

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION 2026-008

RECOMMENDATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO RELATED TO USE SPECIFIC
STANDARDS FOR DATA PROCESSING FACILITIES IN THE LAND DEVELOPMENT
CODE

WHEREAS, in 2025, the City of Northfield adopted an updated Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, Action 4-3.4 of the Implementation Chapter of the updated Comprehensive Plan charges the Community Development Department to review regulations and policies to reduce or eliminate barriers to new business creation; and

WHEREAS, Action 4-8.6 of the Implementation Chapter of the updated Comprehensive Plan charges the Planning Commission and Community Development Department to revise and regularly update the Land Development Code to remove barriers and reduce costs to housing and economic development; and

WHEREAS, Purpose 1.1.8 of the Land Development Code is to Provide for the expansion and diversification of the economic base to assure a strong economy; and

WHEREAS, the Community Development Department staff have identified the required setback of 3,950 feet from an existing or planned trail, park, or other recreational feature for Data Processing Facilities established by Section 2.9.14 Data Processing Facilities, of Article 2.- Zoning Districts and Use Regulations, of Chapter 34 - Land Development Code of the Northfield City Code as a barrier to industrial business creation and economic development; and

WHEREAS, all required notices regarding the public hearing were properly made; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on August 20, 2026, and received public testimony regarding the proposed land development code amendments; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission recommends a rationale for amending the Land Development Code related to use specific standards for data processing facilities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission hereby recommends to the Mayor and City Council the following amendments to Chapter 34 of the City Legislative Code.

PASSED by the Planning Commission of the City of Northfield on this 20th day of August 2026.

Chair

Member

VOTE: ___ KUHLMANN ___ BUCKHEIT ___ HOLLERAN
 ___ LAUER ___ MENARD ___ NOWAK ___ SCHMIDT

EXHIBIT A

Planning Commission Findings

Land Development Code Approval Criteria

When reviewing a zoning text amendment, the Planning Commission and City Council is to consider several criteria as established in Article 8 of the Land Development Code (8.5.14.C). The Planning Commission and City Council shall review the necessary submittal requirements, facts, and circumstances of the proposed amendment and make a recommendation and decision on the application based on, but not limited to, consideration of the following criteria:

(1) The specific policies, goals, objectives, and recommendations of the comprehensive plan and other city plans, including public facilities and the capital improvement plans.

The Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2025 includes the following actions:

Action 4-1.1 Identify opportunities and provide support for improved business mix, marketing events, and physical improvements.

Action 4-3.4 Review regulations and policies to reduce or eliminate barriers to new business creation.

Action 4-8.6 Revise and regularly update the Land Development Code to remove barriers and reduce costs to housing and economic development.

It also includes Strategy 5: Diversify Northfield's tax base, stating the intended outcome as Northfield will intentionally build a more sustainable local economy to maintain and expand city services and infrastructure.

The Comprehensive Plan also incorporates elements of other City plans including maps of future transportation connections to provide a minimum level of connectivity, guidance that development should be compact and make efficient use of resources, and that care should be taken to protect the natural environment. Specifically, the Comprehensive Plan incorporates a system of planned greenways and trails, portions of which intersect with or are adjacent to the industrial areas. The required buffer of 3,950 feet combined with these planned trails, effectively eliminates the possibility of data processing facilities being located within industrial areas within the City.

The proposed amendment reflects the values and goals of the Comprehensive Plan by preserving the performance standards applied to data processing facilities while reducing the required setback to a reasonable distance consistent with industry best-practices and the required setbacks from other uses.

(2) The purpose and intent of this LDC, or in the case of a map amendment, whether it meets the purpose and intent of the individual district.

The purpose of the I1-B: Industrial zoning district is to:

(1) The I1 district should generally apply to those areas designated as "District" on the Framework map of the comprehensive plan.

(2) The purpose of the Industrial (I1) district is to provide an area to accommodate manufacturing uses, general businesses, offices, service and repair businesses, warehousing and office showroom uses in a functional, attractive manner that does not unduly affect the development or use of nearby property. Limited and incidental retailing shall be allowed in this district. The portion of the district that abuts the Cannon River shall be developed in a manner that enhances, restores, augments and maintains the ecology and beauty of this natural corridor.

The intent or purpose of the I1-B: Industrial zoning district is inhibited by the required 3,950-foot setback for data processing facilities from existing or planned parks, trails, or other recreational features by effectively precluding the possibility of that use within areas of the City zoned I1-B: Industrial. This standard does not reflect the purpose of the use specific standards for Data Processing Facilities, which is to minimize conflicts with adjacent land uses and to ensure the effect of any such enterprise is minimized. The proposed text amendment reflects this intent by ensuring the use is allowed, while preserving the other use-specific-standards designed to minimize conflicts and impacts.

(3) The adequacy of infrastructure available to serve the proposed action.

The proposed text amendment does not alter the availability of infrastructure to serve the proposed use.

(4) The adequacy of a buffer or transition provided between potentially incompatible districts.

Staff reviewed similar ordinances from other cities and counties in Minnesota and nationally, participated in webinars, and reviewed best-practice guidance related to regulation of data processing facilities. A required setback from planned or existing parks, trails, or other recreational features is a common requirement, but research showed the required setback is typically 500 feet or less. Other requirements of the use-specific-standards should adequately address many of the impacts a setback requirement is intended to address such as noise and vibration.

The proposed amendment brings the setback requirement from planned or existing parks, trails, or other recreational features more in-line with the 200-foot setback required from any residential dwelling.