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February 13, 2025

Statement for Public Hearing – Appeal of Determination of Similar Use for 560 Randolph Avenue

Presented by Meg Duhr on Behalf of the West 7th/Fort Road Federation

Good afternoon Commissioners,

My name is Meg Duhr, and I am here on behalf of the West 7th/Fort Road Federation to appeal the Determination of Similar Use for 560 Randolph Avenue. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today at this hearing. We strongly disagree with the finding that FCC Environmental Services' proposed truck dispatch and maintenance facility is consistent with the City of Saint Paul's planning and zoning framework. For my statement, I'm going to keep this very focused on approved plans, policies, and zoning as it relates to the four necessary conditions the city used when it determined compatibility. You will hear from many of my neighbors about the external impacts of trash truck dispatching facilities on surrounding districts, about the legacy of disinvestment and broken promises we have faced from our local governments, our concerns as they relate to livability and community vitality, and the wasted potential of developable land with direct views of the Mississippi River

The city's determination of compatible use rests heavily on the idea that the proposed FCC trash truck storage, dispatching, and refueling site—which *is not* a use described in the table of compatible uses for industrial districts in St. Paul's zoning code—is similar to a public works or maintenance yard, a use that *is permitted* in light, general, and heavy industrial districts. Reading this, we supposed that this assumption is made because FCC is providing municipal trash collection service to the city of St. Paul. However, FCC is a private company, part of a multi-billion dollar, global conglomerate based in Spain with stated objectives of gaining and servicing other municipal contracts in the metro area. This is why although they only need 30-36 trucks to fulfill the St. Paul contract, they are building out the facility on Randolph Ave to house up to 80 trucks. A company representative also stated in a meeting with us that FCC would attempt to purchase surrounding parcels in the future to support company expansion in the metro area. It makes sense: FCC is a private business doing what private businesses do: work to grow and expand to increase profits. A public works facility would remain scaled to the appropriate size necessary to meet the needs of the municipality it serves. A private enterprise seeking to build shareholder wealth will only attempt to expand in scope, scale, and intensity.

This critical distinction may be why uses within the 'Public Services and Utilities' category are typically associated with the greater good and are given more leeway in zoning. As a commercial use, more zoning scrutiny would be applied, or FCC would have had to apply for a conditional use permit. On top of the important public/private distinction, we also believe that FCC's

proposed truck dispatch and maintenance facility is not materially similar in character or impact to a public works yard. While the Statement of Clarification suggests that vehicle dispatch, fleet maintenance, and fueling resemble public works operations, these comparisons fail to capture the true scale and external impacts of this proposal. This is likely why in Minneapolis, 'waste hauler' is a named use in their zoning code and it is only a conditional use in I2 General Industrial and I3 Heavy Industrial zones. Minneapolis zoning staff seem to understand the neighborhood impacts of a trash truck facility in a way that St. Paul does not.

Public works facilities prioritize municipal service delivery, while FCC's private waste-hauling operation would introduce industrial-scale traffic, noise, and pollution 5-6 days a week into a transit-oriented, residential and commercial neighborhood at the edge of the Mississippi River corridor.

We also disagree with the city's assertion that the proposed use is similar to the site's previous use as a vehicle tow yard. The daily operation of 36, up to 80, garbage trucks at this site far exceeds the previous use as a tow yard, which only saw 4–6 trucks operating intermittently. The increase in heavy vehicle trips, fuel storage, and maintenance operations will result in significant external impacts—including increased noise, traffic congestion, safety hazards, and air quality impacts—that violate the intent of light industrial zoning. Let's recall that the zoning code for I1 light industrial describes "industrial operations whose external physical effects are restricted to the area of the district and in *no manner* affect surrounding districts in a detrimental way."

This location is immediately surrounded by T2 and T3 traditional neighborhood zoning districts—areas designed for mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly development. It is also adjacent to a historic district, close to the river, and is located within a designated Neighborhood Node, which city policies explicitly prioritize for transit-oriented redevelopment, multimodal transportation, and increased density.

A private trash truck dispatch center is fundamentally inconsistent with zoning code. It is not similar in character to one or more of the principal uses permitted for light industrial zoning. The traffic generated by FCC's proposed use is not like one or more of the principal uses permitted and this use is not first permitted in a less restrictive zoning district.

FCC's proposed use does not meet the first three conditions for a determination of similar use. That leads us to the last condition. Is the use consistent with the comprehensive plan? At the heart of this appeal is a critical question: Do the policies of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan take precedence over the land use designation shown in one map of one appendix of the Comp Plan?

