

TOWN OF NORMAL

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2040

Complete. Connected. Compact.

Prepared by



115 East Washington Street, #M103
Bloomington, Illinois 61701

In cooperation with the



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Introduction and Executive Summary

“We plan our work and
we work our plan.”

—Mayor Chris Koos



Welcome to the Town of Normal Comprehensive Plan!

A Comprehensive Plan is a community's core statement of development policy and principle. It establishes a vision for growth and development and addresses housing, infrastructure, recreation, transportation, and other topics that influence land use. In other words, the Comprehensive Plan helps us decide what we want our community to be in the future and figure out how to make it happen!

Beyond the straightforward aspects of a Comprehensive Plan—what land uses do we want in which locations—**The Town of Normal Comprehensive Plan considers cultural needs, social equity, public health, resource efficiency, and the changing state of technology.** This holistic approach is a direct result of feedback from community members, expressed during the outreach phase of the planning process, and a bold vision set forth by the mayor-appointed Vision Committee. With the commitment of Town leadership and a can-do community attitude, the implementation of the *Comprehensive Plan* will ensure that Normal remains a vibrant and vital place for future generations to call home.

Planning Context

Normal begins implementation of this comprehensive plan at a moment of uncertainty across social, political, and environmental backdrops. This uncertainty is found at multiple levels of society.

Nationally, the United States is experiencing social, economic and political divisions resulting from profoundly divergent views of governing. Clashes on fiscal policy stymie progress on infrastructure, regulatory enforcement and resource allocation. Environmental policy vital to the national interest is also affected by these divisions. Formerly stable government programs have ended or been radically altered.

In the wake of two years of budget crisis, **State of Illinois** obligations to local governments, social services, and the public remain unmet, and the state's fragile financial condition is an ongoing challenge. Local government cannot rely on state funding, and must seek alternatives. The state's financial situation damages the reputation of Illinois and hampers economic development initiatives.

In **McLean County**, local governments, educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and regional corporate and industrial enterprise are negatively affected by the state's precarious finances. The challenges are compounded due to employment loss as a result of downsizing

by one major employer and closure of another, as well as slowing of population growth and the housing market in the aftermath of the recession. In recognition of these challenges, a wide variety of public and private stakeholders, including area businesses, economic development organizations, and local governments, band together as BN Advantage to lay out a road map for economic development and identify target industry sectors most suited to the community.

The **Town of Normal** has a solid foundation for advancing Smart Growth policies and a national reputation for bold and innovative community development. This work continues with the full sanction of Town policy makers and under the capable guidance of Town staff. Normal is primed to benefit from the example of communities nationwide which, realizing that local resources must deliver more, have gained passage of referenda generating local revenue support for municipal services and capital investments. While the Town's fiscal status continues in a recessionary pattern with reduced tax and utility revenues, the Town Council and staff pursue balanced solutions.

COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS

Demographic Profile

54,902 Total Population in 2015 ⁴	\$85,643 Median Family Income ²	23.5 Median Age ¹
50.4% Bachelor's Degree ²	\$52,102 Median Household Income ²	85.1% Caucasian ¹

Population doubled since 1970⁴

Population is expected to grow by 13,800 people by 2040⁴

Growth rate expected to be slower compared to previous decades⁴

Housing Profile

20,915 Total Housing Units ²	\$827 Median Rent ²	\$304,000 Avg. Sale Price of a New Home ³
51% Home Ownership ⁵	\$162,300 Median Home Value ²	2.57 Average Household Size ²

5,500 more housing units will be needed to accommodate the new growth.

Normal has a potential to add nearly 4,000 new residential units through already-approved annexation agreements.

