

## STEP Framework

The STEP Framework designates areas and several key properties in Northfield as opportunities to strengthen, transform, enhance, and preserve, each describing varying levels of anticipated intervention and change over time. Within this framework, transformation areas represent the greatest opportunity for future development and redevelopment, followed by strengthen. Both areas may see varying levels of regulatory intervention, as well as improvements to the built environment to accommodate development or redevelopment opportunities. 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. Preserve areas represent the areas least in need of intervention. These include the two college campuses, natural areas, parks, and other areas of the city that are well-served..

The STEP Framework is shown on Figure 1 and described in more detail in the sections that follow. The labels on the map correspond to the text that follows.

1. **Transform** areas represent prime opportunities to harness growing market demand and create renewed walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income centers. Transformation of the areas shown on the map will include land use changes or intensification of uses to create vibrant places to live and work, primarily serving as neighborhood centers for residents and employees alike by allowing for:
  - a. More diverse housing options
  - b. A wider variety of jobs
  - c. New amenities including services, retail, and restaurants options
  - d. Public realm enhancements, safe pedestrian paths, and a range of mobility options and programmed activities

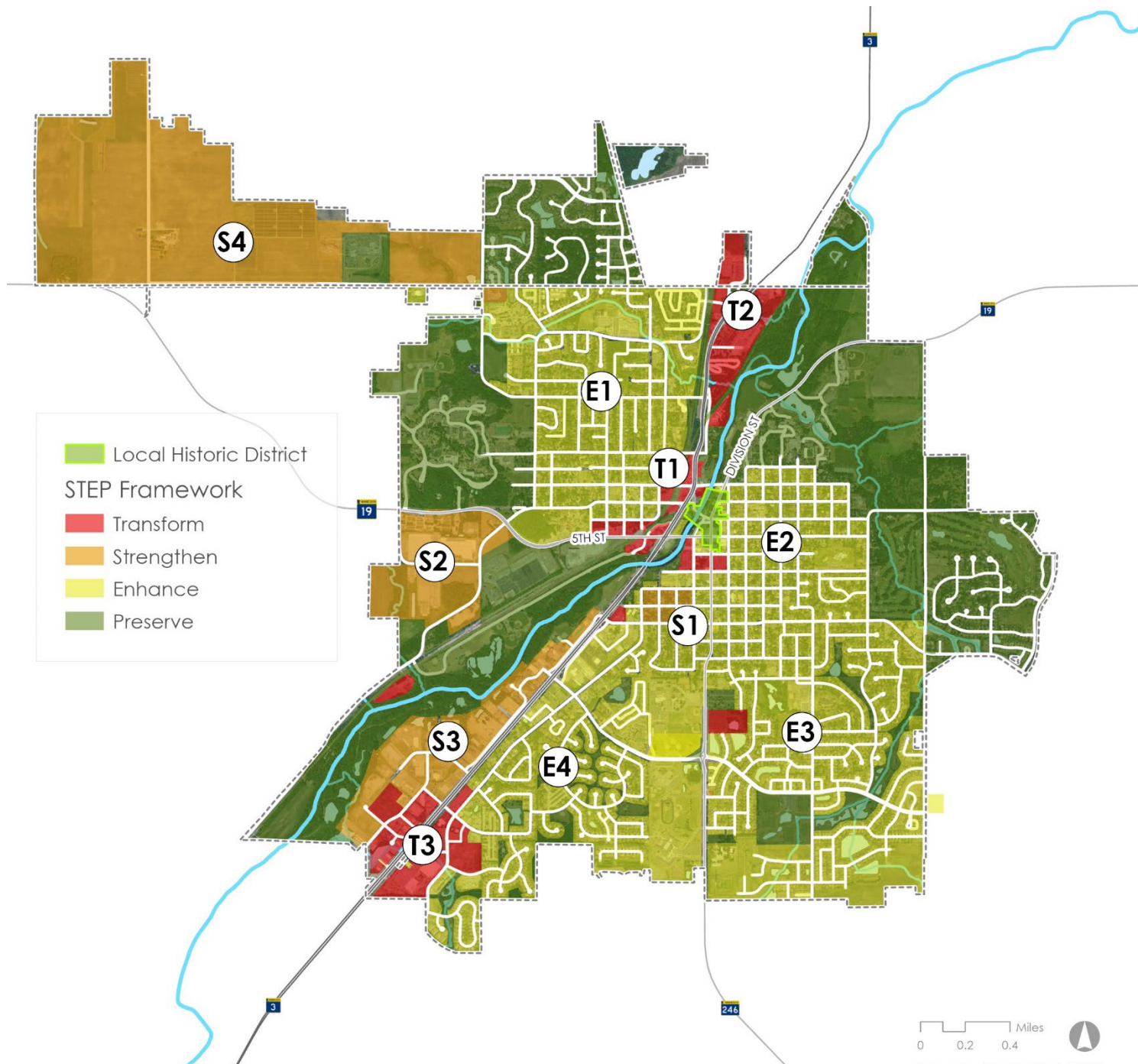
### **Northfield's Transform areas:**

**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 liveliness of downtown Northfield can expand west, making the river the focal point. Land use planning should closely coordinate with the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan, intentionally redeveloping in ways that capitalize on the existing beauty of the river and its surrounds. Redeveloping these properties and extending the downtown westward will also create more accessible amenities for those living in the neighborhoods west of the river.

**T2:** Highway 3 and Fremouw Ave – this intersection has opportunity to serve as a new mixed-use center for both residential and neighborhood serving commercial that is more easily accessible to the Viking Terrace neighborhood and beyond. A key component of making this area successful is to better connect the east and west sides of Highway 3 so that crossing is safe and comfortable. New residential development here could include a wide variety of medium-to-high density housing types. This area also has a need for a park, trail, and/or open space, and there is a unique opportunity for such a use given its proximity to the river. An extensive trail system exists on the east side of the river, another great opportunity to mirror and potentially even connect to the existing network.

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Figure 1. STEP Framework



