

**AGENDA
NORTHPORT PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL**
- 3. INVOCATION**
- 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
- 5. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**
- 6. VERIFICATION OF PROPER NOTIFICATION**
- 7. VERIFICATION OF NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST**
- 8. OLD BUSINESS**
- 9. NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing
- 10. DISCUSSION**
- 11. CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS**
- 12. ADJOURNMENT**

Northport Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting Procedures

- I. The Chairman calls for the next agenda item.
- II. Staff provides a summary of the case and answers any questions from the Commission.
- III. The applicant or petitioner presents his or her request and provides information in support of the application and answers any questions from the Commission.
- IV. If a public hearing is needed, the Chairman will ask for anyone present who would like to provide input regarding the request.
- V. The Commission members may discuss details and issues raised, and may ask questions of the applicant, city staff, or other parties.
- VI. The Chairman will call for a motion to be read and a second, and the Chairman may ask if further discussion by the Commission is needed.
 - i. Motions for a vote and second will be made for each item in a positive fashion. The purpose of which is to allow the Commission to vote on a motion. Members making the motion or second are not obligated to vote in the affirmative for said motion.
 - ii. Waivers may be added to the motion for approval of a preliminary plat if listed verbally in the motion. If it is requested by any member of the Commission, the waivers shall be voted on individually or in a group prior to the vote on the preliminary plat.
- VII. The Chairman will call for a roll call vote.



NORTHPORT

c o m p a s s

Comprehensive Plan 2023
City of Northport, Alabama

A very special thanks...

...to the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama, Citizens Advisory Committee, downtown merchants, Northport Medical Center DCH, Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, West Alabama Regional Commission, and all of the residents and property and business owners who participated in community and focus group meetings, filled out surveys and otherwise contributed their voices to preparing this plan.

City Project Team

Julie Ramm, Director of Planning and Inspections

Shaun Patten, Zoning Administrator

Meredith Mullins, Planner I

Tera Tubbs, PE, City Engineer

Brad Matthews, PE, Assistant City Engineer

John Powell Webb, Utilities Director

Kevin Turner, Utilities Deputy Director

Brooke Starnes, Public Works Director

Glenda Webb, City Administrator

Chris Cunningham, Assistant City Attorney

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mayor

Dr. John Hinton

City Council

Jeff Hogg, President

Christy Bobo, President Pro Tempore

Jamie Dykes

Woodrow Washington III

Karl Wiggins

City Administrator

Glenda Webb

Planning and Zoning Commission

Tracy Kelly

David Kemp

Jason Ward

Roland Lewis

Ernest "Tony" O'Rourke

Jennifer Hayes

Clay Randolph, Mayor's Designee

Kevin Turner, Administrative Official

Karl Wiggins, Council Representative

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INTRODUCTION



PURPOSE

The Comprehensive Plan is a public policy document describing an overall strategy for how Northport will shape itself—through public and private investment—over the next twenty years. The City prepared this plan as a guide to making decisions regarding capital improvements, annexation, facilities and services, growth management, and economic development.

The plan is long-range, general, and focused primarily on the physical and economic development of the community. The plan gives residents, property owners, and merchants a reasonable expectation of how Northport is likely to change in the future so they may invest in the community with greater confidence. It gives developers a reasonable expectation of the future so that they may invest in ways that correspond with the City's growth policies and plans for infrastructure and services.

What does the Comprehensive Plan do?

- Illustrates the ways in which the city intends to develop over time.
- Coordinates planning for land use and development with planning for transportation and infrastructure.
- Identifies important natural and historic features and methods to conserve them in balance with community development.
- Provides a pattern for land use and development that limits incompatibility and protects property values while also supporting economic development and a diversified tax base.
- Models future conditions and provides guidance on municipal investments in infrastructure, facilities and services to meet future demands in a fiscally responsible manner.
- Provides a guide for administering and improving zoning, subdivision and other regulations.

Northport's previous citywide plan was developed in 2007. That plan touched on several issues addressed in this plan but was primarily focused on land use and transportation. Soon after in 2008, the Downtown and Riverfront Plan was developed. In more recent years the City of Northport developed plans to improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility in its northern and southern areas. Three major parks initiatives were planned and are now underway.

In the 16 years since the Northport Land Use Plan was prepared, the city has added roughly 10,000 more residents; and its land area has grown. The city's continued growth in the intervening years has occurred mostly on the city's far north side, stressing transportation and utilities infrastructure.

This plan provides critical updates to the 2007 land use and transportation plans and the 2008 Downtown and Riverfront Plan, accounting for the changes—or lack thereof—that have taken place since their preparation. In addition, the plan supplements the more recent parks, bicycle, and pedestrian plans to provide long-range, citywide strategies for bicycle and pedestrian mobility and parks development.

The Comprehensive Plan is a combination of vision, goals, policies, maps, actions, and priorities. Together, they form a framework to guide public and private decisions to move continuously closer toward the city's long-term vision.



PROCESS

Northport Compass is the process from which this plan emerged. The plan and process was branded to help raise awareness and optimize community participation. The name was selected to complement the “Find Your True North” branding adopted by the City Council in 2021.

Community Engagement

The process included a series of community meetings and creation of an online engagement hub that featured community surveys, mapping activities, and information about the plan to help residents participate in plan development. The City and consultant team hosted a business roundtable and focus group meetings to discuss updates to the Downtown and Riverfront Plan and evolution of the city’s parks and recreation system. Planning team representatives also attended two community events to capture input from residents who may not have attended community meetings or participated in online activities.

The final community meeting prior to its presentation and adoption by the Planning and Zoning Commission was an open house event. Attendees viewed display boards and discussed plan recommendations with City representatives and the consultant team. Participants identified plan efforts they felt were most important. Community input on plan priorities is highlighted in the Implementation section of the plan.



Analysis

An extensive technical analysis effort was conducted to better understand the city today, how it has changed and how the City must prepare for growth and change in the coming years. This included demographic analysis with peer communities, a housing market study, population projections, modeling of future traffic patterns, and assessment of future parks and infrastructure needs based on continued growth.

