



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA

City of Brainerd, Minnesota
City Hall, 501 Laurel Street, Council Chambers
Wednesday, September 16, 2026 @ 5:00 PM

The public is invited to attend these meetings in person.

Attend by Phone: 1-469-250-2695 Meeting Access Code: 115 101 991#

Per MN Statutes 13D.02 Subd 1 Commissioners may participate by interactive technology.

Meetings are broadcast on CTC ch 8, Charter ch 181, YouTube, AppleTV, Roku, and Amazon FireTV

1. **Call To Order**

2. **Roll Call**

___ M. Duval ___ D. Gorham ___ J. Grecula ___ J. Kramer ___ D. Peterson ___ J. Mickelson ___ T. Erickson

3. **Pledge of Allegiance**

4. **New Business**

A. **Comprehensive Plan Draft and Progress Update**

5. **Adjourn**

Visit the City's Website at www.brainerdmn.gov

MISSION

"Provide high quality, cost effective public services and leadership in creating a sustainable city"



IMAGINE BRAINERD

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
UPDATE 2040

DRAFT for 9/16/26 Planning Commission Workshop



RESOLUTION (Placeholder)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY COUNCIL

- Dave Badeaux, Mayor
- Mike O'Day, Council President
- Kelly Bevans
- Tad Erickson
- Gabe Johnson
- Jeff Czczok
- Kevin Yeager
- Kevin Stunek

PLANNING COMMISSION

- Michael Duval
- Don Gorham, Chairman
- Justin Grecula, Vice Chairman
- David Peterson
- Jim Kramer
- John Mickelson

CITY STAFF

- Nick Broyles, City Administrator
- James Kramvik, Community Development Director
- Paul Sandy, Public Works Director
- Zac Swarthout, Public Services Director
- Connie Hillman, Finance Director
- Tim Holmes, Fire Chief
- Tony Runde, Police Chief
- Eric Charpentier, HRA Director

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- Bryan Drown
- Mac Graupman
- Morgan Salo
- Sarah Swedburg, AICP
- Joel Mann

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REFERENCED PLANS, REPORTS, AND STUDIES

The following plans, reports, studies, programs, and source documents are referenced in this Comprehensive Plan and should be retained as supporting materials for implementation, coordination, and future updates.

1. American Community Survey (ACS), including 2024 data references
2. Brainerd Comprehensive Plan / Comprehensive Plan Update
3. Brainerd Goals Survey / City of Brainerd Public Goals Survey
4. Brainerd Nonmotorized Transportation Plan
5. Brainerd Public Utilities Wastewater Facilities Plan
6. City land use and zoning ordinances and official zoning map
7. Citywide Wayfinding Master Plan
8. Complete Streets Policy
9. Crow Wing County HRA Workforce Housing Study
10. Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan
11. Design guidelines for downtown, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use districts
12. Housing Needs and Analysis Study by the Crow Wing County HRA
13. Mississippi Headwaters Board Comprehensive Management Plan (2019)
14. Mississippi Headwaters Ordinance
15. Mississippi River – Brainerd Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan
16. Minnesota GreenStep Cities Program best practices
17. Minnesota Shoreland Management Program / Shoreland Management Act
18. Missing Middle Housing concepts
19. Regional Transportation Coordinating Council materials
20. Safe Routes to School Plan
21. Shoreland Ordinance
22. Smart Growth Principles
23. Sub-area and master planning efforts
24. Tactical Urbanism Guide
25. US Census data
26. Watershed Health Report (2015)

How to Use this Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a leading policy tool that provides a series of steps to help achieve the shared community vision. This plan will help citizens and local leaders work together more efficiently to guide future growth and development within the city. The plan represents a shared vision for the future and a strategic roadmap to achieve it. The plan provides broad recommendations to guide and manage growth and development. These broad recommendations take the form of goals and policies that express the city's aspirations for the future.

Efforts to implement the plan's vision, goals, and strategies began upon adoption. This living document should be used for the day-to-day activities of city officials and staff and referenced as needed to justify specific actions. This plan should be easily accessible to elected and appointed officials and city staff, and should be explicitly referenced in land use decisions.

Comprehensive Plans are generally intended to provide direction over 10 to 20 years; however, they are most effective when updated every 5 years.

The plan provides specific recommendations that directly manage the city's growth and

development. To utilize the full potential of the plan, it should be used to:

Guide city officials and staff to assist with a variety of tasks:

- Communication of the city vision for the future.
- Establishment of regulatory changes and permitting.
- Acquisition and use of land.
- Capital improvement planning.
- Development and infrastructure decisions.

Guide businesses, property owners, and residents in assisting them in:

- Determining potential property use.
- Understanding possible land use changes in the surrounding area.
- Establishing reasonable land use expectations.
- Understanding future infrastructure improvements.
- Improving and investing in property.

Guide developers with property acquisition and the coordination of plans with city goals, regulations, and infrastructure plans.

Assist and coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions on issues and topics of mutual interest.

1 Introduction

VISION STATEMENT

We seek to provide high-quality, year-round recreation, a strong workforce, and a variety of life experiences that support a welcoming place to live, work, play, stay, and learn for all.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Continue enhancing Brainerd's neighborhoods in ways that encourage safety and a sense of community.
- Champion the range of employment opportunities available in the Brainerd Lakes Area (BLA).
- Promote the development and redevelopment of housing for a range of densities, types, and price points.
- Highlight, maintain, and enhance the recreational assets and opportunities located within Brainerd.
- Celebrate the unique qualities, attributes, and identities of Brainerd's neighborhoods.
- Expand and enhance high-quality rental property opportunities in Brainerd by continuing to encourage best practices and accountability.
- Be active in a vibrant downtown, support existing businesses, new business development, housing, arts, and cultural events, all tied to Brainerd's historic character.
- Maintain and enhance infrastructure and recreational assets by considering both form and function.

OVERVIEW

This plan seeks to capture the critical momentum at this current juncture in the City of Brainerd. This plan sets forth a path to advance a different model of place for the city and to actively promote our role as the region's hub, building on our assets and strengths. Brainerd boasts a long list of iconic historic properties, notable neighborhoods, and a vibrant art community, and this plan provides a set of tools to help local places thrive. The city's distinct places play a role in the economic competitiveness, giving the City of Brainerd an edge over rival communities in Crow Wing County and beyond. In taking active strides to create the best Brainerd, people will be drawn to the city's distinctive and vibrant places and walkable neighborhoods. The content within this plan is set to create the best version of our city for future generations to live, work, play, stay, and learn.

The city is nestled in the heart of lakes country and welcomes a booming tourist population in the summer months. With a ballooning summer population, the city has an opportunity to leverage this base by attracting visitors by building on its assets. Located right on the Mississippi River, this national amenity offers a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Brainerd's beautiful setting, progressive nature, and prime location make it a community with significant growth and change potential over the next 15 years.

Brainerd is home to over 18,000 workers per day, fueling medical, education, governmental, and professional office occupations. This is a drastic change from the city's historical backbone, where the majority of employment was in the railroad and paper mill industries in the prior century. Much of north and northeast Brainerd dates back to the 19th century, and a significant portion of the housing stock was built before 1930. Many of the original platted

streets can still be found throughout the city, along with centralized courtyards. A vital part of the city's identity is to capture and preserve the bits of history and seek ways to integrate modern architecture to meet the needs of all residents who seek to call Brainerd home.

HISTORY

The city was founded in 1870, when the Northern Pacific Railroad's crew determined that their crossing over the Mississippi River should occur here. As the city grew, it developed a prominent image as the railroad and wood-products center of north central Minnesota. Extensive railroad shops and yards dominated the city's industrial makeup for many years. To this day, the railroad plays a significant role in the city through its active main line. Much of the community's history and very existence can be traced to the railroad.

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Brainerd is located roughly 60 miles north of St. Cloud on Highways 10 and 371; roughly 120 miles north of the Twin Cities. Brainerd is the largest city in Crow Wing County and serves as the county seat. The community lies at the intersection of the major east-west and north-south highways in Central Minnesota. Trunk highways 371, 210, 18, and 25 all converge within the community, connecting the entire state to this regional hub. Passersby visit the city from Fargo to Duluth, folks navigate east-west along this main thoroughfare, and tourists travel throughout the region to reach their recreational destinations.

The city is 8.4 square miles in size, containing 0.5 square miles of water in the various lakes, streams, wetlands, and the Mississippi River.

Home to 14,365 people (US Census Bureau, 2020), the surrounding area nearly doubles in population during the summer months. Residents of the city have nearly 400 lakes within the Brainerd Lakes Area, as well as a multitude of year-round recreational

opportunities. Brainerd's beautiful setting, progressive nature, and prime location make it a community with great potential and significant assets to build on.

PROCESS

The initial Comprehensive Plan update process began in 2017 when a large group of volunteers signed up to partake in a set of citywide community surveys. The comprehensive planning process is based on a three-pronged approach (1) inventory and analysis 2) goal and policy development, and plan preparation, three plan refinement and adoption, which is spread out over five larger tasks.

AUTHORITY TO PLAN

The State of Minnesota gives its communities the legal authority to adopt a Plan under the Municipal Planning Act, Statute Sections 462.351 to 462.353. These statutes create a single, uniform procedure that applies to all cities (462.351-462.359). The Comprehensive Plan provides the legal framework for enacting land-use controls and other municipal actions to implement long-term growth and development regulation strategies. The city's land use (zoning) ordinances and official zoning map should be updated to conform to the Comprehensive Plan pursuant to adoption.

"In essence, a comprehensive plan is an expression of the community's vision for the future and a strategic map to reach that vision."

- League of Minnesota Cities

Comprehensive planning is an important tool for cities to guide future land development and ensure a safe, economical environment for residential, commercial, industrial, and public activities. In addition, planning can help:

- Preserve important natural resources, agricultural land, and other open lands.
- Create an opportunity for residents to participate in guiding a community's future.

- Identify issues, stay ahead of trends, and accommodate change.
- Ensure that growth makes the community better, not just bigger.
- Foster economically and environmentally sustainable development.
- Provide an opportunity to consider future implications of today's decisions.
- Protect property rights and values.
- Enable other public and private agencies to plan their activities in harmony with the municipality's plans.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring residents can voice their opinions is key to any planning process. The City of Brainerd used a mix of informational and engagement strategies to encourage public participation in this comprehensive plan update.

Brainerd Goals Survey

The 2021 Comprehensive Plan had many goals and policies that were cumbersome to navigate and difficult to prioritize, hindering the city's ability to review its goals. The project team crafted a survey that both the Planning Commission and select city staff completed and then made it available to the public. The results of this survey on the City of Brainerd's Goals and Priorities produced interesting and insightful results. The top five priorities among the city's goals for residents were:

1. Public Safety: Protect and provide for the safety of residents and visitors
2. Parks & Recreation: Maintain a quality parks system
3. Natural Resources: Protect and preserve waterways, wetlands, and wooded areas
4. Facilities & Infrastructure: Provide quality water/power and wastewater systems
5. Economic Development: Support our workforce and help them thrive.

The five lowest priorities to the public were the following:

1. Land Use: Support mixed-use development focused on integration
2. Housing: Encourage preservation and historical significance of neighborhoods
3. Mobility: Maintain, develop, and adapt a dynamic multimodal transportation system
4. Mobility: Utilize the airport for economic vitality
5. Land Use: Support and invest in incremental enhancements of quality of life.

When analyzing the results by age and income the trend emerges that those respondents under age 35 placed their highest priority on the provision of water, power, and wastewater systems showing a focus on infrastructure not shared by those respondents over age 35 who saw providing safety for residents and visitors. Viewing the results through the lens of income the highest priority for each income group varied. Lower-income respondents (under \$30,000) prioritized housing—specifically, providing a diverse mix of housing choices and ensuring quality living conditions. Middle-income groups (\$30,000–\$99,999) focused on infrastructure, natural resources, and parks, such as quality utilities, protecting waterways, and maintaining parks. Higher-income groups (\$100,000 and above) placed the highest priority on maintaining a quality parks system and, for the highest bracket (over \$150,000), on public safety for residents and visitors. These priorities reflect the most frequently selected 'High Priority' responses within each income group.

The open-ended responses to the question what a goal of the city of Brainerd should be drew mixed responses from the respondents with thirty-six of the sixty-seven respondents choosing to provide an answer. The major theme of the responses was that Brainerd residents want to see goals that promote the following

- Green Space Expansion (8 responses)
- Business and Job Development (7 responses)
- Affordable Housing Development (7

responses)

- Public Space and Aesthetic Improvement (6 responses)
- Youth and Recreation Facilities (5 responses)
- Water and Ecosystem Protection (4 responses)
- Public Transportation System (4 responses)
- Street and Road Maintenance (4 responses)
- Tax and Cost Reduction (4 responses)

Informing the community

One Page Flyer

To reach Brainerd residents with information about this project, the project team produced a one-page flyer. The goal of this document was to direct any more in-depth questions to the city or consultant teams. To achieve the widest possible reach for this information, it was provided to the Brainerd Lakes Area Economic Development Corporation, VisitBrainerd, and the Brainerd Chamber of Commerce, which used the digital version of the flyer on their websites.



Figure 1: Brainerd One-Page Flyer used on Facebook May 2026

Social Media

The city made three postings to the city Facebook page in May and June to solicit feedback on the comprehensive plan updates through a link to the public survey. These posts occurred on May 15, June 2, and June 4, 2026.



Figure 2: Facebook Post from City of Brainerd June 4, 2026

Meetings

The City of Brainerd held a Planning Commission Meeting to develop various aspects of the plan's goals and policies. These meetings occurred on the following dates:

- March 12, 2026 Kickoff Meeting: Established the preferred methods of communication with decision makers and set expectations at the project's onset.
- April 26, 2026, Planning Commission: Reviewed the existing goals and policies and discussed opportunities for updates.
- July 15, 2026 Planning Commission: Provided feedback on the priority goals and an update on work progress.
- September 16, 2026 Planning Commission and City Council Workshop: Reviewed the first draft plan
- Monthly staff check-in meetings (April – November 2026)

TRENDS & DEMOGRAPHICS

Livability

This plan strives to improve the livability of our

community. For the context of this plan, a livable community is defined as “one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and has supportive community features and services” (AARP). Taking a multifaceted approach towards improving livability is key. Residents view livability differently, so taking a holistic approach to assessing the city's livability is important, as every part of Brainerd has unique strengths. A set of frameworks should catalyze the city to measure and improve livability. The following framework should be viewed as core concepts and a general set of guidelines meant to achieve a high standard for livability in the city. These concepts help define what livability means to the City of Brainerd:

Age-Friendly Communities

The city will take active strides to become an age-friendly community, one that provides opportunities for people of all ages. As the city plans for the future, city leaders acknowledge that our population is aging.

The median age of Brainerd residents is 35.1 (American Community Survey (ACS 2024), which is significantly lower than that of Crow Wing County which has a median age of 46.1 (ACS 2024). This provides the city with a unique opportunity and responsibility to apply sound planning practices and policies to improve our city, serving a broad spectrum of needs and abilities, helping us become the city of choice in our region.

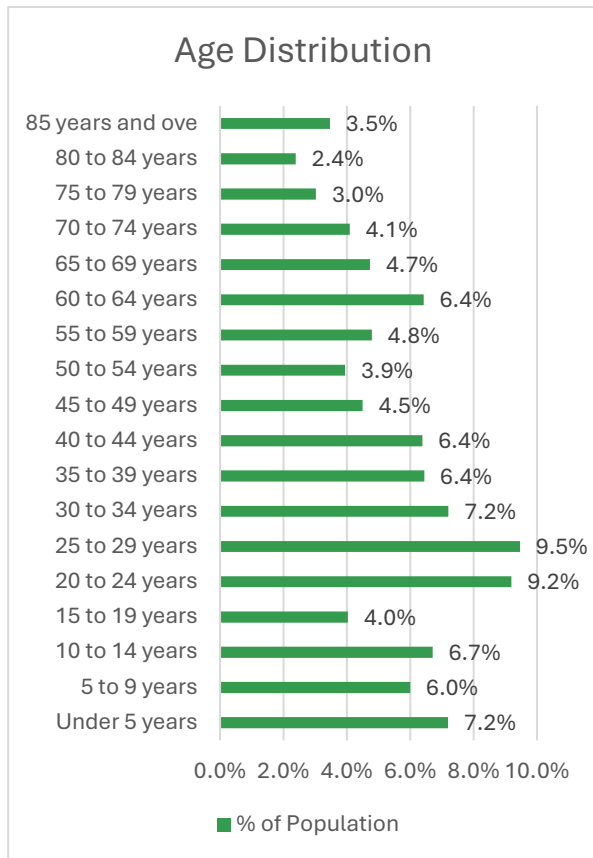


Figure 3: ACS 2024 Age Distribution of Brainerd Residents

By being intentional in our policies and design, the city can provide opportunities for all residents to “age in place” and thrive at every age (and stage) and economic level in life. By strategically preparing for an aging population, the city can take an active step in supporting its residents by focusing on areas such as housing, community engagement, volunteering, and caregiving. In addition, the city can put policies in place that ensure people are within walking distance of work, live in walkable neighborhoods, use transit, offer housing options, and have places where residents can stay in their homes for as long as possible. Brainerd residents have spoken on the importance of becoming a great place for people of all ages and economic levels

Identifying trends in population growth and other demographic data is a very important part of the comprehensive planning process. It can provide clues to future growth patterns and indicate which types of housing and public

facilities may be needed. For example, an increase in young couples with children would require starter housing, new parks and schools, and new or upgraded community facilities. In contrast, an increase in the elderly population would lessen the need for schools and increase the need for specialized housing.

Race and Ethnicity

The City of Brainerd is predominantly white with increasing racial diversity in the last decade.

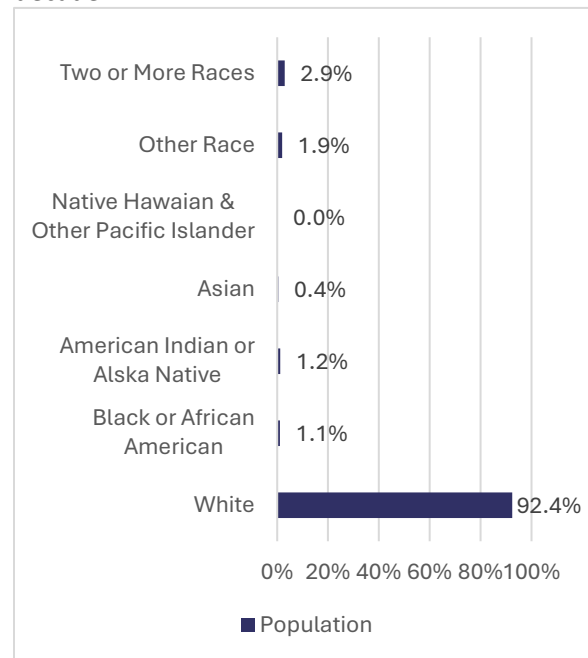


Figure 4: Racial Composition of Brainerd Population (ACS 2024)

Income

Residents of Brainerd have a median annual household income of \$46,917, about half of that of the state. The income distribution in Brainerd features three peaks in the data. Among the residents of the community, 18% of the population have household incomes under the federal poverty line and 18% of the population utilizes some form of state or federal assistance. In addition, 30% of the households in the community contain at least one occupant with a disability.

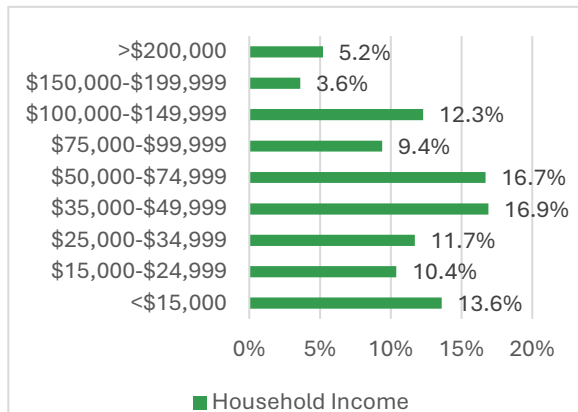


Figure 5: Income Distribution of Brainerd Households (ACS 2024)

Education

Over 50% of the city residents have some college education. With only 6.7% not graduating from high school. The community is home to Brainerd Public Schools and Central Lakes College both institutions providing education to many of the region's learners.

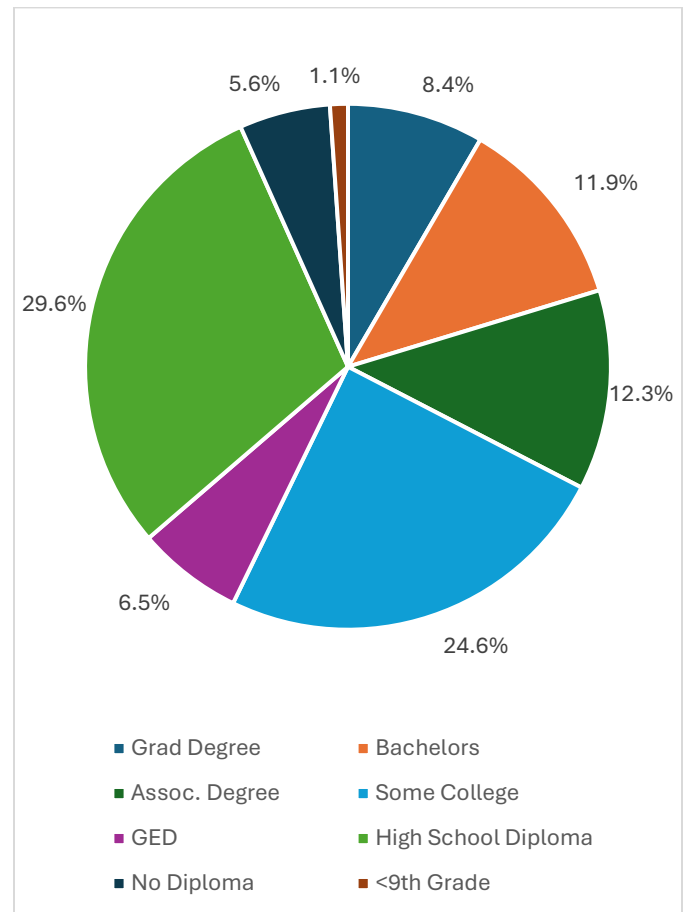
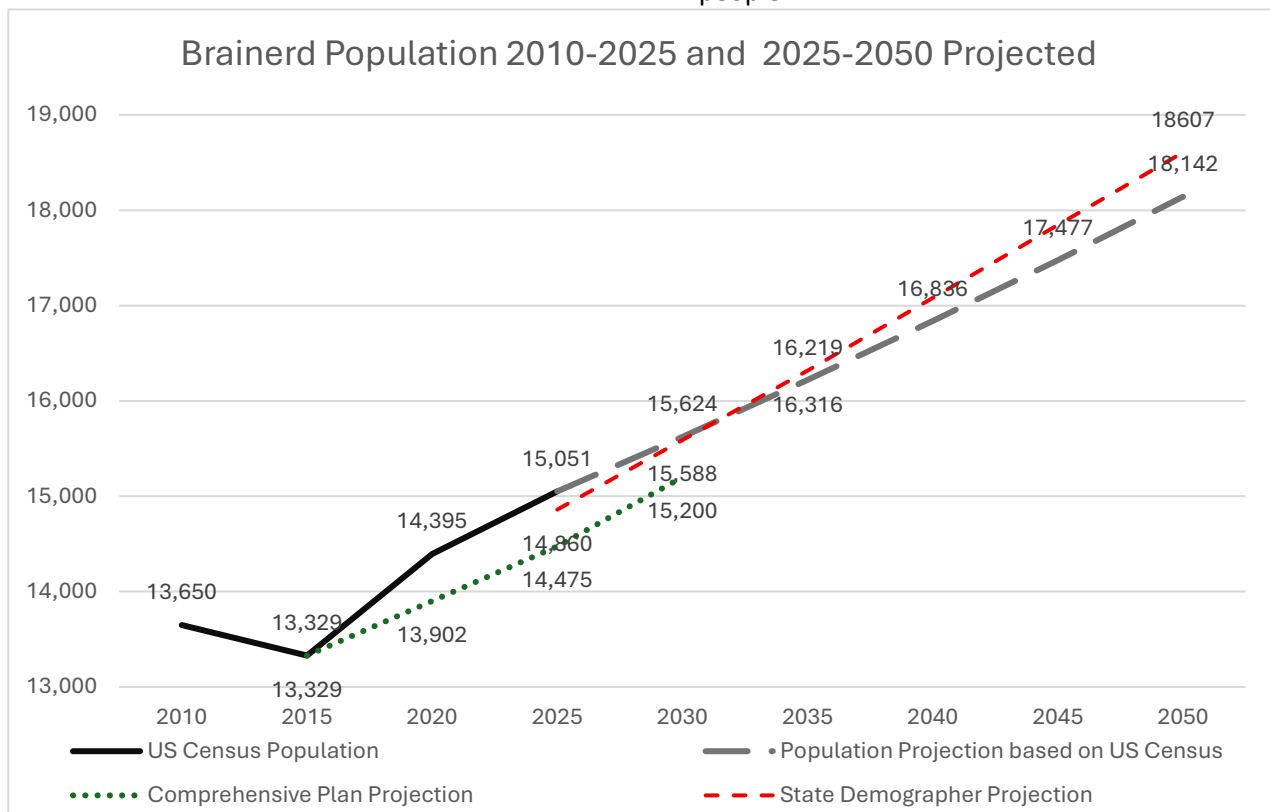


Figure 6: Education Attainment of Brainerd Residents (ACS 2024)

Population Growth

According to US Census data, the city's population increased from 13,650 to 15,051 between 2010 and 2025, a nearly 1,500-person increase. This leads to an average increase of one hundred people per year. According to the US Census data, the city has an annual growth rate of 0.75%, approximately .15% higher than Minnesota's average. At this rate, the city could expect to group to 18,142 people by 2050. That equates to an increase of 3,091 people or a net average annual growth of 122 people over the next 25 years.

from the 2021 Comprehensive Plan and the state demographer's projections. The state's demographers estimate a growth rate of around 0.92%. At this rate, the city could expect a population of 18,607 in 2050. That equates with an increase of 3,556 people, or a net average of 142 people over the next 25 years. The city decided in the recent Brainerd Public Utilities Wastewater Facilities Plan to base projections on the projected state demographer's numbers. To maintain consistency, this plan will also maintain the expected population in 2050 to be 18,607 people.



This is comparable to the growth projections

Figure 7: Brainerd Population Scenarios based on US Census, Comprehensive Plan 2021, and MN DEED State Demographer

2 Natural Resources

OVERVIEW

Brainerd is situated in the heart of one of Minnesota's prime recreational areas. More than four hundred lakes are estimated to be within twenty miles of the city. The greatest economic impact of tourism on the environment is in the summer months, driven by fishing, biking, and golfing, with numerous championship golf courses within 15 to 30 minutes of the city. Winter activities such as ice fishing, skiing, and snowmobiling also draw vacationers to the area during the winter season.

The lakes are of many ecological types, and no two are exactly alike. Some are best suited to fish, some to waterfowl, and others to aquatic life. All provide scenic and recreational value. This sub-chapter addresses the existing conditions in the city, as well as future opportunities to enhance the water quality of the city's various natural resources.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Protect and preserve our waterways, wetlands, and wooded areas, and identify threats to native species within and around the city.

Policies:

1. Identify corridors along the Mississippi River and other streams or wetlands that could accommodate low-impact developments,

such as trails or green spaces, to preserve these natural resources for future generations.

2. Utilize greenways to connect residents and neighborhoods to community destinations, open spaces and natural areas.
3. Preserve natural open spaces for habitat and scenic recreational qualities of the city.
4. Collaborate with all layers of government on the restoration and management of natural resources.

GOAL 2: Increase access to open space.

Policies:

1. In concert with surrounding communities and county government, become a world-class destination by connecting trails, the Mississippi River, history, and culture.
2. Engage in partnerships with local stakeholders and champions that build on the value of the natural resource system.
3. Develop education and outreach programs that teach residents the importance of preserving our natural resources.

GOAL 3: Comply with environmental regulation requirements in all City codes, policies, and practices.

Policies

1. Implement and maintain the Shoreland, Floodplain, and Mississippi Headwaters Ordinances.
2. Update and maintain the policies and procedures related to environmental review

for new developments, including the Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY INPUT

As a part of the outreach process, nearly 79 percent of community survey participants note that parks and lakes were the single most important aspect of living in the city. Participants also noted that, in terms of future city growth, protecting and preserving water quality was the second-highest priority for the city. Participants also noted that preserving open space was the third most important issue around concerns of future city growth.

Consistently throughout the public engagement process, we learned of residents' passion for natural resources and spoke about their strong connection to the water and the environment. It is no surprise that three out of four people note that parks and lakes were the single most important aspect of living in the city. For this chapter, the goals focus on the natural environment within city limits, but time and time again, people referenced their location in the lakes region as an important element.

Residents would like to see recreational opportunities enhanced through trail connections, greenway development, a centralized civic space, and public improvements along the Mississippi River, and improved access to the Mississippi River. When asked to prioritize public improvement, survey participants noted the riverfront development as the third leading public investment overall.

Through the improvement of active and passive recreational spaces, the city can take active strides to improve aspects of quality of life for residents while intentionally attracting visitors.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Water Quality

Water quality involves more than just taste and looks. Several biological and chemical factors

bear on the determination of whether water is "healthy." The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) manages the sampling and monitoring of Minnesota's surface waters. The MPCA collects water quality data from state, local, and federal agencies, as well as citizens. Of all the lakes and the Mississippi River, only the river is listed on the impaired waters list for mercury.

Wetlands

Most of the city's wetlands follow the area of the Mississippi River and the Whitley's and Little Buffalo creeks. As you follow the creeks to their eventual connection to the Mississippi River, pockets of wetlands exist throughout. These areas provide excellent filtration for water before entering the rivers, animal habitat, and scenic corridors for nature observers.

Groundwater

Subsurface geology and groundwater are important considerations for all communities as they are the source of drinkable water. The actions of humans and forces at work above ground have a direct impact on our groundwater resources.

Lakes

Either partially or entirely within the city are Boom Lake, Gilbert Lake, and Rice Lake/Reservoir. Boom is a small lake on the southern edge of town near the Mississippi. Boom Lake is surrounded by a city park as well as various walking and biking trails. Gilbert and Rice are on the northern edge of town, with Rice Lake a backwater of the river due to the dam at the former paper mill site.

The area's lakes around the city are recognized as some of the best sport-fishing waters in the nation. Although the rivers offer their fishing assets, they are little used by anglers compared to the vast array of lakes. Conservatively speaking, there are over thirty prime walleye lakes within a 40-mile circle around Brainerd.

Larger lakes noted for walleye fishing are Mille Lacs, Gull, Pelican, and the Whitefish Chain (2004 Brainerd Comprehensive Plan).

