

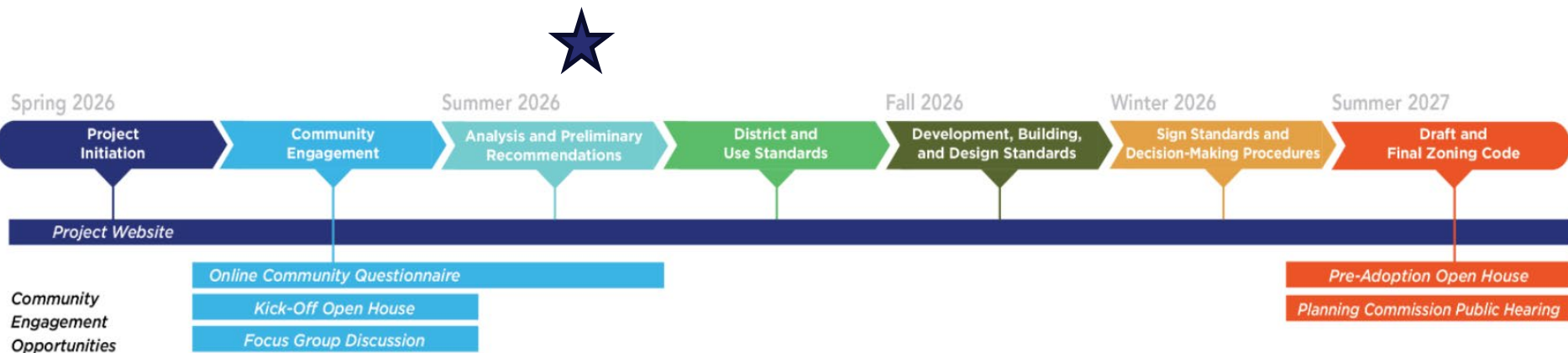


Zoning Code Update

Environmental Quality Commission

August 19, 2026

Timeline



What is a Zoning Code?



- **Regulates development within the city**
 - Uses – where, when, how
 - Forms – setbacks, height limits, access, size, materials, etc.
 - Buildings, signs, subdivisions, streets
 - Performance – lighting, noise, dust, traffic
 - Process – permits, variances, enforcement, etc.
- **What it's not:**
 - Building code, fire code, fiscal policy, nuisance code, private actions

Purpose of a Zoning Code?



- Implement Comprehensive Plan (and other city plans)
- History of public health
- Includes purpose statement
 - Preserve & protect natural, historic, & cultural resources...
 - Encourage growth in infill locations...
 - Promote an ethic of sustainability...
 - Create a comprehensive and stable pattern of land uses...

Why Update?

