

City of Lowell

Master Plan 2024

Adopted: _____



Acknowledgments

The City of Lowell Master Plan benefited from significant collaboration with City Staff and leadership, the Planning Commission, and citizens of the Lowell community. Without this support and input, completion of this plan would not have been possible.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter 1 Introduction..... | 5 |
| Chapter 2 Our People..... | 7 |
| Chapter 3 Our Environment..... | 21 |
| Chapter 4 Our Community | 34 |
| Chapter 5 Public Engagement..... | 49 |
| Chapter 6 Goals & Objectives | 61 |
| Chapter 7 Future Land Use | 69 |
| Chapter 8 Implementation..... | 83 |
| Appendix | |
| Community Engagement Report | |



CHAPTER 1
Introduction



The City of Lowell is a picturesque community located in eastern Kent County, about 15 miles east of Grand Rapids. Located at the confluence of the Flat and Grand Rivers, Lowell boasts an unique historic character, abundant natural features, and a strong sense of community pride. While considered a rural community by most standards, the City is gradually being drawn closer to the sphere of influence generated by the Grand Rapids metro area.

What is a Master Plan? *A Master Plan provides the City with a guide for land use, development, redevelopment, and conservation. The Master Plan serves as the basis for land use decisions and regulation under zoning and other regulatory means. Because of its impact on the built environment, a Master Plan represents a statement about what a community is, what its residents and businesses value, and what those residents and businesses hope the community will become in the future. It reflects the community's commitment to caring for its residents and their quality of life, and this Master Plan makes a strong commitment to retaining and strengthening the community.*

This Master Plan is the product of two years of work by the City staff, Planning Commission, citizens, and local leaders. It is comprised of several different sections, including a description of the City's existing conditions and trends related to its people, environment, and city services. It also contains policy statements outlining the future direction for the City through a common vision statement and a detailed set of goals and objectives that are intended to achieve that vision.

This Master Plan is an update of the City's previous Master Plan, adopted in 2007. Some of the policies from the previous plan have been retained, while others have been strengthened, revised, or removed. This Master Plan has been developed pursuant to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008, as amended), which enables municipalities in Michigan to undertake planning efforts.





CHAPTER 2
Our People



This section of the master plan examines demographic patterns and housing trends in the City of Lowell, utilizing data sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau.

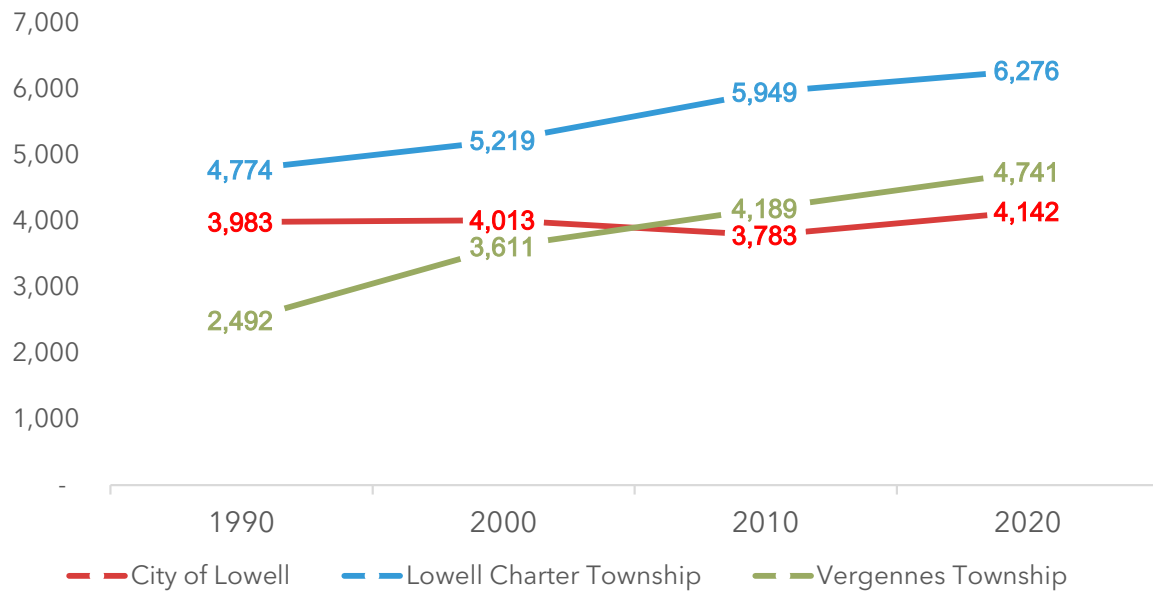
In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the City of Lowell, relevant comparisons have been drawn with neighboring communities and Kent County, where applicable. Demographic analysis plays a crucial role in master plans as it provides essential insights for planning future growth and development. It involves considering factors such as the projected population that will require city services, the availability of housing, and potential needs for new businesses or industry. This analysis aims to identify demographic characteristics that distinguish the City from other communities within Kent County. Discrepancies in these characteristics may indicate specific issues or areas where land use planning and public policies beyond the usual scope of a master plan may be necessary. By recognizing these differences, appropriate measures can be taken to address them effectively.

This chapter also incorporates data sourced from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is an ongoing survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, providing vital yearly information regarding population and other demographics. While the ACS results are available annually, the survey is administered to a sample population rather than the entire United States population, as done in the Census. Consequently, the ACS dataset is not without limitations. However, it serves as a valuable resource for communities, furnishing current information to inform programming, economic development, emergency management, and local issues and conditions. It is worth mentioning that the total population reported by the U.S. Census and the ACS may not align precisely due to the utilization of distinct datasets.

POPULATION

Growth of a community's population is a primary force driving new development, redevelopment, and additional community services, while a decline in a community's population can lead to abandoned buildings and blight. Therefore, population trends are an important component of a demographic analysis. The total of population and percentage of change is presented in Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1.

Figure 1.1 | Total Population 1990-2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990-2020



Table 1.1 compares the population growth trends for the City of Lowell against adjacent Townships. Over the course of 10 years, the City of Lowell experienced a remarkable resurgence in population growth, bouncing back from a minor decline between 2000 and 2010.

The City of Lowell experienced a 9.5% increase in population from 2010 to 2020, while Vergennes Townships exhibited a slightly higher growth rate of 13.2%, and Lowell Charter Township grew by 5.5%. surpassing other jurisdictions listed in Table 1.1. However, it is worth noting that the City of Lowell's growth rate outpaced the overall population growth of the State of Michigan, which stood at 2.0% from 2010 to 2020. Since 2020 development has continued in the region and the greater Lowell community has continued to gain additional residents.



Table 1.1 | Population Change, 1990-2020

| Jurisdiction | 2000 | 2010 | 2020 | Percent Change (2010-2020) |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------------------|
| City of Lowell | 4,013 | 3,783 | 4,142 | 9.5% |
| Lowell Charter Township | 5,219 | 5,949 | 6,276 | 5.5% |
| Vergennes Township | 3,611 | 4,189 | 4,741 | 13.2% |
| Kent County | 574,335 | 602,622 | 657,974 | 9.2% |
| Michigan | 9,938,444 | 9,883,640 | 10,077,331 | 2.0% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990-2020

RACE

The racial composition of Lowell reflects a predominantly White population, comprising 90.0% of the total number of people. The second-largest racial group consists of individuals identifying as two or more races, accounting for 6.7% of the population. Some other race category represents 1.4% of the residents, while Black or African American individuals make up 1.0%. The Asian population constitutes 0.5% of Lowell's residents, and American Indian and Alaska Native individuals represent 0.4%.

Table 1.2 | Racial Composition, 2020

| Race | Number of People | Percent of Population |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| White | 3,726 | 90.0% |
| Two more races | 278 | 6.7% |
| Some other race | 56 | 1.4% |
| Black or African American | 43 | 1.0% |
| Asian | 21 | 0.5% |
| American Indian & Alaskan Native | 18 | 0.4% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

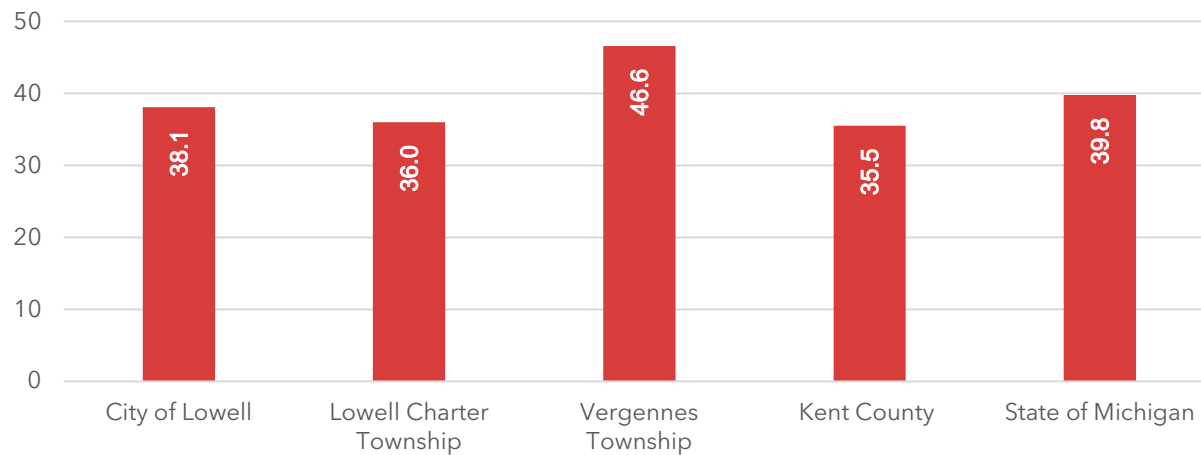
The racial makeup of Lowell is similar to that of many smaller, rural communities, although the presence of a diverse range of racial and ethnic groups is also notable, with individuals identifying as two or more races making up a significant portion. Additionally, small but distinct populations of individuals from other races, including Black or African American, Asian, and American Indian and Alaska Native, contribute to the City's overall racial makeup. This diversity enriches the cultural fabric of Lowell, creating a community that encompasses various racial backgrounds and experiences.

AGE

The age of a community's population impacts planning and development, whether is it an increased or decreased need for schools to serve the population under the age of 18, or a need for housing alternatives for older residents. This section analyzes the age of the City's residents and provides insights into the age demographics of each area.

Lowell's median age is 38.1 years, indicating a relatively balanced age distribution. Similarly, Lowell Charter Township has a slightly younger median age of 36 years, while Vergennes Township exhibits a significantly higher median age of 46.6 years, reflecting a comparatively older population as shown in Figure 2.2. Kent County, encompassing these jurisdictions, has a median age of 35.5 years, indicating a relatively youthful demographic. The State of Michigan as a whole has a median age of 39.8 years, falling slightly above the median age of the City of Lowell and Kent County. These variations in median age among different jurisdictions highlight the diversity in age profiles and demographics, offering valuable insights for understanding the population composition and potential implications for various services and policies.

Figure 1.2 | Median Age, 2021

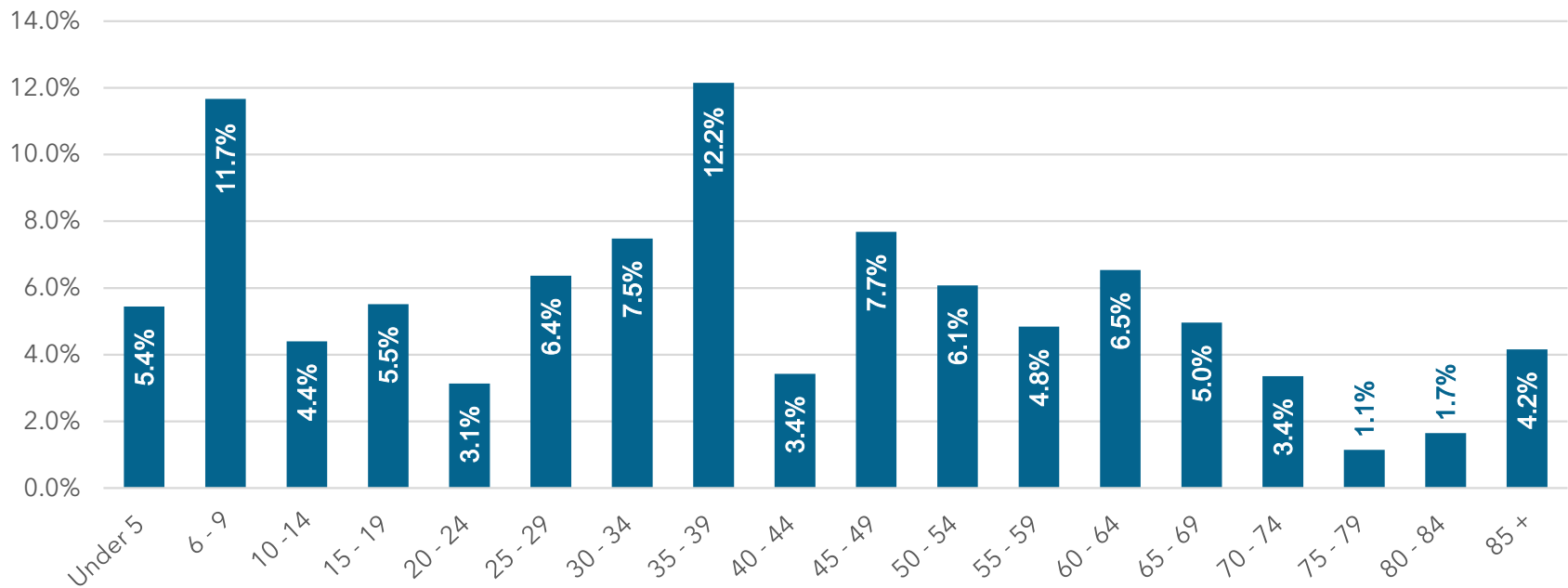


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

As shown in Figure 2.3, the City of Lowell exhibits two prominent age groups: 6 to 9 years and 35 to 39 years. These age groups hold significance as they represent the presence of families with young children and individuals in their prime working and productive years, which contribute to the vitality and development of the City of Lowell. Figure 2.3 also highlights the existence of a significant number of young children in the City, emphasizing the importance of providing adequate schools and recreational facilities to meet the needs of students and young families. People over the age of 65 account for nearly 15.3% of the population in the City, indicating a notable presence of seniors within the community.



Figure 1.3 | Age Composition, 2021

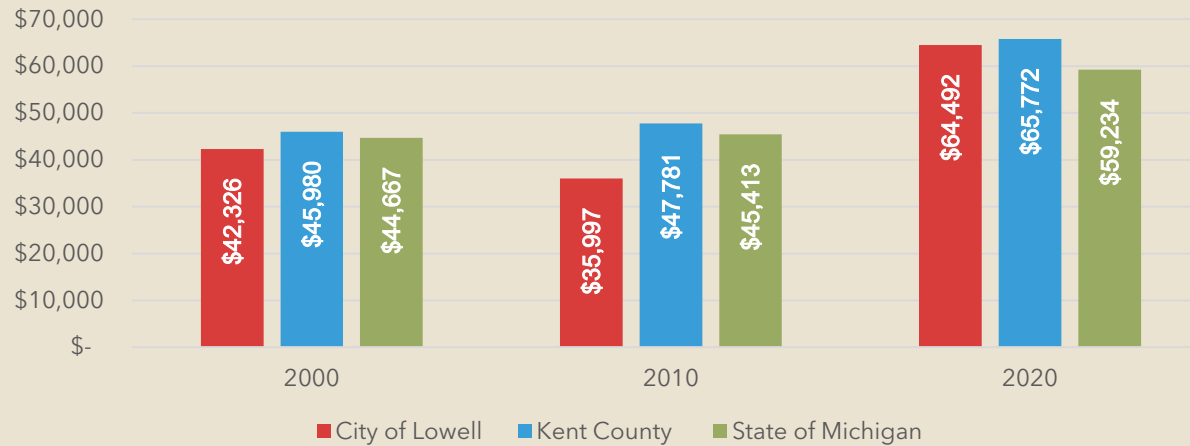


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

INCOME

In 2000, Lowell’s median income stood at \$42,326, slightly lower than both Kent County and the State of Michigan. From 2000 to 2010, Lowell experienced a decline in median household income, reaching \$35,997 in 2010. However, from 2010 to 2020, the City of Lowell saw a remarkable upturn in median household income, surging to \$64,492 surpassing both the state and the county. While both the County and State of Michigan experienced an economic rebound from 2010 to 2020, Lowell’s economic growth and improvement in household income increased at a faster rate.

Figure 1.4 | Median Income, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

EMPLOYMENT

Employment data forms the bedrock for comprehending the local economy, workforce dynamics, infrastructure demands, housing requirements, and community development. By incorporating accurate and up-to-date employment data, a Master Plan can address economic, social, and livability aspects essential for fostering sustainable growth and enhancing the overall well-being of the community.

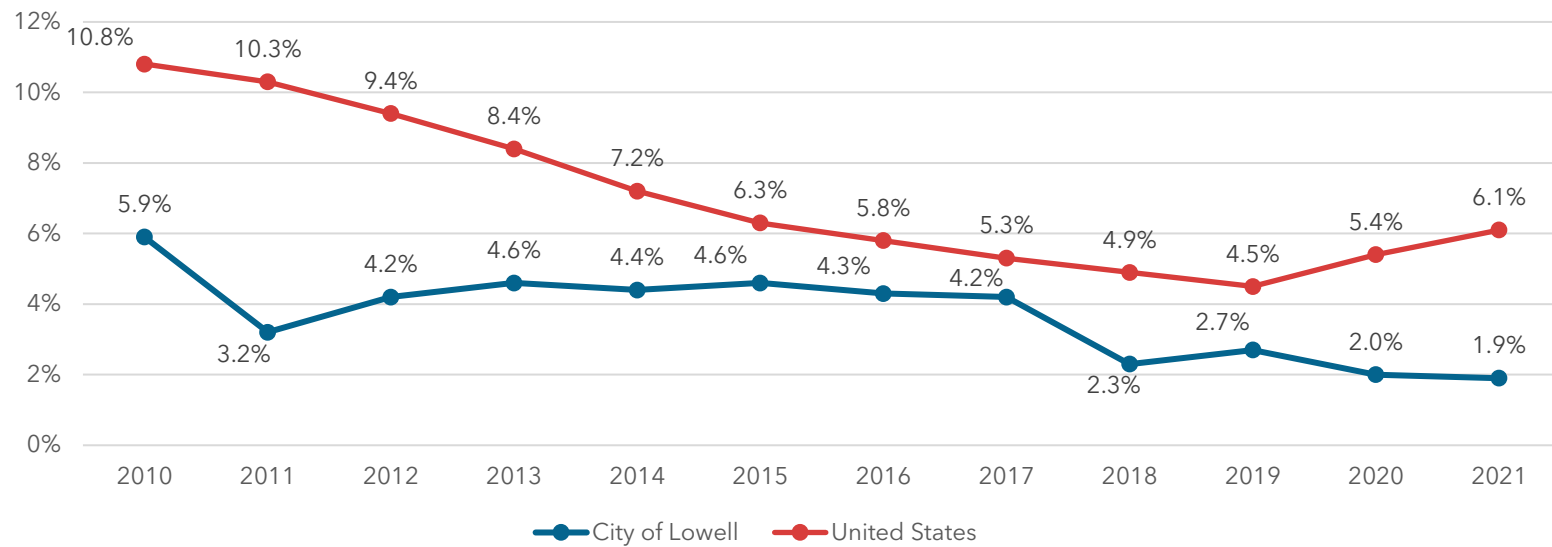
According to the 2021 ACS 5-year estimates, there were a total of 3,196 people of age 16 or above in the City of Lowell. Of that, 1,942 individuals were estimated to be a part of the civilian labor force. Of the civilian labor force, nearly 1,881 individuals are estimated to be employed and about 61 people are estimated to be unemployed. This puts the estimated unemployment rate in Lowell at 1.9%, which is significantly lower than the national unemployment rate of 6.1%. As of July 2024, the unemployment rate in Kent County was 4.4%, the seventh-lowest rate in the state.

Among the categories presented in Figure 2.5, the management, business, science, and arts sector is estimated as the largest, constituting 28.2% of the workforce. Service occupations follow closely, representing 23.7% of the workforce, while sales and office occupations account for 20.2%. The production, transportation, and material moving sector comprises 17.5% of the workforce, and the natural resources, construction, and maintenance sector represents 10.5%. This analysis reflects a diverse range of employment sectors, indicating a balanced mix of industries and occupations within the community. It showcases the significance of sectors such as management, business, science, and arts, which play a crucial role in driving economic activity, while also highlighting the importance of service-oriented roles and other supporting occupations.



