



# CITY OF MCHENRY VISION 2050 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN **EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT**

DRAFT FOR PUBLIC REVIEW- JANUARY 3, 2024





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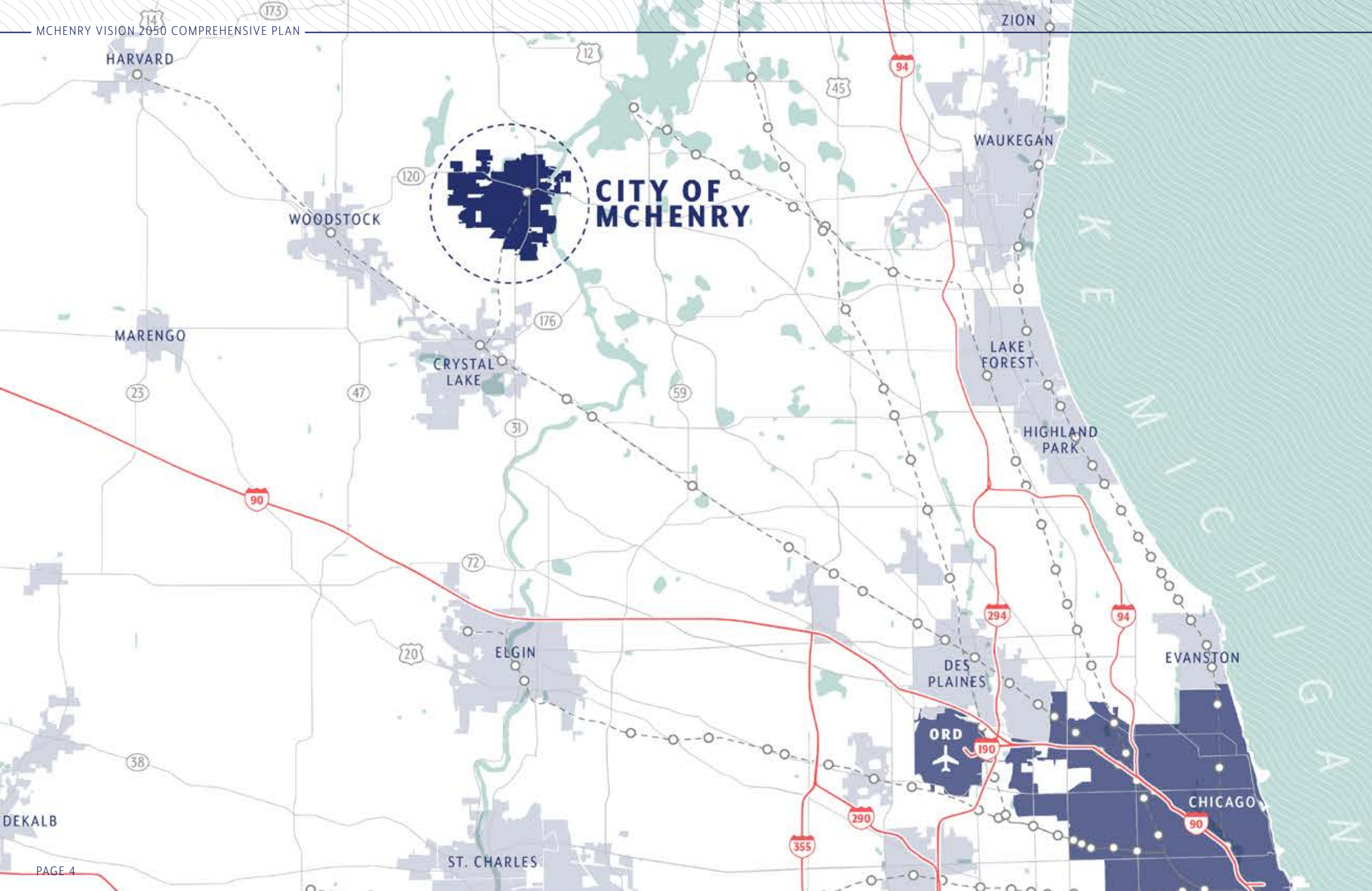
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## INTRODUCTION TO MCHENRY 2050

The City of McHenry is in a new era. Anyone who has lived or spent much time here over the past few years can see the changes that have transformed downtown and made McHenry a regional destination. While downtown has flourished, particularly around the vibrant McHenry Riverwalk, the city has not lost its character as a small town with a close-knit community. The qualities that encourage residents to stay have also brought challenges. Housing availability, congestion, struggling commercial corridors, and access to walking and biking paths are key concerns of the community.

This plan will evaluate the many factors that define McHenry's strengths and opportunities and result in a plan that will guide investment and growth towards a vibrant and livable future.

This plan will focus on three themes:

-  Community Development
-  Infrastructure Development
-  Economic Development

Each of these will have strategies and priorities developed through the analysis of existing conditions data, advice of subject matter experts, and most importantly, through extensive community engagement.



## PLANNING AREA & CONTEXT

The Vision 2050 Plan will have two primary areas of focus. The comprehensive plan will be a citywide document, while the downtown plan will focus on McHenry’s downtown area. **Figure 1** illustrates the planning areas and local context.

### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AREA

The Vision 2050 Comprehensive Plan is a citywide effort and will result in a framework to guide development and investment for the next 25 years. Community input will provide the foundation of the 2050 vision and the goals and strategies needed to make that vision a reality.

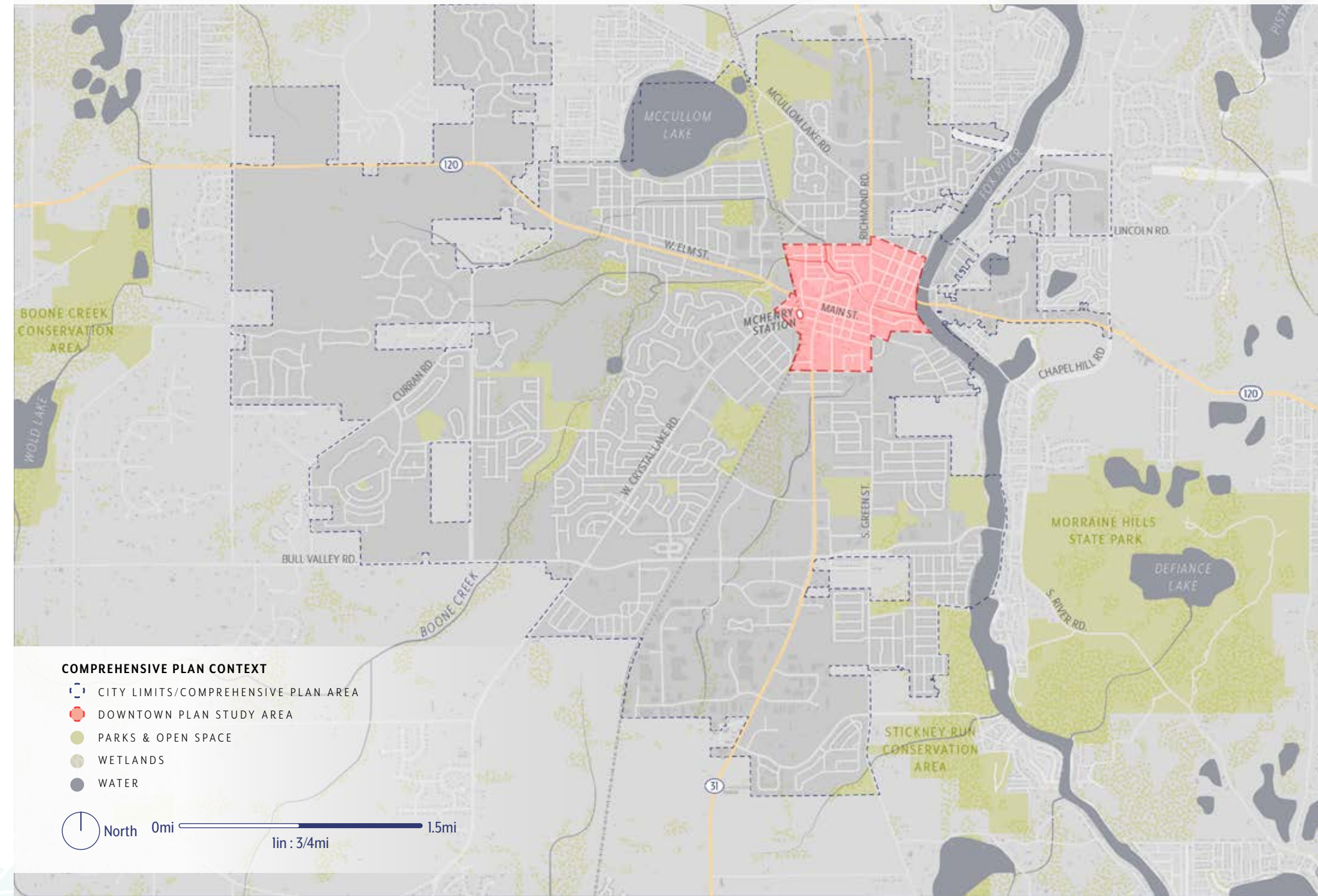
For this planning effort, the city’s 2023 municipal boundaries will be used as the study area. Certain components such as future land use may take into consideration areas for potential annexation or locations adjacent to city boundaries in unincorporated McHenry County.

### DOWNTOWN PLAN AREA

The Downtown Plan is a focused component of the comprehensive planning effort to address the unique character and challenges of McHenry’s downtown. Similar to the Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Plan will result in a framework for public investment and development guidelines. Stakeholder outreach will ensure that residents, businesses, and visitors to McHenry’s downtown provide feedback that will shape the vision.

For this planning effort, downtown is generally defined as the area from West Crystal Lake Road (west) to the Fox River (east) and from Maple Avenue/Washington Street (north) to West Kane Avenue (south).

FIGURE 1. CONTEXT MAP





# PLANNING PROCESS & TIMELINE



FIGURE 2. PLAN PROCESS

This planning process will result in two documents, a citywide comprehensive plan and a focused downtown plan. The plans will be developed over 18 months, with the process officially beginning with City Council approval in June 2023. Both plans will be developed in five phases. **Figure 2** illustrates the planning process and the milestones associated with each phase.

## LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that as many voices as possible are heard, the project team will be engaging with the community at multiple points throughout the planning process. The team will be present at city celebrations, project-specific meetings, targeted outreach events, and through digital/online engagements. The community engagement plan (shown in red) is structured to elicit feedback that supports the goals of each phase.

### PHASE 1: PROJECT KICK-OFF

There is no official public outreach during this phase. Phase 1 is primarily coordination between the city staff and project team to ensure data and necessary supporting materials are available for the successful development of this plan.

### PHASE 2: DISCOVER & ANALYZE

The primary focus of public outreach in this phase is to spread awareness of the planning efforts and to develop an understanding of the strengths and opportunities of McHenry from a broad spectrum of residents and stakeholders. The first of two surveys will be deployed via the project website to confirm the key topics of the planning efforts that were developed from preliminary engagement.

### PHASE 3: DEFINE PLAN GOALS

During Phase 3, the project team will use the community feedback collected in Phase 2 as a foundation to articulate a vision statement for McHenry and to develop plan goals. Also during Phase 3, the project team will organize a public design charrette where conceptual designs are developed for key opportunity sites identified by the city and public feedback. Additionally, during this phase draft goals and strategies will be provided on the project website for public review.

### PHASE 4: DEVELOP THE PLAN

During this phase, the project team will host an implementation workshop with key stakeholders to develop a framework for the implementation of goals and strategies developed in Phase 3. A second online survey will be deployed via the project website to gauge community excitement for finalized goals and strategies as well as design concepts for catalyst site development.

### PHASE 5: DELIVER THE FINAL PLAN

During Phase 5, an in-person plan debut event will give the public a chance to see the final plan and share their thoughts on the finalized goals, strategies, and design concepts.



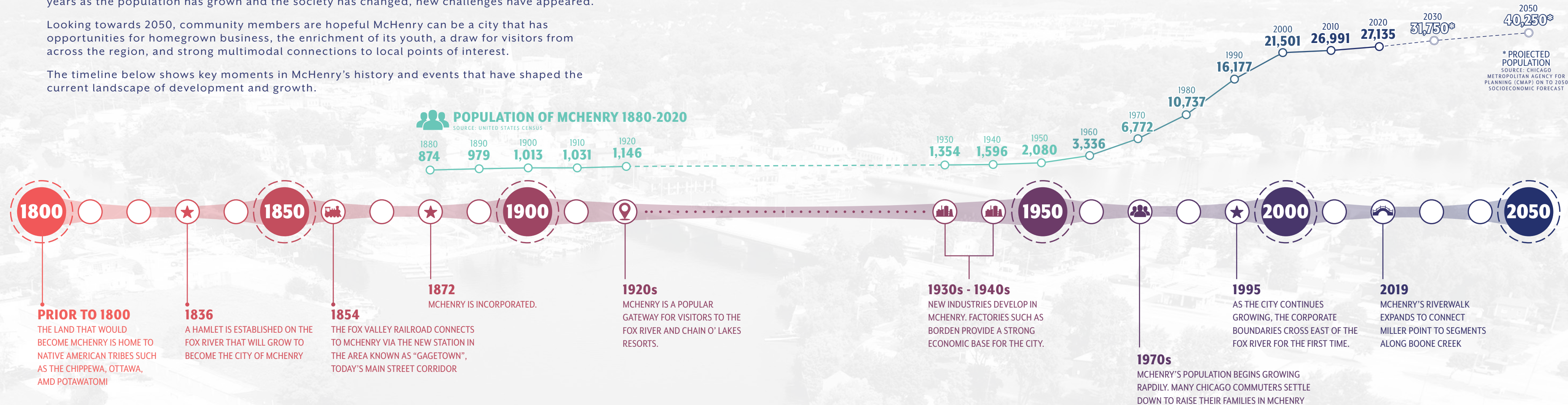
# THE STORY OF MCHENRY

Over its nearly 150-year history, McHenry has grown from a small settlement on the Fox River to a vibrant city of over 27,000 residents. McHenry has seen its most significant changes over the past 50 years. Between the 1960s and today, the population has grown over 800% and the city's boundaries have expanded to incorporate areas on both sides of the Fox River and beyond.

Today, McHenry residents look back with nostalgia on the vibrant community they grew up in, where they knew their neighbors' names and were able to live their American Dream. In recent years as the population has grown and the society has changed, new challenges have appeared.

Looking towards 2050, community members are hopeful McHenry can be a city that has opportunities for homegrown business, the enrichment of its youth, a draw for visitors from across the region, and strong multimodal connections to local points of interest.

The timeline below shows key moments in McHenry's history and events that have shaped the current landscape of development and growth.





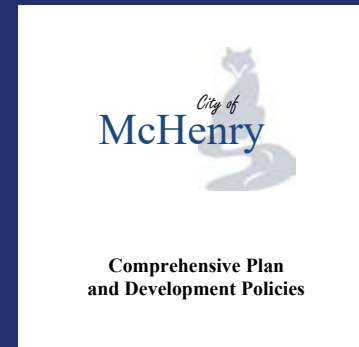
## PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The Vision 2050 Comprehensive and Downtown plans do not exist in a vacuum. The city, county, and regional organizations have completed many planning efforts that underlay this plan. This section will explore previous planning efforts and their key points that will serve as foundational components of the recommendations and strategies of this planning effort.

The plans and initiatives identified on this page are not an exhaustive list. Those of highest relevance or greatest potential for synergies have been identified here and reviewed by the planning team. To see all publicly available plans for McHenry, visit the city's website.

### CITY OF MCHENRY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

City of McHenry | 2008



#### PLAN SUMMARY

The 2008 Plan is an update to the 1990 McHenry Development Plan. The plan's stated purpose is to "shape and guide the type, intensity, rate and quality of growth, so that new development achieves the objectives of the City of McHenry within the available resources."

#### RELEVANCE

As a predecessor to this plan, the 2008 Comprehensive Plan states that a new 20-year vision plan should be adopted prior to 2028. Vision 2050 will build upon the framework established in the 2008 plan.

### COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

City of McHenry | 2014

#### SUMMARY

This document sets out a detailed strategic plan for the City of McHenry from 2014 to 2019. It focuses specifically on both internal (administration and operations) as well as external (development and infrastructure) strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. The document sets out proposed strategies and goals for organizational improvement and the identification of stakeholders responsible for specific goals.

#### RELEVANCE

The document identifies unique downtown areas as an asset and the following limitations: limited commuter rail service, aging vital infrastructure. Key Opportunities are: development of bike paths through public and private implementation. Relevant challenges include vacant/underutilized retail space and unfunded mandates.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

City of McHenry | 2009

#### SUMMARY

The plan establishes the goal of economic development to be: create a vibrant downtown; develop and implement strategies to retain existing businesses in the city; enhance the existing retail base; encourage retail development on the south side of the city; market McHenry as a Character Counts! Community and a Great Place To Live, Work, Play and visit; create opportunities for industrial, job generating development and work to locate a facility for large-scale meetings and events in the city. The plan then also establishes several items of action plans for each goal.

