

ROME TOWN CENTER 25-YEAR VISION

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GOALS

BE PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE

The Town of Rome has acknowledged the importance of the roughly 230-acre Town Center. In 2019, the Rome Town Center Master Plan was adopted and in May of 2024 the Implementation Recommendations for the Rome Town Center Design Plan expanded the 2019 Plan by outlining specific next steps. Despite some lost momentum due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2024 Implementation Recommendations have provided a renewed and necessary impetus to move the project forward. This Master Plan is simply building on an established vision set forth by the Town and hundreds of its residents in these planning documents.

The Town has already incorporated several of these ideas. They built an expanded Town Center Park, which includes a splash pad, bandshell, and playground, as well as attracted a brewery, residential development, and have funded the extension of Timberline Parkway. These documents were instrumental in the facilitation of these assets and projects, however the Town Center lacked a specific vision for its future. The Implementation Recommendations provided direction for future zoning revisions and answered the question, “how should the Town move forward?”, but it did not answer the question, “what should the Town Center should look like?”.

This Master Plan is different from typical planning documents. It is concise and highly visual. It distills previous planning efforts, community input, and planning policy into a Plan that outlines where streets, blocks, parks, new buildings, sidewalks, trails, alleys, and parking lots should be built into order to create a clear vision for the Town Center.

As the Town Center grows, attracting new businesses, residents, and visitors, it is critical to set a clear vision for future development and community assets. Not unlike preparing for a long road trip, which requires setting the destination before choosing a route, the Town has decided to set the vision first, and then allow the development to follow this vision. The Town has decided to act proactively, and not reactively.

GROW RESPONSIBLY

The Town of Rome experienced an 11.2% increase in population between 2010 and 2020 according to the United States Census Bureau. This is a significant increase from the 2.4% growth experienced between 2000 and 2010. The singular goal listed in Chapter 7 of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan for future land use was to “maintain orderly planned growth that promotes the health, safety, and general welfare of Town residents and makes efficient use of land and efficient use of public services, facilities, and tax dollars.” In alignment with this goal, the Town of Rome turned their attention to the Rome Town Center, identifying the area as an opportunity for responsible growth.

In 2019, the Town of Rome Board of Supervisors approved the Rome Town Center Design Plan which more fully and clearly outlined this area as a “hub of civic activity”, which “provides a vital economic core for the community.” A range of uses including commercial, institutional, recreational, and residential are appropriate for the area and would strengthen the community as a whole. Since the adoption of the 2019 Plan, new residential units, businesses, and open space improvements have been built.

The Town of Rome is at a critical juncture in its growth. As the 2019 Plan states, this level of growth has not been “experienced in the community since the creation of the Tri-Lakes half a century ago.” Growth is inevitable and already happening. This Vision illustrates how the Town Center can direct this growth in a way that is consistent with previous plans, the community’s aspirations, and follows principles that support the long-term health of a community. Responsible growth is mixed-use, compact, walkable, and respectful to both the existing and future residents of the Town of Rome.

25-YEAR VISION

This Vision will not happen quickly and is intended to guide the form of the Rome Town Center over the next 25-years. The Master Plan will require the cooperation of numerous developers, builders, business owners, Town Boards, and residents that do not yet call the Town of Rome home.

While this Plan is intended to direct the form of streets, parks, and development, it is not a guide for future utility infrastructure. As this Plan becomes reality, further study by engineers and Town officials will determine the appropriate next steps for water, stormwater, sewer, natural gas, electricity, and telecommunication utilities. The Town of Rome owns over 125 acres of the Town Center, the majority of the vacant land in the area, and therefore can dictate the pace of development, making certain development and utility capacity align. In the near-term however, the Town Center can support light to moderate growth, utilizing the existing infrastructure. New development can continue to use group or community septic systems, a cost each developer, not existing Town resident, would bear.

This Plan thinks both big and small. On one hand, this document illustrates what the Town might look like in 25-years. On the other hand, it also anticipates which steps need to be taken immediately, such as an update to the Rome Town Center Zoning District. At the end of the document, specific next steps will help guide the Town over the short-term.

PROCESS

The process of building consensus around a single Vision for the Rome Town Center followed three steps over roughly a three-month time frame. This Vision is rooted in the voices of Rome, both its constraints and strengths, which is why the process was transparent, comprehensive, and authentic.



1. UNDERSTAND

The first step is always to listen to you, the community. The residents, business owners, and local leaders are the experts of their Town. With the help of the Rome Town Center Design Plan Sub-Committee, the planning team identified the key stakeholders in the area. In order to chart the best direction forward, the planning team needed to understand the work that had been completed so far and what the aspirations for the community were. This strong foundation, built by the voices of Rome, helped create a Vision and Master Plan that is a reflection of the Town.

