

Comprehensive Plan Framework

City of Granite Falls, Minnesota

Updated February 2022



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Preface

“Granite – a coarse grain igneous rock with qualities of firmness and durability”

Like the rock, Granite Falls has endured events over time that have tested its durability and established its firmness. Granite seems ready to face the challenges that lie ahead. There is tremendous energy in the community, with efforts like the Yes! House, the artist-in-residence program, new and existing entrepreneurs, among many other assets. However, the city faces declining population and households, declining school enrollment (almost 50% over the past 20 years), lack of housing choices (especially family-oriented housing), and growing senior demographics... trends that need attention now and in the future.

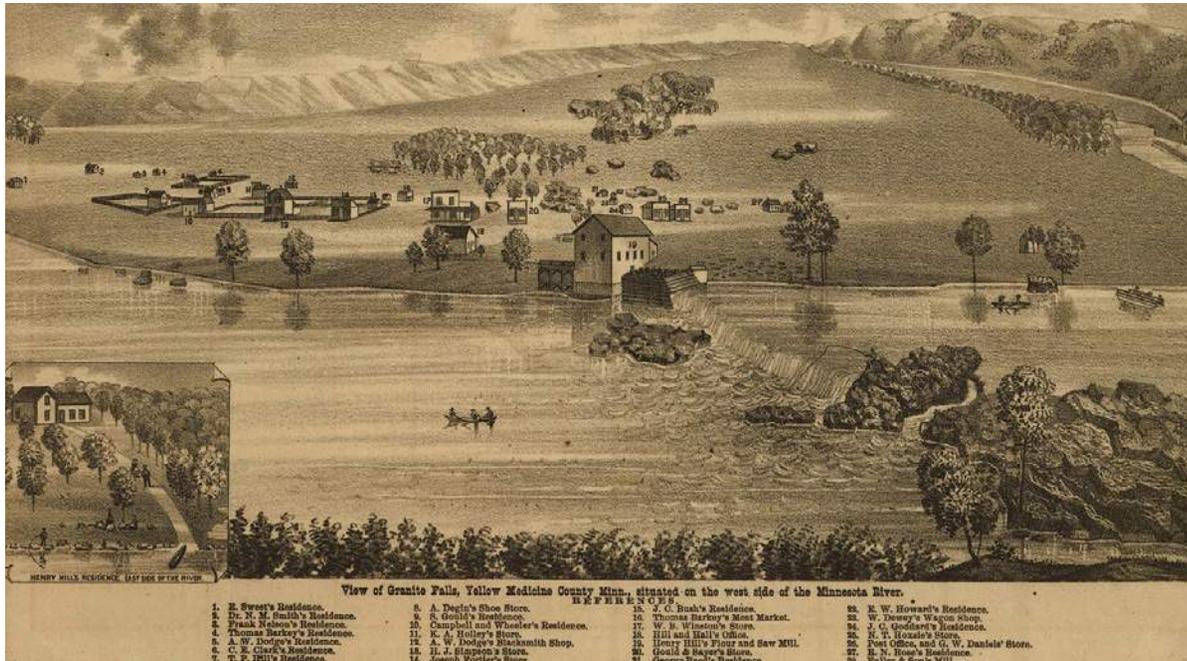
This community visioning process and framework is a point in time that provides an opportunity to reflect on the city’s ability to be firm and durable. The effort is not just about how things get built or which road gets repaved—it’s about the people of Granite Falls. Now is the best time to focus on the citizens of Granite for today and tomorrow: How will they make their contribution? How will they benefit from living here? How will their collective community continue to successfully provide a firm foundation and durable quality of life?

This Community Vision can serve as a framework that continues to confirm and reinforce Granite Falls as a home now and for many years to come.

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An aerial, high-angle photograph of a bustling street market. The street is filled with people, many of whom are pushing carts or strolling. Several vintage cars, including a prominent dark-colored sedan in the foreground, are parked or moving along the road. The buildings lining the street are multi-story, with various storefronts and awnings. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color, which serves as a background for the text.

Part 1. **Discovery**
Background & Review



Views of Main Street, Granite Falls from early 1900s
Source: LakesnWoods.com

View of Granite Falls Minnesota, 1874

Source: An illustrated historical atlas of the state of Minnesota, ©1874 A. T. Andreas, Chicago

Introduction

The 2021 Granite Falls Comprehensive Plan Framework is composed of a number of **initiatives, studies and reports** that are summarized here in order to define a larger strategic framework and vision for the city.

The land surrounding Granite Falls and bordering the Minnesota River Valley was first home to the Dakota Oyate Nation. They called it “Pejuhutazizi Kapi” (the place where they dig for yellow medicine).

This tribe occupied the area for thousands of years before the US Dakota Conflict of 1862.

Henry Hill and Orange Miller acquired the land that is now Granite Falls in 1869 and Hill built the dam for water power. Hill’s intent was that no buildings were to be built on the east side of Prentice Street, leaving the west bank of the river as an open park. The H. Hill historic plaque declares that he “gave free lots to secure settlers....established the post office and first church....donated land for the first school....led the effort for the county seat....and during the grasshopper plague, fed the needy.”

Granite Falls is located within two counties, Yellow Medicine and Chippewa, and is the county seat for Yellow Medicine County. The area is home to many destinations, including Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Prairies Edge Casino, Andrew Volstead House, Avera Clinic, and Yellow Medicine East High School. Parks and recreation areas include Memorial Park, Upper Sioux Agency Park, the Downtown Riverfront, Rice Park, and other city parks.

Trade & Market Area Excerpts

The following information is from the Market Area Profile – Granite Falls A Retail and Service Market Analysis of the Granite Falls Area, by Linscheid and Pesch, University of Minnesota Extension, May 2021

Market Area Profile

A Market Area Profile study was completed for the community of Granite Falls, Minnesota in the spring of 2021. The Market Area Profile uses primary and secondary data about a defined trade area to provide insights into opportunities for retail and service development. Data sources include resources like the U.S. Census, Minnesota Department of Revenue. There were a number of insights emerged through the study. Granite Fall's location at the intersection of US 212 and MN 23 brings significant traffic to the area. Estimates, using mobile data, show that the most frequented location in Granite Falls is at that same intersection. Downtown Granite Falls is an appealing business district, but the perennial challenge is bringing shoppers to the downtown area from the primary thorough fare. ...It is difficult identify exactly where that potential spending might be happening, but it's reasonable to guess that the Willmar, Marshall, and potentially Montevideo are attracting consumers. Granite Falls has many amenities that can be used to pull-in visitors and encourage more local shopping. Amenities like the Prairie's Edge Casino, the river walk, Carl's Bakery, and the Fagen Air Museum, all bring people to the community. Respondents in the business survey estimated their percentage of sales attributed to tourists as nearly non existent. There may be significant opportunities to improve in this regard, and even small marginal increases in sales attributed to tourists could be meaningful.

Survey and Trends

We asked each business approximately what percentage of sales come from local shoppers. Ten businesses estimated 0% of their sales come from local shoppers. Five businesses estimated that local shoppers account for 40% or less of their sales. Six businesses estimated local shoppers account for between 70-85% of their business. Thirteen businesses estimated local shoppers account for 90% of their sales or more.

We also asked about the percentage of sales that come from seasonal residents. Nearly all businesses estimated that seasonal residents make up zero (31) or a very small percentage of sales. 64% of businesses estimated that visitors or tourists make up 0% of total sales. A few businesses have significant sales from tourists, with two businesses estimating 55-60% of their sales coming from visitors. Most businesses (82%) have none of their sales coming from online. Two businesses have 50% or more of their sales coming from online.

Mobile Analytics

In order to understand how traffic flows to the retail areas downtown and along Highway 212, Extension examined mobile phone data from data provider Uber Media. Since cell phones are tracked through apps, Uber Media provides rich data on exact locations of cell owners, including their location before and after a visit at a site, their home location, and time of day when they visited. This data is available only for those cell phone users who have their location turned on or allow apps to track their location. With this limitation, the data available from Uber Media is a sample of all those who visited a site and not

