

DRAFT

**AMENDMENT TO THE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR
THE CITY OF SANDSTONE**

Pertaining to the I-35 Interchange and adjacent areas

Adopted:_____

Prepared for the:

Sandstone Economic Development Authority

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A. Introduction

Through a series of public workshops in 2005, the Sandstone Economic Development Authority, with consultants Thorbeck Architects, Ltd., and the Northspan Group, Inc., produced a Concept Development Plan for the I-35 Interchange in Sandstone. The intent of this plan was outlined as follows:

The Interstate I-35 interchange with Highway 23 and the City of Sandstone is a focus for major economic development, and the City, through its Economic Development Authority, has the goal to develop a Concept Development Plan that will illustrate and guide development on both the east and west sides of the I-35 interchange. The concept plan will look at the physical development advantages and constraints of the area, visually defining alternative uses that fit the area, compliments the downtown, and maintains a unique character for the interchange – one that is different from other interchanges along the I-35 corridor.

Mission: To develop the I-35 freeway interchange as a unique, two pronged development site consisting of a major new lodging development and significant outdoor recreation retail / service center.

- Differentiate this interchange from any other north of the Twin Cities.
- Recruit a major outdoor recreation/sporting goods retailer as anchor.
- Build a marketing strategy around the theme – “Sandstone...the Northwood’s Recreation Gateway.”
- Prepare a concept development design to visualize the development.

The final plan, a concept called “Skunk Creek Clearing,” recommends several changes in zoning and land planning to guide the development of the interchange and surrounding areas as a unique place, in keeping with the other long-term goals of the city. This amendment updates the recommendations found in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan regarding this area in order to implement the I-35 Interchange Concept Development Plan, and integrate it into a consistent plan for the future of Sandstone.

The interchange concept herein is not a new vision for Sandstone as much as it is a strategy for implementation of the goals of the 2002 Comprehensive Plan. By intensely developing the interchange and connected areas in a sustainable, visually-identifiable way, the existing virtues of the community can be preserved and enhanced. These virtues include:

- Tremendous environmental and recreational assets. The interchange concept provides a

framework for creating a unique place on I-35, that will allow better visibility of and access to the natural amenities of Sandstone. A highly visible bicycle/pedestrian trail, the protected wetlands of Skunk Creek, and proposed prairie plantings amidst the existing forest help create a place that is pleasant to visit, while inviting further exploration of the city, trails, and river beyond.

- Historic downtown. The plan is a catalyst for highway-scaled development, stretching from the interchange eastward down highway 23 toward the downtown business district. New development in the form of health care, hotels, recreational retailers, essential service providers, and transient RV parks will support existing downtown businesses by providing new visitors and supporting existing residents.
- Robinson Park. The plan recommends that Robinson Park be restored to more reflect its character when it was an active quarry to better respond to tourist and recreational/sporting users.
- Midwest Country Theatre. This venue is a very popular destination in the region drawing visitors from around the country. The plan is to promote and enhance performance opportunities by construction a community theatre with seating for 500. This venue could become part of a community center with indoor water park, children’s playground, meeting rooms, and city hall/library.

This amendment shares the intention of the 2002 Comprehensive Plan to “direct the public decision making process in a manner consistent with preserving environmentally sensitive, historic or aesthetic virtues within the community, while keeping the expenditure of public funds to a minimum. Indeed, it is a principal concern of the planning process to guard the public interest by insuring development is both properly located to minimize cost and also to insure the proper timing of development.” The diagrammatic approach herein follows the procedure of the 2002 Comprehensive Plan, as follows: “In each of these planning areas, there are several zoning districts; however, the planning area should be viewed as an entire area, and within the context of the land use already existing within the city or land use policies identified in this document. Additionally, these planning areas do not include considerations for property ownership patterns.” The planning areas affected by this amendment were originally defined as:

- 2.) The area immediately north of Trunk Highway 23, east and west of I-35. *and*
- 3.) The property immediately south of Highway 23 at the I-35 interchange, including the now-closed Sandstone Municipal Airport

In this document, these areas are redefined as:

- Planning Area #2.) The four quadrants of the freeway interchange, including adjacent land.
- Planning Area #3.) The former airport property.

