



NORTH BRANCH

—Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt
Chair

Steve Cich
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2026 @ 6:30 PM
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH
BRANCH, MN 55056**

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. ROLL CALL

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Provides an opportunity for the public to address the Council on items that are not on the Agenda. Please raise your hand to be recognized. Please state your name and address for the record. This section is for the express purpose of addressing concerns of City services and operations. It shall not be used to clarify individual's views for political purposes.

5. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

6. CONSENT AGENDA

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

a. Approval of March 4, 2026 Planning Commission Minutes

ACTION

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Plat

ACTION

b. Surfacing

ACTION

8. REPORTS

a. Farm Winery Discussion - Text Amendment or Rezoning

INFO

- b. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) INFO
 - c. Zoning Ordinances and Building Design Standard Amendments VERBAL UPDATE
 - d. Comprehensive Plan Update INFO
9. NEXT MEETING - May 5, 2026, 6:30PM
10. ADJOURNMENT



Prepared By:

Presenter:

Date: 01/28/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Approval of March 4, 2026 Planning Commission Minutes

Approval of March 4, 2026 Planning Commission Minutes

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



NORTH BRANCH

—Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt
Chair

Steve Cich
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 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, March 3, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Nathan Ehalt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

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

Absent:

Remote:

Others Present:

Notes:

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Provides an opportunity for the public to address the Council on items that are not on the Agenda. Please raise your hand to be recognized. Please state your name and address for the record. This section is for the express purpose of addressing concerns of City services and operations. It shall not be used to clarify individual's views for political purposes.

5. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

RESULT: Passed

MOVER: Ross Otto

SECONDER: Steve Cich

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

ABSENT:

NOTES:

6. CONSENT AGENDA

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

a. Approval of February 3, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes ACTION

RESULT: **Passed**

MOVER: **Steve Cich**

SECONDER: **Ross Otto**

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

ABSENT:

NOTES:

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

8. REPORTS

a. Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-855 Surfacing ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-855 Surfacing. The Planning Commission held a public hearing at the February 2, 2026, Planning Commission meeting to obtain public input on potential Text Amendments to clarify City Code Sec 66-855. Surfacing to include commercial and industrial zoned properties requiring hard surfaces for driveways and parking areas. There was no public comment received at the meeting. The Planning Commission further discussed and provided input to staff for potential modifications to the code and to bring back to the March 3, 2026, meeting for discussion.

City staff have been reviewing provisions of the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or subject to varying interpretation. One section that has repeatedly arisen during discussions with developers and property owners is Section 66-855 (Surfacing), particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial districts are required to be paved.

As currently written, Section 66-855 only establishes surfacing requirements for residential properties two (2.0) acres or smaller and does not clearly address surfacing standards for commercial or industrial zoned properties. This omission has resulted in uncertainty during project review and inconsistent expectations between applicants and the city.

Additionally, Section 66-856 (Drainage) requires poured-in-place concrete curbing for parking lots and access drives within commercial and industrial developments. The intent of this requirement assumes hard-surfaced parking areas; however, this relationship is not explicitly reflected in the surfacing section, creating potential conflicts in interpretation and enforcement.

During prior Planning Commission discussions, Commissioners expressed interest in maintaining neighborhood appearance and protecting public infrastructure while also allowing reasonable flexibility for residential properties, particularly for side or rear parking areas. At the February 3rd Planning Commission Meeting, surfacing locations for residential properties 2 acres and under were debated and it was determined that it is appropriate to require hard-surfaced driveways and parking areas in the front yard, while allowing flexibility for gravel surfaces on the side yard. Rear yard driveway/parking surfaces

should be analyzed and discussed further to review whether the city should allow designated vehicle routes and parking behind the principal structure.

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 long-term maintenance concerns. Establishing clear standards also promotes predictable development expectations and consistent code administration citywide.

Example Code Language Option 1:

“All driveways and parking areas serving commercial and industrial uses shall be hard surfaced with bituminous, concrete, or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director. On residential lots two (2) acres or less, the driveway from the public street to the front façade of the principal dwelling shall be hard surfaced. Parking areas and driveways located within the side or rear yard may be surfaced with gravel or other approved aggregate material.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Includes front and rear yard gravel surfacing flexibility
- Protects streets from gravel tracking near public right-of-way
- Maintains consistent neighborhood streetscape appearance
- Provides homeowner flexibility for recreational vehicles and accessory parking
- Reduces paving costs for homeowners
- Targets hard surfacing where usage intensity is highest

Example Code Language Option 2:

“All driveways and parking areas serving commercial and industrial uses shall be hard surfaced with bituminous, concrete, or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director.

On residential lots two (2) acres or less, the driveway from the public street to the front façade of the principal dwelling shall be hard surfaced. Parking areas or accessory driveways located within a side yard may be surfaced with gravel or other approved aggregate material. Gravel or aggregate driveways and parking areas shall not be permitted within the rear yard.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Maintain hard-surfaced access from the street to the home
- Allow limited homeowner flexibility for side-yard parking (trailers, boats, RV’s)
- Prevent expansion of informal parking areas behind homes
- Reduce visual and drainage impacts associated with rear-yard vehicle circulation
- Maintain clearer enforcement standards by limiting aggregate areas to one defined yard location

By allowing aggregate surfacing only in side yards, the City preserves opportunities for accessory parking while discouraging large rear-yard parking areas that may create drainage concerns, screening issues, or impacts to adjacent residential properties. This approach also simplifies administration by establishing clear locational limits for non-paved surfaces.

There was some discussion amongst the Planning Commission as to what constitutes impervious. Is Class 5 considered to be an impervious surface? An impervious surface means an artificial or natural surface through which water or air cannot penetrate. Do we need to have a clearer definition in the surfacing section, making it clear as to what material can be used, identifying bituminous?

There seemed to be a consensus that Option 1 would be good, as long as we define the types of surfaces and what should be included in the surfacing section. City Planner Ryan Saltis will bring this back to the Planning Commission next month.

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Comprehensive Plan Update. There was a meeting in February, and some of the Planning Commission, City Council, and various staff attended and broke into small groups. One of the small groups discussed accessory dwelling units, separate from the primary house. Another item discussed is to really dial in our design standards and whether they need to be revised. Ryan feels that we have the zones identified, like along 35, along 61, and 95. Heavily traveled areas typically have higher design standards. Then, there are sections like the industrial park where we're not as stringent about what materials are on the buildings.

Chair Ehalt said that the concern is that when we look at addressing this, it impacts the entire business district, so we need to be very cognizant and aware that one section change, which might make sense to a small portion of the City, is going to impact any acres that are undeveloped currently. He said he thinks we need to be really thoughtful about that, so we don't have a tax base issue long term. The valuable properties will build up much more quickly, which is a benefit right out of the gate, but they won't stand the test of time. That's where these design standards with materials really come into play.

There will be another meeting on Wednesday, March 18th, at 6 PM at the City Hall.

9. NEXT MEETING - March 3, 2026 - 3:30 PM

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on April 7, 2026.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The City Planning Commission adjourned at 7:07 PM.



Prepared By:

Presenter:

Date: 03/30/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Plat

The preliminary plat for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition, a 17-lot single-family development, was scheduled to hold a public hearing at the April 7th Planning Commission Meeting. Upon staff review of the proposed development, it was determined that a variance would need to be submitted for consideration prior to approving the preliminary plat.

The subject parcel (PID 11.00070.05) is zoned RR - Rural Residential and requires a lot depth of 300 feet. A variance would be needed for reduced lot depths on Lots 1-4 of Block 1 and Lots 1-3 of Block 2.

