



A BETTER BELDING

City of Belding 2025 Master Plan

Adopted: _____, 2025

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BELDING

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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction





INTRODUCTION

What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan represents a statement about what a community is, what its residents value, and what those residents hope the community will become in the future. This Master Plan is the product of more than a year of work by the City's staff, Planning Commission, citizens, and local leaders. It reflects the community's commitment to caring for Belding's people and its natural and built environment. This Plan provides a strong commitment to retaining and strengthening the local quality of life for everyone in Belding. This plan also looks to the future and identifies opportunities for redevelopment and positive change in the City.

The 2025 Master Plan is comprised of several different sections, including a description of the City's history and the existing conditions and trends related to its people, the land, and city services. It also contains policy statements outlining the future vision for the City through a detailed set of goals and objectives that are intended to achieve that vision.

In addition, the Master Plan provides the City with a guide for land use, the character of new development, and opportunities for new development, redevelopment, and conservation. The Master Plan serves as the basis for land use decisions and regulation under zoning and other regulatory means. This Master Plan has been developed pursuant to the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008, as amended), which enables municipalities in Michigan to undertake planning efforts.

This 2025 Belding Master Plan is an update of the previous Master Plan, adopted in 2009. While some of the policies from the 2009 Plan have been retained, others have been strengthened, revised, or removed.



The Planning Process

The effort to develop the Belding Master Plan began in mid-2024 and consisted of the following phases:

1. Community Profile. The Community Profile (Chapters 2 through 5) contain a snapshot of conditions in the City as of 2024-2025. This fact-finding activity is crucial to the planning process as it provides a data-driven, factual basis on which assumptions and decisions can be founded.
2. Public Engagement. 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 Belding Middle School, visioning meetings with City leadership and stakeholders, and additional public meetings. These are described in additional detail in Chapter 6, and a complete Public Engagement Report is included in the Appendix.
3. Goals and Objectives. Goals and Objectives (Chapter 7) were developed over a series of meetings with the Planning Commission. The Goals and Objectives from the 2009 Plan were used as a starting point, but many new goals and objectives were written to address contemporary challenges and priorities. The public input received in step 2 of this process informed the policies and overall direction found in Chapter 4.
4. Future Land Use. The Future Use Plan and map (Chapter 8) provide a guide for land use and zoning decisions in the City. Each future land use designation is related to one or more of the City's zoning districts to aid the Planning Commission in determining how the future land map relates to the zoning map. This Chapter also identifies four potential development areas that are discussed in more detail as key locations in the City where additional development or redevelopment is possible.
5. Implementation Strategies. The Master Plan concludes with a series of steps that, when implemented, will fulfill the Plan's Goals and Objectives and should allow the Belding to achieve the vision articulated by this Plan. These can be found in Chapter 9.

Belding's History

In the 1830s, Belding's first settler, Levi Broas, arrived in what is now Belding and constructed a mill. The community was initially known as Broas Rapids. Later, Lucius Patterson acquired an interest in Broas's mill property, and during its logging era, the community was also known by names such as Patterson Mill and Hog Wallow. In 1871, the name was officially changed to Belding in honor of the Belding family.

The Belding family built the first silk mill in 1884, naming it the "Richardson Mill" out of concern it might not succeed. However, their fears were unfounded. Belding Brothers and Company went on to construct another silk mill in town, along with three dormitories to house female workers. These high-class boarding houses were known as "The Ashfield," "The Belrockton," and "The White Swan," each accommodating up to 125 people. Belding eventually became the third-largest silk-producing city in the world and earned the nickname "Silk City."

The development of rayon (or "artificial silk") and the popularity of shorter skirts in the 1920s decreased the demand for natural silk. The Great Depression further impacted the labor-intensive silk industry, leading to the closure of Belding Brothers and Company's last silk mill in Belding in 1932. Despite the industry's decline, Belding's strong historical association with the silk mills remains a defining aspect of its unique character.

Of the original dormitories, only the Belrockton remains. It now serves as the Community Center and houses the Belding Museum.

In 1972, a Housing and Urban Development program aimed at revitalizing downtown replaced the core downtown blocks with an indoor shopping area known as the Covered Village Mall. Although initially successful, the mall has not remained a lasting economic anchor and has instead created a physical barrier to broader downtown redevelopment.

Despite the challenges posed by the Covered Village Mall, downtown Belding still showcases several strengths. These include the restored Library, the Belrockton Museum, and other historic buildings that preserve the community's heritage. The riverfront, featuring updated park facilities and easy access to nearby neighborhoods, along with a strong civic presence downtown, are all valuable assets that Belding can build upon as it looks to the future.

Looking Ahead

The adoption of this Master Plan in 2025 represents the culmination of a lengthy, comprehensive planning process and a commitment to its implementation. Without regular review, consultation, and proactive action, many of the Plan's policies will not be achieved. While the City cannot compel private property development, it can foster a citywide environment and culture that encourages responsible development, supports good design, and cultivates a sense of community and stewardship.

Residents of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities contributed to the development of this Plan. Through its appointed and elected leadership, the City has translated the needs, desires, and visions of those who participated in the planning process into actionable steps. Therefore, the City has both a duty and a responsibility to champion the Plan's implementation and pursue its goals.

These steps may be small—such as rezoning individual parcels of land—or large—such as completing a major project recommended by the Plan. Each action, guided by local economic conditions, municipal budgets, and political considerations, will be necessary to create a better Belding.

CHAPTER 2.

Natural Features

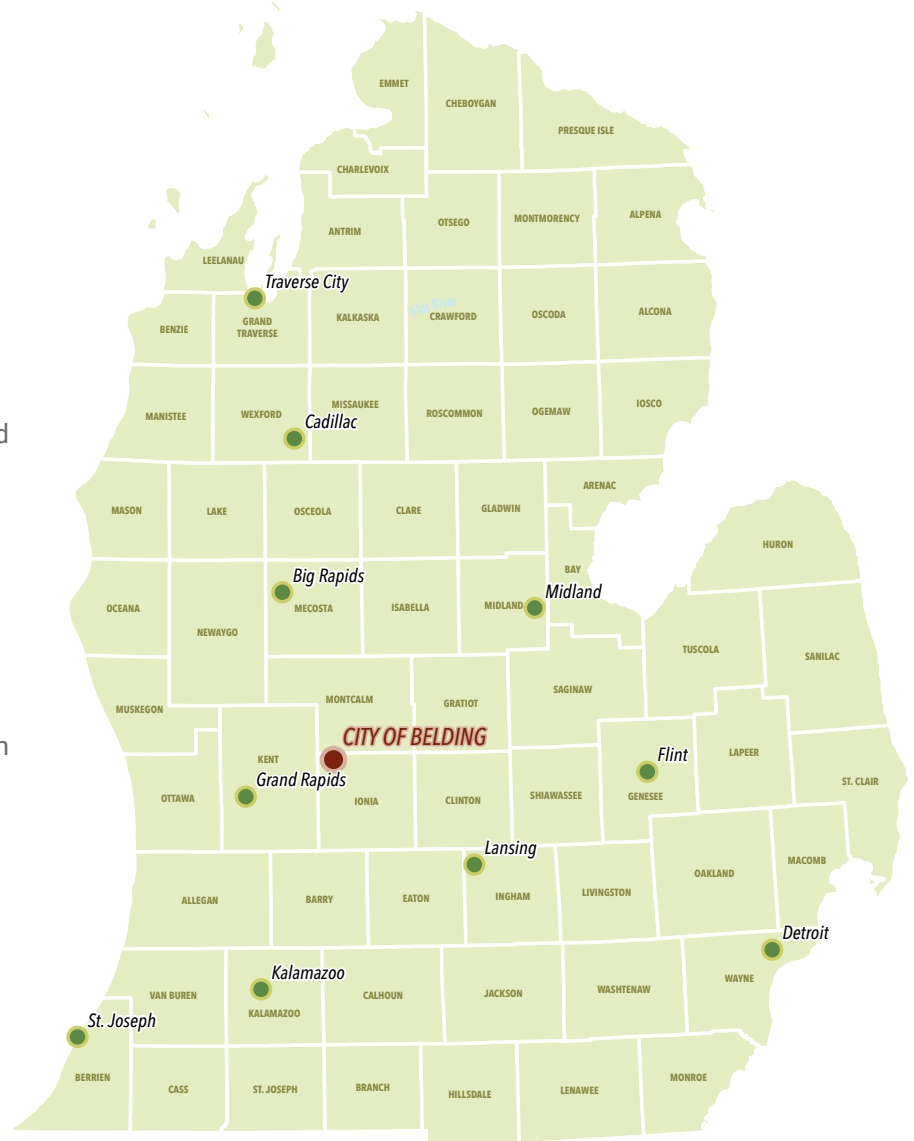


NATURAL FEATURES

For any community Master Plan, a discussion recognizing and discussing natural features is essential for promoting environmental sustainability, enhancing quality of life, attracting visitors and businesses, and preserving the unique identity of the City. By exploring the protection of these features and integrating these natural assets into policies, the Master Plan can facilitate the development of a balanced and resilient urban environment that benefits both present and future generations.

Location

The City of Belding encompasses 4.9 square miles and is situated in the northwest corner of Ionia County, adjacent to Kent and Montcalm Counties. Nearby urban centers include the cities of Greenville, Rockford, Ionia, Lowell, and the larger Grand Rapids metro area. Key thoroughfares within Belding are M-44, Bridge Street, and Ellis Street, with the M-91 corridor located just west of the city limits. The Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Trail serves as a significant nonmotorized transportation route, traversing the city from southwest to northeast. Positioned 25 miles northeast of Grand Rapids, Belding has experienced gradual population growth, reflecting broader regional trends in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area and the west Michigan region.





Topography

The topography of the City features a gently rolling landscape with occasional low-lying wetland areas as shown on Map 1. Steep slopes are present along some sections of the Flat River's banks, offering attractive views of the river valley. The elevation in city lies between 744 and 858 feet, as shown in Map 2. Overall, the elevation range is relatively narrow, as the city is situated on moderately level terrain with only slight variations in height across its area.

Hydrology

The Flat River is the main hydrological feature in Belding, serving both economic and recreational purposes for residents, offering opportunities for fishing, boating, and other activities. The river is a designated Michigan Natural River under Part 305 of the Natural Rivers Act, PA 451 of 1994. The City of Belding falls within the Lower Flat River Watershed which is approximately 78,873 acres in size encompassing eastern part of Kent County and the northwestern part of Ionia County.

The watershed covers 564 square miles across Kent, Montcalm, Ionia, and Mecosta counties. The Flat River originates in the Six Lakes and flows to the south through Greenville, Belding and Lowell, where it empties into the Grand River. The Flat River and its tributaries, extending over 150 miles of stream channels, are valued for their scenic beauty and recreational opportunities including fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Watersheds are shown in Map 2.

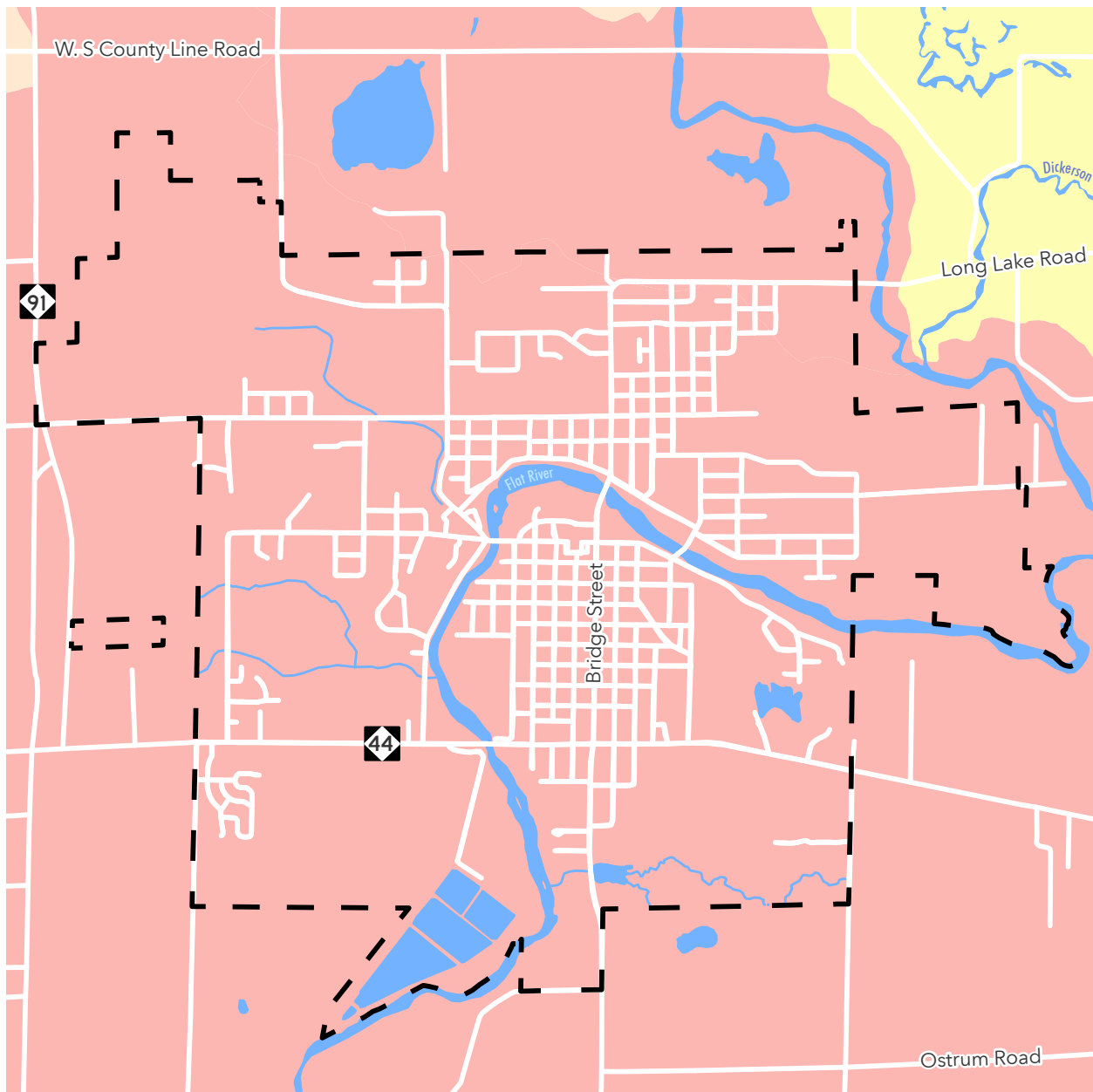
While the Flat River itself only flows through three communities, it is fed by a large network of tributaries spanning more than 500 square miles, so activities in and around Lakeview, Edmore, McBride, Stanton, Sheridan, Sand Lake, and everywhere in between can also impact the quality of the river.

There are several civic organizations and community groups who work to protect the Flat River, such as the Flat River Watershed Council, which was formed in 2011 by a group who wanted to ensure that this resource would be enjoyed by future generations. The Flat River Watershed Council was a partner in creating the first Watershed Management Plan for the Flat River, and they also partner with the Montcalm Conservation District to put on educational events, stream sampling, and river cleanups.

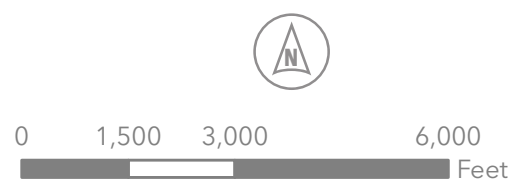
In 2016 the Flat River Watershed Management Plan was adopted, which contains among other things, goals and objectives for the watersheds, a summary of pollutants, sources, and causes in the watershed, best management practices, a social survey analysis and information and education recommendations, preservation recommendations, area management plans, and an evaluation and monitoring plan.



MAP 2. WATERSHEDS



- Dickerson Creek
- Flat River
- Seely Creek
- Wabasis Creek
- Rivers, Streams, and Ponds



Wetlands

Belding also contains abundant wetlands, which provide habitat for wildlife, naturally filter surface water entering the river, and enhance the area’s aesthetic appeal. This unique system of wetlands and the river offers fishery habitats of regional significance. The total land area that is potentially a wetland amounts to approximately 365 acres as shown on Map 3.

Wetlands are vital ecosystems that provide numerous environmental benefits. They serve as natural filtration systems, improving water quality by trapping pollutants and sediments. Wetlands also offer critical habitat for a diverse range of wildlife, including many endangered species. Additionally, they act as natural buffers against flooding by absorbing excess rainwater, and they contribute to the aesthetic and recreational value of an area, enhancing the quality of life for local communities.

As shown in Map 3, a majority of the wetlands in the City of Belding are Forest/Shrub Wetlands. They are characterized by a mix of trees, shrubs, and wetland vegetation and often occur in low-lying areas prone to seasonal flooding or near water bodies, contributing to the overall diversity and ecological health of wetland ecosystems.

Land Cover

Land cover refers to the vegetation and land use present within a particular community. In the case of the Belding, the land cover data was obtained from the National Land Cover Dataset (NLCD) prepared by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in 2021. This dataset was generated by analyzing Landsat TM satellite imagery through an automated computer-based process.

The National Land Cover Database (NLCD) provides nationwide data on land cover with a 16-class legend based on a modified Anderson Level II classification system. 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. While the land cover data may not be entirely accurate, it provides a broader understanding of the overall land cover composition within the City (Map 4).

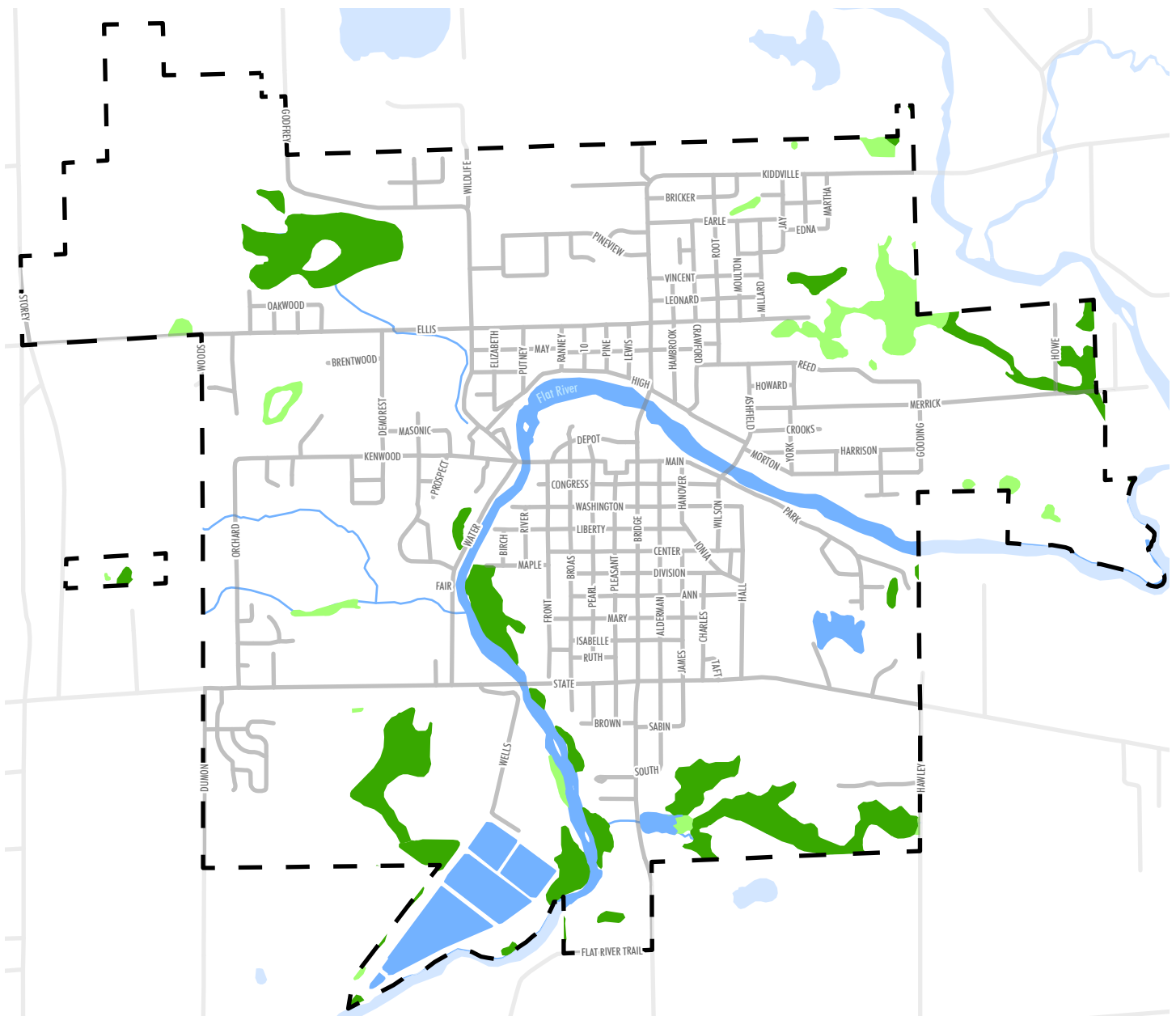
As shown in Table 2.1, Forest/Tree Canopy represents the largest land cover category in Belding, totaling an estimated 771 acres, accounting for nearly a quarter of the city’s land area. Mature trees are abundant across the city, adorning streets and gracing numerous residential properties. City parks and state-owned areas such as Lightning Bend Park and the Flat River Valley State Game Area boast dense woodland cover. The natural vegetation exhibits a diverse range, featuring species like ash, willow, poplar, and elm in lowland regions, while beech, maple, and hemlock thrive in steep slopes and seasonal wetlands. Predominant tree species within the City include maple, linden, oak, and ash, along with evergreens such as white pine, spruce, and fir, commonly utilized in residential landscaping.

Table 2.1: Land Cover Classification

Land Cover Classification	Acres	Percent
Forest/Tree Canopy	771	24%
Developed, Open Space	649	20%
Developed, Low Intensity	576	18%
Developed, Medium Intensity	437	14%
Wetlands	365	11%
Developed, High Intensity	170	5%
Open Space/Agricultural	148	5%
Open Water	84	3%
Barren Land	1	0%

Source: National Land Cover Database 2021.

MAP 3. WETLANDS

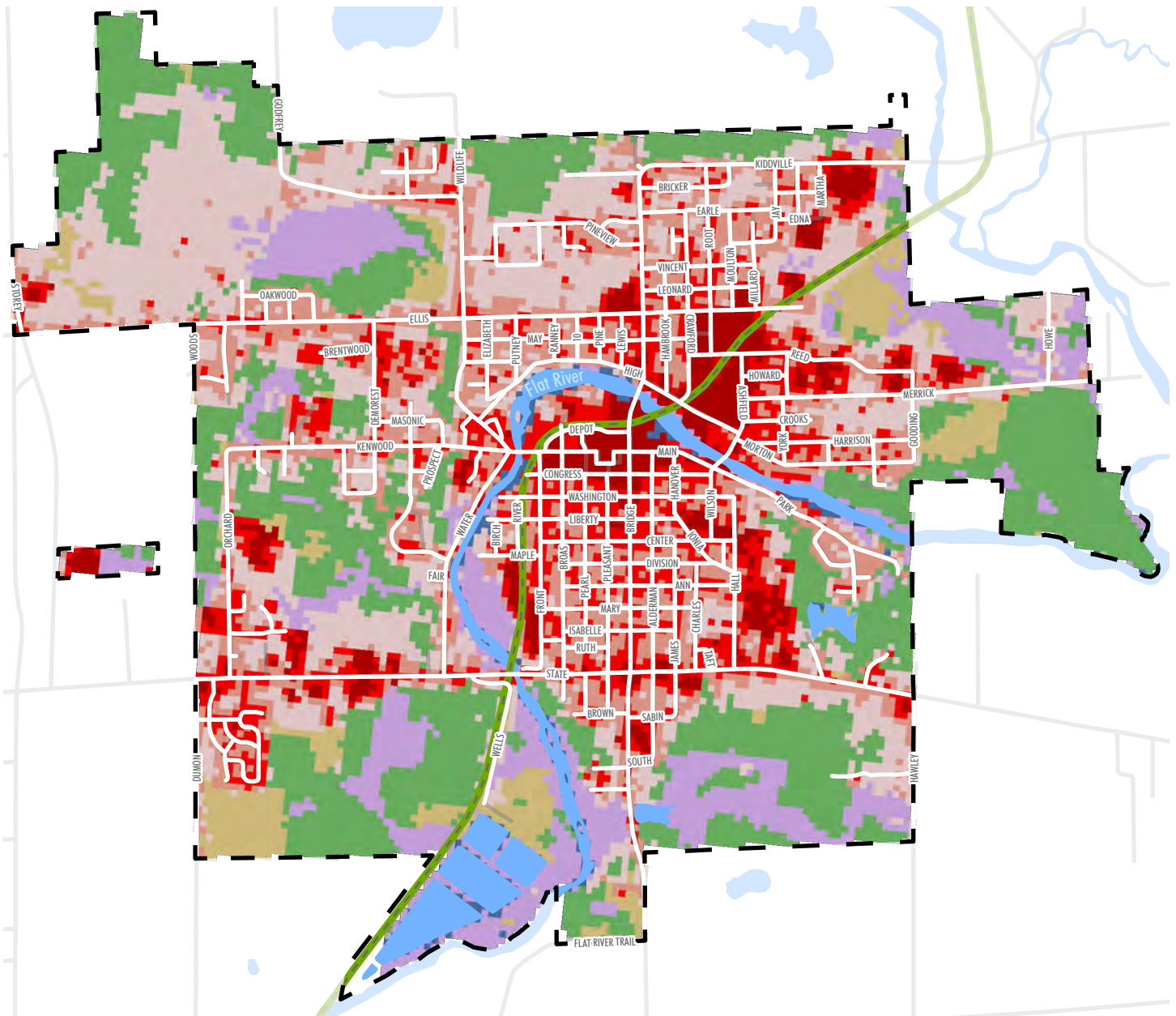


- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Rivers, Streams, and Ponds

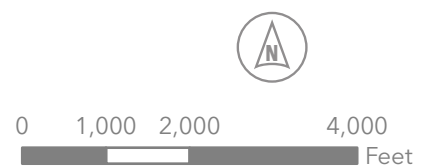


0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet

MAP 4. LAND COVER



- | | |
|---|---|
|  Developed, Open Space |  Open Space/Agricultural |
|  Developed, Low Intensity |  Wetlands |
|  Developed, Medium Intensity |  Open Water |
|  Developed, High Intensity |  Rivers, Streams |
|  Forest/Tree Canopy | |
|  Barren Land | |





Existing Land Use Patterns and Zoning

LAND USE

Much of the developed property in the City consists of developed single-family neighborhoods arranged in a traditional grid pattern around the downtown. Much of this land is part of the original plat of the City of Belding from the late 1800s. This land use classification also includes commercial and industrial development, parks, streets, schools, and additional human development.

