRE
- SANITARY MANHOLE
- CLEAN OUT
- STORM CATCH BASIN
- STORM MANHOLE
- FLARED END SECTION
- OVERFLOW CONTROL STRUCTURE
- WATER MANHOLE
- HYDRANT
- VALVE
- MANHOLE
- VAULT
- VENT
- IRRIGATION VALVE
- EVERGREEN TREE
- DECIDUOUS TREE

- OH — OVERHEAD UTILITY
- E — UNDERGROUND ELECTRIC
- F — UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTIC
- G — UNDERGROUND GAS
- S — STORM SEWER
- > — SANITARY SEWER
- | — WATER MAIN
- > — TREE LINE
- — CURB AND GUTTER
- — BUILDING EDGE
- — PLAT BOUNDARY
- — PROPOSED LOT LINE
- — PROPOSED RIGHT OF WAY
- — PROPOSED D and U EASEMENT

NOTES

- ALL OF FLETCHER AVENUE RIGHT OF WAY, DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION IS PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
- ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF NORTH BRANCH INDUSTRIAL PARK WHICH ARE WITHIN LOT 1, BLOCK 2, SAID NORTH BRANCH INDUSTRIAL PARK, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
- AND
- ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 2ND ADDITION WHICH ARE WITHIN OUTLOT A, SAID ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 2ND ADDITION, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.
- AND
- ALL UNDERLYING DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS DEDICATED BY THE PLAT OF ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION WHICH ARE WITHIN LOT 1, BLOCK 1, AND OUTLOT A, AND OUTLOT B, SAID ESSBY BUSINESS PARK 3RD ADDITION, ARE PROPOSED TO BE VACATED.

VICINITY MAP



NOT TO SCALE

REVISIONS

NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS SURVEY PLAN, OR REPORT WAS PREPARED BY ME OR UNDER MY DIRECT SUPERVISION AND THAT I AM A DULY LICENSED PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYOR UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA.

Jeremy R. Hanga

DATE: 01/26/2026 LIC. NO: 58013

Preliminary Plat

Plat Name

PID No. 11.01072.02, 11.01072.10, 11.01072.13
11.01072.25, 11.01072.26, 11.01072.24, 11.01072.33
City of North Branch, Minnesota

WSB PROJECT NO.
033098-000

SHEET

3 OF 3



Prepared By: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Presenter: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Date: 01/28/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific

Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LP) has submitted an application for a Conditional Use Permit to allow outdoor storage of raw materials and finished products associated with a proposed 120-acre industrial site within the City of North Branch.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council, for the following request:

- Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific.

Overview / Background

Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LP) has submitted an application for a Conditional Use Permit to allow outdoor storage of raw materials and finished products associated with a proposed 120-acre industrial site within the City of North Branch.

The proposed facility will receive unpainted OSB-based siding products by truck and rail, which will be temporarily stored outdoors prior to being processed inside the building. Finished products will also be stored outdoors in designated storage areas prior to shipment. Outdoor storage is a required operational component of LP's ExpertFinish facilities and is necessary due to the volume, variety, and logistics of the materials involved.

The proposed outdoor storage areas are shown on the submitted site plan and will consist of large paved storage yards, internal forklift aisles, and truck circulation routes. Product stacks will generally be approximately 16 feet in height for inbound materials and less than 12 feet in height for finished product. Other outdoor storage will include pallets, empty paint totes, and related materials. Trash compactors and dumpsters will be located outdoors but under roof.

The site is planned to operate 24 hours per day, though shipping activities are currently anticipated to occur primarily during weekday day shifts.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses
2. Site Improvements and Outdoor Storage Operations
3. Consistency with City Code Requirements

Analysis of Issue(s)

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses

The Subject Property is zoned **I - Industrial** and guided **LUI - Land Use Industrial**, per the Comprehensive Plan. Manufacturing uses are allowed in this zoning district while outdoor storage as an accessory use requires approval of a Conditional Use Permit due to its potential visual, operational, and safety impacts.

The surrounding area consists primarily of industrially zoned land, transportation corridors, and undeveloped acreage. There are residentially zoned properties located to the east of the project site however the houses do not directly abut the site and are separated by County Rd 30 (Forest Blvd).

Existing and planned industrial uses in the area are consistent with the scale and intensity of development proposed by LP. The large size of the parcel allows outdoor storage activities to be located internally on the site and setback from public streets and neighboring properties.

2. Site Improvements and Outdoor Storage Operations

The project includes construction of a large manufacturing building, internal roadways, rail access, stormwater ponds, and more than 30 acres of impervious surface dedicated to outdoor product storage. Outdoor storage areas are clearly defined on the site plan and are integrated into the overall circulation and logistics design of the facility.

Materials will be delivered by truck and rail, moved internally by forklifts, and stacked in organized storage rows by product type and color. Existing tree lines along Forest Boulevard will be largely maintained to help screen views into the site where possible. The scale and layout of the storage areas reflect typical operations at LP's existing ExpertFinish facilities in other locations.

Fire protection infrastructure, including hydrants and a dedicated firewater system is planned throughout the site due to the combustible nature of the wood-based materials being stored.

3. Consistency with City Code Requirements

The proposed Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage is evaluated against the City's Conditional Use Permit criteria. City Staff comments are provided below in **Bold**.

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:

- a. Relationship to the city's comprehensive plan;

The 2018 Comprehensive Plan identifies industrial development and job creation as key economic goals, particularly in areas planned for employment and manufacturing uses. The plan supports large-scale industrial operations that strengthen the local tax base while being designed to minimize impacts on surrounding land uses. The proposed outdoor storage is an integral component of the LP facility and supports the intended industrial use of the site, making it consistent with the comp plan.

- b. The geographical area involved;

The project site is located within a designated industrial growth area of the city and is served by major transportation infrastructure, including rail and arterial roadways. The size and configuration of the parcel allow outdoor storage activities to occur without encroaching on residential neighborhoods or incompatible land uses.

- c. The character of the surrounding area;

The surrounding area is characterized by industrial, transportation, and undeveloped land. Outdoor storage of materials is a common and expected feature of large industrial facilities in such areas. The proposed storage will not introduce a use that is inconsistent with the existing or planned character of the area.

- d. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;

The site is planned to be served by municipal water and sanitary sewer, along with private utility extensions. Fire suppression infrastructure has been specifically planned to support the outdoor storage of combustible materials. Existing and proposed utilities are capable of accommodating the use.

- e. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;

Given the industrial zoning of the area and the fact that outdoor storage is accessory to a permitted manufacturing use, staff does not anticipate the proposed outdoor storage will depreciate surrounding property values. The use is consistent with other industrial operations and is located on a large site that minimizes off-site impacts.

- f. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;

The project will be privately developed and maintained by LP. Required infrastructure improvements, including utilities, stormwater facilities, and internal roadways, will primarily be funded by the applicant. The request does not create an undue financial burden on the City.

- g. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;

Outdoor storage will consist of stacked materials rather than buildings and will be located internally on the site. Given the parcel size and setbacks, the storage areas will not impair light or air to adjacent properties.

- h. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;

Truck and some rail traffic is anticipated as part of normal industrial operations. The site has been designed with internal circulation, loading areas, and rail access to efficiently manage traffic. While the facility will generate truck traffic, it is consistent with the industrial nature of the area and is not expected to create unreasonable congestion.

- i. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety;

The applicant has acknowledged the combustible nature of stored materials and has planned a comprehensive fire suppression system, including hydrants and firewater infrastructure. Outdoor storage areas are organized and managed as part of a controlled industrial operation. With compliance with fire code and permitting requirements, the use is not expected to endanger public safety.

- j. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

The Conditional Use Permit process is intended to allow flexibility for uses that are appropriate in certain locations but require additional oversight. The proposed outdoor storage is clearly accessory to a permitted industrial use and is designed to operate in a safe, orderly, and efficient manner. Staff finds the request consistent with the intent of the City Code.

Additional to the Findings of Fact section, the Conditional Use Permit request will also have to meet Sec 66-66 Conditions on Approval, when applicable. Responses from City Staff are provided below in **Bold**, where the request for a Communications Tower is applicable.

Sec 66-66 Conditions on Approval

1. In approving requests for variances, appeals, amendments or conditional use permits, the planning agency and the city council may require certain conditions upon approval of the request. Such conditions for approval may include the following, when applicable:

1. The land area and setback requirements of the property containing such a use or activity shall be the minimum established for the district;

The subject property consists of approximately 120 acres, which provides ample land area to accommodate outdoor storage operations while maintaining appropriate internal setbacks from property lines, roadways, and adjacent parcels. Outdoor storage areas are located internally on the site and are separated from public streets by building placement, circulation areas, and existing vegetation. Staff finds that the land area and site layout meet and exceed the minimum standards of the zoning district and allow the use to function without encroaching on neighboring properties.

2. When abutting a residential use in a residential district, the property shall be screened and landscaped in compliance with section 66-970 et seq.;

The proposed outdoor storage areas do not abut property zoned for residential use. The surrounding area is industrial and transportation oriented in character. Existing tree lines along Forest Blvd are planned to be largely preserved, which will provide visual buffering from the public right-of-way. Should residential zoning be established adjacent to the site in the future, additional screening or landscaping may be evaluated at the time through future development review.

