

STAFF REPORT



A-2011-12b
Official Zoning Map Amendment
Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map Amendment
Land Generally west of Anoka County Library and north of
County Road 116
City of Anoka
August 3, 2011

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Anoka is proposing a 2030 Comprehensive Plan Land Use map amendment and official zoning map amendment to approximately 22.5 acres located generally east of the Rum River and Anoka Nature Preserve, north of County Road 116 (CSAH 116), south of the Anoka Nature Preserve, and west of the Anoka County Library. The land use map amendment would change the land use on the 2030 Comprehensive Plan Land Use map from Planning Area to Low Density Residential and Medium Density Residential. Planning Area was a designation the Metropolitan Council allowed the city to use for this area because when the comprehensive plan was approved in 2008, discussions of future land use in this area had not been completed. The City Council did not want to designate the area public land use because of the anticipation it would change. The Low Density Residential area is approximately 12.8 acres and located entirely within the Rum River Wild and Scenic. The Medium Density Residential area is approximately 9.7 acres and located outside of the Rum River Wild and Scenic. The rezoning would change the entire 22.5 acres from R-F Rural Farm to Sensitive Development District.

It has been a general goal of the City Council to continue to seek ways to increase City revenues by adding tax exempt property to the tax rolls and reduce the burden on all Anoka tax payers. In pursuit of this goal, all non-tax generating properties were identified; included city owned properties. One such property that has been discussed is the area identified in this application.

In 2006 approximately 200+ acres of land was put into a conservation easement and is now called the Anoka Nature Preserve. A map is included that shows the Anoka Nature Preserve. This area generally abuts the subject area for this application to the west and north. Lands within the Anoka Nature Preserve are protected through the conservation easement and management plan and are not included as part of this application. Notably, the small strip between the Rum River and subject area that is in the Anoka Nature Preserve is approximately 120 feet wide. Trees and other vegetation are not permitted to be removed within that 120 feet. No private lot lines would extend to the Rum River over the nature preserve.

At this time no development is proposed. Rezoning the property would prepare for it to be sold for development. If and when a development is proposed, there will be a public hearing before the Planning Commission and final determination by the City Council. Details relating to a plat, site design, stormwater management, etc. would be reviewed during this process.

Notice of the rezoning was sent to Kate Drewry, Area Hydrologist at the Minnesota DNR. However, due to the state shutdown city staff has not yet received a response on the rezoning proposal. Staff doesn't anticipate a concern from the DNR because the land within the Wild and Scenic will be regulated by Minnesota Rules and Statutes. Also, Ms. Drewry had little concern with the Sensitive Development Zoning district and ordinance when it was originally established in 2010.

Included for your review: 2030 Comprehensive Plan Amendment map, Proposed Rezoning map, Potential Access road map, site aerial showing Anoka Nature Preserve boundary, survey and legal description of the areas, letter sent to Jeannie Wilkinson of the Friends of the Anoka Nature Preserve, letter sent to property owners within the 350' notification area.

ZONING MAP AMENDMENT

The property is currently zoned R-F Rural Farm. The rezoning would change the zoning to Sensitive Development District. This district allows for single family, townhome and public use within designated areas legally described within the ordinance. Generally, the purpose of this district is to create residential development that is designed to prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to natural resources and to preserve and enhance their values to the public. Development shall be regulated to minimize the risk of environmental damage to these areas. This is accomplished through density control, lot size, public land dedication and tree preservation. Residential development in these areas should encourage creativity, variety and use of quality materials. River use and recreation on and along the Rum River is encouraged as the Rum River is viewed as a recreational asset to the City. The Planning Commission and City Council must consider the following criteria when considering a change to the zoning classification of a property:

1. *Whether the proposed amendment corrects an error or addresses a changing condition, trend or fact.*

Staff Findings: This land has always been vacant. Since the 1970s this land has been a topic for several different development options however none were ever acted on. In 2006 200+ acres abutting the subject area were put in a conservation easement and is now known as the Anoka Nature Preserve. Since then, the City Council has directed staff and Planning Commission to look at future land use for this area. The existing R-F zoning was sufficient for the past and current uses. However, because the City Council wishes to market this land for development at certain densities and uses, the Sensitive Development District will be more appropriate.

