

# STITCHING TOGETHER LAND, FLAVOR, AND PLACE

A PLAYBOOK FOR MOWER COUNTY AND AUSTIN, MINNESOTA



# NOTES FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS

We are thrilled to present this comprehensive plan playbook, a testament to the power of aligned planning, collaboration, and community engagement. This playbook is not just a guide; it reflects our collective commitment to shaping a sustainable and prosperous future for both the City of Austin and Mower County.

At the heart of successful land use planning is alignment—ensuring that our goals, strategies, and actions are harmonized across various sectors and jurisdictions. By aligning our efforts, we can maximize resources, reduce redundancies, and create a cohesive vision for our community’s growth and development.

The collaboration between the City of Austin and Mower County serves as a unique model of joint planning. This partnership exemplifies how two entities can come together, respecting each other’s strengths and perspectives, to create plans that benefit the entire region.

In today’s world, data is an invaluable asset. Our planning process has been enriched using comprehensive data analysis, which will allow us to make informed decisions that are both strategic and responsive to the needs of our community. Public input is crucial in shaping a land use plan that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. We have actively sought and incorporated feedback from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. Thanks to everyone who has participated.

We must also acknowledge the invaluable role of our elected officials. Their leadership and vision have been instrumental in guiding this collaborative process. By working in partnership, they have demonstrated a commitment to serving the greater good of the people, prioritizing the long-term well-being of our community over short-term gains.

This playbook is more than a document; it is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together with a shared purpose. We are excited to continue this journey with all of you, confident that our aligned planning efforts will lead to a vibrant, resilient, and thriving community for generations to come.

Thank you for your dedication and partnership.



**Trish Harren**  
County Administrator  
Mower County, Minnesota

The process we were led through with the consultant team was an amazing exploration of what Austin and Mower County can become as we look towards 2045. We’ve had a tremendous amount of public participation in the process where citizens, elected officials, city staff, business owners, corporate leadership, and non-profit leaders came around numerous tables to craft a vision for our community and the region that can take all of us to the next level of opportunity.

We knew at the outset that our decision to collaborate with our partners at Mower County was something special within the standard comprehensive planning process. We also knew we wanted more than a simple comprehensive plan update. From this planning process, we have created a working coalition that can leverage partnerships and strengths in a unified approach spanning many other issue areas while offering an aspirational and implementable vision. The goals outlined in the following document are bold, but we know many hands make light work and our final product can be successful as we gain critical alignment turning vision into reality.

We look forward to taking the action steps outlined in this document and focusing on implementing the objectives we have set out on the horizon. I am thankful for all those who participated and welcome all to join in as we transform the vision to realities for Austin and Mower County.



**Craig Clark**  
City Administrator  
Austin, Minnesota



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the people of Mower County and the Austin community for inviting us into this audacious and inspiring endeavor. This playbook reflects the collective wisdom, passion, and excitement shared through countless one-on-one conversations, group meetings, online forums, surveys, emails, texts, phone calls, notes slipped into our hands, raised eyebrows, and well-timed smiles.

We're incredibly grateful for the early morning chats at the Coffee House on Main as the sun rose and the city stirred to life. We were energized by the laughter and brainstorming around the conference table at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center and The Launch Space, and honored to walk the Cedar River alongside city staff dreaming big about the future. We were satiated with late-night tacos at Tienda y Taqueria Guerrero, and raised a glass to good ideas over happy hour beers at B & J's. There were so many rich moments, shared with so many thoughtful people, in so many wonderful places across this community.

This playbok offers a process overview, along with observations and initial recommendations to help manifest a shared vision that will culminate in a unified comprehensive plan for the City of Austin and Mower County. It touches on big-picture economic strategies, regional open space concepts, the arts and culture ecosystem, the growing tourism industry, a robust and inclusive food system, and a dynamic, energetic downtown.

And because a plan is only as good as its implementation, we've worked diligently to support the systems that will turn ideas into action. The creation of Communities of Practice, District Councils, and deep collaboration with partners like the City of Austin, Mower County, Impact Austin, the Development Corporation of Austin, and many others, lays a strong foundation to bring these ideas to life. We are deeply appreciative of the incredible hospitality shown to our team—and we wish you all the best as you turn this vision from page to reality.



# HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

The Mower County/Austin Playbook is more than a list of projects—it's a strategic roadmap built to empower community leaders, local organizations, and engaged residents. It encourages big-picture thinking, aligns local systems for implementation, and helps prioritize developing ideas that reflect the emerging community vision.

## BUILT BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

This Playbook was shaped by the work of District Councils (DCs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs)—multi-disciplinary, community-led teams formed at the very beginning of this initiative. Their goal was twofold:

1. Prioritize projects aligned with the broader community vision.
2. Lead implementation efforts to ensure ideas become reality.

These teams are supported by a newly realigned Development Corporation of Austin/Impact Austin, providing organizational capacity and coordination.

## WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

Beyond implementation frameworks, the Playbook includes strategies across several priority areas, including:

### TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Concepts to strengthen local attractions and boost visitor engagement.

### OPEN SPACE DESIGN & MANAGEMENT

A community-first ethos for creating accessible, welcoming, and sustainable public spaces.

### ARTS & CULTURE INTEGRATION

Ideas to embed creative expression into everyday life in Austin.

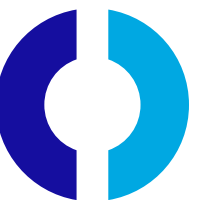
Implementation of these strategies continues through the DCs and CoPs, who serve as stewards and catalysts for progress.

## A BOLD FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

The Playbook outlines a comprehensive, equity-focused food system strategy. It connects:

- Producers to consumers
- Food access to local economic development
- City and county efforts under one coordinated approach

The CoPs—rooted in local expertise and passion—are leading this work.



## **DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION FRAMEWORK**

The Playbook also offers a clear vision for downtown Austin's future, with guidance on:

- Wayfinding
- Gateways and signage
- Parking strategies
- Catalytic projects to activate experience districts
- Code reform recommendation to accommodate future development

Each “Experience District” is supported by its own District Council. However, some districts are still in need of local champions to continue conversations, lead design efforts, and engage the broader public in decision-making.

## **A LIVING DOCUMENT FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Above all, this Playbook is a call to collaboration. It is a living, evolving tool—designed to be shaped by the very people who use it. By working together, sharing responsibility, and staying aligned around shared goals, the Playbook not only captures community-driven strategies but also outlines the organizational structure needed to bring them to life. Through this collective process, we can turn bold ideas into action and build a stronger, more connected future for all of Mower County and Austin.



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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

**"I WOULD SAY TO ALWAYS FOLLOW YOUR DREAM. AND DREAM BIG BECAUSE MY WHOLE CAREER, INCLUDING ANY OF THE THINGS THAT I'VE ACCOMPLISHED, I NEVER THOUGHT IN A MILLION YEARS THAT I WOULD BE HERE. SO IT JUST PROVES THAT ONCE YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, AND YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO SOMETHING, YOU CAN DO IT."**

**+  
SIMONE BILES**

# FROM VISION 2020 TO TODAY

## A LEGACY OF COMMUNITY ACTION AND MOMENTUM

Vision 2020 began in 2011 as a grassroots movement in Austin, Minnesota, engaging hundreds of volunteers and community organizations in a bold effort to improve the city's quality of life by the year 2020. Through a broad citywide campaign to gather ideas, the community identified and prioritized the most promising concepts to bring to life. In 2012, ten bold Vision Statements were publicly unveiled, serving as a guiding framework for action. Over the next eight years, a coalition of civic leaders, residents, and institutions transformed that vision into tangible outcomes.

### Notable accomplishments included:

- The relocation of the SPAM® Museum to the heart of downtown
- The expansion of the Blazing Star Trail
- The creation of Austin Aspires, a nonprofit dedicated to educational advancement
- A renewed focus on the use and stewardship of Austin's waterways
- The design and construction of the Austin Community Recreation Center, which opened in 2020

As Vision 2020 concluded its formal work in 2020, a new chapter emerged with the launch of Impact Austin, an initiative designed to carry forward the community's momentum. Impact Austin's mission focused on aligning people and resources to revitalize, discover, and invest in Austin's future always in ways that reflect the community's authentic identity. The initiative emphasized four pillars of impact:

- Housing
- Economic Growth
- Downtown District Revitalization
- Identity and Connection

Recognizing that long-term success required a space for ongoing innovation, collaboration, and experimentation, Impact Austin evolved as both a convener and catalyst for big ideas.

In Fall 2022, Daniel Hintz of the Velocity Group was invited to Austin to help re-energize the strategic vision for Impact Austin and its broader community development goals. Over four months, Hintz led workshops and facilitated in-depth interviews with more than 100 community members.

### The recommendations shared in early 2023 included:

- Launching a collaborative, regional planning process through an aligned comprehensive plan for the City of Austin and Mower County
- Integrating a food systems strategy that advances placemaking, community health, food access, land use planning, economic development, and workforce attraction—especially in alignment with employers like Hormel
- Updating the 2014 Downtown Master Plan
- Strengthening Impact Austin through a strategic plan tied directly to the community's comprehensive vision
- Building local capacity and deepening community engagement to support implementation

In mid-2024, the City of Austin and Mower County released a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to lead a combined, forward-looking comprehensive planning process. This new plan will replace and unify:

- The 2016 City of Austin Comprehensive Master Plan
- The 2002 Mower County Comprehensive Plan
- The 2014 City of Austin Downtown Master Plan

The RFQ was awarded to a partnership between Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH) and Velocity Group, along with a team of subject matter experts. This new phase of planning officially launched in September 2024, ushering in a collaborative and community-driven process to shape Austin and Mower County's shared future.



# THE CURRENT INITIATIVE

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan is a vision of what a community wants to be and acts as an everyday guide to help shape a community's future growth, protect what its stakeholders value, and enhance what they want to improve. These plans are created through a collaborative process involving local government officials, community members and a wide variety of stakeholders with the purpose of addressing a wide range of issues and needs that impact the community. These subjects include housing, infrastructure, education, health and wellness, economic development, talent recruitment and retention, social services and citizen equity, environmental and natural resources, arts and culture, tourism and historic preservation, among others.

## TWO DISTINCT PLANS, ONE SHARED VISION

Recognizing the interconnectedness of the City and County, the City of Austin and Mower County governments have partnered to develop aligned comprehensive plans that ensures a unified vision for the City and County into the year 2045. Each plan will reflect the specific challenges, opportunities, and aspirations of both jurisdictions, while identifying shared elements for an actionable regional roadmap that reflect the identity, culture, and needs of the community.

## BEYOND TRADITIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

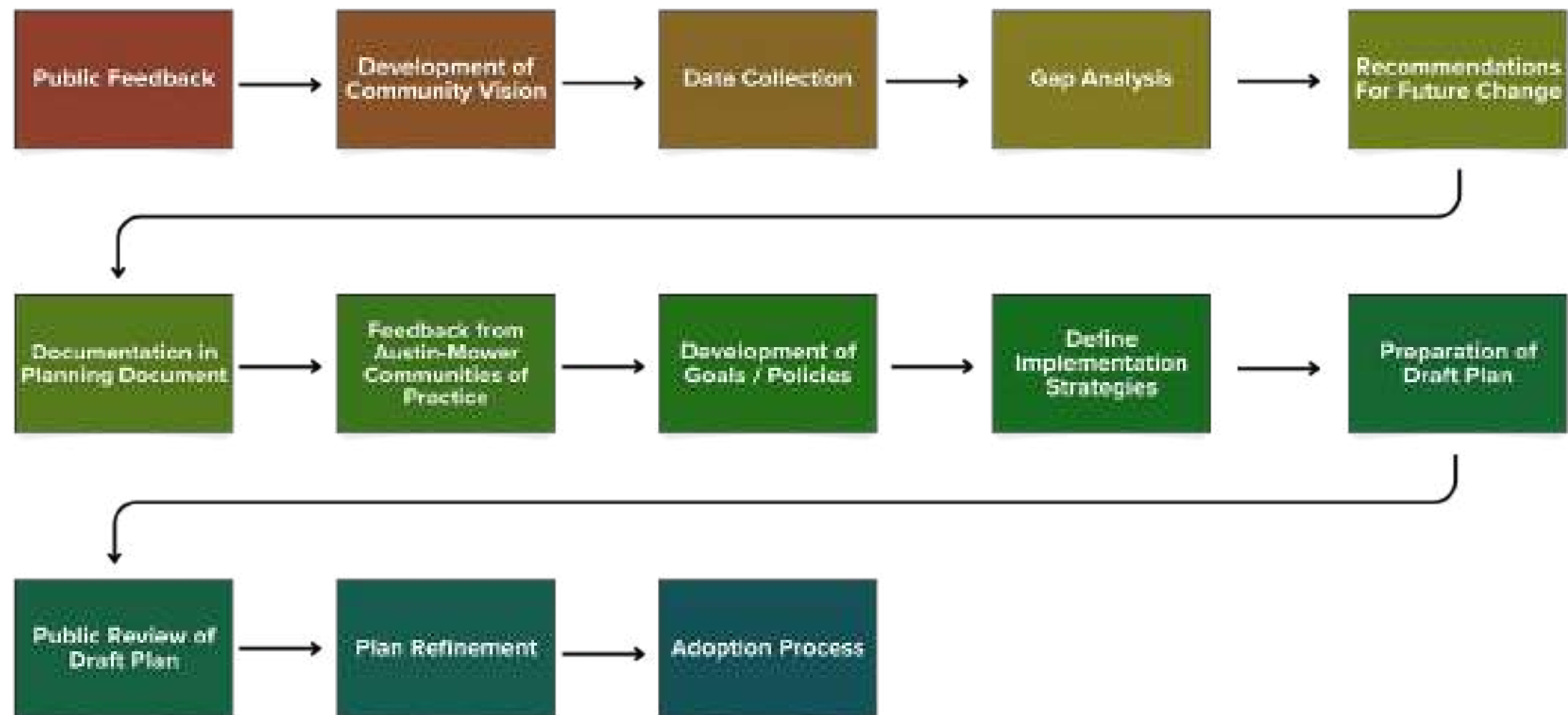
Combining the Mower County and Austin comprehensive planning process is an incredibly unique approach, offering a rare and inspirational national model to community design and development. Layering in organizational capacity and structures, dynamic food systems, downtown development frameworks, tourism strategies, arts and cultural elements, a reframed economic analysis, and open space and parks plan takes this initiative to a new level of planning. The planning and implementation outlined in this playbook and the emerging comprehensive plans embrace new methodologies that allow for ongoing community engagement and adaptive strategies to address emerging issues in new and innovative ways. This approach also ensures smaller, more manageable projects that can be quickly implemented for quick wins that build momentum and trust within the community as the larger catalytic investments manifest over time.

## STRENGTHENING FOOD SYSTEMS IN MOWER COUNTY

A core part of both comprehensive plans include concepts that grow and foster the regional agricultural economy and promote local farming, strengthens community-based food projects, expands local food distribution and processing, increases retail and restaurant options, broadens access to local foods, and aligns educational efforts to support food and agricultural science. This work helps position Austin and Mower County as an epicenter of innovative food and agriculture initiatives within Minnesota and around the country.



# THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS



The comprehensive plans are anticipated to be completed by December 2025. The development of the comprehensive plans began with a review of previous and current planning projects, data evaluation of current demographics and conditions, and engagement of stakeholders to identify current issues and needs. The initial tasks helped develop a vision statement that outlines how the community wants to grow and develop in the future, and what services they will provide.

The community vision is currently guiding the development of goals and strategies for important comprehensive plan elements, such as transportation, land use, economic development, tourism, food city, downtown development,

parks and open spaces, community facilities, utilities, implementation, and more. The project team will seek additional feedback from stakeholders to ensure that goals, strategies, and recommendations reflect community input. The draft plans will be presented to the public for review, allowing for additional input and refinements. The drafts will be further refined before being presented to their respective Planning Commission.

The final steps will involve the formal adoption of the plans by the Mower County Board of Commissioners and Austin City Council. The adoption process will make the comprehensive plans official guiding documents for the County and City. The diagram above outlines the overall comprehensive planning process.

# THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Comprehensive plans are not a one-and-done project. Creating cohesive and efficient organizational systems to support the implementation of the emerging goals and ideas while enabling collaboration at every level is vital. The responsibility of implementation just doesn't fall on government, but is a shared responsibility that includes non-profit, philanthropic and private market sectors as well. It truly takes a village!

Building teams around the various focus areas within the plan builds advocacy and ownership and convenes action groups to tackle urgent community needs, opportunities and shifts in local conditions. We are grateful for the leadership of the Core Planning Team of these folks listed below, as well as the hundreds that attended community meetings and shared their thoughts online.

## CORE PLANNING TEAM

### MOWER COUNTY

Trish Harren, County Administrator

Val Sheedy, Deputy Director

Matthew Verdick, Chief Deputy County Administrator

Angie Liptet, Zoning Administrator

### CITY OF AUSTIN

Craig Clark, City Administrator

Holly Wallace, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Jason Sehon, Director of Parks, Recreation & Forestry

### DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF AUSTIN

John Garry, Executive Director

### IMPACT AUSTIN

Nick Novotny, Director of Community Engagement & Enhancement

## PLAN CONSULTING TEAM

### SHORT ELLIOTT HENDRICKSON INC.

Brea Grace, Project Manager

Nate Day, Senior Planner

Mark Nolan, Senior Planner

Kristen Peterson, Community Engagement

Adrian Diaz, Community Engagement

Bob Kost, Senior Urban Designer

Brad Woznak, Water Engineer

Brian Kent, Environmental Science

Deric Deuschle, Ecologist

### VELOCITY GROUP

Daniel Hintz, Founder/CXO

### URBAN3

Heather Worthington, Principal

Phillip Walters, Catalytic Project and Plan Economic Analysis

Shea Bruer, GIS Technician

### KARIN ENDY CONSULTING

Karin Endy, Principal

### DMOPROZ

Bill Geist, Owner

### CIVITAS

Scott Jordan, Principal

Rebecca Asser, Designer

### PLACE STRATEGIES

Brad Lonberger, Partner

Ivan Gonzalez, Partner

### MAXFIELD RESEARCH

Matt Mullins, Vice President Business Development



# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ENGAGEMENT (AS OF APRIL 2025)

Robust community engagement is at the heart of this comprehensive planning process. Our goal is to ensure that the final plans reflect the values, voices, and vision of people across both the City of Austin and Mower County. Since the project launched, community members have engaged in a variety of ways—online and in person—to share their ideas, concerns, and aspirations. Here is a snapshot of engagement activities completed to date:

## PROJECT WEBSITE

The online hub for all things planning—offering project updates, event announcements, and access to key materials. **VISITORS: Approx. 3,150 since launch**

## OPEN HOUSE

An interactive, in-person event where residents learned about the plan, provided feedback, and connected with team members. **PARTICIPANTS: Approx. 79**

## STAKEHOLDER GROUP WORKSHOPS

Informal workshops with community groups, businesses, and organizations to introduce the project and gather input. **MEETINGS HELD: 45 workshops with an estimated 400 participants**

## ONLINE SURVEYS

Two separate survey rounds—one for each plan—gathered community insights on assets, issues, and opportunities. **RESPONSES: 850**

## INTERACTIVE ONLINE MAP

An easy-to-use tool allowed residents to pinpoint specific assets, challenges, and opportunities. **RESPONSES: 105**

## ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

In-depth, personal conversations helped surface nuanced perspectives across the region. **PARTICIPANTS: 100+**

## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (COP) WORKSHOPS

Focused on building strategy within the Food City/Food System vision. **PARTICIPANTS: 52 community leaders**

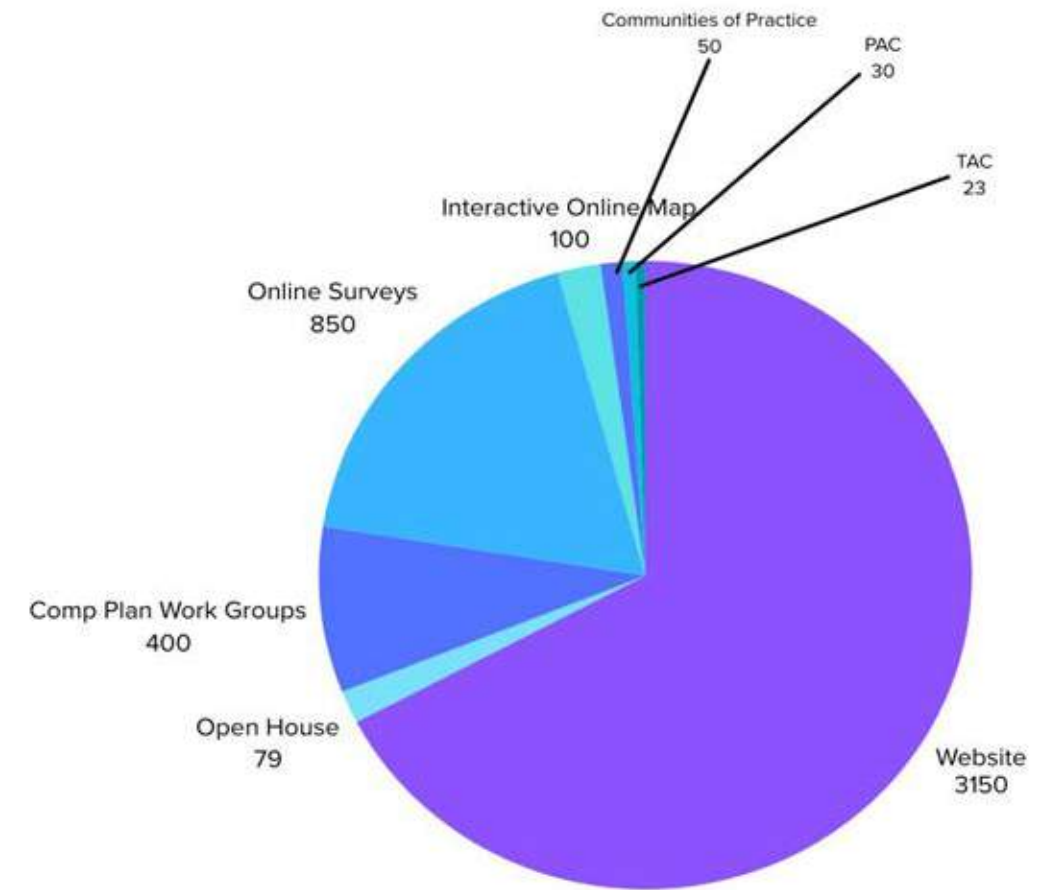
- **DOWNTOWN DISTRICT COUNCILS (DC):** Organized around key focus areas within the downtown planning area. **WORKSHOPS HELD: 8 Participants: 30**
- **PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC):** A mix of residents, business owners, and local staff for both Mower County and Austin, these groups provides ongoing community insight, feedback, and advocacy throughout the process. PAC members also serve as community ambassadors for the plan. **PARTICIPANTS: 30**
- **TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC):** Composed of technical staff from both City and County departments. **PARTICIPANTS: 23**

The TAC provides expert guidance on topics such as:

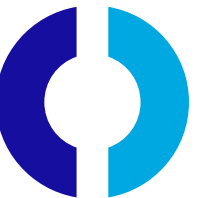
- Land Use & Zoning
- Public Utilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Tourism
- Parks & Recreation

The planning team also reviewed and incorporated findings from:

- Existing City, County, and School District plans
- Riverland College strategies
- The Welcome Plan
- Local nonprofit partner strategic plans
- Historical survey data and recent community feedback from partner organizations



This ongoing engagement ensures that the resulting comprehensive plans are community-rooted, inclusive, and future-ready.



# EMERGING THOUGHTS

The planning process has been reaching out to community members from across the region to solicit ideas, concerns and opportunities. The following are the emerging themes from those conversations:

## COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENTS

These are draft Community Vision Statements (as of 03/11/2025). They will remain draft versions and may be updated prior to the formal plan adoption.

### MOWER COUNTY

**“MOWER COUNTY EMBRACES ITS AGRICULTURAL ROOTS WHILE BUILDING A THRIVING FUTURE. OUR WELCOMING TOWNS AND VIBRANT CULTURAL EVENTS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS. BY FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABILITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND RESIDENTS’ WELL-BEING, WE CREATE A RESILIENT COUNTY.”**

### CITY OF AUSTIN

**“THE CITY OF AUSTIN IS A VIBRANT AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY OFFERING A RICH BLEND OF CULTURE, ART, EDUCATION, AND NATURE. IT IS A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED BY A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND HISTORY. IT FOSTERS INNOVATION, INCLUSIVITY AND TRADITION, MAKING IT ATTRACTIVE TO LIVE, VISIT, WORK, AND START A BUSINESS.”**

## CITY OF AUSTIN

### COMMUNITY ASSETS

- Small town character while having a variety of amenities and services
- Diversity of community members, businesses, and cultures
- Strong sense of community support

### ISSUES OR PROBLEMS

- Limited retail and dining options
- Limited housing options (i.e., budget and cost, size, type, etc.)
- Concerns about quality of schools and education

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- Expand retail and dining options
- Improve public facilities and infrastructure
- Improve sense of safety
- More community and youth activities (e.g., sports, youth center, etc.)
- Increase housing options (i.e., budget and cost, size, type, etc.)
- Strengthen downtown development
- Implement Food City Concept to strengthen community identity and increase business opportunities
- Identify opportunities to strengthen school district and education

## MOWER COUNTY

### COMMUNITY ASSETS

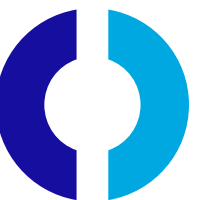
- Strong sense of community and friendliness
- Rural character and small towns
- Access to community amenities (i.e., shopping, restaurants, parks, recreation, etc.)

### ISSUES OR PROBLEMS

- Limited housing options (i.e., budget and cost, size, type, etc.)
- Lack of recreation and entertainment options
- Concerns about slow economic development
- Maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Encourage economic development and business growth
- Improve public facilities, services, and infrastructure
- Preserve agricultural and farming businesses
- Expand recreational and entertainment opportunities (e.g., retail, parks, movie theaters, events, etc.)





# THE SYSTEMS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

**“THE TINIEST SEED IN THE RIGHT SITUATION TURNS INTO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FOREST. AND THE MOST PROMISING SEED IN THE WRONG SITUATION TURNS INTO NOTHING.”**

**+**

**BRIAN ENO, MUSICIAN**

# VITAL ELEMENTS NEEDED FOR PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Successful community plan implementation requires a comprehensive system that integrates various elements—such as planning, governance, resources, and community engagement—into a unified approach.



## GUIDES DECISION-MAKING

A well-defined vision ensures that actions are aligned with overarching goals.

### INSPIRES ACTION

A compelling vision energizes and motivates the community to get involved by fostering a sense of shared purpose.



## ENERGY & ENTHUSIASM

Passionate people provide the motivation and energy to overcome challenges and setbacks, and their commitment sustains momentum throughout implementation.

### COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Residents, elected and appointed officials, city staff, community organizations, funders and businesses must take ownership of the plan to ensure implementation.



## COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collaboration brings together diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives, ensuring that all aspects of the plan are addressed comprehensively and new opportunities and emerging voices are welcomed.

### SHARED RESOURCES

Alignment between organizations and stakeholders allows for resource-sharing, making implementation more cost-effective and efficient.

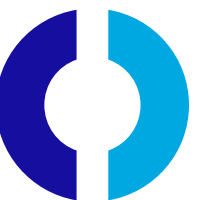


## LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Sustainable resources - human and financial - are essential to maintaining the momentum of the project over time. Without continuous investment and management, even the most promising plan falls short.

### FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Securing philanthropic funding, getting access to private capital, expanding organizational capacity and resources for long-term maintenance and growth of the plan ensures it doesn't stagnate or degrade over time. It is very difficult to implement a long-term plan with short-term resources.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT PLANNING

## SHAPING THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITIES

Municipal planning is the cornerstone of a well-functioning, vibrant community. It provides the shape, design, and structure for counties, cities and towns, guiding their growth and evolution in ways that benefit residents and businesses alike. The process is rooted in clear vision, legal descriptions, and policies that allow city officials and the private market to make informed decisions, ensuring the community evolves in response to the changing needs and challenges of its population. Aligned municipal and county planning is especially important in regions like Mower County and the City of Austin, Minnesota, where interconnected systems and shared resources are essential to regional development, efficient service delivery, and overall quality of life. This understanding formed the foundation of the initial strategy to align comprehensive planning efforts between the city and county. It is the hope that this collaborative model continues to guide and strengthen coordinated planning well into the future.

### Key aspects of municipal planning include:

#### ADAPTING TO DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Populations are in constant flux due to factors like birth rates, aging populations, migration patterns, and changing family structures. These shifts influence the demand for housing, services, and infrastructure, requiring planners to anticipate and adjust community offerings accordingly.

#### EMBRACING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

With smart cities, autonomous vehicles, advanced communication technologies, and universal internet access changing how people live and work, municipal planning must evolve to accommodate these advances. Infrastructure and policy need to adapt to the integration of new technologies, ensuring cities remain connected, efficient, and resilient.

#### ECONOMIC SHIFTS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The demand for services and infrastructure is also shaped by economic factors. New industries and employment patterns require planners to adjust their strategies, ensuring cities remain competitive for investment and talent. Moreover, economic challenges, such as recessions or transitions from manufacturing-based to service-based economies, can significantly impact municipal priorities and strategies.

#### ADDRESSING AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

As cities and towns grow, existing infrastructure may age and require modernization. At the same time, new developments demand fresh investments in public utilities, transportation systems, and other infrastructure. Planning helps municipalities balance the needs of revitalizing old systems with accommodating new growth, ensuring resources are allocated effectively.

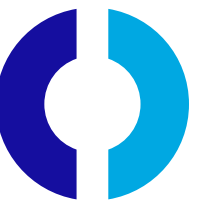
### PROACTIVE PLANNING FOR RESILIENCE, SUSTAINABILITY, AND EQUITY

Updating community plans is not simply about reacting to external changes—it is about proactively shaping the future of communities. A thoughtful and inclusive planning process can address new challenges, create sustainable systems, and ensure equity. Municipal planning offers an opportunity to build resilient and adaptable cities that meet the evolving needs of residents while promoting sustainability and equity for future generations.

In essence, planning is not just about building structures but building communities that are innovative, inclusive, and sustainable.

### BEST PRACTICE PLAN UPDATE TIMELINES

- Community Strategic Plan—Every 3 Years, with annual review
- Economic Development Plan—Every 3 years, with annual review
- Comprehensive Plan Updates, including Land Use and Master Thoroughfare Plans—Every 3 to 5 Years
- Parks & Recreation Master Plan—Every 3 to 5 Years
- Community Surveys—Every 2 Years
- City Branding Update—Every 3 to 5 Years
- Special Area Plans (ex. Downtown Master Plan, Neighborhood Plans, Corridor Plans, etc.)—Every 5 years, with annual review
- Neighborhood and Development Design Guidelines—As Needed
- Utility Master Plans—Every 5 Years
- Capital Improvement Plan—Every 3 Years, with annual review
- Partner Organization Plan—Every 3 years, with annual review
- Infrastructure Design Standards—Every 5 Years
- Ordinances - Subdivision Ordinance, Zoning Ordinance, Overlays, etc.—As Needed



# THE CATALYTIC TRIAD<sup>®</sup>

The Catalytic Triad Model of Community Development<sup>®</sup> is a strategic framework that emphasizes the importance of collaboration across three key sectors—government, non-profit/philanthropic organizations, and the private market—to achieve meaningful and sustainable community development. Each sector has distinct roles but, when combined, they create a powerful synergy that can tackle the multifaceted challenges and seize opportunities in community development.

## THE SYNERGY

The strength of the Catalytic Triad lies in the alignment of these three sectors. The government provides the necessary policies and public funding; the non-profit sector ensures social sustainability and advocates for underserved populations; and the private sector brings in investment and entrepreneurial drive. Together, they can create a transformative effect on communities by addressing complex social, economic, and infrastructure issues in an integrated and sustainable way.

By leveraging the unique strengths of each sector, communities can achieve more equitable, sustainable, and impactful development outcomes that not only solve current challenges but also build a foundation for future generations. This collaboration allows for a holistic approach that balances economic, social, and environmental factors, ensuring long-term community resilience.

## GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

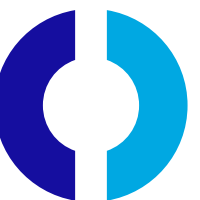
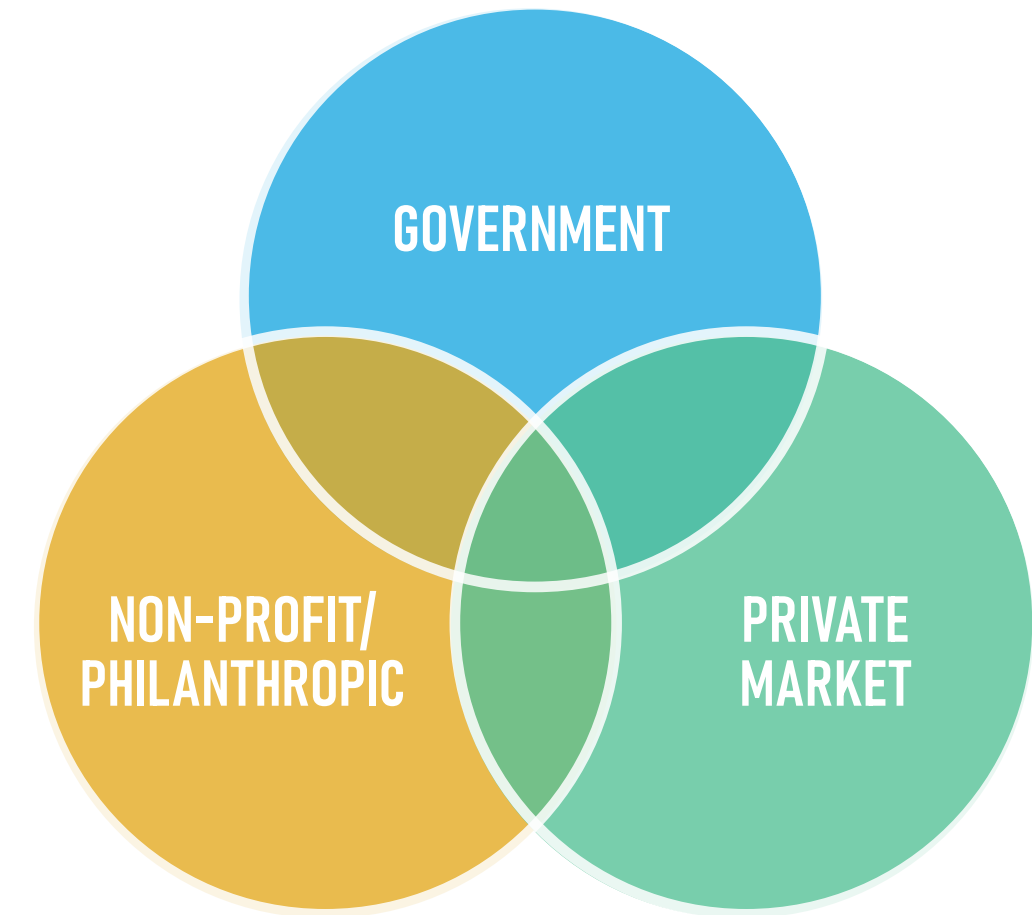
The government provides the regulatory framework, public funding, and policy guidance that help turn community visions into reality. It ensures projects align with public interest and the well-being of the community. Government resources are often tied to the private market, with investments in infrastructure and urban development contributing to land value increases and population growth. The government's ability to provide long-term policy direction and funding is essential for large-scale initiatives.

## NON-PROFIT/PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR

Non-profits and philanthropic organizations play a vital role in addressing the social, economic, and health needs of community residents. They work to ensure that underserved and at-risk populations are supported, often by providing essential services, advocating for community interests, and fostering local participation in development efforts. Philanthropic organizations can provide flexible funding that allows initiatives to tackle complex issues, support innovation, and fill gaps that neither the government nor the private sector can address alone. Their ability to drive social change and build long-term capacity is essential to sustained community development.

## PRIVATE MARKET

The private market brings the financial resources, business expertise, and operational efficiency needed to execute development projects, create economic opportunities, and sustain long-term financial viability. Private sector investments often play a key role in developing infrastructure, promoting job creation, and ensuring that there is a growing tax base to support community initiatives. By driving economic growth, the private market helps to create a more resilient and prosperous community.



# BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE

## THE DYNAMIC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN

Creating a robust municipal organizational structure is key to the efficient operation of a city, ensuring that governance, service delivery, and community engagement are seamless and effective. A well-defined structure improves coordination, clarity, and transparency among departments, while also supporting the city's broader vision and growth strategy. For the City of Austin, the consultant team's recommendations on fostering internal improvements within city operations are integral to realizing its comprehensive plan. This plan summarizes the key components and immediate recommendations below, highlighting their importance for ensuring that Austin's municipal governance aligns with its long-term goals:

### Key Objectives for Austin's Municipal Organizational Structure:

**CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** It's essential that each municipal department has well-defined roles, responsibilities, and reporting structures. When departments know exactly what their tasks are, it reduces ambiguity, enhances efficiency, and ensures that services are delivered consistently to the public.

**ESTABLISHING A CHAIN OF COMMAND:** A clear chain of command is crucial for employees at all levels to understand whom they report to and the decision-making authority they hold. This reduces confusion and creates a more responsive and accountable municipal government.

**TEAMWORK ACROSS DEPARTMENTS:** Collaboration between departments—such as public works, finance, planning, and parks—ensures the city is addressing complex issues in a coordinated manner. When departments work in unison, the city can create more cohesive policies and services that support community development and quality of life.

**MEASURABLE OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE METRICS:** Each department should develop measurable outcomes to track progress, identify inefficiencies, and adjust strategies as needed. Having clear metrics allows departments to continuously improve and adapt to emerging challenges.

**AUTONOMY WITH COORDINATION:** Empowering department heads to make day-to-day operational decisions is important for efficiency, but they must align their activities with the city's broader goals and the comprehensive plan. This ensures the city remains focused on its long-term vision while allowing departments to operate effectively.

**OPEN COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK:** Effective communication across and between departments is necessary to ensure that everyone is informed, especially when it comes to development projects that may require input from multiple departments. Additionally, community engagement tools such as surveys and feedback forms will help city leaders understand resident satisfaction and adjust services accordingly.

**ONGOING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:** Providing training opportunities for municipal employees and elected/appointed officials ensures they stay up-to-date on evolving technologies, regulations, and best practices. This improves the quality of services provided to the community and ensures the city stays on the cutting edge of municipal governance.

**ALIGNING DEPARTMENT GOALS WITH CITY VISION:** A strategic plan should be developed that aligns the long-term and short-term objectives of each department with the comprehensive plan. This alignment helps ensure that all departments are working towards the city's unified goals.

### Immediate Recommendations:

#### 1. Create a Planning and Community Services Department:

Elevate this department to report directly to the City Administrator to streamline urban planning and community engagement. This department would be responsible for:

- Short and long-term urban planning
- Enforcing zoning regulations and reviewing new developments
- Ensuring a collaborative development process between city staff, developers, and elected officials
- Managing a Neighborhood Council Program, offering residents a voice in decision-making
- Supporting local artists, public art initiatives, and cultural festivals to enhance the vibrancy of neighborhoods

#### 2. Create a Director of Communications Position: Establish a new role for a Director of Communications who would also report directly to the City Administrator. This person would oversee all aspects of communication, including:

- Managing media relations, public relations, and crisis communications and handles public outreach and social media strategies
- Coordinating internal communications to keep city staff informed and aligned with municipal goals: Coordinating and leading communications between city departments to ensure staff and elected officials are informed and decisions are aligned with municipal goals

# HOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS IMPACT AUSTIN'S GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONS

## ENHANCED COLLABORATION

By creating a centralized planning department and streamlining communication, the city ensures that various departments work together to achieve common goals. The collaboration between urban planning, housing, economic development, and other departments will lead to more holistic, integrated solutions for community development.

## MORE INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

The Director of Communications will ensure that both internal and external stakeholders are well-informed, improving transparency and building trust with the public. Clear communication about policies, projects, and community initiatives will foster greater engagement and support for the city's plans.

## INCREASED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The development of Neighborhood Councils and the emphasis on cultural vibrancy through public art and festivals will give residents a more direct voice in shaping their communities, fostering a deeper sense of ownership and pride.

## EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

By defining roles and responsibilities clearly and establishing measurable outcomes for each department, Austin will improve its operational efficiency. Regular feedback and surveys will provide insight into areas for improvement, while ensuring that Austin can adapt to the needs of its growing population.

Overall, these changes would not only improve internal operations, but also enhance Austin's ability to deliver high-quality services that contribute to a vibrant, sustainable, and thriving community.



# UNIFYING VISION, AMPLIFYING IMPACT

DCA & IMPACT AUSTIN'S INTEGRATED PLATFORM FOR  
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN GROWTH

As part of their evolving role in a rapidly changing economic landscape, the Development Corporation of Austin (DCA) and Impact Austin (IA) have come together to form a united front for implementing Vision 2045. This strategic merger recognizes that today's economic development goes far beyond traditional business attraction. It's about nurturing local entrepreneurs, enhancing quality of place, aligning workforce development with industry trends, and investing in neighborhoods through placemaking and inclusive growth strategies. By combining resources, relationships, and missions, DCA and IA are now positioned to lead these efforts with one voice.

Through this integrated platform, DCA serves as the strategic engine—offering guidance, funding tools, policy alignment, and regional coordination—while IA operates as the community-grounded catalyst for neighborhood-level action, creative placemaking, and quality-of-life initiatives.

## Key Focus Areas of the DCA + IA United Strategy:

### PLAN-DRIVEN IMPLEMENTATION

Every initiative aligns with the Comp Plan 2045, ensuring actions directly reflect the community's shared goals for economic, cultural, and social advancement.

### PLACEMAKING WITH PURPOSE

Impact Austin leads on-the-ground initiatives that activate public spaces, foster arts and culture, and reflect the identity and aspirations of local neighborhoods.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION

Supporting startups and small businesses with tools, mentorship, and access to capital—particularly in underserved areas—is a core priority of the new platform.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Partnering with schools, training providers, and employers to build pipelines to good jobs and upskilling opportunities that meet real-time industry needs.

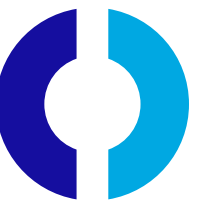
### PARTNERSHIP-CENTERED APPROACH

Whether working with local government departments, regional coalitions, or community organizations, the unified DCA + IA approach focuses on collaboration over competition.

### MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

Programs are tied to outcomes that track improvements in economic mobility, small business vitality, neighborhood vibrancy, and resident satisfaction.

The unification of DCA and Impact Austin is more than a structural change—it's a statement of intent. Austin's growth will be intentional, inclusive, and community-powered, driven by organizations that understand the importance of both big-picture strategy and block-by-block transformation. Through this new chapter, DCA and IA are setting a bold example of what modern economic development should be: integrated, adaptive, and relentlessly rooted in place.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT FOR IMPACT UNITING VISION & ACTION

## A UNITED PLATFORM FOR PROGRESS: MERGING MISSIONS, AMPLIFYING IMPACT

As part of the ongoing merger process shaped by the Comp Plan 2045, the Development Corporation of Austin (DCA) and Impact Austin (IA) have formally united their missions to create a single, dynamic platform for plan implementation. This integration leverages both organizations' strengths—economic strategy and quality-of-life leadership—to ensure that Austin's future is not only prosperous but also people-centered.

Together, they are committed to:

**“WORKING CLOSELY WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS TO AGGRESSIVELY MARKET THE AREA, ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES, AND SUPPORT EXISTING ENTERPRISES FOR THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF AUSTIN AND GREATER MOWER COUNTY.”**

— Development Corporation of Austin (DCA)

**“SERVING AS THE PLACEMAKERS, CONNECTORS, STRATEGISTS, AND ACTIVATORS FOR QUALITY-OF-LIFE INITIATIVES IN AUSTIN, MN—DEDICATED TO IMPROVING OUR CITY FOR THOSE RESIDING IN, DOING BUSINESS IN, AND VISITING AUSTIN.”**

— Impact Austin (IA)

Through this united platform, DCA and IA now function as two sides of the same coin: one driving strategic economic growth, the other shaping vibrant, inclusive spaces and experiences that define Austin's identity. Together, they are building a future that's as competitive as it is connected, and as thriving as it is livable.

As part of the integration process between Impact Austin (IA) and the Development Corporation of Austin (DCA), several key areas of strategic alignment have been identified ensuring that IA not only complements but enhances DCA's mission. These alignments reflect a shared commitment to both economic vitality and community livability, and position IA as an embedded, strategic partner within the broader DCA organization rather than a standalone initiative.

## DCA STRATEGIC PRIORITIES + IA ALIGNMENT

### PRIORITY 1

Position Austin as a destination for businesses, innovators, and entrepreneurs at the intersection of food, health, agriculture, and biosciences.

- IA enhances this by promoting quality-of-life initiatives that make Austin an attractive place to live and work—supporting talent retention and place-based branding.

### PRIORITY 2

Ensure entrepreneurs and startups have access to technical assistance and funding to launch their ideas.

- IA's community networks and grassroots relationships help connect local entrepreneurs to resources, space, and support.

### PRIORITY 3

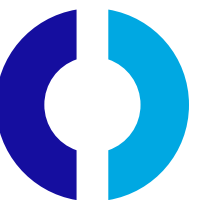
Support existing firms with access to workforce, infrastructure, capital, and space to stay and grow locally.

- IA helps shape the built environment and public spaces that create a strong sense of place—critical for talent attraction and retention.

### PRIORITY 4

Collaborate with community partners to make Austin a world-class destination for residents.

- This is core to IA's mission—actively building partnerships and initiatives that enrich Austin's cultural, recreational, and neighborhood assets.



## IA'S STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTIONS WITHIN THE DCA ECOSYSTEM

The past six months of collaborative work between the DCA staff and Board of Directors, IA staff and Steering Committee, and Velocity Group have clarified IA's evolving role to serve as DCA's placemaking and community engagement arm, driving forward initiatives that make Austin not only competitive but also connected, equitable, and livable.

IA's focus areas now include:

### BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST & COLLABORATION

Proactively gathering community input to inform development decisions and promote transparency.

### PROMOTING COLLECTIVE ACTION

Aligning stakeholders toward shared goals that elevate community well-being and economic strength.

### ADVANCING EQUITY

Expanding access to opportunity for underserved and underrepresented populations across Austin.

### ENRICHING QUALITY OF LIFE

Enhancing Austin's educational, cultural, and recreational offerings to create a vibrant environment for residents and visitors.

### DRIVING REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

Championing innovation in policies and actions that improve health, mobility, education, and sustainability.

### REVITALIZING PUBLIC SPACES

Prioritizing walkable streets, community gathering areas, and neighborhood vibrancy.

### EXPANDING HOUSING ACCESS

Advocating for diverse, attainable housing options that serve a range of needs and incomes.

### GROWING SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES

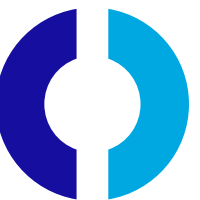
Strengthening the tax base and supporting smart land use to cultivate long-term city and community resilience.

## IMPLEMENTATION IN MOTION: SUPPORTING VISION 2045

With a focused and aligned structure, DCA and IA are now actively supporting the Vision 2045 Comprehensive Plan by developing tools, resources, and collaborative programming. These efforts directly address past gaps in implementation, notably from the 2020 planning cycle, and create a strong foundation for sustained success.

This united approach ensures that projects and programs not only fit DCA's economic development goals but also drive meaningful community outcomes—connecting strategy to street-level impact.

As part of the integration process between Impact Austin (IA) and the Development Corporation of Austin (DCA), several key areas of strategic alignment have been identified—ensuring that IA not only complements but enhances DCA's mission. These alignments reflect a shared commitment to both economic vitality and community livability, and position IA as an embedded, strategic partner within the broader DCA organization rather than a standalone initiative.



# COMMUNITY-LED IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

The comprehensive planning process created numerous community-led implementation and support teams to advise on the emerging strategies and also act as part of the plan implementation after the planning process concludes. These teams will be tasked with executing specific strategies, interventions, or policies to address the opportunities highlighted in the plan and address new ideas as the process unfolds.

## TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

Made up of municipal and county staff and specialized expertise, the TAC helps inform the direction of the comprehensive plan and its various components to ensure the plan aligns with technical standards and best practices.

### CITY OF AUSTIN

- Craig Clark, City Administrator
- Julie Clinefelter, Library Director
- Jason Sehon, Director of Park, Recreation and Forestry
- Steven Lang, City Engineer
- Keven Maxa, Engineering Supervisor – Utilities
- Alex Baumgardner, Energy Resources & Utility Operations Director, City of Austin

### MOWER COUNTY

- Mike Hanson, Public Works, Mower County
- Mitch Wenum, Highway Engineer, Mower County
- Angie Lipelt, ES Supervisor/ Zoning Administrator, Mower County
- Marcus Thompson, Solid Waste Officer, Mower County
- Nitaya Jandragholica, Cultural Liaison – Court Interpreter, Mower County
- Steve King, Director of Corrections, Mower County
- Michael Harvey, Assessor, Mower County
- Crystal Peterson, Director, Health and Human Services Mower County
- Cliff Helkenn, Child Support Officer, Health and Humans Services Mower County
- Sara Wilson, Eligibility Worker, Mower County HHS
- Dave Pike, Chief Deputy Sheriff, Mower County
- Joy Kanne, Director of Land Records & Taxpayer Services
- Amy Bramwell, Emergency Management
- Matt Verdick, Deputy Administrator
- Trish Harren, County Administrator

## PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC)

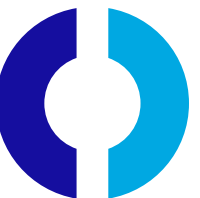
Comprised of community members to provide input, guidance, and recommendations on the comprehensive plan and its various components, the PAC ensures planning efforts are aligned with community needs, values, and goals while incorporating diverse perspectives and expertise.

### CITY OF AUSTIN

- Steve Kime, community member
- Joe Bower, CEO, Austin Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Kathleen Linekar, President, Riverland Community College
- Lyn Merritt, Community Member
- Herve Idjidina, Consultant, Small Business Development Center
- Nancy Schnable, Executive Director, Discover Austin
- Diane Baker, CEO, YMCA of Austin
- Mike Postma, Ward 2 City Council, City of Austin
- Ojoye Akane, Loan Consultant, Loan Depot
- Patrick Wagner, Project Manager, The Joseph Company, Inc
- Terry Hall, Real Estate Broker and Developer
- Lindsey Compton, Co-Founder/Producer at The MOD Medspa & Owner Operator at The Style Lounge Salon
- Katie Larson, Director of Human Resources, Hormel Foods
- Craig Clark, City Administrator, City of Austin

### MOWER COUNTY

- Val Sheedy, Deputy Director, Mower County
- James Christian, City Administrator, Grand Meadow
- Taggart Medgaarden, Executive Director, Housing Authority of Austin
- Whitney Thome, Board Chair, Southland Community Foundation
- John Mueller, Mower County Commission District 1
- Sharrie Garbisch, Farmer/Cedar River Farmers Market Producer
- Ruth Jovaag, Farmer
- Cody Fox, District Manager, Mower County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Mike Ankeny, Mower County Commissioner District 5
- Brian Meyerhofer, Business Owner, Twp Supervisor, Meyerhofer Crane, Pleasant Valley Township
- Trish Harren, County Administrator
- Mike Bustad, Contractor/Business Owner, Bustad Dozing and Excavating
- Steve Gleason, Planning Commission, Mower County
- Angie Lipelt, Environmental Services Supervisor, Mower County
- William Stegemann, Lansing Township
- Mitch Wenum, Engineer, Mower County



# COMMUNITY-LED TEAMS

## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

### COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

To support both the planning and implementation of the food system work, we have formed Communities of Practice (CoP). A collection of knowledgeable people within each food system realm, these CoPs develop and share a common vision and then come together to craft group goals, share solutions and champion implementation. These CoPs provide guidance through the planning process and offer continued leadership as implementation begins. Over 140 people have joined these community leadership groups and new members are welcome.

### ACCESS & EQUITY

Expand access to healthy, affordable, and culturally significant foods in the community.

**GEMA ALVARADO-GUERRERO (Co-Chair)**  
Workforce Wellness Facilitator  
Hormel Foods & Team Lead for Hometown Food Security Project

**MOLLY LANKE (Co-Chair)**  
Executive Director  
United Way of Mower County

**SARA LEE**  
Community Relations Manager  
Mayo Clinic

**VARINH VAN VUGT**  
Director  
Welcome Center/Parenting Resource Center

**BILL MCCLAIN**  
Manager of Food Safety and Quality, Hormel Foods  
Board Member, Salvation Army

**JANELLE KOEPKE**  
Dean of Institutional Advancement  
Riverland Community College

**JEFF WYANT**  
Senior Services Director  
Semcac/Community Action Agency

**KARLA RODRIGUEZ**  
Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio

**KELLY DICKE**  
Planning and Development Director  
Semcac/Community Action Agency

**MARY WEIKUM**  
Volunteer  
Hometown Food Security Project

**VELERIE FAULHABER**  
Program Coordinator  
United Way of Mower County

**DR. ANNIE LIN**  
Assistant Professor of Human Nutrition, Food Science  
Hormel Institute

**APRIL RODRIGUEZ**  
Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio

**JENNIE CREWS**  
Health and Human Services  
Community Health

### BRAND AND STORY

Shape a collective voice around a united vision serves as a unifying story that attracts talent, investment, tourism, and fosters social cohesion and positive attention.

**NANCY SCHNABLE (CHAIR)**  
Executive Director  
Discover, Austin

**CRAIG CLARK**  
City Administrator  
City of Austin

**TRISH HARREN**  
Country Administrator  
Mower County

**JAMES DOUGLASS**  
Executive Director of Communications, Media Relations  
and Marketing  
Riverland Community College

**KATIE CLARK**  
Senior Vice President & Chief Communications Officer  
Hormel Foods

**JOHN GARRY**  
CEO  
Development Corporation of Austin

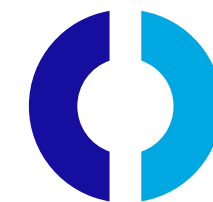
**RYAN MEYERS**  
Communications Coordinator  
Austin Public Schools

**TAMMY SCHULTZ**  
Administrative Assistant  
Mayo Clinic

**JENNIFER LIVINGSTON**  
Director of Community Relations  
Mayo Clinic

**MATTHEW MANGUSO**  
Marketing & Communications Manager  
Hormel Institute

**NAN HANEGRAAF**  
Market Lead  
Bremer Bank/The Development Corporation of Austin



## EDUCATION: BUILDING AN INFORMED AND SKILLED WORKFORCE FOR THE FOOD SYSTEM

Develop a robust education sector that fuels the food system with a knowledgeable, skilled, and engaged population. By equipping individuals with the tools and expertise to thrive in the food industry, a robust educational initiative lays the foundation for generational social mobility and sustained investment in the local opportunity that has global impact.

**DR OKECHUKWU UKAGA** (Chair)  
Associate Dean of Food and Agriculture  
Riverland Community College

**DR. KATIE BASKIN**  
Executive director of Academics and  
Administrative Services  
Austin Public Schools

**HEATHER CONLEY**  
Vice President of Academics & Innovation  
Riverland Community College

**RANDEL HANSON**  
Consultant, Regenerative Agriculture and  
Community Food Systems  
Riverland Community College

**RUTH JOVAAG-OFSTEDAL**  
Farmer

**JAYNE GIBSON**  
Executive Director  
Austin Aspires

**NICK SHILTZ**  
Instructor, Center for Agriculture and  
Food Science Technology  
Riverland Community College

**MATT SCHMIT**  
Principal  
Austin High School

**JENNIFER LIVINGSTON**  
Director of Community Relations  
Mayo Clinic

**MATTHEW MANGUSO**  
Marketing & Communications Manager  
Hormel Institute

**CRAIG CLARK**  
City Administrator  
City of Austin

**HOLLY WALLACE**  
Planning and Zoning Administrator  
City of Austin

## ACTIVATION

Attract positive attention and generating excitement through festivals, farmers markets, pop-up events, restaurants and bars.

**NICK NOVOTNY** (Chair)  
Director of Community Engagement & Enhancement  
Impact Austin

**HOLLY WALLACE**  
City of Austin Planning & Zoning Administrator  
and Volunteer  
4th Ave Fest

**THOMAS ROBBINS**  
Executive Director  
Austin Artworks Center/Austin Artworks Festival

**VARINH VAN VUGT**  
Director  
Welcome Center/Parenting Resource Center

**MARY ULLAND**  
Farmer + Austin Farmers Market

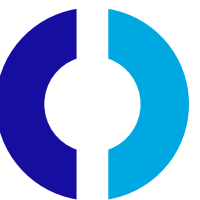
## PRODUCTION

Support a diverse tapestry of farmers, breweries, distilleries, cheese makers, butcheries, coffee roasters, bakeries, and other sectors of agriculture and manufactured product development.

**TOM COTTER**  
Farmer

**RUTH JOVAAG-OFSTEDAL**  
Farmer

**ANN KIRBY**  
Director of Partnerships and Outreach  
Forever Green



# CONT. COMMUNITY-LED TEAMS

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

## DISTRIBUTION

Strengthen distribution chains to broaden access to products and expand market growth.

### HEATHER BOES

Owner  
SuperFresh Garden, Market and Bakery

## POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

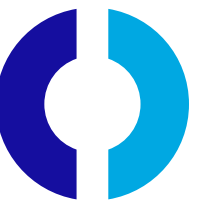
Address laws, regulations and local ordinances that affect the food industry.

### JOHN GARRY

President/CEO  
Development Corporation of Austin

### CRAIG CLARK

City Administrator  
City of Austin



# COMMUNITY-LED TEAMS DISTRICT COUNCILS

## DOWNTOWN DISTRICT NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS: EMPOWERING LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

The Downtown Frameworks Plan identifies a variety of Downtown Experience Districts, a nuanced approach to urban planning that recognizes the wide variety of vibes and experiences throughout downtown. Each unique district focuses on creating a atmosphere that provides a unique blend of cultural, social, and economic activities , providing diverse spaces for entertainment, commerce, and community engagement.

District Neighborhood Councils (DC) are the community-led groups that represent these specific districts and neighborhoods. These councils serve as key representatives in the planning and implementation of street-level infrastructure improvements, housing and development, zoning, and other public and private market activities that directly impact the area. The planning process focused on creating DCs for five downtown districts, with other areas of downtown as part of a next phase of downtown planning.

### CITY CENTER

**JOSEPH BOWER** (Chair)  
CEO  
Austin Area Chamber of Commerce

**HOLLY WALLACE**  
Planning and Zoning Administrator  
City of Austin

**CHAUNCE STANTON**  
Director of Marketing & Communications  
Austin Area Chamber of Commerce

**SAMANTHA HOVELAND**  
Senior Brand Manager  
Hormel

**ISSAC GORMAN**  
Manager  
Accurant Financial

**HEATHER WAGNER**  
Owner  
Brick Furniture

**JEFF BRINKMAN**  
President/Founder  
Superior Cannabis Company

**AMANDA GUNDERSON**  
Associate Vice President of Business/  
Commercial Lending, First Farmers and  
Merchants Bank

**LINDSEY COMPTON**  
The Style Lounge/Downtown Property  
Owner

**TERRY HALL**  
Downtown Property Owner

**CRAIG CLARK**  
City Administrator  
City of Austin

### 4TH AVE CORRIDOR

**HOLLY WALLACE**  
Planning and Zoning Administrator  
City of Austin

**MATT VERDICK**  
Chief Deputy County Administrator  
Mower County

**THOMAS ROBBINS**  
Executive Director  
Austin Artworks Center/  
Paramount Theatre

**SCOTT FOX**  
Owner, Fox Electronics +  
B&J Bar and Grill

**CINDY MEANY**  
Executive Director  
Hormel Historic Home

**STEVEN LANG**  
City Engineer  
City of Austin

### OAKLAND AVENUE CORRIDOR

**HOLLY WALLACE**  
Planning and Zoning Administrator  
City of Austin

**MATT VERDICK**  
Chief Deputy County Administrator  
Mower County

**JOHN GARRY**  
CEO  
Development Corporation of Austin

**MIGUEL GARATE**  
Minority-International Student Advisor  
Riverland Community College

**NITAYA JANDRAGHOLICA**  
Cultural Liaison, Court Interpreter  
Mower County

**CRAIG CLARK**  
City Administrator  
City of Austin

### CEDAR RIVER PARK/ WHITEWATER PARK

**CRAIG CLARK**  
City Administrator  
City of Austin

**JASON SEHON**  
Director of Parks, Recreation & Forestry

### CEDAR RIVER NEIGHBORHOOD

**TAGGERT MEDGAARDEN**  
Austin Housing & Redevelopment Authority  
(HRA)



An aerial, top-down view of a diverse group of approximately 15-20 people of various ethnicities and ages. They are gathered in a circle on a grey, textured floor, leaning in towards the center as if in a collaborative meeting or huddle. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the variety of their clothing and hair colors. The overall mood is one of teamwork and shared focus.

# THE BIG IDEAS

**“BIG IDEAS, BIG AMBITIOUS PROJECTS NEED TO BE EMBEDDED WITHIN CULTURE AT A LEVEL DEEPER THAN THE POLITICAL WINDS.”**

**+**

**NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON**



# PLACE-CENTERED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**“BUY LAND, THEY’RE NOT MAKING IT ANYMORE.”**

**+**

**MARK TWAIN**

# SMART GROWTH, STRONG PLACES

## A FRAMEWORK FOR PLACE-BASED PROSPERITY

Place-based economic development refers to strategies and policies aimed at improving a community by leveraging its unique characteristics and assets—tailoring solutions to the specific needs and opportunities of that place. As one of the cornerstone approaches of this document, it's important to recognize that not all development is created equal, especially when it comes to both context and fiscal productivity.

Development isn't just about buildings—it's about how land, infrastructure, and people interact in space. Two developments can serve similar functions but produce vastly different outcomes, depending on where they're located and how they use land. Smart development fits the place—it complements the scale, form, needs, and fiscal return necessary to sustain local services and long-term resilience.

The following builds the case that different types of development—such as suburban big-box retail vs. compact downtown mixed-use—generate dramatically different fiscal and social returns for communities.

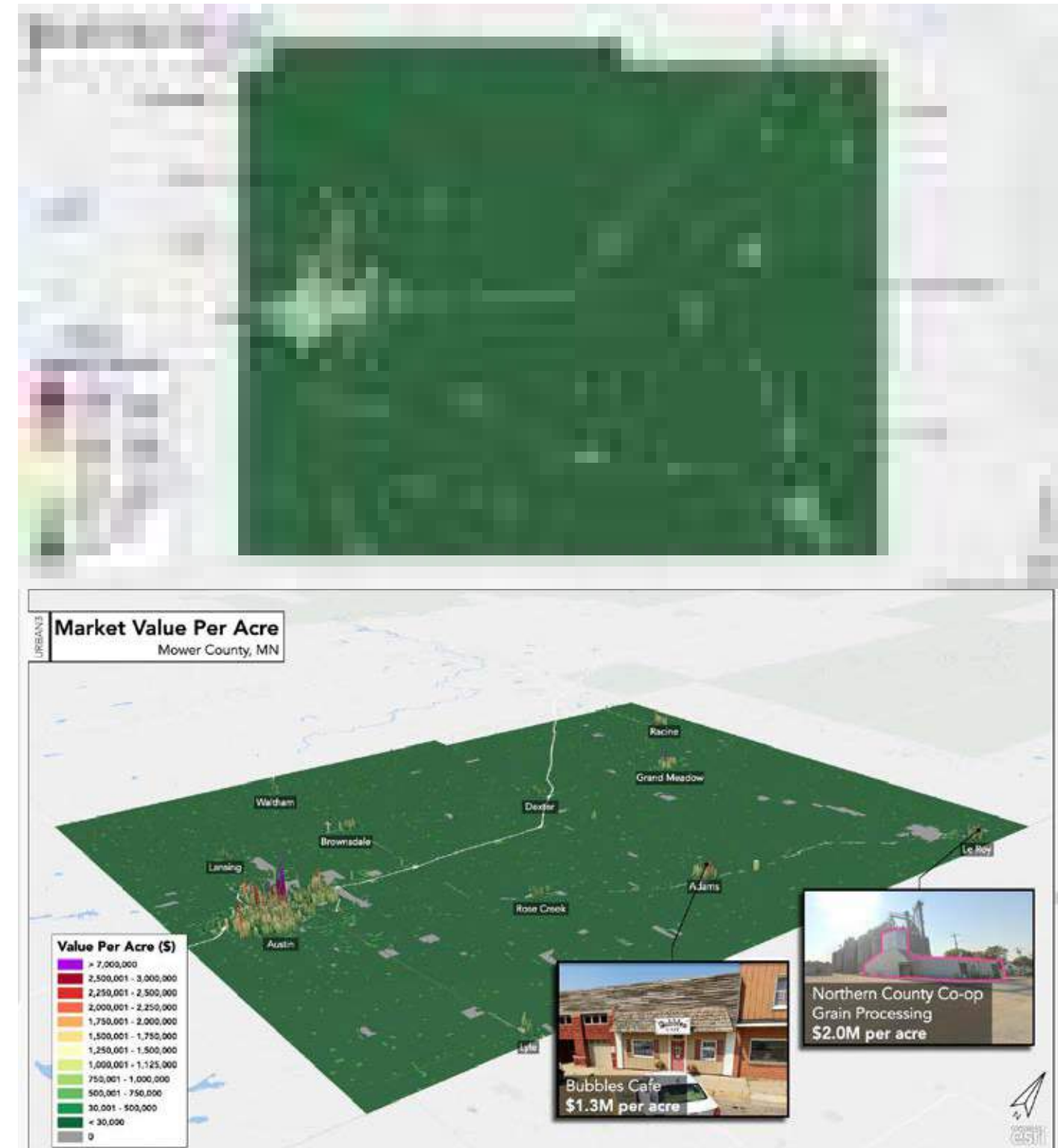
At the heart of the following analysis is a shift in how we measure value. Traditional valuation methods often prioritize total assessed value, which favors large, land-intensive projects. But value per acre, a metric that measures the taxable value of a property relative to the amount of land it occupies, reveals a deeper truth: how efficiently a community is using its land from a fiscal perspective.

Traditional development patterns—like strip malls or big-box stores—may appear fiscally beneficial due to their size and visibility, but when measured on a per-acre basis, they often fail to carry their financial weight. In contrast, compact, mixed-use urban development—even simple two-or-three-story buildings—can yield many times more revenue per acre, while requiring less infrastructure and offering more flexibility over time.

This approach forces us to ask different questions of our data—an underrated but transformative superpower. It's not just about collecting information; it's about unlocking insight, clarity, and direction. The value per acre lens turns conventional tax data into visual value maps that answer essential planning and budgeting questions:

- Which areas are fiscally productive?
- Which development types cost more than they return?
- Where should we prioritize investment, zoning reform, or infrastructure upgrades?

Ultimately, the most effective community development strategies are those that marry economic return with placemaking—creating environments that are not only financially sustainable, but also livable, equitable, and vibrant.





**TOURISM & THE AUSTIN STORY | ACTIVATING THE PUBLIC REALM | ARTS & CULTURE**

**“IF I AM GONNA TELL A REAL STORY. I’M GONNA START WITH MY NAME.”**

**+**

**KENDRICK LAMAR**

# A SHORT HISTORY OF TOURISM MARKETING IN AMERICA

While many major American cities established specialized organizations to attract conventions in the early 20th century, the rise of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in rural America didn't occur until the 1980s. This shift came with the adoption of the hotel room tax, which provided funding to support what were then called Convention and Visitors Bureaus—today's DMOs.

In the beginning, DMOs focused primarily on printed visitors guides and promotional materials that showcased local hotels, restaurants, and attractions. However, with the internet revolution, these traditional guides became less essential. Travel consumers could now access that information directly on their mobile devices. This led to a shift in DMO strategy: they transitioned from being simple information distributors to becoming community storytellers.

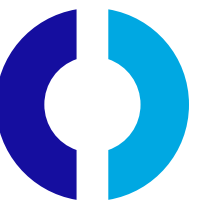
Where the internet provided listings and reviews, it lacked the ability to tell a compelling, unified story about a community. DMOs like Discover Austin embraced this role, curating and sharing the unique narratives of their cities, aiming to inspire not just travelers, but future residents and investors as well. In today's competitive landscape, where every community is vying for talent to drive its economy, the role of DMOs is more critical than ever. Attracting visitors is just one part of their mission. Their stories are equally crucial for drawing future residents and businesses—reinforcing a message that appeals equally to tourists and those looking to live and work in the area. Today, the work of DMOs goes far beyond attracting tourists. They are critical to the economic success and quality of life of a community. A strong DMO helps create a thriving place—attracting visitors, residents, and investors alike, all of whom contribute to the area's growth and vitality.

Tourism becomes a powerful driver of economic development when it is intentionally planned, community-aligned, and sustainably managed. Thoughtfully cultivated tourism can stimulate job creation, infrastructure development, cultural preservation, and attract investment to underutilized areas. These benefits directly contribute to achieving broader economic development goals, creating a cycle of growth that uplifts the entire community.

**“IF YOU BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO VISIT, YOU’LL BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE. IF YOU BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE, YOU’LL BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO WORK. IF YOU BUILD A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO WORK, YOU’LL BUILD A PLACE WHERE BUSINESS WANTS TO BE. IF YOU BUILD A PLACE WHERE BUSINESS WANTS TO BE, YOU’LL BE BACK TO BUILDING A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO VISIT. IT ALL STARTS WITH A VISIT.”**

+

**MAURA GAST  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
IRVING, TX CVB**



# IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE ECONOMY

## Revenues generated by visitors either directly or indirectly support Government Services

- Taxes paid by visitors help offset residents' tax bill.

## Growth in the visitor economy drives growth in other areas of the economy

- Destinations with a higher concentration of visitor-related industries have tended to grow faster than average.

## Amenities and lifestyle play an important role in attracting new residents to a community

- Talent is attracted to destinations that offer a good quality of life. Hence, talent attraction initiatives led by or in collaboration with destination organizations tend to have the greatest impact.

## Destination brands can be leveraged across the economic development spectrum

- Tourism advertising not only attracts visitors; it also lifts the destination's image for economic development.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth across the United States, generating substantial revenue and supporting millions of jobs.

## Here are the key figures and insights from 2023:

### ECONOMIC OUTPUT

- US travel spending reached \$1.3 trillion, producing an economic footprint of \$2.8 trillion
- Job Creation - The travel industry directly employed 8 million Americans, supporting nearly 15 million jobs in total
- Contribution to National GDP - The travel sector accounts for 2.5% of the national GDP
- National Park Visitor Spending - 325 million park visitors spent \$26.4 billion in local gateway regions, supporting:
  - + 415,000 jobs
  - + \$19.4 billion in labor income
  - + \$32.0 billion in value-added economic impact
  - + \$55.6 billion in total economic output

### INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

- International visitors contributed \$155 billion to US travel spending in 2023
- Sports Tourism - Sports travelers spent \$52.5 billion, with 21% of spending on lodging
- Travel & Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) - The real output of goods and services directly sold to visitors grew 7.0% in 2023, following a 20.8% increase in 2022
- Travel & Tourism Investments - Investment in Travel & Tourism increased by 13% in 2023, reaching over \$1 trillion



Image source: Mize.tech

# IMPACT OF TOURISM ON MINNESOTA

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM IN MINNESOTA

In 2023, Minnesota's tourism industry had a profound impact on the state's economy, generating a total economic output of \$24.2 billion, supporting 180,473 jobs, and contributing \$2.3 billion in state and local tax revenues. These figures highlight the vital role tourism plays in supporting both the financial well-being and employment landscape across Minnesota.

Tourism in Minnesota generated \$14.1 billion in direct visitor spending in 2023. This spending flowed into a variety of sectors including lodging, dining, retail, transportation, and entertainment. Beyond direct expenditures, tourism also produced substantial indirect and induced economic impacts.

## JOB CREATION

Tourism was a significant driver of employment in Minnesota, supporting 180,473 jobs across the state. These included:

- Direct jobs in hotels, restaurants, attractions, and transportation services
- Indirect jobs in supply chain sectors that serve the tourism industry
- Induced jobs supported by the household spending of those employed in tourism
- This broad employment base reflects the industry's far-reaching influence across diverse areas of the economy.

## TAX REVENUE

In 2023, tourism generated a total of \$2.3 billion in state and local tax revenues, which help fund essential public services and infrastructure:

- \$1.5 billion came directly from visitor activity (sales taxes, lodging taxes, etc.)
- An additional \$725 million was generated through indirect and induced economic activity
- These revenues are crucial for sustaining state and local government programs, enhancing community development, and reducing the overall tax burden on residents.

## VISITOR VOLUME

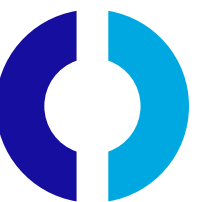
**SPENDING GROWTH: VISITOR SPENDING GREW BY 8.0% OVER 2022, REACHING A RECORD \$14.1 BILLION.**

In 2023, Minnesota welcomed 80.2 million visitors, marking a 4.6% increase from 2022 and exceeding pre-pandemic levels by 3.9%. This growth reflects the state's continued appeal as a travel destination, with strong interest from both domestic and international travelers.

Visitor spending also reached new heights in 2023. Tourists spent a record \$14.1 billion, representing an 8.0% increase from the previous year. This surge in spending was driven by robust activity across key sectors, including:

- Lodging
- Food and beverage services
- Transportation
- Retail shopping
- Entertainment and recreation

The increase in visitor expenditures highlights tourism's growing contribution to the state's economy and the value visitors bring to local businesses and communities across Minnesota.



# IMPACT OF TOURISM ON MOWER COUNTY / AUSTIN

## ECONOMIC IMPACT IN MOWER COUNTY – 2024

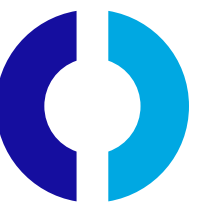
- Tourism continued to play a valuable role in Mower County's local economy in 2024, contributing significantly to business revenue, tax generation, and employment.
- Overall Spending - Visitors to Mower County spent an estimated \$85.8 million, fueling local businesses across hospitality, retail, food services, transportation, and entertainment sectors.
- Gross Sales Tax Revenue - Tourism activity generated \$8.1 million in gross sales tax revenue, supporting public services and infrastructure at both the state and local levels.
- Private Sector Employment - The tourism sector supported 648 private sector jobs, providing stable employment opportunities and contributing to the county's economic resilience.

To support a thriving local economy and position Austin as a year-round destination, Discover Austin, MN has actively recruited and hosted a variety of events, conventions, and tournaments.

Since 2023, the top 15 secured groups have generated or are projected to generate significant economic impact for the community:

## KEY TOURISM GROUPS RECRUITED BY DISCOVER AUSTIN, MN (2023-2025)

EVENT / GROUP	DATE(S)	ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT
American Junior Golf Association (3 years)	July 2023, June 2024, June 2025	\$1,024,473
MN Disabled American Veterans Convention	September 2024	\$152,628
Republican Congressional First District Convention	April 2023	\$114,471
MN Square Dance Federation	June 2023	\$83,153
MN/IA Flood Plan	November 2024	\$67,156
MN State April AAUW	April 2025	\$63,585
Gopher State Baseball Tournament of Champions	July 2024	\$57,335*
MN DOT	May 2024	\$36,630
Gold Wing Group	June 2025	\$34,341
MN Newspaper Association	June 2024	\$30,525
United Snowmobilers Association	October 2022	\$28,617
MN Deer Farmers Association	March 2023	\$24,802
Creative Retailers	June 2024	\$23,342
Fittest on Turf	June 2024 & returning in 2025	\$21,898
Model A Car Club	October 2024	\$11,944



# GROWING THE ORGANIZATION

## EMPOWERING DISCOVER AUSTIN

Visitors aren't just a nice-to-have — they're the first date of economic development. The goal of a relevant DMO is no longer simply to fill hotels, restaurants, and attractions. Today, every visit is an opportunity to inspire someone to envision a future life in Austin and Mower County — as a resident, a member of the workforce, an entrepreneur, an investor, or an employer. Tourism is the first impression that sparks deeper connections and lasting impact.

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) serve as the stewards of a city or region's brand. They are the engine behind visitor attraction, brand storytelling, economic development, and strategic tourism planning. However, it is rare to see an organizational capacity assessment included in comprehensive planning. That oversight is particularly pressing in the case of Discover Austin, MN, where the potential far outweighs current resources.

### DISCOVER AUSTIN: HIGH IMPACT, LOW RESOURCES

Despite operating with a modest budget of \$185,000 and a small team (1 full-time, 2 part-time staff), Discover Austin has earned exceptional praise from stakeholders and state officials alike. This level of performance with such limited capacity speaks volumes about the organization's commitment, leadership, and value to the community. Stakeholder interviews consistently describe Discover Austin as:

- Creative, collaborative, and effective marketers
- Highly resourceful in securing state grants, as praised by Explore Minnesota
- Innovative, notably translating their website into multiple languages—an inclusive step that larger, better-funded DMOs haven't taken

### THE RISK OF UNDERINVESTMENT

While these accomplishments are impressive, the reality is that continued underfunding threatens the success of many strategic initiatives within the comprehensive plan. Without immediate and sustained investment, Discover Austin's limited staff and budget will constrain the implementation of community-driven goals—ultimately stalling growth and opportunity. The belief that tourism should be funded only through hotel room tax revenue is outdated and limiting. Public-private partnerships and diversified funding models are essential to build a competitive, modern DMO.



Even communities of similar size or with fewer major attractions are investing 2x-6x more than Austin, allowing them to promote tourism, attract talent, and boost local economies more effectively.

### DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATIONAL COMPARISONS (EACH DMO HAS A VARIETY OF REVENUE SOURCES)

- **Winona, MN** (Population: 26,029, annual budget est. \$388,500) – A scenic river town, hosting the Great River Shakespeare Festival
- **Austin, MN** (Population: 26,171, Annual Budget - \$185,000, 1 full-time, 2 part-time) - famously known as “SPAMTOWN USA” due to its long history with Hormel Foods, and is home to the SPAM Museum, Hormel Historic Home, Riverland College, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, Paramount Theater, Austin Artworks and the Greyhounds baseball team
- **Marion, IN** (Population: 28,105, \$250,000, 2 full time ) – A hidden gem for basketball fans with home Indiana Wesleyan University and being the birthplace of James Dean
- **Beloit WI** (Population 36,300, annual budget - \$1,240,169, with five staff members) - Beloit College, historic downtown, vibrant arts scene, Beloit Farmers’ Market, and its location along the scenic Rock River, as well as being a revitalized industrial hub with unique shops and restaurants
- **Grants Pass, OR** (population 39,100, annual budget \$893,168, 3 staff members) - beautiful location along the Rogue River, rich history, vibrant local culture, and being a hub for exploring the natural beauty and outdoor activities of the Rogue Valley and surrounding areas
- **Bartlesville, OK** (population 38,100, annual budget \$445,000, two staff members) - rich history, particularly its association with the oil industry and the establishment of the Phillips Petroleum Company. It’s also famous for its unique architecture, art scene, and cultural attractions like the Woolaroc Museum & Wildlife Preserve and the Price Tower Arts Center
- **Findlay, OH** (population 40,100, annual budget \$832,514, two staff members) - Flag City, U.S.A.” and is a micropolitan area with a thriving industrial sector, including the headquarters of Marathon Petroleum, home to the University of Findlay
- **Bentonville, AR** (Population: 59,471, current annual operating budget \$3,633,948 + \$1,547.500 for parks in comparison to 2007 population of 33,831 and a budget of \$374,272)– A fusion of arts, culture, and the great outdoors – Bentonville, Arkansas was dubbed “a new capital of cool” by the Wall Street Journal in 2023. Known as the birthplace of Walmart and home to its brand new corporate headquarters, this city boasts a bounty for visitors and residents alike. The city has invested millions into the art, culinary, music, cycling, history and parks over the past 20+ years.

“IN SMALL COMMUNITIES, \$200,000 MIGHT SOUND LIKE A MAJOR INVESTMENT, BUT IN TODAY’S DESTINATION MARKETING LANDSCAPE, IT’S NOT EVEN CLOSE. TO TRULY MAKE A MARK – TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS, DRIVE SIGNIFICANT VISITOR TRAFFIC, AND POSITION A PLACE AS A MUST-VISIT (AND MUST-LIVE) DESTINATION – THE REAL COST OF ENTRY IS CLOSER TO \$1 MILLION. SERIOUS RESULTS REQUIRE SERIOUS INVESTMENT, PARTICULARLY IN A COMMUNITY AS WELL POSITIONED AND RESOURCED AS AUSTIN.”

+  
BILL GEIST  
DMOPROZ



# A CALL TO ACTION

Discover Austin has already proven it can punch above its weight. Now, it's time to give it the resources to truly thrive. A well-funded DMO is not a luxury—it's a necessity for Austin to compete, grow, and create the vibrant community its residents and businesses deserve.

## STRATEGIC PILLARS FOR STRENGTHENING TOURISM IN AUSTIN & MOWER COUNTY

### STABLE & DIVERSE FUNDING

A resilient DMO needs predictable, flexible revenue streams to plan long-term campaigns and adapt to market changes.

#### Key Strategies:

- **EXPAND TOURISM TAXES & FEES:** Advocate for the expansion of hotel, Airbnb/VRBO occupancy taxes, restaurant taxes, and creation of Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs).
- **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:** Foster collaboration with local businesses and corporations to co-invest in tourism marketing and branding initiatives.
- **GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS:** Secure state, federal, and philanthropic funding for destination development and promotional efforts.
- **CONTRACTS FOR SERVICE:** Establish formal contract agreements with the City of Austin and Mower County to align tourism with public policy and economic goals.
- **AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM:** Offer tourism-focused businesses (e.g., B&Bs, guides, tour operators) the opportunity to become Discover Austin partners in exchange for visibility and promotional support.

### DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Access to high-quality tourism data ensures strategic targeting, smarter investment, and clearer ROI measurement.

#### Key Strategies:

- Invest in tools like visitor analytics, traveler sentiment surveys, geolocation data, and economic impact reports.
- Share data with regional and city economic development teams to align tourism with broader growth strategies.

### DESTINATION BRANDING & STORYTELLING

A compelling, authentic brand builds civic pride, drives visitation, and supports talent and business recruitment.

#### Key Strategies:

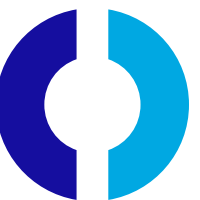
- Partner with local, county, and state entities to amplify Austin and Mower County's place-based brand.
- Encourage community storytelling, elevating local voices, traditions, and experiences.
- Emphasize inclusivity and authenticity in messaging to ensure everyone sees themselves in the community narrative.

