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Land Use & Community Design

This chapter outlines the desired future land use for La Crescent and the surrounding planning area, including categories of land uses, development densities and design strategies consistent with the goals, objectives, and strategies of Chapter 2.

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Decisions about the development of land have a long-term impact on the function and character of our community. This chapter establishes our preferences for where and how development should occur. Property owners, developers, and City officials should review these policies when considering development and redevelopment ideas.

Vision Statement

The City of La Crescent is growing, at a modest pace and in diverse ways. New housing has been created through limited westward expansion and through the redevelopment of obsolete buildings and sites in the City, especially near downtown. Redevelopment in the downtown core has brought new businesses and vitality to the area. New investment in the shoreland areas along the highways has improved the appearance of these high-profile corridors and enhanced connections to the marsh. With every project the City has worked with landowners to protect the natural environment and enhance public health, demonstrating the community's commitment to these core values.

Issues & Opportunities

The planning process revealed the following issues and opportunities related to land use and community design. (These statements are drawn from public comments, the Community Indicator Report, committee discussions and survey results; they do not represent policy decisions.)

- There are very few lots available in the City for the construction of new homes
- The supply of undeveloped land near the City is extremely limited due to the presence of waterways, wetlands and bluffs
- The City has allowed suburban residential development with private well and septic systems to occur in La Crescent Township in past decades, and has gradually been annexing those homes when septic systems fail and/or to maintain the City population above 5,000.
- Per the 2015/2016 community surveys:
 - residents want a more vibrant downtown, but also retention of the small-town feel and greater flexibility with how redevelopment occurs
 - residents want waterfront land along the highway corridors to transition to more recreation-oriented uses, more retail and service uses, and to have a higher aesthetic quality as compared to existing development
 - the preferred locations for new housing are within the City (ie through infill and redevelopment) and west along County Highway 6. Fewer than 40% support blufftop growth to the north in Dresbach Township, and fewer than 25% support blufftop development west or south of the City.
 - conservation of natural resources, enhancing recreation amenities and maintaining public health are seen as higher priorities than the attraction of businesses, jobs or residents

Goals & Objectives



Goal:

La Crescent will see modest growth in population and property value, with only limited geographic expansion

Objectives:

1. Increase the frequency of successful infill and redevelopment projects that add value and increase the use of existing City parcels
2. Developable land in La Crescent Township deemed feasible for eventual sewer and water extension will be reserved for future urban use
3. Investment in housing will emphasize the attraction of families with children to live in La Crescent
4. *Investments in school facilities will be integrated and coordinated with neighborhood planning, to support both educational needs and community vitality.*
5. *If the La Crescent-Hokah Elementary School is relocated from its current location on South Oak Street, the existing site will be redeveloped for housing, with an emphasis on formats desirable to families.*

Goal:

New development and redevelopment will maintain the City's small-town character and establish a reputation for environmental stewardship and investment in public health

Objectives:

1. New development will be compact, to use land and infrastructure efficiently, but it will generally not be tall, meaning four stories or less
2. The use of on-site stormwater management techniques will increase, especially including natural filtration and infiltration of stormwater runoff

3. The use of sustainable building materials, energy efficient construction and sustainable energy systems will increase
4. There will be no new development on bluff faces within or visible from La Crescent
5. New development and uses will not diminish the quality of the air we breathe or the water we drink
6. *Park land and/or amenities will continue to expand, at least commensurate with neighborhood and population growth.*

Goal:

Properties along the State and Federal highway corridors will be improved and redeveloped

Objectives:

1. Buildings will be improved or replaced with higher-quality materials and design
2. Outdoor storage uses on these prominent sites will relocate and/or have improved screening.
3. Billboards will be removed
4. The trailer parks will be redeveloped for other uses

Strategies



1. To facilitate redevelopment projects the City will sometimes take an active role in the process, including direct purchase of parcels if redevelopment is unlikely to occur solely through private sector action
2. The City will pursue an Orderly Annexation Agreement with La Crescent Township to address multiple issues, including the reservation of certain parcels in Pine Creek Valley for future urban development on City sewer and water and the protection of visible bluff faces from any development of any kind.
3. The City will promote the efficient use of land by allowing and encouraging landowners and developers to use compact development strategies such as shallow front yard setbacks, attached residential units, and multi-story buildings.