Community Meetings

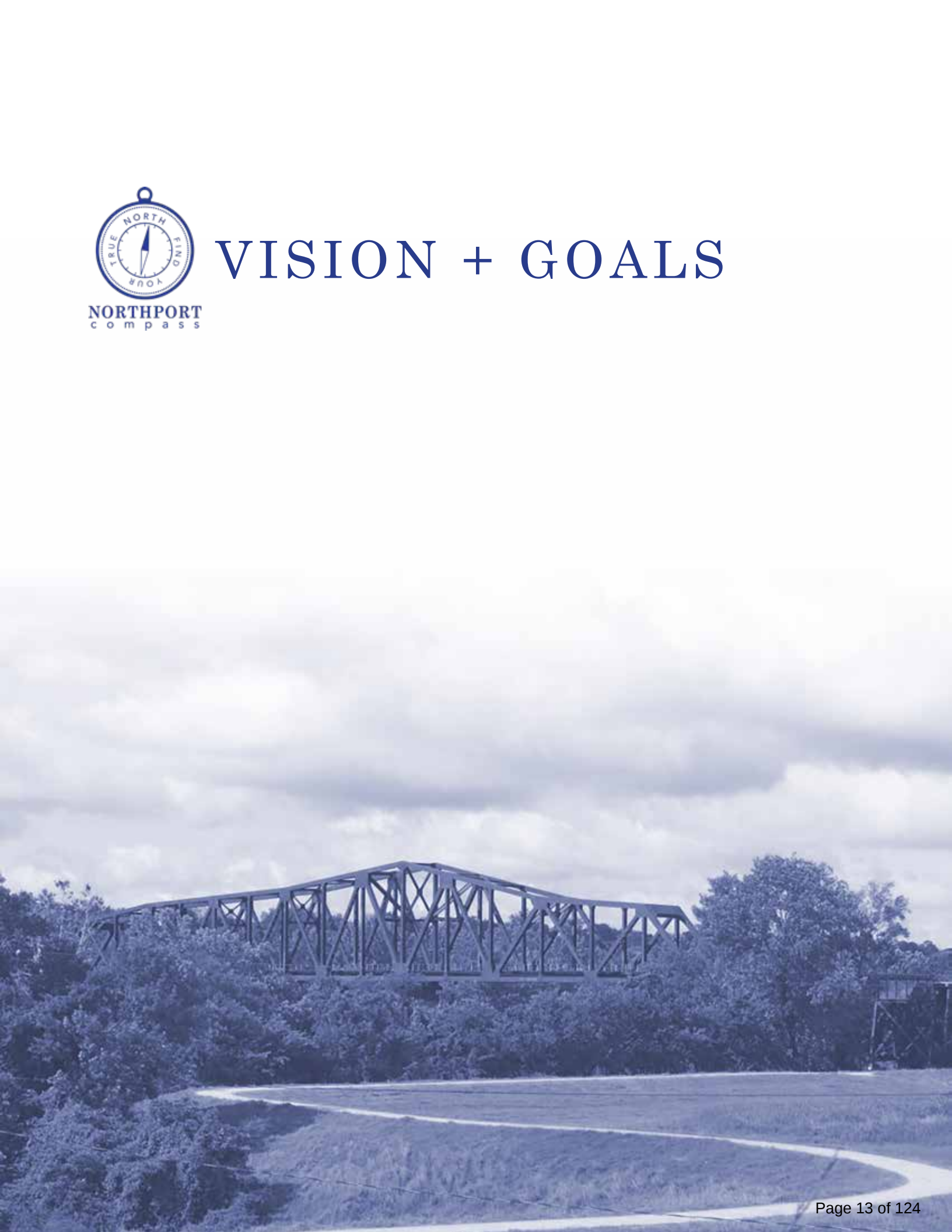
Visioning Workshop	January 2023
Development Strategy	February 2023
Land Use + Transportation	March 2023
Downtown + Riverfront	May 2023
Facilities + Infrastructure	June 2023
Open House	August 2023

DRAFT





VISION + GOALS





VISIONING WORKSHOP

As part of the Comprehensive Plan process an on-line engagement hub was created to allow residents, property owners and other community stakeholders to provide input on the city's future and guide the development of the plan. The Northport Compass engagement hub provided opportunities for the community to share their ideas and concerns on their own schedule. The site included a visioning survey, issue mapping activities, meeting schedule and announcements, presentations and draft documents.

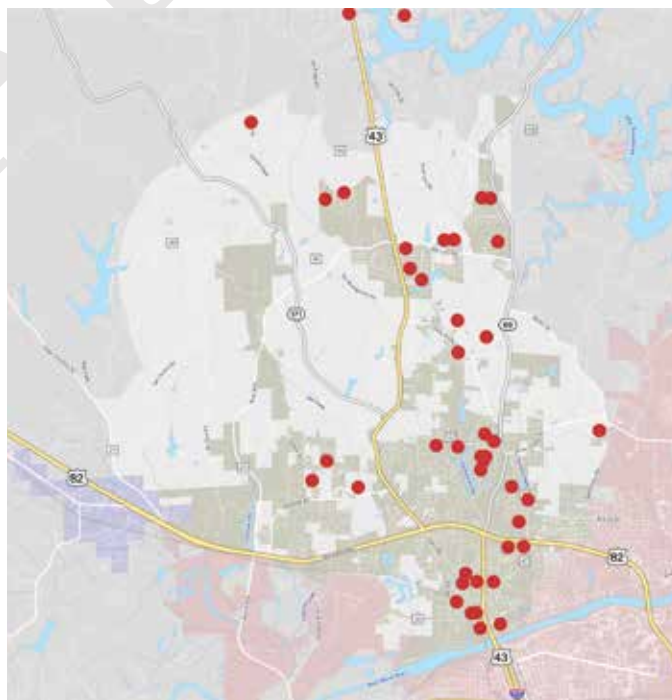
In addition to online participation opportunities, the City and consultant team hosted a series of community meetings, three focus group sessions and two planning "pop-ups," to optimize awareness and participation in the planning process.

The first community meeting, a Visioning Workshop, and survey were conducted to gauge how the community feels about Northport today and how it is changing and to understand the community's concerns for the future. A summary of the community's input in the meeting and survey are provided here. The community's input describes a vision for Northport's next twenty years and highlights key issues the community feels must be addressed to provide a safe, attractive and enjoyable environment for residents and businesses.



The Visioning Workshop was held on January 30 at Northport City Hall. During the workshop, participants discussed and identified the city's assets and issues today, top issues for the future and ideas about how they would like to see Northport grow, change or improve over the next 20 years. In addition to the input from group discussions, attendees were able to share what they personally would like to see accomplished over the next twenty years that would have the most positive, long-term impact on the community.

A summary of the workshop follows. A detailed account of the community's input from the workshop is provided in the Plan Appendix.



As participants entered they were asked to place a dot on the part of the city or planning area that best represents them—where they live, work or own property.

Key Themes

Eight key elements of a vision for the future of Northport emerged from the community conversations at the Visioning Workshop.

