

# COMMUNITY Patterns

# 3

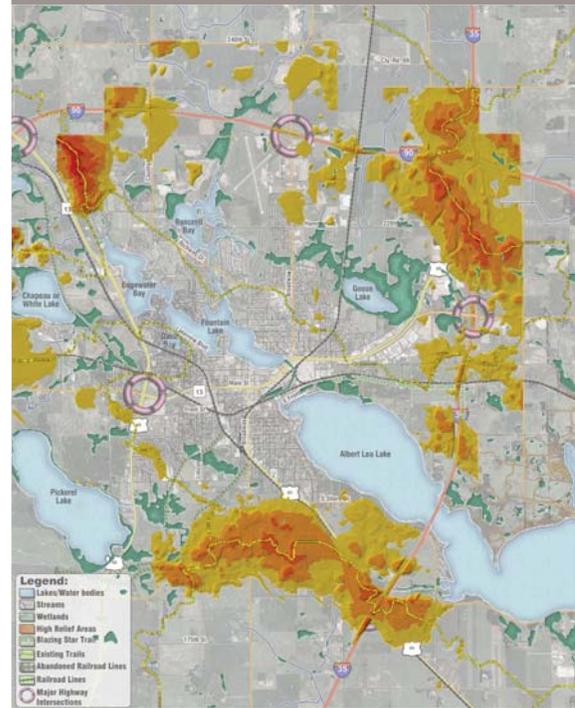
**A**t its core a comprehensive plan is a body of policy used to guide the evolution of a community. We began by defining four key characteristics that shape Albert Lea: ridges, lakes and wetlands, railroad corridors, the old federal highway system and their points of access.

**Ridges:** ridges are represented by high points in the community that are generally connected to one another (roughly 1,340 feet above sea level). Where connected, these ridges suggest a general boundary for parts of Albert Lea and natural boundaries for infrastructure systems. Where ridges are more pronounced features of the landscape they might become amenities for our community or attractive settings for neighborhoods.

**Lakes and wetlands:** wetlands lie below ridges, most often along stream corridors and ditches or in the margins around our lakes. Importantly, our wetlands serve a critical environmental function, treating storm water runoff from developed and agricultural portions of Albert Lea and offering habitat for wildlife. Lakes form the heart of our watershed, occupying the lower profiles of our landscape. Together, our wetlands and lakes offer a recreation and visual amenity and more recently they have become the core of our identity.

**Rail corridors:** at one time in our history the number of rail yards in Albert Lea was second only to St. Paul. Over time, some corridors were abandoned, but Albert Lea still lies at the confluence of three railroads that carry more than a dozen trains through our community every day. We should consider the vacation of abandon rail rights-of-way for purposes that advance the vision and guiding principles of Albert Lea. But at the same time, we might anticipate the resurgence of rail for freight or even commuters and study carefully the notion of abandoning rail rights-of-way.

**Interstate highways:** I-90 and I-35 connect Albert Lea to trade centers of the Midwest. These interstate corridors largely define two edges of our community. Areas near interchanges on I-35 have seen significant commercial and industrial development in the last several decades, while those on I-90 have



*Albert Lea is well defined by its lakes, ridges and wetlands.*

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not seen nearly so much “freeway” oriented development (perhaps due to the lesser volumes of traffic on I-90 when compared to I-35). Two interchanges on I-35 and one on I-90 at Bridge Avenue generate prime economic development opportunities. The possibility of future access points to the interstates continues to pique interest and discussion in our community.

## **Existing Land Use Patterns**

Figure 3-1 represents a snapshot in 2007 of current land use patterns. Those properties that appear white are either vacant or of an agriculture use are more likely to see development in the time frame of our plan. This analysis is important so that we can understand the availability of our land resources and see the physical or political challenges of development within our current boundaries. Our data is maintained in a computer model (Geographic Information System), can be maintained on a regular basis and will be used for future planning analysis. The existing land uses are described as follows:

**Commercial and Industrial** lands form our job base. Commercial uses are generally retail and service oriented uses including offices which provide day-to-day needs for the community. Industrial uses include manufacturing of products, storage and distribution centers and research and design type facilities.

**Private Recreation** uses include predominantly open spaces that are privately held and used for recreation oriented businesses or clubs.

**Public Park** land on the other hand is land owned by the public and part of the public park and recreation system.

**Residential** uses are categorized as **estate**--large lots with on-site private sewer and water systems and low, mid and high density housing, all which have municipal sewer and water services. Density refers to the number of dwelling units per acre. **Low density** includes detached single family homes developed between 1 to 4 units per acre of residential land. Mid density includes a mix of detached homes on smaller lots and attached housing (townhomes, quadhomes, duplexes, triplexes, etc..) typically developed at a density of 4 to 10 units per acre of residential land. **High density** housing generally includes attached housing in a vertical or stacked configuration, commonly envisioned as apartments or condominiums. High density is generally in excess of 10 units per acre.

**Public and Semi-Public** uses include government owned facilities, school district facilities and religious or philanthropic institutions that are generally of a non-profit status.

**ROW** stands for public street/road right-of-way and “**utility**” refers to power stations or sub-stations.

**Vacant or Ag** are lands with minimal or no structures relative to the amount of land. Essentially these uses are what we used to determine “development capacity” later in the plan. If there is evidence of productive agricultural uses, the land is coded as Ag, otherwise it is simply vacant land.

**Open water and wetlands** are regional data sets that are provided by the state of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. These data sets include lakes, ponds and streams that are part of the Protected Waters Inventory (PWI) and National Wetland Inventory (NWI). This data is the “best available” data for identifying undevelopable lands at a Comprehensive Plan level of detail.

