



DEVELOPMENT CODE REWRITE PLAN CONFORMANCE REPORT

January 2022
Draft

The Plan Conformance Report is an analysis of the Town of Johnstown’s development regulations – Chapter 16: Zoning; Chapter 17: Subdivisions; Transportation Master Plan (adopted 2008), Street Design & Construction Standards (Part II of the Design Criteria & Construction Regulations); and the Landscape Standards and Specifications. The report compares these regulations to the Comprehensive Plan’s (adopted 2021) policies and identifies where the regulations support these policies or where they may not support or specifically conflict with these policies. The purpose of this report is to evaluate how well the current regulations align with the plan and identify a range of options to consider through the regulation update process. This report is a preliminary step in the process. It provides a critical view of the regulations and is intended to start a dialogue on a wide range of potential regulatory strategies and actions.

The Comprehensive Plan has two types of policies – those to pursue immediately or through proactive steps by the public and private sector; and those that are influenced by the town’s regulations as developers and public officials react to projects incrementally over time. The regulations establish standards for public and private property and coordinate many projects to achieve the broader and long-range goals of the community. The significance the development regulations have on implementing the comprehensive plan increases over time. The impact and coordination of multiple projects accumulates, and the relationship of public investments and private development emerges, establishing the character of the community.

The analysis and recommendations of a plan reflect the long-term vision of the community; however, a plan does not necessarily predetermine anything. Rather, it establishes a policy framework to manage future change through development. Therefore, development regulations must provide the Town with the tools to best manage change, enable different options, and react to many circumstances that cannot be fully anticipated. This analysis is organized around the core elements of the policy plans and provides an assessment of how well the regulations anticipate change and prepare the community to implement those elements.



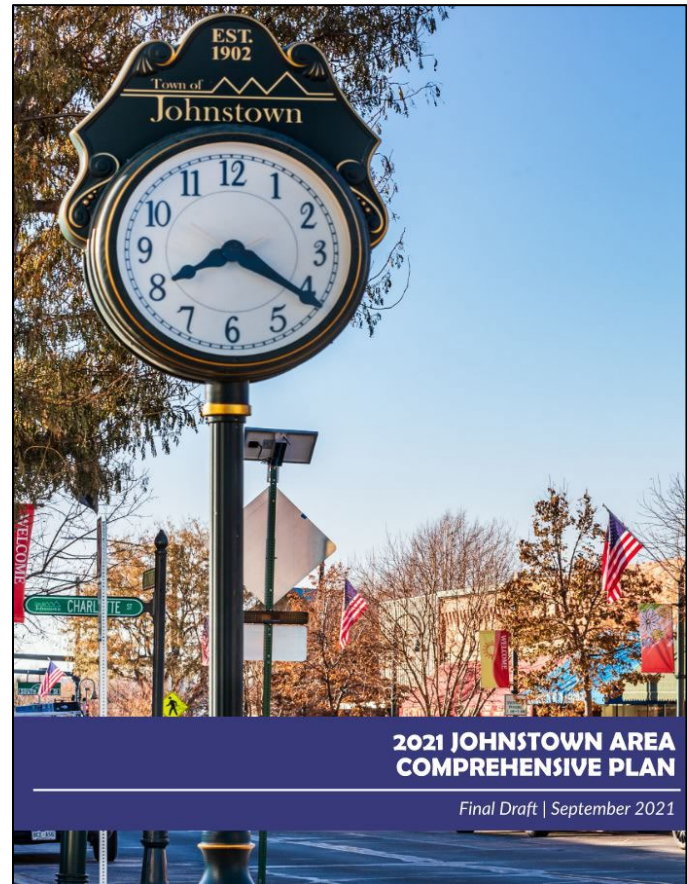


PLANNING POLICIES

The principal planning policy document Johnstown is the Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan (2021). The Street Design & Construction Standards (2004), the Parks, Trails, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (2003), and the Town and Downtown Design Guidelines and Landscape Standards were also reviewed. The objective of these adopted plans and guidelines is to steer future growth and development in a way that is supportive of the public's long-term vision and goals.