### POLICY ALIGNMENT & GOVERNMENT INTEGRATION

Tourism success hinges on supportive infrastructure, policy, and governance that reflects its economic value.

#### Key Strategies:

- Align city planning, zoning, transportation, and cultural preservation policies with tourism growth.
- Provide Discover Austin with the opportunity to manage public spaces for events and marketing campaigns.
- Streamline permitting processes for tourism-related experiences.
- Ensure Discover Austin has a seat at the table in city and regional economic development discussions.



## SUSTAINABLE & INCLUSIVE TOURISM

Support for tourism must be community-centered and reflective of long-term sustainability and social equity.

### Key Strategies:

- Focus on attracting higher-spending, lower-impact visitors who value the area's unique offerings.
- Promote off-peak to spread economic benefits across the calendar year.
- Prioritize accessibility and diverse representation in all Discover Austin marketing and programming.

## CHAMPION LOCAL EXPERIENCES

Unique, local experiences are the heart of return visitation and community pride.

### Key Strategies:

- Collaborate with local artisans, chefs, musicians, and guides to develop and promote homegrown events.
- Invest in or help curate unique festivals and cultural experiences that reflect the soul of Austin and Mower County.

## TOURISM WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A vibrant tourism economy depends on a skilled, passionate workforce.

### Key Strategies:

- Partner with local schools, colleges, and workforce agencies to promote hospitality and tourism careers.
- Support training and leadership development opportunities to grow and retain local talent.

## THE ROLE OF THE DISCOVER AUSTIN BOARD

To fully realize the ambitious vision outlined in the comprehensive plan, the Discover Austin Board must take an active and visible leadership role. As trusted stewards of Austin's destination brand and community vision, the Board is uniquely positioned to drive alignment, advocacy, and momentum.

### KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD:

- **Socialize the Plan Across the Community** - Help communicate the plan's goals, strategies, and benefits to local stakeholders, residents, and businesses—building understanding and buy-in across Mower County.
- **Advocate for Funding and Partnerships** - Lead efforts to secure the necessary public and private investments to expand Discover Austin's capacity and implement key initiatives.
- **Ensure Continuity Beyond Government Cycles** - Provide a stable, consistent voice for tourism and branding initiatives that can outlast election cycles and shifting government priorities.
- **Keep the Comprehensive Plan on Track** - Act as champions for the plan's execution—tracking progress, keeping it top of mind in the community, and holding partners accountable.

Without bold and consistent advocacy for Discover Austin and the tourism industry, the organization risks its steady, strategic voice that ensures destination development remains a top priority. As private-sector leaders, the Board role is not only to support the organization and its work, but to champion it.



# STRENGTHENING THE DESTINATION

Building a vibrant and sustainable tourism economy in Austin and Mower County requires thoughtful planning, strategic partnerships, and inclusive development. Done well, this approach doesn't just attract visitors—it enhances quality of life for residents, supports workforce recruitment and retention, and draws positive attention from across the region, nation, and world.

## BUILDING A DESTINATION IDENTITY

In today's competitive tourism landscape, a distinctive destination brand is essential. It's not just about a catchy slogan or stylish logo—it's about crafting a compelling, authentic narrative that reflects Austin and Mower County's character and aspirations.

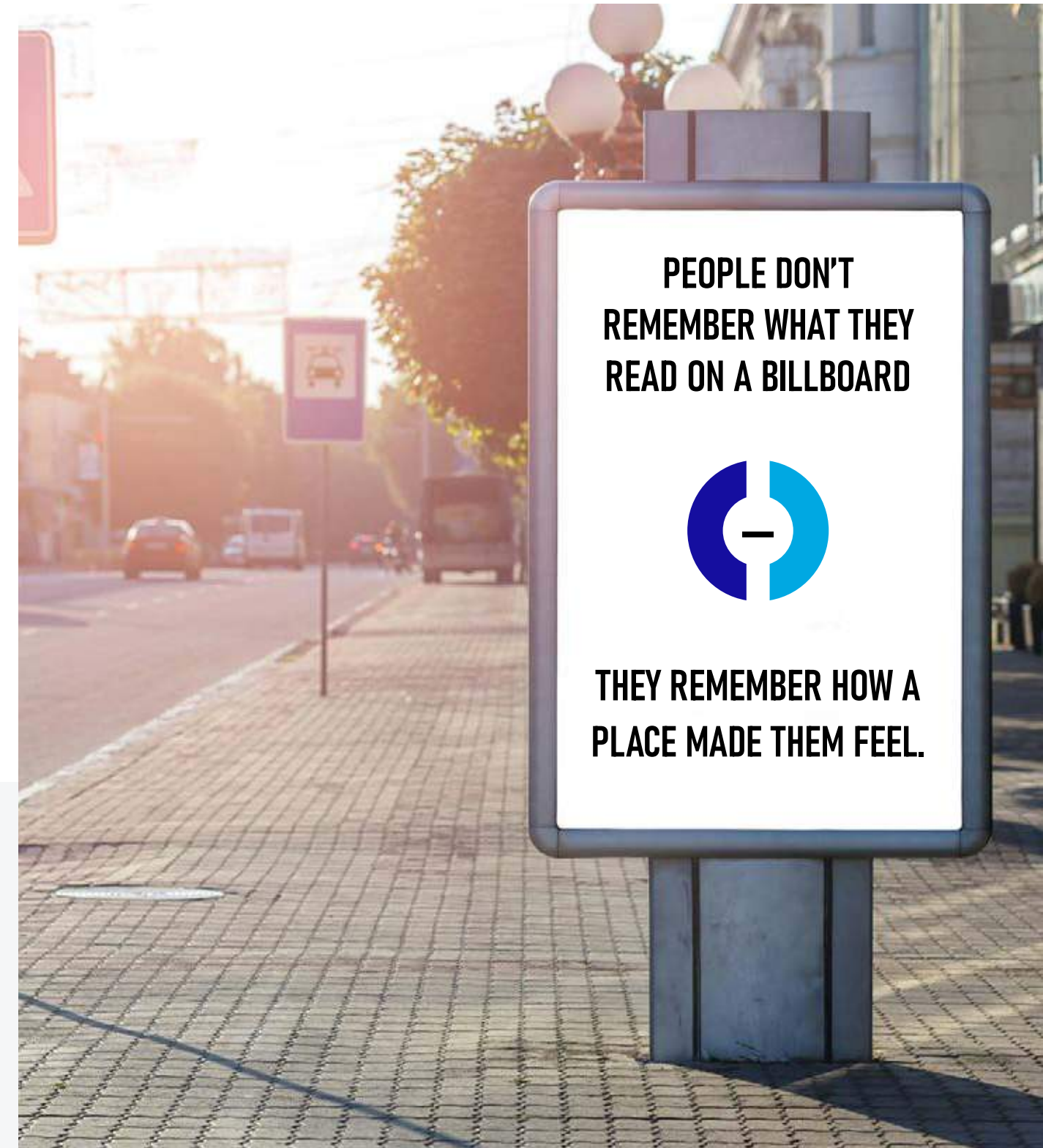
## AUSTIN'S BRAND OPPORTUNITY

A unique destination brand is crucial for a place to stand out in a competitive tourism market, attracting visitors and boosting the local economy. It involves crafting a distinctive identity that resonates with travelers and highlights the area's unique attributes. A strong brand also builds trust and loyalty, encouraging repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth referrals. It's about more than just a logo or tagline; it's about creating a memorable and compelling narrative that resonates with both locals and visitors by creating a sense of place, purpose, and lifestyle — which can also speak directly to the values and interest of the global workforce. And it's important to note that a future-focused civic brand only works when the experiences match the message. People remember what they feel and do, not what they read on a billboard.

Positioning Austin, MN as a destination means identifying and amplifying its unique character—rooted in food, innovation, arts, and nature—and telling that story in ways that resonate both regionally and beyond. Positioning Austin, Minnesota as a destination is all about identifying and amplifying its unique character, layering in compelling experiences, and creating a story that resonates regionally and beyond. With its roots in food production (hello, SPAM!) and a growing arts, culture, and immigrant presence, Austin can evolve from a pass-through town to a vibrant rural destination.

## EMERGING BRAND THEMES

- **Austin Feeds Innovation** - Leverage Austin's identity as the birthplace of Hormel and SPAM while promoting a growing culture of food entrepreneurship.
- **Culture on Every Corner** - Position Austin as a rural creative hub with arts festivals, artist studios, public art, and community celebrations.
- **Walk. Wander. Be Well.** - Build wellness-centered weekend experiences around the nature center, riverfront trails, and future whitewater park.
- **Every Bite Has a Backstory** - Use storytelling to link heritage with the future—connecting food, people, and place in ways that feel personal and real.



## **ANCHORING THE BRAND IN ACTION**

Austin already offers one-of-a-kind experiences, including:

- The SPAM Museum and the town's rich food history
- The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center and scenic Cedar River
- A whitewater park in development with exciting potential
- A strong foundation in cultural diversity and creative expression

These core experiences can form the pillars of a destination strategy focused on culinary and adventure tourism. These two themes—paired with expanded festivals, immersive cultural programming, and support for entrepreneurs—offer Austin a chance to evolve from a pass-through stop into a sought-after rural getaway.

Looking outside of the downtown area, the ShopKo site has become a drag upon the community's psyche since its closing in 2019 and efforts should be re-doubled to reimagine that site, as well as the context in which it sits. The proximity to the majority of Austin's current hotels cluster offers an opportunity to turn that area into a lifestyle entertainment center with food court, amusements and performance space.

## **FROM CONCEPTS TO CATALYSTS**

Destination development also includes supporting and partnering with local agencies like the Development Corporation of Austin, Austin Area Chamber of Commerce, and City of Austin to:

- Encourage new restaurant and hotel development
- Promote new sports and recreation facilities
- Invest in signature parks and community assets
- Align infrastructure improvements with tourism growth

## **REIMAGINING THE SHOPKO SITE**

The former ShopKo site, dormant since 2019, represents one of the most visible missed opportunities in Austin. Given its proximity to the city's hotel cluster, it holds enormous potential to become a destination lifestyle and entertainment district. Imagine this space reimaged as a vibrant mixed-use hub featuring:

- A food court with local vendors and pop-up kitchens
- Family-friendly amusements or interactive attractions
- An outdoor performance space for music, art, or theater

If designed intentionally, this could become an amenity unmatched in surrounding communities—including Rochester—offering Austin a new anchor for both residents and visitors.



# CONT. STRENGTHENING THE DESTINATION

## DOWNTOWN AUSTIN: THE HEART OF THE DESTINATION

Downtown Austin is more than just a commercial district—it’s the emotional and cultural core of the community and a vital tourism asset for Austin and Mower County. The community clearly recognizes downtown’s value, and there is strong support for focusing tourism investments in this area. Concentrating festivals, farmers markets, lodging, culinary development, and public experiences in downtown offers the highest potential return on time and financial investment. Anchored by the SPAM Museum and framed by the scenic Cedar River, Downtown Austin has the bones of a premier rural destination. Now, it needs constant activation.

## MAXIMIZING THE SPAM MUSEUM’S ECONOMIC IMPACT

The SPAM Museum is an international draw with 100,544 projected visitors in 2025. According to Americans for the Arts, the average spending by a cultural tourist per museum visit is \$38.46, which translates to a potential economic impact of \$3.87 million annually. This type of visitor spending supports the growth of surrounding restaurants, boutiques, and entertainment offerings.

## RETAIL & RESTAURANT ACTIVATION STRATEGY

To create a dynamic and magnetic downtown, Austin must fill its storefronts with the right mix of retail and food establishments.

### This includes:

- Aggressive recruitment strategies to attract new restaurants and shops
- Conducting a restaurant and retail feasibility study to identify gaps and opportunities
- Appointing a lead organization—with Discover Austin at the table—to coordinate downtown development efforts with other economic and community development agencies



SOURCE: 21C MUSEUM HOTEL, BENTONVILLE, AR

SOURCE: THE OLIVER HOTEL, OXFORD, MS

## HEADS IN BEDS: THE NEED FOR HOTEL INVESTMENT

With just 400 hotel rooms, Austin lacks the mid-range to upscale accommodations needed to serve its growing tourism potential. Despite being home to Hormel Foods, the Hormel Institute, and multiple signature events, the current hotel inventory does not meet visitor expectations—especially for corporate guests, event attendees, or cultural tourists.

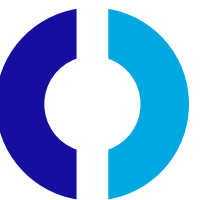
### This shortfall affects:

- Event and convention recruitment
- Visitor retention
- Corporate and academic partnerships
- Discover Austin’s ability to secure high-impact tourism and economic development opportunities

### STAR RATING

### OVERVIEW

★	_____	Basic lodging, minimal amenities
★ ★	_____	Modest accommodations with basic services
★ ★ ★	_____	Mid-range hotels with good comfort and added amenities
★ ★ ★ ★	_____ <b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	Upscale hotels with full-service dining, spa, fitness centers, and premium guest experiences
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	_____	Luxury hotels with concierge service, fine dining, and high-end experiences



## ARTS & CULTURE: A HIGH-YIELD INVESTMENT

Austin punches well above its weight in the arts and culture sector. From the Austin ArtWorks Festival to live music, theater, galleries, and maker events, the city showcases an unexpectedly rich creative community that rivals much larger urban centers. Investing and expanding Austin's arts ecosystem is not only good for community identity—it's smart economic development.

## THE ECONOMIC POWER OF CULTURAL VISITORS

- Arts & cultural tourists spend an average of \$60.57/day—twice that of local attendees.
- In 2024, the Austin ArtWorks Festival alone generated \$500,000+ in economic impact over two days.
- This impact of the arts and culture multiplies when considering the full spectrum of local events throughout the year.



# CONT. STRENGTHENING THE DESTINATION

## EATING WELL: FOOD AS IDENTITY, ECONOMY, AND EXPERIENCE

Austin and Mower County's identity as a "Food City" is more than a slogan—it is a strategic pillar in both the comprehensive plan and the tourism development roadmap. Investing in culinary entrepreneurship, expanding diverse dining options, and leveraging food as a cultural and economic asset will strengthen both quality of life for residents and Austin's attractiveness to visitors, talent, and investors.



### ACTIVATING CULINARY SPACES: FOOD TRUCK COURTS

As a first step, the community should activate underutilized lots downtown into vibrant food truck courts. These spaces provide:

- Low-barrier entries for immigrant and local food entrepreneurs
- Test kitchens for new restaurant concepts
- Cross-promotion opportunities with the Austin Farmers Market, SPAM Museum visitors, and arts and cultural events

#### Case Study:

Pensacola, FL launched a food truck incubator where operators develop loyal customer bases and are supported in transitioning into brick-and-mortar locations—often within 12 months. This model has helped fuel culinary revitalization and increased tourism engagement.



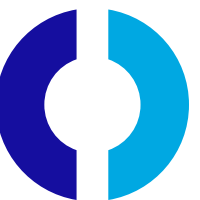
### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROWING THE CULINARY SECTOR

**Define the Opportunity and Sell the Story:** Position Austin not just as a place to eat, but as a place-based food movement people want to be a part of.

**Curate the Culinary Mix:** Recruit restaurateurs and concepts that fill market gaps, reflect the community's brand, and provide authentic, memorable experiences.

**Lower Barriers to Entry:** Provide pop-up space at public events, market insights, small business support, and streamlined permitting for:

- Outdoor dining
- Alcohol in public spaces
- Parklets and temporary installations
- Night markets and sidewalk cafes





## BE THE PLACE TO GATHER

Austin has a unique opportunity to position itself as a boutique convention and sports tournament destination—a strategy that plays to its strengths: location, affordability, and local assets like Hormel Foods, the Hormel Institute, Riverland College, and emerging culinary and cultural sectors.

### CONVENTIONS & INDUSTRY EVENTS

Rather than compete with major metros, Austin should embrace the role of an “Unconventional Convention City”—a place for small-to-medium gatherings in specialized fields:

- Agriculture & ag tech
- Healthcare & wellness
- Food innovation
- Creative industries

Bundling unique event spaces (like the Hormel Historic Home, downtown venues, and Riverland College) into event packages can attract niche events with high per-person economic impact.

### SPORTS TOURNAMENTS: A HIGH ROI OPPORTUNITY

Expanding sports infrastructure and partnering with Riverland to offer athletic space rentals could have a significant return. Nationally, families spend on average \$1,272 per tournament weekend, and a 300-person tournament could generate \$381,600 in just three days. This kind of visitor traffic not only fills hotel rooms but drives dining, retail, and entertainment spending across the region.

### COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS: CULTURE + ECONOMY

Austin’s community events are a beloved part of local life—but they also offer tremendous tourism potential. Festivals that highlight the cultural diversity and creative spirit of the region can help build Austin’s reputation as a must-visit rural destination.



## UNLOCKING GROWTH THROUGH POLICY INNOVATION

During planning workshops, Austin event producers expressed concerns that outdated regulations around alcohol sales limit event success. To modernize and support growth:

- City and County governments should pursue state waivers for outdoor events, where appropriate.
- Consider establishing a Downtown Entertainment District, where limited open-carry of alcohol is permitted within a defined zone.

### Best Practice:

Entertainment Districts Communities across the U.S. (like Mobile, AL and Duluth, MN) have seen minimal violations and increased foot traffic after implementing entertainment districts. These zones encourage longer visitor stays, support small businesses, and add vibrancy to public spaces—especially during festivals and events.



# WHY AUSTIN IS PERFECT FOR AN UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGY

## THE UNCONVENTIONAL CONVENTION CITY: A SMART PLAY FOR AUSTIN, MN

In a world dominated by massive convention centers and crowded city hotels, smaller cities like Austin, MN can win by going in a different direction—embracing the Unconventional Convention City model. Rather than trying to compete with Minneapolis, Des Moines, or Rochester, Austin can stand out by offering intimate, unique, and deeply meaningful experiences for groups that crave more than just another generic ballroom. The Unconventional Convention is all about substance, setting, and storytelling.



### These events are:

- Curated for community and connection
- Held in character-filled spaces like historic venues, museums, breweries, and outdoor settings
- Rooted in local culture, food, and authenticity
- Often focused on niche industries or passionate interest groups
- More affordable, flexible, and memorable than large-scale events



Event organizers are prioritizing meaningful locations - not just square footage. Austin offers a powerful combination of assets that make it a natural fit for unconventional conventions:

- A global brand name (Hormel/SPAM) that sparks curiosity
- A walkable, authentic downtown with arts, museums, and culture
- Beautiful natural spaces like the Cedar River and Jay C. Hormel Nature Center
- A culinary identity rooted in food production and emerging diversity
- Academic and research leadership via Riverland College and the Hormel Institute
- Affordable, safe, and welcoming atmosphere for attendees



## TARGET EVENTS & AUDIENCES FOR AN UNCONVENTIONAL CONVENTION RECRUITMENT INITIATIVE

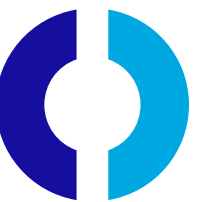
### Austin can attract:

- Small-to-midsize industry summits (food innovation, ag-tech, healthcare, wellness, sustainability)
- Creative conferences and artist residencies
- Culinary and craft food expos
- Diversity & cultural exchange events
- Youth leadership retreats
- Sports summits & training camps
- Faith-based gatherings, retreats, and non-profit conveniences

### How to make it work:

- Map out non-traditional venues: museums, schools, art spaces, breweries, nature centers.
- Bundle spaces into “convention packages” with themes like Food, Wellness, or Innovation.
- Design turnkey experiences that include lodging, local food, curated activities, and transportation.
- Invest in storytelling and branding around Austin as the “Unconventional Convention Capital of Southern Minnesota”.
- Create flexible pricing and support packages for non-profits, start-ups, and grassroots organizations.

This strategy gives Austin a lane of its own - instead, focus on charm, storytelling, and curation that offers visitors something real. With just a few tweaks in marketing, logistics, and hospitality, Austin could generate significant dollars in annual economic impact from small, powerful, high-value gatherings.



#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize downtown development through coordinated investment in lodging, retail, and cultural infrastructure.
- Invest in a downtown hotel to anchor revitalization and meet unmet demand.
- Support the arts sector as a core economic driver through funding, policy, and promotion.
- Use cultural and culinary tourism to differentiate Austin from its regional peers and elevate its statewide and national profile.
- Launch a Downtown Food Truck Court Pilot in coordination with city planners, Discover Austin and Impact Austin.
- Develop a Culinary Recruitment & Incubation Strategy aligned with the Food City initiative.
- Map and bundle unique event venues to attract niche conventions and creative summits.
- Negotiate space access agreements with Riverland College for tournaments.
- Test a Downtown Entertainment District to support downtown events and nightlife.
- Simplify permitting and streamline support for pop-ups, festivals, and outdoor dining.



#### THE PATH FORWARD

Strengthening Austin's identity as a destination means investing in brand development, creating memorable experiences, and building the infrastructure to support them. When done right, these efforts not only draw visitors—they build community pride, expand local business opportunities, and support a more resilient regional economy.



A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and a dirt path leading through them. The trees are mostly evergreens, and the path is a mix of dirt and small stones. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rectangle in the center of the image.

## ACTIVATING THE PUBLIC REALM

**“NATURE SURROUNDS US, FROM PARKS AND BACKYARDS TO STREETS AND ALLEYWAYS. NEXT TIME YOU GO OUT FOR A WALK, TREAD GENTLY & REMEMBER THAT WE ARE BOTH INHABITANTS & STEWARDS OF NATURE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.”**

**+**

**DAVID SUZUKI**

# CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PUBLIC SPACES

CIVITAS provided the following recommendations to improve connectivity of the Mower County greenway trails. Recommendations for greenway connections are encouraged to be multi-benefit and multipurpose to encourage collaboration between the County, private landowners, and partnering agencies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to collaborate with landowners along the desired route to allow for a greenway corridor that provides landowners with multipurpose and multi-benefit solutions such as windbreaks, water quality, or vegetative buffer. These improvements would be in alignment with Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, Goal 1: Clean Transportation.
- Connect the Shooting Star Trail to the Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail at the Iowa border and other county destination.
- Explore alternative incentives for landowners to deed land as greenway corridor.
- Develop landowner and business partnerships to support the processing and sale of cultivated plants in windbreaks or vegetated buffer.
- Potential productive windbreak planting: American hazelnut, American plum, black cherry, sugar maple.
- Educate landowners and farmers on the financial benefit of planting commercial cover crops for food production. Encourage the planting and cultivation of cover crops such as winter rye, winter and spring field peas. Explore funding opportunities for stream restorations and vegetated buffers.
- For future endeavors, consider connecting the Shooting Star Trail to Grand Meadows Chert Quarry and Pioneer Prairie Wind Tower Lookout and Interpretive Center.
- Improve existing sections of the Shooting Star Trail that are exposed to the elements with additional vegetation, shade, and amenities. Improvements could be leveraged as potential revenue sources through productive landscapes or tourism opportunities.

These improvements would be aligned with Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, Goal 2: Climate-Smart Natural and Working Lands.

## Potential improvements include:

- Restore a diverse native prairie buffer.
- Plant sunflowers and/or other nitrogen-fixing vegetation and cover crops in critical areas that could protect streams and groundwater.
- Expand potential tourism opportunity for a sunflower festival.
- Introduce agroforestry practices that include productive/edible plants in vegetated buffer to promote cultivation along the greenway.

## These practices could serve as potential revenue sources and enable tourist opportunities:

- Potential native productive plants: wild blueberries and raspberries, juneberries, chokecherries, maple trees, and elderberries
- Champion the production, market development, and food production of commercial cover crops in vegetated buffers and throughout farmland within the county
- Potential tourism opportunity for a harvest festival and/or the sale of locally made jams and syrups
- Place additional benches, bike repair stations, and shade shelters at critical intersections

Strengthen existing and build new partnerships with local advocacy groups, other government agencies, and businesses to promote the Shooting Star Trail as an asset for local tourism and sustainability initiatives.

## Potential partners include:

- The Border Bike event hosted by the Wapsi-Great Western Line Trail
- Prairie Visions
- Extension at University of Minnesota Community Development Department
- Riverland Community College
- Minnesota Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan. Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative
- Carbon Reduction Program. Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program's Climate Smart Farms
- Potential funding sources for trail improvements:
  - Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
  - Regional Trail Grant Program. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

As a long-term exploration, consider carbon crediting programs for all improvements mentioned above as a passive revenue stream that could provide green jobs in the management and maintenance of productive vegetated buffers.

## Potential Partners and/or Carbon Credit

### Programs:

- Chestnut Carbon
- Continuum Carbon Services
- American Forest Carbon

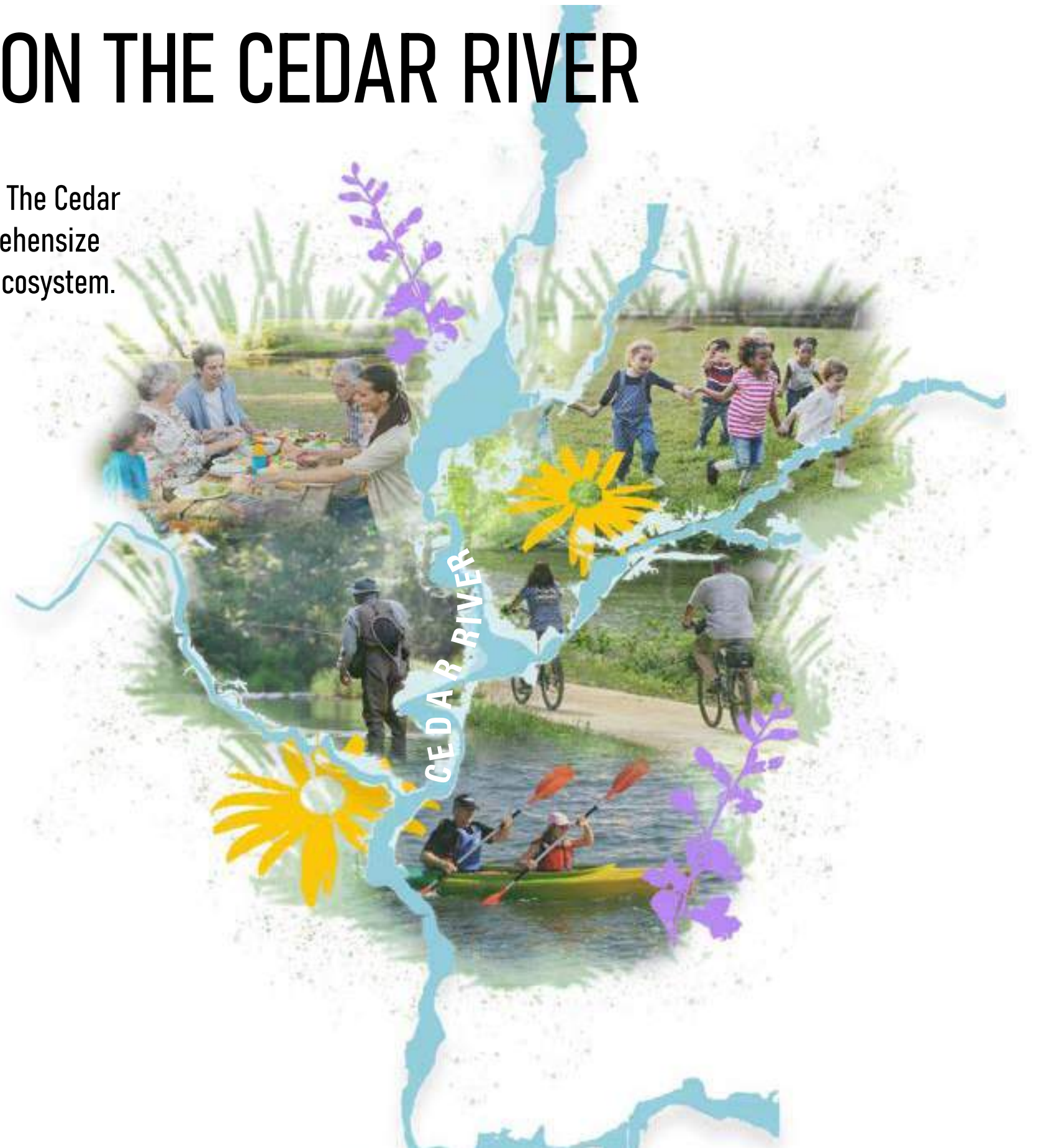
## Potential resources:

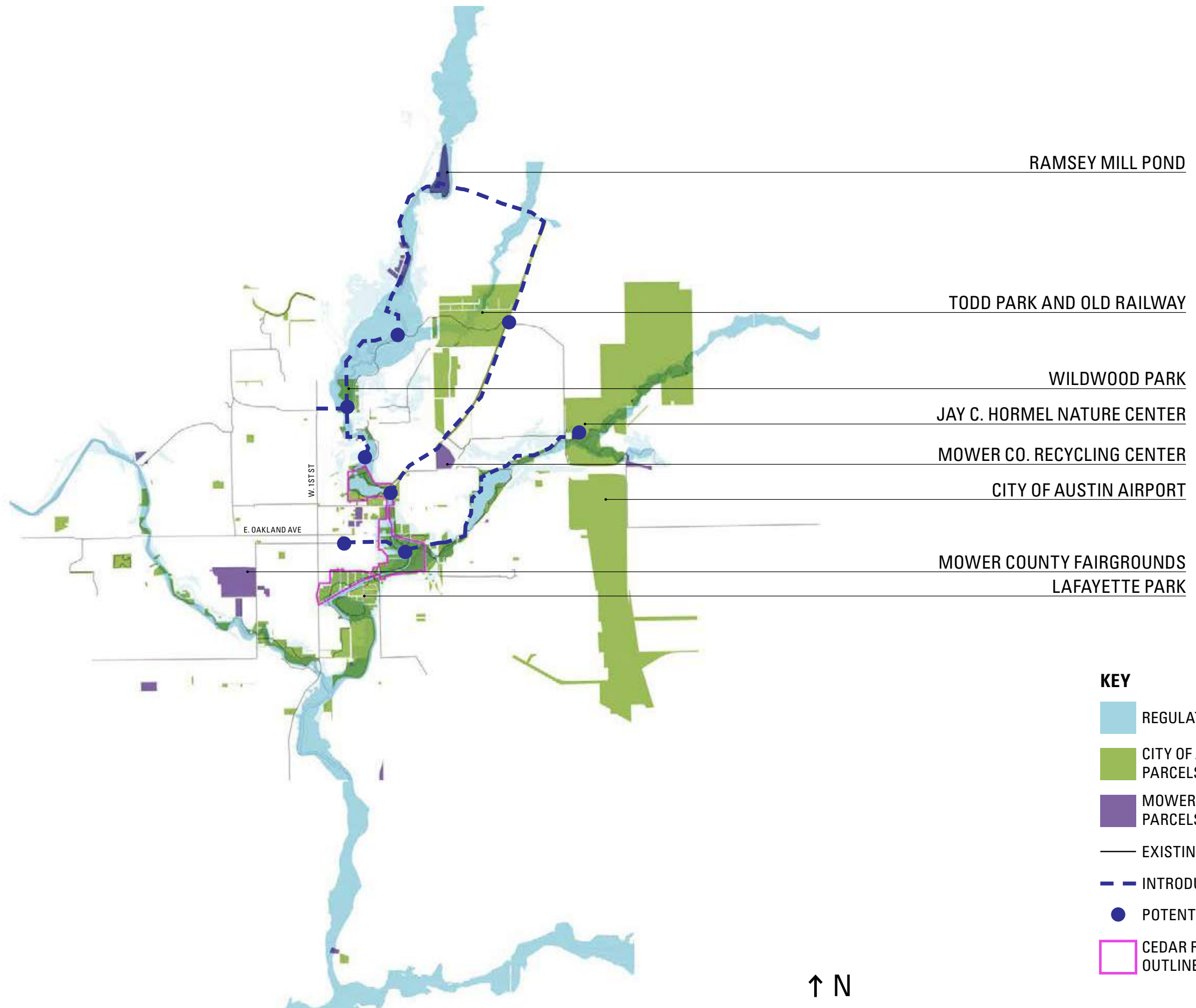
- Jim Doten. Program Manager. City of Minneapolis Carbon Sequestration Program
- Erin Kelly. Director of Sustainability and Innovation. Wayne County, MI



# A DYNAMIC COLLABORATION ON THE CEDAR RIVER

To harness the greatest potential from the recreation and scenic enjoyment of The Cedar River, Mower County and the city of Austin must collaborate to create a comprehensive approach, this will maximize the benefit for residents, visitors, and the local ecosystem.





A wooden workbench with various art supplies including paint tubes, a palette, and a pencil case. The workbench is covered in paint splatters and has a white surface in the center where the text is located. A pencil case filled with colored pencils is visible in the bottom right corner, and a palette with paint is in the bottom left corner. A tube of paint is in the center, and a small bowl of paint is in the top right corner.

# ARTS AND CULTURE

**“TO CREATE ONE’S WORLD IN ANY OF THE ARTS TAKES COURAGE.”**

**+**

**GEORGIA O’KEEFFE**

# ARTS & CULTURE AS CORE INFRASTRUCTURE

A STRATEGY FOR BELONGING, ECONOMIC VITALITY, & PLACE-BASED STORYTELLING

Arts and culture are not optional amenities in community planning—they are a foundational infrastructure for a thriving, inclusive, and future-focused city. From talent recruitment to tourism, downtown revitalization to civic pride, a robust cultural ecosystem is essential to Austin and Mower County's comprehensive vision.

## NATIONAL & STATE-LEVEL ECONOMIC IMPACT

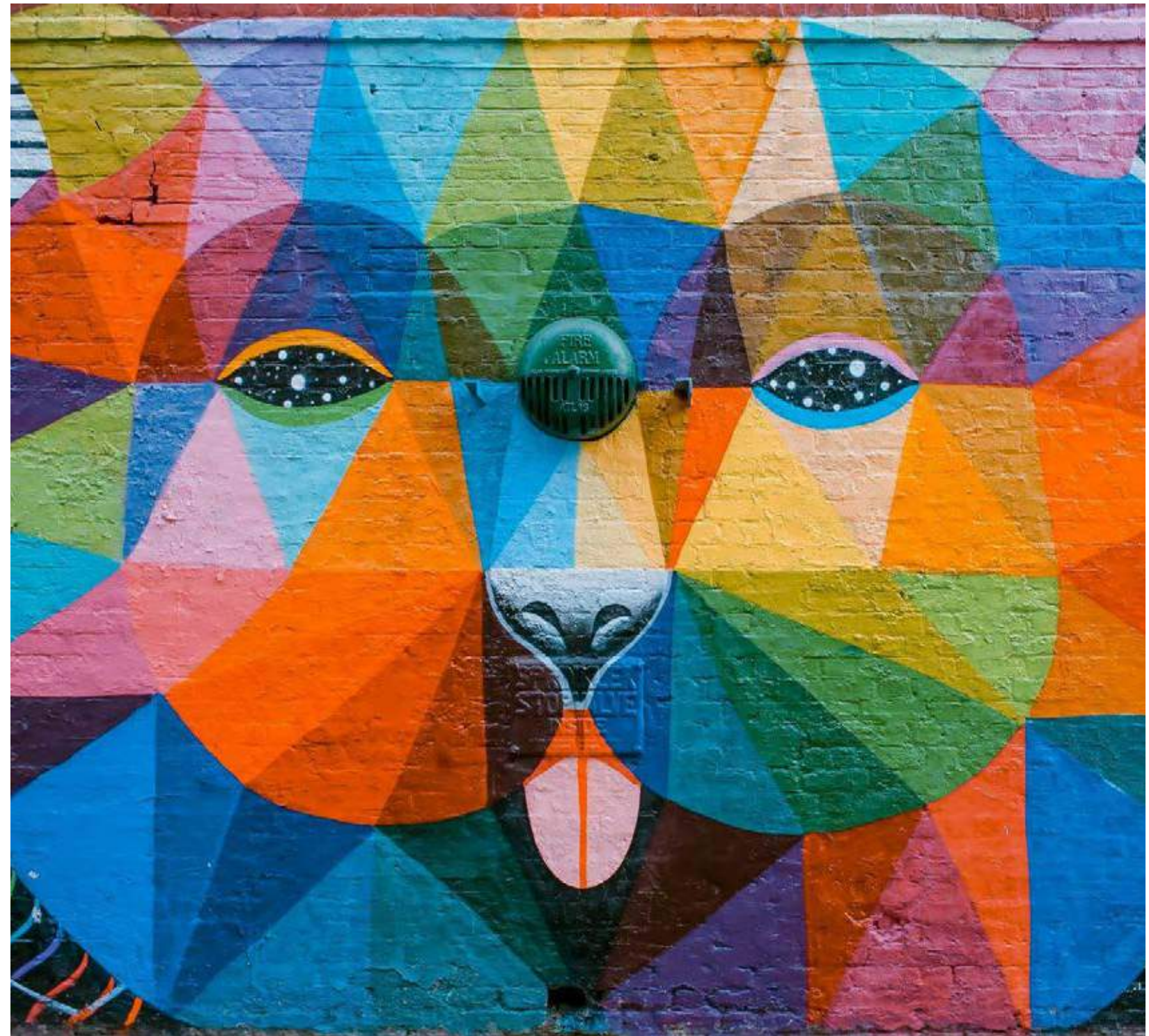
Investment in arts and culture is not just good policy—it's smart economics. The arts and entertainment sector (nonprofit + commercial) is now a \$1.02 trillion industry, supporting 4.9 million jobs and making up 4.4% of the national GDP—larger than construction, agriculture, or transportation.

According to Americans for the Arts' AEP6 Study, the nonprofit arts and culture sector in the U.S. generated:

- \$151.7 billion in total economic activity
- \$73.3B from organizational spending
- \$78.4B in event-related audience spending
- Supported 2.6 million jobs
- Provided \$101B in personal income
- Generated \$29.1B in tax revenue

## MINNESOTA SNAPSHOT

- \$12 billion economic contribution
- 3.6% of state GDP
- Supports 30,000+ artists and 1,600+ arts organizations
- Out-of-county attendees spend \$60.57 per person, double that of locals
- Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund spending generated \$41.6 million in output and 408 jobs across sectors (U of M Extension)



# LOCAL ACTION IN AUSTIN & MOWER COUNTY

As part of the comprehensive planning process, local arts leaders formed an Arts and Cultural Community of Practice, laying the groundwork for collaborative growth. From this coalition, key strategies have emerged:

## CONDUCT A CULTURAL ASSET INVENTORY

- Map all performance spaces, galleries, museums, studios, creative businesses, parks, and informal cultural spaces.
- Assess space needs in collaboration with local artists and cultural workers.
- Identify underutilized/city-owned spaces for adaptive reuse.
- Integrate arts into urban planning, zoning, and neighborhood development.
- Build and maintain a living directory of artists, makers, performers, organizations, and spaces.

## ELEVATE VISIBILITY & ACCESS

- **CREATE A CULTURAL CALENDAR & ARTIST DIRECTORY:** A single, dynamic online hub for all things creative in the region. From gallery openings to artist bios, this is where the community and visitors find what's happening.
- **BRANDING SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS & ORGANIZATIONS:** Offer workshops and 1:1 consulting on social media, PR, and branding via a centralized advocacy body or incubator.
- **LANGUAGE & ACCESSIBILITY:** Ensure all cultural programs are low- or no-cost, multilingual, and physically accessible — especially for immigrant, refugee, and disabled communities.

## STRENGTHEN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

- **ARTS & CULTURAL COORDINATOR POSITION:** Hire a dedicated staffer embedded within the City of Austin (or jointly supported by multiple entities) to align, promote, and support all creative efforts across the community.
- **TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Partner with Riverland Community College and statewide experts to offer regular workshops on grant writing, entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and nonprofit finance.
- **ART + INNOVATION:** Incentivize collaboration between artists and fields like healthcare, education, tech, and urban planning for projects with layered impact (e.g., art in healing spaces, STEAM curriculum, or placemaking).
- **IMPACT TRACKING:** Work with the Development Corporation of Austin and Discover Austin to gather and share data on the economic, social, and tourism impact of the creative sector.

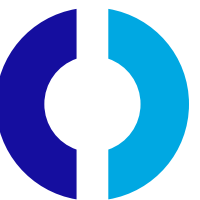
## PROMOTE ART IN THE EVERYDAY

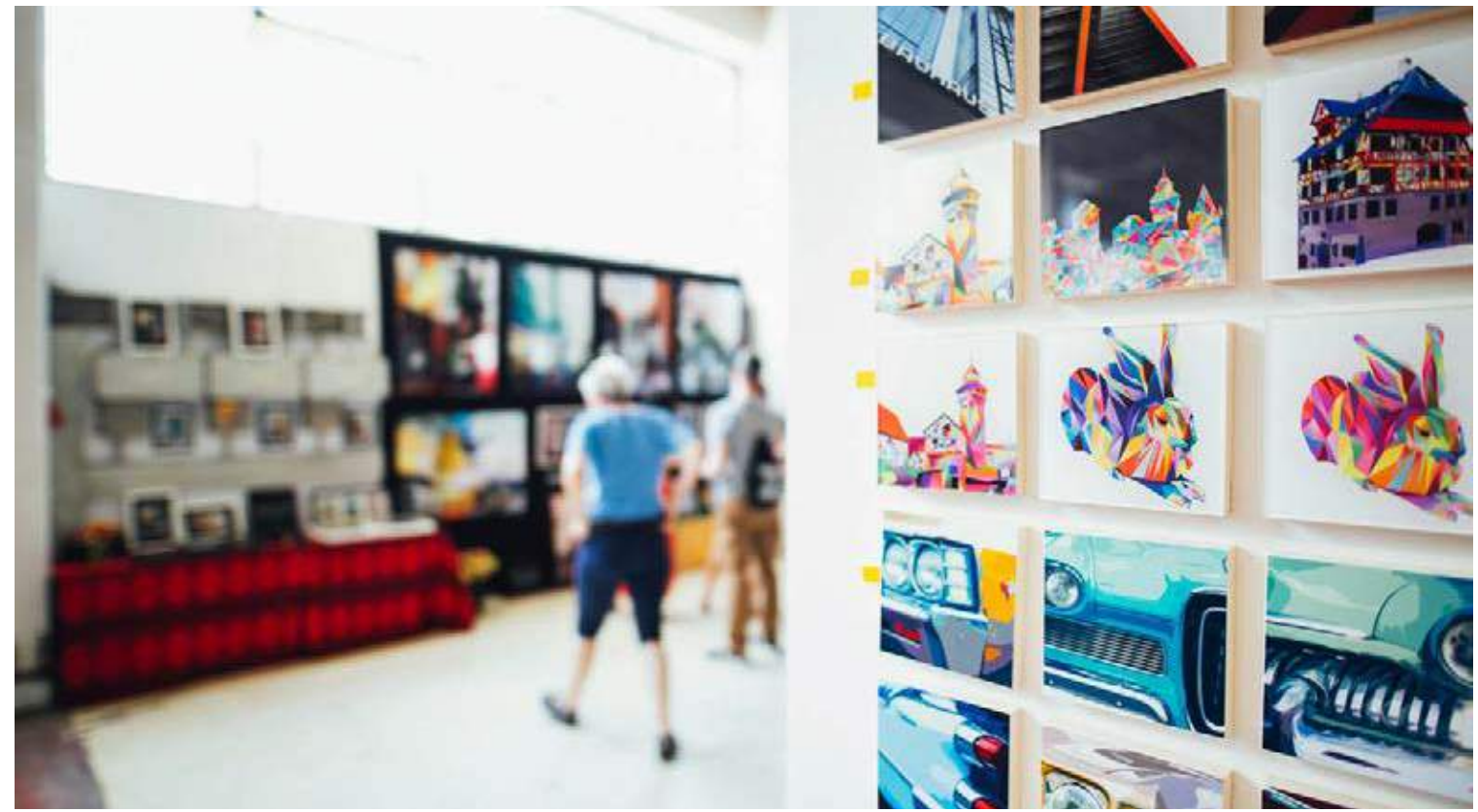
- **FUND & MAP PUBLIC ART:** Activate sidewalks, parks, bridges, buildings, schools, and even crosswalks as canvases for local creativity. Develop a digital self-guided tour experience.
- **PUSH THE MEDIUMS:** Encourage performance, sound, light, and interactive installations — not just visual art. Make room for surprise and play in public space.
- **COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY PROJECTS:** Fund joint artist/community-driven projects that reflect local history, diverse cultures, and neighborhood pride.

## GROW CREATIVE SPACES AND CULTURAL HUBS

Transform Underused Spaces: Convert vacant warehouses, schools, or libraries into studio spaces, galleries, or performance venues. Even short-term use activates neighborhoods.

- **CREATIVE CONTAINERS:** Use shipping containers or prefab pods as plug-and-play artist hubs or pop-up galleries. Prioritize areas like the Harty Mechanical site, Cedar River Farmers Market zone, or park nodes.
- **DOWNTOWN & 4TH AVENUE FOCUS:** Leverage redevelopment energy to integrate art studios, rehearsal space, galleries, and coworking areas in key buildings or as part of new developments (incentivized via tax relief or zoning bonuses).
- **EXPLORE THE YMCA:** Assess empty or underutilized areas of the YMCA and surrounding blocks for a multipurpose creative complex.







# FROM FARMLAND TO FORK

## A COMPREHENSIVE FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

**“FOOD IS EVERYTHING WE ARE. IT’S AN EXTENSION OF NATIONALIST FEELING, ETHNIC FEELING, YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY, YOUR PROVINCE, YOUR REGION, YOUR TRIBE, YOUR GRANDMA. IT’S INSEPARABLE FROM THOSE FROM THE GET-GO.”**

+

**ANTHONY BOURDAIN**

# FOOD AS A FORCE FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

## BUILDING A RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

Food brings us together. It is how we share our cultures, support healthy living, shape our communities, and fuel vibrant local economies. In Austin and Mower County, food isn't just nourishment — it's our story, our identity, and our opportunity.

A comprehensive food system strategy — one that integrates every step from seed to plate and from table to soil — offers a bold, holistic approach to community development. It connects agriculture, health, education, economic development, and equity into a single, powerful framework. And in rural communities like Austin and Mower County, this strategy can become a blueprint for resilience, innovation, and growth.

Recognizing food's power as a multi-sector economic driver, Mower County and the City of Austin are embedding a food system strategy directly into their joint comprehensive planning process — a move that positions this region as a leader in statewide and national rural innovation. By uniting goals around tourism, job creation, economic development, health equity, cultural celebration, and sustainability, this strategy ensures food is both a community catalyst and a competitive advantage.

### With assets like:

- Hormel Foods (global innovation & workforce magnet)
- The Hormel Institute (research excellence in food and health)
- A robust and diverse agricultural base
- An emerging culinary and cultural scene

Austin and Mower County are uniquely positioned to become a national hub for food-forward rural revitalization.



# CONT. FOOD AS A FORCE FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION



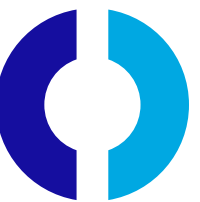
## STRATEGIC PILLARS

Each component of the food system unlocks a ripple of opportunity and collectively deepens the initiative's impact.

1. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY ATTRACTION:** Attract agricultural tech companies, research facilities, food startups, and supply chain innovators.
2. **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & CONSERVATION:** Support farmers through incentives for cover crops, soil restoration, and regenerative practices that feed both people and the land.
3. **CULINARY & CULTURAL ACTIVATION:** Develop new food destinations, pop-ups, festivals, and restaurants that reflect and celebrate the region's cultural diversity.
4. **HEALTH & PLACE-MAKING:** Activate the public realm with edible landscapes, community gardens, and "food as infrastructure" amenities that reinforce a healthy, walkable, and vibrant city.
5. **GLOBAL DIALOGUE & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP:** Host conferences and summits on food justice, innovation, and sustainability — establishing Austin as a center for global food policy and practice.
6. **INNOVATION IN PUBLIC POLICY & EDUCATION:** Integrate food into city planning, school nutrition, and economic strategies. Make Austin a national learning lab for food-forward cities.
7. **IMMIGRANT & ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT:** Build inclusive spaces like multicultural food halls, food truck incubators, and public markets where small businesses can thrive and diverse cultures can shine.
8. **LOCAL SUPPLY CHAIN STRENGTH & FOOD EQUITY:** Connect local producers to institutional buyers and global markets, create food hubs, and grow equitable access to healthy food across the county.

## FOOD IS NOT JUST ABOUT PRODUCTION — IT'S ABOUT POSSIBILITY

In Austin and Mower County, food can be a powerful tool for transformation. It's a way to improve public health, build community wealth and celebrate who Austin and Mower County are. This food systems strategy is more than a policy document — it's a bold vision for a future rooted in equity, sustainability, innovation, and joy. And in doing so, it positions this region as a national model for rural food system transformation.



# CULTIVATING THE ROOTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

## A SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING THE REGIONAL FOOD ECOSYSTEM

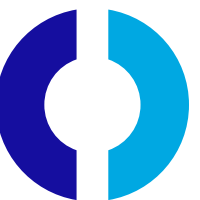
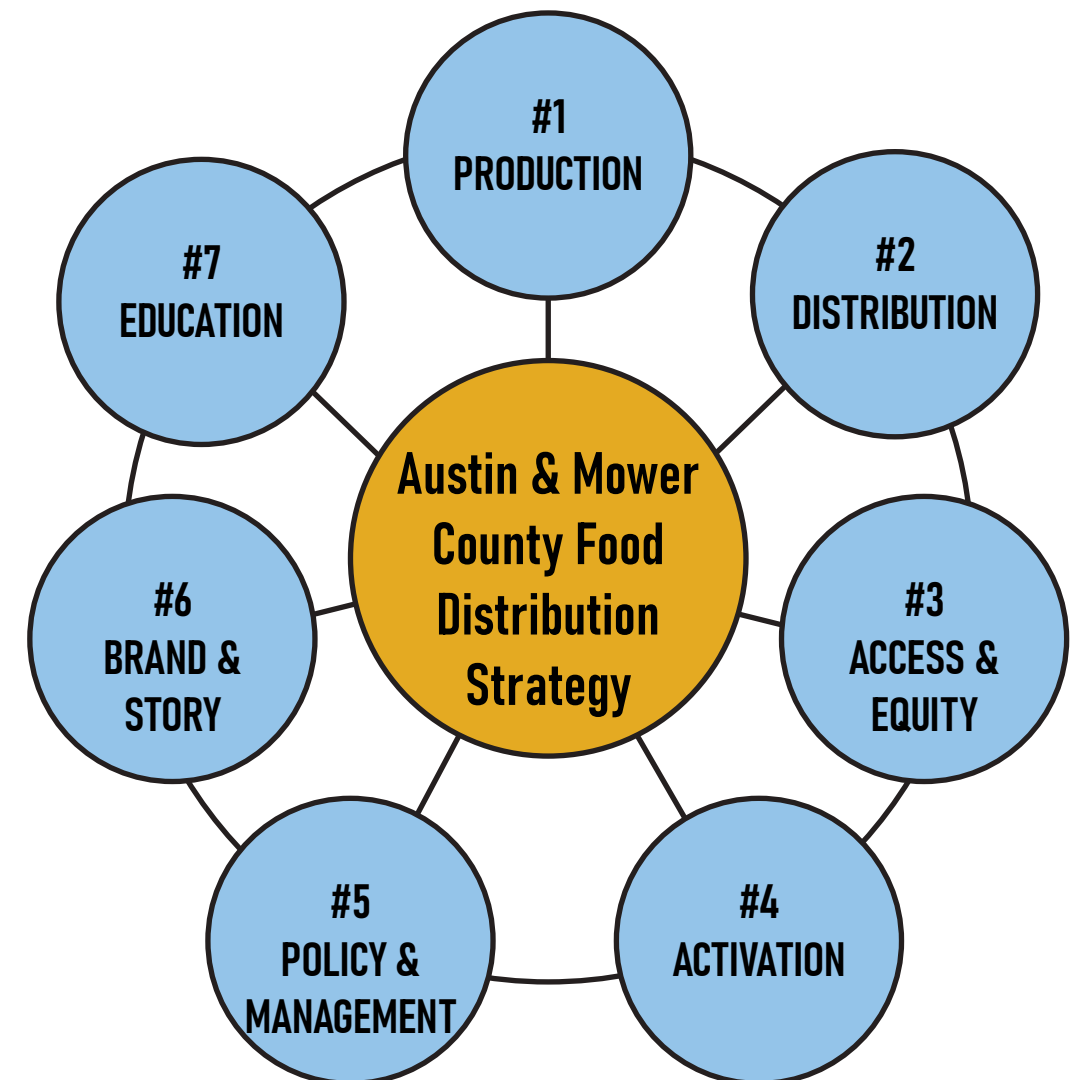
Creating a thriving food system requires more than isolated projects or single-sector investment – it demands a comprehensive, connected, and collaborative approach. In Austin and Mower County, we are recognizing the food system as an integrated ecosystem that touches health, economy, culture, environment, and identity.

To move from vision to implementation, this strategy connects existing assets, identifies critical gaps, and develops integrated cross-sector solutions that work for everyone – farmers and entrepreneurs, families and institutions, visitors and investors alike.

## THE SEVEN REALMS OF A RESILIENT FOOD ECOSYSTEM

This work is rooted in seven interconnected realms – each essential to building a sustainable and inclusive food future:

- 1. PRODUCTION:** Support a vibrant, diverse food and agriculture sector – from traditional farms to innovative producers like brewers, cheesemakers, bakers, butchers, roasters, and emerging food manufacturers. Strengthen both local and regional supply chains, including small-scale food entrepreneurship and value-added production.
- 2. DISTRIBUTION:** Invest in food distribution infrastructure that increases market access for producers, improves efficiency and logistics, and ensures local food can move easily between farms, processors, retailers, and consumers.
- 3. ACCESS & EQUITY:** Ensure all residents – regardless of income, geography, or cultural background – have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful food. Support community food programs, public transportation options, and equitable retail access.
- 4. ACTIVATION:** Celebrate and animate local food culture through farmers markets, restaurants, festivals, food trucks, and neighborhood food events that foster entrepreneurship and community participation.
- 5. POLICY & MANAGEMENT:** Align local laws, ordinances, and public systems to reduce barriers, promote innovation, and support sustainable food businesses. This includes zoning, permitting, health codes, tax policy, and public land access.
- 6. BRAND & STORY:** Develop a unified regional food identity – one that reflects the character, values, and aspirations of the community. A strong place-based brand fuels tourism, attracts talent and investment, and builds civic pride.
- 7. EDUCATION:** Grow the next generation of food leaders through robust education and workforce training. Integrate food into K-12, higher education, and adult learning pathways to expand opportunity, promote health, and power the economy.



# MOWER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PROFILE

Most of the farmland in Mower County is dedicated to a rotation of commodity crops, used for fuel and animal feed. The growing season for fresh produce is short. Efforts to increase fruit and vegetable production in the region will remain limited due to climate limitations. While small holders can significantly contribute to community food security, and commodity crop growers with an interest in fruit and vegetable production can convert portions of their land, Mower County lacks the climate to become the breadbasket of America. The overwhelming majority of produce that is grown in Mower County are vegetables, potatoes, and melons grown for processing. There are only 13 growers on 33 acres in Mower County growing fresh vegetables, potatoes and/or melons. A deeper look reveals that the vegetables for processing are primarily sweet corn (57 farms, 9,226 acres harvested), and green peas (30 farms, 2,531 acres).

Minnesota Department of Agriculture survey responses from 2022 show the average fruit producer in the Southeast MN region, including Mower County, grows 4.4 different products on 4.4 acres, while the average vegetable producer grows 19.3 products on 4.9 acres. This style of production is consistent with direct-to-consumer sales such as farmers markets, u-pick, and farm stand production.

Mower County TOTAL Fruit and Vegetable Production - Harvested 2022	
Number of Farms	79
Acres	11,517
Mower County Land in Orchards - 2022	
Number of Orchards	13
Acres	48
Mower County Fruit and Nuts - 2022	
Number of Farms	10
Acres	Data Supressed
Mower County Land in Berries - 2022	
Number of Farms	5
Acres	5
Mower County Vegetable, Potatoes and Melons Harvested for Sale - 2022	
Number of Farms - Fresh	13
Acres - Fresh	33
Number of Farms Processing	66
Acres - Processing	11,756

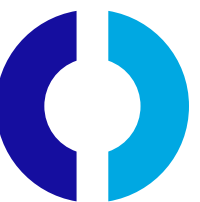
- Number of Farms: 999
- Land in farms: 380,070 acres
- Average size of farm: 380 acres
- Mower County Share of Sales by Type (%) and Value (\$)
- Crops: 66%, valued at \$348,518,000
- Livestock, poultry, and products: 34%, valued at \$180,736,000
- Livestock is overwhelmingly hog and pig production, with \$134,977,000, or approximately 75% of total sector revenue.

	Number	Percent of Total
1 to 9 acres	110	11
10 to 49 acres	268	27
50 to 179 acres	207	21
180 to 499 acres	228	23
500 to acres	72	7
1000+ acres	114	11

### CROP BREAKDOWN IN DOLLARS:

- Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas: \$335,694,000
- Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes: \$11,578,000
- Fruits, tree nuts, berries: \$142,000

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022



# MOWER COUNTY AGRICULTURE PROFILE SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES & CERTIFICATIONS

Mower County agricultural production is dominated by large scale commodity crops. Few growers are utilizing soil health practices such as no till and cover cropping. Cover cropping, which keeps roots in the ground during winter months, prevents soil erosion and improves water quality. Efforts to increase adoption of winter cover crops has failed for a plethora of reasons, principally the cost to the farmer of adding a crop without additional revenue. Subsidy programs have helped, but widespread adoption of cover crops will not happen without the commercialization of cover crops. Those growing fruits and vegetables have not joined certification programs such as Certified Naturally Grown and the National Organics Program.

	Farms	Acres	%
No till	99	11,385	10%
Reduced till	270	173,501	27%
Cover crop (excluding CRP)	67	12,958	7%



**NUMBER OF CERTIFIED NATURALLY GROWN PRODUCERS:**

Mower County: 0  
 Minnesota: 4

**NUMBER OF USDA CERTIFIED ORGANIC FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCERS:**

Mower County: 0  
 Minnesota: 0

Sources: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022; Certified Naturally Grown; USDA Organic Program

# THE IMPACT OF MOWER COUNTY GROWN

## REIMAGINING A FOOD CITY

The Food City vision celebrates the full lifecycle of food and drink—from seed to table to export—rooted in Mower County’s land, culture, and economy. This strategy champions a bold idea: that food grown and processed in Mower County can revitalize rural economies, support soil and water health, and tell a story of sustainability and place. Mower County is poised to become a leader in the next generation of food systems—where regenerative cover crops, specialty grains, and locally grown fruits and vegetables fuel a new era of food entrepreneurship, food security, and regional identity.

## A SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT PRODUCTION

While most of Mower County’s agriculture is dedicated to commodity and processing crops, there’s a small but promising base of fresh fruit and vegetable growers.

### By the numbers:

- There are 380,070 acres in agricultural production in Mower County
- 57 farms, totaling 9,226 acres are dedicated to sweet corn for processing
- 30 farms, covering 2,531 acres, grow green peas for processing
- Only 33 farms on 66 acres grow fresh produce (vegetables, potatoes, melons) for local and national consumption

While this signals an opportunity for a regional food system rooted in small-scale, high-diversity production—particularly fruits and vegetables—the commodity crop growers would be transitioning different growing systems to accommodate part of this strategy. The incentive to move in this directions expands dramatically with the right infrastructure, policies, and market incentives.

## SMALL ACREAGE, BIG POTENTIAL

### According to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (2022):

- The average fruit producer in Southeast MN (including Mower) grows 4.4 different products on 4.4 acres
- The average vegetable producer grows 19.3 different crops on 4.9 acres

### These small-acreage, high-diversity models are perfectly suited to:

- Farmers markets & CSA programs
- Farm-to-institution supply chains
- Agri-tourism and u-pick operations
- Cottage food production and local food hubs

\*recognize institutions may need certain certifications for purchase, which may exceed capacity of small growers

By scaling these systems—and supporting them with policies, education, and funding—Mower County can boost food security, create jobs, and circulate more food dollars locally.

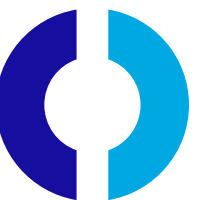
## The Vision Moving Forward

Mower County’s future food economy isn’t just about what’s grown—it’s about how it’s grown, who it serves, and what story it tells.

### Imagine:

- A local brewery pouring Kernza ale with a story rooted in regenerative farming
- A bakery featuring hazelnut scones and rye bread grown by local producers
- A downtown co-op selling Mower-branded products with a regional label
- School cafeterias sourcing salad bar items
- Families accessing affordable produce grown just down the road

Together, these outcomes create a resilient, place-based food system—one that connects soil to supper, tradition to innovation, and local farms to the global stage.



# EXAMPLE INITIATIVES



## **NORTHWEST ARKANSAS FOOD SYSTEM INITIATIVE – PHILANTHROPY-LED**

### **BUILDING A FOOD SYSTEM THAT SERVES AS A MODEL FOR LOCALLY GROWN FOOD**

The Walton Family Foundation invested in food systems planning, pilot programs, and infrastructure investment following a strategic systems-based approach. Northwest Arkansas has a rich farming heritage, and for much of the 20th century, its dedicated farmers were some of the country's most prolific growers of fruits and vegetables. While the region has experienced renewed interest in small-scale farming over the past decade, an aging farm workforce and the rising cost of land have made farming inaccessible for too many residents. As consumer demand grows for local produce, and recent crises highlight the essential role farmers play in the food chain, Walton Family Foundation's Northwest Arkansas Food System Initiative supports local growers from seed to form, connecting new and existing farmers to educational opportunity, land, technical assistance and capital. It also improves farmers' access to wholesale and direct-to-consumer markets by supporting programs that provide certifications along with aggregation, sales and distribution, and processing services.

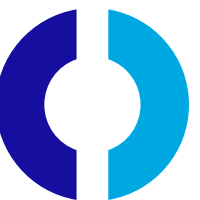
## **MASSACHUSETTS FOOD POLICY COUNCIL – GOVERNMENT-LED**

The Council works to increase farming and sales of Massachusetts grown foods and to support programs to bring healthy foods to everyone in the state. Protecting land and water is important, as well as training for farmers and workers in the food system. Created by statute in 2010, the Council created a comprehensive food system plan to address the opportunities and challenges of our State's local food system. The Council established four general goals for the plan; Increase production, sales, and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods; Create jobs and economic opportunity in food and farming and improve the wages and skills of food system workers; Protect the land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing, and ensure food safety; Reduce hunger and food insecurity, increase the availability of healthy food to all residents, and reduce food waste.



## **VERMONT FARM TO PLATE – GOVERNMENT-LED**

Vermont Farm to Plate is Vermont's food system plan being implemented statewide to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector, improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape and improve access to healthy food for all Vermonters. When Vermont Farm to Plate launched in 2009, it was estimated that about 5% (about \$114 million in sales) of the food Vermonters consume annually was produced in Vermont. At that time there were 58,000 Vermonters employed in the food system across 11,221 farm and food enterprises. The sector's total economic output was estimated at \$9.3 billion. After 10 years, local food sales were doubled to 10%, or 481 million annually; total economic output of food and farm sector was increased to \$14.2 billion; 300 net new farm and food businesses were created; and 62,000 Vermonters were employed in the food system. Vermont took a soil-to-soil approach, taking action across every part of the food system (i.e., farm inputs, production, processing, distribution, retailing, and nutrient management).



# PRODUCTION STRATEGY

## VISION STATEMENT

Mower County and Austin are regional and national leaders in regenerative agriculture and local food production. We cultivate a seed-to-table economy rooted in cover crop innovation, post-harvest processing, and value-added food manufacturing—strengthening our soil and waterways while growing a robust retail and culinary ecosystem. At the same time, we elevate public health and economic opportunity through the expansion of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

### 1. Consume Cover Crops

- Make Mower County the center of edible cover crop production and supply chain processes

### 2. Grow Local Food Everywhere

- Increase local fruit and vegetable production in Austin and Mower County to enhance community food security and build local supply chains

### 3. Help Food Entrepreneurs Grow

- Create an incubator space where aspiring food entrepreneurs can develop their own food brands using locally sourced ingredients from the garden

## A STRATEGY TRIAD FOR FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE

The production component of the Mower County Food System Strategy focuses on three distinct but complementary goals:

- Advance the development, commercialization, and market infrastructure for large scale cover crops used in food and beverage production.
- Expand local fruit and vegetable farming to improve food access, support small-scale agriculture, and feed the community.
- Grow the opportunity for food makers and manufacturers to utilize local produce to expand their businesses.

Together, these efforts create a dynamic agricultural ecosystem that supports both economic opportunity and community wellbeing—building a food system that works across scales, seasons, and sectors.

## COMMERCIALIZING COVER CROPS FOR FOOD, NOT JUST FEED

Today, most cover crops lack a viable commercial market and are planted only with government subsidy. But, a game-changing opportunity exists by turning climate-smart crops into profitable, marketable food products. The Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota is leading the charge in developing cover crops with commercial potential, such as Kernza® (a perennial grain), Hazelnuts, Elderberries & Aronia Berries, Winter Barley, Winter Rye, and Winter Wheat.



# ACTIVATING THE VISION

To build a regenerative, resilient, and locally rooted food system, Mower County will lead a bold multi-year strategy focused on the adoption, processing, commercialization, and utilization of commercial cover crops and locally grown fruits and vegetables. This work will fuel new economic opportunities, enhance community food security, and position the region as a national model for place-based food innovation.

## 1. Consume Cover Crops

### Build a Strategic Roadmap for Cover Crop Commercialization

- Develop a clear, phased strategy for the introduction, testing, post-harvest processing, and marketing of select regenerative edible cover crops.
- Collaborate with research institutions like Forever Green, farmers, entrepreneurs, and processors to ensure product-market fit and market readiness.

### Strengthen Supply Chain Infrastructure

- Identify and fill critical supply chain gaps to support local and regional commercialization of cover crops (e.g., seed cleaning, aggregation, transportation, milling)
- Attract and fund businesses that create jobs, build resilience, and increase economic self-sufficiency in the region

### Expand Adoption Among Large-Scale Farms

- Incentivize and support large farms in adopting edible regenerative cover crops through targeted technical assistance, market development, and guaranteed demand from local and global buyers
- Collaborate with existing ag networks to support downstream investment in processing and product development

### Build Post-Harvest Processing Capacity

- Develop and/or attract investment in shared-use and scalable processing facilities that support food safety compliance, shelf-life preservation, and product quality for start-up and early-stage food businesses.
- Prioritize projects that increase immediate potential for investment and support local products reach larger markets by engaging brokers and buyers in an awareness campaign

### Lead Whole Supply Chain Development for Cover Crops

- Design a full ecosystem approach—from soil to shelf—for cover crop integration across Mower County, prioritizing crops with environmental, nutritional, and economic value.
- Key goals include:
  - Increase soil and water health through cover crop adoption
  - Grow farmer revenue through viable market outlets
  - Add new businesses in cleaning, milling, packaging, transportation, and feed applications
  - Launch new retail and food manufacturing enterprises based on these crops (e.g. Kernza bakers, pea-protein snacks, nut-based spreads)

## 2. Grow Local Food Everywhere

### Expand Local Fruit & Vegetable Production

- Increase production of fruits and vegetables for community consumption
- Expand climate-controlled systems like greenhouses to extend the growing season
- Offer targeted support for new farmers, urban growers, and alternative models such as vertical farming and hydroponics
- Build supports for community food programs such as urban agriculture, community gardens, hospital and food pantry farms
- Help commodity crop growers transition small acreage to specialty crops

### Increase Community Access & Food Security

- Improve distribution through farmers markets, aggregation hubs, and food access initiatives.
- Leverage government and philanthropic funding to build lasting infrastructure for local food access and equitable distribution.
- Ensure availability of SNAP, WIC, and other state and local programs such as FNPP and VeggieRx

## 3. Help Food Entrepreneurs Grow

### Support Local Food & Beverage Makers

- Support and attract culinary entrepreneurs creating culturally distinct, high-quality food and beverage products—especially those using locally grown ingredients
- Support cottage food producers using locally grown ingredients, serving culturally relevant, or health-promoting foods.
- Build pipelines between producers and end users for fresh produce and consumable cover crops (e.g. bakers, brewers, distillers, food manufacturers)

### Impact-Driven Goals by 2045

- **50% increase** in Mower County croplands in regenerative edible cover cropping systems
- **Significant growth** in average farmer revenue from new cover crop-based supply chains
- **Attract or create 10+** new food-related businesses in Mower County (processing, retail, manufacturing)
- **Double the availability** of locally grown fruits and vegetables in schools, markets, and nonprofit food programs
- **Link production to community** through local branding, storytelling, and market access

# STRATEGY 1: CONSUME COVER CROPS

## ACTION ITEMS:

- Organize working group to include Forever Green, local farmers, conservation organizations, and economic development professionals to identify specific crops.
- Develop supply chain map, understanding both upstream and downstream needs, existing infrastructure, and gaps.
- Create economic development plan to build out, support entrepreneurs, and attract critical businesses.
- Work with farmers and farmer support organizations to develop a phased plan to test crops and implement adoption.
- Increase educational offerings and entrepreneurial supports relating to culinary uses for crops including distilling, brewing, baking at both small scale and manufacturing scale of production.
- Work with food manufacturers beyond Mower County to ensure adequate markets for new crops.
- Work with hog industry to adopt cover crops into animal feed.

## KEY ORGANIZATIONS IN WHOLE SUPPLY CHAIN DEVELOPMENT FOR COVER CROPS

- Forever Green
- UMN Pea Plant Protein Group
- AURI
- CFANS/FAARM
- Riverland Community College
- FAARM
- Hormel, suitability of these crops in hog feed
- Naturally MN
- Local economic development organizations
- MN Soil Health Coalition
- Soil and Water Conservation District – Steve Lawler
- TJ Kartes, Cover crop seed dealer
- UMN Extension – farmer outreach, education
- NRCS
- Farmers already growing cover crops: Ruth Jovaag-Ofstedal, Tom Cotter
- Land Stewardship Partnership
- GreenSeam
- Minnesota Farmers Union
- Artisan Grain Collaborative
- Renewing the Countryside (already working on elderberries)

## EXAMPLES



The report *Putting Down Roots*, analyzing the environmental and economic benefits of continuous living cover for Minnesota's farmers, water and climate found that continuous living crops could support an increase in both total on-farm gross revenues (+3%) and net returns (+20%).



The projected regional economic impact for every acre of Kernza® production is approximately \$92 of additional local economic activity supported in Minnesota if the flour miller in Minnesota purchased only Kernza® grown in Minnesota. By purchasing exclusively Minnesota grown grain, the job multiplier for a flour mill in Minnesota increases from 7.99 to 8.24: an additional .25 jobs are supported for every one job that exists in a flour mill buying only Minnesota grain.



### **SUPPORT REGIONAL PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Back the development of facilities provide necessary post-harvest cleaning, storage, and milling.
- Identify additional infrastructure gaps (e.g. drying, roasting, pressing, packaging) and attract investment or public-private partnerships to fill them.
- Mower County's strong animal agriculture sector creates a built-in market for cover crops that don't meet human food-grade standards, supporting the overall financial viability of the system.
- Emerging initiatives like the FAARM program at the University of Minnesota further strengthen local processing by offering research and development capacity around animal feed innovation and cross-sector applications.

### **DEVELOP THE DOWNSTREAM ECONOMY**

- Encourage and incubate local makers and manufacturers (e.g., bakers, brewers, distillers, snack food producers) to incorporate cover crops into products.
- Prioritize support for entrepreneurs that elevate these crops through branding, innovation, and connection to local food narratives.

### **ALIGN SUPPLY CHAIN PLAYERS**

- Convene stakeholders across the chain: farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, institutional buyers, researchers, and funders.
- Work closely with the Forever Green Initiative (UMN) to align crop development with real-world market potential.

### **ATTRACT FUNDING & POLICY SUPPORT**

- Pursue USDA, state, and philanthropic investment to fund supply chain infrastructure, farmer incentives, and market development.
- Explore incentives or loan programs for farmers transitioning acreage to regenerative edible crops.

## **STRATEGIC IMPACT**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Cover crops reduce erosion, capture carbon, and protect waterways—making agriculture more climate-resilient.

### **ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION**

Commercializing these crops adds new revenue streams for farmers and new industries for Mower County.

### **FARMER VIABILITY**

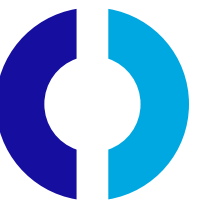
Transitions become possible when there are markets for what's grown—not just subsidies for planting.

### **RURAL REVITALIZATION**

Processing, packaging, and product development can be based in Mower County, bringing jobs and innovation to the region.

### **EXPORT & LOCAL USE**

These crops have potential to serve both local culinary entrepreneurs and national markets, creating an ecosystem rooted in place but outward-looking.



# STRATEGY 2: GROW LOCAL FOOD EVERYWHERE

Despite its deep agricultural roots, Mower County produces very little fresh produce for local consumption. Most of the region's vegetable acreage is dedicated to sweet corn and green peas grown for canning, not for fresh markets or community access. This creates a unique opportunity to catalyze small-scale fruit and vegetable production—both for community-based food access and commercial markets. With strategic partnerships and scalable pilot programs, the region can grow a resilient, place-based food system that serves both its economic and public health goals.

## This strategy addresses the following opportunities:

- Improves public health through increased access to fresh, nutritious food
- Increases economic opportunity for beginning and small-scale farmers
- Builds regional food security and local supply chain resilience
- Reduces reliance on distant supply chains, a lesson emphasized by COVID-19 disruptions
- Fosters community self-sufficiency through neighborhood-level food systems

## UNDERSTAND MARKET DEMAND & FOSTER INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

- Conduct a market demand assessment with schools, hospitals, food shelves, retailers, and restaurants.
- Facilitate advance purchase commitments to de-risk growers' investments in new crops.
- Frame this as a cooperative endeavor, focused on shared outcomes—not just profit.

## SUPPORT SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY GROWING SPACES

- Develop and expand community gardens, school gardens, and farm-to-institution growing spaces
- Identify underutilized land (public or private) for food-growing potential.
- Provide technical assistance and small grants for tools, soil improvement, and infrastructure.
- Organize working group to include local growers, farmers market, food security organizations, Riverland Community College, Master Gardeners, public schools and health care.
- Create a strategy for investment in strategically placed urban greenhouses to provide a controlled environment for year-round growing, with particular focus on those high-value crops to help offset initial capital and ongoing operating expenses.

## PARTNER WITH ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

- Facilitate purchase agreements between local growers, schools (farm-to-school), hospitals and senior facilities (farm-to-institution), food pantries and community kitchens (farm-to-food pantry) and integrate culturally appropriate produce to meet diverse community needs.

## DEVELOP A LOCAL FOOD HUB

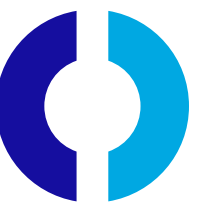
- Co-locate aggregation and distribution infrastructure for local small production farmers with the ideal location adjacent to the Austin Farmers Market.
- Partner with agencies like Renewing the Countryside and others to develop food hub.
- Provide a revenue-generating outlet for growers and a consistent supply for institutions and food access programs.
- Provide commercial kitchens where individuals can prepare value-added products such as jams, sauces, canned goods, pickles, and fermented foods. These products can be sold at local markets, online, or in partnership with retailers.
- Create an incubator space where aspiring food entrepreneurs can develop their own food brands using locally sourced ingredients from the garden. Provide training on product development, packaging, marketing, and sales.

## ENCOURAGE ENTRY OF COMMERCIAL GROWERS INTO FRESH MARKET CHANNELS

- Offer business planning support, mini-grants, and market development tools for growers transitioning to fresh produce.
- Partner with Riverland Community College or other educational entities to provide training on High tunnel or climate-controlled growing, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and crop planning and marketing.

## LEVERAGE REGIONAL FOOD HUBS AND AGGREGATORS

- Expand Austin and Mower County's participation in The Good Acre's and Shared Ground Cooperative aggregation and distribution network.
- Create a path for local growers to scale up sales beyond Mower County without major infrastructure investment.



## URBAN FARMS, AGRICULTURE INCUBATORS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS AS BOTH PRODUCTION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Community gardens are more than just places to grow food — they are micro-economic engines, community gathering spaces, and catalysts for health, education, and entrepreneurship. By aligning these gardens with local markets, public health programs, and economic development goals, Austin and Mower County can unlock new layers of impact across multiple sectors.

### URBAN FARMS & AGRICULTURE INCUBATORS AS PRODUCTIVE FOOD HUBS

- Prioritize growing high-demand, culturally relevant crops such as herbs, leafy greens, tomatoes, peppers, and berries that perform well in small-scale intensive production.
- Integrate diversified crops to serve a broad customer base, including WIC and SNAP recipients, seniors, and immigrant communities.
- Offer CSA-style subscriptions or “pick-your-own” options to nearby residents, allowing for revenue generation and stronger community engagement.
- Partner with local chefs, schools, and healthcare providers to grow specific crops for their use, creating “hyper-local” food supply chains.
- Edible landscaping in parks and along trails can be a part of this opportunity with an operations agreement for maintain and harvesting with a local neighborhood group or non-profit organizations as managing partners.

### ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITY

- Pair urban farms, greenhouses and agriculture incubators with business training and support services through Riverland Community College, Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), or nonprofit partners.
- Enable producers to become cottage food manufacturers, using crops to make jams, pickles, sauces, teas, etc..
- Offer micro-grants or mini-loans to help producers to activate the greenhouses with the tools, seeds, packaging for resale.
- Establish mentorships with farmers market vendors and local food entrepreneurs to share best practices and build capacity.

### COMMUNITY GARDENS SITING

- Locate gardens on underutilized city-owned land, vacant lots, or city parks (see parks walkability map to help strategize best locations) near Food pantries, SNAP-friendly grocers or bodegas, housing complexes or community centers and public parks.
- Plot size, rules and management agreements will be driven by neighborhood context and user needs.

### IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

- Centralize Management and Operations: Ties the management of the gardens to the farmers market program to create an aligned produce pipeline and generate revenue for both market and urban gardner.
- Create a Land Access Program: Identify and map available public land suitable for gardens; provide low-barrier leases or usage agreements.
- Establish a Garden Development Toolkit: Include soil testing, water access, fencing, raised beds, and community engagement templates.
- Launch a Garden-to-Market Pilot: Start with one to two flagship gardens to test market linkage and develop the model.
- Develop a Garden Entrepreneurship Program: Partner with local colleges and nonprofits to teach basic business skills, marketing, pricing, and value-added production.



# KEY PARTNERS

Organize working group to include local growers, farmers market, food security organizations, Riverland Community College, Master Gardeners, public schools and health care.

- Understand potential market demand and size; buyers will need to make commitments before growers will put seeds in the ground: this is a cooperative – not capitalist-- endeavor.
- Provide educational opportunities, access to garden plots/land, tools and capital.
- Leverage government and philanthropic funding to support community food security and health by purchasing locally grown produce.
- Partner with existing food hubs and community food security organizations such as Renewing the Harvest and The Good Acre rather than try to build it all independently.
- Fill remaining supply chain gaps: cold storage, last mile transportation.

## KEY PARTNERS IN EXPANDING PRODUCTION OPPORTUNITIES

### EDUCATION & GROWER DEVELOPMENT

- Riverland Community College
- Mower County Master Gardeners
- Austin High School agriculture and FACS programs

### FOOD SECURITY & NUTRITION

- Hometown Food Security Project
- Hunger Solutions
- Mayo Clinic Health System (Community Health Initiatives)

## FUNDERS & SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

### FEDERAL SOURCES (PENDING/FLEXIBLE)

- USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA)
- Local Food for Schools (LFS)
- Farm to School, Farm to Early Care and Education
- USDA AMS Grants
- EPA Environmental Justice and Food Waste Prevention programs

### STATE SOURCES

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- AGRI Farm to School and ECE
- Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant

### PHILANTHROPIC OPPORTUNITIES:

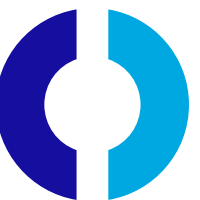
- Hormel Foundation
- Chef Ann Foundation
- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF)
- Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation

### FOOD DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

- Renewing the Countryside
- The Good Acre
- Local grocery and co-op stores

### LOCAL RETAIL PARTNERS

- Facilitate farmer–retailer partnerships for year-round local produce sales
- Include culturally significant crops to serve diverse communities



# COMMUNITY GARDENS AS BOTH PRODUCTION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Today, most farmland in Mower County is dedicated to a traditional rotation of commodity crops—primarily corn and soybeans—used for animal feed and fuel. While this system has supported economic stability, it also leaves soils bare and vulnerable during winter months, accelerating erosion and degrading water quality. No other rural region has yet committed to a full seed-to-table strategy for regenerative cover crops. Mower County can lead the way—and reap the economic benefits of owning the supply chain.

Winter cover crops offer a powerful solution to these environmental challenges. However, farmer adoption remains limited, primarily due to the lack of commercial markets. Without a clear return on investment, cover crops remain an added cost rather than an economic opportunity. To achieve widespread adoption, Mower County must not only encourage on-farm planting of cover crops—but also build a robust supply chain that enables their commercial use in food and beverage production, animal feed, and beyond.

But adoption has been slow. Why?

High upfront costs and a lack of guaranteed markets make these crops risky.

Government subsidy programs have helped, but long-term success depends on commercial viability—not incentives alone.

## THE CASE FOR SUPPLY CHAIN COMMITMENT

The opportunity lies in taking a systems-based approach—not just promoting cover crop use, but simultaneously building the infrastructure, markets, and partnerships necessary to make them profitable.

This includes:

- Developing crops that have dual-use value (human and animal consumption)
- Supporting farmers in adoption and transition
- Building post-harvest processing capacity
- Attracting manufacturers and entrepreneurial ventures
- Connecting to local and export markets

## COMMERCIALIZE COVER CROPS WITH MARKET POTENTIAL

- Focus on regenerative, dual-purpose crops that improve soil health and offer market value for human consumption or value-added products:
  - + Currently explored: Oats, Kernza®, winter rye, winter wheat, yellow field peas
  - + Emerging opportunities: Hazelnuts, elderberries

### EXAMPLE 1: NYC GreenThumb



Turning vacant city-owned lots into vibrant gardens

- Residents identify vacant lots and determines ownership online
- GreenThumb helps negotiate with the city, registers garden and provides education and support
- Gardeners are considered 'stewards' of the land and are not safe from eviction

### EXAMPLE 2: Springfield Community Gardens, Springfield MO



Springfield Community Gardens works with a network of volunteer community gardens and market farms to grow healthy food, build relationships, and generate social capital with each new garden. It connects neighborhood leaders in Springfield, Missouri, with available land and provides technical assistance and a living wage to beginning farmers through apprenticeship and internship programs. It currently operates 16 community gardens, 3 urban farms, a community food forest, and test kitchen.

