



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

APPENDIX A

eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

McLean County

PREPARED BY

Juliana Vidal
Director of Mission and Equity Consulting
YWCA McLean County

PREPARED FOR

McLean County Regional Planning Commission





1. BACKGROUND

A Call for Increased Community Engagement

On June 24th, 2025, the McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) opened a public review period for its draft Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP). As community members became more familiar with the draft, a number began to voice concerns about proposed land use changes and designated future growth areas—particularly in locations where those changes were associated with perceived impacts to their homes, property, and neighborhoods. In addition, stakeholders raised objections to the planning process itself, citing a lack of early engagement and limited opportunities for public and rural municipal input prior to the release of the draft. Of those that provided comments, many felt that key decisions had been made in advance, without sufficient community consultation, leading to questions about transparency and representation [1].

In response to this wave of feedback, MCRPC committed to expanding opportunities for stakeholder input. The initial public comment period was extended by approximately one month (from July 24th to September 1st, 2025), and five open houses were scheduled in strategic locations across McLean County to provide dedicated opportunities for public dialogue with planners and key staff from MCRPC, the City of Bloomington, the Town of Normal, and McLean County.

Additionally, a second round of public engagement was held for input on the revised or second draft version of the SLUP. This second round included two additional open houses and a public comment period that lasted from September 22nd to October 22nd, 2025. These initiatives complemented the public outreach efforts already in progress, as described in Section 2.

[1] Here, it is important to note that the initial tone and focus of public feedback was largely shaped by the widespread misconception that land use planning is equivalent to zoning. This conflation was evident in many public comments, which explicitly referred to areas as having been re-zoned in the Future Land Use Map, even though the Strategic Land Use Plan does not, in itself, enact zoning changes.

The MCRPC and YWCA McLean County Partnership

Alongside these expanded outreach efforts, MCRPC welcomed a collaboration with the **YWCA McLean County** (YW) to bring additional transparency and expertise to the engagement process. Known for its long-standing presence in the community and a broad focus on racial justice, civil rights, and socioeconomic advancement for systems-impacted individuals, the YWCA McLean County's mission to eliminate racism and empower women while promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all positioned the organization as a trusted partner to support MCRPC during the expanded public engagement process. While the YW is best known for its direct services—from early childhood education to crisis response and reentry support—it also advances its mission through programs and partnerships shaped by the community's needs.



Included within these initiatives is the Mission and Equity Consulting department which extends the YW's work into the civic and institutional landscape by applying robust social science methodology to support equity-informed community engagement and outreach efforts. It was within this context that the Director of Mission and Equity Consulting was brought into the community engagement process to serve in an independent, non-contracted role. The Director attended each open house session to document community feedback and key themes that emerged from public input. Following each open house, the Director collaborated with planning staff to identify common community concerns, misunderstandings, and opportunities to directly incorporate feedback within the Strategic Land Use Plan. These debriefs, in combination with the following summary document, informed the iterative revision process for the second and final draft of the plan, further equipping MCRPC to address issues raised by the public while remaining grounded in the goals and constraints of the Strategic Land Use Plan.

This partnership reflected a shared effort to listen, learn, and strengthen public trust through more inclusive and transparent planning. It also provided a constructive mechanism for community concerns to be observed, synthesized, and relayed by a neutral, mission-aligned partner, reinforcing MCRPC's ongoing work to make the planning process more responsive to the community it serves.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Between May and October 2025, MCRPC undertook a multi-faceted public outreach campaign to promote awareness of the draft Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP) and solicit meaningful feedback from residents, stakeholders, and local officials. Engagement efforts were designed to be accessible and to reach community members across all of McLean County.

Original outreach activities included print and digital media coverage, targeted email communications, a series of in-person presentations and, later, open house events. To support broader public awareness, press releases announcing the launch of the draft plan and public review period were distributed to the following media outlets: 25 News/WEEK TV Newsroom, Illinois State University, The Herald Review, The Pantagraph Newsroom, WCIA Newsroom, WJBC Newsroom, WGLT Newsroom, WMBD Newsroom, and the WTVP Newsroom.

Email and social media campaigns were used to reach residents who more regularly engage with digital platforms. MCRPC distributed updates to its Constant Contact mailing list of 2,025 subscribers, and regularly posted content on its Facebook page (842 followers) and Instagram account (108 followers) to share and repost (i) requests for community feedback on the SLUP, (ii) media releases, (iii) the QR code and link to the public comment website, and (iv) links to an interactive mapping tool.

To ensure the document was accessible to residents who preferred or required a physical format, hard copies of the draft SLUP were distributed to all McLean County libraries. Each public-facing communication also included the Community Planner's phone number and email address, which provided community members with a direct, responsive channel to provide feedback, ask questions, or request additional information.

To meet residents where they were, MCRPC staff established a physical presence at community events such as the McLean County Fair, the McLean County Road Commissioners Picnic, and the Sweet Corn Circus. Staff also conducted presentations to and gathered feedback from local boards, commissions, and elected officials. While the initial development of the draft SLUP involved a limited set of stakeholders from the city, town, and county, these later outreach efforts aimed to broaden participation and provide opportunities for rural communities and smaller municipalities to engage in the planning process as well (see Figure 1).



MAY
2025

May 5th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **McLean County Zoning Board of Appeals**

1

May 6th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Regional Planning Commission Meeting**

2

June 4th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with **Bloomington Planning Commission** and during the **McLean County Regional Planning Commission Meeting**

3

JUNE
2025

4

June 5th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **Normal Planning Commission**

June 24th, 2025

MCRPC 1st Press Release - Draft Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP) Public Review Initial Launch

McLean County Government Facebook page posts about the draft SLUP initial launch

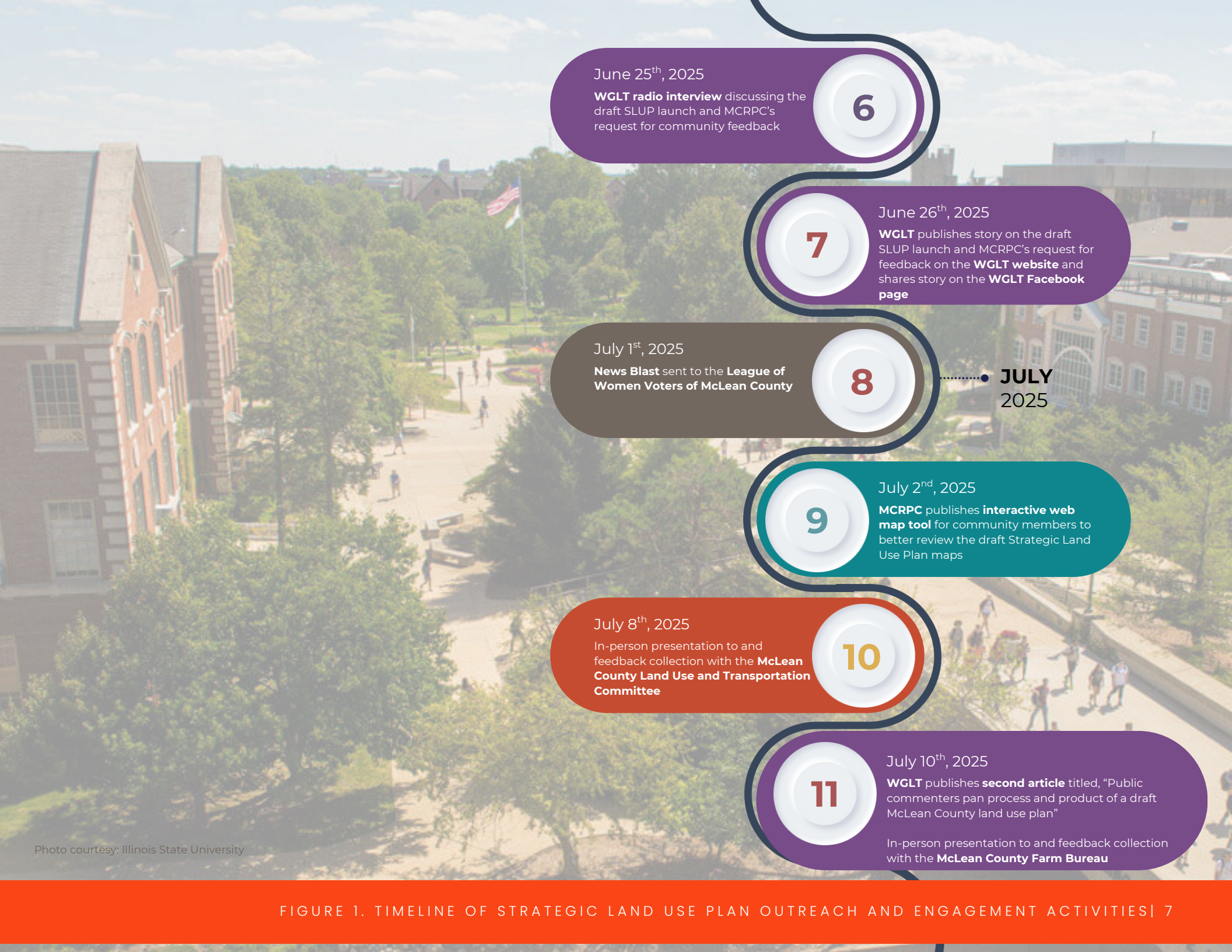
McLean County Regional Planning Commission Facebook & Instagram pages post about draft SLUP initial launch

5

June 24th, 2025 CONT.

MCRPC Constant Contact Mailing List email with information on the draft SLUP sent to **2,025 subscribers**

FIGURE 1. TIMELINE OF STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES | 6



June 25th, 2025

WGLT radio interview discussing the draft SLUP launch and MCRPC's request for community feedback

6

June 26th, 2025

WGLT publishes story on the draft SLUP launch and MCRPC's request for feedback on the **WGLT website** and shares story on the **WGLT Facebook page**

7

July 1st, 2025

News Blast sent to the **League of Women Voters of McLean County**

8

JULY
2025

July 2nd, 2025

MCRPC publishes **interactive web map tool** for community members to better review the draft Strategic Land Use Plan maps

9

July 8th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **McLean County Land Use and Transportation Committee**

10

July 10th, 2025

WGLT publishes **second article** titled, "Public commenters pan process and product of a draft McLean County land use plan"

11

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **McLean County Farm Bureau**

Photo courtesy: Illinois State University

FIGURE 1. TIMELINE OF STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES | 7

July 23rd, 2025

MCRPC 2nd Press Release - Draft Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP) **Extended Public Comment Period**

MCRPC Facebook and Instagram posts about the **Extended Public Comment Period**

12

July 23rd, 2025 CONT.

