

Vernonia Geographic

By Benjamin Fousek

The Vernonia City Council has approved the Economic Opportunity Analysis (EOA) and adopted the largest land use rezoning ever in Vernonia. This historic event is one of many substantial changes in Vernonia over the last few years. The new school and extensive flood hazard mitigation are two immediate and highly visible changes, however land use change is less visible, and the effects will most likely not be evident for years. Because of this, there has been speculation and rumor about why the City is making these changes to Vernonia's land use zoning. I'm here to set the record straight, because when the issue is reduced to its simplest terms, there is only one reason the City is making these changes.

Let's start with some background. The State of Oregon has some of the most comprehensive land use laws in the country. These laws are designed

to protect forest and farm land, and to control urban development. Of course, we're talking about urban development here in Vernonia. These laws compel municipalities to plan for expansion well into the future. In fact, large cities, like Beaverton and Hillsboro are planning as far out as 50 years with some aspects of future expansion. Planning out the future of a city is complicated, but essentially it comes down to economics and population projections. In Vernonia our development plan is spelled out in the City of Vernonia Comprehensive Plan. The Comp Plan, as it's referred to, details how and where we will expand, as well as, how infrastructure (e.g. streets, utilities, etc) will be upgraded and expanded.

This is where the Vernonia EOA comes into play. The EOA is an analysis, which projects future residential, commercial and industrial land needs based on population projections through 2031. Based on Vernonia's current

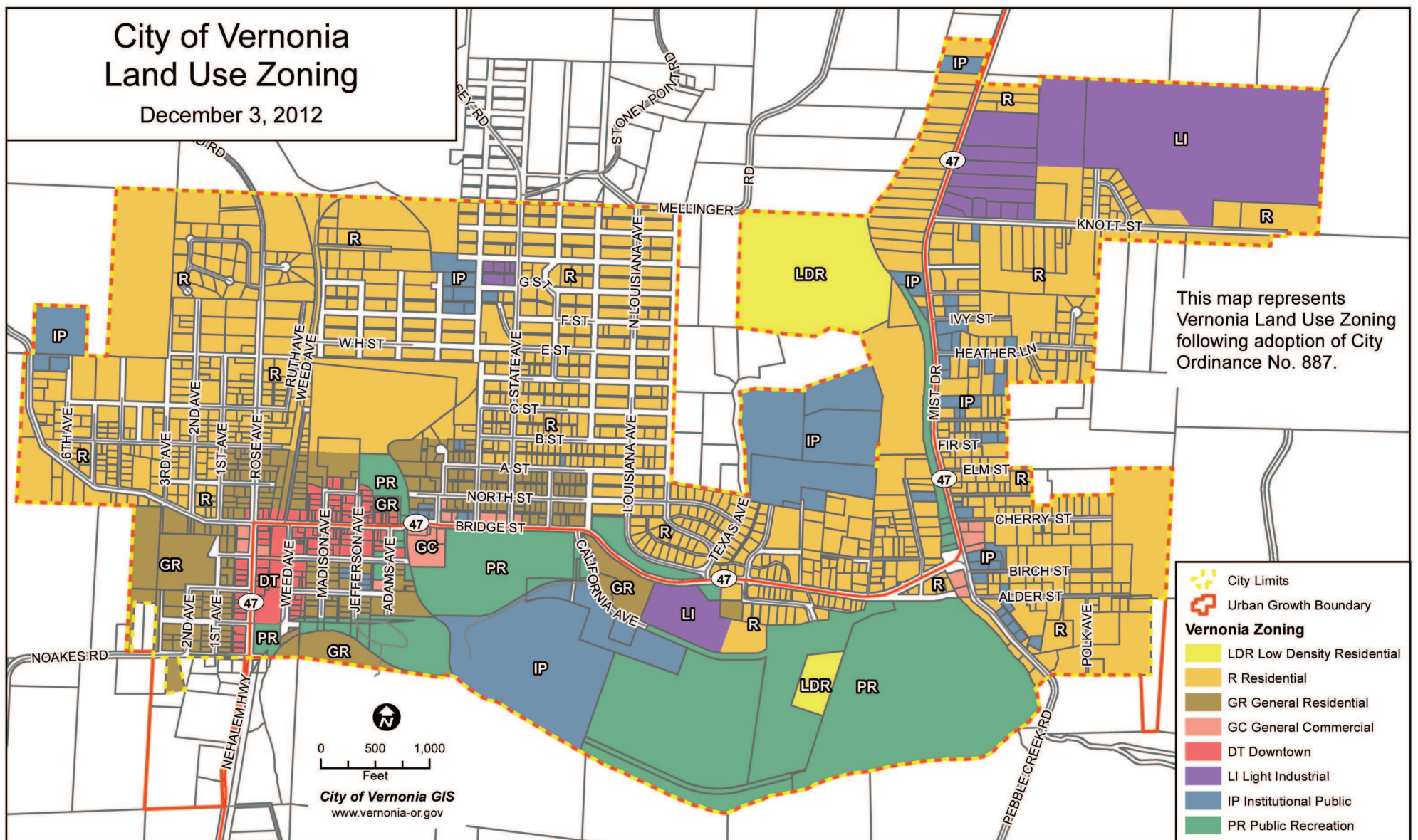
land use, economic opportunity, and population projections; the conclusion of the Vernonia EOA is we have too much residential land and not enough commercial land. On top of that, the City has bought out several flood properties, the school and Spencer Park swapped places, new flood zones have been adopted, and there are many public owned properties which are improperly zoned, e.g. the sewer lagoons zoned as industrial land. Throw in the fact that historically Vernonia has not always made the most advantageous decisions concerning long-term planning, and it adds up to a need for some updates to the Comp Plan. The updates to Vernonia's Comp Plan accomplish the following:

1. Rezone flood constrained lands from residential, commercial and industrial zones to a public zone.
2. Rezone public owned lands, which are improperly zoned for the current use to a public zone.
3. Rezone approx. 3.4 acres from

a residential zone to Downtown commercial zone to increase future business opportunities.

There is a singular reason why we built the new school, and have taken flood hazard mitigation so seriously. And it's the same reason the City of Vernonia is making changes to its land use zoning: to ensure the long-term viability of this community, and the success of its citizens. What Vernonia looks like in 5, 10, or 15 years from now is anyone's guess, however we must put ourselves in the position to take advantage of future economic opportunities, and align our land use planning with state-level planning goals designed to help us develop those opportunities when they arise.

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