Arts, Culture & Recreation

Participants' vision for Northport includes having a range of parks, green spaces, and other recreational and cultural opportunities that are accessible to all. They want to see continued investment in existing assets (such as Kentuck Park and the arts festival), and they offered ideas for new investment including a nature park and aquarium.

Community Character

Participants' vision for Northport includes being a visually attractive community. Specific ideas shared included having distinctive city gateways, green spaces along major corridors, preserved historic character, beautiful streetscaping, increased curb appeal, and design standards for signage.

Community Services & Collaboration

Participants' vision for Northport extends beyond physical development to focus on building strong collaboration and engagement among the City of Northport, other community partners such as tourism and the parks authority, neighboring communities, and citizens.

Growth & Development

The most frequently mentioned component of participants' vision for Northport was growth and development. In terms of overall development, participants want to see thoughtful and planned growth that results in an improved community and vibrant districts across the city. In terms of economic development, participants want to see greater diversity in businesses, restaurants, retail, and hospitality.

Historic Downtown Northport

The most frequently named idea that participants believe would have a positive, long-term impact in Northport was continued development, revitalization, connection, and investment in Historic Downtown Northport. Participants recognized downtown as one of Northport's greatest assets and believe it should be an important focus and recruitment tool in the future.

Housing

Participants' vision for the future of Northport includes a range of housing options, including mixed-use developments and smaller and affordable housing. They recognized affordable housing is a significant challenge today and needs to be a continued focus in the future.

Riverfront

Participants' vision for the future of Northport includes thoughtful development of the riverfront that preserves historic views and character, offers physical and visual connectivity between Northport and Tuscaloosa, and includes business, open space and other uses that increase access and enjoyment of the river.

Transportation & Connectivity

Participants' vision for the future of Northport includes a range of strategies to improve transportation and increase connectivity. Specifically, they focused on fewer cars, congestion, and traffic but improved roads and infrastructure. They also indicated a desire for more pedestrian walkways, an electric trolley system or other form of public transportation.





Group discussions during the Visioning Workshop included the following:

Assets

Northport has a small town atmosphere and strong sense of community. It is a safe community and viewed as a good place to live and invest.

Residents have access to “big city amenities” including local healthcare services.

City government and personnel are accessible and attentive to the needs of residents and businesses.

Northport values its downtown and historic areas. The Kentuck Arts Center is an important asset that enriches the lives of residents.

Proximity to Tuscaloosa, highway accessibility and Northport’s location along the riverfront are key advantages for residents and businesses.



Issues Today

Dining and retail offerings are viewed as limited. The community has not taken enough advantage of the riverfront. There are concerns about how the community is growing, particularly with respect to residential development.

Traffic congestion takes away from Northport’s small town environment. Alternative modes of travel are very limited.

Some parts of the community, including high visibility commercial areas, do not project the clean, attractive, small town image residents expect for Northport.

Recent flood events have highlighted the need to focus on stormwater management to protect the community.

There is no public library in Northport.



Issues for the Future

The sewer system and transportation network will need to be upgraded to accommodate continued growth. There should be more infrastructure for pedestrians, bicycling and electronic vehicles in the future.

The quality of the schools serving Northport are critical to the city's future. The community will benefit from strong partnerships with county and regional organizations.

Northport's downtown and historic areas should be preserved. They reflect characteristics that the community would like to see modeled in other areas of the city. The design of major roadways should project a more attractive image and include more green space.

Northport offers unique arts and recreational amenities and events enjoyed by the community. Those should be sustained and expanded, while supporting accessibility for all residents.

Visions for the Future

Growth & Development. Intentional, well-planned growth that improves the community and offers more diversity in housing types.

Transportation & Connectivity. A well-developed, less congested transportation network that supports walkability.

Collaboration. Productive partnerships with county and regional organizations that avoid redundancy and fill in gaps.

Community Character. Historic preservation, gateway and streetscape improvements on major roads and higher standards for development.

Riverfront. More development along the riverfront but with views and public access to the river protected

Downtown. Reinvestment in industrial/heavy commercial areas that enables more retail, dining and walkable mixed-use development downtown

Culture & Recreation. More parks and green space in convenient locations as residential development occurs, use of the riverfront to attract development of cultural amenities.



VISIONING SURVEY

The Visioning Survey was conducted on the Northport Compass site from January to April 2023. Over 500 individuals responded to the online survey.

The survey gave participants the opportunity to share their thoughts on how the City is doing today and their concerns and hopes for the future of Northport.

City and County Services and Infrastructure

Overall, respondents view most City and County services as satisfactory or better. Survey results indicated mixed opinions or concerns over County schools, parks and library services and the City's management over development. Respondents indicated a lack of satisfaction with regard to roads, traffic, and bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Results also indicated concern over stormwater management, likely influenced by flooding in 2021.