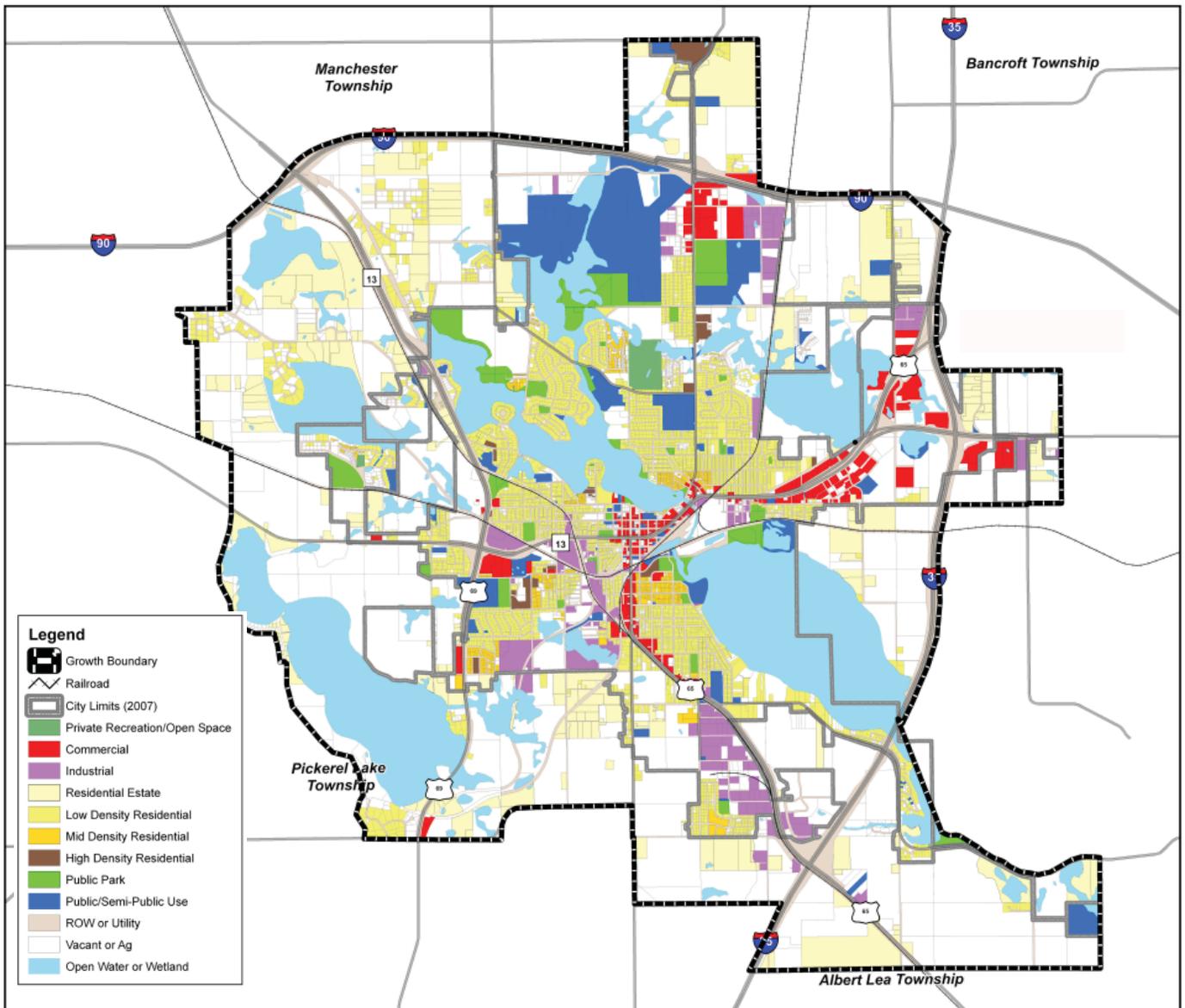


Figure 3-1: Map of Existing Land Use Patterns (2007)

Land Use (2007)	Current City Limits		Growth Areas Only		Grand Total	
	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total
Commercial	356	4.73%	36	0.37%	392	2.25%
Industrial	436	5.78%	33	0.33%	469	2.69%
Private Recreational	59	0.78%	0	0.00%	59	0.34%
Residential Estate	199	2.64%	1,705	17.25%	1,904	10.93%
Low Density Residential	1,365	18.11%	320	3.24%	1,685	9.67%
Mid Density Residential	159	2.11%	0	0.00%	159	0.91%
High Density Residential	75	0.99%	0	0.00%	75	0.43%
Public Park	344	4.57%	12	0.12%	356	2.04%
Public/Semi-Public Use	849	11.26%	29	0.29%	878	5.04%
ROW or Utility	59	0.78%	104	1.05%	163	0.93%
Vacant or Ag	2,030	26.93%	5,596	56.61%	7,625	43.77%
Open Water or Wetland	1,607	21.32%	2,050	20.74%	3,657	20.99%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,536</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>9,884</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>17,421</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 3-1 2007 Existing Land Use *Note: This table and all successive land use tables are based on an evaluation of each parcel as obtained from Freeborn County Assessors data and validated by aerial photography and windshield survey. Data is stored and calculated using a GIS parcel data set.*

## Population, Households & Jobs

We can look at population, household and job data from the US Census or the State Demographer to obtain a sense of where we have come and to anticipate where we may be going. We also have a sense of our jobs based on our economic development efforts. The following are a few points to consider as we think about our future in terms of population and job growth.

***Rough numbers in 1940--our population was 12,200 and we had 4,250 jobs.***

***Rough numbers in 1970--our corporate limits included approximately 3,500 acres--our population was 19,500 and we had roughly 9,800 jobs.***

***Rough numbers in 2000--our population was 18,350 and we had roughly 10,900 jobs of the 16,750 jobs in Freeborn County.***

- ▶ *In 2007, Albert Lea had roughly 9,000 people in its labor force (on average we have had about 9,000 people in our labor force for the last decade.)*
- ▶ *2000 Census data indicated that there were almost 11,000 jobs in Albert Lea in the year 2000. Our own survey work and knowledge of the business community suggests that today we probably have close to 10,000 if not more jobs.*
- ▶ *Since 2006, the State Demographer estimated that we had a population of 18,184 and we had 7,979 households (2.28 people per household).*
- ▶ *We have approximately 1,650 acres of commercial, industrial and institutional land use which generates our job base. Or, we have approximately six jobs per acre of land generating jobs.*
- ▶ *We have approximately 1,800 acres of land used for housing. Or, we have approximately ten people per acre or four households per acre of residential land.*

These ratios are important as we think about how we grow in the future and how we estimate future population, household and job growth. How we plan for community systems relies on projections that are grounded and supported with sound assumptions.

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## A Growth Management Strategy

In preparing our comprehensive plan, we have looked closely at the physical condition and the character of our community. Through analysis of existing conditions we have identified three broad policy directions to guide growth and investment in our community: 1) preservation, infill and maintenance 2) reinvestment and redevelopment and 3) new growth.

### *Preservation, Infill and Maintenance:*

Our community is over 150 years old. Historical growth patterns beginning with the downtown and the lakes and moving its way out to the interstate corridors have defined the character of our community. With age comes the need for preservation and maintenance of the street patterns, architectural styles and neighborhood character that reflect the history of Albert Lea. Preservation and maintenance must occur at more than just the individual property level. It must start with the community in maintaining and preserving infrastructure, public spaces, parks, road corridors, water quality and government facilities. Just like we must take care of our health and bodies, we must take care of our communities so that they are sustainable.

### *Reinvestment and Redevelopment*

There are parts of our community where reinvestment and redevelopment are a desired policy direction. These areas include the downtown, older stable neighborhoods, and transportation corridors where some existing uses may no longer be viable in their current form. We take direction from a guiding principle that says we “encourage new while planning (re-evaluating and redefining) the old.”

### *New Growth*

Albert Lea is a community that embraces new growth on the edges where new infrastructure must be extended. These new growth areas provide us an opportunity to do more than just build new housing or new industry. They give us the opportunity to build new neighborhoods that benefit from the lessons we have learned in past development waves.

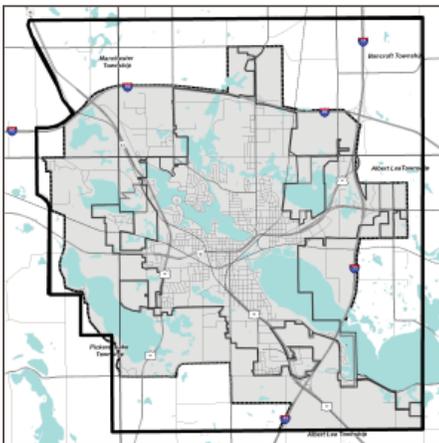
### *Growth Management Goal*

Our goal for growth management is not aimed at controlling the pace or rate of growth, but instead it is intended to direct and guide growth consistent with our guiding principles: encourage evolution, not revolution; encourage new while planning the old; restore and reuse our treasures; keep edges close; make change on our terms. More explicitly put, our goal is to ensure growth happens in an efficient and sustainable manner.

***Establishing a Growth Boundary as illustrated in Figure 3-2 provides the City and adjacent townships with a clear identification of where the urban/rural divide is planned to be. Such a divide provides policy direction to local and regional officials in making key land use decisions in areas of transition.***

**What is sustainable development? The State of Minnesota defines it as...**

**“Development that maintains or enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”  
Minn. Stat. 4A.07, subd.1(b)**



The Urban/Rural Expansion District serves as an area that protects and separates urban and rural land uses.

### Growth Management Policy

We establish the following policy to help guide growth and infrastructure investment in our community. These guidelines are not meant to be strict rules, but instead serve as guidelines for evaluating development projects that in some cases may be premature. These guidelines should be balanced with the broader vision and guiding principles of the community.