The employment industry data reveals a diverse range of sectors within the analyzed area. Educational services, health care, and social assistance emerge as the largest sector, employing 27.3% of the workforce. Manufacturing follows closely, employing 18.6% of individuals. Professional, scientific, and management, along with administrative and waste management occupations, account for 10.7% of the workforce. Finance and insurance, as well as real estate and rental and leasing, employ 10.3% of individuals, while retail trade represents 8.5%. The construction sector employs 7.9% of the workforce, and arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation and food services employ 6.9%. Other services, excluding public administration, constitute 4.4% of employment. Transportation and warehousing, along with utilities, employ 2.7% of individuals, while wholesale trade represents 1.3%. Lastly, agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining account for 0.8%, and the information sector employs 0.7% of the workforce.

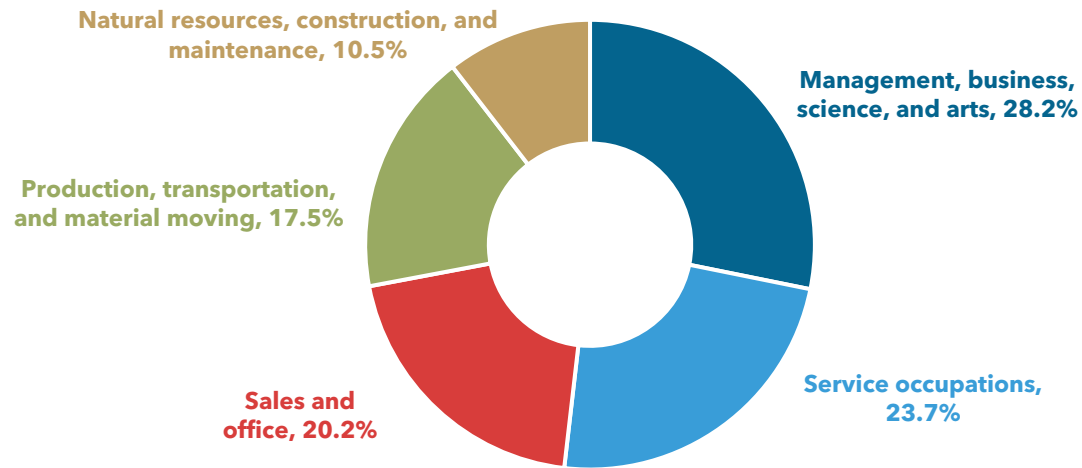
Figure 1.5 | Unemployment Rate, 2020-2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

This analysis highlights a diverse and varied employment landscape within the community, encompassing sectors such as education, health care, manufacturing, professional services, finance, retail, construction, arts and entertainment, and transportation. The prominence of educational services, health care, and social assistance indicates the importance of the local education and health sectors in providing essential services to the community. Additionally, the presence of manufacturing and professional services sectors signifies the existence of skilled employment opportunities. The variety of sectors demonstrates a robust and well-rounded local economy, supporting the livelihoods of individuals with diverse skill sets and interests.

Figure 1.6 | Employment by Occupation, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The data on commuting habits provides insights into the transportation choices and mean travel time to work within the analyzed area. The majority of individuals, accounting for 77.5%, commute by driving alone in a car, truck, or van, indicating a heavy reliance on private vehicles for daily transportation. Carpooled commuting represents a smaller percentage at 5.8%, suggesting some degree of shared transportation. Walking is chosen by 7.1% of the population, indicating a noteworthy number of individuals who engage in active transportation while 6.4% of individuals work from home, likely benefiting from remote work arrangements. The mean travel time to work is reported as 25 minutes, reflecting an average commute duration, likely as a result of people working in or near the City of Grand Rapids. Overall, the data underscores the significance of private vehicle usage in commuting patterns, but also reveals a notable portion of individuals who engage in alternative modes of transportation such as walking or working from home.

Lowell Public Schools, King Milling, Litehouse Foods, and Atwood are among the top employers in the City.

Top 4 Employment Industries



Table 1.3 | Employment by Industry, 2021

| Employment Industry | Number of People | Percent of People |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance | 514 | 27.3% |
| Manufacturing | 350 | 18.6% |
| Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services | 201 | 10.7% |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing | 193 | 10.3% |
| Retail trade | 160 | 8.5% |
| Construction | 149 | 7.9% |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services | 129 | 6.9% |
| Other services, except public administration | 82 | 4.4% |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 51 | 2.7% |
| Wholesale trade | 24 | 1.3% |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining | 15 | 0.8% |
| Information | 13 | 0.7% |

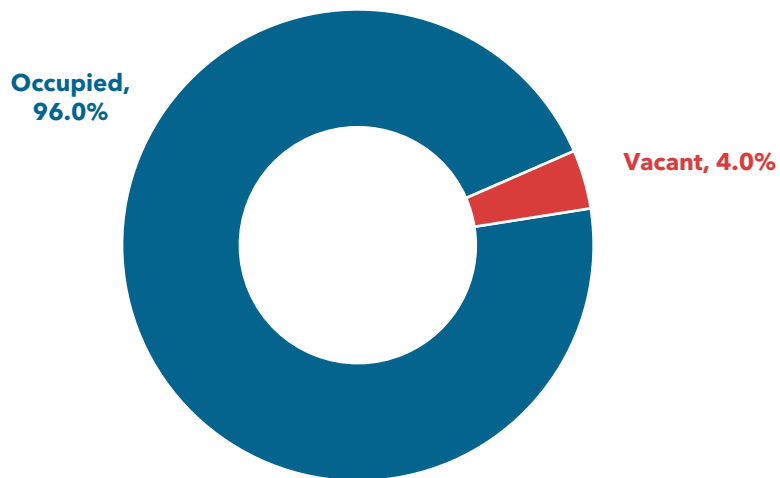
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

HOUSING

Examining housing is crucial to any planning effort as they serve as a key unit of analysis, providing insights into the demand for housing units. Changes in the number of households can indicate fluctuations in the need for housing. Furthermore, households act as fundamental purchasing units, generating demand for various retail services. Therefore, understanding the characteristics and dynamics of households is essential for comprehending housing demands and retail market trends within the City.

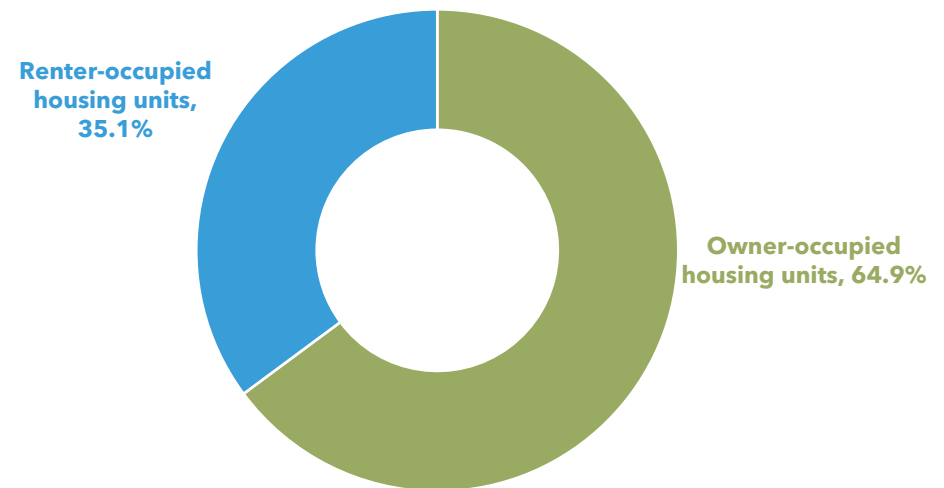
Figure 1.8 shows that owner-occupied housing units account for 64.9% of housing in the City, while 35.1% of the City's housing units are renter-occupied. This is a healthy mix of rental versus owner occupancy and suggests stable residential landscape. Understanding the balance between owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing units is essential for comprehending the housing dynamics and meeting the diverse housing needs of the community.

Figure 1.7 | Housing Units, 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

Figure 1.8 | Housing by Occupancy, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 1.4 | Occupied Housing Units by Type, 2021

| Type of Unit | Number of Units | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| 1, detached | 1,097 | 69.2% |
| 1, attached | 45 | 2.8% |
| 2 apartments | 24 | 1.5% |
| 3 or 4 apartments | 87 | 5.5% |
| 5 to 9 apartments | 150 | 9.5% |
| 10 or more apartments | 105 | 6.6% |
| Mobile home or other type of housing | 77 | 4.9% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Table 1.4 provides insights into the types of housing units within the City of Lowell. 69.2% of housing units in the City are detached single-family dwellings. Larger multi-family developments (either condominiums or apartments) can be found throughout the City, with 9.5% of units comprising five to nine apartments, and 6.6% consisting of 10 or more apartments. Moreover, about 4.9% of the units are estimated to be mobile homes or other unconventional housing types, providing alternative housing choices within the community. This mostly includes manufactured homes, as there are two such communities in Lowell. Overall, Table 1.4 demonstrates a diverse housing market with options for individuals or families seeking apartment living.

According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR) calculations of ACS and Federal Housing Finance Agency data, the average median home value for Kent County was estimated at \$323,256 with a monthly mortgage payment at \$1,489. Furthermore, the average median sale price for homes in the City of Lowell were estimated to be \$280,000, based on Redfin calculations of home data from MLS and other public records. The average monthly rent for apartments in City of Lowell was estimated as \$1,538 for an average apartment size of 1,032 square feet, according to Rentcafe.com.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population trends refer to the historical direction a community has followed with respect to its population counts while population projections refer to the direction a community is anticipated to follow in future years. The Lowell community has followed a steadily increasing population trend over the past few decades. The statistical averaging techniques in this section project the City's population growth to the year 2050. The approaches are intended to provide a general sense of growth in the future. The following generalizations are limited in scope and are based on past trends documented by the United States Census Bureau and the City data.

The **Arithmetic Method** projects future population counts based on the increase or decrease in the average number of persons per year. The following projections are based on an average decrease of 5 persons per year in Lowell since 1980.

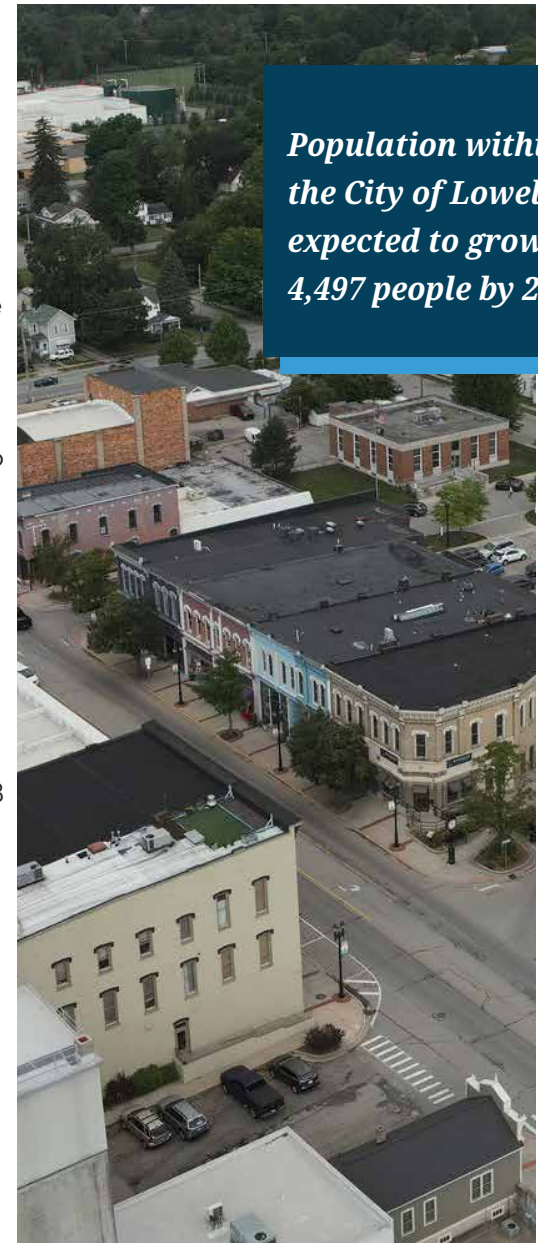
The **Growth Rate Method** assumes growth or decline will occur at the same rate as it did in the past, similar to the Arithmetic Method, but as a percentage instead of a fixed number. According to the U.S. Census, the population rate of growth in the City of Lowell was approximately 0.16% per year between 1980 and 2020.

The **Building Permit Method** is based on the number of residential building permits issued by the City. A total of 120 permits were allowed in the City of Lowell from 2012 - 2023 with an average of 10 permits per year. The City's average household size as estimated by the Census Bureau was 2.37 persons. Extrapolating these figures into the future also projects population growth if current trends remain the same.

Table 1.5 summarizes the population projection information based on an average of all three projection methods which shows population for the City of Lowell growing to 4,260 by 2030, 4,378 by 2040, and 4,497 by 2050.

Table 1.5 | Population Projections

| Method | Current | Projected Population | | |
|-----------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 2020 | 2030 | 2040 | 2050 |
| Arithmetic | 4,142 | 4,192 | 4,242 | 4,292 |
| Growth Rate | 4,142 | 4,209 | 4,277 | 4,345 |
| Building Permit | 4,142 | 4,379 | 4,616 | 4,853 |
| Average | 4,142 | 4,260 | 4,378 | 4,497 |



Population within the City of Lowell is expected to grow to 4,497 people by 2050.

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CHAPTER 3

Our Environment



The natural features of a city play a crucial role in shaping its Master Plan. This section discusses the natural features found in within the City of Lowell.

Lowell's natural beauty serves as a significant asset for urban development. Incorporating and preserving these natural features within the master plan ensures harmonious blend of human-made structures and the surrounding environment. The rolling topography creates unique neighborhoods with stunning views and distinctive character, while the forests and rivers provide opportunities for recreational spaces and economic initiatives. By embracing Lowell's natural features, the Master Plan can foster a sustainable and livable community, where residents can enjoy the benefits of nature while experiencing the conveniences of modern urban living.

Recognizing and incorporating natural features into the Master Plan is essential for promoting environmental sustainability, enhancing quality of life, attracting visitors and businesses, and preserving the unique identity of the City. By prioritizing the protection an integration of these natural assets, the Master Plan can create a balanced and resilient urban environment that benefits both present and future generations.



GEOGRAPHY

Lowell lies on the western part of the state of Michigan in Kent County, east of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan area. Lowell is situated along the banks of the Flat River and the Grand River, which flow through the City. Lowell is easily accessible, as it is connected to major roadways, including Interstate 96, making it convenient for commuting and travel to nearby cities and townships. Nearby Townships include, Vergennes Township (north), Lowell Charter Township (south), Cascade Township (west), and Boston Township, Ionia County (east). Additionally, the City of Lowell's geographic location places it within proximity to various natural features that provide a naturally attractive aesthetic character to the City.

HYDROLOGY

The City is located along Flat River, which winds its way through the area, adding natural beauty to the surroundings. Lowell also encompasses a section of the Grand River which flows along the southern boundary of the City. Proximity to two major water bodies adds largely to the natural features and charm of the City, enhancing the overall appeal of its geography. The Flat River is a significant waterway that originates in Six Lakes and flows south through the cities of Greenville, Belding, and Lowell before emptying into the Grand River. It serves as a prominent feature of the City. Of the approximate 66 miles of Flat River mainstream, 1.3 miles (2%) flows through the City of Lowell. The hydrology of Lowell also includes smaller creeks and streams that intersect with the Flat River or flow into it. These tributaries contribute to the overall water network of the City and play a role in shaping the local hydrological patterns.

The hydrological features of Lowell, including the Flat River and its tributaries, not only provide a scenic element to the City's landscape but also offer opportunities for recreational activities such as fishing, boating, and water-based sports. Additionally, the hydrology of the area supports the local ecosystem by providing habitats for various aquatic species and contributing to the overall ecological balance. Lowell Friends of the Flat is a non-profit organization that aims to preserve and maintain the Flat River ecosystem, prevent invasive species and improve the overall quality of life within the City of Lowell.





Watersheds

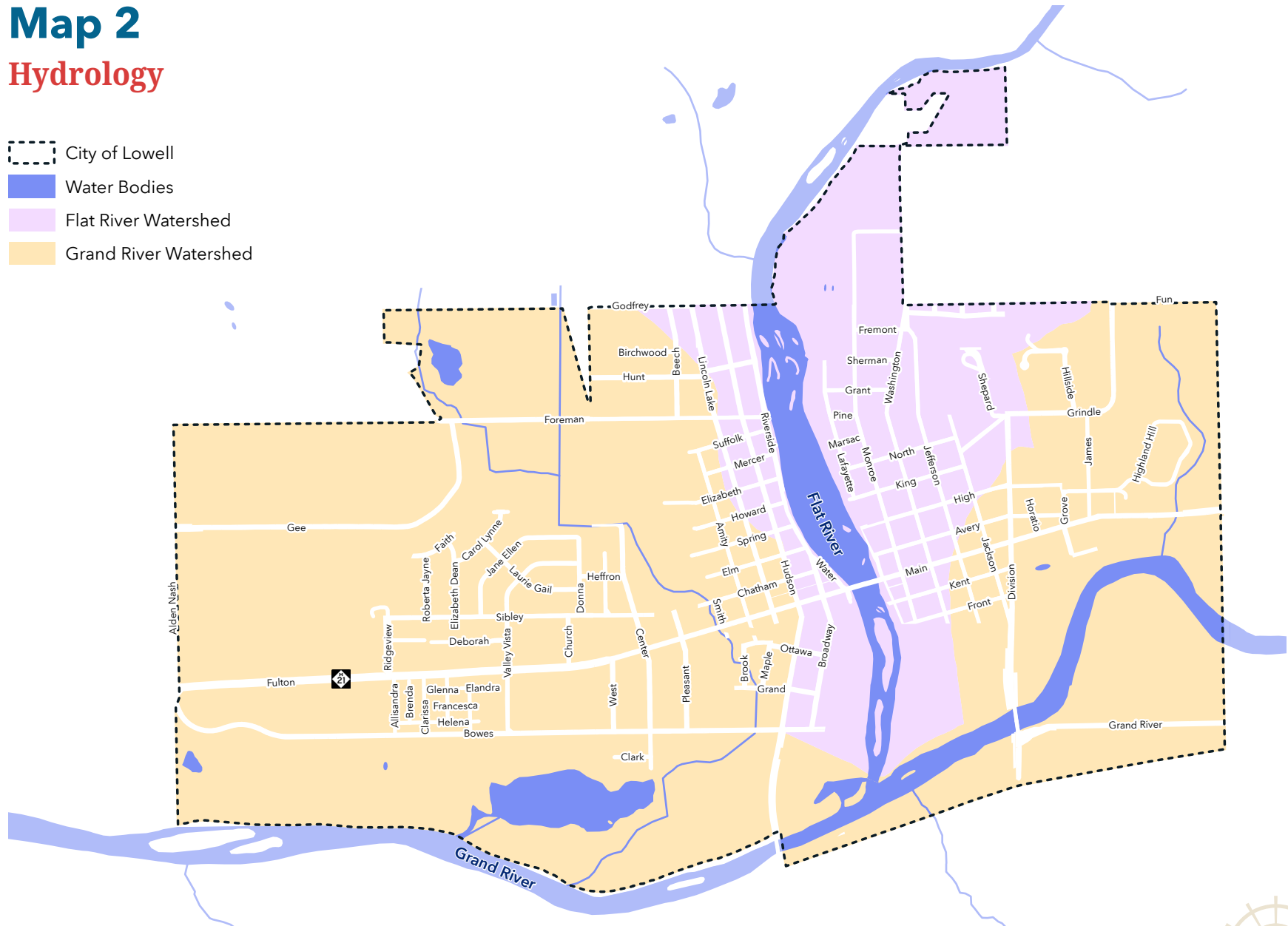
The City of Lowell falls within the Grand River Watershed, and the Flat River is a sub-watershed of the Grand River. This is important to note as it means that surface waters in the City flow towards and into the Grand and Flat Rivers. The protection of these rivers is a key priority since they are both recreational and cultural staples for Lowell and many other nearby communities, such as Greenville and Belding.