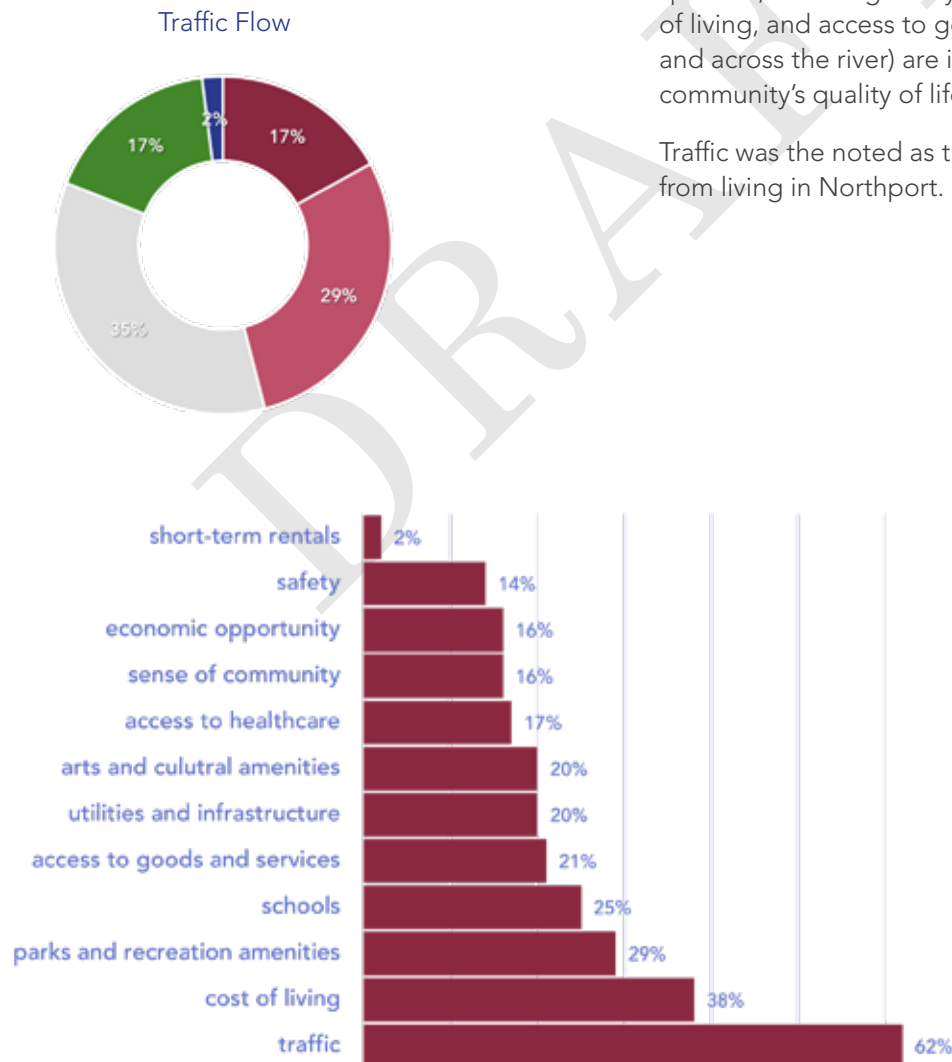


Quality of Life

Survey participants overwhelmingly enjoy living in Northport and most felt it has remained positive or improved despite concerns reflected from other survey questions.

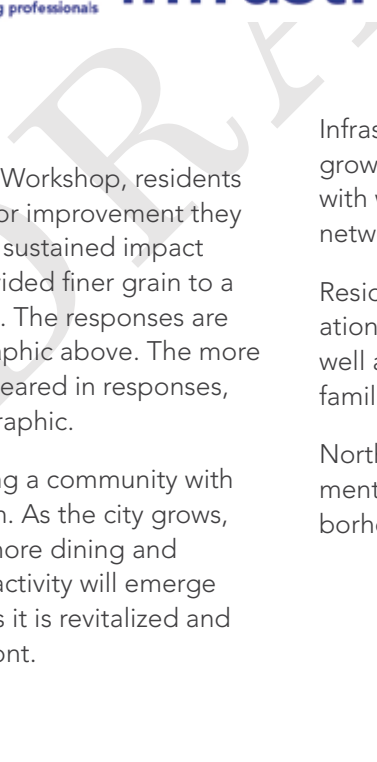
Respondents indicated that Northport's small town qualities, including safety, sense of community and cost of living, and access to goods and services (in Northport and across the river) are important contributors to the community's quality of life.

Traffic was noted as the primary concern detracting from living in Northport.



Quality of Life Limitors

When asked what conditions may have limited or reduced their quality of life, respondents overwhelmingly pointed to traffic (62%). Other top choices were cost of living (38%) and limited parks and recreation amenities (29%).



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Issues for the Future

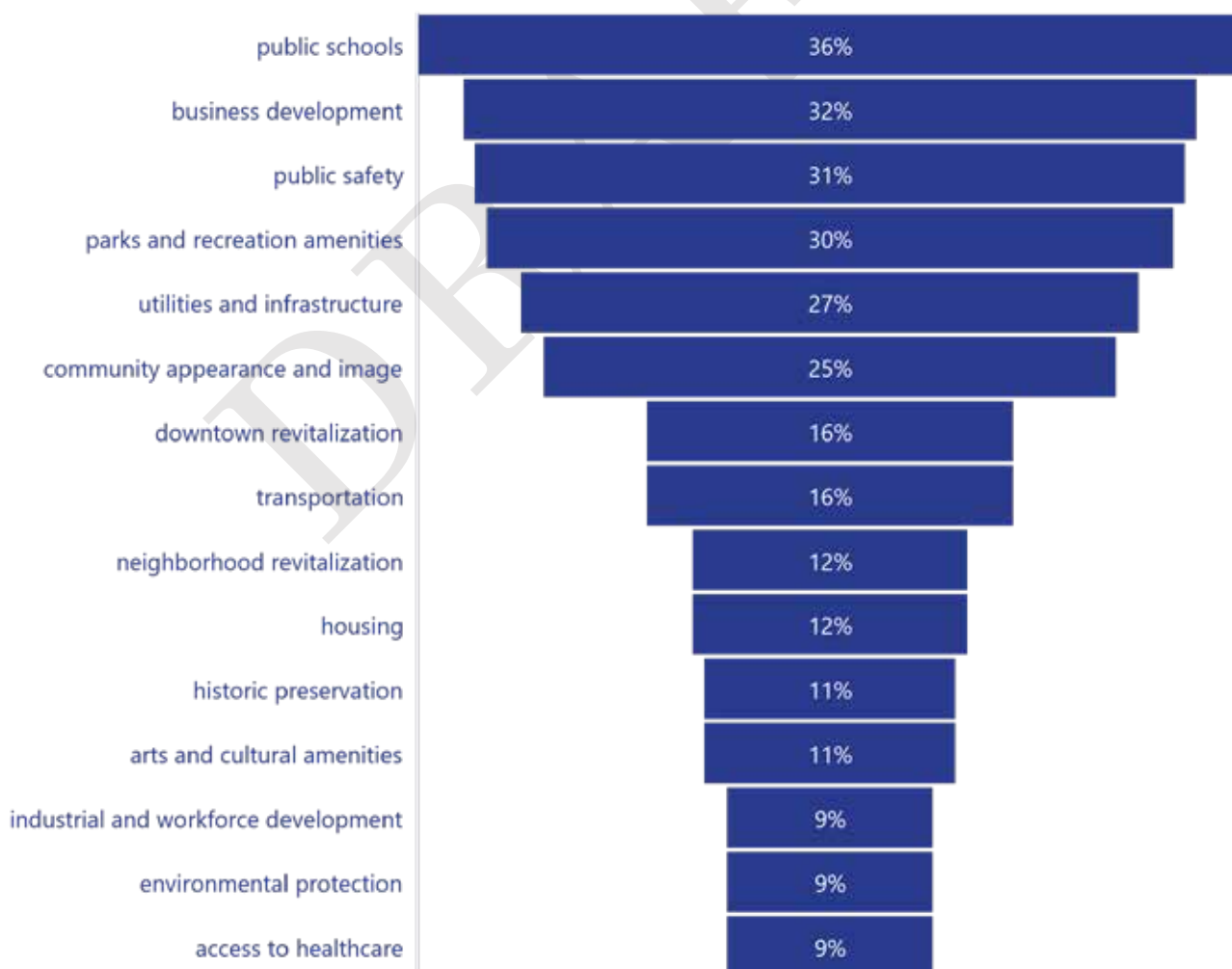
Survey takers were asked to select those issues they felt are the most important for the community to address to assure a bright future for Northport and its residents.

