

2025

CASCADE VILLAGE AREA PLAN

CASCADE TOWNSHIP, MI

April 16th, 2025 - Draft

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the steering committee members, stakeholders, community members, staff, and officials who invested their time and expertise in the creation of this Village Area Plan for the future of Cascade Township.

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



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01

Project Overview

01

Project Overview

OVERVIEW

In early 2024, Cascade Township engaged OHM Advisors to develop a strategic Area Plan aimed at identifying and analyzing key initiatives in the heart of the community. These initiatives are designed to support the community's efforts in fostering purposeful residential and commercial growth, ensuring safe and accessible connections within the area, enhancing local parks, and preserving the small-town charm that residents cherish.

The plan builds upon existing plans and proposed projects while working closely with other consultants who provide essential planning and design services for the village. This collaborative effort, involving the Downtown Development Authority, local staff, leadership, and elected and appointed officials, aims to create a comprehensive and visionary approach. It's important to note that the concepts unveiled in this planning study are suggestions intended to illustrate how these areas in the township might be redeveloped in the future, not proposed developments. It is intended to guide both public and private investments in the Cascade Village core over the next five to ten years.

PLANNING PROCESS

A customized three phase planning process was designed to complete the area plan. The process was iterative; each stage built on and informed the next step. Each phase is listed and described below:



Phase 1: Explore

In this initial step, the project team performed a detailed analysis of the existing conditions and worked closely with local stakeholders and the client team to hold a preliminary visioning session. This session established the framework for the study area and explored potential priorities concerning design, development character, and implementation.



Phase 2: Plan

This phase built upon the energy and design direction established in the first phase to finalize a vision for the plan. The project team developed three concepts with varying levels of development intensity and reviewed them with both the project team and the community to identify a preferred concept.



Phase 3: Develop

In the final phase of the project, the planning team further explored the preferred development concept and outlined priority projects to achieve the community's vision. Finally, the team completed the document and is preparing for the next steps to implement key initiatives.

KEY PLANNING ELEMENTS

The plan combines the findings from an analysis of existing conditions, guidance from the steering committee, and feedback from the community. It incorporates development principles that reflect the values and goals of the Cascade Township community. This integration has informed the creation of the Plan Framework, including key recommendations and development concepts. The complete plan will help define the character of future developments and shape the heart of the township for years to come.

The Plan Framework defines four key elements of the project that the recommendations look to achieve. These include maintaining an iconic riverfront, offering safe connections for non-motorized and motorized users, creating an energetic and unique village center, and promoting the brand and image of the community through thoughtful placemaking. These elements guided all recommendations and design concepts and ensured that this process was rooted in the values of the Cascade Township community.



MAINTAINING AN
ICONIC RIVERFRONT
PARK



PROMOTING A SAFE
AND CONNECTED
STREETSCAPE



CREATING A
VIBRANT, MIXED-USE
VILLAGE CENTER



BOASTING AN
AUTHENTIC IMAGE
AND BRAND

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN



This Plan is a living document which should be reviewed annually and updated periodically. The township will oversee the plan implementation and coordinate the efforts of the parties identified as being responsible for its implementation. As conditions change and various sections of the plan are implemented, the township might find additional projects and/or strategies with which to achieve its desired goals and objectives. Specifically the plan achieves the following:

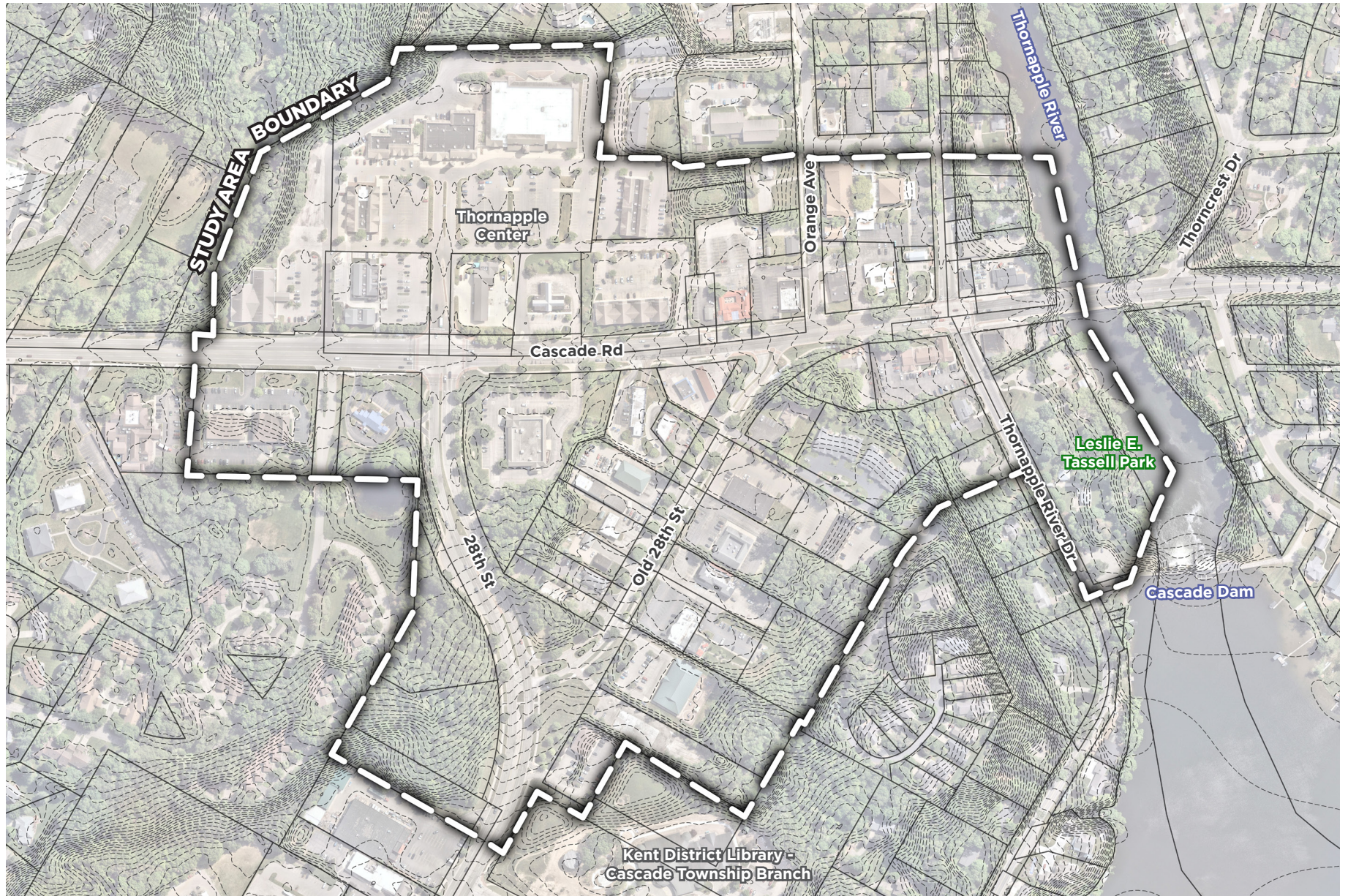
- » **Prioritizes key community initiatives** – what does the community want to do?
- » **Advises future policy decisions** – how can local policymakers create the opportunity?
- » **Sets expectations for future improvements** – how does the township set the standard the community wants to uphold?
- » **Guides future public sector investment** – how can the township set the stage for future opportunities? (local, state, + federal funding)
- » **Informs future private sector investment** – how can the township attract and protect investment?



02

Creating the Framework

Study Area Map



STAKEHOLDER SESSION

In Spring 2024, the project team convened with the client team and a group of dedicated local stakeholders, each representing diverse backgrounds and interests within the community, for a visioning session. The meeting outlined the scope of the project and presented existing conditions data, including demographics, zoning, land use, natural features, and utilities. Following this introduction, participants broke into smaller groups to engage in a visioning exercise alongside the project team. Stakeholders from the arts, development, local government, business, and parks communities provided valuable feedback that laid the groundwork for defining the project framework.