#### RELEVANCE

The strategy emphasizes economic development in Downtown McHenry through completing the riverwalk, provide parking, encourage quality business and multi-family housing, create, implement, and market financial incentives to encourage reinvestment, reduce storefront vacancies, keep close contact with Metra, and tie Main St, Green St, and Riverside Dr together.

### CITY OF MCHENRY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ORDINANCE ASSESSMENT

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) | 2013

#### SUMMARY

Prepared by CMAP, this assessment is intended to provide specific suggested revisions to the comprehensive plan and existing ordinances in the City of McHenry. The assessment was done using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Water Quality Scorecard and the Watershed Action Plan as a starting point.

#### RELEVANCE

The comprehensive plan assessment recognizes the existing plan's emphasis of sustainable design and natural resources; however, the comprehensive plan lacks the "specificity necessary to protect natural resources and reduce negative impacts." The assessment identifies areas for improving the comprehensive plan in terms of better existing condition analysis, overall goals revisions, future land use, transportation, neighborhood character, economic development, parks and recreation, and public facilities.

### BICYCLE & PATHWAY SYSTEM PLAN

City of McHenry | 2004

#### SUMMARY

The Plan's goals is to develop a citywide network of bicycle facilities and integrate them with other planning efforts, encourage safe and lawful operation of bikes, develop a financially feasible plan with a high likelihood of implementation, and regularly review the plan.

#### RELEVANCE

The goals in this plan will be a foundation for strategies around creating a citywide network that connects people on foot or bike to local destinations and regional trail systems.

### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

City of McHenry | 2012

#### SUMMARY

The Master Plan describes how the City of McHenry plans to provide park and recreation open spaces that are accessible to the entire community.

#### RELEVANCE

The Plan establishes guidelines for improving existing parks, developing new parks, renovating a number of parks, and expanding the intra-city and inter-city bicycle path network.

### FOX RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN

CMAP | 2021

#### SUMMARY

"The Fox River Corridor Plan presents a shared vision for the future of four municipalities, unincorporated communities, expansive open space, and the waterway that connects them all...The plan provides stakeholders with a long-term framework for making informed decisions about development and conservation that will affect the river and the adjoining land. It builds on planning initiatives at the community, county, and watershed scales and integrates recommendations from past plans that strive to strengthen the health, vibrancy, and resilience of the Fox River and the area it supports."

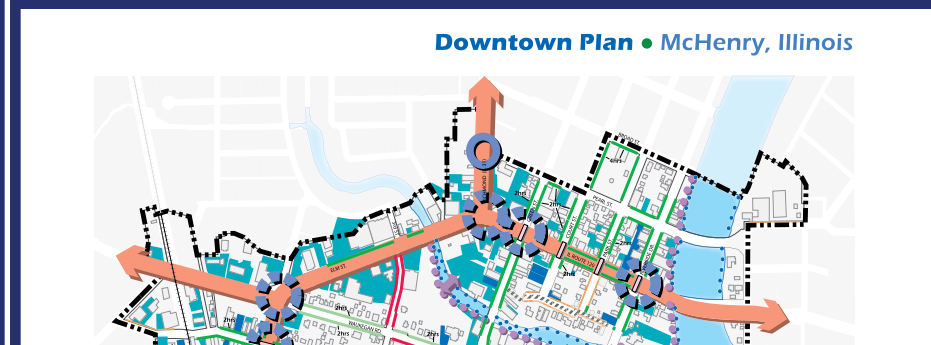
#### RELEVANCE

The plan's recommendations include continuing the investment in public open space and downtown redevelopment, specifically promoting infill and mixed-use development, increasing riverfront access from downtown, and finishing McHenry Riverwalk with significant cooperation with private landowners and fundraising. The plan also recommends pursuing river-oriented development, low-impact and conservation-oriented development, expanding the bike and pedestrian network and integrate with the regional network, improving transportation infrastructure and implementing complete streets policies, investing in walkability, and diversifying transportation options.

DOWNTOWN PLANNING EFFORTS

**DOWNTOWN PLAN**

City of McHenry | 2003



**SUMMARY**

The Downtown Plan is “the City’s official policy guide for physical improvement and development within Downtown McHenry.” The plan establishes the foundation for public and private improvement and development, guidelines for private development proposal evaluation, guidance for public investments and capital improvements, the desired “blue print” for growth and development, the basis for refining the zoning ordinance and other development codes, and a tool for marketing Downtown. This plan is intended to preserve the historic character of the area as well as renew the economic and recreational uses in the center of town while promoting new mixed-use developments.

**RELEVANCE**

The plan envisions Downtown in 2013 to have a completed and thriving Riverwalk project, stable single-family residential neighborhoods balanced with mixed-use and multi-family developments, redeveloped businesses with ideal walkability environment, thriving businesses, better Metra frequency, less congestion and new public parking lots. The Downtown aim to achieve a balance between preservation and new development, accommodate and establish the multiple roles of downtown, maintain and further Downtown as a mixed-use environment, establish improvement and development guidelines for land use areas, improve vehicular circulation and parking, establish guidelines for buildings and storefronts, and enhance other urban design aspects of Downtown.

**DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES**

City of McHenry | 2004

**SUMMARY**

The guidelines are “for new construction and for enhancing the appearance of existing buildings in the Downtown Overlay District. These standards will provide the criteria by which the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission and Staff will evaluate development plans for consistency with the implementation policies of the City’s Downtown Plan and the purposes of the Downtown Overlay District.”

**RELEVANCE**

The guidelines are applicable for new developments and establishes standards for urban massing/design, façades, windows, doors, awnings, landscaping, etc.

**DOWNTOWN STREETScape MASTER PLAN**

City of McHenry | 2022

**SUMMARY**

“The Downtown Streetscape Master Plans purpose is to create a unified vision for the various areas within the core Downtown Area...The purpose of this plan is to design streetscapes that enhance the City of McHenry’s three historic downtown areas: Green Street, Riverside Drive, and Main Street “ The plan specifically identifies a family of preferred streetscape elements, proposes improvements on Main Street, Green Street, and Riverside Drive.

**RELEVANCE**

Impacts on the configuration of roads and public realm in Downtown Mc Henry.

COUNTYWIDE PLANNING EFFORTS

**MCHEHRY COUNTY 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

McHenry County | 2010

**SUMMARY**

“The McHenry County 2030 Comprehensive Plan establishes a vision for McHenry County as well as a set of actionable goals and objectives that serve as a road map to realizing that vision...The Comprehensive Plan provides long-range policy recommendations for the development and redevelopment of the County’s built form and physical assets as well as for the maintenance and enhancement of the County’s valued natural resources. The 2030 Plan, its vision, and recommendations are intended to serve as a general guide to regional policy and decision making over the course of the next two decades and into the year 2030...”

**RELEVANCE**

The comprehensive plan promotes increased density and compact development, discourages leapfrog development in suburban areas and sprawl, promotes TODs around the County’s several Metra stations, promotes adaptive reuse and sustainable design. The plan also promotes land uses that maintain and preserve natural features, promotes retention and management of open space for conservation, wildlife habitat and recreation, preserve and enhance existing surface and groundwater resources, etc. The plan supports greater multimodal systems of transportation, development of appropriate and adequate facilities for the use of pedestrian, equestrian, and non-motorized traffic safety and convenience and for recreational purposes.

**MCHEHRY COUNTY GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**

McHenry County | 2012

**SUMMARY**

“The plan seeks to encourage green infrastructure concepts (such as greenways, trails, conservation design, and green building practices) in land use decisions and new development, and to establish a network of green infrastructure that runs through every jurisdiction in the county.” –2016 Update to 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

**RELEVANCE**

The plan recommends several local scale implementation initiatives such as permeable paving, green roofs, rain barrels, bioswales and rain gardens, and natural landscaping. The plan also encourages local governments to link development priorities to natural resource constraints and opportunities, expand implementation of conservation design, implement trail corridors—one of which goes through the City of McHenry on Miller Road.

**MCHEHRY COUNTY 2040 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

McHenry County | 2014

**SUMMARY**

The plan lays out its priorities from 2014 to 2040 to best manage the use of over \$20 million in annual transportation maintenance and new project funding. “The plan identifies six goals: 1) Mitigate highway congestion; 2) Make transportation safer; 3) Promote mobility for all residents; 4) Provide transportation choices; 5) Preserve environmental quality; and 6) Link transportation and land use.” –2016 Update to 2030 Comprehensive Plan

**RELEVANCE**

To support all goals, the plan recommends safe bike/ped facilities to reduce highway traffic and fatalities, and increase the mobility of those that cannot drive. The plan encourages using NACTO guidelines and incorporating bike/ped facilities to promote ecological and human health. The plan supports making improvements to accommodate diverse transportation needs and incorporating a “complete streets” approach to design.



# THE PEOPLE OF MCHENRY

McHenry is defined by its people. With over 27,000 residents and one of the fastest growing populations in the region, McHenry will need to plan for a future with more children, adults, and seniors, each with specific needs. Following current trends, the people of McHenry in 2050 will be more diverse, more educated, and require housing that allows for a thriving multi-generational community.

## 2022 POPULATION PROFILE

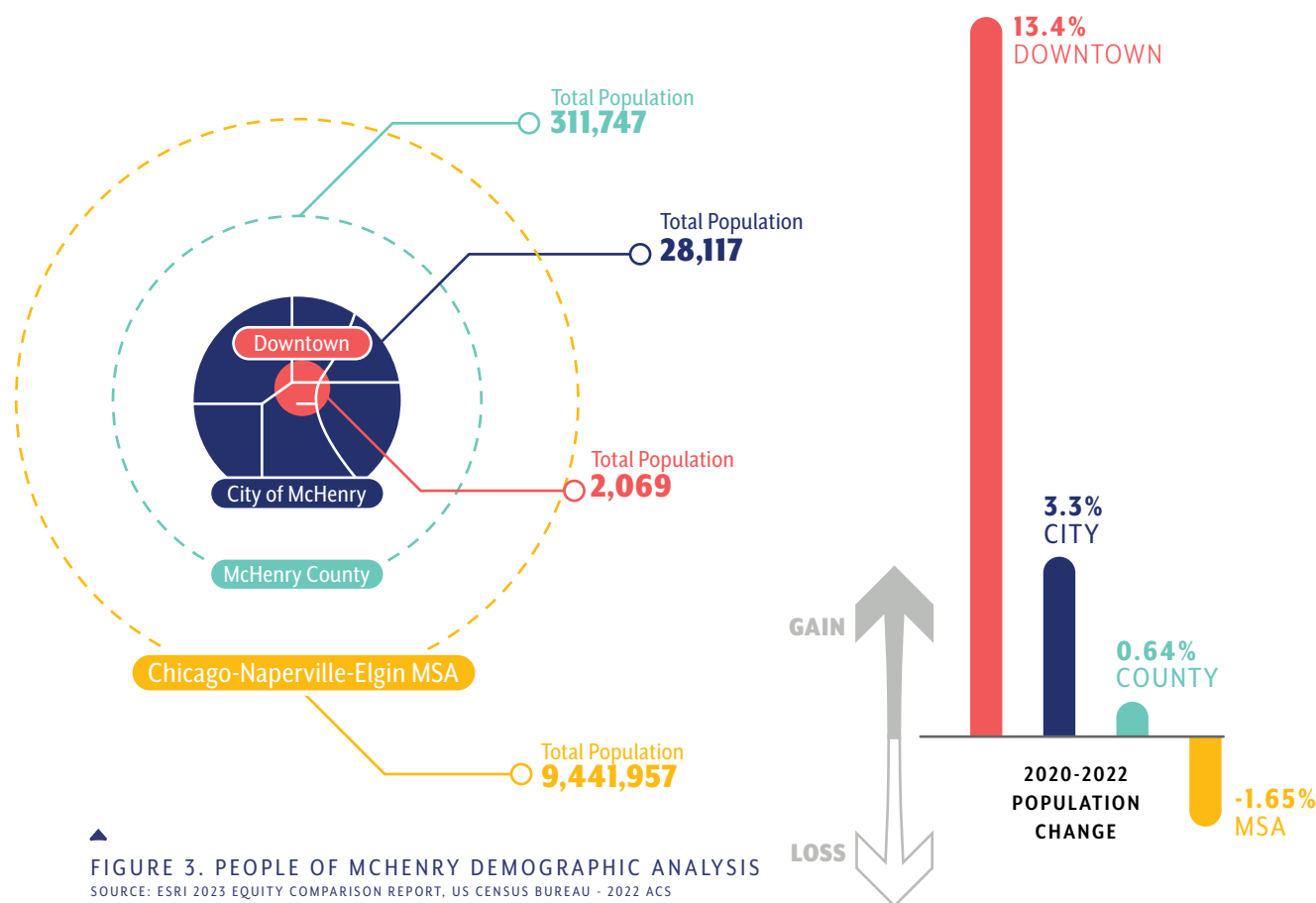
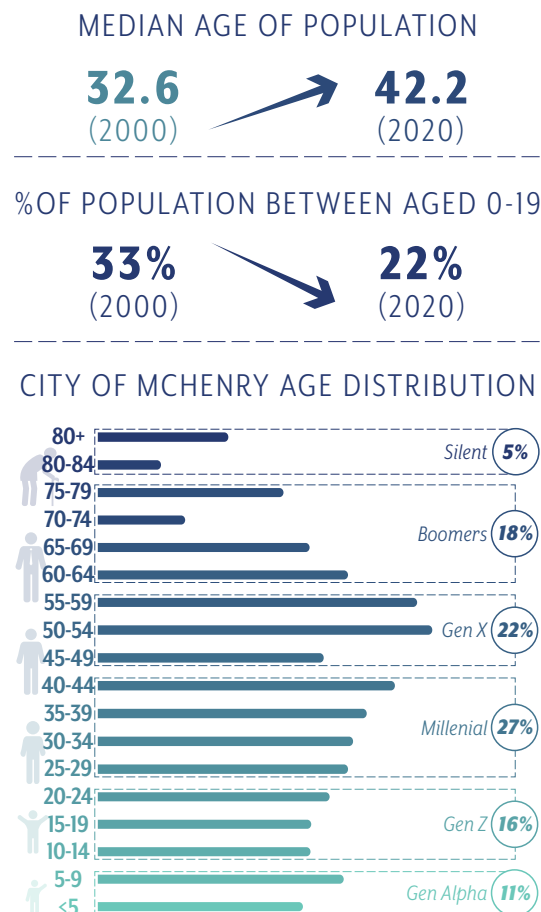


FIGURE 3. PEOPLE OF MCHENRY DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: ESRI 2023 EQUITY COMPARISON REPORT, US CENSUS BUREAU - 2022 ACS

## AGE DISTRIBUTION & TRENDS



## POPULATION

The city has a steadily growing population. McHenry is outpacing both the county and MSA in terms of growth as shown in **Figure 3**. The population of downtown has grown 13.4% since 2020 growing from about 1,800 residents to 2,100. As new developments come on line downtown and throughout the city the population is expected to grow further. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Planning’s “On to 2050 Socioeconomic Forecast” anticipates that McHenry’s population will surpass 31,000 by 2030 and continue growing to about 40,000 in 2050.

As the population of McHenry has grown over the years, it has also aged. Since the 2000 census, the median age has increased by 10 years, growing from 32.6 to 42.2. During this same period the share of the population 19 and under has decreased to 22%. As the population has aged, the concurrent growth has led to a modest decrease in the youth population’s absolute numbers, going from 6,647 in 2000 to 6,013 in 2020.

## RACE/ETHNICITY

McHenry’s population is predominantly white, with notable minorities of Asian/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and those of mixed races. About 16% of the population is Hispanic and about 7-10% of the city’s population does not speak English well or at all. Downtown has a slightly more diverse composition with higher percentages of Hispanic and Asian residents. **Figure 4** illustrates the racial and ethnic composition of the city and downtown populations.

McHenry has become more diverse over the past 20 years. The share of the population identifying as Hispanic has grown from 7% to 16% since 2000 while the percentage identifying as white has reduced to 91% from 94%.