Map 2

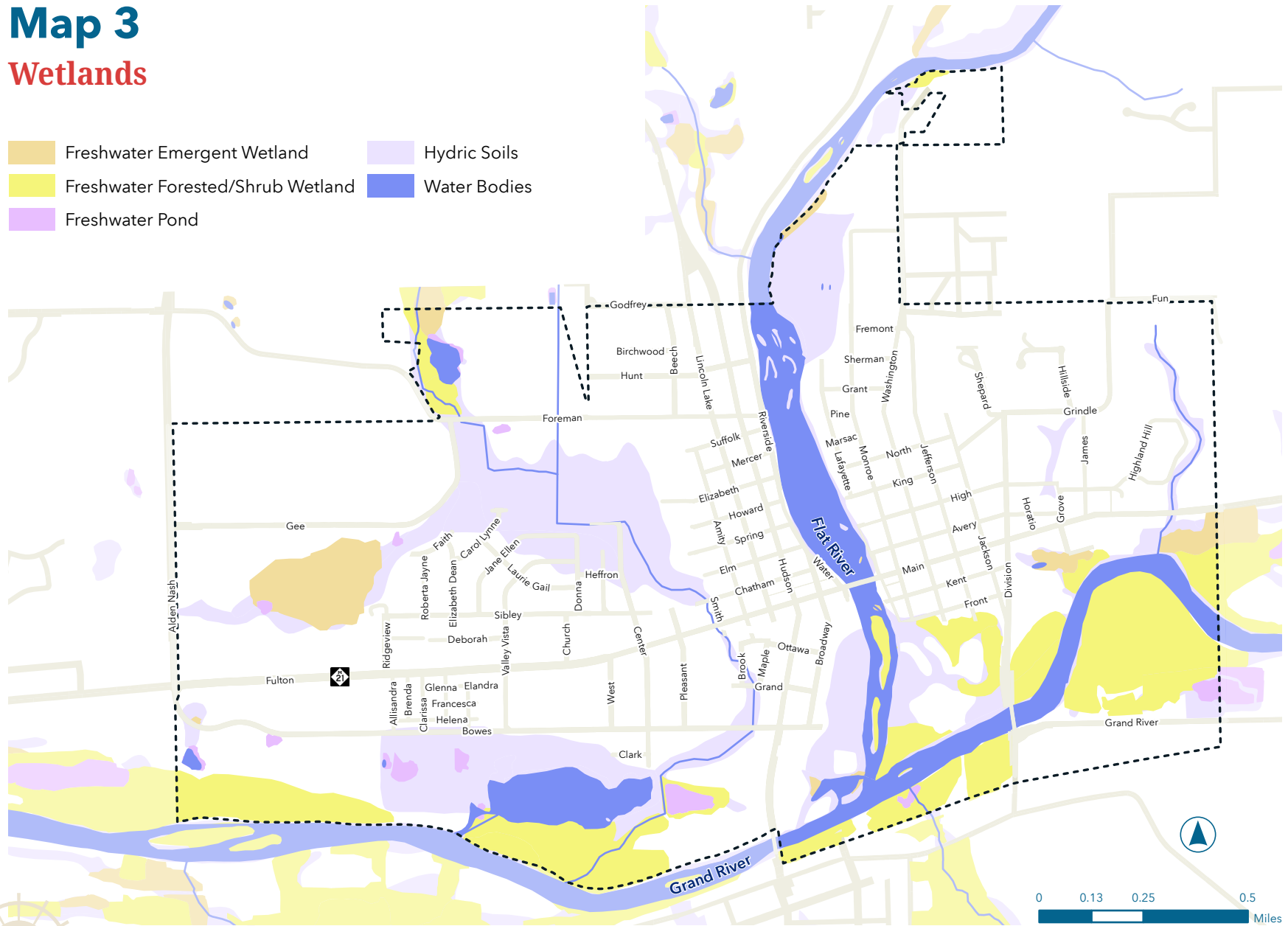
Hydrology

-  City of Lowell
-  Water Bodies
-  Flat River Watershed
-  Grand River Watershed



Map 3 Wetlands

- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Freshwater Pond
- Hydric Soils
- Water Bodies



Wetlands

Area of wetlands in the City of Lowell can be found around the Grand River along the southern boundary of the City. As shown in Map 3, these wetland areas are mainly Freshwater Forested/Shrub wetlands and areas of hydric soils. Hydric soils form under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part.

Wetlands are vital to the local ecosystem as they can provide essential breeding grounds, nesting sites, and feeding area for a variety of waterfowl, migratory birds, and amphibians. They also serve as a natural filtration system, purifying water, and mitigating floods by absorbing excess rainfall and runoff. Wetlands:

- Provide important refuge for wildlife in drought conditions;
- Have intrinsic natural beauty and provide opportunities for recreation activities such as boating, swimming, hiking and bird watching;
- Provide a natural hydrological balance in the landscape and help to provide protection against floods;
- Provide water quality protection in the catchment by filtering pollutants such as sediments, nutrients, organic and inorganic matter, and pathogens; and
- Provide nursery areas for fish, and breeding grounds for wildlife, particularly waterbirds.

Floodplains

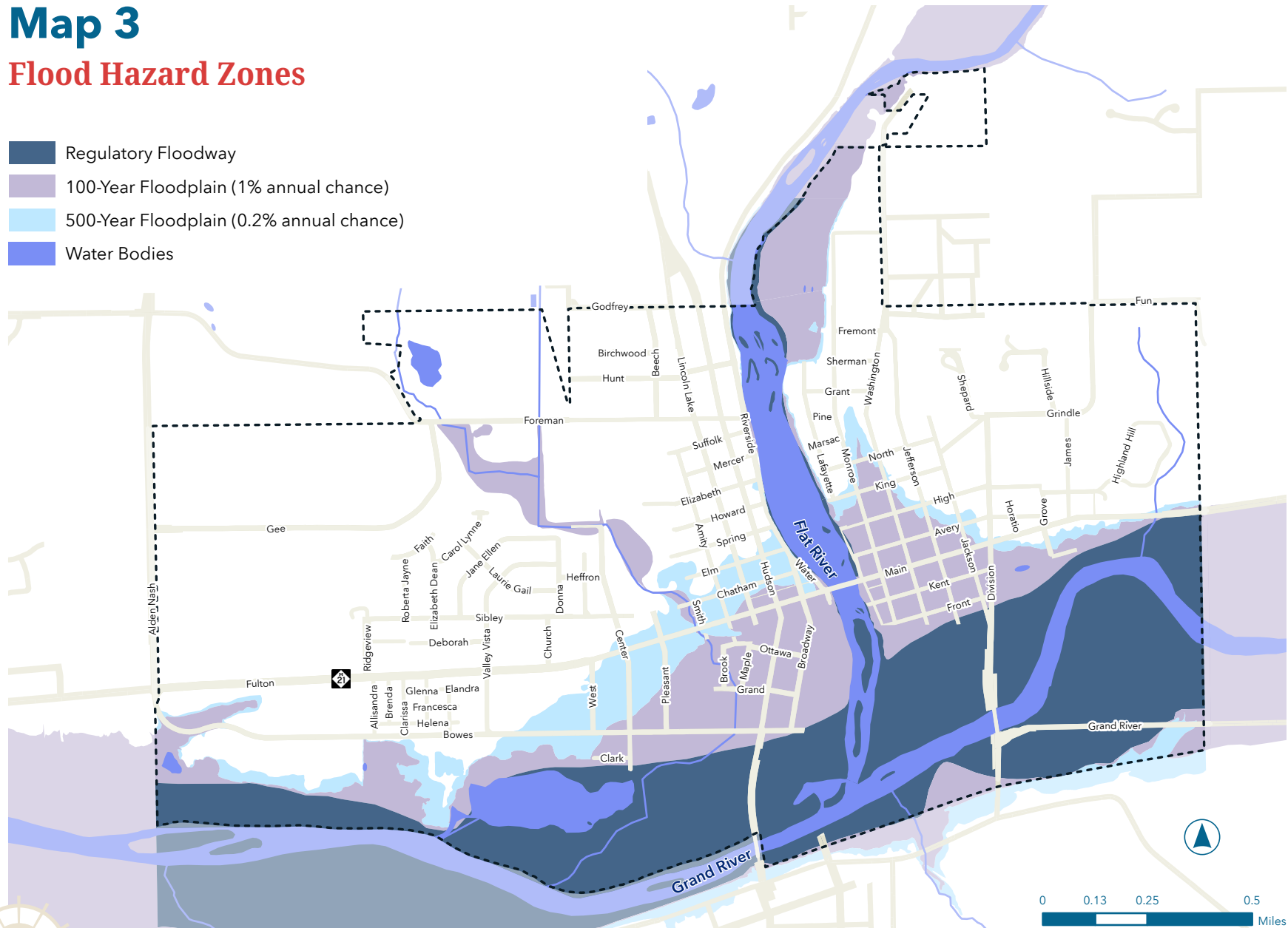
A river, stream, lake, or drain may on occasion overflow their banks and inundate adjacent land areas. The land that is inundated by water is defined as a floodplain. In Michigan, and nationally, the term “floodplain” means that the land is that will be inundated by the overflow water resulting from a 100-year flood (a flood which has a 1% chance of occurring any given year). Map 4 shows areas that have a 1% chance of flooding (they 100-year floodplain) and areas that have a 0.2% chance of flood hazard in any given year(the 500-year floodplain).

A regulatory floodway means the channel of a river adjacent land areas that must be reserved in order to discharge the base flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than a designated height. Communities must regulate development in these areas to ensure that there are no increases in upstream flood elevations.

Map 3

Flood Hazard Zones

- Regulatory Floodway
- 100-Year Floodplain (1% annual chance)
- 500-Year Floodplain (0.2% annual chance)
- Water Bodies



The State of Michigan's Floodplain Regulatory Authority, found in Part 31, Water Resources Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), requires that a permit be obtained prior to any alteration or occupation of the 100-year floodplain of a river, stream or drain. The floodplain is divided into two parts, the floodway which carries most of the flow during a flood event, and the floodway fringe which is an area of very slow-moving water or "slack water". Floodways are the channel of a river or stream and those portions of the floodplain adjoining the channel which are reasonably required to carry and discharge the 100-year flood; these are high hazard areas of rapidly moving water during times of flood. The purpose of Part 31 is to assure that the flow carrying capacity of a watercourse is not harmfully obstructed, and that the floodway portion of the floodplain is not used for residential construction. In general, construction and fill may be permitted in the portions of the floodplain that are not floodway, if local ordinance and building standards are met, and compensating excavation is provided equal to the volume of fill placed in the floodplain. New residential construction is specifically prohibited in the floodway.



Wellhead Protection Areas

The City's Public Water Treatment Plant has developed a Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP). The WHPP is a program that minimizes the risk of contamination to public groundwater supplies by managing the land area surrounding a well. The intent of the program is to protect areas around municipal wellfields from contamination through the identification of potential contamination sources, the development of contingency plans in the event of groundwater contamination, and establishing standards to be considered in the selection of new municipal well locations.

Through scientific study, a WHPP defines a wellhead protection area (WHPA). The WHPA is defined as the land surface and subsurface area surrounding a wellfield through which water (or contaminants) can enter the ground and move toward the wellfield within a specific time period. The purpose of implementing a WHPP is to provide a foundation for preventing groundwater contamination by identifying contaminant sources within the WHPA and developing a management plan for the WHPA.

The City is in the process of implementing the wellhead protection program to protect the wellhead protection area. Lowell and Vergennes Townships are cooperating in the process. The City should examine its Zoning Ordinance to ensure that requirements supporting wellhead protection are included in the Ordinance.

SOIL

Understanding the soil composition is an important part of land use planning. Different soils can affect storm water run-off, water quality and preservation, soil erosion, and sediment control. Soils provide valuable information about the composition, fertility, and drainage characteristics of the land. Understanding the soil types in an area helps determine the suitability for agriculture, construction, and infrastructure projects. It influences decisions related to land zoning, conservation, and environmental protection. By considering soil properties in a master plan, jurisdictions can ensure responsible land use practices, preserve natural resources, and create sustainable and resilient communities. As shown in Map 5, ten different soil types can be found in the City of Lowell. These soil types are:

- Loam
- Sand
- Muck
- Loamy sand
- Fine sand
- Sandy loam
- Loamy fine sand
- Marlette-Oakville-Boyer complex
- Pits, gravel
- Urban land

The City of Lowell being situated within the Grand River Glacial Series means that the soil composition is a result of glacial deposits left behind by past ice sheets. The predominant soil type in Lowell and its surrounding areas is typically loamy and well drained due to the glacial till. Loamy is a balanced soil type that contains a mixture of sand, silt, and clay providing good fertility and water retention properties. This is illustrated in Map 5, with much of the City resting on a loamy and loamy sandy soil types.












Loamy sand soil is a type of soil that combines characteristics of both loam and sandy soils. It is a well-draining soil with a relatively equal mixture of sand, silt, and clay particles. The sandy component provides good drainage, allowing excess water to move through the soil easily and preventing waterlogging. At the same time, the presence of silt and clay particles enhances its ability to hold some moisture and nutrients which is good for gardening and farming. These soils can offer a suitable foundation base for buildings, given its balanced mixture of sand, silt, and clay. Sandy soils, on the other hand, have high proportion of sand and these soils drain water quickly and dry out faster which makes them low in nutrients. While sandy soils have good drainage, they also possess low load-bearing capacity making it challenging for construction and foundation stability.

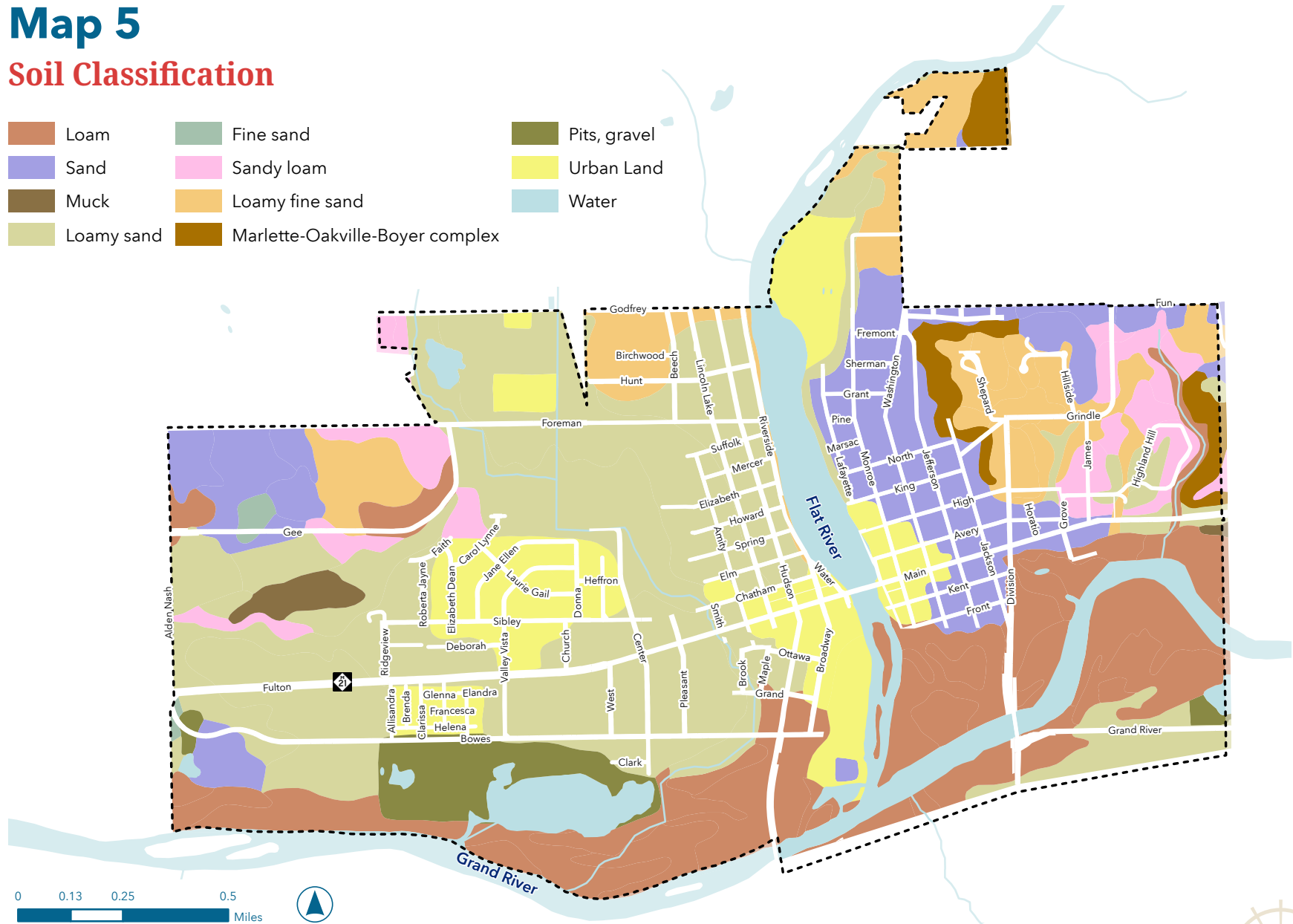
Scattered area of urban land, sandy, and loamy fine sand can also be found in the City. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines urban land as soils in area of high population density in largely built environment. Soils in urban areas exhibit a wide variety of conditions and properties and may have impervious surfaces, such as buildings and pavement.



Map 5

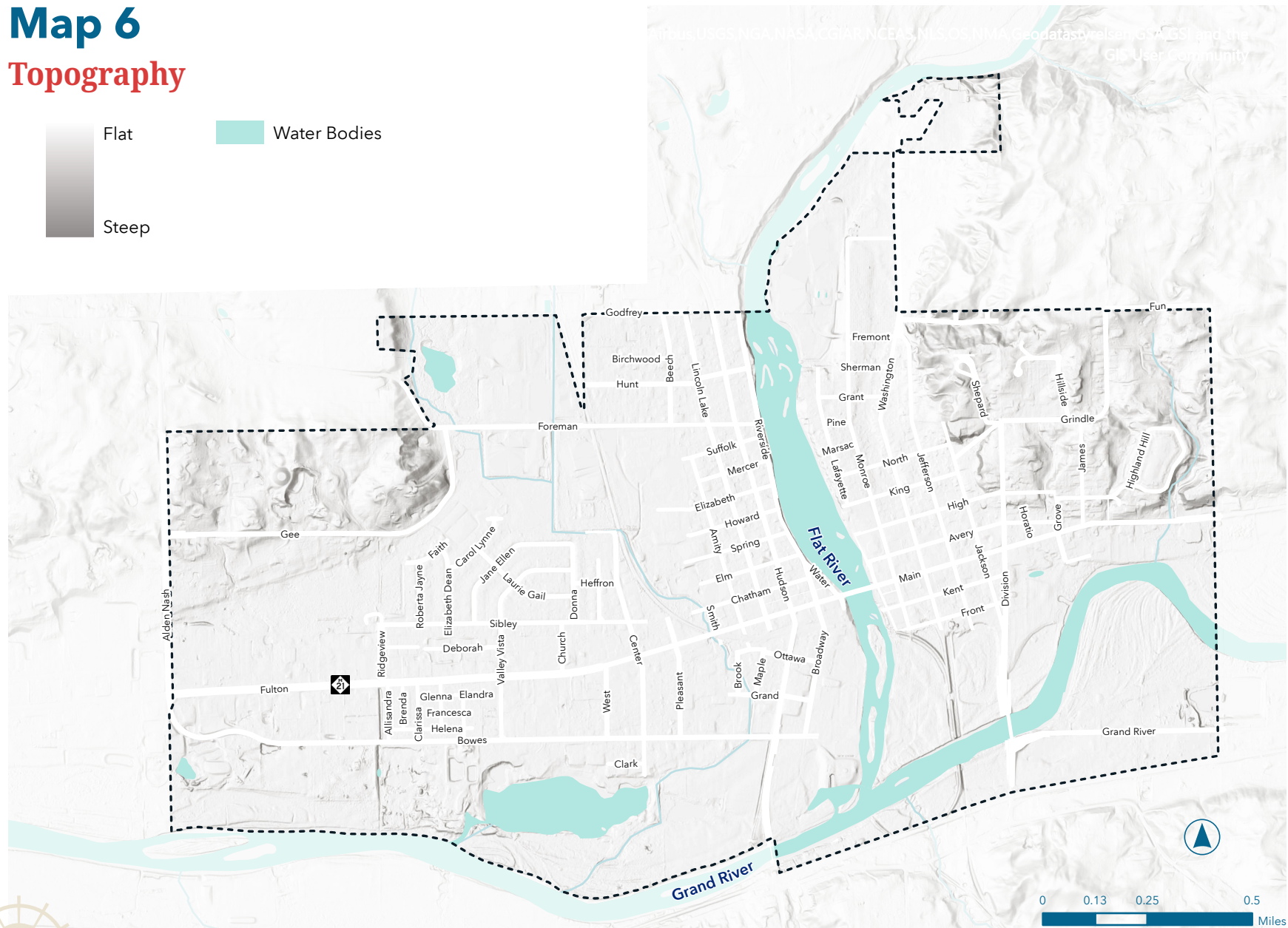
Soil Classification

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
|  Loam |  Fine sand |  Pits, gravel |
|  Sand |  Sandy loam |  Urban Land |
|  Muck |  Loamy fine sand |  Water |
|  Loamy sand |  Marlette-Oakville-Boyer complex | |



Map 6 Topography

Atlas LISGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodata, Geisen, G, A, ISI and the GIS User community



TOPOGRAPHY

The region's topography is characterized by gentle slopes and elevation changes, providing opportunities for outdoor activities. Map 6 illustrates topography in the City of Lowell. Most of the City of Lowell is located on level ground, and the most intensive development in the City has occurred on the lower-lying level areas near the rivers. Steeper slopes and elevated ground are located at the northeast and northwest corners of the City.

Areas with steeper slopes are important natural areas, and the City should consider protecting the existing slopes from degradation as a result of development. These areas can be susceptible to erosion and failure as a result of poorly executed development. Slope failure can lead to loss of property and have a deleterious impact on the natural environment.