B. Planning Area #2

The four quadrants of the Interstate 35 interchange, and adjacent lands

Area Description ...

Included in this planning area is property currently located within Sandstone Township adjacent to the western boundary of the City of Sandstone. This property, while not located within the boundaries of the city, is

vital to the overall development scheme of the interchange, and should be included within this document for planning purposes.

Existing land use planning includes Highway Service Business, some large lot rural areas, and high and medium density residential.

Physical Characteristics...

Land within this area slopes gently toward Skunk Creek, which runs through the area from west to east. Vegetation is mixed, with second growth tree cover. Soil types within this area include Twig (990), Ahmeek (738), and Cloquet (355) which can cause some slight to moderate limitations in excavating basements for dwellings or commercial structures.

Public Services ...

City water and sewer extend along Highway 23 to both sides of properties immediately adjacent to the highway, and extend just across I-35. Otherwise, there is no public infrastructure within this planning area and no utilities exist for the homes along Grouse Street. The highway is maintained by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN/DOT), while Grouse Street, a gravel road, is maintained by the City of Sandstone.

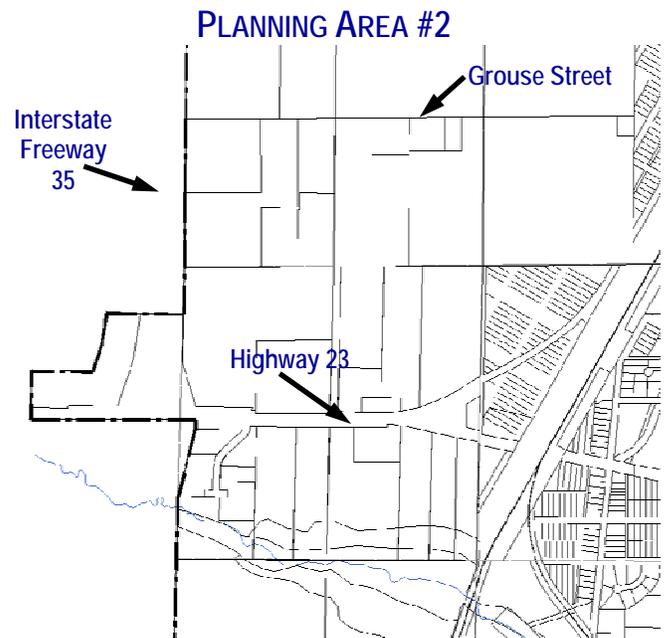
Recommendations ...

Economic development can best be maximized and sustainably managed by implementation of a cohesive design for areas immediately adjacent to I-35 and Highway 23, in keeping with the recent I-35 Concept Development Plan.

The recommended concept, Skunk Creek Clearing, suggests that the landscape of the interchange be altered to become an open clearing with prairie grass and wildflower planting as a contrast to the pine forest that surrounds Sandstone. The four quadrants of the interchange are to be rezoned and selectively developed in particular ways that are most beneficial to the city and supportive of the goals of the comprehensive plan.

