

City of Ann Arbor's Comprehensive Land Use Plan

2050





source: City of Ann Arbor

Goals and Strategies

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Housing and Neighborhoods

The goals in this chapter include:

Goal 1: Increase the supply and diversify the types of housing for households of different sizes, abilities, and income levels.

Goal 2 : Support all residents in accessing quality housing and mitigate displacement.

Goal 3: Provide high-quality, accessible parks, trails, and recreation areas.

Goal 4: Encourage walkable, connected neighborhoods with access to basic needs and amenities.

These goals make Ann Arbor more:



Affordable

by increasing housing to stabilize prices, adding more housing types for all household types, generating income-eligible affordable housing funds, reducing transportation costs.



Equitable

by providing diverse housing options across the city and improving access to services, amenities, and economic opportunity, not reinforcing existing, often exclusionary policies.



Sustainable

by bringing people closer to services and jobs, enabling better transportation options to reduce the city's carbon footprint, and protecting natural features.



Dynamic

by bringing new people and businesses to the city, and encouraging complete neighborhoods that are more walkable.

Rationale

What We've Heard:

Housing:

- ▶ Affordability and a lack of different housing types are major concerns, with participants citing the need for more housing options, concern about the cost of rent/mortgage, and concern that housing geared toward students have high bedroom counts that are not suitable or convertible for other household types.
- ▶ There is support for increasing housing options in all residential areas with public interest in seeing more "missing middle" housing types (such as townhouses, duplexes, and triplexes) integrated into neighborhoods. This approach aligns with zoning adopted by other cities that have made changes to their single-family districts. After the first draft of the plan was released in April 2025, the city has continued to do neighborhood-level engagement where sentiment toward density was more mixed.
- ▶ People expressed concern over the impact of increased density on green spaces and the built form. Some do not want to see any change to single-family neighborhoods, but most are comfortable with increased density as long as the buildings are not a big change in scale from what exists in neighborhoods now.
- ▶ Adequate housing and support services for low-income individuals, retirees, and those on fixed incomes, are needed to be a more inclusive and resilient community.

Housing & Neighborhoods

Rationale

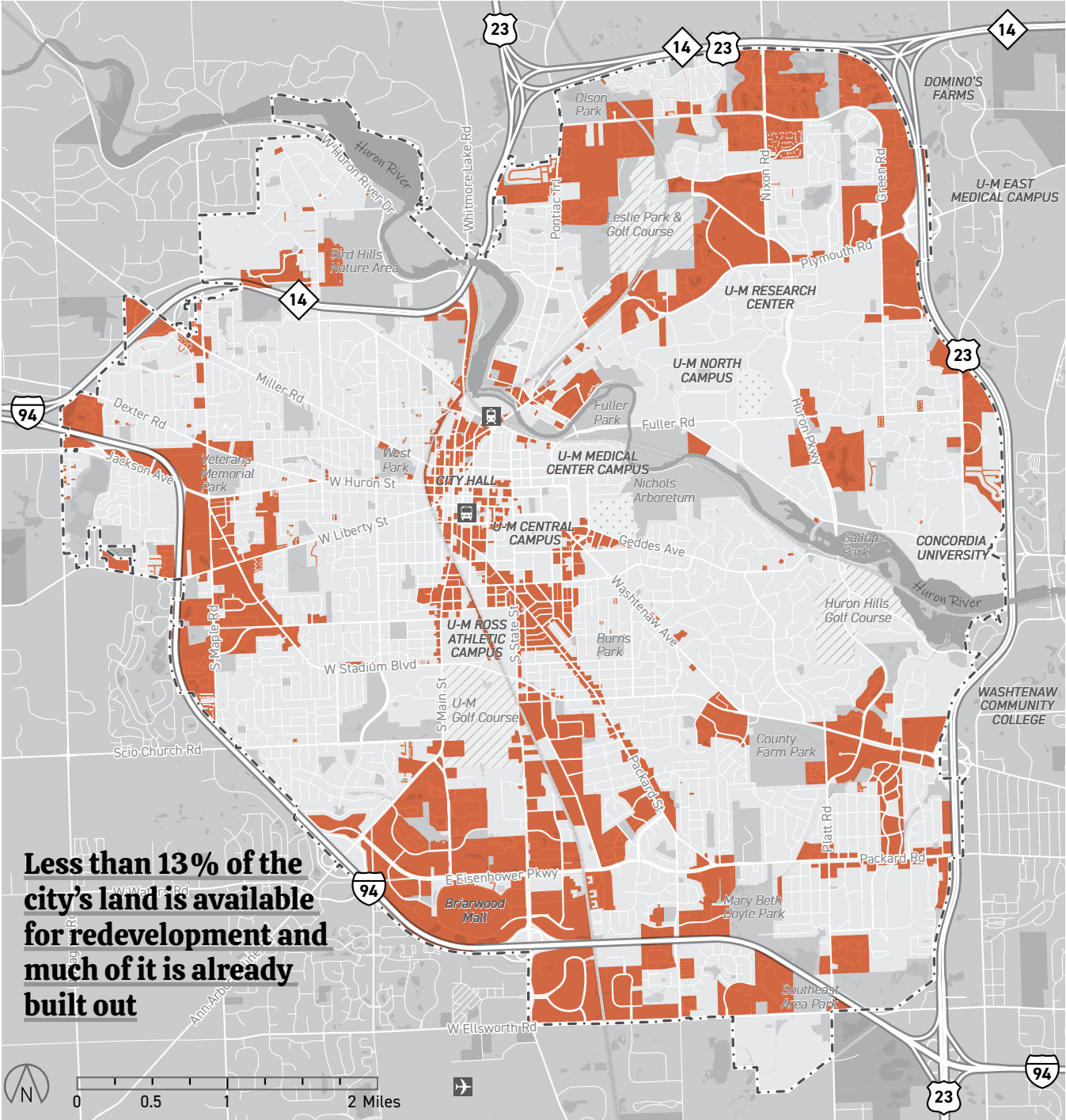
Key Considerations:

Housing development:

- Population growth in Ann Arbor has been largely driven by students at the University of Michigan. When students are excluded, the city's population growth has remained relatively stagnant in recent decades. Growth slowed significantly around 1970: over the past 50 years, Washtenaw County's population has increased by 59%, while Ann Arbor's has grown by only 24%.¹ However, the stagnant growth in non-student households does not mean that there is no demand.
- Too little housing is being built in Ann Arbor. Vacancy rates have remained extremely low for several years, indicating an unhealthy imbalance between supply and demand.² To restore balance, new construction will be needed to achieve a healthier vacancy rate, typically considered to be between 5% and 8%.³
- Population trends reflecting an aging population and smaller household sizes suggest a shift in both the types and number of housing units needed. Between 2000 and 2020, the population aged 65 and older increased by 59%, while the number of residents under 18 and those aged 35 to 64 (typically those who would make up a family household with children) decreased by 21% and 9% respectively.⁴
- Close to 80,000 people commute into the city, contributing to congestion and carbon emissions.⁵ Providing housing for many of these commuters would be needed to reduce vehicle miles traveled and carbon emissions.
- Adding housing offers additional benefits that residents across the city value, including reducing transportation costs by encouraging alternative modes of travel, helping transit agencies meet service improvement goals, and supporting local businesses by expanding the city's customer base.
- As shown in the map on page 53, most land suitable for development that is not protected as natural area has already been built upon. Under current regulations, only 13% (or 2,438 acres) remains available for redevelopment that could increase the number of housing units. As a result, future growth will need to focus on infill and redevelopment opportunities within the existing urban fabric.

¹ U.S. Census 1970-2020 for Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County, University of Michigan Enrollment Reports
² U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year and 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022.
³ <https://www.nccor.org/tools-econindicators/healthy-economies/vacancy-rate-residential/>
⁴ U.S. Census 2000-2020

⁵ U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamic (LEHD) On The Map data, (Primary Jobs 2021)



Map
Developable Land Under Existing Regulations

Developable Land

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, Washtenaw County GIS, Assessor's Office

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY: The amount of developable land was calculated by subtracting Public Right-of-ways, Township Islands, Public Land, Floodplains, Historic Districts, and R1 and R2 Zoning Districts from the city's total land area to highlight where new housing units could be added under current regulations.

Housing & Neighborhoods

Rationale

Key Considerations:

Housing affordability:

- Housing costs in Ann Arbor exceed what the median household income can afford. Based on 2022–2023 data, the affordable rent for a household earning the median wage was \$2,188, and the affordable home price was \$262,500. In reality, median rents in 2023 were higher at \$2,399, and the median home sales price reached \$299,950.¹ Since then, prices have continued to climb amid tight supply, with the median home price rising to \$440,900 in Q1 2024.² Combined with higher interest rates, this trend has made homeownership even less attainable.³
- Ann Arbor is more housing cost burdened than the region (cost burdened households are defined as spending more than 30% of their income on housing): 18.3% of owner households were cost burdened and 50% of renter households were cost burdened. However, 51% of cost burdened renters are in the student-age cohort, 15 to 24 years of age.⁴
- The student population impacts both the rental and for-sale market as some for-sale properties are bought and converted to student housing, especially close to the university.⁵
- Over the next 20 to 30 years single-family homes will go through generational turnover as 54% of homeowners are over the age of 55.⁶ Currently, property tax caps impact the ability of these homeowners to downsize, thus worsening supply as it slows generational housing turnover. When housing does turn over, uncapping property taxes plays a significant role in the cost.
- Adding more housing can stabilize prices and provide opportunities for housing that accommodates people with different needs.⁷
- Short-term rentals impact the housing supply by taking units off the market. The city will explore the extent to which this has affected Ann Arbor’s housing stock.
- Homelessness is an outcome of housing scarcity, rising costs, and displacement pressures, and must be addressed as a land-use and affordability issue

1 ACS 5-yr estimates, 2018-22, S1901, 2023 Zillow Housing Rent Market Study, Ann Arbor Board of Realtors Market Statistics for October 2023
2 National Association of Realtors, Ann Arbor Area, First Quarter 2024
3, 5, 7 Refer to the "Housing Appendix" for sourced research articles on the relationship between housing supply and prices.
4, 6 ACS 5-yr estimates, 2018-22

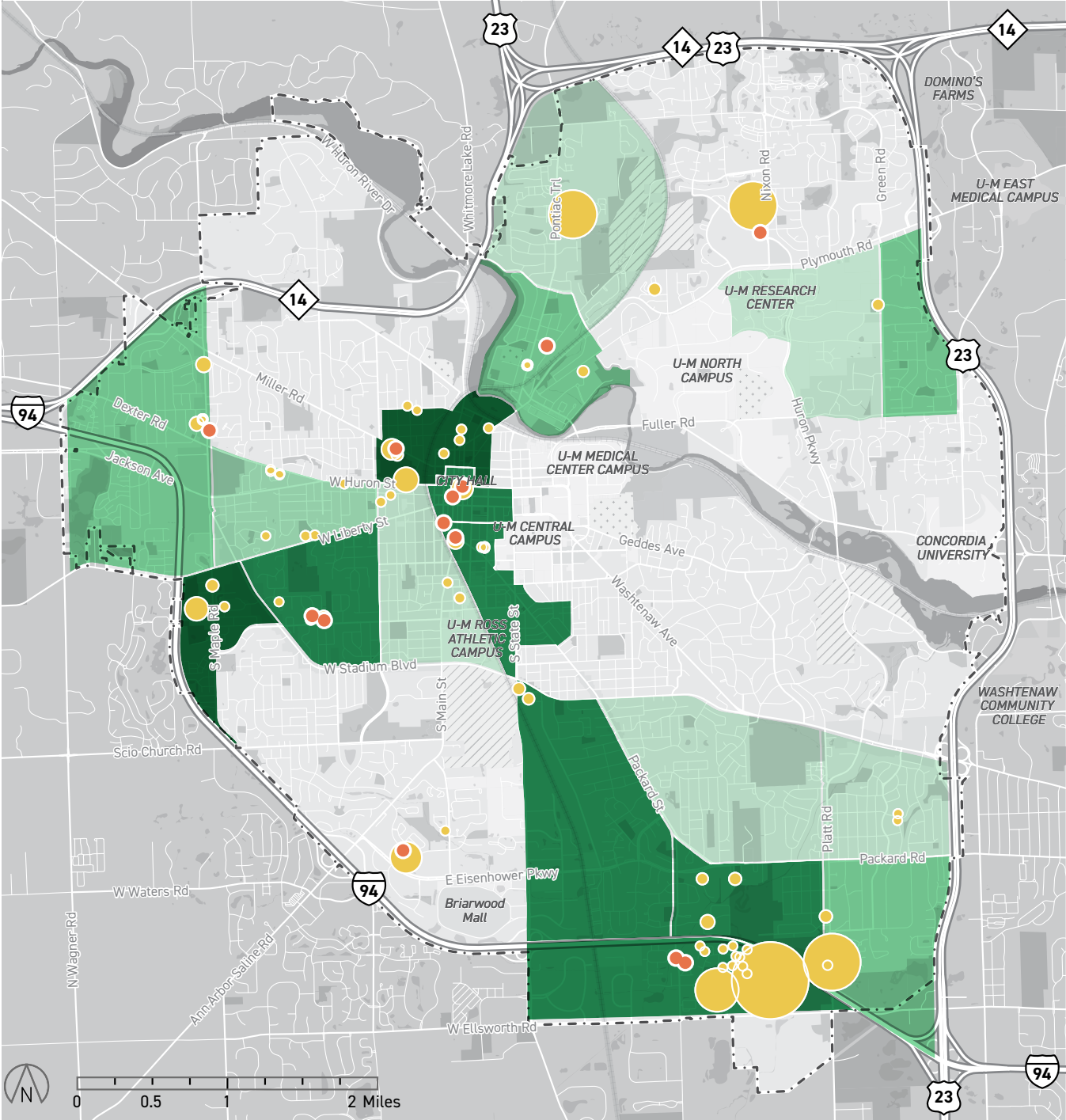
Existing City Programs

Affordable Housing Millage:
Ann Arbor voters approved Proposal C in November 2020 for an affordable housing millage. The millage generates funds to develop housing for Ann Arbor residents earning less than 60% of the Area Median Income by assessing a 1-mill tax over 20 years.