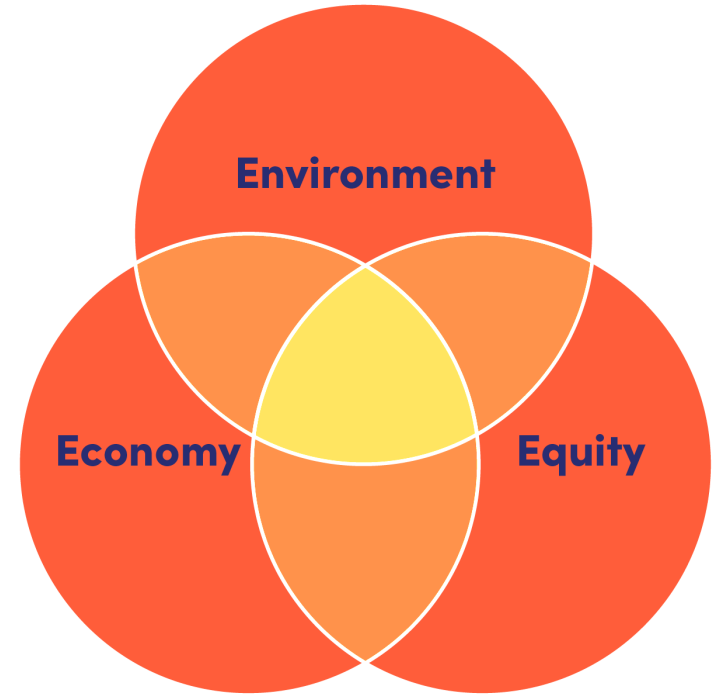


- **Align with the 2045 Comprehensive Plan.**
 - Ensure zoning regulations support the goals and vision outlined in Northfield's Comprehensive Plan 2045
- **Modernize and Update.**
 - The Zoning Code was last fully updated in 2011, with several amendments added over time
- **Respond to Evolving Development Needs.**
 - Update regulations to better reflect current and future development trends
- **Improve Development Standards.**
 - Refine regulations related to setbacks, building coverage, parking, lighting, and signs
- **Enhance Usability and Clarity.**
 - Redesign the Code to be clearer, easier to navigate, and more user-friendly for residents, developers, and City staff
- **Process Improvement.**
 - Implement proportional and transparent processes with clear requirements and decision criteria

Key Themes of Comp Plan



- Northfield is a welcoming city, providing equitable access to a high quality of life.
- We are a city with a strong identity rooted in history while growing as a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable place. We maintain our integrity as an independent and distinct city shaped by our historic and natural resources, the Cannon River, rural neighbors, and our colleges.



Key Considerations



- **Clear**
 - Terms defined, consistently used, reflect intent
- **Enforceable**
 - State/Federal law, practical constraints
- **Practicable**
 - Allow/prohibit, dis/encourage, requirements/conditions
- **Balance trade-offs and competing priorities**

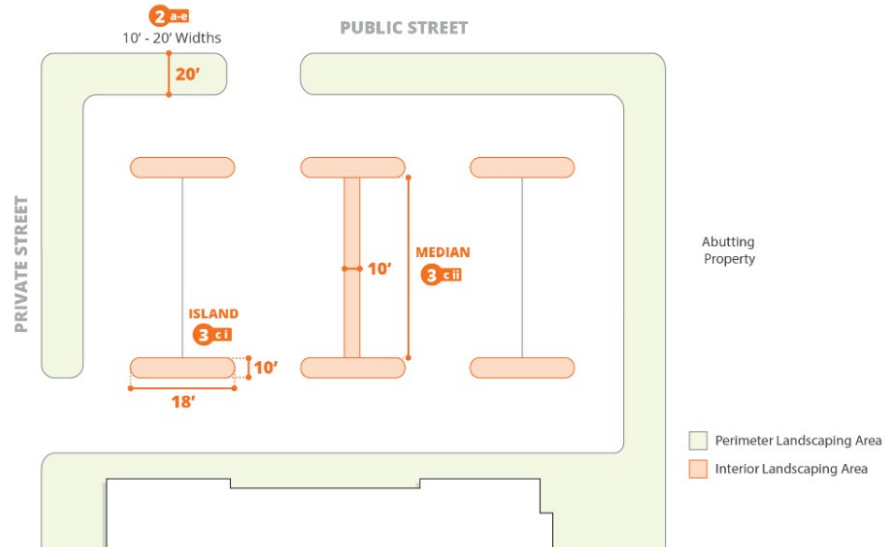
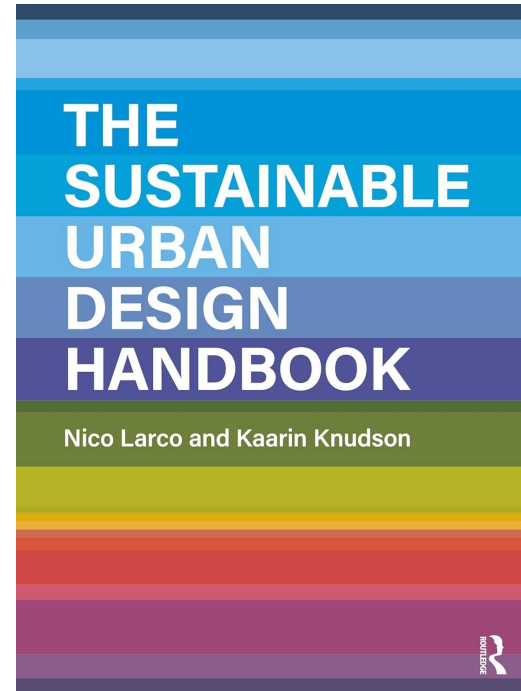