4. The City will continue to use the zoning ordinance to facilitate the efficient use of land for vehicle parking, including provisions that enable the use of on-street parking, public lots, and shared private parking lots whenever those strategies can be shown to strike an appropriate balance between parking stall utilization and user convenience.
5. The City will amend the zoning ordinance to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which are separate units on single-family lots that can be used by a family member or rented out. ADUs have their own exterior entrance and are typically located in backyards and/or above detached garages.
6. The City will work with property owners to create a master plan for all of the shoreland sites along the highways, including those on the east side of 14/61 and 16, and those on the south side of 14/16 ("the pike"). This could be one plan for all those areas (preferred) or a series of plans for specific clusters of parcels as projects and opportunities arise. The plan(s) should identify specific desired changes in site design, use and appearance that could occur incrementally or through wholesale site redevelopment.
7. *The zoning ordinance will be amended in most residential districts to allow greater lot coverage, to ensure that the maximum lot coverage ratio is not an impediment to compact development.*
8. *Existing park spaces and amenities will generally be protected and maintained over time. Should the City ever consider replacing existing park space with a non-park, non-recreational use, there will be a careful review and public discussion about the proposal.*
9. *The City will work with the La Crescent-Hokah School District to ensure that major facility changes and investments are supporting neighborhood vitality. If the District decides to relocate the Elementary School, the City will pursue negotiations with the District to have the City purchase the land and facilitate its redevelopment as compact, family-friendly housing.*
10. *Create an overlay zoning district to guide aesthetic improvements to the shoreland areas near the rail lines (west shore of the wetlands and Blue Lake)*



Future Land Use

Using the Future Land Use Map



The Future Land Use Map (next page) identifies categories of similar use, character and/or development density. These categories are described in the following pages, including explanation of the City’s intent and design and development strategies for each.

This map and the corresponding text are to be consulted whenever development is proposed, especially when a zoning change or land division is requested. Zoning changes and development should be consistent with the use category shown on the map and the corresponding text.

Where uses in this map differ from the current use, it is not the general intent of the City to compel a change in zoning or a change in use. Except in instances when the City may actively facilitate redevelopment of a priority site, the City’s use of this map will be only reactive, guiding response to proposals submitted by property owners.

There may be instances when a single development or redevelopment project is proposed on parcels spanning more than one land use category, for example Downtown Core Mixed Use and Downtown Residential. In these cases it is at the discretion of the City (typically the Plan Commission) to decide which category should apply to the project, and in most cases it should be acceptable to apply the more intensive land use category to the entire project area.