Did You Know?

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)
refers to housing units that are unsubsidized, market-rate housing units that are still affordable to low- and middle-income households due to low market values. These units may be low-cost for a variety of reasons, such as location (i.e., being located in low-cost areas), or age (i.e., older structures that lack premium amenities, such as dishwashers). Many of these units fall into the "missing middle" category and are owned and operated by small developers.

source: Institute for Housing Studies



Map
Existing
Income-Eligible
Subsidized Housing

source: Ann Arbor Housing Commission, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Units

Housing Choice Voucher Units (Census Tract):

94-156	34-46	13-23
47-93	24-33	

Ann Arbor Housing Commission Units (scaled by number of units)

1 10 50 100 1,000

Key Considerations:

Neighborhoods:

- ▶ Parks are widely regarded as essential neighborhood amenities for residents, especially within walking distance of their homes.
- ▶ There is support for aligning growth with transit to create mixed use, walkable neighborhoods: new centers of activity near transit corridors with a mix of housing, office, retail, and entertainment would bring amenities closer to other parts of the city.
- ▶ Residents would like to see more walkable and accessible retail amenities in all neighborhoods, particularly small-scale mom and pop businesses, so they don't have to drive for everything.
- ▶ Increasing density by building up rather than building out is necessary to preserve green spaces, create walkable neighborhoods, and reduce car dependency.
- ▶ While increased density can bring benefits, it must be balanced with the need for green spaces and community amenities.

Did You Know?

Historic Districts

The city currently has 15 designated historic districts. Each district was established pursuant to Michigan Local Historic Districts Act of 1970, state law distinct from Michigan's planning and zoning enabling laws, following extensive public input and deliberation required by that act. Historic districts serve to recognize and conserve structures within distinct areas that provide significant historical meaning and heritage reflecting the city's origins and early development. Any modifications to existing districts would require following similarly extensive public input and deliberation procedures. While not part of a local zoning code, historic districts function essentially as overlay districts, where the more restrictive requirements of either zoning or historic preservation govern.

Most of the city's historic districts are located close to downtown. They are also predominantly if not entirely zoned for uses and densities greater than single family residential development alone, and duplexes and smaller multifamily housing units can be found throughout and immediately adjacent to them. In addition, because all were built prior to the city's shift toward larger minimum lot size requirements, the historic districts are some of the most densely developed and walkable neighborhoods in the city.

Key Considerations:

Parks:

- ▶ Ann Arbor has a high ratio of parks to population: 17.96 acres of park land per 1,000 residents, compared to a median of 9.2 acres per 1,000 residents for cities of a comparable population.¹ According to the Trust for Public Land's ParkServe mapping tool, 91% of Ann Arbor residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park.² The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)'s 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review indicates a national median of one park for every 2,411 residents. The City of Ann Arbor has one park for approximately every 755 residents – three times the national median.
- ▶ Given the large quantity of public owned land and aging facilities, maintenance and capital improvements are a challenge for existing parks and protected natural features. Over the next 30 years, the Parks Department has identified \$19M in park system ADA barriers that need to be addressed and \$200M+ in capital assets that have an expected end of life within the 30 year time span. The parks millage supports between \$2-2.5M annually for capital projects, which over 30 years amounts to between \$60-75M compared to the \$219M+ in identified capital improvements needed.
- ▶ Equitable access to parks and recreational spaces is an important part of the city's land use planning and considerations for acquisition and capital improvements. As the city grows, it will be an important consideration for new development.
- ▶ The PROS Plan has been retained as a part of this planning process and is updated every five years with detailed park data, trends, and strategies. As such, land use planning and decision-making that relates to parks or recreation will consult the PROS Plan, as amended, to stay consistent and supportive of its goals.

¹ Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan 2023-2027 (2023)
² Trust for Public Land ParkServe

Existing City Programs

Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage

Also known as the Greenbelt Millage, this was approved in 2003 and is a 30-year, 0.5 mil tax levy to provide funds for the preservation and protection of open space, natural habitats, agricultural lands, and the city's source waters outside of city limits, and the purchase of parkland within city limits.

Parks Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage

Ann Arbor voters renewed the 2025-2044 Parks Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage in November 2024 for the next 20 years. The annual millage funds support city park maintenance activities and city park capital (larger-scale) improvements.

Housing & Neighborhoods

Rationale

Key Considerations:

Retail amenities:

- ▶ Many neighborhoods lack access to walkable retail and in those that have access, it is often dangerous or unpleasant to walk, as shown in the map on page 59.
- ▶ To support the neighborhood amenities residents want, greater density is needed. Increasing the number of people living in an area helps sustain nearby businesses and essential services, while also making active and public transportation more viable and accessible. (See Economy and Opportunity – Goal 5 for more details.)

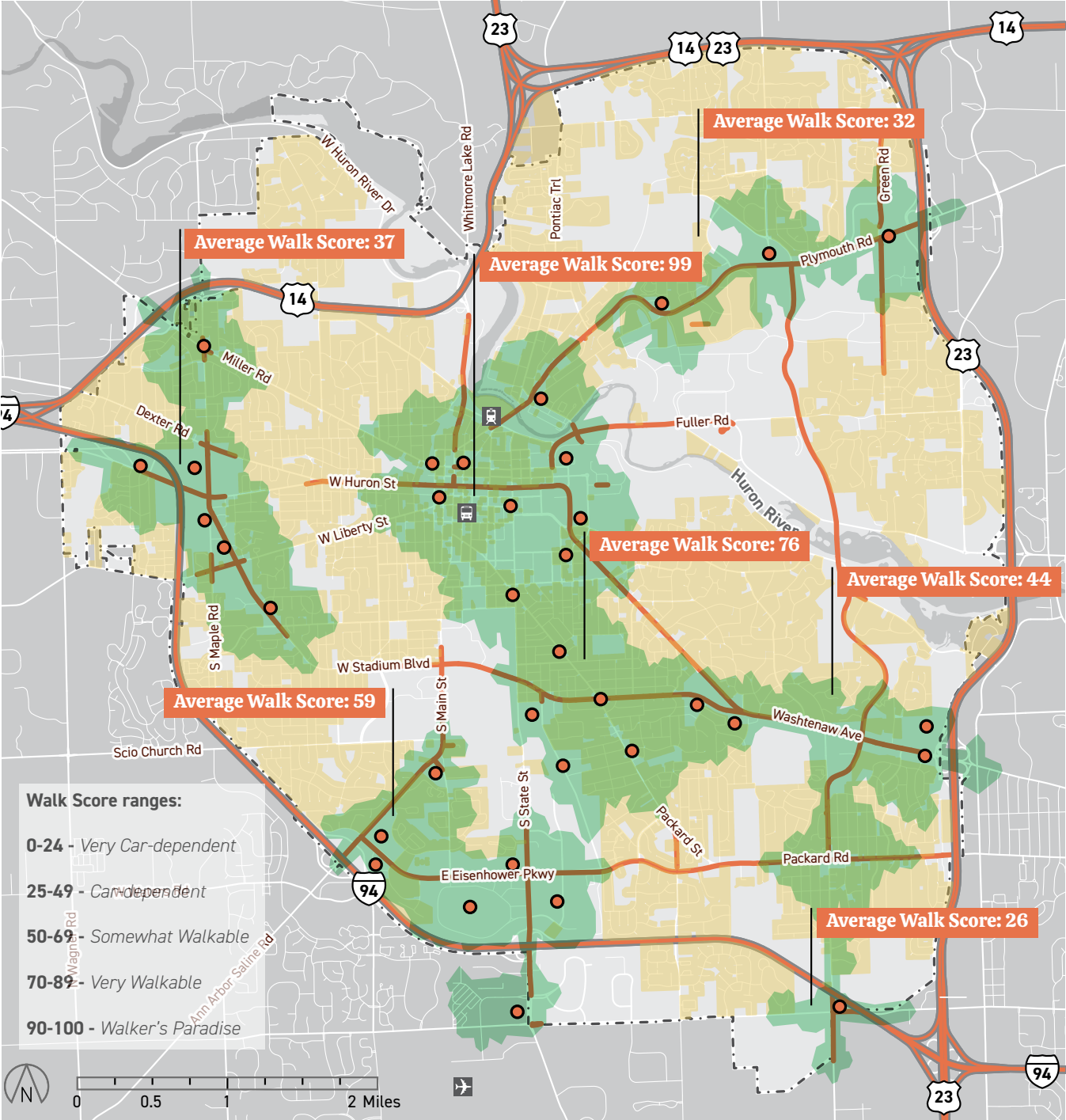
Did You Know?

Complete Neighborhoods

Ann Arbor's Moving Together Towards Vision Zero transportation plan defines "complete communities" (20 minute neighborhoods) as:

"A 20-minute neighborhood is a place where residents can meet most of their daily, nonwork needs (like shopping, groceries, parks, and schools) within a safe, convenient 20-minute walk... By bringing people and the destinations they need to reach closer together, 20-minute neighborhoods offer residents a host of benefits: improved access, more opportunities for physical activity, lower transportation costs, and reduced emissions and air pollution. Ann Arbor residents who live in neighborhoods with poor access to daily essentials spend 8% more on household transportation costs and emit 15% more carbon dioxide each year. 20-minute neighborhoods also enable older adults to age in place, so that losing access to a vehicle does not result in losing independence."

The Trust for Public Land, National Recreation and Park Association, Urban Land Institute, and Mayor's Institute on City Design utilize a 10-minute standard for park access. For the purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, a 10-minute walk is used as a more inclusive measurement that accounts for the average distance most people are willing to walk to reach a destination. A 10-minute walk is approximately a half-mile for an able-bodied person.



Map
Access to Commercial
Amenities & Walk Score

source: Walk Score, City of Ann Arbor GIS

WALKSCORE: Walk Score is commonly used as a high-level indicator of access to daily needs, reflecting proximity to amenities such as retail, services, parks, and schools. Please see the Glossary of Terms on Page 167 for more detail.

- Major walking barriers (thoroughfares of at least four lanes)
- Shopping Center / Major Commercial Node
- 10 Minute Walkshed from Shopping Center/Node
- Zoned Residential Areas

SHOPPING CENTER/NODE DESIGNATION: Shopping centers and major commercial nodes were identified based on key intersections located within city-designated commercial areas, as well as the presence of larger shopping centers.

Goal 01:

Increase the supply and diversify the types of housing for households of different sizes, abilities, and income levels

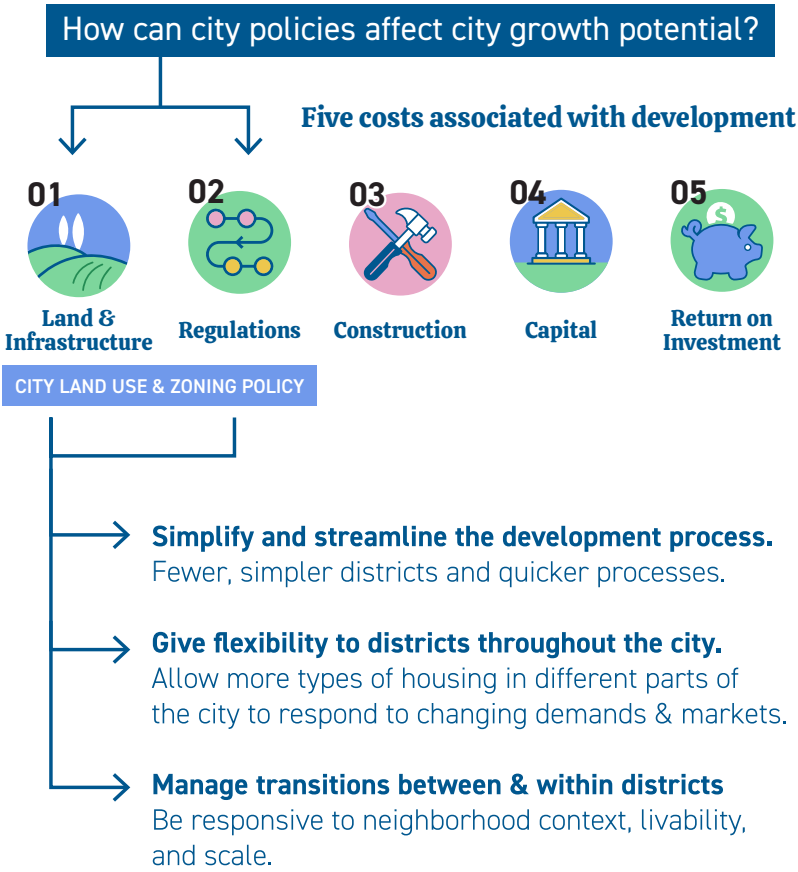
Strategies:

1.1 Change dimensional standards to allow for more density in all residential districts and encourage denser multi-family housing in places with public infrastructure

Growth should be directed into places where it can benefit from other public investments, particularly in transit and other multimodal facilities, sewer and water capacity, and park space. To fulfill City Council's directive to add new homes in single-family zoned areas, the city should allow more housing units by right and reduce minimum lot size requirements across all residential districts. Duplexes and triplexes will be permitted citywide, and greater density will be allowed when consistent with the surroundings.

