



Comprehensive Land Use Planning in High Frequency Transit Corridors:

Dense, Mixed-Use, Transit Oriented
and Affordable Housing Development

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide background on Metropolitan Council’s density, Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), and affordable housing policies to support collaboration between cities that now or in the future will host a High Frequency Transit corridor. Providing examples of how cities are meeting these expectations through land use/zoning, TOD policies and affordable housing policies and programs is anticipated to support the exchange of information and collaboration between cities.

High Frequency Transit service in the Twin Cities metro has expanded exponentially since the first Light Rail Transit (LRT) project, the Blue Line, opened in 2004. In the 17 years since, one LRT project, the Green Line, two Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (ABRT) Projects, the A and C line, and one BRT project, the Orange Line have opened. Those four projects set the stage for what is to occur over the next four years (2022-2026); 3 ABRT Projects, 3 BRT Projects and 1 or more LRT Projects will begin operations. Table 1 names the 12 transit routes and their type of service, their opening or anticipated opening year and the 22 cities along these High Frequency Transit corridors.

Table 1: High Frequency Transit Routes and their Respective Cities

Transit Route Name	Type of Transit Service	Year Opened or Opening	Cities on High Frequency Transit Routes
Blue Line	LRT	2004	Minneapolis, Bloomington
Green Line	LRT	2014	Minneapolis, St. Paul
A Line	ABRT	2016	Minneapolis, St. Paul, Roseville
C Line	ABRT	2019	Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center
Orange Line	BRT	2021	Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, Burnsville
D Line	ABRT	2022	Minneapolis, Edina, Richfield
B Line	ABRT	2024	Minneapolis, St. Paul
Gold Line	BRT	2024	St. Paul, Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale, Woodbury
E Line	ABRT	2025	Minneapolis, Edina
Green Line Ext.	LRT	2025	Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, Eden Prairie
Purple Line	BRT	2026	St. Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, White Bear Lake
Blue Line Ext.	LRT	TBD	Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, Brooklyn Park

Metro Transit defines High Frequency as service every 15 minutes (or better) throughout most of the day on weekdays and Saturdays. There are a few bus routes that are high frequency but not included in this report. Historically, those bus routes are the first to become ABRT routes. Map 1 is an image of the 12 High Frequency Transit routes highlighted in this report.