3. Where applicable, all city, state and federal laws, regulations and ordinances shall be complied with and all necessary permits secured;

Outdoor storage associated with the proposed manufacturing facility will be subject to city zoning requirements, Minnesota State Building Code, Minnesota Fire Code, environmental regulations, and applicable stormwater and utility standards. The applicant will be required to obtain all necessary permits prior to construction and operation. Compliance will be verified through the City's permitting, inspection, and site plan review processes.

4. All signs shall be in compliance with section 66-821 et seq. and shall not adversely impact adjoining or surrounding residential uses;

Any signage associated with outdoor storage areas is expected to be limited to safety, operational, and regulatory signage (material identification, safety warnings). No advertising signage is proposed within outdoor storage areas. All signage will be reviewed for compliance with the City's sign ordinance and shall not create visual clutter or nuisance conditions.

5. Adequate off-street parking and loading shall be provided in accordance with section 66-848 et seq. Such parking and loading shall be screened and landscaped from abutting residential uses in compliance with section 66-970 et seq.;

The proposed outdoor storage areas are served by an internal network of paved truck routes, forklift aisles, and loading zones designed to accommodate the scale of industrial operations anticipated. Loading and staging activities will occur entirely on-site and will not rely on public streets. Because the site does not abut residential districts, additional screening for parking and loading areas is not required at this time.

6. The proposed water, sewer and other utilities shall be capable of accommodating the proposed use;

The outdoor storage component of the project does not require sanitary sewer service and has minimal water demand outside of fire protection needs. The site plan includes a dedicated firewater and hydrant system designed to serve outdoor storage areas containing combustible wood-based materials. Utilities have been planned to adequately support the proposed use without exceeding available capacity.

7. The street serving the use or activity is of sufficient design to accommodate the proposed use or activity, and such use or activity shall not generate such additional traffic to create a nuisance or hazard to existing traffic or to surrounding land uses;

The site is served by roadways designed for industrial traffic volumes and by direct rail access. The future I-35 interchange planned at 400th Street will help alleviate truck traffic through town and will provide businesses in the industrial park direct connectivity to the freeway. Truck traffic associated with outdoor storage and shipping is typical of large manufacturing operations and is expected to be distributed throughout the day, primarily during weekday daytime hours. Internal circulation and staging areas are designed to prevent queuing or backup onto public streets. Staff finds that the serving streets are adequate to accommodate the proposed use.

8. All access roads, driveways, parking areas, and outside storage, service, or sales areas shall be surfaced or grassed to control dust and drainage;

All outdoor storage areas, internal drive aisles, and loading zones associated with the proposed use are planned to be paved, providing effective dust control and drainage. This is particularly important given the scale of the site and the volume of truck and forklift traffic anticipated. Stormwater management facilities are provided to manage runoff from these impervious surfaces.

9. All open and outdoor storage, sales and service areas shall be screened from view from the public streets and from abutting residential uses or districts;

Outdoor storage areas are located internally on the site and set back from Forest Blvd and other public streets. Existing tree lines will be maintained where feasible to reduce visibility from the public right-of-way. Given the industrial context of the area, complete visual screening is not required; however, the site design minimizes direct views of the storage areas and maintains an orderly, planned appearance consistent with industrial development standards.

10. All lighting shall be designed as to have no direct source of light visible from adjacent residential areas or from the public streets;

Outdoor storage lighting, if installed, will be designed as part of the site plan review process. Lighting shall be downcast, shielded, and limited to levels necessary for safety and operations. The intent is to prevent glare, light trespass, and spillover onto adjacent properties and public roadways.

11. The use or activity shall be properly drained to control surface water runoff;

The project includes stormwater ponds and drainage infrastructure designed to manage runoff from extensive outdoor storage and paved areas. Drainage will be reviewed in detail during engineering review to ensure compliance with city requirements and to prevent impacts to neighboring properties.

12. The architectural appearance and functional plan of the building and site shall not be so dissimilar to the existing buildings or area as to cause impairment in property values or constitute a blighting influence;

Outdoor storage is a functional necessity for the proposed manufacturing operation and is designed in an organized, delineated manner consistent with modern industrial facilities. Storage areas are clearly defined, paved, and integrated into the overall site plan. Staff does not find the proposed outdoor storage to constitute a blighting influence given the industrial zoning and surrounding land uses.

13. Where structures combine residential and nonresidential uses, such uses shall be separated and provided with individual outside access, and the uses shall not conflict in any manner.

This condition is not applicable, as the proposal does not include residential uses.

2. All conditions pertaining to a specific request are subject to change when the planning agency or city council, upon investigation, finds that the community safety, health, welfare and public betterment can be served as well or better by modifying the conditions.

Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval/denial to City Council, for a Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific with the following conditions of approval:

1. The applicant shall comply with all applicable city, state, and federal regulations, including but not limited to building, fire, and environmental requirements.
2. Outdoor storage materials to be stored shall limited to the areas shown on the approved site plan unless amended by the City.
3. Outdoor storage materials to be stored shall be consistent with applicant's narrative unless otherwise approved by the City.
4. Maximum storage heights shall be consistent with the applicant's narrative unless otherwise approved by the City.
5. Any substantial expansion of outdoor storage areas beyond what is approved shall require an amended Conditional Use Permit.
6. All conditions of approval are subject to modification by the City if necessary to protect public safety, health, and welfare or to meet future code requirements.



1610 West End Ave., Suite 200
Nashville, TN 37203
615.986.5600
LPCorp.com

January 19th, 2026

Nathan Sondrol
Community Development Director
City of North Branch
nsondrol@northbranchmn.gov

Hello Nathan Sondrol,

Upon completion of the 120 acre North Branch industrial site purchase and capital approval by the LP board in the summer of 2026, LP Plans to build an ExpertFinish facility on this greenfield site. To operate successfully, LP requires a conditional use permit that allows the storage of LP product and raw materials outside of the planned building. The storage process is as follows.

In bound trucks and rail cars from places like Hayward, WI and Two Harbors, MN deliver unpainted OSB based siding board units to the site. These units, which are approximately 4'x2.5'x16' will be carried via forklift and stacked into closely packed "stacks" by product type. These stacks will be approximately 16ft in height but can vary in height and density. Once ready, operations will transfer units inside the building where the boards within the units will be automatically unstacked, painted one of 16 colors, and repackaged. This facility will paint panel boards, lap siding boards, trim boards, shake, and corners. This variability in product type and color creates a wide range of final packaging configurations which require dedicated outdoor product storage by type and color in predefined areas to effectively manage the complex inventory that this process creates. The final product stacks will be less than approximately 12ft in height. From the predefined outdoor areas, the product is staged for shipment, loaded on truck or rail, and then shipped offsite to customers.

Some information for consideration:

- This site will operate 24/7, however, shipping is currently only planned for day shifts, M-F.
- The wood-based material is flammable. However, a comprehensive fire suppression hydrant system is planned for the site.
- The current project is planning for more than 30 acres of impervious surface that will be used for product storage. If manufacturing additions are added in the future, additional impervious surface would also be needed.
- Existing tree lines will be maintained to block sight lines from Forest Boulevard where possible.
- Other raw materials will be stored outside such as pallets, empty paint totes, and misc.
- Our trash compactor and dumpsters will be outside but under roof.
- Pictures from New York and Green Bay are included for reference.

Outdoor storage is required at every ExpertFinish as the alternative requires prohibitively large and costly facilities that would prevent operation at each site. If you require further clarification on any point of the outdoor plan, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Best Regards,
Nathan Roach, PE
ExpertFinish Regional Engineering Manager



1610 West End Ave., Suite 200
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Picture 1 – Bath NY outgoing truck loading station.



Picture 2 – Bath NY product storage yard



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Picture 3 – Green Bay WI product storage yard and truck loading.



Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council, for a Variance from the minimum lot width requirement to allow a lot width of 120 feet where 150 is required for PID 16.00482.10.

Overview / Background

Dennis Christ (Applicant) has requested approval for a Variance from the City of North Branch Zoning Code Sec 66-210 minimum lot width requirement for an R-2 zoned parcel with 3-6 attached units. The subject property is legally described as PID 16.00482.10 and is generally located West of Oakview Ave and South of Pecan St. The parcel is currently 120 feet in width, while the zoning ordinance requires a minimum lot width of 150 feet for the proposed development. The variance is requested to allow construction of a four-unit residential building consistent in size, scale, and orientation with the existing adjacent multi-family building immediately to the north.

The subject property and the adjacent parcel were historically under common ownership and were developed at a time when zoning standards permitted the existing configuration. The lot has remained vacant for several years and all necessary public utilities (water and sewer) are already installed and sized to accommodate a four-unit building.