MCRPC Constant Contact Mailing List email with information on the **Extended Public Comment Period** sent to **2,025 subscribers**

WGLT publishes **third article** titled, "McLean County Regional Planning Commission revises land use plan review process"

July 23rd - 27th, 2025

MCRPC tables at the **McLean County Fair** in Bloomington to share information about the draft SLUP and gather feedback

13

14

July 25th, 2025

Draft SLUP Documentation distributed to **all McLean County libraries**

15

July 31st, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Mayors Association Quarterly Meeting**

16

August 5th, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **McLean County Land Use and Transportation Committee**

AUGUST
2025

Photo courtesy: WJBC



August 5th, 2025 CONT.
MCRPC hosts **Open House 1** at Heartland Community College in **Normal**

17

August 6th, 2025
In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Regional Planning Commission meeting**

18

August 7th, 2025
In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Road Commissioners Meeting**

19

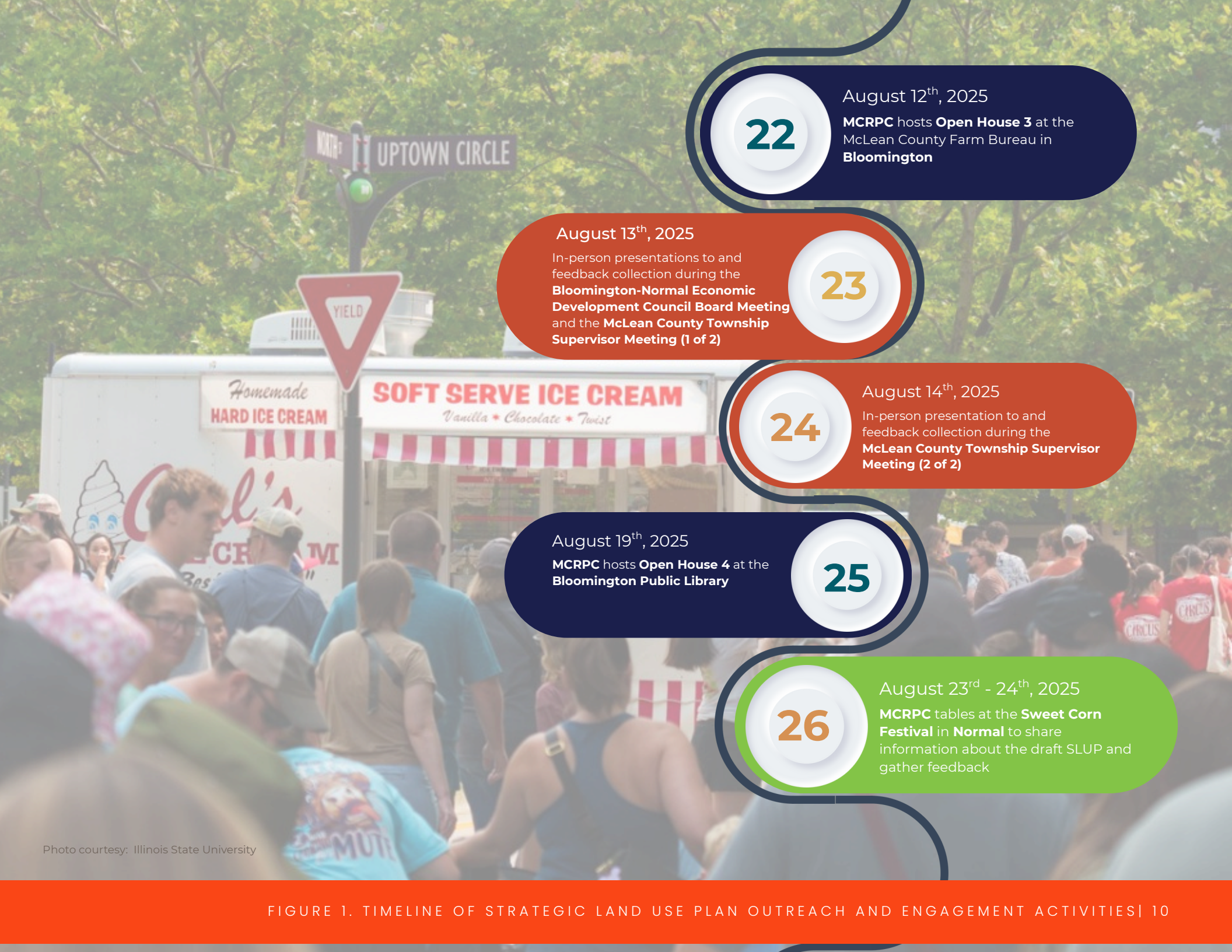
August 7th, 2025 CONT.
WGLT publishes **fourth article** titled, "First of 5 public meetings shows worry about outward expansion in McLean County's draft land use plan"

20

August 8th, 2025
MCRPC hosts **Open House 2** at Lexington Community Center in **Lexington**

21

Photo courtesy: @doorwaysofchicago



22 August 12th, 2025
MCRPC hosts **Open House 3** at the McLean County Farm Bureau in **Bloomington**

August 13th, 2025
In-person presentations to and feedback collection during the **Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council Board Meeting** and the **McLean County Township Supervisor Meeting (1 of 2)**

23

August 14th, 2025
In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Township Supervisor Meeting (2 of 2)**

24

August 19th, 2025
MCRPC hosts **Open House 4** at the **Bloomington Public Library**

25

August 23rd - 24th, 2025
MCRPC tables at the **Sweet Corn Festival** in **Normal** to share information about the draft SLUP and gather feedback

26

Photo courtesy: Illinois State University

August 27th, 2025

MCRPC hosts **Open House 5** at the Living Well United Senior Center in **Le Roy**

27

SEPTEMBER
2025

28

September 1st, 2025

Extended Public Comment Period closes

September 2nd, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection with the **McLean County Land Use and Transportation Committee**

29

September 3rd, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection during the **McLean County Regional Planning Commission Meeting**

30

September 3rd - 22nd, 2025

In-person presentation to and feedback collection from **various rural municipal townships**

31

**OCTOBER
2025**

32

September 22nd, 2025
MCRPC releases **Draft 2 of the Strategic Land Use Plan** and opens second public comment period

October 14th, 2025

MCRPC hosts **Open House 6** at the Downs Community Fire Department in **Downs**

33

October 15th, 2025

WGLT publishes **fifth article** titled. "Public gets answers, raise concerns about Mclean County Strategic Land Use plan"

34

October 16th, 2025

MCRPC hosts **Open House 7** at Heartland Community College in **Normal**

35

36

October 22nd
Round two public comment period closes

3. A QUANTITATIVE SNAPSHOT OF OPEN HOUSE ENGAGEMENT

Open House Design and Format

In response to public concern over limited early engagement, MCRPC expanded its outreach strategy to include a two-part dedicated series of open house events held throughout the month of August 2025 and, later, the month of October 2025. The first series included five open houses whereas the second series included two open houses. In both cases, open house locations were strategically selected to correspond with the major quadrants in McLean County as well as with the logical groupings of the nine designated future growth areas found in the draft Strategic Land Use Plan (see Figure 2). These sessions were designed to provide residents from across McLean County with a more direct and accessible opportunity to learn about Draft 1 and 2 of the Strategic Land Use Plan, ask questions, and share public comment.

To broaden geographic reach and accommodate residents' availability outside of standard working hours, open houses were held across Le Roy, Lexington, Downs, Normal, and Bloomington, Illinois. In the first round, open houses were held from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. In the second round, open houses were held between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Each open house was divided into two sessions, with a brief 15-minute educational presentation on the SLUP scheduled at the beginning of each hour followed by public comment and dialogue. If no new community members arrived for the second hour, the public comment period continued uninterrupted. If new attendees did arrive, those who had

attended the first session were invited to stay while the presentation was repeated for newcomers, after which public comment session resumed with all present.

Each open house offered an informal setting where participants could engage directly with planning staff and representatives from MCRPC, the City of Bloomington, the Town of Normal, and McLean County government. This offered a level of dialogue beyond what was available through the online public comment form.

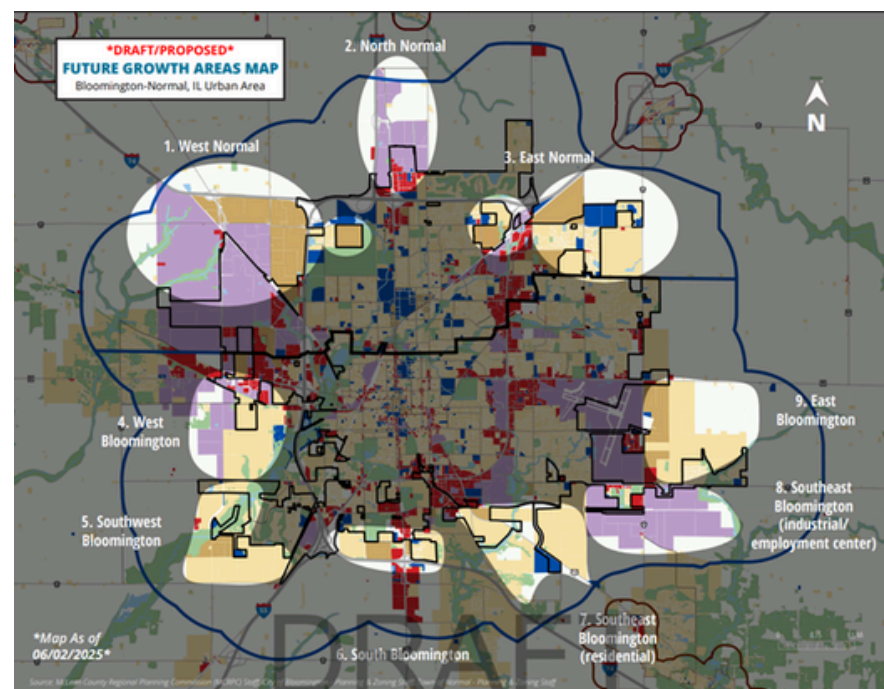


Figure 2. Future Growth Areas Map from the Strategic Land Use Plan (first draft).



Photo courtesy: McLean County Farm Bureau

Open House Attendance, Demographics, and Geographic Reach – Round 1

In total, **74 attendees** were counted across the five open house events, though only 60 individuals signed in. Five written comments were submitted during the open house sessions, and seven additional comments were submitted via email. These attendance figures exclude MCRPC and partner staff and may underrepresent actual participation as not all attendees chose to sign in.

Demographic observations suggest that open house attendees were predominantly white, aged 40 years and above on average, and included a sizable number of individuals who self-identified as residents of rural areas in McLean County. Based on visual observation alone, the perceived gender representation was relatively balanced across the five open houses (see Table 1).

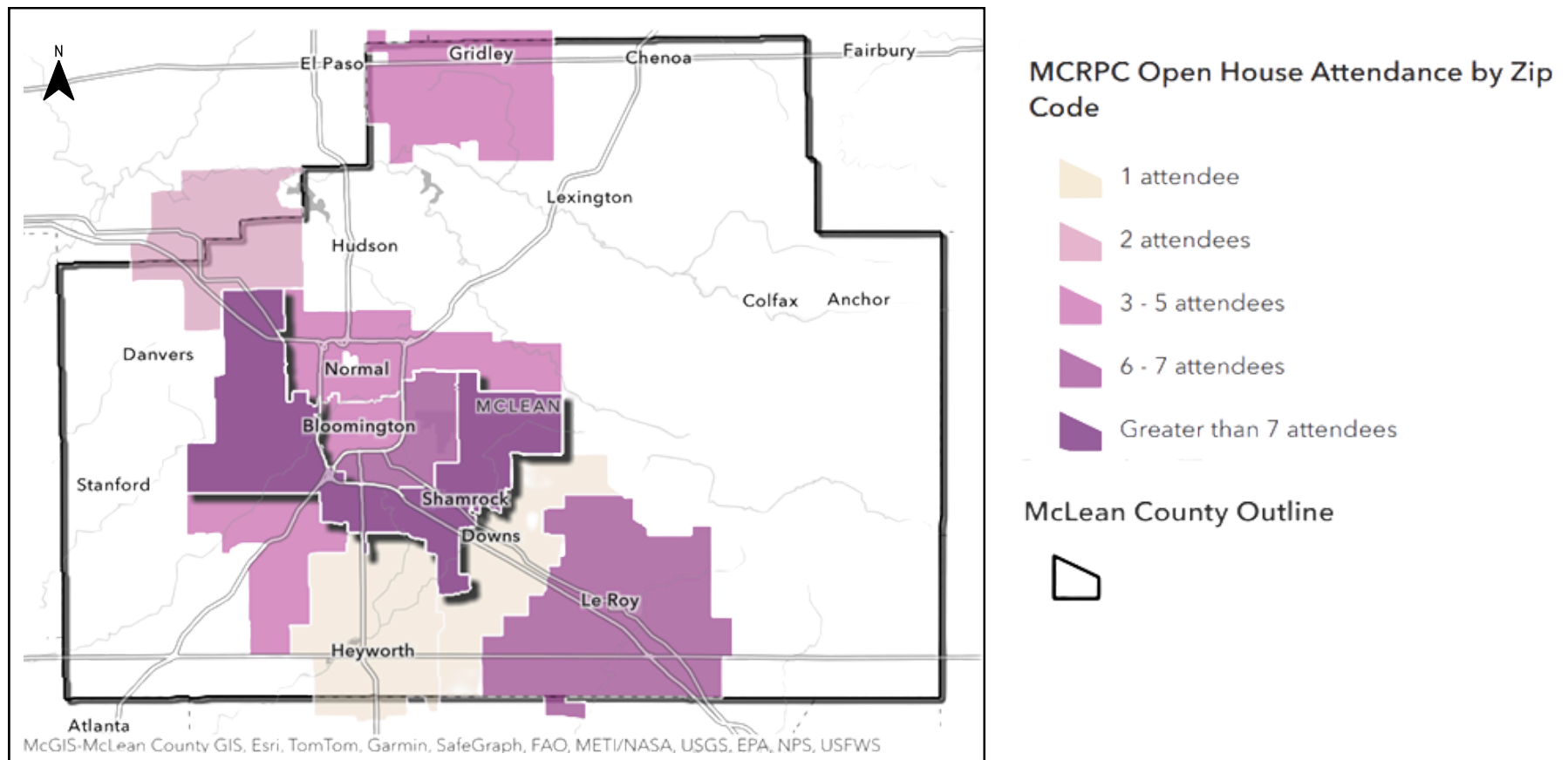
Open House 4 had the highest turnout, with 22 community members in attendance, whereas Open House 2 had the lowest, with only 2 attendees. Given that attendance at the other open houses ranged from 15 to 22 participants, the discrepancy in attendance during Open House 2 could be partially attributed to its scheduling on a Friday evening.