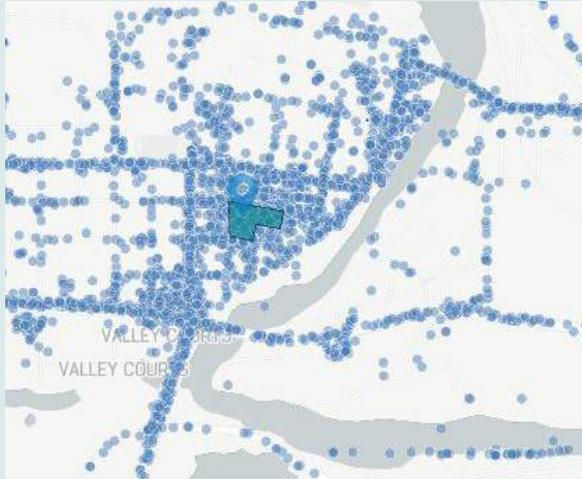


Figure 1.1 Clinic Visitors Heat Map

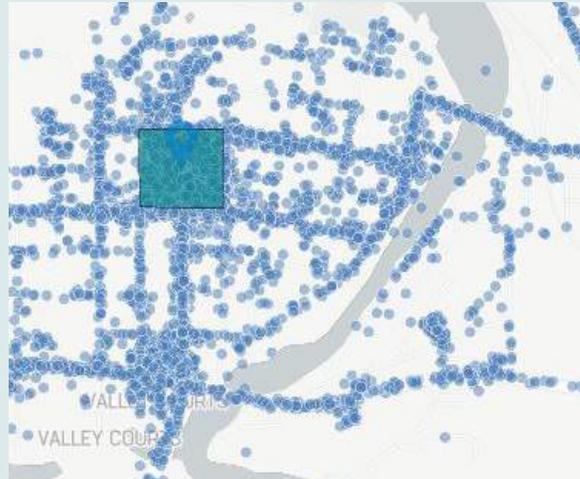


Figure 1.2 High School Visitors Heat Map

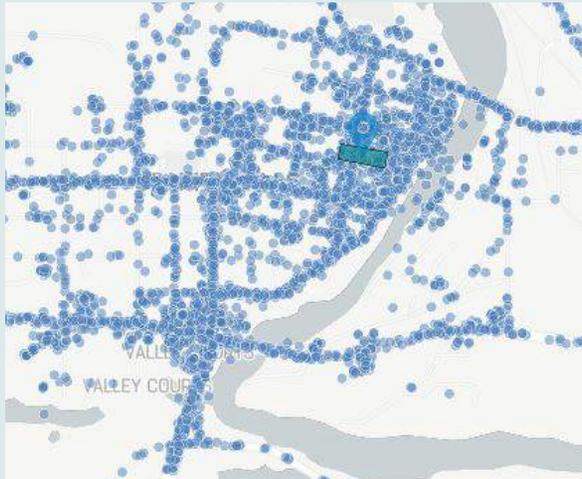


Figure 1.3 County Services Visitors Heat Map

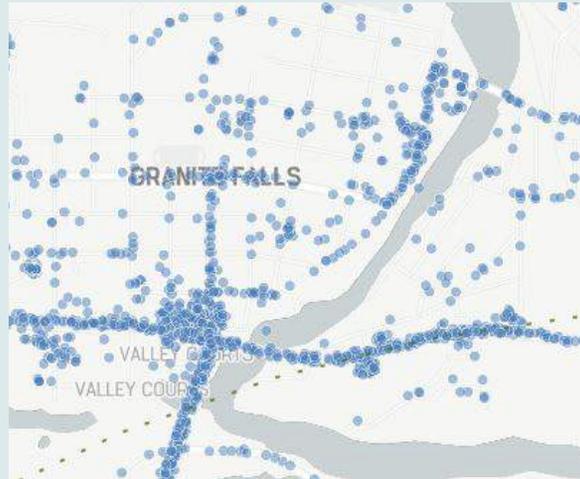


Figure 1.4 Casino Visitors Heat Map

necessarily representative of all visitors. Extension profiled four locations which have important roles in driving traffic in the Granite Falls: the clinic, school, county service center, and Prairie's Edge Casino. A heat map displaying the location before and after their visit to the each of these sites was generated to provide an indication of relationship between the site and Granite Falls retail locations (See Figures 1.1-1.4).

Housing Study Excerpts

The following information is from the City of Granite Falls, Housing Study, February 2021, Community Partners Research, Inc.

Population, Demographics & Households

A current-year estimate was obtained from Esri which shows 2,870 people living in the City of Granite Falls in 2020, down by only 27 people from the level recorded in the 2010 Census (see Table 1.2). The most recent estimate from the Minnesota State Demographer's Office has an effective date of April 1, 2019, so a data lag of more than one year exists. It showed 2,747 people living in Granite Falls. When compared to the 2010 Census benchmark, the City had lost 150 residents between 2010 and 2019. A third estimate source,

the Census Bureau's annual population estimates program, placed the City's population at 2,698 people in 2019, down by 199 people from 2010.

Esri's projection for Granite Falls expects the City to lose 42 permanent residents between 2020 and 2025. On an average annual basis, this would equal approximately 8 to 9 people per year. (City of Granite Falls, Housing Study, February 2021, Community Partners Research, Inc.)

Esri's projection for Granite Falls expects the loss of 19 households over the next five years, or an annual average of approximately 4 households per year. This future rate of loss is greater than the estimated level over the past decade, which was probably between 1 and 2 households per year. (City of Granite Falls, Housing Study, February 2021, Community Partners Research, Inc.)

Table 1.1 Population Change by Age Between 2010 & 2020

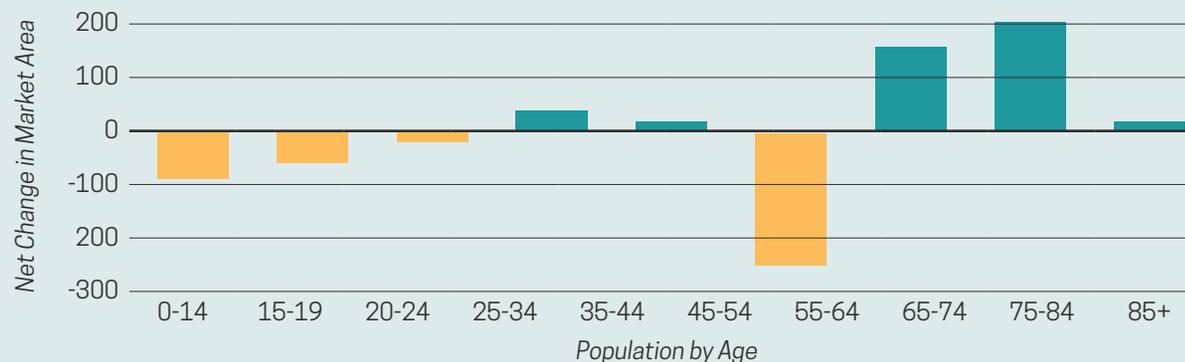


Table 1.2 Population Trends - 1990 to 2020

	1990 CENSUS	2000 CENSUS	% CHANGE 1990-2000	2010 CENSUS	% CHANGE 2000-2010	2020 ESTIMATE	% CHANGE 2010-2020
Granite Falls	3,083	3,070	-0.4%	2,897	-5.6%	2,870	-0.9%
Market Area	6,449	6,364	-0.9%	6,116	-4.3%	6,131	0.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Esri

Table 1.3 Granite Falls Projected Households by Age - 2020 to 2025

AGE RANGE	2020 ESTIMATE	2025 PROJECTION	CHANGE
15-24	56	50	-6
25-34	161	147	-14
35-44	168	173	+5
45-54	183	168	-15
55-64	259	218	-41
65-74	238	265	+27
75+	206	231	+25
Total	1,271	1,252	-19

Source: Esri

Housing & Building Permits

Based on available reporting, there have been 16 housing units constructed in Granite Falls between 2010 and 2020. Six of these were single family detached houses and intended for owner-occupancy. There have also been five duplexes constructed, creating 10 rental units. No multifamily housing construction for rental use was identified. The actual net gain in housing units has been smaller, as at least eight to ten houses were demolished during this same time period, most as part of a flood damage mitigation effort. The exact number of housing unit demolitions was not confirmed, but the overall growth in the City's housing stock has been very limited over the past decade.

Using a standard that 30% of income for housing defines a cost burden, most renter households in Granite Falls had a cost burden for rental housing in 2019. Overall, approximately 53% of all renters were paying 30% or more of their income for housing. The large majority of these households were actually paying 35% or more of income, and would have a severe cost burden. (City of Granite Falls, Housing Study, February 2021, Community Partners Research, Inc.)

In 2021, the EDA owns two lots in the Barber Circle area. However, there are a number of privately-owned lots in Barber Circle that are delinquent on property tax/special assessment payments, and it is possible that the EDA may attempt to acquire some of these lots in lieu of tax delinquency.

The website Realtor.com, maintained by the National Association of Realtors, was used to collect information on active residential real estate listings in Granite Falls. On January 17, 2021, there were 14 single family homes that were listed for sale that appeared to be located in the city limits of Granite Falls. However, eight of these 14 listings were identified as "pending" or "contingent" sales.

There are two mobile home parks in Granite Falls. The largest of these, Chippewa Terrace, reported 43 mobile homes, with 17 owner-occupancy and 25 renter-occupancy units. No contact was made with the second mobile home park. Chippewa Terrace does have 12 additional vacant lots available, so the number of mobile homes could increase in the future. However, these lots are often utilized by seasonal campers or RVs, including temporary housing for limited duration construction workers in the area.

Rental Housing

Overview: Granite Falls serves as a rental center for small cities and rural townships in the surrounding region. At the time of the 2010 Census, more than 34% of all households in the City were renting their housing. This percentage has probably remained relatively stable since 2010, as only a limited number of new housing units have been constructed in the City. Granite Falls has a diverse mix of rental units by both housing segment and structure type. In addition to conventional market rate rents, the City has federally subsidized rental housing and some units oriented to seniors.

Much of the City's older conventional market rate inventory exists in single family houses offered as rentals and in other small structures with four or fewer units. According to the American Community Survey estimates, nearly 29% of all rental units in Granite Falls are in single family houses and approximately 37% of all rental options are in structures with four or fewer units. had specifically focused on anticipated rental demand.

Projected Household Growth

Projections are often based on past patterns, which are then trended forward. For Granite Falls, the limited growth pattern in past decades yields an expectation of only modest changes going forward. The projections obtained from Esri expect the City to lose approximately two households per year over the next five years. For the entire aggregated Market area, a loss of six to seven households per year is being projected through 2025.

