

# LAND USE

*This section is draft pending the upcoming public workshop on March 27 but has been reviewed by the Steering Committee.*

## GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

### GOAL LU 1: IMPLEMENT FUTURE LAND USE PLAN TO ACHIEVE COMMUNITY GOALS RECOGNIZED THROUGHOUT NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030

#### **Policy LU 1.1: Use the future land use plan as a guide for land use, development and conservation decisions within North Adams.**

##### *Action A: Use the Plan as a Guide for Development or Redevelopment Decision Making*

Use desired land use goals and other plan goals to guide projects that will positively influence the City of North Adams.

##### *Action B: Comprehensive Zoning Update*

Update North Adams' existing zoning code to be consistent with the future land use plan, possibly including form-based code elements. The City will be working with BRPC to identify issues with the existing zoning code, and identify strategies to bring the code up to date and become a tool to help implement goals of the North Adams Vision 2030 plan.

#### **Policy LU 1.2: Adopt land use tools and techniques to revitalize and expand activity within downtown.**

##### *Action A: Consider Mixed-use Zoning in the Downtown Area*

Increasing the mix, including allowing housing on the upper floors of buildings, and businesses can help support a more active downtown. This was noted in both the Economic Development and Housing and Neighborhoods section.

##### *Action B: Consider Adopting Design Guidelines*

Design guidelines can help the city guide and enforce aesthetics of areas, whether infill and modifications within the downtown or areas identified as downtown gateways. Gateways are a visitor's first impression of a community and design guidelines can help guide plantings, façade improvements and property maintenance.

##### *Action C: Consider a Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District (40R)*

The 40R Overlay District encourages mixed income housing development by providing financial incentives to municipalities through payments for units, bonus payments, educational costs and funding preference from DHCD, the Executive Offices of Environmental Affairs, Transportation, and Administration and Finance.

##### *Action D: Designate Local Historic District Bylaw with Design Guidelines*

Having a local historic district allows for review of exterior architectural changes visible from a public way for respect to the historic character of a district. Encouraging design guidelines within the district would ensure renovations or new development are consistent with and do not detract from the historic character.

***Action E: Adopt a Corridor Overlay District in the Downtown***

A pedestrian-friendly downtown is a key objective of the city. This overlay district can help support pedestrian-friendly design by promoting denser development or redevelopment, mixed-use, parking considerations and urban design elements such as building placement, parking location, or provision of active facades. In the public workshops, residents especially noted the need for traffic calming along Route 2.

***Action F: Adopt Cultural District Designation***

The Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural District designation aims to strengthen the sense of place, stimulate local economic activity and improve the personal experience of visitors and residents. The designation will bring attention to the City as a tourist destination rather one or two individual sites, and will also build a case for grant program applications and focused investment.

**Policy LU 1.3: Adopt land use tools and techniques to support and expand the industrial park and commercial areas to retain and add living wage jobs, and to promote North Adams as a business-friendly community.**

***Action A: Identify Priority Growth or Priority Development Area(s)***

The state has incorporated this language into a number of its programs as it works to prioritize and package public investment in a way to maximize impact. The region has set a goal of working to identify these sites countywide, whether those sites are local or regional. The city should proactively work to identify its own priority sites to make it more competitively placed for funding and enable the city to advocate for one or more city sites as sites of regional and state priority.

***Action B: Consider adopting the Chapter 43D Expedited Permitting Zoning Bylaw***

43D sites have an expedited permitting pathway which allows municipalities to offer a maximum of 180 day local permitting process. Opting into 43D allows cities to target areas for economic development through streamlined permitting. The Berkshire region has three of these districts, but none are in North Adams. Such a district could be a tool in redeveloping some of the larger, unused buildings in the City. This could ideally be linked to a high priority site the city would like to see listed as a state Priority Development Area as the state considers 43D status in those selections.

***Action C: Consider an Adaptive Reuse Zoning Bylaw***

One city objective is to facilitate the reuse of historic buildings and sites, including mills, churches, former big box stores or any kind of large building. An Adaptive Reuse Zoning Bylaw can be linked to special permitting to allow further discretion for the City and/or permitting authority.

***Action D: Foster Business-friendly Environment Within Zoning Update Process***

Work with the business community to identify current problem areas and explore zoning or permitting tools or incentives to remove barriers as a means of facilitating industrial and commercial site reuse and business growth and development. These could include overlay districts as described above.

***Action E: Consider a Corridor Overlay District on Route 8 and Route 2***

These two main arterial corridors are also home to planned bike paths, major community serving commercial and major employers. It is therefore important to support traffic management and foster a multi-modal environment in highway commercial and industrial areas, particularly where the bike paths or major pedestrian routes (e.g. Appalachian Trail crossing) interface with those areas.

