

Northfield 2045 title page

# Acknowledgements

## Placeholder Letter from Planning Commission

A comprehensive plan is built on an aspirational vision representing the community's shared values. It must balance interests and provide clear guidance for decisions to move the city towards its vision. The comprehensive plan acts as a guide to decision making when the city is faced with new challenges, opportunities and questions that were not originally anticipated. While by nature an overarching document, it is not everything to everyone.

The plan is centered around the values we heard matter most to you in your community: equity, the environment, and the economy, including housing. The plan represents all of us, connected, in the community we share: each person, family, community, block, street, business, organization, and company. To make sure the city is resilient, we must attempt to tackle things we know and be prepared to adjust to the things we don't. This plan is designed to help us do that.

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Environmental Quality Commission

Heritage Preservation Commission

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Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
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Library Board  
Northfield Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention  
Northfield Area Fire and Rescue Services  
Northfield Transportation Advisory Committee  
Mayor's Youth Council  
Park and Recreation Advisory Board

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Northfield Convention and Visitor's Bureau  
Northfield Rotary  
Friends of Downtown Northfield  
Northfield Racial and Ethnic Equity Collaborative  
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Special thanks to all the community members who generously gave their time to attend meetings, complete surveys, visit the website, review drafts, and provide thoughtful input and feedback that serves as the foundation of this plan. Additional thanks to community members who volunteered and provided additional technical assistance based on professional expertise.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

A comprehensive plan is built on an aspirational vision representing the community's shared values. It must balance interests and provide clear guidance for decisions to move the city towards its vision. The comprehensive plan acts as a guide to decision making when the city is faced with new challenges, opportunities and questions that were not originally anticipated. While by nature an overarching document, it is not everything to everyone.

The plan is centered around the values we heard that matter most to the community: **the economy**, including housing, **the environment**, and **equity**. The plan represents all of us, connected, in the community we share: each person, family, community, block, street, business, organization, and company. To make sure the city is resilient, we must attempt to tackle things we know and be prepared to adjust to the things we don't. This plan is designed to help us do that.

## How to Use the Plan

Read the **core principles** below. These three essential concepts are intended to be embedded in how the city operates, not simply what it decides to do.

Move to Chapter 2 to understand the **vision and guiding values**. Developed from expansive community engagement and refined by the community members on the Steering Committee and Planning Commission, these broadly shared statements guide all the strategies and actions described in the Plan.

Continue with Chapter 2's **decision-making framework**. The framework consists of examples of questions decision-makers can ask to ensure their choices move the city toward the vision. This framework should be supplemented by taking advantage of the four-year strategic planning process to set interim goals that can be measured to evaluate progress. Choose one of **the three policy chapters** (they can be read in any order): Access, Sustainable and secure economic future, and Infrastructure. Each chapter:

- Responds to what we heard from the community on this policy area.
- Develops strategies and actions to move the city forward.
- Includes detailed analyses supporting the strategies.

Finish with the **Implementation** chapter. Here is where metrics that measure what matters will help city officials and residents have a shared understanding of the progress being made toward the city's adopted goals and share in the accountability for the plan's successful implementation.

Also included are **Appendices** containing a summary of community engagement activities as well as background and technical information. References to these materials are included as links or cross-references in the plan text.

This plan integrates policy areas across departments and disciplines to plan more holistically than prior plans. Some recommendations appear in more than one chapter; this is intentional. For example, planning for compact development is critical not only to land use, but to more and more affordable housing, meeting climate goals, providing effective transit, and managing infrastructure costs. Expanding employment opportunities and growing the tax base necessitates providing more housing affordable relevant to local wages, supporting small businesses, ensuring downtown thrives, and ensuring Northfield is a place employers want to locate. [Streets are not just for moving](#)



| cars, they are key public spaces which provide safe corridors for everyone to travel, can be designed to help reduce car travel, connect people to jobs, help manage stormwater, provide space for trees, and help kids get to school. This plan is intended to help break down departmental silos, encourage community partnerships, and foster creative problem solving for Northfield.

## Core principles: Economy, the environment, and equity

These three core principles define how the city plans, budgets, and makes decisions. Each of these easy to remember terms should be read broadly. Community conversations during the development of this plan reinforced the importance of these principles to everyone in Northfield. To accomplish what matters most to Northfield, these principles offer a way to strengthen or change how the City of Northfield conducts business.

City actions should consider the impact to the financial health of the city, how to ensure the benefits and burdens of actions are distributed equitably, and whether an action improves climate resilience and sustainability. There will always be tradeoffs: spending more money in the short term for future climate benefits or equity gains, for example, or not permitting types of businesses which would add valuable tax base but would negatively impact natural or human resources. The city will intentionally and transparently consider impacts and compromises for the best long-term outcomes.

### Economy

As the steward of taxpayer dollars, Northfield plans for the long-term economic health of the city and its residents. Northfield prioritizes growth in locations and patterns that pay for themselves; strategies related to land use patterns, growth areas, transportation, and infrastructure expansion prioritize balancing revenue generated and the costs to serve new development. Northfield plans for the lifecycle costs of all facilities; strategies related to infrastructure and city facilities emphasize seeking grants to offset capital costs, efficient operation and maintenance, and scheduled replacement. Northfield manages debt, utility rates, and project planning to minimize unexpected fluctuations in utility rates and property tax impacts. Northfield understands that new, data-supported information may lead to unanticipated needs which may cost more in the short term; similarly, not acting to address climate and equity may cost more in the long term.

### Environment

As a city concerned about the environment since the 1970s, Northfield plans to mitigate and become more resilient to a changing climate while protecting and managing its natural assets. This plan builds on the 2019 Climate Action Plan, 2005 Natural Resources Inventory, and other planning related to protecting resources, infrastructure, and limiting or mitigating human impact. Northfield plans infrastructure, land use regulations, transportation, housing, and budgeting for long term sustainability. Northfield invests to protect people from extreme weather, shift travel patterns, and promote long-term energy savings.

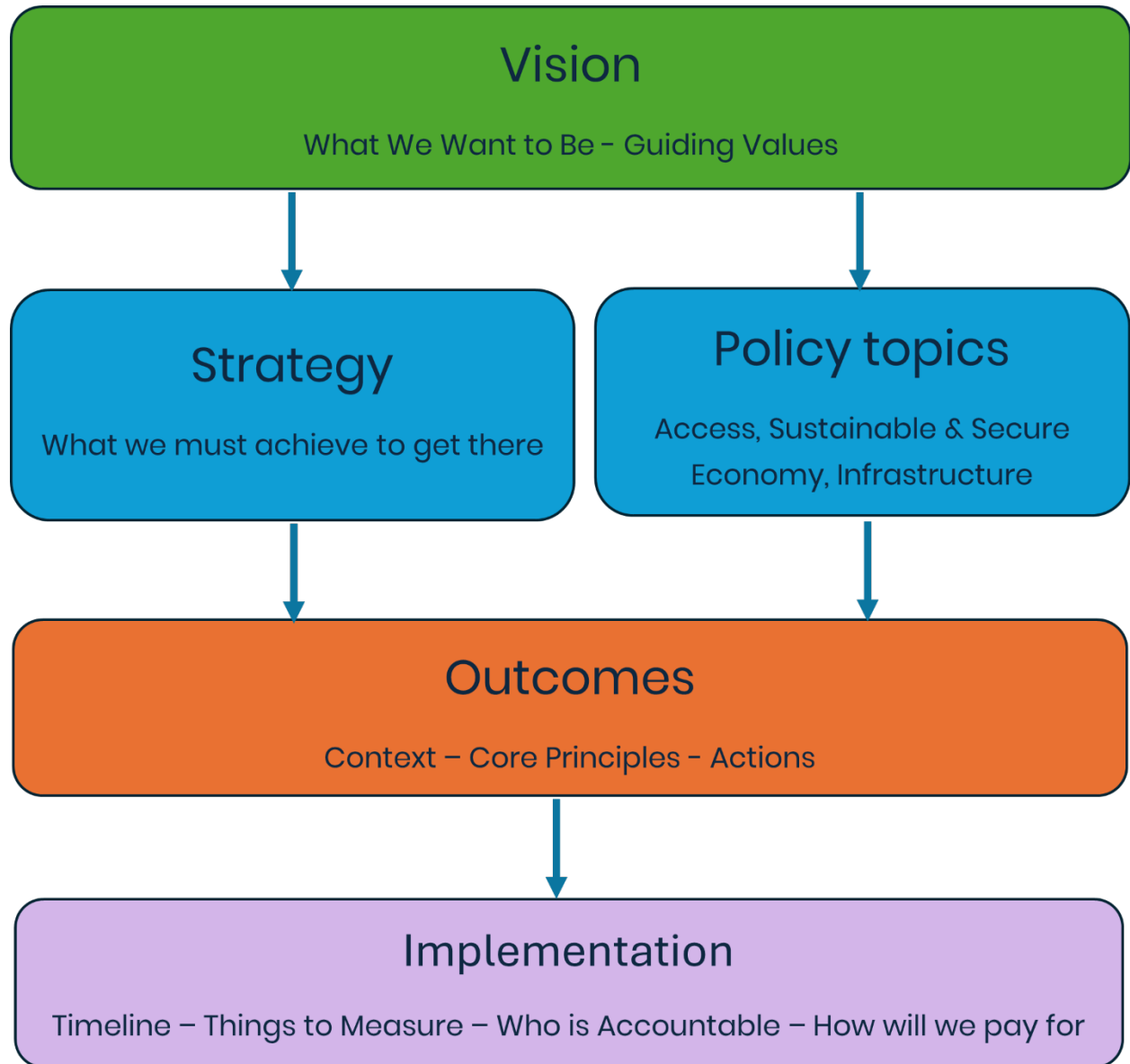
### Equity

As an increasingly diverse city, Northfield plans and acts equitably. Ensuring equitable outcomes requires the city to consider who benefits most from initiatives, who bears burdens, how a project contributes to the overall success of Northfield, and to consider how Northfield balances each of these three values, especially when they may be in tension for any project. A comprehensive plan provides an opportunity to use its necessary breadth to speak to filling needs created by past city

actions and seeking community input more broadly. It also offers an opportunity to implement policies that raise the baseline quality of life for everyone and an invitation to develop goals and metrics to measure what matters.

For more information on community conversations, visit [\[link to Engagement Summary\]](#), and for information about equity within the plan, visit [\[link to Equity Policy Framework\]](#) and [\[link to Community Profile\]](#).

**FIGURE 1: HOW THE PARTS OF THE PLAN RELATE TO EACH OTHER**



## Chapter 2 - Vision & Guiding Values

This comprehensive plan starts with a vision that reflects ideas and priorities from community members. The purpose of the plan is to create a clear path to achieving that vision.

This chapter provides the vision, a set of community-based guiding values, and a decision-making framework to keep the principles of this comprehensive plan consistently in front of decision-makers. The vision and values were developed from extensive community engagement and refined by residents on the Steering Committee and Planning Commission.

### What we heard<sup>1</sup>

Below and beginning each chapter, we share the significant themes heard from residents, business owners, and other key stakeholders like educational institutions and the non-profit community.

#### Northfield

- The small-town feel is both an asset and a challenge
- Northfield can be a difficult place to find community and the community feels segregated
- Become more welcoming and inviting to all who live, work, and play here
- Retain unique identity: charming downtown, historic and natural resources, colleges
- Create a center of gravity in Northfield that leverages that unique identity and ‘vibe’

#### Economic Sustainability

- Smart, sustainable, balanced growth
- Recruit/expand businesses that offer living wage jobs and support environmental sustainability
- Collaborate with colleges to support fair taxation and economic development initiatives
- Build/enhance public-private partnerships to attract investment
- Historic preservation and the arts are important components of the city’s economic success

#### Housing

- Homes are too expensive to buy, and many rental apartments are too small or too expensive
- Major employers want more housing opportunities built to retain/attract employees
- Not enough affordable housing is in the most walkable areas of the city
- More pathways to homeownership and generational wealth are needed
- More mixed income neighborhoods are desired

#### Climate change

- Climate and sustainability solutions must be affordable and accessible to residents
- Preservation of trees, wetlands and green spaces is important for the ecosystem and to make the community more welcoming
- Coordinate with neighboring farming communities in the discussion about climate change
- Do more to implement the Climate Action Plan

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete summary of engagement activities and results from the comprehensive planning process, please refer to the [Engagement Summary](#).

- New jobs must pay a living wage and be environmentally sustainable

## Mobility

- Residents do not feel safe crossing highways even with crossing lights which are not always respected
- Transit takes too long, is not direct, and does not operate at the hours needed
- Transportation limitations present a challenge for people with disabilities to find and maintain employment
- Improved infrastructure is needed for sidewalks, paths, and safe crossings
- Lighting along sidewalks and in parks is lacking in many areas across the city

## Equity

- Address the high tax rate for residents
- Some neighborhoods do not see as much investment as others
- There are food deserts, lack of [relevant amenities in] parks, and limited transit and connections to the downtown core in the north and northwest neighborhoods
- Residents need access to good jobs, food, housing, green/open space, and recreation to ensure economic stability and a good quality of life
- Address the needs of the most vulnerable and under-represented residents

## Human Connections

- Publicly accessible, free indoor and outdoor gathering and recreation spaces for youth and community are needed to facilitate community connections
- Continue to support entrepreneurs and small businesses
- The downtown historic district and related citywide gathering spaces are important
- Need for inclusive community engagement in city planning
- Call for accountability and follow-through on community needs and desires

## Vision

*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.

## Guiding Values Overview



Northfield will develop **creative solutions to local challenges** by working with the community, ensuring staff understand and have tools to implement best practices in their fields, and using consultants who understand Northfield and its values.



Northfield's capital planning and budgeting advances the goals of this plan in **economically responsible and sustainable** ways to ensure revenue is sufficient to meet the city's needs for the long term.



Northfield promotes **safe, stable housing** in a wide variety of types, sizes, and ownership models, to accommodate residents in all stages of life, and addresses demand for homes for workers.



Northfield develops infrastructure, policies, and practices to **foster resilience** and **mitigate the effects of climate change**.



Northfield works to provide a network of transportation **mobility options** that enable all Northfield residents and visitors to move throughout the community safely and conveniently



Northfield **emphasizes equity** to address disparities and to ensure equitable access to jobs, housing, education, essential services, retail, mobility options, and open space for all.



Northfield **fosters human connections** in our increasingly diverse community through well-designed neighborhoods, gathering places, and business districts that are inclusive for all, independent of age, economic status, mobility, gender, or racial and ethnic background.

## Decision-Making Framework

When making decisions, including those suggested by the implementation section of this plan, City of Northfield officials, staff, community partners, and residents will ask how the option chosen furthers at least one, if not several of the values, while not damaging the others. The framework provides a template leaders can use to frame discussions to ensure the values of this plan are clearly reflected in the work of the city. The **sample** questions are drawn from the **guiding values**.

The **outcomes**, **strategies** and **actions** in later chapters describe how the guiding values are translated into the work of appointed and elected city officials and departmental staff.

This Framework should be supplemented by setting interim goals and appropriate metrics to measure success through the shorter, four-year horizon strategic planning process and for work planning purposes across departments, boards, and commissions.

## Find Creative Solutions to Local Challenges

Northfield will develop creative solutions to local challenges by working with the community, ensuring staff understand and have tools to implement best practices in their fields, and developing relationships with consultants who understand Northfield's complexity and its values, including but not limited to the value of fiscal impact, responsibility and government accountability.

### *Sample questions - How does this Action...*

- ... test ideas before committing to high-cost projects?
- ... balance professional expertise with lived experience?
- ... improve upon or take advantage of current best practice?
- ... consider multiple pathways to a desired outcome

## Emphasize Equity

Northfield emphasizes equity to address disparities and to ensure equitable access to jobs, housing, education, essential services, retail, mobility options, and open space for all.

### *Sample questions - How does this Action...*

- ... improve access to services (municipal, healthcare, schools, etc.)?
- ... create or enhance parks and recreation opportunities in underserved neighborhoods?
- ... provide a service tailored to those who need it most?
- ... increase opportunities for homes, business, and/or social connections?

## Foster Resilience

Northfield develops infrastructure, policies, and practices to foster resilience and mitigate the effects of climate change and our contributions to the sources of climate change.

### *Sample questions - How does this Action...*

- ... reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and/or decrease reliance on non-renewable energy?
- ... preserve and conserve natural resources and habitat?
- ... design or implement infrastructure to effectively manage stormwater, protect people from heat, and reduce risks associated with flooding and other extreme weather events?
- ... develop policy and practice which incorporates resilience into all city actions?

## Be Economically Responsible and Sustainable

Northfield's capital planning and budgeting will advance the goals of this plan in economically responsible and sustainable ways to ensure revenue sufficient to meet the city's long-term needs.

### *Sample questions - How does this Action...*

- ... impact the city's tax levy, debt level, and/or bond rating?
- ... affect the sewer, water, electricity, natural gas, and transportation systems?
- ... support local business development, expansion, and retention and/or increase the city's commercial/industrial tax base?
- ... respond to stated resident priorities and concerns and address known problems?

## Foster Human Connections

Northfield fosters human connections in our increasingly diverse community through well-designed neighborhoods, gathering places, and business districts. City services will be designed and delivered to meet the needs of all community members.

### *Questions - How does this Action...*

- ... design for walkable and proximate parks and gathering spaces, accessible to all?
- ... create or enhance opportunities for human interactions (indoors or outdoors)?
- ... make City Hall and other city facilities inclusive, visitable, and welcoming?
- ... ensure city communication efforts are inclusive, appropriate, and effective for all audiences?

## Promote Safe and Stable Housing

Northfield promotes safe, stable housing in a wide variety of types, sizes, and ownership models, to support residents in all stages of life.

### *Questions - How does this Action...*

- ... affirmatively further fair housing?

... ensure all housing is safe and secure in all weather conditions?

... address housing conditions and/or increase the supply, variety and affordability of housing types needed?

... promote inclusive neighborhoods?

## Provide Mobility Options

Northfield plans development and services for proximity so people are closer to where they need to go; Northfield designs streets for safe and convenient trips, however people choose to travel.

### *Questions - How does this Action...*

... allocate public right of way to connect people to places?

... improve connections between neighborhoods?

... reduce demand for driving and parking?

... facilitate transit improvements?



## Chapter 3 – Land Use and Transportation: Connecting people to places and opportunities

This plan guides the city to rethink how we measure transportation and how we guide land use strategically to connect people to the places they need to go - homes, jobs, shopping, and services - through a place-based approach to transportation. In the past, Northfield has measured mobility and street congestion without always considering how streets connect people and places. This plan asks the city to measure accessibility and to integrate land use, zoning, climate action, and transportation to provide equitable access throughout the city. The desired outcome is for Northfield to focus investments to improve connections in locations lacking adequate infrastructure, emphasizes affordable transportation, designs streets for people and connectivity, and efficiently plans for growth in areas served by appropriate infrastructure.

This chapter builds flexibility, sustainability, equity, and economic responsibility into policies. Driving will be the predominant way people travel for the foreseeable future because Northfield has been designed for easy access by car. In Northfield, what could be an easy walk, or ride has been made more difficult by the land use and transportation choices made over time. Shifting to planning for accessibility means asking what places can be reached safely and comfortably within a certain time, distance, or cost. Northfield 2045 guides the city to locate opportunities closer to where people live and work while ensuring a safe, low stress, people-centered transportation network. suitable for all users.

### What We Heard<sup>2</sup>

- “The northwest side of Northfield needs investment. We lack parks, transit, housing... even grocery stores.”
- “Having equitable access to parks and recreational activities will help facilitate greater community connections.”
- “There is not enough affordable housing in the most walkable areas of the city.”
- “Northfield is missing places to shop, entertainment options, and youth-friendly activities.”
- “The buses take too long and don’t get me where I want to go.”
- “I would like to see improved infrastructure for sidewalks, path sharing for pedestrians and bikers, and traffic management for safer crossing specifically across Highway 3.”

### Connecting Land Use and Transportation

How Northfield builds streets and locates businesses, schools, and services determine how residents can carry on daily activities. The last several comprehensive planning efforts show community members want to be able to go to the park, the store, and schools safely and conveniently without having to drive. People gave multiple reasons including reducing our

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<sup>2</sup> For a complete summary of engagement activities and results from the comprehensive plan process, please refer to the [Engagement Summary](#)

dependence on non-renewable energy, getting more exercise, letting kids get to school independently, and seeking more affordable options. Being able to bike and walk plus developing better transit is a priority for Northfield. Providing this kind of accessibility requires connecting places at a scale and proximity which makes walking, biking and transit safe, pleasant, and convenient.

This plan recognizes that driving is how most people in Northfield get around and also calls out past planning which has made driving necessary. Starting in the 1960s, Northfield (and most other places) began building places for easy driving by widening streets, putting stores and schools at the edges of town, and requiring large amounts of parking. By 2025, the costs of this patterns of development are becoming clearer. These costs include impacts to personal finances (owning and operating a new vehicle is estimated to cost \$1,000 a month in 2024<sup>3</sup>), travel time, physical health, safety, the environment, and reduced human connections.

This plan gives Northfield a framework for steady, incremental actions to move away from the "drive everywhere" model begun in the 1960s while also ensuring driving is not difficult. Everyone benefits from safer and greener streets, better connected streets, and more ways to travel.

To visualize how patterns of land use and transportation interact, compare Division Street with Minnesota State Highway 3, which runs roughly parallel to Division Street, but has four plus lanes of traffic that generally moves faster than the posted 30 mile-per-hour speed limit. Highway 3 is good for driving through Northfield quickly or driving from downtown to Target, but reaching a store, school or office requires getting off the highway. It is unpleasant to walk along and unsafe to cross on foot.

## Division Street and Bridge Square



Photo credit: <https://www.carleton.edu/admissions/visit/northfield-twin-cities/>

On Division Street and around Bridge Square, the downtown shops, the river, and other services are most accessible by walking. Within a short walk, a person can buy groceries, vote at City Hall, borrow a library book, fish at the riverfront, eat at a restaurant, have coffee (or ice cream or a beer), check out both the historic Depot and the brand-new transit hub, and get a haircut. Downtown's

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/loans/auto-loans/total-cost-owning-car>

land use pattern of multi-story mixed use development (retail on the street level and apartments and services on floors above), public space, and closely spaced storefronts make walking easy. Division Street itself is slow with parking on both sides, pedestrian scale lighting, trees, and seating also signal it's a place to park and walk, linger, and gather. Northfield's parklets further integrate transportation and land use by providing public space to sit in the street right of way. Downtown's pattern of street and buildings generates more tax revenue per acre than less dense areas, maximizes existing infrastructure, and is the core of Northfield's distinctive sense of place.

