



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt  
Chair

Steve Cich  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, JULY 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 June 2, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes ACTION
7. PUBLIC HEARINGS
  - a. Westside Commons 3rd Addition - Preliminary Plat ACTION
8. REPORTS
  - a. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) INFO
  - b. High Utility Users INFO
  - c. Townhomes - Central Business District INFO
  - d. Design Standards INFO
  - e. R-3 Maximum Density INFO
  - f. Residential Side Setbacks INFO

g. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

9. NEXT MEETING - AUGUST 4, 2026 - 6:30 P.M

10. ADJOURNMENT



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt  
Chair

Steve Cich  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
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Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 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, June 2, 2026**

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Nate 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

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Steve Mark provided a public comment asking the Planning Commission to carefully consider the long-term consequences of the decisions for everyone who has invested in the North Branch Community.

5. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

**ACTION**

**RESULT: Passed**

**MOVER:** Steve Cich  
**SECONDER:** Ross Otto  
**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 May 5, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes ACTION

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

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Zoning Text Amendment - Residential Interior Side Setbacks ACTION

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

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

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

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

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

The proposed amendment is intended to:

- Increase spacing between residential structures
- Improve privacy and access between homes
- Enhance consistency between zoning districts

- Support neighborhood character and lower-density development patterns

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

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

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

#### Potential Challenges:

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

### Impacts to Developers & Builders

#### Potential Benefits:

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

#### Potential Challenges:

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

### Impacts to the City

#### Potential Benefits

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

#### Potential Challenges

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

#### Cost Considerations

##### Developers:

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

##### Homeowners:

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

##### City:

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

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

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

Public Hearing opened at 6:46 PM.

David Melby provided a comment during the Public Hearing. He commented that he doesn't have

an issue with changing the 10-foot setbacks; if that did change in existing communities, it would be very difficult for their development, since some lots are only 70 feet wide due to certain range issues.

Jeff Tentinger provided a comment during the Public Hearing. Jeff stated the following: I'm here tonight to respectfully ask and recommend denial of the proposed amendment increasing residential side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet. I want to be very clear about my position. If the city wishes to establish different setback requirements for future developments, future plans, and future neighborhoods, that is a discussion worth having. Cities have every right to evaluate how they want future growth to occur. However, what concerns me is the impact this amendment could have on current homeowners who purchased their homes under existing rules and who may suddenly find themselves owning legally nonconforming properties through no action of their own. As I reviewed the staff report, I found myself asking a number of questions that I'd leave to the answers to before any recommendations are made. First, how many existing homes in North Branch would be completely noncompliant with this change? I understand it now. We don't know. The staff report acknowledges that existing homes built under the 6-foot standard would likely become legal nonconforming structures. If it takes deep research, it takes deep research before changing the decades-old standard. Should we know exactly how many residents could be impacted? Second, what studies or analysis have been conducted regarding the impacts on existing homeowners? The report identifies potential benefits, such as increased privacy, improved maintenance access, enhanced site and air, and improved privacy, but where is the evidence that existing homeowners are experiencing problems in these areas? Has the city conducted surveys? Has there been a documented pattern of complaints? Have there been official, documented fire department recommendations suggesting that current setbacks are creating safety concerns? The report presents these as potential benefits. I have not seen any data demonstrating that these are actual problems requiring correction in existing vehicles, and that leads me to another question. How many homeowners would be affected by this amendment have actually requested this amendment? My guess is zero. I suspect that you asked homeowners where they wanted their properties to become legally nonconforming, whether they wanted future limitations on additions, or wanted uncertainty strongly built that's required, the answer would be no. The staff report discusses increased prices, but the people living in neighborhoods like these purchased homes knowing exactly how these neighborhoods were designed. We knew the spacing between homes, we knew the lot sizes, we knew the neighborhood character; those are not hidden conditions. They were approved by the city and accepted by the homeowners who chose to live here. The report discusses neighborhood character. I would respectfully suggest that neighborhood character is not determined solely by the number of feet between homes. Neighborhood characters, where people live, and I will drive around this community with anybody, and we can start doing this objective comparison for neighborhood characters. Our neighborhood is made up of police officers, veterans, teachers, health care professionals, plumbers, carpenters, factory workers, retirees, young families, parents, grandparents, and volunteers. We are Lions Club members, church members, business owners, taxpayers, and community members. We represent North Branch, and we like our neighborhood exactly how it is. The report also mentions improved fire safety. Can I ask, where's the evidence? Where's the evidence? Current 6-foot setbacks are creating a safety problem that warns of changing the status of existing homes that don't exist, and that justification appears speculative. The report further acknowledges one of the most significant concerns, non-conforming structures. This issue deserves far more attention than it has received. When a home becomes legally non-conforming, that status can affect future additions, remodeling projects, and potentially rebuilding after a casualty loss. Imagine this: your home is wiped out by a fire tornado. "Sorry, you can't rebuild that same home. That's the very true potential. It also may create complications during future real estate transactions. Buyers, lenders, title companies, and insurers often scrutinize nonconforming properties more closely.

While a home may remain legal, the existence of a nonconforming status can create additional questions on certainty and cost during its sale. Homeowners should not be placed in that position

because the city changes rules after homes are built. Will that homeowner be permitted to rebuild exactly what they had, or will they be required to comply with new setback standards? If a rebuilt home complied with a narrower building, the homeowner could be forced into a small home, and that raises important questions not only about property rights, but also about insurance settlements and replacement costs. As the city analyzed these implications, has anyone consulted with insurance professionals regarding the potential impact on affected homeowners? The answer is not clear today, and that uncertainty alone should concern every homeowner in affected neighborhoods. Staff report acknowledges that future issues could be limited. What is not discussed is how these limitations affect the homeowner's ability to adapt their home, changing their home to adapt to changing land circumstances. Either one family may want additional living space. An aging homeowner may want somebody to have an accessible addition. These opportunities could be reduced simply because they changed the rules. The report also notes that larger setbacks lead to support neighborhood character. I would respectfully suggest there's another side to that discussion. We already have an established character. This amendment will not move a single existing home away from its neighbor. It will not create additional privacy. Between existing homes, it will not create additional light and air. Between existing homes, it will not create additional access. Between existing homes, what it will do is change the legal status of homes that were built in full compliance with the city's regulations. City identifies several theoretical benefits, but I don't see evidence for this. What I do see are real potential wants consequences for real people, potential nonconforming status, potential limits on future improvements, potential uncertainties around building rights, potential complications with insurance claims and settlements, potential impacts on future home sales, potential impacts on property values, potential, if not certain legal disputes rising from those impacts, and all of this is being considered well without the understanding of how many homeowners would actually be affected. I'm also concerned that this proposal appears to place virtually all of the burden on existing homeowners, while providing zero benefit to those same homeowners. From our perspective, it feels as though intentions are being directed toward neighborhoods that were roughly approved, built according to city standards, and have successfully housed families for years. That perception may not be the intent, but it is the reality of how many residents feel. We would generally like to know what problem this amendment is attempting to solve for existing homeowners who ask for it, who benefit from it, and how many homeowners can be negatively affected by it. Those questions deserve answers going forward. The city wishes to establish different standards for future developments. I support that discussion, but I do not believe it is fair, ethical, legally wise, or necessary to impose new burdens and new uncertainties on homeowners who relied upon the rules that existed when they purchased their homes. Thank you for your time, your consideration, and thank you for your service to residents in North Branch.

Keith Lindstrom provided a comment during the Public Hearing. Keith asked what would happen if there was a disaster, and what would happen with the setbacks? Do you build it to the 6-foot setback or the 10-foot setback? How does that go back on restructure for a wholesale loss? Chair Nate Ehalt answered that essentially, there's a 12-month period during which you have an opportunity to reconstruct that home on its footprint. The question becomes, how long may it take for insurance to provide those payouts? If that extends beyond 12 months, are there vested rights? Is there not? There are some potentially legal questions that would still need to be answered, and we're unable to provide that answer directly at this point in time.

Karen Altnow provided a comment during the Public Hearing. Karen commented that she just closed on her horse a month and 1/2 ago, and she questions whether, if something catastrophic happens to her house, will her insurance will cover it, and to please grandfather in the existing units.

Jay Roos provided a comment during the Public Hearing. Jay is with LGI Homes, a builder-developer of the Meadows North Project. Jay stated the following:  
I just want to say I agree with the comments brought up, so Meadows North, to be honest, you know that project we are almost completed with the building within that project there again, so most

of my concerns is with our future project, I'm not saying that again to take away from anyone else's concerns, everyone has valid concerns here, I was in this room six days ago, last week, at that city council meeting we received the final plat approval for the first phase of our new project, Meadows Ridge, which is north of Meadows North, and you know that that project, of course, came through the planning commission, and then we had a final plat, and originally we bit off a bigger piece, a bigger chunk for the first edition, and we decided, you know, what we don't, you know, extend ourselves that far, and we revised the phase of our first phase, and that revision, the planning commission saw the final plat for the first version, I believe, right, and then this revision, as I said, was just approved, approved last week, and so our, our project, Meadows Ridge, the new project is a mix, and I. Mean, I've got a colored map we would show, and it's the colored map, lot of different colors representing different lot sizes, and we look at that as we like the variety of colors that represents variety of options for buyers, different size lots in different homes for that, so we've got lots, 42 foot wide lots, we've got, and that's similar to Meadows, Meadows Ridge, so we've, we've got that project, 336 lots total, 67 of which are the 42-foot wide lots, and right now, if we were to have to observe 10 foot setbacks on that 42 foot wide lot, 10 feet on each side, that means a 22 foot wide house. We have zero plans that would be able to be built on those 67 lots. We don't have a plan, not to say you can't design a plan, but a plan that is 22 feet wide. A garage, double garage door is 16 feet. A garage itself is going to be about 20 feet. You don't even have room for a front door on the front of the house, which means you walk along the side to enter the house on a side door behind the garage, you know, that's not a tough plan to sell, and likewise, our next phase of loss, we've got some 47 footers, we only have six of those. We have five plans right now that could fit on those, but they're basically the same plan from the front. They don't look any different because there's not much availability to have much variation from the front, because it's garage about 20 feet in a front door, and that's all the variation is maybe different roof pitch or something on that, and then we have 52 foot wide lots, there we have eight options available in our current plan, a lot of those are the same, the narrow basically a garage door to front door right now, with 42 for the narrowest lots that we have in the six foot setbacks that we developed the project under, we have more variation, we have some plans that, in addition to that double garage door, walk-in door. There's room for additional space. There's a window there. It gives much, much more curb appeal. And on that plan, we can even build that as a two-story.

So, there again, you have variety of housing, so instead of going down the line, you have basically the same house after house after house, you mix it up and have some variety, lot more variety of roof pitches, so obviously those smaller lots are the greatest concern to us, because it just really limits what options that can build on that, the wider lots for us, LGI. We have some 85-foot lots in this project as well, you know, a lot of different lot sizes. That's not as big a concern to us. We have plans that have three car garages that can still fit on that, but maybe it's a bigger deal to another developer who has different plans, so I don't want to just say that obviously we're the only developer here that's saying the woe is me, that could have an impact from that, likewise there's been talk about, okay, maybe is there grandfathered and draw a line, maybe drop that line is drawn a preliminary plat approval, and yes, we have preliminary plat approval, we have final plat approval on the first phase, but you know we've spent \$750,590.02 that we spent in our budget, overall budget, and that does not include lineup, that's after land, because on the prelim, remember, we had an EA. We had traffic studies, we had a lot of stuff that went into that preliminary plat, if grandfathering is involved, where is that line drawn? Because if that was drawn at preliminary plat approval, well, most of the \$750,000 was spent not just in the last month as part of final plat, it was part of that preliminary plat approval. So, if the line was drawn a week before we have preliminary plat approval, that's still a big financial investment, and I'm just thinking, for the next person, or a future, or who, whatever other developer may be out there, you know, our main concern is those smaller lots, because a 10-foot setback has a big difference, whether it's a 42-foot lot or an 85-foot lot, in terms of house selection and what the streetscape is gonna look like.

