



PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Case#:	2025-008P –Downtown Regulating Plan & Zoning Updates
Date of Report:	November 24, 2025
Application:	Plan Approval and Recommended Zoning Updates
<i>Date of Application:</i>	11/26/25 (official city action)
<i>Date of Meeting:</i>	12/4/2025
Action:	<i>After comprehensive surveys of and studies of past and present conditions and trends, a plan may show the Planning Commission's recommendations for development or redevelopment of the city or specific areas in the city. A plan requires the commission to hold a public hearing before the Planning Commission, adoption by a majority of all members of the Commission, and approval by the City Council.</i> <i>A zoning ordinance text amendment requires a public hearing before the Planning Commission, with a recommendation to the City Council. Any zoning amendment consistent with the land use component of the comprehensive plan is presumed reasonable, and amendments to the ordinance should be evaluated against the comprehensive plan, and any other plans, policies, or programs of the City.</i>
Applicant Name:	City of Tonganoxie; George Brajkovic, City Manager; Dan Porter, Assistant City Manager
Property Owner Name:	n/a, multiple owners; Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods
Subject Property	
<i>Address:</i>	n/a - downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods
<i>Property Size:</i>	na/ - refer to plan documents
<i>Zoning / Use:</i>	HBD & R-SF/R-I; smaller pockets of R-MF1, R-MF-2, I-LT and I-MD
<i>Legal Description:</i>	n/a - refer to plan documents
Surrounding Property – Zoning / Use:	
<i>West:</i>	n/a - refer to plan documents
<i>South:</i>	n/a - refer to plan documents
<i>East:</i>	n/a - refer to plan documents
<i>North:</i>	n/a - refer to plan documents
Staff Recommendation:	
Recommend approval.	

SUMMARY

The City of Tonganoxie began a planning process for the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods in August 2024. The planning process occurred in 3 phases: existing conditions assessing the physical and regulatory context; engagement and goal development working with key stakeholders to develop the direction of the plan; and plan development formulating specific recommendations for the plan and related zoning updates. The process involved public open houses, work sessions and surveys with the downtown stakeholder group, and work sessions with the Planning Commission and City Council. A final draft was reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council in August 2025, prior to introduction into the official adoption process.

The plan includes immediate, incremental and long-term recommendations for development and public improvements downtown; strategies to better coordinate the downtown area with surrounding and supporting neighborhood; and specific zoning ordinance updates to enable development that better meets the physical development context and policy recommendations for downtown and the near-downtown neighborhoods.

ANALYSIS

The initial study area for the plan includes what most consider “Downtown Tonganoxie” - blocks fronting on 4th Street from just east of Main Street to U.S. 24/40 and including some lots and blocks that extend deeper to 3rd Street. This roughly corresponds with the HBD (Historic Business District) in the zoning ordinance. The study also impropriated areas that affect or are affected by downtown and its vision for future development, specifically: areas zoned industrial along 4th Street east of Main Street; areas zoned residential and commercial along 4th Street and abutting the 24/40 Corridor; and all residential areas in the surrounding vicinity that include 3 different residential zoning districts and all covered by the R-I (Residential Infill) overlay district - roughly U.S. 24/40 on the north and west; Washinton Street on the south; and East Street on the East.

The plan is based on a vision to strengthen Downtown Tonganoxie as the heart of the community and a unique, walkable, and vibrant mixed-use area. The vision is supported by increased residential investment in and around the downtown area, and improved connections to downtown from adjacent areas, including a downtown-adjacent industrial area to the east and neighborhoods to the north, west, and south.

The plan includes two key components: a Public Spaces component that focuses on strategic interim, incremental, and long-term investments in the public realm; and a Development and Regulating Plan that addresses policies and codes affecting private development in and around downtown.

Key recommendations of the public space plan include:

- Tactical, incremental, and long-term streetscape updates that improve both the pedestrian attributes of downtown streets (primarily 4th Street, but also side streets and neighborhood streets) and the capacity for on-street parking to support downtown businesses.
- Opportunities for more activation and programing of public spaces in and around downtown.
- Improvements to the image and identity of downtown through public art and wayfinding.

