

# Room to Grow

How Zoning Affects Our Environment



# Welcome

Andrew Ericson, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

Natalie Heneghan, Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region

**We are zoning enthusiasts.**

# Overview

Zoning basics

La Crosse's zoning code through the years

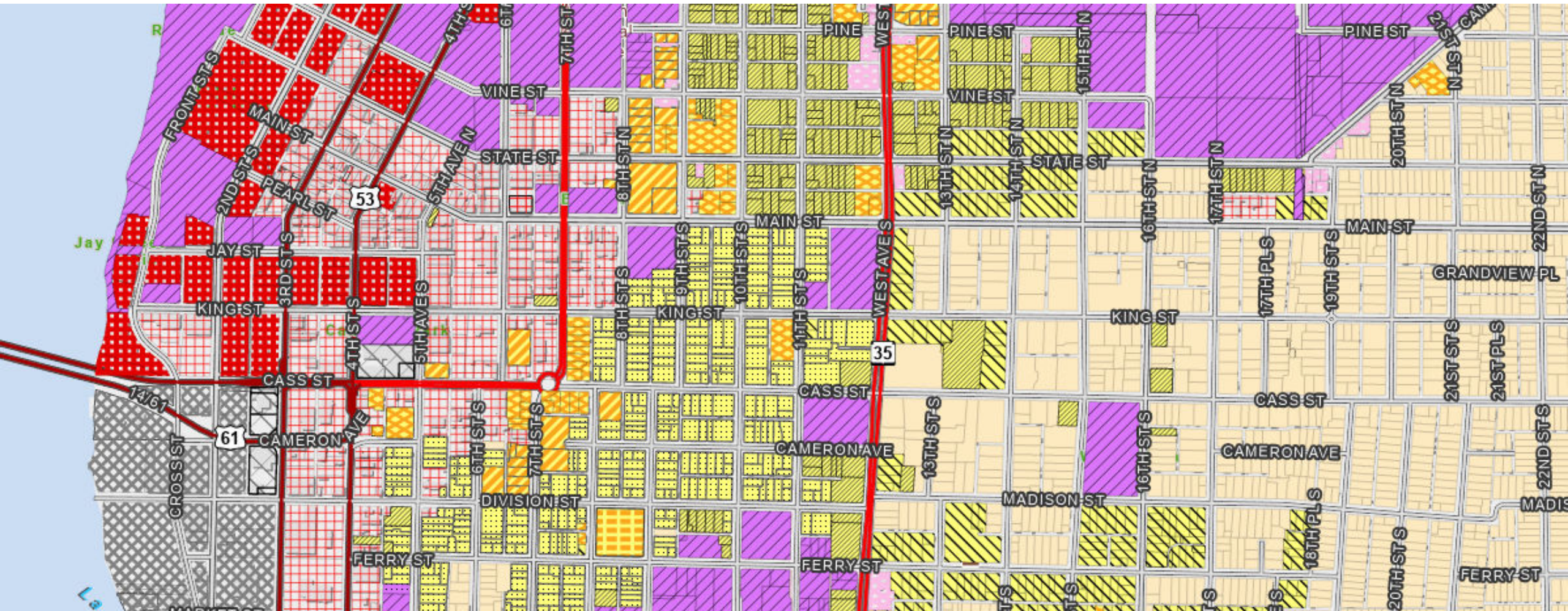
Zoning impact on the environment

Direct impact on La Crosse's Environment

What's next? What's possible?



# Zoning





# BALTIMORE TRIES DRASTIC PLAN OF RACE SEGREGATION

Strange Situation Which Led the Oriole City to Adopt the Most Pronounced "Jim Crow" Measure on Record.



Councilman Samuel L. West, Who Introduced the Segregation Ordinance.

On last Monday, Dec. 15, the City Council of Baltimore passed and the Mayor signed a bill which provides for the segregation of the races in public places.

The ordinance seeks to amend the existing laws of Baltimore to prohibit the negro from occupying seats in public places, including the street cars, and to prohibit the negro from occupying seats in public places, including the street cars, and to prohibit the negro from occupying seats in public places, including the street cars.



Mayor A. Barry Mahood of Baltimore.



Law 7-14 Where the Negro Invasion Has Popularized Values.



House 1424 McCulloch Street in Which a Negro Lawyer Named McNeenan Moved in June, 1910, and Which Promptly Had His Windows Broken, as Shown in the Cut.



Argyle Avenue, Another Street Where Values Have Been Greatly Affected by Negro Tenants.



Milton Dakshill, Author of the Ordinance.

City Solicitor Edgar Allan Poe.

City Solicitor Edgar Allan Poe, who advised the ordinance, says that the measure is a "Jim Crow" law, and that it is a "discrimination against the negro race." He says that the ordinance is a "discrimination against the negro race" and that it is a "discrimination against the negro race."

The ordinance is a "discrimination against the negro race" and it is a "discrimination against the negro race." It is a "discrimination against the negro race" and it is a "discrimination against the negro race." It is a "discrimination against the negro race" and it is a "discrimination against the negro race."

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# The Equitable Building, New York.



1910 - Baltimore

1916 - NYC

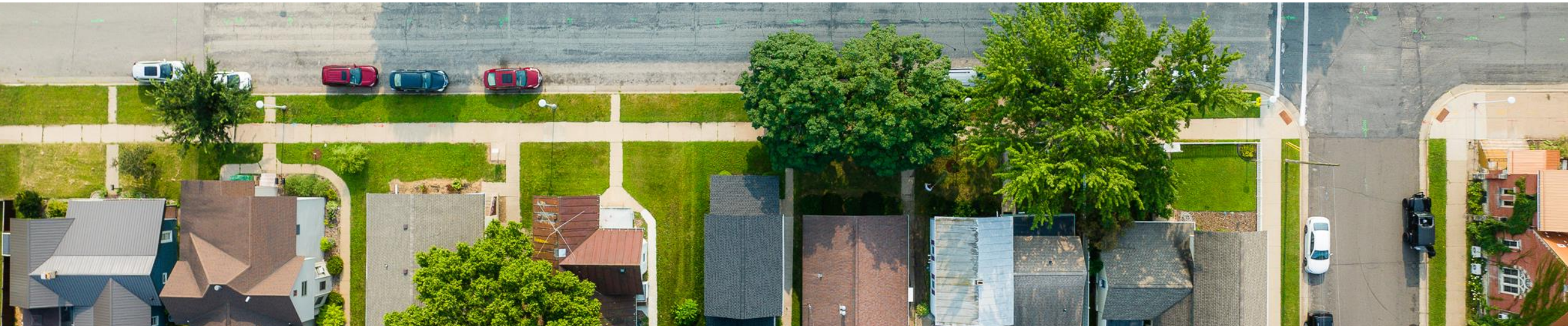


# What does zoning do?

Establish uniformity throughout an area

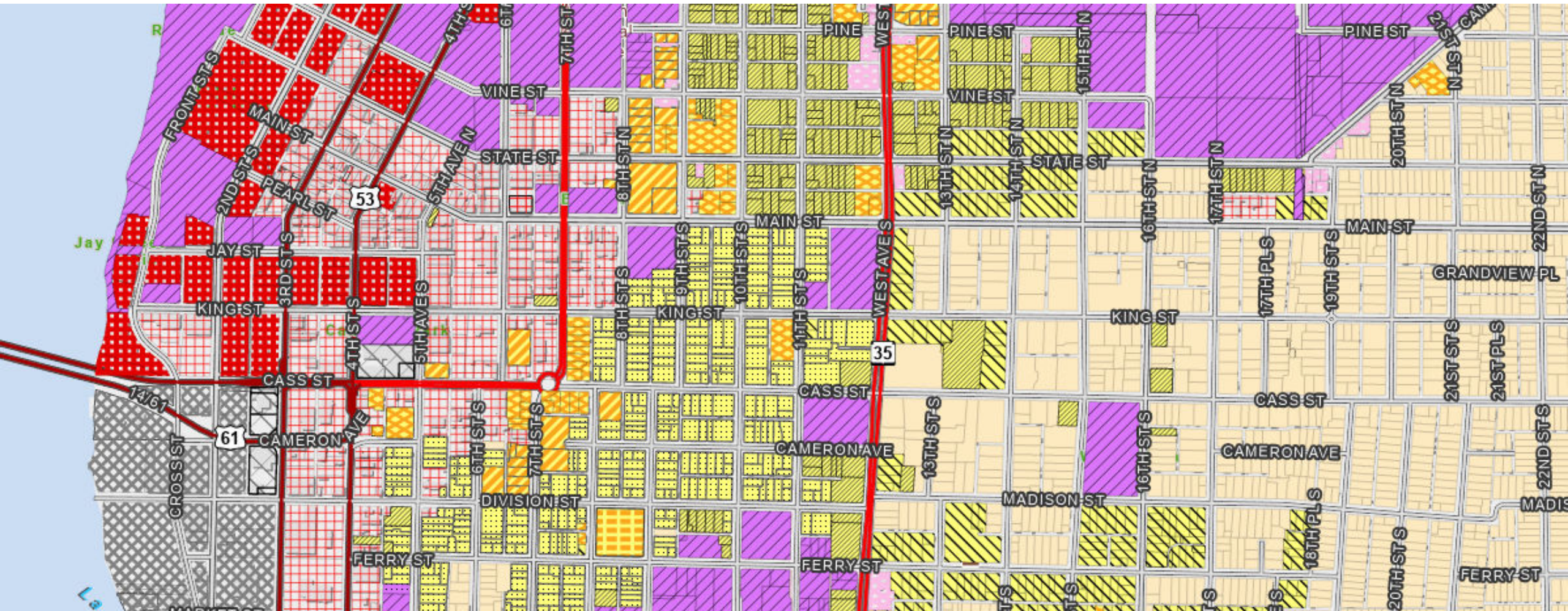
Govern property use

Manage appearance of properties





# Zoning in La Crosse





# Zoning in La Crosse

“Times change and the community changes with them. A good zoning ordinance must change with the community to which it applies, or it may become a hindrance to orderly development.”

- *La Crosse Tribune, January 2, 1956*



# Zoning in La Crosse

From the 1930s through the 1990s, a series of zoning code rewrites occur in La Crosse. Key themes that emerge include:

- Public health
- Preserving property value
- Cleaning up patchwork laws + exceptions to the rule





# Zoning in La Crosse

From the 1930s through the 1990s, a series of zoning code rewrites occur in La Crosse. Key themes that emerge include:

- Limiting encroachment of student housing
- Limiting encroachment of rentals of any kind



# Zoning in La Crosse

By the late 1990s, single-family zoning dominates residential areas. R1, or Single Family Residential, composes the second highest percentage of land use at 19%, topped only by Conservancy at 22.9%.