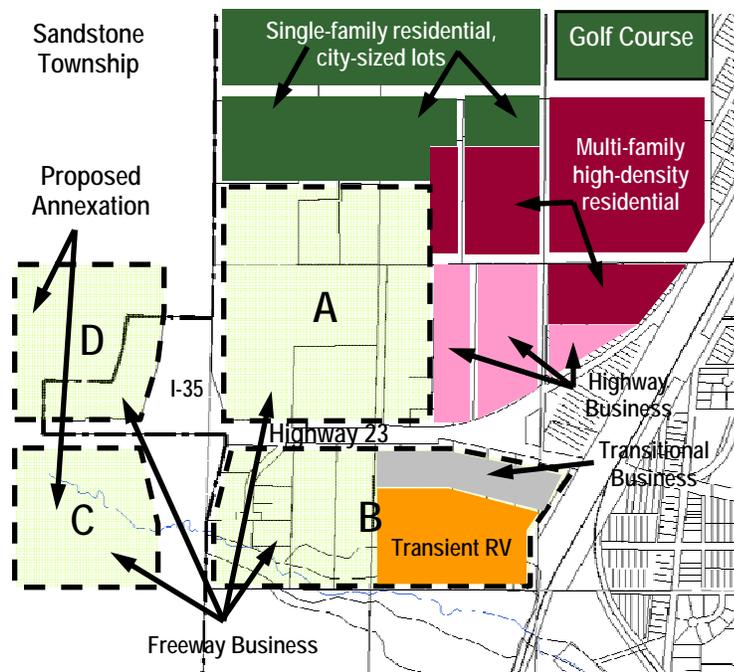
Quadrant A, the northeast corner of the interchange, is the location of the existing clinic and energy company. This should be the focus for future expansion of medical facilities in Sandstone, such as a regional hospital, along with supporting development such as specialized health/wellness retail and a 50-60 room hotel.

Quadrant B consists of land between Highway 23 and Skunk Creek, extending to the east of the freeway. The portion of this quadrant that abuts the freeway is highly visible and accessible to tourists, and should be developed with a focus on outdoor recreation, sports, and related services. Possible uses include



outdoor recreational retailers, a hotel/water park, a theatre/arts complex, or enhanced fitness facilities. The existing forest and wetlands, indicative of Sandstone’s natural and recreational assets, should be preserved and enhanced where possible. Between this area and the railroad to the east is a key transitional area towards downtown; the highway frontage here is to be rezoned “Transitional Business” and encouraged to develop in a pedestrian- and vehicle-friendly way that connects to the existing downtown. Along the Skunk Creek corridor south of highway 23 is an ideal location for a transient RV park, in a natural setting with walkable access to downtown and to proposed regional trails.

AMENDED PROPOSED LAND USE FOR PLANNING AREA #2



Quadrant C, the southwest corner consisting predominantly of wetlands under DNR protection, is best suited to a nature-oriented information center or trailhead-type facility. It is important to maintain this quadrant’s natural features, including the wetlands of Skunk Creek and forest beyond, as a means of visually signifying Sandstone’s environmental and recreational assets to freeway passersby. Other commercial uses that support the nature-oriented focus can be considered by the Planning Commission.

Quadrant D provides a location for retail and service businesses that support the overall interchange concept, such as specialist outdoor recreation stores, restaurants, and fuel. To best support the overall scheme, this development should be visually-consistent and preserve a recognizable natural order, such as ‘a clearing in the woods’ as detailed in the I-35 Interchange Concept Development Plan.

Coherent implementation of this scheme requires creation of two new zoning districts, “Freeway Business District” and “Transitional Business District,” with new building and landscape guidelines. These are similar to the existing Highway Business District, but allow a narrower range of uses and aesthetic expressions in these critical areas. The Freeway Business District applies to the four quadrants mentioned above, while the Transitional Business District is an area along Highway 23 that helps connect new development at the freeway interchange with the existing downtown business district.

For other areas to the north and east of the freeway interchange, the mixed-use recommendations of the 2002 Comprehensive Plan still apply, and shall remain until infrastructure improvements have been made and zoning changed. These include existing highway business areas, an area of high-density multi-family housing buffering the business district, and single-family residential development adjacent to the to-be-redeveloped golf course.

C. Planning Area #3

The former airport property

Area Description ...

This area includes the now-closed airport. The boundary to the north is Quadrant B of the freeway interchange, while the southern boundary is the city limits. (for discussion purposes, this also includes some land located in Sandstone Township). Adjacent to the west is Interstate 35, and to the east lies a portion of Sandstone Township land and the KREEC (Kettle River Environmental and Education Center) property.

Physical Characteristics...