## RACE & ETHNICITY IN MCHENRY

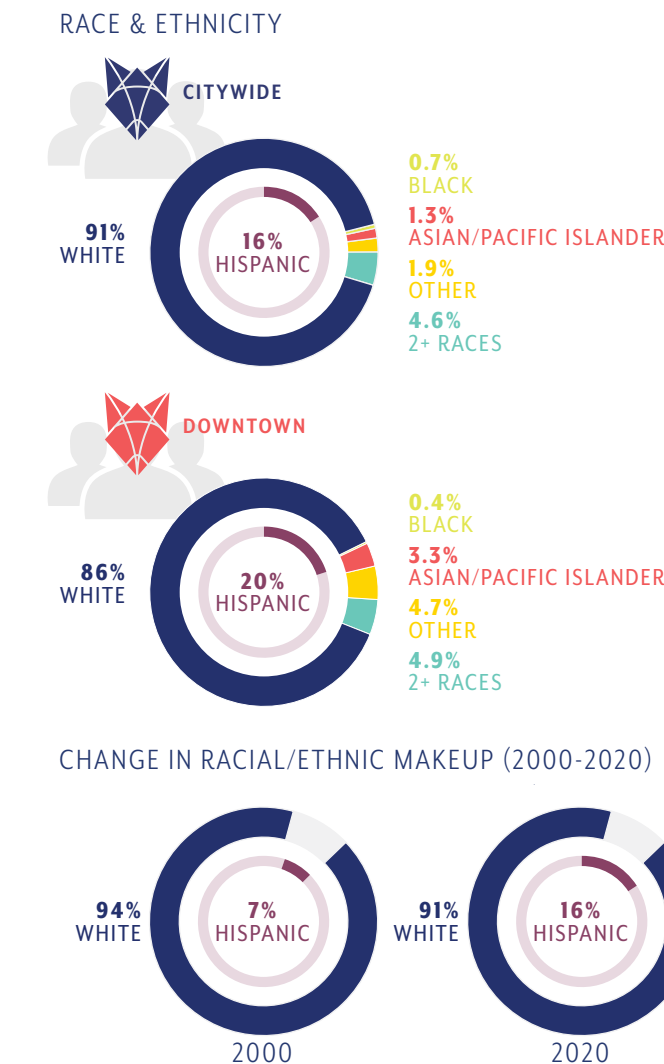


FIGURE 4. PEOPLE OF MCHENRY RACE & ETHNICITY ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: ESRI 2023 EQUITY COMPARISON REPORT, US CENSUS BUREAU - 2022 ACS

## EDUCATION

McHenry benefits from a strong school district. The strong educational foundation provided by McHenry's schools makes the city an attractive place to raise a family. . McHenry Community High School and McHenry Middle school have both received "Commendable School" designations from the Illinois State Board of Education. The high school boasts a 92% graduation rate for the 2021-2022 school year. The presence of the McHenry County College Shah Campus provides affordable and local access to higher education. With a fall 2019 enrollment of 7,475 students (MCC 2019 Annual Report) it is clear that McHenry residents are taking advantage of this opportunity.

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The educational profile of McHenry residents shows that overall, the community is well educated and on par with national averages for educational attainment. In McHenry, 64.5% of those 25 and older have education beyond a high-school diploma as compared to the 63% national average. The population enrolled in school (ages three and older) is split into about 70% who are enrolled in grades K-12 and about 30% enrolled in college or a graduate/professional program. **Figure 5** shows the educational attainment and enrollment for McHenry residents. Statistics are from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS).

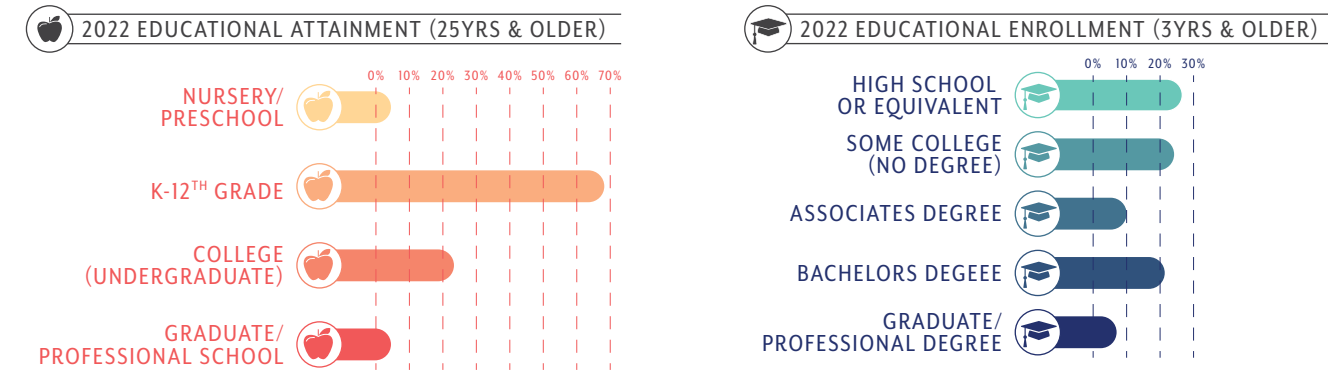


FIGURE 5. CITYWIDE EDUCATIONAL ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU - 2022 ACS



# THE ECONOMY OF MCHENRY

McHenry’s population growth over the last few decades has spurred further residential development and economic opportunities. Its convenient location between Chicago, Milwaukee, and Rockford also establishes McHenry as a desirable community for those seeking a high quality of life, economic viability, and urban accessibility. Still, a large portion of the labor force living in McHenry commutes to other communities for work, and new residents may face challenges with housing affordability. The city is poised for sustained growth and prosperity in the future, but it will need a strong economic vision to attract talent, improve housing opportunities, and draw new investment.

## INCOME

The city has a wide range of household incomes, with a median household income of nearly \$77,000 – approximately 6% higher than the state median. Approximately 20% of city residents earn more than \$150,000 annually, while a similar percentage of residents earn less than \$35,000 a year. The percentage of households below the poverty line in the city is approximately 6.8%. More broadly, McHenry County stands out in the region with a median household income of over \$93,000, as shown in **Figure 6**.

It is important to note that the median household income in downtown McHenry is substantially lower than the rest of the city at \$63,193. While wages downtown may be similar to the median income in the heart of Chicago, residents may find more compelling work opportunities in other communities. Bringing average incomes in the downtown districts in line with the rest of the city and county is critically important to make downtown an area where people can work and thrive.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	HOUSEHOLDS BELOW POVERTY LINE		
Downtown McHenry	\$63,193	Downtown McHenry	10.82%
City Of McHenry	\$76,858	City Of McHenry	6.79%
McHenry County	\$93,801	McHenry County	6.56%
Chicago	\$65,781	Chicago	10.82%
Illinois	\$72,563	Illinois	11.97%

FIGURE 6. MCHENRY INCOME COMPARISON  
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU: 2021 5-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

## LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

The McHenry labor force is comprised of a mix of white collar, blue collar and service workers. The three primary employment sectors in McHenry are:

- Education, Healthcare and Social Assistance (17%)
- Retail Trade (16%)
- Manufacturing (15%)

Downtown McHenry in particular offers approximately 2,800 jobs across more than 240 businesses. **Figure 7** summarizes employment in the study area and City of McHenry.

A majority (87%) of those who work in McHenry do not live in the city. Roughly the same number of McHenry residents commute outside of the city for work. These employment trends extend to the area more broadly, with 70% of McHenry County residents working outside of the county. The city may need to employ new strategies to retain existing businesses and create opportunities to attract new business into the area.

Most workers in McHenry have a commute that is less than 25 minutes, and 79% of those workers drive alone to work. Only 4% of workers use public transportation or walk to work. Expanding public transportation options and access could attract a more diverse workforce to the city and limit barriers to employment.

CITYWIDE EMPLOYED LABOR FORCE BY INDUSTRY

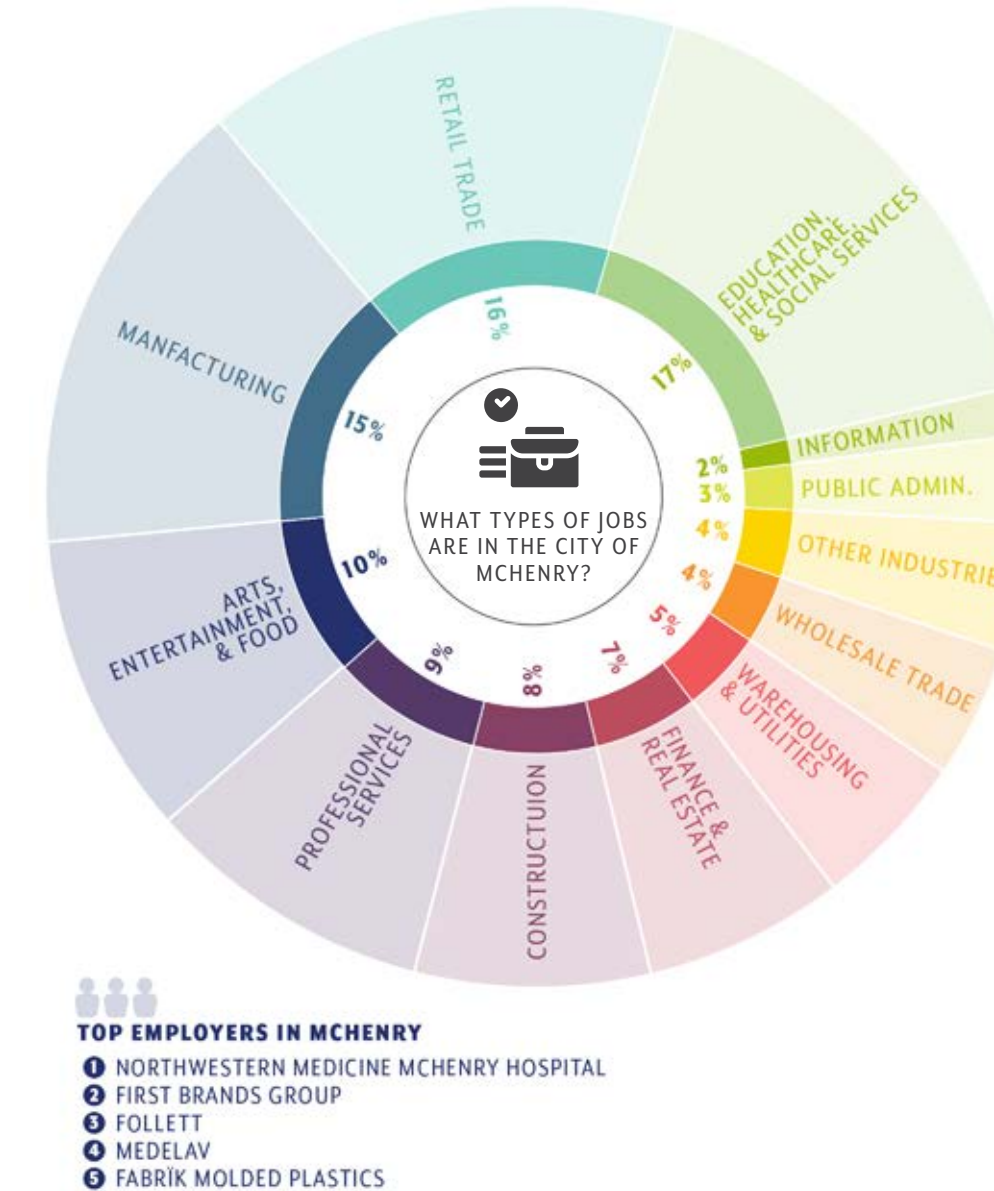
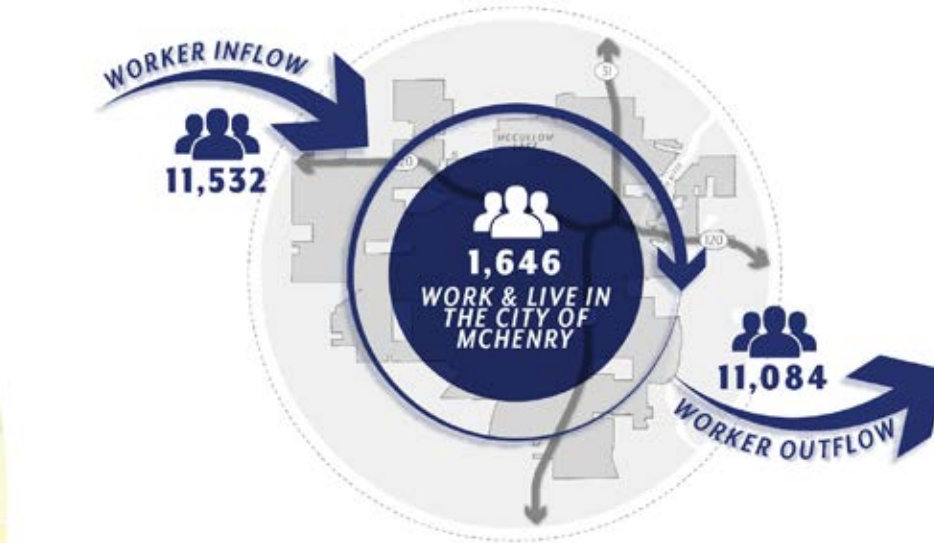
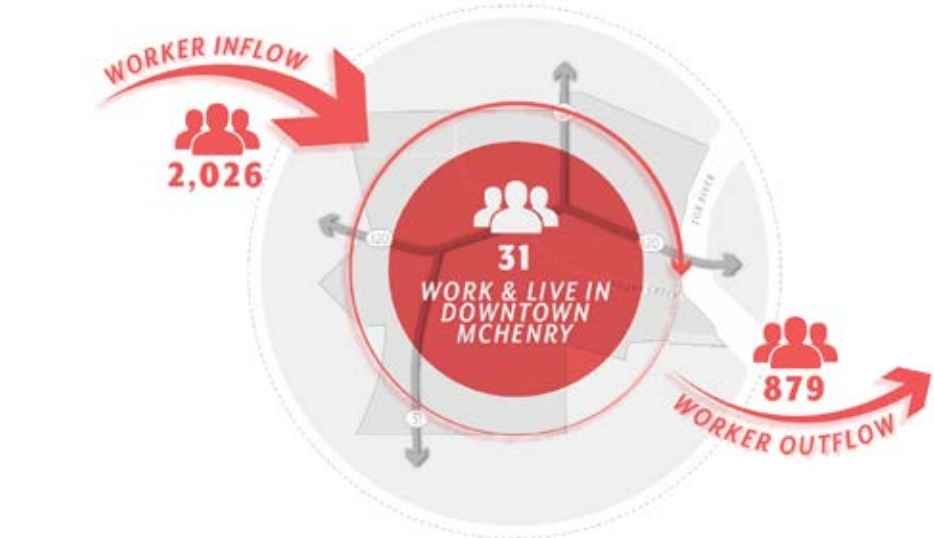


FIGURE 7. CITYWIDE & DOWNTOWN EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: ESRI 2023 EQUITY COMPARISON REPORT, US CENSUS BUREAU - 2022 ACS; MCHENRY CITY COUNCIL: THINK MCHENRY ILLINOIS

FLOW OF WORKERS IN AND OUT OF MCHENRY



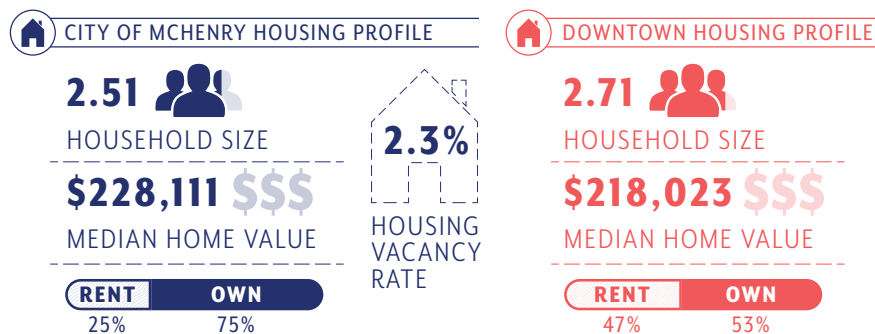
FLOW OF WORKERS IN AND OUT OF DOWNTOWN



## HOUSING

McHenry is a predominantly low-density residential community with about a third of the land area currently used for single-family housing (see “**Figure 12. McHenry Existing Land Use**” on page 29). Regionally, it boasts more affordable housing, with a citywide median home value of \$228,111 which is lower than the countywide median of \$275,000 (Esri 2023 Equity Comparison Report). While homes are relatively affordable in McHenry, costs have increased, and vacancies remain low indicating that the supply of housing is not meeting local demand.

Residents report feeling the tight supply of homes for sale and have noted that there are few options for renters. Additionally, many residents have reported that housing is generally oriented towards larger families with few opportunities for starter homes or smaller homes for singles and seniors. **Figure 8** illustrates the data supporting these perceptions, showing the 2.3% citywide housing vacancy rate and 75% homeownership ratio.



MEDIAN HOME VALUE		HOUSING AFFORDABILITY INDEX	
Downtown McHenry	\$218,023	Downtown McHenry	85
City Of McHenry	\$228,111	City Of McHenry	108
McHenry County	\$275,353	McHenry County	107
Chicago	\$293,586	Chicago	95

**FIGURE 8. CITYWIDE & DOWNTOWN HOUSING ANALYSIS**  
SOURCE: ESRI 2023 EQUITY COMPARISON REPORT, US CENSUS BUREAU - 2022 ACS

### MCHENRY IS IN NEED OF A GREATER DIVERSITY OF HOUSING OPTIONS TO PROVIDE IT'S GROWING POPULATION AND CURRENT RESIDENTS WITH CHOICES THAT FIT A VARIETY OF LIFESTYLES AND INCOMES.

Downtown McHenry provides one of the best opportunities for renters and smaller households, and it currently boasts a slightly more affordable housing supply, with a median home value of \$218,023. The 2021 McHenry Strategic Planning Analysis for Rental Apartments prepared by Tracy Cross & Associates, Inc, identifies key opportunities for providing more rental options and meeting existing demand for new housing types in McHenry. Key points of the rental analysis include:

- o The strong demand and structural opportunities for providing more downtown housing that will supply a mixed-use urban environment and walkable lifestyle.
- o The opportunity to provide housing that meets the needs of a broad consumer base such as professional singles and couples without children, couples in the early stages of family formation, and localized empty nesters.
- o Potential development sites that are positioned with sufficient land area, access to amenities, and connectivity for new development. These include the following:
  - 3810 McCullom Lake Road
  - Downtown district properties identified as 9 adjoining parcels located at the southwest intersection of Elm St/Route 120 and Route 31.
  - 3510-3522 W. Elm Street
  - The Former Wastewater Treatment Facility
  - 1900 N. Richmond Road.