Open House	Location	Week-day	Female attendance	Male attendance	TOTAL
1	Heartland Community College <i>Normal, IL</i>	Tuesday	6	9	15
2	Lexington Community Center <i>Lexington, IL</i>	Friday	1	1	2
3	McLean County Farm Bureau <i>Bloomington, IL</i>	Tuesday	11	9	20
4	Bloomington Public Library <i>Bloomington, IL</i>	Tuesday	12	10	22
5	Living Well United Senior Center <i>Le Roy, IL</i>	Wednesday	8	7	15
TOTAL			38	36	74

TABLE 1. OBSERVED OPEN HOUSE ATTENDANCE BY LOCATION, WEEKDAY, AND PERCEIVED GENDER | 15

In addition to headcounts, MCRPC collected ZIP code data at each of the open houses in the first round of outreach to better understand where participants were coming from. ZIP code data collected at the open house events reflects participation from a geographically diverse cross-section of McLean County. Out of the 60 attendees who provided ZIP code data, **the most represented ZIP code was 61705 (24 attendees or 40%)**, followed by 61704 (7 attendees or 12%), 61752 (6 attendees or 10%), 61701 (5 attendees or 8%), 61761 (5 attendees or 8%), and 61772 (5 attendees or 8%). Additional participation came from 61744 (4 attendees or 7%), 61725 (2 attendees or 3%), 61736 (1 attendee or 2%), and 61745 (1 attendee or 2%). Refer to Figure 3.



An Addition to Open Houses: Round 1 Online Public Comment Submissions

While round 1 of the open house sessions captured in-depth, place-based feedback, online submissions through the Strategic Land Use Plan public comment form provided an additional channel for residents across the county to engage with the planning process.

The public comment website received a total of 83 electronic submissions via an online form which included a range of questions regarding the first draft of the plan. Among these, respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1 (not very satisfied) to 5 (very much satisfied). **The first-round survey results showed that the majority of respondents (58%) rated their satisfaction with the first draft as 1 - not very satisfied.** Together, scores of 1 and 2 accounted for 68% of the responses, indicating general dissatisfaction with the draft. About 19% of participants selected a neutral score of 3, while 10% and 4% rated their satisfaction as 4 and 5, respectively, reflecting a smaller portion of more positive feedback (see Table 2). The average satisfaction score across the 83 submissions was 1.92 out of 5. **Overall, these results suggest that most community members who provided comments were not satisfied with the initial draft, highlighting areas for improvement in subsequent revisions.**

The feedback submitted through the online public comment form, as well as through the five written comment forms collected during open houses and seven emailed comments, reinforced key themes raised during the in-person sessions. All feedback collected through these various input channels played a critical role in shaping revisions to the second draft of the SLUP.

Draft 1 Strategic Land Use Plan Overall Satisfaction Score	Response Frequency	Percent
1 – not very satisfied	48	58%
2	8	10%
3	16	19%
4	8	10%
5 – very much satisfied	3	4%
<i>TOTAL</i>	83	100%

Open House Attendance, Demographics, Geographic Reach, & Public Comments – Round 2

In the second round of public outreach, the public comment period was held from September 22nd to October 22nd, 2025 with two open houses. As a direct response to public feedback that no open houses had historically been held in Downs, IL, the first open house was scheduled at the Downs Community Fire Department which saw five attendees. The second was held at Heartland Community College in Normal and saw nine attendees. **In total, 14 attendees were present during the second round of open houses**, representing a marked decrease of public attendance compared to the first round. What is more, of that total, only 7 people were new attendees. The rest were repeat attendees— those who had attended at least one to multiple open houses across both rounds.

Similar demographic trends were observed as in the first round of open houses: predominately white and over 40 years of age on average. Women (9) made up the majority of attendees. Because attendance was small and many people chose not to sign in, there was not sufficient ZIP code data to analyze for the second-round open houses.

However, ZIP code data was collected as part of the second-round online public comment submission. **For public comments, 61761 was the most represented ZIP code (6 comment submissions or 38%)** followed closely by 61705 (5 comment submissions or 31%). Other represented geographies included 61701, 61704, 61736, 61745, and 61754 with one comment submitted from each area.

In total, 16 public comment submissions and one email were received as part of the round-two public engagement process, reflecting a similar decrease as seen in the open house attendance when compared to the first round. The average satisfaction score for the second draft of the SLUP was 2.13 out of 5. While this round saw an increase in the number of 4 and 5 scores and fewer neutral scores, the percentage of those who were not satisfied with the plan remained consistent at 69% demonstrating a continued dissatisfaction with the plan despite revisions.

Draft 2 Strategic Land Use Plan Overall Satisfaction Score	Response Frequency	Percent
1 – not very satisfied	9	56.3%
2	2	12.5%
3	1	6.3%
4	2	12.5%
5 – very much satisfied	2	12.5%
TOTAL	16	100%

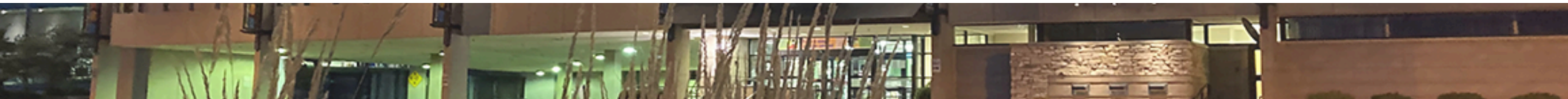


4. EMERGING THEMES FROM THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Community engagement is important because it serves as both a channel for participation and as a critical source of qualitative insight into the values, priorities, and concerns held by residents. This section synthesizes the major themes that emerged across the multiple forms of engagement during the draft Strategic Land Use Plan Community Engagement process, including that feedback shared during in-person open houses, online public comment submissions, emails, and written submissions. Rather than treating each comment in isolation, responses were comprehensively analyzed for recurring sentiments and ideas, offering a grounded understanding of how the subset of community members engaged in this planning process collectively interpreted and responded to the first and second draft of the Strategic Land Use Plan.

Bearing in mind that no community is a monolith and that individuals and groups often hold differing or even conflicting values and priorities, it is also important to recognize that the following themes are drawn from a relatively small sample size of participants when compared to the total population of McLean County.

The following analysis emphasizes the significance, consistency, and context of the themes that emerged across various forms of input. Taken together, these themes reflect a wide spectrum of local perspectives and provide a foundation for responsive, community-informed planning. This section begins with an overview of the methodology, then provides a reference to the maps and figures included in the first draft of the SLUP, followed by a breakdown of the key themes. Where applicable, notes are included on how MCRPC incorporated community feedback into the second draft of the Strategic Land Use Plan.



Methodology

The analysis presented in this section draws from qualitative data collected through multiple engagement channels conducted between June and October 2025. These channels included seven in-person open house sessions, 96 anonymized online public comment form submissions, eight anonymized email communications from community members, and five anonymized handwritten feedback forms submitted during the open house events. Together, these sources captured a mix of structured and unstructured input, offering both direct responses to targeted prompts and more open-ended reflections.

For all written feedback, personally identifying information was redacted before being shared for analysis. To collect data during the open house sessions, the YWCA's Director of Mission and Equity Consulting took detailed notes on the feedback provided. As with the written submissions, no personally identifying information was included in these notes.

After the public comment periods closed, all community input was gathered, and an inductive coding approach was used to identify emerging themes across the data. Rather than applying a predefined framework, codes were developed organically through close, iterative readings of the responses. Comments were reviewed in their original

context to preserve the perspectives and language of participants and sorted into key thematic groupings based on recurring and shared concerns. As codes took shape, they were refined and cross-checked across the full dataset to ensure internal consistency and clarity. This process was repeated after the second round of community engagement. When relevant, input was also analyzed for geographic specificity (e.g., references to particular municipalities or communities).

What the Public Saw: Maps and Materials from Draft 1 and 2 of the Strategic Land Use Plan

This subsection includes key maps and figures from the first draft of the Strategic Land Use Plan to provide visual context for the public feedback summarized in this report. Because many of the concerns, questions, and suggestions raised during community engagement referenced specific land use designations, growth areas, or planning boundaries, it is important to include the original materials that informed those responses. These visuals help illustrate what community members were reacting to during the review period and serve as a reference point for understanding the basis of public input.