***This Page:** Assortment of images of the Visioning Session in action. From sketching on maps, selecting precedent images, and discussing a plan program, the feedback will help the project team establish a draft area plan framework.*

Community Impressions

The project team presented demographic data and key maps to the stakeholders to provide a basis for future design. Key data points included population and growth statistics, median age, average household size, median household income, median home value, owner-occupied percentage, key job sectors, and educational attainment. Other key maps shown included existing land use, zoning, village ownership, topography, parks, traffic counts, bike and pedestrian network, and utilities. The following points are key takeaways across the existing conditions that provide a basis for identifying key recommendations and the plan vision.



PROXIMITY TO NATURAL FEATURES: CONTINUE TO LEVERAGE

The presence of a river within a community is a rare and valuable feature. The client team acknowledges that promoting access to the water, improving existing green spaces, and identifying new areas for recreation are important themes that residents and visitors highly value.



AVAILABLE QUALITY OF LIFE AMENITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE: UPGRADE AND SUPPLEMENT INTO THE FUTURE

The community already has quality-of-life amenities and infrastructure in place, so there's no need to start from scratch. Instead, the focus should be on improving and expanding the existing networks as development moves forward.



APPROPRIATE LAND USE AND CHARACTER: BUILD UPON EXISTING

The current downtown area is generally functioning well. It includes a variety of retail tenants catering to both motorized and non-motorized residents and visitors. Additionally, there is a riverside park. While some areas within the study area may need improvement, the composition of the area overall is well-suited to build on.



NEW DEVELOPMENT: POLICY AND ZONING UPDATES COMING TO CURRENT PUD

A new, forward-thinking Form Cased Code for the township is on the horizon, as antiquated methods of zoning and zoning changes have resulted in the downtown core being zoned PUD (which has its own advantages and disadvantages). Local staff and another consultant team are undergoing a process to create these updates concurrent with this area plan process, and the teams will work in tandem with the findings and goals to ensure that recommendations are aligned.



STEADY POPULATION GROWTH: MAINTAIN CHARM

Over the past 20 years, Cascade Township has experienced steady development and growth while retaining its charm. This intentional growth has established Cascade Township as a leading community in the region, known for its excellent schools, access to nature, and small-town atmosphere.



HEALTHY AND DIVERSE ECONOMIC SECTORS: CONTINUE TO BUILD UPON

The township's job market is not dominated by a single economic sector, which makes the local economy diverse and stable in both the short and long term. Additionally, the community has a very high level of educational attainment, with nearly 90% of the population having at least some post-secondary education (44% bachelor's degrees/26% master's degrees).



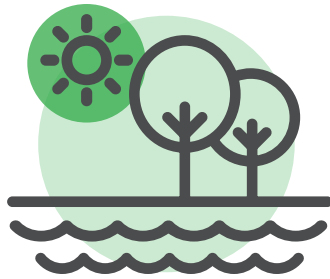
COMPETITIVE HOUSING MARKET: CONTINUE GROWTH

Average home values indicate a competitive housing market due to factors such as quality schools and access to nature. However, the data on average age and owner-occupied housing suggests that this is true mainly for the single-family housing market. We can conclude that while there are housing options for families, there are not many other options for smaller units or rentals that would appeal to young professionals or accommodate seniors who want to age in place.

FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS

A framework plan and map were developed based on insights gathered from the analysis of existing conditions and input from key stakeholders. These elements represent key themes and areas of focus identified during the process and serve as the ‘north star’ of the plan and its recommendations. The following section outlines the key framework elements, along with the associated plan goals and key objectives for each element. These objectives highlight areas of focus and future public and private projects aimed at advancing the overall vision for the village area and were crafted with the help of the project and client teams.

The following pages highlight those goals and objectives:



GOAL:

A destination green space along the river that offers a variety of programming.

OBJECTIVES:

- » **Supplement existing park elements and integrate new programming to improve Tassell Park** – a new central green, new multi-purpose structures, water access, improved cohesion, pathways, etc.
- » **Important to better connect to the remainder of the village to Tassell Park** – promoting greenway connections, creating new signage and wayfinding packages, adding greenspace nodes throughout the community, emphasizing key gateways, etc.