# Zoning in La Crosse

Other residential uses, including Low Density Multi-Family (duplexes, triplexes, etc.), Multi-Family Residential, and Special Residential total 4.5% of land use.



# Missing Middle Housing





# Lot size

Lot size increases over time with every new zoning rewrite

- Pre-1938 = less than 5,000 sq ft
- 1938-1966 = minimum 5,000 sq ft
- After 1966 = minimum 7,200 ft

# Affordability

City of La Crosse	1999 Census	2020 Census
Number of owner-occupied units	9,198	10,610
Median home value	\$85,100	\$183,300
% spending 30% or more on housing	18%	13.6%
Number of renter-occupied units	10,380	11,661
Median monthly rent	\$449	\$941
% spending 30% or more on rent	36.2%	44.1%*
Minimum wage	\$5.15/hour	\$7.25/hour
Median salary (county)	\$39,483	\$46,438

+215% (\$196,600 in 2023)

+210%

+118%

\*24.7% spend more than 50% of income on rent



# Zoning in La Crosse

## Consequences:

- We're running out of space
- Buildable land rapidly increases in value, costs passed on to buyers and renters

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- Homeownership is out of reach for more residents
- Housing demand goes elsewhere – suburbs
- Car dependency built into our city – don't have density to uphold healthy transit infrastructure
- Parking lots

# Zoning and the Environment

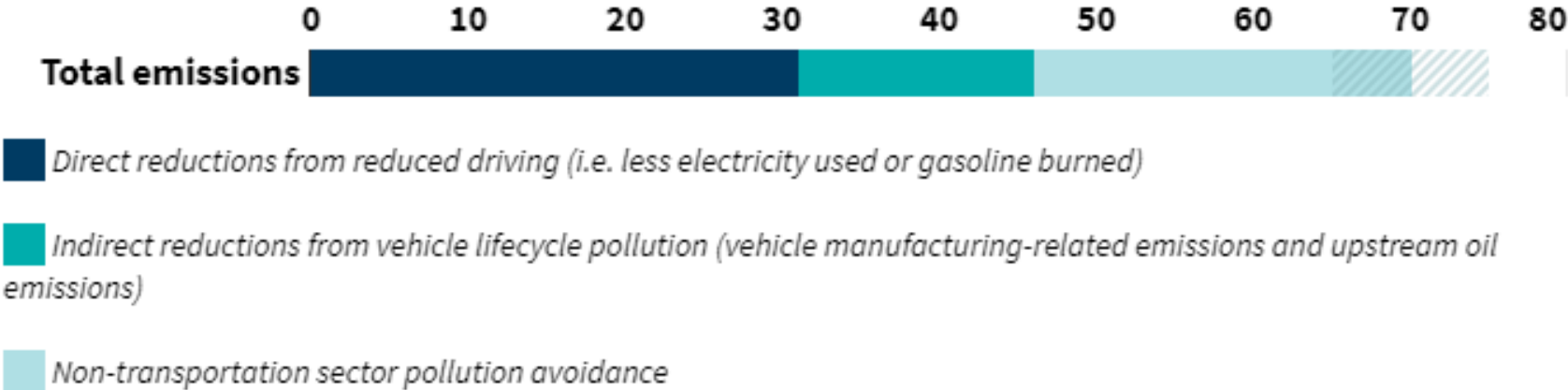
- Zoning can incentivize Sprawl:
  - Excess Car Use
  - Impervious Surfaces
  - Fragmentation and Encroachment of Ecosystems
  - Higher Energy Inputs
- Zoning can incentivize Smart Growth
  - Walkability/Bikeability
  - Transit Friendly
  - Preserves Open Space/Ecosystems (broadly)
  - More efficient use of energy

# Emissions Reduction

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## Carbon Pollution Avoided in 2033

(Millions of tons CO<sub>2</sub>e per year)



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*Exhibit 1. Total emissions avoided through reduced driving, vehicle lifecycle pollution avoidance, and other pollution avoidance.*

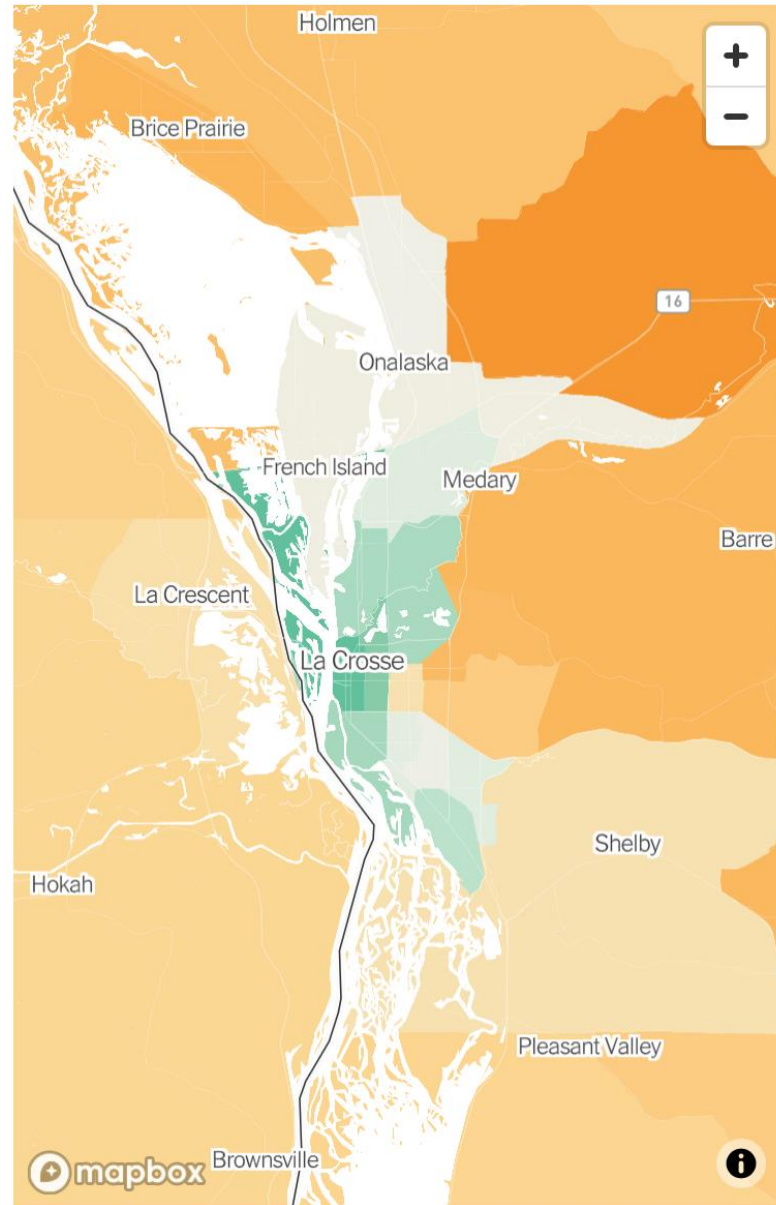
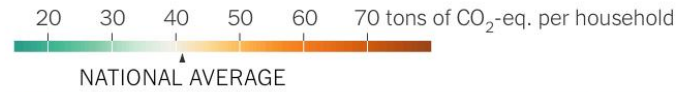
Source: <https://rmi.org/why-state-land-use-reform-should-be-a-priority-climate-lever-for-america/>



# Climate Impact per Capita

- Source: NYT, Climate Impact of Your Neighborhood, Mapped (Dec. 13, 2022)

La Crosse, Wis. metro area



Note: Metro area names have been simplified.

# Car Dependency

## Transportation Performance

Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per capita for all passenger vehicles within the City of La Crosse for the year 2023 via Google EIE.

Data Year	2023
Average Daily Distance, Total	1,197,260
La Crosse Total Population per USGBC Population Calculator	60,670
Daily VMT Per Capita	19.733975111

# Car Dependency Continued

Table 3: Community-Wide Annual GHG Emissions by Source Category



Source Category	Annual GHG Emissions (MT CO <sub>2</sub> e)					Percent Change	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	'19-'23	'20-'23
Electricity	260,955	196,849			183,388	-30%	-7%
Natural Gas	215,482	209,040			213,017	-1%	+2%
Transportation	266,169	226,700			258,014	-3%	+14%
Solid Waste	29,502	31,239			25,529	-13%	-18%
Wastewater	407	407			455	+12%	+12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>772,515</b>	<b>664,235</b>			<b>680,403</b>	<b>-12%</b>	<b>+2%</b>

Info Source: GHG Inventory Tool, [www.paleBLUEdot.llc](http://www.paleBLUEdot.llc)






# Transit

Toward greener transit: Carbon-efficient density thresholds for public transit vs. private vehicles

[Bumsoo Lee](#) <sup>a</sup> , [Sungwon Lee](#) <sup>b</sup>  

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2025.104641> 

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Minimum Density required for transit to be more carbon efficiency than driving - 3.4 persons per acre

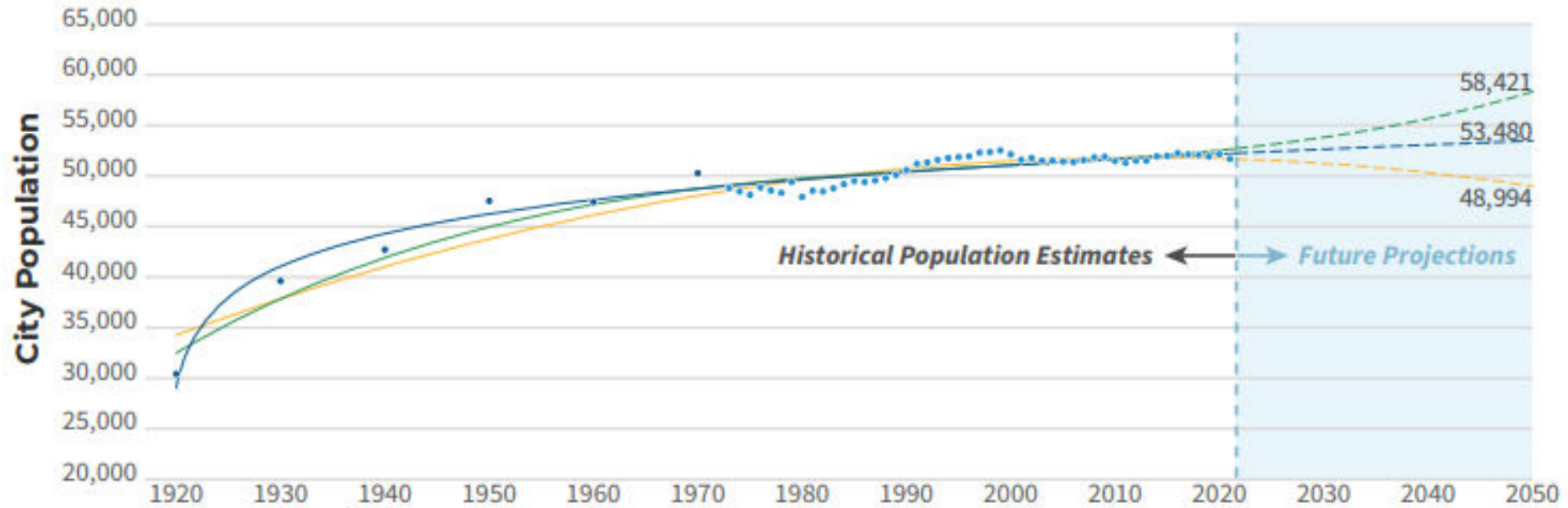
Carbon benefits increase beyond that.