Dimensional standards can be used to ensure that new development remains low-rise and consistent with the existing neighborhood scale. Medium and high density multi-family transit-oriented development can be encouraged along transit corridors and hubs, and in proximity to community amenities and assets to encourage walkable, mixed-use development. The city will need to review and rewrite the zoning code and also streamline the development review process to support affordability goals and more easily develop "missing middle" housing, whose production has declined over the past decade. One way to do this is to encourage alternative approaches to land use such as community land trusts.

Historic district boundaries and requirements within them will continue to follow the standards and guidelines established by the Historic District Commission (HDC). The current multi-unit residences and mixed-use developments within the existing historic districts provide evidence of their compatibility within those districts. The city should support opportunities for increased missing-middle housing density within existing historic districts when and where appropriate, consistent with the goal of increasing such density throughout the city, and consistent with HDC standards and guidelines for modifications to existing structures and the development of new structures within historic districts.



Duplex housing on Baldwin Avenue that fits into the context of the Burns Park neighborhood.

source: Interface Studio

Did You Know?

Zoning Reform Toolkit
Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA)
15 Tools to Expand Housing Choice & Supply
(**BOLD** indicates a tool Ann Arbor already uses)

- Zoning Districts**
- > Collapse Zone Districts
 - > **Rezone for Mixed-Use / Multifamily in Commercial Districts**
 - > **Expand Allowable Uses**
 - > **Performance Standards for Uses**

- Form and Context**
- > Reduce Minimum Lot Width and Area
 - > **Reduce or Eliminate Minimum Dwelling Unit Size**
 - > **Reduce or Eliminate Minimum Parking Requirements**
 - > Missing Middle Housing (Including ADUs)
 - > **Density / Height Bonuses**

- Processes**
- > **Eliminate or Reduce Elected Body Approval**
 - > **Expand Administrative Review**
 - > Pre-approved Plans
 - > More Flexible Approach to Nonconformities
 - > **Police Power Ordinances for Nuisance**

1.2

Diversify the types of housing through a “missing middle” housing strategy and universal design

Ann Arbor’s housing stock is mainly composed of single family homes and multifamily apartment and condo buildings. The “missing” housing type is “middle” or medium-density housing such as duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and cottage court housing. These types of housing fit well into existing neighborhoods and provide density that helps to support walkability, local-serving retail and transit.

To support gradual and affordable infill, especially in Residential areas, future zoning implementation should explore expedited permitting pathways for small-scale multifamily housing—especially duplexes and triplexes. Removing unnecessary barriers to these housing types can help ensure that new homes are added steadily, without delay or disproportionate administrative burden. Additionally, as part of aligning zoning with land use categories, existing height exceptions in the Unified Development Code (UDC) should be reviewed and reconsidered for removal in the Residential category, where 3-story form is intended to be the general maximum. The applicability of height bonuses—such as those tied to sustainability incentives—should be carefully evaluated during the zoning phase, and may be more appropriately confined to designated Hub and Transition areas. However, zoning reform alone is insufficient to spur the development of “missing middle” housing;

Did You Know?

“Missing Middle” Housing

“Missing middle” is a term to describe the housing types that are found less often in communities, located in the middle of the housing types spectrum. Prior to zoning that separated residential districts into single-unit from multi-unit, more smaller scale attached units like duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, and townhouses were integrated into neighborhoods. Many municipalities and housing developers are more familiar with single-unit houses and apartment buildings, but are reclaiming that “missing” part of the housing type spectrum to help fill the demand for housing.

Universal Design

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.

Universal Design Standards are based on the following principles: (1) Equitable, (2) Flexible, (3) Simple/Intuitive, (4) Communicative, (5) Hazard Minimizing, (6) Low Physical Effort, (7) Size and Space for Approach/Use



in addition to streamlining the development review process, the city needs to be willing to use available financial and other incentives to stimulate this type of construction, and to support the efforts of nonprofit housing developers (e.g. mission-based affordable housing, land trusts, etc.).

Another important outcome of providing diverse housing types is to support independent living for residents of all ages and abilities. Universal design for accessibility and “missing middle” housing supports residents of all ages and abilities over their lifetime, allowing for families to grow and also for aging in place and downsizing.

1.3

Support and preserve existing subsidized income-eligible housing and non-subsidized housing and make it more sustainable

Affordability remains a top concern for community members, with preserving and expanding subsidized income-eligible affordable housing identified as a major priority. Existing income-eligible subsidized units are a critical resource to be protected, not only to maintain housing affordability for residents, but also to support sustainability by preserving embodied carbon in existing buildings.

To address both affordability and environmental goals, the city should explore innovative strategies to reduce the cost of building permits as well as grants and other incentives that assist low- and moderate-income homeowners and housing developers with the costs of maintenance and repair. The Office of Sustainability and Innovation (OSI) manages a home energy rebate program where at least half of sustainability-related rebates go to income qualified households. These programs can also promote the adoption of sustainable building practices, which can lead to long-term savings through improved energy efficiency, lower utility bills, and reduced maintenance needs over time. As an example, Ann Arbor Housing Commission (AAHC) and OSI have collaborated to secure funding to bring geothermal to a new housing site at Catherine Street, solar to nearly a dozen AAHC sites, and to make energy efficiency improvements in multiple units – demonstrating that affordable housing and sustainability can work seamlessly together.

1.4

Prioritize and expedite process for subsidized affordable housing development for income-eligible residents across the city

Building more subsidized, income-eligible affordable housing will require coordinated efforts across financing, site selection, and multiple partners. To advance equitable development and address the harms of past policies, the city is already enhancing its Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) scoring potential by supporting affordable housing in areas well served by transit, public assets such as parks, libraries, and schools, and essential commercial amenities like grocery stores. Additional strategies the city can pursue to expand subsidized, income-eligible affordable housing include leveraging publicly owned land, preserving naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH), relaxing development standards, offsetting certain sustainability requirements, and waiving or reducing development fees.

1.5

Coordinate housing implementation strategy across local and regional partners

Meeting the community’s housing needs extends beyond the city’s authority and will require strong coordination with local and regional partners to address both key priorities and implementation barriers, including the prevention and reduction of homelessness. While zoning plays a role, other factors—such as development economics, state and local building codes, and the capacity of developers and construction trades—also shape outcomes. At the local level, the city should regularly track housing and student population goals in relation to University of Michigan enrollment and employment trends, as well as indicators related to housing stability and homelessness. Partnerships with community land trusts, co-operatives, and other non-profit mission-driven housing providers can further expand housing options and support housing stability for vulnerable populations. Regionally, workforce development in the skilled trades will be essential to expanding construction capacity (see Economy & Opportunity Strategy 7.3 for details on contractor development programs).

Goal 02:

Support all residents in accessing quality housing and mitigate displacement

Strategies:

2.1 Provide supports for low- and moderate-income residents to mitigate displacement

As more investment occurs in the city, vulnerable residents must be protected to ensure they are not displaced. The city should prioritize keeping residents in their homes and helping them age in place through home repair and retrofit programs for low- to moderate-income residents and work with the county on eviction prevention and early intervention programs such as emergency rental assistance. The city can also use an education first approach that connects residents with available programs to help address code violations and code use enforcement to help identify at-risk properties and bad actor landlords and prevent displacement and poor health outcomes due to property condition.

Additionally, the city can target home and building owners for engagement with the Sustainable Energy Utility and other energy programs to reduce operational costs for residents. Finally, the city should continue to increase awareness and accessibility of income-eligible affordable housing and homeownership support programs and work with non-profits and the county to support unhoused residents with connections to housing and social services to increase housing security.

2.2 Advocate for county- and state-level policy and legislation

Protecting residents and mitigating displacement require coordination and advocacy at the local, county, and state level, and is a key component of the City Council directive to repair past policies and regulations that resulted in exclusion of people based on race, income or other inequities. The city can adopt a suite of anti-displacement strategies (described below), but implementation will also necessitate advocating for county- and state-level action.

Anti-displacement policy solutions address housing supply and renter protections and can be viewed broadly as:

- **Neighborhood stabilization** to keep residents in their homes through tenant opportunity to purchase and renter protections (Housing and Neighborhoods Strategy 2.1)
- **Production** to increase all housing (market-rate as well as subsidized income-eligible affordable) through zoning changes (Housing and Neighborhoods Strategy 1.1) and funding (Housing and Neighborhoods Strategy 1.4)
- **Preservation** to maintain current subsidized and unsubsidized affordable housing (Housing and Neighborhoods Strategy 1.3)

Existing Programs

Income-Eligible Affordable Housing and Homeownership:
Individual programs change, however the funding sources of local programs include:

- *Ann Arbor Affordable Housing Millage*
- *Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development*
- *Michigan State Housing Development Authority*
- *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*
- *Michigan Economic Development Corporation*
- *Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)*
- *Philanthropic Entities*

Goal 03:

Provide high-quality, accessible parks, trails, and recreation areas

Strategies:

3.1 Continue to maintain high-quality parks and recreation areas and align with land use patterns

The city has a high ratio of parks per resident and most residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is an essential neighborhood amenity. Nevertheless, not all parks are equal with regard to size and amenities, and park access is not evenly distributed across the city. Some of the densest areas of the city, such as downtown, have limited park and recreational space, highlighting the need to strengthen activity hubs and connections along the Huron River Corridor as both a downtown asset and a citywide destination. Recent investments, such as the Border to Border Trail tunnel and the proposed Treeline Trail, are important steps toward improving these connections.

From a regional perspective, density can be seen as a tool for ecological and recreation preservation. Building more densely within a city helps to protect natural open spaces in the region that would otherwise be developed through sprawl.

As the city continues to grow, it will be essential to align parks and recreation planning with evolving land use patterns. Maintenance and capital improvements also present a challenge due to the large amount of publicly owned land and the aging condition of many facilities. The city will need to prioritize quality of amenities and maintenance over quantity. This may include identifying and redistributing land and facilities to better serve neighborhoods, recognizing that the city must follow proper procedures for acquiring and reallocating parklands, and that – by city charter – it cannot sell public parklands without a majority vote of its citizens.¹ Utilizing recreation trends should be considered when evaluating the quality, equity, and ecological benefit of new or existing park spaces.

¹ pp. 70-79 of the City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS) 2023-2027.

3.2 Focus on quality, equity, and ecological benefit in the development of new open space

As the city grows, it will also need to ensure open space can meet the needs of new residents, particularly in higher density areas that do not currently have park space. While larger parks or natural areas may not be feasible in areas identified for growth, such as downtown and transit corridors, reimagining the definition of parks and open spaces to include non-traditional spaces and public-private partnerships can help expand the opportunities to provide open space.

New open space can be created through targeted acquisition as well as through private development. The city should consider recreation trends, high priority natural features, and adjacencies to existing open space, parks, and neighborhood connections in the targeted acquisition of new open space and the creation of greenways [see also Infrastructure and Services 10.1]. For new development, the city should incentivize quality, rather than quantity, in open space requirements within the zoning code to encourage private development, maintenance, and management of high quality open space that is publicly accessible.

Plans To Retain

This plan does not replace the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan and the Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan. As regular updates are made to those plans, there should be coordination with strategies of this plan to ensure alignment.

Parks and Recreation Open Space PROS Plan:
The Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS) is the city's vision for parks and recreation in Ann Arbor and is officially part of the City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan. The PROS Plan provides an overview of the park system, including a physical description of the city, administrative structure and budget information, and a detailed inventory of existing parks, facilities, and programs. It identifies parks and recreation needs and deficiencies, proposes major capital park projects for existing and new parks, and develops goals and objectives for future planning guided by public input. The plan is updated every 5 years, as required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to be eligible for grants.

Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan:
The 2017 Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan is a planned urban trail through the heart of Ann Arbor that aims to connect people and places across Ann Arbor. The Treeline plans to connect city-owned properties, neighborhoods, and downtown businesses while linking to the Huron River and the regional Border-to-Border trail (B2B Trail). The project extent connects to the B2B Trail along the Huron River at the north end of the study area and connects to the South State Street and Stimson Street intersection on the south end.

Goal 04:

Encourage walkable, connected neighborhoods with access to basic needs and amenities

Strategies:

4.1 Leverage public and institutional land to accommodate growth in walkable neighborhoods and historically underinvested neighborhoods

The city has an opportunity to repurpose underutilized public and institutional lands, such as parking lots, underused school and institutional grounds, and open areas that require maintenance but that provide little ecological benefit, to support opportunities to provide complete, walkable neighborhoods that are well-served by transit and high-quality community amenities. To do so, the city should evaluate its public lands in alignment with land use priorities and explore the repurposing of such underutilized spaces. This evaluation should explore alternative uses such as housing development as well as the public assets needed to serve a growing population, including city services, public safety facilities, libraries, and schools.

4.2 Promote “complete neighborhoods” with neighborhood-level retail and service hubs

While the plan identifies transit corridors and hubs as areas of the city that have the most opportunity for dense mixed-use development, all neighborhoods can move toward “complete neighborhoods” that are able to meet basic needs without a car. This will entail allowing for small-scale commercial space in residential areas and improved mobility options for neighborhoods where commercial amenities are unlikely.



Argus Farm Stop is an example of neighborhood serving commercial.

source: Argus Farm Stop

Did You Know?

