
Chapter 8. Land use

Land use planning is one of the most important tools that local governments have at their disposal. Creating a future land use plan allows the city to ensure that adequate land is available to allow the community to grow and meet its future development goals. Additionally, land use planning encourages orderly development of land that allows the City to provide services in the most efficient way possible.

The Future Land Use Map serves as a guide for future zoning, subdivision, and annexation decisions. A good future land use map provides consistency and predictability in the decision-making process that encourages and protects investment in the community.

The goal of this chapter is to help the City of Mechanicsville plan for future development by developing land use policies that promote economic development, good quality of life, and allow the City to provide services in the most efficient manner possible over the long term.

Land Development Tools

Mechanicsville has a number of regulatory tools available to promote orderly land development. Zoning and subdivision ordinances give the community the ability to establish land use patterns that are logical, orderly, and attractive. Sound planning enforced by effective development codes provides the key to a well-planned city. The City can use its zoning and subdivision codes to effectively enforce its planning efforts so public resources can be expended more efficiently.

Zoning

Combined with the comprehensive plan, the City uses zoning to establish an orderly land use pattern. Following the comprehensive plan, the city of Mechanicsville may update their existing zoning ordinance to better reflect current economic conditions and community priorities. The zoning ordinance divides the city into districts and defines how property within those districts can be used. Zoning assigns compatible uses to the same district and separates incompatible uses. Zoning also controls the height and bulk of structures and separation between buildings.

Subdivision Regulations

The City of Mechanicsville regulates land development through a subdivision ordinance. The City's subdivision ordinance establishes rules for how land is divided and developed from vacant property into residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Regulating how land is divided allows the City to ensure that all new developments meet minimum safety and infrastructure standards for streets, utilities, and drainage.

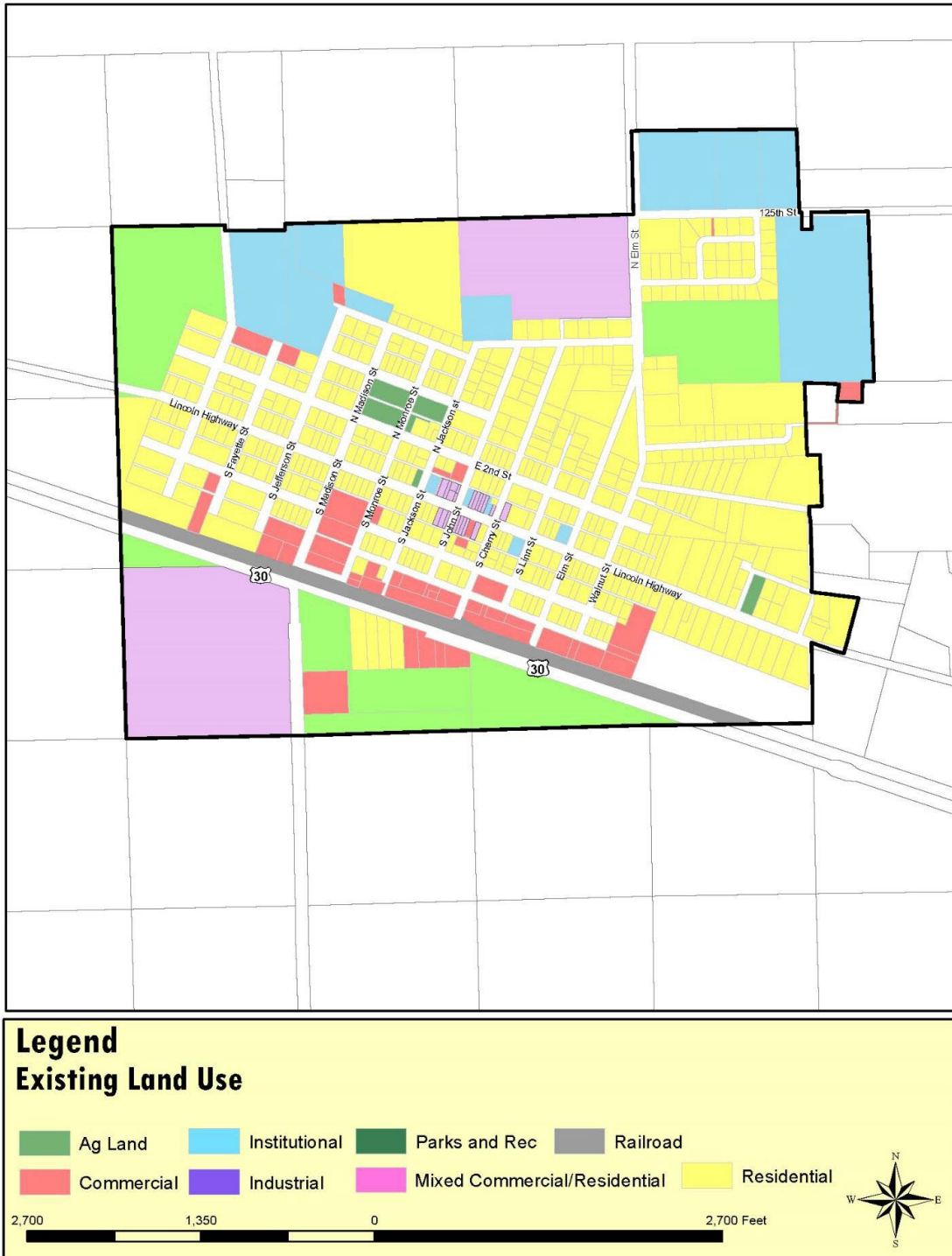
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