General Land Use

Reviewing the generalized land use diagram, the development pattern of the city responds to the meander of the Minnesota River and the highway alignments of 212 and 23. The city is organized by the river, east and west with the downtown, high school, county offices, hospital and established neighborhoods on the west side (Yellow Medicine County), and more recent and emerging development located the east side (Chippewa County). Most of Granite Falls' historic pattern is located west of the river and the downtown location probably benefited from its relationship to the dam. The downtown is a really a unique built environment sitting right on the bank of the river with “main street” (Prentice Street) just a shallow half block away. There are not many cities in Minnesota that have such an intimate, human-scaled relationship to the river (think of Red Wing, Stillwater, Wabasha, or Grand Marais) which represents a huge opportunity for the city. Businesses and commercial uses are arranged in a linear pattern as Highway 212 heads west. The area east of the river is connected to downtown by the historic Roebling pedestrian bridge and Oak Street (County 22). It exhibits a

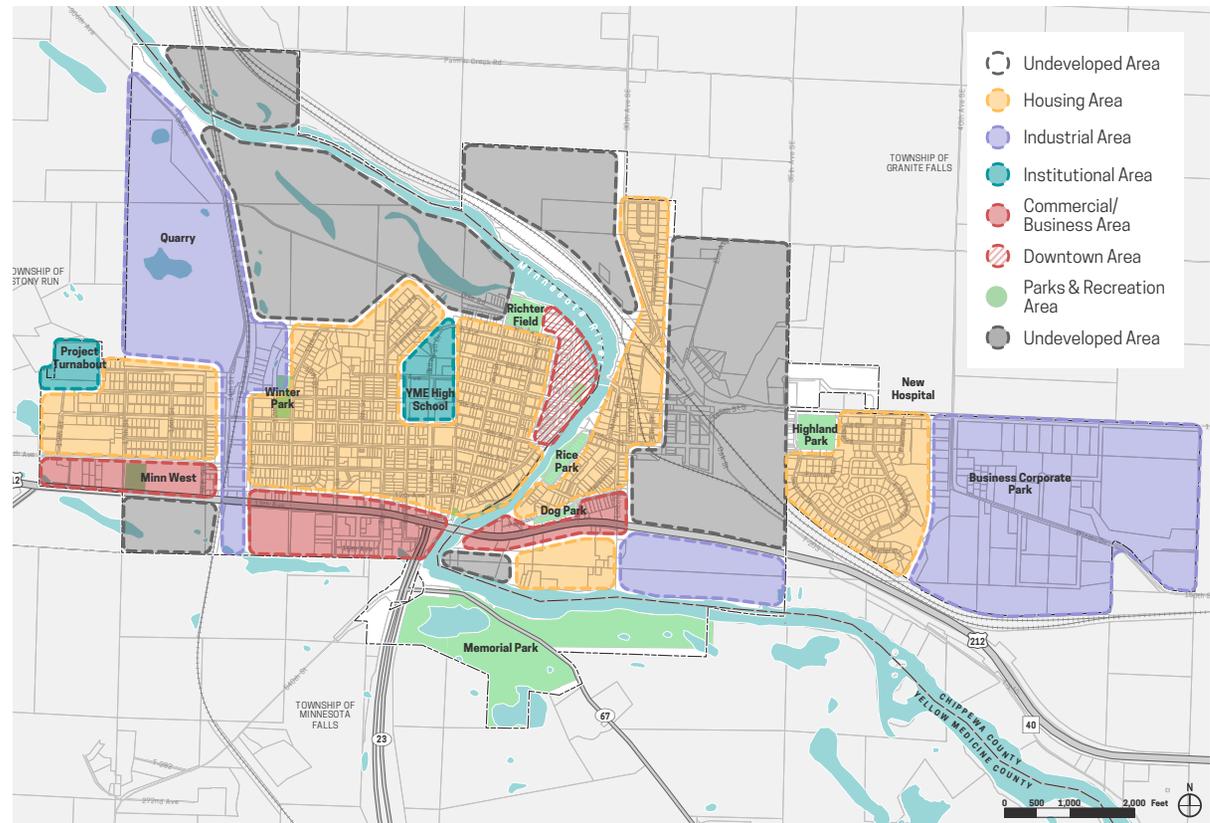


Figure 1.5 General Land Use

very different land use pattern, highlighted by the flood-impacted Rice Park. Residential areas east of the river are less organized by a regular street and block pattern and development occurs in discrete pockets. Interestingly, a large undeveloped area currently separates the next and newest increments of development and the corporate

business park further east. South of Highway 212 sits the former Xcel power plant and the city’s largest open space, Memorial Park. South on Highway 23 are the airport, home to Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, and Rivers Edge Casino & Resort.

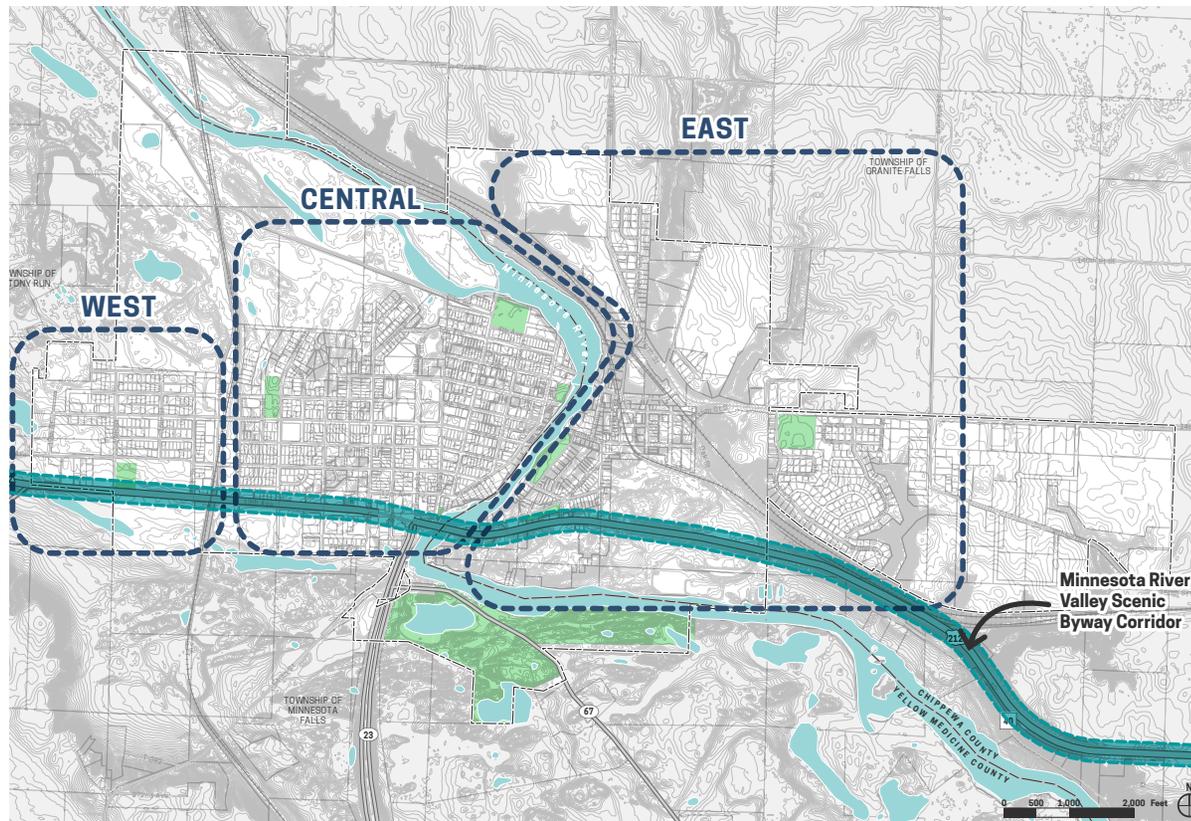


Figure 1.6 Development Patterns

Development Pattern

The city grew up along the riverfront on land owned by Henry Hill and Orange Miller, who were also responsible for building the dam. Their earliest idea was that the land on the east side of Prentice St. would remain open as a park along river. The historical plat continued to extend westward for several decades.

Granite Falls has a distinct street pattern that responds to the Minnesota River meander to both sides. This pattern is delineated as "east," "central," and "west" sub-areas. The central area of the city includes historical settlement patterns along the west bank of the river. This area is a well-connected pattern of streets and sidewalks contained within a regular grid of blocks and sidewalks. The central area features Prentice

Street, that serves as the downtown "main street" and Granite Street linking it to the intersection of Highways 212 and 23.

Further west, and beyond the BNSF rail corridor, is a later era of development (most likely 1950s and 60s and beyond) that exhibits a pattern of larger lot sizes, no sidewalks, and single family residential types common to conventional suburban development.

East of the river, the rail corridors and topography interrupt the more rational pattern exhibited west of the river. There is a small traditional neighborhood area on the river but several houses were taken and demolished after the floods. The east area has a less connected network. The main east-west artery is Oak Street (145th St SE), that includes larger homes around 30th Ave SE, and new residential development south of Oak along Skyline Drive.

Street widths in Granite Falls are often somewhat wider than required for residential streets. The City's assessment policy states that residential property owners shall only be assessed for that portion of the street both in width and depth required for a typical residential street as determined by the City Engineer. When feasible, the City has been reducing street widths to 38 feet which allows for two-way traffic and parking on both sides.

Parks & Open Space

The City includes a variety of parks and open spaces from the large and multi-use Memorial Park to the unimproved riverfront Rice Park to a new dog park that is still to be fully funded. Key parks include Sorlein Park (downtown) and the Granite Falls overlook both situated along the west bank of the river. Neighborhood parks such as Highland Park and the to-be improved Rice Park are located the east area of the city (Chippewa County). The Minnesota River Valley Overlook is located on Hwy 212 and highlights the scenic Minnesota River Scenic Valley Byway Corridor. The Roebling Bridge is a major historic landmark that connects both sides of the river.

West of the river, the City has special and single use parks like the baseball park/Richter Field, Fireman's Park and the Veterans Memorial Park. A neighborhood park with some winter time features is located on 9th Ave and 11th St. A small ball field and outdoor park are located just west of the MN West Community & Technical College. Sports fields and courts are located within the Yellow Medicine East High School campus.