# CONT. COMMUNITY GARDENS

AS BOTH PRODUCTION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY



## COMMUNITY COLLEGE-OPERATED COMMUNITY GARDENS

- **INVER HILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE (INVER GROVE HEIGHTS, MN):** garden plots for community college and broader community
- **KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE (BROOKLYN, NY):** operated by community college office of workforce development, open to college and broader community



## GROWING GARDENS

- Growing Gardens manages more than 535 individual community garden plots across eleven locations in Boulder County, CO
- Each garden is managed in partnership with a resident Garden Leader (or multiple Garden Leaders) who serve as resources for the individual gardeners
- Fees for users, discounted for low income residents



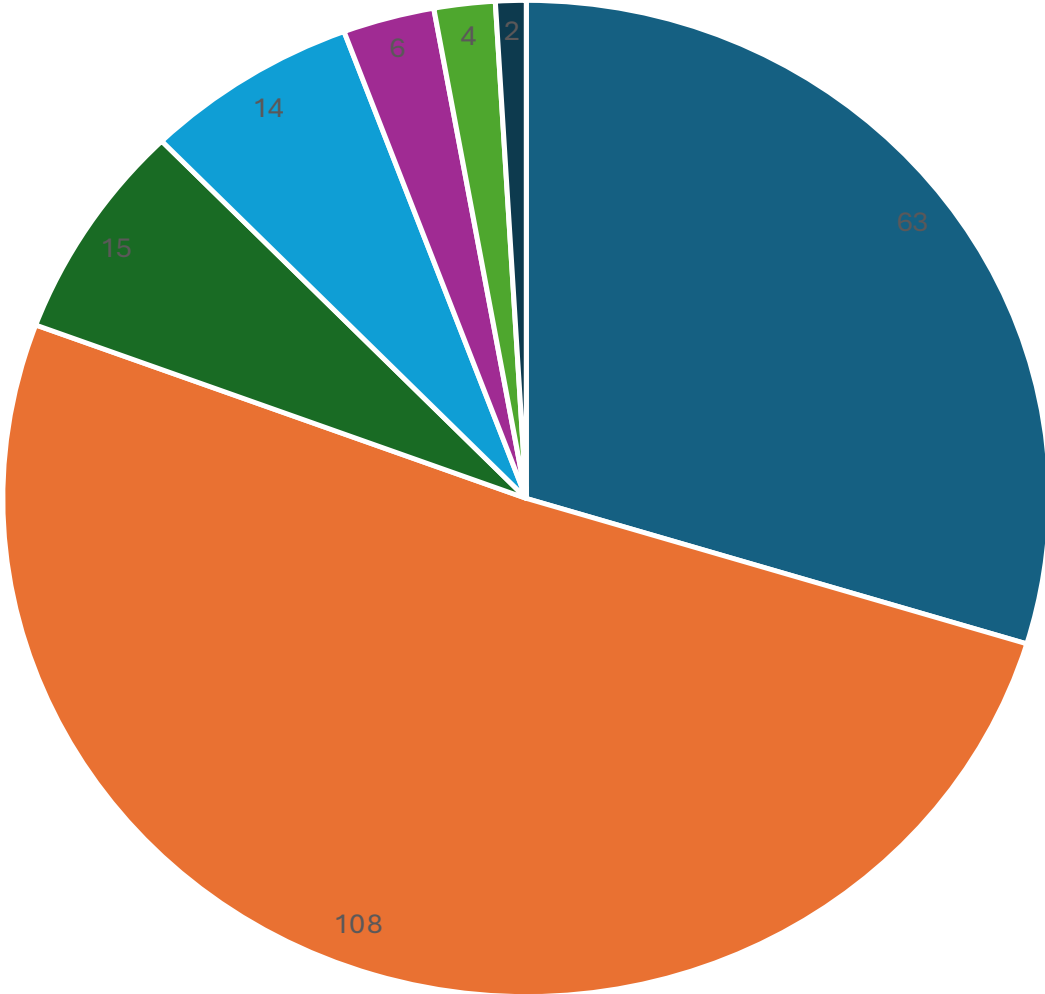
# STRATEGY 3: HELP FOOD ENTREPRENEURS GROW

Austin has a significant number of food businesses, ranging from cottage food producers making food from home to the international scale of Hormel and everything in between. In Mower and adjacent communities, there are 63 cottage food producers, for example, Oh Fudge in Rush City, The Treat Wag'n in St. Paul, Gingersnap Vegan Bakery in Moorhead and The Freeze Dried Barn in Lakeville. This list can be utilized as a business recruitment and retention asset. These home-based food entrepreneurs typically provide additional income to the household, are self-motivated receiving little support from programs that support entrepreneurs, and often fill a niche demand in the community.

The success of a food city vision relies not just on increasing agricultural production to meet the needs of community food security and to expand large-scale production in economically and environmentally important ways, but also on providing a framework for helping food entrepreneurs grow.

**THE KITCHEN DOOR** maintains the most comprehensive listings of shared use commercial kitchens across the United States. There are zero listings within a 50 -mile radius of Austin. The lack of access to commercial equipment is a barrier to growth for beginning entrepreneurs. Commercial production space and equipment are expensive. Scaling from a home-based production is not viable without the physical infrastructure and business education.

Food Licenses by Type of License



- Cottage Food
- Mobile Food
- USDA
- Special Event
- Retail Food Handler
- Wholesale Food Processing/Manufacturing
- Wholesale Food Handler

# CONT. STRATEGY 3: HELP FOOD ENTREPRENEURS GROW

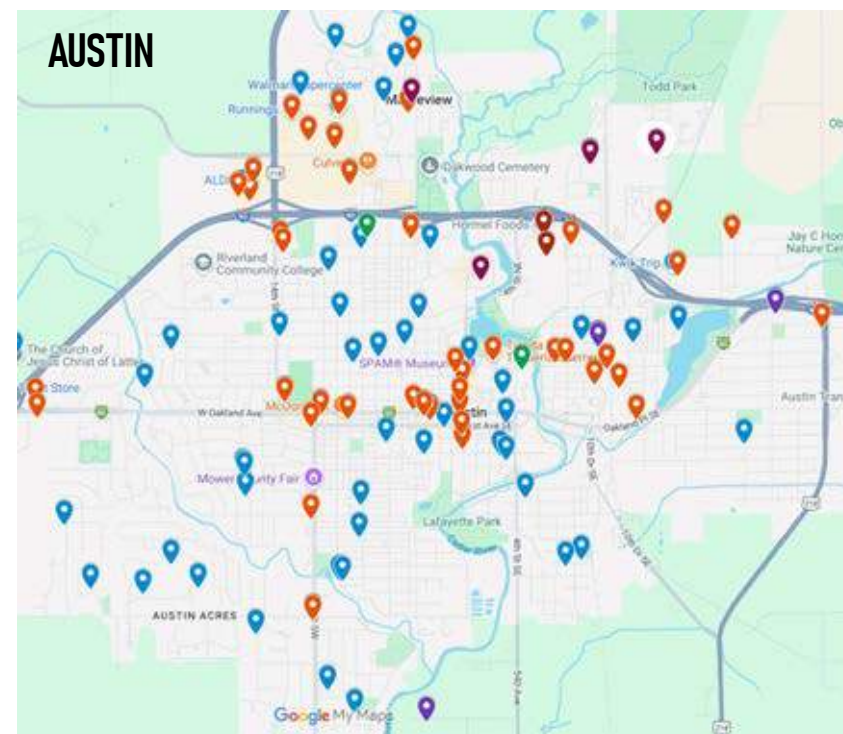
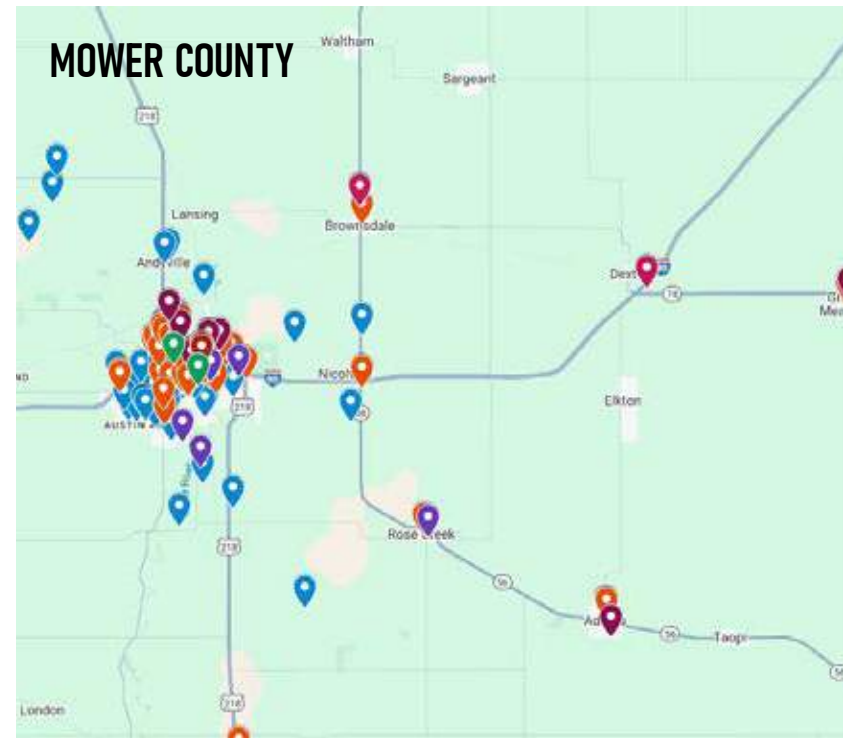
## PURPOSE OF THE MAPS FOOD LICENSEE LOCATION TOOL

This map serves as a strategic planning and visualization resource to support inclusive economic development and improved food access. It provides a multi-layered understanding of the current food landscape and its potential growth areas across neighborhoods, cities, and counties.

### Key purposes include:

- **ILLUSTRATING EXISTING AND FUTURE MANUFACTURING CLUSTERS:** Helps identify where food production is already concentrated and where new facilities can be strategically located.
- **HIGHLIGHTING EXISTING AND FUTURE RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES:** Pinpoints retail food businesses in proximity to Mower County community hubs and Austin neighborhoods, which help align local economic development goals with the Food System Initiative.
- **IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL FOOD HUB/SHARED KITCHEN LOCATIONS:** Illuminates strategic location opportunities to support small-scale, home-based producers (e.g., under Cottage Food Laws) through shared infrastructure like kitchens or food hubs.
- **SHOWCASING IDEAL DISTRIBUTION HUB LOCATIONS:** Identifies key sites for aggregation and distribution that can efficiently serve broader markets while supporting local producers.
- **ANALYZING ROAD AND TRANSPORTATION ACCESS:** Evaluates logistics corridors and accessibility, both as assets and areas for improvement, to inform infrastructure investment and expand equitable access to opportunity.

By layering this food licensee data with metrics on food access, urban agriculture potential, and land use, stakeholders can develop a dynamic, place-based activation plan—driving neighborhood revitalization, enhancing food system resilience, and aligning with broader city and county development strategies.



### MAP KEY

- Blue – Cottage Foods
- Orange – Retail Food Handlers
- Purple – Mobile Food Handlers
- Dark Red – Wholesale Food Processing and Manufacturing
- Medium Red – USDA Inspected Wholesale Food Processing and Manufacturing
- Light Red – Wholesale Food Handler



## INITIAL ACTIVITIES

- Convene cottage food producers, food retailers, and beginning food companies, to better understand their business needs and aspirations
- Develop supports for beginning and mid-stage entrepreneurs including shared kitchen and manufacturing space, specialized equipment, business and culinary education, access to capital, supply chain and market access
- Ensure language access for immigrant entrepreneurs
- Provide additional incentives for those entrepreneurs using locally grown products
- Foster connections between food entrepreneurs and food buyers at all scales of production
- Develop Food City market outlets: farmers markets, foodie events, food halls
- Foster a culture of supporting local entrepreneurs

## KEY ORGANIZATIONS

- Riverland Community College
- Development Corporation of Austin
- AURI
- Naturally MN
- Artisan Grain Collaborative
- Renewing the Countryside
- The Good Acre

## EXAMPLES/CASE STUDIES

### EXAMPLE 1: COMMONWEALTH KITCHEN, DORCHESTER, MA

Provides food production space and supports throughout the development of small food businesses along with connections to local farmers and market opportunities.

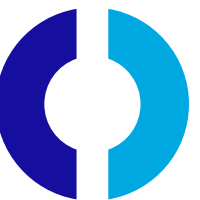
### EXAMPLE 2: HARDWICK CENTER FOR AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY (CAE)

The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) is a nonprofit in Hardwick Vermont that operates programs that support food access, farm viability and working landscapes. It operates the Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC), a shared use kitchen facility with three kitchens that are rented to food entrepreneurs, farmers, and community groups, among others.

In addition to rental kitchen space, it developed a “Just Cut” line of minimally processed vegetables for food service to support farmers and provide healthy food to schools. CAE contracts with farmers to purchase crops, which are processed, packaged and sometimes frozen before delivery through distributors. In 2016 over 75,000 pounds of produce was sold, generating \$95,000 in revenue. CAE subsidizes the cost of production, does R&D to develop recipes, and teaches institutions how to use the products.

### EXAMPLE 3: WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS FOOD PROCESSING CENTER, GREENFIELD, MA

The Franklin County Community Development Corporation (FCCDC) is an economic development nonprofit providing business development education, access to capital, and commercial office and manufacturing space. It was formed in 1979 as manufacturing companies in the region were closing, seeking to improve the community’s economic outlook. In addition to services supporting a broad range of economic opportunities, it operates the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center. Its mission is to promote economic development through entrepreneurship, provide opportunities for sustaining local agriculture, and promote best practices for food producers. It operates a shared use commercial kitchen available to rent by the hour along with training and support for small food businesses and farmers, and co-packing services.



# DISTRIBUTION

## BUILDING A CONNECTED, VALUES-DRIVEN FOOD SYSTEM

### VISION STATEMENT

Fostering collaboration and innovation across local and national supply chains, Mower County and the City of Austin are positioned as a regional logistics and food systems epicenter—expanding market access for local producers, strengthening national supply chains, and building economic resilience rooted in equity, culture, and sustainability.

### FRAMEWORKS

#### ESTABLISH & SUPPORT A FOOD HUB MODEL

- Partner with established regional and statewide food hubs (e.g., Renewing the Countryside, The Good Acre) to scale impact while avoiding redundant infrastructure investments.
- Support the development or enhancement of a Food Hub to:
  - Help small and mid-size producers aggregate supply
  - Increase access to shared cold storage and infrastructure
  - Facilitate entry into institutional and wholesale markets
  - Support coordinated transportation and backhauling solutions

#### STRENGTHEN LOCAL MARKET CHANNELS

- Launch or expand programs that connect local restaurants, schools, hospitals, and grocers directly to nearby farmers and makers.
- Support food service buyers in navigating logistics, pricing, and food safety compliance.
- Encourage multi-year purchasing agreements or seasonal contracts to give farmers predictability and planning power.

#### PROMOTE CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

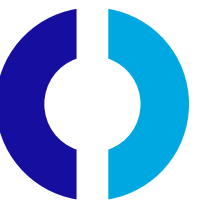
- Help local producers and processors grow, source, or distribute culturally relevant crops and specialty products.
- Prioritize affordability and geographic access to these goods—especially in underserved neighborhoods and food deserts.
- Ensure community voices (especially immigrant and BIPOC populations) help define what “access” and “relevance” mean.

#### ADDRESS STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION GAPS

- Strengthen access to shared cold storage, dry storage, and aggregation facilities in key locations across Mower County.
- Coordinate “last mile” distribution efforts, using vehicles already on the road (e.g., school meal delivery vans, CSA routes, nonprofit food service trucks).
- Explore public-private partnerships to invest in mobile or modular infrastructure where permanent facilities aren’t viable.
- Support gaining supply chain certifications across production, distribution and packaging as production scales to wholesale volumes.

#### BUILD A COLLABORATIVE REGIONAL FOOD LOGISTICS ECOSYSTEM

- Align efforts with existing nonprofit and regional food security organizations, avoiding duplication and leveraging proven best practices.
- Foster regional collaborations that transcend county borders—creating shared value across southern Minnesota and attracting state and federal support.



## ACTIONS

### 1. PROVIDE A PHYSICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SMALL PRODUCERS TO SCALE AND REACH NEW MARKETS

- Partner with established food hubs (e.g., The Good Acre, Renewing the Countryside) and develop spaces in Austin and Mower County for shared infrastructure models.
- Support the development of a local food hub or aggregation site for:
  - + Cold/dry storage
  - + Wash/pack facilities
  - + Cross-docking for shared transportation
  - + Light processing for value-added goods
  - + Co-locate adjacent to a farmers market, kitchen incubator, food hall and culinary training space for efficiency and broader impact

### 2. INCREASE DEMAND FOR LOCAL PRODUCTS THROUGH TARGETED BUYING PROGRAMS

- Create a Farm-to-Institution Initiative (schools, hospitals, correctional facilities) to scale up new markets and coordinate around access to institutional facility kitchens, cold and dry storage.
- Develop matchmaking between local farms and restaurants, groceries, and caterers in collaboration with Development Corporation of Austin, Austin Chamber of Commerce and others.
- Produce quarterly “Meet the Buyer” events that connect producers and procurement professionals in a dynamic and exciting environment that also invites the public to experience (see production retail spaces – 8th Street Market, Bentonville, AR; Industry City, Brooklyn, NY; Pike’s Place Market, Seattle, WA; Utz Potato Chip Factory, Hannover, PA).
- Develop a branded “Grown/Produced in Mower County” program to raise visibility.

### 3. STABILIZE AND DIVERSIFY INCOME FOR LOCAL PRODUCERS BY ENSURING REGULAR, RELIABLE BUYERS AND CONNECT INDUSTRIAL SCALE PRODUCERS TO NEW MARKETS

- Partner with local grocers, food co-ops, farm-to-table restaurants, and independent retailers.
- Provide technical assistance to small producers to standardize product specs and pricing.
- Pilot hyperlocal sourcing contracts with a grocery or meal program.
- Build and manage a central procurement portal or database for local, regional and national food buyers.
- Link local brands to e-commerce and regional shipping/distribution systems.

### 4. IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS CRITICAL COLD STORAGE & LAST MILE DISTRIBUTION INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS THAT PREVENT SMALL PRODUCERS FROM SCALING AND LARGE PRODUCERS FROM DEVELOPING COVER CROP PROGRAM

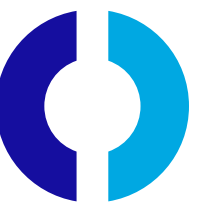
- Map existing storage and transport assets across the region.
- Partner with logistics companies or cooperatives to develop shared last-mile distribution for large scale producers and small producers ready to scale.
- Seek funding to install or retrofit cold storage units in key areas (hubs, markets, schools).
- Pilot mobile refrigerated units or “rolling markets” that combine delivery and access.

### 5. ENSURE MARKET SYSTEMS SERVE ALL RESIDENTS AND UNLOCK THE ECONOMIC POWER OF LOCALLY PRODUCED CULTURAL FOOD PRODUCTS FOR REGIONAL, STATEWIDE AND NATIONAL EXPORT

- Create a pathway for culturally relevant crops and value-added products to reach local shelves, with a strategic focus on local producers and food entrepreneurs from immigrant and BIPOC communities.
- Provide technical assistance in language-appropriate formats on pricing, packaging, and regulation.
- Encourage retailers to source and highlight culturally specific goods.
- Incorporate cultural storytelling and branding into packaging + local marketing.

### 6. LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD A REGIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN MOVEMENT THAT POSITIONS AUSTIN AND MOWER COUNTY AT ITS CENTER

- Formalize partnerships with The Good Acre, Renewing the Countryside, SFA, Minnesota Food Charter Network, regional co-ops, USDA, MN Dept. of Ag, Extension offices and others.
- Produce a quarterly Supply Chain & Infrastructure Roundtable to address real time challenges and build collaborative business opportunities.
- Share data and maps to identify gaps, opportunities, and overlaps through a dynamic website, with storytelling around key (metrics pounds moved, markets opened, income generated) to communicate progress and attract further investment and interest.



# CONT: DISTRIBUTION (EXAMPLES)

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## **EXAMPLE 1: MN STATE TOOL KIT**

Developed Food for Farms: Toolkit for Direct Purchasing of Local Food. The toolkit offers examples and templates for starting up community-based procurement of local food directly from farmers. The Toolkit enables an organization to craft a transparent process that involves administrators and community members, makes sales opportunities available to the widest variety of local farmers possible, complies with applicable state and federal laws, and builds community support. Communities and organizations can take ownership of this process and mold it into a system that works well for their particular situation.

## **EXAMPLE 2: RENEWING THE COUNTRYSIDE - FARMERS MARKET AGGREGATION HUBS**

Institutions and other buyers increasingly want to provide local food to their customers. At the same time, small farmers struggle to expand their markets. While farmers' markets provide a good outlet for sales, most farmers have excess produce at the end of market. Others would grow more produce if they had ready markets. The needs and requirements don't line up nicely. Small producers can't supply enough to larger buyers. Buyers don't have the time or expertise to set up efficient systems to source local product.

What is needed is an aggregator that can pool enough local produce to supply wholesale buyers. Food hubs are one example, but most require significant capital investments for infrastructure and operating expenses. Aggregation by a farmers' market is a low-cost approach to address these challenges and requires limited infrastructure and staff. Full resources are available for farmers markets seeking to add aggregation services.

## **EXAMPLE 3: GOOD ACRE**

Connects good food, good people and good opportunities. As the largest non-profit food hub in Minnesota, their mission is to unlock economic opportunity for farmers in our region through a unique combination of personalized support and market development. Through programs and services, they help growers, makers, partners, consumers, buyers, and donors sustain a healthier, more equitable food system. It includes local food for home cooks, accessing resources for farmers to grow healthy foods and secure the financial future of their business and wholesale buyers.

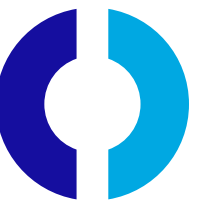
## **EXAMPLE 4: FOOD BANK OF THE ROCKIES - THE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FOOD INITIATIVE (CRFI) - CO**

Aims to overcome barriers to food access experienced by Food Bank clients from different cultural backgrounds. Those barriers include, but are not limited to:

- Diverse food preferences
- Experiencing language barriers or uncertainty about eligibility
- Not feeling comfortable when visiting food pantries that do not understand their culture

## **EXAMPLE 5: DREAM OF WILD HEALTH - MINNEAPOLIS, MN**

Wild Health works to restore health and well-being in the Native community by recovering knowledge of an access to healthy foods, medicines and lifeways. They offer an Indigenous Food Network, which provides an opportunity for Native-led community organizations in Minneapolis to work together to rebuild a sovereign food system by identifying and leveraging organizational and community assets. The work of the IFN builds on the cultural knowledge of community members and uses an intertribal and multigenerational approach. Youth Programs offer Youth kids ages 8-12 to join Cora's Kids, a one-week program that teaches about organic farming, health, and culture and youth ages 13-18 join Garden Warriors to learn more in-depth lessons on farming, culture, seed saving, and healthy cooking. Special events also showcase community learning like the Corn Festival.



# ACCESS AND EQUITY

## VISION STATEMENT

We are a community of neighbors where every person—regardless of income, race, language, ability, or zip code—has equitable access to nutritious, culturally relevant food. Our food system is rooted in sustainability, economic opportunity, and collective well-being, and ensures that every resident has the dignity of choice and the power to shape their own food future.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

To make this vision a reality, Mower County and the City of Austin will pursue a place-based, community-led approach that centers equity, justice, and empowerment in every part of the food system.

### EXPAND ACCESS TO FRESH, AFFORDABLE, CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD

- Prioritize investments in underserved areas within the city and county to ensure that no resident is left out.
- Create incentives for grocery stores, corner stores, and food retailers to source local and culturally relevant products.
- Expand double-up food bucks, WIC/SNAP acceptance, VeggieRX, and culturally appropriate outreach at local food outlets.

### BUILD AN INCLUSIVE AND LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

- Design programs that connect small-scale and BIPOC growers with public institutions (schools, hospitals, food shelves).
- Support culturally relevant food entrepreneurship, especially among immigrant and refugee communities.

### INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

- Support and scale up community-led efforts like:
  - Community gardens, urban farms, and backyard grower networks
  - Farmers markets and mobile markets in underserved neighborhoods
  - Culturally relevant cooking classes and nutrition education
  - Local food banks and meal programs that partner directly with local growers

### PROMOTE EDUCATION, CHOICE, AND PARTICIPATION

- Expand healthy cooking and food literacy programs in schools, clinics, and libraries and leverage DSRIP funding for nutrition education.
- Provide multilingual, accessible resources that reflect community diversity.
- Facilitate co-creation of policies and programs with those most affected by food insecurity.

### COLLABORATE ACROSS SYSTEMS

- Actively participate in state and federal programs that:
  - Fund local food purchasing for underserved communities (e.g., LFPA, Farm to School/ECE)
  - Provide produce prescriptions and medically tailored meals
  - Work with elected officials to protect and expand these programs, ensuring their long-term sustainability

### STRENGTHEN THE EQUITY & ACCESS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Broaden the network of stakeholders advancing food equity in Mower County.
- Ensure this Community of Practice collaborates deeply with all other Food City CoPs—embedding equity as a cross-cutting value across the entire food system.

**SHIFTING FROM CHARITY-BASED FOOD ACCESS MODELS TO COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ECOSYSTEMS IS ESSENTIAL TO ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY. BY CENTERING EQUITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND INCLUSION, MOWER COUNTY AND AUSTIN CAN LEAD A RURAL MODEL FOR JUST FOOD SYSTEMS—ONE THAT UPLIFTS BIPOC, LOW-INCOME, IMMIGRANT, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN EXCLUDED FROM FOOD DECISION-MAKING AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY. IN ADDITION, THESE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ECOSYSTEMS ARE STILL DEPENDENT UPON GOVERNMENT OR PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING. TO ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITABLE OUTCOMES, IT'S CRUCIAL THAT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THESE ECOSYSTEMS OFFER MINIMUM WAGES THAT EXCEED POVERTY GUIDELINES, PROMOTING ECONOMIC STABILITY FOR PARTICIPANTS.**

# CREATING HEALTHY, CONNECTED, AND FOOD-SECURE COMMUNITIES

Food access and walkability are deeply interconnected, especially when a community like Austin is focused on building healthy, equitable, and vibrant communities. Walking to fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate food should be a primary goal of the Equity and Access Community of Practice, as it improves public health and supports community cohesion, particularly in underserved urban and rural neighborhoods.

**Some immediate benefits:**

- When healthy food is within walking distance, communities have lower rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.
- Walkable food access addresses disparities in low-income and BIPOC communities where car access may be limited.
- Walkable food hubs increase foot traffic, support local business, and create safer, more connected neighborhoods.

**Some specific strategies to consider:**

**EMBED FOOD ACCESS INTO NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING**

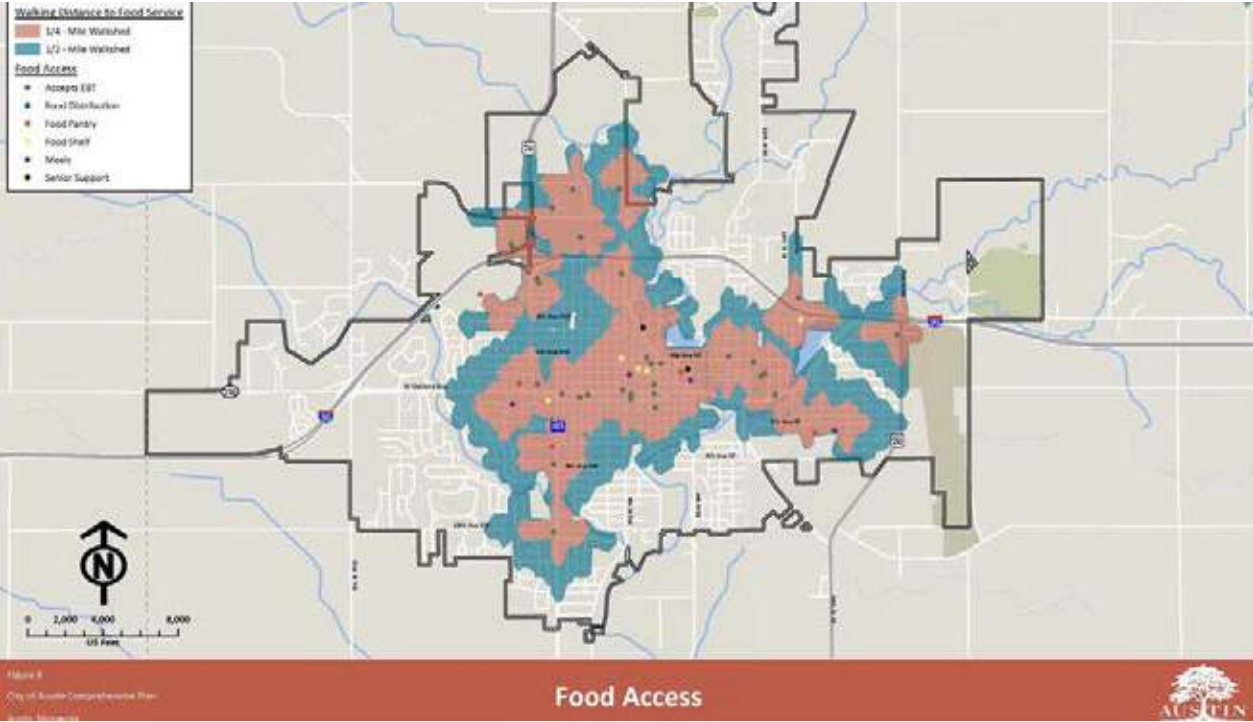
- Zone for mixed-use development that allows grocery stores, farmers markets, and food co-ops within residential zones (see map #1).
- Prioritize “20-minute neighborhoods” where essential needs (food, schools, transit) are within a short walk or bike ride.
- Develop food forests, low impact edible landscaping, urban gardens and greenhouses within the park system (see map #2).
- Encourage small-scale food retail like corner stores, bodega-style markets, or co-ops in underserved areas.

**BRING FOOD CLOSER TO HOME**

- Support community gardens, urban farms, or edible landscaping in residential areas.
- Develop micro food hubs or “neighborhood fridges” where residents can access or share produce and staples.
- Partner with housing authorities to bring gardens, markets, and food delivery to public housing communities.

**Some examples:**

- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN:** Homegrown Minneapolis integrates community gardens, farmers markets, and food policy into urban planning
- **DETROIT, MI:** Urban farming and corner-store partnerships fill grocery gaps in walkable ways
- **PORTLAND, OR:** 20-minute neighborhoods with zoning for grocery, food carts, and green spaces



MAP 1: WALKSHED & NEIGHBORHOOD MAP TO LOCAL FOOD RESOURCES – OVER 95% OF AUSTIN'S POPULATION IS WITHIN 15 MILES WALK TO A PARK

# IMPROVING FOOD ACCESS & NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR FOOD-INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS

Food insecurity has significant negative impacts on individual health and societal well-being, leading to malnutrition, chronic diseases, and mental health problems, as well as social isolation for children and families. The collaborative team at the Hometown Food Security Project has developed a phone app to address these disparities by adapting mobile health (mHealth) technology to improve both access to food and nutrition education for households at risk of food insecurity.

The Hometown App, a mobile platform designed to provide personalized nutrition guidance based on the user's location will deliver real-time information on local food pantries, digital manufacturing coupons, and tailored nutrition education based on pantry items. This phone-based application offers a unique tool for improving diet quality and access to food resources. The development team, including Hormel Institute, Hormel and the Hometown Security Project will be testing the app to assess how the placement of augmented reality tokens influences user engagement and food access. This project represents an innovative approach to address both nutrition care and geographic barriers in underserved communities. The findings will inform future scalable interventions and improve dietary behaviors in underserved populations.

Mobile health (mHealth) technology is a powerful, flexible tool to address both food insecurity and nutrition education, especially for households facing barriers to access. By putting resources directly in the hands of users—literally—you can reach people more effectively, personalize interventions, and reduce the digital divide in food access. While having a significant and positive impact on Mower County and Austin, this app can become more than just tools for communication and support for food insecure members of the community, but can also be a mission-driven engines for earned revenue.

## SOME OTHER OPTIONS IN CONSIDERATION INCLUDE:

### NUTRITION EDUCATION & COACHING

- Bite-sized lessons on healthy eating, cooking skills, and label reading
- Personalized meal plans based on health needs (diabetes, heart health, allergies)
- Multilingual content and culturally appropriate food guides
- Text-based tips or reminders (e.g. "Try adding one green vegetable this week!")
- Chat with a nutritionist or peer coach via in-app messaging or telehealth

### LOCAL FOOD LOCATOR: MAPS OF FREE OR LOW-COST FOOD RESOURCES (FOOD BANKS, PANTRIES, SCHOOL MEALS, FARMERS MARKETS)

- Help users find locations that accept benefits, show real-time availability of produce boxes or prepared meals
- Easy self-enrollment in programs like WIC, Meals on Wheels, or Produce Rx
- Push notifications when users are near food pickup sites or pop-up markets

### INCENTIVES & BEHAVIORAL NUDGES

- Users earn points or badges for completing modules, trying new foods, or visiting food resources
- Create text nudges for goal tracking (e.g. drink more water, eat 2 servings of veggies)
- Capture what's working and adapt content in real time with surveys & feedback loops

A nonprofit licensing a mobile food access app can create a sustainable revenue stream, expand its impact, and help other communities tackle food insecurity using proven tools. Think of it like building a "tech-for-good" platform that other orgs can adopt, localize, and run—while supporting the nonprofit's core mission.

### Some licensing options include:

- **OPEN-SOURCE CORE + PREMIUM ADD-ONS:** Free base app, with add-ons for analytics, messaging, CRM integration, etc. Offers broader reach with optional upgrades
- **FRANCHISE-STYLE PARTNERSHIP:** Training, branding, and backend tools included in a bundled licensing model with regional partners replicating your model
- **AAS SUBSCRIPTION:** Monthly and annual fee to access platform and dashboard. Ideal for smaller organizations or community coalitions
- **WHITE LABEL LICENSING:** Partner organizations get their own branded version of the app. Ideal for local governments, larger non-profits and NGO



# CREATING A CENTRALIZED FOOD HUB AND CULINARY HALL

Establishing a Centralized Food Support Hub and Culinary Hall in Austin could serve as a transformative space for food access, education, and entrepreneurship. This hub would act as a distribution center for locally grown produce, connecting area farmers directly with institutions like schools, hospitals, and food shelves—streamlining logistics, reducing food waste, and ensuring more residents have access to fresh, nutritious foods.

Food Hubs - Food hubs are more than just warehouses or distribution centers—they are community anchors that connect local producers with consumers, institutions, and markets. A food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of food products from local and regional producers. It serves as an intermediary between small-scale producers and larger buyers—schools, hospitals, grocers, restaurants, and consumers. In a rural region like Austin and Mower County, the potential of a food hub is especially transformative.



## FOOD HUB EXAMPLES

### THE PLANT IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Plant is an industrial food hub located in a former meatpacking facility on the South Side of Chicago. This initiative integrates sustainable food production, distribution, and consumption by housing a variety of businesses all focused on local and sustainable food.

- **FOOD HUB FUNCTIONALITY:** The Plant hosts vertical farms, food processors, and small manufacturers. It provides shared commercial kitchen spaces and co-working spaces for food entrepreneurs.
- **FOOD HALL ELEMENT:** While primarily an industrial hub, The Plant incorporates public-facing spaces where food makers and chefs create products that can be sold in markets or consumed onsite, effectively integrating a food hall experience.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** The Plant's focus on sustainability, local sourcing, and community impact makes it a model for both the back-end and front-end of the food ecosystem.

### UP FOOD EXCHANGE + MARQUETTE FOOD COOP, MARQUETTE, MI

Working with the collaborative local food systems working group, the Marquette Food Coop added additional cold storage to its new retail facility to serve as a local food aggregation and distribution point.



# FOOD HALLS

Food Hall - Unlike a traditional food court, a food hall features a curated mix of local food vendors, chefs, and artisans, often under one roof. These halls offer affordable space for emerging food entrepreneurs and a diverse culinary experience for residents and visitors alike. The United States has about 360 food halls, up from 220 in 2019, according to a report by brokerage Cushman & Wakefield. Another 127 food halls are under development around the country, with most of them expected to open by 2025. Food halls typically have a centralized operator, which then rents small stalls to chefs launching a new concept or small, local restaurateurs seeking an additional location.



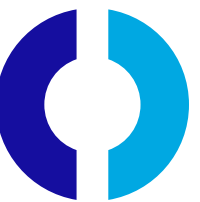
## FOOD HALL EXAMPLES

### MOTHER ROAD MARKET, TULSA, OK

Mother Road Market is a philanthropic initiative of the Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation. Together with Kitchen 66, it provides commercial kitchen space, entrepreneurial supports and market access for local food entrepreneurs. It anchors Tulsa's Market District on historic Route 66.

### GENERAL DUFFY'S WATERHOLE, REDMOND, OR

Redmond has a population of approximately 30,000 people. General Duffy's Waterhole, which opened in 2019, combines a taphouse, food court, and event venue. It features six food carts offering a variety of cuisines, a large indoor events hall, an outdoor stage, and a spacious patio with picnic tables and fire pits. The venue also hosts weekly street markets and live music, serving as a vibrant community gathering spot.



# UNIFIED FOOD HUB + FOOD HALL

## A UNIFIED FOOD HUB + FOOD HALL CONCEPT - AN INNOVATION ENGINE FOR LOCAL AGRICULTURE, CULINARY CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN AUSTIN AND MOWER COUNTY

Merging a food hub and a food hall creates a dynamic, multi-use facility that not only strengthens the regional food system, but also creates a thriving public destination by essentially combining infrastructure with experience, distribution with celebration, and back-end logistics with front-end community engagement. By combining a food hub with a food hall, the concept would create a single, interconnected facility that supports the entire local food ecosystem—from production and aggregation to entrepreneurship, education, and community gathering.

The Culinary Hall component would celebrate Austin's cultural diversity through shared kitchens, pop-up restaurants, and food incubator programs that support emerging chefs and food entrepreneurs, especially from immigrant and underserved communities. By combining food access with workforce development, this space could empower residents, nurture local talent, and build a resilient local food economy that reflects the community's unique global flavor.

The Salvation Army Food Distribution building that was recently purchased by the City of Austin is a possible location for this concept with the focus on developing the adjacent site across the street as the location of the Austin Farmers Market, along with possible on-site greenhouse and community garden locations to anchor the east side of the City Center District and creates an active mid-point along the Cedar River between the future whitewater park and the Bandshell Community space.

## EXAMPLE

### FARM FRESH RHODE ISLAND, PROVIDENCE, RI

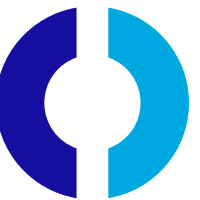
FFRI combines a full service warehouse, aggregation, and distribution center with a thriving indoor and outdoor marketplace. In addition, it offers a culinary workforce development program, sponsors Bonus Bucks farmers market nutrition incentive program, farm-to-school and community education, and a gleaning program.

### TORONTO FOOD HUB AND MARKET AT EVERGREEN BRICKWORKS IN TORONTO, ONTARIO

Evergreen Brickworks is a community-driven urban space in Toronto that features an environmental focus and integrates local food systems, sustainability, and community building. The space serves as a hub for agriculture, food production, and local food sales.

#### Features of the Unified Concept:

- **FOOD HUB FUNCTIONALITY:** Evergreen Brickworks includes an indoor food market where local farmers and food producers sell their goods. It also includes a food processing space where products like sauces, jams, and fresh bread are created by small businesses.
- **FOOD HALL ELEMENT:** The market features a food hall with stalls that offer prepared food from local vendors, along with cafes and eateries. This space connects directly to the surrounding community and gives visitors an authentic local food experience.
- **SUSTAINABILITY AND EDUCATION:** Evergreen Brickworks serves as an educational hub with programs and workshops on sustainable farming, cooking, and food systems, making it an integral part of the city's green infrastructure.



# FARMERS MARKET STRATEGIES

Farmers markets are so much more than places to buy fresh produce. They're dynamic, multi-dimensional platforms that intersect equity, entrepreneurship, food access, placemaking, tourism and local economic development if they are aligned with a broader community vision. Producing an Austin Farmers Market as the intersection of all 7 realms of the Food System Strategy is key to both the programs relevancy and long-term sustainability.

## **1. FARMERS MARKETS MUST BE DESIGNED AND OPERATED AS INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES THAT SERVE ALL RESIDENTS — NOT JUST AS A BOUTIQUE FOOD EXPERIENCE, BUT AS A CORE STRATEGY FOR HEALTH AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE.**

- Expand access for low-income residents through incentive programs that make fresh food more affordable through a SNAP/EBT & Market Match.
- Provide space for vendors selling heritage crops, local produce, arts and crafts and traditional prepared goods including culturally relevant foods that attract and celebrate diverse communities within Austin and Mower County.
- Foster a sense of welcoming and belonging through efficient management practices, dynamic programming and inclusive marketing where everyone sees themselves reflected — linguistically, culturally, and economically.

## **2. FARMERS MARKETS SHOULD BE MORE THAN JUST AN OUTLET FOR PRODUCE — THEY ARE AN ACCESS POINTS TO WELLNESS, NUTRITION, PUBLIC HEALTH, ARTS AND CULTURE, LOCAL CELEBRATION AND THE AUSTIN AND MOWER COUNTY VISITOR EXPERIENCE**

- Fresh, local, and seasonal produce, as well as arts and crafts, retail goods, prepared foods and community non-profit, school and municipal engagement provides opportunities.
- Markets can be paired with cooking demos, tastings, and recipe cards to generate traffic, specifically if paired with Shop with A Chef program.
- When strategically located, they reduce travel barriers to local neighborhoods and serve underserved areas for local groceries.

## **3. RELEVANT FARMERS MARKETS OFFER LOW-BARRIER ENTRY POINTS FOR LOCAL FOOD ENTREPRENEURS TO START AND GROW THEIR BUSINESSES**

- Ideal for startups, immigrant-owned businesses, and cottage food producers.
- Allow for product testing, branding, and direct customer feedback.
- Foster economic mobility through side incomes or business incubation.
- Successful vendors can scale up to local retail, food hubs, co-packing, or restaurants.
- Pair with a shared kitchen or business technical assistance to build a full entrepreneurial pipeline.

## **4. FARMERS MARKETS ARE ONE OF THE MOST HUMAN-CENTERED, JOYFUL EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC LIFE AND ARE AN EPICENTER OF WEEKLY COMMUNITY GATHERING**

- Act as a weekly for residents to gather, socialize, and build relationships.
- Provide live music, kids activities, art, storytelling, and food demos.
- Celebrate local culture and seasonal traditions.
- Cornerstone to a community identity and a local and regional destination.

## **5. WELL-DESIGNED AND MANAGED FARMERS MARKETS BECOME SIGNATURE DESTINATIONS THAT DRAW VISITORS AND CONTRIBUTE TO A STRONG COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

- Provides a magnet for visitors seeking authentic and local experiences.
- Showcases regional foods, arts, and music in one place.
- Anchors downtown revitalization efforts by increasing weekly foot traffic that support surrounding businesses.
- Excellent market experiences are instantly shareable weekly experiences that offer a visual representations of a place's spirit and creativity through organic consumer storytelling.
- All produce must be grown by the vendor, with certified growing audits done by partners like University Extension Offices, etc..
- Creation of an advisory committee made up of citizens, neighbors, customers, farmers, and vendors that works with the professional management for a stronger market experience.

# FARMERS MARKET MANAGEMENT

Professional market management that is connected to a larger community development strategy is at the heart of a successful farmers market. This vital element turns a collection of vendors into a cohesive, well-run, high-impact experience for both producers and the public and leads to vendor success, customer satisfaction, and long-term sustainability.

## WHERE TO START:

**1. DESIGNATE AN ORGANIZATIONAL SPONSOR OR EMBED THE FARMERS MARKET WITHIN AN EXISTING 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY, FISCAL OVERSIGHT, SUSTAINABILITY, CREDIBILITY, ACCESS TO FUNDING AND ALIGNMENT WITH LARGER FOOD SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS.**

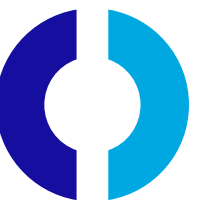
- Connecting the market as a program of food equity entities, downtown development agencies, economic development entities or tourism organizations all provide different approaches, but offer similar outcomes – a market that provides a regular and dynamic activation connected to desired community outcomes .
- This approach leverages the parent entities overall resources –staff, financial, marketing, volunteer base and network – to immediately expand capacity of the market.

**2. HIRE OR DESIGNATE A PROFESSIONAL MARKET MANAGER WITH THE AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE RULES, COORDINATE VENDORS, AND REPRESENT THE MARKET. A GREAT MARKET MANAGER IS PART LOGISTICS EXPERT, PART RELATIONSHIP-BUILDER, AND PART CHEERLEADER.**

**3. ESTABLISH A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE — NONPROFIT BOARD, ADVISORY COUNCIL, OR STEERING COMMITTEE THAT INCLUDES FARMERS, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND COMMUNITY VOICES AND ENSURES CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND PARTNERS.**

**4. TRACK METRICS TO INFORM VENDOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES, PROGRAMMING IMPACT, PRODUCTION SEASON DEVELOPMENT, GRANT PROCUREMENT, SPONSOR ENGAGEMENT, CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS AND MARKETING STRATEGIES. SOME IMPORTANT EXAMPLES INCLUDE:**

- Number of vendors (total + per category: farmers, prepared food, artisans, etc.)
- Weekly sales reports
- SNAP/WIC sales figures
- Weekly/monthly average attendance
- Customer zip codes or demographics (via surveys or geocaching)
- Repeat customer rates
- Transportation mode to the market (walk, bike, drive, bus)
- Customer satisfaction & suggestions (via comment cards or QR surveys)
- Average customer spend per visit
- Pre/post surveys on shopping habits or fruit/vegetable consumption
- Number of nutrition education or cooking demo attendees
- Number and type of special events (e.g. chef demos, music, festivals)
- Volunteer participation hours
- Media and social media reach (followers, impressions, press mentions)



# LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The location of a farmers market is one of the most important factors that determine its success, both in terms of attendance and its ability to achieve its broader community and economic goals. A thoughtfully chosen location can attract a steady flow of customers, improve vendor performance, enhance community engagement, and foster long-term sustainability for the market. Some elements to consider:

## 1. MAXIMIZING CONVENIENCE SO THAT MARKET VISITORS AND VENDORS DON'T HAVE TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ENTRY.

- Highly visible with easy access is essential for attracting customers. High foot traffic areas (e.g., near parks, major attractions, busy streets, commercial corridors ) make it easier for people to stumble upon the market without needing to plan their visit.
- Ensuring the location is accessible by car, bus, bike, and even walking is key. If customers can easily access the market using multiple forms of transportation, they're more likely to attend regularly.
- Adequate parking (especially for those driving) is crucial. Lack of parking can deter people from attending, even if they live nearby.
- Vendor spaces that are easily accessible for load-in and load-out, have access to electricity and water to limit use of generators and expand vendor types and provide off-site parking to create more of market feel.

## 2. LOCATION STRENGTHENS AND ENHANCES LOCAL ENGAGEMENT WITH MARKETS SITUATED NEAR COMMUNITY CENTERS, PARKS, OR DOWNTOWN AREAS TEND TO BENEFIT FROM BEING THE HEART OF LOCAL ACTIVITY AND A DESTINATION POINT FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS. THE GOAL IS TO MAXIMIZE SYNERGY AND BOOST ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AROUND THE LOCATION.

- Placing the market near established hubs—like downtowns, schools, food hubs/food halls, waterways, hospitals, or universities—can drive cross-promotion opportunities and increase customer loyalty.
- A location near other local businesses (e.g., coffee shops, bookstores, boutiques) can help drive foot traffic between the businesses and the market, benefiting all stakeholders involved.
- Proximity to theaters, galleries, museums, or other event venues allows the market to tap into a different type of visitor, fostering a cultural synergy between food, arts, and community spaces.

## 3. LOCATION MUST ALLOW FOR EXPANSION, SCALABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE MARKET VENDORS AND PROGRAMMING.

- The market should be located in an area where expansion is possible as demand for space grows. Whether this means adding more vendors, offering new activities, or introducing seasonal programming.
- The location should allow for flexibility in layout, with options for different vendor configurations, food trucks, and spaces for events or community activities (live music, cooking classes, etc.).

## 4. USE THE MARKET TO ADVANCE A SENSE OF PLACE THAT IS INTEGRATED INTO A VISUALLY APPEALING AND INVITING ENVIRONMENT, AS CONSUMERS ARE ATTRACTED TO MARKETS IN PLEASANT AND DYNAMIC PLACES.

- Locations can either foster existing places or play a role in transforming new public spaces into dynamic destinations. The more the market is integrated into the local environment, the more it will become a signature destination for tourists and locals alike.



# FARMERS MARKET EXAMPLES

## BENTONVILLE FARMERS MARKET

Downtown Bentonville Inc., the local nonprofit, assumed management of the farmers market in 2007, integrating it into a broader food and culinary strategy. This move positioned the market as a cornerstone of downtown's revitalization and helped catalyze a wave of new restaurants, food trucks, and culinary retail businesses.

In 2008, the market featured approximately 55 vendors and generated \$94,000 in sales. By 2011, vendor numbers had grown to around 70, with sales reaching \$376,000. In 2012, sales surpassed \$500,000—a 413% increase in just five years. The upward trajectory continued, with annual sales exceeding \$1 million in 2021 and reaching a record \$2.9 million in 2024.

Originally held only on Saturdays, the market expanded in 2023 to include Thursday evening sessions, increasing access to local produce and goods. That same year, the launch of the indoor “Market @ Record” transformed it into a year-round event, providing consistent opportunities for both vendors and the community.

The market has also seen significant community engagement, drawing over 200,000 attendees in 2023 alone. Its success and impact were further recognized when it was named the best farmers market in Arkansas by the American Farmland Trust for two consecutive years, in 2023 and 2024.

## GREENMARKET LOCAL GRAINS PROJECT

In 2004, Greenmarket assessed how to better integrate bakers into our mission to support regional agriculture and provide fresh, local food to New York City residents. In 2009, Greenmarket began requiring bakers to use a minimum of 15% local grain -- grown and milled in the region -- in their baked goods. The rule was intended to kick start a nascent grains economy by building demand for regional grains; help facilitate processing and distribution; and encourage bakers to showcase regional grains in their baked goods. The rule also attempted to reverse the longstanding belief that the climate in the Northeast wasn't suitable for producing grain for human consumption. The work of a few pioneering farmers and millers was proving that it could be done.

In April of 2019, the minimum requirement for local grain in Greenmarket baked goods increased from 15% to 25%. What started as a conversation about how to encourage Greenmarket bakers to incorporate local flour into their baked goods has bloomed into a full-blown initiative to revitalize and sustainably scale up the production of grains in the Northeast.

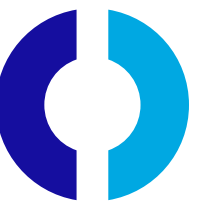




### **JUSTIN'S MUELLER LAKE PARK FARMERS MARKET (AUSTIN, TX)**

Situated in a growing, walkable community with a focus on health and sustainability, attracting a diverse mix of residents.

- 120+ vendors, about 40% of which are agricultural producers
- Ag producers are from within 150 miles of the market
- Manager inspected, producer only markets
- Double up to \$30 SNAP Lonestar dollars with our food access programs at the market!
- Fun activities for kids every Second Sunday of the month

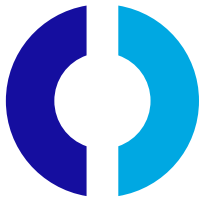


# CONT. FARMERS MARKET EXAMPLES



## BROOKFIELD FARMERS MARKET | BROOKFIELD, ILLINOIS

- Farmers, crafts, and prepared foods
- Ag producers are from Wisconsin
- Accepts EBT and partners with Ascension to provide double dollars
- Ongoing community events



## CEDAR RAPIDS, IA FARMER'S MARKET

- Approximately 200 vendors, Iowa farmers, fresh flowers and crafts
- Ag producers are from within 150 miles of the market
- Manager inspected, producer only markets
- SNAP, WIC and FMNP accepted by specified vendors
- Live music



## CONT. FARMERS MARKET EXAMPLES



### AZTECA FARMERS MARKET | HOUSTON, TEXAS

- Prepared foods, fresh produce, crafts and more
- Focus on Latin American foods and culture
- Core values on building community
- Website and social media in both English and Spanish
- Focus on affordability

# ACTIVATION

## VISION

Our restaurants, festivals, farmers markets, and pop-up events are a celebration of culture, creativity, and community. We elevate the unique flavors, stories, and identities of our people—positioning Mower County and the City of Austin as a dynamic culinary destination that enriches our local economy, inspires pride, and welcomes the world to our table.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

To cultivate a vibrant and inclusive food culture, the following strategies help blend economic development, tourism, cultural storytelling, and creative community engagement.

### CELEBRATE OUR ROOTS AND FLAVORS

- Elevate food as a cultural asset by spotlighting:
  - Local foodways and heritage food stories
  - Immigrant culinary traditions
  - Historic recipes and regional specialties
  - Partner with local chefs, elders, and food historians to preserve and share local food stories.

### DEVELOP CULINARY POP-UP EVENTS

Creating culinary pop-up events throughout the year is a dynamic and flexible way to build buzz, support local food entrepreneurs, and bring energy to public spaces—without the overhead of permanent infrastructure. When done right, pop-ups can also act as incubators, market testers, and placemaking tools. Mix this in with a weekly music series or incorporate into the local farmers market to expand impact.

- Offers a low-barrier entry for emerging chefs and food businesses and can also be used to invite chefs from around the region to play in Austin (see partnership with Hormel when they bring in their guest chefs)
- Activates underused spaces (alleys, plazas, parks, parking lots, etc.) and brings attention to emerging areas of redevelopment
- Adds a vibrancy to downtowns and neighborhoods that is authentically local and attracts visitors
- Engages the community and attracts visitors with something fresh and surprising
- Offers a platform to test ideas before scaling into full-service restaurants or food halls

### LAUNCH AN EDIBLE AUSTIN-STYLE PUBLICATION

- Produce a regional Edible Magazine (print and digital) featuring profiles of local growers, chefs, and food makers, recipes from the community, event calendar, maps of food trails and culinary hot spots.

### DEVELOP A UNIQUE, SIGNATURE FOOD FESTIVAL

Activating the food scene through a unique, place-rooted festival is one of the most energizing and high-impact ways to bring a food system strategy to life. It transforms all the behind-the-scenes planning—distribution, access, equity, education—into a vibrant, public-facing experience that fuels local pride, boosts economic opportunity, and brings national attention. Partners like the James Beard Foundation and others could be possible production partners.

#### Elements could include:

- Local and immigrant cuisine
- Panels and workshops on agricultural and food tech innovations, chefs and farmer collaborations, health and wellness, food policy
- SXSW style food entrepreneurship idea sharing and start-up capital opportunities
- Showcase of local, regional and national talent in art, music and culinary

## EXAMPLE

### FOOD LOVES TECH FESTIVAL (PRODUCED BY EDIBLE MANHATTAN AND EDIBLE BROOKLYN)

Food Loves Tech is a first-of-its-kind education by entertainment innovation expo. Arranged as a series of experiential exhibits, Food Loves Tech (FLT) links multiple immersive installations, technologies, tastings, leadership panels, and dining experiences to explore and celebrate the future of food through technology and innovation. It brings people with a passion for innovating food and drink together with people who have a passion for enjoying the latest culinary wonders. Here, you'll find creators, makers, startup teams, thought leaders, food and drink aficionados, and techies.



# ACTIVATION: ACTION ITEMS

## EXPAND UNIQUE FOOD OFFERINGS IN EXISTING FESTIVALS

Expanding food offerings in existing festivals is a smart, scalable, and cost-effective way to activate a food system strategy. Instead of starting from scratch, building on the momentum, audience, and infrastructure of existing events while layering in economic opportunity, education, equity, and engagement is both efficient and supports long-term growth of those existing experiences.

### EXAMPLE: ARTS BEATS AND EATS (ROYAL OAK, MI)

Celebrating their 28th year, Arts, Beats and Eats Juried Fine Art Show continues to bring a steady supply of art patrons to the downtown streets of Royal Oak, Michigan. Nestled at the south-end of a mile-long event which draws over 300,000 people each year, Arts, Beats and Eats features the best of art, music and food from around the state and country. They also offer a variety of food trucks and restaurant booths featuring unique cultural dishes, classic American cuisine, summer fun food, desserts and more.

## DEVELOP AN AGGRESSIVE RESTAURANT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY

Essential for building a dynamic local food scene and supporting a resilient food economy, designating an organization or provide the resources to the Activation CoP to lead the effort is vital to the success of this endeavor. Goals of this effort should include:

- Activate food as a tool for placemaking and downtown revitalization.
- Attract new, diverse food concepts that fill market gaps.
- Support existing restaurants to thrive and expand.
- Foster local ownership and culinary entrepreneurship.

## ACTION ITEMS

- Conduct a data-informed culinary gap analysis and opportunity profile.
- Promote Austing and Mower County as a great opportunity to start a new restaurant, with a campaign around “Start Your Restaurant Here”.
- Develop a startup technical assistance (business planning, kitchen design, food costing) program, with specific elements to support for BIPOC, immigrant, and first-time restaurateurs in partnership with Riverland Community College.
- Launch a Food Business Incubator in a shared kitchen or underused space in collaboration with space needs identified by the Access and Equity Community of Practice (see A Unified Food Hub + Food Hall Concept).

Utilize the Activation CoP platform to start a Restaurant Advisory Council in partnership with Discover Austin to lead regular listening sessions with local restaurants, support group marketing campaigns, share workforce support and develop strategies of involvement with festivals, farmers markets and other public events. Work with the Policy and Management Community of Practice to advocate for entertainment districts/outdoor dining districts, outdoor dining zones, parklets, shared patios and other options to expand dining options in the public realm.



# POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

## VISION

We are a community where civic leadership, grassroots advocacy, and public policy work together to build a resilient, equitable, and innovative food system. Through bold local ordinances, aligned state and federal strategies, and data-informed decision-making, we reduce barriers, unlock entrepreneurial opportunities, and ensure access to healthy, culturally relevant food for all.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

To support the long-term success of the Food City Initiative, Mower County and the City of Austin will champion a strong policy environment that drives food system innovation, investment, and inclusion.

## PRIORITIZE LOCAL FOOD SOURCING

- Develop procurement policies that encourage public institutions (schools, hospitals, government offices) to purchase from local farmers and food producers.
- Incentivize local sourcing for restaurants, grocery stores, and food distributors through tax credits or recognition programs.
- Create local programs to supplement or replace key USDA programs that are in jeopardy that support farmers markets, school nutrition, public health, and food security.

## SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Advocate for financial and technical support for farmers implementing:

- Cover crop rotations
- Reduced pesticide use
- Soil health improvement
- Regenerative agriculture practices
- Align with state-led programs like Forever Green and other regional ag-tech innovations

## PROMOTE FOOD ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Implement business-friendly policies that reduce startup barriers for small food businesses, including:

- Microloan programs
  - + Local grant opportunities
  - + Tax incentives for innovation in food and beverage production
  - + Create a streamlined permitting process for food trucks, cottage food producers, pop-up operations, entertainment districts/outdoor dining districts, parklets, etc.

## FUND POST-HARVEST & PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE

Work with regional and federal stakeholders to:

- Identify funding for post-harvest processing of cover crops.
- Support manufacturing startups using local ingredients.
- Catalyze economic development through value-added ag investments.

## COORDINATE REGIONAL & STATE ADVOCACY

Collaborate with:

- Other Food City Communities of Practice
- Regional advocacy organizations
- State-level food councils and coalitions
- Push for comprehensive policies that reflect the full food system—from soil health to food justice

## EXPAND ZONING AND ORDINANCE FLEXIBILITY

Review and revise local zoning codes to:

- Allow urban agriculture, backyard poultry, and food forests.
- Create flexible space for pop-up restaurants, cafes, mobile markets, and food trucks.
- Support mixed-use developments that integrate food enterprises.

## PRIORITIZE EDIBLE PUBLIC SPACES

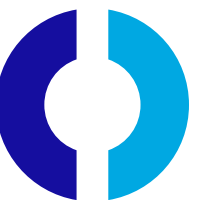
Work with the Parks Department to integrate:

- Edible landscaping
- Community orchards and gardens
- Pollinator pathways and native edible plantings
- Embed food access and education into park and open space planning

## BUILD DATA-DRIVEN POLICY SYSTEMS

Establish baseline metrics and ongoing tracking for:

- Food insecurity and public health outcomes
- Local farm revenue and new business formation
- School meal sourcing and farm-to-institution purchases
- Environmental impacts like soil erosion, water quality, and cover crop adoption
- Use this data to inform future policy changes and share impact with the community



# CONT. POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

## CONNECTING FOOD LICENSES TO LAND VALUE

This following pages illustrate the spatial relationship between food-related business activity and land value. By overlaying food license data with land value indicators, the map provides critical insights that can inform equitable economic development, urban planning, and food system investments. Key purposes include:

## REVEALING ECONOMIC CLUSTERS AND VALUE CREATION

Shows how concentrations of licensed food businesses correlate with higher land values, signaling active economic zones and potential areas for investment or preservation.

## IDENTIFYING UNDERUTILIZED AREAS WITH HIGH POTENTIAL

Highlights low land value areas where food businesses are emerging or could be catalyzed, helping to direct incentives, infrastructure, or support to spur equitable growth.

## INFORMING LAND USE POLICY AND ZONING DECISIONS

Provides a data-driven basis for evaluating how food businesses influence or are impacted by zoning, land use policy, and property trends.

## SUPPORTING COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

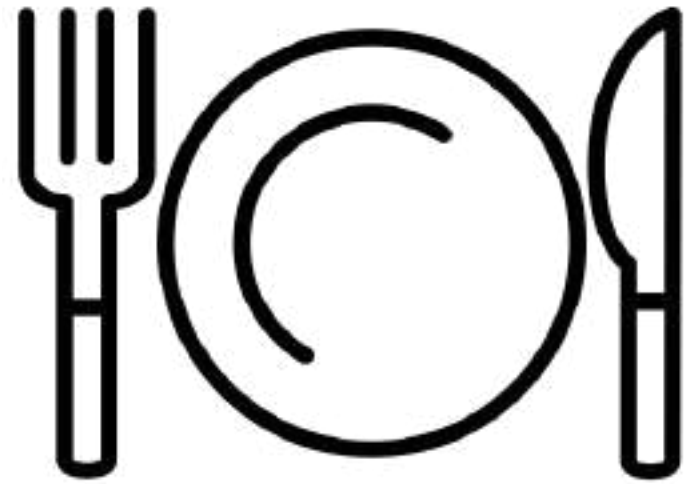
Guides strategies to support small and home-based food entrepreneurs in areas where land values are still accessible, preventing displacement and promoting inclusive ownership.

## TRACKING GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT RISKS

Illuminates neighborhoods where increasing food activity may be contributing to rising land values, signaling a need for proactive protections for residents and legacy businesses.

By visualizing these connections, the map becomes a powerful tool for aligning food system growth with land justice, equitable development, and resilient urban planning.





# Food Licenses

Exploring the Geography of Food in Austin, MN

URBAN3



Lower barrier to entry!



### Cottage Food Licenses

For individuals to sell food



### Food Licenses

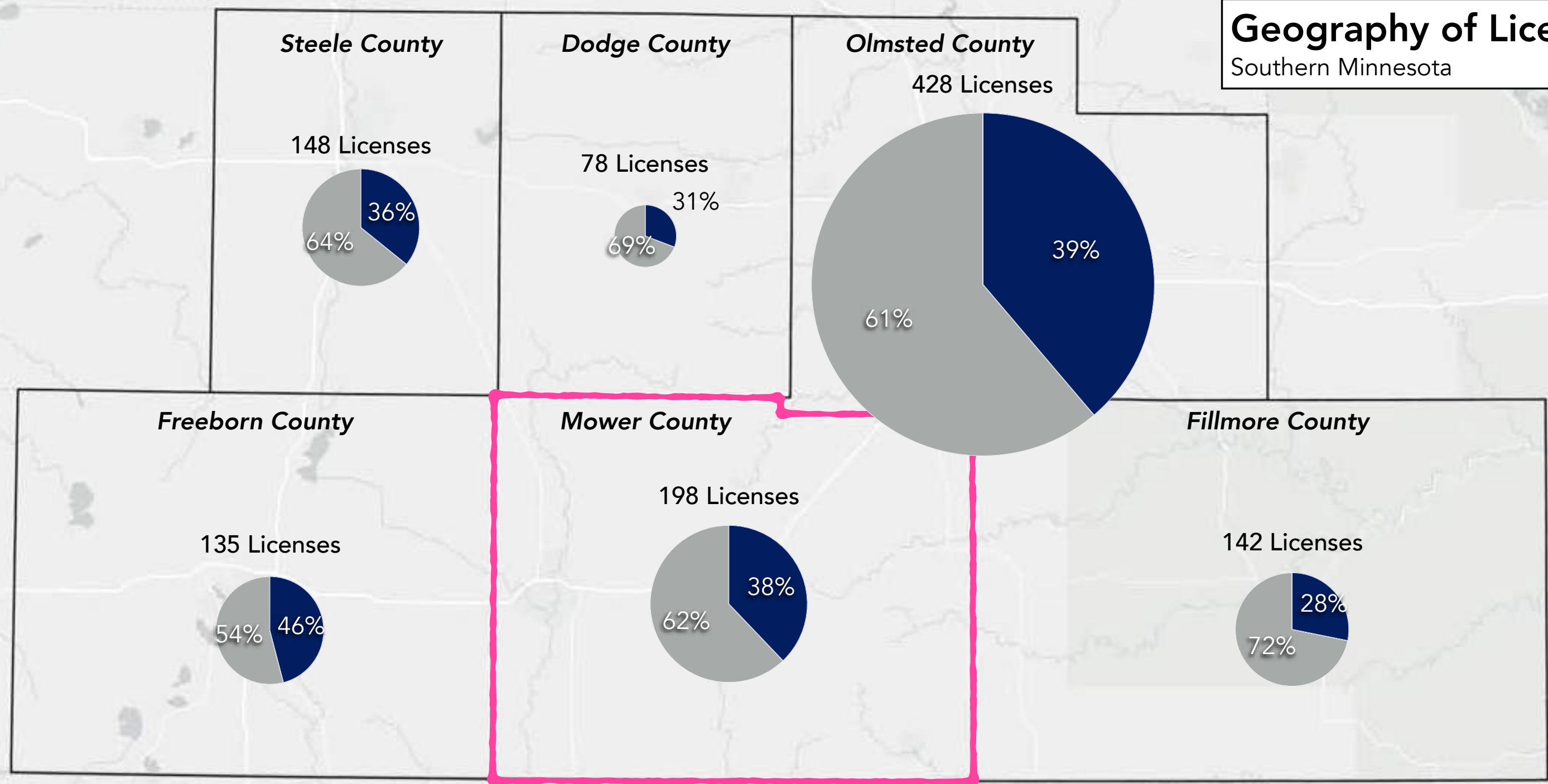
For permanent and mobile retail food establishments



Source: [mda.state.mn.us](http://mda.state.mn.us)

# Geography of Licenses

Southern Minnesota



● Cottage Food Licenses vs. ● # Businesses with Food Licenses

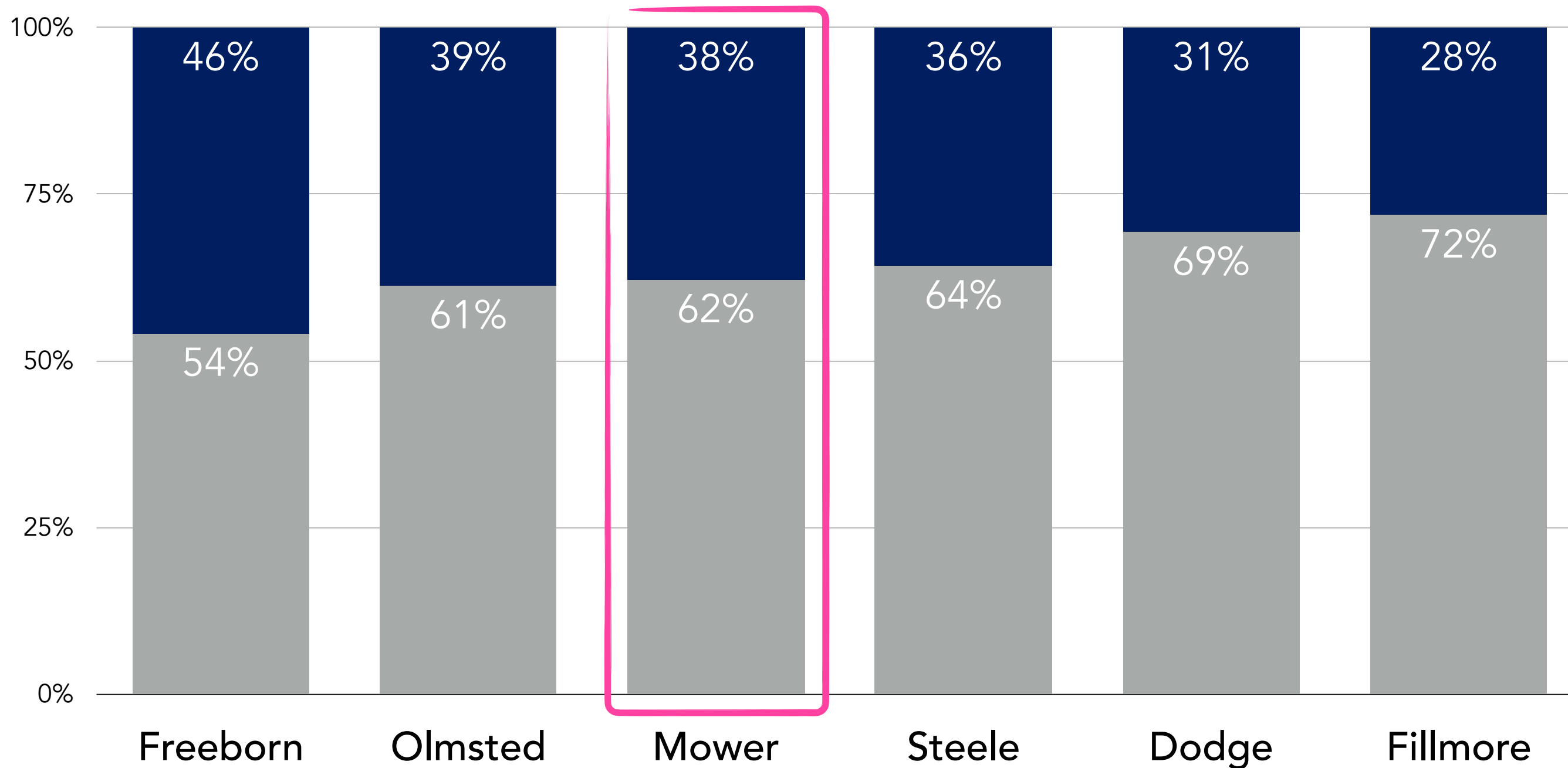


Source: [mda.state.mn.us](http://mda.state.mn.us)

# Cottage Food Licenses vs. # Businesses with Food Licenses

Southern Minnesota Counties

■ Food Licenses  
■ Cottage Food Licenses



Source: [mda.state.mn.us](http://mda.state.mn.us)

# Market Value Per Acre

Austin, MN

FREEBORN COUNTY

Downtown Austin

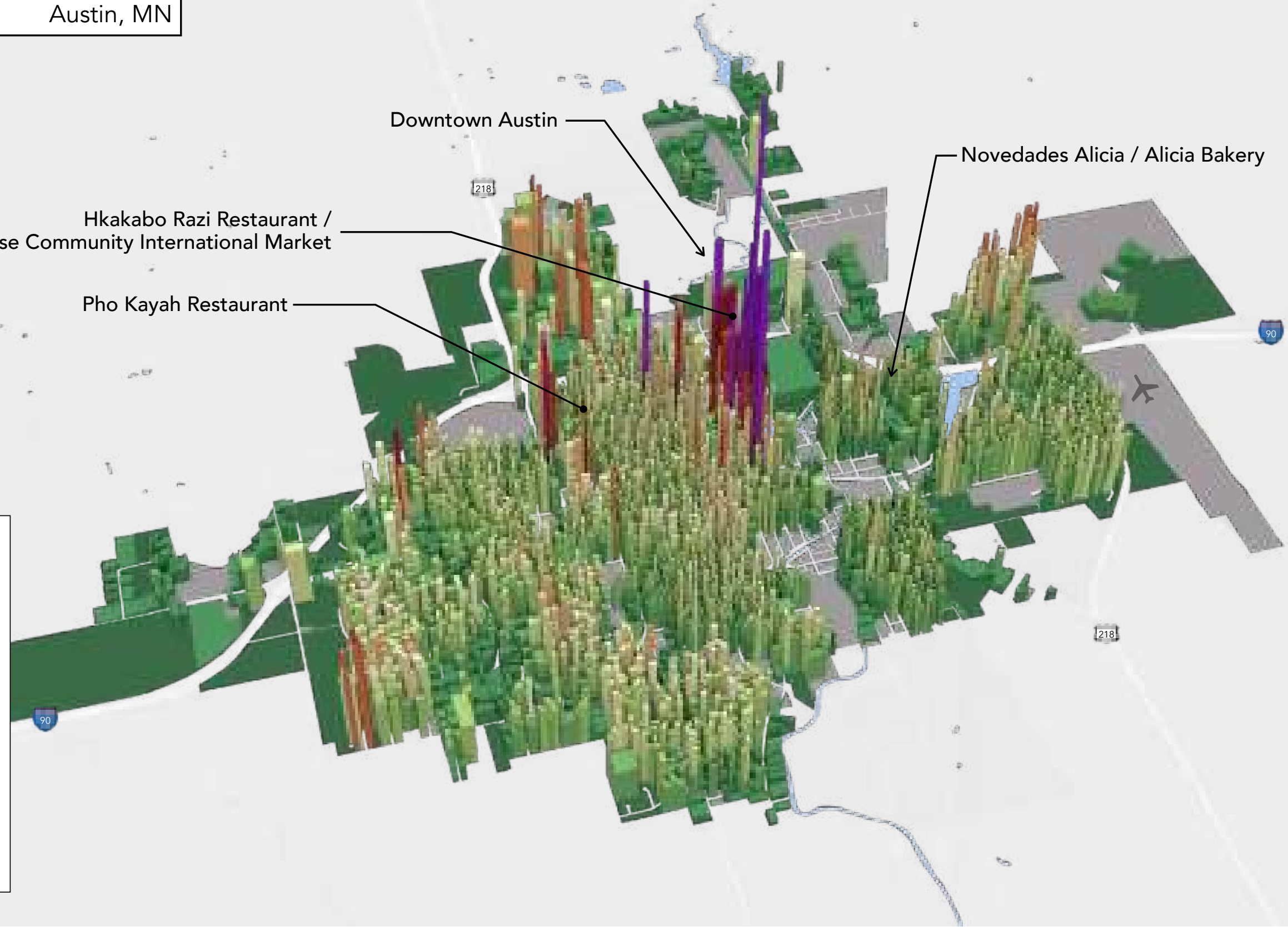
Hkakabo Razi Restaurant / Sudanese Community International Market

Pho Kayah Restaurant

Novedades Alicia / Alicia Bakery

## Value Per Acre (\$)

Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Light Green	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Medium Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0

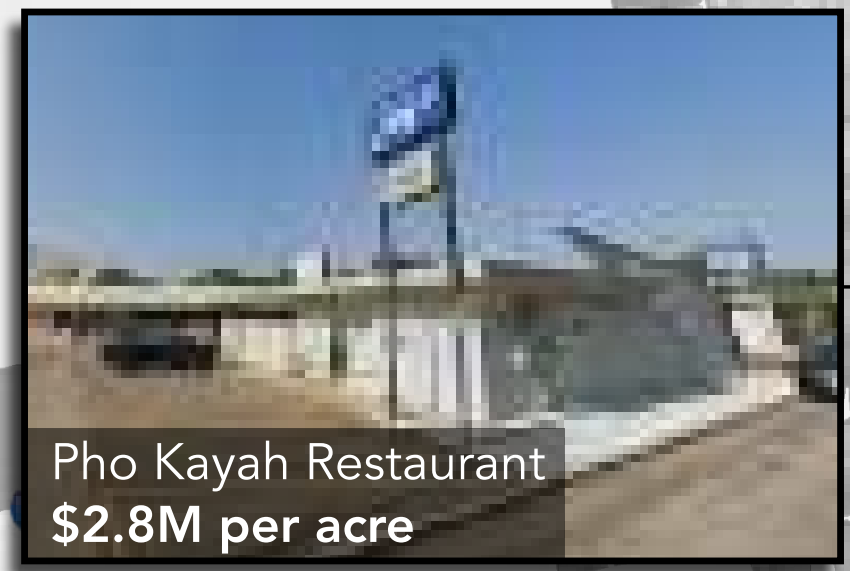


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Food License Highlight

Austin, MN

FREEBORN COUNTY



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



# Value Per Acre: Commercial (Food)

Mower County, MN

Novedades Alicia  
\$1.6M per acre

Alicia Bakery  
\$0.4M per acre

This parking lot  
is likely diluting the  
value per acre of  
Alicia Bakery



Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Commercial (Food)

Mower County, MN



Pho Kayah Restaurant  
**\$2.8M per acre**



Hkakabo Razi Asian Restaurant + Market  
**\$3.2M per acre**

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps



I love it all!

# BRAND AND STORY

## VISION

The incredible stories being shared about the food assets and opportunities in Mower County and Austin are more than just narratives—they are catalysts for economic growth, social engagement, cultural celebration, and regional pride. Through bold, authentic storytelling, the Food City Initiative will launch a local brand and community positioning that excites, engages and reflects the values and diversity of our people.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

Mower County and Austin will grow a recognizable and respected food identity by cultivating a place-based brand built on authenticity, equity, entrepreneurship, and flavor. This brand will position our community as a destination and inspiration for what rural food systems can achieve.

## DRAFT A COMPELLING COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

- Develop a strong, multifaceted story that weaves together the full spectrum of the Food City Initiative: farming, entrepreneurship, culture, health, education, and equity.
- Use the Seven Realms of the Food Systems of the initiative as thematic anchors to highlight interconnected stories of people, progress, and possibility.

## COORDINATE COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING

- Designate lead organizations (e.g., Discover Austin, Austin Area Chamber, Hormel Foundation) to manage messaging, coordinate content, and track engagement.
- Create a shared content calendar across partners for intentional, consistent messaging across platforms.

## MAXIMIZE DIGITAL PLATFORMS

- Leverage Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube to spotlight local chefs and makers, behind-the-scenes food production; festivals, events, and market scenes; and success stories from entrepreneurs and community leaders.
- Include a mix of photos, short-form video, interviews, and testimonials to drive engagement.

## CREATE A FOOD-CENTRIC VISITOR GUIDE

- Publish a print and digital guide to local restaurants, food trucks, breweries, distilleries, and markets and incorporate maps, seasonal food trails, chef spotlights, special event listings.
- Use the guide as a tool for both tourism and economic impact tracking.

## HIGHLIGHT LOCAL CHAMPIONS

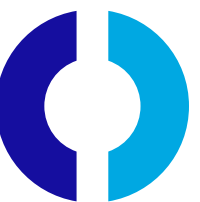
- Launch a Faces of Austin/Mower County Food Scene storytelling series showcasing individuals driving transformation within each realm—farmers, educators, activists, chefs, youth, scientists, and more.
- Model after campaigns like People of New York to build emotional connection and local pride.

## CELEBRATE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION

- Develop an annual Food City Awards Program recognizing excellence in local sourcing, food equity and sustainability, food entrepreneurship, community leadership, philanthropy, new business, heritage farming, etc..

## INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL MARKETING

- Hire a communications and branding firm to elevate the regional and national reach of the initiative.
- Develop a visual identity, slogan, and campaign strategy tailored to different audiences: locals, tourists, investors, policymakers.



# POSITIONING COMMUNITY AS A FOOD DESTINATION

## POSITION STATEMENT 1: “HORMEL AND...”

A Strategy Rooted in Legacy and Launching the Future

Developed during planning conversations with the Brand & Story Community of Practice, the “Hormel and...” brand strategy serves as a foundational platform to position Austin and Mower County as a national leader in regenerative agriculture, culinary innovation, and rural economic resilience. While Hormel Foods anchors our heritage, the future of our region lies in its remarkable convergence of innovation, creativity, and community collaboration across every layer of the food system.

## BRAND PILLARS

### HERITAGE & INNOVATION

- Proud hometown of Hormel Foods, a global food leader with deep local roots
- From SPAM to sustainable protein: connect corporate food legacy to the emerging future of food and agriculture
- The Hormel Institute fuels breakthrough cancer research with global implications, solidifying Austin's place in the global conversation on health, wellness, and food science
- New initiatives in ag-tech, regenerative farming, and supply chain innovation are turning Mower County into a testbed for the future of sustainable agriculture and food entrepreneurship

### CULTURE & CREATIVITY

- Home of the quirky, iconic SPAM Museum—a symbol of Americana and a gateway to food storytelling
- Rich and growing immigrant communities shape a vibrant culinary landscape filled with diverse flavors, international cuisines, and cultural fusion
- Food festivals, public art, and multicultural events breathe life into the region's identity
- The area's agricultural heritage and entrepreneurial energy are celebrated through emerging food and beverage businesses that put local flavor front and center

### NATURE & LIFESTYLE

- A region blessed with bike trails, the Cedar River, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, and plans for a new Whitewater Park
- A strong sense of place and livability: affordable, charming small-town life infused with big-town energy and civic pride
- Clean water, clean air, and open space create a canvas for wellness-focused lifestyles and outdoor culinary experiences

### CAREER & COMMUNITY

- Strong employers + affordable living = opportunity for families, young professionals, and entrepreneurs
- A workforce that's skilled, loyal, and diverse, drawn from both longtime residents and new Americans
- Investment in public amenities like community parks, shared kitchens, and local food markets underscores a quality-of-life advantage that few cities can match

## POSITION STATEMENT 2: GLOBAL IMPACT. LOCAL FLAVOR.

Austin, Minnesota, is an emerging model for what's possible when global innovation meets small-town determination.

