

# 02

## LAND USE

### Chapter highlights

- Overview
- Current Land Use
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Future Land Use
- Growth Areas
- Development Districts
- Zoning
- Goals & Actions



# OVERVIEW

Planning for future land use allows a community to guide development in effective, compatible, and efficient ways. Well-guided land use organizes the city by aligning city-wide resources, promoting equitable development, and ensuring compatibility among nearby uses. The Land Use section of this plan establishes and defines land use classifications to be applied across the City of Albert Lea's jurisdiction. This chapter will also set a framework for the future development and redevelopment of land within the city by outlining a vision for future growth. The goal of this chapter is to plan for the success of future growth by ensuring compatibility and efficiency of land uses.

The City of Albert Lea is approximately 9,690 acres in size, with a planning area that includes the entirety of the city limits and 4,045 acres of the surrounding townships. Future land use will follow patterns already established in the city. Commercial areas will continue to cluster around the Highway 65 corridor, with an emerging mixed-use development area establishing itself just south of Fountain Lake. Future industrial development will continue to cluster around where Highway 65 meets the Interstate 35 corridor. Industrial land use currently located near Highway 13 will slowly phase out as the area grows in commercial and mixed-use development. Instead, industry will be encouraged to grow near the Interstate 90 corridor, on the northern end of the city. Patterns of low-density, medium-density, and high-density residential housing will largely stay the same and will be intermixed with institutional uses, agricultural uses, and parks and open spaces.

As of 2010, Albert Lea had 18,016 people and 7,774 households. It is estimated that the city's population grew by 3% between 2010 and 2020 to 18,492, while the number of households increased by 2% to 7,951. While the city's overall population is expected to remain stable, the city will continue to grow and change in other ways. For example, the city's largest age cohorts, the 55 to 64 age group (13% of the population) and the 75 and older age group (12% of the population), are anticipated to grow. To prepare for this demographic shift, future single-family residential developments are expected near the city's boundaries while the center city is expected to grow in density of both residential and commercial uses to increase housing choice. Furthermore, the population of Albert Lea, as well as the entire region, is becoming more diverse. This change creates both opportunities and challenges. Diversity creates opportunities for new cultural experiences, including new food and restaurants, service businesses and employees. The challenge for the city will be to ensure a variety of housing opportunities, recreational activities, and abilities for business expansion and growth.

## Section Overview

- Current Land Use
- Opportunities & Challenges
- Future Land Use
- Growth Areas
- Development Districts
- Zoning
- Goals & Objectives

The goals of this chapter deal with the built environment— relating it to the social, economic, and natural environments. Land Use goals introduced below include creating livable neighborhoods, encouraging new development, and expanding city gathering places.

# CURRENT LAND USE

Existing land use patterns in Albert Lea are a culmination of historical development, long-term planning effort, and everyday decisions. They tell the story of the city. The current land use map and the current land use table illustrate the city’s existing land uses in 2022. The following defines the existing land uses in Albert Lea:

**Commercial and Industrial** lands form the job base. Commercial uses are generally retail and service-oriented uses including offices that provide day-to-day needs for the community. Industrial uses include the manufacturing of products, storage, 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 Parks** are 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 of 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, quad homes, 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.

