



## LAND USE BASICS

Presented by Lisa Barajas and Angela Torres  
Thursday, June 16, 2016  
12:00 – 1:00 PM

**Webinar Summary:** Planning future land uses helps identify where forecasted growth will occur in your community over the next 30 years and can identify where, when, and how redevelopment opportunities exist. *Thrive MSP 2040* sets minimum or maximum density level expectations based on Community Designations. In this webinar, you will learn about how to structure your land use categories, residential densities and calculations, and supporting growth through staging development and planning for redevelopment.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

### 1. Are there any exceptions for submitting a comp plan update after 2018?

Well, the deadline is December 31, 2018. Statute does allow the Council to consider granting extensions to that deadline, but that is a formal Council action that will need to be taken, it cannot be a staff decision to do that. In the last cycle, as some of our listeners may be familiar with, we did have an extension process that required an application by the city including a resolution and a work plan to complete the remaining items for their comp plan. And that required formal Council review and action in order to approve that. Communities were allowed, I believe, between six months and up to a year extension. Of course, for communities that have a planning grant from the Council that would also impact their planning grant contract and expectations for completion as well. So there are a number of actions that are interrelated here. We're not sure if our Council would allow that, but it certainly would be an item that we would bring to our Council for their consideration. Likely, late in 2017 or early 2018.

### 2. In the last round of comp planning there was a land use staging table template to fill out. Do planners have to fill the same table out?

Well, in the last cycle we found that our staging table template was probably more confusing than helpful. So we won't have a template in this cycle. All the pieces that we covered today in the webinar can also be found in the Handbook around the minimum elements that we are looking for: the extent of planned land uses, the location, and the densities, all within those 10 year milestone timeframes. However the community wants to present that information within their plan, is completely up to them. We do have examples that we're happy to share. Local staff are welcome to contact sector reps if they want to walk through and make sure they have the right information and that it's appropriately detailed enough to do that analysis, but so long that it's in there, there is no template. If we can find it in the plan, that should be sufficient to meet that requirement.

### 3. Should the planners use or reference generalized land use in the comp plans?

That's entirely up to the community. We do provide that information at a regional scale anyway, so any information that we do have available, we want to make easy to access for the communities. As I mentioned in the webinar, there is a difference between generalized land use and existing land use, so the community really just needs to evaluate which approach they want to take and then how much information they want to provide and how they want to use that information. We do accept the generalized land use as meeting the existing land use requirements, so if that's easier for communities, we encourage them to use that resource. But again, it's entirely up to the community and the direction that they would want to take.

### 4. During the planning process many projects are not yet determined. How does that translate into defining the % residential in a mixed use district?

I point back again to what we discussed earlier in the presentation about the importance of identifying both the community's vision in a particular area like a neighborhood or a downtown area where the mixed use is being employed, and what you are trying to achieve in that particular area. This will help guide the



development decisions. Those development goals and community visions should be driving your decisions. What you ultimately choose for the % mix should be based on what you're trying to achieve in that community and as Angela mentioned, you may also point to a follow-up action item or implementation item to revisit that mix if you're still not sure. Periodically update that as development occurs.

**5. How should we calculate mixed use if we don't know if there is market for horizontal vs. vertical mixed use?**

In many parts of the region, communities are planning mixed use districts. These can include anything from downtowns, main streets, commercial nodes, or suburban town centers where cities envision a mix of residential, retail, office, and/or service commercial uses.

Designating parcels as Mixed Use can provide flexibility on how each parcel can develop. Cities determine, really though, the overall policy objectives for mixed use districts, and how that flexibility is to be applied throughout their plan. Cities can create more than one type of mixed use district, depending on the planned character or desirable density of an area. Some communities might allow either commercial OR residential. Another community might allow commercial, but only in cases where it is located on the ground floor of a residential building, for example. Other cities might even state that the high end of a density range is only possible for development that meets multiple policy objectives for that district. The policy language of your plan will articulate what a Mixed Use designation means to a property owner or prospective developer.

What we need to understand is each city's assumptions regarding how land use will eventually develop or redevelop. If Mixed Use districts allow housing, then a district requires an allowable density range. If a city believes that only a portion of the area will develop with housing, then we need an estimate of the percentage of land that will develop at that range. We multiply the acreage of areas guided for Mixed Use development or redevelopment by the estimated percentage of land that will develop as residential. We then multiply that figure by the minimum end of the density range. This is part of the calculation to determine whether your planned land use, areas identified for redevelopment, and minimum density range will accommodate your planned forecasted household growth.