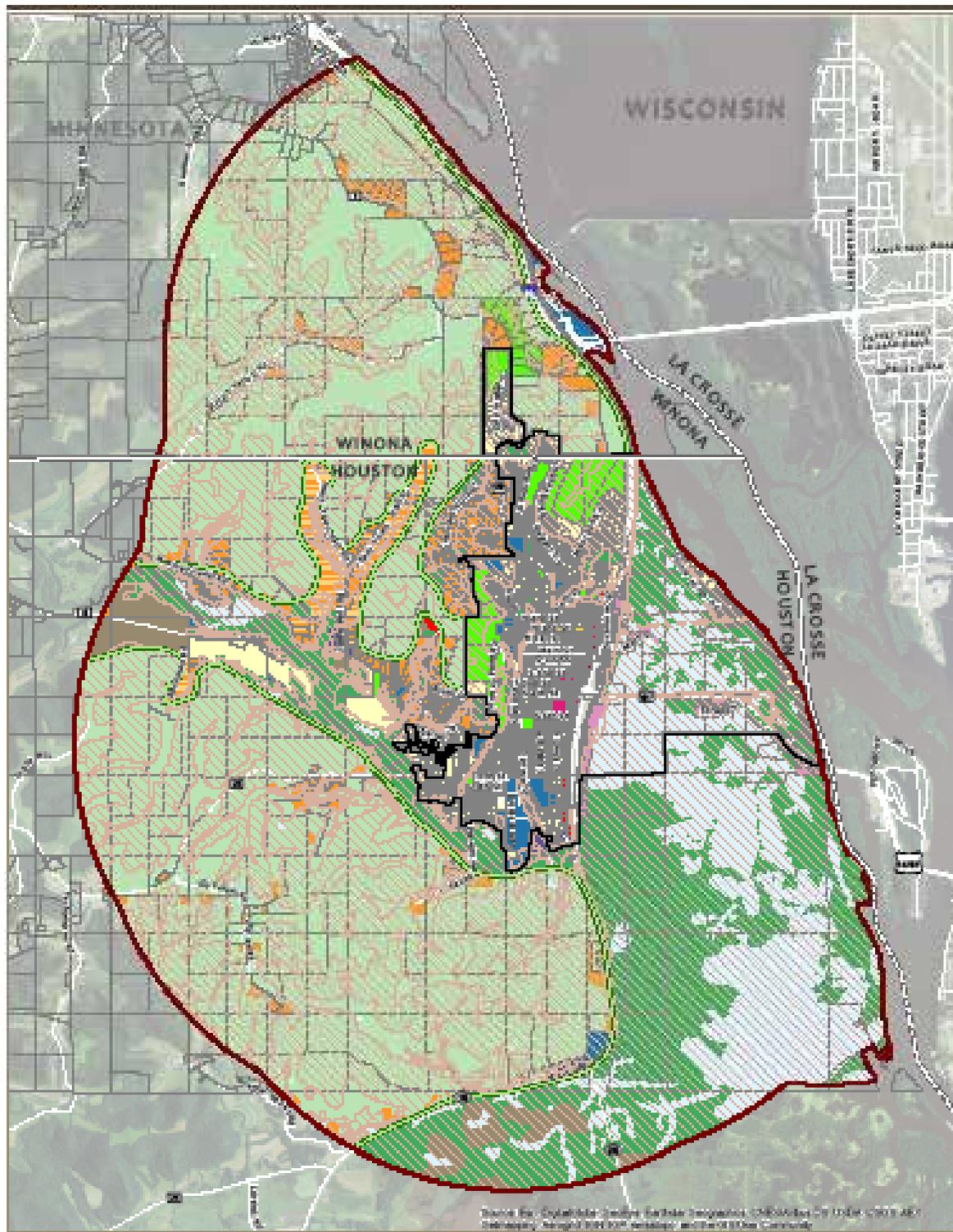
Amending the Future Land Use Map



It will from time to time be appropriate to consider amendments to the Future Land Use Map. For example, a project may be proposed that is inconsistent with the Future Land Use Map but generally viewed to be appropriate and desirable. The best practice in these situations is to amend the plan, so that the City can continue to act in accordance with it’s adopted plan. The following criteria should be considered before amending the map to enable development not previously anticipated.

- The proposed use is compatible with adjacent uses, especially existing residential neighborhoods.
- The proposed use will not adversely affect important natural features such as wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, scenic vistas or significant woodlands.
- The lay of the land will allow for construction of appropriate roads and/or driveways that are accessible by emergency vehicles.
- Provision of public facilities and services will not place an unreasonable financial burden on the City.
- There is a clear public need for the proposed change and/or the proposed development is likely to have a positive fiscal impact on the City.
- The proposed development is consistent with the general vision for the City, and the other goals, objectives, and policies of this Plan.

See the Implementation Chapter for the description of the process for amending the plan.



Source: City of La Crescent, City of Houston, City of Winona, MN, 2014. All rights reserved. Prepared for MSA by the City of La Crescent.