Neighborhood Commercial

To develop a thoughtful and community-responsive policy for integrating small-scale commercial uses into residential areas, it is important to begin with a clear set of questions that identify where these uses belong, what types are appropriate, and how they can align with neighborhood priorities. Some questions to consider:

- ▶ What types of small-scale commercial uses are appropriate within residential areas, and how can they support neighborhood vitality without disrupting the quality and livability of the neighborhood?
- ▶ Where within residential areas are commercial uses most suitable?
- ▶ How can use restrictions be shaped to reflect the desires and needs of the surrounding community?
- ▶ What safeguards or design standards are necessary to ensure compatibility between commercial activity and nearby homes?
- ▶ How can equity be built into the process to ensure access for local entrepreneurs and underserved neighborhoods?
- ▶ What are the loading, delivery, lighting, and operational needs of these businesses, and how can they be managed to minimize neighborhood disruption?

Economy and Opportunity

The goals in this chapter include:

- Goal 5:** Diversify the economy to grow the non-residential tax base.
- Goal 6:** Create and enhance walkable mixed-use hubs that appeal to a broad range of residents, employers, and employees.
- Goal 7:** Support entrepreneurs across different industries to launch, scale, and mature in the city.

These goals make Ann Arbor more:



Affordable

by preserving affordable commercial space and diversifying the tax base



Equitable

by improving access to economic opportunity across the city with a focus on disadvantaged groups



Sustainable

by bringing people closer to services and jobs in mixed use centers, enabling better transportation options, and supporting a circular economy to reduce the city's carbon footprint



Dynamic

by diversifying the economy and tax base, supporting new businesses, and creating great places

Rationale

What We've Heard:

- ▶ There is support for significant new development within the downtown area, as well as for its expansion. Community members also broadly support aligning growth with transit to create walkable, mixed-use communities. Establishing new activity centers along transit corridors—with housing, offices, retail, and entertainment—would bring amenities closer to more parts of the city.
- ▶ Residents value the city's small businesses and the services they provide. However, there is concern about business displacement, particularly with ongoing downtown development and the introduction of new mixed-use areas. Many community members want growth to be accompanied by anti-displacement efforts that support legacy businesses, preserve affordable commercial spaces, and ensure a continued mix of businesses that serve a range of incomes. There is particular concern for protecting local minority- and immigrant-owned storefronts. These efforts are seen as essential to maintaining a city that is both affordable and equitable.
- ▶ Residents would like to see more walkable and accessible neighborhood-serving retail amenities, particularly small-scale mom and pop businesses, so they don't have to rely on driving for everyday needs.
- ▶ The influence of the University of Michigan (U-M) on the city's housing market and tax base is a recurring theme, with concern centered on its expansion and its impact on affordability for residents and small businesses. More diversity in economic opportunities and increasing the commercial tax base is important.

Key Considerations:

Economic diversification

- ▶ The Ann Arbor region is the 4th most economically dependent on anchor institutions in the country, more than 3 times the national average.¹
- ▶ Ann Arbor is already one of the highest taxed cities in the state and overly dependent on the residential tax base.²
- ▶ 42% of the parcel area in the city is tax exempt and taxable land continues to shrink as U-M acquires more taxable property, increasing the tax burden on the residential tax base further.³
- ▶ The city's economic development strategy, A New Approach to Economic Development, supports economic growth, expansion of the tax base and revenue, and a strategic land acquisition strategy.

Top Employers in Ann Arbor Area

sources:
U-M Faculty & Staff Numbers (Ann Arbor Campus & Hospital):
University of Michigan Faculty and Staff Headcount Summary

Non U-M Employee Counts:
City of Ann Arbor Annual Comprehensive Financial Report,
Ann Arbor Spark 2023

Principal Employers - 2023	Employees
University of Michigan Faculty & Staff	31,987
University of Michigan Medicine	21,475
Trinity Health System	5,900
Veterans Administration	3,500
Ann Arbor Public Schools	2,500
Integrated Health Associates	1,600
Toyota	1,400
Washtenaw County Government	1,200
Domino's Pizza	1,100
Thompson-Reuters	1,100
City of Ann Arbor	700

¹ *Economic Reliance on Anchor Institutions*
by Patrick T. Harker, Deborah Diamond, Theresa Dunne
& Sisi Zhang, 14 May 2024, Federal Reserve Bank
of Philadelphia (<https://www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/workforce-and-economic-development/economic-reliance-on-anchor-institutions>)

² *SmartAsset Second Annual Study - U.S.*
Census Bureau for 2023, 2023 CAFR, Ann Arbor Financial
Disclosure Form.

³ *City of Ann Arbor Assessor's Office Data.*

Key Considerations:

Opportunities for new companies with U-M investment

- ▶ U-M has adopted a new approach with an increased emphasis on creating companies versus traditional licensing and startup launch programs. With MCity, the university's mobility research and development hub, and the growth of biomedical research, U-M has begun investing in its technology changing the trajectory of local company formation. Since 2021, U-M has been averaging 23 startups per year. In 2024, 28 startups launched and \$514m in venture capital raised.
- ▶ Without available space within the city, these emerging companies may be forced to relocate to nearby townships or even outside the county to remain in the region. Of the 28 startups launched in 2024, only 10 have located in Ann Arbor, 7 have moved elsewhere in Michigan, and 11 have left the state.¹ Startups that succeed will need space outside of university labs and incubators to scale up. Inexpensive space is critical to manage the "burn rate," or the rate at which a company burns through its cash on hand, of venture capital.

University of Michigan Funding:

source: University of Michigan

- ▶ *2016 - Biomedical Venture Fund launched*
- ▶ *2019 - Accelerate Blue Fund (internal venture capital fund for UM startups) launched*
- ▶ *2021 - Climate Venture Fund launched*
- ▶ *2024 - Michigan University Innovation Capital Fund (pre-seed venture capital fund) launched and Accelerate Blue Foundry program launched*

¹ *University of Michigan, <https://innovationpartnerships.umich.edu/portfolio/>, NP Analysis of U-M data plus individual company research.*

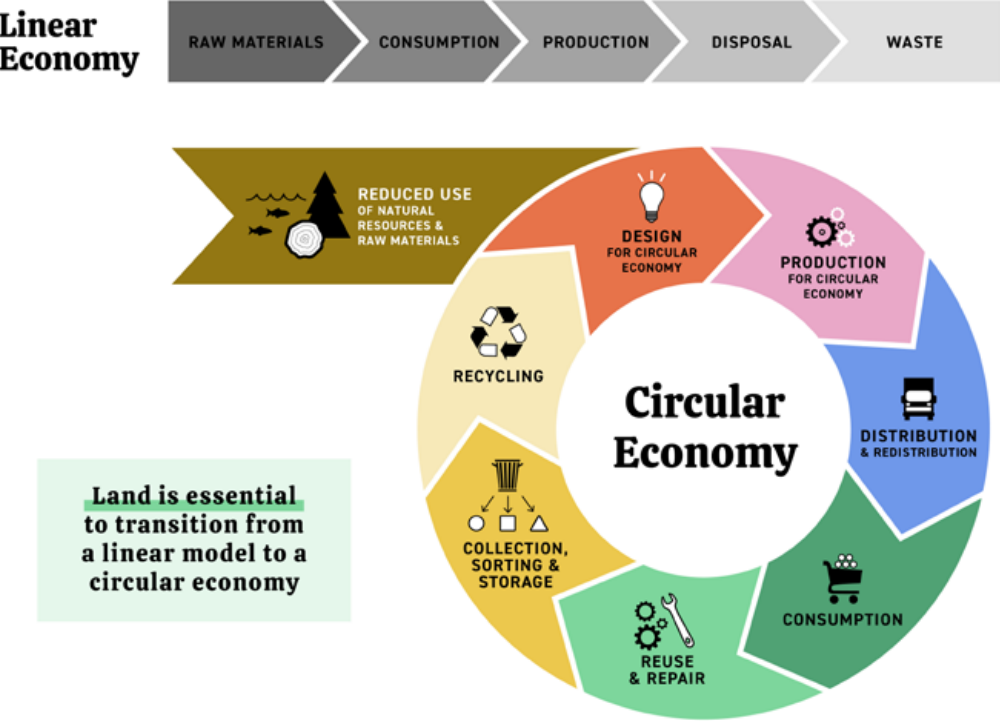
Economy & Opportunity

Rationale

Job diversity, equity, and sustainability

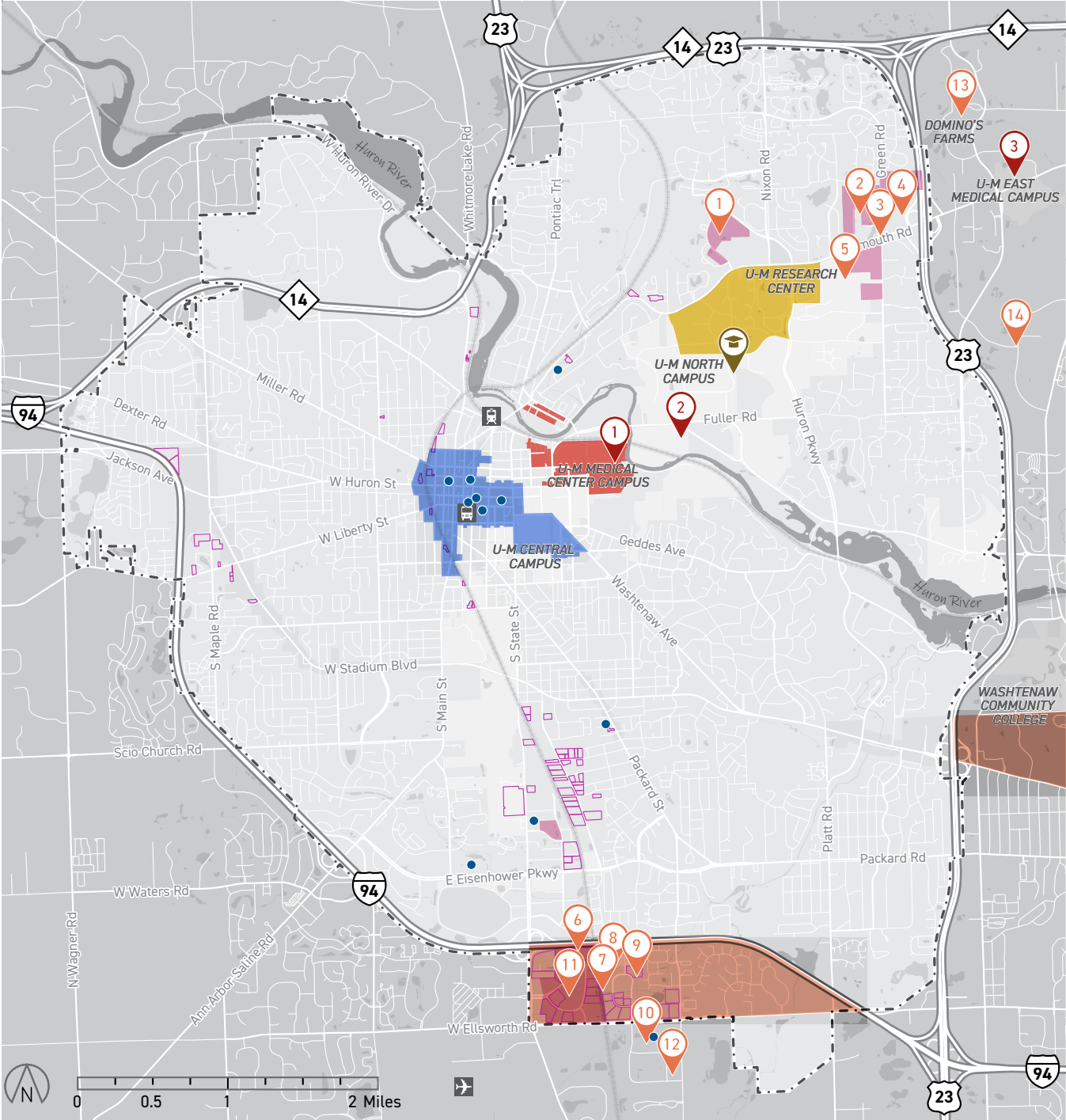
- Jobs in manufacturing, construction, warehousing, industrial trades, and repair or circular economy sectors typically use industrial-type spaces, offer higher wages, and do not require advanced degrees. These industries also provide significant employment opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) workers.²
- A²ZERO calls for a circular economy which entails responsible resource use, recycling, and repair to give goods and resources a new life or extend the useful life of an item, including materials repair, recycling, and redistribution.
- There are relatively few places in Ann Arbor to locate any substantial jobs particularly those that require certain types of locations and facilities as very little of the land is zoned for industrial use.
- The incentive zones shown on the map on page 75 include the state-designated **SmartZone**, which provides capital to support the commercialization of research products developed at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University, as well as the growth of private high-tech enterprises that might otherwise be delayed or located outside the SmartZone area. Also shown are the federally designated **Opportunity Zones**, which offer preferential IRS tax treatment to encourage private and public investment in underserved communities, as defined by census tracts.

2 Appendix - Economic Development, page 74



Whereas a linear economy utilizes raw materials and ends in waste, a circular economy is an economic system that generates value by reclaiming and reusing material resources.

For more information about the circular economy, see the A²ZERO [Circular Economy Page](#)



source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, Washtenaw County GIS, University of Michigan Campus Plan 2050, DDA, Assessor's Office

Economy & Opportunity

Rationale

Key Considerations:

Retail characteristics

- ▶ Ann Arbor is a highly desirable market for both small, locally owned businesses and national retailers. These businesses are woven throughout neighborhoods, providing essential goods, services, and gathering spaces.
- ▶ Ann Arbor’s retail serves the region and are major contributors to the tax base. Visitors and residents originating outside of Ann Arbor contribute to the viability of retail space. Arborland and Briarwood are among the city’s major taxpayers.¹
- ▶ However, small businesses are increasingly at risk as neighborhood shopping centers are redeveloped to support the city’s housing production goals—often without intentional strategies to preserve commercial space or retain existing tenants.
- ▶ Retail space vacancy rates are low - 3.9% as of Q2 2023 - resulting in significant rental rate growth of 39.6% between 2013 and 2023.² This tight market creates high barriers to entry for entrepreneurs seeking brick-and-mortar locations, limiting opportunities for new businesses to establish themselves.

