

# Envisioning Growth

Community Development Committee

Holly Leaf, Urban Design Planner

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May 4, 2026



# What is urban design?

**A multidisciplinary field concerned with the built environment of the public realm**

The art of making places



# Envisioning Growth Goals



# Support growing communities



**Help local communities** plan for minimum density requirements

**Foster shared understanding** of residential density between Met Council, local governments, and community members throughout the region

# Advance Imagine 2050 goals



**Encourage compact development** and the creation of “missing middle” housing in the region

**Advance efficient and orderly development** within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA)

**Related policies:**

Land Use Policy 2: Efficient land use and density

Housing Policy 5: Connected housing and neighborhoods

# The Toolkit



# The toolkit focuses on where most growth will happen



**61% of regional growth of households is forecast to occur in Suburban and Suburban Edge communities**

Community Designation	Forecast Added Households, 2020 to 2050	Percent of Regional Growth in Households, 2020 to 2050
Urban	76,509	23.6%
Urban Edge	30,956	9.5%
<b>Suburban</b>	<b>72,971</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
<b>Suburban Edge</b>	<b>125,605</b>	<b>38.6%</b>

# Who will use the toolkit?

## Toolkit Users

- Local government planning staff
- Met Council staff

## Audiences

- Local decision-makers
- Community members
- Developers
- Local government planning staff



# Project Goals



## What questions are we trying to answer?

“We need tools to visualize density”



“How can we envision the growth of our communities?”

1. What kind of neighborhoods do communities want?
2. What housing types can be utilized?
3. How can communities meet minimum density requirements?
4. What are the community-wide impacts of different neighborhood patterns?

# Envisioning Growth Photo Library

**LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK**

Envisioning Growth Photo Library

This photo library contains street-level photography of residential neighborhoods in the Twin Cities. The locations were selected to provide a wide variety of housing types, density levels, and communities. The photos are available for use by anyone.

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All Densities | five to twelve units | All Community Designations | All Counties | Clear all filters

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# Housing Types & Density

**HOUSING TYPES & DENSITY**

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

Across the spectrum of housing density, there are a variety of housing forms that are well suited to meet the needs of community residents. It is important to understand the possible housing types for a given density range during the land use planning process. This guide is intended to provide an overview of housing types and density along with examples within the 7-county metropolitan region.

<b>SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED</b> <8 du/acre (or more with ADUs)	<b>DUPLEX</b> 4 to 12 du/acre	<b>TRIPLEX</b> 4 to 14 du/acre
<b>FOURPLEX</b> 4 to 20 du/acre	<b>COTTAGE COURT</b> 4 to 20 du/acre	<b>TOWNHOMES</b> 4 to 24 du/acre
<b>LOW-RISE APARTMENTS</b> 12 to 30 du/acre	<b>MID-RISE APARTMENTS</b> 20 to 60 du/acre	<b>HIGH-RISE APARTMENTS</b> 40+ du/acre

# Calculating Net Density

**CALCULATING NET DENSITY**

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

Understanding how the Met Council calculates net density is key to meeting minimum density requirements and ensuring that approved subdivisions are consistent with local land use plans.

**NET DENSITY**  
Net density is calculated as the number of housing units planned to be built in a given area divided by the net area.

**HOUSING UNITS**  
The number of housing units includes all units expected to be built.

**NET AREA**  
Net area is the combined acreage of all land that encompasses the planned housing units, including some public land like local roads. Some areas of land are not included in the net area. See the table below for what land is and is not included in the net density calculations.

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NOT INCLUDED in net density calculations	INCLUDED in net density calculations
Water bodies, wetlands (including buffers, and publicly-owned and maintained stormwater ponds)	Water bodies, wetlands, and stormwater management
Arterial and collector rights-of-way	Road rights-of-way
Publicly-owned parks, trails, open space, and conservation/preservation easements	Parks, open space, & conservation easements
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Areas that are undevelopable due to protection under state or local ordinances including floodplains, steep slopes, and bluffs. Areas that are undevelopable due to insufficient depth to bedrock or water table.	Other undevelopable land
	Setbacks from water bodies and wetlands, privately/HOA-owned stormwater ponds
	Local road rights-of-way including sidewalks and boulevards
	Private/HOA-owned parks, trails, open space, and conservation/preservation easements
	Drainage and utility easements along lot lines