Louis Thompson provided a public comment during the Public Hearing. He commented that he feels the setbacks that we currently have are correct and relevant, and he doesn't feel any danger

from fire or anything. He stated that he doesn't want his home to become a nonconforming home and would like to ask that the City Council and the Planning Commission reconsider.

Larry Bender provided a public comment during the Public Hearing. He commented that he had listened to all of the Public Hearing comments, and not one single comment was in agreement with what is being proposed. He said he doesn't understand how to possibly take this for existing property.

Christina Berry provided a public comment during the Public Hearing. She commented that changing the setbacks, thus changing the homes to non-conforming homes, would impact other people coming into the city and developing their homes and continuing to support our school system. She suggested that the City should take the Public Hearing comments back and give the Community another chance to speak their minds, and once the City is able to answer some of those big questions.

Jean Dipaolo provided a public comment during the Public Hearing. She commented that she felt like this was just sprung on the Community. She asked how this affects the members of the Planning Commission and staff. She said she's worried that if she needed to sell her home, she's worried she wouldn't be able to sell it. She said that she doesn't feel that the Commission should make a decision on this without having answers.

Public Hearing closed at 7:24 PM.

Motion to postpone the decision on this item until the August Planning Commission Meeting, with additional information to be provided to the commissioners at the July Planning Commission Meeting.

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

b. Zoning Text Amendment - R-3 Maximum Density ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Zoning Text Amendment - R-3 Maximum Density.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Proposed Amendment

#### Current Standard

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

#### Proposed Standard

- Maximum Base Density: 6 to 18 units per acre

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

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

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

#### Potential Challenges:

- May limit the availability of diverse and more affordable housing types
- Could reduce opportunities for compact, walkable development patterns

- Potential upward pressure on housing costs due to constrained supply

### Impacts to Developers

#### Potential Benefits:

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

#### Potential Challenges:

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

### Infrastructure and Service Impacts

#### Potential Benefits

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

#### Potential Challenges

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

### Cost Considerations

#### Developers:

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

#### City:

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

### Planning Considerations

- A maximum density aligns R-3 zoning with common planning practices that define both minimum and maximum thresholds

- Helps reinforce transitions between zoning districts
- Supports long-term comprehensive planning goals if density targets are defined

However:

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

### Key Policy Considerations

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

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

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

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

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

Public Hearing opened at 7:54 PM

Steve Mark provided a comment at the Public Hearing. Steve stated the following:

We've likely spoken with more than 20 senior housing developers over the years. The consistent challenge has been economics: on our two-acre site, developers couldn't build enough units to achieve the scale needed to make a project financially viable. Construction costs in North Branch are essentially the same as they are closer to the Twin Cities, but rents are lower here. As a result, we've owned that property since 2017 and are still searching for a viable housing project.

A similar situation exists with another property I became involved with near County Market. At the start of COVID, a longtime community member in his 80s approached my business partner and me about helping develop the site. We became part owners, and for the past six years, we've worked to find the right project and the right partners. Time and again, we've learned that development is driven by market realities, not simply by what a community wants. Whether it's grocery stores, restaurants, assisted living, or other commercial uses, developers first look at whether the numbers work.

One success story was working with the city to help bring an assisted living project to North Branch. Through that effort, we connected with partners interested in developing a senior housing project, and the city rezoned property to make that possible. While the proposal before you tonight may not directly affect either of these sites, the underlying issue remains the same: attracting investment to North Branch requires projects that are economically feasible.

Affordable housing is a major concern. When I graduated in 1977, many young people—including some who became successful business owners in North Branch—started out in affordable housing such as mobile home parks. That first step allowed them to build equity, buy homes, and invest in local businesses. Affordable housing has always been an important part of a healthy community. At its core, this discussion is about economics. We face a classic chicken-and-egg problem: do we attract businesses first, or residents first? Businesses need a workforce, but workers need places to live. Housing growth helps create the conditions that attract both employers and employees.

Senior housing is another critical need. Demographic trends show that adults over 65 will soon outnumber children under 18. Yet North Branch currently has no market-rate senior apartment housing, despite communities 20 to 30 miles away offering those options. Building that housing today is far more challenging than it would have been five or ten years ago due to rising costs.

The city has tools to encourage development, but reducing density makes projects more expensive and less attractive to developers. If apartment density is reduced by 20%, the fixed costs of land, roads, utilities, and infrastructure must be spread across fewer units. Those costs don't disappear—they are simply shifted onto the remaining apartments, making housing less affordable.

For example, road frontage costs today are roughly \$300 per foot, up significantly since COVID. At the same time, land values for apartment development have remained relatively flat. Landowners have not benefited from inflation the way construction costs have increased. The reality is that every reduction in density raises costs and increases the likelihood that developers will need additional public assistance to make projects work.

I understand the desire to preserve North Branch's small-town character. I grew up here, and I appreciate those concerns. But North Branch has been growing for decades. This proposal is not about turning us into a large city—it's about ensuring we have the housing options needed for young families, working residents, and seniors.

I encourage you not to reduce density standards, particularly for apartment housing. Density is one of the few tools available to help keep housing attainable while making development financially feasible. Finding the right balance is difficult, but lowering density will only make it harder to address the housing needs our community already faces.

Public Hearing closed at 8:02 PM.

Motion to deny the zoning text amendment in its entirety.

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

c.    Zoning Text Amendment - Design Standards

**ACTION**

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

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

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

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

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

Specifically, commissioners discussed:

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

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

#### Existing Standards

Design standards apply to:

- Commercial, Central Business, and Industrial Zoning Districts

Design standards do not apply to:

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

#### Design Overlay Zones

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

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

##### *Zone 2 – Transitional Areas*

- Minimum 50% Class 1 materials

- Moderate flexibility in design
- Serves as a transition between high-visibility and industrial areas

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

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

### Potential Design Standards Map Modifications

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

### Potential amendments discussed included:

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

### Potential Façade-Based Standards:

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

Examples of potential ordinance language concepts could include:

### Street Facing Elevations

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

### Residential Adjacency Standards

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

## Visibility-Based Standards

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

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

### Overall Evaluation

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

### Comparison to Surrounding Cities

A review of neighboring communities indicates several common themes:

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

### Impacts of Current Standards

#### Benefits

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

#### Challenges

- Higher material requirements may increase construction costs
- Limits flexibility for developers, particularly for industrial and commercial projects
- May discourage smaller-scale or cost-sensitive developments
- Requires periodic amendments to accommodate new materials

## **Potential Amendment Options**

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

#### *Material Percentage Adjustments*

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

#### *Façade-Based Standards*

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

#### *Expanded Material Allowances*

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

#### *Design Overlay Zone Modifications*

- Simplify or reevaluate the current three-zone structure

### Cost and Development Considerations

#### Developers

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

#### City

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

### Text Amendment Options:

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

#### (k) Street-Facing Facades

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

#### (l) Residential Adjacency Standards

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

#### (m) Design Standards Map Adjustments

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

#### (n) Visibility-Based Building Materials

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

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

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

Public Hearing Opened at 8:28 PM.

Steve Mark provided a comment at the Public Hearing. Steve stated the following:

The reason I stood up to talk about this is that, as we work in apartment buildings, especially in the central

business district, cost has always been an issue, and the developers we work with have struggled with the design standards and material standards that are required. They tell us that there are alternatives today that are just as good that meet the fire retardancy and durability standards that maybe were inherent in old materials like brick and stucco or stone, so I would guess I would. I don't know all the design standards that have changed. I did see a slight reduction in the amount of it from 65 to 50% five but for certain kinds of developments, it does make sense not to hold it to that downtown meeting Main Street standard. Also, again, community business, which has a property out in the industrial park, they certainly did not understand how those design standards and the stone facing helped out of the industrial park. So, I encourage you to dig deeper to figure out ways to make our community affordable for businesses and make it affordable for people to develop. I understand the longevity issues and durability and visual standards that we're trying to address, and we have troubles even doing our residential homes along, you know, Main Street, keeping them up to a standard when those homes are reached. I don't think there's been a home built in that eastern part of the Central Business District since I was in high school, so those homes are aging, and they're going to become an issue in the future. Everything needs to be replaced with some kind of business.

Public Hearing closed at 8:30 PM.

Motion to deny the Zoning Text Amendment - Design Standards in its entirety.

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

## 8. REPORTS

a. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

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

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

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

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

City staff is requesting that Planning Commission members review and analyze the questions and policy considerations identified within this report to provide staff with direction on how a potential ordinance

amendment could be drafted. Planning Commission members are also encouraged to review the attached Chisago County and Isanti County ADU ordinances and identify provisions, standards, or processes they support or oppose. Feedback from the Planning Commission will assist staff in determining appropriate zoning districts, approval processes, development standards, and operational requirements that may be incorporated into a future ADU ordinance for consideration.

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

### Zoning Districts

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

### Approval Process

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

### Unit Type and Location

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

### Size Limitations

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

### Owner Occupancy Requirements

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

### Parking Requirements

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

### Utilities and Infrastructure

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

### Design and Compatibility Standards

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

### Number of Units

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

### Enforcement and Administration

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

Some of the feedback that the Planning Commission discussed was concerns about parking and the impact on neighborhood aesthetics, limiting the number of ADUs per parcel, a condition of use process

for ADUs to ensure compatibility with neighborhood character, maximum size of 750 square feet. Conversation to include a draft ordinance for next month's Planning Commission Meeting.

- b. Central Business District - Zoning Boundaries INFO

There was a brief discussion regarding concerns about the permitted uses table and the potential impact of data center. Suggestions were made to create a condition of use permit process for data centers to ensure long-term planning, as there isn't any city ordinances related to data centers, and this should be considered. The commission agreed to explore this to address and foresee an potential issues that the data centers could cause.

- c. Flink Ave - Flex Business Zone INFO
- d. Comprehensive Plan Update INFO

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol gave a brief Comprehensive Plan Update. One issue we've encountered is the difference in how similar housing types are treated in the Central Business District. Currently, a duplex is a permitted use, so a building with one unit above another is allowed. However, a twin home with a property line separating the units is not permitted. Functionally, these developments can be very similar, yet one is allowed, and the other is not. We've also received inquiries about townhomes, which are not currently listed as a permitted use. A row of side-by-side attached units is not permitted, while a multifamily dwelling with three or more units in a single building is allowed. Given the similarities among these housing types, it's unclear why some are listed as permitted uses while others are not. This may be an area the commission would like to review and discuss.

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

10. ADJOURNMENT

The North Branch Planning Commission Meeting ended at 9:22 PM

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

## **Recommended Planning Commission Action**

Motion to recommend approval of the revised Preliminary Plat request for Westside Commons 3<sup>rd</sup> Addition, subject to the conditions of approval listed within this report.

## **Overview / Background**

AIM Holdings, LLC, with Westwood Professional Services acting as the applicant, has submitted a revised Preliminary Plat request for Westside Commons 3<sup>rd</sup> Addition. The subject property is legally described as Outlot A, Westside Commons 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition and is located southwest of the intersection of Falcon Avenue and St. Croix Trail (TH 95).

The Planning Commission reviewed and recommended approval of a Preliminary Plat for this development at the May 5, 2026 meeting. Since that review, the applicant has revised the layout to incorporate an updated roadway alignment and revised outlot configuration. Because these revisions modify the previously approved layout, the Preliminary Plat is being returned to the Planning Commission for an updated recommendation.

The applicant has also submitted a separate request to the City seeking Tax Increment Financing (TIF) assistance to help finance certain eligible public infrastructure improvements associated with the development. The TIF request is being reviewed through a separate process by the Economic Development Authority and City Council and is not part of the Planning Commission's review of the Preliminary Plat. The Planning Commission's review is limited to determining whether the revised plat complies with the City's Comprehensive Plan, subdivision regulations, zoning ordinance, and applicable engineering standards.

The Preliminary Plat represents the first phase of a larger master planned development. The overall concept includes construction of a senior living campus on the southern portion of the property while preserving land for future commercial development that supports continued growth within the Westside Commons area.