This item is recommended to be tabled to the May 5th, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting. At this meeting, the variance and preliminary plat will be presented simultaneously.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority

PRELIMINARY PLAT OF SHERWOOD PINES SECOND ADDITION

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

(per tax description)
Outlot A, Sherwood Pines, Chisago County, Minnesota

SURVEY NOTES

- This bearing system is based on the Chisago County Coordinate System NAD83 (1996 Adj.)
- Site Benchmark: Capped Monument at the Northeast corner of Outlot A Elev. =905.29 NAVD88.
- The property is vacant. PID No. 11.00070.05.
- Total Property Area: 1,311,397 sq.ft. or 30.11 acres.
- Contours shown are based on data collected in the field on NAVD88 datum.
- The wetlands on the subject property are shown according to the Wetland Delineation completed by Earth Science Associates Inc, dated January 2, 2025.

FLOODPLAIN NOTES: FLOOD INSURANCE RATE MAP (FIRM)

COMMUNITY NO.	PANEL NO.	SUFFIX	DATE OF FIRM INDEX	FIRM	ZONE
27025	0165	D	04/17/2024	X	

LEGEND

- FOUND 1/2" IRON PIPE MONUMENT W/CAP MARKED RLS 42648 UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE
- 1230- MAJOR CONTOURS
- 1234- MINOR CONTOURS
- BITUMINOUS SURFACE
- GRAVEL SURFACE
- TELECOM PEDESTAL
- FOC UNDERGROUND FIBER OPTIC LINE
- ELECTRIC POLE
- OHE OVERHEAD ELECTRIC LINE
- PROPOSED WELL
- EXISTING EASEMENT LINE
- PROPOSED EASEMENT LINE
- PROPOSED EASEMENT AREA
- SETBACK LINE

SOIL BORING	ELEVATION AT MOTTLED SOIL	SOIL BORING	ELEVATION AT MOTTLED SOIL
SOIL BORING 2	910.0	SOIL BORING 32	NA
SOIL BORING 3	909.6	SOIL BORING 33	NA
SOIL BORING 4	914.2	SOIL BORING 34	919.5
SOIL BORING 5	914.6	SOIL BORING 35	NA
SOIL BORING 6	901.4	SOIL BORING 36	NA
SOIL BORING 7	901.4	SOIL BORING 37	917.0
SOIL BORING 8	NA	SOIL BORING 38	NA
SOIL BORING 9	902.1	SOIL BORING 39	NA
SOIL BORING 10	903.7	SOIL BORING 40	NA
SOIL BORING 11	903.4	SOIL BORING 41	NA
SOIL BORING 12	NA	SOIL BORING 42	912.0
SOIL BORING 13	918.1	SOIL BORING 43	907.6
SOIL BORING 14	920.8	SOIL BORING 44	NA
SOIL BORING 15	NA	SOIL BORING 45	NA
SOIL BORING 16	NA	SOIL BORING 46	NA
SOIL BORING 17	NA	SOIL BORING 47	910.9
SOIL BORING 18	NA	SOIL BORING 48	NA
SOIL BORING 19	918.4	SOIL BORING 49	NA
SOIL BORING 25	908.8	SOIL BORING 50	NA
SOIL BORING 26	NA	SOIL BORING 51	NA
SOIL BORING 27	902.2	SOIL BORING 52	NA
SOIL BORING 28	896.2		
SOIL BORING 29	900.9		
SOIL BORING 30	NA		
SOIL BORING 31	NA		

SITE DATA

ZONING: RURAL RESIDENTIAL
 FUTURE LAND USE: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
 GROSS AREA: 1,311,397 SQ. FT. / 30.11 AC.
 GROSS SITE DENSITY: 18/30.11 = 0.60 DUA
 PROPOSED ROW: 116,168 SQ. FT. / 2.67 AC.
 *PROPOSED NEW EASEMENTS: 184,825 SQ. FT. / 4.24 AC.
 **NET AREA: 1,054,662 SQ. FT. / 24.21 AC.
 NET SITE DENSITY: 18/24.21 AC. = 0.74 DUA
 * DOES NOT INCLUDE EXISTING DRAINAGE EASEMENT
 ** GROSS AREA - EASEMENTS*** - ROW
 *** THE NEW EASEMENT FOR OUTLOT A = 44,259 SQ. FT. IS ADDED TO THE PROSPED EASEMENT TOTAL ONLY

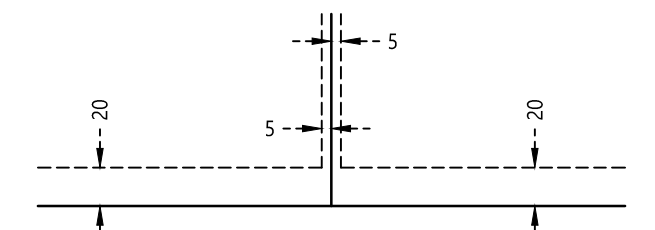
DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

SINGLE FAMILY LOTS
 FRONT SETBACK 40 FT.
 REAR SETBACK 30 FT.
 SIDE SETBACK (INTERIOR) 10 FT.
 SIDE SETBACK (CORNER) 30 FT.
 MINIMUM WIDTH 110 FT.
 MINIMUM DEPTH 300 FT.
 LOWEST FLOOR ABOVE HIGHEST KNOWN GROUNDWATER LEVEL 3 FT.
 LOWEST FLOOR ELEVATION ABOVE 100-YEAR FLOOD ELEVATION 2 FT.

AREA SUMMARY

BLOCK 1 =	863,384 SF.	19.82 AC.
BLOCK 2 =	280,306 SF.	6.43 AC.
TOTAL LOT AREA =	1,143,690 SF.	26.255 AC.
TOTAL OUTLOT AREA =	51,540 SF.	1.18 AC.
TOTAL R/W AREA =	116,168 SF.	2.67 AC.
TOTAL AREA =	1,311,397 SF.	30.11 AC.

DRAINAGE AND UTILITY EASEMENTS ARE SHOWN THUS:



BEING 20 FEET IN WIDTH ADJOINING STREET LINES AND 5 FEET IN WIDTH ADJOINING LOT LINES, UNLESS OTHERWISE SHOWN ON THIS PLAT.

