

Chapter 4: Land Use

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Photo credit: GBAJPB



Photo credit: True North Bemidji

VISION

Retain and enhance our community character, diversity of uses, natural and historic resources, and human scale of the Greater Bemidji Area.

Introduction

This section examines the existing land use patterns and proposes a future land use scenario for the Greater Bemidji Area. A primary purpose of land use planning is to protect existing conforming properties and future development from incompatible uses. This protection benefits residents, landowners, developers, and investors alike.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

The principles and standards for implementing the Future Land Use Plan will need to be specifically defined in the Greater Bemidji Area's land use plan as well as in the zoning and subdivision regulations. Land development regulations are the foremost means of implementing the guidelines in this comprehensive plan and controlling land use in the Greater Bemidji Area.

Current Land Use

The current land use in the Greater Bemidji Area reflects past development decisions and tells the story of the area's development history and trends. The planning process helps ensure coordinated land use decisions enhance the overall quality of life of the Greater Bemidji Area by mitigating the impacts of undesirable uses next to neighborhoods. This process begins with examining the types and locations of existing land uses within the Greater Bemidji Area and determining how and where new growth and development may best be accommodated (see **Figure 2**).

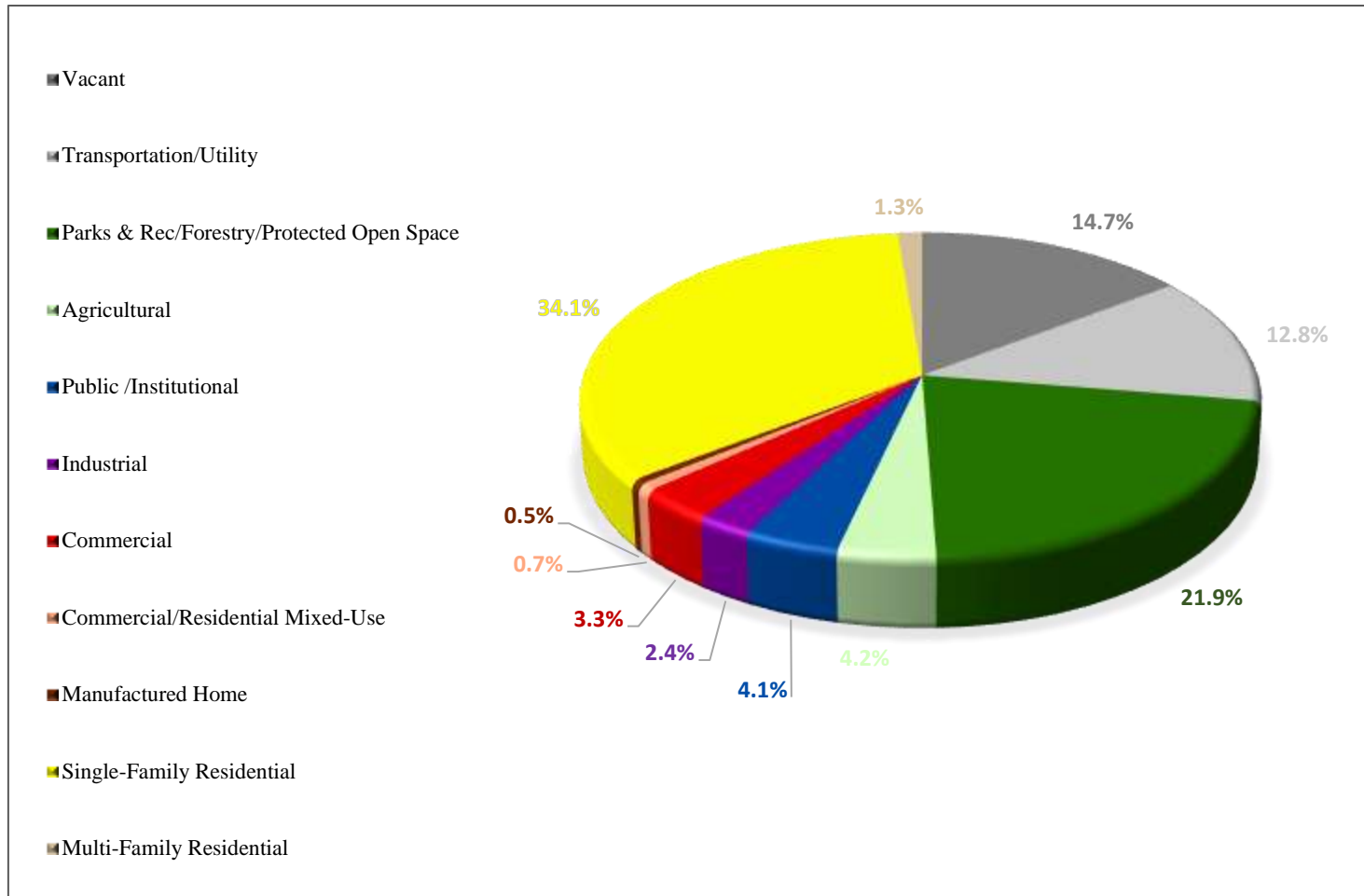
An assessment of the current land use in the Greater Bemidji Area was performed at the beginning of this comprehensive plan study to identify existing development patterns. **Table 4** and **Chart 8** break down the total land use acreage within the Greater Bemidji Area.