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

1. Land Use and Zoning
2. Revised Preliminary Plat
3. Master Development Concept
4. Transportation & Future Connectivity
5. Plat Standards

## **Analysis of Issue(s)**

### **1. Land Use & Zoning**

The Subject Property is guided **LUB – Land Use Business** north of 386<sup>th</sup> Street and **LUR-3 – High Density Residential** to the South of 386<sup>th</sup> Street per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned **B – Business**.

Senior Communities for Independent or Assisted Living are a Permitted Use in the B-Business Zoning District. The proposed preliminary plat continues to support the planned senior housing development while preserving additional land for future commercial development. Staff finds the revised plat remains consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan and the intent of the B-Business zoning district.

Staff finds the proposed plat to be generally consistent with the City's land use guidance and development objectives for this area.

## **2. Revised Preliminary Plat**

The Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3<sup>rd</sup> Addition proposes the following:

- Creation of Lot 1, Block 1 (4.71 acres) for the proposed senior living development
- Creation of Outlot A (6.16 acres) for future expansion of the senior housing campus
- Creation of Outlot B (1.49) to accommodate future roadway, utility, and public infrastructure needs
- Creation of Outlot C (0.64 acres) for stormwater ponding
- Creation of Outlot D (12.68 acres) to accommodate future commercial development
- Dedication of public right-of-way for the extension of 386<sup>th</sup> Street together with associated drainage and utility easements

The revised plat provides a logical subdivision of the property while maintaining flexibility for future development phases. Staff finds the layout appropriately balances current development with future expansion opportunities and public infrastructure needs.

## **3. Master Development Concept**

The Preliminary Plat has been designed around a long-term master plan for the property.

The first phase includes development of a senior living facility on Lot 1, Block 1. Outlot A has been retained to allow future expansion of the senior housing campus should additional residential facilities or amenities be constructed in the future.

The northern portion of the property, identified as Outlot D, has been preserved for future commercial development. This configuration provides flexibility for future businesses while ensuring compatibility with the existing and planned commercial development occurring throughout the Westside Commons area.

By separating future residential and commercial development into distinct development areas, the Preliminary Plat establishes a framework that can accommodate phased growth while minimizing future subdivision modifications.

## **4. Transportation & Future Connectivity**

A significant component of the revised Preliminary Plat is the extension of 386<sup>th</sup> Street.

The roadway extension establishes the first phase of the proposed internal street network for the Westside Commons development. The proposed roadway alignment is intended to ultimately complete the 386<sup>th</sup> Street loop by connecting Falcon Avenue with St. Croix Trail (TH 95). This future roadway connection will improve traffic circulation, provide additional emergency access, distribute traffic more efficiently throughout the development area, and improve access to future commercial development.

The revised roadway alignment also allows municipal water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and other public utilities to be extended in conjunction with future roadway construction, supporting the orderly development of the remaining property. Staff finds the revised roadway alignment supports the overall functionality of the Westside Commons development and provides an efficient framework for future phases of development.

## **5. 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
B – Business	5,000	50'	100'

Staff finds the proposed lot dimensions of Lot 1, Block 1 exceeds City requirements, and the outlots are appropriately configured to support future phases of development, public infrastructure, drainage, and transportation improvements. Outlots A, B, C, and D are not proposed as buildable lots through this Preliminary Plat. These outlots are intended to accommodate future development, roadway, drainage, and other public infrastructure improvements as identified in the master development plan. Prior to development, any outlot intended to become a buildable lot shall be replatted or otherwise subdivided in accordance with the City's subdivision regulations and shall be required to comply with all applicable zoning district dimensional standards in effect at that time.

**Staff Recommendation**

The revised Preliminary Plat continues to implement the City's vision for orderly commercial growth while establishing the first phase of a master planned development consisting of senior housing, future commercial development, and long-term transportation improvements.

Although the Planning Commission previously reviewed this project, the updated roadway alignment and revised subdivision configuration warrant additional review. Staff finds the revised Preliminary Plat remains consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, subdivision regulations, and the B-Business zoning district, while improving opportunities for future development and public connectivity.

Accordingly, staff recommends approval of the Preliminary Plat for **Westside Commons 3rd Addition**.

**Recommended Planning Commission Action**

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council of the Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall submit a Final Plat consistent with the approved Preliminary Plat, City Code, and Minnesota Statutes.
2. All engineering, grading, utility, stormwater, and erosion control plans shall be reviewed and approved by the City Engineer.
3. Minor modifications to the roadway alignment may be approved administratively by the City Administrator and City Engineer, provided such modifications are consistent with the approved Preliminary Plat and applicable City standards
4. A Development Agreement shall be executed addressing construction of all required public improvements, including roadway, utilities, stormwater infrastructure, and associated public facilities.
5. All required easements and public right-of-way shall be dedicated as shown on the approved Preliminary Plat.
6. All required permits, fees, and financial obligations shall be satisfied prior to recording the Final Plat.
7. All comments from the City Engineer shall be addressed prior to Final Plat approval.



## Report

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

### Overview / Background

At the April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026 Planning Commission meeting, a resident requested that the City evaluate the possibility of allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) as an additional housing option within North Branch. The topic was subsequently discussed at the May 5<sup>th</sup> and June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026 Planning Commission meetings to evaluate potential benefits, development standards, and regulatory considerations associated with permitting ADU's within the City.

Following discussion at the June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, the Planning Commission provided policy direction to City staff regarding the development standards that should be incorporated into a potential ADU ordinance. Based upon that direction, staff has prepared the attached draft ordinance for Planning Commission review and discussion. The purpose of this meeting is to obtain feedback on the draft ordinance, identify any additional revisions, and determine whether the ordinance is ready to proceed toward a future public hearing.

### Summary of Draft Ordinance

The attached draft ordinance would establish regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units within Chapter 66 of the North Branch City Code. The ordinance would permit ADU's as a Conditional Use within the AG, RR, and R-1 zoning districts while establishing development standards intended to maintain neighborhood character and ensure compatibility with surrounding residential properties.

### Key Components of the Draft Ordinance

The draft ordinance currently proposes the following standards:

- Accessory Dwelling Units permitted only within the AG, RR, and R-1 zoning districts.
- Conditional Use Permit required for all ADUs.
- Separate provisions for attached and detached ADUs.
- Maximum floor area of 750 square feet for both attached and detached ADUs.
- Maximum of one (1) ADU permitted per property.
- Property owner must occupy either the principal dwelling or the ADU.
- The principal dwelling shall remain the primary residential use of the property.
- Detached ADUs shall be located entirely within the required rear yard.
- Setbacks shall comply with the principal structure setbacks of the underlying zoning district.
- Exterior building materials shall be compatible with the principal dwelling.
- Minimum of one (1) additional off-street parking space required.
- Compliance with applicable Building and Fire Codes.
- Connection to approved public water and sanitary sewer systems, or demonstration of adequate private well and septic capacity.
- Manufactured homes, recreational vehicles, campers, shipping containers, and tiny homes on wheels shall not be permitted as detached ADUs.
- Short-term rentals shall be prohibited.
- Failure to maintain owner occupancy or comply with ordinance requirements may result in revocation of the Conditional Use Permit.

## Staff Analysis

Staff believes the draft ordinance establishes a balanced approach to allowing Accessory Dwelling Units while preserving the character of existing residential neighborhoods. The proposed standards provide clear expectations regarding building size, placement, parking, owner occupancy, and architectural compatibility while allowing flexibility for homeowners seeking additional long-term housing opportunities.

Requiring a Conditional Use Permit also allows each proposal to be evaluated individually to ensure site-specific issues such as parking, utilities, lot layout, and neighborhood compatibility are appropriately addressed.

Staff is requesting that the Planning Commission review the draft ordinance and provide feedback regarding any additional revisions before preparation of a final ordinance for a future public hearing.

## Additional Research / Analysis

Staff reviewed ADU regulations from several Minnesota communities and counties to compare common ordinance standards with the draft North Branch ordinance. Overall, the draft ordinance is generally consistent with other Minnesota ADU regulations, particularly regarding owner occupancy, one ADU per parcel, building code compliance, utility review, parking, and compatibility with the principal dwelling.

### Comparison to Other Minnesota Communities

- Chisago County:* Permits accessory dwelling units in the AG and RR zoning districts and requires compatibility in materials and appearance with the principal dwelling. Chisago County also requires dedicated on-site parking and requires ADU's to meet residential standards. This generally aligns with North Branch's draft ordinance, which would allow ADU's in AG, RR, and R-1, require compatible exterior materials, and require additional parking.
- Isanti County:* Has also evaluated ADU's as a form of second dwelling or guest house housing option. Isanti County's process identified ADU's as a tool for multi-generational housing, caregiver housing, and additional long-term rental housing. This is consistent with the general purpose of the North Branch ordinance, which is intended to provide additional housing opportunities while preserving residential character.
- Forest Lake:* Requires an ADU to meet building code requirements and requires a building permit for the change of use or construction activity. Forest Lake also requires parking for the accessory dwelling. North Branch's draft ordinance is consistent with this approach by requiring Building Code and Fire Code compliance and one additional off-street parking space.
- Lindstrom:* Allows only one ADU per property, requires ADU's to meet principal structure setbacks, and requires compliance with zoning district height standards. These standards are similar to North Branch's draft ordinance, which limits properties to one ADU, requires principal structure setbacks, and requires height compliance with the underlying zoning district.
- Stacy:* Defines ADU's as subordinate to a single-family dwelling and allows ADUs to be internal, attached, or detached. Stacy's ordinance includes a 500-square-foot size limit, which is more restrictive than North Branch's proposed 750-square-foot maximum.

The primary areas where the North Branch draft ordinance is more restrictive than some communities include:

- Requiring a Conditional Use Permit rather than administrative approval.
- Limiting ADU's to AG, RR, and R-1 zoning districts.
- Requiring ADU's to be located in the rear yard only.
- Applying a fixed 750-square foot maximum size to both attached and detached ADU's.

Staff believes these more restrictive provisions are appropriate for an initial ADU ordinance because they allow the City to evaluate proposals on a case-by-case basis while the ordinance is new.

## **Municipal Water and Sewer Connection Analysis**

ADU's function as independent dwelling units and therefore require adequate utility service. Based on other Minnesota city examples, there are generally two ways an ADU may be served by municipal water and sanitary sewer:

1. The ADU may connect to the existing private water and sanitary sewer service lines serving the principal dwelling, subject to review and approval by the City Engineer, Public Works Department, and Building Official.
2. The ADU may be required to install separate utility service connections if necessary due to building code, plumbing code, utility capacity, metering, maintenance, or site-specific conditions.

The Minnesota State Plumbing Code generally requires every building to have its own independent water and sewer connection, though guidance recognizes that exceptions may apply where site conditions make separate connections impractical.

Because of this, staff recommends that the North Branch ordinance not automatically require either shared or separate utility connections in every case. Instead, the ordinance should require ADUs to connect to approved water and sanitary sewer systems in a manner approved by the City Engineer, Public Works Director, Building Official, and applicable utility provider. This gives the City flexibility to determine whether shared or separate connections are appropriate based on the site plan, building type, utility capacity, and applicable code requirements.

### *Suggested Utility Language:*

*“Accessory dwelling units shall be connected to approved public water and sanitary sewer systems where available. Utility connections may be provided through the existing service lines serving the principal dwelling or through separate service connections, subject to review and approval by the City Engineer, Public Works Director, Building Official, and applicable utility provider. Where private well and septic systems are utilized, the applicant shall demonstrate that the existing or proposed systems have adequate capacity to serve both the principal dwelling and the accessory dwelling unit, subject to approval by the applicable reviewing authority.”*

## **Discussion Items**

Staff is requesting Planning Commission feedback on the following items:

- Does the draft ordinance accurately reflect the policy direction previously provided by the Planning Commission?
- Are there additional development standards the Planning Commission would like staff to consider?
- Are there provisions within the draft ordinance that should be modified before scheduling a future public hearing?
- Is the Planning Commission comfortable with the proposed zoning districts, approval process, dimensional standards, parking requirements, and operational standards?

## **Planning Commission Action**

This item is presented for discussion purposes only. Staff is requesting feedback regarding the attached draft ordinance and direction on any revisions the Planning Commission would like incorporated prior to scheduling a future public hearing.

