

VISION 2050 LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

The land use component of VISION 2050 presents a development pattern and recommendations that accommodate projected growth in regional population (369,000 additional residents), households (187,000 additional households), and employment (229,000 additional jobs) in a sustainable manner consistent with VISION 2050 plan objectives through a focus on compact development. The compact development recommended under VISION 2050 ranges from high-density development such as transit-oriented development (TOD), to neighborhoods in smaller communities with housing within walking distance of parks, schools, and businesses. This range of development is recommended because it has a number of benefits, including:

- Minimizing impacts on natural and agricultural resources
- Minimizing impacts to water resources and air quality
- Positioning the Region to attract potential workers and employers
- Maximizing redevelopment in areas with existing infrastructure
- Minimizing the cost of infrastructure and public services
- Meeting the needs of the Region's aging population
- Walkable neighborhoods that encourage active lifestyles and a sense of community
- Reducing the distance needed to travel between destinations
- A variety of housing options near employment
- Supporting public transit connections between housing and employment
- Increasing racial and economic integration throughout the Region

VISION 2050 is intended to provide a guide, or overall framework, for future land use within the Region. Implementation of the following plan recommendations ultimately relies on the actions of local, county, State, and Federal agencies and units of government in conjunction with the private sector.

Residential Development within Urban Service Areas

VISION 2050 recommends focusing residential development within urban service areas that typically include public sanitary sewer and water supply service, parks, schools, and shopping areas. Residential development would occur largely as infill, redevelopment, and new development under the Small Lot Traditional Neighborhood, Mixed-Use Traditional Neighborhood, and Mixed-Use City Center land use categories as shown on Map 1 (see Figure 1 for descriptions of all VISION 2050 land use categories). About 96 percent of new households would be located within urban service areas.

- **Recommendation 1.1: Develop urban service areas with a mix of housing types and land uses**
A mix of housing types and land uses would be possible under the Small Lot Traditional Neighborhood, Mixed-Use Traditional Neighborhood, and Mixed-Use City Center land use categories. VISION 2050 recommends that local governments in urban service areas include these land use categories in their comprehensive plans as shown on Map 1.1. The community's zoning and land division ordinances should be consistent with its comprehensive plan. This would allow for the development of multifamily housing and single-family homes on smaller lots (one-quarter acre or less) that tend to be more affordable to a wider-range of households than single-family homes on larger lots. This would also encourage the development and redevelopment of walkable neighborhoods by allowing housing in proximity to a mix of uses, such as parks, schools, and businesses.

Figure 1
VISION 2050 Land Use Categories

The recommended VISION 2050 land use pattern was developed by allocating new households and employment envisioned for the Region under the Commission’s year 2050 growth projections to a series of seven land use categories that represent a variety of development densities and mixes of uses.



MIXED-USE CITY CENTER
 Mix of very high density offices, businesses, and housing found in the most densely populated areas of the Region



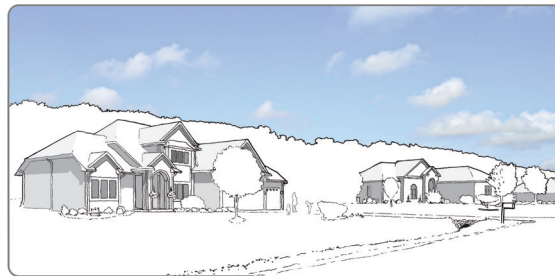
MEDIUM LOT NEIGHBORHOOD (showing lots of about 15,000 square feet)
 Primarily single-family homes on 1/4- to 1/2-acre lots found at the edges of cities and villages



LARGE LOT NEIGHBORHOOD (showing lots of about 1/2 acre)
 Primarily single-family homes on 1/2-acre to one-acre lots found at the edges of cities and villages and scattered outside cities and villages



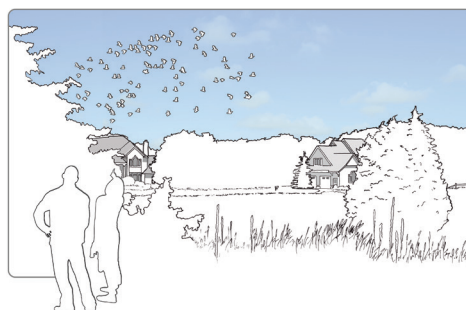
MIXED-USE TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD
 Mix of high-density housing, businesses, and offices found in densely populated areas