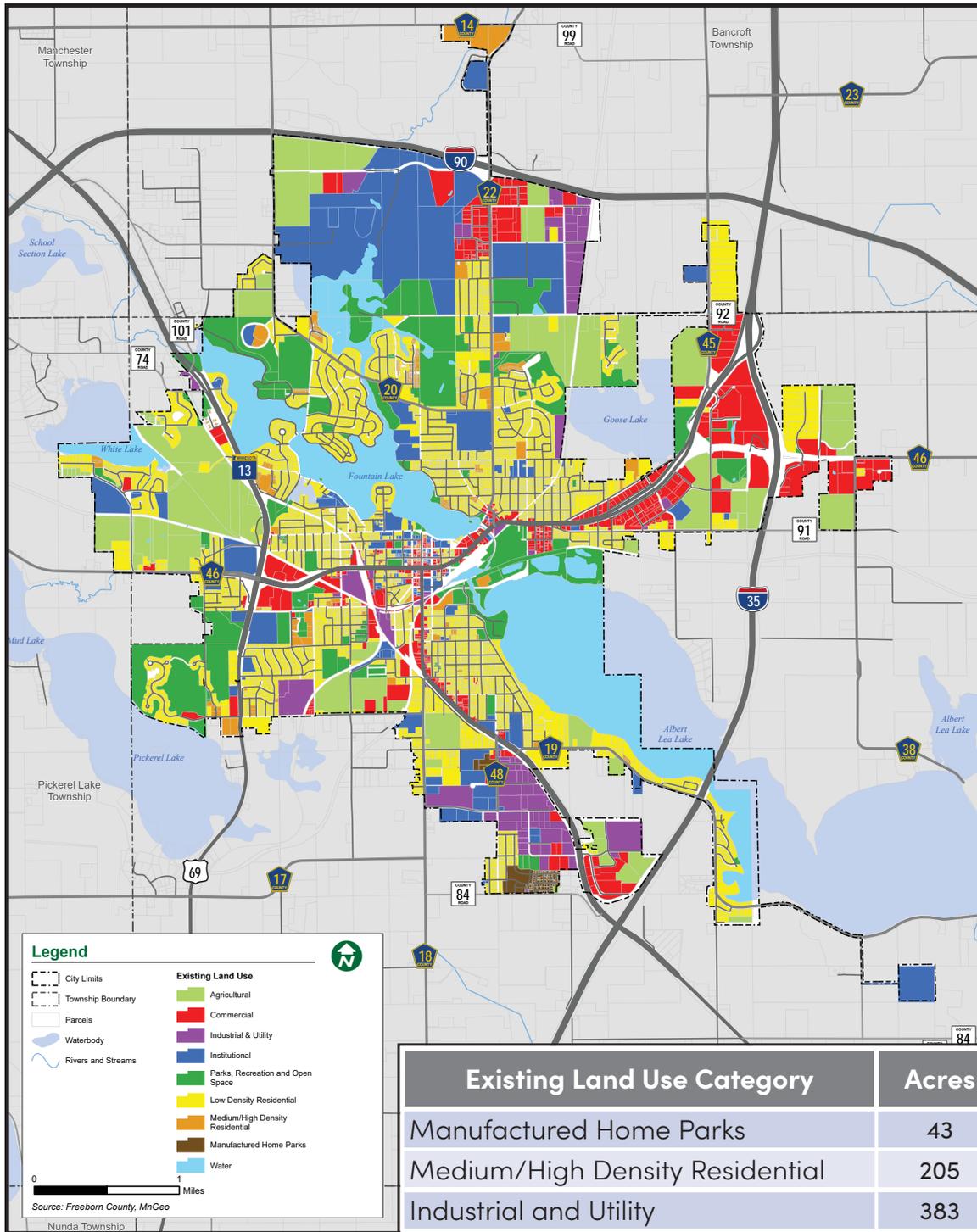
**Public and Semi-Public** uses include government-owned facilities, school district facilities, and religious or philanthropic institutions that are generally of a non-profit status.

**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 2-1 CURRENT LAND USE**



**TABLE 2-1  
CURRENT  
LAND USE  
ACREAGE**

Existing Land Use Category	Acres	Share of City
Manufactured Home Parks	43	0.5%
Medium/High Density Residential	205	2.4%
Industrial and Utility	383	4.5%
Commercial	788	9.2%
Parks, Recreation and Open Space	998	11.6%
Institutional	1122	13.1%
Agricultural	1224	14.3%
Water	1736	20.3%
Low Density Residential	2070	24.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,569</b>	<b>100%</b>

# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES



## Preserving and Expanding Housing Choice

Although growth is not projected for Albert Lea overall, growth is expected to occur among older adults in the community. To accommodate this demographic change, it will be necessary to invest in aging housing stock throughout the city while also identifying areas for new development of housing at various densities. To keep Albert Lea's quality of life high and cost of living low, the city will support medium- to high-density residential housing near the downtown area as well as around existing commercial nodes in the city.



## Commercial Growth

To support the increase in housing units, Albert Lea will encourage mixed-use, neighborhood commercial development downtown and near existing commercial nodes to promote livability and the use of non-motorized transportation. The city will continue to market Albert Lea's economic programs to attract and support new and existing businesses. Future land use will also promote better access to healthcare and social services for residents.



## Growing Local Workforce

Popular ideas include diversifying available jobs and even more recreational activities to take advantage of the landscape. Challenges that face Albert Lea are the lack of industrial land, which limits certain types of expansion, and the lack of adequate childcare, which restricts families from moving to Albert Lea and accessing job opportunities.



