

# City of Iron River Michigan



# Master Plan 2015-2035



## Foreword

Prior to this document, the city's master plan dated back to 1963. Innumerable changes in the city itself and in planning and zoning law have taken place since. In 2013, the City of Iron River Planning Commission committed to develop a new 20-year Master Plan to guide growth and provide backing for a revamped zoning ordinance. This document serves that purpose.

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## 1. Purpose and Basis for Planning

### **Urban Planning**

Urban or city planning has evolved over the course of hundreds of years. The field began with artistic physical design of cities in antiquity, a paradigm that continued on and off through the 1800s. Modern urban planning began around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when the focus shifted toward support of legal control of development with the advent of zoning.

Today's comprehensive or "master" planning, which is the focus of this document, consists of broad guidance of future development through a tiered implementation system. Generally, issues are identified, broad goals are set, and several manageable objectives are identified to satisfy each goal (in some cases, not all three tiers are necessary). Then specific actions are identified to implement the objectives. Any actions pertaining to public works infrastructure such as roads become part of a capital improvements program. This is where the initiatives in a master plan become visible to the public and have a direct impact on budgeting.

Master planning is usually conducted over a 20- to 30-year horizon, with more frequent updates in between. This helps communities make decisions that are best for the long term.

### **Zoning**

As a practical matter, a plan is often developed primarily to be the basis of a zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance is a legal mechanism to control land use along with characteristics of lots and buildings. In some cases, use zoning has been displaced or supplemented by form-based zoning, which regulates external building characteristics rather than the activities that take place inside the buildings. Regardless of the type, zoning promotes stability in a community, especially where land values are concerned. Studies have shown that zoning tends to increase land value.

Zoning is implemented through law and gives local officials the police power to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of city residents and landowners. Though zoning can be controversial in regulating activities of landowners on their own property, it is generally accepted as necessary to protect the rights of others.

### **Basis in Michigan**

City planning was first authorized by the State of Michigan in the 1931 Municipal Planning Act. In 2008, this antiquated law, which existed alongside separate laws authorizing township and county planning, was replaced by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Zoning, first authorized in 1921, was reauthorized in the 2006 Zoning Enabling Act. A master or comprehensive plan is required in order to conduct zoning. A Planning Commission is required by statute to develop a master plan.

## 2. History

The area of present-day Iron River was occupied by Native Americans prior to the arrival of White settlers, who were drawn to the area en masse by iron mining in the late 1800s. Iron Ore was first discovered by Harvey Mellon in Stambaugh in 1851. Extension of an important rail line facilitated migration of prospective miners to the region, and the original Village of Iron River was formally established in 1885.

Following the inception of iron ore mining, Iron River grew rapidly for several years but then stagnated in the 1890s amid a struggling national economy. Logging had also emerged as an economic driver during the late 1800s and was less affected by external economic factors. After mining resurged in the early 1900s and logging remained, Iron River underwent a period of great prosperity until the city was formally incorporated in 1926. Smaller communities that had developed around other area mines were also incorporated. The Cities of Caspian, Gaastra, and Stambaugh were located just south of Iron River, and the Village of Mineral Hills immediately north.

Mineral Hills was a unique case – a wide-ranging village incorporated to encompass six distinct clusters of 12 houses each; each cluster was developed as housing for miners at a particular mine. These mine housing developments were known as “locations.” However, a business district never developed in Mineral Hills, and the community has changed little since its creation.

After the mining period ended, Iron River's main industry became logging. While logging still plays an important role, general retail and service activity, largely in support of tourism, have become dominant. The city attained and retains status as the area's commercial center.

In the 1970s, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development commissioned a study on merging the area's five adjacent municipalities. Efforts leading to the 2000 consolidation began in 1994 with a request by the same municipalities for assistance from Michigan State University Extension.

Various combinations of the Iron River area's five municipalities (not to mention the surrounding townships!), which were connected contiguously in a north-south direction, had already been sharing police and fire services. With that success in efficiencies in an uncommonly dense cluster of small, independent, abutting jurisdictions, Iron River was a logical area to pursue full government consolidation. Consolidation was unsuccessful in Caspian and Gaastra due to lack of support, but the City of Stambaugh and Village of Mineral Hills successfully voted to consolidate with the City of Iron River in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Iron River today remains the only consolidated city in Michigan.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about consolidation, see: Martin, Joseph M., “Municipal Consolidation: Theoretical Inquiry and Case Study – City of Iron River, Michigan” (Plan B Paper, Michigan State University, 2006).



Consolidation has been an important part of the city's identity in the intervening years, and the resulting geographic patterns are clearly visible in the city's layout (and factor into this plan). Though consolidation was and remains difficult, it has created a strong singular entity to bolster the West Iron County economy.

### 3. Previous Plans

#### **“Today’s Vision – Tomorrow’s Reality” (1992)**

This plan was created by a Community Strategic Planning Alliance formed in January 1991. Economic development was the overall objective. The plan was funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Commerce matched by City of Iron River funds. A key component of the plan was a community survey that was mailed to all residents and property owners in the city and garnered a 40 percent response rate.

The plan’s vision of a “can-do” community was to be effected by a long list of goals and strategies organized into ten categories:

- **Economic Development**, including a distribution center, road and traffic flow improvements, property acquisition, and a new airport and on-site industrial park
- **Finances**, including development of a Local Development Finance Authority and offering of various incentives
- **Infrastructure**, focused on improving the city’s appearance through such measures as beautification and sidewalk repair as well as relocation of Highway U.S. 2 and improvement of transit options
- **Business Incubator** development
- **Housing**, including home improvements incentives and development of apartments
- **Historical** site and structure promotion and preservation
- **Social and Community** calendar raising awareness of community events
- **Recreation** through construction of a multi-purpose complex
- **Consolidation** of communities adjoining the city, beginning with a feasibility study
- **Education** through development of a student/teen business enterprise

The breadth of the strategies included makes it difficult to determine what happened as a result of the plan. There was no mechanism included for monitoring and evaluation of progress. The Consolidation strategy was accomplished, though not for all adjoining communities as was hoped, and many of the other strategies remain relevant.

#### **Iron River Downtown Blueprint 2006**

This plan was completed by HyettPalma as one of the “Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan’s Downtowns” that were funded under the Michigan Cool Cities Initiative of 2003. The focus of the initiative was to enhance downtown living for young college students who would otherwise leave the state. Iron River’s blueprint examined the current state of downtown, surveyed residents and businesses, developed a vision for the future, performed a market analysis, and laid out a plan of action and implementation.

The Blueprint recommended designation of the original Downtown Iron River as **Historic Downtown Iron River** and former Downtown Stambaugh as **The Hilltop Business District**. The area examined in the Blueprint was an “L” shape composed of 18 blocks in Historic Downtown, bounded on the west by 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and generally following Highway U.S. 2 and Genesee Street east, connected with an arm roughly one block wide following Lay Street eight blocks south to terminate at The Hilltop’s Evergreen Street.

The study identified strengths of and concerns for Downtown. Strengths included business and community anchors, aesthetics, residential growth, grade area, tourism, and motivated individuals and organizations. Concerns included real or perceived vacancies, disconnectedness of the original downtowns, deficient infrastructure, apathy, and funding limitations.

The report included a public opinion survey, market analysis, and action plan organized within the context of eight guidelines: transition, “make dust or eat dust,” disparity, positive base, do’s and don’ts, priority, mindset, and economic orientations. Recommended “catalyst projects” were development of Central School into housing, completion of a “Contact Center” development in The Hilltop, major renovation or demolition of the former Cloverland Hotel, expansion of West Iron District Library, enhancement of the Iron River stream corridor, and upper-story housing.

Since completion of the Blueprint, Central School has been redeveloped, with state assistance, into apartments; the library has been expanded; and the contact center, Global Response, has come to be and continues to seek expansion. Ongoing success of the plan is to be furthered through private-public-nonprofit-residential partnerships supported by existing staffing, new funding sources, benchmarking, and formal adoption of the plan by the Downtown Development Authority.

The Blueprint outlines only the starting point of implementation – several tasks organized into each of six categories: Partnership and Management, Catalyst Projects, Public Improvements, Private Property Improvements, Business Development, and Marketing. Top public improvements projects were to be a streetscape plan, which came to be developed in 2007, and façade work. The entire Blueprint was intended to be updated within four to five years if significant progress was made.

### **Iron River Streetscape Master Plan 2007**

This was developed as one of the recommendations of the Blueprint and intended to be used and implemented in conjunction with a storefront façade program, wayfinding plan, and Iron River (stream) enhancement/management plan. Rather than a duplication of the Blueprint, the Streetscape Master Plan was more operational as an implementation tool. The plan focused primarily on infrastructure work in order to increase downtown activity, especially during evenings and nights, and overall attractiveness.

Input was taken through two exercises in a public forum: identification of opportunities and constraints followed by a planning and design charrette. Improvements suggested by the public

included improved trail connections and parking, establishment of entrance gateways, and traffic calming. In the final analysis, planners determined that parking was adequate in volume but substandard in quality and in some cases location. Vacancies were also regarded as a major problem in overall vibrancy.

### **City of Iron River 2011-2016 Recreation Plan**

A Recreation Plan is required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in order to make a community eligible for DNR recreation grants for acquisition and development. The goals set out in Iron River's 2011-2016 plan were to:

- Continue the present level of recreational facilities and programs proportionate to population and finances
- Conserve land and water resources within the city and cooperate with adjacent communities to do the same
- Provide a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities to all age groups
- Develop goals and objectives and maintain a schedule for their implementation

Major projects in the Five-Year Recreational Improvements Plan included construction of a multi-purpose facility (a strategy from the 1991 strategic plan), ORV trailhead development, development of additional trails and a bike path, and riverfront property acquisition.

## 4. Planning Process

In September 2012, the City of Iron River contemplated changes to its Zoning Ordinance to address newly arising issues. It was determined that a new master plan would be beneficial to justify and legally support the zoning updates. In July 2013 the Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region (WUPPDR) was selected to assist the city with preparing the plan. Plan development was slated to begin in September 2013 and conclude in spring 2015.

An initial meeting of WUPPDR staff with the City of Iron River Planning Commission on September 5, 2013 was used to identify issues, assets, and opportunities in the city. This meeting served as the basis for a draft public opinion survey created by WUPPDR staff and distributed to the Planning Commission. In the next several months, progress was limited by organizational changes in the Planning Commission, but the commission that emerged in early 2014 was particularly strong and representative of all sectors of the city. At that time development of the master plan formally began, and notices of intent were distributed to required entities.\*

The survey was launched with the Planning Commission's endorsement on February 13, 2014 and set to conclude on March 16. Donations of incentive prizes were solicited from area businesses, and over a dozen gift cards and offers were donated as an enticement for members of the public to respond to the survey. The survey was also widely publicized in the Iron County Reporter newspaper and on radio programs.

The survey was left open to responses until late March, and 202 responses were received, half of which were from residents of the city (most of the remainder being from surrounding communities). The survey was estimated to take an average of 10 minutes to respond, but results suggested that many residents dedicated more time to make thoughtful comments and suggestions. The survey form, report, and results summary are in **Appendix I**.

WUPPDR discussed survey results with the Planning Commission via conference call during an April 3 public meeting and met with the commission to discuss goals and objectives at a July 9 public meeting. Following the meeting, revised goals and objectives were presented to and accepted by the commission, and the proposed master plan draft was completed.

WUPPDR staff attended another Planning Commission meeting on November 6 in preparation for distribution of the proposed master plan for review. Further changes were suggested; these changes were incorporated into the draft and reviewed by Planning Commission members. At its December 4 meeting, the Planning Commission recommended submission of the proposed master plan to the City Council.

At the City Council's December 17 meeting, the council approved distribution of the proposed master plan. The proposed plan was then submitted to required entities, beginning the required 63-day review period. The review period was also publicized to the general public through the

news media, and the plan was made available physically at the West Iron District Library and online at two websites.

After the review period ended, WUPPDR evaluated comments and suggested a number of revisions to the proposed plan. Final comment was accepted at the required public hearing on March 26, 2015. Notice of this was submitted to required entities and published in the Iron County Reporter, a newspaper of general circulation within the city, on March 11, 2015.

Immediately following acceptance of comment at the March 26 hearing, the Planning Commission held a meeting where it accepted WUPPDR's proposed revisions, and, with these changes, adopted the City of Iron River Master Plan 2015-2035. The final plan was then submitted to required entities.

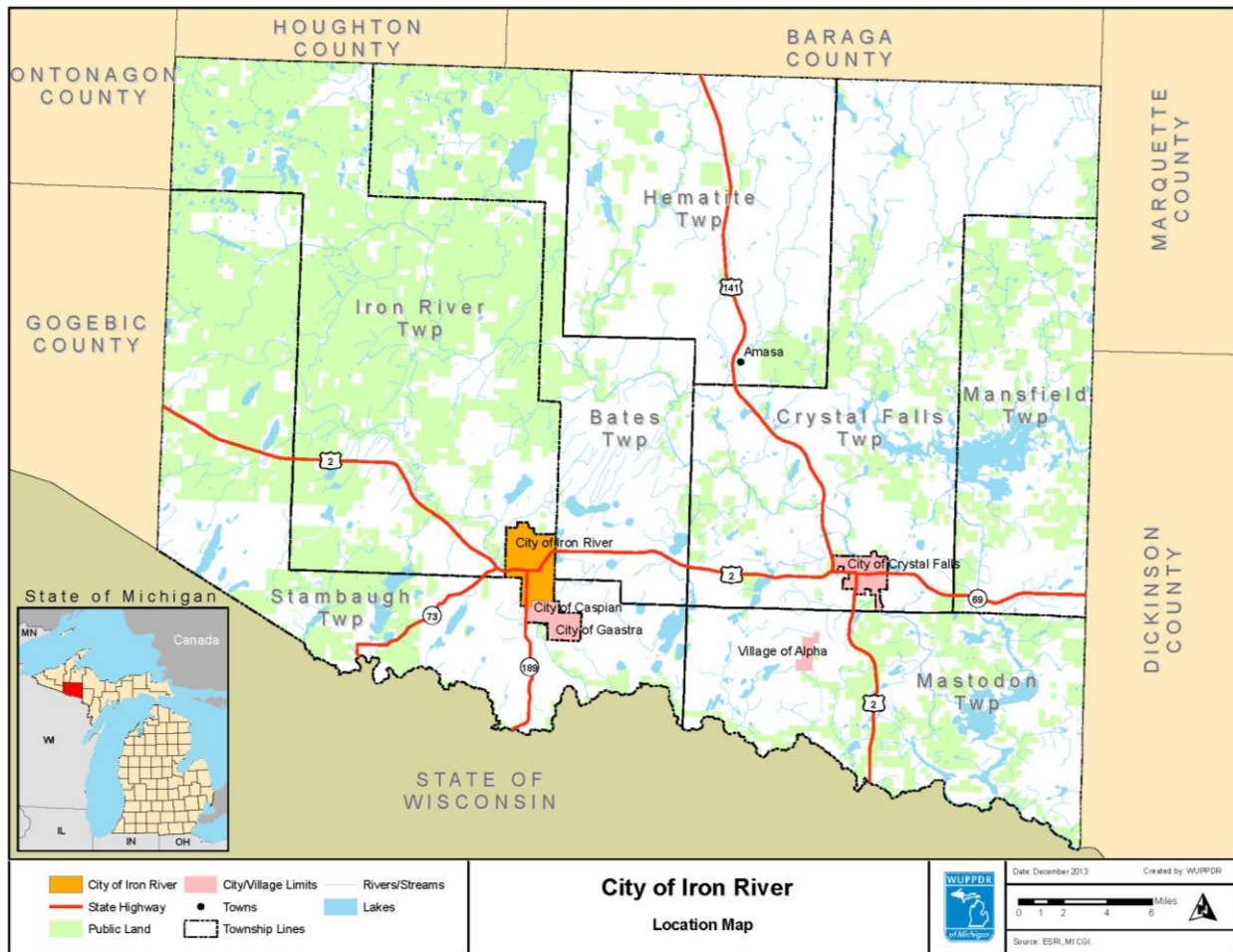
Minutes, resolutions, and evidence of notices and submissions are in **Appendix II**.

\* Notices of intent originally were issued by WUPPDR on behalf of the Planning Commission. For good measure, these were later reissued directly by the Planning Commission.