- 1.1 *Prioritize new growth through redevelopment, reuse and infill development within those areas identified as reinvestment and redevelopment.*
- 1.2 *Prioritize investment in the maintenance and upgrading of existing infrastructure systems (sanitary sewer, public water supply, streets, sidewalks, trails, parks and storm water management systems.)*
- 1.3 *Achieve a balance between the creation of new jobs and new housing providing opportunities for all income groups.*
- 1.4 *Promote compact development that makes for more efficient delivery of infrastructure systems, uses less of our land resources, preserves farmland and helps keep our edges close.*
- 1.5 *Evaluate requests to extend municipal infrastructure to new growth areas using the following as guides:*
  - *The site is identified in the plan as a new growth area*
  - *Through good conservation oriented site design practices and principles, the site is able to protect and preserve significant natural resources (i.e. mature woods, quality wetlands or intact prairie areas).*
  - *The project can be designed to minimize potential conflicts between urban and rural land uses.*
  - *The site can be served by a financial feasible municipal infrastructure system with minimal downstream investments to increase capacity.*
  - *Deliverers of other government services (i.e. fire, police, public works, public education) have been consulted and satisfied that the development can be serviced under existing or planned programming levels.*
  - *All agencies and stakeholders have been made aware of the project and had the chance to evaluate potential opportunities and impacts.*
  - *The plan for development has been designed in consideration of the vision, guiding principles, goals, policies and objectives of the comprehensive plan.*
  - *The proposed development project can fully fund infrastructure costs needed to support its existence.*

The Urban/Rural Expansion District (UR) is defined in the Freeborn County Land Use Policy Plan and in past comprehensive plans for the City of Albert Lea (see figure at left). Our plan continues this policy. The intent of this policy is to provide a district designed for the protection and separation of urban and rural development. Our plan supports the continuation of this policy. The Growth Boundary 2008 illustrated in Figure 3-2 provides direction for the extension of future urban services. Growth outside of this boundary would require a comprehensive plan amendment and should be carefully evaluated.

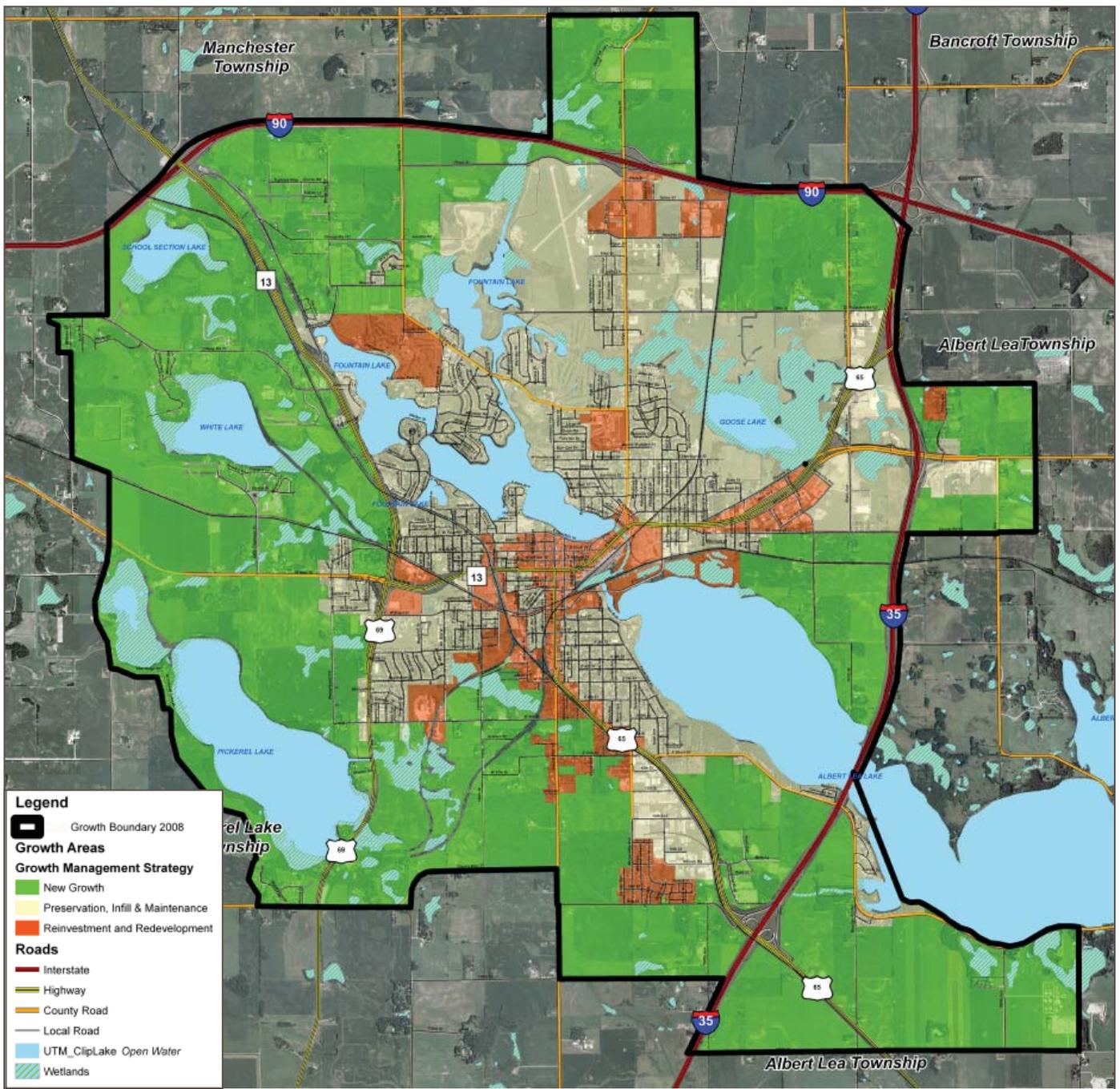
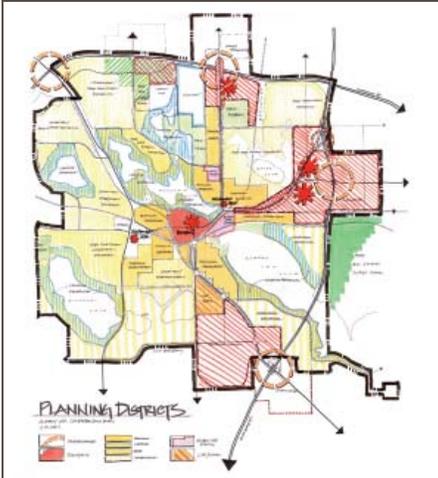


Figure 3-2: Map of Policy Directions and Table 3-2, tabulation of vacant lands by policy areas. The Growth Boundary was established based on the ridges and valleys forming a bowl around Albert Lea. Significant discussion occurred regarding inclusion of the four quadrants of the I-35 and I-90 cloverleaf. The boundary was not expanded at this time, but it was acknowledged that future amendments will consider this area as potential growth.

Vacant Lands by Growth Management Policy Areas	Current City Limits		Growth Areas Only		Grand Total	
	Vacant or Ag Acres	% of Total	Vacant or Ag Acres	% of Total	Vacant or Ag Acres	% of Total
Reinvestment and Redevelopment	189	11.60%	3	0.05%	191	2.72%
Preservation, Infill and Maintenance	601	36.95%	110	2.04%	712	10.09%
New Growth	837	51.45%	5,311	97.91%	6,148	87.19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,627</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>5,424</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>7,051</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## Future Land Use Plan (2030)



*This diagram was generated during the planning process as we explored possible patterns of land use and development in Albert Lea. From this analysis emerged the idea of describing our community's evolution through districts, corridors and nodes.*

A conventional comprehensive plan guides every parcel of land in a community to a specific land use (various forms of residential, commercial and institutional uses.) Like a traditional land use plan, this plan guides a property's use so that we may understand future growth in population and employment and its impact on infrastructure needs. In guiding lands for a particular land use pattern, we provide a degree of certainty (or predictability) in our investments which would not otherwise exist. Using the four key characteristics (ridges, lakes and wetlands, railroad corridors and interstates) as a guide, we have developed a core framework of districts, corridors, and nodes described generally as follows:

**Districts:** larger geographic areas defined by common characteristics and a primary function within the larger community. The district level provides the primary land use direction for our plan.