# Draft Ordinance – Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s)

## Sec. 66-XXX. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s)

### (a) Purpose.

The purpose of this section is to provide standards for accessory dwelling units (ADU’s) that offer additional housing opportunities while preserving the character of existing residential neighborhoods. These standards are intended to ensure that ADU’s remain subordinate to the principal dwelling and are compatible with surrounding residential development.

### (b) Applicability.

Accessory dwelling units may be permitted as a Conditional Use in the AG Agricultural, RR Rural Residential, and R-1 Single-Family Residential zoning districts. ADU’s shall comply with all provisions of this section in addition to the regulations of the underlying zoning district.

### (c) Types of Accessory Dwelling Units.

- (1) Attached ADU: Located within or physically attached to the principal dwelling.
- (2) Detached ADU: Located in a detached accessory structure subordinate to the principal dwelling.

### (d) Conditional Use Permit Required.

Accessory dwelling units require approval of a Conditional Use Permit in accordance with Sections 66-64 through 66-66.

### (e) General Standards.

1. Only one (1) accessory dwelling unit shall be permitted per property.
2. A legally established principal single-family dwelling shall exist on the property prior to approval of an accessory dwelling unit.
3. The owner of the property shall occupy either the principal dwelling or the accessory dwelling unit as their primary residence.
4. The principal dwelling shall remain the primary residential use of the property. The accessory dwelling unit shall remain subordinate and incidental to the principal dwelling.
5. The maximum floor area of an accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed 750 square feet.
6. Accessory dwelling units shall not be subdivided or sold separately from the principal dwelling.
7. Short-term rental use of an accessory dwelling unit or the principal dwelling is prohibited. Rental periods shall be no less than thirty (30) consecutive days.
8. All accessory dwelling units shall comply with all applicable Building Code, Fire Code, Plumbing Code, Electrical Code, Mechanical Code, and other applicable federal, state, and local regulations.
9. Manufactured homes, recreational vehicles (RVs), travel trailers, campers, shipping containers, and tiny homes constructed on a chassis or wheels shall not be permitted as detached accessory dwelling units unless expressly authorized elsewhere in this chapter.
10. Accessory dwelling units shall be connected to approved public water and sanitary sewer systems where available. Utility connections may be provided through the existing service lines serving the principal dwelling or through separate service connections, subject to review and approval by the City Engineer, Public Works Director, Building Official, and applicable utility provider. Where private well and septic systems are utilized, the applicant shall demonstrate that the existing or proposed systems have adequate capacity to serve both the principal dwelling and the accessory dwelling unit, subject to approval by the applicable reviewing authority.
11. Failure to maintain owner occupancy or comply with this section or any Conditional Use Permit condition may constitute grounds for revocation of the Conditional Use Permit.

### (f) Location Standards.

1. Detached accessory dwelling units shall be located entirely within the rear yard.

**(g) Dimensional Standards.**

1. Setbacks shall comply with those required for principal structures in the underlying zoning district.
2. Maximum size shall be 750 square feet.
3. Height shall comply with the underlying zoning district.

**(h) Parking.**

1. A minimum of one (1) additional off-street parking space shall be provided for each accessory dwelling unit.
2. The required parking space shall be shown on the site plan submitted with the Conditional Use Permit application and shall comply with all applicable parking, driveway, and surfacing requirements of this chapter.
3. The location and design of the required parking space shall be subject to review and approval by the City through the Conditional Use Permit process.

**(i) Architectural Standards.**

Exterior building materials shall match or be substantially similar to the principal dwelling. Roof pitch, siding, trim, colors, and architectural details shall maintain compatibility with the principal dwelling.

**(j) Utilities and Addressing.**

1. All accessory dwelling units shall obtain all required building, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and utility permits prior to occupancy.
2. Utility connections shall be installed in accordance with all applicable City standards, State Building Code, State Plumbing Code, and the requirements of the applicable utility provider.
3. The City Engineer, Public Works Director, Building Official, and applicable utility provider shall determine the appropriate method of water and sanitary sewer service based on the proposed site plan, utility capacity, applicable codes, and site conditions.
4. Separate addressing shall be provided when required by the Building Official, Fire Department, Chisago County, or emergency service providers.

## Report

Discussion Item – Data Centers in the B-Business Zoning District

### Overview / Background

The City's Permitted Use Table currently identifies Data Centers as a permitted use within the B-Business Zoning District. However, the North Branch City Code does not currently contain a definition for "Data Center" nor does it establish development standards, operational requirements, or performance criteria specific to this type of use.

As data center development continues to expand nationally due to increased cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital storage demands, many communities are reviewing their zoning regulations to determine whether existing code adequately addresses these facilities.

Because the City currently lacks regulations specific to data centers, staff believes it would be appropriate to evaluate whether this use should remain a permitted use in the B-Business District until appropriate ordinance language can be developed.

### Discussion

Data centers are significantly different from traditional office, commercial, or industrial uses. While they generally generate limited traffic and employment once operational, they can require substantial infrastructure investments and place unique demands on municipal utility systems.

Potential impacts include:

- Significant electrical demand and the need for redundant power infrastructure.
- High water consumption for cooling systems, depending on facility design.
- Increased wastewater generation where water-cooled systems are utilized.
- Backup generators and fuel storage that may generate noise and require additional safety standards.
- Limited employment opportunities relative to the amount of land and infrastructure consumed.
- Large building footprints that may affect community character and future redevelopment opportunities.

Because these facilities can vary greatly in size and operational characteristics, staff believes additional review of zoning standards would be beneficial before allowing future development proposals.

### Potential Ordinance Amendments

If the Planning Commission wishes to continue allowing data centers within North Branch, staff recommends developing ordinance language that would include:

- A formal definition of "Data Center" within Chapter 66.
- Development and operational standards specific to data center facilities.
- Performance standards addressing noise, backup power systems, mechanical equipment screening, lighting and security.

- Utility and infrastructure requirements, including coordination with municipal utility providers.
- Site design requirements for building placement, landscaping, and buffering from residential properties.

## **High Utility User Considerations**

Due to the substantial electrical and water demands associated with many modern data centers, the City may also wish to establish regulations for **High Utility Users**.

Potential ordinance provisions could include:

- Defining a threshold for facilities classified as High Utility Users based on electrical demand, water usage, wastewater generation, or other measurable criteria.
- Requiring applicants to submit utility demand analyses prepared by qualified professionals.
- Demonstrating that adequate municipal water, sanitary sewer, and electrical capacity exists prior to project approval.
- Allowing the City to require infrastructure improvements or developer-funded system upgrades when necessary to maintain adequate service levels.
- Requiring coordination with utility providers early in the development review process.

These provisions could apply not only to data centers but also to other future uses with exceptionally high utility demands.

## **Planning Commission Discussion**

Staff is requesting feedback from the Planning Commission regarding the following policy questions:

- Should Data Centers remain a permitted use in the B-Business Zoning District?
- Should the Data Centers instead require a Conditional Use Permit or be limited to industrial zoning districts?
- Should the City establish definitions and development standards specific to data centers?
- Should the City create regulations for High Utility Users to ensure future developments do not negatively impact municipal utility infrastructure?

## **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission provide policy direction regarding whether data centers should continue to be permitted within the B-Business District and whether staff should prepare ordinance amendments establishing definitions, development standards, and high utility user regulations. Developing these standards proactively would better position the City to evaluate future proposals while protecting municipal infrastructure and ensuring new development is compatible with surrounding land uses.

This approach allows the City to address emerging development trends before receiving an application, rather than relying on regulations that were written before modern large-scale data centers became common land uses.

## Report

Discussion of Potential Text Amendment – Allow Twinhomes and Townhomes in CBD (Central Business District)

## Request

The purpose of this discussion item is to consider a text amendment to the City's Permitted Uses Table to allow *Dwelling, Twin Homes* and *Dwelling, Quad & Townhome* as Permitted Uses ("P") within the CBD – Central Business District zoning district.

If adopted, the amendment would add a "P" in the CBD column for the following residential uses:

- Dwelling, Twin Homes
- Dwelling, Quad & Townhome

## Overview / Background

The Central Business District (CBD) is intended to serve as the City's traditional downtown area by supporting a mix of commercial, residential, civic, and pedestrian-oriented development. Historically, the district has accommodated a variety of residential housing types that contribute to a mixed-use environment.

Under the current Permitted Uses Table, the CBD zoning district already allows several higher-density residential uses, including:

- Two-Family Dwellings (Duplex and Triplex)
- Multi-Family Dwellings (3-6 units)
- Multi-Family Dwellings (7-16 units)
- Apartments
- Apartments above commercial

However, Twinhomes and Townhomes, which generally represent lower-intensity forms of attached housing, are not currently permitted within the district. Staff believes this omission may be unintended given the broader range of higher-density housing already allowed.

## Analysis

### Consistency with Existing Residential Uses

The proposed amendment would create a more logical progression of residential housing types within the CBD zoning district.

Currently, the City permits residential developments with significantly greater density than either Twinhomes or Townhomes. In many cases:

- Twinhomes consist of only two attached dwelling units
- Townhomes typically range from 4 to 8 units and often resemble traditional neighborhood-scale development.

- Apartments and larger multi-family developments generally produce greater density, building mass, traffic generation, and parking demand than townhome developments.

Because these more intensive residential uses are already permitted, allowing Twinhomes and Townhomes would provide additional housing options without substantially changing the character or intent of the zoning district.

### Housing Diversity

Allowing these housing types would expand the City's available housing choices by providing:

- Owner-Occupied attached housing opportunities
- Missing middle housing between single-family homes and apartments
- Housing options for first-time homebuyers, young professionals, and empty nesters
- Opportunities for smaller-scale residential redevelopment

Townhomes and Twinhomes can also provide ownership opportunities that require less maintenance while utilizing existing municipal infrastructure efficiently.

### Downtown Redevelopment Opportunities

The CBD contains several parcels that may not be large enough to support apartment-style developments but could accommodate small-scale attached housing.

Allowing Townhomes and Twinhomes may:

- Encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties
- Increase investment in the downtown area
- Support additional residents within walking distance of businesses and services
- Strengthen the mixed-use character envisioned for the CBD

Because these housing types generally have smaller building footprints than apartment buildings, they may also provide additional flexibility on constrained redevelopment sites.

### Consistency with Comprehensive Planning Goals

One of the City's ongoing planning objectives is to encourage a variety of housing types that meet the needs of residents throughout different stages of life.

This amendment would support that objective by:

- Increasing housing diversity
- Providing additional ownership housing options
- Encouraging efficient use of existing infrastructure
- Supporting infill development within established areas of the community

Comparison of Existing Permitted Uses

Zoning District Permitted Use Table Excerpt:

District Uses	Notes	Standards	R1	R2	R3	RR	AG	PUB	OSP	CBD
<b>A. RESIDENTIAL USES</b>										
<b>Household Living</b>										
Dwelling, Single-Family			P	P		P	P			
Dwelling, Single-Family (Prior to December 31, 2022)										P
Dwelling, Two-Family (Duplex) & Triplex				P	P					P
Dwelling, Twin Homes			P	P	P					
Dwelling, Quad & Townhome				P	P					
Dwelling, Multi-Family (3 to 6 units)				P	P					P
Dwelling, Multi-Family (7 to 16 units)					P					P
Dwelling, Apartments					P					P
Dwelling, Apartments Above Commercial										P
Dwelling, Prefabricated Home				C	C					

The Central Business District (CBD) currently permits several higher-density residential uses, including duplexes, triplexes, multi-family dwellings, and apartments, but does not permit Twinhomes or Townhomes. Staff believes these housing types are compatible with the existing residential uses already allowed in the district and would provide additional ownership housing opportunities while supporting downtown residential growth. Therefore, staff recommends amending the Permitted Uses Table to designate Twinhomes and Quad & Townhomes as permitted ("P") uses within the CBD zoning district.

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff believes allowing Twinhomes and Townhomes within the CBD District is consistent with the purpose and intent of the district.

The amendment would introduce housing types that are generally less intensive than several residential uses already permitted in the CBD, while expanding housing choices and encouraging redevelopment opportunities within the City’s downtown.

