

Implementation of Climate Action Plan

The City of Northfield adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) in 2019. At a high level, the plan commits the city to decreasing its greenhouse gas emissions through mitigation strategies and becoming more resilient to prepare for climate change. The CAP's overarching goal is for Northfield to achieve 100% carbon-free electricity by 2030 and be a 100% carbon-free community by 2040.

As the city's primary policy document guiding future growth, the Comprehensive Plan should incorporate and build upon the priorities, strategies, and actions in the CAP. The following summarizes the strategies and actions in the CAP that overlap with the Comprehensive Plan. Recommendations have then been provided on how the policies from the CAP may be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan and its implementation.

Land Use

The CAP includes land use related strategies that can be incorporated and built upon in the Comprehensive Plan policies. By tying these strategies into the Comprehensive Plan, it will strengthen the city's ability to reference them in daily decision-making, and to subsequently update its Land Development Code in ways that reinforce the goals of the CAP. The following summarizes the strategies and actions included in the CAP and describes ways in which these may be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan and its implementation.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Update and strengthen the comprehensive plan and Land Development Code to increase residential density within City limits through infill best practices, such as the elimination of minimum parking requirements.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The goal of increasing infill development has been included in past planning processes including the 2006 Economic Development Plan and the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. While the CAP action only mentions increasing residential density, the City also has goals for increasing commercial and industrial infill development.

For the Comprehensive Plan, specific attention has been given to increasing infill development over "greenfield development." The STEP land use analysis prioritizes strengthening and transforming areas within the City limits which are already served by city infrastructure. It also proposes limited strategic growth areas, which could help to create mixed use nodes for existing neighborhoods, reducing the need for additional vehicle trips. The economic analysis reinforces that redevelopment is fiscally responsible, utilizing preexisting street and utility infrastructure and limiting the boundaries for safety and emergency services, while generally increasing the value and property tax revenue from redeveloped properties.

Prioritizing infill and redevelopment can also provide benefits that will help the city achieve its climate and resilience goals. The city has already begun the process of eliminating or reducing parking minimums, as referenced in the CAP. The policy recommendations in the "Infill Best Practices" section below will propose other ways that the city may explore incentivizing infill development over greenfield development.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Consider climate migrants (unexpected growth in population) in City planning efforts.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The Comprehensive Plan will include population projections, which are generally based on historical trends and projections from the State Demographers office. Generally, these population projections, and the resulting land use guidance, will account for the limited amount of growth that may occur due to climate migrants by the year 2045. Of equal importance, climate migrants may require affordable housing and support services, which are key pillars of the Comprehensive Plan vision framework. While the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies may not reference climate migrants specifically, there will be emphasis on supporting housing affordability and vulnerable populations while planning for population growth.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Continue to include Accessory Dwelling Units as a permitted use in Northfield’s Land Development Code to enable more efficient use of land.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** Northfield’s Land Development code allows denser residential districts than most cities in Minnesota. In addition to accessory dwelling units, Northfield also allows up to three dwelling units per lot in the R-1 low density residential district. Northfield can continue to build on this allowed density by encouraging more infill development in its Comprehensive Plan, both residential and commercial/industrial. The “Infill Best Practices” section below discusses this further. Infill development will also enable a more efficient use of land by limiting the need for outward growth of the city.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Identify opportunities to expand renewable energy in or near Northfield; coordinate with Carleton, St. Olaf, Post Consumer Brands (formerly Malt-O-Meal), and Xcel Energy
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** Currently, solar energy and micro-wind energy systems are allowed in all zoning districts per the city’s Land Development Code, and the city’s subdivision code requires developers to consider energy conservation and solar access in all new development. The City also has resources and educational materials on its website for residents and businesses looking to pursue renewable energy. The Comprehensive Plan, and subsequent updates to the city’s Land Development Code could also provide incentives for on-site renewables within city limits. Incentives could include relaxed setback standards, density bonuses, streamlined permitting and/or reduced fees. The City may also work with its Economic Development Authority to provide small grants or matching funds for renewable energy development.

Additionally, Northfield could also prioritize working with its neighboring townships and counties to ensure that agricultural land surrounding the city allows for renewable energy. The city could encourage these partners to reduce barriers to renewable energy development such as onerous development and permitting requirements. While this is less directly under the city’s sphere of influence, the Comprehensive Plan can include policies that encourage this type of partnership.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Report annually to the Planning Commission, Environmental Quality Commission and City Council on how strategic growth strategies in the Comprehensive Plan that

emphasize infill over expansion or energy efficiency have been implemented to date and how they are being applied to upcoming developments.

- **Comprehensive Plan:** Tracking, metrics, and reporting are key to successful implementation of the Comprehensive Plan policies. The decision-making matrix incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan will include metrics to track progress towards the Guiding Values and goals in the Plan, including climate resilience. It will also provide a tool for making decisions that are not specifically mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan. By ensuring a regular touch-point to review progress, the city can easily pivot or modify policies to obtain better outcomes.