Specific tasks included:

- Review Existing Plans
 - Comprehensive Plan (2016)
 - Rome Town Center Design Plan (2019)
 - Zoning for the Rome Town Center District (RTC)
 - Implementation Recommendations for the Rome Town Center Design Plan (2024)
- Tour of the Rome Town Center
- Focused Stakeholder Sessions: February 19, 2025
 - Business owners, local developers, local leaders, Town Departments, elected officials
- Community Open House 1: February 19, 2025
 - Hosted an public, open house at the Rome Town Hall and invited residents to share their visions, ideas, and experiences with the team

2. EXPLORE

During this step, the team translated and distilled the community’s aspirations and ideas into a draft Master Plan for the Town Center. This Vision was shared with individual stakeholders in focused sessions and with the community. The goal was to reflect back what the team heard in a highly illustrative and visual format in order to gather additional feedback.

Specific tasks included:

- Creation of a Draft Master Plan for the Rome Town Center
 - Three draft renderings
- Focused Stakeholder Sessions: April 10, 2025
 - Business owners, local developers, local leaders, Town Departments, elected officials
- Community Open House 2: April 10, 2025
 - Hosted a public, open house at the Up North Brewing Company and invited residents to provide additional feedback on the draft Master Plan

3. IMPLEMENT

In the final step, our team refined the Master Plan based on the feedback received in the previous project step. A transparent, honest process created consensus around a Master Plan that is tailored to the needs, wants, and aspirations of the Town of Rome. This document elaborates and outlines the recommendations that are the result of this process.

Specific tasks included:

- Creation of a Final Master Plan for the Rome Town Center
 - Finalization of three draft renderings
- Open Space and Trail Recommendations
- Potential Sequencing Recommendations
- Implementation and Next Steps

A special thanks to the Rome Town Center Design Plan Sub-Committee for guiding this process and dedicating their valuable time and energy to it. They care deeply for the future of the Town and always placed the interests of the Town ahead of their own. Its members include:

- Lori Djumadi, Former Town Board Chair
- Lexi Dargiewicz, Former Zoning Administrator
- Diana Duelge, Planning Commission Chairwoman
- Heather Dalton
- Bill Kappel
- Tiffany Seavecki
- Baker Thompson

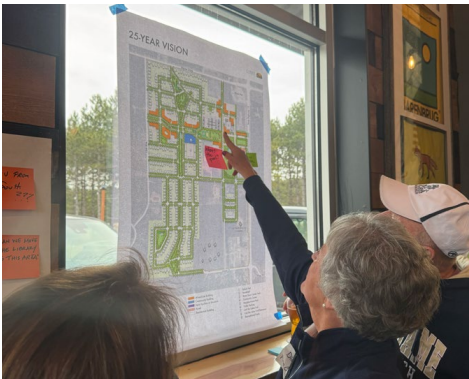
This 25-year Vision and Master Plan was funded by Sand Valley. Thank you for providing this generous gift to the Town of Rome!

WHAT WE HEARD

BIG IDEAS

After speaking with a range of individuals, from residents to business owners, many themes emerged from the planning team's conversations.

- **Support Existing Businesses:** Residents expressed and showed their appreciation for the existing businesses in the Rome Town Center. Winter can be difficult on them, so the Master Plan should provide ways to support them all year round, not just in the summer.
- **Harness Existing Open Spaces:** Recent investments to the Rome Town Center Park have been well-received by residents. Proposed development and investment should build on these assets.
- **Create Connections:** The Master Plan should make it easier to walk and bike within and to the Town Center.
- **Foster a Mixed-use Center:** The Master Plan should include a variety of uses, similar to small downtowns and older neighborhoods of many Wisconsin towns.
- **Provide a Range of Housing Options:** There is significant housing demand in the Town, especially beyond single-family homes on medium- to large-sized parcels.



Community members providing input into the Vision

WHAT IS NEEDED IN THE TOWN CENTER?

1. Restaurant/Cafe
2. Community Center
Fresh Food Access
Theater/Performing Space
3. Healthcare
Hotels/ Lodging
Retail
4. Personal Services
5. Flexible Co-working Space
Outdoor/Recreation Rentals
Professional Services



WHAT SHOULD OUR TOWN CENTER LOOK LIKE?



Most Liked Image



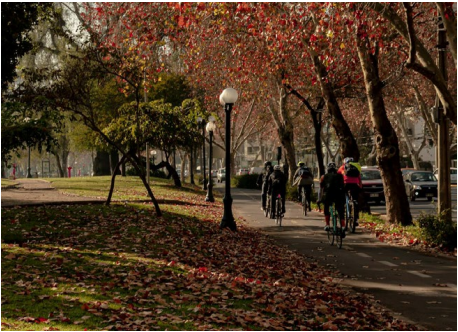
Second Most Liked Image

Participants at Community Open House 1 were asked to place a dot on one of 15 images they were shown. The top two most liked images are shown above. Based on the results of this visual preference survey, the following information was gathered.