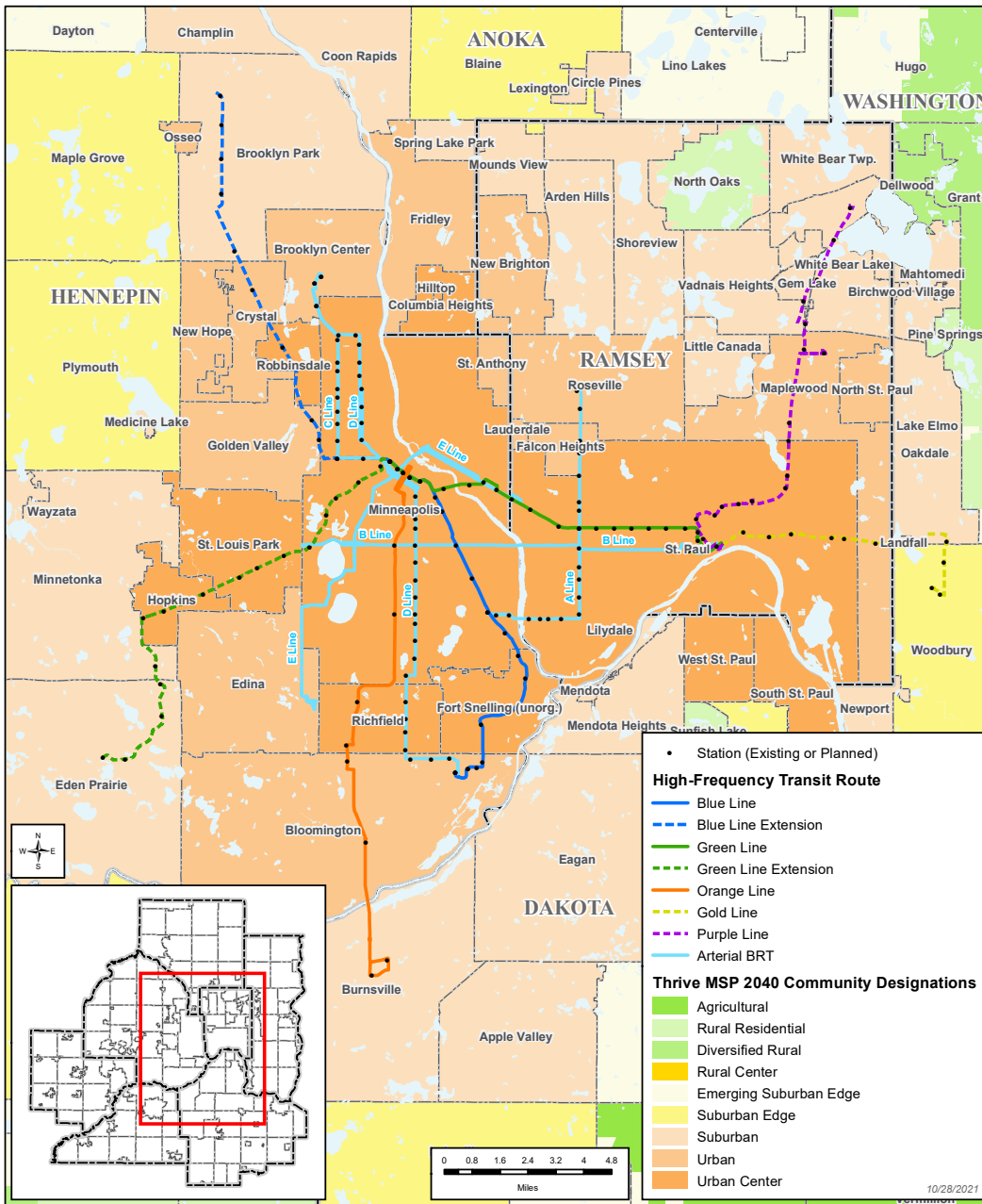
The 22 cities along these High Frequency Transit corridors address policies of the Metropolitan Council to build dense, walkable, mixed-use developments within a ½ mile radius of the transit stations along the corridor. The TOD definition, found in the Metropolitan Council TOD Policy, is an internal policy and consistent with the regional policies referenced above:

“Transit-Oriented Development is walkable, moderate to high density development served by frequent transit with a mix of housing, retail, and employment choices designed to allow people to live and work without need of a personal automobile”. (Metropolitan Council, 2013, pg. 1)

Thrive MSP 2040 Regional Development Guide (Metropolitan Council, 2014) and the Transportation Policy Plan (Metropolitan Council, 2015) are the key documents addressing density along transit corridors. Cities were required to respond to this regional development guide with a Comprehensive Plan covering a period through 2040.

Thrive MSP 2040 and Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) establish policies for density based upon Community Designations that include minimum density for the city as a whole and minimum density at station areas based on type of transit service. This policy requirement applies to areas that the city has identified in its comprehensive plan for new development or as candidate locations for redevelopment.

Map 1: The Twelve High Frequency Transit Routes highlighted in this report



The first section of this paper will name the 22 cities along the High Frequency Transit corridors, their Community Designations, and minimum density policies for the city. See Table 3. Table 4 notes how the density policy is higher within a ½ mile radius of a transit station based on the type of transit service provided.

The second section of this paper identifies the land use designations these cities included in their 2040 Comprehensive Plan documents as well as the ordinances they have implemented to encourage high-density development and TOD within their cities and station areas. See Table 5.

The last section of this paper addresses density expectations associated with affordable housing, each cities allocated number of units to contribute to meeting the regions affordable housing need, and a measure of the effort needed given their available land and density allowances. See Table 7.

I - Cities within High Frequency Transit Corridors and Metropolitan Council Density Guidance

The Metropolitan Council uses Community Designations to group cities with similar characteristics to target policies that are tailored to the development and market context of the city. As noted in Thrive MSP 2040, (Metropolitan Council, 2014):

The Council uses these community designations to:

- Guide regional growth and development to areas that have urban infrastructure in place and the capacity to accommodate development and redevelopment.
- Establish land use expectations, including overall density, and development patterns for different community designations.
- Outline the respective roles of the Council and the individual communities and strategies for planning for forecasted growth.” (pg. 92)

Table 2 provides the same information from Table 1 in a format that lists the cities once with a checkmark for each transit route in their city.