- Austin is a microcosm of global cultures, home to growing immigrant and refugee populations who enrich the region with new traditions, flavors, and foodways
- The community's hard work ethic, agricultural know-how, and signature Minnesota Nice hospitality create a welcoming environment where diversity is not just accepted—it's celebrated
- Hormel Foods' commitment to global sustainability, regenerative agriculture, and food safety reflects a corporate ethos that aligns with local values
- New food businesses—supported by local farmland, entrepreneurial infrastructure, and food equity initiatives—are reshaping what rural food economies can look like
- Institutions like The Hormel Institute and community efforts like Hometown Food Security elevate health and food security as pillars of regional pride and shared progress



# EDUCATION

## VISION

Our education ecosystem equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to meet the demands of a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable food economy—positioning Austin and Mower County as a center of excellence in culinary arts, agriculture, food science, food technology, innovation, nutrition, and public health.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

### FOOD & CULINARY EDUCATION

- Partner with restaurant and food entrepreneurs to create incubators, food halls, and shared-use kitchens, offering mentorship, training, and business development support.
- Expand certification opportunities including ServSafe, HACCP, Cicerone, sommelier training, and small business development courses.
- Support education in specialty food and beverage product development, particularly in the use of commercial cover crops (e.g., Kernza, hazelnuts, field peas) as raw ingredients for innovative food products.

### AGRICULTURE & FOOD SCIENCE

- Become a national hub for agricultural research and development—managing and developing proprietary intellectual property (IP) in areas such as regenerative farming practices, pest management and precision agriculture, food safety and environmental sustainability, supply chain and logistics innovation, food tech, culinary training, and other studies.
- Implement agriculture-focused curricula in K-12, scaffolded through programming at Riverland Community College and university partnerships, to build clear pathways into ag-tech and agri-business careers.
- Offer vocational training and certifications in farm equipment maintenance, irrigation systems, greenhouse management, and sustainable agriculture, etc..

### CAREER PATHWAYS & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

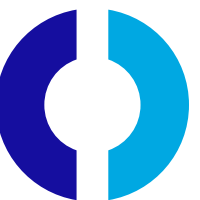
- Create certificates, degrees, and continuing education programs to meet the evolving workforce needs across the Food City realms: agriculture, culinary, food manufacturing, logistics, food safety, and nutrition.
- Strengthen internship and mentorship pipelines that connect K-12 students and college learners to on-farm apprenticeships, food labs and processing centers, culinary arts experiences, real-world research projects around soil health, cover crop performance, food waste reduction, and climate resilience.

### SCHOOL & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- Expand access to school-based food access programs: campus food pantries, student-run gardens, mobile food markets.
- Support scratch cooking in schools by upgrading equipment and training cafeteria staff.
- Integrate food literacy and nutrition education into classroom curriculum—with hands-on learning in gardens, kitchens, and farms.
- Empower students and families to co-create culturally relevant food programs, such as student-led cooking classes, pop-up meals, and peer-to-peer food education.
- Connect older students with mentorship roles that allow them to teach younger peers, developing leadership skills while fostering community.

### THOUGHT LEADERSHIP & NATIONAL REACH

- Attract and host conferences, summits, and think tanks that align with the Food City Initiative—convening thought leaders, policymakers, investors, and educators in Austin year-round.
- Position the region as a living laboratory for rural food system transformation, attracting research grants, talent, and media attention to Austin and Mower County.



## GOAL

Become the go-to rural/mid-sized community in the U.S. where the future of food is explored—on the plate, in the lab, on the farm, in the classroom and through policy.

## ACTION

Position Austin and Mower County as a national thought leader in food tech, agriculture, culinary arts, and policy through attracting and producing summits, conferences and individual invitations to influencers to experience and tell the Austin and Mower County story. This should be developed in partnership with Discover Austin, Development Corporation of Austin, Riverland Community College, Hormel Foods, Hormel Institute, Austin Chamber of Commerce and other partners that are working to attract ideas, talent, investment, and attention. This approach blends tourism, economic development, and thought leadership to position Austin and Mower County as a model for others by positioning the community where the future of food is imagined and experienced.

Activate school campuses as places where students, families, and neighbors can connect with healthy, affordable food through food pantries, community gardens, mobile markets, and food literacy programs.

- Address food insecurity among students and families with school-based food pantries, with fresh meal creation as part of the high school Pro Start.
- Develop community gardens on school campus grounds and connect them to on-site food pantries, in school weekly mobile markets or provide a vendor space at the local farmers market as part of an entrepreneurial class.
- Enable use of campus kitchens for community use as part of a local food entrepreneur focused on the high school Pro Start and Riverland culinary and food science students.
- Find local funding to support the emerging Pro Start program at the high school level and greenhouse and agriculture program at Riverland.

Cultivate the next generation of ag-leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs by embedding agriculture-focused learning throughout K-12, and aligning it with higher education, workforce needs, and national food system challenges to strengthen Austin/Mower County positioning as a living lab and destination for agricultural education and research

## EXAMPLE 1: FOUNDATIONS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (GRADES K-5)

- Getting fingers dirty in a garden-based learning experience that incorporates science, math, ecology, biology, etc.
- Uncover family food origin stories and share with community, including its own project website (see Humans of New York project)
- Introduce the science of composting, pollinators, water cycles and incorporate art, technology and multi-media as part of a unique mapping of Austin and Mower County
- Conduct farm field trips & facilitate hands-on farmer and scientist visits
- Introduction to cooking classes within classrooms, as well as after-school family-based learning opportunities
- Partner with Hormel and other industry leaders – as well as restaurant owners, food manufactures, distribution companies, Homel line workers, etc. for career awareness



# CONT. EDUCATION

## EXAMPLE 2: EXPLORATION IN MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6–8)

- Offer core classes and electives in sustainable agriculture, ag-tech, food systems.
- Partner with Riverland on sharing soil & plant science labs, aquaponics, hydroponics studies and curricula development.
- Provide access and exploration of digital agriculture tools, such as GPS mapping technology, drone use (see FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certification), and app development (see Hometown Food Security app as example).
- Offer Capstone project credit that enables problem-based learning around challenges of food access and equity, global warming, cover crop development, etc..
- Support entrepreneurial projects (mini-farm stand, school market).

## EXAMPLE 3: SPECIALIZATION IN HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9–12)

- Dual credit & early college courses with Riverland and agriculture Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs.
- Internships with farms, co-ops, ag-tech startups, processors, restaurants, distribution companies, etc..
- Capstone senior projects: product development, research, policy, farm planning, agribusiness, plant/animal science, conservation, and food tech tracks.
- Participation in Future Farmers of America, Skills USA, ProStart Invitational, American Chef Federation, Career Development Events (CDEs), National Competition in Food, Farming and Natural Environment and other national competitions.
- Supporting launch of micro-enterprises (greenhouse, livestock, culinary) as part of core curricula.
- Strong partnerships with Riverland, including Summer bridge programs and college immersion days.
- Joint advisory board between high school ag educators and Riverland faculty and recruitment scholarships into Riverland's ag, food science, or environmental programs.



# FOOD EDUCATION: EXAMPLES

## KALAMAZOO VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE: VALLEYHUB, KALAMAZOO MI

ValleyHUB is a social enterprise food hub that is a program of Kalamazoo Valley Community College. It operates alongside community education and workforce development programs, with learning and innovation as a central pillar to connect food buyers and sellers through matchmaking and logistics. Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Food Innovation Center (FIC) is a living lab for skills-based training programs, community education and networking focused on building a sustainable, healthy, prosperous and equitable food. The Food Innovation Center is part of the Bronson Healthy Living Campus, a collaboration between Bronson Healthcare Group, Integrated Services of Kalamazoo, and Kalamazoo Valley Community College

## THE BRONSON HEALTHY LIVING CAMPUS

A catalyst for urban revitalization, community health and workforce development through sustainable food education, training production, distribution and preparation. Innovative collaborations between the three project partners, the nearby medical school, the City of Kalamazoo, adjoining neighborhoods, and other organizations are meeting increasing community demand for holistic approaches to health. Together, we are preparing the next generation of professionals for existing and emerging careers in food and healthcare. Facilities include Classroom space for college and community classes; Urban Farm: Greenhouse, Grow Room, Raised Bed Chef's Garden, Apiary, Garden and landscape demonstration spaces; and the offices and licensed Wholesale Food Facility for ValleyHUB. The Food Innovation Center includes flexible food processing and logistics space, equipped to wash, peel, chop, freeze and package fresh, in-season produce.

## FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROJECT

Farm-to-school enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons and farm field trips. Farm-to-school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.

### May include:

- **PROCUREMENT:** Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste-test.
- **SCHOOL GARDENS:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.
- **EDUCATION:** Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition.

## IMPROVING SCHOOL FOOD: WELLNESS IN THE SCHOOLS

Wellness in the Schools is a national nonprofit that teaches children healthy habits to learn, live and thrive. It partners with public schools, chefs and coaches to ensure access to nourishing food and active play. The Cook for Kids program helps feed kids real food, transforming the cafeteria menu and making the classroom a fun and encouraging space to learn about nutrition. Understanding the limited resources of public schools, WITS Chefs, trained culinary graduates, work with schools to transform the cafeteria menu, train school staff, and provide nutrition education to students.

## IMPROVING SCHOOL FOOD: CHEF ANN FOUNDATION

The Chef Ann Foundation helps school districts build, implement, and sustain a self-operated, cook-from-scratch program. A comprehensive program provides professional development and district support – including funding support – to help public school districts provide scratch-cooked, healthy and delicious meals.



*Greetings from*



*Minnesota*

#VisitAustinMN

**ROOTED IN WELCOME**

AUSTIN'S DOWNTOWN BLUEPRINT

# A PLACE TO BELONG, A PLACE TO THRIVE

A vibrant and thriving downtown is a cornerstone of community identity. It shapes how residents live, how visitors experience a place, and how a city expresses its character. Downtown is more than a commercial or cultural center – it is often the beating heart that reflects a community's values, history, and aspirations.

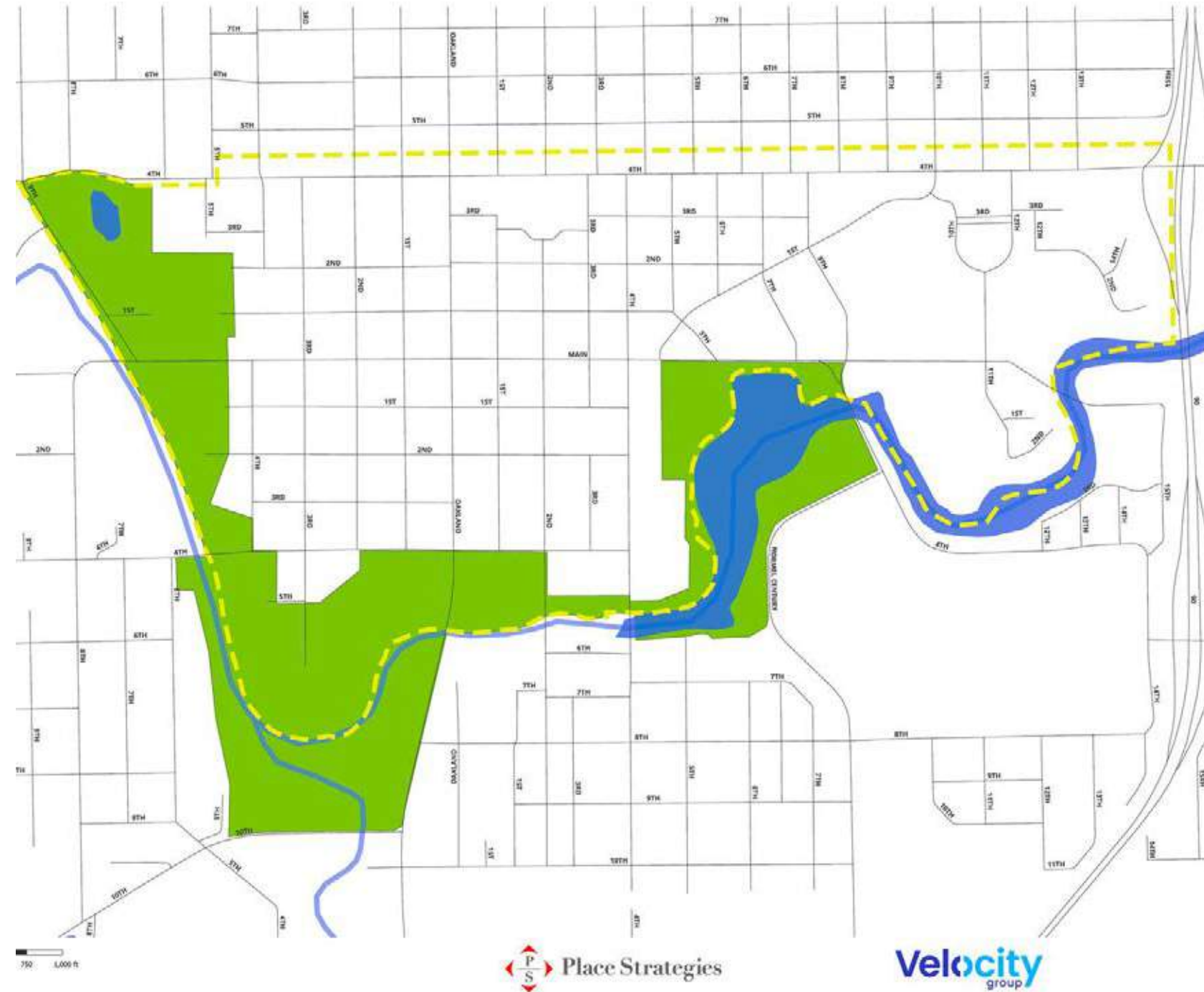
Downtown Austin is no exception. In recent years, the community has made significant strides to revitalize its core through major catalytic projects like the relocation of the SPAM® Museum, the construction of new YMCA facilities, and the renovation of the historic Paramount Theatre. These initiatives – combined with adjacent private development – have redefined Downtown Austin as not only a local hub, but also a regional destination, and in the case of the SPAM® Museum, a point of global interest.

Thanks to years of hard work and collaboration across both the public and private sectors, downtown development has gained meaningful traction. Now, with momentum building, the City of Austin is entering a new phase of opportunity – one rooted in strategic alignment, regional collaboration, and bold vision.

In an unprecedented effort for a community of this size, the City of Austin has launched a comprehensive planning process in partnership with Mower County – of which both governmental entities have a profound interest in the future of Downtown Austin. This unique approach bridges long-term vision with street-level action, connecting infrastructure with identity, and planning with place-making. It positions both the City of Austin and Mower County as statewide leaders in community planning, economic development, and regional branding.

The current planning process defines the downtown geographic boundary at approximately 457 acres – about 16% of Austin's total footprint. Within that footprint lies the city's commercial, social, educational, cultural, historical, political, and civic center. The goal moving forward is clear: to continue strengthening downtown as the epicenter of community life, where Austin's evolving story is told, and where its future is taking shape.

## DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORK PLANNING AREA



# A STRONG CORE, A STRONGER CITY

## THE POWER OF A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN

Creating a downtown that is both sustainable and vibrant requires more than just development—it calls for a thoughtful, holistic approach that balances economic vitality, environmental responsibility, and community well-being. A truly thriving downtown is one where people live, work, gather, and connect in ways that reflect their shared values and vision for the future. The following core elements outline the foundational ingredients necessary to ensure Downtown Austin continues to grow as a welcoming, resilient, and dynamic heart of the community.

### CORE ELEMENTS OF A SUSTAINABLE AND VIBRANT DOWNTOWN

#### MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

- Blend of residential, commercial, office, and entertainment uses
- Encourages walkability and 24/7 activity
- Supports a live-work-play environment

#### AFFORDABLE AND DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS

- Ensures residents of all incomes and ages can live near the core
- Supports local workforce and social diversity
- Reduces displacement and commuting pressures

#### MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY

- Safe and accessible streets for pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and vehicles
- Connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and regional destinations
- Thoughtful parking and traffic management

#### PUBLIC SPACES & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Parks, plazas, and gathering spaces that invite daily use and community events
- Green stormwater systems, trees, and native landscaping
- Promotes environmental health and urban resilience

#### LOCAL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT

- Storefront revitalization programs, incubators, and grants
- Spaces for makers, creatives, and startups
- Encourages a unique and authentic local economy

#### CULTURAL, ARTISTIC, AND HISTORIC ASSETS

- Preservation and celebration of local heritage
- Public art, performance spaces, and cultural programming
- Adds vibrancy and reflects community identity

#### SAFETY, CLEANLINESS, AND MAINTENANCE

- Well-lit, well-maintained, and secure public areas
- Partnerships for ongoing upkeep (e.g., downtown associations, BID programs)
- Enhances perception and reality of safety

#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & INCLUSIVE PLANNING

- Ongoing input from residents, business owners, and underrepresented groups
- Transparent decision-making processes
- Builds long-term trust and shared ownership

#### ECONOMIC RESILIENCE & ADAPTIVE USE

- Policies that support long-term investment and flexible use of space
- Plans that anticipate market shifts, climate change, and demographic trends
- Encourages reinvention without losing identity

#### STRONG IDENTITY AND BRANDING

- Clear vision for what the downtown represents and offers
- Cohesive design elements and storytelling
- Attracts visitors, investment, and civic pride



# THE GOALS OF THE DOWNTOWN AUSTIN FRAMEWORKS PLAN

At the heart of Austin's vision for the future is a simple yet powerful idea: that a successful downtown isn't just built with bricks and mortar — it's grown with intention, inclusivity, and care. This Downtown Plan is guided by the belief that when a city is rooted in welcome, it creates spaces where everyone feels they belong. When we invest in connection, creativity, and collaboration, we grow more than buildings — we grow opportunity, community, and prosperity for all.

## CORE PRINCIPLES IN THE AUSTIN DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORKS

### 1. HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

Every element of the downtown plan will prioritize the human experience. From public spaces to private developments, the plan aims to create environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and engaging. The goal is to design for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities, ensuring that everyone feels at home and connected in Downtown Austin.

### 2. CONNECTION TO NATURE AND THE CEDAR RIVER

The Cedar River will be integrated into the experience of downtown as both a natural asset and a central gathering space. By activating the riverfront and repurposing floodplains for recreation and wellness, the plan illustrates how a vibrant corridor that blends urban life with nature can be a defining feature of downtown's experience.

### 3. CREATING VIBRANT PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces — including parks, plazas, and green corridors — will be activated with art, events, and community programming. These spaces will serve as gathering points in a downtown that pulses with life. The integration of public art and cultural installations will further enrich the experience, ensuring that art is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

### 4. WALKABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The downtown plan will prioritize walkability, with interconnected streets, pedestrian-friendly zones, and bike lanes that encourage exploration and ease of movement. By emphasizing active transportation, the plan fosters a connected urban landscape where people can easily access different districts, businesses, and amenities by car, bike or foot.

### 5. PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVATIONS

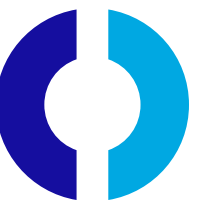
The heart of the experience lies in continuous activation — bringing the streets and public spaces to life with events, festivals, and community-driven programming. From seasonal celebrations to farmers' markets, pop-up shops, and live performances, downtown will be a dynamic stage for creativity and connection. These activations will provide opportunities for local businesses to thrive, create cultural touchstones, and draw visitors to the area.

### 6. INNOVATIVE ARCHITECTURE AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

Experience design is also about creating spaces that feel both modern and rooted in history. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings will honor downtown's heritage, while introducing innovative architectural elements that bring new life and purpose to the district. The goal is to create a downtown that is contemporary yet respectful of its past.

### 7. INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our approach will ensure that local residents and community stakeholders are at the center of the plan implementation. By developing the District Councils (DC) as the platform for citizen action and engagement, the ongoing downtown development will reflect the diversity and needs of its people. These DC's can continue to lead in public input around development concepts, conduct community workshops about particular issues and challenges, and the DC's ongoing engagement will help shape spaces that are truly reflective of Austin's unique cultural fabric.



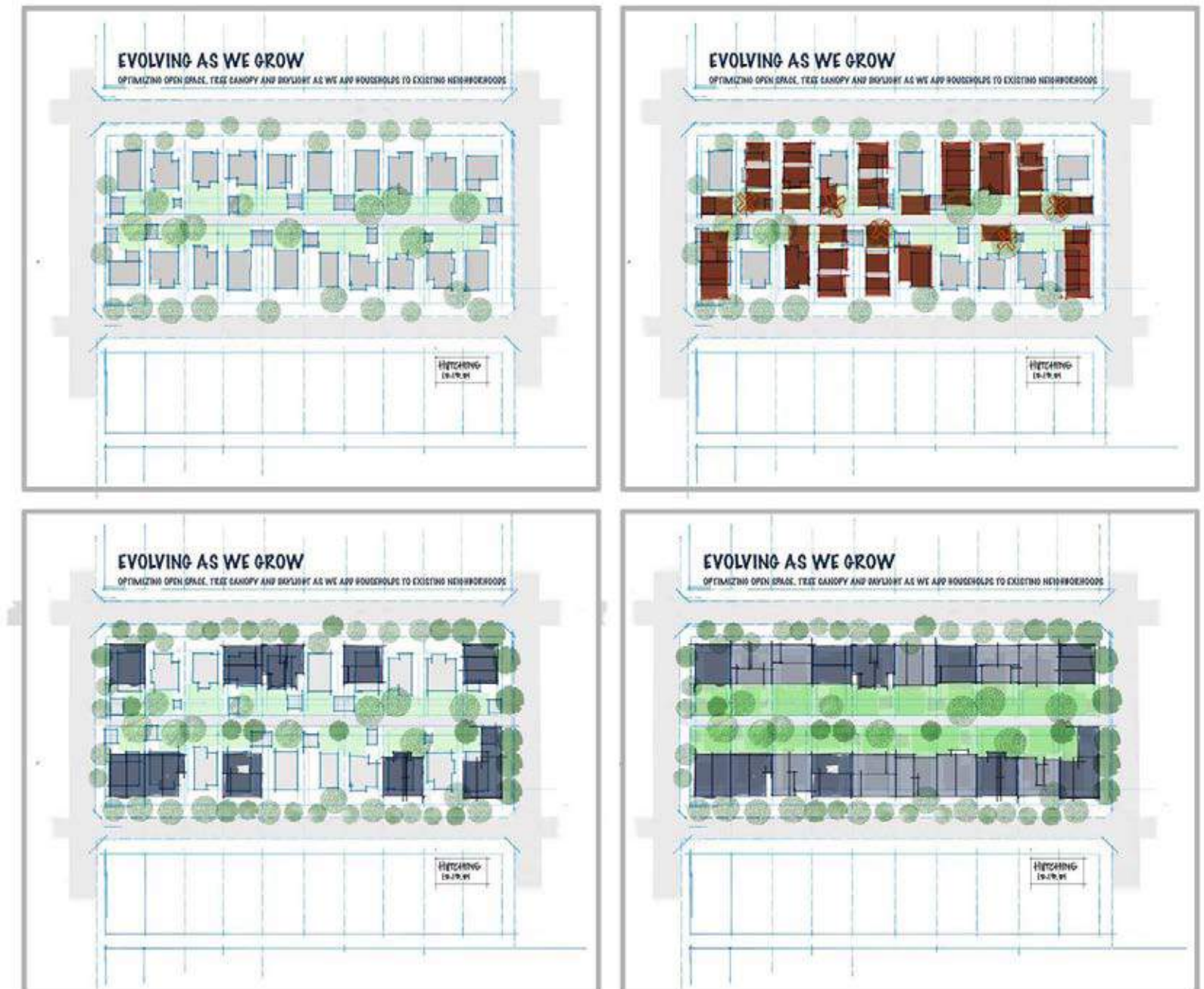
# ACTIVATING THE VISION

Emerging Downtown Vision: **A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN THAT HONORS THE TOWN'S HISTORY, CULTURE, AND VALUES**—serving as a dynamic regional and national hub for diverse economic activity, expanding tourism, rich food and entertainment offerings, and constant social connection.

## VISION FRAMEWORKS

### PROMOTE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

- Prioritize development that increases land value, strengthens the tax base, and respects the character and context of downtown.
- Support Infill Growth
  - + Focus on context-sensitive infill development that integrates residential, commercial, and recreational spaces—offering diverse, walkable opportunities to live, work, and socialize.
- Reconnect with the Cedar River
  - + Reimagine the river's edge as an asset—transforming floodplain and floodway areas into vibrant outdoor recreation and wellness spaces connected to the local food system plan.
- Link Open Spaces
  - + Strengthen downtown's role as the hub of a connected city by linking to existing and future parks, trails, and recreation facilities.
- Celebrate Creativity in Public Spaces
  - + Activate downtown streets, parks, and buildings with public art, sculptures, murals, and creative installations.
- Elevate Downtown as a Destination
  - + Expand the downtown brand by attracting unique retail, a wide range of restaurants and bars, and vibrant seasonal events that draw visitors.
- Strengthen Implementation Capacity
  - + Ensure a strong organizational structure and local capacity exists to effectively implement and sustain the vision.
- Encourage Adaptive Reuse
  - + Support the transformation of existing buildings, with a focus on redeveloping second-floor spaces for housing to strengthen the downtown residential core.



source: cast architecture

# CONNECTING THE AUSTIN DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORKS TO THE FOOD CITY STRATEGY

The vision for downtown Austin is deeply intertwined with the city's broader ambitions for a sustainable, dynamic food system. By aligning the Austin Downtown Frameworks with the Food City Strategy, the plan create a seamless ecosystem where urban growth, food production and distribution, great culinary experiences, dynamic programming are mutually reinforcing. This integrated approach not only strengthens the heart of Austin but also transforms downtown into a vibrant, food-centered destination that embodies the city's food city positioning.

## PLACE-BASED FOOD SYSTEMS AND PUBLIC SPACES

In alignment with the Downtown Framework, public spaces—such as parks, plazas, and riverfront areas—will be activated as food hubs. These spaces can host farmers' markets, community gardens, and food festivals, making food production and consumption an integral part of the urban experience. The Cedar River corridor, in particular, can serve as an area for agriculture-focused programs, offering opportunities for urban farming, local food markets, and community-based events that celebrate the role of food in community life.

## SUPPORTING LOCAL PRODUCERS AND FOOD ENTREPRENEURS

The Food City Strategy focuses on strengthening local food producers and entrepreneurs, which aligns directly with downtown's economic development goals. By prioritizing spaces for local food vendors, pop-up restaurants, and artisanal food markets, we can create entrepreneurial opportunities that contribute to downtown's vibrancy while supporting the local food ecosystem. These initiatives will stimulate both the downtown economy and the local food economy, fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Integrating food systems into the downtown framework also aligns with goals for environmental sustainability. The repurposing of floodplains and the integration of green spaces will incorporate sustainable food practices such as hydroponic farming, community gardens, and zero-waste initiatives. By creating a green corridor along the Cedar River, Downtown Austin can serve as a model for climate-smart urban agriculture that reduces the city's carbon footprint while enhancing access to healthy, local food.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Both the Downtown Frameworks and the Food City Strategy emphasize the importance of community engagement. By creating educational spaces within downtown—such as food incubators, workshops on sustainable agriculture, or interactive food programming—residents and visitors alike can learn about food security, sustainability, and urban agriculture. These spaces also encourage collaborative partnerships between local farmers, chefs, food activists, and urban planners, ensuring that the food strategy is inclusive and community-driven.

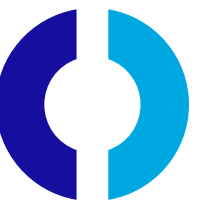
## CONNECTING DOWNTOWN TO REGIONAL FOOD NETWORKS

The Austin Downtown Frameworks emphasize connectivity, and by linking downtown to broader regional food systems and supply chains, the city can enhance its role as a hub for food innovation. Building connections with local farmers, food cooperatives, and regional food distributors will provide downtown with fresh, diverse, and locally-sourced food options. Additionally, food-centric tourism, such as farm-to-table experiences and culinary tours, can further position Downtown Austin as a destination that celebrates its rich agricultural heritage and innovative food scene.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS INTEGRATION

As part of downtown's focus on health and wellness, the food strategy directly complements these goals by encouraging access to fresh, nutritious food and promoting food as a part of a healthy lifestyle. By creating spaces for healthy food production, like urban farms or community gardens, and programming that focuses on nutrition, downtown can help cultivate a culture of well-being for all residents. This supports food access initiatives, ensuring that healthy food options are available to all members of the community.

This connection between the Downtown Frameworks and the Food City Strategy will transform Downtown Austin into a living example of how food systems can thrive in an urban setting, enhancing quality of life, economic development, and environmental sustainability for years to come.



# DOWNTOWN GATEWAYS

## CREATING VIBRANT ENTRANCES TO AUSTIN'S URBAN CORE

To create a seamless and cohesive experience for those entering a community or transitioning between districts and neighborhoods, it's essential to understand the points of entry and the context of these transitions. Designing gateway features and liminal spaces - the subtle transitional zones between downtown districts and surrounding neighborhoods - must respect the community's identity and facilitate clear transitions from one area to another ensures a more welcoming and engaging urban environment.

### IDENTIFY KEY ENTRY POINTS (GATEWAYS)

Before designing any gateway features or transitional spaces, first map out where people most commonly enter your community, district, or neighborhood. Key entry points could include:

- **MAJOR HIGHWAYS AND ROADWAYS:** These are the most visible entry points for those arriving by car. They require large, attention-grabbing signage and clear transitions to lower-speed urban areas.
- **PUBLIC TRANSIT HUBS:** Consider bus stations, train stations, or light rail stops as major access points for pedestrians and cyclists.
- **PEDESTRIAN PATHS AND GREENWAYS:** Key walking routes or trails leading into downtown or neighborhoods
- **WATERWAYS OR PARKS:** Areas where people may access the community via boat or walk through parks could also be significant entry points.

### UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE ACCESS SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND ATTRACTIONS

Next, understand how people typically access services, amenities, and attractions after entering the community or neighborhood. This knowledge will help in crafting pathways that lead people to key destinations and integrate with the surrounding environment:

- **KEY DESTINATIONS:** Identify where people are heading after they pass through the gateway. This might include government buildings, cultural hubs, commercial areas, or public spaces like parks and libraries.
- **PUBLIC SERVICES:** Identify where major public services like medical facilities, community centers, or schools are located and ensure these are well-connected through the gateway areas.
- **COMMERCIAL AREAS:** Retail, restaurants, or entertainment districts should be integrated into the gateway design to encourage foot traffic and tourism.

### ANALYZE THE "VIBE" AND CONTEXT OF EACH ENTRY POINT

Every district or neighborhood has its own distinct vibe and context, and these should inform the gateway design. Whether a neighborhood is historic, arts-focused, residential, or commercial, the design features should reflect the unique culture and story of the area. Consider:

- **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:** Is there a local story, historical event, or cultural reference that defines the community? Incorporate these elements into gateway markers, signage, or art installations.

- **ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:** The architectural design of the area should inform the choice of materials, colors, and signage styles. For example, a historic district might utilize more traditional, stone-like materials, while a modern district may favor clean lines and metal finishes.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY:** Understand the mood or character of the neighborhood. For example:
  - + A historic district may have classical-style gateway signage, plaques, or sculptures that reflect its past.
  - + An art district may integrate vibrant, abstract public art and creative signage that communicates the artistic energy of the area.
  - + A residential area may require more subtle, greenery-focused gateways and signs that feel integrated into the landscape.

The merging of identifying gateways with a complete wayfinding strategy involves creating a seamless system that not only marks key entry points into a city or district but also provides continuous guidance throughout the entire urban space. This integration enhances the user experience, reinforcing a sense of identity and purpose while maintaining functionality across different spaces.



## TRANSITION FROM HIGH-SPEED TO URBAN STREETScape

The transition between high-speed highways and slower-moving, pedestrian-friendly downtown streets should be carefully managed through design:

- **PAVING AND SURFACE TREATMENTS:** As drivers exit highways and enter downtown, gradually shift from the more industrial feel of highways to softer, more intricate paving (e.g., brick, cobblestone, or textured concrete) to signal the change from vehicular to pedestrian space.
- **WIDE BOULEVARD ENTRANCES:** Consider using boulevard-style entrances with tree-lined medians and wide lanes that transition people from the high-speed environment of highways to a more relaxed pace as they enter the downtown core.
- **SCALED SIGNAGE:** On highways, signage should be large and easily visible from a distance, with clear directional cues. As people enter the downtown district, the signage can become more detailed and pedestrian-oriented, highlighting specific destinations, neighborhoods, and public spaces.

## GREEN SPACE AND LANDSCAPING AS TRANSITION ZONES

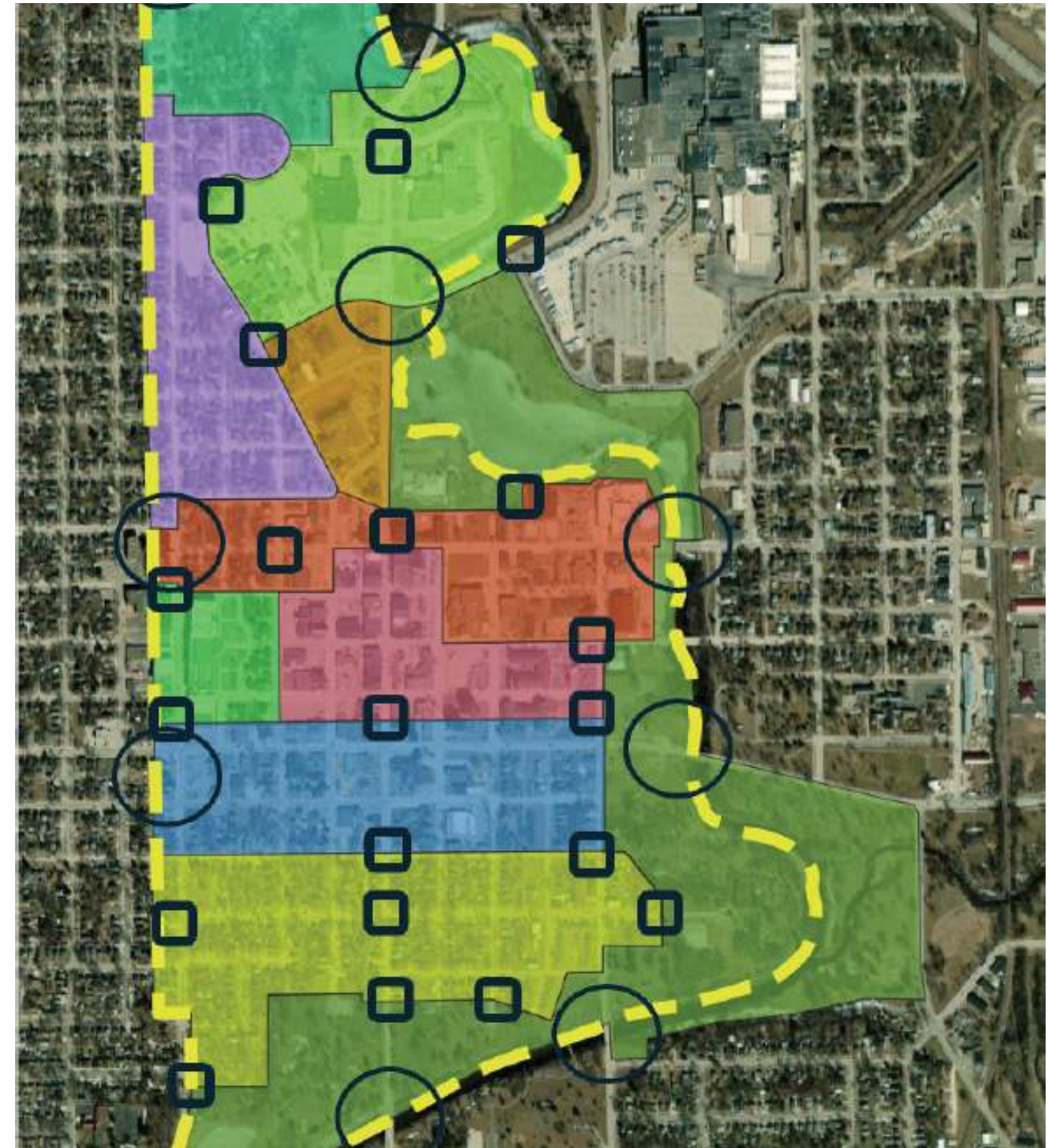
Strategically designed green spaces can act as both a buffer and a visual cue between the high-speed, concrete environment of highways and the more walkable urban downtown:

- **GATEWAY PARKS AND PLAZAS:** Incorporating small parks or green medians at gateway points can signal a transition into a more vibrant, community-oriented area. These parks should be designed with features like native plantings, water features, and seating that welcome people to pause and transition into the city.
- **TREE CANOPY:** The use of trees along roadsides not only softens the entrance but also provides visual and physical buffers, creating a clear distinction between the highway and downtown districts.

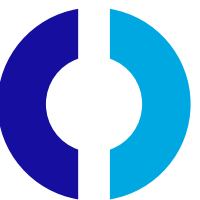
## ART AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS TO REFLECT IDENTITY

Incorporating art and culture into gateway design can enhance the sense of place and make the experience more memorable:

- **PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS:** Integrating local art (e.g., sculptures, murals, mosaics) into gateway areas can evoke the cultural heritage and creativity of Austin. This could involve collaborative art projects with local artists that represent the city's unique identity.
- **CULTURAL MARKERS:** Include historical signage or architectural features that reference the city's past, providing visitors with a deeper connection to the area and enhancing the feeling of entering a distinct space.



Map Key  
Major Gateways - circle  
District/Neighborhood Gateways/Public Art - Square





# IDENTIFYING GATEWAYS

**THE MERGING OF IDENTIFYING GATEWAYS WITH A COMPLETE WAYFINDING STRATEGY INVOLVES CREATING A SEAMLESS SYSTEM THAT NOT ONLY MARKS KEY ENTRY POINTS INTO A CITY OR DISTRICT BUT ALSO PROVIDES CONTINUOUS GUIDANCE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE URBAN SPACE. THIS INTEGRATION ENHANCES THE USER EXPERIENCE, REINFORCING A SENSE OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE WHILE MAINTAINING FUNCTIONALITY ACROSS DIFFERENT SPACES.**

# THE LANGUAGE OF PLACE

## WAYFINDING AND PUBLIC ART TO BUILD DOWNTOWN'S IDENTITY

Wayfinding is traditionally understood as a signage system that highlights key attractions and features of a community or neighborhood, guiding both residents and visitors to these destinations. However, when paired with placemaking, wayfinding evolves beyond directional signs—it becomes a tool for storytelling, shaping experiences, and revealing the identity and history of a place.

A comprehensive wayfinding system does more than guide movement—it shapes perception and enhances experience.

- Establishes identity at key gateways through branded signage, landscaping, and design elements that signal arrival into a distinct place or district.
- Embodies the community's story through visual cues, materials, and messaging that reflect its history, values, and aspirations.
- Drives economic vitality by encouraging exploration, increasing foot traffic, and attracting visitors—ultimately supporting local businesses and expanding the tax base beyond residents.

### A UNIFIED MUNICIPAL APPROACH TO WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

A well-designed wayfinding and signage program must function as a comprehensive municipal system, not a collection of isolated signs. It should be strategically planned across all city zones—from highways to pedestrian paths—to ensure consistency, clarity, and cohesion. This system supports not only navigation but also placemaking, branding, and economic development, reinforcing a sense of identity throughout the community.

### FOCUS OF WAYFINDING

Wayfinding systems are designed to promote public spaces, civic institutions, schools, community destinations, and major cultural or recreational attractions. Their primary purpose is to support navigation, community identity, and equitable access to shared resources. These systems do not serve as advertising tools for private businesses, but rather highlight assets that contribute to the public good and collective experience of the community.

### PUBLIC ART AS A COMPONENT OF WAYFINDING

Public art enhances wayfinding by turning navigation into an experiential journey rather than a purely functional task. Integrated thoughtfully, art can serve as a visual landmark, an orientation tool, and a storytelling medium that reflects the community's identity and values.

Sculptures, murals, artistic signposts, and pavement inlays can mark key intersections, gateways, or paths—guiding people intuitively while enriching their connection to place.

Rather than replacing signage, public art complements it, offering a memorable sense of location and fostering civic pride. When art and wayfinding are developed together, they create a layered system that is both navigable and inspiring.



# WAYFINDING SYSTEMS

A COHESIVE JOURNEY FROM HIGHWAY TO SIDEWALK

The wayfinding system for Austin, Minnesota is designed as a layered, context-sensitive network that guides visitors and residents seamlessly from the highway gateway to the heart of the community. As users transition through different travel modes and speeds—highway, urban corridors, neighborhood streets, and pedestrian zones—the system adapts in form and scale while remaining unified in brand identity, typography, and color palette.

## HIGHWAY GATEWAY (45–70+ MPH)

At the highway level, large-scale entry monuments and directional signage introduce Austin as a destination. These signs prioritize legibility and quick comprehension, using bold fonts, high-contrast colors, and reflective materials. They orient drivers to key exits and major attractions like downtown, the SPAM® Museum, or the Hormel Nature Center.

## URBAN CORRIDORS (25–45 MPH)

As vehicles enter primary roads within the city, signage scales down but retains the same brand language. Corridor signs highlight downtown, districts, parking, and visitor services. Materials and design details start to reflect local character—brick bases, steel accents, or artistic embellishments—all tied together through a consistent visual identity.

## NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS (15–30 MPH)

In quieter residential or commercial areas, wayfinding becomes more community-focused. Signage points to schools, parks, trail access, and local destinations. These signs are more human-scaled and may incorporate storytelling elements or public art, still unified in typography and color.

## PEDESTRIAN ZONES (WALKING SPEED)

In downtown and recreational areas, pedestrian-oriented signs, kiosks, and interpretive panels offer detailed information, walking maps, and points of interest. This level allows for richer storytelling, historical context, and even digital integration through QR codes or mobile mapping. All visual elements maintain alignment with the city's brand system for a seamless and memorable experience.

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS ACROSS ALL SCALES

- Consistency in branding across speeds (colors, icons, typography)
- Hierarchy of information depending on distance and decision urgency
- Material durability and vandal-resistance
- Accessibility: Include Braille, high contrast, and universal symbols where applicable

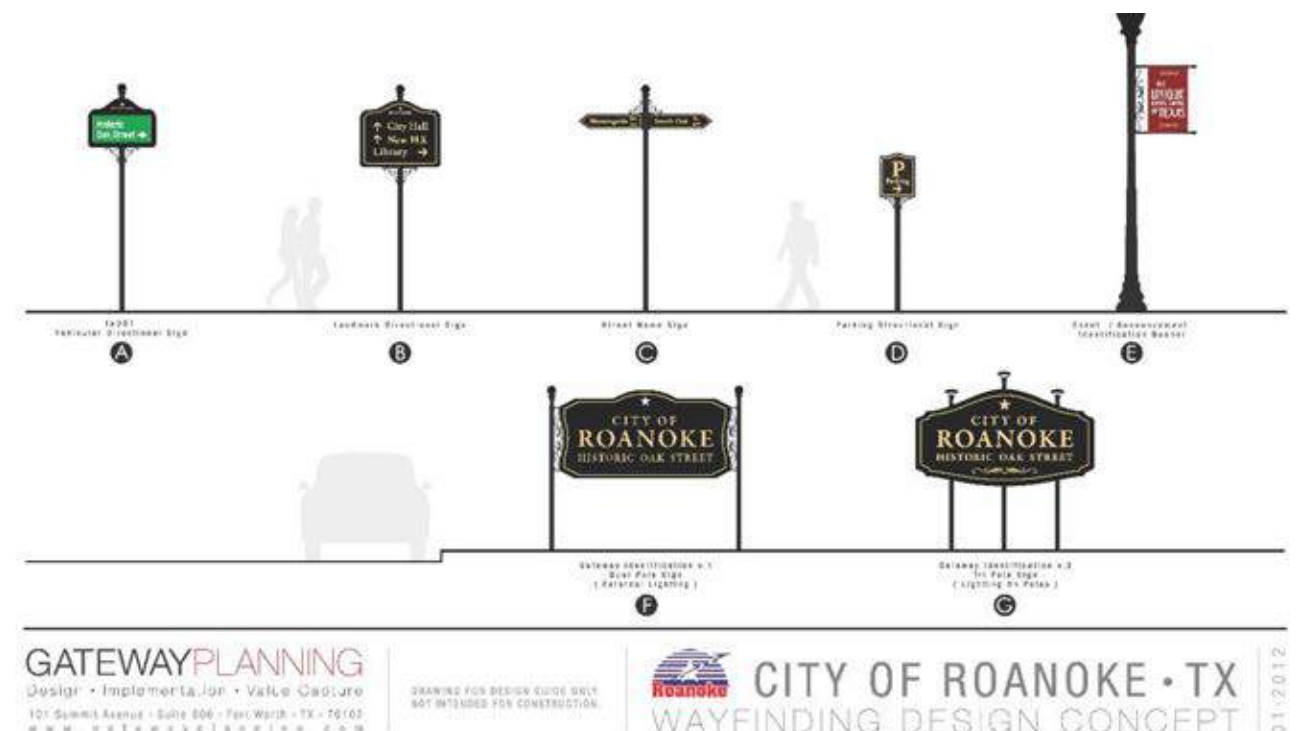


Figure - Wayfinding signage family for the City of Roanoke, Texas

# WELCOME STARTS AT THE CURB PARKING AS A GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE

Effectively managing parking in Downtown Austin, MN, is about more than simply providing spaces to park—it sets the tone for the entire downtown experience. Parking is the first impression for visitors, a critical access point for employees, and a tool that can enhance safety and traffic calming on key streets.

A well-planned, adaptable parking strategy is essential to support local businesses, improve the visitor journey, and promote a shift toward walkability and multi-modal transportation. To sustain a vibrant, accessible downtown, Austin must thoughtfully manage a full spectrum of parking assets—including on-street spaces, public and private off-street lots, and structured parking decks—under a coordinated system that emphasizes responsive policies, operational efficiency, and high-quality urban design.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF A DOWNTOWN PARKING STRATEGY

### 1. ON-STREET PARKING

- Supports quick access to retail and dining
- Encourages turnover through time limits or pricing
- Enhances the streetscape when combined with landscaping, signage, and pedestrian-friendly design

### 2. PUBLIC OFF-STREET LOTS

- Convenient for longer visits, events, and daily downtown users
- Should be clearly signed, well-lit, and integrated into the wayfinding network
- Opportunities exist for shared use agreements to increase efficiency

### 3. PRIVATE OFF-STREET PARKING

- Often underutilized, particularly during evenings and weekends
- Public-private partnerships can unlock this capacity for broader community benefit
- Shared parking strategies reduce the need for additional land consumption

### 4. PARKING DECKS (STRUCTURED PARKING)

- Offer higher capacity in a compact footprint
- Should be strategically located, with attractive, active ground-floor uses
- Long-term flexibility and sustainable features (e.g., EV charging, solar panels) increase community value

### 5. MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS PRINCIPLES

- Centralized oversight to coordinate policies, maintenance, pricing, and data collection
- Embrace smart technology—real-time availability, mobile payments, and dynamic pricing
- Regularly assess usage trends and user feedback to adapt over time
- Connect parking policy to larger goals: economic vitality, equity, sustainability, and multi-modal access



Downtown Austin **CURRENTLY OFFERS A RANGE OF CONVENIENT PARKING OPTIONS** to support visitors, workers, and residents. The system is designed to balance accessibility, turnover, and walkability throughout the urban core.

### METERED PARKING

- Available on key streets within the downtown district
- Operates during designated hours (typically business hours on weekdays)
- Rate: \$1 per hour
- Time Limits: Vary by location to encourage turnover near high-demand areas such as the SPAM Museum, Main
- Street shops, and civic buildings

### PUBLIC PARKING LOTS

- Strategically located to serve downtown businesses, events, and attractions
- Many offer free parking for the first two hours, making them ideal for shopping, dining, and short visits
- Options include both surface lots and structured parking decks, with signage to guide users to available spaces

### TARGETED PARKING STRATEGIES FOR DOWNTOWN AUSTIN, MN

To further enhance access, mobility, and economic vitality, Downtown Austin can adopt the following tailored parking strategies:

#### 1. SPAM MUSEUM & VISITOR DESTINATIONS

- Prioritize short-term, high-turnover parking near entrances.
- Provide clear wayfinding from major roads and public lots.
- Designate bus and group tour parking nearby but off the main corridor.

#### 2. MAIN STREET

- Implement and enforce time-limited metered parking (e.g., 90-minute max).
- Use attractive streetscape elements to blend parking into the pedestrian experience.
- Provide curb space for deliveries, ADA access, and rideshare pick-up/drop-off.

#### 3. PUBLIC OFF-STREET PARKING LOTS & RAMPS

- Promote underused lots through signage and digital maps.
- Maintain free first-hour or two-hour parking incentives to encourage downtown visits.
- Upgrade lighting, safety features, and pedestrian access for comfort and visibility.

#### 4. PRIVATE PARKING PARTNERSHIPS

- Create shared-use agreements with underutilized private lots (especially evenings/weekends).
- Offer incentives for opening private lots to the public during special events.

#### 5. CIVIC BUILDINGS

- Reserve ADA-accessible and short-term public service parking near entries.
- Provide long-term, permitted staff parking in adjacent lots or decks.
- Include secure bike racks and EV charging stations.

#### 6. DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD EDGES

- Establish residential permit zones to prevent spillover parking.
- Use on-street parking strategically for traffic calming on residential streets. Explore shared parking near parks or schools during off-peak hours.

#### 7. SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- Design safe, separated drop-off zones to reduce congestion and conflict.
- Provide staff parking in designated off-street areas.
- Use signage and curb design to protect children and enhance pedestrian visibility.
- A one-size-fits-all approach to parking doesn't work in a diverse downtown like Austin's. Tailoring parking strategies to the function and character of each area—while ensuring they connect through consistent signage, access, and design—ensures a system that supports business, tourism, public access, and neighborhood livability.

# FROM VISION TO ACTION DOWNTOWN GOVERNANCE FOR A THRIVING CORE

A successful downtown doesn't run on vision alone — it needs dedicated, ongoing stewardship. A downtown management and activation entity plays a critical role in coordinating efforts across sectors, ensuring that public spaces are clean, safe, and engaging, and that events, businesses, and development are strategically aligned.

Whether it's a Business Improvement District (BID), nonprofit, or public-private partnership, this entity serves as the backbone of downtown vitality — overseeing day-to-day operations, long-term planning, marketing, and programming. With the right leadership and collaboration, it becomes the driving force behind an activated downtown that not only thrives but continually adapts and grows with the needs of the community.

Some examples to consider:

## **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) / SPECIAL SERVICE DISTRICT (SSD)**

A BID is a defined area within which businesses pay an additional assessment to fund services and improvements beyond what the city provides.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Cleaning, safety, marketing, events, streetscape maintenance, business support
- **GOVERNANCE:** Typically governed by a board of property and business owners
- **EXAMPLE:** Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District (MDID)

## **DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA)**

A public entity, often enabled by state legislation, that uses tools like Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to reinvest in downtown infrastructure, economic development, and placemaking.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Capital improvements, development incentives, strategic planning
- **GOVERNANCE:** Board appointed by local government
- **EXAMPLE:** Grand Rapids DDA (MI)

## **MAIN STREET PROGRAM (NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER MODEL)**

A revitalization approach rooted in historic preservation and community-driven economic development typically used in small to mid-sized communities.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Business retention, design, promotion, historic preservation, volunteer engagement
- **GOVERNANCE:** Usually a nonprofit or city-affiliated organization
- **EXAMPLE:** Winona Main Street Program (MN)

## **NONPROFIT DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP / CORPORATION**

An independent or quasi-public nonprofit that manages, markets, and advocates for downtown, often with a blend of public and private funding.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Branding, activation, advocacy, economic development, strategic initiatives
- **GOVERNANCE:** Board of civic, business, and public-sector leaders
- **EXAMPLE:** Downtown Alliance (Salt Lake City, UT)

## **CITY-LED DOWNTOWN DIVISION OR DEPARTMENT**

A city-run entity that oversees downtown development, maintenance, and planning. May coordinate closely with planning, economic development, and tourism departments.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Policy, infrastructure, land use, interdepartmental coordination
- **GOVERNANCE:** Operated within city government
- **EXAMPLE:** City of Austin (TX) Economic Development Department – Downtown Division

## **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (P3) ENTITY**

A hybrid model that combines public oversight with private sector leadership to implement large-scale downtown development or management strategies.

- **KEY FUNCTIONS:** Project development, investment coordination, long-term planning
- **GOVERNANCE:** Typically joint city and private sector governance
- **EXAMPLE:** 3CDC (Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation)



A blurred photograph of a city street at night. The scene is filled with warm, golden-yellow lights from street lamps and buildings, creating a bokeh effect. A dark tree trunk is visible in the foreground on the right side. The overall atmosphere is cozy and urban.

# DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS

# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS A PEOPLE-FIRST APPROACH TO DOWNTOWN DESIGN

**AN EXPERIENCE DISTRICT IS MORE THAN JUST A COLLECTION OF STREETS, STOREFRONTS, AND BUILDINGS** — it's a curated, people-centered environment that invites discovery, connection, and joy. These districts are designed to be immersive, memorable, and emotionally engaging, blending building typologies and uses, public spaces, art, culture, retail, food, and events into a seamless, walkable fabric.

**IN AN EXPERIENCE DISTRICT, EVERYTHING IS INTENTIONAL** — the sounds, lighting, signage, storefronts, wayfinding, even how people feel moving through the space. It's about storytelling through place: evoking pride, curiosity, and belonging while encouraging people to linger, explore, and return.

## WHY DESIGNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE HAS THE GREATEST LONG-TERM IMPACT

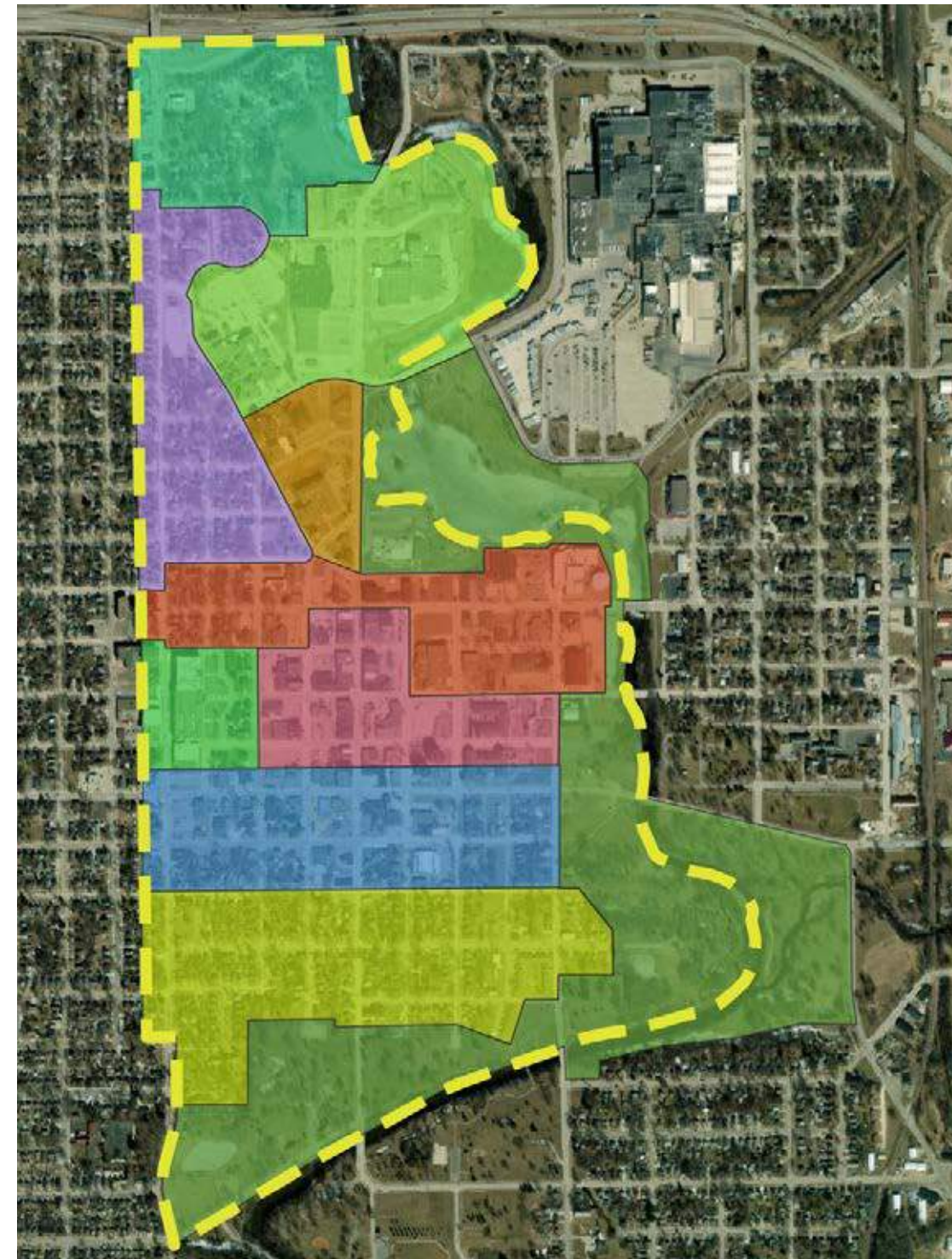
**DESIGNING A DOWNTOWN AROUND HUMAN EXPERIENCE**, rather than solely around infrastructure or economic metrics, yields the most sustainable and transformative results. Here's why:

- People remember how a place makes them feel. Experience-focused design creates emotional connections — which drive return visits, word-of-mouth promotion, and loyalty.
- It attracts both residents and visitors. A well-crafted experience draws locals back to the heart of the city and positions downtown as a destination for tourists, events, and investment.

**IT SUPPORTS LOCAL BUSINESS.** The more time people spend in a space, the more likely they are to support nearby shops, restaurants, and venues.

**IT REFLECTS AND CELEBRATES IDENTITY.** Experience districts amplify what makes a place unique — its culture, its heritage, its creativity — building civic pride and a sense of place. It adapts and evolves. Experience-based strategies encourage dynamic programming, flexible spaces, and seasonal activation that keep downtown fresh and relevant over time.

**DESIGNING A DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORKS PLAN THROUGH AN EXPERIENCE-BASED STRATEGY TRANSFORMS DOWNTOWN FROM A LOCATION INTO A LIVING STORY — ONE THAT RESIDENTS ARE PROUD TO BE PART OF AND VISITORS WANT TO KEEP EXPLORING.**



- Greenway District
- Health District
- Doctor Junction
- 4th Street Neighborhood
- 4th Avenue Corridor
- City Center District
- Education District
- Oakland Avenue Corridor
- Cedar River Park Neighborhood
- Cedar River Regional Park District

# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS: #1 CEDAR RIVER PARK

## CEDAR RIVER PARK: A GREEN CORRIDOR FOR URBAN CONNECTIVITY

The Cedar River Park District represents a bold and forward-thinking vision for Austin – one that reimagines the riverfront as more than a natural asset, but as an active, connected green corridor that unites neighborhoods, downtown, and regional destinations. By weaving together trails, the whitewater park concept, public spaces, and natural landscapes, this district creates opportunities for recreation, environmental stewardship, and community gathering.

In addition, the following plan for the Cedar River Park also includes ways to to reclaim and restore the Cedar River floodplain, transforming it from a barrier into a resilient community asset. Through thoughtful design, environmental restoration and intentional landscaping, the city can create a multi-functional riverfront that manages flood risk while also becoming a regional destination.

The overall downtown plan certainly looks to the Cedar River as a defining feature of Austin's identity and By embracing the natural dynamics of the river, Austin can lead the way in creating a climate-smart, people-centered corridor that turns water into both a safeguard and a spark for community life.

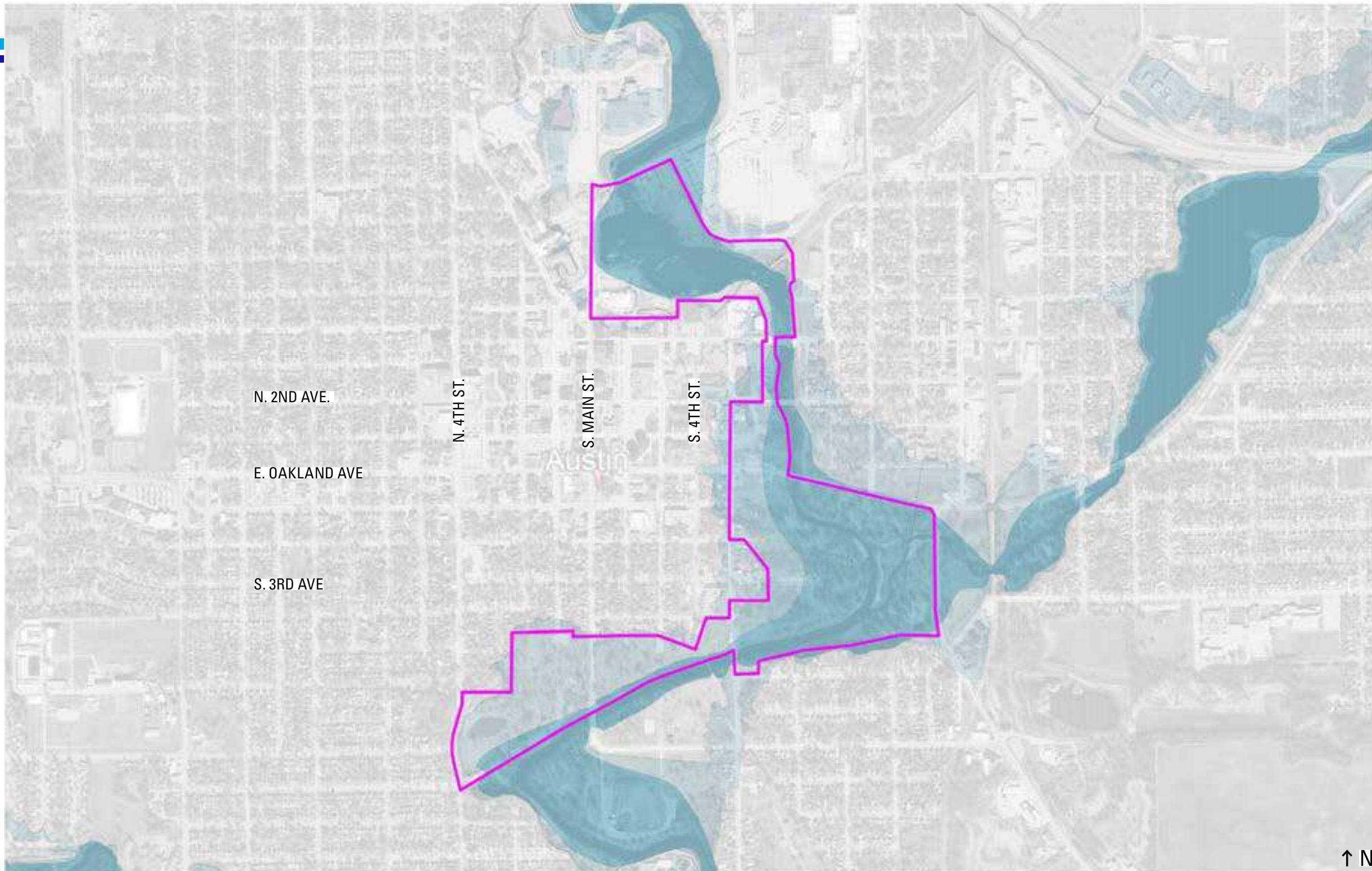


# How can Austin's Cedar River Regional Park reflect the city's vision for the future?

# FLOODING

The greatest need to be addressed for the Cedar River Regional Park is flooding. The 100 year and 500 year floodplains showcase the severity of flooding not only within the park boundary but also throughout downtown Austin.

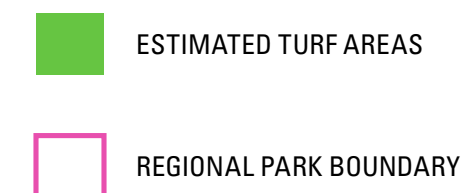
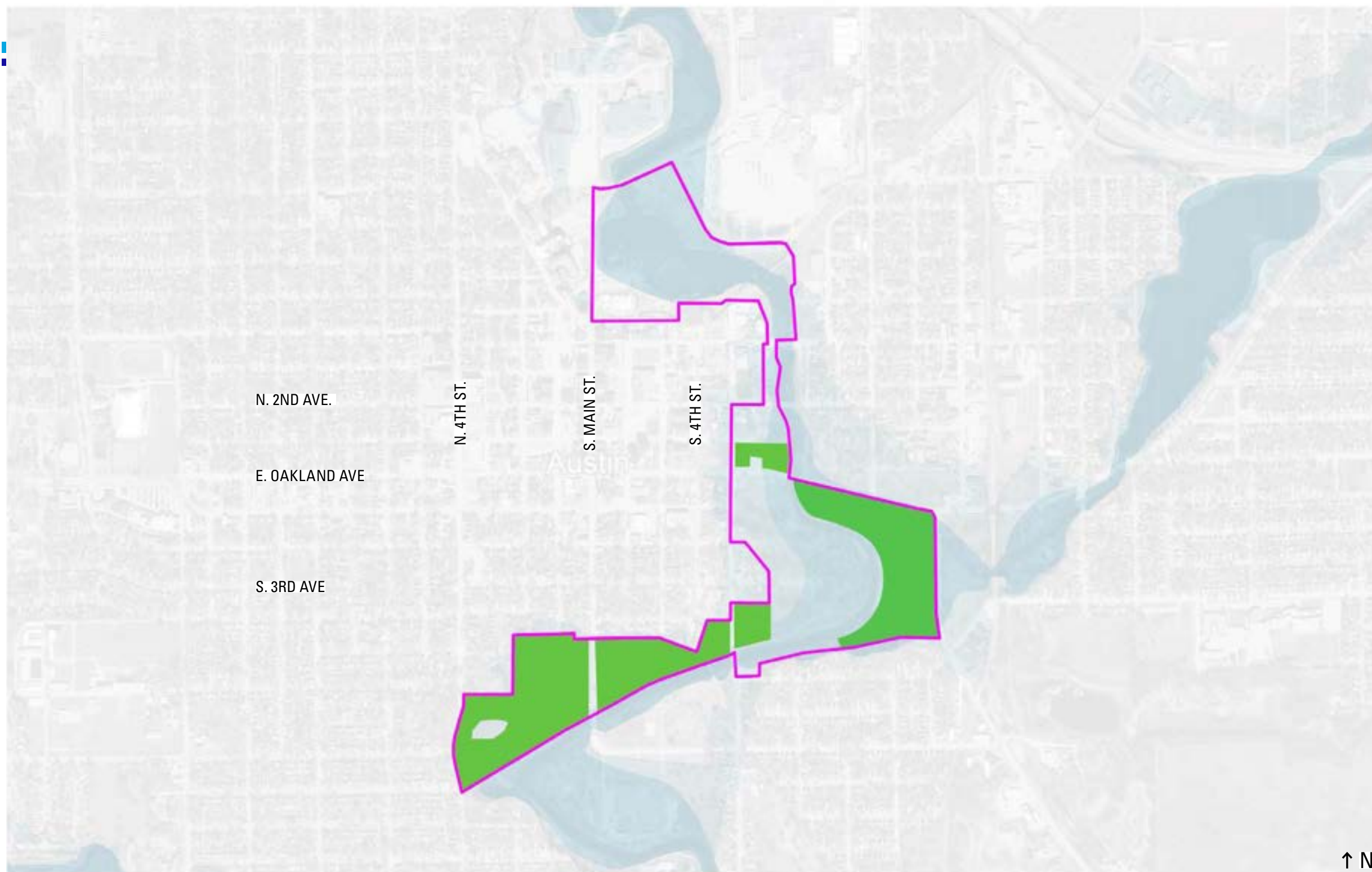
Therefore, the current floodplains should greatly inform design, interventions, and programming.



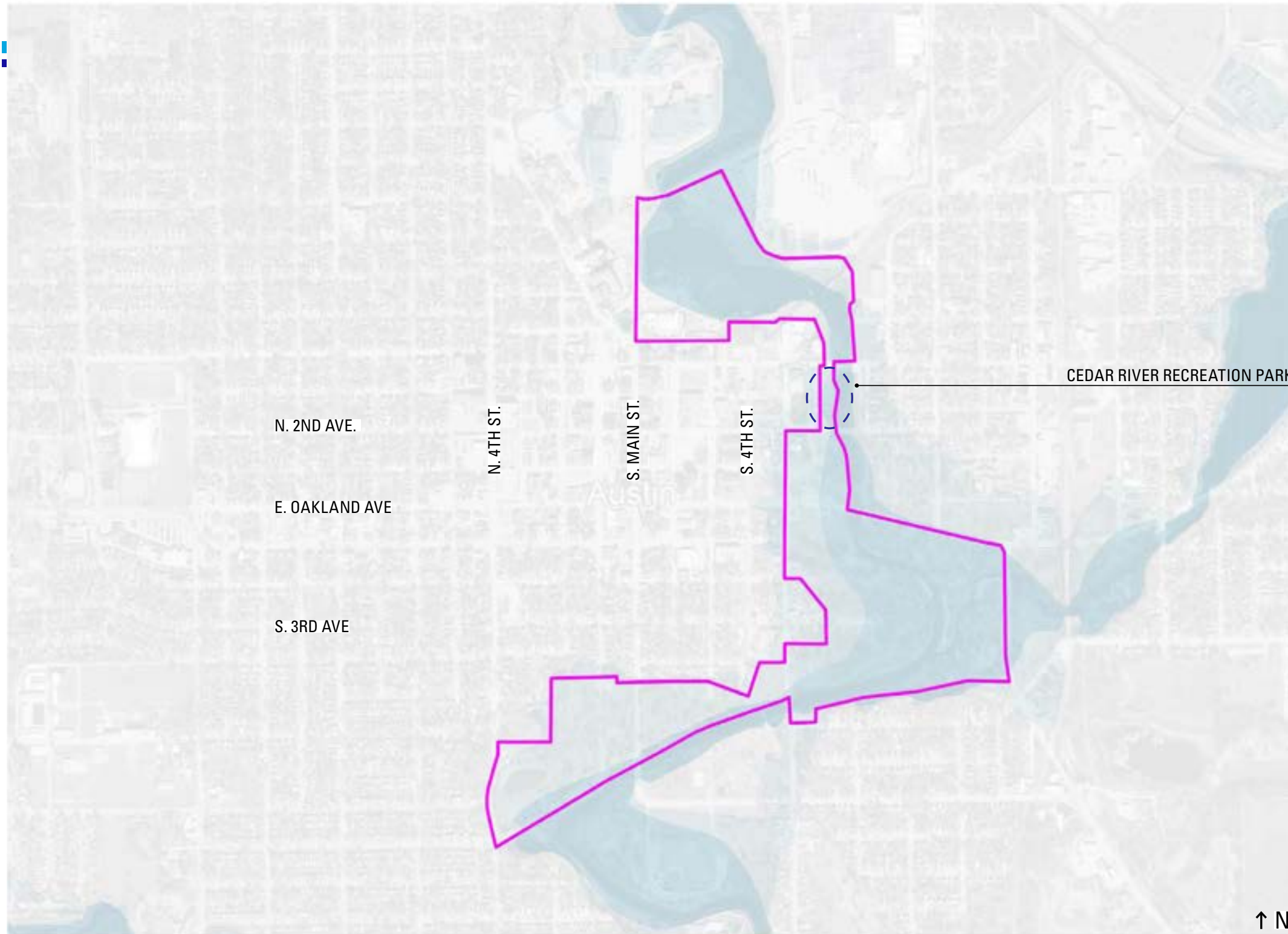
## LAND AND TURF

The Cedar River Regional Park District boundary boasts about 83 acres across the Cedar River and close to downtown Austin.

There is an estimated 50 acres of turf that is currently maintained by Austin's Parks and Recreation department. Reducing turf areas could greatly relieve current maintenance efforts and budget.



# CEDAR RIVER RECREATION PARK



STUDY BY: RECREATION ENGINEERING & PLANNING

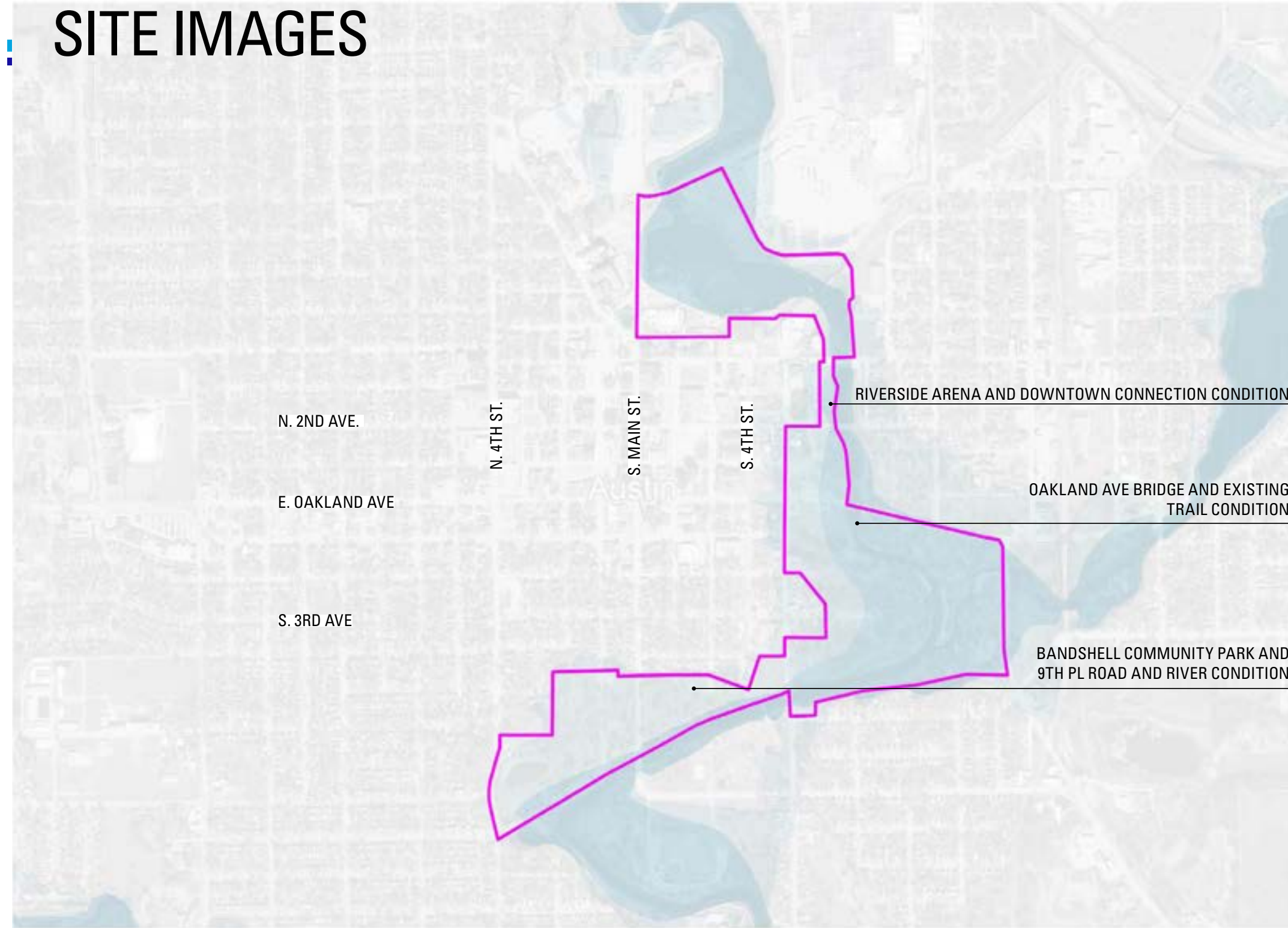
The Cedar River Recreation Park lends itself as a major catalyst project for downtown Austin.

The Whitewater park would attract regional tourism that allows a variety of users to enjoy river surfing, kayaking, and tubing. The Cedar River Recreation Park would improve pedestrian and greenway connectivity along the river that could then be further connected into the Cedar River Regional Park.

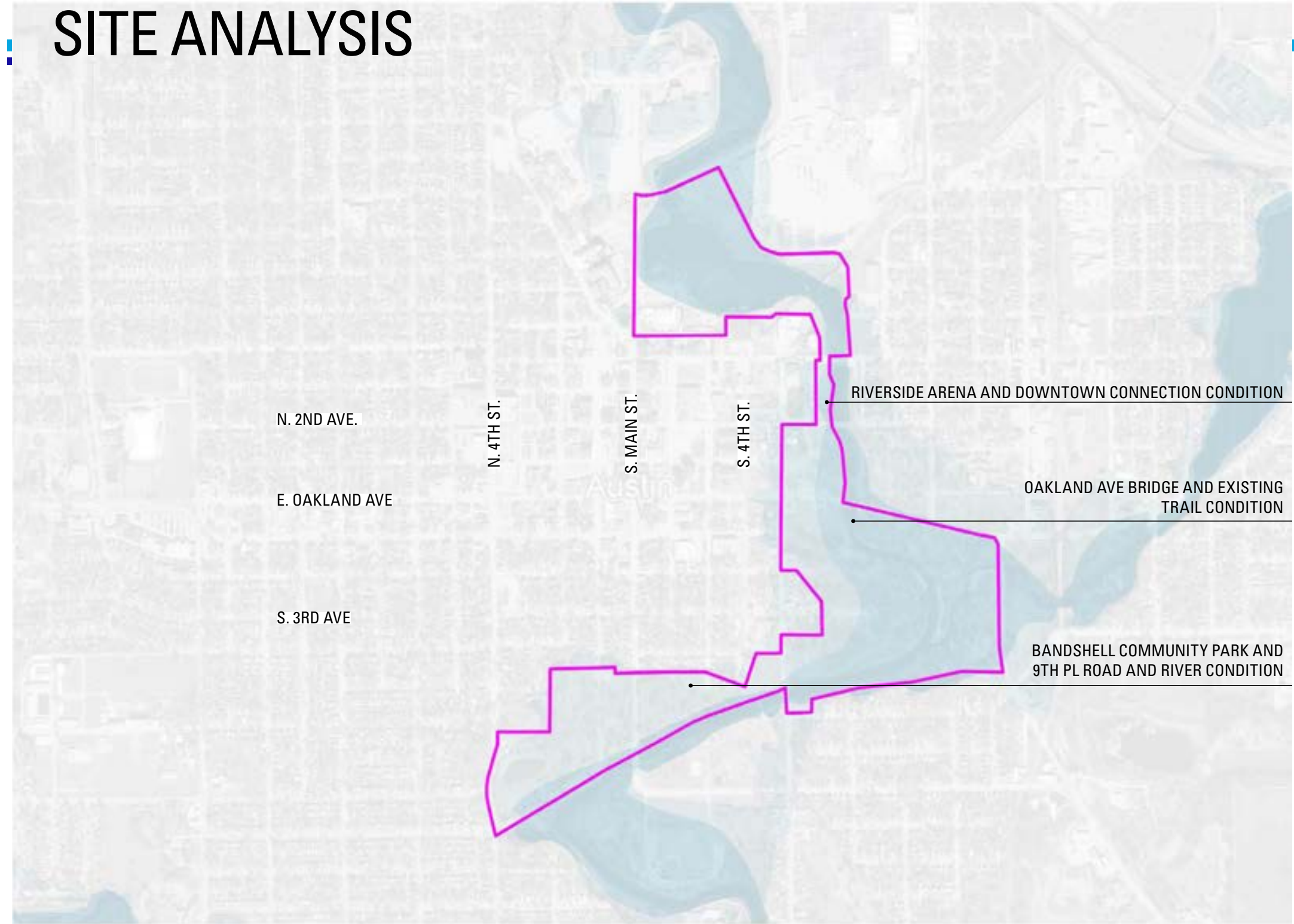
All future plans for the Cedar River Regional Park must consider the proposed improvements of the Recreation Park, while extending its impact and catalytic qualities to ignite change in downtown and empower broader economic vitality.

 REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

# SITE IMAGES



# SITE ANALYSIS



- CEDAR RIVER IS VISUALLY HIDDEN WITH LIMITED ACCESS
- AREA IS PRIMARILY TURF LAWN
- EXISTING GREENWAY IS MINIMALLY MARKED
- NATIVE PLANTING AND EXISTING TREES ARE ROBUST
- RIVER EDGE IS HIDDEN OR VERY STEEP IN SECTIONS
- RIVER ACCESS IS DISCONNECTED FROM GREENWAY EXPERIENCE
- THE AUSTIN DOG PARK IS MINIMALLY AMENITIZED
- THE COMMUNITY BANDSHELL AND VETERANS PAVILIONS ARE GREAT COMMUNITY ASSETS
- GREENWAY CROSSING AT 9TH PL IS NOT ADEQUATELY MARKED
- COMMUNITY BANDSHELL PARK CONSISTS OF A LOT OF TURF LAWN
- EXISTING TREES AROUND RETENTION POND ARE BEAUTIFUL



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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## HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The following pages outline principles and strategies for making the Cedar River Regional Park a dynamic destination while also addressing the need to protect downtown Austin from recurring flooding. All target metrics should be applied at a regional scale and not on a park by park basis.

The guiding principles were inspired by reviews of the current efforts within the City of Austin Comprehensive Plan, mapping and analysis, site visits, and in conversations with staff at the City of Austin.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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## 1. MAKE IT RESILIENT

The Cedar River Regional Park should act as a natural buffer to protect Austin's downtown from flooding.



## 2. MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

The Cedar River Regional Park should champion sustainable practices in the landscape and its maintenance needs should maximize benefits while minimizing costs.



## 3. MAKE IT CONNECTED

The Cedar River Regional Park should connect and expand the existing greenways, walkways, canoe trails, and play offerings to strengthen Austin's overall park and open space network.



## 4. MAKE IT AUTHENTIC

The Cedar River Regional Park should reflect Austin's vibrant community and integrate initiatives championed by local and regional stakeholders.



# 1. MAKE IT RESILIENT



COMMONS PARK - DENVER, CO. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 1.1 Expand Capacity

Explore opportunities to lower existing grades in underutilized areas along the riverfront to hold and divert water away from downtown Austin and other developable areas.

### TARGET METRIC:

**25%** of site to be lowered to add storage capacity and increase resiliency



CLEAR CREEK WHITEWATER PARK - GOLDEN, CO PHOTO BY: UNCOVER COLORADO

## 1.2 Create a Buffer

Where feasible, terrace and soften steep embankment grades to create capacity, introduce secondary river channels, and enhance the naturalized riparian buffer along the length of both sides of the Cedar River.

### TARGET METRIC:

**100'** wide native buffer is established on both sides of the Cedar River with intentional areas that create physical and visual access

**75%** of total river frontage is transitioned to a naturalized riparian edge



UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA - VANCOUVER, CAN. PHOTO BY: UBC VANCOUVER

## 1.3 Minimize Urban Run-off

Introduce rain gardens and other upstream techniques to retain, treat, and infiltrate urban run-off to lessen river-based flow during rain events.

### TARGET METRIC:

**100%** of future infrastructure improvements and upstream developments to capture and treat all first flush runoff



COMMONS PARK - DENVER, CO. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 1.4 Introduce Upstream Protection

Engage with the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies to assess flood-proofing strategies upstream and along both sides of the Cedar River.