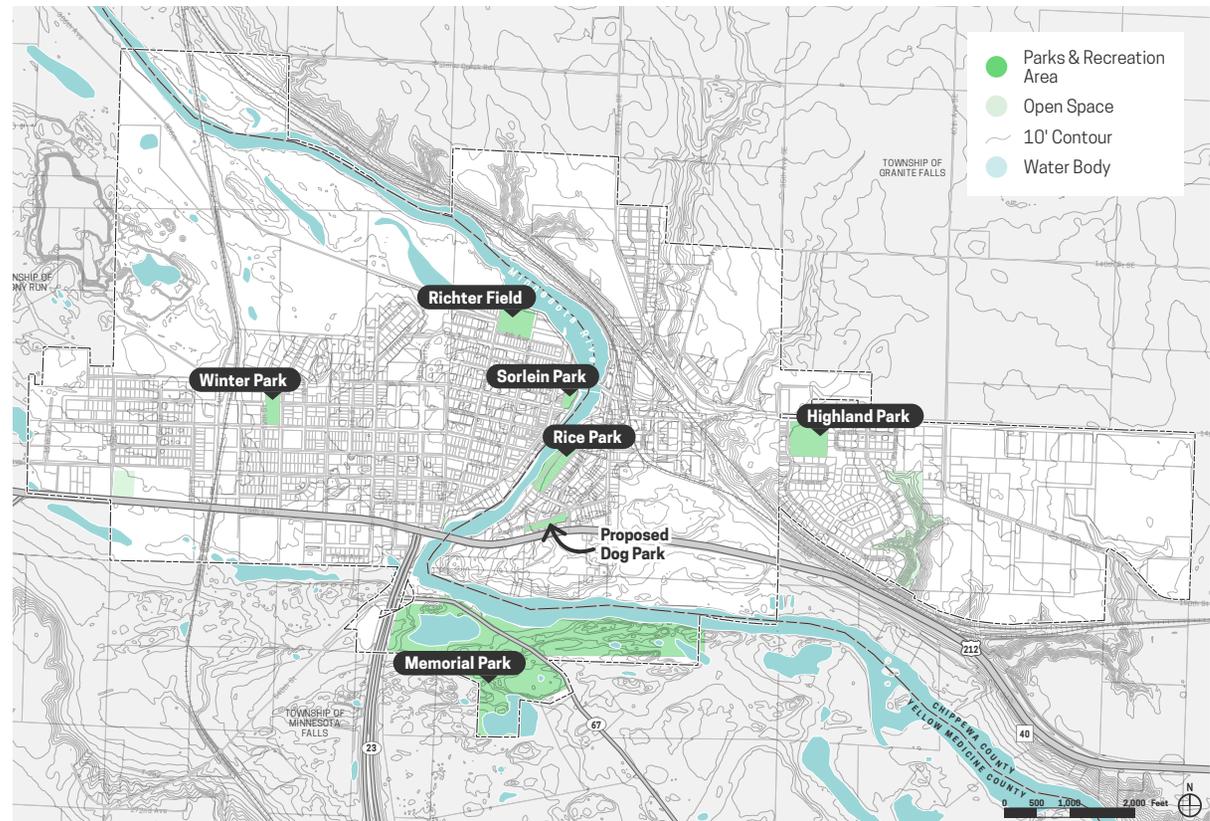


Figure 1.7 Parks & Open Space

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Part 2. **Discussion** *Issues & Vision*



Community Conversations with over 60 residents and stakeholders were held in June of 2021.



Residents provided input on the proposed vision, goals, & objectives at SquidFest 2021.

Community Engagement

Over 200 residents and stakeholders have guided the development of this document between both in-person and online engagement events. At the end of June in 2021, Community Conversations were held in-person at the high school where groups were interviewed in 45 minute sessions. This event acted as a kick-off for the comprehensive plan update, and also included

a community tour for the project team led by City and EDA staff. An online survey was distributed throughout July of 2021, asking similar questions as the initial in-person event in an attempt to reach community members who couldn't attend the in-person event.

The initial engagement efforts guided the development of a community vision with goals and objectives that were presented to the community at the first annual SquidFest in September 2021. Input provided at this event defined the

final vision, goals, and objectives outlined in this document.

The following is a breakdown of participation across all engagement efforts:

- 82 online survey responses
- 65 stakeholders interviews
- 95 (approximate) participants at SquidFest

A summary of what the project team heard across all engagement events can be seen in Figure 2.1. A full breakdown of community engagement can be found in the "Appendix" on page A-1.

Top Three Priorities



Housing

Lack of housing options, such as apartments/rentals, senior, assisted, independent, starter, safe, aging-in-place, new & twin homes, tax/utility costs



Economic Development & Business

More jobs, businesses, family/breakfast/lunch restaurants, downtown vitality



Outdoor: Parks & Rivers

Riverfront, Rice Park, Memorial Park, skate park, walking/biking trails, splash pad, outdoor pool, dog park

Other Issues & Priorities



More Activities

In general for all ages



School

Losing enrollment, academics, administration, funding, families



Maintenance & Aesthetics

Private property, trash/litter, stray animals



Childcare



Highway 212 & 23

Improvements, signage



Increased Communication

Newspaper, calendar, broadband, connecting



Sidewalks & Accessibility



Upper Sioux Community & Granite Falls



Minnesota West Community & Technical College

Figure 2.1 Community Engagement Summary: Issues & Priorities

Vision, Goals, & Objectives

Community Vision

Granite Falls is a **connected community** centered on **unique cultural and natural resources**, with **diverse social and economic opportunities**.

Goals & Objectives

This vision covers a broad range of goals and objectives; the ones highlighted in yellow were prioritized during the Squid Festival Sept 18.

➔ **Goal 1:** Connect the Downtown retail experience and the scenic Riverfront experience.

- ☞ Enhance the Riverfront Alley (*alley name is Lende Lane*) with pedestrian amenities and gathering spaces.
 - Create backdoor retail experiences facing the river.
 - Provide a trail connection between the Legion and the river and develop a complete loop.
 - Provide safe river access and portage sites.
- ☞ Redevelop both sides of the riverfront with gathering spaces, play for all ages, and a performance venue.

➔ **Goal 2:** Connect people with housing that fits their needs at all life stages.

- ☞ Provide high-quality independent and assisted senior housing, ideally walking distance from Downtown.
- ☞ Encourage investment in rehabilitating existing housing stock, infilling vacant lots, and redeveloping sites within the existing residential neighborhoods.
 - Conduct a housing inventory study to align existing resources and needs.

➔ **Goal 3:** Connect residents and business owners with resources to build economic resilience.

- ☞ Expand childcare options with a daycare pod, babysitting co-op, senior/youth program, and other resources.
 - Work with providers and employers to invest in high quality broadband service.
 - Leverage the Community Marketing Plan as it is rolled out.
- ☞ Develop a shared MinnWest/High School/ Employer curriculum that builds on the strengths of all three and develops connections that keep students around (*or returning*) after graduation.
 - Improve awareness of community investments and programs (*see Goal 4*).

➔ **Goal 4:** Connect people with meaningful activities for all ages.

- Create a community newsletter and calendar that is available by mail, in public spaces, and online.

- ☞ Develop deeper relationships with the Upper Sioux Community to share resources.
 - Provide opportunities for involvement outside of the committee structure (*volunteering for single events or shorter-term commitments*).
 - Create a volunteer brigade to assist with property clean up, such as a lawn mowing team, a house painting team, etc.
 - Form a Welcoming Committee to gather resources for new residents and employers.
- ☞ Continue to invest in the artist-in-residence program and its connections to the schools and broader community.

➔ **Goal 5:** Connect infrastructure investments throughout the community to create synergy.

- Develop signage along highways (*and especially at the 212/23 intersection*) that creates awareness of Downtown Granite Falls and other resources.
- Create a visitor's kiosk at the 212/23 intersection and a complementary use of the 107 E Highway 212 Site (*formerly owned by the Zimmerman Family*).
- ☞ Develop a streetscape from the 212/23 intersection towards Downtown that creates a sense of welcome and draws visitors in.
 - Address liability and livability issues with sidewalks, especially on routes that connect schools, Downtown, and areas where seniors walk frequently.
- ☞ Complete the trail connection to Montevideo and provide safe and inviting access from it to Downtown.