**Corridors:** linear in nature following a path and serving as a connection between two or more features. In our plan, corridors reflect transportation corridors. The corridor level provides a secondary guide to land use and offers more in the way of physical site or design directions.

**Nodes:** more defined places that are oriented around a specific place, feature or landmark.. They occur within the context of a district or corridor. The node level provides a secondary guide to land use.

Our plan is informed by the dialog and early planning that occurred through the Albert Lea Listens process, the Minnesota Design Team visit, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Land Between the Lake Action Team and, open forums for public engagement. We've defined a set of goals that build on the qualities of Albert Lea and the directions we feel are important to the future of our community. Each goal is supported by policies that demonstrate a path toward implementation. When coupled with the translation of this plan into a map, they constitute definitive directions for the future of Albert Lea. The patterns defined as districts, nodes and corridors are based on their character and function in the community. This plan crafts direction for the future by recognizing how each of these patterns shapes the community and what public or private investments that might be required.

### Districts

Districts are defined by key physical features such as pre-existing development patterns, roadway corridors, rail corridors, viewsheds, or environmental features. We use the district connotation to help describe its overall purpose, character and place within the community. Districts offer a primary direction for desired land uses within the community. In Albert Lea, districts include:

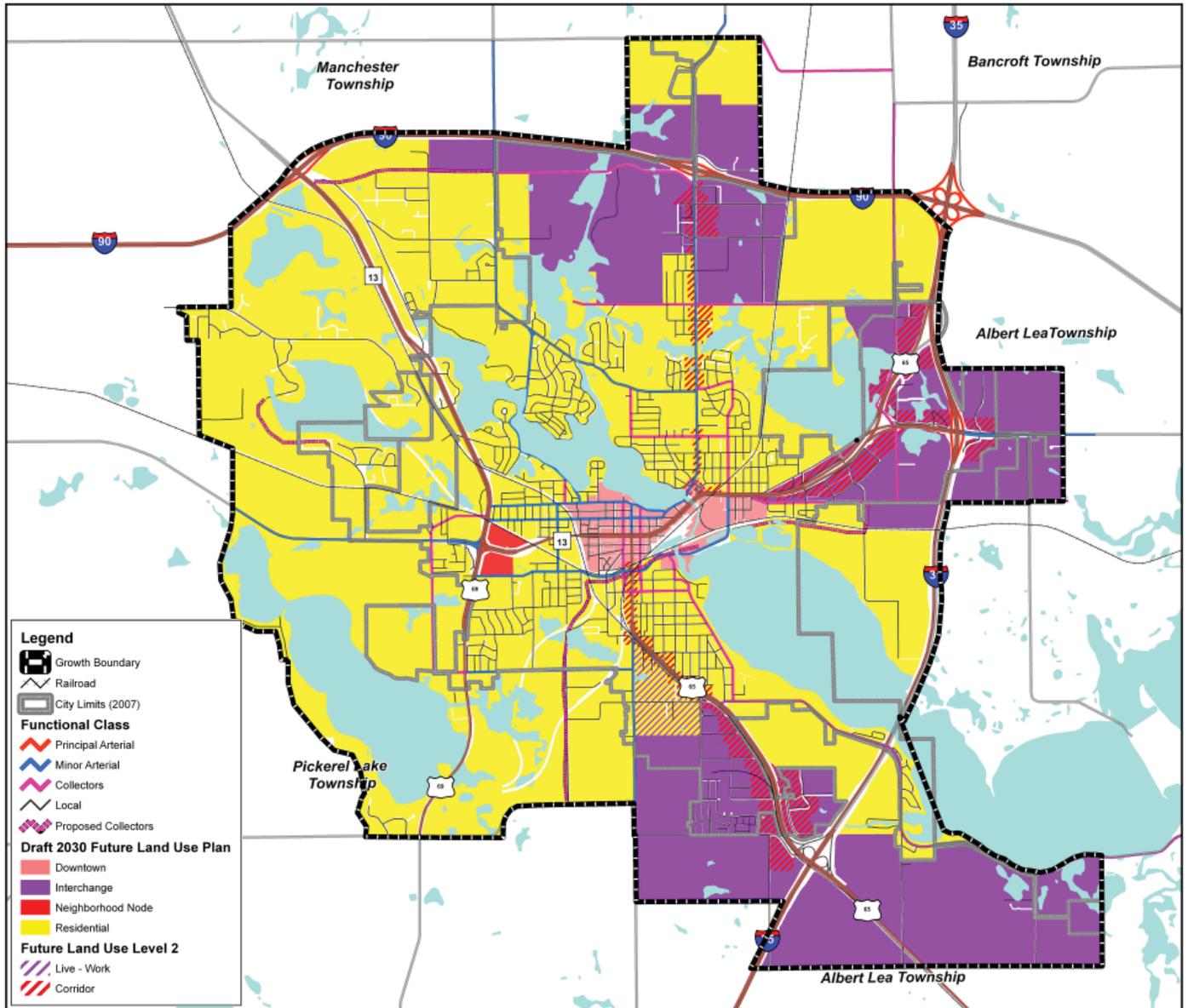


Figure 3-3: Future Land Use Patterns and Table 3-3 Future Land Use Tabulations

Future Land Use (2030)	Current City Limits		Growth Areas Only		Grand Total	
	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total	Acres	% of Total
Residential	3,526	46.79%	5,331	53.93%	8,857	50.84%
Downtown	241	3.20%	0	0.00%	241	1.38%
Interchange	2,047	27.17%	2,404	24.33%	4,452	25.55%
Commerical Node	42	0.56%	0	0.00%	42	0.24%
ROW or Utility	59	0.78%	103	1.04%	162	0.93%
Open Water or Wetland	1,620	21.50%	2,046	20.70%	3,666	21.05%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,536</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>9,884</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>17,420</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



*Housing over storefronts is a promising pattern of future redevelopment or revitalization for downtown Albert Lea.*



*Integration of outdoor dining areas or public plazas that invite informal gatherings.*

- ▶ *Downtown: a truly mixed use district with its core strength being the service center of the region*
- ▶ *Interchange: a district that exists because of its access to the interstate highway system and consisting predominantly of commercial and industrial land uses and high intensity mixed use.*
- ▶ *Residential (traditional residential, edge residential, beyond the edge residential): districts that consist of our residential neighborhoods today and in the future*

**Downtown:** As a district downtown supports a true mix of activities: retail and service commercial uses; employment, cultural, and entertainment uses; and government services. Integration of housing, primarily in a stacked configuration (apartments or condos) over storefronts or in a free standing building, is an important component for the future vitality of downtown. Enhancement of public spaces, whether plazas, pocket parks, courtyards, or streetscapes, foster a stronger sense of identity and reinforce the pedestrian character needed for a vibrant downtown. Maintaining the integrity of the historical buildings and preserving the basic grid of streets –the character-defining features of downtown—are important steps for its future.

Downtown is the center of our community, and a place of human interaction as much as physical structure: social and cultural; casual and formal; civic and entrepreneurial; entertainment or business. But it works better because the setting offers a stage for the kinds of activity that people want in downtown—the historic buildings, the regular patterns of streets and blocks, attractive storefronts and inviting streetscapes, the park at the end of Broadway—together they establish a platform for critical human activity.