Figure 3 Parking Lot Landscape

EQC Relevant Topics



- **Density & land use**
 - Buildings & Transportation – 2 primary sources of GHG
- **Landscaping**
- **Stormwater**
- **Lighting**
 - Currently have a dark-sky lighting ordinance
- **Preservation/adaptive reuse**

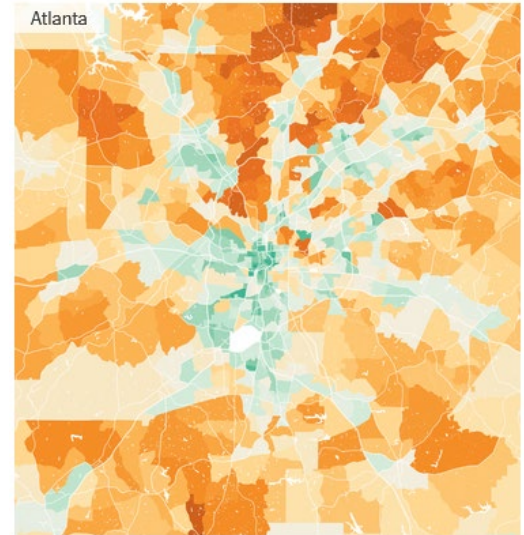
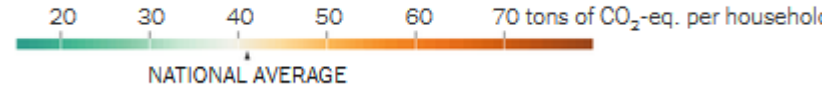


Compact Development



- **Density & land use**
 - Buildings & Transportation – 2 primary sources of GHG
- **Multiplier effects**
 - Destinations to walk to, enough customers to support, more efficient buildings, reduced land consumption
- **Effectively manage change**

Emissions Footprint of the Average Household



Compact Development



- 1 unit on 1.01 acre lot
- Density $< 1/\text{acre}$
- VPA = \$1.8 million



- 3 units on 0.17 acre lot
- Density $> 17/\text{acre}$
- VPA = \$3.9 million



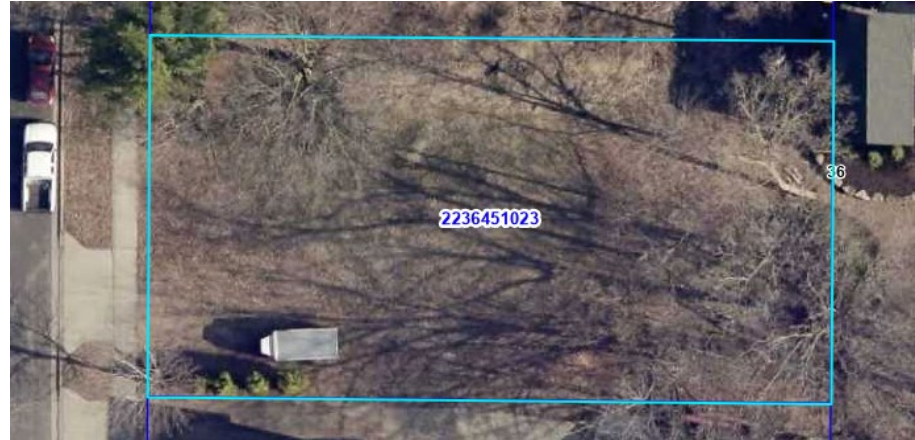
Compact Development



- 0 units on 0.25 acre lot
- Density = 0/acre
- VPA = \$130,800



- 0 units on 0.22 acre lot
- Density = 0/acre
- VPA = \$261,400



Compact Development



- 1 units on 12.18 acre lot
- Density = 1/acre
- VPA = \$550,000



- 1 units on 0.05 acre lot
- Density = 1/acre
- VPA = \$6.5 million



Compact Development



- **Known issues**

- Clarity needed for attached vs. detached ADUs
- NC-F zoning location requirement too restrictive
- Additional housing types
- Height limits
- Minimum lot sizes

- **Lessons on current code**

- Allowing change $\neq$ having change
- Financing/market forces play a significant role

- **Sample questions**

- Regulate density vs. form?
- Expansion of small-scale commercial?

