



**CITY OF
ROCKFORD**
KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

MASTER PLAN



ADOPTED MONTH, DAY 2022

DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Planning Commission
City of Rockford Staff
City Council
Sustainability Committee
Chamber of Commerce
Community members who participated in this
planning process.

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DRAFT

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CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Section 1.1

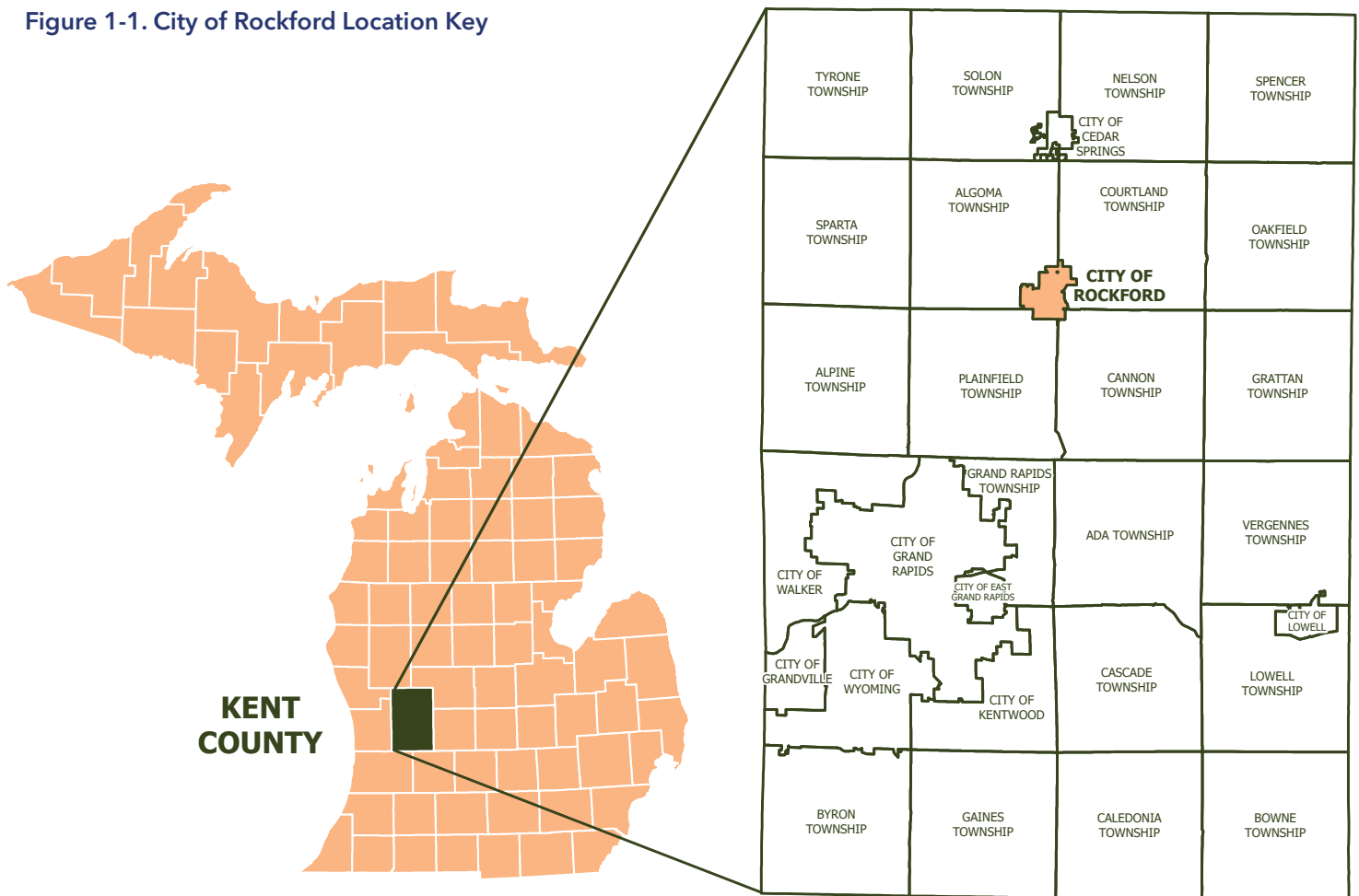
Located in the northern half of Kent County, the City of Rockford has long been considered one of the Grand Rapids metro area’s most desirable small towns. Nestled along the banks of the Rogue River, Rockford is a close-knit community with plentiful parks, numerous employment opportunities, and homes fronting tree-lined streets surrounding a vibrant, walkable downtown.



Rockford citizens enjoy abundant recreational opportunities, including the White Pine Trail, the Rogue River, and numerous high-quality parks. Ample local and regional employment opportunities at both large and small companies are accessible within the City and greater region.



Figure 1-1. City of Rockford Location Key



What is a Master Plan?

A master plan represents a statement about what a community is, what its residents value, and what those residents and businesses hope the community will become in the future. This master plan is the product of more than a year of work by the City staff, Planning Commission, citizens, and local leaders. It reflects the community’s commitment to caring for Rockford’s people and its natural and built environment. This plan provides a strong commitment to retaining and strengthening the local quality of life for everyone in Rockford.

The Master Plan is comprised of several different sections, including a description of the City’s history and the existing conditions and trends related to its people, the land, and city services. It also contains policy statements outlining the future direction for the City

through a common vision statement and a detailed set of goals and objectives that are intended to achieve that vision.

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

The 2022 Rockford Master Plan is an update of the previous Master Plan, adopted in 2002. Some of the policies from the 2002 Plan have been retained, while others have been strengthened, revised, or removed.

The Planning Process

The effort to develop the 2022 Rockford Master Plan began in July 2021 and consisted of the following phases:

1. **Community Profile.** The Community Profile (Chapter 2) contains a snapshot of conditions in the City as of 2021-2022. This is crucial to the planning process as it provides a data-driven, factual background upon which the plan's recommendations and policies can be based.
2. **Public Engagement.** A well-rounded master plan must be founded on the interests and desires of the public, and this plan is no exception. The policies of this master plan were developed following a robust public outreach campaign, which included pop-up planning activities, a community survey, student engagement at North Rockford Middle School, visioning meetings with City leadership, and additional public meetings. These are described in additional detail in Chapter 3, and a complete Public Engagement Report is included in the Appendix.
3. **Goals and Objectives.** Goals and Objectives (Chapter 4) were developed over a series of meetings with the Planning Commission. The Goals and Objectives from the 2002 Plan were used as a starting point, but many new goals and objectives were written to address contemporary challenges and priorities. The public input received in step 2 of this process informed the policies and overall direction found in Chapter 4.
4. **Future Land Use.** The Future Use Plan and map (Chapter 5) provide a guide for land use and zoning decisions in the City. Each future land use designation is related to one or more of the City's zoning districts to aid the Planning Commission in determining how the future land map relates to the zoning map. This Chapter also identifies four potential development areas that are discussed in more detail as key locations in the City where additional development or redevelopment is possible.
5. **Implementation Strategies.** The Master Plan concludes with a series of steps that, when implemented, will fulfill the Plan's Goals and Objectives and should allow the City of Rockford to achieve the overarching vision articulated by this Plan. These can be found in Chapter 6.



Communities have a responsibility to look beyond the day-to-day zoning issues and provide a blueprint for land use and development in the community, and the long-range, community-based perspective of a master plan provides that blueprint. A properly formulated, thoughtful master plan can be of great value to the citizens of Rockford. When implemented, this plan will help to preserve the small town charm that citizens value, encourage thoughtful and sustainable development, and protect the environment of the City that gives Rockford its unique character.

The adoption of the Master Plan is not the end of the process, but the beginning. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the Master Plan will depend on the willingness of the City to follow the Plan and achieve its vision through cooperative, methodical, and positive actions. Doing so will be hard work, but the rewards and benefits to future generations will be well worth the effort.

CHAPTER 2



WE ARE A COMMUNITY



OUR HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

Section 2.1

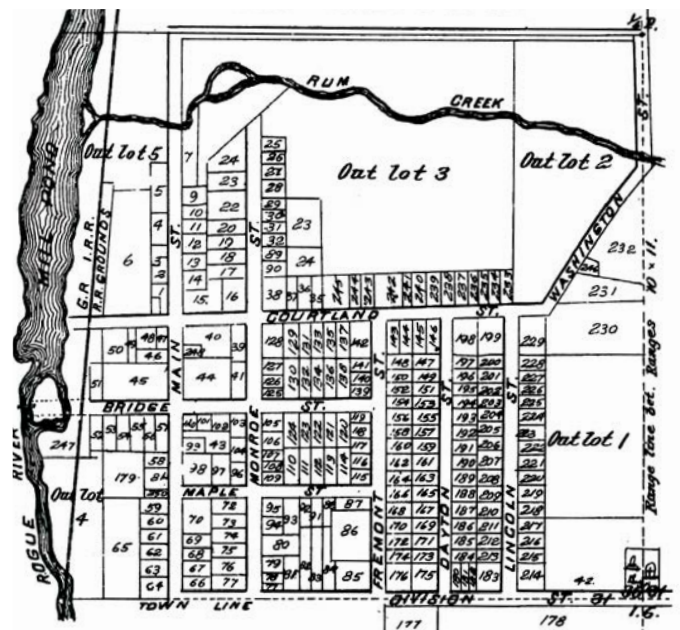
Historical Background

The City of Rockford is nestled along the Rogue River in northern Kent County, approximately ten miles north of Grand Rapids. Although no archeological finds of Native American settlements have been located in the Rogue River Valley, trails from several Native American tribes, like the Hopewell, Mascouten, and Ottawa have been surveyed¹.

In 1842, Merlin Hunter came to the area looking for lumber and wintered in a cabin near the Rogue River. The following spring, he was joined by his brother William and an associate, Smith Lapham, who hoped to dam the river and build a water-powered sawmill. Smith Lapham later built his own sawmill in 1844 on 40 acres of land given to him by Hunter. By 1845, five families had settled in “Laphamville” and a road was created. William Thornton platted the village in 1856. The tradition of planting trees along all of the streets was instituted—a practice that continues today. The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company began their extension through the village in 1865 and encouraged the village to adopt a shorter name. The village changed from Laphamville to its current name, Rockford in 1865 and was incorporated as the Village of Rockford in 1866¹ (see Fig. 2-1).

By the 1870s, the once-abundant pine forests were almost exhausted and a series of devastating fires and

Figure 2-1. Historic Plat of Rockford



floods in the late 1800's nearly leveled Rockford. But its water power, large farming community, and railroad line ensured that the village would be rebuilt. With a decline in lumbering, Rockford needed new industry and the Hirth-Krause Company's decision to build a shoe factory met this demand. Using the Rogue River as a source of power, the Hirth and Krause families built their factory in 1903 and a tannery in 1909. From 1903 to the present, the company, which adopted the trademark “Wolverine,” has been a cornerstone in Rockford's growth.

¹“History.” Rockford.Mi.Us, City of Rockford, Michigan, www.rockford.mi.us/community/about_rockford/history.php. Accessed 11 July 2022.

Rockford became a home rule city in 1935 with a charter, city council, and city manager. Since then, the City has continued to grow and evolve due in part to the steady expansion of Wolverine Worldwide and other employers, the community's small-town charm, excellent public school system, and its proximity to the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Today, Rockford's 2.6 square miles contain a rich mix of quality residential neighborhoods, vital businesses, productive industry, high-quality public amenities, and pristine natural features. Its location near the U.S. 131 highway makes it readily accessible to the Grand Rapids area employment centers, educational opportunities, and cultural institutions. In addition, it is home to the company that evolved from the humble Hirth-Krause Company into a world leader in the shoe industry, Wolverine Worldwide.

Rockford possesses a vibrant downtown that has a strong local and tourist market. The downtown business district serves as the cultural and civic heart of the community. The City's other commercial areas at Ten Mile Road and Wolverine Boulevard provide additional commercial goods including a grocery store, personal service establishments, retail stores, fitness centers, restaurants, and pharmacies. The efforts to revitalize the City's downtown into a charming and walkable district, coupled

with steady economic growth and one of the most respected school districts in the nation, have continued to attract new residents to the community.

Historical Features

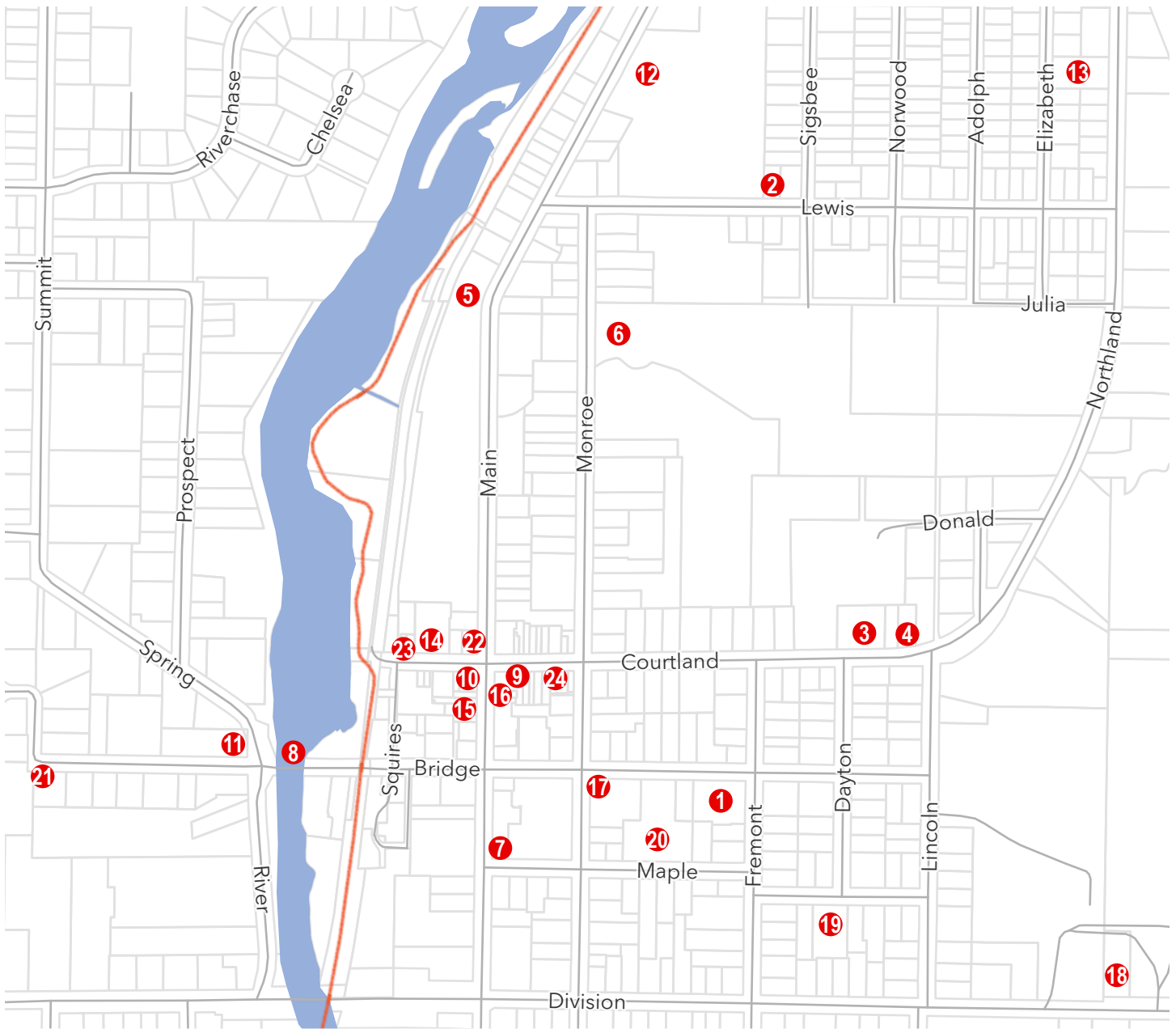
Rockford's many historical resources represent a cultural and physical link to the City's rich historical past. While some historical resources still maintain the same uses for which they were originally built, others have been renovated or repurposed for other uses.

The Hessler Opera House (built 1896- 1900) is a prime example of a past use that no longer exists, but the building has been adapted for other purposes. Other significant historical structures such as the Smith Lapham Home (home of Rockford's founding father, built-in 1871) help provide a historical timeline through the different eras of Rockford's past.

The City contains several historic treasures distributed primarily throughout the City's east side (see Map 1).

To learn more about the history of Rockford, visit the Rockford Area Museum at 21 S Monroe Street NE, Rockford, MI 49341.



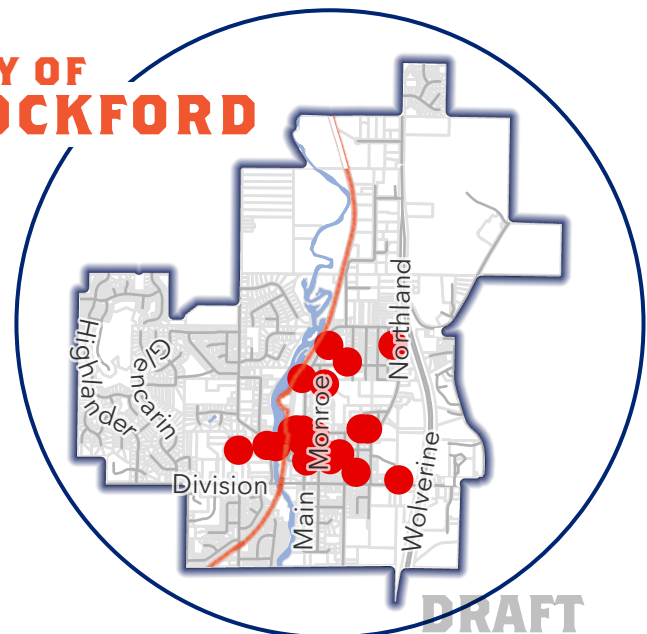


MAP 1. HISTORIC PLACES

Data sources: Michigan Open Data Portal, ESRI Living Atlas, City of Rockford

- **Historic Places** — **Fred Meijer White Pine Trail**
- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Congregational Church | 17. Krause Memorial Library |
| 2. Smith Lapham Home | 18. Pioneer Cemetery |
| 3. Judson Spore Home | 19. Ross Squires Home |
| 4. Otto Krause Home | 20. Methodist Church |
| 5. Hush Puppies Factory | 21. Original Water Tower Foundation |
| 6. Rockford Community Cabin | 22. McMillan Building |
| 7. Rockford Area Museum | 23. Lumber Company |
| 8. Rockford Dam | 24. American Legion |
| 9. Hessler Opera House | |
| 10. Corner Bar | |
| 11. James F. Judson home | |
| 12. Rockford Public School circa 1923 | |
| 13. Former Michigan State Police | |
| 14. U.S. Post Office | |
| 15. Hotel Maine | |
| 16. Rockford State Bank | |

CITY OF ROCKFORD



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Soils and Terrain

Rockford's location in the valley of the Rogue River results in nearly level topography in downtown and some areas east of the river. Newly developing areas west of the river, however, sit on steep banks and more undulating topography (see Map 2). Likewise, the land rises sharply on the other side of the City, east of Wolverine Boulevard. The soils of Rockford and its surroundings were created during the last glacial period, resulting in a variety of soil types differing in texture, drainage, and slope. In general, soils on the City's east side are the most well drained (removes water very rapidly) or well-drained (removes water readily but not rapidly) with sandy and loamy materials (see Map 3). However, on the west side, soils tend to be heavier, poorly drained clay.

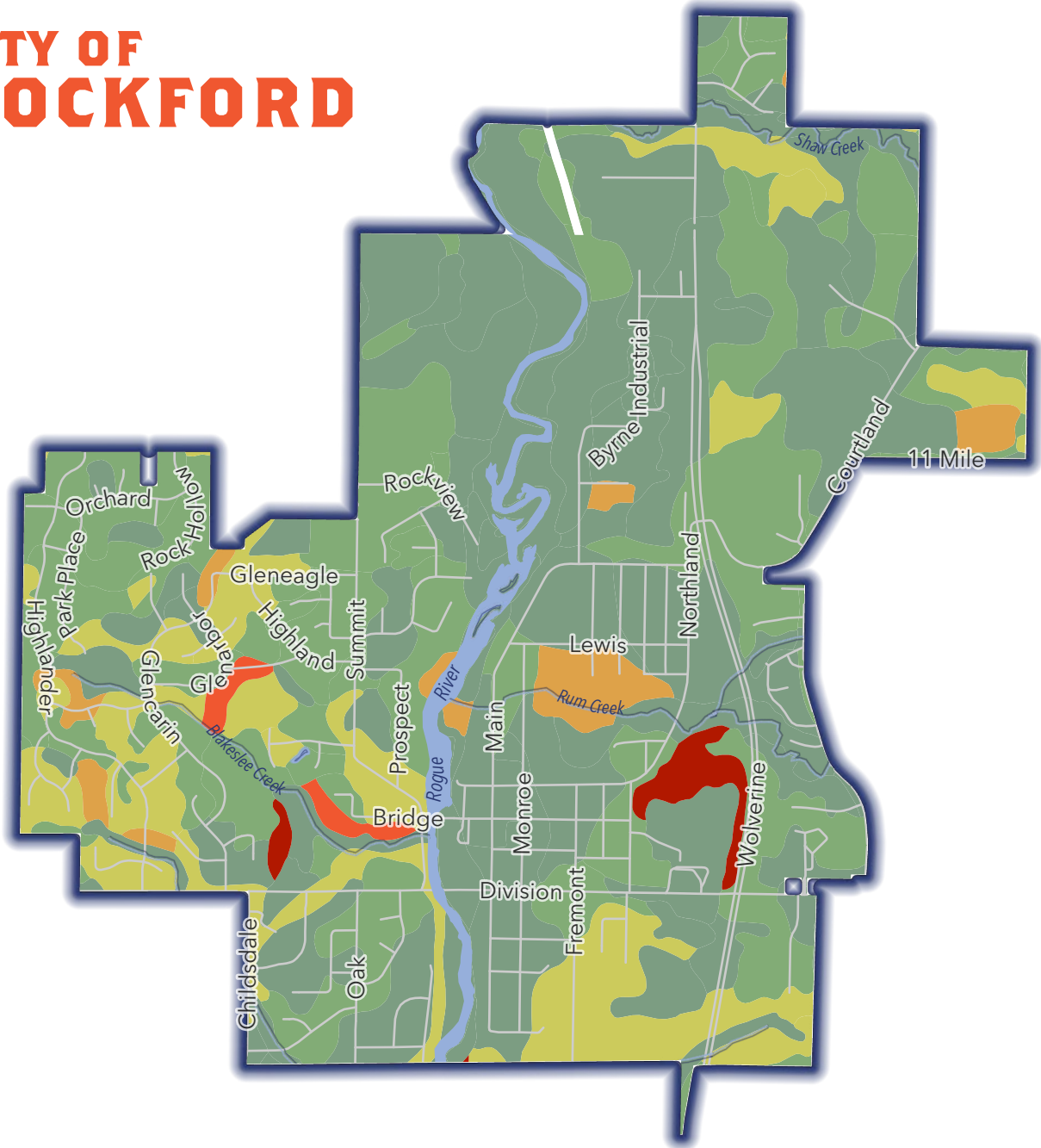
Water Features

An abundance of natural features makes Rockford an aesthetically pleasing place to live, work, recreate, and relax. Woods, water, and steep bluffs all offer visual interest and scenic views. The City's most prominent

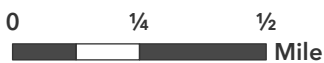
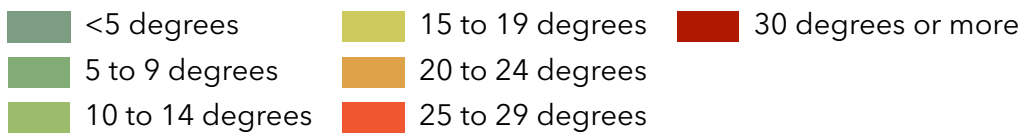
natural feature is the Rogue River which flows from north to south and bisects the City. It is fed by several smaller but important tributaries including the Shaw, Rum, and Blakeslee Creeks. Recognizing the river's value to the community, steps have been taken by the City to ensure access to the Rogue River by purchasing the land along its west side from Bridge Street to 11 Mile Road, with future goals of continuing riverfront access North to the city limits. Careful attention has been paid to maintain the high-quality natural native vegetation to restore the riparian ecosystem and provide a meaningful experience for the visitor. The City has been active in developing recreational amenities along and near its rivers and streams, including parks, canoe and kayak access points, trails, and boardwalks.

Wetlands are primarily located along the Rogue River in the northern portion of the City. Approximately 85 acres of private, undeveloped land along the river have preserved a large portion of these wetlands. Other wetlands in the City are generally located along the Shaw, Rum, and Blakeslee Creeks. The City's wetlands provide valuable functions including wildlife habitat, purification of water entering the streams and Rogue River, and mitigation of flooding impacts.

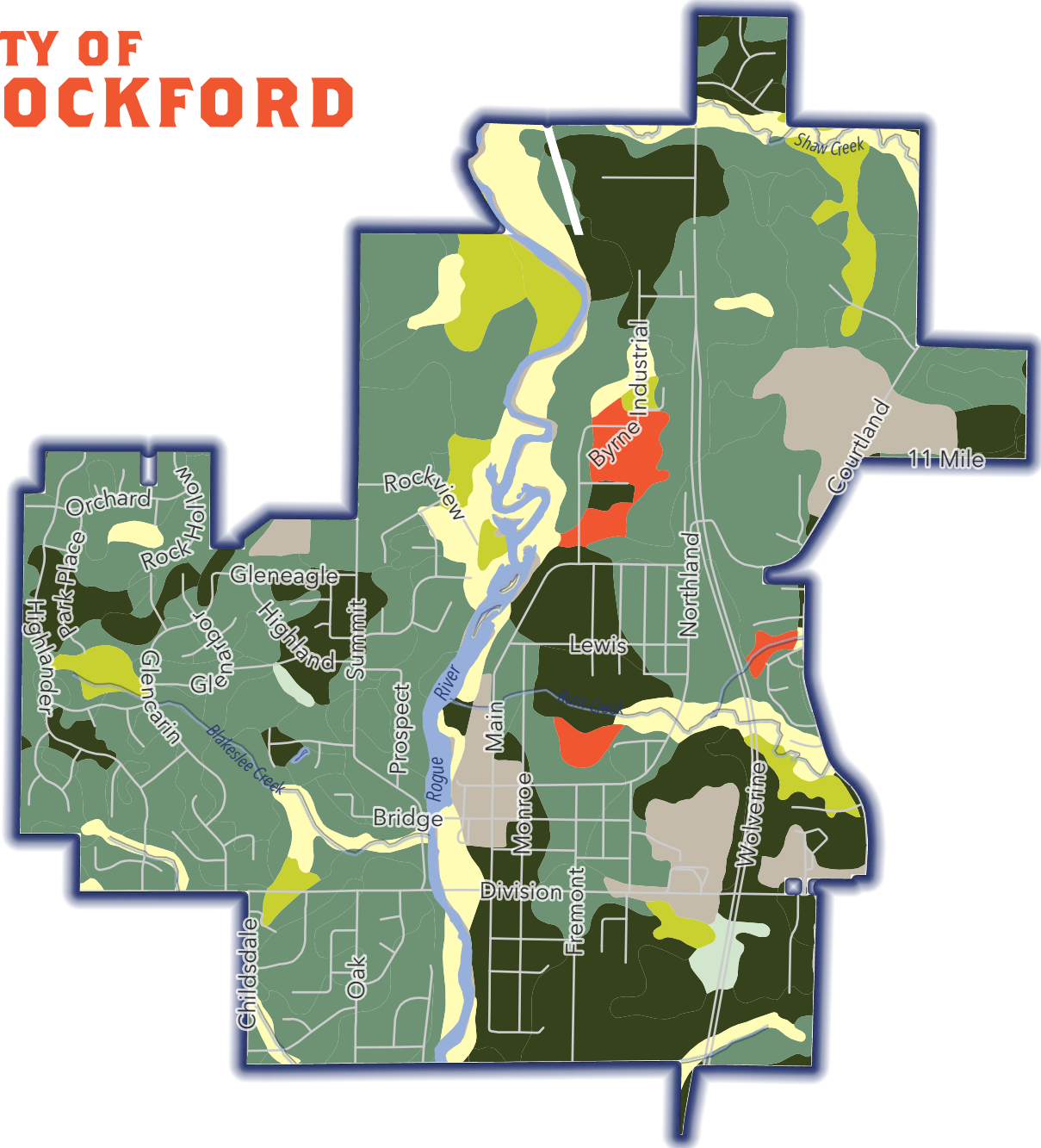
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MAP 2. SLOPE

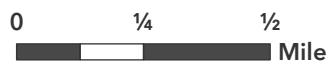


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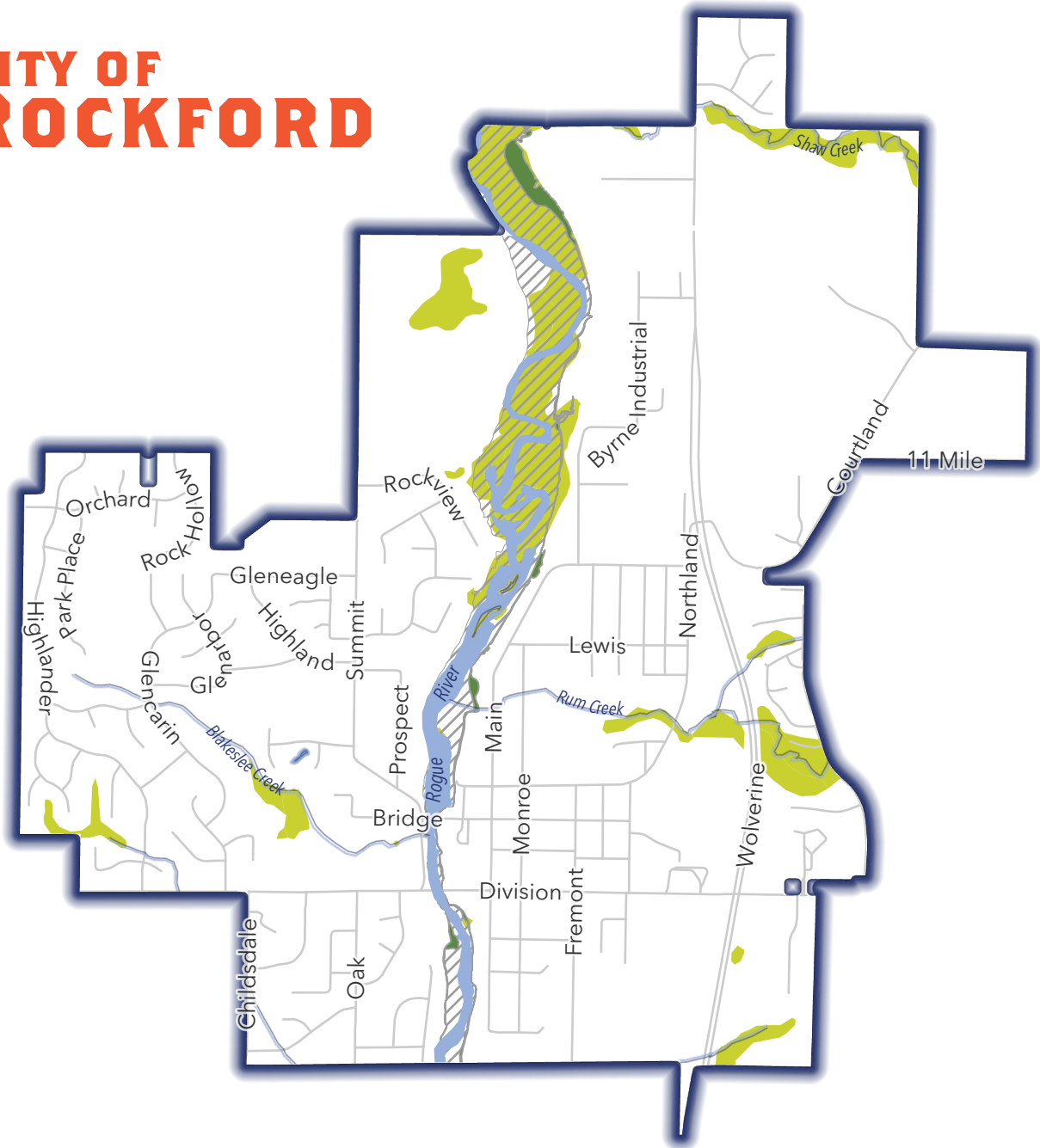


MAP 3. SOIL DRAINAGE

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Most well drained |  Somewhat poorly drained |
|  Well drained |  Very poorly drained |
|  Moderately well drained |  No data |
|  Poorly drained | |

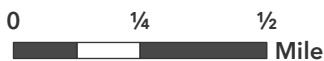


CITY OF ROCKFORD



MAP 4. WETLANDS, RIVERS, AND FLOODPLAINS

- Wetlands
- 100-year Floodplain
- Rivers
- 500-year Floodplain





OUR PEOPLE

Section 2.2

Population

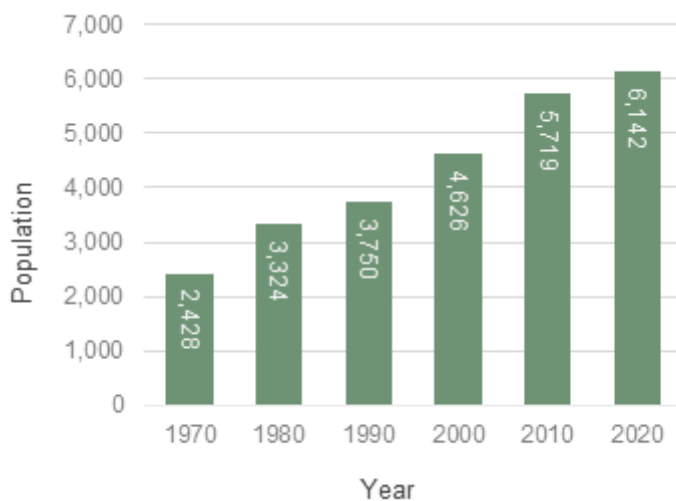
Since the 1970s, the City of Rockford has experienced a steady increase in population, consistent with the overall population growth of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Pre-1970s, the City was a small community of approximately 2,000 residents and is now home to over 6,000 people (see Fig. 2-2). The population of Rockford has grown by almost 70% over the past 30 years. Since 2000, the City has generally grown at a faster rate than other comparable cities in the region such as Cedar Springs and Greenville (see Table 2-1).

Table 2-1. Population Comparison

Community	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Chg. 2000-10	% Chg. 2010-20
Rockford	3,750	4,626	5,719	6,142	23.6%	7.4%
Cedar Springs	2,600	3,112	3,509	3,627	12.8%	3.4%
Greenville	8,101	7,935	8,481	8,816	6.9%	4.0%
Algoma Twp.	5,496	7,596	9,932	12,055	30.8%	21.4%
Courtland Twp.	3,950	5,817	7,678	9,005	32.0%	17.3%
Plainfield Twp.	24,946	30,195	30,952	33,535	2.5%	8.3%
Cannon Twp.	7,928	12,075	13,336	17,379	10.4%	30.3%
Kent Co.	500,631	574,335	602,622	657,974	4.9%	9.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2020 U.S. Census

Figure 2-2. Population Growth in Rockford



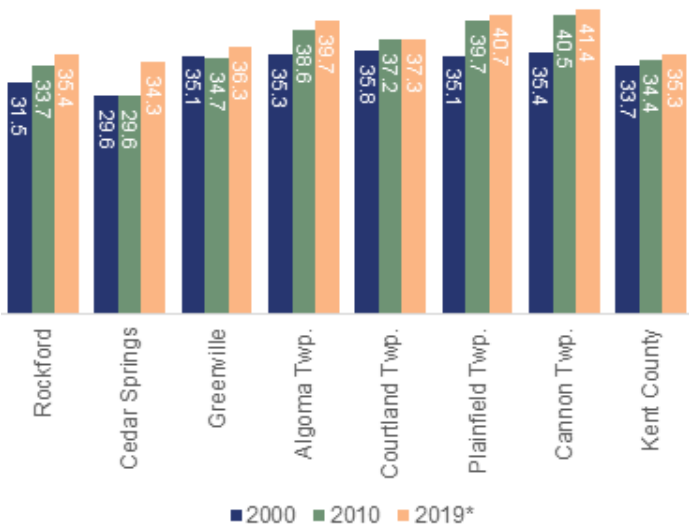
Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2020 U.S. Census

Age

The City's median age provides a helpful indicator of its population age distribution. Rockford has a relatively young median age of 35.4 years and this has been similar to the median age of Kent County (Fig. 2-3). The City's median age is also lower than all surrounding townships. It is typical for the City to contain a younger population than the townships, as it offers an urban core for convenient goods and services, along with a wider variety of housing options that appeal to a diverse range of families with children and young adults.

The City's median age is also lower than that of the State of Michigan, which was estimated at 39.7 years in 2019. However, surrounding cities and townships including the City of Rockford and Kent County are all experiencing an increasing age in their demographic structure over time. This trend is representative of state and national trends, which also indicate an overall increase in median age due to the aging of the "baby boomer" generation and the tendency of families to have fewer children than previous generations.

Figure 2-3. Median Age Comparison

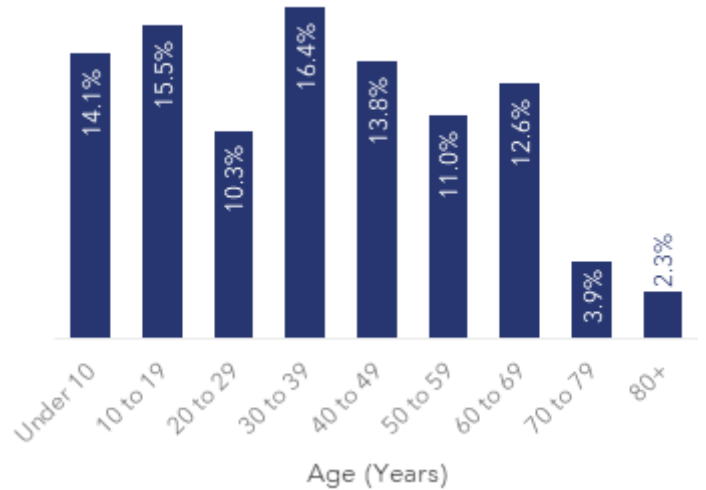


Source: U.S. Census Bureau

*Estimate from the 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

While median age provides insight into the City's overall age in general terms, the age structure helps to identify any age groups that may be prominent in the City. Population estimates from 2019 indicate a strong presence of children and young adults in the City, with 40% of the population less than 30 years of age (Fig. 2-4). The largest age group is those between 30 and 39 years in age (16.4%), and the second-largest group is those aged 10 to 19 years (15.5%). Together, these groups suggest a strong presence of families in the community, which is reflective of the high-quality public school system. This age distribution naturally impacts the need for family-oriented facilities such as schools, daycare centers, parks, and other facilities and services.