# 2. MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE



BURLINGAME COUNTRY CLUB - HILLSBOROUGH, CA. PHOTO BY: USGA

## 2.1 Introduce Native Plant Typologies

Naturalize turf areas with native planting and succession planting strategies to reduce maintenance costs and increase biodiversity in the landscape.

### TARGET METRIC:

**50%** overall reduction of lawn area throughout the Cedar River Regional Park site



COMMONS PARK - DENVER, CO. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 2.2 Create a Balanced Open Space System

Consider the Cedar River Regional Park as a system of open spaces where amenities and programming are balanced across the entire network to limit duplication of amenities, while diversifying the overall park offerings.



CEDAR RIVER OPEN SPACE - AUSTIN, MN. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 2.3 Protect and Enhance the Canopy

Protect existing healthy trees, while introducing the next generation of tree canopy and native plant communities as part of all proposed open space improvements.

### TARGET METRIC:

**75%** of existing canopy trees are protected during park renovations

Implement a tree canopy replacement planting strategy to be completed by **2050**



COMMUNITY BBQ - DALLAS, TX. PHOTO BY: DALLAS ROTARY CLUB

## 2.4 Leverage Your Partners

Leverage community and regional partners as champions and potential funders/grant providers to enhance and protect the Cedar River Regional Park.

# 3. MAKE IT CONNECTED



ST. PATRICKS ISLAND - CALGARY, CAN. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 3.1 Enhance Health and Wellness

Strengthen community health and wellness by expanding the riverfront trail network into adjacent neighborhoods and across the Cedar River.

### TARGET METRIC:

**100%** of existing greenway experience to be improved with native planting buffers and amenities

**2 miles** of walking trails added to the park area that connect into the surrounding neighborhoods



MINNESOTA BOUNDARY WATERS - MINNESOTA CANADA BOUNDARY. PHOTO BY: STILL AMAZED

## 3.2 Expand the Network

Expand and connect the existing riverfront trail into adjacent greenways, sidewalks, and canoe trails, while enhancing the system to meet and exceed current best management practices.

### TARGET METRIC:

**50%** of all adjacent developments to have connections by 2035

Begin city-wide and regional trail expansion efforts such as at the Austin Wastewater Treatment plant, Todd Park and Brownsdale area, and the abandoned railway to Lyle, MN by **2030**



THE LOWER RAMBLE - FAYETTEVILLE, AR. PHOTO BY: SUSTAINABLE SITES

## 3.3 Integrate Multi-Benefit Solutions

Proactively explore opportunities to grow adjacent proposed infrastructure and roadway projects to enhance connectivity both across and along the Cedar River throughout Austin. By getting a seat at the table during early planning phases, most river improvements can be added to larger projects for fractions of the cost as stand alone river projects.

### TARGET METRIC:

**100%** of new infrastructure projects within 1 mile of the Cedar River Regional Park to incorporate access enhancements and greenway connections



GLOBAL TREE PLANTING - LOCATION UNKNOWN. PHOTO BY: ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION

## 3.4 Create a Destination

Collaborate with regional educational, social, and youth services to develop program and activation strategies that position Cedar River Regional Park as a regional destination. Ensure that the Cedar River Regional Park and other amenities are to be added as they are financially feasible.

# 4. MAKE IT AUTHENTIC



TWIN SILOS PARK - FORT COLLINS, CO. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 4.1 Embrace the Community

Activate the river as a place for community gathering by providing spaces and experiences that are comfortable, safe, and adaptable to Austin's growing and diverse community.



WAYZATA RIVERWALK - WAYZATA, MN. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 4.2 Ensure Access

Provide experiences and access for all users by creating places for all mobility levels and by implementing universal design strategies.

### TARGET METRIC:

**100%** compliance with ADA for all existing and proposed greenway trails and connections by 2035



GREENWAY ENTRANCE - AUSTIN, MN. PHOTO BY: CIVITAS

## 4.3 Celebrate this Place

Prioritize materiality, planting, and programming that reflects the local context and community.

Connect the Regional Park to current open spaces including Horace Austin Park, Mill Pond, Lafayette Park and the future Cedar River Whitewater Park.



MAIN STREET - AUSTIN, MN. PHOTO BY: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## 4.4 Connect with Local Initiatives

Look for opportunities to connect with local initiatives championed by the City of Austin, Impact Austin, the Hormel Foundation and other local leading groups, such as the Food City Initiative and Cedar River Recreational Park to further embed the Regional Park into the everyday experience of all visitors and community members.

# FRAMEWORKS

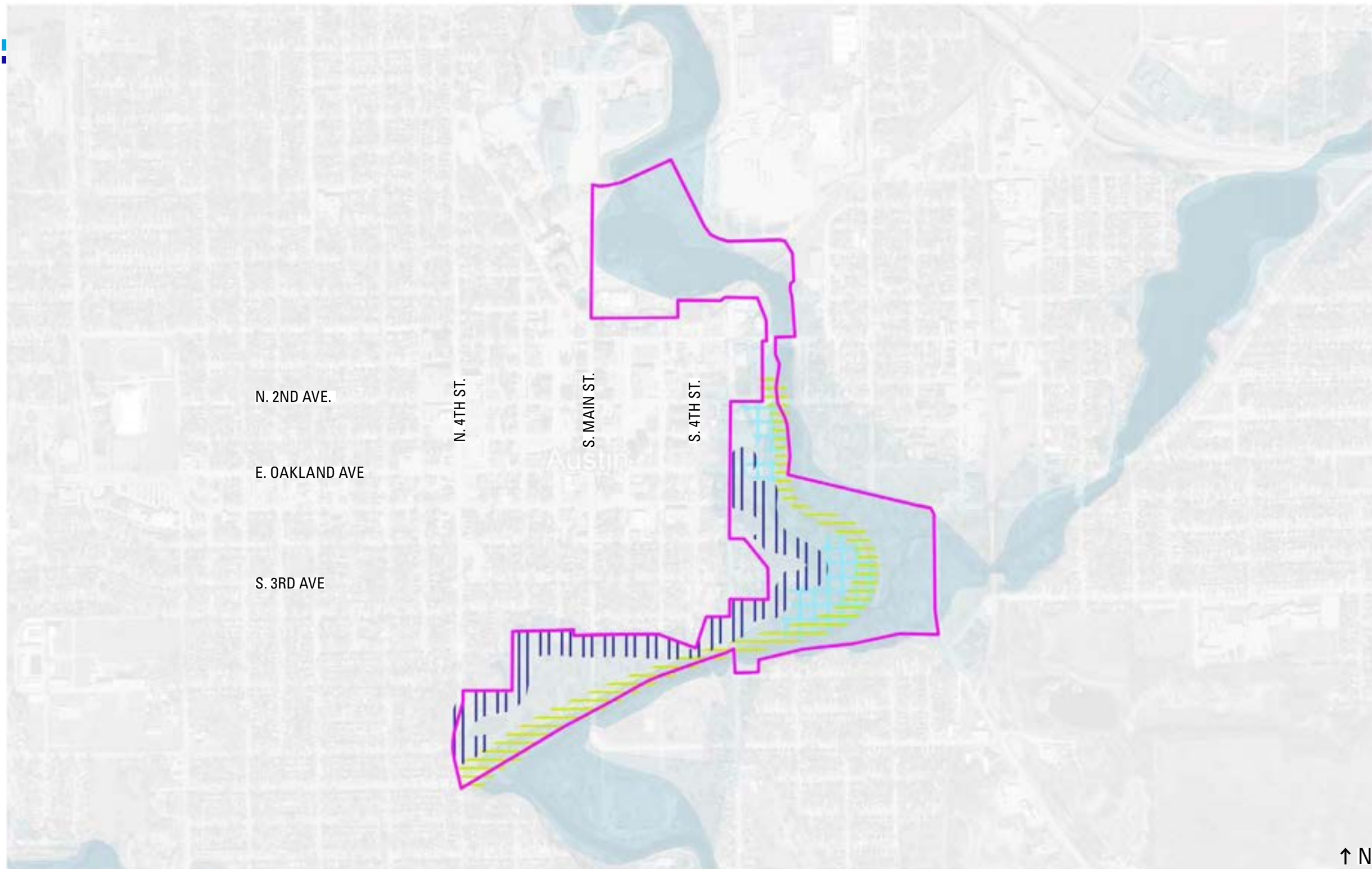
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## HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The following pages are meant to demonstrate how and where the guiding principles may be applied to enhance resiliency, sustainability, connectivity, and authenticity within the Cedar River Regional Park.

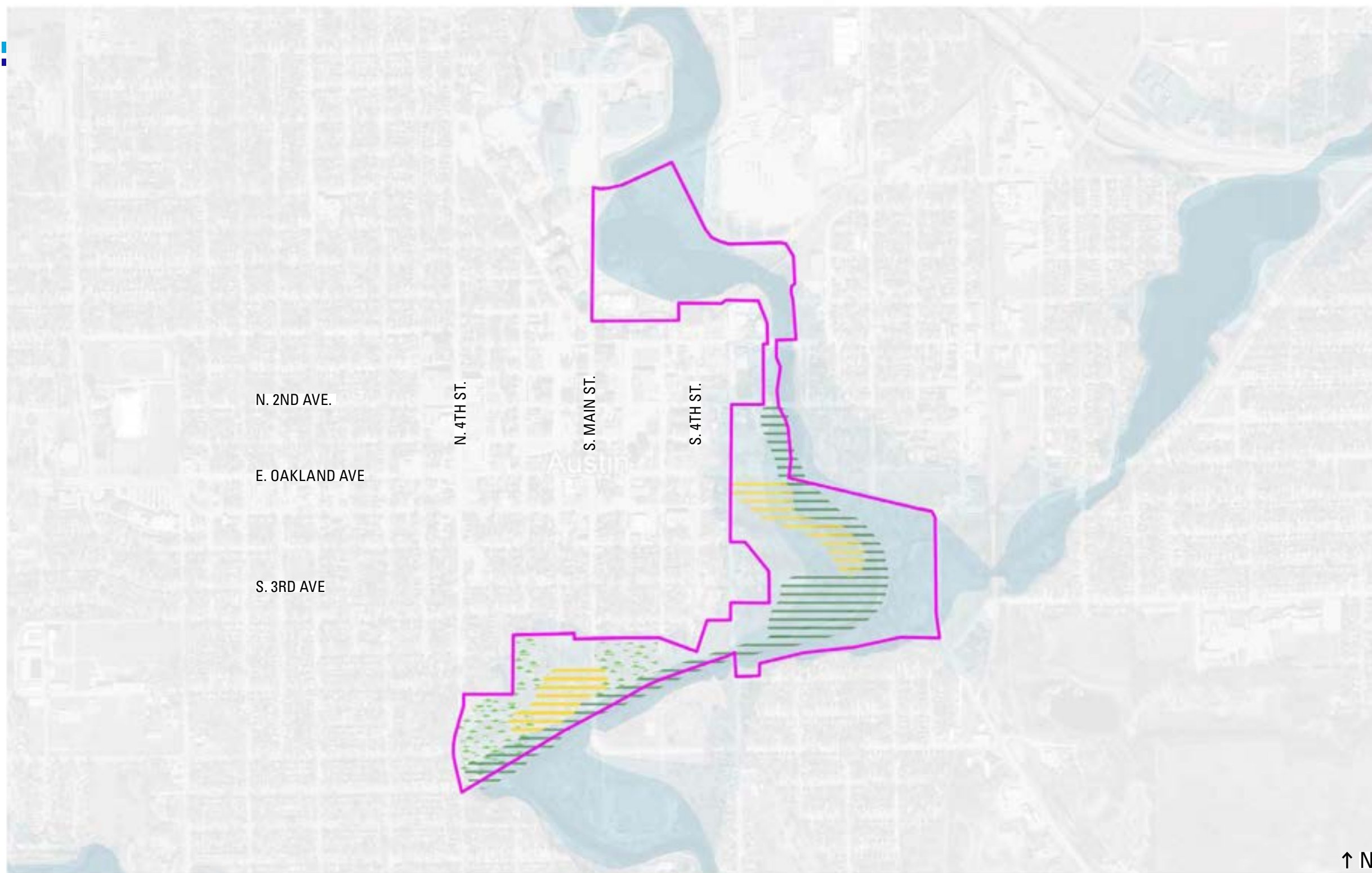
These frameworks are conceptual and will require further study.

# 1. MAKE IT RESILIENT



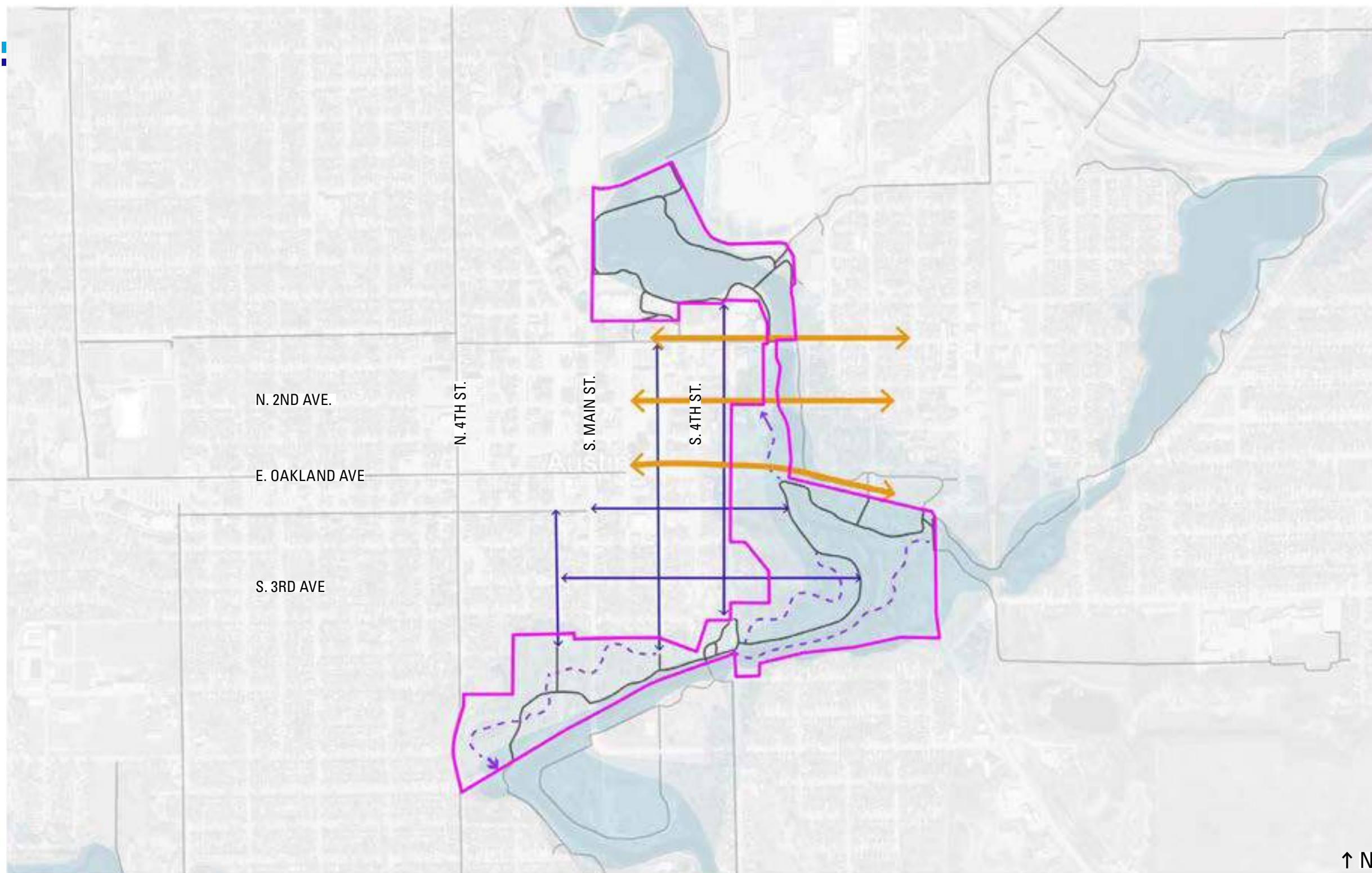
-  1.1 AREAS TO BE LOWERED
-  1.1 AREAS TO BE RAISED
-  1.2 RIPARIAN BUFFER
-  REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

## 2. MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE



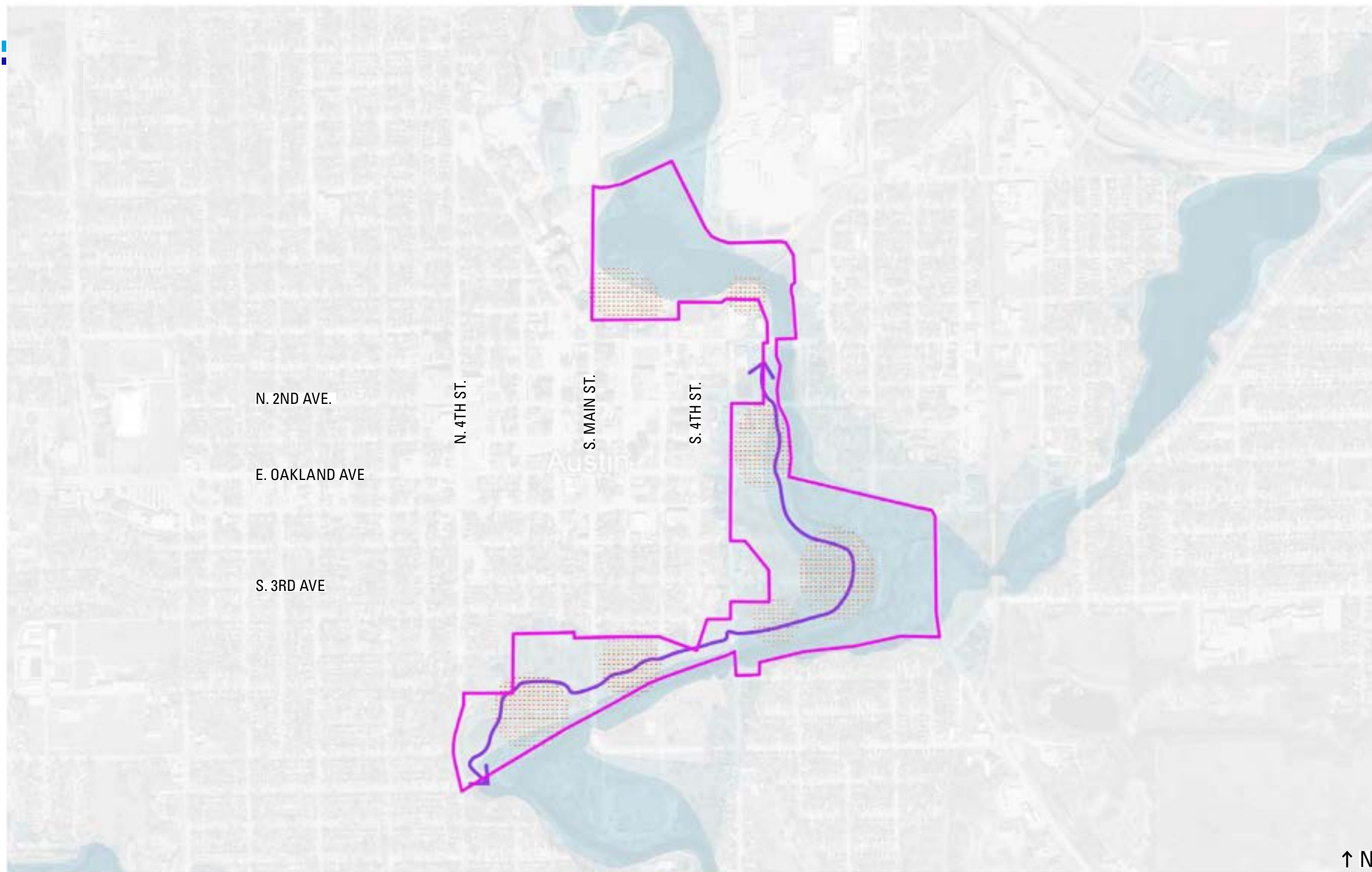
-  2.1 REDUCE TURF AREAS
-  2.2 CONSOLIDATE AMENITIES
-  2.3 PROTECT HEALTHY TREES
-  REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

### 3. MAKE IT CONNECTED

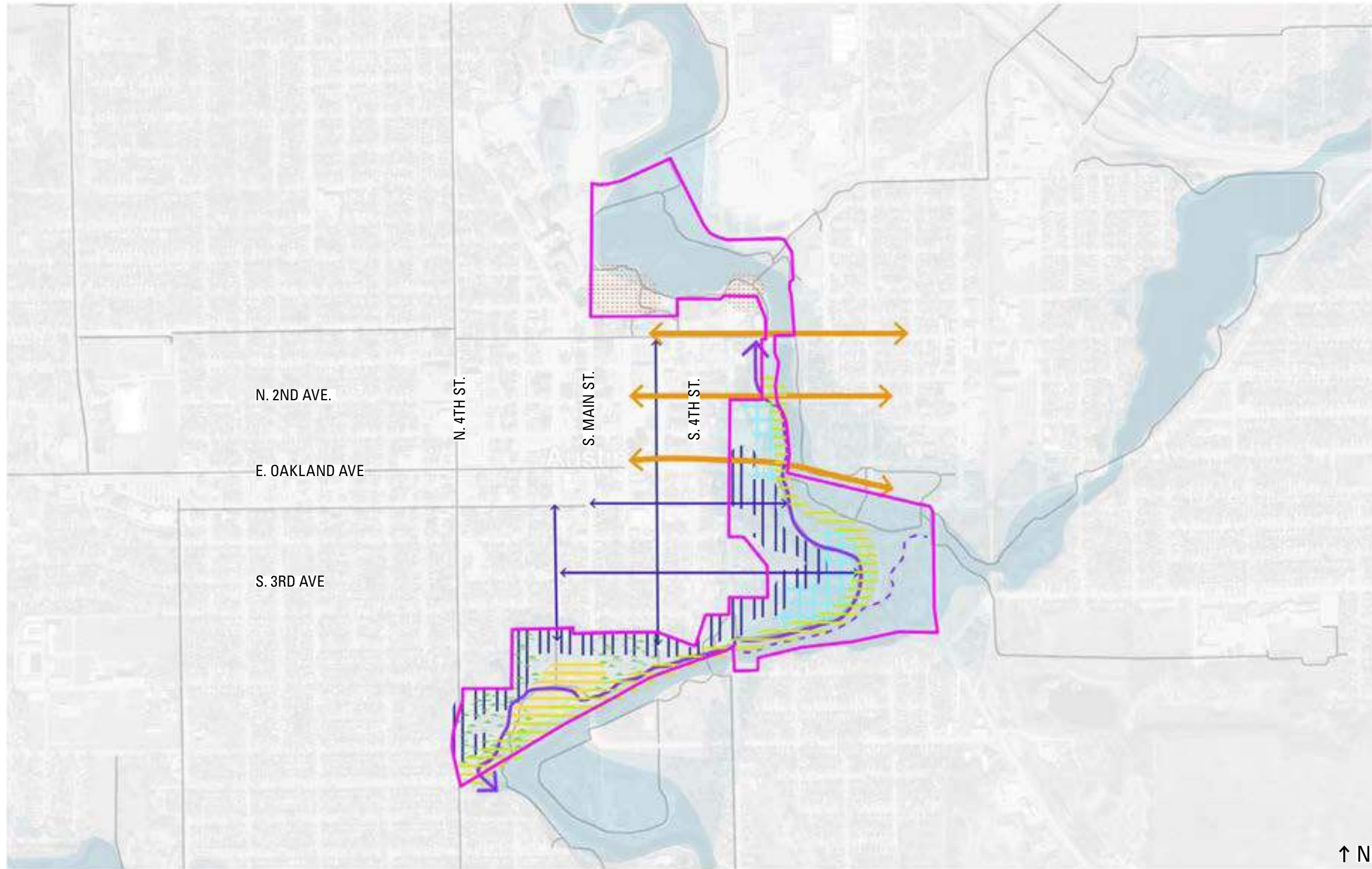


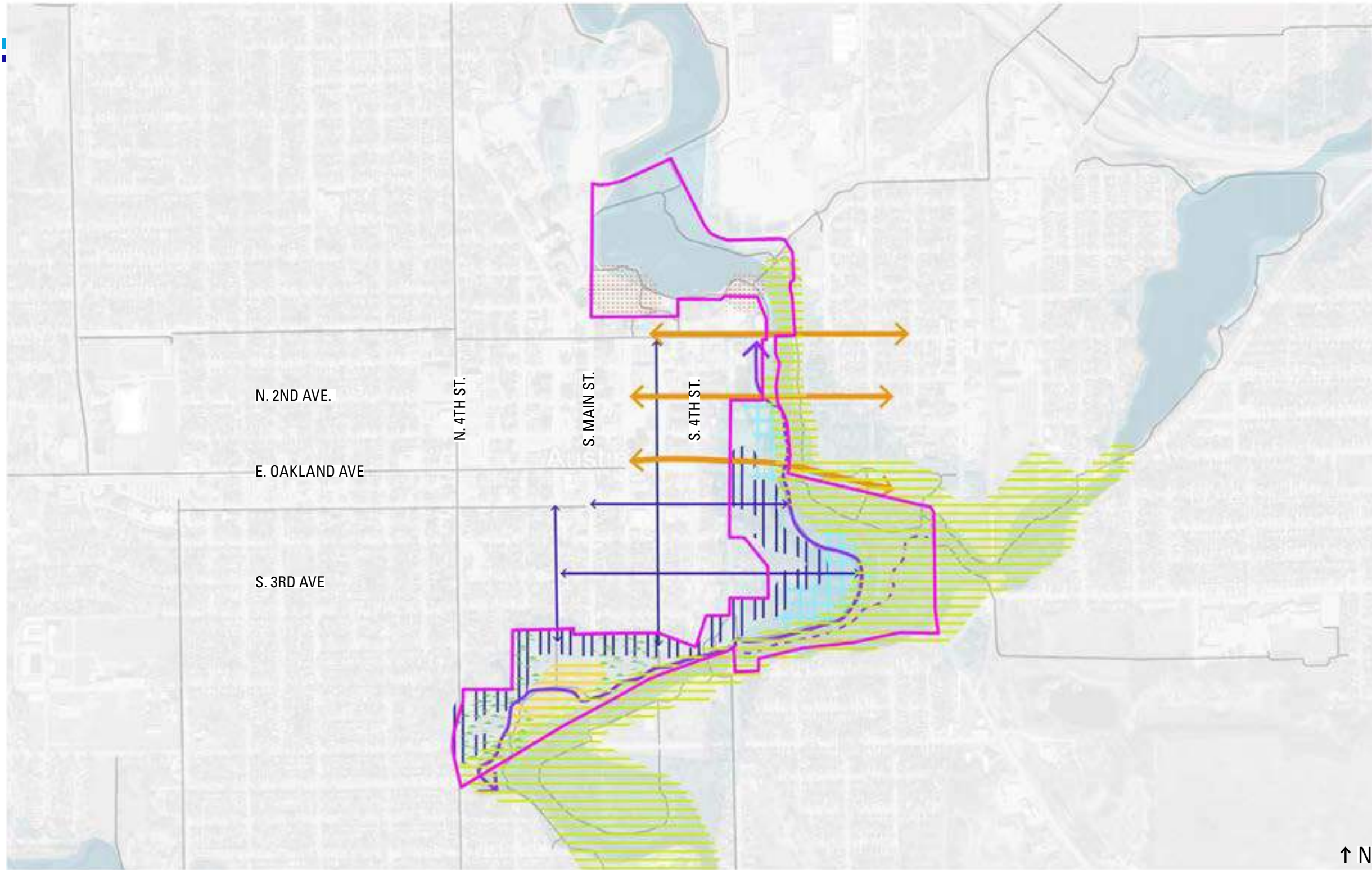
- 3.1 ENHANCE EXISTING GREENWAYS
- ← - - - → 3.1 ADD ADDITIONAL GREENWAYS
- ↔ 3.2 CONNECT TO NEIGHBORHOODS
- ↔ 3.3 USE BRIDGE UPDATES TO INCREASE CONNECTIVITY
- REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

## 4. MAKE IT AUTHENTIC



# A DYNAMIC DOWNTOWN REGIONAL PARK FOR THE CITY OF AUSTIN





## AN EXTENDED REGIONAL PARK PLAN

The Cedar River and its adjacent existing open spaces gives the City of Austin an opportunity to extend the Cedar River Regional Park into an expansive floodplain amenity with a diverse system of resiliency and sustainability, recreation, and community gathering spaces.

To capitalize on the potential of the Cedar River corridor as the open space heart to Austin, the City should develop a system-wide community-based vision. The vision must include all open spaces on both sides of the river, incorporate the proposed improvements of the Cedar River White Water Park, and explore all areas as a single regional system that balances amenities, introduces a phasing strategy, and includes extensive community input to create a holistic vision to build towards with all future projects.

# PROGRAMMING PRECEDENTS



HUNTS POINT LANDING - BRONX, NY. PHOTO BY: LANDEZINE AWARD



HUBBARD PARK - SHOREWOOD, WI. PHOTO BY: SNYDER & ASSOC.



LAKE EDGE HOUSE - LAKE CHAMPLAIN, NY. PHOTO BY: TRUXXCULLINS ARCHITECTURE



JOHN G. AND PHYLLIS W. SMALE RIVERFRONT PARK - CINCINNATI, OH. PHOTO BY: CHRISTIAN PHILLIPS PHOTOGRAPHY



GRAND JUNCTION PARK & PLAZA - WESTFIELD, IN. PHOTO BY: DAVID RUBIN COLLECTIVE



COMMUNITY GARDENS - TOWERSIDE COMMUNITY GARDEN LOCATION MINNEAPOLIS, MN. PHOTO BY: MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND REC BOARD



WILD MILE - CHICAGO, IL. PHOTO BY: DAVE BURK/SOM



LA TOURELLE DES ESCHELLES - LOIRE VALLEY, FR. PHOTO BY: LOIRE VALLEY EXPERIENCES



DUKE WATER RECLAMATION POND - DURHAM, NC. PHOTO BY: MARK HOUGH/NELSON BYRD WOLTZ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



LAKE WACONIA REGIONAL PARK - WACONIA, MN. PHOTO BY: HGA



BEAR LAKE TRAIL - ROCKY MOUNTAIN, CO. PHOTO BY: COLORADO.COM



SKATING TRAILS: NESTEWAY RED RIVER SKATING TRAILS WINNIPEG, CAN. PHOTO BY: TIM SMITH, THE GLOBE AND MAIL



ANOKA COUNTY PARKS - ANOKA COUNTY, MN. PHOTO BY: ANOKA COUNTY PARKS



CHILDREN JUMPING OFF DOCK - LOCATION UNKNOWN. PHOTO BY: GETTY IMAGES STOCK PHOTOS



RED LOCK TRAILHEAD - CUYAHOGA NATIONAL PARK, OH. PHOTO BY: CVNP / AARON SELF



DISCOVERY MEADOWS PARK - MCMINNVILLE, OR. PHOTO BY: IN SITU ARCHITECTURE



SUPERIOR TRAIL RACE - NORTH SHORE, MN. PHOTO BY: MINNESOTA MONTHLY



NATURE PLAY: WESTMORELAND PARK - PORTLAND, OR. PHOTO BY: GREENWORKS

BOAT ACCESS

RIVER ACCESS

SHADE STRUCTURES

TRAILS/GREENWAYS

OTHER

■ FRAMEWORKS

# Rijnvliet Edible Neighborhood

■ UTRECHT, NL

37 ACRES

1,000 NEW DWELLING UNITS

food forest with 200 edible species

water management

educational opportunities

promote healthy living and eating

## FIRMS

Felixx

■ ASPIRATIONAL PRECEDENTS



# Tom Lee Park

■ MEMPHIS, TN

31 ACRES

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

recreational and play opportunities

flood-able areas to allow the river to ebb and flow

cafe location and public art draw community in

fitness and educational programming

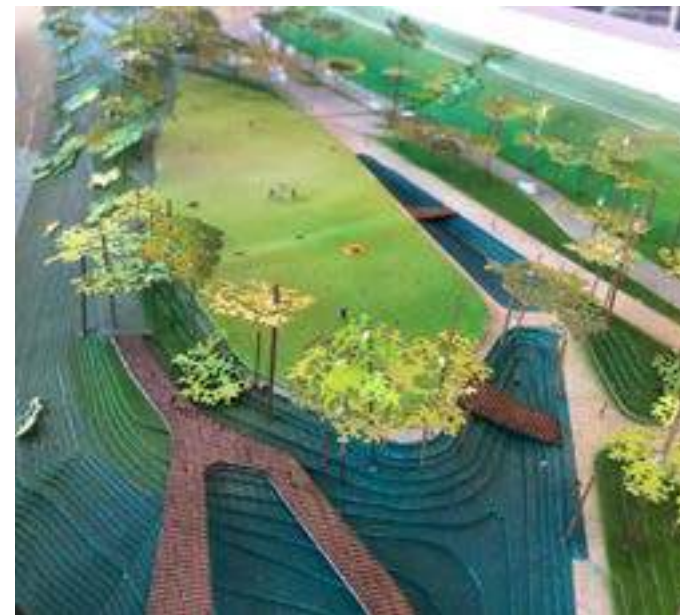


FIRMS

SCAPE

Studio GANG

ASPIRATIONAL PRECEDENTS



# St. Patrick's Island

■ CALGARY, CAN

30 ACRES

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

water is intentionally slowed to make a safe place for kids to play and people to access the water

serves as terminus for the white water river tours

educational opportunities and center

amphitheater and events gathering spaces

resilient design welcomes regular flooding in a safe and controlled manner to limit damage, while enhancing overall ecosystem health.

FIRMS

Civitas



■ ASPIRATIONAL PRECEDENTS

# Commons Park

■ DENVER, CO

20 ACRES

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

park design reintroduced Denver to its riverfront, while implementing resilient strategies to minimize impacts of flooding

introduced native plant communities and a 100' wide riparian buffer in highly disturbed and ecological damaged urban condition

introduced kayaking and white water activities through river improvements to introduce new recreation uses in downtown

**FIRMS**

Civitas

■ ASPIRATIONAL PRECEDENTS



# Lumberton Community Floodprint

■ LUMBERTON, NC

806 ACRES, 8.5 MILE TRAIL

## FLOOD MITIGATION AND PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

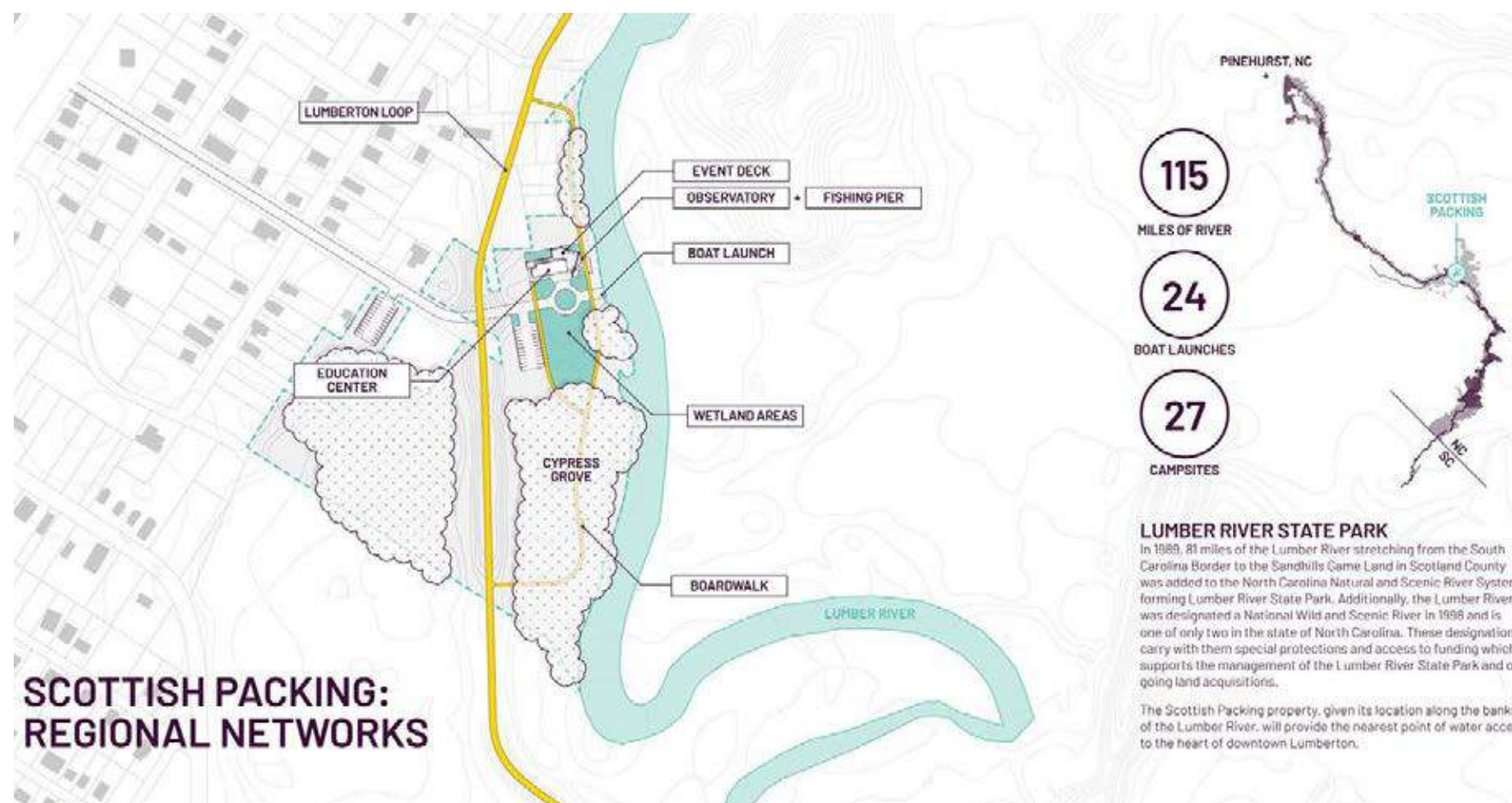
repurposes floodplain properties to create vast open space, riverfront amenities, and greenway

allows for river water levels to safely ebb and flow while protecting surrounding neighborhoods

town of 20,000 utilized many community and federal partnerships to realize larger community vision

### AGENCY

NC State University Coastal Dynamics Design Lab



■ ASPIRATIONAL PRECEDENTS

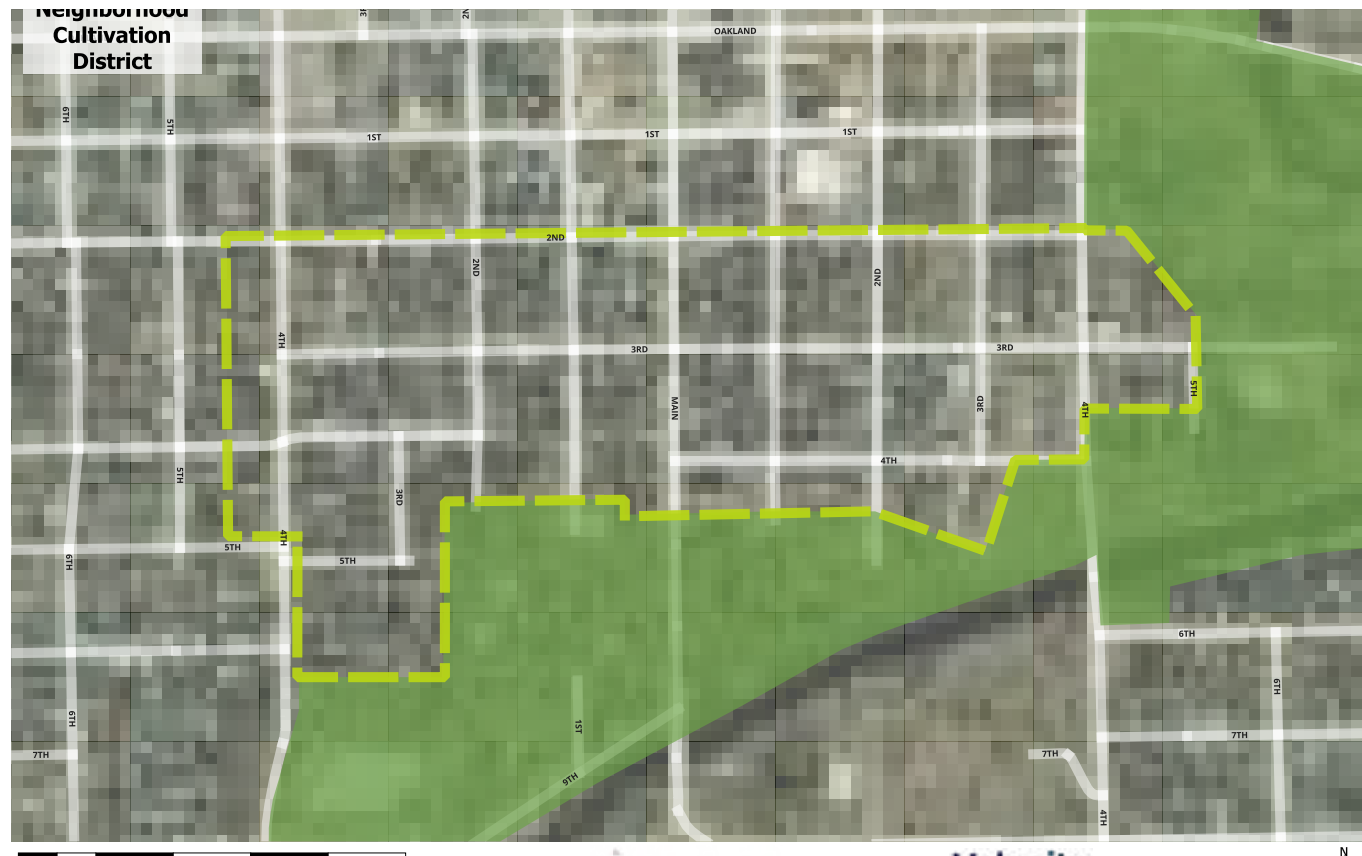
# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #2 CEDAR RIVER PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Direct connections to Cedar River Park system.
- Includes vacant parcels and aging housing that could be rehabbed for multi-units or redeveloped with different housing types.
- Grid block structure supports walkability.
- A true downtown neighborhood that frames the commercial center of the area.
- Generally serves a mix of incomes and reflects the various families and lifestyles that wish to be closer to the commercial core.
- Realizing urban residential development on the outskirts and need to formalize development rules for appropriate infill development.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Infill development of various housing types.
- Focus on building density closer to Cedar River Park system, while allowing for access to park from the neighborhood.
- Improve walkability and reduce higher speed traffic.
- Infill and redevelop aging structures or large lots to support smaller format housing types.
- Update zoning to reflect the vision of the area.
- Establish a downtown neighborhood with a real identity and support neighborhood activities.





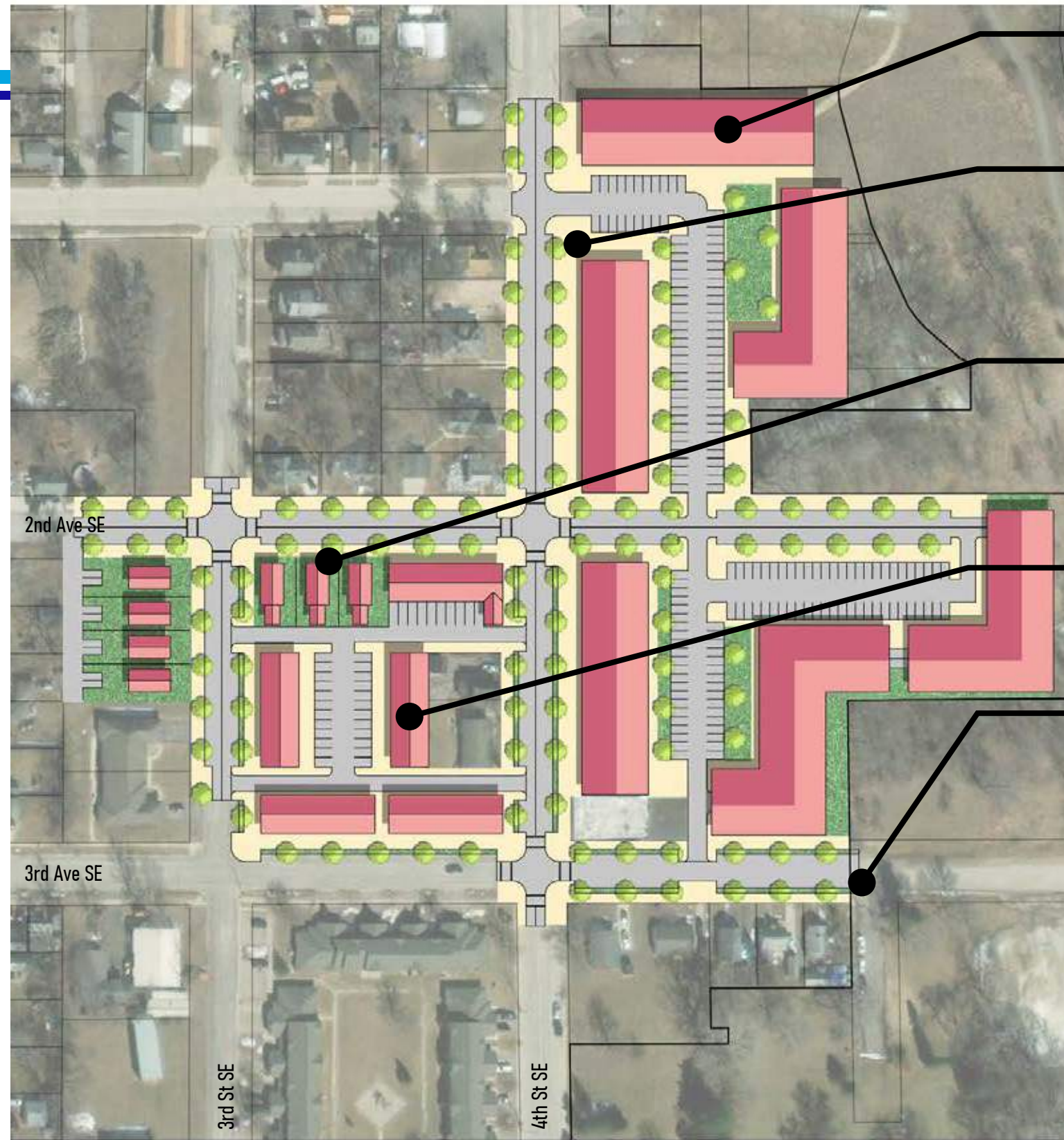
Modular Housing



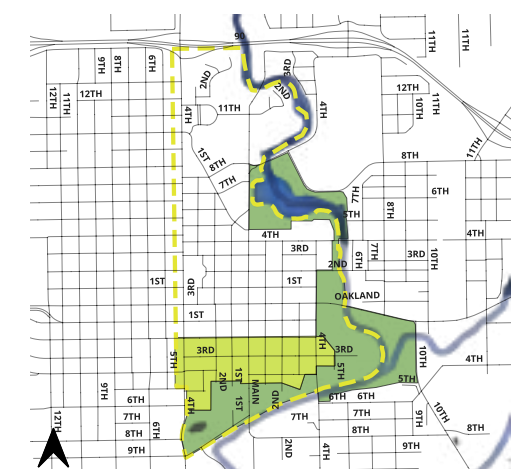
Infill Townhomes



Mid-Rise Apartments



- Mid-rise Apartments
- Updated streetscape to promote walkability
- Infill Modular Housing
- Infill townhomes
- Access to Cedar River Park system



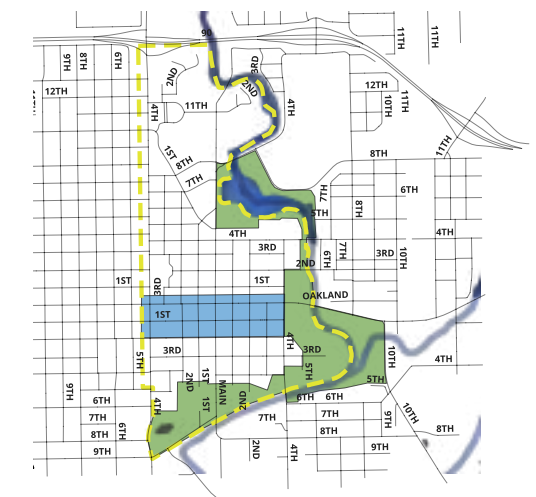
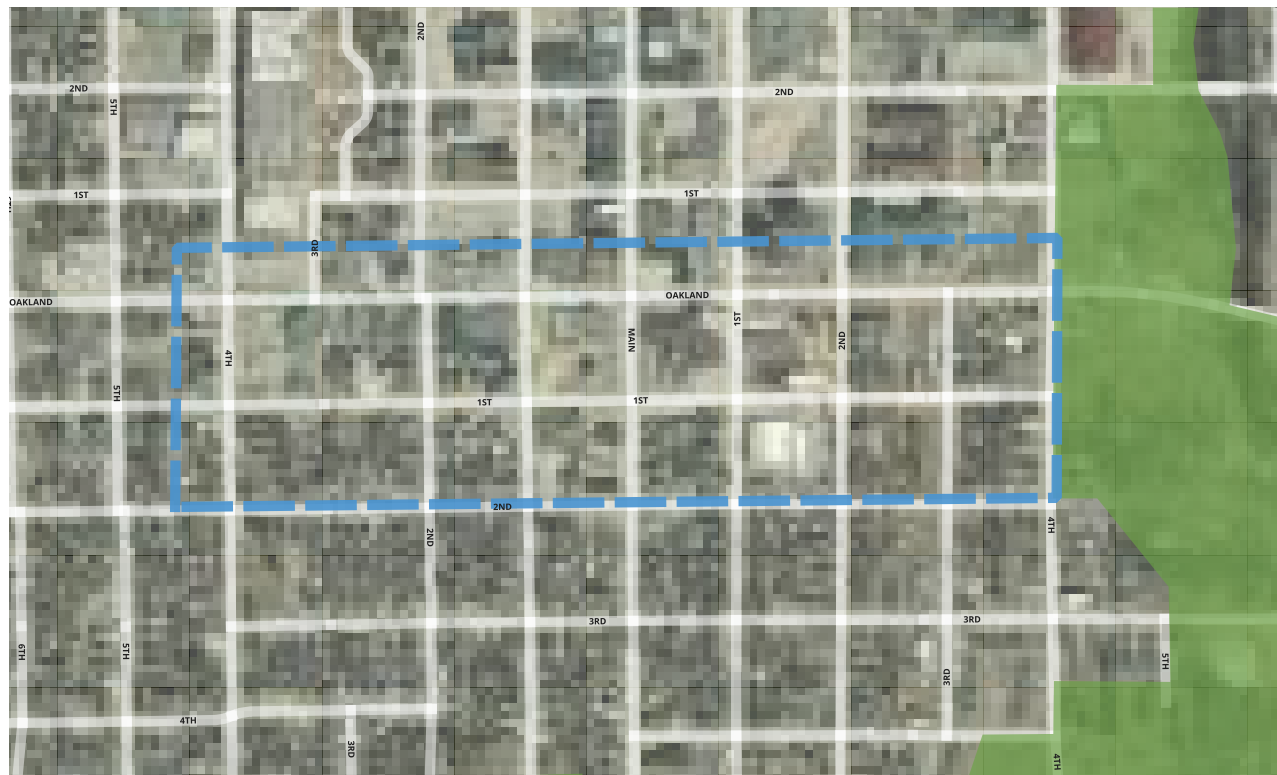
# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #3 EAST OAKLAND AVENUE

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- One-way couplet on Oakland Avenue and 1st Avenue. Creates corridors of higher speed vehicles that interrupt the walkability in downtown and connectivity between the Cedar River Neighborhood and the commercial core.
- Identity of Oakland Avenue as a major corridor sets the requirement for continuing vehicular movement, but also ensure a safe pedestrian environment.
- 1st Avenue currently has little identity and does not serve a purpose other than traffic flow.
- Lack wayfinding and lighting to support any pedestrian or bike movements.
- Predominance of parking lots and curb cuts, creating safety concerns.
- Some infill development of urban residential that would benefit from enhanced adjacent pedestrian improvements.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND FRAMEWORK

- Townhomes fronting East 4th Street and the Cedar River Park.
- Infill with shophouses and other live-work and multi-generational, mixed-use buildings.
- Extend the design framework and goals of the West Oakland Avenue Corridor Plan over to the Cedar River. Integrate the unique elements outlined in this playbook.
- Oakland remains a thoroughfare and vehicular traffic but adapted for pedestrian facilities.
- 1st Avenue to be focused on pedestrians and bicyclists as top priorities.
- Approach Oakland and 1st Avenue as public art corridors and incorporate a public art strategy along the corridors to create interest and tourist attractions.
- Orient off-street parking to the sides and rears of buildings, preferably accessed from mid-block alleys, while consolidating existing curb cuts or relocating them to side streets.
- Consider on-street parking, angled or parallel as space permits, for the length east from Main Street to Cedar River.





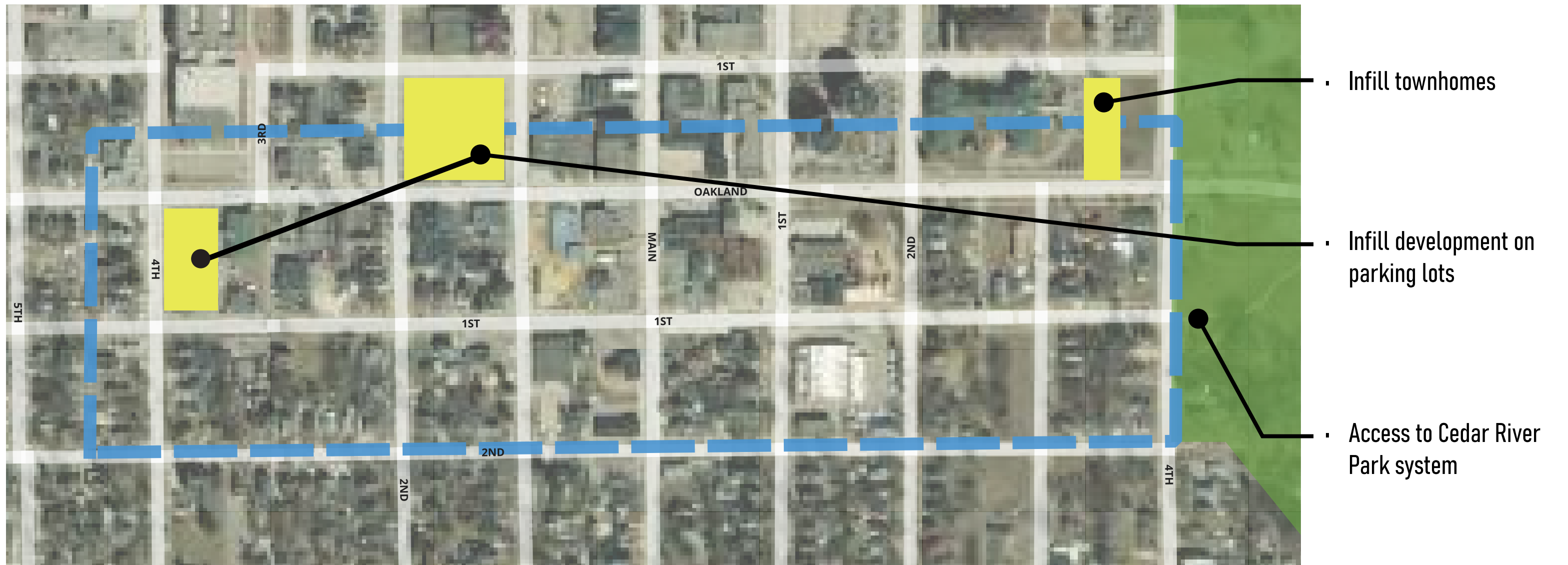
Townhomes facing park space



Corner store and shopfront house



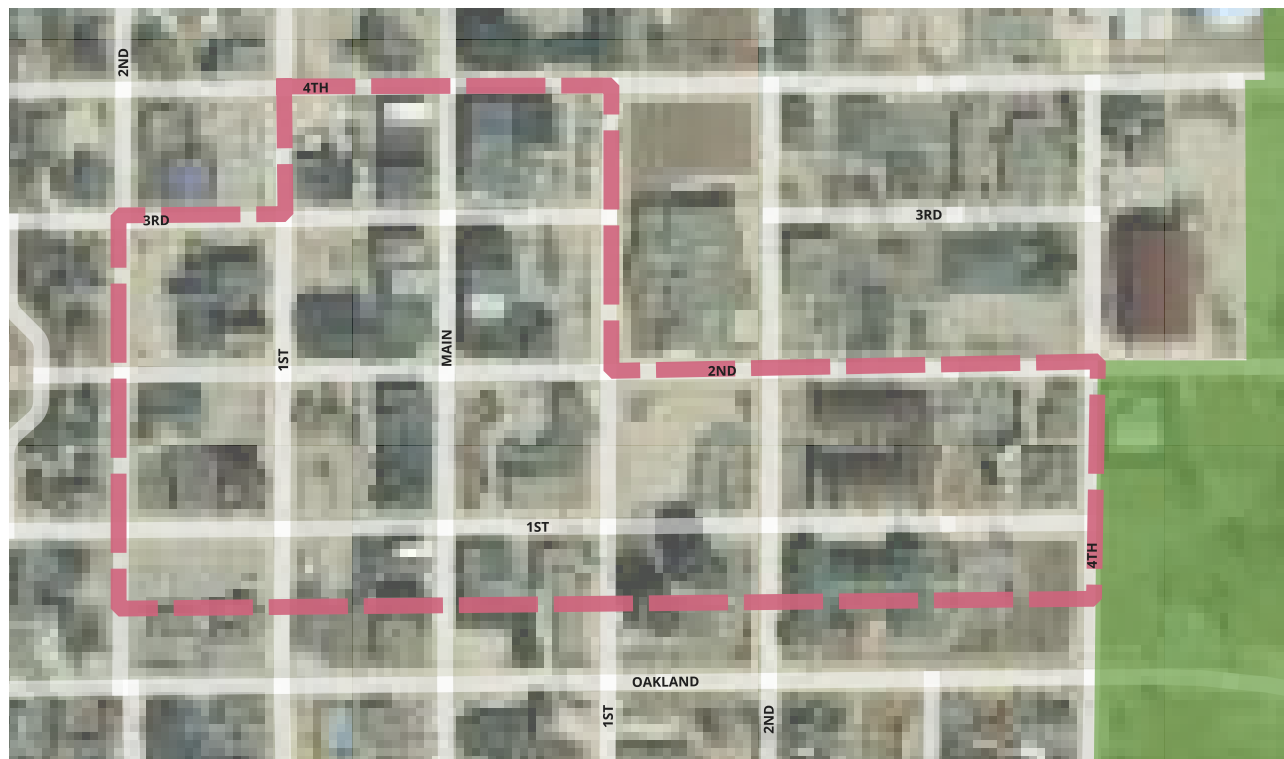
Park access and adjacent development



# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #4 CITY CENTER

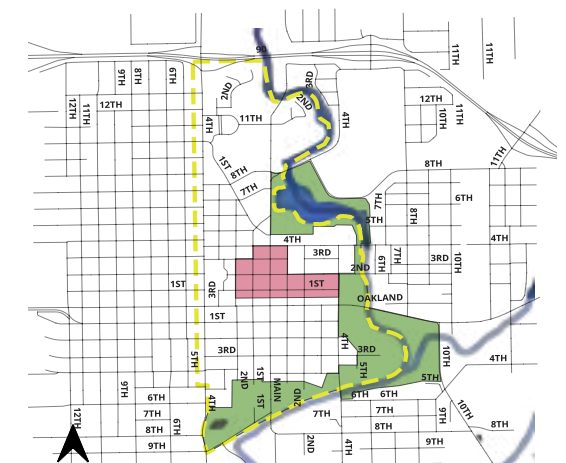
## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Incorporates the historic core of Main Street and Downtown.
- Includes Mower County offices and extensive employment parking lots.
- Limited availability of second floor residential.
- Highest property value in the city (per acre).
- Anchors the identity and brand of Austin.
- Wider sidewalks and on-street parking support pedestrian activity.
- Limited weekly activations beyond regular business or civic activity.
- Limited vacant space other than parking lots.
- Undervalued rental comparisons that limit market growth.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Place unique boutique hotel in municipal parking lot adjacent to SPAM Museum that serves patrons of the Spam Museum, Downtown businesses, and corporate travellers. This includes underground parking to replace the existing parking and serve the hotel needs.
- Identify future opportunity sites for mixed-use housing and incorporate underground parking to replace existing parking use.
- Infill incubator shops in underutilized property along Main Street to build back incremental walkable shopping experiences.
- Create a parking management plan and team to implement shared parking opportunities.
- Developing a restaurant recruitment strategy and match operators with available building owners to facilitate deals.
- This district is the epicenter of all major public events and activations, so utility needs should be considered in the public realm.
- Consider creating an entity or empower an existing organization to oversee long-term planning, marketing and programming in the city center district.





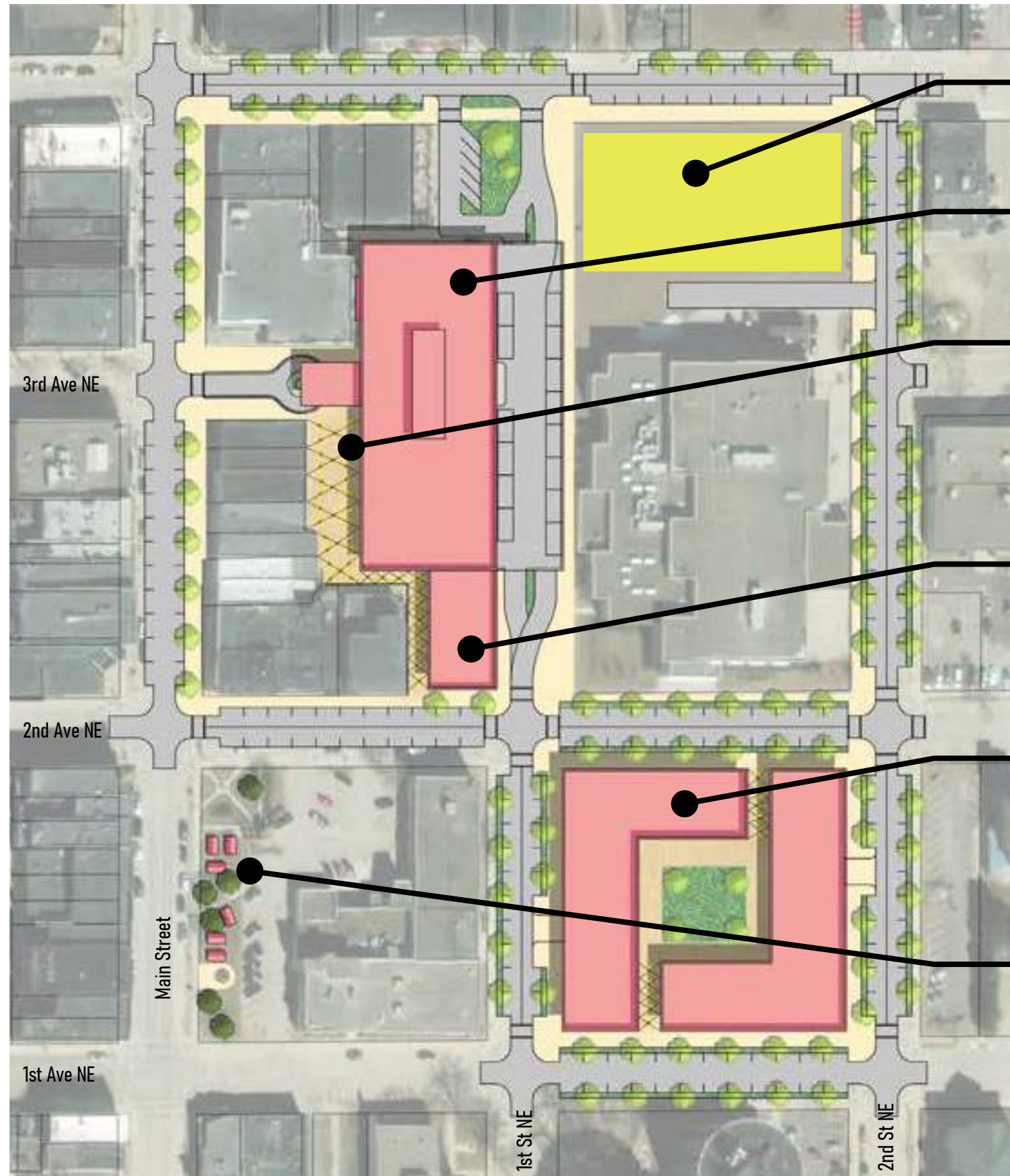
Urban Downtown Hotel



Street Front Restaurant



Incubator Shops Example



- Opportunity Site
- Hotel over underground parking garage
- Pedestrian Plaza
- Hotel Restaurant at street front
- Mixed-use building over underground parking garage
- Incubator shops along Main Street

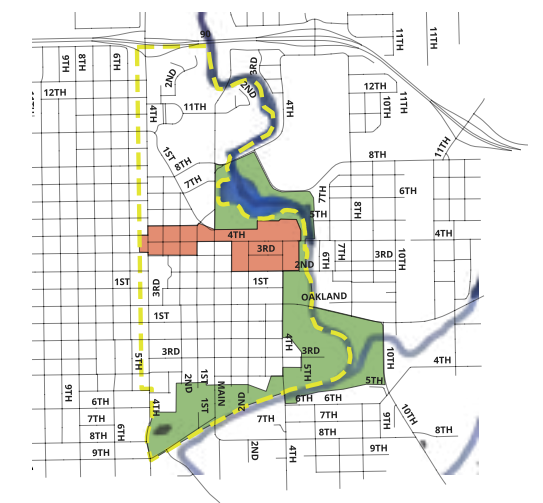
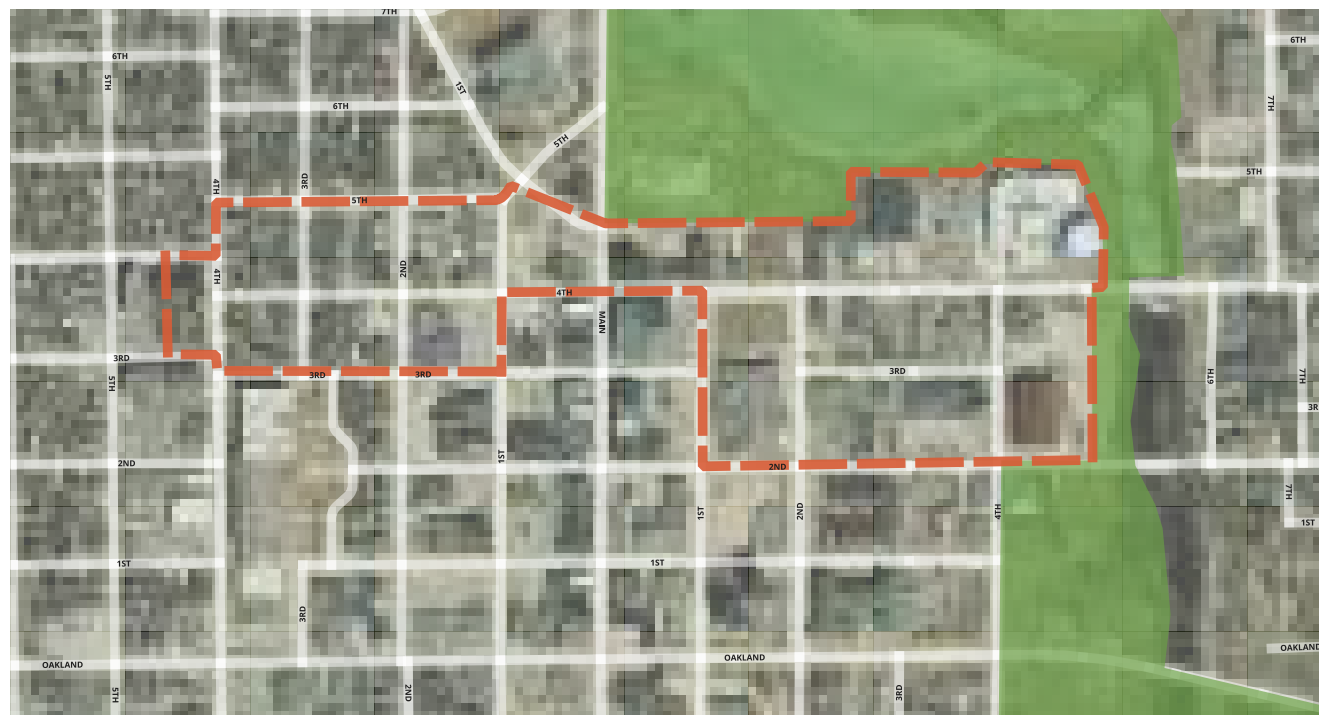
# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #5 4TH AVENUE CORRIDOR

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Lacking sense of place and purpose on the streetscape and wayfinding, lacking a direct connection across the downtown area
- Predominantly focused on vehicular travel and fronted by off-street parking lots
- Historic buildings along the roadway (Paramount Theater, Historic Hormel House, Tendermaid Sandwich Shop) and director connector to historic Austin neighborhoods
- Bookended by the historic St Augustine Church and future White Water on the Cedar
- Gateway from West 4th Avenue into the commercial core
- Access point to municipal buildings (City Hall, library, YMCA, public pool, Mill Pond, and Riverside Arena)

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Roundabout on 4th Street and 4th Avenue
- Enhanced streetlights, sidewalks, pedestrian furniture and landscaping along whole corridor
- Incremental transition of homes to commercial activity to allow for natural evolution of the corridor
- Infill on underutilized parking lots
- Develop traffic management strategies at intersections to promote better pedestrian movement
- Extend on-street parking along whole corridor, while reducing travel lane widths and promote slower traffic speeds.
- Promote and develop 4th Avenue as a public art corridor
- Transform roadway between pool and Brick Furniture to be an accessible roadway for services and parking access to buildings along the north side of 4th Avenue
- Support infill urban residential and mixed-use buildings where feasible
- Future White Water at the Cedar





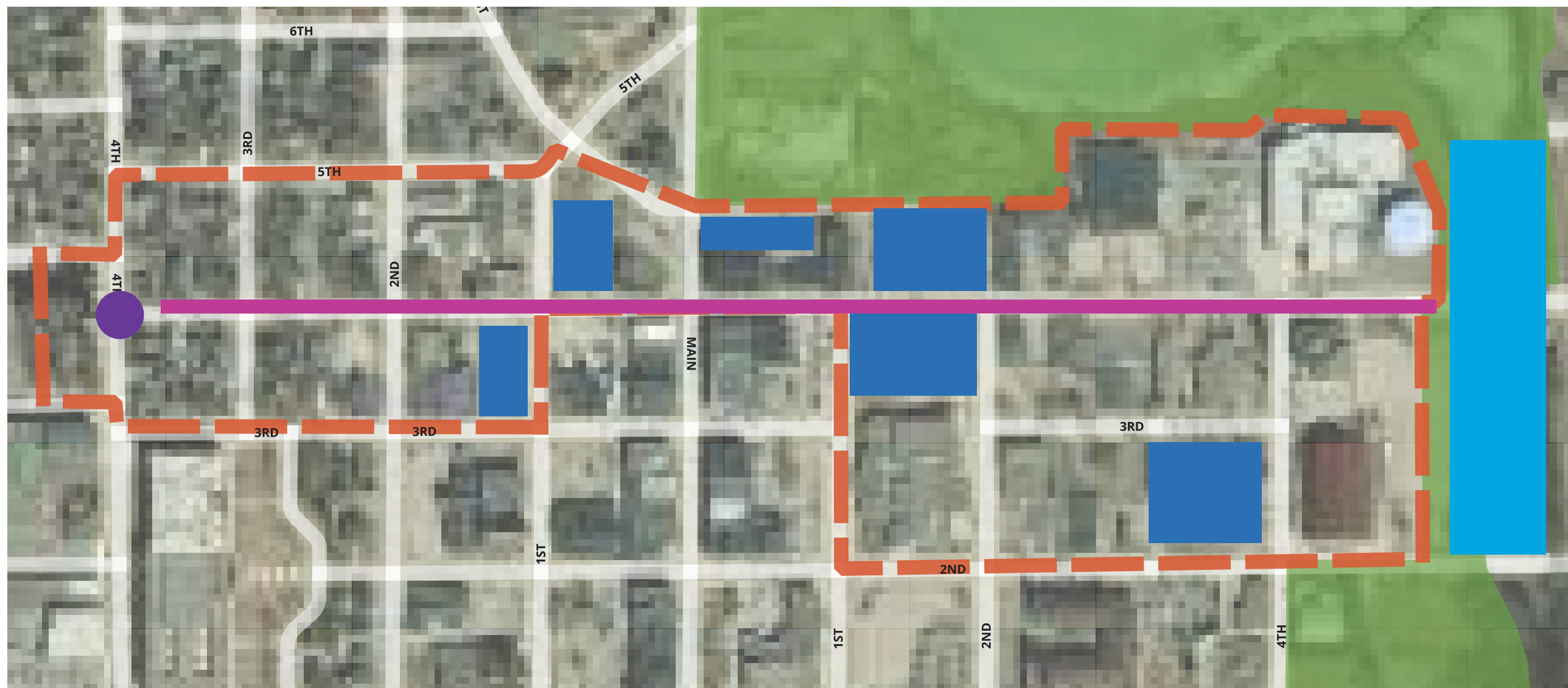
Roundabout Design at the Intersection of 4th St. and 4th Ave.



Angled parking when appropriate along 4th Avenue



The Whitewater Park



- Opportunity 1:  
Roundabout
- Opportunity 2:  
Angled Parking
- Opportunity 3:  
Potential Catalytic  
Developments
- Opportunity 4:  
Whitewater Park



# BLUEPRINTS FOR SUCCESS

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR THE OTHER DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS



# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #6 EDUCATION DISTRICT

## EDUCATION DISTRICT STRATEGY: A CAMPUS FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING

### DISTRICT IDENTITY & ROLE

Anchored by Austin High School, MacPhail Center for Music, and Pacelli Catholic School, the Education District serves as a vibrant hub for learning, arts, and community connection. With thoughtful design and management, this district can emulate the best qualities of a college campus—welcoming, walkable, and deeply integrated with its surroundings.

### KEY STRATEGIES

#### 1. Design a Campus-Like Public Realm.

- Treat streets, green spaces, and buildings as part of a cohesive educational campus.
- Develop shared outdoor classrooms, performance areas, and gathering spaces accessible to both students and the public.
- Use consistent materials, lighting, signage, and landscaping to unify the district visually.

### PRIORITIZE SAFE & ACCESSIBLE MOBILITY

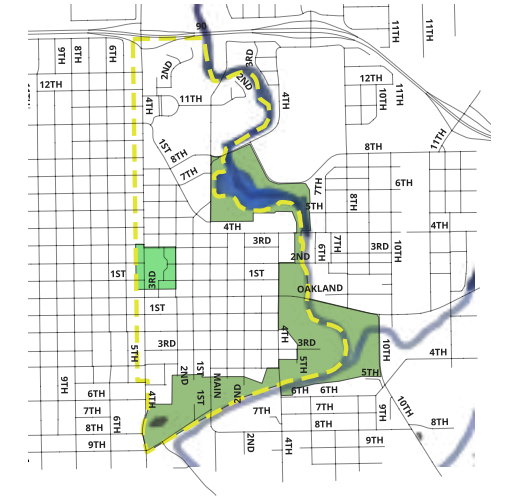
- Introduce traffic calming measures and clear crosswalks near schools and across key corridors.
- Develop a connected network of bike paths, sidewalks, and ADA-accessible routes linking schools to each other and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Include secure bike parking, pedestrian-scale lighting, and seating along routes.

### EXPAND INDOOR AND OUTDOOR LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- Encourage the use of parks, open lawns, and nearby public spaces as flexible outdoor learning environments.
- Explore partnerships to build shared-use facilities (e.g., greenhouses, studios, labs) available to schools and the broader community.

### INTEGRATE FOOD & SOCIAL SPACES

- Establish food options near or within the district—like food trucks, cafes, or small eateries that support students, staff, and visitors.
- Design social spaces with seating, shade, and Wi-Fi to support informal gatherings and studying.



### FOSTER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Encourage collaboration between schools, nonprofits, arts organizations, and businesses to create a diverse educational ecosystem.
- Program regular events (e.g., concerts, speaker series, science fairs) that invite community participation and celebration.

### CONNECT TO THE BROADER CITY

- Ensure seamless pedestrian and bike connectivity from this district to the Downtown, Gateway, and residential neighborhoods.
- Use trail networks and visual wayfinding to integrate the district into the city's overall mobility plan.

### MANAGE AS A UNIFIED DISTRICT

- Create a district-level task force or partnership council made up of schools, civic leaders, and community reps to guide shared programming, maintenance, and design.
- Treat the area as a “learning commons” that welcomes all ages, not just K–12 students.

# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #7 4TH STREET NEIGHBORHOOD

## CORRIDOR IDENTITY & ROLE

The 4th Street SE Corridor is a critical connector through the community—anchoring the transition between neighborhood living and urban vibrancy. The strategy balances increased housing supply and walkable, mixed-use opportunities along the corridor, while preserving the scale, quiet, and character of the residential interior.

## APPLY TRANSECT-BASED PLANNING TO GUIDE DENSITY

### PROMOTE ADAPTABLE COMMERCIAL USES IN RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES

- Allow for flexible, low-impact commercial uses (e.g., offices, studios, cafés, salons, neighborhood shops) within existing homes along 4th Street.
- Require minimal exterior alterations to retain residential form and character—preserving the corridor’s historic and human-scale feel.
- Encourage live-work models and small business incubation that supports entrepreneurs and local services.

## URBAN CORRIDOR ZONES (T4/T5)

**1. Focus 6–20 unit multi-family residential development directly along 4th Street SE and 1st Avenue SE, creating a higher-density spine with excellent access to transit, services, and walkability.**

### NEIGHBORHOOD INTERIOR (T3):

Preserve and enhance lower-intensity housing—single-family, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes—in the blocks just off the corridor, allowing for gentle density increases without disrupting neighborhood character.

### 2. Support Residential Infill & Reinvestment.

- Incentivize infill development on vacant or underutilized lots to strengthen the residential core and improve housing choice.
- Launch a home rehab and modernization program targeting aging structures in the corridor to improve livability and aesthetics.
- Encourage infill designs that match existing character while adding density and modern amenities.

### 3. Enhance Walkability and Corridor Character.

- Create a cohesive pedestrian-friendly streetscape: continuous sidewalks, safe crossings, pedestrian lighting, and street trees.
- Use design standards for new buildings that promote transparency, porch/front entry orientation, and reduced setbacks to activate the street.

### 4. Connect to a Broader Network.

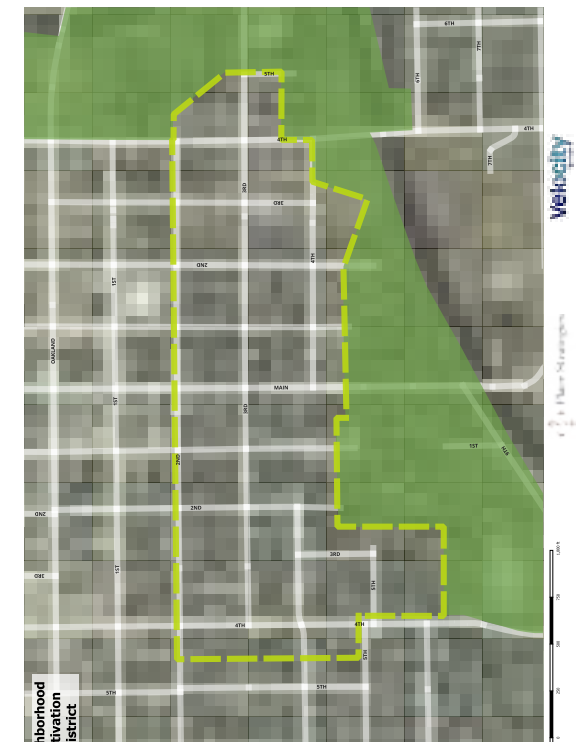
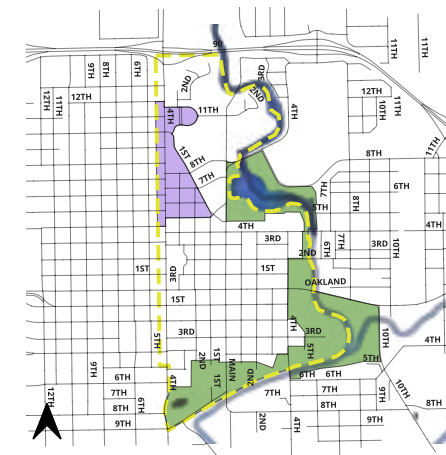
- Design 4th Street SE as a mobility corridor linking downtown, employment centers, and surrounding districts.
- Improve bike lanes, trails, and transit stops to provide low-car access and support active transportation.
- Integrate with adjacent neighborhood street grids to promote fluid movement across the district.

### 5. Include Neighborhood-Scale Amenities.

- Allow small-scale commercial or live-work uses at key nodes to support residents and reduce need for car trips.
- Plan for pocket parks or gathering spaces along the corridor to support community interaction and walk-to recreation.

### 6. Promote Equitable Growth.

- Prioritize development strategies that deliver affordable housing options across multiple income levels.
- Engage long-term residents in planning decisions to ensure revitalization without displacement.



# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #8 HEALTH CARE DISTRICT

## DISTRICT IDENTITY & ROLE

The Health Care District is centered around Mayo Clinic and represents a significant opportunity to grow into a regional center for health, wellness, and innovation. A coordinated strategy will leverage Mayo's long-term development plans while cultivating a district that supports healthcare workers, patients, and associated businesses.

## KEY STRATEGIES

### 1. Collaborate with Mayo Clinic on Long-Term Planning.

- Establish a formal partnership with Mayo leadership to understand growth projections, space needs, and campus expansion goals.
- Coordinate land use, transportation, and infrastructure planning with Mayo's anticipated timeline to ensure alignment and readiness.
- Identify opportunities for shared-use facilities, such as parking, green space, or community wellness programs.

### 2. Recruit Health-Related Businesses & Services.

- Develop a business attraction plan focused on complementary health uses:
  - + Specialist clinics
  - + Diagnostic labs
  - + Physical therapy & rehabilitation centers
  - + Medical offices and administrative support
- Designate flexible zoning to allow for medical office development and ensure adequate infrastructure (e.g., broadband, parking, accessibility).

### 3. Support Amenities for Patients, Visitors, and Staff Encourage the development of convenient services:

- Quick-serve restaurants, cafes, and food trucks
- Pharmacies and wellness retail
- Temporary lodging options like short-term rentals or hotel expansion
- Promote pedestrian-scale amenities that improve the experience of caregivers and visitors: seating areas, shaded plazas, transit stops.

