



PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA SECTION	OTHER BUSINESS
MEETING DATE	APRIL 1, 2025

ITEM:	Discussion on Zoning Updates and Districts	
DEPARTMENT:	Community Development	BY/DATE: Brenna Jansen, Community and Economic Development Intern March 28, 2025

INTRODUCTION:

Staff have been discussing ongoing challenges associated with the commercial districts defined within the City’s Zoning and Development Ordinance, especially the Limited Business District (LB). The Limited Business District is currently comprised of separate clusters that are not uniform in character, use, or characteristics. Since the district is so spread out and inconsistent, staff is presenting this information to the Commission for discussion on how the Limited Business District could better fit our comprehensive plan, how to support and guide the LB District by identifying existing components of LB that are barriers to future development. The City’s Commercial Zoning Districts are described as follows:

- (D) LB, Limited Business District provides appropriate locations for limited retail sales and services for convenience of adjacent residential neighborhoods along collector or arterial roadways near residential neighborhoods, arranged and designed to be a functional and harmonious part of the neighborhood, and accessible by public sidewalks or trails as well as by roadways.
 - Multiple family housing is a permitted use in the LB, but single-family housing is not permitted unless it is accessory to commercial use.
- (E) GB, General Business District provides appropriate locations for general retail sales, services and other commercial developments that benefit from proximity to other commercial uses and are located away from residential neighborhoods, along arterial roadways and are accessible primarily by automobile.
 - GB does not allow for housing as a use and there has been a City policy of purchasing functionally obsolete single-family houses in this district along Central Avenue for future redevelopment. Medtronic and the Rainbow redevelopment sites anticipate high density housing in the form of multifamily housing and townhouses.
- (F) CBD, Central Business District provides for the development and redevelopment of the established downtown core, including a mix of retail, financial, office, service and entertainment uses; residential units are allowed within this district when located above a first-floor commercial use.

There are two primary concerns related to legal nonconformity in the Limited Business District:

- Commercial uses in the Limited Business District have off-street parking requirements, but these parcels’ lot sizes are not large enough to accommodate the required parking spaces. This legal nonconformity limits commercial growth on LB parcels such as 1601 37th Avenue NE, 604 40th Avenue NE, etc.
- Single family housing is not permitted in the Limited Business District, but almost half of the parcels zoned as LB were grandfathered in when the district was created and are currently being used as single-family homes. Most of the nonconforming single-family homes in LB are in the 40th Ave or

University Ave clusters. Single family homes make up 78% of the LB parcels on 40th Ave and 33% of the LB parcels on University Ave.

EXISTING LB CLUSTERS:

There are several clusters containing most of the parcels zoned as LB, the Commission is urged to consider challenges and potential future direction of LB parcels within the context of these clusters and their surrounding land uses.

University Avenue is comprised of LB parcels located between General Business parcels to the north and R2 parcels to the south. Six residential parcels and a General Business parcel separate the LB parcels on this stretch. Of the 24 LB parcels: eight (8) are currently used for single family housing, 15 for multifamily housing, and one (1) for a church. Staff recommend considering the future of this segment during the reconstruction of University Ave and the 2050 Comprehensive Planning process.

Consider: What does the transition from University to the surrounding area look like in the future?

40th Avenue contains 42 LB parcels along 40th Ave between Washington St and Jackson St operating most similarly to a transitional zone. They are surrounded by General Business parcels to the east and Central Business parcels to the west. Of the 42 parcels in this stretch: the majority (32) are currently used for single family housing, one (1) for a church, and the remaining properties are used for commercial purposes.

Consider: What is the role of housing in the LB district and how does the reconstruction of 40th Avenue influence that vision?

Central Avenue has three separate clusters of LB parcels located along Central Ave between 42nd Ave and 45th Ave with other parcels on these blocks zoned General Business, and the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map indicates all should be commercial. For the sake of cohesion along this corridor and to comply with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, it would make sense to rezone these LB parcels as General Business. However, nine of these parcels currently contain housing (seven single family, two multifamily), which is not a permitted use in the General Business District. The City has already purchased 4416 Central Ave (single family home) for redevelopment and has an established policy for purchasing functionally obsolete single-family houses in the GB District.

Consider: 800 53rd Avenue NE was recently re-guided to allow for the use of multifamily housing and townhouse development in GB, moving forward, should multifamily housing be an allowed use in the GB District?

