

Chapter 10: Community Design



INTRODUCTION

Community design is about the cohesiveness of many different elements of a city, including scale, character, mobility, and density among others. Good community design results in places that are inviting, comfortable, and user friendly. It influences how people interact and move about within their environment. A key component of community design is the relationship between the natural and built environment. Development patterns such as block shape and form, the sidewalk, and landscaping are also part of community design. Many issues and topics covered in other parts of this plan have an influence on community design.

PREVIOUS AND ONGOING COMMUNITY DESIGN RELATED PLANS

Several past and ongoing efforts include elements of community design and have been reviewed as part of developing this chapter. These efforts are listed below.

City of North Mankato Complete Streets Plan & Policy (2016)

The City of North Mankato adopted the Complete Streets Plan and Policy to ensure streets and sidewalks are well designed and constructed to serve everyone – pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers – and they take into account the transportation needs of all people, including children, older adults, and people with disabilities or impaired mobility. This Plan and Policy is aimed at changing streets from places where vehicles dominate to places where all users are accommodated.

Belgrade Avenue Master Plan (2017)

The Belgrade Avenue Master Plan process included development of design guidelines for the Central

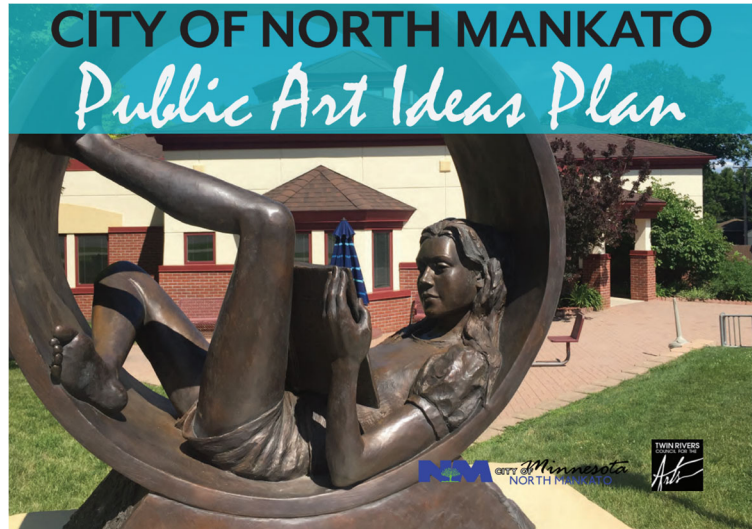
Business District (CBD) along Belgrade Avenue. While design guidelines are not requirements for developers, they are meant to encourage developers to use architectural design elements in structures that maintain cohesive area design. The City can require developers to follow design guidelines when they are seeking financial assistance or incentives from the City to ensure projects include design elements that fit the context of the CBD.

Belgrade Avenue Corridor Study (2017)

MAPO and the City of North Mankato, in partnership with MnDOT, completed this study to identify a long-term vision for multimodal improvements on Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato. The Study included streetscape design elements that would improve vehicle and pedestrian circulation through the downtown.

Public Art Ideas Plan (2017)

The goal of this plan is to highlight the importance of public art and how it can be used by the city as a guide to integrate it into existing and future planning initiatives and identify those areas that could be enhanced. It lays out what public art is, why it should be invested in, and creates a reference guide/idea bank of public art ideas for specific locations.



Commerce Drive Area Development Plan (2019)

The Commerce Drive Area Development Plan included elements of streetscape design that improved the pedestrian realm such as seating nodes, mid-block crossing, and expanded trails and sidewalks along Commerce Drive that connect to the larger sidewalk and trail system. Building design and architectural cohesiveness were also part of the discussion.

Lookout Drive Area Plan (2022)

The Lookout Drive Area Plan considered locations along the corridor that could accommodate area design in streetscaping and green spaces.

North Mankato Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan (2019)

The North Mankato ADA Transition Plan provides a framework for fixing existing sidewalk infrastructure ADA deficiencies and also best practices for how pedestrian facilities should be constructed to maintain compliance.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The City of North Mankato has several areas which developed at different time periods, resulting in different development patterns and building forms. Lower North is the older part of the city which developed consistent with early 20th century development patterns. City blocks in Lower North are mostly on a grid network. Most single-family homes in Lower North are older and well maintained. Many also have detached garages in the rear yard and many blocks have alley access. Residential lots

are generally smaller in Lower North than in residential areas that developed at a later time period. Homes are also generally built with limited setbacks. Most streets have a sidewalk on both sides of the street and trees have been well preserved.

Lower North is comprised mostly of low-density residential with parks, schools, institutional uses and some higher density residential uses mixed in. Belgrade Avenue serves as the primary commercial corridor in Lower North and is the City's downtown. Many of the original buildings in the downtown remain. These buildings are built to the sidewalk and have relatively narrow storefronts creating a pedestrian friendly atmosphere. The combination of older houses and the downtown give Lower North a distinguishable quaint character and small-town feel.