Other Facts

18.3 Corporate Area in Square Miles ¹	425 Lane Miles of Street	2.5 times Growth in Area Since 1970
2,861 People per Square Mile ¹	15 Miles of Constitution Trail	800 Fewer People per Square Mile Compared to 1970

¹ U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Census

² 2011–2015 American Community Survey

³ Bloomington-Normal Realtors Association 2016 data

⁴ Projections as published in the Town of Normal Community Snapshot and Outreach Report

⁵ Town of Normal Community Snapshot and Outreach Report

Planning Process

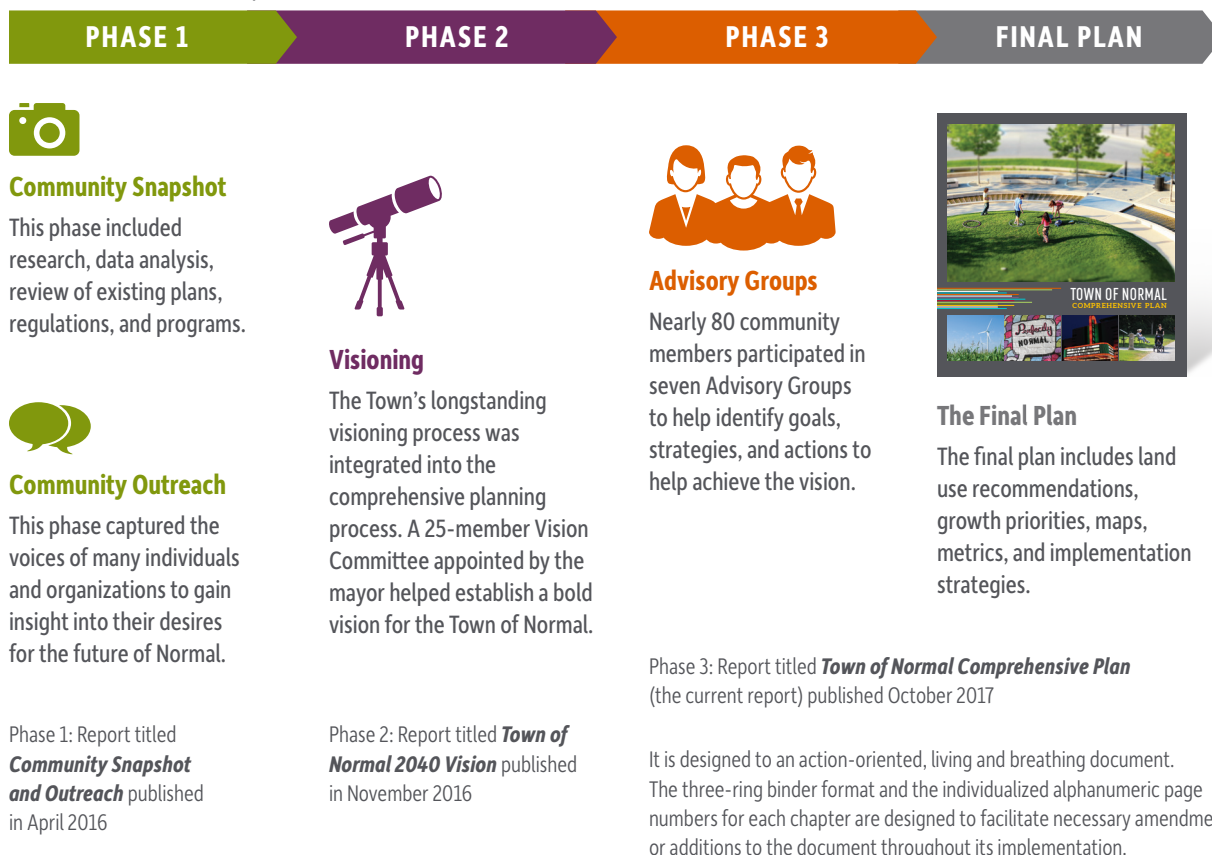
To succeed, a comprehensive plan needs:

- A **vision** generated by the people in the community and rooted in careful analysis of existing conditions, and
- A **clear course of action** to show how best to achieve the community's vision.

This 24-month-long process involved three distinct phases as outlined in Figure 1. The *Community Snapshot and Outreach Report* and the *2040 Vision Report*, summarizing phase 1 and phase 2 respectively, were published in 2016. These documents are available on the plan website (www.planitnormal.com), Town of Normal website (www.normal.org) and the McLean County Regional Planning Commission's website (www.mcplan.org).

Work conducted during the first two phases became the basis for phase 3. Several Advisory Groups met to identify goals, strategies, and actions pertinent to the *Vision Plan*. This phase ended with the creation of the *Comprehensive Plan*, which provides a clear course of action. Keep in mind that comprehensive plans are advisory in nature, and are implemented through the adoption of a zoning ordinance and map and other municipal codes conforming to this plan. However, by adopting a Comprehensive Plan, the Town is making a statement of official public policy and should therefore use the plan to guide development decisions.