Table 2: The Twelve High Frequency Transit Routes highlighted in this report

City	Blue Line LRT (2004)	Green Line LRT (2014)	A Line ABRT (2016)	C Line ABRT (2019)	Orange Line BRT (2021)	D Line ABRT (2022)	B Line ABRT (2024)	Gold Line BRT (2024)	E Line ABRT (2025)	Green Line Ext. LRT (2025)	Purple Line BRT (2026)	Blue Line Ext. LRT (TBD)
Minneapolis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Bloomington	X				X							
St. Paul		X	X				X	X			X	
Roseville			X									
Brooklyn Ctr				X								
Richfield					X	X						
Burnsville					X							
Edina						X			X			
St. Louis Park										X		
Hopkins										X		
Minnetonka										X		
Eden Prairie										X		
Robbinsdale												X
Crystal												X
Brooklyn Park												X
Maplewood								X			X	
Landfall								X				
Oakdale								X				
Woodbury								X				
Vadnais Heights											X	
Gem Lake											X	
White Bear Lk											X	

Table 3: Community Designation, Density Expectation and Applicable Cities

Community Designation	Average Minimum Net Density for (Re)Development*	High Frequency Transit Cities by Community Designation and Density Guide
Urban Center	20 Units/Acre	Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Richfield, Robbinsdale
Urban	10 Units/Acre	Bloomington, White Bear Lake, Gem Lake, Vadnais Heights, Maplewood, Roseville, Brooklyn Center, Oakdale
Suburban	5 Units/Acre	Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, Brooklyn Park, Landfall, Burnsville, Crystal
Suburban Edge	3-5 Units/Acre	Woodbury
Suburban Edge Emerging	3-5 Units/Acre	None

*Cities may guide land at lower and higher densities, with the average meeting this minimum requirement. Thrive MSP 2040 (Page 116)

The Transportation Policy Plan (Metropolitan Council, 2015) supports density expectations by type of transit service overlaid by community designation. Table 4 provides average minimum net density for new residential or mixed-use development within ½ to ¼ mile of a transit station.