***Action F: Continue to Ensure That the City Supports Alternative Means of Employment***

With broadband expansion, alternate employment and business models such as telecommuting and home-based businesses are expected to increase. The city can support this by reviewing and

updating home based business regulations and by promoting mixed use opportunities in the Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

**Policy LU 1.4: Employ appropriate land use tools and techniques to support the river as a central recreation and character asset in the downtown and larger community.**

***Action A: Consider a Low Impact Development Bylaw***

The river is a major feature of the city and one planned for increased recreation and aesthetic focus. The terrain of the city means water runoff and flood management has been and will continue to be a critical infrastructure need. Current practice is working to integrate “green infrastructure” to help support system capacity and function as an alternative to traditional, high-cost upgrades. Practices encouraged in a Low Impact Development bylaw could include green infrastructure such as stormwater planters, vegetated swales, and rain gardens or required use of infiltration or permeable pavements.

***Action B: Consider Adopting Native Landscaping Standards for Neighborhoods***

Individual property owner decisions on landscaping and maintenance can impact water quality. A bylaw to help cultivate best practices, particularly within the riparian corridor or near other features of natural resource significance to help protect the integrity of wildlife corridors and crossings.

***Action C: Provide Training and Technical assistance for Residents and Businesses***

Commercial and private property owners interested in implementing green infrastructure in front yards of right of ways should be able to access information and technical assistance to do so. This could include partnering with MCLA or McCann, as well as with local nursery or gardening centers, and working with City to identify priority areas for green infrastructure implementation and best practices.

***Action D: Maintain Resource Protection Overlay Districts***

North Adams has resource protection overlay districts, and maintaining these districts will help protect natural resources and public health and welfare.

***Action E: Continue to Pursue the Planning and Implementation of the Mohawk Bicycle Pedestrian Trail***

North Adams is working with BRPC and Williamstown to plan and implement a bicycle and pedestrian pathway between the two communities and along the river. This planning effort offers great benefits for residents of both communities.

**Policy LU 1.5: Use land use tools and techniques to retain or improve linkages to key recreational resources.**

***Action A: Negotiate Public Resource Connections***

Explore how the negotiation of public resource connections can be retained through development review process to help promote linkages to public resources regardless of ownership.

***Action B: Maximize the Use of Publicly or Privately Conserved Land***

This effort can be pursued through estate planning, to secure permanent public access to recreation and open space resources

**Policy LU 1.6: Adopt land use tools and techniques to encourage the maintenance of and reinvestment in all of North Adams' neighborhoods.**

***Action A: Consider Complete Streets Design Standards***

This would be best used for neighborhoods struggling with vehicular traffic. These standards can address street width, parking patterns, plantings and other elements of design and construction to help calm traffic and focus on pedestrian safety and comfort.

***Action B: Adopt a Mixed-use Bylaw (this will be explored through the scenarios)***

***Action C: Designate Local Historic District Bylaw with Design Guidelines where Appropriate***

The city has a number of national historic districts, but no local districts which carry a greater degree of protection. As the Historical Commission works through the process of updating surveys and nominating districts, the Planning Board and other city leaders should support the investigation and proposal of one or more local historic districts where there are concentrations of notable sites and structures.

**Policy LU 1.7: Adopt land use tools and techniques to support and expand food production within the City of North Adams, and to support active life styles through enhanced pedestrian and cycling infrastructure as well as linkages to recreation and open space.**

***Action A: Require Multi-modal Infrastructure***

Consider incorporating pedestrian or cycling infrastructure as a design standard in new development or adaptive reuse projects.

***Action B: Safe Routes to School***

Consider implementing Safe Routes to School to encourage walking or biking as healthy and safe means of school transportation

***Action C: Right to Farm***

Adopt a Right to Farm bylaw to encourage food production within North Adams.

**GOAL LU 2: PROVIDE THE NORTH ADAMS PLANNING BOARD WITH THE SUPPORT NECESSARY TO CHAMPION THE NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030 LAND USE PLAN**

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**Policy LU 2.1: Communicate and educate on the plan and how to use it.**

***Action A: Support Boards Through Increased Access to Training***

Actively pursue training opportunities open to planning board members, including workshops and presentations hosted by BRPC or the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative.

***Action B: Working Group Meetings***

Encourage working group meetings between the planning board and city staff, boards, and officials to foster better understanding of implementation efforts and progress and opportunities for collaboration.

***Action C: Seamless Development Review Communications within City***

Ensure staff and other boards and commissions (e.g., Conservation Commission and Historic Commission) are brought into development decisions early, perhaps using an all boards approach if the proposal is complex enough to warrant it.

***Action D: Promote Use of the Neighborhood Geographies***

Continue to incorporate the newly delineated neighborhood boundaries into land use planning efforts and implementation.

***Action E: Engage the North Adams Neighborhood Council in land use planning efforts***

Once created, engage them as community partners to help define and shape land use planning efforts as appropriate (See Housing and Neighborhoods, Goal 3, Policy 2, Strategy 1).