From a land use perspective, staff finds this to be a logical modification to the Permitted Uses Table that better aligns the permitted housing types with the mixed use character envisioned for the Central Business District.

**Planning Commission Discussion**

Staff requests Planning Commission discussion and direction on the following questions:

1. Should Twinhomes be permitted in the CBD zoning district?
2. Should Quad & Townhomes be permitted in the CBD zoning district?
3. Should staff prepare a formal ordinance amendment and schedule a public hearing for consideration of the proposed text amendment?

## **Overview / Background**

At the June 17, 2026 Joint Planning Commission/City Council Work Session, City Council members, Planning Commission members, and City staff discussed potential modifications to the City's Design Standards regulations contained in Section 66-943 of City Code. The discussion focused on balancing the City's long-standing commitment to quality architectural design with the need to improve development flexibility, reduce construction costs, and remain competitive in attracting commercial and industrial investment.

Following discussion, the Planning Commission and City Council reached consensus on several policy changes that staff has incorporated into the proposed ordinance amendments. These amendments are intended to simplify the Design Standards Map, better align design requirements with existing land use patterns, and modernize the City's list of approved exterior building materials while maintaining the overall character of North Branch's primary gateway corridors. The proposed amendments do not substantially alter the intent of the Design Standards Ordinance but instead refine where the highest standards should apply and expand material options to better reflect current construction practices.

## **Proposed Design Standards Map Amendments**

As directed during the Work Session, staff has prepared an updated Design Standards Map for consideration. The proposed map revises several Design Zone boundaries to better correspond with existing development patterns, visibility from major transportation corridors, and anticipated future land uses. The revised map generally maintains Design Zone 1 within the City's primary gateway corridors while expanding Design Zone 2 into areas where greater flexibility is appropriate for commercial and employment-oriented development.

*Map revisions include the following:*

### *Flink Avenue Corridor:*

Several commercially guided properties along Flink Ave have been transitioned from Design Zone 1 to Design Zone 2, recognizing the corridor's evolving employment and business development pattern and providing additional flexibility for future projects.

### *Interstate 35 Corridor:*

Portions of the Interstate 35 corridor that are less visible from the freeway or are anticipated for industrial and business park development have been reclassified from Zone 1 to Zone 2, while maintaining Zone 1 standards for highly visible gateway locations surrounding the Highway 95 interchange and downtown area.

### *Commercial Transition Areas:*

Select commercial properties adjacent to industrial or employment areas have been incorporated into Zone 2 to create a more consistent transition between commercial gateway areas and industrial development.

### *Downtown/HWY 95 Corridor:*

Design Zone 1 has been retained throughout the downtown core and along the Highway 95 corridor where buildings have the greatest visual impact on the community and serve as primary gateways into North Branch.

Amendment	Proposed Change
Design Standards Map	Update Zone 1 and Zone 2 boundaries as shown on the draft map.
Class I Materials	Add LP® SmartSide® siding and engineered wood siding to the list of permitted materials.
Class II Materials	No changes proposed.
Material Percentages	No changes proposed.
Design Standards Zones	No changes to the three-zone structure.

Overall, the proposed Draft Map better aligns architectural expectations with development intensity and visibility while preserving enhanced design standards in the City’s most prominent commercial corridors. City staff has attached both the existing Design Standards Map and the proposed draft Design Standards Map for review and comparison. Planning Commission members are encouraged to review the proposed revisions and provide any additional comments or suggested modifications prior to the August Planning Commission meeting. Staff will incorporate any final direction received and prepare the official ordinance amendments to Section 66-943 of the North Branch City Code, along with a finalized Design Standards Map, for formal consideration at the August Planning Commission meeting.

### **Proposed Building Material Amendments**

During the Work Session, the Planning Commission and City Council also discussed updating the City’s list of permitted exterior building materials to better reflect modern construction practices. Based upon that discussion, staff is proposing amendments that expand the list of approved materials while continuing to require durable, high-quality exterior finishes.

Proposed building material amendments include adding:

- **LP SmartSide Engineered Wood Siding**
- **Engineered wood siding products meeting City design standards**

These materials have become increasingly common in commercial and mixed-use construction due to their durability, appearance, lower maintenance requirements, and ability to replicate the appearance of traditional wood products. Expanding the list of approved materials provides additional flexibility for developers while maintaining architectural quality throughout the community.

The proposed amendments build upon the City’s previous approval of insulated metal panels as a permitted Class II material and continue the City’s effort to modernize its Design Standards without reducing overall expectations for building appearance.

### **Potential Discussion Item**

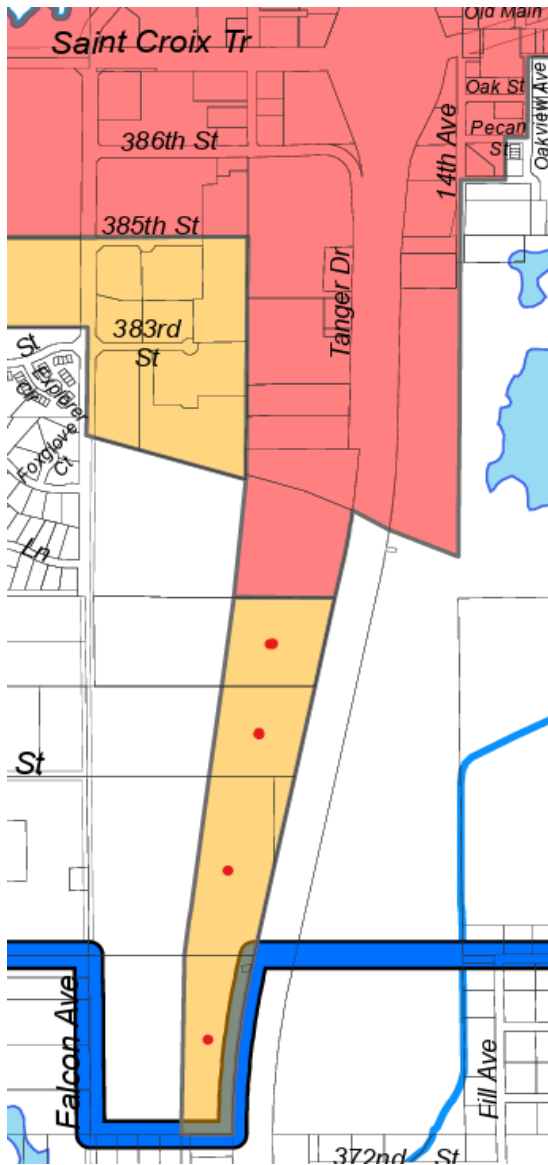
As staff prepared the draft Design Standards Map, one area was identified that may warrant additional discussion prior to finalizing the map. Along the south side of the Interstate 35 interchange, the proposed Design Zone 1 boundary generally follows the intended corridor rather than existing parcel boundaries. As a result, several larger commercial parcels would be divided between Design Zone 1 and Design Zone 2.

Splitting individual parcels between two Design Standards Zones could create administrative and design challenges when future development occurs. Depending on the location of proposed buildings, a single

development may be subject to multiple design standards, creating uncertainty regarding which material requirements apply and where those standards transition across the site.

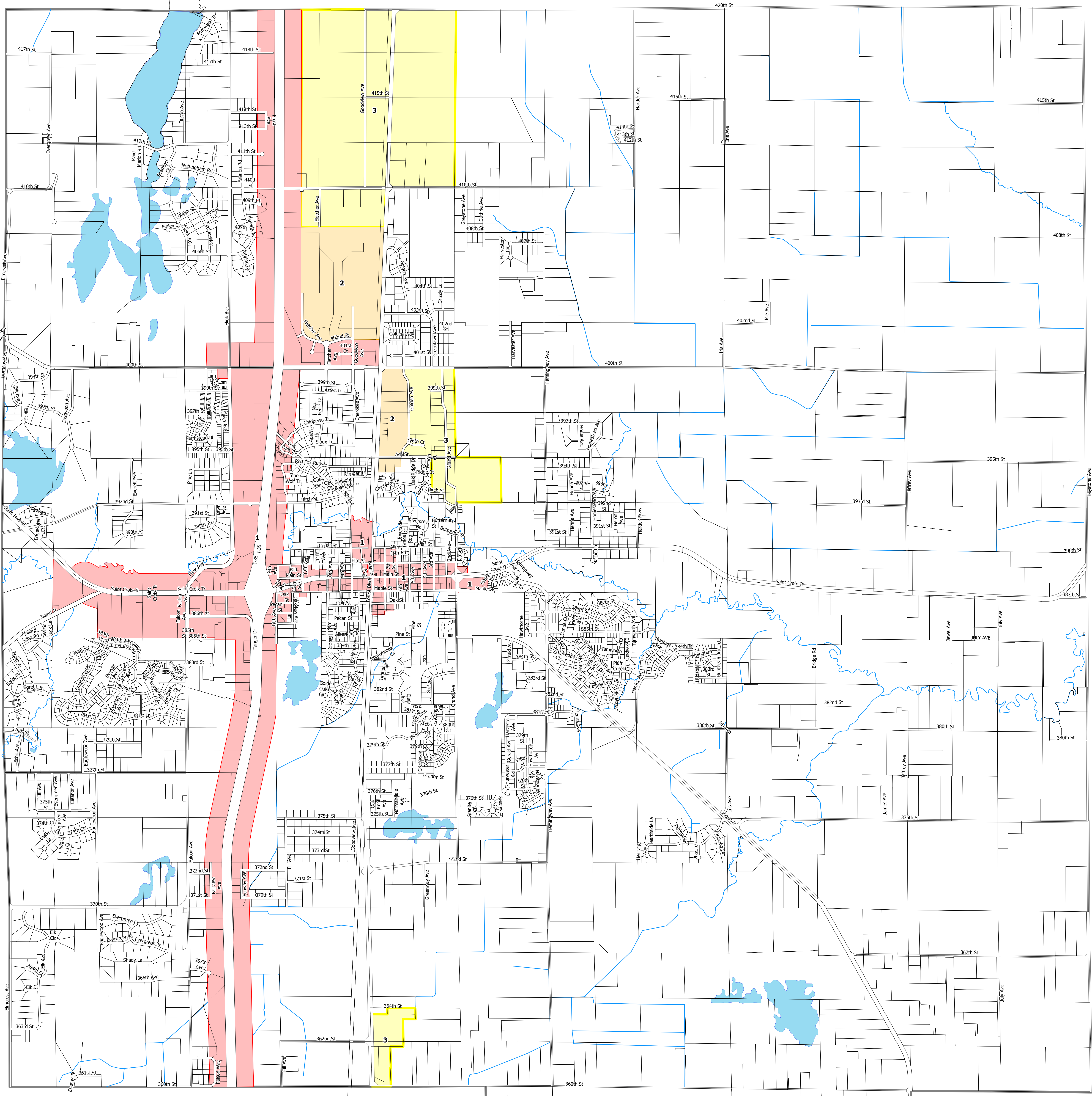
Staff is requesting feedback from the Planning Commission regarding whether the Design Standards boundary in this area should continue to follow the proposed corridor or whether the boundary should instead be adjusted to include the entirety of these parcels within a single Design Standards Zone. Aligning the boundary with parcel lines could simplify ordinance administration, provide greater certainty for future applicants, and eliminate situations where a single development is subject to multiple design districts.

If the Planning Commission supports modifying the boundary, staff can revise the draft Design Standards Map prior to preparing the final ordinance amendments for the August 4<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission Meeting.