Issue(s) to Consider

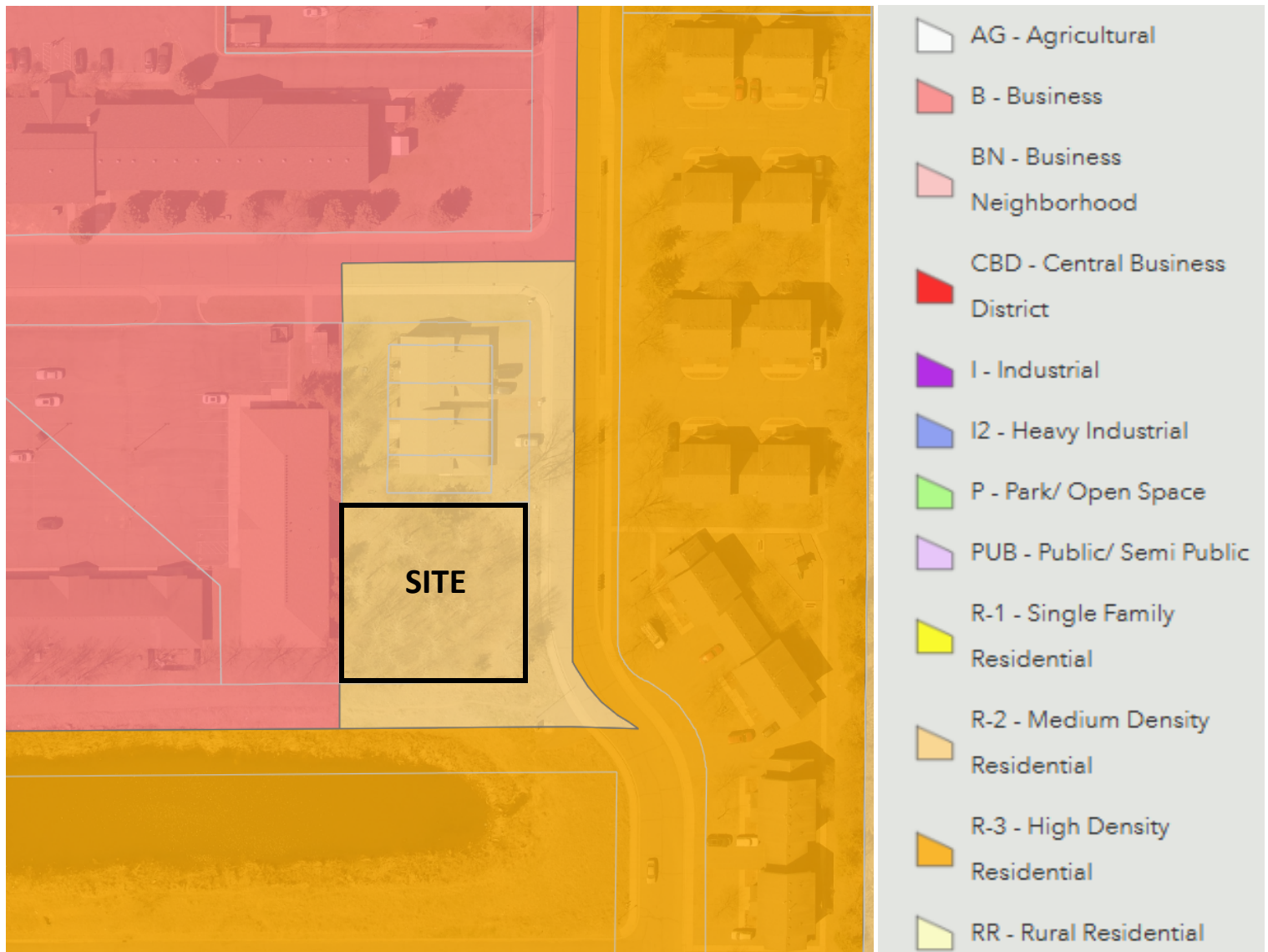
1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses
2. Variance from Lot Width Requirements

Analysis of Issue(s)

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses

The Subject Property is zoned **R2 – Medium Density Residential** and guided **LUR-2 - Land Use Medium Density Residential**, per the Comprehensive Plan. The subject site is surrounded by similar zoned R-2 townhomes to the north, B-Business zoned parcels to the west, and R-3 High Density Residential developments to the east. The proposed use is permitted within the zoning district, and the variance request relates solely to lot width, not use or density beyond what already exists in the immediate area.

Zoning Map:



2. Variance from Lot Width Requirements

The applicant is requesting a variance from the minimum lot width requirement of 150 feet, proposing a lot width of 120 feet. The variance is required in order to construct a four-unit residential building consistent with the adjacent development to the north.

Variances must follow certain criteria listed in City Code Chapter 66 Division 2 Variances, Appeals, Amendments, and Conditional Use Permits. These Sections are described below, with responses by City Staff provided in **Bold**:

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;

The Comprehensive Plan supports infill residential development, efficient use of existing infrastructure, and the provision of additional housing options within established neighborhoods. The proposed four-unit building aligns with these goals by utilizing an existing vacant lot with installed utilities and matching the scale of nearby development.

2. The geographical area involved;

The subject site is a residential lot within an established neighborhood. No unique natural features, topography, or environmental constraints are present that would be impacted by the requested variance.

3. The character of the surrounding area;

The surrounding area contains similar residential uses, including an adjacent four-unit building constructed on a lot with similar dimensions. Allowing the reduced lot width would not alter the established neighborhood character and would maintain consistency with existing development patterns.

4. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;

Public water and sanitary sewer infrastructure is already installed on the site and sized for a four-unit residential building. The proposed variance does not affect utility capacity or service availability.

5. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;

The proposed development is designed to match the adjacent building in scale and appearance. Staff does not anticipate depreciation of surrounding properties as a result of the reduced lot width, particularly given the consistency with existing development.

6. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;

The variance request will not place an undue financial burden on the city. All infrastructure is already in place, and no additional public improvements are required.

7. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;

The variance for reduced lot widths will not directly impact light and air to the adjacent property. The proposed development will need to meet all other zoning standards such as setbacks and building height for adequate light and air of adjacent properties to be maintained. These zoning standards will be acknowledged during the site plan review process or at the time of building permit review.

8. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;

The proposed four-unit residential building is not expected to generate traffic beyond what is typical for similar residential developments in the area.

9. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety;

The development will be subject to building and fire code review at the time of permitting. The variance does not increase any known public safety concerns.

10. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

The request is consistent with the intent of the zoning code to create a developable lot for the intended use of the property.

Additional to the Findings of Fact section, the variance request will also have to meet Sec 66-65 Conditions on Approval. This section has been analyzed below, with City Staff comments being provided in **Bold**.

Sec 66-65 Conditions On Approval

1. The planning commission and the city council may not permit as a variance any use that is not permitted under the 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:

1. When they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance; and

The intent of the lot width requirement is to ensure orderly development and neighborhood compatibility. Given the historical context of the lot, existing adjacent development, and installed infrastructure, staff finds the request consistent with the spirit and intent of the ordinance.

2. 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:

1. The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance;

The proposed four-unit residential building is a permitted use within the zoning district.

2. The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner; and

The lot was created and utilities installed prior to changes in zoning standards. The current lot width requirement was adopted after the original parcel configuration, creating a unique circumstance for this property.

3. The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

The proposed development mirrors the adjacent four-unit building and maintains the existing neighborhood character.

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.

The variance is not being requested for the sole purpose of economic gain. Staff would support the variance to create a developable lot for a use that is permitted in the zoning district and fits well with the existing neighborhood.

3. The board of adjustment and appeals, the city council acting as the board of adjustment and appeals, may impose conditions in granting the variance to ensure compliance and to protect adjacent properties.

The Planning Commission and City Council have the ability to put conditions of approval on the variance request in order to protect adjacent properties. Conditions of approval are restrictions placed on properties to minimize potential negative impacts.

Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council for a Variance from the minimum lot width requirement to allow a lot width of 120 feet where 150 feet is required, for property located at PID 16.00482.10 subject to the following conditions:

1. The development shall substantially conform to the plans submitted with the variance application for a 4-unit townhome development.
2. All other applicable City Code requirements shall be met unless otherwise modified by this variance.
3. Any future expansion or reconfiguration of the lot shall comply with current zoning standards.

12/18/2025

To: North Branch Planning Commission

From: Dennis Christ

Re: 38xxx Oakview Ave, parcel # 16.00482.10; Variance Application

This parcel is owned by Daniel and Laura Scholl. They owned this parcel and the identical one adjacent to it for many years. They built the existing four-unit building on the northern lot. They chose not to build on the above lot for unknown reasons and have put it up for sale.

I have an agreement to buy the property pending City of North Branch approval to construct a four-unit apartment like the building next door. Both lots have the same dimensions, 120ft wide by 125ft deep. The northern building footprint is about 100 ft wide by 69 ft deep. I am seeking a variance to allow a four unit building within the same footprint on an identical parcel. If approved, I will proceed with the lot purchase and commence construction soon, adding four more housing units to serve the North Branch community. I intend to build a quality building yet affordable to residents in the area.