## 5. Social Geography

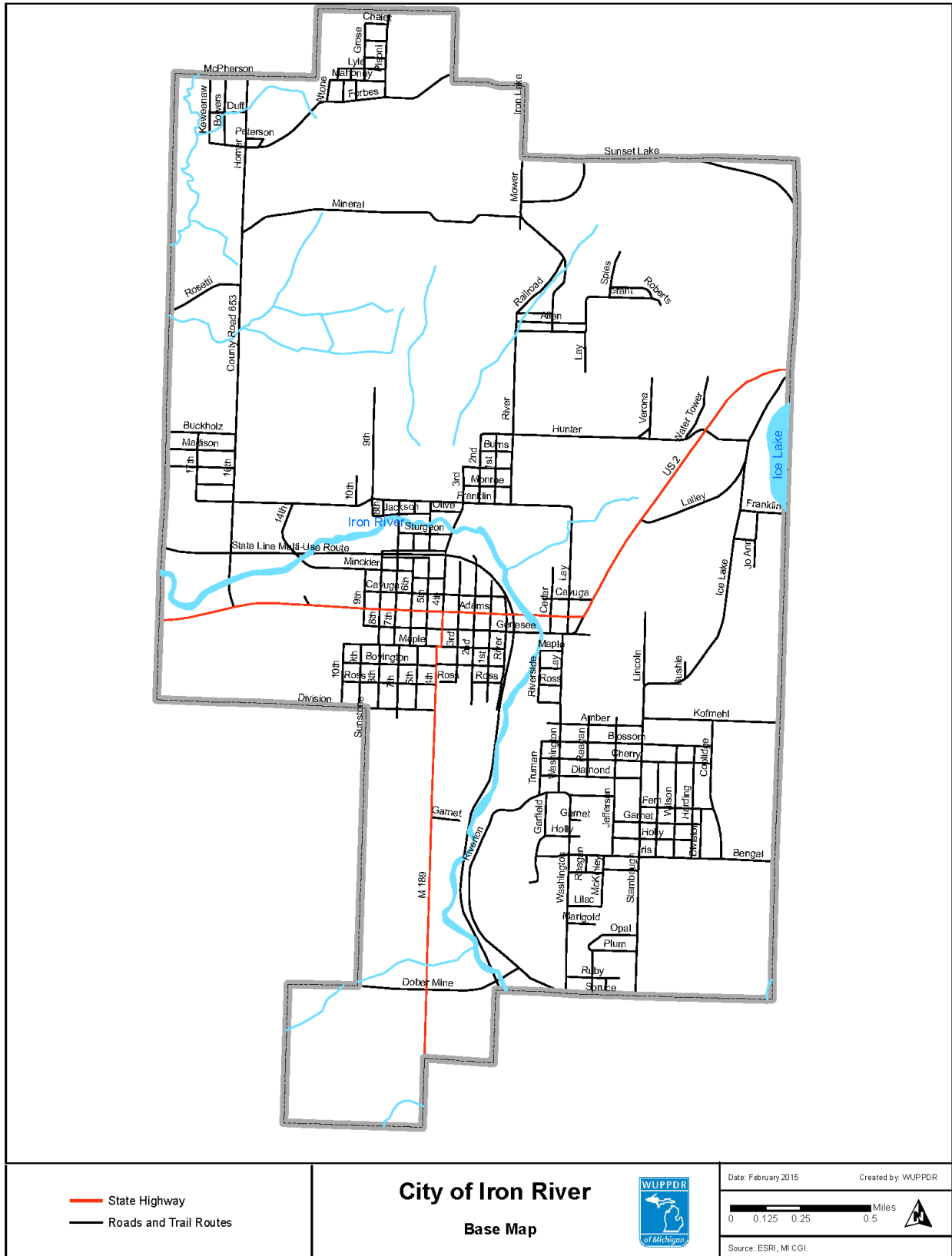
The City of Iron River is located in southwestern Iron County in the southwestern Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.) (see **Maps 5.1** and **5.2**). With a population of approximately 3,000, the city is the largest of four in Iron County (population 11,817) and the thirteenth-largest in the U.P. Iron River was once a contender to be the county seat; however, it was Crystal Falls, the population hub of the east side of the county, that was successful. Within west Iron County and neighboring areas to the south and west in Wisconsin, Iron River is a destination for shopping, professional services (including medical care), and general employment.

**Map 5.1. Location and Context**



Iron River is located a long distance from major population centers. The nearest city of substantially larger size is Iron Mountain (population 7,624), which is a drive of nearly an hour but offers few essential services that Iron River does not. Green Bay and Wausau, Wisconsin, the nearest metropolitan areas, are both approximately a two-and-a-half-hour drive away. These distances make Iron River a fairly self-sufficient community out of necessity.

Map 5.2. City of Iron River Base Map





## General Demographics

Under the 2010 U.S. Census (the base year used in this section), the main built-out areas of the City of Iron River are the basis of the Iron River Urban Cluster, which also includes built-out portions of the Cities of Caspian and Gaastra (see **Appendix III**). However, any analysis in this section is based on the City of Iron River's own boundaries rather than the cluster boundaries.

The 2010 population of the City of Iron River is 3,029. This is an 11.8-percent decline from a 2000 population of 3,386 for the three consolidated municipalities. Within Iron County, this level of decline is hardly unique to the city itself. The county's population loss was 10.1 percent during the same period. All other local governments contiguous with the city lost large percentages of population, led by Iron River Township, which lost 35.2 percent from 2000 to 2010. Bates and Stambaugh Townships and the City of Caspian lost slightly smaller percentages. The only local jurisdictions in the county that did not lose any residents during this time period were Crystal Falls Township, with a 1.2 percent gain, and the City of Gaastra, with a 2.4 percent gain.

The population of the city (based on a total of the three separate municipalities prior to 2010) peaked in 1920 and has steadily declined ever since, with a 59.6-percent total drop from 1930 to 2010. The sharpest decline in both the city and the county occurred from 1960 to 1970 following the demise of iron mining in the area. The city's rate of population loss since 1930 has exceeded that of the county, and the city now comprises approximately one-fourth of the county population. Meanwhile, from 1930 to 2010, the state's population has grown by 104.1 percent. See **Table 5.1** and **Figure 5.1**.

**Table 5.1. City, County, and State Population Trends**

		1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	Total Change
City	Population	7,497	6,841	6,350	5,941	4,376	4,125	3,576	3,386	3,029*	-4,468
	Chg. from Prev. Yr.	X	-8.8%	-7.2%	-6.4%	-26.3%	-5.7%	-13.3%	-5.3%	-10.5%	-59.6%
Co.	Population	20,805	20,243	17,692	17,184	13,813	13,635	13,175	13,138	11,817	-8,988
	Chg. from Prev. Yr.	X	-2.7%	-12.6%	-2.9%	-19.6%	-1.3%	-3.4%	-0.3%	-10.1%	-43.2%
MI	Population (1,000s)	4,842	5,256	6,372	7,823	8,875	9,262	9,295	9,938	9,884	5,042
	Chg. from Prev. Yr.	X	8.6%	21.2%	22.8%	13.4%	4.4%	0.4%	6.9%	-0.5%	104.1%

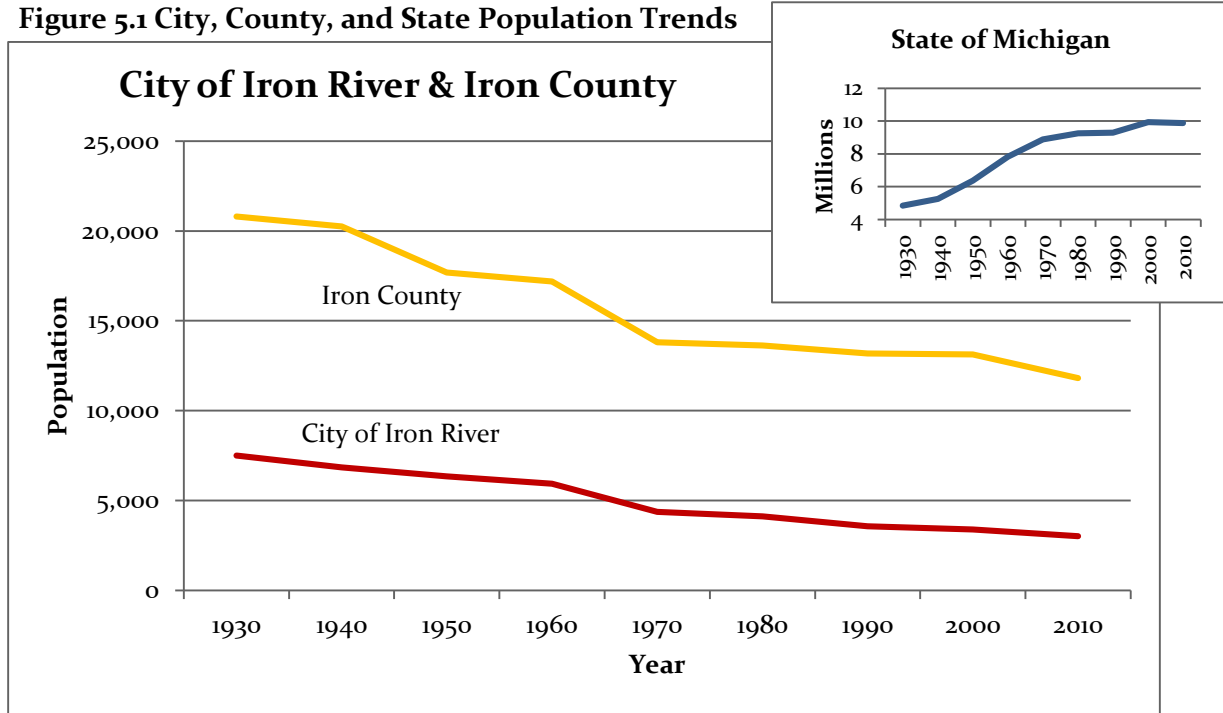
\* In 2010 the city's population was a single number from the Census; in prior years the population was a total of the City of Iron River, City of Stambaugh, and Village of Mineral Hills.

From the present through 2040, the city's and county's population are both expected to decrease at a slightly decreasing rate, eventually leveling off. The city's population is expected to decrease to 2,304 and the county's population to 10,758 by 2040. Forecasts are based on trends from 1970 to 2010, a period during which a pattern of relative stability was established. See **Table 5.2**.

**Table 5.2. City and County Population Forecast**

		1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	Total Change
City	Population	4,376	4,125	3,576	3,386	3,029	2,771	2,507	2,304	-2,072
	Chg. from Prev. Yr.	-26.3%	-5.7%	-13.3%	-5.3%	-10.5%	-8.5%	-9.5%	-8.1%	-47.3%
Co.	Population	13,813	13,635	13,175	13,138	11,817	11,793	11,257	10,758	-3,055
	Chg. from Prev. Yr.	-19.6%	-1.3%	-3.4%	-0.3%	-10.1%	-0.2%	-4.5%	-4.4%	-22.1%

**Figure 5.1 City, County, and State Population Trends**



The city's age profile is disproportionately old. Iron River residents age 65 and older comprise 24.7 percent of the city's population, and the median age is 46.6. See **Table 5.3**. This is slightly younger than Iron County, where 26.3 percent are 65 or older and the median age is 51.9. In the State of Michigan, only 11.7 percent of the population is 65 or older, and the median age is 38.9. This disparity, illustrated in **Figure 5.2**, has significant implications for the city, which faces continuing population decline for the foreseeable future as younger residents leave for job opportunities elsewhere. It is important to consider differing policy priorities for the city and the state.

**Table 5.3. Population by Age (2010)**

Age (Years)	City		State
	#	%	%
Under 5	164	5.4	6.0
5-19	495	16.3	20.5
20-34	469	15.5	20.8
35-49	467	15.4	20.5
50-64	686	22.6	20.4
65-84	567	18.7	9.8
85 or more	181	6.0	1.9
Total	3,029		

**Figure 5.2. Population by Age (2010)**



The city’s population is 96.3 percent White. The second-largest single race is American Indian and Alaska Native, which accounts for 1.2 percent of the population. Most of the remaining residents are classified as Two or More Races, among which American Indian and Alaska Native is predominant. Most other minority races are far less prevalent than in the state and nation. See **Table 5.4.**

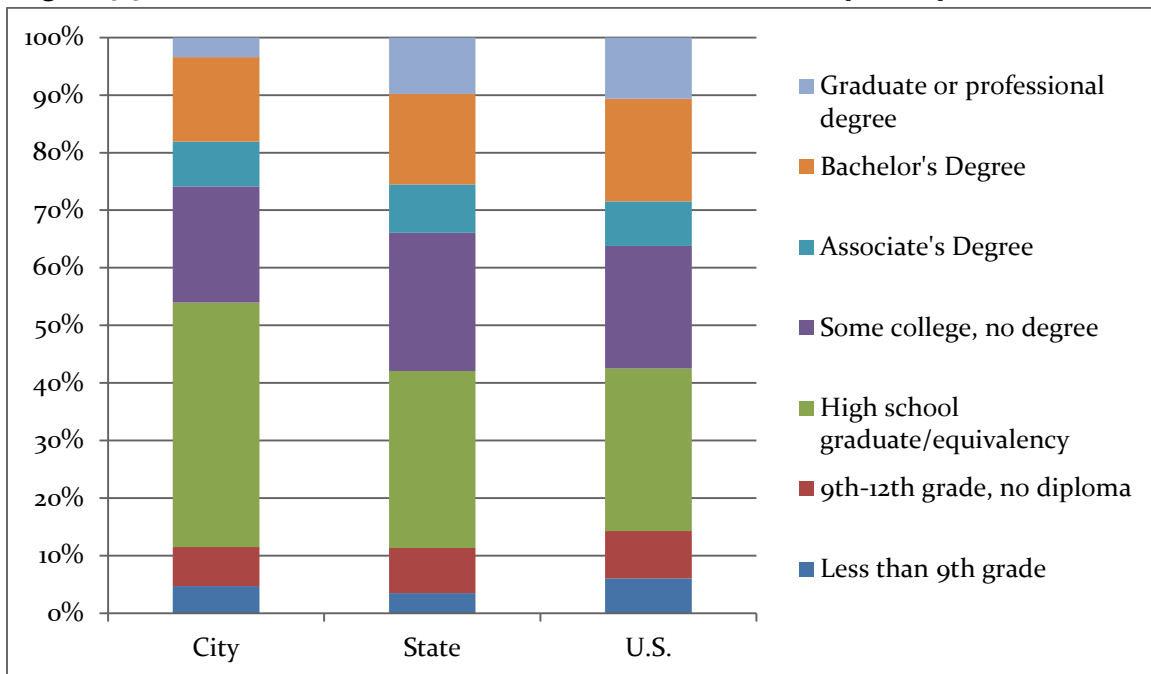
**Table 5.4. Population by Race (2010)**

Race	City		State	U.S.
	#	%	%	%
One Race	2,978	98.3	97.7	97.1
White	2,916	96.3	78.9	72.4
Black or African American	7	0.2	14.2	12.6
American Indian and Alaska Native	37	1.2	0.6	0.9
Asian	9	0.3	2.4	4.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	2	0.1	0.0	0.2
Some Other Race	7	0.2	1.5	6.2
Two or More Races (White + race indicated)	51	1.7	2.3	2.9
American Indian and Alaska Native	28	0.9	0.6	0.5
Asian	3	0.1	0.4	0.5
Black or African American	12	0.4	0.7	0.6
Some Other Race	8	0.3	0.2	0.6
Total	3,029			
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	57	1.9	4.4	16.3
Not Hispanic or Latino	2,972	98.1	95.6	83.7

## Education

The population 25 years old and over (the range used by the U.S. Census in gauging educational attainment) in the City of Iron River is 2,392. Of these, 2,117, or 88.5 percent, have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, and 432, or 18.1 percent, have a bachelor's degree or higher. The latter figure is significantly lower than the state, where 25.5 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, and even lower than the U.S., where 28.5 percent do. However, the percentage of residents with at least a high school diploma is on par with the state and slightly above the U.S. See **Figure 5.3** and **Table 5.5**.

