

# 9. LAND USE

## INTRODUCTION

The Land Use chapter of the comprehensive plan outlines the City of Berlin’s vision for sustainable development and community well-being through effective land use planning. It aims to strike a balance between residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational land uses while preserving open spaces and protecting environmentally sensitive areas.

## ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Reinvestment Opportunities:** Reinvesting in existing neighborhoods and downtown properties can enhance community character, increase housing supply, and support local businesses.
- **Underutilized and Blighted Properties:** Vacant lots and underutilized buildings—particularly in the downtown and commercial corridors—are opportunities for revitalization and economic activity.
- **Growth Pressure vs. Preservation:** As Berlin grows, residents want to ensure that new development is thoughtfully integrated and doesn’t compromise community identity.
- **Incompatible Uses:** Early development patterns in the City did not always properly buffer between heavy industrial uses and residential uses. These sites— both current and former— pose an environmental contamination risk where remediation should be prioritized.
- **Strategic Commercial Expansion:** Thoughtful planning in commercial corridors can enhance visibility, access, and economic vitality.

## VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

**33%** of all survey respondents ranked Reinvestment in Downtown buildings and sites as the top priority for development and property improvement

Overall, survey results show strongest support for small lot single family homes (**79%** support or strongly support), majority support for duplexes, townhomes, and apartments, and comparatively greater uncertainty (**46%** support or strongly support, **44%** unsure or need more information)—for accessory dwelling units.

Residents want to ensure that new development aligns with Berlin’s small city charm and community values; there is a desire to balance growth with preservation of historic character.

A majority of survey respondents (**83%**) support requiring greenspace, conservation, or recreational areas in new developments.

## LAND USE GOALS, STRATEGIES, & ACTIONS

### GOAL 1

**An economically and environmentally sustainable development pattern.**

### STRATEGIES

1. New development within the City's jurisdiction should support the efficient use of public services and infrastructure.
  - i. Coordinate development plans between staff for efficient public facilities and services.
  - ii. Infill development that uses existing infrastructure is strongly encouraged. Leapfrog development that requires costly infrastructure extensions through undeveloped lands is discouraged.
  - iii. The City will collaborate with the County and adjacent townships to enable new development within the City's growth areas that is compatible with the use, density, and configuration recommendations of this Plan; the City cannot regulate use outside its boundaries (unless extraterritorial zoning is established in cooperation with a township) but will seek outcomes that are compatible with future urban development and could someday be served efficiently by the full array of urban services. Any development in the planning area should be consistent with City Ordinances.
2. Encourage development that uses land efficiently.
  - i. Encourage infill development that fit the density of the surrounding properties on sites already surrounded by urban uses.
  - ii. Promote the inclusion of residential where appropriate that minimize land consumption, including small lots and attached units.
3. Protect and respect natural resources and systems in all development decisions.
  - i. Preserve environmental corridor features including waterways, floodplains, wetlands, ground water recharge areas, and steep slopes (greater than 20%), through the enforcement of the City's Subdivision Ordinance, Zoning Ordinance and Official Map.
    - a. Developers should be encouraged to design developments in such a manner so as to preserve mature vegetation, particularly along the street and highway rights-of-way.
    - b. Require environmental corridor features to be accurately depicted on all site plans, certified survey maps, preliminary plats, and final plats.
  - ii. Encourage landscaping practices in new and existing neighborhoods that protect ground water and surface water resources.
  - iii. Encourage the clean-up of contaminated sites to foster redevelopment of brownfields.

## LAND USE

4. Make land use decisions in accordance with this approved and adopted Comprehensive Plan, as well as any other pertinent development plans that are approved and adopted. Consider long-term implications of land use decisions.

### ACTIONS

- A. Meet annually with representatives from contiguous government entities and Green Lake and Waushara County to discuss land use issues as needed.