### 4. Design for Comfort, Access, and Connectivity.

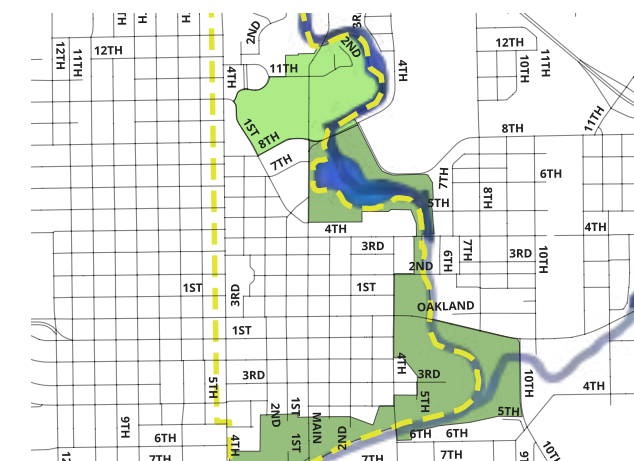
- Enhance walkability and wayfinding within the district, including connections to Downtown, residential neighborhoods, and transit corridors.
- Consider "healing landscape" elements like gardens, green buffers, and calming public spaces in and around healthcare facilities.

### 5. Encourage Innovation and Workforce Development.

- Partner with local educational institutions to align training programs with medical workforce needs.
- Support medical innovation and entrepreneurship through coworking labs, startup space, or incubator partnerships.

### 6. Ensure Compatible Land Use Transitions.

- Use design guidelines and land use buffers to transition from high-intensity medical uses to adjacent residential areas.
- Prioritize adaptive reuse where possible to reduce vacancy and preserve district character.



# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #9 DOCTOR STREET JUNCTION

## DISTRICT IDENTITY & ROLE

Situated just outside the downtown core and adjacent to key employment hubs, the Doctor Street Junction District is positioned to become a vibrant urban neighborhood—one that maximizes residential capacity while offering the daily amenities and services needed for a thriving, walkable lifestyle.

### PRIORITIZE HIGH-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Encourage large-scale multi-family and mixed-use apartment projects to increase housing supply near jobs and downtown.
- Promote design excellence and livability—balconies, shared green spaces, and street-level activity should be integral.
- Support a mix of market-rate and affordable units to ensure inclusive growth.

### CLUSTER COMMERCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES NEARBY

- Plan for ground-floor retail, small groceries, coffee shops, daycare, fitness, and healthcare—essential services within walking distance of residents.
- Focus commercial activity at intersections and nodes that naturally draw foot traffic.

### BUILD FOR A 24/7 NEIGHBORHOOD FEEL

- Incorporate active uses at the street level, strong nighttime lighting, and pedestrian-friendly amenities.
- Create plazas or pocket parks that give residents informal places to gather and socialize.

### CONNECT TO DOWNTOWN AND EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

- Ensure seamless walking, biking, and transit access to nearby job hubs and the city center.
- Improve crossings and pathways to make movement safe and intuitive—especially during peak commute times.

### INCLUDE TRANSIT AND MOBILITY OPTIONS

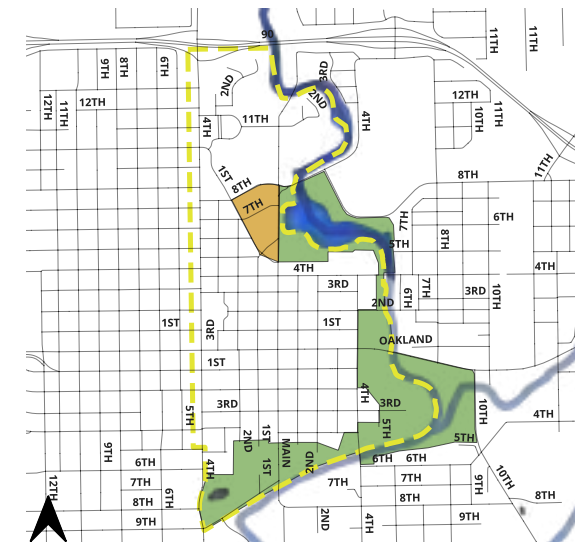
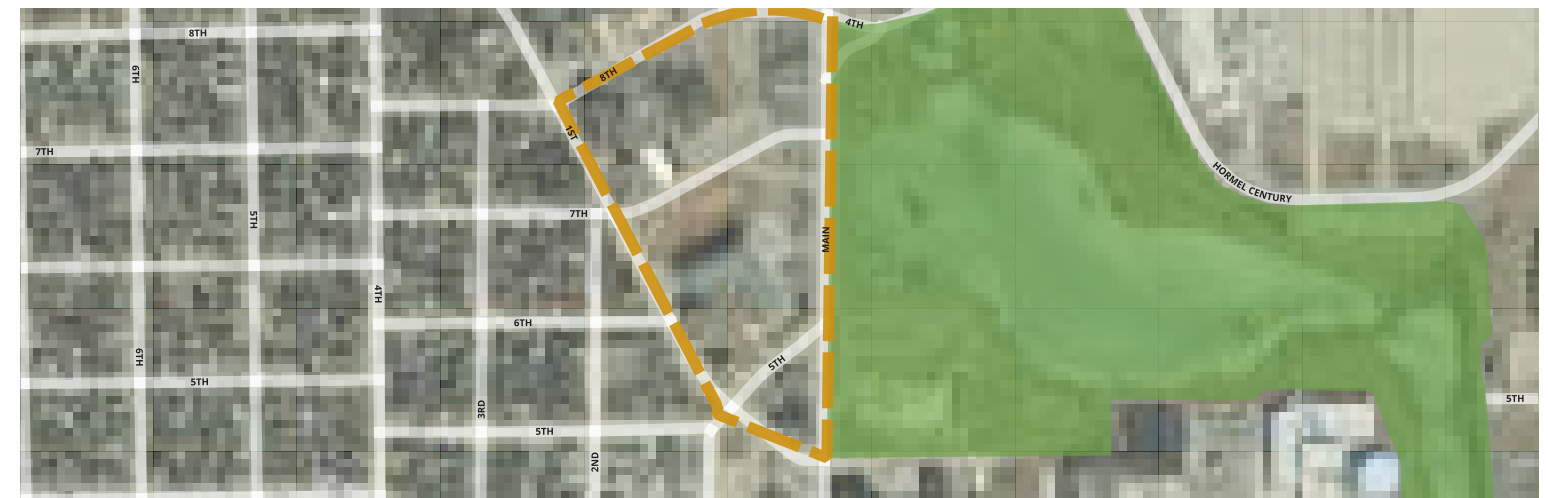
- Plan for public transit stops or micro-mobility hubs (e-scooters, bike-share) to reduce car dependency.
- Minimize parking ratios for new residential developments to encourage use of active and shared transportation.

### DESIGN FOR LONG-TERM LIVABILITY

- Ensure high-quality streetscapes, tree canopy, stormwater management, and noise buffers (especially near major roads or employers).
- Include community-oriented spaces like co-working lounges, rooftop patios, and wellness amenities within residential buildings.

### BUILD A COHESIVE VISUAL IDENTITY

- Develop district-wide design guidelines to ensure that new development fits a shared character—modern urban, but welcoming.
- Use cohesive materials, wayfinding, and streetscaping to visually tie the district to the Downtown.



# EXPERIENCE DISTRICTS #10 GATEWAY DISTRICT

## DISTRICT IDENTITY & ROLE

As the primary exit off Highway 90 into the heart of Austin, the Gateway District plays a crucial role in shaping the first impression of the city. This district should exude a sense of arrival, blending a neighborhood feel with select highway-oriented amenities. Unlike the mall area to the north, the Gateway is about human scale, charm, and transition—leading visitors seamlessly into the 4th Street Corridor and eventually Downtown.

## KEY STRATEGIES

### 1. Celebrate Arrival: Establish a Strong Visual Identity.

- Design signature gateway signage, landscaping, and lighting that reflects the city's history and culture.
- Incorporate public art, murals, or sculptures at key intersections and entry points.
- Improve streetscaping with tree-lined sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and consistent architectural elements to unify the corridor visually.

### 2. Protect and Evolve Residential Character.

- Maintain the existing single-family housing format while allowing for gradual integration of small multi-family housing (e.g., duplexes, fourplexes, or small courtyard apartments) that respect scale and form.
- Focus residential growth on underutilized lots or as part of adaptive reuse projects—preserving the community's fabric.

### 3. Support Thoughtful Commercial Development.

- Concentrate small commercial and chain retail near the gas station node only, providing services for travelers and residents without disrupting the neighborhood feel.
- Encourage neighborhood-scaled commercial such as cafes, service businesses, or small markets that meet daily needs while fitting the context.
- Prohibit large-format or auto-dominant commercial typical of the mall area to the north.

### 4. Promote Adaptive Reuse and Mixed-Use Opportunities.

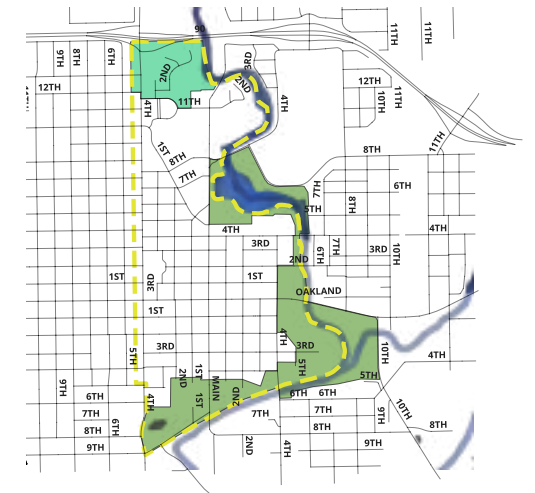
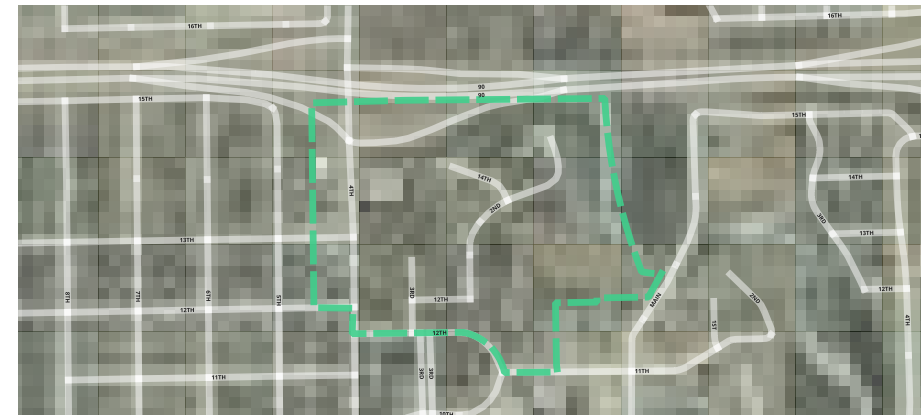
- Allow existing residential structures along the corridor to be reused as live-work spaces, offices, or low-impact retail, while retaining their original scale and charm.
- Provide incentives or design support for transforming older homes into small businesses or community-serving facilities.

### 5. Design with the Pedestrian in Mind.

- Require all new commercial development to frame the street, with parking located at the rear or side of buildings to maintain walkability and visual appeal.
- Improve sidewalk connectivity, add benches, street trees, and wayfinding to invite movement into the 4th Street Corridor.

### 6. Emphasize Scale, Context, and Transition.

- Use form-based design standards to ensure new development aligns with neighborhood scale—focusing on height, roof pitch, façade rhythm, and material consistency.
- Ensure smooth transitions from commercial edges to residential interiors using setbacks, landscaping buffers, and careful massing.



# Downtown Austin, MN: Value Per Acre Examples by Building Type

**Density**

Low
  Medium
  High



\$6.9M



\$5.0M



\$3.0M



\$2.4M



\$1.6M



\$0.9M



\$0.2M



\$0.2M



Vacant      Commercial      Residential      Residential      Residential      Residential      Commercial      Commercial

U3

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# ZONING STRATEGIES

## INTRODUCTION

As Austin enhances the focus on increasing housing investment and increasing housing options in the City Center, there are key aspects to consider from a regulatory focus. In addition, as neighboring towns and villages in Mower County look to enhance their housing options near their main streets and community centers, there are lessons from these concepts that help improve the development process to create flexible rules, while also requiring a level of predictability in what is going to be built.

The zoning recommendations in this document apply only to the existing standards in the City of Austin Zoning Ordinance but may be applicable to other cities and towns in the County, with careful consideration of the goals, culture, and expectations of those individual communities. With any new project, the context of the neighborhood around it, should inform the regulatory changes, and not a simple copy/paste exercise.

## CONCEPT 1 - DOWNTOWN INFILL, MIXED-USE



Focus on utilizing underutilized blocks for redevelopment of catalytic projects. This includes redeveloping parking lots with underground and/or above ground parking garages and incorporating mixed-use retail, hospitality, food & beverage, and housing. In most cases the existing parking needs to be replaced within the garage to mitigate any parking loss with the development. Considerations for reduced and unbundled parking within the garages and on-street should be addressed, along with parking management programs for any public parking included in the development.

## CURRENT DISTRICTS, VERSUS CONCEPT PLAN

The opportunity site is currently zoned Central Business - B-3 and takes the idea of framing 1st Street by developing underutilized surface parking and reclaiming a block of 3rd Avenue. Adding activity to that corridor partnered with small pop-up units along main street to bolster economic development and provide an incubator environment for new businesses.

Zoning Requirements	
Central Business District - B-3	
Land Uses	Allows hospitality, retail, mixed use and variety of residential above 2 units.
Setbacks	Uses an average maximum setback based on existing block frontage or a 10-20 min-max setback.
Height	No maximum height and shall have a minimum of two stories.
Standards	Includes form-based development standards such as building and parking placement, minimum façade requirements, and entry location standards.
Parking	Parking standards for multifamily is 1.5 spaces per unit, and retail uses are based on employees and maximum capacity of establishment.

## CONFLICTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Primary conflict with implementation lies within the minimum building frontage requirements and plaza programed with the northern portion of the development. B-3 code requires that a minimum of 75% of street frontage be occupied along 4th Avenue.
- Parking minimums are not differentiated between downtown core areas and greenfield development. Shared on-street parking is a condition that is not anticipated and is vital component of any urban downtown development which is derived from a shared experience and not individual development projects.
- Right-of-way vacation of 3rd Avenue is a conflict regarding potential public infrastructure that would need to be accounted for by relocating or through a platting process.

## CONCEPT 2 - PARKSIDE URBAN RESIDENTIAL



To correlate with park improvements of the Cedar River frontage. This area focuses on connections through development to access the park, providing trailheads for parking or bike trail access, street and gateway improvements into the City Center and park system, and incorporating housing with its respective parking. The area is envisioned as three-story multi-family with ground level porches or stoops to access ground floor units. Any non-residential uses should be located at key intersections that allow access to the park system. This would be good locations for bike repair shops, juice and coffee bars, or brunch spots that have views and access directly to the Cedar River Park.

### CURRENT DISTRICTS, VERSUS CONCEPT PLAN

The opportunity site is currently split zoned Multi-Family Office (R-0) on the southern portion and Central Business (B-2) on the northern portion. The proposed concept is intended to provide a framing of the Cedar River and 4th Street which can naturally attract residents to visit and stay. The residential component can provide a constant foot traffic count and provide needed housing in a meaningful way that also brings retail.

	Zoning Requirements	
	Central Business District B-2	Multi-Family Office R-0
Land Uses	Allows residential uses above single family and only mixed use if more than 5 units. Allows a mix of commercial and retail uses that are automobile or pedestrian oriented.	Allows residential uses above two-family and mix use with general retail and professional uses.
Setbacks	7 ft front setback	25 ft front setback, 8 ft side setback and 10 ft rear setback
Height	65 ft max	65 ft max
Standards	80% lot coverage and subject to shoreland overlay	60% lot coverage and subject to shoreland overlay
Parking	Parking standards for multifamily is 1.5 spaces per unit, and retail uses are based on employees and maximum capacity of establishment.	Parking standards for multifamily is 1.5 spaces per unit, and retail uses are based on employees and maximum capacity of establishment

### CONFLICTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Property is split zoned and does not have consistent development regulations.
- Property is multiple different lots and platted individually which creates conflicts with infrastructure, building layouts, and access.
- Multi-Family Office District has a 25-foot front setback that is inconsistent with proposed concept and urban core neighborhood development.
- Parking minimums are not differentiated between downtown core areas and greenfield development. Shared on-street parking is a condition that is not anticipated and is vital component of any urban downtown development which is derived from a shared experience and not individual development projects.

## CONCEPT 3 - INFILL NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL



As the neighborhood received reinvestment, either by current owners, or by new investors, understanding what housing types allow for increased density and compatibility with the neighborhood is an important aspect to success. As commercial and multi-family development develops along Cedar River and Oakland Avenue Corridor, transitions in single-family will need to occur. This is explored through townhomes, multi-unit buildings (Up to 6 units) and smaller lot single-family housing.

### CURRENT DISTRICTS, VERSUS CONCEPT PLAN

The opportunity site is currently split zoned Multi-Family Office (R-0) and Light Industrial (I-1). Frontage along the eastern 3rd Street block and north and south of site has been rezoned to light industrial even though there is predominantly residential. The proposed project transitions higher intensity into the neighborhood heading west. The townhomes transition down to single family units that mix in well with current housing stock.

ZONING REQUIREMENTS		
	Multi-Family Office R-0	Light Industrial I-1
Land Uses	Allows residential uses above two-family and mix use with general retail and professional uses.	Allows multifamily or mixed use residential above 5 units. Allows a mix of commercial, retail, and light industrial uses.
Setbacks	25 ft front setback, 8 ft side setback and 10 ft rear setback	25 ft front setback, 10 ft side setback and 10 ft rear setback
Height	65 ft max	75 ft max
Standards	60% lot coverage	No lot coverage
Parking	Parking standards for multifamily is 1.5 spaces per unit, and retail uses are based on employees and maximum capacity of establishment	Parking standards for multifamily is 1.5 spaces per unit, and retail uses are based on employees and maximum capacity of establishment

### CONFLICTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Property is split zoned and does not have consistent development regulations. Light Industrial does not allow single family residential development.
- Current zoning districts require a 25 ft front setback that is inconsistent with the urban infill development concept that is meant to provide a walkable and connected development.
- Current height maximums allow for a much larger development that is not consistent with the existing neighborhood fabric.
- Parking minimums are not differentiated between downtown core areas and greenfield development. Shared on-street parking is a condition that is not anticipated and is vital component of any urban downtown development which is derived from a shared experience and not individual development projects.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- City initiated rezoning to consolidate project sites based on community vision. The private market moves fast and not being primed for development could be a missed opportunity.
- Right sized parking regulations that differentiate between urban core and greenfield development. Urban core areas provide a shared experience and with that, shared parking. That is a different context than a greenfield development that is viewed as independent.
- Add form-based regulations outside of B-3 to provide use flexibility but also form predictability for development. Currently districts such as R-0 and B-2 have very little guidelines on what development should look like and do not adjust based on neighborhood context.
- Review of subdivision ordinance with an emphasis on urban core and historic lot sizes and infrastructure. The zoning ordinance must be coupled with a subdivision ordinance that is consistent with the type of development that is being proposed. Allowing for horizontal multi-family and innovative housing is only as efficient as the platting and subdivision ordinance will allow.

# THANK YOU



Daniel Hintz  
Daniel@dnaofplace.com  
479-200-1812

# APPENDIX

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# URBAN3

Economics of Community Design

*Austin/Mower County,  
Minnesota*

Value per acre map of Auckland,  
New Zealand



# What is a City?

URBANS

Photo Source: [midwestliving.com](http://midwestliving.com)

# Land Production



URBAN3

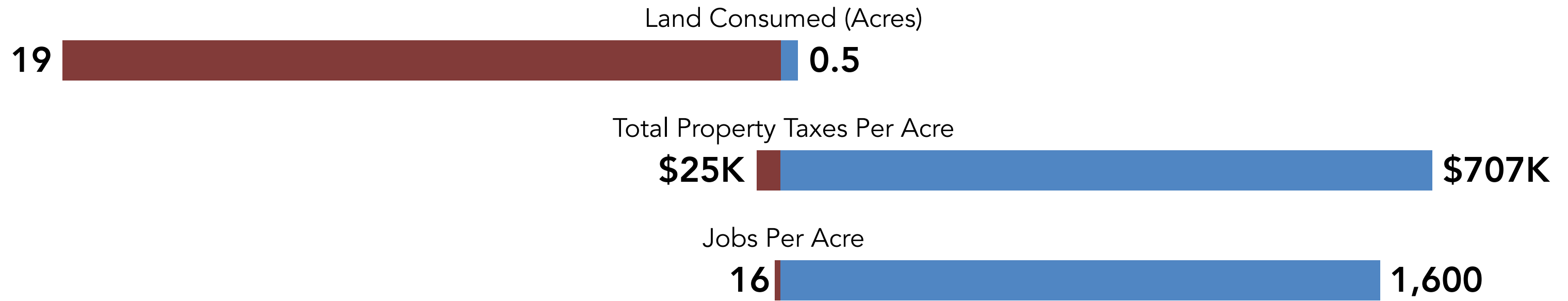
# Roseville Walmart

Total Tax Value:  
**\$14M**



# Osborne370

Total Tax Value:  
**\$11M**





# Tax Systems

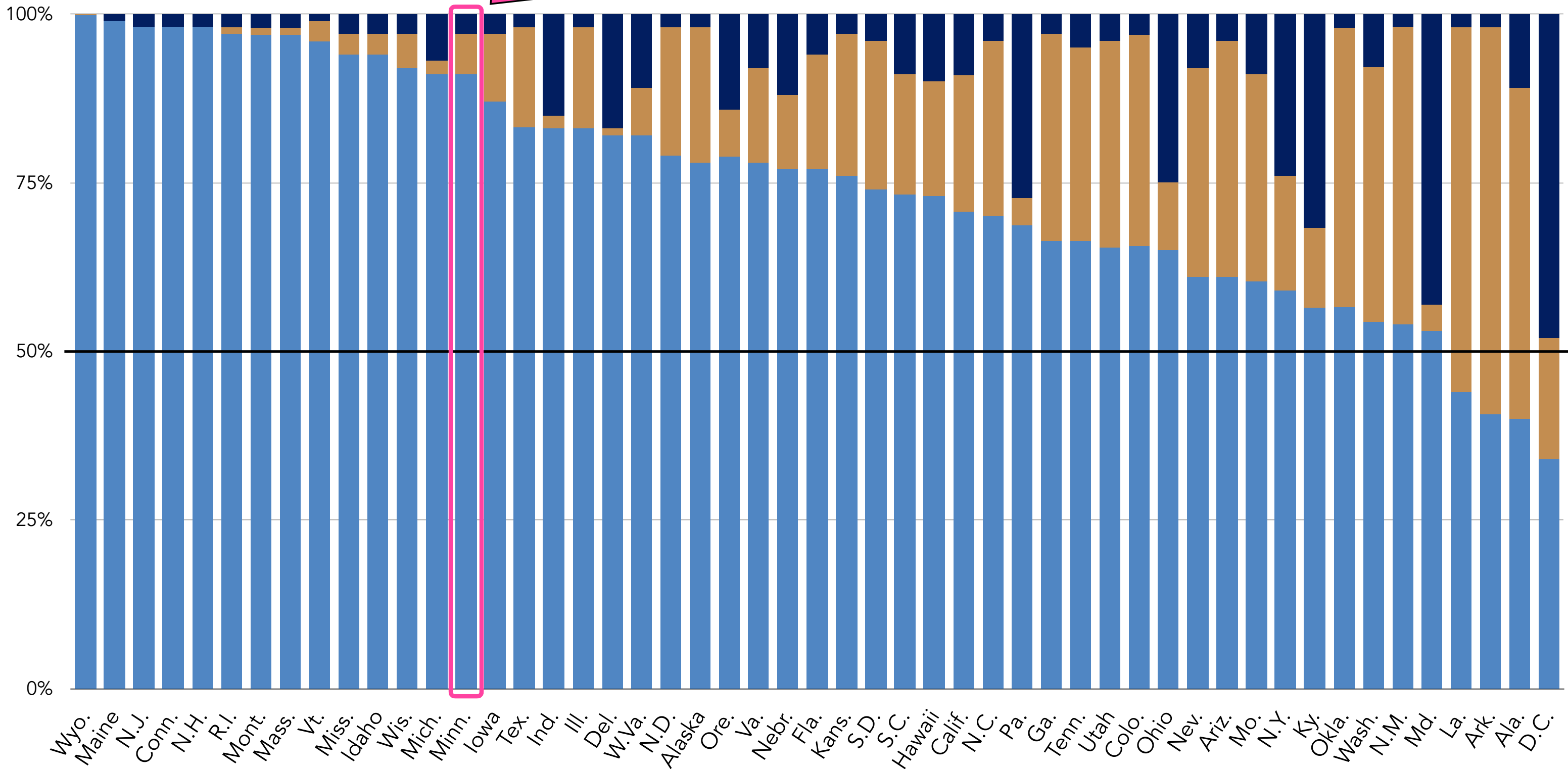
How Your Services are Funded

URBAN3

# Local Tax Revenue Sources

United States

Property Sales Income & Other



Source: US Census 2021 State & Local Government Finance Historical Datasets and Tables



$$\text{Market Value} - \frac{\text{Deferments, Exclusions, Reductions}}{=} =$$

$$\text{Taxable Value} \times \frac{\text{Class Rate}}{=} =$$

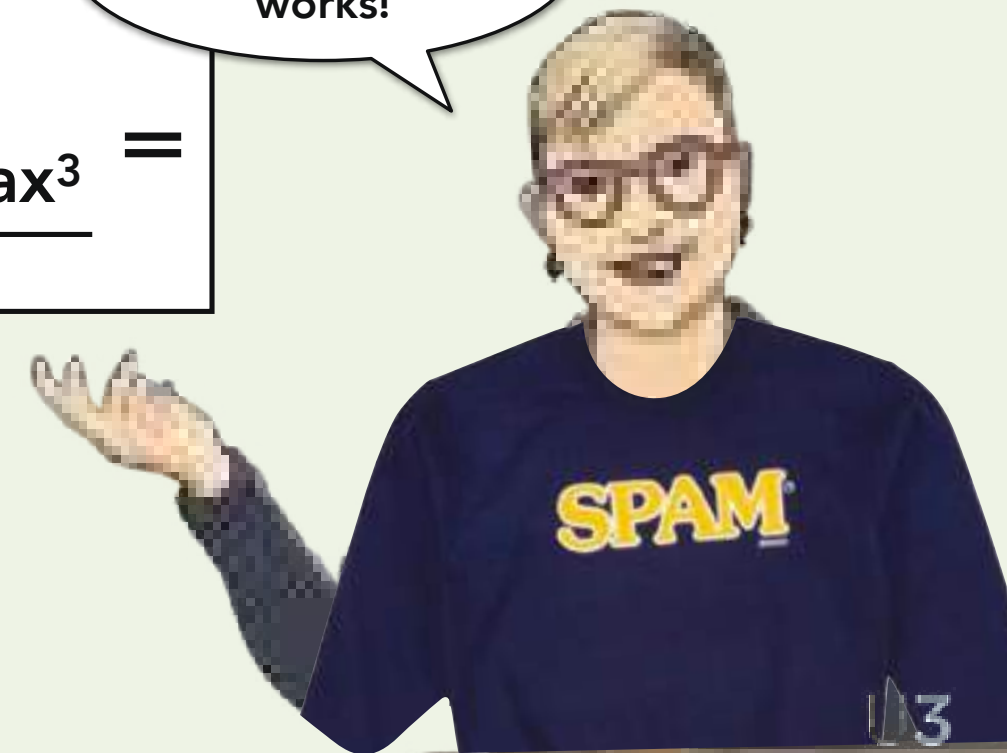
$$\text{Tax Capacity} \times \frac{\text{Local Tax Rates}}{=} =$$

$$\text{Base Tax Bill}^1 + \frac{\text{Referendum Tax}^2}{+} + \frac{\text{State General Tax}^3}{=} =$$

**Total Tax Bill**

A reference for Minnesotans!

This is how Minnesota's system works!



<sup>1</sup>Tax credits (if applicable) are subtracted from the Base Tax Bill.

<sup>2</sup>Varies based on your locality

<sup>3</sup>Only applied to commercial, industrial, & seasonal residential properties



### Tax Bill Formula

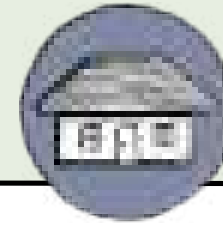
$$\text{Market Value} - \frac{\text{Deferments, Exclusions, Reductions}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Taxable Value} \times \frac{\text{Class Rate}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Tax Capacity} \times \frac{\text{Local Tax Rates}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Base Tax Bill}^1 + \frac{\text{Referendum Tax}^2}{\text{}} + \frac{\text{State General Tax}^3}{\text{}} =$$

**Total Tax Bill**



### Residential Tax Bill Sample

$$\$300,000 - \$0 =$$

$$\$300,000 \times 1.0\% =$$

$$\$3,000 \times 110.592\% =$$

$$\$3,318 + \$594 + \$0 =$$

**\$3,912**

<sup>1</sup>Tax credits (if applicable) are subtracted from the Base Tax Bill.

<sup>2</sup>Varies based on your locality

<sup>3</sup>Only applied to commercial, industrial, & seasonal residential properties



### Tax Bill Formula

$$\text{Market Value} - \frac{\text{Deferments, Exclusions, Reductions}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Taxable Value} \times \frac{\text{Class Rate}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Tax Capacity} \times \frac{\text{Local Tax Rates}}{\text{}} =$$

$$\text{Base Tax Bill}^1 + \frac{\text{Referendum Tax}^2}{\text{}} + \frac{\text{State General Tax}^3}{\text{}} =$$

**Total Tax Bill**



### Residential Tax Bill Sample

Homestead

$$\$300,000 - \$19,550 =$$

$$\$280,450 \times 1.0\% =$$

$$\$2,805 \times 110.592\% =$$

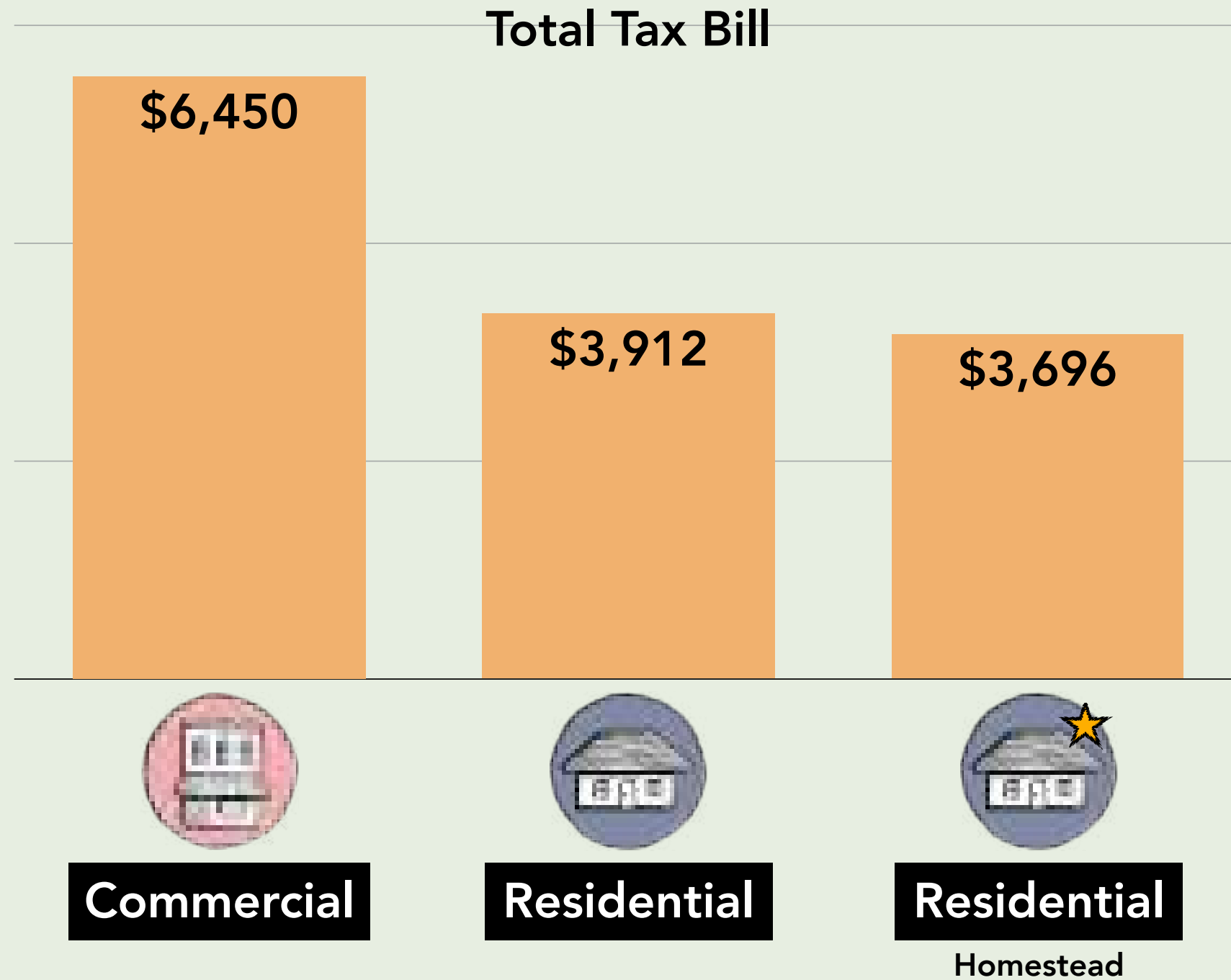
$$\$3,102 + \$594 + \$0 =$$

**\$3,696**

<sup>1</sup>Tax credits (if applicable) are subtracted from the Base Tax Bill.

<sup>2</sup>Varies based on your locality

<sup>3</sup>Only applied to commercial, industrial, & seasonal residential properties



Commercial is taxed almost twice as much as residential!



Source: [revenue.state.mn.us](https://revenue.state.mn.us)

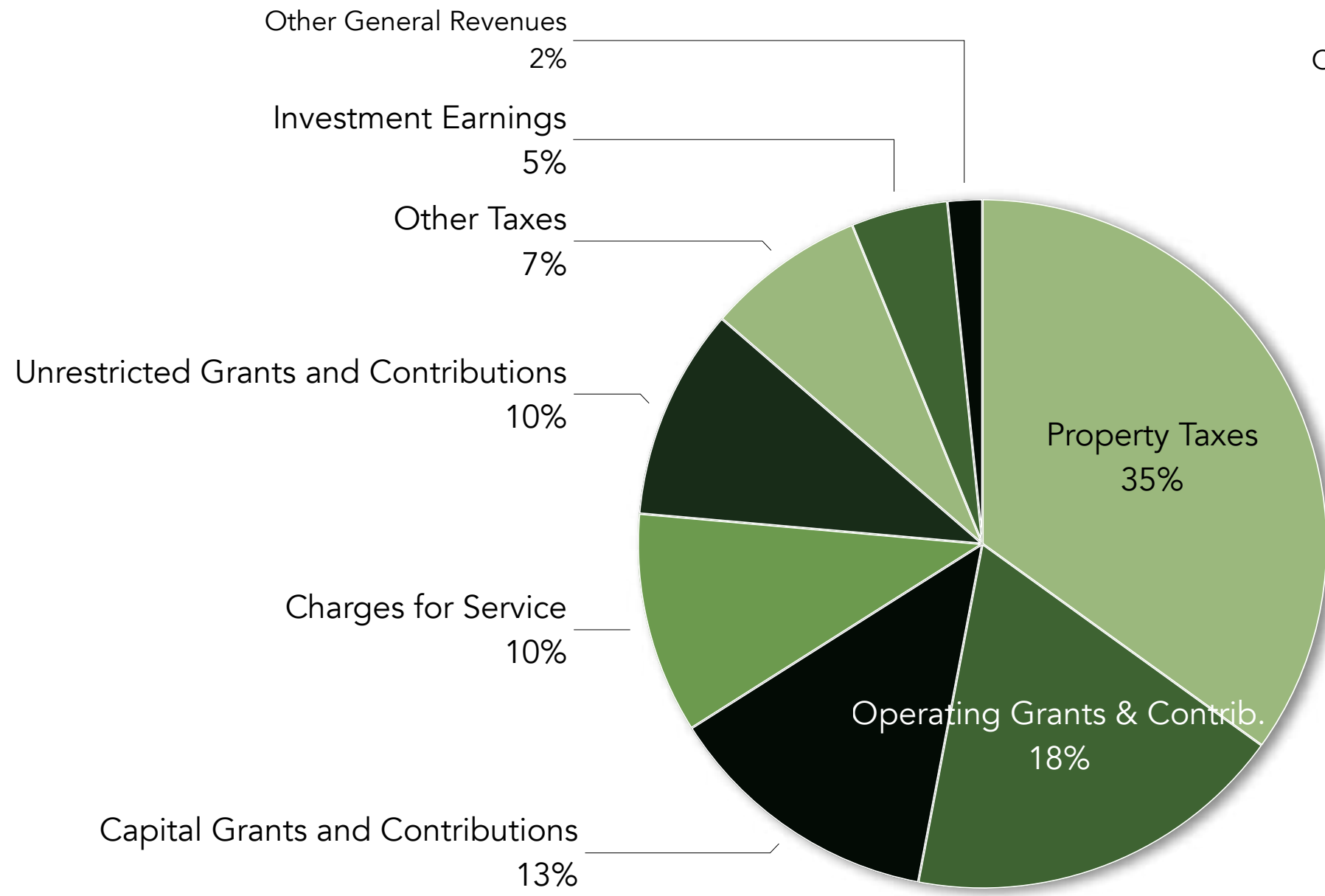


# Budget

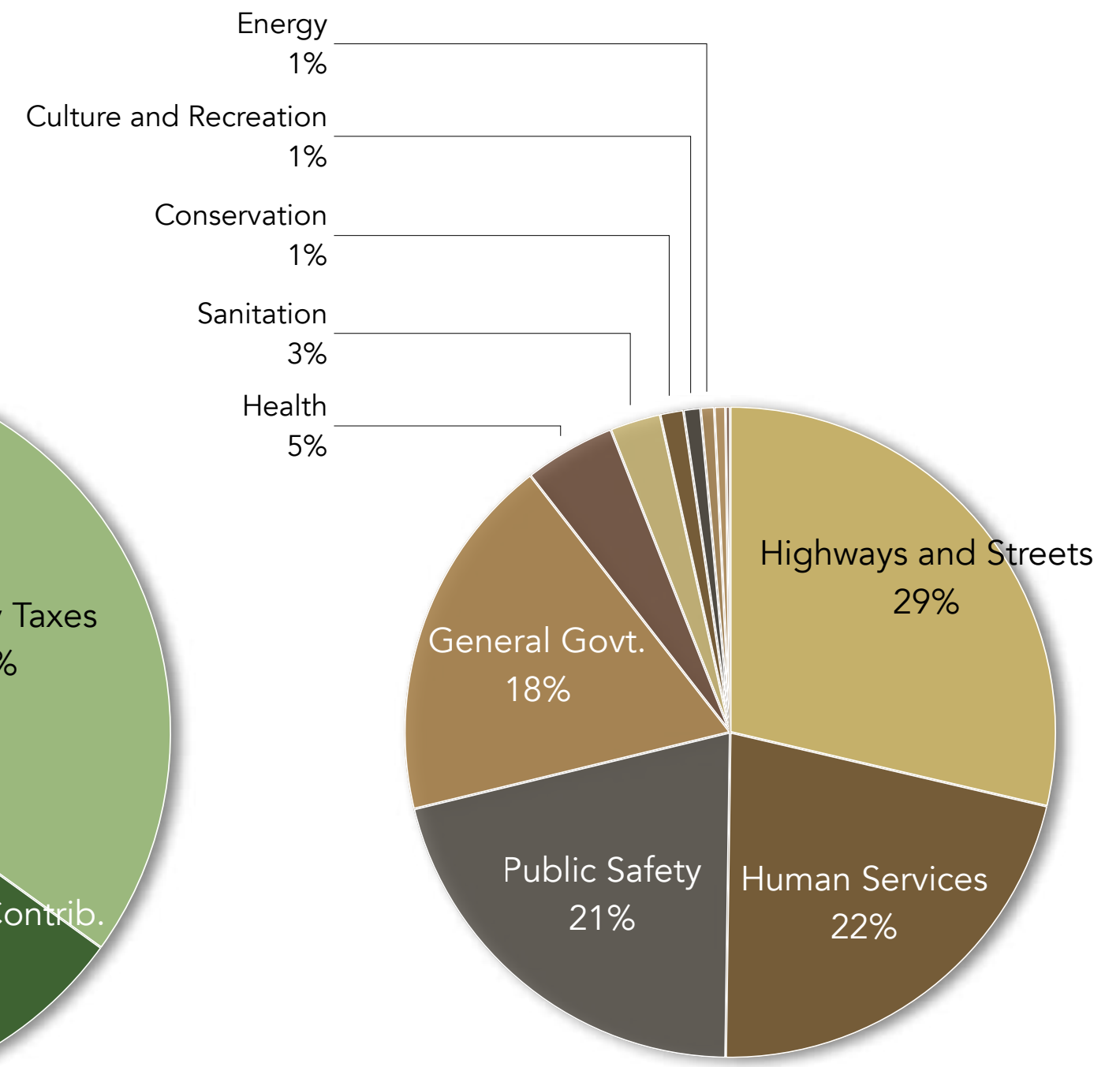
Your City by the Numbers

URBAN3

**URBAN3** **All Funds: 2023 Actuals**  
Mower County, MN

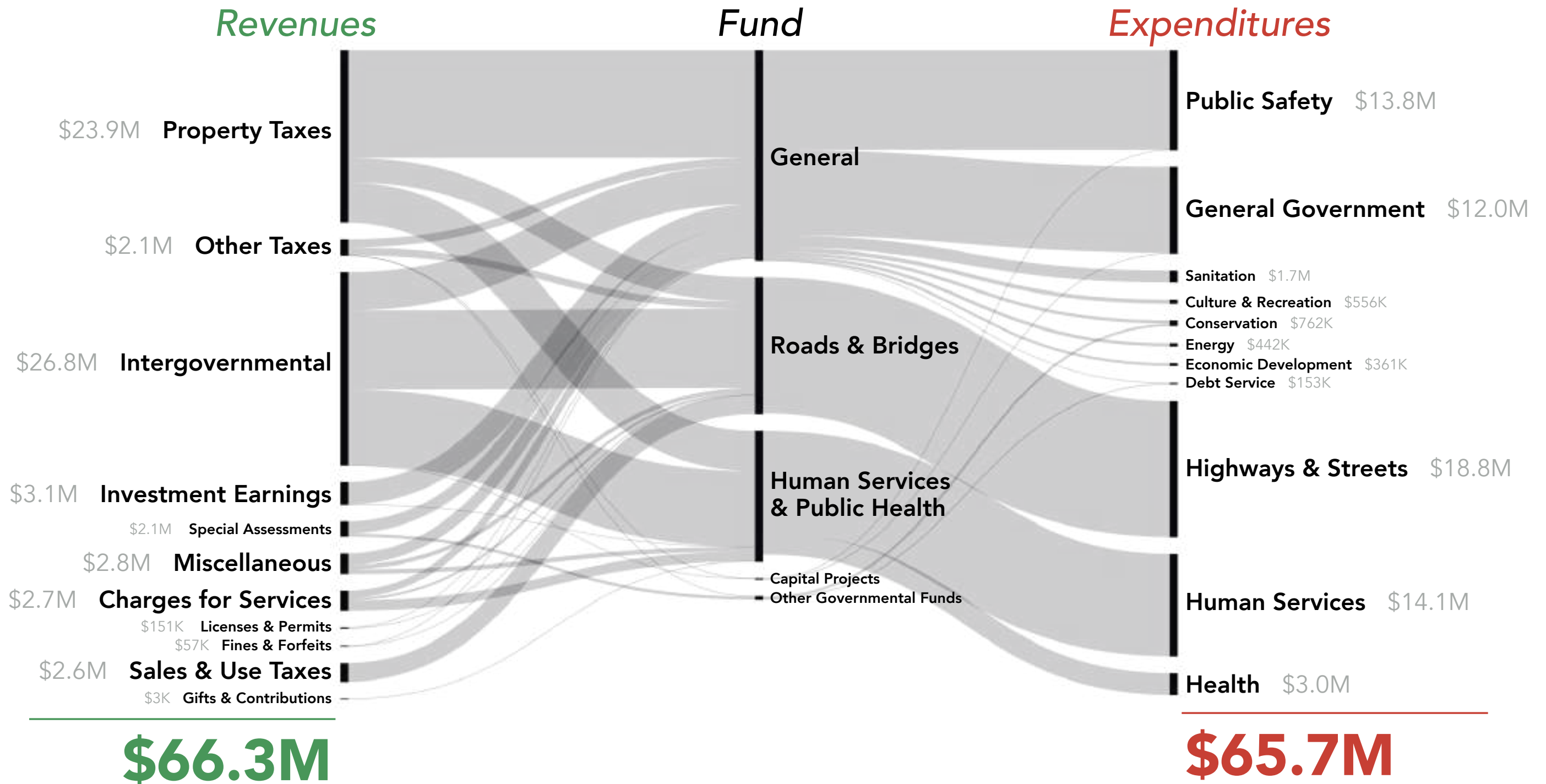


**Revenues: \$66.3M**

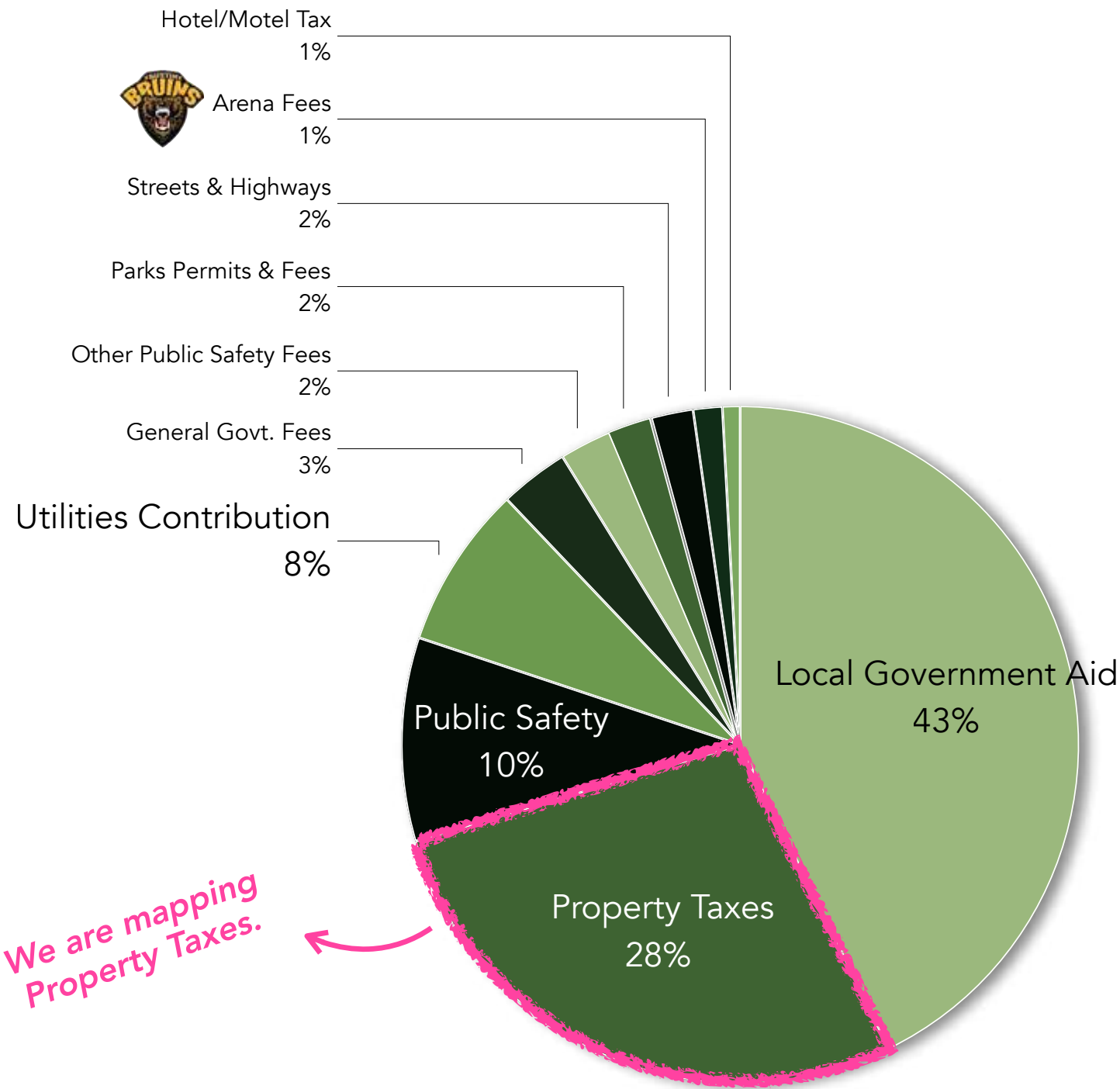


**Expenditures: \$65.7M**

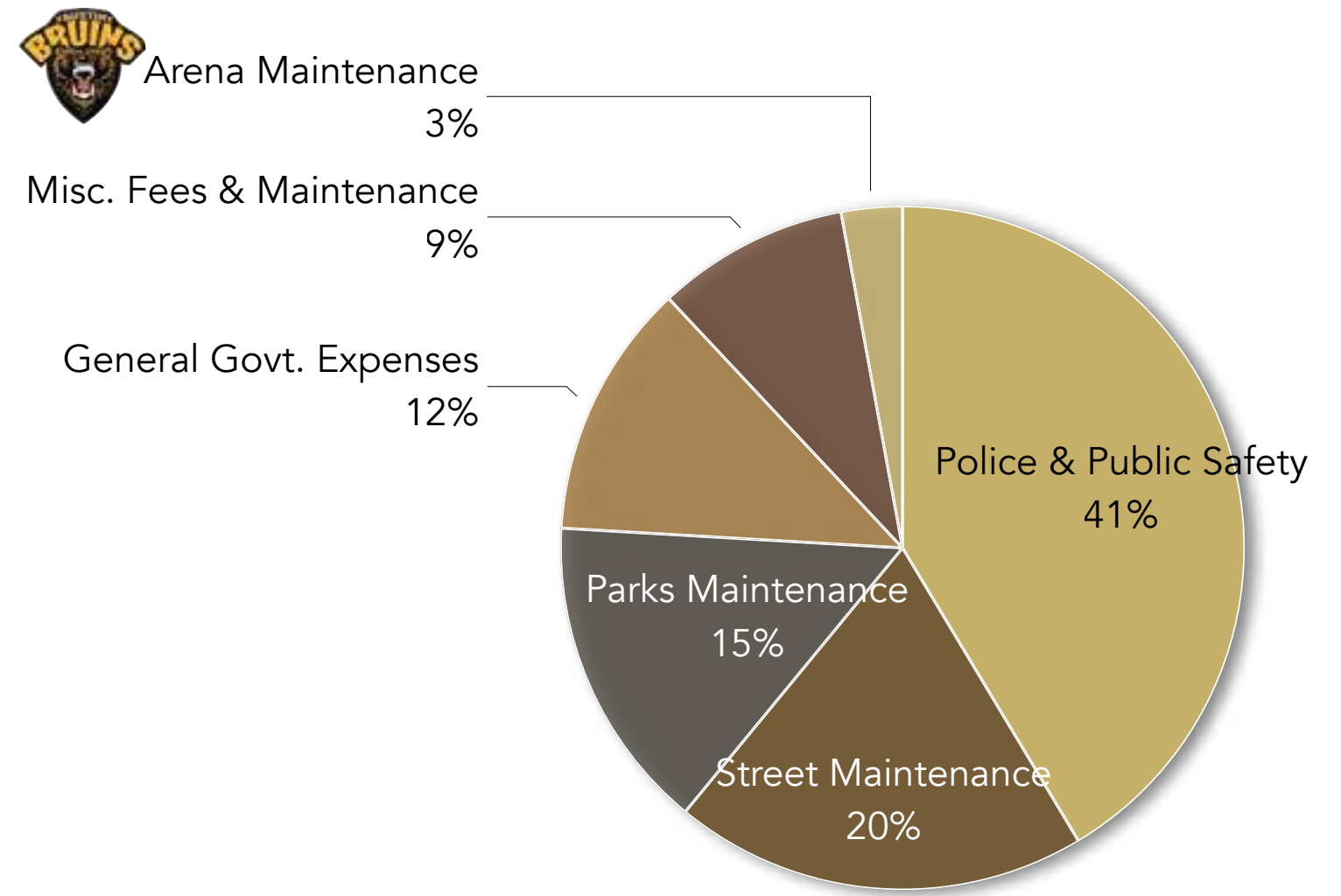
Source: [Mower County Financial Statements and Supplementary Info \(2023\)](#)



Source: Mower County Financial Statements and Supplementary Info (2023)



**Revenues: \$21M**



**Expenditures: \$20M**

Source: City of Austin 2025 Proposed Budget

# General Fund: 2023 Actuals

Austin, MN

## Revenues

## Fund

## Expenditures



\$9.0M Local Government Aid

We are mapping Property Taxes.

\$5.8M Property Taxes

\$0.2M Hotel/Motel Taxes

\$1.6M Utilities Contribution

\$0.8M Police

\$0.5M Fire

\$0.8M Other Public Safety Fees

\$0.4M Park Permits & Fees

\$0.4M Streets & Highways

\$0.7M General Government Fees

\$0.5M Misc. Revenues

\$0.3M Arena Fees

**\$21M**

General

Police \$5.7M

Fire \$2.1M

Other Public Safety \$0.6M

Street Maintenance \$4.0M

Parks Maintenance \$3.0M

General Govt. Expenses \$2.4M

Misc. Fees & Maintenance \$1.8M

Arena Maintenance \$0.6M

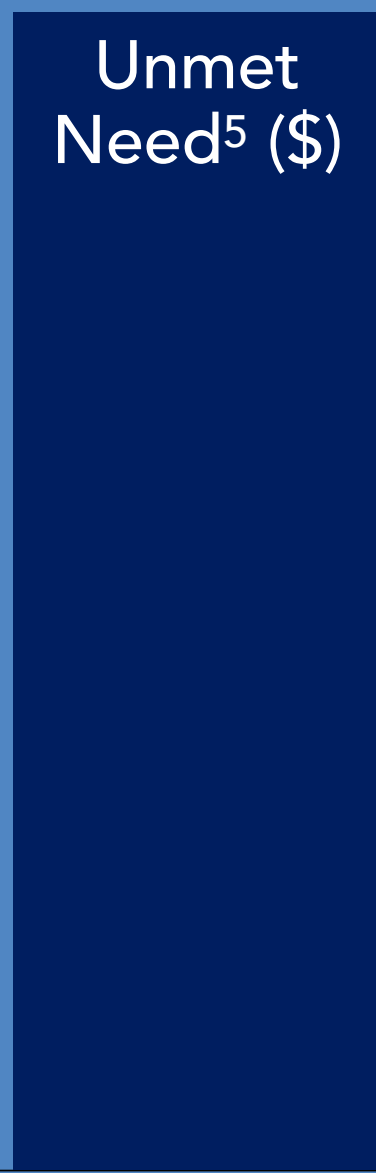
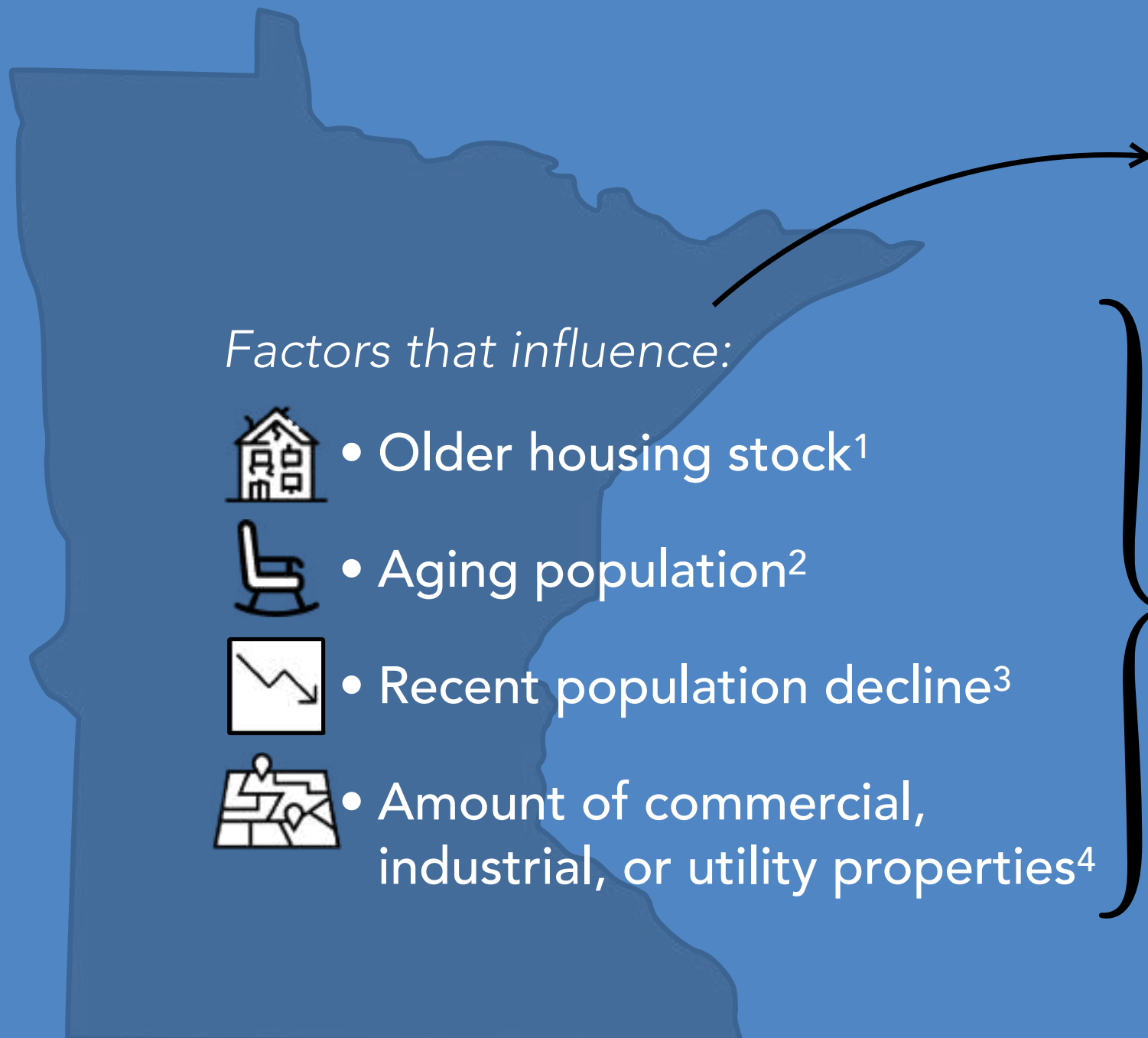
**\$20M**

Source: City of Austin 2025 Proposed Budget



Funded through statewide sales tax

Established 1972



Difference (\$) = amount of aid given

Sample City in MN

<sup>1</sup> Percent of housing built before 1940  
<sup>2</sup> Percent of city's population 65 and older  
<sup>3</sup> Population decline from city's peak population in the last 40 years  
<sup>4</sup> Percent of city's tax base classified as commercial, industrial, or utility  
<sup>5</sup> Unmet need is the difference between Need and its equalized tax capacity by the average rate of all MN cities

Source: [minneapolismn.gov](http://minneapolismn.gov), [revenue.state.mn.us](http://revenue.state.mn.us), State of MN Dept. of Revenue



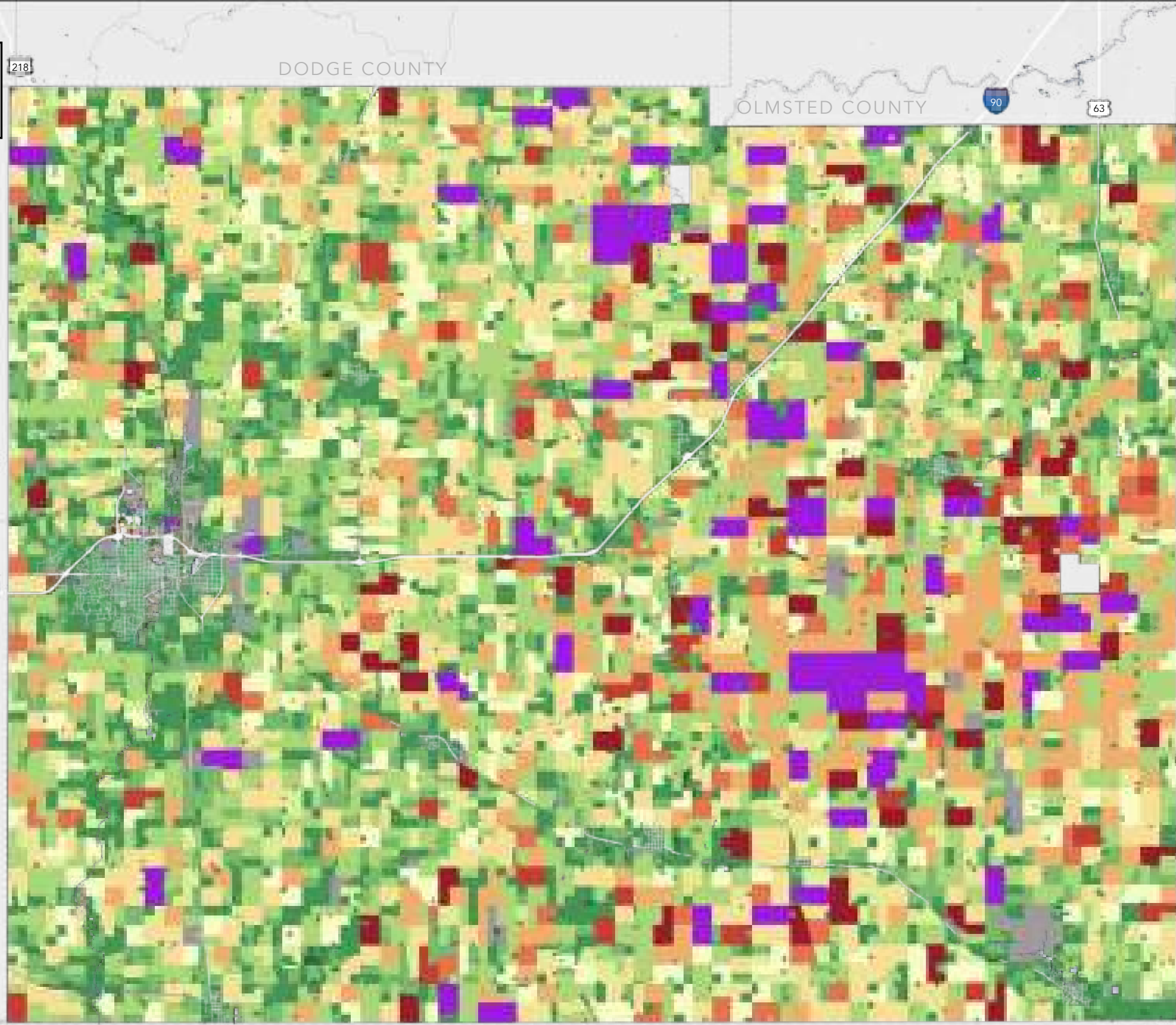
Case Study: Economic MRI®

# Austin/Mower County, Minnesota

URBAN3

# Total Market Value

Mower County, MN



Total Value (\$)	
█	> 7,000,000
█	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
█	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
█	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
█	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
█	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
█	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
█	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
█	750,001 - 1,000,000
█	500,001 - 750,000
█	30,001 - 500,000
█	< 30,000
█	0

FILMORE COUNTY

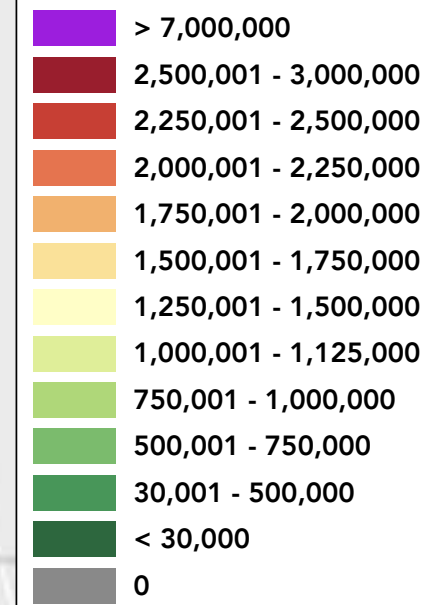


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Market Value Per Acre

Austin, MN

## Value Per Acre (\$)



Brownsdale

Lansing

Austin

Racine

Grand Meadow

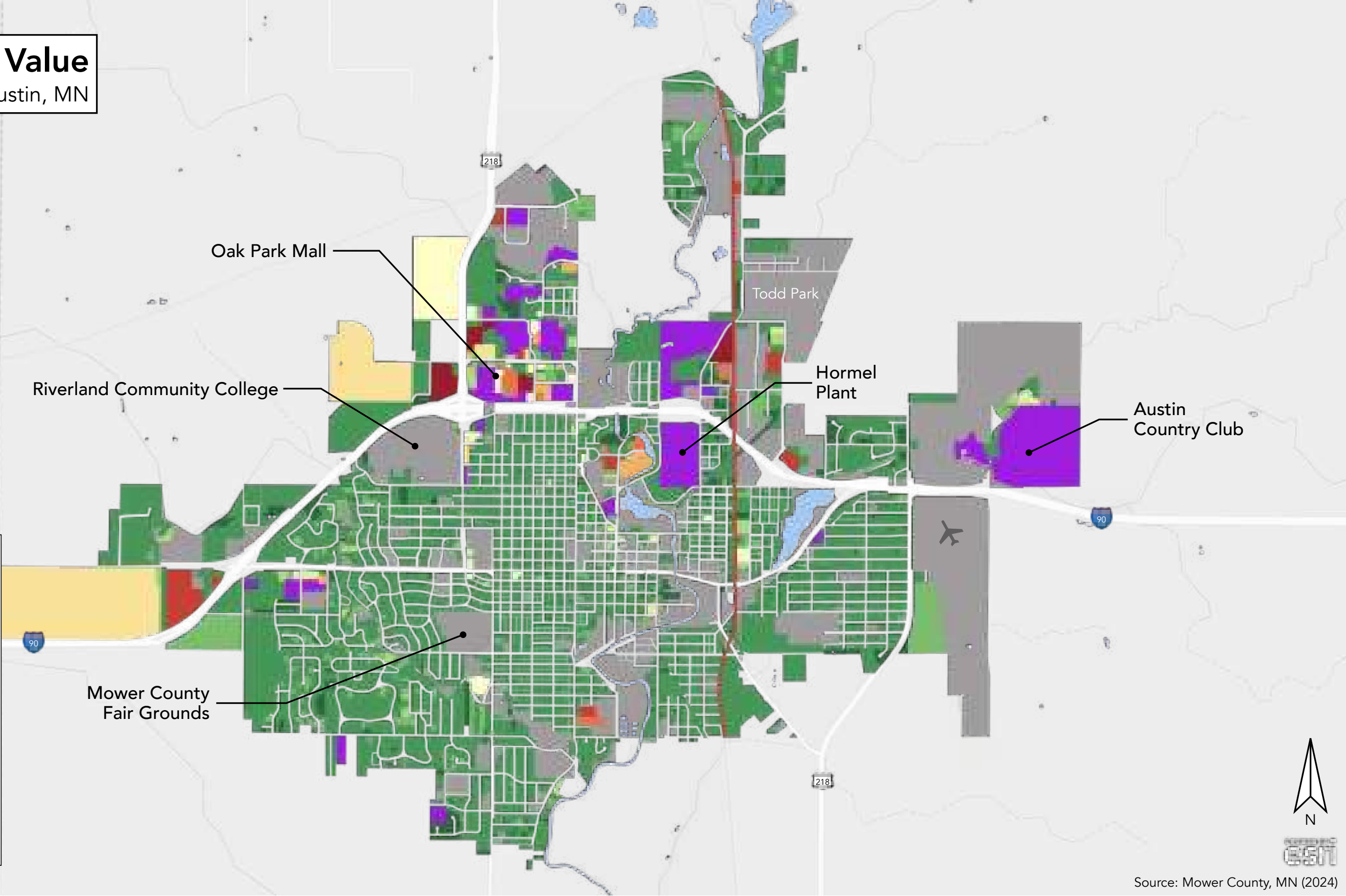
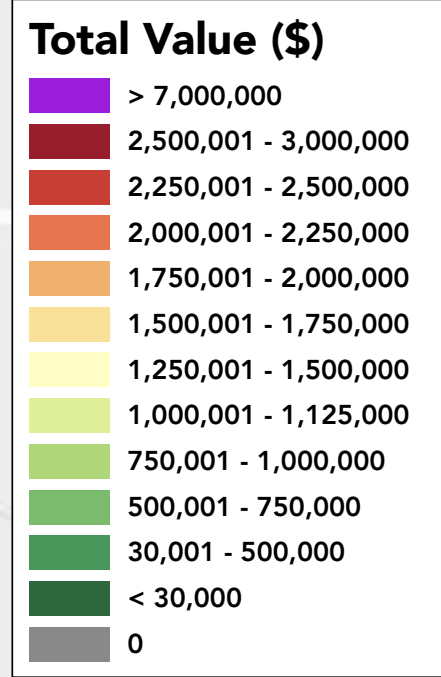
Le Roy

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

URBAN3

# Total Market Value

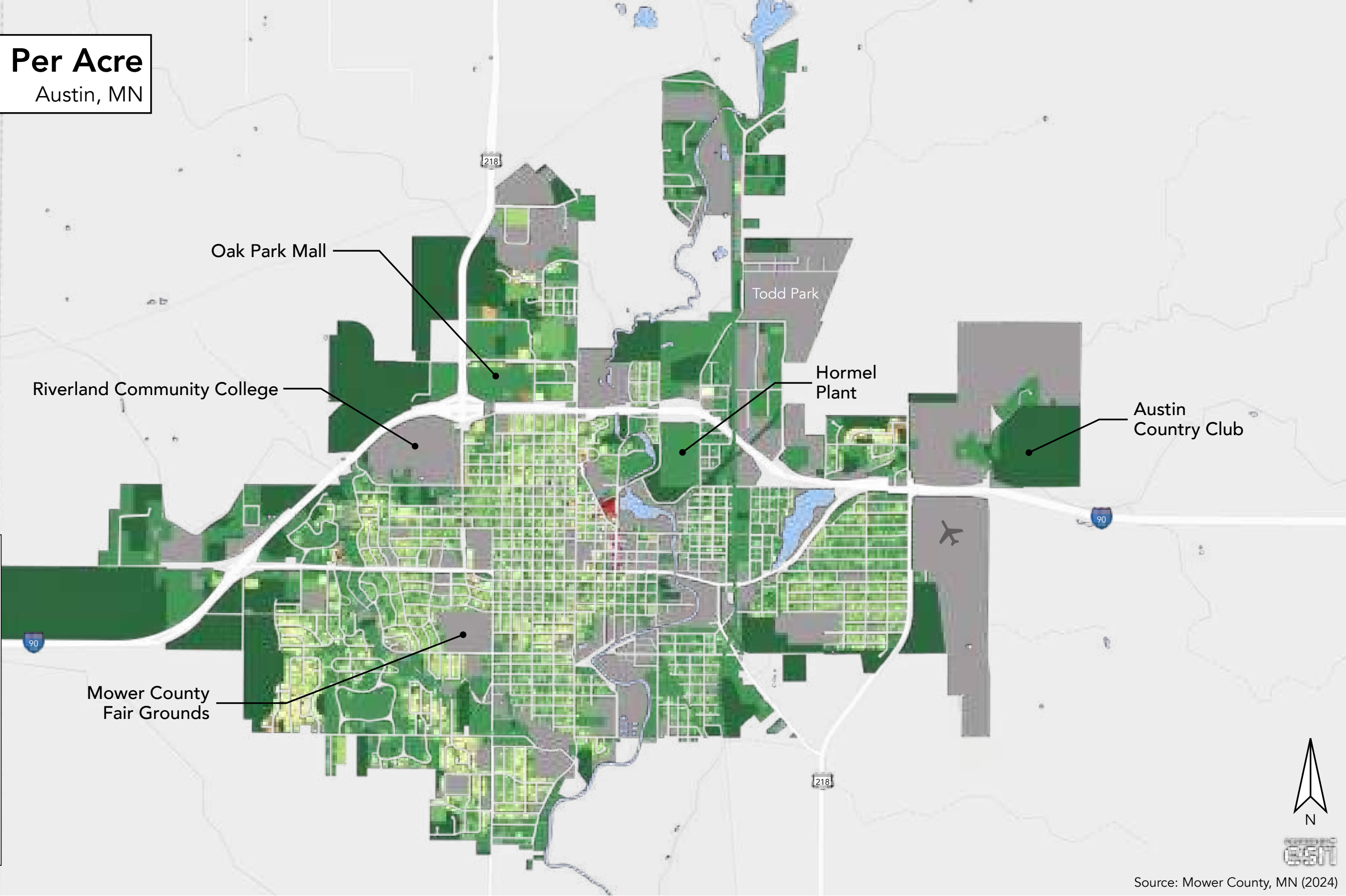
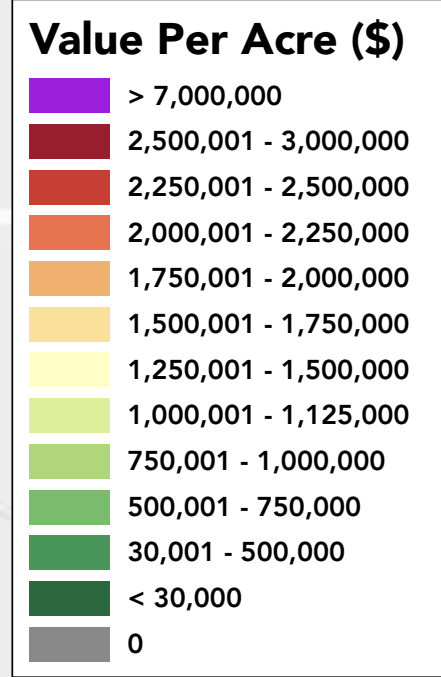
Austin, MN



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Market Value Per Acre

Austin, MN



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

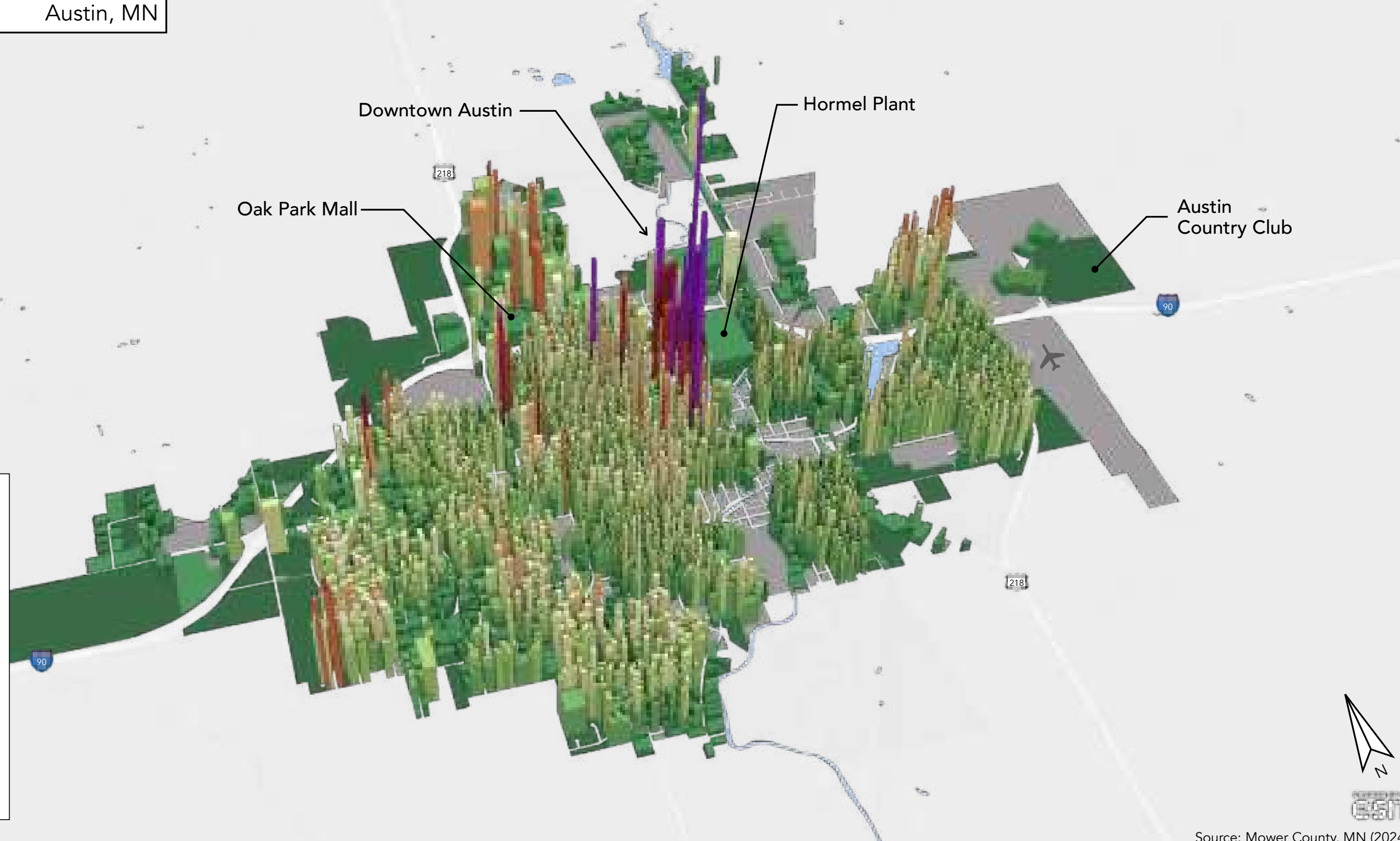
# Market Value Per Acre

Austin, MN

FREEBORN COUNTY

## Value Per Acre (\$)

█	> 7,000,000
█	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
█	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
█	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
█	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
█	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
█	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
█	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
█	750,001 - 1,000,000
█	500,001 - 750,000
█	30,001 - 500,000
█	< 30,000
█	0

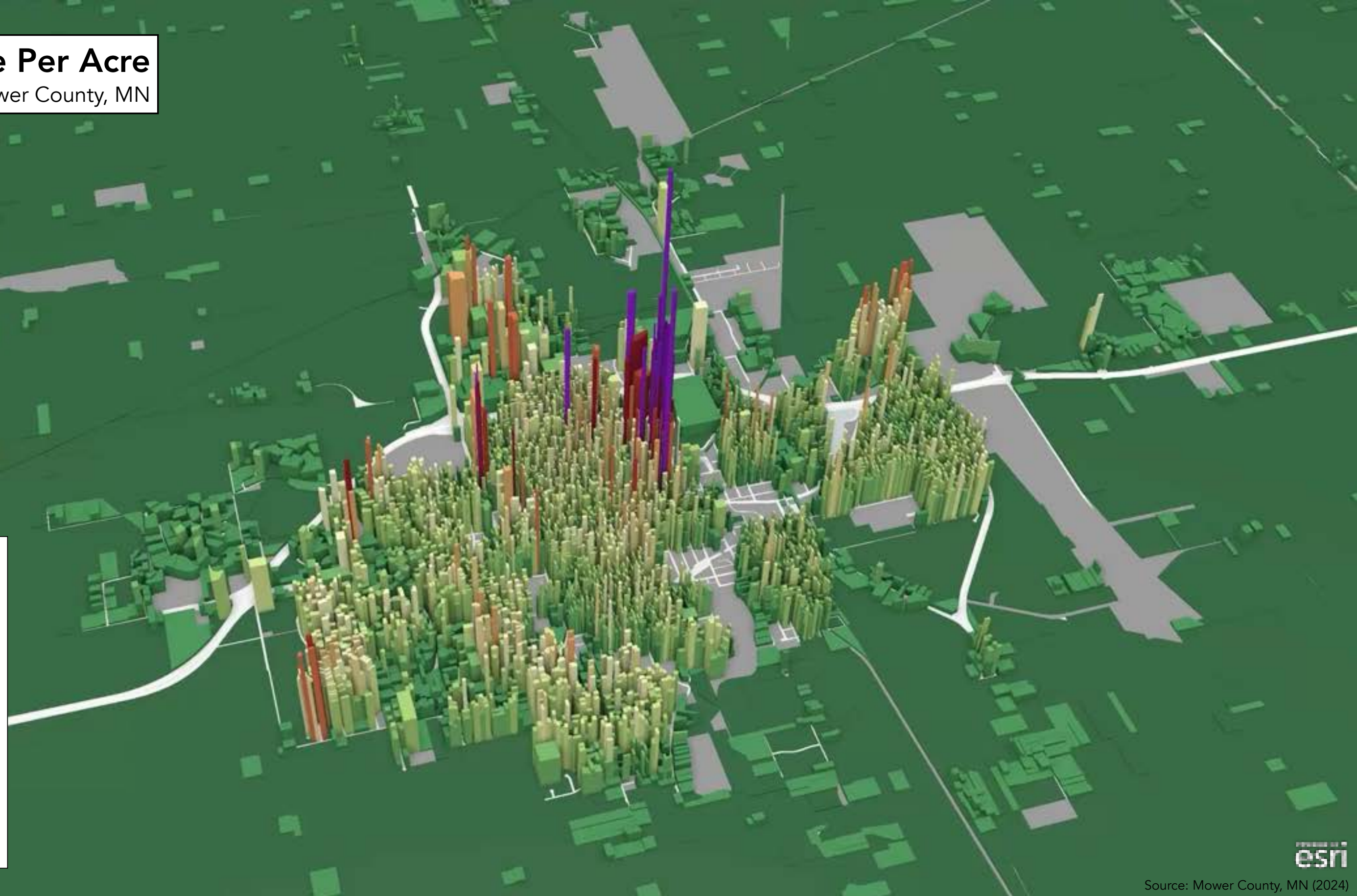
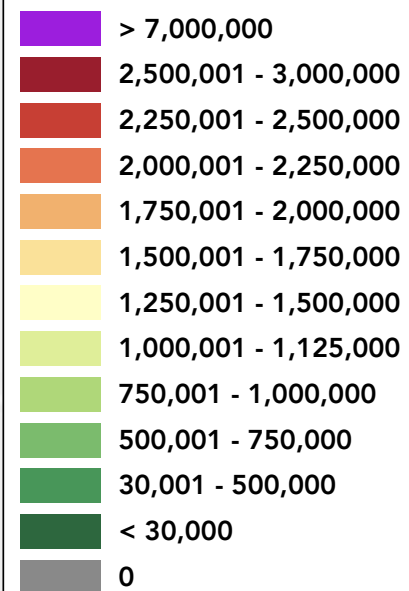


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Market Value Per Acre

Mower County, MN

## Value Per Acre (\$)

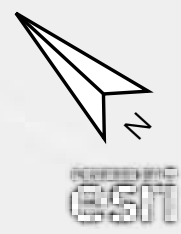


# Market Value Per Acre

Mower County, MN



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

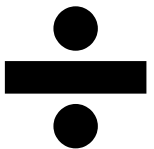


City of Austin

Mower County

Taxable Acres

4,840 acres



442,500 acres



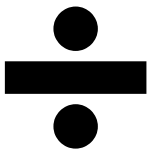
0.01

1



Total Value

\$1.65B



\$7.5B



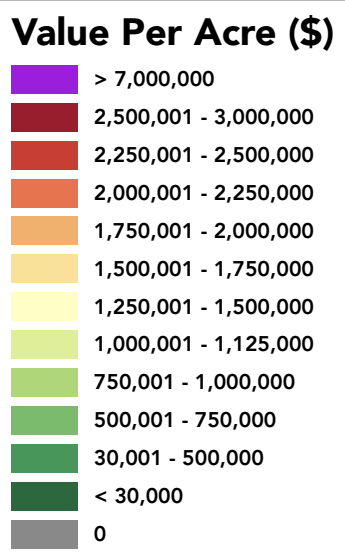
0.2

20

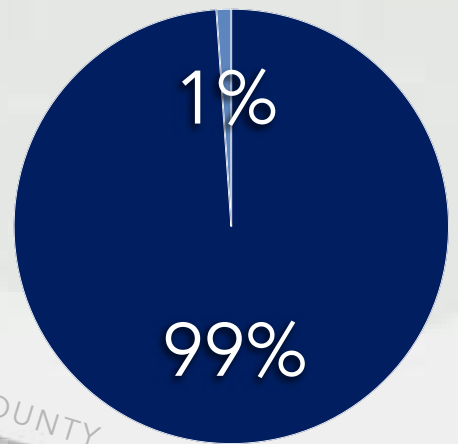
Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Productivity Ratio

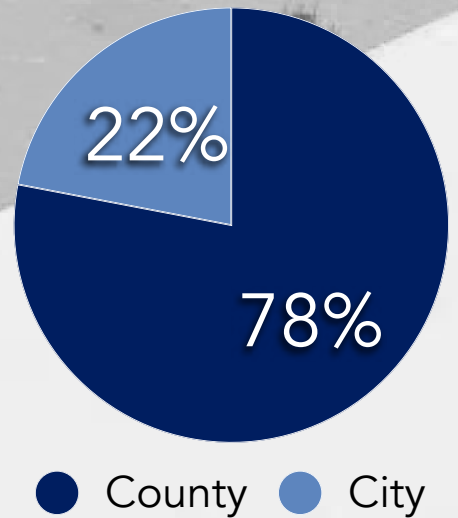
City of Austin to Mower County, MN



## Taxable Acres

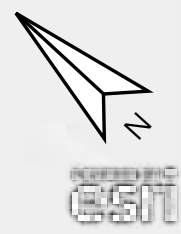


## Total Value



# 1:20

Austin's taxable value is **20 times greater** than the amount of County area it takes up.