At 8.6 persons per acre benefits significantly shift up

By developed space in La Crosse (not including conservancy) 6.1 per acre.

# Population Growth - City

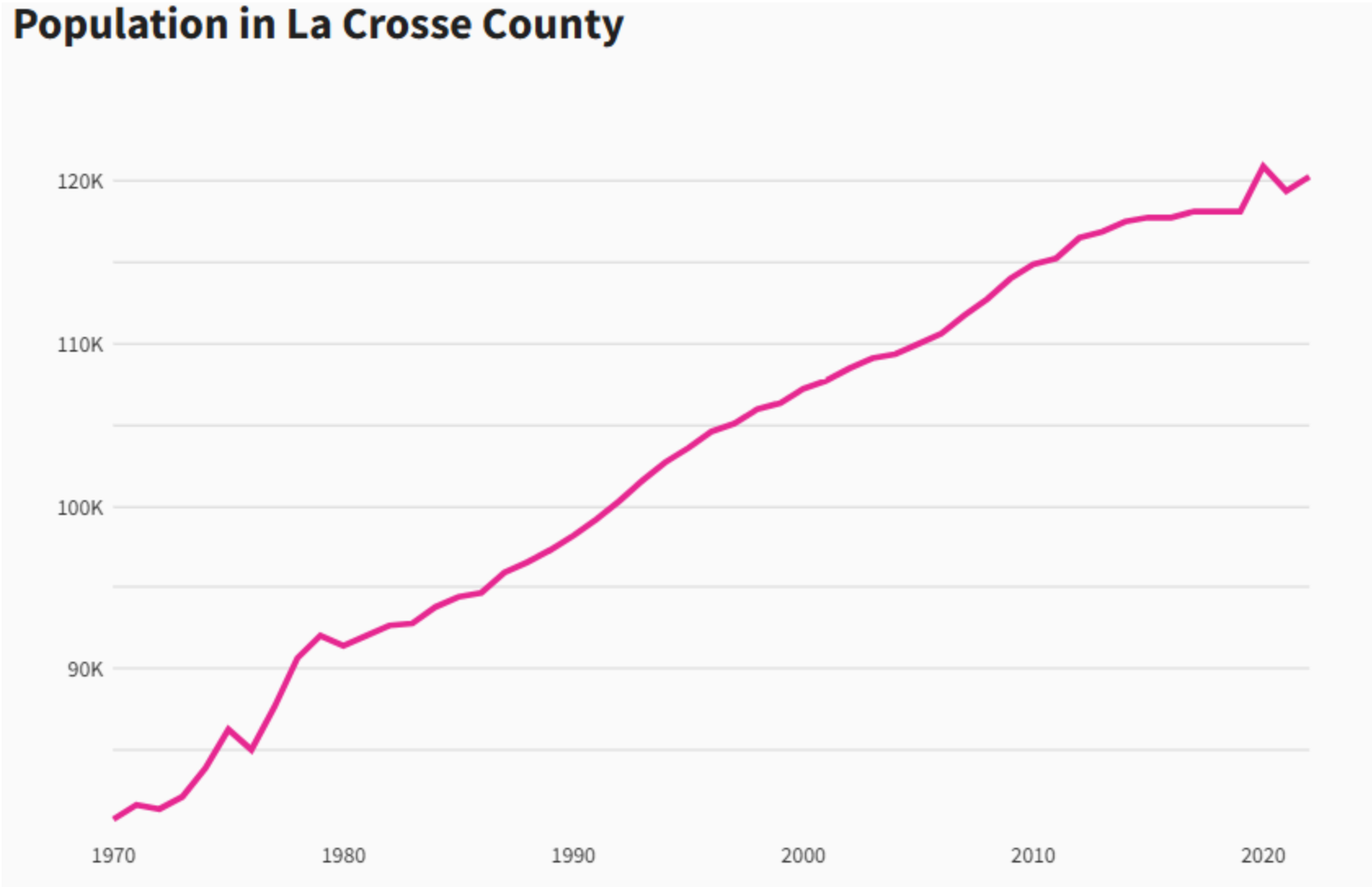
▼ Figure 1.2: City of La Crosse Population Projections.



Source: Forward La Crosse (comp plan)

# Population Growth - County

Population in La Crosse County

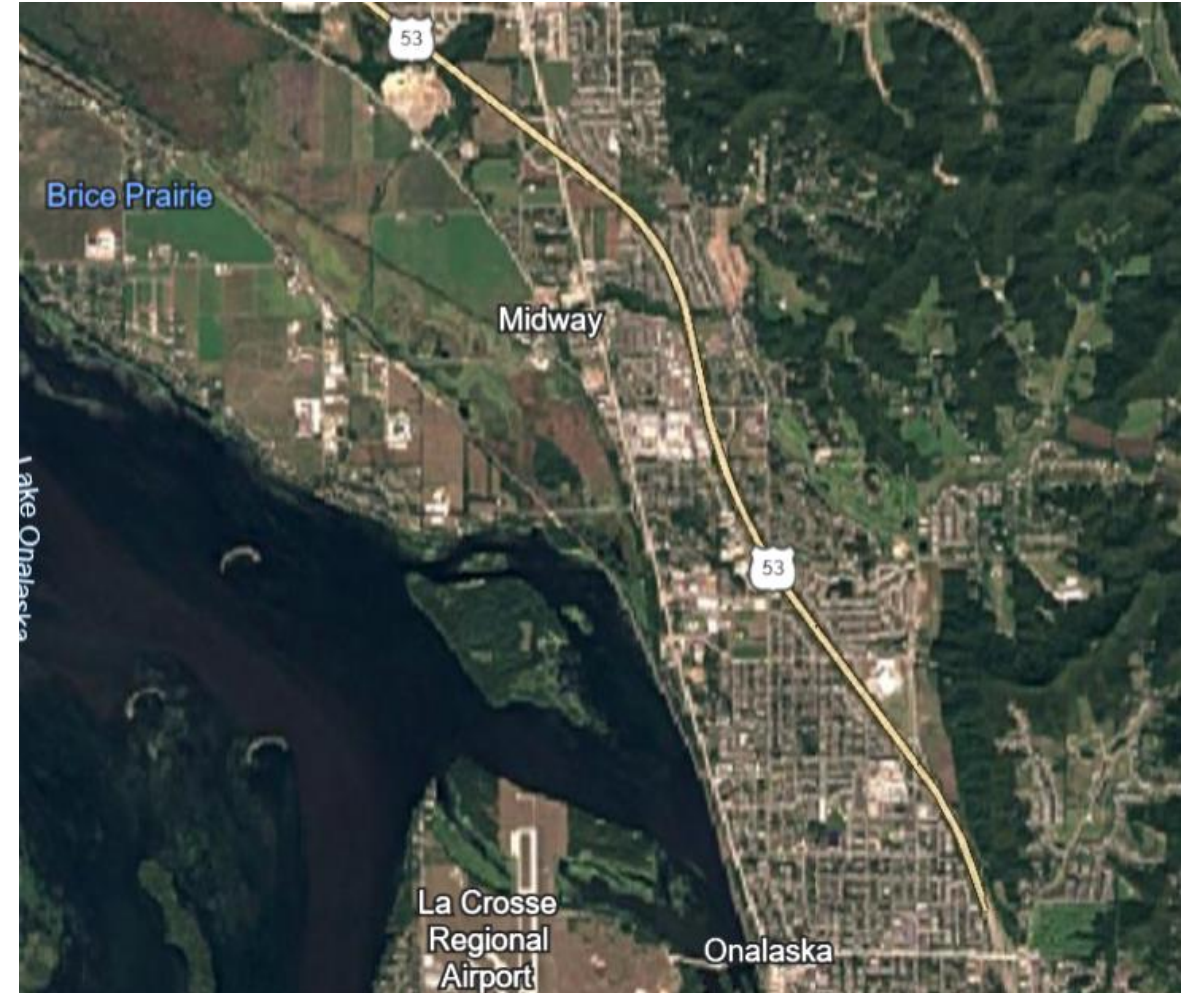
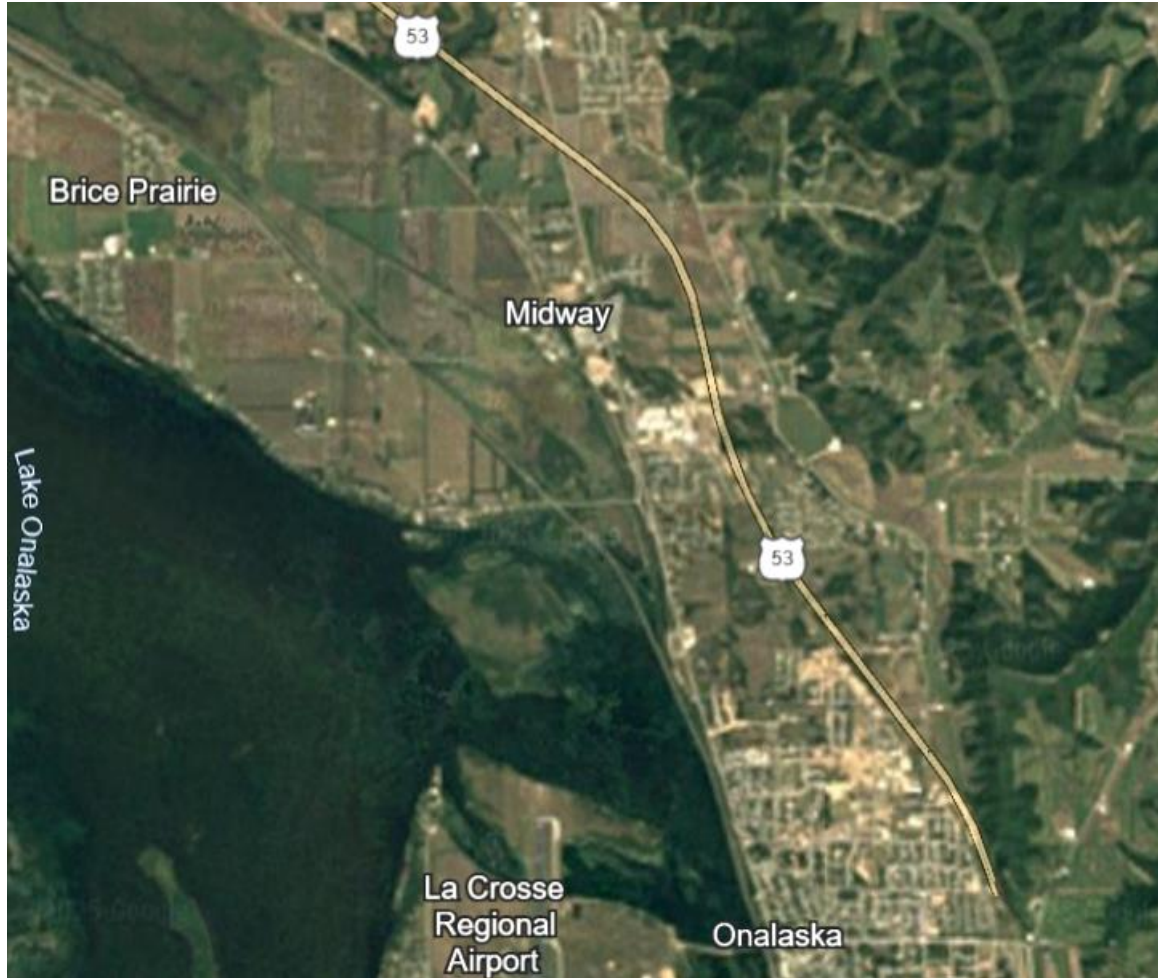