## Cost of Living

During community engagement activities for this plan, residents expressed they were attracted to Albert Lea by the quality of life and cost of living—two big strengths in the city. This Comprehensive Plan organizes land use to promote low-cost housing and commercial and industrial development to maintain a high quality of life while keeping the cost of living low for residents.



## Outdoor Recreation

Albert Lea residents appreciate the existing recreational amenities in the city and see parks and open space as an area to expand. During community engagement activities, residents expressed a desire for more outdoor winter activities. Recreational biking and walking are a strength of the community.

## Quality of Life and Blue Zones



According to the comprehensive plan steering committee, the strengths of Albert Lea include a beautiful and well-maintained built environment, a high-quality school system, and a close-knit and engaged community. Each of these strengths contributes to a high quality of life for residents.

In addition to the above, Albert Lea is known for being the first Blue Zones community. Blue Zones are a combination of lifestyle and diet decisions coupled with public and private investment in communities. Such investments improve walkability, increase access to trails and parks, and establish sustainable systems for growing health equity, stability, and resilience against challenges to personal and societal health.

Blue Zones differs from other programs by finding the intersection between health and economic vitality. With a healthier population, millions of dollars or more can be saved in healthcare costs, businesses save more money in group healthcare plans, and workers are less sick. Eating healthier foods encourages spending at grocery stores and restaurants with healthier food options. More time is spent walking, biking, and being active instead of sitting in sedentary positions.

The current trend in economic development includes looking at a city's quality of life. Through having a great quality of life, cities can make a stronger pitch for relocating businesses within city limits and attracting highly-skilled workers. More information on Blue Zones and how the program has positively impacted Albert Lea can be found at [www.bluezones.com](http://www.bluezones.com).

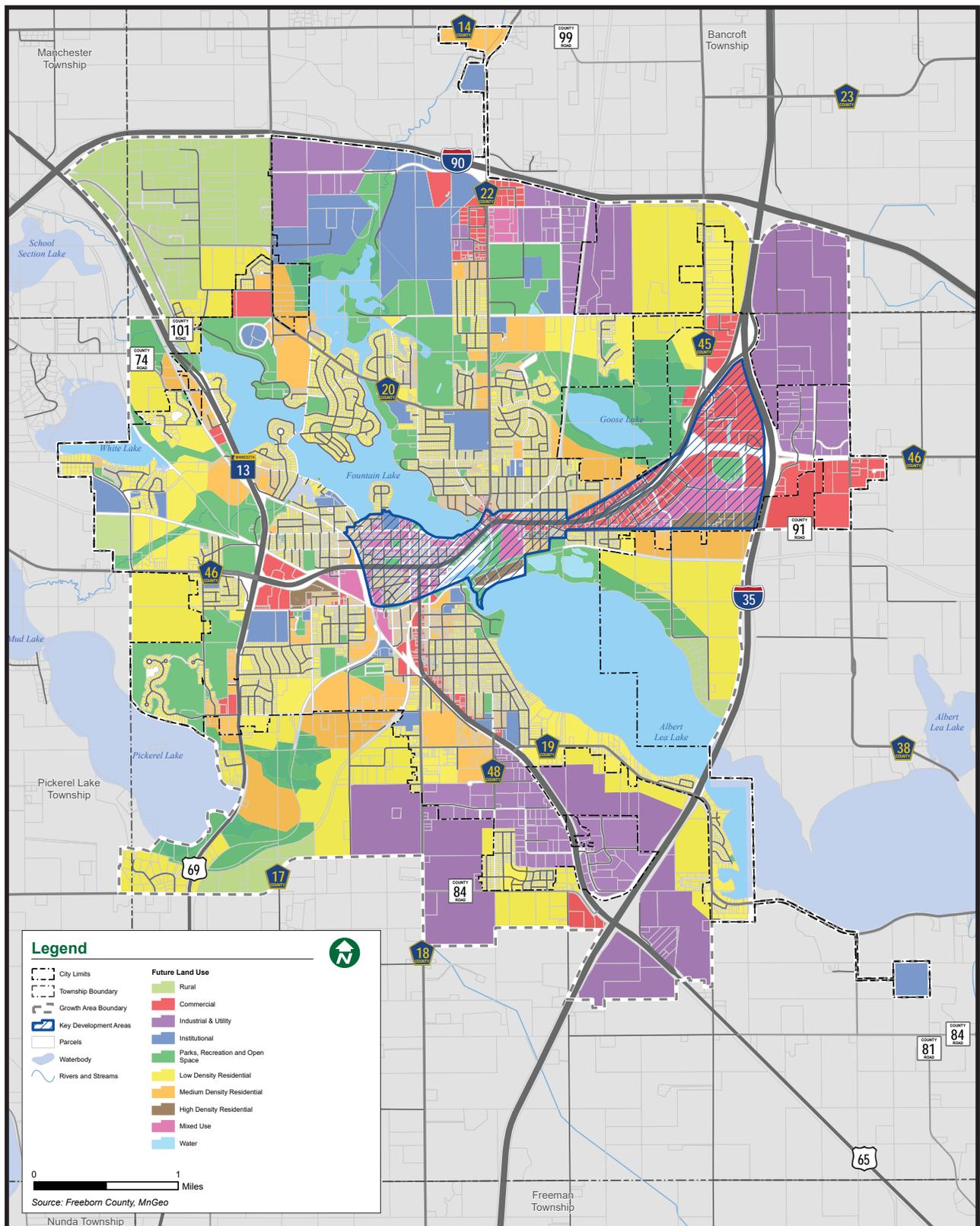
### By the end of the Blue Zones pilot project, adopting the model made a significant difference in Albert Lea:

- 90% increase in community satisfaction
- 40% drop in city worker healthcare costs
- 25% increase in property values
- 40% increase in biking and walking
- Three additional years of life added to the participants' life expectancy
- Moved up from #68 to #45 in Minnesota County Health Rankings



# FUTURE LAND USE

## FIGURE 2-2 FUTURE LAND USE



## TABLE 2-2 FUTURE LAND USE ACREAGE

Future Land Use Category	Acres	Share of City
Low Density Residential	3,637	26.3%
Industrial & Utility	2,327	16.8%
Water	2,136	15.5%
Parks, Recreation and Open Space	1,866	13.5%
Medium Density Residential	1,126	8.2%
Rural	842	6.1%
Institutional	786	5.7%
Commercial	741	5.4%
Mixed Use	275	2.0%
High Density Residential	77	0.6%
TOTAL	13,814	100.0%

### Future land use categories can be described as follows:

**Agricultural** – More rural in nature with land for agriculture and large-lot single-family homes. Allowable uses include limited agriculture, hobby farms, and large lot single-family homes without public water and sewer service. Single-family homes in this category are allowed at a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit/10 acres.

**Low Density Residential** – Single-family detached housing units are typical of newer single-family neighborhoods in Albert Lea. Attached single-family housing units are allowed when residential density is less than 6 units. Places of worship and small, neighborhood-scale services may be found along major roads and prominent intersections within low-density neighborhoods.

**Medium Density Residential** – Includes attached housing units, e.g., townhomes and smaller apartments. Residential densities are typically between 6 to 12 units/acre. Places of worship and small, neighborhood-scale services may be found along major roads and prominent intersections.

**High Density Residential** – Typically located near commercial and mixed uses, golf courses, schools, and major city routes, this category allows for multi-story and multi-family housing. Residential densities are typically more than 12 units/acre. Places of worship and small, neighborhood-scale services may be found along major roads and prominent intersections.

**Mixed Use** – This category of land use allows for a mix of residential and commercial uses generally located at key intersections, corridors, and nodes of Albert Lea, and at key locations along both Main Street. Scale and building heights are dependent on the surrounding context but range from 1 - 5 stories in height. This category also allows for higher densities of residential uses (>15 units/acre) and commercial uses such as restaurants, offices, services, and retail. Uses should ideally be vertically mixed, but developments that incorporate a variety of uses spread horizontally can be appropriate towards the edges of the city.

**Commercial** – Includes both large-scale, regional-serving and moderate-scale, local-serving commercial uses. Typically applied to areas with higher levels of accessibility and visibility from adjoining roadways. The site and building design of commercial areas should be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and residential areas.

**Industrial** – Allows for design, assembly, finishing, packaging, processing, and storing of products or materials. Also includes facilities for administration, research, assembly, storage, warehousing, and distribution of goods, such as electronics firms, data centers, trucking companies, textile mills, and auto assembly plants. Also allowed are surface structures associated with manufacturing operations including loading devices, trucks, access roads, processing facilities, stockpiles, and storage sheds.

**Parks, Recreation, and Open Space** – City parkland, associated facilities, and land located along protected streams and bodies of water. Includes retention and detention basins and other characteristically natural lands. Areas considered un- or under-developed, the 100-year floodplains, floodways, and wetlands are also considered green space.