There are three integral themes identified within the Comprehensive Plan. Each theme is reflected in the following goals and strategies that are most applicable to how development regulations can implement the plan:

- ***Johnstown is Resilient***
 - Preserve Natural Systems
 - Build Housing Variety
 - Adequate Public Facilities
 - Concentrate Employment Hubs
 - Promote Agriculture Heritage
- ***Johnstown is Vibrant***
 - Design Diverse Neighborhoods
 - Strengthen Walkable Downtown
 - Neighborhood Activity Centers
 - Community Corridors & Gateways
- ***Johnstown is Connected***
 - Open Spaces + Gathering Places
 - Multimodal Streetscape Design
 - Connected Street Networks

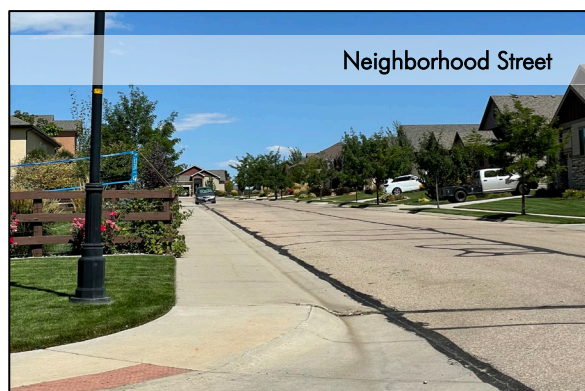
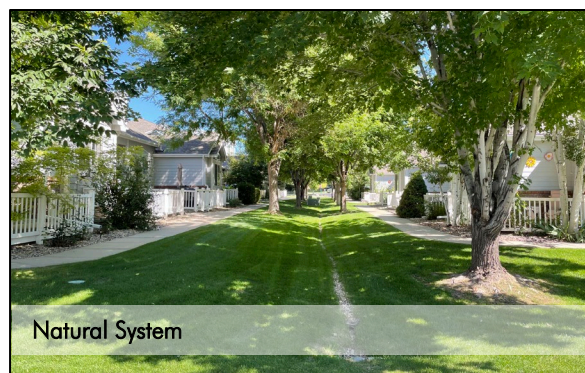


FUNDAMENTAL REGULATORY THEMES

Some adopted planning policies are more directly impacted by development regulations than others. The following sections are intended to align the adopted policies of the Comprehensive Plan with physical attributes of the community most impacted by regulations.

This analysis focuses on 4 primary topics:

- **Agricultural & Natural Systems** – undeveloped or organic systems that influence development patterns and community character, and which should be accentuated and complimented by the design of the built environment.
- **Street Design & Networks** – the fundamental public space system that connects the community and establishes development patterns.
- **Housing & Neighborhood Design** – the key to building enduring neighborhoods that withstand the test of time, promote long-term stewardship by residents, and sustain multigenerational roots.
- **Walkable Commercial Places** – centralized places for people to advance the interchange of ideas, commerce, and culture, intended to encourage interaction and bring the community together.



AGRICULTURAL & NATURAL SYSTEMS

POLICY OVERVIEW

- Update land use regulations to encourage development to have agricultural elements and themes (e.g. orchards, community gardens, re-purposing agricultural structures, etc.) into their design. Alongside this effort, collaborate with new and existing neighborhoods, special districts, and other community partners to implement agricultural elements and themes in neighborhoods and facilities.
- Assess opportunities to protect vital viewsheds along major corridors and gateways to highlight Johnstown's unique natural features (e.g. rivers, mountains, protected agricultural lands, etc.)

2021 Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan.

WHY IT MATTERS

Johnstown's roots start with a rich agricultural history, and today benefits from a large amount of open space containing important habitats to a host of wildlife, including natural features, public parks, and agricultural farmland. The preservation of these areas, as well as integration within future development, is an important priority to address within the development regulations. Proactive strategies that promote preservation and integration of agricultural and natural systems will be beneficial to the community, for several reasons:

- Provides stability for wildlife dependent on wetland and riparian areas, as well as food and shelter found in undeveloped areas.
- Protects the ecological functions of the land.
- Promotes the creation of greenways, potentially serving as protected natural, passive recreational space, and connectivity for trails.
- Reduces impact on public infrastructure by allowing natural systems to support development and protects future development projects from locating in unviable natural areas such as floodplains.
- Accentuates the distinct natural and agricultural character of Johnstown, promoting longstanding stewardship and investment, and increasing community desirability.

- Integrates productive agricultural lands into development patterns as a focal point of the community.



