

# 9 LAND USE

The city is set within a valley with steep terrain on all sides. This means that the city has naturally developed with a compact footprint and is largely “built out” in terms of additional developable land. This does not however mean that land use pattern changes cannot occur. The city can still define the patterns it would like to see in the future through new development, infill, and redevelopment. This chapter sets out the future land use plan, the map and accompanying land use descriptions that convey what patterns are desired for the future of the city. It then sets goals, policies, and actions for the city to pursue to implement that map to achieve the quality and type of development to foster a strong future for the city.



### Related Maps

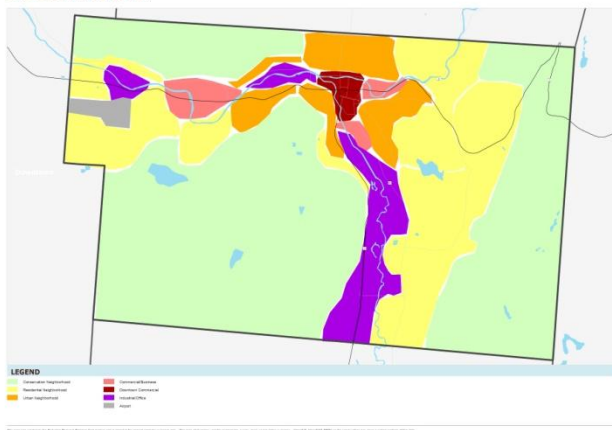
- Map 16: Existing Land Use (State)
- Map 17: Existing Land Use (Assessor)
- Map 18: Zoning
- Map 19: Future Land Use Plan

*Located in Appendix C*

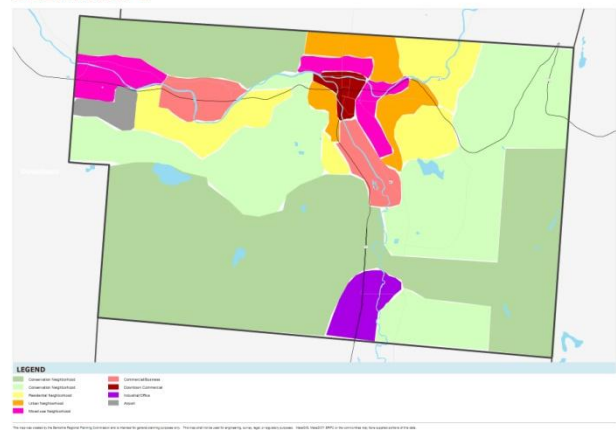
## FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

A future land use plan maps out land use patterns and functional areas for the long-term future of a community. It is a non-regulatory blueprint intended to guide development or redevelopment efforts, zoning changes, and encourage a range of place making efforts. A summary of the public open house on land use and infrastructure and services is contained in Appendix D.

**SCENARIO 1**



**SCENARIO 2**



The future land use plan was developed through scenarios whereby members of the public and the steering committee were given two scenarios, and asked to indicate which they preferred. The first scenario demonstrated the status quo, or land use continuing as is in North Adams. The second scenario demonstrated new mixed use areas, scaled back development expectations in areas with constraints, and emphasized community gateways to mark entry into the city. Participants resoundingly selected scenario 2 as the future land use plan for the city.