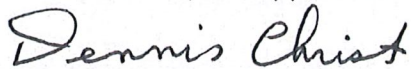
The reasons this variance should be approved are:

- (1) The infrastructure is already installed for a four-unit building – four sewer and water taps.
- (2) The vacant lot was intended to have a four-unit building evidenced by the 4 sewer and water taps. At one time not too long ago, the plan for this neighborhood was to allow a four unit structure. This is an opportunity to get more return on the City's past infrastructure investment.
- (3) The lot has been vacant for years and should be utilized as it was intended to allow more residents to share the good quality of life as existing North Branch residents. New residents in this high-quality neighborhood will add to the living experience of existing residents as well. Additional housing will add to the tax base providing additional resources to North Branch.
- (4) It will allow us to build four more affordable rental or owner-occupied units with close access to the freeway. There is evidence that North Branch is a growing community and has shortage of housing. The City of North Branch participated in facilitating 2 multi-million-dollar housing developments recently. There is still need for more.
- (5) The circumstance unique to this property requiring the variance is due to the change in the zoning ordinance after the existing owner acquired it. The property owner did nothing to

create the need for a variance. After the owner bought it, the City changed the zoning, perhaps without checking if parcels already created were still vacant. Usually, such lots are Grandfathered to the zoning in effect at the time of development.

(6) Allowing this property to be improved as it was intended is reasonable. Now that the ordinance has changed, building a similar building to an existing adjacent building will not change the essential character of the neighborhood. This lot is less ideal for a single-family home due to its location among multi-family residences. Requiring a duplex instead of a four-plex will only increase the cost per unit making them less affordable.

Therefore, I request approval of this variance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Christ". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dennis Christ

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: (Per Warranty Deed No. 291290)

Lot 5 Fifteen (15) to Twenty-Six (26), inclusive, in Block Four (4) in Oakhurst Addition in the Village of North Branch, Minnesota, according to the map or plat thereof on file or of record in the Office of the County Recorder in and for Chicago County, Minnesota.

1. Operational of the bearing system is based on the Chicago Early, modernized edition (MCHSE).
2. Local bearing system is based on the Chicago Early, modernized edition (MCHSE).
3. Local bearing system is based on the Chicago Early, modernized edition (MCHSE).

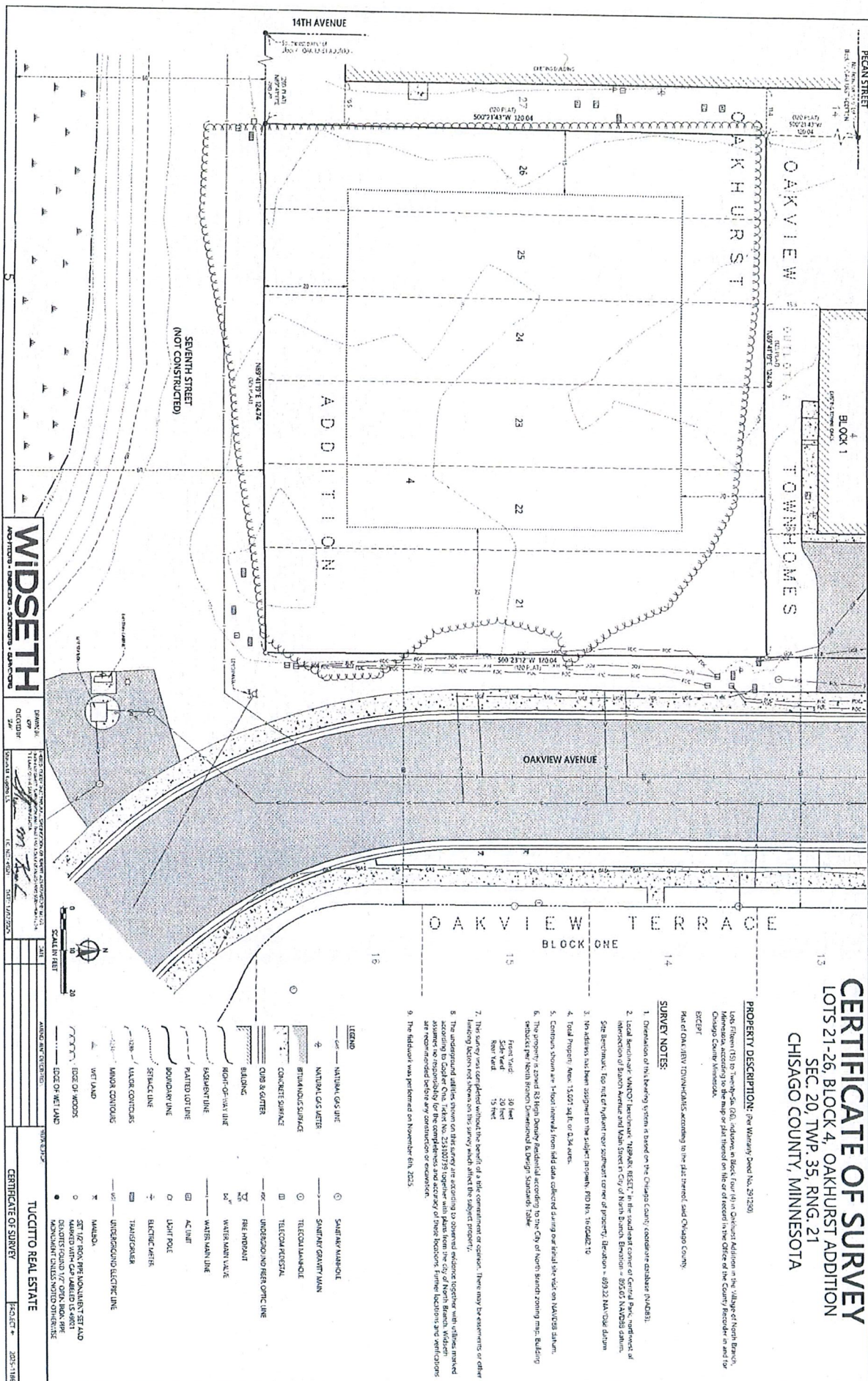
4. Total Property Area: 15,000 sq.ft. or less, 36 acres.
5. Contours shown are 1-foot intervals from field data collected during our final site visit on NAWCIS datum.
6. The property is zoned R3 High Density Residential according to the City of North Branch zoning map. Building setbacks are shown on the map. The property is located on the North Branch of the Des Moines River. See attached North Branch of the Des Moines River map.

From Yarn
Side Yarn

7. This survey was completed without the benefit of a title commitment or opinion. There may be easements or other interests in the property that have not been discovered by the abstract records.

assumes no responsibility for the completeness and accuracy of these locations. Further locations and verifications are recommended before any construction or excavation.

9. The fieldwork was performed on November 6th, 2025

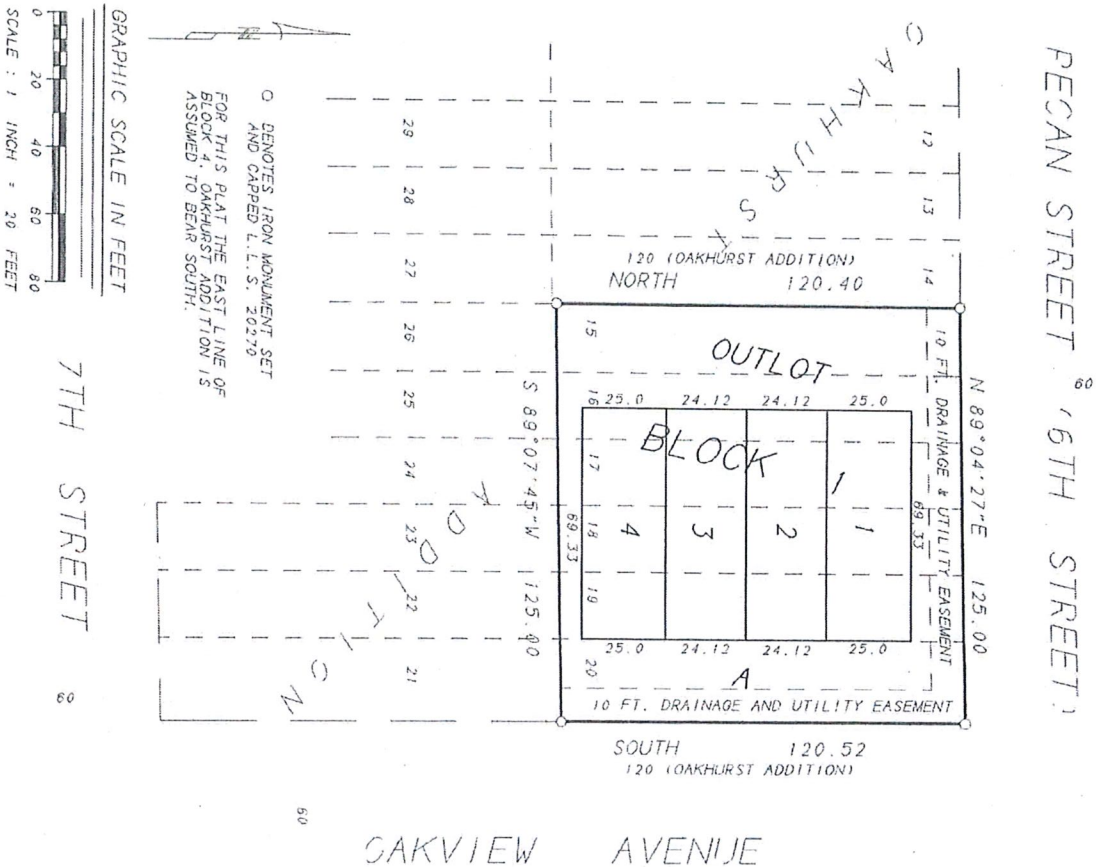


DEAN, DR. 679 1100 S. 10TH ST. SEATTLE, WA 98104	ORDERED BY JAL
SPECIAL REQUESTS DR. JAL	IC NO. 4001 DATE 1/17/75

TUCCITTO REAL ESTATE	
CERTIFICATE OF SURVEY	PG. 627 * 2025-1186
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Survey of adjacent lot To The North

OAKVIEW TOWNSHIP



NOTARIAL RECORDS OF THE RECORDS. That Daniel J. Schell and Laura F. Schell, husband and wife, owner and proprietor of the following described property, situated in the County of Chicago, State of Illinois, to wit: Lots 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20, Block 4, OAKHURST ADDITION, Chicago County, Illinois.

have caused the same to be surveyed and plotted as shown for TOWNSHIP, and do hereby donate and dedicate to the use of the public, as a park, the drainage and utility easements, as shown on the plat.