# Distribution of Development

**DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT**

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

Net density supports orderly, efficient growth by ensuring regional services—such as wastewater, highways, transit, parks, and redevelopment programs—are cost-effective and sustainable. Communities in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA) receive these higher-level services and are expected to plan for development at densities that economically support them. The Metropolitan Council sets density expectations by Community Designation, with higher targets near transit, based on anticipated growth, market demand, existing patterns, redevelopment opportunities, and local comprehensive plans. Minimum average densities give communities flexibility in locating higher or lower density development while meeting overall regional goals.

**RESIDENTIAL DENSITY**  
Communities should carefully consider the impacts of density. Denser developments typically can have a wide range of benefits, including lower infrastructure costs, greater housing choice, visibility of multimodal transportation options including transit, and preservation of land for agriculture, natural systems, recreational use, or future development. Greater density can also support desirable amenities such as parks, trails, retail, and dining, which may not be possible at lower densities. However, many residents may have a preference for lower density development, citing concerns such as traffic congestion, neighborhood character, property values, and the environment. Proper planning and design can mitigate all of these concerns, while benefiting from the benefits of greater density.

**AVERAGE NET DENSITY**  
The minimum net density requirements are calculated as a community-wide average net density. For example, not every parcel in a Suburban community needs to meet the minimum net density requirement of 7 units per acre. Instead, all the expected new residential development in the community is averaged. Existing development is not part of the average net density calculations. For more information, see the Calculating Net Density resource on the Local Planning Handbook.

**PLANNING FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT**  
How residential density is distributed is one of the most important considerations in planning for future residential development, especially if a community is expecting MUSA expansion. Land use planning decisions today will have widespread impacts in how a community looks and functions decades from now.

**DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS**  
The remainder of this resource will explore a variety of development scenarios in a fictional community that is slated for a MUSA expansion. Several aspects of planning have been simplified, such as development phasing and market conditions, for the purpose of focusing on the distribution of development and density.

The City of Townville, MN is a rapidly-growing community on the edge of the existing MUSA boundaries. They have identified a 160 acre area at the intersection of two existing arterial roadways for a MUSA expansion by 2050. Based on population forecasts, the City must accommodate 560 new households at a minimum average net density of 3.5 dwelling units per acre. What are some ways that the City could distribute development of these residences in their Future Land Use planning? We will explore four development scenarios and discuss their impacts:

- Scenario A – Low-density single-family
- Scenario B – Low-density mixed
- Scenario C – Medium-density
- Scenario D – High-density

**Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA) Minimum Net Density Requirements**

Urban	25 units per acre
Urban Edge	14 units per acre
Suburban	7 units per acre
Suburban Edge	3.5 units per acre

**160 DEVELOPABLE ACRES**

# Envisioning Growth Photo Library



# Envisioning Growth Photo Library provides access to visual resources

**LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK**

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**Interactive and flexible** – users can find photos to use in presentations, reports, and other materials; or just explore the library

**Collaborative** – users will be able to nominate new locations and submit their own photos

**Iterative** – the library will be maintained and built upon for years to come

**Filters:**

- Net density (minimum and maximum)
- Number of housing units per structure
- Community designation
- County















# Library page

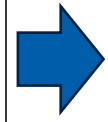
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 <p><b>57th Place N &amp; Trenton Lane N</b> 10 photos 5 du/a Plymouth Hennepin County</p>	 <p><b>57th Ave N &amp; Zachary Ln</b> 9 photos 5.5 du/a Plymouth Hennepin County</p>	 <p><b>Elm Rd N &amp; Upland Ln N</b> 9 photos 5.5 du/a Maple Grove Hennepin County</p>	 <p><b>Churchill Street</b> 11 photos 5.5 du/a Shoreview Ramsey County</p>
			



# Single Location page















## Envisioning Growth Photo Library

← Return to search

### 57th Ave N & Nathan Lane N

**Neighborhood density:** 3 dwelling units per acre  
**Housing units:** one unit  
**City:** Plymouth  
**County:** Hennepin County  
**Community designation:** Suburban