**Public and Institutional** – Public and semi-public lands including Freeborn County Fairgrounds, city and county government land and facilities, Albert Lea School District land and facilities, and medical hospitals. Includes other uses typically considered under educational, medical, and institutional uses. This use is typically public/semi-public in nature.



# GROWTH AREAS

As the City of Albert Lea continues to change in population, supportive residential, commercial, and industrial centers must be provided. The city has identified several areas for redevelopment and future development. Redevelopment areas were selected based on a combination of the following criteria:

- Guided for higher density residential development or mixed-use development
- Located along a major roadway corridor
- In some cases, the site is currently underutilized, with lower densities of residents and jobs compared to potential development opportunities

It is not anticipated that the city will seek to acquire and/or redevelop all of these sites. Most development will happen via private sector activity, and many of these sites may remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. This exercise establishes what areas may have the potential to accommodate planned growth.

The continued expansion and development within the growth areas identified in this Comprehensive Plan will require the extension of public utilities into those areas. In general, the existing infrastructure system is well-positioned and of adequate size to support expansion into the growth areas. 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.

## Growth Area 1

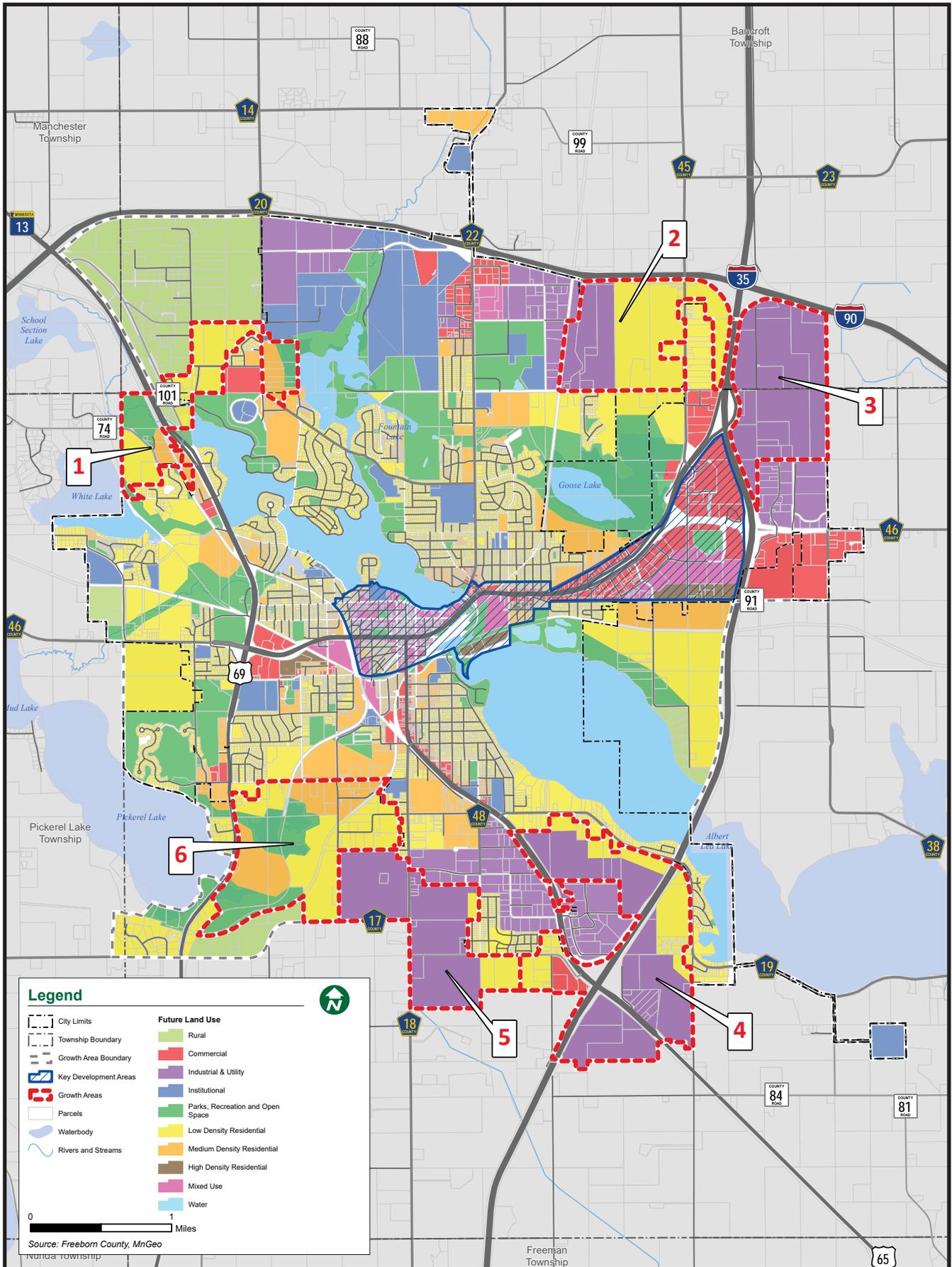
Growth Area 1 is identified as being primarily low-density residential with some medium-density residential along major roads, small commercial nodes to serve residents on the edge of city limits, and open space accommodating natural corridors and floodplains. Beyond this area are areas identified for agriculture, which include large-lot residential estates. New development is bound primarily by existing large-lot residential to the north and Fountain Lake to the southeast. New development is expected to occur along existing major corridors, like State Highway 13, and near the intersection of 740th Avenue and Itasca Road. Northeast of this growth area, next to the city transfer station and landfill, is an area intended for industrial uses to be filled out five to ten years into the future.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Limit access to major transportation corridors for traffic safety.
- Preserve of open space encumbered by floodplain, water features, or shoreland.