Upper North consists of newer development with more modern suburban style subdivisions. Residential lots are generally bigger than those in Lower North and are not on a grid network. Most single-family homes have driveways off the front of their lots with garages in front of the home. Commercial, industrial and institutional uses are generally situated along arterial roadways. Sidewalks are generally located on at least one side of the street. Several small neighborhood parks are mixed throughout residential areas, but several larger parks attract users from a wider area. In parts of Upper North, natural areas have been well preserved where residential subdivisions have been built around forested areas. Some areas in Upper North, such as Commerce Drive and Northport Industrial Park are designed with the consideration of accommodating large truck traffic in mind. Lot size, visibility, streets and intersections are all well designed for supporting a business-friendly environment that should be considered attractive to existing and potential businesses.

Key Issues and Opportunities

The following provides an overview of the key issues and opportunities pertaining to community design for North Mankato.

A. Development Pattern

As mentioned previously, North Mankato developed with two different development patterns over time. Both have value for the City by offering residents variety in neighborhood character. Land available for future development in the City is mostly to the north and west. Growth areas in Upper North are mostly planned for low density residential and industrial; however, the Land Use Plan aims to mix in more commercial uses in close proximity to residential areas to minimize the distance required to travel and allow for biking and walking. This is mostly in the form of key commercial nodes and corridors. As such, key streets should be designed to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians to get to their destinations. Special consideration should be given for enhanced landscaping between residential neighborhoods and key destinations where walkers and cyclists may go. With new subdivisions, any proposed street network should also be analyzed for connectivity and the ability to efficiently get from one point to another.

B. Climate Sensitive Design

Designing for Weather

Being in Minnesota, special design considerations are necessary for new infrastructure to ensure usability throughout all seasons. The winter months generally have the greatest implications for impacting livability. Snow and ice can create a wide variety of problems for mobility and safety. Available space for snow storage is something that should be analyzed for new developments.

Standards such as driveway setbacks are examples of controls that can help mitigate impacts from snow or storm water runoff. In the public realm, streets, sidewalks and bikeways should be designed to accommodate easy snow removal and storage and be compatible with snow removal equipment. Space should be provided between the sidewalk and the street to allow for snow storage. Landscaping enhancements could also be considered in key pedestrian areas for wind screening.

Alternative Energy

The City should encourage the use of solar panels (or other non-fossil fuel sources) on new public and private buildings.

The City should also continue to ensure vehicles using alternative power sources are accommodated effectively as mentioned in *Chapter 6: Transportation*.

C. Public Spaces

Well-designed public spaces can be a tremendous asset to a community. These may be in the form of plazas, public squares, parks, amphitheaters, gardens or others. These spaces provide areas for residents to spend time outdoors and provide opportunities for social interaction. Much of the public space in North Mankato is in the form of parks. Neighborhood parks are evenly spread throughout the community to provide public space in close proximity to most residents. Many of these parks offer playground equipment, picnic areas, and athletic facilities for sports such as tennis, soccer, basketball or softball. How public spaces are designed should be thoroughly analyzed. It is important to not just provide public spaces, but that they also be designed to consider safety, comfort and aesthetics. Elements such as lighting and vegetation can be designed to help improve the perception of



safety at night. Any amenities that are installed such as seating should be comfortable and attractively designed.

A public art movement has also taken place in the Greater Mankato area and that includes North Mankato. The City is beginning to place emphasis on enhancing public spaces such as space along trails and/or sidewalks with seating and art. The City has incorporated the City Art sculpture walk in the CBD and has also incorporated various public gathering spaces, seating nodes, and murals throughout the community. Many of these art installations rotate in and out on a seasonal basis, ensuring a new sculpture every year, while others are just one-time temporary or, alternatively, permanent installations. The City should continue to incorporate public art as opportunities arise.



In 2022, the City Center Partnership staged temporary outdoor seating in North Mankato on a portion of sidewalk in the CBD where a bicycle fix-it station, trail information kiosk, and planters were located. This was a demonstration project to activate the space, providing a location for those walking the sculpture tour, or using the trail system to sit for a moment. This temporary seating arrangement can be seen in the image to the right.



D. Architecture and Character

North Mankato contains a variety of buildings and homes with different architectural styles, which is partly due to the varying time periods over which different areas developed. There is a noticeable difference in architectural style between the homes in Lower North near the east end of Belgrade Avenue, homes constructed in the 1970s, and homes built in the last ten years. Many of the homes in Lower North were constructed in the early part of the 20th century but have been well preserved and maintained over the years. These charming neighborhoods provide a classic small town feel that is valued by many of the residents.

Over the years, North Mankato has continued to see an influx of new residential development. New development has generally moved towards the north and west over time. Homes built towards the latter half of the 20th century offer a more traditional suburban style home. Many

of the homes built in the last ten years present a more modern architectural style. The wide range of architectural styles of homes and buildings is an asset to the community because it provides a wide range of housing options, as some residents may prefer one style of home over another. The City of North Mankato will continue to support a varying degree of architectural styles through new development and redevelopment of existing areas.