FIGURE 1: Phases of the Comprehensive Plan



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Many members of the community contributed their voices, time, and talent to shape this *Plan*. The information below provides a quick snapshot of community involvement at various stages of the planning process.

Community Outreach JULY TO DECEMBER 2015

Extensive outreach efforts, using both traditional and non-traditional methods and conducted over a period of 6 months, captured the voices of a diverse cross-section of the community. Many stakeholders, including several groups working with underrepresented or vulnerable demographics such as renters, low-income populations, and seniors, were interviewed to gain a holistic perspective of community issues.

1,718
Community
Voices

27
Community
Partners

12
Outreach
Events

40
Stakeholder
Interviews



Many Public
Presentations
& News Articles

Vision Committee APRIL TO OCTOBER 2016

The Town's longstanding tradition of establishing a Vision Committee every five years was integrated into the comprehensive planning process. The Vision Committee appointed by Mayor Koos consisted of residents, entrepreneurs, community leaders, students, and other members of the workforce and the community at large who brought a range of perspectives and experiences. This group accepted the *Community Snapshot and Outreach Report* as their initial input, conducted additional surveys, and gathered additional data to establish a shared vision, core community values, and critical frameworks upon which to build. Their report, the *Town of Normal 2040 Vision*, was accepted by the Town Council in November 2016.

7

Meetings



25-Member Committee Appointed by the Mayor

Advisory Groups JANUARY TO JUNE 2017

Many members of the community, including Vision Committee members, subject matter experts, and other interested individuals, participated in the Advisory Groups. The goals, strategies, and actions outlined in the Economic Vitality, Community Identity & Public Places, Town & Gown, Humanitarian & Social Aspects, and Health & Sustainability Elements were developed and vetted by these groups. The feedback provided by the Regional Housing Study Steering Committee was used to create the Housing Element, and Town staff with subject matter expertise in various infrastructure systems contributed their time and talent to inform the Infrastructure Element.

78
Advisors



7 Advisory Groups

21
Meetings

Foundations for Normal's Future

The Town of Normal enjoys advantages not available to all communities. Key among these advantages is that there are few or no significant problems that must be addressed immediately. Thanks to this solid foundation, projects for the future involve building on its strengths and guiding future growth.

Normal's current strategic advantages include:

- **Strong and appealing community identity:** Normal is often described as having a small-town feel with big-city amenities.
- **Solid community anchor in Illinois State University:** The university is the Town's largest employer; the source of many of the Town's residents, customers, and visitors; and a driver of innovation and economic development in the region.
- **Relatively young, well-educated population:** A relatively high percentage of ISU graduates choose to stay in the area as adult residents, and Normal also draws non-ISU-affiliated young talent from across the nation and the world.
- **History of economic stability:** Thanks to major employers and industries (e.g., education, healthcare, agriculture, and manufacturing), the Town has a history of economic strength even during difficult times.
- **History of rational, forward-thinking leadership rooted in careful planning and bold policymaking:** Multiple "generations" of Town mayors, Council members, city managers, staff, and others have negotiated, nurtured, and implemented a shared vision of what the Town could and should be while maintaining carefully balanced fiscal policies.

Like every community, the Town of Normal also faces serious challenges, both current and future. These include:

- **Changing fiscal fundamentals**
 - Declining revenues from sources like sales and utility taxes
 - Unstable state and federal support
 - Need to diversify the local economy rather than relying on a few major employers
- **Rapid technological developments**, which have so far largely left the public sector behind
- **Global environmental crises** like climate change
- **Changing demographics and social conditions**

Vision and Values

Guiding the Town's planning efforts are several key commitments and values laid out in the *Town of Normal 2040 Vision* report. The report's overall vision statement is: ***We have a place for you in our vibrant, prosperous, and connected community.*** Two major themes underpin the vision: *sustainability and technology*.