New housing types such as rentals, townhomes, and condominiums will build upon the momentum of recent developments such as the 27-unit River Place development located at Green Street along the Riverwalk. Other multi-family offerings such as Authentix off of Route 31 have begun to supply housing to smaller households which will reduce the scarcity of single-family homes for larger families.

## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability is defined by the gap between median household income and median home value in an area. A variety of factors impact housing affordability, such as housing supply, commuting and transportation costs, and mortgage rates. Measuring the affordability of homes in an area can provide an indication of how a typical household budgets for housing costs. Esri's Housing Affordability Index (HAI) measures the gap between household income and home value to quantify the ability of a typical household to purchase an existing home in an area. If an area's HAI is greater than or equal to 100, then the median household income is sufficient to purchase a median valued home. When an area's HAI is less than 100, the median household income is insufficient to purchase a median value home.

While the HAI in the city and county is greater than 100 – indicating that most residents earn enough to qualify for a loan for a median-valued home – downtown McHenry has an HAI of 85. Downtown residents may face more challenging financial conditions and barriers to housing. These circumstances present a specific opportunity to expand affordable housing options and improve financial conditions in downtown McHenry.

Housing prices in McHenry have typically remained more affordable and more stable compared to the broader Chicago metropolitan area, though prices vary by neighborhood and have increased steadily over time. The city's lower cost of living compared to other parts of the region and country, coupled with its proximity to other major cities and resources, makes McHenry an attractive place to live for those seeking a better value for their income.

## REAL ESTATE

McHenry's real estate market is marked by a mix of housing options and commercial development. Properties in McHenry's downtown districts range from historic homes and storefronts to contemporary developments with modern amenities. Consistent with the rest of the region, property rents are increasing and expected to continue increasing, as median listing prices saw double-digit increases over the last year.

The city has nearly 40 properties available today with over 315,000 square feet total waiting for redevelopment. These properties are mostly in the downtown districts of McHenry and are primarily industrial, warehousing, and office spaces.

While ample opportunities for commercial and industrial development exist in the city, McHenry could benefit from expanded housing options for a range of household types and income levels.





# LAND USE & ZONING

McHenry's rural roots and agricultural heritage remain deeply entwined with the character of the city. As growth has changed much of the landscape from prairie to subdivisions, it has become more important than ever to plan for growth that preserves ecology and promotes livability. Natural assets such as the Fox River, Boone Creek, McCullom Lake, local parks, and conservation areas are economic engines as much as natural ones. A prosperous McHenry in 2050 will need to grow in a way that ensures new housing, business, and industry do not come at the expense of air and water quality or ecological systems.

## CURRENT ZONING

Zoning defines the legally allowed building types and activities for a given piece of land. It controls the density and intensity of development and typically aims to avoid conflicts between incompatible uses or building types.

Figure 9 illustrates the land area assigned to a specific zone in McHenry. In McHenry most land is zoned to be residential. Within the residential zones, the majority of land is zoned for single family homes, with only about 5.4% of all land zoned for multifamily dwellings. McHenry has a large number of residential zoning districts when compared to the city's size.

Figure 10 on page 25 shows the current citywide zoning map. Generally higher density development is concentrated downtown and along primary arterial roads. Industrial zoning is mostly in the south and west portions of the city.

### CURRENT ZONING LIMITATIONS

McHenry has limited zoning for mixed use and clustered development types. The Integrated Design District (IDD) allows clustered development but is not extensive enough to promote land conservation throughout the city. The current zoning code also has limited open space guidelines or incentives for preserving natural resources.

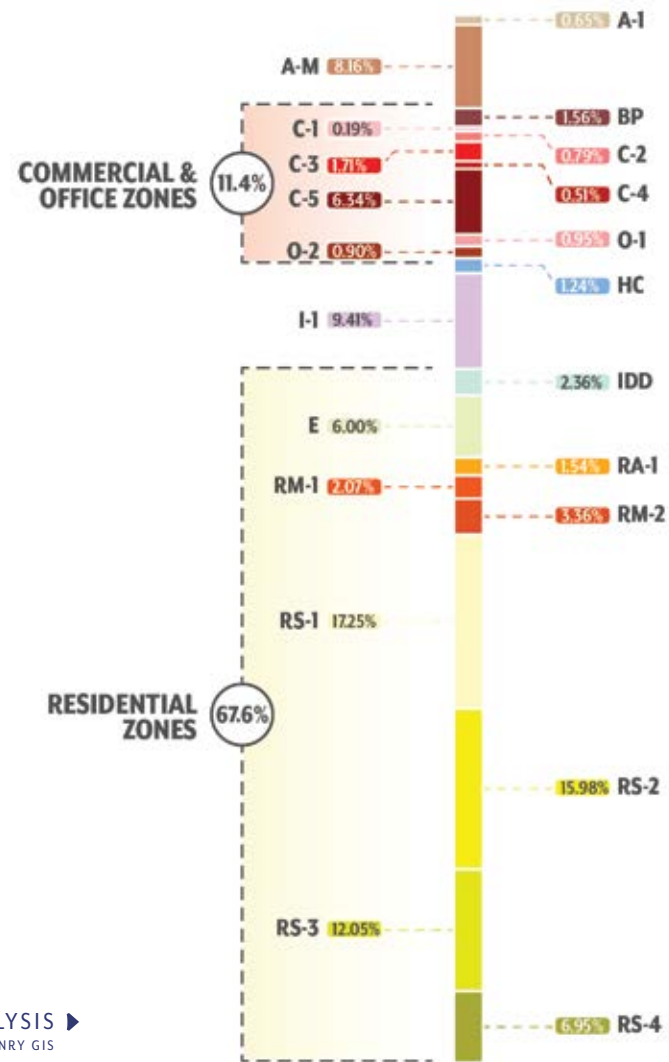
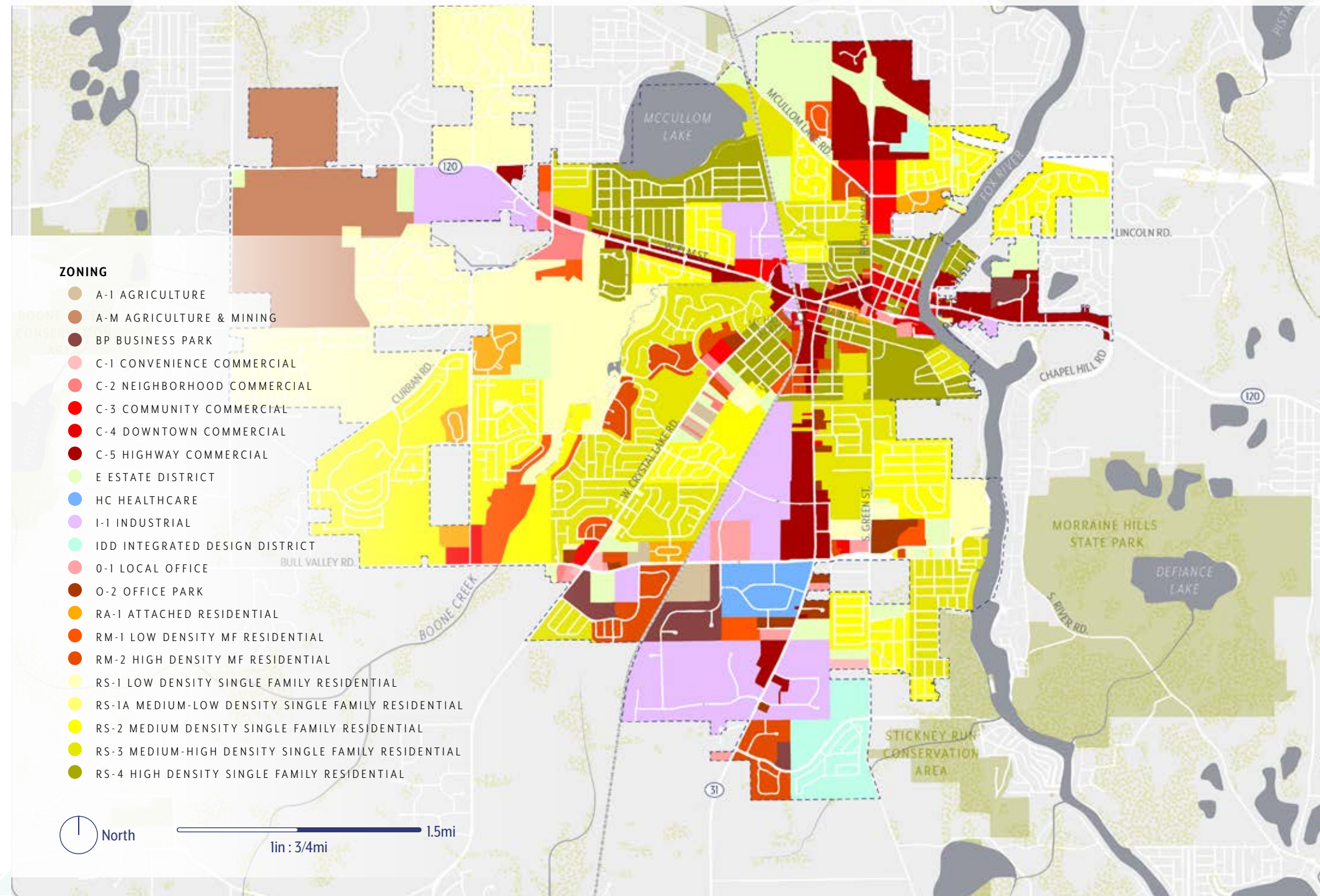
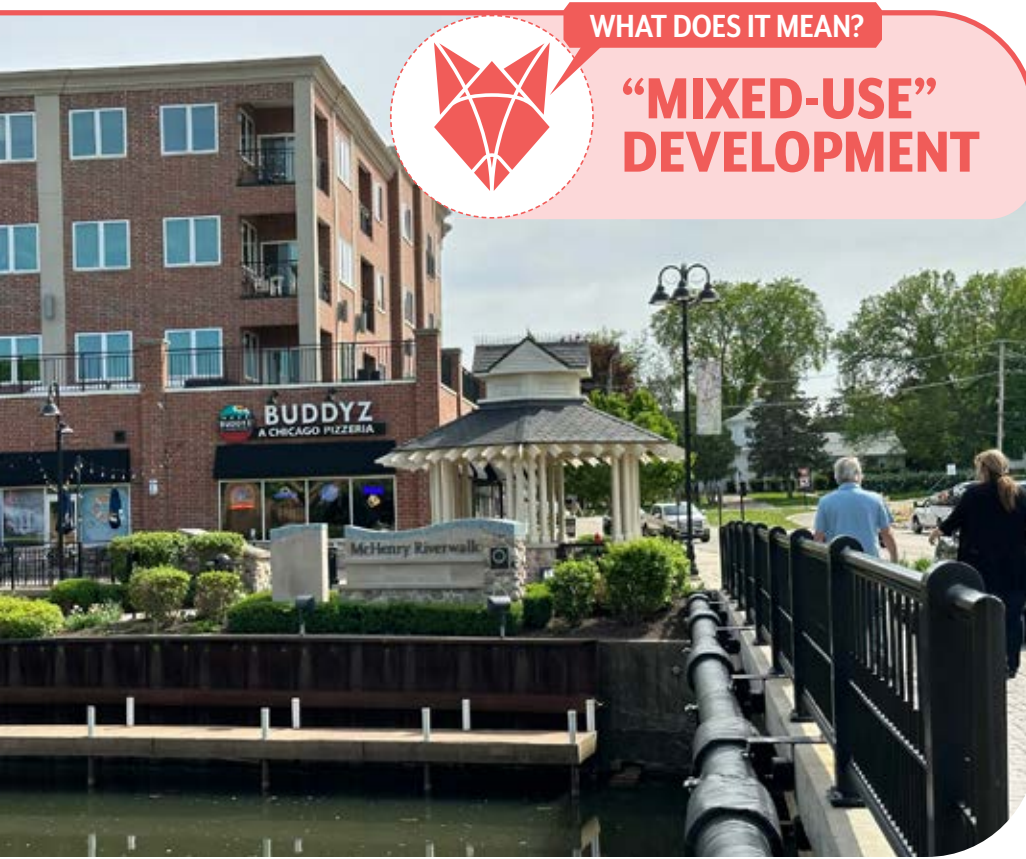


FIGURE 9. CITYWIDE ZONING ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: MCHEHRY GIS

FIGURE 10. MCHEHRY ZONING





Properties that have more than one use in a building or on a plot of land are known as “mixed-use developments.” These developments are often found in downtown areas and can include apartments or condos above businesses.

Mixed-use development allows people to live near amenities and promotes walkable neighborhoods where food, entertainment, and recreation are easily accessed without needing to drive. Development on Green Street near the McHenry Riverwalk is an example of this type of development in Downtown McHenry,

## DOWNTOWN ZONING

Downtown McHenry has a long history as a home to many, as well as a place of business, entertainment, leisure, and recreation. Located at the crossroads of major regional transportation routes (Metra, Rt. 31, Rt. 120) and with public access to the Fox River, downtown has a distinct mixed-use environment. The combination of local businesses, residences, historic structures, and public spaces creates a uniquely walkable environment that attracts locals and regional visitors alike. The zoning composition of downtown has both enhanced this and created challenges for downtown.

While the majority of downtown is zoned residential, a large portion of the downtown area is zoned for commercial and mixed-uses. Compared to citywide zoning, downtown has 36.5% of its land area in commercial or office zones. **Figure 11** illustrates the overall zoning composition of downtown McHenry.

The primary commercial zoning designations are C-5 “Highway commercial zoning” and C-4 “Downtown Commercial.” C-5 zoning, which is more auto-oriented, makes up nearly a fifth of the downtown area. The resulting development is generally low-rise, and with expansive surface parking, the results on the urban character of this type of development is apparent along Elm Street west of Rt. 31 and along Rt. 31 south of Elm Street.

C-4 zones provide the type of development that gives downtown McHenry its characteristic charm. This zoning allows for mixed residential and commercial buildings such as those along Elm Street and Riverside Drive that don’t require as much parking. This type of development encourages more walkability and gives corridors like Elm Street and Riverside Drive the “Main Street USA” feel that residents and visitors cherish.

Elsewhere, RS-4 High Density Residential (over 40% of the downtown study area) provides for smaller lots and walkable residential neighborhoods. Many of the historic homes in McHenry are in these areas, and it has allowed newer developments to fit into the traditional development patterns of downtown neighborhoods.