LAND COVER

Land cover refers to the vegetation and land use present within a particular community. In the case of the City of Lowell, the land cover data was obtained from the National Land Cover Dataset (NLCD) prepared by the United States Geological Services (USGS) in 2019. This dataset was generated by analyzing Landsat TM satellite imagery through an automated computer-based process. To ensure accuracy, an assessment of the satellite data was conducted, which involved comparing it to aerial photographs to evaluate the quality of the computer-based interpretation.

The 2019 data was released in May 2021 to provide "explicit reliable information on the Nation's land cover and land cover change". The information is useful in determining the distribution and development patterns and their change over time throughout the City. The 2019 NLCD includes various classes of land cover type based on a modified Anderson level II classification system. While the land cover data may not be entirely accurate, it provides a broader understanding of the overall land cover composition within the City of Lowell.

As shown in Map 7, the predominant land cover type in the City of Lowell is the Developed land. Developed land is further classified into four categories, open space, low intensity, medium intensity, and high intensity.

- Developed, Open Space areas consist of a combination of constructed materials and mostly vegetated spaces, such as lawns. Less than 20% of the total cover is composed of impervious surfaces. Examples include large-lot single-family housing units, parks, golf courses, and landscaped areas used for recreation, erosion control, or aesthetics.
- Developed, Low Intensity areas contain a mix of constructed materials and vegetation, with impervious surfaces accounting for 20% to 49% of the total cover. They typically include single-family housing units.
- Developed, Medium Intensity areas also have a blend of constructed materials and vegetation, but impervious surfaces make up 50% to 79% of the total cover. They commonly consist of single-family housing units.
- Developed, High Intensity areas are highly developed areas that have a high concentration of residential or commercial/industrial buildings, such as apartment complexes and row houses. Impervious surfaces account for 80% to 100% of the total cover.

The remaining land cover in the City is categorized as Forest or Agricultural/Open Space. Agricultural/Open Space comprises various land cover classes, including shrubland, herbaceous areas, pastures, and cultivated crop lands. The Forest land cover class encompasses both evergreen and deciduous forests.

As shown in Table 2.1, the overall land cover of Lowell exhibits a diverse mix of open spaces, forested, and developed areas, highlighting the blend of human-made structures, natural vegetation, and open spaces within the City.

Table 3.1 | Land Cover Classification, 2019

| Land Cover Class | Acres | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|
| Developed, Open Space | 334.5 | 16.7% |
| Developed, Low Intensity | 393.6 | 19.6% |
| Developed, Medium Intensity | 370.1 | 18.5% |
| Developed, High Intensity | 182.8 | 9.1% |
| Wetlands | 304.0 | 15.2% |
| Forest | 250.6 | 12.5% |
| Water Bodies | 116.3 | 5.8% |
| Open Space/Agricultural | 53.2 | 2.7% |

Source: 2019 National Land Cover Dataset, 2019





CHAPTER 4

Our Community



Community facilities play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life, fostering civic engagement, supporting cultural activities, and instilling a sense of community pride.

Alongside essential recreational areas, public schools, and civic buildings, they offer local spaces for interaction, education, and community development. When considering planned growth, it is essential to concrete development in desirable community locations, ensuring that these facilities remain easily accessible and well planned to meet the needs of the residents. The key to creating desirable communities lies in providing convenient access to a suitable array of such facilities.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Water Supply

The City of Lowell owns and operates a drinking water supply system, including a treatment plant and water distribution network. In addition to serving properties within the City, water is also provided to parts of Lowell and Vergennes Townships. There is no specific allocation on the amount of water that may be distributed to the Townships, only a limitation in terms of geographic area that may be served. The ultimate water service area is defined in the 1992 water service contract with Lowell Township.

The water treatment plant is permitted at a capacity of 1.75 million gallons per day and the plant currently treats 700,000 gallons per day on average (approximately 40% of overall capacity) with peaks near 1.6 million gallons per day during the summer months (approximately 90% of overall capacity). The plant currently serves 1,327 customers including the approximately 4,000 people in the City and approximately 2,000 people in Lowell Township. According to its operator, in practical terms there is a half of a million gallons per day in reserve. This is provided by the ground storage tank at the site of the water treatment plant. There are also two (2) storage tanks located in the distribution network to balance out hour-by-hour variations in system demand. Drinking water service is provided on a first come, first served basis. For the fiscal year 2023-24, a City resident pays \$2.62 per 1000 gallons commodity charge and a charge of \$26.88 for “readiness to serve” for a 5/8-inch water meter.

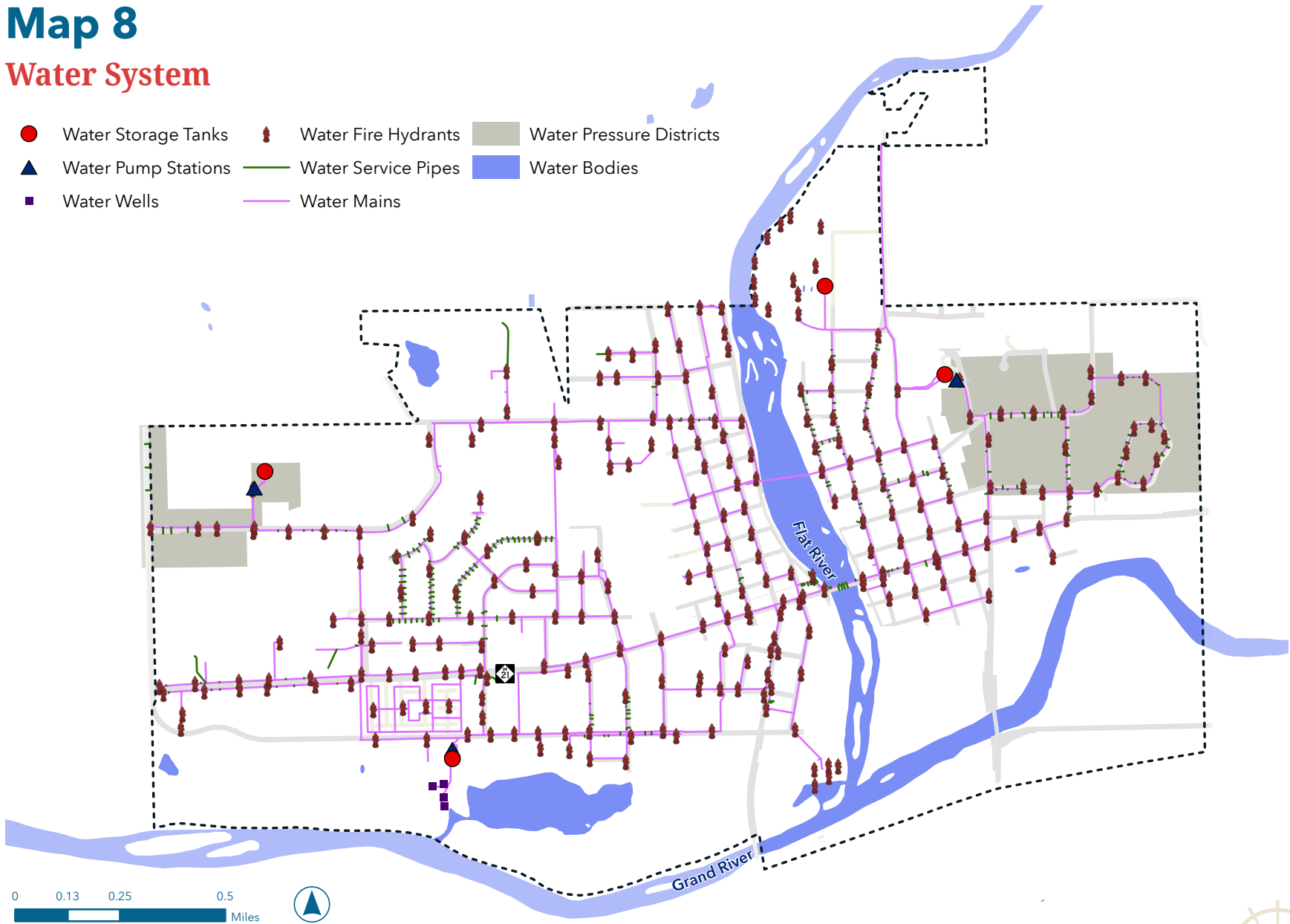
The Michigan Department of the Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) requires that public water utilities plan for a system expansion when the max day demand reaches 80% of the system capacity. In addition, the Water Supply Agreement includes a provision that requires a Joint Water Advisory Committee to study, review, and advise the City and Lowell Township of the need for and options available to expand the water system when the water usage reaches 80% of system design capacity. In 2018, the City of Lowell completed a water treatment plant expansion study. The proposed plant expansion project will double the capacity of the plant to 3.5 million gallons per day and is estimated to cost \$8.4 million.



Map 8

Water System

- Water Storage Tanks
- ▲ Water Pump Stations
- Water Wells
- 🔥 Water Fire Hydrants
- Water Service Pipes
- Water Mains
- Water Pressure Districts
- Water Bodies





Wastewater Treatment

The City of Lowell owns and operates a wastewater collection system and treatment plant. In addition to serving properties within the City, sanitary sewer service is also provided to parts of Lowell and Vergennes Townships. The Lowell Township sanitary sewer contract also provides limited service in Vergennes Township and stipulates that Lowell Township own and maintain the pipes in their contract area. The wastewater treatment system currently services about 5,000 people.

The collection system consists of approximately 96,000 feet of sanitary sewer as well as manholes, three (3) lift stations, and force mains. The City separated storm and sanitary sewers from each other in the 1970's.

The treatment plant treats wastewater to secondary effluent standards using oxidation ditches, oval-shaped concrete tanks that use extended aeration and microorganisms to remove contaminants from the wastewater. The treated effluent water ultimately discharges into the Flat River.

The permitted capacity of the wastewater treatment plant is 1.42 million gallons per day. Over the last five years, the average daily flow through the plant has reached 1.40 million gallons. Per the Lowell Township wholesale contract, 18% of the engineered capacity of the plant is reserved for its use (252,000 gallons per day) anywhere within the Township. Lowell Township currently uses around 12% of the overall plant's capacity. Other than Lowell Township's reserved 18%, wastewater service is provided on a first come, first served basis. Per the current schedule passed in May 2006, a typical City resident is charged a sewer bill of \$4.80 per 1000 gallons and a monthly "readiness to serve" charge of \$29.11 if they have a typical 5/8-inch meter.

The Michigan Department of the Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) requires that public wastewater utilities plan for a system expansion when the max day flow reaches 80% of the plant capacity. In 2019, the City of Lowell completed a wastewater treatment plant expansion study. The proposed plant expansion project will double the capacity of the plant to 2.84 million gallons per day and is estimated to cost \$11.8 million.



Light & Power

Like many Michigan cities, Lowell began supplying power to its residents around 1900. However, by the 1930's most communities had sold off their power plants. Lowell and approximately 40 other Michigan cities continue to supply power to their communities. In addition, Lowell also supplies electricity to parts of Lowell and Vergennes Townships.

Current capacity of the overall system is between 25 and 30 megawatts of power. Current peak usage is around 18 megawatts of power. Using conservative estimates, the City can service its residents and those of Lowell and Vergennes Townships for the next 20 years within its existing capacity. As such, the Board of Light and Power aggressively seeks new customers to add to its current base of 2,674 residential and 447 commercial & industrial customers.

The City of Lowell receives the majority of its electricity through participation in the Michigan Public Power Agency (MPPA). MPPA is a consortium of communities that formed a joint action agency to facilitate and share in energy supply investments through ownership entitlements and purchase power agreements. Lowell's power supply is a diverse set of resources, which include, coal, natural gas, landfill gas, wind, and solar resources. Lowell is scheduled to cease coal operations in 2028. Lowell also has a local power generation plant that is primarily used during peak load and for emergency grid support. Lowell's plant consists of two natural gas fired simple cycle turbines and can generate approximately 6.5 megawatts of power.

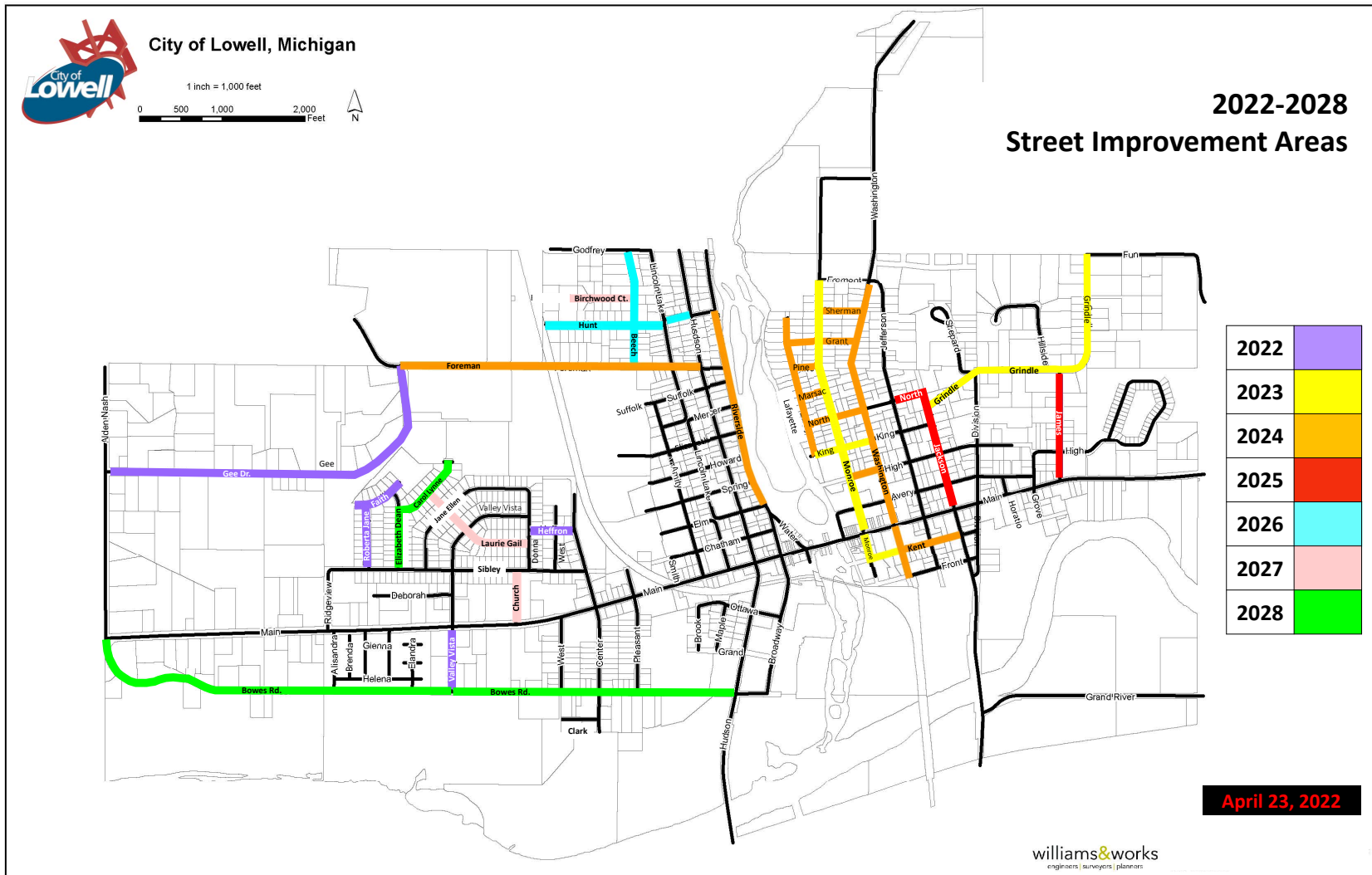


Streets

Within the City of Lowell, key thoroughfares feature M-21(aka Main Street/Fulton Street). M-21 runs along the northern bank of the Grand River, turning southeasterly and east to Lowell. The roadway passes through downtown and over the Flat River near its confluence with the Grand. M-21 runs east of town through the southern end of the Lowell State Gaming Area and crosses into Ionia County. This major artery serves as a route through the heart of the community, dividing the City into its northern and southern halves. M-21 facilitates essential connectivity between the cities of Grand Rapids and Flint by passing through several small towns and cities along its course.

The Department of Public Works is responsible for the maintenance of the City's local and major streets. Maintenance activities include routine patching, repairs, plowing, snow removal, and sweeping. In addition, the DPW also maintains the City's traffic signage and pavement markings; trims and removes trees within the right of way; maintains storm catch basins and culverts, and assists with special events with barricading and street closures. There is a 7-year road improvement plan which aims to improve several streets throughout the City from 2021-2027. The Street Improvement Areas are shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 | Street Improvements, 2022-2028



Traffic Counts

Traffic counts provide vital data on current and historic traffic patterns. This information is essential for planning and designing an efficient transportation system and ensuring that the infrastructure can accommodate traffic volumes. S shown in Map 9, the highest traffic counts (AADT - Annual Average Daily Traffic) can be seen on Fulton St/Main St, Hudson St, and Alden Nash Ave. Table 3.1 shows the traffic counts from 2021-2022 for major street in the City of Lowell.

Table 4.1 | Traffic Counts, 2021-2022

| Street | Approach | At | Directions | AADT |
|-------------------|----------|-----------------|------------|--------|
| Fulton Street | West of | Valley Vista Dr | EB/WB | 12,788 |
| Hudson Street | North of | Foreman St | NB/SB | 11,712 |
| Hudson Street | North of | Hunt St | NB/SB | 8,136 |
| Alden Nash Avenue | North of | Main St | NB/SB | 7,028 |
| Bowes Road | West of | Hudson St | EB/WB | 3,686 |
| Grand River Drive | North of | Oberley Dr | NB/SB | 2,960 |
| Bowes Road | South of | Main St | NB/SB | 2,901 |
| Monroe Street | North of | Main St | NB/SB | 2,367 |
| Riverside Drive* | North of | Hunt St | NB/SB | 1,534 |
| Hunt Street | East of | Hudson St | EB/WB | 1,362 |
| Foreman Street | West of | Hudson St | EB/WB | 1,322 |
| Foreman Street | East of | Gee Dr | EB/WB | 1,200 |
| Gee Drive | East of | Alden Nash Ave | EB/WB | 897 |

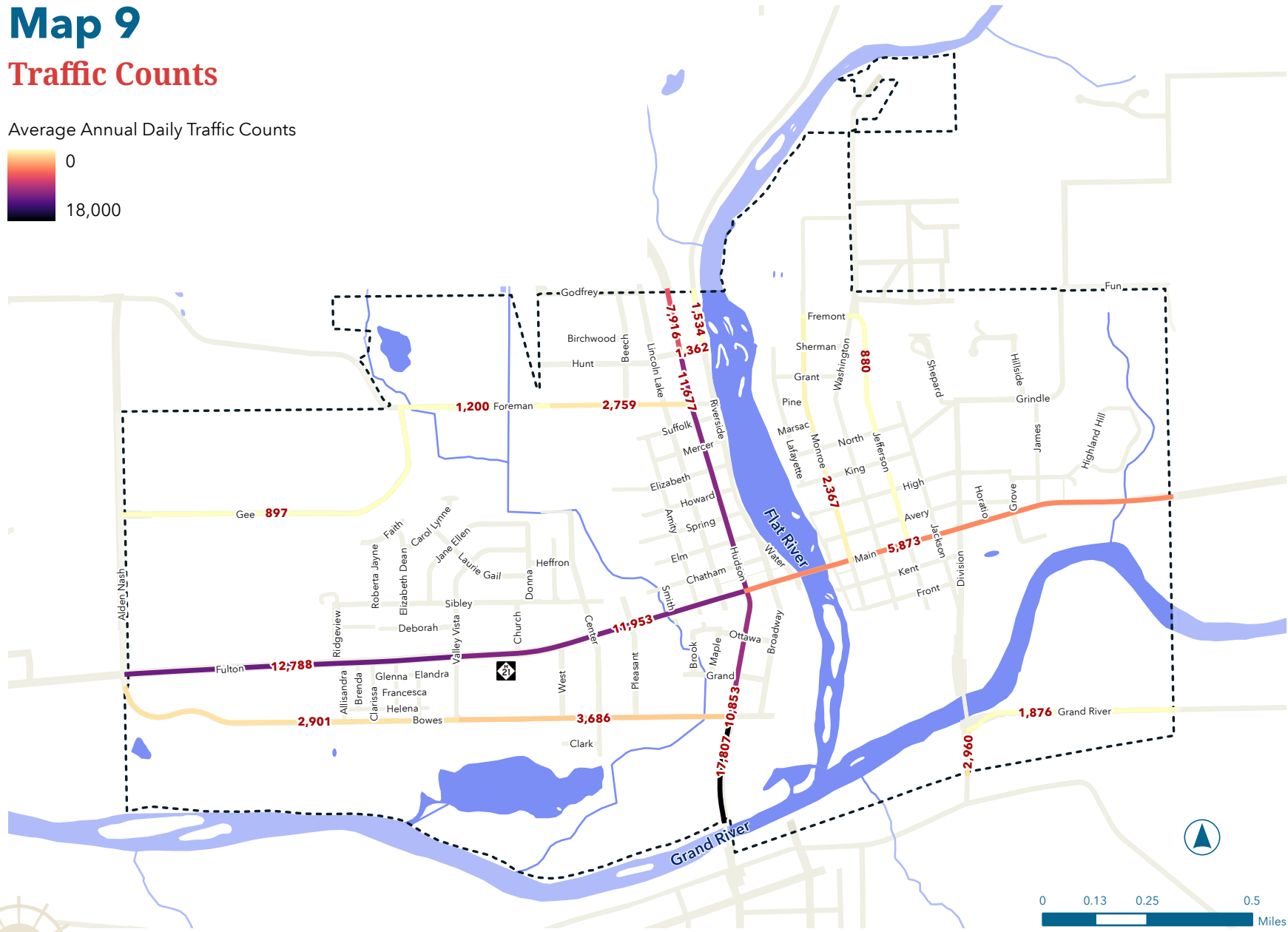
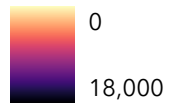
Source: Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Traffic Monitoring Program

* Riverside Drive was updated to include a barrier, which is expected to result in a reduction in Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT).