**Figure 5.3. Educational Attainment** (2012 American Community Survey [ACS])



West Iron County Public Schools serves roughly the western half of the county, including the City of Iron River and its adjacent communities. The closest bordering school districts in Michigan are Watersmeet Township School District to the west and Forest Park School District, which covers the

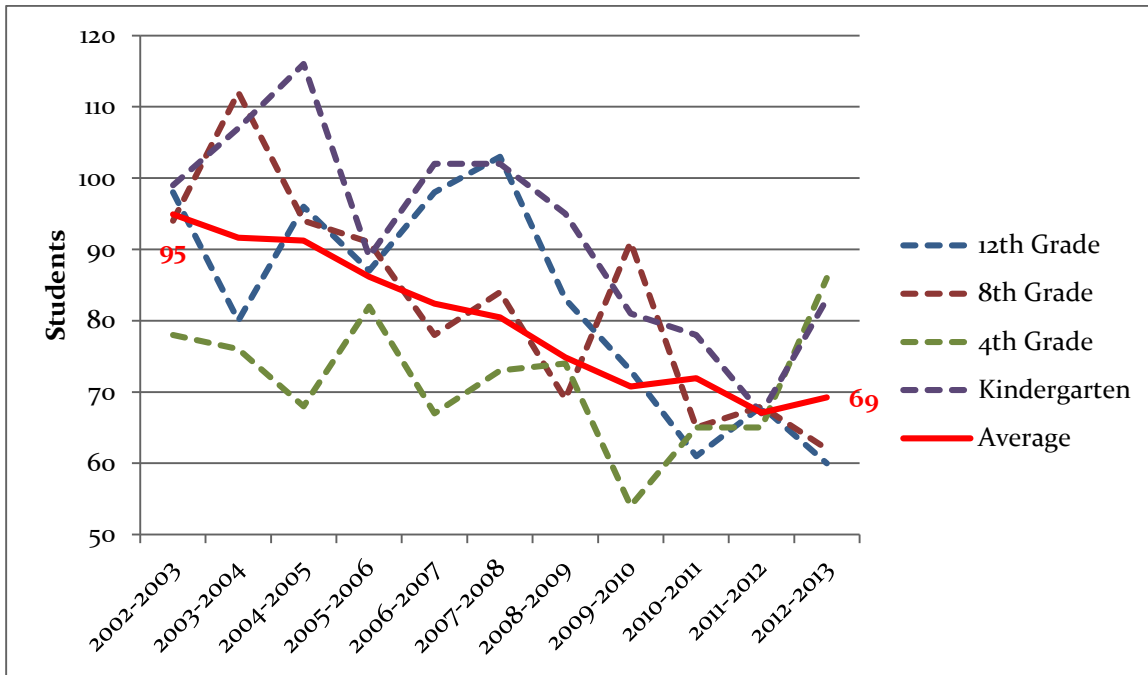
eastern half of Iron County. Michigan's Schools of Choice program allows students the option to attend public schools outside of their district.

**Table 5.5. Educational Attainment** (2012 ACS)

Highest Level of Attainment	City		State	U.S.
	#	%	%	%
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	113	4.7	3.5	6.0
9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma	162	6.8	7.9	8.2
High school graduate/equivalency	1,016	42.5	30.7	28.2
Some college, no degree	483	20.2	24.0	21.3
Associate's Degree	186	7.8	8.4	7.7
Bachelor's Degree	351	14.7	15.7	17.9
Graduate or professional degree	81	3.4	9.8	10.6
Total persons 25 and older	2,392			

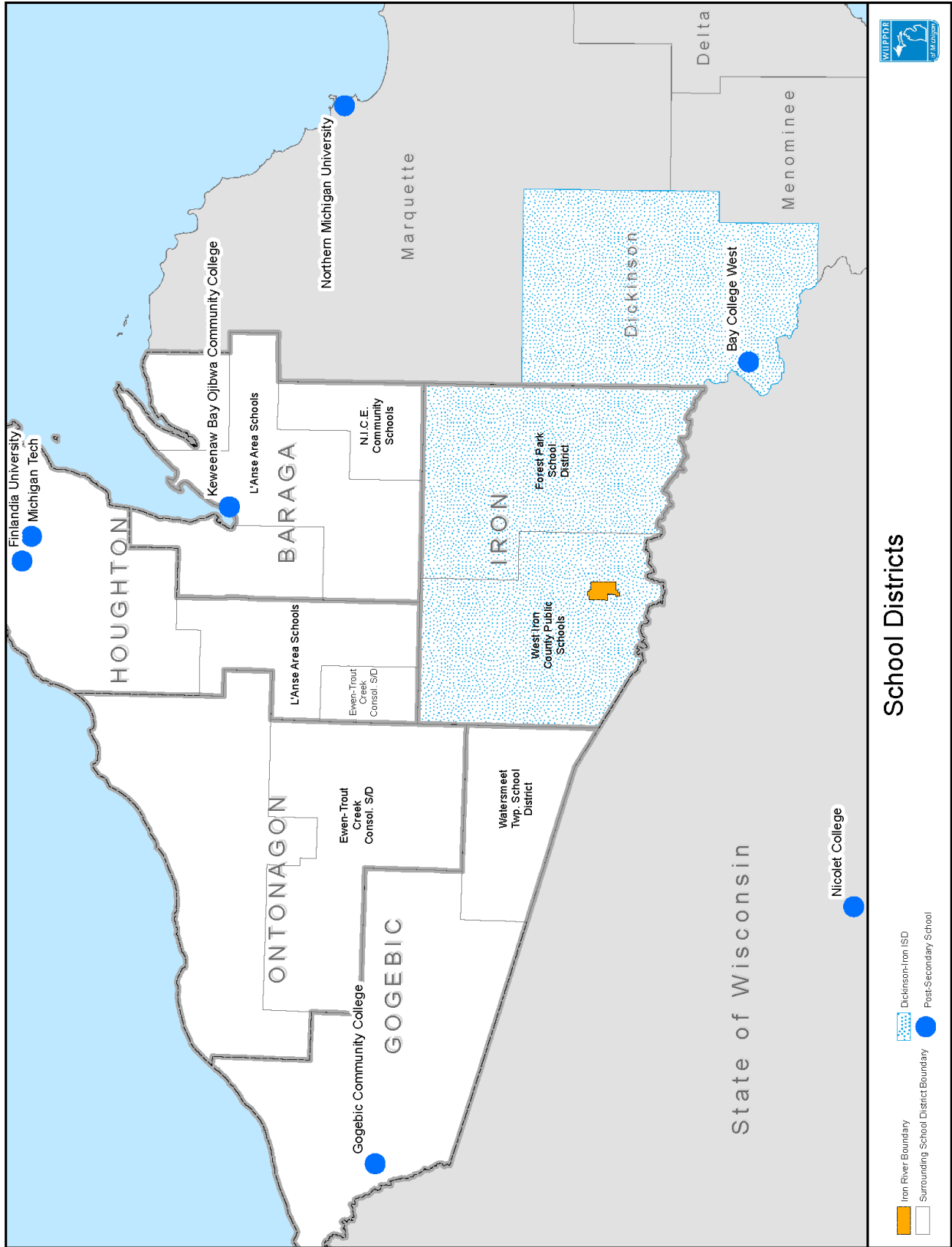
Enrollment in the school system has steadily declined for over 10 years. The size of the average grade class dropped from 95 in 2002-2003 to 69 in 2012-2013 – a loss of 27.4 percent of students. Students in 12<sup>th</sup> grade have fluctuated during that time period, but the long-term loss in that grade has been 38 students or 38.8 percent, dropping off most significantly after the 2007-2008 school year. Continuing declining enrollments are to be expected in parallel with a decline in the general population and aging of the population. See **Figure 5.4**.

**Figure 5.4. West Iron County Public Schools Enrollment Trends (MI Dept. of Educ.)**



The city is located a long distance from any institutions of higher education. The closest are community and technical colleges: Bay College West in Iron Mountain (44 miles), Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College in L'Anse (56 miles), and Nicolet College in Rhinelander, Wisconsin (60 miles). Several other institutions are 80 to 90 miles away: Bay College's main campus in Escanaba, Finlandia University in Hancock, Gogebic Community College's main campus in Ironwood and Copper Country Center in Houghton, Michigan Technological University in Houghton, and Northern Michigan University in Marquette. See **Map 5.3**.

Map 5.3. School Districts and Institutions of Higher Learning in Region



## Housing and Household Characteristics

As of the 2010 Census, there were 1,770 housing units in the city, 1,446 (81.7 percent) of which were occupied. Of occupied units, 1,000 (69.2 percent) were owner-occupied, and 446 (30.8 percent) were renter-occupied. The homeowner vacancy rate was 5.4 percent. The rental vacancy rate was 13.0 percent.

As of the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), when the city had an estimated 1,794 housing units, the city's housing stock was far older than in the state or U.S. Approximately half (50.7 percent, or 910) of the units in the city, versus 15.6 percent in the state and 13.7 percent in the U.S., had been built in 1939 or earlier. Only 30 units were built in the city in 2000 or later. Based on the 2010 Census, approximately one in five housing units were vacant, and only one in four of these, or 4.7 percent of all units, were seasonal in use. See **Table 5.6**.

**Table 5.6. Housing Year Built and Occupancy**

Characteristic	City		State %	U.S. %
	#	% of totals		
Total Units (2012 ACS)	1,794			
<b>Year Built</b>				
1939 or earlier	910	50.7	15.6	13.7
1940-1959	486	27.1	23.9	16.6
1960-1979	243	13.5	27.7	27.3
1980-1999	125	7.0	22.8	27.9
2000 or later	30	1.7	10.1	14.5
<b>Units in Structure</b>				
1 unit, detached	1,446	80.6		
1 unit, attached	0	0.0		
2 units	126	7.0		
3 or 4 units	55	3.1		
5 to 9 units	44	2.5		
10 to 19 units	20	1.1		
20 or more units	89	5.0		
Mobile home	14	0.8		
Total Units (2010 Census)	1,770			
Occupied	1,446	81.7		
Vacant	324	18.3		
For rent	67	3.8		
Rented, not occupied	2	0.1		
For sale only	57	3.2		
Sold, not occupied	3	0.2		
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	83	4.7		
All other vacant units	112	6.3		

Housing stock is much less valuable than in the state or U.S. overall. Median value of owner-occupied units is \$58,900, with 85.1 percent of these valued under \$100,000. See **Table 5.7**. Single-unit detached homes make up the bulk of all housing stock, with 1,446 (80.6 percent) units in that category, followed by 2-unit structures (126, or 7.0 percent). Median gross rent is \$473.

**Table 5.7. Housing Value (2012 ACS)**

Value	City		State %	U.S. %
	#	%		
Less than \$50,000	443	39.1	13.1	8.6
\$50,000-99,999	515	45.5	23.5	15.2
\$100,000-199,999	139	11.9	38.8	30.8
\$200,000 or more	35	3.0	24.6	45.4
Total Owner-Occupied Units	1,170			

Iron County's State Equalized Value is \$700,161,888, of which the city is \$61,097,427, or 8.7 percent. This percentage is considerably lower than the city's 25.6-percent population share of the county.

The city's average owner-occupied household size is 2.08 persons, and the average renter-occupied household size is 1.6 persons. One or more vehicles are available in 87.5 percent of households.

The median household income in the city is \$27,759 and per capita income is \$18,391. These are both significantly lower than in the state and U.S. The city's median household income is 41.7 percent less than the state's. See **Table 5.8**.

**Table 5.8. Income (2012 ACS)**

	City	State	U.S.
Median Household Income	\$27,759	\$48,471	\$53,046
Per Capita Income	\$18,391	\$25,547	\$28,051

As of the 2012 ACS, 24.6 percent of individuals and 12 percent of families in the city were in poverty. These figures compare with 16.3 percent of individuals and 11.7 percent of families in the state; and to 14.9 percent of individuals and 10.9 percent of families in the United States. The disproportionately high percentage of individuals in poverty in the city may be partially attributable to the city's large number of older adults who live alone on a limited income.



## 6. Physical Geography

Iron County is one of only two Upper Peninsula counties that have no Great Lakes frontage. However, Iron County is similar to the rest of the U.P. in most other physical respects. The county is primarily forested and includes a great deal of federal, state, and commercial forestland used for both recreation and timber harvesting. The county is also interspersed with lakes of a wide range of sizes, as well as hundreds of miles of streams, many of which are regionally renowned for trout fishing. One of the most notable streams is the Iron River itself, which courses through the city and is the highlight of several neighborhoods and recreation facilities.

The City of Iron River is located at approximately latitude 46°N, longitude 88°W. Land cover in the city is shown in **Map 6.1**.

### Weather and Climate

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The City of Iron River lies within the Lake Michigan watershed, which has a typical humid continental climate characterized by cold, dry winters and warm, humid summers. Despite the long and cold winters, the city has a growing season of 84 days. Average temperatures in January are a low of -1 degree Fahrenheit and high of 21 degrees Fahrenheit. In July average temperatures are a low of 50 and high of 77. The city receives an annual average of 32 inches of rain and 102 inches of snowfall. See **Table 6.1**. Unlike many other areas of the Upper Peninsula, Iron River, because of its inland location, experiences little lake effect weather; however, this location subjects the city to relatively extreme temperatures.

**Table 6.1. Climate (Stambaugh NOAA Weather Station)**

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Ann.
Temp. (°F)	Avg	10.1	13.1	23.2	38.2	50.4	59.6	63.6	61.6	53.0	41.4	29.0	15.7	38.4
	High	21.4	26.1	36.3	51.1	64.0	72.9	76.9	75.0	66.1	53.0	37.8	25.1	50.6
	Low	-1.2	0.1	10.1	25.3	36.7	46.3	50.3	48.2	40.0	29.9	20.1	6.4	26.1
Precip. (in.)		0.98	0.85	1.53	2.24	3.03	3.73	4.17	3.10	3.55	3.08	1.88	1.29	29.43

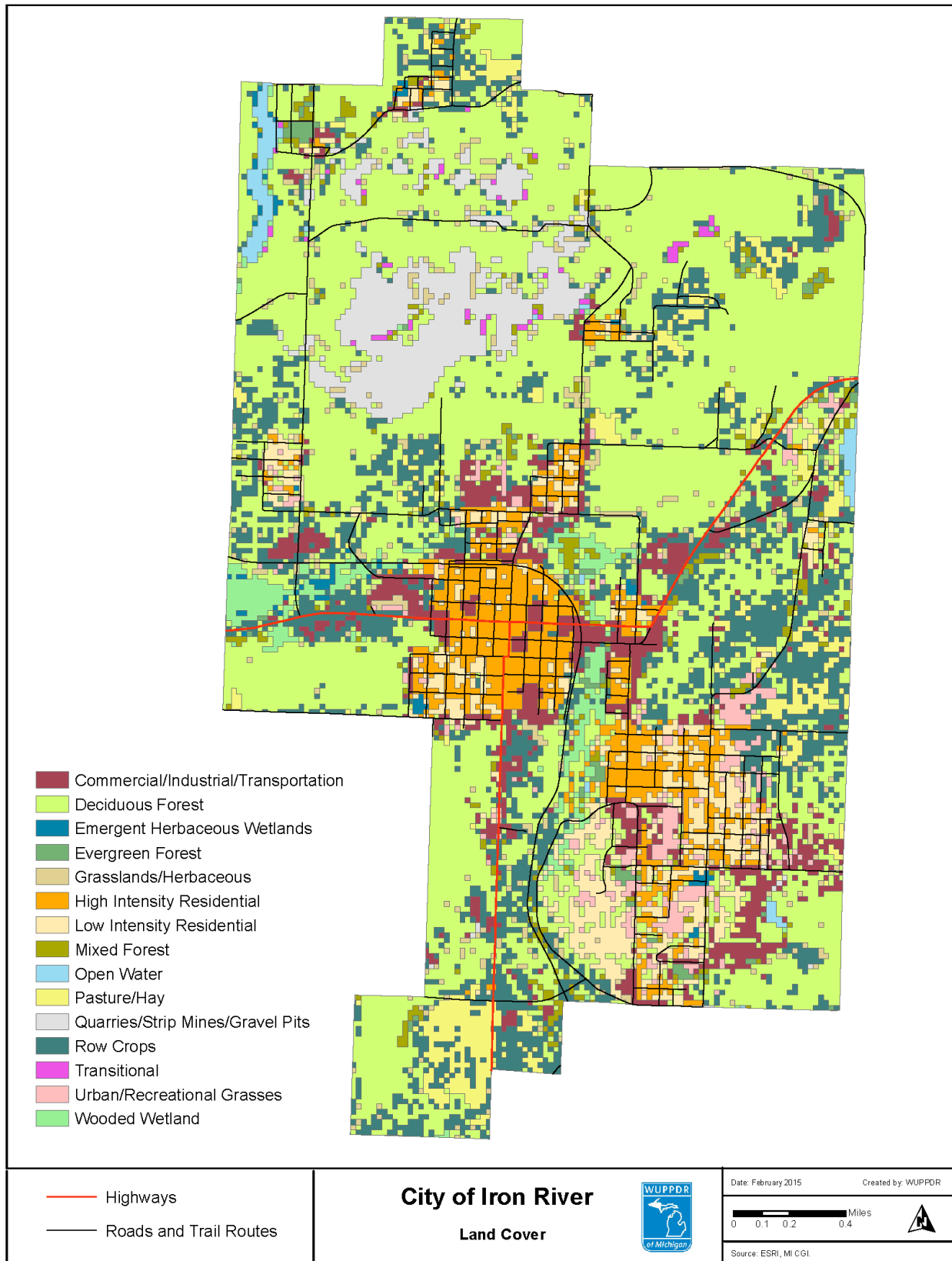
### Waters and Wetlands

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The western edge of Ice Lake and a segment of the Iron River itself are surface water bodies within the city. The outlet of Ice Lake, also the location of a city park, is a tributary to the Iron River. Water makes up .02 square miles, or 0.2 percent, of the city’s total area.