FUTURE LAND USE

CITY OF LA CRESCENT
HOUSTON AND WINONA COUNTIES, MN



Future Land Use Categories

Bluffland Conservation

The Bluffland Conservation (BC) category is intended to protect from development most of the blufflands immediately surrounding the City, and especially those bluff faces and bluff tops visible from the City and the approaching highways.

The development of new housing is discouraged in areas designated as Bluffland Conservation Area. The preferred development density is no more than one (1) dwelling unit per twenty (20) acres of contiguous land under single ownership. In limited cases, the use of conservation subdivisions or cluster developments may be acceptable. The development of commercial and manufacturing uses is strongly discouraged in BC areas, with the exception of agricultural or recreational businesses.

The City is strongly opposed to any new buildings or site clearing on bluff areas visible from the City and the approaching highways, including all of the State and Federal routes.

Any new development in less prominent areas shall be located in order to minimize its visibility from the County highways and town roads, in order to protect these “secondary” corridors that today offer exceptional scenic beauty.

The City is also strongly opposed to any new mining, agricultural, or business uses in this area that would dramatically increase truck traffic through City neighborhoods.



The Bluffland Conservation area is intended to protect the exceptional beauty of the La Crescent area

Rural Residential

The Rural Residential category identifies those areas in the City’s extraterritorial jurisdiction most suitable for the development of new housing on private well and septic.

New housing in the Township should only occur on lots of sufficient size and with soil characteristics for at least two septic system drain field sites. This will typically be at least two acres per dwelling unit.

Preferred Design Strategies



Minimize the visibility of rural homes by locating them away from main roads and behind forested buffers



Provide multi-purpose trails to link rural homes to the City

Neighborhood Residential



Neighborhood Residential (NR) areas are intended for housing with densities that range from three (3) to twelve (12) units per acre. Areas classified as NR (most of the City) will be predominately single-family detached units with the potential for some duplex, twindominiums, four plex, townhouses and multi-family housing (typically <8 units per structure). Though housing is the primary land use in most neighborhoods, healthy and balanced neighborhoods may also include other uses that support the needs of residents, including:

- Parks and recreational facilities
- Small municipal and institutional facilities (e.g. well house)
- Community centers
- Places of worship
- Schools
- Day care centers
- Small pockets of High Density Residential (typically located near major roadways) designed to be compatible with adjacent lower-density housing.
- Small commercial uses that serve neighborhood needs (typically located along major roadways) designed to be compatible with adjacent development.

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- CDD - Conservation Development District
- R-1A Low Density Residential
- R-1B Traditional Low Density Residential
- R-1C New Urban Low Density Residential
- R-1D Annexation Low Density Residential
- R-2 Single & Two Family Residential
- R-3 Multi-Family Residential (as described above)
- PUD Planned Unit Development

Preferred Design Strategies



Narrow lots and shallow front yard setbacks are encouraged, to use land efficiently



Front porches are encouraged on new homes, especially when built close to the street



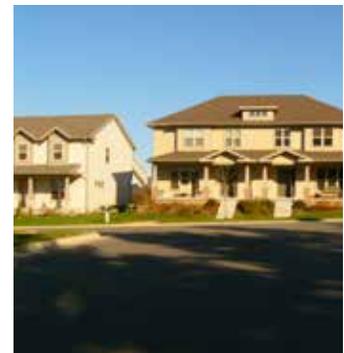
Accessory dwelling units are one way to add new housing units to existing neighborhoods



Garages should be further from the street than the front door



Sidewalks and street trees should be used everywhere to enhance neighborhood safety and character



Various housing types and building sizes can be integrated within a healthy neighborhood

Future Land Use Categories

Shoreland Mixed Use

The Shoreland Mixed Use (SMU) category is designated in the lowland areas east of highways 14/61 and 16, and on the south side of the pike. *It is intended that this area will continue to function as the City's primary supply of highway-oriented land uses. It is further intended that this land use designation will allow a wide variety of uses while leading to improvements in the appearance and environmental performance of these areas.*