LARGE LOT EXURBAN (showing lots of about 1.5 acres)
 Single-family homes at an overall density of one home per 1.5 to five acres scattered outside cities and villages



SMALL LOT TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD (showing lots of about 7,000 square feet)
 Mix of housing types and businesses with single-family homes on lots of 1/4-acre or less found within and at the edges of cities and villages



RURAL ESTATE (showing a cluster subdivision with one-acre lots)
 Single-family homes at an overall density of one home per five acres scattered outside cities and villages

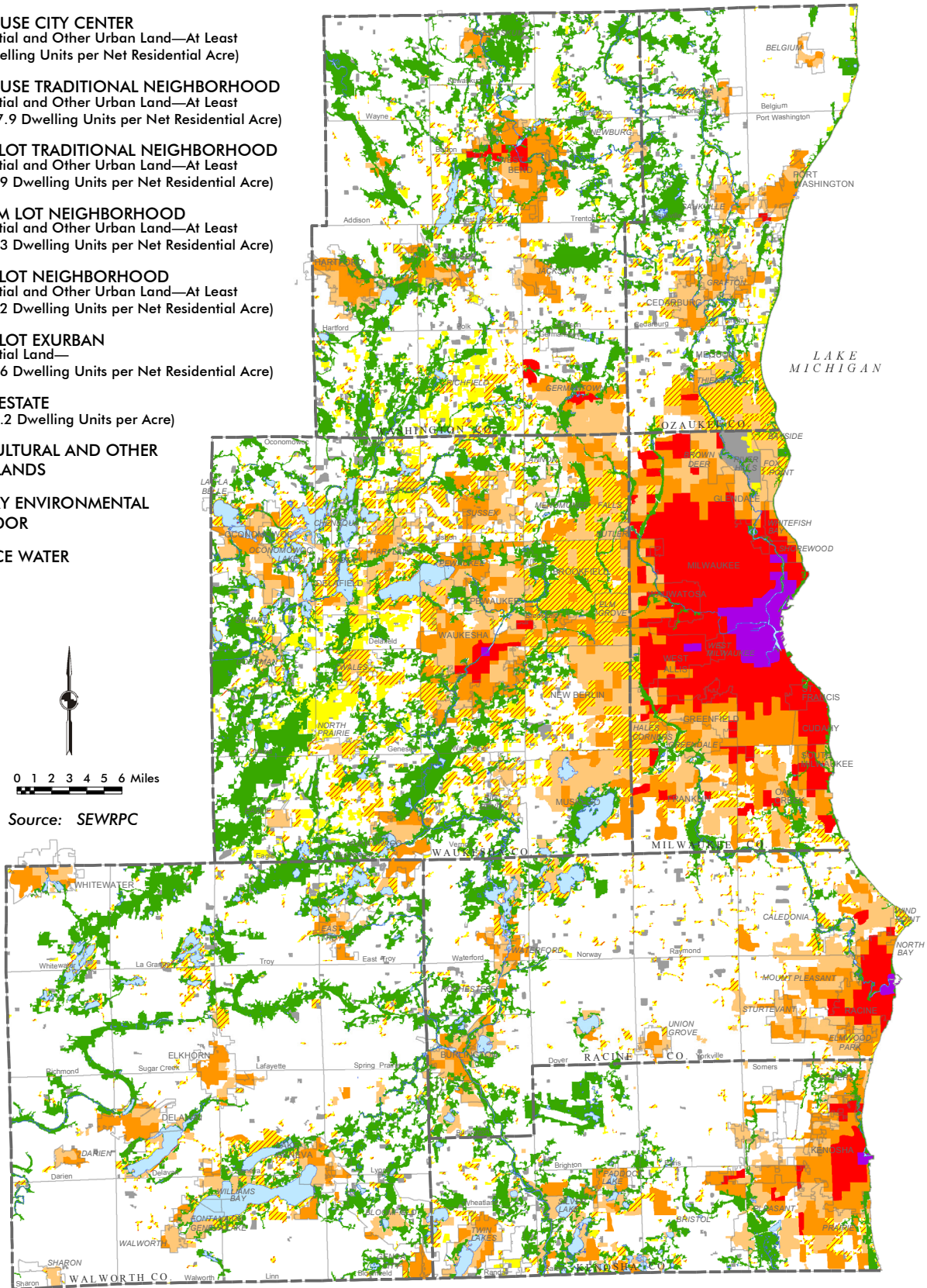
Map 1 Land Use Development Pattern: VISION 2050