Vision 2040 identifies all three legs of sustainability—fiscal, social, and environmental—as critical aspects for the Town's future. To achieve fiscal sustainability, the Town will continue to focus on infill and redevelopment, maintain existing assets in good condition, and seek innovative funding and financing mechanisms for governance. In pursuit of social sustainability, the Town will strive to be a great place to live, work, and play for residents of all backgrounds, income levels, and abilities. To maintain environmental sustainability, the Town will continue to be a leader in responding to climate change and working with, not against, our natural environment.

In the area of technology, the Vision Committee notes that while the direction of technological process is impossible to predict in granular detail, it is possible to identify several important themes with respect to how our society is currently changing and likely to continue changing over the coming years. Our lives will continue to become increasingly interconnected, affecting everything from personal telecommunications and entertainment to essential systems like transportation, education, and healthcare. As a society—and this is especially true of the public sector—we are still trying to understand and respond to the complex effects of these changes.

Vision 2040 positions the challenges and opportunities of technology and sustainability as positive rather than negative. Technological progress is inevitable and accelerating; local governments (and governments at all levels) are adapting to new fiscal realities; social systems are being re-examined, both for good and ill; and communities like Normal continue to lead in acknowledging the reality of climate change and other sweeping environmental shifts. We can either plan for these changes and determine how to take advantage of them, or we can allow them to overwhelm us, forcing us into a cycle of reactivity rather than proactivity. This report recognizes the coming challenges and presents plans to address them efficiently.

THE VISION for 2040

We have a place for you in our vibrant, prosperous, and connected community.

We aspire to go above and beyond Normal in:

1. **Engagement.** Ours is a resourceful and collaborative community that fuels civic engagement and inspires meaningful and generous contributions from residents of all walks of life.
2. **Economy.** Ours is an innovative and diverse economy in 2040 that has grown from what it was in 2016.
3. **Spaces.** Ours is an inter-related community visible through safe and accessible spaces that people love.
4. **Social equity.** Ours is a compassionate community that strives for social consciousness, responsiveness, and justice.
5. **Multiculturalism.** Ours is an inclusive and welcoming community that celebrates our unique and diverse backgrounds, identities, cultures, and talents.
6. **Lifelong learning.** Ours is an engaged and inquisitive community that encourages growth and supports lifelong learning.
7. **Creativity.** Ours is a creative community that promotes art and artists as an essential infrastructure and values art as a powerful process for bringing people—and ideas—together.
8. **Well-being.** Ours is an equitable health and wellness system, ensuring the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Planning Elements

The themes of sustainability (fiscal, social, and environmental) and technological advancement run through the seven planning “Elements” of this *Comprehensive Plan*. The key concepts of each of these Elements are summarized below.

Housing



Normal (like the surrounding region) is generally overbuilt and has more housing units than can be absorbed by 2020. Making matters more complicated is Normal’s potential to add nearly 4,000 new residential units through already-approved annexation agreements. These developments may add to the oversupply of single-family detached housing while increasing sprawl and associated infrastructure costs. Another potential challenge is affordability. Normal’s housing stock is reasonably priced for most people, but affordability remains a concern for certain populations, including

recent graduates, young professionals, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, and low- to moderate-income households. The Town needs to close gaps between housing demand and supply by responding to changing demographics and through a commitment to smart growth. Core strategies include:

- Address a lack of housing that appeals to young professionals and empty nesters by ensuring that Town policies are set up to allow and encourage developers to respond adequately to the changing demands.
- Use regulations, incentives, and collaborative programming to help preserve and repurpose the existing housing stock, and to add affordable and supportive housing to the inventory.
- Support aging in place.

Health & Sustainability



Recognizing the ways in which the health of individuals and the natural environment are intertwined—and taking actions to improve both—has become one of the defining challenges not only for Normal, but for the entire global community.

This Element pushes the Town of Normal to consider health in all policies and continue to be a regional leader in environmental stewardship. These policies are driven by several key principles: a commitment to smart growth and sustainability; the value of a vibrant local food system; responsible stewardship of our natural resources; and fiscal sustainability. Key strategies in line with these principles include:

- Encouraging compact infill development that places less strain on the natural environment and puts active modes of transportation on equal footing with driving.
- Facilitating a vibrant local food system that takes advantage of Normal's location in Central Illinois, one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. A local food economy that produces fresh, healthy food and supports a network of businesses that tap into that resource and be an asset in reducing the region's high obesity rate.
- Protecting and enhancing open and green spaces to provide healthy recreation opportunities and make a positive environmental impact.
- Promoting environmental sustainability in the built environment.