Landscaping



- **Location, type, purpose**
 - Aesthetics, buffering, screening, shading
- **Tree preservation**
 - Which trees are protected, how to protect, how to manage replacement
- **Adequate standards – i.e. tree survival**
- **Standards based on benefits**



Landscaping



- **Known Issues**
 - Clarity ex. “...shall be generously and intensively landscaped”
 - Parking lot trees not surviving
 - Enforcement around boulevard plantings
- **Sample Questions**
 - How to improve tree survival
 - Is buffering adequate, excessive, etc.?
 - How to balance economics, density, and natural systems



Stormwater



- State-level Regulations
- Stormwater ponds
 - Due to karst topography and clay soils, infiltration is difficult in Northfield
 - Location, design, up-stream interventions (ex. street trees)
- Managed by Public Works & Engineering
 - Soils, flow rates, capacity, etc.



Amphibian Amphitheater

Roof water captured by the on-site pond provides both habitat and the water needed for irrigating the vibrant landscape.

Stormwater



- **Sample questions**
 - Incentivize alternatives to large ponds?
 - Impervious limits on single-family or low-density housing
 - Rainwater capture/re-use
 - Maintenance considerations – adequate expertise, time, money, etc.



Lighting

- **Current dark-sky lighting ordinance**
 - Requires full cut-off
 - Regulates light temp
 - Height limits
- **Sources not regulated**
 - Internally lit signs
 - Interior building lights
- **Relatively new update – monitoring areas for improvement**

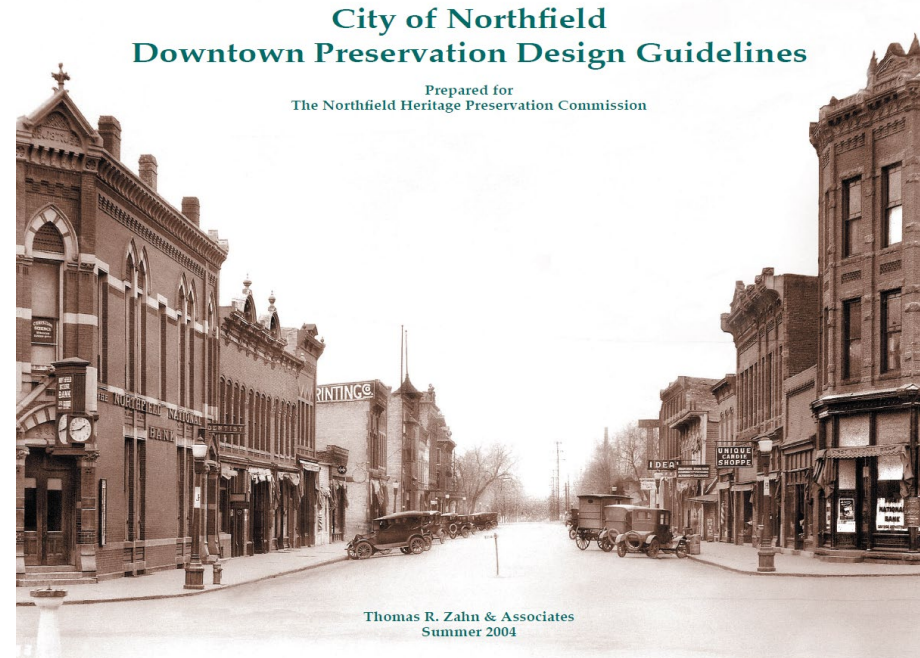
Examples of Acceptable / Unacceptable Lighting Fixtures



Preservation and Adaptive Reuse



- Embodied carbon is significant portion of life-cycle emissions
- Preserving and reusing buildings reduces waste and life-cycle emissions
 - May require additions, accommodations/exceptions from regulations
 - Efficiency upgrades can be difficult and/or costly
 - Misaligned incentives



Preservation and Adaptive Reuse



- Sample questions
 - Demolition review ordinance?
 - Balance “character” and modern systems
 - Clear path for adaptive reuse projects?
 - Especially outside of historic district



How to provide feedback



- <https://northfield-mn-zoning-code-update-hlplanning.hub.arcgis.com/>
- Project website – updates will be posted
- Specific topics may involve stakeholder engagement
- Email: athias.Hughey@northfieldmn.gov