Presently, the City features an array of land uses that reflect its historic roots and more recent community development trends. Residential areas dominate the city, with single-family homes on historically platted lots, and some conversions of homes and historic structures into multi-family housing, such as the former silk factory.

The historic downtown core was replaced by the Covered Village Mall in 1972, but many historic structures remain such as the Alvah N. Belding Memorial Library and the Belrockton Historical Museum. Commercial development can be found along State Street south of downtown while more traditional commercial uses can still be found around downtown.

Industrial areas are mostly located in the northeast corner of the City, though additional development can be found along other stretches of the Flat River trail given the trail was once a railroad that served the industry in Belding.

Belding also boasts abundant recreational spaces with the Flat River and Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail both running through the city and parks such as Lightning Bend offering ample outdoor opportunities.

ZONING

Belding's zoning ordinance divides the city into twelve districts as shown on Map 6. There are six residential districts, three commercial districts, one industrial district, and two unmapped districts. These are described in greater detail below:

Residential Zoning Districts

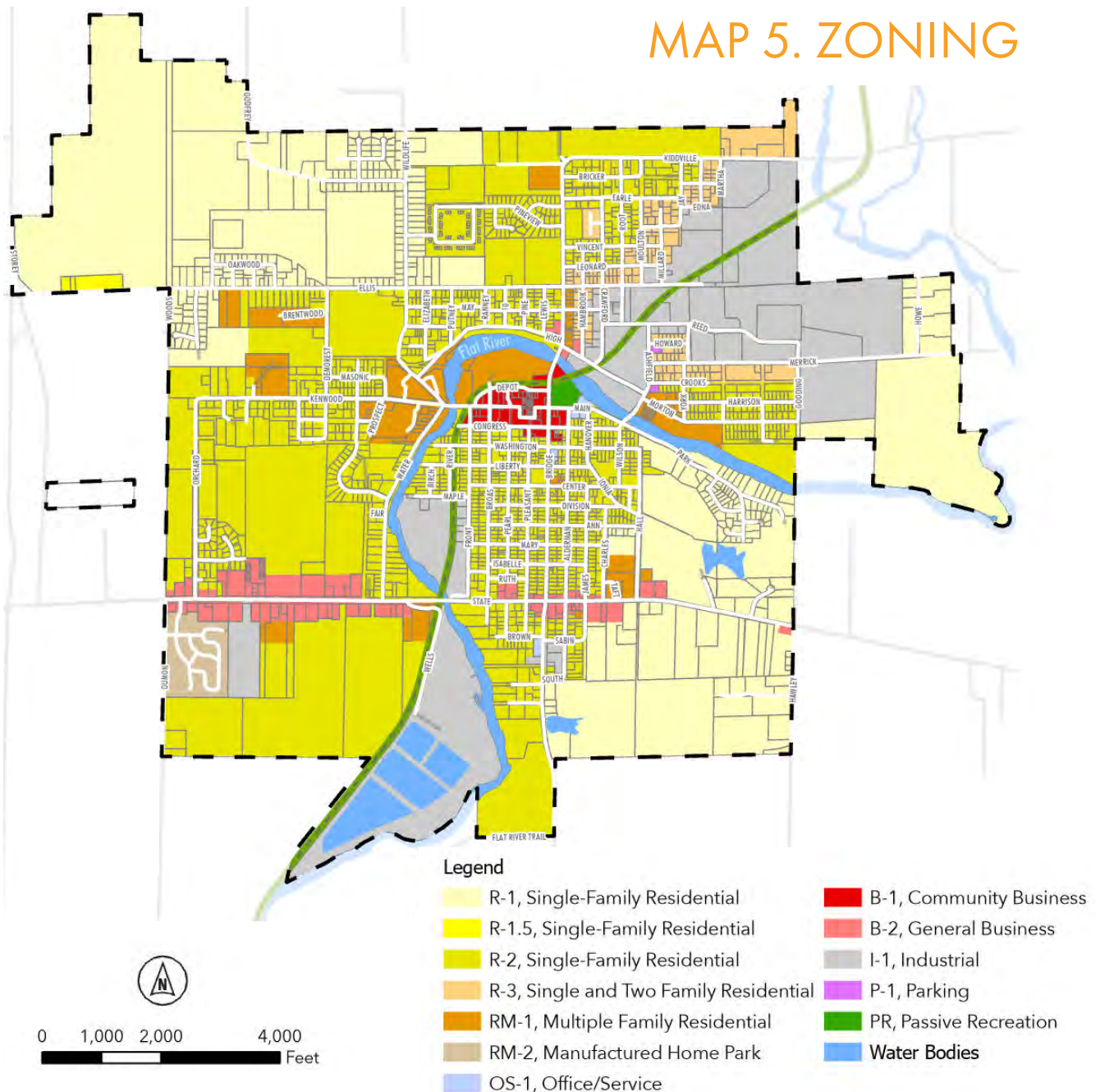
- **R-1 Single Family Residential** – The R-1 district permits single family homes and customary non-residential uses such as parks, churches, and public buildings at very low densities. Minimum lot size is 21,000 square feet; Minimum Lot Width 100 Feet
- **R-1.5 Single-Family Residential** – Like The R-1 district, the R-1.5 district permits single family homes and customary non-residential uses such as parks, churches, and public buildings at low densities. This district is limited to a handful of property on the north side of Ellis Street, adjacent to the Candlestone Golf Course. Minimum lot size is 14,520 square feet; minimum lot width is 80 feet.
- **R-2 Single-Family Residential** – The R-2 district encompasses most of the Belding's historic neighborhoods and occupied most of the City's land area. It permits single family homes and customary non-residential uses such as parks, churches, and public buildings on at low densities. Most of Belding's historic neighborhoods were platted at 8,712 square feet (66'x132'), so the minimum lot size in this district is 8,450 square feet and the minimum width is 66 feet.
- **R-3 Single and Two Family Residential** – The R-3 district is limited to lands on the northeast side of the City and permits single family homes and customary non-residential uses such as parks, churches, and public buildings on at low densities. Unlike the R-1, R-1.5, and R-2 districts, the R-3 district also permits two-family dwellings. Most of the properties in the R-3 district are historic neighborhoods that were platted at 8,712 square feet (66'x132'), so the minimum lot size in this district is also 8,450 square feet and the minimum width is 66 feet.
- **RM-1 Multiple Family Residential** – The RM-1 district permits the same types of residential uses as the other residential districts, but also permits multiple-family dwellings such as apartments and condominiums. In addition, this district also permits larger facilities such as homes for the aged, nursing homes, and child care facilities. For single-and two-family dwellings, lot requirements are the same as the R-2 district. Additional land area is required for multi-family developments, with a maximum density of 12 units per acre.
- **RM-2 Manufactured Home Park** – The RM-2 Manufactured Home Park district contains the Wellington Estates, the City's only manufactured housing community. Communities are required to provide for manufactured housing as an option to its residents, and Belding has taken the customary approach of creating a zoning district tailored specific for manufactured housing communities.

Commercial Zoning Districts

- **OS-1 Office/Personal Service District** – The OS-1 district is a commercial district intended to accommodate low-intensity uses such as offices and personal services to the residents of Belding. This district permits offices, banks, personal services, and similar uses. There are very few properties in the OS-1 district along Bridge Street and Park Street.

- **B-1 Community Business District** – The B-1 district covers Belding’s downtown area including the covered Village Mall property. Like the OS-1 district, it is intended to accommodate low-intensity commercial retail and service uses. For the most part there are no requirements for lot area, width, or setbacks in this district, which enables property owners to maximize their land area.
- **B-2 General Business District** – The B-2 district allows general commercial uses, most of which are on State Street. Most property from the western City limits to the Flat River are zoned B-2, along with various properties along State Street east of the River, from Broas to Hall Streets. The B-2 district requires at least 15,000 square feet of land area and 80 feet in width. A required front setback of 40 feet, coupled with required parking standards results in very low-density auto-oriented development.

MAP 5. ZONING



Industrial Zoning Districts

- **I-1 Industrial District** – The I-1 district accommodates general industrial activities such as wholesalers, warehousing, manufacturing, storage, and other industrial uses. The northeast portion of the City contains more than 200 acres of industrial land, many of which are vacant or underutilized. These properties were originally developed as industrial uses due to the presence of the railroad corridor, which is now the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail. With truck access made difficult to do that lack of good access to transportation corridors, new development and redevelopment has been challenging. However, the recent expansion of existing businesses suggests that remain opportunities for additional development in the City.

Other Zoning Districts

- **Passive Recreation District** – The Passive Recreation District was created in 2015 and the only property in this district is the Electrolux property located at the northwest corner of Main Street and Bridge Street, just east of the Covered Village Mall. The site used to contain the historic Gibson Building and landmark clock tower, but these were demolished in 2012 and designated parkland.
- **Parking District** – This district tallows for off-street parking lots as a principal use. There are only two parcels within this district, both along Ashfield Street north of the Flat River. It was developed to allow parking lots by petition or request to serve an adjoining use district which lacks sufficient off-street parking facilities.

Planning Implications

1. While the City is mostly built out, there remains on its periphery larger properties that may be able to accommodate new development. The City should carefully consider future land use decisions on these parcels and take into account the need for additional housing options, the availability of infrastructure, and the character of adjoining neighborhoods.
2. The City's industrial area is in need to redevelopment but is situated in an unfavorable location due to a lack of transportation connections for heavier industrial traffic. The City should look to explore options to connect industrial-zoned properties on the northeast side of the City to Ellis Street, which would provide a direct connection to M-91. Concurrently, the City should tailor its industrial recruitment efforts to businesses that would not on regional transportation access and truck shipments.
3. The City of Belding has a unique history unlike most communities of its size. Efforts should be made to capitalize on this unique aspect of Belding. Work to preserve the City's historic buildings should be preserved.
4. In some cases, commercial zoning provisions may need to be modified to allow for better use of properties. There exist several underutilized commercial properties on Main Street that could be re-purposed, but zoning requirements may present an opportunity to meaningful redevelopment. The City should work to loosen restrictions on these properties through either rezoning or text amendments to the B-2 district.
5. There may be additional opportunities to consolidate zoning districts and simplify the zoning ordinance easier administration. For example, some of the City's residential districts could be consolidated into one district. The parking district could likely be eliminated. Other districts could be modified to be made less restrictive to facilitate new development.

CHAPTER 3.

Community Profile





COMMUNITY PROFILE

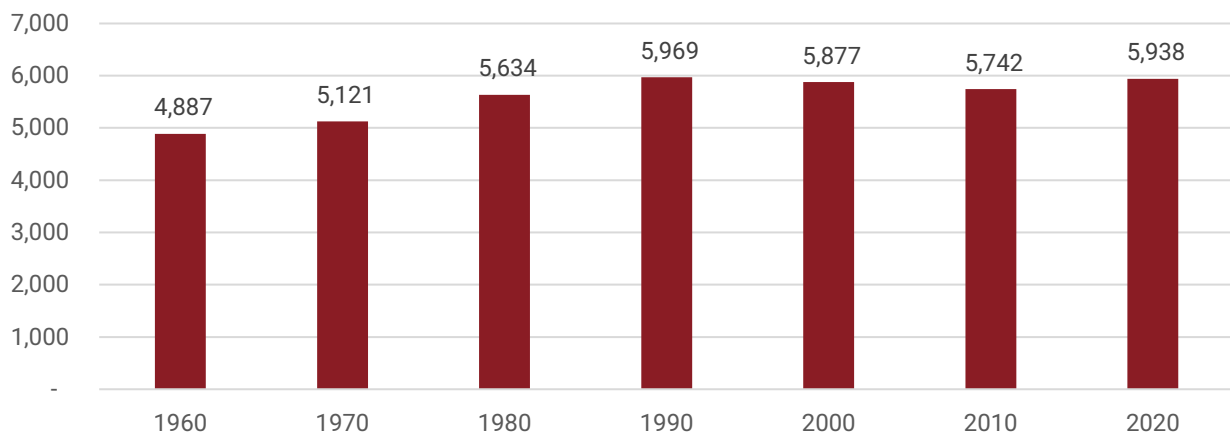
Analyzing the community demographics play an important role in developing a master plan. This section of the plan presents data on population, housing, social dynamics, and employment characteristics specific to the City of Belding. Understanding these demographic trends can inform local policymakers and stakeholders in planning for future infrastructure, services, and community development initiatives.

This chapter incorporates data sourced from the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS data is influenced by the decennial census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The decennial census serves as the foundation for the ACS, providing important baseline data for population counts, demographics, and housing characteristics. The decennial census ensures that the ACS data is grounded in an updated and representative snapshot of the population, enhancing the accuracy and usefulness of the ACS in providing current demographic and socioeconomic information.

Population

This section analyzes the population data for Belding and surrounding communities. Between 1960 and 2020, Belding experienced a population increase of approximately 1,100 residents. Most of this population growth occurred between 1960 and 1990, when the City reached a peak population of 5,969. From 1990 to 2010, the City's population declined slightly by approximately 200 residents before rebounding between 2010 and 2020 to its current populations of 5,938 in 2020. In general, however, the City's population has remained steady for the last 30-40 years, as shown in Figure 3.1.

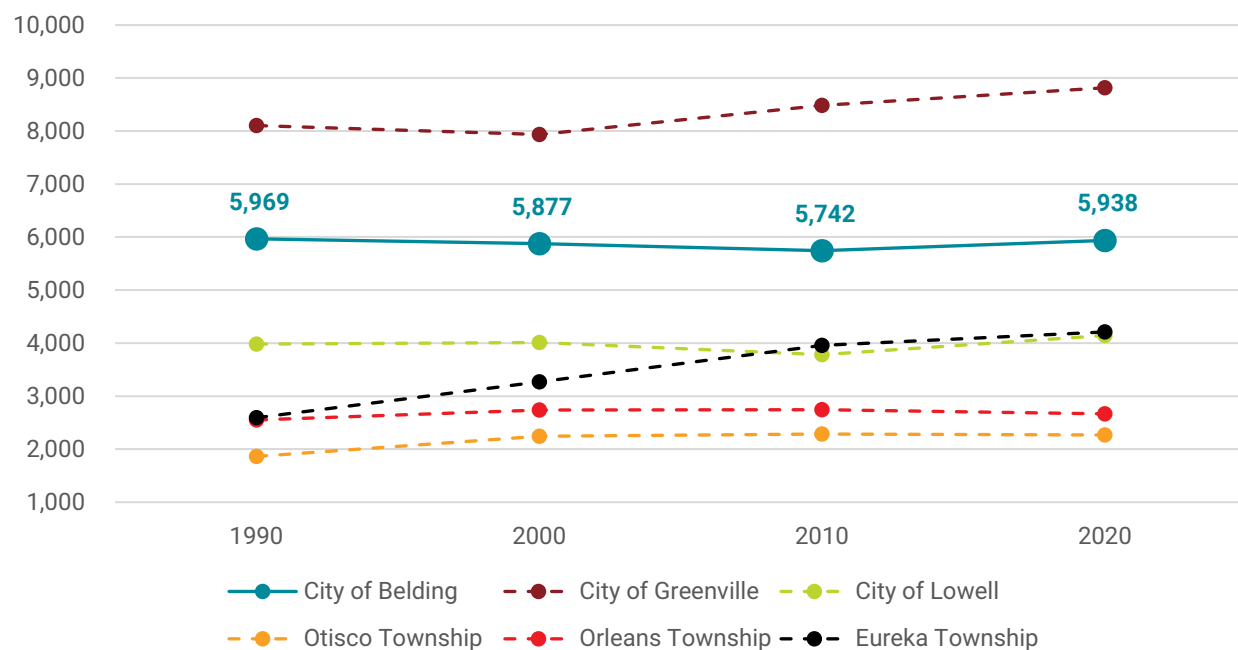
Figure 3.1: City of Belding Population Change, 1960-2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Figure 3.2: City of Belding Population Change, 1990-2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Comparing Belding’s population changes to neighboring communities and Ionia County as a whole provides additional context, as shown in Figure 3.2. While Belding experienced modest growth over the decades, it has maintained a smaller population than Greenville. Greenville experienced consistent growth from 1990 to 2020, though it should be noted that Greenville’s jurisdictional boundaries expand when new development is served by City water and sewer services. Similarly, Ionia County demonstrated steady population increases throughout the same period. Other neighboring communities such as Lowell, Otisco Township, Orleans Township, and Eureka Charter Township also experienced varying degrees of population growth with minor fluctuations. In general, however, Belding’s population trends are similar to that of Lowell and other small cities in west Michigan.

Overall, Belding’s population reflect a mix of modest growth and periods of stagnation, contrasting with the more consistent growth observed in neighboring Townships and in Ionia County as a whole. Understanding these demographic trends can inform local policymakers and stakeholders in planning for future infrastructure, services, and community development initiatives.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Statistical averaging techniques were used to project the City's likely population growth through the year 2050. These 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 data. These projections can be used to understand the future position of the City in terms of growth and total population. There are three different projections techniques explored in this section: the Arithmetic Method, the Growth Rate Method, and the Constant Proportion Method.

Arithmetic Method

The Arithmetic Method projects future population counts based on the increase or decrease in the average number of persons per year. The projections shown in Table 3.1 are based on an average increase of **10** persons per year in Belding since 1980.

Growth Rate Method

This method assumes growth or decline will occur at the same rate as it did in the past, similar to the Arithmetic Method. According to the U.S. Census, the population rate of growth in the City of Belding was approximately **0.18%** per year between 1980 and 2020.

Constant Proportion Method

The Constant Proportion Method assumes that the City of Belding's population will continue to be proportion of the population of Ionia County. In 2020, Ionia County's population was 66,804, and with a population 5,938, Belding comprised **8.88%** of the total County population. Ionia County is projected to decrease over time with a projected population of 66,622 by 2030, 65,129 by 2040, and 61,392 by 2050.¹

Table 3.1 summarizes the population projection information based on the number of building permits provided by the City. The projections summarized assume that the past trends will continue, which limits the reliability of the information, but it is useful for future planning.

Table 3.1 Projected Population

Method	Projected Population			
	2020	2030	2040	2050
Arithmetic Method	5,938	6,038	6,138	6,238
Growth Rate Method	5,938	6,045	6,155	6,267
Constant Proportion Method	5,938	5,916	5,783	5,451
Total	5,938	6,000	6,025	5,985

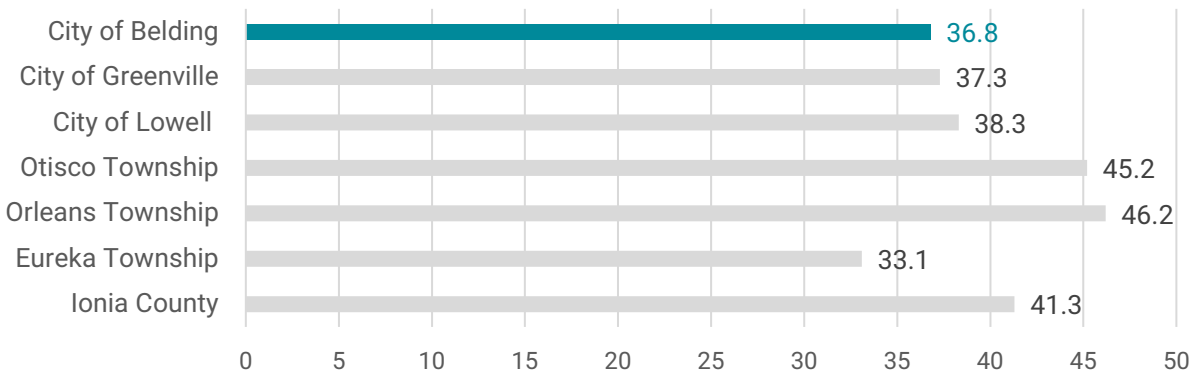
Table 3.1 above indicates that Belding's population will likely remain steady for the foreseeable future. However, there are additional factors that the City should consider when planning for future population, including the availability of employment opportunities, the need for attainable workforce housing in the community, and the continued growth of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Growth in one or more of these factors could lead to additional population growth in Belding, and the City will need to be prepared to accommodate a quickly evolving world.

¹ Michigan Statewide Population Projections through 2050. Prepared by the Michigan Center for Data and Analytics. Published April 2024. Accessed April 2025.

Age

Understanding the age distribution of a municipality crucial for local governments, service providers, and businesses as it allows them to tailor resources and amenities to meet the needs of different age groups within the community. It also informs long-term planning strategies, such as healthcare services, education facilities, and recreational facilities and programs to ensure the well-being and vitality of the population across all age ranges.

Figure 3.3: Median Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The City of Belding, along with Greenville and Lowell, maintain a younger population compared to the surrounding townships, as evidenced by their lower median ages shown in Figure 3.3. Belding's median age of 36.8 years suggests a slightly younger population compared to the county average of 41.3 years. This is common of small cities and urban areas in Michigan, which tend to have a younger population than the rural townships that surround them.

Belding's largest age segment falls within the 35 to 39-year range, comprising 9.2% of the population. This indicates a significant portion of the population in the prime working-age bracket. Additionally, age groups spanning from 25 to 54 years old collectively make up a substantial portion of Belding's population, reflecting a relatively stable and economically active demographic.

Table 3.2: Age Groups

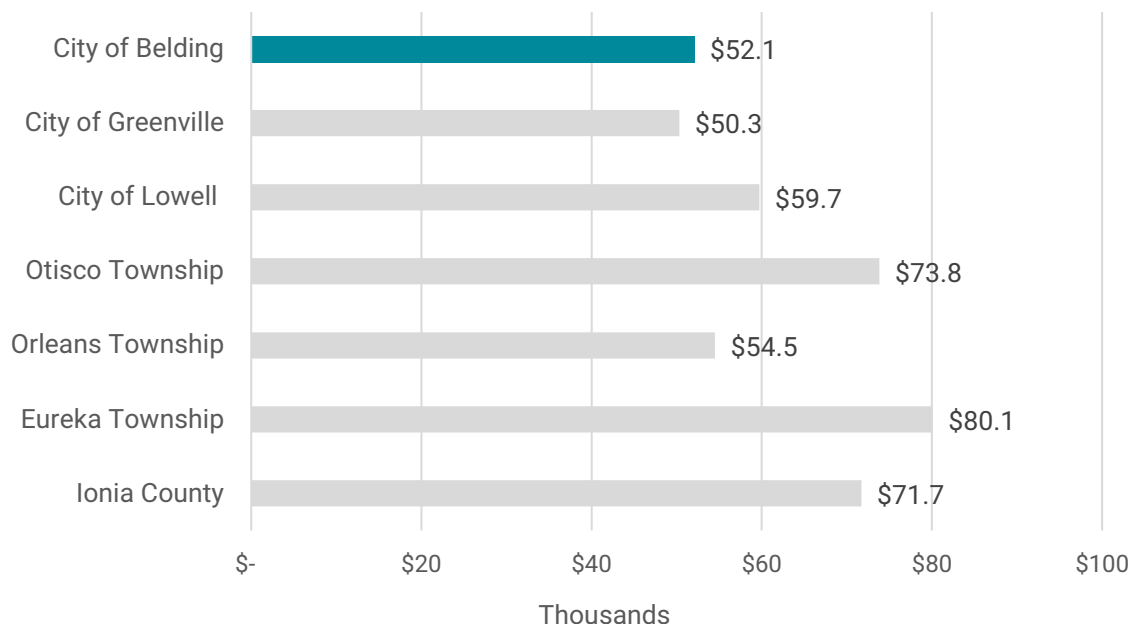
AGE	No. of People	Percent
Under 5 years	303	5.1%
5 to 9 years	389	6.5%
10 to 14 years	385	6.5%
15 to 19 years	372	6.3%
20 to 24 years	407	6.8%
25 to 29 years	418	7.0%
30 to 34 years	417	7.0%
35 to 39 years	548	9.2%
40 to 44 years	409	6.9%
45 to 49 years	245	4.1%
50 to 54 years	439	7.4%
55 to 59 years	293	4.9%
60 to 64 years	399	6.7%
65 to 69 years	329	5.5%
70 to 74 years	229	3.9%
75 to 79 years	144	2.4%
80 to 84 years	90	1.5%
85 years and over	126	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Income

Exploring individual and household provides insight on the economic landscape and the financial well-being of people in the community. As shown in Figure 3.4, Belding's median income of \$52,083 places it in the lower end compared to surrounding communities. Eureka Township stands out with the highest median income of \$80,074, while, Otisco Township and Orleans Township also report higher median incomes compared to Belding. Ionia County's median household income of \$71,720 falls above Belding's but below Eureka Township's.

Figure 3.4: Annual Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Examining income distribution within the City of Belding, a diverse range of income cohorts can be seen (see Table 3), indicating a broad middle-income segment within the city. However, a significant proportion of households, approximately 18.6%, fall below the poverty level, highlighting economic challenges faced by a substantial portion of the population. This is higher than the national average, which was around 12.4% in 2022. Further, the 2022 ACS reports that approximately one-third of households in Belding received food stamps/SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits in the last twelve months.

Table 3.3: Income Classification

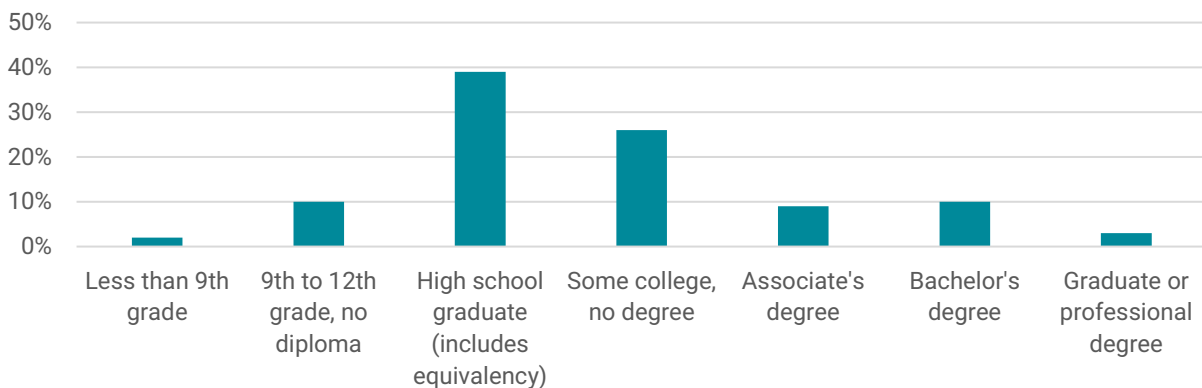
Income Cohort	Percent of Households
Less than \$10,000	7.6%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	7.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	10.1%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	4.8%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22.7%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	17.3%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	11.5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.5%
\$200,000 or more	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Education

Figure 3.5 shows the highest level of education achieved by individuals in Belding. Nearly 90% of residents have attained a high school graduation or higher, indicating a strong foundation of basic education within the community. Moreover, 13.5% of individuals hold at least a bachelor's degree, suggesting a considerable portion of the population has pursued higher education. When compared to Ionia County, a similar proportion of the population has a high school diploma, but a larger segment of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher (21.5%) compared the Belding (10%). A Belding seeks to attract new industrial development or other employment opportunities to Belding, it will need to be cognizant of the education level of its residents and which potential employers will have staffing needs to that align with the makeup of the community.