OWNER/DEVELOPER

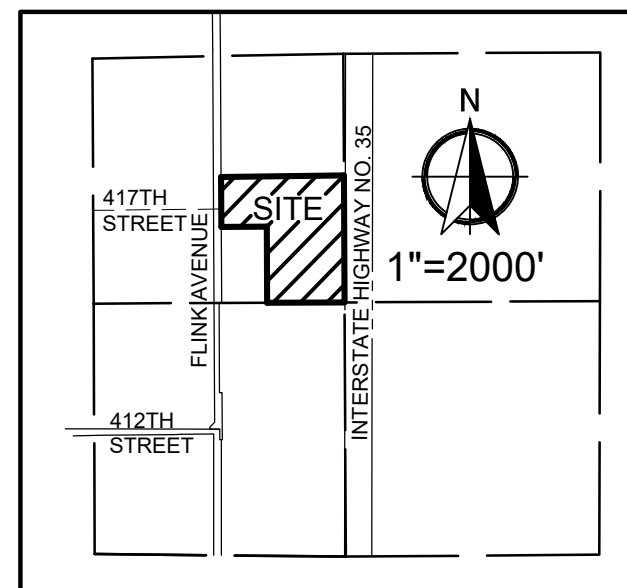
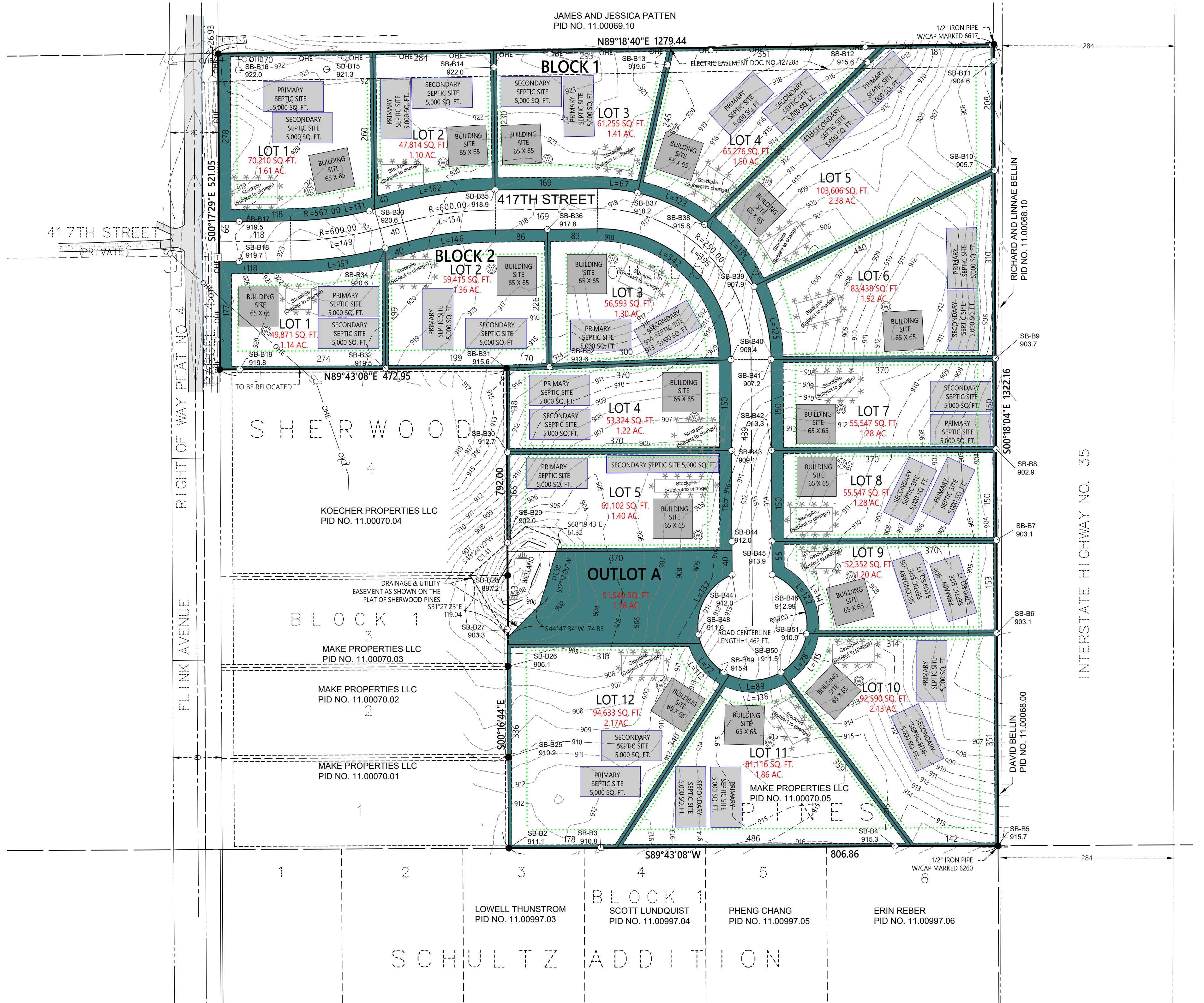
MaKe PROPERTIES INC
 21542 SHALLOW LAKE RD
 WARBA, MN 55793
 651-226-4039

LAND SURVEYOR

KELLY L. JORDAN
 WIDSETH
 5368 266TH STREET
 WYOMING, MN 55092
 651-464-3130

SOIL TESTER

JOSH PUTT LIC #L4063
 PO BOX 45
 SHAFER, MN 55074
 651-900-1567
 TEST DATE: 11/18/2024



VICINITY MAP
 SEC. 5, T35, R.21
 CITY OF NORTH BRANCH
 CHISAGO COUNTY, MINNESOTA



0 100 200
 SCALE IN FEET

WIDSETH
 ARCHITECTS • ENGINEERS • SCIENTISTS • SURVEYORS

DRAWN BY:
JMM
 CHECKED BY:
KLU

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.
 KELLY L. JORDAN LIC. NO.: 42648 DATE: 03/06/2026

DATE	AMENDMENT DESCRIPTION

PREPARED FOR:

MaKe PROPERTIES LLC

PROJECT #: 2026-10288



Prepared By: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Presenter: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Date: 03/30/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Surfacing

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority

Planning Commission Action

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing establishing updated surfacing requirements for residential, commercial, and industrial properties.
- Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-8 Definitions to include material types in the “impervious surface” definition

Overview / Background

City staff has been reviewing provisions of the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or subject to varying interpretation. One section that has repeatedly arisen during discussions with developers and property owners is Section 66-855 (Surfacing), particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial districts are required to be paved.

As currently written, Section 66-855 only establishes surfacing requirements for residential properties two (2.0) acres or smaller and does not clearly address surfacing standards for commercial or industrial zoned properties. This omission has resulted in uncertainty during project review and inconsistent expectations between applicants and the city.

Additionally, Section 66-856 (Drainage) requires poured-in-place concrete curbing for parking lots and access drives within commercial and industrial developments. The intent of this requirement assumes hard-surfaced parking areas; however, this relationship is not explicitly reflected in the surfacing section, creating potential conflicts in interpretation and enforcement.

During prior Planning Commission discussions, Commissioners expressed interest in maintaining neighborhood appearance and protecting public infrastructure while also allowing reasonable flexibility for residential properties, particularly for side or rear parking areas. At the February 3rd Planning Commission Meeting, surfacing locations for residential properties 2 acres and under were debated and it was determined that it is appropriate to require hard surfaced driveways and parking areas in the front yard, while allowing flexibility for gravel surfaces on the side yard.

At the March 7th Planning Commission Meeting, staff presented three options for text amendments that addressed driveways and parking surfaces in the front, side, and rear yard locations. The Planning Commission agreed that Option 1 was the preferred language to include in City Code. There was additional discussion about clarifying the impervious surface definition to clearly identify surface types. Proposed text amendment language to the definitions section of city code is found in the Analysis section of this report.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 - Surfacing
2. Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-8 - Definitions

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”

This existing language:

- Applies only to residential properties;
- Does not address commercial or industrial uses; and
- Does not distinguish between primary driveways and accessory parking areas.

Text Amendment Proposal:

The Planning Commission recommended the following language to amend City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing:

“All driveways and parking areas serving commercial and industrial uses shall be hard surfaced with bituminous, concrete, or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director.

On residential lots two (2) acres or less, the driveway from the public street to the front façade of the principal dwelling shall be hard surfaced with bituminous (asphalt) or concrete. Parking areas and driveways located within the side or rear yard may be surfaced with gravel or other approved aggregate material.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Establishes a uniform requirement that all commercial and industrial driveways and parking areas must be hard surfaced (e.g., asphalt or concrete).
- Requires residential driveways (≤ 2 acres) to be hard surfaced from the street to the front façade of the home.
- Allows flexibility for homeowners by permitting gravel or aggregate surfacing in the side and rear yard parking areas.
- Helps ensure durable, all-weather access for primary driveways serving homes and businesses.
- Reduces dust, mud, and maintenance issues along public street frontages.
- Maintains consistent visual standards along streets while allowing less visible areas to remain more flexible.
- Balances cost considerations for residents with overall community appearance and infrastructure quality.
- Supports orderly site design and drainage control by limiting loose surface materials in primary access areas.

2. Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-8 Definitions

The definition for an “Impervious Surface” within Sec 66-8 Definitions currently reads as follows:

“Impervious surface means an artificial or natural surface through which water, air, or roots cannot penetrate.”

Planning Commission members expressed that they would like to see material types listed within the definition for impervious surface. This includes bituminous and concrete surfaces.