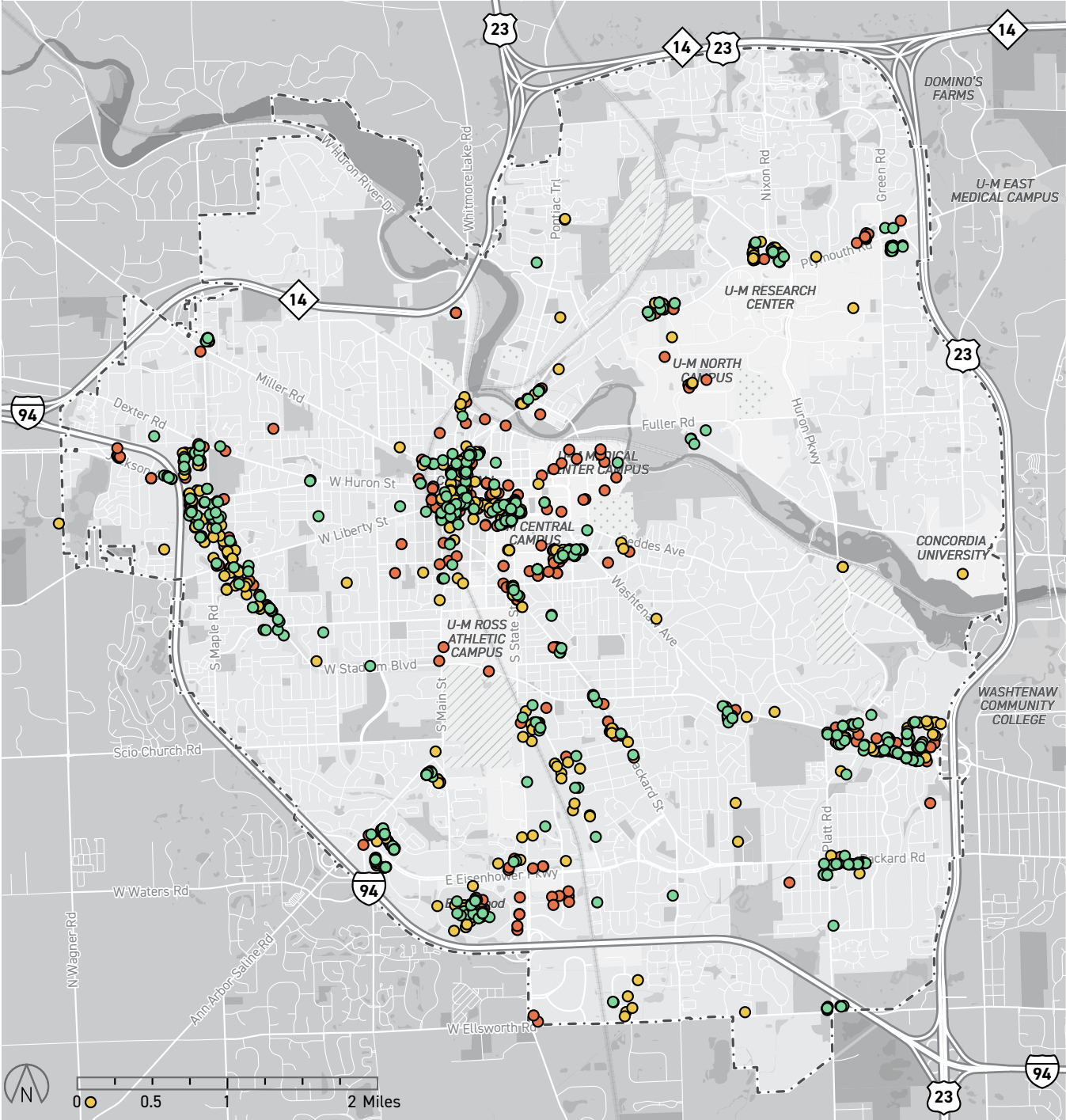
¹ City 2023 Bond Disclosure sourced from EMMA
² Costar, 2023

Retail types

- ▶ Neighborhood Goods and Services: This category includes establishments that heavily depend on the patronage of residents. Business types include: grocery stores, drugstores, florists, bakeries, specialty food stores, dry cleaner/laundromats, hair and nail salons, printers, pet salons, machine repair shop, and similar uses.
- ▶ Food and Beverage: This category includes establishments that serve food and/or alcohol consumed on-premises, serving a range of customers and trip purposes. Business types include: sit-down restaurants, cafes, bars, coffee shops, sandwich shops, ice cream shops, quick-bite establishments, fast-food restaurants, and similar uses.
- ▶ General Merchandise: Customers are often comparison shoppers in this category, seeking best quality, price, or overall value to meet their need. Business types include: clothing stores, furniture stores, bookstores, jewelry stores, gift boutiques, pet stores, sporting goods stores, home goods stores, craft stores, antique shops, electronics stores, auto parts stores, and similar uses.

Supporting new retail

- ▶ Additional residential development helps to sustainably offer new retail in the city. On average, each resident supports 46 sq.ft. of retail space. The following outlines the number of households required to support a business in each of the following categories and based on 100% capture of average expenditures:
 - Grocery store - typical format of 40,000 sq.ft.: 3,065 households / small format of 10,000 sq.ft.: 766 households
 - Hardware store - typical format of 10,000 sq.ft.: 4,641 households / small format of 5,000 sq.ft.: 2,320 households
 - Restaurant of 3,500 sq.ft.: 616 households



Map
Existing Retail

- Food & Beverage (646 businesses)
- General Merchandise (493 businesses)
- Neighborhood Goods & Services (373 businesses)

source: Google, &Access, June 2023

Goal 05:

Diversify the economy to grow the non-residential tax base

Strategies:

5.1

Secure a share of the companies that grow out of universities

In order to achieve the goals of the city's economic development strategy to attract and grow businesses and diversify the economy and tax base, successful commercialization of university-originated technology, inventions, and innovations will be needed. For example, the University of Michigan's shift in approach to creating companies will create more opportunities for start-ups and capturing a share of these start-ups in Ann Arbor will be important. In 2024, 28 start-ups launched, of which only 10 have located in Ann Arbor.¹ Helping these start-ups succeed in Ann Arbor and moving them out of university labs and incubators will need a combination of partnerships, commercial space, and incentive models.

¹ University of Michigan, <https://innovationpartnerships.umich.edu/portfolio/>, NP Analysis of U-M data plus individual company research.

5.2

Encourage a wide-range of businesses by offering flexibility in land use and regulations in key locations

Land is a necessary component for supporting a diverse range of businesses, especially those with larger footprints or hybrid operations. For example, advancing the city's A²ZERO circular economy goals may require industrial-scale facilities for activities such as recycling and repair, returnable container washing, or storage for thrift stores. Hybrid businesses, responding to a changing retail landscape, may sell consumer products while also requiring space for distribution or simple manufacturing. Another example is coffee shops that incorporate co-working, event, or meeting spaces. With greater land use flexibility, there is more potential to integrate a variety of jobs into the local economy, many of which do not require an advanced degree.

Because residential uses will be allowed near higher-intensity uses, nuisance regulations should be reviewed to reduce potential conflicts. At the same time, flexibility for hybrid businesses and industrial facilities should remain a priority. When well-coordinated, this type of land use flexibility can support sustainability initiatives and create jobs across a wide range of skill levels.



Examples of hybrid businesses that combine consumer products with facility uses such as distribution, simple manufacturing, showroom/retail in one location.

image sources: (top) William Case, (middle) Mike Persico, (bottom) Treeline Coffee Roasters

Goal 06:

Create and enhance walkable mixed-use hubs that appeal to a broad range of residents, employers, and employees.

Strategies:

6.1 Strengthen downtown as the economic, cultural, and civic heart of the community

While the goal is to create walkable, mixed-use hubs throughout the city, downtown has a specific role to play as it is already established with existing public assets, infrastructure, and transit investment, as well as organizational and implementation support in the form of the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority. To capitalize on these significant advantages, the city should expand the downtown district for greater density and intensity of uses, accompanied by investment in associated infrastructure and services to support additional people, making downtown more welcoming, affordable, and inviting for all people. This includes broadening the range of activities and amenities, enhancing the pedestrian environment to connect key destinations, applying curb management strategies to support the needs of competing users, and ensuring city services can meet the increase in demand.

Plan Alignment

Downtown Development Authority Development Plan:
Ann Arbor’s Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is updating its strategic plan and considering the first expansion of its boundary since the 1980s. This update is being closely coordinated with the Future Land Use Map to ensure alignment. Expanding the DDA boundary reflects both current development patterns and community feedback gathered during this planning process, particularly around Downtown. It aims to better represent already-approved developments and support a cohesive urban framework.

6.2 Promote the expeditious redevelopment of car-oriented shopping centers to create more downtown-like environments, with a greater mix of uses and improved walkability.

Redeveloping car-oriented shopping centers like Briarwood presents an opportunity to create more mixed-use hubs and add significant housing to the city. However, unlike downtown, these areas do not yet have the necessary infrastructure to support higher density development. The city will need to upgrade infrastructure and city services to support new uses and density, and encourage TheRide to align transit improvements. Additionally, these types of shopping centers are difficult to redevelop if they are not already vacant. Ann Arbor’s shopping centers have high occupancy rates with well-loved businesses, some of which have long leases which would need to be bought out for redevelopment to occur. Given the complexity of such redevelopment projects, the city will need to consider a combination of regulatory tools and potential incentives to encourage redevelopment, with a goal of transitioning these shopping centers into walkable, mixed use hubs with flexibility to support existing small businesses.

Goal 07:

Support entrepreneurs across different industries to launch, scale, and mature in the city

Strategies:

7.1 Encourage a variety of commercial and industrial spaces in the city to provide affordable opportunities for local entrepreneurs

One of the challenges Ann Arbor faces as it grows is the loss of affordable space for small businesses whether they are retail entrepreneurs or tech-based businesses outgrowing incubators. The city should explore various strategies and programs, including incentives, to help businesses start, grow, and stay in Ann Arbor. To do so, the city should work with its partners to identify and prioritize space for preservation and affordable “growth space” in key areas, such as downtown, neighborhood commercial districts, publicly owned assets, and underutilized industrial zones. In residential areas, the city should also explore Accessory Commercial Uses (ACUs) as a long-term strategy to address affordability challenges while enabling small-scale entrepreneurship close to home.

7.2 Support local entrepreneurs through training, financing, and technical assistance programs

Fledgling businesses benefit from additional support to help manage risk and uncertainty, particularly in today’s rapidly changing retail landscape, where margins are thin and resources limited. This need is even greater in the face of potential redevelopment and displacement as Ann Arbor grows. The city can help fill capacity gaps and provide greater stability through a range of measures. These may include reducing regulatory barriers, expanding marketing programs such as the A²ZERO Green Business Challenge, offering credit enhancement and financing options for new commercial tenants, and supporting master leasing (in which a nonprofit, service provider, or government agency leases space from a property owner and then subleases to smaller tenants). The city can also promote model lease frameworks that increase transparency in rent rates and rent increases, while requiring relocation assistance in cases of substantial rate hikes.

7.3 Support workforce capacity building and clear connection between development and emerging job opportunities

The recommendations of this plan to increase development, create new businesses, and support emerging tech opportunities lend themselves to new job opportunities for a range of skillsets. To meet this opportunity, the work force must be ready. The city can help ensure the skilled trades are able to meet the coming development demand by working with county and institutional partners on training and programming, including in relation to green construction and green jobs, as well as engaging contractors associations and programs. One example is the collaboration with OSI and local IBEW 252 and UA190. Working together, these organizations have created a foundational workforce development strategy to grow local, good paying, family sustaining jobs in sustainability-related industries. Additionally, local educational institutions should be encouraged to provide tech literacy, tech exposure, and skill development training that matches with emerging tech opportunities in the region.

Infrastructure and Services

The goals in this chapter include:

- Goal 8:** Increase community resilience to support disaster preparedness, climate change readiness, and community health and well-being
- Goal 9:** Invest in a mutually-supportive street, transportation, and land use system that prioritizes safe and equitable access
- Goal 10:** Balance development with protection and integration of natural features to foster a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem
- Goal 11:** Promote carbon neutrality through efficient energy and resource use, and ultimately transition to zero carbon sources like renewable energy
- Goal 12:** Plan for and invest in city services and infrastructure that can accommodate expected growth.