### GOAL 2

**Established, balanced neighborhoods throughout the City.**

### STRATEGIES

5. Provide a mix of housing types to accommodate every stage of life (see also Housing goals and policies).
6. Use city review processes to encourage design for land use compatibility. Consider the following design guidelines in these reviews:
  - i. **Land Use Planning.** Maintain adequate physical separation between residential areas and uses that tend to produce excessive noise or odors, without sacrificing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. Locate community facilities such as schools, churches, libraries, museums, parks and community centers in strategic locations that enhance and are safely accessible from the surrounding neighborhoods.
  - ii. **Site Design.** Direct traffic from higher volume uses to collector and arterial streets, away from neighborhood streets. Use screening (walls, landscaping, berms) to create separation when distance alone is not possible or sufficient. Design the site so that major activity areas such as building entrances, service and loading areas, parking lots and trash receptacle storage areas are oriented away from less intensive land uses to the greatest degree possible. Reduce the impact of parking areas with physical separation and visual barriers.
  - iii. **Building Design.** Encourage building and site design techniques to make larger buildings more compatible with smaller residential uses, such as increased setbacks, stepped-back upper stories, and architectural strategies to break up the apparent volume of the building. Require building design and materials standards for all multi-family uses and nonresidential uses in neighborhood settings. Encourage underground parking facilities when feasible.
  - iv. **Lighting Design.** Outdoor lighting of parking, storage and service areas shall be designed to minimize spillover of light onto adjacent properties and public rights-of-way.
7. Institutional land uses (schools, churches, community centers, etc.) should communicate with surrounding neighbors whenever they are considering long-term expansion plans. City staff should facilitate this process by creating (or requiring) detailed small area plans that include possible expansion.

- 8. Encourage large ownership parcels to be developed as planned developments, rather than subdivided into lots without a coordinated development plan.
- 9. Encourage building and neighborhood design to enable passive solar heating and photovoltaic power generation.
- 10. Enforce property maintenance codes to maintain neighborhood quality and prevent blight.
- 11. Encourage public dialogue and incorporate public input into decisions regarding planning. Use outreach and education techniques to keep residents informed of land use changes occurring in the city.

## ACTIONS

- B. Review and update the City of Berlin's Zoning Ordinances (Section 13.1.30) as necessary to align with the land use goals as established in this Plan.
- C. Consider developing an interactive online zoning map for use by city staff and the general public.

### GOAL 3

**Placemaking that is vibrant, attractive and unique, especially within Downtown.**

## STRATEGIES

- 12. Encourage property owners to convert or rehabilitate vacant second-floor spaces into code-compliant residential units, supporting additional housing options and increasing downtown vitality.
- 13. Discourage the use of storefront-level

space for storage and encourage active commercial or community use through targeted engagement, updated regulations, and tenant recruitment support.

- 14. Foster the development of Downtown as a mixed-use district, encouraging development of shopping, employment, housing and community gathering opportunities.
- 15. Encourage infill development of vacant or underutilized lands or buildings. Work with property owners to bring forward projects consistent with this Comprehensive Plan and other relevant documents.
- 16. Continue to promote development incentives (e.g., waivers, flexibility, and/or TIF assistance) to encourage and support infill and redevelopment projects that substantially improve the downtown area and the City as a whole.
- 17. Encourage the preservation of architecturally, historically, and culturally significant sites, buildings, and structures in the city and its environs. Encourage continued use, maintenance and adaptive reuse of existing buildings with historic value.
- 18. Encourage more extensive floral, shrub, and tree planting in both public rights-of-way and on private property as allowed.