2. *Whether the proposed amendment will protect the health, safety and welfare of the public.*

Staff Findings: The proposed Sensitive Development District generally would allow for residential and public uses. Approximately 12.8 acres is within the Rum River Wild and Scenic area. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has regulations outlined in

Minnesota Statutes and Rules that apply to this area. Though the city will have some local control, a majority of zoning regulations would be applied through the Rum River Wild and Scenic regulations. For example, lot sizes must be a minimum of 15,000 sf. within the Wild and Scenic, as compared to just 10,000 sf. in a typical residential area. Generally the more strict DNR regulations should protect the health, safety and welfare of the public. However, approximately 9.7 acres are outside of the Wild and Scenic area and will be solely regulated by the Sensitive Development District which allows medium density residential land use. The purpose of this district is to create residential development that is designed to prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to natural resources and to preserve and enhance their values to the public. Based on the purpose of the district and the regulations that are present in the ordinance, staff believes the rezoning of the entire area should protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

- 3. Whether the City and other service providers will be able to provide sufficient public safety, transportation and utility facilities and services to the subject property, while maintaining sufficient levels of service to existing development.*

Staff Findings:

The property is located adjacent to CSAH 116. A road easement was also provided for in the conservation easement to allow access from 6th Avenue. This easement is shown on the survey map that is provided. Initially when development for this area was discussed, it was assumed that this area would only have access from 6th Avenue. However, in the past year the city and Anoka County have been in discussion about the potential of a full, signalized access point from CSAH 116 that would provide access to this area, but also the area east of the library. This access point and road connection is shown on the “potential access road” map. The city commissioned a traffic study to determine whether an intersection at this location would meet warrants for full signalization. The study showed that if development were to occur north of CSAH 116, the intersection would meet warrants for a signal. Anoka County will be upgrading the intersection at CSAH 116 and 7th Avenue in 2012. A new intersection from CSAH 116 to serve any development north would not be part of this project and would not occur until development occurs. This additional access should alleviate traffic on 6th Avenue that may be created as a result of development. Based on the proposed improvements to the transportation system in the area, staff believes sufficient transportation service will be maintained.

The property will be serviced by city utilities. Currently there is an 8 inch water line that provides service to the Anoka County Library and is located under 6th Avenue (dead end road adjacent to the library). This line would be of sufficient size to provide water service to any residential development west of the library. Sanitary sewer is also available under 6th Avenue and would provide service to west of the library. A lift station likely would be required due to changes in grade, however would not be difficult to accomplish.

4. *Whether the proposed rezoning will have significant adverse impacts on the natural environment, including air, water, noise, storm water management and vegetation.*

Staff Findings:

Generally, the purpose of this district is to create residential development that is designed to prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to natural resources and to preserve and enhance their values to the public. Development shall be regulated to minimize the risk of environmental damage to these areas. This is accomplished through density control, lot size, public land dedication and tree preservation. Residential development in these areas should encourage creativity, variety and use of quality materials.

Single family lot sizes are required to be increased from the minimum standards in the R-1 district of 10,000 square feet to 15,000 square feet. This naturally reduces the density of any proposed development which in turn has positive impacts on air, water, noise, storm water management and vegetation. Density for townhome use is typical with other densities in the city; however the ordinance requires architectural standards on the housing to ensure a long lasting, quality end product, tree preservation if applicable, and landscaping. This is not typical in other residential zoning districts in the city.

Naturally there will be an increase in impervious surface than what currently exists. However, lots within the Rum River Wild and Scenic River District shall not exceed a 25% impervious surface coverage. Typical allowed single family lot coverage is 35%. Townhome development may not exceed 50% which is typical city-wide. Any development that is proposed will have to meet stormwater regulations and be reviewed by the Lower Rum River Watershed Management Organization land within the Wild and Scenic, Minnesota DNR.

Lastly, standards have been included in the zoning ordinance for the district that further regulates vegetation. In 2008, the City adopted a stricter tree preservation requirement than what was in place. Additionally, the zoning district requires a minimum four trees to either be preserved or planted on single family lots, and 10 shrubs or bushes.