The Iron River is formed from two branches that join four to five miles northwest of downtown along Highway U.S. 2. The South Branch originates at Lake Ottawa, a major recreational water body located four miles west of downtown. The North Branch originates in wetlands near the Hazel and Beechwood locations approximately seven miles northwest of downtown. The Iron

**Map 6.1. City of Iron River Land Cover**



River flows into the Brule River along the Michigan-Wisconsin border. The Brule flows east to the Menominee River, which in turn flows southeast into Lake Michigan.

The city includes two flood zones. Two small, isolated locations within Zone A are located along the west side of the city on either side of County Road 653 (Gibbs City Road). Most of the Iron River within the city is located within a narrow corridor designated Flood Zone AE. Designations A and AE are similar, but AE is determined using more detailed methods and includes defined Base Flood Elevations. Both are 100-year flood zones, which means that there is a one-percent chance of a flood within that area in any given year.

According to the Iron County 2013-2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan, the City of Iron River is at moderate risk and severity of flooding. However, even though significant flooding has occurred within the county several times in the 2000s, the only recent major flooding of the Iron River occurred in 2002, a year in which spring flooding was widespread throughout the region. Nevertheless, construction of permanent structures in floodplains should always be discouraged. The city does not have a floodplain ordinance.

The aquifer underlying the city is composed of glacial deposits, has generally moderate yield, and is the source of the city's drinking water. Groundwater is an integral natural system, impacting factors such as water suitability of area streams for fish species and serving as the basis for sensitive wetland areas and land cover types overall.

Wetlands within the city are few and scattered. The prominent clusters are around U.S. 2 near the city's western border and immediately northeast and southeast of original central Iron River. Most wetlands are of the wooded variety, with a few isolated blocks of emergent herbaceous wetlands around the western U.S. 2 cluster. Development in that area is accordingly light.

## **Geology and Soils**

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The geology and soils of the City of Iron River were formed during the time of Pleistocene glaciation. Underlying bedrock is a complex, folded series of sedimentary rocks of the Middle Precambrian period. Although bedrock influenced the development of present-day soils, the main parent material of the soil is glacial debris transported from other locations. This glacial veneer contains a great variety of mineral materials, arranged in many topographic expressions, under all conditions of drainage, and modified by long-term variations in cover and climate. In general, glacial deposits are composed of poorly consolidated sands and gravels covered by relatively stable boulder till. The glaciated subsurface is the main determinant of the water table, which, as earlier mentioned, is sufficient for production of water for drinking and other human uses.

Myriad soil types have evolved from the heterogeneous glacial parent material and the individual conditions governing soil profile development. The soils of the City of Iron River can generally be defined as the Amasa-Stambaugh Organic Type, which is deep, nearly level, and gently sloping with medium and moderately coarse textured subsoils and poorly drained organic soils. Soil is predominantly silt loam that varies from stony to very stony. Along the Iron River, sandy loam is

present along with rock outcrops. Both soil types are fairly fertile, and crops are cultivated in many areas throughout the city.

## **Metal and Mineral Resources**

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The City of Iron River is located on the west end of the Menominee Iron Range, which was a major source of the nation's iron ore in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This range has been inactive for many decades but could potentially become economically productive again as ore values rise.

Underground mines are present throughout the city, with the greatest number located in the Stambaugh and northern Mineral Hills areas. Surface subsidence is a risk, with the most recent known incident occurring at the city's disc golf course in 2013.

## **Topography**

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With a large land area spanning a variety of geographic features, and owing to the terrain's glacial heritage, topography varies widely within the city. Elevation ranges from 1,140 to 1,660 feet within the Urban Cluster. Within the City of Iron River, the lowest points are along the Iron River itself. In planning for land development, consideration of topography is important to reduce risks and environmental impacts associated with construction on steep slopes. The steepest drop-offs in the city are located along the east bank of the Iron River proximate to the Stambaugh area.

Downtown Iron River and adjacent neighborhoods are located on a plateau near the bottom of the river valley. See **Map 6.2**.

## **Vegetation**

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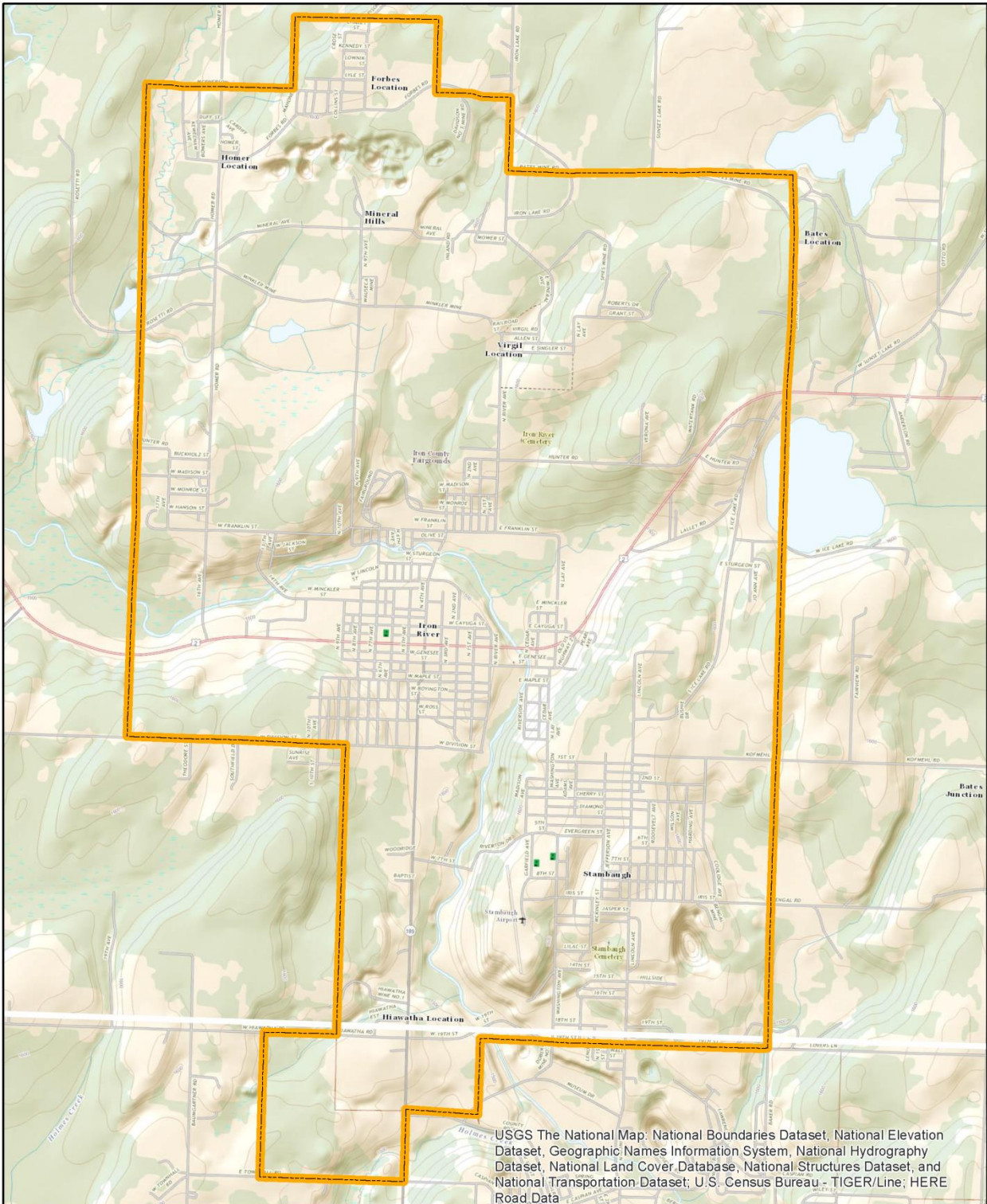
Woods are the dominant vegetation in most of the city. The most common trees are northern hardwoods, pine, balsam, fir, and spruce. Agriculture consists mainly of feeder cattle and raising of grains. The city is interested in expanding agricultural production of foods for local distribution.


## **Wildlife**

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Wildlife species found in Iron County are similar to those found in other Western Upper Peninsula locales. Large mammals such as white-tailed deer, black bear, coyote, wolf, and bobcat live in the area, as well as small mammals such as squirrel, rabbit, chipmunk, raccoon, otter, beaver, skunk and fox. Seasonal and year-round bird species are seen in the area including songbirds, shore and water birds, and game birds. Habitat exists in the City of Iron River in which many species of mammals and birds can live, but due to the city's urban nature, most can be found immediately outside of it. Deer, however, pose an increasing problem within the city limits. Dominant fish species in the city are brook trout in the Iron River and smallmouth bass, yellow perch, other panfish, and northern pike in Ice Lake.

**Map 6.2. City of Iron River Topography**



 City of Iron River

**City of Iron River**  
Topography



Date: May 2014 Created by: WUPPDR



Source: ESRI, MI CGI.

## **Environmental Contamination**

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The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality database shows six sites in the city with cases open for underground storage tank leaks. Five of these sites are located along West Adams Street and one along East Genesee Street. The city's Brownfield Authority may be used to resolve the issues.

Along the border of the city south of Old Stambaugh is Dober Number 2 mine, an iron ore mine that flooded several years after closure in the 1970s and then began to release acid drainage. The drainage eventually flowed into and contaminated the Iron River downstream of the city. The State of Michigan has mitigated the problem by installing a water treatment system, but the drainage continues to occur and will continue indefinitely.

## 7. Land Use/Zoning and Development

### General Composition

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Iron River's composition from three consolidated jurisdictions makes for an unusual pattern of land development within the city. Roughly the northwestern quarter of the city is composed of the former Village of Mineral Hills ("Old Mineral Hills"), a rural municipality with a highly dispersed population of only 214 in the year 2000. The southern quarter is composed of the former City of Stambaugh ("Old Stambaugh"), which had a population of 1,243 in 2000. The central original City of Iron River had a population of 1,929 in 2000.

The north end of today's Iron River is characterized mainly by forests and mines with scattered areas of residential development and croplands. Central Iron River remains the nucleus of service and professional activity, with a downtown that is surrounded by active residential areas. Most commercial development is concentrated along the Highway U.S. 2 corridor, with the main downtown cluster located along the south edge of the highway. Another important commercial area, characterized by "big box" and franchise development, is located along U.S. 2 northeast of downtown. Additional residential development is located across U.S. 2 north of downtown.



### *Strip Commercial Development along U.S. 2*

As in many small cities in the region and United States overall, downtown Iron River is an area of special concern. The decline of downtown is indicative of the city's overall struggling economy. Storefront vacancies are prevalent; street activity is low, particularly off business hours; and building quality is substandard, with several properties of condemnation grade. Nuisance ordinance enforcement and condemnations are a lengthy and difficult process stymied by absentee landowners and properties whose ownerships cycle repeatedly between state, banks, and private individuals. Resolution of these issues is a high priority for residents.



***Traditional downtown commercial development***

The developed part of Old Stambaugh, located southeast of central Iron River, is a satellite community that is nearly as large as central Iron River. The two are connected by Lay Avenue, a primary north-south thoroughfare lined by residential development. Old Stambaugh is mostly residential, with a small amount of commercial development in the original downtown, and retains a distinct community identity.

Like the north side of the city, other outlying areas are mainly agricultural and forested, with notable pockets of industrial and commercial activity.

### **Building Trends**

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Based on building permits issued from 2010 through 2013 (see **Table 7.1**), residential construction activity in the City of Iron River is disproportionately low in comparison to Iron County overall. The city contains 25.6 percent of the county population, but the city issued only 4.3 percent of residential home construction permits (a total of 5) and 15.2 percent of other residential building permits. Residential activity in both the city and county steadily decreased from 2010, at the depths of the recession, to 2013.

The majority of residential home construction from 2010 through 2013 occurred in the county's townships. During the four-year period, a total of 55 permits were issued for new homes in the three townships abutting the city. No new home permits were issued during the period in the cities of Caspian and Gastra. Commercial building permits, however, paint a different picture. From 2010 to 2013, one-third of these permits in the county were issued in the city. This illustrates the prevalence and importance of commercial activity in the city.



**Table 7.1. Building Permits Issued**

Year	Residential Home Construction		Other Residential*		Commercial	
	City	County	City	County	City	County
2013	0	22	27	190	5	12
2012	1	34	35	231	4	10
2011	2	35	45	243	3	10
2010	2	24	37	282	2	10
2010-2013 Total	5	115	144	946	14	42

\* Includes mobile homes, room additions, remodels, and outbuildings

## Zoning

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Zoning is a type of regulation of urban land development. The practice began in the early 1900s to combat problems such as congestion and pollution associated with urbanization. Zoning was institutionalized in 1926 when a Village of Euclid, Ohio ordinance was upheld as constitutional by the United States Supreme Court. Now known as “Euclidean zoning,” this type of ordinance dictates placement of properties within a municipality based on use – primarily commercial, residential, and industrial.

The premise for Euclidean zoning is that such uses are incompatible and thus must be restricted to separate geographic areas. This type of zoning also usually includes dimensional requirements such as lot size, setbacks (distance between structures and lot lines), and floor area ratio (total floor area of structures in proportion to lot size).

Euclidian zoning is currently in effect in the City of Iron River, and it is by far the most common type of zoning in the United States. The shortcomings of Euclidean zoning have become increasingly evident from the perspective of modern urban planning. Critics of Euclidean zoning point out that the activity occurring on a site, particularly in a building, bears little relationship to the site’s appearance and effect on the outside world.

Modifications and wholesale reconsiderations of zoning have come in response to such shortcomings. For example, many communities provide for “planned unit developments.” These sites are custom-designed by a developer who works with planners to make unique developments internally functional and compatible with surrounding zoning. Traditional mixed commercial and residential downtown development can be legalized through “overlay zones” that add flexibility to rigid single-use designations in certain areas. Finally, the newest innovation in zoning, “form-based code,” focuses on exterior design of a site rather than the activities that occur within.

## Current Zoning in Iron River

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The City of Iron River’s existing zoning ordinance was mostly recently revised in 2006 and thus reflects the character and challenges of the consolidated city. Current zoning districts in the city

are described below based on their uses. Each district also has dimensional requirements and restrictions for lots and buildings which are best reviewed in the zoning ordinance itself.

### *Commercial Zoning*

A relatively small land area in the city is zoned commercial, and most commercial development conforms to the zoned district. Commercial zoning stretches from Riverside Plaza, a shopping development along U.S. 2 northeast of downtown, to the core downtown area and farther south along M-189 to the abutting City of Caspian. Little commercial development actually exists along M-189.

At the center of downtown, a six-block area centered on Genesee Street is zoned **C-1, Central Business District**, which is intended "to concentrate local business in locations to the mutual advantage of both consumers and merchants and thereby promote the best land use at certain locations." Permitted uses include all the amenities commonly associated with downtowns, such as shops, professional offices, restaurants, personal services, and certain kinds of residences. Signs are also permitted. Manufacturing and industry are not permitted. C-1 has no "permitted uses with special approval" (subsequently to be referred to here as "conditional uses").

The eligibility to include second-floor and rear-ground-floor residences on mixed-use properties (a development type highly supported by survey respondents) makes Iron River's C-1 District preferable to traditional ordinances that allow no new residential uses in core downtown areas. This accomplishes the same end as a mixed-use overlay district and is appropriate for a small city that requires a relatively low level of fine-tuning of zones.

All other commercially zoned areas are in **C-2, General Business District**, which "is intended for retail business and service uses which are needed to serve the nearby residential areas and the community as a whole." The main difference from C-1 is that C-2 allows automobile-focused functions such as car washes and dealers. Permitted uses in C-2 include those of C-1 as well as self-storage facilities, golf courses, temporary construction buildings, garages, dwellings larger than single-family, and a variety of educational and public facilities.