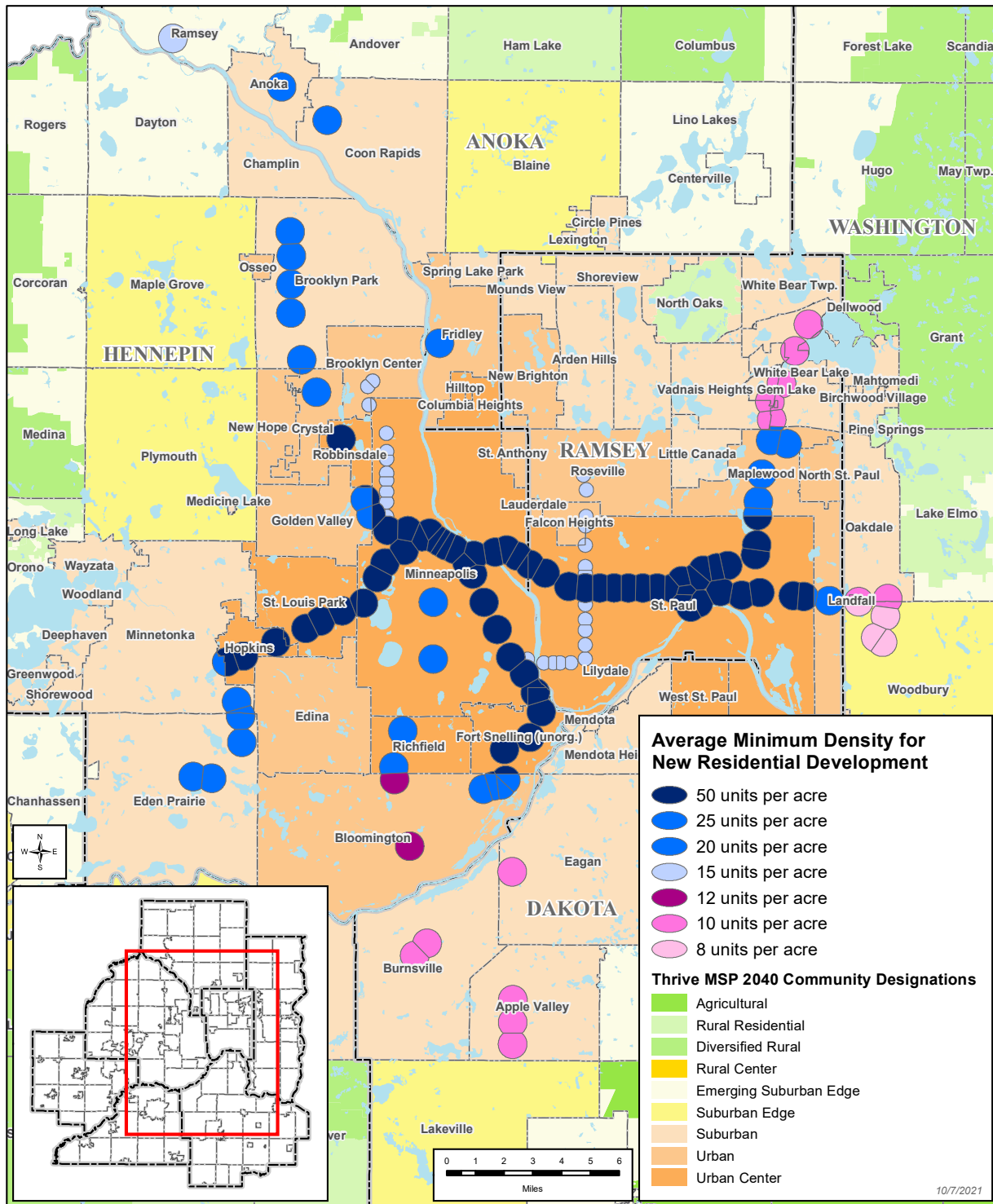
Table 4: Minimum Units Per Acre for Type of Transit Relative to Community Designation*

Type of Transit	Urban Center	Urban	Suburban	Suburban Edge
Fixed or Dedicated ROW (area within 10-minute walk or ½ mile)	50 Units/Acre	25	20	15
Highway BRT (area within 10-minute walk or ½ mile)	25	12	10	8
Arterial BRT (area within 5-minute walk or ¼ mile)	15	15	15	15

*Cities may guide land at lower and higher densities, with the average meeting this minimum requirement. Transportation Policy Plan 2040 (Table 3-1)

Cities benefited from an instructive summary document entitled “Density and Activity Near Transit, Local Planning Handbook” (Metropolitan Council, 2018), which explained the density policies, including how to designate or evaluate their transit station areas. Map 2 illustrates the Average Minimum Density for New Residential Development in the High Frequency Transit corridors.

Map 2: Density Policy near Transit



II - Density Policy in Station Areas

The 2040 Comprehensive Plans of all 22 cities were reviewed to gather each city's future land use categories specific to TOD and/or the category with the highest density allowance of units per acre. See Table 5. All but two of the 22 cities have guiding land uses with densities that exceed the Metropolitan Council requirements noted above. These two cities are Gem Lake with a population of under 700 people and Landfall whose current housing stock is 100% affordable, manufactured housing in one mobile home park. The other cities have density expectations far beyond the minimum expectations.