Map 9

Traffic Counts

Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts



PUBLIC FACILITIES, SERVICES & RECREATION

The City has a variety of municipal facilities, including: City Hall with the attached police station, fire station, the water and wastewater treatment plants, a department of public works garage, light, power and cable facilities, an airport, several parks, and the Oakwood Cemetery. The City Hall was extensively renovated and rededicated for service on July 12, 2003.

Police

The City of Lowell Police Department formed in 1949 and serves the City of Lowell. The current police force is comprised of 6 full-time officers, a contingent of part-time officers, two clerical staff and a school crossing guard. The department provides professional public safety services which includes, but are certainly not limited to: patrols, responding to calls about criminal and noncriminal matters, accident investigation, and enforces city code violations.

Fire

The Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority serves the City of Lowell, Vergennes Township, and the northern two-thirds of Lowell Township. This multi-jurisdictional fire department is funded from the general fund from the City of Lowell and a separate dedicated millage supporting it in both Vergennes and Lowell Townships. This 60-square-mile area contains a population of approximately 17,000 people. The department is an all-hazards mitigations department, responding to all fires, accidents with injuries, and medical emergencies. One full-time chief, one full-time firefighter, 32 part-time firefighters staff the Department. Over the last 5 years (2018-2023), the department responded to an average of 1,000 calls annually. The fire station is located at 315 S. Hudson Street. Equipment includes 3 Class A Pumpers, 1 3000-gallon tender, two medic units, 2 brush units, two water rescue units, 1 UTV, and a command unit. The department currently has an ISO rating of 4 in the City of Lowell and 4 in the Townships. Mutual aid agreements are in place with the surrounding communities as well.

Waste

The City has a contract with one waste hauler, but residents are free to contract with others. Recycling service for paper, glass and cans is available to City residents along with curbside yard waste pick up. No burning is allowed within City limits.

Airport

The Lowell City Airport is located north of the City on the east side of Lincoln Lake Avenue. Under contract, the School of Missionary Aviation Training (SMAT) operates the Lowell City Airport. The airport covers an area of 72 acres and has three runways, including a 100-foot wide 2,700-foot-long grass runway, a 100-foot wide 1,900-foot-long grass runway, and a 48-foot wide 2,395-foot-long paved runway. The runways can handle single-engine and light twin-engine airplanes.

SMAT has been located at the airport since 1997 (although missionary aviation training has occurred at the airport since 1975). According to the SMAT President, on average there are five or six training flights a day, six days a week and a number of recreational flights. The hangars on site accommodate approximately 30 airplanes from which the City receives rents. Planned capital improvements include widening and lengthening the paved runway and adding a taxiway, rotating beacon, and perimeter fence. These planned upgrades to the facilities will add additional safety measures and enable the airport to qualify for future grants. The aforementioned upgrades could qualify the airport to also upgrade its classification from a Basic Utility Airport to a General Utility Airport. Such classification and site improvements would allow for corporate twin-engine airplanes to use the facilities.

Englehardt Branch Library

The Lowell Public Library was established in 1878 and joined the Kent District Library in 1956 as a branch. The library branch moved to its present location along the Flat River north of Main Street in 1997. The 8,800-square foot facility is named after its major benefactor, Harold Englehardt. The facility includes private rooms, computer access, color copier, free printing vending services, used book sales, teen spaces, and a community room that is available for rent.

Lowell Area Historical Museum

The Lowell Area Historical Museum is located in the Graham Building at the northeast corner of the Hudson/Main Street intersection. The Museum was founded in 1990 and moved into its current location in 2001. The Museum is governed by a 12-member Board of Directors chosen from the community and funded by a variety of grants, community funds, and a ¼ mil property tax. The Museum strives to provide innovative ways to enrich, delight, and inspire the community and visitors with the City's rich culture and heritage, and serves as an important and vital member of the Lowell community.

Parks

As shown in Map 10, there are six City parks:

- Recreation Park
- Creekside Park
- Richards Park
- McMahan Park
- Scout Park
- Stoney Lakeside Park

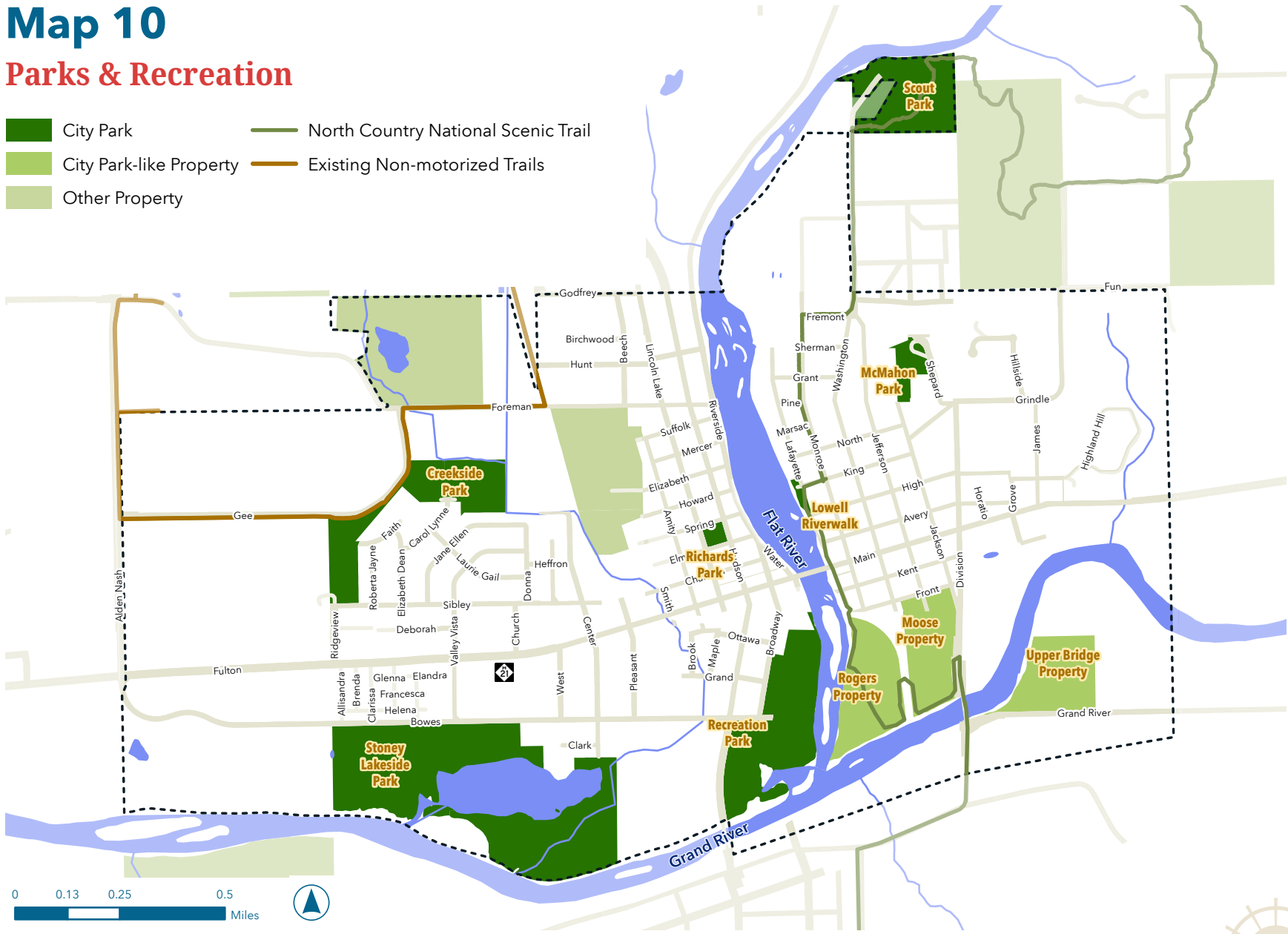
Various recreational opportunities are available in the parks, including scenic walkways picnic facilities playgrounds, soccer, football, and softball fields; basketball courts and 4-H facilities. School grounds, the Oakwood Cemetery, Riverwalk Park/Showboat area, and nearby public and private recreational facilities provide city residents with additional recreational opportunities. North Country National Scenic Trail passes through the Saranac-Lowell State Fame Area and the City of Lowell providing a destination to residents and people from surrounding communities for recreational hiking.



Map 10

Parks & Recreation

- City Park
- City Park-like Property
- Other Property
- North Country National Scenic Trail
- Existing Non-motorized Trails



0 0.13 0.25 0.5 Miles



The City Parks and Recreation Plan was recently completed in 2023. Communities are eligible to apply for park improvement grants through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund if a community has an adopted Parks and Recreation Master Plan that is less than five years old and that has been approved by the Department of Natural Resources. The City has maintained a Parks and Recreation Plan for many years and has received several grants from the DNR for various projects.

Trailways

The Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) volunteer group was formed in 2004 to research ways to better the recreation opportunities for Lowell area residents. The group is led by the LARA Board which consists of an elected official from Vergennes Township, Lowell Charter Township, and the City of Lowell.

The focus of LARA has been the planning, design, and construction of trails to serve the community. Phase 1 of the system was realized in 2011 with the installation of a 3.2-mile trail connecting the Flat River Valley Rail Trail to the Wittenbach/ Wege Agriscience & Environmental Education Center. In 2014 and 2015, LARA worked with the MDNR to identify alternative routes to connect the Fred Meijer Rail Trail system through the Lowell community. In 2018, construction was completed on the trail connecting Alden Nash Rd. from Gee Dr. to W. Main Street (M-21) to the Lowell Township North Park. More recently, LARA is working with MDOT using a Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant to complete a connection from Lowell Township Park and an existing part of the LARA trail network to Hudson Street, with future hopes of connecting across the Grand River via a pedestrian bridge to the Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Trail along Grand River Avenue and abandoned rail corridor.



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CHAPTER 5

Public Engagement



The City of Lowell conducted an extensive engagement campaign to shape the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.

A well-rounded master plan must be founded on the interests and desires of the public, and this plan is no exception. The policies of this master plan were developed following a robust public outreach campaign, which included pop-up planning activities, a community survey, student engagement at Lowell Middle School, visioning meetings with City leadership, and additional public meetings with the Planning Commission. .

This chapter includes a summary of the input and data collected, an analysis of the conclusions drawn, and a discussion of the feedback methods used for this process. The complete engagement report can be found in the Appendix.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The public engagement for the City of Lowell’s Master Plan update encompassed a variety of outreach techniques and methods to solicit community feedback from numerous sources. Both online and in-person outreach methods were utilized, which allowed participants to choose events that most interested them, suited their availability and level of comfort.



COMMUNITY SURVEY

POP-UP PLANNING

CLASSROOM COLLABORATION

STAKEHOLDER VISIONING

AUG 2023

AUG 2023-MAR 2024

DEC 2023

FEB 2023-APR 2024

An online survey opened in August of 2023. It was created for members of the community to provide detailed feedback about their perceptions of the City today and goals for the future.

Quick and engaging planning activities were conducted at the Sizzlin’ Summer Concert Series and the Lowell Expo.

Two student groups at Lowell Middle School were taken through a series of exercises to explore their ideal future for Lowell.

Four visioning sessions were held with local government leaders to discuss opportunities, threats, and top master plan priorities.





Community Survey

Methodology and General Information

Due to the sample size, sample population, and other limitations generally present in online surveys, these results should not be interpreted with a purely scientific mindset. However, these survey results provide valuable perspectives of the community's opinions regarding the Master Plan updates.

This survey was one tool to help the City craft community-supported policy and promote uses that are aligned with the desires of the public for short- and long-range municipal planning. Survey questions were developed by the City Planning Commission and the planning consultant team. The survey was organized into four sections: Background, Housing, Economic Development, and Community Investment. Responses from each section are summarized in this chapter.

Background

Due to the sample size, sample population, and other limitations generally present in online surveys, these results should not be interpreted with a purely scientific mindset. However, these survey results provide valuable perspectives of the community's opinions regarding the Master Plan updates.

This survey was one tool to help the City craft community-supported policy and promote uses that are aligned with the desires of the public for short- and long-range municipal planning. Survey questions were developed by the City Planning Commission and the planning consultant team. The survey was organized into four sections: Background, Housing, Economic Development, and Community Investment. Responses from each section are summarized in this chapter.

A total of 227 surveys were completed from August 2023 through February 2024.

Housing

The second section of the survey asked participants about their household and housing needs within the City of Lowell.

- Respondents were prompted to select the most important reason(s) they live or would consider living in the City of Lowell. A safe area and proximity to Grand Rapids were the most frequently selected answer choices, followed by parks & trails, local character, and attractive downtown.
- Lowell's ratio of owner to renter occupied dwellings is relatively high compared to other cities in West Michigan. Nearly 62% of the participants indicated owning their current residence.
- A wide margin of respondents live in single-family homes (59%), followed by two family/multi-family housing (5%). About 35% reported not living within the City.
- A little more than half of the participants answered "yes" to having access to their desired housing type if they were to relocate within the City while 20% answered "no." The most preferred housing type in the City was single-family home followed by apartments, attached single-family homes, and townhomes. Other comments regarding housing included demand for affordable housing, retirement community and assisted living, mixed-use housing, accessory dwelling units, and infill housing.
- When asked about the City's housing priorities, participants voted for improving neighborhoods, increasing housing opportunities for families, and increasing housing for young professionals as the top three priorities.

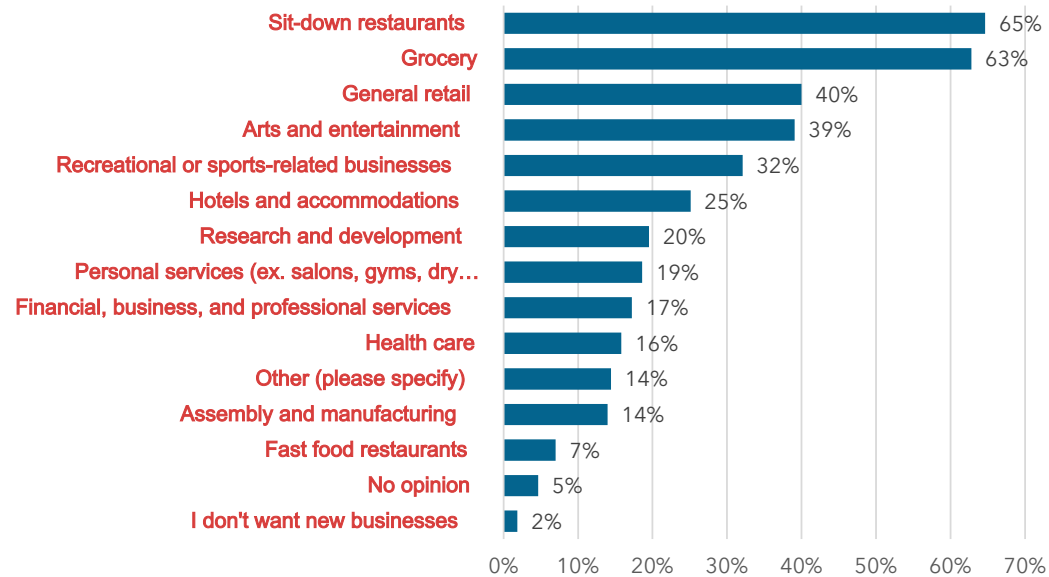


Economic Development

The third section of the survey inquired about opinions regarding growth, development, and land use in the City of Lowell. A definition of economic development introduced this section to provide context for the questions to follow. It described economic development as the process of improving a community's quality of life through the creation of places that foster economic opportunity, prosperity, and stability and can be accomplished through programs, policies, activities, and investments that support or attract business growth and innovation.

- Respondents were asked what types of new businesses they would like to see in the City. Nearly 65% of participants selected sit-down restaurants, followed by grocery, general retail, and arts & entertainment. 14% of participants selected "other", and their comments focused on specific food-oriented businesses such as a small grocery store, fast food chains and general concern regarding the number of marijuana shops in the City.
- Lowell ranked highest for participants when asked where they go for shopping and services while Grand Rapids ranked higher for arts & entertainment, and recreation or sports-related facilities.
- 39% of respondents believe the City is doing an excellent or good job in guiding and directing development and growth, while 36% feel the City's efforts are fair. An additional section for written comments was provided, where most feedback expressed concerns about the number of marijuana shops in the City. Improving downtown and encouraging redevelopment within downtown ranked highest on the City's business priorities.

Figure 5.1 | What type of new businesses would you like to see in the City?



Community Investment

The final section of the online community survey included questions regarding community priorities and public investment in the City of Lowell.

Participants were asked to submit three words that described their future vision for the City. The most frequently used words included, safe, affordable, family, diverse, and friendly.

- The participants were asked to rate the importance of a series of City priorities on a 5-point likert scale. The majority of respondents prioritize the protection of natural areas as a key factor in improving access to the river, with 49% of respondents considering it very important. Following closely, expanding trails/boardwalks along the river is also regarded as crucial, with 33% rating it as very important.

Figure 5.2 | Use three words to describe your future vision for the City of Lowell.



Mobility

This section asked the participants about their input on mobility and transportation related habits/desires in the City of Lowell.

- The participants identified well-maintained streets and a walkable, connected sidewalk system as the top priorities for street improvements. They were also asked to name specific streets, intersections, and trail segments they believed needed improvement; a detailed list is available in the appendix.



Visioning Sessions

Visioning meetings are useful in that they are structured and follow a strategic planning process involving the identification of community opportunities and threats. Visioning sessions were held with members of the Planning Commission, City Council, DDA, and Sustainability Committee. Each meeting lasted 90 to 120 minutes and resulted in a thorough understanding and discussion of opportunities, threats, and a common vision for each of the four boards.

Four visioning sessions with local leaders were held from February through April 2024 with the Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority (DDA), City Council, and the Parks & Recreation Commission.



Opportunities & Threats

Members of each respective group were asked to list their perceived opportunities and threats for the future of the City of Lowell. Opportunities were described as things that would help their ideal vision for the City of Lowell become a reality, and threats are things that may prevent this vision from becoming reality. Once their list was completed, each member was asked to share their list with the group and add any additional ideas from others to their list that they felt aligned with their vision. A full list of each group's opportunities and threats can be found in the Appendix. A summary of common themes among all groups is illustrated below.

Members of each group were also asked to evaluate the Master Plan's current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. Most groups answered that the current vision statement reflected or somewhat reflected their vision for the community. The groups also wanted the statement to reflect a balance between different neighborhoods, focus on sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and progressive efforts that focused on the vibrancy of the community, arts, and culture. A more comprehensive feedback list can be accessed in the Appendix.

Table 5.1 | Priority Opportunities & Threats

| Priority Opportunities | Priority Threats |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Additional affordable housing | Controlling pace of change |
| Affordable housing | Cost for renovation |
| Affordable housing | Costs |
| Affordable rental housing | Density of development/ lack of attention to placemaking |
| Camping | EGLE |
| Greenspace at fairground | Flooding |
| Housing | Housing affordability |
| Optimize river usage, river walk | Infrastructure costs |
| Our water resources and rivers | Lack of control of our cities resources (EAGLE) |
| Parks and trails improvements | Lot size |
| Regional Prosperity with GR area | Main St traffic |
| Rivers | MDOT |
| Rivers, Trails, & Natural Resources | Natural feature degradation |
| Walkable area | Out of character overdevelopment |
| Walking friendly town | Overdevelopment of old fairgrounds |
| West riverbank sea wall | State of Michigan |
| Zoning for affordable housing | State of Michigan impacting local control |
| | Traffic flow |
| | Vacant buildings |



Vision Statement Brainstorming

All four groups were asked to evaluate the Master Plan’s current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. The majority felt that the current vision statement somewhat reflects their vision for Lowell.