Table 4: Land Use Acreage as of 2017

Land Use Type	Percent
Single-Family Residential	34.1%
Multi-Family Residential	1.3%
Manufactured Home	0.5%
Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use	0.7%
Commercial	3.3%
Industrial	2.4%
Public/Institutional	4.1%
Parks & Rec/Forestry/Protected Open Space	21.9%
Agricultural	4.2%
Transportation/Utility	12.8%
Total Developed	85.3%
Vacant Acreage	14.7%
Total Acreage	100%

Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Chart 8: Land Use Distribution as of 2017



Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Residential

Residential use is the predominant land use in the Greater Bemidji Area, accounting for 35.9% of the total land area. Residential uses are classified into the following categories:

- Single-Family Residential (34.1%)
- Multi-Family Residential (1.3%)
- Manufactured Homes (0.5%)

Existing residential uses have been mapped according to the number of residences on a property. Single-family residential is based on primarily one home per parcel. Multi-family residential includes multiple units per parcel such as townhomes, apartments, condominiums, etc.

Commercial

Commercial land use makes up 3.3% of the total land area in the Greater Bemidji Area. Commercial land uses offer a wide variety of goods and services and are primarily located along major transportation corridors, which serve both regional and community needs. Commercial uses located downtown largely serve local needs and are specialty market places.

Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use

Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use only makes up 0.7% of the Greater Bemidji Area total land area. The mixed-use category represents a variety of lower intensity land uses. Appropriate uses within the mixed-use category may include retail establishments, food establishments, office space, and service uses with residential quarters. Mixed-use is primarily located in downtown Bemidji.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Industrial

Industrial land use makes up 2.4% of total land area throughout the Greater Bemidji Area. This includes light or heavy industrial land uses, large warehouse facilities, and offices.

Public/Institutional

Public/Institutional is land owned by the city, township, or county for public use such as the library, city/town hall, public works facility, or other governmental centers. This category also includes quasi-public uses such as the hospital, schools, churches, cemeteries, and other publicly owned social service providers. Public/Institutional makes up 4.1% of the total land area in the Greater Bemidji Area.



Photo credit: Sanford Health

Agricultural

Agricultural land is used for farming, dairying, pasturage, horticulture, silviculture, animal and poultry husbandry, and the necessary accessory uses for treating and storing produce. Agricultural land in the Greater Bemidji Area covers roughly 4.2% of the region.

Parks & Rec/Forestry/Protected Open Space

Parks & Rec/Forestry/Protected Open Space accounts for 21.9% of total land area in the Greater Bemidji Area. This category applies to permanent open space intended for recreational or resource conservation uses. Included are neighborhood, community, and regional parks.