1984- 93,721

2022 -120,294

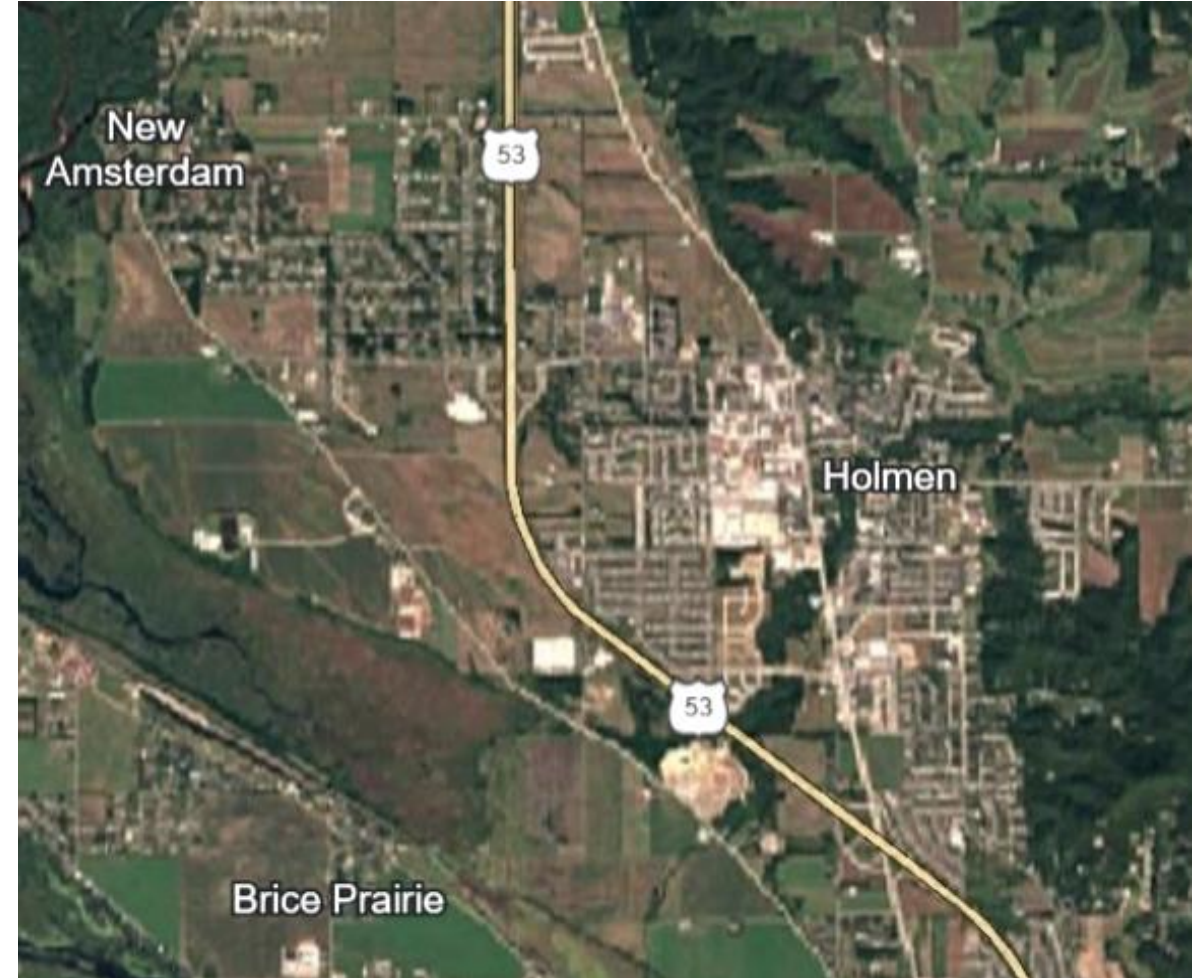
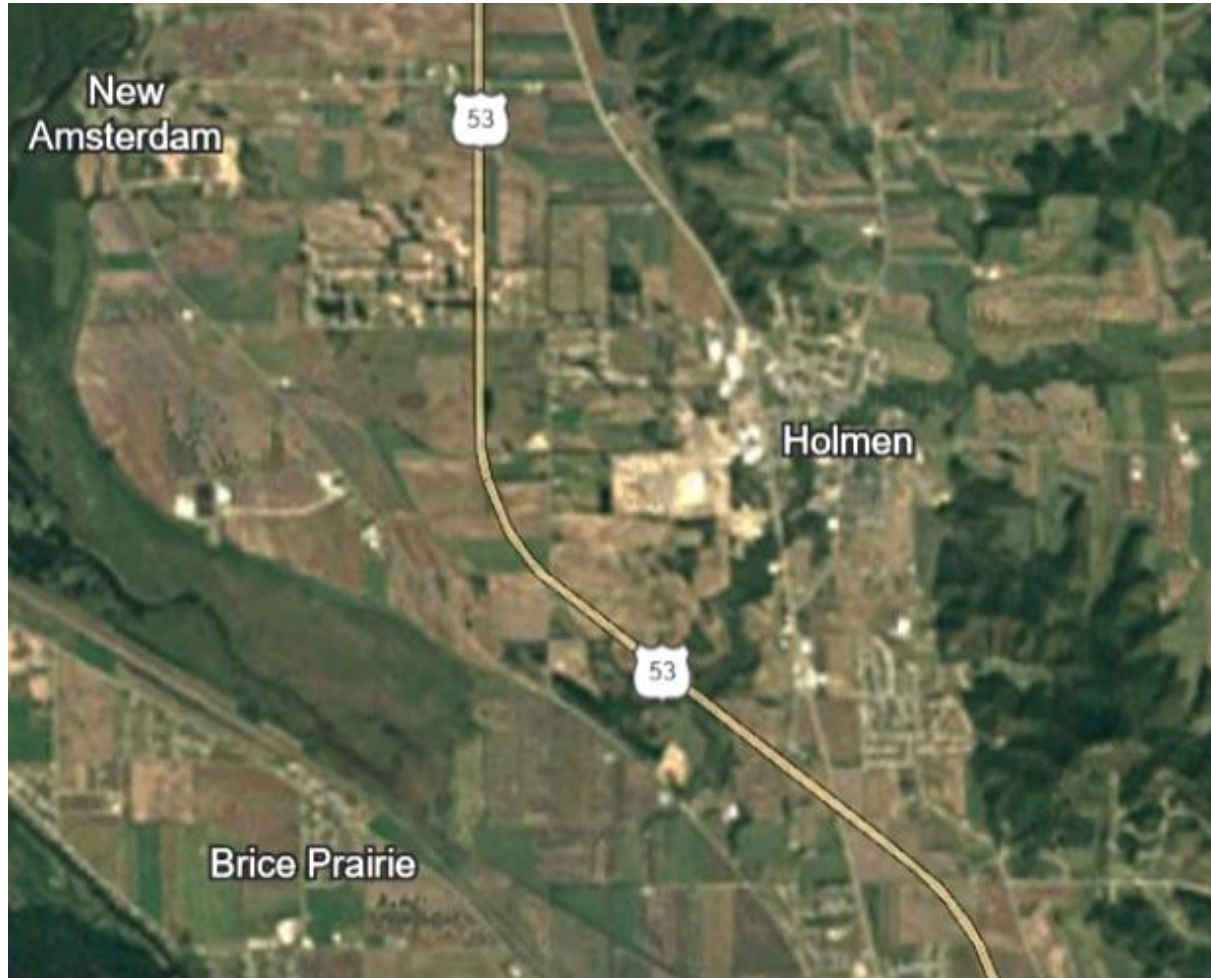