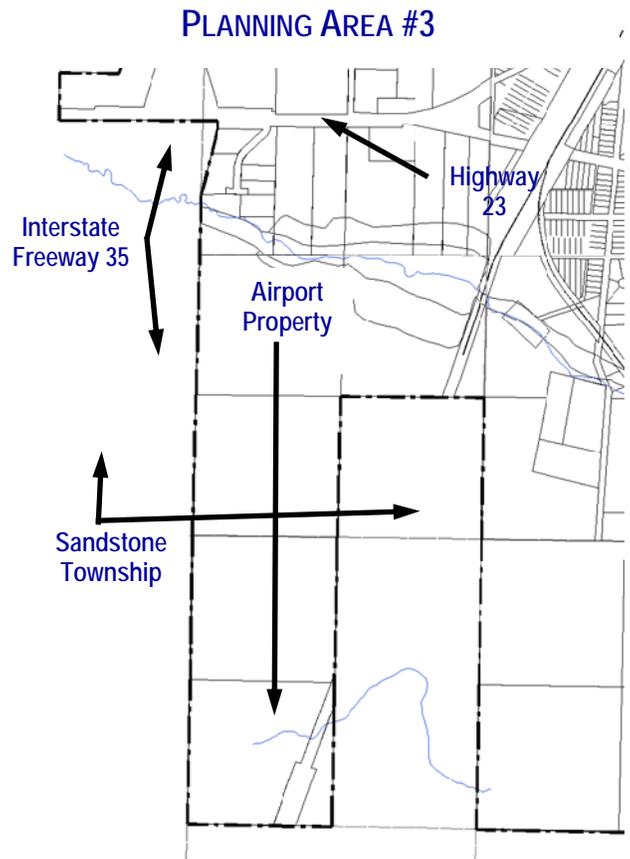
This property includes a portion of the Skunk Creek shoreland. It is gently rolling. Soil types include Ahmeek (738), Mora (164) and Ronneby (166), some of which may present some problems for basements in dwellings and commercial structures, as well as for local streets.

Public Services ...

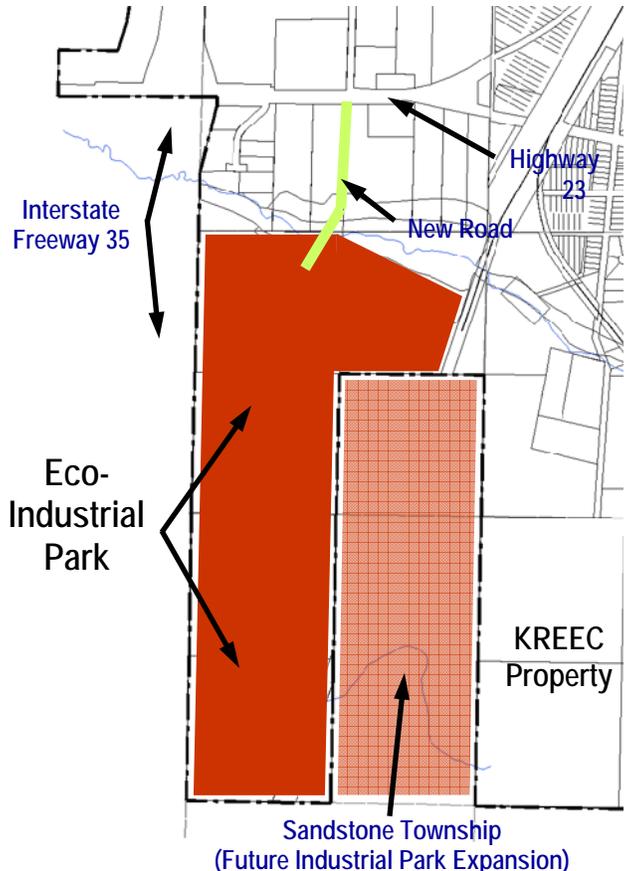
This area has very little in public infrastructure improvements. No city water or sewer is present. Access to this area is served by a shared city and township road that is not capable of withstanding heavy traffic flows. Moreover, it crosses the railroad tracks at an angle, which makes the road a hazard to traffic.

Considerations...