- Strong preference for non-residential images over residential images
- A preference for the number of stories as follows:
 1. 3 stories (or more)
 2. 1 story
 3. 2 stories

WHICH AMENITIES DO YOU LIKE TO USE?

1. Bicycle Path
2. Cross Country Ski Trail
Public Art
3. Pickleball Court
4. Basketball Court
5. Fire Pit
Outdoor Market
Picnic Area
Running/Walking Path



WHICH TYPE OF HOUSING DO YOU PREFER?



Most Liked Image

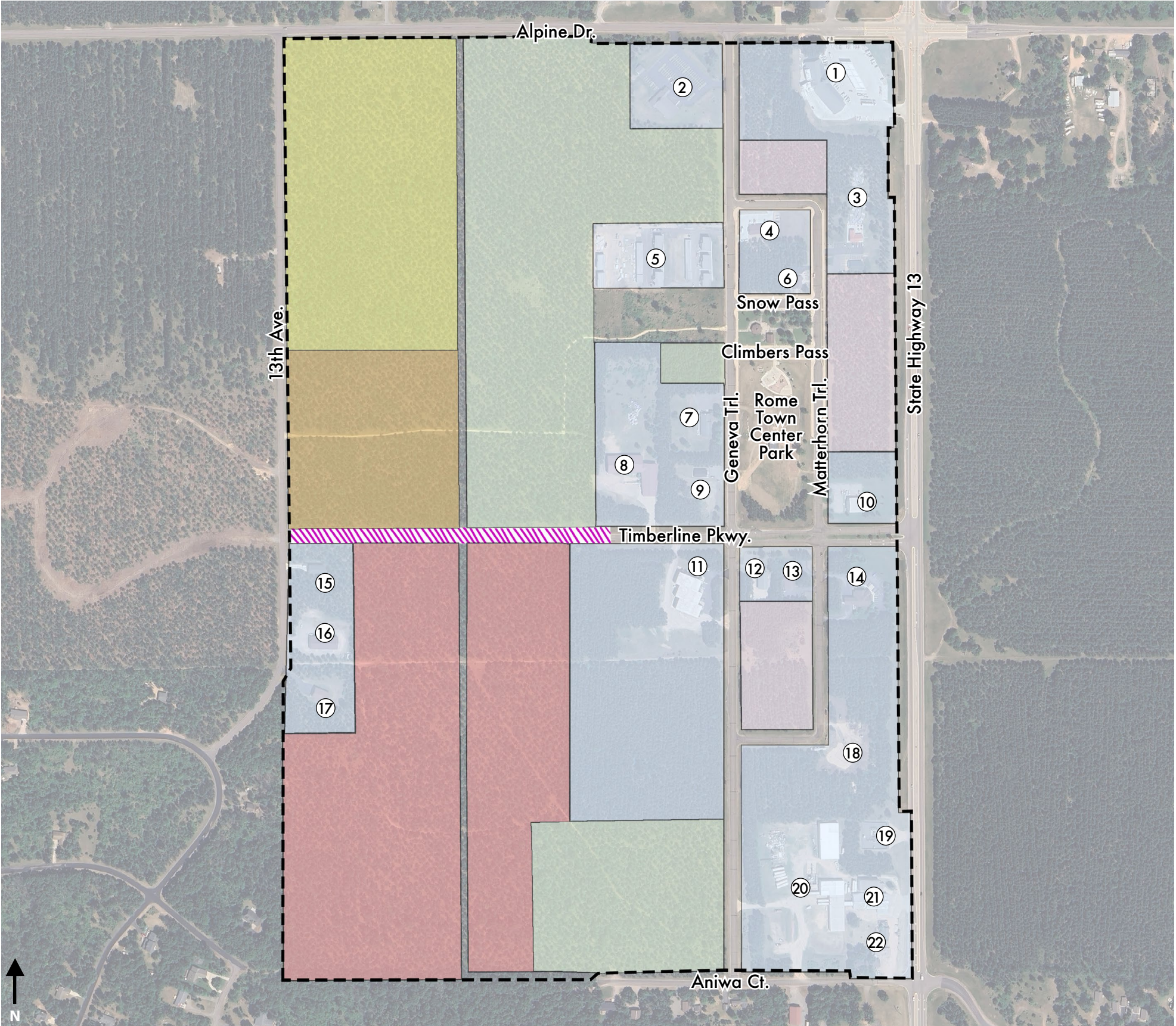


Second Most Liked Images

Participants at Community Open House 1 were asked to place a dot on one of 15 images they were shown. The top three most liked images are shown above. Based on the results of this visual preference survey, the following information was gathered.