# 1984 to 2020 Onalaska





# 1984 to 2020 Holmen



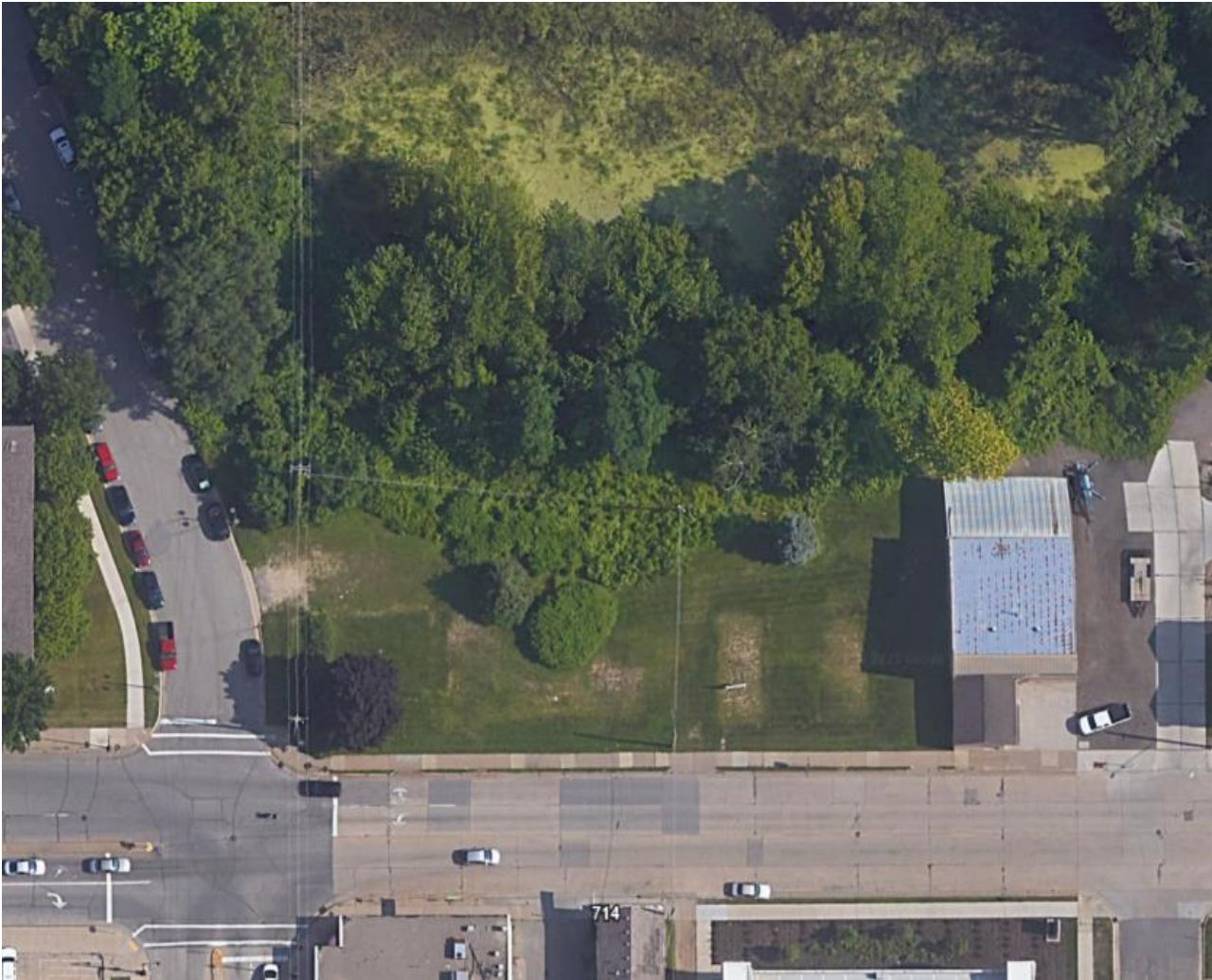


# 2003 to 2025 La Crosse



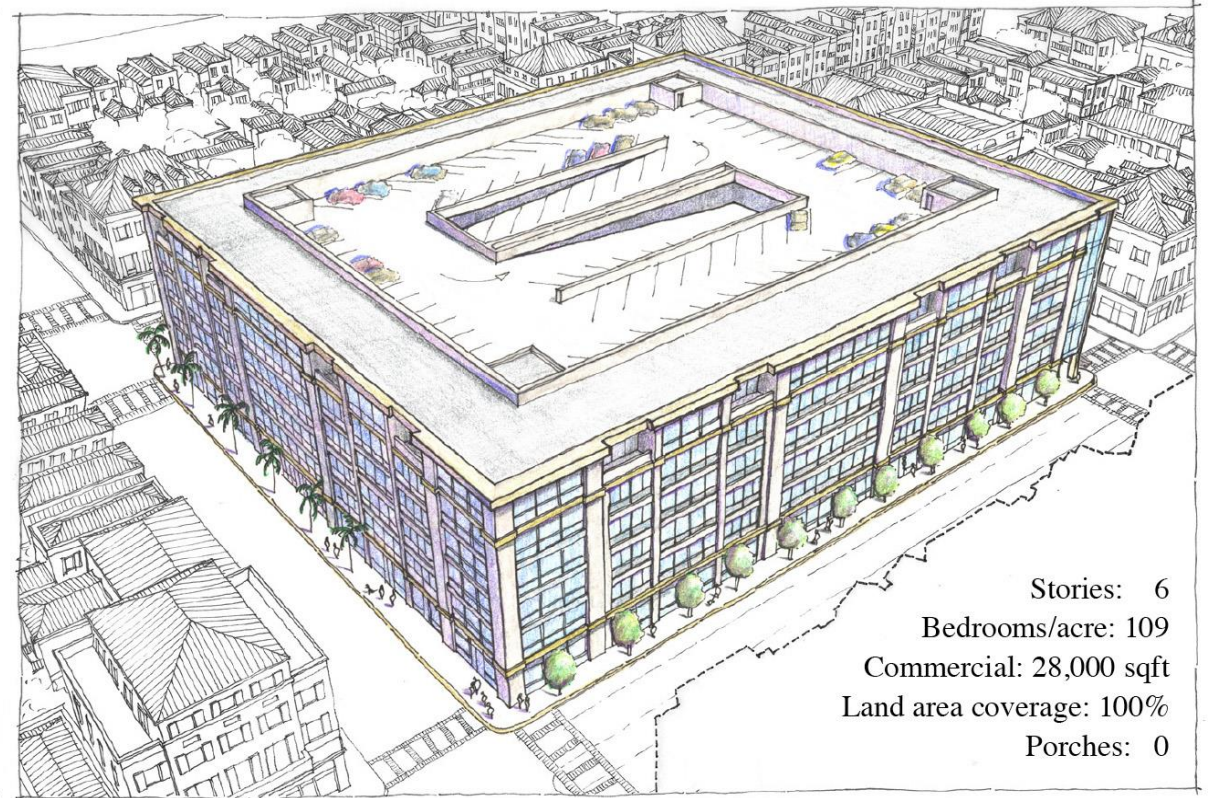
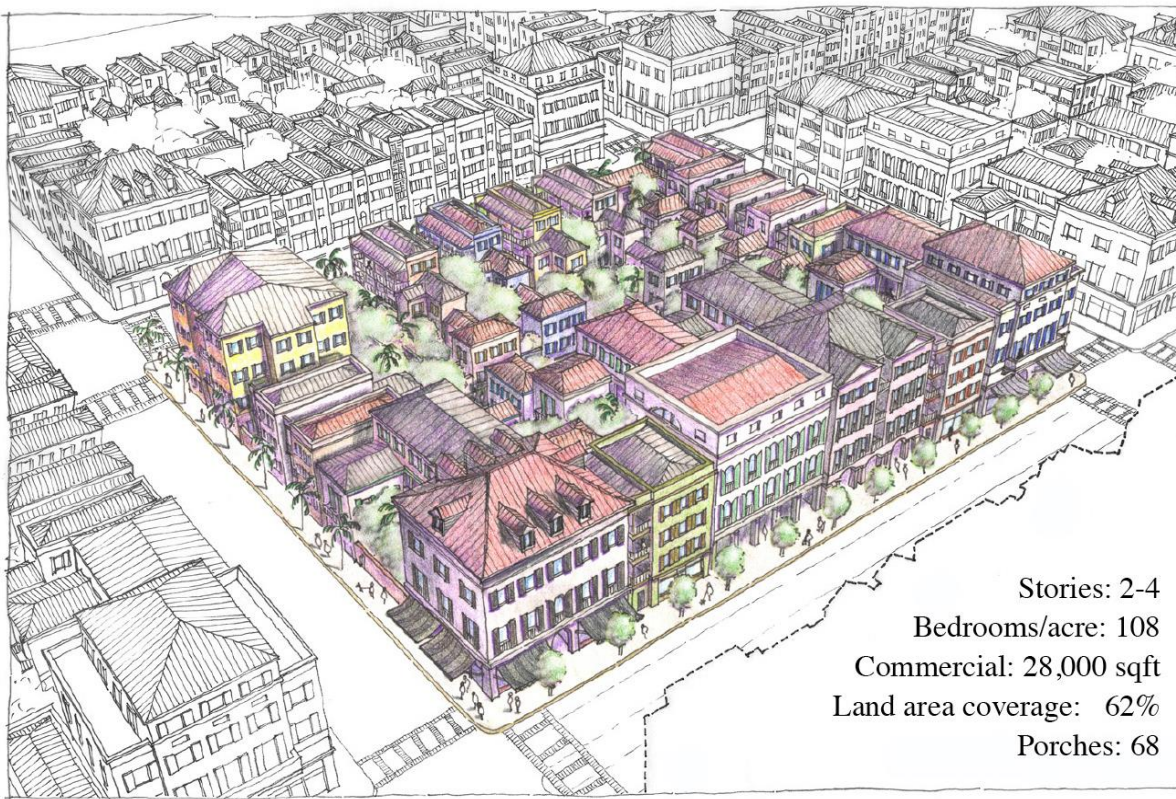


# 2015 to 2022 La Crosse





# Density Can be Green



Source: <https://www.civicconservation.org/casestudy>

# Water




- Lawns don't infiltrate as much as you think
- Low density means more off-site impervious infrastructure (roads, parking lots)
- Stormwater infrastructure (ex: rain gardens) can make up for more impervious surface.