## ACTIONS

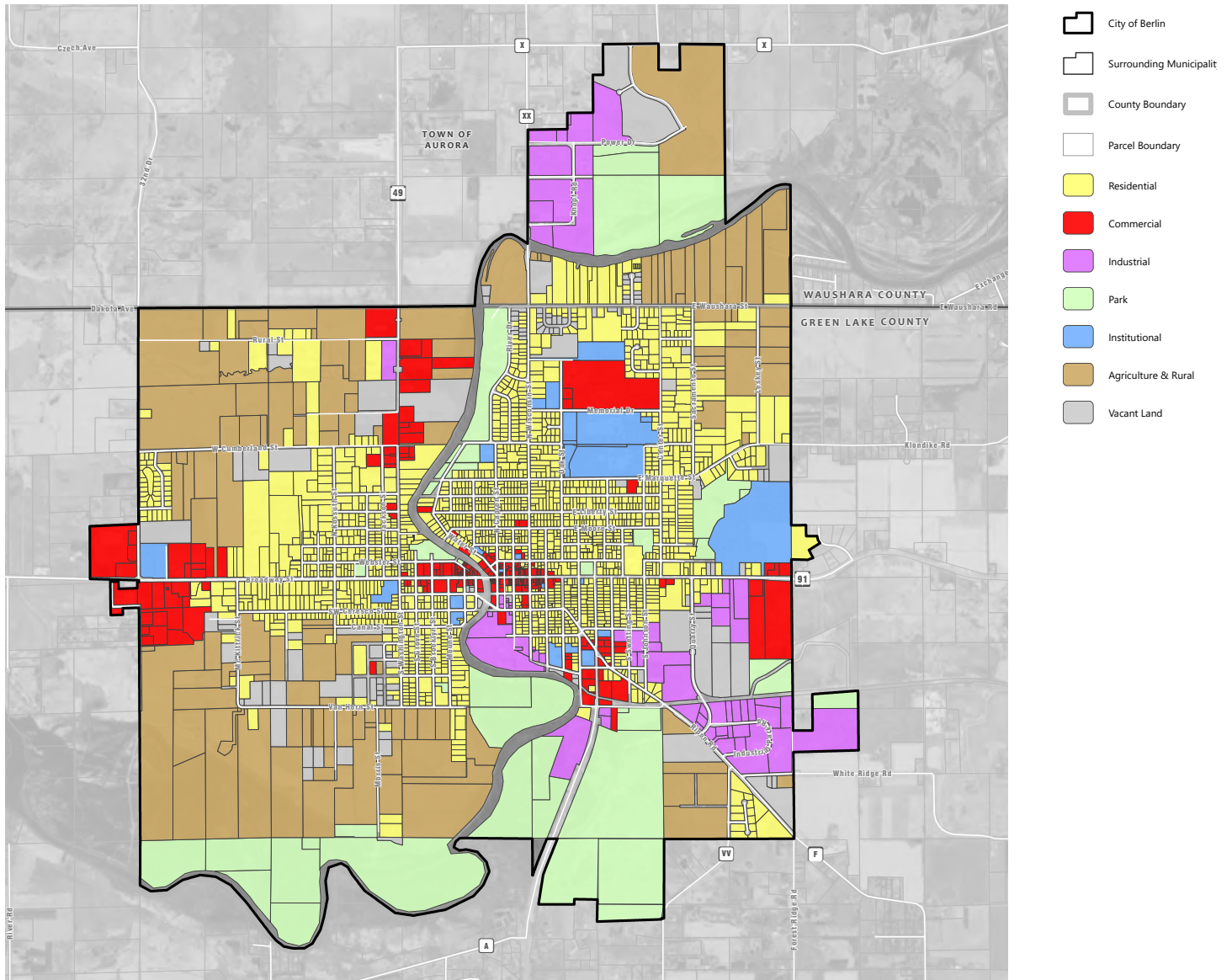
- D. Develop and implement a plan to make the City's entry corridors attractive and inviting through landscaping, lighting, etc.
- E. Implement streetscaping improvements, wayfinding signage, placemaking, and connectivity strategies to make Downtown unique, memorable, and attractive.