Vacant

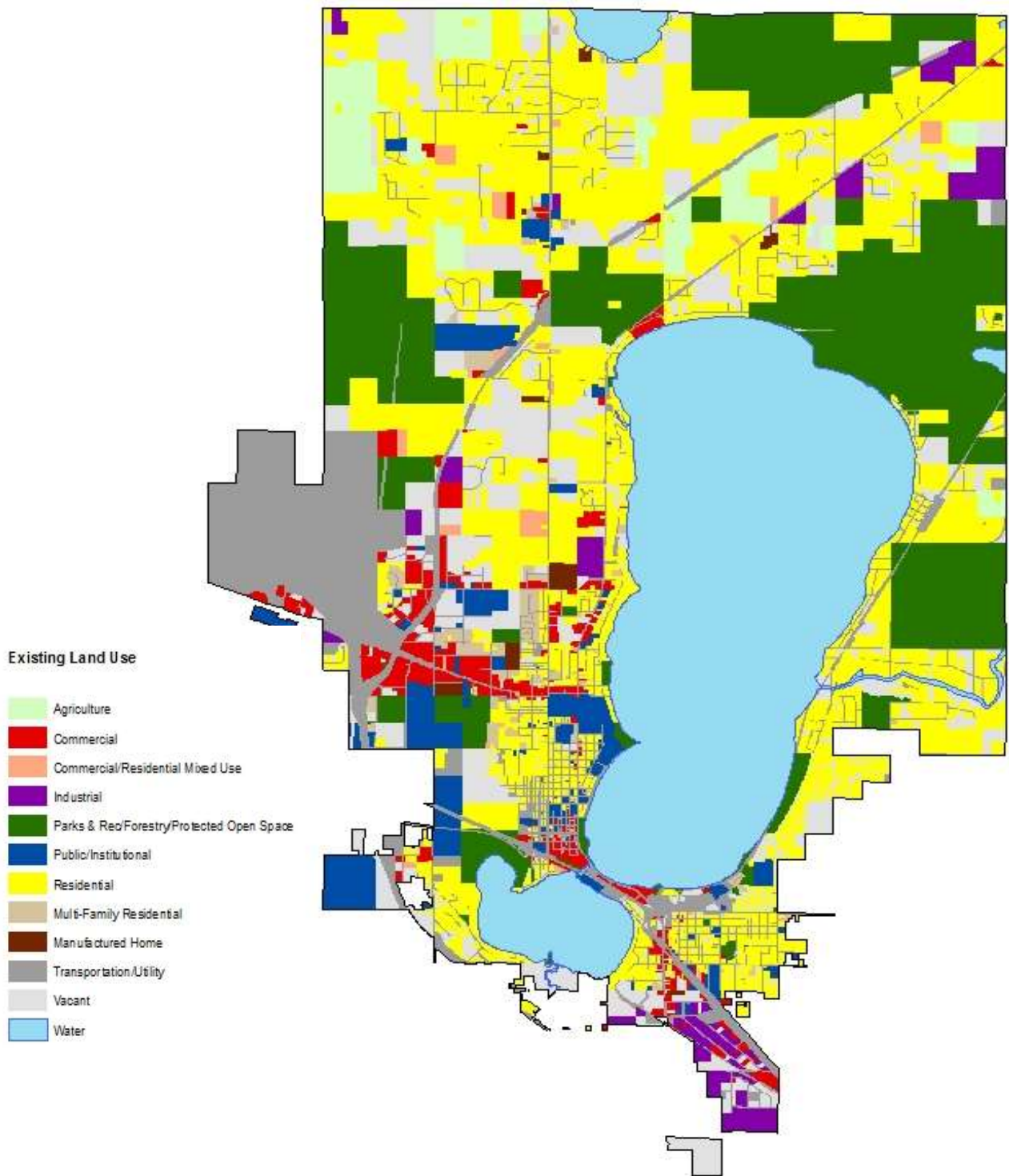
Vacant land use consists of developed lots that do not have a principal building or are developable areas that are not currently developed. Roughly 14.7% of the land in the Greater Bemidji Area is undeveloped or classified as vacant.

Transportation/Utility

Transportation/Utility encompasses all areas dedicated specifically for use as road right-of-way. In the Greater

Bemidji Area, 12.8% of land use is dedicated to transportation/utility.