GOAL:

A safe and connected vehicular and pedestrian environment with improved streetscapes and optimized connections.

OBJECTIVES:

- » **Link the village anchors** – better connect important community destinations such as Thornapple Center, Tassell Park, and Friendship Park through updated non-motorized facilities.
- » **Explore pedestrian-oriented streetscape solutions along Cascade Road** – promote traffic calming initiatives such as improved lighting, wider sidewalks and paths, multi-modal options, intersection solutions, etc.
- » **Re-imagine Old 28th Street in tandem with potential reinvestment solutions** – opportunity to improve existing road alignment, explore new configurations such as one-way, cul-de-sac, etc.



GOAL:

A vibrant and authentic village center that supports a variety of commercial and residential uses.

OBJECTIVES:

- » **Intentional growth along the riverfront** – maintain the small-town, commercial feel and respect to nature along Thornapple River Rd.
- » **Old 28th St. Commercial District approaching the end of its life cycle** – a candidate for a re-imagined district with a mixture of residential mixed-use uses, etc.
- » **Strategic and contextual reinvestment at Thornapple Plaza** – explore the balance of public and private amenities to supplement this signature community district.
- » **Overall, remain sensitive to number units and square footage of future uses** – desire to remain authentic and not overdevelop, but explore a variety of options as it relates to development intensity, housing types, and the future residents the community aims to attract and retain.



GOAL:


Inviting and significant gateways that promote the community image and brand.


OBJECTIVES:


- » **The township-owned Tuffy site is the first impression as residents and visitors arrive in the community** – ownership and desire to create a sense of arrival and key gateway to the community makes this site a priority project and potential first step for reinvestment in the area.
- » **Continue to build on beautification efforts in the community** – promoting elements such as planters, landscaping, public art, etc.
- » **Explore incremental placemaking initiatives** – pocket parks, small plazas, tactical urbanism, etc.
- » **Take advantage of the additional gateway locations and promote natural features** – complement Friendship Park, the riverfront, and Cascade Rd with gateway improvements to boast the community image


FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS MAP

Land Use Elements


 The **Cascade Village Core** serves as the cultural heart of the Township. Development in this area should be intentional, sensitive to both scale and architecture, while preserving the small-town commercial atmosphere and respecting the nearby riverfront.


 The **Village Fringe** is a transitional area that blends auto-centric development with the village core. Development in this area should consist of a variety of uses that seamlessly integrate commercial, office, and residential spaces, moving toward the authentic center of the community.


 The **Old 28th Street District** is an area designated for future redevelopment. This development should include a mix of locally serving businesses, with a primary focus on offering various types of housing. The goal is to ensure that these housing options are in close proximity to the village core and the riverfront.

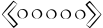
 **Thornapple Center** serves as the commercial core of the village center. The vision for this area is to develop a mixed-use district that integrates green space design, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, and thoughtful commercial infill alongside quality residential development.


Streetscape Elements

 **Primary roadways** serve as key routes for residents and visitors in the study area. While the street layout is expected to remain unchanged, enhancing safety and design elements in the pedestrian realm—like lighting, landscaping, signage, and artwork—is essential.


 **Secondary roadways** serve as local connectors throughout the community and cater to a variety of users. These roadways have the potential to adapt their existing traffic configurations to enhance pedestrian safety amenities while also promoting safer, more efficient connectivity for both motorists and non-motorists.


 **Neighborhood roadways** are designed to feature new configurations in the study area. These roads will incorporate traffic-calming elements such as narrower right-of-ways, mid-block crossings, pedestrian amenities, and on-street parking.


 **Internal roadways** are designed to improve pedestrian safety and accessibility by enhancing the existing grid within the study area. This includes features such as narrow roadways, wider commercial furnishing zones, and on-street parking.


 **Improvements at intersections** enhance key roadway points in the community. These enhancements include wider crosswalks, optimized signal timing, refuge islands, new turning angles, using traffic-calming materials, etc.