Staff recommends the following language:

“Impervious surface means any artificial or natural surface, including bituminous (asphalt) and concrete, through which water, air, or roots cannot penetrate.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Provides clarity through examples by explicitly naming bituminous (asphalt) and concrete as impervious surfaces.
- Prevents ambiguity in enforcement by reducing disputes over whether common paving materials qualify as impervious.
- Supports consistent staff interpretation across zoning, engineering, and stormwater review.
- Aligns with common industry understanding of impervious surfaces without being overly technical.

Planning Commission Action

1. Motion to recommend the proposed text amendment language to Sec 66-855 Surfacing
2. Motion to recommend the proposed text amendment language to Sec 66-8 Definitions



Prepared By: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Presenter: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Date: 04/02/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Farm Winery Discussion - Text Amendment or Rezoning

City staff has received a request for a proposed winery on a vacant parcel (PID 11.00458.00). The prospective owners intend to establish a small vineyard and winery operation on the site. The parcel is currently zoned RR – Rural Residential, where crop production is permitted; however, a Farm Winery is not an allowed use. Farm Wineries are permitted within the AG – Agricultural zoning district.

To accommodate the proposed use, two options are available for consideration. The first is to amend the permitted uses table to allow Farm Wineries as a Conditional Use within the RR district. This approach would require both a text amendment and subsequent review and approval of a Conditional Use Permit, including the establishment of specific standards for such operations. The second option is to rezone the parcel to AG, which would allow the winery use by right and enable the project to proceed more immediately.

The applicants have also indicated plans to construct a barn to support vineyard and wine production activities. Agricultural structures of this type are permitted in the AG district; however, in the RR district, such a building would not be allowed without a principal residential structure on the property.

Staff is seeking Planning Commission discussion and direction on whether to pursue a rezoning of the parcel or a text amendment to the zoning code.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority

Sanders Proposed Vineyard and Farm Winery

My wife and I plan to establish a small vineyard and winery operation on this parcel. The intent is to develop the property as a working agricultural use centered around grape growing and small-scale wine production. The primary use of the property would be vineyard cultivation, with buildings serving agricultural and wine production functions that support that use.

The parcel has characteristics that are well suited for grape growing, including favorable soils, slope, drainage, and sun exposure. These conditions make the site particularly appropriate for vineyard cultivation, and we believe the property has strong potential to function as a productive agricultural property over the long term.

The project would be developed in several phases as the vineyard becomes established and the operation grows.

Phase 1 – Initial Vineyard Planting and Production Building

The first phase would involve planting an initial block of vineyard and constructing a small building to support wine production and vineyard operations. The building would serve as the primary space for fermentation, barrel storage, and other small-scale winemaking activities.

The building would also support vineyard operations, including equipment storage and workspace needed to maintain the vineyard.

During this phase, production volumes would be small as the vineyard becomes established. The focus during this stage would be learning the site, establishing healthy vines, and producing small quantities of wine.

Occasionally, small private tastings may take place within the production building by appointment. These would be limited in size and frequency and would typically involve small groups interested in seeing the vineyard and learning about the wine produced on the property.

Grapes produced on the property may also be sold to other wineries as part of normal agricultural production.

Phase 2 – Vineyard Expansion and Agricultural Building

As the vineyard expands, additional blocks of grapes would be planted across more of the property.

A second building may be added during this phase to support the growing agricultural needs of the operation. This building would primarily house vineyard equipment,

agricultural storage, and other farming-related functions as the acreage under cultivation increases.

Phase 3 – Full Vineyard Development and Potential Tasting Space

Over time, additional vineyard blocks would be planted until the majority of the parcel suitable for cultivation is established as vineyard.

The intent is for the vast majority of the parcel to remain planted vineyard acreage, with only a small portion of the property used for buildings and operational space that support agricultural production.

At this stage, depending on how the operation develops, a tasting space may be considered so that wine tasting activities can occur separately from the production area. This would allow the production facility to remain focused on winemaking while providing a space for visitors.

This phase would likely occur many years into the future and only if it makes sense based on the scale of the vineyard and winery.

Long-Term Vision

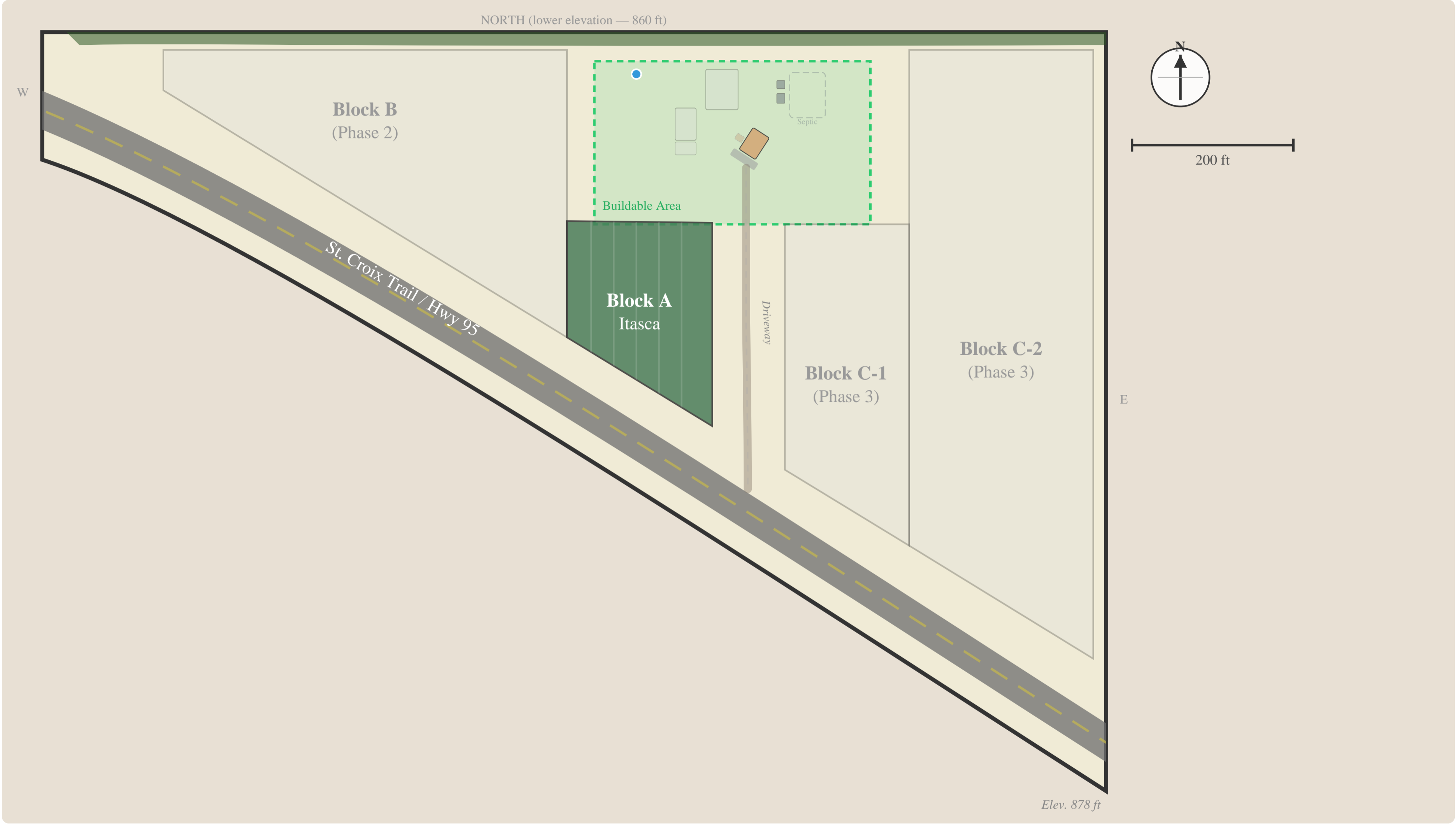
The long-term goal is for the parcel to function primarily as a vineyard, with most of the land planted in grapes and a small number of buildings supporting agricultural and wine production activities.