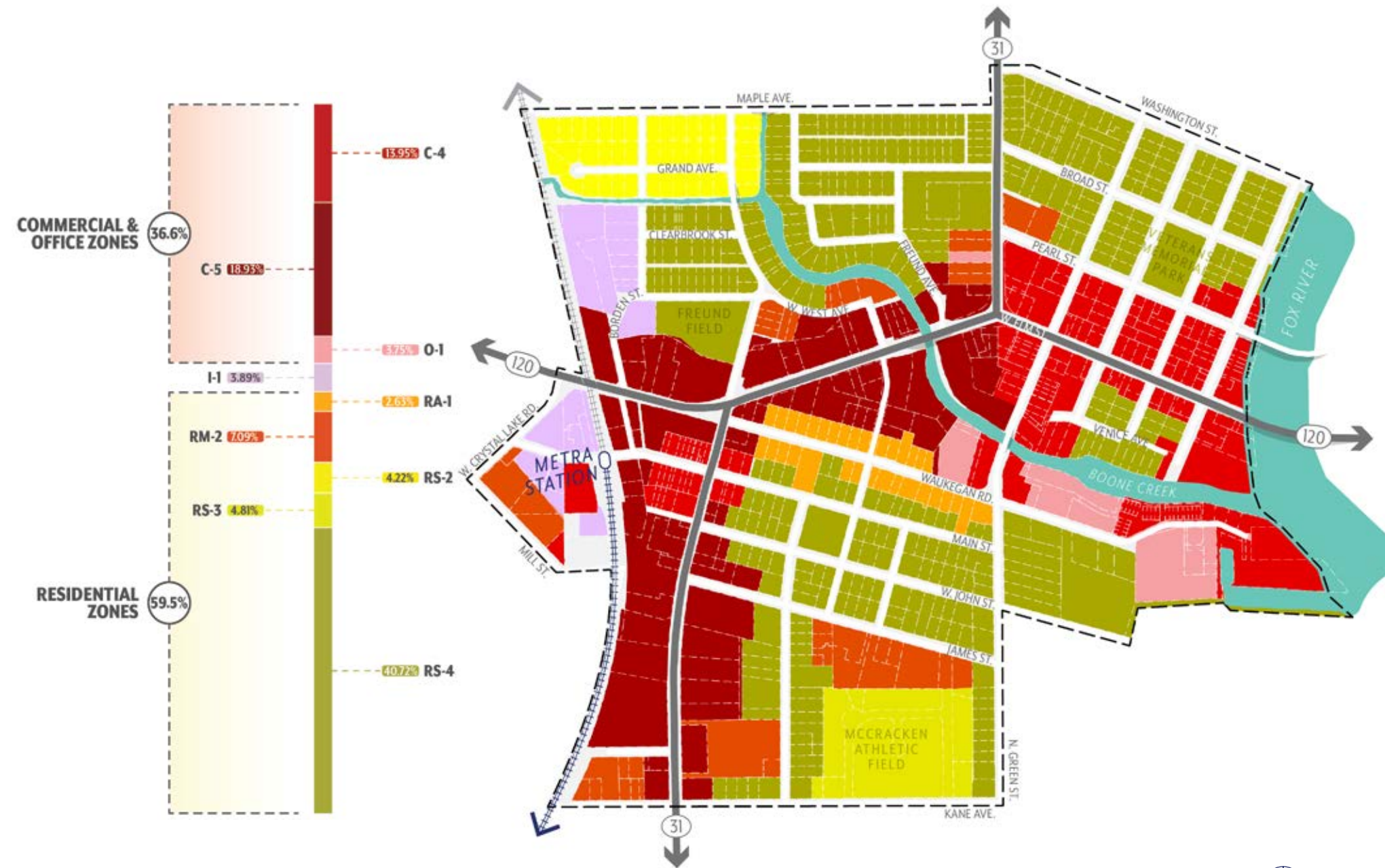


FIGURE 11. DOWNTOWN ZONING ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: MCHENRY GIS



## CURRENT LAND USE

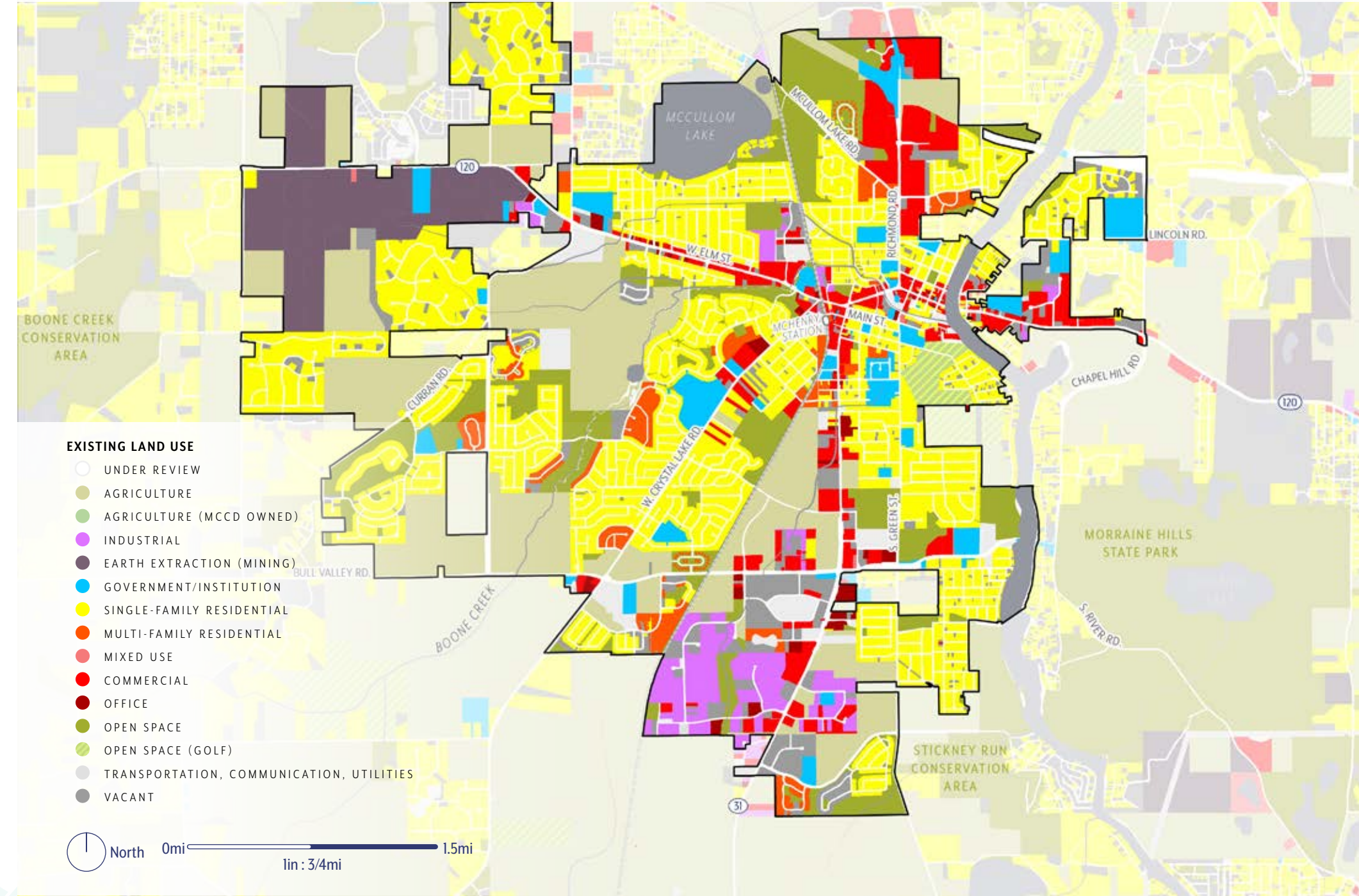
Whereas zoning indicates what uses are allowed on a parcel of land, “land use” is a description of what the land is being used for. Existing land use is from McHenry County’s 2023 GIS data and will be used as the basis for understanding the current land uses in the City of McHenry. The map of existing land use can be seen in “**Figure 12. McHenry Existing Land Use**” on page 29.

Through the evaluation of existing land uses, their susceptibility to change, and development trends, the Vision 2050 Comprehensive plan will result in a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) that will serve as a guide for where and in what form future development will be in the city. The FLUM will determine where strategic changes can be made to encourage smart growth and development over the next 25 years. For the purposes of this plan, land use is split into 14 categories as defined by the County’s Land Use Map. The FLUM will use these same categories so that that any change in composition can be analyzed in an apples-to-apples comparison.

Currently, most of the land in McHenry is being used for residential or agricultural purposes. Single-family residences are by far the most prevalent land use and take up more than a third of the citywide area. Agriculture accounts for 21% of the city’s land use. These two categories represent land uses that are respectively most stable (single family residential) or most likely to change (agriculture). More information on the land use composition of McHenry and Downtown can be seen in “**Figure 13. McHenry Land Use Analysis**” on page 31.

Most new development in McHenry has occurred on previously undeveloped agricultural land, and most of the land currently used for agriculture is zoned for residential or industrial uses. Future land use must take into consideration the potential for McHenry’s undeveloped and agricultural land to provide ecological benefits when redeveloped. Clustered development, natural restoration, and provision of open space will ensure that future residents, employees, and visitors continue to have clean water and comfortable environments to live and work.

FIGURE 12. MCHEHRY EXISTING LAND USE





### DOWNTOWN LAND USE

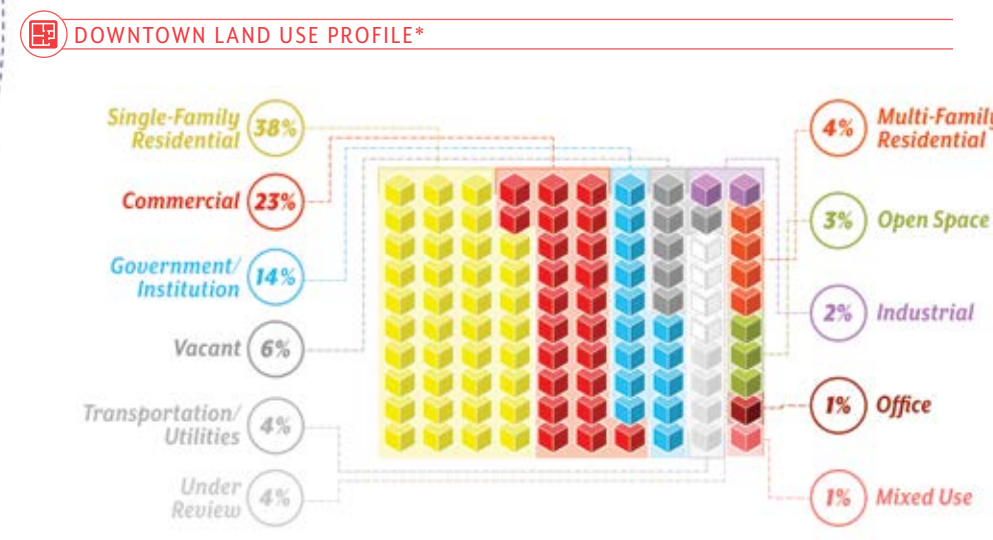
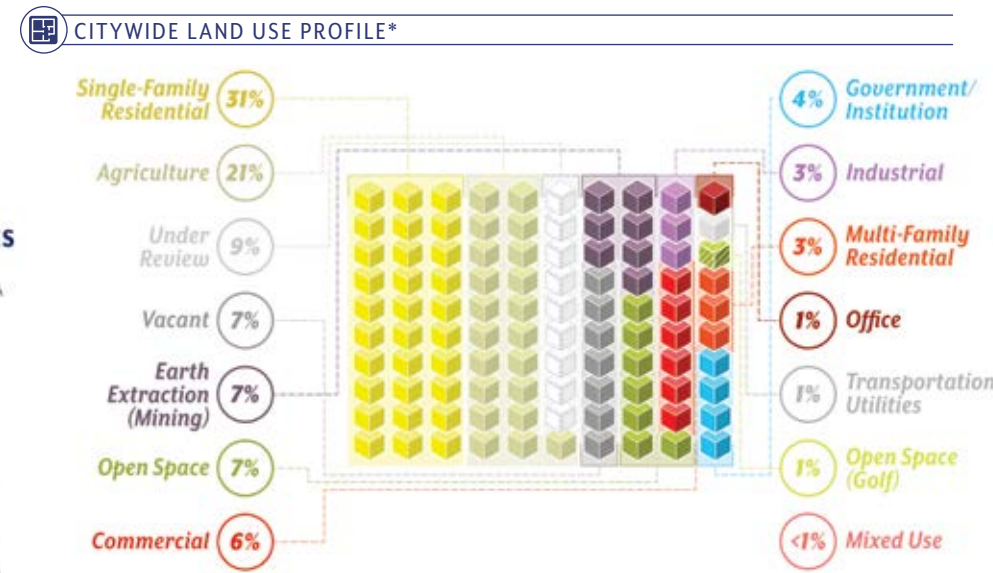
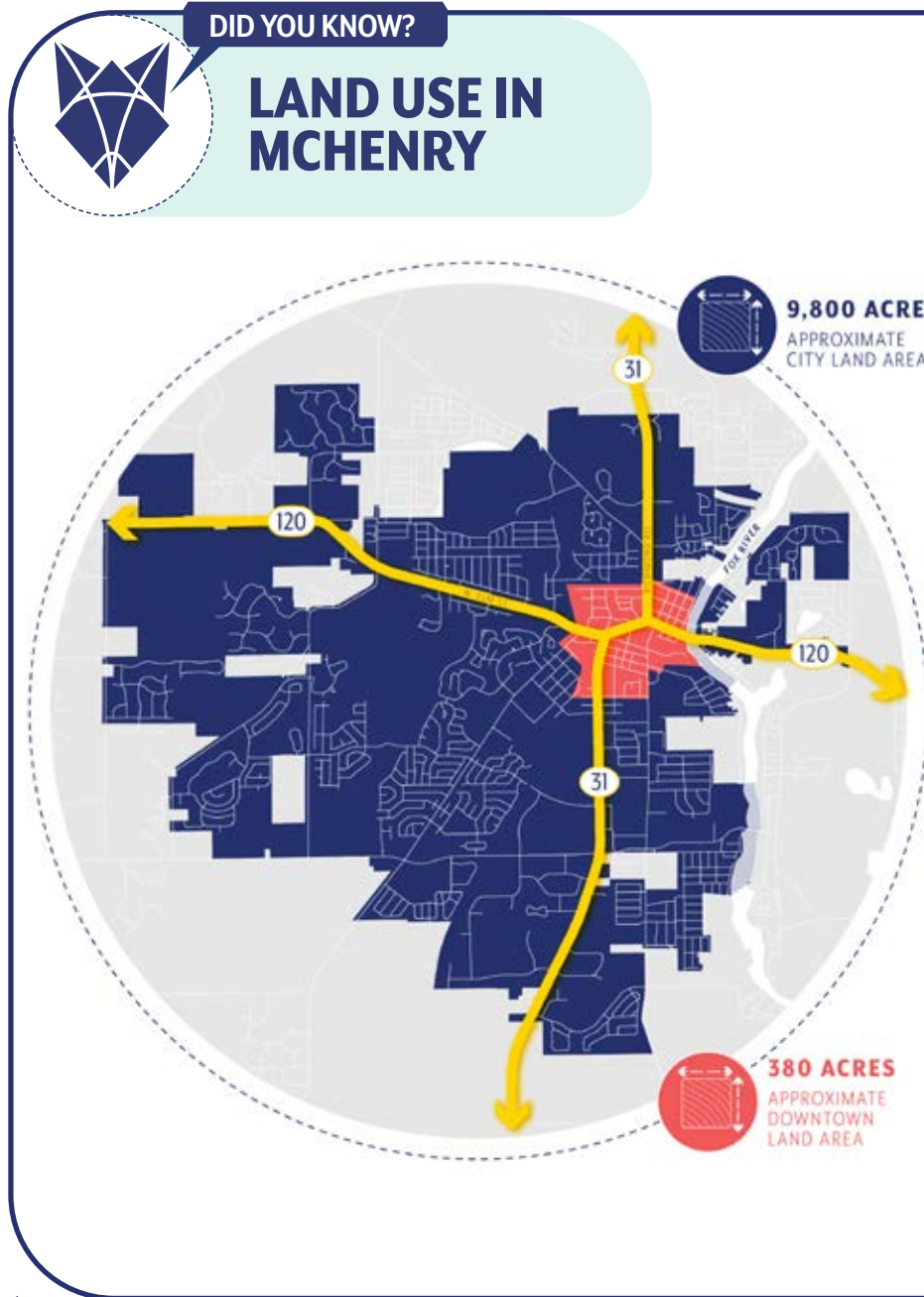
The downtown area is the oldest part of McHenry, and the historic development pattern has led to a unique land use composition. Downtown has proportionally higher amounts of commercial, transportation, institutional, and even residential land uses when compared to the citywide composition. Smaller blocks and more dense development create walkable mixed-use neighborhoods.

While a significant portion of downtown is used for single family residences, the properties are on average 40% smaller than residential properties elsewhere, leading to a higher population density.

Commercial properties downtown house many local businesses and similarly have smaller lots. In many cases they share a wall with neighboring buildings. Buildings along Elm Street (east of Rt. 31), Main Street (west of Rt. 31), Green Street, and Riverside Drive have storefronts that meet the street and limited parking which creates the walkable downtown experience McHenry residents and visitors cherish.

Downtown also has a comparatively high proportion of government/institutional properties due to the multiple school campuses. Landmark Elementary School and the McHenry High School Freshman campus are the two largest institutional properties.

About 7% of land downtown is vacant, resulting in about 20 acres of developable land. Vacant and underutilized land downtown presents key opportunities for redevelopment and new businesses and residences.



\*Land use composition is calculated by parcel area and does not include open rights-of-way such as streets or public waters.

FIGURE 13. MCHENRY LAND USE ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: MCHENRY COUNTY GIS



# TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

McHenry sits at a crossroads. The city has two major state routes (Rt. 31 and Rt. 120) meeting at its center, and it is served by its own Metra rail connection with regional service to Crystal Lake and Chicago. Growth has led to increasing congestion, and automobile-oriented development has left limited ability to access destinations by foot or on bike. Access to safe and enjoyable bike and walking paths is good for public health and for reducing congestion. The McHenry Riverwalk, the Illinois Prairie Trail and Grand Illinois Trail provide a great foundation for developing a citywide trail network. Looking forward to 2050, the city can create a more robust mobility network that reduces car dependency and supports a healthy and active population.

## ROADS

Community Survey, 80% of the population drove alone to work and another 6.6% carpooled. With about 10.7% of the workforce working from home, only 2.7% of the population commutes via methods other than driving. As the population has increased, so has traffic, resulting in notable pockets of congestion. Reducing congestion will require a combination of new modes of transportation and strategic roadway projects to increase capacity and efficiency.

Roadways in McHenry fall under different jurisdictions. Depending on the road, maintenance and improvements may fall to national, state, local, or private entities. There are seven primary jurisdictions of roads:

- Interstate Highways
- United States Highway
- State
- County
- Municipality
- Township
- Private

Figure 14 shows the four primary roadway jurisdictions found in McHenry.