Anticipated uses in these areas include:

- Wholesale and Distributing Facilities
- Industrial
- Retail Sales and Service
- Restaurants and Entertainment
- Professional Offices
- Civic and Institutional
- Park and Recreation
- Multi-Family Residential

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- C-1 Highway Commercial
- C-PD Commercial Planned Development Overlay
- I - Industrial District
- R-3 Multi-Family Residential
- PUD Planned Unit Development

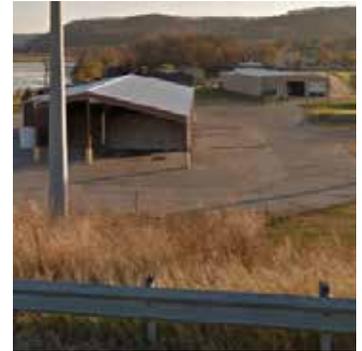
The City intends to prepare a master plan for the Shoreland Mixed Use areas that identifies strategies to improve public access to waterways, stormwater runoff quality, and the aesthetic appearance of buildings, sites, signage and lighting as visible from nearby highways and waterways. Any substantial improvement or complete redevelopment project should be consistent with that master plan. If no such plan exists, the property owner will collaborate with the City to prepare a concept plan for the immediate surrounding area before redevelopment proceeds, so that new investment is part of a strategic vision for improvement of this area.

Any substantial improvement or complete redevelopment project should consider the potential to highlight and utilize the adjacent wetlands (Blue Lake) as an amenity. This could include building and site design strategies that enhance views of this natural area.

Preferred Design Strategies



Storage and loading areas should be screened from view from the highways



Buildings that are lower than the adjacent highways should not have rooftop mechanical equipment



Signs in this area should be monument style and no taller than the tallest building on the site



On-site stormwater management methods should be used to protect the adjacent waterways



Exterior lighting should use full cut-off fixtures that prevent light trespass and glare, especially as seen from the marsh



Generous landscaping, preferably with native species, is strongly encouraged

Downtown Residential



The Downtown Residential (DR) area is intended for housing with densities that exceed twelve (12) units per acre. This area will be predominately multi-family attached units with the potential for some single-family attached, single-family detached, duplex, twindominiums, four plex, and other lower density housing developments.

Though housing is the predominant intended use, other uses that support the needs of residents may also be located in this area, including:

- Parks and recreational facilities
- Municipal and institutional facilities
- Community centers
- Places of worship
- Schools
- Day care centers
- Small commercial uses that serves neighborhood needs (typically located along major roadways) and designed to be compatible with adjacent residential development

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- R-1C New Urban Low Density Residential
- R-2 Single & Two Family Residential
- R-3 Multi-Family Residential
- PUD Planned Unit Development

Preferred Design Strategies



High quality, long-lasting materials are strongly encouraged



New single-family homes in this area should utilize small lots and minimal setbacks



Individual private entrances from the street are encouraged, when feasible



Frontporches are encouraged on multifamily housing, especially senior housing



Larger buildings should use various strategies to minimize apparent size, including projections, varied rooflines, etc.



Generous landscaping, preferably with native species, is strongly encouraged



Future Land Use Categories

Downtown Mixed Use and Downtown Core Mixed Use



Two Downtown Mixed Use areas are designated, each intended to provide a unique mix of commercial, residential, public and related uses in a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Anticipated uses in the Downtown include:

- Restaurants and Entertainment
- Retail Sales and Service
- Small Professional Offices
- Civic, Institutional and Schools
- Park and Recreation
- Live-Work Residential
- Attached Single-Family Residential (e.g. townhomes)
- Multi-Family Residential
- Senior Housing
- Assisted Living Facilities

Single-family detached housing exists in the DMU area in 2016, but this area is anticipated to transition over time to more intensive land uses.