Establishing a vineyard would allow the property to remain in productive agricultural use while preserving the open rural character of the area. Development on the parcel would remain limited in scale, with most of the land dedicated to agricultural production rather than structures or intensive development.

Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 1 — Build + Plant — Full View

St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a



Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 1 — Build + Plant — Buildings Zoom

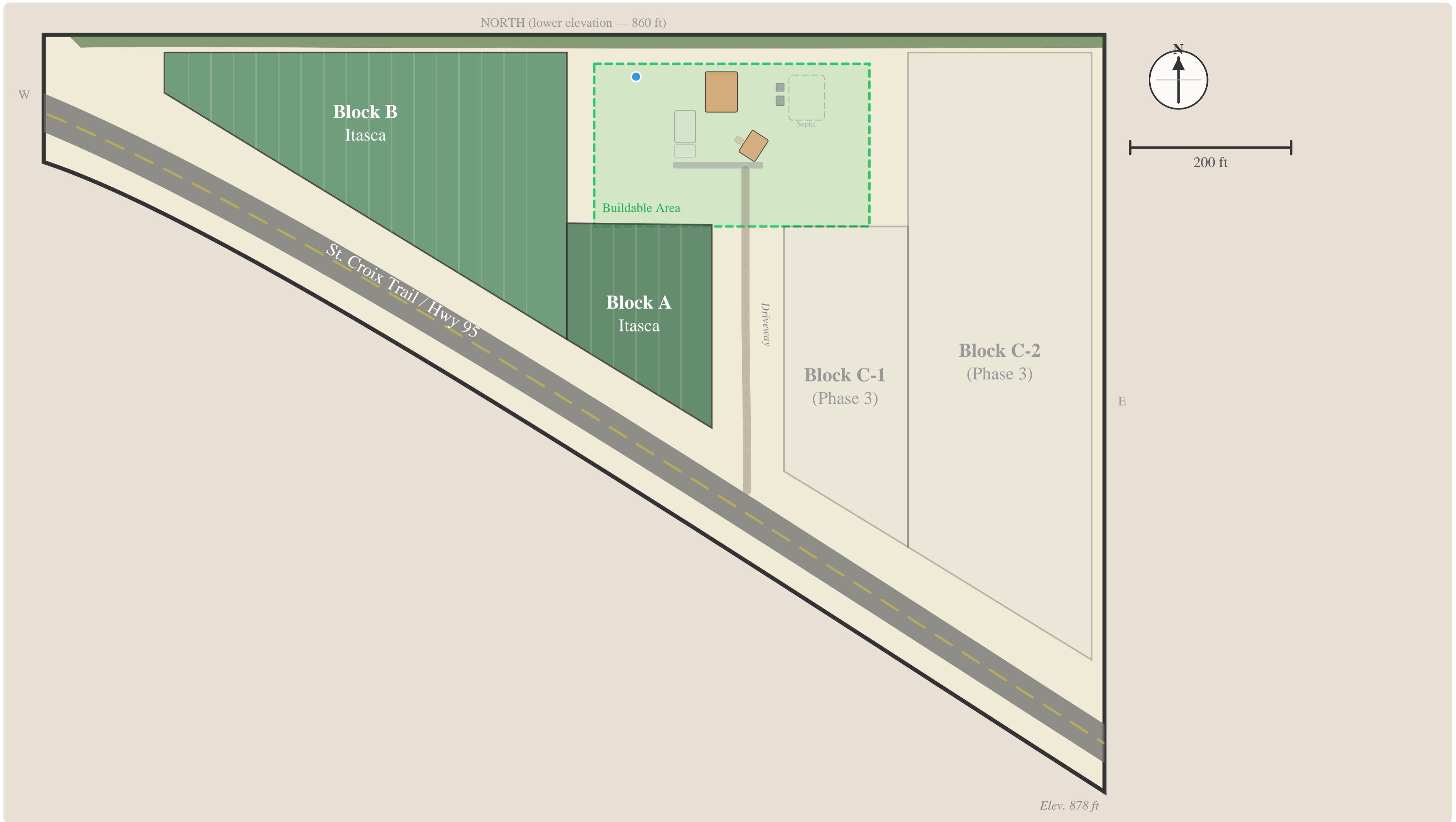
St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a



Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 2 — Expand — Full View

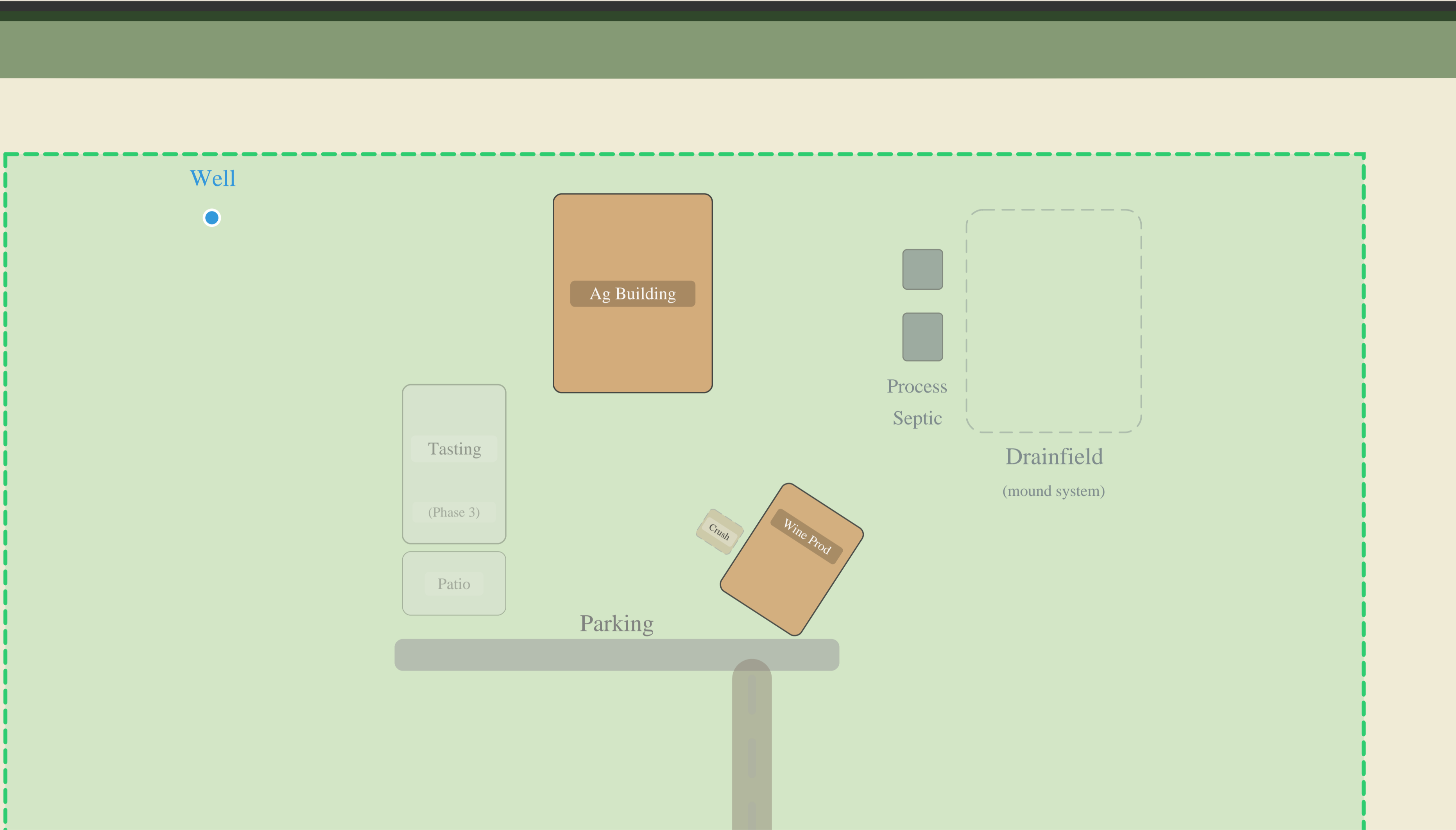
St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a



Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 2 — Expand — Buildings Zoom

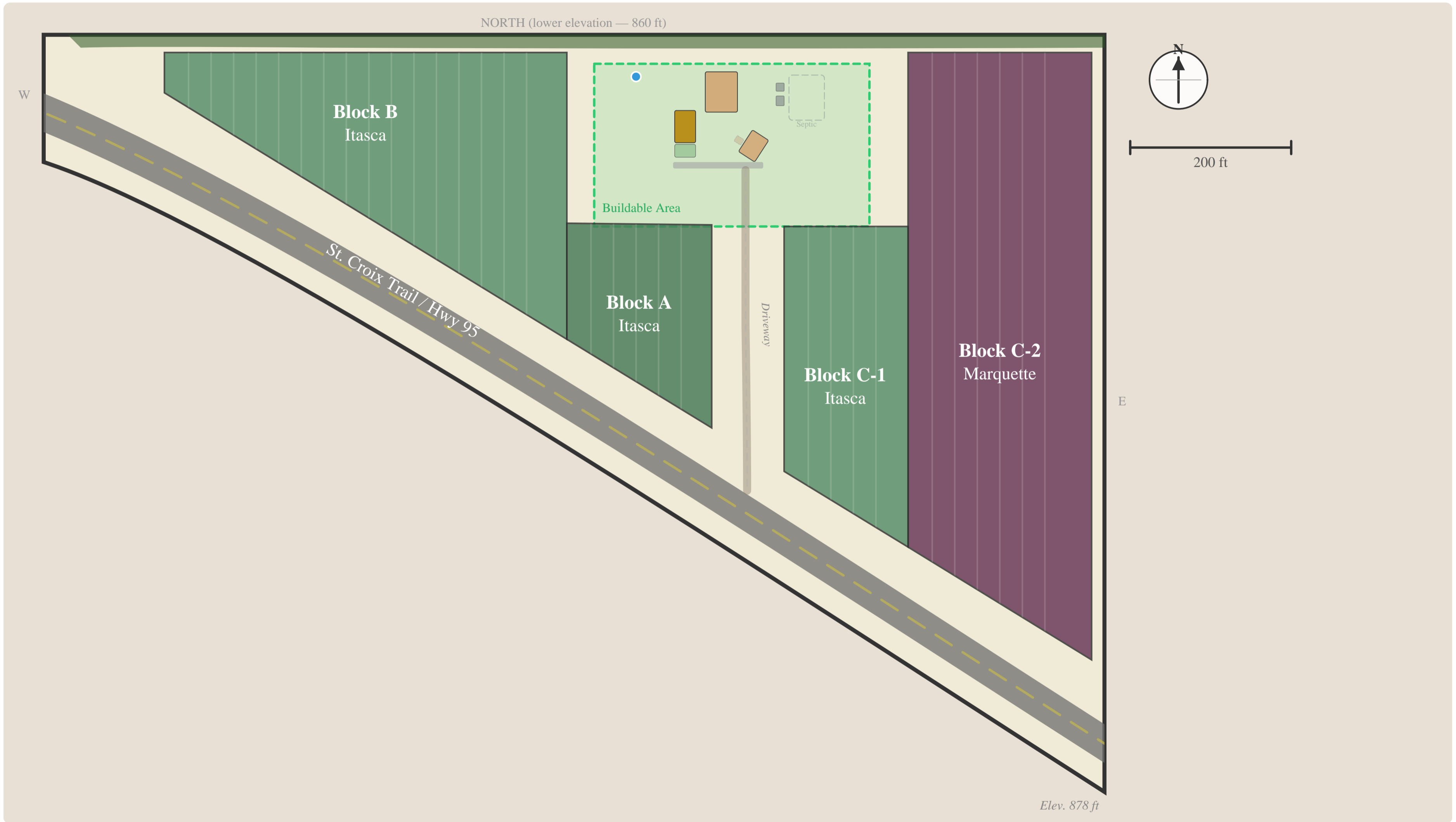
St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a



Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 3 — Destination — Full View

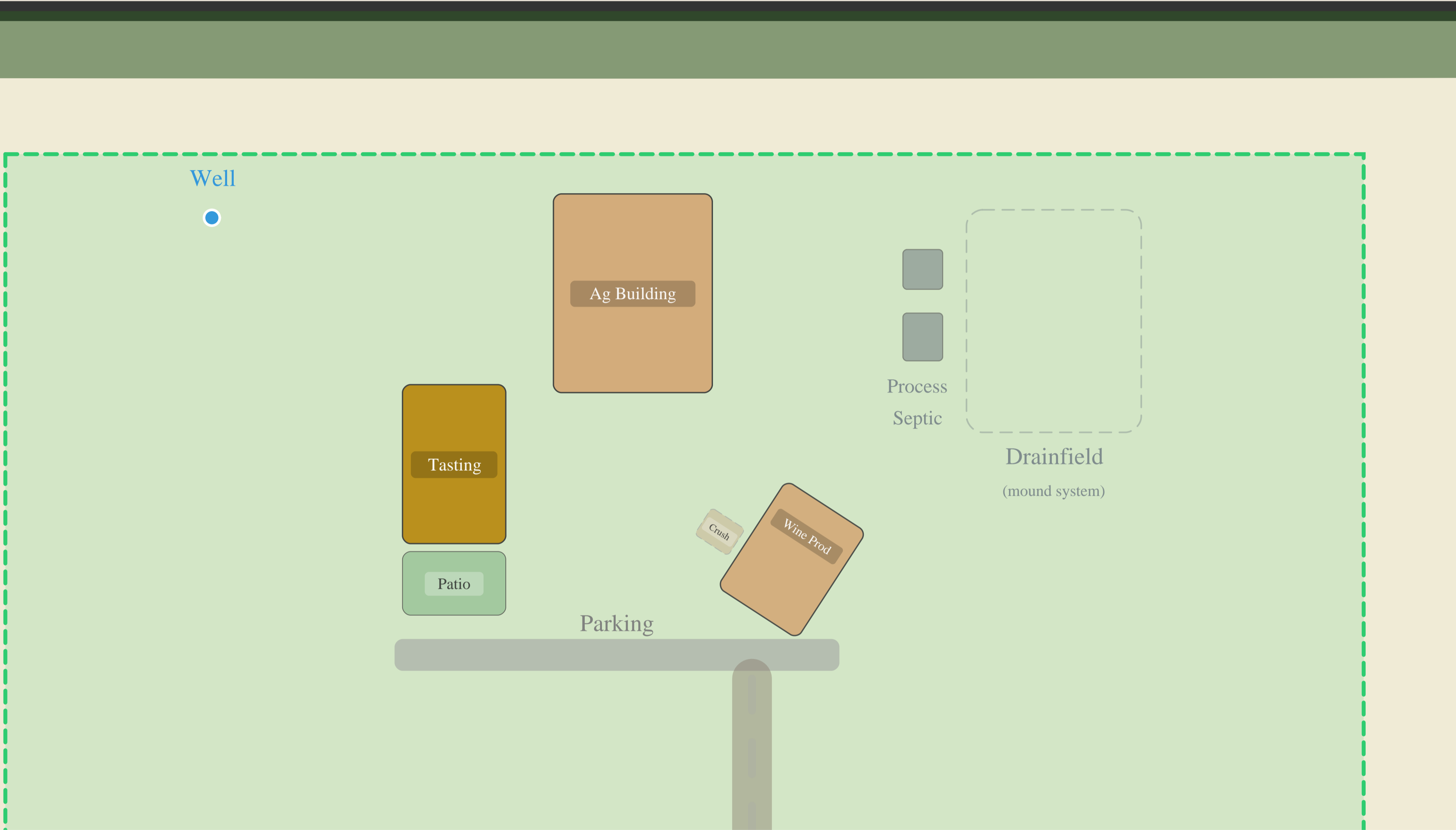
St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a



Proposed North Branch Vineyard & Winery

Phase 3 — Destination — Buildings Zoom

St. Croix Trail, North Branch, MN | 16.02 Acres | Zone 4a





Prepared By: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Presenter: Ryan Saltis, City Planner

Date: 04/02/2026

Board & Commission: Planning Commission

Subject: Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

Resident Ben Hedberg is requesting the City to adopt an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) section within the City Code.