## PRIMARY REGIONAL ACCESS

Regional access to McHenry is primarily in the form of state and county roads. The city is served by Illinois Routes 31 and 120 which provide regional connections in the four cardinal directions. These routes have the highest daily traffic volumes and are the primary routes for commercial traffic (IDOT). The state routes meet in downtown McHenry at Elm Street. Some key characteristics for each are listed below:

### ILLINOIS STATE ROUTE 31

- North to Richmond and Wisconsin
- South to Crystal Lake, Algonquin, and along the Fox River to Elgin
- 17,100 - 22,200 average daily traffic (ADT) in McHenry (IDOT IROADS 2023)

### ILLINOIS STATE ROUTE 120

- West to Woodstock
- East to Waukegan, with connections to US Route 45 and Interstate 94.
- 18,800 - 31,500 average daily traffic (ADT) in McHenry (IDOT IROADS 2023)

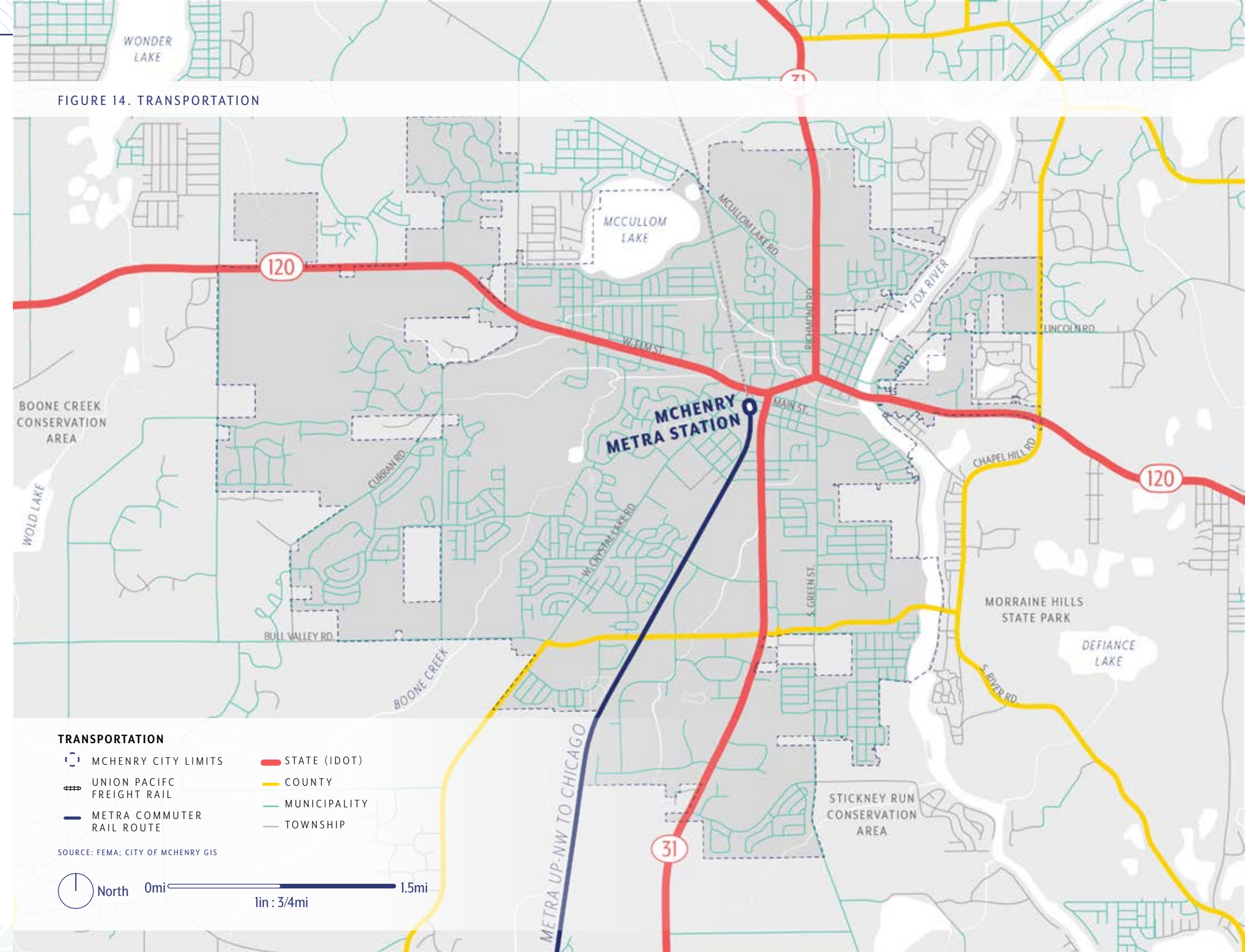


FIGURE 14. TRANSPORTATION



INTERSECTION OF ELM STREET AND ROUTE 31



VIEW OF CRYSTAL LAKE ROAD LOOKING SOUTH

### MAJOR PROJECTS

To address congestion and traffic efficiency, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has included the reconstruction of Route 31 from IL 176 in Crystal Lake to Rt. 120 (Elm Street) in its Multi-Year Highway Improvement Program. The project will encompass 6.8 miles of roadway and the west intersection of Rt. 31 and Rt. 120. The project will result in the addition of new traffic lanes, sidewalks along the entire length of the project, and a multi-use path connecting to the Miller Memorial Highway bike route. The project is planned for the 2025-2029 Fiscal Years.

The McHenry 2040 Long Range Transportation identified a possible Fox River crossing (Project M7) in the north of McHenry south of Johnburg to create a potential northern connection from Rt. 31 to Rt. 120.

### DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC

With two state roads converging on downtown McHenry, most regional traffic passes through the heart of the city. Elm Street supports most of this and has the highest ADTs in the city at 31,500 per IDOT's 2023 Illinois Roadway Analysis Database System (IROADS). West Crystal Lake Road, Green Street, Pearl Street, and Riverside Drive are the primary connections to nearby neighborhoods.

The large volume of traffic, particularly along Elm Street, often leads to congestion during rush hours. Land development along the central segment of Elm Street (Label #1 in **Figure 15**) has responded to the highway-like condition of the road with automobile-oriented development and large surface parking lots. Elm Street is often perceived as a barrier for non-car users and has only three north/south crosswalk connections in the downtown area (Riverside Dr, Rt. 120, and Front St).

### 2023 DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC VOLUMES

- 1 RT. 120/ELM ST (A) - 31,500 ADT
- 2 RT. 120/ELM ST (B) - 26,800 ADT
- 3 RT. 120/ELM ST (C) - 22,200 ADT
- 4 RT. 120/ELM ST (D) - 19,300 ADT
- 5 RT. 31 (A) - 22,200 ADT
- 6 RT. 31 (B) - 17,100 ADT
- 7 W. CRYSTAL LAKE RD - 10,900
- 8 GREEN ST - 4,650 ADT
- 9 PEARL ST - 4,550 ADT
- 10 RIVERSIDE DR - 4,100 ADT
- 11 MAPLE AVE - 2,450 ADT
- 12 MAIN ST - 1,600 ADT
- 13 JOHN ST - 1,200 ADT
- 14 KANE AVE - 625 ADT



FIGURE 15. 2023 DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC VOLUMES  
SOURCE: MCHENRY GIS, IDOT ILLINOIS ROADWAY ANALYSIS DATABASE SYSTEM



MCHENRY METRA STATION AT MAIN STREET



PRAIRIE TRAIL AT PETERSEN PARK

## RAILS

A Union Pacific Railway corridor shares operations with Metra regional rail and runs through the center of McHenry. Metra service terminates at McHenry Station, and train operations beyond the station are generally freight-related.

### METRA REGIONAL RAIL

McHenry has long been served by rail at the station located on Main St. Currently Metra operates three commuter trains a during weekdays along its Union Pacific Northwest (UP-NW) line. McHenry train service operates on a spur and routes through Crystal Lake at the Pingree Road station on its way to Chicago. Weekend service is currently not available, with the nearest station for weekend trips located in Crystal Lake. Two parking lots with a total of 104 parking spaces serve the station.

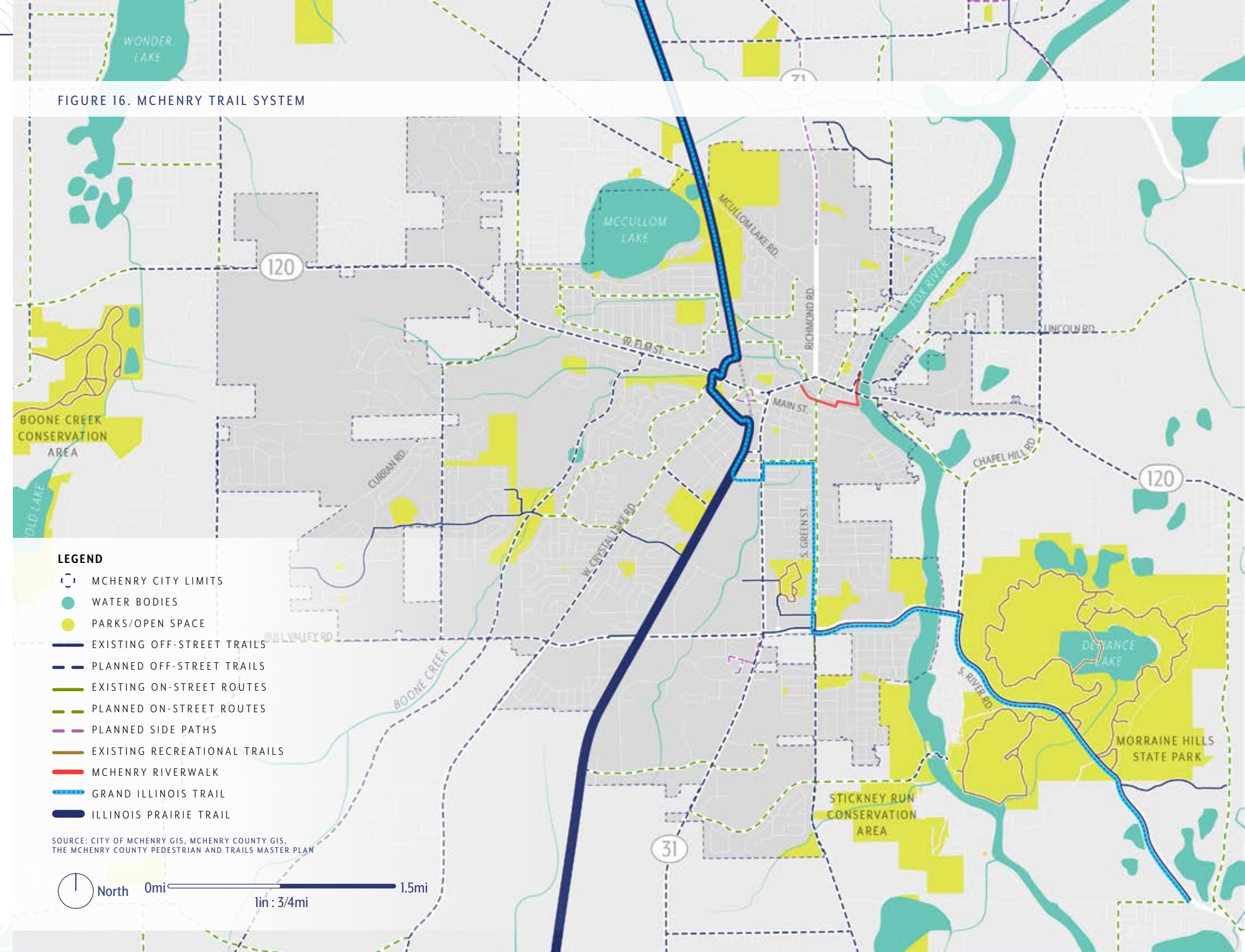
## TRAILS

McHenry’s bike and recreational trails offer residents and visitors opportunities to exercise, access parks, and travel to regional destinations. **Figure 16** illustrates the trail network in McHenry. Trails in McHenry fall into five categories:

- Local Multi-Use Paths (Side Paths)
- On-Street Bike Routes
- Off-Street Bike Routes
- The McHenry Riverwalk
- Regional Trail Systems

The “McHenry County Connection Pedestrian, Bicycle and Trails Master Plan” and McHenry County Long Range Transportation Plan have proposed a wider network of on and off-street trails to create a robust trail network in McHenry.

FIGURE 16. MCHENRY TRAIL SYSTEM



**LOCAL MULTI-USE PATHS (SIDE PATHS)**

These paths provide pedestrians and cyclists a shared off-street route for recreation and active transportation. In McHenry multi-use paths such as the side paths along Dartmoor Road and Miller Memorial Highway permit bikes and pedestrians. These paths are wide enough to accommodate both types of users and typically have clearly marked street crossing and signage. Certain trails in nearby parks such as the trails in the Boone Creek Conservation area are meant for hiking and prohibit bike riders.

**ON-STREET BIKE ROUTES**

McHenry does not have any on-street biking routes. The lack of on-street bikeways discourages residents from biking as a form of transportation and limits the options for safe non-vehicular travel. The McHenry County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan identifies potential future bike routes throughout the city. Planned on-street bike routes serve as connection points between off-street trails and side paths.



CUNAT PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE AT THE MCHENRY RIVERWALK

**MCHENRY RIVERWALK**

The McHenry Riverwalk is a unique path in downtown McHenry. Initially opened in 2017, the riverwalk offers a scenic walking route between the Green Street and Riverside Drive shopping and dining districts. The path currently starts at the Green Street bridge at Boone Creek and travels east to Miller Point and north to the Rt. 120 bridge. The Riverwalk features art installations, boat docks, and seasonal activities. This popular downtown amenity is planned to expand farther east along Boone Creek and north along the west bank of the Fox River. There is potential for future connections to the larger regional trail network.

**REGIONAL TRAILS**

The primary off-street trail system is the Illinois Prairie Trail which mostly follows the Union Pacific Railway right-of-way and is part of a 26-mile regional network of predominantly off-street trails. The Illinois Prairie Trail connects to multiple local neighborhood paths and recreational sites such as Peterson Park.

The Grand Illinois Trail (GIT) is a large 500-mile regional biking route with on- and off-street components. The route crosses through McHenry, coming from the north along the Prairie Trail and then splitting off heading eastward via local roads. The GIT connects McHenry to Chicago and the Mississippi River along scenic biking routes that showcase the beauty of northern Illinois.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

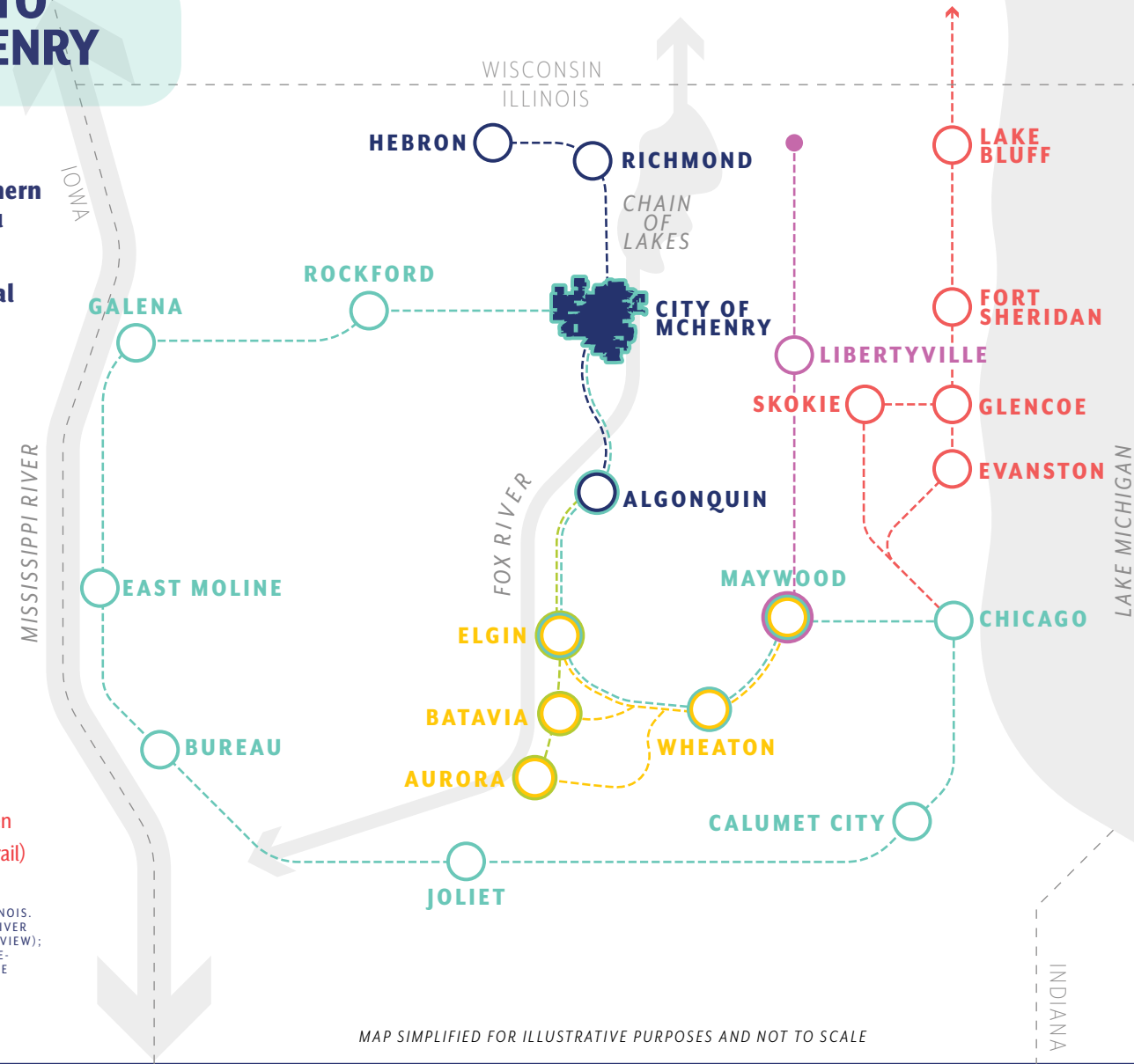
## ALL TRAILS LEAD TO THE CITY OF MCHENRY