**T3: Target/Cub** – Anchored by the existing grocery and retail stores, there are both development and redevelopment (i.e. large parking lots) opportunities for this area. A suburban retrofit strategy could transform this area into a more walkable, mixed-use area that offers opportunities to live, work, and play, while also serving nearby neighborhoods. New residential development here could include a wide variety of medium-to-high density housing types.

**Individual Transform properties:**

- Riverpark Mall and adjacent blocks – redevelopment opportunity for vertical mixed use and better connection to Riverside Park and river.
- Woodley and Highway 3 – redevelopment opportunity at the corner with an existing trail connection to Memorial Park, Riverside Park, and the river. Access planning will be important here with the Woodley/Hwy 3 intersection becoming more complex as the Mill Towns Trail crossing is incorporated.
- City compost site – there may be an opportunity merge the city yard waste collection with the county landfill site, which could open up this area for another use. Careful planning around the trout stream is critical.
- Property south of Northfield Cemetery – this is the last remaining large development site in this area. There is potential to connect the currently disconnected Washington Streets and plan for a mix of mid-to-high density residential and neighborhood-serving commercial uses.

**2. Strengthen** areas have opportunities to make near-term investments that prepare areas well for future changes, where smaller scale interventions vary based on the land use and the unique needs of the area. Strengthen areas are not the highest priority redevelopment areas but have the potential to become such areas longer term and under the right market conditions. In the interim, small-scale interventions can improve the quality of the area in preparation for nearby redevelopment. Strengthening interventions may involve:

- a. Improvements to the appearance of the neighborhood through upgrades to public open space, trail connections, or sidewalks
- b. Incentives to make improvements to private property, buildings, and residences
- c. City support to build neighborhood structure and capacity
- d. Improving sense of place through public and private interventions
- e. Infill development that supports the surrounding uses
- f. Significant policy changes to

**Northfield's Strengthen areas:**

**S1:** The 6 blocks bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> St., Water St., Woodley St., and Poplar St. The focus here is to preserve the naturally occurring affordable housing that has excellent proximity to downtown. Thus, the City should include targeted financial tools for this purpose. This small section of blocks is also lacking sidewalks and curb and gutter in some places, so the City should prioritize these upgrades. The City might also provide tools and/or incentives for improved property maintenance and upgrades.