The key to downtown’s future is not simply the preservation of a few nice buildings, but bringing life to them and it is here that people play the vital role. With the range of activities that occur here, it’s a great place to live—and in the future, more people will come to see Downtown as an attractive place to make a home. We won’t expect to see single family homes springing up along Broadway, but expansive lofts over storefronts, flats in a renovated downtown building, or even rowhomes at the periphery of downtown offer unique living environments for a segment of our population. In the process of offering more choices for where (and how) people live in Albert Lea, these homes bring more life to Downtown’s streets and public spaces every day. In the end, both are necessary and should be planned.

*Downtown District Goals:*

Our goal is to recapture the vibrancy and sense of place offered by downtown Albert Lea and to re-establish downtown as a “great experience” to live, shop, gather, recreate and work.

**G1 Establish a sense of vibrancy, ownership and critical mass that promotes active use and upkeep of downtown**

**G2 Enhance the pedestrian experiences within downtown**

**G3 Embrace history and tourism as an economic development tool**

**G4 Expand the function of downtown to include the full mix of uses**

*Downtown District Policy:*

We establish the following policy directions for the downtown district. Our downtown should:

2.1 *Be served with modern and well maintained infrastructure systems that are both functional infrastructure systems as well as attractive amenities (pedestrian oriented streets, landscaped storm water systems such as rain gardens, rain barrels etc..., decorative and pedestrian scaled street lighting, wayfinding signage directing people to key public spaces, underground utilities (electric, cable, phone), strategically located but accessible sewer and water systems (hydrants, lift stations, manholes, etc...)*

2.2 *Serve as the center for government services for the County and the City.*

2.3 *Serve as a regional focal point for social and cultural venues such as museums and conference centers.*

2.4 *Support various uses and businesses that are complimentary, that provide a vital function for downtown and that together keep downtown active throughout the entire day, 7 days a week.*

2.5 *Maintain attractive and safe sidewalks that are fronted by store fronts in commercial areas and front porches or stoops in residential areas.*

2.6 *Encourage opportunities for storefronts that “spill out” onto the sidewalks either via outdoor seating areas, plazas, or sidewalk sales/vending.*

2.7 *Present an attractive but functional street system that facilitates safe and convenient traffic movement and snow removal while providing a sense of place and identity that promotes downtown as a destination (street furniture, attractive/distinguishable crosswalks, on street parking, bike lanes on some streets.)*

2.8 *Preserve the integrity of historic structures: establish a design palette that provides guidance regarding appropriate/acceptable exterior treatments and finish materials for rehab projects and requires appropriate architectural styles and relative to the location of new development/redevelopment.*

2.9 *Integrate a planned system of pocket parks that offer passive and active spaces for gathering, resting or simply attractive visual experience. Such spaces might include locally commissioned art as a unique identity element. The spaces may also be either hardscaped or landscaped.*

2.10 *Make off-street parking a true system that serves all of downtown, but is supported by the City, County, businesses and residents who most rely on the parking. Rather than large surface parking lots, parking areas should be*



*Storefronts embrace the sidewalk, occasionally spilling out into the public realm offering intrigue and experience to the pedestrian.*



*Downtown should serve as a regional destination offering uses such as museums, theaters or galleries. Above image is a childrens museum developed in Westport Connecticut as a result of a downtown planning process.*



*Downtown streets should be designed to help create memorable experiences such as the annual band festival.*



*The Interchange District at Bridge Avenue and I-90 is a good characterization of a mix of uses, auto oriented and reliant on access to the regional highway system.*



*Commercial uses in Interchange areas require greater levels of parking. Creative approaches to stormwater management should be applied to help protect water quality in our lakes.*

*Ultimately, unique design pays off in property value, rental rates and patronage.*



*Commercial shopping areas should be encouraged to design internal pedestrian linkages between storefronts and pad sites.*

*strategically dispersed in smaller (heavily landscaped) surface lots and in some cases tiered parking structures that can take advantage of topography changes to minimize the cost of parking structures. A wayfinding system (unique to Albert Lea) could direct the public to public parking areas.*

*2.11 Support the inclusion of housing opportunities for all income and age groups.*

*2.12 Encourage redevelopment efforts to retain iconic elements of downtown, whether they are preserving long time establishments, key design/identity features or historical resources.*

***Interchange:*** The Interchange is a district that identifies an area surrounding an intersection of a major thoroughfare and an interstate highway, where either existing access to the interstate highway or the potential for future interchange access might ultimately support a land use pattern of a business nature (commercial or industrial). The form and function of the specific land uses within the district depends on three factors:

- ▶ *the character of the existing lands within the area (i.e. natural resource base including wetlands, lakes, woodlands, prairie, unique topography),*
- ▶ *the pre-existing infrastructure systems (i.e. railroads, sanitary sewer, storm water and potable water) and;*
- ▶ *the pre-existing development pattern (i.e. established neighborhoods or development that is unlikely to “re-develop” over time.)*

***Interchange District Goals:***

Our goal for the interchange district is to promote a land use pattern that encourages growth of intensive mixed uses appropriate to the character of the individual interchange areas.

- G5 Establish a sense of identity and presence to Albert Lea**
- G6 Optimize use of infrastructure capacity and land resources**
- G7 Satisfy the demand for and exploit the opportunities for economic growth (jobs and tax base)**
- G8 Peak an interest of travelers in exploring Downtown Albert Lea through signage and wayfinding systems**

***Interchange District Policy:***

We establish the following policy directions for the interchange districts:

- 3.1 Design character and site design patterns should pay tribute to or respect**

*the heritage or history of Albert Lea (i.e. use of local building products, high level architecture or site design features worthy of a community gateway, expression of “land between the lakes”)*

*3.2 Site design and building design should orient the higher quality architectural features and design elements towards the principal corridor that serves as the gateway into the community.*

*3.3 Creative approaches to storm water management (preserving water quality) that integrate landscaping and natural features as the primary part of the management system should be encouraged.*

*3.4 Interchange areas are opportunities to create critical masses of mixed use and intense development creating new community nodes. These areas are intended to serve the traveler and commerce as well as draw new people into the community to explore other opportunities within this regional center.*

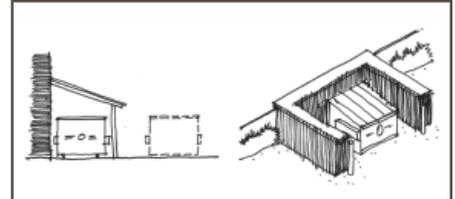
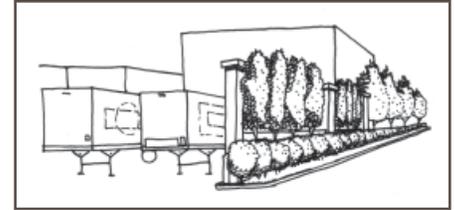
*3.5 Development along major arterials should have its principle access on a side street or commercial service road. Managing access points along major arterials will foster a stronger development environment in the long run by reducing traffic conflicts. This policy would suggest commercial areas should be master planned to understand access and movement patterns throughout a district rather than addressed on a project by project basis.*

*3.6 Site design of more industrial type uses that have intensive outdoor storage needs should carefully consider views from adjacent land uses and public corridors/spaces. These considerations have two purposes: crime prevention through avoiding dark, unobservable spaces and screening of activities or uses that conflict with adjacent land use patterns.*

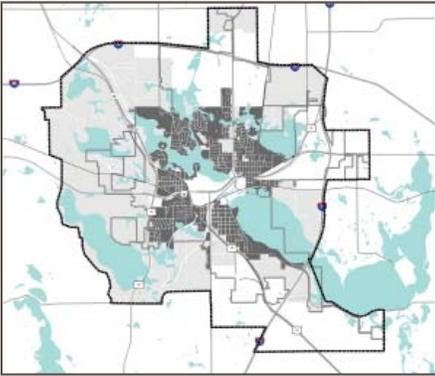
*3.7 Uses that are heavy industrial uses, heavy water users, generators of excessive noise levels, waste or pollutants should be encouraged to incorporate modern technologies that minimize or eliminate the conflicting characteristic of the site.*