5. *Whether the proposed amendment will have significant adverse impacts on other property in the vicinity of the subject tract.*

Staff Finding: The general public and adjacent property owners/users have enjoyed open space in this area. Whenever a zoning change occurs to land that has been vacant, adjacent to publicly used land and development may occur, there will be change. However, the Planning Commission should consider whether that change is an adverse impact. Residential uses are the lowest impact land uses other than recreation. The

proposed zoning district and DNR Wild and Scenic regulations attempt to address the following to limit adverse impacts:

- No private river lots are permitted due to the conservation easement detaching the area from the Rum River.
- Reduced single family densities compared to typical residential development.
- Requiring less impervious surface for single family residential uses.
- Requires architectural standards for the housing to ensure a long lasting, quality end product.
- Stormwater management
- Tree preservation

If development is proposed, the Planning Commission and City Council will have a specific opportunity to address potential adverse impacts on adjacent property and require certain conditions upon a development approval. Based on this finding, staff believes that though there could be a change from what exists today, the proposed amendment will have the least impact and more importantly not a significant adverse impact on other property.

6. *The suitability of the subject property for the existing zoning classification and proposed zoning classification.*

Staff Findings: The property is currently zoned R-F, Rural Farm and has been since the property was annexed. R-F zoning exists in four places throughout the city. In this area, east of 11th Avenue, King's Island, and the Anoka County Fairgrounds parking lot. R-F generally permits single family uses at a very low density (minimum lot size of 2.5 acres), agricultural, and public uses. In general, this zoning district likely should be removed from the zoning code and these areas zoned more accordingly. However, the existing uses do fall within the permitted uses in the district.

The zoning district is specific to property in sensitive areas near the Rum River. Because the City Council has expressed interest in developing this property, it makes sense to have a zoning classification that will provide for development that is designed to prevent and mitigate irreversible damage to natural resources and to preserve and enhance their values to the public. As such, the proposed zoning classification is more suitable than other classifications for development.

7. *The need for the proposed use at the proposed location.*

Staff Finding: This site is special because of its location adjacent to the Rum River and Anoka Nature Preserve. According to reports about today's housing market, housing developers are looking for smaller, unique sites, closer to Minneapolis and St. Paul for development. This is in contrast to the large tracts of farmland that were developed in the 2000s in the exurbs (Monticello, Otsego, Rosemount, etc.). Based on this trend, staff

believes that this type of site is ideal to provide for move-up housing that the city currently lacks.

2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN LAND USE MAP AMENDMENT

The 22.5 acre piece of land is categorized as a Planning Area on the 2030 Comprehensive Plan Land Use map. The area is described in the comprehensive plan as follows: *“In the early 1970’s the City of Anoka acquired approximately 267 acres of land at the northern tip of the City just north of Bunker Lake Boulevard and west of Seventh Avenue. The land has remained publicly owned and undeveloped since. In 2007, a conservation easement was placed on approximately 198 acres of the land preventing development perpetually. Two areas of land remain for possible development. The first area is 46.3 acres and located directly along Seventh Avenue and Bunker Lake Boulevard. The second area is 22.5 acres and located just north of Bunker Lake Boulevard and east of the Rum River. This property was area of focus during the 2030 Comprehensive Plan public process. Suggested uses for this land varied. The land is identified as a Planning Area on the 2030 General Land Use map because it is unknown at this time how the City will proceed. When determining future uses for this property, the City will take into consideration park, housing, and economic development needs for the City.”* The proposed Sensitive Development requires a land use map amendment from Planning Area to Low Density Residential and Medium Density Residential as State Statutes require a City’s comprehensive plan to be consistent with the zoning ordinance. The Low Density Residential area is approximately 12.8 acres and located entirely within the Rum River Wild and Scenic. The Medium Density Residential area is approximately 9.7 acres and located outside of the Rum River Wild and Scenic.

Surrounding Land Uses

	EXISTING USES	ZONING DISTRICT DESIGNATION	CURRENT LAND USE DESIGNATION
NORTH	Anoka Nature Preserve	R-F Rural Farm	Park and Recreation
WEST	Anoka Nature Preserve	R-F Rural Farm	Park and Recreation
SOUTH	Anoka High School/City Soccer Fields	R-1 Single Family, R-F Rural Farm	Park and Recreation/Institutional
EAST	Anoka County Library	R-F Rural Farm	Institutional

Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

The goals and policies summarized from various chapters of the Anoka Comprehensive Plan may help frame the discussion and issues when considering the land use designation change.

Land Use Plan

The Comprehensive Plan lays out general criteria to consider when designating land use. When creating zoning ordinances, this criterion is considered as a base, and the zoning ordinance typically regulates density, uses, etc. further.

The Low Density Residential category is designed to allow for single family uses on lots a minimum of 10,000 square feet. Generally these areas are zoned R-1 Single Family Residential. However in this instance the zoning ordinance requires single family lots a minimum of 15,000 square feet.