Mississippi River

Starting at the northern side of the city and meandering within, the Mississippi River is one of the city's prominent natural resources. The river provides the connection to the natural environment that many citizens desire.

Some protection of the resource was created outside the city limits. The Mississippi River Headwaters Board (MHB) began in 1980 as a grassroots effort by counties, an alternative to federal control of the Mississippi River corridor. The MHB jurisdiction applies to the unincorporated areas of the counties along the Mississippi River and headwater lakes. Therefore, everything within city limits does not fall in this jurisdiction. Still, this entity would make a great partner for projects along the river corridor so that its efforts do not just stop at the city limit line.

Watershed

A watershed is defined as an area of land from which all water drains to a given point. It is a ridge or stretch of highland dividing an area drained by different rivers or river systems. Unlike boundaries of political subdivisions such as counties, cities, and townships, which are mainly straight and uniform, watershed borders zigzag across the natural lay of the land. Crow Wing County lies within the Mississippi River Headwaters Drainage Basin and contains parts of five major watersheds. Within each are minor or sub-watersheds, all of which flow into the Mississippi. The City of Brainerd lies within the Mississippi River – Brainerd sub-watershed. According to the 2015 Watershed Health Report compiled by the MN Department of Natural Resources, the watershed received a health rating of sixty-three out of one hundred. This rating is very similar to other watersheds in the northcentral and northeastern parts of the state.

Mississippi River – Brainerd Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP)

The Mississippi River – Brainerd Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan establishes a coordinated, watershed-wide approach to protecting and improving water resources that are central to the City of Brainerd's character, economy, and quality of life. Developed through Minnesota's One Watershed, One Plan program, the plan spans multiple counties and focuses on the Mississippi River and connected lakes, rivers, and tributaries that flow through and around the Brainerd area. For the city, the plan reinforces the importance of maintaining high water quality in the Mississippi River, which supports recreation, tourism, public access, and environmental health. It identifies urban stormwater as a key concern in the Brainerd–Baxter area, highlighting the need to manage runoff, reduce erosion and pollutants, and protect river and lake shorelands affected by development and infrastructure.

From an implementation standpoint, the plan provides Brainerd with a regionally supported framework to align land use planning, stormwater infrastructure investments, and shoreline management with shared watershed priorities. By participating in a state-approved comprehensive watershed plan, the city is better positioned to coordinate with Crow Wing County, neighboring communities, and the Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District on projects that address flooding risks, protect natural resources, and improve long-term water quality. The plan also strengthens Brainerd's eligibility for state and Legacy funding for stormwater improvements, green infrastructure, and habitat protection projects identified in the plan. Overall, the Mississippi River – Brainerd CWMP supports Brainerd's efforts to balance growth and redevelopment with protection of the Mississippi River system that defines the city's environment and recreational identity. Its goals include:

- **Protection:** Protect and enhance forest cover, focus lakes and streams, and groundwater through adding 14,765 acres of conservation easements, Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA), and acquisitions in priority minor watersheds.
- **Agricultural Land Management:** Implement 7,130 acres of agricultural best management practices (BMPs) including cover crops, nutrient management, pasture management, and conservation tillage.
- **Phosphorus Reduction:** Reduce phosphorus loading in nearshore focus lakes by 5% and watershed focus lakes by ten pounds/year.
- **Urban Stormwater Management:** Develop a comprehensive stormwater information data set for eight cities that have drainage to a priority lake or stream.
- **Drinking Water Protection:** Protect or manage with BMPs 160 acres in high-vulnerability Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs). Seal ten unused wells per year.
- **Shoreland Restoration:** Enhance 2 miles of shoreline or streambank around focus lakes and streams.
- **Water Retention Build resiliency** by adding four hundred acre-ft of storage through cover crops and stormwater management.

The Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP)

The Crow Wing River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) guides how water, land, and natural resources are protected and managed across the Crow Wing River watershed, which includes the City of Brainerd. As a state-approved One Watershed, One Plan document, it sets shared priorities for improving water quality, reducing polluted runoff, and protecting high-quality rivers and lakes that are central to Brainerd's identity and economy. For the city, this means a stronger emphasis on managing urban stormwater, protecting the Crow Wing and Mississippi River corridors, and reducing erosion and nutrient runoff from streets, redevelopment areas, and

riverfront lands. These priorities directly support Brainerd's goals for recreation, public access, and long-term environmental health, while reinforcing the importance of rivers and lakes to tourism and quality of life.

From a planning and implementation perspective, the CWMP provides Brainerd with a clear framework to align land-use decisions, capital projects, and environmental investments with regional watershed goals. The plan supports conservation of forested and sensitive lands, encourages coordination on shoreline and buffer protections, and promotes economically and environmentally sustainable growth patterns near water resources. Just as importantly, projects that align with the CWMP are better positioned to compete for Clean Water Fund and Legacy funding, creating opportunities for Brainerd to partner with Crow Wing County and the Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District on stormwater improvements, green infrastructure, and habitat protection projects. Overall, the CWMP strengthens Brainerd's ability to balance growth, infrastructure needs, and river protection within a consistent, regionally supported policy framework.

The Mississippi Headwaters Board Comprehensive Management Plan (2019)

The Mississippi Headwaters Board Comprehensive Management Plan (2019) establishes a long-standing regional framework to protect the first four hundred miles of the Mississippi River in north-central Minnesota, including its lakes, wetlands, and connected natural systems. Developed jointly by eight counties, the plan continues earlier policy direction while updating it to reflect modern conditions and development pressures. Its core purpose is to protect and enhance the river's natural, scientific, cultural, recreational, and historical values through coordinated land use management and stewardship. The plan emphasizes strong local zoning controls within a designated river corridor, guiding how

development, shoreline alterations, infrastructure, and land uses occur near the river in order to reduce impacts and preserve sensitive resources

In practice, the plan functions as both a regulatory and collaborative framework. It promotes cooperative management among counties, state agencies, and partner organizations, while encouraging best management practices on public and private lands to protect water quality, habitat, and recreational assets. Key implementation tools include corridor zoning regulations, protection or acquisition of critical shorelands, and coordinated management of public lands for habitat and recreation. The plan also prioritizes education and stewardship, reinforcing shared responsibility for protecting the river as development and land-use changes continue across the region. Overall, the 2019 plan maintains a consistent policy structure while strengthening coordination and long-term protection of the Mississippi Headwaters corridor.

Shoreland Areas

Brainerd updated its Shoreland Ordinance in 2026 to comply with current standards and requirements. The history of Minnesota's Shoreland Management Program dates back to 1969 with the passage of the Shoreland Management Act. Minimum development standards — such as structure setbacks, height limits, impervious surface limits, lot requirements, vegetation removal, and land alteration requirements — are established in state rules (Minnesota Rules, parts 6120.2500-6120.3900) and administered through local ordinances.

Shorelands typically contain important habitat and erodible soils, which pose a high risk of surface water pollution if not anchored by natural, deep-rooted vegetation. Many of these areas are highly sensitive to development. Shoreland standards are designed to

accommodate development around sensitive water bodies in a sustainable way — reducing impacts on water quality and preserving the natural character of the water body” (MN DNR).

Minnesota GreenStep Cities Program

The City of Brainerd joined this program in 2015. GreenStep Cities is a voluntary challenge and program that helps cities achieve their sustainability and quality-of-life goals. The core framework of this program is based on a series of best practices that address 1) land use, 2) buildings and lighting, 3) transportation, 4) environmental management, and 5) resilient economic and community development. A total of twenty-nine best practices exist that help communities focus on cost savings, quality of life, and energy use reductions that ultimately lead to a culture of innovation. Each best practice can be implemented by completing one or more specific tasks from a list of four to eight actions. The City of Brainerd has completed the first two of five steps in the program.

Goals are in line with comprehensive support and align with the best practices outlined in this program.

Urban Forest

Insert Summary of Forest Management Plan, Tree Inventory, Tree Ordinances, and EAB Management Plan

Greenways

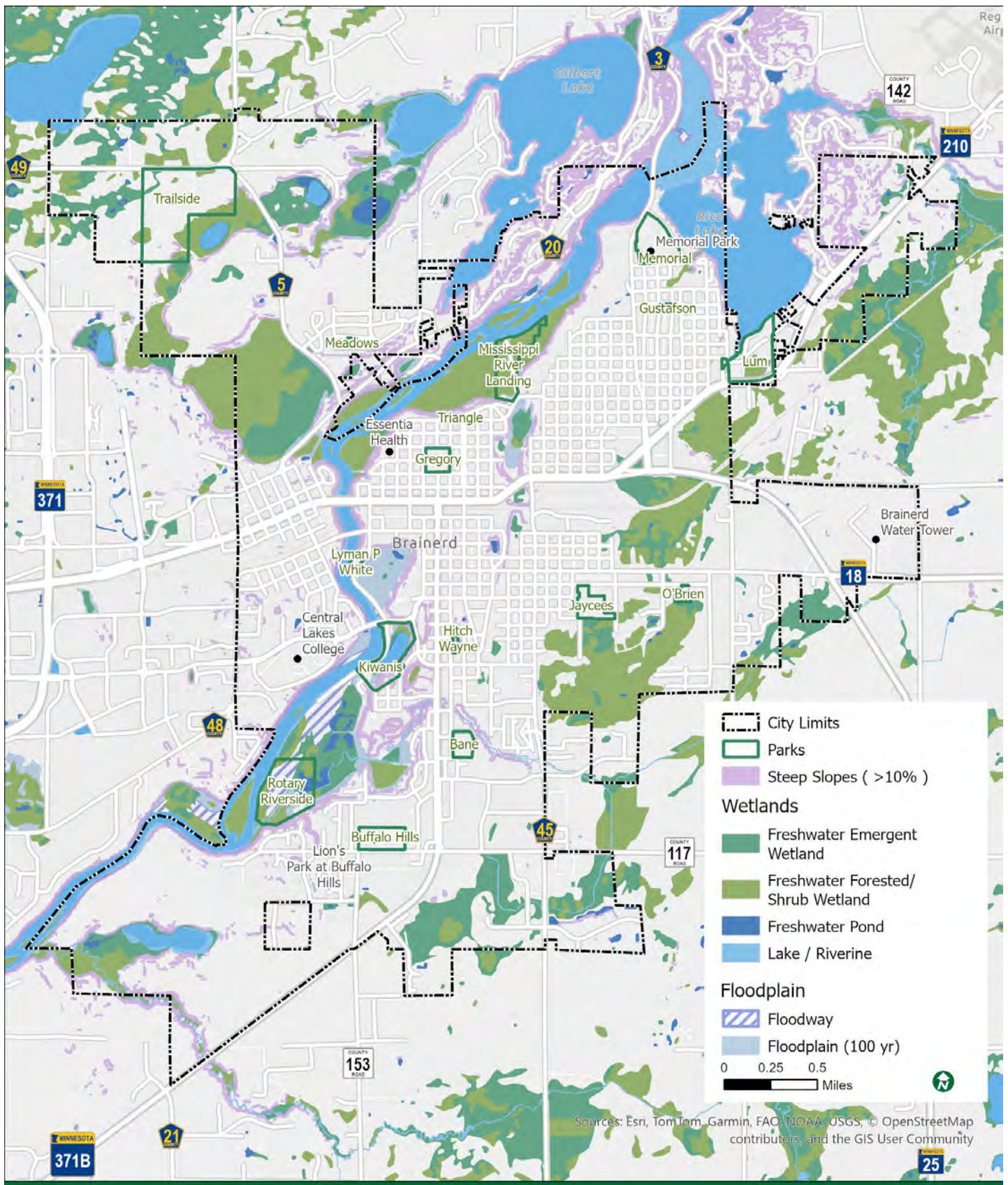
A greenway is a linear space established along a corridor, such as a riverfront, stream, valley, or other natural or landscaped system. Greenways connect residential areas to open spaces, parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites as well as commercial areas and community destinations. Greenways may or may not include a bikeway, shared-use path, or multi-use trail.

The social benefits of greenways can create places for people to meet and serve as

connectors to destinations, residential neighborhoods, and other parks. The health benefits of linear parks combine both physical exercise and mental benefits from interacting with nature. Brainerd can capitalize on the vast amount of green space and sensitive environmental areas by drawing people to a linear park network that serves as a transportation system as well as a recreational network.

Environmental Constraints

Protecting natural resources is a top priority for the city. The first step in this effort is to identify and map areas with challenges to development due to physical constraints, high-quality natural resources, and environmental regulations. The map on the following page illustrates areas as “constrained,” including surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, ponds), wetlands, shorelands, parks, steep slopes (18 percent or more slope).



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Environmental Constraints

July 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X14216800\GIS\Pro\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_C

3 Land Use

OVERVIEW

Land use is traditionally the central element of the comprehensive plan as it 1) establishes the physical development and configuration of the city, 2) defines the location and mix of land uses, and 3) establishes the infrastructure that supports each land use. The land use plan is a collection of policies. Public and private decision makers depend on it to guide real estate transactions, site plans, project design, and the review and approval process. The first section of this chapter reviews and analyzes the city's existing development patterns. The second half of the chapter presents a set of development frameworks to achieve the community's future land-use preferences.

This plan will focus on four major concepts to help guide development, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments:

Historic preservation

Preserve and protect historically significant buildings and landmarks that add to the city's social and cultural identity.

Community image

Identify and leverage the tangible and intangible characteristics that define the community's identity.

Neighborhood investment

Develop programs and target investments to create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods with access to open spaces and interconnected through a trail network.

Targeted revitalization

Strategically identify areas for reinvestment and revitalization to promote the redevelopment of districts.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Support mixed-use development that is focused on integration instead of the separation of land uses.

Policies:

1. Deploy smart growth principles to achieve economic, environmental, and community aspirations.
2. Develop complete neighborhoods that meet the needs of all people within a comfortable walking or bicycling distance.
3. Allow a mix of land uses in appropriate locations, leading to lively neighborhoods.

GOAL 2: Through thoughtful planning, maintain the unique identity of the city and all the appropriate land uses that support it to help existing places thrive.

Policies:

1. Ensure appropriate transitions between rural and urban areas through appropriate land use practices.
2. Maintain the appropriate blend of historical and modern structures (buildings).

GOAL 3: Support land use patterns that enhances quality of life.

Policies:

1. Endorse a vibrant downtown that supports mixed-use land use, arts, cultural events, and investment within our corridors.
2. Ensure a wide range of residential land uses are available for the development of housing types for all income levels.
3. Preserve and provide equitable access to parks, open spaces, and natural resources (especially the Mississippi River) by maintaining and expanding park land use throughout the city.
4. Take strides to become a pedestrian-friendly community by encouraging pedestrian-scale development and expanding sidewalks and trails along key corridors.

COMMUNITY INPUT

The city strives to become the best version of itself and to improve the sense of place throughout the city. As a part of the community input process, participants noted that the following list is important to them in terms of redevelopment, investment, and listed priorities for the future:

Mix of lot sizes and housing types

When asked about their preferred lot sizes, approximately 67 percent of participants agreed that a mix of lot sizes is needed within the city. This mixture includes an appropriate amount of small (7,000 square feet or less), medium (7,001-12,000 square feet), and large (12,001-20,000 square feet). When asked about preferences regarding new residential developments, participants noted their support for a mix of single-family, duplex, and multi-family options.

Code enforcement

Nearly 73 percent of survey participants would like to see code enforcement increase, as they feel it is insufficient. Feedback from the community design session indicated that residents wish to see housing conditions improve, neighborhood blight addressed, and the exterior maintenance of structures enhanced.

Natural resource preservation and opportunities.

When asked about concerns related to future city growth, residents noted protecting and preserving water quality, preserving open space, and loss of trees as the second, third, and fourth leading concerns. Residents feel that new developments should have sidewalks, trails, and open spaces, and be within walking distance of a park.

Downtown redevelopment

Brainerd's downtown plays a critical role in the city's economy and social identity. Residents seek a collaborative approach to improving the downtown's physical, social, and economic conditions. When the community survey panel was asked if it was important to invest and redevelop downtown as a mixed-use destination, 65 percent agreed, and 24 percent somewhat agreed.

Neighborhood investment

The city has a diverse collection of neighborhoods, as evidenced by the ward meetings. Ward meeting respondents noted concerns about housing-related matters, including exterior façade condition, property maintenance, and code enforcement. The community survey panel responses showed support for future growth in existing neighborhoods over the next 10 years.

EXISTING LAND USE

A land-use inventory was completed to analyze existing development patterns and the quantity of each land use within the city. The current development patterns reflect the city's history and original settlement.

The kind of development, and where and how it is allowed, should reflect the community's needs and desires. The city has seven general land-use districts and fourteen categories. The following chart provides an overview of each category.

Residential	Single-Family	Houses, private cabins, and other dwellings that house only one family, or one group of people, in one building that is located on off-lake parcels.
Residential	Two-Family	Duplexes (either side by side or up and down).
Residential	Multi-Family	Townhouses, apartments, condominiums, rooming houses, and other dwellings that house more than one family in one building.
Residential	Manufactured Homes	Manufactured homes, manufactured home parks, and trailer homes if they are permanently located on the site.
Commercial	Downtown Commercial	All businesses, retail stores, services, and professional offices, such as attorneys, real estate, insurance, etc., in the downtown area.
Commercial	General Commercial	Retail stores, restaurants, banks, hotels, motels, lumber yards, business and professional offices, medical and dental clinics, veterinary clinics, gas stations, and other businesses serving the public in the city.
Industrial	Industrial	Manufacturing, warehousing, assembly, truck terminals, mining, quarries, and other businesses that provide goods and services but not directly to the public. Note on the maps the specific kind of business on each parcel, e.g., Lexington Manufacturing, factory, bakery (wholesale), printing plant, etc.
	Public/Semi-Public	All publicly owned uses, such as schools, city buildings, county buildings, water towers, pumping stations, sewage treatment plants, sanitary sewers, etc., as well as public utilities, such as power plants, electrical substations, telephone companies, etc. Includes private institutional uses, such as hospitals, colleges, private schools, churches, monasteries, cemeteries, etc.
	Park and Open Space	All public parks, open spaces, walking trails, and recreational areas. Also includes campgrounds, golf courses, whether public or private.
	Water	Rivers and lakes, at their normal water lines (natural).
	Vacant	All platted vacant land with no actively used buildings.

Residential

Comprising 43 percent of the city's total developed area, residential development is the largest land use type in the city. Low-density homes (single- and two-family residential) consume the vast majority, over 84 percent, of the city's residential land.

Commercial

Commercial areas make up a relatively small portion of Brainerd's total land area, equaling 7 percent of the city's total developed area.

Commercial uses are concentrated primarily in the downtown area along major transportation corridors, particularly Business Highway 371 and TH 210.

Industrial

Industrial uses make up a moderate portion of the city's land area. Approximately 13 percent of the city's developed area is used for industrial purposes. The largest concentration is along the city's southeastern portion.

Public & Semi-Public

Comprising 25 percent of the city's developed area, public and semi-public land uses make up an important portion of the city's total acreage. The largest area devoted to public use is south and west of the downtown, including: the Crow Wing County Government Center, City Hall, Brainerd Public Schools High School.

Water

Open water comprises approximately 6 percent of the total city. The primary water feature in Brainerd is the Mississippi River. Rice, Boom, and Gilbert lakes are also important water features within the city. These water bodies, along with the numerous wetland areas, are among the city's prime scenic and recreational features, and efforts to preserve them should be continued and enhanced where appropriate.

Parks:

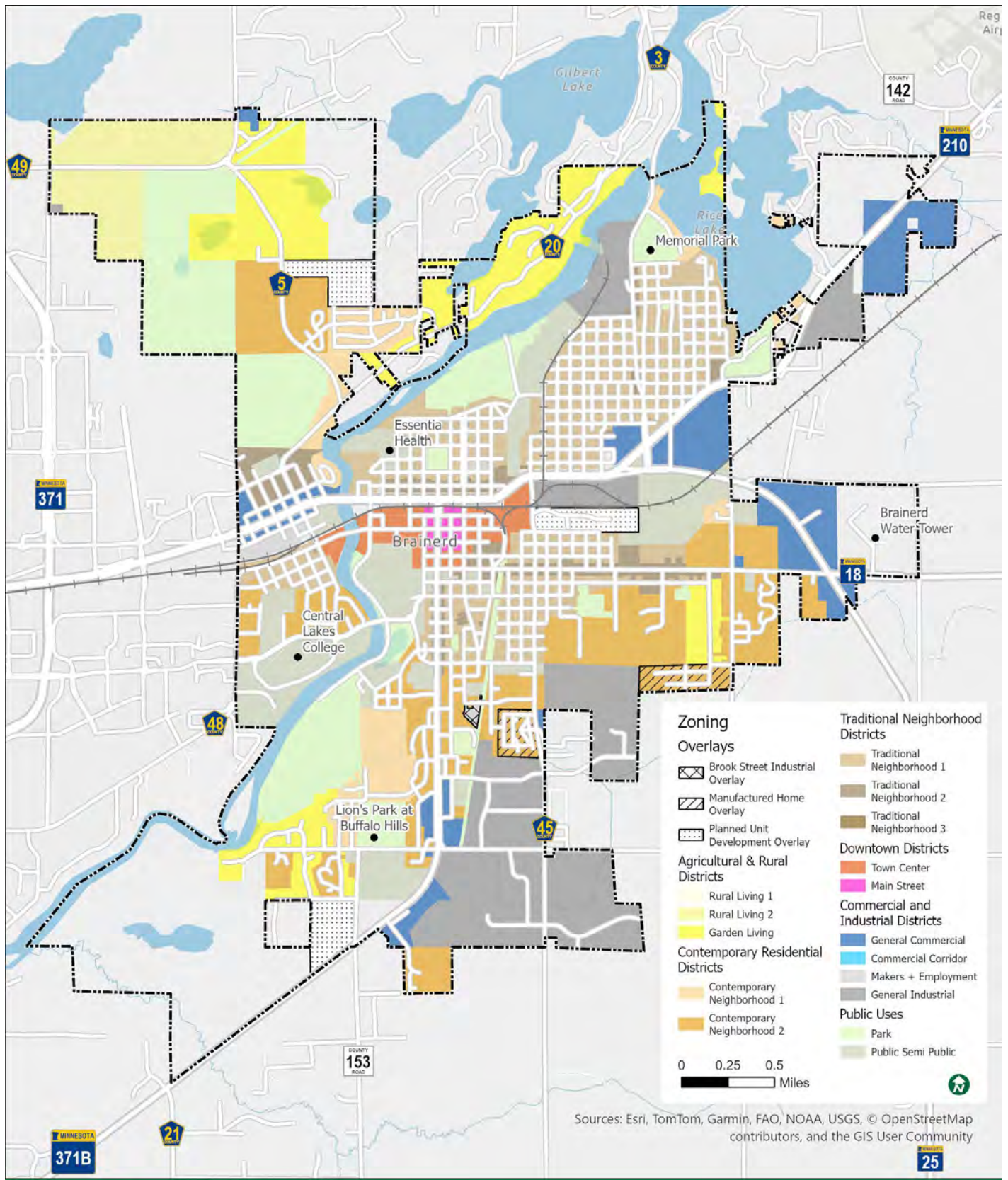
Brainerd has 430 acres of parks and open space, accounting for nearly 5 percent of the city's developed land. Over a dozen neighborhoods, community, and regional parks are scattered throughout the city.

Vacant

Vacant/undeveloped land comprises 29 percent of the city's total land area. However, it is worth noting that a fairly large portion of this area (34 percent) is wetland.

CURRENT ZONING

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan included a zoning map. This update is not making significant changes to the city's zoning districts. The following page shows the existing zoning at the time of this update. The most current Zoning Map is on file with the Brainerd Community Development Department.



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Zoning

July 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X142168000\GIS\Pro\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_07_10.aprx

TOOLS

Smart Growth Principles

The future land use map is built on the following principles:

- Mix land uses;
- Take advantage of compact design;
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
- Create walkable and bikeable communities;
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas;
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities;
- Provide a variety of transportation options;
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective;
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

How the city develops impacts the daily lives of our residents, workers, and students, as well as those of future generations. By leveraging a set of creative strategies, the city can seek to preserve its assets while reusing already developed land. Smart growth principles strive to:

- Conserve resources by reinvesting in existing infrastructure and historic buildings.
- Design neighborhoods that have homes near daily services and amenities and provide motorized and nonmotorized options.
- Provide a range of housing types, encouraging lifecycle housing and options for residents and families of all income levels.
- Enhance neighborhoods and involve people in decision-making.
- Create vibrant places to live, work, play, stay, and learn.

By integrating this set of principles, the city can leverage land more efficiently, take active steps toward environmental sustainability, and

transition its regulatory framework to enhance the community's quality and character. This set of principles will help the city be proactive about future growth while building on existing elements.

Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes (FBC) address the relationship, form, and mass of buildings as well as the scale and types of streets and blocks. Conventional zoning focuses on separating land uses and imposing density restrictions. Form-based codes are tools to foster walkable, pedestrian-oriented development. The most notable distinction between form-based codes and conventional zoning codes is that FBCs seek to establish physical development patterns, rather than separate incompatible land use types.

The city is taking active steps to become an age-friendly community where people of all ages can thrive. Form-based codes can advance this goal, as their true intent is to break down zoning districts that regulate the density (or type) of houses and address this holistically. These new regulations create places with a variety of housing types, services, and transportation options. The city offers housing for young people, families, seniors, and people with disabilities, as well as affordable housing. But with conventional zoning, building walkable places is truly limited. Form-based codes can create communities and neighborhoods where people can “age in place” and thrive in a walkable community.

Infill and Redevelopment

Redevelopment is a key goal within the land use, housing, and economic chapters. As a part of the community engagement process, residents noted the importance of building within, rather than extending our growth footprint outward. Infill and redevelopment will be key practices for addressing vacant and blighted parcels and for directing development to targeted areas to generate revenue and

advance the city's vision. This type of redevelopment strategy utilizes prior infrastructure investments and consumes less land. This practice can result in:

- Efficient utilization of land resources.
- More compact patterns of land use and development.
- Reinvestment in areas that are targeted for growth and have existing infrastructure.
- More efficient delivery of quality public services.

Redevelopment is often a complex process involving many partners. Infill and redevelopment practices require collaboration with a wide range of partners, including various agencies and cities, property owners, adjacent property owners, and developers.

Public participation is key to a successful infill development project. Residents are passionate about their neighborhoods, citing them as a major factor in the city's livability and quality of life. To build support and trust for a future project, work alongside developers to include residents in the process. This collaboration will lead to community buy-in and support during approval processes, thereby strengthening the neighborhood's fabric.

A focus of this plan is infill development and neighborhood investments, transitioning the city toward a more walkable, mixed-use development style. Fiscal impact analysis focuses on the fiscal sustainability of the type of growth. Fiscal impact analysis is a policy adopted by the unit of government that requires new development to be analyzed to calculate its short- and long-term impacts on local government expenses and revenues. A fiscal impact analysis can be conducted at various scales, including a single-family house, multiple buildings, a proposed development or redevelopment, or growth projections.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

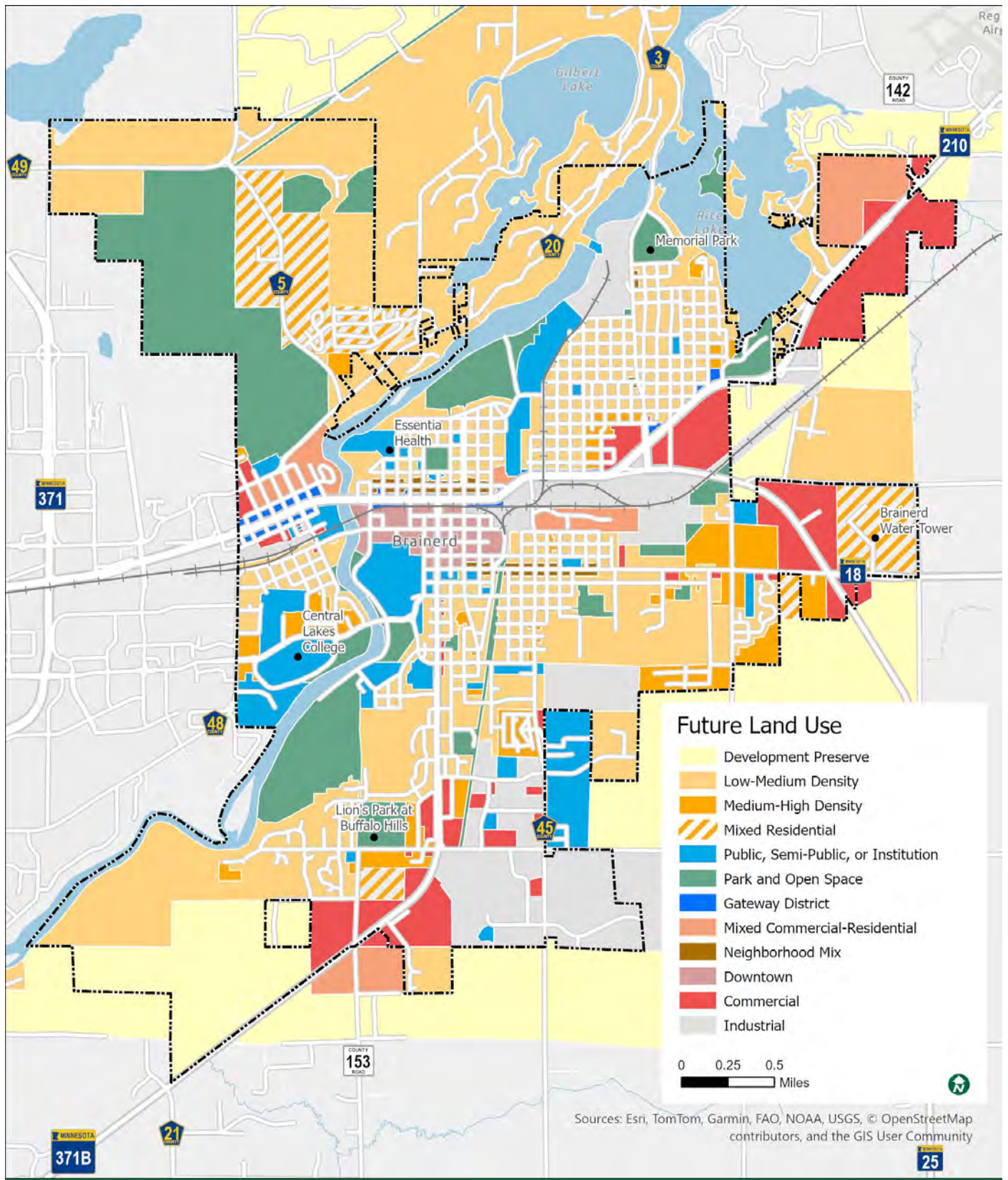
The future land use plan and map illustrate the various future-oriented land use designations for the city and its planned growth areas. The designations influence zoning regulations and the city's future land use form. Collectively, these classifications provide a general framework for growth and development within Brainerd and its growth areas at full development. The plan text provides policies, standards, and principles to guide the city's future physical form and function. It serves as the basis for updating the zoning ordinance and other development controls that are enforceable under the city's powers.