**McHenry is connected to a wide network of Northern Illinois trails. Starting in the city of McHenry, you can access more than 600 miles of bike routes.**

**From McHenry you can travel along many regional trails and bike routes which include:**

- **61+ Miles along the Prairie Path**
- **40+ miles along the River Trail**
- **500 miles along the Grand Illinois Trail**
- **45+ miles along the Prairie Trail**
- **28+ miles along the Des Plaines River**
- **35+ Miles along the North Shore trail system from Chicago to the Illinois Border and on to Kenosha, Wisconsin.**  
(North Branch Trail System, North Shore Channel Trail, Green Bay Trail, Robert McClory Bike Path, Kenosha County Bike Trail)

SOURCE: PRAIRIE PATH (HTTPS://IPP.ORG/); GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL (HTTPS://DNR.ILLINOIS.GOV/RECREATION/GREENWAYSANDTRAILS/GRANDILLINOISTRAIL.HTML); DES PLAINES RIVER TRAIL (HTTPS://FPDCC.COM/PLACES/TRAILS/DES-PLAINES-RIVER-TRAIL-SYSTEM/#OVERVIEW); PRAIRIE TRAIL (HTTPS://FILES.MCCDISTRICT.ORG//PUBLICATIONS/RECREATION/PRAIRIE-TRAIL-BROCHURE\_2018\_DEC.WEB.PDF); NORTH SHORE TRAILS (COOK COUNTY GIS, LAKE COUNTY GIS, GOOGLE EARTH, LAKE COUNTY INTERACTIVE TRAIL MAP)



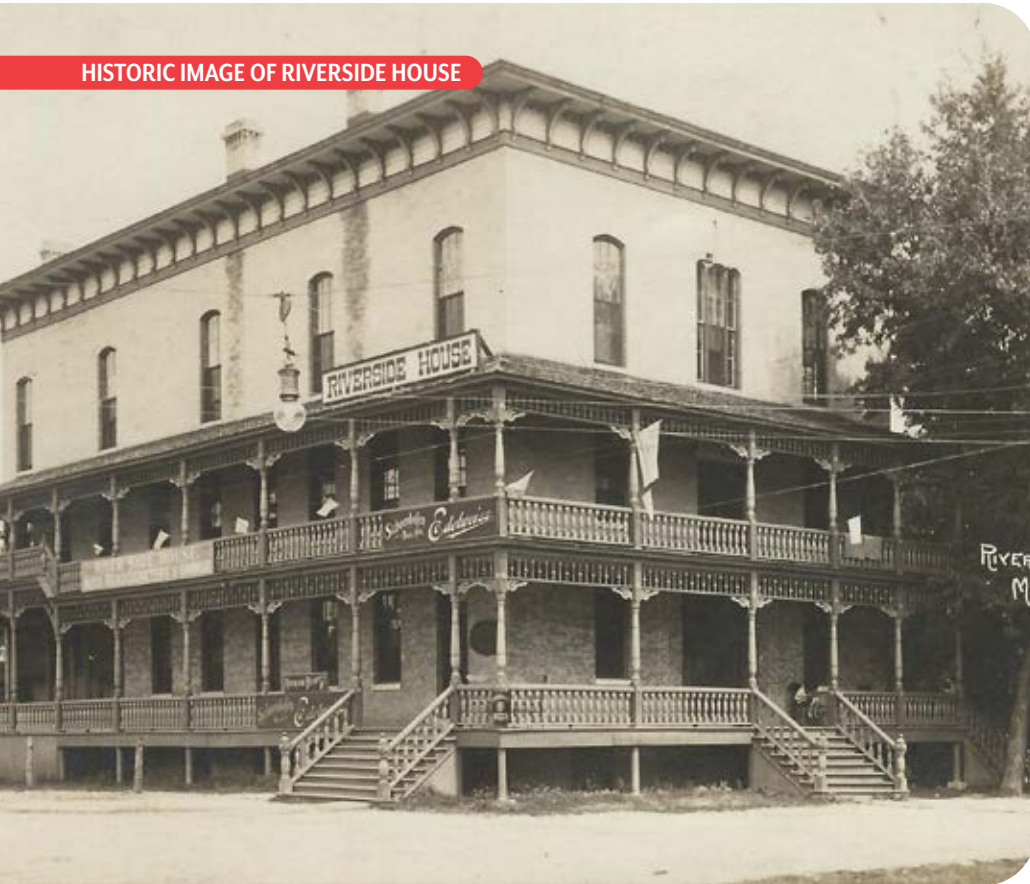
MAP SIMPLIFIED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES AND NOT TO SCALE



# SENSE OF PLACE

McHenry has long been a place whose rural charms, historic downtown, and local amenities have attracted residents to plant roots and grow families. Good schools, public safety, parks and open space, and community celebrations are just some of the assets that make the city attract and retain residents. In 2050, both longstanding community assets and those to come will continue to make the City of McHenry a vibrant place to live, work, and play.

HISTORIC IMAGE OF RIVERSIDE HOUSE



Built in 1864, the Riverside House was a popular resort destination for visitors to the Chain O Lakes area. Many arrived by train from Chicago to relax and enjoy nearby recreation. Today the building is still standing at the NE corner of Elm Street and Riverside drive. Historic buildings downtown are an important part of the

## HISTORIC ASSETS

Over its 150+ year history, McHenry has seen many structures and developments come and go. As of 2023, the City of McHenry's landmark commission has designated 21 historic landmarks. Most of the historic landmarks with plaques are in the downtown area. Two exceptions are Petersen Farm on the northwest side of the city and the Riverside Chocolate Factory on the eastern edge of McHenry. Many more buildings are not formally recognized but retain historic character and contribute to the aesthetic quality and urban form of downtown. Prioritization of these buildings for rehabilitation and preservation will ensure that they continue contributing to the unique character of McHenry for years to come.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS

Community assets are essential elements of the city that enhance health, safety, education, and happiness. **Figure 17** illustrates six types of community assets in McHenry (fire stations, hospitals, schools, libraries, parks, and police stations).

### SCHOOLS

McHenry School District 15 operates eight schools in the city: five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one year-round elementary school. McHenry School District 156 operates McHenry Community High School. Nine other schools operate privately or for populations with special needs. McHenry County College maintains a satellite campus at the Shah Center on Crystal Lake Road where it houses its Catalyst workforce training program.

### HEALTHCARE

Northwestern Medicine's McHenry Hospital is a 143-bed acute care teaching hospital located in McHenry off Route 31. The hospital specializes in cardiovascular and cancer care and is the largest employer in the city.

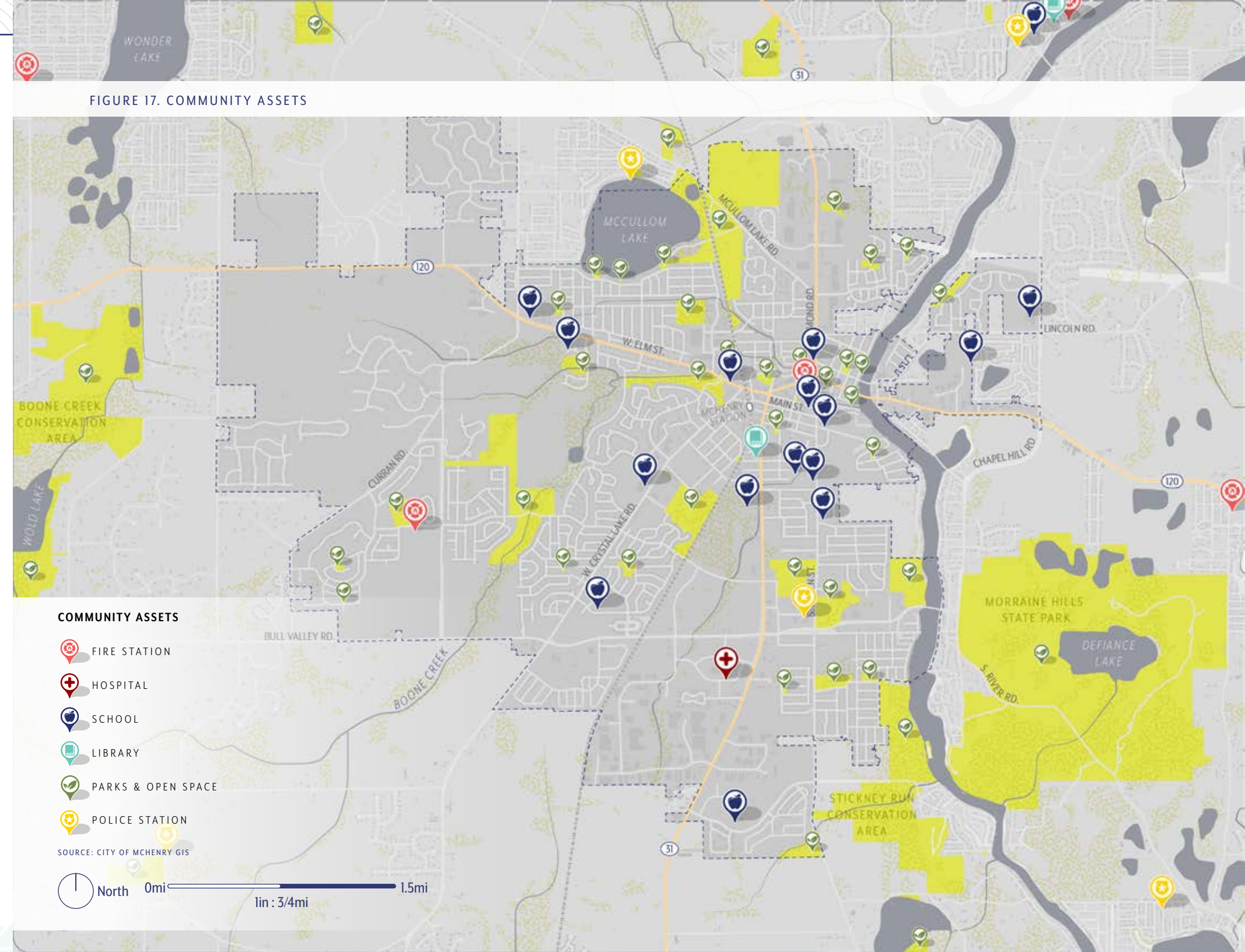
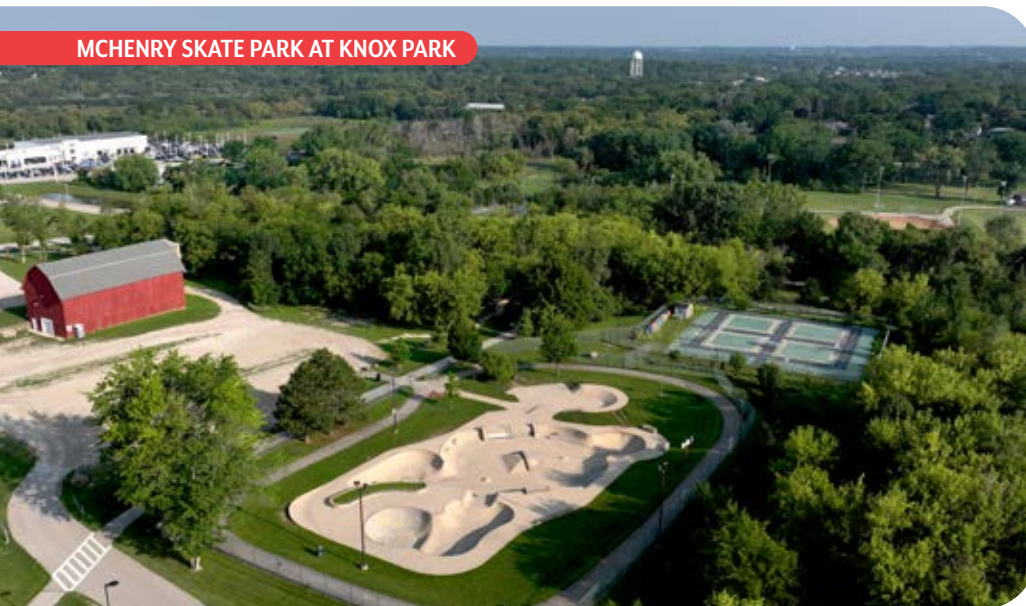


FIGURE 17. COMMUNITY ASSETS



MCHENRY SKATE PARK AT KNOX PARK



VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Parks provide important spaces for recreation, healing, gathering, celebrating, and interacting with nature. Parks and open space can range from small pocket parks and playlots to city parks and regional assets such as state parks and nature preserves.

The McHenry Parks & Recreation Department manages 38 parks totaling over 650 acres of park space. State parks such as Moraine Hills and other nearby conservation areas offer outdoor recreation as well.

The 2007 McHenry Parks & Open Space Master Plan uses a standard ratio of 15 acres of city-owned active recreation space per 100 people to ensure there is an adequate amount of recreational open space in the city. The 2007 plan identified two primary concerns with the existing open space in McHenry:

- When adjusting open space calculations to exclude natural preserves that do not provide recreational access, the city falls below the 15-acres per 100 population goal.
- Due to limited recreation offerings in neighboring communities, the service area for McHenry’s parks extends beyond the population within its borders.

The amount of space dedicated to active recreation is just one measure to identify the adequacy of parks and open space. Access to parks and open space is an essential component to ensuring residents are healthy and happy. As McHenry develops new land, it is essential to improve connections to existing open spaces while providing new active recreation opportunities. More information on the network of trails can be found in the section “*Trails*” on page 36.

### COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Community cohesion is an important part of a city’s vibrancy, safety, and health. Opportunities to meet neighbors, celebrate together, and build social connections are often best facilitated through community events and civic organizations. These events also provide opportunities to market the city and build its reputation beyond its borders. Groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, VFW, Downtown Business Association, and many more help to create year-round programming that attracts residents, builds community, and bolsters the local economy of McHenry.

## DID YOU KNOW? YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY EVENTS IN MCHENRY



People come from all over to visit McHenry and participate in the many events that occur throughout the year.

Celebrations, fundraisers, volunteer events, athletic competitions and more boost the economy and community pride.

SOURCE: K-ADAMS PHOTO; MCHENRY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION, MCHENRY KIWANIS CLUB, MCHENRY ROTARY CLUB

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH SHAMROCKS THE FOX FESTIVAL
APRIL ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION	MAY THE SPRING SIP PEARL STREET MARKET	JUNE TASTE OF MCHENRY
JULY FIESTA DAYS MUSIC FEST DUCK DERBY ART & STREET FAIR	AUGUST BANDS BREWS & BBQ	SEPTEMBER DOWNTOWN UNCORKED LIGHT THE NIGHT
OCTOBER FULL MOON MARKET HAUNTED HAYRIDE	NOVEMBER HOLIDAY WALK/LIGHTS TOYS FOR TOTS PARADE TURKEY TROT	DECEMBER



# ENVIRONMENT

McHenry’s natural environment is one of its greatest strengths. Water is at the heart of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the city with the Fox River, Boone Creek, and surrounding lakes providing important ecological and recreational resources. New developments continue to reduce natural and agricultural lands and pose challenges to managing water resources. As McHenry looks to 2050, ecologically sensitive development that protects environmental resources will create a sustainable future that allows the next generation to enjoy the same environmental resources we do today.

Within the city of McHenry, the Fox River meanders into the downtown, Riverstream, and McHenry Shores neighborhoods. Significant streams within the city include Boone and Dutch Creek. McCullom Lake is present in the northern region of the city. Wetlands, floodplains, and floodways border these water resources. The city also has a high proportion of park and conservation lands. Although not within the city of McHenry, Moraine Hills State Park borders the city to the southeast. Due to the high level of ecological resources present within its boundaries, the City of McHenry should work to preserve and enhance these natural features in future development plans as the city welcomes further growth.

## ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

Wetlands are areas inundated or saturated with water at a frequency and duration to support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions under normal circumstances. The United States Army Corps of Engineers criteria for wetland determination depends on three key factors: vegetation, soil, and hydrology. An area must meet the classifications of possessing hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soil, and hydraulic conditions to be considered a wetland unless it can be proven to have significant disturbance, in which case one or two out of the three factors may be sufficient.

Wetlands are essential for water management, reducing flooding by providing water storage and infiltration, supporting water security by promoting groundwater recharge, and reducing water pollution through natural filtration. Wetlands are also one of the most productive and biodiverse habitats, supporting a multitude of bird, fish, amphibian, shellfish, insect, and herbaceous species. There are approximately 684 acres of wetlands within the city’s limits, although the presence, quantity,

and quality of wetlands can only formally be determined through formal wetland delineations.