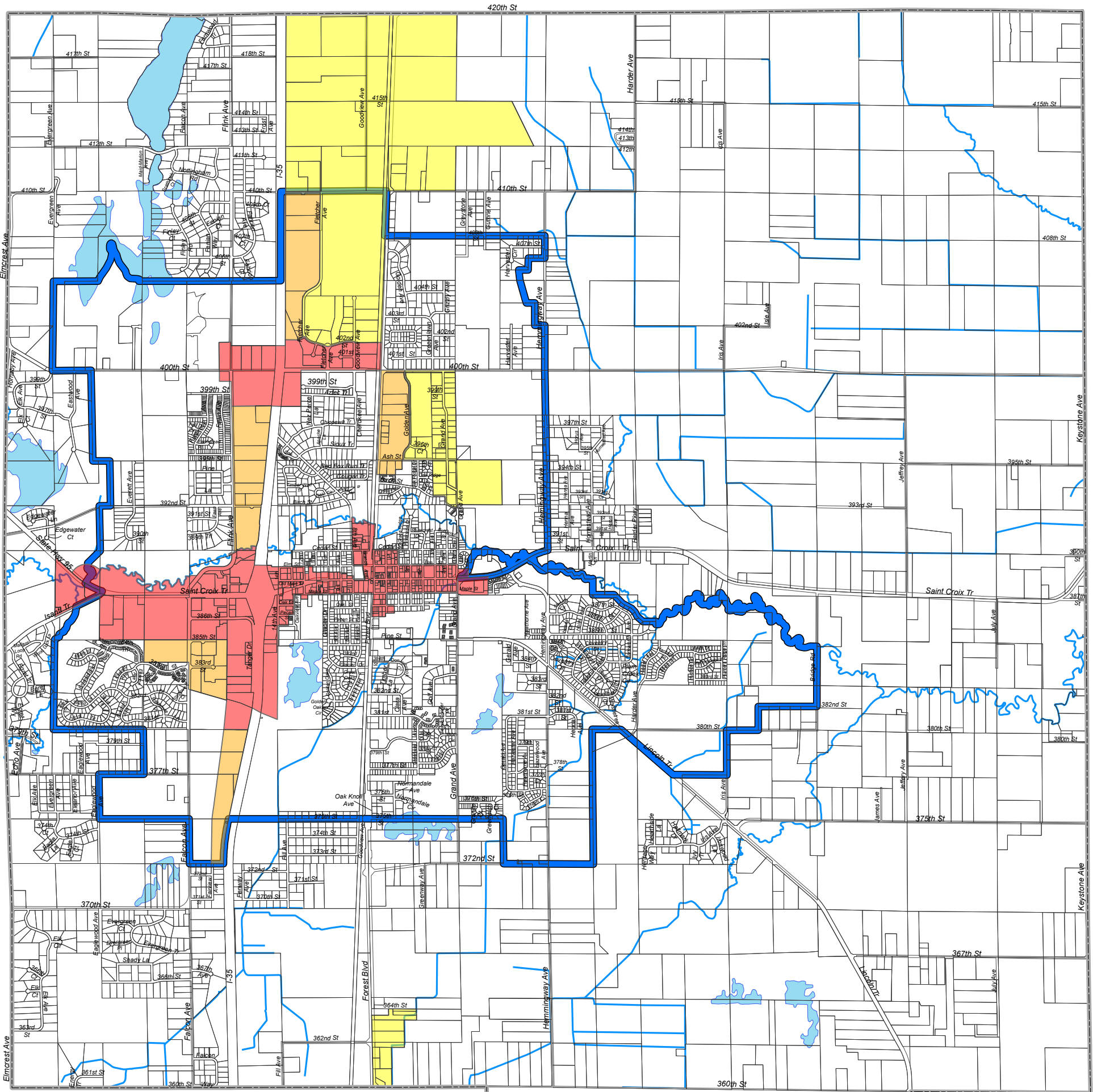
### Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the proposed Design Standards Map revisions and updated building material standards to confirm that the proposed amendments accurately reflect the policy direction provided during the June 17, 2026 Joint Planning Commission/City Council Work Session. Staff intends to provide analysis of specific map changes as PowerPoint slides during the PC Meeting. Following Planning Commission review, staff intends to prepare the formal ordinance amendments and revised Design Standards Map for future public hearing and adoption by the City Council.



Design Standards Zones

- 1
- 2
- 3



Design Standards Zones

- ZONE**
- 1
  - 2
  - 3

## Report

Discussion of Potential Text Amendment – R-3 Zoning District Maximum Density

### Overview / Background

The proposed amendment to establish a maximum residential density within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district was discussed during the June 17, 2026 Joint Planning Commission/City Council Work Session. Rather than focusing on a specific maximum density number, discussion centered on the need for additional analysis to support any future amendment to the City's density standards.

Planning Commission members and City Council members discussed the importance of establishing a density standard that is supported by objective data rather than selecting an arbitrary maximum density. Members expressed interest in understanding how different density thresholds would affect future residential development, housing opportunities, infrastructure planning, and the City's long-term growth objectives.

Staff was directed to conduct additional analysis of vacant R-3 zoned properties throughout the community, including identifying the total acreage of undeveloped R-3 land, evaluating representative development sites of varying sizes, and preparing build-out scenarios illustrating how different maximum density standards would impact potential residential unit counts. Discussion also included the importance of evaluating the rationale behind any proposed density cap and developing findings that clearly support the selected density threshold.

Rather than proceeding with a text amendment at this time, the Planning Commission and City Council agreed that additional research and analysis would provide a stronger foundation for future policy decisions. Staff will prepare updated maps, site-specific development analyses, build-out comparisons, and supporting findings to assist the Planning Commission and City Council in determining whether a maximum density should be established within the R-3 zoning district and, if so, what density standard would best align with the City's long-term planning, housing, and development objectives. This additional information will be presented at the August Planning Commission meeting for further discussion and consideration before any recommendation is forwarded to the City Council.

## Overview / Background

The proposed amendment to establish a maximum residential density of 18 units per acre within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district was considered by the Planning Commission at its June 2, 2026 public hearing. The amendment would have modified the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table by changing the current maximum base density standard from "6+ units per acre" to "6-18 units per acre" for properties zoned R-3. The stated purpose of the amendment was to provide additional predictability regarding residential development intensity while balancing neighborhood compatibility, infrastructure capacity, and long-term growth objectives.

During the public hearing, discussion focused primarily on the potential impact that a maximum density cap could have on future apartment, senior housing, and multi-family residential development within North Branch. Public comments emphasized that residential development economics have become increasingly challenging due to rising land, infrastructure, financing, and construction costs. Several participants noted that many apartment and senior housing projects require higher densities in order to spread fixed development costs across additional units and remain financially feasible. Concerns were expressed that reducing allowable density could discourage future housing investment, limit housing choices, and make it more difficult to attract developers to the community.

Discussion also highlighted broader housing policy considerations, including the City's need for additional housing opportunities for young families, workforce housing, and senior residents. Testimony indicated that North Branch continues to face challenges attracting market-rate senior housing and apartment developments due to lower rental rates relative to development costs. Concerns were raised that reducing density could increase per-unit development costs, reduce housing affordability, and potentially require additional public incentives to make future projects financially viable.

Planning Commission members discussed the role of the R-3 district as the City's primary zoning district intended to accommodate higher-density residential development, including apartments, townhomes, and other multi-family housing types. Commissioners acknowledged that existing zoning standards already regulate development intensity through building height limitations, setbacks, lot area requirements, impervious surface limitations, parking requirements, and landscaping standards. Discussion generally centered on whether an additional density cap was necessary given the existing development controls already contained within City Code.

Following the public hearing, the Planning Commission unanimously voted to deny the proposed text amendment in its entirety. Commissioners expressed concern that the proposed maximum density of 18 units per acre could unnecessarily limit future housing opportunities and reduce the financial feasibility of apartment and multi-family developments within the community. The Commission ultimately determined that maintaining the existing density standards or by raising the proposed max density of 18 would provide greater flexibility for future residential development and better support the City's long-term housing goals.

The topic was subsequently discussed by the City Council at its June 10, 2026 meeting. Council members reviewed the Planning Commission recommendation and discussed concerns related to housing affordability, future apartment development, senior housing opportunities, and maintaining flexibility within the R-3 zoning district. Additional discussion occurred regarding whether alternative density thresholds or housing-type-specific density standards may warrant future consideration.

## Density Analysis and Development Capacity

As part of the review process, staff evaluated how existing R-3 development standards may naturally limit residential density even without a maximum density cap. Although the R-3 district currently does not establish a maximum density and only requires a minimum density of six units per acre, residential development is still regulated through a variety of standards including building height, setbacks, impervious surface limitations, parking requirements, landscaping requirements, stormwater management standards, and minimum apartment unit size requirements.

To better understand the practical development potential of the R-3 district, staff analyzed a hypothetical five-acre apartment site. Under the proposed amendment of 18 units per acre, a five-acre site would be limited to approximately 90 dwelling units. Assuming the City's parking requirement of two parking stalls per dwelling unit, the development would require approximately 180 parking stalls, in addition to internal drive aisles, sidewalks, landscaping, stormwater facilities, and building footprints.

The R-3 district currently permits apartment buildings up to three stories or 50 feet in height and allows a maximum impervious surface coverage of 75 percent. The City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table also establishes minimum apartment unit sizes, including 400 square feet for efficiency/studio units, and 850 square feet for three-bedroom units in the R-3 apartment category. These minimum unit sizes affect the amount of building floor area needed and therefore influence the practical number of units that can fit on a site.

Based on these standards, staff estimates that a well-designed apartment development could reasonably achieve densities in the range of approximately 22 to 28 units per acre while still complying with parking, setback, landscaping, minimum unit size, and site design requirements. This would equate to approximately 110 to 140 dwelling units on a 5 acre site. A theoretical maximum density approaching 29 units per acre may be achievable under ideal site conditions with a favorable unit mix; however, most developments would be expected to fall below this level once stormwater, circulation, utility, landscaping, building layout, and bedroom mix are incorporated into the site design.

<b>Density</b>	<b>Approximate Units on 5 Acres</b>
18 Units Per Acre	90 Units
22 Units Per Acre	110 Units
24 Units Per Acre	120 Units
28 Units Per Acre	140 Units
29 Units Per Acre	145 Units

This analysis indicates that a density cap of 18 units per acre could reduce the development potential of a typical five-acre apartment site by approximately 20 to 55 dwelling units compared to what may otherwise be achievable under existing zoning standards. For a community with a limited supply of apartment and senior housing developments, this reduction may affect the financial feasibility of future projects and the City's ability to expand housing opportunities. Conversely, a density cap could provide additional predictability regarding

development intensity and neighborhood impacts. The City Council may wish to consider whether an alternative density threshold, such as 22, 24, or 28 units per acre, would better balance housing production goals with concerns regarding development intensity.

It is important to note that the densities discussed in this analysis represent potential maximum development capacities rather than expected development outcomes. Establishing a maximum density simply sets an upper limit on the number of units that may be developed on a site; it does not require or guarantee that a development will be built at that density. Actual densities will vary significantly based on site size, parcel configuration, environmental constraints, stormwater requirements, market demand, building design, parking needs, and the type of housing proposed. As a result, many apartment, townhome, senior housing, or mixed residential developments may be constructed at densities well below the maximum allowed by the zoning district.

Staff notes that estimating a practical maximum density is inherently challenging because actual development capacity is highly dependent on site-specific design decisions that occur during the engineering and architectural design process. Planning staff are responsible for reviewing and evaluating development proposals for compliance with City Code rather than designing projects or preparing detailed site layouts. Factors such as building configuration, unit mix, parking layout, stormwater design, grading, utilities, open space, and market conditions can significantly affect the number of units that can ultimately be accommodated on a site. As a result, the density estimates provided in this report should be viewed as planning-level approximations intended to assist policy discussions rather than definitive development capacities.

## **Options for Consideration**

Based on the information presented, the City Council may wish to consider the following options:

1. Maintain the current standard of 6+ units per acre with no maximum density cap.
2. Establish a maximum density of 18 units per acre as originally proposed.
3. Establish a higher maximum density threshold (e.g., 22, 24, or 28 units per acre) to provide additional development flexibility while still creating a defined upper limit.

## **Report**

Discussion of Potential Text Amendment – Side Setbacks for Residential Zoning Districts

### **Overview / Background**

The proposed amendment to increase residential interior side yard setbacks from six (6) feet to ten (10) feet was discussed during the June 17, 2026 Joint Planning Commission/City Council Work Session. During the discussion, Planning Commission members, City Council members, and City staff reviewed the potential implementation challenges associated with modifying the City's current setback standards, including impacts to existing neighborhoods, approved developments, redevelopment opportunities, and future housing types.