### *Residential Zoning*

Three residential zoning districts occur in the city: **R-1, Single Family Residential; R-2, Multi-Family Residential**, and **R-3, Rural Residential**.

R-1 is the most visibly discernible residential district, as it is composed mainly of single-family homes located in the most active areas of the community. These areas are immediately north and southwest of downtown. Almost all of Old Stambaugh is also zoned R-1, as is the narrow strip connecting that area to central Iron River. In downtown Iron River, R-1 transitions seamlessly into C-1 and C-2, with some bleed between these uses. The R-1 district's purpose "is to encourage a suitable environment for families typically with children." Single-family dwellings are permitted

along with public parks and playgrounds – family-oriented neighborhood amenities – and supervisory residential institutions.

R-2 is the largest of the residential districts and weaves around the city in a haphazard manner, most notably in the eastern half. R-2's purpose "is for more intensive residential use with various types of multi-family dwellings, 2-family dwellings, boarding houses and convalescent homes or nursing homes." This district is flexible with regard to the housing sizes needed to meet differing needs. All R-1 uses are permitted in addition to dwellings larger than single-family. Conditional uses include all R-1 conditional uses as well as convalescent or nursing homes, most medical facilities, bed and breakfasts, and municipal and state cemeteries.

R-3 is most prevalent on the peripheries of the western half of the city, with another small segment on the south side of the eastern border. R-3's purpose "is intended as a district primarily for single-family homes on large lots." This use is characteristic of the townships that the district borders, so the district serves as a transition zone between urban and rural areas. All R-1 and R-2 uses are permitted in the district, as well as plant/produce cultivation, dog kennels, and farm and accessory buildings. Conditional uses are the same as those in R-1 and R-2.

### *Industrial Zoning*

The purpose of I-1, the only industrial district in the city, "is to accommodate research, office and light industrial uses, including wholesale activities, warehouses, and industrial operations whose external, physical effects are restricted to the area of the district and in no warehousing [sic] activities in a planned environment." Other intentions of the district are to not interfere with surrounding districts, to encourage high-technology and other low-impact uses, and to direct industrial traffic to major thoroughfares. Products of industry in this district must be finished or semi-finished rather than raw materials shipped for utilization elsewhere.

Permitted uses in I-1 are manufacturing, heavy equipment sales and service establishments, commercial contracting, lumber and planing mills (in the interior of the district), public utility service and storage yards, and distribution centers. Conditional uses include all those of C-2, except residential, along with recycling processing facilities.

### **Zone Plan**

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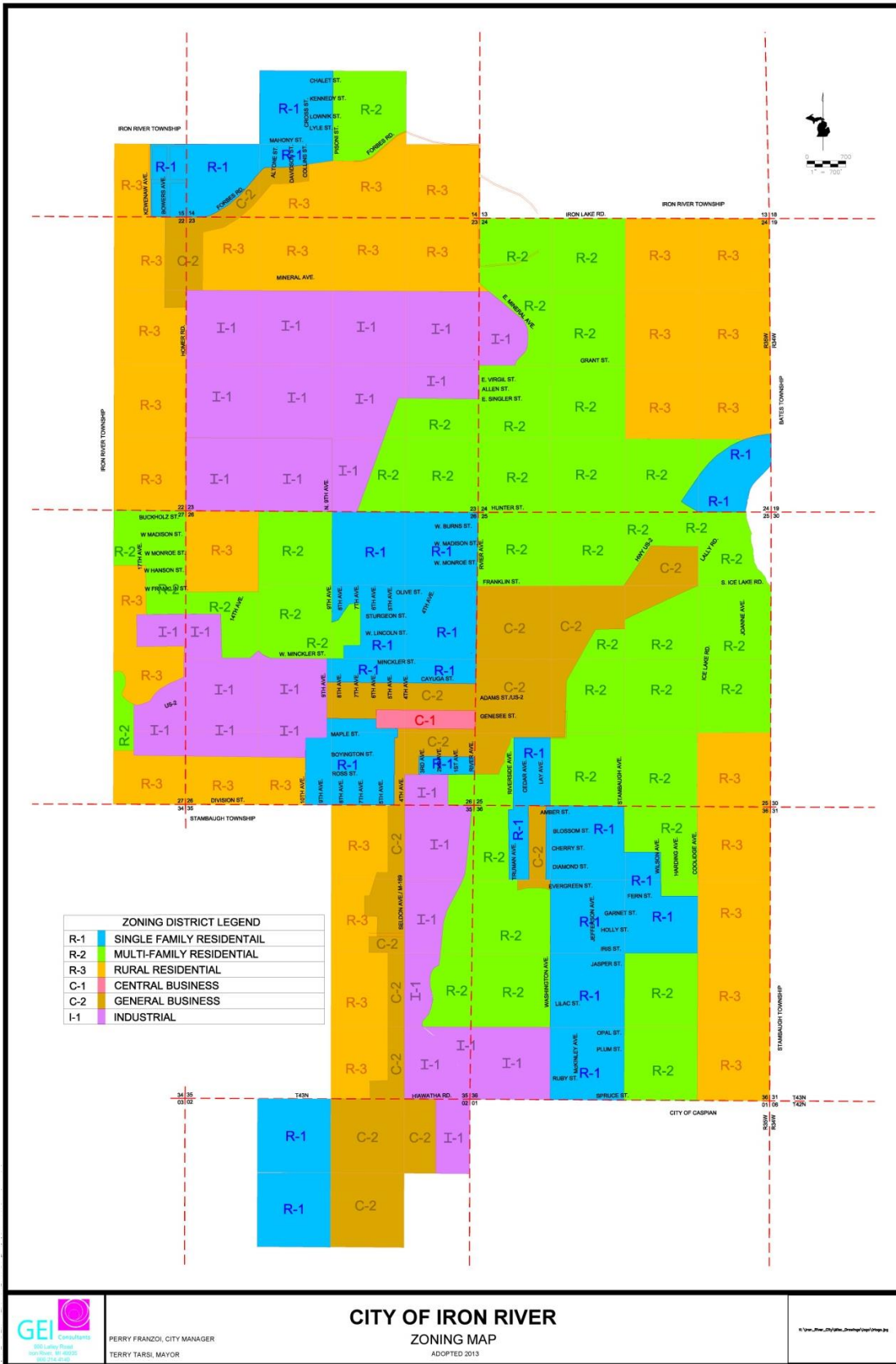
Though the Zoning Ordinance should be evaluated on an ongoing basis, this plan serves as a one-time guide for zoning changes. Ideally, a wholesale update should occur preemptively in order to cater to and guide natural development trends, to prevent the need for piecemeal re-zonings, and to avoid the temptation of illegal spot zoning and unwarranted variances. Furthermore, characteristics of built-out areas may warrant zoning district changes to bring non-conforming properties into compliance. Zoning changes should be based on both internal study by the city government and input from residents and businesses.

The city intends to continue traditional land use zoning in accordance with this plan, though newer zoning trends such as mixed-use designations and physical form standards will be considered. Since the recent wholesale revision of the city's zoning ordinance, zone locations generally remain consistent with the city's current goals for development. At this time, the one potential zone change foreseen is to rezone around the far east end of Highway U.S. 2 within the city from residential to I-1 – but this is not yet considered well enough justified to change the future land use plan accordingly. All other new development should be planned in accordance with existing zoning districts, as these represent both the current state of and future intentions for land use. In addition, several changes to permitted uses and dimensions are intended:

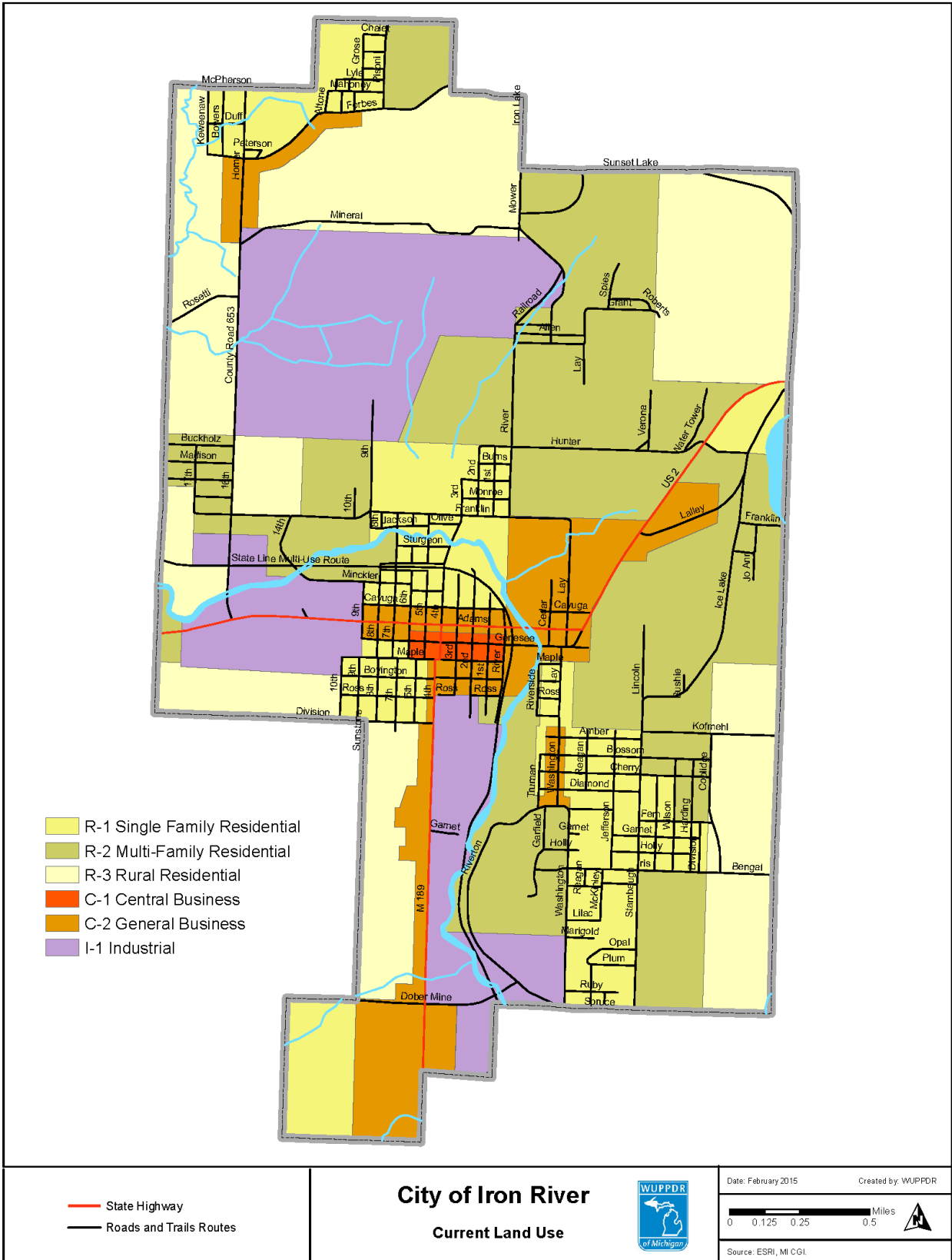
- Modify zone R-1 to allow construction of “granny flats” – accessory housing structures intended for elder relatives of a primary residential structure – with flexibility in setbacks and other dimensional requirements as needed to accommodate the accessory structure.
- Reduce setback requirements in R-1 and R-2 zones, particularly with regard to construction of privacy fences.
- Modify zones C-2 and I to permit medium- and large-scale agricultural activities.
- Modify residential zones to permit small-scale agricultural activities consistent with area and neighborhood character, including food retail.

The current zoning map is an accurate reflection of current land use in the city, and no changes are proposed at this time for future land use. Thus all three maps (**Maps 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3**) are identical at this time.

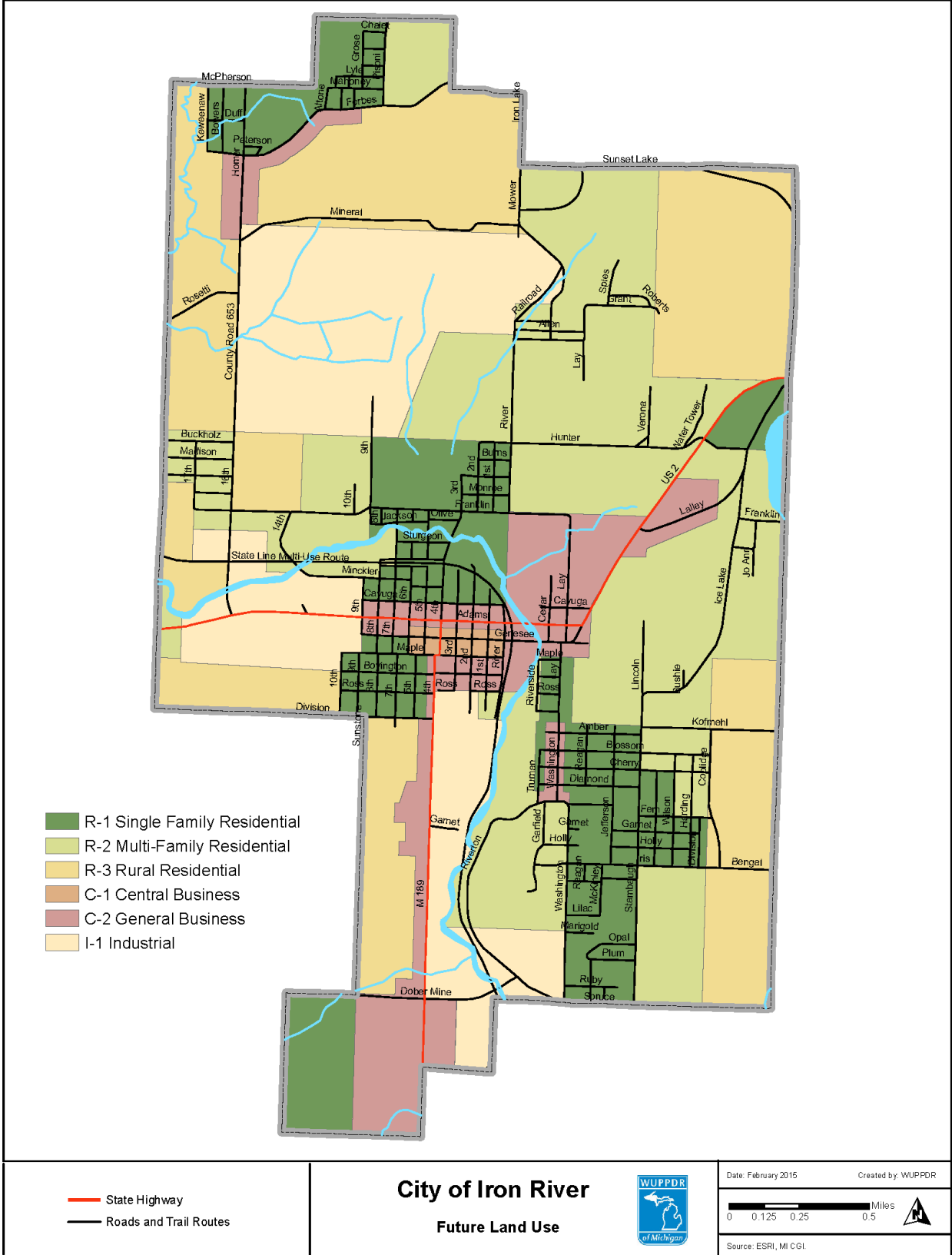
Map 7.1. City of Iron River Zoning



Map 7.2. City of Iron River Current Land Use



Map 7.3. City of Iron River Future Land Use



## ➤ Issues, Goals, and Actions

Below, a number of land use and development issues identified by residents, city officials, and other stakeholders are presented, followed by actions that may be taken to address them.

Issue: Blight in the city needs to be aggressively addressed, especially downtown.

- **Goal:** Reduce the number of commercial vacancies.
  - Action: Develop an inventory of vacant commercially zoned properties.
  - Action: Encourage property owners to keep rents at a reasonable level.
  - Action: Consider temporary tax abatements for property owners renting to respectable business operations.
- **Goal:** Actively take steps to eliminate or revitalize long-term blighted properties.
  - Action: Establish a permanent and structured mechanism and staffing to enforce blight and nuisance regulations.
  - Action: Locate, contact, and, if necessary, take legal action against negligent absentee property owners.
  - Action: Seek and utilize funding for demolition of severely dilapidated properties.