The issue most frequently selected by respondents was *public schools*. Those for whom this is a key issue showed concern primarily with the quality of education provided by the County schools serving Northport. Some respondents indicated a desire for the City to create a local system.

There is a desire for a greater variety of restaurants and shopping options. Northport is safer than its neighboring city and must remain so. Residents yearn for more parks and recreation options than are provided by the County parks authority.

Two other issues were ranked highly: *utilities and infrastructure* and *community appearance and image*. Some residents expressed concern over the sanitary sewer system and its ability to keep pace with city growth. Respondents noted apprehension over the character of McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard, wanting to see improvement in signage, streetscape design and buildings.

Though traffic was indicated as the primary condition disrupting residents' quality of life, it was not ranked as one of the top issues for the future.



DRAFT

The following overarching goals emerged from input of residents, business and property owners, City staff and officials, and other stakeholders through community and focus group meetings and online engagement. These topics represent the issues that the community identified as most important for the City to focus on to assure that Northport develops and improves in ways that are consistent with the community vision and that improves the lives of citizens. These goals inform the development strategy and land use, transportation, facilities and infrastructure elements of this plan.



ECONOMY

Northport intends to grow and diversify its economy by pursuing continued business development and recruitment. Downtown and the riverfront will play more significant roles in the community's economic growth and enhance Northport's tourism opportunities.

Business Development and Recruitment

Northport's existing retail base is bolstered by high area incomes and population growth. Regional commuting traffic passing through the city each day also enhances Northport's ability to attract and support retail development along McFarland Boulevard and other major roads. Continued residential development in and around Northport will help recruit more retailers and restaurants from beyond the city. The community must also develop strategies to nurture local businesses and entrepreneurs.

The Northport business community is supported by the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce, a multi-county organization that provides a range of economic development services to member communities. The City of Northport does not have staff dedicated specifically to economic development. Adding staff to take on retail recruitment, tourism and other economic development pursuits would ensure adequate attention and focus is given to Northport's economic interests. Nonetheless, collaboration among the Chamber, the County, Tuscaloosa and Northport will often be necessary to pursue major strategies that have the potential to create positive impacts throughout the region.



Southern Living named Archibald's BBQ as one of the ten "most legendary" barbecue joints in the South

Downtown and Riverfront

Northport's historic downtown is loved by residents and is known throughout much of Alabama, thanks in part to its connection with the Kentuck Arts Center and annual festival. While the downtown is relatively small and has only limited land available, there is potential for additional development that would connect it with the nearby Levee Trail and take better advantage of the under-utilized riverfront.

The riverfront east of Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard, including the Bridge Avenue corridor, represents substantial opportunities for developing a mix of businesses, housing and other activities along the riverside. This area has the potential to become a more contemporary, walkable mixed-use district linked to the historic downtown by the Levee Trail and riverfront.

Tourism

The City is in the process of developing three recreational facilities that will increase visitation to the community. The planned outdoor adventure park, water park and the transformation of Kentuck Park into an expanded sports, recreation and event venue will each draw visitors to the community who are likely to patronize nearby shops, restaurants and lodging establishments. The introduction of these facilities can create a symbiotic relationship with Northport's historic downtown, the Kentuck Arts Center and future development and activity along the riverfront. Likewise, recreational trails, particularly when connected to the riverfront, Levee Trail and other attractions will add more activities for visitors to enjoy. This combination of activities will be advantageous in getting visitors to stay longer and spend more.

Local Business Support

From the perspective of the business community, the City can better support local businesses and new business growth by continuing recently-implemented improvements in licensing and permitting processes. And, while traffic is generally good for businesses, congestion can make it more difficult for customers to reach them. The City and ALDOT must continue to work on traffic flow on major arteries for the benefit of both residents and businesses. The City and local businesses must maintain lines of communication to better understand the needs of each and how they can support one another.

INTENTIONAL GROWTH

Northport intends to manage the growth of the city to assure the adequacy of infrastructure and services, to uphold the community's small town character and image and to encourage reinvestment in already developed areas south of McFarland Boulevard.

Infrastructure

Northport will invest in its water, sewer and transportation systems to enable cost-effective new growth. Growth far to the north, with little connecting development, has strained the city's ability to provide and upgrade sewer infrastructure and to accommodate traffic increases. As the City works to resolve these infrastructure limitations, zoning and other decisions will tend to favor closer-in development. Over time, once infrastructure capacity has been sufficiently increased, opportunities for continuing northern development will re-emerge.

New development will contribute to improving citywide infrastructure. In addition to expanding the footprint of the sewer system, residential subdivisions and other large-scale developments will help to create a more interconnected street network to better distribute traffic throughout the city.

Housing

Northport will support development of a variety of housing types to meet the needs of residents at all stages of life. Most housing development over the last 20 years has been devoted to detached, single-family homes. Current prices for new single-family homes are out of reach for some families and household types.

Increasing density is an important way to reduce housing costs, but it also puts more demand on infrastructure. More affordable—often denser—types of housing may only occur where existing and planned infrastructure will support it.

The community also intends for new residential development to be of a quality that contributes positively to Northport's small town character and that maintains value over time.

Annexation

The City will actively pursue annexation along the major roads north of McFarland Boulevard to capture revenue from existing and future business areas and to have greater influence over the development along those corridors. Unincorporated areas between US 43 and AL 69 will be annexed as opportunities arise.

Character and Image

Downtown Northport and the city's early neighborhoods represent different aspects of the small town character that the community wishes to protect. Traffic congestion along McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard is not one of those characteristics. Nor is the design and condition of some development on those roads.

The community envisions change along those corridors that will better reflect Northport's desired image, including reinvestment in aging developments and streetscape improvements that incorporate more greenery, lighting and walkways. Public and private enhancements along these prominent roadways will have a clear impact on the character and image of the city.

Revitalization

Infrastructure, land use and other policies and decisions will enable and encourage reinvestment in Downtown Northport, along the riverfront and in adjacent business areas and neighborhoods. Redevelopment, infill and reinvestment in these already developed areas poses less of a burden to city infrastructure.