Figure 2: GBAJPB Existing Land Use Map



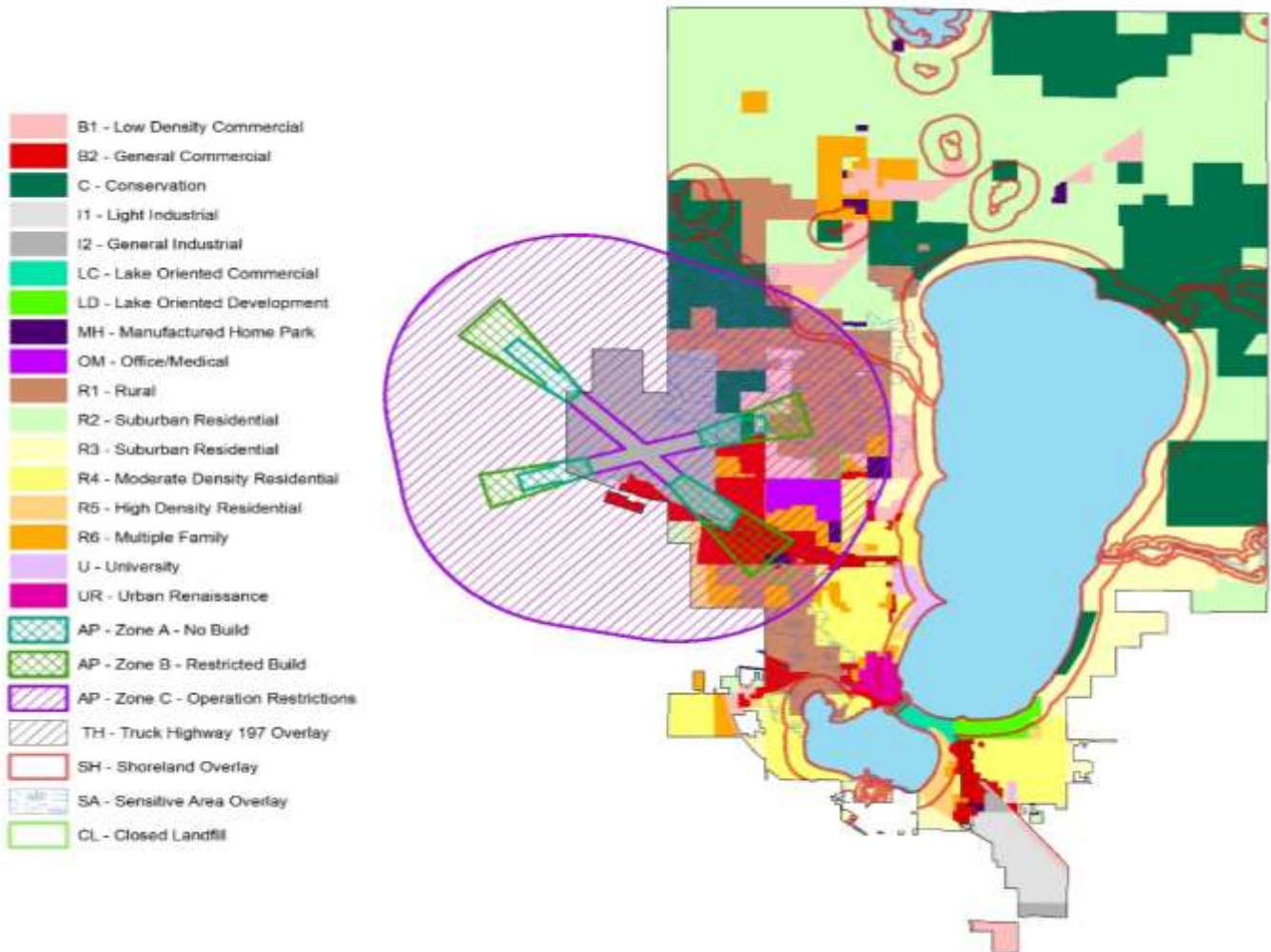
Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Zoning

The Greater Bemidji Area is currently governed by the Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance, adopted in 2007 with the most recent amendment in 2017. All applications are reviewed by the JPC and subject to approval by the JPB.

Figure 3 illustrates the current arrangement of zoning districts. An approximate statistical breakdown of the amount and proportion of land zoned for various uses is provided in the following table. Table 5 provides a description of all zoning districts.

Figure 3: GBAJPB Zoning Map



Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Table 5: Zoning Classifications & Acres

Zone	Description	Percent
B-1	Low Density Commercial	4.5%
B-2	General Commercial	4.1%
C	Conservation	19.0%
I-1	Light Industrial	1.4%
I-2	General Industrial	6.2%
LC	Lake Oriented Commercial	0.3%
LD	Lake Oriented Development	0.5%
MH	Manufactured Home Park	0.6%
OM	Office/Medical	0.7%
R-1	Rural	10.0%
R-2	Suburban Residential	31.2%
R-3	Suburban Residential	9.5%
R-4	Moderate Density Residential	6.6%
R-5	High Density Residential	1.0%
R-6	Multiple Family	3.4%
U	University	0.5%
UR	Urban Renaissance	0.5%
Total		100.0%

Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Zoning Districts

Zoning districts are created to promote orderly land development within the Greater Bemidji Area, including the shoreland of its public waters. The Greater Bemidji Area is divided into the following zoning districts:

- Low Density Commercial (B-1)**
 Provide areas for the placement of commercial establishments, including service, retail, and wholesale providers as well as uses complimentary to such uses in areas where central services are not available.
- General Commercial (B-2)**
 Provide areas for the placement of commercial establishments, including service, retail, and wholesale providers, and uses complimentary to such uses in areas where central services are not available.
- Conservation (C)**
 Provide areas of low intensity uses and development in order to preserve wildlife habitat and protect sensitive natural resources.