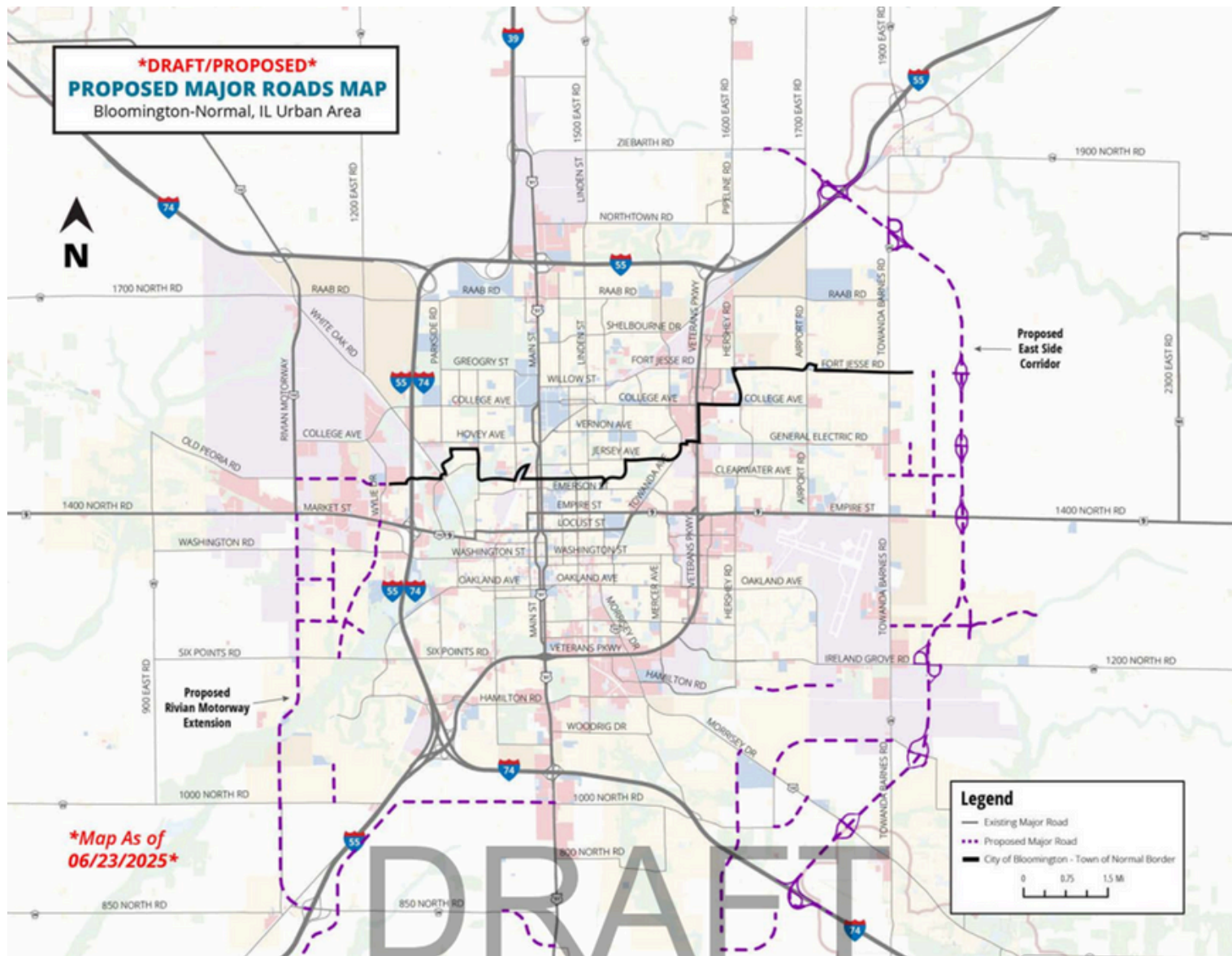


FIGURE 4. PROPOSED MAJOR ROADS MAP FROM THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN (DRAFT 1) | 21

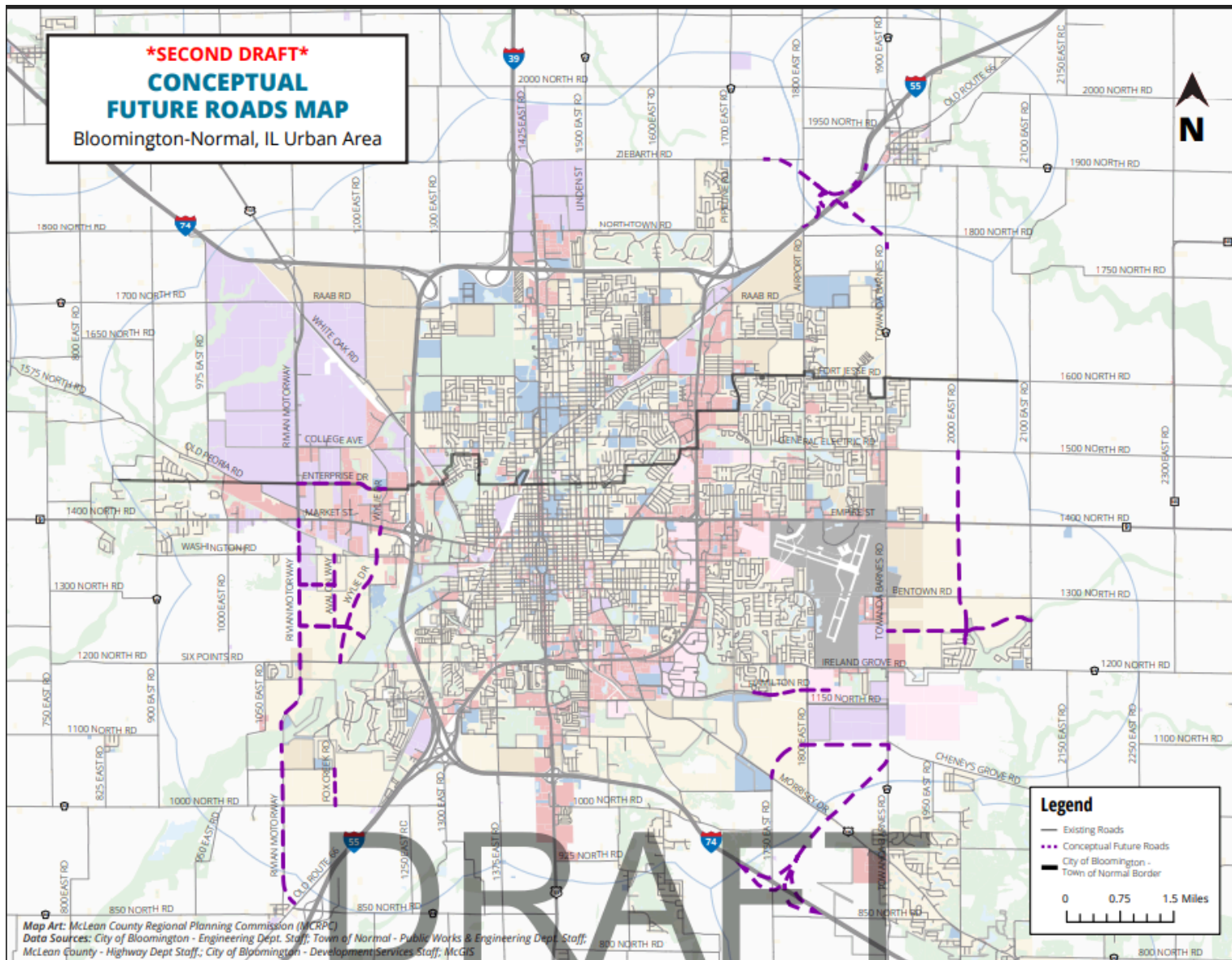


FIGURE 5. PROPOSED MAJOR ROADS MAP FROM THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN (DRAFT 2) | 22

DRAFT/PROPOSED
FUTURE LAND USE
MAP
 McLean County, IL

Legend

Future Land Use Categories

- Agriculture/
Undeveloped
- Commercial/
Retail
- Industrial/
Employment
Center
- Public &
Institutional
Development
- Mixed-Use
Development
- Natural
Resources
- Residential
Development

Roadways

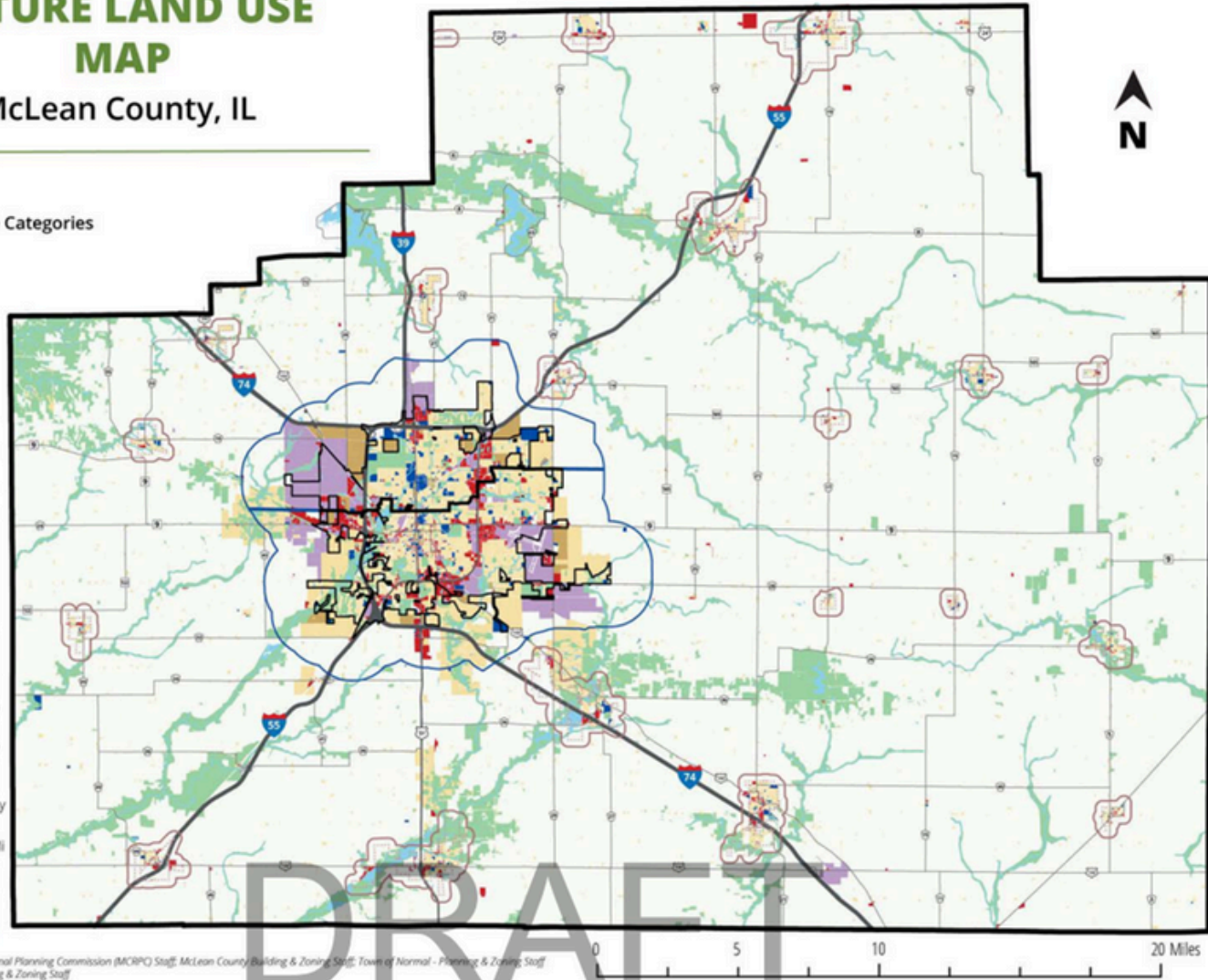
- Interstate
- U.S Highway
- IL State Route
- County Highway

Other Elements

- McLean County
Border
- Rural Municipality
Boundary
- Rural Municipality
0.25 Mile
Planning Area
- Urban Municipality
Boundary
- Urban Area 1.5 Mi
Extraterritorial
Jurisdiction
- Water

**Map As of
06/11/2025**

Source: McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) Staff; McLean County Building & Zoning Staff; Town of Normal - Planning & Zoning Staff; City of Bloomington - Planning & Zoning Staff



