

Chapter 7: Land Use and Growth

Introduction:

The land use chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is often seen as the “heart of the Comprehensive Plan”, as it guides development of the Official Zoning Map and City through placement of land uses by use type and density. It also guides future land use, which in turn becomes reality through development of residential, commercial and industrial areas. Therefore, in order for the City of Isanti to have guided deliberate development with proper placement of transportation and utility systems, evaluation and planning for land use is necessary for the future community.

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan studied existing and proposed land uses in the future land areas of the City. This update will focus on land use within the planning area boundary as defined by the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. This planning boundary is defined as land south of 301st Avenue, west to the Rum River, south to the Athens Township line and east to Durant Street. It should be noted that land uses in the City do extend beyond planning boundaries, as development in the City already extends south into Athens Township.

Land Use Inventory:

The land use inventory and Existing Land Use Map (See Figure 7-1, attached at the end of this Chapter) have been updated to reflect current development patterns. The acreages are reflected in the figure below. The development has followed existing planning and zoning requirements, which were based on the 2007 comprehensive plan. Areas that were annexed in that time period have been assigned a zoning classification based on their land use. Most of those properties are residential in nature and have been reclassified from rural residential to low density residential.

Intrinsic Suitability:

The existing land use plan is based on evaluation of proposed land uses and the “intrinsic suitability” of the land use in light of the natural systems and existing land use in the planning area boundary. Areas that have been developed for agricultural, rural residential, recreational, or rural commercial have already been altered. These areas have been evaluated for suitable future land use and densities. These systems and recommendations have been discussed in Chapter 5 and are included in the Future Land Use Plan.

Table 7-1

Existing Land Use - 2019

City of Isanti Planning Area

Land Use Category	<u>Gross Acres</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Agriculture	4,642.45	49.64%
Rural Residential	1,077.74	11.52%
Low Density Residential	641.82	6.86%
Medium Density Residential	160.70	1.72%
High Density Residential	36.63	0.39%
CBD	4.26	0.05%
General Commercial	120.15	1.28%
Industrial	289.92	3.10%
Public/Semi Public	216.03	2.31%
Golf Course	235.90	2.52%
Open Space	1,444.19	15.44%
Park	168.78	1.81%
Vacant	313.85	3.36%
Total	9,352.42	100%

Source: City of Isanti

Land Use Designations:

The following designations are used to define land use in the city and land within the planning area boundaries:

Agricultural – Current agricultural use encompasses 4,642.45 acres, which is 49.54 percent of the total land use in the planning area boundary. This is the largest land use type and signifies all agricultural land uses, of which the majority are in crop production.

Rural Residential – Rural residential use typically identifies single-family homes on large lots. The properties range in size from 1 to 10 acres. The use is typically residential, but some properties have an ancillary home occupation or business use.

Low Density Residential – The areas on the updated in the Existing Land Use Map (Figure X) that identify low density residential signify the next tier of single-family residential uses on lots of 8,500 to 15,000 square feet. This use of developed land is the next highest at 641.82 acres. This land use also signifies single family residential uses on larger lots that have been brought in to the city corporate limits.

Medium Density Residential – medium density residential includes single-family homes on traditional “grid” blocks to attached dwellings, such as twin homes or townhomes.

High Density Residential – This designation includes areas for multifamily residential structures that range from designated townhouse developments to large multi-unit buildings. Such uses are typically located along major traffic corridors.

Central Business District – This area is defined as the traditional downtown commercial district in the city. This area, developed next to the rail corridor, has historic commercial structures and service commercial uses.

Commercial – This commercial designation has the largest amount of acreage and broadly defines general commercial uses, which range from mini malls to free standing commercial buildings with a variety of commercial uses. The area is adjacent to the Highway 65 and major transportation corridors in the city. A significant amount of vacant commercial land is available and adjacent to Highway 65 Corridor.