In witness whereof, said Daniel J. Schell and Laura F. Schell, husband and wife, have personally set their hands at _____, 199__.

Daniel J. Schell

Laura F. Schell

STATE OF ILLINOIS

Notary Public, was personally before me this _____ day of _____, 199__.

By Commission Expires January 31, 2000

I, Randy L. Kraft, do hereby certify that I have surveyed and plotted the property described on this plat as the TOWNSHIP, that this plat is a correct representation of said survey, that all distances are correctly shown in hundreds of a foot, that all monuments have been correctly placed on the ground as shown on the plat, that all are correctly shown on the plat, and that there are no wet lands or public highways to be designated after the plat is recorded.

Randy L. Kraft, Illinois Licensed Land Surveyor No. 20270

STATE OF ILLINOIS

Notary Public, was personally before me this _____ day of _____, 199__.

By Commission Expires January 31, 2000

This plat was prepared and accepted by the City of North Branch, Chicago County, Illinois at a meeting held on the _____ day of _____, 199__, and the conditions of Illinois Statutes 505.03, Subchapter 1 have been fulfilled.

By _____ Mayor

By _____ Clerk

This plat was approved as to form and execution on this _____ day of _____, 199__.

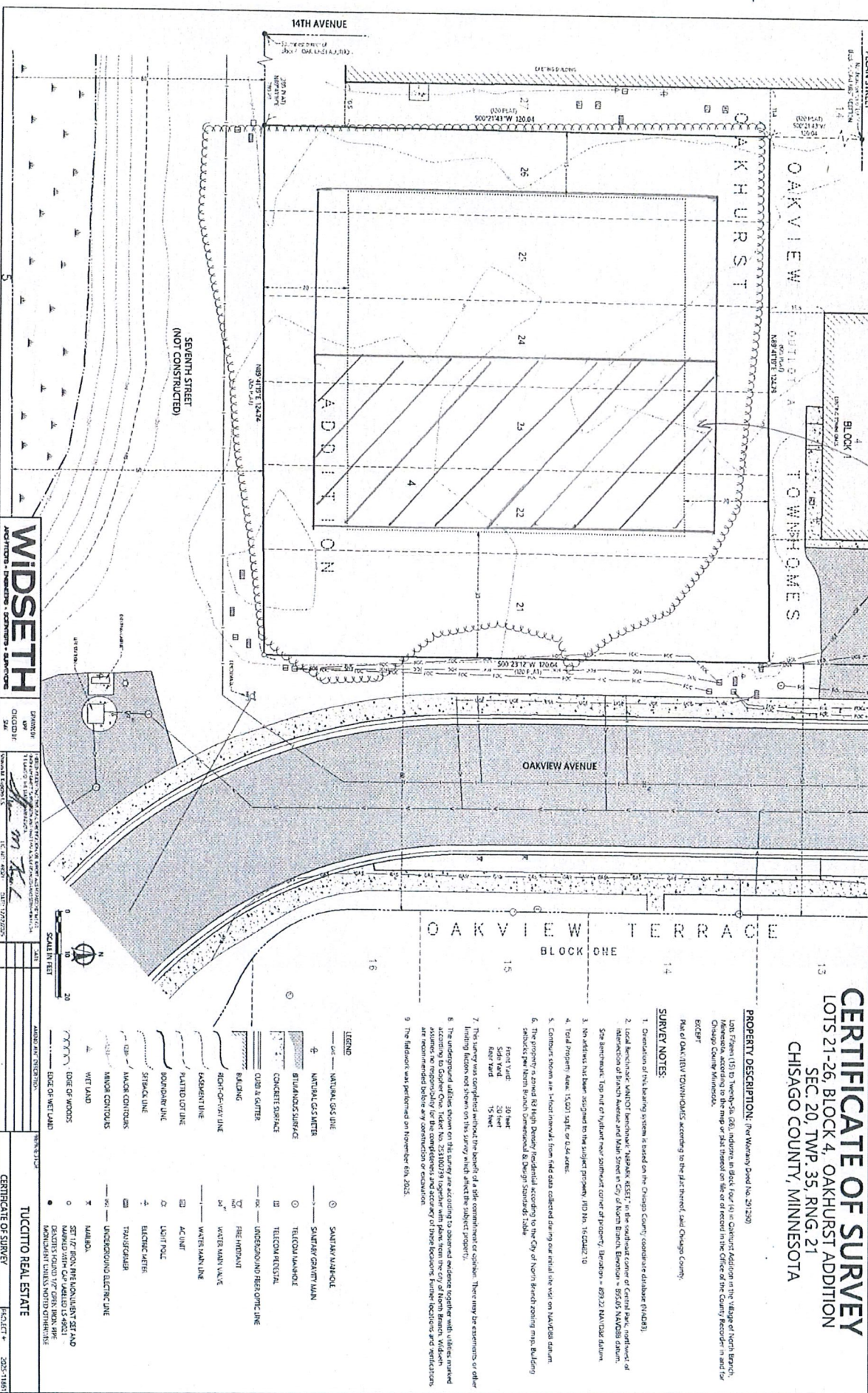
City Attorney, North Branch, Illinois

County Recorder-Notary, Chicago County, Illinois

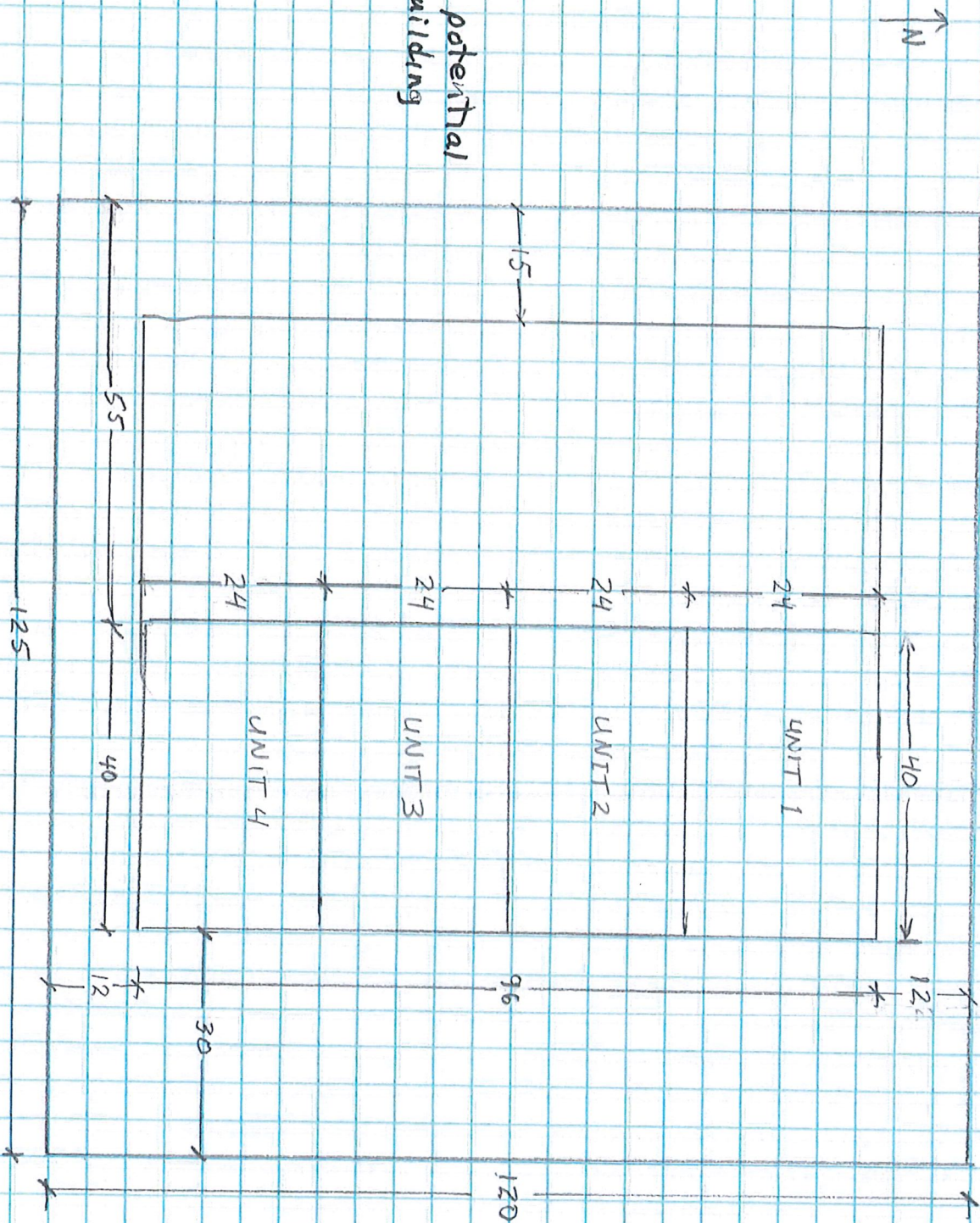
I hereby certify that the plat of OAKHURST TOWNSHIP was filed in this office for record on the _____ day of _____, 199__, at _____ o'clock _____, and is hereby certified.