Planning Commission Vision Statement Critique:

In 2050, Lowell will be a vibrant City that works together with neighboring communities, provides quality services, and effectively manages growth while maintaining a strong sense of place and pride.

Downtown Development Authority Vision Statement Critique:

The DDA believed the City is moving away from the 2007 Vision Statement and that the following elements should be included:

- Walkability, outdoor, or active community
- Add “with our neighboring municipalities” (instead of communities)
- Bring people into town (visitors), being welcoming and open
- Vibrant, welcoming, and active
- Add “in order to address the changes caused by growth”

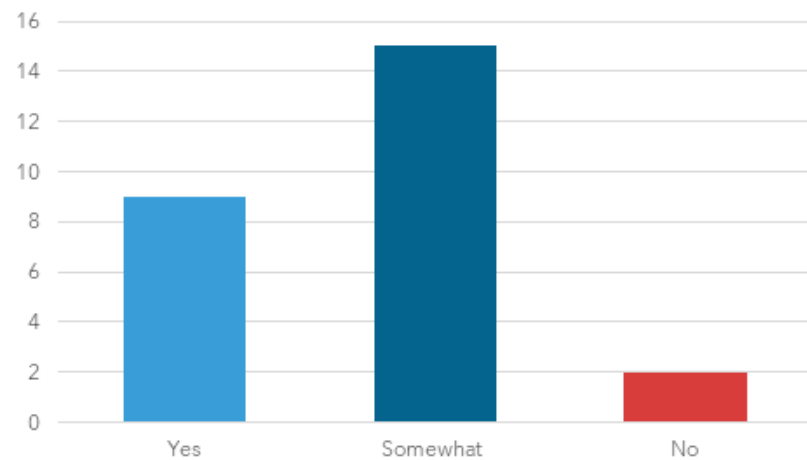
City Council Vision Statement Critique:

In 2050, Lowell will be a City of citizens who invite themselves and visitors to experience our grand history, vibrant downtown, and all the art and adventure the area offers. We will continue to work together to build our community as it’s called to be while balancing growth and our priorities to support quality public services and safety.

Parks & Recreation Commission Vision Statement Critique:

In 2050, Lowell will value and celebrate our natural resources and downtown, honor our past and look forward to the future. We will have a strong sense of community and be a leader in the region.

Figure 5.3 | Do you feel the current Vision Statement still reflects the vision for Lowell?



Classroom Collaboration

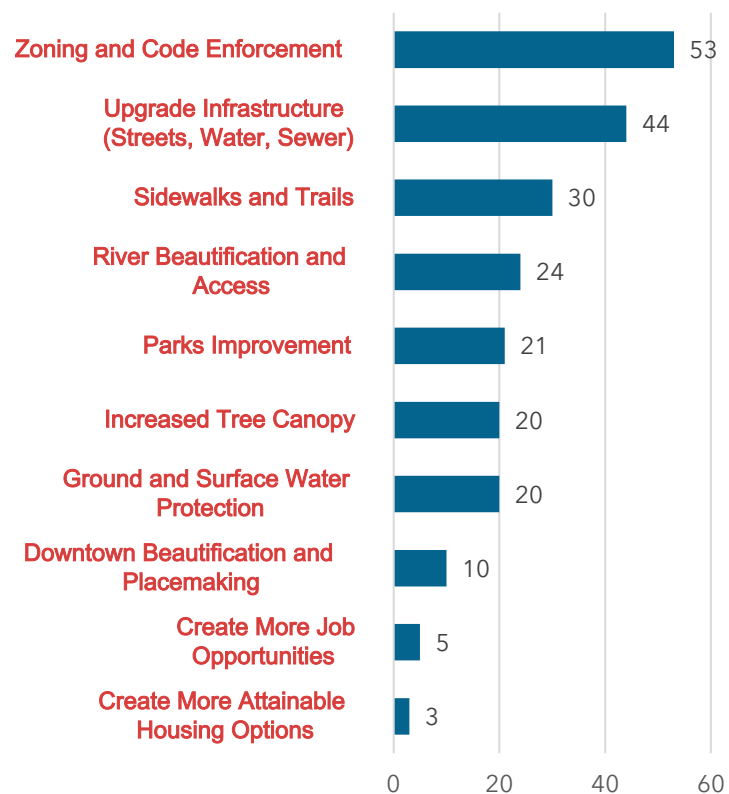
Students at Lowell Middle School were engaged in the planning process for updating the City's Master Plan. Each session included the same activities and began with an introductory presentation, a Mentimeter activity, a heat index activity, postcards to your future self, and penny jar voting about city priorities. The students were asked about a variety of master plan related topics.

One session with Lowell Middle School students was held in December 2023 to gather their feedback and engage them in the planning process.

The results from these activities are as follows:

- When asked to describe what they love about Lowell, the five most frequently used words were sports, parks, friends, fishing, and community.
- A majority of the students strongly agreed that they feel safe walking/biking/scooting in their neighborhood and that they need more sidewalks/trails to get around town.
- Students picked more hangout spots like coffee shops and restaurants and more bike lanes/sidewalks as their top choice for improvements that need to be prioritized in Lowell.
- According to students, the top preferences for their future living arrangements are family-friendly neighborhoods and proximity to work.

Figure 5.4 | Student Session Penny Jar Activity



Sizzling issues reported by students included too many marijuana shops, need for more recreational spaces, gyms, specific retail/chain stores and better internet connectivity while hot issues included the need for more sports facilities, family-owned businesses, and improved parks. Simmering issues were mainly concerns about housing and, lack of specialty stores. Tables below show the transcribed comments from the worksheets.

Table 5.2 | What are the “sizzling” issues that need to be addressed in the City of Lowell?

| Issue | Solution |
|---|---|
| we need less pot/weed shops | get rid of some |
| more places to hangout | build more buildings |
| add more gyms/places to workout | - |
| open up rollaway!!! | use it |
| need a good donut shop | get rid of a weed shop |
| weed shops | get rid of them |
| Meijer's | unban under 15 |
| too many pot shops | change them for sports facilities |
| weed shops | say no to them + get rid of them |
| we need some sort of hospital | build hospital |
| internet to work | get better sell towers |
| more clean sidewalks | build more sidewalks |
| nature parks | keep environments |
| pot shops | get rid of them |
| not enough things to do | add more things like bike trails, laser tag, rock-climbing, roller-skating rink |
| more chick-fil-a places | put in Lowell |
| open balls (balls softie) ice cream back up | keep it in Lowell |

The worksheets show student responses to the question: "WHAT ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED TO ENSURE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CITY OF LOWELL?". Each worksheet is divided into three categories: SIZZLING, HOT, and SIMMERING, with a corresponding Heat Index scale (Sizzling: 100-120, Hot: 80-100, Simmering: 60-80).

Worksheet 1 (Top):

- SIZZLING:**
 - Issue: more and less pot shops
 - Solution: get rid of some
 - Issue: more places to hangout
 - Solution: build more buildings
 - Issue: Add more gyms/places to workout
 - Solution: use it
 - Issue: Draw up rollaway!!!
 - Solution: use it
 - Issue: need a good donut shop
 - Solution: get rid of a weed shop
- HOT:**
 - Issue: more and less pot shops
 - Solution: get rid of them
 - Issue: need a good donut shop
 - Solution: get rid of a weed shop
- SIMMERING:**
 - Issue: use the buildings on main street for apartments
 - Solution: buy from and build apartments for rent
 - Issue: people come to Lowell for stores and ideas places to live
 - Solution: create a side to build

Worksheet 2 (Middle):

- SIZZLING:**
 - Issue: too many pot shops
 - Solution: change them for sports facilities
- HOT:**
 - Issue: park is trash
 - Solution: upgrade them basketball courts
 - Issue: much ball
 - Solution: upgrade it
- SIMMERING:**
 - Issue: change burger king
 - Solution: chick-i-a
 - Issue: more activities
 - Solution: more activities

Worksheet 3 (Bottom):

- SIZZLING:**
 - Issue: weed shops
 - Solution: get rid of them
 - Issue: pot shops
 - Solution: get rid of them
- HOT:**
 - Issue: not enough things to do
 - Solution: add more things like bike trails, laser tag, rock-climbing, roller-skating rink
 - Issue: more chick-fil-a places
 - Solution: put in Lowell
- SIMMERING:**
 - Issue: open balls (balls softie) ice cream back up
 - Solution: keep it in Lowell



CHAPTER 6

Goals & Objectives

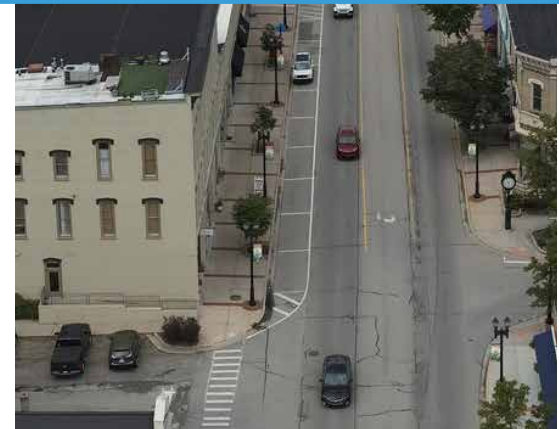


The Lowell Master Plan strives to articulate and implement a broad, community-based vision for the City based on the needs and desires of its residents, business owners, visitors, and local officials. The overarching policies and direction of this Master Plan are guided by the vision statement and the goals and objectives set forth in this chapter. These statements and policies are informed and based on the community input received in support of this plan as summarized in Chapter 5.



“In 2040, Lowell will be a welcoming, vibrant, and active City characterized by walkable neighborhoods, high quality public services, and engaged citizens. We will continue to work together and with our neighbors to address the changes resulting from growth while maintaining a strong sense of community, place, and pride.”

This vision provides a relatively broad yet concise description of the desired future community. The goals and objectives articulated by this chapter, along with the future land use plan, implementation strategies, and other recommendations of this plan are created in pursuit of this statement.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives below are founded on the input received from the public, businesses, and local officials. Each goal is supported by more specific objectives, and the policies of this plan are based on these statements.

The goals are policy statements that describe a future state of the City and set into motion the basis for actions that will fulfill the vision statement. Goals are intentionally general but are attainable through diligent and concerted effort. The objective statements tend to be more specific actionable items that can be regarded as milestones on the journey to achieving the larger goal.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Goal 1

Lowell will create an economic identity for the downtown and begin a long-term economic and physical revitalization program to capture those businesses and services that uphold that identity.

Objectives:

- a. Work with the DDA, property owners, businesses, and residents to encourage an appropriate mix of retail, service, and public uses for downtown Lowell.
- b. Implement the 2018 Lowell Downtown Placemaking Plan.
- c. Continue to hold activities and attractions that bring people downtown such as the summer concert series, Christmas Through Lowell, and others.
- d. Partner with state and or federal regulatory agencies and regulators to expand opportunities to utilize the Flat River in downtown Lowell as a recreational asset for the community.
- e. Pursue economic development opportunities to provide the jobs that will help increase employment opportunities in the City.



Goal 2

Lowell will undertake cooperative efforts with surrounding Townships to increase opportunities for new industrial development that will benefit all communities.

Objectives:

- a. Work cooperatively with surrounding Townships to develop a mutually acceptable policy for provision of water and/or sewer services and appropriate locations for industrial development that will benefit all communities.
- b. Encourage and actively facilitate the development of new modern industrial projects in the Lowell area that are sustainable, ecologically friendly, and of a scale appropriate for the community.





COMMUNITY IMAGE

Goal 3

Lowell will maintain its image as a walkable historic community, featuring turn of the century architecture, rich cultural history, and important natural features such as the Flat and Grand Rivers.

Objectives:

- a. In collaboration with stakeholders of the Flat River and communities within the watershed, work to improve physical and visual access as well as navigability along the Flat River. Efforts may include building pathways, constructing scenic overlooks, and implementing other related initiatives.
- b. Encourage building owners to restore building fronts to their original style to maintain the downtown's sense of community and walkability. Information on historic district regulations, tax incentives, architectural styles, façade grants, and other issues will be made available.
- c. Continue to proactively build out the regional trail network and work with LARA, the North Country Trail, and others to promote the community's high-quality non-motorized trail system.

LAND USE

Goal 4

Lowell will be characterized by walkable, stable neighborhoods and conveniently-located public, commercial, and service uses.

Objectives:

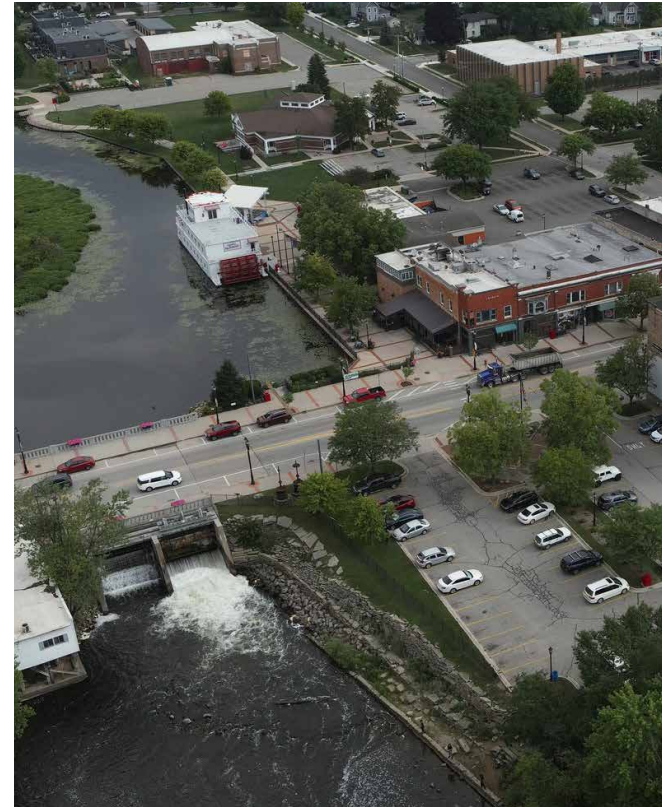
- a. Improve access to and walking along the Flat and Grand Rivers, including the ongoing buildout of the City's robust trail network.
- b. Work on improvements to the streetscape and riverfront to make walking to and within downtown Lowell safer and easier. Pedestrian crossings at the Flat River in downtown Lowell will receive special attention in this regard.
- c. Review pertinent zoning and related regulations to ensure that future development enables residents to walk to businesses and services that they need. Solicit resident opinions to find where improvements and pedestrian connections are needed and prioritize projects based on this feedback.
- d. Facilitate new development and redevelopment in and around the downtown area, at an appropriate scale and design, to build off the downtown as an important resource and destination.
- e. Work with state and federal agencies to explore dredging the Flat River north of the dam or undertake efforts to make the Flat River more navigable.

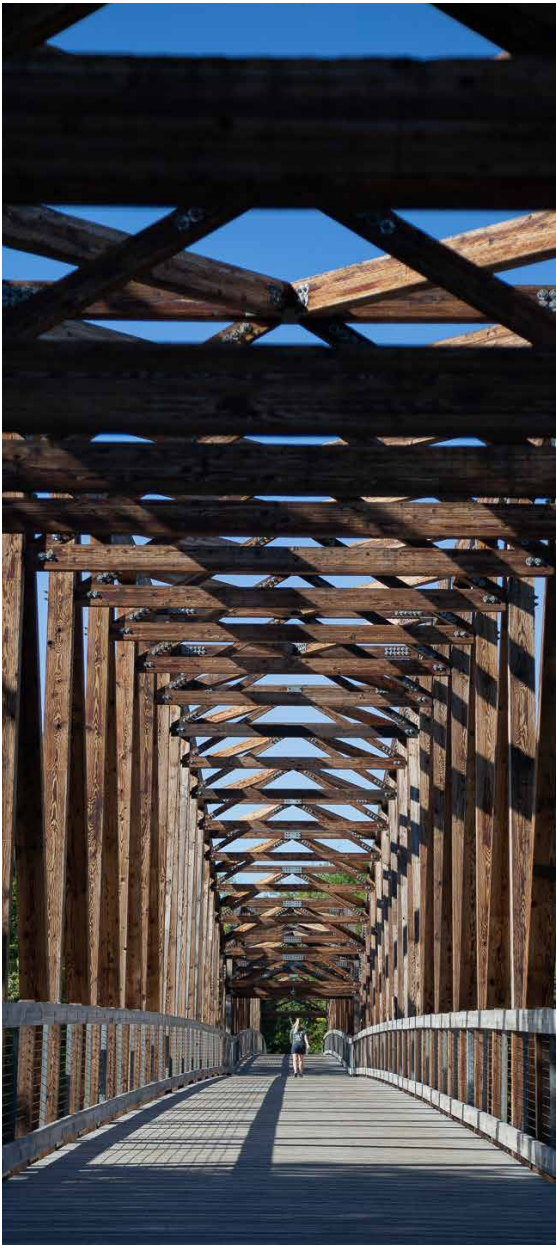
Goal 5

Lowell will work with adjacent communities to develop and coordinate land use policies and development patterns that will promote a regional community identity.

Objectives:

- a. Cooperate with the adjoining Townships to develop a plan for coordinated and compatible land uses along M-21.
- b. Work with surrounding Townships to develop mutually acceptable utility service-related agreements, and jointly plan for land uses and development that will benefit all communities.
- c. Cooperate with the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council and other agencies as appropriate on issues of regional concern to advance the interests of the City.





TRANSPORTATION

Goal 6

Lowell will maintain a transportation network that is sensitive to the land uses it serves, protects the integrity of residential neighborhoods, and promotes safety within all areas of the City.

Objectives:

- a. Continue to work with MDOT and adjacent communities to promote and implement improvements to M-21. These improvements should target key intersections such as Hudson Street, Bowes Road, and the downtown, and balance the need to improve safety for all users with particular attention to pedestrians, bicyclists, users of assistive devices, and all others.
- b. Maintain an awareness of regional transportation issues that affect the Lowell area and work to proactively address issues that are important to Lowell.
- c. Work with existing public transit agencies such as The Rapid to explore options to serve the Lowell community with some form of mass transit service.
- d. Ensure that street maintenance is routinely performed and takes into account potential traffic increases resulting from new development in the City and adjacent Townships.

Goal 7

To promote an appropriate image of the community, Lowell will maintain an attractive appearance at the major entrances to the City and along its principal transportation corridors.

Objectives:

- a. Work with community groups and businesses to initiate and coordinate efforts to provide a gateway - a clear sense of entry into the community - on Main Street at Alden Nash Avenue on the west side, and on Main Street near Grove Street on the east side.
- b. Emphasize the heritage of the rivers through branding, marketing, and tourism efforts and their importance to the image of the City of Lowell.
- c. Implement the 2018 Lowell Downtown Placemaking Plan, and regularly review it and perform updates as needed.

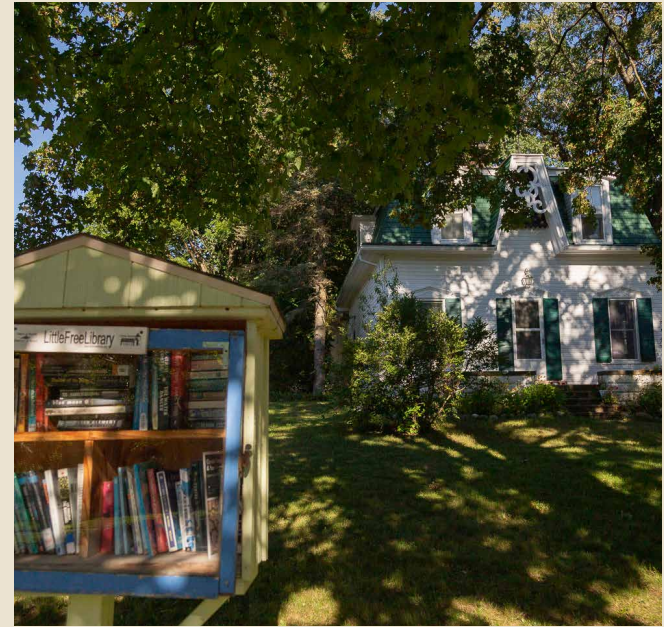
HOUSING

Goal 8

The City, through proper zoning and other appropriate measures, will facilitate opportunities for the provision of quality, affordable housing for people of all ages, income levels, and abilities.

Objectives:

- a. Review and revise, as necessary residential zoning district standards to foster a variety of housing opportunities by ensuring that a variety of housing types are possible, including two-family, three- and four-plexes, accessory dwelling units, and other types of attainable and affordable housing suitable for all ranges of age and income levels.
- b. Actively assist property owners to improve housing conditions and connect property owners to resources who can assist in housing rehabilitation and improvement.
- c. Revise the zoning ordinance to remove regulatory barriers to the development of new housing and to encourage long-term investment in the City's housing stock.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Goal 9

The City will continue to provide municipal services that are appropriate to the level of funds available.