- A preference for housing types as follows:
 1. Cottage Court
 2. Mixed-use building
 3. Duplex
 4. Single-Family and Multi-Family
 5. Townhouse

EXISTING ROME TOWN CENTER



SUPPORT THE EXISTING COMMUNITY

The Rome Town Center is roughly 230-acres and contains numerous business, one residential property, and the Rome Town Center Park. While it is zoned the Rome Town Center District, it is subdivided into 5 separate subdistricts.

LEGEND

- Rome Town Center Area
 - Senior Living Subdistrict
 - Mixed Multifamily Subdistrict
 - Mixed Commercial/ Light Industrial Subdistrict
 - Mixed Town Center Subdistrict
 - Commercial "A" Subdistrict
 - Existing Business
 - Planned Timberline Parkway Extension (Expected Completion 2025)
- Kwik Trip
 - Lakes Area Christian Fellowship
 - Papa Bear's Mini Golf
 - Rome Country Meats and Deli
 - Geneva Apartments
 - Slice of Heaven Bakery
 - Rome Away From Home Vacation Lodge
 - Trade Show Logistics & Controls
 - Market Boutique In Rome
 - Coldwell Banker Advantage
 - PerMar
 - Plato Construction
 - E P Schmidt Properties
 - KeySavings Bank
 - Tenihagen Acoustics
 - Shermalot Ski Team
 - Rome Sno-Bandits
 - Up North Brewing Company
 - Adams Columbia Electric Cooperative
 - Multicran Cranberry
 - Rome Child Care
 - DNA Investments

25-YEAR VISION



PLAN AHEAD FOR GROWTH

This Master Plan envisions a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood with a range of housing options. Cottage courts, single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, and small apartment buildings create a year-round community that supports a business core. Healthy neighborhoods rely on cooperation and interdependency between commercial and residential uses in the same area. Public parking lots are located throughout the Town Center, and every street has on-street parking, discretely integrating parking into the neighborhood. Parks and recreational amenities, located within a short walk of most homes, creates a higher quality of life and healthier population. Green corridors provide access to the Town Center and link major amenities together.

LEGEND

- Rome Town Center Area
- Mixed-Use
- Community Building
- Park Pavilion or Structure
- Hotel
- Residential
- Existing/Proposed Building
- Park
- Parking Lot/Alley
- Trail
- Sidewalk
- ① Splash Pad
- ② Bandshell
- ③ Rome Town Center Park
- ④ Community Center
- ⑤ Neighborhood Park
- ⑥ Public Parking
- ⑦ Link the Lakes Trail
- ⑧ Link the Lakes Trail Extension
- ⑨ Recreational Fields
- ⑩ Proposed Pedestrian/Bicycle Route (2016 Comp Plan)