Iowa planning and development Code gives cities that have adopted subdivision ordinances the option to review subdivision plats that are located within two miles of their city boundaries. If a property owner within two miles of the city wishes to subdivide their land, they must apply to both the city and county for approval. Mechanicsville has the opportunity to use its extraterritorial subdivision review authority to help promote efficient and orderly development around the edge of the city by ensuring that future rural development will be built to city standards.

Existing Land Use

Developing Mechanicsville’s Future Land Use Map begins with an evaluation of existing land uses within the community. Figure.12 maps the City of Mechanicsville’s existing land use.

Figure 12. Mechanicsville Existing Land Use Map



Land Use Priorities

Throughout the planning process several land use priorities emerged that were used to guide the development of the Future Land Use Map.

Identify Appropriate Areas for New Growth

New land development is necessary for quality of life and economic vitality. However, it is equally important that new growth occurs in appropriate locations and in an orderly manner. The City must carefully analyze conditions and consider the type of development that is most appropriate at a given location. Considerations regarding infrastructure, topography, and surrounding uses should be made when carrying out this analysis.

The future land use map represents the first step in the process of identifying the appropriate type of growth for site across the community. The map provides a conceptual development guide based on a high-level analysis of existing conditions. The map serves as a general guide, but how each parcel is developed will ultimately be determined by a more specific assessment of the development proposal and site conditions that occurs during the zoning and subdivision review process.

Invest in Downtown Mechanicsville

Mechanicsville should not only consider areas of expansion, but also how existing assets could be developed in the future. Mechanicsville's downtown is a unique asset that should be maintained and adapted to reflect current economic realities. Continued investment in infrastructure, maintenance, building rehabilitation, and infill development conveys to visitors and residents that Mechanicsville is valuable and cared for. In turn, this may help build positive momentum within the community, as neighbors will be more likely to invest in their properties once they see others doing the same. Identifying potential development sites is the first step to neighborhood investment. Existing vacant lots and buildings, empty storefronts, neighborhood parks, homes that need repair, and local streets could all be opportunities for investment.

Mixed Land uses

Many common land use tools, like zoning, are based on separating incompatible uses. In some cases, mixing land uses can make a community a more vibrant and economically productive place. Downtown Mechanicsville is a great example of a mixed-use area as there are residential, office space, restaurants, and retail all within close proximity. When planning new developments, it is important to consider whether or not the uses really are incompatible, and if there is an opportunity to allow appropriate mixing of different yet compatible land uses.