Table 5: Land Use Category with Highest Density Allowance, by City

City	City Designation	Units Per Acre Allowed in Highest Density Zone	Land Use Category
Minneapolis	Urban Center	200-1000	Urban Neighborhood, Community, Production and Destination Mixed Use
St. Paul	Urban Center	50-300	Downtown
St. Louis Park	Urban Center	50-125	TOD & Office
Richfield	Urban Center	50-150	Mixed Use (I-494 & Lyndale and 66th)
Robbinsdale	Urban Center	50-76	Mixed Use Residential
Hopkins	Urban Center	75-150	Activity Center and Downtown Center (w/in ¼ mile of station)
Bloomington	Urban	10-150	High Density Residential
Roseville	Urban	20-36	CORE Mixed Use
Brooklyn Ctr	Urban	31-130	TOD
Maplewood	Urban	25-50	Mixed Use Neighborhood High Density Residential, Mixed-Use Community
Oakdale	Urban	15-50	Bus Rapid TOD
Edina	Urban	90-150	Mixed Use (Community Activity Center)
Landfall	Suburban	5-10	Residential
Burnsville	Suburban	20-60	Mixed Use (Heart of the City)
Eden Prairie	Suburban	25-80	TOD
Crystal	Suburban	25-50	Mixed use
White Bear Lk	Suburban	25-60	Lake Village, (TOD Mixed Use 25-50)
Gem Lake	Suburban	8 (minimum)	Mixed Use (Gateway)
Brooklyn Park	Suburban	12-50	High Density Residential and Mixed Use
Vadnais Heights	Suburban	12-30	City Center
Minnetonka	Suburban	12-100	High Density Residential & Mixed Use
Woodbury	Suburban Edge	10-15	Mixed Use & High Density Residential

In the Land Use Category column for the high-density guiding land uses, less than 25% have designations with TOD in the title. The remainder are more general in their description such as mixed-use and high density residential. None the less, all the cities address transit in their comprehensive plans and most call out TOD specifically. TOD is often defined and goes beyond density considerations to address design and type of uses.

In terms of specific, named TOD Policies, there are very few and they vary considerably. Links to two examples, Brooklyn Park and Eden Prairie, are included in the reference section. These two cities are the anchors (furthest from downtown Minneapolis) for the Blue Line and Green Line LRT Extension Projects. As the most suburban of these Projects, establishing a clear TOD expectation is considered critically important. At a minimum, the range of density allowances and uses in Table 5 provides a source of information for cities aiming for similar density results.

Beyond density guidance, the Metropolitan Council also provides cities with an estimate of the level of activity expected at station areas. Besides residential land uses, other uses that generate activity include employers, schools, retail, entertainment, and recreation. Chapter 3 of the TPP (Metropolitan Council, 2015) includes a guideline that each half-mile station area along transitways, including Highway BRT, achieve a combined total of at least 7,000 residents, jobs and/or students. This guide also includes that part of the TOD Policy definition that calls for, “...mix of housing, retail and employment choices....”.

The last phrase in the Metropolitan Council TOD definition, “...designed to allow people to live and work without need of a personal automobile.” can be accomplished by a person’s activities of daily living or needs being met within the station area, within the transit project corridor or within the region’s transit system.

One of the reasons people make a choice to live without a car, or can’t afford to own a car, is the cost. According to AAA (AAA, 2020) the average cost of owning, driving, and maintaining a car in 2020 was almost \$10,000 (\$9,570). Divided by 12 this is nearly \$800 per month. When compared to a monthly transit pass cost of \$83, an individual could theoretically save \$717 a month or \$8,600 a year by relying on other ways to be mobile, such as walking, biking, taking transit, Uber/Lyft (taxi), relying on friends and family, or sharing a car (HOV car). Even with this financial incentive, many people choose or have no choice, but to own a car, often due to access or time constraints.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) developed a Housing + Transportation Affordability Index that shows most Americans are finding it increasingly difficult to afford both their home and their means of mobility. CNT set a benchmark that a household should be spending no more than 45% of their household income on housing and transportation. By that standard, 55% of U.S. neighborhoods are considered “affordable” when allowing for 30% of the household income to be spend on housing. “When transportation costs are factored into the equation, the number of affordable neighborhoods drops to 26%.” (Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2021)