**6. Do you recommend specifying Mixed Use categories? For example, "mixed use residential" or "mixed use commercial"?**

You know, I think that will really depend on what communities are trying to achieve. I mean we did see a handful of communities in the last cycle used something called "Mixed Use Residential". In some cases it would be a variety of residential housing types and it would all be residential. But in some cases it would be "primarily residential", "mixed use residential" would be, and "mixed use commercial" would be "primarily commercial". If you have those goals, we would recommend doing that to really highlight: "this is that we're trying to achieve in this district. We want this to be, say in the case of mixed use commercial, we want this to be primarily commercial development, but we want to have other mixes kind of sprinkled in as well." If that works for your community, certainly use it. But again, the requirements that we discussed earlier around that kind of proportion of uses and how they are distributed within that district, that acreage, and the density ranges - if you're including residential uses as a part of that mixed use district will all need to be specified.

**7. What happens if my city council changes over and a new idea of mixed use comes about? That is, what should planners do if the political and market forces change regarding density after approval of the plan?**

Communities have the ability to amend their plan at any point after it's adopted and approved by the Metropolitan Council. Certainly if there is a big change that makes a community reconsider how they are planning for the community, they can absolutely take another look at that. So long as the amendment meets the minimum requirements and densities that are expected for the communities, we do encourage them to use the amendment process to better prepare for changes. We certainly do not expect things to be static during the next 10 years before the next comp plan update either, so calling for those pieces and even anticipating some of those can be helpful as part of a comprehensive plan.

**8. If a community has approved their larger preliminary plat that will take several years to build up, will the Met Council allow the community to use the actual density approved for that development instead of the minimum density of the area yet to be developed?**

That's a really good question and I am glad that it was asked. This would apply both for plats where there are development approvals as well as in redevelopment areas where there's specific master planning or development approvals that have been granted but maybe phased out over 5, 10, 15 years, for example. In both cases, yes we will use your actual approved density as a part of your density calculations. I regret I didn't include any examples of that in our presentation today, but we did do that in the last cycle for some communities where they had those specifics. You should include that as a part of your plan, to say that these areas, especially when they encompass large areas or are part of a larger redevelopment, for example, include that as a part of your comprehensive plan whether it's in an appendix or in some other area so that it's known. Also, we can be sure that we're including it in a part of our density calculations at the approved densities and not at the minimum guided. We want to give you credit for the work that has been done.

**9. How is redevelopment included in density calculations?**

We do density calculations for redevelopment just as we do for Greenfield. The example that we walked through today was simplified to show that some areas were new development for residential and other areas were for redevelopment. In our example, I used that mixed-use category as a redevelopment area. Regardless of the development being a Greenfield or Brownfield, all of that land is included in the standard density calculation, netting out any of those natural features and other features that we discussed earlier. As I had noted earlier, redevelopment typically doesn't have all that much to net out since it's already been done and you're down to a more specific parcel. But if it does exist, please do net it out and let's use that net density. But the calculation is the same.

**10. Is there a minimum acreage for a property to be eligible to enroll in Ag Preserves Program?**

Well the simple answer is yes. The statute sets the minimum acreage to 80 acres in order for that property to be enrolled in the program. Reductions in that acreage would remove that property from eligibility. There is a minimum 8-year commitment to enrolling in the program as well. If a community has a property that is in Agricultural Preserves or a property owner that is interested in registering for that program, the forms and additional information can be found on the Department of Agriculture's site under the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program.

**11. Are there any suggested approaches for communities that want to forecast future employment land use?**

First, a community's employment forecasts should be referenced to anticipate how many new jobs to plan for a certain year. With those forecasts as a basis, communities can choose to consult information about average Square Footage per employee for industrial land uses as found in resources like the Planner's Estimating Guide or the US Energy Information Association to arrive at the amount of employment-based square footage needed to accommodate future employment. This square footage information, used in the context of a local community's existing land use and urban design policy and regulatory framework as related to things such as floor area ratio, parking and open space requirements, and setbacks, can then be used to roughly estimate how much land should be planned for future employment-based uses.

**12. Should a City's Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Table focus on the total acreage per land use or the change in land use between the 2030 and 2040 planning cycles?**

That's a good question, and like we discussed when we walked through the density calculations, we were looking at the land between 2030 and 2040 to support forecasted growth, so it's the change. The other thing I want to note too, is that if you are re-guiding land use, for example maybe you have an area right now that is guided for low-density residential, and you want to change it to medium-density residential, then we will include that change as well. We want to be sure that anything that is newly guided to support growth in the next cycle is counted as a part of that density calculation. That being said, any areas that are not changing, we're not counting in your density calculation. That's already considered approved, we've reviewed that at the Council when we approve that as a part of authorizing your community to put that plan into effect. So again,

focus on the change - the acreage of change in there because that is the amount of land we are going to be looking at for that density calculation.

**13. Will this presentation be available on the website? Maybe a summary of the Q&A as well?**

If you would like to view today's presentation again, we will be posting the video, presentation slides with annotations, and a summary of the Q&A (including questions we didn't get to) on the [PlanIt](#) page of the [Local Planning Handbook](#). We will be posting all of the webinars throughout 2016 on the website as well.

Please send additional questions or comments to [angela.torres@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:angela.torres@metc.state.mn.us).