Figure 2-4. Age Composition in Rockford, 2019



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Race & Ethnicity

The Census Bureau provides information related to race and Hispanic origin. These are two separate concepts in the Census, as Hispanic is considered an origin rather than a race in the classification system. Therefore, Hispanic people may be of any race. Racial diversity, while increasing since the 1990 Census, remains somewhat lacking in Rockford as it is a predominantly white (95.0%) community. The largest minority groups are Asian (1.1%) and two or more races (6.3%) (see Table 2-2). Most residents did not report having Hispanic or Latino origin.

Table 2-2. Racial Distribution in Rockford, 2020

Race	Number	Percent
Population of One Race:		
White alone	5,758	93.76%
Black or African American alone	36	0.59%
American Indian and Alaska Natives alone	27	0.44%
Asian alone	68	1.11%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders alone	1	0.02%
Some Other Race alone	62	1.01%
Population of Two or More Races:		
	384	6.25%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2020 U.S. Census

Education

Rockford residents exhibit a high level of educational attainment as 94.5% have a high school diploma or higher level of education compared to 90.7% for Kent County. Similarly, the City has a considerable percentage of people with a bachelor’s degree or higher (42.5%) compared to Kent County (35.7%).

Rockford Public Schools have maintained a remarkably consistent enrollment for the last ten years, as total enrollment remained virtually the same from 2010-11 to 2019-20. (Table 2-3). However, between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, enrollment dropped by 3.1%. This may be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time many families chose alternative education options such as virtual instruction or homeschooling.

Table 2-3. Rockford Public Schools Enrollment Change

School Year	Enrollment	Change	
		#	%
2010-11	7,972		
2011-12	7,964	-8	-0.1%
2012-13	7,990	26	0.3%
2013-14	7,945	-45	-0.6%
2014-15	7,944	-1	0.0%
2015-16	7,912	-32	-0.4%
2016-17	7,908	-4	-0.1%
2017-18	7,992	84	1.1%
2018-19	7,987	-5	-0.1%
2019-20	7,974	-13	-0.2%
2020-21	7,730	-244	-3.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2020 U.S. Census

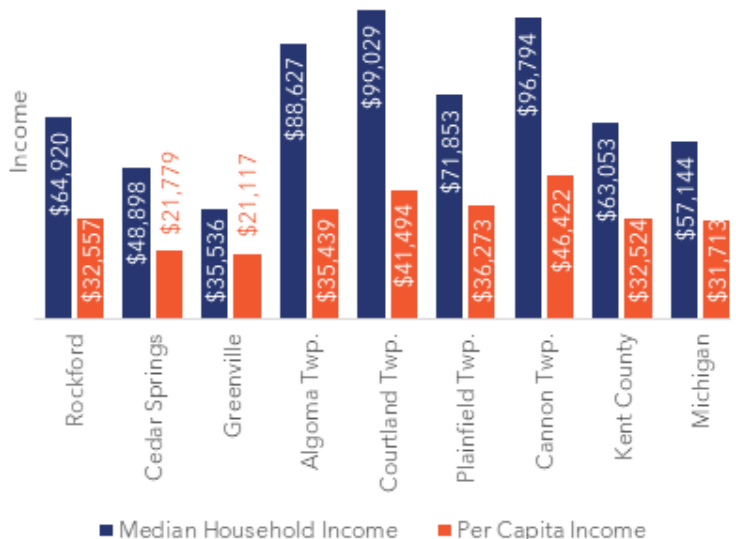


Image Source: Michigan Sports Radio

Income

The City of Rockford’s median household income was estimated at \$64,920 and its per capita income was \$32,557 in 2019. These values are generally higher than other comparable cities in the region and lower than surrounding townships. It is not uncommon for city residents to have lower incomes than outlying areas, as cities often offer more affordable housing options and community services not found in surrounding suburban and rural areas. Nevertheless, Rockford residents earn a relatively high income overall. The City’s median and per capita incomes are very similar to Kent County and higher than the State of Michigan as a whole (Fig. 2-5).

Figure 2-5. Comparison of Median Household & Per Capita Incomes, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau;



OUR HOMES AND ECONOMY

Section 2.3

Housing

Rockford’s housing stock is varied in both style and age of structures. The pattern of development is most visible from the varying styles of homes and their location within the City. The City’s oldest homes are found, predictably, at or near the heart of the community adjacent to downtown in a traditional grid pattern. The housing stock gets progressively newer as development moves outward from the city center, and these neighborhoods follow a suburban form with wide, curvilinear streets, prominent garages, and fewer sidewalks.

Renter-occupied dwellings include both traditional “apartments” and homes being rented or leased, while owner-occupied units are both homes and condominiums occupied by the owner/purchaser. About three of every four dwellings (76.1%) within the City are owner-occupied, according to the 2019 American Community Survey estimates. This number represents a continued increase in homeownership in the City that has been occurring for several decades.

Rockford’s ratio of the owner- to renter-occupied dwellings is relatively high compared to other cities in West Michigan (Table 2-4). Cities often have a greater percentage of rental units, influenced by younger populations and proximity to local services and utilities. However, Rockford is somewhat distinct from this trend. While still containing a younger population, the presence of many families likely bolsters its residential homeownership rates. Its foundation as a small town outside the metropolitan Grand Rapids area has also

allowed a greater number of single-family homes to become established in the City. Homeownership is often an indication of wealth, as being a homeowner involves a large financial commitment. Further, homeownership can create generational wealth through equity as homes tend to increase in value over time. This is reflected in the City’s relatively high median household income, as discussed in Section 2.2.

Table 2-4. Comparison of Occupancy Characteristics

City	% Owner-Occupied	% Renter-Occupied
Rockford	76.1%	23.9%
Grand Haven	70.9%	29.1%
Belding	58.5%	41.5%
Portland	60.6%	39.4%
Greenville	54.6%	45.4%
Ionia	51.3%	48.7%
Cedar Springs	55.4%	44.6%
Lowell	58.9%	41.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

The City's housing units have also remained largely occupied. Most housing units were occupied in 2010 (95.6%) and this percentage was estimated to increase in 2019 (98.3%). The low number of vacancies indicates a stable housing market however it can also represent a shortage in the housing market. The strength of this market in the City helps to bolster property values and generally supports the high quality of life enjoyed by Rockford residents. Limited vacancies may also mean that the City has limited space for new residents and contributes to a competitive real estate market.

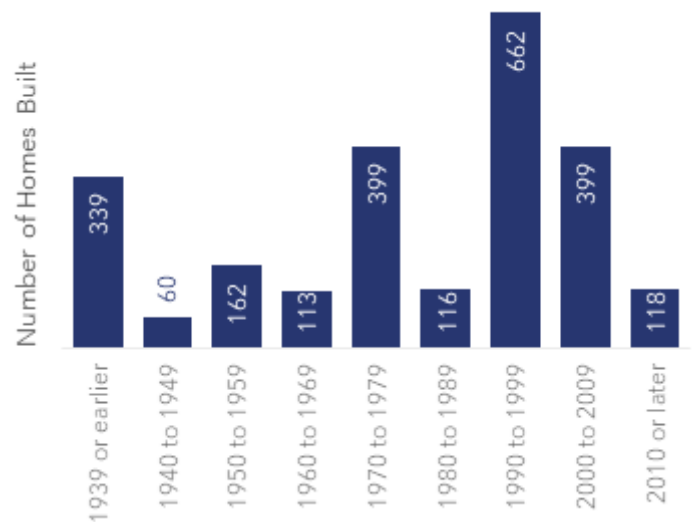
The majority of the new residential development has occurred at the periphery of the City. The Rockford Highlands neighborhood, located west of the Rogue River, is an example of a modern residential development that has introduced typically suburban-style housing with relatively large lots (10,000 to 15,000 sq. ft. or more) and curvilinear, cul-de-sac streets. This represents a departure from the traditional neighborhood pattern found in the older core neighborhoods which exhibit more of a true grid pattern of streets. Additional new projects in adjacent Plainfield, Algoma, Courtland, and Cannon Townships follow this type of development pattern.



New Development

Rockford became a home rule city in 1935 and many homes were constructed before 1940 (14.3% of total). However, the City's fastest growth occurred between 1990 and 1999, during which time 662 new homes were built (28.0% of total). Most of the City's homes were built after 1970, with fewer constructed in recent years (see Fig. 2-6). Much of the housing stock is of moderate age and most homes are in good condition, but they may need general maintenance and updates in the near future.

Figure 2-6. Home Construction in Rockford

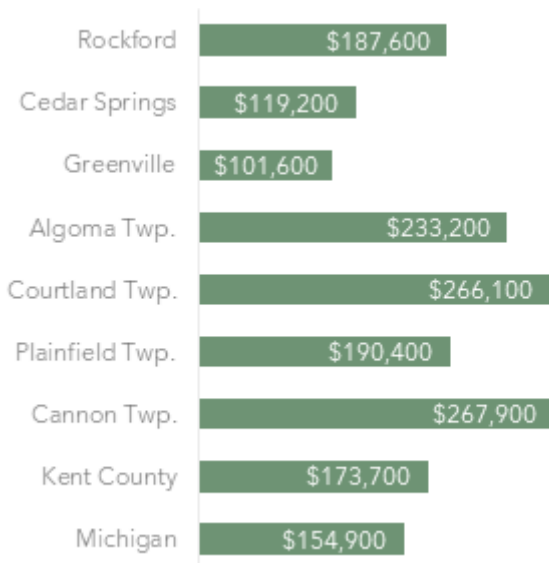


Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Home Value

The median home value indicates home affordability, attainability, and community wealth. Home values in Rockford are relatively high. High home values are abundant throughout this region in the greater Grand Rapids area, as Rockford and all surrounding townships had a median home value greater than the County and State (Fig. 2-7). This aligns with high median household and per capita incomes in the area, as discussed in Chapter 2.2. The high values of homes are often associated with a quality housing stock, high demand, and well-maintained properties.

Figure 2-7. Median Home Values, 2019



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The City’s planning efforts should consider housing availability and attainability in relation to its housing costs. Strategies to provide “missing middle” housing may be appropriate, as well as those to promote high-quality and affordable housing in the City. In 2020-21, property values have increased dramatically and many potential homebuyers, particularly those looking for middle-income housing, are at risk of being priced out of the housing market.

Figure 2-8. Typical Home Value - Grand Rapids, MI, Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)



Source: Zillow Home Value Index (ZVHI) as of October 2021

Employment

Residential growth has not been the only change within Rockford; industrial opportunities have grown over time and now are providing a steady source of employment. Rockford is home to a wide array of employers, offering job opportunities to the residents of the City and surrounding townships. Of the top ten employers within the city limits, seven are product-related industries. Wolverine Worldwide leads the list of employers with a local workforce of 713 (Table 2-5).

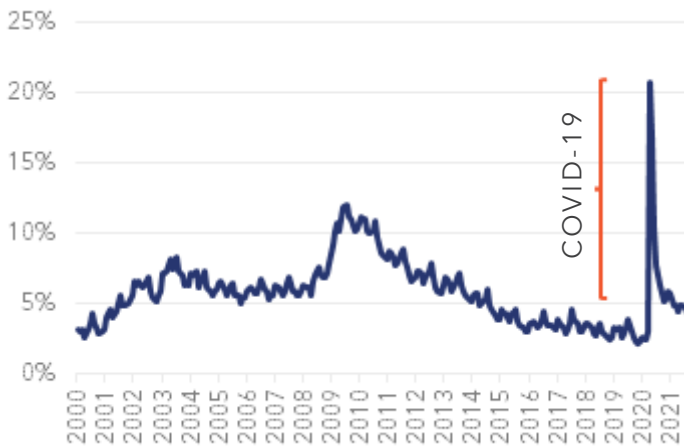
Institutional and retail employers also contribute significant job opportunities. Rockford Public Schools employs 250 people within the city limits. Industrial businesses such as Grand Rapids Controls and Byrne Electrical Specialists provide close to 500 jobs each. The City’s top employers provide over 3,000 job opportunities within the City of Rockford.

Table 2-5. Top Employers in Rockford

Employer	Number of Employees (approx.)	Product/Service
Wolverine Worldwide	713	Product
Grand Rapids Controls Inc.	250-499	Product
Byrne Electrical Specialists	250-499	Product
North Rockford Middle School	100-249	Service
ITW Dahti Seating	100-249	Product
Family Fare	50-99	Service
MVP Sports Club	50-99	Service
Advanced Fabricating Tech Inc.	50-99	Product
Alloy Exchange Inc.	20-49	Product
Distinctive Machine Corp.	20-49	Product

Source: Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget, and Wolverine Worldwide

**Figure 2-9. Unemployment Rate, 2000-2021
(Kent County, Michigan)**

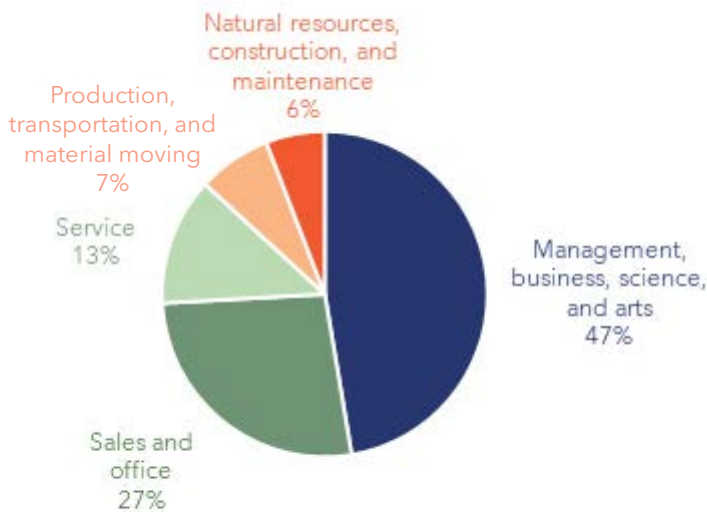


Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data. Economic Research Division - Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

The availability of over 3,000 jobs from top employers contributes to a relatively low unemployment rate. As of fall 2021, the unemployment rate in Kent County was 3.9%, which has recovered significantly from the impact of COVID-19 on the unemployment levels since 2020.

Rockford residents are employed in a diverse range of occupations. The two largest employment sectors are “management, business, science, and arts” and “sales and office.” Figure 2-10 shows the employment distribution by occupation.

Figure 2-10. Employment by Occupation



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Commuting Patterns

Located on the northern edge of metropolitan Grand Rapids, the City of Rockford is conveniently positioned in relation to a wide array of employment opportunities. Major transportation corridors such as Wolverine Boulevard/Northland Drive and the US-131 highway offer direct north/south access into the Grand Rapids metro area. The average commuting time reported in the 2019 American Community Survey was 25.4 minutes, with 79.9% driving alone to work. This represents a slight increase from commuting times in 2010 and 2000 (21.6 and 21.0 minutes, respectively). However, it represents a decrease in the number of people who drove alone to work compared to 2010 and 2000 (87.5% and 85.1%, respectively). No public transportation options are available within the City, to other adjacent municipalities, or to Grand Rapids.

In 2019, the large majority of Rockford residents worked in Kent County (92.8%) but outside the City (81.1%). While the City provides some major employers for residents, its location near the Grand Rapids metropolitan area offers numerous job opportunities. Therefore, it is likely that the majority of residents travel south into the more urban Grand Rapids area for work.



OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Section 2.4

Existing Land Use

The City of Rockford is largely built-out, meaning that most of its land is developed (Map 5). Residential properties comprise the largest percentage of land in the City (46.9%), followed by industrial properties (17.4%) (Table 2-6). A considerable portion of the City also contains tax-exempt land, which is primarily governmental, public school, and church properties.

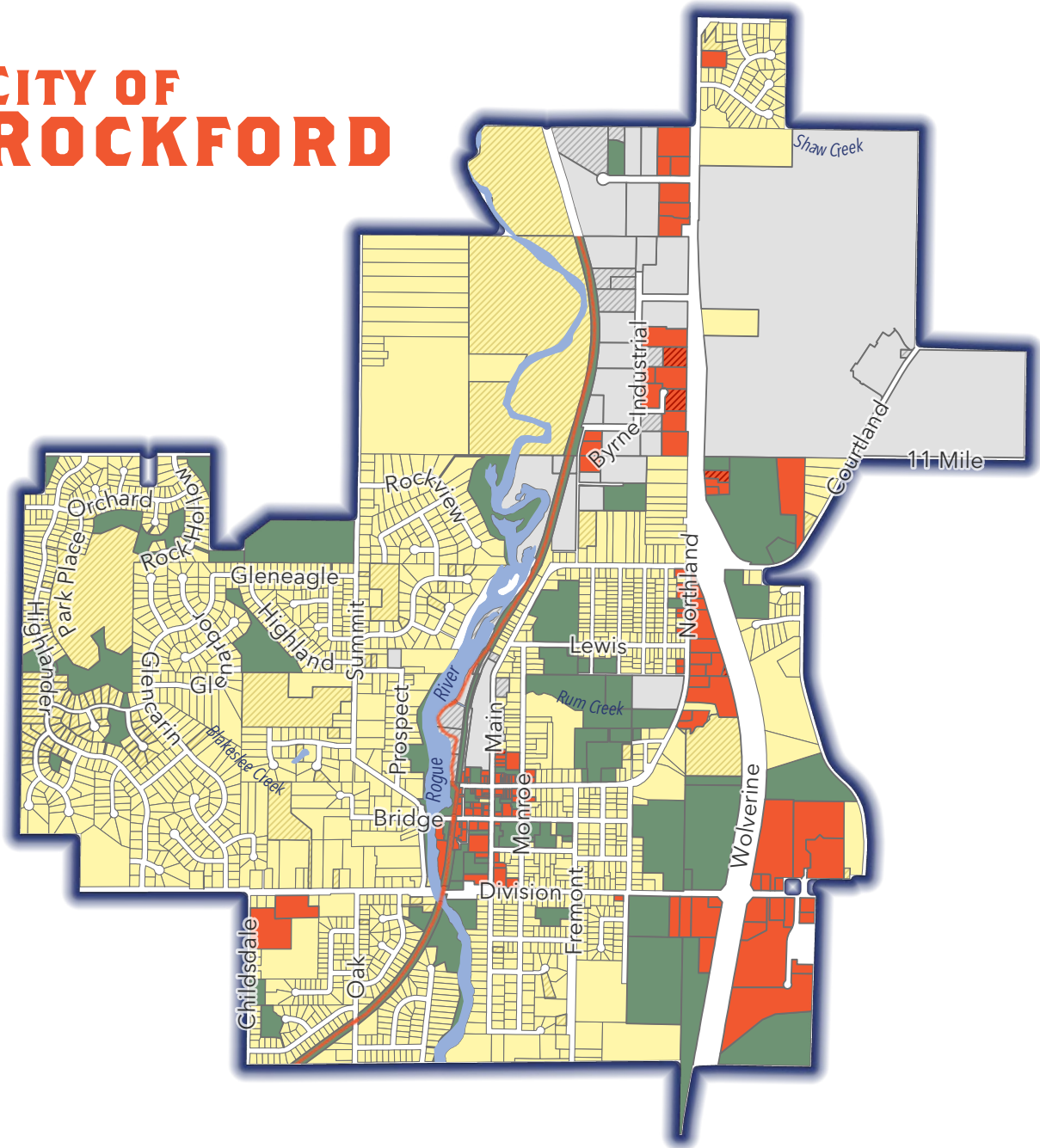
While there are isolated vacant parcels scattered throughout the City, there are few large blocks of land that have yet to be developed. The majority of the City's vacant property is classified as residential (224 acres). There are much more limited areas for industrial growth (28 acres) and commercial growth (6 acres) on vacant parcels. Based on current tax code classifications and zoning standards, it is likely that new development in the City will occur on residential properties or involve the redevelopment of existing properties in the City.

In 2001, the City of Rockford and Algoma Township entered into an agreement whereby approximately 170 acres of vacant, rolling land along Rockford's west border, north of 10 Mile Road, was transferred from the Township to the City under a cooperative, tax-sharing arrangement. This area still contains many of the existing vacant residential properties in the City.

Table 2-6. Land Uses in Rockford Based on Parcel Tax Classifications

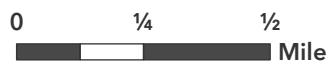
Land Use	Acres	% of Total Area
Commercial	190	9.2%
Industrial	360	17.4%
Residential	969	46.9%
Exempt	291	14.1%
Vacant	258	12.4%
TOTAL	2,068	100%

CITY OF ROCKFORD



MAP 5. EXISTING LAND USE

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Commercial |  Residential |
|  Commercial - Vacant |  Residential - Vacant |
|  Industrial |  Exempt |
|  Industrial - Vacant |  Fred Meijer White Pine Trail |





OUR COMMUNITY

Section 2.5

Transportation

North/south access to and from Rockford is reasonably good via the U.S.131 highway and Wolverine Blvd./Northland Drive. However, there is limited access along east and west corridors, placing large volumes of traffic on 10 Mile Road/Division Street through the center of the City. According to the Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) traffic counts, the average annual daily traffic (AADT) count for Division Street west of Main was 16,507 vehicles in 2021. This road is partially lined with single-family homes and commercial uses that also front the corridor. Most have separate driveways and minimal setbacks, creating frequent traffic conflicts. In addition, the street is lined with large, stately trees which reduce any likelihood of it being widened.

Ten Mile Road between the city limits and U.S. 131 interchange is also significantly busy at peak hours. This is the primary road providing access to the City from U.S. 131 and is classified as a principal arterial road. This road segment carries just under 20,000 vehicles per day in Algoma and Plainfield Townships. Several new developments have occurred on this corridor in recent years, including residential, recreational, and commercial projects in Plainfield and Algoma Townships. Traffic volumes will likely continue to increase in the future as additional development occurs in the region and a lack of public transportation necessitates the need for single-driver commuting patterns.

Public Schools

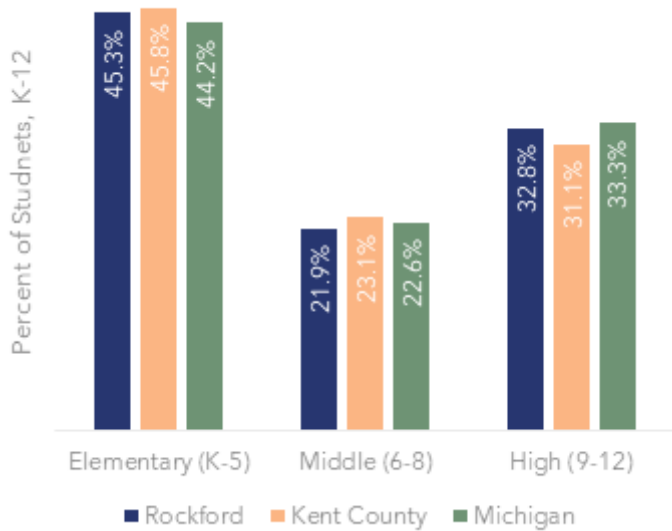
The entire City of Rockford is within the Rockford School District, though the district boundaries extend well beyond the city limits and encompass several neighboring Townships. The Rockford School District is renowned for excellence in academics, athletics, and fine arts. The high school has been recognized as one of the top 250 high schools in America by Newsweek magazine. The school district is strongly supported by its residents, resulting in a vibrant and active school system. The district offers an Early College Program that allows students to take classes for college credit, preparing students for future careers and investing in the future workforce.

Rockford School District Awards

- Advance Placement District of the Year Award
- State and national Blue Ribbon School District
- AdvancED accreditation
- 63 state championships in athletics
- Marching band state champions and performance at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade
- 9 state championships in TV Studio

The North Rockford Middle School, Parkside Elementary School, Valley View Elementary School, and the school district administration offices are located within the City, while other elementary schools, the high school, freshman center, and East Rockford Middle School are located in surrounding townships. A private school and three pre-schools are also located within the City. Overall, elementary schools comprise the greatest portion of the Rockford School District enrollment (45.3%), followed by high school students (32.8%). This distribution is comparable to the enrollment distribution in Kent County and Michigan (Fig. 2-11).

Figure 2-11. School Enrollment Distribution, 2020-21 School Year



Source: MI School Data

The Grand Rapids metropolitan area is also home to many public and private institutions for higher education. These include Grand Valley State University, Calvin University, Cornerstone University, Grace Christian University, Grand Rapids Community College, Montcalm Community College, Aquinas College, Kendall College of Art and Design, Kuyper College, and Ross College, along with numerous university extensions such as Michigan State University, Northwood University, and Ferris State University. The abundance of colleges and universities in the greater Grand Rapids area provides numerous opportunities for Rockford residents to pursue higher education.

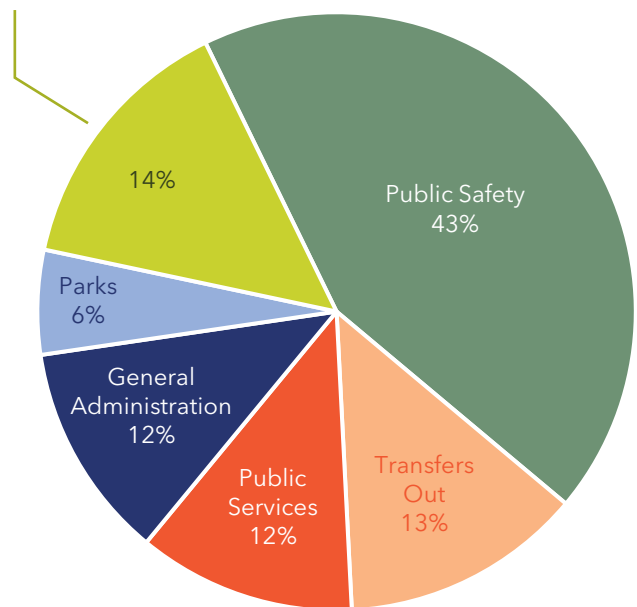
Public Safety

The City of Rockford’s public safety department contains three divisions: Enforcement, Fire, and Public Services. The Enforcement Division is comprised of 10 full-time and 3 part-time public safety officers. All full-time officers are also cross-trained as firefighters. The Fire Division employs a Fire Marshall and includes paid on-call firefighters. The Public Services Division includes 11 public service employees, who are cross-trained as firefighters. Between all three divisions, the public safety department includes 30 certified firefighters.

The Public Safety Department also maintains several community partnerships and educational programs. These include neighborhood watch groups, block parties, outreach events, D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) curriculum that is provided to the public school district, and Fire Prevention programs that are coordinated with the National Fire Prevention Week. The Public Safety Department is appropriated the highest percentage of funds by department (Fig. 2-12).

Figure 2-12. City Appropriations By Department

Departments with less than 5% appropriations (Cemetery, Yard Waste Disposal, General Government Operations, Assessing, Community Events, Community Cabin, City Council, Museum & Chamber Complex, Downtown Gathering Spaces, Farmers Market, Elections, Planning)



Source: City of Rockford

Water and Sewer Services

The City of Rockford owns and maintains its sanitary sewer and water systems. The sanitary sewer system is connected to and treated by the North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA). The NKSA was founded in 1997 by the City of Rockford, Plainfield Charter Township, and the Townships of Alpine, Cannon, and Courtland. While the primary purpose of the NKSA was to acquire, own, improve, and repair the area's existing sanitary sewer collection and transportation system, the purpose has evolved to include the construction and operation of a wastewater treatment facility, now known as the PARCC Side Clean Water Plant, which was completed in 2008. The plant uses bioreactors, membrane filters, and ultraviolet disinfection to produce clean water to discharge into the Grand River.

The Rockford Water Treatment Plant draws water from an aquifer more than 100 feet below the surface of the earth and pumps it directly into the on-site treatment facility. From there, the water travels through the distribution system and into homes, businesses, irrigation systems, and fire protection systems. This system is comprised of approximately 40 miles of water main, thousands of water meters, over 400 fire hydrants, a booster pumping station, and four water towers ranging in capacity from 200,000 gallons to 500,000 gallons. These elevated tanks provide the City with water pressure and volume for daily use as well as fire suppression. The City also provides water services to parts of Algoma, Cannon, and Courtland Townships.

The 2020 water quality report indicated that the City's water met or exceeded all federal and state requirements. While per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination has become a greater concern for the City of Rockford and several nearby communities in West Michigan, there was no detection of this substance at the water plant point of entry into the distribution system when tested in January 2021. There were, however, properties in the City where contamination occurred, and PFAS has been detected in the Rogue River. Wolverine Worldwide Inc. has submitted the final Tannery Interceptor Response Activity Plan which outlines the design parameters for the interceptor system, that will appropriately address and control PFAS contamination in the groundwater at the Tannery before it enters the Rogue River. These substances (PFAS)

remain an area of significant public concern and efforts are ongoing to understand the scope of the problem and necessary remediation efforts.

Another water quality issue of local, state, and national importance in recent years is the distribution of water through lead service lines. A variety of different materials were used by contractors over time, and lead service lines are common in older homes throughout the nation. Newer services lines are typically made of copper and plastic. Efforts are ongoing to replace lead service lines to ensure that all residents of the City are provided with a source of clean, safe drinking water. The City is exploring additional locations for public water facilities to increase capacity, if needed.

Parks and Recreation

The natural environment is highly valued by Rockford residents. The City has been designated as a "Tree City" since 2010 and takes pride in maintaining this status. An annual Parkway Tree Program is also conducted, during which residents are offered the chance to purchase a tree for their parkway on a 50/50 cost basis with the City.

The City maintains two cemeteries: Pioneer and Rockford. The Pioneer Cemetery is located on half an acre at 387 East Division and was the original City cemetery. The last burial in this cemetery occurred around 1900. The Rockford Cemetery was created around 1875 and is a 26-acre property located on South Lincoln Street in the southeast portion of the City. This cemetery is still used today.

Rockford contains several parks and trails that contribute to the area's beauty and add to the City's charm. These are summarized as follows:

Rockford Dam Overlook. The Rockford dam is a highlight for both residents and visitors, offering a spectacular view of the Rogue River. This overlook offers direct access to the river and provides opportunities to watch fishermen, picnic, or enjoy sitting near the water.

Peppler Park. Located west of the Rockford Dam, this park includes a fishing platform, picnic areas, and a walkway across the dam. Highlights of this park include a new overlook, railings, access ramp, landscaping, flowers, stairs to Bridge Street, and the Rockford Area Community Endowment "Recognition Plaza."

Rogue River Nature Trail. This boardwalk begins in Pepper Park, west of the Rockford Dam, and extends a quarter mile north along the Rogue Riverbank. While encompassing 4.5 acres, the trail offers views of the Rogue River, woods, and downtown Rockford for pedestrians on foot.

Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park. This rail trail offers a 92-mile partially paved connection from northern Grand Rapids to Cadillac. Traveling through downtown Rockford, this trail offers scenic views of the Rogue River and opportunities for walking, bicycling, and rollerblading.

Garden Club Park. Located adjacent to and northeast of the Rockford dam, this park is in the heart of Rockford and includes picnic tables, lighting, and a concert stage that was improved in 2021. It is frequently used for community events such as the Rogue River Blues, Praise in the Park, Art in the Park, and others. A Parks and Recreation Master Plan for this park was completed in 2019 that calls for additional improvements to the park, including a skating rink, outdoor fireplace, and additional amenities. Efforts to implement this plan are ongoing.

Rotary Jaycee Park. This neighborhood park includes a play structure, basketball court, open field, picnic tables, and drinking fountain.

Rockford Community Cabin. Located at N. Monroe Street in Memorial Park the Community Cabin was built in 1937 and renovated for public use. It is often reserved for meetings, receptions, reunions, and picnics.

Memorial Park. This park contains the Rum Creek Nature and Fitness Trail, the Community Cabin, and open spaces, and is used as part of the playground for Parkside Elementary. The creek is a pristine, cold water stream containing trout. A Parks and Recreation Master Plan for this park was completed in 2019 that calls for additional improvements to the park, including a skate park, educational pavilions, walking trails, and other amenities financed by the public.

Glen Park. Glen Park contains a boardwalk, playground, nature trail, picnic tables, and benches. The wooded setting provides space to enjoy the outdoors and relax with family and friends. This park is located on Glen Park Drive, west of Highland Drive.

Pickett Park. This park contains a fitness challenge climbing structure, swings, jeep riding toys, a WUM climber, picnic tables, and access to the White Pine Trail State Park. This park includes a pedestrian bridge that spans the Rogue River to Richardson Sowerby Park.

Richardson-Sowerby Park. This park is located on the east and west banks of the Rogue River and accessed from the White Pine State Trail or off Main Street. It includes a covered pavilion, grills, a playground, fishing areas, and restrooms. A pedestrian bridge provides access to the Rockford dog park.

Rockford Dog Park. This park is located on the western side of the Rogue River, south of Pickett Park. The park includes a fenced open space with benches, trash cans, and a connection to the White Pine Trail.





OUR OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Section 2.6

Rockford is widely considered to be among the region's most desirable communities as a place to live, work, or simply visit. As it works to define its future for the next twenty years or more, there are a number of planning issues impacting the City's future that the Master Plan addresses.

Small Town Charm

The quaint charm, compact size, family-friendly atmosphere, safe neighborhoods, and nearby employment opportunities have lured many people to the Rockford community over the years. The scale of that growth, however, has outpaced the availability of existing homes and land within the City's central core.

New residential development has found its place mainly on the west side of the Rogue River, and at other locations in the City such as the new Tamarack Run development near Parkside Elementary School. However, rather than continuing the pattern of urban design established by the original settlement, new developments have been created with a contemporary style of development that are generally designed for automobiles and commuting populations, such as wide meandering streets, cul-de-sacs, prominent garages, and expansive front yards. Elsewhere, industrial and commercial establishments have developed, but again, new development has not often blended well with the City's original character.

This issue was discussed extensively in the previous Master Plan as a critical issue facing the City. Like the previous plan, this plan recognizes that the original community cannot be duplicated in every detail and the terrain associated with much of the remaining available land may preclude a traditional walkable neighborhood development pattern. However, new development, whether residential or business, can still incorporate certain design elements that embrace the feeling of the core neighborhoods to represent an idyllic form of small-town life and create a harmony throughout the community. The previous plan strongly advocated for development consistent with the City's core neighborhoods in terms of architectural style/material, smaller lot sizes, sidewalks, etc. This has not materialized over the years, and it may never fully come to fruition. This plan sets forth some policies that result in people-oriented traditional patterns. However, the City must determine what steps it is willing to take to help such a policy manifest.

It is worth noting that despite the physical differences, Rockford's culture is fairly unified. Residents of both old and new neighborhoods share the same pride in the community and enjoy the assets and amenities that Rockford offers. This strong sense of community and shared culture is a primary strength of the community upon which future improvements can be built.

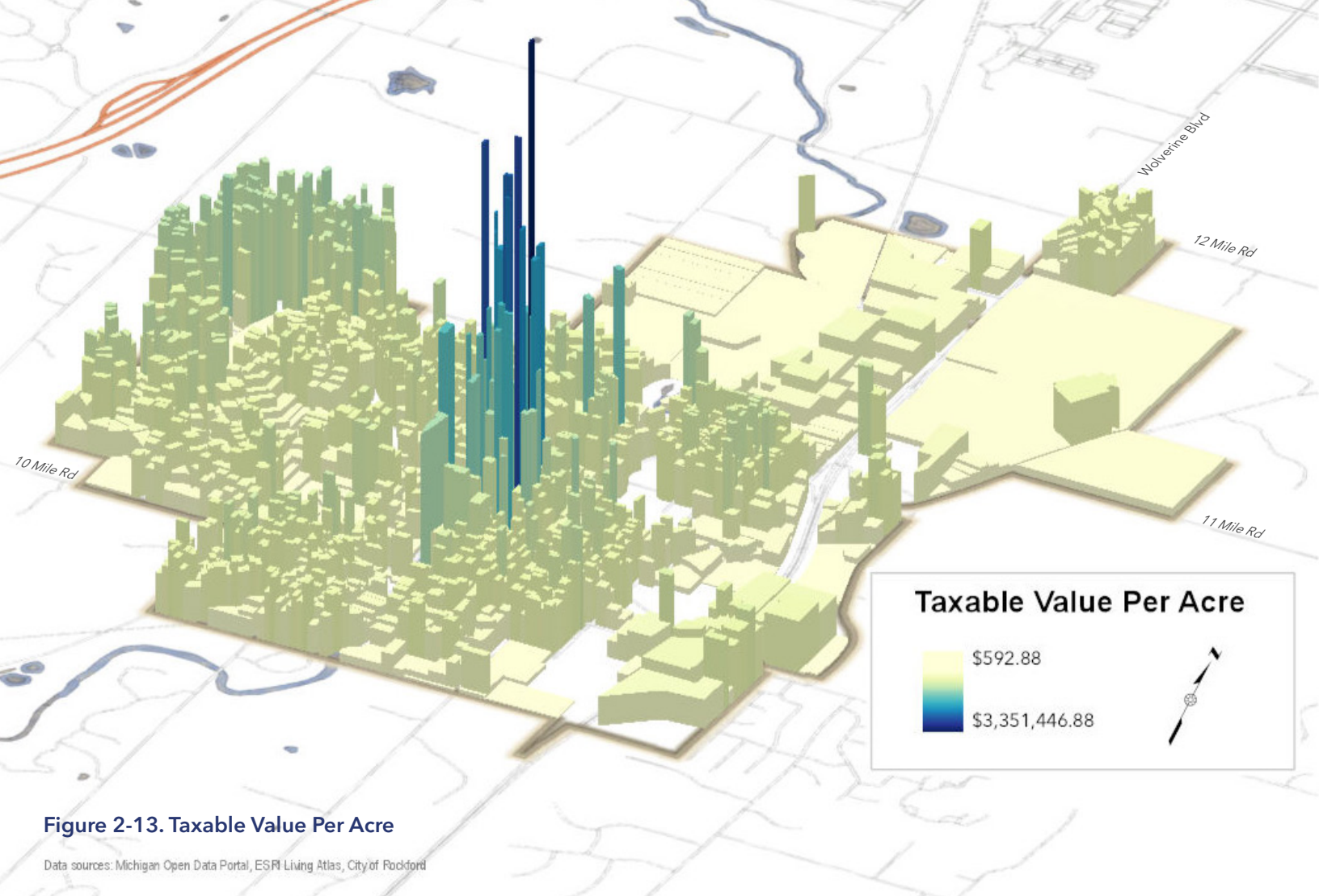


Figure 2-13. Taxable Value Per Acre

Data sources: Michigan Open Data Portal, ESRI Living Atlas, City of Rockford

Neighborhood Integrity & Tax Base

An issue closely related to protecting Rockford’s small-town charm is that of protecting the residential character of the City’s established neighborhoods from the threat of non-residential expansion. Additionally, many uses such as churches, schools, and parks contribute greatly to the fabric of the traditional neighborhood and may even provide a focal point for the area.