MOBILITY

Northport intends to improve its street network and other elements of its transportation system and to guide development in ways that improve mobility for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists and that support opportunities for public transportation.

Street Network

Northport's street network relies heavily on a few major roads. McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard support Northport's commuting residents as well as regional through traffic and local traffic accessing area businesses. And, because of the residential growth that has occurred at the north end of the city, traffic has increased significantly on AL 69 and US 43 north of McFarland Boulevard. With few convenient, alternate routes, a significant strain is put on these corridors and the major intersections along them, particularly during morning and evening rush hours.



While there are opportunities to add capacity on some congested roadways, others have or are being improved to the extent practicable. So, to reduce congestion and improve emergency response times, new connections must be made within the street network. This will include direct public investment in new and/or interconnecting roadways as well as requirements for future private development to contribute to a more interconnected street network. This will provide residents and emergency responders with more route options and relieve the strain on the city's congested roadways and intersections.

In addition, land use planning and access management policies will be implemented to preserve the capacity of major roads by reducing conflicts between local and through traffic.

The City will maintain an updated inventory of street conditions and prioritized plan for pavement management and correction of safety and other deficiencies.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Historically, sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities have been limited in Northport. During development of this plan—and recent community engagement for the North and South Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans—the community expressed a clear desire for Northport to become more walkable and bicycle-friendly.

Strategic investments will be made to enhance pedestrian access between residential areas, schools, parks and other priority community destinations. New development will also contribute to a community-wide network of sidewalks and trails.

As localized walkability is improved, the City will pursue a long-term goal to build a recreational trail around the city consisting of interlinked on- and off-road facilities anchored by the Levee Trail.

Public Transportation

Past attempts to make public transportation available to Northport residents and workers have not been sustainable. As the city grows, the number of people and businesses who would benefit from transit access will also rise. Therefore, the City will evaluate emerging strategies and potential partnerships with the Tuscaloosa Transit Authority to bring sustainable public transportation services to Northport.

RECREATION AND CULTURE

Northport intends to develop local parks, recreation and cultural amenities to enhance the quality of life of residents and to support economic development through tourism.

Parks and Recreation

While parks and recreation facilities throughout Tuscaloosa County have typically been established and operated by the countywide Parks and Recreation Authority (PARA), Northport is embarking on three transformational park projects that will provide residents access to high quality recreational facilities and simultaneously grow the city's economy.

The expansion of Kentuck Park will allow Northport to host sports tournaments and other events, increasing local lodging activity and visitor traffic to downtown businesses. The adventure park and water park will feature a variety of activities for residents and create a regional draw. The latter two parks will also encourage visitors to the Arts Festival, tournaments and other events to explore more of the city, stay longer and patronize local businesses.

As Northport grows, the City will pursue development of smaller, neighborhood-serving parks to be distributed throughout the community so that residents are within a short drive, bicycle ride or walk of a nearby park. The creation of a citywide trail system will provide more recreation opportunities for walking and bicycling and a means to get from neighborhoods to parks and other community destinations on foot or bike.

As the City of Northport invests in local parks and recreation facilities and programs, it will continue to coordinate with PARA, other municipalities and other stakeholders to assure Northport residents have convenient access to a variety of quality parks and recreational activities.

Cultural Activities

The Kentuck Arts Center is an important part of the community, providing arts programs for the enjoyment of residents, promoting the arts and the city through its annual festival and acting as an anchor for Downtown Northport. City investment in Kentuck Park will create a better host site for the arts festival, while maintaining proximity to downtown.

Northport prides itself on its unique history, having preserved and maintained historic sites, such as Shirley Place, the train depot and museum, and having supported the designation of national and local historic districts. The City will continue its support for the preservation and interpretation of local history, exploring opportunities to increase access to and use of historic features.



As Northport's population increases, so will the number of Northport residents who are members of the county library system, of which all branches are located across the river. The City will explore opportunities with the county library system to create a Northport branch. Given the growth of digital access and other trends, libraries are evolving into versatile community spaces with physical book collections less a dominant component of the building. Such changes will expand ways in which the City and county library system can partner on such a venture.

A notable aspect of Northport's small town character is the City's involvement in conducting community events throughout the year. Together with business and non-profit partners, the City will continue to support events like Dickens Downtown and the West Alabama Wine and Food Festival. Community events provide more cultural activity for residents, while supporting historic preservation, arts, local businesses and community interaction.





DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



INTRODUCTION

This section describes an overall strategy for the continued growth and improvement of Northport. The strategy builds on and reinforces the prevailing patterns of existing development. The intent is to capitalize on the city's resources, to build on past investment, history and institutions in combination with the advantages of the city's location, land character and setting. The concept gives physical expression to the citywide vision that emerged from the community engagement process and provides a framework for planning of land use, transportation, utilities and community facilities.

The Development Strategy diagram (Figure 3-1) on the following page illustrates the locations and relationships of existing development, growth opportunities, and key elements of the city's infrastructure. The major elements portrayed in the Development Strategy diagram and introduced in this section are described in more detail in later portions of the plan document.

The Development Strategy is informed by the following principles, some of which are carried forward from Northport's 2007 Land Use Plan:

DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Commercial development will be organized primarily into **walkable, mixed-use nodes** along main thoroughfares, in downtown and along the riverfront. Business investment will continue along McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard.

Development will be directed primarily to **locations with infrastructure capacity** and to locations where infrastructure can be economically extended.

The city's **green infrastructure will be conserved** to enhance development, preserve community character and maintain environmental functions.

Northport will **take advantage of its location along the river** for recreation and economic development.

Public infrastructure and services will be planned to support an intentional growth pattern, encouraging new development in appropriate locations and reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and business areas.

Annexation will support intended growth and the effectiveness and economy of municipal services and infrastructure.

Residential infill and redevelopment will be encouraged to revitalize under-invested neighborhoods, taking advantage of existing infrastructure.

Development of the street network will emphasize **connectivity, access management, walkability** and appropriateness to adjoining land uses.