These goals make Ann Arbor more:



Affordable

by reducing transportation and energy costs through enabling better transportation options and improving energy efficiency and access to clean energy



Equitable

by investing in and improving access to community health, services, and amenities, and enhancing resilience for everyone



Sustainable

by encouraging efficient land use through compact, dense development to better preserve natural features and enable better transportation options thus supporting A²ZERO goals for reducing the city's carbon footprint, improving resilience of people and place, working toward a circular economy, improving energy efficiency, and transitioning to clean energy



Dynamic

by encouraging complete neighborhoods that are more walkable, creating new mixed use centers for activity, and strengthening community relationships and quality of life

Rationale

What We've Heard:

Resilience and Natural Features:

- The importance of natural features to the city's health, resilience, and identity emerged as a major theme throughout the engagement process. In response to concerns about the instability caused by climate change, the public emphasized that city infrastructure should incorporate systems capable of supporting the community through future stressors.
- Many participants viewed the network of open spaces, parks, tree canopies, and other natural features as essential for resident well-being and community resilience.
- Increasing density by building up rather than building out is seen as necessary to have a greater impact on preserving ecologically beneficial green spaces and also meet larger sustainability goals by creating walkable neighborhoods and reducing car dependency.
- However, many participants expressed anxiety that increased density would lead to loss of habitat, quality open space, landmark trees, and tree canopy.
- The quality of open spaces was often seen as more important than the quantity, with an emphasis on high-quality habitat, such as forests and wetlands.
- When asked about how to balance competing priorities, the top priorities included aligning development with transportation infrastructure, preserving natural features, and greater density of housing.

Infrastructure:

- Some community members expressed concern that additional density in areas of the city would strain city infrastructure or require unrealistic investment, and there is also concern over the high tax burden. Intentionally linking land use changes to transportation and infrastructure investments is preferred over increasing spending and taxes for areas of the city with little existing infrastructure and fewer drivers for growth.

- Improved infrastructure for walking, biking, and transit was a major theme coming from nearly all the engagement activities, with support for prioritizing safe biking and walking over cars to meet plan goals. However, some expressed concern that these changes have made driving more difficult.

Sustainability

- Sustainable building practices, reducing fossil fuel dependence, and transitioning to clean energy emerged as themes throughout the engagement process, although some noted potential conflicts with promoting affordability.
- Residents expressed support for the A²ZERO goal of achieving carbon neutrality, with particular interest in the expanded use of renewable energy.
- Green infrastructure and stormwater solutions were seen as an integral part of the overall city system.
- Waste reduction and recycling, composting programs, and reducing overall waste generation are top of mind for many Ann Arborites.

Infrastructure & Services

Rationale

Key Considerations:

- Resilience and Natural Features
- Ann Arbor is home to significant natural features, including endangered species habitat, floodplains, woodlands, landmark trees, steep slopes, watercourses like the Huron River, and wetlands. Many of these features are already under public ownership.
 - Wetlands offer many benefits including flood control, stormwater storage and release, ground water recharge, and water quality improvement. Their preservation helps to maintain ecological stability, educational opportunities, and quality of life.
 - Climate change is increasing precipitation variability, substantially affecting stormwater management needs, as well as increasing the urban heat island effect.
 - Nature-based solutions can complement traditional infrastructure while providing ecological benefits.
 - The city has robust programs in place to conserve natural features during development and to increase overall tree canopy throughout the city. Under those programs, in some instances, development projects are modified to protect natural features, and in some instances natural features are removed to accommodate site development needs. When the loss of natural features is necessary, that loss is mitigated through site design features and new plantings, and the city's tree canopy overall is being enhanced through the planting of new and mitigation trees.

City Efforts To Protect Natural Features, Underway or Planned

Urban Tree Canopy

- The 10,000 Tree Program, which has surpassed its distribution goal with 11,000 trees planted on private property to date.
- Partnership with the Elizabeth Dean Fund in a collaborative and synergistic fashion for tree planting and tree maintenance
- Provide educational and engagement materials to highlight the importance of urban trees and other natural features to our community members
- Implement a grant-funded program for tree maintenance work on private property within EPA-identified disadvantaged communities to improve tree canopy health and reduce risk of property damage
- Assess current tree canopy and health, prioritize plantings based on canopy cover and equity

Stormwater

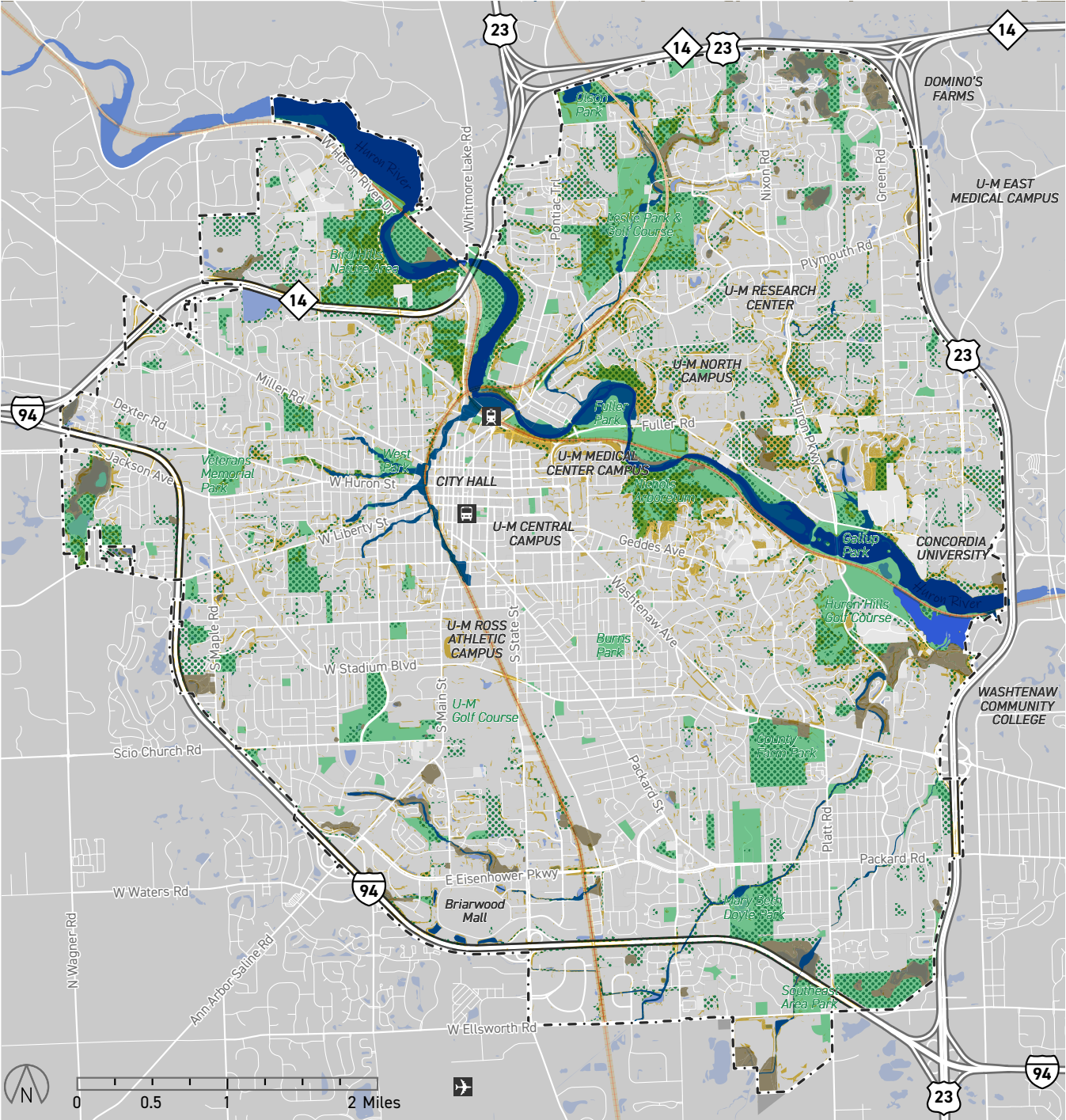
- Maintain the floodplain management overlay district
- Develop Comprehensive Stormwater Plan that incorporates sustainability and equity and enforce stormwater credits
- Promote Washtenaw County's Master Rain Gardener program

Planning & Development

- Enforce existing zoning protection and mitigation regulations for seven natural features
- The Greenbelt Millage, which protects surrounding farmland and the city's water supply

Biodiversity

- Collected 30 years of ecological data within the city's park system to increase biodiversity on public land



Map
Natural Features

- Hydrology (Rivers and Other Water Bodies)
- Floodplain (FEMA Flood Map)
- Park/Open Space
- Woodlands
- Wetlands
- Steep Slopes

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, Washtenaw County GIS, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Infrastructure & Services

Rationale

Key Considerations:

Energy

- ▶ In November 2024, voters approved the creation of the Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU), marking a significant step toward diversifying the city's energy sources and advancing its sustainability and resilience goals. Implementing the SEU will involve identifying suitable sites for solar installations and maximizing rooftop solar potential in new development projects.
- ▶ A major challenge in Ann Arbor's energy transition will be providing cleaner heating sources; thermal energy districts, similar to those deployed in cities like Framingham and Copenhagen, will help to distribute equitable and decarbonized heating solutions.
- ▶ Residents have expressed concerns that increased building heights could shade rooftop solar units. Although experiences in other cities suggest that shading effects are minimal, the Plan should aim to minimize zero-sum tradeoffs between valued goals. Capping height at three stories in the residential category is one important step in that direction.
- ▶ Aging housing stock poses a costly challenge for many homeowners, as older homes and buildings often suffer from inefficient and leaky roofs, windows, and building envelopes. Weatherization, such as sealing air leaks, upgrading insulation, and improving windows and roofing, is a critical strategy for improving energy efficiency, reducing utility costs, and increasing comfort and resilience. New development and the opportunity for electrification provide even faster emissions reductions.
- ▶ Shifting towards higher density buildings for residential and multifamily provide excellent opportunities to catalyze district energy systems with ground source heat pumps. District energy systems are characterized by one or more central plants producing hot water, steam, and/or chilled water, which then flows through a network of insulated pipes to provide hot water, space heating, and/or air conditioning for nearby buildings. District energy systems combine loads

Existing Energy Transition Programs:

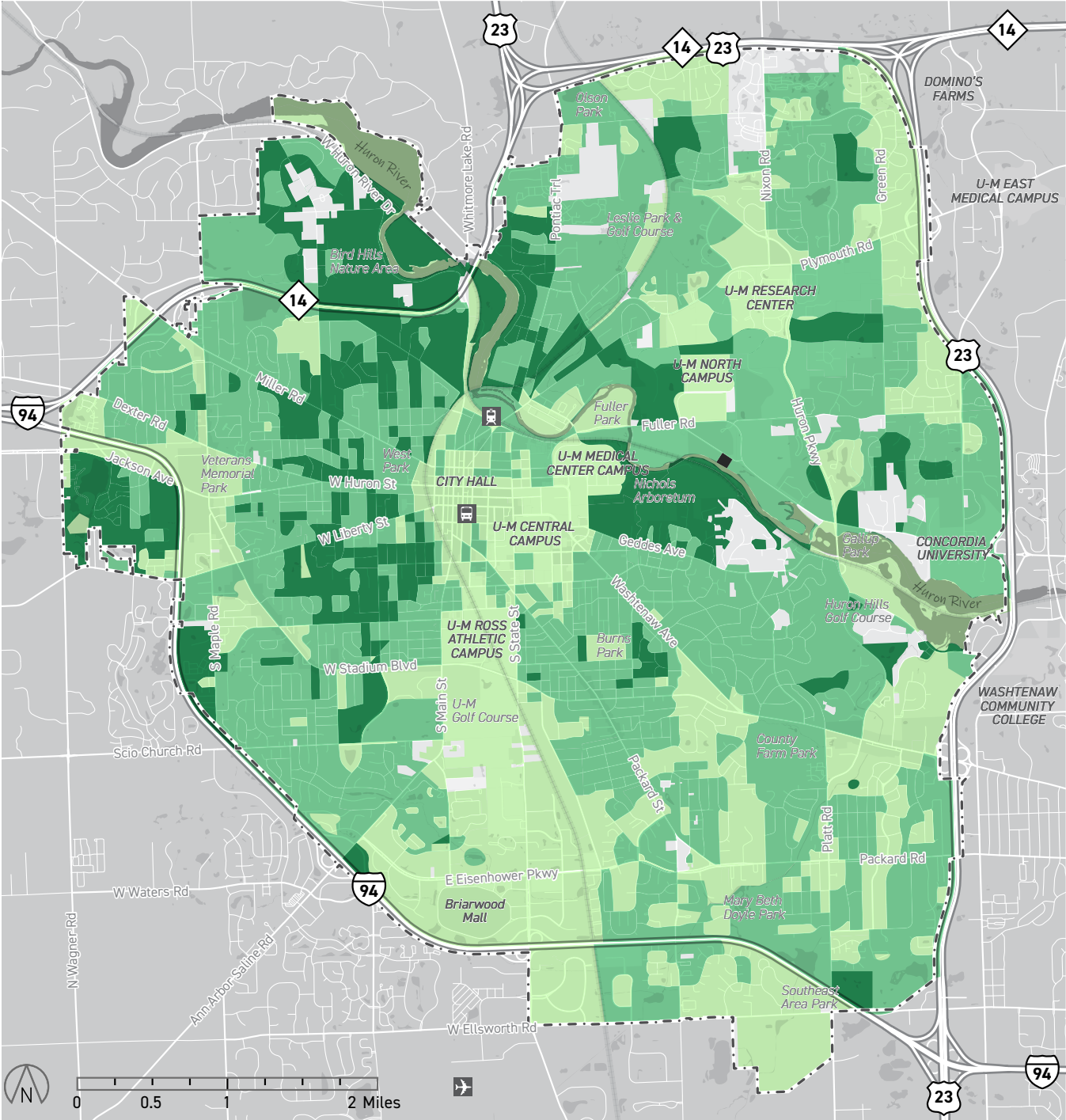
- ▶ Sustainable Energy Utility
- ▶ Home Energy Rebate Program
- ▶ Home Energy Advisor Services
- ▶ Heat Pump Concierge
- ▶ Aging in Place Efficiently Program
- ▶ A Carbon-Neutral Bryant Neighborhood
- ▶ Commercial Decarbonization Program
- ▶ Green Rental Housing Program

for multiple buildings (as found in downtowns, institutional, or industrial campuses) to create economies of scale that help reduce energy costs and enable the use of high-efficiency technologies.