However, the growth and expansion of non-taxable properties can sometimes result in the demolition of viable residential lots for paved parking lots that receive, at best, sporadic use. Although these institutions add value to the community, they can also erode the fabric of the neighborhood. Further, they also have an impact on the tax base of the city as productive land uses are taken off the tax rolls.

Maintaining the residential integrity and character of Rockford’s neighborhoods should be given priority over other competing interests. Existing homes should not

be sacrificed to non-residential uses without serious consideration of all other possible alternatives. Dense residential neighborhoods are often the economic backbone of many communities, as, on a per-acre basis, they generate more tax revenue for the City than most other types of development, including industrial development.

In Rockford, the most productive properties from a property tax perspective are not the large employers located in the industrial park; rather, they are commercial and mixed use properties located in the City’s downtown. These properties have higher taxable values per acre than the most productive industrial businesses. As indicated in Figure 2-13, the highest taxable value is reported to be around \$3 million for a property downtown and some of the lowest values are around \$600. Aside from the downtown, both new and old single-family residential homes contribute significantly to the City’s financial health compared to most other development, although in some cases, they require a



The City may also consider encouraging redevelopment and infill development in existing commercial and industrial areas, including the downtown. The City will need to ensure that its policies and regulations, at a minimum, enable development forms that are preferred by the community.

External Pressures

The Master Plan is intended to guide community development decisions to achieve the City's long-range goals and policies. However, there are certain conditions beyond the City's direct control that significantly impact its future. Such external influences must be recognized and addressed to the extent possible by the City in cooperation with its neighbors.

Continued development along 10 Mile Road probably has the greatest potential to impact Rockford. The U.S. 131 interchange has changed significantly in the last 20 years and now is a hub of commercial activity that includes a Meijer store, a senior residential development, two apartment complexes, a medical office, several additional fast-food and sit-down restaurants, and a variety of commercial businesses. In addition, Plainfield Township's Premier Park, the Meijer Sports Complex, Autumn Trails Residential Community, and other approved developments along Ten Mile Road between US-131 and Rockford's city limits have added substantial development to the region. This development is positioned at the front door of the City and will inevitably impact its future. Ten Mile Road is a heavily traveled five-lane highway from US-131 into the City, and traffic is likely to increase in the coming years as new developments come online.

Other development on all sides of the City will also impact Rockford. Specific concerns with development will relate to its compatibility with existing or planned uses; the image it presents at the City's entry points and its visual relationship to the character of Rockford. Again, these are matters outside the City's direct control. To a large extent, the City must rely on the cooperation of adjoining townships and their desire for quality development to promote a harmonious built environment.

higher level of city services. Nevertheless, the downtown and core neighborhoods represent an efficient development pattern in the community that should be encouraged and strengthened.

Commercial Development

Commercial development presents a complex issue for Rockford. While its downtown is a focal point for the City and an attraction that pulls thousands of visitors to the community each year, it is not without its challenges. Business turnover, insufficient room for expansion, and retail mix are frequently stated concerns. The City's other commercial center at 10 Mile Road and Wolverine Boulevard is active, but is also auto-oriented, lacks character, and is limited in its ability to expand. A few scattered businesses in other locations are destinations, but lack the synergy to be considered "centers."

The City may struggle to accommodate new commercial activity unless that activity takes place in existing commercial buildings or redeveloped properties. As new development and redevelopment are considered in the City, it will need to carefully evaluate the impact on the entire community to ensure that there are no unintended consequences.



The City does however have the ability to lessen the impacts of these external development pressures by limiting commercial expansion between the western city limits and Northland Drive. While the City has positive relationships with its surrounding Townships, joint efforts regarding the multi-jurisdictional 10 Mile Corridor Plan are an ongoing effort in promoting well-landscaped, walkable, development that is in line with Rockford’s identity.

Geographic Limitations

Like cities everywhere that have already dealt with growth issues, Rockford is nearing its geographic limitations for new development. Most of the community is “built-out” meaning that there is little land left within the city limits that have not been developed. Isolated lots offer some infill potential, but there are only a few large tracts of land available to accommodate large projects.

Most of the surrounding land, located in four separate townships, is rural but rapidly developing with suburban residential development. Development philosophies also vary among the adjoining communities. While Courtland (to the east), Cannon (to the southeast), and Plainfield (to the south) have planned their respective

lands for various categories of rural residential, Algoma Township (west and northwest of Rockford) anticipates a higher relative density (2-3.25 units per acre), if public utilities become available. In addition, Algoma proposes extending commercial and industrial development north of the City along the west side of Northland Drive. As of 2020, much, but not all, of the west side of Northland Drive from 12 Mile Road to M-57 contains commercial or industrial development.

Future industrial development presents a greater challenge. The existing industrial park on the north end of the City is nearly built-out. The only remaining land suited to the industry is found on the east side of Northland Drive, north of 11 Mile Road. This land, however, is owned by Wolverine Worldwide Corporation and will likely be held for corporate expansion.

Whether future growth occurs within or outside the boundaries of the City, will impact Rockford’s “small town” character. It is important for the City to avoid the erosion of its character and guide the new growth that does occur within its boundaries in a way that contributes to its charm.

One of the issues to be confronted as growth continues

in and around the City relates to moving traffic. As previously noted, east/west access is largely confined to 10 Mile Rd./Division Street corridor, which connects with the only interchange at U.S.131 near Rockford. This corridor will likely continue to be congested and the City should work cooperatively on transportation planning with neighboring jurisdictions and the Kent County Road Commission as opportunities arise to ensure that Division Street maintains its character in the City.

Redevelopment & Infill Opportunities

The City contains two prominent locations that present an opportunity for redevelopment. These are the Wolverine Worldwide property directly north of the downtown adjacent to the Rogue River, and Old Northland Drive between Courtland and East Main Street. The downtown business district offers the potential for creative redevelopment of some existing buildings and infill, as was evidenced by a proposal in 2019 to construct a hotel on one of the City's downtown parking lots. Additionally, the upper floors of many of these buildings are vacant or, at best, underutilized. Many offer potential opportunities for offices, apartments, or condominium units.

Beyond a building-by-building redevelopment effort downtown, there may be a long-range opportunity on a presently-undeveloped property currently owned by Wolverine Worldwide Corporation. Until recently, this lot was not developable due to environmental concerns, but the site was home to a time-critical removal action/short-term extensive cleanup in 2018-2019. The site could now be developed in several ways, including an expansion of the business district, or a walkable single-family or mixed residential neighborhood along with designated open spaces.

Another redevelopment focus is found in the east-central part of the City. The Old Northland Drive area between Courtland Drive and East Main Street contains a mix of businesses and residences. Some are new,

while others are old; some are well-maintained while others appear tired and neglected. While some new investment has been made in the area in recent years, incompatibilities and deterioration still exist. This area would benefit from extensive redevelopment efforts and focused sub-area planning. This will be a challenging area for redevelopment due to the mix of businesses, residences, and other factors, but it is obvious that the area needs investment, focused planning, and a cohesive land use pattern.

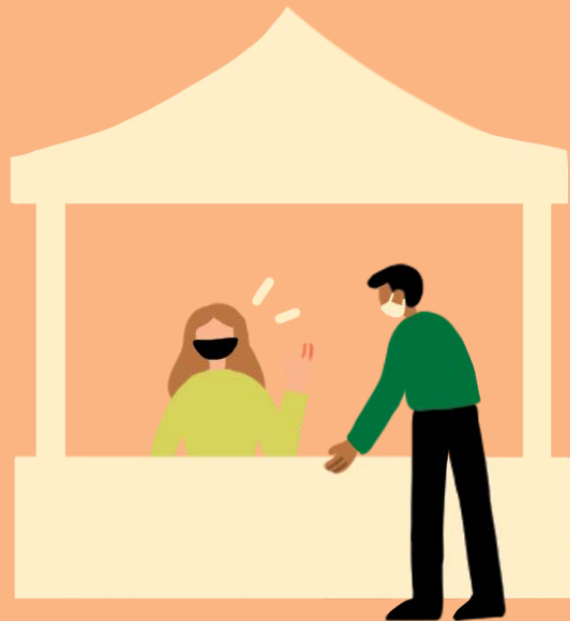
Conclusions

The vision statement from Rockford's previous Master Plan was that by 2020, the city "...will be a walkable small town that has maintained its natural and historical assets while providing a variety of leisure, economic, and residential opportunities resulting in a sense of community pride and distinctive character." This vision statement has largely come to fruition. The City has done an admirable job of building on its many strengths, such as its excellent school system, idyllic physical setting, vibrant downtown, stable housing stock, and abundant recreational opportunities.

However, the landscape has changed in the last 20 years, as there are new challenges facing the City that the updated Master Plan must address. Issues related to PFAS, housing affordability, changing retail habits, and the COVID-19 pandemic threaten the physical, social, and cultural fabric of the community. While effective planning can't solve every challenge facing the community, it can address many of these concerns if founded on broad community support and thoughtfully and properly implemented.

This 2022 Master Plan is based on input from the public, the Planning Commission, and city leadership. It seeks to build on much of the work that has been accomplished to date. Changing conditions in the community and new challenges require the City to adjust its policies as necessary to address the next phases of Rockford's evolution.

CHAPTER 3



WE ARE ENGAGED

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

Section 3.1

Engagement Campaign

The City of Rockford undertook a robust engagement campaign to inform the goals and objectives of this master plan. A summary of these findings in terms of the input and quantified data received, an analysis of the significance of the conclusions, and a discussion of the methods used to solicit feedback are provided as part of this chapter, with the full engagement report available in the Appendix.

The public engagement for the City of Rockford’s Master Plan update encompassed a variety of outreach techniques and methods to solicit community feedback from numerous sources.

A hybrid of virtual and in-person events were conducted to solicit community feedback. This hybrid approach allowed participants to choose events and activities that most interested them, suited their availability, or they were most comfortable with, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3-1. Master Planning Events and Timeline



POP-UP PLANNING

SEPT-OCT 2021

Quick and engaging planning activities were conducted at Harvest Fest and the Farmers Market.



COMMUNITY SURVEY

SEPT-DEC 2021

An online survey was created for members of the community to provide detailed feedback about the Master Plan.



VISIONING SESSIONS

OCT-DEC 2021

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



CLASSROOM COLLABORATION

NOV 2021

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

POP-UP PLANNING

Section 3.2

Mobile pop-up events provided a casual, drop-in format for participants to engage with activities at their own pace and learn about the Master Plan. By providing a variety of quick, fun, and eye-catching activities at well-attended events, the consultants were able to solicit feedback from passersby, drawing in people who may not typically engage in traditional public planning endeavors.

What do you love about Rockford?

Participants were asked to write down three reasons why they love the City of Rockford on sticky notes and place their responses on a designated board. The words or combination of words that were most frequently used in this exercise included trail, farmers market, walkability, community, river, downtown, and town (often referencing small-town charm). Additional topics commonly expressed in the activity included a love of nature and city parks, an appreciation for community entertainment and programming, and enjoyment of the local shops and eateries.

Areas for Investment

Participants were also asked to place red pins on the map in areas where they believe the most public investment is needed and yellow pins in areas where moderate public investment is needed (see Appendix for more detail and the reference map from this activity). Area C, the former Wolverine site, had the highest weighted average for investment, followed by Area F, Northland Drive east, and Area A, neighborhoods west of the river. Area E, 10 Mile and Wolverine Boulevard, had no pins placed during either pop-up planning event.

Sustainability Priorities

A voting exercise was provided during both events to gauge the importance of multiple topics related to sustainability. The top three sustainable priorities included ground and surface water protection, increased tree canopy, and habitat preservation. A city-sponsored compost program received mixed results, ranking high at one event and low at the other. Electric car charging stations was regularly ranked low at all events.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Section 3.3

Methodology and General Information

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

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



A total of 532 surveys were completed from the September 24, 2021 through December 5, 2021.

Background

The first section of the survey provided context for its purpose in relation to the City's Master Plan update and inquired about the participant's background.

- A majority of the respondents answered as living in the Rockford area for more than 20 years. The majority of participants indicated that they are living with two to four persons, suggesting a mix of couples and families. Over half of the survey participants had children under the age of 18 in their household.
- The largest age group of survey participants was 35-44 followed by the 45-44 and 25-34 year old age groups. The survey results were on par with the relatively young median age of 35.4 years found in the City of Rockford.
- Fewer than 18% of survey participants live in a household with persons over the age of 65. 82 respondents provided this information, indicating 1 to 2 seniors per household for respondents living with persons over the age of 65.

Housing

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

- Respondents were prompted to select the most important reason(s) they live or would consider living in the City of Rockford. A safe area and an attractive downtown were the most frequently selected answer choices, followed by the local character, recreational opportunities, and the school district. Other comments included the KDL Library, the local schools, and proximity to Grand Rapids.
- Rockford's ratio of owner- to renter-occupied dwellings is relatively high compared to other cities in West Michigan. 64.1% of survey participants indicated owning their current residence.
- A wide margin of respondents live in single family homes (64.1%), followed by two family, multi-family, or mixed use housing.
- 75.2% of respondents indicated the housing type they desire is available in the City today. The participants also provided further insight through open-ended comments regarding the type of housing they would like to see. Most frequently mentioned housing types included acreage, affordable housing, condos, large homes, small homes, and new construction homes.
- The most preferred housing type in the City was single family homes. 21% of respondents indicated that they do not want new housing in the City. Although there was not strong support for alternative types of housing beyond single-family homes, the "other" category included common elements, such as affordable housing, condos, and diverse housing types.

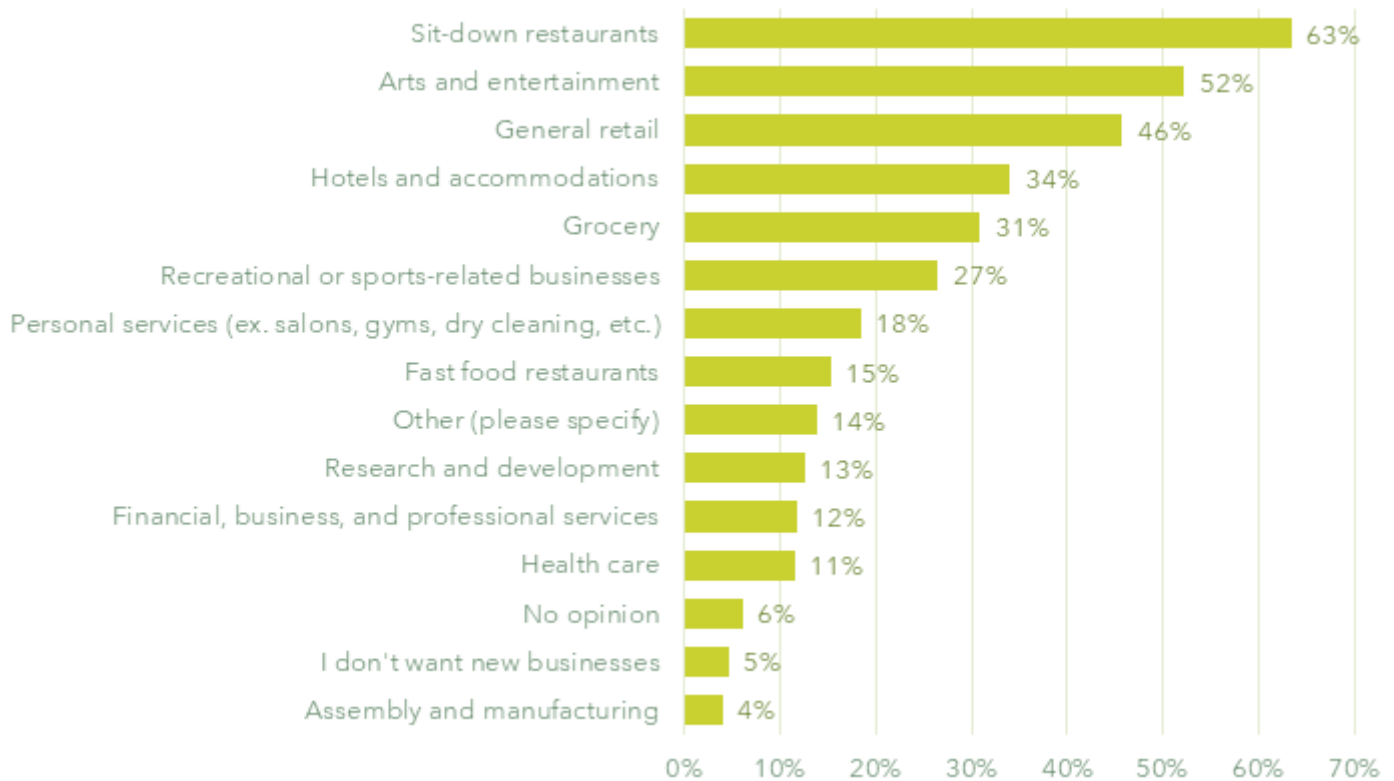
Economic Development

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

- Public safety had the highest weighted average at 4.59, with 69% of participants selecting this factor as very important. Ability to walk to shops and restaurants, aesthetics/appearance, walkability, cost of living, and taxes followed as the next five highest weighted economic development factors.

- The majority of respondents believe the City is doing a good job with efforts to guide and direct development and growth. Additional space was provided for written comments. These comments varied greatly in their response, some expressing support for the recent city-led efforts, such as RORA, several with concern regarding the City budget and taxes, and a few who were unsure about the City's efforts in economic development.
- Respondents were asked what types of new businesses they would like to see in the city (Fig. 3-2). 63% of participants selected sit-down restaurants, followed by arts and entertainment, general retail, hotel accommodations, and grocery. 14% of participants selected "other", and their comments focused on specific food-oriented businesses, such as small grocers, delis, bakeries, and coffee shops. Other common comments included creating a greater variety of retail businesses and providing more youth and family-friendly spaces.

Figure 3-2. What type of new businesses would you like to see in the City?



Community Investment

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

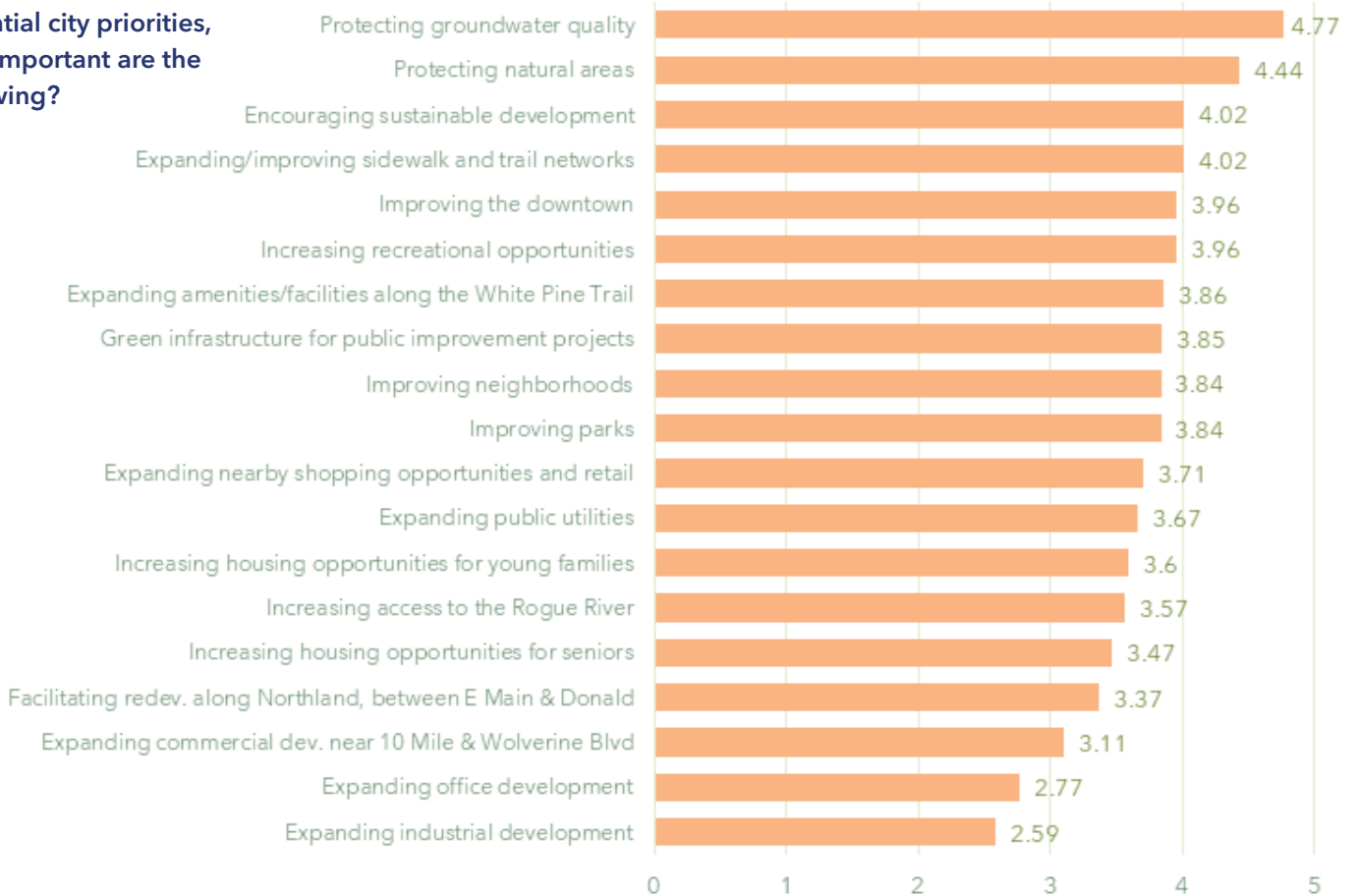
- Participants were asked to submit three words that best described their future vision for the City. The most frequently used words included safe, community, sustainable, clean, friendly, green, affordable, fun, walkable, and beautiful.
- A reference map of the City was provided for participants to identify areas they believe require public investment. The map was divided into seven distinct areas (see Appendix for area reference map). Respondents ranked each area based on the location they thought was most in need of public investment to least in need of public investment. Area A, the former Wolverine site (5.79), and Area B, downtown (4.92) were weighted as the most in need of investment while Area G, the industrial parks (2.86) were

weighted as the least in need of investment.

The former Wolverine site was determined to be most in need of investment and the neighborhoods east and west of the river placed third and fourth respectively for need of investment. The industrial parks, 10 Mile, and Wolverine Boulevard were consistently in the bottom three for need of investment.

- Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of city priorities on a 5-point likert scale. This scale was then used to calculate the weighted average for each provided city priority (Fig. 3-3). Protecting groundwater quality had the highest weighted average, with 81% of respondents classifying this priority as very important. Other priorities with a weighted average categorized as important include protecting natural areas, encouraging sustainable development, and expanding/improving sidewalk and trail networks.

Figure 3-3. In terms of potential city priorities, how important are the following?

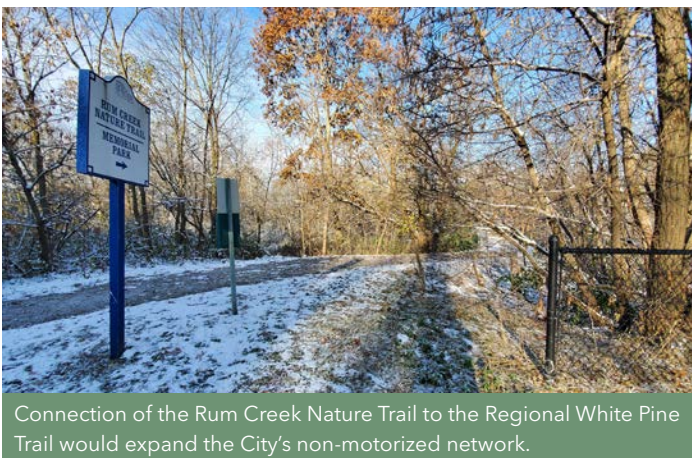


- A comment box was provided for the respondents to indicate streets/intersections that need traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements. Comments were located and categorized, as shown on Map 6. Comments pertaining to streets and traffic signs/signals were the most frequently referenced, often requesting new traffic lights, four- or three-way stops, speed limit signs, or bike lanes. Sidewalks and crosswalks were the second most common comment type, with respondents identifying stretches of sidewalk for repair, locations in need of new sidewalks, intersections for crosswalk repair, or the installation of pedestrian signals. Connections to or maintenance of the White Pine Trail was a common theme among trail-oriented comments. Other comments included requests not related to the other three defined categories (e.g. connections across the river, speeding, etc.) or identified locations that provided no further description (e.g. Bridge and Main, Division and Oak, etc.).

- Participants were asked to submit three words that best described their future vision for the City. The most frequently used words included safe (n=44), community (n=33), sustainable (n=25), clean (n=23), friendly (n=19), green (n=19), affordable (n=17), fun (n=15), walkable (n=14), and beautiful (n=14).
- The final survey question asked what else participants would like city leaders to consider while updating the City of Rockford Master Plan. A wide variety of responses were recorded and are included in the Appendix but several comment themes included requests for the City to balance community growth and the impacts of that growth, such as preserving the area’s natural beauty and small town charm, accommodating increased traffic, continuing to connect to regional and local trail systems, providing a sufficient number of schools, and planning for impact’s on the City’s budget and infrastructure.



Neighborhoods west of the River are in need of safe sidewalks along Division to downtown.

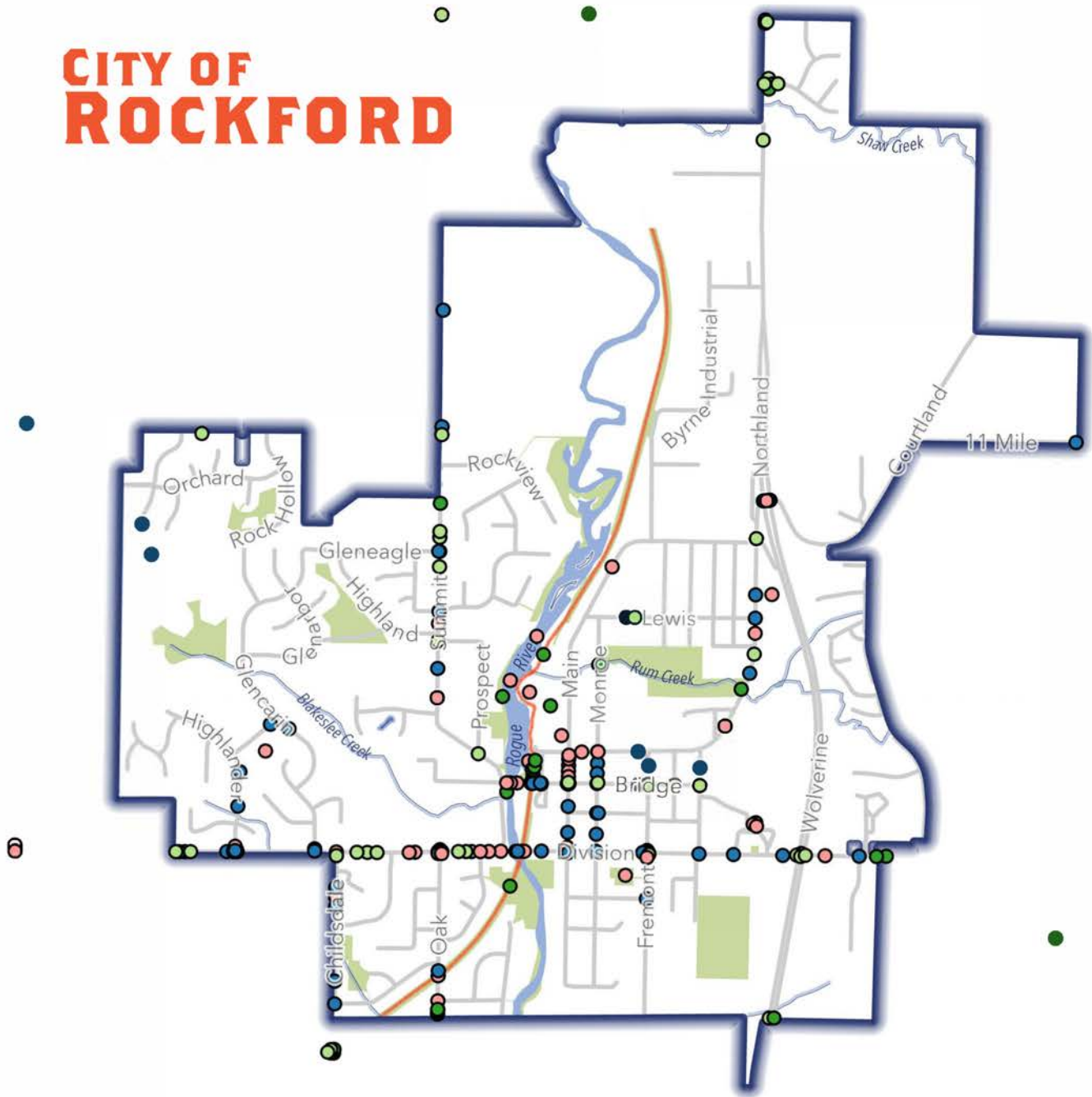


Connection of the Rum Creek Nature Trail to the Regional White Pine Trail would expand the City’s non-motorized network.



Several sidewalk crossings are in need of reconstruction to meet ADA accessibility standards.

CITY OF ROCKFORD



MAP 6. COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED MOBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

- Fred Meijer White Pine Trail
- Parks & Cemeteries
- Streets & Traffic Signs/Signals (n=77)
- Sidewalks & Crosswalks (n=66)
- Trails (n=33)
- Other (n=55)



VISIONING SESSIONS

Section 3.4

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

Opportunities and Threats

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

PRIORITY OPPORTUNITIES	PRIORITY THREATS
Varied Housing Options (Type of Housing, Cost Range)	Accessibility to Neighborhoods (West of River, Northeast of Northland)
Community Wealth	Lack of Sustainable Efforts/Understanding
Gathering/Community Spaces	Communication Deficiencies
Healthy Downtown	Funding
Infrastructure/Parking/Streets/Transportation	Infrastructure
Redevelopment of the Tannery Site	Not Implementing City Plans
The Rogue River	Intergovernmental Cooperation/Leadership Alignment
Sustainability (Integration, Coordination, and Education)	Lack of Affordable Housing
Zoning Reform/Planning	Political Divides
Industrial Park Expansion	Resistance to Change
Connected Community	Underutilized/Vacant Properties
	Unsustainable Growth

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

CLASSROOM COLLABORATION

Section 3.5

Students at North Rockford Middle School were engaged in the planning process for updating the City's Master Plan. Two sessions were held, one with a class of 6th graders and the other with 8th graders. Each session included the same activities and began with an introductory presentation, a Mentimeter activity, a road map to the future exercise, postcards to your future self, and penny jar voting about city priorities.

The students were asked about a variety of master plan related topics. The results from these activities are as follows:

- When asked to describe what they love about Rockford, the five most frequently used words were food, downtown, community, people, and nature.
- Conversely, the students were then asked to submit three words (or phrases) to describe what they dislike about Rockford. The words most frequently used were pollution, parking, COVID, roads, and people.
- A majority of students responded with feeling safe in their neighborhood. A few students noted that they do not feel safe in their neighborhood, with burglaries and vandalism being discussed as potential safety issues in the community.
- The students were asked to pick the top three improvements they would like to see in Rockford. They selected more hangouts, improved or additional parks, citywide wi-fi, and improved sidewalks and roads as the most common answer choices.
- From the penny jar activity, the top five public services or amenities included providing more entertainment options, attracting new job creators, supporting police & fire services, fixing roads & sidewalks, and expanding/maintaining parks & trails. Support sustainability efforts had the fewest votes. This was surprising based on the high number of students who focused on sustainable elements in the roadmap and postcard activities, like preserving nature, cleaning pollution, and creating parks.
- Preserving nature and cleaning up pollution, such as PFAS and plastic, was a popular topic that emerged in the postcard activity. Other common postcard themes included expanding parks and recreational spaces, repairing roads and sidewalks, inclusivity and diversity, and having a greater variety of shops and restaurants.



CHAPTER 4



**WE ARE CREATING A
BALANCED FUTURE**

PLANNING THEMES

Setting the Stage



The City of Rockford Master Plan strives to articulate and implement a broad, community-based vision for the City based on the needs and desires of its residents, business owners, visitors, and local officials. The overarching policies and direction of this master plan are guided by the following five themes. Each of the five themes outlined below is based on input received from the public and further informed by Rockford’s Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority, City Council, Sustainability Committee, and staff.

- **Community and Culture.** Rockford will be a safe, inclusive, forward-looking, and vibrant community that celebrates the diversity of its residents, businesses, and visitors.
- **Businesses, Neighborhoods, and Housing.** Rockford homes and neighborhoods will be well-maintained and provide housing opportunities for people of all ages and income levels. Businesses will be prosperous and vital members of the community.
- **Recreation and the Natural Environment.** Rockford will continue to provide high-quality recreational amenities and protect sensitive natural features for the benefit of future generations.
- **Infrastructure and Mobility.** Rockford will have a balanced, multi-modal transportation system that will reduce dependency on private automobile trips. Streets and utility services will be reliable, safe, and efficient throughout the City.
- **Sustainability and Leadership.** Rockford will be a leader in sustainability by actively promoting (1) sustainable waste management practices, (2) the use of renewable energy sources, (3) the protection and conservation of natural resources, and (4) public education surrounding sustainability issues. Rockford’s sustainable practices will meet the needs of today without sacrificing the needs of tomorrow.





WE HAVE A VISION

The following is Rockford's Vision Statement for this master plan:



"In 2040, Rockford will be a welcoming, vibrant, and diverse community that has preserved and protected its natural and historical assets, walkable neighborhoods, and distinct sense of community and character while continuing to provide a range of sustainable recreational, economic, and residential opportunities for everyone."

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





GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Defining our Future

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

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

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE



GOAL 1

The City will foster a sense of community and belonging through preserving its safe atmosphere, small-town character, and charm.

Objectives:

- A. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to encourage or require property owners to maintain key characteristics of their property that contribute to the walkable environment of core city neighborhoods.
- B. Develop a community brand that promotes a unified direction that reflects Rockford's history, character, and culture.
- C. Promote neighborhood pride by facilitating the development of neighborhood organizations with open lines of communications to the City government.
- D. Explore ways to connect the Shaw Creek Estates, the neighborhood located at the corner of 12 Mile Road and Northland Drive, to the city center.
- E. Explore ways to minimize 10 Mile Road/Division as a barrier to pedestrian and non-motorized traffic between the north and south parts of the City.



GOAL 2

The City of Rockford will promote the arts, music, and culture.

Objectives:

- A. Hold festivals, events, and similar activities in the downtown that promote art, music, and culture.
- B. Align marketing and public relation messaging to promote the City as a welcoming and inclusive community.

GOAL 3

The City will embrace the diversity of West Michigan and take active steps to ensure that Rockford’s government represents the varying backgrounds and perspectives of its residents, businesses, and visitors.

Objectives.

- A. Strive to engage people with balanced and varied perspectives to serve on city boards, commissions, and committees.
- B. Seek out and engage with organizations representing people of varying backgrounds to ensure that all people feel welcomed and represented in the community
- C. Evaluate city policies with the goal of ensuring that the City government provides city services to everyone equally and effectively.
- D. Amend ordinances to allow City Council representation on Planning Commission as non-voting members.

BUSINESSES, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND HOUSING

GOAL 4

Downtown Rockford will continue to be known as the vibrant heart of the City that is clean, safe, and home to a varied and active business community. The City will emphasize increasing downtown living options and preserve its cherished historic buildings.

Objectives:

- A. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to encourage highly desirable development, such as mixed uses (specifically residential above retail) and business with active storefronts in the downtown as uses permitted by right and/or with administrative approval.
- B. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to include form-based standards that would address site design, building placement, build-to lines, ground-floor transparency, building entrances, and architectural standards within the central business district.
- C. Expand the central business district to the north to include the former Wolverine Worldwide tannery site and facilitate development on this property that would be a continuation of the land use and character that is found downtown, consistent with the planning and design principles of the central business district.
- D. Create additional and preserve the existing public gathering spaces through urban design and placemaking principles that encourage people to gather and socialize downtown and facilitate social interaction among citizens.
- E. Review the Zoning Ordinance and other city policies and regulations to codify smart growth principles, encourage mixed uses, walkability, and a robust tree canopy.
- F. Encourage first floor retail, restaurant, and service business over office development. Encourage redevelopment.