## LAND USE CATEGORIES

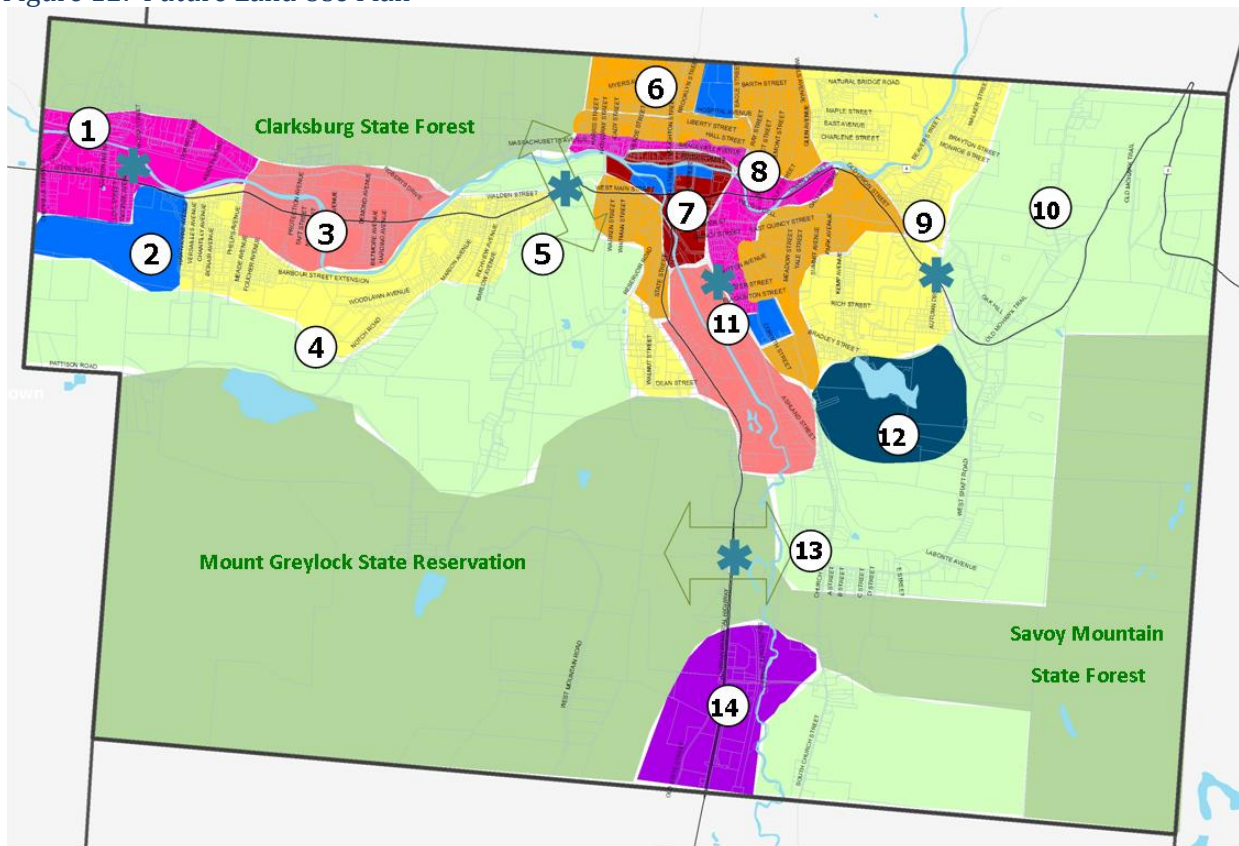
This table provides a summary of each land use category. These categories sync with the regional land use plan adopted through the Sustainable Berkshires plan in March 2014. The summary paints the picture – what land use looks like in the area. The primary and secondary uses indicates area appropriate uses to support through land use and zoning regulation.

Future Land Use Category	Description	Primary Uses	Secondary Uses
<b>Resource Conservation</b> <i>Density: Very low</i>	This land use category denotes those lands currently protected from development. It contains state owned land as well as lands protected by conservation restrictions, held by towns and non-profit organizations such as land trusts. These lands contain critical habitat, provide biodiversity and offer recreation resources. They provide connectivity of other resource areas and provide corridors for wildlife. Typically they have many constraints to development including habitat and slope constraints. The scenic nature of many of these areas, including view sheds and landscapes, is a contributing factor to the Berkshires being a tourism attraction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Space</li> <li>• Recreation</li> <li>• Habitat preservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forestry</li> <li>• Watershed protection</li> </ul>
<b>Rural Residential</b> <i>Density: Low</i>	This land use category represents areas where low-density residential development either exists or in many instances could occur, although in many instances there are severe constraints to development that would preclude any development, such as slope or wetlands. These areas are outside of the downtown and generally adjacent to conserved lands. The emphasis here is to maintain a distinct rural identity and landscape and ensure that low density development in these areas employs best practices for wildlife-friendly landscaping, stormwater management, and resource protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family residences</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duplexes</li> <li>• Home-based businesses</li> <li>• Rural small businesses</li> <li>• Resource based economic development</li> </ul>
<b>Outdoor Recreation Neighborhood</b> <i>Density: Medium to High</i>	Regionally, these areas are medium to high density neighborhoods around lakes, ski or other resort areas. They are located there because of the lake or resort and may be largely second homes. In the city, the development around Windsor Lake resembles this given, while more connected to the city than other such areas in the county, the lake is a key draw and asset. Care needs to be given not to degrade the recreational asset or impair associated environmental qualities or restrict access to a degree that limits the lake as a recreational resource for the broader community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single family residences</li> <li>• Condos</li> <li>• Recreation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting retail /commercial</li> <li>• Home-based businesses</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Residential Neighborhood</b> <i>Density: Medium to High</i>	This land use category represents areas of medium to high density residential development. This is the Berkshires version of the suburbs. These are our well-established neighborhoods, often with sidewalks, of primarily single family homes with some duplexes and apartments. They are largely auto-dependent and do not contain a broad mix of services or retail opportunities for residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family residences</li> <li>• Duplexes</li> <li>• Apartments</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small scale gardening</li> <li>• Home-based businesses</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