Highway 3 is good for driving through Northfield quickly or driving from downtown to Target, but reaching a store, school or office requires getting off the highway. Although the posted speed limit in downtown is 30 miles per hour, traffic moves much faster. The four lanes of fast-moving traffic along with the noise and debris from the vehicles make walking along the highway unpleasant and unsafe to cross; the painted bike lanes are unsafe. Highway land use is different, too. Businesses are not directly accessible from the highway but require using side streets or parking lots to walk to the door. Buildings are typically one story, set further back and widely spaced. This pattern makes walking and biking distances longer, generates less tax revenue per acre, and requires more vehicle travel.

For Northfield, planning growth to be more like the pattern of land use and street pattern downtown rather than highway focused development is intended to use land more productively, reduce the need for vehicle trips, decrease greenhouse gas emissions, increase tax values, make streets safer and provide more freedom to choose how to travel. Shifting Northfield's transportation planning to increase and measure accessibility addresses climate, economic, and equity goals simultaneously and capitalizes on Northfield's distinctiveness. Responding to Northfield residents' desire to walk and bike more requires guiding growth for efficient locations and safe street connections and helps the city meet its climate action goals.

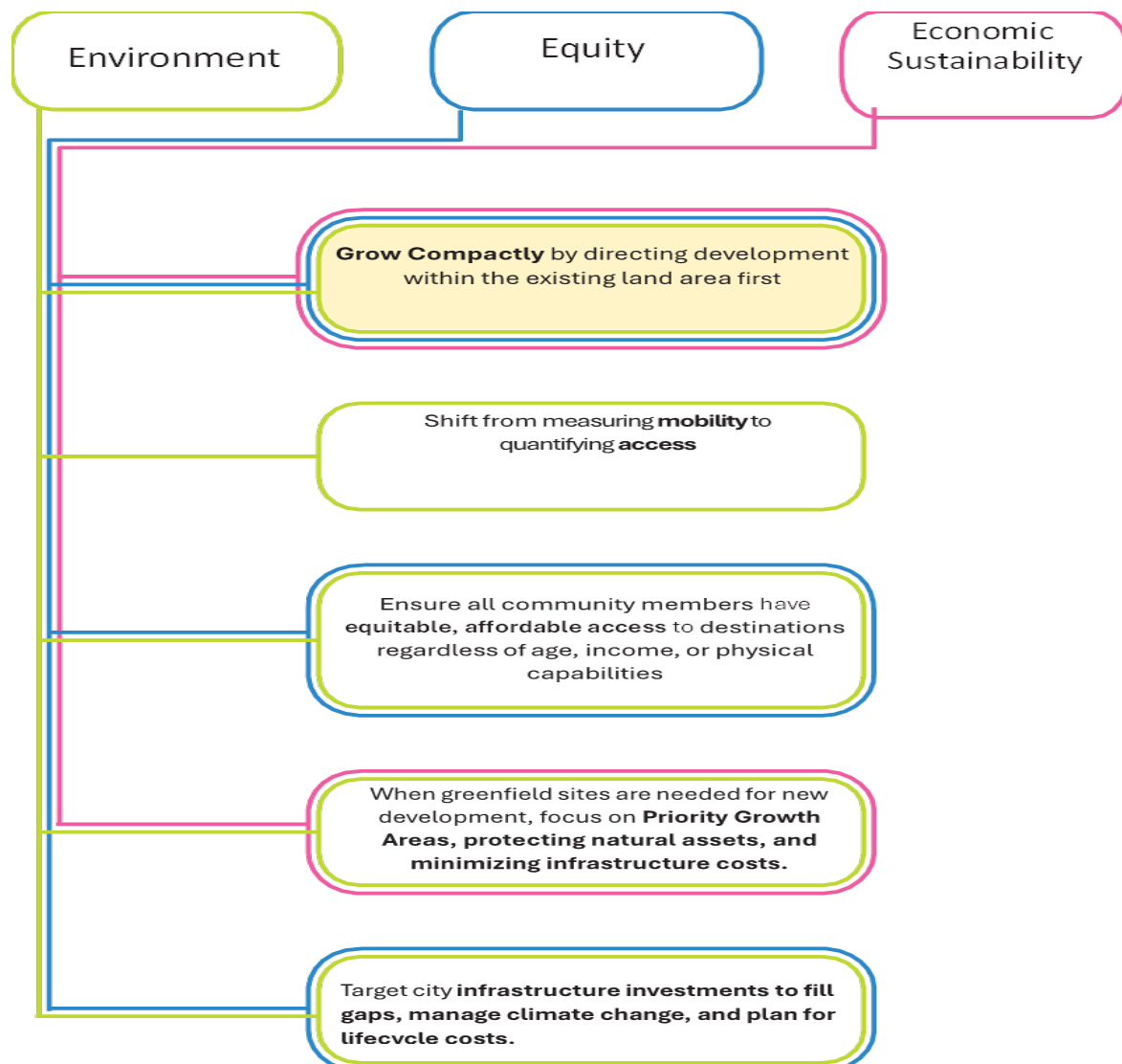


Photo credit: BDB

## Core principles: Economy, Environment, and Equity

Land use and transportation decisions have big consequences for Northfield's economy, environment, and equitable access. How access is created impacts the city's **economic sustainability** (developing appropriately scaled businesses near enough people to help them succeed), **environmental sustainability** (greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle trips), and **equity** (ensuring that people can access the things that contribute to a high quality of life from many modes of transportation).

**FIGURE 2** shows how the **core principles** interact with each other in this chapter. The highlighted boxes show where all three principles converge.



## Definitions

The following terms are defined as they are used within this chapter:

**Accessibility:** The ease of reaching goods, services, activities and destinations. “*Ease*” includes travel time, safety and comfort, and affordability. Improving accessibility by more affordable and sustainable modes like transit, walking and biking, and shorter vehicle trips is a goal of this plan.

**Active transportation:** This term is a catch-all for people walking and using “small things with wheels<sup>4</sup>” – both human powered (such as bicycles, skateboards, hand-cycles), electric (motorized wheelchairs and mobility scooters, full power e-bikes), and those in between such as power assist e-bikes. Where relevant, different modes will be specified yet all ways of traveling share priorities about what’s needed for safe, convenient travel. Although rarely included in definitions, mobility devices like strollers and walkers, as well as bike trailers and wagons should also be considered. Also sometimes referred to as micro-mobility.

**All Ages & Abilities (AA&A) Design:** This industry term refers to designing streets and active transportation facilities to be safe, low stress, and equitable for everyone. For example, children, seniors, people of color, and women each have somewhat different needs for making biking feel safe and comfortable; street design which allows the broadest range of riders to feel safe and comfortable by reflecting the land use context and traffic character is AA&A design.

**Mobility:** How quickly people, goods, and services can be moved from one place to another. The degree of mobility depends on several factors, including the capacity of the roadway, and the operational level of service on the roadway system.

**Orderly annexation agreement:** a binding contract between a city and a township that identifies larger potential growth areas and terms to what triggers an annexation. It allows both the city and township to proactively address annexation potential instead of passively waiting and reacting to growth. The agreement is enforceable in the district court in the county in which the unincorporated property in question is located.

**Priority Growth Area:** Defined area within the urban expansion area to which growth may be directed after other priorities within a municipal boundary are exhausted or insufficient. Priority growth areas offer greater connectivity to the street network, able to be served more efficiently by transit, are more proximate to important destinations such as schools, shopping, and encourage future growth in a compact pattern.

**Separated bikeway:** Sometimes called *protected bikeways*, these are bikeways and paths that are separated from car traffic by some sort of physical barrier. They can be designed just for people biking, or they can be designed to be shared by people walking and biking. Separated bikeways always include both a bike travel space and a buffer between the bikeway and the street.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

<sup>5</sup> NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition



**Transit:** Transportation options that don't require the person traveling to drive or navigate such as: fixed-route bus service (Hiawathaland Red and Blue Lines), dial-a-ride, taxis, ride share (Lyft, Uber) and passenger rail

**Urban Expansion Area:** An area around the boundary of a village or city that is reserved for future residential and business growth. It is developed in collaboration with the county and informed by orderly annexation agreements between municipality and township officials.

**Walkable:** Walkable refers to how safe, convenient, and comfortable it is to walk to destinations.

**Walkability:** Measurable by tracking distances (how long does it take to get to the supermarket?), navigation difficulty (how many turns does it take?), sidewalk connections (do you have to cross two streets because sidewalks abruptly end?), access to shade and benches, and safety (do cars or vehicles endanger pedestrians on this path?)

## Existing Conditions

The City of Northfield was planned by John North in the mid-19th century with a grid street pattern formed by 300 ft by 300 ft standard size blocks. Division Street and adjacent blocks formed the business district, Central Park was the community center, and churches, schools, and parks were added within residential neighborhoods. The regular street pattern and central business district created a compact and walkable city providing easy access to daily destinations that persisted until the 1960s.

After Minnesota State Highway 3 was built in 1958, Northfield began to adopt policies and practices popular at the time. Churches and schools moved to the edges of the city on much larger parcels of land with large parking lots; commercial development began to stretch down the highway in a single-story, horizontal pattern. The regular street grid was replaced by winding roads with cul-de-sacs creating residential areas with few through roadways connected to the now more distant commercial areas of the city by busier collector streets.

This land use pattern has continued with much more highway commercial development, large subdivisions with few connecting streets, and facilities like Northfield Hospital and Northfield's newer public schools being located at the fringe where larger parcels of land were more available and less expensive. Today it is more difficult to live in Northfield without reliable access to a car than it once was and dispersed land uses increase travel time, greenhouse gas emissions and the amount of infrastructure the city must maintain.

Retrofitting this land use and transportation pattern will take effort. The strategies and actions in this chapter begin to address these challenging issues by envisioning a future where everyone has the freedom to choose how to travel safely and affordably to their destination.

Driving a car, moving shipments of freight around, and emergency access will still be easy, and the city will build more flexibility into street corridors, ensure availability of work opportunities closer to where people live, provide reliable transit, and is a good steward of the environment and taxpayer dollars.

## Analytical Focus Areas

Northfield identified three analytic focus areas for increased work in this plan: (1) completing the active transportation network, (2) planning for increased transit, and (3) future land use and development. All three areas analyze existing conditions and needed to change to achieve the outcomes described above and established in the strategies which follow.

### Completing a safe, connected system for biking, walking and rolling.

Northfield has planned better biking, walking and rolling facilities for more than 20 years. Over time, facility design has improved, planning priorities have evolved, and the number and variety of small vehicles on the market and on Northfield streets has increased. This plan renews the focus on completing a consistent, connected and comfortable active transportation network connecting everyday destinations like grocery stores, schools, and the central business district. This means city officials will have to change the ways they determine how the public right of way is used.

Northfield's past choices about land uses and transportation infrastructure make developing a wonderful active transportation network more challenging; it shares this problem with many other cities. Sixty years of separating land uses, moving schools and large, essential stores to the edges of the city, building schools on busy roadways, and allowing many dead ends or disconnected streets reduces options for direct and clear routes to connect people to places they want to go. In some cases, earlier attempts at providing bike lanes and pedestrian facilities have proved to be unsafe or even unusable. Now that we know better, we can do better.

**Figure 3** proposes an active transportation network intended to create a safe, comfortable, convenient, and consistent system for getting around Northfield by walking, biking and rolling. Northfield has planned active transportation networks in the 2008 Parks, Open Space and Trail Plan; 2019 Pedestrian, Bike and Trail Plan update; and 2022 Pedestrian and Bikeway Analyzation. The proposed network below builds on the 2008 Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan because of its attention to accessibility to important destinations not found in other plans.

The proposed network features both principal routes with separated bikeways providing direct connections between neighborhoods on higher-volume roadways, and uses lower volume, lower speed roadways for connections within neighborhoods and to those principal routes.

**Bikeway Network**

- Proposed Bikeway Connectivity Routes
- Future Bikeway
- Future Trails
- Future Mill Towne State Trail
- Existing Bikeway
- Existing Trails
- Existing Mill Towne State Trail
- Water Bodies
- Transit Hub
- Library
- School
- County Line
- City Limits
- Water Bodies

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

**NORTHFIELD**  
MINNESOTA

Routes and types of facilities were selected using the following questions:

**What is the best type of sidewalk, trail, or on-street bikeway for the location?** The suggested network is based on designing routes and types of infrastructure for the character of the land use, traffic speed and volume, destinations served and the most likely users of different segments.

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(2025) including preferring one-way bikeway designs in most situations. However, design decisions may differ based on the width of available right of way, level of reconstruction anticipated, and the cost effectiveness of implementation. This evaluation must be included in CIP planning efforts.

**Primary routes:** Separated bikeways will be constructed on primary routes while also planning a corridor for stormwater management, shade, and access. No specific design is suggested in advance, because there are multiple ways to provide physical separation: curb or concrete medians, planters, bollards, vehicles in a parking lane or constructing an off-street facility. Principal routes must also be planned as direct routes to and from critical destinations.

**Secondary routes:** secondary routes will provide All Ages & Abilities facilities appropriate to the traffic volume and speed as well as surrounding land use. These may include separated bikeways. Neighborhood routes are intended to be useful for routine errands within and between neighborhoods. These routes must connect safely and seamlessly between other neighborhood routes and principal routes using thoughtful intersection designs and legible wayfinding. Finally, neighborhood routes must help build a coherent and cohesive network of great neighborhood streets that are planned and designed with the expectation that people will travel both walking and rolling in addition to driving. This requires investing in traffic calming measures within the roadway and at intersections creating AA&A conditions for most, if not all streets within a neighborhood.

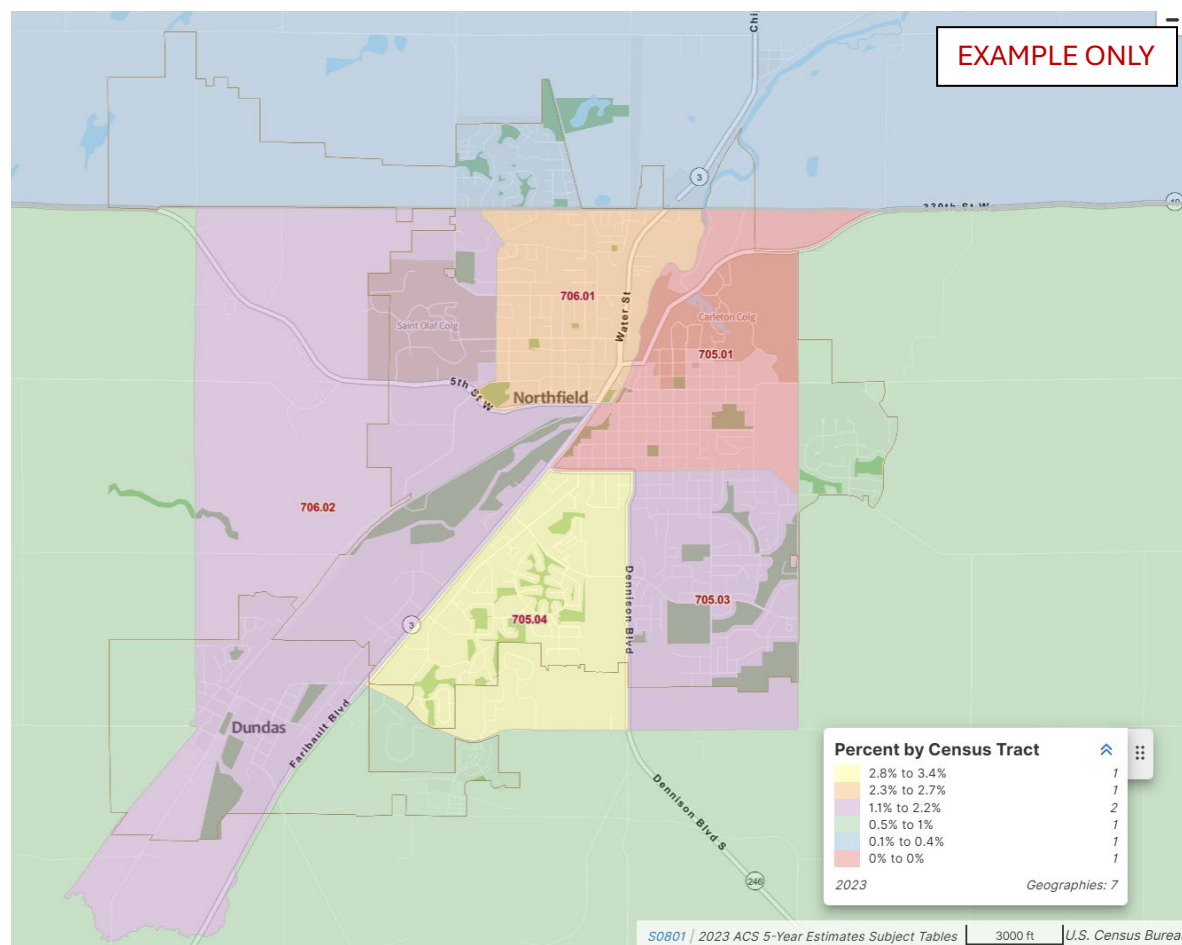
**All routes:** When evaluating capital improvements to roadways designated as principal routes, projects must create routes which are simple and easy for residents and visitors alike to navigate. They must plan for safety by providing dedicated space for active transportation that is physically protected from fast-moving and turning vehicles and at the same time lower vehicle speeds by designing for and posting a lower speed limit. Intersection safety must be a top priority in designing roads for all modes.

## Planning for Transit

Community engagement revealed an unmet need for reliable transit. Public transit in Northfield is currently provided by Hiawathaland Transit, which was created in 1998 by the non-profit Three Rivers Community Action to meet transit needs in the region. Primary service is provided by two fixed routes centered at the Transit Hub and on-demand Dial-A-Ride services in Northfield. Hiawathaland Transit also provides a regional route connecting Northfield and Faribault, which runs every two hours during weekdays.

Current routes and transfer locations are not aligned with the areas of greatest need for transit services. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the highest percentage of households with workers aged 16 and older with no vehicle available are in two census tracts.

**FIGURE 4** *Percentage of Households with Workers without a vehicle*



In addition to reliability problems, transit routes are neither frequent enough nor stop in enough places to provide useful access to destinations. The current fixed routes operate year-round during the day but only connect and overlap at the Transit Hub; the Blue Route only serves the northwest area while the Red Route serves the southern half of Northfield. Therefore, people using transit either must plan trips carefully to make transfers or they may have to wait extended amounts of time for the next bus. For people who do not work 9-to-5 jobs, no service is available.

The limited service discourages people from using transit and overly burdens households that rely on transit to get to daily destinations, exacting high costs in terms of time and convenience, as well as money. With major destinations located on extreme ends of the city - the hospital in the northwestern corner and major shopping destinations located in the southwestern quadrant of the city – transit trips to these destinations can be challenging for those living on opposite sides of the city.

Transit should not only help people get around within Northfield, but also between Northfield and other parts of the region. To that end, the City of Northfield was awarded \$1.75 million in state bonding funds in 2020 to complete the construction of the Northfield Transit Hub, co-located with

the existing historic Northfield Depot to serve as a transfer center for local and regional buses and connect to future passenger rail routes. There is a stated need for transit between Northfield and nearby communities like Faribault, as well as options to reach the Twin Cities and Rochester transit networks. The transit hub opened in 2025.

The transit hub is centrally located and provides a safe place to wait. However, it is located on the west side of Highway 3, so planning for safer crossings to help people get to and from downtown, schools and other east side destinations is required. Future routes need to include more stops at shopping and medical services. Planning efforts should include all the different kinds of people who use or would like to use transit, in particular: older adults, youth, people with disabilities, and college students. In addition, planning for transit should consider it to be an important tool in providing affordable transportation and helping Northfield achieve its climate goals.

Providing effective and affordable transit requires more attention to compact and connected land use.<sup>6</sup> As Northfield grows, planning streets and housing should consider how new development can be served by transit including safe walking to transit stops.

## Future land use and investment

In the face of uncertainty associated with global climate change and documented demographic shifts, Northfield must capitalize on what has contributed to its success – like downtown’s compact and diverse mix of uses – to ensure the sustainable future of a likely more populous Northfield. This plan lays out what future development patterns will look like in different parts of the city.

Community conversations throughout the planning process and existing policies highlight the need to encourage more commercial, industrial, and residential development. Greater diversity in the types of housing built is needed, and a strong preference exists for this to occur within the existing urbanized core.

The next section outlines future land use categories designed to meet those stated outcomes and shows those categories on the [future land use map](#). The subsequent section outlines the approach to realizing the desired future development pattern in the [interventions framework](#) map and text. The interventions framework is used to make the critical connection between land use and transportation.

The interventions framework is derived from the future land use map and categories; it designates key locations and specific properties as opportunities for different levels of intervention. The interventions framework prioritizes growth in the following order:

### ***Within existing city limits***

- Intensification, infill and redevelopment opportunities in areas already served by infrastructure, and as outlined in the Interventions Framework.

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/publications/planning-cities-and-towns-for-successful-bus-services/>

### ***Priority Growth Areas: Key areas and/or intersections adjacent to existing city limits and infrastructure***

- New development in priority growth areas should be mixed use and serve as neighborhood centers offering commercial/services and amenities with safe options for non-motorized access to nearby residents. Expansion to the north might also include industrial uses.

### ***Northfield's orderly annexation areas***

- The city has established orderly annexation agreements with its surrounding townships except Waterford Township. While the city does not have land use or zoning authority over those areas it is important to work with township and municipal neighbors to limit disconnected and unsustainable development. For the city this means guiding development within the municipal boundary while working in partnership with neighboring townships and municipalities.

## **Future Land Use**

The future land use map is based on the community vision guides development for the next 20 years using very general categories: Mixed-Use Commercial, Mixed-Use Residential Neighborhood, Parks and Open Space, Industrial, and Rights of Way. Upon adopting this plan, the official controls of the municipality such as relevant portions of the city's Code of Ordinances, notably chapters 34 and 70 and relevant regulatory guidance will be updated and revised to best implement the plan. The Interventions map identifies those areas expected to see more investment and potential change in the next 20 years, as well as showing those places where Northfield wants to continue what's working well and areas where lower cost, high-impact investments may be needed and anticipated.

## **Future Land Use Categories**

### ***Mixed-use Commercial***

#### ***Summary***

- Uses: Commercial, multi-family housing, office, public/institutional
- Densities: When contemplating multi-family housing projects, a citywide average density of 5 to 15 units per acre should be the minimum outcome to provide enough density to support future transit connections with other parts of the city.
- Transportation considerations: Improve walkability between and around businesses and connections to the river. Improve pedestrian and bicycle routes across major barriers including Highways 3 and 19, railroad tracks, and the Cannon River. Collaborate with MnDOT to redesign Highways 3 and 19, paying particular attention to improving safety and connectivity at major intersections.

#### ***Description***

Mixed-use Commercial is based on the essential built form of the city's Downtown Historic District. The category includes the nationally designated historic district with historic buildings and landmarks, small scale retail, professional offices, short term rentals and higher density housing and the center of Northfield. Future interventions in the historic district and nearby blocks include

the preservation and maintenance of historic buildings and enhancing this area as a compact mixed-use core of the city by supporting small business and adding housing. The heart of downtown on the east side defines the grid street network and includes predominantly street-level commercial uses with commercial and residential uses on upper floors, some multifamily, multistory residential and public space. This pattern of mixed uses, sidewalks, and more than one story is the tax productive, compact pattern Northfield would like to see built in other areas. Priorities for downtown include properties on the west side of Washington Street and along both sides of Division and between 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Woodley Street.