*3.8 Site design should be considerate of emergency service needs such as fire lanes, adequate water pressure and hydrant access.*

*3.9 Site design should seek to maximize the use of industrial land resources for building area and explore strategies to minimize hard surface areas. Site design should consider green space/open space as a priority.*



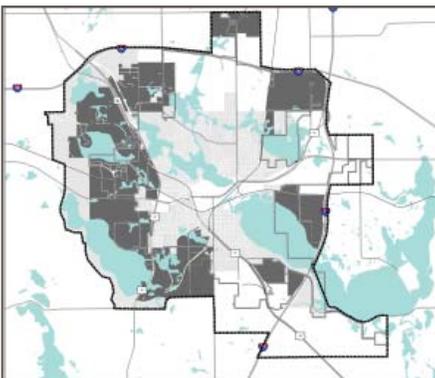
*Careful screening of utilitarian aspects of interchange district uses can help protect community image and identity.*



Traditional residential areas include some of the original neighborhoods of Albert Lea. An objective here is to maintain and preserve the strengths and qualities of our neighborhoods.



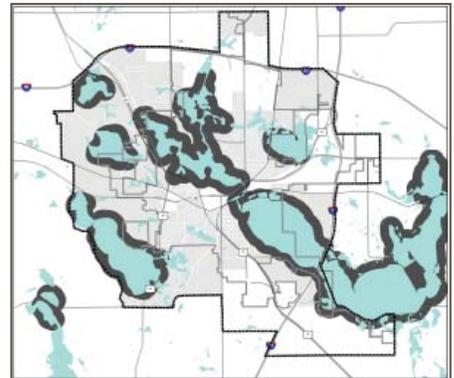
Neighborhoods in more traditional parts of Albert Lea have homes that front on the street with sidewalks. Garage access is often by way of alley.



Edge residential areas are those areas near the edge of our anticipated growth boundary and are more reflective of modern housing styles and trends. Our objectives in new growth areas are to ensure a sustainable design pattern.

**Residential:** Our community is largely comprised of residential neighborhoods. Our guiding principle is about building or re-building neighborhoods. If there is any wave from the past that continues to ripple through our city, it is how we develop residential neighborhoods. For our plan, we look to describe our residential districts by the character of what exists today (our traditional neighborhoods); by the proximity of some existing neighborhoods to our prized lakes (lakeside); by the proximity of new neighborhoods at the edge of the community (edge); and by new neighborhoods that will emerge beyond the edge (conservation). Our plan identifies land use by a primary designation of “residential” and a series of secondary designations as follows:

- ▶ *Traditional -- this pattern reflects the existing grid street system, front porches, alley fed homes, variable lot sizes and neighborhood parks in some of the earlier residential neighborhoods of Albert Lea. Housing types provide a variety of attached single and multi family units as well as the traditional single family detached product. Limited retail and service commercial uses might also factor into this pattern provided the type of business, size and design of the structure “fits” with a residential pattern.*
- ▶ *Lakeside--this pattern reflects the proximity to lakes. The pattern may contain similar characteristics of Traditional Residential, but its proximity to the lake suggests more attention should be given to managing surface water runoff to help protect water quality and preserving views. Housing types might be similar to the Traditional residential neighborhoods, but site design and storm water management should be a greater priority.*
- ▶ *Edge--this pattern reflects many of the new growth areas near the edge of the community and more modern subdivision design trends. Characteristics include street patterns with larger block sizes, larger lot sizes, integrated park and open space patterns and diversity of single family attached and detached housing.*
- ▶ *Conservation--conservation residential areas represent a form of development that embraces and preserves open space features whether they are natural features (wetlands, drainage areas, prairie, woodlands, and ridges) or simply open fields that preserve the agrarian character of the area. This pattern is most characterized by a low density pattern of development with expanses of open areas and predominantly single family detached housing. Unlike the other three districts, it may have alternative sewer and water services where provision of municipal utilities is neither practical nor appropriate to the character of the area.*



Lakeside areas are reflected by a 1,000 foot buffer around our Public Waters. These areas of our community have great impacts on our lakes.

### Residential District Goals:

The development of neighborhoods is critical to the success of our community. In our pursuit of making Albert Lea a great place to live, we will:

- G9 Enhance livability of our existing neighborhoods**
- G10 Achieve diversity in housing type and price ranges**
- G11 Increase walk-ability within and between neighborhoods**
- G12 Decrease surface water runoff directly entering our neighborhood lakes**
- G13 Sustain neighborhood parks and neighborhood schools**
- G14 Manage traffic through and between neighborhoods**
- G15 Sustain the cost (affordable/efficient) of service delivery (trash, recycling, utilities, etc...)**
- G16 Minimize energy usage**
- G17 Maintain property values**
- G18 Facilitate re-investment in aging homes**
- G19 Maintain and improve aging infrastructure systems**

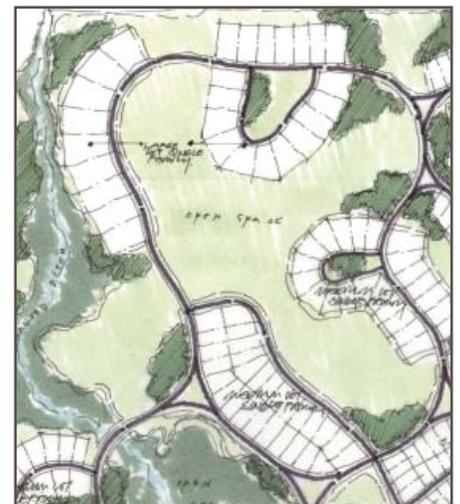
### Residential District Policies:

We establish the following policy directions for residential districts:

- 4.1 *Vacant or skipped over residential parcels/lots within the traditional and lakes side areas should be encouraged to develop with new housing that fits the character of the neighborhood.*
- 4.2 *Distressed or underutilized areas of residential districts should be considered for redevelopment to higher density residential uses where adjacent or near downtown, along major corridors or adjacent key community nodes.*
- 4.3 *Incentive programs that assist with maintenance and upkeep of existing aging residential properties should be supported or explored through partnerships with local lending institutions or private banks.*
- 4.4 *Accessory structures as living units on owner-occupied single family residential properties should be supported as a means of diversifying the housing stock and offering affordable housing choices.*
- 4.5 *Neighborhood commercial nodes should be developed at key intersections to support surrounding adjacent residential areas, promote active living and walkability and to serve as traffic management (reduction) strategy.*
- 4.6 *New residential design patterns at the edge of the City should be designed to take advantage of mature landscape features such as ditches, hedge rows, bluffs, knolls, woodlots etc... which can serve as open space amenities or buffers from freeway noise or commercial uses.*
- 4.7 *New residential streets should be designed such that they terminate with*

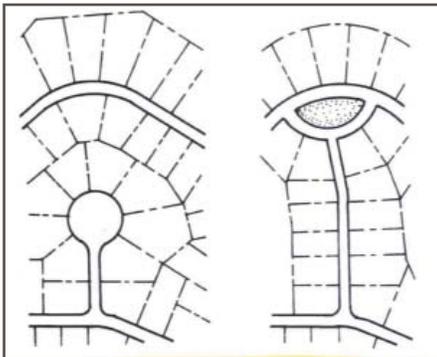
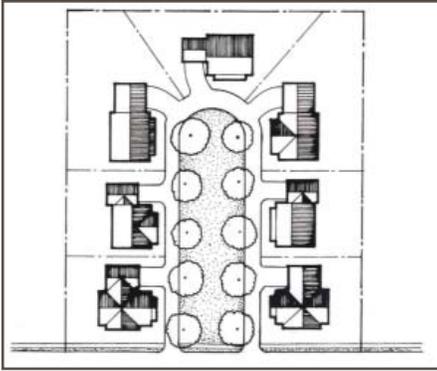


*Wider streets and no sidewalks often characterize edge neighborhood development. Future development in Albert Lea should ensure adequate pedestrian facilities that support our desire to be a walkable community.*



*A conservation design approach that protects open space, generally requires less infrastructure and embraces natural features may be a more practical pattern of development on the far edges of Albert Lea's growth boundary. Careful consideration should be given so that future growth, however long term it may be, is not hindered.*

*Strategies for the establishment, management and long term maintenance of open space areas should be agreed to at the time of development entitlements. Public ownerships should be considered for those areas that server a broader public good.*



Loop drives and “crescents” provide good alternatives to the cul-de-sac, maintaining connectivity and lessening excessive hard surface cover.