<p><b>Urban Neighborhood</b> <i>Density: High to Very High</i></p>	<p>This land use category contains predominantly high density residential development in an urban environment. These areas contain single and multi-family residences in close proximity to each other. A diverse mix of residents populates these areas. Residents feel closely linked to the activities happening in downtown and to nearby neighborhood-serving retail as well as service and employment opportunities. Services such as pocket parks, corner stores or coffee shops provide the opportunity for social engagement. High quality public services are generally provided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family residences</li> <li>• Duplexes</li> <li>• Apartments</li> <li>• Condos</li> <li>• Multi-family residences</li> <li>• Neighbor-hood commercial and retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community services</li> <li>• Home based business</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mixed-Use Neighborhood</b> <i>Density: Medium to High</i></p>	<p>Mixed use neighborhoods contain an eclectic mix of uses, including a range of residential densities, vertical and horizontal mixed use, and commercial uses - that can provide for many of the needs of the residents without the use of cars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community retail</li> <li>• Community services</li> <li>• Home-based businesses</li> </ul>
<p><b>Highway/Corridor Commercial</b> <i>Density: Medium to high</i></p>	<p>These areas provide retail, commercial, and professional services developed corridor-style along route 2 and route 8. Public transit generally serves these sites although they are auto-oriented in their design, typically with large parking areas in front of the buildings. Most of the shopping areas, including grocery stores, are located in these sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail</li> <li>• Professional office</li> <li>• Hotel / motel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storage / warehousing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Downtown Commercial</b> <i>Density: Very high</i></p>	<p>The downtown is the physical and social heart of the city. It has high density mixed use multi-story buildings in close proximity to each other. A wide mix of land uses offer basic as well as specialized good and services along with municipal services and cultural opportunities. Residential opportunities, especially on upper floors, are provided. There is a space for residents and visitors of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy social engagement, recreational activities and cultural events. Pedestrian accessibility is a strength of these areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail</li> <li>• Medical services</li> <li>• Professional services</li> <li>• Cultural amenities</li> <li>• Senior housing</li> <li>• Apartments</li> <li>• Restaurants</li> <li>• Residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban recreation</li> <li>• Light manufacturing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Industrial</b> <i>Density: Low to high</i></p>	<p>These areas serve as employment centers and house a number of the city’s larger employers. They have major infrastructure needs: arterial highway access is very important and transit service is available. This includes the industrial park and other current industrial use areas as well as some additional land that could be developed with employment uses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manufacturing</li> <li>• Industrial</li> <li>• Energy &amp; infrastructure</li> <li>• Freight / goods movement</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting commercial</li> <li>• Storage/ware housing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Special Use Area</b></p>	<p>These areas contain educational institutions (MCLA), the hospital, and the airport: institutions with relatively large land holdings and a unique function within the city distinct from more general land use categories, They are areas that are relatively self-contained but exert a strong influence on the surrounding areas. They can serve as activity centers used by relatively large numbers of people on a periodic or regular basis. In many instances they have their own facilities plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Institutions</li> <li>• Hospitals</li> <li>• Airports</li> <li>• Cultural Institutions<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting commercial</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Because the Mass MoCA campus includes additional commercial use, the Steering Committee opted to not designate it as a Special Use Area.