The area located west of Division Street and north of 5<sup>th</sup> Street/Highway 19 - today divided by Highway 3, the Cannon River, and the railroad tracks – has some buildings following the downtown pattern, with multistory hotel and condominiums along the river, and some highway commercial uses, the Northfield Depot and transit hub. The Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan recommends enhancements to the river-facing sides of the downtown business district to make the riverfront and river walk more active and by improving the parks and trails along the Cannon River. This plan capitalizes on that concept to build support for expanding the compact mixed use development pattern to Fremouw Avenue to the north and Linden to the west. The goal is not to replicate downtown, but to create places that are similar in scale and use, which work well and pay for themselves.

The Highway 3 corridor south of the intersection with Woodley is also included in the Mixed-Use Commercial designation. These areas consist mostly of commercial, office and light industrial uses and do not include appropriate infrastructure for safely navigating without a car. Arcadia Charter School, the Northfield Police Department, existing and future Ice Arena sites, and access to the East Cannon River Trail, Babcock Park, and Campostella Park are nestled in this primarily low-density commercial area. While some of these areas include sidewalks, the auto-oriented nature of the area creates conflicts for pedestrians to safely navigate the area and make access to Arcadia School and the river more difficult. The Mill Towns State Trail crosses Highway 3 at Woodley Street, follows the east side of the highway frontage road and crosses Jefferson Parkway; ensuring this regional facility is safe and prominent is a strong priority.

#### *Future State*

Future interventions in the historic district and nearby blocks include the preservation and maintenance of historic buildings and enhancing this compact mixed-use core of the city by supporting small businesses, offering incentives for interior and exterior rehabilitation, and adding more housing, office, retail, small-scale production, and gathering spaces.

The “South Highway 3” area is designated Transform in the interventions analysis, indicating a need for a high level of investment/reinvestment leading to strategic infill and redevelopment, improving walkable and bikeable connections across the highway, river, and railroad tracks, and multi-story mixed-use buildings that meet defined community needs.

Infill development in this area will be required to provide improved active transportation infrastructure and, where available, connections to the river.

## *Mixed-use Residential Neighborhood*

### *Summary*

- Uses: Residential, neighborhood scale or incidental commercial
- Densities: Residential infill projects will include a mix of single-family homes and smaller (2 to 12-unit) multifamily structures. Small scale mixed-use infill buildings of two to three stories are encouraged. Transit would be best supported by an overall city-wide residential density of 15 units per acre and excellent connectivity
- Transportation considerations: Continue to plan for active transportation, especially at the edges of this district where the grid pattern transitions to a curvilinear street pattern. Reconnect and redesign streets to facilitate safe connections for bike/walk facilities. Prioritize creating or improving connections to schools, parks and other daily destinations.

### *Description*

All residential areas in Northfield are guided as Mixed-use Residential. As such, these areas range from the walkable pattern of the original town plat with its diverse housing types to suburban character neighborhoods with prominent garages, more uniform home types within subdivisions, and larger homes and lots with fewer connecting streets. Street re-design in this district should focus on improving safe connections to important daily destinations and allocating space in the rights of way for safe biking and walking, and sustainable stormwater management facilities.

### *Future state*

- Zoning code revisions will
  - More easily allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and small-scale multifamily housing (5 to 13 units per acre) by right in these high amenity neighborhoods.
  - define a clear separation of land uses between the college campuses and adjacent neighborhoods to create a defined edge to both.
  - permit small-scale, neighborhood commercial nodes in all residential areas and may be incentivized in any projects where public funding is requested.
- Revisions to Northfield street standards will require increased connectivity for all new development to promote greater connections to the existing grid structure and provide greater access to destinations across the city.
- Streets will be redesigned to improve safety for all users, reduce traffic speeds, provide sustainable stormwater management, grow a denser tree canopy, and complete the proposed active transportation network. Particular attention should be paid to connecting schools, parks and neighborhoods and building out the proposed active transportation network.

## *Parks and Open Space*

### *Summary*

- Uses: parks and recreation, preservation areas, greenways

- Density: All residents and visitors can reach a park or open space within 10 to 15-minutes by walking, biking, or rolling.
- Transportation considerations: sidewalk and trail connections to and from neighborhoods, seamless integration of recreational trails and street bike/walk facilities, and between indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities. Plan park improvements to put desired facilities close to the populations which use them. Transit access to community and regional parks should guide future development.

#### *Description*

Areas dedicated to park and recreational opportunities, the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, or the Greenway Corridor system.

#### *Future state*

- City initiatives focus on providing equitable access to parks across the community, ensuring park facilities are appropriate for the neighborhood and ensuring playgrounds and parks are accessible to people with disabilities. Parks should include an appropriate mix of active uses (basketball, pickleball, skateboarding, etc.) and passive uses (walking trails, seating, access to nature)
- Parks and open space are treated as green infrastructure which is planned, planted and maintained to manage stormwater, mitigate flooding, improve habitat, and provide shade.
- Greenway corridor access and protection are central to the city's planning efforts.

#### *College*

##### *Summary*

- Uses: May include offices, classrooms, athletic facilities, parking, residences, and other uses needed to operate a residential college campus.
- Density: Relatively intense in terms of mix of uses and size of student residential dormitories. Generally, campus-like settings.
- Transportation considerations: sidewalk and trail connections to downtown, job centers, and shopping destinations. Those who live in these areas can access reliable and effective transit to health care facilities, which may require improved paratransit service for medical transportation, particularly for older people and people with disabilities. Emergency vehicles must also have safe and direct access.

##### *Description*

Areas dedicated to the two college campuses. Some small uses of these types may be integrated into other land use categories.

##### *Future state*

- Defined "edges" are designed to connect the educational campuses including Northfield Public Schools and Carleton and St. Olaf colleges and prevent encroachment into surrounding neighborhoods as applicable.

- Connections between and among these facilities and neighborhoods are safe and convenient, with limited impact on the surrounding residential or agricultural uses. reliable transit connects the campuses to most dense commercial and residential areas with service every 30 minutes or greater.

## *Industrial*

### *Summary*

- Uses: Manufacturing, raw material processing, production, assembly, research and development, warehousing, distribution.
- Density: Buildings that cover at least 50% of the lot and have an average of 1,200 square feet of space per industrial worker.
- Transportation considerations: Connections to transit, rail freight, highways and major transportation corridors. Those who work in industrial areas can get to and from work and home safely by any mode.

### *Description*

Areas that offer employment opportunities at higher-intensity commercial and industrial establishments and strengthen the city's tax base.

### *Future state*

- Code-based or adopted policy direction to require performance standards for industrial uses limit impacts such as noise, odors, water use and other non-renewable resource use.
- Enterprises offering family-sustaining wages (\$27/hour by 2024 standards) are recruited and encouraged to locate and expand in Northfield.
- Enterprises offering complementary goods and services to the greater Northfield economy are recruited and encouraged to locate and expand in Northfield. Complementary industries include research and development for human and animal pharmaceuticals and agricultural products, limited production and processing of food, beverages, and other consumables; reclamation and recycling of information technology waste; renewable and sustainable green energy and energy efficiency in construction.

## *Rights-of-Way*

### *Summary and Description*

- Uses: Transportation of people and goods, recreation, tree canopy, stormwater management, utilities
- Transportation considerations: Allocating space for appropriate modes of transportation based on policy priorities, safety, and land use context.

*Description:* Primarily street rights of way which can be developed to serve multiple goals of this plan at once. Which government has jurisdiction may influence the design, purpose, maintenance, rehabilitation and installation of the right-of-way. Those rights-of way-under municipal jurisdiction offer the greatest amount of influence and control over evaluation and implementation of tools to

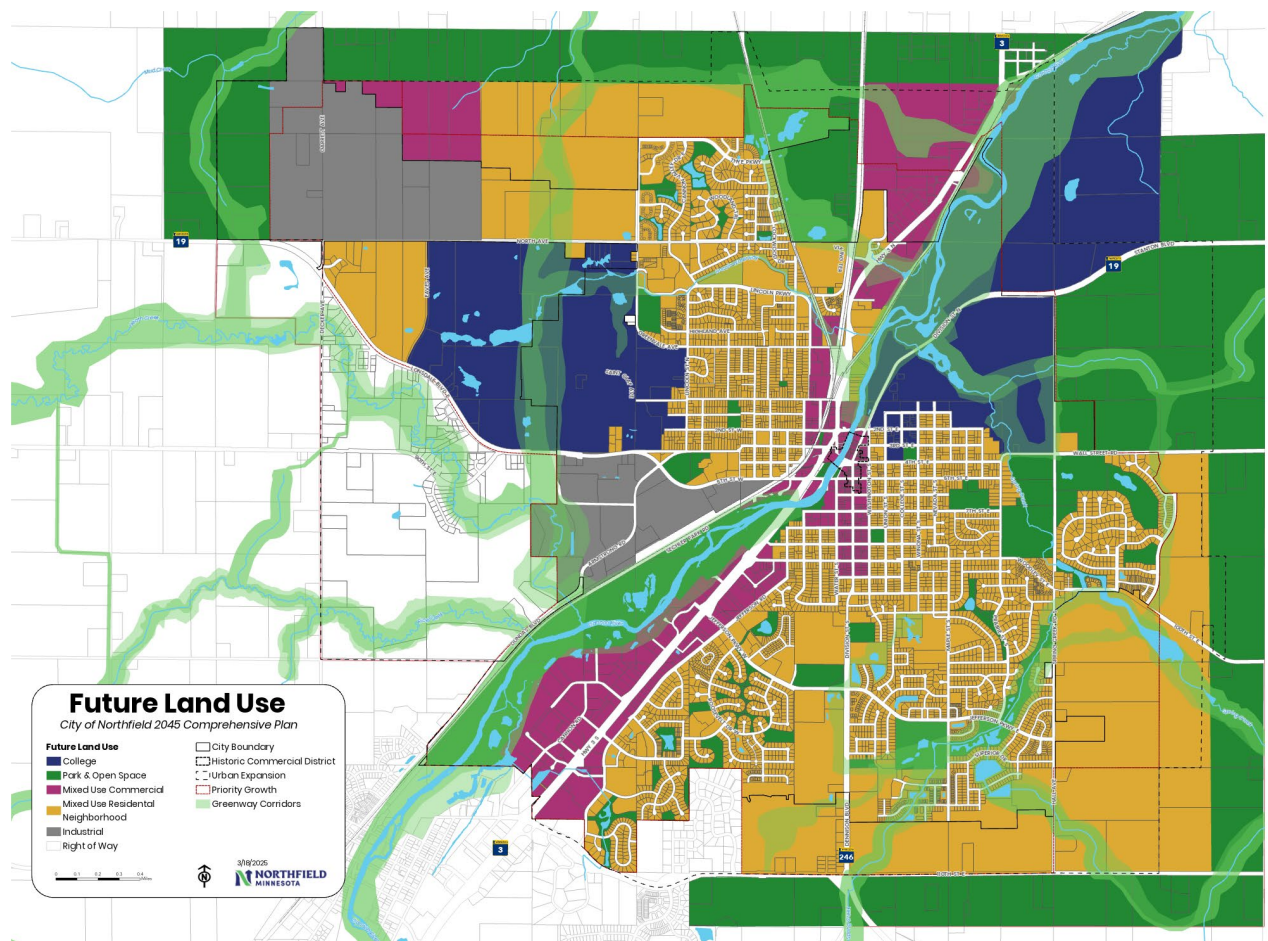


improve the right of way. This important public space can offer multimodal connectivity, stormwater management, and increased human connection.

#### *Future state*

- A reduced citywide speed limit increases safety for residents of all ages.
- New street and street reconstruction projects are designed for safe and legible use by cars, pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized users.
- Surface stormwater is better managed in the rights of way.
- Budgeting for capital projects includes community member involvement

**Figure 5 Future Land Use**



## Analysis and Interventions Framework

*The Interventions Framework designates areas and key properties in Northfield as opportunities to strengthen, transform, enhance, and preserve, each describing varying levels of anticipated intervention and change over time. It is based on an analysis of the existing state and what it would take to get to the future state.*

This Framework is used to make the critical connection between land use and transportation. Levels of intervention within this framework are classified as follows:

**Transform** areas represent the greatest opportunity for future development and redevelopment to harness growing market demand and create walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income centers. Land use changes and/or an intensification of uses will create lively places to live, work and play. They will serve as neighborhood centers for residents and employees alike by allowing for:

- Diverse and abundant housing options
- A wider variety of jobs
- New amenities including services, retail, and restaurant options
- Constructing safe routes, paths, and crossings for people walking, biking and rolling.

**Strengthen** areas present opportunities to make smaller scale, context-sensitive investments that prepare an area for future changes. Strengthening interventions may include:

- Improvements to the function, safety, and appearance of the neighborhood through upgrades to public open space, trail connections, or sidewalks
- Incentives and/or support to make necessary improvements to private property
- Infill development supporting the surrounding uses.

**Enhance** areas in Northfield are primarily located in residential neighborhoods and represent areas needing smaller-scale interventions, such as accessibility and associated public realm and mobility enhancements. Appropriate interventions may include:

- Traffic calming measures on roadways, especially higher volume collector streets
- New active transportation connections and improved facilities for people of all ages and abilities biking, walking, and/or rolling to nearby, mixed-use centers, parks and open space, and schools.
- Creation of new active parks, passive open space, and denser tree canopy
- Infill and redevelopment that increases the range of available housing types.

**Preserve** areas represent the areas least in need of significant intervention such as green spaces and historic places important in defining the city's character, historic form, and quality. Opportunities exist to improve these areas, such as supporting rehabilitation of deteriorating historic buildings, and enhancing city parks, recreation spaces and passive open spaces. These areas will need to be maintained and supported for long-term health and longevity.

While access improvements have been suggested in all areas of the city, these interventions could have the most impact on Northfield's 'enhance' areas and established neighborhoods.

The labels on *Figure 6* correspond to the text that follows. The numbers are for reference purposes and are not intended to prioritize these areas:

### *T1 Downtown River West*

Through transportation improvements to Highway 3 and redevelopment of properties west of the river and along the Highway 3 corridor, the downtown land use pattern and scale will expand west, making the river the focal point and making the Transit Hub accessible and more convenient, and encouraging lively and active streets. Ames Park will be a year-round usable and active space.

### *T2 Highway 3 and Fremouw Ave*

This intersection can serve as a new mixed-use center with residential and neighborhood-serving commercial that is more easily accessible to the Viking Terrace neighborhood and beyond. This transformation would make this north/northwest neighborhood more connected, safe, and livable, by bringing goods and services to a previously isolated area.

### *T3 Target/Cub*

Anchored by these stores, this area is ripe for transformation into a denser, walkable, mixed-use area with opportunities to live, work, and play. New residential development includes a variety of medium-to-high density housing types. Reducing surface parking in favor of more productive uses is encouraged.

### *T4 Northwest Northfield/Hospital area*

While the preference is to focus on redevelopment close to the city's core, a basic urban design layout and concept should be prepared in anticipation of future annexation or growth, so the area develops in a thoughtful way and lives up to the expectations of the **Core Principles**.

### *T5 South and southeast priority growth areas*

While the preference is to focus on infill and redevelopment first, this area offers additional land for mixed use residential development which has the most opportunity to connect to the existing street network and create a more connected neighborhood than other areas. The proximity to schools and southern shopping, connections to major corridors (Division Street/246, CSAH 81/1, Ford Street, Maple Street, and Spring Creek Road make this area most aligned with the goals of this plan.

In addition to homes, this area includes the planned Meadows Park community park and greenway corridors connecting the southern part of town. Meadows Park has been master-planned for land acquired through tax forfeiture and must be used for public uses such as parks and affordable housing.<sup>7</sup> The 41.7-acre site has been planned with future residential development on the northeast 4.6 acres of the site and along the re-defined southern

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<sup>7</sup> [Meadows Park Master Plan, 2015](#)

boundary of the park. The final park property consists of 34.0 acres. Managing stormwater through the park's design while maintaining road connectivity are strongly aligned with the objectives of this plan.

### *T Individual Transform properties:*

- Riverpark Mall and adjacent blocks: interventions focus on visual and physical access to Riverside Park and the Cannon River, bringing buildings closer to Water Street and continuing the multistory, mixed-use pattern of Division Street.
- State-owned property at the northeast corner of Woodley and Highway 3: interventions focus on anchoring this corner as a more urban, walkable place with beautiful connections to Lions Park and Riverside Park and the west side of the Cannon River. This intersection is crossed by the Mill Towns State Trail in two directions (across Highway 3 and across Woodley Street) and is also complicated by the frontage road.
- The city compost site should be considered as a possible site for expanding Sechler Park or appropriate infill.
- Property south of Northfield Cemetery (Festler Farm): interventions focus on planning safe street connections, especially access to Division Street/TH 246, and excellent bike/walk connections are a priority. Uses should complement Northfield High School, easy access to the Mill Towns State Trail along Jefferson Parkway, and proximity to downtown.

### *S1 The 6 blocks bounded by 8th St., Water St., Woodley St., and Poplar St*

This neighborhood consisting of naturally occurring affordable homes with excellent proximity to downtown offers a rare opportunity to improve the safety and stability of the neighborhood homes, streets and sidewalks. Care must be taken to prevent displacement of lower-income residents.

### *S2 West side industrial area.*

This area, south of Trunk Highway 19, offers opportunities for expanded industrial development by encouraging development on vacant or underutilized parcels. Care must be taken to protect Heath Creek water quality and recreational value and connections to Sechler Park.

### *S3 Mixed Use Commercial area between Highway 3 and the Cannon River*

Infill and potential redevelopment of underutilized properties is the primary focus in this area. Visual appeal, access to the river, and connectivity between existing facilities should be improved with any development, whether private or city driven.

### *S4 Strengthen areas along the riverfront to correspond with Northfield's Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan:*

These areas are components of completing the downtown riverwalk, including transferring Carleton College-owned Cannon River frontage to the city. The city must implement planned

flood wall improvements and work with Riverpark Mall managers, owners, and tenants to co-design minor enhancements to the back of the property.

### *E1 Residential neighborhood west of the river*

This residential area lacks parks and could also benefit from enhanced non-motorized connections to improve access to services and commercial enterprises.

### *E2 Residential neighborhood adjacent to downtown*

This neighborhood could include gradual residential density increases, increasing the range of affordability and housing options while preserving the high quality of life offered by the connection to downtown.

### *E3 Southeast residential*

The existing small commercial node at Division and Anderson Drive could accommodate more neighborhood-scale commercial use. There is also one large undeveloped parcel across Division St from Northfield High School; small-scale commercial or mixed-use development could be considered here. Gradually increasing residential density or allowing for smaller multifamily housing is also a priority in this area.

### *E4 Between Highway 3 and Northfield High School*

This area will benefit from improved access between residential and commercial uses along Highway 3, especially non-motorized connections.

## *E Individual Enhance properties:*

Cannon Riverfront: Use the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan as a guide to establish the riverfront as a regional park: a well-connected recreation destination featuring opportunities for land and water-related active transportation, featuring a reconstructed Ames Mill Dam and rock rapids that reinforces the health, continuity, and variety of the Cannon River State Water Trail and four enhanced, interconnected parks along a riverwalk loop that offer new recreation and relaxation opportunities, restore the ecological health of the river, and fill in missing sidewalk and trail segments.

- Ames Park: This park is a critical component of the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan and currently almost unreachable by any mode of travel. Access to this park requires redesigning Highway 3 to allow safe, convenient crossing and travel along the highway by walking and biking, providing limited parking and curb access for people with disabilities, and improved bike/walk connections from the east side of the river to make this park usable.

K-12 School campuses: Continue to pursue the turnback of Highway 246 from the state to local control and redesign the corridor between campuses to reduce school vehicle travel, safe and convenient facilities for young people to reach school; reconsider the two-way

bikeway in favor of one-way facilities on both sides of this important route for more intuitive and safer route.

Ole Store: When the market allows, use this long-standing neighborhood dining institution to anchor a neighborhood-serving commercial node.

### *P Preserve properties/areas:*

Northfield's Nationally Designated Downtown Historic District. Representing valued historic and cultural landmarks and resources, this area must be maintained with attention paid to repair and preserve the Historic District building exteriors while encouraging creative reuse of interior spaces, adding housing and additional commercial space through thoughtful redevelopment and reduction in surface parking.

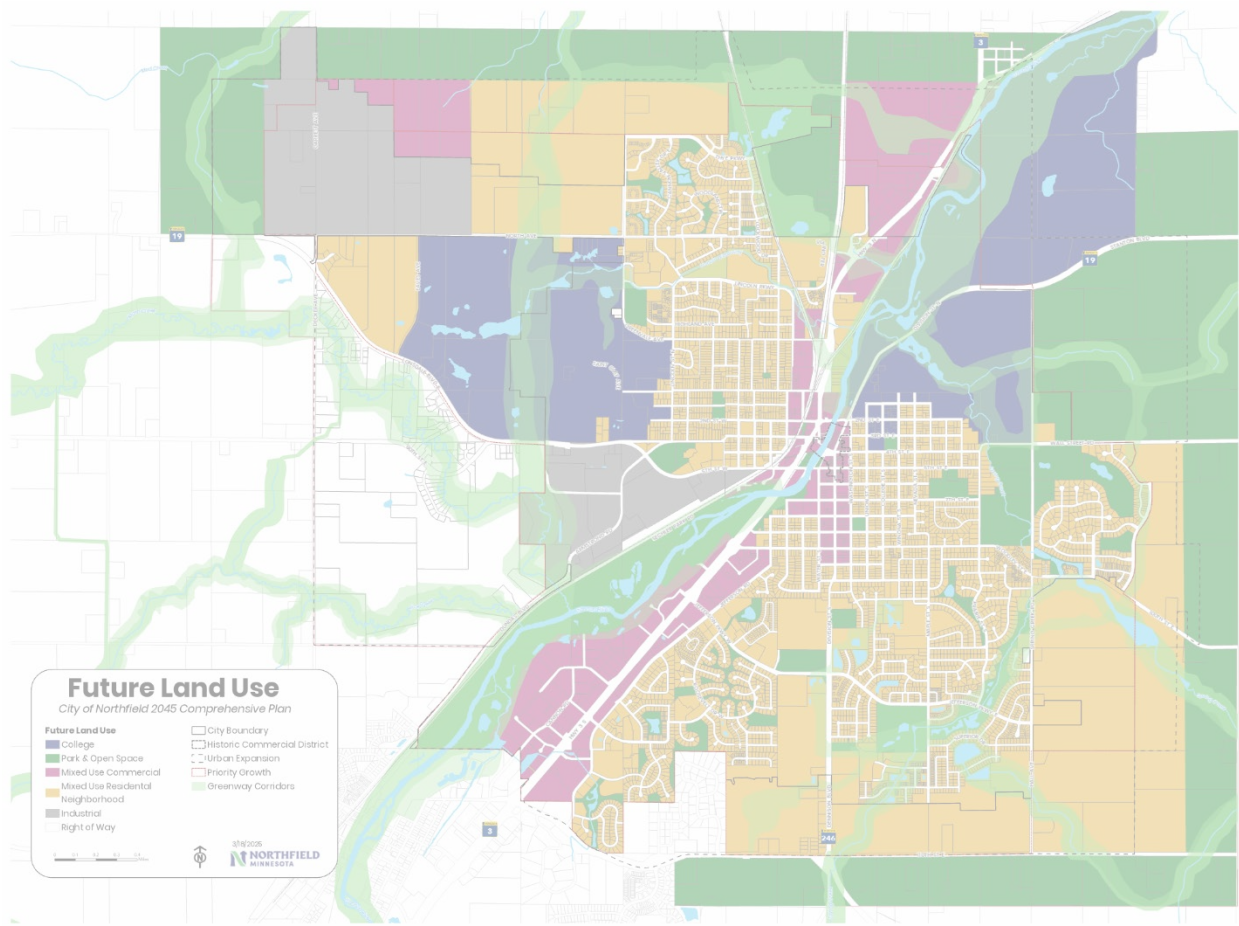
Carleton and St. Olaf campuses. Work with the colleges to create firm and identifiable boundaries between college property and surrounding neighborhoods and prohibit campus parking adjacent or visible to residential neighborhoods.