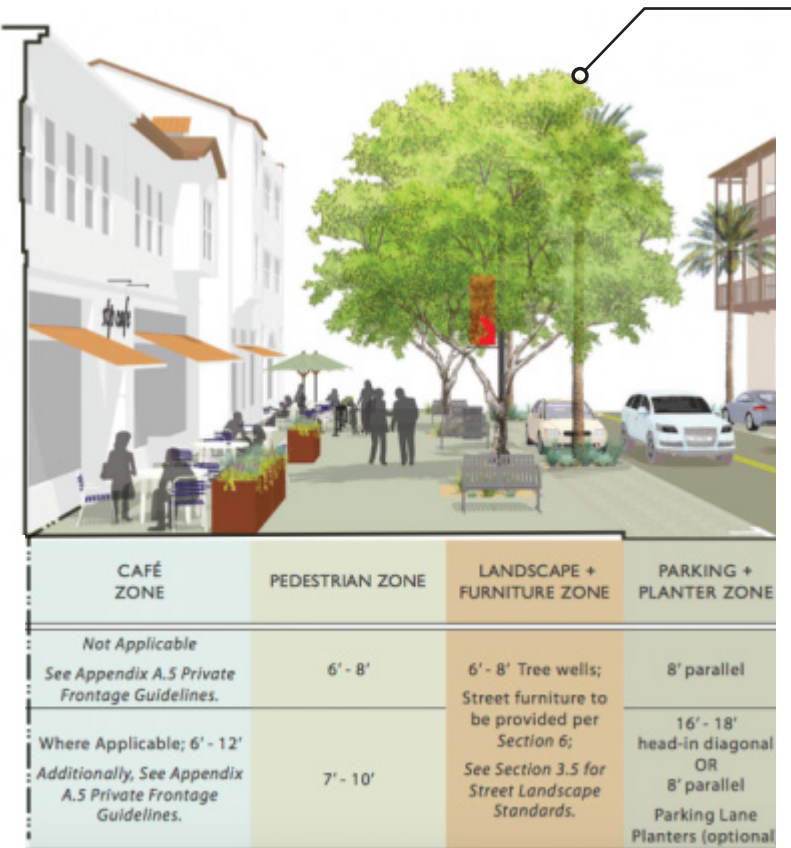


Image Credit: Sargent Town Planning



GOAL 5

Rockford will consist of a healthy mix of clean, responsible, and positive businesses and industries that provide meaningful employment and career opportunities.

Objectives:

- A. Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that commercial, industrial, and other non-residential districts allow for a diverse mix of businesses that are appropriate for their location within the City.
- B. Discourage the development of commercial businesses along 10 Mile Road/Division Street west of North Rockford Middle School.
- C. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to encourage and allow for highly desirable development, such as mixed uses (specifically residential above retail) and business with active storefronts in the downtown as uses permitted by right and/or with administrative approval.
- D. Facilitate the development of local business in the downtown and discourage the development of large national chains that are less responsive to the local economy.
- E. Explore regulatory options that would ensure that downtown Rockford continues to support a diverse base of local businesses including retail, service, restaurant, hospitality, and other local business contributors that will create a vibrant downtown and support street activity.
- F. Explore the expansion of the City's industrial park and/or create opportunities for the development of a sustainable industrial or business park in the City.

GOAL 6

Housing in Rockford will consist of a variety of attractive and attainable housing options available to the entire spectrum of society. The City will work to maintain the character of its core historic neighborhoods while allowing context-sensitive, appropriately scaled residential development and redevelopment.

Objectives:

- A. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to include design standards, dimensional requirements, and other regulations to ensure that new development and redevelopment are compatible with the character of the City's core residential neighborhoods.
- B. Adopt policies that encourage/provide for aging in place to accommodate the aging portion of the City's population.
- C. Connect seniors, military veterans, and other groups to resources that assist in the maintenance and care of their homes.
- D. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that affordable and/or attainable housing is enabled and encouraged in the City.
- E. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow additional housing options in the City, such as accessory dwellings, live/work units, townhouses or rowhouses, and similar units that are compatible with the City's character.

RECREATION AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

GOAL 7

Rockford will protect the environment and natural features including the Rogue River and its banks, tree-lined streets, areas with high elevation, and creeks.

Objectives:

- A. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to encourage or require the preservation of mature trees, woodlands to the extent possible or feasible, and other key natural features while still allowing for the reasonable use and development of property.
- B. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require and incentivize the use of native plants, rain gardens, pollinator gardens, and other ecologically sound landscaping in new developments and substantial redevelopments. Innovative techniques should be encouraged whenever possible.
- C. Use native plants that attract pollinators and native plants in all landscaped City parks.
- D. Encourage or require low-impact design techniques to manage stormwater runoff in all new development.
- E. Develop an ongoing partnership with Valley View Elementary, Parkside Elementary, and North Rockford Middle School to build or maintain rain gardens on public lands while educating students on the benefits of sustainable development techniques.
- F. Evaluate the need for improvements in light of flood risk, riparian improvements, and desired beautification efforts to Rum Creek, west of Main Street.
- G. Strengthen zoning requirements requiring “dark sky” lighting in new development and redevelopment and use dark-sky compliant lighting fixtures in all lights on City-owned property.
- H. Where feasible, encourage open space development techniques that preserve mature tree canopy and natural features.





GOAL 8

Rockford residents will have easy access to clean, safe, well-maintained, and popular public parks and recreational facilities that serve both existing and emerging neighborhoods and meet the recreational needs of people of all ages and abilities.

Objectives:

- A. Maintain the highest level of quality of all public parks. While the City should explore land acquisition opportunities as they arise, the maintenance of existing parks and recreation facilities should be prioritized over the acquisition of new additional public parkland. Explore land acquisition or offers of dedication cautiously.
- B. Increase opportunities for public access to the Rogue River.
- C. Encourage and cultivate the creation of small public gathering spaces that foster social interaction throughout the City.
- D. Implement the City's adopted 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan and other adopted Park Master Plans and seek grant opportunities through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, whenever possible, park improvements.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY



GOAL 9

Rockford neighborhoods, businesses, and industry will be well-connected to the City through a well-maintained, safe, and logical network of streets, sidewalks, and trails.

Objectives:

- A. Improve the conditions of City sidewalks through the enforcement of existing sidewalk maintenance requirements to create a year-round pedestrian-friendly, bike-friendly, and an ADA compatible community.
- B. Adopt standards requiring that all new development and redevelopment be served by and connect to adjacent sidewalks and streets, and where feasible, recreational trails.
- C. Develop and implement a plan to create a connected network of complete streets throughout the community.
- D. Coordinate non-motorized trail planning with surrounding Townships to ensure that key trail connections can be made to connect the City to the broader regional trail network.
- E. Encourage the construction of missing sidewalk segments throughout the existing sidewalk network and require the inclusion of 5' sidewalks on both sides of street, when applicable, for all new development.
- F. Resist efforts to widen 10 Mile Road (Division Street) between Wolverine Boulevard and the western city limits to accommodate additional vehicular traffic.



- G. Develop and implement a bike-share or scooter-share program downtown, and expand on the library's efforts to implement the same.
- H. Become a "bike friendly community" with the American League of Bicyclists.
- I. Evaluate key intersections in the City to ensure that they are safe for people crossing.
- J. Make an effort to minimize vehicular queues at schools by encouraging walking, biking, and transit over private automobile travel by partnering with Safe Routes to School.
- K. Explore options to provide transit service to connect Rockford to the Grand Rapids metro region.
- L. Actively support the use of rideshare and transit options to minimize parking demand, particularly in downtown Rockford.

GOAL 10

All development in the City will be served by reliable, well-maintained, and safe drinking water and sewer services. Expansions of these systems will be carefully coordinated with neighboring jurisdictions and their Master Plans, along with the future land use plan of the City.

Objectives:

- A. Replace all lead water service lines in the City.
- B. Permit and promote the development and use of solar energy systems in the City.
- C. Review and amend utility plans, as necessary, to ensure utility extension occurs incrementally and sequentially to avoid "leapfrog" development patterns.
- D. Review the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that existing and planned extensions of utility systems are taken into account.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEADERSHIP

GOAL 11

The City of Rockford will be a statewide leader in the development and implementation of sustainable land use policies, partnerships, and operational practices.

Objectives:

- A. Review all City ordinances to ensure that policies and regulations encourage sustainable development practices.
- B. Develop, adopt, and implement a climate action plan.
- C. Implement and promote sustainable waste management including a citywide recycling program, compost, and educational resources.
- D. Develop an ongoing partnership with Valley View Elementary, Parkside Elementary, and Our Lady of Consolation and North Rockford Middle School to maintain rain gardens and native landscaping on public lands while educating students on the benefits of sustainable development techniques.
- E. Explore the development of a utility-scale solar energy facility that serves the City.
- F. Work to make sustainability an embedded part of the City's governmental operation including the use of electric vehicles, efficient public lighting, recycling, compost, limitation of water use, and similar practices.

GOAL 12

The City of Rockford will be a leader in fostering positive and productive relationships with surrounding Townships, the school district, churches, non-profits, and other local and regional organizations.

Objectives:

- A. Develop an ongoing partnership with Valley View Elementary, Parkside Elementary, North Rockford Middle School, and Our Lady of Consolation to maintain rain gardens on public lands while educating students on the benefits of sustainable development techniques.
- B. Partner with Rockford Public Schools to make recreational facilities available for use by the public.
- C. Coordinate non-motorized trail planning with surrounding Townships to ensure that key trail connections can be made to connect the City to the broader regional trail network.
- D. Work with Wolverine Worldwide to develop a sub-area plan for the former tannery site located between Main Street and the Rogue River, just north of downtown, and their other properties in the City.
- E. Work with surrounding Townships to ensure that land use policies are consistent at the City's borders and explore opportunities for shared and/or consolidated services.
- F. Carefully evaluate requests to expand the city's boundaries, including financial impacts.

Wake
up



CHAPTER 5



WE HAVE A PLAN



FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Section 5.1

Future Land Use

The Rockford Future Land Use Plan provides a general guideline for land use over the next twenty to thirty years. This applies to future growth, development, and redevelopment within the City, and will be most useful to the Planning Commission as it evaluates development requests, zoning changes, and seeks to provide regulatory guidance in furtherance of this plan.

The Future Land Use Plan is inevitably associated with and linked to Rockford's zoning districts. However, it is important to understand the distinction between the zoning map and the future land use map. While the Zoning Ordinance is the law regulating the development and use of land in the City, the Future Land Use Plan is a policy that guides development in the City and envisions the desired forms and uses involved in that development. It does not, however, carry the force of law.

The Future Land Use Plan seeks to carefully balance the desired future development of property in the City with the realities of existing land use and development forms and patterns. The Future Land Use Plan is also intended to bring the Plan's goals and objectives toward fruition, which are founded on community desires. The regular consultation of the Future Land Use Plan is one of several ways in which the Master Plan is implemented. Although the City is largely developed, there are still several opportunities for development and redevelopment within its boundaries. Implementation of this plan will encourage and enrich existing development patterns that enhance and complement the City's charm, character, neighborhood connections, recreational opportunities, and economic development potential.

There may be some aspects of the Future Land Use Map (Map 7) and supporting policy that do not fully "fit" existing development in the City. This should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of City support for the continuation of these uses; however, the City should carefully consider the impact of these uses on surrounding areas and future development when making decisions. The designations contained in the Future

Land Use Plan are broad and intended to be somewhat flexible; where two or more designations adjoin one another, either may be considered appropriate.

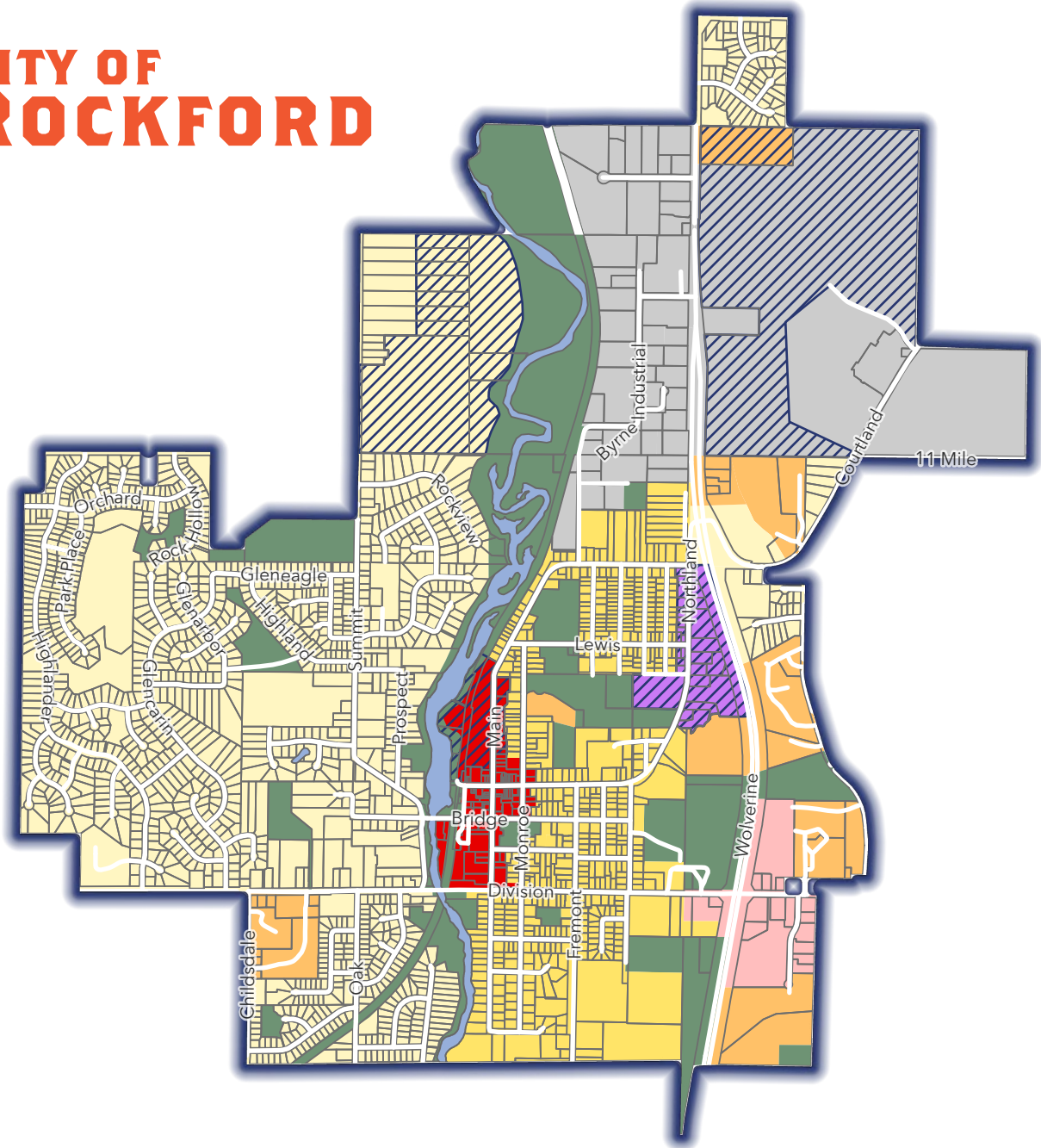
Eight future land use designations and one overlay designation have been crafted based on existing neighborhood character, anticipated future use, and needs of the community. This includes the following designations:

- Downtown
- Neighborhood Mixed Use
- General Commercial
- Suburban Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Multi-Family Residential
- Industrial
- Public
- Potential Development Areas










Detailed descriptions of each designation are illustrated on the subsequent pages with visions for Potential Development Areas explored in section 5.2.

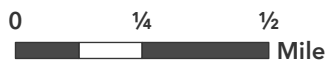


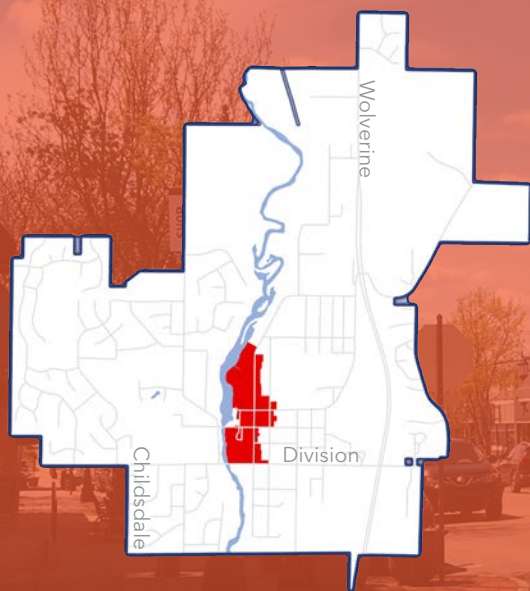
CITY OF ROCKFORD



MAP 7. FUTURE LAND USE

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
|  Downtown |  Suburban Residential |  Industrial |
|  Neighborhood Mixed Use |  Traditional Neighborhood |  Public |
|  General Commercial |  Multi-Family Residential |  Potential Development Areas |





DOWNTOWN

Rockford’s downtown is a central hub of the community and a popular destination for residents and visitors alike. The City’s traditional retail core is found in the “downtown” along the east bank of the Rogue River. Its combination of small shops, active public spaces, restaurants, and access to natural features like the Rogue River, reinforces Rockford’s unique culture and charm. Downtown is the heart of Rockford and the central gathering place for the community.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed Use • Live/Work • Retail/Service • Multi-Family Residential • Office • Public/Quasi-Public • Boutique Hotels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthy mix of active ground floor uses that stimulate a vibrant pedestrian environment (ie. restaurants and cafes, demonstration studios, retail and service businesses, etc.) should be encouraged. Businesses should spill into the public realm with sidewalk sales and outdoor seating, so long as adequate space is maintained for safe and navigable sidewalks and streets. Office spaces or similar uses should be discouraged on the first floor. • Downtown density should be encouraged and architecture should build up, not out. Buildings should be placed at the sidewalk and the first floors of buildings facing the street should have high transparency. Surface parking should be reduced through public parking offsets, deferred or shared use parking agreements, and other methods. Multi-story buildings that complement the historic character of the existing building stock should be encouraged. • Promote pedestrian movement downtown by maintaining walkable and connected streets and further improving key intersections and multi-modal crossings. Sidewalks should be as wide as possible.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C-2 Central Business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain streetscape enhancements, such as street trees, wide sidewalks, decorative paving patterns, lights, plantings, waste receptacles, and benches. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development projects. • Maximize connections to public spaces and natural features, like the Rogue River, White Pine Trail, Garden Club Park, City Hall, Krause Memorial Library, etc.



NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED USE

The Neighborhood Mixed Use designation is located along Northland Drive from Rum Creek to Main Street. It is an eclectic mix of development including a variety of residential uses, retail, service, office, and light industrial activities. This designation seeks to accommodate this neighborhood-scaled mixed use pattern. Development should remain small in scale and intended to serve the needs of nearby residents.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed Use Live/Work Retail/Service Attached or Detached Single Family Residential Office Hotels Townhome/Rowhouses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential buildings that include architectural elements such as walkways, porches, or stoops are encouraged to provide visual and physical connections to the street. Accessory structures, such as garages and accessory dwellings, should always be set back from primary structures to form a consistent, walkable environment. Non-residential development should be limited to small building footprints and heights should not exceed two stories, similar to surrounding residences. Consider street improvements that include on-street parking for non-residential uses to preserve land for other uses and avoid the creation of unnecessary off-street parking areas. Promote pedestrian movement throughout the corridor and to the downtown by adding sidewalks to the east side of Northland Drive, maintaining well-marked bike lanes, and implementing traffic-calming measures at key locations.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed Use district should be created C-1 Office Commercial C-3 General Commercial* C-4 Highway Commercial* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a traditional street environment with large parkways and regular vertical elements such as street trees, lamp posts, etc. Create multi-modal complete streets for pedestrians, bicycles, and cars. Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development and street projects. Maximize connections to surrounding neighborhoods and natural features such as Rum Creek.

* Potentially compatible but not optimal



GENERAL COMMERCIAL

Following the pattern of a traditional commercial corridor, this designation is defined by larger-scale commercial activity compared to what is downtown and is mostly located at the intersection of Division Street (10 Mile) and Wolverine Boulevard. This plan does not envision any significant expansion of the existing general commercial areas but rather an improvement upon what has already been built and what future infill may come to fruition. Development patterns that encourage multi-modal access and reference the aesthetic quality of downtown should be encouraged.

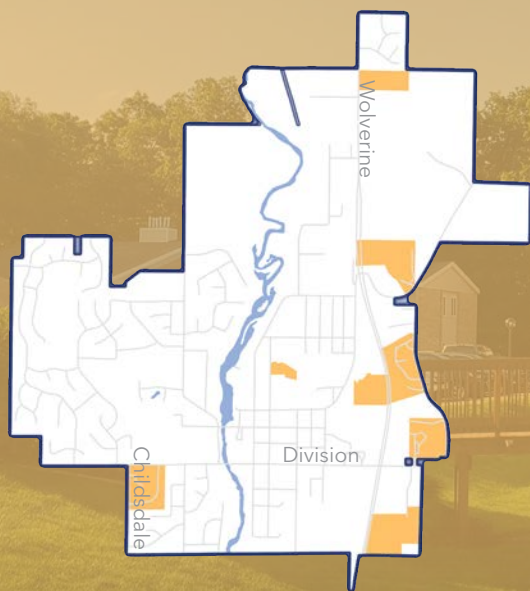
Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail/Service • Office • Mixed Uses • Live/Work • Indoor Recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development tends to be more automobile-oriented in this district but driveways and parking lots should be well-landscaped and sized appropriately for the uses they serve. • Street-facing building facades should add to the aesthetic quality of the street and be designed to break up large building expanses. This can be done by requiring building transparency (>50%), high-quality materials, and regular facade articulations to create a three-dimensional form. • Encourage pedestrian and bike connections to nearby neighborhoods and multi-family developments to provide a safer environment for people not using an automobile. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development and street projects. • Encourage expansion of general commercial district along Division Street. Expansion west, past Wolverine should be discouraged.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C-3 General Commercial • C-4 Highway Commercial 	



INDUSTRIAL

The growth of the City’s industrial park is a priority for community leaders, with a large portion of this future land use designation identified as a potential redevelopment area. Light industrial activities are designated on the City’s north end and take advantage of access to Northland Drive/Wolverine Boulevard. Non-industrial businesses in this area should be primarily service-oriented establishments with limited retail that is complimentary to the service nature of the business.

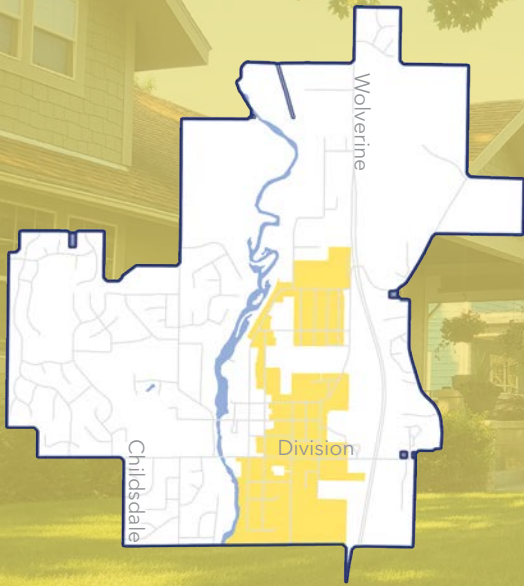
Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing, Processing, Assembly • Research • Indoor Recreation • Limited Retail/Service • Office • Brewing & Distillery Operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development will be more automobile-oriented but driveways and parking lots should be well-landscaped and sized appropriately for the uses they serve. • Street-facing building facades should add to the aesthetic quality of the public street and be designed to break up large building expanses. This can be done by requiring building transparency (>50%), high-quality materials, and regular facade articulations to create a three-dimensional form. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development and street projects. • Loading areas should be either on the side of the building or at the rear of the building, hidden from public view.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I-1 Industrial • C-4 Highway Commercial 	



MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Several areas of the City contain multi-family residential developments of varying sizes and intensity. This designation allows for the expansion of available and attainable attached multi-family housing within the community at greater densities than in traditional neighborhoods. This designation seeks to accommodate the need for a variety of housing options in attractive and walkable development patterns.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-Family Residential • Multi-Family Residential • Live/Work • Mixed Use • Senior Housing • Office • Non-Profit Organizations/ Churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building forms should include architectural elements such as walkways, porches, or stoops to provide visual and physical connections to the street. • Attractive, durable building materials and architecture should complement the surrounding neighborhood to form high-quality, lasting developments that are consistent with the neighborhood character. • Promote pedestrian movement by maintaining walkable and connected streets and further improve key intersections and multi-modal crossings. Much of this land use designation is located along the City's eastern boundary, so additional attention should be paid to safe crossings over Northland Drive/Wolverine Boulevard. • Maximize connections to public spaces and natural features in the City. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development and street projects.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-3 High Density Residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developments should include designated greenspace and/or access to parks and recreational amenities.



TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL

This designation is defined by classic principles of urban design. Walkable, tree-lined streets connect in a predictable grid pattern that supports a residential fabric. Homes often showcase prominent front porches and historic architectural features. This designation reinforces the traditional character and pleasant setting of Rockford. Single-family homes on historically platted lots comprise the majority of this designation’s housing mix, but townhomes, accessory dwellings, two-plexes, and other housing types may be compatible, especially near downtown and/or along key streets.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached or Detached Single Family Residential • Two-Family Residential • Senior Housing • Accessory Dwellings • Non-Profit Organizations/ Churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential building forms, including architectural elements such as walkways, porches, or stoops, provide visual and physical connections to the street. • Accessory structures, such as garages and accessory dwellings, should always be set-back from primary structures to form a consistent, walkable environment. • High-quality building materials and architecture complimentary to the historic forms existing in this district today help define the neighborhood character. • Promote pedestrian movement throughout the neighborhoods, to downtown, and to the Northland Drive corridor by maintaining walkable and connected streets and further improving key intersections and multi-modal crossings. • Maintain a traditional gridded street pattern with large parkways and regular vertical elements such as street trees, lamp posts, etc. • Create multi-modal complete streets for pedestrians, bicycles, and cars with a specific focus on safe routes to school.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-2 Medium Density Residential • R-1 Low Density Residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for City and private development projects. • Maximize connections to public spaces and natural features, like the Rogue River, White Pine Trail, Rum Creek, Parkside Elementary, Krause Memorial Library, Memorial Park, etc. • Preserve neighborhood character by keeping small lots and discouraging overbuilding new structures in place of historic homes. Encourage missing-middle housing with a traditional neighborhood character.



SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL

This designation is characterized by a conventional suburban development pattern. Homes situated on large lots afford generous yards to homeowners while winding streets create patterns that encourage low traffic volumes and speeds. Most land west of the Rogue River is within this designation. This designation provides a suitable transition to the more rural residential development in the adjacent townships.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-Family Residential • Accessory Dwellings • Non-Profit Organization/ Churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large lots with generous yards create a feeling of openness and separation between homes. • High-quality building materials and newer or modern homes define the neighborhood character. • Promote pedestrian movement throughout the neighborhoods and connection to downtown by maintaining walkable and connected streets and further improving key intersections and multi-modal crossings. • Create multi-modal complete streets for pedestrians, bicycles, and cars with a specific focus on safe routes to school, access to downtown, and traffic calming measures. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swailes, rain gardens, and native plantings for all development and street projects.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-1 Low Density Residential • R-2 Medium Density Residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize connections to schools, public spaces, and natural features, like the Rogue River, White Pine Trail, Valley View Elementary, Glen Park, etc.



PUBLIC

Lands occupied by and planned for public facilities (government offices, parks, trails, schools, cemeteries, etc.), quasi-public facilities (private recreational spaces, conservation areas, undevelopable land, etc.), and sensitive areas for conservation fall into this category. These uses are scattered throughout the City and along prominent natural features, such as the Rogue River.

Land Uses	Key Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Buildings • Parks • Conservation Areas • Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate universal design elements and park amenities that serve people of all ages and abilities. • Maximize connections between public spaces, the downtown, and residential neighborhoods. • Encourage the use of green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings for City and private development projects. • Provide appropriate buffers to sensitive natural features, such as steep slopes, high-quality woodlands, floodplains, water bodies, etc. when considering public improvements. • Maintain and expand naturalized areas for habitat preservation.
<p>Compatible Zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Districts 	

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Section 5.2

Several potential development areas have been identified on the Future Land Use Plan and are highlighted on Figure 5-1. These properties are the few undeveloped areas left within the City or are places with the opportunity for redevelopment.

1. The Former Tannery Site

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Former Tannery Site has undergone a time-critical removal action/short-term extensive cleanup in 2018-2019 due to the detection of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other industrial contaminants. To appropriately address and control PFAS contamination in the groundwater, an interceptor system plan is being developed and remediation efforts are ongoing.

Because of the unique environmental conditions of the Former Tannery Site, it is understood that improvements to this property will likely occur in stages over the duration of many years. A variety of ideas have been discussed during the master planning process, including more immediate enhancements, such as the establishment of meadows and trails, to longer vision developments, like the expansion of the built downtown fabric. This property will be a valuable asset once buildable, as it is directly adjacent to the Rogue River, the White Pine Trail, and is a short walk from the areas most popular parks, eateries, and shopping district. The below images and massing diagram presented in Figure 5-2 provide inspiration for what this site could become, illustrating the scale of potential development and desire for a unified plan.

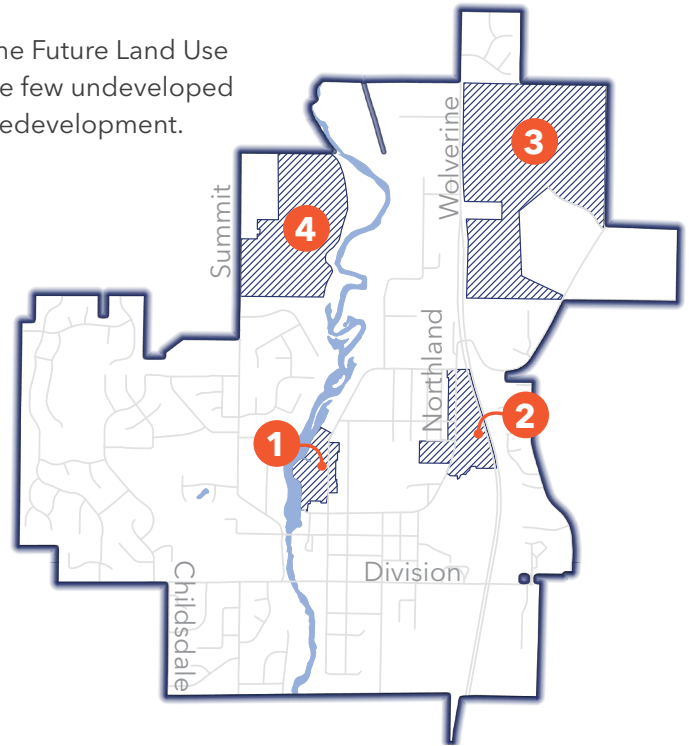


Figure 5-1. Potential Development Areas Location Key





Figure 5-2. Former Tannery Development Area Conceptual Massing Diagram

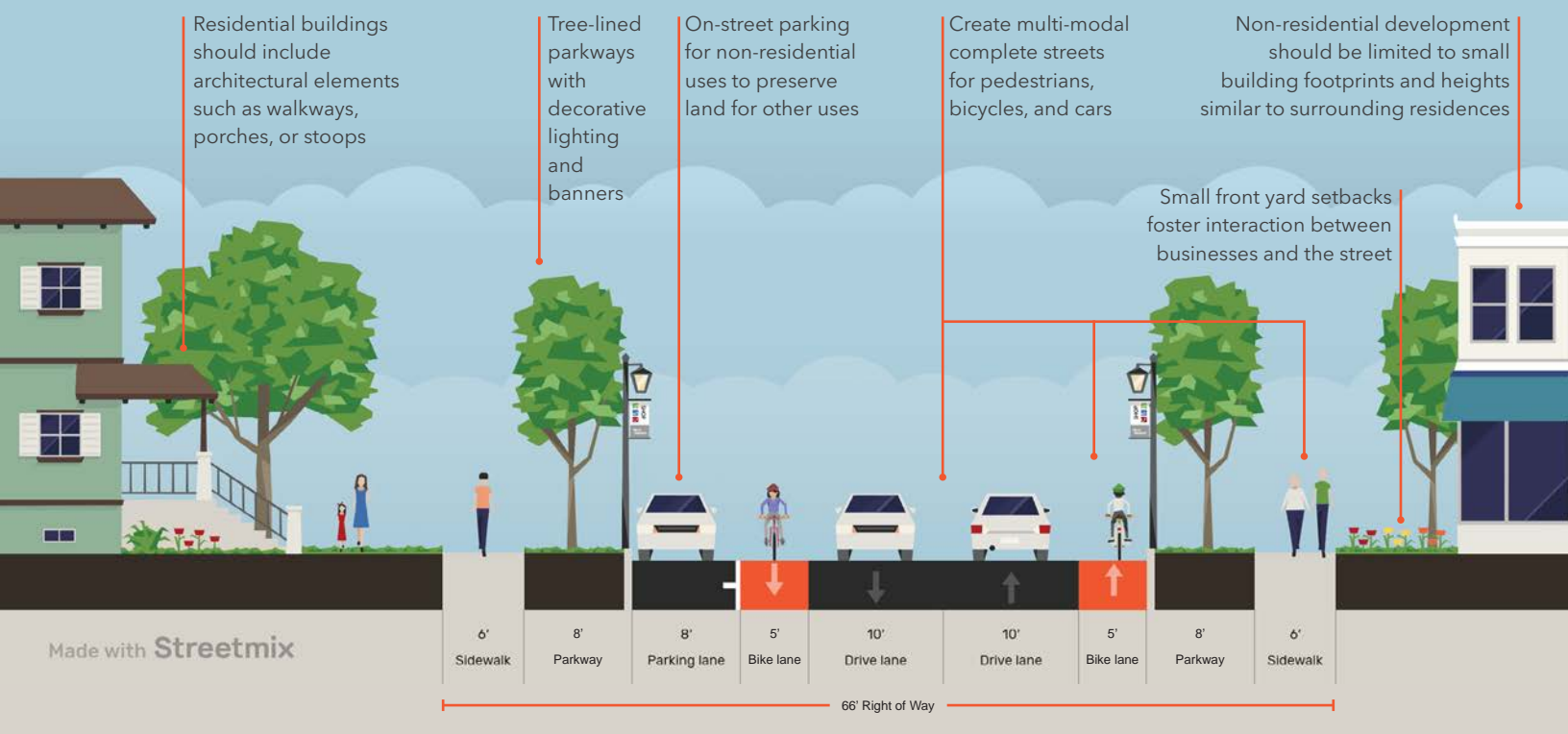


Figure 5-3. Northland Drive Street Improvements

2. Northland Drive

Northland Drive from Rum Creek to Main Street includes a unique mix of land uses. Retail, service, office, light industrial, and traditional residential are intermixed along this corridor. Today, the scale of these various uses lack a cohesive character or connection to Northland Drive. The future land use designation of this area aims to reinforce a market driven, neighborhood-scaled mixed use pattern while still supporting successful business growth and development.

Making Northland Drive a safe and inviting corridor is the first step to enhancing this development area. Improvements to the street function and aesthetics will help unify the built environment and provide real and perceived safety improvements for people using all modes of travel. Figure 5-3 illustrates Northland Drive as a walkable, bikeable, and drivable corridor. Tree-lined parkways, sidewalks, lighting, and banners on both sides of the drive frame the street and create a more comfortable and inviting space for pedestrians. Bike lanes and on-street parking provide a further sense of enclosure to the street, calming traffic and reducing the need for off-street parking lots. Other improvements,

such as bulb-outs to manage stormwater and define parking areas, mid-block crossings at all intersections, the reduction of the number of curb-cuts, and narrowing drive lanes and driveway widths will further improve the walkability of this area.

As this area continues to grow and evolve, consideration should be given to further creating neighborhood-scaled mixed use development patterns with businesses that support the adjacent neighborhood and downtown. Figure 5-4 illustrates the existing pattern of development and a concept of development pattern ideals that should be encouraged. Northland Drive should always be treated as the front door for all developments. Elements that will help to shape Northland’s character include:

- Bringing buildings closer to the street
- Placing parking in the rear (especially for properties with frontage on Wolverine Boulevard)
- Sharing parking for differing uses and utilizing available on-street parking
- Providing pathway connections between buildings to the sidewalk
- Encouraging architecture that is similar in scale and style of the traditional residential found to the west

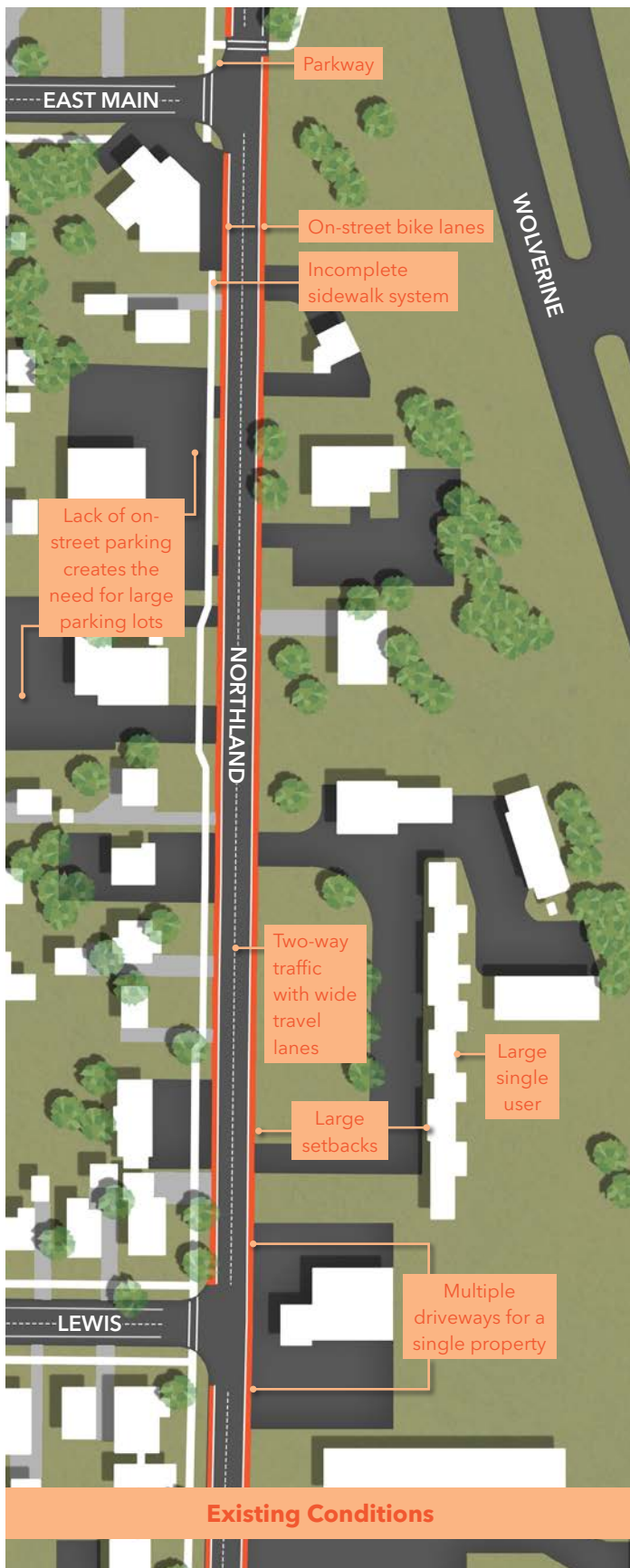


Figure 5-4. Northland Drive Potential Development Area Enhancements



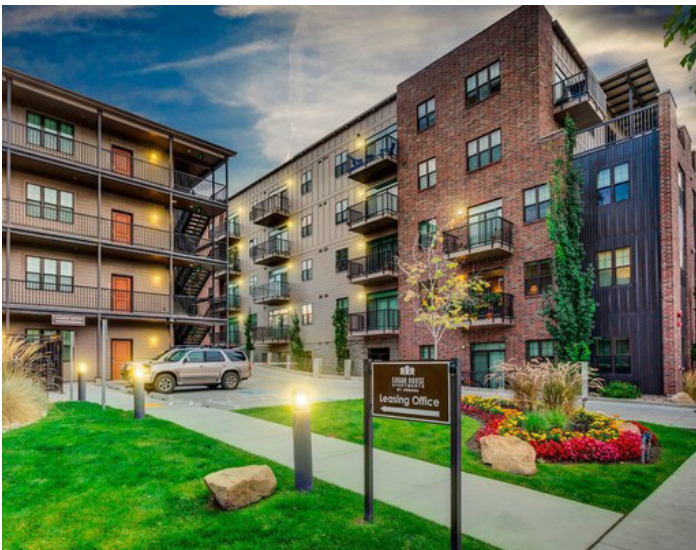
3. Wolverine Worldwide

This development area primarily includes the vacant land surrounding the corporate headquarters for Wolverine Worldwide. The potential development area covers approximately 150 acres of forests and meadows. Goal 5 of this master plan advocates for the expansion of the City’s industrial park and/or the creation of opportunities for the development of a sustainable industrial or business park in the City. With direct access to Wolverine Boulevard, the future expansion of Wolverine Worldwide’s facilities or other industrial uses, such as medical or pharmaceutical manufacturing or big tech, is easily imagined. The existing landscape and mature trees on-site also offer some advantages for the inclusion of greenspaces for employees, natural buffers between uses, and green infrastructure elements, such as bio-swales, rain gardens, and native plantings.