Of course they do. The Future Land Use Map appendix is not policy. It is a broad guidance tool that must be interpreted in context with the actual policies of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which serve as the legal framework for land use decisions. Yet in every recent conversation with city staff and in the staff report which recommends denying our appeal, their argument rests on a single map in an appendix of the plan which depicts a high-level view of the zoning designations meant to align with the 2040 Comp Plan. And unfortunately, somebody in the GIS

department forgot to change the color of the map coding this area. That is literally all the rationale that FCC and city staff have to stand on, while our community has identified at least thirteen policies from the current comprehensive plan and four other city-approved plans considered formal addenda to the comp plan that stand in direct contrast to the proposed land use.

Let's discuss a sampling of those policy conflicts between the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use Map. Rather than list every relevant policy, I will highlight just a few that most clearly contradict the proposed industrial use and support mixed-use redevelopment at this site:

- Policy LU-1: *Encourage transit-supportive density and direct the majority of growth to areas with the highest existing or planned transit capacity.*
 - 560 Randolph Avenue is within the Randolph-W. 7th/Schmidt Neighborhood Node, an area explicitly identified for increased density and urban growth—not intensifying industrial use.
- Policy LU-2: *Pursue redevelopment of Opportunity Sites (generally sites larger than one acre) as higher-density mixed-use development or employment centers.*
 - 560 Randolph is a 4.27-acre site—exactly the kind of site the 2040 Plan prioritizes for redevelopment, not industrial preservation.
- Policy LU-30: *Focus growth at Neighborhood Nodes using the following principles:*
 - Increase density toward the center of the node and transition in scale to surrounding land uses.
 - Prioritize pedestrian-friendly urban design and infrastructure that emphasizes pedestrian safety.
 - Cluster neighborhood amenities to create a vibrant critical mass.
 - This site sits at the entrance to West 7th's historic and evolving commercial corridor—an industrial truck yard undermines every one of these principles.
- Policy LU-46: *Retain and protect current industrial land from conversions to residential or institutional uses unless guided otherwise in a City of Saint Paul adopted plan.*
 - As previously noted, there are multiple City adopted plans that guide an alternate future use for this property. The assertion that the proposed use does **not** preclude future redevelopment in alignment with long-term community goals is absurd. We acknowledge that residential development conditions at the moment are difficult in St. Paul. Attracting developers to build high density housing and mixed use spaces overlooking a garbage truck facility makes this all the more challenging.
- Policy T-38: *Reduce the number of heavy vehicle trips on local streets through measures such as consolidation, coordination, and route designation/planning, in order to reduce maintenance costs.*
 - Up to 80 garbage trucks per day running through a designated Neighborhood Node directly contradicts this policy.
- Parks and Recreation-Policy 44: *Support facility improvements that better connect neighborhoods to the Mississippi River.*

- The Mississippi River Corridor Plan and Great River Passage Plan both identify this site as a critical connection point to the river. A truck facility further isolates it.

This is just a sampling of policies from the 2040 Comp Plan that support denying this appeal. I didn't even discuss the relevant policies from the Parks and Recreation chapter, the Housing chapter, the Bicycle Plan, or the Pedestrian Plan. Importantly, the Great River Passage Plan and Mississippi River Corridor Plan both contain specific plans for the land on which 560 Randolph sits: a vision of river-oriented, mixed-use development with a green connection to the river. These are both formally approved city plans and are considered formal addenda to the 2040 Comp Plan, meaning they are in effect and enforceable. There is overwhelming policy support for transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use redevelopment not industrial use at 560 Randolph Avenue.

We also note that the staff report contains a chart displaying supporting plans and their relationship to the Comprehensive Plans. This chart fails to include the Mississippi River Corridor Plan. This plan, like the Great River Passage plan contains specific guidance about the site and remains in effect.

	Plan	Comprehensive Plan in Place	Zoning Action to Implement
2000	Brewery/Ran-View Plan Summary	2020 Comprehensive Plan*	Brewery/Ran-View 40-Acre Study (ORD 00-993)
2005	Fort Road Development Plan		Fort Road Development Plan Zoning Study (ORD 05-99)
2010, 2013	District 9 Area Plan Summary		District 9 Commercial Zoning Study (ORD 11-75), District 9 Residential

		2030 Comprehensive Plan*	Zoning Study (ORD 11-76), District 9 Gateway Zoning Study (ORD 12-25)
2013	Great River Passage Plan		
2019	2040 Comprehensive Plan	2040 Comprehensive Plan	

*The 2020 and 2030 Comprehensive Plans were decertified when the successive Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

Table from staff report with incomplete list of relevant plans

I also want to note that the staff report suggests that because this site was never rezoned, industrial use should continue. That argument is flawed. Failure to rezone does not mean industrial use is still appropriate. Whether or not rezoning occurred is irrelevant to the fact that these plans contain policies that foresee a non-industrial future use of the site.