Placemaking Elements

 The **Community Anchor** is intended to be the first significant public project within the study area. The former Tuffy site has the potential to be transformed into a valuable community asset that complements Tassell Park.

 The **Primary Greenspace** in the community is Leslie E. Tassell Park. This process identified the need to enhance the park by providing more options for gathering, water access, connectivity, and passive recreation.

 **Primary Gateways** are located at key entry points for both residents and visitors into the study area, and it is essential for these areas to enhance the community's image and brand through solutions like signage, wayfinding options, and art installations.

 **Secondary gateways** foster a welcoming sense of arrival in a community through tactical urbanism, temporary art installations, and other low-cost or short-term solutions. They are typically located within a study area or along less-traveled roadways.

 **Greenspace Nodes** integrate a variety of pedestrian-friendly elements into mixed-use districts and streetscapes. These elements can include mid-block crossings, pocket parks and plazas, temporary or permanent art installations, signage, and wayfinding, among others.

Framework Map



- KEY**
- Cascade Village Core
 - Village Fringe
 - Old 28th Street
 - Thornapple Center
 - Community Anchor
 - Primary Greenspaces
 - Primary Roadways
 - Secondary Roadways
 - Neighborhood Roadways
 - Internal Roadways
 - ✶ Primary Gateways
 - ✶ Secondary Gateways
 - ✶ Intersection Improvements
 - ✶ Greenspace Nodes

COMMUNITY WORK SESSION

After establishing the plan framework, the consulting team developed a series of development concepts at various development intensities to test with both the client team and the general public. A community meeting was held to explain the planning process and the plan framework, as well as to gather feedback on a preferred development concept for further study throughout the remainder of the project. Additionally, the community provided valuable insights and direction to the planning team, helping to identify priority projects and areas of focus for future implementation and funding efforts. These included potential changes to Tassell Park, Thornapple River Drive, Old 28th St, and addressing pedestrian safety along Cascade Rd. Key information and feedback are summarized on the following pages:



Scan the QR code above to watch the October 17th, 2024 Board of Trustees Work Session which includes the presentation and discussion with the general public.



Above: Following the formal presentation, participants were able to engage in conversation with the project team regarding development concepts and draft Tassell Park improvements.

Draft Development Concepts

After establishing the framework map for the plan, the planning team developed a series of development concepts at various intensities to test with the community. The concepts described below are shown to the right:

OPTION 1:

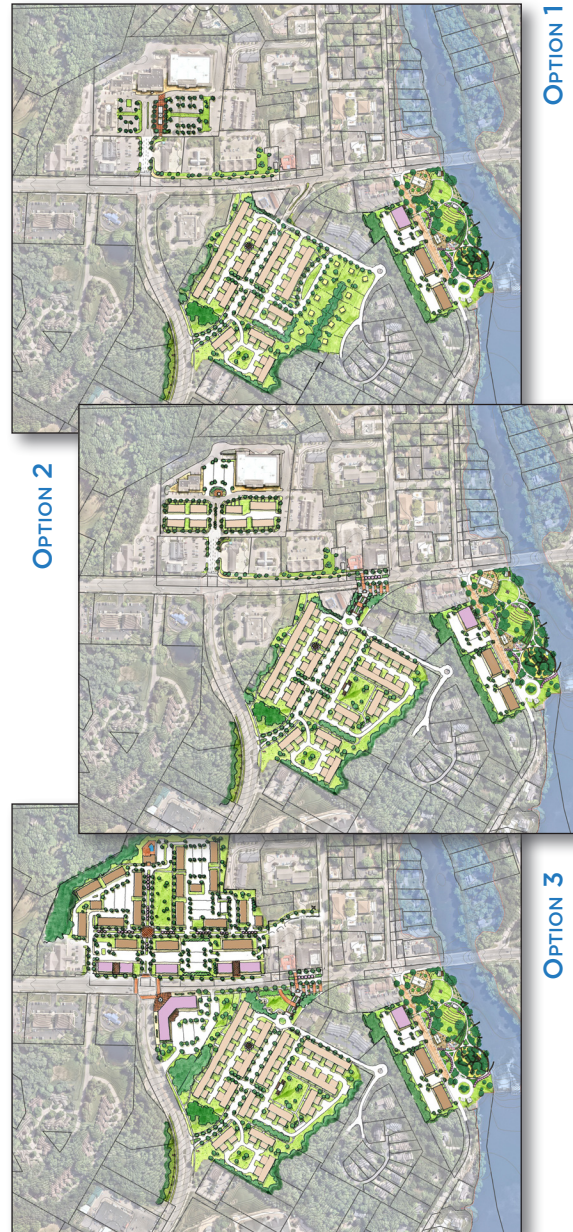
Option 1 is the least development-intensive of all three concepts, transforming the Old 28th Street area into a residential neighborhood with a variety of medium-density housing options. A multi-purpose structure for gatherings and events is proposed at Thornapple Center in place of some currently underutilized parking areas. Each concept includes a new park design for Tassell Park, along with mixed-use development shown on the east side of Thornapple River Drive.