Although the majority of this potential development area has been identified as an industrial future land use designation, a small portion is designated for multi-family residential. This more intensive use is seen as a transition between the single family residential found to the north and the potential industrial expansion to the south. Additionally, multi-family housing in this location may offer more affordable living options within the City and could function as workforce housing for future business expansion in this area.



Industrial Park Expansion



Multi-Family Residential

4. North Summit Avenue

The North Summit Avenue properties include three parcels and are of the few remaining vacant lands in the City. Large fields along North Summit Avenue encompass about half of the property, with sensitive landscapes, such as woods and wetlands, covering the remaining properties. The eastern portion of the site borders the Rogue River and provides opportunities for waterfront access.

The property is held by a private land owner and is not expected to be sold in the immediate future. In the event that this land is developed, single family or senior housing is imagined as appropriate land uses, as these would fit the Suburban Residential future land use designation and fill a need within the community.

Providing community greenspaces, public access to the river, and allowing for density to help alleviate housing demands within the City should all be considered priorities for this site. Differing site configurations can achieve these characteristics more easily, such as arranging home sites along a green courtyard with rear-loaded garages accessed by alleys.



Homes Facing a Courtyard



Rear-Loaded Single Family Homes



Existing Conditions

TRANSPORTATION

Section 5.3



Traffic Calming & Safety

Traffic calming is a term used to describe various techniques that reduce or ameliorate the negative effects of automobile use and slow speeds, creating a safer and improved environment for everyone else. These measures are often design-oriented and intended to induce drivers to slow down and pay more attention to their surroundings.

The physical change in the street environment and the psychological change in the “feel” of the road can reduce both the frequency and severity of crashes, improve air quality, reduce noise, traffic congestion, and broadly improve the environment of the street and community. Traffic calming devices work by making roads feel a little uncomfortable to traverse by car, forcing drivers to slow down and pay attention to their surroundings. A variety of techniques are used to achieve this result and may focus on creating a sense of enclosure around the vehicle, road diets, deflecting vehicle movements, or by having textural differences in the roadway.

Common traffic calming devices include:

- Improving and enhancing crosswalks,
- Providing regular vertical elements along the street edge, such as trees, lamp posts, and street furnishings,
- Using texturized materials, like pavers
- Adding speed humps/tables,
- Reducing the number of lanes,
- Narrowing lane widths,
- Creating separated bike lanes,
- Adding on-street parking, and
- Adding chicanes, medians, roundabouts, bulb-outs, or curb extensions.

Key corridors in Rockford that should be considered for traffic calming enhancements include Main Street from downtown to Northland Drive, Fremont Street, Courtland Street, Northland Drive, Bridge Street, Lincoln Street, and Division Street (10 Mile).

Wide lanes, few vertical street elements, a straight road alignment, and no road surface texture changes make Division feel like a quick moving thoroughfare.

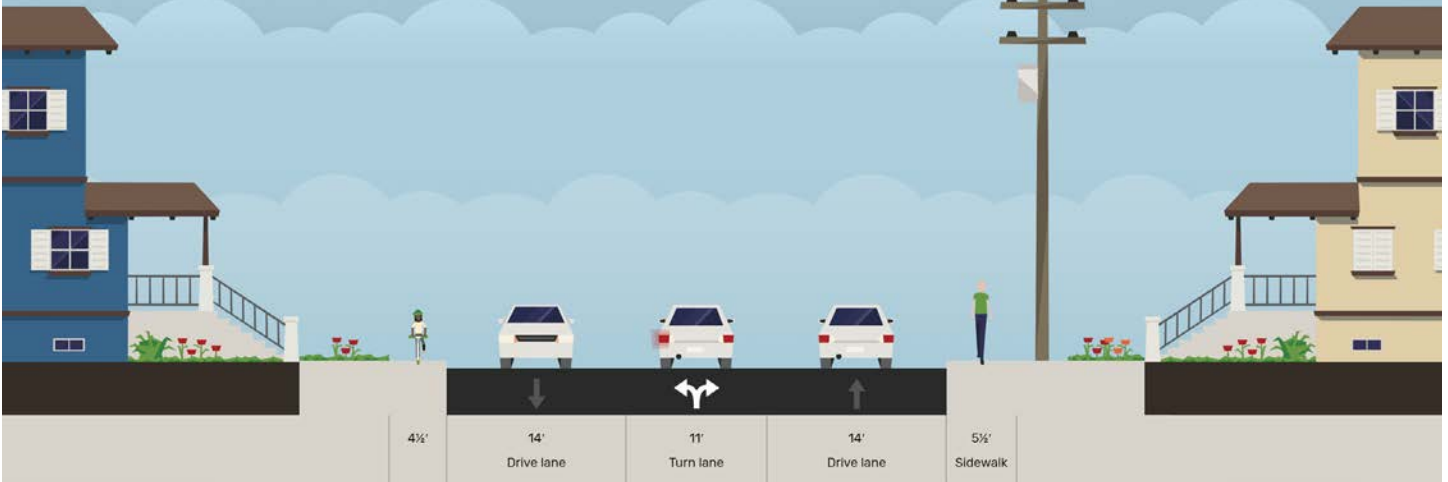
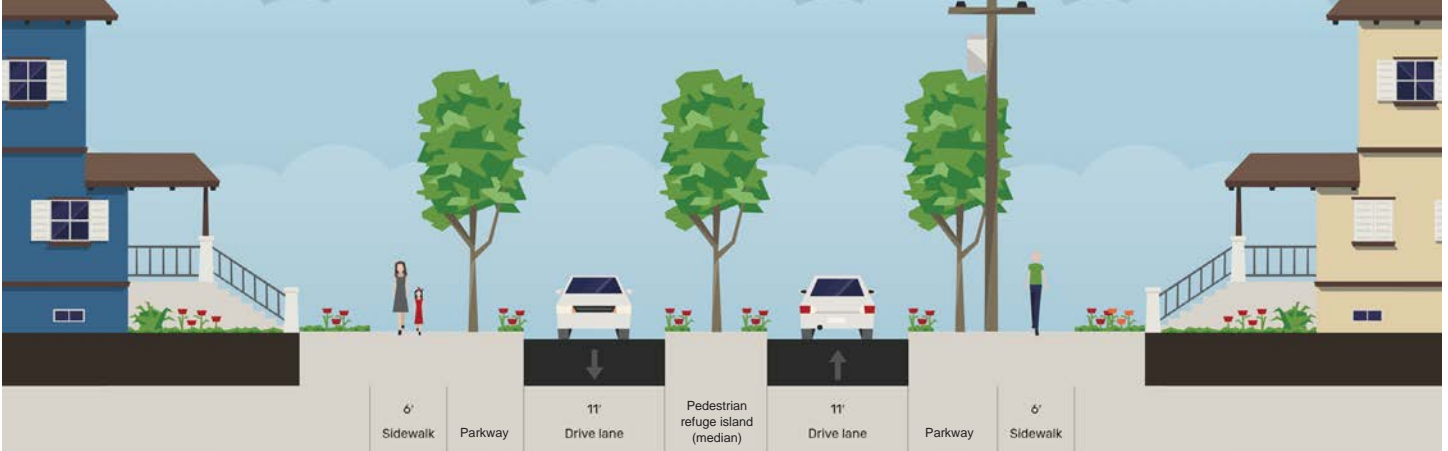


Figure 5-5. Existing Street Condition: Division & Oak (66' Right Of Way)

Reduced number of lanes, wider sidewalks, vertical elements and plantings, and a pedestrian refuge island are elements in this sample that calm traffic and create safer streets for pedestrians.



The inclusion of colored on-street and separated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, vertical elements and plantings, and bus stops are elements in this sample that calm traffic and create safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists.



Figure 5-6. Road Rebalancing Samples: Division & Oak (66' Right Of Way)

Complete Streets

Transportation in Rockford involves more than just moving vehicles efficiently and safely. A transportation system should to meet the needs of all types of users – motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and individuals with mobility impairments. In many cases, this is accomplished with lower vehicle speeds and other traffic calming elements, while in other places, wider vehicle lanes and higher speeds may be needed to allow for the movement of vehicles and goods.

The design of a transportation system must fit within the context of adjacent land uses. Nationally, this approach is often referred to as “complete streets.” This refers to harmonizing streets with their surroundings while balancing transportation networks to meet the mobility needs of all users, without one user or transportation method taking an overwhelming priority over the others. This master plan fully supports and embraces a complete streets policy.

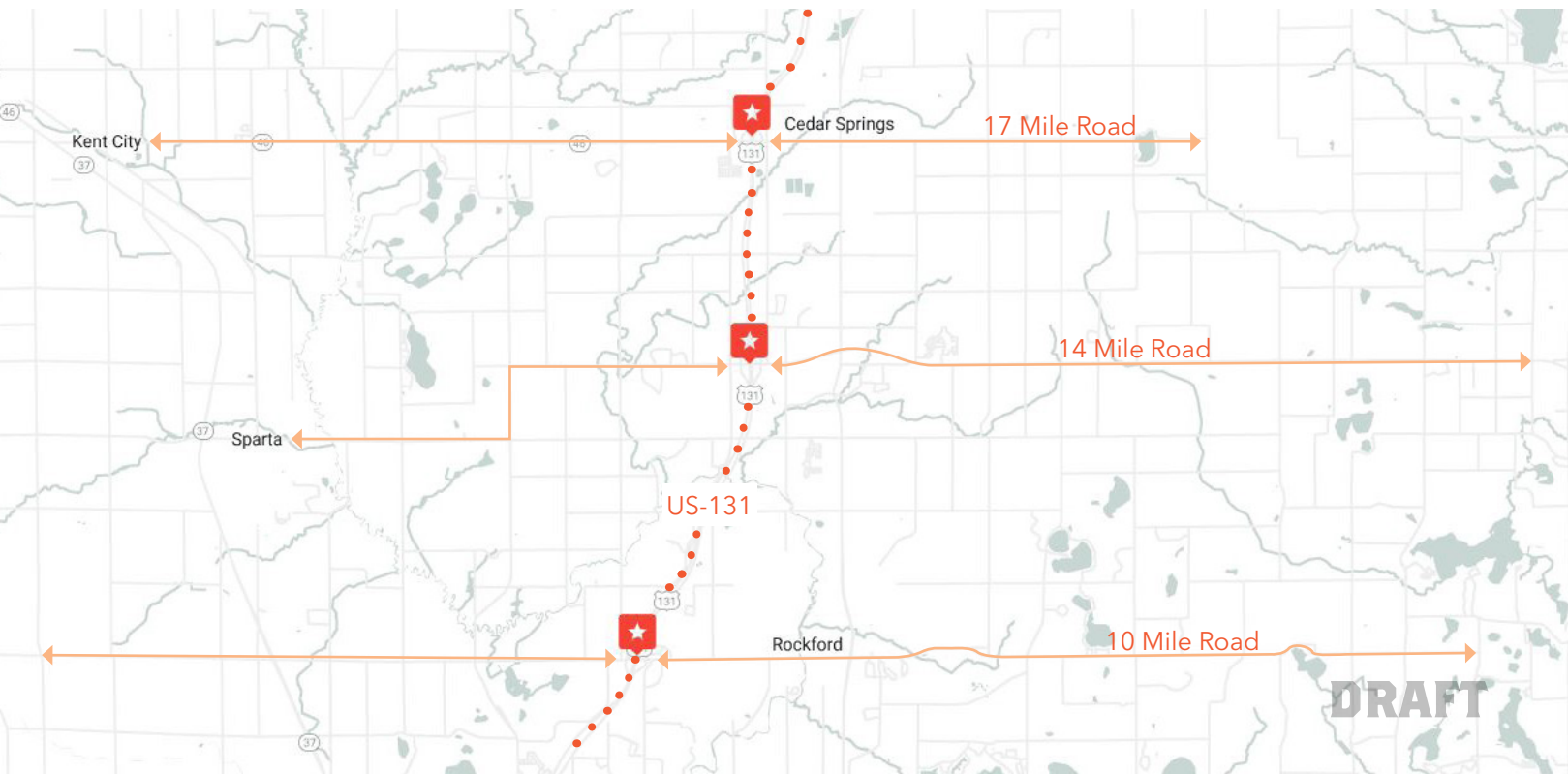
One of the key elements of implementing the Master Plan will be implementing a design for the City’s public realm (streets) that contain context-sensitive solutions to accommodate all users and ability levels. By installing ADA-compliant curbs and ramps, pedestrian-friendly crosswalks, sidewalks of appropriate width and distance from the roadways, on-street bicycle facilities (where feasible and appropriate), and other methods, the City will make itself substantially more accessible and welcoming to residents and visitors alike.

While most of the City’s street network contains sidewalks, there are still gaps in the network that should be filled. Strong connections need to be created to link neighborhoods to the downtown and other commercial areas. In particular, the Division Street (10 Mile) corridor is a notable barrier that cuts off the neighborhoods south of Division from the City’s downtown.

This master plan recommends that all streets contain sidewalks or trail connections to the rest of the City. In addition to a strong sidewalk and trail system, signs, trail markings, and improved crossings along with signalized intersections are recommended for key intersections along Division Street, Northland Drive, and others as necessary.

Changes to Division Avenue (10 Mile) will need to be coordinated with the Kent County Road Commission. This will be a challenging corridor to modify due to the key regional connection that Division/10 Mile serves in the region, as it is one of only three corridors (the other two being M-57 (14 Mile Road) and 17 Mile Road in Cedar Springs) that connect US-131 to northeast Kent County. All planning of Division Avenue (10 Mile) should respect the vision of the multi-jurisdictional 10 Mile Corridor Plan. The City may consider the evaluation of an additional bridge crossings over the Rogue River. This crossing could alleviate traffic on 10 Mile or act as a purely pedestrian access from east to west.

Figure 5-7. Local Highway Access



CHAPTER 6



**WE ARE WORKING
TOGETHER**

DRAFT



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Section 6.1

Achieving the vision set forth in this master plan requires its effective implementation. This plan describes the desired direction for growth, development, and positive change in the City, as determined by the community's desires. The City must be proactive in pursuing the Plan's goals and objectives if they are to be realized. Thus, the following strategies have been established as a framework by which the implementation of the Plan's policies may be achieved.

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

The City Council, Planning Commission, and staff are given the primary responsibility for implementing these strategies and developing work assignments to set the Plan in motion. These assignments may be supported

by additional entities such as the DDA, Sustainability Committee, Chamber of Commerce, local community partners, and other entities as deemed practicable.

Strategies may include special studies or assignments, ordinances, programs, planning activities, and administrative procedures. Additionally, some implementation strategies will require significant public and private investment and/or outside professional assistance, while others may be integrated into City operations at a relatively low cost.

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

Zoning Ordinance Revisions

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

Rockford's Zoning Ordinance was last amended in 2014 and contains many regulations found in a conventional zoning ordinance. However, several recommendations of this plan are not fully achievable unless the Ordinance is amended. Possible amendments to the Rockford Zoning Ordinance may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The incorporation of design standards for buildings in the downtown.
- The addition of land uses not presently listed in the Ordinance.
- The addition of or revisions to standards related to landscaping, tree preservation, and sustainable design.
- Procedural changes to streamline review processes and facilitate or incentivize desirable forms of development.
- The inclusion of additional housing types to ensure that varied housing options are available for all residents.
- Review existing parking standards to ensure they meet modern practices.



Downtown Design Guidelines

Downtown Rockford contains a mix of new and old buildings containing a variety of businesses. It is the economic and cultural heart of the community and a significant part of what contributes to Rockford's charm and unique sense of place. To ensure that new development and redevelopment is consistent with the established character of the City, the creation of downtown design guidelines is recommended.

Downtown design guidelines should work in conjunction with the City's Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and related specifications and would serve as a design-oriented document that articulates the City's desires and expectations for new construction, additions, renovation, and other modifications to buildings in downtown Rockford. It should promote context-sensitive design, set forth architectural standards, recommend

streetscape elements and design expectations, and ensure that the downtown environment works for all forms of mobility including pedestrians, bicyclists, users of assistive devices, and vehicular traffic. This guide should be consulted for all public infrastructure and facility development in and around downtown. The City may consider creating these guidelines as a policy document or through more enforceable means, such as incorporating additional design or architectural standards into the Zoning Ordinance or developing a form-based code for the downtown.

Additional design elements in the public realm that could be addressed include outdoor seating, planters, lighting, waste receptacles, bicycle/scooter parking, wayfinding, public art, and similar amenities.



Marketing and Pre-Development Evaluation for

Potential Redevelopment Areas

The Future Land Use Map (Map 7) contains four distinct potential redevelopment areas. These areas are (1) the former Wolverine Tannery site on Main Street just north of downtown, (2) the neighborhood mixed use area along Northland Drive, (3) the undeveloped property on the east side of Summit Avenue and west of the Rogue River on the north side of the City, and (4) the property owned by Wolverine WorldWide on the east side of Wolverine Boulevard between 11 Mile and 12 Mile Roads.

For each of these four areas, the City should work closely with the property owners to identify timeframes for possible development (if any), any public improvements that may be needed to accommodate new development or redevelopment, and evaluate market conditions, local concerns, and property owner preferences and desires. While this plan contains conceptual illustrations for the type of development desired on these parcels, additional work will be needed to create plans that balance the desires of the City, landowners, and the public, and bring them to fruition. Care should be taken to ensure that marketing efforts for these properties coincide with the ability and interest of the property owner to develop them.

Business Retention/Recruitment Strategy

One of the goals outlined in this plan is the need to foster economic development in Rockford and provide additional meaningful employment opportunities through additional industrial development. It also contemplates new mixed use development and redevelopment along Northland Drive and just north of downtown. If these goals are to be fulfilled, the City must (1) retain its current businesses and (2) attract new business and industry to locate in these key areas of the community. Thus, the City should partner with the Chamber of Commerce and others to develop a plan to retain existing businesses and recruit new businesses to the City.

The Plan should focus on a variety of business and industries, as the three potential redevelopment areas identified in this master plan would accommodate a variety of business types in a variety of sizes and intensities. Efforts to bring new business to the community should also be mindful of and congruent with the City's goals and strategies relative to the environment, sustainability, and climate change.

DINE

Downtown
Rockford

Citywide Branding, Marketing, and Communication Plan

Rockford presently enjoys a position as a premier destination in West Michigan. However, this must be proactively maintained and the City's promotional efforts must evolve to continue to attract the attention of developers, visitors, and residents. Rockford has much to offer to residents and visitors alike: charming local businesses, high-quality public spaces, regional trails, civic pride, and economic opportunity.

This strategy involves a plan to market the City as a regional destination that would inform investors, businesses, and potential visitors of all that Rockford has to offer. It also includes a communication plan to keep city residents, workers, and business owners informed. A city supported downtown business watch program should be organized to promote business activity and well-being. Most residents have mobile devices and are consuming information digitally. Therefore, the City should continually strive to improve its online presence to keep residents informed of current events, decisions, projects, and other issues in and around the community that impact their lives.

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Non-motorized Transportation Plan

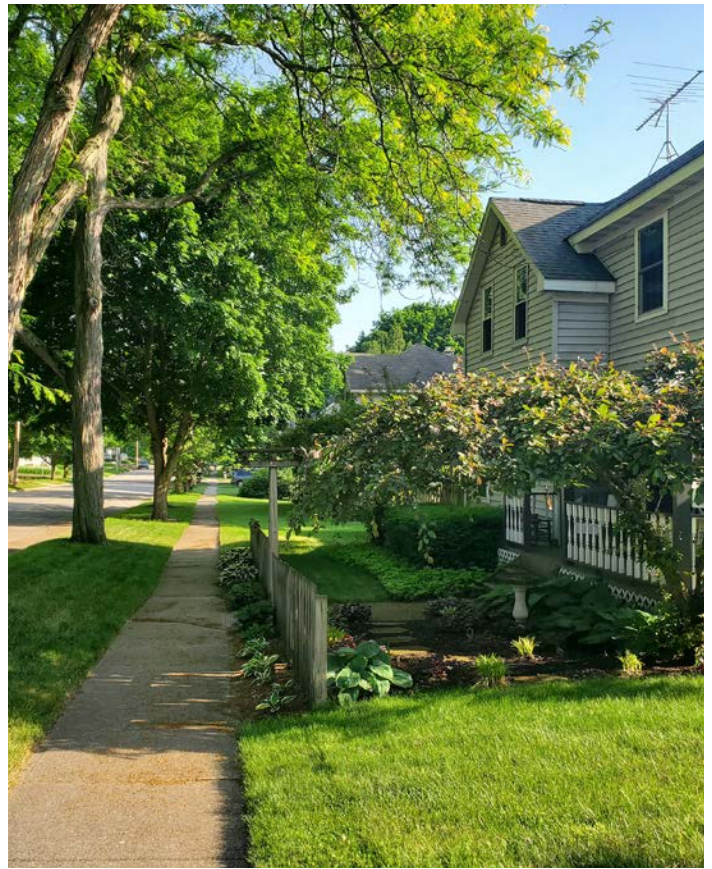
Rockford has taken many steps over the years to be a walkable and bike-friendly community. However, work is ongoing and a comprehensive non-motorized transportation plan can make Rockford a more attractive and livable City by providing practical, safe, and attractive options in a user's preferred mode of transportation.

Walking and bicycling are not merely recreational activities; for many, they are primary modes of transportation to accomplish their daily needs. Rockford residents often walk or bike to school, work, run errands, or visit recreational facilities. The City contains elementary schools, a middle school, numerous parks, and a walkable downtown. Coupled with its location along the White Pine Trail and a healthy base of walkers and bikers, Rockford residents can benefit from a comprehensive plan to provide a complete network of transportation resources that facilitate multi-modal connectivity. A properly implemented non-motorized transportation plan should enable people of all ages and abilities to get around the City by foot or by bike.

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

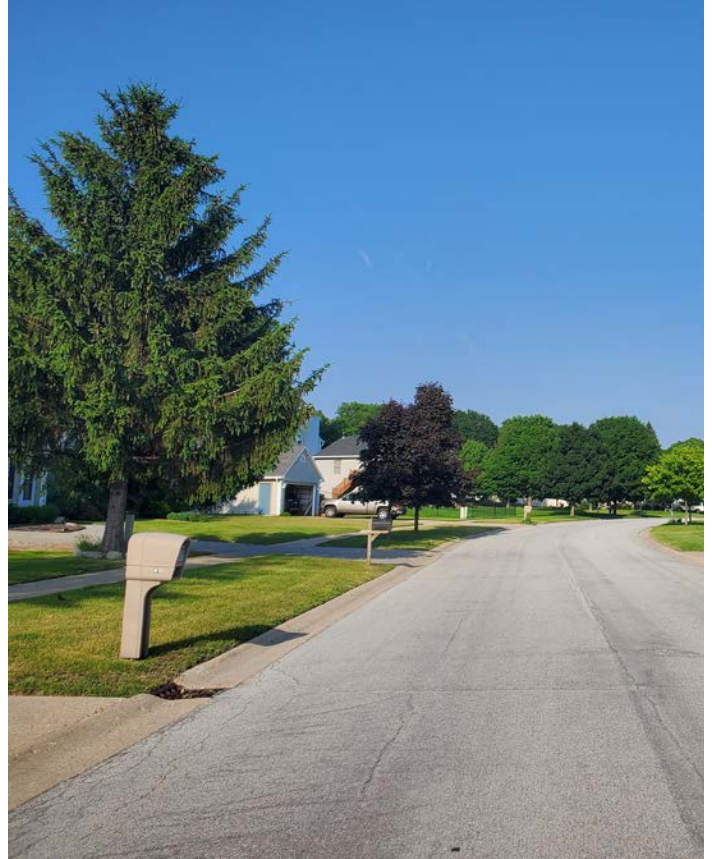
Housing and Neighborhood Maintenance Strategy

Rockford contains a healthy mix of new and older housing in traditional and suburban patterns. While many homes are in good condition, there remain opportunities for improvement in most neighborhoods to maintain and enhance the condition of properties throughout the City. This strategy would involve attention to public spaces such as streets and sidewalks to ensure that these vital public facilities are safe, accessible, and usable. In addition, the City should explore partnerships to connect groups such as veterans, seniors, low-income households, and the disabled population with resources to assist them in maintaining their properties.



Support Neighborhood Organization

Neighborhood associations are difficult for a government body to initiate because their success requires broad support and buy-in from neighborhood leaders and residents. However, residents in Rockford have formed semi-formal resident groups through social media. This plan encourages the formation of neighborhood organizations to identify issues and to act as a conduit through which city residents can communicate with their government. In addition, the City should work with neighborhood leaders to facilitate the emergence of neighborhood groups to engage in civic activities and reestablish a neighborhood watch program.





Partnerships with Local Governments, Schools, and Community Stakeholders

Some of the policies in this plan are dependent on cooperation with the City's neighboring municipalities. For example, the Kent County Road Commission has jurisdiction related to the 10 Mile Road (Division Street) corridor that runs through the City and joint planning efforts related to 10 Mile Road have occurred in the past between the City of Rockford, Plainfield, and Algoma Townships. Similarly, Rockford's sanitary sewer system is connected to and treated by the North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA), which also includes Plainfield Charter Township, Alpine Township, Cannon Township, and Courtland Township. Thus, numerous factors that influence growth and development will necessarily need to be addressed through a cooperative approach.

Rockford shares some of the same challenges when it comes to local and regional economic development. The extent to which cooperative efforts to attract new business and expand industrial development can be coordinated with local and regional partnerships and organizations will be helpful to the City and the surrounding Townships.

Additionally, coordinating site design standards for zoning districts and along key transportation corridors and municipal boundaries can help to create a unified aesthetic, establish a greater sense of place within the community, and ensure compatible development across jurisdictions. The City should also work to form alliances with the Rapid, the interurban transit partnership providing bus service to the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. A relationship with the Rapid to expand transit service to the City and form partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions

can enhance the city's educational, recreational, and cultural amenities.

Climate Action Plan

The City of Rockford is committed to a sustainable future and this plan seeks to develop and implement sustainable land use policies, partnerships, and operational practices. The City has officially proclaimed that it will strive to meet the State's goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. This can be accomplished through the development of a climate action plan, which is a strategic plan intended to provide the City with a roadmap toward reducing harmful emissions, meeting clean energy goals, and facilitating sustainable practices, while also achieving social and economic objectives.

In April of 2022, the State of Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) released the MI Healthy Climate Plan. This plan's "road map to 2030" consists of the following key recommendations:

- Commit to Environmental Justice and Pursue a Just Transition
- Clean the Electric Grid
- Electrify Vehicles and Increase Public Transit
- Repair and Decarbonize Homes and Businesses
- Drive Clean Innovation in Industry
- Protect Michigan's Land and Water

These recommendations are similar to many of the policies listed in this plan and through the development and implementation of a climate action plan, the City of Rockford will further establish itself as a leader in sustainable practices in West Michigan.

Parks and Recreation Planning

The natural environment is highly valued by Rockford residents. The City has been proactive in maintaining and improving its public parks and has sought grant assistance from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to help offset the cost of some improvements. Key to maintaining park facilities is the ongoing implementation and maintenance of the City's Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan. The DNR requires that municipalities have a valid Five-Year Parks and Recreation Plan on file in order to be eligible for grant assistance. There are numerous types of grants available including the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant, Passport Grant, Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant, and others that assist local governments in meeting their recreational goals. The City should focus on the maintenance of existing parks over the acquisition of new parkland, and carefully assess donations of public lands based on the City's maintenance capacity.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

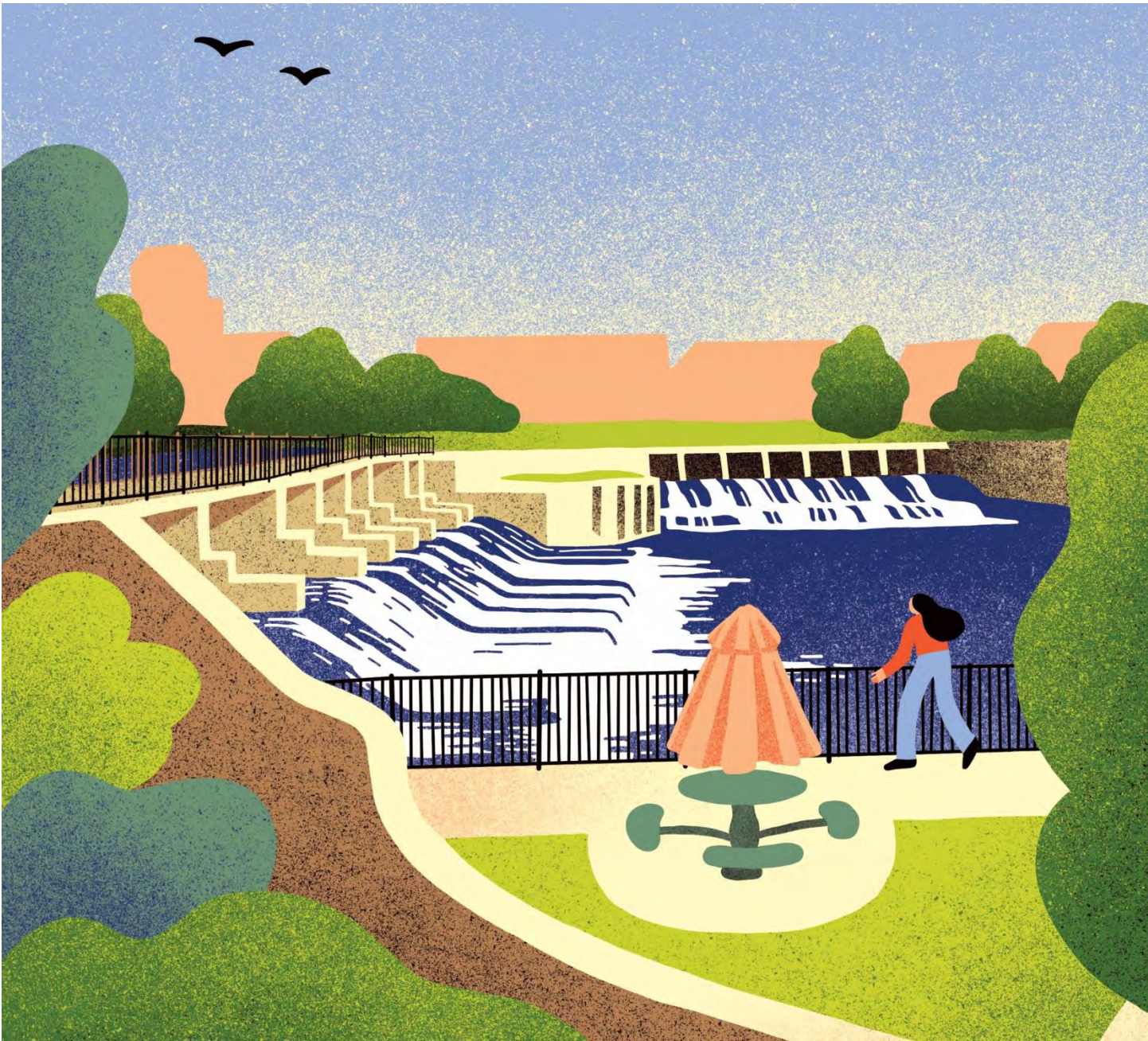
Section 6.2

Project and/or Program	Description	Timing (Near-, Mid-, or Long-Term)	Primary Responsible Parties
Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance Update or Rewrite	Update the City Zoning Ordinance in accordance with the vision, goals and objectives, and implementation strategies of this plan.	Near	Planning Commission
Potential Redevelopment Area Marketing	Coordinate with land owners to produce fact sheets for the potential redevelopment area sites to be featured on the City's website and shared with the local business and regional development communities. Fact sheets will include basic parcel information, such as size, PPN, sale price (if available), ownership, zoning, master plan designation, and a context sensitive narrative.	Long	DDA, City Staff
Climate Action Plan	Complete a strategic climate action plan to guide the City in reducing harmful emissions, meeting clean energy goals, and facilitating sustainable practices.	Near	Sustainability Committee, City Staff
Downtown Development Guidelines	Create a downtown design standard manual or form-based code to maintain building form, function, and aesthetics.	Mid	Planning Commission
Non-Motorized Transportation Plan	Develop a comprehensive non-motorized transportation plan to make Rockford a more attractive, navigable, and livable city.	Near	Planning Commission
Sidewalk Repair and Enhancement Program	Implement a sidewalk repair and enhancement program to address sidewalk maintenance, crosswalk demarcations, gaps in the existing sidewalk network, and accessibility deficiencies.	Mid	City Council
Street Repair and Sustainable Infrastructure	Implement a plan to evaluate and install sustainable infrastructure when street projects are undertaken.	Long	City Council
Traffic Calming and Streetscape Enhancements	Continue efforts to install traffic calming devices, provide safe spaces for cyclists and pedestrians, and enhance overall streetscape aesthetics along Main Street from downtown to Northland Drive, Fremont Street, Courtland Street, Northland Drive, Bridge Street, Lincoln Street, and Division Street (10 Mile).	Long	City Council

Project and/or Program	Description	Timing (Near-, Mid-, or Long-Term)	Primary Responsible Parties
Citywide Branding	Create a cohesive and unique brand that could include a new logo, slogan, and color scheme that would be used on all official city signage, letterhead, uniforms, etc.	Mid	City Staff
Marketing Campaign	Develop a plan to market the City as a regional destination that would inform investors, businesses, and potential visitors of all that Rockford has to offer.	Mid	City Staff
Community Education, Outreach, and Communication Plan	A communication plan to keep city residents, workers, and business owners informed. The City should continually strive to improve its online presence to keep residents informed of current events, decisions, projects, and other issues in and around the community that impact their lives.	Mid	City Staff
Business Retention/ Recruitment Strategy	Develop a plan to retain current businesses and attract new business and industry to areas of the city poised for development and/or redevelopment.	Long	Chamber of Commerce, EDC
Housing and Neighborhood Maintenance Strategy	The City should explore partnerships to connect groups such as veterans, seniors, low-income households, and the disabled population with resources to assist them in maintaining their properties and assessing housing options within the community.	Mid	City Staff
5-Year Parks & Recreation Plan Update	Update the City 5-Year Parks & Recreation Plan in accordance with DNR guidelines to assess maintenance needs and improvements to existing park facilities, and to ensure eligibility for grant funding opportunities.	Near	Planning Commission

APPENDIX





CITY OF ROCKFORD

MASTER PLAN ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Prepared by Williams & Works

Draft 01.14.2022

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Appendix A: What do you love about Rockford? Activity Transcribed Comments

Appendix B: Areas for Investment Activity Transcribed Comments

Appendix C: Community Survey Responses

Appendix D: Visioning Exercise Opportunities and Threats



INTRODUCTION

The City of Rockford's Master Plan is a broad policy document that provides a community vision and acts as a guide for land use and development, capital investment, and growth management. It is a vision that articulates what the community desires to become, and it establishes a framework for achieving that vision through a series of specific strategies and tasks.

The existing Plan was adopted in 2002 and was written with a 20-year planning horizon. In 2021, the City of Rockford Planning Commission began the process for the development of a new Master Plan to guide the community over the next two to three decades. The City of Rockford undertook a robust engagement campaign to inform the goals and objectives of the new Master Plan. This report presents the findings of this outreach effort. It includes a summary of these findings in terms of the input and quantified data received, an analysis of the significance of the conclusions, and a discussion of the methods used to solicit feedback.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The public engagement for the City of Rockford’s Master Plan update encompassed a variety of outreach techniques and methods to solicit community feedback from numerous sources. A hybrid of virtual and in-person events was conducted to accomplish these purposes. This hybrid approach allowed participants to choose events and activities that most interested them, suited their availability, or they were most comfortable with, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. A detailed analysis of these events and activities is presented in the following section.

EVENTS AND TIMELINE



**POP-UP
PLANNING**



**COMMUNITY
SURVEY**



**VISIONING
SESSIONS**



**CLASSROOM
COLLABORATION**

SEPT-OCT 2021	SEPT-DEC 2021	OCT-DEC 2021	NOV 2021
Quick and engaging planning activities were conducted at Harvest Fest and the Farmers Market.	An online survey was created for members of the community to provide detailed feedback about the Master Plan.	Four meetings were held with local government leaders to discuss opportunities, threats, and top Master Plan priorities.	Two student groups at North Rockford Middle School were taken through a series of exercises to explore their ideal future for Rockford.