- MIXED-USE CITY CENTER**
(Residential and Other Urban Land—At Least 18.0 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- MIXED-USE TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD**
(Residential and Other Urban Land—At Least 7.0 to 17.9 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- SMALL LOT TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD**
(Residential and Other Urban Land—At Least 4.4 to 6.9 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- MEDIUM LOT NEIGHBORHOOD**
(Residential and Other Urban Land—At Least 2.3 to 4.3 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- LARGE LOT NEIGHBORHOOD**
(Residential and Other Urban Land—At Least 0.7 to 2.2 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- LARGE LOT EXURBAN**
(Residential Land—0.2 to 0.6 Dwelling Units per Net Residential Acre)
- RURAL ESTATE**
(0.1 to 0.2 Dwelling Units per Acre)
- AGRICULTURAL AND OTHER OPEN LANDS**
- PRIMARY ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDOR**
- SURFACE WATER**



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Miles

Source: SEWRPC



- **Recommendation 1.2: Focus TOD near rapid transit and commuter rail stations**

VISION 2050 recommends TOD in areas surrounding rapid transit and commuter rail stations recommended under the transportation component of VISION 2050. Residential development within TODs should occur largely in multi-family buildings or buildings with a mix of uses such as commercial-retail space on the ground floor and dwellings on upper floors. Some buildings may have a mix of commercial-retail space on the ground floor with office space on upper floors. Public plazas, parks, and other governmental and institutional uses may also be incorporated into TOD. Streets and sidewalks within TODs should provide convenient and safe access for walking and bicycling to the transit station.

TOD is a focus of VISION 2050 because it supports healthy communities, mobility, and revitalization of urban areas. Despite these benefits, concern regarding the potential for gentrification and displacement of low-income households was expressed during VISION 2050 public outreach activities. Some strategies for incorporating mixed-income housing in TODs include density bonus, revising parking regulations, targeting government funding for affordable housing to station areas, and streamlining permitting processes.

- **Recommendation 1.3: Focus new urban development in areas that can be efficiently served by essential municipal facilities and services**

VISION 2050 is a systems level plan that includes generalized boundaries for urban service areas. Urban service areas include public sanitary sewer service. In addition, they typically include public water supply, parks, schools, and shopping areas. Urban services can be extended and provided to compact development in a more efficient and cost-effective manner than to lower-density development. Local government land use policies should allow development as recommended under Recommendation 1.1 to facilitate efficient and cost-effective provision of services to urban development. It is recommended that local governments consider limiting new development in the Medium Lot Neighborhood¹ and Large Lot Neighborhood² land use categories to existing vacant lots, as infill development in existing neighborhoods with similar residential densities, or where commitments have been made to such development through approved subdivision plats or certified survey maps.

Residential Development Outside Urban Service Areas

VISION 2050 recommends residential development outside urban service areas occur in the Rural Estate land use category using cluster subdivision design. About 4 percent of new households would be located outside urban service areas.

- **Recommendation 1.4: Consider cluster subdivision design in residential development outside urban service areas**

VISION 2050 recommends that the demand for homes in an open space setting be accommodated on a limited basis through Rural Estate development where there would be no more than one home per five acres. Residential development at this density can accommodate future demand for living in an open space setting while minimizing impacts on the natural resource and agricultural base, maintaining rural character, and avoiding excessive demands on rural public facility and service systems, especially when cluster subdivision design is used. Local and county government land use policies should allow cluster subdivision design with no more than one acre of residential land (house and yard area) for each dwelling while maintaining an overall density of one home per five acres.

¹ Primarily single-family homes on quarter- to half-acre lots.

² Primarily single-family homes on one-acre lots.