# FIGURE 2-3 GROWTH AREAS



## Growth Area 2

Growth Area 2 is identified by two major land uses: heavy industrial, expanding from an existing industrial park west of the growth area, and low-density residential. Construction in this area is bound by Interstates 90 and 35, with the railroad tracks on the west and both Hammers Road and Goose Lake floodplain to the south. Residential uses are expected to be primarily developed near the intersection of Hammer and Sorensen Roads. New industrial will be able to take advantage of reasonable access to and visibility from Interstate 90, along with access to the railway corridor. Residential development in this growth area and around Goose Lake is expected within the next 5 years.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Limiting access to major transportation corridors for traffic safety.
- Adequate transitional space between industrial and residential areas.
- Preservation of open space encumbered by floodplain, water features, or shoreland.

## Growth Area 3

Growth Area 3 is identified as a potential expansion area for industrial uses across Interstate 35. New development is bound primarily by existing agriculture, large-lot residential, Interstate 90, and commercial uses near the Travel Center along County Highway 46. New industrial will be able to take advantage of access to and visibility from Interstate 35. However, the industrial in this area will likely be limited to warehousing, low-intensity industrial, and supporting businesses due to challenges in water and sewer availability.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Upsize existing sanitary sewer on Stevens Street and East Main Street.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.

## Growth Area 4

Growth Area 4 is identified as a potential expansion area for primarily industrial uses, but also new low-density residential along Albert Lea Lake and South Shore Drive. New development will focus on the existing industrial park and the intersection of Interstate 35 and Highway 65. New industrial will be able to take advantage of access to and visibility from Interstate 35.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Development areas encumbered by shoreland.
- Limiting access to major transportation corridors for traffic safety.
- Adequate transitional space between industrial and residential areas.

## Growth Area 5

Growth Area 5 is identified as a potential expansion area for heavy industrial uses directly south of Downtown Albert Lea and adjacent to existing industrial properties. Industrial along 14th Street will continue developing to and south along Broadway Avenue to County Highway 84. New development is bound primarily by existing agriculture, large-lot residential, and residential in and near Stoney Creek Estates. New industrial will be able to take advantage of access to and visibility from Interstate 35.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Adequate transitional space between industrial and residential areas.
- Limiting access to major transportation corridors for traffic safety.

## Growth Area 6

Growth Area 6 is identified as being primarily low-density residential with some medium-density residential along major roads and open space accommodating natural corridors and floodplains. Beyond this area are areas identified for agriculture, which include large-lot residential estates. New development is bound primarily by existing large-lot residential to the south and Pickerel Lake to the west. New development is expected to take place along existing major corridors, like Federal Highway 69. Along Lincoln Avenue, near Growth Area 5, is identified for industrial uses.

***Development in this growth area must address the following challenges or complete action steps:***

- Extend trunk sanitary sewer and watermain.
- Provide stormwater management that meets the City's MS4 permit and complies with the goals of the Shell Rock River and Winnebago River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan.
- Preservation of open space encumbered by floodplain, water features, or shoreland.
- Limiting access to major transportation corridors for traffic safety.



# DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

The following Development Districts are areas of the city that require a more detailed approach than one found in a comprehensive plan. Ultimately, a small-area or master planning effort will be needed to make detailed and implementable goals for the two districts: Downtown and Main Street.

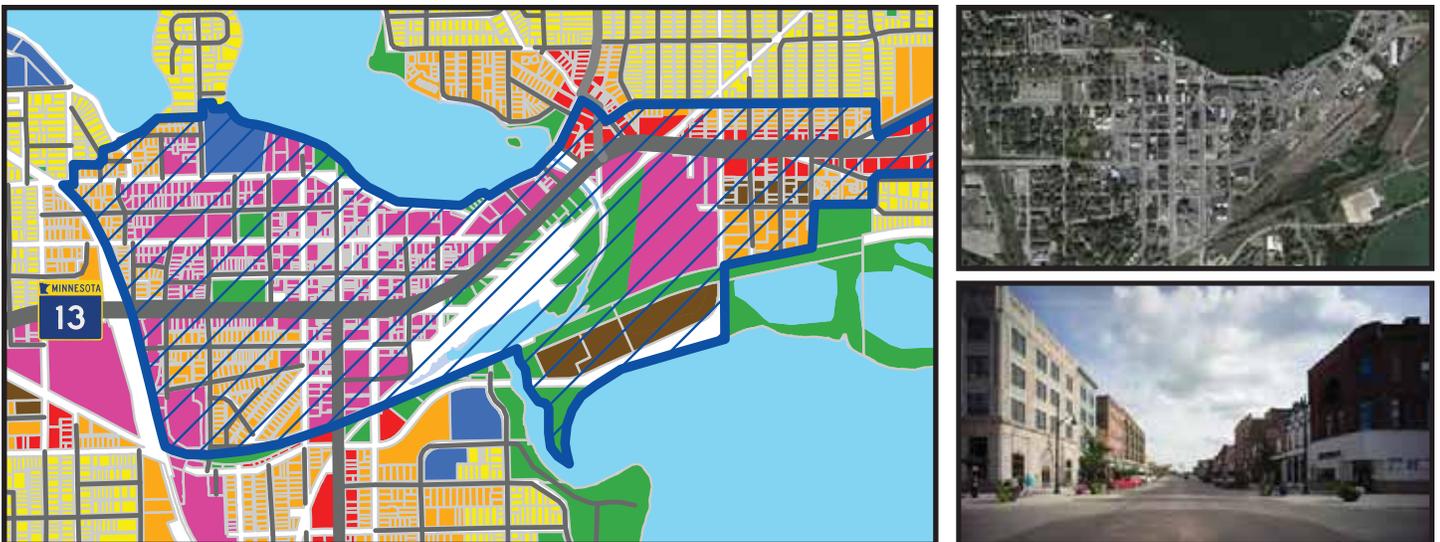
## Downtown Mixed-Use District

The Plan for Albert Lea’s Downtown District is to enhance and preserve the historic character of the area surrounding the intersection of South Broadway Avenue and East Main Street. In addition to this intersection, the surrounding historic neighborhood and mix of uses offer vibrant destinations unique to the City of Albert Lea. The intent of creating this district is to promote and capitalize on opportunities that enhance and improve land use patterns in the district, while the area evolves and develops alongside structures and uses that reinforce the historic charm.

The vitality of the Downtown District is dependent on enough support from nearby households and residents supporting its businesses. Knowing this, the Future Land Use Plan has designated this area as mixed-use to allow for a combination of residential and commercial uses in the district. The plan works to identify areas where increased residential density is compatible with the existing and expected future commercial development, bringing more residents closer to the conveniences and desired destinations of the Downtown District.

The Downtown District historically served as the city’s primary area of commerce. During years of growth and expansion, new highway commercial and industrial construction began to occur along Main Street to the east and west of the Downtown District. In an attempt to retain the historic downtown as a destination, the city will work to encourage investment in the Downtown District. This will include updating the zoning code to allow for a more diverse variety of uses, continuing to enforce strict code compliance on building maintenance, and marketing programs designed to encourage maintenance and renovation of historical buildings. Using a variety of tools, Albert Lea plans to retain the Downtown District as a vibrant commercial and residential center far into the future.

**FIGURE 2-4 DOWNTOWN MIXED-USE DISTRICT**



## Main Street District

The Plan for Albert Lea’s Main Street east of Downtown is to connect the corridor with Downtown, integrate it with surrounding neighborhoods, support continued private and public investment in the corridor, and encourage the construction of mixed-use developments. In addition to the above goals, this corridor will continue to be a major commercial center for the city and region. Due to this distinction and its placement as a major interchange for Interstate 35 and Highway 65, this district will be a gateway, destination, and rest area for those traveling to and around Albert Lea.