*The City acquired the former Coast-to-Coast building, one of the most blighted downtown, and later slated it for demolition.*

*Acquisition is an important component of blight elimination.*



- *Goal:* Obtain funding from existing programs at higher levels of government to improve or eliminate blighted properties.
  - Action: Pursue Michigan Economic Development Corporation Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Blight Elimination and Façade Improvement Grants.
  - Action: Explore, and utilize to the extent possible, United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development and Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) homeowner and rental rehabilitation programs.
  - Action: Explore use of MSHDA CDBG funds for demolition of blighted structures in residential areas.
  - Action: Pursue designation of the city as a “target area” or “county allocation community” under MSHDA housing rehabilitation programs
  - Action: Explore formation of a county or regional land bank, which allows for acquisition and demolition of blighted properties
  
- *Goal:* Promote highest and best use of vacant lots.
  - Action: Consider modifying zoning ordinance to provide more opportunities for reuse of nonconforming lots on which buildings are demolished.
  - Action: Encourage residential property owners to purchase adjoining nonconforming vacant lots to be converted and maintained as green space.

Issue: The atmosphere and recognition/awareness of downtown and area points of interest need improvement for both visitors and residents.

- *Goal:* Improve aesthetics and accessibility downtown.
  - Action: Improve appearance of parking lots, as through volunteer beautification.
  - Action: Institute design and landscaping standards for new parking lots.
  - Action: Allow aesthetically appropriate signs on the rear facades of businesses, particularly those facing parking lots.
  - Action: Reexamine the optimal number of lanes on U.S. 2 in the interest of calming traffic and reducing auto/pedestrian/cyclist conflicts as well as easing the flow of automobile traffic.
  - Action: Clean up the Iron River, as it is an area of great opportunity for business location and resident enjoyment.
  
- *Goal:* Make it easier to find services and attractions within and near the city.
  - Action: Design and place wayfinding signs for points of interest.
  - Action: Organize businesses to sponsor business district signs, including sponsor logos, to be placed along U.S. 2/Genesee Street.
  - Action: Allow placement of business signs below street signs on the same poles.
  - Action: Design, obtain, and install directional gateway sign near McDonald’s Restaurant for the Hilltop Business District.
  - Action: Encourage, and facilitate however possible, formation of a visitor center by the Iron County Chamber of Commerce.



*A 1980s streetscape project improved Downtown aesthetics, but aging furniture and vegetation need refreshing to create an inviting downtown atmosphere. Features should also be of a uniform scale, unlike the highway-style streetlights shown here.*

Issue: Most retail and some services activity has shifted to “big box” and other stores operated by national companies and located east and west of downtown, particularly in Riverside Plaza.

- **Goal:** Promote the actual and potential 24-hour commercial service/residential mix of uses downtown.
  - Action: Pursue Michigan State Housing Development Authority grant funding for rehabilitation and development of rental units, particularly on second floors above businesses.
  - Action: Modify the zoning ordinance to allow flexibility in parking regulations to reduce the number of spaces required by apartments, as these units are more likely than houses to be occupied by non-drivers.
- **Goal:** Promote the advantages of a central location to any prospective outside businesses.
  - High property values in nearby residential neighborhoods
  - Walkable environment
  - Existing supporting businesses such as restaurants and personal services
  - High traffic volume and convenience for drivers to stop to fulfill their needs



***Riverside Plaza highway commercial development***

Issue: The city's housing types, while adequate, are not ideally suited for an aging population.

- *Goal:* Ensure that the zoning ordinance provides adequate flexibility for senior-oriented housing types.
  - *Action:* Modify the zoning ordinance to ease requirements for lot size, setbacks, etc. in order to allow smaller lots and homes, as well as “granny flats” (small accessory homes), to be constructed.

Issue: Local food access and production is a priority, and this can be supported by policies for the use of city-owned land.

- *Goal:* Support growing more food on City of Iron River property.
  - *Action:* Establish community gardens that are highly accessible to residents throughout the city.

## 8. Community Services and Facilities

A wide range of public services is one of the primary factors separating a municipal corporation such as the City of Iron River from a township. Offerings range from city-provided services such as trash collection, local streets, water, and policing to county services like road maintenance and third-party utilities like power and cable.

One benefit of consolidation to the city was the increased efficiencies in service provision resulting from elimination of numerous service providers filling the same roles in adjacent jurisdictions. Municipal services provided by the original City of Iron River now extend to the Old Stambaugh as well as outlying areas of Old Mineral Hills. This poses some challenges in equal coverage, but overall, city facilities are set up well to handle the task.

Community services and facilities to deliver them are inventoried and described below and displayed in **Map 8.1** (note that this particular map omits a small recently annexed area at the far south border).

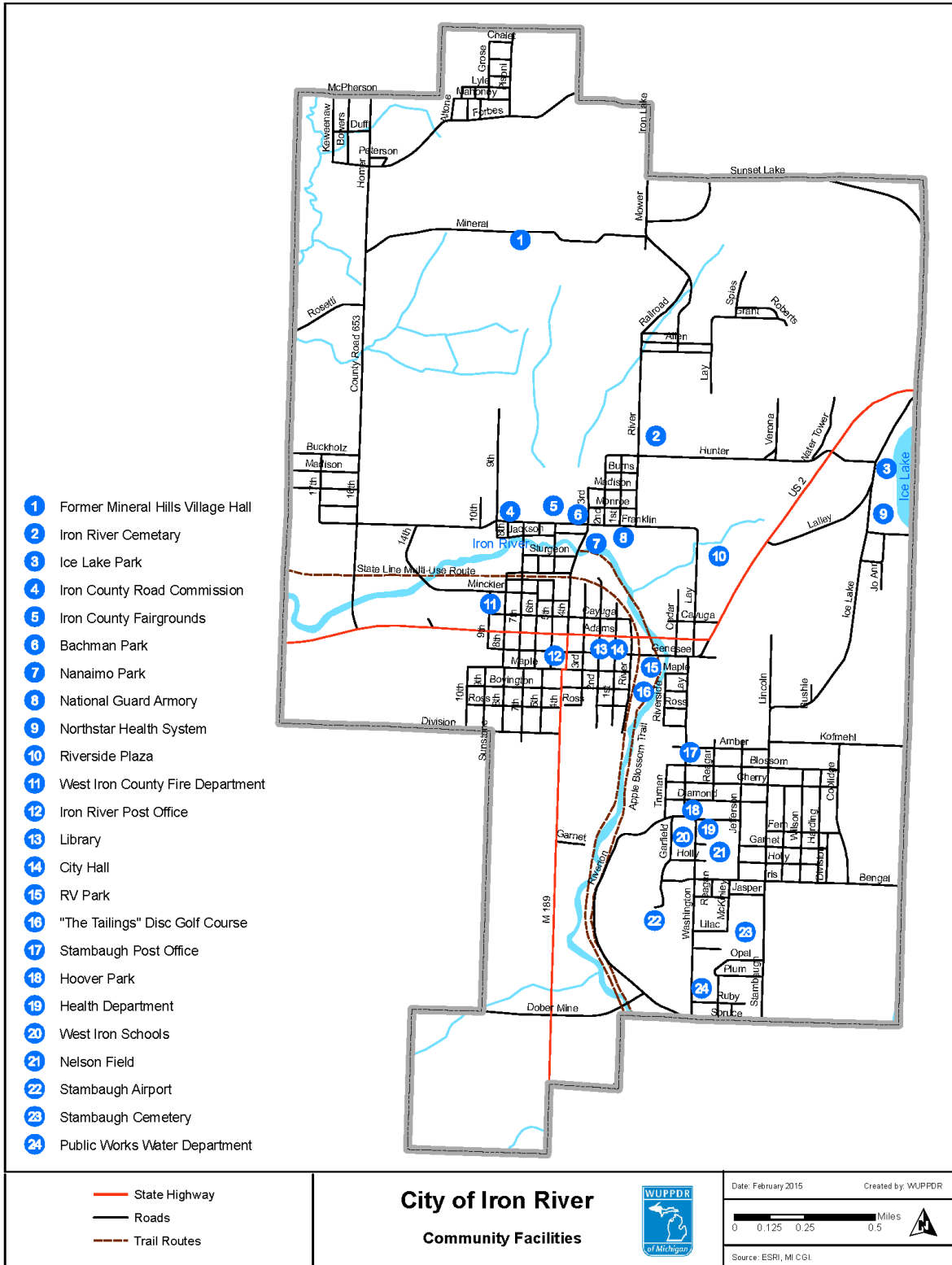
### General Government

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The City of Iron River is a home-rule charter city operating under a council-manager form of government with a five-member City Council that meets once a month. The following commissions and committees are responsible for particular aspects of city government:

- **Board of Review:** state-mandated appointed body that meets at least annually to reevaluate property tax assessments upon the requests of individual taxpayers
- **Brownfield Authority**
- **Compensation Commission**
- **Downtown Development Authority:** meets monthly
- **Housing Commission:** independently responsible for HUD-certified housing structures in the City
- **Planning Commission:** formed under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 and responsible for developing this Master Plan, as well as zoning; meets monthly
- **West Iron County Fire Board:** independently oversees the West Iron County Volunteer Fire Department; the City is represented along with adjacent townships
- **West Iron District Library Board:** meets monthly to independently administer the West Iron District Library; includes representatives of each local government in the district, including the City
- **West Iron County Sewer Authority:** operates and administers the sanitary sewer system in Iron River and surrounding communities; the City is a member with majority use, but, following consolidation, not majority representation
- **Zoning Board of Appeals:** meets as needed

**Map 8.1. Community Services and Facilities**



Iron River City Hall, the headquarters of the city government, is located at 106 West Genesee Street in downtown Iron River. This is the location of several city offices: Assessor, Clerk, Manager, Police, and Treasurer. The building, constructed in 1914, is three stories high and built of red brick and sandstone. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places on December 22, 1983.

## **City-Provided Services and Facilities**

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### *Police*

The Iron River Police Department provides police coverage 20 hours a day with a staff of three officers. In July 2013 the department was cut down from six officers for budgetary reasons. The department is housed in City Hall. Other police agencies providing coverage in and near the city are the Iron River Sheriff's Department, based in Crystal Falls; Michigan State Police, with a post in Iron Mountain; and the Caspian-Gaastra Police Department.

### *Public Works*

The Department of Public Works is located at 1701 Washington Avenue. Responsibilities of the department include: maintenance of roads, water distribution, well and tank maintenance, meter reading, sewer collection system, lift station, pump maintenance, parks and recreation, grass cutting, truck and equipment maintenance and repair, building maintenance and repair, cemetery maintenance, compost collection, Christmas decorations, Christmas tree collection, snowplowing including parking lots, and salting and sanding.

### *Solid Waste Collection and Recycling*

The city contracts with Great American Disposal for solid waste and recycling services. Customers are billed monthly for pickup up to a maximum amount, after which additional fees must be paid per bag. Drop-off recycling is collected once a month at the Department of Public Works garage.

A closed solid waste landfill is located at the extreme northeast corner of the city.

### *Water and Sewer*

The Water and Sewer Department is responsible for these utilities within the city, though sanitary sewer service is provided by the West Iron County Sewer Authority (see below). The water and sanitary sewer systems are stable and provide sufficient capacity for foreseeable growth. However, parts of the system are over 100 years old and will need major maintenance and replacements in the coming years. The Department of Public Works is responsible for maintaining the storm sewer system that serves areas of concentrated development within the city.

### *Industrial Park*

The Iron River Industrial Park is located on the north side of West Adams Street/U.S. 2 just west of downtown. The park is 77 acres in area and has four tenants at the time of plan development.

## Other Emergency and Medical Services

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### *Ambulance*

Ambulance service in the city and a wide surrounding region is provided on a 24-hour emergency basis by NORTHSTAR Health System EMS, based in Iron River. The service employs 20 professionally trained staff members: 11 Paramedics certified in Advanced Cardiac Life Support and Pediatric Advanced Life Support and trained in First Trauma Care as well as 9 Emergency Medical Technicians certified in Basic Life Support and trained in First Trauma Care. Four fully equipped Advanced Life Support ambulances are maintained in Iron River and Crystal Falls.

### *Fire*

The West Iron County Volunteer Fire Department is located in the city at 640 North 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The department provides fire response to an area of 569 square miles in the western part of the county and has a staff of approximately 35. A fire siren is located on Iron River City Hall.

Nearby is the Caspian-Gaastra Volunteer Fire Department, which provides fire response to those two cities and has approximately the same level of staffing as West Iron County. The two departments, as well as three others in the county and others in surrounding areas, have mutual aid agreements to bolster each other's capacity.

### *Hospitals*

NORTHSTAR Health System (acquired in 2014 by Aspirus of Wausau, Wisconsin) has its main hospital facility located at 1400 Ice Lake Road near the eastern border of the city. Specialized services and a clinic operate in adjacent buildings and off site at 927 Riverside Avenue and 229 West Genesee Street. Clinics are also located in Crystal Falls, Marenisco, and Bates location.

The main hospital offers 25 inpatient beds, including three intensive care beds; six outpatient beds; two operating room suites; an emergency department and walk-in clinic; and a variety of diagnostic services. The health system employs 18 active and 34 consulting physicians.

Two unaffiliated medical clinics are available in the city: Marquette Medical Clinic and Hilltop Clinic. Also located in the city is the Iron River (long-term) Care Center, with 69 staffed beds. Regional medical centers are located in Marquette, Michigan and in Wausau and Green Bay, Wisconsin.

## **Utilities**

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### *AT&T*

AT&T provides voice telephone service and DSL broadband internet within the city.

### *DTE Energy*

DTE is the natural gas utility in the city.

### *Fast-Air Internet, Inc.*

Fast-Air Internet, Inc. is a broadband provider within the city that utilizes fixed wireless technology to broadcast signals between access points on local towers and residential subscriber units. Service is available anywhere there is a line of sight between a tower and a subscriber location.

### *Iron River Co-Op TV*

Iron River Co-Op TV is the only cable provider in the city and offers digital telephone and broadband internet service in addition to television.

### *Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) and We Energies*

UPPCO and We Energies are electrical utilities operating within the city.

### *West Iron County Sewer Authority (WICSA)*

WICSA is based in Caspian and operates the municipal sanitary sewer system in Iron River and the surrounding area.

## **Other Services and Facilities within City**

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### *Dickinson-Iron District Health Department*

One of the Health Department's two offices is located in Iron River at 601 Washington Avenue. The Health Department is responsible for community health services, such as immunizations and testing; environmental health, including food inspection; and preparedness for public health emergencies.

### *Iron County Fairgrounds*

The fairgrounds are located just north of downtown. The fairgrounds host several annual events including the Iron County Fair and the regionally significant Upper Peninsula Pro Rodeo, both in summer.



### *Senior Centers*

Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency (DICSA) operates the Iron River Senior Center at 800 Fourth Avenue and the Stambaugh Senior Center at 212 Washington Street. The centers are open Monday through Thursday and Monday through Wednesday, respectively.

### *United States Post Offices*

The Iron River Post Office is located at 425 West Genesee Street. The building, constructed in 1939 and renovated on an ongoing basis, is a community focal point – one of the most prominent and attractive buildings in the downtown area; contemporary but with a historic design.



***Iron River Post Office demonstrates downtown’s aesthetic potential.***

Stambaugh has also retained a unique ZIP code and a Post Office located at 201 Washington Avenue.

### *West Iron County Schools*

The school district covers roughly the west half of Iron County, an area of approximately 560 square miles. More statistics are provided in the Human Geography section. The district was consolidated in 1967 from the districts of Bates Township, Iron River, and Stambaugh Township. Today the district has three facilities, all of which are located within the city: Stambaugh Elementary, 700 Washington Avenue; the Junior/Senior High School, 701 Garfield Avenue; and the Community Schools and Administration offices, 601 Garfield Avenue.

### *West Iron District Library*

At 116 West Genesee Street, the library is located in an existing building to which it moved from City Hall in 1995. The building was expanded in 2008 to offer enlarged collections areas and program space as well as a computer room. An outdoor courtyard is planned for the future.

The library district includes the Cities of Iron River, Caspian, and Gaastra, as well as Iron River, Stambaugh, and Bates Townships.

## **Other Regional Services and Agencies**

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### *Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency*

DICSA is a Community Action Agency formed under federal law to administer programs promoting self-sufficiency of those in the community. Programs include housing assistance, food assistance, and transportation. Within the City of Iron River, many of these services are operated through the two senior centers. DICSA's main office is located in Iron Mountain, but the agency serves both Dickinson and Iron Counties. DICSA is operated by U.P. Community Services, Inc.