Figure 3.5: Highest Level of Education Attainment (Population 25+ years of age)

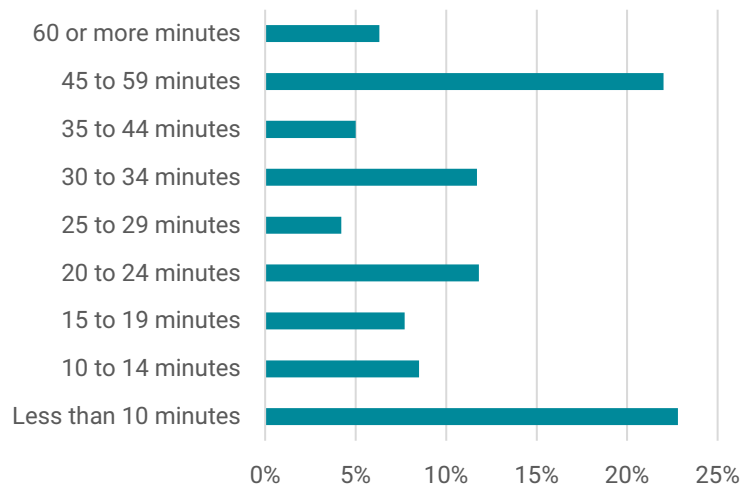


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Commuting Patterns

Analyzing commuting patterns in Belding reveals a predominant reliance on private vehicles, with approximately 95.7% of workers commuting to work by car, truck, or van. The majority of car commuters drive alone, comprising 88.0% of the workforce, while carpooling accounts for 7.5%. Alternative transportation modes such as public transit, walking, and biking are rarely utilized, collectively representing only 3.50% of commuting methods. Approximately 0.8% of workers work from home, indicating a small segment with remote work arrangements.

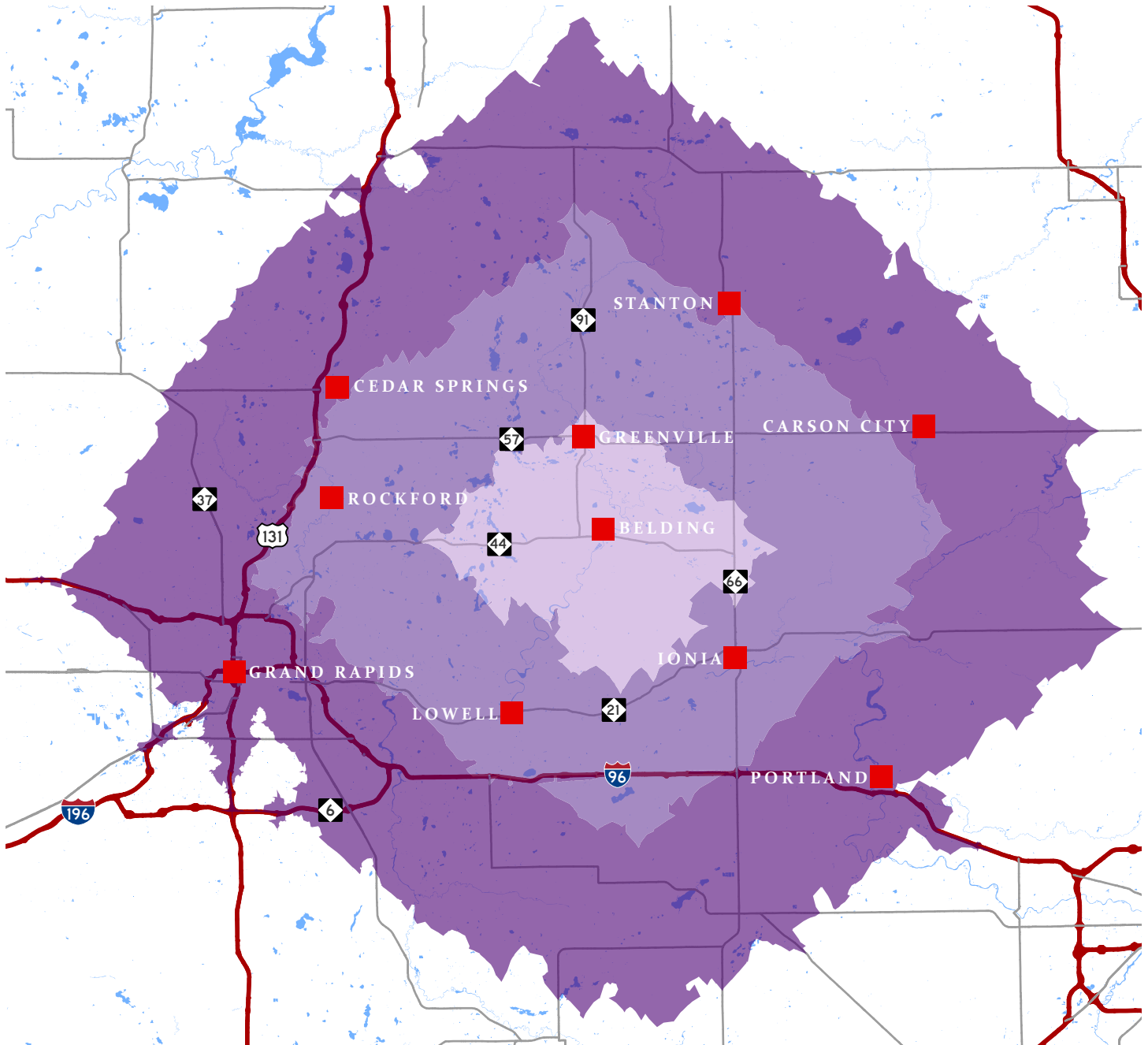
Figure 3.6: Travel Time to Work



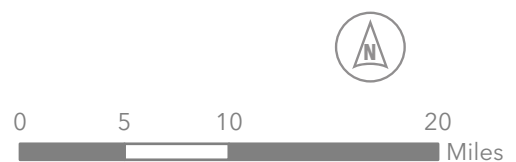
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

As shown in Figure 3.6, commute durations vary, with nearly one-third experiencing short commutes of less than 15 minutes, while about 28.0% endure longer commutes of 45 minutes or more. The mean travel time to work is 26.5 minutes. Given Belding's location in Ionia County, it is logical to assume that many Belding residents stay local for employment, while many other travel to various employment centers in the region including Greenville, Iona, and the larger metro areas of Grand Rapids and Lansing.

MAP 6. COMMUTER SHED



- Within 45 minutes
- Within 30 minutes
- Within 15 minutes

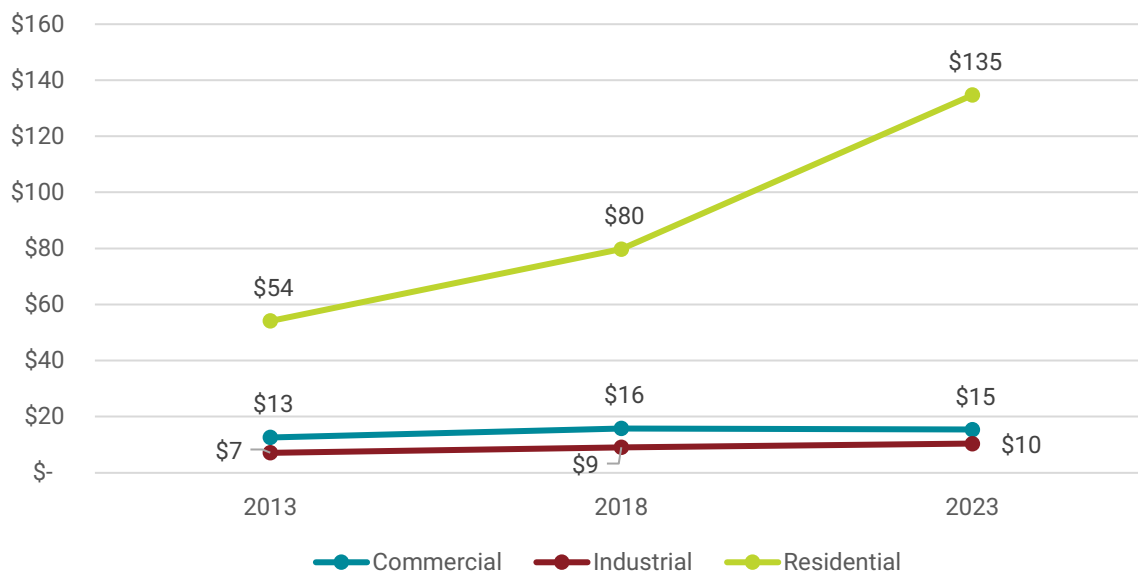


Property Values

Analyzing the property values for the City of Belding helps to determine the amount of tax revenue the City collects to pay for services. The state equalized value (SEV) is the final assessed value after the County and State completed their equalization processes and certified Assessed and Taxable Values. Typically, the SEV is the same as the Assessed Value, which is 50% of the true cash value of the home. Belding's City Assessor is responsible to assess all property in the City at 50% of fair market value. This includes commercial, industrial, and residential properties, vacant land, and personal property. The Assessor reviews approximately 20% of the properties in the City each year to make assessment determinations and maintain accurate assessment records for property in the City.

Data from 2013 to 2023 reveals significant growth across all property categories, with the most dramatic increase observed in residential property values. The total SEV for residential property in the City increased from \$54,116,800 in 2013 to \$134,743,800 in 2023, representing an increase of approximately 149% over eleven years. Commercial property values also experienced growth, rising from \$12,573,600 in 2013 to \$15,390,500 in 2023, a 22% increase, while the industrial sector saw notable growth as well, with property values increasing from \$7,103,100 in 2013 to \$10,371,300 in 2023, a rise of approximately 46%. Overall, the data demonstrates robust growth in property values across all sectors, reflecting a thriving real estate market and broader economic development within Belding over the past decade.

Figure 3.7: Equalized Real Property Values, 2013-2023

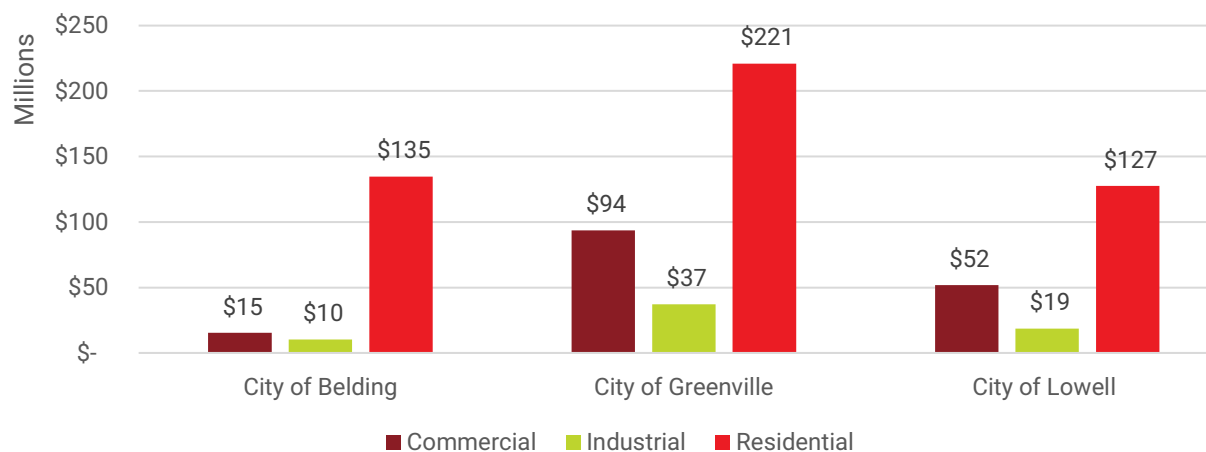


Source: Ionia County Equalization Reports, 2013-2023

Comparing SEV of City of Belding to that of City of Greenville and Lowell highlight notable differences in property valuations across various sectors, as shown in Figure 3.10. Belding's total SEV stands at \$160,505,600, with residential properties contributing the largest share followed by commercial and industrial sectors. In comparison, Greenville's total SEV is significantly higher at \$351,804,800, driven by substantial commercial property values of \$93,710,400 and the highest residential SEV of \$220,965,400 among the three cities. Industrial properties in Greenville also hold a considerable value of \$37,129,000. Lowell's total SEV is \$197,866,100, with commercial properties valued at \$51,762,800, industrial properties at \$18,628,800, and residential properties at \$127,474,500.

Figure 3.8 below also suggests that Belding is more dependent on residential properties for its tax base compared to the nearby cities of Lowell and Greenville. In Belding, residential properties comprise 85% of the City's tax base, compared to 62% for Greenville and 64% for Lowell. The City has experienced a loss of industrial development of the years, and is actively working to redevelop these areas and attract new commercial and industrial businesses to the community.

Figure 3.8: Equalized Real Property Values, 2023



Source: Ionia County, Montcalm County, and Kent County Equalization Reports, 2023

Planning Implications

1. The City's population has remained steady for the last thirty years and this trend is expected to continue. However, Belding is only thirty minutes from the Grand Rapids area, which has experienced rapid population growth in recent years. The City may experience demand for new development as new residents may be looking for a smaller City with convenient connections to the shopping, entertainment, and cultural amenities that larger cities offer.
2. Belding's population is younger than most of the surrounding townships. This is typical as many families seek more populated neighborhoods in close proximity to schools, and housing on smaller city lots tends to be more affordable than large lot development that is common in the outlying areas. Thus, Belding will need to tailor its services and amenities to meet the needs of this age demographic to improve the quality of life for residents.
3. The City is likely overly dependent on residential development for its property tax revenue. While the City has been actively engaged in economic development efforts in recent years to attract more employers to the City, additional work is needed.
4. The City should also bear in mind larger trends that suggest that younger generations are seeking a quality place. Historically, it was assumed that people would move to where their job is located, but recent data suggest that younger individuals seek out a quality place to live first, and seek employment second. This means that the City should be also investing in itself and creating quality parks, amenities, and public spaces to attract new residents.

CHAPTER 4.

Housing



HOUSING

Introduction

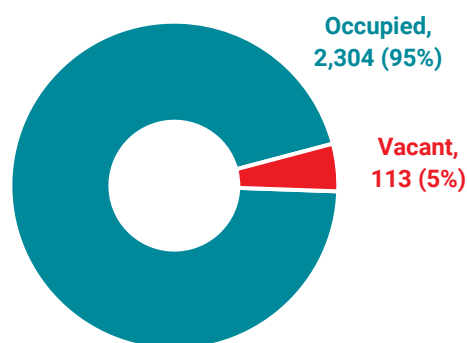
In 2024, the City applied for a Housing Readiness Incentive Grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, a program aimed at increasing housing supply and variety in communities across the State by assisting with the cost of long-range planning, community engagement, and zoning updates. The City was awarded the grant, which subsequently set-off the process of this Master Plan formulation. As such, this chapter was included in the plan for emphasis on the importance of planning for the future of housing.

Below is an analysis of the current state of housing in the City, as well as potentially viable changes that could be made to the housing stock in Belding. It is worth noting that these suggested housing typologies are reflective of community feedback, and may require future zoning ordinance amendments in order to be permitted in the City.

Housing Units and Occupancy

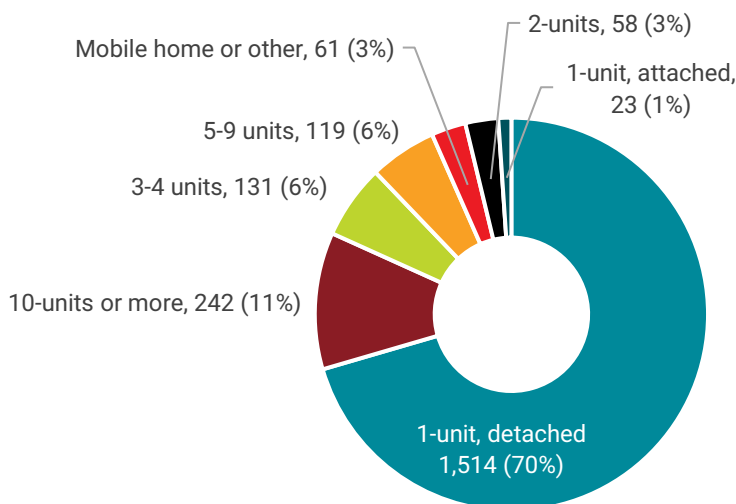
The 2020 U.S. Decennial Census reveals that the City of Belding contains 2,417 housing units. 2,304 (95%) are occupied, leaving 113 (5%) vacant. Among the occupied housing units, approximately 64% are estimated to be owner-occupied, while 36% are renter-occupied. A majority of the City's housing units are single-family detached homes, which account for 1,514 units (70%). There are also other housing types in the City including 23 single-family attached units, 58 two-unit structures, 131 three- or four-unit structures, 119 five- to nine-unit structures, and 242 buildings with ten or more units. Mobile homes or other types of housing make up 61 housing units.

Figure 4.1: Housing Units by Occupancy



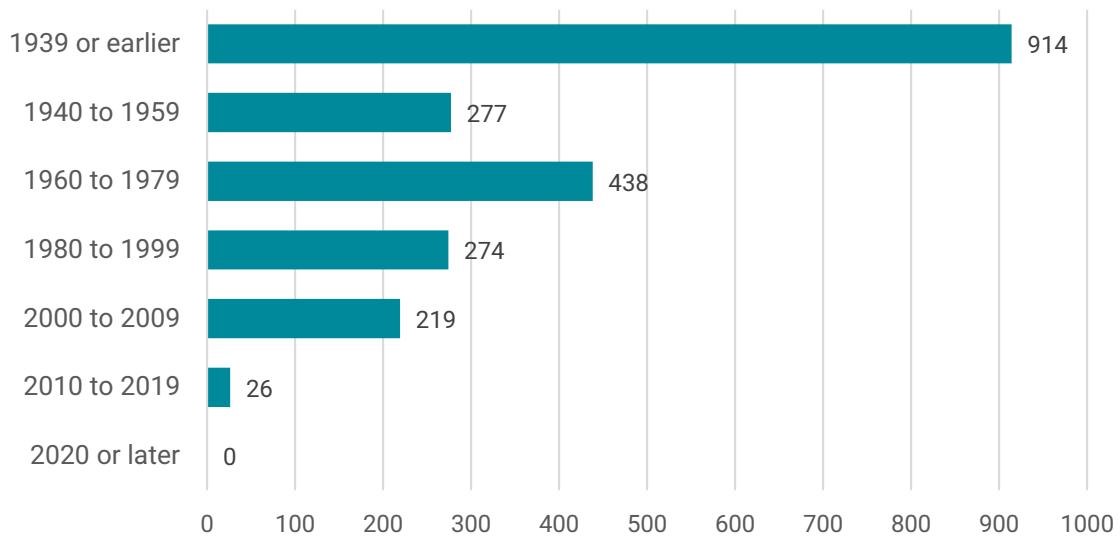
Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 4.2: Structure by Number of Units



Source: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Nearly half of Belding's housing units were built before 1939 (914 units). Housing built between 1940 and 1959 includes 277 units. This mirrors the trend in Ionia County, where a majority of homes were constructed during or before 1940, according to the State of Michigan Housing Data Portal. An aging housing stock is common in small communities and presents the issue that older homes may require additional maintenance costs as they age.

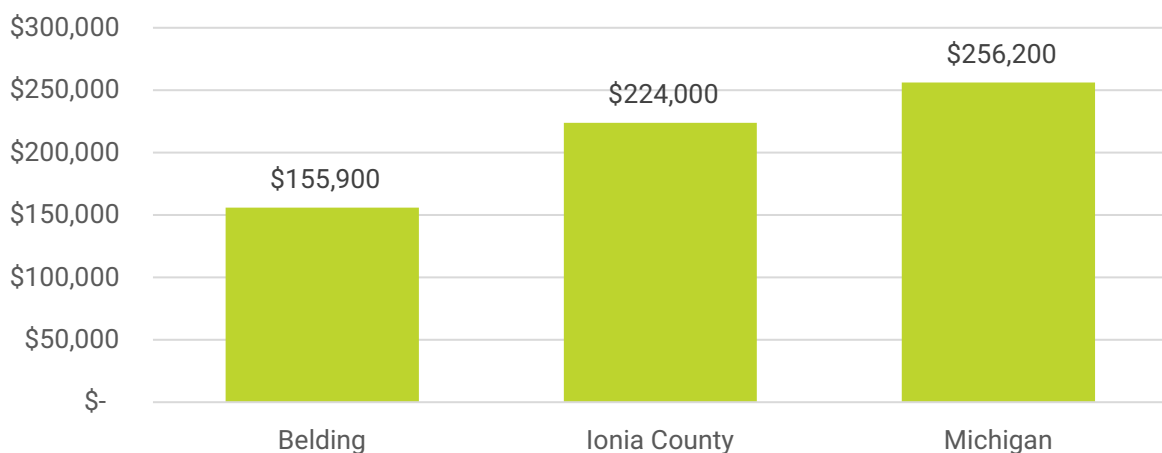
Figure 4.3: Age of Housing Stock

Source: Michigan Housing Data Portal

Additionally, the chart above shows a declining trend in the number of housing units being constructed in the City over time. This presents a serious issue as relating to housing affordability. Without a growing supply, and an increasing demand for housing in the City and regionally, costs could balloon as a result. Housing costs are discussed in greater detail below.

Median Home value

The median home value in 2023 in the City of Belding was estimated to be just shy of \$156,000. This is comparatively lower than the median values across Ionia County and the State. This may reflect a slightly less intense housing market in the City, and may also be a drawing factor for potential residents looking to move to the area.

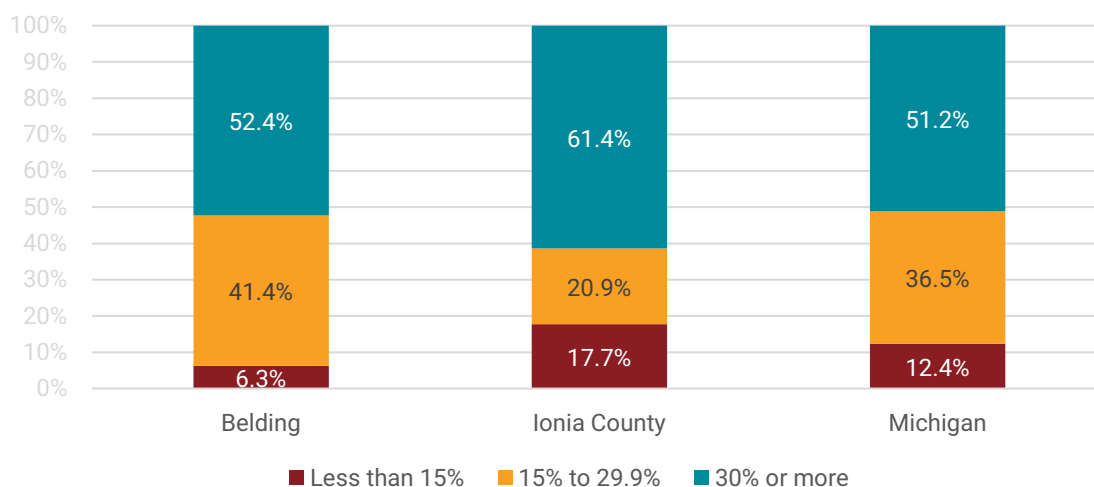
Figure 4.4: Median Home Values

Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Housing Cost Burden

The relationship between the cost of housing and household income is referred to as “cost burden.” The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development considers households to be cost burdened if they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, mortgage payments, or various other housing expenses. Cost burden can vary across communities, counties, states, and beyond as a result of local economic conditions, housing demand, median incomes, and more. In the case of the City of Belding, over half (52.4%) of renters pay more than 30% of their income on rent. This number is comparable to the State of Michigan’s average, and is lower than Ionia County’s average. This may stem from a lack of housing supply and variety, and may ultimately drive up costs.

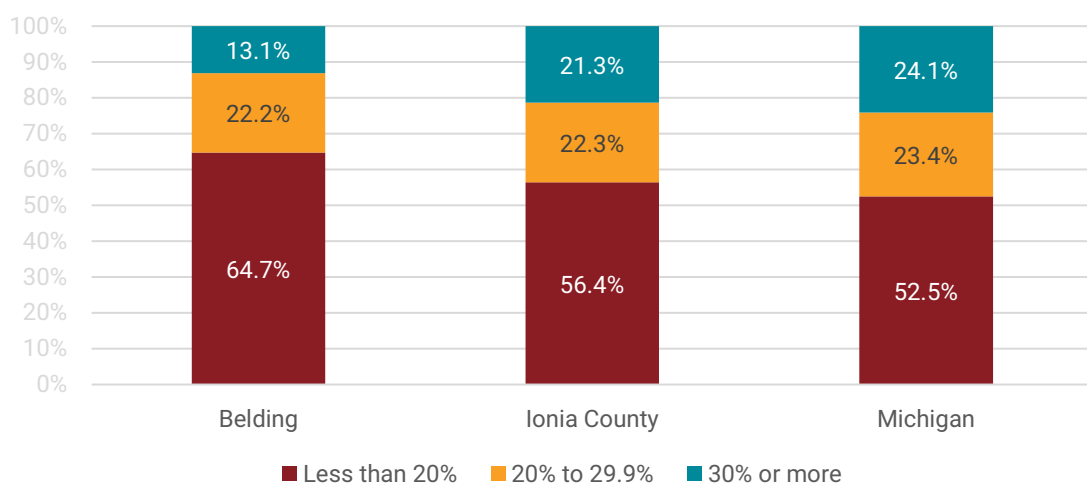
Figure 4.5: Cost Burden for Units Paying Rent



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

However, owner-occupied units with mortgages across the City, County, and State reflect a different trend, with generally less than a quarter of all housing units being considered cost burdened. In fact, the City of Belding has the lowest rate of mortgage cost burden across the three jurisdictions at only 13.1%.

Figure 4.6: Cost Burden for Units with Mortgages



Source: American Community Survey, 2023

Ionia Montcalm Counties Housing Plan

The Ionia Montcalm Counties Housing Plan, developed by the Upjohn Institute in 2022, sheds greater light on the housing challenges and needs of these two relatively rural West Michigan counties. The plan draws a number of conclusions that are important to note for the City of Belding as it considers the future of its housing stock. For example, an aging population across the counties highlights the needs for diversified housing options for seniors, as large, single-family homes may be impractical and too costly for those on fixed-incomes. Additionally, the population of the two counties has grown at a rate greater than the rate of new housing construction. As a result, demand for housing has increased.