Figure 12: Future Land Use Plan



- ① Blackinton area is designated mixed-use, which is similar to the current land use pattern which includes a mix of housing types and interspersed small-scale commercial both in the small commercial district and along Route 2.
- ② The airport is highlighted as a major feature with a strong connection to and gateway treatments on that section of Route 2 to create an attractive entry for those entering the city from the west or by air.
- ③ Community-scale commercial is retained in this area of Route 2.
- ④ Neighborhood density is “feathered” getting less dense closer to mount Greylock to both create an urban-rural transition and to reflect some of the natural constraints, including slope and draining, in this area.
- ⑤ This area, with cemeteries on either side of route 2, creates a natural break just before one begins the descent into downtown. This break is emphasized here as a gateway into downtown, doubling as a wildlife crossing.
- ⑥ Urban neighborhoods surround downtown and support patronage of the businesses and activities there.
- ⑦ The downtown is a higher density mixed use area with an emphasis on vertical mixed use that includes housing.
- ⑧ Mixed use areas surround downtown and create a transition between the higher-density mixed use of the downtown with some more moderate density mix of uses (vertical and horizontal).
- ⑨ Route 2 gateway treatments for those descending into the city from Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway east of the city.
- ⑩ Rural neighborhoods along West Shaft Road and Mohawk Trail retain their lower-density rural character.
- ⑪ The commercial corridor or Ashland Street is emphasized as an important corridor connecting the downtown and MCLA.
- ⑫ Windsor Lake and the surrounding neighborhood is highlighted with a special district emphasizing the recreation and natural values of the resource and retaining access for public use into the future.
- ⑬ This area, with its many wetlands and seasonal flooding, is not well suited to development and serves as a natural gateway separating the industrial uses on Route 8 in Adams and North Adams from the downtown area.
- ⑭ The industrial park and additional nearby undeveloped lands are retained as an important land supply for primary employment sites and jobs creation.

## GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

### GOAL LU 1: IMPLEMENT FUTURE LAND USE PLAN TO ACHIEVE COMMUNITY GOALS RECOGNIZED THROUGHOUT NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030

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#### **Policy LU 1.1: Use the future land use plan as a guide for land use, development and conservation decisions within North Adams.**

##### ***Action A: Use the Plan as a Guide for Development or Redevelopment Decision Making***

Use desired land use goals and other plan goals to guide projects that will positively influence the City of North Adams.

##### ***Action B: Comprehensive Zoning Update***

Update North Adams' existing zoning code to be consistent with the future land use plan, possibly including form-based code elements. The City will be working with BRPC to identify issues with the existing zoning code, and identify strategies to bring the code up to date and become a tool to help implement goals of the North Adams Vision 2030 plan.

#### **Policy LU 1.2: Adopt land use tools and techniques to revitalize and expand activity within downtown.**

##### ***Action A: Consider Mixed-use Zoning in the Downtown Area***

Increasing the mix, including allowing housing on the upper floors of buildings, and businesses can help support a more active downtown. This was noted in both the Economic Development and Housing and Neighborhoods chapters.

##### ***Action B: Consider Adopting Design Guidelines***

Design guidelines can help the city guide and enforce aesthetics of areas, whether infill and modifications within the downtown or areas identified as downtown gateways. Gateways are a visitor's first impression of a community and design guidelines can help guide plantings, façade improvements and property maintenance.

##### ***Action C: Consider a Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District (40R)***

The 40R Overlay District encourages mixed income housing development by providing financial incentives to municipalities through payments for units, bonus payments, educational costs and funding preference from DHCD, the Executive Offices of Environmental Affairs, Transportation, and Administration and Finance.

##### ***Action D: Designate Local Historic District Bylaw with Design Guidelines***

Having a local historic district allows for review of exterior architectural changes visible from a public way for respect to the historic character of a district. Encouraging design guidelines within the district would ensure renovations or new development are consistent with and do not detract from the historic character.