Industrial – The City has a large area that has access to the Highway 65 corridor that is used for light industrial uses. The industrial park and land guided for industrial development are 289.92 acres of the total land use area. The area contains both “shovel ready lots” for expansion, as well as large acreages that could be utilized for industrial development.

Golf Course – The golf course is approximately 270 acres or 2.52% planning area land use.

Public/Semi-Public – This designation includes both lands and community facilities that are owned or operate by the governmental organizations.

Park/Open Space – Parks and open spaces are an extremely valuable part of the existing land use in the City. In recent years, the City has added two larger parks, Legacy Park and River Bluff Preserve, as well as land for small neighborhood parks. Currently the City has 168.78 acres in this designation.

Existing Growth Patterns:

Overall, the City has continued growth trends since completion of the 2007 comprehensive plan. Although residential development came to a virtual standstill during the great recession; post-recession Isanti has enjoyed substantial residential, commercial and industrial development. The reason that drove earlier growth is still the same today. Homeowners are seeking value in purchase of a new home in Isanti. Residential development within the past 5 years has basically been infill on platted lots and planned areas that were in place prior to the recession. The inventory of open lots has virtually been exhausted. Future growth will come from new subdivisions. This update is timely from the perspective of rechecking past assumptions and updating land use directives, as new land is considered for subdivision and development.

Growth is also predicated on placement of infrastructure. Investments previously made by the City in main line extensions to the east side of Highway 65, and in water and wastewater treatment facilities have allowed the City to achieve the growth that it enjoys today. Capacity remains for additional residential growth to the east, with some potential infill to the south and northwest. While plant and system capacity may be sufficient for residential growth within the time period of this update; planned facility and system updates will be necessary to both meet environmental and licensing requirements, as well as provide capacity for the growing city.

Future Land Use and Growth:

The future land use plan (Figure 7-2, attached at the end of this Chapter) is developed from three source documents: existing land use, natural areas and growth areas maps. The land use plan reflects the direction and goals of the City as to future development. It guides citizens and developers with respect to residential, commercial and industrial development. The plan uses land use designations that are common between this and past comprehensive plans. The plan forms the basis for zoning and the implementation of land use and zoning as properties become part of the City. As discussed in the prior comprehensive plan the land use plan does the following: “1) It reflects existing development and generalized land use patterns; 2) It addresses the need to plan for orderly expansion of urban development into areas that are most efficiently served by public infrastructure and utilities; and 3) The plan recognizes and places emphasis on the natural environment.”

Basic Planning Provisions:

As recognized and discussed in the past comprehensive plan, implementation of the land use plan is based on the following principles:

- Zone existing and new property in accordance with this plan.
- Ensure that major and collector streets have access to existing and new development in the City and growth areas.
- Guide development to areas that have accessibility to utilities in a phased manner.
- Prepare and plan for orderly expansion beyond the current City boundary into the growth area.
- Connect existing and new residential neighborhoods, parks, and community facilities with pedestrian access and trail systems.
- Work cooperatively with surrounding townships and the county in planning for trails, road and street networks, and other cross jurisdictional systems.
- Create a capital improvements plan to prepare for the development of additional facilities to provide utility capacity and infrastructure to newly developing areas.

Physical Character of the City:

Listed below are the basic four elements that define the physical character of the City. These were taken from the existing plan and amended for this comprehensive plan update.

1. City Development Pattern and Neighborhood Form

- Continue redevelopment of the downtown and promote connections to adjacent commercial development. Encourage mixed use development in the district.
- Consider more compact development densities as appropriate in new and redeveloped residential areas to spread infrastructure costs.
- New residential areas and neighborhoods should be developed in harmony with natural areas and systems.
- Encourage green residential development and retain connections with natural systems.
- Guide development and density to provide economical extension of city utilities.
- As appropriate, integrate lower density multi-family, small lot single-family, and life cycle housing in residential developments.
- Develop high density multi-family housing along major or collector road systems in conjunction with commercial development.