After reviewing the implementation options and surrounding community research, the Planning Commission and City Council requested additional analysis before determining whether to proceed with a zoning ordinance amendment. Specifically, members requested that City staff prepare a citywide map and supporting analysis identifying existing residential homes that are currently located within six (6) feet of an interior side property line. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand the number and geographic distribution of homes that could be affected by a future increase in side yard setbacks and to provide additional context regarding the potential impacts of any ordinance change.

City staff will prepare the requested mapping and analysis for a future Planning Commission meeting. The information will assist the Planning Commission and City Council in evaluating the practical implications of increasing minimum interior side yard setbacks and determining whether additional ordinance amendments or alternative implementation strategies should be considered before moving forward with a proposed text amendment.

## Overview / Background

The proposed amendment to increase minimum residential interior side yard setbacks from six (6) feet to ten (10) feet was considered by the Planning Commission at its June 2, 2026 public hearing. During the discussion, several residents expressed concerns regarding the potential impacts on existing homes and neighborhoods that were developed under the current six-foot setback standard. Residents noted that many existing homes could become legal nonconforming structures if the amendment were applied citywide, raising questions about future home additions, reconstruction following casualty loss, property values, and the long-term implications for established neighborhoods. Residents generally supported maintaining the current standards for existing developments and emphasized that homeowners purchased and constructed their homes in reliance on the regulations in place at the time.

Representatives from the development community also raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposed amendment on future residential development. Discussion focused on existing preliminary plats, concept plans, and master-planned developments that were designed around the current six-foot setback requirement. Developers indicated that increasing setbacks could reduce buildable width on lots, require redesign of approved development plans, reduce overall lot yield, and increase housing costs. Concerns were also expressed regarding the feasibility of applying the amendment to developments that have already received approvals based on the existing standards.

Throughout the discussion, Planning Commission members acknowledged the City Council's stated intent that any increase in side yard setbacks would primarily be directed toward future development on vacant land rather than impacting existing homes or previously approved neighborhoods. As a potential alternative to a citywide amendment, discussion included the possibility of creating a new residential zoning district or applying revised setback standards only to future zoning districts and undeveloped areas. This approach would allow the City to achieve larger setbacks in future residential development while minimizing impacts to existing neighborhoods, platted lots, and developments that were designed under the current six-foot setback standard.

The topic was discussed by the City Council at its June 10, 2026 meeting. During that discussion, Council members acknowledged the concerns raised by residents, builders, and developers regarding potential impacts to existing homes, approved developments, and future residential growth. Rather than taking action on the proposed amendment at that time, the City Council directed staff to bring the matter forward for further discussion at a joint Planning Commission/City Council Work Session scheduled for June 17, 2026. The purpose of the work session is to evaluate potential implementation options, including approaches that would focus increased setback requirements on future development and vacant land while minimizing impacts to existing neighborhoods, previously approved plats, and developments designed under the current six-foot setback standard.

**Analysis:**

To provide additional context for the discussion, staff reviewed residential side yard setback requirements in several surrounding communities, including Princeton, Isanti, Forest Lake, and East Bethel. The research focused on minimum interior side yard setbacks within residential zoning districts commonly used for single-family development. While zoning district structures and development patterns vary between communities, the comparison provides a general understanding of how North Branch's current setback standards compare to those of neighboring jurisdictions. The following table summarizes the residential interior side yard setback requirements identified during staff's review.

<b>City</b>	<b>Residential District</b>	<b>Minimum Interior Side Setback</b>
<b>North Branch</b>	R-1 Single-Family	6 ft
	R-2 Single-Family	6 ft
	R-3 Single-Family	6 ft
	R-2 / R-3 Attached Housing	6 ft (attached portion of unit)
<b>Princeton</b>	R-1	10 ft
	R-2	10 ft (living area), 5 ft (garage)
	R-3	10 ft
<b>Isanti</b>	R-1	10 ft
	R-2	10 ft
	R-3	10 ft
<b>Forest Lake</b>	Mixed Single-Family Residential	7.5 ft
	SF (Single-Family) District	10 ft
	RR (Rural Residential)	20 ft
<b>East Bethel</b>	R-1	10 ft
	R-2	10 ft

The comparison chart indicates that North Branch's current six-foot interior side yard setback is generally smaller than the setback standards utilized by many surrounding communities, where ten-foot setbacks are more common for traditional single-family residential development. While these standards provide a useful benchmark for comparison, it is important to recognize that zoning district requirements represent only the base development standards within each community. Many residential developments are approved through Planned Unit Development (PUD) processes, negotiated development agreements, or other flexible zoning tools that may allow modifications to dimensional standards based on the specific design, layout, and objectives of a project. As a result, the setback requirements shown in the chart should be viewed as general zoning standards rather than an indication that all residential developments within those communities are constructed with identical setbacks.

While North Branch's six-foot side yard setback is generally smaller than the standards utilized in many surrounding communities, it is important to recognize that many of those communities established their setback requirements in conjunction with their lot width, lot size, and subdivision design standards. In many cases, the setback standards were incorporated into the original design of new neighborhoods rather than applied to existing neighborhoods after development had occurred. As a result, direct comparisons between communities should be considered within the context of each city's overall zoning and subdivision framework.

### Option for Consideration – Creation of an R-10 Residential Zoning District

As an alternative to amending setback requirements within existing residential zoning districts, the City could consider creating a new residential zoning district, tentatively titled R-10 Residential, that would establish a minimum interior side yard setback of ten (10) feet for future residential development.

Under this approach, existing residential zoning districts and neighborhoods would retain the current development standards under which they were approved and constructed. Existing homes, platted lots, and residential subdivisions developed with 6 foot side yard setbacks would not be affected, thereby avoiding the creation of legal nonconforming structures and minimizing impacts to homeowners who relied upon the City's existing zoning regulations when purchasing or constructing their homes.

The R-10 District could be applied through rezoning to vacant or undeveloped residentially guided land intended for future residential development. This would allow the City to achieve its objective of increased separation between homes, enhanced privacy, and a lower-density neighborhood character in future developments while maintaining consistency within existing neighborhoods.

One consideration with this approach is the treatment of previously approved preliminary plats, master planned developments, and phased subdivisions that were designed utilizing the current 6 foot side yard setback standard but have not yet completed all phases of development. Staff is currently reviewing existing approvals and development agreements to identify projects that may be affected by a future zoning district change and to evaluate whether transitional provisions, exemptions, or grandfathering language may be appropriate.

#### Draft Zoning District Language:

R-10 Residential District

#### **Purpose and Intent**

The R-10 Residential District is intended to provide for low-density residential development characterized by increased separation between homes, enhanced privacy, and larger side yard areas. The district is designed to accommodate future residential growth while promoting neighborhood character, improved access for maintenance and utilities, and compatibility with lower-density development patterns. The district is intended primarily for undeveloped and future residential growth areas and is not intended to alter development standards applicable to existing residential neighborhoods.

## Permitted Uses

The R-10 District shall permit the same residential uses, accessory uses, and conditional uses as permitted within the R-1 Single-Family Residential District unless otherwise specifically provided within this chapter.

## Dimensional Standards

<u>Standard</u>	<u>R-10 Requirement</u>
Front Yard Setback (Interior)	Same as R-1 (30 ft)
Lot Width (Corner)	Same as R-1 (80 ft)
Lot Width (Front)	Same as R-1 (80 ft)
Rear Yard Setback (Interior)	Same as R-1 (30 ft)
Rear Yard Setback (Corner)	Same as R-1 (15 ft)
Side Yard Setback (Interior)	<b>10 feet</b>
Side Yard Setback (Corner)	Same as R-1 (30 ft)
Lot Depth Minimum	Same as R-1 (100 ft)
Minimum Lot Size	Same as R-1 (12,000 sq ft)
Maximum Base Density	Same as R-1 (1-4 units per acre)
Minimum Building Size	Same as R-1 (800 sq ft)

### *Implementation Considerations – Creation of an R-10 Zoning District*

While the creation of an R-10 Residential District could provide a mechanism for requiring 10-foot side yard setbacks on future residential development without creating nonconforming structures in existing neighborhoods, several implementation considerations remain. One consideration is how the City addresses future redevelopment of properties that are currently developed and zoned under existing residential districts. If an existing home is removed and the property is later subdivided or replatted for new residential development, the underlying zoning district may still permit six-foot side yard setbacks unless additional ordinance provisions are adopted. The City may wish to consider whether newly created residential lots, replats, or redevelopment projects should automatically comply with the R-10 standards regardless of the property's previous zoning designation.

An additional consideration is how increased setback requirements may impact future housing types and development patterns. Many residential zoning districts currently utilize six-foot side yard setbacks to accommodate narrower lots, compact single-family neighborhoods, twin homes, patio homes, and attached housing products. If the R-10 District is structured similarly to the existing R-1 District with larger side yard setbacks, certain housing types may become more difficult to develop without increasing lot widths, reducing overall lot yield, or modifying building designs. This could affect development feasibility, housing affordability, and the City's ability to accommodate a variety of future housing options. As part of the work session discussion, the Planning Commission and City Council may wish to consider whether the R-10 District should be limited to traditional low-density single-family development or whether alternative dimensional standards should be established for other residential housing types.

## Option for Consideration – Residential Setback Overlay District

As an alternative to amending setback requirements citywide or creating a new residential zoning district, the City could consider establishing a Residential Setback Overlay District (RSO). Under this approach, the City's existing residential zoning districts would remain unchanged, while an overlay district would be applied to designated future residential development areas. The overlay would modify only the minimum interior side yard setback requirement, increasing the setback from 6 feet to 10 feet, while all other development standards, permitted uses, density requirements, and dimensional standards would continue to be governed by the underlying zoning district.

One advantage of an overlay district is that it allows the City to achieve its objective of increasing spacing between future homes without affecting existing neighborhoods, homes, or platted subdivisions that were developed under the current six-foot setback standard. Because the underlying zoning districts would remain unchanged, existing residential properties would not become legal nonconforming structures and would retain the development rights currently associated with their zoning designation.

The overlay district could be applied to vacant residentially guided land, future subdivision plats, planned unit developments, or other residential developments approved after the effective date of the ordinance. This approach would allow the City to establish larger side yard setbacks in future residential neighborhoods while preserving existing development patterns throughout the community. Several implementation considerations remain. Staff is currently reviewing existing preliminary plats, approved master plans, and phased residential developments that may have been designed utilizing the current six-foot setback standard. The City may wish to determine whether future phases of previously approved developments should continue under the standards in effect at the time of approval or whether undeveloped phases should be subject to the overlay district requirements. Additionally, consideration should be given to whether the overlay would apply only to detached single-family residential development or whether other housing types such as twin homes, patio homes, and townhomes should also be subject to the increased setback requirement.

### Draft Overlay District Language

#### **Residential Setback Overlay District (RSO)**

##### **Purpose and Intent.**

The purpose of the Residential Setback Overlay District is to establish increased side yard setbacks within designated future residential development areas while preserving the existing development pattern of established neighborhoods. The overlay is intended to provide greater separation between residential structures, enhance privacy, improve access for maintenance and utilities, and promote a lower-density neighborhood character without creating nonconformities for existing residential properties.

##### **Applicability.**

The Residential Setback Overlay District may be applied by the City Council to vacant residentially guided land, future residential subdivisions, replats, planned unit developments, or other residential development areas approved after the effective date of this ordinance. The overlay district shall supplement the regulations of the underlying zoning district.

##### **Overlay Standards.**

Within the Residential Setback Overlay District, the minimum interior side yard setback for detached single-family dwellings shall be ten (10) feet. All other dimensional standards, permitted uses, conditional uses, density requirements, and development regulations shall be governed by the underlying zoning district unless otherwise specifically modified by this chapter.

## **Existing Development.**

The Residential Setback Overlay District shall not apply to existing residential structures, existing lots of record, or previously developed residential subdivisions unless otherwise expressly approved by the City Council through rezoning or subdivision approval.