This plan is intended to serve as a guide for the Planning Commission and City Council on land-use-related actions and decisions. Residents, business owners, and landowners must understand that the policies and maps in this chapter are intended to direct development to areas where facilities and services are available and where adjacent land uses are compatible. The future land use plan should not be used for site-specific decisions and does not preclude lower-intensity land uses or densities. This decision-making tool must be viewed as general in nature.

Five major elements define the physical character of the city: 1) development pattern, 2) road network, 3) neighborhood form, 4) future growth pattern of community facilities and open spaces, and 5) locality and nature of major business centers. Several guiding principles have been established for each element:

A set of future categories has been identified to guide growth and development within Brainerd. This set of categories addresses a range of land uses that exist throughout the city today, as well as those likely to occur in the future. The Future Land Use map on the following page reflects the most current information at the time that the Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

The most current Future Land Use map is on file with the Brainerd Community Development Department.



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Future Land Use

July 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X142168000\GIS\Pro\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_07_13.aprx

Future Land Use Categories

The following categories introduce the intent behind the various future land use districts. These categories describe the general use, character, and form and offer a variety of

descriptions that will influence policy direction for future zoning actions, infill development strategies, infrastructure investments, and future planning studies.

CATEGORY	OVERVIEW	DENSITY
Development Reserve	This district takes an active step in preserving land from rapid development. This land use is the lowest density allowed within the community, and at the time of annexation or development, it has limited street connections and on-site septic systems.	3-4 du/acre <i>Joint Board approved</i>
Low- to Medium-Density Residential	This category contains a blend of low- to medium-density lots, ranging from larger to smaller, to facilitate a variety of housing needs and development. Traditional neighborhoods have grid-like streets, whereas more suburban-style residential developments have many layouts and are located at the fringe of the community.	4-9 du/acre
Medium- to High-Density Residential	Contains a mixture of medium- to high-density residential areas intended to accommodate a variety of housing types and create walkable neighborhoods.	10-20+ du/acre
Mixed Residential	The intent is to promote neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and densities within a single development, not dominated by any singular type.	4-12 du/acre
Mixed Commercial Residential	An intermediate district between the Gateway District and the Neighborhood Mix. Meant to encourage a blend of medium to high-density housing types and commercial uses, where the purpose is focused on walkability and deters auto-oriented commercial uses. Business uses will support the daily needs of residents while providing services to the broader community.	9-20+ du/acre
Neighborhood Mix	This category includes a mix of low-intensity business uses and a range of residential densities. Development comprises small areas with a mix of uses, located adjacent to or within residential neighborhoods, to provide these amenities in a walkable context.	9-20+ du/acre
Downtown	The intent is to emphasize the core of the city's social, civic, and cultural life. This classification is meant to be a unique, historic, mixed-use district. This district is a place to explore local food, culture, and history, and to live and work.	-
Commercial	The district supports economic growth and employment hubs that offer a variety of commercial uses. This district is near arterial and collector streets.	-
Gateway District	The purpose of this district is to provide a welcoming travel throughout the city's main highway corridor. The intent is to provide prominent, evident architectural and design standards that highlight the community's identity and support highway- and light-commercial-related businesses.	-
Industrial	Intended to provide a series of industrial uses, separated from other businesses and concentrated in a general district.	-
Park and Open Space	Parks and open spaces are meant for recreation and provide environmental benefits to the community.	-
Public/Semi-Public	Contains publicly owned uses that benefit the community.	-



Development Reserve (DR)

3-4 dwelling units per acre or limited to the Joint Powers Board

The purpose of this category is to protect undeveloped land from rapid growth before urban services become available. This category should include the lowest density allowed in the city. Secondary uses could include agricultural uses until services are available, forestry, and recreation.



Low- to Medium-Density Residential (LMR)

4-9 dwelling units per acre

This category provides for housing options that include one- and two-family dwellings, such as duplexes (stacked and side-by-side), twin homes, townhouses, and attached and detached single-family dwellings. Low- to medium-density residential could include both older neighborhoods with smaller lots within the city and large, new subdivisions and planned growth areas.



Medium- to High-Density Residential (MHR)

10-20+ dwelling units per acre

This category provides a mix of housing options at higher density, such as twin homes, duplexes (side-by-side and stacked), triplexes, fourplexes, row houses, townhouses, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, multiplexes, apartments, condominiums, senior housing, manufactured home parks, and other multi-family developments. This also includes lesser intensity residential density types. The purpose of this category is to provide a buffer between lower residential densities and higher intensity land uses.



Mixed Residential (MR)

4-12 dwelling units per acre

This category is intended to promote neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and densities within a single development. A range of housing types are appropriate within this category: single-family, twin homes, duplexes (side-by-side and stacked), triplexes, fourplexes, row houses, townhouses, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, multiplexes, apartments, condominiums, and other housing typologies that align with the development's intent. No single type should dominate any given area.



Neighborhood Mix

9-20+ dwelling units per acre

This category includes a mix of low-intensity business uses, such as office and limited commercial, that serve the everyday needs of residents and are located within or adjacent to neighborhoods, providing neighborhood amenities. This category also includes low-, medium-, and high-density residential uses, such as single-family homes (attached and detached), twin homes, townhomes, row houses, duplexes (stacked and side-by-side), triplexes, fourplexes, bungalow courts, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, multiplexes, and apartments. This future land use category aligns with form-based code principles.



Mixed Commercial-Residential (MCR)

9-20+ dwelling units per acre

This district is intended to support a mix of housing densities and commercial uses that are not automobile-dependent and to serve as a buffer between high-intensity commercial uses and lower-density residential neighborhoods. In

this district, housing, jobs, retail, and service uses will be in proximity, allowing residents to live close to their jobs. This category focuses on an appropriate blend of these uses, seeking a balance between commercial and residential, with no single type dominating any given area. This category reflects the continued trend toward integrating residential and nonresidential development in walkable settings, places where transit is available, and providing alternative circulation opportunities. This future land-use category would benefit from sub-area and master planning efforts, as well as targeted walkable infill development.

Appropriate uses within this district could include both vertical and horizontal mixed-use development, where a focus is on walkability and strong pedestrian connections to support a pedestrian-friendly environment. This district should guide medium to high-density residential development. Appropriate commercial uses would include clinic and health service-related uses, offices, professional services, hotel/lodging, retail, institutional, civic, and entertainment.

[Image Placeholder]

Downtown (D)

This category applies to the larger downtown Brainerd district, encouraging businesses that facilitate a pedestrian-oriented environment. This category encourages retail and commercial services, higher-density residential, live/work, service, office, governmental, and public uses. The zoning ordinance controls residential density. Higher-density, mixed-use buildings and apartments are encouraged in the downtown core, with an appropriate transition to lower residential densities along the periphery.

Development in downtown should seek to preserve historic structures, rehabilitate buildings, focus on adaptive reuse, and promote mixed-use development. New development or rehabilitation projects should utilize high-

quality building materials that complement the historic architecture. This district will encourage active street frontages and ground-floor uses in the downtown core, maintain a high-quality streetscape, and preserve and showcase the district's character. The grid-street development patterns should continue and be encouraged for all new development projects. Building setbacks, heights, and orientations should be consistent with and proportionate to those of neighboring structures.

[Image Placeholder]

Commercial (C)

This category applies to commercial development outside of the central business district, providing services and retail, and serving the adjacent neighborhoods, community, and regional needs. Supported uses include auto-oriented commercial development; a mix of uses, office use, large-scale retail, and service-oriented businesses.

[Image Placeholder]

Gateway District (GD)

This category identifies portions of the city located at major entrances and along major transportation corridors. This district intends to design a thoroughfare corridor that reflects the community's character. This district will have higher-quality design elements, building construction, and architectural guidelines for new commercial development. This category supports a variety of commercial development types, such as civic, medical, auto-oriented, retail, and professional office.

[Image Placeholder]

Industrial (I)

This category is intended to provide a series of industrial uses, separated from other businesses and concentrated in a specific location. Uses include manufacturing, warehousing, assembly, and other similar

businesses that provide goods and services.

[Image Placeholder]

Public, Semi-Public, Institution (PSI)

This category identifies portions of the city that should contain uses that benefit the public and provide a variety of value to residents. This includes all publicly owned uses, such as schools, city buildings, county and state buildings. In addition, this district includes private institutions such as hospitals, churches, and similar institutions.

[Image Placeholder]

Park and Open Space (PO)

This category identifies portions of the city that contain parks and open spaces. This category also seeks to preserve sensitive environmental resources, such as river corridors, habitats, trails, and other natural features important to the city's and neighborhoods' image.

FUTURE GROWTH AREAS

A key principle of the Future Land Use Plan is centered on targeted growth and identifying development areas throughout the city. Significant deliberation and discussion informed a variety of sites, ranging from open-space corridors to residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. The following is an overview of each selected "site."

Northwest:

Support a blend of residential uses from low-density to medium-high-density development. This would include single-family homes, attached dwellings, townhomes, and other types of housing. No single housing type should dominate; rather, a variety of typologies should foster walkable, interconnected neighborhoods.

West Brainerd:

This development area should focus on a mix of

commercial, medium-density, and higher-density residential. This district aims to provide a blend of commercial uses to meet people's daily needs. This development area will serve as a buffer between residential neighborhoods and the Highway 210 corridor.

Mississippi River Greenway Corridor:

Focus on preserving green space, conservation efforts, and providing access to a variety of parks and open spaces.

East Brainerd:

This site should provide a mix of housing densities to support the development of walkable neighborhoods. This would include single-family homes, attached dwellings, townhomes, and other types of housing. No one housing type should dominate.

210 Corridor:

As a key gateway to the city, redevelopment opportunities should focus on vacant properties. This development area supports a variety of infill commercial and redevelopment opportunities to transform this corridor into a vibrant thoroughfare, one that supports the needs of motorists, provides a variety of housing types, and a mix of commercial land uses. This corridor would benefit from new and improved development and design standards. Strategic redevelopment will support a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly corridor and ensure that all modes of transportation can use it safely.

Business 371:

This development area will continue to develop as a health-care district with office and office-service uses. Infill development and redevelopment opportunities should support smaller-scale retail that can serve the nearby industrial employment base. The corridor can support a mix of uses and serve as a neighborhood district. Design guidelines should be developed to help influence the aesthetics,

streetscape, site, and architectural character, and overall experience of this corridor.

Kingwood Street Corridor:

The corridor will include a mix of low-intensity business uses and a variety of residential densities and typologies. Through strategic infill development, the corridor will be transformed into a walkable streetscape, designed to serve residents' everyday needs and connect them to neighborhood amenities.

Downtown:

This development area encompasses the historic Brainerd area and the broader limits of the downtown district.

Guide infill development within the general district, specifically live/work, retail, professional offices, and high-density residential. Strive to keep government buildings downtown as they create a cohesive district. Focus on placemaking and the importance that art and culture have in building a social center for the community.

Oak Street Corridor:

This development area will create a neighborhood node, providing services to support residents' daily needs. Development should include a mix of housing densities and neighborhood commercial uses. Underutilized sites and parcels should be targeted for redevelopment, and appropriate parcels should be combined to support a mix of residential uses and densities. This corridor will be transformed into a walkable thoroughfare, supporting all modes of transportation and needs.

Northern Pacific Center:

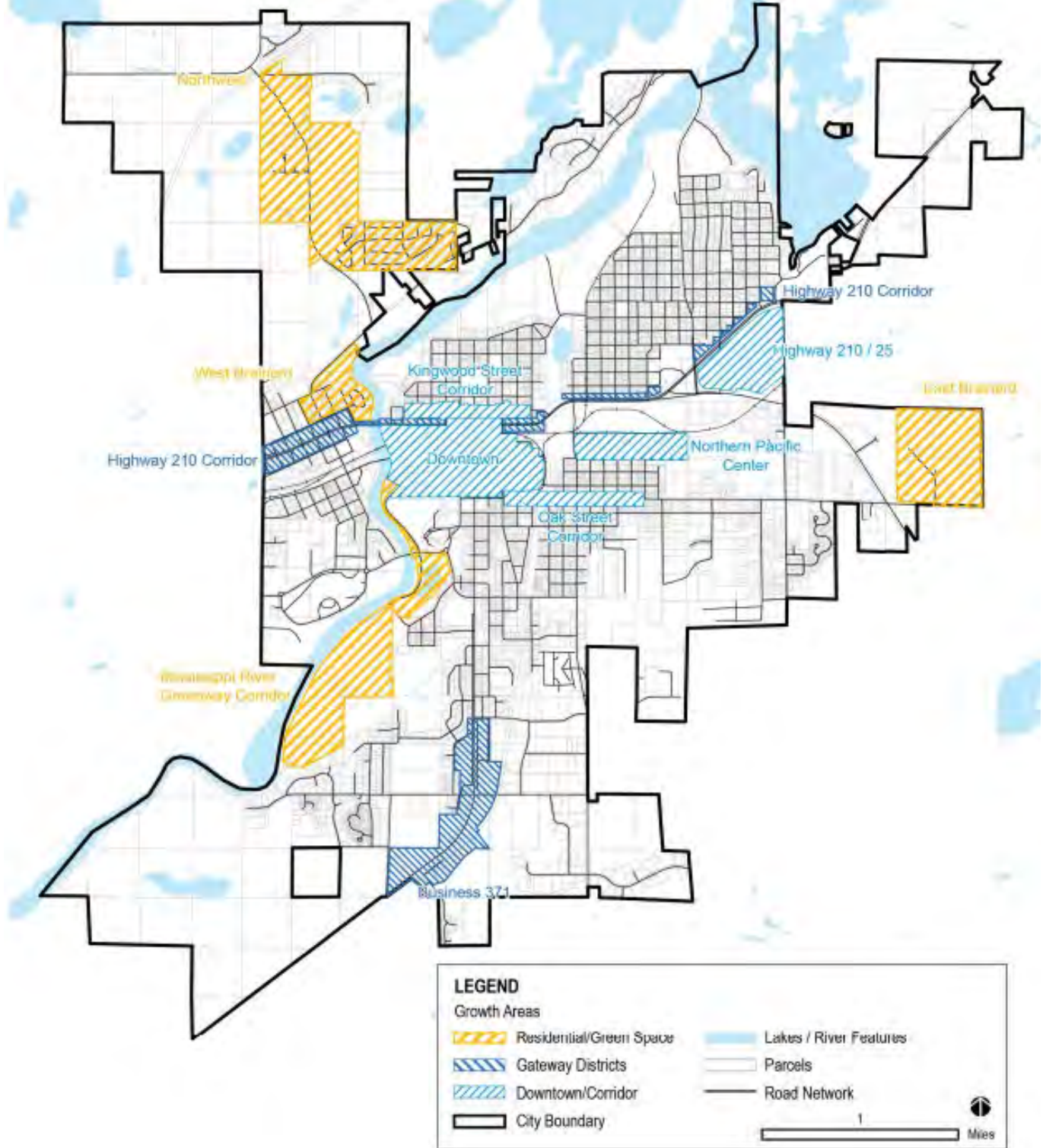
Support the development of mixed commercial-residential development within the Northern Pacific Center Campus.

Highway 210/25:

This development area serves as a gateway for targeted commercial development. This redevelopment site should remain a strong commercial node in the future, supported by aesthetic parking, access improvements, and improved site circulation.

FUTURE GROWTH AREAS

Identifying targeted infill development opportunities



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The content within the future land use plan highlights future land use categories and targeted growth areas. This framework will serve as the legal foundation for decision-making. Other elements should also be considered and incorporated during the development process, such as the themes identified throughout the chapter and planning practices and principles that lead to resilient and economically and environmentally sustainable communities. The following considerations stem from the smart growth principles outlined in this chapter. These considerations can inform policy and regulations or may be used during the development review process.

Walkability:

Proactively planning for walkability can help lead to improved health, environmental conditions, and community building. Planning starts before the development review process. By identifying dedicated pathways, corridors, and sidewalk networks, the city can provide safe, comfortable spaces for pedestrians – for all abilities. Then, planners and review staff can ensure these plans are transferred over to design and redevelopment proposals.

The focus should be on prioritizing pedestrians over vehicles in new developments and mitigating the negative impact of parking lots on walkable environments.

Natural Resource Planning:

Preserving and protecting sensitive environmental features within the city is a critical function of the planning process. Maintaining unique landscape features and valuable natural resources provides numerous community benefits and can continue to foster a walkable, bicycle-friendly environment. Identifying critical landscape features and character is an important step for a community

to take towards conservation. Managing stormwater to preserve streams and water bodies is the single best way to mitigate negative impacts. By integrating green infrastructure practices into development proposals, the city can achieve water quality goals and ensure that runoff water becomes a resource rather than a waste product.

Compact Neighborhoods:

Compact building design ultimately saves money, energy, and time while producing livable places and communities. Compact buildings use land more efficiently, allowing people to live closer to work, school, and businesses. This helps to reduce travel times and limit single trips. Compact building development also provides space for parks, trails, and environmental amenities. Historic neighborhoods feature a variety of residential densities and small lots, which contribute to a strong sense of place. These walkable neighborhoods contribute to the unique character championed by this project. The city should consider the long-term consequences of sprawl-like development patterns and the pressure this type of development places on infrastructure costs, police and fire protection, roads, and intrusion on critical farmland, natural areas, and wildlife habitat.

Mix of uses:

A blend of mixed uses was highlighted during the community engagement process. An approach to integrate a mixture of land uses is common in a downtown setting. Integrating mixed-use development into neighborhoods also benefits by providing neighborhood-scaled services within a walkable distance, meeting daily needs. Sub-area planning efforts will be beneficial for areas identified as mixed commercial and residential. The intensity of commercial uses and residential densities within a neighborhood should be considered during the development review process.

Design Standards:

Design standards are an important tool for regulating the character of development, architectural materials, specific design requirements, and, sometimes, site design standards. These regulations go beyond standard setbacks and height requirements. Standards can be applied to the larger community or specific districts and areas in the city. Design standards are recommended for the gateway district's future land-use category and the Business 371 future growth area. Design standards help craft a community's character and its look and feel. It is an important tool in a city's development tool set.

Neighborhood Design:

Character and historic image were highlighted during the community engagement process. Design and character of Brainerd's neighborhoods are unique identifiers that should be preserved and enhanced. Neighborhood and design should be considered part of the development process. New residential development areas should establish the same sense of place and character found in traditional neighborhoods. Subdivision design standards can help define this vision and outline regulations to create neighborhoods with a strong sense of place.

4 Community Character

OVERVIEW

History is infused throughout the city, in the neighborhood schools, the grid-like street network, the downtown, and historic homes. The surrounding environment and the river contribute to a high quality of life for Brainerd residents and were noted as key factors. This chapter seeks to maintain a positive community places.

image, specifically tailored to improve existing places and help them thrive. The directives of this sub-chapter focus on the city's design attributes, programming, and branding elements. By identifying a set of frameworks, guided by public input, the city can take active strides to strategically and thoughtfully create thriving public spaces, neighborhoods, and

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Preserve and repurpose historic assets to maintain the history and small-town feel of Brainerd.

Policies:

1. Seek small-scale opportunities to reinforce local history and identity through incentives and programs.
2. Identify historic structures and strongly encourage preservation through the development of incentives and programs.
3. Transform historic sites, especially those in decline, to serve today's contemporary needs through adaptive reuse.
4. Support orderly, efficient growth while preserving historic structures and areas.

GOAL 2: Enliven the community through intentional community design.

Policies:

1. Provide flexible spaces for programming and events.
2. Transform downtown as a destination and social hub of the community and the region by enhancing community connections.
3. Work with residents to collectively reinvest and reimagine public spaces that are in the heart of the community.
4. Become a year-round, 24/7 community: a place where you can live, work, play, stay, and learn.
5. Become the hub for cultural events, experiences, public art, and music.

GOAL 3: Enhance the city's unique identity where the appropriate blend of historic and modern structures co-exists.

Policies:

1. Support façade improvements while keeping the historic look of infrastructure.
2. Collaborate with developers and builders on future development and/or redevelopment proposals to ensure high-quality design.
3. Seek small-scale ways to integrate community identity, fused with local history.

INPUT

As part of the public input process, the following themes have been identified regarding community design.

Overall Image

As part of the community input process, residents loudly expressed their desire to improve the city's overall image. Residents seek to address property maintenance violations, improve the aesthetics of the gateway corridors, and improve the exterior facades of residential homes.

Downtown Revitalization

Residents support a coordinated effort to rehabilitate and invest in the downtown area. Downtown plays an important role in the economic and social aspects of Brainerd's identity. Survey respondents identified rehabilitating downtown as one of the greatest concerns regarding growth and development (46 percent). Survey participants seek a collaborative approach to improve the physical, social, and economic condition of the downtown.

Emphasize natural resources

Survey respondents noted their passion for improving the city's natural resources, championing the Mississippi River, and supporting opportunities and the expansion of amenities in the general area. The city should seek ways to integrate open space into new development proposals, identify existing redevelopment opportunities, and identify greenways.

Community brand:

Project participants wish to see a community branding initiative that captures the essence of the city's history and natural features, making Brainerd a unique community in our region. This new vision for the city should capture the culture and history, but also acknowledge the vast year-round activities.

TRENDS

Tactical Urbanism

This term refers to small-scale demonstration projects meant to experiment and gather input on potential design changes. Tactical urbanism refers to a city-, organizational-, and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building that uses short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change (Tactical Urbanism Guide). There are many tactics for studying and facilitating conversation about complex design issues. Below is a series of examples that the city should consider in the upcoming years:

- new trail alignment or protected bike lane
- enhanced pedestrian crossings
- pop-up town hall or city council meeting
- open street events
- park(ing) day

Placemaking

An important element of this chapter is to strategically position the city from a project-based development approach towards a place-based development tactic. *Placemaking* can be a springboard for community development – and revitalization.

Placemaking inspires people and community leaders to reimagine and reinvent public spaces within their communities. *Placemaking* is a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm to maximize shared value (Project for Public Spaces). Placemaking does much more than promote better use of urban design; it focuses on creative use patterns, concentrating on the social, cultural, and physical attributes that define a place.

FUTURE CONDITIONS

Design Guidelines

A group of illustrations and text can serve as a visionary tool, providing suggested and descriptive elements for the built environment. This guide will be an important tool for the City of Brainerd to implement this plan successfully. Such guidelines can help preserve the city's historic character and maintain consistency and a strong community image. Traditional design guidelines are meant to allow for flexibility and innovation and to differ in scale.

- Develop a set of design guidelines that address the downtown, general commercial, and industrial, as well as mixed-use districts

Historic preservation

The city can take strides by protecting historically significant structures, landmarks, and landscapes to enhance its cultural and social value. By conserving and preserving historic assets, we can help retain that tangible connection to previous generations and celebrate the specific architectural and artistic significance. Additionally, these historic buildings play a significant role in Brainerd's identity and create a sense of place that is often impossible to re-create with new construction.

- Encourage adaptive reuse by working with local entities and partners
- Identify a list of local properties that should be preserved.
- Adopt a preservation ordinance

Signage

Private and public signage play a significant role in shaping the city's overall image. Without clear standards and regulations, signs (both public and private) could diminish the overall image of districts, neighborhoods, and corridors. The city's local ordinances need to balance the varied objectives of public and private entities while developing a local flavor, identity, and theme.

Develop a guideline document outlining the standards and design requirements of the signage ordinance. Develop different standards for:

- significant neighborhood nodes and the downtown,
- main corridors, and
- areas outside of those districts.

Make it easy for applicants to find this tool on the city's website.

Wayfinding signage (directional and informational) is extremely important in developing a walkable and bikeable community. This public signage can reflect and celebrate the community's heritage and image as well. This plan emphasizes improving the aesthetics of the city's main corridors. Signage should suggest points of interest throughout the city and serve as a navigation tool for visitors.

- Develop a citywide wayfinding master plan

Corridor enhancements

Our road networks serve as the backbone of our community. Visitors and passersby often experience Brainerd only by driving through it. Often, this serves as the first impression of our city. The city has an opportunity to design the elements within the corridor strategically. Signage, streetscaping, lighting, boulevard trees, and landscaping in key locations along the city's main corridors, as well as at important gateways, should be strategically designed to reflect the city's brand, easily orient drivers, and

indicate that they are in the City of Brainerd.

- Design gateway features on the city's main arterial roads

Downtown

Downtown serves as the city's social and cultural hub. One important element identified during the outreach process is that residents would like to see the city build on Brainerd's historical character. Many elements in this chapter are tied directly to the central business district. Several properties in downtown Brainerd contribute to the city's cultural identity, and efforts should be taken to preserve these landmarks or identify adaptive reuse opportunities.

- Formalize a central gathering space that can be flexible to adapt to a multitude of civic uses, e.g., farmers' market, pop concert, performances, etc.
- Site elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, banners, sidewalk striping, pedestrian refuges, community gardens, and murals are examples of "fast" improvements that can be accomplished in a short period of time.
- Seek opportunities to infuse the downtown with public art, sculptures, and murals

DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY



The city should consider leveraging placemaking to empower residents and community stakeholders to have a voice in local projects. During the 20th century, the planning process suppressed residents' ability to voice their ideas and aspirations about places within communities. Placemaking can be a tool to break down silos by expanding the lens of planners, designers, and engineers and broadening their focus beyond professional disciplines and agendas. Grass-roots efforts, such as placemaking, can be a tool to alleviate some of the pressure and rigid regulations around project development.

Eleven principles for creating great community places:

- 1) The community is the expert.
- 2) Create a place, not a design.
- 3) Look for partners.
- 4) You can see a lot just by observing.
- 5) Have a vision.
- 6) Start with petunias: lighter, quicker, cheaper.
- 7) Triangulate.
- 8) They always say, "It can't be done!"
- 9) Form supports function.
- 10) Money is not the issue.
- 11) You are never finished!

5 Housing

OVERVIEW

For many, housing is the single most important factor in a person's quality of life. For a new resident or visitor, it also provides a visual indicator of the community's character, including prosperity and vitality. From a city's perspective, housing is typically the largest user of land and city services; it is also a significant base for local taxes. Having a clear understanding of current housing inventory (number and types) and current and future population projections will assist Brainerd in providing sufficient housing units to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Brainerd is a community of neighborhoods with

safe, attractive, and affordable housing options to serve residents throughout their lives. To this end, Brainerd will support policies that preserve and enhance the character of existing neighborhoods while encouraging diverse housing options in all neighborhoods— new and old.

With Brainerd being the hub of Crow Wing County, all the needs of current and future residents must be met. Brainerd offers residential housing, including rural residential housing, within its city limits. This asset and the ability to satisfy these needs make Brainerd different from surrounding cities and will ultimately strengthen Brainerd's brand as the region's hub.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Provide a diverse mix of housing choices for all stages of life, income ranges, and ownership/rental preferences.

Policies:

1. Complement Brainerd's entry-level and affordable housing options by encouraging other move-up and mid- to upper-end, market-rate housing options.
2. Expand home ownership and rental opportunities through rehabilitation and new construction.
3. Rehabilitate and/or replace substandard housing with units that are decent, safe, healthy, affordable, and of appropriate size to meet the city's current and future housing needs.
4. Ensure an adequate supply of quality and affordable housing units for current and future residents.

GOAL 2: Encourage the preservation and historical significance of existing neighborhoods.

Policies:

1. Identify the historic nature of each neighborhood throughout the city.
2. Encourage the creation of neighborhood associations.
3. Encourage energy efficiency and sustainability in home renovation and new construction.
4. Take neighborhood character into account when designing infrastructure improvements and redevelopment/infill development.
5. Develop friendly, safe, and welcoming neighborhoods that encourage interaction through all stages of life.

GOAL 3: Ensure quality living conditions for all residents.

Policies:

1. Encourage continued and timely enforcement of all maintenance codes and continue to monitor and inspect all properties.
2. Promote and facilitate the maintenance of existing housing and rental units to ensure they are in decent, safe, and healthy condition.
3. Inventory and monitor properties in foreclosure for proactive rehabilitation/redevelopment planning.
4. Encourage residents (owners and renters) to become engaged in their neighborhood, which can lead to retention.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Robust feedback was gathered from the community design session in November 2018. Below is a list of suggestions gathered from community engagement completed throughout the planning process:

- Better code enforcement
- Follow policies better
- More housing to attract new residents
- Upkeep of homes
- Provide diverse housing
- Improve housing quality
- Improve rentals
- Affordable, quality housing for both lower- and middle-income earners
- Protect residential zoning

Survey participants seek an array of housing options that meet their income, size, and quality needs. Various concerns were voiced about the quality and inventory of available rental units within the city. Safe, well-maintained housing is critical for Brainerd's community character. Survey participants support a coordinated effort to address blight, improve housing conditions, and increase availability.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

City of Brainerd offers the following seven residential districts that provide a range of housing choice and densities:

Rural Residential District: for large lots, single-family residential uses, and open space areas in

environmentally sensitive and high natural amenity areas.

Single-Family Estate Residential District: to provide for larger, urban lots in areas containing unique natural features and amenities.

Single-Family Residential: to allow areas of low-density, single-family, detached dwellings and to preserve the quiet, single-family neighborhoods.

Single-Family Residential: to allow and preserve areas of quiet neighborhoods of one- and two-family homes.

Medium-Density Residential: to provide for low-to medium-density housing through the mixture of one- and two-unit dwellings and medium-density, multiple-family dwellings.

High-Density Residential: to provide for areas of high-density residential housing, including senior housing.

Manufactured Housing District: to provide a separate district for manufactured housing parks, distinct from other residential areas.

Housing Stock

In 2025, according to US Census data, Brainerd had 6,760 households and an average household size of 2.21 people. Based on population projections, if the city maintains an average of 2.21 people per household, it will have 7,772 households, or 1,324 more, by 2050.

There are more housing units than residential households because the region is desirable for cabins and summer homes. The difference between the total number of housing units and households represents homes that are for sale, vacant, or owned as cabins or second homes. Specifically, seasonal homes account for 154 units or 2.44% of the housing stock. From 2015 to 2025, Brainerd's housing growth rate was 0.46% annually. At that rate, the city would have 7,548 housing units by 2050, or an additional 818 units.

Using building permits or the rate of development to project housing growth, City staff expect 10 to 15 single-family homes and 50 to 100 multifamily housing units per year through 2050. That would result in a range of 1,500 to 2,875 new homes. Using a third method to project housing, based on population projections and applying a 2.21 people per household, 5% vacancy rate, and 2.44% seasonal units, yields a middle ground of 9,096 units by 2050. See the graph below for a comparison of the forecasts. While the Wastewater Treatment Facilities Plan did not directly site the number of homes projected to meet the flow projections, however the use of the population of 18,60 in 2050 would equate to 8,419 housing units required in 2050 falling between the city's low growth and market equilibrium rates.