An accessory housing unit helps maintain a degree of affordability and provides diversity opportunities. Owner occupancy of the property ensures upkeep.

a vista that establishes neighborhood identity and recognition (park, scenic view/overlook, church, school, historic home, natural open space) rather than simply ending as a cul-de-sac.

4.8 The use of cul-de-sac should be minimized in new development on the edge in support of establishing connectivity between neighborhoods.

4.9 New development on the edge should only take place on land where development will cause the minimum of disturbance to the natural ecology and should be designed in harmony with its natural surroundings.

4.10 Sidewalks should connect new and existing residence to regional sidewalks and trails, neighborhood parks, schools, neighborhood commercial centers, employment hubs or other key destinations. The exception to this rule may be where a street dead-ends in a short distance, has few homes on it and does not connect to any regional trail system.

4.11 Housing should face directly onto green spaces or parks rather than relegating park and open space to back yards.

4.12 Residential streets should be fronted with the primary entrance to the residence, porches, stoops and windows and not excessive garage doors.

4.13 As with our traditional neighborhoods, new parks should be defined by public street ROW as park frontage, not back yards.

4.14 Neighborhood parkways offer a quality residential street. New growth on the edge should take a cue from traditional residential districts and line lakes with a public parkway rather than private back yards.

4.15 All residential households should be able to walk to a neighborhood store or services within a 10 to 15 minute walk.

4.16 Neighborhood schools are an identity builder and a key to enhancing the quality and livability of residential neighborhoods. The City and School District must collaborate on finding solutions to making neighborhood schools sustainable.

4.17 Promote a balance of size and types of new housing units with a mix of single family attached, detached, multi-unit, owner-occupied townhome and condominium owned, rental and other housing opportunities.

4.18 Provide ample opportunity for both owner occupied housing and rental housing.

4.19 Ensure sufficient supply of affordable housing within the community balanced across various residential neighborhoods and activity centers and not isolated to a few small housing projects.

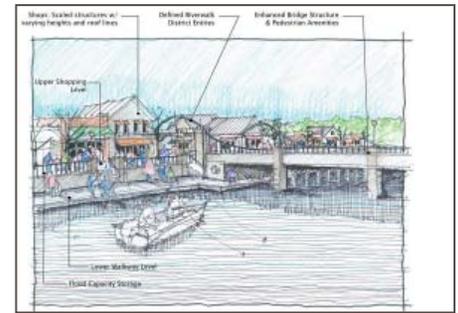
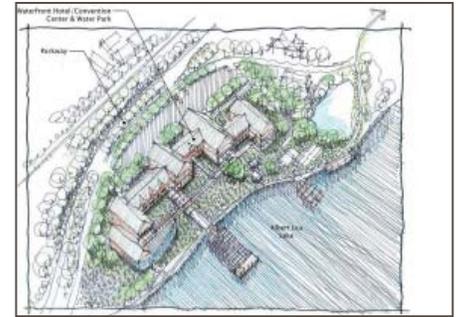
4.20 Development within conservation areas should be guided by a site inventory that highlights the areas sensitive natural resources and seeks to preserve those resources as passive open space areas.

4.21 In general, new development should avoid impacting significant natural resources (habitat, wetlands, woodlands and areas of steep slopes) by integrating the features into the design of the neighborhood as part of a park and open space system or as part of an ecologically based storm water management approach.

4.22 Creative planning and development techniques should be applied as a tool to transfer density from areas of natural resource protection (habitat or ag lands) to lands more suitable for development.

**Specific Redevelopment and Infill Sites:** Other notable land use elements should be emphasized in our plan. They are as follows:

- ▶ **The Blazing Star Landing (part of the Downtown District):** BSL, as it is often referred to, includes the former site of Farmland Foods and the area between Albert Lea Lake and Fountain Lake along East Main Street. BSL functions as an important gateway into downtown from the east. The city has explored concepts for redevelopment on this site since it became clear that rebuilding the former industry that burned in 2001 at the current site was not a preferred option. Through those planning efforts, a framework for the site has emerged. The BSL site is a signature site for redevelopment and a tremendous opportunity for the community. What has been envisioned for the site is a mix of uses including the possibility of a destination oriented theme (hotel/conference center/waterpark) a range of housing opportunities, small shops and a leisure craft marina. These concepts provide a vision and framework for public and private re-investment at the BSL site.
- ▶ **County Fair Grounds:** Our County Fair is an important regional event. Its location along Bridge Avenue is one that from time to time is questioned. Could the site be better utilized for other more year round uses? Would the County Fair operate more smoothly in a different location? Have they or will they out grow their site? Our vision for the community does not suggest that the fair grounds should in fact relocate. However, as our guiding principle states, “encourage new while planning the old”, we must think proactively should the fair grounds ultimately relocate. Our plan suggests reuse of this site to a mixed-use pattern of attached and detached housing (stacked as well as row-house with limited (so as not to detract from downtown) retail and service commercial (less than 10K square feet). This patterns offers diversity in housing options and price ranges, makes good use of existing infrastructure systems and capacities, contributes positively to Albert Lea’s tax base and supports the idea of a sustainable, walkable neighborhood development pattern. It is important to note that the northern 2/3rds of the site falls within an airport safety zone which essentially limits development capacity of the site. Future development would need to be cognizant of site limitations and the impacts associated with nearby airport operations.
- ▶ **Live/Work:** Live work is limited in its application to the area adjacent the north end of the industrial park along Southeast Broadway. This category is a unique category (but not necessarily new to Albert Lea) tailoring to the demand for hobbies or businesses that require larger outbuildings for storage or limited business uses such as cabinet making, contractors, antique car or farm tractor collecting/refurbishing etc... The character of the uses would include larger lots 4 to 20 acres generally, that may not require



Many ideas have been explored for the BSL site. A core objective is to redevelop the site to a destination oriented use that compliments downtown Albert Lea.



Our plan envisions the County Fair staying put. However, we recognize the strains on operating a fair in this location and the possibility that it could move. Our plan for if the Fair relocates envisions predominantly a residential use with limited commercial services and well designed open space. Access to Bridge Avenue would be limited.

Any future development of the fair grounds is constrained by limitations from runway safety zones.

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*sanitary sewer or public water and could accommodate a pole building or larger garage on the site. We know that there is demand for these types of uses and so our plan seeks to find a suitable location.*

*Redevelopment and Infill Goal:*

Our goal for redevelopment and infill sites is to create opportunities which serve as catalysts for recapturing underutilized, passed over or deteriorated sites that are in need of redevelopment.