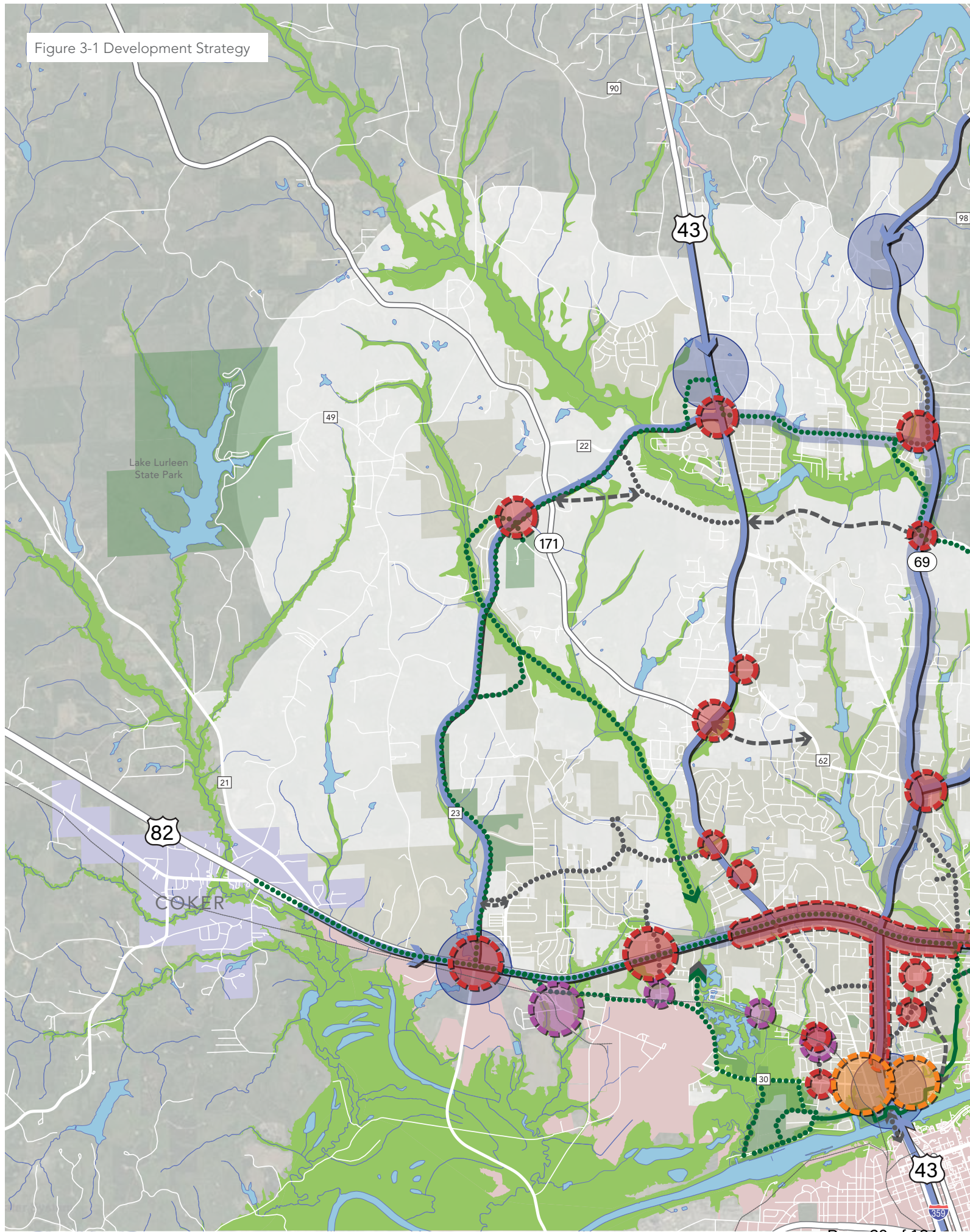
Pedestrian and bicycle mobility will be enhanced between neighborhoods, schools, parks, downtown and commercial nodes.

The City's parks system will provide **recreational amenities near where people live** and offer a variety of activities for residents and visitors.

The **image and legibility** of the city will be improved as Northport grows. Primary gateways will be attractive and well defined. Main corridors will project a positive image.



Figure 3-1 Development Strategy



DEVELOPMENT NODES AND CORRIDORS

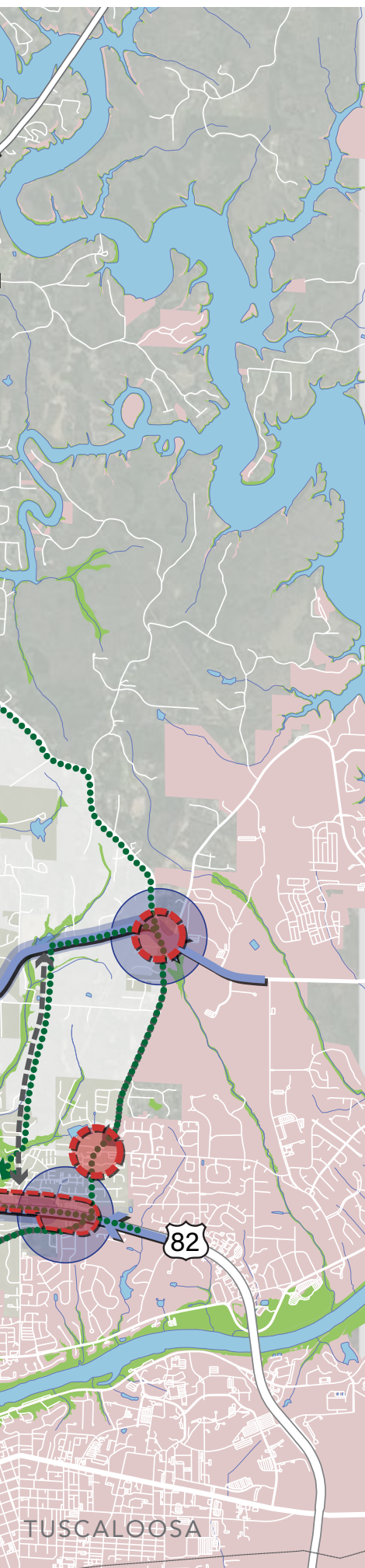
The development strategy highlights several locations for commercial and industrial activity. While many of these locations are established business or industrial areas, some are in early stages of their development and a few are proposed for future growth.

Commercial Nodes

As existing business areas continue to grow and new ones are formed, it is intended that they accommodate a mix of uses and evolve into a compact, walkable form, each featuring a street network that absorbs and disperses a portion of local traffic away from main thoroughfares. The type, scale and mix of uses in each commercial node will vary according to their location and existing development composition.

Commercial nodes should be viewed as anchors around which residential development concentrates. This relationship provides neighborhoods proximity to goods and services and the robust infrastructure necessary for business development.

Northport's historic downtown business area, centered around the intersection of Main Avenue and 5th Street, is the most representative of the development patterns intended for the community's commercial nodes. It is highly walkable and features a mix of businesses, civic and cultural uses and adjacent housing. It is also well-connected by way of local streets to nearby neighborhoods, parks and other development nodes. There are unique opportunities for new development and reinvestment along the riverfront and along Bridge Avenue.



