

CHAPTER 11: Land Use

This chapter on land use is a major component of the Buffalo Comprehensive Plan, providing a physical representation of the city's development goals and objectives. It draws upon existing land use patterns, environmental features, physical limitations on development, and future population projections to recommend a rational organization of land uses which will protect the city's existing character and allow orderly, economical growth.

This chapter is also a foundation of the city's land use regulations, including the zoning and subdivision ordinances. It indicates the types of zoning districts needed. It also recommends the approximate locations and development guidelines for different types of land uses.

The land use chapter is designed to serve as a guide for public and private development decisions during the 2007-2025 planning period. Although all development envisioned by the Plan may not occur during this period, development which does occur can be coordinated with the city's goals and policies for physical growth and development.

Present Land Use

The Buffalo city limits encompass about 2,900 acres or 4.5 square miles. Over 796 acres are state-owned lands associated with the Wyoming Veterans Home and the vast majority of this land is undeveloped.

About 19.7 percent of the city (573 acres) is used for residential purposes, mostly single family homes in neighborhoods and subdivisions. There are about 2,057 housing units in Buffalo situated on these 573 acres. The overall density of the city's residential areas is 3.6 housing units per acre.

Recreational lands including Buffalo's major parks and greenbelt areas are another 14.7 percent (427 acres) of the city. Vacant or undeveloped tracts and lots constitute 10.5 percent (305 acres) of the city. Public usage including publicly owned facilities (post office, schools, fire hall, etc.) and privately-owned community uses (primarily churches) occupy 7.4 percent (215 acres) of the city.

Commercial and industrial lands are respectively 5.4 percent (156 acres) and 0.4 percent (13 acres) of the city. Streets take up about 410 acres or 14.1 percent of the city. These land use figures are summarized in the following table:

Land Use Summary Table		
Land Use	Acres	% of Total
Residential	573	19.7%
Commercial	156	5.4%
Industrial	13	0.4%
Public	215	7.4%

Existing Land Use map

Recreation	427	14.7%
Streets	410	14.1%
Vacant	305	10.5%
Undesignated	15	0.5%
Veterans Home	796	27.4%
TOTAL	2910	100.0%

Present land use in the city is also presented in the Existing Land Use Map.

Vacant Land and Development Potential

In preparing the future land use component of this plan, it is necessary to evaluate the potential for housing development within the present city limits. New housing can also be developed by replacing existing houses and by converting existing non-residential buildings to residential use. These have not been estimated but will not likely account for a lot of new housing.

A substantial amount of vacant land is potentially available for residential development. Of the vacant land in the city about 206 acres are zoned residential. It is reasonable to assume that one-third of this land (69 acres) will be on the market for development at some time in next 20 years. At 3.6 units per acre (the average density of existing residential areas in Buffalo) this land would provide space for about 250 housing units.

Potential Growth Areas

Development on vacant land within the city will not by itself address expected future growth. Areas outside the present city limits will need to be annexed and developed to meet future growth needs.

To begin identifying areas outside the city suitable for future growth, a number of development limitations were considered. These limitations include:

- ▶ the physical limits of city water service
- ▶ flood plains
- ▶ topography of the areas

These factors were mapped and are presented in the Development Limitations map.

Areas outside the city were further evaluated with consideration to several additional factors:

- ▶ the proximity of the areas to the existing street system
- ▶ the present land use of the areas
- ▶ whether the areas are public lands
- ▶ land uses on adjoining lands
- ▶ use designation on City's 1975 Comprehensive Plan

Sixty-Three separate areas were identified and used as the basis for alternative future land use scenarios. The boundaries of these areas as depicted on the maps are not intended to be exact. The areas are approximations of the boundaries of future land use areas.

Future Land Use Alternatives

Three alternative future land use scenarios have been mapped and analyzed. They differ primarily in how they accommodate the future demand for housing. As noted in the following table, each alternative has a different mix of residential housing densities.

In Alternative #1, the mix includes high density housing (5-10 units per acres) providing 38 percent of the new housing and low and moderate density provide 26 percent and 35 percent respectively.

In Alternative #2, half of the future housing that will be added to the city will be low density (1-3 units per acres) and the other half will be moderate density (3-5 units per acre). No high density housing is planned.

A third alternative is the preferred alternative and is presented as the proposed future land use map. It has a greater emphasis on high density housing (50 percent of new housing) and less low density housing (18%) while moderate density housing is still about a third of new housing.

Note how the overall size of the city varies among the alternatives. The preferred alternative has the smallest overall size of the city at 5,027 acres, which is a doubling of the land area of the present city. In Alternatives #1 and #2, the greater reliance on lower density housing results in even more land area becoming part of the city. These two alternatives spread the city out, consuming more rural open space, are more expensive to develop (longer roads, longer runs of water and sewer lines, etc.) and on-going public services are more expensive to provide.

PLAN ALTERNATIVE	OVERALL CITY SIZE	RESIDENTIAL MIX LOW – MODERATE – HIGH DENSITY
Future Land Use Map	5,027 acres	18% - 32% - 50%
Alternative #1	5,770 acres	26% - 35% - 38%
Alternative #2	6,590 acres	50% - 50% - 0%

The first two alternatives were prepared early in the planning process as a focus for public input on future land use. Comments received from the public and the steering committee helped shape the preferred third alternative, the proposed future land use map.