SECOND DRAFT
FUTURE LAND USE
MAP (2025)
 McLean County, IL

Legend

Future Land Use Categories

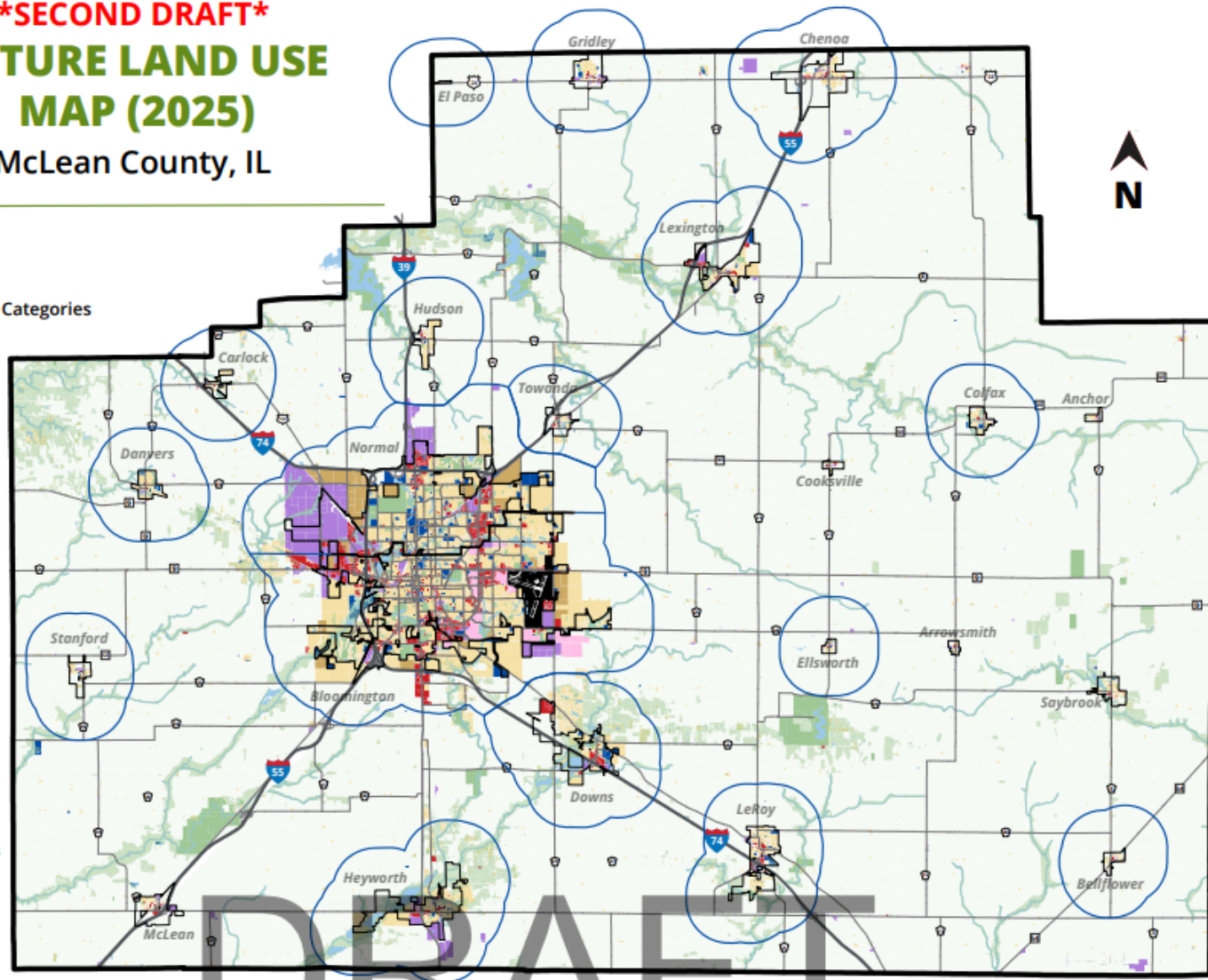
- Agriculture
- Aviation
- Commercial/ Retail
- Employment Center
- Industrial
- Public/ Institutional
- Mixed-Use
- Natural Resources
- Residential

Roadways

- Interstate
- U.S. Highway
- IL. State Route
- County Highway

Other Elements

- McLean County Border
- 2025 Municipal Corporate Limits
- 1.5 Mile Extraterritorial Jurisdiction
- Forests Overlay (NLCD)
- Water



*Map Art: McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) Staff
 Data Sources: McLean County Building & Zoning Staff; City of Bloomington - Development Services Staff;
 Town of Normal - Planning & Zoning Staff*

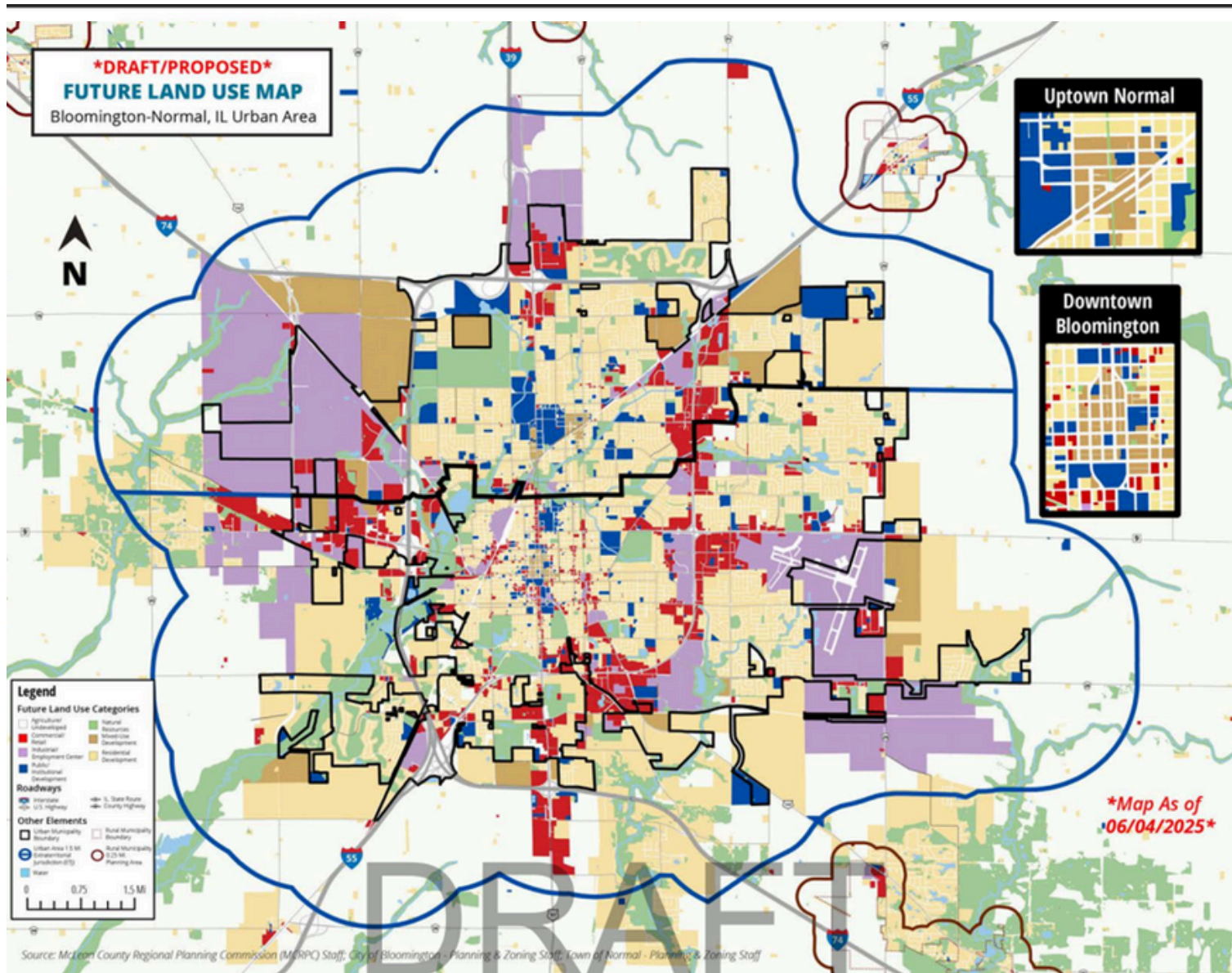


FIGURE 8. PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE MAP FROM THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN (DRAFT 1) | 25

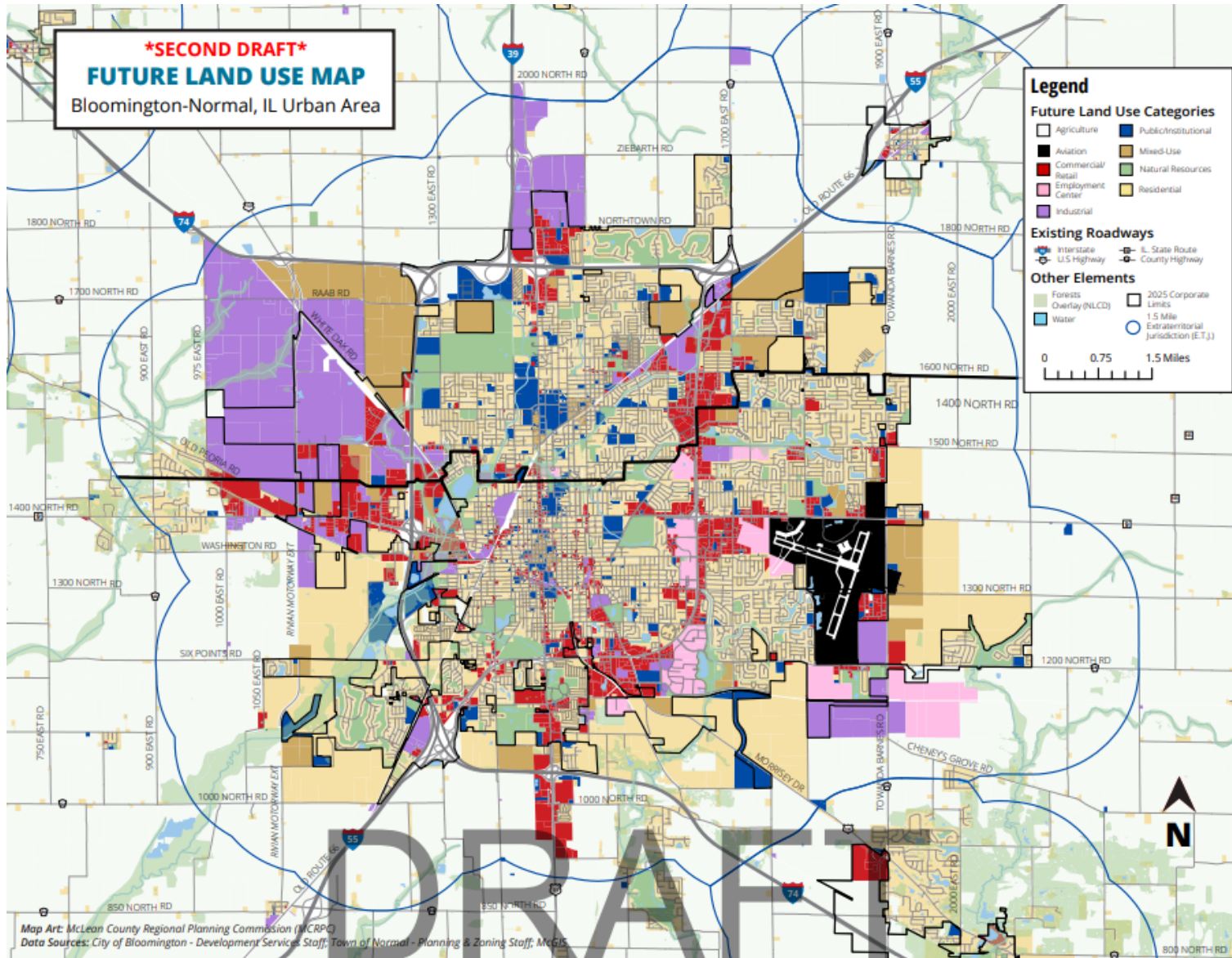


FIGURE 9. PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE MAP FROM THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN (DRAFT 2) | 26

Theme 1 – Contextualizing the Disconnect: Community Perception and the Function of the Strategic Land Use Plan

One of the most consistent themes to emerge from public feedback was strong dissatisfaction with what was described as a “top-down” process that lacked early communication, meaningful consultation, and inclusive outreach.

Community members criticized the absence of clear planning values as well as errors in the draft SLUP, which some viewed as further evidence of insufficient public consultation. Many called for a more transparent, collaborative process that begins with shared values and includes rural communities, landowners, school districts, and township governments from the outset as the basis for a planning framework that reflects the needs and priorities of the entire county.

“What is the rationale of beginning the comprehensive plan with a land use plan? As a concerned citizen, it’s very distressing that this is being made without a statement of values and a mission statement. So, if there is development pressure and the method is to work with the landowners, why doesn’t the city planner go talk to the landowners?”