- **Recommendation 1.5: Limit low-density development outside urban service areas**
Large Lot Neighborhood and Large Lot Exurban³ residential development outside urban service areas is neither truly urban nor rural in character. Development of this nature generally precludes the provision of centralized sewer and water supply service and other urban amenities. VISION 2050 does recognize existing commitments to this type of development even though such development is not consistent with VISION 2050 objectives. This results in a small portion of the planned households in the Region allocated to accommodate Large Lot Neighborhood and Large Lot Exurban development outside urban service areas where there are approved subdivision plats and certified survey maps. VISION 2050 recommends that local and county government land use policies limit Large Lot Neighborhood and Large Lot Exurban development beyond urban service areas to commitments to such development made during the VISION 2050 planning process. VISION 2050 also recommends limiting other development beyond urban service areas to highway-oriented business, utility, and recreational uses.

Commercial and Industrial Land

VISION 2050 recommends focusing new commercial and industrial development within urban service areas as infill, redevelopment, and new development.

- **Recommendation 1.6: Provide a mix of housing types near employment-supporting land uses**
Commercial land and business parks should be developed in mixed-use settings where compatible, or near a mix of housing types to avoid job-worker mismatches. Local government land use policies should allow a mix of housing types and land uses as recommended under Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 to promote accessibility between housing and jobs.
- **Recommendation 1.7: Encourage and accommodate economic growth**
Major economic activity centers are defined as areas containing concentrations of commercial and/or industrial land with at least 3,500 employees or 2,000 retail employees. A total of 61 centers have been identified that have either reached major center status or are anticipated to by 2050 based on existing employment and input from local governments. VISION 2050 recommends continued development of major economic activity centers to encourage economic growth, including a focus on developing and redeveloping long-established major centers. In addition, local government land use policies should allow a mix of housing types as recommended under Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 near major economic activity centers to promote accessibility between housing and jobs.

Governmental and Institutional Land

VISION 2050 recommends that new governmental and institutional developments, such as schools and libraries, be provided to meet the needs of the Region's planned population. VISION 2050 also envisions a system of major governmental and institutional centers throughout the Region, including: county courthouses and administrative offices, State and Federal office buildings, medical complexes,⁴ universities,⁵ technical colleges, and major cultural centers.

³ Single-family homes on one and a half-acre to just under five-acre lots.

⁴ Includes medical centers with 600 or more beds.

⁵ Includes institutions with accredited bachelor's degree programs that have a total enrollment of 4,500 or more students.

- **Recommendation 1.8: Provide new governmental and institutional developments in mixed-use settings**
VISION 2050 recommends that new governmental and institutional uses occur in mixed-use settings to the greatest extent possible to be accessible to the greatest number of residents possible.

Transportation, Communication, and Utility Land

VISION 2050 envisions that land devoted to transportation, communication, and utilities will increase due to land needed for streets and highways, airport expansions, and utility facilities.

Recreational Land

VISION 2050 recommends an expansion of recreational land based on park site acquisition and development proposals set forth in county and local park and open space plans and the neighborhood parks attributable to new urban development. VISION 2050 also envisions a system of 32 major parks of regional size and significance. Major parks have an area of at least 250 acres and provide opportunities for a variety of resource-oriented outdoor recreational activities.

- **Recommendation 1.9: Provide neighborhood parks in developing residential areas**
VISION 2050 recommends reserving land for parks as new residential neighborhoods are developed within urban service areas.

Environmentally Significant Land

VISION 2050 recommends minimizing the impacts of new development on environmentally significant lands. New urban development should avoid environmentally significant lands, particularly primary environmental corridors. To the extent possible, new urban development should also avoid secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas. In addition, to the extent possible, new development should attempt to preserve wetlands, woodlands, natural areas, critical species habitat sites, and park and open space sites outside environmental corridors.

- **Recommendation 1.10: Preserve primary environmental corridors**
The most important elements of the natural resource base of the Region, including the best remaining woodlands, wetlands, prairies, wildlife habitat, surface water and associated shorelands and floodplains, park and open space sites, scenic views, and natural areas and critical species habitat sites, occur in linear patterns in the landscape termed environmental corridors. The most important of these have been identified as primary environmental corridors, which are at least two miles long, 200 feet wide, and 400 acres in size. They are typically located along major stream valleys, along the Lake Michigan shoreline, or around major lakes. VISION 2050 recommends limiting development within the primary environmental corridors to essential transportation and utility facilities and compatible outdoor recreation facilities. Rural Estate residential development in upland corridors could also occur. Cluster subdivision design should be used if such development does occur. Local and county government land use policies, including comprehensive plans and land use ordinances, should incorporate this recommendation. Planned primary environmental corridors (shown on Map 1) would encompass 493 square miles in 2050, which is an increase of about 2 percent over the existing area (2010).⁶