The third alternative is the proposed future roads and land use map for Buffalo. It has the following features:

- ▶ The planning horizon is to the year 2025.
- ▶ The map is designed to accommodate the NPA Very Strong Growth projection to 2025 (about 6,587 residents and 3,350 housing units).
- ▶ The map assumes that approximately 250 housing units will be constructed within the present city limits by the year 2025.
- ▶ The map is based on a 4x market factor. This means the map allocates land at about four times the projected demand. This is done to ensure competition in land prices. If the plan only allocated land acre for acre with demand, soon there would be a restricted land market, land monopolies, very high prices and huge pressure to deviate from the plan. It is assumed that over the next 20 years, only about one-third of the future land use areas will actually be developed.

Housing densities are depicted as a range on the future roads and land use map. The lower number on the density range indicates the density which is allowed when the developer provides all public facilities required by the City's development regulations. The upper number on the density range indicates the density which is allowed when the developer provides all required public facilities required for the lower density plus additional amenities or facilities. These additional amenities or facilities may include:

- ▶ Public facilities
- ▶ Open space for parks and recreation
- ▶ Innovative design
- ▶ Affordable housing
- ▶ Environmental protection
- ▶ Historic preservation

The density range offers developers flexibility in housing type and density according to level of services provided. This plan specifically encourages developers of large tracts to go beyond minimum development requirements and achieve high densities by incorporating extra facilities or amenities in new developments.

Each type of area depicted on the future roads and land use map is described below:

Low density residential: This is residential housing at a density range of 1 to 3 housing units per acre. This area would be primarily single unit housing with lot sizes ranging from 1 acre down to about 15,000 square feet.

Moderate density residential: This is residential housing at a density range of 3 to 5 housing units per acre. This area would be primarily single unit housing but some multiple unit housing would be feasible as well. This density level approximates the housing densities in many of Buffalo's older residential sections. Single unit lots would range from about 15,000 square feet down to about 7,000 square feet. Multiple-unit housing would take the form of duplexes and smaller apartment buildings, perhaps with no more than four units per building.

High density residential: This is residential housing at a density range of 5 to 10 housing units per acre. This area would be a mix of multiple-unit housing and single unit housing on smaller lots. Single unit housing could be on lots as small as 3,500 square feet. Larger apartment buildings, town houses and other higher density housing would be established in this type of area.

Mixed use: This area represents areas in transition between heavy commercial areas and other land uses. It is intended that a variety of commercial and residential land uses would be established here. Some mixed use areas are existing, such as the south side of Fort Street, while others are in the future. Master planned developments with a mix of shopping centers and high density housing would be an ideal future use. The Mixed Use designation represents a contingency factor in terms of land use because the use of the land can flex in response to an unanticipated increase in demand for residential or commercial land. (Housing that could occur on Mixed Use lands was purposely not accounted for in ascertaining how much land would be needed to meet residential housing needs.)

Central business district: This area is the old downtown of Buffalo and adjoining older neighborhoods. The area consists of commercial and residential buildings and public facilities including the courthouse, post office, Clear Creek elementary school, library, town hall and churches. It is intended that this area would retain much of its present physical character, which is predominantly historic buildings. Restoration and adaptive reuse of historic buildings would be encouraged.

CBD expansion: This area includes areas along Main Street north and south of the present Central Business District. To the south the area includes many fine older homes. To the north, there is a mixture of contemporary commercial buildings including a liquor store, a service station, offices and older residential buildings including the historic Holland House. Also to the north are examples of attractive, older residences that have been respectfully adapted for commercial use.

These areas should be allowed to become further commercialized while retaining, restoring and reusing the remaining homes. New structures built in the areas should be carefully designed to compliment the historic architecture of the older structures. Eventually, these areas can be commercial extensions of the downtown extending the historic ambiance of downtown from Hart Street to the southern end of Main Street.

Highway commercial: These are areas that are or will be predominantly commercial but with very limited pedestrian access. These areas are primarily accessed by motor vehicle and tend to require large parking areas.

Light industrial: This type of area is primarily undeveloped land now but in the future would be used for industrial parks. These areas are mostly located along the west side of Interstate 90.

Public facilities: This type of area includes existing major public facilities: the public schools, the sewage works, the hospital, the Veterans Home and the cemetery. No new facilities of this magnitude are proposed in the future land use map.

Parks and open space: Parks and open space shown on the future land use map are all existing. That is not to say that Buffalo should not have more parks and open space. It is just that future parks have not been shown. Future parks will be smaller parks within new developments with their exact size and location determined in the development approval process.

Statutory area: By law, the City has approval authority over subdivisions in the county that are within one-mile of the Buffalo city limits. The Statutory Area within this area is any area within one-mile and not designated as one of the above land use categories. Such areas are not expected to become part of the city before 2025. Ideally, these areas will remain in present agricultural use. Subdivisions should be limited to very low density. Areas within 1 to 3 miles of the city are also important to the city but are outside the city’s subdivision approval jurisdiction. These areas should also be limited to agriculture and very low density subdivisions.

It should be noted that the City’s comprehensive plan should be agreed to by Johnson County in order to make the plan effective outside the city limits. The implementation chapter of this plan recommends the City and County develop a protocol for development of areas outside the city limits. In the course of establishing this protocol, the City and County should reach a mutual understanding more precisely defining allowable developments for the statutory area.

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	PROJECTED ACREAGE
CBD Expansion	16
Central Business District	71
High Density Residential	345
Highway Commercial	398
Light Industrial	507
Low Density Residential	507
Medium Density Residential	992
Mixed Use	409
Parks & Open Space	563
Public Facilities	1230

Future Roads & Land Use map