Rezoning may not have happened for any number of reasons—City staff availability, competing priorities, timing issues—but the policies in multiple city-adopted plans remain valid and authoritative.

- The Great River Passage Plan explicitly identifies this site as a "River-Oriented Redevelopment Opportunity."
- The Fort Road Development Plan prioritizes mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly design.
- The District 9 Plan supports rezoning this site to better reflect changing land use patterns.

Even the staff report itself acknowledges that the Great River Passage Plan envisions redevelopment of this site "as opportunities arise"—which is exactly what we are arguing for today. I also want to note that these plans are not "de-certified" or of less importance than what's written in the current plan. These are current plan addenda; still in effect and still enforceable. We do not need to "prove" that industrial use is inappropriate. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan policies and plan addenda already do that.

This is our community's request: Given the clear conflict between the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's policies and the entrenchment of industrial use at this site, we urge the Planning Commission to:

1. Reject the Similar Use Determination – FCC's proposed use of the site is a mismatch for I1–Light Industrial Zoning. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the Great River Passage Master Plan, and the Mississippi River Corridor Plan, as well as small area plans and the District 9 Plan do not support embedding industrial use at this site.
2. Initiate a Rezoning Study – This site and the adjacent parcels should be rezoned to align with the 2040 Plan policies and the other supporting addenda.
3. Recognize that the Future Land Use Map appendix cannot override the Comprehensive Plan's policies – The Plan's policies are the city's guiding framework. The Future Land Use Map is merely a reference tool—one that in this case, conflicts with the actual directives of the Plan.

Conclusion

I want to close now by saying, as a fellow volunteer serving my community, I appreciate your volunteer service on the planning commission. I would imagine that like me and my fellow district council board members, you probably spend hours every week in unpaid service to this city and to your communities. Plans should matter. Your work on the planning commission and our work in communities should matter. If the city simply ignores decades of approved planning documents in the pursuit of short-term property tax revenue gain, what is the point of any of us

being here today? We urge the Planning Commission to follow city plans and grant this appeal, and prevent the permanent entrenchment of an industrial use in this important river-oriented site.

Please note the images on following pages of relevant sections of city plans.

Thank you.



CITYWIDE PLANS

[DEPARTMENTS](#) / [PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT](#) / [PLANNING](#)

2040 Comprehensive Plan

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan is Saint Paul's 'blueprint' for guiding development in the city over the next twenty years. It was adopted in 2020 after several years of community engagement, interdepartmental collaboration, and Planning Commission and City Council review and approval.

The Comprehensive Plan also includes numerous addenda: the citywide [Bicycle Plan](#)  (2024), the [Pedestrian Plan](#) (2019), the [Mississippi River Corridor Plan](#)  (2002), the [Central Corridor Development Strategy](#) (2007), the [Downtown Development Strategy](#)  (2003), and the [Great River Passage Plan](#)  (2013).