2. Transportation Facilities:

- Develop sidewalk and trail systems to connect newly developed residential areas to existing systems for access to commercial, community facility, parks and regional systems.
- Connect street and pedestrian systems between new residential developments
- Implement a transportation plan that includes signal and road capacity upgrades as the City develops.

3. Open Space/Community Facilities:

- Strategically locate city and neighborhood parks and open space
- Ensure connection of natural areas and wildlife corridors.
- Connect all jurisdictional community facilities by sidewalks and trails
- Continue to implement street, sidewalk and trail maintenance plans and upgrades as required.

4. Commercial Areas:

- Work to implement transportation systems and access to land in the Highway 65 commercial district to encourage development.
- As needed, create neighborhood commercial areas to serve residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage mixed use and redevelopment in an expanded Downtown District.

- In the downtown district, encourage architectural styles and building construction that honor the history and place that is historic downtown Isanti.

Future Land Use Designations:

It is the intent that these future land use designations will guide the use of the land in their respective locations, as well as any policies regarding their future development, zoning or subdivision. These policies will provide the legal basis for development of the land as per this comprehensive plan.

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan identified 14 land use categories for the Future Land Use Plan. These categories will be continued in this comprehensive plan update. An abbreviated description, as well as any additional considerations or discussion is provided as follows.

Agriculture – These are existing active agricultural lands and facilities that will likely remain in production beyond the timeframe of this comprehensive plan update. It should be noted that through the county land use plan and regulations, rural residential development will likely continue as some landowners maximize the development potential of their property. The City should work with county and township zoning authorities on joint planning efforts to review and comment on proposed rural residential development.

Rural Residential – The rural residential designation identifies large lot subdivisions or existing residential development in the planning area that are outside of city boundaries. The developments are 1 acre or larger properties. Provision for utility service, especially sanitary sewer service should be planned for. In the event that there are multiple properties in a rural subdivision, joint on-site collection and treatment systems should be considered as an interim step until the City system is extended to their area. Clustering of housing should also be encouraged to preserve open space and natural areas.

Low Density Residential – This category identifies both existing and potential future low density residential development within the timeframe of this comprehensive plan update. Low density single family residential land use will take up the majority of new land acreage added to the City. Housing density in this classification is 0-3 units per acre. This is in conformance with the 2007 comprehensive plan and a density of 3 units per acre would allow reasonable retention of natural systems as land is developed for this purpose. Allowances for greater density by planned unit developments should be considered to maximize the amount of land that could be left in natural state. This is also beneficial when the need for storm water retention or flood plain systems (along existing creeks/waterways) is required.

Medium Density Residential – Medium family residential remains defined as areas in the City that could accommodate residential units in the densities of 4-8 units per acre, not to exceed 10 units per acre. Structures in this classification consist of twin homes and duplexes, detached and attached townhomes. This classification provides life cycle housing opportunities in the City, with such housing seen as both first time buyer and empty nest / senior housing options.

This use also has potential for planned unit development, with clustering of housing units to preserve natural areas and systems. Placement of this land use should be in conjunction with both transportation and utility systems that have capacity to handle this use. Those factors should be considered in any review of proposed development plan.

High Density Residential – Traditionally, this classification was used to define multifamily units with densities of 10-12 units per acre or more. Current zoning has maximum densities at 12 units per acre. Development of these facilities is preferred closer to retail commercial and commercial/service areas. High density residential also needs adequate transportation corridors and utilities. The siting of increased density housing provides a clientele and synergy for development of retail and service commercial. This use contributes to life cycle housing for both young residents who cannot afford a home or empty nesters / seniors who desire to rent versus owning housing. Creativity in design and possibly a mixed use development can be used to produce housing with site amenities that benefit those living there and the greater community. The planned unit development process is a way to encourage design creativity with these developments.