Housing

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Increase affordable housing, emergency, and transitional housing in Northfield, and ensure safety of these homes.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The city conducted a recent housing study, and the Comprehensive Plan will continue to build on this work. Equity and affordable housing are pillars of the Comprehensive Plan, and goals and policies in the housing section will address this CAP strategy.
- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Explore opportunities to require energy improvements for quality affordable housing that is safe and energy efficient.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The Comprehensive Plan housing chapter will have a focus on affordable housing. This CAP action has been implemented through the city's energy efficiency rebate program aimed towards income-qualified households. The Comprehensive Plan could include a goal that the city continue to fund this program and regularly analyze its effectiveness.
- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Implement a voluntary green building code for new or substantially reconstructed buildings.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** Northfield adopted a sustainable building policy in January 2022, which applies to all new construction and redevelopment projects that receive at least \$150,000 in public funding from the city. Given the city's commitment to providing safe and affordable housing, the Comprehensive Plan could guide the city to continue monitoring residential developments subject to this policy to ensure that it is not impacting affordability.

Transportation and Mobility

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Adopt a policy for market-based pricing for parking in commercial areas and dedicate funds to go toward transportation for biking, walking, and public transit.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The Comprehensive Plan could include this policy, and guide specific areas where this would be applicable.
- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Work with Hiawathaland transit and other partners to explore a subsidized bus pass program and/or simplify the payment method to increase ridership on the existing transit system
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The transportation analysis for this Comprehensive Plan emphasizes multimodal transportation and connections. One of the goals or policies in the Comprehensive

Plan could be specific to working with Hiawathaland to improve the existing and plan for future transit system. In addition to subsidies, the Comprehensive Plan should also include strategies for improving the transit systems routes and frequencies to connect residents with needed services and amenities.

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Collaborate with community partners, particularly St. Olaf and Carleton, to explore bike, scooter, carsharing or other mobility options; ensure motorized options are electric and accessible to all residents
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** These types of micromobility options can be difficult to implement successfully in smaller cities, but could be explored with the partners listed in this CAP action. The Comprehensive Plan would likely keep this goal or policy as an option to explore.
- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Continue to implement the current bike/ped plan to improve access and safety of bike and pedestrian infrastructure
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The transportation analysis in this Comprehensive Plan provides suggestions on implementation and prioritization of projects from the bike/ped plan.
- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Incorporate additional transportation modes (such as bike infrastructure, wide sidewalks) and green stormwater infrastructure systems (such as rain gardens) into street maintenance and reconstruction projects
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** Comprehensive Plan goals or policies can encourage the city to incorporate these types of projects into their Capital Improvement Projects.

Economic Development

- ❖ **CAP Recommended Action:** Sustainable Tourism and Marketing - This strategy focuses on outward engagement by marketing Northfield's energy conservation and renewable energy projects and programs in a way that attracts and retains tourists, residents, and businesses.
 - **Comprehensive Plan:** The City of Northfield has generally done a good job at promoting itself as a progressive, environmentally focused community. The colleges also help with this perception. The Comprehensive Plan can include goals and policies to guide the city and its partners at the Northfield Chamber of Commercial and Tourism and Visit Northfield to continue marketing the city in this manner.
- ❖ **Comprehensive Plan:** Recruit sustainability, waste processing (recycling and composting), and energy-focused businesses to existing Northfield spaces and/or a future green business park or industrial development
 - The Comprehensive Plan can include a goal or policy that encourages this type of business recruiting and work with partners to understand opportunities and create promotional materials.

The commitments in the Climate Action Plan can only be achieved if adopted in every facet of city life. By incorporating key policies and commitments into the Comprehensive Plan and its decision-making framework, the city can more easily incorporate climate action into its day-to-day decision-making.

Infill and Redevelopment Incentives

The city has expressed interest in encouraging more infill and redevelopment in areas of the city already served by infrastructure and services. Several past plans, including the 2006 Economic Development Plan and 2008 Comprehensive Plan, have encouraged this type of development. While there has been some infill development over the past 15-20 years, there are inherent challenges to overcome when pursuing infill and redevelopment projects. This analysis provides best practices the city could explore to overcome these challenges.

To create policies and incentives that encourage and incentivize infill and redevelopment, it is helpful to understand some of the challenges to this type of development. Policies can then be targeted to address specific challenges developers may face. Challenges to infill and redevelopment include, but are not limited to:

- Small parcels with fragmented ownership
- Higher capital costs associated with higher value land and acquisition costs, demolition, and replacement of outdated infrastructure
- More limited financing options
- Potential for existing environmental contamination
- Longer regulatory approval process

Best Practices

To address these challenges, the city should explore best practices which address each of these barriers to infill and redevelopment. The following analysis summarizes best practices the city could consider.