## EXAMPLE 1: ONE-ACRE LEVEL

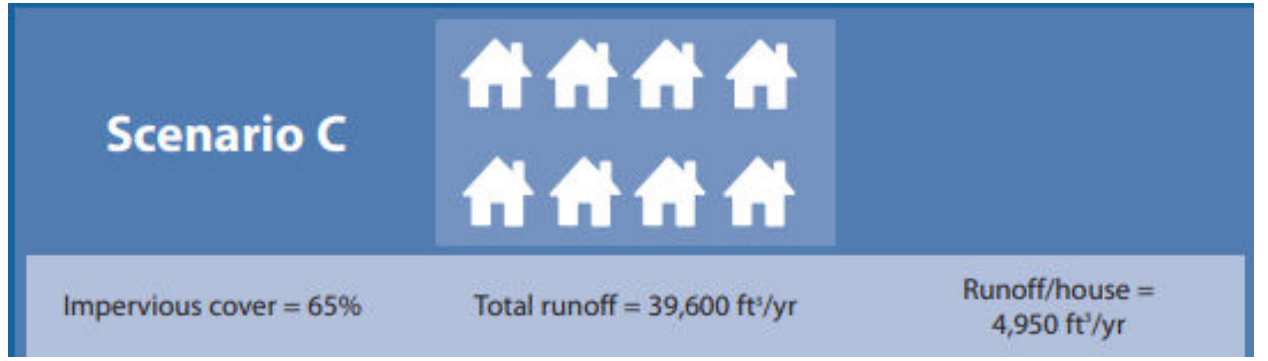
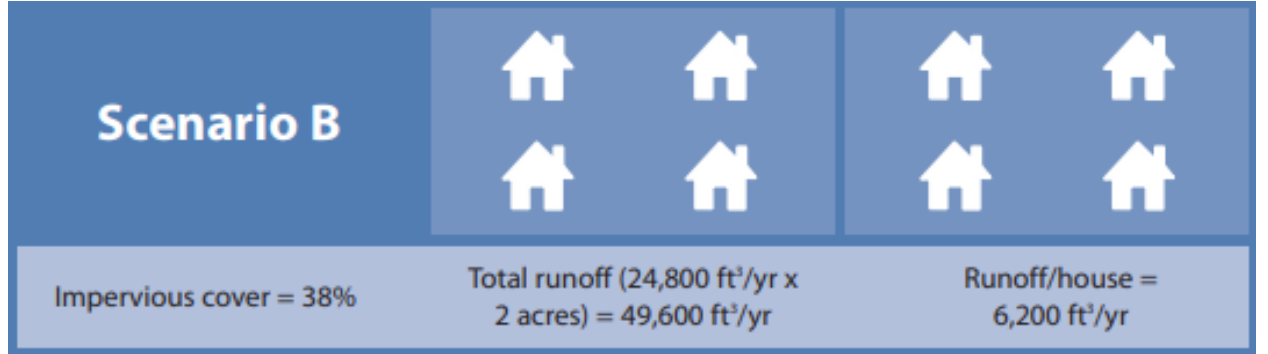
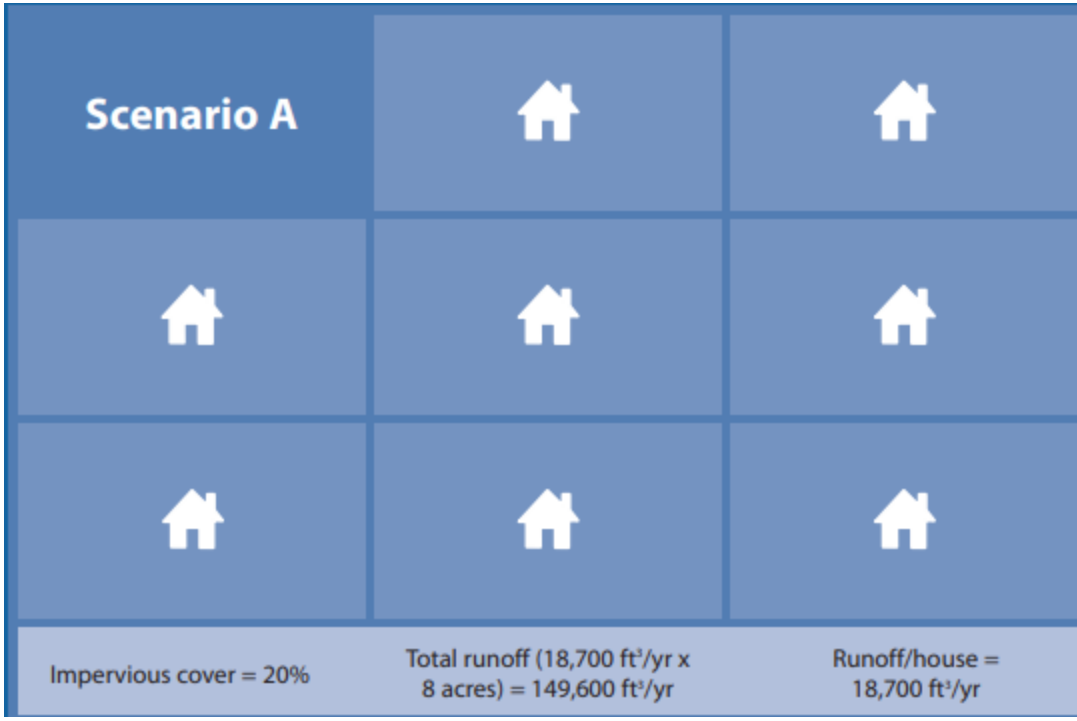
Scale of Analysis	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
One Acre	1 house	4 houses	8 houses

### EXHIBIT 3: Total Average Annual Stormwater Runoff for All Scenarios

Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
		
Impervious cover = 20% Runoff/acre = 18,700 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr Runoff/unit = 18,700 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr	Impervious cover = 38% Runoff/acre = 24,800 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr Runoff/unit = 6,200 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr	Impervious cover = 65% Runoff/acre = 39,600 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr Runoff/unit = 4,950 ft <sup>3</sup> /yr

## EXAMPLE 2: LOT LEVEL




Scale of Analysis	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
Lot	8 houses built on 8 acres	8 houses built on 2 acres	8 houses built on 1 acre



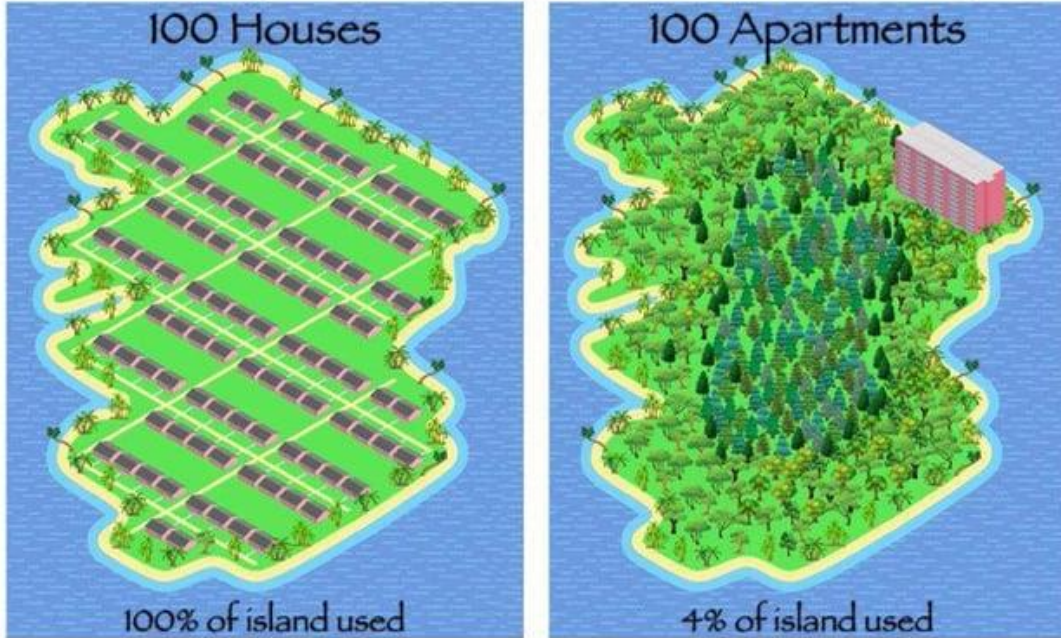
<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/protecting-water-resources-higher-density-development>



### EXHIBIT 5: 10,000-Acre Watershed Accommodating 10,000 Houses

Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
		
<p>10,000 houses built on 10,000 acres produce: 10,000 acres x 1 house x 18,700 ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of runoff = <b>187 million ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of stormwater runoff</b> <b>Site: 20% impervious cover</b> <b>Watershed: 20% impervious cover</b></p>	<p>10,000 houses built on 2,500 acres produce: 2,500 acres x 4 houses x 6,200 ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of runoff = <b>62 million ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of stormwater runoff</b> <b>Site: 38% impervious cover</b> <b>Watershed: 9.5% impervious cover</b></p>	<p>10,000 houses built on 1,250 acres produce: 1,250 acres x 8 houses x 4,950 ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of runoff = <b>49.5 million ft<sup>3</sup>/yr of stormwater runoff</b> <b>Site: 65% impervious cover</b> <b>Watershed: 8.1% impervious cover</b></p>

How would you prefer to see this island developed?

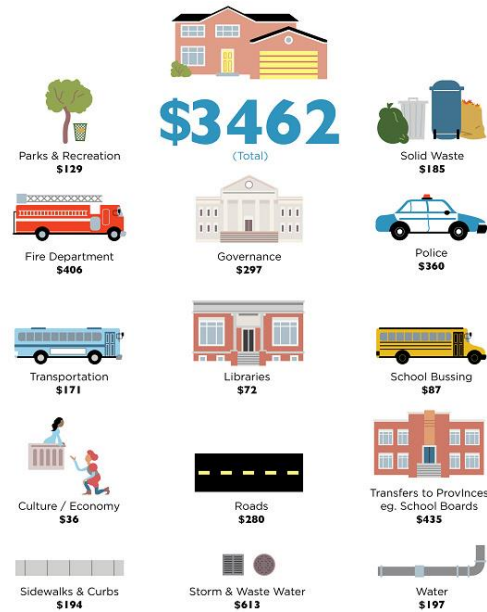


Then why not prefer apartments in your own town?