Economic Vitality

This Element outlines policies that position Normal to complement, and where appropriate to lead, economic development efforts in the spirit of BN Advantage. *Vision 2040* notes that technology should be central to Normal's approach to governance. To embrace innovation and build a stronger, more diverse economy, Normal should foster a rich entrepreneurial ecosystem rooted in the creative economy, small and local businesses, and a strong local food system.



As technology redefines every aspect of our society, Normal should:

- Become a Smart City with a thriving Information Communications and Technology (ICT) sector and an open, proactive acceptance of disruptive innovation; modernize its operations and services through smart urban systems; and enable community-wide connectivity through high-quality technology infrastructure.
- It calls for the Town to play a key role in the development of an Innovation District centered on Illinois State University (ISU), Uptown Normal, and Advocate BroMenn, bolstered by major regional actors such as State Farm. As an exemplar of place-based economic development, this district would serve as a regional hub for the entrepreneurial community and a proving ground for civic technologies and innovation.
- Rethink its approach to planning and land use for its economic centers.
- Deploy sensible growth policies, tax and fee structures that are aligned with the Vision, more efficient service delivery, and innovative funding and financing mechanisms.

Community Identity & Public Places



Normal's identity is defined by a culture of lifelong learning; agricultural roots; family-friendly neighborhoods; a wealth of arts and entertainment amenities; a forward-thinking and sustainable approach to community development; and a vibrant and prosperous twin city. This Element calls for the Town to celebrate its culture and history and use its public spaces as canvas to preserve and enhance its sense of place.

Key strategies include:

- Protect and promote Normal's rich history.
- Encourage compact, mixed-use development, thoughtful and distinctive architecture, human-focused design, and the incorporation of public art, to create multifunctional public spaces with a strong sense of place.
- Embrace and celebrate cultural diversity through events and programming and urban design in the public realm.
- Foster community engagement and leadership.

Humanitarian & Social Aspects



In an age of increasing diversity and rising inequality, the Town must reaffirm its commitment to the core values, established in *Vision 2040*, of social equity and multiculturalism. This Element attempts to translate that commitment into policy.

The Town of Normal can take a number of steps to ensure equal opportunity for all of its residents. It can effect change directly through internal policies, local ordinances, public-private partnerships, and intergovernmental agreements; or pursue less direct means of influence such as education and advocacy and

facilitating collaboration among third parties such as human service nonprofits, higher education institutions, Unit 5 schools, and other local governments. This Element proposes:

- Building awareness, understanding, and empathy for people of all backgrounds, circumstances, and abilities.
- Fostering informal multicultural interactions.
- Considering the needs of all residents when designing public places and programming.
- Achieving equitable outcomes in law enforcement and the legal system.
- Reducing economic inequality and promoting opportunity for all residents through inclusive economic development efforts, support for public and private human service providers in Bloomington-Normal, provision of a greater supply of affordable and supportive housing, support for equitable transportation options, and pursuit of "Compassionate City" initiatives that use technology to address social disparities.

Town & Gown



Normal is a college town. Higher education institutions shape Normal's economy and culture in myriad ways, both direct and indirect. Likewise, the desirability of the Town, is an important factor in the success of these institutions.

Normal and its higher education institutions have a long history of working together. Both Town & Gown can and should expand their coordinated efforts. This plan calls for:

- Enhanced policy- and staff-level cooperation with respect to workforce and economic development, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and improving community engagement on Town-Gown issues.
- Increased collaboration in land use planning and development, particularly in the area in and around ISU's campus—referred to here as the University Influence Zone (UIZ)—where the university has its greatest impact on land use.

The UIZ, defined for the first time in this plan, encompasses ISU's campus and properties, the portion of the Main Street corridor that runs along the campus; and the neighborhoods adjacent to the campus. This plan calls for the Town and ISU to work together in the UIZ to enhance the public realm, promote smart growth, and strike a balance between supporting the student population and protecting the traditional character of the neighborhoods surrounding the campus.