⁶ Primary environmental corridor delineations include certain farmed floodplains and other lands that are expected to revert to more natural conditions over time, eventually becoming part of the adjacent environmental corridors as envisioned in local sewer service area plans and local and county comprehensive plans. The delineation of primary environmental corridors was modified on Map 1 to reflect re-establishment of natural resource features resulting from such restorations. VISION 2050 also

- **Recommendation 1.11: Preserve secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas**

Other concentrations of natural resources have been identified as secondary environmental corridors or isolated natural resources areas. Secondary environmental corridors contain a variety of resource features and are at least one mile long and 100 acres in area. Isolated natural resource areas are concentrations of natural resources of at least 200 feet wide and five acres in size that have been separated from the environmental corridor network by urban or agricultural use. It is recommended that local governments consider preserving secondary environmental corridors as natural, open space; or as drainage ways, stormwater detention or retention areas, or as local parks or recreation trails in developing areas. It is also recommended that local governments consider preserving isolated natural resource areas in natural open uses insofar as practicable, including incorporation as parks, protected open space, or for use as stormwater detention or retention areas where appropriate, as determined in local plans.

- **Recommendation 1.12: Preserve natural areas and critical species habitat sites**

A comprehensive inventory of the Region's natural areas and critical species habitat sites⁷ was conducted as part of the regional natural areas and critical species habitat protection and management plan. The vast majority of natural areas and critical species habitat sites are located within environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas. VISION 2050 recommends preserving all identified natural areas and critical species habitat sites.

Agricultural Land

VISION 2050 recommends minimizing the impacts of new development on productive agricultural land, including highly productive Class I and II soils (prime agricultural land) as classified by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service. Some Class I and II farmland located in the vicinity of existing urban service areas may be converted to urban use as a result of planned expansion of those urban service areas to accommodate efficient regional growth. Also, as previously discussed, a small amount of residential development is anticipated outside planned urban service areas. A total of 1,097 square miles would remain in agricultural use under VISION 2050, which is 95 percent of the existing area.

- **Recommendation 1.13: Preserve productive agricultural land**

VISION 2050 recommends a compact urban development pattern that would minimize the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses, including prime agricultural lands and other productive agricultural lands. Local and county government land use policies should incorporate VISION 2050 recommendations, which include:

- A compact development pattern for urban service areas
- Cluster subdivision design to minimize the impact of Rural Estate development on agricultural land

supports planned efforts to restore other farmland and open space to more natural conditions that result in the re-establishment of wetlands, woodlands, prairies, grasslands, and forest interiors.

⁷ Natural areas are tracts of land or water that contain plant and animal communities believed to be representative of the pre-European settlement landscape. Critical species habitat sites are other areas that support endangered, threatened, or rare plant or animal species.

- Limiting Large Lot Neighborhood and Large Lot Exurban development beyond urban service areas to commitments to such development made during the VISION 2050 planning process
- **Recommendation 1.14: Protect productive agricultural land through farmland preservation plans**
The Wisconsin Farmland Preservation law (Chapter 91 of the *Wisconsin Statutes*) requires counties to update their farmland preservation plans as one of the conditions for continued landowner participation in the Farmland Preservation tax credit program. Kenosha, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha Counties have prepared and adopted farmland preservation plans that have been certified by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. Each plan identifies land to preserve for agricultural and agricultural-related uses. Farmland preservation areas may not include any areas that are planned for nonagricultural development within 15 years after the date the plan is adopted. VISION 2050 recommends continued agricultural use in these areas. Therefore, no incremental development was allocated to farmland preservation areas identified in county farmland preservation plans outside planned urban service areas under VISION 2050.
- **Recommendation 1.15: Develop a regional food system**
VISION 2050 recognizes the relationship between the Region’s urban centers and agricultural resources. The compact development pattern recommended by VISION 2050 would help to preserve agricultural land. In addition, the Region’s urban centers provide a market for agricultural products from the Region. VISION 2050 also recognizes the need to make healthy foods accessible in all areas of the Region. A number of census tracts in the Region with concentrations of low-income households are “food deserts,” which the U.S. Department of Agriculture defines as an area where residents are more than one mile from a large supermarket or grocery store.⁸ VISION 2050 recommends developing a regional food system that connects food producers, distributors, and consumers to ensure access to healthy foods throughout the entire Region. In addition to encouraging supermarkets and grocery stores near residential areas, local government land use policies should consider allowing urban agriculture, such as community gardens on vacant lots and vertical farming. Local governments should also support farmers markets as an alternative source of healthy foods. There are a number of organizations in the Region that could partner with local governments to better connect food production, distribution, and land use policy.