E. Transportation

The ability for residents to move quickly and easily throughout the City is an important factor that influences livability. The transportation network should be designed to efficiently and safely accommodate all modes of travel during all seasons. Roads are designed based on the amount of traffic and speeds they are intended to accommodate. The expected type of traffic, such as large truck traffic, can also influence road design. This means that the location and design of new roadways is greatly influenced by land use. For example, larger commercial uses that tend to generate more traffic should be located adjacent to roadways that can accommodate such traffic. Residential streets are generally narrow and may not be striped while arterial roadways may be several lanes across. Buildings may be designed differently based on the type of roadway they are adjacent to. For example, a commercial use adjacent to a larger roadway with faster speeds will generally want to be setback farther from the roadway and have a wider storefront for improved visibility.

The design of roadways should always consider the user friendliness of alternative modes of transportation all while preserving on-street parking where feasible. This does not mean that a bike lane should be striped on every street; however, if one is not provided, sufficient width should be provided to accommodate space for cyclists with two-way traffic. In some areas, it may be beneficial to construct off-road trails as an alternative to biking on the street. Design of these trails should be wide enough to allow for bikes traveling in each direction. Barriers and structures should not be located directly adjacent to paths or impede visibility at intersections. Directional signage and pavement markings can also help with flow and safety. For pedestrians,



sidewalks should generally be located a few feet off the street to provide some separation from vehicles and provide space for snow storage. In key pedestrian areas, landscaping enhancements should be considered to improve the aesthetics of the surroundings.

VISION FOR COMMUNITY DESIGN

The City of North Mankato will incorporate and support community design that enhances the livability and quality of life for residents. Strategic improvements will enhance the functionality of the public realm and result in a more enjoyable and aesthetically attractive environment.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

The following is a series of goals for community design followed by a series of objectives and policies intended to influence future development decisions in a direction that is aligned with the Vision Statement above.

GOAL 1: Enhance the livability of North Mankato through quality design.

Objective 1.1: Make enhancements that improve the functionality of the public realm.

Policy 1.1.1: In the design of new infrastructure, consider designs which accommodate seasonal variability and allow for use during all times of the year.

Policy 1.1.2: Make infrastructure and public realm improvements that complement the surrounding land uses.

Policy 1.1.3: Where appropriate, promote features that provide a physical buffer and transition between land uses of varying intensities, such as landscaping, fencing or setbacks.

Policy 1.1.4: Support the development of medium and high-density housing near commercial or high traffic areas.

Policy 1.1.5: Make improvements to public spaces that improve the comfort and enjoyment of those areas.

Policy 1.1.6: Consider non-motorized modes of transportation in the design of new roadways. Explore opportunities for off-road trails where appropriate.

Policy 1.1.7: For new subdivisions, promote street patterns that maximize connectivity and efficiency of getting from one point to another.

Policy 1.1.8: Periodically update the City of North Mankato plans and policies that include design guidance, including the North Mankato Complete Streets Plan and Policy, the Public Arts Ideas Plan, and small area plans to ensure new development and redevelopment incorporate up-to-date design guidance.

Policy 1.1.9: Explore opportunities for new forms of public spaces such as plazas, public squares or outdoor performing areas.

Policy 1.1.10: Analyze existing pedestrian areas and public spaces for lighting and make improvements where necessary to increase safety at night.

Objective 1.2: Make decisions that enhance the appearance and attractiveness of the public realm.

Policy 1.2.1: Promote the protection and enhancement of natural resources as a means to maintain the integrity, heritage and local character of the community.

Policy 1.2.2: Consider landscaping improvements along key pedestrian and bike corridors and in other public spaces.

Policy 1.2.3: Continue to incorporate public art including sculptures, decorative seating nodes, murals, etc. throughout the community.

Policy 1.2.4: When installing amenities such as seating, trash receptacles, pedestrian lightings, or others similar types of features, explore the feasibility of more attractive options.

Policy 1.2.5: Encourage reuse of existing buildings where feasible.

Policy 1.2.6: Consider developing a plan or implementation tool that offers incentives for infill development and removal of substandard buildings or consolidating of land where feasible.

Policy 1.2.7: Consider design standards applied using overlay districts to effectively manage structure design.

GOAL 2: Promote the use and accommodation of alternative energy sources in building and infrastructure design.

Objective 2.1: Facilitate the use of alternative energy sources on buildings.

Policy 2.1.1: Consider city code amendments that incorporate alternative energy sources in the construction of all new public buildings.

Policy 2.1.2: Consider retrofitting existing public buildings with alternative energy sources.

Policy 2.1.3: Promote the use of alternative energy sources in private development.

Objective 2.2: Ensure transportation infrastructure accommodates advances in vehicles using alternative energy sources.

Policy 2.1.1: Continue to research new trends in alternative energy usage in transportation and how elements could or should be integrated into the North Mankato system.