Download all



# Housing Types & Density Guide



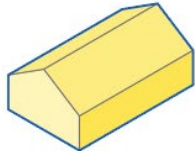
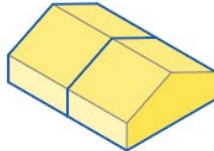
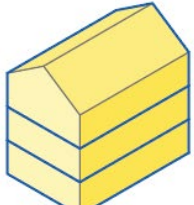
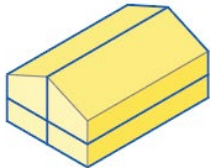
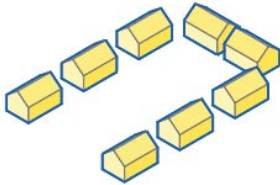
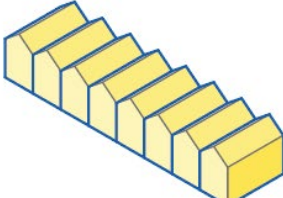
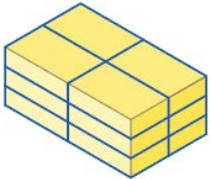
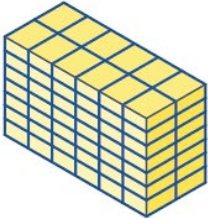
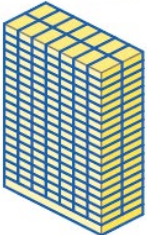
# Housing Types & Density

- **Expands thinking** around built form through diagrams and photos coupled with density figures
- **Encourages communities** to have discussions around multiple housing types
- **Companion to the Photo Library** – less flexible, more easily available out-of-the-box

## HOUSING TYPES & DENSITY

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

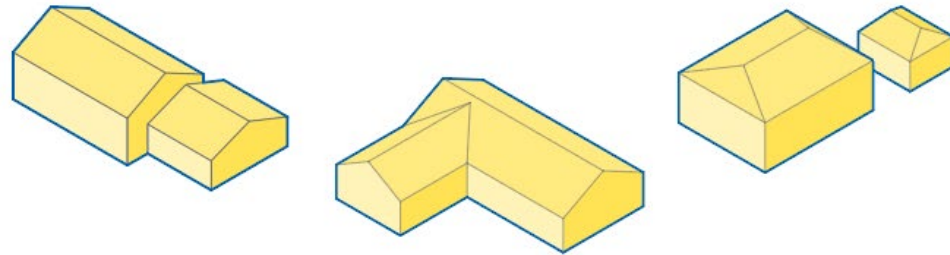
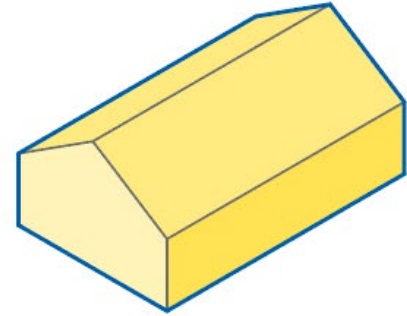
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**SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED**

<8 du/acre (or more with ADUs)

- 1 unit per parcel (or 2 with ADU)
- Low density
- Most prevalent housing type in the region
- High infrastructure costs
- No shared walls



Hugo, MN  
3.6 dwelling units per acre



Plymouth, MN  
3.7 dwelling units per acre



Maple Grove, MN  
5.5 dwelling units per acre

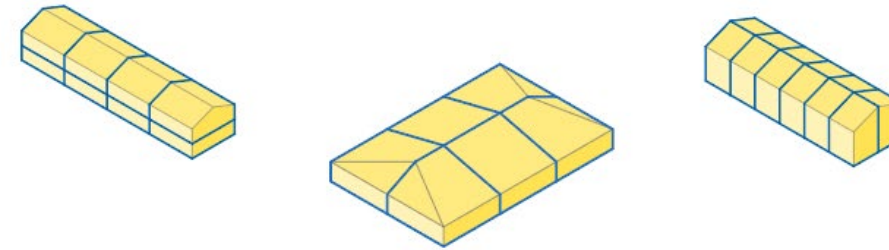
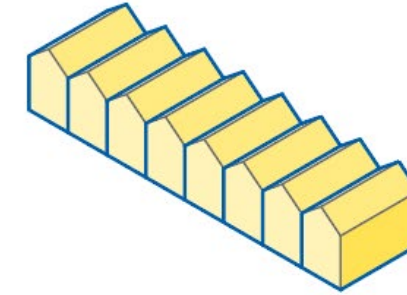