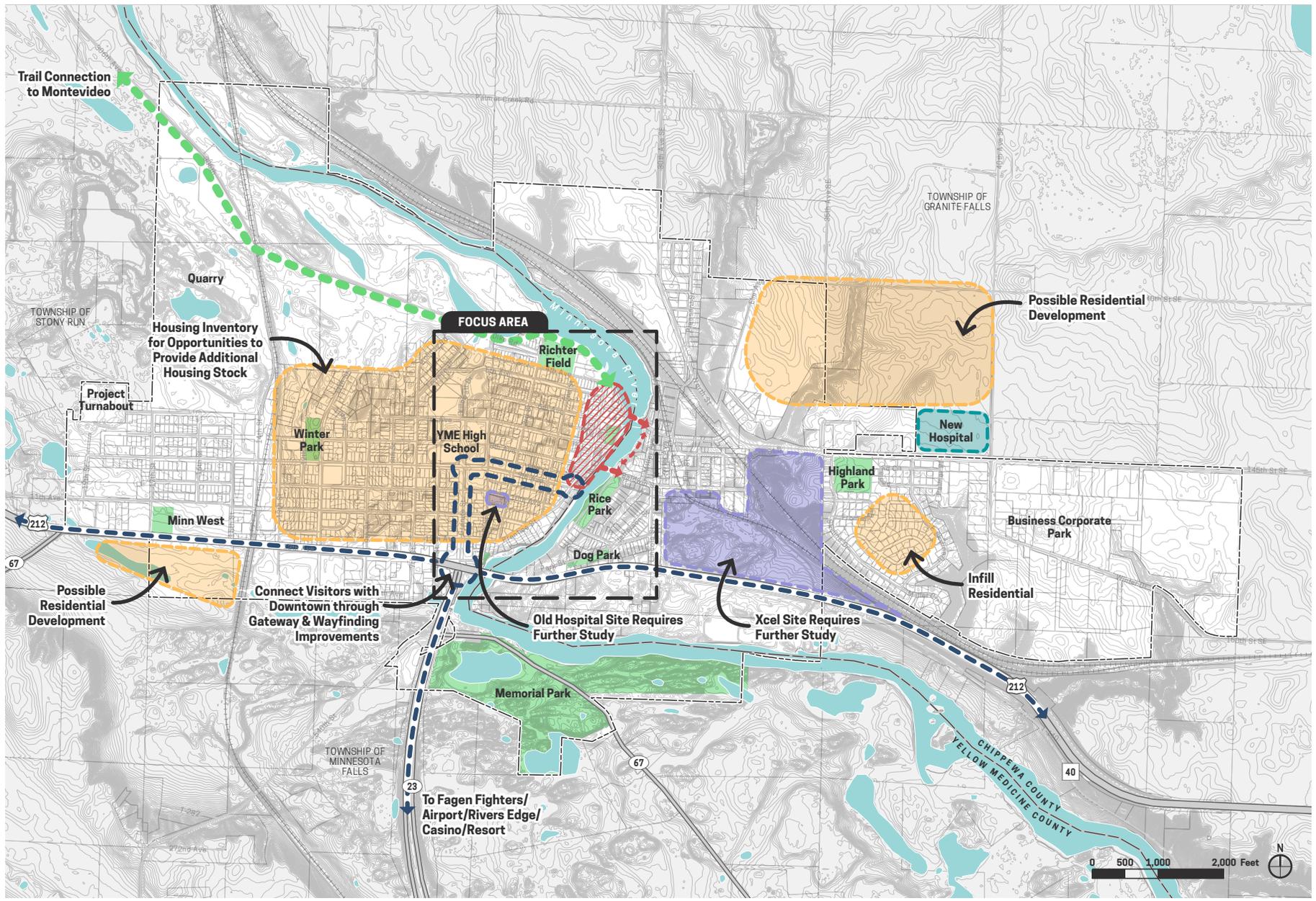


Figure 2.2 Vision Map

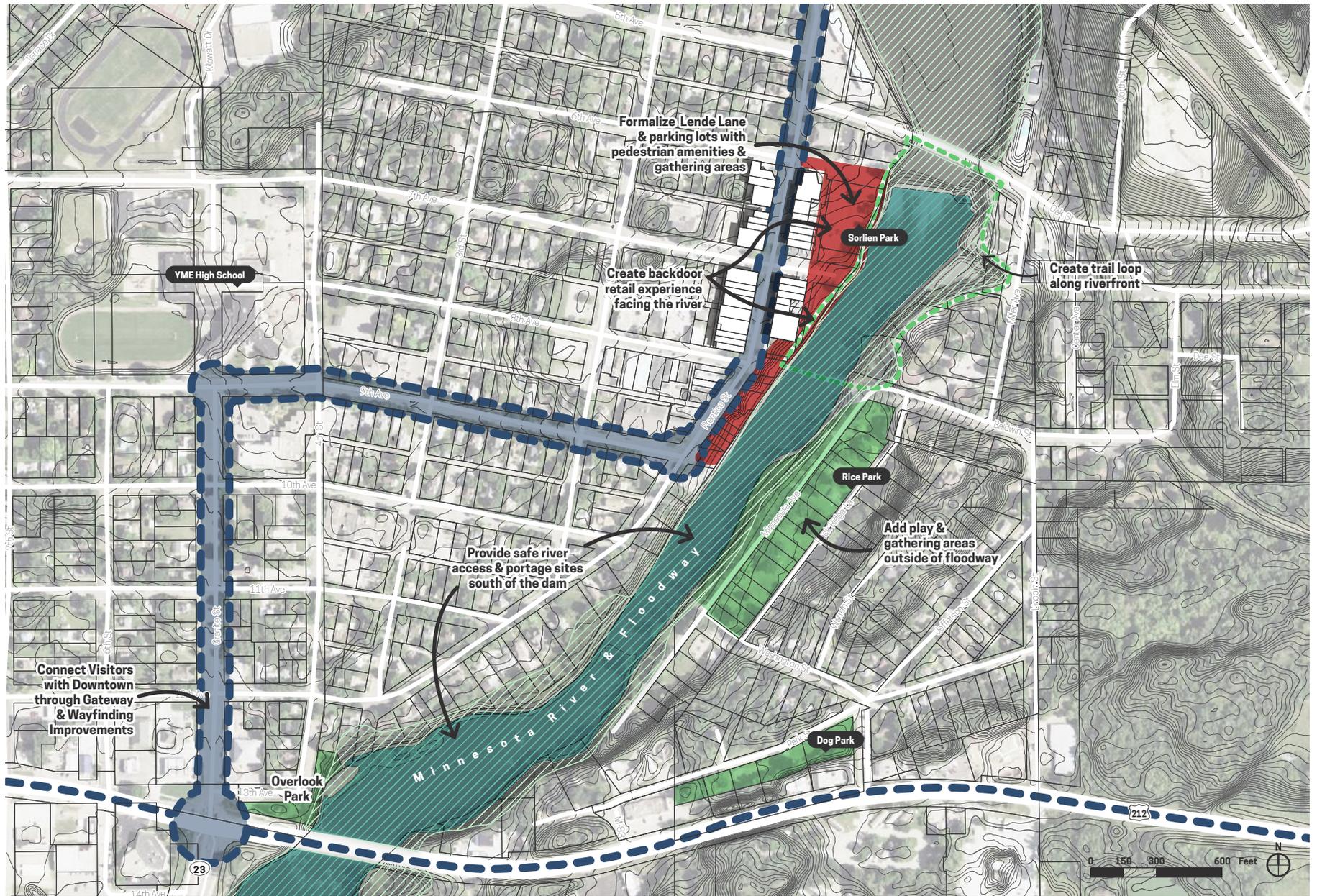


Figure 2.3 Vision Map Focus Area



Part 3. **Direction**
Comprehensive Plan Framework

Community Wide Goals

- ➔ **Goal 1:** Connect the Downtown retail experience and the scenic Riverfront experience.
- ➔ **Goal 2:** Connect people with housing that fits their needs at all life stages.
- ➔ **Goal 3:** Connect residents and business owners with resources to build economic resilience.
- ➔ **Goal 4:** Connect people with meaningful activities for all ages.
- ➔ **Goal 5:** Connect infrastructure investments throughout the community to create synergy.

Framework Summary

This plan's Framework is a way to understand and communicate overarching growth and development ideas for the city over the next ten to 20 years. A number of major issues were identified during the engagement process, community analysis, and from recent and past studies. These serve as the basis for a set of strategic initiatives and a long-term direction.

Issues included a variety of housing needs/ types, park and riverfront improvements, trail connections, promotion/marketing, community communication, and how future development should reflect the walkable and connected small town character of Granite Falls. Central to the future of Granite Falls is the ability to attract new employees and families; provide new and attractive family-oriented housing; enhance the destination qualities of the downtown riverfront; and attract new students by building on area schools' commitment to excellence and achievement.

The Framework focuses on the following key leverage points:

- Take advantage of and emphasize the natural resource of the river – its location in downtown, its recreational qualities, and its potential to make downtown a more desirable destination.
- Leverage the qualities of downtown and its connections to established neighborhoods, the river, and the 23/212 highway system.
- Celebrate and invest in parks and open spaces, especially the riverfront in downtown, as an active, pedestrian-oriented place; realize the long term potential of Rice Park and take advantage of underutilized areas as well as broader connections, like a bike trail to Montevideo and other destinations.
- Continue to support, collaborate, and lean on anchor institutions like City Hall/EDA, Yellow Medicine County Seat, Minnesota West Community & Technical College, Yellow Medicine East High School, and the Avera Medical Center, as well as local businesses and stakeholders

Land Use

Land use patterns and future opportunities will continue to be a strategic and selective process based on market conditions, available infrastructure, and guiding policy from the City. From a land use perspective, downtown is the heart and center of Granite Falls for business, community, recreation, and as an engaging visitor destination. The downtown area includes Prentice Street, west riverfront, Roebling Bridge, the dam, and Sorlien Park. As far as riverfront communities along the Minnesota River, Granite Falls clearly stands out as having the most inviting and accessible riverfront along the whole river corridor. It is an asset the community should continue to feature as a major visitor destination that also reinforces quality of life for everyone.

An initial first step is to think about how to highlight the west side of the riverfront with more amenities, features, events, and visitor-related programming, perhaps expanding Sorlien Park, considering the potential for additional development on the river and focusing on people-oriented spaces (and less on paved areas for parking cars).