The City currently does not allow for ADU's. Section 66-898 "Accessory Buildings, Uses, and Equipment" addresses this with the following language:

(h) Detached garages and accessory buildings shall not include living space nor shall be used as a dwelling unit.

However, surrounding cities and counties have ADU ordinances in place.

Ben would like the opportunity to share the following information with the Planning Commission:

- Overview/Definition of Accessory Dwelling Units
- Purpose and Benefits of ADU's
- Drawbacks of ADU's
- Other City's experiences with ADU's
- Proposed Code Change

Staff is seeking Planning Commission discussion and direction.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority



Nathan Sondrol <nsondrol@northbranchmn.gov>

ADU Introduction

Benjamin Hedberg <benshometownflooring@yahoo.com>
To: Nathan Sondrol <nathans@ci.north-branch.mn.us>

Wed, Apr 1, 2026 at 7:14 PM

Attn: Nate Sondrol, Mayor, city council and staff,

I, Ben Hedberg, am formally asking the City of North Branch to adopt an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) policy for the benefit of it's residents and guests. Currently, the North Branch City code does not allow for ADU's, however, Chisago County does allow them. The current North Branch comprehensive plan actually supports the idea of allowing them. Virtually all of the cities surrounding North Branch, and across the state of Minnesota have already adopted policies to allow them. It is time that North Branch gets up to speed and changes it's code to meet the needs and desires of it's property owners and residents.

I would like the opportunity to share with the City administration, the following information in more detail in order to bring about a timely change of city code.

- Overview/definition of Accessory Dwelling Unit
- Purpose and Benefits of ADU's
- drawbacks of ADU's
- other cities experiences with ADU'S
- proposed code change

Thank you for consideration,

Ben Hedberg
7000 410th Street
North Branch



NORTH BRANCH
City of North Branch
Staff Report

Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Presenter: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

Date: 03/30/2026

Board & Commission: City Council

Subject: Zoning Ordinances and Building Design Standard Amendments

Background

The City Council discussed a variety of potential changes to the city's zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan at the March 25, 2026 meeting. The discussion included possible changes to building setbacks, density, design standards, Central Business District boundary and the zoning along Flink Ave from 392nd St to 395th St. The Council came to a consensus to direct the Planning Commission to review and consider these changes.

Below is the memo from the Mayor at the city council meeting.

Intro:

Since the summer of 2025, the City Council and various commissions have discussed potential updates to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. During this period, the city has received several development proposals in both conceptual and formal stages.

Based on recent city meetings, I believe leadership desires changes that may reduce conflict with these upcoming developments. To minimize impact on builders' design plans, I propose the attached changes for immediate discussion and to initiate the approval process as soon as possible.

I have attached a spreadsheet outlining these basic change requests and will provide a more detailed presentation at our upcoming council meeting.

Requested Action

The City Council is requesting the Planning Commission to review and consider the attached changes to the city's zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan.

Voting Requirements:

Voting Options Simple Majority

Topic	Currently	Proposed change	Comments	Notes	Priority
Side set-back- interior lot - in ft	6ft	10ft	Apartments change to 15ft	most residential zones	High
Max density of R3 zoning	None	18 dwellings/acre	R-3: plus 7		High
		Reduce required material percentages. Allow additional materials that meet our goals, with a focus on material that may be provide less expensive building costs.	Builders are continually telling North Branch there are less expensive materials that are widely accepted as higher quality withing the construction industry.	With several years worth of high inflation, and the current economy seemingly looking more volatile for the near future, it is time to reconsider our design standards that can still meet our codes, yet allow builders to keep their costs more reasonable for their customers.	High
Design Standards	Zones 1, 2 & 3	Remove section of properties (from CBD)between 4th Ave and Grand Ave, from Maple to Elm Street	Put this area into a new zone that allows current businesses to stay, single family housing to stay, and also allow medium and high density dwellings.	"Downtown Legacy (Flex) Zone"???	Medium
CBD	Extends to Grand Ave	Create a flex zone to allow light industrial permitted uses in the eastern half of the property that is adjacent to I-35.			Low
Business zone north of 392nd, between Flink and I-35.	Zoned commercial				



Prepared By: Nathan Sondrol, Community Development Director

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

Date: 03/30/2026

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:

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

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

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 25 at 6pm at City Hall.

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

- **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.