**S2:** West side industrial area. There are opportunities for expanded industrial development in this area, which would increase availability of industrial land within City limits. The area has been

identified as a strengthen area for this reason, but also because of the planned Rice County connection of Decker Avenue from TH-19 to TH-3. The transportation and land use changes associated with the Decker Avenue corridor should be coordinated with any plans for this area, as new roadways between Decker Avenue and this area are likely. Careful planning for new industrial development near the trout stream will be critical.

**S3:** Industrial/commercial area between Highway 3 and river. Infill industrial and potential redevelopment of underutilized properties is the focus of this area. Strategies for this area should focus on utilizing the East River Trail along the river to its maximum potential. A river crossing is desired somewhere in this area that connects the city's industrial areas of S2 and S3, but cost and sensitive environmental resources are major barriers.

**S4:** Northwest Northfield/Hospital area. While the preference is to focus on redevelopment close to the core of the City over greenfield development, a basic urban design layout and concept should be prepared for this area, so that the area develops favorably. For economic sustainability purposes, planning for this area must also include analysis of the costs of extending infrastructure versus potential tax revenue. Potential future development in this area, and land use mix, must be aligned with Economic Development priorities as well.

An Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR) environmental analysis was conducted for the western portion of this area which studied two industrial development concepts including a large single tech user and a multi-user business park. The AUAR was approved by the City Council in November 2023 and will help to inform local planning and zoning decisions.

### **Individual properties:**

- NE corner (and potential expansion across the street to the west) of Division Street and Anderson Drive – existing commercial use here (florist), but potential for intensification.

**3. Enhance** areas are places that need minor improvement, with interventions dependent on the land use and neighborhood context. This includes most of the city's residential areas outside of the core, as well as commercial and industrial uses along the southern half of Highway 3. This category does not anticipate any major change to existing land uses. Interventions in enhance areas may include the following strategies:

- a. Traffic calming measures on roadways
- b. New non-motorized connections to nearby walkable, mixed-use centers
- c. Improved bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure
- d. Opportunities for new parks, open space, and tree canopy
- e. Small-scale, context-sensitive infill that compliments neighborhood character
- f. Infill and redevelopment that increases the range of housing types

### **Northfield's Enhance areas:**

**E1:** Residential neighborhood west of the river. This residential area lacks parks and could also benefit from enhanced non-motorized connections with access to services/commercial. Individual properties in this area have the potential to intensify by adding dwelling units such as ADUs. This area contains the census tract with higher percentages of low income, people of color, and people

with a disability. To the extent possible, the City should intentionally direct resources to underserved areas as priority.

**E2:** Residential neighborhood adjacent to downtown. This neighborhood can contribute to the guiding values of this plan similar as the E1 area, by gentle residential density increases by adding units or ADUs, which will increase the range of affordability and housing options while preserving the high quality of life and connectedness to downtown.

**E3:** Southeast residential. Though this area's street network is not well connected, the area benefits from parks and trail connections. As one of the City's newer neighborhoods, it offers no neighborhood-serving commercial. 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 Gates Avenue from Northfield High School; small-scale commercial or mixed-use development could be considered here. Jefferson Parkway has been identified as an on-street bikeway gap, although the Mill Town off-street trail is currently being constructed. Additionally, this area of the city is the worst served by public bus route. Safe walking and biking routes along with better transit service to other commercial areas would help increase the quality of life in this area.

**E4:** Between Highway 3 and Northfield High School. Especially as the development pattern transitions away from a grid into curvilinear and cul-de-sac pattern, connections, mobility, and accessibility decrease. This area could benefit from improved access between residential and commercial uses along Highway 3, especially non-motorized connections.

**Individual properties:**

- Ames Park: Village Green on the Water concept – enhance as described in the Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan, with gateway, promenade, gardens and vegetation, seating, playground, shade canopy, and more. Land use and transportation improvements must go hand-in-hand, as current access by all modes to Ames Park is very poor.
- Northfield Middle and Bridgewater Elementary Schools: while the school district is under its own planning timeline, it is important that future changes/redevelopment on these school sites are planned with the surrounding neighborhoods in mind. For example, opportunities to remove barriers and reconnect neighborhoods (via streets or non-motorized trails) should be prioritized.