Objectives:

- a. Cooperate with the Townships, Lowell Area Schools, and other governmental units to ensure that recreational and community facilities can be utilized to benefit residents.
- b. Work with County agencies to improve access to County services, and distribute information about those services to City residents.
- c. Explore opportunities for local government service consolidation with neighboring municipalities to provide more efficient



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CHAPTER 7

Future Land Use



The City of Lowell Future Land Use Plan contained in this chapter provides a general guideline for land use over the next twenty to thirty years.

This applies to future growth, development, and redevelopment opportunities within the City. It is typically most useful to the Planning Commission as it evaluates development requests and rezoning changes; it seeks to provide the regulatory guidance needed to implement this Master Plan.

The Future Land Use Plan is linked to the zoning districts found in the Zoning Ordinance; however, it is important to understand the distinction between the Zoning Map and the Future Land Use Map. While the Zoning Ordinance (and map) is the law regulating the development and use of land in the City, the Future Land Use Plan is a policy that guides development in the City and envisions the desired forms and uses involved in that development. It does not, however, carry the force of law. The Zoning Map regulates land uses today and articulates what can be built and what kind of requirements apply to the property.

The Future Land Use Map, on the other hand, is visionary and describes how land in the City should be used in twenty or thirty years. In most cases, the two maps will be consistent, but the Future Land Use Map is looking at the most appropriate future land uses, which may not be the same as uses existing today.

It should also be realized that there may be some aspects of the Future Land Use Map (Map 7) and supporting policies that do not fully “fit” existing patterns of development. This should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of City support for the continuation of these uses; however, the City should carefully consider the impact of these uses on surrounding areas and future development when making decisions. Perhaps most importantly, the future land use map is not intended to be interpreted as rigid or inflexible. The designations contained in the Future Land Use Plan are broad and intended to be somewhat flexible to allow the Planning Commission reasonable discretion in determining if a request is consistent with this Plan. Where two or more designations adjoin one another, either may be considered appropriate.

Nine future land use designations are shown on the Future Land Use Map:










- Suburban Residential
- Traditional Residential
- High Density Residential
- Manufactured Housing
- Corridor Mixed Use
- Downtown
- General Commercial
- Industrial
- Public

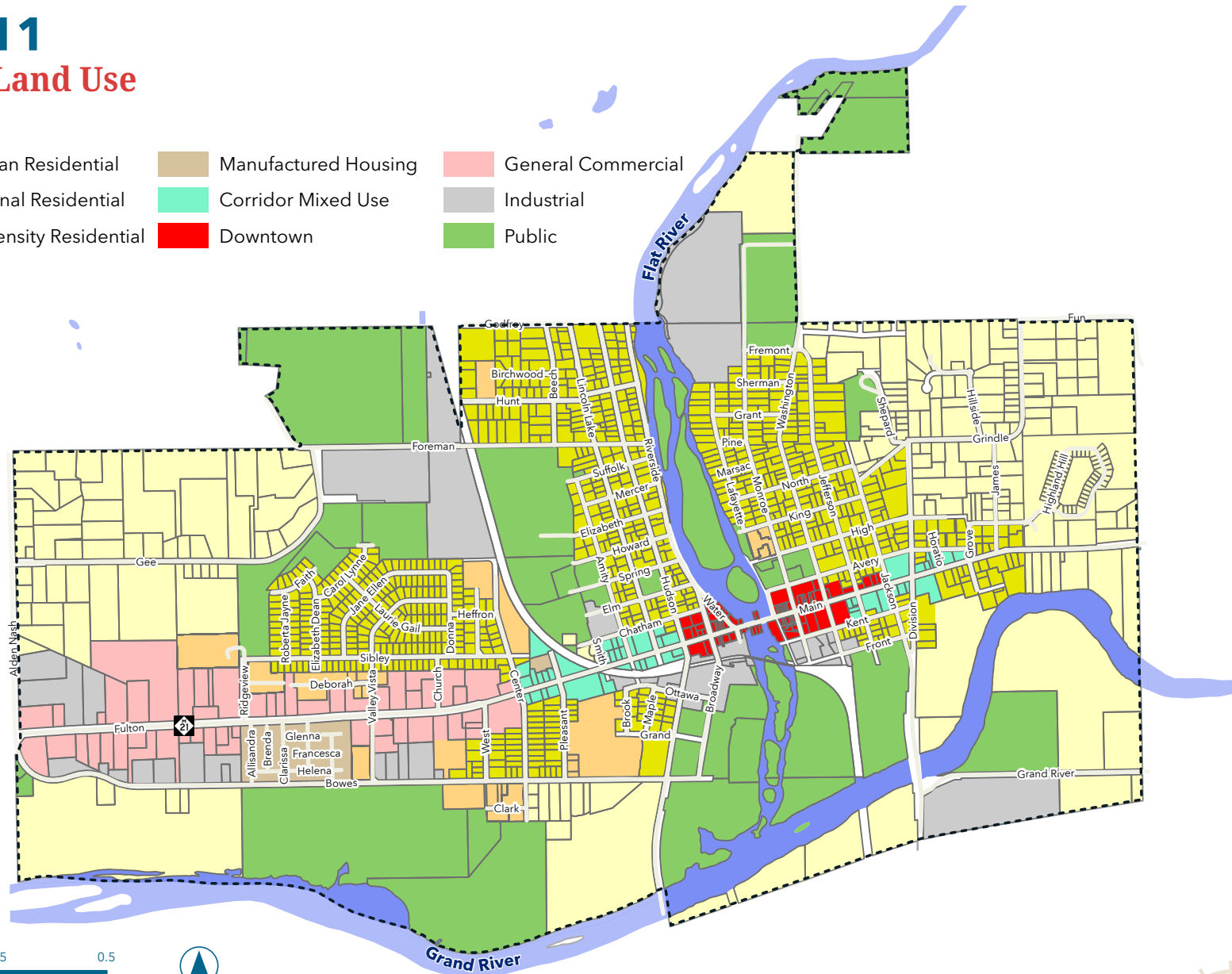
The Future Land Use designations have been created based on existing neighborhood character and development, anticipated future uses, and the needs of the community. Detailed descriptions of each designation are discussed on the subsequent pages.



Map 11

Future Land Use

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
|  Suburban Residential |  Manufactured Housing |  General Commercial |
|  Traditional Residential |  Corridor Mixed Use |  Industrial |
|  High Density Residential |  Downtown |  Public |

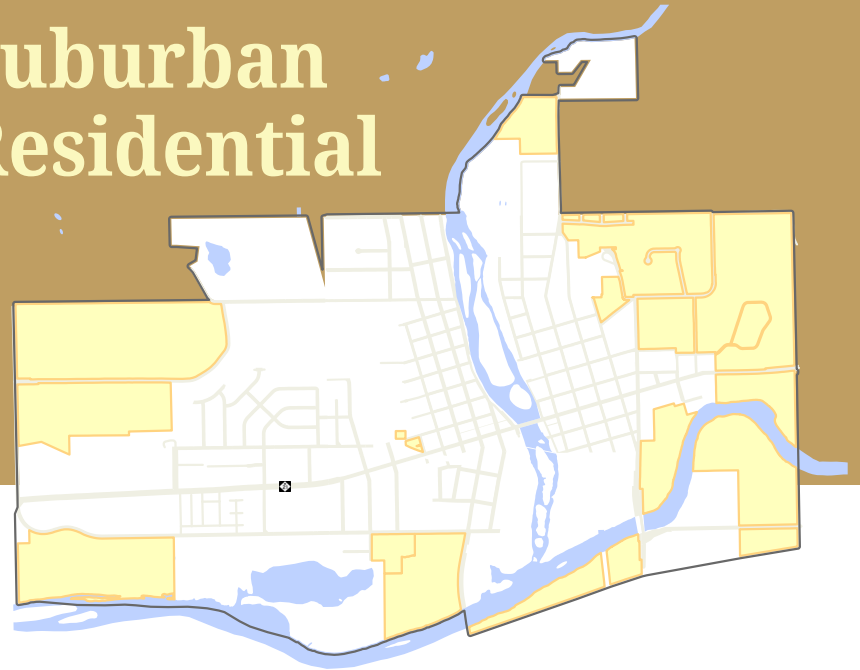


0 0.13 0.25 0.5 Miles





Suburban Residential



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family Houses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SR Suburban Residential |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplexes* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-1 One-Family Residential |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessory Dwelling Units* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-2 Single or Two Family Residential* |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

This designation is characterized by a unique mix of conventional suburban development and more rural patterns of development found along Gee Drive and in many areas on the east side of the City. In this area, homes are situated on larger lots and afford generous yards to homeowners, while winding streets create patterns that encourage low traffic volumes and speeds. Most land east of Division Avenue, where the hilly topography makes more intense development unworkable, is within this designation. This designation provides a suitable transition to the more rural residential development in the adjacent Townships.

Land uses in this designation will primarily be single-family homes, although the City may consider duplexes, ADUs, or other housing types as necessary. In addition, parks, religious institutions, and educational facilities may also be appropriate here. Some of the land

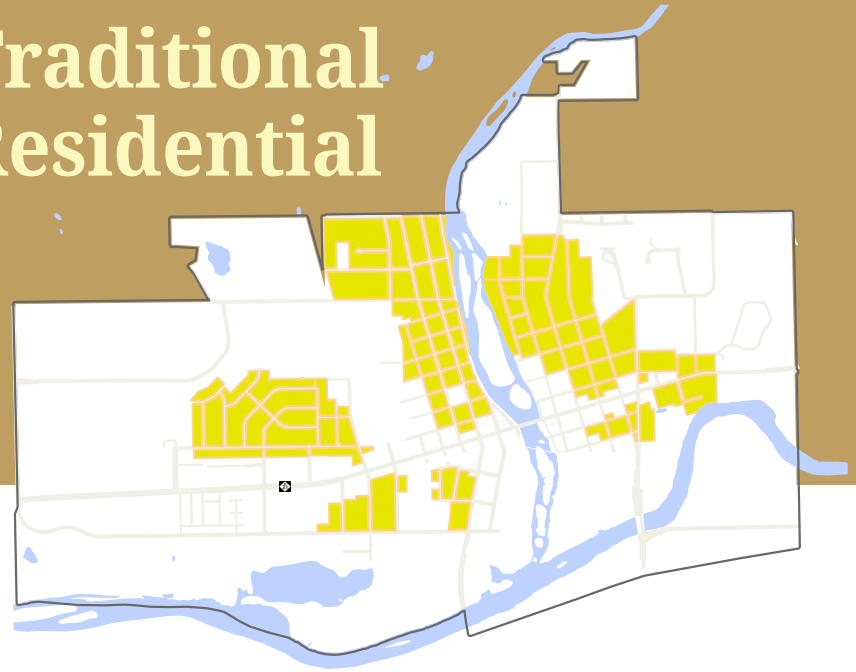
in this designation is not served by public water and sewer services, so the need to provide wells and septic facilities will also limit the density possible in these properties in many instances.

This designation also contains the large 50-acre parcel on the south side of Bowers Road. Currently a sand and gravel mining operation, the end use plan for this property includes the creation of a man-made lake that will be surrounded by residential development around its northern boundary, which could consist of single-family, two-family, or multi-family development at relatively low net overall densities. There are other large parcels that exist within this designation that are not buildable due to the presence of wetlands, the 100-year floodplain, or other limiting factors.





Traditional Residential



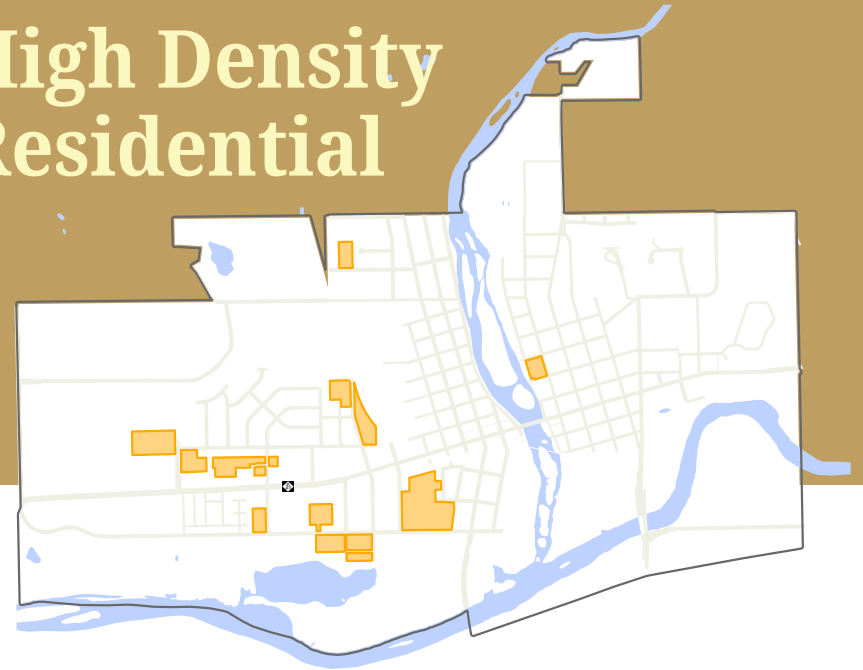
| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family Houses • Duplexes • Triplexes/Quadplexes* • Accessory Dwelling Units* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-1 One-Family Residential • R-2 Single or Two Family Residential • R-3 Multiple Family Residential |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

This designation is defined by the historic development pattern in Lowell and, like most small cities, reflects the classic principles of neighborhood design. Walkable, tree-lined streets connect in a predictable and navigable grid pattern that supports functional neighborhoods. Homes often showcase prominent front porches and historic architectural features. This designation reinforces the City's history, traditional character, and charm. Single-family homes on historically platted lots comprise the majority of this designation's housing, but duplexes, tri- or quad-plexes, accessory dwellings, and other housing types may be compatible, especially near downtown and/or along key streets. In the event that housing other than single-family is proposed, attention should be given to the overall design to ensure that the design principals that gives this designation is character are preserved.



High Density Residential



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple-family housing • Assisted and/or senior living facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-3 Multiple-Family Residential • MU Mixed Use* |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

Several areas of the City contain multi-family residential developments of varying sizes and intensities, both as condominiums and as rentals. This designation allows for the expansion of available and attainable attached multi-family housing within the community at greater densities than in traditional neighborhoods. This designation seeks to accommodate the need for a variety of housing options in attractive and walkable development patterns. Most of the land in this designation is already developed with multi-family development and includes the Laurels of Kent, which provides long-term care and short-term sub-acute rehabilitative services, and the Schneider Manor independent senior living development. Schneider Manor has sought to expand in recent years and this plan is supportive of these efforts.

In addition to the developed areas shown on the map, the City may consider additional high-density residential development to serve as a transition between the higher intensity commercial uses along Main Street and the City's neighborhoods. Historically, much of the multiple-family residential development in the City has been limited to 8-10 units per acre. The City should explore permitting higher densities in areas where there is infrastructure available to support it to enable the development of additional attainable housing options in the City.



Manufactured Housing



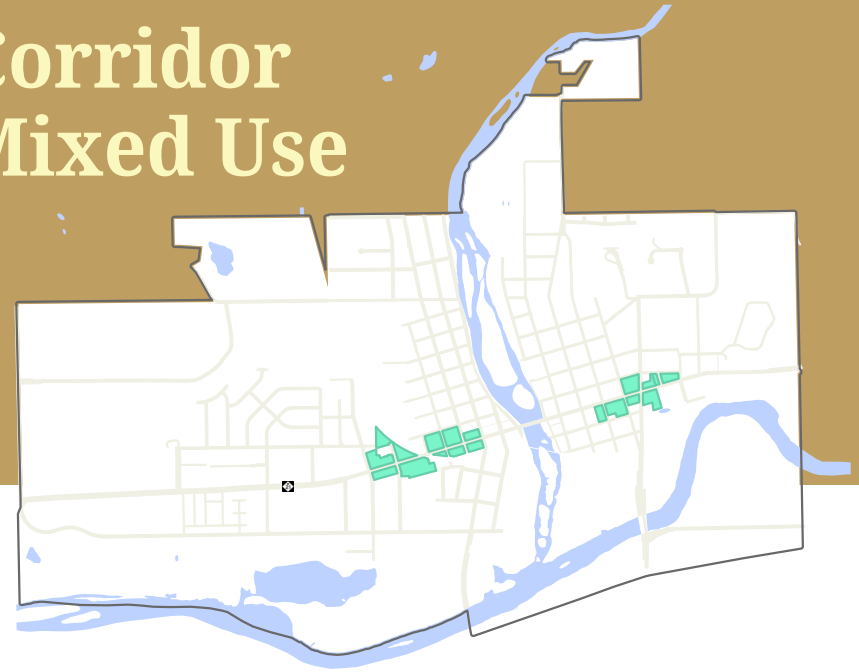
| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manufactured Houses/ Mobile Homes and Manufactured Housing Parks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MHP Manufactured Home Park |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

This designation reflects the two manufactured housing communities in Lowell: the Key Vista Manufactured Home Community located on the south side of Main Street between Sibley Street and Valley Vista, and a much smaller development on Pleasant Street north of Main Street. This plan supports manufactured housing as an affordable option for many residents. Steps should be taken to ensure that manufactured housing developments are well-maintained and consistent with State standards for manufactured home communities.



Corridor Mixed Use



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family, two-family or multiple family homes • Retail, office, and service uses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MU Mixed Use • C-1 Neighborhood Business • R-3 Multiple-Family Residential* • C-3 General Business* |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

On each side of Lowell’s central business district, there exists a variety of land uses that are interspersed together and form their own collective identity. The character of these areas is less auto-oriented and more walkable than the general commercial development found on West Main, but lack the intensity and scale of development found in downtown Lowell. This designation seeks to accommodate this neighborhood-scaled mixed use pattern as long as it remains small-scale and is intended to serve the needs of nearby residents.

On the west side of downtown, this area consists of properties primarily along Main Street from Center Street to Hudson Street. This area is characterized by a mix of uses, including single-family dwellings, restaurants, auto dealerships, florists, offices, and others. Most of these uses are located on smaller lots, so large-scale

development is not expected in this area, particularly east of the railroad tracks. There are also viable single-family dwellings here that may be continued or converted into small-scale service or office uses if the demand arises.

On the east side of downtown, this area consists of land with frontage on Main Street from approximately Jefferson Street to Grove-Street. This area serves as a transition between the low- and medium density residences on the east side of the City and downtown Lowell. Single-family and multi-family homes, churches, and small-scale commercial businesses such as ice cream shops, personal services, offices, and a church are found here. This area should also support a mix of land uses of varying intensities.

In all cases, new development and redevelopment in the Corridor Mixed Use designation should be oriented toward the street in a traditional, walkable pattern. Parking lots should be located in rear yards, and buildings should be built as close to the street as practicable with generous amounts of ground-floor transparency, particularly for nonresidential developments. Mixed-use developments are also encouraged here, as are higher density residential developments that are within close proximity to the downtown and will help to support a thriving downtown.





Downtown



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed-use development Retail, office, and service uses Restaurants Public/civic uses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C-2 Central Business MU Mixed Use |

Downtown is the heart of Lowell and a popular destination for residents and visitors. Located along Main Street from Hudson to Jackson, downtown Lowell is characterized by historic multi-story, mixed-use buildings arranged in a classic “Main Street” design. Buildings are built to the sidewalk, and contain a variety of small shops, offices, restaurants, and similar uses. Many buildings also contain residential uses on the second and third stories, offering downtown living. On-street parking is available in most of the downtown, and the City owns and operates several public parking areas behind buildings to allow for additional visitor parking.

This plan envisions a continuation of this pattern in the future – a healthy and vibrant mix of land uses and buildings designed first and foremost for pedestrians. Activity should spill into the public realm with sidewalk sales and outdoor seating, so long as adequate space is maintained for safe and navigable sidewalks and streets. Office spaces, residences, and similar passive uses should be discouraged on the first floor but are encouraged on upper floors.

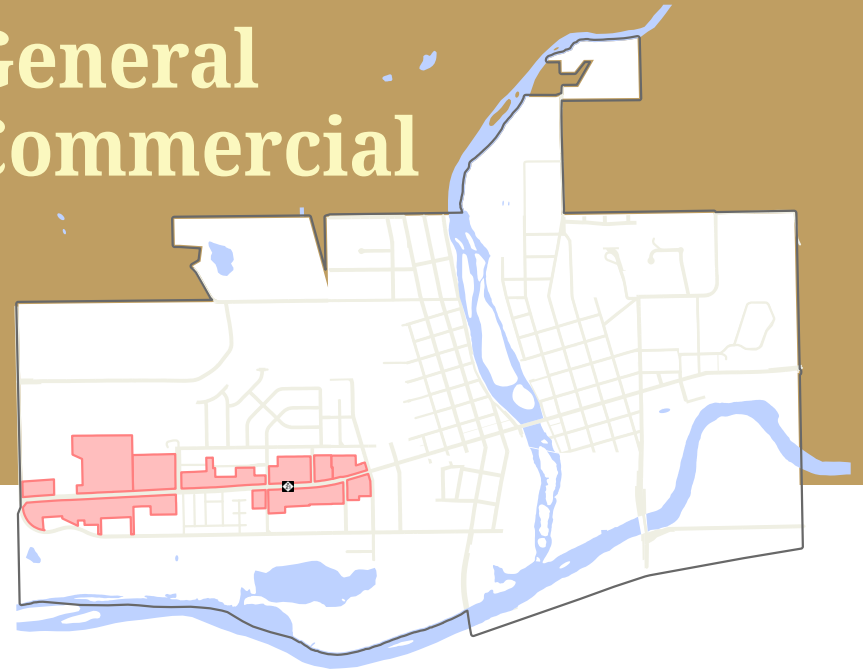
In addition, density in Lowell’s downtown should be encouraged, and architecture should build up, not out. Buildings should be placed at the sidewalk, and the first floors of buildings facing the street should have high transparency. Multi-story buildings—up to three or four stories—that complement the historic character of the existing building stock should be encouraged.