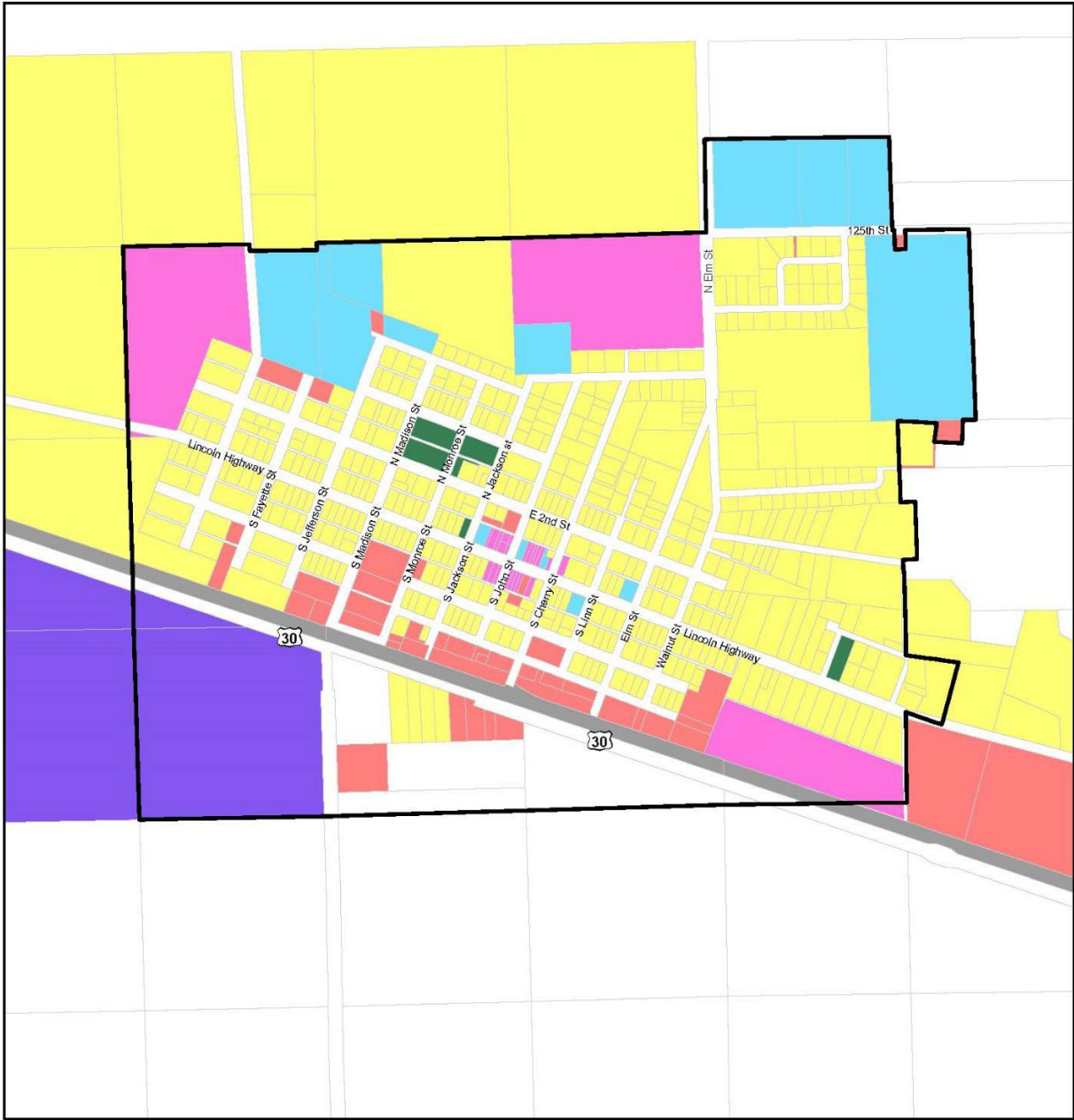
Protect Natural Resources

Rural communities like Mechanicsville are often defined by their connection to the natural landscape that surrounds them. As the city grows, the community will have to decide how to best preserve their natural resources, while maintaining a dynamic economy. Farmland, forests, and other natural areas play a vital role in defining a community's sense of place, and should be conserved if the community believes they are of value. By engaging in strategic planning, a community can identify what land will be used to accommodate growth and what land should be conserved.

Future Land Use

Through the comprehensive planning process the City of Mechanicsville has developed a future land use map that will serve as a guide for the future development of the city. The Future Land Use Map in Figure 13 is a development concept that provides a general guide for future development. The City should review the future land use map regularly and update the map as conditions change. Ultimately, land shown in the map is expected to transition from its existing use to its future use based on market conditions and when the property owner chooses to sell, subdivide, or develop their land.

Figure 13. Mechanicsville Future Land Use Map



Legend
Future Land Use

Ag Land	Institutional	Parks and Rec	Railroad
Commercial	Industrial	Mixed Recreational/Commercial	Residential

3,000 1,500 0 3,000 Feet

Future Land Use Categories

- **Agriculture** Includes farms and land used for agricultural purposes.
- **Single-Family Residential** includes low density single and two-family homes with open lawns. The area also includes parks, religious and educational facilities, on and off-street trails, and interconnected streets with sidewalks.
- **Institutional** includes facilities that serve an educational, governmental, medical, religious, or charitable purpose.
- **Commercial** areas include a variety of businesses that provide residents with desired goods and services.
- **Mixed Commercial and Residential** Properties that include a combination of residential and commercial uses.
- **Industrial /Manufacturing** provides space for a variety of uses associated with manufacturing, assembling, fabrication, warehousing, wholesaling, and commercial services.

Land Use Recommendations

Update Future Land Use Map

- Review the Future Land Use Map every five years to ensure that it reflects current community priorities and development conditions.
- Review and amend the Future Land Use Map if economic conditions change dramatically.
- Following the adoption of the comprehensive plan, review and update the zoning ordinance to make sure that it reflects community priorities.

Align Land Use with Economic Priorities

- Provide adequate amounts of land for a variety of commercial uses based on current and future needs based on economic trends.
- Review zoning ordinance to make sure that mixed land uses are included to create more economically productive areas.
- Encourage continued reinvestment and redevelopment in Downtown Mechanicsville.
- Promote the retention and expansion of existing, and attraction of new, industrial development opportunities in suitable locations.

Promote Principles of Community Design in Developments

- Ensure that adjacent land uses are compatible with regard to such factors as smoke, noise, odor, traffic, activity, and appearance.
- Plan for conservation areas that provide recreation opportunities and protect important environmental resources.