4. **Preserve** areas represent green spaces and historic places that are important in defining the city's character and quality. Change should be carefully managed to enhance the setting and protect the environmental quality of these areas. In conjunction with key parks and open spaces, the trails and greenways network should provide attractive, viable travel corridors for walking and biking.

**Northfield's Preserve properties/areas:**

- Northfield's Downtown Local Historic District, which represents valued historic and cultural landmarks and resources
- Carleton and St. Olaf campuses
- Northfield Middle and Bridgewater Elementary Schools
- City parks, recreation areas, and open spaces along the river

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- Private recreation areas – Northfield Golf Club

### Individual properties:

- Carleton and St. Olaf campuses: while both campuses have their own master plans, it is important to continually engage both schools in planning around the campus edges. Existing campus boundaries should be maintained and any potential development near campus edges should be context sensitive.

## 2045 Growth

### Population Projections

*\*Maxfield is currently underway with an updated housing analysis, which will provide updated projections. The projections below are a starting point for our discussion of growth areas.*

Based on County population projections from the State of Minnesota Demographic Center, between 2025 and 2045, the City of Northfield accounts for approximately 31% of Rice County's historical growth. Using that share, and the State Demographer's projection for the county, we can anticipate the city to grow by 1,698 people (6.5 percent) by 2045.

Household population was estimated by accounting for the student population, anticipated to remain constant. Number of households assumes the 2020 average household size of 2.37 people per household. From there, housing units are estimated using the assumption that 5 percent of housing units are vacant. Table 1 includes our preliminary population, household, and housing unit projections. Table 2 includes the major takeaways from the analysis for the 2025-2045 time period.

It should be noted that these projections are based on past patterns of growth. If the City is able to open up new areas for housing development, additional growth may occur.

*Table 1. Population, Household, and Housing Unit Projections*

	Northfield Population	In Group Quarters (Students, 2020)	Household Population	Number of Households	Housing Units
2025	21,291	4,847	16,444	6,939	7,304
2030	21,789	4,847	16,942	7,149	7,525
2035	22,200	4,847	17,353	7,322	7,707
2040	22,524	4,847	17,677	7,458	7,851
2045	22,777	4,847	17,930	7,565	7,964

*Table 2. 2025-2045 Projections*

<i>Population Change 2025-2045</i>	<b>1,698</b>
<i>Growth Rate 2025-2045</i>	<b>6.5%</b>
<i>Annual Growth Rate</i>	<b>0.34%</b>
<i>Housing Units Needed by 2045</i>	<b>660</b>

### **Priority Growth Areas**

The 2008 Comprehensive Plan identified the Priority Growth and Urban Expansion areas as shown on Figure 2 (these are also included in the Rice County Comprehensive Plan). Based on population projections and demand for commercial and industrial development, it is unrealistic to expect that this entire area is needed to accommodate growth through 2045. However, if the city desires to accommodate more housing growth than projected, some of these expansion areas could create that opportunity.

The STEP framework sets the foundation for inward growth in areas within existing city limits, which aligns well with the City's desire to focus on infill and redevelopment opportunities in areas already served by infrastructure.

Proposed updates to the growth plan outside existing city limits are shown on Figure 2. Northfield should prioritize growth in the following order:

1. Within existing City limits: Intensification, infill and redevelopment opportunities in areas already served by infrastructure, and as outlined in the STEP framework.
2. Key areas and/or intersections adjacent to existing city limits and infrastructure, as identified on Figure 2. New development in these areas should be mixed use and serve as neighborhood centers that offer commercial/services and amenities and have easy non-motorized access to all existing or new nearby residents. Expansion to the north might also include industrial uses.
3. Rice County Land Use Plan – Urban Expansion Area / Northfield's orderly annexation areas. These areas could provide more area for additional housing to serve pent-up demand, particularly for entry-level starter homes.



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Figure 2. Growth Areas