AERIAL VIEW



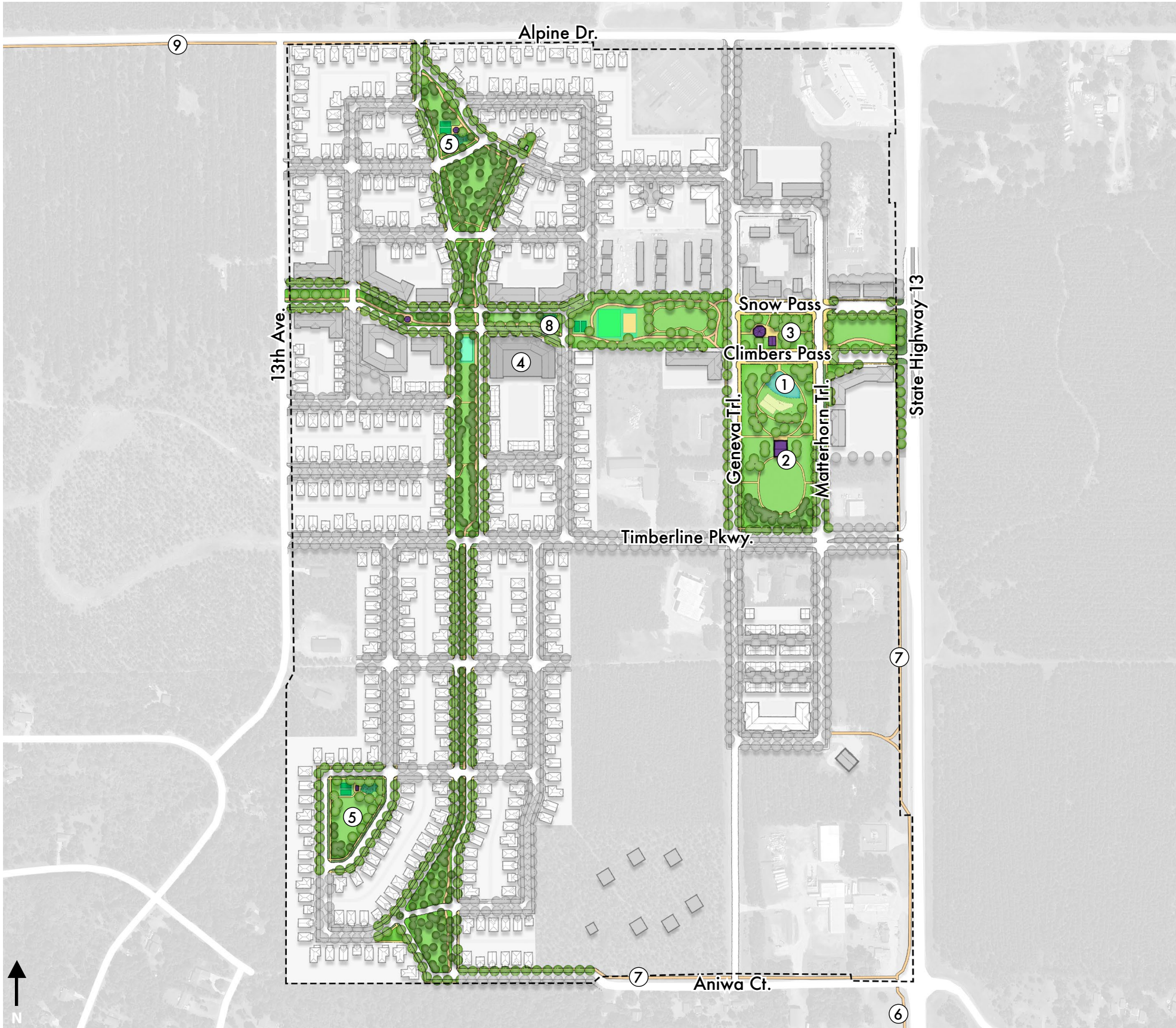
TOWN SQUARE VIEW



RESIDENTIAL STREET VIEW



TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE



RESILIENCY AND CONNECTIVITY

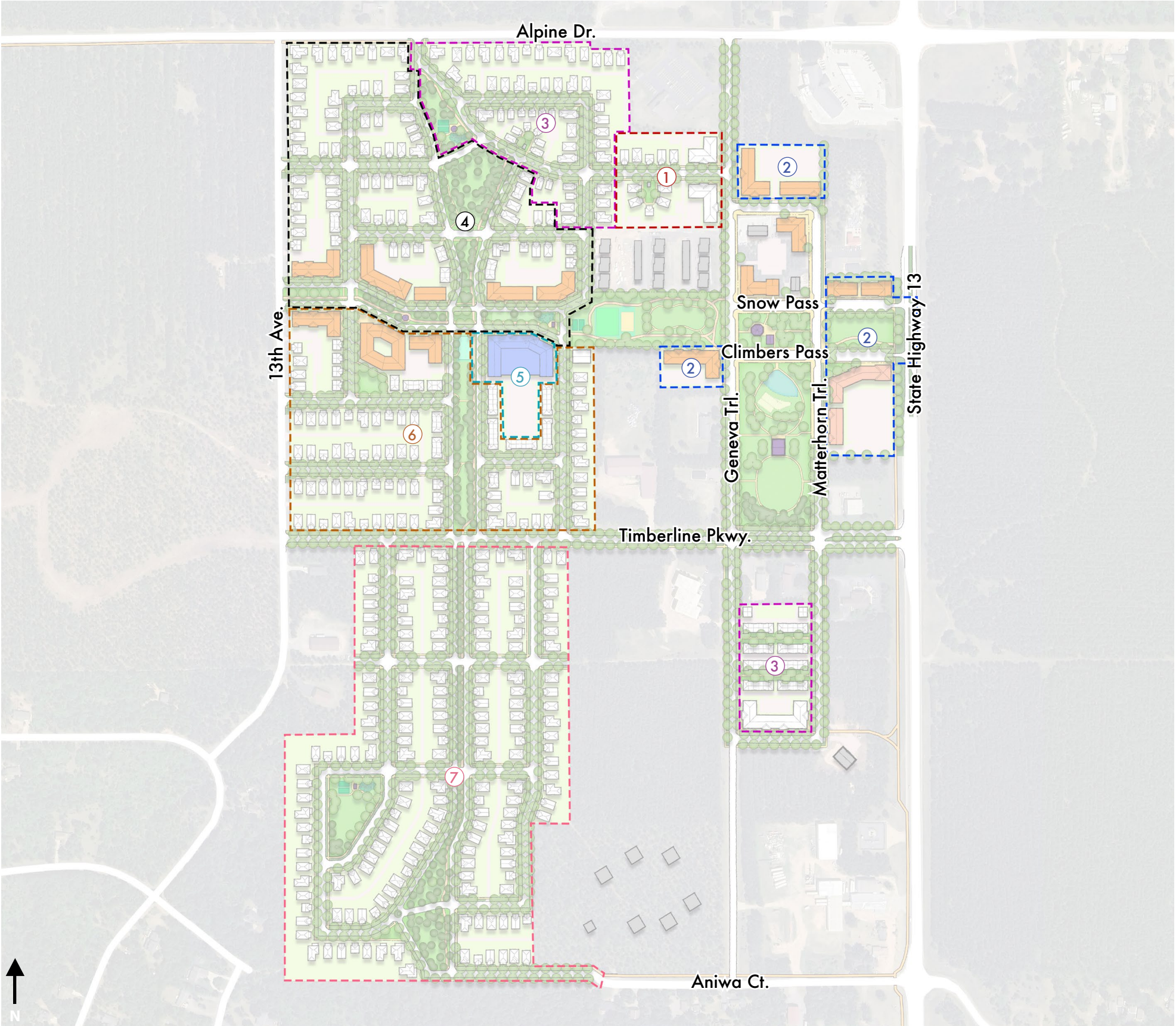
The community expressed a strong desire to transform the Town Center into a connected neighborhood. These connections extend not only to other parts of Rome, but also internally with small, compact blocks, which are easy for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate.