WHAT THE REGULATIONS SAY



Neighborhood Agriculture



Native Landscape

Specific regulations related to preservation of natural systems include:

- ARTICLE IV Dedication and Reservation of Land requires a 10% open space dedication for subdivisions.
- Article VII contains general site considerations including criteria promoting the value of larger scale natural systems that can be expanded upon to ensure proper implementation.
- Zoning districts each contain open space requirements for site and block-scale development projects.
- There is a specific zoning district for Open Spaces (“O District”) that essentially establishes a “non-development” area for the town. The O District is currently assigned to all public facilities including town facilities, parks, and schools.
- The Holding Agricultural (“H-A”) zoning district is intended to temporarily preserve agricultural land.

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

There are several regulatory options to consider for preserving and integrating natural systems throughout the community:

- Revisit open space dedication requirements for subdivisions, and associated fees, to ensure open spaces are appropriately applied for various contexts.
- Align open space standards within specific zoning districts (i.e. “livability open space”) with subdivision regulations, and promote a more clear and comprehensive approach to creating valuable, contextually appropriate spaces.
- Expand the range of open space types, specify the application to neighborhood and commercial settings, and promote open space as an active extension of the streetscape (i.e. greenways, pocket parks).
- Reevaluate use and application of the O-District for implementation and preservation of open space. (i.e. consider open space as an infrastructure element in all districts, rather than a specific land use that needs a special zoning district.)
- Strengthen agricultural standards to better preserve and integrate agricultural land into future surrounding developed contexts, potentially adding different scales of agricultural uses that can be integrated into the development pattern (i.e. community-scale agriculture, edible landscapes, agri-tourism).
- Incorporate pocket parks and natural areas in all commercial and employment centers to create public space and offset environmental impacts.



- Update development standards to include right-of-way landscaping requirements that use green infrastructure to protect, restore, and mimic the natural water cycle.
- Consider an Agricultural Preservation Overlay – large-lot residential, farms, pastures, arenas, agri-tourism
- Evaluate the applicability and practicality of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs), conservation development, or other similar strategies to protect valuable agriculture lands.
- Codification of the Greenway/Floodplain character area within the Land Use plan, as established by FIRM/FEMA.
- Update regulations to encourage new development projects to incorporate agricultural elements or themes into their design.

STREETS & CONNECTIVITY NETWORKS

POLICY OVERVIEW

- Residents of Johnstown currently rely primarily on cars for transportation (within and outside of town). However, Johnstown can provide additional multi-modal transportation services to encourage active transportation options and promote the community's health, equity, and wellbeing.
- Residents have indicated connectivity as a major issue. Whether by car, bike, foot, or transit, traveling is made difficult by a lack of straight connecting roads, railroad tracks, and dead ends. Reviewing trails, roads, and overpass connections will be important to keeping a unified community character.

2021 Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan.

WHY IT MATTERS

The design of streets and connectivity networks is a foundational public space investment of any community. The connectivity of street networks determines the type and degree of access for all users – vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit. The pattern of blocks defines the scale, relationship and transition of different places. The quality and design of streetscapes establish the character of public spaces and determines how private development may relate to these spaces. Streetscapes establish the character of the public realm, and their design Contextual streetscape design, as well as connected multimodal networks, have a number of benefits:

- Provides a familiar street network hierarchy and pattern to allow for better wayfinding.
- Establishes the perception of the community, and the character of different places within the community.
- Supports adjacent development patterns and uses providing the appropriate level of access.
- Broadens the use of the public realm beyond solely facilitating mobility, but also accentuating recreation, civic life, and other passive activities.