PROMOTION

Several methods of coordination were used to promote available public participation opportunities and included:

- The creation of a dedicated Master Plan webpage on the City’s website for educational and promotional purposes;
- Distribution of printed survey flyers at both pop-up planning events and to downtown businesses for display;
- Regular sharing of digital flyers for each pop-up planning event and the community survey on the City’s official website, Facebook page, email to local organizations, and a flyer display on the City’s Downtown Welcome Center;
- Attendance at regular or special meetings with City leaders for all visioning sessions, all of which were open to the public;
- And letters to parents of children participating in the classroom collaboration sessions to inform them about the process and encourage their participation in the online survey.

POP-UP PLANNING

Mobile pop-up events provided a casual, drop-in format for participants to engage with activities at their own pace and learn about the Master Plan. By providing a variety of quick, fun, and eye-catching activities at well-attended events, the consultants were able to solicit feedback from passersby, drawing in people who may not typically engage in traditional public planning endeavors.

Two pop-up planning events were conducted as part of the planning process:

- **Harvest Fest**
Saturday, September 25, 2021, from 10 am - 2 pm
- **Rockford Farmers Market**
Saturday, October 2, 2021, from 8 am - 1 pm

WELCOME BOARD

An informational welcome board was present at each pop-up planning event that provided context about the Plan and encouraged participants to take part in the available activities. This board included educational text regarding three questions: (1) What is a Master Plan, (2) Why is planning important, and (3) Why are we here today.



AREAS FOR INVESTMENT

A map of the city was provided for participants to identify areas they believe require public investment (Figure 2). The map was divided into seven distinct areas, and are as follows: (A) Neighborhoods west of the river, (B) Downtown, (C) Former Wolverine site, (D) Neighborhoods east of the river, (E) 10 Mile and Wolverine Boulevard, (F) Northland Drive east, and (G) Industrial Parks.



Figure 2. Areas for Investment Reference Map

Participants were asked to place red pins on the map in areas where they believe the most public investment is needed and yellow pins in areas where moderate public investment is needed. Area C, the former Wolverine site, had the highest weighted average for investment ($n=2.00$), followed by Area F, Northland Drive east ($n=1.80$), and Area A, neighborhoods west of the river ($n=1.78$). Area E, 10 Mile and Wolverine Boulevard, had no pins placed during either event. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the pin voting based on the most and moderate need of investment. Participants were also encouraged to write additional comments on the board to elaborate on their pins. Common themes expressed in the comments included additional recreation amenities or maintenance of trails, sidewalk connections or locations for repair, requests for specific types of businesses (primarily dining), and street improvements. A full list of comments transcribed from this activity can be found in [Appendix B](#).

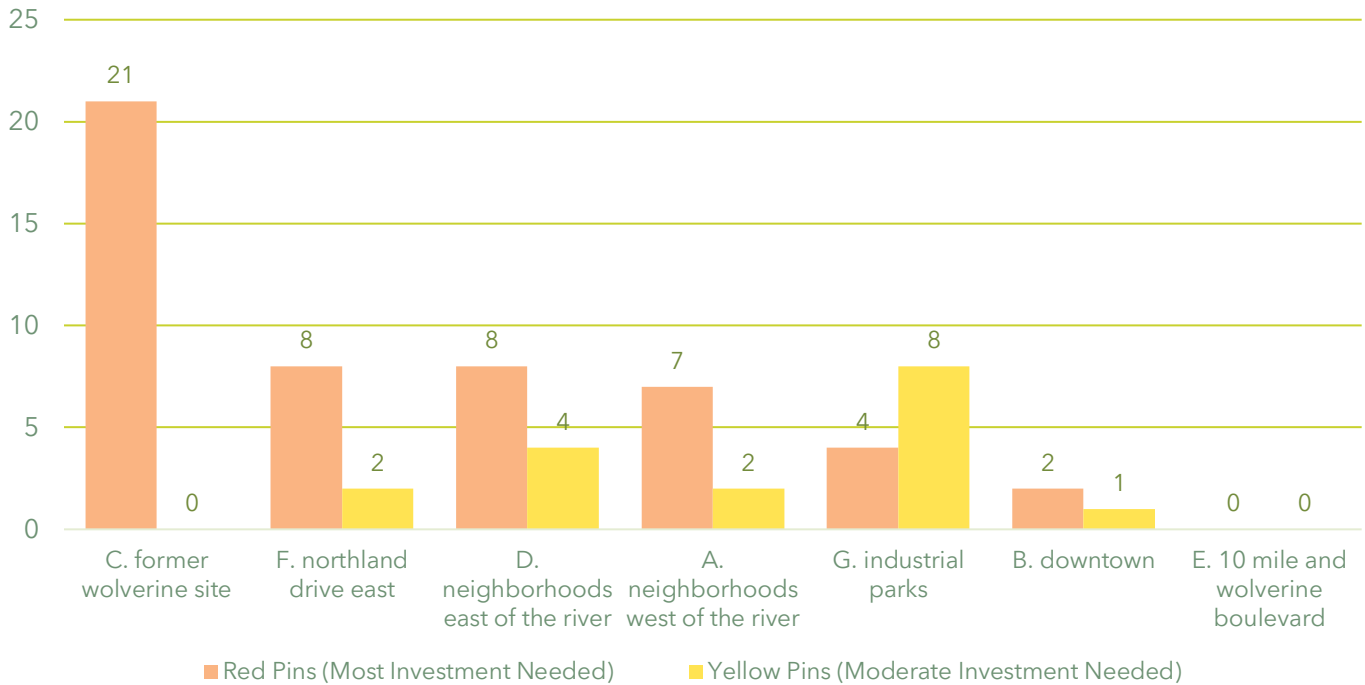


Figure 3. Areas for Investment - Combined Event Totals



SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES

Environmental stewardship and sustainability are topics not currently addressed in the Master Plan. Since the current plan was adopted in 2002, the Sustainability Committee (SusCom) has been created. This citizen advisory board focuses on enhancing and promoting sustainable practices in the community. Through this Master Plan update, there is the opportunity to include sustainable policies for natural and built resources for future generations.

A voting exercise was provided during both events to gauge the importance of multiple topics related to sustainability. For this activity, participants were told to imagine they were in charge of directing investment for publicly supported sustainable initiatives. Each participant was given 10 pennies representing their tax dollars. They were instructed to distribute their pennies into jars labeled with different sustainable initiatives according to their preference for investment.

A total of 1,113 pennies were collected during both events, with higher participation at the Farmers Market (n=652) than Harvest Fest (n=461). Although their order varied, the top three sustainable priorities were the same at both events and included ground and surface water protection (17%), increased tree canopy (17%), and habitat preservation (14%). Electric car charging stations was consistently at the bottom for both events (4%). Generally, sustainable priorities ranked similarly between both events, with the exception of the city-sponsored compost program, which placed second to last at Harvest Fest but was in the top four during the Farmers Market. Figure 4 illustrates the total distribution of pennies from both events.

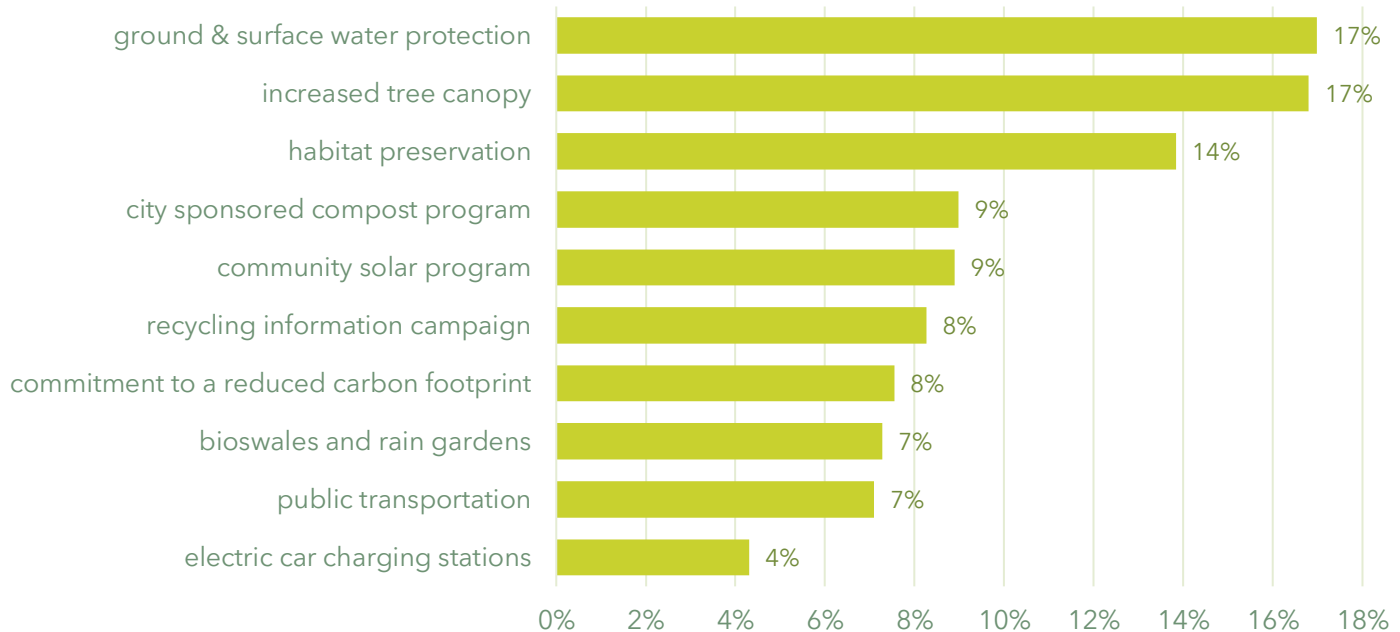


Figure 4. Sustainability Priorities - Combined Event Totals

COMMENT CARDS

Comment cards were available during both events. A total of four comment cards were completed and their content has been transcribed below. Both the What do you Love about Rockford? activity and the Areas for Investment map provided opportunities for open-ended comment as well.

- Please bring back the chairs & fire pits downtown on Main St.
- Red pins [areas for most investment] on James Street/Longview. Street lights and lights near the trail and Longview entrance.
- Transportation for senior citizens and a senior center would be nice.
- Stop cutting down the trees.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

METHODOLOGY AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Survey questions were developed by the City Planning Commission and the planning consultant. The survey was organized into four sections: Background, Housing, Economic Development, and Community Investment. The survey was conducted through the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, allowing respondents to submit confidential replies using a “check-the-box” format. This format was designed to expedite the completion rate of the survey, maximize response rates, and facilitate a consistent scoring of results. A total of 532 responses were completed from the launch of the survey on September 24, 2021, through the close of the survey on December 5, 2021. This results in a margin of error of 4% (based on the City’s 2020 population of 6,142).

A TOTAL OF 532 RESPONSES WERE COMPLETED FROM THE LAUNCH OF THE SURVEY ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2021 TO THE DECEMBER 5, 2021, DEADLINE.

Some respondents completed the survey, but left various items blank; however, all surveys had at least some responses that could be scored. The rate of completion for the full survey was approximately 69%. Survey fatigue is recognized in items 16-20 as 21% or more of respondents skipped these questions, whereas the rate of completion for items 1-15 was 89% or higher. Some questions provided space for respondents to fill in the blank and leave comments. When spelling and grammar mistakes were obvious, corrections were made, and if profanity or other offensive language was used, it was edited. Due to the sample size, sample population, and other limitations generally present in online surveys, these results should not be interpreted with a purely scientific mindset. However, these survey results provide valuable perspectives of the community’s opinions regarding the Master Plan updates. The survey was successful in that it resulted in objective, quantifiable information from a large number of people compared to typical participation in other forms of public input (e.g. community workshops, focus groups, etc.). This survey will help the City craft community-supported policy and promote uses that are aligned with the desires of the public for short- and long-range municipal planning.

The online survey tool presented respondents with a standardized set of questions from which they could choose responses. Some questions only permitted one answer, some permitted multiple answers, and others allowed space for individual comments. This method restricted acceptable entries to those required by the survey form, providing a standardized method by which analysis could be conducted and trends observed.

Two scoring scales were used to report the data received: nominal and ordinal scales. A nominal scale merely counts responses by particular classification (e.g., place of residence). This scale is useful to separate responses into working groups or to evaluate the overall sample to determine whether it represents the larger population. Items 1-12, and 14 were scored on a nominal scale.

An ordinal scale is more useful in gaining insight into respondent beliefs because it includes the characteristic of rank order. That is, one item is greater or lesser than another item, or it has more or less of a particular quality, based on a commonly understood standard. An ordinal scale enables some greater judgment about the relative strength or weakness of particular responses (e.g., "most ideal," "how often," etc.). It does not, however, include a quantifiable or consistent interval between the various points in the scale. Items 13 and 15-17 were scored on an ordinal scale.

For the purposes of reporting survey results, the ordinal scales used were converted to interval scales. This merely means that a numeric value was assigned to each response with an interval of "1" between each point on the scale. For example, in Question 13, "Very Important" responses were assigned the number 5, "Important" responses were assigned the number 4, and so forth. This was done to enable the measurement of central tendency of all responses, which is accomplished by determining the arithmetic mean (or average) response for the item. However, it must be recognized that the assignment of value to the intervals of the scale does not automatically result in a true interval scale because each respondent will have his/her own interpretation of the interval. Nevertheless, in aggregate, this procedure does enable a comparison of the items from one to the next.

Open-ended questions were used for items 18-20 which prompted participants to leave a written response. Additionally, open-ended answer choices were provided for items 1, 3, 6-12, 14, and 15 if a respondent's desired answer choice was not available or additional information was requested based on their initial response. While summaries of survey responses are provided in this report, all survey responses are located in [Appendix C](#).

BACKGROUND

The first section of the survey provided context for its purpose in relation to the City's Master Plan update and inquired about the participant's background.

1. The first question asked respondents to identify where they lived and was required to continue with the survey. The majority of the respondents were from the City of Rockford (57%, n=302) (Figure 5). The surrounding townships of Plainfield (10%), Algoma (10%), Courtland (9%), and Cannon (9%) made up the largest percentage of respondents outside of the City limits with few participants indicating their residence outside of the local area.

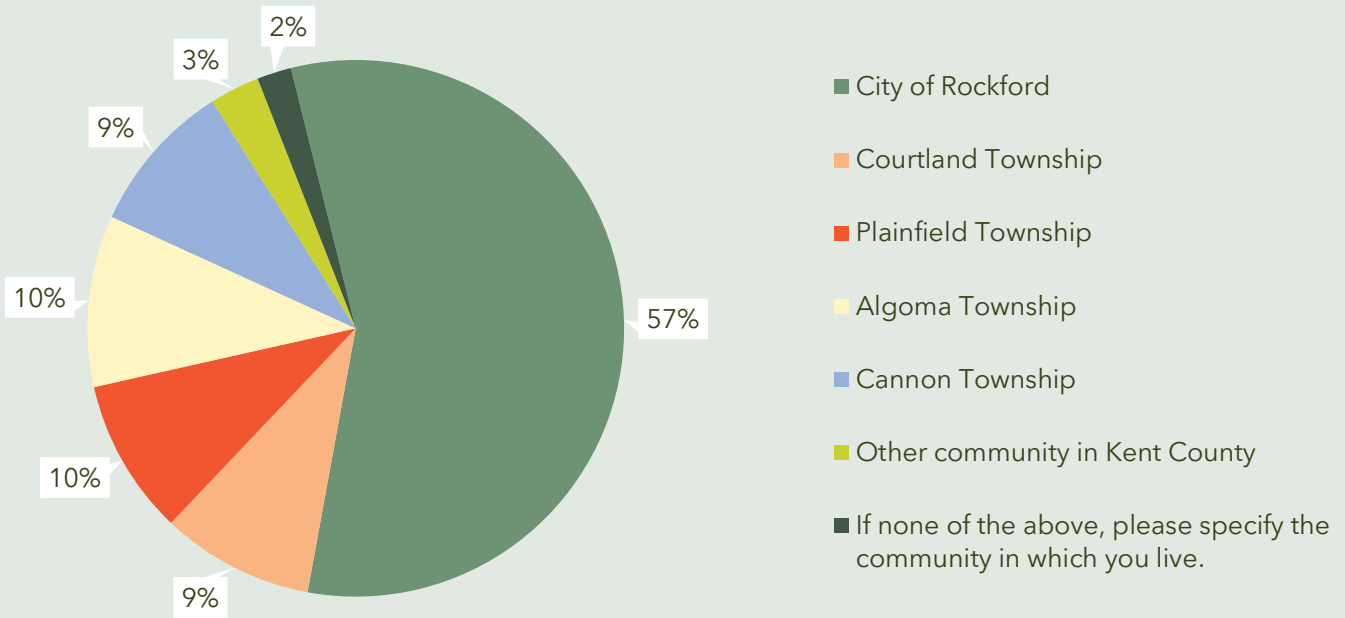


Figure 5. Where do you live?

2. Respondents were asked to indicate how long they have lived in the Rockford area. The largest percentage of participants indicated they have lived in the Rockford area for more than 20 years (38%), nearly 20% higher than the next most frequently chosen answer (Figure 6). A relatively even distribution of responses was received for those living 10 to 20 years (19%), 6 to 9 years (14%), 3 to 5 years (11%), and less than 3 years (15%). The smallest percentage of respondents do not live in the Rockford Area (3%). Overall, this indicates a strong presence of long-term residents.

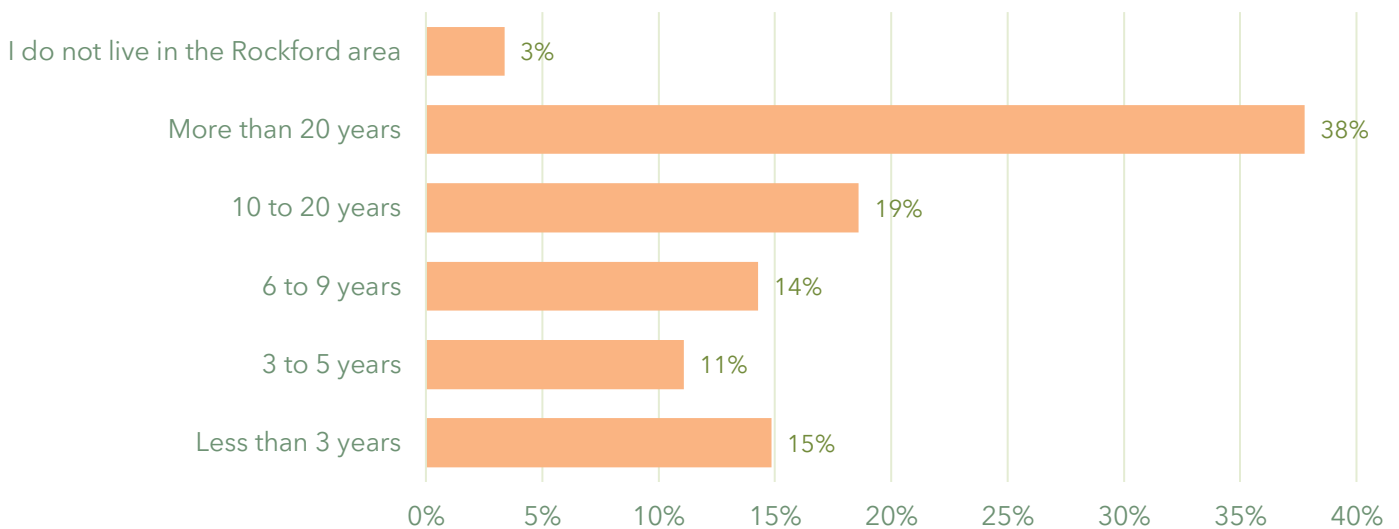


Figure 6. How long have you lived in the Rockford Area?

3. The primary connection respondents had to the City of Rockford was as a resident (82%) (Table 1). This indicates a strong presence of local opinions throughout the survey. The next most popular group contained respondents who work in the City (13.4%), followed by participants who identified as a business owner (13%), or a resident in a nearby community (11.7%). No seasonal residents participated in the survey.

Answer Choices	Percent	Number of Responses
Resident	82.0%	436
Work in the City	13.4%	71
Business owner	13.0%	69
Resident in a nearby community	11.7%	62
Visitor	5.6%	30
Other (please specify)	3.0%	16
Landlord	2.6%	14
Commercial property owner	2.4%	13
Student	1.7%	9
Seasonal resident	0.0%	0
	Answered	532
	Skipped	0

Table 1. Which of the following best characterizes your connection to the City? (select all that apply)

4. The largest age group of survey participants was 35-44 (28%), followed by the 45-54 (21%) and 25-34 (18%) year old age groups (Figure 7). This is unsurprising as Rockford has a relatively young median age of 35.4 years. Under-represented age groups based on the 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates include individuals below the age of 18 and 18-24-year-olds, who only made up 1% and 2% of survey participants respectively.

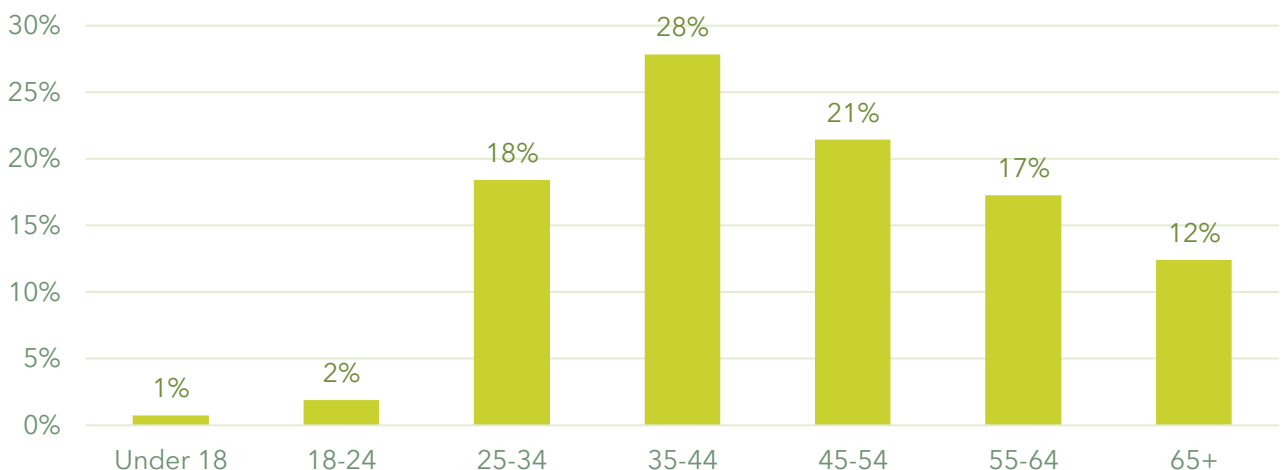


Figure 7. What is your age?

5. Question 5 asked respondents to indicate how many people, including themselves, live in their household. The majority of participants live in households comprised of two to four persons, suggesting both a mix of couples and families (Figure 8).

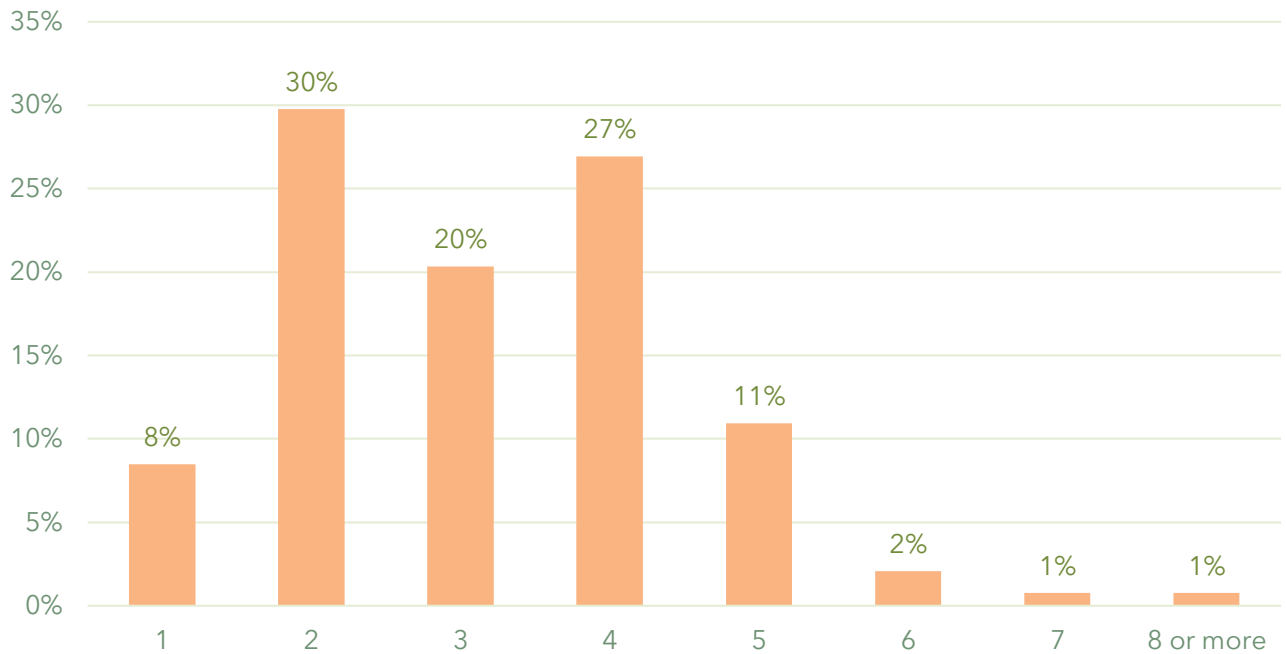


Figure 8. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

6. Just over half of survey participants had children under the age of 18 living at home (50.9%) (Table 2). As a follow-up to this question, respondents were asked to specify how many children under the age of 18 were living in their household. 227 respondents provided this information resulting in an average of 2 children per household for respondents living with children under the age of 18.

Answer Choices		Percent						Number of Responses	
Yes		50.9%						270	
No		49.1%						260	
If yes, how many?		-						227	
•	Number of Children	1	2	3	4	5	6		
•	Answer Frequency	68	113	34	6	3	3		

Table 2. Do you have any children under 18 living at home?

7. Fewer than 18% of survey participants live in a household with persons over the age of 65 (17.5%) (Table 3). As a follow-up to this question, respondents were asked to specify how many individuals over the age of 65 were living in their household. 82 respondents provided this information indicating 1 to 2 seniors per household for respondents living with persons over the age of 65.

Answer Choices		Percent	Number of Responses
Yes		17.5%	93
No		82.5%	439
If yes, how many?		-	82
• Number of Seniors	1	2	
• Answer Frequency	48	34	

Table 3. Is anyone in your household over 65?

HOUSING

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

8. Respondents were prompted to select the most important reason(s) they live or would consider living in the City of Rockford. Safe area (72%) and attractive downtown (71%) were the most frequently selected answer choices, followed by local character (58%), recreational opportunities (57%), and the school district (56%). Additionally, 25 written responses were recorded as "other". Trends in the "other" comments included the KDL Library, the local schools, and proximity to Grand Rapids.

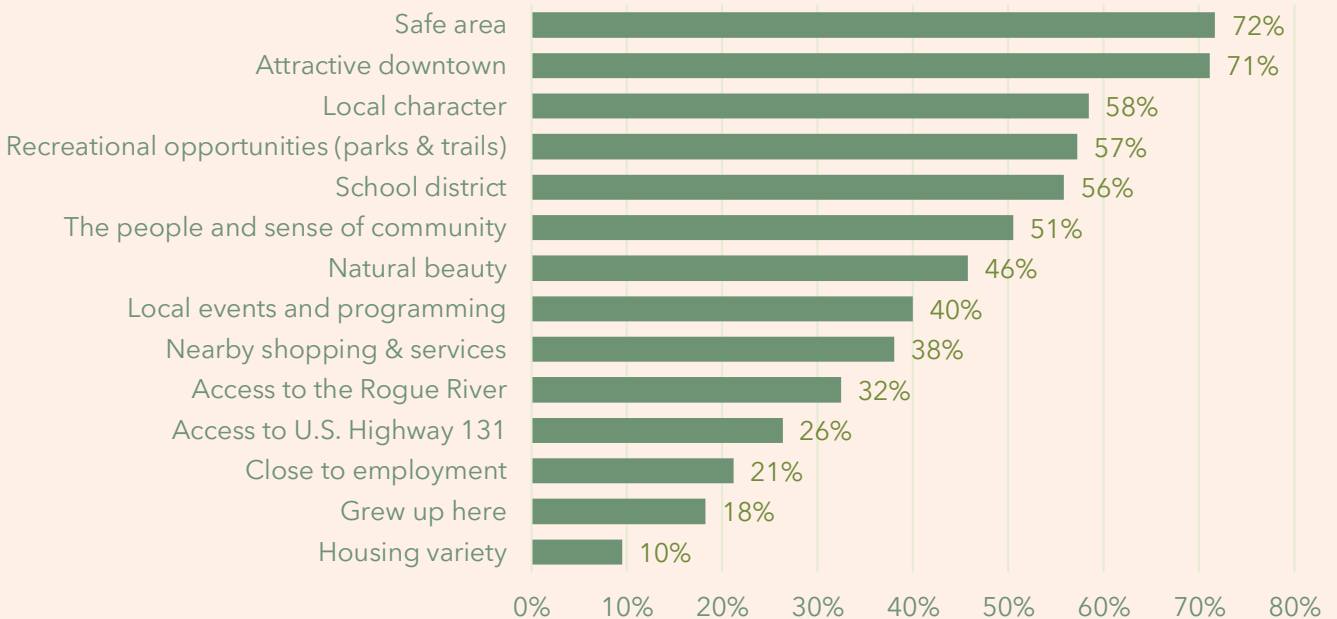


Figure 9. The most important reason(s) you live or would consider living in the City of Rockford (check all that apply)

9. Rockford’s ratio of owner- to renter-occupied dwellings is relatively high compared to other cities in West Michigan, so it is not surprising that 64.1% of survey participants own their current residence (Figure 10). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates 23.9% of residences in the City are rented. With only 3% of survey participants indicating that they rent their residence, it is likely the majority of respondents will address this survey through the lens of a homeowner.

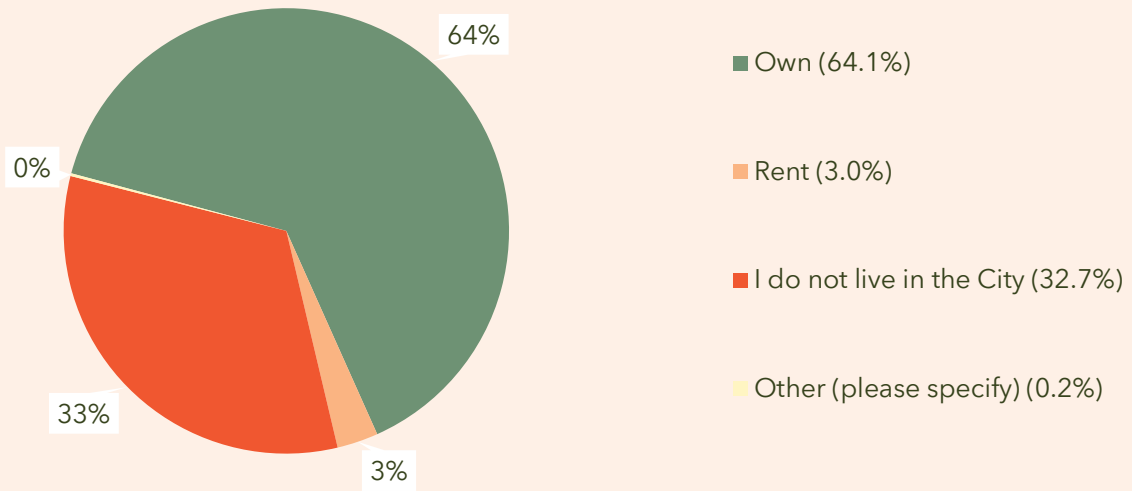


Figure 10. If you live in the City, do you own or rent your residence?

10. A wide margin of respondents live in single family homes (64.1%), followed by two family or multi-family (3.2%) or mixed use housing (0.6%) (Table 4).

Answer Choices	Percent	Number of Responses
Single Family Home	64.1%	318
I do not live in the City	31.7%	157
Two Family or Multi-Family	3.2%	16
Mixed Use Housing	0.6%	3
Other (please specify)	0.4%	2
Retirement Community/Assisted Living	0.0%	0
	Answered	496
	Skipped	36

Table 4. If you live in the City, in what type of residence do you live?

11. 75.2% of respondents indicated the housing type they desire is available in the City today (Table 5). 13.6% of respondents provided further insight through open-ended comments regarding the type of housing they would like to see. Most frequently mentioned housing types included acreage (n=13), affordable housing (n=12), condos (n=11), large homes (n=5), small homes (n=5), and new construction homes (n=5).

Answer Choices	Percent	Number of Responses
Yes	75.2%	349
No	11.2%	52
Please specify the type of housing you would be seeking if it is not available	13.6%	63
	Answered	464
	Skipped	68

Table 5. If you were to relocate within the City, is the housing type you would be seeking available?

12. Consistent with responses from question 11, the housing type most preferred in the City was single family homes (65%) (Figure 11). 21% of respondents indicated that they do not want new housing in the City. Other types of housing followed including retirement community and assisted living (16%), tiny homes (16%), mixed use housing (15%), and attached single-family residential (14%). Although there was not strong support for alternative types of housing beyond single-family homes, the “other” category (7%) included common elements, such as affordable housing (n=11), condos (n=7), and diverse housing types (n=5).

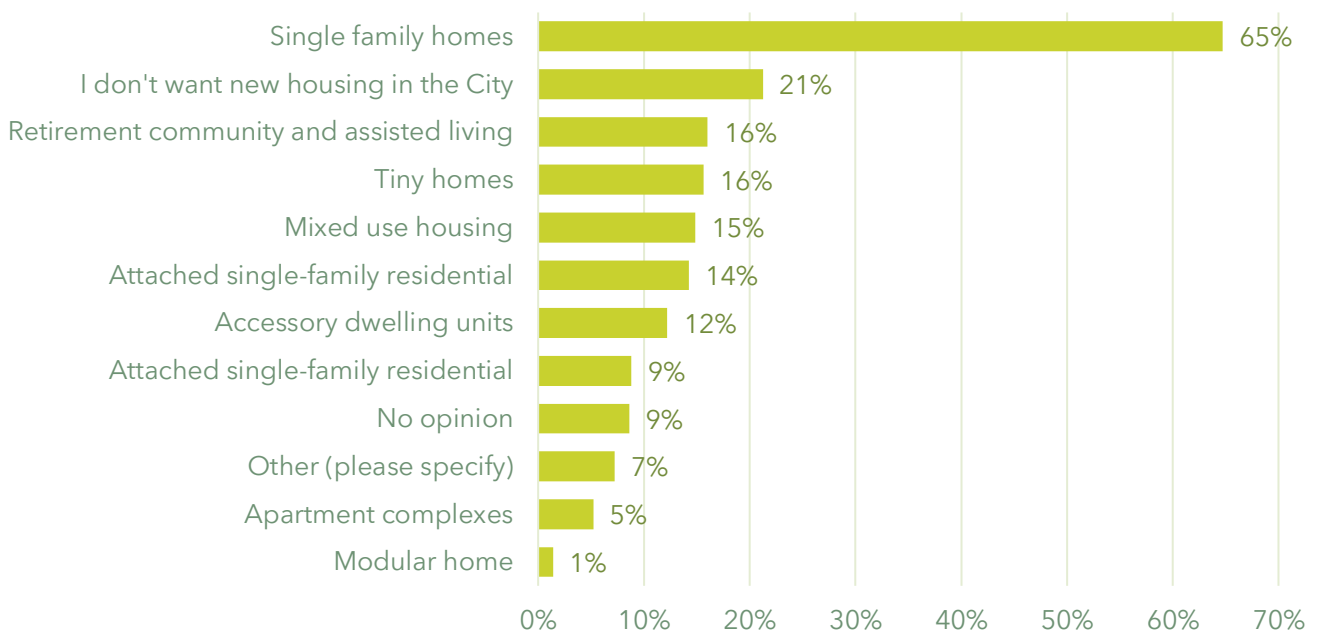


Figure 11. What types of housing would you like to see in the City? (check all that apply)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

13. Question 13 asked participants to rank a list of predefined factors on a 5-point Likert scale in relation to the economic development of the City. The weights applied to the scale are as follows: 1=Very Unimportant, 2= Unimportant, 3=Somewhat Important, 4= Important, and 5=Very Important. These scales were then used to calculate the weighted average for each economic development factor (Figure 12). There was a relatively high ranking of all economic development factors presented, with the very unimportant answer choice being selected less than 10% of the time for any one factor. Public safety had the highest weighted average at 4.59, with 69% of participants selecting this factor as very important. Ability to walk to shops and restaurants (4.46), aesthetics/appearance (4.41), walkability (4.38), cost of living (4.33), and taxes (4.26) followed as the next five highest weighted economic development factors. Available land for development was the lowest weighted factor at 3.01 but was still fell into the somewhat important overall ranking.