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- CBD - Central Business Mixed Use District (CBD-1 and CBD-2)

The City desires redevelopment in the Downtown area that brings more uses and activity of all kinds, including more residential units and more commercial and office space. New development should create an urban form and character that is distinctively “downtown” while retaining a small-town feel. The design strategies on the following page illustrate aspects of the desired character (and are consistent with the design standards in the current CBD-1 and CBD-2 zoning districts).

The City desires a concentration of the most intensive new development within a limited area, including portions of Main Street and Walnut Street. This area is designated “Downtown Core Mixed Use” on the Future Land Use Map and is most appropriate for the CBD-1 zoning. To make this area distinctly “downtown”, buildings should be built to the front property line (no setback) without exception, and at least two stories tall whenever feasible. Multistory buildings are strongly preferred.

A secondary area is designated simply “Downtown Mixed Use” and is most appropriate for CBD-2 zoning. Buildings may be set back up to twenty (20) feet in this area and single-story buildings should be allowed.

Preferred Design Strategies



Outdoor seating is encouraged for any restaurants or cafes throughout the downtown area, either on the sidewalk or on the restaurant site.



The street level of any commercial space should feature large windows to allow a strong visual connection between the street and the building.



Mixing uses in the same building is encouraged, including retail or office space on the ground floor, and residential or office space on upper floors.



Larger buildings should utilize design techniques that reduce their apparent height and width.



Signs should be modest in scale, complementary to the building architecture, and lighted externally.



Awnings are encouraged - they add architectural character, shelter pedestrians, shade the interior, and offer a signage opportunity.



Home-to-office conversions are a good transition use and design at the edges of the downtown area.



Parking should be no closer to the street than adjacent buildings and should be buffered from the sidewalk by landscaping and/or a low wall (3' maximum height).



Free-standing signs in the Downtown Mixed Use area should be "monument" style only, except signs along the state or federal highways, which may be taller.

Future Land Use Categories

Commercial

Commercial (C) areas are intended for retail, service, and office uses that serve neighborhood, community and regional markets. Example uses include:

- Retail and service businesses
- Offices
- Clinics and health care facilities
- Hotels
- Restaurants and entertainment businesses
- Storage
- Gas Stations and convenience stores
- Automobile sales and services

The type, size and design of uses will be determined by site characteristics and market demand. For example, larger sites visible and accessible from US 14 and MN 16 will be suitable for convenience retail and may require highly visible parking. Areas along local collectors may be appropriate for smaller-scale commercial uses that require less visibility and less parking.

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- C-1 Highway Commercial District
- C-PD Commercial Planned Development Overlay
- PUD Planned Unit Development

Preferred Design Strategies



Awnings and canopies are encouraged at entrances to enhance shelter and architectural character



Pitched roofs and gables should be considered for all buildings, especially single-story structures



Service features such as garbage containers should be shielded from view in an enclosure compatible with the building architecture



Bringing a portion of the building close to the street is encouraged whenever possible



All commercial buildings are encouraged to use large windows to enhance visual connections and interior lighting



Monument signs are encouraged in all settings instead of pole signs



Parking should be separated from the building and the public sidewalk by landscaped buffer strips



Parking lot landscape islands can also collect and filter stormwater runoff

Industrial

Industrial areas are intended for light or heavy manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, wholesale trade, accessory offices, and similar uses.

Generally Acceptable Zoning Districts include:

- I - Industrial District

Any new or expanded industrial use should have the following features to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses and the City's environmental stewardship principles:

- fencing and landscaping to reduce or eliminate the visibility of any outdoor storage or loading areas
- exterior lighting design that prevents light trespass to neighboring residential or natural areas
- reasonable limits on any objectionable sounds or odors
- on-site stormwater management practices that protect local waterways from excessive or polluted runoff

Preferred Design Strategies



On-site stormwater management methods should be used to protect local waterways



Storage and loading areas should be screened from view from adjacent lands, especially residential or natural areas



Exterior lighting should use full cut-off fixtures that prevent light trespass and glare, especially as seen from the marsh