The plan ultimately lays out a number of strategies for addressing housing supply and affordability. Some of these strategies include zoning updates, infrastructure expansion, utilization of the Redevelopment Ready Community Program, and more. These strategies helped to guide, and are reflected in, the goals and objectives and implementation strategies within this Master Plan.

Belding Housing Commission

The Belding Housing Commission offers rental opportunities to senior citizens, families, handicapped and disabled individuals under income-based and flat rent options. The Commission rents 140 affordable units in the City to approved applicants. Family units include water, sewer, and trash removal, while senior, handicapped, and disabled units also include heat. Located at five sites within the City limits, all apartments offer ground-level entry, with many units wheelchair accessible. All locations are close to schools, downtown, shopping, parks, the library, museum, transportation, and City services. Applicants must meet income and other screening eligibility requirements as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and local policy.

Housing Typologies

The following paragraphs discuss several different housing typologies that may be appropriate to plan for and construct in the City as a means increasing housing supply and affordability. These particular typologies were selected given community feedback, their general adherence to the City's character, and lower construction costs.

It is important to note that zoning ordinance changes may be necessary to allow proliferation of these typologies. This is discussed further toward the end of this plan.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) provide low-cost, low-impact solutions for increasing housing supply. They can take the form of converted garages and outbuildings, basements, and other structures accessory to the main dwelling on a lot. As mentioned above, ADUs can offer the ability to increase housing in existing neighborhoods without potentially changing the neighborhood's character. ADUs can also be constructed within existing structures, lowering costs and making them a more affordable option than building new housing from scratch. They also offer the ability for residents to age in place near family members and neighbors, creating an attractive option for seniors looking to remain independent with the benefit of nearby assistance.





COTTAGE COURTYARD (THE POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD)

The cottage-courtyard model is now widely viewed as an effective way to meet demand for new single-family homes. Set within a pocket neighborhood, each house fronts onto a shared central green, with its façade turned inward toward the courtyard. The layout works especially well as infill on larger lots, which can be found throughout the City of Belding.

Among the strengths of cottage courts are their ability to fit on small sites. The pocket-neighborhood format can also accommodate both detached and attached single-family units in the same project. On a one-acre parcel for example, residential density can reach or even exceed five to ten dwellings per acre. By placing parking around the edge of the development, the design keeps most vehicle activity outside the core, providing attractive green space for residents and reducing the likelihood of pedestrian–vehicle conflicts.

TOWNHOMES OR ROWHOUSES

The townhome offers both efficient land use and visual appeal, especially when built as two or three-story units. Incorporating a third floor is important for achieving a floor area between 1,500 and 2,000 square feet, aligning with the typical layout of modern homes. With careful design and efficient space planning, a developer could fit as many as twelve units on a single acre, also making townhomes a viable infill development.

To preserve a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape, front facades should avoid auto-centric features like front-facing garages. Instead, placing parking behind the buildings helps limit vehicle-pedestrian interaction on sidewalks, typically reducing it to just one driveway access point. Smaller townhome groupings can be introduced into existing single-family neighborhoods, while larger, master-planned communities can make even better use of available land.





DUPLEXES AND TRIPLEXES

Multi-unit homes, such as duplexes and triplexes, have a long history in American neighborhoods, though many were effectively zoned out of existence in the mid-1900s. Recently, zoning policies have begun to re-embrace these traditional residential forms. For example, the City of Ionia now permits duplexes by right and allows triplexes as a special land use in residential districts. These regulatory changes reflect a growing movement to diversify housing options beyond the post–World War II suburban model that has dominated American development for decades. Compared to detached single-family homes, these smaller attached units tend to be more attainable and offer a “right-sized” alternative for those who want to remain in modern neighborhoods without downsizing drastically. These structures can blend well into existing residential areas or be incorporated into mixed-housing developments.

Best practices suggest minimizing the visual impact of automobile-related features by placing garages at the rear of the structure, or integrating them subtly into the building itself. Front-facing garages often overpower the façade and draw attention away from the front entrance, which diminishes the welcoming, neighbor-oriented character of the home. To enhance the sense of community, zoning codes can require design elements like functional front porches. A “usable” porch should span at least 70% of the front façade and measure no less than eight feet in length and six feet in depth, ensuring enough space for everyday use and social interaction. These design elements are important to ensure that these structures blend well into the existing historic character of many Belding neighborhoods.



MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL

With the potential for redevelopment in Downtown Belding, consideration may be made for mixed-use structures that both compliment the remaining historic downtown structures, as well as provide housing and commercial options to residents and visitors alike. Sometimes referred to “5 over 1s”, these mixed-use, mid-rise buildings reflect historical patterns of development and provide greater housing variety in the form of apartments and/or condominiums in a variety of sizes.

If the City takes steps to return downtown Belding to its development pattern prior to the construction of the Covered Village Mall, these mixed-use types of developments may become more feasible. Steps could include re-platting and reconnecting the historic street grid, ensuring availability of utilities, and ensuring proper zoning regulations permit medium to high-density development. The expansion of the City’s wastewater treatment facility is already paving the way for greater densities in the future of Downtown Belding.

Planning Implications

As discussed throughout this chapter, the City of Belding has a number of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities when it comes to housing. The City has a low vacancy rate and generally more affordable housing overall when compared to the County and the State medians. However, much of the housing stock is aging, and cost burden for renters remains high. Additionally, approximately 70% of the City’s housing stock is in the form of single-family homes. This often presents a barrier to both prospective owners and renters in the City as single-family homes cost more to finance compared to more affordable options such as attached units and multi-family units.

Many American communities have zoning ordinance regulations that do not permit diverse forms of housing, and instead prioritize single-family homes on individual lots. Belding is no different in this regard, and attention may need to be paid to loosening some zoning regulations following the conclusion of the Master Planning process.

Further, as the City begins to implement the goals and strategies of this Master Plan, the deeply intrinsic relationship between housing and other metrics will need to be considered. This includes the future of Downtown Belding and the opportunity for new multi-family housing downtown; infrastructure expansion, such as the City’s new wastewater treatment facility; and the potential that housing has for boosting the City’s stagnating population growth.

CHAPTER 5.

Community Facilities & Infrastructure



COMMUNITY FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

The following section contains information about Belding's various community facilities and an overview of municipal services.

Transportation

ROAD NETWORK

The road network in the Belding comprises a well-connected grid system with major arteries and local streets providing access throughout the city, as shown in Map 7. Belding has four roadway classifications, which function in a hierarchical fashion.

1. State highways are large roads maintained by the state government, facilitating travel between cities and regions. Within the City, Belding Road (M-44) is a state highway that connects Grand Rapids to Belding, and terminates at M-66 a few miles north of Ionia.
2. Principal arterials are wide roads within urban areas that connect neighborhoods and commercial centers, handling significant traffic volumes. There are several principal arterials in Belding, the most notable being Bridge Street, Ellis Street, Kenwood Street, and Hall Street
3. Minor arterials are smaller roads that provide secondary routes within urban areas. Most roads in the City that are not state highways or principal arterials are considered minor arterials.
4. Local roads are smaller streets primarily serving residential areas, with limited traffic flow. These are usually small residential cul-de-sac streets that do not connect to many adjoining streets or properties.

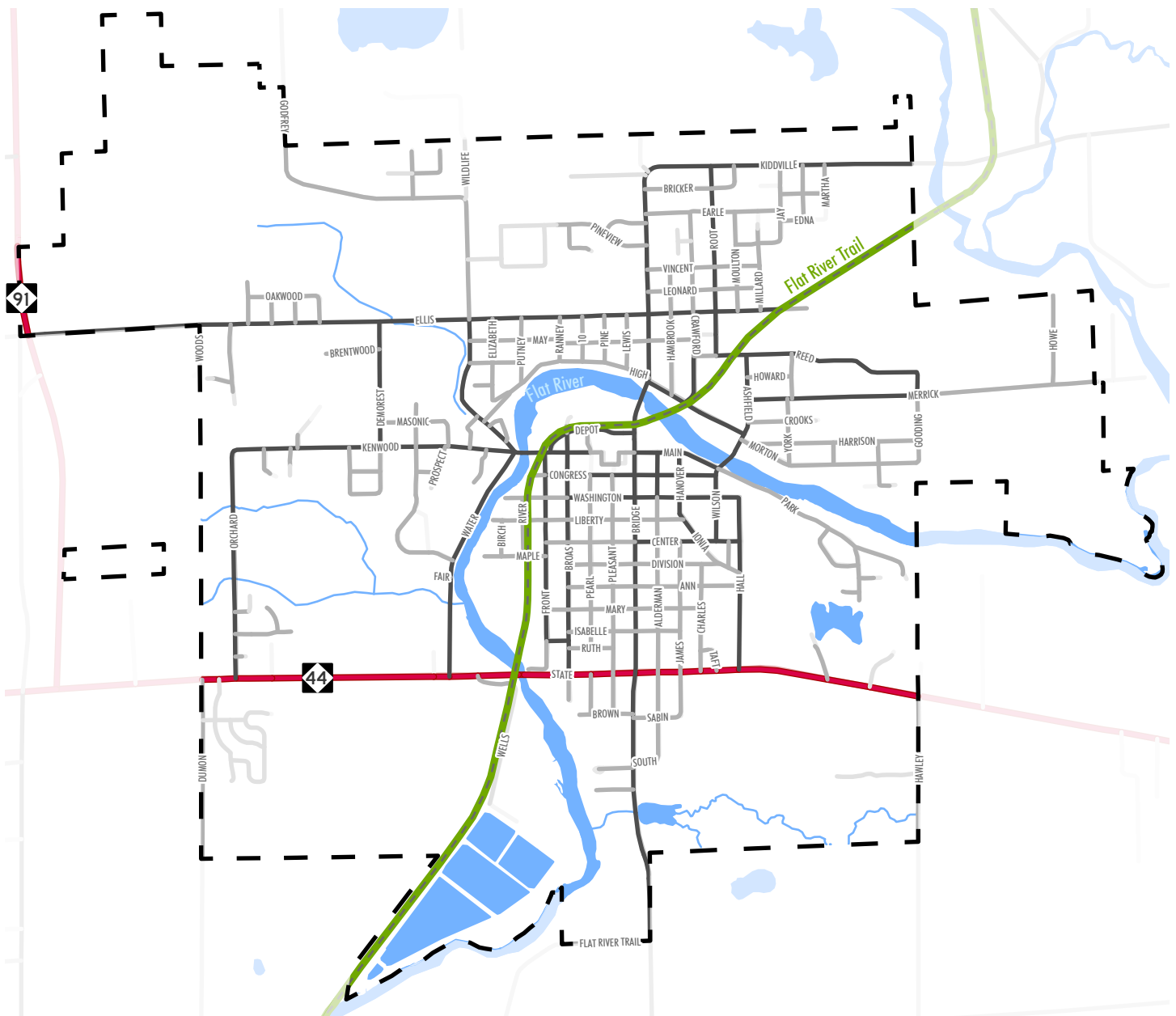
Belding's thoroughfares include Belding Road (M-44), Bridge Street, and Ellis Street, which serve as primary routes connecting Belding to neighboring areas. These roads facilitate efficient transportation for residents and visitors, supporting both local commuting and regional travel. The City contains approximately 36 miles of streets which are maintained primarily by the City's Department of Public Works.

TRAFFIC COUNTS

The annual average daily traffic (AADT) can vary significantly depending on the specific location, size, and characteristics of a city like Belding, Michigan. Typically, this data is collected through traffic counts conducted by transportation agencies like Michigan Department of Transportation. Map 8 shows the AADT data collected in 2023 for major thoroughfares within the City of Belding.

M-44 is the City's highest traveled road and experiences between 5,700 to 9,000 trips per day on average. Additionally, Bridge Street also experiences substantial traffic with an average daily traffic count with a count of 4,934 trips, due to its direct connection from Belding Road to the city's downtown. Bridge Street also contains one of three bridges across the Flat River in the city and offers the most direct connection to areas on the north side of the river. Other notable streets with significant traffic include Ellis Avenue, Washington Street, and Main Street, each recording counts above 1,000 trips per day.

MAP 7. ROAD NETWORK



- State Highway
- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Local Roads
- Trail



0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet



NONMOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION AND SIDEWALKS

According to the National Association of City Transportation Officials, “sidewalks play a vital role in city life. As conduits for pedestrian movement and access, they enhance connectivity and promote walking. As public spaces, sidewalks serve as the front steps to the city, activating streets socially and economically. Safe, accessible, and well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental and necessary investment for cities, and have been found to enhance general public health and maximize social capital. Just as roadway expansions and improvements have historically enhanced travel for motorists, superior sidewalk design can encourage walking by making it more attractive.”

Map 9 illustrates Belding’s sidewalk and trail network. Most of the City’s older neighborhoods contain a fairly complete and well-connected network of sidewalks. However, there are numerous street segments throughout the City that do not offer any sidewalks, particularly areas south of Mary Street and on the north side of the City, north of the Flat River.

Belding is also home to a segment of the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail, which is part of a larger regional trail network that utilizes old railroad rights of way. The Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail connects the cities of Lowell, Belding and Greenville. North of Greenville, the trail continues on as the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail and continues through Stanton and Edmore before reaching its terminus in Alma.

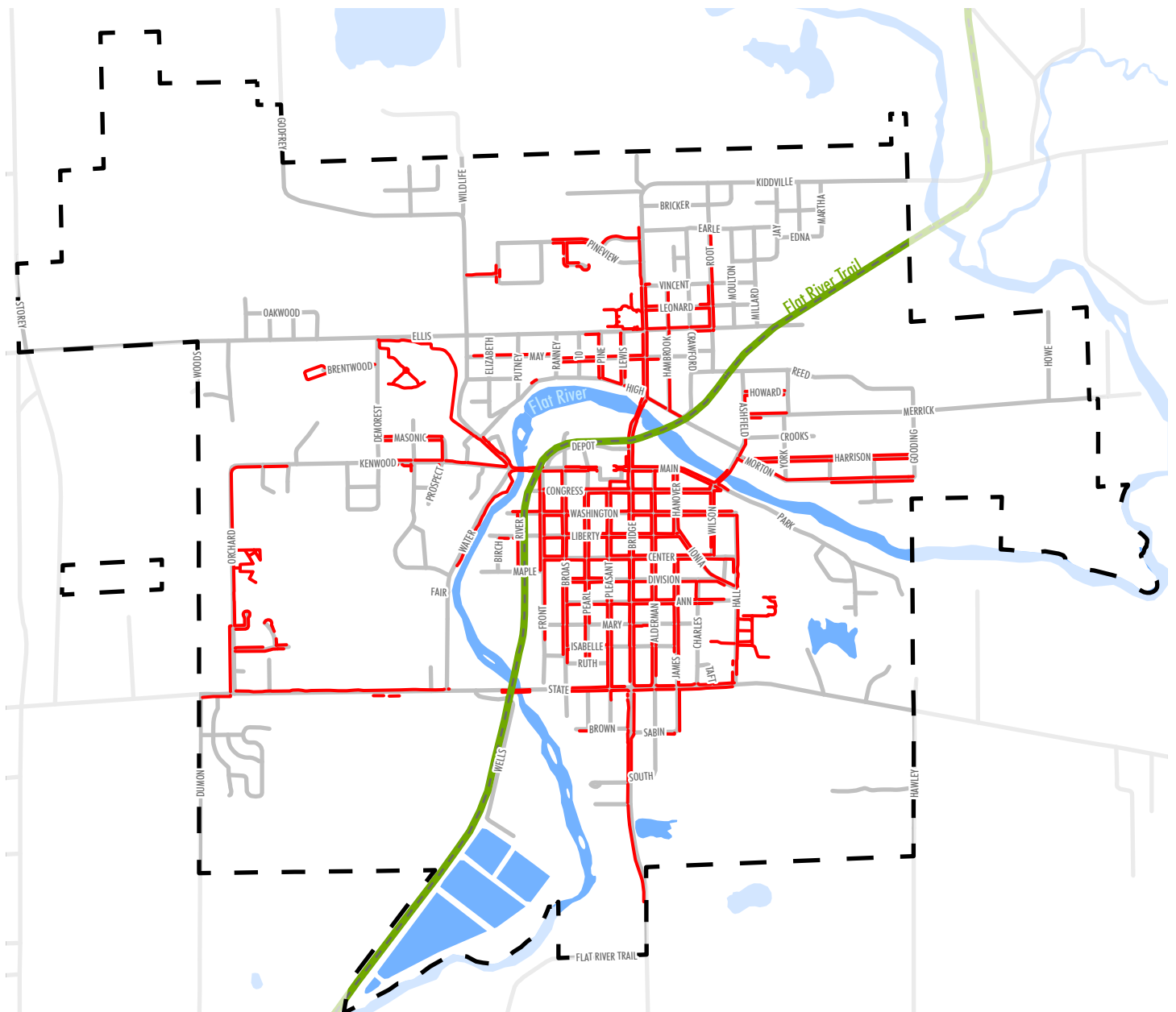
The Silk City Nature Trail is a local trail that connects Water Street Park to Demorest Field in the City. The trail begins along the Flat River just north of Morgan Drive, and runs north along the western bank of the Flat River, behind the Belhaven Apartments, and ends at Demorest Field.

DIAL-A-RIDE

The City of Belding offers a Dial-a-Ride transportation service in the Belding area, operating Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Special routes and schedules are available on weekdays connecting Belding, Greenville, and Ionia. The fare for service within Belding is \$3.00 per adult, \$2.50 per student, and \$1.50 per senior or disabled person. Children aged 3 years or younger ride free when accompanied by an adult. Dial-a-Ride maintains five lift-equipped buses for customers with special needs, and those requiring wheelchair assistance or disability accommodations are able to bring an aide at no additional cost.



MAP 9. SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS

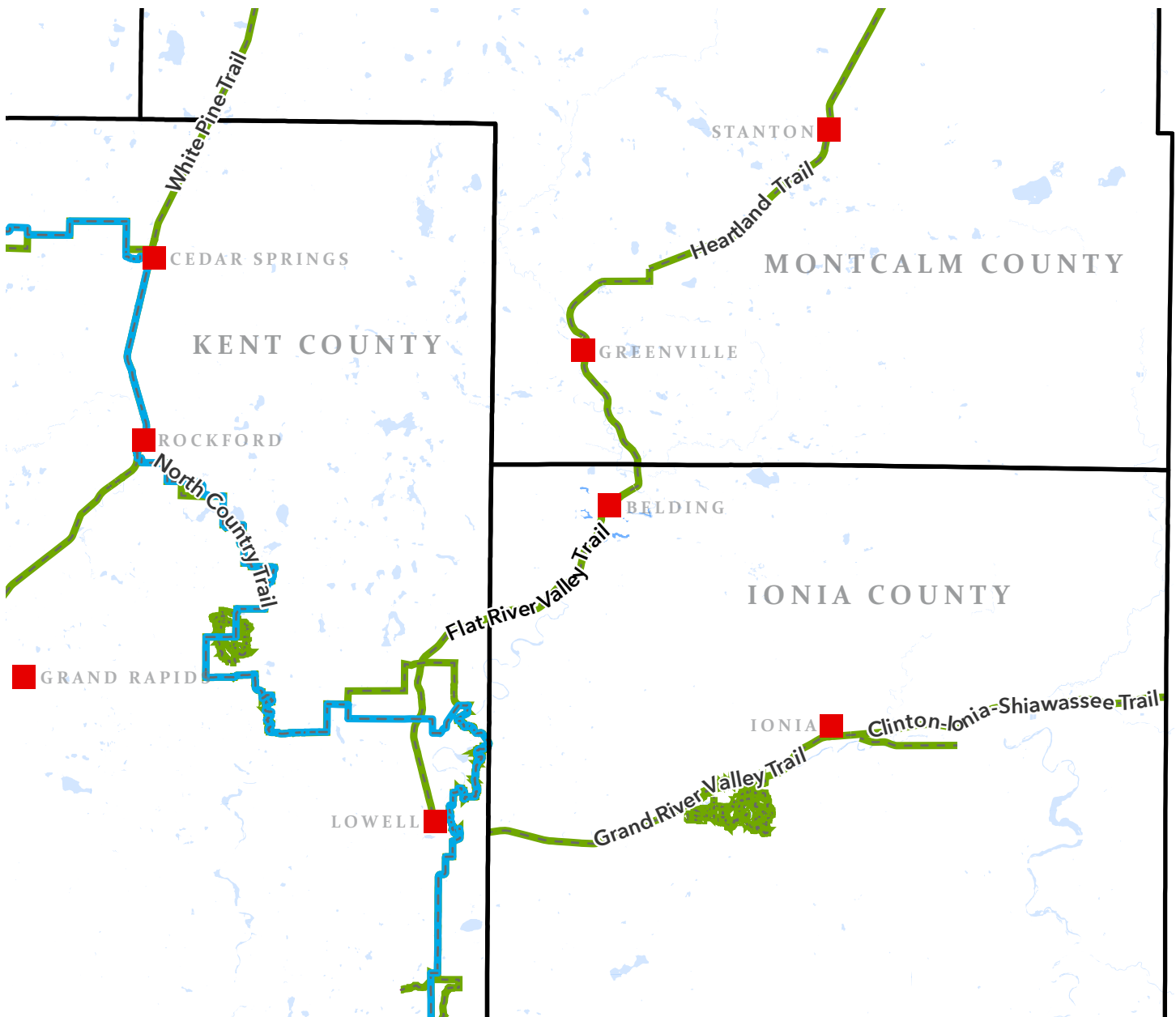


- Trail
- Sidewalks
- Roads



0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet

MAP 10. REGIONAL TRAILS



North Country Trail
Regional Trails



0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet



Parks and Recreation

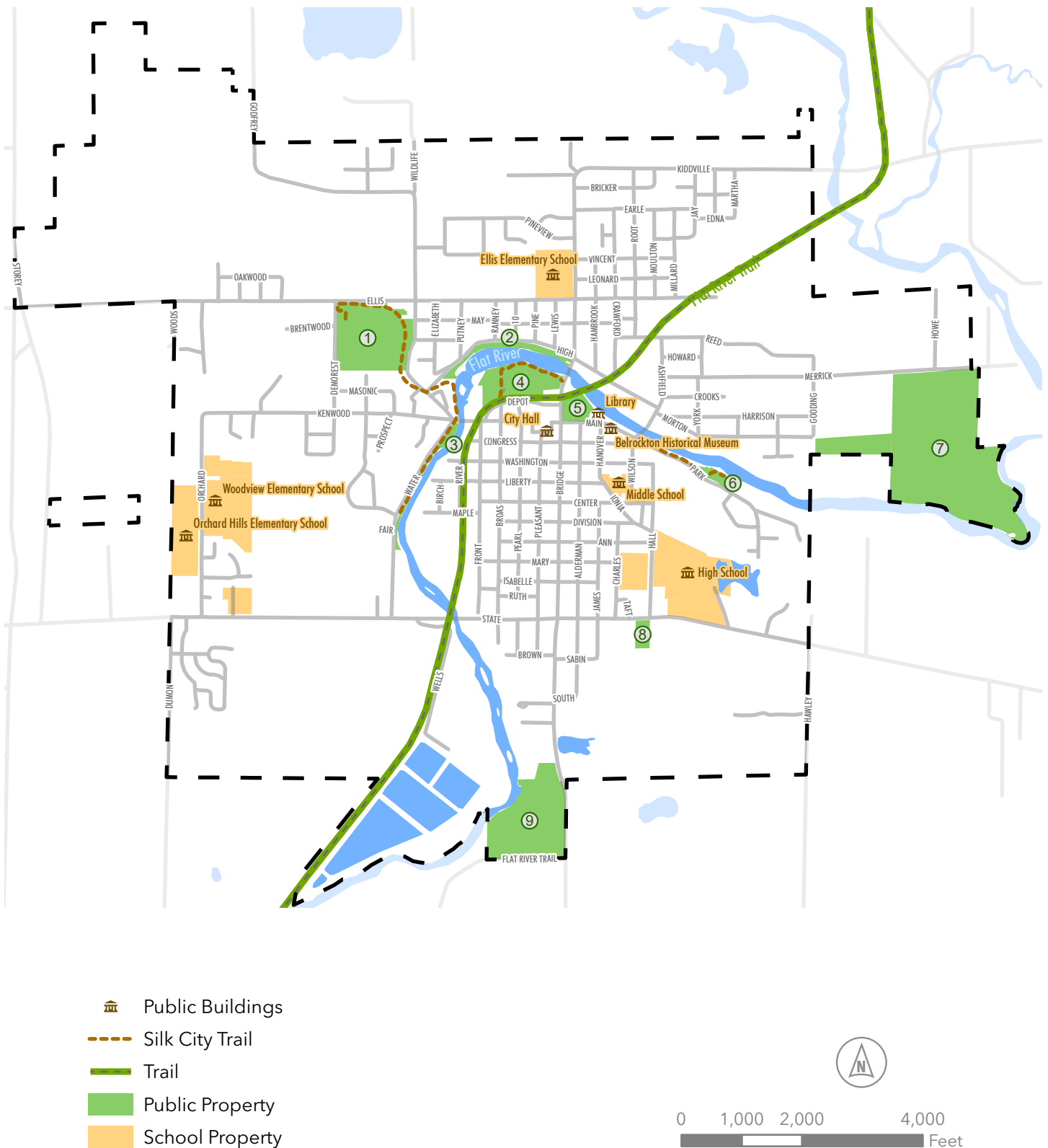
The presence of high-quality recreational opportunities is a helpful indicator of an city's quality of life and such facilities characterize the City of Belding. The city is home to numerous recreational opportunities, including regional trails, parks, natural areas, and access to the Flat River. The health and leisure benefits of regional trails and other recreation lands, such as disc golf courses and dog parks, extend beyond the city limits. In addition to recreational facilities, public schools provide neighborhood spaces for interaction, learning, and community building.

The following list includes parks and recreation areas that are located with the City of Belding (also shown in Map 11).

- **Armstrong Park:** Developed in the 1920s with riverside boardwalks and seating, now undeveloped with no facilities. It has Flat River frontage.
- **Central Riverside Park:** A 5-acre park in the central business district with numerous amenities including soccer fields, tennis courts, a skate park, playground, picnic shelters, basketball courts, sand volleyball, exercise stations, a trail, restrooms, drinking fountains, and parking.
- **Demorest Field:** A 30-acre park in the west part of the city with several ball fields, a running track, playground, restrooms, concessions, shuffleboard court, picnic facilities, and trail access.
- **East Riverside Park:** A 1.5-acre neighborhood park on the east side with a picnic pavilion, accessible restrooms, playground, boat launch, trail access, and parking.
- **Gathering Place:** A 4.8-acre undeveloped park southwest of downtown, hosting the Belding Beatnik Bazaar. It features a mural, benches, trail access, and river access.
- **Lightning Bend Preserve:** A 138-acre nature preserve in the northeast with hiking and bike trails, disc golf, river access, ponds, a picnic shelter, rustic toilets, and parking.
- **Water Street Park:** A 2.25-acre neighborhood park in the west part of the city with playground equipment, picnic tables, benches, trail access, a boat launch, river access, restrooms, and parking.