County Recorder, Chicago County, Illinois

*Proposed:
Footprint of a 96' x 40' building
See potential plan 963-01075*



Layout of potential 96 x 40 building





Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council, approving the Minor Subdivision request for Hemingway Meadows, with the conditions of approval listed in this report.

Overview / Background

Reliable Land and Trust (Applicant) has submitted a request for a Minor Subdivision for a new residential subdivision known as Hemingway Meadows, located generally east of Hemingway Ave and south of 372nd St. The undeveloped Subject Property consists of approximately 40.08 acres and is guided and zoned RR "Rural-Residential". The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of 4 single-family residential lots that are each approximately 9.7 - 9.8 acres in lot size.

The applicant has submitted a complete application, including preliminary plat drawings, wetland delineation, and septic locations.

Issue(s) to Consider

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

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 consists of four large lot, single-family residential parcels, each exceeding the minimum one-acre buildable area requirement of the RR zoning district. The proposed use and density are consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan and zoning district standards.

Land Use and Zoning standards are satisfied.

2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat for Fairway Field proposes to develop the property into four residential lots arranged linearly east-to-west, with access provided from Hemingway Avenue, a public right-of-way.

Each lot is designed to accommodate a single-family dwelling, private well, and both primary and secondary septic drainfield areas. Drainage and utility easements are shown along lot lines and road frontage. Wetland areas are clearly identified and avoided by building pads, septic systems, and driveways.

The plat layout reflects existing site constraints, including wetlands, topography, and existing easements, while maintaining large lot sizes consistent with the rural character of the area.

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. The lots created through this platting process are required to meet the following:

Type	Lot Standards		
	Area (sf)	Width	Depth
RR – Rural Residential	1 acre buildable	110'	300'

Based on review of the Preliminary Plat, all proposed lots meet or exceed the minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements of the zoning district.

Lot/Block	Area (Acres)	Minimum Depth	Depth (Proposed)	Minimum Width	Width (Proposed)
Lot 1, Block 1	9.78	300'	1286'	110'	331'
Lot 2, Block 1	9.77	300'	1286'	110'	331'
Lot 3, Block 1	9.77	300'	1286'	110'	331'
Lot 4, Block 1	9.76	300'	1286'	110'	331'

4. Engineering

Utilities

Lots will be served by private well and septic as the parcel boundary is located outside of the city's designated Urban Service Area. Primary and secondary septic areas are shown for each lot.

Wetlands

Wetlands have been delineated on the Preliminary Plat and are primarily located within the southern and eastern portions of the site. All building pads, septic systems, and driveways are located outside of required wetland setbacks.

The Wetland Permit Application and Wetland Delineation Report have been submitted to Chisago County for their review. At this time, Chisago County has deemed the application incomplete due to site conditions (snow) and recommended that the applicant apply for the permit on April 1st, 2026. This has been added to the conditions of approval for the overall development in this report.

The proposed layout minimizes impacts to sensitive environmental features while allowing reasonable use of the property.

Grading

Grading will be required for the driveway work, the area immediately around proposed driveways, residences, and septic fields. Each lot will be individually graded upon development of each unit. The Applicant or the future builder will be required to provide grading and erosion control plans and obtain all necessary permits, prior to building on the new lots.

Staff Recommendation

City staff recommends approval of the Minor Subdivision request for Hemingway Meadows with conditions as stated.

Recommended Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend approval to City Council, approving the Minor Subdivision for Hemingway Meadows, with the following conditions:

1. Chisago County approval of the Wetland Permit Application and Wetland Delineation Report is required prior to construction on the lots.
2. The application shall provide the required Park dedication in the form of land or fees prior to release of the Final Plat for recording.
3. The Applicant or the future owner of the lots shall obtain all necessary approvals, including submittal and approval of a site grading plan, and pay all applicable fees prior to commencing construction on the lots.
4. All fees and financial obligations shall be received by the City prior to releasing the approval documents related to this project for recording.

Preliminary Plat of:
Hemingway Meadows

COUNTY OF CHISAGO
CITY OF NORTH BRANCH
SEC. 27, T. 35, R. 21

OWNER / DEVELOPER

RELIABLE LAND & TRUST
PO BOX 32
CAMBRIDGE, MN 55008

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Southwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter of Section 27, Township 35, Range 21, Chisago County, Minnesota

ZONING INFORMATION

ZONING DISTRICT - RURAL RESIDENTIAL

BUILDING SETBACKS
FRONT YARD SETBACK 40 FEET
REAR YARD SETBACK 30 FEET
SIDE YARD SETBACK 10 FEET
WETLAND SETBACK 40 FEET

MINIMUM LOT WIDTH 110 FEET
MINIMUM LOT DEPTH 300 FEET

LOT AREAS

LOT 1, BLOCK 1	9.78 ACRES
LOT 2, BLOCK 1	9.77 ACRES
LOT 3, BLOCK 1	9.77 ACRES
LOT 4, BLOCK 1	9.76 ACRES
RIGHT OF WAY	1.00 ACRE
TOTAL AREA	40.08 ACRES
NET AREA*	33.39 ACRES

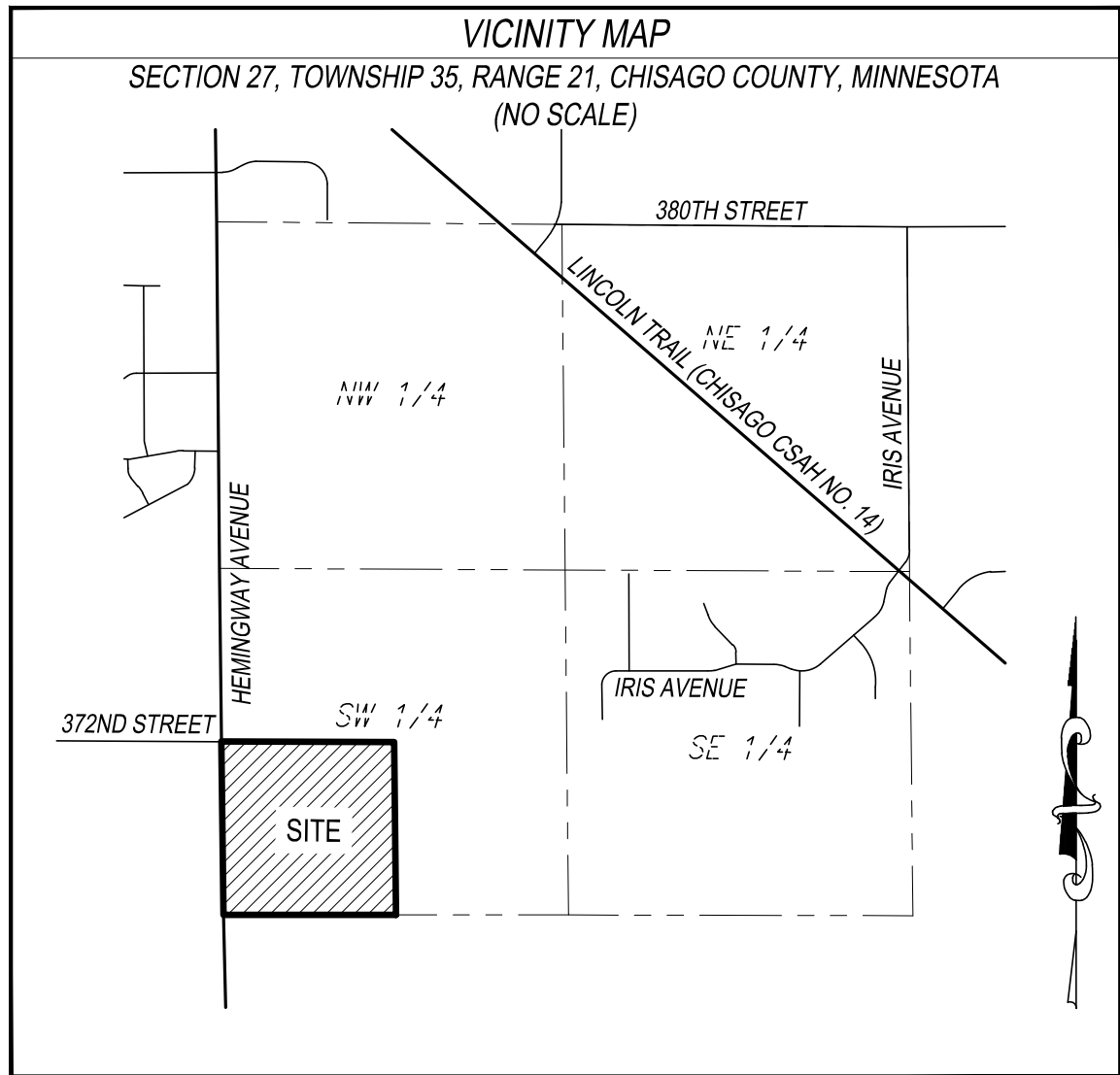
* NET AREA IS TOTAL AREA LESS AREA WITHIN RIGHT OF WAY OR DRAINAGE & UTILITY EASEMENTS