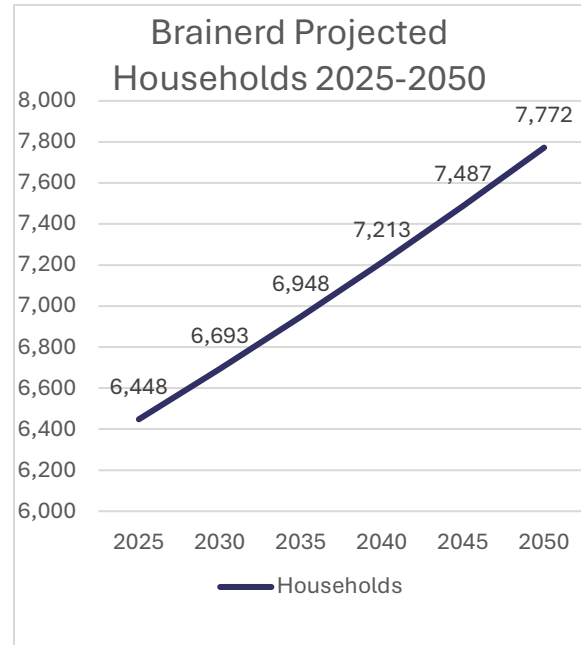


Figure 8: Households projections based on US Census Data

Existing Plans and Boards

Housing and Redevelopment Authority: The purpose of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority is to provide affordable housing and redevelopment opportunities to strengthen neighborhoods and the community.

Existing Housing System

Housing inventory can change year to year, but having an understanding of current inventory and future needs will help Brainerd attract and retain residents. Brainerd is unique because it is nearly evenly split between owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing units. Rent is considered low in Brainerd, with an average monthly rent of \$703 compared to Baxter's average rent of \$957. This makes it cheaper to rent than to have a mortgage payment, which averages \$976 per month in Brainerd.

According to the Housing Needs and Analysis Study by the Crow Wing County HRA, by 2020, the estimated percentage of renters in Brainerd will jump from 50.5 percent to 57 percent, which equates to around one hundred new renters (ACS).

Missing Middle Housing

One strategy in responding to the demand for walkable urban living is to integrate “Missing Middle Housing” concepts. Missing Middle Housing is not a new type of building; rather, it is a range of building types that existed pre-1940 and were a fundamental building block.

Types: duplex; side-by-side, duplex; stacked, bungalow court, carriage house (ADU), fourplex, multiplex; small, townhouse, live/work, and courtyard apartments.

Missing middle buildings typically have footprints no larger than a large single-family home. This makes it easy to integrate into neighborhoods; they are a good tool for transitioning to a higher-density, walkable context. These housing types provide a diverse array of options, such as duplexes, fourplexes, and bungalow courts, that effortlessly fit into low-rise neighborhoods seeking walkability, local-serving retail, and public transportation.

This housing typology will help address affordability and address the mismatch between the available housing stock, the demographic shift, and the growing demand for walkability.

The age of existing homes in Brainerd was frequently raised during public engagement sessions. The discussions were mainly focused on exterior deterioration, which harms the housing stock and is not aesthetically pleasing to potential new residents. The figure below shows that 59.3 percent of the houses in Brainerd were built before 1970. The national average for homes built before 1970 is 38.9 percent, far below Brainerd’s stock

Construction Year of Housing Units

Year Built	Estimate	Percent
Total Housing Units	6,760	100.00%
2020 to present	272	4.02%
2010 to 2019	104	1.54%
2000 to 2009	622	9.20%
1990 to 1999	683	10.10%
1980 to 1989	517	7.64%
1970 to 1979	630	9.31%
1960 to 1969	890	13.16%
1950 to 1959	924	13.67%
1940 to 1949	658	9.73%
1939 or earlier	1,460	21.60%

US Census, ACS 2024

That being said, old homes add character to communities and neighborhoods that brand-new homes cannot. During each ward meeting, residents noted their love and appreciation for their neighborhood. Whether it be social or physical traits, history, family heritage, or proximity to amenities, residents shared ideas for improving their neighborhoods to attract new residents to town and maintain the community's character. Residents championed Brainerd's history and the need to improve the exterior of the neighborhoods they live in. They exhibited a passion for improving the aesthetics of housing units, which, in turn, will build stronger neighborhoods and a sense of place.

Brainerd has a high rental rate: in 2024(ACS), 53.4 percent of the city's housing units were rentals.

LIFECYCLE HOUSING OPTIONS

A community's housing needs are related to its household demographic profile. Households generally transition through several lifecycle stages, including entry-level households, first-time homeowners, move-up buyers, empty nesters, and seniors. The following section provides an overview of each household.

Entry-Level Households: People in the 18-24

age cohort typically rent a house or apartment because they do not have the income needed to purchase a home. Many people in this age category move frequently, making them more hesitant to purchase.

First-Time Homeowners: This group is typically in their 20s and 30s and are usually transitioning from renting apartments or joint living conditions. Traditionally they are often young families or single individuals. These homeowners are prone to moving within several years of their first home purchase due to increased financial resources, occupation advancement, and family structure changes.

Move-Up Buyers: Move-up buyers are typically in their 30s and 40s and are transitioning from a small, less expensive home that they had purchased at an earlier time. This is an important age group in terms of an economic growth perspective.

Empty Nesters: Empty nesters are typically in their 50s and 60s. Children have moved out and the square footage is much larger than needed. Empty nesters often want to live in a smaller home, such as a townhouse, which requires less maintenance and upkeep. However, the city has limited supply and housing options at a price that they can afford.

Seniors: Those in their 70s and older are looking for low-maintenance, manageable, or assisted living housing. As the population ages, Brainerd should continually ensure that it has adequate housing to meet the needs of seniors.

CWC Housing Study

The Crow Wing County HRA recently adopted the Crow Wing County Workforce Housing Study in 2020. This study analyzed the county's housing market, with specific emphasis on middle-income or "workforce" housing. According to the report, middle income refers to households earning between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per year (or \$10-\$25) per hour. The report identifies strategies and

recommendations to close the housing gap for middle-income residents in the county. One of those recommendations is to incentivize the construction of single- and multi-family housing affordable to this segment of the population. The housing study highlights six priority recommendations:

- Identify opportunity sites
- Create or enhance a Down Payment Assistance Program
- Assist with rehabbing older homes
- Amend the Tax Forfeited Property Land policy
- Use the Housing Trust Fund to incentivize new construction
- Host developers onsite to build interest

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

People are seeking walkable neighborhoods that offer a mix of housing and transportation options that are close to jobs, schools, entertainment, shopping, and parks. Coupled with an ageing population and a decrease in households with children, we will continue to see the demand for smaller homes in more compact neighborhoods.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) are small houses or apartments that exist on the same property as a single-family residence. Accessory dwelling units play a major role in serving a national housing need.

This traditional home type is re-emerging as an affordable and flexible housing option that meets the needs of older adults and young families alike. ADU's come in many shapes and styles including:

- Detached
- Attached
- Interior (upper level)
- Interior (lower level)
- Above garage
- Garage conversion

ADUs can house people of all ages. An individual's housing needs change over time, and an ADU's use can be adapted for different household types, income levels, and stages of life.
-AARP

Life-cycle Housing

As Brainerd takes steps to become an age friendly community, strategic actions should be taken to offer a variety of housing choices that meet the need of a changing demographic.

Communities with a variety of housing options will attract households of diverse sizes, incomes, and ages. Such places enable people to remain in their community as they age, providing transitional opportunities such as staying in their home or moving to housing in line with their changing needs. Brainerd's median age is very low for the county (32), and the city could take strides to attract older generations and age cohorts by responding to their housing needs. Ideally, Brainerd should have high-quality options for people of all income levels. The need for assisted living or residential nursing care should never preclude someone from living in a community of his or her choice.

Programming

Upkeep and home maintenance can be physically and financially challenging. Affording basic home repair can be a challenge for low-income residents, and home repairs could be difficult for people who have trouble getting around. Brainerd could consider starting low-cost or no-cost programs to help residents with a low income or those living on disability to maintain their homes.

Pride in one's neighborhood and property plays a role in the community image. This sense of pride leads to personal value and gratification in the maintenance and care of buildings and grounds. Similar constraints apply to rental housing. The ability to finance repairs and

maintenance comes from rent income, which is dependent on the market; which can sometimes lead to activities being deferred.

Neighborhood Associations

Groups like neighborhood associations or organizations can play an active role in developing neighborhood capacity, rehabilitation, and branding. This volunteer group will work together to build stronger neighborhoods. The city could leverage these groups of volunteers to address concerns like blight and deferred maintenance on dwellings and businesses. Small pools of funding could be made available by either proposals, or managed through the neighborhood association to support or solicit small-scale, community-led improvement projects like public art, tactical urbanism, parks, gardens, etc. Neighborhood groups could also assist in fundraising and financing to address redevelopment/reinvestment needs in particular areas.

Maintenance and Rehabilitation

Improvements of the existing housing stock will help maintain the aesthetic of the neighborhood and will support the historic aspect that Brainerd's neighborhoods proudly reflect. Individual homeowners may lack the skill or ability to complete projects on their own; either building or grounds. City programs can be developed to take an active role in the maintenance and rehabilitation of neighborhoods. Programs should seek to remove barriers for rehabilitation and maintenance by connecting homeowners with contractors, technical support for those who want to pursue improvements, financial programs, and assistance including historic preservation and restoration. Such programs could include a housing rehabilitation toolkit, workshops, partnerships to provide consultation, or as advanced as a housing redevelopment program to identify and mitigate housing blight/deterioration.

Future Opportunities

During each ward meeting, residents noted their love and appreciation for their neighborhood. Whether it be the social or physical traits, history, family heritage, or location to amenities, residents voiced their opinions on ways to improve their neighborhoods to help bring new residents to town and maintain the community character. Figure 9 shows that housing was one of the most important topics at all of the ward

meetings.

Residents championed the history of Brainerd and the need to improve the exterior facades of the neighborhoods where they live. The quality of rental units oftentimes led conversations. Residents have a passion to improve the aesthetics and appearance of housing units, which in turn will build stronger neighborhoods and a sense of place.

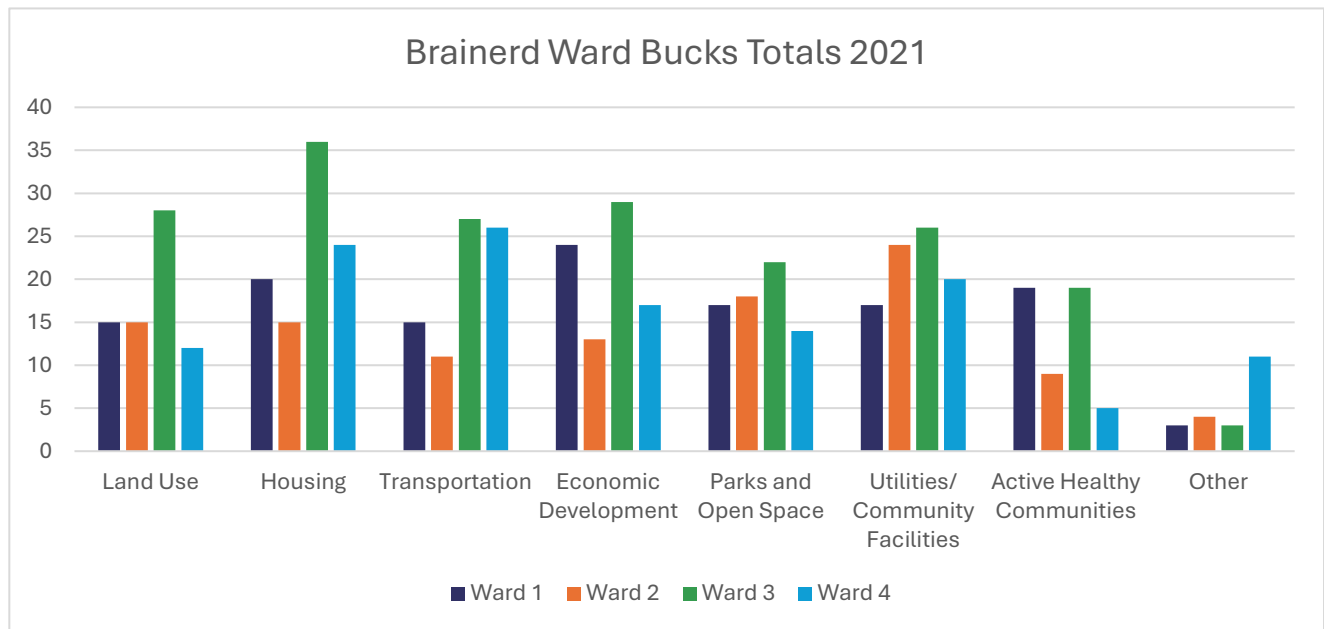


Figure 9: Brainerd Ward Bucks Results, 2021 Engagement

6 Mobility

OVERVIEW

Brainerd has a multimodal regional transportation system built around highway access along major corridors including both Minnesota trunk highways and Crow Wing County roads. Within the central portions of the city limits, this is complemented by local and collector streets that serve the city's neighborhoods and commercial districts. The broader transportation system features other assets that provide additional modal travel choice around the city and immediate region.

The overall intent of the Mobility chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide the city in creating and maintaining a transportation system that supports its future land use vision,

potential growth in the region's travel demand (especially from visitor-based travel), and sets investment priorities broadly in line with areas of greatest potential for growth and change in Brainerd. The three goals articulated in the following section reflect the major policy emphasis of this plan: promoting a travel system that effectively serves multiple travel options, leverages outside funding and resources to do this, and sets investment priorities to favor components of the transportation system serving areas with the greatest potential for growth. The last point sets a path for recommendations of this plan chapter around corridor and small-area investment priorities based on areas of potential growth and the transportation infrastructure supporting them.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: The city maintains, develops, and adapts a dynamic multimodal transportation system within Brainerd that seamlessly accommodates all users.

Policies:

1. Balance the competing needs and safety of local traffic, bicycles, and pedestrians, and ensure the efficient transfer of freight through the City of Brainerd. This requires considering all users in design decisions, and considering adaptation of the larger transportation network to collectively serve a variety of travel modes, even if not all modes are accommodated in a single street or corridor.
2. The city will incorporate best practices in urban street design that accommodate the unique snow management needs of its winter climate. This will include universally compliant signage, technologies, and access management to improve transportation system safety and reliability while helping users navigate the community.
3. Continue to maintain and celebrate Brainerd's expansive trail network, and consider opportunities to expand it through logical local, regional, or statewide connections. This will include continuing to incorporate trails and active transportation facilities into development opportunities.
4. In capital project planning and programming, the city will **emphasize bike and pedestrian connections from neighborhoods to the downtown**, other business hubs, and park and recreation areas that are safe, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing, with an intent to capture local travel

demand with non-driving modes of transportation.

GOAL 2: Achieve a balanced system through continued partnership with MnDOT, other public agencies, the private sector, and residents, with an intent to improve the mobility network in the region and elevate other modes of transportation to the same level of convenience and connectivity as vehicle travel.

Policies:

1. Expand the local transportation system thoughtfully, strategically, and sustainably where growth and demand dictate.
2. In consideration of fiscal constraints and long-term maintenance, prioritize the maintenance of the existing transportation network, and only expand thoughtfully and strategically.
3. Consider ways to leverage the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) to maximize ridership and efficiency
4. Identify the most pressing challenges facing Brainerd/Crow Wing Public Transit and take steps to address them.

GOAL 3: Brainerd's other transportation system assets provide for movement of people and goods beyond the Brainerd Lakes Area, leveraging these assets for improved economic vitality in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Policies:

1. Prioritize the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport as a primary transportation asset for the region, pursuing opportunities for commercial service development and prioritizing landside access projects and initiatives to better connect the airport to the rest of the city.
2. Work toward improved customer experience within the Passenger Terminal Building through arts, entertainment, and improved communication devices
3. Continue relationships with expanding airlines and seek scheduled passenger air service through another hub airport beyond Minneapolis-St. Paul to promote service competition and a variety of travel costs for area passengers.
4. Work with area economic developers to attract new aeronautical businesses and airport tenants for the development of additional land along the extended taxiway.
5. Plan for appropriate land uses to support aviation safety and economic development, especially on land already owned by the City and County.

COMMUNITY INPUT

As part of the community design session, residents identified a series of transportation-related priorities. Participants noted their preference for increasing walkability throughout the city and for connecting our neighborhoods, downtown, and the Mississippi River. During the neighborhood meetings, ward four which is generally identified as the southeast quadrant of Brainerd, identified transportation as its number one planning

element. Meeting participants noted street maintenance, the need for more sidewalks, and transit as areas where they felt investment was needed. In the larger context of the four neighborhood meetings, the general discussion of walkability was identified as one of the leading themes from the outreach process.

Residents noted that existing walking and biking opportunities do exist within their neighborhoods, which speaks to the vastness of the network. Residents use these networks to either connect to nature and area green spaces

or to the downtown. Barriers such as Washington Street, sidewalk maintenance, gaps in the network, or no sidewalks at all, and snow removal were all noted as barriers that deter them from utilizing the network from time to time.

Both the findings and the recommendations identified in this plan are based on and in alignment with a robust community engagement plan that included surveys, interviews, neighborhood ward meetings, several focus groups, and a community visioning session. The major themes from the community engagement done through this planning process include:

- The need to continually improve public transportation.
- The need to improve bike and pedestrian crossings of TH 210 and South Sixth to create connections between neighborhoods and downtown.
- Continue to improve upon the current trail network.

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Highway and Street Network

Brainerd functions as a transportation hub and crossroads for the Brainerd Lakes Area. Major routes include **Minnesota Highway 371**, **Minnesota Highway 371B**, **Minnesota Highway 210**, and other regional connections such as Highways **18** and **25**, which provide access toward the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, Bemidji, Duluth/Superior, and Fargo/Moorhead. The local street network supports neighborhoods, downtown circulation, schools, businesses, and lake-area tourism activity.

Because of the City's geographic location along the Mississippi River and south of the Brainerd Lakes, the major routes described above converge in the primary urban footprint of the city where the majority of its street grid

extends, with these regional routes doubling as city streets as they approach Brainerd's city center. Ownership and maintenance of this system is shared between the city, Crow Wing County, and MnDOT, with the city maintaining approximately eighty-three miles of streets. Approximately nineteen miles of these are designated Municipal State Aid routes under Minnesota's State Aid for Local Transportation (SALT) funding framework, making these eligible for State Aid funding but also requiring compliance with design standards.

Pedestrian

Within the city, transportation also relies on sidewalks, local streets, trails, using these for short-distance trips between neighborhoods, downtown, parks, schools, and commercial areas. Brainerd's collective network of streets across different ownership agencies include an extensive sidewalk network throughout the city, though significant gaps exist across entire city districts. The sidewalk network is most widespread in and around the downtown and in the neighborhoods in the north. The sidewalk network is less complete in the northwest, northeast, western, and southeast portions of the city, with many streets north of H Street NE lacking sidewalks altogether.

In addition to the city's sidewalk network, the city continues to maintain, expand, and improve its trail network, building upon the Paul Bunyan Trail (PBT), the Buffalo Hills Trail, the Cuyuna Lakes Trail, and other paved trails off of Canterbury Drive near Thiesse Drive. Two significant barriers came up frequently from residents throughout the planning process. These barriers include the difficulty pedestrians experience when attempting to cross either TH 210 or South Sixth Street, particularly near downtown, but along each corridor. The high traffic volumes and traffic speeds on these two corridors create an uncomfortable environment for pedestrians crossing. Furthermore, because these two corridors intersect near downtown, they act as barriers, blocking pedestrian traffic from the rest of the community on both sides.

Bicycle

While all streets in Brainerd legally allow bicycle use within the traveled way, given varying degrees of skill and comfort, many bicyclists do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable or confident in bicycle safety and laws to enter a roadway and engage with and navigate vehicular traffic. This underscores the importance of separated and protected bicycle trails and paths. Brainerd's Nonmotorized Transportation Plan was established to promote and implement a greater degree of transportation alternatives, including bicycling, with several of these implemented since its adoption in 2017.

Roadway Functional Classification

Functional classification is the grouping of streets and highways into classes or systems according to the character of service they are intended to provide. Basic to this process is the recognition that most travel involves movement through a network of roads. Functional classification defines the role that any particular road or street plays in serving the flow of trips through an entire network.

The functional classification of Brainerd's Road Network is shown in the table and map over the following pages.

NEED TO REVIEW AND CONFIRM

Principal Arterials

Route	Termini	Jurisdiction
Business Highway 371/S. 6th	S. city limits to Washington St./TH 210	State
Trunk Highway 210	W. city limits to E. city limits	State

Minor Arterials

Route	Termini	Jurisdiction
Mill Avenue/County Road 3	TH 210 to N. city limits	County
Southeast 13th Street/CSAH 45	Co. Rd. 117 to E. Washington Street/TH 210	County
Trunk Highway 25	E. Washington St./TH 210 to city limits	State
Oak Street	S. 6th St./Business 371 to city limits	City
West Laurel Street	River to Highland Scenic Dr./CSAH 48	City/County
Southwest 4th Street	W. Laurel St. to W. Washington St./	City
Laurel Street	Business 371 to River	City
Riverside Drive/CSAH 20	W. Washington St./TH 210 to Jackson St.	City
West College Drive	CSAH 48 to River	City
Industrial Park Road/County Road 117	S 6th St. to 13th St. SE/Co. Rd. 45	County

Major Collectors

Route	Termini	Jurisdiction
Industrial Park Road/County Road 117	13th St. SE/Co. Rd. 45 to East City Limits	County
Bluff Avenue	N. 4th St. to N. 7th St.	City
Fir Street	N. 7th St. to N. 11th St. and Evergreen Ave	City
Wright Street	S. 6th St. to CSAH 45	City
H Street	4th Avenue to Mill Ave/CSAH 3	City
Riverside Drive (CSAH 20)	Jackson St. to Beaver Dam Rd.	City
North 4th Street	Washington St./TH 210 to Bluff Ave	City

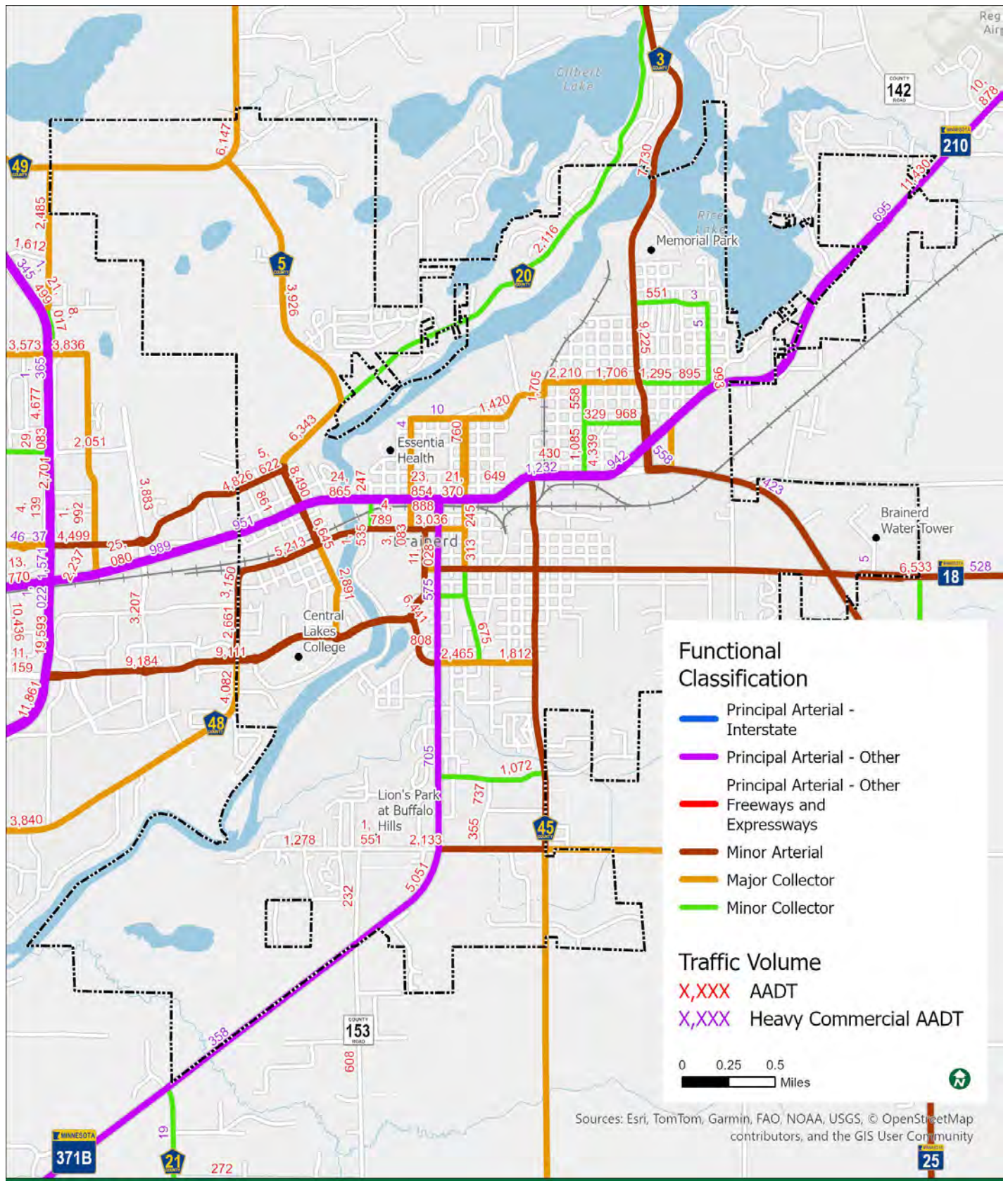
Route	Termini	Jurisdiction
South West 4th Street	W. Laurel St. to E. College Dr.	City
Beaver Dam Road	CSAH 20 to Wise Rd./CSAH 49	County
CSAH 45	S. city limits to Co. Rd. 117	County
Front Street	S. 6th St. to S. 8th St	City
H Street	Mill Avenue/Co. Rd. 3 to Gillis Ave	City
Evergreen Avenue	1st Avenue to Fir	City
Fir Street	Evergreen Ave. to N 8th St.	City
North 8th Street	Fir St. to Washington St/TH 210	City
South 8th Street	Washington St./TH 210 to Oak St.	City
Willow Street	SE 13th St. to S 6th St./Business 371	City
Highland Scenic Drive/CSAH 48	W. Laurel St. to city limits	City
Southwest 4th Street	W. Laurel St. to W. College Dr.	City
Laurel Street	S. 8th St. to Business 371	City

Minor Collectors

Route	Termini	Jurisdiction
H Street	Mill Avenue/Co. Rd. 3 to 13th Ave	City
South 8 th Street	Oak St. to Broadway St.	City
Broadway Street	S. 8 th St. to Willow St.	City
South 9 th Street	Vine St. to Willow St.	City
Vine Street	S. 4 th St. to S. 6 th St.	City
East College Drive	River to Quince St.	City
4 th Avenue	E. Washington St./TH 210 to H St. NE	City
N Street	Mill Ave/CSAH 3 to 13 th Ave	City
13 th Avenue	E. Washington St./TH 210 to N. St.	City
Riverside Drive (CSAH 20)	Beaver Dam Rd. to city limits	City
East River Road	Washington St. /TH 210 to E. College Dr.	City

Local Roads

All other roads, not listed in Brainerd City limits are classified as “local roads”



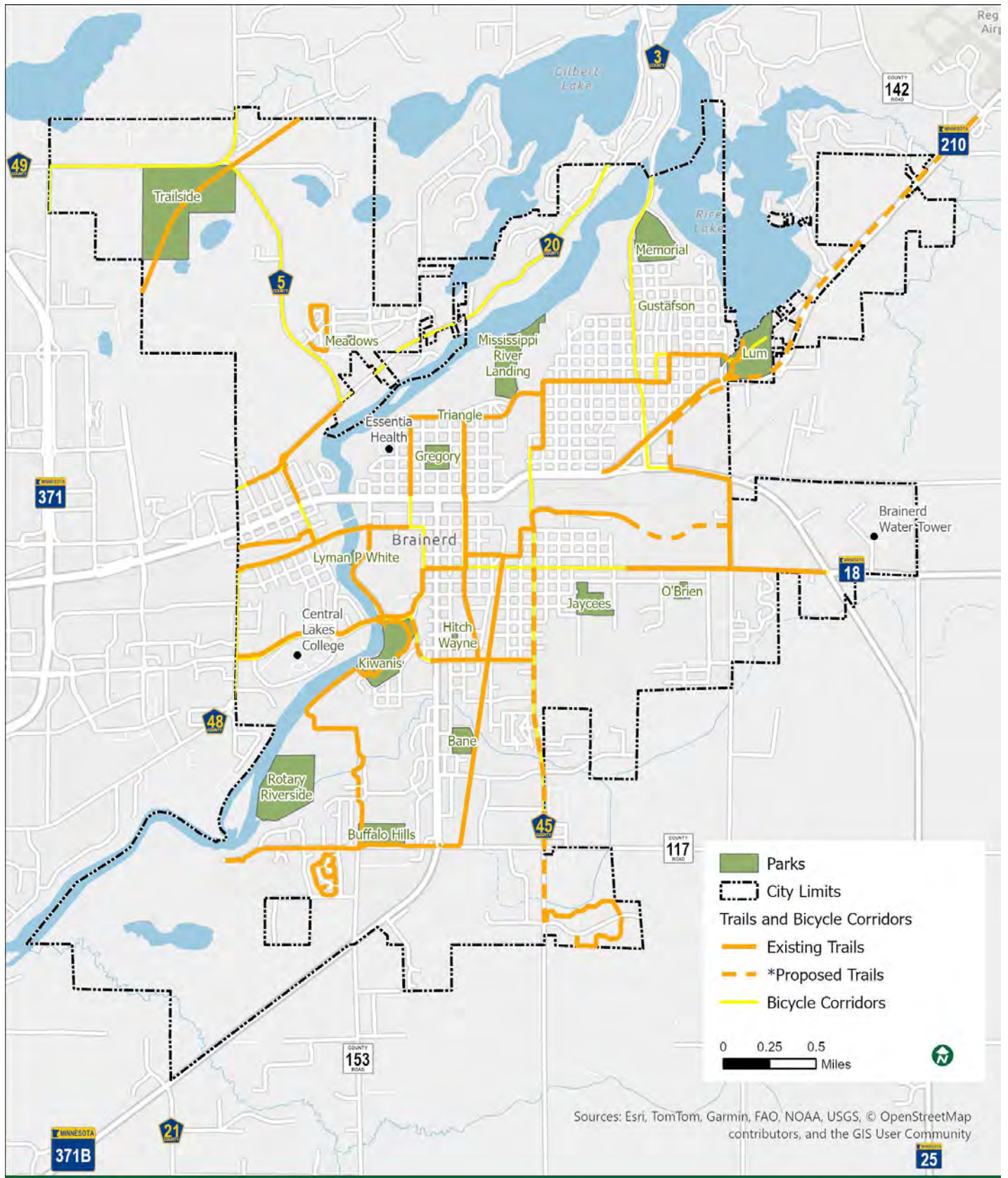
Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Transportation

July 2026

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Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Trails and Bicycle Corridors

August 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X142168000\GIS\Pro\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_08_03.aprx

State Aid for Local Transportation (SALT)

To support the state's system of streets, roads, and bridges, MnDOT distributes funds for highway maintenance and construction to counties, cities and townships based on a formula determined by the Minnesota Legislature. MnDOT's State Aid division works closely with local levels of government to ensure the state maintains a safe, effective, and coordinated highway network.