OPTION 2:

Option 2 offers an incremental change solution for Thornapple Center. This concept includes additional mixed-use development within the center, along with enhanced placemaking features to foster community gatherings. It also suggests creating a cul-de-sac on Old 28th Street to reduce heavy traffic in the proposed residential neighborhood. Furthermore, a pocket park and a mid-block crossing are proposed to establish a key gateway and improve pedestrian safety along Cascade Rd.

OPTION 3:

Option 3 is the most transformative concept, which completely redevelops Thornapple Center into a mixed-use district. This plan includes open spaces, multi-unit residential areas, and new commercial development along Cascade Road. Additionally, other commercial parcels are considered for redevelopment to enhance safety, foster connectivity and cohesion, and improve the community's image through elevated design.



KEY FEEDBACK



- » Support for the **redevelopment of the former Tuffy site** should focus on creating a key community amenity and a welcoming gateway into the village center.
- » **Enhancing pedestrian safety is highly desired;** Thornapple River Drive and Cascade Road are prime candidates for important pedestrian-first streetscape improvements.
- » Desire to **promote intentional mixed-use development** by encouraging a diverse range of residential and commercial uses within the aging commercial areas of the village center.
- » **Tassell Park should be developed as a regional greenspace destination,** offering a variety of programs for both passive and active recreation, as well as hosting community events.



03

Preferred Development Concept

03

Preferred Development Concept

OVERVIEW

This section of the plan presents the recommended development concept for the project study area, which encompasses both the public and private realm. It's important to note that this concept is a suggestion intended to illustrate how these areas might be redeveloped. The following statements clarify the purpose and intent of the preferred concept:

- » The examples in this section are only **concepts**
- » The example **IS NOT** a proposed development
- » It highlights **new planning principles in the village center**, which is more about authentic and strategic growth, not maximum, 'cookie cutter' development
- » Like the Framework Elements, it is intended to **guide and inform future development decisions**
- » The concept sets a **proactive path forward** as it relates to the development of these high priority sites
- » It is **NOT** about zoning, but it is about **creating social and financial value** when these areas are ready to transform
- » This concept is intended to be used in tandem with the **Form Based Code** to implement the vision

THE CONCEPT

The preferred concept highlights key improvements to the study area in both the public and private realms. It also emphasizes enhancements across the key elements shown in the framework map from the previous section, which include Land Use, Streetscape, and Placemaking elements. The following section focuses on specific areas:

- » The Riverfront District
- » Old 28th St District
- » Thornapple Center

Each focus area provides an outline for development character, streetscape improvements, key greenspace elements, and character imagery to help visualize potential enhancements.



Preferred Development Concept



Riverfront District

Authentic, small-scale, mixed-use development on the doorstep of pristine natural spaces

A RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Development Character: 3-story flats and/or townhomes that demand proximity to Tassell Park.

**Note: Although these parcels are outside the new Form Based Code planning boundary, they were included in this project because they are essential for planning alongside the proposed public improvements to the park and streetscape.*

B LOCAL COMMERCIAL INFILL

Development Character: 2 to 3 story mixed-use that encompasses the authentic feel of the district.

C STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

Streetscape Character: improved pedestrian safety and connections to Tassell Park, on-street parking, and dedicated mid-block crossings to help calm traffic along Thornapple River Drive.

D TASSELL PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Greenspace Character: additional park programming along with former Tuffy site improvements transform the park into a regional destination.



A Residential Infill



Character Images

B Local Commercial Infill



C Streetscape Improvements



D Tassell Park Improvements - Concept Renderings





Old 28th St District

Re-envisioned area boasting residential development with proximity to everything Cascade has to offer.

A RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Development Character: 3-story flats and townhomes with elevated design and architectural aesthetic in a pedestrian friendly community with close proximity to the village center.

B NEIGHBORHOOD GREENSPACE

Greenspace Character: formal green that contributes to the pedestrian-friendly environment of the district with a focus on passive recreation options for relaxing and gathering in the heart of the neighborhood.

C STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

Streetscape Character: re-imagined Old 28th Street to become a pedestrian-first, cul-de-sac, that promotes safety and connectivity to the heart of the township.

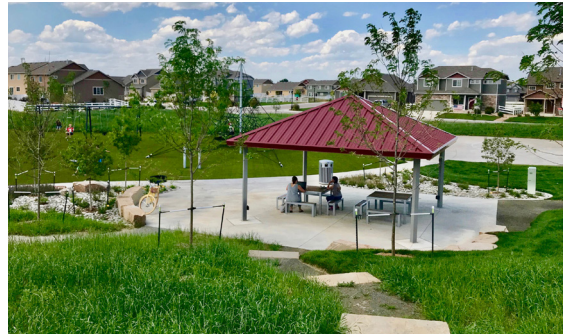


A Residential Infill



Character Images

B Neighborhood Greenspace



C Streetscape Improvements



Thornapple Center

Vibrant epicenter of the township with opportunities to live, work, and play.

A RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Development Character: 3-story flats supporting a vibrant mixed-use district.

B COMMUNITY GREENSPACE

Greenspace Character: formal community space that anchors the district with opportunity for recreation and gathering.

C INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

Streetscape Character: traffic and aesthetic features to improve pedestrian safety.

D MIXED-USE INFILL

Development Character: 3-story mixed-use development creating an authentic and energetic regional destination.

E POCKET PARK & CROSSING

Greenspace Character: tactical pocket park and community gateway with a key mid-block crossing to promote safety and connectivity.

F COMMERCIAL REDEVELOPMENT

Streetscape Character: uphold the local commercial feel through targeted improvements and development solutions.