In addition to the facilities listed above, the Belding community is home to a number of annual events. These include the Gus Macker Tournament, which began in the area and was established in 1974; The Labor Day Celebration, which draws thousands into the City for food, games, and live entertainment; Home For the Holidays, with a parade and tree lighting; and the Garden Walk, where community members

MAP 11. COMMUNITY FACILITIES



are offered a chance to engage with neighbors and showcase their home gardens and landscapes. These community events encourage gathering and interaction year-round and across the City. Additionally, during the summer months East Riverside Park hosts Music by the River, providing weekly concerts and food vendors.

Public Safety

The Belding Fire Department offers 24-hour service, with full-time firefighters working 24-hour shifts at the fire station. Response times within the city limits average less than three minutes. Additionally, the department provides fire and rescue services not only in the City of Belding but also in Otisco Township and the northern portion of Keene Township. The department's ISO PPC rating was re-evaluated in September 2021, resulting in a Class 4 rating as of January 1, 2022. Moreover, the Belding Fire Department offers Medical First Responder services to its protection area, with on-duty firefighters responding to high-priority medical emergencies alongside ambulance services.

The Belding Police Department is comprised of nine police officers, led by Chief Dion Sower, along with eight patrol officers. Additionally, the department maintains an active reserve unit consisting of five officers. The department's responsibilities encompass various services, including traffic enforcement, ordinance enforcement, accident investigation, and criminal investigations. Furthermore, it conducts proactive community programs, such as vacation house checks, school safety talks, and classroom visits, contributing to public safety and community engagement efforts.

Public Schools

The Belding Area School District covers the entire City of Belding in addition to the surrounding Townships, stretching just over 100 square miles across Ionia, Kent, and Montcalm Counties. Enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year totaled 1,652 students, marking a 5% decline from the 2019-2020 school year, and a nearly 17% decline from the 2014-2015 school year. As a result of enrollment decline, the school district likely has the opportunity to accommodate more students if, and when, new housing development attracts young families into the City. Active communication between the City and district regarding new housing development will be important to ensure adequate school capacity is maintained into the future.

The district contains one high school, one middle school, two elementary schools, and an early childhood center that also serves eligible students pre-K and special education needs. Additionally, the District has a fleet of 19 school buses, providing transportation for students. A maintenance team is located within the facilities department housed just behind the middle school building. It serves all 8 of the district's buildings and 20 acres of outdoor athletic spaces.



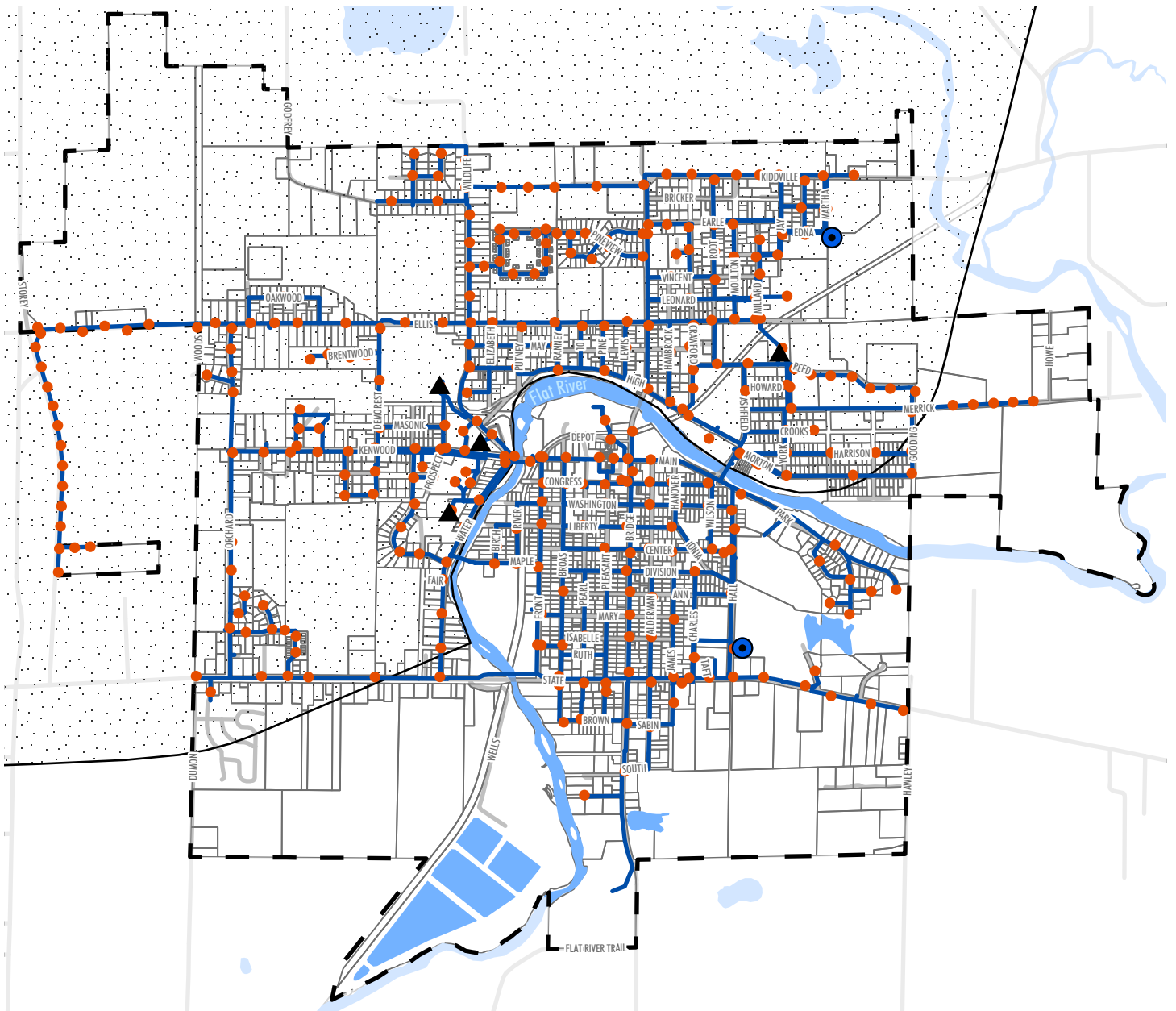
Public Works

Water, sewer, streets, parks, and cemeteries are among the responsibilities of the City's Department of Public Works (DPW). The DPW also manages sewer and lift station maintenance, street maintenance and snow plowing, park, and cemetery upkeep, as well as managing the city motor pool, which includes maintenance for police vehicles.

Belding's water infrastructure includes 2 water towers and 4 wells ranging from 107 to 180 feet in depth and a pumping capacity of more than 4,000 gallons per minute. Annually, the city pumps over 600 million gallons of water, and each water tower boasts a capacity of 500,000 gallons. Due to the reliance on groundwater, Belding has instituted a wellhead protection program to protect the groundwater from contamination.

The current wastewater treatment plant was built in 1965 and was designed to treat around 1.2 million gallons of wastewater per day. However, the capacity of the aging system presently is closer to half of its designed number. As a result, the City broke ground on a new water treatment facility in 2023. The new facility will be constructed directly to the north of the existing facility at a cost of around \$45 million and is expected to bring capacity back up to 1.2 million gallons per day while also utilizing modern treatment techniques. This cost also covers the associated decommissioning of the existing plant's lagoons, which were found to have numerous structural deficiencies and elevated levels of contaminants. Nearly half of the proposed cost is expected to be covered by grants, such as from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. This new facility is anticipated to be operational by 2026 and is expected to have the capacity for new development and growth in the City.

MAP 12. WATER SYSTEM

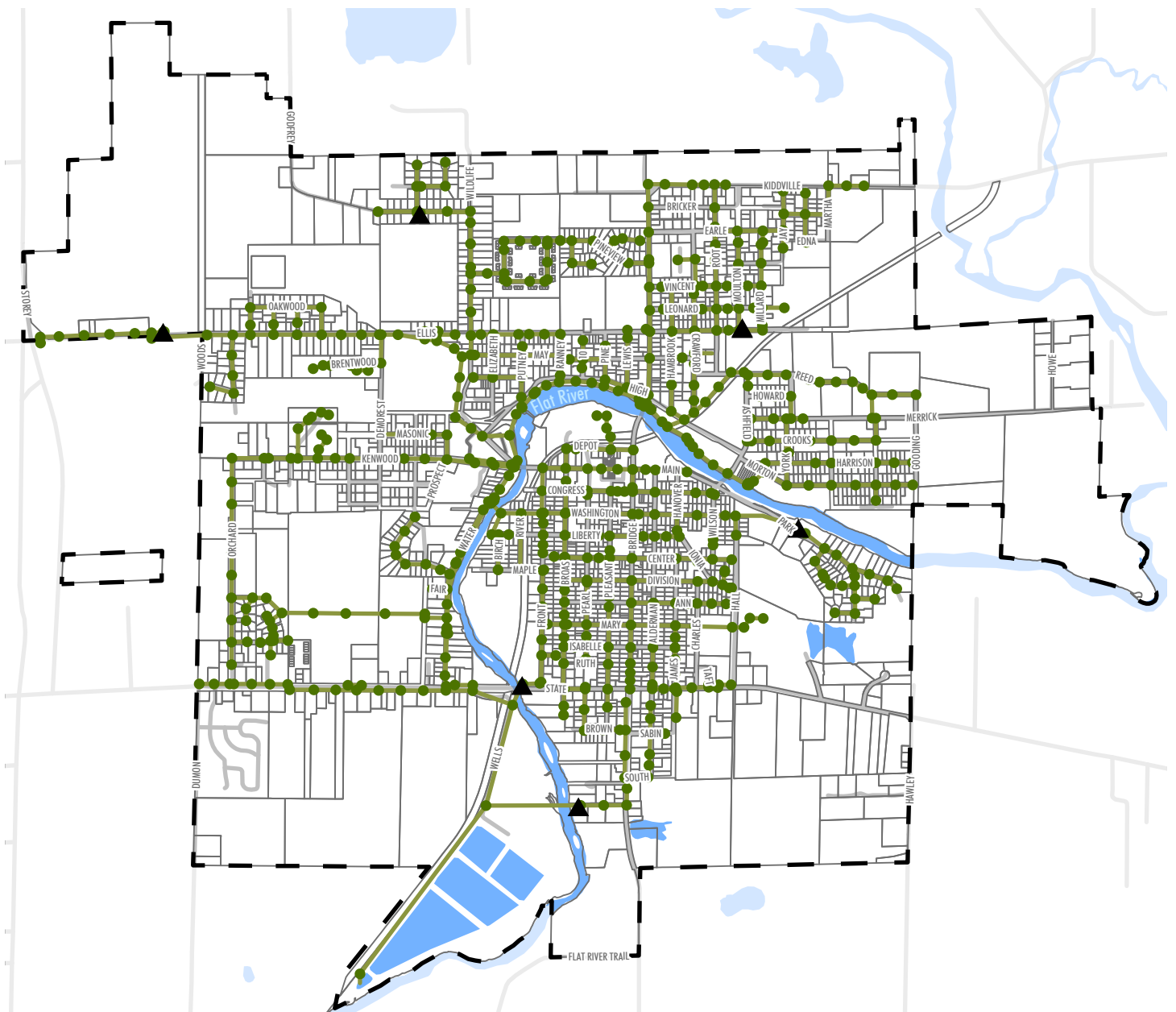


- ▲ Water Wells
- Water Towers
- Fire Hydrants
- Water Mains
- Wellhead Protection Area



0 1,000 2,000 4,000
Feet

MAP 13. SEWER SYSTEM



- ▲ Lift Stations
- Sewer Main Structures
- Sewer Mains



Other Amenities

BELDING MUSEUM

The Belding Museum, housed within the historic Belrockton at 108 Hanover Street, stands as a testament to the city's rich heritage. Open on the first Sunday of each month, along with Saturday and Monday of Labor Day weekend, this Michigan Historical Site offers a glimpse into Belding's past.

The museum serves as Belding's Community Center and houses the museum across three floors. With thousands of items on display, including artifacts tracing the evolution of silk production, early refrigerators, and medical equipment, the museum offers an immersive journey through time. Various programs and speakers cater to all ages and interests, making the Belding Museum a must-visit destination for anyone eager to explore the city's vibrant past.

ALVAH N. BELDING MEMORIAL LIBRARY

The Alvah N. Belding Memorial Library, located at 302 E. Main Street in Belding, Michigan, serves as a Class III public library catering to residents of Belding, Otisco Township, the north half of Keene Township, and Orleans residents within the Belding School District. As a member of the Lakeland Library Cooperative, the library offers access to a vast collection of books, print materials, non-print materials, and digital resources through MEL interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing programs. Patrons can enjoy free internet access, in-house wi-fi, photocopying, scanning, and faxing services. The library also boasts an extensive collection of family history and genealogy resources specific to the Belding area.

CHAPTER 6.

Community Engagement





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Listening to the needs and desires of the public is a critical component of any effective planning process. Planning is an inherently political process undertaken by local governments that directly impacts the public health, safety, and welfare of its citizens, and the decisions that local and elected officials make can impact a community for decades. Thus, long-range planning policy decisions that are not rooted in and reflective of the public's ideas and interests will lack the support and undermine the viability of the Master Plan. This chapter reviews the City's efforts to engage the public in the master planning process, and the feedback and data that was collected from participants in the engagement process.

Pop-Up Planning

A master planning booth was set up at the annual Labor Day Celebration held in Downtown Belding on Saturday, August 31, 2024. This booth was located on the southeast corner of Bridge and Main Streets for several hours during the late-morning and early-afternoon. This placement and timing were intended to capture the feedback of residents and visitors to the City who might not normally participate in traditional planning exercises. The booth contained a number of activities detailed below, and captured responses from several dozen people.

WELCOME BOARD

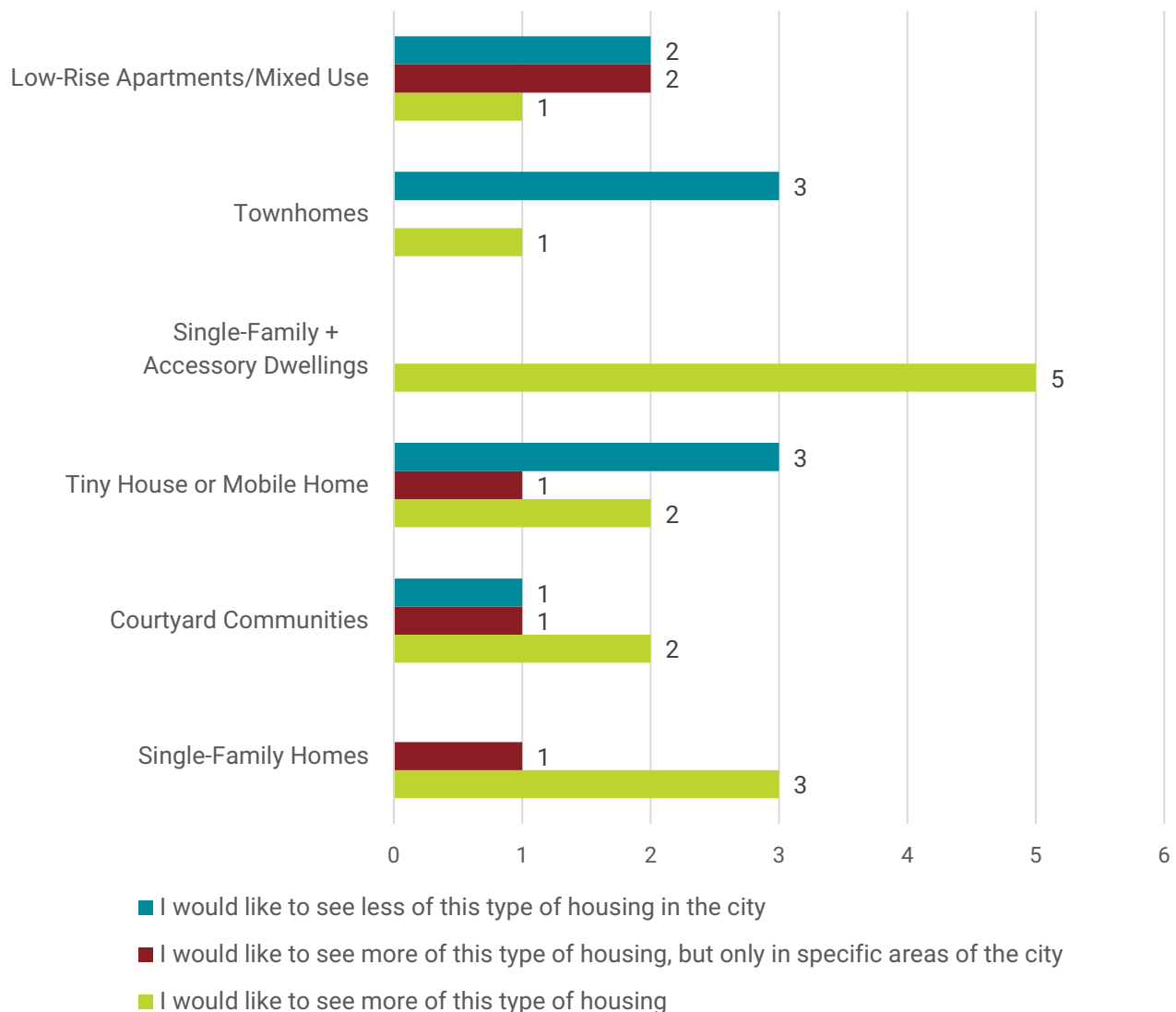
An informational welcome board was present at each pop-up planning event that provided context about the Plan and encouraged participants to take part in the available activities. This board included educational text regarding three questions: "what is a Master Plan," "why is long range planning important," "and why are we here today."

WHAT TYPE OF HOUSING DO YOU SUPPORT?

Participants in this activity were asked to use colored stickers to vote on different housing typologies they wished to see more of in the City in the future. Options included single-family homes, courtyard communities, tiny or mobile homes, accessory dwelling units, townhomes, and low-rise apartment buildings. Participants were provided with red, yellow, and green stickers, indicating “I would like to see less of this type of housing,” “I would like to see more of this type of housing, but only in specific areas of the city,” and “I would like to see more of this type of housing,” respectively. Figure # below illustrates the responses from the participants.

The bulk of participants in this activity desired single-family homes and low-density options typical of the City already. Additionally, there was interest in accessory dwelling units on single-family lots. Responses were fairly mixed in categories such as low-rise apartments/mixed use, tiny house/mobile homes, and courtyard communities. Results skewed slightly unfavorable for Townhomes. This indicates overall that participants desired to see the low-density nature of the City continue into the future, and where greater densities could be located, thought and more careful consideration on placement is desired.

Figure 6.1: Housing Typology Voting Results



DOWNTOWN VISIONING

This activity asked participants to consider the future of downtown Belding, specifically, the Covered Village Mall site being an opportunity for redevelopment downtown including street improvements and placemaking. Sticky notes and pens were provided and participants were instructed to place notes on a map of the downtown area with their comments and visions for downtown. Additionally, an area was provided for comments that were not location specific.

14 comments with location-specific feedback were placed with one more comment being placed in the non-location specific box. Moving west to east from the Flat River to Bridge Street, the comments were as follows:

- Develop small businesses and remove the mall!
- Develop small businesses
- Remove mall
- Bulldoze mall
- Switch mall with central park
- Get more businesses to downtown
- Improve Main Street + Bridge, more businesses, get rid of mall
- Develop along Depot Street
- Remove the mall! Or remodel. It is an eyesore!
- Remove mall and redevelop downtown
- Restore main street
- Landscaping improvements outside covered village
- Splash pad

The one non-location specific comment was as follows:

- Please leave soccer fields

The overwhelming sentiment of participants in this activity was the desire to redevelop downtown Belding, including a removal of the mall. Participants appeared to desire a restoration of Main Street and the development of small businesses such as once existed in the City. Other comments surrounded the desire for protected park and recreation spaces in the City center.

PENNY JAR ACTIVITY

A voting exercise was provided to gauge the importance of specific City investments. For this activity, participants were told to imagine they were in charge of directing funding for City-related improvement initiatives. Each participant was given 10 pennies representing their tax dollars. They were instructed to distribute their pennies into jars labeled with various planning related topics, according to their preference of interest.

A total of 280 pennies were cast into jars, averaging approximately 28 participants. By far, the most popular option was the redevelopment of downtown, with around 35% of pennies being cast for that option. The remaining options such as river beautification and access, infrastructure upgrades, parks, zoning and code enforcement, and job opportunities accounted for the remaining 65% of pennies cast. This further reiterates the community's desire for redevelopment activities in the downtown.

Table 6.1: Penny Jar Activity Results

OPTION	COUNT
Downtown redevelopment	97
River beautification and access	34
Upgrade infrastructure (streets, water, sewer)	32
Improve city parks	26
Zoning and code enforcement	23
Create more job opportunities	22
Sidewalks and trails	15
Create more attainable housing options	15
Ground and surface water protection	9
Industrial redevelopment or expansion	7

COMMENT CARDS

Comment cards were available to participants to capture other thoughts regarding the future of the City that may not have been reflected in the previous engagement activities. The four comments that were received are transcribed below:

- Have all the roads fixed
- How can we get people to take pride in their property? Clean it up.
- Share more information of events publicly.
- More good paying long term jobs.

These comments are reflective of the broader concepts for infrastructure improvements, zoning and code enforcement, city communication, and economic development and job attraction.

Classroom Collaboration

Twelve students at Belding High School were engaged in the planning process for updating the City's Master Plan. The session began with (1) an introductory presentation, (2) a Mentimeter activity, (3) a Heat Index Activity, (4) Postcards to Your Future Self, and (5) Penny Jar Voting about city priorities.

MENTIMETER

The students were asked to participate in an interactive, real-time polling platform called Mentimeter. The poll asked a variety of master plan related topics. Results are as follows:

1. Ice breaker activity to get the students acquainted with the platform.
2. **What do you love about Belding?**

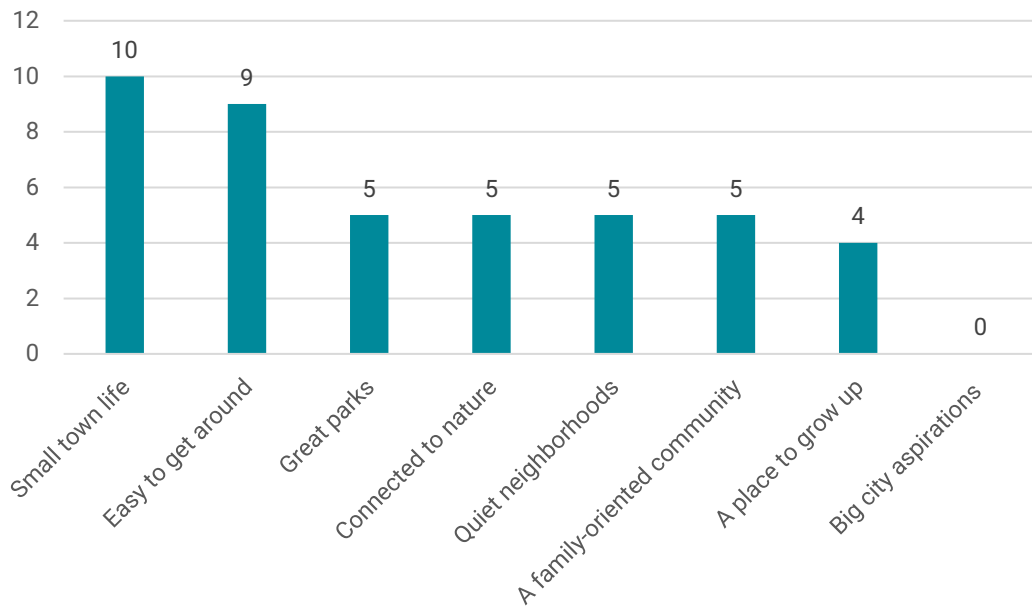
Figure 6.2: Mentimeter Word Cloud



Some of the most common responses included: people, parks, and layout.

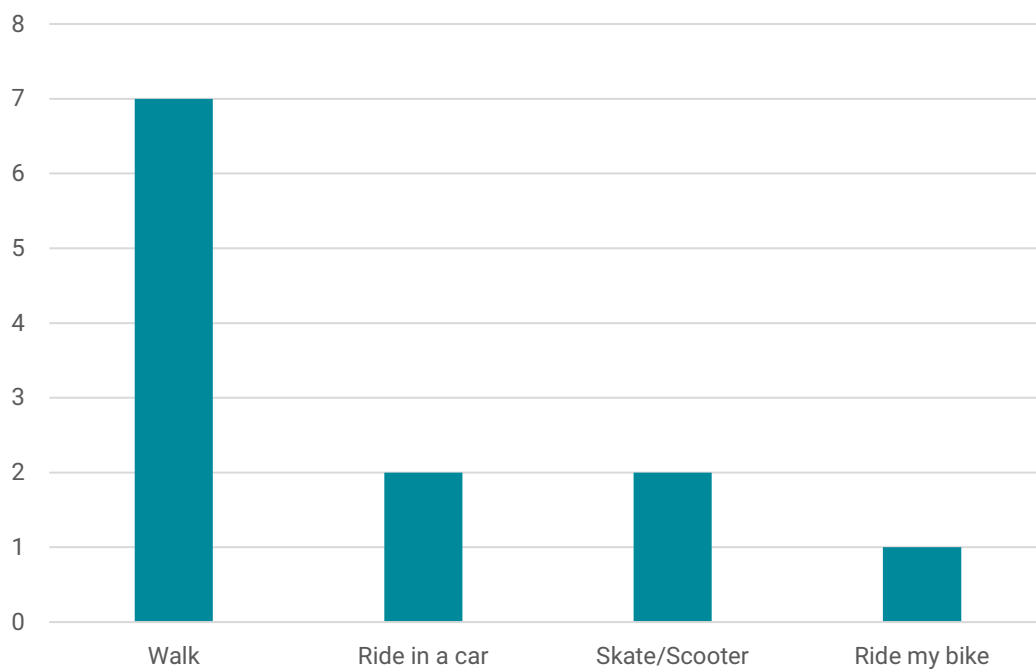
3. What phrases do you think best represents Belding? Choose all that apply.