Private recreation areas such as the Northfield Golf Club, Cowling Arboretum, St. Olaf Natural Lands

As part of a renewed approach to preservation in the City of Northfield, landmarks such as Central Park, locally designated, should be considered for National Register of Historic Landmarks designation.



**FIGURE 6-? INTERVENTIONS MAP (OR A SERIES THEREOF)**





## How Northfield Can Grow

To ensure municipal growth is predictable and productive, Minnesota provides several tools to designate land for future development.

**Northfield's orderly annexation areas:** Orderly annexation begins with the adoption of a joint resolution by a township and a city to designate an area adjacent to the city limits in need of orderly annexation. Following the resolution, the jurisdictions negotiate a contract describing what land may be annexed and other terms of the agreement. The city has established orderly annexation agreements with three of four surrounding townships based on the County-determined urban expansion areas. The agreements typically allow a certain number of acres within the Urban Expansion Area to be annexed within the duration of the contract and stipulate compensation to the township in exchange for the land. Although the city does not have land use or zoning authority over those areas, it is important to work with township neighbors to limit disconnected residential development and to guide development to areas served by municipal sewer, water and other utilities to protect groundwater and limit costs.

**Urban expansion area:** Based on orderly annexation agreements between the townships and the City of Northfield, Dakota and Rice Counties have identified “urban expansion” areas in the county comprehensive plans. These are areas around the municipal boundary of an incorporated city that are reserved for future orderly development of commercial and residential property by extending municipal services. Often, they are used to protect high-value natural or agricultural resources from encroachment by urban-style development.

**Priority growth area:** Within the urban expansion area, the city has identified a smaller area designated as the priority growth area to identify for developers and policymakers where greenfield development is preferred. The priority growth area is established to protect significant resources and direct efficient extension of infrastructure including ensuring annexed areas have equitable accessibility to city resources by all modes. The policy has been and continues to be to prioritize infill development over greenfield development; the city has great discretion to extend or decline to extend utilities to newly annexed areas based on the fiscal impact to the city, impact to natural and agricultural resources, and other policy determinations.

**FIGURE 7 ORDERLY ANNEXATION MAP**

The priority growth areas in this plan have been selected using the following criteria. First, areas which are more readily connected by streets, trails, and infrastructure are the highest priority. Second, clustering development around existing major transportation corridors and intersections. Third, the city has steered development away from high quality farmland and other natural resources.

New development in these areas should be mixed use and serve as neighborhood centers that offer commercial/services and amenities and have safe, convenient bike/walk/roll access to all existing or new nearby residents. Expansion to the north might also include industrial uses.

- *Highway 246 south*

This area presents a growth opportunity to increase development along a major transportation route into the city which also connects three schools and existing residential areas. The city is pursuing a turnback of the state highway to local control to facilitate better local access, lower speeds, and better connections to schools and downtown. This area has a strongly interconnected street network with excellent bike/walk/roll facilities to schools and Highway 3 commercial areas; it is an excellent opportunity to add neighborhood-serving commercial and provide a welcoming gateway into Northfield.

- *Southwest corner of Falk Ave/Eveleth Ave and North Ave*

To complement the anticipated residential growth at Cedar Meadows, this intersection is a clear opportunity for mixed use development that should include higher density residential and smaller scale/neighborhood-serving commercial in an area of the city that currently lacks such services.

- *Between Dresden Ave and Highway 3 north*

With limited industrial growth opportunities within city limits, this area adjacent to existing transportation and city infrastructure has been identified as a potential industrial growth area and an opportunity to work with Waterford Township to create shared control and benefits.

- *Urban Expansion Area outside Priority Growth Areas*

These areas should be considered last for redevelopment and be prioritized for additional housing to serve demand, along with neighborhood serving small-scale commercial/services and amenities with safe and convenient access to existing and new nearby residents, ideally within a 10-minute walk or roll at average pace. The city should extend services to these areas only after detailed review of the fiscal impact and connectivity. Low density single family residential development is discouraged.

**FIGURE 8 SHOWS PRIORITY GROWTH AREAS**

## Strategies and Actions

Guiding how Northfield makes decisions about land development and transportation projects will affect taxes, health, traffic, climate, equity, economic growth and how we carry out our daily lives for a generation or more.

Past land development and transportation practices worked to separate land uses. Homes were located farther from stores, schools, and jobs and streets designed to allow connections only by driving and driving farther. This pattern has created places where walking to school is unsafe, daily errands require more driving, streets are disconnected, and homes are more expensive. Further, the impact of those places on the environment is a large component of the global climate crisis. The City of Northfield specifically addresses many of these concerns in the 2019 Climate Action Plan (CAP).

This comprehensive planning effort reunites land use and transportation to help Northfield grow more equitably, sustainably and affordably. It also reiterates the city's Climate Action Plan (CAP) policy commitment to 100% carbon-free electricity by 2030 and being a 100% carbon-free community by 2040. This plan incorporates strategies from the CAP to enhance the resilience of the community through cultivating and supporting a resilient population, forward-looking stormwater management and infrastructure planning, 21st century electric grid updates, and supporting local food efforts.

Northfield's vision of growing as a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable place requires doing things differently, starting with the larger picture of equitable access and connections – both physical and human – as guides for future development.

## Guiding Values Overview



Northfield will develop **creative solutions to local challenges** by working with the community, ensuring staff understand and have tools to implement best practices in their fields, and using consultants who understand Northfield and its values.



Northfield's capital planning and budgeting advances the goals of this Plan in **economically responsible and sustainable** ways to ensure revenue is sufficient to meet the city's needs for the long term.



Northfield promotes **safe, stable housing** in a wide variety of types, sizes, and ownership models, to accommodate residents in all stages of life, and addresses demand for homes for workers.



Northfield develops infrastructure, policies, and practices to **foster resilience** and **mitigate the effects of climate change**.



Northfield works to provide a network of transportation and **mobility options** that enable all Northfield residents and visitors to move throughout the community safely and conveniently.



Northfield **emphasizes equity** to address disparities and to ensure equitable access to jobs, housing, education, essential services, retail, mobility options, and open space for all.



Northfield **fosters human connections** in our increasingly diverse community through well-designed neighborhoods, gathering places, and business districts that are inclusive for all, independent of age, economic status, mobility, gender, or racial and ethnic background.

## Strategy 1: Plan for Accessibility



*Increasing access connects people to where they want to go and supports Northfield's vision of values of promoting sustainability, increasing equity, and creating a thriving community.*

**Outcome:** Northfield has established goals for connectivity, land development, and transportation and adopted relevant metrics to measure progress.

**Outcome:** Northfield's capital investments and other funded projects are based on creating complete places, filling gaps, supplying missing assets, and ensuring equitable access to destinations.

**Outcome:** Northfield has well-connected and well-used transit, rideshare, and carshare alternatives for trips that require a vehicle.

**Outcome:** All existing documents guiding planning, growth, and development are updated to reflect the goals of this plan.

### Strategy 1 Actions:

- 1** Update or replace the [Typical Street Sections](#), Complete Streets Policy, Safe Routes to School, and other relevant plans to prioritize safety, comfort, and access to destinations for people of all ages, incomes and abilities in accordance with the goals of this plan. Simplifying and consolidating policy documents should be a guiding priority.
- 2** Update or replace the [Typical Street Sections](#), Comprehensive Transportation Plan and other relevant plans to plan for accessibility and adopt relevant metrics to measure progress.
- 3** [Update or replace the Typical Street Sections, Comprehensive Transportation Plans, and other relevant plans to reduce climate impacts including lifecycle emissions, air and water pollution, urban heating, and stormwater runoff.](#)
- 4** Advocate with MnDOT to redesign Highway 3 from Fremouw Road to Jefferson Parkway for safe, pleasant travel along and across the highway prioritizing slower speeds, local access, safe intersections, and connections to the Mill Towns State Trail, Transit Hub, and the riverfront.
- 5** Plan with the Northfield School District and other community partners to increase students' walking, biking, and bus access to schools to reduce school car traffic and road congestion.
- 6** Plan land use to locate housing, services, and shopping areas close to one another for improved accessibility.
- 7** Quantify non-motorized and transit use in Northfield on a biannual basis.
- 8** Establish accessibility goals and measure progress. Use the shorter-term strategic planning process and capital improvement program to make progress toward identified goals.
- 9** Commit to funding and improving options for transit services and other options when a trip requires a vehicle, including ridesharing and car sharing options.

- 10** Develop and adopt an official map identifying future street and trail connections, parks, and other public infrastructure in accordance with MN Stat. 462.359.

## Strategy 2: Develop in a Compact, Sustainable, and Fiscally Responsible Pattern



*Growing compactly by prioritizing infill and redevelopment before annexing additional land advances Northfield's vision by preserving Northfield as a free-standing city, making development more cost effective, connecting people more equitably, and preserving valuable land and natural resources.*

**Outcome:** Short-term strategic planning sets interim goals and adopts quantifiable metrics to measure progress including measuring fiscal impact, advancing equity, and climate action progress.

**Outcome:** The city increases overall density, has fewer underutilized properties and a wider range of housing types, connected by multiple transportation options reducing vehicle miles traveled, improving transit, and meeting climate goals.

**Outcome:** The city supports farmland preservation in surrounding townships, reducing climate impact, encouraging food production, and maintaining Northfield's rural edge.

**Outcome:** Northfield maximizes the value of existing infrastructure and extends infrastructure in a fiscally responsible and sustainable way by directing development first to infill on existing vacant land, then by intensifying uses and redeveloping property, then by developing in the identified Priority Growth areas, and consider orderly annexation areas beyond the priority growth areas when other locations have been exhausted.

### Strategy 2 Actions:

- 1** Use the Future Land Use Map to guide short-term strategic planning efforts.
- 2** Revise zoning and other regulations to implement this plan:
  - a. Ensure zoning and infrastructure support environmentally and economically efficient, resilient land use development to advance this plan.
  - b. Incentivize infill and intensification in both commercial and residential areas.
  - c. Encourage Accessory Dwelling Units and small-scale multi-family housing in all residential neighborhoods to add more housing in existing neighborhoods, add housing types, and put more people closer to established parks, schools, shopping and jobs.
  - d. Eliminate regulatory definitions of family and increase allowable dwelling types to reflect how people want to live while meeting fair housing requirements.
  - e. Include standards to facilitate neighborhood-scale commercial uses (including multi-unit housing) in all residential neighborhoods to advance this plan's goals of greater accessibility, increased housing, and reduced reliance on vehicle trips.



These uses should be concentrated on vacant sites, and/or sites where the building to land value ratio is low (indicating the site is ripe for redevelopment).

- f. Include tools to incentivize building more housing and more affordable housing such as density and/or height bonuses, development fee reductions or deferments, inclusionary zoning requirements and related tools.
- 3** Manage parking, including pricing parking, to ensure efficient use of existing parking facilities, reduce demand for surface parking, and require structured parking to be able to be converted to other uses with a positive return on investment.
- 4** Adopt a fiscal impact tool to measure the impact of all large developments to determine if adopted metrics are met. Prioritize developments and initiatives that meet adopted metrics, and incent innovations not previously contemplated that may have the potential to outperform the adopted standard.
- 5** Seek grants to reduce capital costs of projects while also budgeting for the additional costs of operations and maintenance over the life cycle of the project.

### Strategy 3: Target Areas of Under Investment



*Improve the stability and health of all communities by implementing placed-based investments, such as public infrastructure, improvements and maintenance in parks, open spaces, culturally appropriate community spaces, active transportation facilities, and infrastructure, to areas of concentrated disadvantage such as in and around neighborhoods where housing costs are lower.*

**Outcome:** City infrastructure, such as roads, water, sewer and stormwater facilities, and tree canopy are of the same quality across the city.

**Outcome:** Northfield's capital investments and other funded projects are based on creating complete places, filling gaps, supplying missing assets, and ensuring equitable access to destinations.

#### Strategy 3 Actions:

- 1** Establish criteria for identifying underinvestment, map these areas, and plan for improvements using the strategic plan, capital improvement plan and budget.
- 2** Include specific improvements for parks, infrastructure, and other identified needs in currently underserved neighborhoods and prioritize in the Capital Improvement Program and Park and Recreation Capital Investment Plan.
- 3** Partner with Northfield Public Schools, Northfield Community Education and private partners to consider youth out-of-school time programming to fill needs not currently met.
- 4** Prioritize transportation infrastructure connections between underserved residential neighborhoods and desired destinations such as downtown, educational facilities, highway-oriented job centers.

- 5 Prioritize affordable transportation and safe access to desired destinations regardless of age, ability, or income.

## Strategy 4: Ensure Equitable Access



*Ensure that all community members are free to choose how they travel to destinations regardless of their age, income, or physical capabilities.*

**Outcome:** The network designed for people biking, walking, and rolling is complete, safe, and consistent.

**Outcome:** State highways 3 and 19 have been redesigned to improve residents' freedom to travel by reducing speed, noise, pollution, and adding facilities for safe travel along and across the highways.

**Outcome:** The Cannon River riverfront is a connected, accessible space for the entire community with culturally relevant and appropriate facilities, a mix of activities, and great design.

### Strategy 4 Actions:

- 1 Prioritize safety and equity benefits in transportation project selection.
- 2 Implement a community-based evaluation of the existing transit routes—either to expand or reroute existing services—for better connectivity, coverage and ease of use
- 3 Commit to funding and improving transit services and ridesharing options. Encourage partnership between Hiawathaland Transit, healthcare providers, rideshare companies, or other private/public entities for paratransit services and/or providing last-mile connections from transit stops.
- 4 Continue improving railroad crossings for quiet crossings to improve safety and quality of life in Northfield
- 5 Complete the bike network with safe and convenient transitions between off street trails and on-street facilities for continuity and easy, affordable access to parks, open spaces, and other recreational facilities
- 6 Guide home construction, job development and services close to each other and to other destinations such as parks, schools, and shopping to increase affordable access by biking, walking, and transit.
- 7 Work with MnDOT to redesign Highway 3 from Fremouw Road to Jefferson Parkway to ensure safe access to the Transit Hub, facilitate transit operations, increase safe travel along and across the highway. and reduce noise and pollution for neighborhoods adjacent to the highway.
- 8 Work with MnDOT to redesign Hwy 246 from Jefferson Parkway to County Highway 1 to improve pedestrian safety, facilitate safer vehicular access to Bridgewater Elementary and

Northfield Middle School and surrounding neighborhoods, and improve the character of Northfield's southern gateway.

- 9 Update the ADA Transition Plan regularly as improvements are completed. Encourage private and public partners that provide surface transportation services to accommodate people of all ages and physical capabilities when possible.

## Strategy 5: Design for Safe Access



*When making transportation decisions, focus on the land use context and building streets which promote safe, low stress travel.*

**Outcomes:** There are clear, safe pathways for people walking, rolling, biking, and driving to access destinations within the city on highly interconnected streets. Programmed road projects will be designed to complete or create a highly connected street network

**Outcome:** Street rights of way are allocated and designed for all users and modes of travel appropriate to the surrounding land use including access for people with disabilities, pedestrian scale lighting, green infrastructure, and shade trees.

**Outcome:** Pedestrian, non-motorized, and transit and/or emergency-only access ways are implemented where full street construction may be infeasible or unnecessary, through-traffic may be at odds with the land use context, or motor vehicle access can reasonably be expected to result in nuisance driving behaviors.

## Strategy 5 Actions:

- 1 Update the Land Development Code to connect street design with land use and sustainability. Build safe, comfortable places for walking, biking, transit, and stormwater management. These regulations will apply to all street projects.
  - a. Complete the active transportation network shown in Figure 6 prioritizing connections to schools and parks
  - b. Identify and include appropriate metrics for measuring access in addition to mobility.
  - c. Update or replace the Complete Streets Policy, Safe Routes to School Plan, Comprehensive Transportation Plan and other relevant plans and standards to meet the goals of this comprehensive plan and to simplify and coordinate policy guidance
  - d. Plan updates to existing active transportation facilities/infrastructure to ensure a consistent, predictable, and safe network appropriate to the transportation and land use contexts. Early bike lane projects, for example, do not meet current safety recommendations and the variety of facilities creates unnecessary confusion.
  - e. Revise posted speed limits to lower speeds citywide.
  - f. Design intersections with active transportation facilities so that they are safe and intuitive to cross and navigate for all users regardless of mode, age, or ability.

- 2 Prioritize CIP projects based on transparent process, early community engagement and this plan. When determining facility type and design, focus on improvements that consider land use context, equity, increased accessibility, affordable modes, as well as cost.
- 3 Require a highly connected street system with new development and prioritize areas which can be most effectively connected to the existing system. Northfield will revisit its roadway network to ensure new roadways or extensions of existing roadways are highly connected) using widely accepted metrics such as intersection density, link node ratio, block density, cul de sac density, block length to create multiple route options and better support active transportation.

## Strategy 6: Design for Resiliency and Sustainability



*Work to mitigate the effects of climate change and increase resilience of all city systems. This includes evaluating green building standards, upgrading infrastructure to meet climate hazards, designing multimodal streets, and reducing the city's carbon footprint through energy and resource efficiencies.*

**Outcome:** The city as a municipal entity and its residents and businesses have collectively decreased our greenhouse gas emissions through mitigation strategies.

**Outcome:** The city has taken action to ensure climate resilient infrastructure and facilities.

**Outcome:** The city plans land uses and new development to reduce vehicle miles traveled.

**Outcome:** The city has integrated climate action into all capital projects and annual budgeting.

### Strategy 6 Actions:

- 1 The following strategies and actions of the city's adopted 2019 Climate Action Plan (CAP) are incorporated to embed them in city decision-making processes:
  - a. Establish an in-boundary goal to generate the equivalent of 10% of the city's electricity from rooftop and ground-mount solar installations by 2030
  - b. 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
  - c. Encourage rooftop solar on commercial buildings where there is an economically viable solar resource (i.e. available space with adequate sunlight, and a structurally sound roof)
  - d. Coordinate with local waste and recycling haulers to offer curbside compost pick-up for residents and businesses that will be delivered to a local compostable waste processing facility.
  - e. Use the following metrics describing a desired outcome in the CAP to establish goals in strategic planning efforts:

- i. 26% reduction in overall emissions through commercial and industrial building efficiency, such as net-zero energy new construction and energy efficiency retrofits
  - ii. 4% reduction in overall emissions through residential building efficiency, such as net-zero energy new construction and energy efficiency retrofits
  - iii. 7% reduction in overall emissions through community-supported renewable energy
  - iv. 8% reduction in overall emissions through fuel switching from natural gas to electricity in homes and businesses
  - v. 6% reduction in overall emissions through travel strategies such as mode shift and electric vehicles
  - vi. 2% reduction in overall emissions through strategies that eliminate waste emissions by 2030
- 2** Encourage the use of energy-efficient mechanical systems and building products in rehabilitation and new construction to decrease building operation costs and impacts on the environment.
- 3** Encourage the use of deconstruction methods over demolition to decrease negative impacts on the environment, where and when possible. Require for City-led and/or financially facilitated projects.
- 4** Update Chapter 34 of the Code of Ordinances (Zoning Code), 2008 Comprehensive Transportation Plan, and 2020 Surface Water Management Plan to:
  - a. Require Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and sustainable stormwater management practices in public and private projects related to stormwater runoff.
  - b. Plan and schedule improvements in city rights-of-way to reduce the urban heat island effect and increase resilience to flooding through methods such as shared, stacked-function green infrastructure and planting
  - c. Collaborate with partner agencies on water quality improvement efforts, including capital projects and programming. For example:
    - Prioritize and pursue funding to replace the Ames Mill Dam with a high-quality recreation and river-ecological health solution.
  - d. Require electric vehicle-charging-ready infrastructure (electrical conduit or raceway connection to electrical service with sufficient panel space reserved that is capable of operating at Level 2 (two hundred eight (208) Volts) or greater power) be installed with new developments and public projects. Prioritize locating infrastructure for EV charging stations at appropriate publicly accessible areas such as in the right-of-way or in parking lots.
- 5** Create a natural asset management plan and blue green infrastructure plan which includes parks and public rights of way.
- 6** Strengthen partnerships with groups such as Clean Water Partners, Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Board, and educational institutions to measure, evaluate, and enhance the health of the Cannon River
- 7** Maintain response readiness for emergencies related to water supply contamination or interruption and for damage to treatment and distribution infrastructure.

- 8** Measure the potential greenhouse gas emissions impacts of transportation citywide in alignment with state legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. For new projects, use MnDOT's Minnesota Infrastructure Carbon Estimator (MICE) tool to estimate GHG emissions and prioritize projects which advance city emissions goals.
- 9** Analyze and map the city's land surface temperature to establish a baseline heat map for the city.
- 10** Manage both above and below ground utilities to improve the health of the tree canopy in public spaces and rights of way.
- 11** Comprehensively maintain and improve the tree canopy to provide shade, clean air, and stormwater treatment.
- 12** Ensure all new buildings meet the requirement of the adopted sustainable building policy and/or Minnesota Energy Code, including prioritizing electrification and use of passive solar design standards and/or renewable energy sources for heating and cooling.
- 13** Retrofit existing city buildings with energy efficiency upgrades as part of capital improvement scheduling.
- 14** Manage flood mitigation at the watershed level with regional partners.
- 15** Work with river-adjacent landowners, including Carleton College, Riverpark Mall, Just Foods Coop, Post Consumer Brands and others to mitigate negative impacts of flooding.