*Density saves nature.*

## Suburban

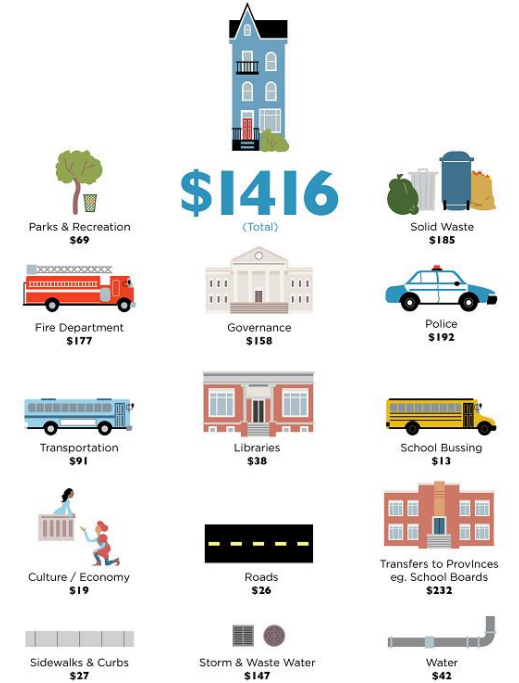
City's Annual Cost, per Household



**SP** Sustainable Prosperity  
For more data and more reports, visit [thecostofsprawl.com](http://thecostofsprawl.com)  
Data based on Halifax Regional Municipality

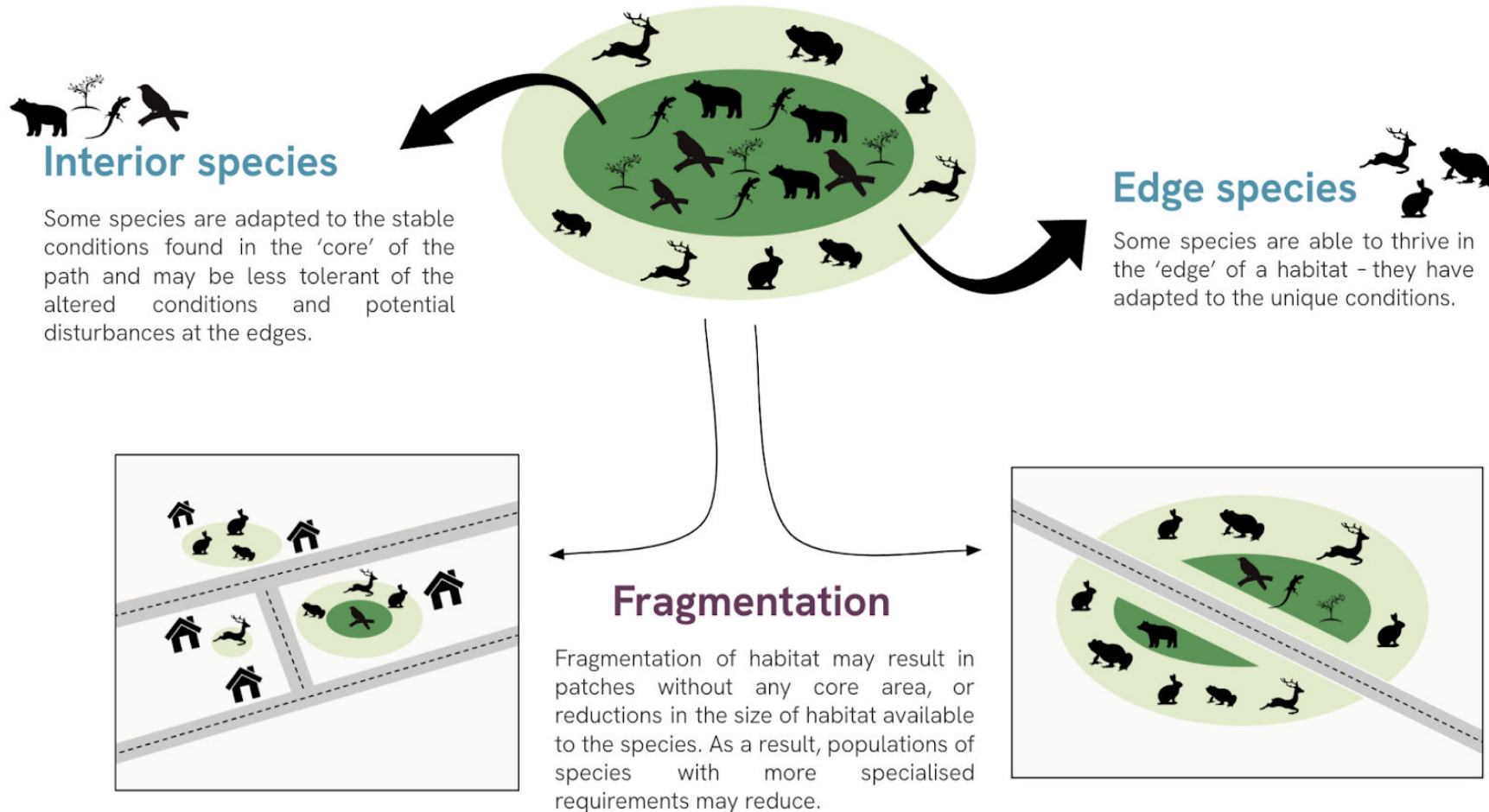
## Urban

City's Annual Cost, per Household



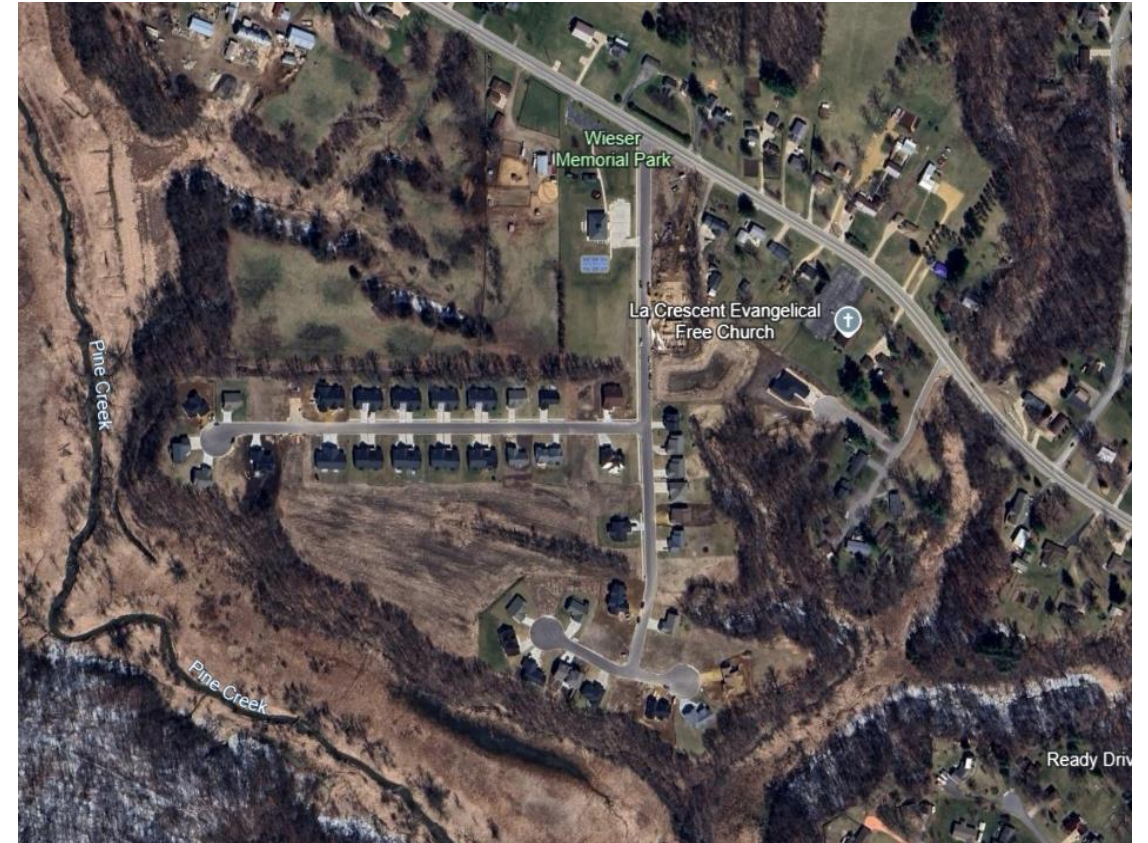
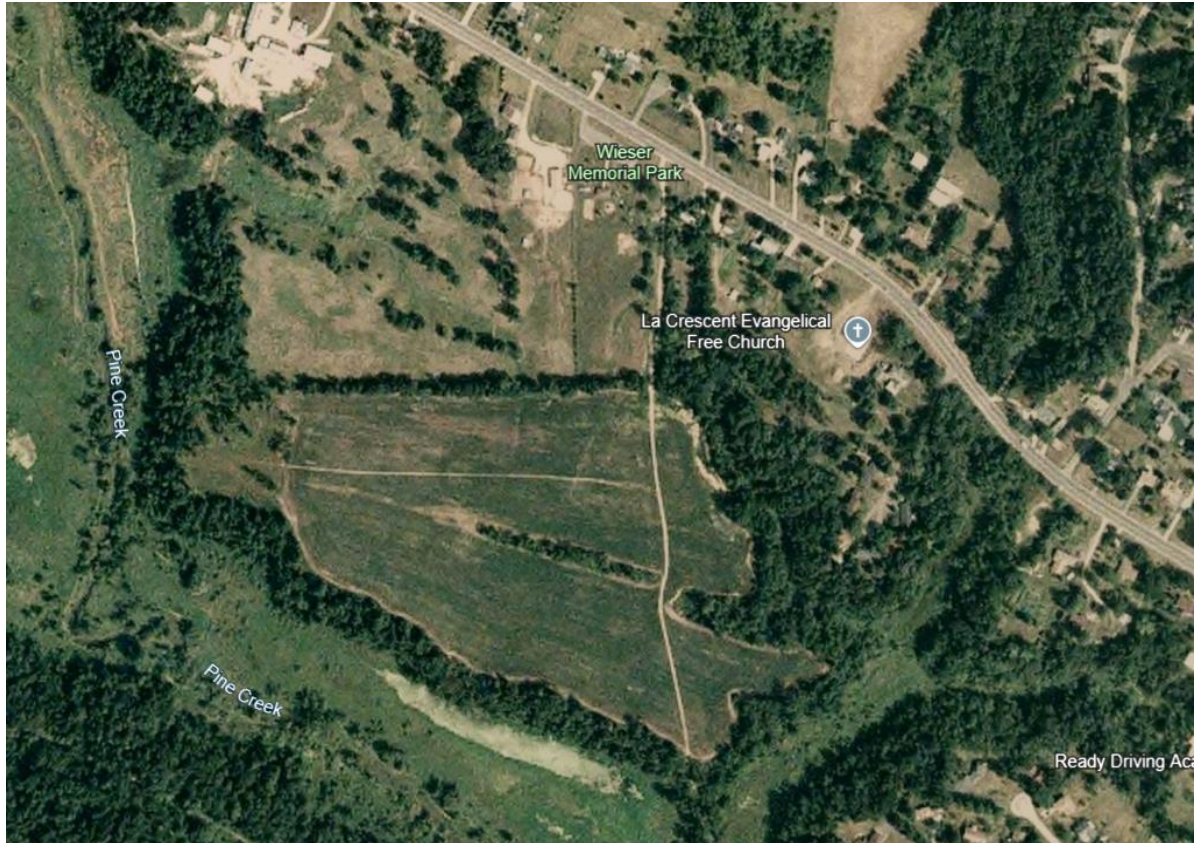
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# Core Species vs Edge Species






