## **Implementation and Regulatory Considerations**

Should the Planning Commission and City Council choose to pursue increased residential side yard setbacks, additional amendments and policy considerations may be necessary beyond simply modifying the setback requirement within the zoning ordinance. Depending on the implementation approach selected, staff may need to evaluate and update several sections of the City's regulatory framework to ensure consistency between adopted plans, zoning regulations, and future development review processes.

Potential amendments and updates may include:

### **Comprehensive Plan**

- Review residential land use goals, policies, and implementation strategies to determine whether larger side yard setbacks are consistent with the City's vision for future residential development patterns, housing diversity, density, and neighborhood character.
- Evaluate whether future growth areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan should be developed under modified setback standards.

### **Future Land Use Map**

- If a new residential zoning district is created, consideration may be given to whether future land use classifications or growth areas should be modified to reflect areas intended for larger lot or lower-density residential development.
- Determine whether specific residential growth areas should be identified for application of new zoning districts or overlay districts.

### **Permitted Use Table**

- Review whether all residential housing types should be subject to increased setback requirements.
- Evaluate whether detached single-family dwellings, twin homes, patio homes, townhomes, and other residential housing products should be regulated differently under any new zoning district or overlay district.
- Determine whether amendments to residential use classifications or district applicability are warranted.

### **Dimensional and Design Standards Table**

- Modify minimum interior side yard setback requirements as directed.
- Evaluate whether corresponding changes to minimum lot widths, lot sizes, density standards, or other dimensional requirements are necessary to maintain development flexibility and accommodate various housing types.
- Determine whether separate standards should be established for detached and attached residential development.

### **Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments**

- Establish applicability standards for any new zoning district or overlay district.
- Address redevelopment scenarios, replats, and newly created lots.
- Determine how previously approved developments, master-planned communities, and future development phases should be treated.

- Develop transition provisions, grandfathering language, and nonconformity standards as necessary.

As staff has evaluated potential implementation options, it has become apparent that increasing side yard setbacks involves broader policy and regulatory considerations than a standalone dimensional standard amendment.



**NORTH BRANCH**  
**City of North Branch**  
**Staff Report**

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

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

**Date: 07/02/2026**

**Board & Commission: Planning Commission**

**Subject: Comprehensive Plan Update**

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

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

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

We are establishing the following timeline for the process:

The committee met on February 18, March 18, April 15 and May 20th to discuss 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, July 15th at 6pm at City Hall.

- **April 15, 2026:** Housing, Transportation, Utilities, Public Safety
- **May 20, 2026:** Presentation of the Comprehensive Plan review results to the Planning Commission for public hearing and consideration.

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

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

- Summary of the feedback forms from the community questionnaires

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

**Requested Action**

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

**Voting Requirements:**

**Voting Options      Simple Majority Super Majority**

# 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.



# 3

## LAND USE & GROWTH

### Introduction

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

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

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

#### USES

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

#### RELATIONSHIPS

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

#### ACTIONS

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

### Figure 3-1: Existing Land Use

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

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

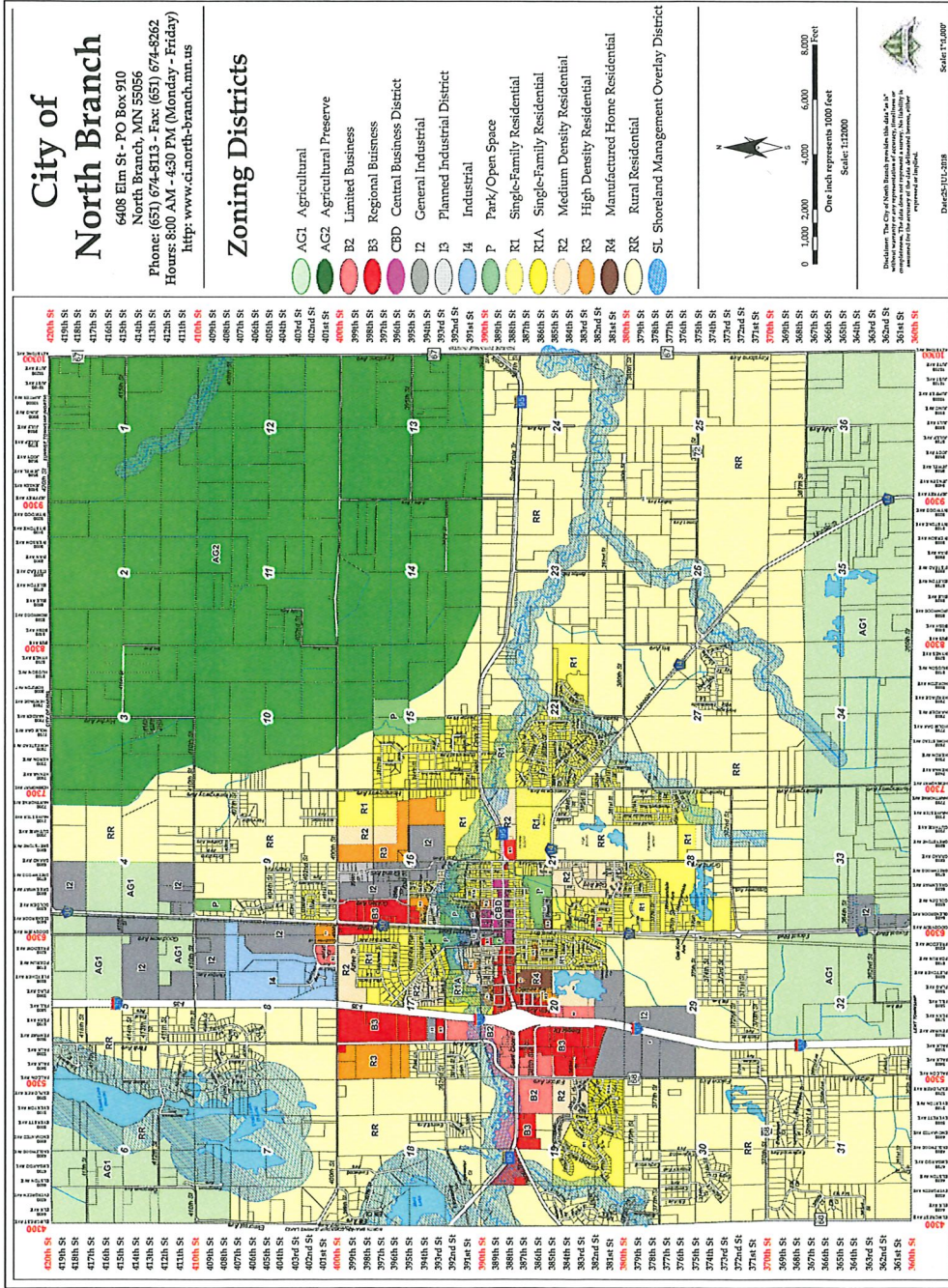


Table 3-A: Summary of Existing Land Use - 2018 summarizes the amount and type of existing land uses designated (whether or not fully developed) in North Branch.

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

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

Figure 3-1:  
Existing Zoning



## *Existing Zoning*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Overlay Districts**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *Vision for Land Use*

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

### **RESIDENTIAL USES**

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

### **COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL USES**

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

### **PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL**

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

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

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

# GOAL 1

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



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

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

### **OBJECTIVE 1.1**

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

#### *Policy 1.1.1*

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

#### *Policy 1.1.2*

*Connect businesses with façade improvement grants and loans.*

#### *Policy 1.1.3*

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

### **OBJECTIVE 1.2**

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

#### *Policy 1.2.1*

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

#### *Policy 1.2.2*

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

#### *Policy 1.2.3*

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

#### *Policy 1.2.4*

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

*Policy 1.2.5*

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

*Policy 1.2.6*

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

**OBJECTIVE 1.3**

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

*Policy 1.3.1*

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

*Policy 1.3.2*

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

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

*Policy 1.4.1*

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

*Policy 1.4.2*

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

*Policy 1.4.3*

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

## Land Use Plan

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

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

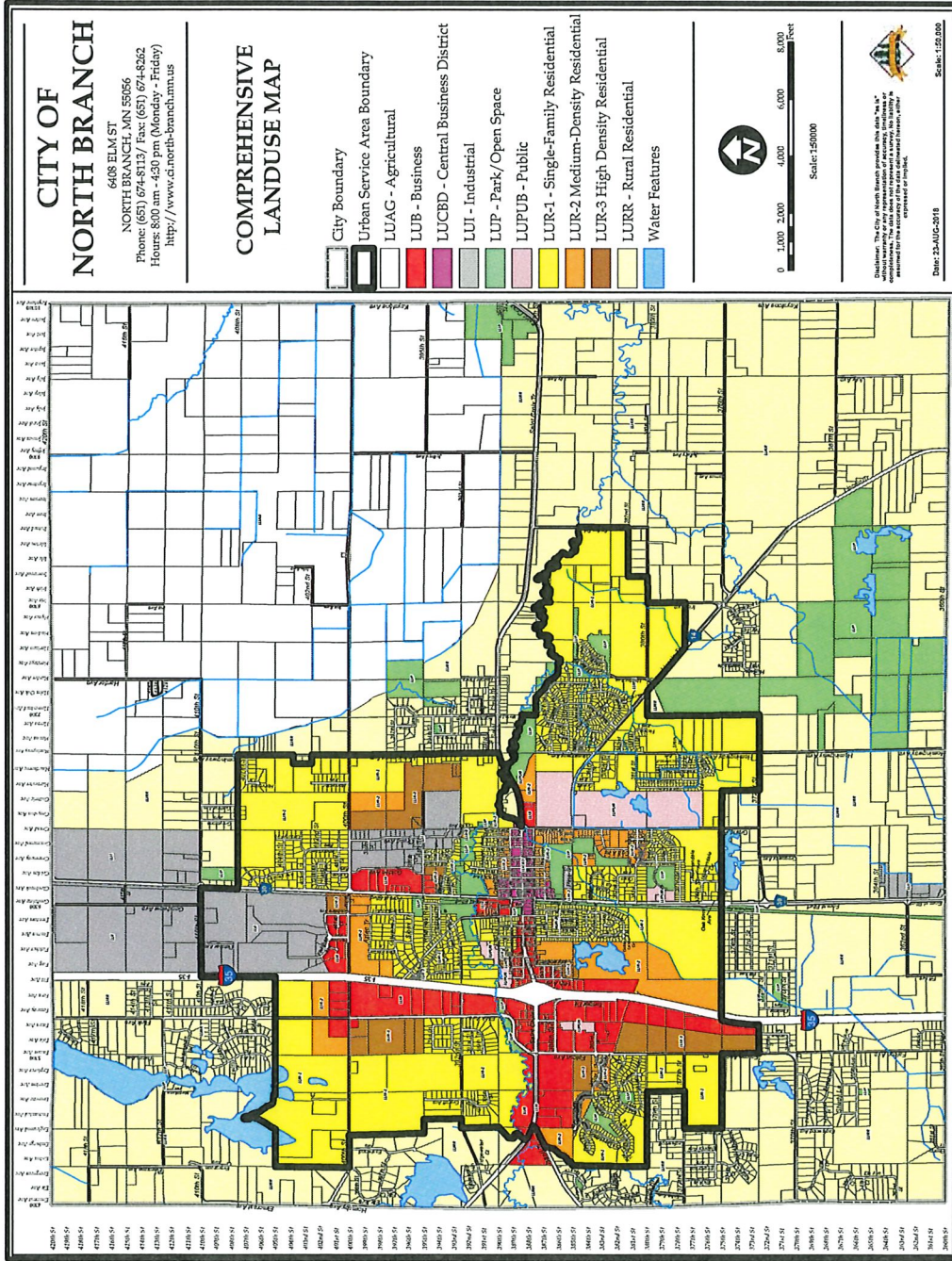
**Table 3 - B: Summary of Future Land Use**

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

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



Figure 3-2:  
Future Land Use



## *Residential*

### **Rural Residential**

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

### **Low Density Residential**

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

### **Medium Density Residential**

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

### **High Density Residential**

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

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

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

### *Agriculture*

#### **Agriculture**

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

### *Commercial*

#### **Downtown Business**

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

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

#### **General Business**

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

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

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

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

### **Industrial**

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

### **Public/Institutional**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