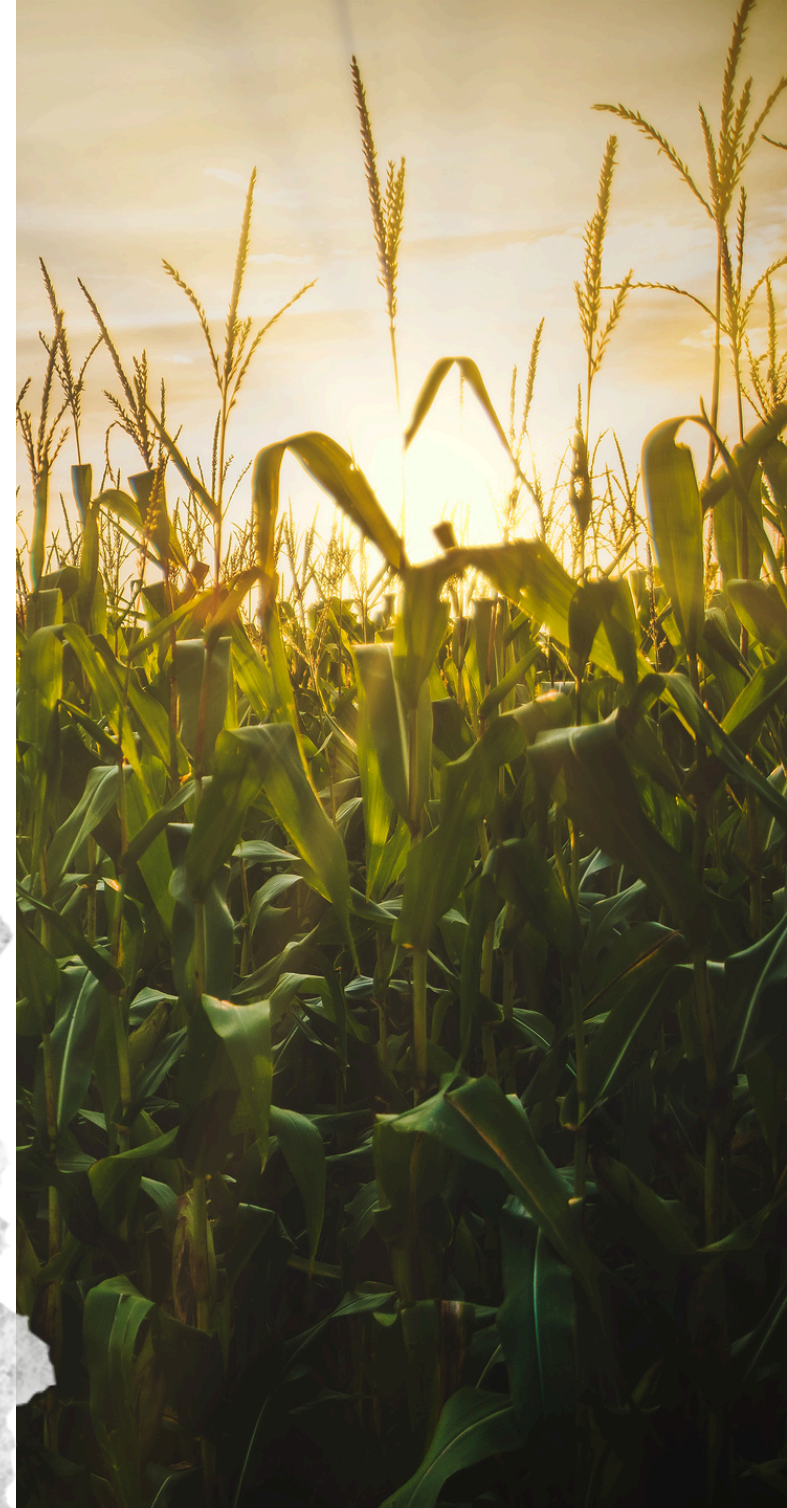
Open House 4

“You get buy-in when you include people in the process.”

Open House 5

“We encourage open dialogue and active participation from residents, school district representatives, and local government officials as this plan moves forward. Community input is critical to ensure growth is balanced, equitable, and sustainable for families, students, and taxpayers alike”

Online Public Comment Submission



While valid concerns were raised about the early phases of the planning process, much of the public dissatisfaction appeared to be rooted in an initial misunderstanding of what the Strategic Land Use Plan is and what it does. Many assumed the proposed land use changes reflected immediate rezoning decisions, which may have significantly contributed to the concern, frustration, and opposition that followed. This misconception was especially evident in the language used to express alarm about the long-term impacts of perceived development decisions:

“Rezoning agricultural land for industrial use, particularly to support Rivian’s expansion in McLean County, presents a complex issue with significant long-term implications that warrant careful consideration. While economic development is often a desirable goal, the proposed rezone needs to be scrutinized through the lens of sustainability, environmental protection, and community well-being, especially given the current financial state of Rivian and the inherent environmental risks associated with its products.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

“The zoning maps are not helpful.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

“And why rezone some of the most rich farmland in the entire world to industrial?”

Online Public Comment
Submission

This misconception fueled anxiety among community members who expressed concern about the broader implications of the proposed changes. Many believed that once a land use designation was changed, it would immediately and exclusively dictate what could—and invariably would—happen on the land, leaving no flexibility or possibility for other uses. Residents worried about potential disruptions to their daily lives and uncertainty about what the future might hold for their neighborhoods. They expressed fear that these changes could fundamentally alter the character of their communities and undermine their sense of place. Alongside these concerns, there was confusion about the procedural mechanism through which any changes might occur:

“The Eastside Highway goes through my house, and it would take out four houses and one business. Would the county come in and condemn properties? How would it work?”

Open House 4

“My biggest concern is with the southeast industrial/employment center proposal. My family lives near that area, and it would be devastating for us to have our home area turned into a hub of manufacturing and commercial buildings.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

Addressing this disconnect will be essential for building trust and fostering meaningful engagement as the planning process continues. Clear communication about the purpose, scope, and limitations of the Strategic Land Use Plan can help alleviate misunderstandings and encourage constructive dialogue. By aligning community perceptions with the plan's actual function, future outreach efforts can better support collaborative, informed decision-making that reflects the values and priorities of all McLean County residents.



MCRPC RESPONSE

- **Expanded intentional community outreach efforts over two iterative rounds**
- **Revised the Executive Summary in *Chapter 1: Introduction* in the second draft of the SLUP to more clearly define the plan's intent, function, and relationship to zoning**
- **Added the following sections to *Chapter 1: Introduction* in the second draft of the SLUP**
 - What is a Strategic Land Use Plan? How do we use it?
 - How does a Strategic Land Use Plan fit into the Comprehensive Plan framework?
 - Comprehensive Plan History and Timeline
 - Frequently Asked Questions – What this Plan Can Do
 - Frequently Asked Questions – What this Plan Cannot Do
 - Frequently Asked Questions – Land Use Planning vs Zoning
 - Frequently Asked Questions – Theoretical Development Timeline
- **Added *Chapter 2: Public Outreach and Planning Process***

Theme 2 – Municipal Concerns and Tensions

While the Strategic Land Use Plan was developed with regional coordination in mind, the lack of robust involvement from rural municipalities, townships, and the agricultural community during the development of the initial draft shaped much of the tensions and concerns voiced by rural neighbors. Questions arose as to why municipalities were not directly consulted during the initial stages of draft development, especially when proposed land uses fell within or near their corporate limits. Many cited procedural issues, including around the 1.5-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), insufficient coordination with township supervisors, and lack of recognition for existing local land use designations and plans.

A few township officials and local leaders reported not being notified of the plan until after its public release, raising concerns about the adequacy of early stakeholder engagement and involvement. In addition, select township leaders and community members voiced strong objections to the draft plan's treatment of municipal boundaries, planning authority, and governance roles. A recurring concern was the perception that the plan disproportionately privileged the City of Bloomington's and the Town of Normal's interests while sidelining smaller municipalities and rural communities' priorities.

"Looking at this map and hearing what you're talking about, this is not a McLean County map. This is a 'Bloomington-Normal and land it may annex in the next years' map. So it appears this is a Bloomington-Normal map and then county land that may be affected by the Bloomington-Normal land use. Sitting on the city council of Le Roy, I would argue it's because we are not included in the conversations. [...] It's not surprising to me that the weight of the effort is being focused on Bloomington-Normal. But it is disappointing."

Open House 5





“If the plan is intended to cover the entire county, why were Bloomington and Normal given the exclusive opportunity among municipalities to participate in creating the initial draft?”

Emailed Public Comment

“It is my understanding that this plan was being driven primarily by the City of Bloomington through the McLean County Regional Planning Commission, with no involvement from any of the smaller McLean County communities other than the Town of Normal, as any information that those communities have on file regarding land planning was ignored or assumed to not exist, even when publicly recorded. If Bloomington wants to prepare a land use plan for themselves and their 1.5-mile extraterritorial authority, they can, today, without involving the county or trying to make a county plan that cedes everybody’s authority to them.”

Online Public Comment Submission

These concerns reflected not only a broader desire among rural communities for more equitable participation in countywide planning efforts, but they also echoed the historical tension between urban cores and rural peripheries. Systemic and structural issues of unequal influence, uneven resource distribution, and development priorities have historically contributed to rural skepticism toward regional planning processes. These perceptions have alienated many rural communities, who often feel their voices are not heard or prioritized in planning processes dominated by urban interests. Within this context, the draft plan was perceived by some as continuing a pattern in which decision-making is driven by the needs and goals of larger urban centers. This feedback highlights the importance of future planning efforts that emphasize early, transparent, and inclusive engagement with all communities to ensure the process reflects the full diversity of needs and priorities across McLean County.

MCRPC RESPONSE

- **During the first public outreach period, MCRPC reached out to and received input from all 20 of the rural municipalities in the county**
- **Continued outreach efforts throughout the second round**
- **Presentations were given to and direct feedback was collected during two McLean County Township Supervisor Meetings, which saw representation from the following townships:**
 - Anchor Township (61720)
 - Dale Township (61705)
 - Downs Township (61736)
 - Funks Grove Township (61754)
 - Lawndale Township (61728)
 - Lexington Township (61753)
 - Martin Township (61728)
 - Money Creek Township (61776)
 - Old Town Township (61705)
 - Randolph Township (61745)
 - West Township (61842)
- **Integration and correction of errors on the Existing and Future Land Use Maps throughout the entire county (including specific collaboration with all rural municipalities)**
- **Addition of the following sections to *Chapter 1: Introduction* in the second draft of the SLUP**
 - Frequently Asked Questions – Municipal Authority
 - Frequently Asked Questions – Illinois Compiled Statutes: 65 ILCS 5/ Illinois Municipal Code
- **A rewritten explanation of Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) to differentiate between the advisory, nonbinding nature of a planning document and regulatory authority, as advised by the McLean County Farm Bureau (refer to page 21 in the second draft of the SLUP)**
- **Removal of the 0.25-mile Rural Municipal Planning Buffer for additional clarity, as advised by the McLean County Farm Bureau**
- **Addition of an ETJ boundary for those rural communities that have one in both the Existing and Future Land Use maps, as advised by the McLean County Farm Bureau**

Theme 3 – Build In Better: Anti-Sprawl Sentiments and the Question of Growth

Public comment revealed widespread concern over what was perceived to be an emphasis on outward expansion and low-density sprawl, particularly on the outskirts of the Bloomington–Normal area. Many residents criticized the proposal for what was perceived to be encouragement of unsustainable growth patterns that would strain existing infrastructure, lead to higher long-term costs, and require the development of valuable agricultural land. There was a clear call for prioritizing infill development, with suggestions to revitalize underutilized or vacant urban spaces, enhance walkability, and increase medium-to-high density housing within city limits.

“We need infill and more density, not more sprawl.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“Many of the proposed future growth areas seem to be in low-density areas on the margins of the existing municipalities, rather than focusing development on high-density areas which have greater economic impact and require less expenditure on new infrastructure and infrastructure upkeep. Instead, why not focus on making Bloomington a more walkable community and revitalizing the downtown area?”

Online Public Comment Submission



“The current draft ignores opportunities for growth in the central parts of Bloomington Normal, focusing almost exclusively on the outskirts. This is unwise ecologically, it’s less financially stable in the long run, and doesn’t [sic] not encourage the development of a people-friendly community.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Residents also expressed frustration that the proposed growth areas failed to comprehensively address the pressures of the current housing crisis. While acknowledging the need for more housing, many believed the plan overlooked smarter, more sustainable strategies such as redeveloping central areas, ensuring school and utility capacity, and aligning land use with actual demand and affordability. The community emphasized the importance of planning that strengthens existing investments rather than unnecessarily expanding its geographic footprint outward.