General Commercial – General commercial uses include auto oriented retail commercial and service commercial uses. That includes developments and businesses such as big box retail, food and grocery stores, strip malls, specialty retail, and fuel/convenience stores. Much of this land use is guided next to the Highway 65 corridor and on Heritage Boulevard (near the intersection of both roadways). Predominately oriented for automobile accessibility, the developments and buildings are of such scale and magnitude that design is very important. The City has prepared and adopted a Highway 65 overlay corridor that is guiding design of buildings and developments in the corridor. The east side of Highway 65 has had infrastructure investments made that need to be utilized to maximize commercial development in that area. Existing and future residential development on the peripheral areas of this district will assist in gaining commercial development. Since the last comprehensive plan, there has been additional development of a medical clinic, senior care facility and physical therapy facility in the district. Additional uses of this nature may be added as the areas develop.

Central Business District – This category represents both the historic downtown areas and adjacent areas that include a mix of residential, commercial and industrial uses. The City has recognized the housing and industrial areas and their interrelationship through implementation of zoning sub districts. The industrial area is part of historic Isanti and was sited along the BNSF railroad to utilize that transportation corridor. As discussed earlier, commercial uses have spread east from the historic downtown, along and between Heritage Boulevard and Main Street. This essentially creates a larger commercial corridor in the area from both a land use and economic basis.

Neighborhood Commercial – This designation anticipates a growing city that will need small scale commercial districts to serve residential areas that develop outside of the central part of the City. One example of such a commercial node is convenience station / mall located on the northeast corner of Whiskey Road NW and Heritage Boulevard intersection. Uses include fuel/convenience stores, small groceries, restaurants and specialty retail. The design and scale

of size of the buildings are typically single level to match development in the area. Areas for this designation will be primarily located in the eastern residential development areas of the City, relating to future road systems.

Mixed Use – Mixed use classification in its essence is a combination of both business and residential uses. Commercial uses could be free-standing, but most often include upper story residential units. New housing units can range from small one level residential, to townhouses and apartments. Density for housing can range from 10 units per acre and above. Often these are planned developments with unique architectural and design features. Site design typically incorporates both pedestrian and vehicular transportation systems and on-site amenities to create a niche neighborhood. Because of their density and need for commercial access, these areas are often located next to major transportation corridors. Currently there is not a zoning classification for this use.

Recreational Commercial- This district represents commercial uses that are based on recreation facilities and services. This includes uses such as hotel/water parks, athletic clubs, fitness gyms, restaurants /recreation facilities, private arenas and golf courses. Natural features should be included in any outdoor recreational facility.

Industrial – The City has worked to develop industrial areas for light industrial uses that include: fabrication and machining, manufacturing, automotive, warehousing and related industrial uses. Office and some ancillary commercial use is also integrated with industrial uses. Sites have been prepared for industrial development and expansion areas are designated on the plan. The City has an area designated for a potential rail industrial park. This project is of regional significance and efforts to develop it should be further explored.

Parks and Open Space – These are land areas that contain both existing and potential park areas. These include both local, county and state facilities. They contain both active and passive recreational uses. Passive uses often include natural areas and systems, both to retain and possibly enhance them.

New residential areas should also include neighborhood parks. Larger city parks should be sited depending on area recreational needs and plans. The City has and should continue to work with recreational groups and educational facilities on recreational facilities and sites, and should continue to explore opportunities and acquisition of natural areas to enhance systems and wildlife corridors.

Public/Semi Public – This category identifies areas that include public and semi-public buildings and facilities. This includes: city buildings, public and private schools, utility buildings and facilities, other governmental buildings or sites. This use also includes: hospitals, cemeteries, and religious institutions.

The 2008 plan included possible locations for a future high school. These locations are continued on the proposed land use map. The relevance of this planning should be reviewed by with the school district.

Land Use and Growth Goals/Strategies:

The following goals and strategies support land use and growth, and are in addition to the ones listed in Chapter 1 of this comprehensive plan update.

- Consider goals listed in Basic Planning Provisions in reviewing development and redevelopment projects.
- Look for mixed use opportunities for land adjacent to major general commercial corridors and expanded central business district that could include high density multi-family residential.