Another focus is to identify housing locations specifically for families and a number of other

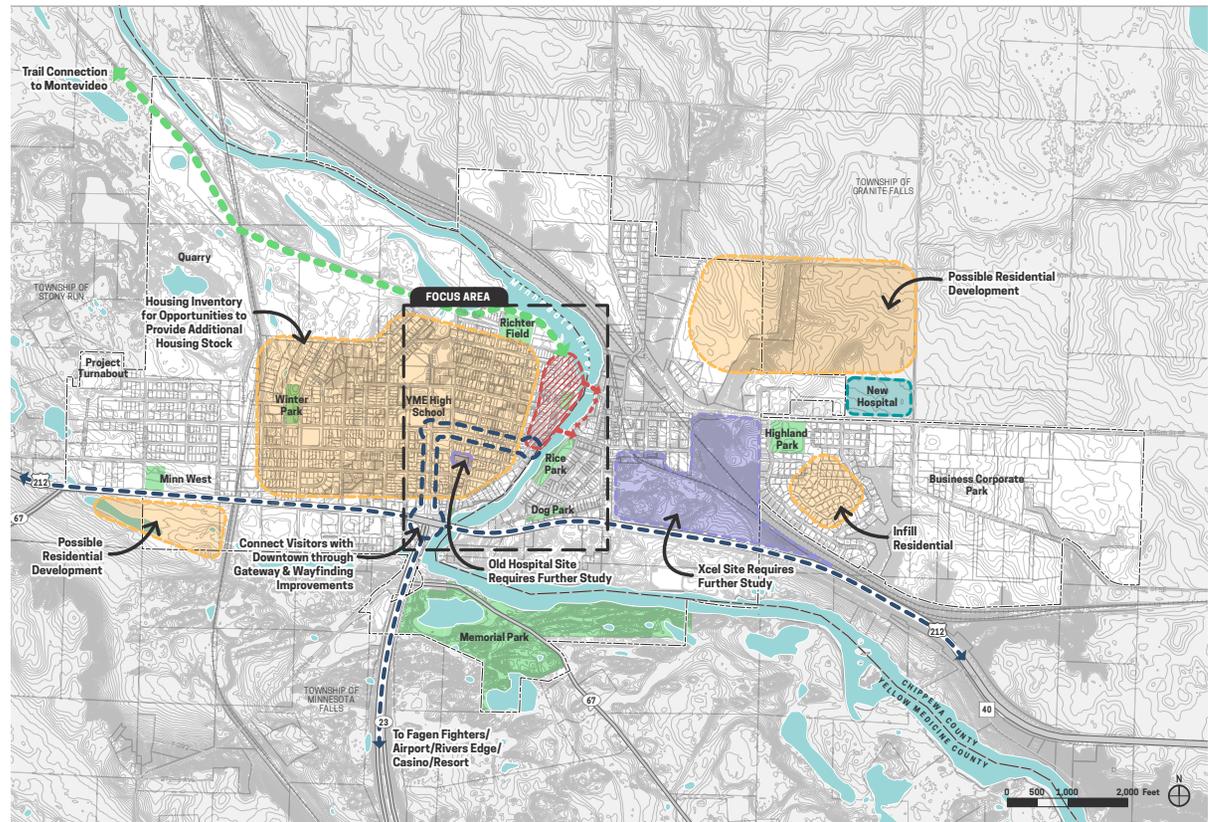


Figure 3.1 Vision Map

market-based housing needs, such as senior units and multi-family buildings. Opportunities include the on-going infill development along Skyline Drive, land around the proposed new Avera hospital campus (north of Oak at Jordan Dr), and a small area of land on Highway 212 across from the MinnWest Campus.

Xcel owns a large parcel of land associated with the old power plant with a major sub-station that remains in operation along the river. However a large portion of the property sits north of Highway 212 and should be studied to see if there are any opportunities for this area in the future and if Xcel would be open to a change in use or ownership.



Figure 3.2 Existing Lende Lane Riverfront Streetscape & Open Space Facing South

Downtown Riverfront

Granite Falls' unique location combines a charming downtown and a beautiful river setting. Today, the two elements are somewhat divided by Lende Lane. Through a series of related improvements, this plan proposes to reconnect the two elements and create a more inviting experience for visitors and residents. Gathering spaces, a trail loop, river access, play areas, and other enhancements would work together to create a cohesive whole.

There are a number of interconnected strategies that could be used to enhance the entire Downtown Riverfront:

- Create a complete walking loop using Lende Lane, the historic pedestrian bridge, the highway bridge, and Rice Park. Most of this loop already exists, but a connection is needed on the river side of the American Legion building.
- Use the grassy slope and plaza space on the Downtown side of the river to create a venue for performances and movie nights.
- Use site furnishings, public art, and landscaping to enhance Lende Lane and Solien Park. Painted pavement or pavers could be used to clearly mark the pedestrian trail.
- Add a play area (outside the floodway) and replace the underutilized roadway with a trail in Rice Park to create a destination on both sides of the river.
- Incorporate the river access and portage sites that were previously planned.



Figure 3.3 Proposed Lende Lane Riverfront Streetscape & Open Space Facing South



Figure 3.4 Existing Lende Lane Riverfront Streetscape Facing North

Riverfront Alley

As part of the improvements throughout the Downtown Riverfront area, a critical consideration is activating the back of the Downtown businesses. Creating two-sided storefronts allows business to leverage their locations, attracting pedestrians who will be drawn to the river. It allows for greater porosity from Prentice Street to the riverfront and it creates a cohesive whole for the district, incorporating vibrant retail, art, and river-related attractions.

Different businesses can address their back storefront in different ways, but the following enhancements will help activate Lende Lane:

- Use both building signage and sandwich boards to clearly mark back doors.
- Enhance rear entrances with canopies and brightly painted doors.
- Delineate outdoor seating and shopping areas with ornamental fences and planters.
- Continue art and landscaping strategies described in the Downtown Riverfront section.



Figure 3.5 Proposed Lende Lane Riverfront Streetscape Facing North

Housing

Though land is more readily available in east Granite Falls (Chippewa County), this may not be the next best location to develop due to limited street network, challenging topography/environment, railroad corridors, and lack of community amenities. If development does continue in this area it should reflect the traditional patterns and principles that knit the established neighborhoods west of downtown: connected street/block network, sidewalks and street trees, local scaled parks, preserving natural features and drainage, and incorporating a range of housing types, sizes, and prices.

Long-term development may be inevitable east of the river, but Granite Falls housing needs should focus on existing housing stock, located mainly west of the river. By addressing senior housing needs with strategic investments targeted to market-based and assisted housing units, this strategy could then could free-up existing housing stock to support first time buyers, families, and renters. Better understanding the existing housing stock and its condition would be a key early step in addressing this land use approach. This effort would be combined with programs to help with acquisition, renovations, and redevelopment.

The City is fortunate to have access to several agencies that can address housing needs. It is our recommendation that the City work with the housing agencies to prioritize the recommendations of this study and to develop a plan to address housing needs. The plan should include strategies, time lines, and the responsibilities of each agency. While there has traditionally been a degree of staff interaction between these agencies, it will be important that a coordinated approach be used to prioritize and assign responsibility for housing programs.

Housing Strategies

- Conduct a housing inventory to better understand supply, condition, etc. This would primarily be directed in the central area of Granite Falls where housing stock is older or units may need some repair or investment.
- Focus on existing infill/vacant lots. There are a number of vacant or undeveloped lots near downtown and in other central residential areas that may be available. New development could include single detached and attached housing as well as smaller multi-family buildings.
- Identify existing homes for sale and/or reuse. There is usually a supply of housing for sale that could be acquired by the EDA (or other non-profit) to rehabilitate and provide housing for a family or new residents.
- Potential to develop greenfield sites. Two areas have been identified that may have potential for future development: a) the land adjacent and north of the Health Care Center and b) an approximately 12-acre site on Highway 212 across and south of the MinnWest campus.
- Lots/blocks/sites in and near downtown. There are a few undeveloped lots just a block or less off Prentice that could be improved for attached single family units or multi-family housing.
- Mobile home park capacity. Manufactured housing has been a regular solution for providing more affordable supply in most communities. As part of the housing inventory, it may be beneficial to take a closer look at what is available and how mobile home parks can be more effectively utilized.
- Allow accessory dwelling units. Another affordable housing option is to allow for accessory dwelling units, another legal dwelling unit on a current R-1 or R-2 lot that is typically limited to a certain maximum square footage (generally 50% or less than the principal dwelling).
- Identify and plan potential redevelopment areas (e.g. hospital site, 4th/10th/Granite St., etc.). The EDA has proposed potential new housing units next to the hospital in 2021. Once the new Avera hospital is built this site will offer an excellent opportunity to realize new residential development in the heart of the R-2 zoning district.

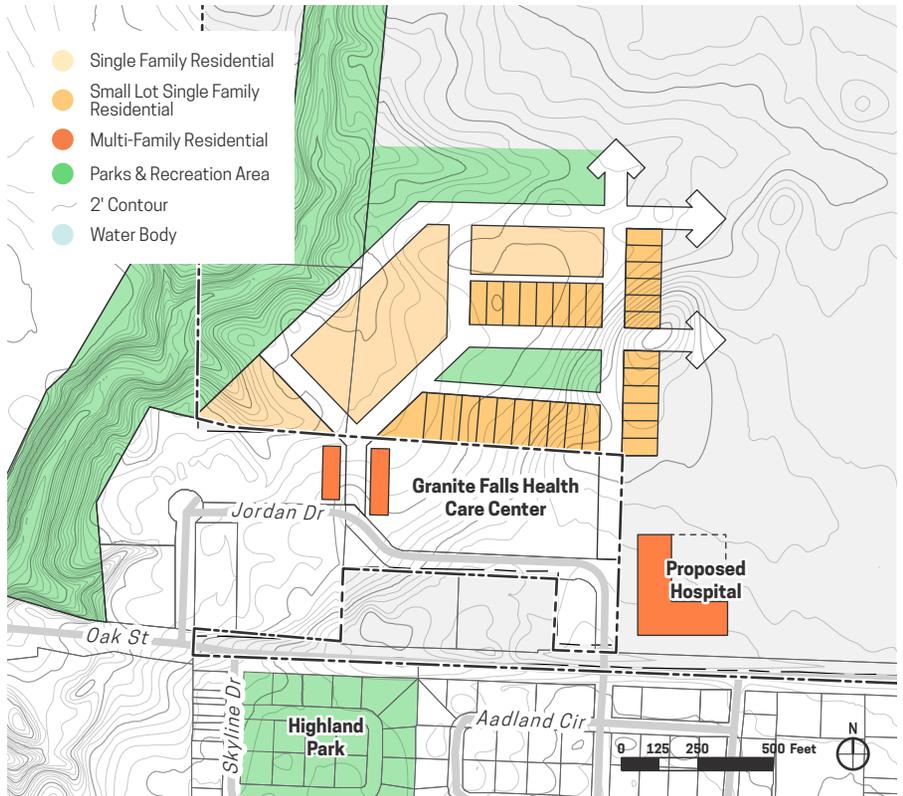


Figure 3.6 Potential Residential Development Area

If additional development is implemented around the new medical center site (north of Oak Street) it should reflect the small town patterns and connectivity of Granite Falls including a prominent public realm that could address stormwater treatment, sidewalks, neighborhood parks and a mix of housing types including single family, single family attached and multi-family building types. The medical center should be sited and built that reflects these patterns so nearby neighbors can walk to the clinic.