“Both the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal have a concerning issue with the urban sprawl they have created in the past 30 years. Both communities have spread out into the rural sector with far-flung neighborhoods and subdivisions, but have [left] vast tracts of farm ground and undeveloped acreage in amongst this development. This map does nothing but promote this sort of sprawl and waste that is eventually going to become costly. The roads will need rebuilt, utilities will need to be updated, and how are we to justify paying for it?”

Online Public Comment Submission

“I would love a focus on cleaning up and properly using existing parts of Bloomington. It seems the focus is so much on growing outward where transportation is limited.”

Online Public Comment Submission

MCRPC Response

- **Addition of “Undeveloped” Land Use Classification for the Existing Land Use Map to highlight specific infill-ready parcels.**
- **Addition of the following callout on page 24 of the second draft SLUP:**
 - Infill development is a high priority for the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. This future land use map does encompass all infill development parcels within the urban area. More detailed information regarding the specific infill properties can be found in existing comprehensive plans and on the City and Town websites.
- **Overall reduction in the new land areas assigned in the Future Land Use Maps.**



Theme 4 – Centering Green Space, Mobility, and Access

In addition to concerns about outward growth, community members provided feedback on the design and character of the built environment. Many highlighted the draft SLUP’s limited focus on creating new green spaces, trail networks, and nature preserves, prompting questions about whether the current growth vision effectively supports expanded access to open spaces and outdoor recreational opportunities.

“When I describe Bloomington–Normal to friends and family, I always say that it’s great, with one exception. There is a total lack of preserved and natural areas nearby. There are virtually no significant forests or prairie within at least 30 minutes in any direction. I can’t hike or ride a bike in a natural area without coming to the other side in a matter of minutes. In the document, you mention habitat preservation and natural areas, but then don’t include that whatsoever in your future plans.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“Our parks and educational institutions are vital to this community; let’s prioritize them. When we do, we see community health benefits.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Commenters also raised concerns about car dependency and the absence of infrastructure that supports walking, biking, and other alternative modes of transportation. Some emphasized how a lack of nearby natural areas and limited pedestrian connectivity can impact residents without access to a vehicle, particularly outside the core of Bloomington–Normal.



“If we want this community to be healthy, engaged, etc., we have to consider de-centering the car.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“Instead, why not focus on making Bloomington a more walkable community [...]?”

Online Public Comment Submission

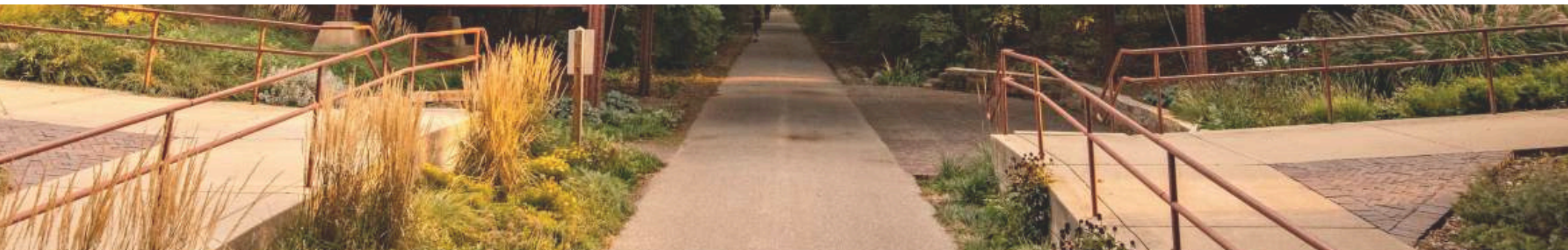
“The future plan looks as though it continues the same trends of prioritizing large residential areas and industrial areas. This makes the city less accessible to people who rely on walking, bike-riding, and other modes of transportation besides motor vehicles, as it creates a bigger divide to cross for basic needs such as grocery shopping if you live anywhere besides the heart of uptown/downtown. There also doesn’t appear to be much, if any, new green spaces being developed. This worsens our air quality and quality of life for people who don’t have the ability to go ‘out of town’ to places like Comlara Park. Our town needs more green space for citizens to enjoy the nature of Illinois, and we already severely lack green space relative to other types of infrastructure.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“Create a wider ‘greenbelt’ around the county within the ETJ.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Taken together, this input pointed to a general public interest in a land use vision that plans for growth while supporting a healthier and more accessible environment—one where residents can move freely, connect with nature, and enjoy a high quality of life regardless of transportation access or geographic location.



Feedback over the 'Natural Resources' designation featured prominently in the second-round public comments and open houses. A few residents felt the categorization was problematic as it did not separate privately-owned open spaces and public assets. Adding to this was the concern that the projected increase in industrial, commercial, and residential acreage coupled with the loss of agricultural land was not proportionately offset by an increase in natural resource acreage. As climate change continues to exacerbate the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, some felt the SLUP did not sufficiently or proactively safeguard the future environmental resiliency of the community.

"The plan assumes environmental and drainage capacity will stay the same even as development expands. Land labeled as "Natural Resources" doesn't actually grow, yet thousands of acres of farmland are reclassified for housing, industry, or mixed use. That means more pavement, more runoff, and less open land to absorb it. Labeling large private parcels as "Natural Resources" gives the impression of protection where none exists. Most of those areas are privately owned and zoned agriculture, which does not provide any legal conservation status. The result is a misleading picture of environmental security."

Online Public Comment Submission

MCRPC Response

- While the "Natural Resources" definition and categorization remains unchanged due to internal consensus, MCRPC added a *Forests Overlay* layer (sourced from the National Land Cover Database) to the interactive map. This layer is superimposed on top of both the Future Land Use map and the Existing Land Use map. It serves as an additional parameter in areas of opposing use (e.g. industrial vs. natural resource) and will be used to flag areas where overlap occurs for extra consideration should future development be pursued.
- Note: any future development is subject to all procedural requirements at the local, state, and federal level involving environmental review and public notice.



Theme 5 – West Bloomington-Normal and the Proposed Expansion of Rivian

Community input on West Bloomington revealed both support for and opposition to future development, particularly around the proposed extension of Rivian Motorway and related infrastructure improvements. A minority of participants voiced strong enthusiasm for west-side growth, viewing it as a key economic opportunity and advocating for job creation and development.

“The west side of Bloomington is really the future of the area.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“I love to see more job growth in the west side of Bloomington. Keep it up.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“West Bloomington can't be developed soon enough!”

Online Public Comment Submission

However, many others expressed concerns about the broader impacts of the proposed land use changes, such as the designation for industrial land use in formerly agricultural areas near the Rivian site.

Comments reflected skepticism about Rivian’s long-term viability, opposition to the loss of high-quality farmland, and unease about the environmental risks including the potential for groundwater contamination.

“Prioritizing short-term industrial gains over long-term environmental and community well-being would be a disservice to the county’s future. There may be alternative locations or strategies for supporting Rivian’s growth that do not necessitate sacrificing prime agricultural land and exposing the community to such significant risks.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Quality of life concerns were also raised, including fears of declining property values, increased industrial traffic, and the erosion of rural character in adjacent neighborhoods. Several residents noted frustrations with existing infrastructure upkeep and questioned whether further expansion would exacerbate those challenges.



Theme 6 – Loud Rumbings Against the Eastside Corridor

The proposed Eastside Bypass generated overwhelming community opposition, with the vast majority of public comments expressing strong concerns about its necessity, location, and long-term implications. Of all comments received, only one was favorable:

“Although I heard this morning (7/9) on WGLT that you got pushback on the idea of a circle road or highway bypass east of Towanda Barnes, I actually think it is a good idea. It has worked in places like Madison, Wisconsin. It may need to be moved a little further east than where you have it, but it looked like the approximate distance between the future siting currently proposed and high-end residential areas is at least as much as between the current west side highway and the center of Bloomington. This implies that road noise for those areas would not be an issue. I would like to see a full circle road that helps form a highway bypass around the twin cities and allows reasonable, controlled growth and development.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Opponents, on the other hand, questioned the need for another major road on the east side, particularly given current population levels and the existing capacity of Towanda Barnes Road, which several commenters suggested could be expanded instead. Many saw the bypass as a catalyst for unwanted suburban sprawl, unnecessary infrastructure spending, and the industrialization of residential and agricultural areas. There was also concern that the corridor could bring noise, pollution, and lower property values to nearby neighborhoods.

“We do NOT need the proposed Eastside corridor, a road which will forever continue the suburban expansion of our community into placelessness.”

Online Public Comment Submission

"It doesn't make sense now or make sense in the future."

Open House 4

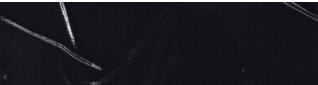
Multiple residents referenced past planning efforts, expressing frustration that the Eastside Corridor continues to appear in maps and proposals despite the local history of prior public resistance. Its inclusion was felt to be disconnected from current community needs.

"From seeing comments elsewhere, I'm unclear whether the east side bypass is still something that is being looked into, but since it is included within these maps, this doubles my concern as this appears to be a major limited access highway that would also bring noise and pollution to these neighborhoods."

Online Public Comment Submission

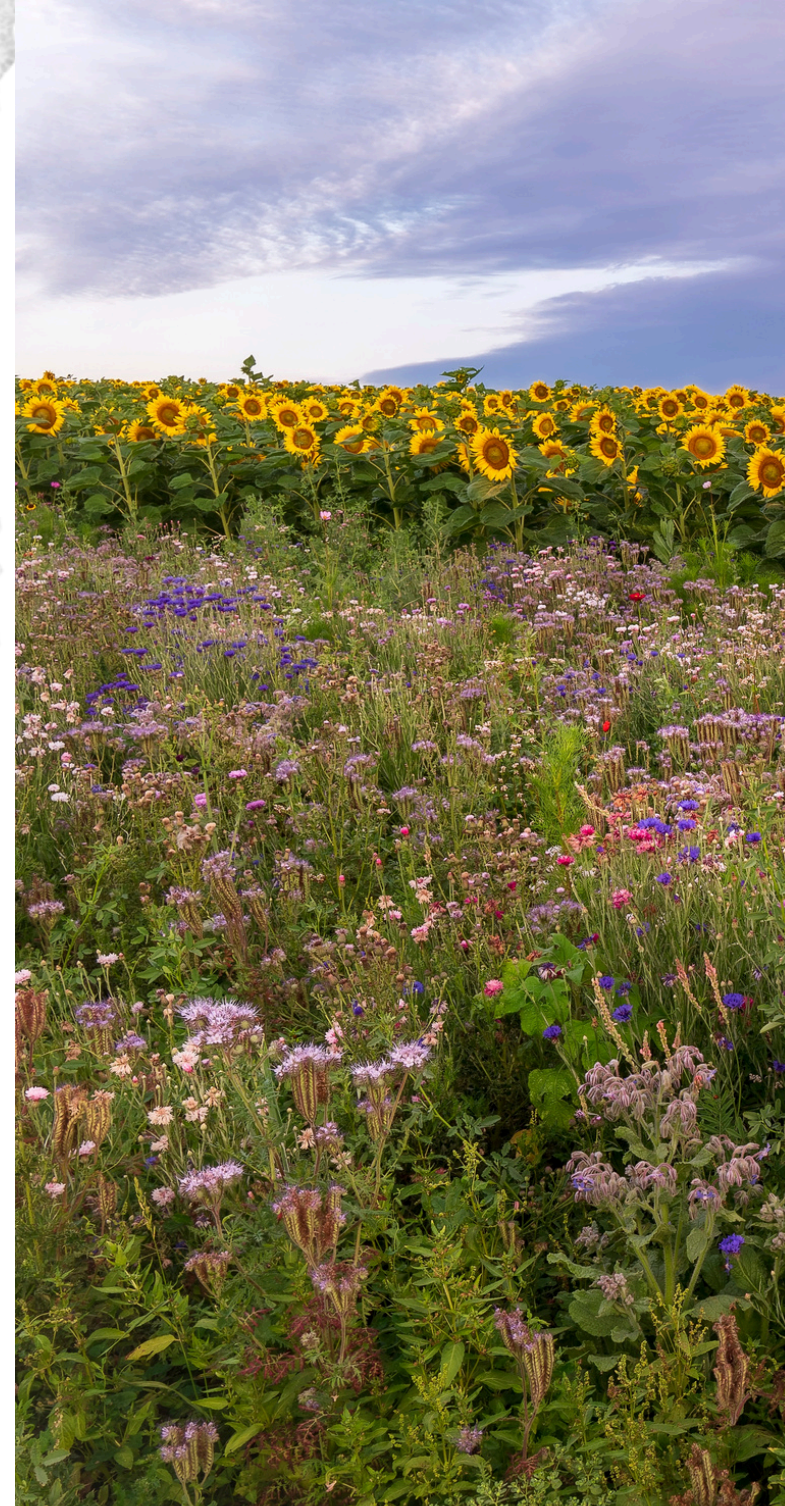
"I think the concern is: you have this on the map. You're going to spend more time and money to study something no one wants."