The property has infrastructure improvement needs, as well as a need for proper access. Because the property is abutting the Skunk Creek floodplain and shoreland districts, developing an access road and getting infrastructure to the site is more difficult. An engineering analysis has been done that locates an acceptable street access at the northeast corner of the property, crossing Skunk Creek at a point of narrower wetlands and joining highway 23 across from the clinic road.



PROPOSED USE FOR PLANNING AREA #3



Recommendations ...

As a blending between the natural and recreational heritage and image of Sandstone, and the region's growing economy, an Eco-Industrial Park is suggested for this area. The President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) defines an Eco-Industrial Park as: "A group of businesses that work together and with the community to efficiently share resources (materials, water, energy, infrastructure, natural habitat and information), enhance economic prosperity and improve the environment."

As noted in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan, this area (about 160 acres) is a substantial industrial park, and requires a clear and aggressive plan for its optimal creation, development and marketing.

Some flexibility will be required in zoning so that a workable relationship can be nurtured between proposed businesses, adjacent uses and other city interests. The establishment of a new zoning district, "Special Industrial District," is recommended to set minimal use, building, and landscape requirements for the area while allowing enough flexibility in zoning interpretation so that a successful Eco-Industrial Park can evolve.

D. Other Goals and Opportunities

The specific recommendations above for planning areas #2 and #3 depend for their success on the coherent implementation throughout the city of the larger goals in the comprehensive plan, namely the careful fostering of a sustainable and growing economy. Given the resources available to Sandstone, anticipated and desired growth has been focused on recreational tourism, health care, and regional services. To this end, the city should:

- Move forward with annexation of property on the west side of the I-35 interchange. This will allow the City to control its character and land use, consistent with the overall concept for the interchange and the entire city.
- Promote enhancements and improvements to historical downtown Sandstone reflecting the pedestrian orientation and scale of buildings. As always, infill should be encouraged, and should be consistent with the existing scale and character of the district. Design guidelines should be established for remodeling, signage and new construction that reflects this character. By maintaining the distinct identity of the historic downtown district (versus highway business districts), visitors will be more likely to recognize it and explore it on foot.
- Move forward with acquisition of right-of-ways for development of the Sandstone trail system. A visible and useably-interconnected trail network is important to establishing Sandstone as a recreational destination and trailhead. The existing Willard Munger Trail and the proposed Kettle River Trail are outstanding assets to Sandstone's recreational identity. The trails proposed in the I-35 Interchange Concept Development Plan will allow bikers/hikers to both explore the natural features of the city and to access the large trail network beyond. The city should coordinate with Mn/DOT and the DNR for creation of a paved recreational trail/ right-of-way along the Skunk Creek.
- Improve Robinson Park. All recreational tourists and residents stand to gain by the improvement of the park. Clearing trees and shrubbery to reveal the rock outcroppings and the character of the old quarry will provide improved experiences for paddlers, hikers, rock-climbers and ice-climbers, historians, and casual visitors. Reinstating a series of performances in the park will provide an additional draw for

tourists such as Midwest Country Theater visitors.

- Explore potential of constructing a Community Theatre seating 500 as a regional focal point for the performing arts and exhibitions. A strong arts orientation for Sandstone can further enhance its tourist uniqueness by building upon the success of Midwest Country Theatre. The community theatre could become part of a large regional community center that would include an indoor water park as well as meeting rooms, banquet facilities, and possibly a new city hall and library.
- Create a new concept for utilization of the 160-acre Kettle River Environmental Education Center (KREEC) site as soon as possible, that would connect with the overall concept of ecological understanding underpinning the Comprehensive Plan. One idea builds upon the original purpose for the site and suggests that the site be regenerated as a unique full-service residential education facility focusing on sustainability and renewable energy. It would be a place where life-long education in holistic sustainability - including land planning and water management; energy conservation, renewable energy and atmospheric protection; indoor environmental quality and day lighting; human and environmental health; materials, recycling and waste management; and innovation and design can all be demonstrated, explored and experienced in a natural environment.
- Explore the potential for a new indoor water park, either as a stand-alone facility or as part of a new regional community center or hotel. Such a facility would reinforce the identity of Sandstone as an active, family-oriented tourist destination.