
To: Board of Adjustment and Planning Advisory Commission
From: Megan Smith, Land Use Management Director
Mtg. Date: April 27, 2026
Re: Goodhue County Density Committee Recommendations

In early 2026, a committee was formed to study residential density in Goodhue County's unincorporated areas, evaluate the zoning ordinance regulations related to density, and make recommendations on changes. The Committee met three times, and has made the following and recommendations, and the findings to justify the changes.

Recommendations:

1. Allow up to 16 homes per section, instead of 12, in sections zoned A2, thereby allowing up to one home per quarter-quarter section (40 acres).
2. Eliminate the A3/Urban Fringe zoning district and convert the land back to A1 or A2
3. Repeal the County's conservation subdivision ordinance
4. Minimum lot size for newly platted subdivisions zoned R1 shall be 2 acres instead of 1 acre

Findings:

1. Goodhue Co has approximately 20,000 households, with a population of 48,000 people.
2. Density outside of cities is regulated by the County through zoning, first enacted county-wide in the early 1970's.
3. The majority of the County's Zoning fall into the agricultural district categories of either A1, A2, and A3.
4. A typical section of land is 640 acres, with 16 quarter-quarter sections, each comprised of 40 acres. Because of this rule, two quarter-quarter sections are left without building rights. This has created unintended outcomes, such as a first come first serve mentality related to building rights, properties keeping dilapidated homes just to preserve building rights, and awkward lot splits across quarter-quarter section lines to create building sites. There are also several property owners who have expressed frustration with not being able to build on 40 acres, just because of this density limit.
5. A total of 224 sections of land could see growth with the A2 change, mostly across the northern portion and more populated portion of the County.
6. There are 14 sections that already have 16 or more homes in them that would be unaffected by this change.

-
7. Thirteen (13) of the County’s 21 Townships have adopted their own zoning ordinances. Most of these townships have lot size and density requirements of their own. By allowing an increase in density in County ordinance, it opens the door to allowing townships to follow suit, but does not force any township to allow more density than it wishes to allow.
 8. The A1 District allows up to 4 homes per section. Approximately 2/3rds of the county’s land area is covered by A1 and no changes are being proposed to this zoning district.
 9. A3 has several issues:
 - a. It has created dozens of non-conforming feedlots, many of which were in existence before zoning controls were put in place and therefore these existing feedlots cannot be expanded or altered.
 - b. A3 land requires 35 acres or more for a building site and prohibits landowners from putting their homestead on a smaller parcel that is separate from the agricultural land, which is allowed in A1 and A2.
 - c. Cities and townships should work together to determine growth areas. In many cases, the county’s urban fringe district expands way beyond the city’s planned growth areas.
 10. Of the 999 parcels total zoned A3, 717 of them are less than 35 acres in area. Of those 717 parcels, 192 contain dwellings. With a total of 253 total dwellings in A3, that means 81% of those homes are on parcels less than the 35-acre requirement. This creates a number of issues related to non-conformities.
 11. Since its adoption in 2020, only three conservation subdivisions have been approved, resulting in 3 homes being built. This data shows that the conservation subdivision has been used as a way to circumvent zoning, instead of building small neighborhoods on land in cluster style development patterns, as originally intended.
 12. Related to lot size in R1, the County has seen several variance requests on R1 property where an acre is argued to be too small to fit a home, outbuildings, a well, a septic, and a back up septic location.
 13. Another issue related to R1 is the County’s reluctance to re-zone larger tracts of land to R1 knowing how much density could potentially be put these sites. In a recent case, a property owner with 10 acres petitioned for an R1 district and was denied, in part due to the possibility of 10 future homes on that site. If the lot size increases to 2 acres, the County is faced with less intense density possibilities in the pockets of land that are zoned R1.