Woodbury, MN  
4.2 dwelling units per acre

**TOWNHOMES**

4 to 24 du/acre

- 4+ units attached
- Medium density
- Side-by-side (rowhomes) or stacked
- Shared walls and higher density decrease infrastructure and utility costs per unit



Maple Grove, MN  
13 dwelling units per acre



Hugo, MN  
7.5 dwelling units per acre



Shoreview, MN  
9 dwelling units per acre



Lino Lakes, MN  
13 dwelling units per acre

# Calculating Net Density Guide



# Calculating Net Density

- **Informational tool** – provides an easy-to-understand explanation of how the Council calculates net density.
- First page works as a standalone document
- The remaining pages demonstrate a fictional example of calculating net density in a small subdivision.

CALCULATING NET DENSITY
LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK






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**EXAMPLE OF CALCULATING DENSITY**

The remainder of this guide will provide a fictional example of how density is calculated.

A new subdivision is being planned in the city of Townville, MN which will feature a mix of single-family detached homes and townhomes.

The land use for this subdivision is planned for a mix of low- and medium-density residential with a range of 3 to 12 units per acre.

How can Townville planners calculate net density to ensure it meets the density requirement?



Two figures need to be determined:  
**THE NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS TO BE BUILT**  
 and the  
**NET AREA IN ACRES**

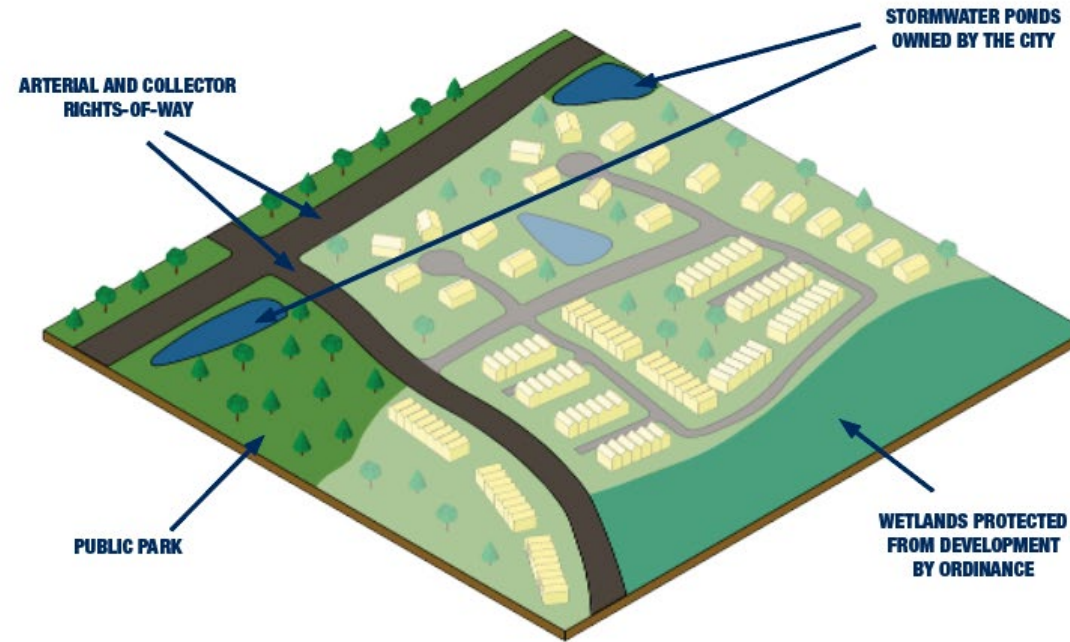
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GRAPHIC: PLAN VIEW OF SUBDIVISION