- **Light Industrial (I-1)**

Provide areas for wholesale activities, warehouses, and industrial operations whose external, physical effects are restricted to areas within the district and in no manner negatively affect any properties in surrounding districts. The I-1 District is intended to permit, along with any specified uses, the manufacturing, compounding, processing, packaging, assembly, and/or treatment of finished or semi-finished products from previously prepared materials. These areas are intended to encourage the development of industrial uses that are clean, quiet, and free of hazardous or objectionable elements such as noise, odor, dust, smoke, glare, or other pollutants. The uses permitted in this district are generally required to be in an enclosed structure and all premises are to be developed in accordance with an approved plan. It is further intended that the processing of raw materials for bulk shipment to be used in an industrial operation at another location will not be permitted.

- **General Industrial (I-2)**

Provide areas for manufacturing, assembly, and fabrication activities, including large-scale or specialized industrial operations whose external physical effects will be felt by some degree by surrounding properties. The I-2 District is intended to permit, along with any specified uses, the manufacturing, compounding, processing, packaging, assembly, and/or treatment of finished or semi-finished products from both raw materials or from previously prepared materials. These areas are intended to encourage the development of industrial uses that are apt to have some impact on properties located in close proximity. Therefore, the uses in this district should be separated from residential districts and other low intensity districts by intervening light industrial or commercial districts.

- **Lake Oriented Commercial (LC)**
Promote and preserve a high-quality commercial area that provides an attractive transition from the southern entrance of the community into downtown.
- **Lake Oriented Development (LD)**
Provide areas for a mixture of Residential and Commercial Development that take advantage of the unique recreational opportunities available within lakeshore areas.



Photo credit: John Andringa

- **Manufactured Home Park (MH)**
Provide areas for the placement of manufactured homes in an approved manufactured home park.
- **Office/Medical (OM)**
Provide areas for the placement of medical and professional office uses and compatible commercial uses.
- **Rural (R-1)**
Provide areas of low-density development and low-intensity uses to preserve a predominantly rural residential character.
- **Suburban Residential (R-2)**
Provide areas for low-density residential development and other compatible uses at a density that will not require the provision of centralized sewer or water services.
- **Suburban Residential (R-3)**
Provide areas for suburban residential development and other compatible uses at a density that will encourage the provision of centralized sewer or water services.

- **Moderate Density Residential (R-4)**
Provide areas for residential development and other compatible uses at a moderate density served by centralized sewer and water.
- **High Density Residential (R-5)**
Provide areas for residential development and compatible uses at a density that promotes an efficient delivery of central services.
- **Multiple Family (R-6)**
Provide areas for multiple family residential development and compatible uses in both urban and suburban settings.
- **University (U)**
Provide areas for secondary educational institutions in a manner designed to accommodate their unique, physical development needs.
- **Urban Renaissance (UR)**
Provide areas for retail, recreational, and governmental functions in a high amenity setting, accessible by automobile but conducive to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Overlay District

- **Shoreland Overlay (SH)**
The Shoreland Overlay District will overlay zoning districts established by the Greater Bemidji Area JPB so that any parcel of land located within shoreland will also lie in an established zoning district.
- **Sensitive Area Overlay (SA)**
Allows the appropriate development of land consistent with the intent of the underlying zoning district provided that adequate protection of sensitive environmental areas is ensured.
- **Trunk Highway 197 Overlay (TH)**
Protects the character of development along the Trunk Highway 197 Corridor and protects the functionality of the highway.
- **Airport Protection Overlay (AP)**
Protects the character of airport operations, airport safety, and development in the airport safety zones at the ends of the runways.
- **Closed Landfill Overlay (CL)**
Protects against potential health and safety impacts of methane gas and its migration around closed

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) managed landfills.

- **University Overlay (UO)**

The BSU area surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods as well as the public streetscapes meant to encourage infill, mixed use, and redevelopment. The campus will serve as the primary focal point of the district. The main intent of the district is to preserve and promote the distinct character in existing structures.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Future Land Use

Figure 4: GBAJPB Future Land Use Map is a guide for the Greater Bemidji Area's zoning ordinance and map, which is the official regulating document for land use. The land use map should be used in conjunction with the policies from this chapter. The JPB has developed the Future Land Use Map to guide decisions regarding future growth and development. **Table 6** below breaks down each future land use category and the potential zoning district(s) to be used. The property owner can initiate any land use changes, although the JPB has the ability to rezone properties on the land use map to rezone properties as appropriate as the part of a zoning ordinance update.