In addition to funding support, staff from MnDOT State Aid provides technical assistance in highway and bridge design, construction and maintenance; authorizes grants for bridge construction; coordinates local federally funded projects; and provides overall management of the State Aid system.

Aviation

The Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport (BRD) provides low-cost, reliable air service in the Lakes Area. For business travelers and vacationers, the BRD airport provides direct flights to and from Brainerd. The BRD airport has an ample parking lot that is free to use, well-lit, safe, and conveniently located just outside the terminal doors.

Delta Air Lines, operated by SkyWest, operates daily service in and out of BRD airport, which, when coupled with the Wings Café, free wi-fi and many transportation options, such as rental car agencies, taxicab services, and the county transit makes BRD Airport one of the more complete terminals north of the Twin Cities. In addition, a variety of other aviation-related businesses, as well as a full-service fixed base operator, are also located at the airport

Rail and Roadway Freight

While the city of Brainerd does not own, operate, or maintain any rail infrastructure, rail has played an integral role in Brainerd's founding, history, and development. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), one of the US's Class

I operators, owns and operates the rail corridor running east and west adjacent to Brainerd's central business district. While the presence of the railroad in and through Brainerd has facilitated decades of transport of freight, goods and commodities, as well as directly providing jobs in Brainerd, it is only freight-focused, with no passenger rail service directly serving Brainerd. It can also pose significant transportation challenges for local governments as they manage efficiency and safety, particularly at rail crossings.

For freight movement on the highway and street network, the City has developed a road restriction map showing which of its roadways are classified as four-ton roads and 10-ton roads.

KEY DIRECTIONS FOR MOBILITY POLICIES

The City of Brainerd recognizes the need to plan for the future needs and development of the city's transportation network. Overall, Brainerd's system is **auto-oriented but regionally connected**, with highways forming the backbone, local streets accommodating in-town circulation needs but also offering varying degrees of multimodal travel, public transit adding limited mobility options for residents and visitors without a car, rail supporting freight movement, and the airport linking the community to broader state and national travel markets.

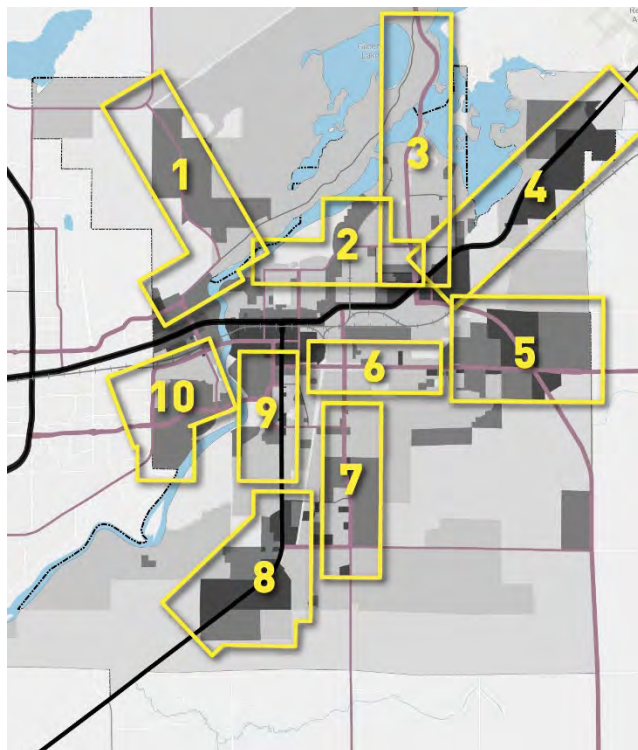
Inventory of Major Corridors and Growth Potential

With this system's emphasis on the street and highway network serving most local needs, the Comprehensive Plan transportation policies focus on recommendations for enhancing and improving major links in the roadway network. This is based on an approach that divides the city into a system of travel sheds focused on major corridors, defined in turn by areas of potential growth and development and the

impact that growth would be expected to have on the transportation network.

The travel shed definitions are general and do not follow any formal definitions or existing systems of boundaries (such as Census geographies, City council districts, or other similar systems). They also focus solely on corridors connecting to Downtown Brainerd and do not include the downtown business district of the TH 210 corridor through the city west of 8th Avenue NE. This is intentional, designed to define priorities for corridor enhancement in districts that are more homogenous in land use and development character, while underscoring that downtown and the TH 210 corridor are more complex land use mixes and represent the commercial and business heart of the city and region (and thus merit a customized approach to corridor investment).

These travel sheds are defined in the map and table below.

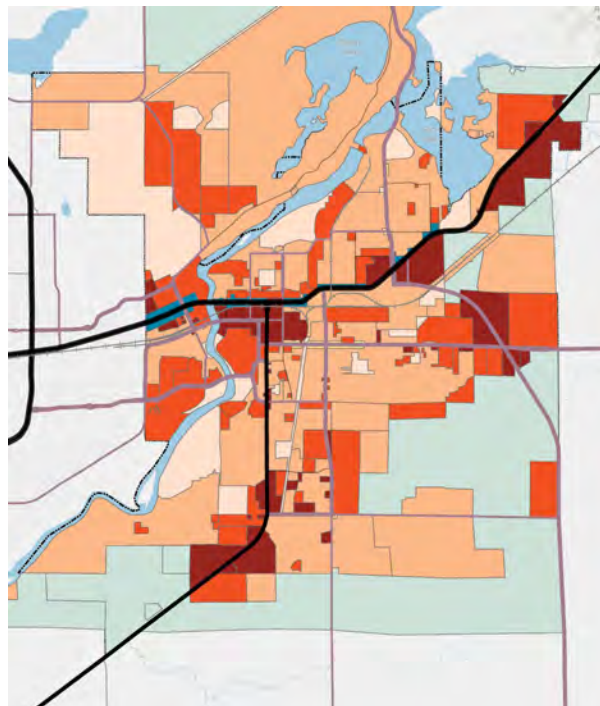


Travel Shed	Description	Major Uses
1	Beaver Dam Road: Beaver Dam corridor from northern City limits and Riverside Drive from west from Beaver Dam to western City limits	Rural residential and vacant land, with significant wetlands likely to limit development potential
2	Bluff-Evergreen-H Street: streets connecting northern residential neighborhoods across Evergreen Cemetery	Neighborhood residential, including parks and schools
3	Mill Ave-County Hwy 3: 8 th Avenue-Mill Avenue corridor from TH 210 north to the Mississippi River crossing	Neighborhood residential, including Memorial Park and a major industrial site
4	TH 210: Corridor northeast from Lum Park to City limits (near Airport)	Commercial, with vacant land closer to airport
5	TH 25/Oak Street: district around the intersection of TH 18 and TH 25	Commercial, with MN state office complex
6	13th Street/Oak Street: Oak Street corridor generally between Buffalo Hills Trail and SE 19 th St	Neighborhood residential with an elementary school and parks
7	SE 13th Street: County 45 corridor from Quince Street to Thiesse Road	Neighborhood residential north of Willow Street, industrial south of Brook Street

Travel Shed	Description	Major Uses
8	Buffalo Hills: Voyageur Hwy Corridor generally around the intersection of Buffalo Hills Lane	Commercial and multi-family residential
9	TH 371B: 6 th Street corridor generally from Downtown to Spruce Drive	Residential in south; civic uses and downtown commercial in north
10	Central Lakes College: District around CLC and focused on College Drive	College campus and residential (mostly multifamily)

The methodology behind this determination follows similar logic to trip generation in conventional traffic analysis, with different land uses generating different levels of traffic impact from the same degree of development intensity, drawing from industry knowledge resources such as the Institute for Transportation Engineers *Trip Generation Handbook*. Generally, commercial land uses are the most intense trip generators, office and residential uses are less intense, and industrial and civil infrastructure-based uses tend to be among the least intense. This used the Future Land Use map to determine a general degree of growth potential compared to an estimated current density of land uses (and thus

estimating an increment of potential future growth) and assigned each major land use designation a simple level of intensity to compare to the corridors adjacent to it.



TRANSPORTATION IMPACT INTENSITY

Low  High

Based on these intensity levels, the number of expected trips is compared to current roadway volume and capacity serving each travel shed.

As illustrated in the table on the following page, each of these travel sheds has varying potential degrees of growth, with a broad assessment of roadway capacity and potential need for expansion.

Travel Shed		Current Use and Capacity/Operations Enhancements Needs			Improvement Potential beyond Capacity/Operations
		LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	
1	Beaver Dam Road (includes Riverside Drive and Jackson Street as main corridors)	Current Volumes: 4,000 – 6,400 AADT Current Capacity: Two Lanes with intersection enhancements Potential needs: Modernization/Operational Improvements			
2	Bluff-Evergreen-H Street	Current Volumes: 1,400 – 2,200 AADT Current Capacity: Two Lanes Potential needs: No capacity improvements likely needed based on growth potential			Other potential improvements: Safety and Neighborhood Enhancements
3	Mill Ave-County Hwy 3	Current Volumes: 7,700 – 9,200 AADT Current Capacity: Three Lanes (includes continuous two-way left turn lane) Potential needs: No capacity improvements likely needed based on growth potential			Other potential improvements: Safety Enhancements, especially at offset intersections (K, L Streets)
4	TH 210 East	Current Volumes: 10,900 – 11,400 AADT Current Capacity: Three Lanes (includes continuous two-way left turn lane) Potential needs: Modernization/Operational Improvements			
5	TH 25/Oak Street	Current Volumes: 6,500 AADT (Oak St); 7,200 AADT (TH 25) Current Capacity: Four Lanes (Oak St east of TH 25); three lanes (TH includes continuous two-way left turn lane) Potential needs: Access management and operational improvements as development occurs (timing of improvements should strive to understand development timing)			Other potential improvements: Safety Enhancements at intersection; expansion of sidewalk/sidepath infrastructure as area develops
6	13th Street/Oak Street	Current Volumes: 6,200 AADT (at SE 13 th Street) Current Capacity: Two lanes Potential needs: No capacity improvements likely needed based on growth potential			Other potential improvements: Sidewalk and pedestrian enhancements in larger area
7	SE 13th Street	Current Volumes: 4,700 – 6,100 AADT Current Capacity: Two lanes Potential needs: No capacity improvements likely needed based on growth potential			Other potential improvements: Safety and Neighborhood Enhancements
8	Buffalo Hills	Current Volumes: 5,100 AADT (TH 371B south of Buffalo Hills) – 10,000 AADT (TH371B north of Buffalo Hills) Current Capacity: Three Lanes (includes continuous two-way left turn lane) Potential needs: Modernization/Operational Improvements			Other potential improvements: Access management south of Buffalo Hills Lane Completed since 2019 Plan adopted
9	TH 371B	Current Volumes: 12,000 AADT (at Little Buffalo Creek) Current Capacity: Three Lanes (includes continuous two-way left turn lane) Potential needs: No capacity improvements likely needed based on growth potential			Other potential improvements: Safety improvements to manage pedestrian access to civic campus
10	Central Lakes College	Current Volumes: 7,700 – 9,200 AADT Current Capacity: Three-Four Lanes (College Drive) Potential needs: Modernization/Operational Improvements			Other potential improvements: Safety improvements to manage campus access

ONGOING SUPPORTING PLANS

The city has created and regularly updates several transportation plans to guide decision-making. These plans include the following:

2027-2036 City of Brainerd Street and Sewer Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The City of Brainerd's 2027-2036 Street and Sewer Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a ten-year investment guide for the construction and/or improvement of city streets, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers. City staff have prepared the plan to assist the City Council in long-range planning of capital infrastructure upgrades and to give a big-picture perspective on the continuing need to fund a transportation and utility system that serves the constituents of Brainerd and uses their tax dollars in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Nonmotorized Transportation Plan

The plan seeks to outline the value and benefits to the city that can be derived from providing additional nonmotorized transportation options.

ADA Transition Plan

The adoption of an ADA Transition Plan by all public agencies with greater than or equal to 50 employees is a requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enacted on July 26, 1990. ADA is a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against individuals on the basis of a disability. ADA consists of five titles outlining protections in the following areas:

- Employment
- State and local government services
- Public accommodations
- Telecommunications

- Miscellaneous provisions

Five-Year Transit System Plan

The goal of this five-year planning process is to facilitate and develop identification of transit system strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities, including unmet needs and anticipated or desired future transit service changes.

Safe Routes to School Plan

The Brainerd/Baxter Safe Routes to School Plan (SRTS) is intended to provide a framework on which to continue building a community in which more students have the opportunity to safely walk or bike to and from school when and where it is safe to do so.

The SRTS plan is intended to increase opportunities to walk and bike to school and, first and foremost, lead to a safer active transportation environment, improved physical and mental health, improved student concentration and study skills, a reduction in negative behavioral issues, as well as improvements to the local sidewalk and trail networks.

The SRTS plan was developed through the efforts of a planning team developed by the city and in conjunction with the Region 5 Development Commission (R5DC). To date the City of Brainerd has successfully implemented several sidewalk projects in and around Garfield and Lowell elementary schools.

7 Economic Development

OVERVIEW

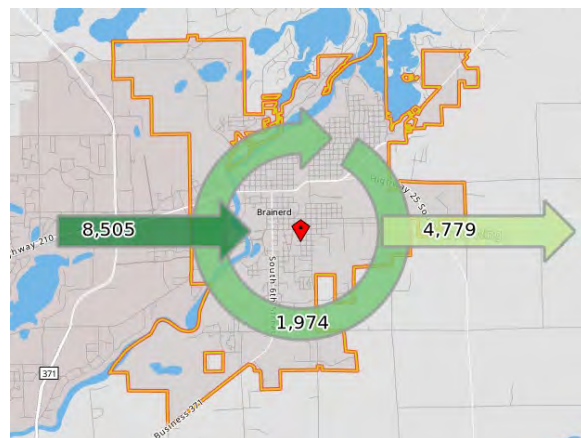
Economic health is an important component of a healthy and thriving community. A strong commercial and industrial base provides jobs to community residents, contributes to a city's tax base, and can be a source of psychological strength to a community. This can best be explained when one compares a downtown area of boarded-up buildings to one with a thriving business sector. The community with the vacant or boarded-up buildings appears lifeless, while the one with the strong downtown community is lively, busy, and thriving

A primary focus of this chapter is to create a new identity, one that reclaims the city's role as the economic hub of the region. Brainerd is entering a different time, as is its workforce. Since the 2004 comprehensive plan, the city's workforce has increased and has seen further growth in various sectors.

Brainerd is the regional service center of the region and the hub for medical, education, government, and professional offices. The following industries employ the largest percent of workers in the city (US Census Bureau, 2025).

- Health care
- Retail trade
- Manufacturing

The graphic below shows that more people commute into Brainerd for work than leave it. The inflow and outflow report from the Census in 2023 indicates that there is an influx of 8,505 workers into the city who live outside of Brainerd city limits. Conversely, 4,779 live in Brainerd but are employed outside of the city. This shows a net increase of 1,974 workers.



Improving job opportunities and growing and supporting local businesses were among the top concerns as a part of the community outreach process. Providing pedestrian- and automobile-oriented commercial development, additional opportunities, and choices on specific retail offerings were leading weaknesses identified in the 2004 plan and remain a concern and focus today.

This chapter builds off a set of smart growth economic development strategies. This approach seeks to build upon existing assets,

takes incremental actions to strengthen a community, and builds long-term value to attract a range of investments.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Support infill and redevelopment throughout Brainerd as a strategic component of growth.

Policies:

1. Drive infill development and redevelopment towards areas where current infrastructure is present, including the city's main highway corridors and downtown, or places where high levels of blight or disinvestment exists.
2. Evaluate the near and long-term fiscal impacts of annexation and development proposals.
3. Reclaim underutilized infrastructure within the city (industrial sites, rail lines, parking lots, blighted structures, vacant blocks).
4. Encourage redevelopment proposals that seek to rehabilitate historic structures through adaptive reuse.

GOAL 2: Support our workforce and help them thrive.

Policies:

1. Collaborate with local partners and stakeholders to address industry workforce needs, creating a career and education pathway for residents of all ages.
2. Encourage access to advanced education or certification programs, workforce development, and job training opportunities.
3. Support the expansion of transit opportunities to business clusters and of transit hours of operation to support workforce during all shift times.
4. Expand transit opportunities to the various business clusters, or concentrated areas with high business density, throughout the community.
5. Expand affordable childcare availability (family childcare and childcare centers) to support workforce and business expansion.

GOAL 3: Help local businesses grow and attract new businesses in our neighborhoods, along our main corridors, and in our downtown.

Policies:

1. Support current businesses through a variety of programs, resources, and offerings.
2. Attract new businesses best suited for the community's assets, increasing local employment options and building the city's tax base.
3. Encourage entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.
4. Support the transition of businesses in the community.
5. Support the expansion of existing and attraction of new industrial businesses in areas best designed for industrial growth.

ONGOING INITIATIVES

A series of ongoing initiatives, programs, and

plans has sparked local excitement across various corridors, neighborhoods, and sites. Countless volunteer hours and local leadership

have taken aggressive steps toward cultivating new ideas to enhance the quality of life in Brainerd.

Central Business District Incentive Policy: A collaborative meant to build on the current momentum to revitalize Brainerd's community district and create a narrative that encourages investment and planning along the corridor from the Mississippi River to the NP Center.

Mississippi Riverfront Committee: A committee dedicated to advancing the economic, recreational, and cultural opportunities of the Mississippi River, transforming it into a multifaceted amenity that meets the needs of residents and visitors.

Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association: A nonprofit taking strides to advance the planning, design, and construction of the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail through Brainerd.

COMMUNITY INPUT

As a part of the public engagement process, the following commonalities were identified:

- Need for adequate employment for a variety of income levels.
- Need to capitalize on and improve Brainerd's brand.
- Invest and revitalize downtown Brainerd.
- Work with existing businesses to expand employment opportunities.
- Attract new businesses to the city.

In addition to these elements, quality-of-life attributes were also identified to support a thriving economic environment such as:

- Offer more suitable, affordable housing options.
- Improve the image of the housing stock.
- Protect and enhance our recreation opportunities.

As a part of the communitywide survey, when participants were asked, "What areas need the most improvement in Brainerd?" the leading area was high-quality/high-income employment

opportunities with nearly 49 percent of the responses. With a tie, residents also seek to provide a wide range of retail/restaurant services (21 percent), as well as be a part of a stable and growing local economy (21 percent).

Economic development was an important topic during the ward meetings, particularly in wards one and three. Economic development ranked as the highest planning element in ward one, generally located in the southwest quadrant of Brainerd. Participants specifically identified 1) appearance and code enforcement, 2) downtown development, and 3) better job opportunities so we can retain residents as the most important issues. Ward three, generally comprised of the northeast quadrant of Brainerd, voted economic development as the second leading topic. Ward meeting participants felt that 1) downtown development and 2) appearance/code enforcement were the most important issues.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to the Esri Community Profile for the City of Brainerd, the city is home to 902 businesses that employ 12,473 people. Three sectors dominate the labor force: health care, retail trade, and manufacturing, accounting for 48.7% of all workers in these areas.

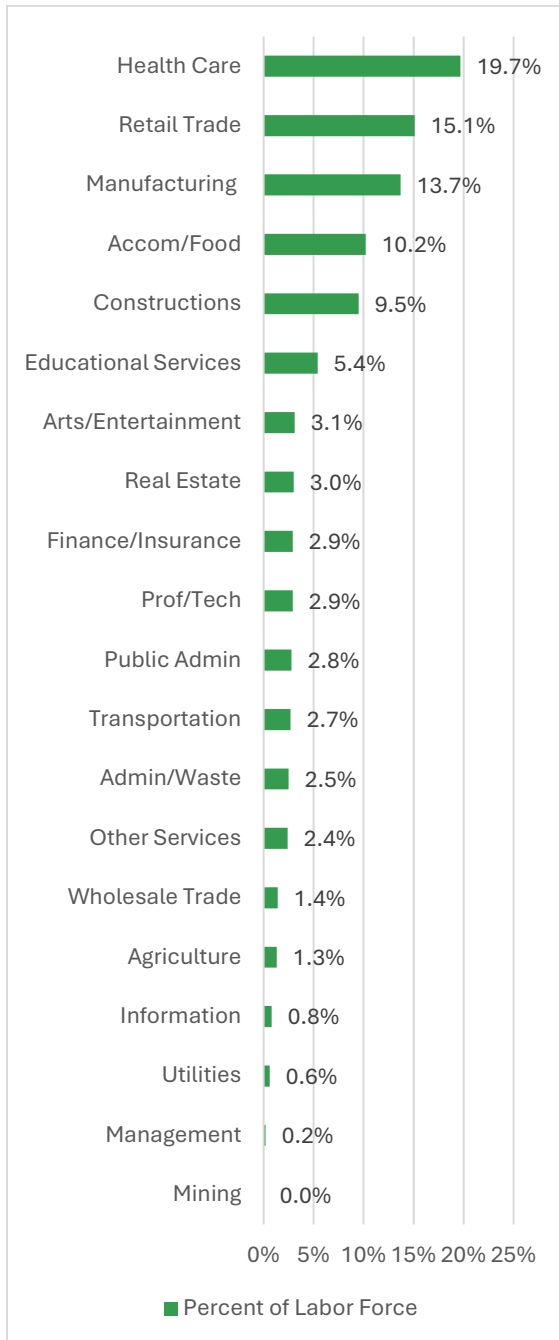


Figure 10: Esri Business Analyst, ACS 2024

Annual job growth in Crow Wing County is strong at 2.48%, according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center County profile. At this rate, the city could grow from 12,473 jobs to 23,012 jobs by 2050. However, the labor force is growing by only 1.56%, which may limit job openings to those that the city's 18,367 workers can fill.

Nearly 65 percent of Brainerd residents are in the workforce. When planning, it is important to understand the economic profile of our residents. Median household income (MHI) plays a role in workforce development, industry recruitment and expansion, and quality of life. The MHI for the City of Brainerd is \$45,435, over 43 percent less than that of Crow Wing County, which, as of 2026, is \$79,236 (ACS 2024).

Brainerd residents tend to not need to commute far for work with over 50% of the residents having a commute less than 15 minutes. This may contribute to the fact that 21% of workers use an alternative means of transportation to their work than a solo driven vehicle.

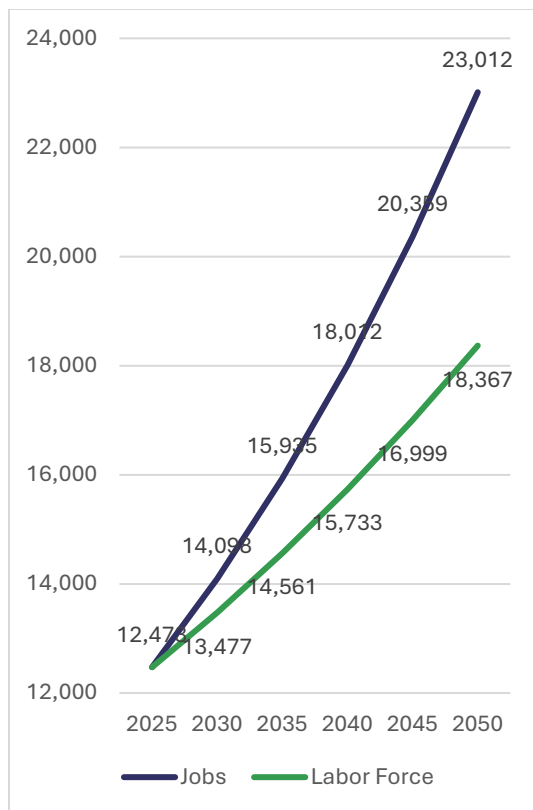


Figure 11: MN DEED County Profile Crow Wing County

Major Employers in Brainerd

Entity	Industry	Employees
Essentia Health Central Region	Healthcare	1,496
Brainerd Public School District	Education	900
Crow Wing County	Government	471
Super One/Super Valu (3 Stores)	Retail	335
CLC	Education	300
Anderson Brothers Construction	Construction	260
City of Brainerd	Government	206
Bang Printing	Manufacturing	200
Bethany Good Samaritan	Healthcare	195

BLAEDC – Note: Does not specifically separate employers by city or address the number of offices.

FRAMEWORK

The following provides an overview of the three core concepts that will help to build on the city's existing community assets and embrace the smart growth approach to economic development.

Support Our Local Businesses

The city can contribute toward economic development by supporting and expanding existing businesses and attracting new businesses. The city can do this in several ways:

- Help businesses create jobs.
- Encourage entrepreneurship.
- Seek to diversify the tax base.
- Take strides to improve quality of life through new services and amenities.

The city should take active steps to understand the current composition and location of businesses and jobs, and identify emerging entrepreneurs. Targeting key economic sectors for growth can allow the city to direct its time, resources, and efforts strategically. Supporting existing businesses could include actions such as:

- Adding or improving infrastructure,
- encouraging new or redeveloped housing to meet the needs of workers who do not live in Brainerd.
- Attracting new businesses will be most effective when tailored to the industries that are best suited for the City of Brainerd.

Support Our Workers

Workforce development is vital to ensure that residents can fairly and successfully compete for employment. It is also essential to ensure that residents can benefit from economic prosperity. Having a workforce with a wide range of skills and education levels can help local businesses grow and attract new businesses. By offering learning and education opportunities for a wide range of jobs, workforce development efforts may reduce the need for workers to commute

long distances for employment. The city should identify how well the skills and education levels of Brainerd residents align with the needs of existing and growing industries. This will provide insight into what the city could do to match workers with business needs.

Bring jobs closer to residents by increasing transportation investments through bike, pedestrian, and public transportation facilities.

Identify the education and skill needs of the local workforce and the skills needed for potential growth industries.

Support Quality of Life Enhancements

By focusing on improving the city's quality of life, we can position ourselves to attract new economic growth and better serve our residents, visitors, workers, and businesses. A variety of factors can improve quality of life, such as:

- Prosperous commercial district
- Thriving downtown
- Green and open spaces
- Variety of transportation choices
- Art and cultural opportunities
- Public transit
- Community resources
- Medical facilities
- Academic institutions

Aesthetic improvements, such as green infrastructure and pedestrian realm enhancements, also enhance quality of life. This element also focuses on identifying key development and redevelopment sites, including brownfields and infill sites, in the city's core.

Encourage business growth in specific locations such as the historic downtown or other core activity centers.

This strategic growth can help improve the overall quality of life for residents (current and future, workers, and visitors).

Attract businesses that provide retail and service options that meet the daily needs of residents of the downtown area and residential neighborhoods.

TOURISM

Brainerd has the opportunity to build on assets such as history, the art and music scene, and its natural resources and trail networks to draw visitors to the community. This unique set of attributes can serve as economic drivers:

Arts, Culture + Music

- Highlight and enhance the existing art facilities and partners in the city, the various performance theaters such as the Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts and the Franklin Arts Center.
- Support public murals and public art (on a major scale) throughout the community, with an overall theme that builds off the city's character.
- Promote the music offerings of local musicians, orchestras, concerts, and music festivals.

Historical Significance

- Preserve historic sites, structures, and landmarks, and take active strides to restore such amenities throughout the city.
- Promote the offerings of the downtown district, and market the business offerings that meet the traveler and consumer's needs.
- Integrate wayfinding and signage throughout the community that help share the story of Brainerd's history.

Outdoor Recreation

- Highlight the vast trail network (both local and state opportunities).
- Promote active and passive opportunities on the Mississippi River.
- Endorse the active living culture within the city.
- Adopt the trail town model of economic

development.

IMPROVE MOBILITY

Seek to make Brainerd interconnected to help visitors and tourists navigate the community. Additionally, strategically plan for the improvement of motorized and nonmotorized transportation modes throughout the city. If the city focuses on fluid movement, visitors will feel more comfortable exploring and hopefully will be enticed to return or stay longer.

HELP EXISTING PLACES THRIVE

This plan outlines numerous actions to help preserve and take care of the city's existing assets and investments including the downtown, the Mississippi River, infrastructure, parks, and other places that the community values. By focusing on existing assets and identifying historic structures or locations worth preserving or reusing, the city can leverage the economic value of these prior investments. These can be the foundation for helping existing places thrive.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A workforce with a wide variety of skills and education levels can help local businesses grow but also attract new businesses. Local and regional agencies should help identify the city as to how well the skills and education of the city's workforce align with the needs of existing and growing industries. Additionally, these entities can provide insight and guidance into what the city can do to help local workers better match businesses' needs.

LOCAL PROGRAMMING

The following is an overview of economic development programs that can be developed to aid in economic development activities within the city:

- Business mentorship program: Formalized program that connects experienced

business owners and entrepreneurs with emerging business professionals.

- Business incubators: Collaborative, supportive flex spaces to offer services and facilities for solo business owners and support entrepreneurs, remote workers, and start-ups.
- Business retention program: a formal program of meetings with local business owners and city staff meant to learn of business needs, long-term plans, and how the city can support their vision.
- Historic building rehab kit: A resource list that assists business owners with local financing options, typical rehabilitation projects, and contractors to help preserve the historical integrity of landmark structures – often on a local heritage

preservation structure list.

- Revolving loan fund: Seed money used as an investment tool, where earnings from payback are then reinvested.
- Neighborhood identity and branding: A process meant to develop a unifying image, idea, or brand that reflects the character of the neighborhood.
- Historic preservation: A practice meant to identify historical and cultural places throughout the city and set specific policies and procedures to guide preservation, restoration, and redevelopment efforts.
- Housing rehab program: A program that offers affordable loans and assistance to qualified homeowners for home repairs.

8 Park & Recreation

OVERVIEW

The parks, trails, and open space system is an important element in the quality of life in Brainerd. It offers recreational opportunities. It preserves and makes lakes, woodlands, open fields, wetlands, and waterways accessible. It

provides places and pathways that draw people to Brainerd to live, work, play, and stay. Brainerd has developed an excellent parks and recreational system that includes quality recreational facilities, neighborhood and community parks, and a citywide network of trails.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Brainerd will maintain a quality parks system that meets the recreational needs of a variety of users.