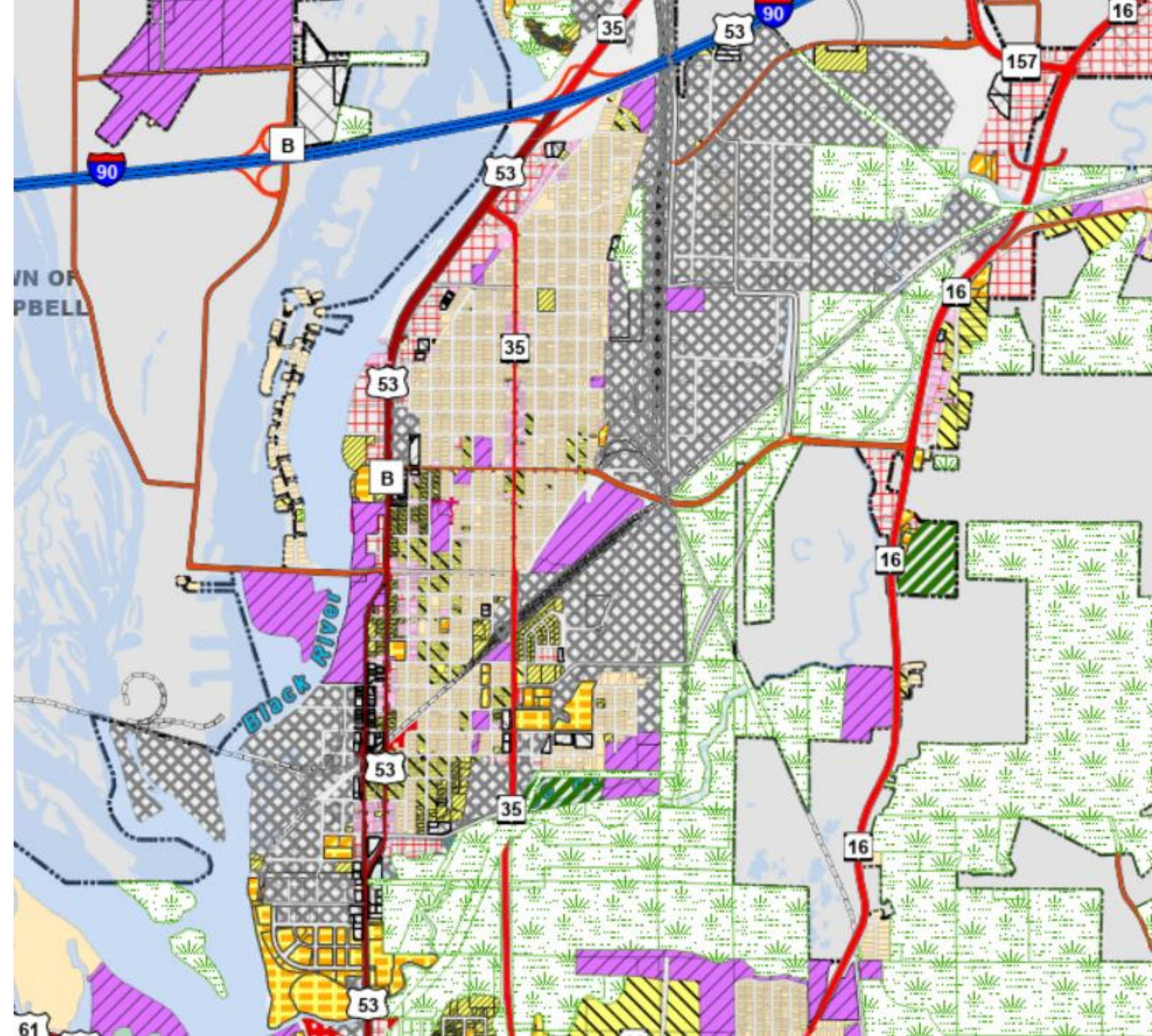
# 2003 to 2024 La Crescent



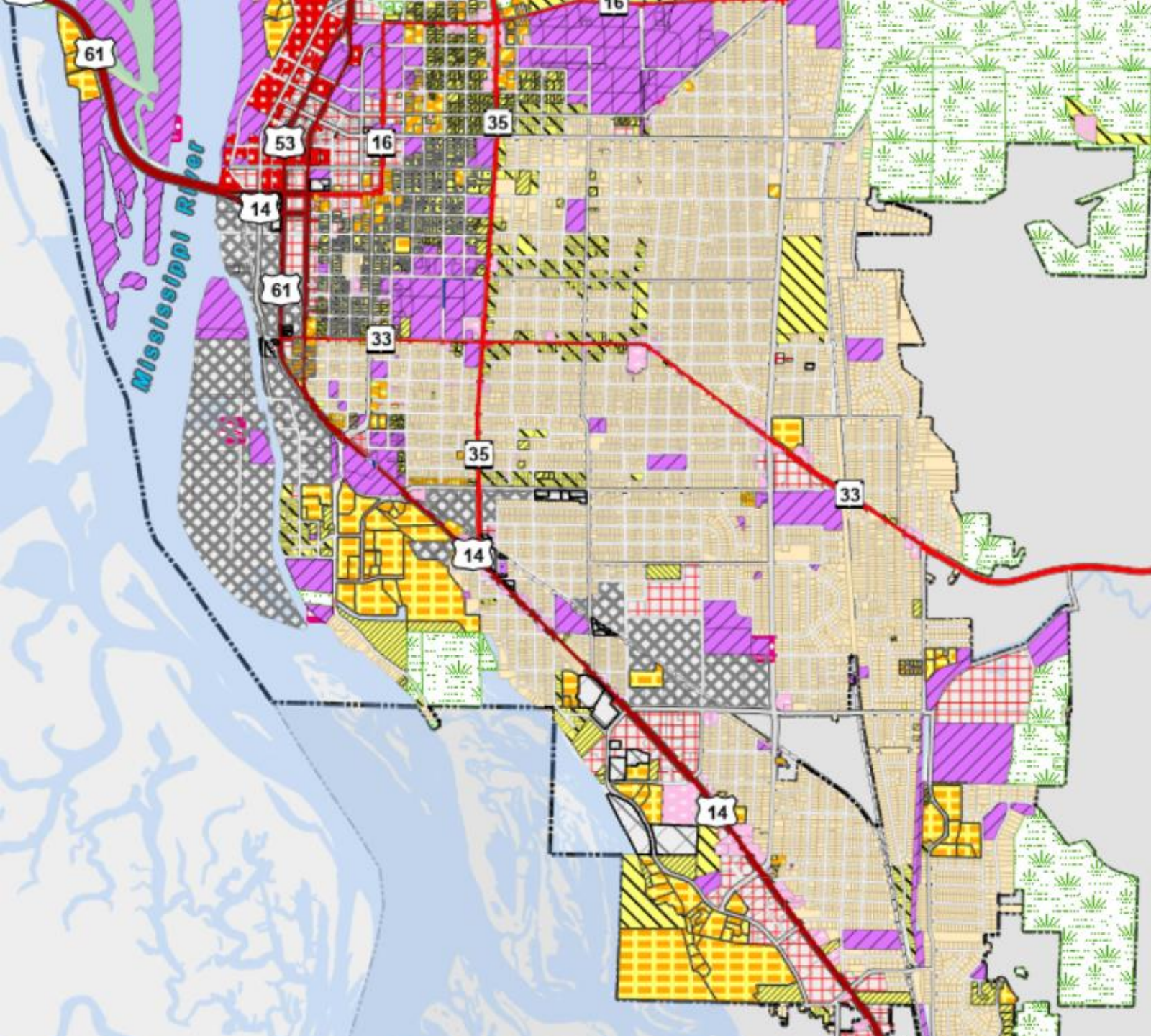


Zoning Information




















-  R1 - SINGLE FAMILY
-  R2 - RESIDENCE
-  WR - WASHBURN RESIDENTIAL
-  R3 - SPECIAL RESIDENCE
-  R4 - LOW DENSITY MULTIPLE
-  R5 - MULTIPLE DWELLING
-  R6 - SPECIAL MULTIPLE
-  PD- PLANNED DEVELOPMENT
-  TND - TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEV.
-  C1 - LOCAL BUSINESS
-  C2 - COMMERCIAL
-  C3 - COMMUNITY BUSINESS
-  M1 - LIGHT INDUSTRIAL
-  M2 - HEAVY INDUSTRIAL
-  PS - PUBLIC AND SEMI-PUBLIC
-  PL - PARKING LOT
-  UT - PUBLIC UTILITY
-  CON - CONSERVANCY
-  FW - FLOODWAY







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# What's next?



# What's next? What's possible?

It's possible to write a zoning code that aligns with our goals for the environment, while also reducing cost of living, supporting schools, and building a healthy tax base.

Become a zoning enthusiast!



# What's next? What's possible?









## THE TYPES



**Duplex: Side-by-Side**



**Duplex: Stacked**



**Bungalow Court**



**Carriage House**



**Fourplex**



**Multiplex: Small**



# ACTIVITY

Build your "Sustainable La Crosse" through  
ZONING!



Low-Density Residential



High-Density Residential



Neighborhood Retail/Commercial (Credit: City)



Low-Density Residential



High-Density Residential



Commercial (credit: La Crosse Chamber)



Medium-Density Residential



Low-Intensity Mixed-Use



Institutional (Credit: City)



Medium-Density Residential



High-Intensity Mixed-Use



Industrial

# Activity Instructions

- Create a zoning legend
  - Zoning Options
    - Conservancy
    - Lower Density Residential
    - Higher Density Residential
    - Lower Intensity Mixed Use
    - Higher Intensity Mixed Use
    - Commercial/Industrial
    - Public/Other
- Rezone your "Sustainable La Crosse"
- Talk with others about your zoning decisions.



Group Share

# What's next?

Visit [www.forwardlacrosse.org/](http://www.forwardlacrosse.org/) to learn about the 2025 Zoning Code Update

Meet your councilmember: [www.cityoflacrosse.org/your-government/city-council](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/your-government/city-council)

Contact ALL councilmembers: email [zzcouncilmembers@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:zzcouncilmembers@cityoflacrosse.org)

# Thank you!