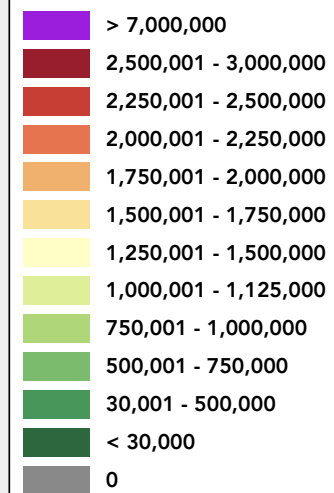


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

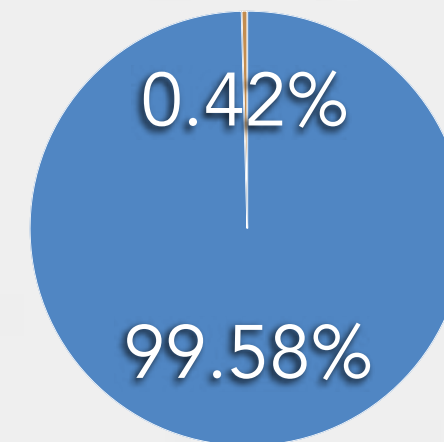
# Productivity Ratio

Austin's CBD to City of Austin, MN

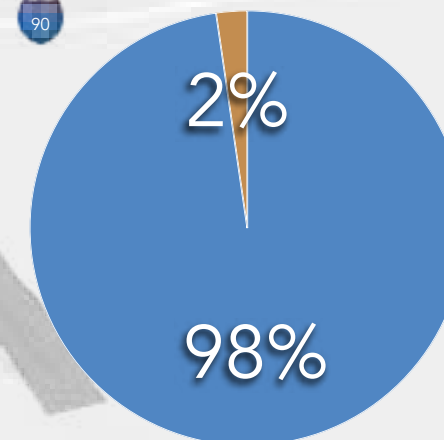
## Value Per Acre (\$)



## Taxable Acres



## Total Value



● City ● Downtown

# 1:5.4

Austin's CBD taxable value is **5.4 times greater** than the amount of City area it takes up.

CBD = Central Business District

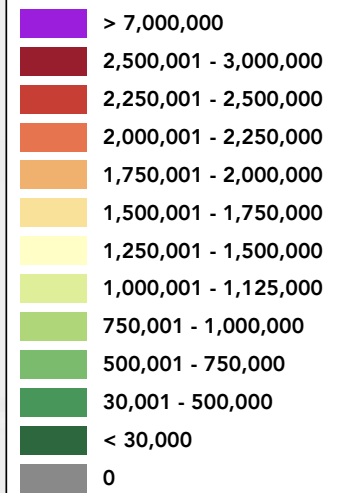
Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



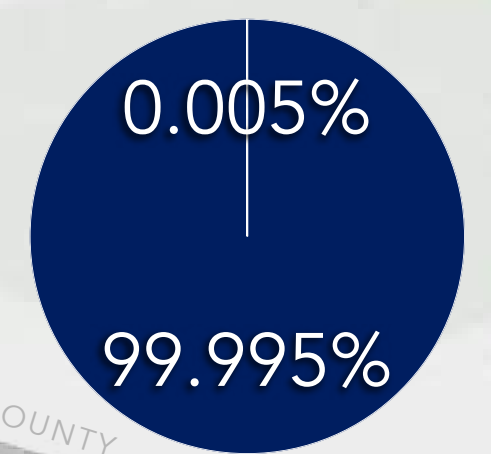
# Productivity Ratio

Austin's CBD to Mower County, MN

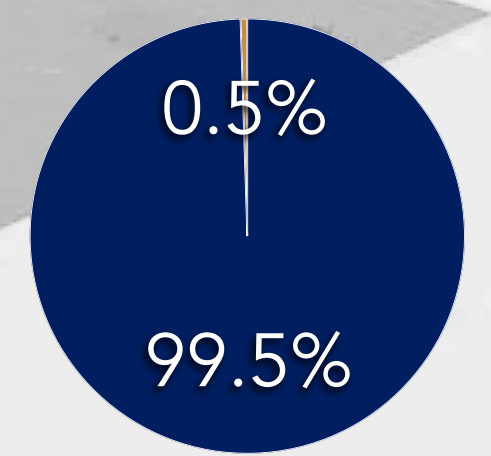
## Value Per Acre (\$)



## Taxable Acres



## Total Value



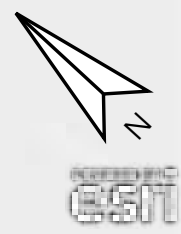
● County ● Downtown

# 1:109

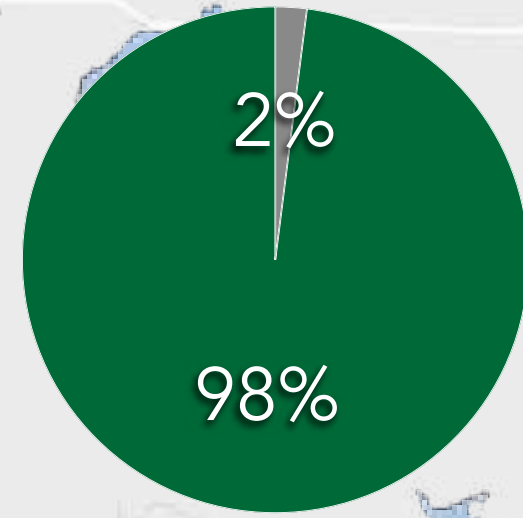
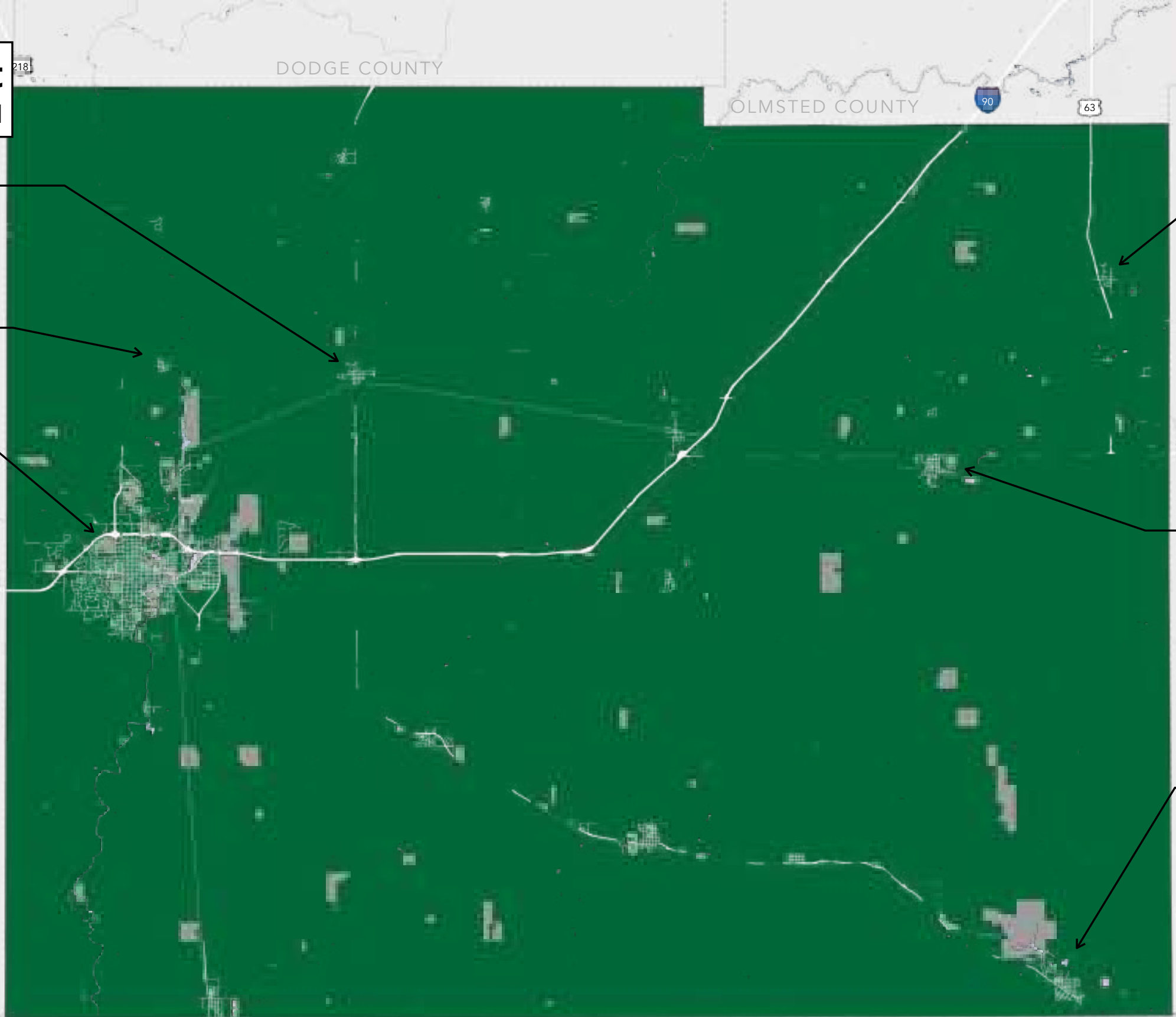
Austin's CBD taxable value is **109 times greater** than the amount of County area it takes up.

CBD = Central Business District

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



URBAN3  
**Taxable vs. Exempt**  
Mower County, MN



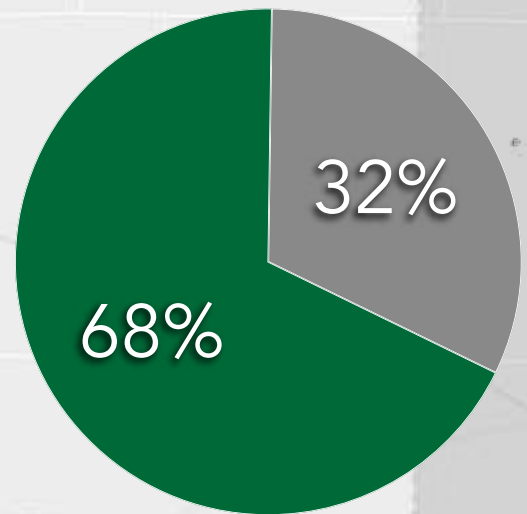
● Taxable ● Exempt



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Taxable vs. Exempt

City of Austin, MN



● Taxable ● Exempt

FREEBORN COUNTY

Riverland Community College Baseball Fields

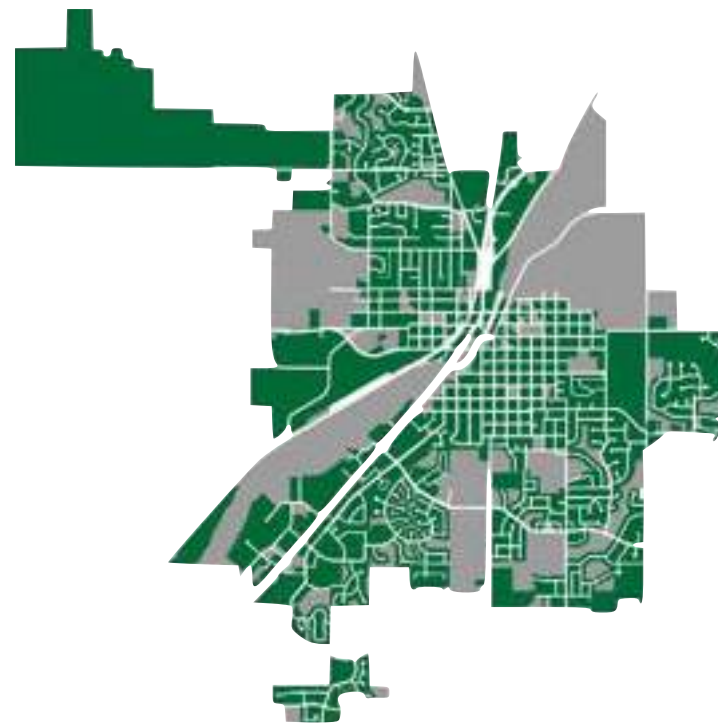
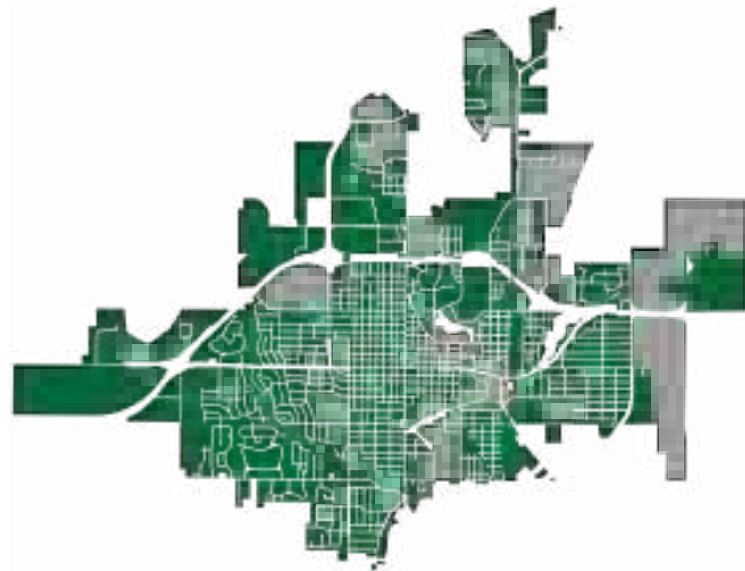
Todd Park

Jay C Hormel Nature Center



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

 Taxable  Exempt

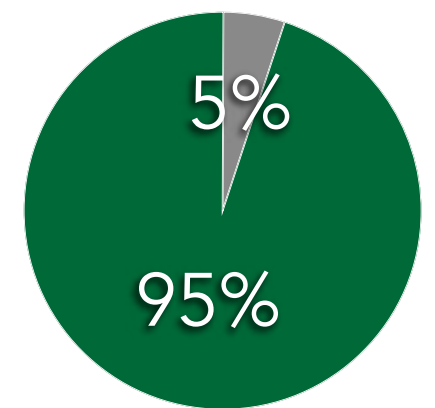
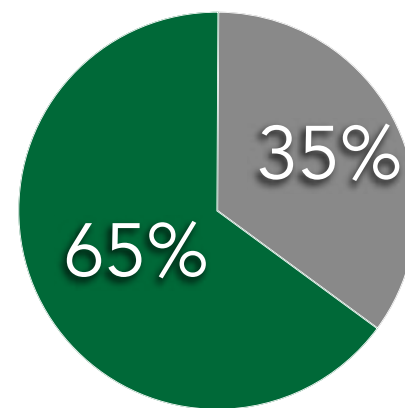
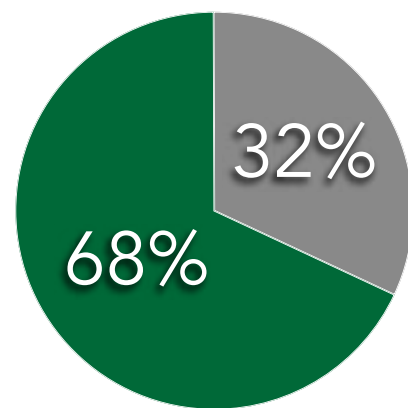
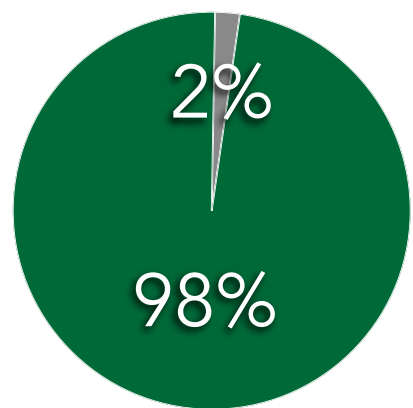


## Mower County

## Austin

## Northfield

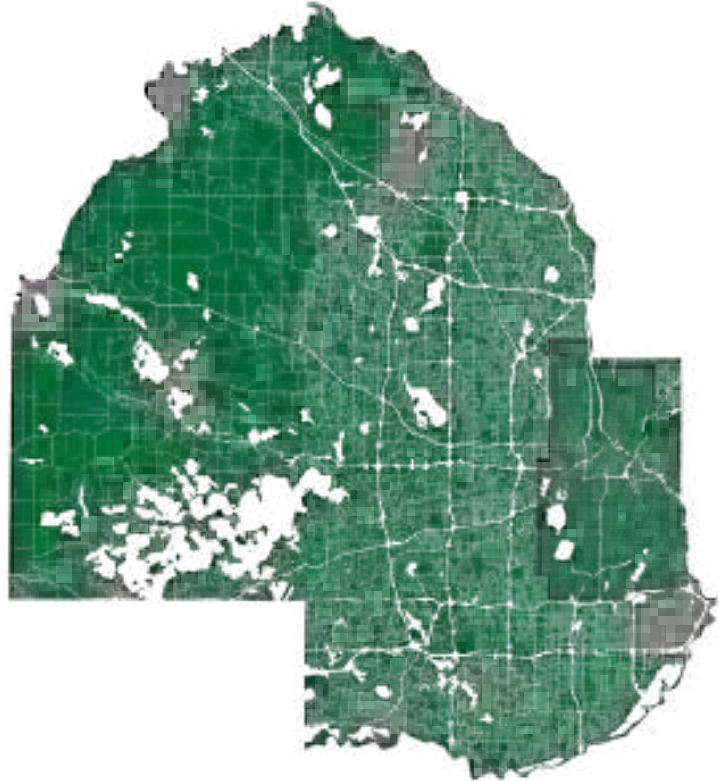
## Rice County



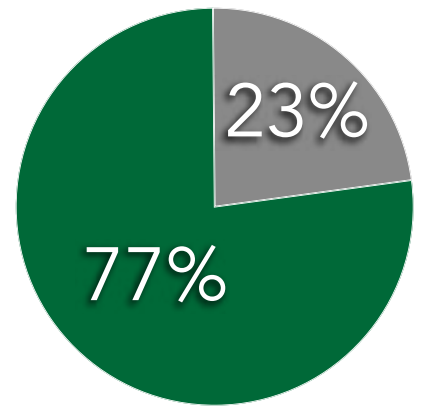
Images are not to scale.

Source: Mower & Rice Counties, MN

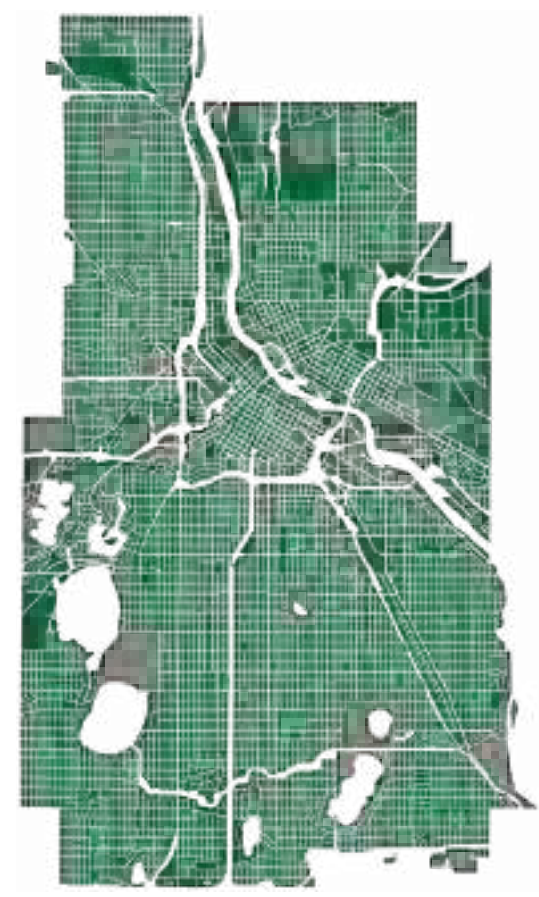




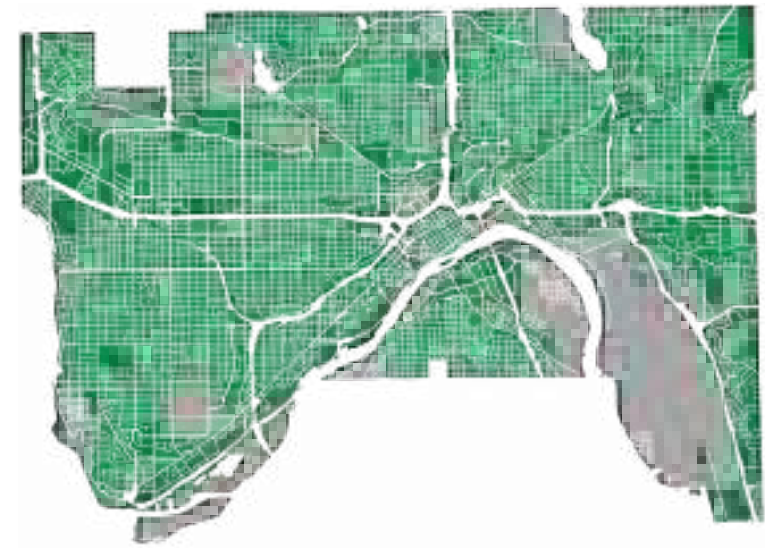
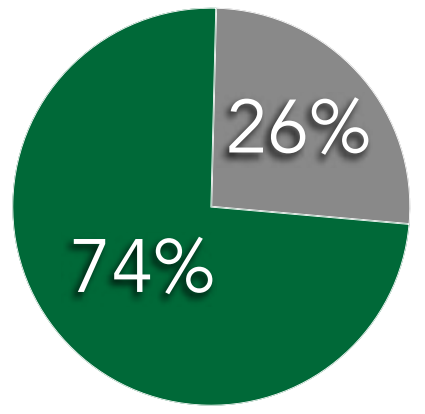
**Hennepin County**



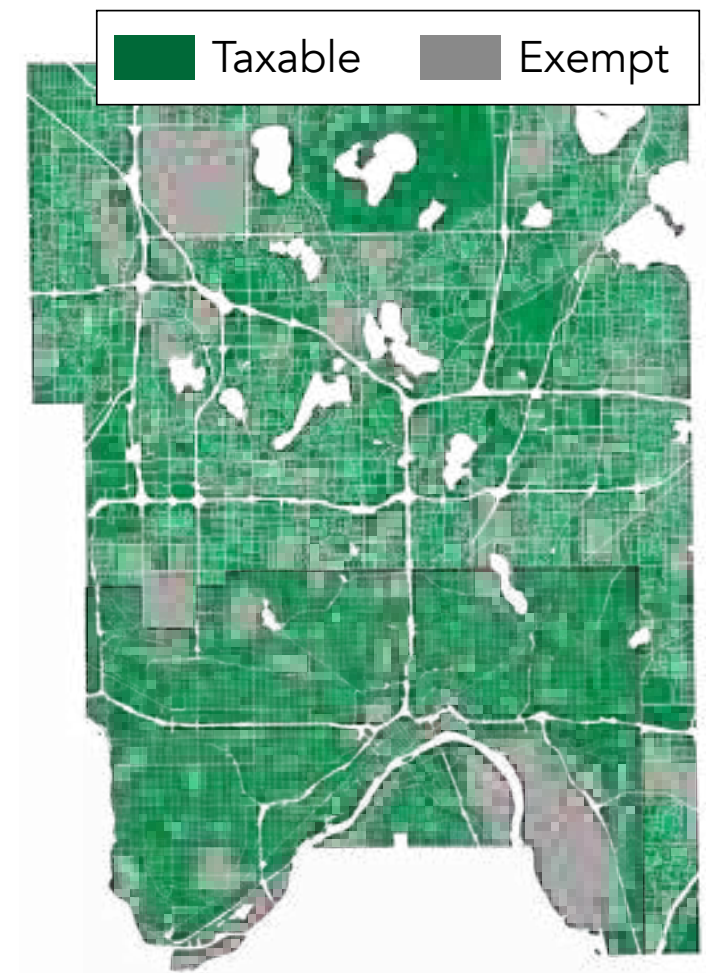
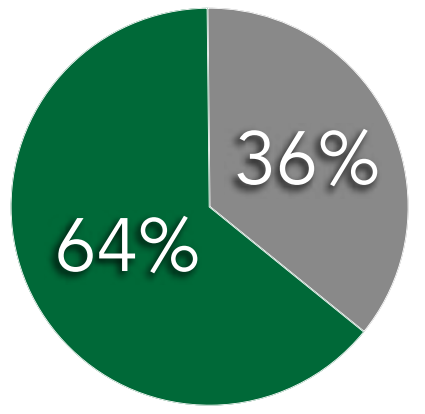
Images are not to scale.



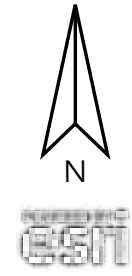
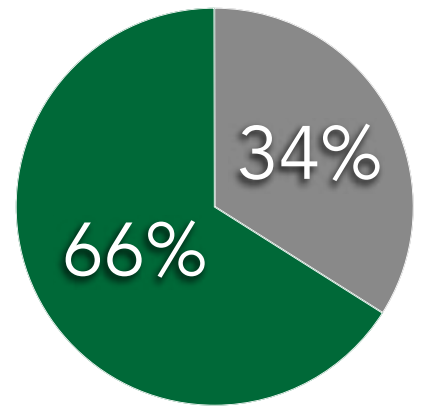
**Minneapolis**



**St. Paul**



**Ramsey County**



Source: Hennepin, Mower, Olmsted, & Ramsey Counties MN

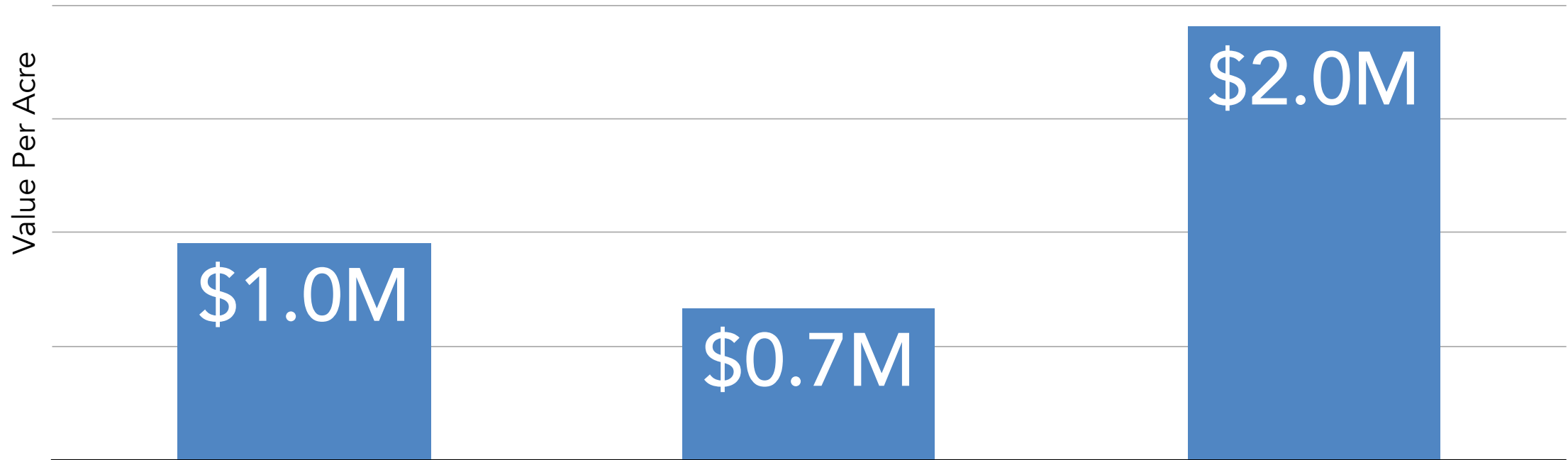
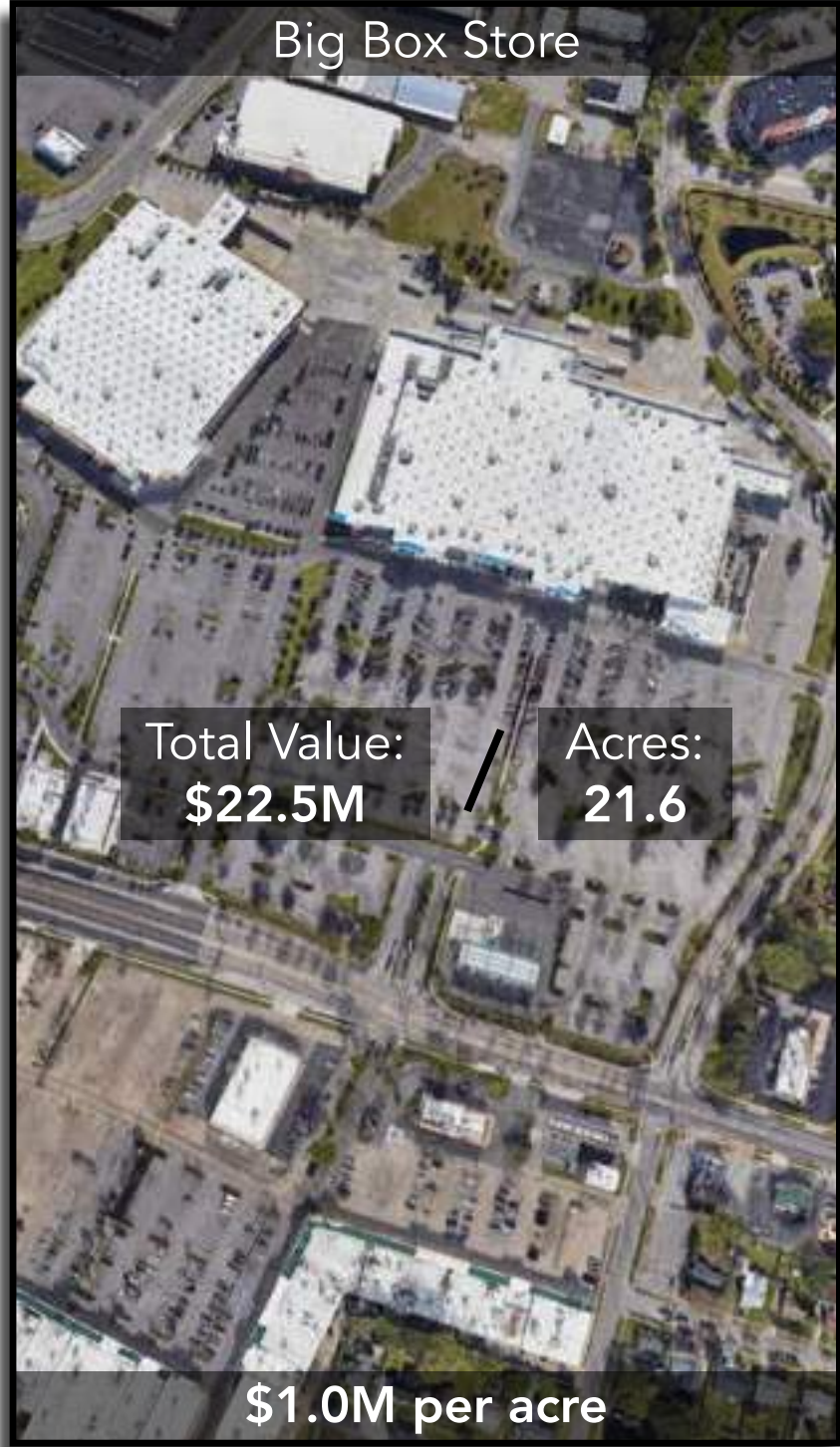


# Land Use Types

Local Samples of Buildings and Developments

URBAN3

# Taxable Value Per Acre



URBAN3

# Value Per Acre: Walmart

Austin, MN

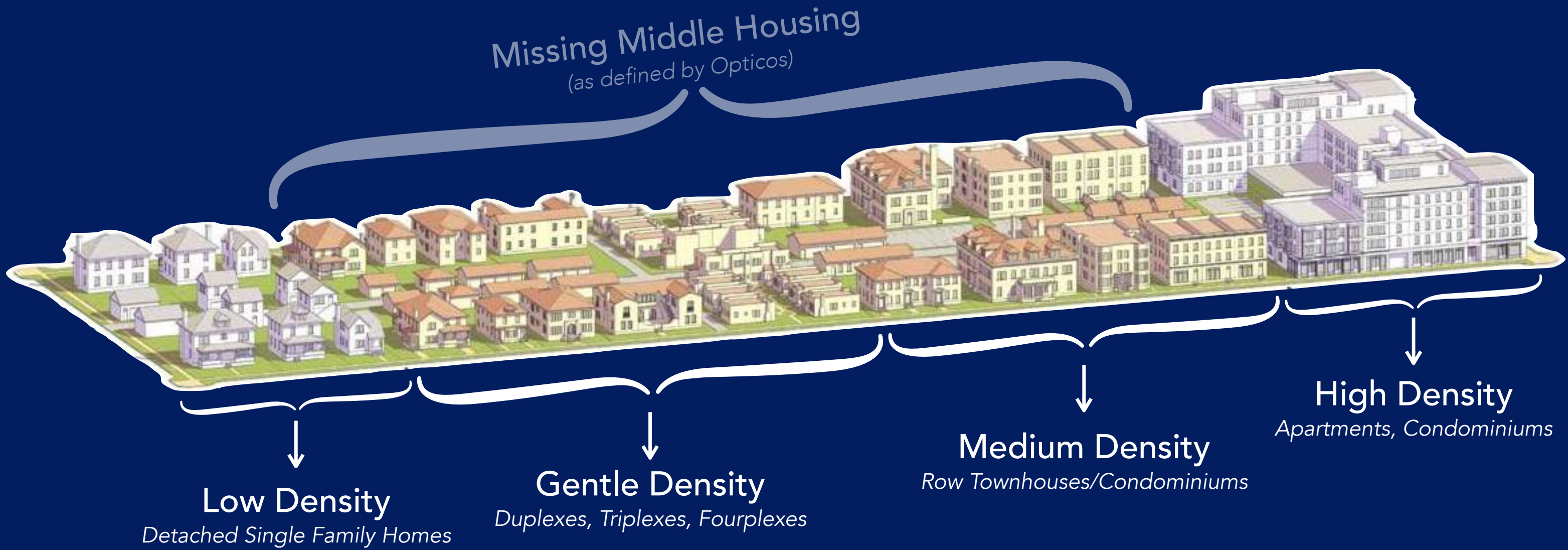


Walmart (18th Ave NW)  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

Land Use Type:

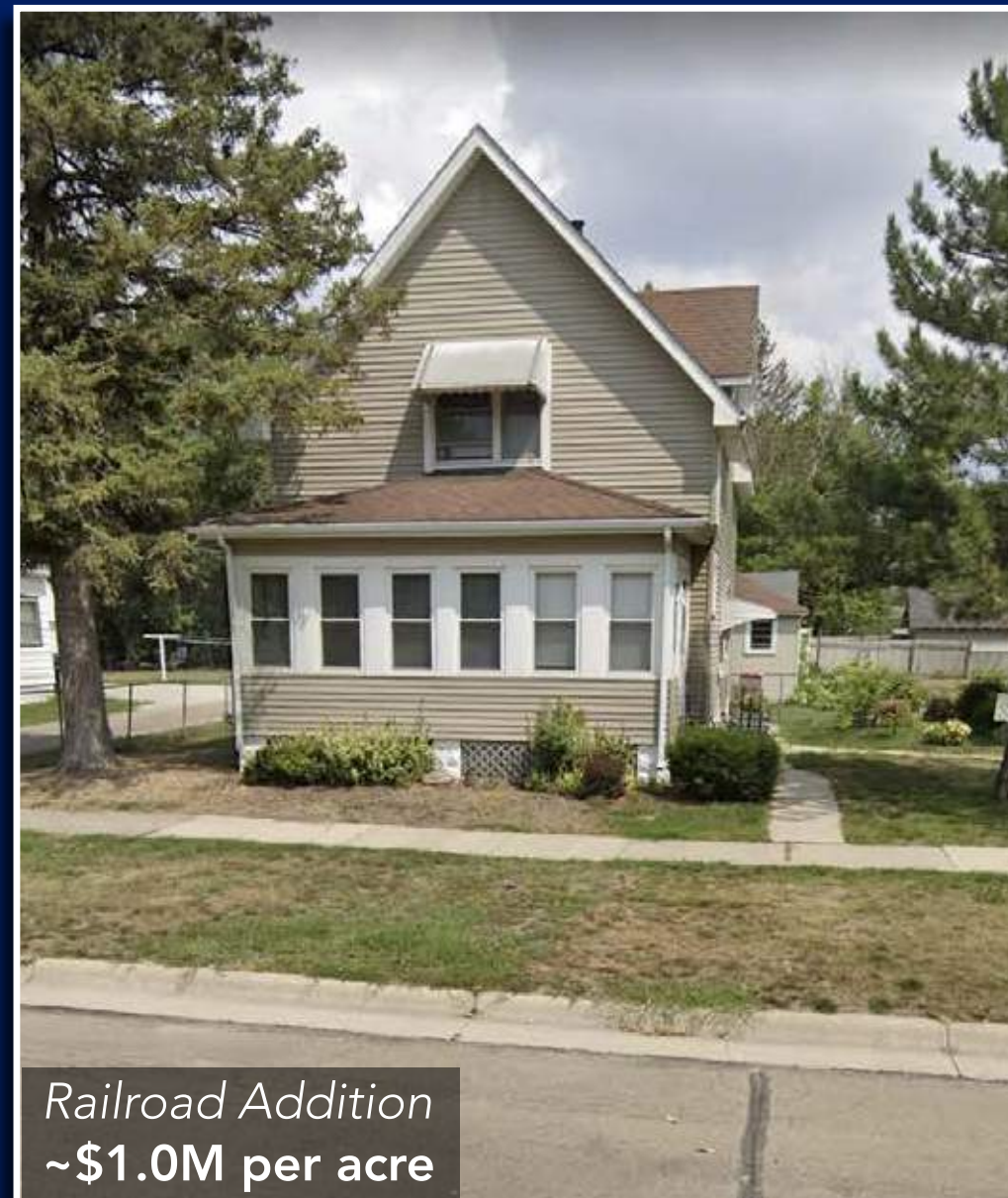
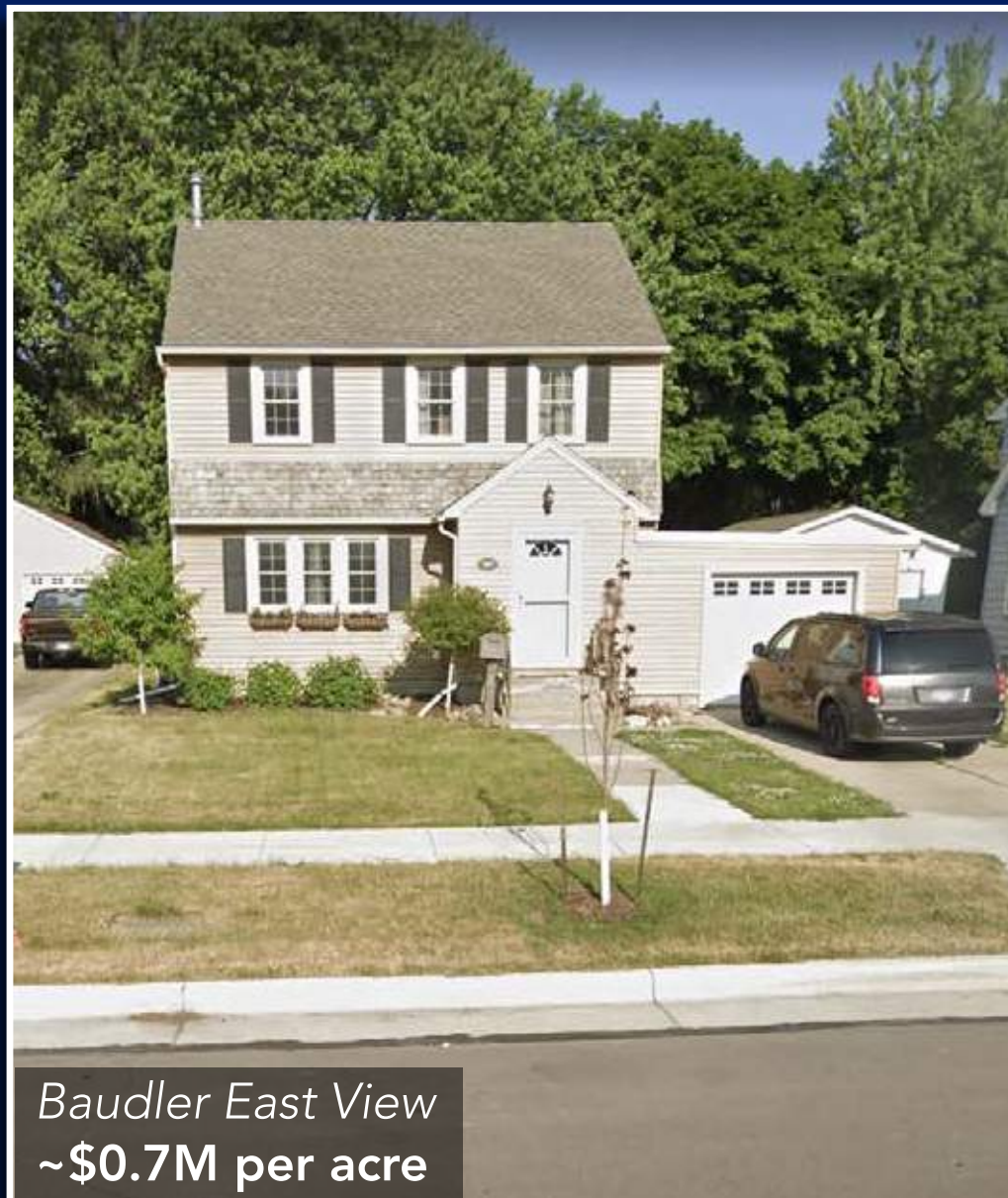
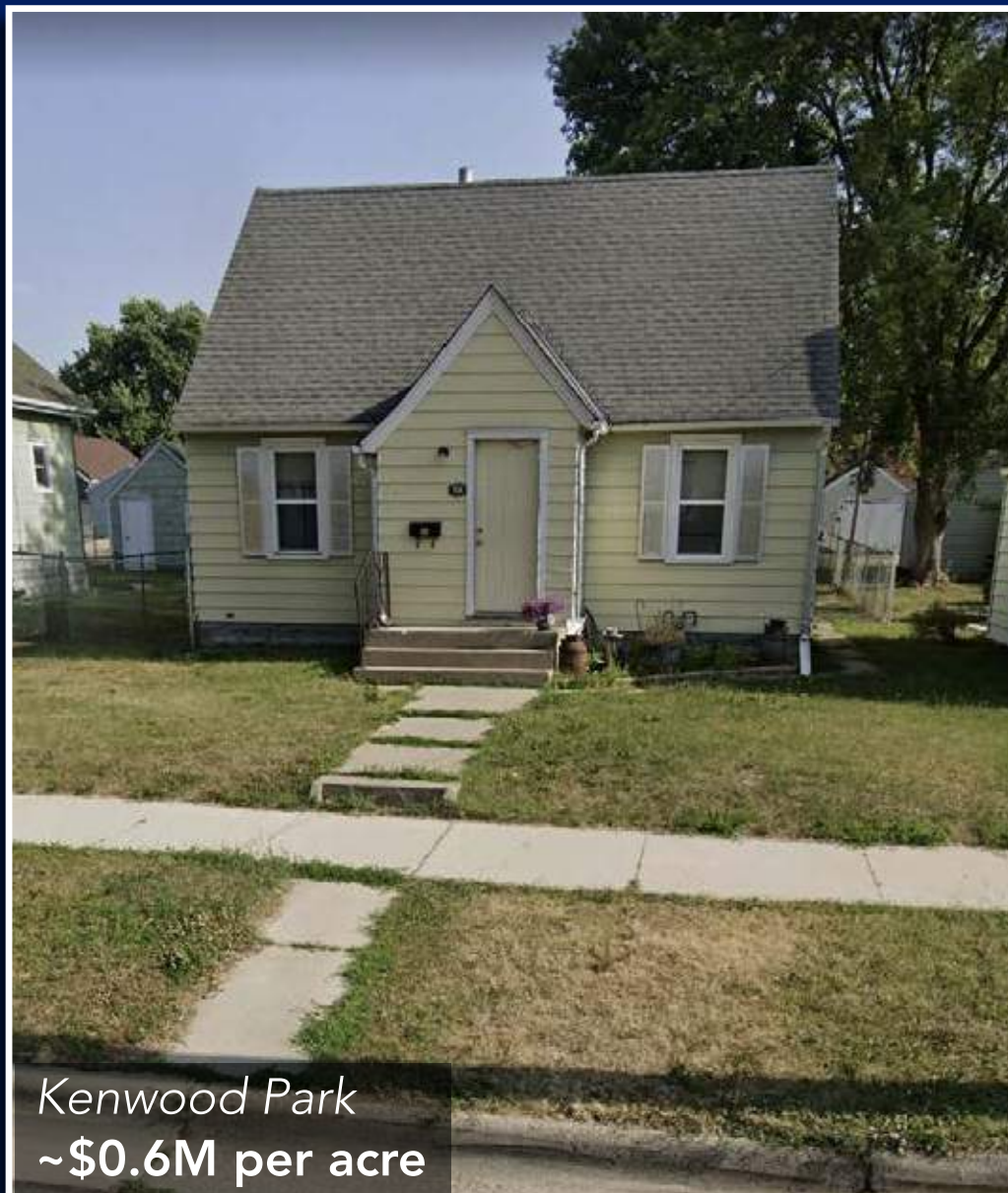
# Residential



Source: [opticosdesign.com](http://opticosdesign.com)

# Value Per Acre: Single Family Residential

Austin, MN



Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Single Family Residential

Mower County, MN



Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

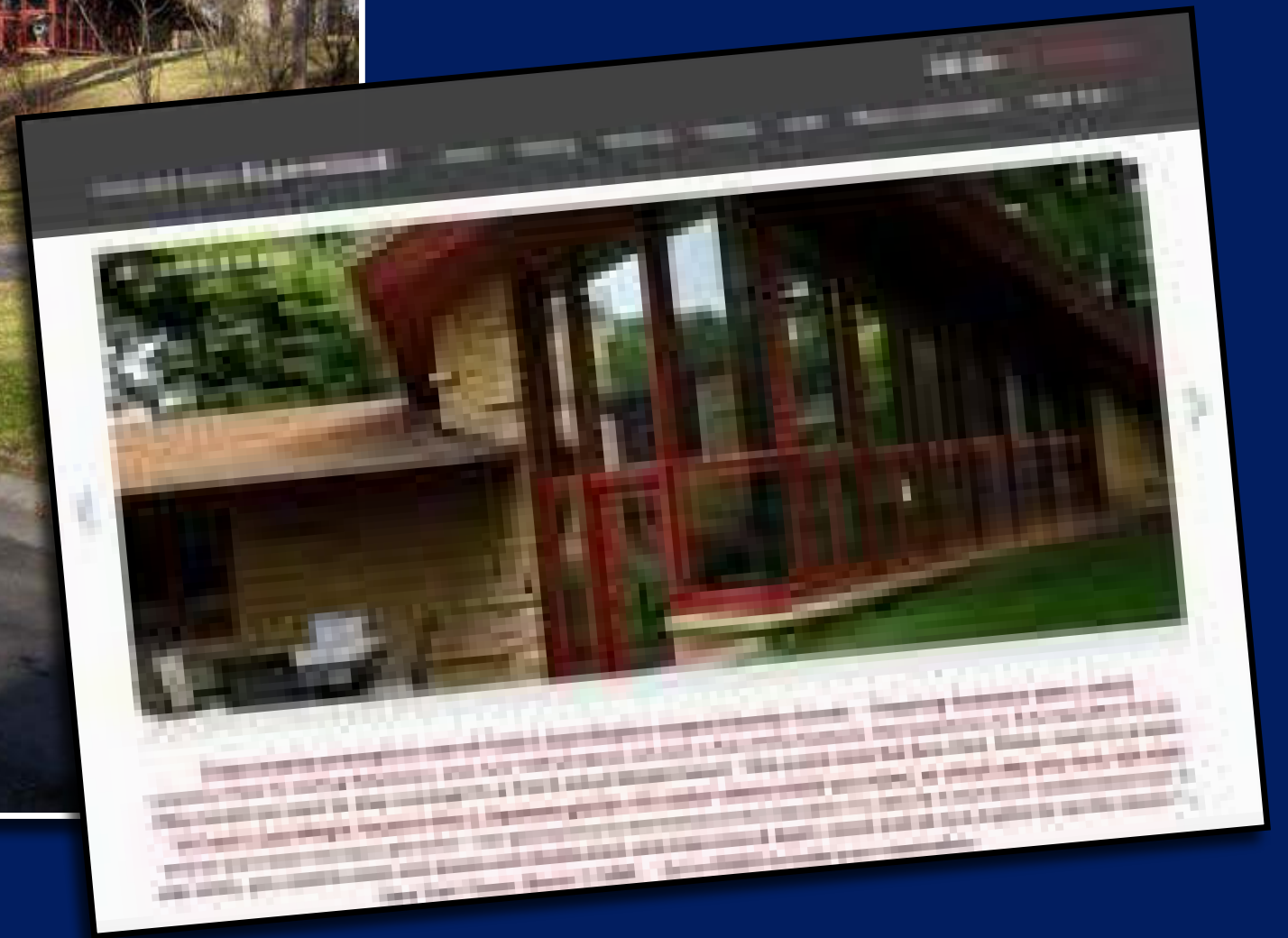
Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Single Family Residential

Austin, MN



Frank Lloyd Wright's Elam House  
**\$0.5M per acre**



Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Missing Middle Residential

Austin, MN



Whittier Place (4th St SE)  
\$0.8M per acre



Quadplex (4th St NW)  
\$0.8M per acre



Blu Line Flats (14th St NW)  
\$1.8M per acre



Medical Building (Main St)  
\$1.9M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Missing Middle Residential

Austin, MN



Oak Tree Flats (10th Ave NW)  
\$2.1M per acre



Triplex (1st Avenue NW)  
\$2.4M per acre



Townhomes (5th Ave NW)  
~\$2.9M per acre



Quadplex (8th Ave NW)  
\$3.1M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Multifamily Residential

Austin, MN



Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), forrent.com, Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Multifamily Residential

Austin, MN



**PILOT**  
(Pay in Lieu of Taxes)



Austin Courtyard Apartments  
**\$0.0M per acre**

*Possible: \$2.5M per acre*



Chauncey Apartments  
**\$0.0M per acre**

*Possible: \$2.9M per acre*



Twin Towers  
**\$0.0M per acre**

*Possible: \$7.3M per acre*

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Comparison of Average Value Per Acre for Residential Properties

Austin, MN



**\$0.7M**



**\$2.0M**



**\$2.4M**

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

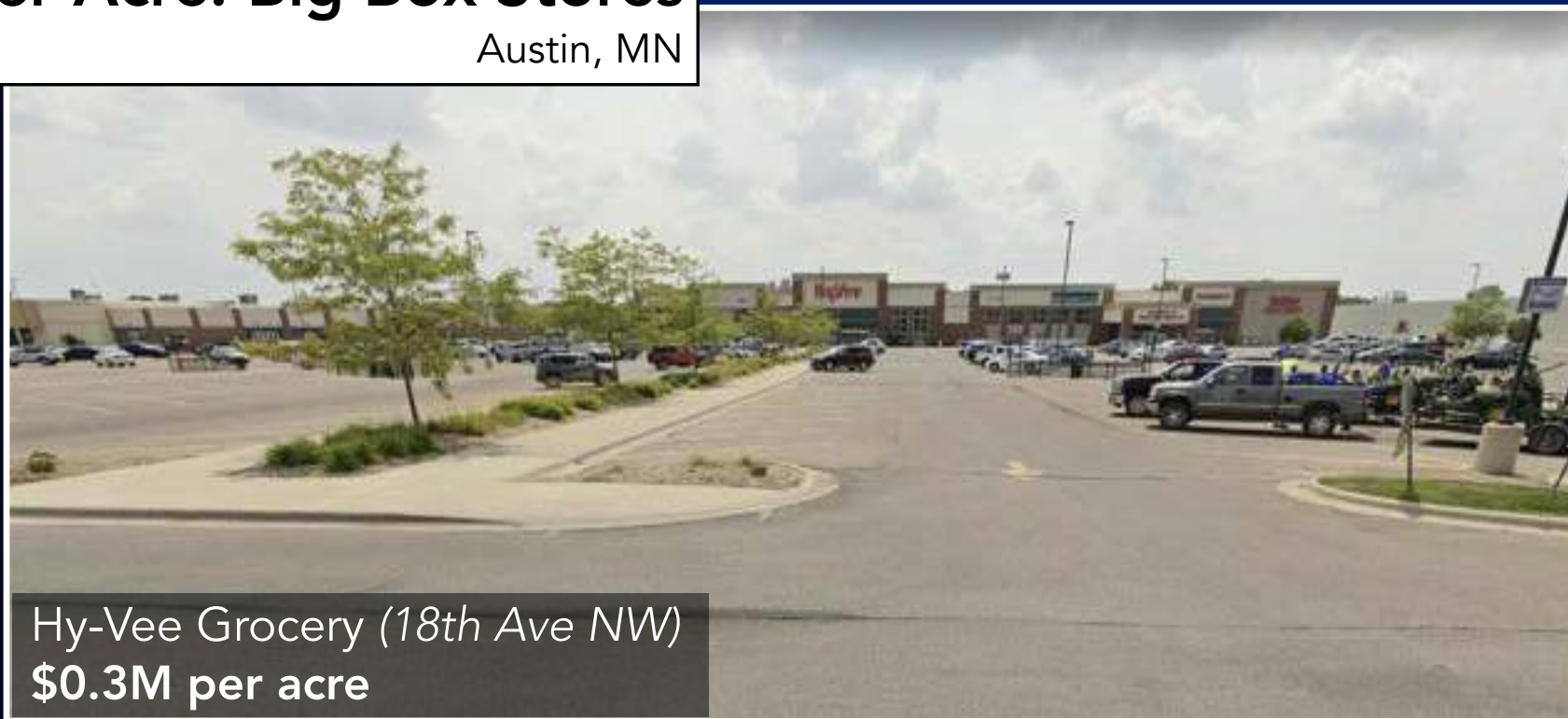
Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

Land Use Type:

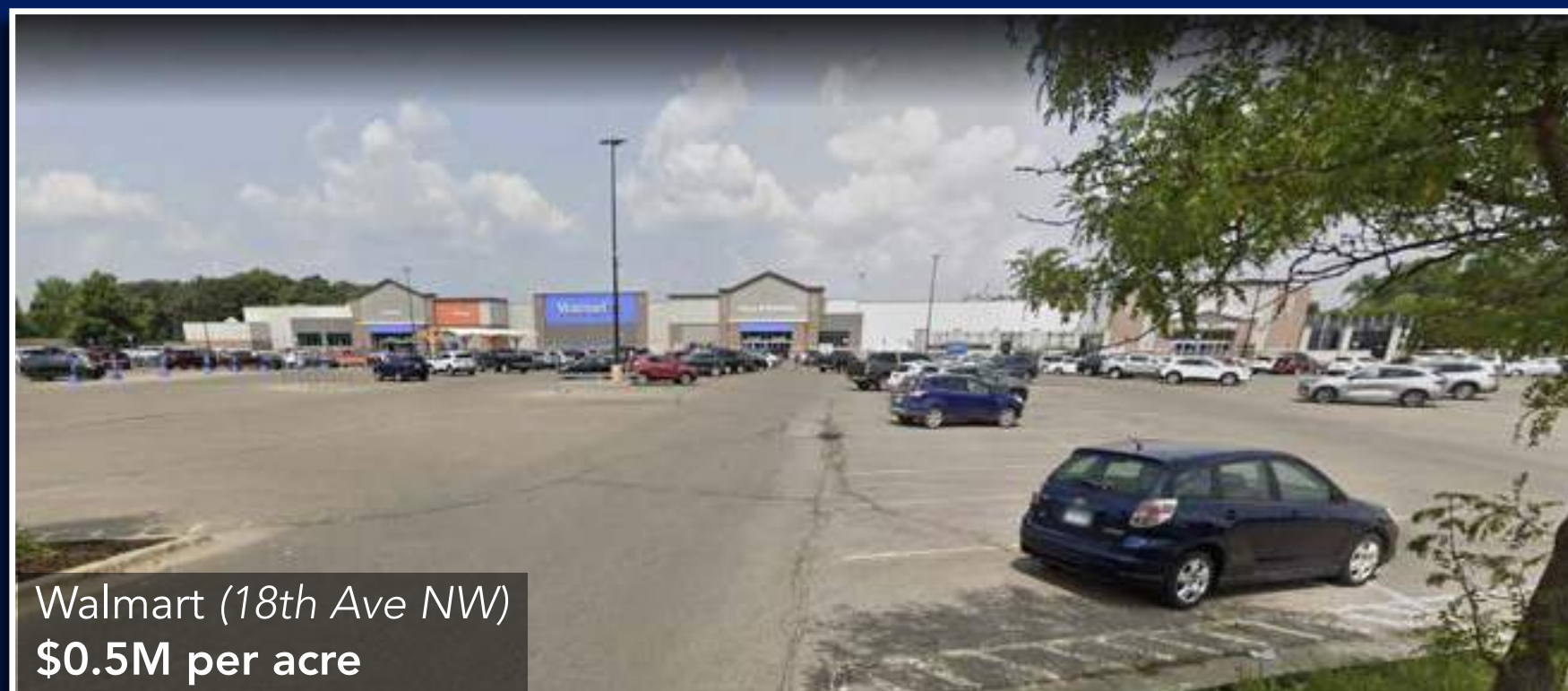
**Commercial**

# Value Per Acre: Big Box Stores

Austin, MN



Hy-Vee Grocery (18th Ave NW)  
**\$0.3M per acre**



Walmart (18th Ave NW)  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

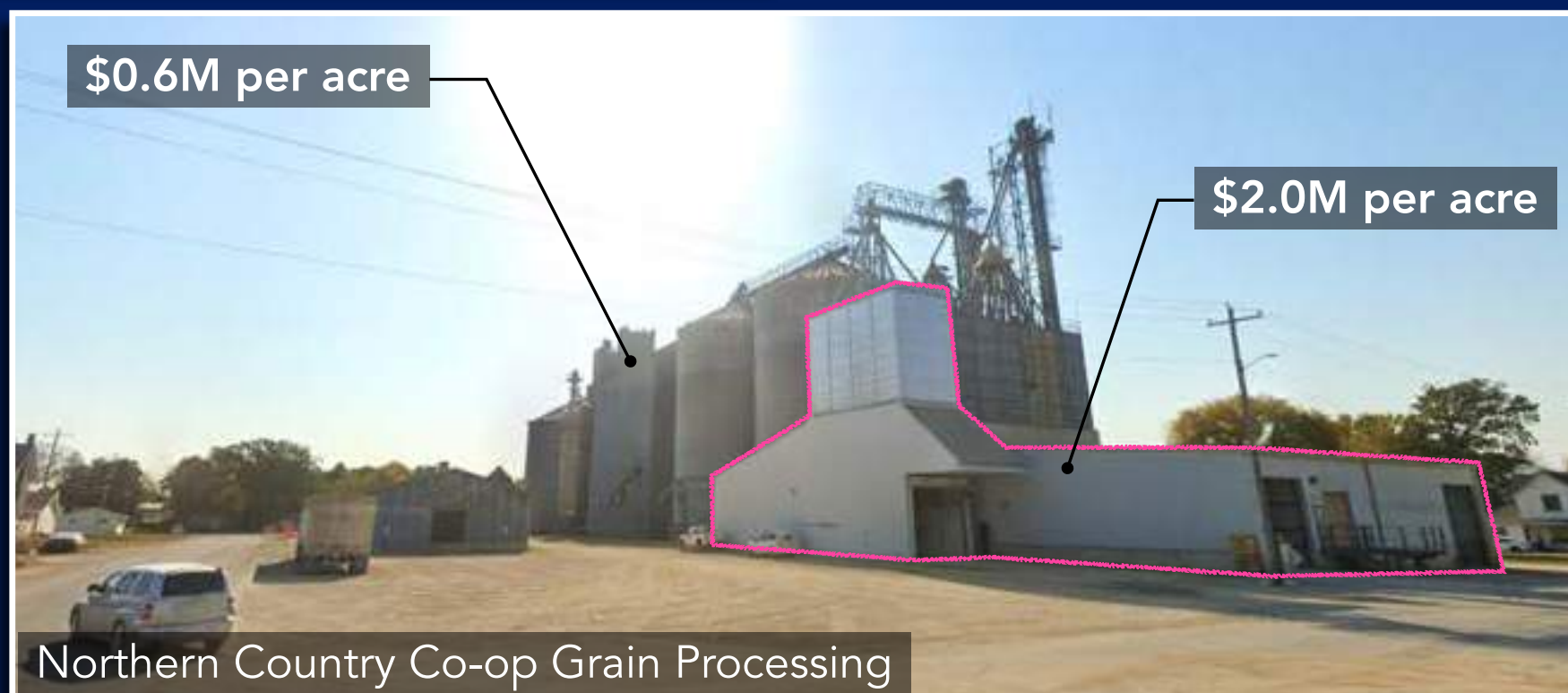
Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Agricultural

Mower County, MN



Farmland (*Grand Meadow*)  
**\$0.01M per acre**



Northern Country Co-op Grain Processing

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Commercial Centers

Austin, MN



Austin Town Center  
**\$0.3M per acre**



Sterling Main Street Shopping Center  
**\$0.9M per acre**

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Main Street Commercial

Austin, MN



SPAM Museum (Main St)  
\$1.9M per acre



The MOD Medspa (3rd Ave)  
\$3.0M per acre



Evolve Dance Studio (Main St)  
\$3.5M per acre



130 3rd Ave  
~\$3.8M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre



CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen) Accounting (Main St)  
\$5.0M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Misc. Commercial

Mower County, MN



Bubbles Cafe (Adams)  
\$1.3M per acre



Hindt Funeral Homes (Grand Meadow)  
\$3.9M per acre



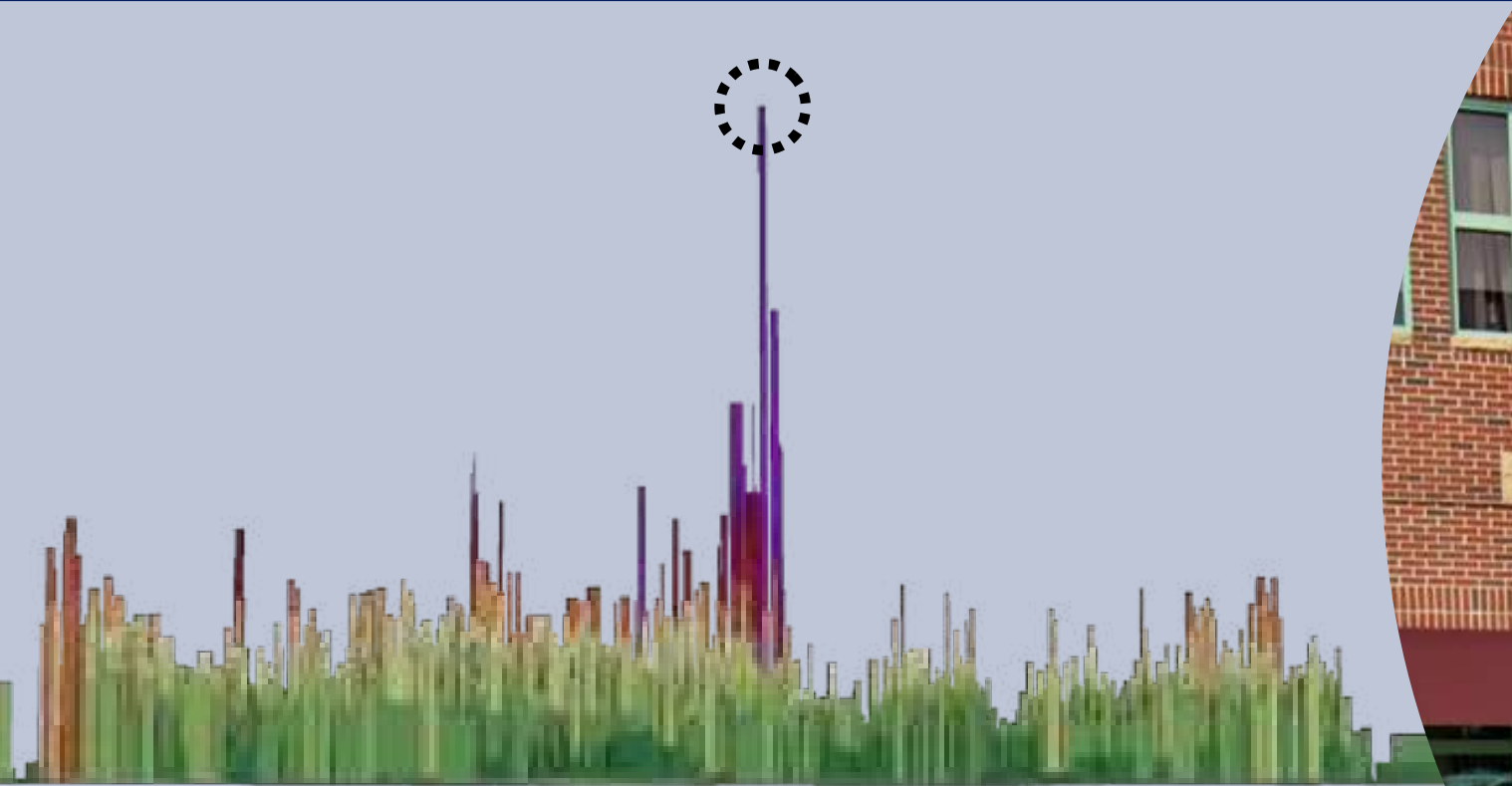
SVS Law (Grand Meadow)  
\$4.2M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Peak Parcel

Austin, MN



Austin looking North



Austin Town Center  
**\$6.9M per acre**

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

Land Use Type:

**Mixed Use**

# Value Per Acre: Mixed Use Buildings

Austin, MN

Mixed Use  
Average Value:  
**\$3.5M per  
acre**



Sweet Reads Books & Candy  
**\$3.2M per acre**



323 Main St N  
**\$2.5M per acre**



Muse (Main St)  
**\$3.9M per acre**



Wagner Building (1st Dr NW)  
**\$4.4M per acre**

Walmart  
**\$0.5M per acre**

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

A Closer Look:

# A Lasting Value

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN

Built 1882



2024



Austin Art Center  
\$4.7M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN

**Built 1892**



**2023**

Dusty's Bar & Lounge  
\$2.5M per acre

Style Lounge Salon  
\$3.8M per acre

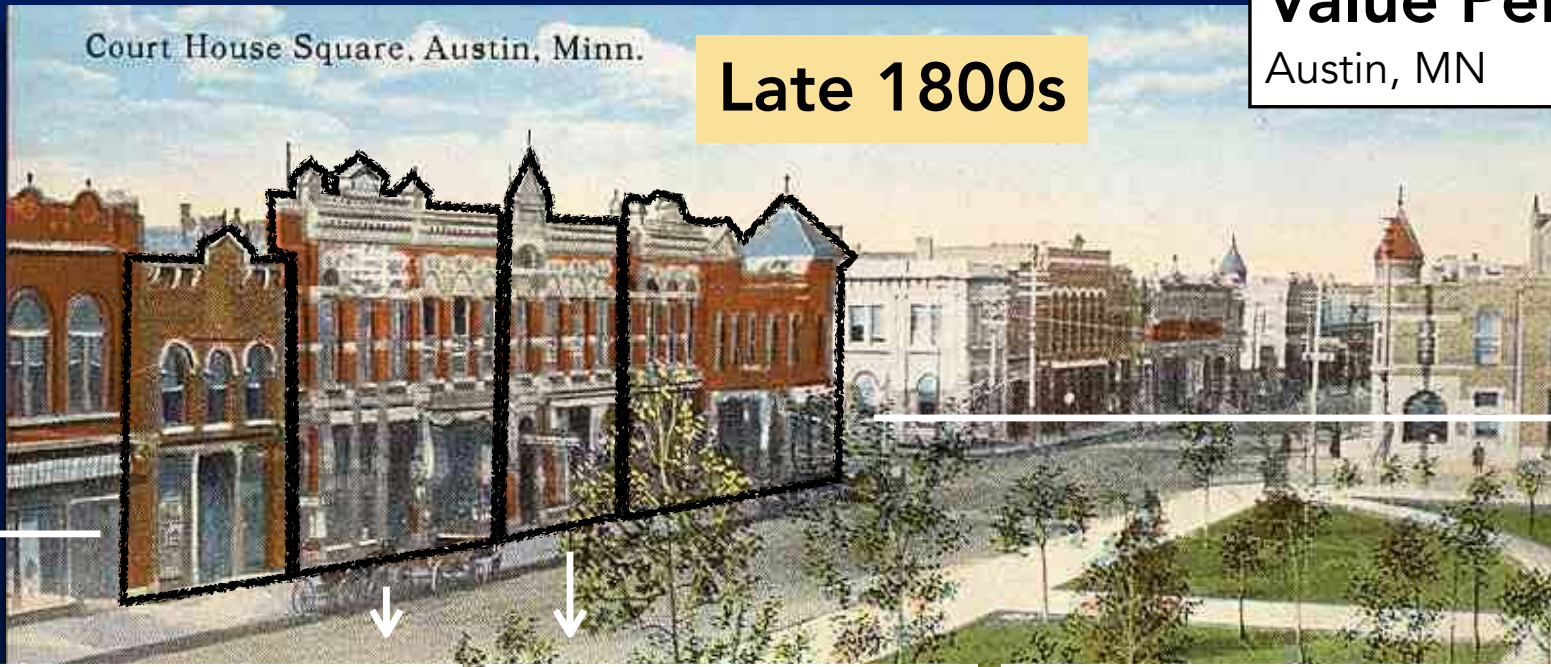


Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN



213 N Main St  
\$1.8M per acre



Rydjour Bike Shop  
\$2.2M per acre



Game Haven  
\$2.6M per acre



El Mariachi Mexican Restaurant  
\$4.7M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN



~1860s



1929



Today

US Bank  
\$1.4M per acre

Masonic Temple  
\$1.8M per acre

Vintage Vixen Artistry  
\$1.5M per acre

Evolve Dance Studio  
\$3.5M per acre

323 Main St N  
\$2.5M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN

Built 1902



2023



Brick Furniture  
\$2.3M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre



Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN

Built 1929



2023



Paramount Theatre  
\$0.6M per acre

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

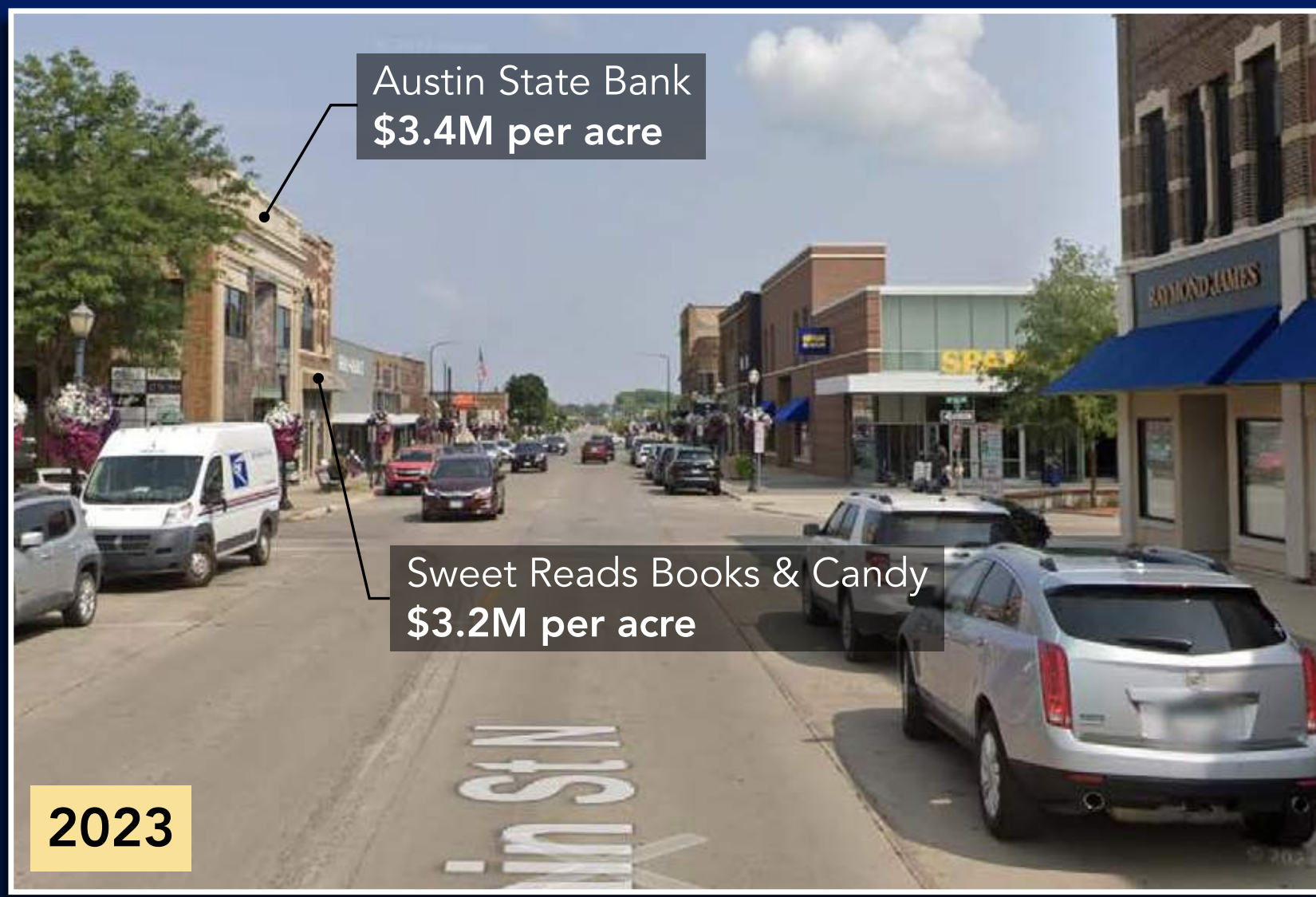
# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN



1940s

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre



2023

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Per Acre: Historic Buildings

Austin, MN

Late 1960s



**TALLEST BUILDING COMES DOWN**

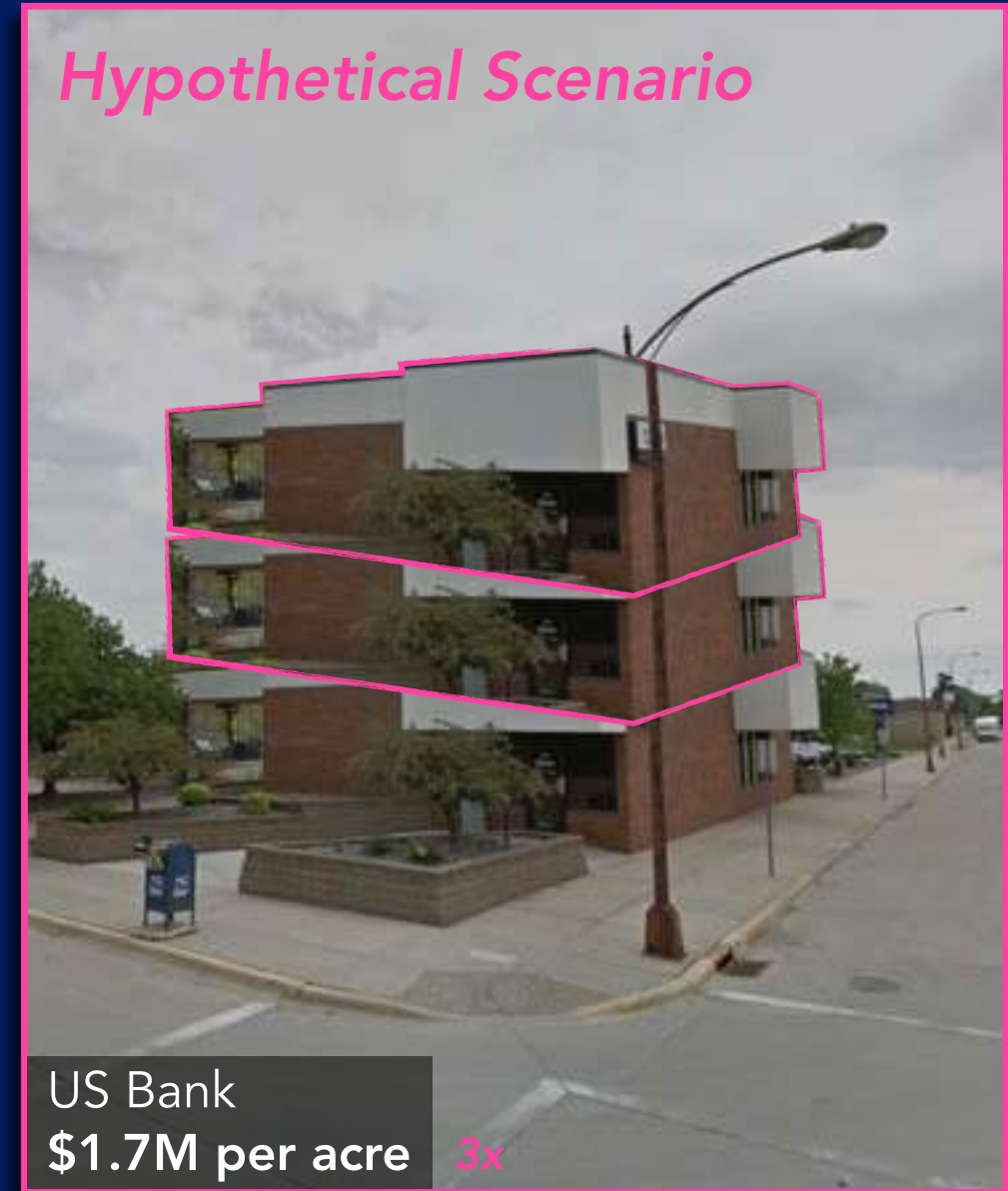
Austin's tallest building, and one of its most familiar landmarks, the Babcock Building, is on its way down to make room for the First National Bank's expanded Drive-In facilities and increased parking space. The Babcock building was vacated recently when Plunkett and Plunkett Law Offices moved to a new location on Main St.