Policies:

1. Add green space and public plazas in a manner that makes them conveniently accessible to all residents and prioritizes function and aesthetics.
2. Enhance the natural environment throughout the community.
3. Collaborate with landowners, developers, and other partners to link parks, neighborhoods, commercial areas, and public spaces with a network of greenways and multiuse trails.

GOAL 2: Collaborate with landowners, developers, and other partners to link parks, neighborhoods, and public spaces with a network of greenways and multiuse trails.

Policies:

1. Work with area artists to integrate public art into neighborhood parks.
2. Partner with public and private entities to expand outdoor programming and tailor it to the demographic needs of the neighborhoods.
3. Partner with public and private entities to enhance and expand sports facilities and/or programming.
4. Partner with public and private entities to enhance and expand year-round recreation activities, including active and passive options for all ages and abilities.
5. Partner with wellness providers to enhance or expand health and wellness initiatives for families and residents of all ages.

COMMUNITY INPUT

As a part of the community-wide survey, participants noted a series of common threads that relate to parks and recreation. General recreation opportunities and abundant natural resources were identified as common themes. Residents value their location near area lakes, trail networks, and natural features. Survey respondents see access to these amenities as one of the most important aspects of their community. Participants also noted their passion for improving the natural resources within the city, championing the Mississippi River as a cherished amenity, and supporting opportunities to expand existing parks, sensitive environmental areas, and greenways in the general area.

Park and open spaces play an integral part in future development. As a part of the community survey, we asked residents about future development and concerns related to future growth. Participants noted protecting and preserving water quality as the second highest element and preserving open space as the third.

Communitywide survey participants were asked about the elements that make Brainerd a great place to live. This question sought to understand the quality of life elements that could be leveraged as assets to build upon. Participants noted the attractive and natural setting as the number one element that makes Brainerd a great place to live. Recreational opportunities are noted as the second leading element.

COMMUNITY VALUE

Economic value

The city's park system provides a valuable service to the Brainerd Lakes area, which can be measured in terms of its effect on the local economy. As the city continues to improve undeveloped parkland and make upgrades and

improvements to existing assets, there are numerous benchmarks with which to measure the total economic value of the Brainerd park system. These include:

Property value

Homes that are near parks have been shown to have higher property values. This, in turn, can generate additional tax revenue for the city.

Tourism value

Brainerd includes several parks and facilities that attract residents or tourists throughout the region. Visitors who come to Brainerd for a park facility may also visit local shops and restaurants, increasing sales tax revenue.

Direct use

Direct use value involves the willingness of a park visitor to pay to participate in activities and enjoy facilities for activities such as team sports, bicycling, walking, and picnicking. Because these facilities are offered for free or at a discount, direct use is a measure of how much the public has saved if it were to use a private facility of similar caliber.

Health value

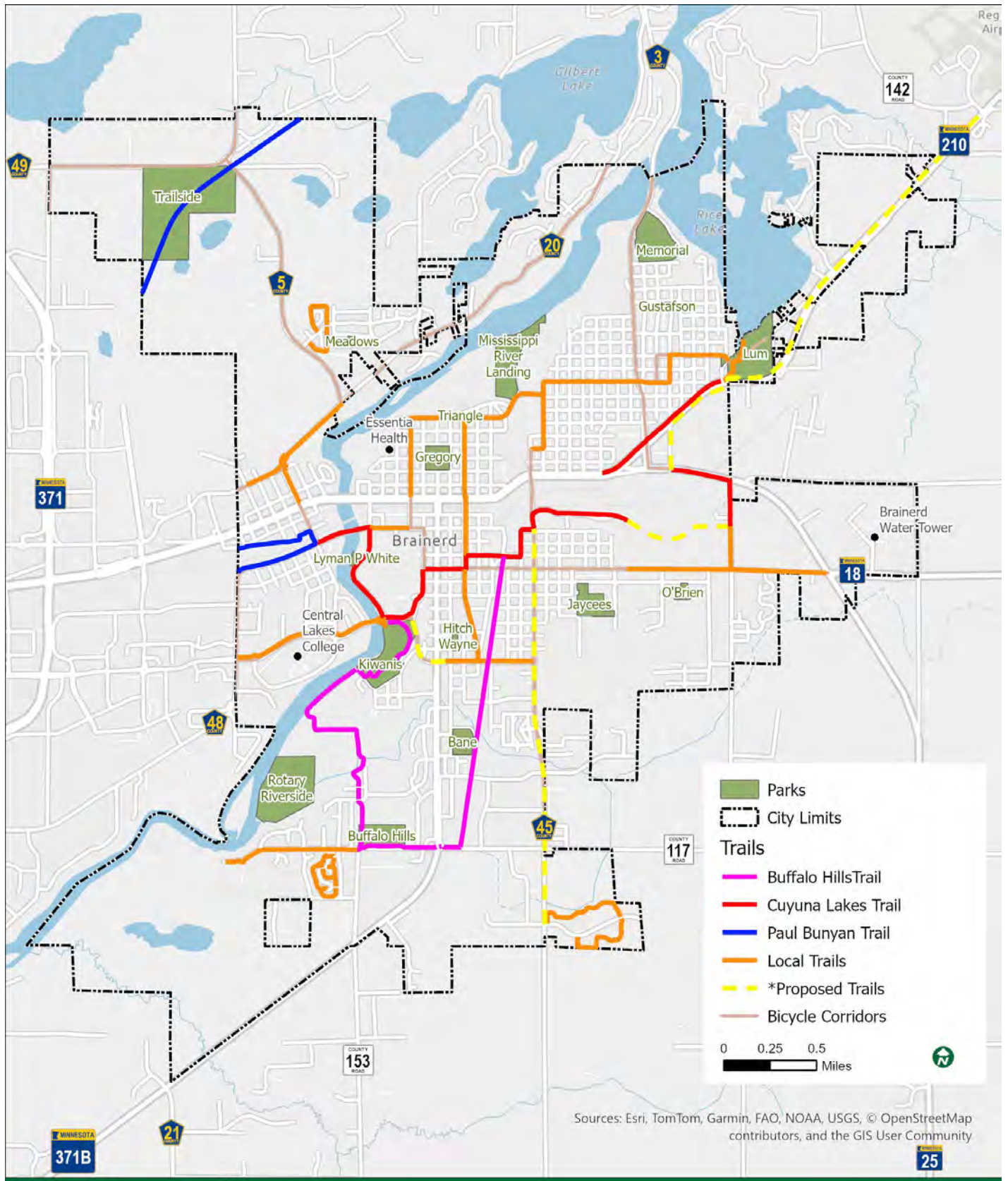
Park access has been shown to increase levels of physical activity. Active lifestyles are associated with lower levels of heart disease, diabetes, and other medical conditions, which can result in lower medical costs. In addition, the natural vegetation within parks improves local air quality, creating a healthier urban environment.

Community connections

In addition to places that provide recreational opportunities, local parks provide community connections. Parks can define a community, allowing for community cohesion and a place to hold events and connect with fellow community members. Parks can create a better sense of place for both residents and visitors.

Stormwater and floodplain management

Parks generally include large areas of pervious, natural surface. As such, they deserve a dual role as an effective stormwater and floodplain management tool and areas for public open space and trail alignments.



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Parks and Trails

August 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X142168000\GIS\Pro\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_08_03.aprx

EXISTING TRAIL NETWORK

Brainerd is known for having exceptional recreation opportunities, and the abundant trails for biking, walking, and running play a major role in that. Whether you are looking to bike around the neighborhoods or take a trail through Brainerd's scenic areas, the opportunities are nearly endless. Brainerd is home to trails that wind through forests, wrap around lakes, and allow residents and visitors to simply enjoy the natural environment. Listed below are the two major trails that cut through Brainerd:

Mississippi River Trail

This 3,000-mile-long trail runs from Itasca State Park, where the Mississippi River begins, and runs alongside the river all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. The trail relies mainly on road shoulders and low-traffic roads but also utilizes state and regional trails.

Paul Bunyan State Trail

Stretching from Brainerd to Bemidji, this 119-mile rail-trail is one of the longest rail-trails in the country. Passing through forests, riding along lakes and rivers, and riding through meadows make this trail one of the most popular in the entire state. The trail can be accessed from the southern endpoint in Crow Wing State Park for those looking to get on the trail in Brainerd.

Along with the two major trails that come through Brainerd, there is also a local trail network that includes the Buffalo Hills Trail and Cuyuna Lakes Trail.

Buffalo Hills Trail

A city trail in Brainerd with connections to MRT, Cuyuna State Trail (segment), and Paul Bunyan State Trail. From East River Road and Kiwanis Park to Buffalo Hills Park, then along former spur line past Bane Park to Oak Street. Bicycle/walking trail with a small share of the road segment.

Cuyuna Lakes State Trail

A local trail segment, the Cuyuna Lakes Trail connects bicycles from the Paul Bunyan Trail through the city and along the river. This local trail segment seeks to expand its mileage and become the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail and the corridor planning is underway. The official Cuyuna Lakes State Trail is eight miles of paved trail within the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area from Crosby to Riverton. One mile passes through the City of Aitkin along State Highway 169. Abandoned by mining companies more than 35 years ago, the state recreation area contains six natural lakes, plus an additional fifteen deep lakes that were former mine pits.

EXISTING PARK NETWORK

The City of Brainerd has an abundance of parks and trail facilities within the community. The city's park department has promoted the growth and maintenance of the community's parks through a variety of on-site activities. In addition, the entire region provides numerous recreational activities that benefit the city and the region as a whole. Park linkages should be considered wherever development and/or projects are discussed to increase connectivity.

The following is a list of parks within the city limits, totaling 408 acres. The inventory below does not include recreational facilities on school grounds or recreation/amusement businesses such as go-carts or miniature golf.

PARK AND TRAIL CLASSIFICATION

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA), in partnership, have developed park and trail system standards to serve as guidelines for communities as they develop their park and trail systems. The following outlines park classifications based on the Level of Service

(LOS). For the purpose of this plan, the following classifications will serve only as general guidelines and a tool to plan for future park needs.

The categories of this hierarchy include mini parks, neighborhood parks, and community parks. Park service adequacy is evaluated in three ways:

- **Facilities by classification:** Parks are classified into different categories to determine the levels and areas they serve.
- **Facilities by Geographic Distribution:** The service radius of each facility is analyzed to identify geographical gaps in service.
- **Facilities in Relation to Population Service Standards:** National standards for the provision of park and recreation facilities are applied to the present system.

Mini-park

The smallest park classification used to address unique recreational needs (i.e., pocket park) is the mini-park. The location criterion is less than a quarter mile distance in a residential setting. The size criterion is 2,500 square feet to one acre.

- Triangle.

Neighborhood Park

This park system serves as the neighborhood's recreational and social hub. The neighborhood park provides both active and passive recreational opportunities for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The location criterion is a quarter-mile to a half-mile mile in the service area needs. The typical size is 5 to 10 acres.

- Wayne Hitch, Bane, O'Brien, Gustafson.

Community Park

This park classification is larger in size and serves a broader focus. Typically, a neighborhood park provides recreational opportunities to residents living a quarter- to a half-mile from the facility. This classification provides both active and passive recreation opportunities. The location criteria should serve two or more neighborhoods with a half-mile to three-mile service radius. The recommended size is between 30 and 50 acres (size may be determined as needed to accommodate desired uses).

- Buffalo Hills/Lions Park, Gregory, Jaycees, Kiwanis, Memorial, Rotary Riverside, Lum.

Special Use Park

This classification covers a broad range of parks and recreational facilities oriented toward a single purpose, such as social, cultural, or historical. Examples include arboretums, public gardens, or performing arts facilities.

- Lyman P White Park

Greenways

Greenways link park networks to create a cohesive system that emphasizes the natural environment. The location of these networks is primarily determined by land availability. Typical greenways are linear in nature and follow natural corridors.

- No classifications at this time; identifies the ability for future development.

Open Space

This classification is broadly defined and can include woodlands, wetlands, floodplains, sloughs, open fields, etc.

Name	Size (acres)	Address	Features
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Bane Park	11	1717 S. 7 th St	Baseball/Softball diamonds (3), concessions, grills, hockey rink, picnic tables, playground, restrooms, skating rink, warming house
Buffalo Hills/Lions Park	19	101 Buffalo Hills Ln	Baseball/Softball diamonds (2), grills, pavilion, picnic tables, playground, restrooms
Gregory Park	11	424 N 4 th St	Basketball court, fountain, gazebo, historic bandstand, pickleball courts (2), tennis courts (5), playground (2), restrooms, skating rink, warming house.
Gustafson Park	1.5	9 th Ave NE & N St	Grass Ballfields (4)
Hitch Wayn Park	2	1201 S 7 th St	Undeveloped
Jaycees Park	14	1600 Rosewood St.	Baseball/Softball diamonds (2), Concessions, grills, pavilion, playground, restrooms
Lum Park	38	1619 Washington St NE	Beach, Boat landing, Disc golf, fishing, grills, pavilion, picnic tables, playground, restrooms, RV Campsites, Sand volleyball court
Triangle Park	<0.5	723 Fir St	Playground
O'Brien Park	4	2424 Pine St	Open space park
Trailside Park	112	Beaver Dam Rd	Parking, Paved trail, undeveloped, the largest city-owned park
Kiwanis Park	37	1101 E. River Rd	Canoe launch, fishing, (Boom Lake and Mississippi River), Gazebo, paved trail, pavilions (2), playground, restrooms, soccer field
Memorial Park	28	1700 Mill Ave	Baseball/Softball diamonds, Concessions, playground, restrooms, soccer field
Rotary Riverside Park	145	E. River Rd	Overlooks, Nature trails, natural-passive spaces.
Lyman P White Park	3	484 East River Road	Amphitheater, Canoe Launch, Pavilion, Playground, Restrooms

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Most see Brainerd as an aging city, but with a median age of 33 years old, that seems to be misconstrued. With the median age so young, this further supports the need for more parks and recreation opportunities.

The National Recreation and Park Association recommends a ratio of ten acres per 1,000 for cities in Brainerd's population range. The City of Brainerd excels with a high parkland ratio of 30.15 acres per 1,000 residents, which can also be described as 405 park acres for the city's current 13,428 residents. It is vital to serve all residents and neighborhoods with park and recreational facilities. As additional areas are identified for redevelopment, it is crucial to identify new areas that need to be served by park and recreational facilities.

The Community Survey Panel was an electronic survey taken by three hundred people (187 residents, 113 nonresidents) with questions surrounding Brainerd. Above are the results of the question, "What are three things that you like most about living in Brainerd?" By far the most popular answer was parks/lakes, which indicates what both residents and nonresidents are looking for when they come to Brainerd.

The community survey asked residents to indicate their opinions regarding the park and trail network. Responses indicated the existing networks serve the residents well but offered areas of improvement and possible additions.

Residents value their location near area lakes, trail networks, and natural features. Survey respondents see access to these amenities as one of the most important aspects of their community. Residents also see recreational

opportunities as Brainerd's greatest asset. Survey respondents also expressed that people are more attracted to the Brainerd Lakes Area rather than Brainerd itself, which was the backbone of responses, indicating that more trails need to connect to surrounding cities in order to get more people to visit Brainerd. Besides connecting trails to other cities, it was also indicated that there needs to be a connection of trails between the parks throughout the city for easy access and improved safety.

Trail Town Model of Economic Development

Communities are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that drive people to their communities, bringing dollars to the places they serve. In addition to preserving critical open space and providing important transportation options, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far. These visitors help facilitate job growth in tourism-related opportunities such as restaurants, local stores, and lodging. Brainerd can leverage the "trail town" model of economic development, which places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for small-town revitalization.

Through careful planning and partnership, communities are realizing the full potential of linking trails and businesses. In addition to promoting small-town revitalization, trails are increasingly being used to revitalize underutilized corridors in more urban communities. Trails are helping build strong, healthy communities, increasing property values for area residents and improving economic opportunities for local businesses.

9 Facilities & Infrastructure

OVERVIEW

Reliable, clean running water, a dependable sanitary sewer system, and safe, reliable electricity are usually not the first things residents think about when asked what they like about their city. However, these functions are the foundation of any successful city, and without them, the development of a city would stall. The fact that we often take these services for granted is a testament to how well the services are provided. For example, we rarely consider the complex process involved in delivering these services to our fingertips unless there is a problem.

This chapter focuses on municipally owned facilities and infrastructure. However, certain services and infrastructure are provided by the private sector, and this chapter will identify those services, such as natural gas, propane, and fiber-optic broadband internet.

This chapter will identify and describe many municipal facilities and infrastructures. It will discuss existing plans and commissions as well as identify the areas of greatest concern based on public input gathered through the community engagement plan. Finally, this chapter will outline the facilities and infrastructure goals.

Because transportation-related infrastructure is covered under the transportation chapter, roads, bridges, sidewalks, and trails are not

dealt with in this chapter.

Existing Municipally Owned Facilities and Infrastructure Structures

- City Hall (Laurel Street)
- Brainerd Public Utilities Administration Building (Highland Scenic)
- Wastewater treatment facility (Highland Scenic)
- Water treatment plant (Emma Street)
- City substations
- Mississippi Hydro-Electric River dam
- Police Department Building (East River Road)
- Fire Department Building #1 (East River Road)
- Fire Department Building #2 (Mill Avenue)
- City garages
- Streets Maintenance Facility (Thiesse Drive)
- Parks Maintenance Facility (Lum Park)
- Parks: Bane, Buffalo Hills, Jaycee, Kiwanis, Lum, Memorial, Rotary, and Gregory

Existing Infrastructure

- City water network: Water towers, pumps, pipes, hardware
- City sewer/wastewater network: Pipes, culverts, drains, hardware
- City electrical grid hardware: Light poles, power poles, cables, wires, conduits, circuits

Existing Critical Private Infrastructure

- Fuel: Natural gas, Excel Energy, CenterPoint Energy
- Propane: Several local providers

- Oil: Several local providers
- Broadband: Charter Communications,

Consolidated Telecommunications Company (CTC), CenturyLink

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Maintain existing public infrastructure that is resilient to climate impacts and adaptive to change.

Policies:

1. Coordinate infrastructure replacement projects with other road and infrastructure improvement projects.
2. Encourage the use of stormwater best management practices to manage runoff and improve local and regional water quality.
3. Promote education and incentive programs to protect water quantity and quality.
4. Increase connectivity to adequate and affordable broadband and other infrastructure development throughout the community
5. Preserve, enhance, and integrate greenscapes into the built environment.

GOAL 2: Enhance and extend public infrastructure to areas most suitable for new development that minimize costs and environmental impacts.

Policies:

1. Invest in public utility and facility improvements that will spur and support revitalization or redevelopment.
2. Ensure adequate water/power supply to meet the long-term needs of the community.
3. Steer city development to energy and resource conservation by promoting renewable energy sources, protecting our water supply, and leveraging the hydroelectric dam.
4. Build, secure, and maintain efficient public facilities that enhance the character and priorities of Brainerd and its neighborhoods.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Just like in other sections of this plan, the facilities and infrastructure goals were based on and in alignment with feedback gathered through the planning processes community engagement plan. The community engagement plans included surveys, interviews, neighborhood ward meetings, several focus groups, and a community visioning session, and therefore reflect the opinions of members of the public. A summary of the findings from the community engagement plan regarding facilities and infrastructure is below:

Increase connectivity to adequate and affordable broadband and other infrastructure development throughout the community by:

- Coordinating with public and private utility companies when major road reconstruction projects are being planned to update/ install infrastructure.

Support façade improvements while keeping the historic look of the infrastructure.

- Consider a historic preservation program

Continue to maintain roads

- Continue to maintain, execute, and update the five-year road maintenance plan.
- Continue to seek funding opportunities for road projects through sources such as:
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP)
- Transportation Economic Development (TED)
- Transportation Economic Development

EXISTING PLANS AND COMMISSIONS

2027-2036 City of Brainerd Street and Sewer Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The City of Brainerd's 2027-2036 Street and Sewer Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a ten-year investment guide for the construction and/or improvement of city streets, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers. City staff have prepared the plan to assist the City Council in long-range planning of capital infrastructure upgrades and to give a big-picture perspective on the continuing need to fund a transportation and utility system that serves the constituents of Brainerd and uses their tax dollars in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Wellhead Protection Plan

In 2024, the city adopted its Wellhead Protection Plan (WHPP), which considers the impacts that land and water uses have presented to drinking water quality over time and future changes that need to be addressed to protect the community's drinking water. The WHP includes the following goals:

- Maintain a safe and adequate drinking water supply for community residents.
- Prevent contaminants from reaching levels that present a risk to people's health.
- Create public awareness and general knowledge about the importance of WHP for maintaining an adequate and safe drinking water supply.
- Continue collecting data and confirming its accuracy to improve future Drinking Water Supply Management Area delineations, wellhead protection planning, and PCSI reviews.

The City of Brainerd's Wellhead Protection Plan Amendment provides a comprehensive strategy to safeguard the municipal water supply for the

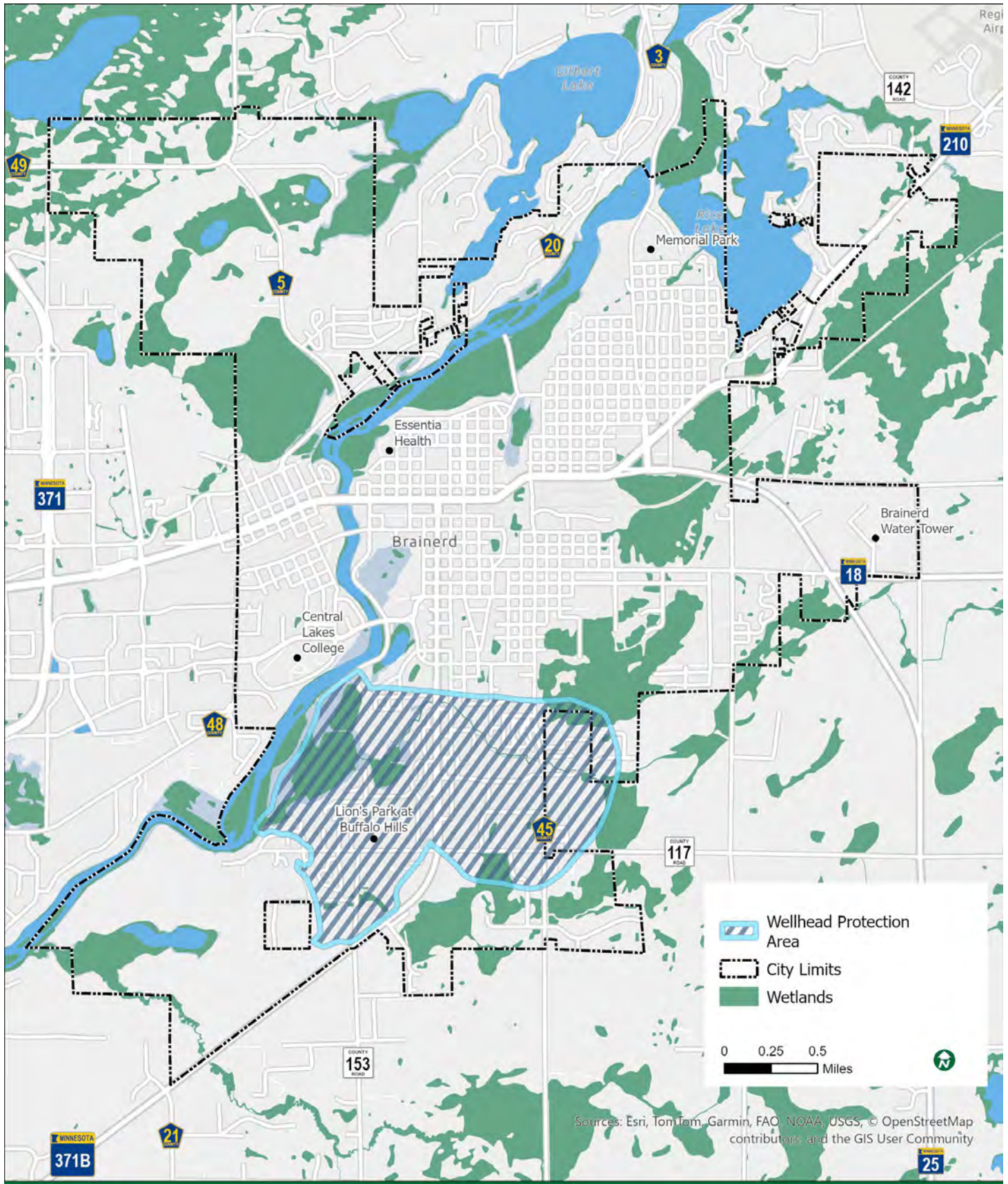
next decade. The plan identifies the city's six primary wells as vulnerable due to their location in a sand and gravel aquifer and outlines a multi-faceted approach to managing potential contaminant sources within the Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA). Key actions include ongoing data collection and monitoring, targeted management of contaminant sources such as unsealed wells and hazardous sites, infrastructure evaluation, and public education initiatives. The plan emphasizes collaboration with local, county, and state agencies, integration of wellhead protection into land use and zoning policies, and regular evaluation of progress. By prioritizing both preventative and responsive measures, the plan aims to maintain a safe, reliable drinking water supply, support community growth, and foster public awareness of water resource protection.

The WHP consists of two parts. Part 1 WHPP, the confirmation of the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA), the Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA), vulnerability of the wells, and vulnerability status of the aquifer in which the city's wells are located was completed and approved by the MDH.

Part 2 WHPP speaks to MN Rules sections 4720.5220 through 4720.5290 and addresses:

- Data elements and their assessments;
- Impacts of changes on the public water supply well;
- Issues, problems and opportunities, including potential contaminant sources;
- Wellhead protection goals, objectives and action plans;
- Program evaluation; and
- Alternative water supply/contingency strategy.

The map on the following page shows the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA), the Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA), and the vulnerability of the water supply to contamination. **UPDATE MAP**



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Wellhead Protection Area

September 2026

Map Document: H:\BRND\26X142168000\GIS\Proj\Brainerd_Comp_Plan_Maps_2026_09_09.aprx

Draft for 9/16/26 Planning Commission Workshop

Public Utilities Commission

The Public Utilities Commission controls, operates, and manages public utilities that are now or may hereafter be owned and operated within the city.

Cable TV Advisory Committee

This committee is charged with monitoring the performance of the cable TV franchise in carrying out compliance with financial and technical provisions. The group advises and makes recommendations to the City Council regarding the present and future use of the cable communications system within the city. It promotes the use of the public educational and governmental access channels by increasing the public awareness of their availability and potential, and by stimulating and promoting public interest and participation. It takes appropriate action to ensure nondiscriminatory access to the public, educational, and governmental access channels.

Parks & Recreation Board

The Parks and Recreation Board has control and supervision of all parks and parkways within the City of Brainerd. It establishes the recreation policy and conducts and supervises recreation areas, facilities, services, and programs for all types of public recreation.

Brainerd Public Library Board

The purpose of this board is to represent the interests of the people of the City of Brainerd in providing library services. This board is also responsible for the maintenance of library property and grounds.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

A new generation of practices has emerged to effectively manage stormwater while simultaneously adding to the community's sense of place, building vibrant and attractive communities. Green infrastructure comes in a multitude of forms, such as bioswales,

rainwater-harvesting barrels, rain gardens, permeable pavement, conservation areas, and many others.

Green infrastructure is a resilient approach to managing wet weather impacts, designed to reduce and treat stormwater at its source while delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Unlike a single-purpose gray stormwater infrastructure network – conventional piped drainage and water treatment systems – green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other elements to restore the natural process needed to manage the water.

Rain gardens

Rain gardens are versatile features that can be installed in almost any unpaved space. Also known as bioretention, or bio-infiltration, cells are shallow, vegetated basins that collect and absorb runoff from rooftops, sidewalks, and streets. This practice mimics natural hydrology by infiltrating, evaporating, and transpiring—or “evapotranspiring”—stormwater runoff.

Bioswales

Bioswales are vegetated, mulched or vegetated channels that provide treatment and retention as they move stormwater from one place to another. Vegetated swales slow, infiltrate, and filter stormwater flows. As linear features, they are particularly well-suited to being placed along streets and parking lots.

SEWER

Future land development patterns must closely align with a cost-effective wastewater service strategy. When it comes time for future development, the city should be certain in identifying locations for lift stations, sanitary sewer interceptors, and force mains to support an economically and environmentally sustainable development pattern. It is vital that the city ensure that these costs are equitably

distributed and services are provided in a planned, phased approach that encourages development.

Wastewater System

The city operates and maintains approximately seventy-six miles of sanitary sewer. All pipes range in size from six inches to twenty-seven inches. The average age of the city's sewer system is about 50 years. The oldest sewer in the system was built in 1904, and the newest in 2026.

Wastewater Treatment Facility

The Brainerd wastewater treatment plant has been in operation since 1982 and received a major upgrade in 2009. The facility continues to serve the community well and has adequate capacity today, but many parts of the system are aging and will require improvements to meet future nutrient limits and to ensure wastewater treatment meets all permit requirements.

Wastewater reaches the plant through lift stations and sewer pipes from Brainerd and Baxter. It first passes through preliminary treatment, where debris, grit, and other materials that could damage equipment are removed. These systems have reached the end of their useful life, and it is recommended to replace the equipment to ensure efficient treatment is maintained. This includes replacement of screening equipment, grit separation equipment, pumps, electrical components, and HVAC components.

The water then moves into large treatment tanks, where naturally occurring bacteria break down pollutants. This process is working well, and the tanks themselves remain in good condition. In winter, however, colder temperatures impact biological performance for the nitrification of ammonia to nitrate. Ammonia is toxic to aquatic species and is an important nutrient to manage at wastewater facilities. Effective management of biological

activity is critical to ensure all permit limits are met, and the wastewater is adequately treated. In addition to nitrification for ammonia removal and reduction, phosphorus is another important nutrient wastewater plants manage to reduce loadings to surface waters. Phosphorus is managed through biological components and aided with chemical addition to precipitate phosphorus that is removed as a solid. Maintaining the biology during winter months helps to ensure all NPDES permit limits are met which will protect downstream waters from pollution.

After treatment, the water is disinfected with ultraviolet (UV) light before being discharged to the Mississippi River. The current wastewater system is meeting current NPDES permit limits, but the facility is not positioned to meet future more stringent limits for nitrogen reduction, phosphorus, and PFAS.

Solids produced in the liquid treatment stages are pumped to holding tanks where they are then thickened, digested, and stored for disposal. The solids treatment system at the wastewater facility has limited storage capacity and often runs into insufficient storage volumes for the solids produced at the facility. The facility currently applies all solids produced once they meet the criteria in the State of Minnesota for land application. If the solids do not meet the criteria or the land application sites are not suitable for applying solids, then the solids must be stored. BPU is currently faced with this challenge yearly. Therefore, biosolids improvements are recommended to replace the current system with a new dewatering system and to set the facility up for future biosolids drying to reduce the total volume of solids disposed.