Disconnected Subdivision Layout



Multi-use Path

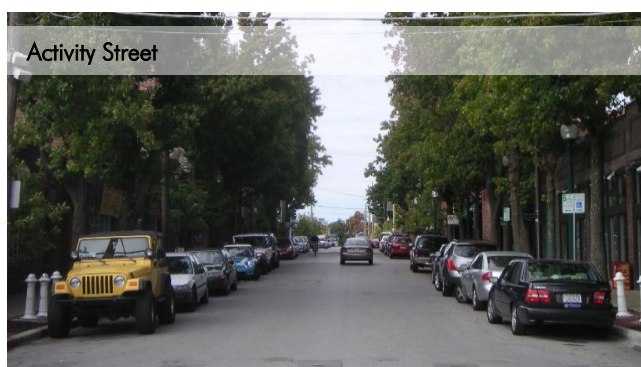
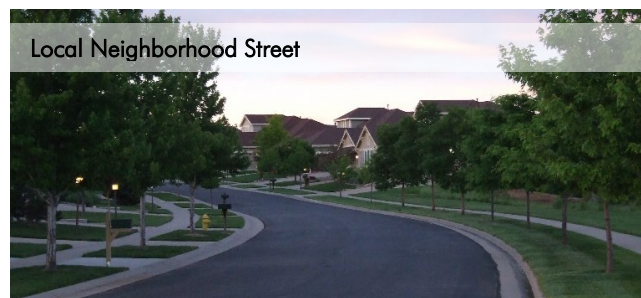
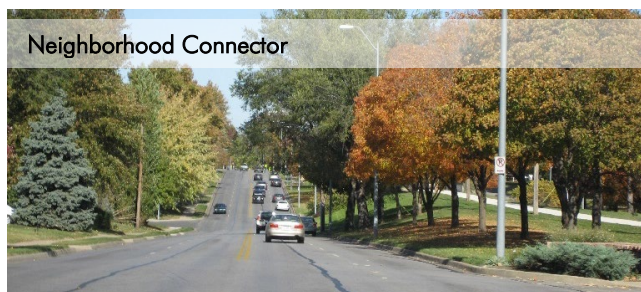
- Enhances the pedestrian experience with appropriately scaled sidewalks, buffers for protection, lighting, and other public amenities.

- Enhances accessibility to businesses and other destinations.
- Lowers travel times and distances for multiple modes of transportation and emergency services.
- Balances the interests of mobility and experiences within the public realm, to preserve and create valuable people places.
- Encourages pedestrian activity that can yield economic and health benefits to the community.

WHAT THE REGULATIONS SAY

Specific regulations related to streets and connectivity networks include:

- Two of the Town's guiding documents impacting transportation, the Street Design & Construction Standards (2004) and the Parks, Trails, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (2003), were last updated almost 20 years ago.
- The Subdivision regulations establish connectivity based the arterial grid; collector and local street connections may not be closer than 1,320 feet and local streets discourage through traffic. This pattern will prevent adequate connectivity and result in purely car-oriented development patterns where large arterials become barriers between neighborhoods and centers.
- The Subdivision regulations contain sufficient standards to ensure streets are established, but lack proper standards related to the design of streets and the contexts they are intended to support. The design of streets is geared to functional class (capacity and speed), with little additional guidance or standards related to context or streetscape quality and character.
- The Street Design & Construction Standards do not adequately tie landscape standards with the design of streets, or how different streetscape elements should be assembled. Without proper context considerations and guidance on the design relationships, the



perceived width of roadways will increase and the opportunity to establish tree canopies and buffers, ease design speeds, and enhance design characteristics is missed.



OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

A number of options should be considered to improve street connectivity networks and design:

- Align the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to make a more explicit reference to coordination between systems of open space, streets and blocks based on different contexts identified in the plan. Require street connections at a finer grain than the arterial grid, promoting signature streets that connect multiple neighborhoods and destinations, such as neighborhood connectors, boulevards, and parkways.
- Establish signature streets along sensitive areas to preserve natural systems as an integrated component of the public realm and accentuate the passive use of preserved areas with trails, sidewalks, and open space.
- The Street Design Standards should ensure specifications adequately support existing and future land use contexts, considering different priorities for different modes of transportation.

- Differentiate between planning and urban design standards for streets (to be incorporated in the subdivision regulations) and engineering and construction specifications (to be retained in the Street Design & Construction Standards). This will allow street networks and street design to be better aligned with land use and development policies.



HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN

POLICY OVERVIEW

- Diversify housing and neighborhoods to provide a wider variety of unit types (from apartment living to large estate lots) and accommodate different lifestyles and income levels. Support new residential developments to build more “complete” neighborhoods with housing near services, parks, transportation, and employment opportunities with neighborhood-scale activity/commercial centers.

2021 Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan.

- There are several significant issues this unified “Development Code” update must address several specific elements, including: Flexible district definitions that create complete and connected neighborhoods, and encourage a range of housing options that accommodate diverse lifestyles and incomes.