A Residential Infill



Character Images

B Community Greenspace



C Intersection Improvements



D Mixed-Use Infill



Character Images

E Pocket Park & Crossing



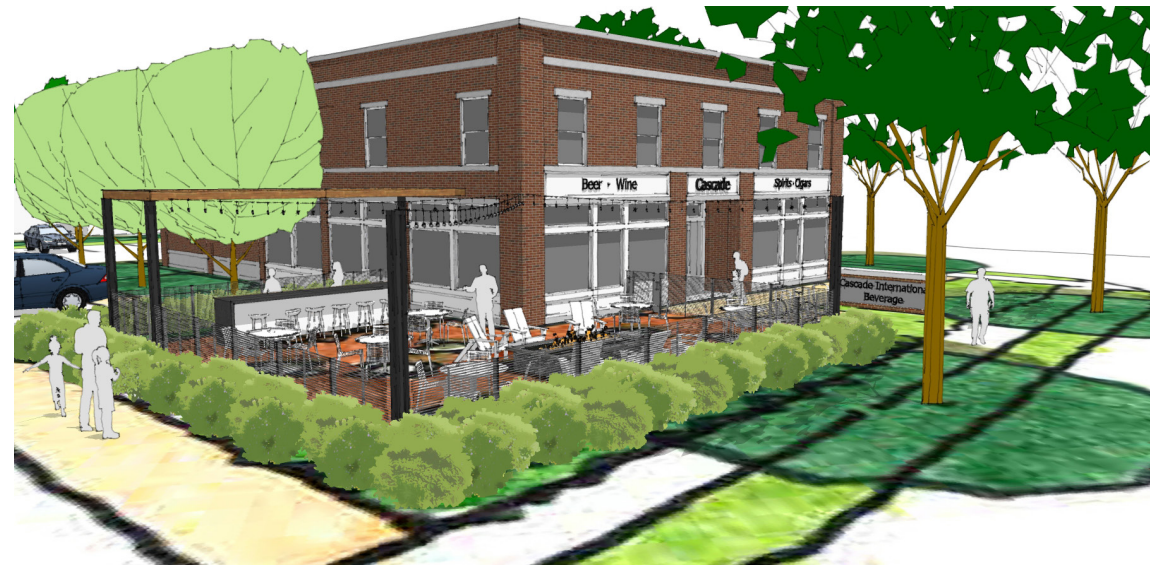
F Commercial Redevelopment



Concept Study: International Beverage

The Thornapple Center District concept presents various opportunities for development and redevelopment. These opportunities include reorienting internal streets, constructing new buildings, and adding pocket parks and pedestrian amenities, leading to significant changes in the district.

The graphics in this section illustrate a case study focused on utilizing existing buildings and making facade improvements, small additions, reconfiguring parking, and creating new outdoor or semi-public spaces to align with the future vision for the area. It is essential to use the Form Based Code for new developments and redevelopments to foster an authentic and cohesive environment.



KEY NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of this visioning process, the planning and client teams successfully identified a vision for future redevelopment. They also recognized key initiatives for greenspace and streetscape enhancements that will advance the community through public and private partnerships and collaboration towards a shared future.

The following initiatives have been identified as priority next steps for further study, including additional preliminary engineering analyses, identifying local and regional development partners, and exploring suitable local, state, and federal funding sources for implementation.

These efforts will help ensure a strategic and well-supported approach to redevelopment. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the process aims to create sustainable and impactful community improvements.

A

UTILIZE THE TOWNSHIPS NEW FORM BASED CODE TO IMPLEMENT THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT VISION

The Form Based Code provides the Township, along with current and prospective property owners, with clear guidelines for future development, streetscape improvements, public space enhancements, and more. This plan should be used alongside the Form Based Code to chart a clear course for the future.

B

RECONFIGURE THORNAPPLE RIVER DRIVE TO PROMOTE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND CONNECTIVITY

Thornapple River Drive serves as a vital connector in the Township, running alongside the Thornapple River. The section from Cascade Road to Tassell Park requires traffic calming and safety initiatives to reduce speed and create a more comfortable experience for residents and visitors.

C

RE-IMAGINE LESLIE E. TASSELL PARK

Tassell Park is a local gem that has the potential to become a regional destination for various programs and events. The next crucial steps in this process involve finalizing the schematic design outlined in this plan, and progressing into design development, then outlining a funding strategy.

D

COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS TO STUDY A MID-BLOCK CROSSING ON CASCADE RD

Ensuring pedestrian safety along Cascade Rd is crucial for the success of this re-imagined study area. This important initiative requires collaboration with local transportation groups and organizations to develop a clear plan for establishing a safe mid-block crosswalk at this key community gateway.

E

IDENTIFY KEY STREETScape AND PROPERTY ACQUISITION STRATEGIES TO TRANSFORM OLD 28TH ST

The future of the Old 28th Street District relies heavily on the configuration of Old 28th Street. Regardless of the future configuration, this district has been recommended to transform into a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. Identifying key properties and communicating the vision to potential developers are initial steps toward implementation.

F

PRESENT THE CONCEPT AND VISION TO POTENTIAL DEVELOPERS AND THORNAPPLE CENTER PROPERTY OWNERS

Redeveloping this center is an essential part of the overall development plan. The next crucial step is to present this vision to the private sector and assess their interest in pursuing transformation. This will help engage property owners and developers in creating a clear and realistic pathway for future progress.

Key Next Steps Map





04

Appendix

04

Appendix

OVERVIEW

The plan appendix contains the follow supplemental documents:

- Stakeholder Summit Presentation (*April 2024*)
- Steering Committee Presentation (*August 2024*)
- Board of Trustees Work Session Presentation (*October 2024*)