## Chapter 4 – Housing and Economic Development:

### Connecting housing and economic security

A sustainable and secure economic future for Northfield and its residents has three components. First, Northfield must have abundant housing to meet the needs of people at all income levels and stages of life. Next the city must develop a more diverse and robust tax base to support the city's needs. Finally, Northfield must ensure these first two components are secure in a changing climate, protect the area's resources, and that the pattern of growth supports our stated values.

As in the previous chapter, this chapter works to integrate policy pieces which are interrelated but have been considered separately in past plans. This chapter describes the current housing stock and economic development landscape, then projects future housing needs and priorities for public spending on economic development. The strategies and actions draw on earlier study data and respond to community concerns regarding housing, family-sustaining wages, and related transportation needs to focus on how the city can provide support, funding, or partnerships to provide abundant housing and a thriving economy for the long term.

### What We Heard -

#### Housing and jobs

- “Many employers can’t retain employees because it’s difficult for their employees to find affordable housing.”
- “The new affordable housing is far from the grocery store and other resources.”
- “There is not enough affordable housing in the most walkable areas of the city.”
- “Northfield should develop mixed-income neighborhoods.”
- “Invest in preserving the existing housing stock.”
- “There should be sufficient housing options available for community members in all stages of life.”
- “Solving issues about providing jobs and building housing to support employees are challenging plans to put into action but it needs to be done.”

#### Business development

- “Create a center of gravity in Northfield that leverages the town’s unique identity and vibe.”
- “The city needs to find a way to increase the number of businesses here and provide incentives.”
- “Bringing new industry into Northfield for better jobs for a growing local economy.”
- “More collaboration between the city and colleges.”

- “The city should increase support for small businesses and invest in facade improvement programs to help businesses improve their buildings.”
- “Investigate why [some claim] it’s harder to work with the City of Northfield to do business than in other cities and make changes to improve that.”

## Equity issues

- “Northfield has the potential to be a great city but isn’t there yet because it hasn’t addressed the needs of its most vulnerable residents.”
- “Equity, inclusivity, and housing are needed for all socioeconomic levels to make this a community people want to live in.”

## Future Northfield

- “Northfield is a thriving place where businesses succeed.”
- “The growth of industry in Northfield eases the tax burden on residents.”
- “Northfield thrives as a cultural mecca with great jobs, sustainable infrastructure, and continuing investment in cultural assets.”
- “Northfield is a place where everyone is ‘okay’ and has a chance to flourish.”

*For a complete summary of engagement activities and results from the comprehensive planning process, please refer to [the Engagement Summary](#)*

## Connecting Housing and Economic Security

A secure and sustainable economic future requires attention to what housing and business activities are supplied by the market and where the market is failing. Public spending should ensure safe and healthy homes for Northfield’s workforce, encourage needed business activity, and build in a pattern which is affordable and sustainable. Safe and secure housing for Northfield’s workforce requires also prioritizing recruitment of firms that pay living wages, and a more diverse tax base to reduce the burden on residential taxpayers.

The housing-related strategies and actions focus on providing safe and affordable housing for all residents, with particular emphasis on supplying homes for Northfield’s workforce. The type of housing, its location, and energy efficiency all matter to concerns of affordability (both the home and transportation costs), accessibility (connections to opportunities), and sustainability. This plan recommends putting housing close to where people need to go, creating mixed-income neighborhoods, and ensuring homes are safe in all seasons and weather.

The economic development strategies focus on housing *not* supplied by the marketplace as a core economic development activity, as well as more typical strategies to retain and expand existing businesses and attract new businesses to diversify the tax base to support the goals of this plan. Northfield will work to retain and develop its high-quality downtown retail environment; its mixed-use pattern is very productive in tax terms, provides higher density housing, and the historic downtown is a key part of Northfield’s attractiveness as a community. Larger-scale commercial and



industrial development is also needed, and the city has recently rezoned a substantial amount of land for this purpose. However, the city must also use existing economic impact analysis tools to ensure extension of infrastructure and other costs do not adversely affect the city's long-term fiscal health.

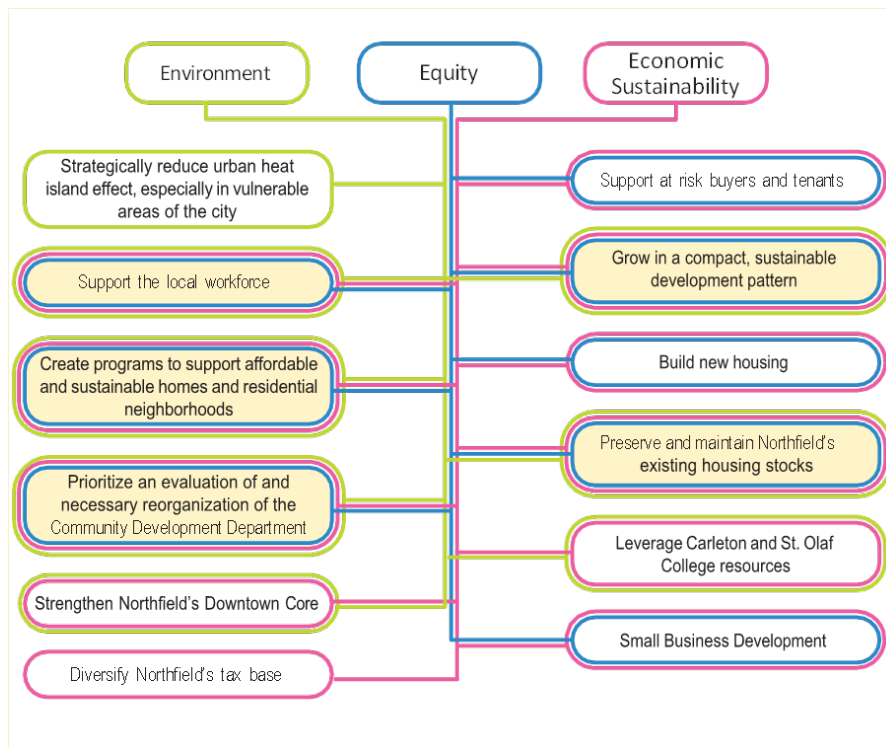
Planning for climate resilience and mitigation, and protecting environmental resources, are also key to this plan. Extreme events such as the 2024 record-breaking flood caused damage to both private and public assets and required repairs and inventory replacement. Planning to manage stormwater, flooding, increased heat and cold, as well as reducing the city's carbon footprint, are all ways to reduce the costs of climate change. This plan contains multiple recommendations to address these issues including development pattern, street design, economic development choices, and housing improvements.

Economic development investments (including housing) impact equity (which businesses the city chooses to support with finite resources), economic sustainability (how the city chooses to grow both physically and financially), and environment (where the city chooses to grow, and maximizes use of existing infrastructure). Northfield is experiencing low rental vacancy rates, rapidly increasing housing prices, and more workers commute into the city than leave to work elsewhere, all indicating a shortage in available housing.

## Core principles: Economy, Environment, and Equity

Northfield's economic future depends on both our ability to provide housing for those who work here and employment opportunities paying a living wage. Housing strategies in this chapter focus on providing safe, affordable housing for all residents with a particular emphasis on ensuring housing availability for those who work here. The economic development strategies in this chapter focus on recruiting and retaining businesses to provide the necessary employment opportunities and tax base to help Northfield thrive. All strategies, whether housing or economic development, must hold up to Northfield's triple bottom line - making meaningful progress toward economic, environmental, and equity goals.

**FIGURE 9** shows how strategies implement core principles. The highlighted boxes show where all three principles converge.



## Definitions

*The following terms are defined as they are used within this Chapter:*

**Adaptive reuse:** Refurbishing or rehabilitating a building for purposes other than its original use. Adaptive reuse extends building lifespan by updating structures to meet economic, energy, and social needs of the community.

**Affordable Housing:** The general definition of affordability as established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is for a household to pay no more than 30% of their income for housing. For this study, we define affordable housing as income-restricted to households earning at or below 80% area median income (AMI), though individual properties can have income restrictions set at 30%, 40%, 50%, 60% or 80% AMI. Rent is not based on income but instead is a contract amount that is affordable to households within the specific income restriction segment. It is essentially housing affordable to low or very low-income tenants.

**Area Median Income (“AMI”):** AMI is the midpoint in the income distribution within a specific geographic area: 50% of households earn less than the median income and 50% earn more. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates AMI annually, adjusted for household size. (In 2024, the median household income in Rice County is \$100,900—equivalent to an hourly wage of around \$50 per hour. For Dakota County the number is \$123,700 – equivalent to an hourly wage of around \$59 per hour.)

**Economic development:** The process by which the economic well-being and quality of life of a nation, region, or local community, are improved according to targeted goals and objectives.

**Economic Mobility:** The ability of a person or family to improve their economic status over time.

**Extremely Low-Income:** Person or household with incomes below 30% of area median income, adjusted for respective household size. Defined by HUD.

**Fair Market Rent:** Estimates established by HUD of the gross rents needed to obtain modest rental units in acceptable conditions in a specific geographic area. The amount of rental income a given property would command if it were open for leasing at any given moment and/or the amount derived based on market conditions that is needed to pay gross monthly rent at modest rental housing in each area. This number is used as a basis for determining the payment standard amount used to calculate the maximum monthly subsidy for families on financially assisted housing.

**Household:** All people who occupy a housing unit, including occupants of a single-family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated people who share living arrangements.

**Housing Choice Voucher Program:** The federal government's primary program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly and the disabled to afford decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market. A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program.

Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies. They receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program. A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the public housing agency on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

**Market Rate Rental Housing:** Housing that does not have any income restrictions. Some properties will have income guidelines, which are minimum annual incomes required to live there.

**Moderate Income:** Person or household with gross household income between 80% and 120% of the area median income, adjusted for household size. Defined by HUD.

**Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing:** Although affordable housing is typically associated with an income-restricted property, there are other housing units in communities that indirectly provide affordable housing. Housing units that were not developed or designated with income guidelines (i.e. assisted) yet are more affordable than other units in a community are considered "naturally occurring" or "unsubsidized affordable" units. This rental supply is available through the private market, versus assisted housing programs through various governmental agencies. Property values on these units are lower based on a combination of factors, such as: age of structure/ housing stock, location, condition, size, functionally obsolete, school district, etc.

**Subsidized Housing:** Housing that is income-restricted to households earning at or below 30% AMI. Rent is generally based on income, with the household contributing 30% of their adjusted gross income toward rent. Also referred to as extremely low-income housing.

**Subsidy:** Monthly income received by a tenant or by an owner on behalf of a tenant to pay the difference between the apartment's contract or market rate rent and the amount paid by the tenant toward rent.

**Visit-ability:** housing designed in such a way that it can be lived in or visited by people who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers. A home is visitable when it meets three basic requirements: one zero-step entrance; doors with 32 inches of clear passage space; one bathroom accessible in a wheelchair.

**Workforce Housing:** Housing that is income-restricted to households earning between 80% and 120% AMI; however, some government agencies define workforce housing from 50% to 120% AMI. Also referred to as moderate-income housing. Generally defined by a funding agency.

## Existing Conditions

The City of Northfield and community housing and economic development partners invested in professional analyses of its tax base, and housing needs to understand the needs of residents and employers. Maxfield Research conducted an analysis of the housing market, related supply and demand, and the city's future need for different housing types. A community-based project facilitated by Enterprise Community Partners (ECP) and Healthy Community Initiative (HCI) studied housing and education outcomes to help Northfield build effective partnerships to address housing as a major contributor to educational success and upward mobility. Northfield also commissioned an infill and tax base needs study by Visible City and is participating in the University of Minnesota Extension's Connecting Businesses and Community program. This plan incorporates this research to develop outcomes, strategies, and actions.

Northfield's demand for housing is driven by both population and job growth. Demographic shifts and the character of the workforce play a role in the types of housing that are demanded. The following data from the Maxfield report form the basis of the recommendations in this plan.

## Demographics

- **The population is growing.** It is projected to grow by 5.2% from 2020 to 2028. Population growth is led by people in the 25 to 45-year-old age groups moving into Northfield.
- **The population is aging.** The 65- to 74-year-old age cohort grew 73% between 2010 and 2020.
- **Household sizes are shrinking.** In 2024, the most common household type in Northfield was people living alone, representing 31.4% of all households in the city, followed by married couples without children at 30.4%.
- **The predominant household type in Northfield is people living alone,** representing 31% of households in 2024. The proportion of people living alone increased modestly since 2010, from 30%. Larger increases were observed among the "other family" and "married couples without children" categories.
- **Homeowners' incomes outpace renters' incomes.** The median income for owner households in Northfield is estimated at \$109,853 as of 2024, 60% greater than the median income for renter households at \$43,467.
- **The population is more diverse.** The percent of people who identify as Hispanic or Latino has increased over that same decade from less than 6 percent in 2011 to approximately 10 percent in 2021. Estimates from the Census Bureau in 2024 suggest that population is now closer to 20 percent of the total population in the city limits.

## Economy

- Northfield's strong economy and number of jobs generates demand for housing. Employment increased by almost 5% between 2010 and 2020, and by an additional 4% by 2023.
- More people come into Northfield to work than leave the city for work.
- Base industries in Northfield, such as manufacturing and higher education, tend to pay higher wages than average for rural communities.
- Hourly wages in Northfield generally start between \$11 and \$16 per hour for retail and entry-level work at major employers. Retail managers and entry-level manufacturing jobs start at \$20 per hour. A family-sustaining wage for the state of Minnesota (2024) is \$26 per hour for a family of four with at least one working adult. For a single person that wage is just over \$21 per hour.
- Northfield households are cost burdened. An estimated 21% of owner households and 35% of renter householders pay more than 30% of their income for housing in Northfield.
- Northfield's unemployment rate decreased from 6.5% in 2020 to 2.7% in 2023.

## Housing Supply and Demand

- An entry-level single-family home in Northfield could expect to be sold for around \$250,000 in 2024. At this price point, given typical 2025 downpayment and mortgage rates, a household would need an estimated income of \$72,600 to spend no more than 30% on their housing costs. An estimated 51% of Northfield households could afford an entry-level single-family home without exceeding the 30% threshold.
- Entry level homes for purchase are few and far between.
- The median sales price of single-family homes in Northfield rose from \$242,000 in 2016 to \$365,000 by the end of 2023, an increase of 51%, according to data gathered from the Greater Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors.
- **Current rental property supply:**
  - There are 1,181 market rate and 453 affordable/subsidized general occupancy rental units in Northfield in 2024 across 31 multifamily properties (three properties offer both market rate and affordable units).
  - Vacancy rates are very low: Vacancy rates were 0.7% for affordable units and 0.7% for market rate units. A healthy rental market maintains a vacancy rate of at or near 5% which promotes competitive rates, ensures adequate consumer choice, and allows for sufficient unit turnover. The exceptionally low vacancy rates indicate strong demand for additional rental housing.
- Rental rates: An estimated 21% of household owners and 35% of renter householders pay more than 30% of their income for housing in Northfield
- Senior housing: There are 925 age-restricted units among 15 properties. These properties include active adult rental and ownership (market rate and affordable/subsidized), independent living with some services, standard and enhanced assisted living and memory care.
- Ten-year projected demand: Demand exists for the following general occupancy housing types between 2024 and 2035:

- Market rate rental: 445 units
- Affordable rental: 163 units
- Subsidized rental: 102 units
- For-sale single-family: 412 units
- For-sale multifamily: 222 units

## Analysis

In addition to the housing market analysis, two topical focus areas were further analyzed to develop this plan — **small business support** and the **fiscal impact of development**.

### Small business support and entrepreneurship

The planning process included research and analysis of the Northfield small business environment. Multiple listening sessions, primarily with downtown business owners, identified critical barriers and needs within the local business ecosystem. Conversations with minority entrepreneurs highlighted issues that were not faced by other entrepreneurs. This growing subset of business owners are interested in entrepreneurship and small business development resources; supporting these programs would advance Northfield’s vision of a more equitable city and more vibrant economy.

The group highlighted several needs, including:

#### *Access to Capital*

- Small business owners reported challenges in accessing capital. Around 50% of participants cited access to funding as their biggest hurdle. Businesses expressed a need for micro-grants, loans, and alternative financing, particularly for physical improvements and operational expenses like marketing.

#### *Communication and awareness of city resources*

- The great majority of participants stated they did not feel well-informed about how the City of Northfield could assist their business. Language barriers, especially a lack of translation and interpretation services, further compounded difficulties in navigating city resources.

#### *Mentorship, networking, and technical assistance*

- Minority business owners emphasized the need for mentorship and technical support, especially in areas like marketing, accounting, and legal counsel. All the participants said access to a mentor or networking opportunities with other minority business owners would be beneficial.
- There was also a noted interest in workshops to aid in navigating business development processes and city services.

## Fiscal Impact of Development

[Chapter 3](#) and the guiding value to “design infrastructure, policies, and practices to foster resilience and mitigate the effects of climate change” guide the city to develop compactly, focusing on infill before expanding city infrastructure. This development pattern has positive impacts on budget and capital planning, preserving natural resources, and connecting people more effectively.

New development generates revenue for cities by adding to the property tax base, yet it also increases city operating costs because the associated households or workforce must be supported by city services such as road and utility infrastructure, fire and police protection, and parks and recreational programming. Development outside the city increases greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging longer daily vehicle trips and consumes land that could be used for natural resource protection or agriculture. Northfield's vision and values ask the city to assess the costs and benefits of new development broadly and make wise decisions for the long term. Considerations related to fiscal impacts were discussed in the Economic Analysis memo located in [Appendix X](#).

Key factors to consider:

- **Differential property tax rates.** In Minnesota the class rate for commercial and industrial property is up to twice as high as the class rate for residential property, yielding greater property tax revenues for equally valued properties.
- **Development intensity.** More intensive development generates greater property value and higher property tax revenues than a lower density development for developments on equally sized properties.
- **Cost of services by development type.** The service burden (cost of providing public services) of commercial development is generally lower than the service burden of residential development—whether measured by land area, floor area, or value. That's because residential buildings are occupied for more hours of the day and many city services are targeted toward residents.
- **Cost by land area/development intensity.** The cost of providing some city services are more correlated with the amount of land developed than the number of people served. These include snow plowing services and street and utility reconstruction. Land intensive and low- density development can be fiscally challenging, especially over the long run.
- **Average cost vs. marginal costs.** The marginal cost of providing city services to new developments is typically lower than the existing per capita cost of the service, because a level of physical and administrative infrastructure has already been established. This is particularly true in redevelopment situations.
- **Redevelopment.** Several of these factors—including increased development intensity and lower marginal cost of services—make redevelopment in previously developed locations that have preexisting street and utility infrastructure fiscally beneficial in comparison to development on previously undeveloped land.
- **Climate/environmental impact.** Typically evaluated when adopting and/or implementing long-term visions for climate mitigation and resiliency to address whether, how, and if places are affected by physical development such as buildings and roads.

### *Infill Opportunities*

The city has created Future Infill maps ([Figures 10-?](#)) to guide community development investments in three key areas:

- Commercial and industrial development
- Housing development
- Business growth and retention

These maps, based on the Interventions framework and map aim to diversify the tax base, address housing needs, and promote economic mobility while ensuring environmental sustainability

The map is intended to show where the most “bang for the buck” infill efforts can be achieved and capitalizes on those initiatives begun or referenced in previous plans that have generated the most success; while introducing new ideas based on current technologies, trends, financial markets, and other external factors outside the city’s control. It offers a mechanism to identify where interventions in market forces may be best focused.

#### *Industrial Infill Opportunity*

- **Northwest Industrial Park:** While the preference is to focus on redevelopment close to the core of the city over greenfield development, this area is designated for an industrial park or industrial user. Annexed in 2009, the area is zoned for industrial uses only, specifically to diversify the city’s tax base. For economic sustainability purposes, planning for this area must also include analysis of the costs of extending infrastructure relative to potential tax revenue.
- **Former Riteway site, Armstrong Road:** This area has potential for industrial infill development, but caution must be taken to protect Heath Creek and other streams to the west. Transportation connections into and out of Northfield still need consideration; Armstrong Road is the only connection and should be planned carefully for infill development to be successful at this site.

#### *Downtown Core Expansion Opportunity*

- **Highway 3 between 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets:** These sites provide an opportunity for an expansion of the downtown core, and a strong reason to redesign Highway 3 to slow traffic through downtown. The Byzantine/SMSQ site is also critical for defining the west side of the river as beautiful and walkable as the east.
- **MnDOT site (NE corner, Highway 3 and Woodley):** The former MnDOT maintenance site is another opportunity to extend downtown and is a key component to making the Riverfront Enhancement and Mill Towns Trail plans work well. Although visually prominent from Highway 3, access to this site is currently difficult; planning to create additional access from 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Highway 3 as well as Woodley Street is required.

#### *Mixed-Use Infill Opportunity*

- **Highway 3 north of Woodley:** Reimagining this stretch of Highway 3 is a high- level goal and high priority. Past plans have emphasized capitalizing on the river with better connections to a high-quality mixed-use environment. Continuing this work is important. Intersection improvements should focus first on 2nd/3rd Street & Highway 3 for safer access from west side residential areas. The second priority should be the Woodley intersection, with particular attention to providing increased access to nearby parcels, redesigning the frontage road at Woodley, and ensuring safe and comfortable connections for the Mill Towns State Trail which crosses this intersection twice.
- **Highway 3 south of Woodley:** This area, including the highway frontage road to the east and the land west of the highway to the river, and between the highway to Jefferson Road is also a priority. This area is bound by Woodley Street to the north, the Cannon River to the



West, Jefferson Road to the east, County Road 1 the south. Because Northfield has a bikeway on Heritage/Lincoln/Roosevelt as the only connecting segment south of Jefferson Parkway, this intersection needs high priority attention to connect the trail across the highway.

- **Festler Farm, Division Street:** This is a prominent and relatively large redevelopment site across from the high school will require improvements to access to be successful. The city should begin to plan desired street, bike/walk, and driveway connections to both Division Street/Highway 246 and neighboring residential streets now.
- **Bluff View, Fargaze Meadows, and Southbridge subdivisions** (Remaining Parcels): Previous planning efforts for these two areas set the expectation for a mix of housing types that includes market-rate and subsidized ownership opportunities that are well-connected to destinations like schools, shops, and parks.

#### *Residential Mixed-Use Infill Opportunity*

- **Jefferson Parkway East:** The city has planned a water treatment plant in this area. The city should further evaluate the feasibility and cost of serving this area with additional infrastructure before actively pursuing additional commercial or residential development.
- **South end of town east of 246:** This area would require new road construction and should prioritize connections to 246 and Ford Street. In 2002 subdivision planning, Ford Street was planned as the only continuous road connection from Spring Creek Road to Division Street/246. The planned subdivision failed with the 2008 recession, and ensuring this connection continues to be critical for ensuring connectivity for future growth. A regional park, Meadows Park, is planned for the far southeast corner of the community and should be scheduled for construction using the park system capital improvement plan.