Figure 4: GBAJPB Future Land Use Map

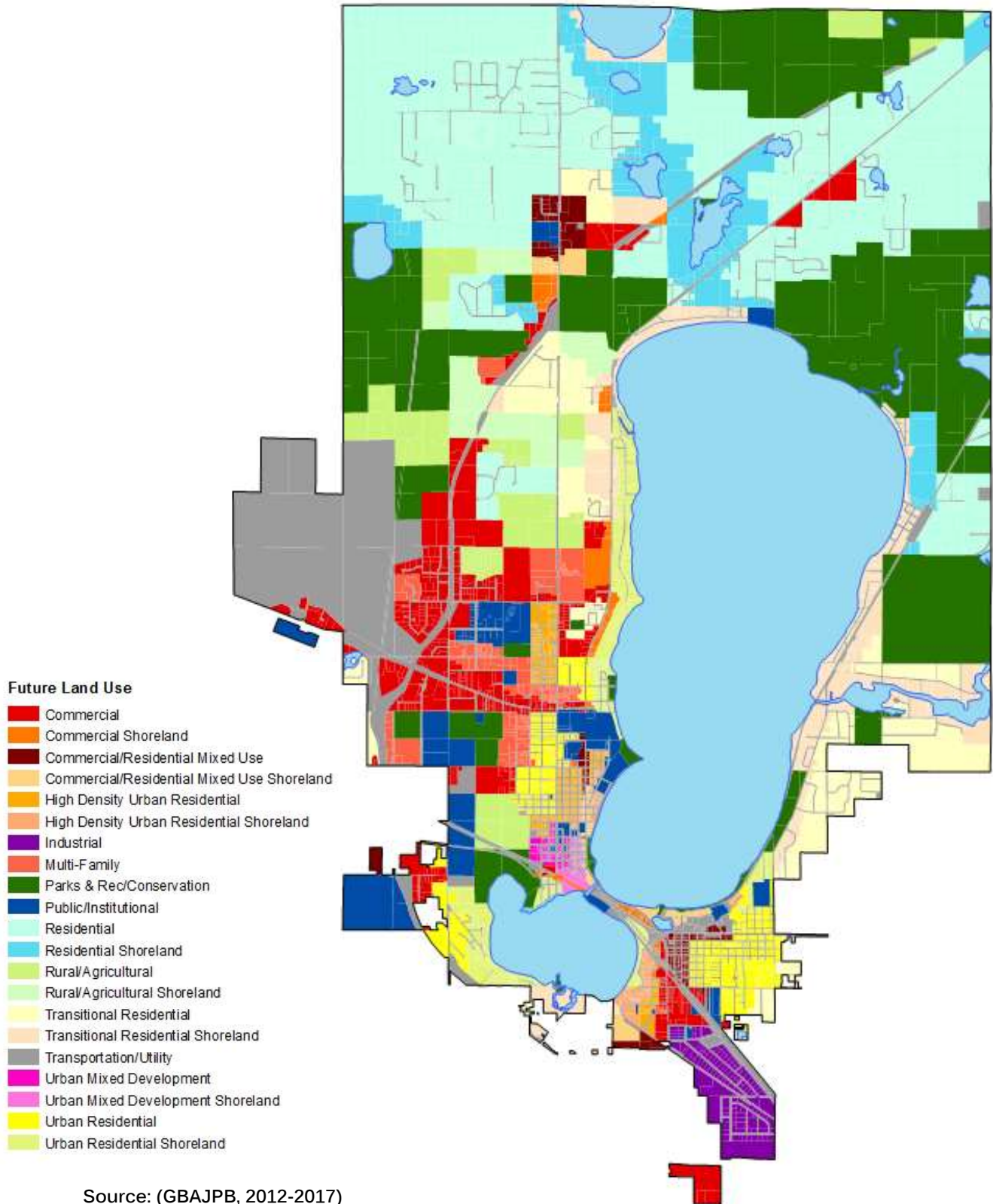


Table 6: Future Land Use Categories and Corresponding Zoning District Categories

Proposed Land Use Categories	Land Uses	Current Corresponding Zoning Districts	Percent
Multi-Family Residential	High-density Multi-Family Residential with access to municipal services.	R-5, R-6	1.9%
High Density Urban Residential Shoreland	High-density residential that allows for alternative housing options to increase density without providing a negative impact on aquatic resources.	R-5	0.3%
High Density Urban Residential	High-density, residential that allows for alternative housing options to increase density.	R-5	0.8%
Urban Residential Shoreland	High-density, single-family residential with access to municipal services, at a density that will not negatively impact aquatic resources.	R-4, R-5	2.0%
Urban Residential	High-density, single-family residential with access to municipal services.	R-4, R-5	2.4%
Transitional Residential Shoreland	Single-family residential with a density to support the future addition of municipal services without negatively impacting aquatic resources.	R-3	4.6%
Transitional Residential	Single-family residential with a density to support the future addition of municipal services.	R-3	4.9%