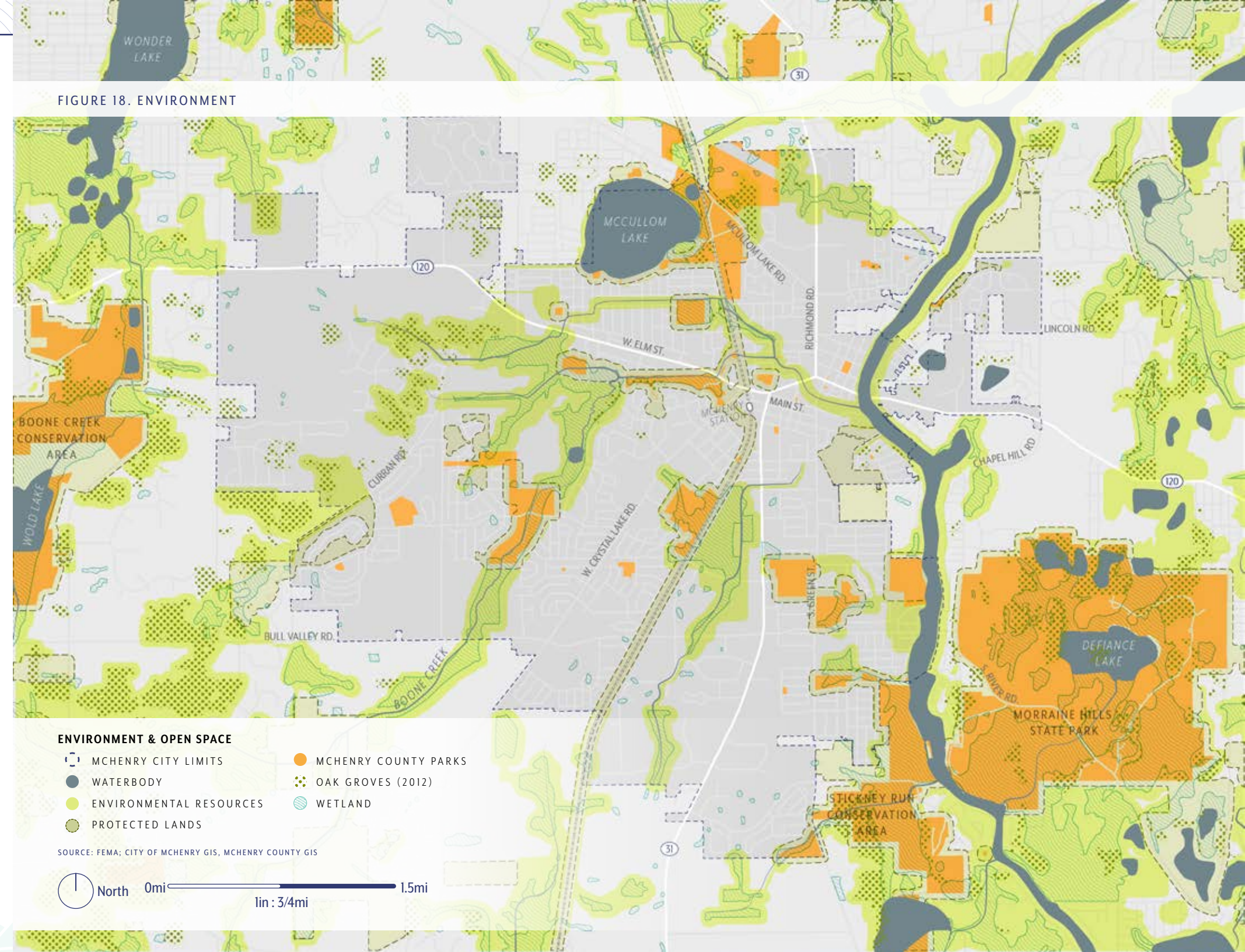
## PROTECTED LANDS & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

The city has a total of 41 parks, or approximately 589 acres of land. Most of these parks are municipally owned and managed by the McHenry Parks and Recreation Department. Located in the southeastern corner of the city, Stickney Run Conservation Area is owned and managed by McHenry County Conservation District. According to McHenry County Conservation District, historic oak ecosystems exist in many locations around the city, particularly around McCullom Lake within Peterson Farm and Peterson Park as well as within McHenry Country Club, Whispering Oaks Park, and the Martin Woods and Woodcreek neighborhoods.

## AGRICULTURAL AREAS & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Approximately 1,817 acres of agricultural lands are within the city. They tend to exist in clusters, generally near other agricultural or open space lands and water resources. Consequently, agricultural lands tend to be further from the more developed downtown area of the city. As the City of McHenry develops and welcomes new residents, it can be expected that agricultural lands will be converted to new land uses. During this conversion, care should be taken to preserve the nearby water resources and the species they support.

FIGURE 18. ENVIRONMENT





WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

## GSI: GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

**Did you know managing stormwater can create a more beautiful streetscape?**

Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) is a term used to describe methods of collecting, managing, and filtering stormwater using plants and other natural features. Rain gardens like the one pictured above can collect rainwater for use by native plants and reduce flow into the city's sewer infrastructure. GSI can help reduce pollution in local waterways and return water into the aquifer.

## HYDROLOGY

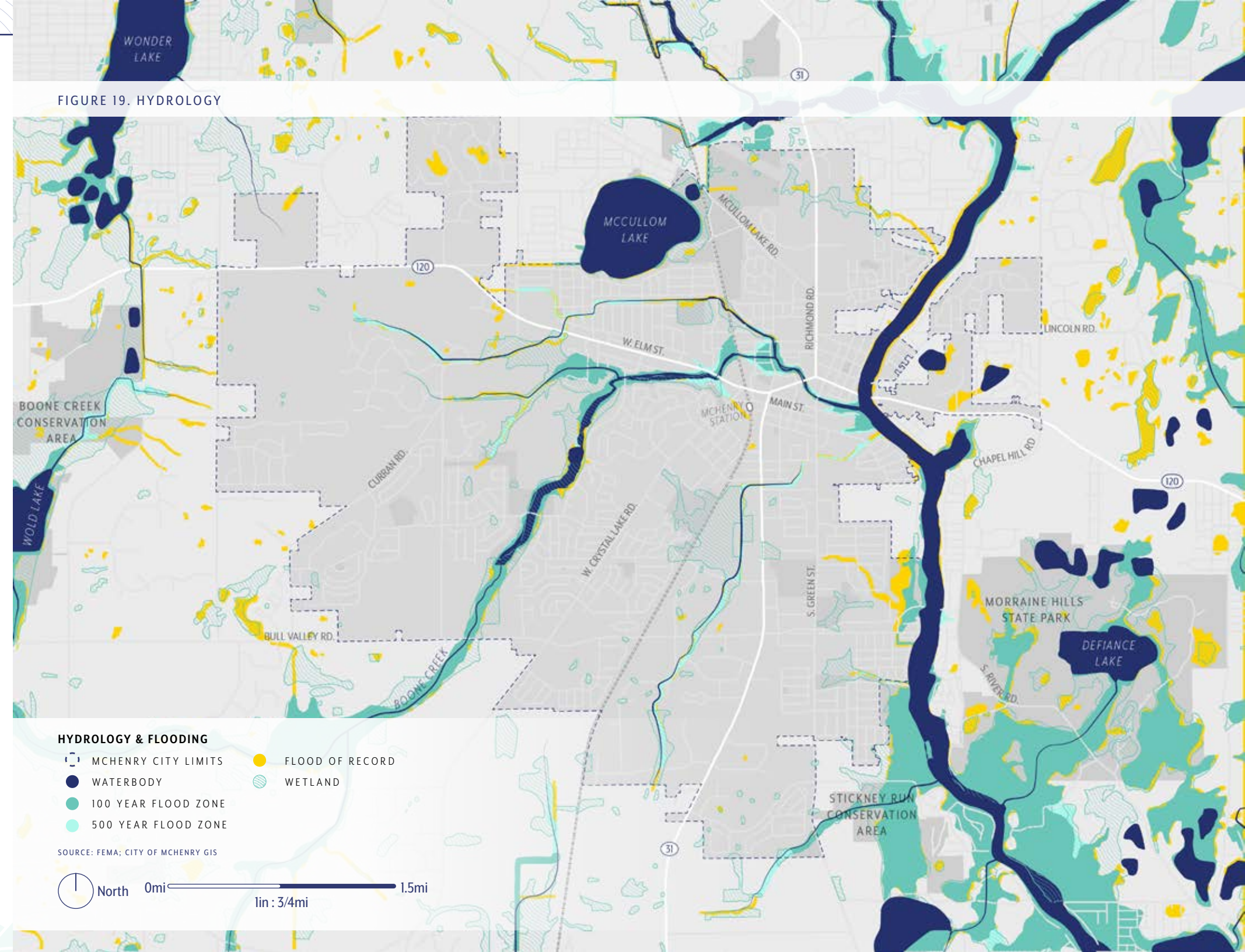
### NOTABLE WATERWAYS/HYDROLOGIC RESOURCES

Notable waterways within the city of McHenry include the Fox River, Boone Creek, and Dutch Creek. The Fox River is a tributary to the Illinois River, originating in southeastern Wisconsin and flowing south through McHenry before joining the Illinois River in Ottawa, Illinois. Streams within the city include Boone Creek and Dutch Creek, both tributaries to the Fox River. Dutch Creek flows east through the northern region of the city and through McCullom Lake before joining the Fox River to the north of the city's limits. Boone Creek flows northeast through the city and joins the Fox River in downtown McHenry, which borders the Fox River to the east. Due to downtown McHenry's close proximity to these water resources, close attention should be paid to the city's impact on water quality. Green infrastructure that manages stormwater runoff can help capture and treat water before entering into waterways. Additionally, many opportunities exist for publicly accessible ecological spaces along the river and the existing riverwalk.

### STORMWATER

The city has 186 storm sewer outfalls, which are locations where a storm drainpipe discharges stormwater runoff, usually into a water body. Additionally, there are 2,665 catch basins and 1,922 inlets within the city limits. Catch basins and inlets are both structures that allow stormwater to drain into the storm sewer system and are integral to flood prevention, especially during and after large rain events. According to the Illinois State Water Survey, annual precipitation in northeast Illinois has increased over recent decades. This trend is expected to continue within the region, especially during the summer and fall seasons.

As land is developed and new impervious areas (hard surfaces that do not allow stormwater to soak into the ground) are added, more rainwater will flow into the city's stormwater system and enter waterways. Increased runoff can diminish water quality and reduce groundwater supplies over time. New development should maximize stormwater management on site and prioritize the inclusion of permeable surfaces to limit runoff.







NIPPERSINK CREEK

SOURCE: ADOBE STOCK



MCCULLOM LAKE

### FLOODING CONCERNS

Approximately 602 acres of land within the city are located within a 100-year flood zone. The 100-year flood zone, also known as the floodplain, is the area that will be inundated by a flood event with a one percent chance of occurring each year. Additionally, approximately 187 acres within the city are identified as a floodway. Floodways are channels of a watercourse and their adjacent lands which must be reserved in order for the base, or 100-year flood, to discharge into. This preserves the base flood elevation so that the water surface elevation will not cumulatively increase more than a designated height. Floodways within the city include the channel and immediately adjacent lands along the Fox River and Boone Creek. Future development should avoid floodways and floodplains as much as practically possible. If development is to occur in these areas, all efforts must comply with applicable permits and regulations. Strategies to preserve water infiltration, such as limiting the use of impervious surfaces like concrete and asphalt, or the utilization of alternatives such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, and green streets, should be considered.

### GROUNDWATER

The city of McHenry, like many other areas in the Chicago suburbs, depends on the Cambrian-Ordovician Aquifer System of Illinois, made up of three major sandstone aquifers: the St. Peter Sandstone, Ironton-Galesville Sandstone, and Mt. Simon Sandstone aquifers, as a primary source of drinking water. According to the Illinois State Water Survey, the continued development of the northeastern Illinois region has caused aquifer water levels to decline. An aquifer's hydraulic head, also known as the potentiometric surface, measures the water level elevation within the aquifer, indicates how much water the aquifer has available, and subsequently determines how low a pump must be set within a well in order to retrieve water. The city of McHenry currently has a potentiometric head level of around 450-600 feet above mean sea level (AMSL), making it of low relative risk compared to other developed areas in the northeastern Illinois region. However, the city of McHenry should still strive to incorporate water saving and groundwater recharging elements into plans for future development in order to preserve its water resources.

## DID YOU KNOW? MCHENRY'S WATERSHEDS

A "watershed" is an area of land that contributes water to a river, lake, or ocean. Understanding what watershed a particular piece of land is a part of is an important step in managing water quality. Ensuring land uses within that watershed are properly developed can avoid pollution and contaminants from entering waterways.

The city has a total of three watersheds -

- Flint Creek-Fox River
- Nippersink Creek
- Manitou Creek-Fox River

Four subwatersheds are also present within the city boundaries, which correspond to their respective larger watershed. Flint Creek-Fox River watershed takes up the majority of the city. Flint Creek-Fox River watershed's corresponding subwatersheds within the city boundaries are Griswold Lake and Boone Creek. Nippersink Creek watershed is located in the northwest region of the city through its subwatershed of Wonder Lake. Manitou Creek -Fox River watershed is located in a small portion in the far eastern city limits through its subwatershed Pistakee Lake.

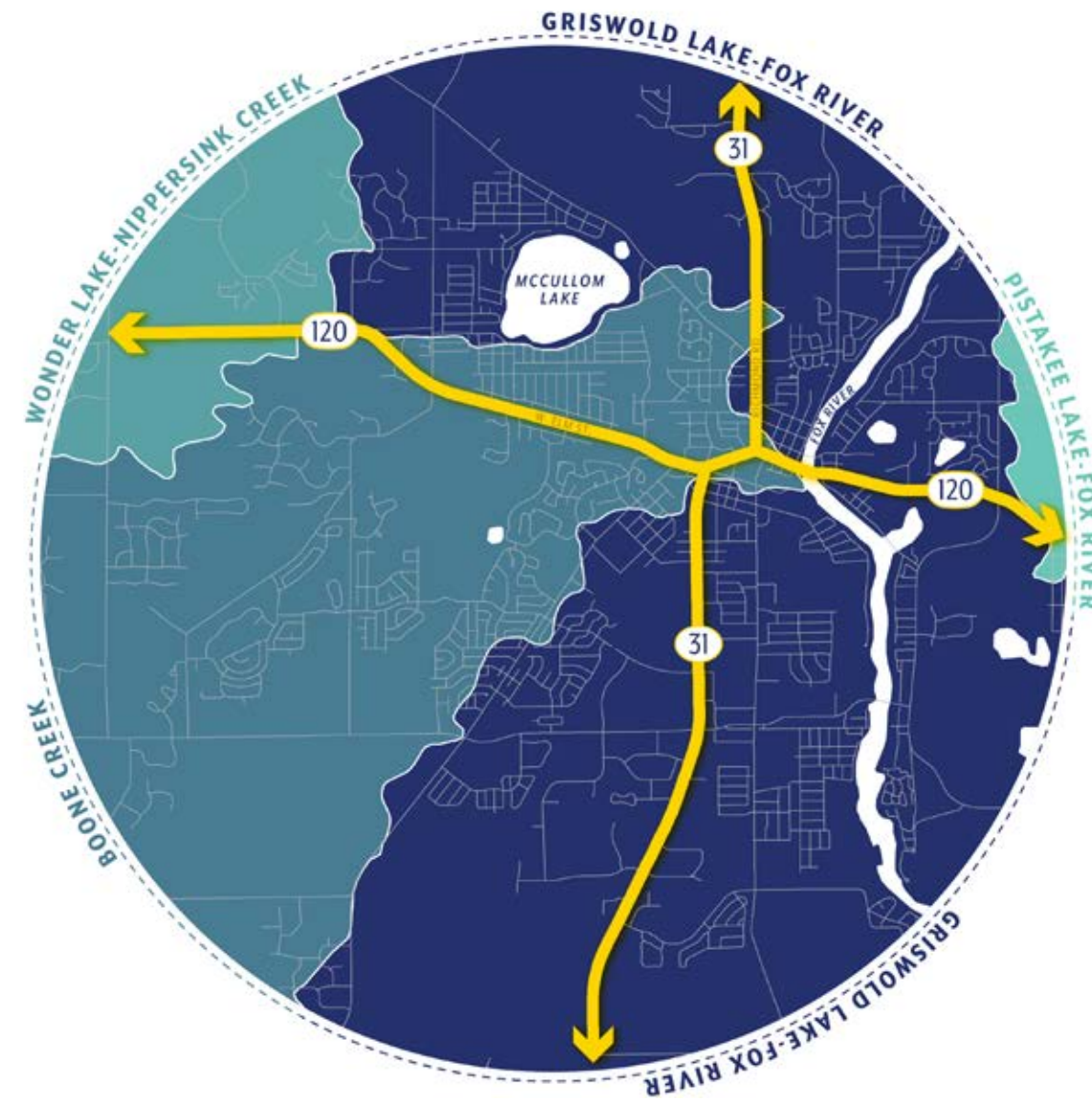


FIGURE 20. MCHENRY WATERSHEDS ANALYSIS  
SOURCE: ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES GIS