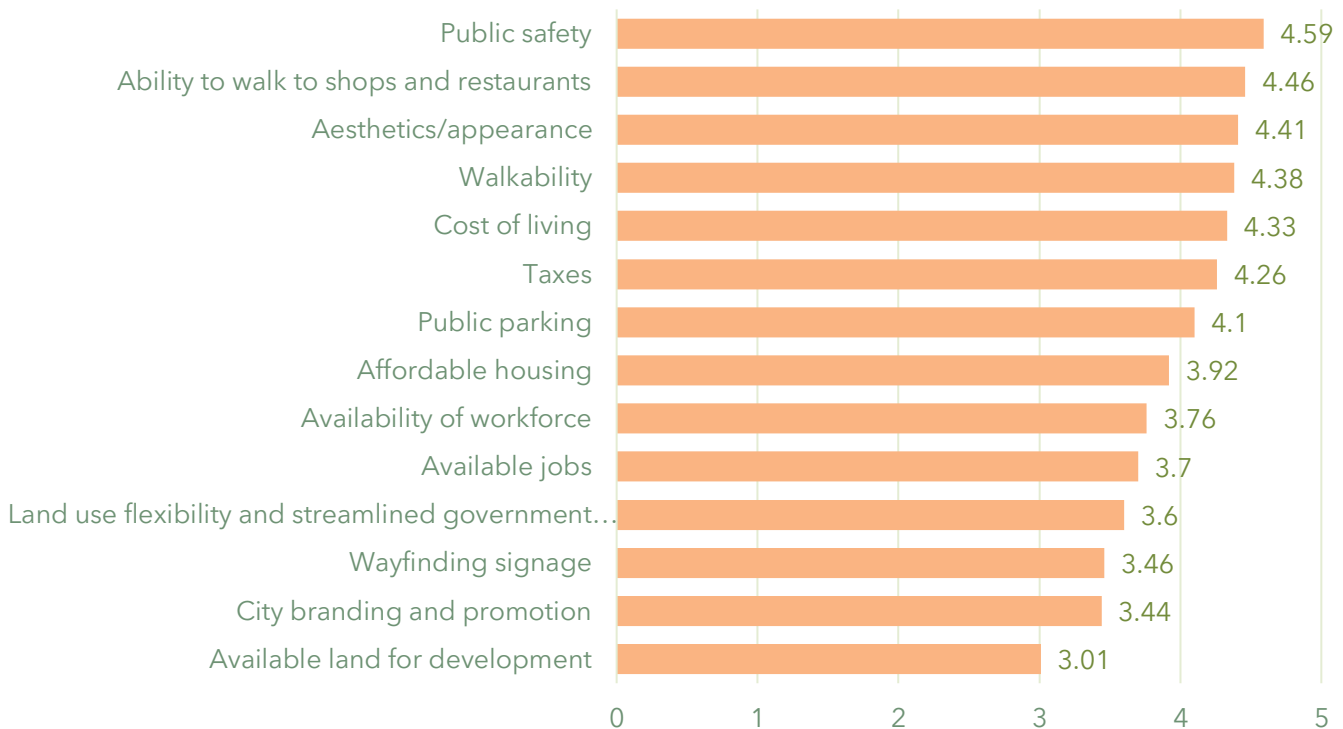


Figure 12. How important are the following factors for the economic development of the City? (weighted averages)

14. Respondents were asked what types of new businesses they would like to see in the City. 63% of participants selected sit-down restaurants, followed by arts and entertainment (52%), general retail (46%), hotel accommodations (34%), and grocery (31%). An “other” answer choice was provided and allowed respondents to write a comment. 14% of participants selected “other”, many focusing on specific food-oriented businesses, such as small grocers, delis, bakeries, and coffee shops. Other common comments included creating a greater variety of retail businesses and providing more youth and family-friendly spaces.

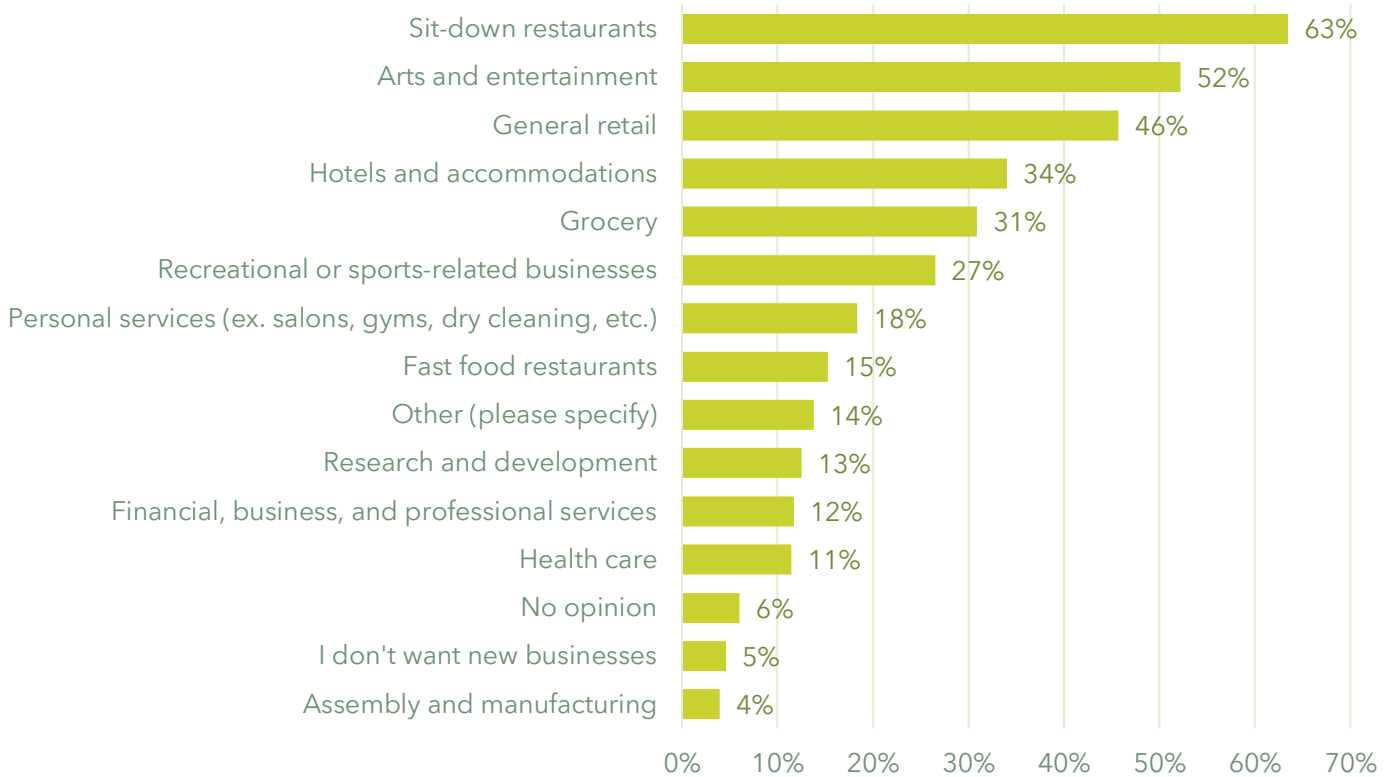


Figure 13. What types of new businesses would you like to see in the City? (check all that apply)



15. The majority of respondents believe the City is doing a good job with efforts to guide and direct development and growth (52%). Additional space was provided for comment (n=25). These comments varied greatly in their response, some expressing support for the recent city-led efforts, such as RORA, several with concern regarding the City budget and taxes, and a few who were unsure about the City's efforts in economic development.

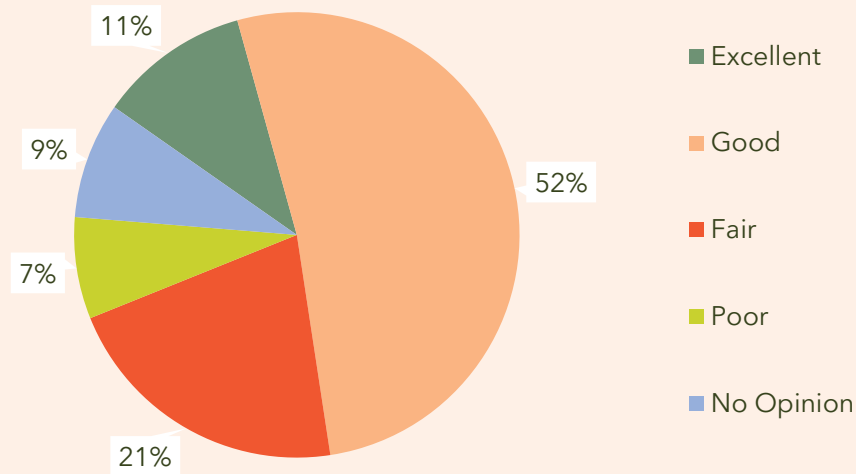


Figure 14. Please rate the City's efforts to guide and direct development and growth

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

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

16. Question 16 of the survey provided the same reference map as the Areas for Investment activity presented during the pop-up engagement. This map of the city was provided for participants to identify areas they believe require public investment (Figure 2). The map was divided into seven distinct areas, and are as follows: (A) Neighborhoods west of the river, (B) Downtown, (C) Former Wolverine site, (D) Neighborhoods east of the river, (E) 10 Mile and Wolverine Boulevard, (F) Northland Drive east, and (G) Industrial Parks. Respondents ranked each area based on which area they thought was most in need of public investment to least in need of public investment. Area A, the former Wolverine site (5.79), and Area B, downtown (4.92) were weighted as the most in need of investment while Area G, the industrial parks (2.86) were weighted as the least in need of investment (Figure 15).

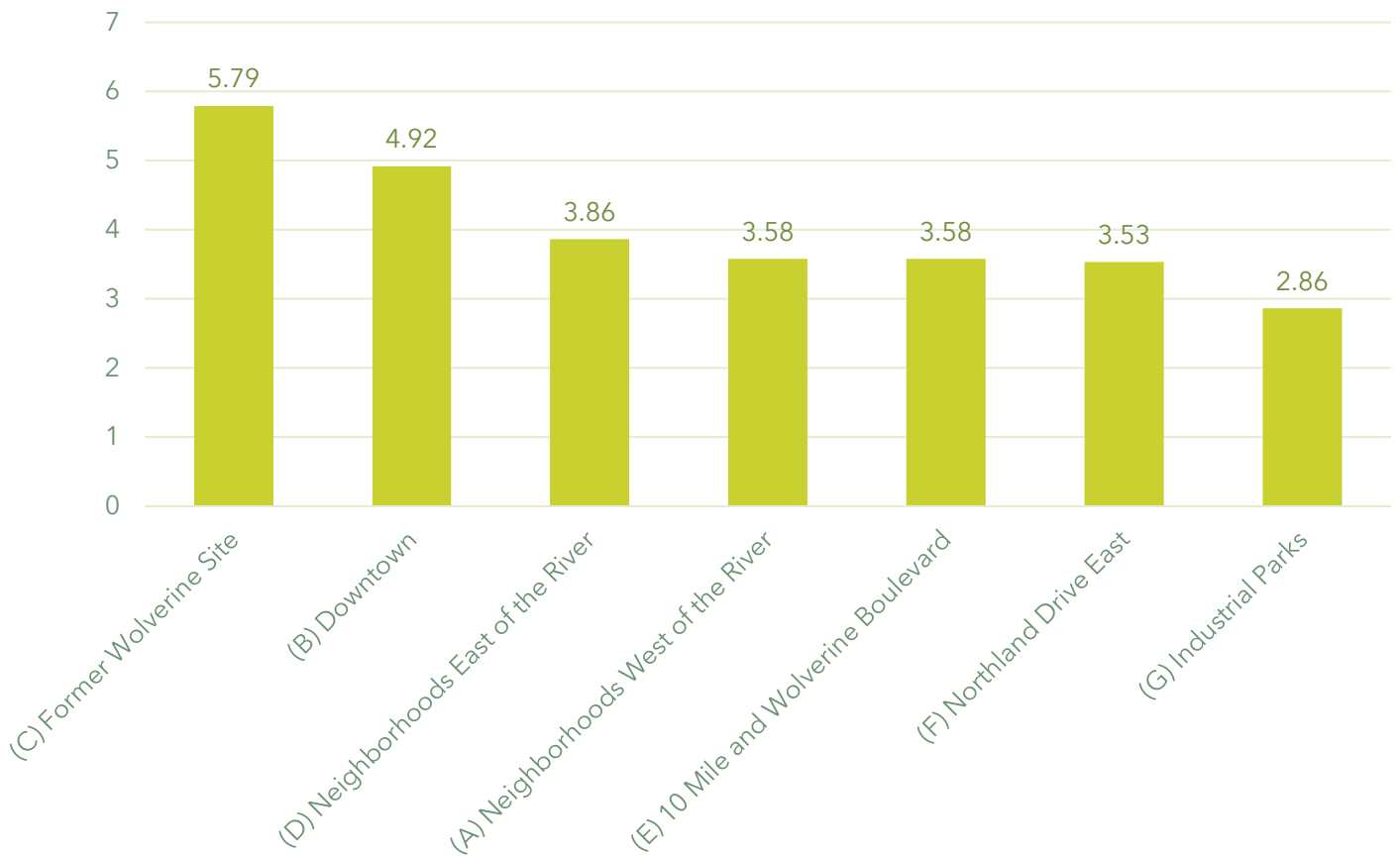


Figure 15. Rank your preference for areas within the community that you believe are most in need of public investment to least in need of public investment

Although the method for determining investment varied between the pop-up engagement activity and the survey, there are similarities and differences worth noting. In both exercises, the former Wolverine site was determined to be most in need of investment and the neighborhoods east and west of the river placed third and fourth respectively for need of investment. The industrial parks and 10 Mile and Wolverine Boulevard both consistently were in the bottom three for need of investment. Major deviations occurred in the ranking of downtown and Northland Drive east, where downtown ranked as second highest in the survey but second lowest during the pop-up event, while Northland Drive east ranked second highest at the pop-up event and second lowest in the survey. This difference may have been due to the context provided of downtown during both pop-up events, where participants could assess the public investment of downtown while answering this question.

17. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of City priorities on a 5-point Likert scale. The weights assigned to the applied scale are as follows: 1=Not at all important, 2= Not important, 3=Neutral, 4=Important, and 5=Very Important. These scales were then used to calculate the weighted average for each provided City priority (Figure 16). Protecting groundwater quality (4.7) had the highest weighted average, with 81% of respondents classifying this priority as very important. Other priorities with a weighted average categorized as important include protecting natural areas (4.44), encouraging sustainable development (4.02), and expanding/improving sidewalk and trail networks (4.02). Expanding industrial development (2.59), expanding office development (2.77), expanding commercial development near 10 Mile & Wolverine Boulevard (3.11), and facilitating redevelopment along Northland Drive, between E Main & Donald Streets (3.37) had the lowest weighted averages. These low-ranking location priorities are consistent with the rankings for areas of investment presented in question 16.

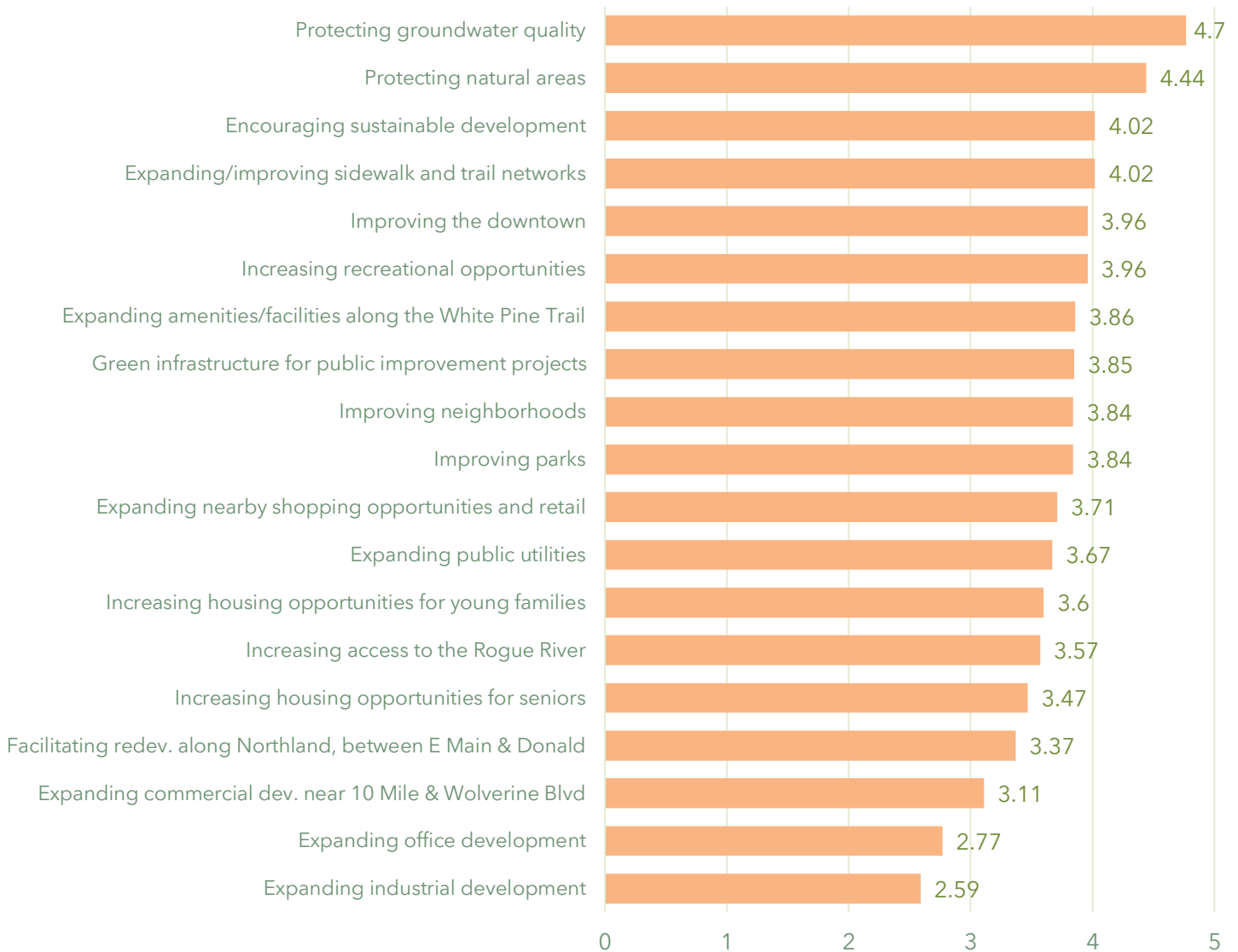


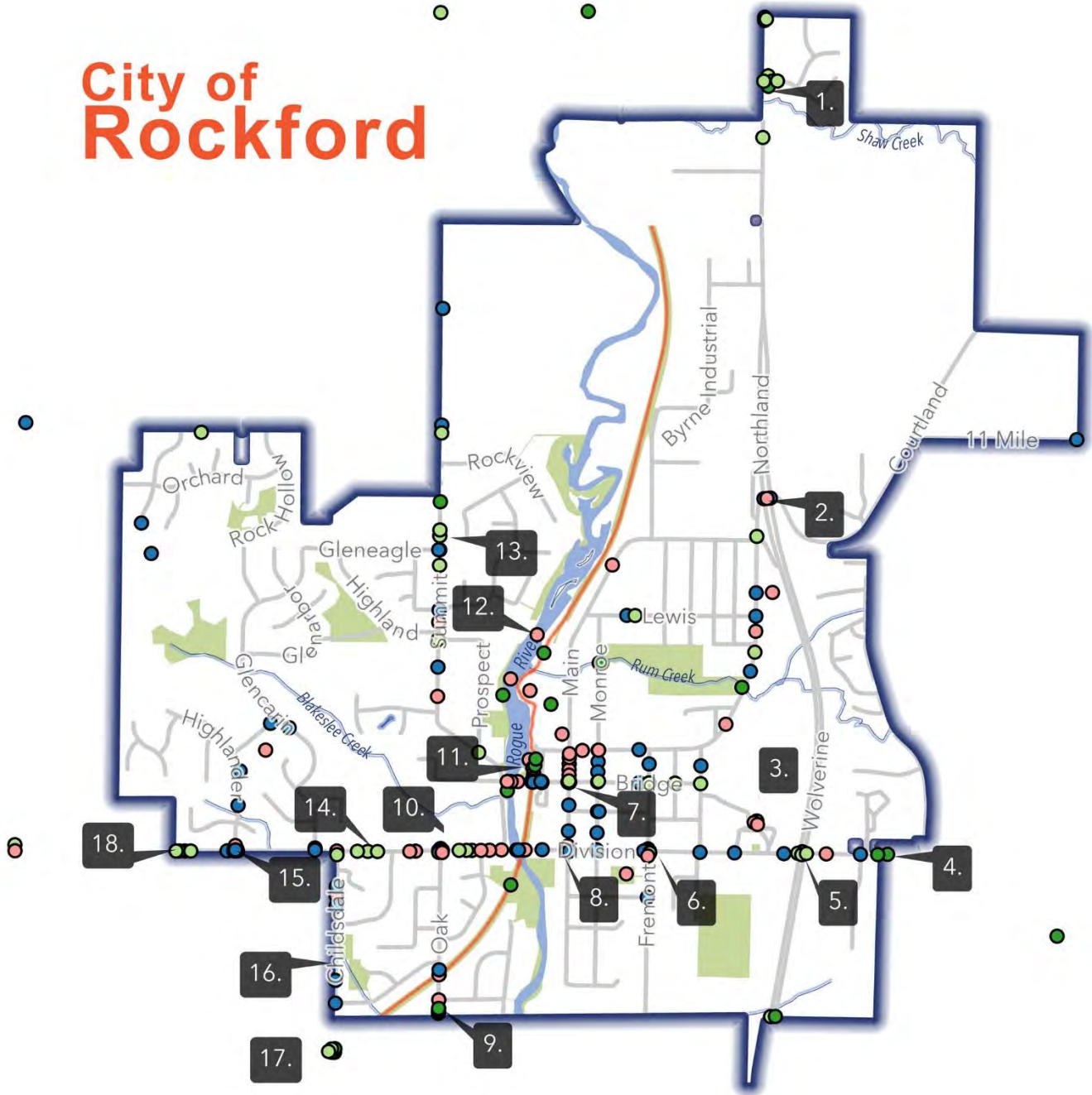
Figure 16. In terms of potential City priorities, how important are the following?

18. Question 18 provided a comment box for respondents to indicate streets/intersections that need traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements. Approximate locations of and type of comment are illustrated in Figure 17a and 17b. 231 comment points were added to the map shown in Figure 17a and were organized into three categories: (1) Streets and Traffic Signs/Signals, (2) Sidewalks and Crosswalks, (3) Trails, and (4) Other. Comments pertaining to streets and traffic signs/signals were the most frequently referenced (n=77), often requesting new traffic lights, four- or three-way stops, speed limit signs, or bike lanes. Sidewalks and crosswalks were the second most common comment type (n=66), with respondents identifying stretches of sidewalk for repair, locations in need of new sidewalks, or intersections for crosswalk repair or the installation of pedestrian signals. Connections to or maintenance of the White Pine Trail was a common theme among trail-oriented comments (n=33). Other comments (n=55) included requests not related to the other three defined categories (e.g. connections across the river, speeding, etc.) or identified locations that provided no further description (e.g. Bridge and Main, Division and Oak, etc.). Comments too far outside the City limits or did not have a defined location were not included in Figure 17a but all comments are available in [Appendix C](#).

Several representative comments are listed below and correspond with the map illustrated in Figure 17a. Zoomed in views of commonly identified intersections in need traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements are provided on Figure 17b.

1. Sidewalk or bike path needed along 12 Mile from Shaw Estates neighborhood to White Pine Trail.
2. Wolverine at Northland NE needs merging helping to enter traffic at stop sign.
3. Better traffic flow around North Rockford Middle in the morning with drop-off.
4. It would be nice to complete the proposed trail out to Luton Park. I'm starting to see a lot more people riding or walking on 10 Mile.
5. Bridge or under-street access to downtown.
6. Fremont and Division, the sidewalks are not handicap accessible on the South end.
7. The corner of bridge street and Main Street desperately needs a crosswalk and walk signals for pedestrians. It's dangerous considering the amount of pedestrian traffic.
8. E. Division and Main St, add a left turn signal for drivers heading North onto Main.
9. Happy to hear about a trail off the road that will go from near the high school to downtown.
10. 10 Mile and Jericho needs a traffic light.
11. White pine trail and bridge street, bikes fly through there and cars don't stop for people. It always feels unsafe whether driving or walking.
12. Possibly add a pedestrian bridge across the Rouge River.
13. Summit and prospect need consistent sidewalks all the way downtown.
14. Sidewalk running from 10 Mile down to park on south side of Division - almost unwalkable.
15. A light at Highlander & 10 Mile should now be considered.
16. Childsdale: widening and resurfacing.
17. Sidewalk located on Childsdale to allow better access to the trail.
18. More bike lanes for commuting to GR/ surrounding areas.

City of Rockford



Map Legend

- Fred Meijer White Pine Trail
- Parks
- Streets & Traffic Signs/Signals (n=77)
- Sidewalks & Crosswalks (n=66)
- Trails (n=33)
- Other (n=55)

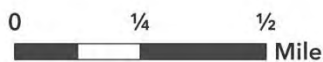
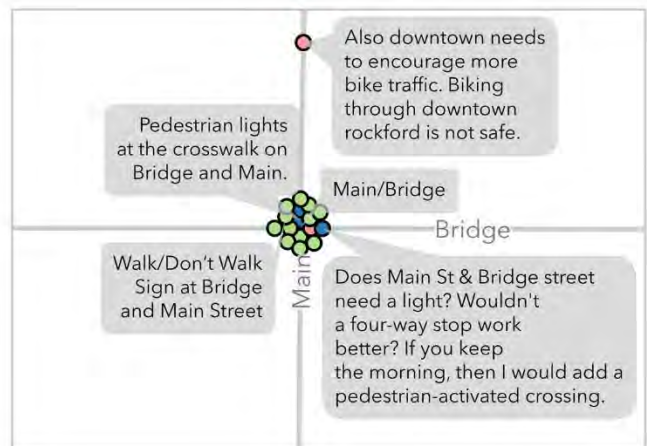
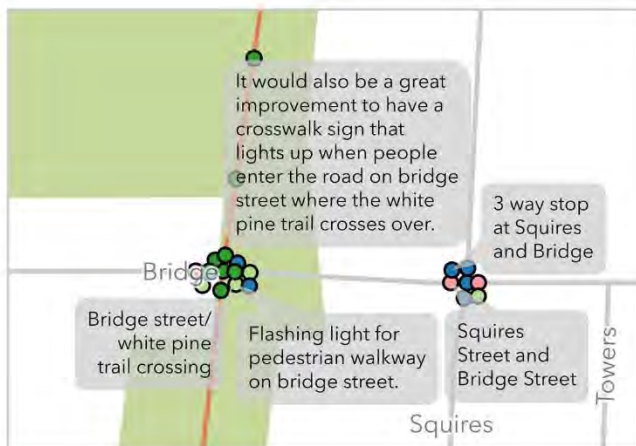
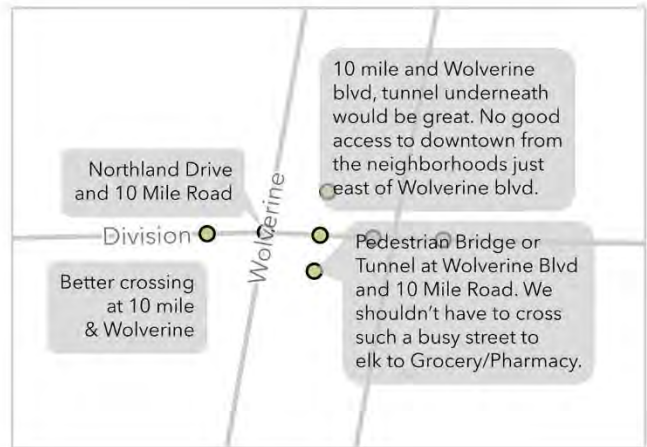
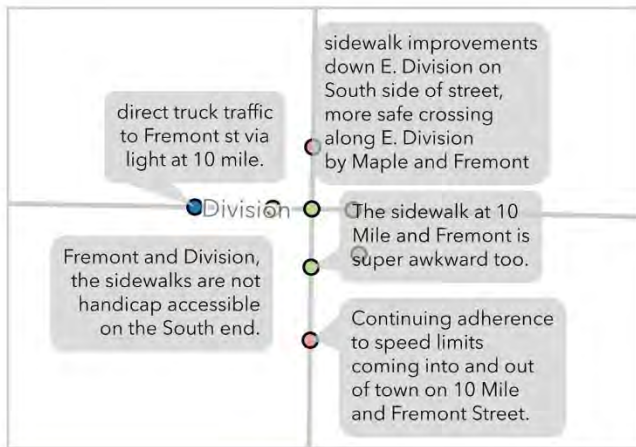
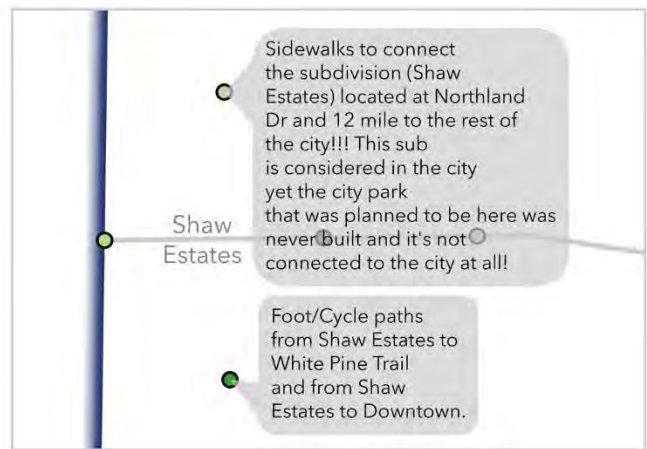
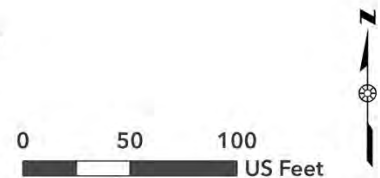


Figure 17a. Indicate streets/intersections that need traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements and what your recommendations for improvements would be



Map Legend

- Fred Meijer White Pine Trail
- Parks
- Streets & Traffic Signs/Signals (n=77)
- Sidewalks & Crosswalks (n=66)
- Trails (n=33)
- Other (n=55)



Data sources: Michigan Open Data Portal, ESRI Living Atlas, City of Rockford

Figure 17b. Commonly identified intersections in need traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements

VISIONING SESSIONS

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

Four focus group visioning sessions were conducted as part of the master planning process:

- **Planning Commission**
October 28, 2021, from 7 pm - 8 pm
- **City Council**
November 4, 2021, from 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm
- **Downtown Development Authority**
November 8, 2021, from 9 pm - 10 pm
- **Sustainability Committee**
December 2, 2021, from 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Members of each respective group were asked to silently list their perceived opportunities and threats for the future of the City of Rockford. Opportunities were described as things that would help their ideal vision for the City of Rockford become a reality, and threats are things that may prevent this vision from becoming reality. Once their list was completed, each member was asked to share their list with the group and add any additional ideas from others to their list that they felt aligned with their vision. A full list of each group's opportunities and threats can be found in [Appendix D](#).

Mentimeter, a real-time polling platform, was then used for members to submit their top three opportunities, top three threats, and to evaluate the current Master Plan vision statement. The results of the Mentimeter are presented in the subsequent sections, with additional analysis based on supplemental discussion.

PLANNING COMMISSION

Eight Planning Commissioners and the City Manager participated in the Mentimeter visioning exercise. Their perceived opportunities and threats are as follows:

1 st Priority Opportunity	2 nd Priority Opportunity	3 rd Priority Opportunity
Rain gardens	Industrial growth	Transportation - Public Transit
Tannery site	Extend shopping along the river	Wolverine property
Continued residential growth of all incomes	Low-income housing	Tannery property development
Affordable housing/zoning reform	More public art installations by local artist	Industrial park expansion
Industrial development	Preservation of open spaces and natural features	Controlled growth of vacant property
A proper mix of retail, restaurants, and service in the downtown area	Multi township cooperation	Industrial park expansion
Sustainability - renewable energy, environment	Affordable and more housing options	Tannery
City plan for future sustainability in all areas in conjunction with Rockford schools	Extend shopping along the trail	Annexation
Educational outreach opportunities with local schools regarding the natural and built environment	Racial, cultural diversity, and low-cost housing	Industrial park expansion

Table 6. Planning Commission Visioning Session Top Opportunities

1 st Priority Threat	2 nd Priority Threat	3 rd Priority Threat
Resistance to change	Loss of habitat	Lack of funding
Intergovernmental cooperation	Racism/bias, parochial mindset	Available land
Lack of information about recycling programs	Infrastructure	Parking
Infrastructure	Affordable housing	Loss of natural areas
Not growing in a smart sustainable way	Failing roads	Overdevelopment - residential, industrial, and commercial
Ignorance of climate change and lack of action	Traffic flow	Lack of ethnic diversity
Lack of control of vacant properties	Lack of funding	Funding
Affordable housing for all ages and income levels	Loss of nature and the current connection Rockford has with its natural habitat being lost	A proper mix of retail, restaurants, and service downtown
Lack of plan for future sustainability as a city	Infrastructure improvement staying current	

Table 7. Planning Commission Visioning Session Top Threats

Members of the Planning Commission were asked to evaluate the Master Plan’s current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. This group felt that an updated vision statement needed to focus on balance: Balance between the unique neighborhood charm, vibrant downtown, growth, history, connectivity, environment, safety, and people.

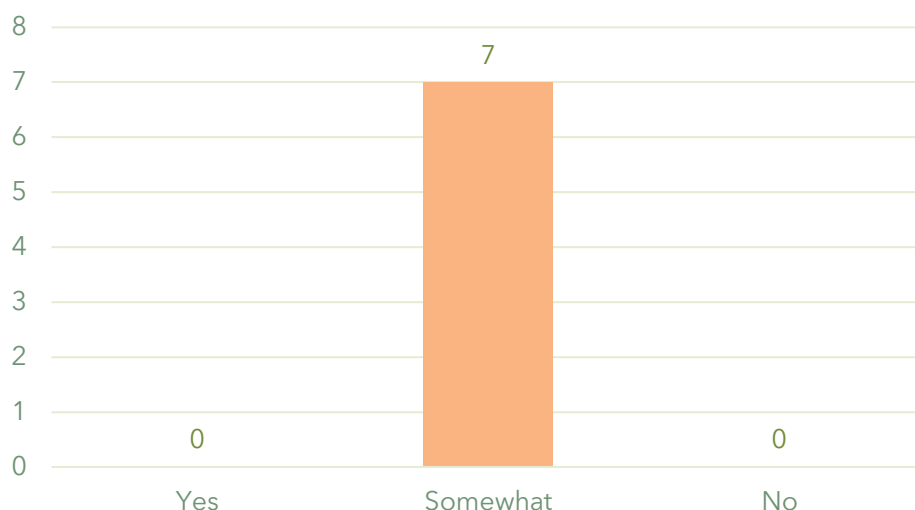


Figure 19. Planning Commission - Do you feel the current Vision Statement still reflects the vision for Rockford in 2040?

CITY COUNCIL

Five City Council members participated in the Mentimeter visioning exercise. Their perceived opportunities and threats are as follows:

1 st Priority Opportunity	2 nd Priority Opportunity	3 rd Priority Opportunity
Infrastructure	Neighborhood engagement	Development of Wolverine property
Growth of the industrial district	Expand industrial park	Communication
New uses for the river	Wolverine Worldwide property	City/Library community commons
River development	Support of Police & Department of Public Service workers	Proximity to Grand Rapids, what they offer, and their population
Varied and affordable housing	Expansion of opportunities along the river	Sustainable green development with pedestrian-friendly areas

Table 8. City Council Visioning Session Top Opportunities

1 st Priority Threat	2 nd Priority Threat	3 rd Priority Threat
Finance	Money	City budget constraints
Not enough money	Limited land area	Changing retail habits
Political divisiveness	Lack of diversity, racial and economic	Affordable housing
Public perception of change	Affordability of homes in the downtown area	Lack of areas to further develop
Accessibility to the City from west of the river	Negative groups or anti-Rockford persons	

Table 9. City Council Visioning Session Top Threats

Members of City Council were asked to evaluate the Master Plan’s current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. This group wanted to see forward-thinking language that focused on sustainability, recreation, diversity and inclusion, and obtainable housing, all while still maintaining the character and charm of Rockford.

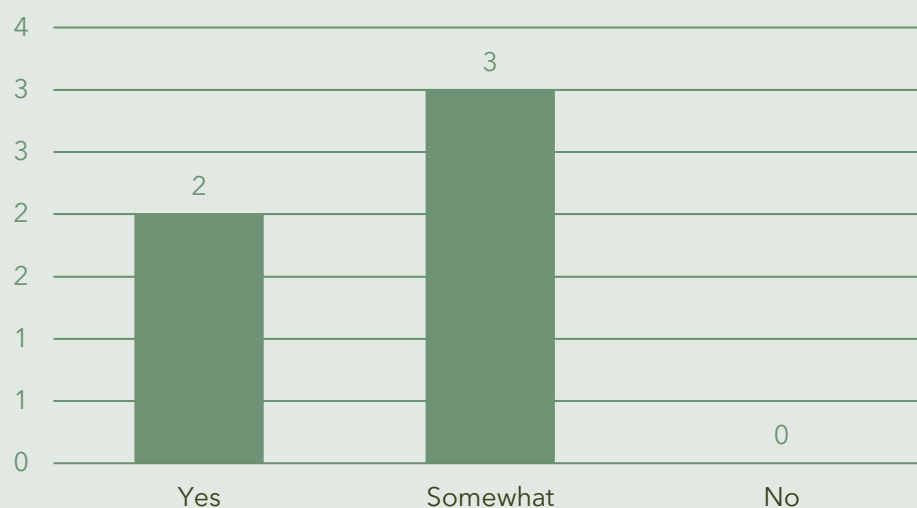


Figure 20. City Council - Do you feel the current Vision Statement still reflects the vision for Rockford in 2040?

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Seven Downtown Development Authority (DDA) members participated in the Mentimeter visioning exercise. Their perceived opportunities and threats are as follows:

1 st Priority Opportunity	2 nd Priority Opportunity	3 rd Priority Opportunity
Build out Wolverine property	2-story hotel	Technology enablement
Wolverine site redevelopment	New business growth	Winter attractions & activities
Develop Wolverine space (starting with a Hotel)	More experience-based activities and venues	Parking
Green space Wolverine Worldwide property	Controlled growth	Sustainability minded leadership & citizenship
More innovative gathering/community spaces	Infrastructure	Park Master Plan
Keep streets open	Wolverine Worldwide property	Preserving character and brand of the city while also being innovative
Expanding community spaces	Preserving the character of downtown & natural spaces	Housing - affordable and redevelopment of existing neighborhoods

Table 10. DDA Visioning Session Top Opportunities

1 st Priority Threat	2 nd Priority Threat	3 rd Priority Threat
Funding	More diversity (not enough in business and people)	Parking
Funding	Municipality competition	Funding
Budget	Budget/financing	Public perception
Infrastructure	Public relations	Budget
Leadership alignment	Loss of proper mix of retail, restaurants, and service in downtown	Leadership alignment (government, schools, business, and residents)
Outside Corridor	Strong leadership	Pressure/influence from outside of the city
Public Perception - Need creative promotion of plans to influence fact/reality-based perception	Closing all three downtown streets	More land and buildings

Table 11. DDA Visioning Session Top Threats

Members of the DDA were asked to evaluate the Master Plan’s current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. The DDA felt that the current vision statement represents Rockford today, not a vision for tomorrow. This group felt the vision statement needed to focus on community, supported by a vibrant downtown, progressive efforts, and environmentally sound practices.