Figure 6.3: Describe Belding Results



4. How do you get around town?

Figure 6.4: Transportation Mode Results

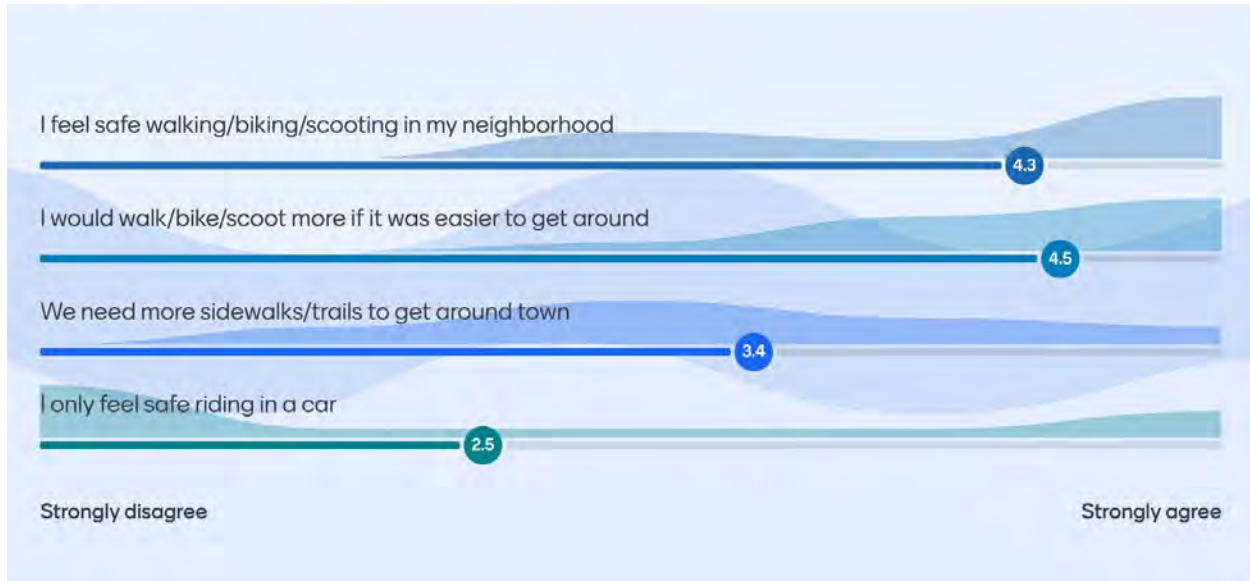


5. Transportation

This question took the average response rating from 0-5 (0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) on the following statements:

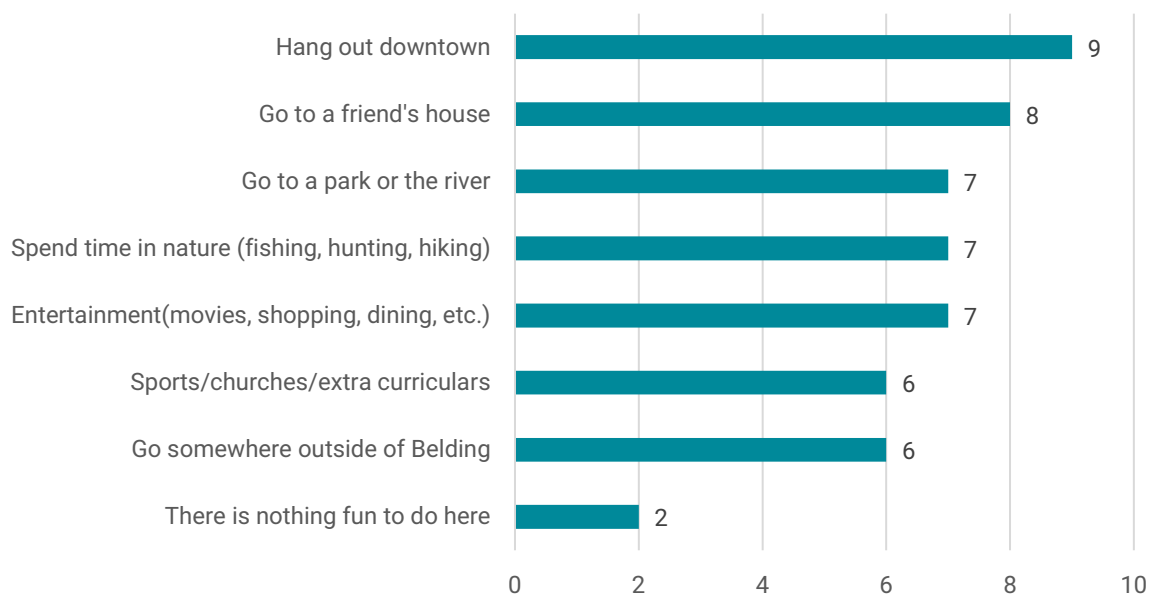
- I would walk/bike/scoot more if it was easier to get around (4.5)
- I feel safe walking/biking/scooting in my neighborhood (4.3)
- We need more sidewalks/trails to get around town (3.4)
- I only feel safe riding in a car (2.5)

Figure 6.5: Transportation Statements Results



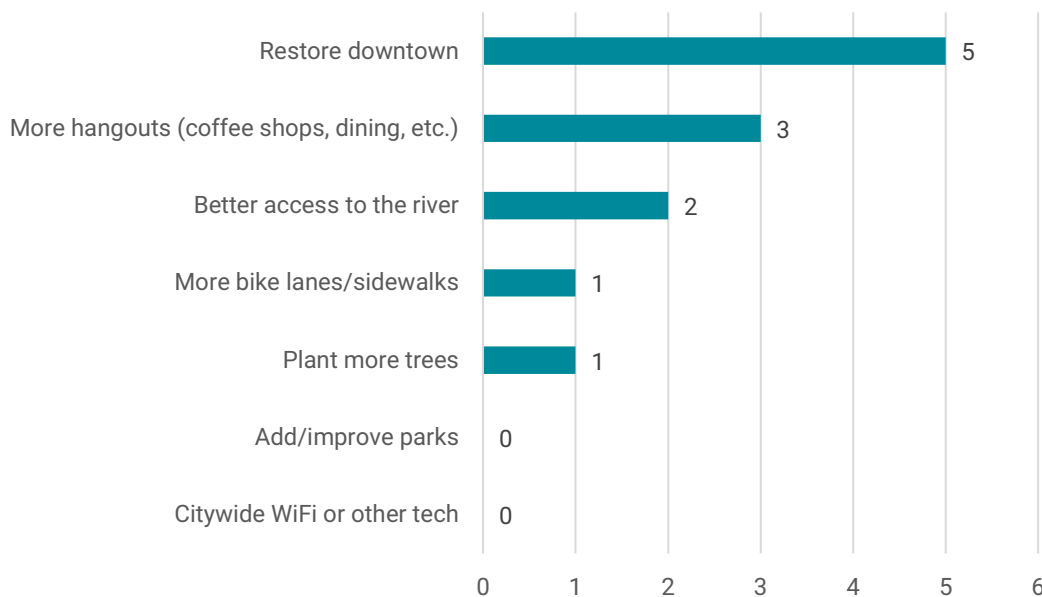
6. What do you like to do for fun? Choose all that apply.

Figure 6.6: Recreation Results



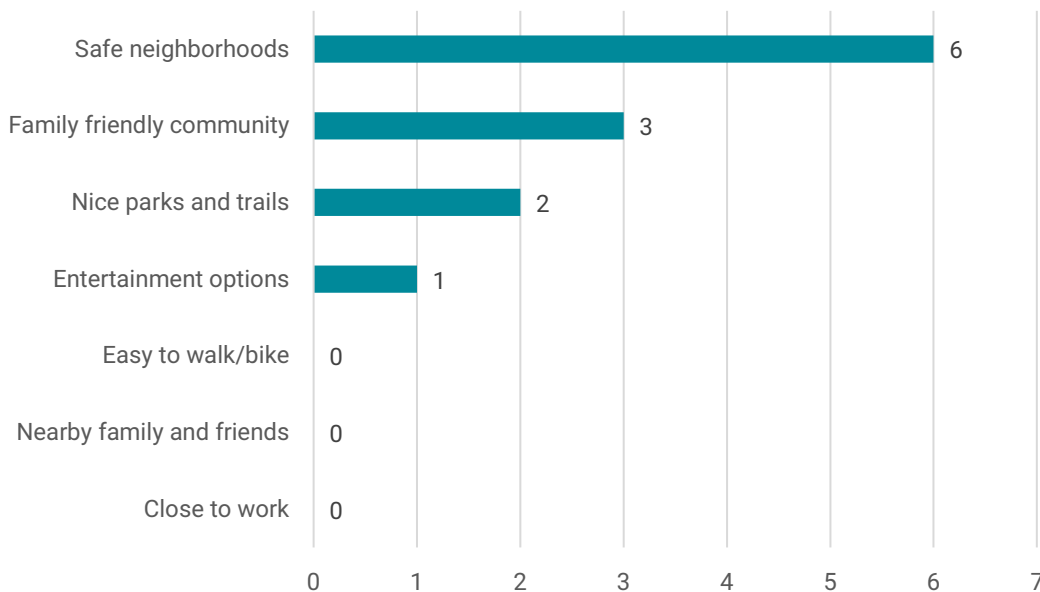
7. What would you like to see improved in Belding?

Figure 6.7: Desired Improvements Results



8. When you grow up and choose a place to live, which of the following will be the most important?

Figure 6.8: Important Qualities Results



The results of the Mentimeter activity illustrate the student’s appreciation for the people and community nature of Belding, including small-town characteristics such as walkability and parks and recreation. However, there appeared to be a desire for safety, improvements to downtown, and the creation of more entertainment and “third places” such as dining and retail options.

HEAT INDEX

In this task, students were tasked with identifying and discussing issues in the City classified as sizzling, hot, or simmering. Sizzling referred to pressing and urgent issues that demand immediate attention. “Hot” issues are also significant but may not be as urgent as sizzling ones, yet they still require prompt action. Lastly, simmering issues are currently on the back burner but should be kept in mind for future consideration and action.

Sizzling issues reported by students included the quality of infrastructure and safety of residents, while hot issues included issues with littering and garbage and the Covered Village Mall. Simmering issues varied from retail options to historic preservation. The following tables show the transcribed comments from the worksheets.

WHAT ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED TO ENSURE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CITY OF BELDING?
Consider talking about topics like jobs and the economy, the environment, roads, sidewalks, trails, public infrastructure, new development, parks, places to learn, shop, eat, play, work, and live. Write down and prioritize your group's thoughts below.

SIZZLING

These issues are pressing and important, and should be considered right away

ISSUE

SOLUTION

HOT

These issues are important and need to be addressed sooner rather than later

ISSUE

SOLUTION

SIMMERING

These issues might be on the back burner right now, but we should be mindful of them moving forward

ISSUE

SOLUTION

HEAT
INDEX

Table 6.2: What are the “sizzling” issues that need to be addressed in the City of Belding?

SIZZLING ISSUE	SOLUTION
Old sidewalks (Hanover Street, Main Street, etc...)	we could repave, watch for tree roots
Not enough streetlights	add more in rural trails
The courts in the skate park	take it down and redo it
Got my house shot at after 3 weeks of living here	don't let teens have guns?
No Taco Bell now	build taco bell
Safety for kids	have more people watch out for people
New sidewalks and trails	add more
Less trees	grow more trees and protect them
Lots of litter everywhere	make a cleaning community or clean your mess and protect our city
Crossing roads	flashing red hand
Crossing Bridge St	blinking cross run + stuff re-paint to crosswalks

Table 6.3: What are the “hot” issues that need to be addressed in the City of Belding?

HOT ISSUE	SOLUTION
Not enough benches/pavilions	Insert more into parks, sidewalks
Not enough trash/recycling cans, doggie supply stations	Look for highly concentrated areas of litter, dog poop
Take down factory that doesn't work any more and put in a shopping place like Marshalls	Build it <u>now</u>
More security	
Roads	We should fix up the roads!
More privacy	throughout buildings or places!
The mall	Find out if you're rebuilding it or destroying it
Animals getting hurt from people or litter and garbage	Help the animals and make more garbage bins or something
A lot of trash in the city	add trash cans
People fighting, trespassing	add cameras
the mall safety / replace	

Table 6.4: What are the “simmering” issues that need to be addressed in the City of Belding?

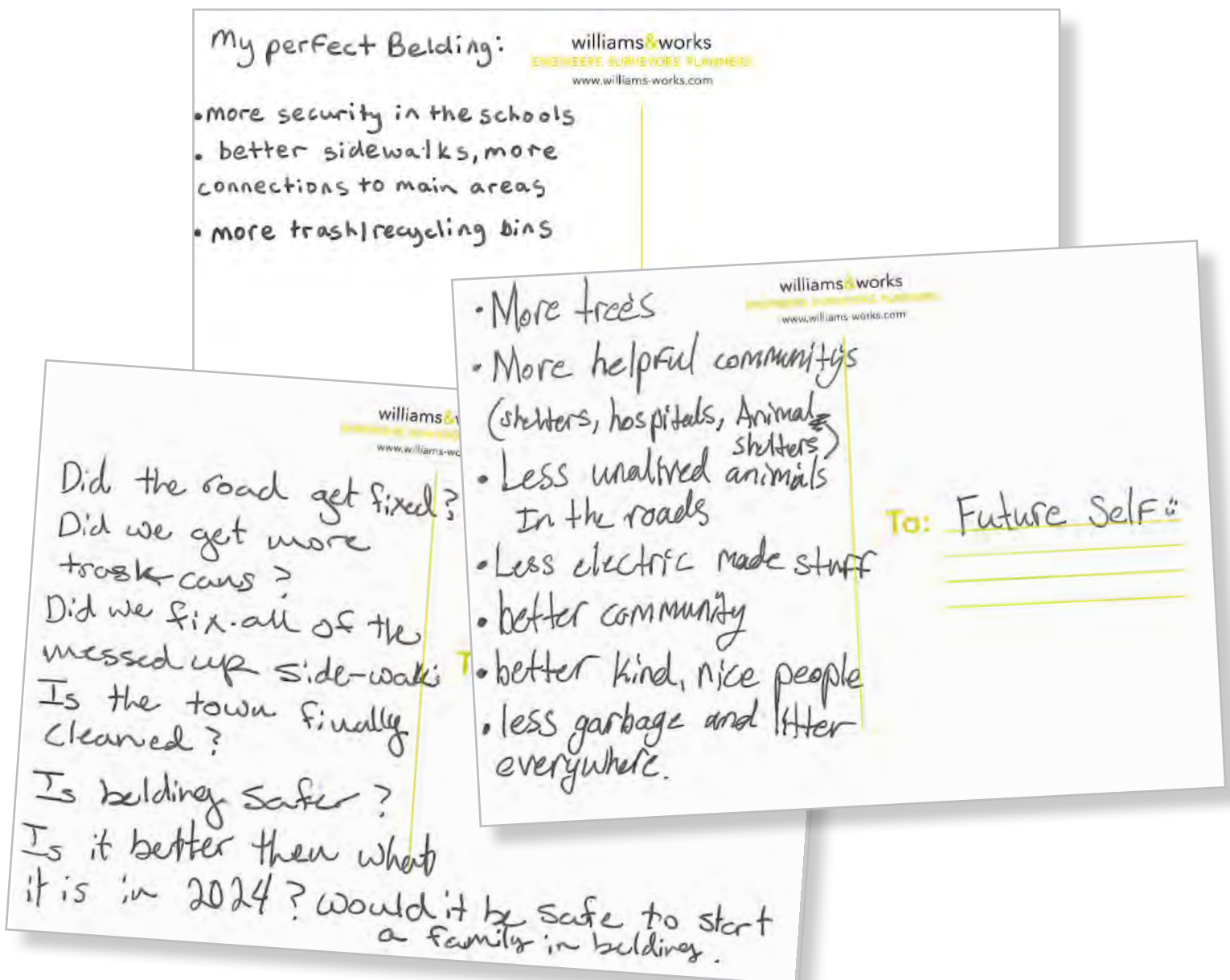
SIMMERING ISSUE	SOLUTION
Old basket factory	revamp, construct into something more useful
Bigger brands in mall (ex: bath and body works)	build them?
The people being weird to kids	tell the people right
More stuff for kids to do	arcades, skating rinks, swimming pool, movies
Hangout spots	add an activity in town
Not tearing the old beautiful old museums or old places	keep those places and clean it to make it better
Crossing the river with gus macker or trails	

POSTCARDS TO YOUR FUTURE SELF

Blank postcards were given to the students. They were asked to write a letter about their perceptions of the City of Belding in the future, imagining they received it from their future self. This activity was meant to help students think critically about what elements would need to exist for them to want to stay in their own community.

The responses from the students indicated a collective desire for a safe, clean, and prosperous City with ample commercial and retail options, improved infrastructure, and entertainment. Many students expressed the desire to see more businesses in the City, both popular chain options such as Taco Bell or Crumbl Cookies, and more civic uses such as a skating rink, improves sidewalk and road system, and a solution to the Covered Village Mall. Overall, the students pictured a clean, safe community that prioritizes mobility, commercial diversity, and green space.

Figure 6.9: Postcards to Your Future Self Samples





PENNY JAR ACTIVITY

Just as the pop-up planning activity providing penny jar voting, students were encouraged to vote on various master planning topics to gauge the importance of specific City investments. Each participant was given 10 pennies representing their tax dollars. They were instructed to distribute their pennies into jars labeled with various planning related topics, according to their preference of interest.

Figure 6.10: Penny Jar Activity

Option	Count
Downtown redevelopment	45
Upgrade infrastructure (streets, water, sewer)	20
Sidewalks and trails	17
Create more job opportunities	14
River beautification and access	10
Improve city parks	7
Ground and surface water protection	2
Industrial redevelopment or expansion	2
Create more attainable housing	2
Zoning and code enforcement	1

A total of 120 pennies were cast into jars. Similar to the broader community, the most popular option by far was the redevelopment of downtown, with around 38% of pennies being cast for that option. The remaining options such as infrastructure upgrades, sidewalks and trails, job opportunities, and river access accounted for the remaining 62% of pennies cast. This illustrates young people's desire for redevelopment activities in the downtown.

Stakeholder Visioning

Visioning sessions were held with local government, economic, and development professionals; each of whom had a relationship to the City of Belding and its wellbeing. These sessions were held on August 28 and 29, and September 19, 2025. The goal of the sessions was to gauge

SURVEY

Between October 2024 and January 2025, the City of Belding conducted a community survey to inform the Master Plan update. The survey received 308 responses and was designed to gather resident feedback on issues related to housing, economic development, land use, and infrastructure. The survey captured a cross-section of the community, with most respondents being long-time residents and homeowners. Additionally, there was a typical distribution of ages of survey respondents, which tend to skew older.

One of the strongest opinions that resulted from the survey was the need for diverse housing options. While single-family homes were the most requested type, residents also expressed support for apartments, tiny homes, attached single-family, and retirement or assisted living facilities. An often-indicated response was that housing affordability was a major issue in the City. Responses were fairly well distributed in regard to housing stock for underserved groups, including families (45%), low-income households (43%), and first-time home buyers (41%) all being listed as groups that were believed to be struggling to find or afford housing in the City.

Economic development was another high priority. Survey participants indicated strong support for attracting more businesses, with respondents indicating desire for general retail (63%), sit-down restaurants (55%), arts and entertainment venues (46%), and manufacturing (41%). There was frequent support to re-purpose underutilized industrial and commercial spaces into new businesses, community centers, or mixed-use developments. Long-term planning, infrastructure improvements, and modern zoning regulations were seen as essential to fostering sustainable economic growth.

The future of the Covered Village Mall stood out as a very important topic. Nearly half of all respondents (47%) favored full demolition and redevelopment of the site with new construction, while others advocated for a mix of new and reused features (28%). A large number of participants expressed support for the return of the City's original Main Street and platted street grid.

The survey also asked about more generalized improvements to downtown. Respondents called for better maintenance of public spaces (56%), more local markets and food vendors (55%), more retail and office space (52%), sit-down restaurants (42%), and restoration of historic buildings (42%). Comment suggestions for downtown included public art, seasonal events, landscaping enhancements, and improved walkability.

Infrastructure and connectivity emerged as concerns. A majority of respondents prioritized maintenance of existing streets and sidewalks (56%), with many criticizing poor road conditions and a lack of safe pedestrian routes. The condition of city streets and sidewalks was repeatedly raised as an issue.

The Flat River was identified as a valuable but underused resource. A majority of respondents supported improving maintenance of riverfront facilities (60%), with many comments regarding the desire to see improved and cleaned riverfront facilities. Expanding trails and boardwalks (47%), and preserving natural areas (43%) also emerged as top choices for improving river access. There was also interest in adding picnic areas, entertainment options, watercraft launches, and scenic overlooks.

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CHAPTER 7.

Goals & Objectives





GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Public policy related to planning and land use must be founded upon the needs and desires of the community it serves. Belding's effort to update this plan contained significant public input discussed in Chapter 6, including meetings with stakeholders, students, a community-wide survey, and pop-up engagement held during the City's 2024 Labor Day Celebration. This input, coupled with best planning practices and previous efforts completed by the City, led to the development of the goals and objectives outlined in this plan.

This chapter contains the primary planning and land use policies for the City of Belding, and this Plan is rooted in these statements. The goals and objectives presented in this Chapter are intended to describe a desirable end state of Belding over the long term (20-30 years or more). While the goal statements are intentionally general, they are thought to be attainable through concerted effort.

Each goal is supported by more specific objectives. Goals are more likely to be achieved if each objective is attained; thus, objectives can be considered as milestones on the way to achieving the goal.

Housing

Goal 1: Belding will be home to a variety of housing types and households located in walkable, inviting, and well-maintained neighborhoods with the support of the Belding Housing Commission.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Work with the Belding Housing Commission to incentivize building affordable housing projects.
2. Work with local financial institutions and the Belding Housing Commission to promote programs that help first-time home buyers.
3. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow additional housing options in the City such as accessory dwellings, live/work units, townhouses or rowhouses, and similar units that are compatible with the City's character.
4. Adjust the Zoning Ordinance to streamline the process for ordinance enforcement to reduce incidences of blight in neighborhoods.
5. Develop a residential rental registration program that sets standards for rental properties relevant to current building and energy codes, and requires annual inspections to ensure clean, safe, and properly maintained rental housing.

Goal 2: The City will provide Belding residents with access to safe, affordable, and thoughtfully-scaled housing for individuals and families across all income levels by adopting flexible zoning policies that accommodate growth while preserving neighborhood character.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Develop workforce housing clusters near employment hubs throughout the City, including Downtown and near M-44 (State Street).
2. Adopt policies that encourage/provide for aging in place to accommodate the aging portion of the City's population.
3. Require that all new, redeveloped, and retrofitted residential developments provide an explicit connection to nonmotorized infrastructure like trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes by strengthening site plan review requirements.
4. Allow for small incremental increases in density in the City's residential neighborhoods (for example, one-family to two-family) to increase affordable options.

Goal 3: The City will take a proactive approach to increasing the affordability and availability of housing stock throughout the City.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Adjust the Zoning Ordinance to eliminate requirements that add to the cost of development and construction, such as private garages and minimum floor areas.
2. Incentivize the development of housing reserved for those earning 80% of the area median income using tools such as a community land trust and Brownfield Tax Increment Financing.

Downtown Belding

Goal 4: Downtown Belding will be walkable, vibrant, and home to a variety of thriving businesses with active storefronts and uses that serve as the heart of the City.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Reduce or eliminate off-street parking requirements to allow for more land in the downtown to be used for development and to reduce barriers to redevelopment in the city center.
2. Adopt design standards for downtown development that address site design, contain ground-floor transparency requirements, building form, and similar requirements.
3. Consider the creation of a Downtown Development Plan with support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation in an effort to become a Redevelopment Ready Community.

Goal 5: The Covered Village Mall and surrounding property will be redeveloped into a walkable, people-oriented space that restores the City’s historic downtown development pattern.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Work with existing owners of the property to revise or affirm the plan for redeveloping the mall property as articulated in Belding’s DDA Plan (see page 81 for further discussion)
2. Review and reaffirm, update, or amend the existing Development Plan and Tax Increment Financing Plan (original plan in 1984, 1st amendment and restatement 2006, 2nd amendment 2015).

Goal 6: New development and redevelopment in downtown Belding will be designed to promote social interaction and enhance a sense of community.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide public spaces for people across generations that will enhance connectivity between people and places.
2. Permit housing units by right in mixed-use developments in downtown Belding.
3. Coordinate with the Downtown Development Authority to increase amenities such as plantings, benches, and lighting to beautify downtown.
4. Where appropriate, encourage or require new development to provide plazas and similar areas for gathering and socializing.

Community & Economic Development

Goal 7: Belding will be home to a strong, diverse, and sustainable business community that will contribute positively to the character and economic health of the community over the long term.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Work with economic development agencies like The Right Place, the Ionia County Economic Alliance, and the Belding Area Chamber of Commerce to promote and market local businesses and spur industrial development and redevelopment within the Belding city limits.
2. Through careful marketing and planning, build a stronger cultural and physical connection to local and regional trails that can act as a catalyst for the development of new businesses.
3. Create an economic development strategy that will be used to direct growth, redevelop vacant properties and buildings, and spur community investment in the City.

Goal 8: Belding’s commercial areas will be enhanced, beautified, and improved with essential infrastructure to create vibrant, accessible spaces that attract new businesses and residents.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Invest in urban design improvements, beautification projects, and the creation of welcoming public spaces throughout the City.
2. Encourage the adaptive reuse of historic or otherwise locally relevant buildings, integrating modern functionality while preserving their unique character.
3. Review and update the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that commercial districts encourage and allow for highly desirable development, such as mixed uses (specifically residential above retail) and business with active storefronts in the downtown as uses permitted by right and/or with administrative approval.

Goal 9: Belding will cultivate a culture that supports the growth and sustainability of small businesses and entrepreneurs by streamlining review and entitlement procedures and other relevant regulations.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Research and implement municipal best practices to update regulatory processes to support small business development.
2. Provide incubator spaces in commercial and/or industrial zoning districts that provide affordable facilities and resources for startups and small businesses.

Parks, Recreation, and Trails

Goal 10: Parks and Trails will be clean, safe, accessible, and well-maintained to encourage their use and enhance the community.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Create a Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement and Deferred Maintenance Plan that will be used to identify the cost, resources needed, and priority level to systematically address park and recreation maintenance needs for City facilities and programs.
2. Continue to pursue grant opportunities to address park and recreation acquisition, development, and/or maintenance needs.
3. Develop a volunteer network to support City maintenance efforts that can help in small ways like litter clean-up days and spring/fall clean-up events.
4. Ensure that new recreation facilities or improvements meet ADA standards and strive for universal design.

5. Engage the City of Belding Police Department to identify ways to develop park surveillance and/or a security program to minimize vandalism and littering.
6. If vandalism occurs, address it soon after it occurs.
7. Work with community members and leaders to educate them about the issues and determine how they might be able to help.