Table 6: Sources for City Information from 2040 Comprehensive Plans

Cities with High Frequency Transit	Opportunity Sites – Acres for Residential Development	Land Use Designation with Highest Density	Allocated Housing Need – 2020-2030
Minneapolis	Pg. 495	Pg. 495	Pg. 508
St. Paul	Pg. 69	Pg. 68	Pg. 131
Bloomington	Pg. 50, Tbl. 2.12	Pg. 48 and 55	Pg. 95
White Bear Lake	Pg. 33	Pg. 33	Pg. 48
Gem Lake	Pg. 29	Pg. 25 and 28	Pg. 86
Vadnais Heights	Pg. 30	Pg. 30	Pg. 52
Maplewood	Pg. 121	Pg. 48	Pg. 121
Minnetonka	Pg. 236	Pg. 236	Pg. 40
Woodbury	Pg. 68	Pg. 46	Pg. 76
Hopkins	Pg. 309	Pg. 39	Pg. 308
Oakdale	Pg. 20	Pg. 18	Pg. 62
Edina	Pg. 161	Pg. 116	Pg. 160
Richfield	Pg. 100 and 101	Pg. 118	Pg. 117
Burnsville	Pg. 213	Pg. 84	Pg. 211
St. Louis Park	Pg. 182	Pg. 140	Pg. 181
Roseville	Pg. 119	Pg. 119	Pg. 151
Eden Prairie	Pg. 62	Pg. 46	Pg. 79
Crystal	Pg. 25 (not clear)	Pg. 26	Pg. 30
Brooklyn Center	Pg. 79, Tbl. 3-6	Pg. 72 and 79	Pg. 100, Tbl. 4-3
Robbinsdale	Pg. 20 (estimate)	Pg. 16	Pg. 31
Brooklyn Park	Pg. 56, Tbl. 3-6	Pg. 51	Pg. 82
Landfall	Pg. 17	Pg. 12	Pg. 17

III - Meeting the Affordable Housing Need

The Council forecasts that from 2021 to 2030, our region will add 37,400 low- and moderate-income households that will need new affordable housing. Cities are required to address their ability to meet their calculated share of the region's need for this period in the Housing chapter of their Comprehensive Plan. (Metropolitan Council, 2015, pg. 2)

Met Council determines the allocated need by analyzing three factors for each city:

- Projection of growth of households experiencing housing cost burden. Housing cost burden is defined as needed to pay more than 30% of the Average Median Income (AMI), calibrated for the size of the household, for housing.
- Current supply of existing affordable housing whether subsidized or naturally occurring.
- Disparity of low wage jobs and housing for low wage households.

The cities show they can meet the allocated need by determining the number of acres they identify for residential development in their comprehensive plans at densities that support potential affordable housing. They must demonstrate they have enough land guided at 8 units per acre or more, to meet their assigned need.

Table 5 gives each cities allocated need to be met between 2021 and 2030 as a total and broken down by three levels of affordability. The number of acres available to place residential units, at the minimum density for those acres (from various land use categories), is the number of units that could be produced. This number is conservative as it calculated at the minimum density allowed. The last column of Table 7 is the result of dividing the total number of units available for affordable housing (at minimum density) by the allocated units to arrive at a percentage of the potential units needed to meet the affordable housing need. For example, the city of Minneapolis would need to encourage developers to produce 26% of their 13,477 available residential units as affordable units, to meet their allocated need. As previously noted, Table 6 notes the page of each city's comprehensive plan that included the acres available for residential development and the affordable housing allocation.

Table 7: Land Use Category with Highest Density Allowance, by City

City	Community Designation	City share (# of units) of Affordable Housing Unit Need 2021-2030 (Sum of next 3 columns)	# Of units for households with <30% Average Median Income	# Of units for households with 31-50% Average Median Income	# Of units for households with 51-80% Average Median Income	Net Residential Acres Available 2021-2030	Minimum Number of Units at Minimum Density per acre	% Units Needed to Meet AH Share at Minimum Density
Minneapolis	Urban Center	3,499	1,551	494	1454	137	13477	26%
St. Paul	Urban Center	1973	832	128	1013	275	5315	37%
St. Louis Park	Urban Center	439	229	132	78	40	1029	43%
Richfield	Urban Center	121	66	29	26	87	663	18%
Robbinsdale	Urban Center	128	63	2	63	4	200	64%
Hopkins	Urban Center	197	90	51	56	10.2	500	39%
Bloomington	Urban	842	445	246	151	91	2641	32%
Roseville	Urban	142	72	50	20	130	264	54%
Brooklyn Center	Urban	238	103	0	135	66	1276	19%
Maplewood	Urban	510	250	95	165	193	1673	30%
Oakdale	Urban	791	422	200	169	205	2826	28%
Edina	Urban	1804	751	480	573	437	11,300	16%
Landfall	Suburban	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Burnsville	Suburban	266	127	69	70	58	584	46%
Eden Prairie	Suburban	1408	802	386	220	534	5697	25%
Crystal	Suburban	25	14	1	10	128	1832	1%
White Bear Lake	Suburban	200	113	71	16	52	376	53%
Gem Lake	Suburban	11	7	3	1	4	35	31%
Brooklyn Park	Suburban	710	365	93	252	525	2271	31%
Vadnais Heights	Suburban	134	57	38	39	43	400	34%
Minnetonka	Suburban	1064	508	412	144	215	2245	47%
Woodbury	Suburban Edge	1043	607	378	58	750	2822	37%