Two major green ribbons extend the length of the Town Center, one from Alpine Drive to Aniwa Court and the other from Highway 13, through the Town Center, to 13th Avenue. At their intersection is a proposed community center with indoor and outdoor recreation as well as flexible community spaces. The two green ribbons are more than a network of biking and walking trails in the summer and cross country and snowmobile trails in the winter. They are also potential stormwater networks if it is determined necessary in the future. Due to the unique, well-draining soil conditions of the area, they may not be necessary for stormwater purposes. Finally, the green ribbons preserve some of the “north woods” feel so many residents love.

LEGEND

- Rome Town Center Area
- Park Pavilion or Structure
- Park
- Trail
- Sidewalk
- ① Splash Pad
- ② Bandshell
- ③ Rome Town Center Park
- ④ Community Center
- ⑤ Neighborhood Park
- ⑥ Link the Lakes Trail
- ⑦ Link the Lakes Trail Extension
- ⑧ Recreational Fields
- ⑨ Proposed Pedestrian/Bicycle Route (2016 Comp Plan)

SEQUENCING



SMALL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

The Rome Town Center will not transform overnight, and it should develop incrementally. As referenced previously, the majority of the area is owned by the Town, which has the leverage to develop it at a rate they deem appropriate. The Town should release requests for proposals (RFPs) for small parcels, even as small as an acre or two in size, to developers and builders prescribing the layouts of streets and parks. Development agreements typically dictate the construction of street infrastructure is the financial responsibility of the developer. After an indeterminate numbers of years the maintenance of the street would fall to the Town. This strategy also allows for growth and the collection of tax revenue, before bearing the cost to maintain infrastructure.

The actual sequencing is likely to be different than what is shown, and should be calibrated to the inevitable periods of economic growth and contraction that the country and region will experience over the next 25 years. This recommendation is more concerned with the sequencing order and general areas of development than prescribing exact areas for projects.

LEGEND

- Rome Town Center Area
- Mixed-Use
- Community Building
- Park Pavilion or Structure
- Hotel
- Residential
- Existing/Proposed Building
- Park
- Parking Lot/Alley
- Trail
- Sidewalk
- ① Sequence 1 - Immediate-Term
- ② Sequence 2 - Near-Term
- ③ Sequence 3 - Mid-Term
- ④ Sequence 4 - Mid-Term
- ⑤ Sequence 5 - Long-Term
- ⑥ Sequence 6 - Long-Term
- ⑦ Sequence 7 - Final Sequence

IMPLEMENTATION

NEXT STEPS

What can be done in the short-term to move the master plan forward? This section outlines five projects or initiatives that should be the next steps. While there are many other ongoing projects in the Town of Rome, the pursuit of these five initiatives can be achieved without compromising any other ongoing effort.

These projects are critical to the success of the overall Town Center. Some are smaller in scale, allowing for a quick show of results with minimal cost, while others are more substantial and necessary for the overall health of the Rome Town Center. Many of these initiatives can be pursued concurrently with one another.