Goal 11: Belding will establish a point of contact to lead and manage park and recreation programs, facilities, and issues.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Pursue a paid Parks and Recreation Director position that could lead the development of park and recreation programs and facilities and address related challenges.
2. Consider unique ways to fund the position, including re-establishing the co-op position that was shared with Belding Public Schools.
3. Consider a parks millage to provide additional funding to provide foundational support for this effort.

Goal 12: Belding will be home to a robust and connected network of trails, sidewalks, and other nonmotorized infrastructure to link the City's parks, waterfront, schools, neighborhoods, business districts, and downtown to support recreation and healthy lifestyles.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Prioritize the filling of gaps in the City's sidewalk network, particularly in existing residential areas.
2. Pursue maintenance opportunities on paved trails and sidewalks.
3. Improve wayfinding signage along trails, including street signage at trail/street crossings.
4. Ensure that all facilities are built to ADA standards and strive for universal design.

Public Utilities, Services and Infrastructure

Goal 13: The City will strategically invest in public utilities, services, and infrastructure to adapt to the needs of a changing community and evolving urban landscape that will maintain a high quality of life.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Improve essential infrastructure to enhance use, accessibility, and connectivity, especially within redeveloping and revitalized areas.
2. Support efforts to replace lead public water line infrastructure, prioritizing residential neighborhoods and schools.
3. Invest in water and sewer infrastructure to provide available, easy utility hook-ups in industrial areas, encouraging and helping facilitate industrial development.
4. Work with EGLE's efforts to address the needs of the Belding Dam.

Transportation

Goal 14: The transportation system in Belding will be safe, accessible, and inclusive for all regardless of age, ability, socio-economic status, or mode of travel.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Adopt a complete streets ordinance that supports the development of a multi-modal network that serves residents and visitors, especially within the Downtown and along major transportation corridors like M-44 (State Street).
2. Work with MDOT to create a functional, safe multi-modal corridor on M-44 (State Street) that will support a variety of local businesses that strengthen the identity of Belding.
3. Support the Ionia County Commission on Aging's dial-a-ride transit services for Belding residents.
4. Continue to maintain and invest in the City's roads, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure to create a community where people can be mobile and feel safe.
5. Identify strategic locations to close gaps in the existing sidewalk and trail network.

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CHAPTER 8.

Future Land Use





FUTURE LAND USE

Introduction

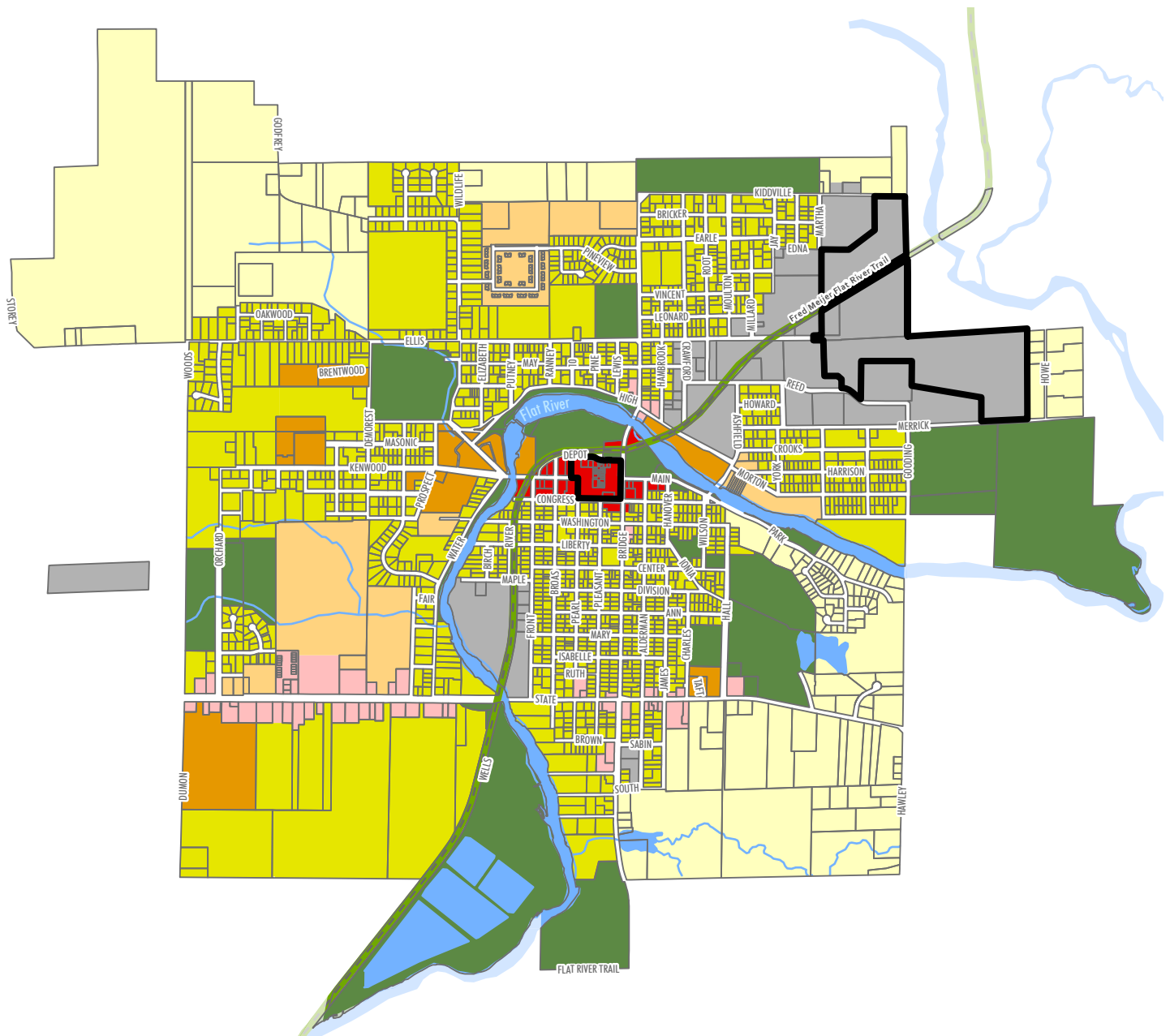
This Master Plan establishes general patterns of land use to guide growth and development for the next twenty to thirty years. It constitutes a practical and integrated approach to accommodate the impacts of growth and change suggested by population trends and existing patterns of development. The chief intent is to foster efficient and sustainable forms of development that preserve the city's unique character while accommodating new development, redevelopment, and managing change.

The overall purpose of the future land use designations outlined in this Chapter is to guide new development in logical and viable patterns while offering fair, and in some cases, value-enhancing opportunities for development and redevelopment, where appropriate.

The following pages describe the future land use designations as illustrated on the Future Land Use Map (Map 13). Each Future Land Use designation is intended to foster a character distinctive of that designation in the City of Belding. As the community develops over the next twenty to thirty years, development should be consistent with this plan should have occurred as market conditions warrant. It will be up to the City's elected and appointed officials, primarily the Planning Commission and City Council, to ensure that new development opportunities are consistent with this Plan.

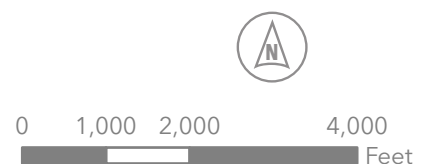
However, this Plan is also intended to be somewhat flexible and the City should bear in mind that it may exercise reasonable discretion in making land use decisions that are in the best interest of the City. The future land use designations on the map are meant to be seen as general with indistinct edges. Along the margins, where two or more designations adjoin, either land use may be appropriate.

MAP 14. FUTURE LAND USE



Legend

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
|  | Low Density Residential |  | Industrial |
|  | Traditional Single Family Residential |  | Public |
|  | Medium Density Residential |  | Opportunity Zones |
|  | High Density Residential |  | Trail |
|  | Central Business District |  | Water Bodies |
|  | General Commercial | | |



Future Land Use Designations

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

Characteristics of this designation are single-family homes found on large lots of an acre or more, generally along the periphery of the City. These areas are generally wooded and may contain wetlands, particularly in the south and west portions of the City. It is anticipated that these areas are likely to remain residential, and in some areas, undeveloped where there exist sensitive natural features or other encumbrances to development. Where development does occur, large lot single-family homes are likely the most appropriate housing form.

This designation also contains the Candlestone Golf Course property. This plan anticipates a continuation of this site as a golf course. However, if redevelopment were to occur, single-family residential homes would be the most appropriate form on development, although some small-scale commercial uses could be considered near the corner of Storey Road (M-91) and Ellis Street.

Primary compatible zoning district: R-1 Single Family Residential

Potentially compatible zoning district: R-1.5 Single Family Residential, R-2 Single Family Residential

TRADITIONAL SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

This designation is defined by the historic platted development pattern in Belding and, like most small cities, reflects traditional neighborhood design principles. These areas generally surround the downtown and Flat River and are characterized by walkable streets connecting in a grid pattern that supports vital neighborhoods. Most of the residential areas of the City fall within this designation, and the majority consists of single-family residences on historically platted lots. However, some of these houses have been converted into two or more units over the years. While such conversions may continue, they should be carefully monitored by the City to ensure safe living conditions and to prevent overcrowding of lots and neighborhoods.

Overall densities of 1-5 units per acre consisting of single-family homes are most fitting in this designation. Where there is room to accommodate them, conversions of dwellings to two or three units may be permitted, and accessory dwellings may be appropriate. Attention should be given to ensuring that the overall design of development projects is consistent with the building forms and principles that give this designation its character. Non-motorized infrastructure such as sidewalks and bike lanes should be constructed or improved in these areas so residents have the option of biking or walking to destinations such as parks, businesses, schools, and employment.

Of particular note in this designation is an area northeast of downtown Belding between Merrick, Harrison, York, and Gooding Streets. Here, there exist lots that were platted with the original plat of the City in 1889. Nothing was ever built, so this land has been left platted but otherwise undeveloped as there are no streets, sidewalks, or any other improvements in the area other than the perimeter streets. This makes the site an excellent location for new single-family development consistent with the City's historic development pattern. Because the land is already platted, approval could be relatively straightforward provided that a willing developer follows the established development pattern.

Primary compatible zoning district: R-2 Single Family Residential, R-3 Single & Two Family Residential

Potentially compatible zoning district: R-1 Single Family Residential, R-1.5 Single Family Residential, RM-1 Multiple Family Residential

MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

This designation is intended to accommodate higher density multi-family residences in the range of 6 to 15 units per acre, although higher densities may also be appropriate when projects can be blended into the fabric of surrounding neighborhoods. Within this designation are areas containing duplexes, triplexes, and greater densities below that of high-density areas. This designation is intended to balance the need for attainable and affordable housing at higher densities with the character of Belding's existing neighborhoods.

Housing typologies in this designation could also include single-family homes on smaller lots, duplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, condominiums, and similar projects. All developments should be served by sidewalks and/or pathways to connect and integrate new developments into the city and improve walkability and increased access to recreational opportunities.

Primary compatible zoning district: R-3 Single and Two Family Residential

Potentially compatible zoning district: RM-1 Multiple Family Residential

HIGH DENSITY MULTIPLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

This designation is intended for densities of over 15 units per acre. This designation presently includes several multiple-family residential developments such as Brentwood Apartments, Jacklyn Apartments, Belhaven, Taft Court townhouses, and the Flats on the River.

It also supports the manufactured housing community in the City: Wellington Estates. This plan supports manufactured housing developments as an affordable option for residents, although it does not anticipate or support additional manufactured housing outside of this park. However, steps should be taken to ensure that manufactured housing developments are well-maintained and consistent with state standards for manufactured home communities.

This designation primarily supports townhome, condominium, and apartment development in the City at high densities. It is intended that apartment buildings, particularly those greater than two stories, should be located closest to the downtown core in an effort to add density and vitality to downtown Belding. Creating higher densities in the city will help to increase both the supply and the diversity of the City's housing opportunities. In areas where High Density Residential developments are proposed, effort should be made to increase walkability and connections to commercial, industrial, and public land uses. This could include sidewalks, multi-use pathways, river access, bikeways, and/or recreational trails.

The Basket Factory

One particular site of interest in this designation is the former basket factory, an historic structure dating back to the era of the Belding Brothers. Located at 131 E High Street along the river, the site is currently used for private storage/warehousing. While the structural soundness of the building is largely unknown, the building could provide an opportunity for a residential conversion, much like the former silk factory located along the river to the west of Downtown that is now the Flats on the River. Although a residential conversion is the preferred future of the site, considerations can be made for other future uses such as mixed-use, office, or commercial space. Regardless of the eventual land use, every effort should be made to preserve this iconic and historic building.

Primary compatible zoning district: RM-1 Multiple Family Residential

Potentially compatible zoning district:

DOWNTOWN BELDING

Downtown is the heart of Belding. While the Covered Village Mall faces its own challenges discussed in greater detail below, new development and redevelopment in this designation should follow the principles of traditional urban design. Buildings should be built to the street with large, transparent windows and active uses such as retailers and restaurants on the ground floor.

Whenever possible buildings should be multiple stories with residential uses such as condominiums or apartments, or less-active commercial uses such as offices on upper floors. Streets should be lined with trees and amenities such as benches and public art. Wide sidewalks should facilitate pedestrian traffic. On-street parking should be available to minimize off-street parking requirements and calm traffic on adjacent streets.

Primary compatible zoning district: B-1 Community Business

Potentially compatible zoning district: OS-1 Office/Service, B-2 General Business

GENERAL COMMERCIAL

The general commercial designation is defined by larger-scale commercial activity compared to the central business district designation, though also distinct from the urban form of the Covered Village Mall. This designation consists primarily of three areas of the City: State Street west of the Flat River, State Street east of the Flat River, and Bridge Street north of the Flat River. West of the river along State Street is defined by more suburban, strip-style commercial uses that are auto-oriented and contain larger commercial buildings such as grocery stores and drive-through restaurants. The other two commercial nodes mentioned above are more appropriate for smaller-scale neighborhood commercial uses. These are defined by better walkability and buildings that are located adjacent to the right-of-way and usually have parking located in the rear of the building.

Properties in the general commercial designation are intended to accommodate smaller-scale commercial uses such as coffee shops, dine-in restaurants, retailers, grocery stores, personal services and similar uses. Land along State Street west of the Flat River will likely continue the existing pattern of development, although the City should strive to ensure that development along West State Street is walkable, well-landscaped, and connected with cross-access easements whenever possible.

Properties in this designation lying east of the Flat River and north of the downtown are envisioned to fill a more urban-style space with small offices, services, and similar businesses. Since lots are small, setbacks should be reduced so buildings can be building closer to the street and the site will be more consistent with the neighborhood-scale development pattern that exists here. These sites will be better suited to business that are not high traffic generators and do not require large parking areas. Mixed use developments, live-work units, or small-scale residential buildings such as lofts, townhomes, or apartments may also be appropriate here if market conditions warrant them.

Primary compatible zoning district: B-2 General Business

Potentially compatible zoning district: RM-1 Multiple Family Residential

INDUSTRIAL

Industrial uses are generally located in two areas of the city: the northeast corner and centrally along the Flat River. This plan does not envision the addition of significant new industrial property to the community. Rather, the city's efforts will be to attract industry to areas of the City already planned for growth, particularly in the northeast corner where there exists plenty of vacant industrial land awaiting development.

The City will need to continue to market these sites to industrial users and be prepared to work proactively with developers along with state and regional economic development organizations to bring projects to fruition. Uses in this designation will likely include all types of industrial operations including manufacturing, assembly, processing, research and development. Some of this land is bounded by established neighborhoods, so the City will need to ensure that these neighborhoods do not suffer adverse impacts from industrial developments. New projects should be carefully reviewed with special attention paid to landscaping buffers, screening, and off-site impacts such as truck traffic, noise, odors, and related impacts.

It is worth noting that these industrial areas were developed at a time when the railroad was still active. Today, most successful industrial parks are located with easy access to interstate highways, state roads, and/or County primary roads that are designed to accommodate industrial users. Industrial facilities in Belding's largest industrial park do not have this advantage, and the lack of easy truck access is likely a hindrance to development efforts. The city will need to remain cognizant of these limitations as it looks to recruit industrial operators to the City.

Primary compatible zoning district: I-1 Industrial

Potentially compatible zoning district: B-2 General Business

PUBLIC

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. 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.

The City should capitalize on the presence of the Flat River Trail and publicly-owned lands along the Flat River near Downtown for drawing visitors and residents alike to recreational opportunities in the City. Improvements to these facilities adjacent to the trail may be appropriate for attracting trail users into the City's parks and beyond.

Primary compatible zoning district: PR Passive Recreation

Potentially compatible zoning district: All residential districts

Opportunity Zones

In late 2022, several areas of the City were identified by staff as areas that could support development opportunities, particularly industrial development, as an attempt to market land for businesses to expand into and bolster the local economy. In this plan, the northeast corner of the City is still identified as an opportunity zone for industrial uses as discussed in the Industrial designation above.



Complete Streets & Mobility

Many respondents in the community engagement sessions and survey indicated the desire to see improvements in the City's transportation infrastructure. Concerns ranged from the quality of sidewalks and roads to river and trail access. Quality infrastructure and the availability of different mobility options is vital to the future of the City of Belding as destination for residents and visitors. The availability of the Flat River Trail provides the potential to draw visitors using the trail into downtown to shop, dine, and recreate. Connections between the trail, river, and neighborhoods can provide residents with abundant recreational opportunities. And connecting neighborhoods to downtown and other job centers using complete streets – streets with nonmotorized infrastructure like sidewalks and bike lanes – presents the opportunity for age and mobility-friendly options for shopping, dining, education, employment, and recreation.

Additionally, having safe and accessible nonmotorized infrastructure is important for creating healthy communities. Access to quality sidewalks and trails can provide residents an easy, low-cost way to get exercise. Investing in complete streets will result in a physically and economically healthier City and provide 21st century mobility options for all.

Riverfront Activation and Development

The Flat River flows through the Belding from the northeast portion of the City to the southwest as it continues towards Lowell and the Grand River. The river is one of the defining natural features of the City and part of what gives Belding its unique character. Belding is fortunate to own a substantial amount of land along the river and this Plan recommends that Belding continue its efforts to showcase the river as a primary community asset. Specifically, this plan contemplates the following:



- The City should continue to work on improvements to Central Riverside Park to increase park usage and draw people to the river. Presently there exists a trail along the south side of the Flat River from Bridge Street to the pavilion. As the City continues to develop this area, special attention should be given to ensure that the design of new park improvements provide views the river, and areas for sitting, fishing, walking, and to enjoy the surroundings.
- Bridge Street there are a few prominent properties that, if redeveloped, could include a unique river overlook or other enhancement. For example, the Bridge Street Café's parking lot currently abuts the river and does not offer views of or access to the river. The VFW Hall on the south side of the river is similarly designed. Should either of these properties be redeveloped, the river should be the primary focal point for redevelopment.
- Similarly, the Basket Factory site discussed above is similarly situated along the north bank of the river. If this property is developed as desired by this Plan, every effort should be made by the developer to focus on the river and make it a cornerstone of the project.

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CHAPTER 9.

The Covered Village Mall



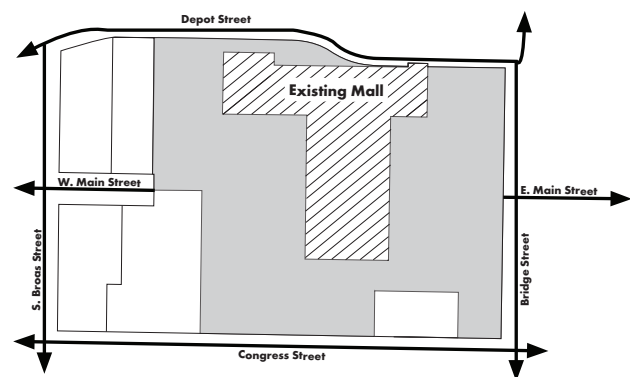


THE COVERED VILLAGE MALL

In 1972, the City of Belding was part of the urban renewal trend that had begun decades before in cities across the nation. Housing and Urban Development funds were allocated by the federal government to the City which were used to demolish the existing downtown core of the City, including historical buildings and platted streets, and replace several city blocks with the suburban-style Covered Village Mall.

Today, the mall is largely vacant. Many stores have access from the exterior of the structure in a strip-mall style as opposed to the classic mall style in which the building was originally constructed. The building has fallen into disrepair over the years, and many residents believe the structure may no longer be suited for downtown Belding.

The future of the Covered Village Mall is complicated by its ownership, with the building having been divided into condominium units with at least six owners and a larger number of tenants renting spaces within the mall. The exterior of the site, including the parking and driveways surrounding the structure, are owned by the City of Belding. Thus, any potential redevelopment of the site would have to be the result of collaboration between the owners of the building and the City, such as a public-private partnership or the outright sale of the building to the City to facilitate redevelopment.



The future of the mall has long been discussed in Belding. In 2015, the City's Downtown Development Authority developed an amended Development and Tax Increment Financing Plan, which builds on the original plan from 1984. This plan calls either for investment in the mall in an attempt to rehabilitate the structure and attract businesses into vacant storefronts or a partial or full demolition of the structure and a reconnection of the street grid to restore the historic layout of the City.

Much of the public feedback received in the community engagement process of this plan encouraged a repurposing of the mall site. Many residents preferred to simply demolish the entire building and restore the original street grid, while others felt that a partial demolition and rehabilitation was a better approach.

Downtown Belding in 1969



Nevertheless, there appears to be a broad consensus to see the mall redeveloped in some form and downtown Belding revived with a traditional gridded street pattern and downtown-style development—something similar to the streets and buildings that existed in the downtown prior to urban renewal.

Below are two aerial images that highlight the destruction of urban renewal in Downtown Belding. The first image depicts the City as it was in 1969, with its connected street grid, historic building-lined streets, rail yard, and factories. The second image depicts the City as it is today, with the Mall, associated parking areas, Fred Meijer Trail, and empty spaces left behind by industry.

Downtown Belding in 2025



This chapter presents two approaches to the property. One approach consists of a repurposing of the property largely consistent with the DDA's 2015 Development and Tax Increment Financing Plan. The mall would largely be kept intact with some modifications to enhance connectivity through the site, and additional development around its periphery in the parking areas would be developed with mixed use, civic, and residential infill development. Another approach contemplates the complete removal of the building, the restoration of the original street grid, and reconstruction of traditional "Main Street" development along and adjacent to Main Street, which would be fully reconnected.

The plans and renderings presented in this Chapter are conceptual in nature and not intended to be final plans. If the opportunity to redevelop the property presents itself, what is ultimately built will vary depending on economic conditions, infrastructure, and other challenges that this plan does not foresee.

Regardless of form or approach, there are a few basic principles that must be upheld if the redevelopment of the Covered Village Mall is to restore life, vitality, and economic activity to downtown Belding:

Architecture and Site Design. Buildings should be constructed of high-quality materials, 2-3 stories in height, and oriented toward the street with minimal to no setbacks. Buildings should have their main entrance facing the street at 75% or more of the first-floor building façade should be comprised of transparent materials. Parking should be provided on-street and/or behind buildings with generous landscaping and screening, particularly where development abuts residential neighborhoods or buildings.

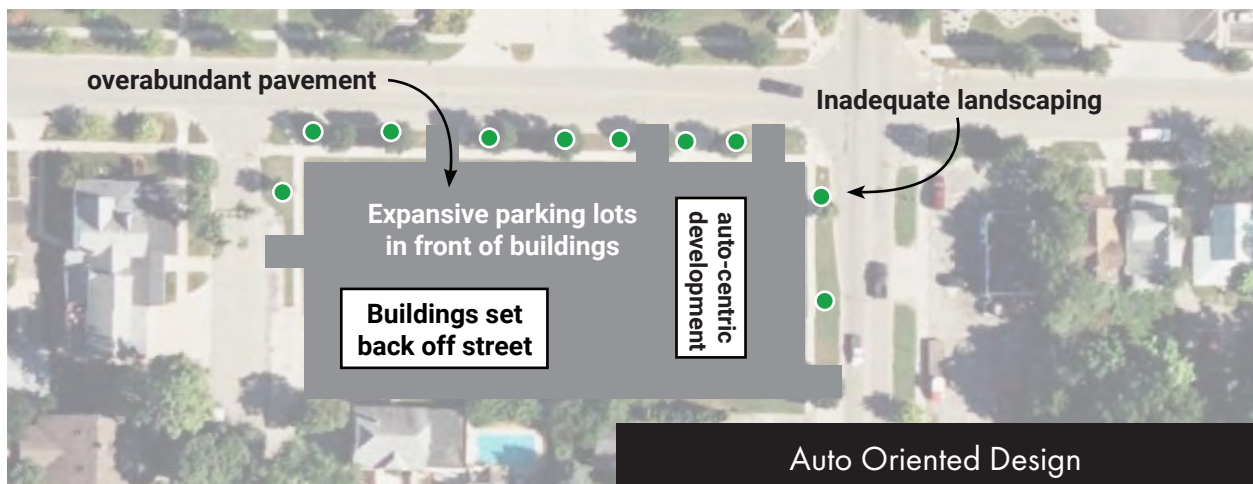
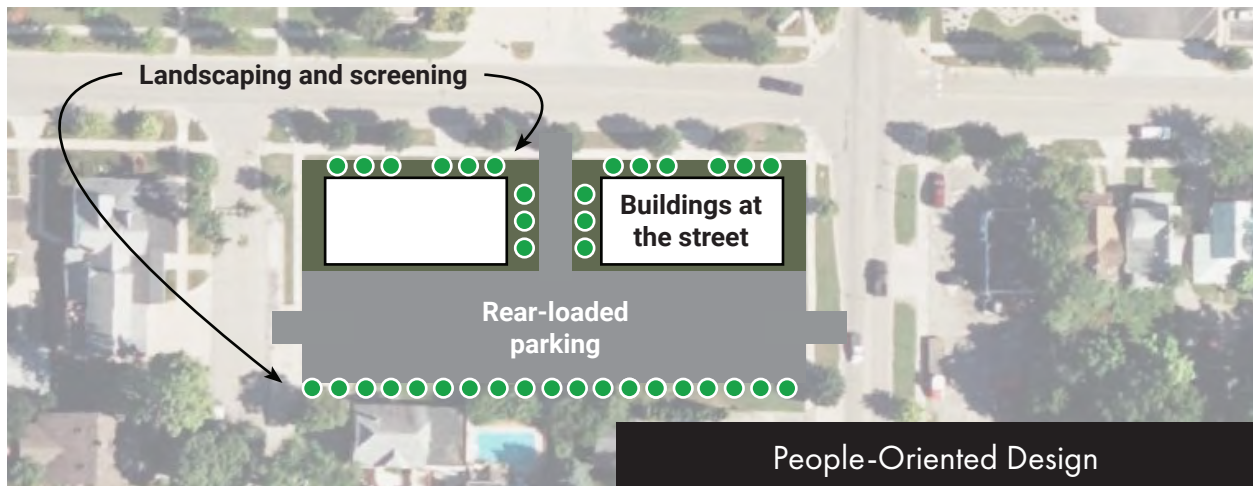
Active Ground Floors. A revitalized downtown Belding should contain healthy mix of active ground floor uses. Businesses that stimulate a vibrant pedestrian environment such as restaurants and cafes, demonstration studios, retail and service businesses, etc. should be encouraged. Businesses should spill into the public realm with sidewalk sales and outdoor seating, so long as adequate space is maintained for safe and navigable sidewalks and streets.