### *Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District (ISD)*

Intermediate School Districts in Michigan are special district governments that provide supporting programs and services for local school districts. Iron County is paired with Dickinson County in its ISD, and the main office is located in Kingsford.

### *Michigan State University Extension*

The Extension provides a wide variety of programs and services to counties throughout the state, covering topics from agriculture to economic development. The 4-H youth development organization is one of the Extension's best-known and most popular functions. Iron County is located in Region 1, which covers the western half of the Upper Peninsula. The county's 4-H coordinator is based in the Iron County Courthouse in Crystal Falls.

Each county has access to all Extension services throughout its region, but counties have some flexibility in selecting which service(s) are based locally. In order to maintain services, counties must appropriate funds in amounts set by the Extension. Currently Iron County receives services from a 4-H coordinator shared with Dickinson County, as well as various education programs.

### *United States Forest Service (USFS) – Ottawa National Forest – Iron River Ranger District*

The United States Forest Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, administers 155 national forests in the United States. One of two national forests in the Upper Peninsula, the Ottawa National Forest is made up of nearly one million acres of land spread over five counties in the Western Upper Peninsula and Marquette County to the east. The forest is administered by five ranger districts, one of which is the Iron River Ranger District. The office of the Iron River district is combined with that of the Watersmeet Ranger District and is located in Watersmeet.

Though the City of Iron River itself is outside the Ottawa National Forest boundary, a substantial share of the forest's public land is located in western Iron County and can be accessed a short drive west of the city. Numerous national forest campgrounds and access sites are located throughout the county.

*Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region (WUPPDR)*

WUPPDR is the State-Designated Planning Region and federal Economic Development District with which the six Western Upper Peninsula counties, including Iron, are affiliated. WUPPDR has a mission to foster stable and diversified economies in the Western Upper Peninsula. The agency is available to provide various forms of technical assistance and information services within the Iron River area. WUPPDR's office is in Houghton.

## ➤ Issues, Goals, and Actions

Below, a number of public service issues identified by residents are presented, followed by actions that may be taken to address them.

Issue: Members of the public have expressed concerns about accountability, transparency, and inefficiencies in city government.

- *Goal:* Ensure the public has accurate information about and accessibility to city departments and staff.
  - Action: Develop an easy-to-understand document detailing departmental staff, budgets, and lists and descriptions of work responsibilities and programs.
  - Action: Release/broadcast a weekly update from the City Manager about the activities of city departments, e.g. DPW road repairs and service calls.
  - Action: Create an improved, revamped City of Iron River website, incorporating additional electronic capabilities such as online payment of utility fees.
- *Goal:* Promote transparency in government administration.
  - Action: Publicize the evaluation system(s) used for city employees.
  - Action: Publicize the EVIP dashboard, and evaluate its contents for possible modifications/additions to align with residents' priorities and concerns.
- *Goal:* Raise the profile of accountability of elected officials.
  - Action: Encourage occasional discussions of the mayor with local media about current issues.
  - Action: Hold "open house" or "meet and greet" sessions for the public as needed to address specific issues.
  - Action: Consider holding City Council meetings in the evening – if not regular meetings, then occasional special meetings.
- *Goal:* Make a concerted effort to make the above information available to all city residents.
  - Action: Release information and enable communication through social media presences (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) as well as through traditional media.

Issue: Crime, particularly drug use, is perceived to be a problem in the city.

- *Goal:* Ensure regional entities are working together for greatest impact and efficiency.
  - Action: Invite healthcare providers, educators, and other stakeholders to ensure social issues related to drug abuse and other crimes are considered and addressed.
- *Goal:* Increase the level of drug abuse prevention and enforcement in the Iron River area.
  - Action: Continue to work with and obtain the highest level of service feasible from the Upper Peninsula Substance Enforcement Team (UPSET).
  - Action: Support continuation and drug abuse education of Neighborhood Watch groups and neighborhood associations.

*NOTE: Local statistics do not exist to gauge the actual level of crime in the city.*

Issue: Residents desire a higher level of recycling and debris disposal services.

- *Goal*: Increase participation by raising awareness of recycling in the community.
  - Action: Designate an annual “Recycling Day” during which the city would work with area businesses, residents, and media to promote the benefits of recycling.
  - Action: Better publicize available collection services through mainstream media.
- *Goal*: Ensure the city’s disposal services meet the needs of residents.
  - Action: Offer a weekly, rather than monthly, drop-off day for recycling materials.
  - Action: Offer an opportunity for drop-off during evening hours.
  - Action: Increase the number of spring cleanup days.

## 9. Transportation

Numerous entities provide transportation services in the City of Iron River. Some of these are operated and partially funded locally, whereas others operate at the state and federal levels. The entities and services are listed below.

### Public Transit

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Iron County has no dedicated public transit service. However, U.P. Community Serves, Inc., operating as Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency (DICSA), offers limited service to senior citizens and persons with disabilities in and around Iron River. Of the two cities, Iron River has the higher level of service. Operating out of the Iron River Senior Center (see description in next section), DICSA offers wheelchair-capable demand-response transportation 7 ½ hours daily from Monday through Thursday. A trip from Iron River to Iron Mountain is offered once a month.

State-subsidized intercity bus transportation is provided within the City of Iron River by Indian Trails. The route travels along U.S. 2 through the city, terminating at Ironwood to the west and Escanaba to the east, with one daily stop in each direction at the Iron Inn Motel. From Ironwood, a connection can be made to Duluth, and from Escanaba, connections can be made south into Wisconsin and east to St. Ignace and ultimately the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

Iron County has no local taxi service. The nearest cab companies are located in Eagle River, Wisconsin; Iron Mountain; and Kingsford.

### Airports

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The Stambaugh Airport, a general aviation airport owned by Iron County, is located at 303 Selden Road. The airport is open to the public with no landing fee. Both runways, each 2,000 feet in length, are in poor condition. The airport is unstaffed and un-towered.

The nearest airport with commercial passenger service and freight service is Ford Airport in Kingsford, which is a 46-mile drive southeast from Iron River. SkyWest Airlines operates Delta flights on regional jet aircraft to and from Minneapolis with two arrivals and two departures daily. One of each of these includes a stop in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Minneapolis offers connecting flights to hundreds of airports in the United States and abroad. SkyWest operates under a two-year contract for subsidies from the federal Essential Air Service program.

### Rail

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The city is no longer served by freight or passenger rail. The city previously had access northwest through Watersmeet, Marenisco, and Ironwood; southeast through Stager, Iron Mountain, Powers, and Escanaba; and south to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Rail remains in service from Amasa, in central Iron County, east and south to Green Bay. This line serves an industrial park in Amasa and

is used to export finished sports flooring. In a 2013 Michigan Technological University study, Amasa was among three potential locations researched for a regional multi-modal “transload” facility to combine long-distance rail and short-haul truck freight transportation. Such a facility would serve much of the Upper Peninsula.

## **Roads**

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### *Overview*

In Michigan, road funding and classification is dictated by Act 51 of 1951. Under Act 51, revenue streams dedicated to roads flow into the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF). Most of the MTF goes into the road system. This road system funding is separated into three funding allocations: The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) receives 39 percent, county road commissions or departments receive 39 percent, and cities and villages receive the remainder.

### *State Roads*

MDOT is responsible for road construction and maintenance of roads under its jurisdiction, which are collectively referred to as the state trunkline. This system is comprised of state and federal highways that account for 8 percent of Michigan’s road network but carry the vast majority of traffic in the state. The most economically important parts of the state trunkline are designated as the Primary Commercial Network (PCN).

U.S. Highway 2, part of the PCN, is the main trunkline route passing through the city. Nationally, U.S. 2 is made up of two disconnected segments, with Iron River located on the western segment. The western segment terminates near Seattle, Washington, on the west, and at St. Ignace, Michigan, on the east. U.S. 2, also known as West Adams Street, is the focus of commercial development in the city and carries large volumes of local and thru traffic. MDOT’s annual average daily traffic counts for the two segments of U.S. 2 entirely within the City of Iron River were 6,646 and 7,916 in 2012.

The other state trunkline route within the city is Michigan Highway 189 (M-189), or Selden Road, a minor arterial that runs south from downtown Iron River, skirts the west border of the City of Caspian, and continues to the Wisconsin state border. Just west of the city, M-73 runs southwest from U.S. 2 to the Wisconsin border.

### *County Roads*

Road Commissions in Michigan are municipal corporations that, in most counties, have the responsibility to maintain county primary and local roads outside of municipalities. Counties that do not have road commissions take on these responsibilities within the general county government. In most counties that have road commissions, including Iron, the road commission conducts winter maintenance on the state trunkline for reimbursement under contract with the State of Michigan.

The Iron County Road Commission is located at 800 West Franklin Street in Iron River. The Commission maintains 270 primary and 363 local roads, amounting to 224 lane miles. Roads within the city are not part of the county roads system.

### *City Streets*

Under Act 51, cities and villages must designate a system of “major streets” which is then approved by the state highway commissioner. Other, lower-priority city and village streets are considered “local streets.” The City of Iron River’s major streets are:

- Mineral and Lay Avenues; portions of 9<sup>th</sup>, Lincoln/Stambaugh, and Washington Avenues
- Forbes, Homer, Hunter, Ice Lake, Lalley, and River Roads; portions of Dober Mine Road
- Allen, Franklin, West Cayuga, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets; portions of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, Amber, Cherry, Coolidge, Division, and Genesee Streets

The City of Iron River Department of Public Works is responsible for plowing and maintaining all city streets.



***Street reconstruction funded by a 2013 Downtown Infrastructure Grant***

### *Federal Classification*

Roads in the city are also classified federally according to the National Functional Classification (NFC) developed by the Federal Highway Administration. NFC includes four hierarchical categories based on road function and depending mainly on mobility factors such as trip generation and destination types. Highest in the hierarchy is Principal Arterial, which includes major state trunkline routes and surface streets. Below this are Minor Arterial, which is similar to



Principal but carries shorter-distance trips to and from lower-volume generators; Collector, which funnels to arterials and provide greater access to individual properties; and Local, which mainly provides access to individual properties. In urban areas, only 5 to 10 percent of roadway miles are targeted to be Principal Arterial, whereas 65 to 80 percent are targeted to be Local.

Principal Arterials, Minor Arterials, and Collectors within the city are designated Federal-Aid roads, which means they are eligible for funding under federal transportation programs. Of 41.6 miles of public roads in the city, 7.9 miles are Federal-Aid roads, and the remainder are designated Local and not eligible. The city's Federal-Aid roads are shown in **Map 9.1**.

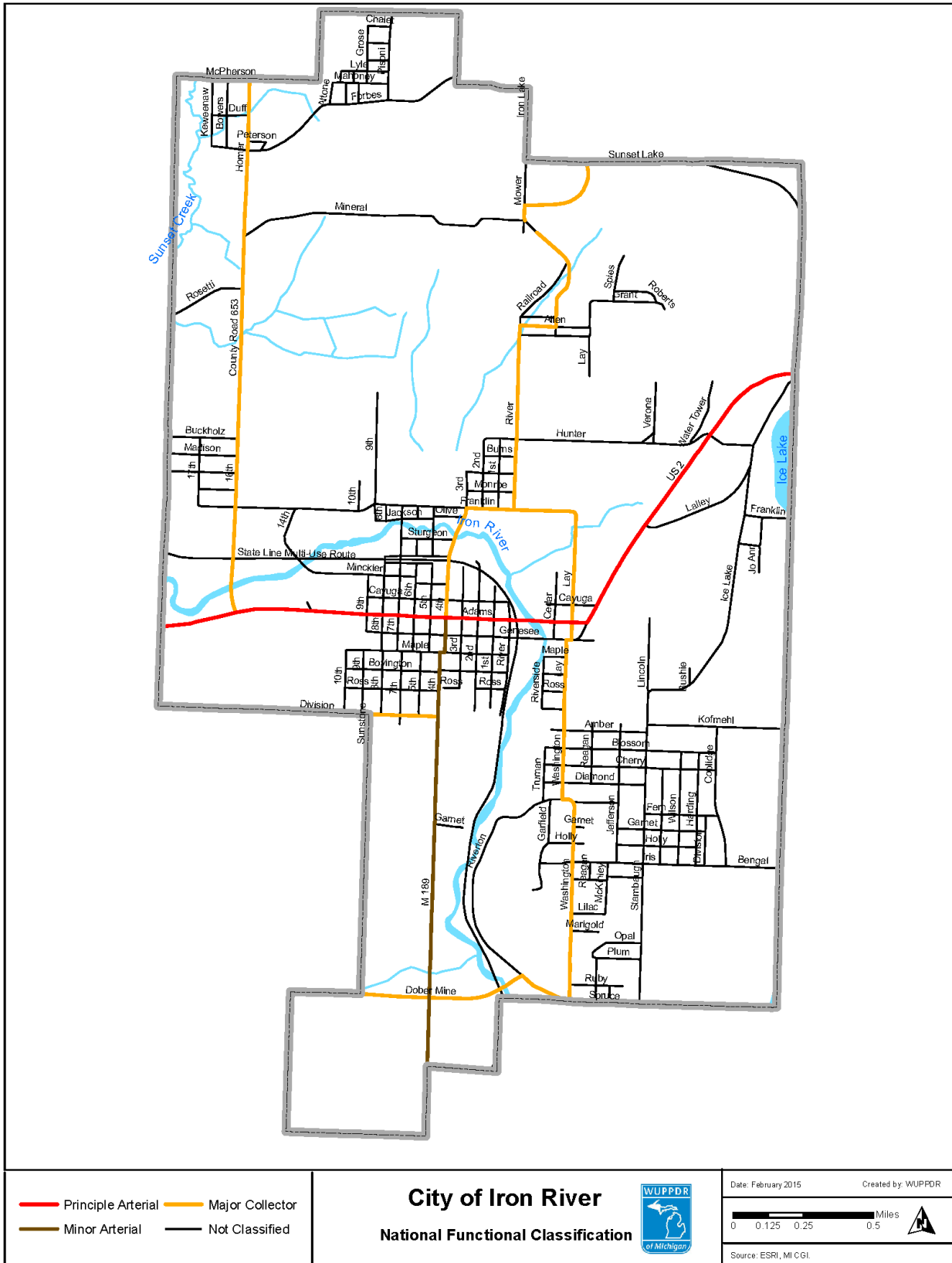
### *Character and Issues*

The network of streets within the city is somewhat unusual in that many streets run long distances through minimally developed areas – partially a result of the city's consolidation, which added not only the core of Old Stambaugh but also large peripheral areas. Mineral Hills, in particular, is almost entirely rural in character, and the former village's incorporated area accounts for a greatly disproportionate share of city land in relation to population.