**FIGURES 10 -? THIS SERIES OF MAPS WILL SHOW THE INFILL AREAS**

## Strategies and Actions

**Overarching strategy for a sustainable economy:** Prioritize using public resources in situations when the private market fails to meet stated community needs. Continuously improve public regulations for ease of use and to prevent undesired outcomes.

### Guiding Values Overview



Northfield will develop **creative solutions to local challenges** by working with the community, ensuring staff understand and have tools to implement best practices in their fields, and using consultants who understand Northfield and its values.



Northfield's capital planning and budgeting advances the goals of this plan in **economically responsible and sustainable** ways to ensure revenue is sufficient to meet the city's needs for the long term.



Northfield promotes **safe, stable housing** in a wide variety of types, sizes, and ownership models, to accommodate residents in all stages of life, and address demand for homes for workers.



Northfield develops infrastructure, policies, and practices to **foster resilience** and **mitigate the effects of climate change**.



Northfield works to provide a network of transportation **mobility options** that enable all Northfield residents and visitors to move throughout the community safely and conveniently.



Northfield **emphasizes equity** to address disparities, and to ensure equitable access to jobs, housing, education, essential services, retail, mobility options, and open space for all.



Northfield **fosters human connections** in our increasingly diverse community through well-designed neighborhoods, gathering places, and business districts that are inclusive for all, independent of age, economic status, mobility, gender, or racial and ethnic background.

## Strategy 1: Strengthen Northfield's Downtown Core



*Continue to strengthen the coalitions, regulations, and investments that keep Northfield's downtown strong.*

**Outcome:** Downtown Northfield grows as the river-focused anchor of the city and key component of its sense of place.

Outcome: Downtown is the hub of Northfield's small business community, locus of valuable tax base, a residential neighborhood, a welcoming and accessible public space, and location of city services on the banks of the Cannon River.

### *Strategy 1 Actions:*

- 1** Identify opportunities and provide support for improved business mix, marketing, events, and physical improvements.
- 2** Promote new and rehabilitated housing in and near downtown to increase housing supply, increase tax productivity, and support local business by putting more people near downtown retail, services, and the river.
- 3** Implement the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan to improve access to the river and build on Northfield's quality of place
- 4** Redesign Highway 3 through downtown to facilitate access to the Transit Hub, Riverfront, parks, and downtown businesses.
- 5** Proactively identify, evaluate, and survey historic and cultural resources with the Heritage Preservation Commission to ensure a consistent approach to preservation. Consider local, state, and/or national designation as appropriate, after study.
- 6** Prioritize adaptive reuse and reinvestment in existing buildings.
- 7** Consider creating a special service district to support a comprehensive and coordinated approach to refuse and recycling collection, snow and ice removal, street trees and municipal landscaping, parks and parklets, and on- and off-street public parking.

## Strategy 2: Develop Carleton and St. Olaf Relationships



*Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges are key parts of Northfield's distinctive character as well as important employers, home to 25% of Northfield's population, and a significant factor in how Northfield can grow; Northfield needs to more actively develop college relationships and guide their physical growth.*

**Outcome:** The City will work with Carleton and St Olaf to plan physical development and increase their economic contributions; the city will benefit from college leadership on climate and collaborating with students.

### Strategy 2 Actions:

- 1 Identify opportunities to increase the colleges' economic contributions to the city to reflect use of city services and resources through increased cash donation and/or in-kind support to mutual programs such as increased transit or pedestrian improvements.
- 2 Work with colleges to evaluate district energy feasibility, improve river health, and learn from their climate approach.
- 3 Guide college land-use planning to eliminate surface parking visible to the community and increase access to the Cannon River.
- 4 Plan development with the colleges to contain it within the set boundary.
- 5 Develop a clear and consistent approach to working with college students and faculty on municipal initiatives for mutual benefit.

### Strategy 3: Small Business Development



*Build a supportive and culturally competent environment for local businesses to thrive by connecting business owners to the resources from which they can benefit.*

**Outcome:** Local small business owners know about and use technical and financial resources available to them.

**Outcome:** Regulations, policies and programs are designed to make small business development easier.

### Strategy 3 Actions:

- 1 Partner with existing local business support organizations and evaluate other support opportunities to establish public and private local funding resources for small businesses.
- 2 Work with existing and potential partners to ensure current and future business owners can easily locate city-related support information for business resources.
- 3 Work with existing and potential partners to provide culturally and linguistically competent and context-sensitive business advisory services for existing and future entrepreneurs.
- 4 Review regulations and policies to reduce or eliminate barriers to new business creation.
- 5 City staff in all departments provide effective and culturally competent assistance.

### Strategy 4: Support the Local Workforce



*Support local businesses in recruiting and retaining their workers through supporting efforts addressing housing, childcare and training.*

**Outcome:** Northfield's existing and future workforce faces fewer barriers to moving to Northfield and living close to their place of employment.

*Strategy 4 Actions:*

- 1 Support housing development that increases the supply and variety of housing that meets the needs of Northfield's workforce.
- 2 Prioritize building new housing in places with convenient access to jobs and services.
- 3 Facilitate development of transit and other affordable transportation to jobs in and out of Northfield.
- 4 Promote strategies and partnerships for increasing high-quality affordable childcare and other needed services for working families in Northfield.

## Strategy 5: Diversify Northfield's Tax Base



*Northfield has a sufficiently diverse tax base so that higher value properties carry the greater share of the tax.*

**Outcome:** Northfield will intentionally build a more sustainable local economy to maintain and expand city services and infrastructure.

*Strategy 5 Actions:*

- 1 Prioritize development in T4 area in the Interventions analysis to ensure an adequate supply of commercially zoned land to provide for ongoing business growth in ways which minimize infrastructure costs, preserve natural resources, and ensure equitable access. [\[Link to Capital Improvement Program and budget\]](#)
- 2 Pursue intensified infill development and business expansions in highway-oriented commercial areas, particularly on Highway 3 between Woodley Street and County Road 1 to increase density, right-size parking, improve accessibility for non-motorized travel, and diversify the range of uses.
- 3 Focus recruitment, retention, and expansion investments that support, complement and enhance the existing retail, commercial, industrial, and service industries. Do so while recognizing that the community's largest local employers are Carleton and St Olaf colleges, Northfield Hospital and Clinics, and Post Consumer Brands and the region benefits from safe, convenient, and affordable access to jobs in Northfield, Faribault, and Rice County.

## Strategy 6: Grow in a Compact, Sustainable Development Pattern



*Northfield grows in a compact pattern that is financially and environmentally sustainable.*

**Outcome:** Northfield’s development and redevelopment initiatives focus on projects that increase tax productivity, preserve natural resources, limits negative climate impacts, improves access to jobs and services, and assesses the fiscal impact of the development or redevelopment project.

*Strategy 6 Actions:*

- 1** Develop an accessible and approachable process that evaluates the benefits, costs, opportunities, and potential negative externalities of larger-scale development projects related to the economic sustainability and health of the overall Northfield community.
- 2** Concentrate on the needs of existing businesses to grow in Northfield and attract compatible and complementary industries.
- 3** Ensure zoning and other regulations guide all development and redevelopment to increase tax productivity, enhance access and connectivity, address climate, reduce vehicle trips, and include requiring fiscal impact analysis.
- 4** Lead actions to support the reuse and redevelopment of underutilized properties that are already served by local infrastructure. Specific actions can be found in the access chapter of this plan.
- 5** Require infill developments to complement existing neighborhoods while incrementally intensifying uses, improving connectivity to the rest of the city and allowing innovation and considering market needs, climate impact, economic feasibility and sustainable affordability.

## Strategy 7: Maintain Northfield’s Existing Housing Stock



*Existing housing is safe and healthy.*

**Outcome:** All residents in Northfield live in safe and healthy housing.

*Strategy 7 Actions:*

- 1** Develop programs and partnerships to support manufactured home communities and preserve this form of housing.
- 2** Establish a survey program to evaluate housing conditions citywide and connect owners with resources to improve unsafe conditions.
- 3** Develop programs in partnership with affordable housing and educational institutions to ensure housing stability in all neighborhoods and communities.
- 4** Develop programs and partnerships to assist those who are cost-burdened to live in safe, healthy and affordable housing that is connected to basic needs.
- 5** Create incentives for landlords to reduce energy costs.
- 6** Support housing near necessary goods and services and which promotes active living and community connectivity.

## Strategy 8: Build More Housing



*New housing development meets defined community needs and diversifies the housing options available to residents by being complementary to existing housing.*

**Outcomes:** There will be a sufficient supply of housing at each price point and stage of life for existing and future residents. All types of homes, including subsidized and unsubsidized construction and rehabilitation, owner-occupied and rental, single- and multi-family are needed to ensure lifecycle choices.

### *Strategy 8 Actions:*

- 1** Prioritize building new housing in walkable areas of the city and guide new development to areas most connected to the existing street system and water infrastructure.
- 2** Complete and regularly update an analysis of market conditions and regulatory approaches that support the development of affordable housing in Northfield.
- 3** Adopt an inclusionary housing ordinance that reflects market conditions and offers a flexible approach to support the development of affordable units.
- 4** Prioritize developing infill sites through direct property acquisition, site preparation for redevelopment, and actively soliciting development proposals targeted to identified needs.
- 5** Partner with local home builders, employers, financial institutions, and other regional non-profit entities to evaluate and develop an inclusive strategy that results in financial and other tools to accelerate the development of home affordable to working families.
- 6** Revise and regularly update the Land Development Code to remove barriers and reduce costs to housing and economic development.
- 7** Include housing needs in strategic planning efforts to ensure that short-term goals meet local market needs and address potential local market failures.
- 8** Encourage visit-ability to make homes accessible to all residents.
- 9** Support township and county efforts to build new housing within the Northfield school district.

## Strategy 9: Support At-risk Sellers, Buyers and Tenants



*Provide support and funding for vulnerable populations in the housing market.*

**Outcomes:** Residents can afford to own or rent a home in Northfield and stay in their homes through hardships.

**Outcome:** Northfield will ensure strong protection for residential tenants.



### Strategy 9 Actions:

- 1** Partner with local organizations working on housing support, such as Community Action Center, Healthy Community Initiative, Rice County Habitat for Humanity, and Three Rivers Community Action to support first-time homebuyers with education and down payment related assistance and homeowners at risk of foreclosure.
- 2** Coordinate with non-profit partners to ensure municipal, EDA and HRA-levied funds are used in ways that most closely align with the direction set through the city-wide comprehensive and strategic plan documents and offer the greatest return on investment.
- 3** Pursue mechanisms to enhance and improve the use of Rice County-administered Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) within the Northfield city limits.
- 4** Build a coalition of partners to create a fund to support replacement of manufactured homes as they reach the end of their useful life and provide temporary relocation support for manufactured home residents when the homes are being repaired or rehabbed.
- 45** Build a coalition of partners to create, fund, and administer a housing legacy program that capitalizes on the Local Housing Trust Fund (LHTF) and MN State Housing Tax Credit (SHTC) programs. A housing legacy program facilitates the donation or bequest of homes by homeowners wishing to leave a legacy of affordable homeownership for future generations.<sup>8</sup>
- 56** Develop clear, comprehensive, and accessible policies and practices relating to tenant and landlord rights, responsibilities, best practices, and resources to decrease conflicts that could lead to evictions. For example:
  - a. Enact a tenant right to counsel ordinance.
  - b. Enact a time of sale inspection ordinance for mobile and manufactured homes.
  - c. Work with community partners to adequately fund the identification and mitigation of tenant-landlord conflicts.
  - d. Adopt a tenant notification requirement related to the sale of rental properties.

### Strategy 10: Create programs to support affordable and sustainable homes and neighborhoods



*Assertively use city resources and authorities to support the production and preservation of needed housing.*

**Outcome:** All residents in Northfield live in safe and stable housing and neighborhoods.

**Outcome:** Local housing needs are met at a greater scale than market forces can provide using existing public resources and authorities and community partners.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://bouldercolorado.gov/homeownership/housing-legacy-program>

*Strategy 10 Actions:*

- 1** Revise the zoning code to permit denser development by right in neighborhoods dominated by single-family development.
- 2** Incentivize energy efficiency in building materials and design, heating/cooling infrastructure, and electrification to reduce lifetime costs of housing.
- 3** Work with housing partners to preserve and maintain affordable housing through strategies such as low-interest home improvement loans, a naturally occurring affordable housing preservation fund and other existing or future opportunities to reduce the cost burden of rehabilitating housing.
- 4** Work to improve sustainability of new and existing housing. All new housing developers comply with Minnesota Energy Code and are encouraged to construct Net-Zero-ready housing.
- 5** Continue to provide incentives for landlords and homeowners to reduce energy costs.
- 6** Use public financial resources to develop the types of housing that are needed and are not being supplied by the market, including through strategic purchase of available property.
- 7** Develop existing city/ housing or economic development-authority owned land to increase the types and range of affordability of housing being built.
- 8** Explore fee waivers/reductions and other incentives for development that addresses city goals (sustainability, affordability, compact development, etc.).
- 9** Support housing near necessary goods and services to increase affordable access, reduce the need to drive, and community connectivity.
- 10** Encourage mixed income neighborhoods, through targeted investment and planning.

## Chapter 5 – Infrastructure: Connecting essential municipal services with sustainability

The planning, construction, operation, and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities is a core municipal function and where the city can most directly implement many goals of this plan,

This chapter addresses the utilities over which the city has direct operational and financial control (water, stormwater, solid waste, and wastewater) and other key infrastructure including streets, trails, and infrastructure contained in street rights of way such as street lighting and boulevard trees. Actions are recommended for traditional, gray infrastructure as well as add blue-green infrastructure and natural assets.

This plan requires the city to manage, repair and develop its infrastructure to realize community identified values. Such an approach requires broader thinking and collaboration among departments and with governmental partners as well as improved public process and related communication and education initiatives.

Northfield's Public Works department is generally responsible for much of the work surrounding infrastructure including planning, programming, design, construction and maintenance. The department is also responsible for planning and maintenance of city parks, streets, and associated infrastructure such as bike/walk facilities, street trees, and streetlights. Public works projects must be informed by the broader planning and development work in the Community and Development Department, environmental quality and climate action work, and leverage the expertise and community connections of public engagement and communications staff, as well as the Arts and Culture Commission.

In 2017, the City of Northfield established the "Art in Public Places" policy. This policy commits 1% of the project construction cost of city capital improvement projects to be used for the cost of public art. As the city's Arts and Culture Commission mission statement says, "Northfield is a community which values, integrates, and engages in arts and cultural experiences - in all their diversity - throughout the fabric of civic life." In Northfield the arts are valued and promoted for their economic benefits and development potential, especially in the downtown area. And works of art and cultural experiences are a valuable component of welcoming new cultural and ethnic groups to Northfield and developing shared approaches to Northfield's identity as an inclusive and welcoming place to live, work, learn, and play.

### What We Heard

- Northfield should develop in a manner that is fiscally and environmentally sustainable.
- Northfield needs to broaden its tax base to reduce the share of the property tax burden on residential property owners.
- Plans for investment from the city for balanced, smart, and sustainable growth are needed.
- The city should balance growth with the preservation of open space, natural resources and agricultural land.

- Tree preservation, improving the tree canopy, wetland protection and sufficient green spaces (active and passive) are important for the ecosystem, mitigating the effects of climate change, making the community feel more welcoming, and offering outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Artwork and artistic components of city-led projects are a vital part of Northfield life and the economic sustainability of the robust art and artistic community.

## Connecting Essential Municipal Services with Sustainability

Municipal services like safe drinking water, fire and police operations, wastewater treatment, trash and recycling, and city street maintenance are key to the city's duty to protect the health, safety, and welfare of residents. How Northfield plans, builds and maintains core systems is also key to long term financial health, equitable outcomes, and Northfield's climate goals.

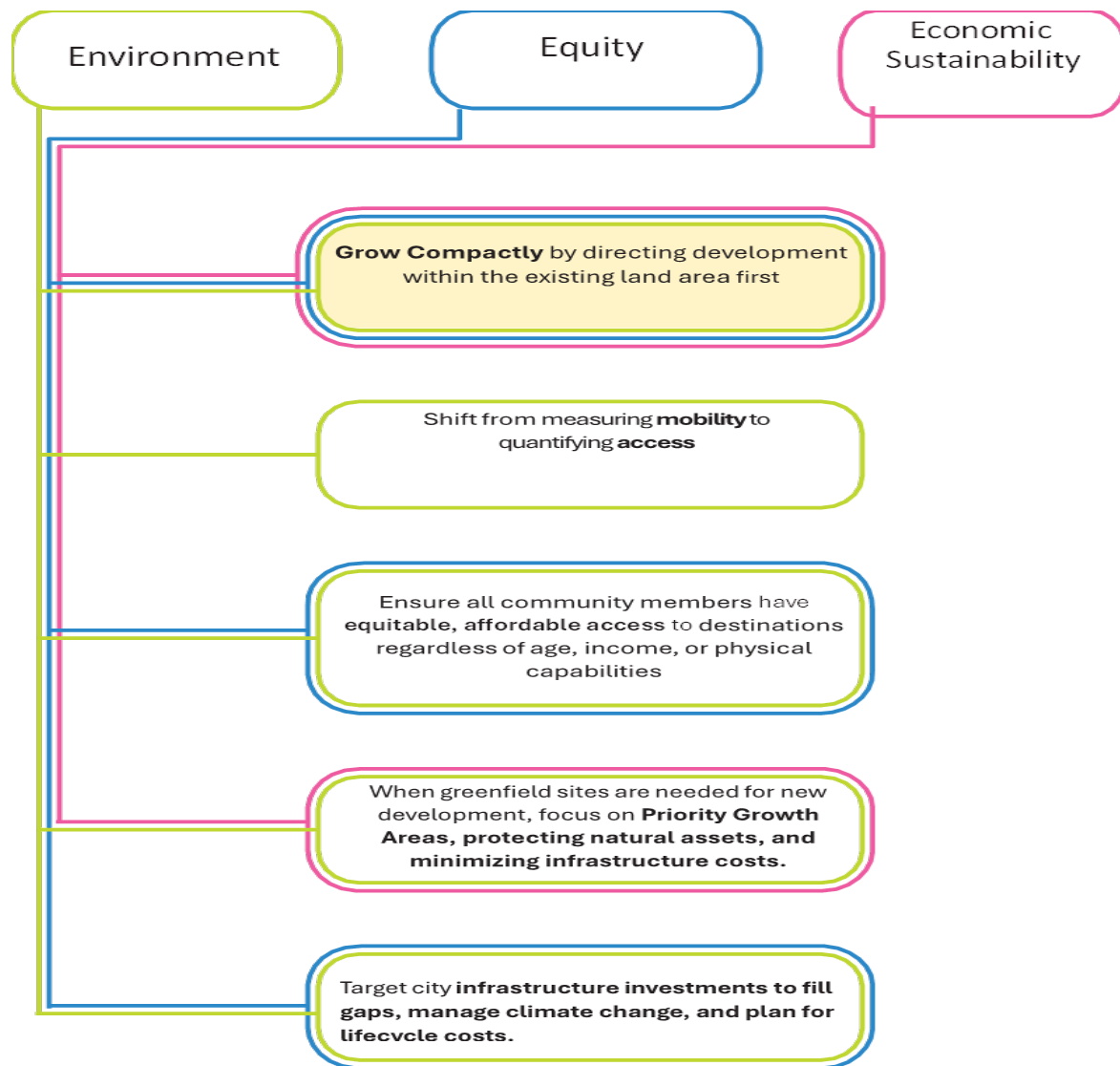
Building, maintaining and replacing infrastructure is expensive. Past decisions to permit extensive low density and geographically dispersed development mean Northfield – like most American communities - has more streets and pipes with comparatively few taxpayers to support the ongoing maintenance and replacement of these systems. This plan stresses compact development to maximize current infrastructure while also increasing the tax base for an economically and environmentally sustainable city. Ultimately, plans to extend or expand infrastructure should occur only when the return on public investment will be sufficient. Compact growth also serves Northfield's goals to preserve natural resources, put people closer to destinations, and provide more and more complete transit options.

This plan directs the city to design infrastructure projects to help Northfield reach its climate goals. This includes both locating infrastructure extensions responsibly as well as evaluating current infrastructure for climate vulnerabilities such as localized flooding, extreme heat and heat-island effects, and planning upgrades which can withstand more flooding, and other extreme weather. Modeling infrastructure for more extreme weather, such as 500- or 1000-year floods, is one way to plan for resilience.

From an equity standpoint, infrastructure for safe drinking water, healthy sanitation, and excellent connectivity at reasonable cost - for **all** - is a baseline measure of success of these systems. In addition, climate resilience for infrastructure is often considered in terms of protecting the streets, pipes and facilities which form these systems. Significant consideration should be given to how infrastructure is planned for greater resilience and mitigation with the goal of ensuring excellent emergency response and prioritizing access to needed services during extreme weather events particularly for neighborhoods without reliable transportation or which have been isolated by a lack of sufficient transportation connections.

## Core principles: Economy, Environment and Equity

**FIGURE 12** shows how the Core Principles interact with each other in this chapter. The highlighted boxes show where all three principles converge.



## Definitions

The following terms are defined as they are used within this Chapter:

**1% for the Arts:** A program or policy in which 1% of all Capitol Improvement Project (for example, road work) must set 1% of their budget aside for public art. In Northfield, the Arts and Culture Commission oversees the design and implementation of that public art.

**Best management practices (BMPs):** Methods that local governments may use to manage and protect the environment. These practices help reduce pollution, improve water quality, and increase resiliency with climate change. BMPs are used to deal with issues like stormwater runoff, waste, and how land is developed.

**Blue-green Infrastructure (BGI):** Blue green infrastructure as a stormwater management strategy relies on networks of natural and designed components, like bodies of water (blue) and fields, marshes, forests, etc. (green.) Other examples can include green roofs, retention ponds, and rain gardens. Blue green infrastructure is increasingly seen by municipalities globally as an effective way to manage flood risk while simultaneously improving the public realm.

**Gray Infrastructure:** Gray infrastructure is a stormwater management strategy that is human engineered, often including treatment facilities, sewer systems, sanitary sewers, and storage basins. During a storm, gray infrastructure redirects water from all sorts of locations through underground pipes to storage basins and water reclamation facilities. There, those systems remove pollutants and toxins from the water so it can be redistributed into the environment.

**Low – impact development (LID):** A stormwater management strategy that controls rainwater where it falls, reducing the need for large, expensive systems. This includes specific site plan designs and small-scale interventions, including rainwater harvesting, natural systems of filtration, and evapotranspiration (when water evaporates into the air from bodies of water and plants.)