- Improved connectivity through two gateways - the west gateway keyed on future mixed-use development, and the east gateway keyed on natural attributes and civic assets in this vicinity.

A “regulating plan” is different from typical plans as it identifies future land use and development policies in a specific area, and on a block-by-block basis, and then includes development standards that directly implement those policies. Regulating plans focus on two key attributes that make them a valuable tool for strategic and expedited implementation in walkable neighborhoods and downtowns: (1) they key development and design standards on relationships to public investments - primarily streetscapes and public spaces; and (2) they promote fine grained transitions in use, development patterns, and intensity based on the block structure and public realm designs in the area. Each of these distinct attributes are crucial to creating cohesive development but diverse activities that strengthen walkable communities.

The key code updates associated with the regulating plan are:

- Updates to the HBD (Historic Business District) that strengthens traditional downtown and pedestrian scaled development and design standards; allow more flexible and mixed uses; and incorporate and update the Historic Business District Design Guidelines.
- Conversion of the east industrial areas (I-LT and I-MD) into a downtown-adjacent industrial district (I-DT). These changes retain all existing uses but update for more downtown appropriate development standards in terms of lot sizes, setbacks, frontage design, and building and use scale. (most uses and lots in this area were “non-conforming” due to I-LT and I-MD having standards that were not appropriate for a near-downtown context)
- Updates of the residential districts, and primarily those currently subject to the R-I (Residential Infill standards). These updates provide a “building type” approach which identifies a range of low- and moderate scale housing options that are compatible with the downtown area and includes building and site design standards that are appropriate for walkable neighborhoods, and which create compatibility across the wider range of housing that is enabled. Based on existing base zoning in this - primarily R-SF and some R-MF-1 or R-MF-2, these updates now correspond to two downtown residential districts: R-DT-1 for lower-scale residential (update of the R-SF/R-I areas) and R-DT-2 for moderate-scale residential and limited mixed use (update of the R-MF-1 or 2 / R-I areas).

The plan also recommends two areas for potential future rezoning based on these updates.

- The 4th Street corridor west of Green Street to just east of U.S. 24/40. This area has some non-conforming uses and, in the past, has been subject of rezoning requests to commercial. This area would best support downtown if rezoned to R-DT-2, which allows a wider range of moderate density housing and some limited mixed use.
- A small area on the southeast side of downtown, currently zoned industrial but has been used and has more potential if incorporated into the core HBD district. This area includes the historic depot property.

These zoning actions would take future steps by the city to rezone the property. Other zoning actions in and around downtown may also be appropriate in the future; however, those would be based on either subsequent investment in the Public Space Plan that corresponded with future development opportunities and/or other actions by private investors relative to their specific property.

Overall, approval of the Downtown Regulating Plan, including the public space plan, the regulating plan, and code updates will enable the city, downtown stakeholders, and private property owners to collaboratively invest in the vision and future of Downtown Tonganoxie.

EFFECT OF DECISION

Downtown Regulating Plan.

The Planning Commission approves the comprehensive plan, and any other plans that are parts of the plan or for specific areas of the city. The plan is not effective until approval by the City Council. Once effective the plan becomes a guide for future decisions on development, capital investments, or any other plan, program, policy, or public action of the city.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments

The Planning Commission recommends zoning ordinance text amendments to the Governing Body. Based on the record and other findings of the testimony at the public hearing, the Planning Commission may:

1. Recommend approval,
2. Recommend approval with specific modifications
3. Continue the hearing for further deliberation or discussions
4. Recommend denial of the text amendment.

The Governing Body reviews the request considering the Planning Commission's recommendation. They may accept the recommendation based on a simple majority of the Governing Body, they may refer the application back to the Planning Commission with direction for specific further discussions or consideration, or they may modify or override the Planning Commission recommendation by a 2/3 vote of the entire Governing Body. The text amendments are effective based on the effective date of an ordinance adopting the amendments.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the Downtown Regulating Plan. (Upon approval by the Commission the plan will be forwarded to the City Council for approval prior to becoming effective.)

Without benefit of any public testimony at the public hearing, staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend the zoning text amendments to the City Council for approval.



Chris Brewster,
City Planning Consultant