##### ***Action E: Adopt a Corridor Overlay District in the Downtown***

A pedestrian-friendly downtown is a key objective of the city. This overlay district can help support pedestrian-friendly design by promoting denser development or redevelopment, mixed-use, parking considerations and urban design elements such as building placement, parking location, or provision of active facades. In the public workshops, residents especially noted the need for traffic calming along Route 2.

***Action F: Adopt Cultural District Designation***

The Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural District designation aims to strengthen the sense of place, stimulate local economic activity and improve the personal experience of visitors and residents. The designation will bring attention to the City as a tourist destination rather than one or two individual sites, and will also build a case for grant program applications and focused investment.

**Policy LU 1.3: Adopt land use tools and techniques to support and expand the industrial park and commercial areas to retain and add living wage jobs, and to promote North Adams as a business-friendly community.**

***Action A: Identify Priority Growth or Priority Development Area(s)***

The state has incorporated this language into a number of its programs as it works to prioritize and package public investment in a way to maximize impact. The region has set a goal of working to identify these sites countywide, whether those sites are local or regional. The city should proactively work to identify its own priority sites to make it more competitively placed for funding and enable it to advocate for one or more city sites as sites of regional and state priority.

***Action B: Consider adopting the Chapter 43D Expedited Permitting Zoning Bylaw***

43D sites have an expedited permitting pathway which allows municipalities to offer a maximum of a 180 day local permitting process. Opting into 43D allows cities to target areas for economic development through streamlined permitting. The Berkshire region has three of these districts, but none are in North Adams. Such a district could be a tool in redeveloping some of the larger, unused buildings in the City. This could ideally be linked to a high priority site the city would like to see listed as a state Priority Development Area as the state considers 43D status in those selections.

***Action C: Consider an Adaptive Reuse Zoning Bylaw***

One city objective is to facilitate the reuse of historic buildings and sites, including mills, churches, former big box stores or any kind of large building. An Adaptive Reuse Zoning Bylaw can be linked to special permitting to allow further discretion for the City and/or permitting authority.

***Action D: Foster Business-friendly Environment Within Zoning Update Process***

Work with the business community to identify current problem areas and explore zoning or permitting tools or incentives to remove barriers as a means of facilitating industrial and commercial site reuse and business growth and development. These could include overlay districts as described above.

***Action E: Consider a Corridor Overlay District on Route 8 and Route 2***

These two main arterial corridors are also home to planned bike paths, major community serving commercial and major employers. It is therefore important to support traffic management and foster a multi-modal environment in highway commercial and industrial areas, particularly where the bike paths or major pedestrian routes (e.g. Appalachian Trail crossing) interface with those areas.

***Action F: Continue to Ensure That the City Supports Alternative Means of Employment***

With broadband expansion, alternate employment and business models such as telecommuting and home-based businesses are expected to increase. The city can support this by reviewing and updating home based business regulations and by promoting mixed use opportunities in the Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

**Policy LU 1.4: Employ appropriate land use tools and techniques to support the river as a central recreation and character asset in the downtown and larger community.**

***Action A: Consider a Low Impact Development Bylaw***

The river is a major feature of the city and one planned for increased recreation and aesthetic focus. The terrain of the city means water runoff and flood management has been and will continue to be a critical infrastructure need. Current practice is working to integrate “green infrastructure” to help support system capacity and function as an alternative to traditional, high-cost upgrades. Practices encouraged in a Low Impact Development bylaw could include green infrastructure such as stormwater planters, vegetated swales, and rain gardens or required use of infiltration or permeable pavements.

***Action B: Consider Adopting Native Landscaping Standards for Neighborhoods***

Individual property owner decisions on landscaping and maintenance can impact water quality. Develop a bylaw to help cultivate best practices, particularly within the riparian corridor or near other features of natural resource significance to help protect the integrity of wildlife corridors and crossings.

***Action C: Provide Training and Technical assistance for Residents and Businesses***

Commercial and private property owners interested in implementing green infrastructure in front yards of right of ways should be able to access information and technical assistance to do so. This could include partnering with MCLA or McCann, as well as with local nursery or gardening centers, and working with City to identify priority areas for green infrastructure implementation and best practices.

***Action D: Maintain Resource Protection Overlay Districts***

North Adams has resource protection overlay districts, and maintaining these districts will help protect natural resources and public health and welfare.