Overall, the facility is well maintained and continues to meet current permit limits, but aging equipment, limited winter performance challenges, insufficient biosolids processing and storage capacity, and limited flexibility will need to be addressed moving forward.

Wastewater Treatment Facility Plan – Brainerd Public Utilities

Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU) provides wastewater treatment services to the communities of Brainerd and Baxter through a Class A facility located in the City of Baxter. The WWTP provides treatment to residential, commercial, and industrial customers. The plant was originally constructed in 1982 and then underwent extensive improvements in 2009. No other major improvements have occurred at the facility, aside from regular maintenance. The WWTP requires biosolids improvements to effectively manage current and anticipated biosolids loading. The existing system is operating at capacity and needs upgrades.

The WWTP can be improved in each step of treatment. First, the pretreatment equipment is in poor condition and should be replaced. The bar screens, screening compactor, grit pump, and grit classifier all need to be replaced. The pretreatment building is in good shape, but the lights and HVAC systems should be replaced. The total project cost to implement preliminary treatment improvements is approximately \$7,350,000.

Secondary treatment is where pollutants are biologically treated and removed. There are several options for secondary treatment technology. For Brainerd, alternative approaches to improve secondary treatment include upgrading the existing sequencing batch reactor (SBR) facility, converting it to a membrane bioreactor (MBR) facility, or implementing an extended aeration activated sludge process with biological nutrient removal (BNR). Since the facility is currently meeting NPDES permit limits, it is recommended to maintain operation of the SBR's until more stringent nutrient limits are imposed at the facility. When MPCA issues the compliance schedule to meet more stringent limits, the facility should convert the system to a conventional activated sludge BNR facility. The current SBR's are not equipped to remove

nitrogen and phosphorus at lower permit limits. This phased approach will help Brainerd budget and build a rate structure to fund the capital improvements and O&M for operating a new biological treatment system when those new limits are imposed.

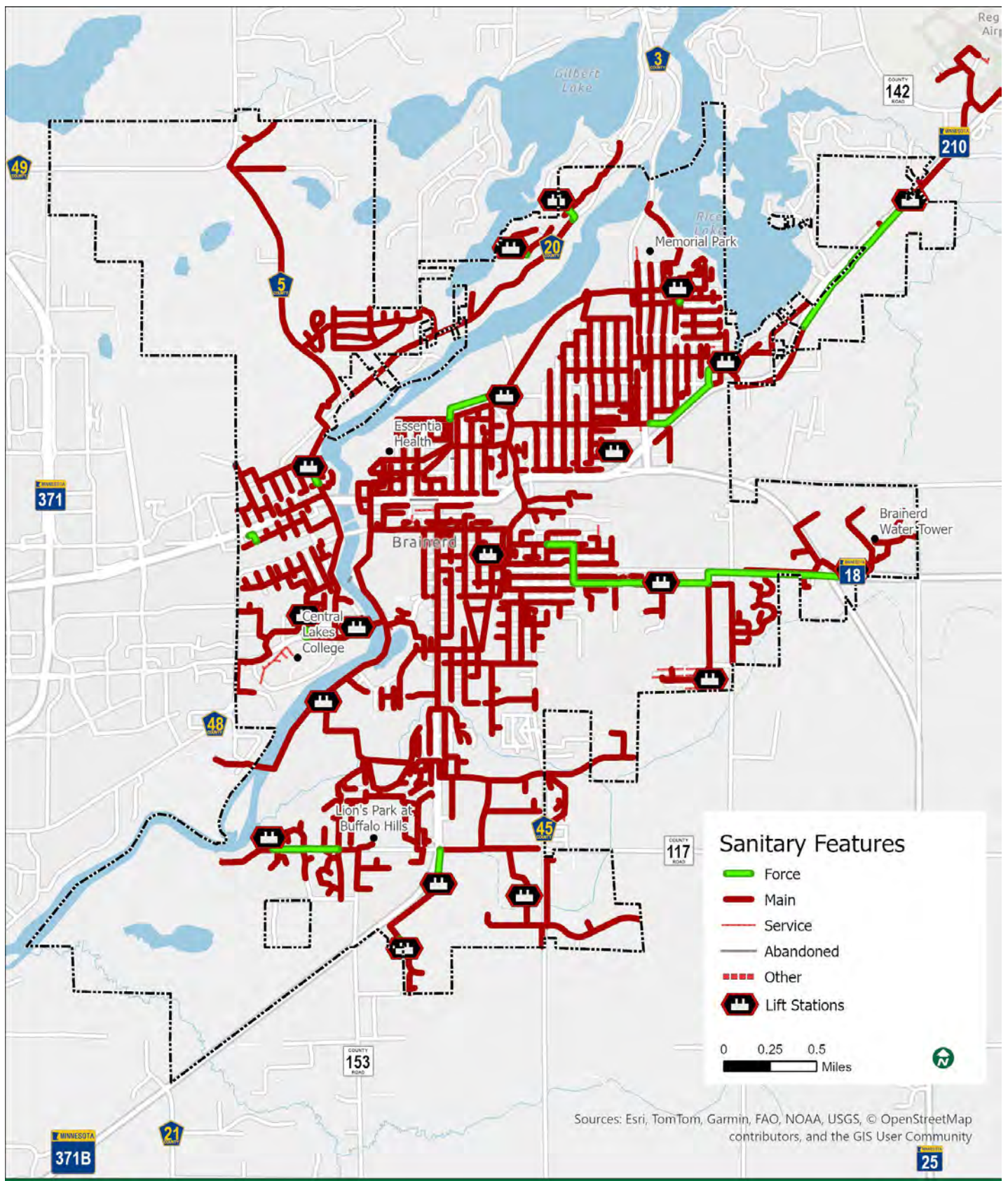
In addition to conversion from SBR's to activated sludge BNR processes, it is recommended to add tertiary filtration. It is likely that when more stringent limits are added filtration will be required. The facility plan evaluated available options, including disc filtration, ultrafiltration membranes, upflow sand filtration, and gravity sand filtration. It is recommended to add disk filters as tertiary treatment once new limits are imposed and the facility undergoes a large liquid phase improvement project as a phase 2 project.

Solids produced at the facility are treated with anaerobic digestion, thickening, and storage before land application. This process has significant limitations and inefficiencies and will not meet the demands of future solids production. It is recommended to perform biosolids improvements as a Phase 1 project and decommission the digestion process and convert the biosolids to dewatering and cake storage. With permit modifications this would allow the facility to either land apply the solids or landfill the solids. Improving the biosolids processing will set the facility up for future solids production and future drying. Drying would be a phase 4 project as needed when the facility needs to reduce the total volume of solids stored and disposed.

Overall facility improvements include implementing a water reuse system, estimated at approximately \$425,000. In addition, many of the building roofs are at or near the end of their useful life. Replacing these will cost \$2,400,000. Electrical system improvements are also recommended, including the replacement of two plant generators and various SCADA

components, which will cost \$6,550,000. An upgrade to the UV disinfection system's programmable logic controllers (PLCs) is also recommended to prevent system obsolescence, at an estimated cost of \$140,000.

A phased approach is recommended to implement these improvements. Phase 1 should include installing the dewatering system and replacing the pretreatment equipment that has exceeded its useful life. The phase 1 project has a cost estimate of approximately \$45 million while the phase 2 liquids treatment project has a capital cost opinion of more than \$80 million.



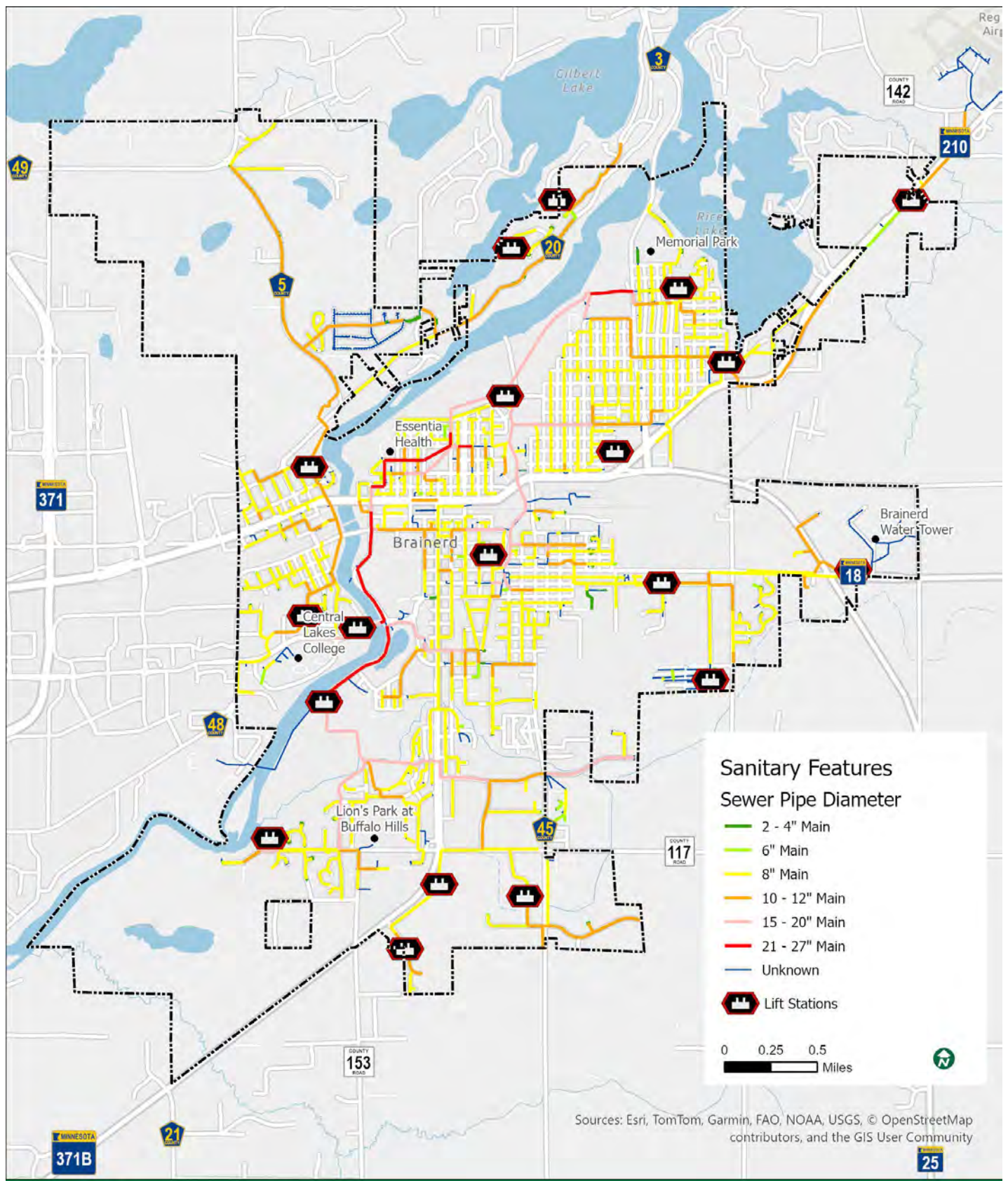
Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Sanitary Sewer

July 2026

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Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Sanitary Sewer

July 2026

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WATER

Providing a safe, adequate water supply system is vital to community growth and sustainability. Protecting and distributing drinking water that meets acceptable standards is an essential function of the city.

Additionally, water pressures need to be maintained for convenience and health, to meet the varying demands of local residents, and to support fire protection.

Protection: Groundwater is the source of drinking water in the city. Along with surface water like streams, rivers, and lakes, this is known as *source water*. Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU) treats water for consumption. Protecting source water from contamination can reduce treatment costs. Protecting source water also reduces the risk of public health exposure to contaminated water. The city can seek to develop zoning requirements to ensure adequate buffers are in place for certain commercial and industrial uses. The city can also protect source water areas by implementing land-use controls, such as acquisition and conservation easements.

Drinking water for the City of Brainerd is supplied by six groundwater wells and is distributed to the customers by Brainerd Public Utilities (BPU). The wells are located close to the water treatment facility, enabling centralized treatment and efficient integration with the distribution system. The wells are numbered from No. 3 to No. 8, with No. 3 the oldest, installed in 1938, and No. 8 the newest, installed in 1983. The wells range in capacity from 900 gallons per minute (gpm) to 2,300 gpm. With varying depths from 120 ft to 190 ft.

The water filtration plant treats approximately 1.35 million gallons of water per day. The treatment train consists of a multi-stage process including oxidation using pyrolusite media, followed by intermediate filtration

through coke filters, and final polishing with tertiary gravity sand filters. Portions of the water treatment system have been in service since 1918; iron and manganese removal have been incorporated into the treatment process since 1932 and are removed with 95% efficiency. In addition to physical treatment, chemical addition includes fluoride for regulatory compliance and caustic soda (NaOH) for pH adjustment and corrosion control. In August 2023, the plant began full-time chlorination of the water and closed the taps with non-fluoridated water due to safety concerns.

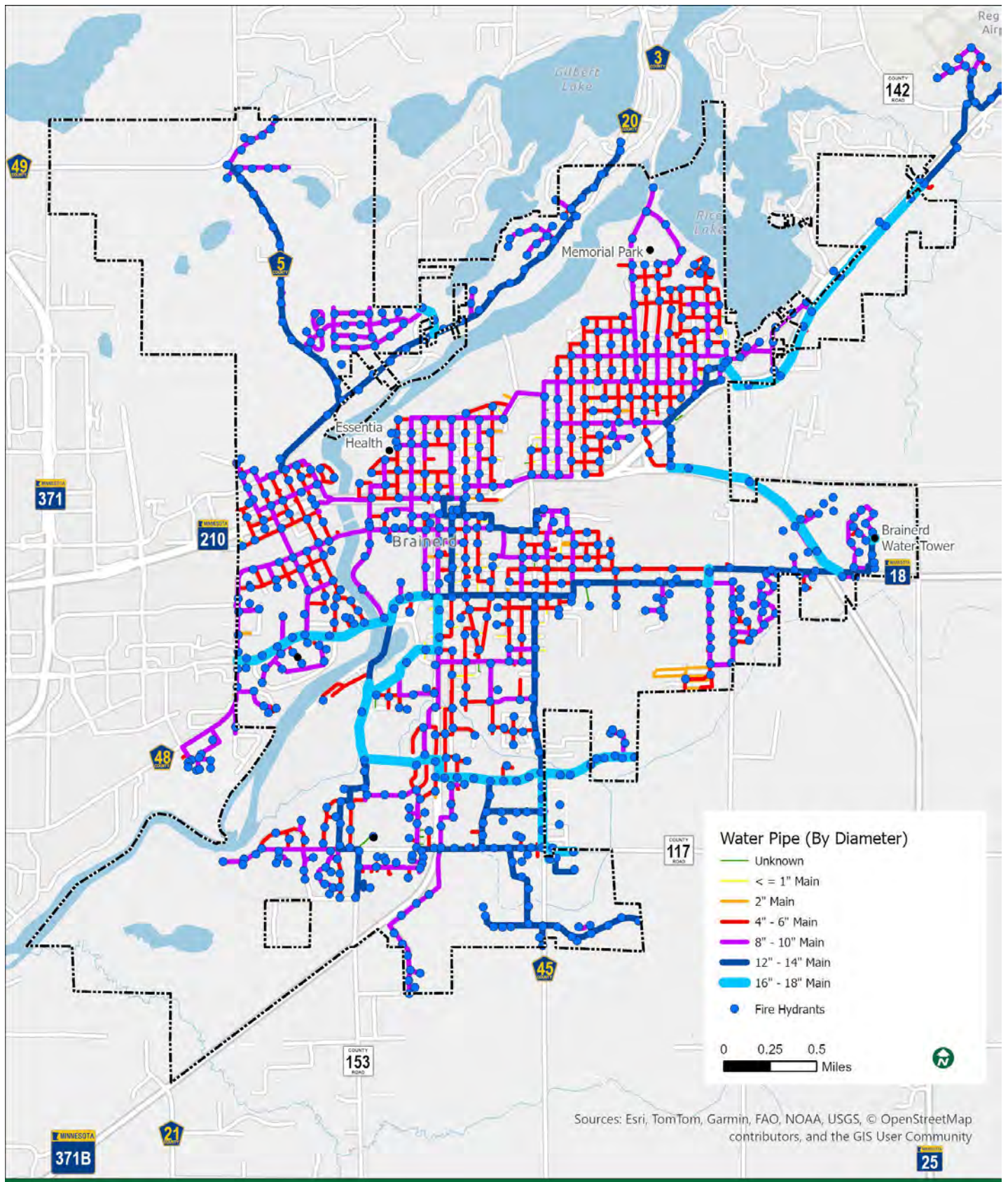
After treatment, water is pumped to the distribution system via high service pumps and stored in three active elevated water storage towers, which provide system pressure, operational flexibility, and fire protection capacity.

The water system needs several improvements due to inadequate capacity for peak demands, aging infrastructure, obsolete equipment, inefficient operations, PFAS risks, and water quality concerns.

As the city of Brainerd continues to grow, they need to expand its water supply capacity to ensure stable and well-balanced water is available to residents. This can be done by adding well No. 9, bringing the town's total to seven wells. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has also recommended that BPU site the new well at a different location than the existing well field. This would allow the town to continue pumping water even if contamination is detected at the current well site. Ideally, the site would be on City-owned land and in close proximity to the treatment facility.

Due to age and condition of existing infrastructure, BPU requires the development and construction of a new WTP. Structural elements such as masonry walls, roof systems,

and concrete tanks exhibit signs of aging, including cracking, spalling, and corrosion of embedded steel. Several of the roof systems are beyond useful life and need to be replaced. From an architectural standpoint, there are numerous code-compliance and life-safety deficiencies, including noncompliant staircases, trip hazards, inadequate exits, and outdated door and window systems. The cost of rehabilitation would exceed that of constructing a new WTP, since most of the equipment is past its useful life. It is recommended that BPU select a new site that remains near the existing well fields and is on city-owned land to reduce acquisition costs.



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Water Distribution

July 2026

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STORMWATER

The framework that seeks to guide future development patterns can only be actually achieved when issues surrounding stormwater management and environmental protection are a core focus in the planning process. A typical stormwater system consists of a network of pipes, catch basins, retention ponds, and ditches. Wetlands and other natural and environmental systems play a vital role in effective stormwater management.

Almost all stormwater from the city drains into the Mississippi River, either directly or through local lakes, reservoirs, streams, and ditches. A few small, landlocked basins are located in the southwestern portion of the city. The entire drainage area of the city is located within the DNR minor watershed "Mississippi River – Brainerd." Roughly 55 percent of the river drains directly into the Mississippi River. Buffalo Creek receives nearly 25 percent of the city's stormwater, while the remainder generally drains to Rice Lake.

The city operates under an MS4 Permit administered through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). This permit requires the city to implement programs that reduce stormwater pollution, educate the public, and protect local water resources. Supporting documents include the City's MS4 Permit, annual reporting, and Stormwater Engineering Manual.

The city has adopted a Public Education and Outreach Plan that provides residents, businesses, and contractors with information on pollution prevention and stormwater best management practices. Educational materials address topics such as:

- Erosion and sediment control
- Hazardous waste management
- Illicit discharge prevention
- Pet waste management
- Lawn care and landscaping practices

The City maintains a Public Participation and Involvement Plan that encourages community engagement in stormwater management and provides opportunities for public feedback on stormwater policies and programs.

The city has adopted an Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Program (IDDE) and Spill Response Plan to identify, investigate, and eliminate illegal discharges to the storm sewer system. The city also provides procedures for residents to report illicit discharges and illegal dumping.

The City implements a Construction Site Erosion and Sediment Control Plan that establishes requirements and inspection procedures for construction activities to minimize sediment and pollutant runoff.

The city requires Stormwater Management Plans for development projects and uses its Stormwater Engineering Manual and stormwater management requirements to ensure long-term treatment and management of runoff after construction is complete.

The city has a Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping Plan that guides municipal operations and maintenance activities to reduce stormwater pollution originating from City facilities and activities.

An Enforcement Response Plan establishes how the City enforces stormwater ordinances, permit requirements, and compliance obligations associated with the MS4 program.

The City's stormwater program is supported by several adopted ordinances, including:

- Erosion Control
- Storm Sewer Utility
- Storm Water Management
- Storm Water and Urban Runoff Pollution Control

Stormwater activities are funded through the

City's Storm Water Utility, established under City Code 715.

In summary, Brainerd has adopted the six minimum control measure programs required by its MS4 permit: public education, public participation, illicit discharge detection and elimination, construction runoff control, post-construction stormwater management, and pollution prevention/good housekeeping. These programs are implemented through formal plans, standard operating procedures, ordinances, and enforcement mechanisms funded by the City's Storm Water Utility.

The City's approach to future storm sewer replacement, rehabilitation, and upgrades is tied to its broader capital improvement planning process. Rather than pursuing standalone stormwater projects, the city integrates storm sewer improvements into roadway reconstruction projects. This allows infrastructure below the surface to be addressed concurrently with pavement, curb, and utility work above it. This coordinated approach minimizes disruption to residents and businesses, reduces overall project costs by avoiding redundant excavation and restoration, and ensures that aging or undersized storm sewer segments are identified and corrected as part of a comprehensive rebuild rather than through piecemeal repairs.

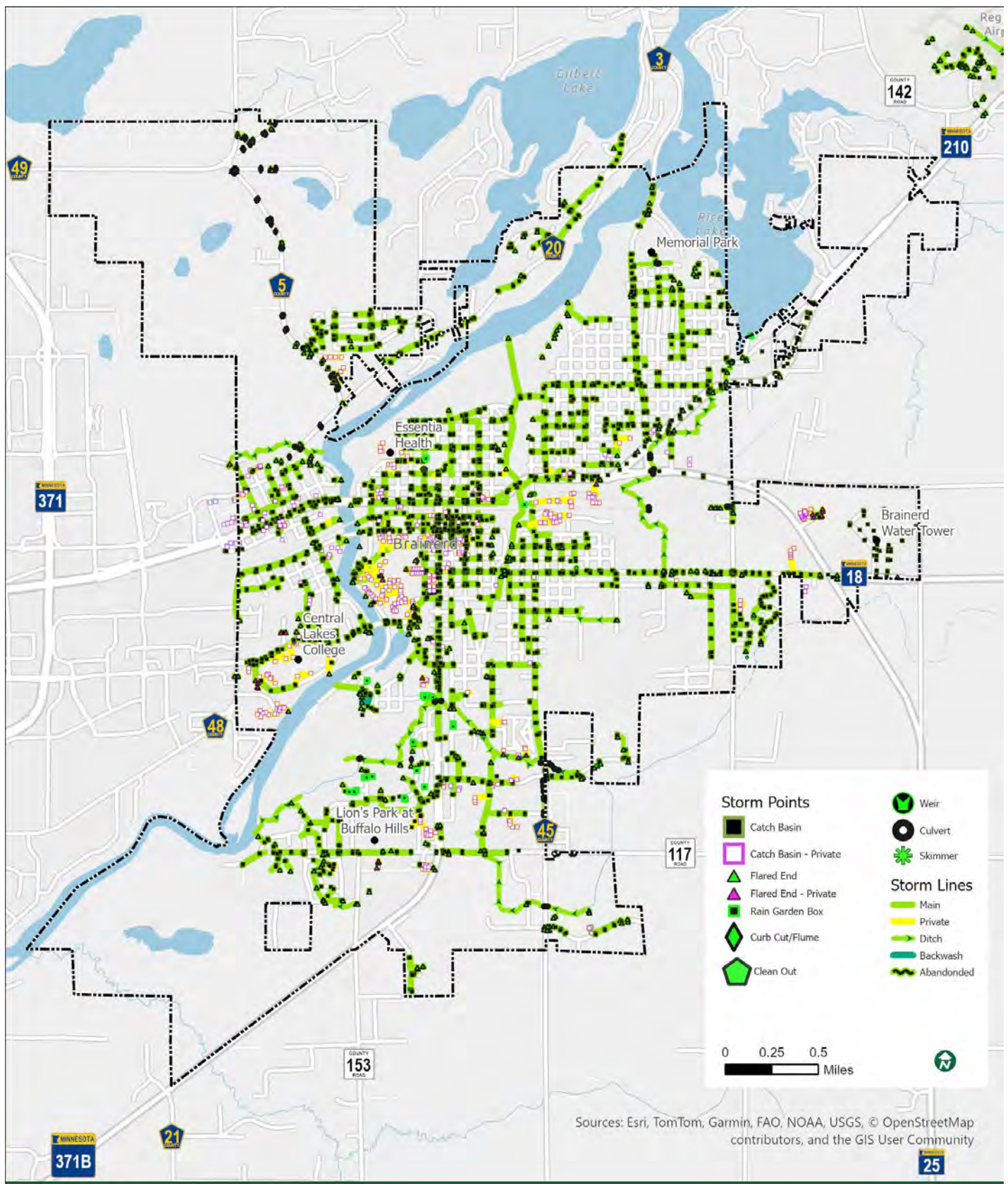
As roadway projects are prioritized in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), City staff will evaluate the condition, capacity, and performance of underlying storm sewer infrastructure to determine whether replacement or rehabilitation is warranted, and to identify opportunities to right-size pipes, update inlet spacing, or address known drainage deficiencies within the project area. The City utilizes its Hydrology and Hydraulic (H&H) model to analyze existing system capacity, simulate storm events, and identify areas prone to localized flooding or surcharging. This modeling tool allows the city to make data-driven decisions about pipe sizing during

reconstruction projects, ensuring that replaced infrastructure is appropriately sized to convey design storm flows, reduce the frequency and severity of localized flooding, and account for changes in tributary drainage area or land use over time. As the H&H model is updated and refined with new data, it will continue to serve as a key planning tool for prioritizing capital projects and validating right-sizing decisions across the storm sewer network.

Where feasible, the city will look for opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure into reconstruction projects to improve water quality, reduce runoff volumes, and support compliance with the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements. Green infrastructure practices include bioswales, permeable pavement, rain gardens, and other low-impact development techniques. These strategies help the city meet regulatory obligations for stormwater quality as well as provide benefits such as enhanced streetscape aesthetics, reduced urban heat island effects, and improved groundwater recharge.

The City's current storm sewer strategy is focused primarily on the replacement and rehabilitation of aging infrastructure within the existing developed area, rather than proactive expansion of the storm sewer network into undeveloped areas. Extensions of storm sewer infrastructure to serve new areas, along with any associated oversizing to accommodate future development or regional drainage needs, will be driven by private development activity.

As development or redevelopment occurs, the city will coordinate with developers to ensure that storm sewer extensions are appropriately sized to serve the immediate project and anticipated future growth in the surrounding area. Size and location decisions will be informed by the H&H model's projections of downstream system impacts and be guided by the goals and land use projections outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.



Comprehensive Plan

City of Brainerd, MN

Storm Sewer

July 2026

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Draft for 01/10/20 Planning Commission Workshop

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The Brainerd hydroelectric dam controls river flow and regulates flooding and provides hydroelectric power to the city. To advance energy goals, the city purchased the hydroelectric dam on the north end of the city on the Mississippi River after the close of Wausau Paper in 2014 to leverage renewable energy and lower electric rates for residents. It is estimated that the hydroelectric service provides more than one million dollars' worth of electricity, nearly 10 percent of what was previously purchased through a utility provider. In addition to renewable energy, the dam helps foster a healthy natural environment downstream through the control of water levels. Brainerd Public Utilities is currently seeking to relicense the Brainerd dam through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, a process that takes five years to complete.

Renewable energy is energy that is generated from natural sources such as sunlight, wind, geothermal, and water. It is energy that is generated from natural processes that are continually replenished and is constantly renewed. The city can play an active role in renewable energy initiatives through policy and planning efforts. Infrastructure and utilities for energy, transportation, water, and wastewater all have important roles in addressing energy issues.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

One challenge faced by communities across the

nation is the cost of maintaining infrastructure. As communities grow, they also increase the amount of infrastructure they build, pay for, and ultimately must maintain. Oftentimes, communities will pay for and build infrastructure in anticipation of future growth. Both of these scenarios can lead to potential financial risks. As Charles Marohn, author and founder of the Strong Towns blog, succinctly notes:

“For generations, North American communities have been growing—or at least, they've been building. But as we've paved endless roads, raised countless buildings and put more and more infrastructure in the ground, we've given almost no thought to whether future generations will be able to afford to maintain the world we'll leave them with—or how many of the things we build are making our communities worse places to live today.”

—Strong Towns

With this warning in mind, this plan update seeks not only to grow but to thrive today, with the future in mind. This document lays out a long-term vision to do this through a variety of innovative, fiscally and socially responsible, pro-growth goals and policies that seek to address both the multi-faceted challenges and the boundless opportunities that exist for the city of Brainerd, its residents, businesses, and visitors.

10 Public Safety

OVERVIEW

Public safety is perhaps the most important foundational element of a successful community. Public safety enhances the sense of community by establishing a sense of safety and security. Law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services ensure residents and visitors

can live, conduct business, and recreate, and lead peaceful lives, knowing that they, their loved ones, their livelihoods, and their personal property are safe, secure, and protected. Furthermore, all individuals can be assured that they will receive the assistance needed in the event of a crisis or emergency within the city of Brainerd.

GOALS & POLICIES

GOAL 1: Protect and provide for the safety of residents and visitors.

Policies:

1. Make efficient use of existing facilities to ensure equal access to emergency services for all residents and visitors.
2. Strategically plan for and implement maintenance and expansion of emergency service facilities in a fiscally and environmentally responsible manner.
3. Continuously seek to eradicate crime through innovative and contemporary strategies, including preventative, proactive, and responsive measures.
4. Sustain fire protection through a combination of up-to-date facilities and fleet vehicles, technology, out-reach, and community engagement initiatives.

GOAL 2: Evaluate and improve Brainerd's emergency management.

Policies:

1. Seek new or emergent emergency management initiatives or opportunities.
2. Continuously seek education opportunities for emergency personnel and key city staff to ensure emergencies are dealt with expertly when (not if) they happen.

GOAL 3: Continue to seek out and foster partnerships to better prepare the public and city staff for emergencies and natural disasters in the context of a changing climate.

Policies:

1. Seek resources and opportunities to carry out the City's Mitigation Action Chart in the Crow Wing County Hazard Mitigation plan.
2. Seek resources and opportunities available through Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM).
3. Seek resources and opportunities available through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

COMMUNITY INPUT

A community survey completed in conjunction with the updating of the comprehensive plan requested input from residents regarding all aspects of this plan. From those questions, respondents were asked a number of questions about public safety, and a summary of the results follows:

- Need more police and fire personnel
- Larger police presence and drug enforcement
- More community-building activities with the police and fire departments
- A community that feels safe will create a domino effect and attract new residents, businesses, and tourists
- Better sense of safety downtown

Public safety is an essential component of the health and prosperity of Brainerd residents. Survey respondents noted that improved safety and lower crime rates are the most important.