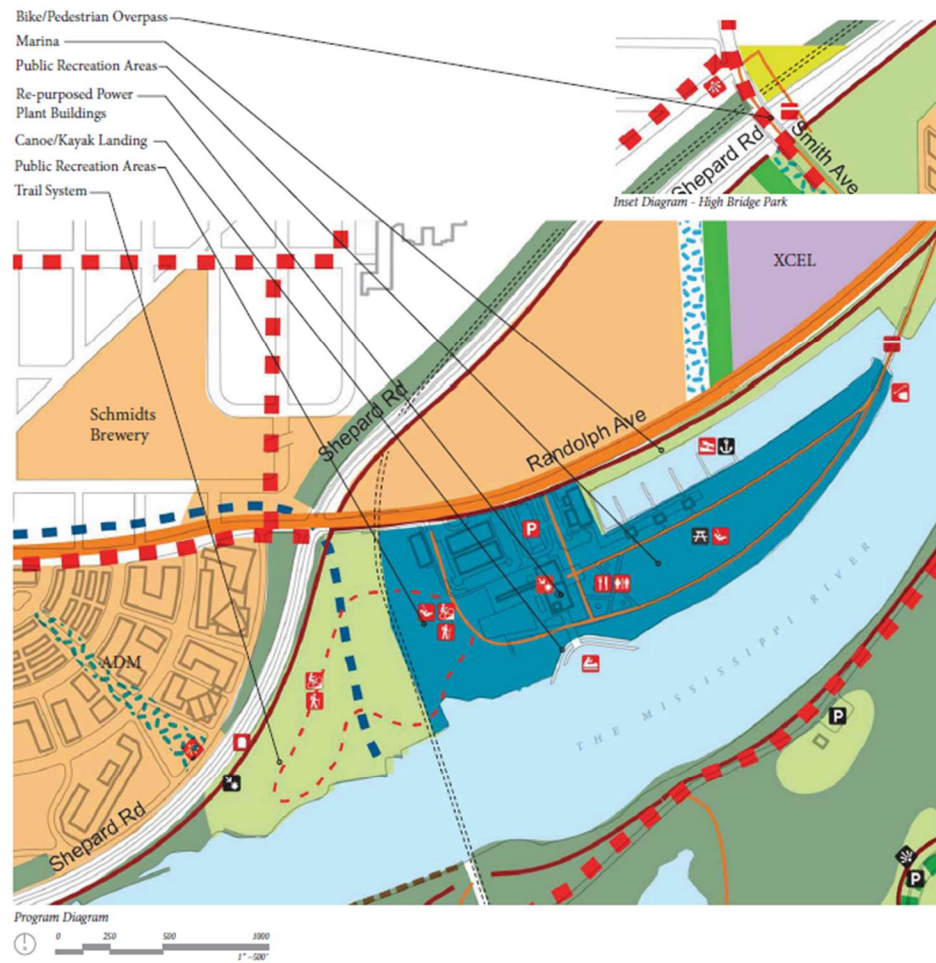
Besides citywide plans, many [District Plans](#) (or plan summaries) have also been adopted as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan.

[Learn more about the 2040 Comprehensive Plan](#)



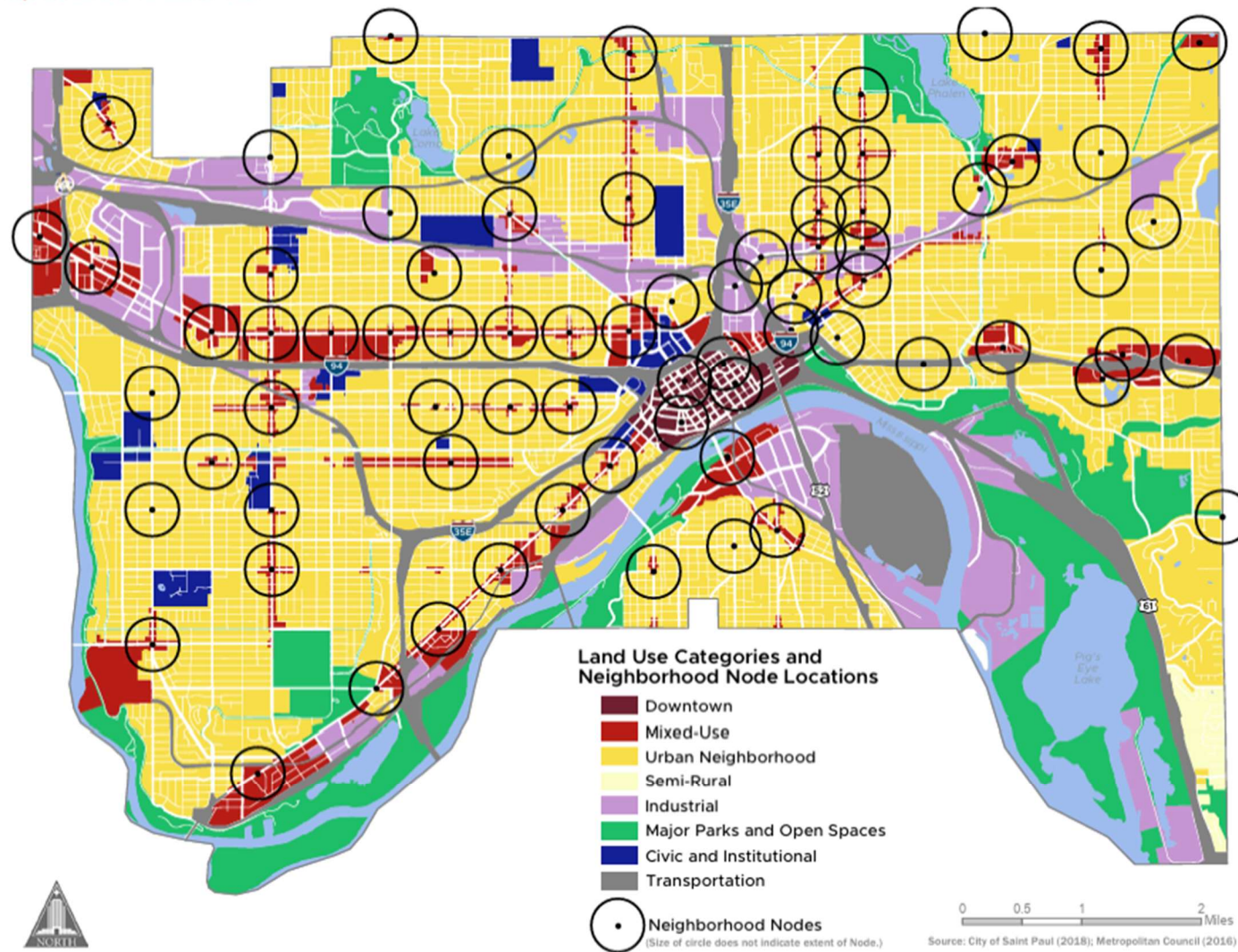
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Screenshot listing formal addenda to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan: <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-and-economic-development/planning/citywide-plans>