Open House 4



MCRPC Response

- **Removal of the East Side Highway Corridor east of Towanda Barnes Road from the Conceptual Future Roads Map**
- **Addition of a *Conceptual Future Roads Explanation* section (refer to page 44 in the second draft of the SLUP)**





Theme 7 – Seeing Purple: Industrial Development Concerns

Designated as purple on the maps in the SLUP, the industrial/employment center land use category was met with widespread opposition. While some community members acknowledged the economic rationale for expanding these zones:

“While I recognize the economic goals behind creating employment-generating zones, the proximity of this development to our neighborhood raises serious concerns about its impact on the environment, health, safety, and overall quality of life for residents.”

Online Public Comment Submission

“While supporting industrial growth and job creation is a legitimate government function, it must be balanced against the irreversible loss of agricultural land, the tangible environmental risks associated with lithium battery technology, and the potential negative impacts on existing residents' property values and quality of life.”

Online Public Comment Submission

The overwhelming majority of public comments expressed concern about placement and potential impacts. Residents objected to industrial designations near established neighborhoods, schools, and productive farmland due to risks such as air and water pollution, increased truck traffic, noise, and declining property values. Many also questioned the long-term need for such extensive industrial zoning, warning that over-allocation could result in underutilized land and missed opportunities for more compatible or adaptable uses. Put most succinctly:

“What I want to see different is less purple.”

Open House 5

Others urged planners to avoid industrial expansion into environmentally sensitive areas, emphasizing the potential loss of prime agricultural land, green space, and biodiversity. Additionally, there was resounding consensus around keeping **data centers out** of the community.

"I am concerned that the land use proposal includes excessive proposed areas for industrial use (including heavy industry) that are in sensitive areas. On both the east and west side of town they cover heritage farms and the watershed for creeks like Kickapoo Creek. The sorts of industry this would allow, according to existing statutes, are things like AI data centers, landfills, asphalt production. I do not want any of these kinds of businesses using water and polluting our environment."

Online Public Comment Submission

"The visual of the proposed expansions made me very nervous. There is a good deal of industrial/red zone expansion that creeps into natural/green spaces. We already have to deal with agricultural chemicals in these spaces & now we will have the added burden of industrial waste. As the federal government continues to removal EPA regulations to protect land and air quality, we must pay attention to how we steward our community land. Will the industrial expansions be 'clean' industries or ones that deplete resources, such as an AI center?"

Online Public Comment Submission

"We have some of the most fertile and productive soil in the entire country and McLean County regularly ranks among the top producing counties in the nation for corn and soybeans. McLean County plays a significant role in feeding, fueling, and clothing the world. We should take pride in that not take land out of production."

Online Public Comment Submission

MCRPC Response

- Industrial/Employment Center land use split to distinguish industrial uses from employment center uses.
- Southeast Bloomington industrial/employment center area reduced with the preservation of agriculture and residential quality of life in mind.
- Overall reduction in the Industrial Land Use category throughout the Bloomington–Normal Urban Area.





Theme 8 – Rural Character, Place-making, and Choice in McLean County

“What do you see when you look out your kitchen window? I have the joy of looking at a corn field or a soybean field, depending on the year. I grew up on a farm, that’s why this neighborhood spoke to me. It is the perfect combination of city and country! I love that our family lives in a safe neighborhood, with friendly neighbors, and a walking path that goes to the elementary school. I love living on the edge of town where I can see thousands of fireflies flickering on summer nights over the fields. I love looking out my window and randomly seeing a bald eagle majestically soaring through the sky. I love that I can hear crickets chirping, coyotes howling and cows mooing in the distance. This is not just a house. This is my home. This is where my family has made memories over the past 16 years. This is where we live, work, volunteer, and spend most of our time. Please don’t destroy what we have worked so hard for.”

Online Public Comment Submission from a
Resident of The Grove

A large number of public comment submissions over the course of the engagement process reflected a strong identification with the area’s rural roots and widespread concern about changes that could alter the nature of neighborhoods like The Grove. Residents described their decision to live in areas outside the urban core as a deliberate choice for a quieter lifestyle. Many emphasized that they had made long-term financial, occupational, familial, and emotional investments based on existing land-use expectations, and felt that paving the way for the potential of future commercial or industrial development near their homes would undermine those commitments. In their view, these areas are places apart from the noise, traffic, and density of urban life, and they sought to preserve that distinction.

“We move to places like this because of its rural character. We had choices to go lots of places and we came here.”

Open House 4

“We live out here because of the rural setting, not because we want to see more commercial development.”

Online Public Comment Submission

Concerns about property values, environmental impacts, increased traffic, and declining quality of life were common. Residents anticipated that industrial development would erode the peace and aesthetics of their neighborhoods. Adding to this view was the significant pride in the area's agricultural heritage, with many opposing the loss of heritage farmland.

However, it is important to place these perspectives in a broader context. Residents from these areas in the county were significantly overrepresented in the engagement process and did not reflect the full demographic or geographic diversity of McLean County (refer to Section 3. A Quantitative Snapshot of Open House Engagement).

This context matters because it reveals whose voices dominated in the engagement process. It is of particular salience when a clear *Not In My Backyard* (NIMBY) tendency—defined as the opposition to the siting of something perceived as unpleasant or hazardous in the area where one lives, especially while raising no such objections to similar developments elsewhere—was reflected across various comments:

“Don't want to live by any type of business, especially manufacturing. Put it in the west side where they have access points from the interstate.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

“New industrial should be limited to north of Washington Street.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

While other comments took a more balanced approach when suggesting the areas flagged for potential future industrial development should be sited away from residential areas more generally:

“I own a home in The Grove at Kickapoo Creek subdivision. The industrial development east of Towanda Barnes is disturbing at best. There are much better locations in the county, further from residential areas.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

“This is NOT what homeowners envisioned when purchasing homes in the subdivisions close to the proposed industrial area. Retail and offices, yes. Industrial? Absolutely not. There are likely more suitable areas much further from existing homes, schools and churches that would still have access to a railroad.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

Other residents threatened to sell their homes or relocate if industrial development became a reality (as opposed to one of multiple possible pathways for future land use as suggested in the SLUP). In addition, many comments referenced the high property taxes in select areas and used this “pay-to-play” condition as a basis for not only rejecting alterations to neighborhood character but also as a vehicle entitling them to lifestyle exclusivity:

“Many of the residents who live in the Grove work in the professional sector. They have the ability to relocate to more desirable areas in, and OUT of the Bloomington-Normal area. While I understand the need for continuing development for long term sustainability, the choice to put industrial or commercial areas so close to a residential area that is a large tax base for the school systems seems to be counter productive. You will see flight out of the residential area, and our family will be one of the first to put our home on the market and will not look to relocate in the area, and likely not in the state. With the state of the State of IL, it won't take much for people to leave the state entirely when pushed. And those with the means to do it, will absolutely do so.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

“The property taxes are high enough in The Grove subdivision and many families will contemplate moving if the feel of rural living gets removed.”

Online Public Comment
Submission

These comments effectively suggest others need to bear the burdens of regional growth. While the rhetoric of rural preservation is sincere, it is also selective. And while these concerns reflect genuine desires to protect home values, environmental quality, and neighborhood identity, they also highlight important contradictions.

Using The Grove subdivision— a relatively affluent, well-resourced suburban area whose residents benefit from low-density living while maintaining proximity to urban amenities and centers of employment— as an example to concretize the emerging contradictions, it was itself created from former agricultural land. Even though its construction prioritized green infrastructure and stream restoration, it still represented a type of expansion into rural areas. This subdivision, which has raised many credible objections in the SLUP process, was an active participant in previous waves of development that altered the rural landscape. Now, residents are resistant to further development in the name of preserving the very rural character their subdivision once changed.

This is not to say that the type of development does not matter (that is to say, habitat restoration versus industrial). It makes sense that a land use plan that introduces the possibility of industrial or commercial uses near homes is concerning to many. It merely attempts to suggest that a

shared recognition of where concessions were previously made could clarify the difficult terrain of contemporary land-use planning— one defined by tensions among participation, expectation, and authority. The Strategic Land Use Plan does not guarantee that industrial development will occur; however, the inclusion of such areas as potential future sites nonetheless provoked frustration and skepticism. Many residents who participated in the process felt that their voices were not fully reflected in the revisions, while MCRPC, for its part, faced the challenge of reconciling local opposition with broader regional needs. The result is a mutual sense of constraint: residents perceive limited agency in fully driving outcomes, and planners must navigate between responsiveness and long-term responsibility.

Amid this impasse, some community members expressed an awareness of the complexity of land use planning decisions when acknowledging their own preferences and the necessity of regional growth:

“What is difficult for me, I know what I don’t want. But I also understand that the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal need to expand. What is difficult for me is not having enough information to know, like, if we do need more heavy industrial-use areas, I don’t know where to suggest [they go]. I don’t know that.”

Open House 4

“The reality is that you have to grow. You have to grow or you die. So we have to be able as a county [...] we have to grow. We have to grow in the best way we can for our area. What you’re giving us is a starting point for us to have conversations. [...] It’s very helpful. But we need to do it planfully. We have to protect our farmland. We have to protect our water.”

Open House 6

5. CONCLUSION

These perspectives capture the tension that is at the heart of much of the feedback provided: a desire to secure community well-being, tempered by recognition that change is inevitable and that its direction is difficult to guide. In this sense, questions of rural character, growth, and public participation intersect and the boundaries between preservation and transformation remain continually negotiated rather than fixed.

What is more, the planning process operates within overlapping and sometimes conflicting scales of belonging and power, where structural realities constrain both community aspirations and institutional capacities. The Strategic Land Use Plan incorporated several revisions in response to community feedback, though it did not resolve every concern, leaving some skepticism and lingering frustration. The McLean County Regional Planning Commission made deliberate efforts to listen, clarify, and adjust designations where possible, but the process also highlighted the limitations of what changes are feasible amid competing tensions and priorities.

This should not be taken as demoralizing to the public or as a failure on the part of MCRPC. All who dedicated time and energy to shaping the plan demonstrated the value of sustained, thoughtful participation. The questions, critiques, suggestions, dialogues helped refine the plan and shed light on local priorities and asymmetries, even if there were moments that at times felt tedious or antagonistic. The process provided important lessons MCRPC will incorporate for future planning efforts such as in the comprehensive plan.

In the end, people in this community are inseparable from its fabric: it is the lives, routines, relationships, and collective actions that shape its future. It is therefore incumbent upon us—planners and community members alike—to continue engaging with one another and turning toward each other not only for the sake of this community, but in recognition of what this moment demands. Here, the work is never done. But this effort in community engagement provides a foundation forward.