Residential Shoreland	Single-family residential within the shoreline and at a density not expected to be served by municipal services in the future.	R-2	5.9%
Residential	Single-family residential at a density not expected to be served by municipal services in the future.	R-2	23.1%
Urban Mixed-Use Shoreland	Downtown development including retail, office, and high-density residential. To be developed at a density that will not negatively impact aquatic resources.	UR	0.1%
Urban Mixed-Use	Downtown development including retail, office, and high-density residential.	UR	0.2%
Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use Shoreland	Retail or service businesses; high-density housing. May include vertical mixtures of land uses. The proportion of land use mixture is not mandated but will be determined upon application review. This includes areas that are not fully developed and could transition into all commercial or all residential. To be developed at a density and with mixed use to not pose a negative impact to aquatic resources.	R-6, B-1, B-2, OM, U, LD	0.5%
Commercial/Residential Mixed-Use	Retail or service businesses; high-density housing. May include vertical mixtures of land uses. The proportion of land use mixture is not mandated but will be determined upon application review. This includes areas that are not fully developed and could transition into all commercial or all residential.	R-6, B-1, B-2, OM, U, LD	1.0%

Shoreland Commercial	Businesses providing office, retail trade, or services for individuals or businesses that will have minimal impact on aquatic resources.	B-1, B-2, LC, UR	0.7%
Commercial	Businesses providing office, retail trade, or services for individuals or businesses.	B-1, B-2, LC, UR	6.2%
Industrial	Office buildings, office-showroom, light industrial buildings, and manufacturing-related warehousing.	I-1, I-2	1.3%
Public/Institutional	City, township, or county offices and/or facilities; schools, hospitals, churches, cemeteries.	OM, U, UR, Any Zoning for some uses.	3.5%
Parks & Rec/Forestry/Protected Open Space	City or County parks and open space.	C	20.7%
Rural/Agricultural Shoreland	Rural housing; farming; dairying; pasturage; horticulture; silviculture; animal and poultry husbandry; and the necessary accessory uses for treating and storing produce. Preservation of open space with low-density or cluster-style development. Developed with standards to ensure mitigated impact on aquatic resources.	R-1, R-2	2.2%
Rural/Agricultural	Farming; dairying; pasturage; horticulture; silviculture; animal and poultry husbandry; and the necessary accessory uses for treating and storing produce. Preservation of open space with low-density or cluster-style development.	R-1, R-2	3.9%
Transportation/Utility	Right-of-ways, utilities.	Any Zoning	13.8%

Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

Land Use Strengths

It is important to identify the current land use strengths of the Greater Bemidji Area to ensure that future land use decisions are building on these strengths and not hindering them. Current land use strengths include:

- A vibrant downtown with an ever-increasing arts and culture scene, new development, and redevelopment of existing buildings.
- A strong entrepreneur culture is finding opportunity in the Greater Bemidji Area. Improved resources with the development of the Mayflower building are aiding in this growing trend.
- Recent history demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving open space and sensitive landscapes as well as providing parks and trails.
- Sense of place and uniqueness built around the shores of Lake Bemidji.
- Increase in cluster style development in rural areas.
- Highway 197 Corridor improvements with a mix of corporations and local businesses redeveloping in compliance with current zoning ordinances.
- Nearly ten years of joint planning and zoning efforts in the Greater Bemidji Area.



Photo credit: True North Bemidji

Land Use Challenges

- Surface water and wetlands comprise approximately 36% of land area within the Greater Bemidji Area.
- Lack of land suitable for residential development with access to central utility services. Northern Township and City of Bemidji are separated by a wetland corridor along all northern traveling corridors.
- Surrounding local government units not participating in a cooperative approach to land use planning.

- Natural hazards can affect the built environment and require additional consideration during land use planning.

Land Use Objectives & Strategies

Objective 4.1: Preserve the Quality Residential Neighborhoods

Thriving neighborhoods are important to a growing community as well as ensuring that existing neighborhoods are not consistently replaced with multi-family or commercial development that could increase rural sprawl. It is also important to allow existing non-conforming residential areas to be redeveloped.

1. **Review and update the land use ordinances and zoning map on a regular basis.** It is important to review current land use patterns to ensure neighborhoods are being preserved. It is anticipated that multi-family and commercial development will continue to increase. It is imperative to ensure this increase will not impact existing neighborhoods with increases in traffic, noise, or other factors associated with intensified development.