The downtown is located along Main Street, an MDOT corridor. To encourage a healthy and safe environment for people, the City should continue to work with MDOT on methods to slow traffic and allow for safe pedestrian movement within the downtown. Sidewalks, landscaping, mid-block crossings, bike lanes, and similar amenities to facilitate multi-modal transportation should be explored and implemented whenever possible.

Downtown Lowell also contains the Lowell Riverwalk and the showboat along the east bank of the Flat River. The City should continue to invest in this important community assets. Additional use of the river should be explored, and the City should continue to work with State and federal agencies to facilitate access, use, and navigability of the Flat River in and around downtown.



General Commercial



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed use development Retail, office, and service uses Restaurants Multi-Family Residential* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C-3 General Business C-1 Neighborhood Business* I-1 Light Industrial* I-2 General Industrial* |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

The general commercial designation follows the pattern of a traditional suburban commercial corridor and is defined by larger-scale commercial activity compared to the downtown and the corridor mixed use designations. This designation consists primarily of properties with frontage on Main Street between Center Street and the western City limits. This plan does not envision any significant expansion of the existing general commercial uses in this corridor but instead focuses on improvements to facilitate additional infill and/or redevelopment opportunities, safe traffic flow, and accommodations for multiple modes of transportation.

The City should also explore permitting multi-family residential uses in this corridor, particularly in the rear portions of lots or on properties that do not have significant frontage on Main Street and are not attractive options for commercial development. There already exists some multi-family uses as a transition between the activity of the Main Street corridor and the adjoining single-family neighborhoods, such as the developments along Deborah Drive, Maplewood Square Court, and others.





Industrial



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing and Processing • Warehouses • Trucking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I-1 Light Industrial • I-2 General Industrial • C-3 General Business* |

*Potentially compatible but not optimal

Industrial uses are located throughout the City as it does not contain a typical industrial “park.” The closest is O.E. Bieri Industrial Park in neighboring Vergennes Township. There are several industrial-zoned properties on the west side of Bowes Road between West Street and Alden Nash. King Milling’s large agricultural processing operation is located directly adjacent to Lowell’s downtown and is a major economic contributor in the community, as is Lighthouse Foods located on Foreman Street and Attwood Corporation located on Monroe, near the northern City limits.

Many of the industrial uses on Bowes Road are quasi-commercial businesses and consist of uses such as self-storage, automotive services, professional services, and others. While they are industrial in nature, they are not large scale operations with heavy manufacturing or other intense operations that result in heavy truck traffic, pollutants, and similar effects.

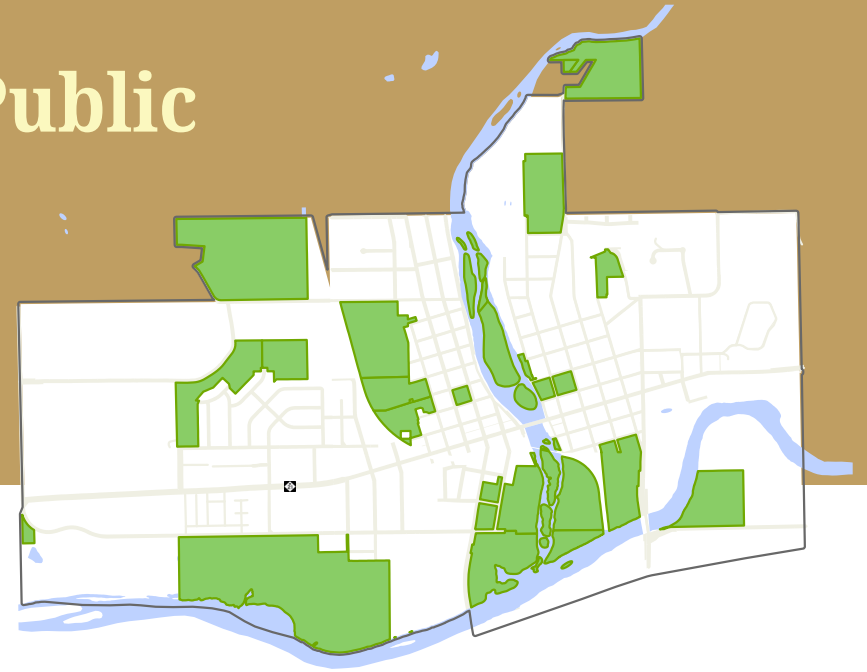
King Milling is the most locally-recognized industrial facility and it has been in operation in Lowell since the 1840s. King Milling’s

operation continues to grow and evolve, and the City has been proactive in working with the company for the mutual benefit of both. Similarly, Lighthouse Foods (located on Foreman Street) and Attwood Corporation (located on Monroe) are valued employers and members of the business community, and this plan supports their long-term viability. Other facilities, such as the truck repair facility on Main Street and other industrial uses located on the east side of the Flat River south of downtown, are similarly supported and expected to continue.

This plan does not envision the addition of significant new industrial property to the community. Rather, the City’s efforts will be to strengthen existing facilities to facilitate a long-term presence in Lowell and provide job opportunities for local residents. Many of Lowell’s industrial properties are near vital commercial areas and residential neighborhoods, so new industrial development or redevelopment must be carefully reviewed and thoughtfully planned to ensure that sites are attractively landscaped and high-intensity uses are limited to minimize adverse impacts to their neighbors.



Public



| Land Uses | Compatible Zoning |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and natural areas • Schools • Places of worship • Municipal facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF Public Facilities |

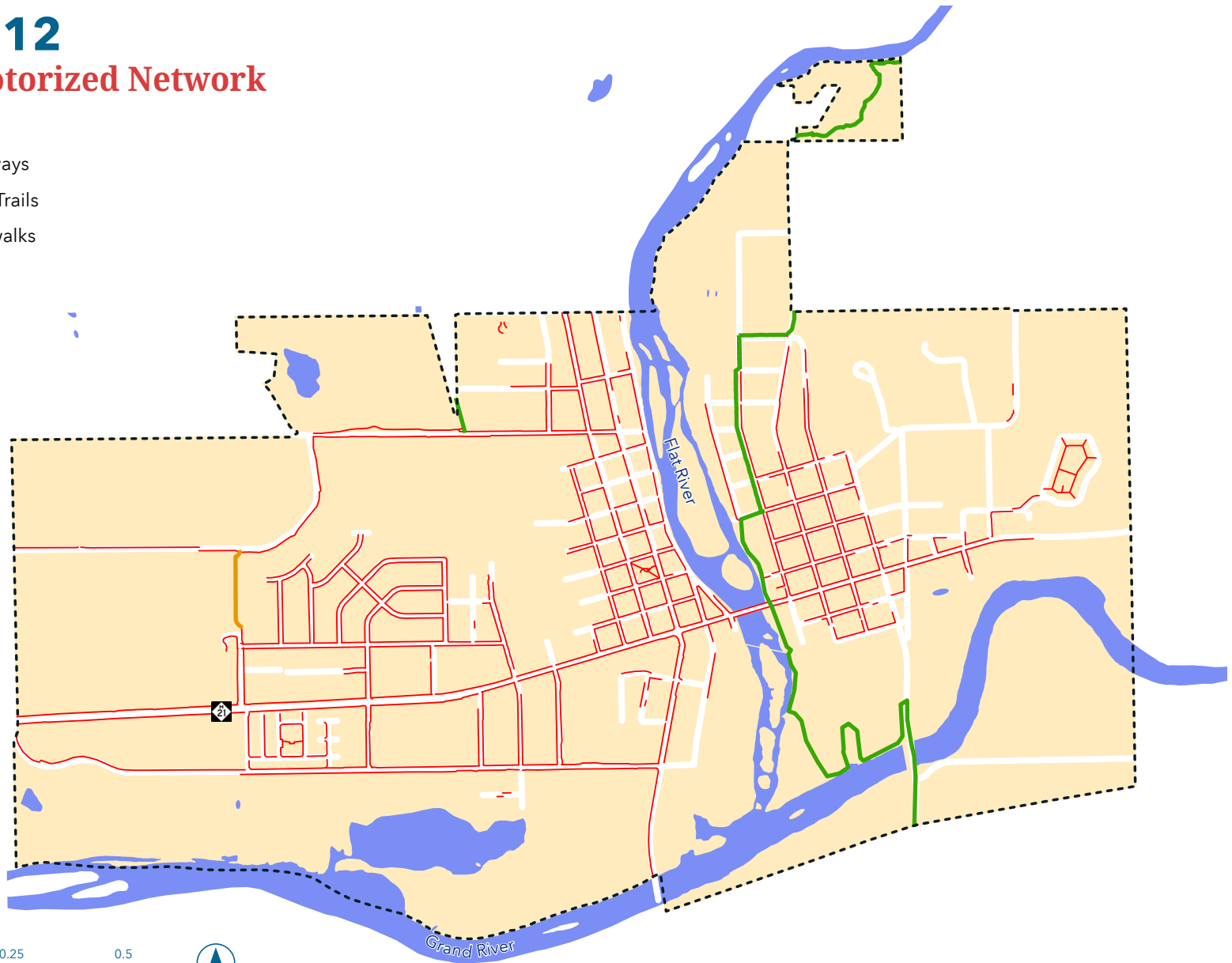
This future land use designation contains lands occupied by and planned for public facilities (government offices, parks, trails, schools, cemeteries, etc.). These uses are scattered throughout the City and along prominent natural features, such as the Flat River and Grand River. This plan does not propose new recreational or public facilities and instead focuses on the maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities to ensure the highest levels of service to the community. The City should continue to implement the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan to ensure both current and future recreation needs are being met.

Similarly, this plan strongly encourages the continual buildout of the local and regional non-motorized trail networks. Lowell has been a regional leader in this regard for years, as the Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA), in cooperation with the City and other units of government, has been instrumental in the buildout of local and regional trails. Map12 shows existing and proposed trails in the community, and this work should continue over the life of this plan.

Map 12

Nonmotorized Network

- Pathways
- DNR Trails
- Sidewalks





CHAPTER 8

Implementation



Achieving the vision set forth in this Master Plan requires its effective implementation.

This Plan describes the desired direction for growth, development, and positive change in the City. However, if the Plan is going to be achieved, Lowell must be proactive in putting the Plan into action. Thus, the following strategies have been established as a framework by which the implementation of the Plan's policies may be achieved.



The descriptions of the following implementation strategies are purposefully general in order to provide the City with flexibility in preparing specific work assignments and prioritizing each strategy within its overall municipal operations. They are listed in no particular order; each strategy is important and contributes to achieving the overall vision expressed by this plan.

The City Council, Planning Commission, and staff are given the primary responsibility for implementing these strategies and developing assignments to set the Plan in motion. These assignments may be supported by additional entities such as the DDA, Parks Committee, Chamber of Commerce, local community partners, and other entities as needed. Strategies may include special studies or assignments, ordinances, programs, planning activities, and administrative procedures. Additionally, some implementation strategies will require significant public and private investment, outside professional assistance, and active endorsement from additional governmental agencies. Others, however, may be integrated into City operations at a relatively low cost.

It is recognized that several strategies are multi-faceted and long-term in scope, and the cooperation of many different entities may be necessary. Thus, the City will have to balance financial, political, and other factors in determining how and when to implement the strategies listed below.

FLAT RIVER ACTIVATION

The Flat River flows approximately 70 miles through Montcalm, Ionia, and Kent Counties where 1.4 miles (2%) of the river flows through the City of Lowell. The river has been central to Lowell’s identity, history, and culture for decades. However, much of it is inaccessible except for a few areas near downtown Lowell. Recently, efforts to improve river access for residents have been frustrated by environmental concerns, bureaucratic challenges, and financial limitations. As time has gone on, sediment has flowed into Lowell resulting in shallow water levels and the proliferation of vegetation in the river. This has made the river more difficult use for recreational purposes and has stunted its impact and influence as a cherished community asset.

Thus, this plan strongly recommends continued efforts to improve the river in terms of access from its banks and navigability. Runoff issues from various sources may arise across approximately 66 miles of watershed in upstream communities outside the City of Lowell, the effects of which can be challenging to manage by just one community. Chapter 5 recommends as an objective “dredging the Flat River north of the dam or undertaking efforts to make the Flat River more navigable” and that objective is emphasized here. Further, there may be additional areas where the City could provide additional access where it controls property along the river’s edge.





ZONING ORDINANCE REVISIONS

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary regulatory tool through which this Plan is implemented. The Zoning Ordinance is the law that regulates land use and development in the City, so revisions to the Zoning Ordinance to implement many of the Master Plan's policies are an effective way to ensure that new development is consistent with the Plan. Thus, revisions to the Zoning Ordinance in light of the City's goals, objectives, and Future Land Use Plan are recommended.

Lowell's Zoning Ordinance underwent a thorough chapter-by-chapter review and update in the early 2020s, so a complete overhaul of the zoning ordinance is not needed at this time. However, some changes may be needed to ensure that the ordinance aligns with this Master Plan. Possible changes include:

- The incorporation of design standards for buildings in the downtown district (C-2)
- The addition of land uses not presently listed in the ordinance
- Procedural changes to facilitate or incentivize desirable forms of development
- The addition of additional housing types to ensure that varied housing options are available for all residents
- Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to conform to the Future Land Use Map and recommendations of this plan, particularly where such amendments will reduce or eliminate potential nonconforming situations.



PLACEMAKING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

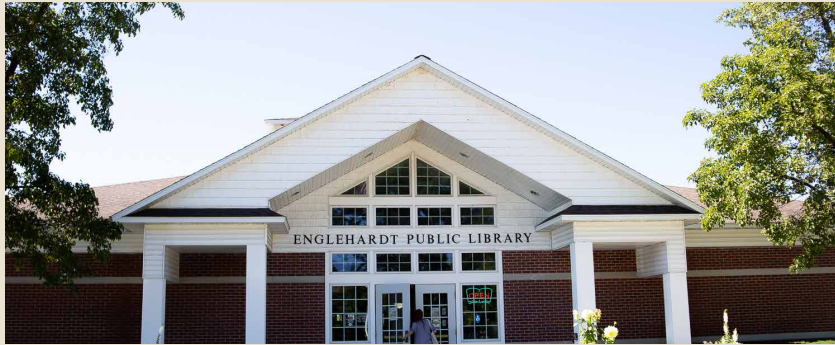
In 2018, the City adopted the Downtown Lowell Placemaking Plan. Placemaking is an approach to the planning and design of public spaces that capitalizes on community assets and potential. Its overarching purpose is to create public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being. Lowell's Placemaking Plan is a set of guidelines to help determine how downtown Lowell is going to look and feel - in short, if followed, it will help to create and further establish a unique sense of place for the downtown.

The 2018 Downtown Placemaking Plan includes strategies and recommendations for several distinct areas of the City: the Downtown Core, Monroe Street, River South, Downtown East, and Downtown West. It also contains design elements for streets, suggestions for wayfinding signage, public art, and other improvements.

HOUSING STRATEGY

At present, Lowell contains a healthy mix of new and older housing in traditional and suburban patterns. While many homes are in good condition, there remain opportunities for improvement in most neighborhoods to maintain and improve the condition of properties throughout the City. This strategy would involve attention to public spaces such as streets and sidewalks to ensure that these vital public spaces are safe, accessible, and usable. The demand for new housing in Lowell remains high, and the City has recently approved several higher density developments to meet this demand. However, there are opportunities in the Zoning Ordinance to allow for additional flexibility that can allow property owners additional flexibility. The City should explore ways it can enable the development of additional attainable housing options. This includes allowing more duplexes or multi-family dwellings, accessory dwellings, and looking for potential barriers to affordable housing.





PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Some of the policies in this plan are dependent on cooperation with the City's neighboring municipalities. The City has historically worked positively with Vergennes and Lowell Townships on a variety of planning and recreational endeavors. Similarly, Lowell's water and sewer system also serves both Townships. Thus, numerous factors that influence growth and development will necessarily need to be addressed through a cooperative approach. The Lowell Area Recreation Authority (LARA) and the ongoing cooperative work related to a potential industrial park in Lowell Township near the I-96 interchange are examples of positive intergovernmental cooperation.

Similarly, Lowell shares some of the same challenges when it comes to local and regional economic development. The extent to which cooperative efforts to attract new business and industry can be coordinated and multiplied through local and regional partnerships and organizations will be helpful to the City and the surrounding Townships.

The City may also explore coordinating zoning and land use standards near and along Main Street (Fulton Street) to help create a unified aesthetic, establish a greater sense of place within the community, ensure compatible development across jurisdictions, and improved access management. The City should also explore working with The Rapid to expand transit service.

CONTINUED NONMOTORIZED TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Walking and bicycling are not merely recreational activities; for many, they are primary modes of transportation. Lowell residents often walk or bike to schools, work, run errands, or visit parks. Lowell is also home to the North Country Trail, which not only runs through the City, but is headquartered in the heart of downtown Lowell.

Lowell has spent considerable time, effort, and financial resources on its trail network over the years and this has resulted in a popular and robust network of nonmotorized trails. In addition to providing a viable transportation option within the City, it also connects the City to neighboring communities such as Ionia, Belding, and Greenville via regional rail trails, such as the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail. The City's active leadership and participation in nonmotorized trail development have been vital to the success of the overall effort, and this plan strongly recommends the continuation of these initiatives to improve the quality of life for its residents.

Along with building out additional non-motorized infrastructure, the City should consider improvements to existing infrastructure to make walking and biking safer, more enjoyable, and a more attractive transportation option. This includes creating complete and accessible sidewalk systems, providing continuous bike lanes, assessing intersection safety, and working with local transportation units on improvements to major thoroughfares.



IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

| Project and/or Program | Description | Timing (Near-, Mid-, or Long-Term)* | Primary Responsible Parties |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Flat River Activation | Continue to improve river access from its banks. | Mid | City Council, State & Federal Agencies |
| | Collaborate with communities to dredge the river north of the dam and implementing measures to enhance navigability. | Mid | |
| | Partner with non-profit organizations like Friends of the Flat to collaborate on initiatives that improve the environmental health of the river. | Short | |
| Zoning Ordinance Revisions | Incorporate design standards for buildings in the Downtown District. | Mid | Planning Commission |
| | Expand the zoning ordinance to include new land uses that are not currently listed. | Short | |
| | Implement and streamline procedural updates to encourage various developments. | Short | |
| | Increase housing diversity by incorporating additional housing types. | Short | |
| | Align the zoning ordinance with the future land use map, prioritizing changes that minimize or eliminate nonconforming situations. | Mid | |
| Placemaking Plan Implementation | Implement strategies to enhance downtown spaces with projects like South Riverwalk/Overlook and bump-outs for pedestrian safety. | Long | DDA, City Council, LARA |
| | Designate areas for public art to enhance the aesthetic value in Downtown. | Mid | |
| | Install gateway signage at key entry points and boost area awareness. | Mid | |
| Housing Strategy | Facilitate development of diverse housing options, including duplexes, multi-family dwellings, and accessory dwellings via zoning changes. | Short | Planning Commission, City Council |
| | Use zoning tools, such as Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) to allow flexibility in zoning requirements for high-quality developments when conventional zoning may be impractical. | Short | |
| | Maintain and improve condition of properties, streets, and sidewalks in neighborhoods across the City. | Long | |

* Near: 0-3 years

Mid: 3-5 years

Long: 5 or more years



| Project and/or Program | Description | Timing (Near-, Mid-, or Long-Term)* | Primary Responsible Parties |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Partnerships with Local Governments, Schools, and Community Stakeholders | Continue to strengthen partnerships with Vergennes and Lowell Townships to address growth and development collaboratively, include planning and recreational initiatives. | Short | City Council, LARA |
| | Collaborate with the Rapid to explore opportunities for expanding transit service. | Long | |
| | Support cooperative projects like the Lowell Area Recreational Authority (LARA) initiatives. | Long | |
| Continued Nonmotorized Trail Development | Continue to develop City's nonmotorized trail system to enhance connectivity and improve existing infrastructure. | Short | City Council, LARA |
| | Continue partnerships with regional stakeholders to establish a complete and accessible trail system. | Long | |

* Near: 0-3 years

Mid: 3-5 years

Long: 5 or more years