The Rome Town Center Design Plan Sub-Committee, with support from the Town Board, can continue to move these projects and conversations forward. The five initiatives are:

- 1. Convert Snow Pass to a One Way
- 2. Create a Form-based Code for the RTC
- 3. Release the First Development RFP
- 4. Work with the State of Wisconsin to Provide Access from Highway 13
- 5. Extend the Square to Highway 13



Community members at the April 10th Open House

1. CONVERT SNOW PASS TO A ONE WAY

Snow Pass is currently a two-way street with parallel parking along both sides. The street should be converted to a one way with automobiles traveling west, the opposite direction of Climbers Pass. Nearly overnight and with some paint, the number of parking spaces along the northern edge of the street could be doubled if the parallel parking was changed to angled parking. This would help with traffic flow on farmer’s market days, general circulation around the Town Square, and create additional, convenient on-street parking.



Proposed conversion of Snow Pass

2. CREATE A FORM-BASED CODE FOR THE RTC

Before more development occurs in the Rome Town Center, the Vision needs to be codified in the Zoning Chapter of the Town Code. The best way to ensure the Master Plan is executed is to use the appropriate regulatory mechanism to guide the growth of the area.

A form-based code is one of the best ways to regulate a walkable, mixed-use district, such as this one. They are highly visual and focus on regulating building form such as heights, setbacks, frontage types, and parking locations. It deemphasizes building uses and density, and as a result is more successful at fostering predictable development and creates a better pedestrian experience.

The five subdistricts should be combined into a singular district, yielding higher quality results and creating a cohesive neighborhood. This type of code is both easier to read and understand, and it will provide harmony across a range of building and housing types. This next project should commence immediately.



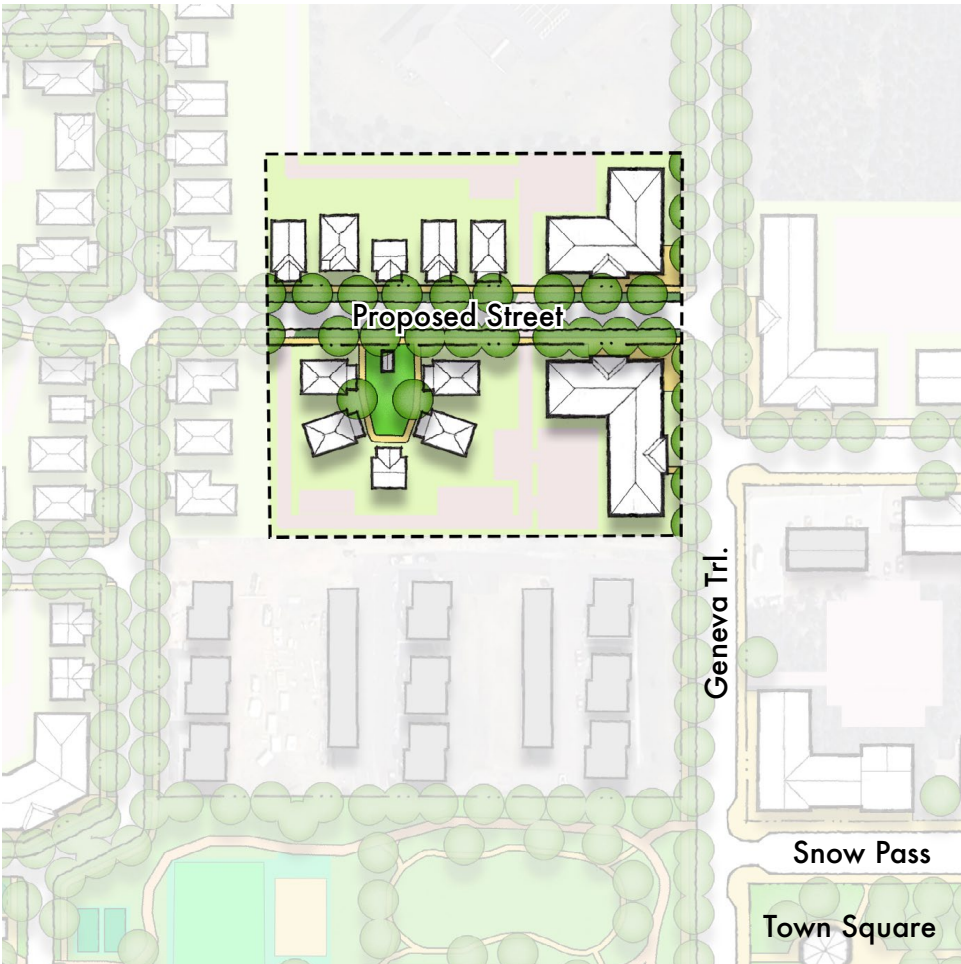
An example lot diagram from a form-based code

IMPLEMENTATION

3. RELEASE THE FIRST DEVELOPMENT RFP

The first RFP released to developers, builders, and the community needs to set the right tone for future phases of development. Therefore, it should be a smaller, more feasible area, providing a template for future projects. It should include a range of housing types, including ones that are not often found in the market, but are nevertheless highly sought after by potential residents.