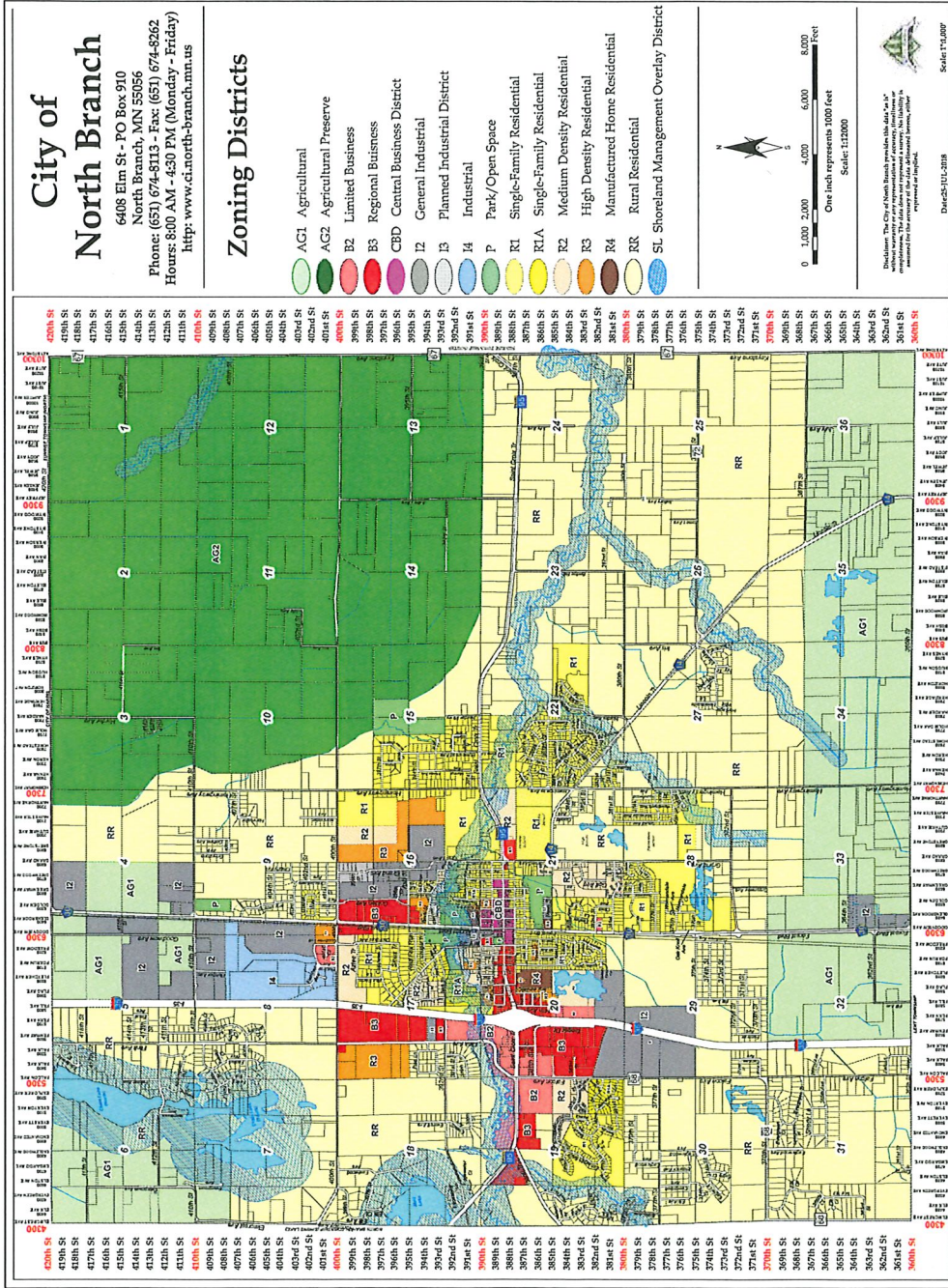


Table 3-A: Summary of Existing Land Use - 2018 summarizes the amount and type of existing land uses designated (whether or not fully developed) in North Branch.

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

*Gross acres of use determined by GIS mapping data.

Figure 3-1:
Existing Zoning



Existing Zoning

Agriculture (AG1 and AG2)

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

Rural Residential (RR)

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

Low Density Residential (R1 and R1A)

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

Medium Density Residential (R2)

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

High Density Residential (R3)

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

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

Manufactured Home Residential (R4)

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

Central Business District (CBD)

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

Limited Business District (B2)

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

Regional Business District (B3)

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

Light Industrial/Office District (I1)

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

General Industrial District (I2)

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

Planned Industrial District (I3)

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

Industrial District (I4)

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

Overlay Districts

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

Analysis of Existing Land Use

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vision for Land Use

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

RESIDENTIAL USES

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

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL USES

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

PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL

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

PARKS, OPEN SPACES AND TRAILS

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

GOAL 1

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



Goals, Objectives, and Policies

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

OBJECTIVE 1.1

PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE SMALL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT OF THE DOWNTOWN.

Policy 1.1.1

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

Policy 1.1.2

Connect businesses with façade improvement grants and loans.

Policy 1.1.3

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

OBJECTIVE 1.2

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

Policy 1.2.1

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

Policy 1.2.2

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

Policy 1.2.3

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

Policy 1.2.4

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

Policy 1.2.5

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

Policy 1.2.6

Discourage “leapfrog” patterns of development on municipal utilities.

OBJECTIVE 1.3

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

Policy 1.3.1

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

Policy 1.3.2

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

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

Policy 1.4.1

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

Policy 1.4.2

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

Policy 1.4.3

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

Land Use Plan

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

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

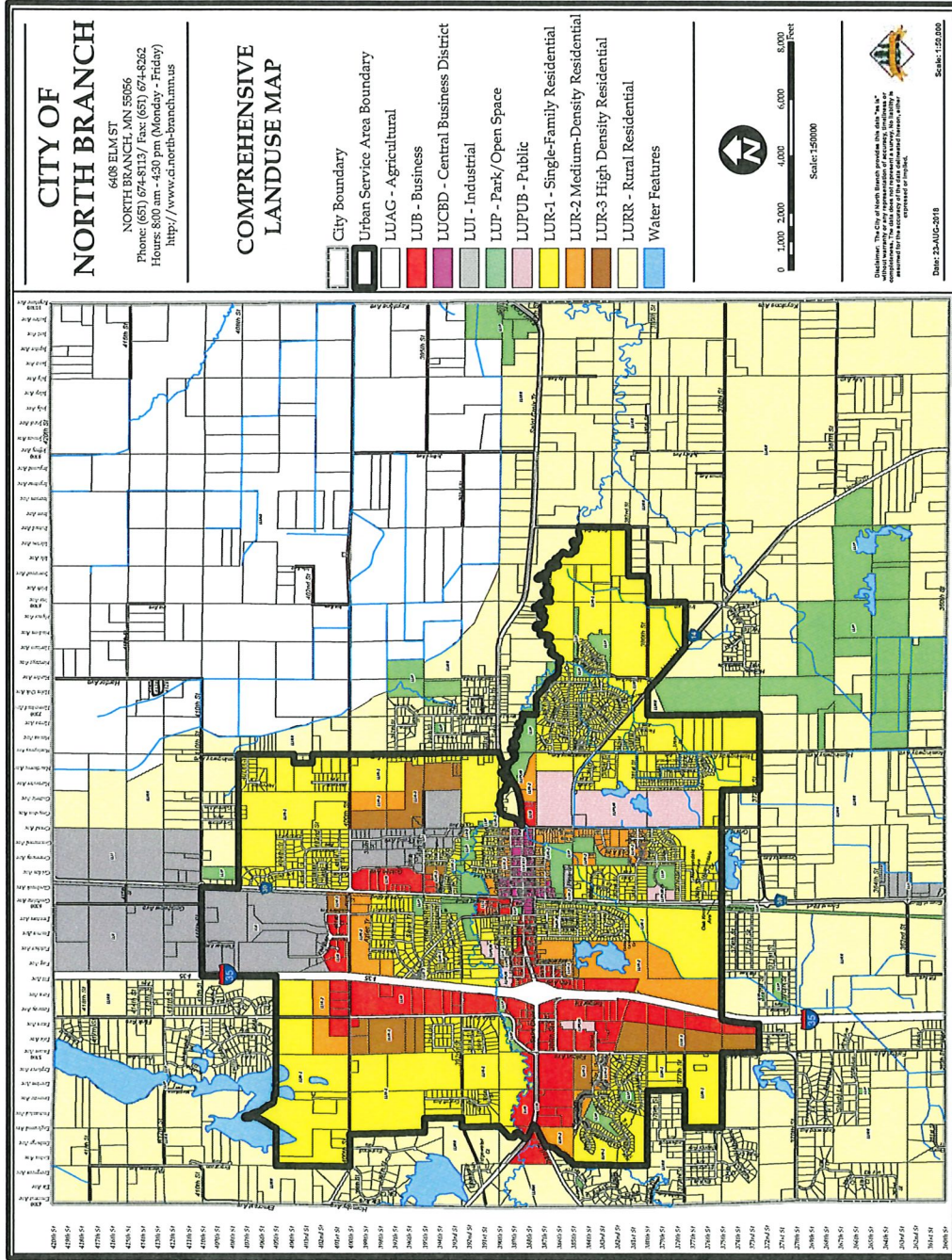
Table 3 - B: Summary of Future Land Use

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

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



Figure 3-2:
Future Land Use



Residential

Rural Residential

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

Low Density Residential

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

Medium Density Residential

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

High Density Residential

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

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

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

Agriculture

Agriculture

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

Commercial

Downtown Business

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

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

General Business

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

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

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

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

Industrial

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

Public/Institutional

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

Required Zoning Changes

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

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

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

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

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

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



2

VALUES AND VISION

Values

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

THE STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

A HOME TOWN FEEL

THE CITY'S COMMITMENT TO ITS PARKS AND TRAILS

A COMMUNITY THAT ENCOURAGES BIKING AND WALKING

QUALITY SCHOOLS

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

Vision for North Branch in 10 years

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

Vision for Land Use

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

Residential Uses

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

Commercial and Industrial Uses

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

Public/Institutional

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



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

Parks, Open Spaces and Trails

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

Vision for Economic Development

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

Vision for Municipal Utilities

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

Vision for Transportation

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

Vision for the Environment and Sustainability

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

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

Minnesota GreenStep City

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



Comprehensive Plan Questionnaire: Key Patterns and Trends

1. Community Strengths and Identity

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

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

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

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.