Pedestrian Connectivity. Sidewalks should accommodate outdoor seating and other pedestrian amenities such as benches, street trees, and similar features that offer vibrant, comfortable civic life. The City should maintain walkable and connected streets and sidewalks and improve key intersections and multi-modal crossings. Sidewalks should be as wide as possible. Additionally, pedestrian connections to the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail via sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, and more will be important to foster the Downtown and its amenities as a stop on the Trail for visitors and residents alike.

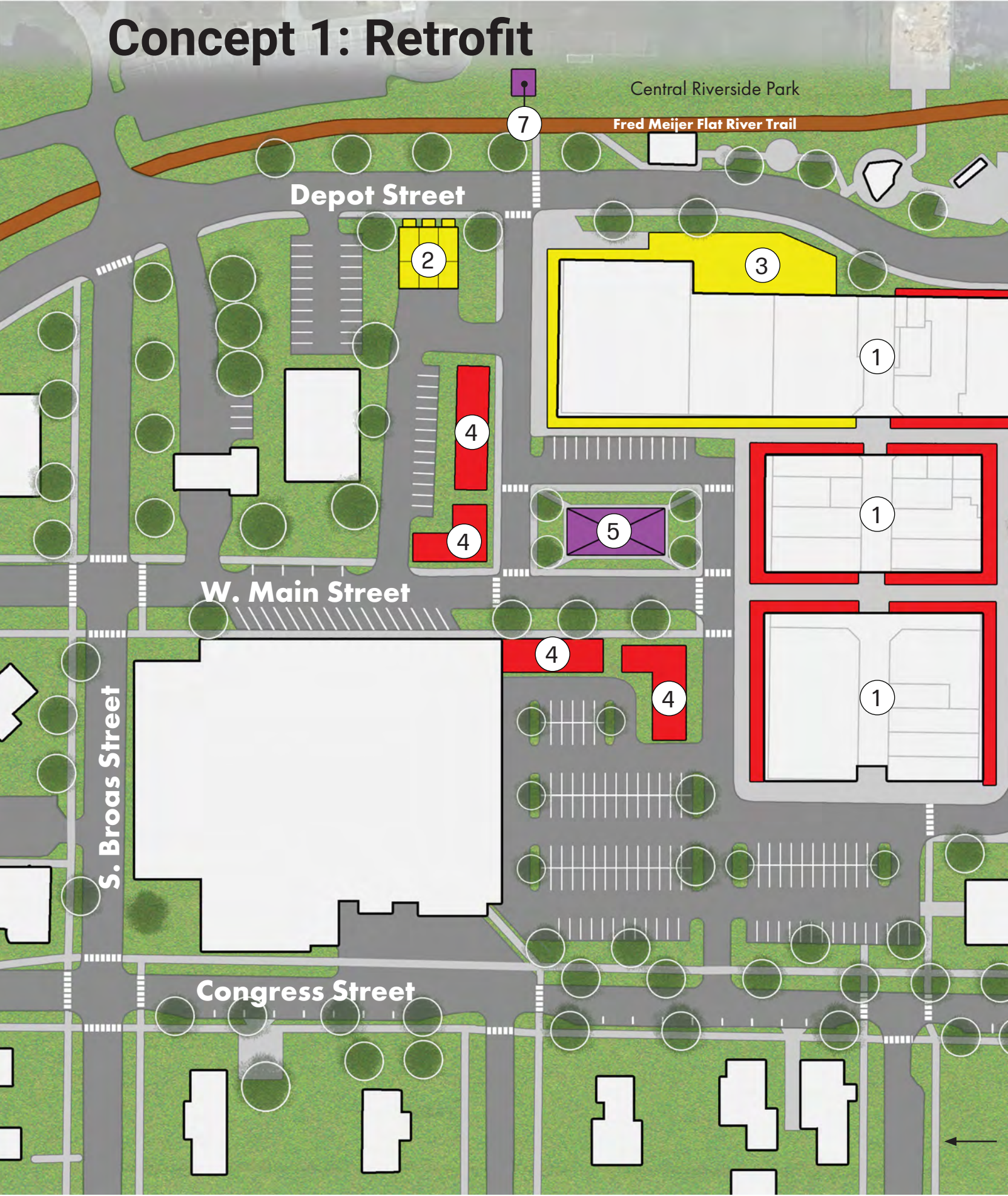
Street Design. Restoring as many street and sidewalk connections as possible will be important to creating a more connected downtown for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles alike. These new connections should feature on-street parking for ease of access to downtown businesses, as well as the pedestrian amenities mentioned above. Additional parking should be provided behind new buildings to ensure any proposed developments align with the principles of good urbanism.

Many of these principles apply to properties outside of the mall, too. For example, the following page uses the example of the empty property at the southwest corner of Congress and Bridge to demonstrate good urban design principles. If, and when, development is to occur here or in other areas of Belding, this plan recommends that architectural and site design features, pedestrian connectivity, landscaping, and other principles of people-oriented design are constructed. This applies not only to the downtown, but to most other sites in the City that are part of a more historic urban fabric and neighborhood.

Examples of Urban Development Principles



Concept 1: Retrofit







Downtown Belding: Retrofit Sub-Area Perspective

Concept 1 - Retrofit

The retrofit plan imagines the situation in which considering all factors, the City of Belding decides that total removal of the Covered Village Mall is not feasible, and a retrofit of the structure to increase walkability and commercial viability of the Downtown becomes the course of action. The site plan above illustrates the potential for splitting the existing structure into smaller buildings with plazas providing pedestrian connections through the site. New street connections, such as restoring the historic street grid, are not proposed in the retrofit plan. Instead, existing drive aisles may be utilized for vehicle circulation. Townhomes and commercial liner buildings are envisioned for the exterior of the site.

New urban infill around the periphery of the site should follow the principles of good urban development which have been discussed above. These include little-to-no building setbacks from the right-of-way, wide sidewalks that include pedestrian amenities such as benches, trees, and lighting. Off-street parking areas should be well landscaped and screened from surrounding properties.

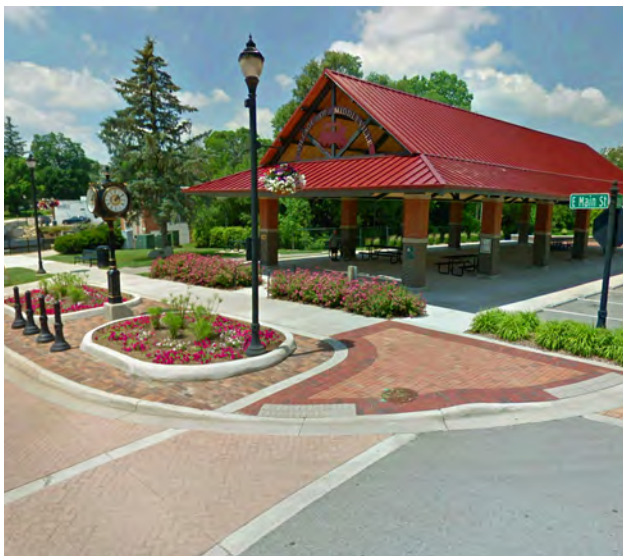
The images on the following page demonstrate some of the urban forms and visions that the retrofit plan envisions for the Downtown, including commercial and community spaces, pedestrian connections, and landscaping.



Well-landscaped walkways and parking areas will provide much-needed shade and pedestrian friendliness.



Commercial uses will take a similar form to what is currently present on the site. New sidewalks and landscaping will improve the appearance, walkability, and overall functionality of the site.



A new pavilion on a square along the southwest corner of the site will provide space for gatherings such as farmers markets and small-scale concerts.

Concept 2: Reconstruction

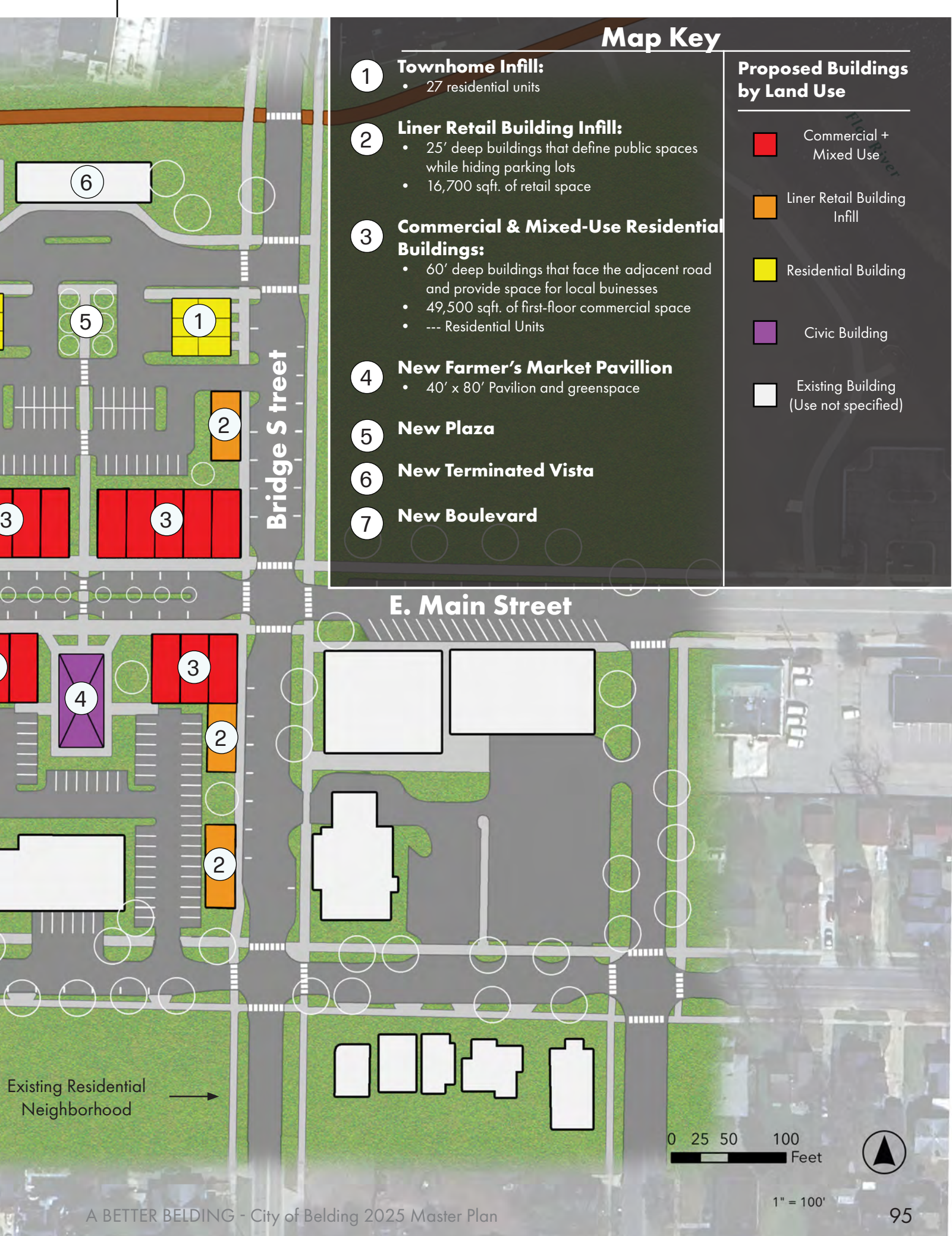


Map Key

- 1 Townhome Infill:**
 - 27 residential units
- 2 Liner Retail Building Infill:**
 - 25' deep buildings that define public spaces while hiding parking lots
 - 16,700 sqft. of retail space
- 3 Commercial & Mixed-Use Residential Buildings:**
 - 60' deep buildings that face the adjacent road and provide space for local businesses
 - 49,500 sqft. of first-floor commercial space
 - --- Residential Units
- 4 New Farmer's Market Pavillion**
 - 40' x 80' Pavillion and greenspace
- 5 New Plaza**
- 6 New Terminated Vista**
- 7 New Boulevard**

Proposed Buildings by Land Use

- Commercial + Mixed Use
- Liner Retail Building Infill
- Residential Building
- Civic Building
- Existing Building (Use not specified)





Downtown Belding: Reconstruction Sub-Area Perspective (Main Street looking east)

Concept 2 - Reconstruction

The reconstruction plan imagines the situation in which the Covered Village Mall is entirely demolished, and the historic street grid is rebuilt to facilitate infill development that matches that of the original Downtown. Assuming the difficulties concerning property ownership and costs are overcome, this vision for Belding more closely aligns with the feedback received from the community during the engagement process of this plan. The site plan above illustrates the potential for development including mixed-use buildings along Main and Pleasant Streets. Liner buildings containing other commercial uses fill side-streets, while off-street parking is located behind buildings to encourage walkability and to enhance aesthetics. Townhomes are envisioned along the north-end of Downtown near the park and trail. A central pavilion for hosting markets and concerts is also envisioned as a gathering space Downtown.

Integral to the reconstruction of Downtown are the principles of good urban development which have been discussed above. These include little-to-no building setbacks from the right-of-way, wide sidewalks that include pedestrian amenities such as benches, trees, and lighting, and parking in the rear of structures. On-street parking should still be provided to also allow for some ease in parking near destinations.

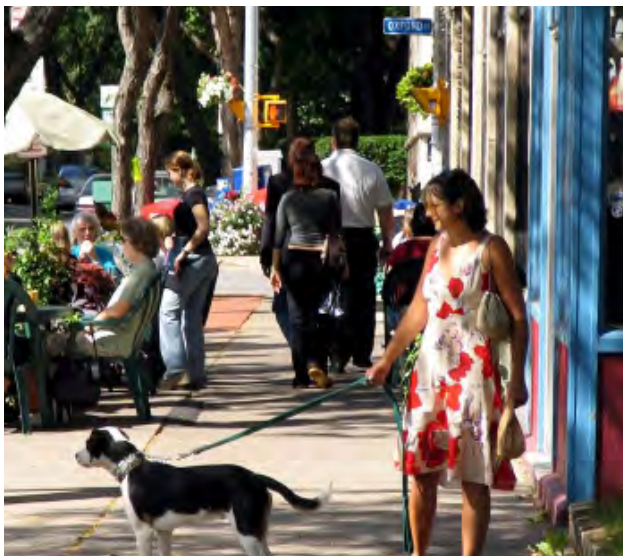
The images on the following page demonstrate some of the urban forms and visions that the reconstruction plan envisions for the Downtown including infill, townhomes, and walkability.



Dense, building-lined streets with mid-rise structures is what is envisioned by the reconstruction plan. This mirrors historic development in Downtown Belding, and the majority of other small town downtowns across the Country.



Also included in this plan are townhomes, which match the density of the historic Downtown while also providing much-needed housing.



Pedestrian amenities are important to ensure that a reconstructed Downtown Belding is walkable. This includes wide sidewalks, seating, street trees and shade, crosswalks and curb extensions, wayfinding signage, landscaping, active ground-floor uses, building transparency, and limited off-street parking near the sidewalk.

CHAPTER 10.

Implementation Strategies



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

If Belding's Master Plan is to truly impact growth and development, its goals, objectives, and future land use plan must be implemented. The following strategies are established to provide a framework for implementing the recommendations and policies described in this plan. Many strategies will be long-term, and many entities will need to cooperate with the City of Belding to implement this Master Plan. The strategies described in this chapter are intentionally general to provide the City the flexibility to prepare specific work assignments and prioritize each strategy as a part of its overall municipal operations. However, each is specific enough to provide City leadership with direction to make the recommended changes.

Primary responsibility for implementing the Master Plan rests with the City Council, the Planning Commission, and staff. This is done through several methods that may include ordinances, policies, programs, and administrative procedures that are described in this chapter. Some of the implementation strategies also require public and private investment, and many will require outside consultant support and assistance.

The following strategies are in no particular order; each strategy is important, as it contributes to achieving the overall vision expressed by the plan. Therefore, it will be important for the City Council, Planning Commission, and staff to develop a detailed set of work assignments to set this plan in motion.

Zoning Ordinance Revisions

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary implementation mechanism for this plan, as it regulates land use in the City. To support this Master Plan's updated goals, objectives, and Future Land Use Plan, this strategy recommends the regular evaluation of the existing Zoning Ordinance for its continued effectiveness to guide growth and development envisioned by the community.

Belding's Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1964 and has been amended periodically based on evolving case law, planning practice, and needs of the City. This plan recommends a comprehensive evaluation of the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that its provisions are clear, fair, broadly understood, and address modern challenges and situations.

In addition, the zoning map should be evaluated for its consistency with the future land use map and the land uses envisioned in this plan. Revisions should occur to support the vision outlined in the updated future land use map. In addition, the ordinance should be evaluated for flexibility to address innovative development techniques and to ensure that it enables the type of development that is supported by this plan.

The effort to update the Zoning Ordinance will likely take 1-2 years. The process should begin with a comprehensive review of the existing zoning ordinance. This should be reviewed with the Planning Commission, City Council, and/or City staff so that the scope of needed revisions is understood and agreed upon. Following this review, the City should embark on a methodical chapter-by-chapter review and update of its regulations.

This effort will be led by the Planning Commission, but it will likely require support from planners, the City's legal counsel, and zoning administration and enforcement personnel.



Flat River Enhancements

Improvements along the Flat River, within Central Riverside Park and Armstrong Park, are desirable to take advantage of the sites' natural beauty and central location. Community members have called for better maintenance of existing parks, and taking advantage of these existing recreation sites would align with public feedback. Central Riverside Park is the hub of recreation within the City and draws a variety of community members along with users of the Fred Meijer Flat River Trail, which parallels the park. On the north side of the river is the overgrown, yet long-standing Armstrong Park with incredible views of downtown and the river. Future planning projects could include park design plans for each park individually or as a pair that include amenities like enhanced internal trails, landscaped natural areas, and river access that are built and maintained along the river. Public engagement during the park also revealed a desire for these recreational assets, and they could be strong additions to these existing City parks.

This strategy would be a larger effort, and coordination and input from many different entities would be needed, including landscape architects, engineers, and other professionals. It is likely that outside financial assistance, such as grants, will be needed to plan and implement this strategy, so as the planning and design process unfolds, the city will also need to make sure there are sufficient finances in place.

Zoning Reform to Encourage Housing

To support affordable, accessible, and well-maintained neighborhoods, the City will need to review and update its Zoning Ordinance to allow for a variety of housing options that are affordable to residents with a variety of income levels and ages. Doing so while preserving the character of existing neighborhoods may involve the following:

- Introducing performance standards in single-family residential areas to ensure that new developments align with the existing neighborhood character.
- Promoting small, incremental growth by adopting flexible zoning policies that encourage responsible residential conversions, such as allowing single-family homes to be converted into two-family homes, where appropriate.



- Increasing the amount of housing available in downtown by amending the ordinance to more easily permit mixed-use development and housing above retail, such as reducing parking minimums or minimum floor areas.
- Language to allow additional housing options such as accessory dwellings, live/work units, townhouses, and similar units that are compatible with the City's character in appropriate locations.

This is a similar task to the zoning ordinance revisions above but would be a smaller work scope focused only on housing. If the City opens to perform a larger overhaul of the ordinance, this strategy could be combined with a larger effort.

Administrative Support

Many of the recommendations of this plan require active management, support, and involvement from the City's appointed officials, including the City Manager, clerk, zoning administrator, Department of Public Works staff, and others. Everything from zoning ordinance amendments to riverfront activation requires hours of time from city staff for these projects and strategies to be effectively carried out. Belding's elected and appointed boards and commissions have been forward-thinking and provided sound policy and regulatory changes, but the City has not often had the administrative infrastructure or depth of professional staff to handle the amount of work that is sometimes generated from those changes.

This strategy, therefore, contemplates an increase in the City's administrative capabilities and, where appropriate, the reorganizing and realigning of staff functions as appropriate. This may include the hiring of new staff members, such as an assistant City Manager or a Parks and Recreation Director. For example, an assistant City Manager could serve as the zoning administrator, aid in overseeing City administrative functions, administer other ordinances, and perform other duties as needed. A Parks and Recreation Director could be a position shared with the school district that could oversee physical maintenance and improvements to recreation facilities and also work on organizing and coordinating recreation programming activities, write grants, and perform other tasks.

Public Education and Outreach

The planning process is consistently changing with shifting social and economic concerns and unique land use challenges. Attitudes of residents toward growth, economic development, traffic, recreation, zoning enforcement, and other pertinent land use issues will likely differ from person to person depending on their individual circumstances. However, the planning process provides an opportunity to develop a unified vision for the future based on input from the community and implement that vision through collective actions. Therefore, it is vitally important for City officials to continue to seek educational opportunities to inform residents of current opportunities and issues in their community. An element of this strategy includes the continued education of City officials on relevant planning and zoning topics.

In addition, the City should endeavor to educate the public on current planning trends and the benefits of implementing the goals and objectives in this plan. Public meetings can include an educational element and provide an opportunity for informative dialogue that allows participants, including the public, to better understand given topics and the options for decisions.

Further, the City should encourage the establishment of committees, to which some of the responsibilities for achieving the goals of this plan may be delegated. These committees could focus on topics that are of great importance to the community, such as a Housing Committee or a Covered Village Mall Committee.

The City should also look for ways to provide residents with news and information regarding their government, including the challenges it is facing, celebrating exciting new projects and initiatives, or other relevant educational information about the work their government is doing for its residents. Possibilities include updates and informational material on the City website, newsletters, social media, printed informational materials, and similar efforts.

Rental Ordinance and Inspections

Approximately 1/3 of Belding's housing stock are rental units. These units can fall into disrepair if not properly managed and inspected, leading to unsafe living conditions for tenants and unnecessary risk for landlords. To address this and to ensure a quality living environment for all of Belding's residents, this plan recommends that the City draft and adopt a residential rental registration and inspection ordinance.

This ordinance would be administered by City staff and would require a rental property owner to register their rental unit with the City. The ordinance would also contain minimum standards for the dwelling units and require an initial inspection by the City, followed by inspections every two or three years.

These types of ordinances are common in many cities and more populated townships that have a larger rental population. There are numerous models that the City can use to serve the City and its residents, but the City will need to ensure that the ordinance it ultimately adopts meets the needs of Belding and can be effectively administered by the city government.

Business Recruitment and Retention Strategy

The City is an attractive place for businesses to locate, with its proximity to Grand Rapids, access to major transportation routes, and nearby residential neighborhoods and land that could be developed into more housing. The City should continue efforts to recruit new industrial operations to the City and support those that are already operating in Belding.

The City's largest industrial area in the northwest portion of the City was originally developed because those properties were located along a rail line that brought materials and goods to and from the City. However, with the economy changing decades ago, the rail line was decommissioned, and the corridor was transformed into the popular Fred Meijer Flat River Trail. For many modern industrial uses, this location in the City may no longer be viable because it lacks adequate transportation access. There are no nearby state highways, and to reach the northeast corner of the community, semi-trucks and other large vehicles need to wind through the downtown and neighborhood streets that have tight, difficult turns for larger trailers. Additionally, the topography in this area presents additional challenges for some properties.

The City may consider commissioning studies to reexamine their economic development vision and opportunities, with a particular emphasis on siting new users. They could consider working with the Michigan Economic Development Council, The Right Place, or the Michigan Municipal League to commission community economic development studies and plans to reimagine the City's industrial and economic future. Projects could include considering studying the feasibility of co-locating new City industrial sites near existing industrial businesses within Otisco Township on M-44, M-91 (Storey Road), or Orchard Street, which are better suited for semi-truck traffic. In addition, the City could focus its efforts to narrow its focus for industrial users in this area to technology-related businesses, offices, or other development types that do not require large trucks.

Marketing and Promotion of Property for Redevelopment

There are a number of properties in Belding that are ripe for redevelopment. Some of these properties have been identified, but a comprehensive list of significant properties doesn't exist. City staff could identify these properties, developing a list of their location, former use (if known), potential use, and other related information so that these sites can be better poised for reinvestment.

The City can also work with an agency like The Right Place or the Michigan Economic Development Council to work on a redevelopment strategy for individual sites or a cluster of properties to market them to investors. With a number of these sites located across the City, including former factories and the Covered Village Mall downtown, potential buyers could have access to information on these sites, better positioning the properties for logical redevelopment, creating synergy for more investment in the community.

Invest in Community Assets

The City should redouble its commitment to invest in its existing community assets, updating and maintaining the incredible resources that are already provided to residents, businesses, and tourists. Setting a tone of community pride starts with local officials, staff, and community champions. Communicating projects or efforts that are already occurring can help residents understand how their tax dollars are being effectively used and can create momentum, or "small wins," to take on bigger initiatives.

Citizens can also be encouraged to take simple but impactful steps too, such as cleaning up their lots, local parks, trails, and school grounds in addition to staff maintenance to help keep the community looking good. Projects could include volunteer efforts focused on a few hours of trash pickup at local parks, trimming and maintaining trails, cleaning graffiti, riverside cleanup, and other small projects. Many students may be looking to fulfill service hours for graduation, extracurriculars, or other community group participation, so the City should coordinate with the school district to identify interested students to take part in these efforts.



Simple, volunteer-led efforts can start improving and building a sense of community and investment in local resources. By taking on projects like this, support can build to take on other projects like improving signage or developing a maintenance plan for parks and rivers. City staff, officials, and residents can work collaboratively to invest in community assets.

Complete Streets

This master plan supports a complete streets policy for the City of Belding. A complete streets policy encourages a design approach that enables safe travel for multiple modes of transportation, including vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transit. Through this approach, thoroughfares are planned, designed, and constructed to allow safe access for all types of users and modes of transportation within the community.

The City's primary objective will be to work with surrounding communities and MDOT to promote healthy lifestyles for people of all ages, abilities, and life circumstances. In addition, the City will promote the installation of sidewalks on both sides of all streets, bicycle infrastructure, and other features that will be promoted as appropriate. Complete streets can result in increased safety for all road users, improved public health, a cleaner environment, mobility equity, and enhanced quality of life through more inviting and safer streets.

Another key motivation to enact complete streets policies is that Michigan law encourages MDOT to give additional consideration to grant applicants with these policies. This also helps clarify the City's intent of developing a connected, safe, inclusive transportation system that supports vulnerable road users, especially people who bike, walk, and roll, when working with MDOT to make changes to state-owned roads. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act has also been amended to stipulate that transportation improvements be respectful of the surrounding context, further ensuring that more equitable and attractive streets become a reality.



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