# LAND USE

## EXISTING LAND USE COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

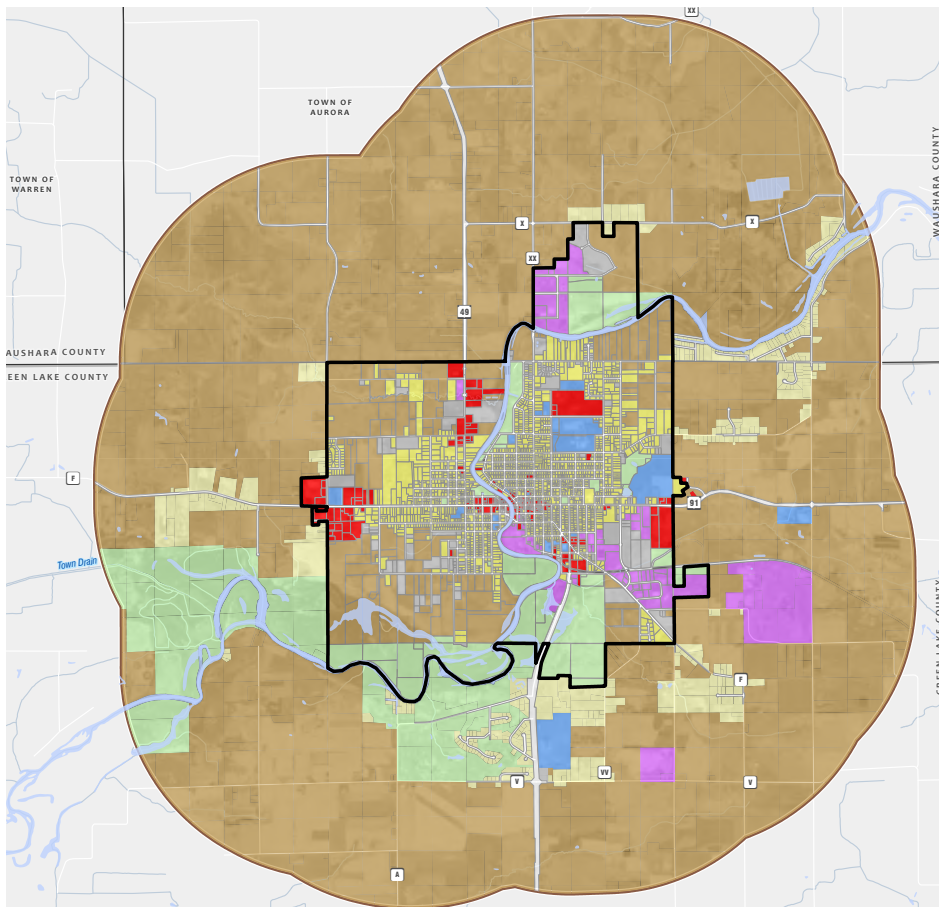
Map 9.1 and Table 9.1 identify the types and locations of various land uses in Berlin. Map 9.2 illustrates land uses in the greater planning area, where rural lands (28%) and residential (22%) comprise the majority of land uses.

### MAP 9.1 - EXISTING LAND USES, CITY LIMITS
















**Table 9.1 - Existing Land Use, 2024**  
(GIS, MSA Professional Services)

LAND USE	COMMUNITY LIMITS	
	AREA (ACRES)	%
Residential	936	22%
Park	664	16%
Vacant	283	7%
Commercial	234	6%
Rural Land	1,192	28%
Transportation	378	9%
Industrial	259	6%
Institutional	147	3%
Water	113	3%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4,028</b>	<b>100%</b>



**MAP 9.2 - EXISTING LAND USES, PLANNING AREA**

-  City of Berlin
-  Planning Area (1.5 Miles)
-  Surrounding Municipality
-  County Boundary
-  Residential
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Park & Open Space
-  Rural Land
-  Public
-  Vacant Land
-  Transportation
-  Water

# LAND USE

## PROJECTED LAND DEMAND

Table 9.2 projects the City’s anticipated land use and space needs through 2050. These projections use current zoning minimum lot sizes, current land use percentages, and projected new housing demand to estimate land needed for other uses. The Plan’s Future Land Use Map (*Maps 9.3 and 9.4*) was developed based on future land demand based on population projections, growth patterns, and input from City staff and the Plan Commission.

### Key Findings

Based on projections of moderate growth in the population, the City will need to develop a minimum of 173 acres of land by 2050 to accommodate projected adjustments in residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Significant increases in the population beyond the current DOA projections should trigger an update to the land use plan and review of projected land demands.

**Table 9.2 - Projected Land Use Demands**  
(GIS, MSA Professional Services, Municipal Zoning Ordinance, ACS 2023)

PROJECTED DEMANDS*	2020	2030	2040	2050	30 YR CHANGE
Population	5,571	5,333	5,068	5,811	+ 240
Avg. Household Size	2.38	2.25	2.06	1.89	- 0.49
Housing Units	2,689	2,723	2,826	3,532	+ 843
Residential Lands (acres)	936.27	940.84	954.80	1050.11	+ 113.84
Commercial Lands (acres)	234.2	235.4	238.9	262.7	+ 28.5
Industrial Lands (acres)	259.48	260.75	264.62	291.03	+ 31.55

Source: WI DOA Population Projections, GIS, MSA Professional Services, Municipal Zoning Ordinance, ACS, B25024 UNITS IN STRUCTURE

\*These projections use current zoning minimum lot sizes, current land use percentages, and projected new housing demand to estimate land needed for other uses.

## FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use (FLU) Map identifies the recommended future land uses within the City of Berlin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. This map and its associated policies form the basis for land development decisions; the FLU Map shall be consulted whenever development is proposed, especially when a zoning change or land division is requested.

### USING THE FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Map contains different land use categories that together illustrate the City's land use vision. These categories, including explanation of the City's intent, zoning, design and development strategies for each, are described in this section. Zoning changes and development shall be consistent with the future land use category shown on the map and their corresponding Plan description.

#### Statement of Intent & Typical Use

The future land use categories identify areas by their primary intended uses, character and densities (herein described as "Statement of Intent & Typical Uses"). These classifications are not zoning districts; they do not establish binding performance criteria for land uses (i.e. setbacks, height restrictions, etc.), nor are they intended to list every possible use that may be permitted within the future land use classification. Parcels on the Future Land Use Map are identified by their primary intended uses; however, some of the parcels on the map have yet to be platted or subdivided. The City recognizes that detailed site planning to identify how larger unplatted parent parcels (herein referred to as "unplatted new development areas") may be subdivided, zoned, and developed is outside of the scope of this Plan.

The City may create neighborhood plans for these areas as part of future amendments to this Comprehensive Plan to further illustrate and guide development within these areas. The City may also require that developers create neighborhood plans and parks for these areas prior to submitting requests for rezonings or preliminary plats.

#### Potentially Acceptable Zoning Districts

The future land use classifications identify those existing City of Berlin Zoning Districts that are "consistent" within each future land use category (herein described as "Potentially Acceptable Zoning Districts"). The list of potentially acceptable zoning districts will be used by the City to confirm whether requests for rezoning of property are generally consistent with this plan.

#### Effect on Zoning

Land use and design policies in this plan should be considered during all development processes, especially in land division and rezoning or zoning ordinance amendment processes when consistency with the plan is a statutory requirement. Where development is proposed under existing zoning regulations, including any Planned Unit Development districts, the regulations of existing zoning supersede policies in this plan.

### AMENDING THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

It may, from time to time, be appropriate to consider amendments to the Future Land Use Map, usually in response to a type of development not originally envisioned for an area when this plan was adopted. *See Implementation Chapter for a description of the procedural steps for amending any aspect of this plan.*

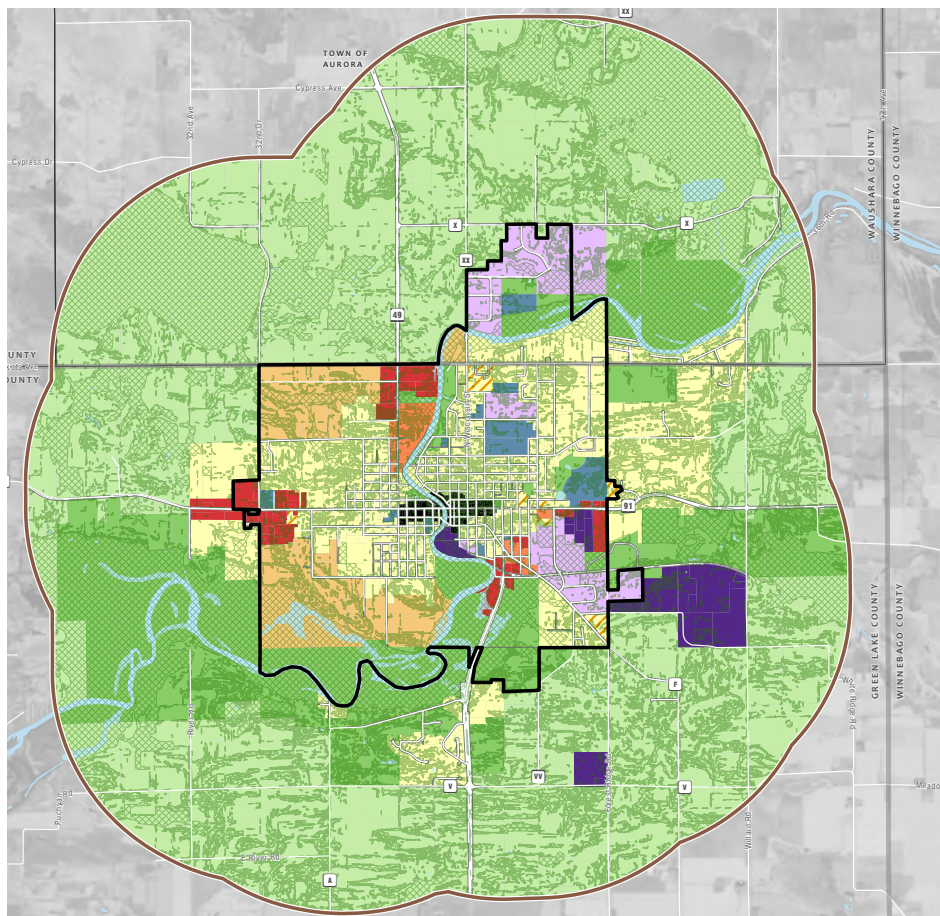
The following criteria should be considered before amending the map:

- **Compatibility:** The proposed amendment/development will not have a substantial adverse effect upon adjacent property or the character of the area, with a particular emphasis on existing residential neighborhoods.
- **Natural Resources:** The land does not include natural features such as wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, scenic vistas or mature woodlands (1 or more acres, especially those consisting of heritage trees), which will be adversely affected by the proposed amendment/development. The proposed development will not result in undue water, air, light, noise pollution or soil erosion.
- **Transportation:** The proposed amendment/development will not create a significant detriment to the condition of adjacent transportation facilities or cause significant safety concerns for motorists, bicyclists, or pedestrians.
- **Ability to Provide Services:** The provision of public facilities and services will not place an unreasonable financial burden on the City.
- **Public Need:** There is a clear public need for the proposed change or unanticipated circumstances have resulted in a need for the change, and the proposed development is likely to have a positive social and fiscal impact on the City. The City may require that the property owner, or their agent, fund the preparation of a fiscal impact analysis by an independent professional.
- **Adherence to Other Portions of this Plan:** The proposed amendment/development is consistent with the general vision for the City, and the other goals, policies and actions of this plan.

## FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

This section includes a description of each of the Future Land Use Plan categories. These categories include recommended land uses (e.g. residential, commercial, industrial), and land use densities (i.e. dwelling units per net acre). All zoning decisions, land divisions, utility extensions, capital improvement projects, and related land development activities and decisions should be consistent with the recommendations of the Future Land Use Plan.

- Neighborhood Residential
  - High-Intensity Residential Overlay
- Neighborhood Mixed Use
- Downtown Mixed Use
- Employment
- Industrial
- Commercial
- Public/Institutional
- Urban Reserve
- Rural Lands
- Parks, Recreation & Open Space (PRO)
- Natural Resource Protection (NRP) Overlay







MAP 9.3 - FUTURE LAND USES, PLANNING AREA

- Planning Area (1.5 Miles)
- County Boundary
- Surrounding Municipality
- Future Land Use**
- Neighborhood Residential
- High-Intensity Residential Overlay
- Neighborhood Mixed Use
- Downtown Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Employment
- Industrial
- Parks, Recreation & Open Space
- Public/Institutional
- Urban Reserve
- Rural Lands
- Transportation
- Water
- Natural Resource Overlay

# FUTURE LAND USE

## Comprehensive Plan Update

City of Berlin  
Green Lake County, Wisconsin

-  City of Berlin
-  Surrounding Municipality
-  County Boundary
-  Parcel Boundary

### Future Land Use

-  Neighborhood Residential
-  High-Intensity Residential Overlay
-  Neighborhood Mixed Use
-  Downtown Mixed Use
-  Commercial
-  Employment
-  Industrial
-  Parks, Recreation & Open Space
-  Public/Institutional
-  Urban Reserve
-  Rural Lands
-  Transportation
-  Water
-  Natural Resource Overlay

Data Sources:  
Green Lake County GIS (2022), Waushara County GIS (2025)