Infrastructure & Public Safety



The Town of Normal has largely kept ahead of the national curve in keeping its infrastructure in good condition. However, the Town faces many of the same difficulties as other communities, including rising costs; decreasing physical space for infrastructure in all three dimensions; large ongoing maintenance commitments resulting from decades of sprawl; and the disruptive effects of new technologies.

The Town must be prepared to meet these challenges by:

- Preserving existing systems in good condition. Future growth must be prioritized by infrastructure availability. This is the key principle for long-term fiscal sustainability of the community.
- Maintaining and developing systems at a high standard, giving special attention to connectivity, both technologically and multi-modally.
- Increasing coordination between a complex web of public and private entities that own and operate infrastructure systems and the agencies that manage them, and anticipating changes on multiple fronts.
- Anticipating and managing change.

Planning Framework

The Planning Framework is a new approach to land use planning. In recent years, Normal has earned a distinctive reputation based on its embrace and pursuit of sustainable strategies for growth. Based on the bold vision set forth by the *2040 Vision Report* and the goals established in the seven planning Elements described above, the Planning Framework calls for development and land use that moves the Town of Normal closer to being a *complete, connected, and compact* community.

Complete . . .

- With **neighborhoods** that provide a variety of housing choices, at various price points, to welcome residents of all backgrounds.
- With **streets** that support healthy and active lifestyles by promoting walking, biking and transit. Street vistas will capitalize on building design, scale, architecture, and proportionality to create interesting visual experiences and make every place unique and enjoyable.
- With vibrant and thriving **centers** of all sizes that serve as neighborhood destinations and employment nodes.

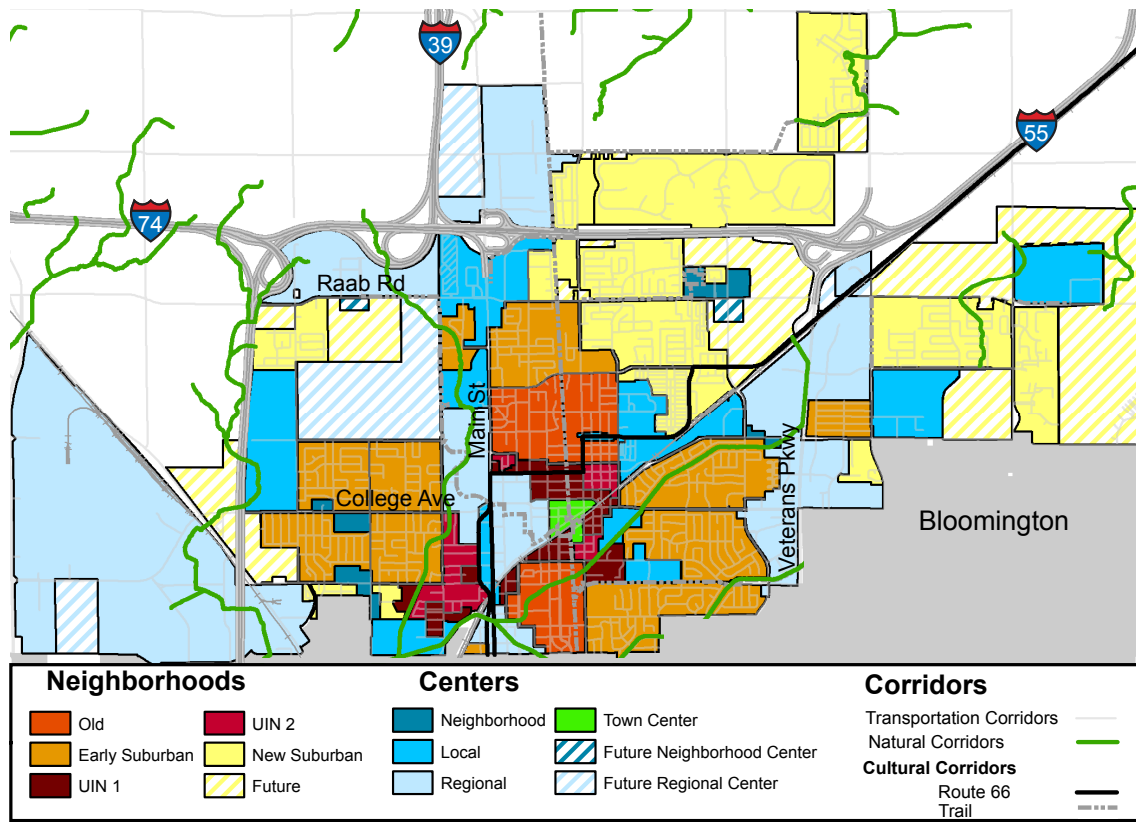
Connected . . .