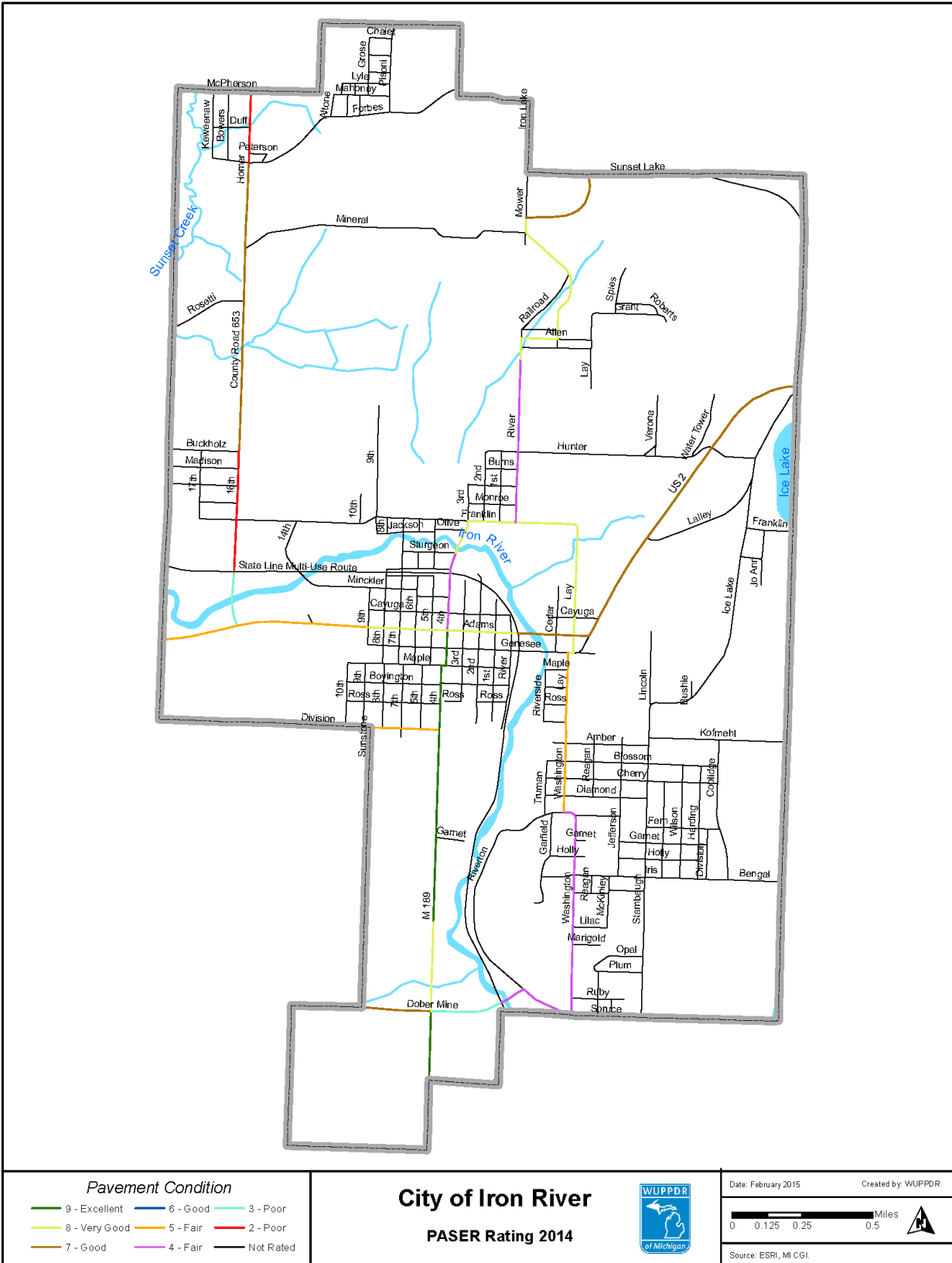
Funding and management of city road infrastructure under consolidation has been an ongoing problem – and one exacerbated by state-level funding shortages. As a result, one of area residents' most frequent complaints of any type is that many roads under the City of Iron River's jurisdiction are in very poor condition. Road construction is more expensive than commonly perceived, and the city's capacity for raising local funding is limited by low property values. As funds originating both locally and from the state have diminished, even basic maintenance has become difficult to keep up with. Furthermore, clay-based soils underlying roads in the city lead to subsidence of concrete upon which blacktop is layered. Deteriorating infrastructure hurts public morale and impedes much-needed economic development. The MDOT Pavement Asset Surface Evaluation Ratings (PASER) for selected federal-aid roads in the city are shown in **Map 9.2**. Many streets around central Iron River have pavement in fair or poor condition.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to the problem of road funding and maintenance. Funding for roads in Michigan has been falling for many years. Trunkline funding alone has decreased from a high of \$665 million in 2009 to \$416 million in 2013, and actual pavement condition ratings have dropped correspondingly. The root of this problem is common to the entire United States: Improved vehicle gas mileage has reduced the volume of fuel purchased and thus reduced the amount of sales and gasoline tax collected. Furthermore, fewer new automobiles are being sold as people keep their vehicles longer than in the past, and this reduces registration fee revenues. Many states have revamped their tax and fee structures to address these problems, but Michigan as yet has not.

Map 9.1. Federal-Aid Road National Functional Classifications in City of Iron River



**Map 9.2. PASER Ratings of Road Pavement Condition in City of Iron River**



## **Trail Routes**

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The city is traversed by the State Line Trail multi-use route that is a state-designated snowmobile trail in winter and primarily an off-road vehicle (ORV)/all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trail in other seasons. Also within the city, paralleling the Iron River for most of its length, is the paved, non-motorized Apple Blossom Trail.

## ➤ Issues, Goals, and Actions

Issue: The city's street system is in generally poor condition.

- **Goal:** Plan street repairs in an orderly fashion.
  - Action: Re-evaluate the city's Capital Improvements Program on an ongoing basis to ensure road repairs are appropriately prioritized.
  - Action: Actively solicit and incorporate residents' concerns about particular street segments when prioritizing road repairs.
- **Goal:** Seek additional funding for street repairs.
  - Action: Ensure legislators are informed about the city's needs for state and federal road funding.
  - Action: Identify grant opportunities for dedicated project funding.



***Certain streets in the city's less-populated neighborhoods – here Mineral Hills – are in particularly poor condition.***

Issue: Public transit service within the city is inadequate for many residents' needs.

- **Goal:** Ensure that the city is not missing any opportunities for state and federal transit funding.
  - Action: Remain in contact with MDOT and WUPPDR regarding funds availability.
- **Goal:** Consider new mechanisms and funding streams for transit.
  - Action: Explore non-traditional programs that offer specialized program funding, such as Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom
  - Action: Consider proposing or endorsing a multi-jurisdictional organization supported by a tax millage assessment.

## 10. Recreation

Iron County is well known for its outdoor recreational opportunities, and the City of Iron River is no exception. The city has a 2 ½-mile paved, non-motorized trail, the “Apple Blossom Trail,” along the Iron River. The trail meets the principles of “universal design” to satisfy the needs of all users. The Iron River itself has a reputation of being a high-quality trout stream and has received “Better Fishing Waters” designation for brook trout by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The city also owns and operates a campground and many parks within the city limits. Finally, the city is traversed by a multi-use trail and (through part of the city) the separate non-motorized Apple Blossom Trail.

Respondents to the survey conducted during development of this master plan indicated great support for public parks development, with 65 percent strongly in favor and only 4 percent opposed.

Recreation facilities (**Table 10.1**), goals, and planned improvements are laid out in the city’s 2011-2016 Recreation Plan. Selected information is provided below.

**Table 10.1. City of Iron River Recreation Inventory**

Site	Type	Owner-ship	Facilities	Area	Access-ibility*
Nelson Field	Stadium	City	Playground, multi-field, lighted tennis courts, concession stand, picnic areas	17.47 ac.	3
Bachman Park	Local Park	City	Ball field, tennis courts, basketball court, playground	3 ac.	2
Ice Lake Park	Local Park	City	Shelter, restrooms, picnic facilities, swimming, fishing, boating	2.5 ac.	2
RV & Trailer Park	Campground	City	Campsites (32) & fishing	8.78 ac.	3
Nanaimo Park	Local Park	City	Restrooms, playground, fishing, picnic facilities	2.5 ac.	2
Iron County Armory	Indoor	State	Snack bar, restrooms, multi-use room	3 ac.	3
Iron County Fairgrounds	Fairgrounds	County	Grandstand, exhibition buildings, restrooms	30 ac.	3
Senior Center	Indoor	City	Snack bar, restrooms	1 ac.	3
Forbes Field	Local Park	City	Softball field	1 ac.	3
Skate Park	Local Park	City	Skate park equipment	9,500 sq. ft.	3
Apple Blossom Trail	Local Park	City	Hiking & biking trail	0.78 ac.	5
“The Tailings”	Local Park	City	Disc Golf Course	6,340 ft.	2

**Table 10.1. City of Iron River Recreation Inventory**

Site	Type	Owner-ship	Facilities	Area	Access-ibility*
Disc Golf Course				long	
Chamber of Commerce	Indoor	City	Tourist information		3

\* 1) None of the facilities are accessible, 2) some facilities are accessible, 3) most facilities are accessible, 4) all facilities are accessible, 5) accessible according to principles of Universal Design

**Goals and Objectives**

As described in the “Previous Plans” section of this document, the City of Iron River 2011-2016 Recreation Plan defines four manageable goals for recreation development:



***Apple Blossom Trail – one of the city’s recreation assets***

1. To continue at least the present level of recreational facilities and programs in the community proportionate to the city’s level of population and financial ability
2. To conserve land and water resources within the city limits to the extent that it is possible, and to cooperate with other units to do the same, so as to provide future generations the continued use and enjoyment of these resources
3. To provide as wide a spectrum of recreational opportunities to all age groups in the city, as available resources will permit
4. To develop goals and objectives, and maintain a schedule for their implementation with the allocation of such resources as may be available from time to time, for this purpose

The city planned an orderly capital improvements plan that addressed each particular park in a different year, aggregated in **Table 10.2** (many of the parks have more than one planned project in a year).

**Table 10.2. Five-Year Recreation Capital Improvements Plan**

Park	Description of Project(s)	Estimated Cost (\$)
<b>2011</b>		
RV Park	Utilities, signage, playground, laundry, building upgrades	57,500
Multi-Purpose Facility	Construction	600,000
<b>2012</b>		
Nelson Field	Grandstand & picnic amenities	11,000
Forbes Field	Field & bleachers	7,500
RV Park	ORV/trailhead development	100,000
<b>2013</b>		
Bachman Park	Field, lighting, security upgrades; batting cage & playground equipment	56,500
Non-Motorized Path	M-189 to Apple Blossom Trail	250,000
<b>2014</b>		
Nanaimo Park	Bocce courts & lights, pavilion & restroom upgrades, grills & picnic tables, fishing pier, playground equipment	69,000
Apple Blossom Trail	Benches, lighting, fishing pier & access sites, extension	251,000
<b>2015</b>		
Ice Lake Park	Restroom/changing facility, picnic area/walkway/bike paths, security	357,500
Skate Park	Lighting & bleachers	8,500
River Front	Property acquisition	100,000

For this master plan, other priorities are to promote riverfront development, extend and fully connect the Apple Blossom Trail, and work with Trout Unlimited for river habitat improvement and promotion. Proposed recreation improvements for the purpose of economic development are presented in the following chapter.

### **Other Area Facilities**

Located near the far southeast corner of the Ottawa National Forest, the City of Iron River can be considered a gateway to this million-acre paradise for activities such as boating, camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, kayaking, and many others. The Ottawa contains over 20 campgrounds offering hundreds of campsites, as well as dozens of other recreation facilities including picnic areas, boat launches, and hiking and ski trails. Across the Michigan/Wisconsin border, the Nicolet National Forest offers similar amenities.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources owns and administers several boat launches near the city. Two townships and Iron County also operate parks near the city.



## 11. Economic Development

Iron River’s economy has changed drastically since modern settlement of the area, but the economy has always been heavily resource-based. Iron mining was predominant in decades around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. More recently, forestry has overtaken mining, though the direct economic impact of forestry through jobs and earnings is relatively low compared to other industries. Tourism, another industry reliant on natural resources, has also taken on an important role. Tourism is part of the broader major category of service industries, particularly “hospitality” industries. Healthcare and social services employment is the broadest category of all. Iron County also has some significant manufacturers.

The City of Iron River has 2,682 persons 16 years and over. Of these, 1,092 are in the labor force. Of 1,055 employed workers who commute, the vast majority (821 or 77.8 percent) drive alone. The mean travel time to work is 14.3 minutes.

Unemployment statistics are measured at the county level. Iron County’s estimated annual unemployment rate was 9.8 percent in 2013 as compared with 8.8 percent in the State of Michigan. The county’s rate is less severe than most of the Upper Peninsula, but it seems particularly acute when considering Iron County’s smaller labor force.

Of the city’s occupations, as of 2012, service occupations employed the largest number of workers: 333 (see **Table 11.1**). Of the city’s industries, the largest was educational services and health care & social assistance, with 345 workers (see **Table 11.2**).

**Table 11.1. Occupations in City of Iron River (ACS 2012)**

Occupation	# Employed	% of All Occupations
(Employed civilians 16 years and over)	1,092	
Services	333	30.5
Management, business, science, and arts	271	24.8
Sales and office work	217	19.9
Production, transportation, and material moving	153	14.0
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	118	10.8

**Table 11.2. Industries in City of Iron River (ACS 2012)**

Industry	# Employed	% of All Industries
(Employed civilians 16 years and over)	1,092	
Educational services and health care & social assistance	267	24.5
Retail trade	173	15.8
Arts, entertainment, & recreation and accommodations & food services	125	11.4
Professional, scientific, & management and administrative & waste management services	105	9.6

**Table 11.2. Industries in City of Iron River (ACS 2012)**

<b>Industry</b>	<b># Employed</b>	<b>% of All Industries</b>
(Employed civilians 16 years and over)	1,092	
Manufacturing	92	8.4
Finance & insurance and real estate & rental & leasing	74	6.8
Other services except public administration	70	6.4
Public administration	61	5.6
Construction	45	4.1
Wholesale trade	31	2.8
Information	20	1.8
Transportation & warehousing and utilities	19	1.7
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, and mining	10	0.9

The largest employers in Iron County, based on 2011 research by the Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Community and Economic Development, are shown in **Table 11.3**. The two largest are in healthcare. Due to residents' short travel time to work and the distance of commuting that is commonly accepted in rural areas, the location of the employers within the county is not especially important for planning purposes.

**Table 11.3. Iron County's Largest Employers**

<b>Company/Entity</b>	<b># Employed</b>
Iron County Medical Facility	310
NORTHSTAR Health System	307
Oldenburg Group	166
Krist Oil Company	128
Ski Brule	113
West Iron County Public Schools	110
Connor-AGA Sports Flooring	108
Angeli Foods Company	90
Aramark	89
Forest Park School District	80
Iron River Care Center	70

Still, the commuting patterns of workers and residents of the city are useful in assessing the city's role in the regional economy. Of 1,064 employees who work in the city, the vast majority (846, or 79.5 percent) are commuters who live outside the city, whereas only 218 (20.5 percent) are city residents. These statistics illustrate Iron River's role as a commuter-reliant employment hub.

## ➤ Issues, Goals, Opportunities, and Actions

Issue: As the City of Iron River is in a state of economic decline, several ideas for industry development within the city have been proposed for further research and exploration through regional organizations and ongoing initiatives:

- *Goal:* Develop a business incubator.
  - Action: Complete environmental site assessments of the Windsor Center and surrounding land, already in progress, to increase business use of the building.
- *Goal:* Support Iron County Chamber of Commerce events and promotion of the area
  - Action: Relocate the chamber office for better exposure.
- *Goal:* Continue working with local broadband internet providers to improve and expand access.
  - Action: Participate in Iron County Technology Action Plan in cooperation with WUPPDR and Connect Michigan.
- *Goal:* Expand opportunities for career technical and vocational education – both during and after high school.
  - Action: Through partnership between Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District and one or more community colleges, establish a program to allow students in West Iron County schools to work toward college technical degrees.
- *Goal:* Develop water-demanding industry within flooded former mines.
  - Action: Explore development of a “server farm,” which would use water to cool computer equipment, utilize the warmed output water for energy generation, and provide increased broadband internet access for business and the general public.
- *Goal:* Provide access to rail transport to serve existing and potential local manufacturers.
  - Action: Explore reestablishment of rail lines that were removed in the 1980s.
  - Action: Support and advocate for development of a regional truck/rail transload facility.
- *Goal:* Support growing retirement community that is relocating to Iron County.
- *Goal:* Improve existing recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.
  - Action: Capitalize on regional and state recreation initiatives.
  - Action: Foster recreational motorized and non-motorized trail development and access.
  - Action: Collaborate with local groups and Ottawa National Forest to expand and improve upon outdoor recreational opportunities.

Issue: Fundamental to the character, economy, and quality of life in Iron River, agriculture and food production are a legitimate and economically integral component of the community.

- *Goals:* Improve the health and sustainability of Iron River’s economy through production, processing, and consumption of local foods, and increase affordability and access to them. Reduce dependence on increasingly expensive imported foods.
  - Action: Seek sources of funding to achieve these goals.

- Action: Support educational opportunities that teach farming and gardening skills and the importance of the local food system.
- Action: Support businesses and institutions operating in Iron River in purchasing local and sustainable foods and composting organic waste.
- Action: Encourage partnerships between local food producers and institutions such as schools, hospitals, and elder care facilities.
- Action: Support activities and policies to facilitate food waste recovery, such as composting and bio-digestion programs.
- Action Group: Support creation of new facilities, as well as adaptation and better utilization of existing facilities, for production of foods including fresh meat and produce.
  - Action: Establish a local food hub cooperative for processing, storage, and distribution of local foods.
  - Action: Establish year-round growing facilities such as hoop houses and other controlled environments.
- Action Group: Formulate or modify procurement rules, permits and licensing, tax benefits, and other tools to facilitate local food production, processing, and retailing.
  - Action: Support efforts to improve marketing of local food.

*NOTE: Also see Chapter 7 for proposed zoning changes and land use policies related to local foods*