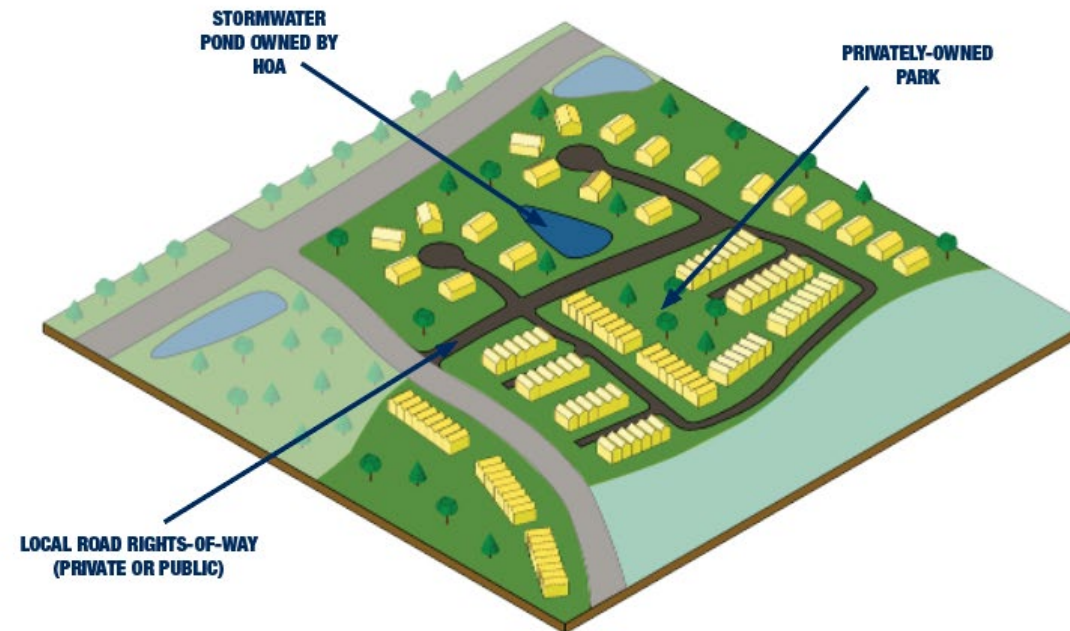
The number of housing units in the subdivision plan includes 20 single-family homes and 96 townhomes, for a total of 114 housing units.

The subdivision encompasses about 33 acres of land. Before “netting out”, that would amount to a gross density of 3.5 units per acre. The single-family portion would be under the 3 units per acre minimum in the land use plan. To find the net area, we need to subtract all the land that is netted out.