In contrast, the Medium Density Residential category encourages single-family homes at higher densities, but also allows for attached housing units in the form of twin homes or townhomes. The following are the guidelines and criteria for development within medium-density residential areas:

- Five to ten units/acre
- Type of dwellings allowed are single-family, detached dwellings, and attached housing in the form of twin homes and townhomes.
- Must abut and have reasonably direct access to intermediate arterials, minor arterials and collectors; should be located near large areas of permanent public open space (community parks, schools, etc.); near neighborhood shopping and service facilities.

The land use section of the comprehensive plan also outlines four goals to consider when reviewing land use. One of those goals is to encourage a land use balance, a mix of housing opportunities, and life cycle housing. The city of Anoka's housing stock ranges in both value and design. Much of the housing stock is affordable for first time homebuyers, but there is a lack of new housing in the \$250,000+ range. The vision of the Planning Commission is that if townhomes were developed on the eastern portion, the development would be similar to style and densities to Riverspointe, a successful development near the Rum River south of downtown. This type of housing product fits into the \$250,000+ range of housing. Another goal is to evaluate future use of City owned lands by periodically updating the City Council on City owned land that is underutilized and could be used for future economic development where appropriate.

Economic Development

There are two goals and implementation steps in the economic development section that relate to the development of vacant, city owned land to increase tax base and also investment specifically in this property They are:

Goals:

Diversify and Expand the Tax Base: To strengthen the tax base through balanced land use and business diversification.

- Promote development of vacant land with uses that achieve city goals and complement existing uses.

Implementation:

Invest in sites and neighborhoods ready for growth based upon market conditions

- Promote development and investment in the following neighborhoods with priority given to those identified in **bold**.
 - Anoka Enterprise Park
 - Central Business District- intersection of Main Street and Rum River
 - **Commuter Rail Village- intersection of rail line and Rum River**
 - Coopers Landing
 - Federal/Hoffman
 - Franklin School
 - Highland Park
 - **Historic Rum River District project**
 - Rottlund Master Plan
 - City Hall re-use
 - Third Avenue, Van Buren to Harrison
 - County leased lot redevelopment
 - Jackson Street
 - **Land North of Bunker Lake Blvd.**
 - Pinewski/Smith properties
 - Schwartzmans/Fairgrounds
 - Thurston/Bunker
 - **West Main Shopping Center**

Housing Plan

The Housing section supports a mix of housing types to meet the needs of current and future residents. The housing goals that relate to this proposal include:

- Increase the quality and value of the existing single family and multifamily housing units in the City of Anoka.
- To diversify the housing stock, promote home ownership among all housing types and provide housing options to attract young buyers and families
- To provide opportunities for older residents to remain living in the City.
- Analyze neighborhood utilities, transportation networks, buffers between different zoning districts and building trends, including new construction and alterations.

- Provide a balance of various housing types to serve "life cycle" housing needs in the City.

Transportation

As stated earlier, the property is located adjacent to CSAH 116. A road easement was also provided for in the conservation easement to allow access from 6th Avenue. This easement is shown on the survey map that is provided. Initially when development for this area was discussed, it was assumed that this area would only have access from 6th Avenue. However, in the past year the city and Anoka County have been in discussion about the potential of a full, signalized access point from CSAH 116 that would provide access to this area, but also the area east of the library. This access point and road connection is shown on the "potential access road" map. The city commissioned a traffic study to determine whether an intersection at this location would meet warrants for full signalization. The study showed that if development were to occur north of CSAH 116, the intersection would meet warrants for a signal. Anoka County will be upgrading the intersection at CSAH 116 and 7th Avenue in 2012. A new intersection from CSAH 116 to serve any development north would not be part of this project and would not occur until development occurs. This additional access should alleviate traffic on 6th Avenue that may be created as a result of development. Based on the proposed improvements to the transportation system in the area, staff believes sufficient transportation service will be maintained.

Parks and Recreation

This property has always been vacant. This property has not been designated or recognized as park area in the Park and Recreation section. The property is adjacent to the Anoka Nature Preserve which is different than a typical city park because of its various protections. Any new development will be encouraged to have interior trails and connections that will serve residents of the development but also potentially residents in the community by making connections to Anoka Nature Preserve.

COMMISSION ACTION

The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the application, denial of the application, or postpone the decision to allow for more information to be obtained.

Erik J. Thorvig
City Planner/Economic
Development Coordinator