2. **Promote “mixed-use” areas to improve the transition of residential land use to other land uses.** Mixed-use areas can provide an excellent transition from residential areas to commercial or highly developed areas. Gradually intensifying the uses on the fringe of neighborhoods or along high-traffic corridors that have been traditionally residential will mitigate impact to existing neighborhoods.
3. **Identify specific redevelopment opportunities and promote revitalization while maintaining character.** Mapping of existing neighborhoods can provide a clearer boundary to ensure preservation. This can also aid in the development of form-based zoning to allow redevelopment of existing non-conforming structures.
4. **Allow flexibility with site design standards to ensure high-quality development.** Allowing for greater flexibility of zoning ordinances or density requirements for meeting site development criteria, such as increased live landscaping, stormwater retention areas, active recreation amenities, or park area, can provide a benefit to developers while

ensuring a high-quality neighborhood is being designed or redeveloped.

5. **Promote pedestrian-scale designs to increase sense of place and improve active transportation in new developments or redevelopments.** It is important to ensure high-density residential areas are designed with active transportation in mind. Pedestrian-scale design of roadways and buildings can allow for a safe and inviting walkable environment.



Photo credit: Justin David; Archinect

Objective 4.2: Preserve and Promote Commercial and Industrial Redevelopment or In-Fill Development Where Appropriate

Providing opportunity for commercial and industrial redevelopment is imperative to reduce urban sprawl and increase land use densities where appropriate. Land use planning can preserve existing developed areas and ensure land is available as well as compatible for increased development.

1. **Promote flexibility for commercial and industrial redevelopment and encourage in-fill development.** Allowing for in-fill development and redevelopment of existing commercial areas will ensure the current commercial and industrial areas remain vibrant, full, and diverse. In-fill and redevelopment will be encouraged before resorting to increasing commercial and industrial areas.
2. **Identify areas where commercial and industrial uses should be located, specifically adjacent to highways with controlled access where noise, odor, dust, and glare will have minimal impact.** When reviewing new commercial and industrial land uses, ensuring these areas are appropriate

and compatible with opportunity to be successful. Piecemeal development of industrial and commercial land uses can increase urban sprawl and have negative impacts on existing, less intense surrounding land uses.

- 3. Incorporate multi-modal transportation access and aesthetically pleasing site and building designs when reviewing commercial development and redevelopment.** With increasing interest in alternative modes of transportation ensuring that retail, office, and mixed-use developments are designed with multi-modal transportation in mind and aesthetically pleasing site layout and building designs can increase success and promote healthy living.
- 4. Utilize overlay zoning districts to address emerging issues and increase connections and transition of land uses.** The creation of overlay districts can allow for increased zoning restrictions or flexibility in areas that are suitable for development or redevelopment. Allowing for a decrease in zoning regulation can ensure in-fill development in already developed areas, while

increasing regulation can ensure that already developed areas remain healthy.

Objective 4.3: Promote Land Use Decisions that Protect the Natural Environment through Smart Growth and Sustainable Practices

When reviewing increases of land uses through subdivisions or large-scale commercial developments, resource conservation measures and sustainable land use practices will be reviewed.

- 1. Utilize guidelines for land use practices conserving natural landscapes and allow zoning flexibility for implementation.** Zoning flexibility can be initiated for development to ensure protection and conservation of natural landscapes on a site such as bluffs, steep slopes, trees, or wetlands, lakes, and streams.
- 2. Preserve existing natural habitat connections.** Preserve the existing natural habitat and large wetland complex within its boundaries to ensure native habitat for animals and an ample amount of open space exists.
- 3. Promote in-fill development with access to public infrastructure.** Supporting projects that can use

existing public infrastructure as well as increase density and intensification of land use when appropriate can help limit urban sprawl. However, supporting proposals at a density that strain existing public transportation or utilities is not sustainable and can negatively impact the public.

4. **Support a reduction of off-street parking requirements for appropriate land uses to allow for increased interior green space.** Maximize the potential for green space with all development or redevelopment of sites when possible, as well as for reduced heat island effects of increased temperatures within the high-density urban area of parking lots.
5. **Allow flexibility for developments that use alternative energy sources or land use practices that conserve energy.** Increased flexibility from zoning ordinances for demonstrating an exemplary effort for energy conservation will be an incentive for developers to be more energy conscious. Alternative energy sources can reduce the overall carbon footprint of the community.
6. **Use natural hazard and wildfire risk assessment information to make informed land use decisions.**

To continue to protect the health of the area, risk to the public and properties from natural hazards will be taken into consideration when making land use decisions.



Photo credit: GBAJPB