***Action E: Continue to Pursue the Planning and Implementation of the Mohawk Bicycle Pedestrian Trail***

North Adams is working with BRPC and Williamstown to plan and implement a bicycle and pedestrian pathway between the two communities and along the river. This planning effort offers great benefits for residents of both communities.

***Action F: Consider Adopting Scenic Mountains Act***

Scenic Mountains Act is a Berkshire County land use tool designed to guide development in higher-elevation areas as a means of safeguarding surface water quality in lowland areas. While much of the upland area surrounding the city is in conservation, the bylaw could be of use in helping to retain the scenery of the surrounding landscape, assist with stormwater runoff, and protect surface water quality of Windsor Lake and the river.

**Policy LU 1.5: Use land use tools and techniques to retain or improve linkages to key recreational resources.**

***Action A: Negotiate Public Resource Connections***

Explore how the negotiation of public resource connections can be retained through development review process to help promote linkages to public resources regardless of ownership.

***Action B: Maximize the Use of Publicly or Privately Conserved Land***

This effort can be pursued through estate planning, to secure permanent public access to recreation and open space resources

**Policy LU 1.6: Adopt land use tools and techniques to encourage the maintenance of and reinvestment in all of North Adams' neighborhoods.**

***Action A: Consider Complete Streets Design Standards***

This would be best used for neighborhoods struggling with vehicular traffic. These standards can address street width, parking patterns, plantings and other elements of design and construction to help calm traffic and focus on pedestrian safety and comfort.

***Action B: Adopt a Mixed-use Bylaw***

A Mixed-use bylaw or district supports neighborhood-scale commercial activity in what are now primarily residential neighborhoods. It also helps advance the addition of housing in the downtown, helping to maintain continual activity and presence. A mixed use district for the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods should include design parameters that prioritize pedestrian access and safety. Route 2 corridor mixed use should also accomplish this, but may have different criteria given the more residential setting and scale, however, addressing traffic-calming for Route 2 and Massachusetts Avenue is a priority in that area.

***Action C: Designate Local Historic District Bylaw with Design Guidelines where Appropriate***

The city has a number of national historic districts, but no local districts which carry a greater degree of protection. As the Historical Commission works through the process of updating surveys and nominating districts, the Planning Board and other city leaders should support the investigation and proposal of one or more local historic districts where there are concentrations of notable sites and structures.

**Policy LU 1.7: Adopt land use tools and techniques to support and expand food production within the City of North Adams, and to support active life styles through enhanced pedestrian and cycling infrastructure as well as linkages to recreation and open space.**

***Action A: Require Multi-modal Infrastructure***

Consider incorporating pedestrian or cycling infrastructure as a design standard in new development or adaptive reuse projects.

***Action B: Safe Routes to School***

Consider implementing Safe Routes to School to encourage walking or biking as healthy and safe means of school transportation

***Action C: Right to Farm***

Adopt a Right to Farm bylaw to encourage food production within North Adams.

**GOAL LU 2: PROVIDE THE NORTH ADAMS PLANNING BOARD WITH THE SUPPORT NECESSARY TO CHAMPION THE NORTH ADAMS VISION 2030 LAND USE PLAN**

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**Policy LU 2.1: Communicate and educate on the plan and how to use it.**

***Action A: Support Boards Through Increased Access to Training***

Actively pursue training opportunities open to planning board members, including workshops and presentations hosted by BRPC or the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative.

***Action B: Working Group Meetings***

Encourage working group meetings between the planning board and city staff, boards, and officials to foster better understating of implementation efforts and progress and opportunities for collaboration.



***Action C: Seamless Development Review Communications within City***

Ensure staff and other boards and commissions (e.g., Conservation Commission and Historic Commission) are brought into development decisions early, perhaps using an all boards approach if the proposal is complex enough to warrant it.

***Action D: Promote Use of the Neighborhood Geographies***

Continue to incorporate the newly delineated neighborhood boundaries into land use planning efforts and implementation.

***Action E: Engage the North Adams Neighborhood Council in land use planning efforts***

Once created, engage them as community partners to help define and shape land use planning efforts as appropriate (See Housing and Neighborhoods, Goal 3, Policy 2, Strategy 1).