Water Supply

The residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and agricultural land uses in the Region rely on two major sources of water supply: surface water supply primarily from Lake Michigan, and groundwater supplied from both deep and shallow aquifer systems. Groundwater is susceptible to depletion in quantity and deterioration in quality as a result of urban and rural development, and diversion of Lake Michigan water west of the subcontinental divide that bisects the Region is constrained by the Great Lakes Compact. The Commission recognizes the relationship between land use planning and water supply and has prepared and adopted a regional water supply plan in response.

The year 2035 regional land use plan served as the basis for the regional water supply plan. It was indicated at the beginning of the water supply planning effort that the land use plan would be amended if water resource constraints were identified due to the development pattern recommended under the land use plan. The water supply planning effort found that water supply would not be a limiting factor within the Region with respect to the recommended development pattern either east or west of the subcontinental divide. The water supply plan

⁸ At least 500 people or 33 percent of the census tract’s population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store in an urban area and 10 miles in a rural area.

also found that implementation of the recommended development pattern would have benefits, such as preserving areas with high groundwater recharge potential. This is due to the focus of the year 2035 land use plan on infill, redevelopment, and compact development within planned urban service areas. It should be noted that the forecast population under the year 2035 plan of 2,276,000 residents is about 95 percent of the forecast population under VISION 2050 (2,389,200 residents) and the forecast employment under the year 2035 plan of 1,368,300 jobs is about 97 percent of the forecast employment under VISION 2050 (1,405,700 jobs). Therefore, the regional water supply plan conclusion that water supply would not be a limiting factor within the Region with respect to the development pattern recommended under the year 2035 regional land use plan also applies to VISION 2050.

- **Recommendation 1.16: Preserve areas with high groundwater recharge potential**
VISION 2050 land use recommendations carry forward the focus on infill, redevelopment, and compact development within planned urban service areas embodied in the year 2035 regional land use plan. The VISION 2050 development pattern would result in about 96 percent of areas with high or very high groundwater recharge potential remaining in open space or agricultural use.

Sustainable Land Use

Sustainable land use concepts relate to arranging land uses and site features to protect natural resources, and avoid converting productive agricultural land and other rural areas to urban use. VISION 2050 recommendations embody sustainable land use concepts through higher-density, mixed-use development/redevelopment in compact urban service areas. In addition to preserving natural and agricultural resources, compact, mixed-use development promotes healthy communities through opportunities for more travel by transit, walking, and bicycling. Compact development is also more energy efficient and results in less greenhouse gas emissions than lower density development. In addition, the cost of extending and maintaining sewer pipes, water mains, and local roads, and providing fire protection, school transportation, and solid waste collection all decrease as density increases.

- **Recommendation 1.17: Manage stormwater through compact development and sustainable development practices**
The compact development pattern recommended by VISION 2050 would minimize impervious surface coverage of new development in the Region. Additional sustainable development measures can be used to increase stormwater infiltration and reduce negative impacts on water quality, such as green roofs, porous pavement, rain gardens, and biofiltration and infiltration facilities. VISION 2050 recommends that local and county governments incorporate the VISION 2050 land use recommendations into their land use policies to minimize the amount of impervious surfaces in the Region. Local and county governments should also encourage sustainable development practices.
- **Recommendation 1.18: Target brownfield sites for redevelopment**
VISION 2050 recommends that local governments target brownfield sites for cleanup and redevelopment as a key element in planning for the revitalization of urban areas. Tools such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and State and Federal brownfield remediation grants and loans may assist in these efforts.