**Natural Asset Management:** The practice of protecting and managing natural resources, like wetlands and forests, to ensure they continue providing vital services for the health, wellbeing, and long-term sustainability of a community. Rather than relying on gray infrastructure (like stormwater treatment facilities and storm drains), Natural Asset Management focuses on using blue-green infrastructure (like natural landscapes and water systems) to provide services, including drinking water, regulating the climate, reducing flood risks, and offering recreational and cultural benefits that enhance the quality of life in a community.

**Organic waste:** Refers to materials made from plant and animal matter that are discarded as garbage. While it often refers to food waste, it also includes yard waste, paper, wood, certain fabrics, sewage, and manure. In both the U.S. and around the world, organic waste makes up about three-quarters of all waste. Organic waste, when properly composted, can be recycled into nutrient rich soil for gardens and farms, reducing waste and supporting healthier ecosystems.

**PFAS:** An acronym for “Per-and polyFluoroAlkyl Substances” and commonly referred to as ‘forever chemicals.’ This generic term refers to thousands of chemicals that are widely used across consumer, commercial, and industrial products. PFAS can be found by examining water, air, fish, soil, animals and humans across the globe. PFAS are being studied by several scientific bodies, and

findings demonstrate that exposure to some PFAS is linked to harmful effects in humans and animals.

**Public Art:** Public art includes murals, sculptures, paintings, and even public performances. It can also describe intentional designs on public features like street signs, streetlamps, playgrounds, and buildings. Public art is intended to represent and speak to the community that accesses it and is often designed by people from the place in which it is featured.

**Sanitary sewer:** A wastewater management feature that collects and transport wastewater to treatment facilities. This includes sewer pipes and transfer and lift stations.

**Solid waste:** Describes most of the things we throw away or discard. This includes everyday household trash, industrial waste from factories, food scraps, construction debris, hazardous waste like lightbulbs and batteries, electronic waste like televisions and computers, and agricultural waste. Solid waste includes things we recycle, compost, incinerate, treat, or send to landfill.

**Stormwater management:** The practice of controlling and treating stormwater runoff from rain and snow. This includes planning, maintaining, and regulating stormwater systems. The goal is to reduce flooding, protect water quality, and create more resilient communities. There are many approaches to stormwater management, including using Gray and Blue-Green Infrastructure, deploying Low Impact Development, and encouraging Best Management Practices.

## Existing Conditions

This plan often refers to infrastructure as an “investment” which captures only part of the picture: public spending from property taxes, grants from other governmental agencies, bonding to raise capital costs to build more streets and pipes to serve new development, improve existing infrastructure, and increase the climate resilience of infrastructure systems is a key way cities attract new taxpayers, improve the city’s quality of life, and protect public health and safety. New development often pays for the construction of infrastructure to serve the development. We can measure the return on this initial investment (how much more tax revenue does the city receive after improving infrastructure). Yet the city must also pay for perpetual maintenance, repair, and eventual replacement. Northfield, like many other cities, has not always considered the long-term costs of installing the infrastructure in the first place. While infrastructure is certainly an economic issue, it determines much about how and where we can use land, address climate change, and ensure everyone in the community has comparable services regardless of where they live.

## Streets

In Chapter 3, this plan guides the city to think of streets as valuable, multi-modal public space to connect people safely, manage stormwater, and serve the city’s larger goals. Discussion of the kinds of connections and types of facilities is found in that chapter. In this Chapter, the focus is on how Northfield develops, maintains and improves the street network to achieve these outcomes.

Maintenance and deferred maintenance: Northfield typically spends an average of \$3 million annually on street maintenance from crack filling to reconstruction; this is a debt-financed capital expense. Over the last three decades, this number has fluctuated between less than \$1 million and

more than \$5 million. The city employs a pavement management program to extend the life of its streets, maintain reasonable pavement quality, and manage costs. A robust pavement management program can reduce the cost of maintaining a road by almost 30% over a 60-year period.

The cost of street maintenance is considerable and at times the city has reduced maintenance to fill short-term budget gaps. Unfortunately, deferring needed maintenance simply allows more streets to deteriorate and increases the need for maintenance in subsequent years. This plan's foundation in a sustainable economy calls for the city to develop a schedule to address deferred maintenance concerns over time.

Rightsizing streets: Over the last 50 years, the trend was to build wider streets. While easy to drive, these designs encourage speeding, discourage or prevent walking and biking, contribute to the urban heat island effect and create more stormwater runoff. They also cost more because of the additional width and more lane miles to serve a more dispersed community. Part of the answer to maintaining Northfield streets is to consider what roadways can be narrowed, how right of way can add more low impact travel modes and building stormwater infiltration into the street corridors.

Climate and trees: Trees are an important part of maintaining street corridors and Northfield's Climate Action Plan and this plan ask the city to develop measurable goals for improving the health of the existing tree canopy and increasing its density in strategic ways.

For example, managing underground and overhead utilities for the health of trees is an important goal. Overhead utility wires have required extensive pruning of street trees [picture of 4<sup>th</sup> street E and 5<sup>th</sup> street E for comparison] to avoid encroachment on wires. The result is not only unsightly, but damages trees, limits their ability to shade pavement and help manage stormwater. Digging and placement of underground utilities often entails drastically cutting tree roots, often resulting in the death of trees.

Mapping the tree canopy as a system to evaluate how to improve it is part of blue-green infrastructure planning which this plan calls for. Further, trees are an equity issue. Research has shown a denser tree canopy contributes to higher property values; conversely, lower income neighborhoods tend to have fewer trees than more affluent areas.

Northfield has done significant work to develop a preferred tree list, require replacement of trees removed for development, and worked to manage invasive species. In 2025, the spread of the emerald ash borer is forcing the city to remove mature ash trees from public right of way and other public land. Planning to replace these trees is a top priority.



Equity and affordability: How streets are designed and maintained can help or hinder people with disabilities and deter use of affordable transportation like walking and biking. Northfield has an ADA compliance plan which should prioritize projects to add curb ramps, safer crossings, and remove barriers. Adding sidewalks, trails and bike lanes builds in affordability as a cost which is a small fraction of the total street improvement budget. Street and sidewalk condition, not just design, is significant for people using mobility aids, older adults, and people riding bikes, skateboards or other devices with small wheels. Car and trucks can roll over many pavement flaws with no difficulty, but the same small cracks or rough pavement can cause more significant falls and crashes for people outside vehicles

## Wastewater

Wastewater infrastructure includes sanitary sewer lines and the wastewater treatment plant which treats wastewater from both Northfield and Dundas. Wastewater treatment capacity is one limiting factor for development; current capacity is sufficient to support a population of approximately 30,000. Generally, sanitary sewer collection systems are designed to use gravity flow, but elevations may require lift stations to collect sewage from these areas including the industrial district in the NW part of the city increasing the cost of construction, operation and maintenance of the system. Directing development to locations most effectively connected by gravity flow can limit costs. Failures of wastewater facilities have environmental and public health consequences by discharging untreated sewage into the Cannon River and other surface water sources. Wastewater treatment facilities are vulnerable to flooding.

Northfield completed a Comprehensive Sanitary Sewer Plan (CSSP) for Northfield and Dundas in 2007 which had a 20-year planning horizon. Since this plan was adopted, Dundas updated its [Comprehensive Plan](#) in 2023 and this plan makes considerable changes to future land use, proposed development pattern, and planning for climate mitigation and resilience. Updates to the CSSP to update data and planning assumptions, as well as climate planning are needed.

### **FIGURE X. MAP OF SANITARY SEWER SYSTEM**

## Drinking water

Distribution System: The current public drinking water supply system includes six deep wells (five active and one inactive), two ground storage reservoirs, one elevated storage tank, a booster station and almost 93 miles of distribution piping. This water system serves residential, commercial and industrial uses as well as providing water for firefighting.

### **FIGURE X. MAP OF DRINKING WATER SYSTEM**

Supply and Treatment: Northfield's water supply comes from five wells drawing from the Jordan-St. Lawrence, Jordan and Jordan-Prairie-du-Chien aquifers. These wells are normally in operation and being controlled by the water level in the ground and elevated storage tanks. As the water level in the tanks decreases, the wells pump to meet system demands and refill storage tanks. Raw water is currently treated at well pumping stations; treatment includes chlorine (disinfection), fluoride (dental health), and polyphosphate (inhibiting iron oxidation). Land use near the wells is regulated by the Well Head Protection Plan to prevent water contamination by managing potential pollution sources in supply recharge areas.

Northfield's wells are considered vulnerable by the Minnesota Department of Health source water assessment. "Vulnerable" describes how easily both water and pollution can move from the land surface into groundwater, rivers or lakes used for drinking water supplies. Northfield's aquifers could be vulnerable if the local geology lacks protective layers between the ground surface and the drinking water aquifer. Scientists at MDH designate areas that need special protection because human activities inside these boundaries could easily harm the water quality in these sources of drinking water.<sup>9</sup> Northfield has a wellhead protection plan to address possible contamination near wells and issues an annual water quality report as mandated by the state of Minnesota.<sup>10</sup>

Construction of a water treatment plant has been recommended to the city by the State of Minnesota Department of Health to reduce manganese. An additional potential benefit of a water treatment plant would be the reduction in per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) or "forever chemicals," and water hardness. Initial planning for a water treatment plant is a specific response to address levels of manganese in the drinking water supply. Three of five wells have a consistent level of manganese exceeding MDH guidelines for a safe level for infants under one year old.

Additionally, it is a component of municipal authority to ensure Northfield's drinking water is also safe. The city has designed a water treatment plant, however, due to costs, in early 2025 the City Council elected not to move forward with the project. The water treatment plant will be planned for future construction. Many of Minnesota's aquifers are known to have higher-than-advised levels of PFAS which do not break down in the environment. PFAS are a class of human-made chemicals that have been widely used for decades. Long-term exposure to PFAS in even small amounts can affect human health. The current level of forever chemicals in Northfield's drinking water is below EPA guidance that requires treatment. Northfield should evaluate and plan water system improvements holistically to address both specific chemicals like manganese as well as climate resilience, future growth, and treating PFAS and other contaminants as identified.

## Solid waste

Northfield's solid waste includes recycling, landfill materials, and organic waste; the city contracts for the hauling of trash for the landfill and collecting recyclable materials. A cooperative offers organics recycling pickup within the city. Each year, Northfield disposes of more than 26,000 tons of solid waste. Roughly half of that amount is recycled with most of the remainder of the non-

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<sup>9</sup> [Minnesota Department of Health Source Water Assessment](#)

<sup>10</sup> [City of Northfield](#)

recycled waste sent to the Rice County landfill; a small percentage goes to a resource recovery (waste to energy) facility.

As of 2021, Rice County estimated the county landfill would reach capacity within 15-20 years at anticipated waste volumes or about the lifespan of this plan. When current landfill capacity is reached, Rice County will need to seek out other disposal options which will likely be economically challenging. Reducing solid waste sent to the landfill should be a high priority to extend the life of that facility as well as divert materials which can be reused, composted or recycled.<sup>11</sup>

Ninety-five percent of emissions from Northfield's solid waste come from landfill waste. Organic materials, such as food and yard waste, sent to a landfill decompose over time, releasing methane, a greenhouse gas. Methane could be captured for use as either compressed natural gas for heavy-duty vehicles or as renewable natural gas that is refined and added to existing natural gas pipeline. Methane production can also be reduced by diverting organic waste from the landfill which also helps extend the lifespan of the landfill. The current level of organics composting is not sufficient for this purpose; the city can consider managing organics collection and composting at a municipal scale.

Northfield also has single stream curbside recycling for paper, glass, some plastic, and some metals as well as a yard waste pick up service and a city yard waste drop off site. Rice County accepts small quantities of hazardous waste (yard chemicals, paint, etc.), appliances, electronics at its recycling center.

Northfield also works to keep prescription medications out of the water and waste systems by providing a "Take it to the Box" program where residents can drop off unused medications at the Northfield Police Department at any time.

## Analysis

Since Northfield adopted its Comprehensive Water Plan (2006) Comprehensive Sanitary Sewer Plan (2007), Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2008), and the preceding Comprehensive Plan (2008), significant changes have occurred in Northfield including current and planned land use, infrastructure design, and our understanding of climate change. The water treatment plant would extend the distribution system by pumping all water to the treatment plant and then distributing water across the city. A new elevated storage tank is scheduled for construction **when prompted by development** in the NW area of the city. The importance of ensuring the system is resilient to climate hazards and using the most sustainable methods possible has become critically important. The health of the aquifers from which we draw water is another consideration.

The 2008 Comprehensive Plan began planning for more compact development to intensify land use to increase density, increase tax value, create more walkable/bikeable places, preserve open space and habitat, and maximize use of existing infrastructure first. This plan sharpens that focus. As a result, the land use assumptions on which many of Northfield's infrastructure plans were based may no longer be valid; strategies and actions below direct the city to update relevant plans.

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<sup>11</sup> [Rice County Solid Waste Plan](#)

A key feature of this plan is planning to realize multiple benefits by planning for systems and people, rather than disciplines and projects. Chapter 3 connected streets with helping people reach where they need to go, improving safety for people walking, biking and rolling, and building climate resilience and mitigation into our street corridors. Chapter 4 emphasized developing housing and attracting businesses which are secure, and which pay for the services needed. This Chapter sets up Northfield to plan its infrastructure as more than pipes, but as necessary foundation for the other goals of this plan.

Transportation planning has been undergoing a paradigm shift. Northfield's earlier plans are based on the old model of planning for mobility including increasing capacity based on traffic projections which have proved unreliable, functional classification of roadways not suited to the land use context in Northfield and relying on metrics to measure vehicle delay and speed. Emphasizing mobility produced wider and faster streets, required more parking, but paid little attention to adjacent land uses, safety for people walking and biking, and the cost of expanding capacity. This plan explicitly guides Northfield to measure accessibility to destinations by measuring proximity, connectivity, affordability, and considering land use and transportation together.

Climate action has taken on critical importance in recent years for infrastructure planning and maintenance; Northfield's infrastructure planning and projects need to incorporate mitigation and resilience. Since the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, Northfield has experienced significant flooding in 2010 and 2024 from heavy rainfall with damage to businesses, roads and homes, downed trees, and contamination from floodwater. Hotter summers stress water supplies from greater demand and extreme weather puts all infrastructure systems at risk of failure. Mitigating the effects of climate change, reaching Northfield's climate goals and ensuring our critical systems are resilient is a key recommendation of this plan.

Northfield's related plans must strongly guide the city toward practices to manage a changing climate and extreme weather. This plan and the 2019 Climate Action Plan call for planning street right of way and parks to include rain gardens or bioswales, larger tree planting areas to increase the tree canopy. While the most recent Surface Water Management Plan was updated in 2020, with the adoption of this 2045-horizon comprehensive plan, that plan should be updated within the next five years.

The Cannon River has been identified as important to the city in every comprehensive plan beginning in 1966. Designated as a state water trail and protected as a Wild and Scenic River, the potential for increasing access to the river and improving the health of the river requires more attention to the river as part of Northfield's blue green infrastructure. Blue green infrastructure uses natural features plus strategically engineered facilities use bodies of water, parks and natural areas, and built infrastructure to build a network of natural areas to manage stormwater and reduce the amount of water running off streets to storm sewers to the river. Properly designed and maintained, blue green infrastructure can deliver multiple benefits including recreation, habitat, economic value, and improved water quality.

The Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan (REAP) has sketched plans for parks adjacent to the river. Planning for developing the riverfront as a regional park also embeds parks as part of Northfield's flood mitigation system and developed to increase the tree canopy, strategically use natural

plantings to infiltrate stormwater, plan park features to manage and withstand flooding and allow Northfield to realize the promise of its riverfront.

A key piece of the REAP is planning for the removal of the Ames Mill Dam built in 1918. Removing the dam could play a critical role in reversing some of the environmental degradation along the river and enabling a greater range of recreational uses. In 2024, the Northfield City Council recommended an option which would replace the dam with extended rapids. Removing the dam and reconstructing this section of the Cannon River requires careful planning of existing sewer and water infrastructure nearby as well as ensuring adjacent buildings are protected from potential damage.

## Tax Productivity and development pattern

Finally, city planners and leaders have paid greater attention to the long -term costs of infrastructure and importance of the development pattern for generating sufficient revenue to support needed services. During Northfield's explosive growth in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the prevailing belief was that all growth was good for the tax base. In the short term, development does pay for new infrastructure and spur tax base growth, but the obligation to maintain, repair and replace infrastructure over decades requires more tax revenue than low density and widely dispersed development can provide. Building many single-family homes and adding big box stores extended Northfield's street network and water and wastewater systems significantly, yet this pattern of development generates relatively little tax revenue to support its share of the infrastructure.

In 2018 Northfield invited Urban3 to analyze tax productivity in Northfield generally with special attention to the industrial land in the NW part of the city. The analysis and resulting [StoryMap](#) show downtown's multistory, mixed use pattern generates much more tax revenue per acre than more spread out development like Northfield's Target and Cub Foods development. For the NW area, the city was cautioned to consider the cost of extending, maintaining and replacing infrastructure as it made plans to develop the area. Comprehensive plans before 2008 all identified this area as a lower priority because of the infrastructure costs associated with the distance and topography of the area.

Moving forward, Northfield is committed to developing the Northwest area because of the need for larger parcels of land for industrial development. The city must also plan for the life cycle of its infrastructure and whether the development considered across the entire city will generate sufficient revenue to maintain its vital infrastructure.

## Other infrastructure:

Reliable, high-speed **broadband** infrastructure is essential for Northfield's economic growth, education, healthcare, and overall quality of life. The city recognizes its role in promoting equitable access to broadband services, including internet, television, and telecommunications, to ensure all residents and businesses—regardless of location or income—can stay connected. Northfield is committed to supporting public and private investment in fiber-optic networks, working with providers to expand service coverage, and prioritizing the installation of conduit or fiber during road construction projects to reduce future costs and improve access. Strengthening broadband

infrastructure will also support smart city initiatives, remote work opportunities, and digital inclusion efforts, ensuring that all community members can participate in an increasingly connected world.

Northfield provides free internet in the downtown area as well as public facilities like the library and Northfield Community Resource Center (NCRC) which levels the playing field for those who cannot afford subscription prices as well as convenience for any resident in these facilities or areas.

#### Renewable electricity generation: Forthcoming

- 1 PiE
- 2 Work with Xcel and CEE
- 3 District energy approach
- 4 Battery Storage options

## Strategies and Actions

### Strategy 1: Implement blue green infrastructure planning and natural asset management

*Northfield integrates blue green infrastructure and other natural asset management into land use planning, capital improvements, and infrastructure decisions.*



**Outcome:** Northfield integrates blue green infrastructure into land use planning, capital improvements, and infrastructure decisions.

**Outcome:** Northfield evaluates public land management practices (parks, open space, public right of way, public buildings) to identify natural assets and plan how to manage, plant and improve these areas to infiltrate stormwater, improve habitat, mitigate climate threats and increase climate resilience.

**Outcome:** Northfield establishes a timeline and interim goals to implement the REAP, Meadows Park plan, and Greenway Corridors plan to preserve natural assets, create a system of green and blue infrastructure, and build long term management of natural systems into city plans.

#### Strategy 1 Actions

- 1 Require planting native plants on public land to reduce area of turf grass, increase stormwater infiltration, and improve habitat.
- 2 Continue planning to remove the Ames Mill Dam, improve Cannon River water quality, and expand recreational use of the river for community and economic development benefits.
- 3 Use the strategic planning process to identify near term goals, metrics and actions for REAC, Greenways Corridor plan, and integrated blue green infrastructure plan.

- 4 Work with Xcel Energy and other utilities to strategically bury power lines to eliminate aggressive tree trimming and improve the health and appearance of boulevard trees.
- 5 Assess, identify and pursue opportunities for financing and funding green and blue infrastructure implementation while budgeting for long term maintenance.
- 6 Plan and design Division Street and other downtown streets to provide space to support larger tree planting areas and additional green infrastructure.
- 7 Map the urban forest to set goals for the density and health of the tree canopy, identify locations for improvement, and consider the economic benefits of trees to property values and livability.

## Strategy 2: Plan water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure to be resilient

*Everyone in Northfield has sufficient access to and use of clean drinking water and all storm water and wastewater infrastructure is sound.*



**Outcome:** Northfield water, wastewater, and stormwater systems are planned and built to withstand extreme weather and improve climate resilience.

**Outcome:** Water and wastewater capacity are used as key metrics for assessing development projects and planning growth.

### Strategy 2 Actions

- 1 Water, wastewater and stormwater plans are updated to reflect current climate guidance and changes in land use assumptions including analyzing systems under extreme weather conditions such as modeling 500- and 1000-year events.
- 2 Evaluate existing drinking water and wastewater systems for capacity concerns and direct investment to those areas with the greatest capacity for expansion for the lowest capital outlay.
- 3 Assess water, wastewater and stormwater systems for any critical failure points and the likely impact on the community and transportation, plan needed improvements.
- 4 Inventory the city's existing tree canopy, landscaping practices, wetland restoration, river and stream buffers, and opportunities for improvement.
- 5 Determine locations for regional stormwater management prior to development and build around those locations.



## Strategy 3: Plan streets for safety and stormwater management

*Streets are designed to serve as part of the stormwater management system.*



**Outcome:** Streets and the entire public right of way are planned, designed, built and operated to meet safety, connectivity, and green infrastructure goals.

### Strategy 3 Actions

- 1** Adopt a street use hierarchy that prioritize the safety needs of people walking, biking, rolling, and using transit.
- 2** Adopt revised Street Types in [the zoning code](#) to apply to all planned and future street projects to provide context-based starting points for street design which guide allocation of space based on land use context and identified priorities for connectivity, green infrastructure, and safety.
- 3** Consider adopting overlay plans as part of [a redesign of the zoning code](#) to sharpen the street type guidance for critical areas which guide special attention to tree canopy, school access, or equity concerns.
- 4** Plan demonstration projects or project areas to test ideas and educate the community about allocating space for all users and green infrastructure.
- 5** Aggressively seek funding to reduce initial capital costs of improvements while ensuring revenue for ongoing maintenance and replacement.
- 6** Review, map, and prioritize for reinvestment in those areas of the city where infrastructure may have seen less investment then work to improve these areas.

## Strategy 4: Provide sufficient broadband services to the community

*Broadband services, including internet, television, and telecommunications both ensure all residents and businesses can stay connected and are resilient to climate impacts.*



**Outcome:** All residents and businesses—regardless of location or income—can stay connected and the infrastructure is protected.

### Strategy 4 Actions

- 1** Support public and private investment in fiber-optic networks, working with providers to expand service coverage, and prioritizing the installation of conduit or fiber during road construction projects to reduce future costs and improve access.
- 2** Bury broadband lines to help maintain the tree canopy and avoid potential damage.

## Strategy 5: Reduce solid waste through diversion, recycling, and reuse.

*Northfield will be a zero-waste community.*



**Outcome:** Northfield has robust policies and procedures in place to reduce the quantity of solid waste that is sent to the Rice County landfill.

**Outcome:** All organic materials are diverted from the waste stream through a community-wide curbside compost collection system available to all property owners and renters.