On September 15, 2021, Council staff presented a report on Affordable Housing Trends to the Metropolitan Council Committee of the Whole. One element of the presentation compared city production of affordable housing units to their previously established allocated goals to be achieved between 2010 and 2020. Broken down by Community Designation, Urban Center cities as a group achieved 49% of their allocated goals, Urban cities achieved 51%, Suburban cities achieved 30%, and Suburban Edge cities achieved 19%. There were 19 cities that produced more than 90% of their allocation of needed affordable housing. The last column in Table 7 and the results of the last decade indicate the difficulty of providing affordable housing at a pace needed to meet the regional affordable housing need.

In recent years, cities have been incorporating new funding streams and policies to help meet this region's affordable housing need. Affordable Housing Policies, named as such, are uncommon but cities have a host of ways they attempt to keep up with the affordable housing need.

In 2020, the Family Housing Fund (FHF), a local non-profit focusing on the entire housing sector, created a tracker of local housing affordability and preservation policies (Family Housing Fund, 2020). This helpful tool gives an indication of what affordable housing policies/programs have proven successful at the local level. The FHF website cited in the references provides direct links to these policies.

In addition, Hennepin and Washington Counties were awarded FTA TOD Planning grants for the Blue Line Extension (\$1.2M) and the Gold Line (\$1.0M). As part of their efforts with the cities along these alignments, an inventory of affordable housing options was produced. More importantly, a gaps analysis (what is missing in their inventory) and how to fill the gap was identified. The Metro Transit TOD Office website includes the total output of these multiple million-dollar grants including the affordable housing analysis, a TOD funding guide, and a report on Innovative Approaches to Funding TOD. (Metro Transit, 2021)

In terms of cities efforts towards producing new affordable housing units, Affordable Housing Trust Funds (AHTF) and Inclusionary Development Policies have become more common in this region. AHTF assists in the financing, typically gap financing, for the production and preservation of affordable rental housing. Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Bloomington, three Urban Center cities, have the largest size funds in this region. Inclusionary Development Policies require affordable housing units be provided in new market rate residential developments. The requirement is typically 10-20% of the units at various levels of affordability. According to the Family Housing Fund tracker, as of April of 2020, eight cities in this region (Edina, Golden Valley, Brooklyn Park, St. Louis Park, Minnetonka, Bloomington, Minneapolis, and Richfield) have put in place Inclusionary Development policies.

As noted in the Metropolitan Council TOD Policy: "The Council has an important stake in successful TOD as the regional agency charged with building and operating the transit system, guiding regional development and transportation investments, supporting affordable housing and providing regional access to opportunity". (pg. 2)

References

[AAA \(2020\) Your Driving Cost Brochure Interactive](#)

[Center for Neighborhood Technology \(2021\)](#)

[Family Housing Fund \(2020\)](#)

[Metro Transit \(2021\) TOD Office Website](#)

[Metropolitan Council \(2013\) TOD Policy](#)

[Metropolitan Council \(2014\) Thrive MSP 2040](#)

[Metropolitan Council \(2015\) Transportation Policy Plan](#)

[Metropolitan Council \(2015\) Housing Policy Plan](#)

[Metropolitan Council \(2018\) Density & Activity Near Transit, Local Planning Handbook](#)

TOD Land Use/Zoning Links

[Brooklyn Park](#)

[Eden Prairie](#)