Smaller parcels with fragmented ownership

- Work with property owners to assemble and acquire land.
- Develop and maintain a list of potential infill and redevelopment sites. Prioritize underutilized parcels or developments that are located close to existing everyday destinations and well connected via bike/ped/transit.
 - Doing this with STEP analysis – transform and strengthen sites.
- Provide flexible development standards for regulations such as lot size, setbacks, or parking requirements.
 - [El Paso, TX Code Ordinances § 20.10.280 \(2017\)](#) - side, front, and rear setback requirements of the base zoning district may be reduced up to 100% by city council for infill developments.
- Provide opportunities in the land development code to increase density either at key sites through a zoning overlay or in exchange for city-desired elements such as climate-friendly design elements.
 - Example: [Auburn, WA Municipal Code § 18.25.040 \(2009\)](#) - residential infill developments are permitted increased maximum density and allowable building height.

Higher Capital Costs/Limited Financing Options

- Reduced application or utility connection fees.
- Provide city-led infrastructure upgrades.
- Waive sewer/water/infrastructure fees and/or development impact fees OR...
- Create deferred payment options for these fees, which helps developers because it reduces the need for more short term construction loans with high interest rates vs. longer-term permanent financing.
 - Example: [Surprise, AZ Code of Ordinances § 109-48 \(2016\)](#) - establishing an infill incentive district where certain new residential developments can receive a 100% waiver of development impact fees.
 - Example: [Avondale, AZ- Code of Ordinances § 19-61 \(2014\)](#) - Avondale established an infill incentive program aimed at certain neighborhoods in order to reinvigorate existing historic areas and support new mixed-use development that would promote the historic identity of the area.^[18] The neighborhoods targeted by the infill incentive program contain many vacant or underutilized areas and exhibit at least one of the following characteristics: high vacancy rates, larger number of older buildings, and continued decline in population in relation to the City as a whole.^[19] Qualified residential projects on residentially-zoned property within the infill incentive district are subject to reduced fees. New residential construction projects receive a 50% reduction in the normal planning and permit fee as well as the development impact fee.^[20] Rehabilitation or remodeling projects are allowed a 50% reduction in planning and permit fees and are not subject to development impact fees.^[21] Qualified commercial projects have the same incentives as residential projects, but with the added benefit of additional incentives being available subject to approval by the city council.^[22] These additional incentives are based on additional criteria, such as high-wage job creation.^[23]
- Provide tax abatement or tax increment financing for redevelopment or infill projects.

Potential for environmental contamination

- Apply for Community-wide EPA Brownfield Grant to identify, assess, and cleanup properties with environmental concerns. Use this as a tool to incentivize and reduce costs of redevelopment.
- Provide site assessment guidance for developers looking to redevelop on a brownfield site.
- Conduct area-wide planning, which is an allowed activity under the EPA brownfield grant. This can be done as a City-led initiative in areas that may be more challenging or need more planning before development can occur. This can also be done in partnership with a developer or property owner to plan for development at key catalyst sites and meaningfully engage with the community prior to beginning the development review process.
- Stantec's brownfield program has helped many cities take advantage of these funds and navigate the process of managing the grant. A few key examples of success that our planning team worked on in Mankato, MN:
 - Studio 5 Mixed Use Development in Downtown Mankato. This project involved a key catalyst site Mankato's historic downtown. The site had contamination that was related to its historic use as a dry cleaner. The grant helped the city and developer complete environmental surveys and assessments and leveraged these opportunities to obtain a

MN DEED cleanup grant. These funds were combined with TIF from the city to redevelop the property as a mixed use development with 19 apartments and two ground-floor commercial spaces. The project has won several awards, including a MN Brownfields Economic Impact award.

- More information: <https://www.mankatomn.gov/about-mankato/business/programs-and-resources/brownfields>
- Riverside North Areawide Plan. This plan was done for an aging commercial corridor and gateway into the city along I-35. The area had several underutilized sites, some privately owned and some owned by the city. The area-wide plan included recommendations for several key catalyst sites, as well as transportation and public realm improvements. One of the catalyst sites has since begun the redevelopment process as intended in the plan.
 - Areawide Plan: <https://www.mankatomn.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/10794/637436095377470000>
 - Subsequent Redevelopment Project: https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local_news/dutlers-bowl-redevelopment-slated-to-start-by-fall/article_f7e9b9c2-e749-11ec-98d4-efab8d1807ba.html
- Jefferson Quarry Redevelopment Plan. This plan was done for a fully-extracted quarry north of downtown along the Minnesota River and south of US Highway 14. The plan envisioned a mixed use neighborhood and explored how the quarry may be served by roads and utilities, add to the parks and open space network and be an amenity for adjacent residential neighborhoods. This plan was done in partnership with the property owner and developer who will carry the project forward through the development review process.
 - Areawide Plan: <https://content.mankatomn.gov/files/Jefferson-Quarry-Redevelopment-Plan.pdf>

Longer regulatory approval process

- Expedited development review, or for certain parts of the development review process
- Review historic variance requests and make land development code more flexible to avoid additional processes and public hearing associated with variances
- Review conditional use permits and work to allow more uses by right, avoiding lengthy conditional use permit processes and public hearings

Sources:

APA <https://www.planning.org/blog/9227414/infill-development-supports-community-connectivity/#:~:text=Identify%20incentives%20that%20encourage%20developers,mixed%20Duse%20requirements%20that%20increase>

Sustainable Development Code <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/encourage-infill-development/>