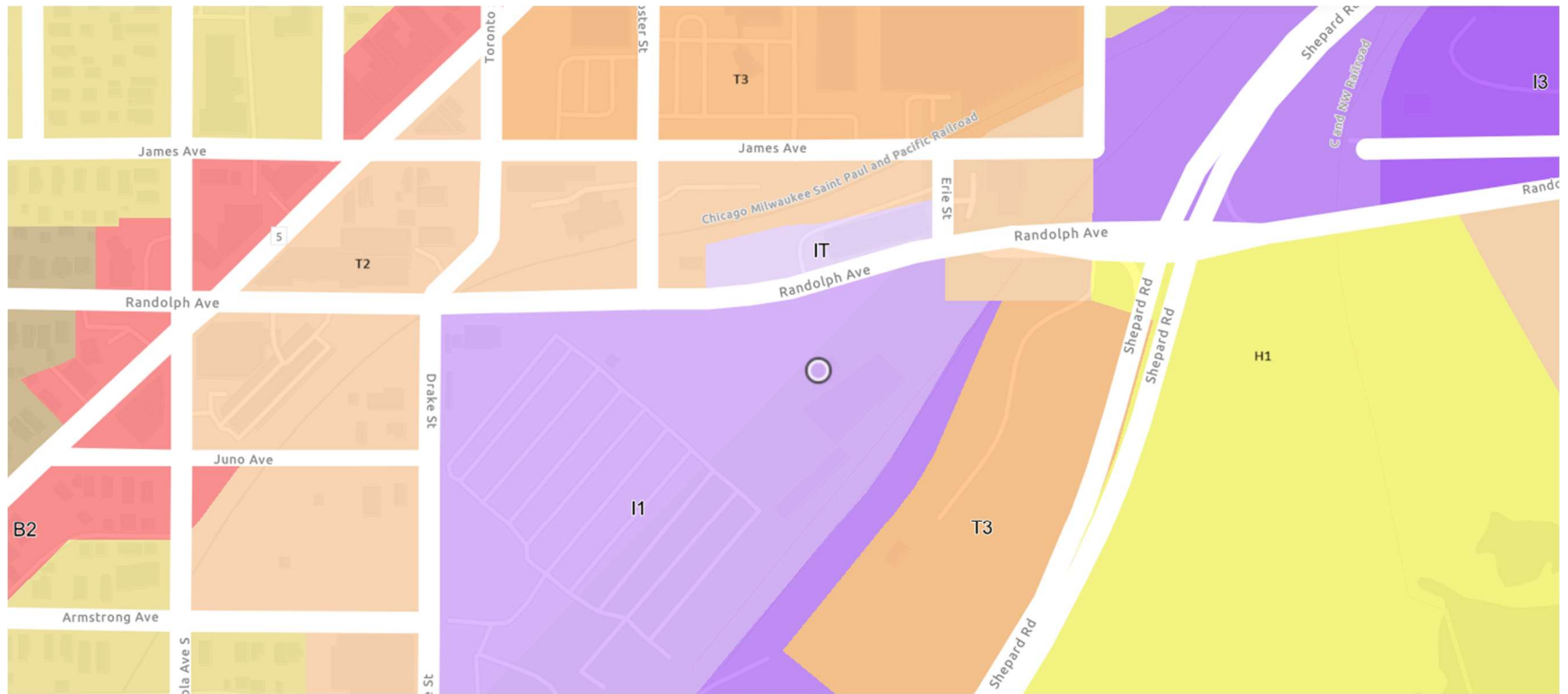


* Red icons represent proposed items.

Map LU-2: 2040 Land Use




Adopted - November 18, 2020



Current zoning map of the area