Town of Johnstown, Request for Proposal, Land Use and Development Code Update RFP #1-29-2021

WHY IT MATTERS

Emphasis on housing variety and walkable neighborhoods should be a critical focus for Johnstown, given the growth pressures and the significant capacity for new residential settings. Creating well-integrated and connected neighborhoods with a broad portfolio of housing options will have a number of benefits to Johnstown:

- Builds valuable, distinguished neighborhoods and sustained investment and reinvestment in housing.
- Ensures new neighborhoods are well integrated with established neighborhoods, composing a holistic and well-connected communitywide context.
- Supports a variety of lifestyles with different housing needs, promoting “aging in place” for existing and future residents as their lifestyle needs change.
- Creates a more resilient housing supply, and helps communities adapt to changing demographics and societal needs.
- Enables more efficient use of space that supports neighborhood retail if homes are in proximity to walkable destinations.

Residential Frontage: Emphasis on Front Porches



Residential Frontage: Emphasis on Garages



WHAT THE REGULATIONS SAY

Specific regulations related to housing and neighborhood design include:

- Residential zoning districts are limited to three districts – SF-1, SF-2, and MF-1. These districts do not promote residential contexts with integrated housing types, but rather isolated, individual residential settings with little variation in terms of housing type, orientation, and lot size.
- Zoning districts regulate the development of housing based on lot size and density, rather than standards related to the pattern, scale and character of development to achieve housing option and neighborhood design goals.
- Current development standards are inflexible to accommodate today's development practices. Development is occurring through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process which essentially creates unique development standards for each development project.
- The development code provides standards and procedures for Planned Mobile Home Park development, providing one option for smaller-format housing.



OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following regulatory strategies should be considered to establish a clear relationship between the Comprehensive Plan policies and the development regulations:

- Implement the adopted land use character areas adopted in the Comprehensive Plan by codifying simple, yet significant, physical design characteristics of neighborhood settings.
- Create flexible zoning districts that serve current community needs and encourages creative and diverse development practices.
- Convert residential standards from a "district-approach" (all property in the district subject to the same standard) to a "building type" approach (standards developed for specific

building types, and the appropriate range of compatible types is applied to each district). This can better-align neighborhood design, housing variety, and walkability goals.

- Revisit and align parking and access standards with neighborhood design goals.
- Consider a broader range of uses compatible with residential neighborhood settings, such as multi-family housing, home occupation businesses, and small-scale commercial.
- Consider at least one residential district that enables a broader mix of housing types and densities into a single neighborhood context. SF-2 may be appropriate for this application since it has been established for rowhouses and duplexes, and can be further broadened with refined standards, or a new district could be created.
- Update standards for larger multifamily types such as apartments or mixed-use buildings to emphasize critical design frontage, access, and development pattern characteristics.
- Revisit standards for mobile home parks for a more comprehensive approach to small-format housing, considering things like courtyard housing and other arrangements of smaller units in coordinated and well-designed contexts.



WALKABLE COMMERCIAL PLACES

POLICY OVERVIEW

- *Johnstown is a vibrant community that leverages our walkable, historic downtown, and traditional neighborhoods, with new innovative commercial and residential areas, offering diverse opportunities to enjoy and create lively and thriving business areas, neighborhoods, and civic spaces.*
- *Commercial centers in an [medium density] area will feature more walkability, perhaps offering covered arcades or awnings, pedestrian-scaled signage, shade trees and nice landscaping that helps slow traffic and break-up parking areas, and enjoyable outdoor spaces to gather. Commercial areas in [low density] areas will feature smaller building footprints ($\pm 3,000$ -30,000 SF), and be focused on providing smaller-scale retailers and services aimed at serving the immediate neighborhood and community, with more walkability and attractive landscaping that helps slow traffic and break-up parking areas, and enjoyable outdoor spaces to gather.*

2021 Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan

WHY IT MATTERS

Commercial places – whether neighborhood, community, or regionally-serving – are important destinations that serve a variety of functions. Prioritizing walkability in these places will produce many physical, social, and economic benefits:

- Creates a sense of place at a block or district-scale, attracting frequent and repeated patrons to businesses, and promoting longevity and adaptability.
- Promotes strong transitions between predominately commercial/mixed-use and residential settings, establishing a development pattern that supports physical activity and fitness, as well as equitable accessibility.
- Produces more efficient development patterns that contribute to the fiscal productivity of the broader community.
- Prioritizes people walking over the sole mobility of cars, enhancing safety for all users, sense of place, and broader use of the public realm.