The 4-acre area shown below requires limited new infrastructure and is already connected to the existing street network. This area is large enough to provide a range of housing options, including a cottage court, single-family homes or duplexes, and small, walk-up apartment buildings. It is also small enough so that local developers and builders can be competitive in the RFP process. The project might only contain 20-30 units.



Potential first RFP of Town-owned land off of Geneva Trail

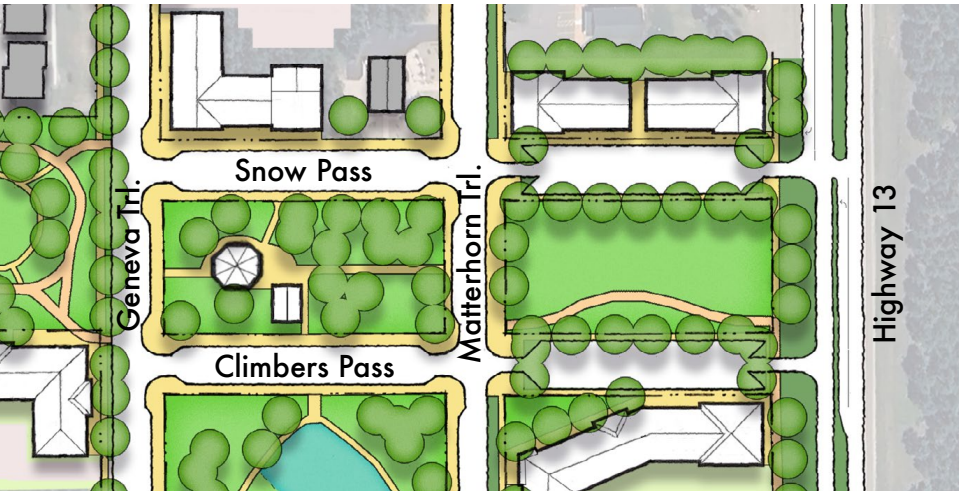
4. WORK WITH THE STATE OF WISCONSIN TO PROVIDE ACCESS FROM HIGHWAY 13

Direct access from State Highway 13 is critical to the success of the Rome Town Center. This connectivity will create increased visibility from a road, which as of 2008, had an average daily traffic (ADT) count of 4,600 vehicles. The current route from Highway 13 to the Town Square is circuitous and separates the heart of the community from those wishing to access it. Lake Forest, Illinois and Seaside, Florida, nationally recognized examples of successful, commercial town squares, are directly connected to their respective main street or highway.

Conversations with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation should begin immediately to study the viability of this vital improvement. The nearest intersection south of the proposed intersection of Highway 13 and Climbers Pass is roughly 750 feet, and the nearest intersection north of the proposed intersection of Highway 13 and Snow Pass is roughly 1,100 feet. There are multiple locations along Highway 13 with the same speed limit and tighter intersection spacing.

To enhance safety, both for motorists and pedestrians, the number of turning movements could be restricted. For Climbers Pass, movement could be restricted to a right turn only onto Highway 13. As a one-way street there would be no access from Highway 13 to Climbers Pass. For Snow Pass, both a left and right turn would be possible from Highway 13. As a one-way street there would be no access from Snow Pass to Highway 13. Further, there is already a wide boulevard between the travel lanes on Highway 13, providing enough width and length for a deceleration lane.

The extended Town Square would provide a critical boost to the businesses that call the Rome Town Center home and it would create a welcoming front door to the community.



A plan of the extended Town Square

5. EXTEND THE SQUARE TO HIGHWAY 13

In order to extend the Town Square to Highway 13, the acquisition of the 5-acre, Nekoosa Port Edwards State Bank-owned property is necessary. Conversations with the bank have already begun, but should continue in order to facilitate the Town Square vision becoming a reality. Part of their property would be converted to an open space, leaving two, highly valuable corner parcels north and south of the new square. Additionally, a Town-owned parcel could be swapped that is equal in value to the land that was converted to open space.

These conversations should continue to occur at the same time as the conversations with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The expansion of the Town Square requires the input and cooperation of both entities, and is part of a single initiative.



View of extended Town Square