2018



US Bank  
\$0.6M per acre

*Hypothetical Scenario*



US Bank  
\$1.7M per acre **3x**

Walmart  
\$0.5M per acre

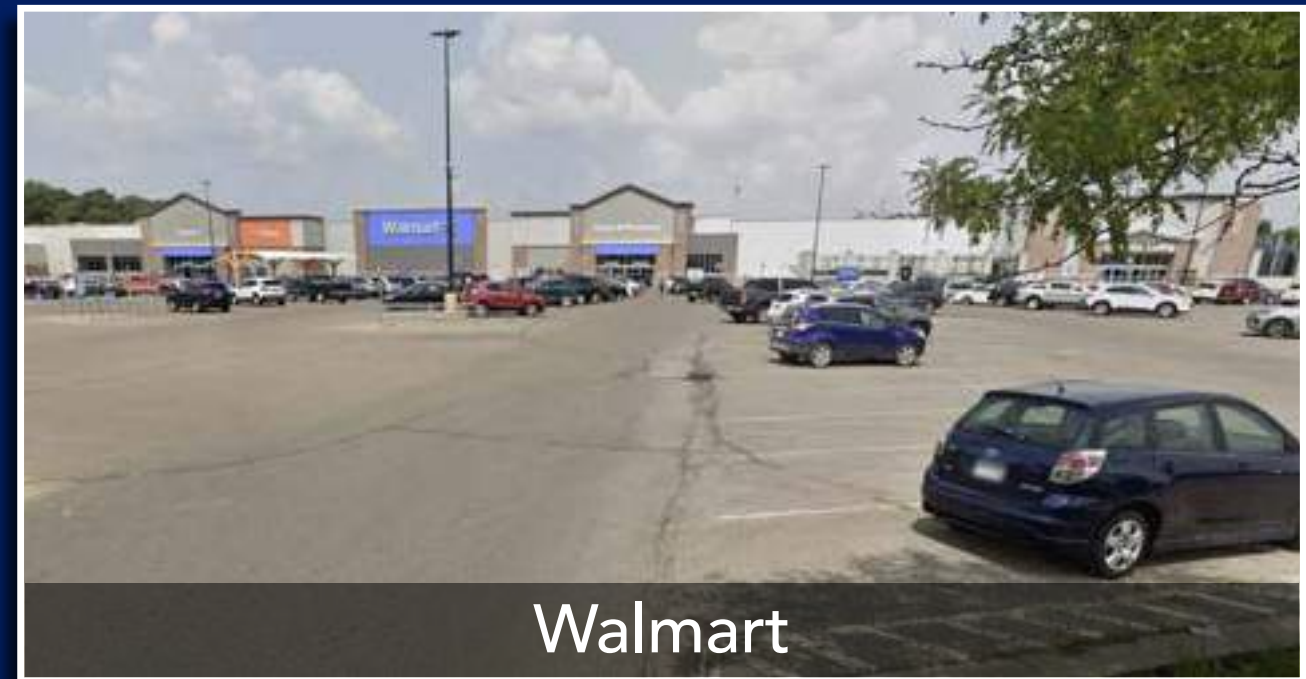
Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

A Closer Look:

# Scale & Use Comparison

# Total Value: Scale & Use Comparison

Austin, MN



Same value —  
different footprint!



\$1.2M + \$7.8M =

0.3 acres  + 6.5 parcels

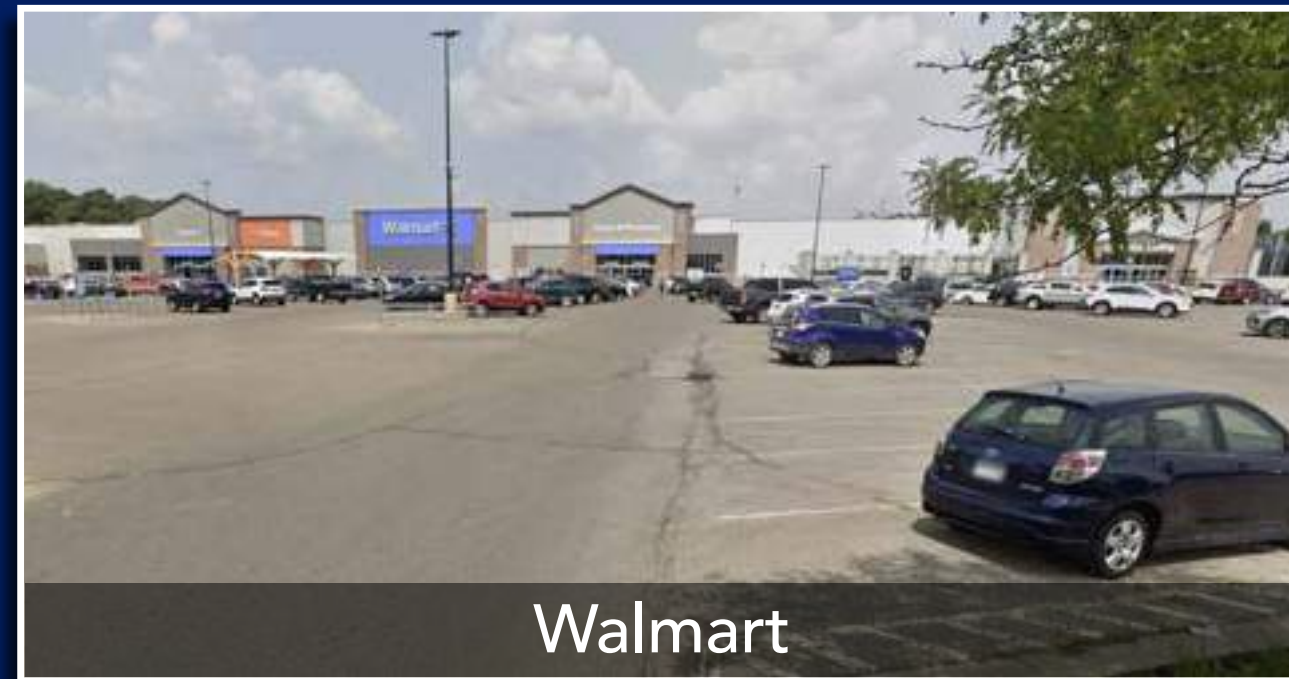


Parcels are shown to scale.

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Total Value: Scale & Use Comparison

Austin, MN



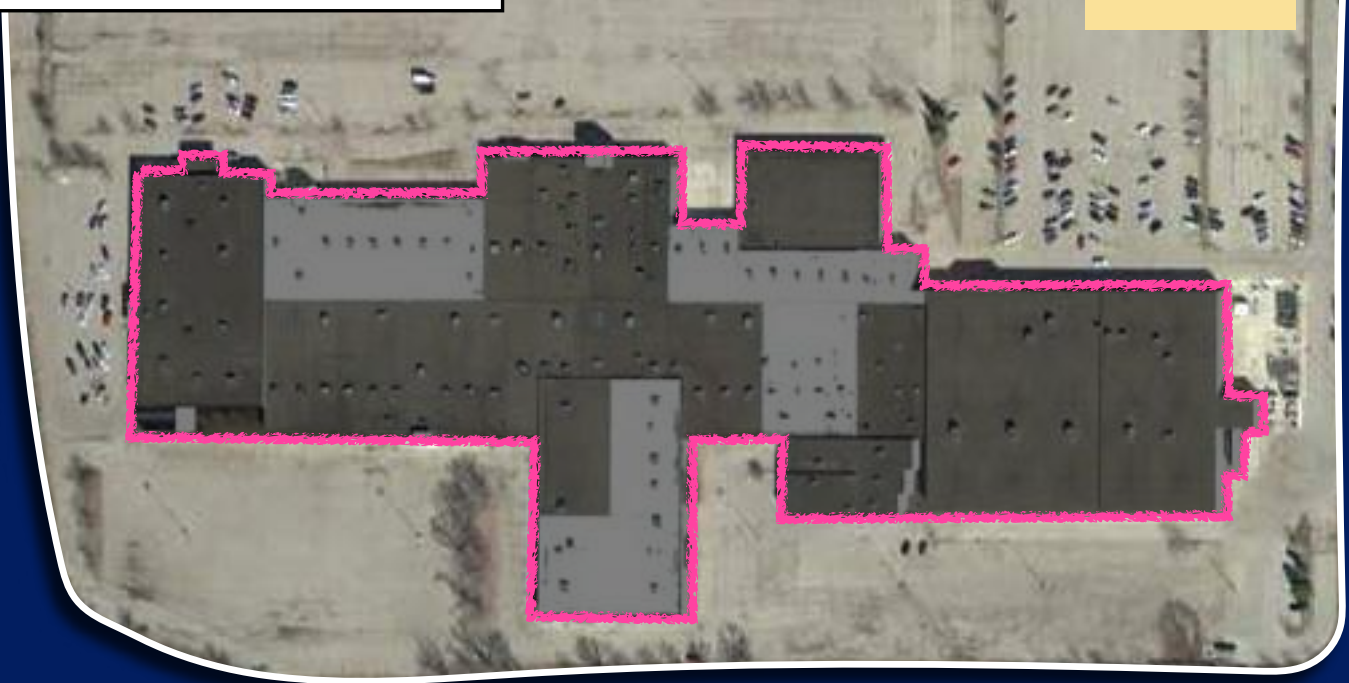
Parcels are shown to scale.

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Value Comparison

Austin, MN

2015



Court House Square, Austin, Minn.

Late 1800s



Today



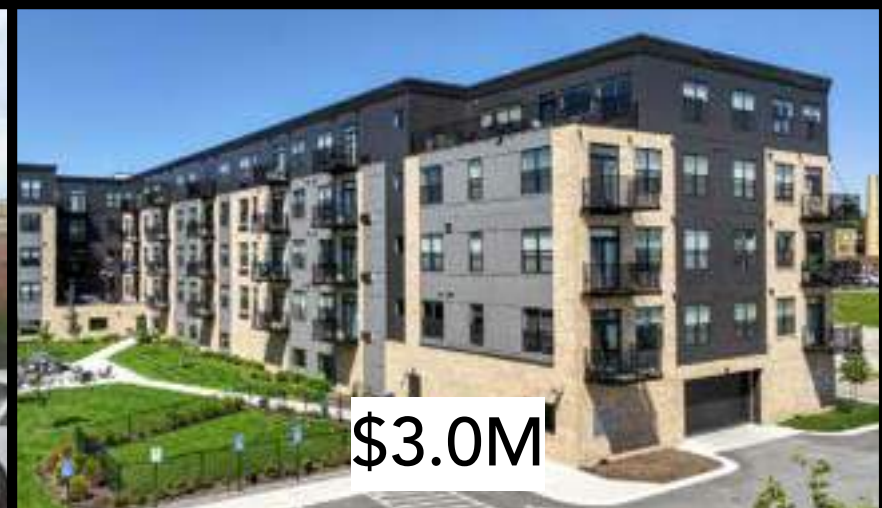
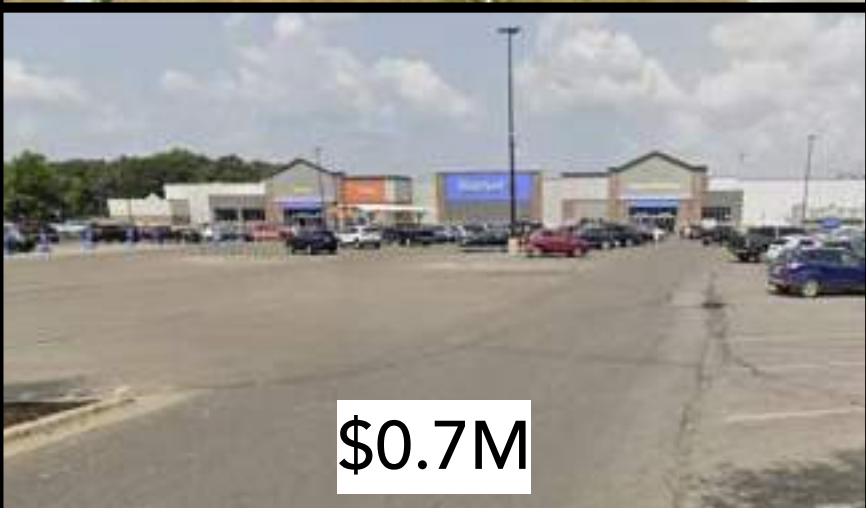







Today



Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Austin/Mower County, MN: Value Per Acre Examples by Building Type

	LOWER DENSITY	MEDIUM DENSITY	HIGHER DENSITY
RESIDENTIAL	 <p>\$0.7M</p>	 <p>\$1.9M</p>	 <p>\$3.0M</p>
COMMERCIAL	 <p>\$0.7M</p>	 <p>\$1.0M</p>	 <p>\$6.9M</p>
MIXED USE	 <p>\$1.9M</p>	 <p>\$4.4M</p>	 <p>n/a</p>

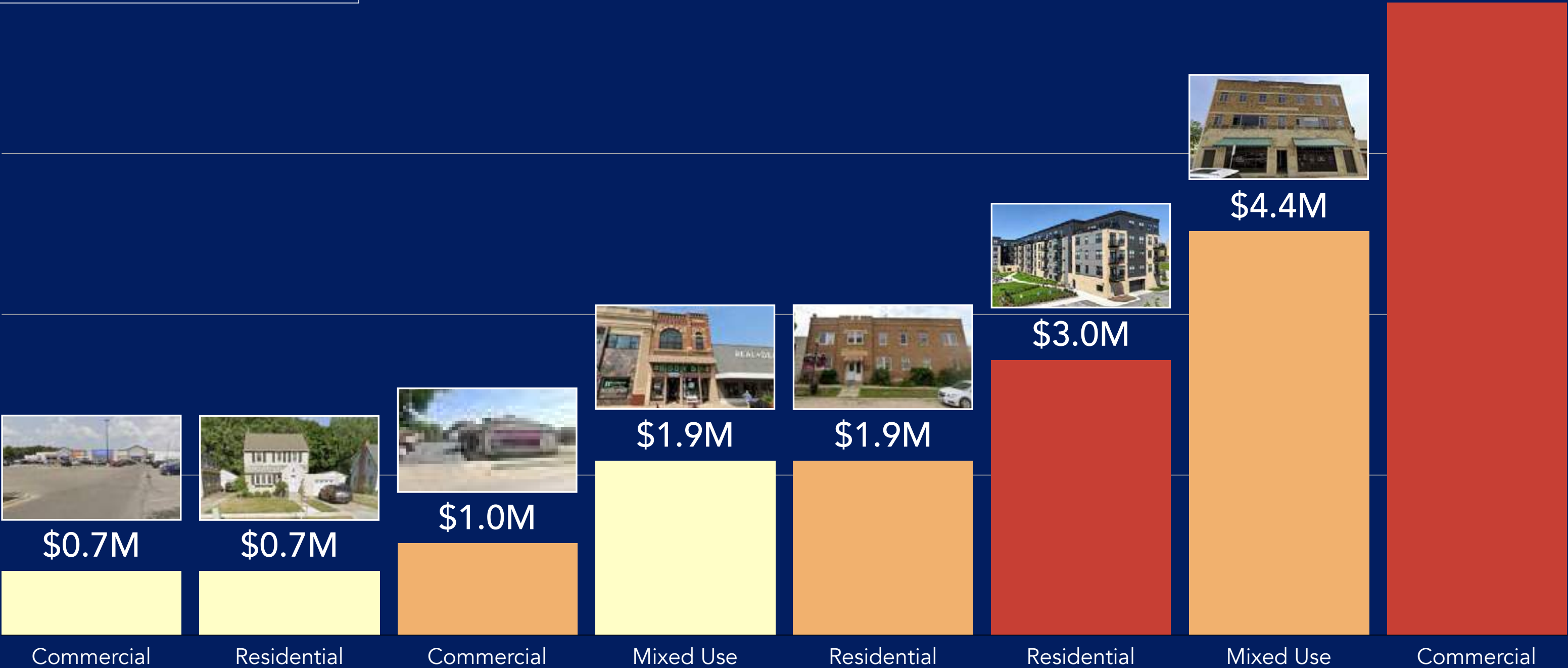
Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

# Austin/Mower County, MN: Value Per Acre Examples by Building Type

**Density**  
 Low Medium High



\$6.9M



U3  
 Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps



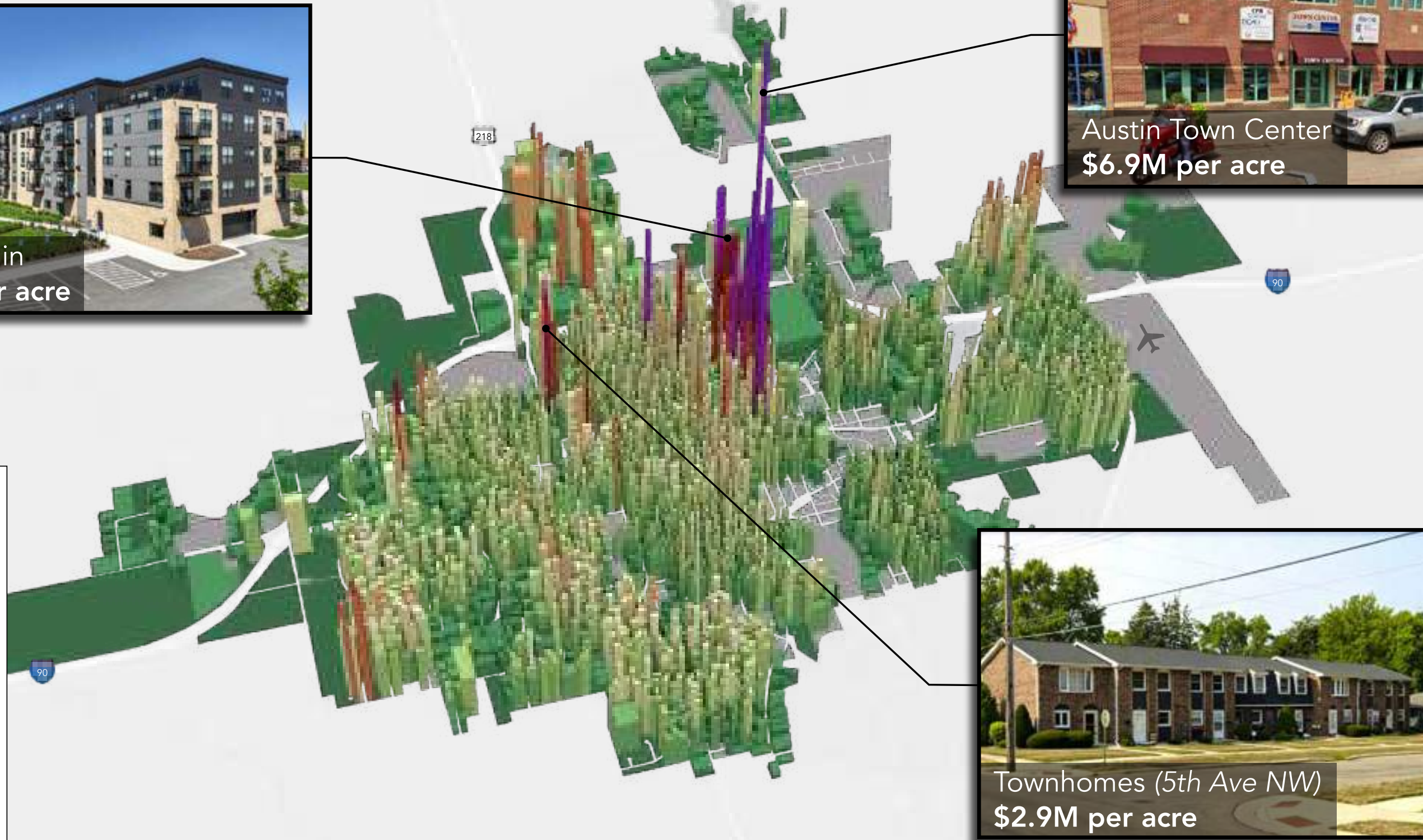
# Land Uses in the Model

Reconnecting the Tax Model with On-Street Examples

URBAN3

# Market Value Per Acre

Austin, MN



### Value Per Acre (\$)

Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Light Green	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Dark Green	500,001 - 750,000
Medium Green	30,001 - 500,000
Light Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

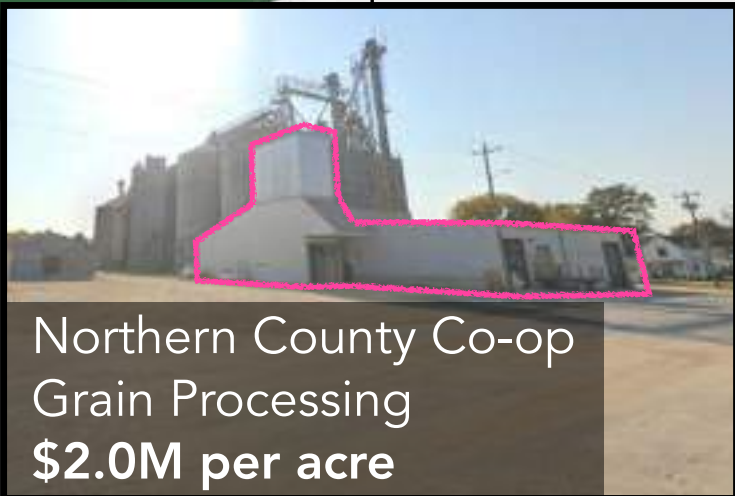
# Market Value Per Acre

Mower County, MN



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

> 7,000,000
2,500,001 - 3,000,000
2,250,001 - 2,500,000
2,000,001 - 2,250,000
1,750,001 - 2,000,000
1,500,001 - 1,750,000
1,250,001 - 1,500,000
1,000,001 - 1,125,000
750,001 - 1,000,000
500,001 - 750,000
30,001 - 500,000
< 30,000
0



Source: Douglas County Assessor (2024)



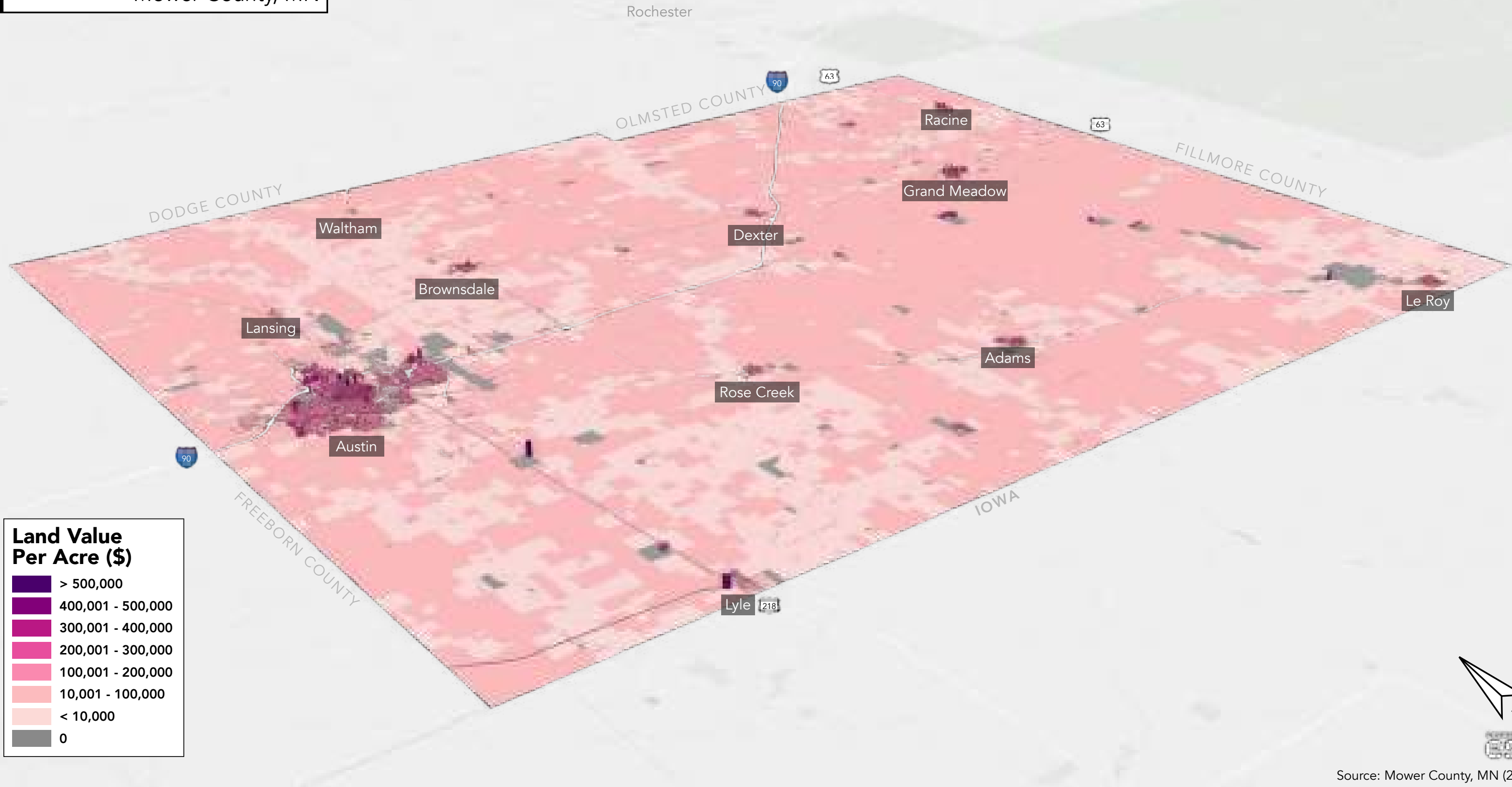
# Land Value Per Acre

The Economics of Land Use

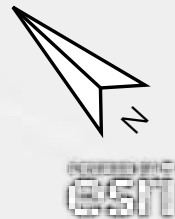
URBAN3

# Land Value Per Acre

Mower County, MN



> 500,000
400,001 - 500,000
300,001 - 400,000
200,001 - 300,000
100,001 - 200,000
10,001 - 100,000
< 10,000
0

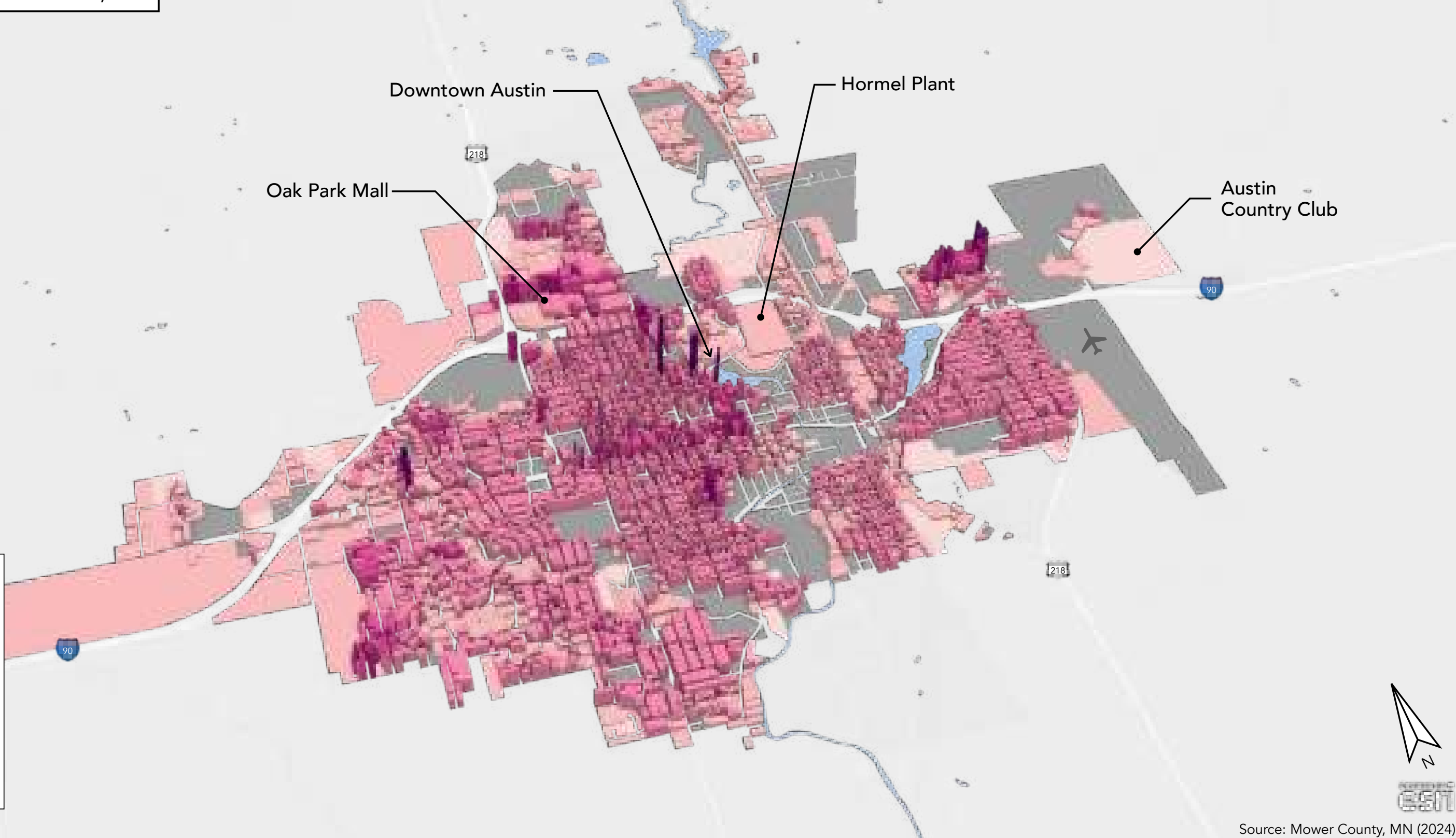
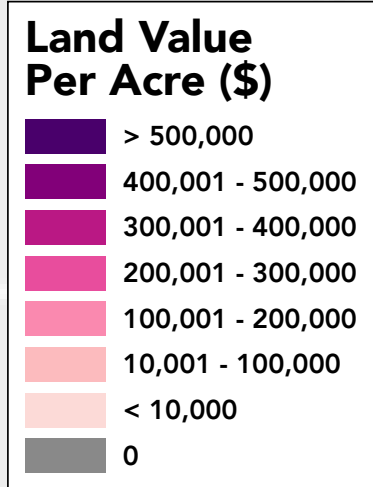


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Land Value Per Acre

Austin, MN

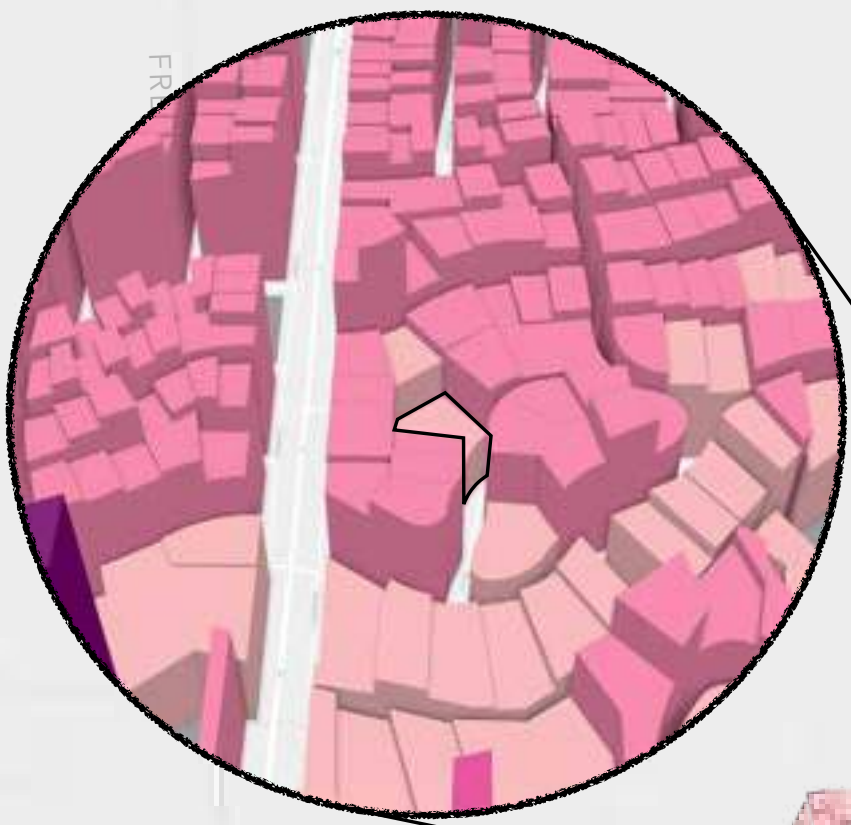
FREEBORN COUNTY



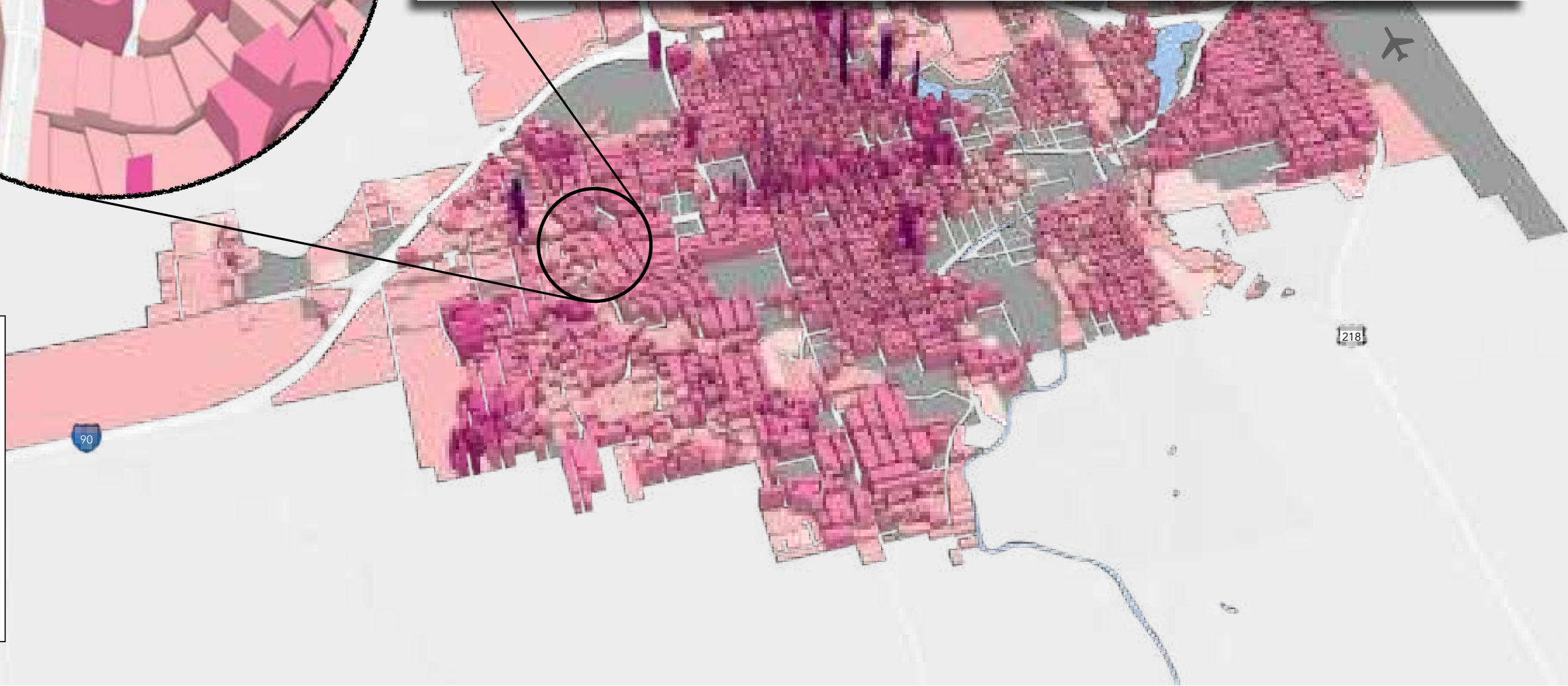
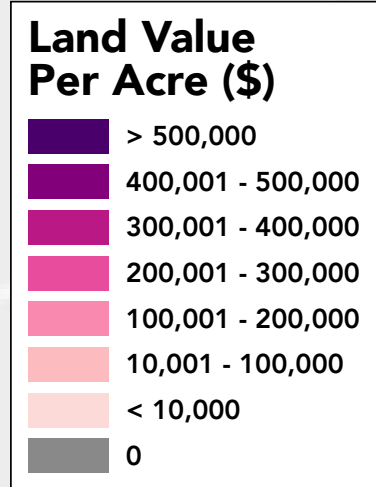
Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Land Value Per Acre

Austin, MN



Frank Lloyd Wright's Elam House  
\$57K per acre

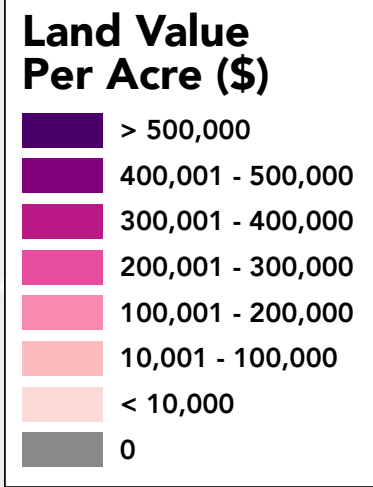


Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Land Value Per Acre: Neighborhood Comparison

Austin, MN

FREEBORN COUNTY



Railroad Addition

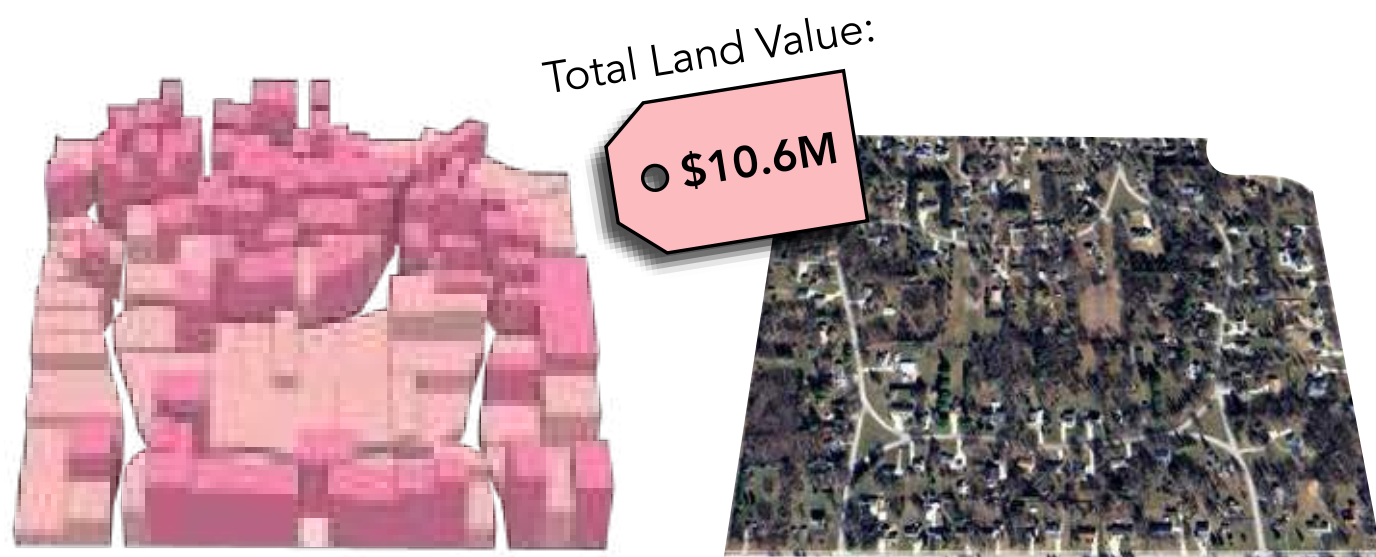
Austin Homesteads

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

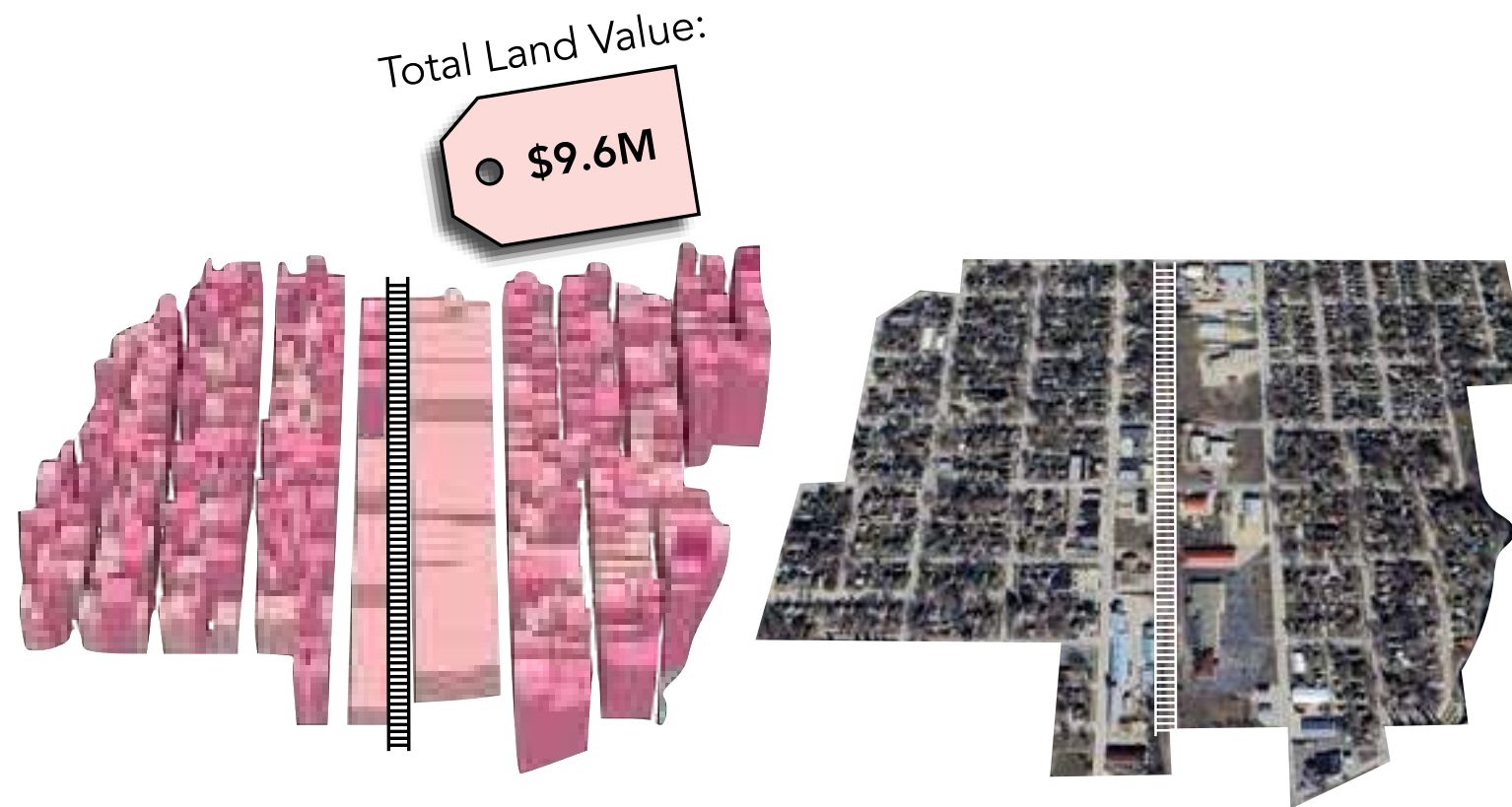


# Land Value Per Acre: Neighborhood Comparison

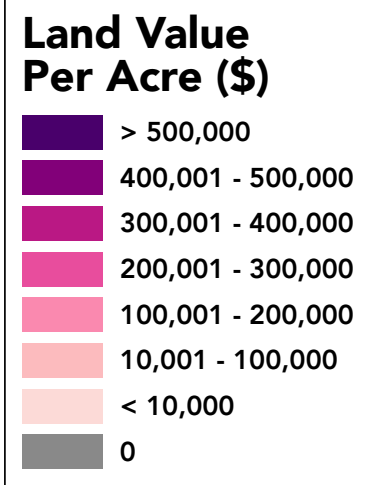
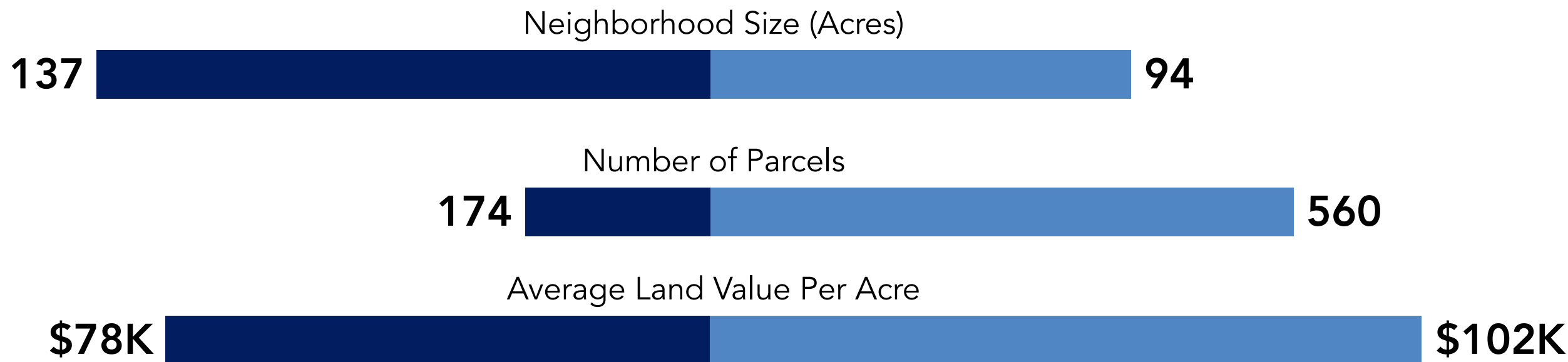
Austin, MN



### Austin Homesteads



### Railroad Addition\*



\*Minus railroad parcels

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)





# Infrastructure Analysis

Roads, Water, Stormwater, and Sewer

URBAN3

# Assets

According to the Municipal Finance Standards (CAFR)



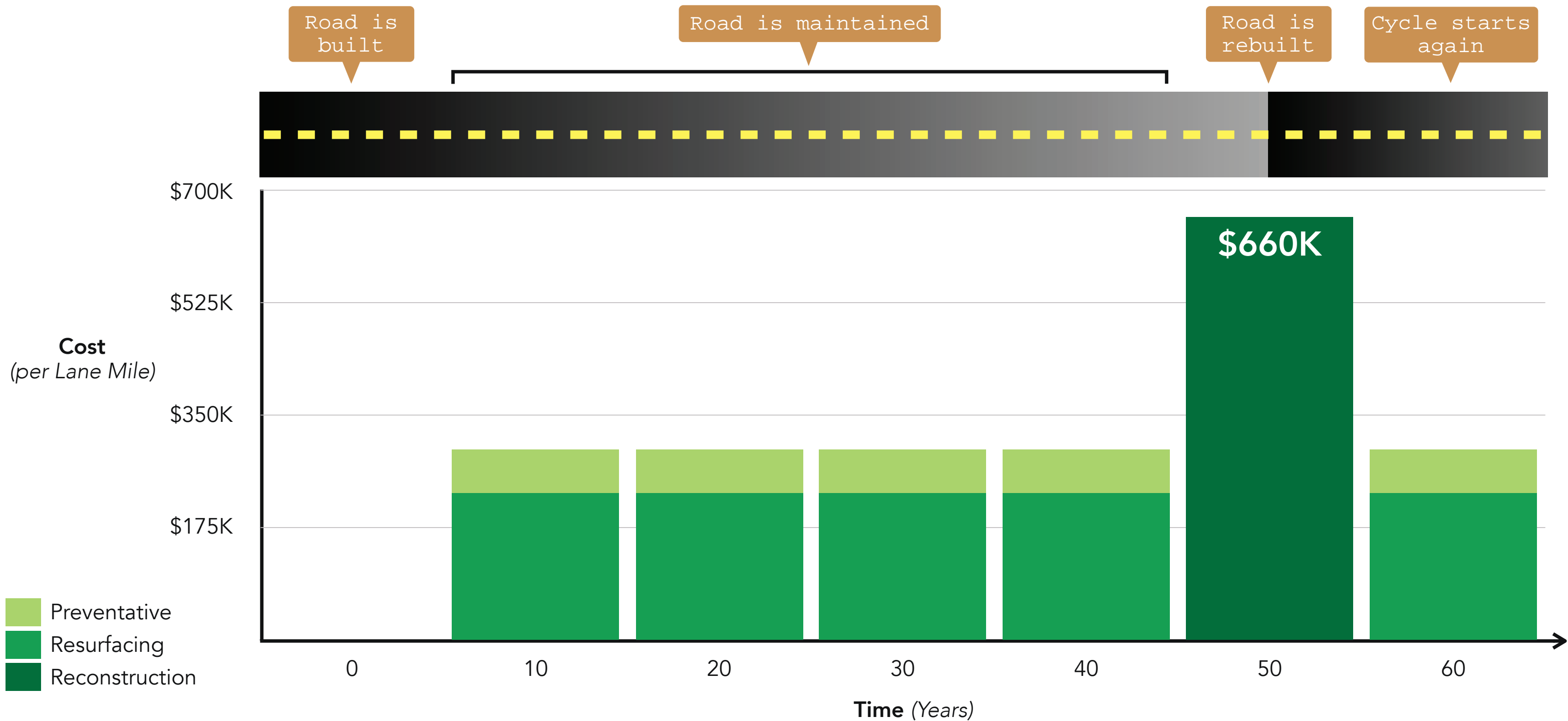
# Liability



URBAN3

# What Happens to a Road Over Time?

Anywhere, USA



For illustration purposes as an "average," and may fluctuate due to level of service, usage, scale of road and substrate, and local cost of labor.

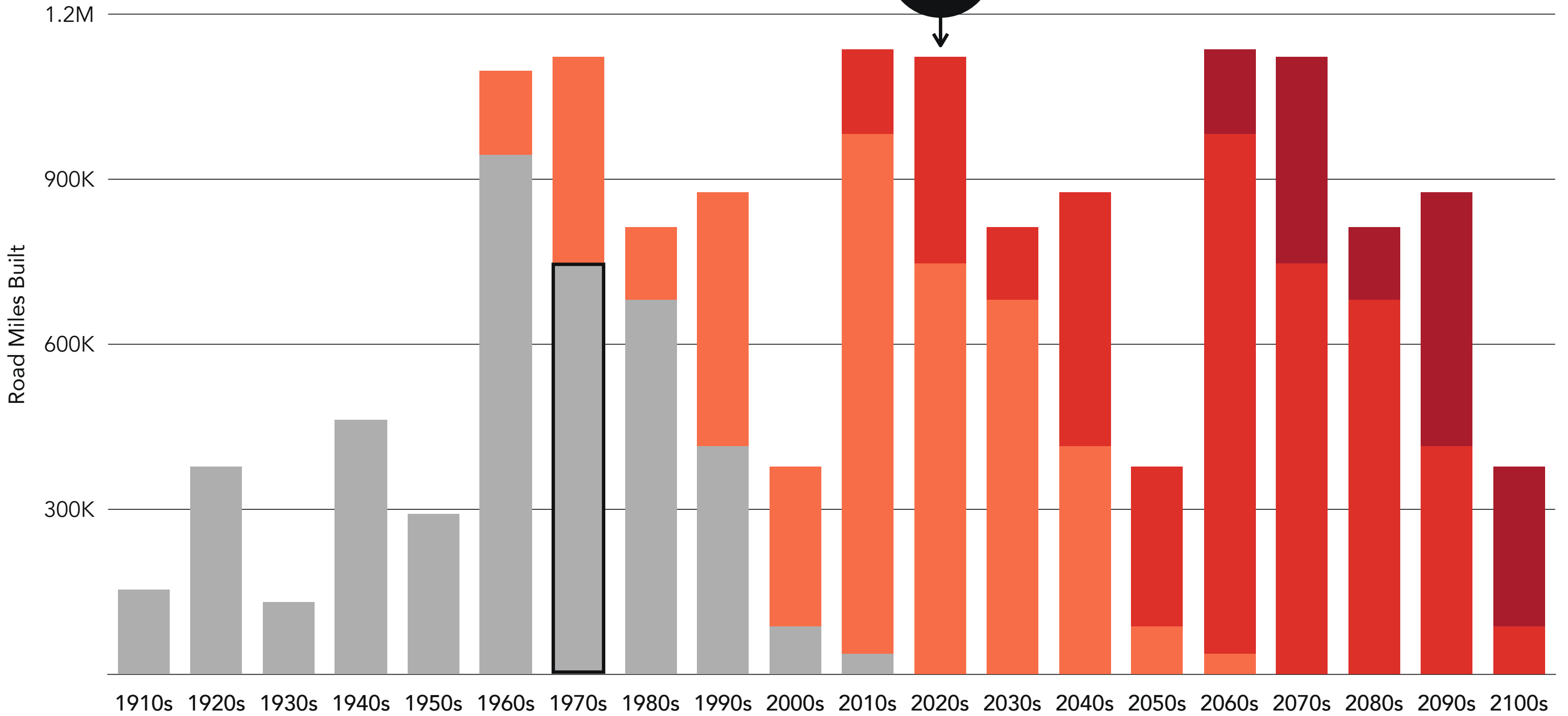
Source: [indusinc.com](http://indusinc.com)

# Road Maintenance Load and Rebuild Schedule\*

Anywhere, USA

Initial Build Rebuild 1 Rebuild 2 Rebuild 3

You are here



\*Conceptualized chart

Source: City of Springfield, MO FY 2023-2024 Adopted Budget, Springfield GIS



Austin, MN

338 lane miles of road to...

Kenosha, WI



Source: Google Maps, City of Austin MN (2024)

**URBAN** **Road Length**  
City of Austin & Mower County, MN



Source: Google Maps, City of Austin & Mower County MN (2024)

# Asset Management



URBAN3

# Asset Management

+\$\$\$

+\$\$\$

+\$\$\$

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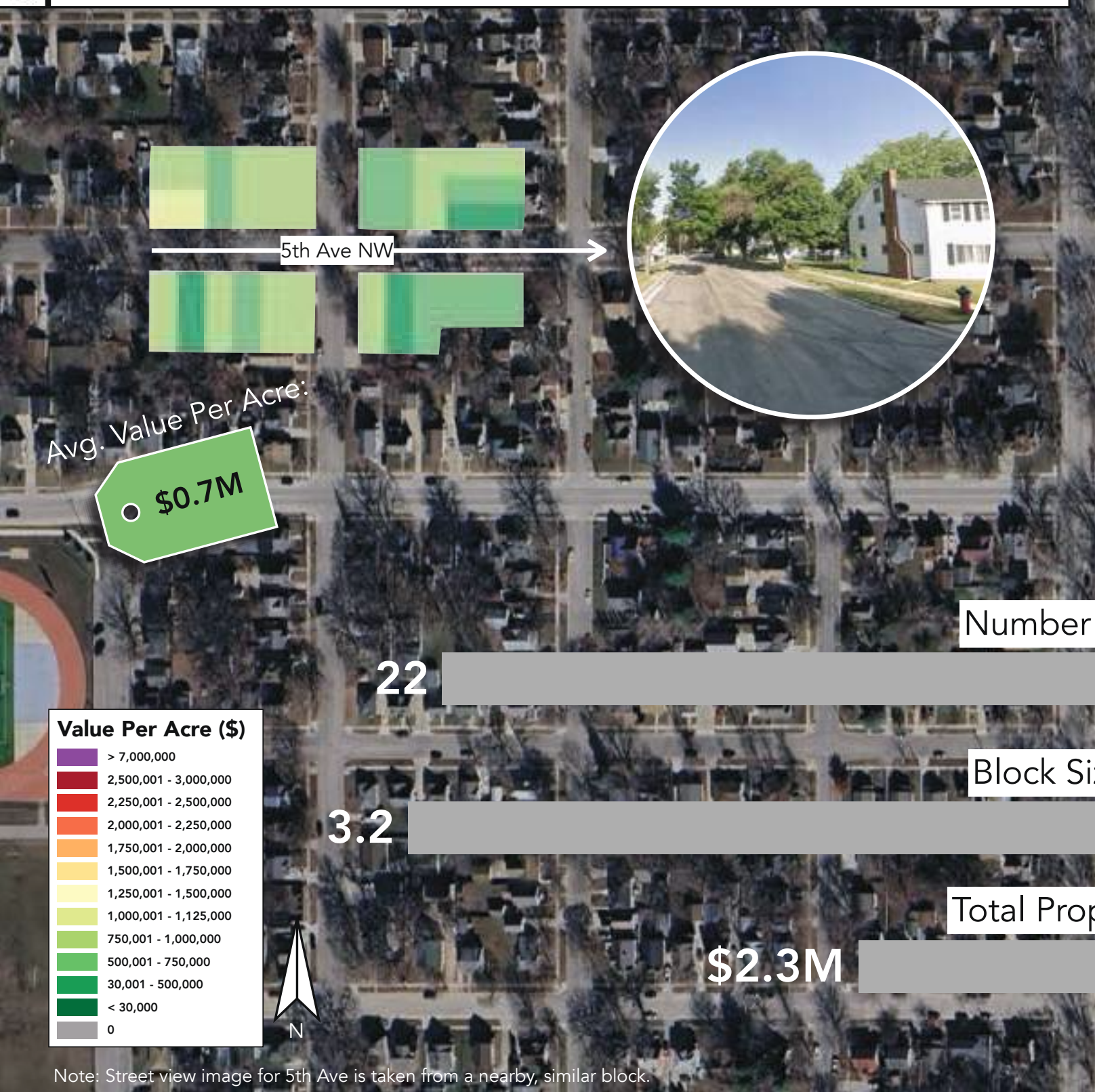
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URBAN3

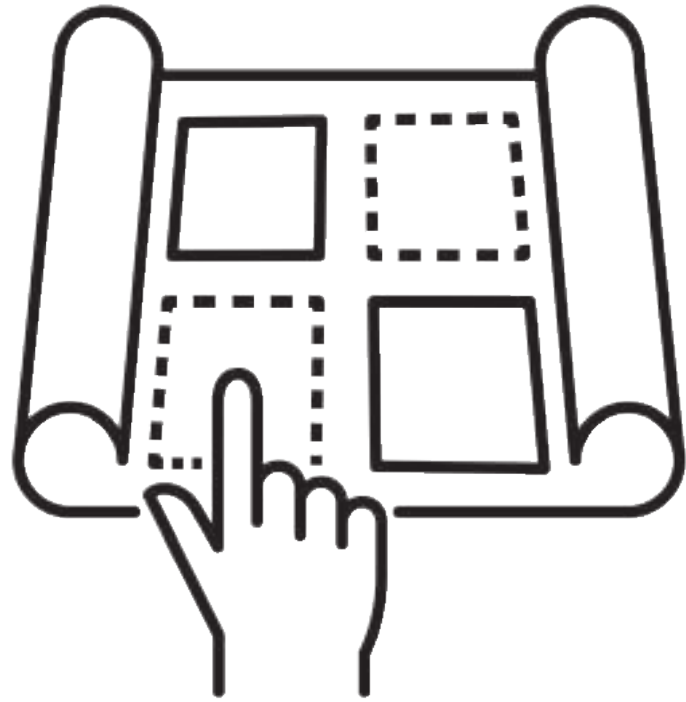
# Comparison: How Do You Pay for Your Roads?

Austin, MN



Note: Street view image for 5th Ave is taken from a nearby, similar block.

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



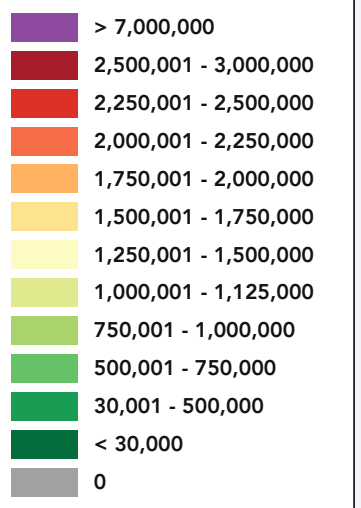
# Downtown Districts

Highlighting Segments of the Downtown Core

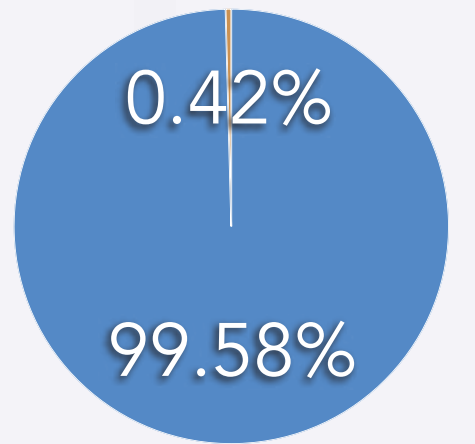
# Productivity Ratio

Austin's CBD to City of Austin, MN

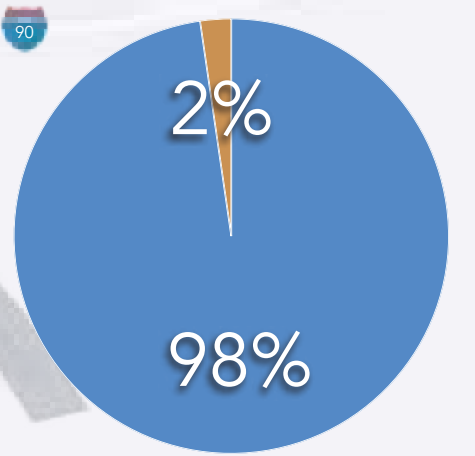
## Value Per Acre (\$)



## Taxable Acres



## Total Value



● City ● Downtown

# 1:5.4

Austin's CBD taxable value is **5.4 times greater** than the amount of City area it takes up.

CBD = Central Business District

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

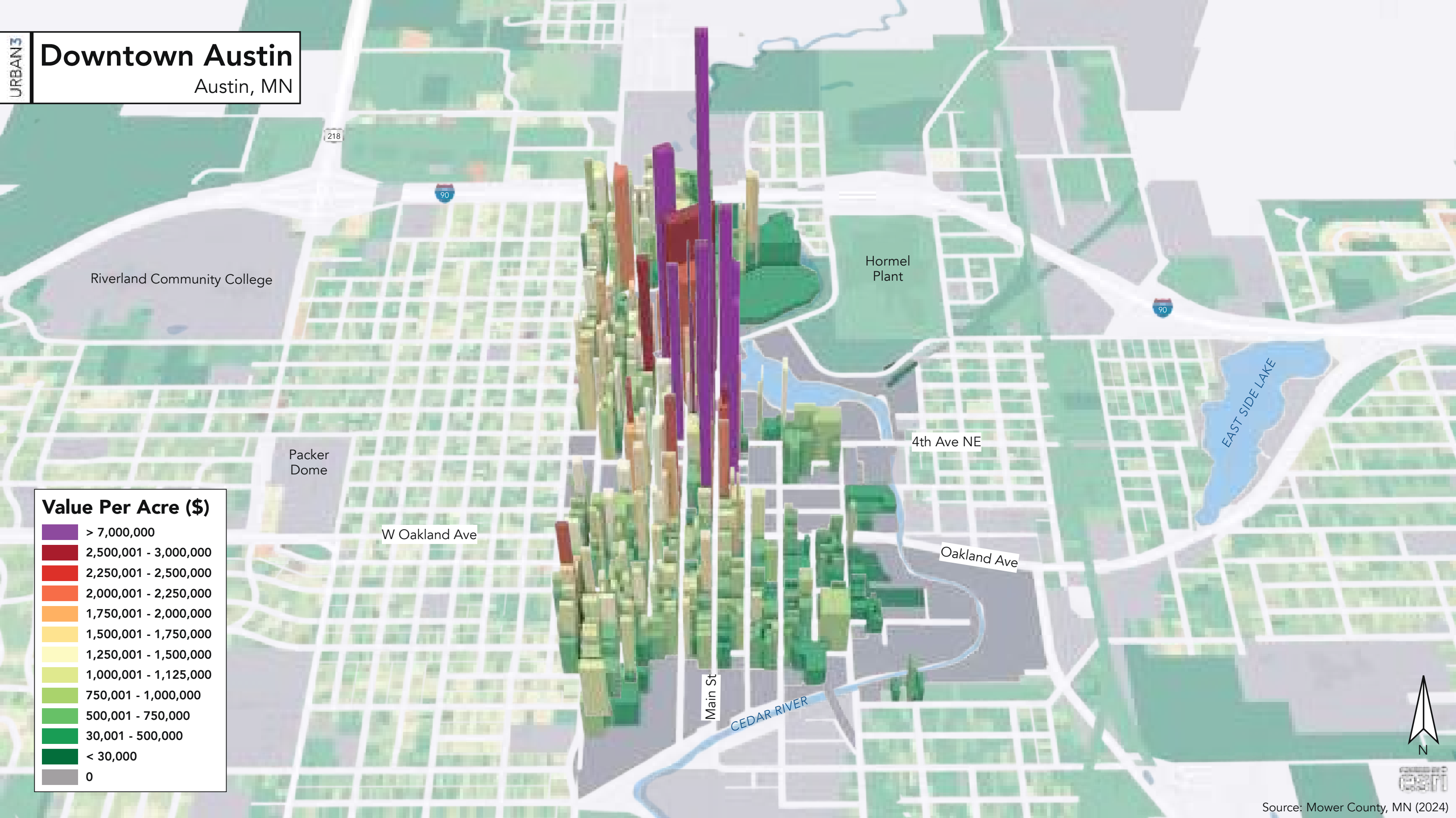


# Downtown Austin

Austin, MN

## Value Per Acre (\$)

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Cedar River Regional Park

Austin, MN



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



# Cedar River Regional Park

Austin, MN



Medium Density Residential  
\$1.6M per acre



Whittier Place  
\$0.8M per acre

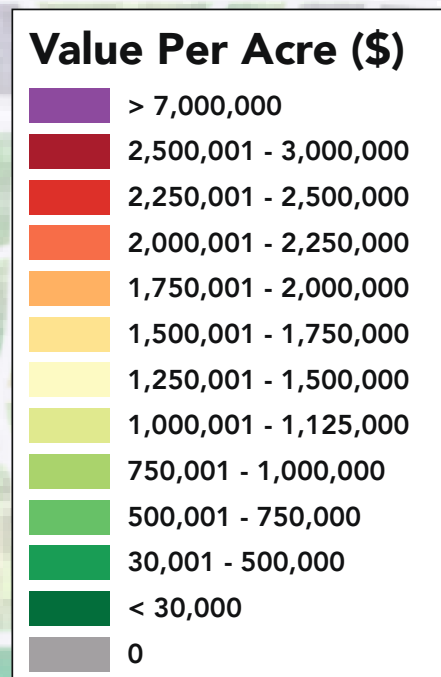
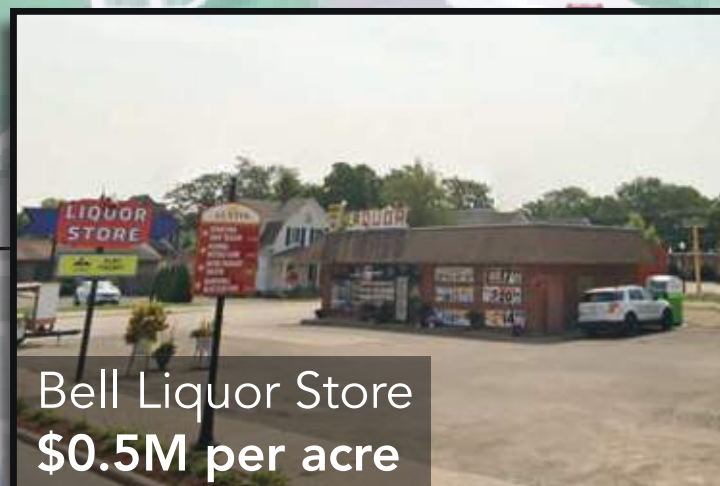
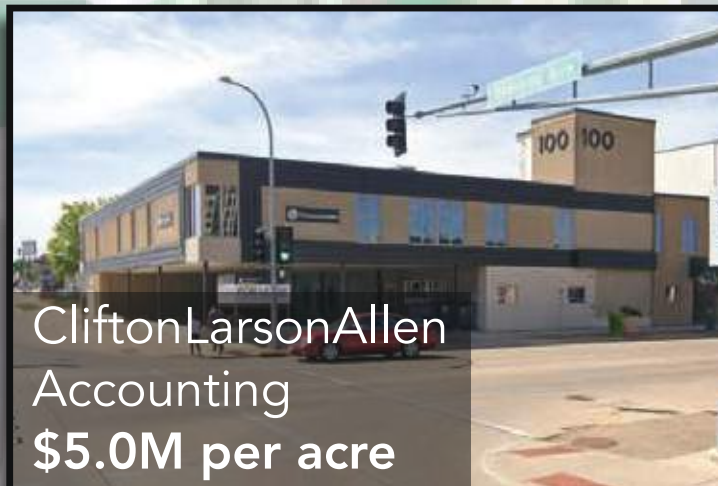
**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0

Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Oakland Avenue Corridor

Austin, MN



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Education District

Austin, MN



Single Family Residential  
\$0.9M per acre



Triplex  
\$2.4M per acre

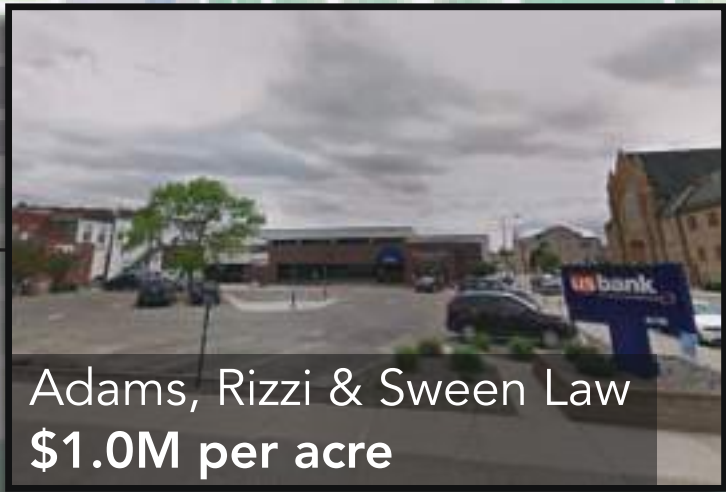
**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Yellow-Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Light Green	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Medium Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



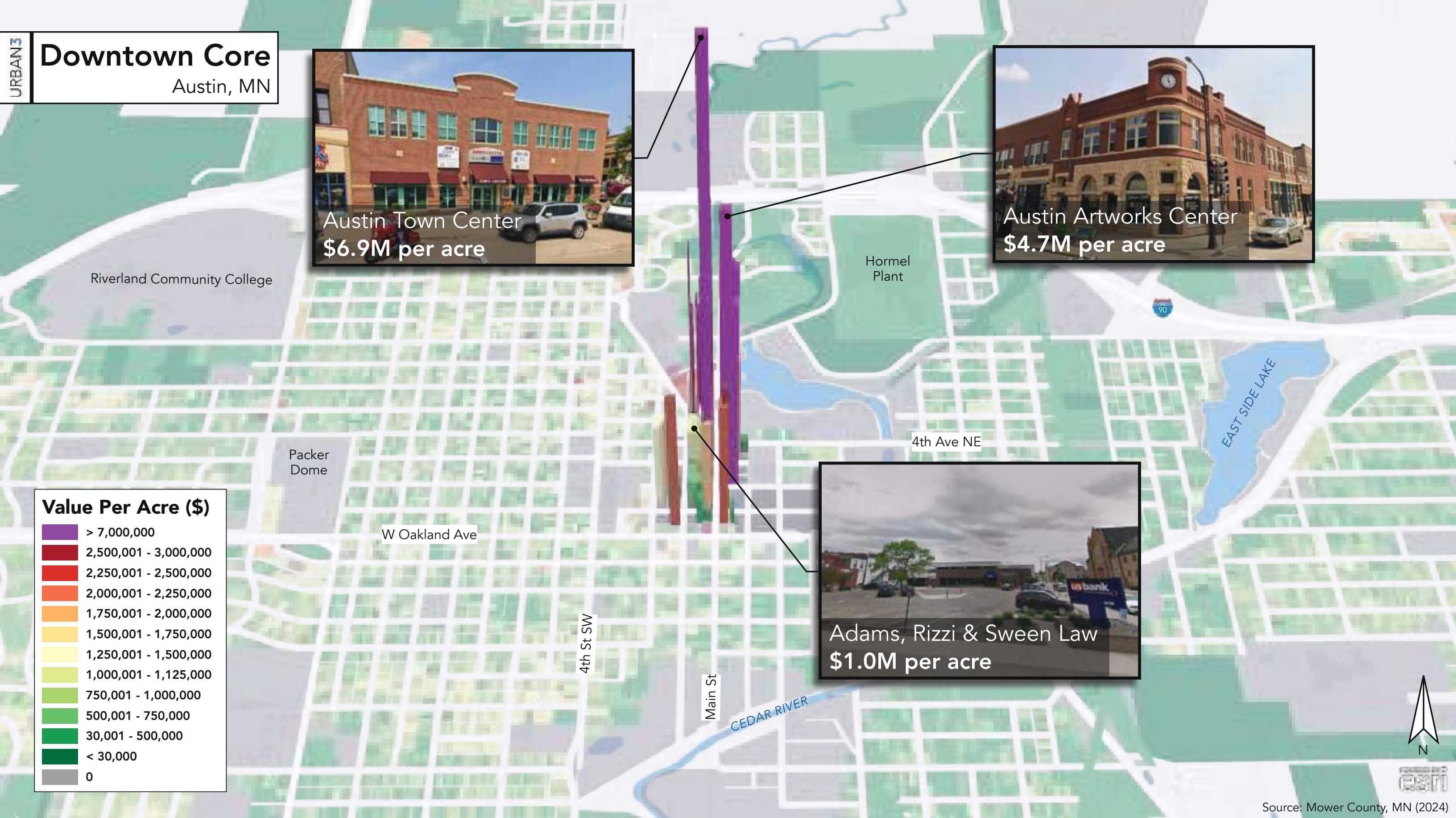
Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

**URBAN3**  
**Downtown Core**  
 Austin, MN



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



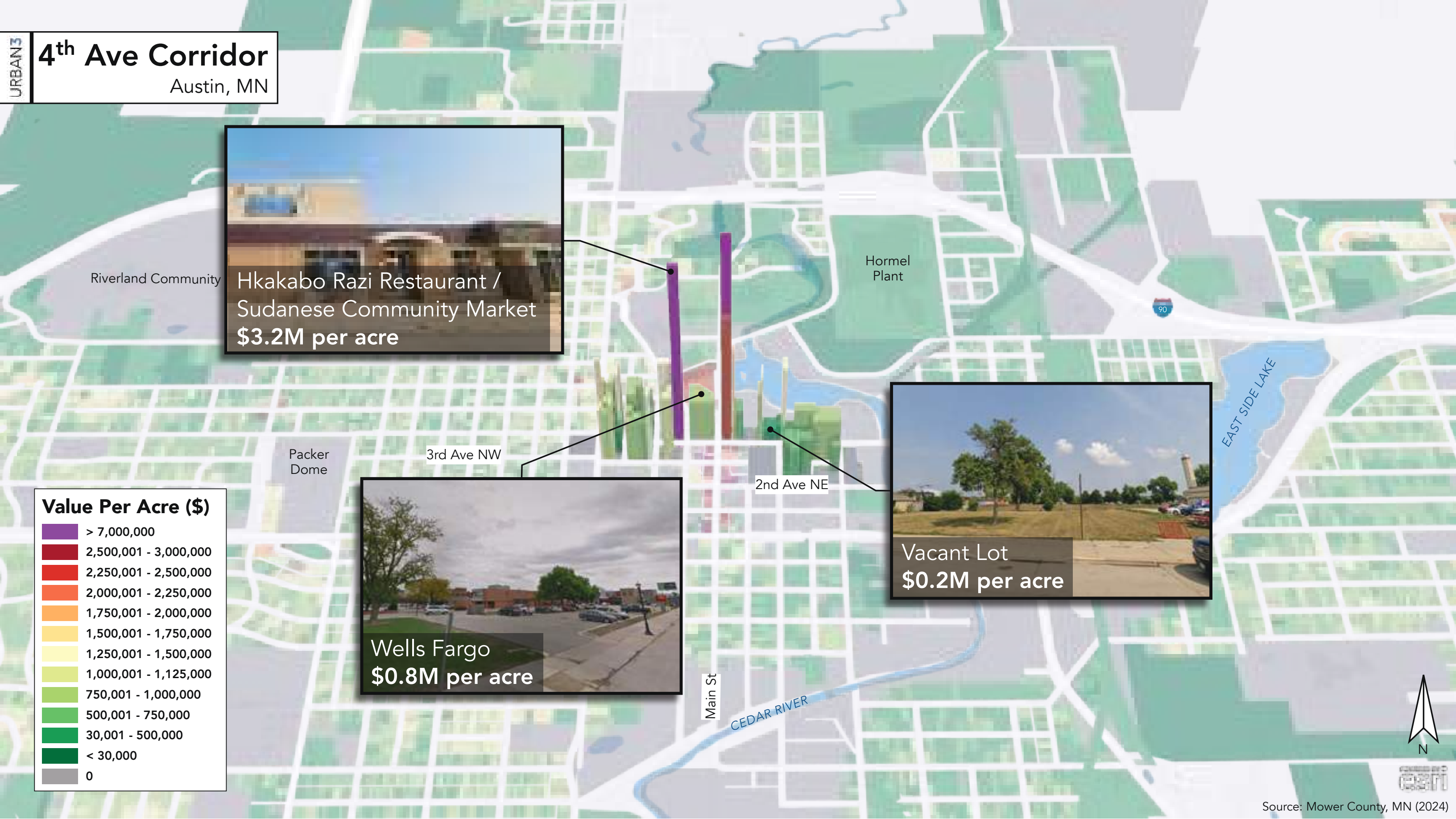
Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

**URBAN3** **4<sup>th</sup> Ave Corridor**  
Austin, MN



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



# Doctor Street Junction

Austin, MN



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)



# 4<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood

Austin, MN



### Value Per Acre (\$)

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Dark Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange-Red	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Light Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow-Orange	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Yellow	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Light Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Green	500,001 - 750,000
Dark Green	30,001 - 500,000
Very Dark Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Healthcare District

Austin, MN



# Gateway District

Austin, MN



**Value Per Acre (\$)**

Dark Purple	> 7,000,000
Red	2,500,001 - 3,000,000
Orange-Red	2,250,001 - 2,500,000
Orange	2,000,001 - 2,250,000
Light Orange	1,750,001 - 2,000,000
Yellow-Orange	1,500,001 - 1,750,000
Yellow	1,250,001 - 1,500,000
Light Green	1,000,001 - 1,125,000
Green	750,001 - 1,000,000
Dark Green	500,001 - 750,000
Medium Green	30,001 - 500,000
Lightest Green	< 30,000
Grey	0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Downtown Austin

Austin, MN



### Value Per Acre (\$)

> 7,000,000
2,500,001 - 3,000,000
2,250,001 - 2,500,000
2,000,001 - 2,250,000
1,750,001 - 2,000,000
1,500,001 - 1,750,000
1,250,001 - 1,500,000
1,000,001 - 1,125,000
750,001 - 1,000,000
500,001 - 750,000
30,001 - 500,000
< 30,000
0



Source: Mower County, MN (2024)

# Downtown Austin, MN: Value Per Acre Examples by Building Type

**Density**

- Low
- Medium
- High



\$6.9M



\$5.0M



\$3.0M



\$2.4M



\$1.6M



\$0.9M



\$0.2M



\$0.2M



Vacant      Commercial      Residential      Residential      Residential      Residential      Commercial      Commercial

U3

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Google Maps

What you can do:

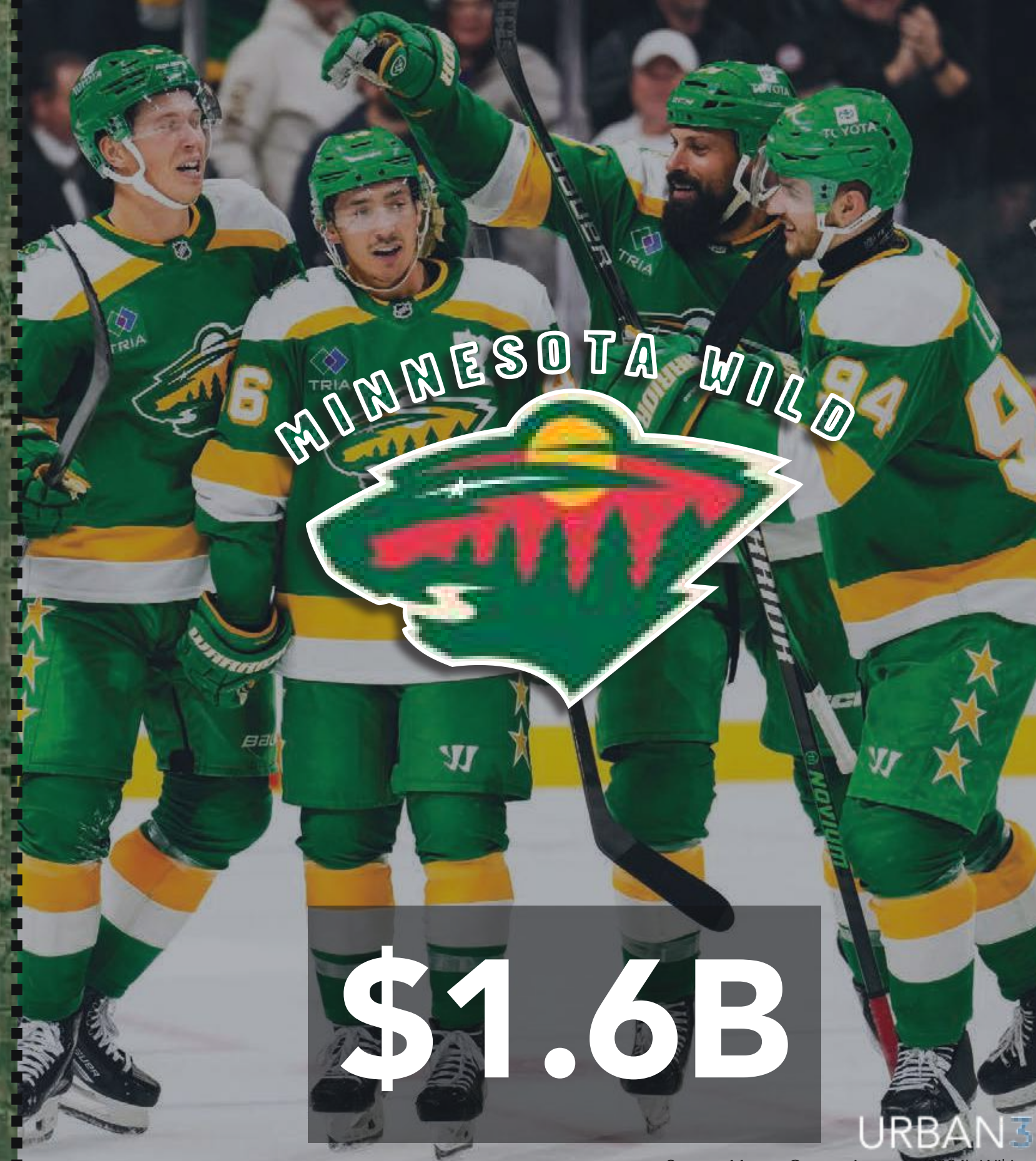
**Know your worth.**

URBAN3



# MOWER COUNTY

**\$7.5B**



**\$1.6B**

URBAN3

Source: Mower County Assessor (2024), Wikipedia



# THANK YOU

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Daniel@dnaofplace.com  
479-200-1812