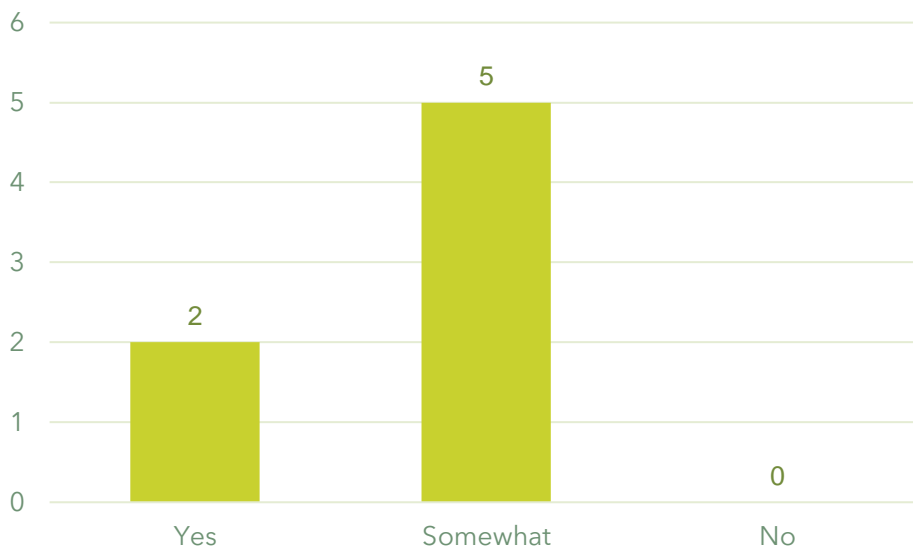


Figure 21. DDA - Do you feel the current Vision Statement still reflects the vision for Rockford in 2040?

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

Five Sustainability Committee (SusCom) members participated in the Mentimeter visioning exercise. Their perceived opportunities and threats are as follows:

1 st Priority Opportunity	2 nd Priority Opportunity	3 rd Priority Opportunity
Better parking/public transportation	Retail diversity downtown	Retail diversity
Make sustainability a planning priority	Walking community with vehicle emission restrictions	Show case the City as a green leader and destination
Make sustainability a priority in all planning	Improve planning with surrounding communities	Connect outlying neighborhood to downtown with sidewalks and bike paths
Connecting community	Public art/more opportunities to draw people to town	Reduce carbon footprint, start with City vehicles
Become a "best in class" sustainable community in West Michigan	Become a vibrant destination that draws people into town	Expand community by connecting areas, discouraging sprawl, and promoting growing up

Table 12. SusCom Visioning Session Top Opportunities

1 st Priority Threat	2 nd Priority Threat	3 rd Priority Threat
Lack of education on sustainability	Lack of affordable housing and economic diversity	Education and follow through and dispelling bad information
Burdening City services	Lack of effective communication methods	Traffic flow and lack of public transportation
Increase crime/vandalism with influx of population	Cost overall. Training revamping investing in green initiatives	Climate threats to river.
Change - It's hard for people to visual beyond today or tomorrow	Population increasing too quickly, too big, too fast. Losing "small town" feel.	Cost to business to make Sustainability changes
Lack of accountability and enforcement of master plans	Reacting too slow to address climate reality and how it will impact our visions.	Social media "haters" / community rumors undermining progress.

Table 13. SusCom Visioning Session Top Threats

SusCom members were asked to evaluate the Master Plan's current vision statement and provide feedback on how this statement may be updated to reflect their vision for the community. They believed that the vision statement needed more progressive elements that focus on the vibrancy of the community, arts and culture, enhancing/promoting natural assets, and a statement that highlights Rockford as a place at the forefront of sustainability.

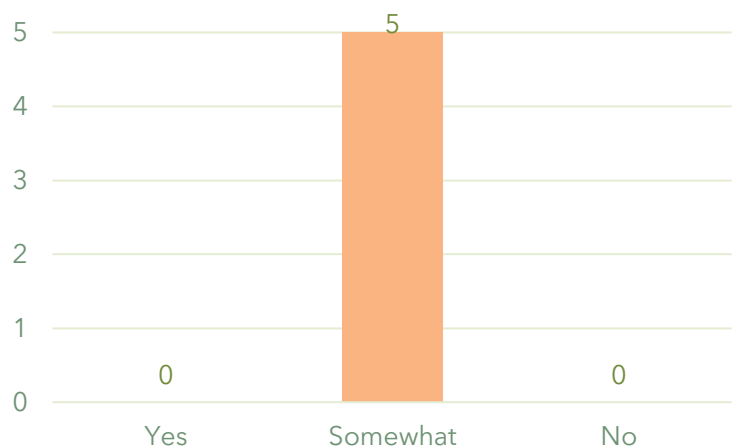


Figure 22. SusCom - Do you feel the current Vision Statement still reflects the vision for Rockford in 2040?

CLASSROOM COLLABORATION

Students at North Rockford Middleville were engaged in the planning process for updating the City’s Master Plan. Two sessions were held, one with a class of 6th graders and the other with 8th graders. Each session included the same activities, and began with (1) an introductory presentation, (2) a Mentimeter activity, (3) a road map to the future exercise, (4) postcards to your future self, and (5) penny jar voting about City priorities.

MENTIMETER ACTIVITY

The students participated in a seven-question interactive exercise using Mentimeter, a real-time polling platform. They were asked about a variety of Master Plan related topics, and the results are as follows:

1. The first Mentimeter question was an icebreaker used to get everyone acquainted with the program.
2. The students were asked to type in three words (or phrases) to describe what they love about Rockford. Figure 23 illustrates a word cloud of common terminology used in the responses to this question. The larger the word, the more commonly it was used in responses. This word cloud was generated through freewordcloudgenerator.com and removes numbers, special characters, and stop words (e.g. the, is, are, etc.) from the transcribed comments. The five most frequently used words were food (n=12), downtown (n=12), community (n=8), people (n=6), and nature (n=5).



Figure 23. Use three words (or phrases) to describe what you LOVE about Rockford

5. Family ties were very important to the students in selecting a place to live. When they grow up, a family-friendly community (n=24) was most important, followed by nice parks and natural spaces (n=20), and nearby friends and family (n=19).

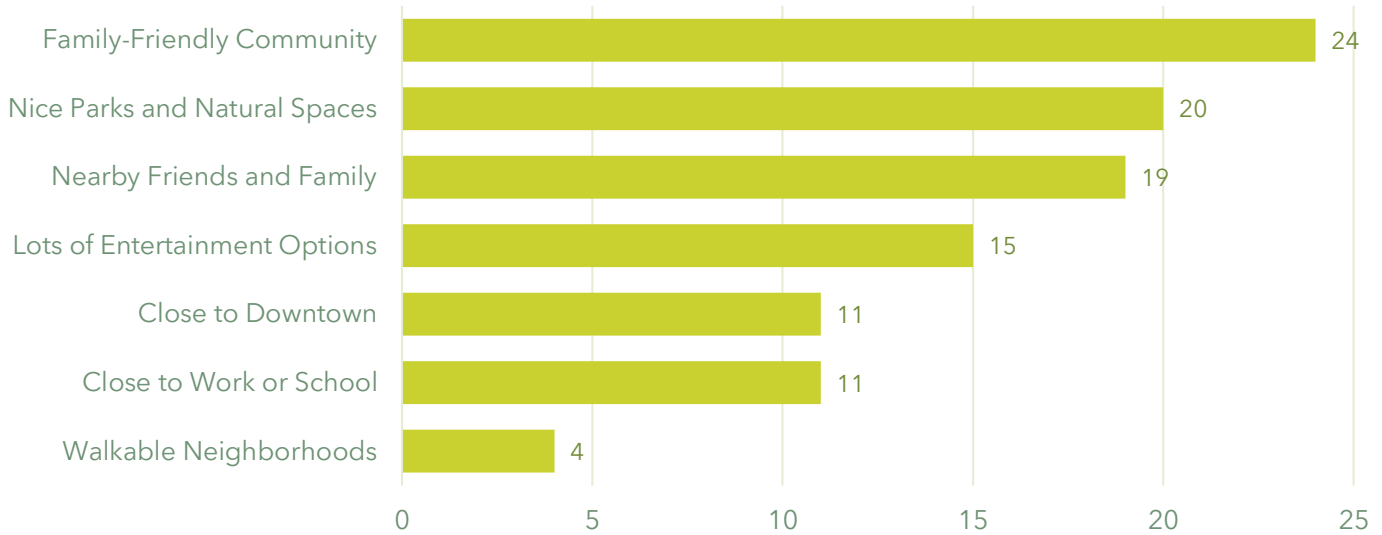


Figure 26. When you grow up and choose where to live, which of the following will be most important?

6. The students were asked to pick the top three improvements they would like to see in Rockford. They selected more hangouts (n=22), improved or additional parks (n=19), citywide wi-fi (n=18), and improved sidewalks and roads (n=19) as the most common answer choices.

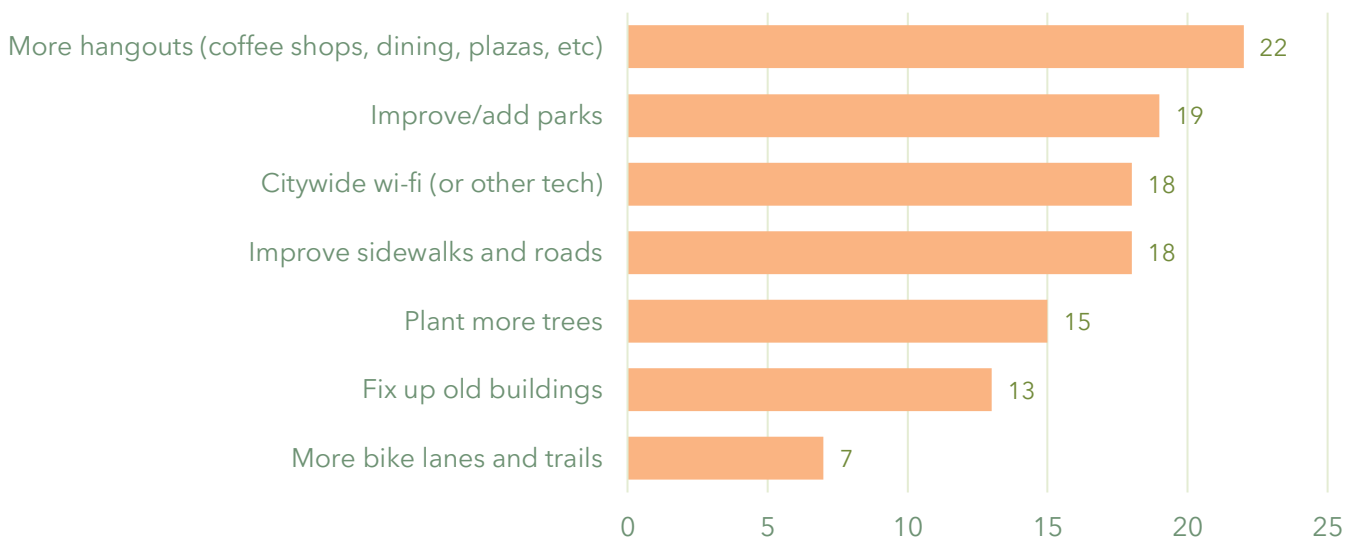


Figure 27. What would you like to see improved in Rockford? (pick your top 3)

7. The final Mentimeter question asked the students to submit three words or phrases to describe their ideal future community. Safe (n=16) was the most frequently submitted word by a wide margin, followed by friendly (n=7) and clean (n=5).

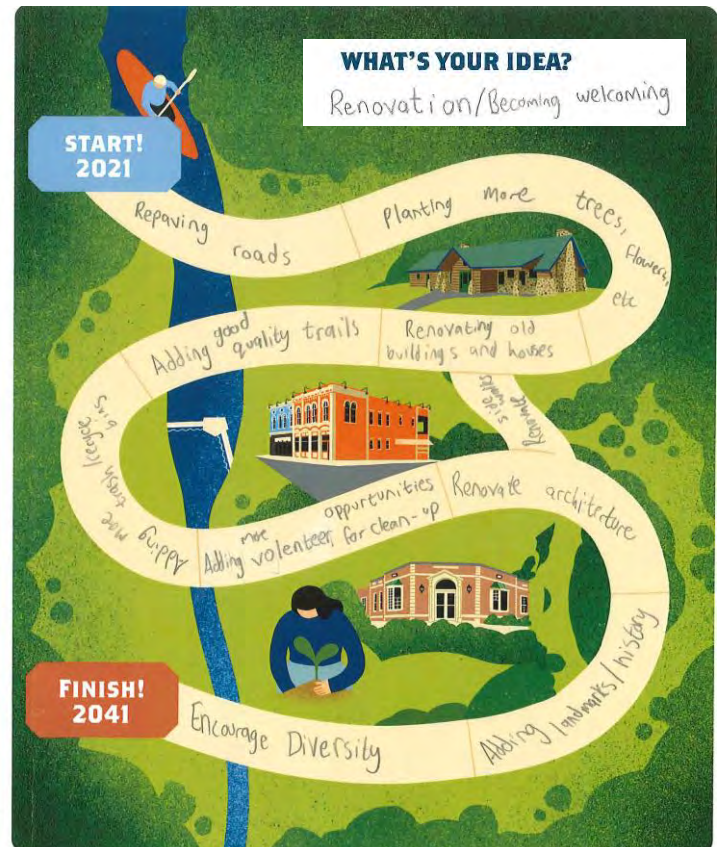


Figure 28. Use three words or phrases to describe your ideal future community

ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

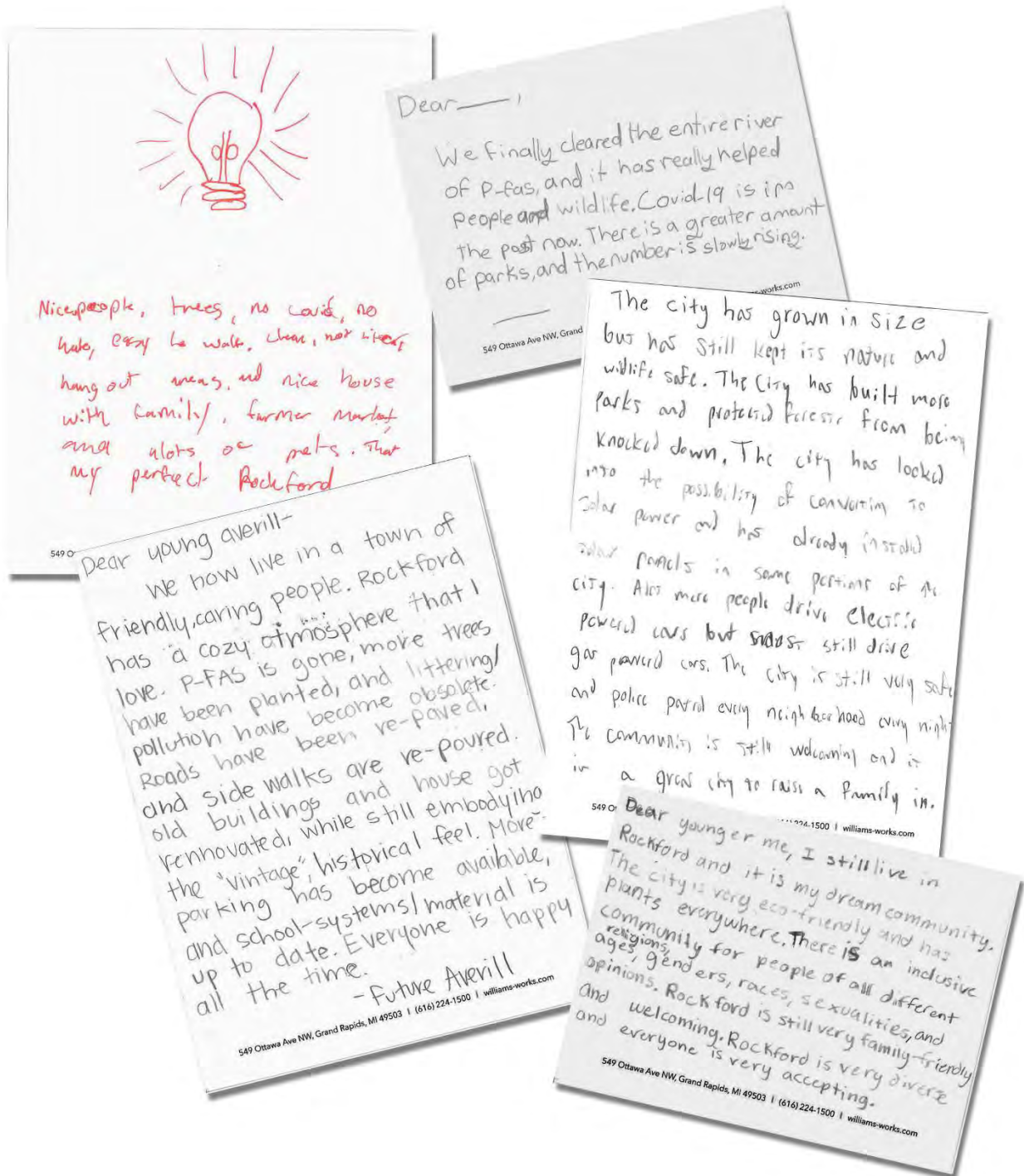
This small group activity asked the students to think of one idea that could make Rockford a better place to live and why that idea would improve the community. They were then asked to write down the steps it would take to make that idea a reality on a map that began in 2021 and finished in 2040.

Twenty-five roadmap activities were completed. Ideas for improvement varied from broad topics, like making the community more welcoming, to specific suggestions, like the creation of a public pool. Several common themes included sustainable elements, such as cleaning pollution or building more parks, attracting more entertainment options, like athletic facilities, community events, and extending RORA, and business development features, like free WiFi, road and sidewalk repair, and fostering specific businesses (hotel, music store).



POSTCARDS TO YOUR FUTURE SELF

Blank postcards were given to the students. They were asked to write a letter about how great Rockford is in 2040, imagining they received it from their future self. This activity was meant to help students think critically about what elements would need to exist for them to want to stay in their own community. Many of the students wrote about raising their families in the City, discussing safety and a variety of family-friendly businesses or activities. Preserving nature and cleaning up pollution, such as PFAS and plastic, was a popular topic. Other common postcard themes included expanding parks and recreational spaces, repairing roads and sidewalks, inclusivity and diversity, and having a greater variety of shops and restaurants.



PENNY JAR VOTING

A voting exercise was provided at the end of both sessions where each student was given ten (10) pennies representing their tax dollars. They were instructed to distribute all of their pennies into jars labeled with various public service and amenity topics. The top five public services or amenities included providing more entertainment options (16%), attracting new job creators (14%), supporting police & fire services (12%), fixing roads & sidewalks (12%), and expanding/maintaining parks & trails (12%). Support sustainability efforts had the fewest votes (4%). This was surprising based on the high number of students who focused on sustainable elements in the roadmap and postcard activities (preserving nature, cleaning pollution, creating parks, etc.).

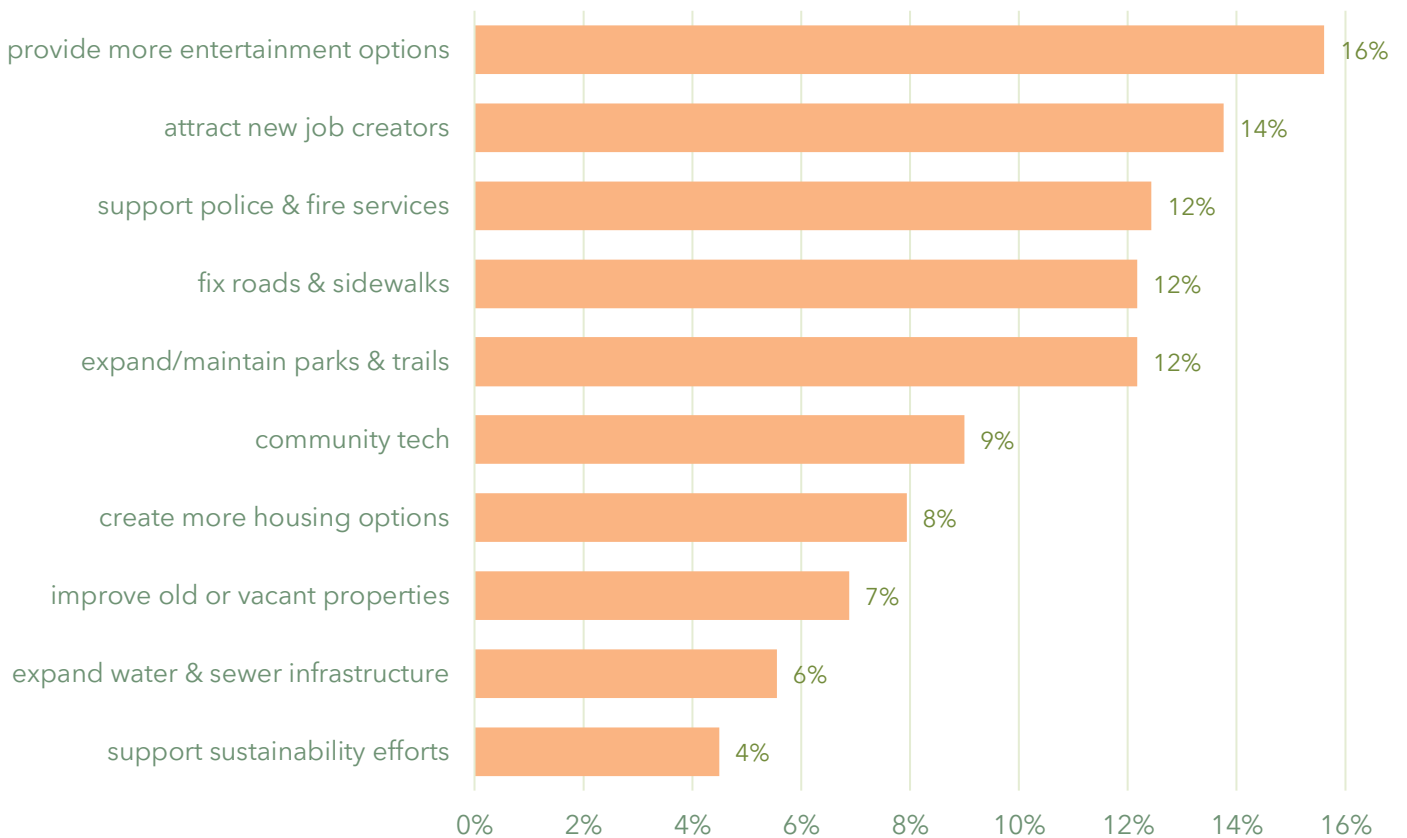


Figure 29. Student Penny Jar Voting Results

APPENDIX A

What do you love about Rockford? Activity Transcribed Comments

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT ROCKFORD?

Harvest Fest Comments:

- Walkability
- Ice Cream
- Lots to do
- Country like community
- Strong downtown and chamber
- Community
- Walkable with trees
- Trails, riverwalk, and dam
- Opportunity to voice opinions! Engagement!
- Kayaking the river and bicycle trail
- Trails, community green space
- Walkability
- Trail! Good at marking pits & cracks
- The sustainability committee
- River
- Fire pits!
- Food
- Friendly people
- Boardwalk
- All the shops
- River, walking, cute stores
- Small town feel
- Good at providing amenities - don't need more
- Sense of community
- Rockford brewing company!
- Good at maintenance
- Different than the big city
- Community <3
- Well-maintained! The city workers rock!
- I love that we have rocky's
- We love walking the trails
- Clean air
- Growing plants
- We love the corner bar!
- Ice cream shops
- Community events! Festivals, entertainment
- Small town feel with lots to do
- Town center - doesn't feel like a suburb
- River & habitat it supports

Harvest Fest Comments (Continued):

- Trails, parks, trees, the landscaping & flowers!
- Friendly people
- Walkability & bikability - sidewalks & trails

Farmers Market Comments:

- Everything, love the walkable
- Fishing, walking, trail
- Walking along river, extend
- I love the entire downtown area
- Loved RORA! Love social, walkable downtown!
- White pine trail with natural perennial landscape
- Parks playgrounds, farmers market, white pine trail
- Love rora!! Keep it!!
- Dam, white pine trail, farmers market
- Activities, concerts
- Rockford dam, Rouge River
- Market!
- Close Main Street for holiday season > great for community
- Trail, farmers market, restaurants
- Brewery
- Farmers market
- A small town & want to keep it that way. Stop developing with tax money
- Farmers market
- Sustainability committee
- I like all the ice cream
- Bike trails
- School-redistricting
- Playgrounds, the river, farmers market
- I like the trails and nature
- Parks, the trail, community activities
- Keep rockford walkable. Fix the sidewalk to richardson by park!
- I like the forest and animals
- Family feel of the city
- Walkability friendliness
- White pine trail, downtown shops, start of summer
- We love the downtown area, the dam, and trail
- Downtown Rockford
- Farmers market
- Eric brown stained glass! :)
- Shops
- Parks, white pine trail, RORA
- New farmers market
- White pine trail

Farmers Market Comments (Continued):

- Rum creek
- Farmers market
- Small town atmosphere
- Toy store
- Efforts towards sustainability
- Brewery
- Walking by the river
- Small town
- Bike path
- Close off Main Street during winter

APPENDIX B

Areas for Investment Activity Transcribed Comments

AREAS FOR INVESTMENT

Harvest Fest Comments:

- Create new streets
- Sidewalk along 10 mile from lincoln to wolverine
- Explore interest in block parties
- New hotel
- Picklebell on the river
- Roads
- Education
- Maintenance
- Pickleball courts
- Multi-level parking garage (parking has been an issue)
- Parking
- Splash pad (freman & ogden)
- Pot holes
- Bury power lines - don't cut down trees
- Entrance to park off monroe
- Pickleball
- Custard by the dam
- Raise street speed back
- Splash pad by the dam
- Make lemonade out of the wolverine site "lemon" for the interim. Explore temporary (10 yr) opportunities that are community building and give youth a bigger presence in the downtown landscape

Farmers Market Comments:

- Additional fishing spots along river
- Steps and more picnic tables close to river
- Shuffle board courts
- Water/splash pad, skate park, picnic table/shelter
- Splashpad! :)
- Work with www to create community use of green space along river
- Merrell trail connect to wpt or safer paved trail from city to merrell
- Pickleball courts at former wolverine site near downtown to encourage business downtown. Courts by parkside ok too!
- Trim back vegetation along boardwalk along river
- Don't spend money we don't have
- Paint street crosswalks with stripes when no stop sign to slow traffic
- More streetscaping and quality amenities
- Expand easy access parking/sidewalks for handicap accessibility
- Leave "c" open
- Help with erosion control along nature trail south of 10 mile
- Pickleball - asap!!
- Agree (response to pickleball - asap!! Comment)

- Keep Rockford walkable! Maintain sidewalks!
- Trim trees on west side over river overhanging the path
- The slanty sidewalk going from 10 Mile to Richardson Sowerby park could be fixed!
- We would love a splash pad
- Love the fire pits in town during the winter
- More rain gardens and native plants in green spaces!
- Another restaurant Japanese or Chinese
- Please trim the vegetation from the guardrail on Fremont after Ogden before the city limits. Storm drains on the east side clogged
- Saggy sidewalk going down to the trail (wp) and parks from main st (south side of division)
- Better clean-up! Storm drains, clean-up after trimming vegetation - don't leave
- New development off Kuttshill - would love trail connection down Childsdale, ability to walk on Jericho
- Starbucks in downtown area
- Congestion off 10 Mile & Jericho - round-a-bout
- No sidewalk on Krause st
- Rods old area with more boutiques
- Splash park
- Create limp pedestrian walkway on squire street
- More parking
- Expand commercial area
- Expand highland parks
- Music venue on former ww site
- Permanent plaza off of main st
- Chickfila close to rockford
- We need pickleball courts
- Walking off 11 Mile and connect to Summit

APPENDIX C

Community Survey Responses

APPENDIX D

Visioning Exercise Opportunities and Threats

VISIONING EXERCISE OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

Planning Commission Opportunities:

- Tannery site
- Utilization/Development of the tannery site
- Controlled Growth
- Annexation
- Diversity
- Extend the shops along the riverfront towards the tannery site
- Build retail downtown
- Sustainability
- Small Hotel
- Preserving natural features and open space
- Additional land for industrial
- Transportation
- Public Art
- Vacant land 425 industrial park
- Rain gardens
- Build out industrial parks
- Affordable housing
- Tannery Property Use
- Expand city
- Vibrant downtown
- Industrialization
- Public art installations that change throughout the year
- RORA, Plaza
- Parks / recreational improvements
- Buy Motel and demolish for city owned space
- Annexation tannery site industrial park expansion
- Keeping Rockford Great
- RORA
- Cannabis dispensaries
- Build out of Wolverine property
- 425 agreements for inspection parks
- Affordable housing options
- Heal Community Wounds
- City sponsored composite program
- Property acquisition
- Continued connectivity with trails
- Low income housing
- Recreational activities near the downtown center, Ice, rink, splash pad,
- Permitting a wider variety of land uses in the downtown area

- Multi-twp cooperation higher education activity
- Nature information along the trail
- Wolverine property
- City plan for sustainability in conjunction with Rockford schools
- Commercial redevelopment
- New housing development
- Educational outreach with surrounding schools
- Cleanup Courtland
- More industrial business
- Desired location for business and family
- Directional signage
- Hotel
- Tannery site, shops along WPT, industrial Park Expansion
- Tannery site
- Rain gardens
- Industrial park expansion

Planning Commission Threats:

- Internet sales
- Uninformed community members with knee jerk reactions for the status quo
- Environmental limitations
- National chains coming into downtown
- Over Building
- Failing roads
- Parking
- Lack of funding
- Loss of retail downtown
- NIMBY
- Maintenance commitment to rain gardens
- Legal, environmental issues with Tannery
- Controlled business uses
- Available land
- Big box stores
- Related crime to cannabis sales
- Lack of infrastructure improvements
- Education and promotion of sustainability needed
- Traffic flow
- Availability of AFFORDABLE land
- Car-centric development standards
- Penny pinching
- Loss of natural habitat
- String diverse opinions failing to agree on anything
- 10 Mile development approaching the city

- Funding shortcomings
- Racism or parochial mindset
- Pollution
- Resistance to change
- Misinformation of recycling program
- Lack of information
- Regarding how PFAS has affected the area"
- Lack of Ethnic diversity
- Lack of vacant land
- Funding
- Proper mix retail, restaurants, and service

City Council Opportunities:

- Infrastructure - roads, sidewalks, etc.
- Water
- Support chamber activities
- Area (RORA) for the community to meet
- Support sustainability
- Support park plan
- Support library, museum community groups
- Continue communication
- Support police, public works, help for citizens
- Work with Wolverine
- Large public tracts
- City commons open including library and Monroe Street - existing square
- River to river boardwalks
- White Pine Trail within the City
- Wolverine Worldwide property
- More community engagement
- Growth in our industrial district
- Development of Wolverine land
- Possible expansion of City limits
- Housing
- Fish ladder dam
- Love local
- And public
- Varied housing, including affordable housing, multi family, denser sustainable green development
- Bike & pedestrian friendly
- Strong downtown area
- Expanded commercial
- Expanded industrial area
- Civic engagement

- Rising home prices
- Vibrant downtown
- Great schools
- Parks & trails
- Neighborhood engagement
- Safe neighborhoods
- Proximity to Grand Rapids
- Proximity to great healthcare
- Churches
- Robust local economy - WM
- River - new uses

City Council Threats:

- Not enough money
- To try educate negative people
- Selfish people
- No land
- People (younger people) being priced out of the housing market
- City budget constraints
- City supporting - DPS & public safety, compensation for employees
- Traffic & accessibility from West side to the central business areas
- No/limited areas for growth
- Public perception - community service
- Annexation not allowed by township
- Budget/finances/funding
- "That's the way we always do it"
- Limited land area
- Housing costs
- 10 Mile thru traffic
- Limited transportation
- Changing retail
- Lack of diversity
- Political divisiveness
- Staffing issues
- Political divisiveness
- Lack of diversity
- Lack of obtainable housing
- Changing retail habits - online
- Anti-tax movement
- No public transportation options
- Another pandemic
- Limited land
- 10 Mile traffic

DDA Opportunities:

- Increased mixed use in downtown
- Affordable housing
- Build out of Wolverine property
- Controlled growth
- Hotel downtown
- Increase industry base
- Redevelopment of housing
- Diversity with growth - people, culture, diverse restaurants & shops
- Focus on preserving beautiful natural surrounding the city & access to it for the public - investing in parks & trail system
- Sustainability focused growth - not enough investment behind?
- Continue focus on welcoming to visitors - growth in hospitality
- Focus on innovative community gathering spaces - whether temporary or permanent
- Keeping the quaint character & history of the downtown area
- Pedestrian & bike friendly
- My vision for an ideal Rockford is a tight-knit community people can feel safe & encouraged
- Wolverine site
- Parks
- Cultural events
- New business growth
- Housing
- Eco tourism - river/trails
- Sporting events
- Enhanced branding
- Beautiful downtown
- Tech enablement
- Keeping Main Street open year round
- Keeping Monroe Street open year round
- No library extension across Monroe Street
- More public gathering/community spaces
- More retail
- More experience based activities & venues
- More outdoor activities
- More moderate to high end homes
- Indoor sports complex
- Event venues
- Hotel in greenspace
- Infrastructure
- Park Master Plan
- More retail
- More industrial
- Green space development

- Work closer with Wolverine Worldwide
- Maintaining the charm
- Cultural events
- Beautiful downtown
- More technology downtown
- Affordable housing
- Parking
- Progress not regress
- Wolverine Worldwide greenspace on the river
- Sustainability growth
- Camping
- Hiking
- Parks
- Skateboard Park
- Tourism growth
- EV friendly
- Parking
- Dog friendly
- Cultural events/diversity
- Winter attractions & activities
- Bikes
- Safety
- Community engagement
- Events hall & gathering
- Community spaces
- Sports complex
- Technology enablement
- Hotel
- Save historic buildings & houses

DDA Threats:

- Big box stores
- Loss of retail downtown/mix
- Infrastructure
- Investment & support with leadership
- Public relations - how to position & promote ideas to the public
- Budget
- Lack of diversity
- Branding awareness
- Competing communities
- Lack of investment - commercial
- Leadership alignment
- Community involvement

- Execution
- Public relations
- Closing Main Street
- One-way Main Street
- Closing Monroe Street for library extension
- Limit outdoor space that takes up parking
- Too many parks
- Uccellos is a mess on Main Street
- Lack of funds
- Lack of space
- Finances/funding
- Land/buildings
- Leadership to make this happen
- Negative people
- Parking
- Public Support
- Police presence downtown
- Pollution
- Fresh water availability
- Funding
- Negative press
- Overgrowth
- Municipality competition
- Parking
- Big box retail development

SusCom Opportunities:

- More boutiques
- More local restaurants
- Better parking/public transportation
- Small grocery
- Art (public)
- Do something with train
- Create more of a destination
- Be a leader in West Michigan for great-green community
- Become more vibrant, less sleepy
- Transportation - people who were in city
- Increase public art
- Entertainment - all seasons
- Showcase green/sustainable efforts
- "Best in class" town
- Expand community
- Most desirable place to live

- Hotels, bed and breakfasts etc.
- Composting
- Walkable
- Diversity
- Move to electric cars & building electrification
- Make sustainability a priority in all planning
- Policies to encourage reduction of fossil fuels
- Connect outlying neighborhoods to downtown
- Improve walkability & bikability
- Support & attract diversity
- Make recycling easier
- Improve planning with surrounding townships
- Plan for influx of people to Michigan
- Smart growth
- Set benchmarks for energy, water, and waste consumption
- Set improvement goals based on benchmarks
- Community center/arts center - more art
- New construction lot size no idle etc.
- Riparian buffers, green infrastructure
- Allow beekeeping, composting
- Showcase City as a green leader
- Sustainability a priority
- Connecting community
- Walking community
- Entertainment
- Vehicle emission
- Compost for restaurants/grocery stores etc.
- Downtown into a walking community to prevent road noise/pollution
- Building/tax breaks for homeowners/businesses switching to or retrofitting
- Change all municipal vehicles to electric / inside & out all electric forklifts etc.
- Incentives Kent County for improvement at recycling center to make it done effective/clean/ability to recycle in one place/compost/styrofoam/regular recycle
- Develop a more active downtown with more purposeful business to help develop more commerce but establish tax breaks & environmental guidance/regulation
- Leading safety protocols
- Environmental testing/cleanup
- Strategic/promotion of public forums
- Robust recycling/trash programs
- City control of lawn, recycling, trash pickup
- Parkway restrictions - parking/trash/items

SusCom Threats:

- No more salons, ice cream, or hot dogs
- No more apartments - too big, too fast
- Crime/vandalism increase
- Climate threats
- Power grid
- Too many people - too much traffic
- extra work & money to maintain
- Too crazy - think NOLA
- Invites possible crime
- Vandalism
- Extra burden on the City success
- Under microscope - Costly pressure to perform, under scrutiny of public eye
- Attract haters
- Rent is too high - people want more affordable house options
- Climate
- Lack of education on sustainability
- Misinformation
- Climate threats - flooding, drought, disease
- Staffing shortage
- Budget
- Inability to set & communicate priorities
- Population influx
- Traffic flow
- Lack of public transportation
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of accountability & enforcement
- School safety
- Cost
- Change
- Education & follow through
- Labor/training/cost for business owners/city
- Parking/business owners on board
- Loss revenue for City
- Cost to City
- Cost to County & City - education of folks may deter business & loss revenue possibly for City (i.e. tax breaks)
- Loss of any parks/recreation budgeting
- School safety
- Affordable housing
- Speeding



MASTER PLAN

DRAFT