**WHAT IS EXCLUDED?**



**WHAT IS INCLUDED?**



# Distribution of Development Guide



# Distribution of Development

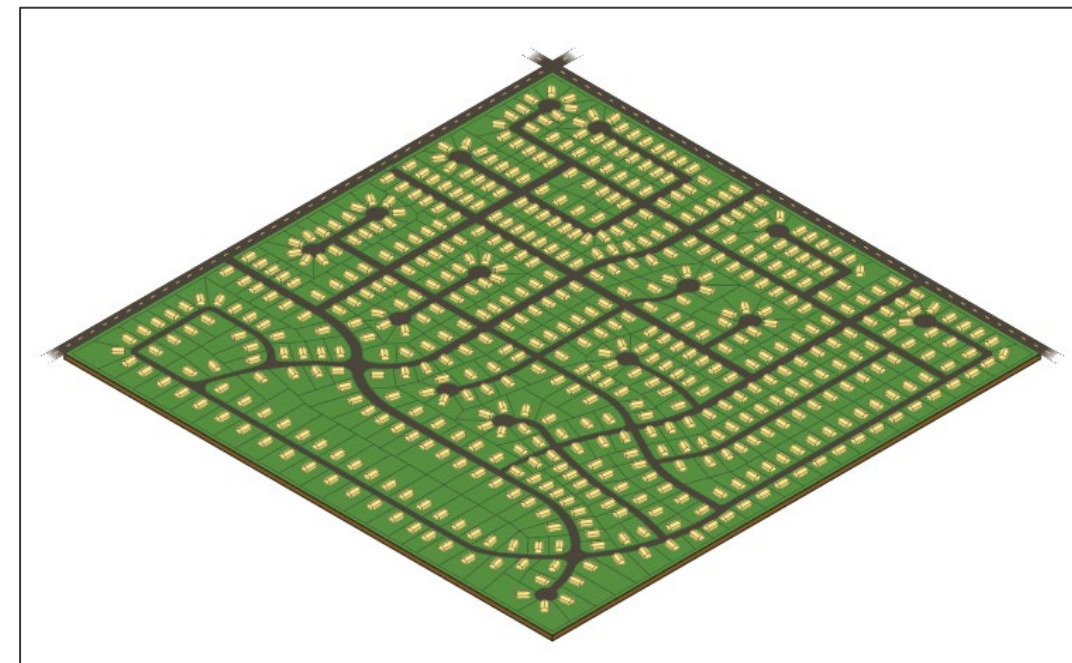
## Four fictional development scenarios

How could a community distribute the same number of houses in on the same piece of land? Imagining greenfield development in a suburban edge community.

1. Low-density, all single-family detached
2. Low-density, mixed housing types
3. Medium-density
4. High-density

## Impacts of Development Patterns

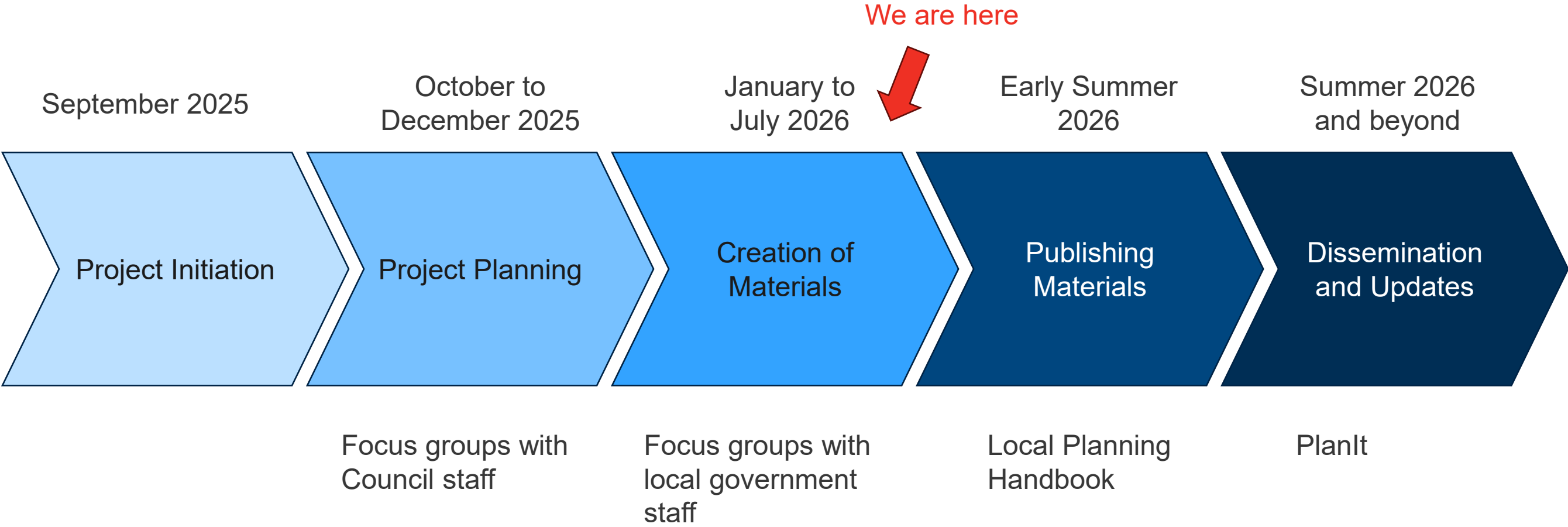
- Land preservation – agriculture, natural systems conservation, future development
- Infrastructure efficiency – utilities and roads
- Housing choice and affordability
- Transportation options – transit and walkability



# Next Steps



# Project Timeline



# Discussion questions & feedback

1. Who else might find these tools useful that we may not have identified?
2. Do you have any other ideas for toolkit items that could help communities envision growth?



Thank you

## Holly Leaf

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Community Development

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