Urban Tree Canopy

- ▶ The urban tree canopy provides numerous benefits, including cleaner air and water, cooler temperatures, and enhanced wildlife habitat. It also plays a critical role in reducing stormwater flows, offering significant stormwater management benefits.
- ▶ Ann Arbor's urban tree canopy was 33% at the last assessment in 2010, but an updated assessment is planned.¹ Comparing across Michigan, Ann Arbor's canopy cover is higher than Detroit and Lansing, but slightly lower than Grand Rapids.

¹ City of Ann Arbor Urban & Community Forest Management Plan, 2014.



Map
Urban Tree Canopy
(2010)

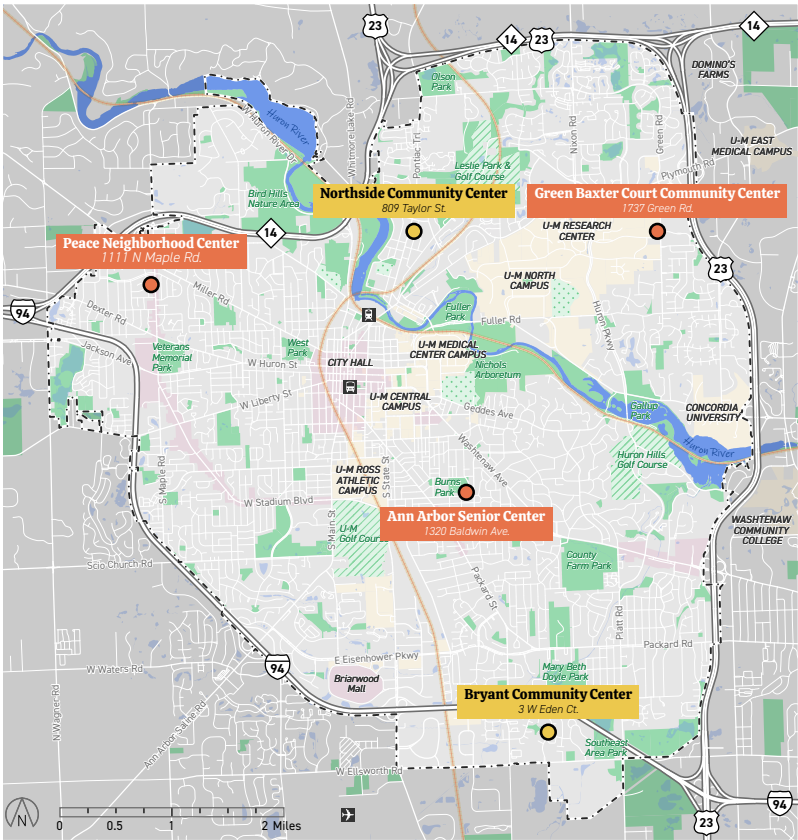
- No data
- <25% Canopy
- 25-50% Canopy
- >50% Canopy

source: Ann Arbor Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, 2010

Key Considerations:

Infrastructure

- ▶ The Comprehensive Plan offers a vision of the city that enables growth and transformation in alignment with community values, however, existing infrastructure and other constraints will influence the realization of this vision. While limiting the plan and future land use to current infrastructure would hinder the city's ability to evolve and achieve its broader vision, it remains essential to acknowledge that existing infrastructure and other constraints will influence the realization of that vision. Some infrastructure investments may be phased in over time to accommodate growing demands, while in other cases, upfront investment may be necessary to support the envisioned growth. Any implementation of this plan must carefully align with analysis and projections of infrastructure investment needs and coordinate zoning with capital improvement planning.



Map
Resilience Hubs

- Active Resilience Hubs
- Future Resilience Hubs

City Efforts To Decarbonize

Climate Millage

On the November 2022 general election ballot, Ann Arbor residents voted overwhelmingly in favor (71%) of a millage related to the community's investment in climate action. The approximately \$7 million dollars generated annually (through 2043) is a historic vote that illustrates the community's dedication to a just and carbon-neutral future. The millage will help to accomplish the following from the Carbon Neutrality Plan:

- ▶ Create, enhance, and provide services that move the city toward a zero waste, circular economy
- ▶ Advance the deployment and utilization of renewable energies such as solar and geothermal
- ▶ Support energy efficiency and weatherization programs designed for residents and businesses in improving the energy and water efficiency
- ▶ Advance neighborhood and community resilience and preparedness to climate change
- ▶ Create and sustain home and transportation related electrification programs
- ▶ Support educational efforts to administer such programs and services
- ▶ Use to unlock additional financial resources

Bryant Neighborhood

Ann Arbor's Bryant neighborhood is one of the city's lowest-income areas. OSI has partnered with the non-profit Community Action Network (CAN) to make it one of the first carbon neutral neighborhoods in the country! This effort would not only help to decarbonize the neighborhood but significantly reduce utility bills and provide financial savings for households. Through grant funding, the city's pilot program is providing free energy efficiency improvements, helping transition appliances to electric, providing solar and energy storage, making home health and safety improvements, and creating a geothermal network that will provide sustainable heating and cooling for the neighborhood, all while advancing goals of affordability, equity, and sustainability.

- ▶ Sanitary sewer and stormwater management infrastructure are currently limited, and the city will need to invest in water distribution and conveyance capacity improvements to accommodate future growth. In addition, source water constraints must be managed to protect the health of the Huron River and preserve reserves for drought or emergency events. Finally, the existing water treatment plant is restricted by its size and cannot be expanded at its current location.
- ▶ Ann Arbor's community infrastructure includes resilience hubs, which are community-serving facilities augmented to support residents and coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, or after a natural hazard event. They strive to enhance community sustainability and resilience through a bottom-up approach centered on co-development and local leadership. The city is looking to develop a resilience hub in each of the five wards of the city.

Infrastructure & Services

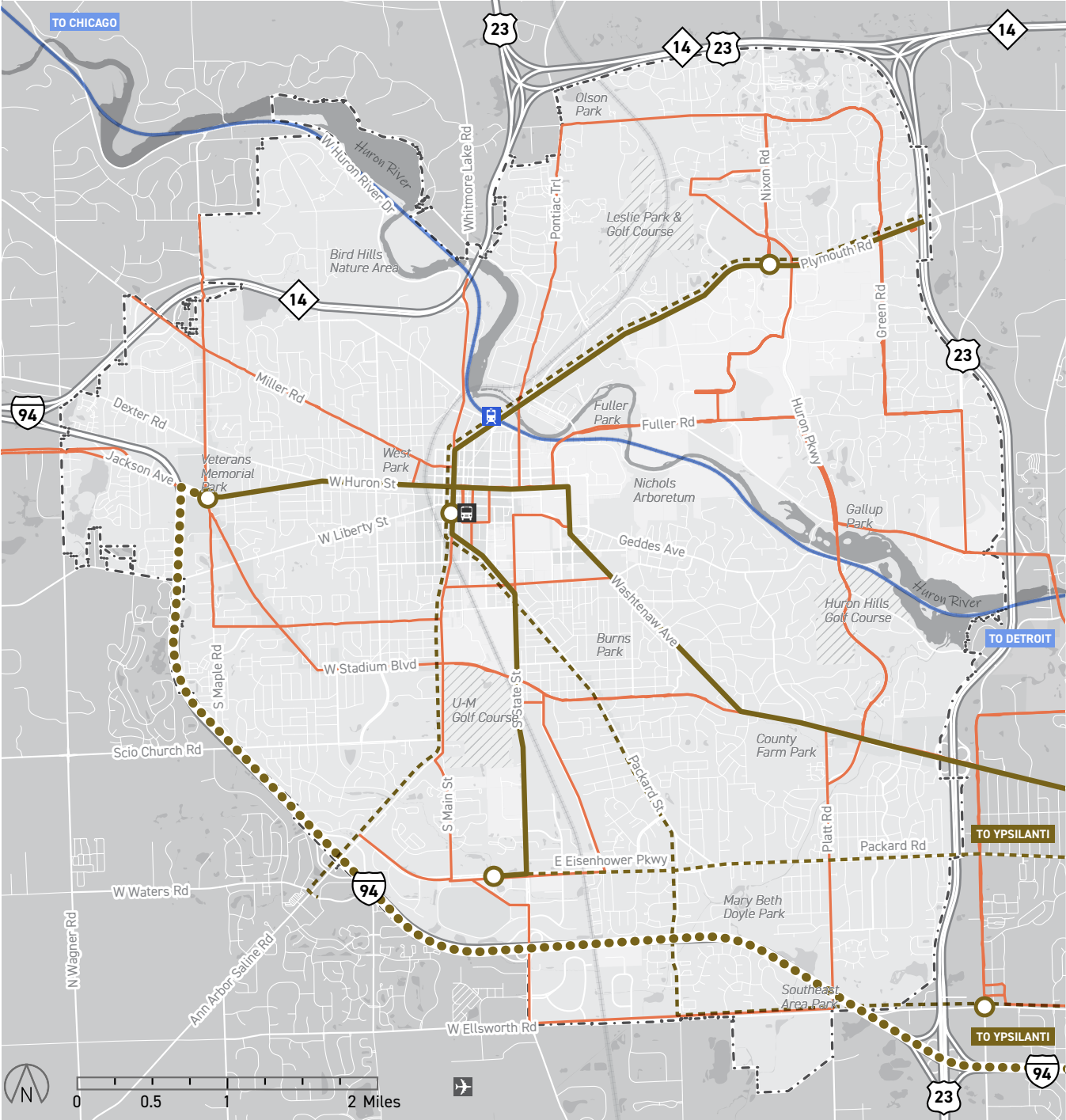
Rationale

Key Considerations:

Transportation

- Ann Arbor’s role as a regional employment and education hub shapes its transportation patterns. Close to 80,000 people work in Ann Arbor and live elsewhere, while 20,000 live in Ann Arbor and work elsewhere.² These commuting patterns impact land use goals and the city’s ability to achieve safe and carbon-neutral streets.
- In some areas of the city, over 50% of households do not own a car.³ Compact land use, frequent and reliable transit service, and safe, comfortable places to walk and bike are important to allow these individuals to access daily needs, as well as to support commuters.
- The Moving Together plan identified Tier 1 focus corridors as having 37% of all fatalities and severe injuries. These include many of the higher-speed, higher-volume arterials that move traffic through the city: Washtenaw, Plymouth, State, Packard, Main, and Division. Planning for increased density on these corridors will require corresponding speed management, transit, pedestrian, and bike improvements to improve safety.
- The Moving Together plan establishes key goals and values to guide its approach to mobility. The two overall goals, zero deaths or serious injuries on the roads and zero transportation emissions, form a guidepost for transportation infrastructure and corresponding land use decisions. Compact, walkable communities allow residents to access most of their daily needs by walking and biking.
- Transit is most cost-effective at dense nodes and corridors of development where ridership is higher. For this reason, the greatest density should be planned where frequent transit lines already exist, creating a positive feedback loop where each supports the other. Regardless, a future land use scenario that adds thousands of residents will require investment in transportation infrastructure to make the city less car dependent.

² Census LEHD - On The Map data, (Primary Jobs 2021).
³ NHGIS, ACS 5-year estimates 2018-2022.



Map
TheRide 2045
Proposed
Transit System

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, TheRide

- Existing Amtrak Route
- TheRide - Transit Hubs
- TheRide - Bus Rapid Transit
- TheRide - Express Service
- TheRide - Priority Bus Service
- TheRide - High Frequency Service Lines

Goal 08:

Increase community resilience to support disaster preparedness, climate change readiness, and community health and well-being

Strategies:

8.1

Strengthen social resilience through education, access, and connections

Social factors, such as community relationships and resources, allow a community to endure and recover from stressors. Yet the U.S. Surgeon General has identified a loneliness and isolation epidemic that has negative impacts on health and resilience. The city and its partners can help facilitate stronger community relationships and social resilience through programming to strengthen community capacity and civic engagement, such as city meetings, events, programs like Citizen Pruners, Community Academy, A²ZERO Ambassadors, and park stewardship initiatives, as well as through improving the vitality and appeal of physical gathering locations such as libraries, cultural assets, and other community centers. The city should also continue to work with the county and non-profits to increase support for social networks and services targeting vulnerable populations facing long-term challenges, such as mental health issues, substance use disorders, youth crises, and chronic homelessness.

8.2

Strengthen physical resilience by investing in the infrastructure and facilities needed to prepare for and recover from disaster

The city should ensure that essential facilities are designed and upgraded to withstand and adapt to future climate risks. To support its residents, it can invest in resilience hubs and identify parcels and/or buildings to be considered “resilient sites” for disaster response meeting places, as well as enhance communication and response systems to create a robust and resilient disaster readiness program. Additionally, the city can enhance access to county-designated cooling and warming centers and increase their number for use during extreme weather events or power outages.

The city regularly updates its Hazard Mitigation Plan to anticipate potential disasters and develop strategies to protect against harm to its residents and infrastructure. Any preparation, planning, and recovery from natural and humanmade disasters should align with this more detailed plan. See the city's [Hazard Mitigation Plan](#).

Frequent storms strain the city's infrastructure.