### Strategy 5 Actions

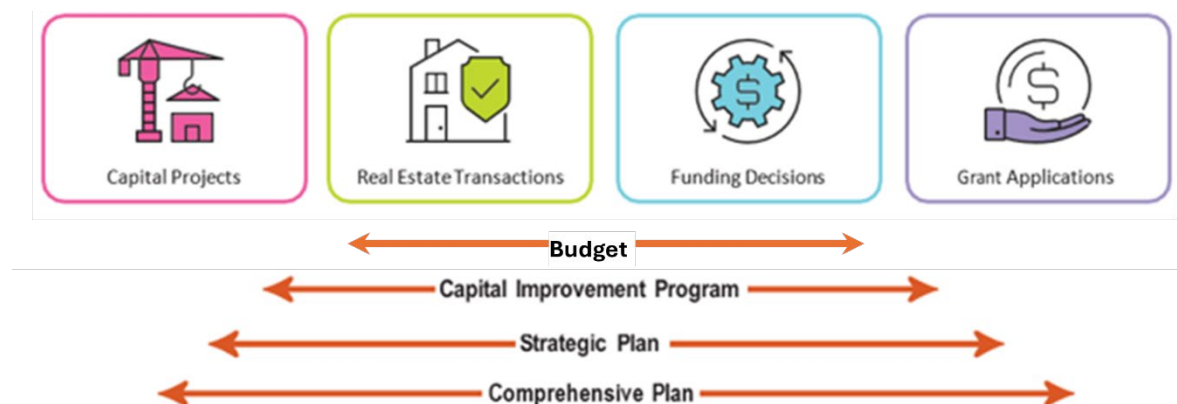
- 1** Decrease total per capita municipal solid waste handled **30% by 2030**
- 2** Achieve 70% organics landfill waste diversion by 2030
- 3** Increase diversion of potential **recoverables by 15% by 2030.**
- 4** Increase recycling from 32% to 35% of total municipal solid waste handled by 2030
- 5** Consider establishing a “deconstruction” program for municipal demolition projects.

## Chapter 6 – Implementation: Connecting actions and goals to achieve outcomes

### Connections to Guiding Values

**Guiding city planning, budgeting and decision-making:** At its core, the Northfield 2045 Comprehensive Plan sets policy directions for decisions made day-to-day by the city council, planning commission, other boards and commissions, and municipal staff. The plan itself does not have regulatory authority but is the policy foundation for other official controls, like the zoning and building codes, subdivision regulations, city budget, Capital Improvement Plan and other tools, as seen in Figure X. Successful implementation of this plan requires the City Council to include its recommendations in its capital planning and budgeting to allocate the resources needed to realize the outcomes in this plan.

**FIGURE X**



**Fostering strong partnerships:** Beyond these key tools, partnerships with other agencies and institutions will also be critical to realizing the full vision of this plan. The city is committed to working with organizations and agencies who share our values; this plan articulates those values for potential partners. Our partners should come from within the Southeastern Minnesota “ecosystem” whenever possible.

**Pursuing outside funding:** This plan establishes priorities and strategies which communicate the city’s values and project priorities to county, state, and federal agencies to support applications for those entities’ funding programs. Many non-profits and higher educational institutions have already built programs and partnerships that need to be perpetuated with further funding and staff participation from the City of Northfield; this plan is intended to align with those programs.

### Connections to Other Plans

A comprehensive plan functions as an umbrella document under which more specialized plans fit. Northfield has produced many topical plans in the years between comprehensive plans. Depending on the age and subject matter of these other plans, some of the recommendations may not align

with the vision and guiding values of this plan. The following matrix identifies each plan, the overall purpose and key policies in each. It also indicates whether each plan should be fully or partially incorporated into the comprehensive plan or should be discontinued to assist staff and decision makers in determining which policies to follow and which are outdated.

For coherence and efficiency, policy should be revised then consolidated in fewer but more actionable plans to aid city staff, council members, board and commission members, consultants, external funders, and the public in understanding city priorities and recommended actions. For example, transportation projects are currently subject to the Complete Streets Policy, Safe Routes to School Policy, Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 34 of the municipal code of ordinances, and Climate Action Plan. Providing more concise guidance will help Northfield achieve the goals of this plan and others.

Where possible, plans are scheduled to be superseded by updates to higher level plans. Complete streets concepts, for example, should be part of the Transportation Plan rather than a standalone policy.

Technological, scientific, and research-based changes over time will more likely than not lead to the need to adapt and amend this plan. Work planning and strategic planning efforts must include the regular evaluation of current data and developments in both practical and policy-based approaches to urban infrastructure, civil engineering, and civic enterprises to ensure appointed and elected officials and the plan are incorporating best-practices and innovations, as appropriate.

**TABLE 2 TABLE OF RELATED PLANS**

Document	Purpose	Key Policies or Ideas?	Year	Replaced	Incorporated	Partial Incorp.	Notes
<b>Land Use</b>							
<b>Downtown Streetscape Framework</b>	Specific improvements to reinforce identity and improve image, function and livability of downtown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughtful analysis of downtown areas</li> <li>• coordinated wayfinding and signage</li> <li>• Flexible palette of design elements</li> <li>• Recommendations to add stormwater infiltration along Division Street</li> <li>• String of Pearls: Linking downtown focal points and highlights with design elements and public art</li> </ul>	2006	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many improvements completed (Library corner, e.g.)</li> <li>• Some aspects replaced by REAPC</li> <li>• Consider whether to retain streetscape palette</li> <li>• Retain for reference</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehensive Plan</b>	Long-range plans for managing the growth of the community and foundation for policies and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit emphasis on compact development prioritizing infill, redevelopment before greenfield projects</li> <li>• Rejects continuing suburban development of early 2000s</li> <li>• Stronger policy on walking/biking</li> <li>• Traditional neighborhood design</li> </ul>	2008	Yes			
<b>Gateway Corridor Improvements Plan</b>	Recommendations to improve entrances to the city along major corridors		2012	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain for reference and design ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Environment and Climate</b>							
<b>Natural Resources Inventory</b>	Assessment of remaining significant natural and open space areas to guide protection and management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed assessment of plant, animal, water, and soil resources</li> <li>• Basis for Greenway Corridor system plan</li> </ul>	2005			Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update any areas which have been developed or undergone significant change (e.g. Kraewood property)</li> </ul>

Greenway Corridor System Plan	Regional plan for connected system of protected natural areas and cultural resources accessible for human use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System protects, preserves and connects natural areas and open spaces</li> <li>• Prioritizes high quality resources for protection and restoration.</li> <li>• Corridor system is one of the community's basic infrastructure systems and part of its comprehensive transportation network</li> </ul>	2006		Yes		Emphasis on greenway corridors as a essential infrastructure and part of transportation network is tightly aligned with Northfield 2045 emphasis on accessibility and planning for blue-green infrastructure and natural asset management.
Climate Action Plan	Strategic guide to addressing climate change in the city.		2019			Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review CAP and update Northfield 2045 in near future with outcomes, strategies and actions</li> <li>• CAP has extensive information about education and programming, but only scattered recommendations for land use and infrastructure which are actionable</li> </ul>
Economic Development							
Comprehensive Economic Development Plan	Guide for economic development in response to overdevelopment of residential uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asset-based approach to maximize existing advantages</li> <li>• increasing availability of commercial land,</li> <li>• leveraging Cannon River and sense of place</li> <li>• aggressive business recruitment.</li> </ul>	2006	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain for reference</li> </ul>
Northfield Strategic Plan	Plan to guide the city's work through 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not strategic</li> <li>• Not a plan</li> </ul>	2021	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will be superseded by 2025 Strategic Plan</li> </ul>
Utilities							
Comprehensive Water Plan	Plan analyzing existing water distribution system and recommending improvements to address growth and expansion		2006				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update to reflect changed land use assumptions, development which has occurred and incorporate climate action priorities</li> </ul>
Comprehensive Sanitary Sewer Plan	Plan analyzing sanitary sewer collection and treatment systems in		2007				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as above</li> </ul>

	Northfield and Dundas.						
Surface Water Management Plan	Plan analyzing current stormwater management system with recommendations for future capacity needs		2020				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes section on green infrastructure and low impact development which is not used for making recommendations in the plan</li> <li>Same as above</li> </ul>
Transportation/Access							
City of Northfield Comprehensive Transportation Plan Update	Plan analyzing existing and future transportation needs with recommendations for updates and improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standalone document developed along with 2008 comprehensive plan and its land use principles</li> <li>Relies on traditional metrics such as LOS, expanding capacity based on traffic projections</li> </ul>	2008				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete update needed</li> </ul>
Safe Routes to School Plan	Guide to necessary improvements for safe routes to school in Northfield.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on improving Jefferson Parkway and TH246 intersection</li> <li>Plan did not include NHS or Arcadia (included in pedestrian, bike and trail update in 2019)</li> </ul>	2009	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate needed updates in revised transportation plan and LDC</li> </ul>
Northfield Area Access Management and Safety Plan (MN Highway 19)	MnDOT plan for Highway 19 between I-35 and Minnesota State Highway 3 to address growth and safety concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anticipates TH19 as 4 lane road to I-35</li> </ul>	2009	Yes			Superseded by TH19 mill & overlay planning
Northfield Modal Integration Project Study Report	Recommendations to improve multimodal crossings of Highway 19 and Highway 3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>emphasis on grade separated crossing</li> <li>foundation for TIGER grant project</li> </ul>	2009	Yes			
Complete Street Policy	Policy to guide the development of Complete Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended developing design guidelines and review every 5 years</li> <li>Included climate and stormwater management as part of street design</li> </ul>	2012	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As with SR2S, the policy and design principles should be included in the LDC and update to comprehensive transportation plan while eliminating this as a named policy</li> </ul>

Pedestrian, bike and trail system update	Reviewed existing policy and regulation plus recommendations for filling network gaps, updating street types		2019	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendations to update ordinances and policy not completed</li> <li>Recommended bike and walk networks had no discernible basis for choosing routes or connecting places</li> </ul>
Pedestrian and Bikeway Analyzation	Identified projects in the CIP that can be designed to improve bikeway and pedestrian design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended two way bikeways as “preferred facilities” (some off-street, some on street, when protection is needed etc.)</li> </ul>	2022	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preferred facility approach did not reflect surrounding land use or improve accessibility</li> <li>Include any relevant information in transportation plan update and LDC</li> </ul>
Downtown Parking Study	Analyzes downtown parking supply and demand.		2023	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deeply flawed study biased in favor of desired projects which are no longer anticipated</li> </ul>
Parks and Open Space							
Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan	Extensive analysis of park system, recommended improvements and funding guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employed Complete Streets framework</li> <li>Includes master plans for individual parks</li> </ul>	2008 "			Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs review to determine if park master plans are still relevant (some park plans have been updated without reference to this plan) or other policy guidance is still useful</li> <li>Served as the basis for proposed bike/walk system in Northfield 2045</li> </ul>
Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan	Framework to guide improvements along the river and future design of park spaces.		2020			Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs review for compliance with Northfield 2045</li> </ul>
Housing							
Northfield Housing Study	Comprehensive study of Northfield's housing needs through 2025.		2021	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor quality study</li> </ul>
Housing and Education in Northfield (Enterprise)	Provides strategies for improving housing affordability and capacity in Northfield.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noteworthy studFy connecting housing, education and social mobility</li> <li>Focused on meeting needs of lower income families</li> </ul>	2022			Yes	



Housing Needs Assessment (Maxfield research)	Provides projections for housing need through 2035.		2024		Yes		
Comprehensive Housing Study (Rice County)	Evaluates current housing demand and projected needs for Rice County.		2024	Yes			Northfield 2045 relies on Maxfield research assessment
Other							
ArtsPlan06	created Arts & Culture Commission		2019				
2019-2024 Cultural Plan	recommended creation of 1% for the Arts program		2019				
Racial Equity Action Plan	Plan for internal action to address racial equity		2020				

## Connecting outcomes and actions

The most important reason to update a comprehensive plan every decade is to respond to changing needs, evaluate what is working and what isn't, and to ensure the municipality is moving forward in the direction the community desires. The matrix below shows how the outcomes statements and actions relate and offer a menu of opportunities for shorter term strategic planning by elected officials, work planning for departments and the appointed boards and commissions they serve.

The matrix indicates which actions most strongly support this Plan's core principles and assigns a rough priority or timeframe as well as which department or other group should lead action. This Plan presumes boards and commissions are a key part of the work of this Plan.

For example, revising zoning regulations is the number one priority action and must precede several other recommendations in this Plan. Zoning changes also strongly influence the cost of development (for both the city and private developers), climate and environmental impact, and ensuring benefits are distributed equitably.

**TABLE X OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX**

Placeholder graphic as example.		Climate	Economy	Equity	Who	Rank
1	<p><b>Plan for Accessibility:</b> Increasing access connects people to where they want to go and supports Northfield's values of promoting sustainability, increasing equity, and creating a thriving community</p> <p>Outcome: Northfield has established goals for connectivity, accessibility, land development, and transportation and adopted relevant metrics to measure progress.</p> <p>Outcome: Northfield's capital investments and other funded projects are based on creating complete places, filling gaps, supplying missing assets, and ensuring equitable access to destinations.</p> <p>Outcome: Northfield updates all documents guiding planning, growth, and development to reflect the goals of this Plan.</p>					

## Appendices

Glossary

Engagement Summary

Equity Policy Framework

Interventions Analysis

Economic Development Technical Memorandum

Housing Technical Memorandum

Community Profile

Timeline of Actions

## Glossary

**1% for the Arts:** A program or policy in which 1% of all capital improvement project (for example, road work) must set 1% of their budget aside for public art. In Northfield, the Arts and Culture Commission oversees the design and implementation of that public art.

**Accessibility:** The *ability to reach* goods, services, activities, and destinations. Accessibility is improved by reducing travel time, and increasing safety, comfort, affordability, and variety of destinations and mode choice.

**Annexation:** The process by which incorporated cities in Minnesota physically expand their boundaries. Only property contiguous to the existing municipal boundary may be annexed.

**Active Transportation:** This term is a catch-all for walking and “small things with wheels” – both human powered (such as bicycles, skateboards, hand-cycles), electric (motorized wheelchairs and mobility scooters, full power e-bikes), and those in between such as power assist e-bikes. Where relevant, different modes will be specified yet all ways of traveling share priorities about what’s needed for safe, convenient travel. Although rarely included in definitions, mobility devices like strollers and walkers, as well as bike trailers and wagons should also be considered). Sometimes referred to as micro-mobility.

**Affordable Housing:** The general definition of affordability as established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is for a household to pay no more than 30% of their income for housing, including utilities but not including transportation costs.

In this plan, and based on the 2024 Maxfield Research, Inc report, affordable housing is considered that which is income-restricted to households earning at or below 80% area median income (AMI), though individual properties can have income restrictions set at 30%, 40%, 50%, 60% or 80% AMI. Rent is not based on income but instead is a contract amount that is affordable to households within the specific income restriction segment. It is essentially housing affordable to low or very low-income tenants.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan:** A document that outlines how a local government will remove barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. They often center transportation accessibility. These plans are a required component of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Area Median Income (“AMI”):** AMI is the midpoint in the income distribution within a specific geographic area: 50% of households earn less than the median income and 50% earn more. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calculates AMI annually, adjusted for household size. (In 2024, the median household income in Rice County is \$100,900—equivalent to an hourly wage of around \$50 per hour. For Dakota County the number is \$123,700 – equivalent to an hourly wage of around \$59 per hour.)

**Best management practices (BMPs):** Best Management Practices (BMPs) are methods that local governments use to manage and protect the environment. These practices help reduce pollution, improve water quality, and increase resiliency with climate change. BMPs are used to deal with issues like stormwater runoff, waste, and how land is developed.

**Economic development:** The process by which the economic well-being and quality of life of a nation, region, or local community, are improved according to targeted goals and objectives.

**Economic Mobility:** The ability of a person or family to improve their economic status over time.

**Extremely Low-Income:** Person or household with incomes below 30% of area median income, adjusted for respective household size. Defined by HUD.

**Fair Market Rent:** Estimates established by HUD of the gross rents needed to obtain modest rental units in acceptable conditions in a specific geographic area. The amount of rental income a given property would command if it were open for leasing at any given moment and/or the amount derived based on market conditions that is needed to pay gross monthly rent at modest rental housing in each area. This number is used as a basis for determining the payment standard amount used to calculate the maximum monthly subsidy for families on financially assisted housing.

**Gray Infrastructure:** Gray infrastructure is a stormwater management strategy that is human engineered, often including treatment facilities, sewer systems, sanitary sewers, and storage basins. During a storm, gray infrastructure redirects water from all sorts of locations through underground pipes to storage basins and water reclamation facilities. There, those systems remove pollutants and toxins from the water so it can be redistributed into the environment.

**Household:** All people who occupy a housing unit, including occupants of a single-family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated people who share living arrangements.

**Housing Choice Voucher Program:** The federal government's primary program for assisting very low- income families, the elderly and the disabled to afford decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market. A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program.

Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies. They receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program. A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the public housing agency on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

**Housing legacy program:** A local program that facilitates the donation or bequest of homes by homeowners wishing to leave a legacy of affordable homeownership for future generations.

**Low-Impact Development (LID):** Low impact development is a stormwater management strategy that controls rainwater where it falls, reducing the need for large, expensive systems. This includes specific site plan designs and small-scale interventions, including rainwater harvesting, natural systems of filtration, and evapotranspiration (when water evaporates into the air from bodies of water and plants.)

**Market Rate Rental Housing:** Housing that does not have any income restrictions. Some properties will have income guidelines, which are minimum annual incomes required to live there.

**Mobility:** How quickly and easily people, goods, and services can move or be moved from one place to another. Mobility can depend on congestion and road capacity, how direct a walking route is, or whether it is safe to bike instead of walking to a destination.

**Moderate Income:** Person or household with gross household income between 80% and 120% of the area median income, adjusted for household size. Defined by HUD.

**Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing:** Although affordable housing is typically associated with an income-restricted property, there are other housing units in communities that indirectly provide affordable housing. Housing units that were not developed or designated with income guidelines (i.e. assisted) yet are more affordable than other units in a community are considered “naturally occurring” or “unsubsidized affordable” units. This rental supply is available through the private market, versus assisted housing programs through various governmental agencies. Property values on these units are lower based on a combination of factors, such as: age of structure/ housing stock, location, condition, size, functionally obsolete, school district, etc.

**Orderly annexation agreement:** a binding contract between a city and a township that identifies larger potential growth areas and terms to what triggers an annexation. It allows both the city and Township to proactively address annexation potential instead of passively waiting and reacting to growth. The agreement is enforceable in the district court in the county in which the unincorporated property in question is located. A municipal council may declare land annexed to the municipality if the land is owned by the municipality or is completely surrounded by land within the municipal limit.

**Organic waste:** Refers to materials made from plant and animal matter that are discarded as garbage. While it often refers to food waste, it also includes yard waste, paper, wood, certain fabrics, sewage, and manure. In both the U.S. and around the world, organic waste makes up about three-quarters of all waste. Organic waste, when properly composted, can be recycled into nutrient rich soil for gardens and farms, reducing waste and supporting healthier ecosystems.

**PFAS:** An acronym for “Per-and polyFluoroAlkyl Substances” and commonly referred to as “forever chemicals.” This generic term refers to thousands of chemicals that are widely used across consumer, commercial, and industrial products. PFAS can be found by examining water, air, fish, soil, animals and humans across the globe. PFAS are being studied by several scientific bodies, and findings demonstrate that exposure to some PFAS is linked to harmful effects in humans and animals.

**Priority Growth Area:** Defined area within the Urban Expansion Area to which growth may be directed after other priorities within a municipal boundary are exhausted or insufficient.

**Public Art:** Public art includes murals, sculptures, paintings, and even public performances. It can also describe intentional designs on public features like street signs, streetlamps, playgrounds, and buildings. Public art is intended to represent and speak to the community that accesses it and is often designed by people from the place in which it is featured.

**Sanitary sewer:** A wastewater management feature that collects and transports wastewater to treatment facilities. This includes sewer pipes, and transfer and lift stations.

**Stormwater management:** The practice of controlling and treating water runoff from rain and snow. This includes planning, maintaining, and regulating stormwater systems. The goal is to reduce flooding, protect water quality, and create more resilient communities. There are many approaches to stormwater management, including using gray and blue-green Infrastructure, deploying low impact development, and encouraging best management practices.

**Solid waste:** Describes most of the things we throw away or discard. This includes everyday household trash, industrial waste from factories, food scraps, construction debris, hazardous waste like lightbulbs and batteries, electronic waste like televisions and computers, and agricultural waste. Solid waste includes things we recycle, compost, incinerate, treat, or send to landfill.

**Separated bikeway:** Sometimes called *protected bikeways*, these are bikeways and paths that are separated from car traffic by some sort of physical barrier. They can be designed just for people biking, or they can be designed to be shared by people walking and biking. Separated bikeways always include both a bike travel space and a buffer between the bikeway and the street.<sup>12</sup>

**Subsidized Housing:** Housing that is income-restricted to households earning at or below 30% AMI. Rent is generally based on income, with the household contributing 30% of their adjusted gross income toward rent. Also referred to as extremely low-income housing.

**Subsidy:** Monthly income received by a tenant or by an owner on behalf of a tenant to pay the difference between the apartment's contract or market rate rent and the amount paid by the tenant toward rent.

**Sustainable Development:** Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It considers a larger approach to decision-making by determining ahead of time how policies and actions affect people, the environment and our economy.

**Transit:** Transportation options other than driving a personal vehicle. Transit options include fixed-route bus service (Hiawathaland Red and Blue Lines), dial-a-ride, taxis, ride share (Lyft, Uber), pedicabs. Transit does not necessarily include micro-mobility options like biking or walking, though transit can supplement those options, like biking to a bus route.

**Urban Expansion Area:** An area around the boundary of a village or city that is reserved for future residential and business growth. It is developed in collaboration with the County and informed by orderly annexation agreements between municipality and township officials.

**Visit-ability:** housing designed in such a way that it can be lived in or visited by people who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers. A home is visitable when it meets three basic requirements: one zero-step entrance; doors with 32 inches of clear passage space; one bathroom accessible in a wheelchair.

**Walkable:** Walkable refers to how safe, convenient, and comfortable it is to walk to destinations.

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<sup>12</sup> NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed

**Walkability:** Measurable by tracking distances (how long does it take to get to the supermarket?), navigation difficulty (how many turns does it take?), sidewalk connections (do you have to cross 2 streets because sidewalks abruptly end?), access to shade and benches, and safety (do cars or vehicles kill pedestrians on this path?)

**Workforce Housing:** When subsidized, workforce housing is income-restricted to households earning between 80% and 120% AMI; however, some government agencies define workforce housing to include households earning between 50% to 120% AMI. Also referred to as moderate-



## Timeline of Actions (will be replaced to bring current to 2025)