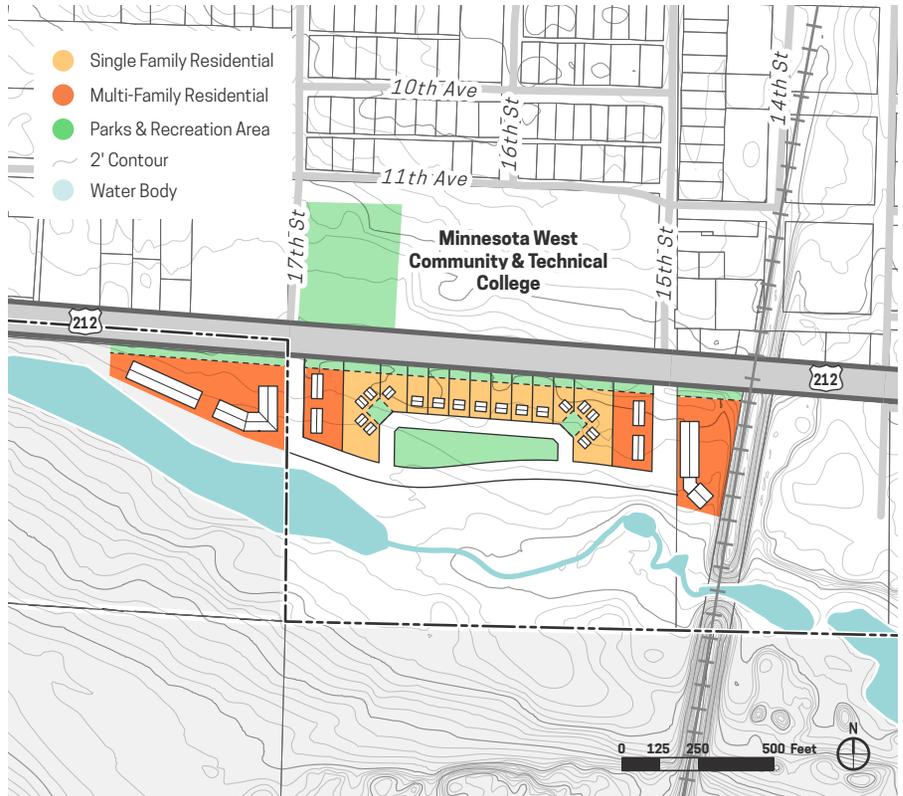


Figure 3.7 Potential Residential Development Area

A new family-oriented development is shown just south of Hwy 212 that includes at least four different building types: single family, small detached residential, single family attached and multi-family all organized around a central green space that could include active kid play areas and passive open spaces adjacent to the creek.

Parks & Open Space

The city has range of park types and sizes from the large, riverfront Memorial Park, to small but significant parks like Fireman's Park and active resources like Richter Field, home of the Kilowatts. A new dog park is planned and fundraising in underway. Even with these assets, the city has an amazing opportunity to improve and enhance the riverfront in downtown, creating a more desirable destination, setting the stage for more programming/events, and further complementing Roebling Bridge. There is the potential to create a downtown riverfront walking loop that would connect from the Roebling Bridge to Oak Street then along the east side of the riverfront to Rice Park and back.

Sorlein Park

Sorlein Park is a major part of the downtown and should include a pedestrian connection along the river all the way to Oak Street. This would require some cooperation and land access/trade/purchase from the American Legion. Improving this park should also expand its green space area by converting some of the contiguous surface parking. This would effectively create more space for passive use and pedestrian areas instead of impervious paving.



Figure 3.9 Existing Rice Park

Rice Park

Rice Park provides the green, open space complement to the Downtown Riverfront. It is currently minimally developed with a frisbee golf course, skatepark, river overlook, and sidewalks. By replacing the stretch of Minnesota Avenue between Washington and Baldwin Streets

with walking paths and seating suitable for the floodway, the park could become more inviting as a passive open space. Outside of the floodway, towards the end of the pedestrian bridge, a themed play area celebrating Granite Falls' history could provide a destination for visitors and residents crossing the bridge.



Figure 3.10 Proposed Rice Park

Transportation

The community is served by a well-connected street and block pattern west of the river. East of the river, the street network is limited mainly due to topography and rail corridors with Oak Street being the major east west access. Highways 23 and 212 provide good regional access and Highway 212 is designated as part of the Minnesota River Scenic Corridor Byway.

In general the city is adequately served from an automobile movement perspective, but there remain opportunities to make sidewalk, multi-use, and bike trail improvements. In particular, pedestrian and bike connections in the riverfront in downtown could create a loop around the dam, Rice park, west riverfront, and Sorlien Park. Another improvement identified during the community conversations is to link the city to Montevideo with a dedicated bike trail. Local efforts have worked to make this connection a reality.

Highways 23 & 212 Intersection

Highways 23 and 212 bring a lot of potential visitors to Granite Falls and, at their intersection in town, there is a tremendous opportunity to invite those people to explore beyond the highway corridors. However, there is currently only fairly



Figure 3.11 Existing 23/212 Highway Intersection (From Google Street View 2018)

utilitarian signage directing people towards the Downtown or other destinations, and few other indications of welcome. Simple improvements to signage and the streetscape could elevate awareness and invite visitors to explore.

The following changes would communicate Granite's welcoming character and draw in visitors:

- Add a monument sign.
- Enhance the directional signage to indicate more destinations and to be more evocative.
- Upgrade pedestrian crosswalks to improve accessibility and safety.
- Incorporate pavement painting at crosswalks and in the intersection of the highways, and repeat the painted crosswalks up Granite/5th Street and 9th Avenue, leading to Downtown.

- Use banners and hanging planters along those streets to add color and create a sense that the roads lead somewhere interesting.
- Add street trees and boulevard plantings along those streets to create a green corridor.
- Consolidate driveway openings and improve sidewalks along those streets for a more pedestrian-friendly and inviting entrance.



Figure 3.12 Proposed 23/212 Highway Intersection

Implementation

The following is a list of **implementation ideas and opportunities** that originally evolved out of the community conversations event. Some of these may be more aspirational than others. The **high priority items** are denoted with a 🏠 and the **most achievable** are denoted with a 🌟.

- 🏠 Conduct a housing inventory to better understand local housing stock, condition, and to align existing resources and needs.
- 🏠 Develop deeper relationships with the Upper Sioux Community to share resources.
- 🏠 Provide opportunities for involvement outside of the formal city committee structure (*volunteering for single events or shorter-term commitments*).
- 🏠 Add student representatives to City Council, Planning Commission, and EDA to help the next generation learn basic civics and train the next level of leaders.
- 🏠 Form a Welcoming Committee to gather resources for new residents and employers.
- 🏠 Create a volunteer brigade to assist with property clean up, such as a lawn mowing team, a house painting team, etc.
- 🌟 Encourage investment in rehabilitating existing housing stock, infilling vacant lots, and redeveloping sites within existing residential neighborhoods.
- 🌟 Develop a shared MinnWest/High School/ Employer curriculum that builds on the strengths of all three and develops connections that keep students around (*or returning*) after graduation.
- 🌟 Expand childcare options with a daycare pod, babysitting co-op, senior/youth program, and other resources.
- 🌟 Continue to invest in the artist-in-residence program and its connections to the schools and broader community.
- 🌟 Consider reviewing and revising the zoning code to allow smaller residential lot sizes, small houses, and accessory dwelling units.
- 🌟 Interview downtown property owners to develop a database and to determine their future plans (*expanding, selling, renovations, etc.*)
- 🌟 Develop an overall plan for the downtown (*potential new businesses, address parking needs, develop an overall theme, art and cultural opportunities, etc.*)
- 🌟 Develop a plan for each downtown property and each downtown block
 - Create backdoor retail experiences facing the river.
 - Provide a trail connection between the Legion and the river and develop a complete loop.
 - Provide safe river access and portage sites.
 - Redevelop both sides of the riverfront with gathering spaces, play for all ages, and a performance venue.
- Provide high-quality independent and assisted senior housing, ideally walking distance from Downtown.
- Work with providers and employers to invest in high-quality broadband service.
- Leverage the Community Marketing Plan as it is rolled out.
- Improve awareness of community investments, programs, and spending priorities.
- Create a community newsletter and calendar that is available by mail, in public spaces, and online.
- Develop signage along highways (and especially at the 212/23 intersection) that creates awareness of Downtown Granite Falls and the riverfront destination.
- Create a visitor’s kiosk at the 212/23 intersection and a complementary use of the 107 E Highway 212 Site (*formerly owned by the Zimmerman Family*).
- Develop a streetscape from the 212/23 intersection towards Downtown that creates a sense of welcome and draws visitors in.
- Address liability and livability issues with sidewalks, especially on routes that connect schools, Downtown, and areas where seniors walk frequently.
- Complete the trail connection to Montevideo and provide safe and inviting access from it to Downtown.



Appendix

Trade Area & Market Recommendations

1. Explore opportunities to expand offerings in restaurant, catering, auto parts, and entertainment categories

Based on the primary and secondary data, there appears to be some demand that is not being met locally in these categories. Moreover, some business operators pointed to some of these categories such as entertainment and food services such as catering and restaurants in particular. To garner additional local dollars, existing firms may consider expanding their offerings, a local entrepreneur might consider starting a business, or the community could work to attract an investor from outside of town to establish a business to serve the needs identified in these categories.