- **Physically**, with neighborhoods connected to each other and to centers, providing convenient access to grocery stores, quality public schools, parks, and neighborhood commercial areas. An interconnected network of streets, sidewalks, and trails will make walking, biking and access to transit easy for all people.
- **Socially**, with gathering places—like streets, parks, front porches, coffee shops, ice cream parlors—that create informal opportunities to meet, get together, and socialize with neighbors.
- **Technologically**, with connected urban systems that deliver services more efficiently to the Town's neighborhoods and centers. Ubiquitous access to high speed, affordable and secure broadband will empower our residents, businesses, and institutions to thrive in this 21st century economy.

Compact . . .

- With **dense development and a mix of uses** that support safe and convenient access to a variety of destinations by any mode of transportation, while contributing positively to fiscal and environmental sustainability.

MAP 1: Planning Framework



The Planning Framework represents a slightly different approach to land use planning by grouping Normal’s geographies into three broad categories—Neighborhoods, Centers, and Corridors. These are further broken down into smaller places types. Neighborhood place types are distinguished according to when they were built—Old, Early Suburban, New/Future Neighborhoods or the influence on them—University Influence Neighborhoods; Centers are classified according to their scale and the geographic area they serve—Neighborhood, Local, Regional and Town Center; and Corridors are sorted according to functions—Transportation, Cultural, or Natural Corridors.

This approach is a deviation from the past where land was divided by individual use, such as low-density residential, medium-density residential etc. This new approach allows the Town to take into account unique characteristics, needs, and assets of each “Place Type” and provides a more intuitive, flexible rubric by which to shape future development. This Framework is further supported by a growth prioritization map that takes into account the availability of existing infrastructure and the goals outlined in the Elements Section to prioritize land developments into three tiers—1, 2, and 3.

The Planning Framework also provides a system for quantifying the status quo and moving methodically toward the goals of the *Plan*. This approach makes the new *Plan* a more intuitive, more flexible resource than past comprehensive plans, while also maintaining clear, firm principles to guide future planning.

Implementation

A great deal of time, effort, and expertise went into developing the *Town of Normal Comprehensive Plan*. Putting the plan into action will take even more time, resources and effort.

We urge readers to keep this in mind as they read and work from the *Plan*: The *Plan* is intended to serve the Town for twenty years. The Town—both its leaders and its citizens—should approach the Plan in five-year “blocks.” The *Plan* sequences and prioritizes actions and geographies for Town decisions based on the vision and the goals set forth in the *Plan*. For example, areas designated as Future Neighborhoods or Centers should further be read in conjunction with the growth priorities map, Map 2, that takes into account available infrastructure and annexation status. Several actions are denoted with a “(Q)” at the end to indicate that they are quick wins.

It is also worth noting that while the *Plan* is comprehensive in its scope, it is inherently limited in its specificity. In many cases, **further prioritization and planning on specific topics or geographies** will be necessary to carry out this plan’s general recommendations. The Town should integrate the recommendations of this plan into planning, budgeting, and capital improvement process of all its departments. The Town should work towards aligning regulations and incentives to move the goals of this plan forward.

The vision and aspirations of this plan are far bigger and deeper than what the Town government can accomplish alone. The Town should invite everyone—other public agencies, educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations, the private sector, and citizens—to be partners in realizing the plan. Planning and **collaborating** with these other organizations will be critical not just for this plan but for the success of regional economic development efforts like BN Advantage that are heavily reliant on the quality of place.

The recommendations in this *Plan* depend upon and result from extensive data gathering. Likewise, many of the strategies and actions recommended here emphasize the importance of collecting even more high-quality **data to track progress** and guide future decisions.

The planning values of sustainability, diversity, and responsibility are old-fashioned, conservative values applied through fresh thinking and bold policy. These are the values and strategies that will provide sound, smart growth to the Town of Normal to the benefit of current and future generations.

MAP 2: Growth Priorities