**G20 Restore underutilized, vacant or deteriorated lands within the community to vibrant, productive and attractive neighborhoods**

**G21 Maximize use of existing infrastructure in the pursuit of new housing and job opportunities**

**G22 Accommodate a range of uses appropriate to the location**

*Policies:*

We establish the following policy direction for redevelopment and infill district:

*5.1 Redevelopment and infill areas should be guided by the development of small areas plans which take into consideration the opportunities for new development on the site, the impacts on adjacent properties and the impacts on the existing infrastructure system.*

*5.2 Redevelopment and infill areas should generally seek to achieve the goals and support the policies established in other districts as appropriate.*

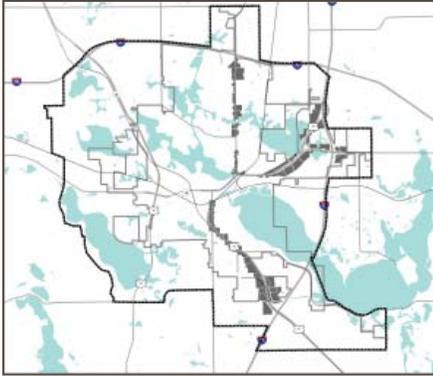
*5.3 Redevelopment should look carefully at the use that is being “replaced” and determine its appropriateness in other areas of the community.*

***Our plan is to improve transportation corridors over time as infrastructure improvements are needed and as development opportunities arise. Transportation infrastructure improvements must be thought about in conjunction with land use and redevelopment planning.***

## **Corridors**

We have established a secondary layer of guidance for key corridors in Albert Lea. The corridor designation essentially serves as an overlay, providing direction towards urban design more so than land use.

Throughout America, we see main street corridors lined with a variety of uses that emerged over time, driven entirely by market opportunities. Often we see single family homes that were built many years ago with individual driveways accessing the street corridor. This was okay back when vehicle trips were not as frequent as they are today. We also see individual businesses that line the corridors or are interspersed amongst residential neighborhoods. These businesses are established to take advantage of convenient access and high visibility. What has resulted in many cases is the proliferation of street corridors that are aging, unorganized, congested and visually unappealing.



*Key Corridors include Bridge Avenue, East Main Street and South Broadway. These streets serve as gateways into our downtown. They are important because they reflect an “appearance” of our community.*

Bridge Avenue, East Main Street and South Broadway are three such corridors in our community. We continue to see new investment and development along these corridors, which is a good thing. This investment needs to be channeled into a more coordinated design strategy that addresses street frontage, signage, community identity features and access.

*Corridor Goals:*

Our goal for our key community transportation corridors is to create a memorable and pleasing experience:

- G23 Improve the function and safety of the roadway corridor**
- G24 Provide for a memorable travel experience**
- G25 Leave a favorable impression on users of the corridor**
- G26 Create an environment where businesses and residents can co-exist**

*Policies:*

In pursuit of our goals for corridors we offer the following policy direction:

- 6.1 Access to roadways from individual properties/parcels should be avoided. Access should be consolidated to serve multiple uses and directed to side streets. This approach reduces the number of conflicts on a street and helps reduce traffic congestion and accident frequency.*
- 6.2 Sign clutter should be minimized. Signage should clearly communicate the business and message and should be compatible with its surroundings.*
- 6.3 A system of way finding should be established and adhered to for the community. A way finding strategy can help build a corridor’s identity in addition to assisting with navigational needs.*
- 6.4 Roadway design should be guided first by the desired character of the road, followed closely by the function and volume of traffic.*
- 6.5 Site planning and building orientation should direct the more visual elements of the site (i.e. landscaping and architectural details) towards the primary corridor. Setbacks should vary for residential and commercial uses.*
- 6.6 Commercial uses should be oriented principally around key intersections and commercial nodes.*
- 6.7 Residential uses should be allowed along the corridor but should have increased setbacks proportional to the intensity of the traffic function of the corridor. Access to residential uses should be via service alley or drive accesses.*
- 6.8 Because corridors typically have a greater intensity of land use and a higher traffic volume, pedestrian circulation systems are of extreme importance. Sidewalks should provide connections to individual commercial stores, shopping centers or office destinations and should be continuous along both sides of major road corridors. Sidewalk connections from the street to individual businesses should be continuous either through direct connections or use of crosswalks/*

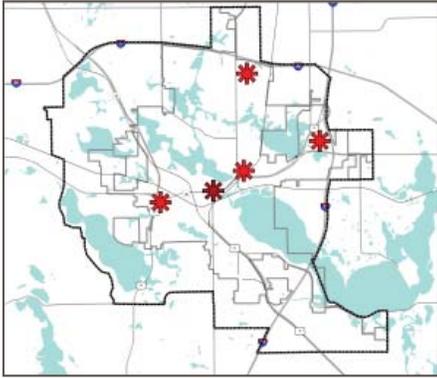


*East Main Street represents several decades of development patterns and styles. It is a State Highway and its road character reflects that fact. Our efforts to shape land use will focus on building orientations, frontage road alignments.*

*dedicated striping in parking lots.*

## **Nodes**

A final layer of guidance in our plan is the identification of key nodes. Nodes represent those areas of the community that are defined by specific landmarks, intersections or identifiable places and have a focus on commercial services and shopping. We have identified two nodes, Skyline Plaza and Bridge Ave/Marshall Street that demand further definition within this section. Other nodes include Downtown (see the downtown district discussion), Northbridge Mall and East Main Street (see interchange discussion).



*Key nodes that serve as our centers for retail and service needs are located along major corridors and key cross roads.*

### Goal for Community Nodes:

Our goal for community nodes is to preserve and maintain a vital center for neighborhood services (general retail needs) that serve the major residential neighborhoods of the community for basic service needs.

### **G27 Establish a land use pattern for small scale commercial services that provide for residents basic needs.**

### Policies:

We support the following policies in relationship to key nodes:

*7.1 Nodes should be established to provide basic commercial services and retail shopping needs for Albert Lea and the surrounding communities.*

*7.2 Nodes should be located near key intersections that provide good access for connecting people from outside of Albert Lea to these services.*

*7.3 Nodes should be maintained in convenient locations to residential neighborhoods. Ideally, commercial services and retail needs are within walking distance of every household in Albert Lea.*

*7.4 Development of commercial services within node areas should be designed to front both the roadway corridors as well as the adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

*7.5 Key pedestrian connections should reach into the neighborhoods enhancing the ability to walk from neighborhoods to shopping areas.*

*7.6 Shopping center development at key nodes should consider strategies to compliment downtown Albert Lea instead of competing and drawing tenants from downtown.*

*7.7 Parking strategies for nodes should explore solutions that minimize the amount of hard surface parking lots while not compromising the vitality of the commercial service and retail needs.*

*7.8 Expansion and growth of neighborhood shopping nodes should consider re-use of existing spaces and structures or vertical expansion (two or three story structures) before expanding into existing neighborhoods.*

7.9 Residential growth within the nodes should be considered but only as a vertical element of a project so as to preserve lands for commercial services and retail needs.

7.10 Use of innovative storm water management strategies that are designed as site amenities should be encouraged.

## **Community Patterns - - Summary**

As a community, we have evolved over the years and changed in many ways. As we look to the future, we cannot predict exactly what might happen; but we know that we will continue to change. Our plan guides us in a direction that will enable us to thrive as a Midwestern town with tremendous assets in our lakes and vibrant downtown, a great location at the crossroads of two interstate highways, an innovative populous and a forward thinking plan.

Our plan enables us capacity to grow, while keeping our edges close through a logically (and geologically) defined edge of ridges, valleys and movement corridors.

Our plan emphasizes sustainability as a core principle that prioritizes reinvestment in our assets and strengths such as our lakes, downtown and our sense for innovation.

Our plan maintains a degree of flexibility and interpretation in our land uses but is clear in our principles.

We embrace the idea of making change on our terms. However, we recognize the importance of being open to ideas and opinions and engaging in healthy debates around what is best for our community.

***We are looking forward to our future!***



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