Stinson Blvd: This block contains 6 parcels being used for multifamily housing and 1 parcel with an empty commercial building. The parcels are located across the street from a mixed residential and commercial block in St. Anthony.

Consider: This cluster would be relatively easy to rezone as R3, so it is worth considering whether the LB zoning serves the future vision for this block.

37th Ave: Two small parcels on the corner of 37th Ave NE and Johnson St NE are zoned LB. The two parcels are surrounded by R-2A parcels in Columbia Heights and across the street from single-family homes in Minneapolis zoned for residential and light commercial uses in mixed-use buildings. 1529 37th Ave currently

holds a business, but 1601 37th Ave is currently vacant. It was previously used as office space and can only be used as a medical/dental clinic, office, professional studio/service, or retail sales. Both lots are legally nonconforming because they do not meet the minimum lot area requirements and 1601 37th is below the minimum width.

THE FUTURE OF LB:

The primary questions to consider are:

- 1) Does the Limited Business District, in the present condition, function as a distinct zoning district.
- 2) Is the Limited Business District serving the City effectively as it is currently written or are there shared characteristics that should be defined within that zoning district or the design guidelines?
- 3) What clusters does the Limited Business District suit best? Should any of these clusters be rezoned?

From staff's perspective, the transitional character described by the Limited Business District is most closely aligned with current conditions on University Ave and 40th Ave. We are contemplating how the LB zone might be edited to better encompass the vision for University Ave and 40th Ave.

Two land use and redevelopment goals from the 2040 Comprehensive Plan are particularly relevant to this conversation:

- Create a redevelopment plan for the 40th Avenue Corridor.
 - Assemble a redevelopment plan for 40th Avenue NE to provide for increased neighborhood commercial development and protect existing residential properties as appropriate
- Enhance the image and viability of the University Avenue corridor while providing opportunities for transit-related uses.
 - Coordinate efforts when redevelopment opportunities arise along University Avenue.

Consider: How do you envision these corridors developing in the future? When you visit these areas, are there any specific challenges you observe?

PARKING IN LB:

A possible solution to the constraints of off-street parking on LB parcels is to remove off-street parking requirements for commercial uses in the LB district. In all of Columbia Heights except the Central Business District, off-street parking minimums are determined based on the parcel's actual use. The Central Business District has been designated an off-street parking district, meaning off-street parking is not required except for residential uses. If the Limited Business District was designated an off-street parking district, street parking might serve 40th Ave and 37th Ave well, but would create complications in other LB clusters:

- University Ave: Does not currently allow street parking or have a sidewalk. Commercial uses without parking lots would rely on side streets, raising accessibility and safety concerns.
- 40th Ave: Currently, street parking and sidewalks are available on both sides of the street. Removing off-street parking requirements might be viable in this cluster, but the presence of Greater Life Church at 4000 Quincy St NE raises the question of whether institutional uses should be required to offer off-street parking in off-street parking districts since they attract large numbers of people at the same time.
- Central Ave: The LB parcels on Central Ave are in an area that does not have street parking, so removing their off-street parking requirement would mean businesses there would have neither street parking nor off-street parking minimums.

-
- Stinson Blvd: All parcels currently have parking lots, but this block does not allow street parking. If any of the buildings converted to commercial use, removing the off-street parking requirement would allow them to remove their parking lots without being served by street parking.
 - 37th Ave: Street parking is not available directly in front of either building on 37th because of their position on street corners, but customers could park further away on 37th or on Johnson St. Sidewalks are available on the other side of 37th in Minneapolis.

Consider: Would any of these areas benefit from a different approach to parking?

Other Items to Consider:

Staff brought forth changes to the City Sign Code in a previous meeting and noticed that Dynamic LED signage, signs that display a changing message every so often, requires a Conditional Use Permit and are only allowed on monument signs/existing pylon signs. Staff does not have examples of conditions that the Planning Commission or City Council could add, but these signs are typically regulated by limits on the maximum area, frequency of message change, and maximum illumination. Additionally, cities are prohibited from regulating signage based on message contents.

Staff would like the Planning Commission to consider what type of neighborhood input is sought and if there are any conditions that could be added; if the Commission cannot come up with reasonable conditions unrelated to message content, then staff recommends bringing a future amendment forward to make Dynamic LED signage a permitted use.

ATTACHMENT(S):

Description of Commercial Zoning Districts and Uses
Limited Business Clusters