FLOOD ZONE

THIS SITE IS INCLUDED ON FLOOD INSURANCE RATE MAP-COMMUNITY PANEL NUMBER 27025C0255D AND IS SHOWN TO BE WITHIN FLOOD ZONE X. THIS FLOOD ZONE IS DEFINED AS AN AREA DETERMINED TO BE OUTSIDE THE 500-YEAR ANNUAL CHANCE FLOODPLAIN.

GENERAL NOTES

- EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY IS PER PUBLICLY AVAILABLE LIDAR DATA (NAV88 DATUM)
- PROPOSED BUILDING, DRIVEWAY, WELL, AND SEPTIC LOCATIONS SHOWN HEREON ARE FOR PLAT APPROVAL PURPOSES ONLY. THE FINAL LOCATION OF THE BUILDING AND SEPTIC SYSTEM TO BE DETERMINED BY THE OWNER/BUILDER FOR EACH LOT, SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE CITY OF NORTH BRANCH
- DELINEATED WETLANDS ARE SHOWN PER LOCATION POINTS PROVIDED BY KEN MEEK WITH EARTH SCIENCE ASSOCIATES 11/22/25.
- SOIL BORING LOCATIONS AND ELEVATIONS PER COORDINATE DATA PROVIDED BY L & R SEPTIC, LLC.



0 50 100
(SCALE IN FEET)

I hereby certify that this plan, specification, or report was prepared by me or under my direct supervision and that I am a duly Licensed Land Surveyor under the laws of the State of Minnesota.

Kyle J. Roddy, MN PLS 42627

Signature: *Kyle J. Roddy* Date: 12/01/2025

LHB
324 Garfield St. South | Cambridge, MN 55008
763.219.1235 | LHBcorp.com



Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing to include surfacing requirements for residential, commercial and industrial zoned properties

Overview / Background

City staff has been reviewing the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or misleading. One section that has repeatedly come up in discussions with developers is the surfacing requirement in Section 66-855, particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial developments should be paved.

As currently written, the surfacing section only specifies paving requirements for residential properties that are two (2.0) acres or smaller and does not clearly address surfacing standards for commercial and industrial zoned properties. Additionally, Section 66-856 (Drainage) requires poured-in-place concrete curbing for parking lots and access drives in commercial and industrial developments. The intent of this section assumes hard-surfaced parking areas; however, this relationship is not clearly reflected in the surfacing section and should be addressed to avoid conflicting interpretations and enforcement.

At the January 6th, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting, additional discussion occurred regarding whether the two-acre threshold for residential properties requiring hard surfacing remains appropriate. Planning Commissioners expressed interest in reducing the two-acre hard surface requirement down to one acre and directed staff to research the impacts of this possible text amendment.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing

Analysis of Issue(s)

1. Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing

Sec 66-855 Surfacing currently reads as follows:

"All areas used for parking and driveways on residential lots 2.0 acres or smaller shall be hard surfaced with bituminous or concrete pavement or equivalent pavement as approved by the City's Public Works Director"

At the January 6th, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting, it was proposed to staff that the language be amended as follows:

"All areas used for parking and driveways on residential lots 1.0 acre or smaller, and on all commercial and industrial zoned lots, shall be hard surfaced with bituminous or concrete pavement or equivalent pavement as approved by the City's Public Works Director"

City staff presents the additional options below for Planning Commission consideration. Each approach balances neighborhood appearance, stormwater management, maintenance concerns, and homeowner flexibility to varying degrees. Pros and Cons of each method are listed to help differentiate options as well as example language for a text amendment to the surfacing section.

The Planning Commission may recommend one or a combination of these approaches for further consideration by the City Council.

Options to Consider:

Hard Surfaced Driveway Apron with Limited Gravel Parking Areas

Require the portion of the driveway extending from the street or alley to the garage shall be hard surfaced, while allowing limited gravel or aggregate parking pads adjacent to the garage.

Example Language:

“The driveway surface extending from the street or alley to the garage shall be hard surfaced with bituminous concrete or pavement. One additional off-street parking area adjacent to the garage may be constructed of gravel or equivalent aggregate, subject to size and location standards established by the City.”

Pros:

- Protects public streets from gravel tracking and sediment
- Maintains flexibility for homeowners
- Reduces construction costs compared to full hard surfacing

Cons:

- Requires clear dimensional limits to avoid expansion of gravel areas
- Some ongoing maintenance concerns remain

Hard Surfaced Primary Driveway; Secondary Parking Areas Allowed Gravel

Require the primary driveway used for daily access to be hard surfaced, while allowing secondary or overflow parking areas to remain gravel.

Example Language:

“The primary driveway serving a residential dwelling shall be hard surfaced. Secondary or occasional use parking areas may be gravel or equivalent aggregate, provided they are clearly defined and do not encroach into required yards or drainage easements.”

Pros:

- Targets the most heavily used areas
- Allows flexibility for recreational vehicles, trailers, or seasonal parking
- Aligns surfacing with intensity of use

Cons:

- May require interpretation of “primary” vs. “secondary”
- Slightly more complex to administer

Hard Surfaced Driveway to Garage; Gravel Parking limited by size

Allow gravel parking areas only if they remain under a defined square footage limit.

Example Language:

“Residential driveways shall be hard surfaced from the street or alley to the garage. Gravel or aggregate parking areas may be permitted adjacent to the garage, provided the total gravel parking area does not exceed ____ square feet.”

Pros:

- Clear and measurable standard
- Prevents excessive gravel coverage
- Easier to enforce than acreage-based thresholds

Cons:

- Requires selecting an appropriate square footage limit
- Less flexible for unusually configured lots

Hard Surfacing in Front Yards Only

Require hard surfacing in front yards while allowing gravel parking areas in side or rear yards.

Example Language:

“All driveway and parking areas located within the front yard shall be hard surfaced. Gravel or aggregate parking areas may be permitted within side or rear yards, subject to setback requirements.”

Pros:

- Improves neighborhood appearance and streetscape consistency
- Reduces street tracking of gravel
- Preserves flexibility behind the primary structure

Cons:

- Requires clear yard definitions
- Some lots may have limited side or rear yard space

Administrative Waiver for Large or Low-Impact Lots

Maintain the hard surfacing requirement but allow an administrative waiver for lots that meet defined criteria.

Example Language:

“The City may allow gravel driveways or parking areas on residential lots exceeding ____ acres where site conditions, drainage, and traffic impacts are minimal, subject to approval by the Public Works Director.”

Pros:

- Preserves a clear default standard
- Allows professional judgment from city staff
- Reduces the need for formal variances

Cons:

- Discretionary decisions could be up for interpretation and may require consistent documentation
- Less predictable for applicants

Regulating surfacing requirements across all development types supports orderly site design and overall community quality. Hard-surfaced parking and driveway areas improve safety, accessibility, and appearance while reducing ongoing maintenance concerns. Addressing these standards citywide helps maintain a cohesive and predictable development pattern.

Planning Commission Action

1. Motion to recommend one of the identified surfacing options, or a combination of options as presented in the staff report, to the City Council.



Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Presenter: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Date: 01/14/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan - MN Bolt & Screw LLC

Background Information:

The City of North Branch has an existing building located on the east side of Co Rd 30 near the intersection of Maple Street. The building is the “old fire station” building with the mural on it and has a property address of 38791 Forest Blvd. The City currently utilizes the building for the storage of city staff vehicles and public works equipment and vehicles. The site is located in the city’s downtown area and has high visibility and parking available at the site. The current use of the building as a municipal garage and storage facility is not the ideal use for the property and building as it is a prime commercial site.