The Main Street District encompasses the property from the bridge crossing the strait near Downtown to Interstate 35. The district also includes nearby neighborhoods and development opportunity sites. The character of this area includes many local and chain retailers, restaurants, and offices. The neighborhoods nearby are modest, largely single-family homes. One end of the district is adjacent to Downtown while the other is anchored by the travel center across the Interstate and the areas between Walmart and Home Depot. Included in the district is the “Blazing Star Site” between the railroad tracks and Main Street across the strait from Downtown.

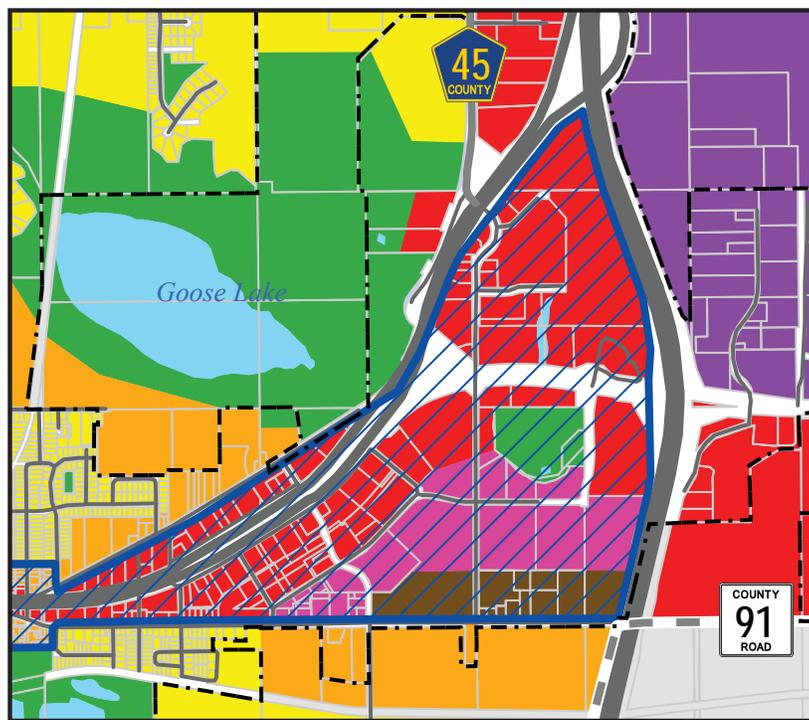
The “Blazing Star Site” is an opportunity to provide more housing adjacent to Downtown. A mixed-use development here will thrive on traffic along Main Street and take advantage of a location between two major lakes. The ability to walk from the property to Downtown and any number of retail or natural amenities is unmatched compared to other development opportunity sites in Albert Lea.

The opposite end of the district along Interstate 35 and around Walmart and Home Depot is spacious enough for mixed-use retail, office, and residential development. The mixed-use in this area is intended to be vertical mixed-use, meaning residential and/or office above retail. Horizontal mixed-use will also achieve a similar result of walkability while providing a different set of housing types and affordability from Downtown and adjacent areas. The proximity to the Interstate may attract households wishing to live in Albert Lea while working elsewhere along Interstates 35 or 90 and businesses capitalizing on both the travel center and vehicle counts for Main Street and the Interstate.

Success in this district will depend on a series of robust and adaptable systems:

- Road and trail systems.
- Wayfinding and signage.
- Utilities and services.
- Access to nature and parkland.
- Access to key retail amenities.
- Range of housing types and affordability.
- Diverse mix of work opportunities.
- Inclusive housing and public spaces.

**FIGURE 2-5 MAIN STREET DISTRICT**





# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## Goal 1: Preserve and Maintain Existing Strengths

- Objective 1.1. Help new and long-time residents find or keep their homes.
- Objective 1.2 Support natural and planned walkable communities.

## Goal 2: Guide and Encourage New Development

- Objective 2.1. Guide development into areas of targeted growth.
- Objective 2.2. Remove barriers to development.
- Objective 2.3. Amend and administer city plans and codes.

## Goal 3: Develop Community Identity

- Objective 3.1. Welcome and engage new and long-time residents and businesses.
- Objective 3.2. Enhance development through inclusive, healthy, and safe design principles.