2. Support transitioning businesses

One in five survey participants shared that they intend to retire or sell their business in the next five years. Considering the sentiment in the business survey to support existing businesses, this should be a primary interest to retain those

businesses in the community even if the current owner or manager moves on. Activities such as succession planning workshops are a valuable entry point, although the primary need of current operators are direct one-on-one assistance in legal and financial.

3. Merchant events and activities

Events are one way to focus the attention of shoppers on local businesses. As a whole, participants of the business survey seem optimistic about the downtown business district and want to continue to find way to directly support their local independent businesses (see Business Owners Survey Findings). Two directly suggested some form of events which would drive traffic and generally create more of a ‘buzz’ which would also have the added benefit of filling the retail gap for entertainment, albeit through community initiative instead of an amusement-based business.

4. Increase online sales

Nearly all of the businesses indicated not receiving sales from online. Increasing the amount of sales happening online is an essential strategy for the long-term sustainability of retail districts.

Competition from online retailers will only continue to increase with time. Other communities have formed local entrepreneur groups to focus on supporting each other as they begin to implement business strategies using the internet. These groups can help build skills in doing business online, and can also provide social support a people attempt to pivot their business.

5. Market to visitors and tourists

Granite Falls is located at the intersection of two heavily traveled Southwestern Minnesota highways. Additionally, amenities like the Prairie’s Edge Casino, Fagen Museum, and Minnesota River all bring visitors to the area. Joint marketing efforts like the Yellowstone Trail Association are working to bring visitors to the area. Based on the business survey, a very small number of sales come from visitors or tourists. Therefore, this appears to be an area with significant potential for Granite Falls. Building on and expanding existing tourism marketing efforts should be strongly considered.

Housing Study Recommendations

Home Ownership

1. Projected demand for three to five owner-occupancy units annually
2. Promote attached single family housing construction
3. Promote the lot options in the City/monitor lot supply
4. Consider the creation of housing construction incentives
5. Consider affordable new construction partnerships
6. Promote the affordable existing housing stock in the City
7. Utilize and promote all programs that assist with home ownership
8. Consider the development of a purchase/rehabilitation program

Rental Housing

9. Promote the production of 20 to 24 units of market rate rental housing
10. Promote the creation of 20 to 30 units of moderate rent market rate housing

11. Monitor the supply and demand for income-restricted rental housing
12. Monitor demand for senior housing with light services
13. Promote the development of 22 to 26 units of senior assisted living
14. Promote the development of 16 to 20 beds of memory care housing

Rehabilitation, Preservation and Other

15. Continue to offer rental housing rehabilitation programs
16. Continue to offer owner-occupied housing rehabilitation
17. Continue to demolish dilapidated structures
18. Consider programs to improve the condition and quality of mobile homes
19. Continue strategies for downtown housing and redevelopment
20. Promote employer involvement in housing
21. Create a housing plan and coordination among housing agencies
22. Develop community marketing programs and strategies

Community Conversation Summary

Meeting Date: June 29 and 30, 2021

Over two days on June 29th and 30th, the LHB team conducted “Community Conversations” with approximately 66 participants. We had structured discussions about issues, changes, and the possibility to do one thing in and for the community. On at least two occasions, we also had the chance to tour the community with Linda Mathiasen, EDA, and Crystal Johnson, City Manager. Below are the main issues and topics that were discussed in order of how often they were mentioned by participants. We have also included a graphic summary of the topics, by priority, and a map highlighting the physical location of specific areas of Granite Falls that were discussed. Complete notes of all sessions are also available.

1. Housing

- a.** Most needed types include affordable, quality rental and for sale for young families; homes for seniors to move out of their large SF homes; assisted living
- b.** Best opportunities: infill vacant lots, hospital site, townhome site, give seniors

options to move out of large single-family homes and infill those homes

- c.** It appears given declining population and aging demographics that one aspect of the housing issue is the lack of transitional housing for retirees and older adults needing managed or assisted living opportunities, which in turn would free up some % of the housing stock for local demand.
 - d.** Apparently, there is a lack of developers to build in Granite; there is a twin home developer that is building then leasing and this seems to be a popular option for some.
- ## 2. Economic Development/Jobs/Businesses
- a.** More jobs are desired which will in turn create a broader market and help drive school enrollment, etc.
 - b.** We heard about the need for a breakfast restaurant as well as other options for lunch.
 - c.** Desire for downtown to be more viable and livelier, with shops, goods and services that were common for earlier generations.
 - d.** We also heard and understood that this is an ag-based economy, and the local bank has expanded its trade area and is doing well which indicates some strength to the economy but not sure how this is translating to Granite. We know farming numbers are declining and size of farms are growing suggesting larger corporate

operators in general though not sure how this defines the surrounding area.

- e.** Attracting employees is a barrier for employers—addressing issues like housing, schools, activities, and others mentioned in this summary would make it easier to recruit.

3. Outdoor: Parks/River

a. Riverfront improvements

- i.** GF has tremendous assets in this area, including the signature pedestrian bridge and surface improvements on the west bank (downtown side) of the river.
- ii.** Plans exist for improved river access.
- iii.** Consider a venue for events, concerts, movies, etc.
- iv.** Make the retail with backs to the river a dual-sided asset, modeled on Stillwater and others.
- v.** Get a trail connection between Legion and the river (currently using alley).
- vi.** There is still interest in the Whitewater Park option, but it faces hurdles.

b. Rice Park

- i.** Interest in improvements like a bandshell, a better playground, restrooms, and seating.
- ii.** There is still interest in a splashpad, but maintenance/operations costs were a barrier.

- iii. We heard a suggestion to use some of the space as a campground.
 - c. Memorial Park is a tremendous asset that should be celebrated more.
 - d. Trail connections from Montevideo are incomplete and many participants wanted to have this connection made and into downtown.
- 4. Activities
 - a. Especially needed for teens and young adults
 - b. Many people did not know bowling was available in town.
 - c. Movies and concerts in the park?
 - d. Many people noted there were activities, but nobody knows about them; see “Communications” below.
- 5. Communications
 - a. In general, there appeared to be a broader awareness about what is going on and who is doing what, especially among those who have a longstanding personal network.
 - b. Several people noted they weren’t aware of city services and policies. For example: people weren’t aware of a watering ban, city resources for housing and childcare, and the City’s system for addressing neglected properties.
- c. Several people noted that they regularly hear about community events and activities after they happen.
 - d. The local newspaper is operating at a very base level (one local employee that we heard about) and generally does not cover local events or activities in a meaningful way, especially sports.
 - e. Suggestions for new resources include a Welcome Committee, Community Calendar, Community newsletter, Community marketing plan.
- 6. School District
 - a. The school district has been losing enrollment to surrounding school districts and to the two charter schools nearby in Clarkfield and Echo. There are varying opinions about how to reverse this, but it may be closely tied to the economic conditions and with declining enrollment it would seem to make it difficult for the district to continue operating elementary schools like the one they closed in Clarkfield years ago.
 - b. Competition from Charter Schools is a likely factor. Clarkfield was in opposition to CES closing.
 - c. The district operates the middle and high school in Granite, as well as Crossroads Alt High School, Open Doors Academy - Echo, and GF virtual academy - Clarkfield.
- 7. Highway 212/23
 - a. Need to draw in more of the people passing through on these highways.
 - b. Signage at 212/23 intersection directing people to community assets.
 - c. Retail and restaurants that appeal to drivers.
 - d. Make the street leading to downtown from 212/23 look inviting (trees, banners, etc.).
 - e. 107 E Highway 212 Site (*formerly owned by the Zimmerman Family*) is a potential development/community site where 212 crosses the river
- 8. Property maintenance/aesthetics
 - a. Many people expressed concerns about property (private, both homes and businesses) with significant neglect (unmown lawns, unpainted buildings, junk, etc.).
 - b. The city has policies and programs in place for addressing neglected lawns and properties.
- 9. Childcare
 - a. We heard how difficult it is to secure daycare and school-age childcare; that there just aren’t many options.
 - b. EDA is working on a pod concept which might help with licensure issues.

10. Sidewalks/accessibility

- a.** Many people noted that sidewalks are cracked, heaving, etc.
- b.** There are safety concerns about people using the roads because the sidewalks are too difficult to navigate.
- c.** Seniors struggle and could fall.
- d.** Sidewalks aren't accessible for wheelchairs, strollers, etc.
- e.** City has a program that can assist homeowners with making payments to repair/replace.

11. Upper Sioux Community

- a.** Create a better connection between the Upper Sioux Community and Granite Falls.
- b.** Lots of opportunities for synergy.

12. Minnesota West Community and Technical College

- a.** Another local resource that is not operating as it once did, with declining enrollment (which was additionally impacted by the pandemic).
- b.** People want this to come back but it faces competitive programs at other locations.
- c.** One idea is to put money into a building facelift orienting the building out to the highway but not sure how this addresses the more fundamental issue. MW president has proposal in Bonding Bill.

13. Other

- a. Broadband**
 - i.** Current service is not sufficient for heavier users.
 - ii.** Project Turnabout is making a major investment into their own system to overcome this. Likely it is a barrier for some other employers.
 - iii.** Will the new infrastructure bill make money available via grants or other mechanisms?
- b. Volunteer depth**
 - i.** Bulk of volunteers and civically active people are older/retired
 - ii.** Younger people aren't attending meetings (Council meetings, for example) or joining Lions, etc.
 - iii.** Mayor has been sitting for multiple decades (council then mayor) and though this may be a popular, the community may need to think about broadening the candidate pool for all elected positions in the future.
- c.** Potential for future expansion of development (housing and industrial) in Chippewa County though no land acquisition or annexation agreements are in place.
- d.** NSP continues to operate a major sub-station at the former power plant site; plant is to be demolished in 2022.