Celebrating the opening of the resilience hub at the Bryant Community Center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

image sources: City of Ann Arbor

Goal 09:

Invest in a mutually-supportive street, transportation, and land use system that prioritizes safe and equitable access

Strategies:

9.1 Develop a context-based street typology decision-making process to design streets appropriately for the expected land use and level of density

A street typology approach provides criteria for decision-making without being too prescriptive. The city can use a street typology approach to align the transportation functions of different types of streets with the adjacent land use context – considering both existing and future land patterns and pairing it with policies to support consistent implementation of street projects. Public investments should support mode shift strategies and compact land use patterns by prioritizing pedestrian safety and comfort with wide, amenity-rich sidewalks in areas slated for growth and building out the All Ages and Abilities bike network to connect these areas, where possible.

9.2 Align transit service and land development

As with street design, transit service and land use must be closely aligned. The city and TheRide are partners in this effort. The city is working to support implementation of bus rapid transit (BRT) and high frequency lines as proposed by TheRide. On major corridors, building setbacks and access define the space available for transit, bicycling, pedestrian, and other features. The TheRide 2045 Long-Range Plan is planning for four transit hubs, composed of multiple stops serving multiple connecting routes, outside of the downtown cores to facilitate better connectivity between peripheral areas. Accommodating dedicated transit lanes and multimodal transit hubs should be a priority on planned high frequency transit corridors, but plans will have to be coordinated with development and cognizant of the trade-offs inherent in limited right-of-way width.

Plans To Retain

This plan does not replace the Moving Together plan; rather, it aligns with and supports its recommendations. As the Moving Together plan is updated over time, coordination with this plan's strategies will be important to maintain consistency and alignment.

9.3 Support a shift in transportation modes, away from vehicular use, through infrastructure investments and updated transportation policies

To reduce car dependency and promote a shift to more sustainable modes of transportation, the city will need to upgrade infrastructure to facilitate the mode shift by continuing to build a network of low stress bicycle connections and shared use trails throughout the city, especially connecting hubs of activity, and partner with Ann Arbor Public Schools (AAPS) to prioritize non-motorized walkability and connectivity.

The city will also need to make policy changes at the intersection of transportation and land use, incentivizing the switch to sustainable transportation through a transportation demand management (TDM) strategy. The Association for Commuter Transportation defines TDM as the use of strategies to inform and encourage travelers to maximize the efficiency of our transportation systems, leading to improved mobility, reduced congestion, and lower vehicle emissions. TDM encompasses a range of tools. The Moving Together plan recommends expanding the getDowntown program, which provides downtown employees with bus passes, removing the need for 1200+ parking spaces. If widened to other parts of the city, it could have even greater impact. The city should work towards this goal in partnership with TheRide, employers, and U-M.

The city should continue to work to expand reliable mobility options for people traveling through Ann Arbor, following the Moving Together recommendations for next steps on bike share, scooter share, car share, and other first/last mile solutions.

Regional connections are also critical given the volume of commuters and visitors to Ann Arbor. The city should make efforts to strengthen regional transit options as outlined in Moving Together, continuing to collaborate with the RTA on D2A2 and AirRide expansion, supporting regional express bus and rail, and expanding Park & Ride services and incentives.

Existing City Traffic Demand Management Programs

The city has a history of traffic demand management. Every bus ride and bike ride induced by city programming and infrastructure is a trip not taken in a private vehicle.

25 Years of getDowntown

- › Distributes approximately 3,000 gol!passes each year
- › TheRide estimates about 300,000 gol!pass rides over a one-year period
- › Post-pandemic, the shift to remote work had a significant effect on gol!pass use as fewer people commute. Since 2022, the gol!pass program is seeing a slow and steady increase.

2024 Bikeway Counts

- › 318,000 bikes on the Downtown Bikeway (Miller, First, William, and Division Streets)
- › Daily weekday average: 908
- › Peak month weekday average: 1,454
- › Maynard Parking Structure vehicle capacity for comparison: 799

Goal 10:

Balance development with protection and integration of natural features to foster a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem

Strategies:

10.1

Protect, enhance, and manage natural features or open space that provide ecological benefits

The city's existing natural features protections will be maintained to mitigate the impacts of development on natural features, including woodlands, landmark trees, steep slopes, endangered species habitats, and waterways. The City Council has also provided a mandate to reduce carbon emissions and supporting denser, compact development for efficient use of land and infrastructure will be one of the most important ways the city can reduce carbon emissions.

To support higher-density development, the city should prioritize the quality and ecological function of open space over sheer quantity in its planning processes and regulations. Promoting compact, concentrated development can help preserve ecologically valuable areas, such as woodlands and tree canopy, which offer far greater environmental benefits than lawns.

The city should consider updating its natural features review standards to reflect current ecological understanding and introduce natural features analysis earlier in the site review process. Emphasis should be placed on maximizing ecosystem benefits—such as preserving woodlands, restoring degraded natural features, or protecting landmark trees of a certain size—rather than relying solely on dimensional standards. Performance metrics and incentives should be aligned with these ecological priorities.

Additionally, the city can continue to encourage community greening and sustainability practices to strengthen natural features on private land, including supporting education on sustainable landscaping and property management, and technical assistance and incentives for rain gardens, native plantings, wildflower pollination lawns, and other ecological enhancements.



Did You Know?

The Gelman Plume

In Ann Arbor, contamination poses risks to water supply and water treatment systems. The Gelman Sciences 1,4-dioxane groundwater plume, spans over four miles through western Ann Arbor and portions of Scio and Ann Arbor Townships. Gelman was ordered by a county circuit court to address the plume with state oversight to operate a treatment system and manage more than 250 monitoring wells to track concentrations. The dioxane plume, a suspected carcinogen, poses significant challenges to land use planning in several ways:

- *Increased cost and complexity to develop: Development within the plume area is more difficult. Sites with shallow groundwater must conduct rigorous water quality testing, and if concentrations exceed certain levels, water must be routed to the Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) for treatment or hauled offsite to a licensed hazardous waste facility.*
- *Constraints on water supply and treatment: The city depends on Barton Pond for roughly 85% of its drinking water. The expansion of the plume northward beyond the Prohibition Zone toward Barton Pond threatens the city's major drinking water source.*
- *Public perception: Even when concentrations are considered protective of public health as defined under Gelman's court order, residents and businesses often express concerns about living, working, or recreating above the plume.*

In March 2026, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officially designated the Gelman Sciences site and associated 1,4-dioxane groundwater plume in Ann Arbor and Scio Township as a Superfund site on the National Priorities List. This designation directs additional federal resources and oversight to address the long-standing contamination.

10.2
Encourage tree cover and landscaping to help mitigate the urban heat island effect

The urban forest provides many environmental, economic, and social benefits to the community, including reducing stormwater runoff, improving water and air quality, moderating summer temperatures, lowering utility costs, improving quality of life, and beautifying the city. Ann Arbor's citywide urban tree canopy was 33% in a 2010 assessment with the highest coverage occurring in residential areas (37%) and recreational and open spaces (48%). The city's tree canopy cover goals are determined by land use as shown in the table below with canopy cover data from 2010. Implementation of the SEU through maximizing rooftop solar potential will require coordination of tree canopy goals.

With climate change, it is anticipated that urban temperatures will continue to rise and tree cover and shade will be critical for mitigating its impact. The city should target tree plantings in areas with limited tree coverage, ensure shading and green spaces surround resilience hubs to provide enhanced cooling capacity and update the landmark trees definition to prioritize ecological benefit. The city should also explore opportunities to provide education and incentives wherever feasible to allow redevelopment while also protecting trees and other natural features in ways that safeguard ecological values, promote climate benefits, and enhance property values. Within its parkland, the city will try to balance ongoing and growing needs for open recreational spaces with opportunities for increasing canopy cover.

Tree Canopy Cover Goals

source: Ann Arbor Urban and Community Forest Management Plan, 2014

Land Use Category	2010	Goal
Commercial	10%	15%
Industrial	14%	25%
Mixed Use	9%	15%
Office	19%	30%
Public/ Institutional	28%	40%
Public Right-of-Way	24%	30%
Recreation/ Open Space	48%	50%
Residential	37%	60%

10.3
Reduce stormwater runoff volume and flood occurrences with a focus on deploying nature-based solutions and managing stormwater where it falls

Rainfall is expected to increase in amount and frequency with climate change. Managing stormwater is a critical component of protecting source waters, managing water quality and reducing the impacts of flooding on infrastructure and properties. To help meet the A²ZERO and other city stormwater management goals, the city should continue to prioritize investment in areas with documented flooding issues and opportunities for infiltrative practices in public projects and rights-of-way. The city should seek further opportunities for incentivizing on-site stormwater management in development projects. Through its Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan, the city will continue to explore how to improve stormwater and watershed management with local and regional coordination.

The city has set goals to increase the tree canopy cover across different land uses, including commercial, and recreational and open spaces.



Nature-based solutions such as rain gardens can both help address stormwater run-off and beautify the streetscape.

image sources: City of Ann Arbor

Goal 11:

Promote carbon neutrality through efficient energy and resource use, and ultimately transition to zero carbon sources like renewable energy

Strategies:

11.1 Support the transition to clean energy through land use and investment

New high density multifamily residential and mixed-use development offer an excellent opportunity to shift to clean energy systems such as solar and geothermal. In 2024, Ann Arbor residents authorized the creation of a Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU), an opt-in program that will provide 100% renewable energy from local solar and battery storage systems, diversifying the city’s energy sources and making its energy infrastructure more resilient as a whole. As SEU planning and design proceeds, the city will be focusing on small-scale generation and distribution, but may also need to identify parcels suitable for deployment of large-scale solar systems and prioritize developments to reduce construction disruption of streets and rights-of-way. New commercial and residential developments should be coordinated with district energy systems to improve energy efficiency. Additionally, the city should designate buildings and locations critical for resilience where microgrids could be implemented to ensure 100% continuous energy operations.

Did You Know?

District Energy Systems

District energy systems are a highly efficient way to heat and cool many buildings at a district or neighborhood scale from a central plant and are commonly used in areas such as downtown districts and university or hospital campuses. A microgrid is a localized form of district energy which can connect and disconnect from the grid, essentially operating as an “island” that can provide power through grid disturbances.

11.2 Reduce energy use and carbon emissions of buildings

In addition to transitioning to green energy, reducing carbon emissions will require reducing buildings’ energy use and resource waste. Building operations accounted for 68% of greenhouse gas emissions, according to data collected by the Office of Sustainability and Innovation. Reducing energy use intensity of existing buildings will be important through increasing weatherization programs and encouraging conversion of HVAC systems that are nearing end-of-life. For new buildings, the city can develop design guidelines for high-performance buildings and full electrification, incentivize zero-emission technologies and energy reduction measures, and promote the utilization of mass-timber to reduce embodied carbon.

Existing City Programs

A²ZERO Home Energy Advisor (HEA) Assessment:

The A²ZERO Home Energy Advisor is a free program designed to provide residents of Ann Arbor clear and actionable pathways to decarbonize their homes. The program is rooted in an assessment of your home where the HEA team will identify opportunities for energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy, and develop a personalized Path To Zero report. Most assessments will be conducted virtually via video call, while a portion will be done on-site, ensuring accessibility for all.

source: A²ZERO

Ann Arbor Solarize:

Since its inception in 2019, Solarize, Ann Arbor’s Community Bulk-Buy Solar Program, has installed over 3.9 MW of rooftop solar on roofs in R1/R2 districts. This saved the 526 participating households a total of \$1.8 million upfront solar costs and a projected \$17.4 million in energy costs over the lifetime of the system.

source: Office of Sustainability and Innovation

Goal 12:

Plan for and invest in city services and infrastructure that can accommodate expected growth

Strategies:

12.1

Coordinate and align infrastructure investment with land use and growth

Significant infrastructure investments will be needed to accommodate anticipated growth that will support the city's goals for additional housing and carbon reduction. Since water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater capacity is limited, the city will need to invest in water distribution and conveyance capacity improvements to support more households, focusing on additional capacity where the highest density will be encouraged. In addition, depending on the intensity of future growth, there will be strains on the current drinking water plant (both treatment and available water source supply) as well as the wastewater treatment plant. At the time of this report, the city has initiated comprehensive utility planning efforts to begin evaluating the changes and investments that would be necessary to accommodate such an anticipated growth being considered with the proposed future land use. To support the city's transition to clean energy, street repairs and major construction projects will need to be coordinated with Ann Arbor's utility planning. This coordination should integrate potential geothermal and district energy networks, support vehicle electrification by installing charging infrastructure at public facilities, and encourage the development of charging stations on public properties.

12.2

Coordinate city services to accommodate growth

As the city grows, it will need to ensure services such as public safety, schools, libraries, community centers, and waste management are evaluated, updated, and increased to handle additional residents and businesses. The city should ensure that police and fire services have the necessary capacity and equipment to accommodate growing populations and maintain target response times. Additionally, it will need to allocate resources for the equipment and vehicles to accommodate additional density and new building types. The city will maintain ongoing coordination with institutions such as Ann Arbor Public Schools, Ann Arbor District Library, Washtenaw County, U-M, and service providers to accommodate city growth.

The city is prioritizing upstream waste reduction such as reduced consumption, repair, and repurposing to keep items out of the waste stream to begin with. Nevertheless, waste management will be an important component of growth. All new developments need to have a Solid Waste Management Plan that will be reviewed and approved by Solid Waste. This will help to ensure that an adequate solid waste capacity and disposal plan are provided by the development. Resources will be needed for the solid waste services staff, equipment, and vehicles to accommodate additional density and new building types. To minimize landfill waste as the city densifies, the city will promote development that incorporates shared waste management systems to streamline collection, manage waste more efficiently, and encourage recycling and composting in households, institutions, and construction projects.