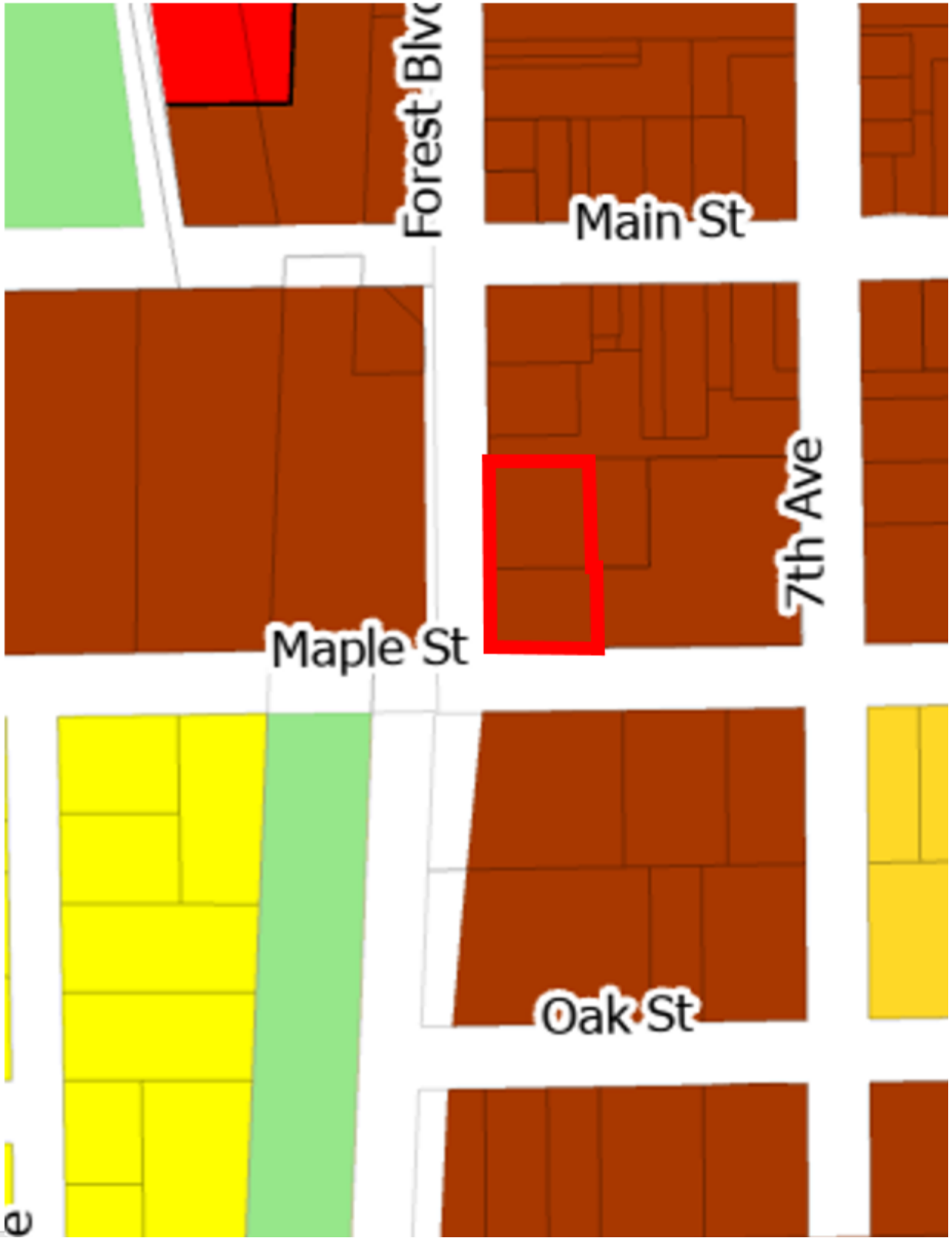
The City Council have discussed to sell the property to provide:

1. Support existing local business in the downtown area.
2. Provide better use of a high visibility property and placement back on the tax rolls.
3. The proceeds from the sale of the building could be utilized to allow for construction of a larger post frame building at the city’s wastewater treatment plant. As council is aware from the recent facility assessment study, the public works department does not have adequate facility and storage space to accommodate existing needs. The construction of this building at the wastewater treatment plant would help provide for a short-term space solution while the city determines a way to fund the entire needs of the city as outlined in the study.

The City Council has a purchase agreement in place for the sale of the property, which is comprised of two (2) parcels totaling approximately 0.41 acres to MN Bolt & Screw, LLC. The parcels are legally described as Lot 1, Block 1, North Branch Downtown Addition and Lot 4, Block 1, North Branch Downtown Addition. The company is proposing to use the property for the sale of industrial products supplies (nuts, bolts, threaded rod, unistrut and pipe supports. Per state statute, the Planning Commission must analyze proposed sales of city owned land to

determine (and make the appropriate finding) that the intended purpose of the buyer is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The City's Comprehensive Plan has the subject area designated as LU CBD – Central Business District. Please see page 25 of the City's Comprehensive Plan.



The City's Comprehensive Plan provides as follows:

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.

Deadline:

February 3, 2026.

Requested Action:

Apply the definition above to the proposed industrial product supply sales use and make a finding that the proposed use is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options **Simple Majority**



Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

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

Date: 01/29/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Comprehensive Plan Update

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:

- **March 2026:** The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee will convene to review the individual group findings.
- **April or May 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

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.

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

*Gross acres of use determined by GIS mapping data.

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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.

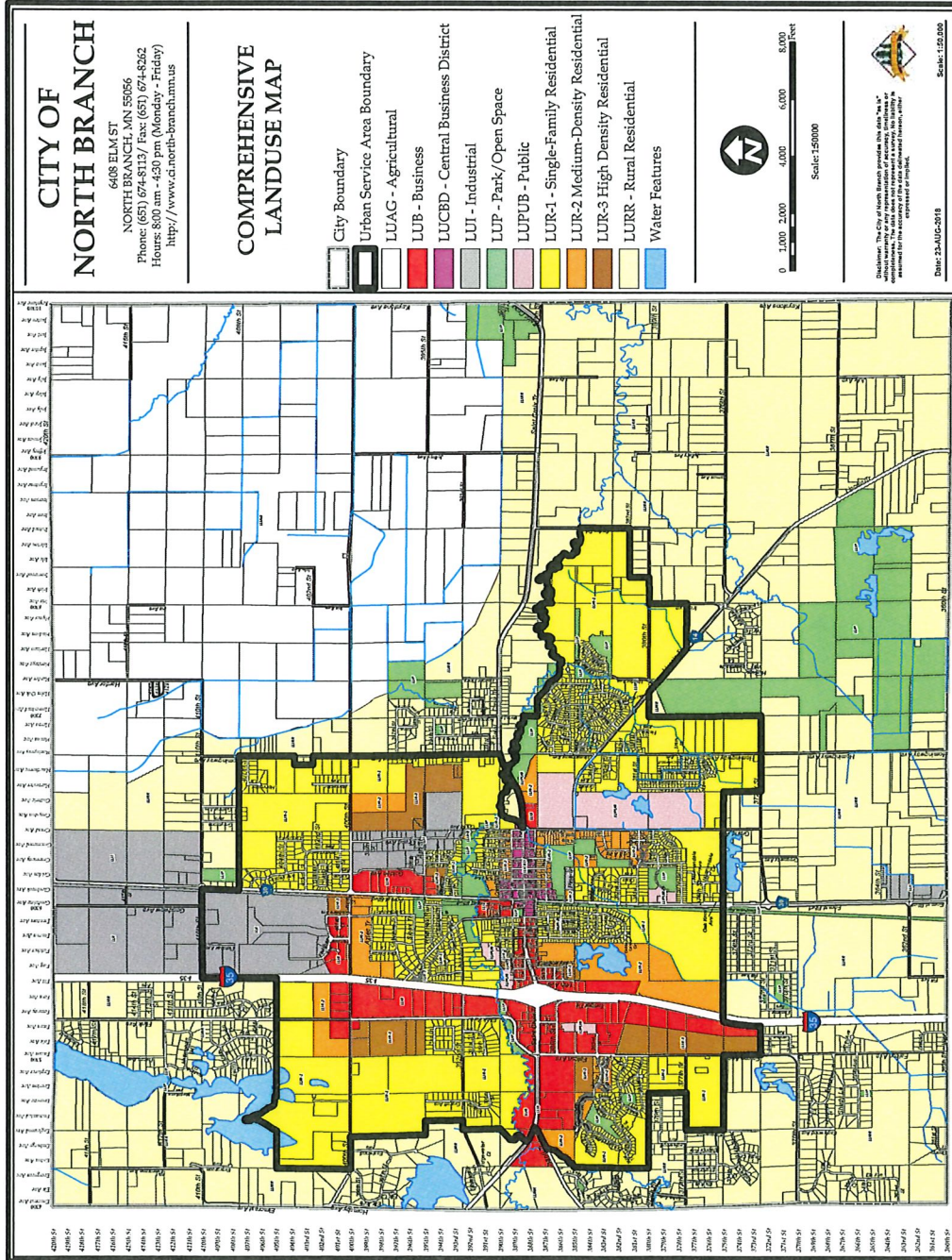
Table 3 - B: Summary of Future Land Use

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

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.

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.

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.

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.