Safety throughout the community engagement process was also common to hear how satisfied residents were with the service. The Community Survey Panel consisted of a series of electronic surveys taken by three hundred people (187 residents, 113 nonresidents) with questions regarding Brainerd. Survey respondents' satisfaction rates for both the police department and fire department were the two highest-scoring services in Brainerd.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Brainerd Fire Department

The Brainerd Fire Department provides fire and rescue services, hazardous materials response, as well as emergency medical services for not only Brainerd residents, but also for the city of Baxter, unorganized territory/first assessment, and the five townships of Crow Wing, Long Lake, Oak Lawn, Nokay Lake, and St. Mathias.

The fire department's leadership structure includes a fire chief, who is responsible for the operations of the department and provides leadership to staff. The department also has a deputy chief/fire marshal, who provides fire code enforcement. In addition, an administrative specialist provides records and office support to the fire department. In addition, two battalion chiefs and five captains are among the ranks of thirty-eight firefighters serving the Brainerd Fire Department. By the numbers, the department covers 260 square miles, responds to an average of 650 calls annually, and serves 35,000 residents. In addition, the firefighters train over 3,700 hours a year and reach 10,000 children and adults annually with public education.

Brainerd Police Department

Brainerd residents and visitors receive law enforcement primarily from the Brainerd Police Department, but also through coordination with the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Department, the Minnesota State Patrol, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), as well as other state and federal law enforcement agencies.

The Brainerd Police Department is a full-service, modern police agency with twenty-three sworn officers, six full-time support staff, and three part-time service staff. They respond to nearly 19,000 incidents per year in a semi-urban city with over 13,000 residents. Brainerd officers patrol nearly 17 square miles and provide transportation security for the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport.

Brainerd officers serve their community in a variety of ways, including patrol, investigations, Bicycle Patrol, Bomb Squad, Community Service Officers (CSO), Crime Prevention Unit, Investigation Division, Police K-9, Drug Unit, Patrol Division, Tactical Team, special assignments, and records management.

Crow Wing County Emergency Management

Crow Wing County Emergency Management coordinates with local, state, and federal agencies to preserve life, property, and the well-being of Crow Wing County citizens from natural, technological, and man-made disasters. By coordinating with Crow Wing County Emergency Management, Brainerd avails itself to additional emergency management resources, such as the Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER)/800MHz, additional fire prevention programs, National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Incident Command System (ICS), and Hazard Mitigation Planning and CWC CWPP.

EXISTING PUBLIC SAFETY PLANS AND COMMISSIONS

Crow Wing County Hazard Mitigation Plan

The purpose of a hazard mitigation plan is to protect the health, safety, and economic interests of residents by reducing the impacts of natural, technological, and human-related hazards through hazard planning, awareness, and implementation. Plans serve as the foundation for hazard mitigation activities within a jurisdiction and provide a path towards continuous, proactive reduction of vulnerability to the most frequent hazards that result in repetitive and often severe social, economic, and physical damage.

Implementation of plan recommendations will help reduce injuries, loss of life, and destruction of property due to hazardous conditions. The ideal end-state is total integration of hazard mitigation activities, programs, capabilities, and actions into normal, day-to-day governmental functions and management practices.

Crow Wing County Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The development of the Crow Wing County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a crucial initiative aimed at safeguarding the county's residents, infrastructure, and natural resources from the threat of wildfires. Located in central Minnesota, Crow Wing County boasts a diverse demographic landscape, comprising both rural and urban areas. With a population that reflects a mix of ages, occupations, and lifestyles, the county's demographics play a significant role in shaping the wildfire protection strategies outlined in the CWPP.

Moreover, the Crow Wing County CWPP recognizes the importance of collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, community organizations, and residents. By fostering partnerships and leveraging resources, the plan aims to enhance wildfire resilience across the county while promoting economically and environmentally sustainable land management practices and fostering a culture of preparedness. Through ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation, the CWPP will help to ensure that wildfire protection efforts remain responsive to the evolving needs and demographics of Crow Wing County, ultimately strengthening the community's ability to mitigate and withstand the impacts of wildfires now and in the future.

Wildland and wildland urban interface fires have become more prevalent, more destructive, and more in need of address in recent years.

Implementation

This chapter will serve as the action plan for prioritizing the goals and policies within each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Once the plan is adopted, a new cycle of continuous work begins. The Comprehensive Plan is intended to guide many of the city's goals and decisions each year.

This section summarizes the recommendations and policies and provides an implementation schedule that city staff, committees, the Planning Commission, and the City Council can use to develop recommended timeframes for executing individual projects and initiatives. This section of the plan is intended to provide the city with a tool to bridge the gap between planning and implementation. This chapter can help guide an annual work plan, separate from the Comprehensive Plan, to align the city's planning and investment priorities.

OFFICIAL CONTROLS

Official controls help the city achieve its vision and implement this comprehensive plan by providing standards for land development and outlining processes and procedures. The city will review its land use controls regularly, consider amendments to conform to new or revised state and federal regulations, and support changes in overarching community goals. City zoning codes regulate land use to promote all citizens' health, safety, order, convenience, and general welfare. They regulate the location, size, use, and height of buildings, the arrangement of buildings on lots, and the population density within the city. City controls regulate land uses and subdivisions through an application and approval process.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

The construction of public improvements and implementation of these plans require funding. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP), grants, and local taxing authority can be used to plan for and fund these improvements.

Capital Improvements Program

The City of Brainerd's 2027-2036 Street and Sewer Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a ten-year investment guide for the construction and/or improvement of city streets, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers. City staff have prepared the plan to assist the City Council in long-range planning of capital infrastructure upgrades and to give a big-picture perspective on the continuing need to fund a transportation and utility system that serves the constituents of Brainerd and uses their tax dollars in the most efficient and cost-effective manner

Grants

Grants are an essential tool for local governments to fund projects that contribute to the community. A government grant is a financial award given by the federal, state, or local government to an eligible grantee. Government grants are not expected to be repaid but are usually allocated for specific needs and may go through a competitive application process.

AMENDING THE PLAN

Amendments will occasionally be necessary to keep the comprehensive plan current. However, as the foundational document guiding development, most amendments should occur through a comprehensive effort to address changes in the community over time.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementing the vision and goals of the comprehensive plan requires an action plan and the coordination and investments of stakeholders. The table below summarizes the goals and specific action steps, organized by chapter, that the city can use in future priority discussions. The Implementation Plan includes:

- Goal: A restatement of the goal
- Policy: Specific action items intended to help meet the goals
- Priority: Indicating whether it is a short-, mid-, or long-term implementation timeline
- Champion: The department or committee within the city that is most responsible for implementing each goal and policy

Natural Resources

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Protect and preserve our waterways, wetlands, and wooded areas, and identify threats to native species within and around the city.	Identify corridors along the Mississippi River and other streams or wetlands that could accommodate low-impact developments, such as trails or greenspaces, in order to preserve these natural resources for future generations.	Short-Term	Community Development; Public Services
	Utilize greenways to connect residents and neighborhoods to open spaces and natural areas.	Short-Term	Public Services, Community Development
	Preserve natural open spaces for habitat and scenic recreational qualities of the city.	Mid-Term	Public Services, Community Development
	Collaborate with all layers of government on the restoration and management of natural resources	Long-Term	Public Services
Increase access to open space.	In concert with surrounding communities and county government, become a world-class destination by connecting trails, the Mississippi River, history, and culture.	Long-Term	Public Services
	Engage in partnerships with local stakeholders and champions that build on the value of the natural resource system.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Develop education and outreach programs that teach residents the importance of preserving our natural resources.	Mid-Term	Public Services
Comply with environmental regulation requirements in all City codes, policies, and practices.	Update and maintain the Shoreland, Floodplain, and Mississippi Headwaters Ordinances.	Short-Term	Community Development
	Update and maintain the policies and procedures related to environmental review for new developments, including the Comprehensive Plan.	Short-Term	Community Development

Partners and Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement natural resources strategies.

- Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): Clean Water Fund Grants, Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program, Soil Health Grants, Buffer Law Implementation Grants, Conservation Easement Programs
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Conservation Partners Legacy Grants, Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid, Parks and Trails Legacy Grants, Outdoor Recreation Grants, Wildlife Management Area Grants, Reviews Shoreland and Floodplain Ordinances, Reviews Land Use Permits

in the Shoreland District

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): Surface Water Assessment Grants, Water Quality Monitoring Grants, Chloride Reduction Grants, Wastewater & Stormwater Grants, Climate Resilience Grants
- Mississippi Headwaters Board: Reviews Mississippi Headwaters Board Regulations for Consistency with MHB Comprehensive Plan
- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Clean Water and Drinking Water Funds, Nonpoint Source Pollution Grants
- National Park Service: Land and Water Conservation Fund
- US Fish & Wildlife Service: Wetland Conservation Grants, Wildlife Restoration Grants, National Wildlife Refuge System Grants
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA): Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wetlands Reserve Program, Water & Waste Disposal Grants, Solid Waste Management Grants

Land Use

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Support mixed-use development that is focused on integration instead of the separation of land uses.	Deploy smart growth principles to achieve economic, environmental, and community aspirations	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
	Develop complete neighborhoods that meet the daily needs of all people within a comfortable walking or bicycling distance.	Short-Term	Community Development; HRA
	Allow a mix of land uses in appropriate locations, leading to lively neighborhoods.	Short-Term	Community Development
Through thoughtful planning, maintain the unique identity of the city and all the appropriate land uses that support it to help existing places thrive.	Ensure appropriate transitions between rural and urban areas through appropriate land use practices.	Short-Term	Community Development
	Maintain the appropriate blend of historical and modern structures (buildings).	Mid-Term	Community Development
Support land use patterns that enhances quality of life.	Endorse a vibrant downtown that supports mixed-use land use, arts, cultural events and investment within our corridors.	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA
	Ensure a wide range of residential land uses are available for the development of housing types for all income levels	Mid-Term	Community Development; HRA
	Preserve and provide equitable access to parks, open spaces, and natural resources (especially the Mississippi River) by maintaining and expanding park land use throughout the city.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Take strides to become a pedestrian-friendly community by encouraging pedestrian-scale development and expanding sidewalks and trails along key corridors.	Short-Term	Public Works; Public Services

Partners and Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement land use strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture: Agricultural Land Preservation Grants
- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT): Local Road Improvement Program, Transportation Alternatives Program, Safe Routes to School Grants, Greater Minnesota Transit Assistance, Winter Maintenance Innovation Grants
- US Department of Housing and Economic Development (HUD): Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

Community Character

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Preserve and repurpose historic assets to maintain the history and small-town feel of Brainerd.	Seek small-scale opportunities to reinforce local history and identity through incentives and programs.	Mid-Term	Community Development; EDA
	Identify historic structures and strongly encourage preservation through the development of incentives and programs.	Long-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
	Transform historic sites, especially those in decline, to serve today's contemporary needs through adaptive reuse.	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
	Support orderly, efficient growth while preserving historic structures and areas	Short-Term	Community Development
Enliven the community through intentional community design.	Provide flexible spaces for programming and events.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Transform downtown as a destination and social hub of the community and the region by enhancing community connections.	Short-Term	Community Development; Public Services
	Work with residents to collectively reinvest and reimagine public spaces that are in the heart of the community.	Short-Term	Community Development; Public Services
	Become a year-round, 24/7 community: a place where you can live, work, play, stay, and learn.	Long-Term	Community Development; Public Services
	Become the hub for cultural events, experiences, public art, and music.	Mid-Term	Public Services
Enhance the city's unique identity where the appropriate blend of historic and modern structures co-exists.	Support façade improvements while keeping the historic look of infrastructure.	Mid-Term	Community Development; EDA
	Collaborate with developers and builders on future development and/or redevelopment proposals to ensure high-quality design.	Short-Term	EDA; Community Development
	Seek small-scale ways to integrate community identity, fused with local history.	Short-Term	Community Development

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement community character strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development: Small Cities Development Program
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails, Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas Programs, Recreation Grant Programs

- Minnesota Historical Preservation Office: Certified Local Government Grants
- Minnesota Historical Society: Historical and Cultural Legacy Grants
- Minnesota State Arts Board Grants
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund Programs
- Rethos: Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants
- USDA Rural Development: Community Facilities Grants
- Five Wings Art Council

Housing

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Provide a diverse mix of housing choices for all stages of life, income ranges, and ownership/rental preferences.	Complement Brainerd's entry-level and affordable housing options by encouraging other move-up and mid- to upper-end, market-rate housing options.	Mid-Term	EDA
	Expand home ownership and rental opportunities through rehabilitation and new construction.	Short-Term	HRA
	Rehabilitate and/or replace substandard housing with units that are decent, safe, healthy, affordable, and of appropriate size to meet the city's current and future housing needs.	Short-Term	HRA
	Ensure an adequate supply of quality and affordable housing units for current and future residents.	Short-Term	EDA; Community Development
Encourage the preservation and historical significance of existing neighborhoods	Identify the historic nature of each neighborhood throughout the city.	Short-Term	Community Development
	Encourage the creation of neighborhood associations.	Short-Term	Community Development; Public Services
	Encourage energy efficiency and sustainability in home renovation and new construction.	Mid-Term	HRA; Public Works; Electric
	Take neighborhood character into account when designing infrastructure improvements and redevelopment/infill development.	Short-Term	Public Works; Community Development
	Develop friendly, safe, and welcoming neighborhoods that encourage interaction through all stages of life.	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA
Ensure quality living conditions for all residents.	Encourage continued and timely enforcement of all maintenance codes, and continue to monitor and inspect all properties.	Short-Term	Community Development
	Promote and facilitate the maintenance of existing housing and rental units to ensure they are in decent, safe, and healthy condition.	Short-Term	HRA; Community Development
	Inventory and monitor properties in foreclosure for proactive rehabilitation/redevelopment planning.	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
	Encourage residents (owners and renters) to become engaged in their neighborhood, which can lead to retention.	Mid-Term	Community Development

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement housing strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Commerce: Energy Loan Plus, Weatherization Assistance Program
- Minnesota Housing: Fix Up Loan Program, Greater MN Housing Infrastructure Grants, Local Housing Trust Fund Grants, Statewide Affordable Housing Aid (SAHA/LAHA), Tier II Housing Aid Grants, Multifamily RFPs- Senior Housing Support (via MN DHS), Accessibility Grants, Lead Safe Home Grants
- National Housing Trust Fund
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA): Section 504 Home Repair Loans & Grants, Rural Housing Site Loans, Rural Rental Assistance, Rural Disaster Home Repair Grants
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): Housing Preservation Grants, Housing Choice Vouchers, HOME Program, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Section 202 & 811 (senior/disabled housing), Disaster Recovery Grants, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- US Department of Energy (DOE): Weatherization Assistance Program

Mobility

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Maintain, develop, and adapt a dynamic multimodal transportation system within Brainerd that seamlessly accommodates all users.	Balance the competing needs and safety of local traffic, bicycles, and pedestrians, and ensure the efficient transfer of freight through the City of Brainerd.	Short-Term	Public Works; Public Services
	Consider innovative designs, universally compliant signage, technologies, and access management to ensure mobility and reduce congestion, helping users navigate the community.	Mid-Term	Public Works
	Continue to maintain and celebrate Brainerd's expansive trail network, and consider opportunities to expand it through logical local, regional, or statewide connections.	Short-Term	Public Services; Public Works
	Commit to creating remarkable bike and pedestrian connections from neighborhoods to the downtown, other business hubs, and park and recreation areas that are safe, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing.	Short-Term	Public Services; Public Works
Continue to work collaboratively with MnDOT, other public agencies, the private sector, and residents, to improve the mobility network in the region to elevate other modes of transportation to the same level of automobile users.	Expand the local transportation system thoughtfully, strategically, and sustainably where growth and demand dictate.	Short-Term	Public Works; Public Services
	In consideration of fiscal constraints and long-term maintenance, prioritize the maintenance of the existing transportation network, and only expand thoughtfully and strategically.	Short-Term	Public Works; Public Services
	Consider ways to leverage the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) to maximize ridership and efficiency	Short-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee; Public Services
	Identify the most pressing challenges facing Brainerd/Crow Wing Public Transit and take steps to address them.	Short-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee; Public Services
Utilize the airport to provide a convenient global gateway that safely and efficiently generates economic vitality in an economically and environmentally sustainable and responsible manner.	Determine ways to maximize the customer experience within the Passenger Terminal Building through arts, entertainment, and improved communication devices	Short-Term	Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission
	Continue relationships with expanding airlines and seek air service through another hub city.	Mid-Term	Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission
	Work with area economic developers to attract new aeronautical businesses and airport tenants for the development of additional land along the extended taxiway.	Mid-Term	Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission; EDA

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
	Plan for appropriate land uses to support aviation safety and economic development.	Mid-Term	Community Development; Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission

Resources:

- Minnesota Department of Administration: Local Government Planning Grants
- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT): Local Road Improvement Program, Transportation Alternatives Program, Safe Routes to School Grants, Bridge Bonding, Greater Minnesota Transit Assistance, Winter Maintenance Innovation Grants
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): Climate Resilience Grants
- Minnesota Public Facilities Authority (MPFA): Transportation Revolving Loan Fund
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG), Bridge Investment Program, Rural Surface Transportation Grant, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program, Planning and Research Grants
- US Department of Transportation (USDOT): Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A), Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grants, Integrated Planning Grants

Economic Development

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Support infill and redevelopment throughout Brainerd as a strategic component of growth	Drive infill development and redevelopment towards areas where current infrastructure is present, including the city's main highway corridors and downtown, or places where high levels of blight or disinvestment exists.	Short-Term	EDA; Community Development
	Evaluate the near and long-term fiscal impacts of annexation and development proposals.	Long-Term	Community Development
	Reclaim underutilized infrastructure within the city (industrial sites, rail lines, parking lots, blighted structures, vacant blocks).	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
	Encourage redevelopment proposals that seek to rehabilitate historic structures through adaptive reuse.	Short-Term	Community Development; EDA; HRA
Support our workforce and help them thrive.	Collaborate with local partners and stakeholders to address industry workforce needs, creating a career and education pathway for residents of all ages.	Short-Term	EDA
	Encourage access to advanced education or certification programs, workforce development, and job training opportunities.	Short-Term	EDA
	Support the expansion of transit opportunities to business clusters and of transit hours of operation to support workforce during all shift times.	Mid-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee; EDA
	Expand transit opportunities to the various business clusters, or concentrated areas with high business density, throughout the community.	Long-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee; EDA
	Expand affordable childcare availability (family childcare and childcare centers) to support workforce and business expansion.	Short-Term	EDA
Help local businesses grow and attract new businesses in our neighborhoods, along our main corridors, and in our downtown.	Support current businesses through a variety of programs, resources, and offerings.	Short-Term	EDA
	Attract new businesses best suited for the community's assets, increasing local employment options and building the city's tax base.	Short-Term	EDA
	Encourage entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.	Mid-Term	EDA
	Support the transition of businesses in the community.	Mid-Term	EDA
	Support the expansion of existing and attraction of new industrial businesses in areas best designed for industrial growth.	Mid-Term	EDA; Community Development

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement economic

development strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED): Launch MN, Workforce Grants, CareerForce, Broadband Grants
- Initiative Foundation: Grants and Technical Assistance
- Region 5 Development Commission: Grants and Technical Assistance
- Sourcewell: Grants and Technical Assistance
- US Economic Development Administration (EDA): Public Works, Workforce Grants, Disaster Grants
- Small Business Administration (SBA): Technical Assistance
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC): Technical Assistance
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA): RBDG, Rural Economic Development, Rural Utilities, BEAD Program

Parks & Recreation

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Maintain a quality parks system that meets the recreational needs of a variety of users.	Add green space and public plazas in a manner that makes them conveniently accessible to all residents and prioritizes function and aesthetics.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Enhance the natural environment throughout the community.	Mid-Term	Public Services; Public Works
	Collaborate with landowners, developers, and other partners to link parks, neighborhoods, and public spaces with a network of greenways and multiuse trails.	Short-Term	Public Services; Community Development; Public Works
Seek ways to collaborate with local community partners to expand event programming for each park in order to maximize the impact of the park system.	Work with area artists to integrate public art into neighborhood parks.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Partner with public and private entities to expand outdoor programming and tailor it to the demographic needs of the neighborhoods.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Partner with public and private entities to enhance and expand sports facilities and/or programming.	Mid-Term	Public Services
	Partner with public and private entities to enhance and expand year-round recreation activities, including active and passive options for all ages and abilities.	Short-Term	Public Services
	Partner with wellness providers to enhance or expand health and wellness initiatives for families and residents of all ages.	Short-Term	Public Services

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement park and recreation strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails, Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas Programs, Recreation Grant Programs, DNR Local Trail Connections Program
- Minnesota State Arts Board Grants
- National Endowment for the Arts
- USDA Rural Development: Community Facilities Program

Facilities And Infrastructure

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Maintain existing public infrastructure that is resilient to climate impacts and adaptive to change.	Coordinate infrastructure replacement projects with other road and infrastructure improvement projects.	Short-Term	Public Works
	Encourage the use of stormwater best management practices to manage runoff and improve local and regional water quality.	Short-Term	Public Works
	Promote education and incentive programs to protect water quantity and quality.	Long-Term	Public Services; Public Works
	Increase connectivity to adequate and affordable broadband and other infrastructure development throughout the community	Mid-Term	Public Works
	Preserve, enhance, and integrate greenscapes into the built environment.	Short-Term	Public Services
Enhance and extend public infrastructure to areas most suitable for new development that minimize costs and environmental impacts.	Invest in public utility and facility improvements that will spur and support revitalization or redevelopment.	Mid-Term	Public Works; Electric
	Ensure adequate water/power supply to meet the long-term needs of the community.	Short-Term	Electric
	Steer city development to energy and resource conservation by promoting renewable energy sources, protecting our water supply, and leveraging the hydroelectric dam. Reference Minnesota 2040 renewable goals	Short-Term	City Council; Public Works; Electric
	Build, secure, and maintain efficient public facilities that enhance the character and priorities of Brainerd and its neighborhoods.	Short-Term	Public Services; City Council

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement facilities and infrastructure strategies.

- Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR): Clean Water Grant Funds Minnesota Department of Administration: Capital Projects Grants-in-Aid, Local Government Grants
- Minnesota Department of Commerce: Energy Resilience Grants, Weatherization Assistance Program
- Minnesota Department of Education: Library and Civic Facility Grants
- Minnesota Department of Health: Emergency Preparedness Grants, Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program, Drinking Water Revolving Fund, Environmental Health Grants
- Minnesota Housing: Greater MN Housing Infrastructure Grants
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA): Wastewater, stormwater, organics management, and climate resilience grants
- Minnesota Public Facilities Authority (MPFA): Clean Water Revolving Fund, Drinking Water Revolving Fund, Water Infrastructure Fund, Point Source Implementation Grants, Transportation Revolving

Loan Fund

- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): State Revolving Funds (SRF): Clean Water, Drinking Water
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): National Highway Performance, Surface Transportation Block Grant, Bridge Investment Program, Rural Surface Transportation Grant
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development: Community Facilities Grants, CDBG Public Facilities Grants, Water & Waste Disposal Loans/Grants, Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program

Public Safety

GOAL	POLICY	PRIORITY	CHAMPION
Protect and provide for the safety of residents and visitors.	Make efficient use of existing facilities to ensure equal access to emergency services for all residents and visitors.	Short-Term	City Council
	Strategically plan for and implement maintenance and expansion of emergency service facilities in a fiscally and environmentally responsible manner.	Short-Term	Fire Department; Police Department
	Continuously seek to eradicate crime through innovative and contemporary strategies, including preventative, proactive, and responsive measures.	Long-Term	Police Department
	Sustain fire protection through a combination of up-to-date facilities and fleet vehicles, technology, out-reach, and community engagement initiatives.	Short-Term	Fire Department
Evaluate and improve Brainerd's emergency management.	Seek new or emergent emergency management initiatives or opportunities.	Mid-Term	Fire Department; Police Department
	Continuously seek education opportunities for emergency personnel and key city staff to ensure emergencies are dealt with expertly when (not if) they happen.	Short-Term	Fire Department; Police Department
Continue to seek out and foster partnerships to better prepare the public and city staff for emergencies and natural disasters in the context of a changing climate.	Seek resources and opportunities to carry out the City's Mitigation Action Chart in the Crow Wing County Hazard Mitigation plan.	Short-Term	Fire Department; Police Department
	Seek resources and opportunities available through Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM).	Long-Term	Fire Department; Police Department
	Seek resources and opportunities available through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).	Mid-Term	Fire Department; Police Department

Resources:

The following resources identify potential partners and grant opportunities to implement public safety strategies.

- Minnesota Department of Public Safety: Emergency Management Performance Grants
- Minnesota Department of Health: Emergency Preparedness Grants
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): Pre-Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management Grants, Hazard Mitigation Grants

Completed

Chapter	Previous Goal/Policy
Community Character	Communicate a design vision through guidelines or standards for structures, site design, building materials, and other requirements meant to accentuate the community image.
Public Safety	Actively participate in the Crow Wing County Hazard Mitigation five-year planning process.
	Conduct a vulnerability assessment.

Appendix A

Community

Input

The process to update the 2019 Comprehensive Plan began in 2017, when a Community Survey Panel was formed to gather community input for the plan's completion. The panel consisted of three hundred volunteers tasked with completing seven surveys covering a range of topics related to long-range planning and the city's community character. A steering committee, comprised of thirteen sector representatives, was formed to provide oversight and serve as an advisory body for this project. A city-wide community survey was conducted to learn about residents, visitors, and workers' preferences on community character and livability. Four neighborhood meetings were held across the wards to identify neighborhood-level assets and needs. A total of five focus groups were held to dig deeper into issues in the community. Finally, a community design session was held to gather additional input on the city's future preferences and priorities. It is estimated that over 1,500 points of contact were made with residents, visitors, and employees in the city. Collectively, the input formed the foundation of the plan and influenced the goals, policies, and strategies to implement the community's overall vision.

WHAT WE HEARD

The following list is a summary of the elements that were identified from the community surveys, focus groups, ward meetings, and community design sessions:

Your neighborhood matters

Residents identified many similarities between their neighborhoods and also identified many differences. The City of Brainerd boasts a diverse collection of neighborhoods, and at the request of its residents, should be celebrated, supported, and enhanced.

Maintain safe neighborhoods

Survey respondents noted that improved safety and lower crime rates are the most important. Traditionally, a comprehensive plan does not serve as a crime prevention plan; the contents can address

socio-economic conditions behind crime and chemical dependency.

Offer suitable, affordable housing options

Survey participants seek an array of housing options that meet their income, size, and quality needs. Various concerns were raised about the quality and availability of rental units within the City of Brainerd.

Improve the image of the housing stock

Blighted houses and vacant storefronts shape the community's image. Survey participants support a coordinated effort to address blight, revitalize neighborhoods, and improve housing conditions.

Provide adequate job opportunities

Respondents seek ways to improve and provide adequate employment offerings for a variety of income levels. A diverse economy provides a wealth of investments and employment opportunities. Survey respondents support a concerted effort to support existing businesses to expand employment opportunities and attract new businesses to the city.

Improve the overall maintenance and the attractiveness of the city

Overall maintenance and community image play a significant role in the city's character. Survey respondents see a collaborative effort to enforce city codes, address property maintenance violations, and improve city gateways and the visual appeal of the main corridors.

Protect and enhance our recreation opportunities

Residents value their location near area lakes and natural features. Respondents seek to improve access and connections to amenities in the general area.

Invest and revitalize downtown

Brainerd's downtown plays an important role in the city's economic and social identity. Residents seek a collaborative approach to improving the physical, social, and economic condition of the downtown.



INTERVIEWS: AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE PROCESS, PROJECT MANAGERS MET INDIVIDUALLY WITH CITY COUNCILORS, PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS, AS WELL AS STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND DISCUSSED SEVERAL WIDE RANGING TOPICS REGARDING THE CURRENT STATE OF BRAINERD AS WELL AS THE FUTURE OF BRAINERD.



FOCUS GROUPS: CITY STAFF AND PROJECT MANAGERS MET WITH A VARIETY OF FOCUS GROUPS TO DISCUSS PERTINENT COMMUNITY ISSUES FACING BRAINERD RESIDENTS, BRAINERD BUSINESSES, AND THE COMMUNITY. WE MET WITH THE FOLLOWING GROUPS: 1) A GROUP OF MILLENNIALS 2) CLC STUDENT SENATE 3) LANDLORDS 4) A GROUP OF SENIORS AND 5) REAL ESTATE AGENTS.



COMMUNITY SURVEY PANEL: AS A PART OF THE PLAN UPDATE, A GROUP OF CITIZENS, COMPRISING OF NEARLY 300 INDIVIDUALS, HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO TAKE A SERIES OF SURVEYS OVER THE COURSE OF ONE YEAR. THE RESPONSES FROM THEIR EFFORTS ARE HELPING US IN ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.



WARD (NEIGHBORHOOD) MEETINGS: IN AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR NEEDS AS A RESIDENT, WE HELD A SERIES OF WARD MEETINGS IN MARCH/APRIL OF 2018. PARTICIPANTS SHED LIGHT ON WHAT MAKES THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD HOME.



CITY-WIDE COMMUNITY SURVEY: A CITY-WIDE SURVEY WAS COMPLETED AND WAS MEANT TO STUDY TWO PARTICULAR AREAS: LIVABILITY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT. A TOTAL OF 660 RESPONSES WERE GATHERED.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & OBSTACLES (SWOO)

A key element in a long-range planning process is identifying the city's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstacles. Collectively, and through a nontraditional approach, the steering committee, along with the many lines of input from the community survey, helped form a complete analysis. The following charts capture the common responses to the four different categories:

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
Historic buildings	Better access to the river
Small town feel	Walkability and bikeability
Park network	Build upon the rich history
Natural setting and open spaces	Downtown improvements
School district	Mississippi Riverwalk
Support for small businesses	Opportunity for growth
Community events	Recreational options
Historic downtown	Community image
Neighborhoods	Tourism
Central Lakes College	Become a regional hub for employment
Paul Bunyan Trail	Preserve the water tower
Lakes	Collaboration with CLC to retain students
Northern Pacific Center	Business growth
Community character	Riverfront, mixed-use development
Variety of small businesses	River to rail corridor improvements
Natural resources	
Essentia	

Many people in the community felt that the community's greatest strengths were the Mississippi River and the environment. It was felt that these features should be leveraged by expanding connectivity and the local and regional trail network. Brainerd participants are proud of the educational systems within the community and medical facilities that serve a regional base.

Through this evaluation, concerns related to housing and maintenance, as well as the community's image, were brought to the surface. The community is concerned about the city's "look." The historic industrial fabric gives a distressed appearance. Housing plays a significant role in the quality of life of Brainerd residents. The existing housing stock has a high percentage of rental units, which helps fill a vital need for affordable housing in the city. Exterior residential façade maintenance and its role in the city's image are important to residents.