The Zona Rosa (upper image) a mixed-use center that is adjacent but disconnected from residential lots, hindering access by foot and emphasizing and prioritizing access by automobiles. Brookside (lower image) is a commercial center that has a neighborhood scale is well-integrated with adjacent neighborhoods, with a good balance of access on foot, bicycle, in a car, or by transit. (Kansas City, MO)



Walkable Suburban Town Center

WHAT THE REGULATIONS SAY

Specific regulations related to walkable commercial places include:

- The current standards promote commercial contexts that are physically separated from surroundings, by enabling discontinuity of connector streets and insufficient design of streets serving a walkable commercial context. (See Streets and Connectivity Networks comments, and specifically the impact of the “arterial grid.”)
- Allowable uses within the zoning districts are not sufficiently defined and scaled to promote commercial destinations designed to the variety of contexts in Johnstown. They are based primarily on the types of uses and not on the scale or format that determine how a use fits into a context or impacts its surroundings.
- The Comprehensive Plan begins to distinguish different contexts based on the scale and format of uses. However, the uses enabled by non-residential districts do not distinguish different scales and formats, and the development standards do not

emphasize differences in development patterns and form between the districts.

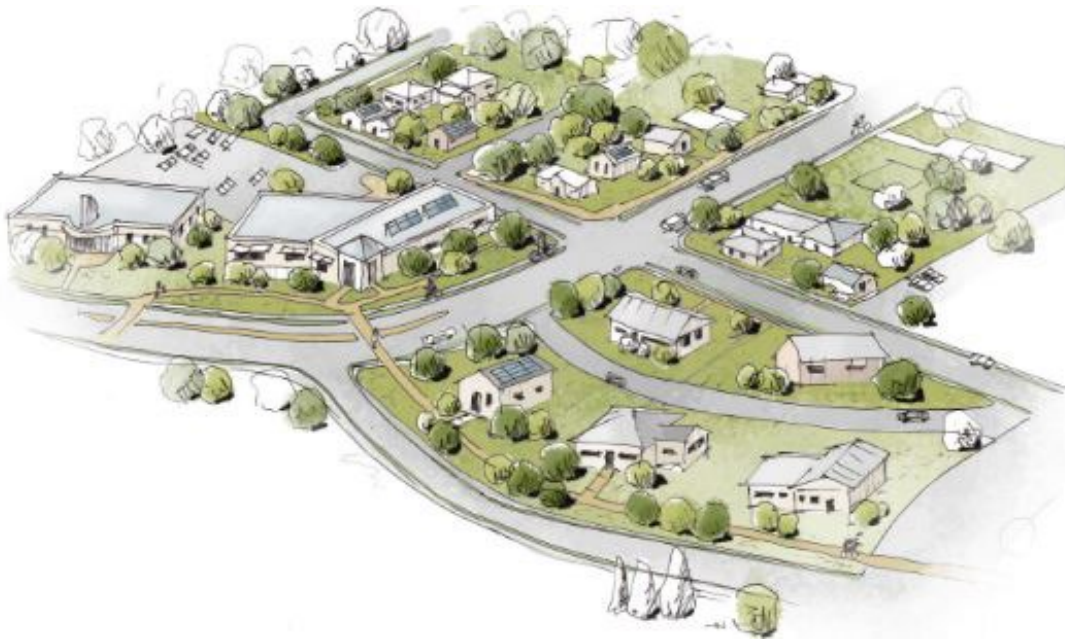
- A 20% open space requirement applies to the Neighborhood Commercial (NC) District, which can yield good civic gathering space depending on its application and scale of project.
- The Central Business (CD) District lacks sufficient standards to ensure walkable form and format and allows project outcomes that could undermine the intent of the district.

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

Standards influencing lot/block structure, street design, and use mix are fundamental to any place’s walkability.

- Evaluate the subdivision regulation to ensure that the foundation for connected, walkable streets and block networks within commercial centers, and between residential settings, is being created.
- All commercial districts would benefit from a comprehensive approach to allowable land use types that are sufficiently defined and scaled.

- Development standards should be revisited to ensure approaches are appropriate for various contexts and achieving desired outcomes. Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR) standards should be reconsidered or be supplemented with frontage, site design standards, and other standards more meaningfully tied to desired design outcomes in some districts.
- Neighborhood Commercial (NC) District and Central Business (CB) District contain use regulations that are not sufficiently defined and scaled to promote walkable contexts.
- Open space standards should be revisited to ensure desired outcomes can be achieved based on scale of project.



*Commercial Hub Integrated in a Neighborhood Setting
2021 Johnstown Area Comprehensive Plan*