Green infrastructure

Northport

Tuscaloosa

Coker

Downtown + riverfront

Commercial node

Commercial corridor

Industrial node

Future park

Gateway

Image corridor

Road connection

Trail

Bike-ped connection



Grocery store at Mitt Lary Road and AL 69

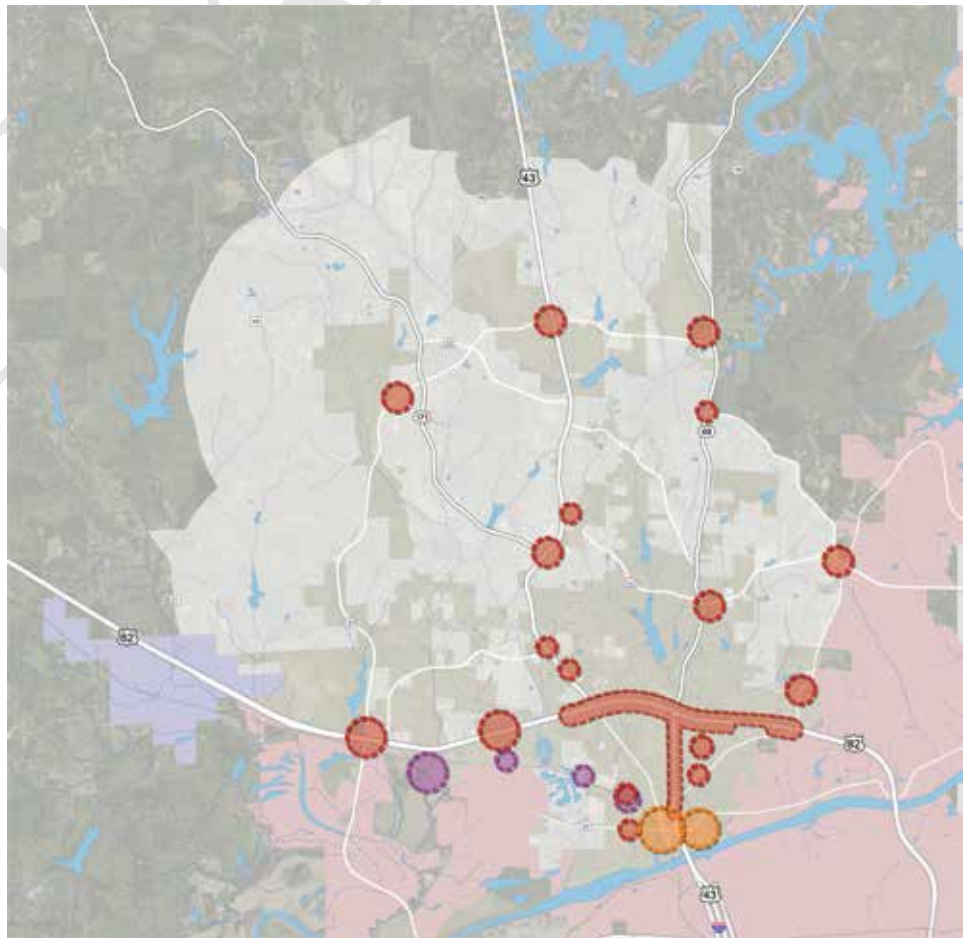
Commercial nodes near downtown include:

- a neighborhood-serving node at 30th Avenue and 5th Street;
- a node containing a mix of businesses and light industrial uses north along 30th Avenue near the railroad; and
- a neighborhood business area at Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard and 19th Street.

The Northport Medical Center is the anchor of a specialized commercial node along Hospital Drive between McFarland Boulevard and Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard. This node is intended for continued growth of health-care-related businesses around the medical center.

North of McFarland Boulevard there are several locations along major roads—some within the city limits and others as yet unincorporated—where commercial activity has emerged. The locations designated in the development strategy are intended to evolve into nodes that will primarily serve surrounding neighborhoods.

Figure 3-2 Commercial and Industrial Nodes



Linear commercial development along AL 69 and US 43 north of McFarland Boulevard should be avoided. Existing businesses not within or adjacent to designated nodes should be viewed as exceptions rather than precedents for expanding business development around them.

The size of the nodes shown in Figure 1 is indicative of their intended function. The smallest nodes represent neighborhood commercial centers with businesses and other uses that cater to the neighborhoods around them. Compared to other commercial nodes, the land devoted to nonresidential uses and the size of buildings in these nodes would be more limited. Larger nodes contain businesses serving larger trade areas and, thus, may take up more land and contain larger buildings and a wider array of businesses and other uses.

Two nodes depicted in the Development Strategy are “future” commercial activity centers, where no business development has yet occurred. These locations—Rose Boulevard at Eugenia Faucett Drive and AL 69 at Martin Road—would be appropriate for future commercial development. The Rose Boulevard location is particularly well-suited for commercial activity given the capacity of Rose Boulevard and proximity to the Faucett Brothers recreation area and emerging residential development.

Commercial Corridors

Commercial development occurring in a linear pattern along highways is generally discouraged. It forces through traffic and local business traffic together, increasing congestion and potential for accidents. It is also difficult to create a physical environment that meets community goals. Nonetheless, Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard and McFarland Boulevard have already developed in this manner. It is not the intent of this plan to reverse this pattern but to improve access management—to reduce conflicts between through and local traffic—and the overall appearance of these corridors.

During the planning process, residents identified Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard as a commercial area in need of improvement. Priorities for this corridor will be encouraging reinvestment, creating a stronger arrival experience into the city and managing and improving access to businesses.

There are available sites for new development along McFarland Boulevard on the city’s west side and potential for redevelopment in various locations along the corridor. In these cases there should be an emphasis on access management, enhancing the community’s image and creating more connections to adjacent neighborhoods.



McFarland Boulevard on the city’s west side

Industrial Nodes

Industrial development will be limited to existing nodes along the railroad and near the airport. Because several of these locations are adjacent to neighborhoods, it will be important to manage transitions between industries and housing to mitigate impacts on residential property values that can lead to disinvestment. Appropriate transitions can be created by limiting the intensity of industrial activities the closer they are to housing areas and requiring landscaped buffers whenever industries are built alongside residential areas.

Opportunities to create a more consolidated industrial area with clearer boundaries separating it from surrounding residences should be pursued if, in the future, any existing industries choose to close or relocate.

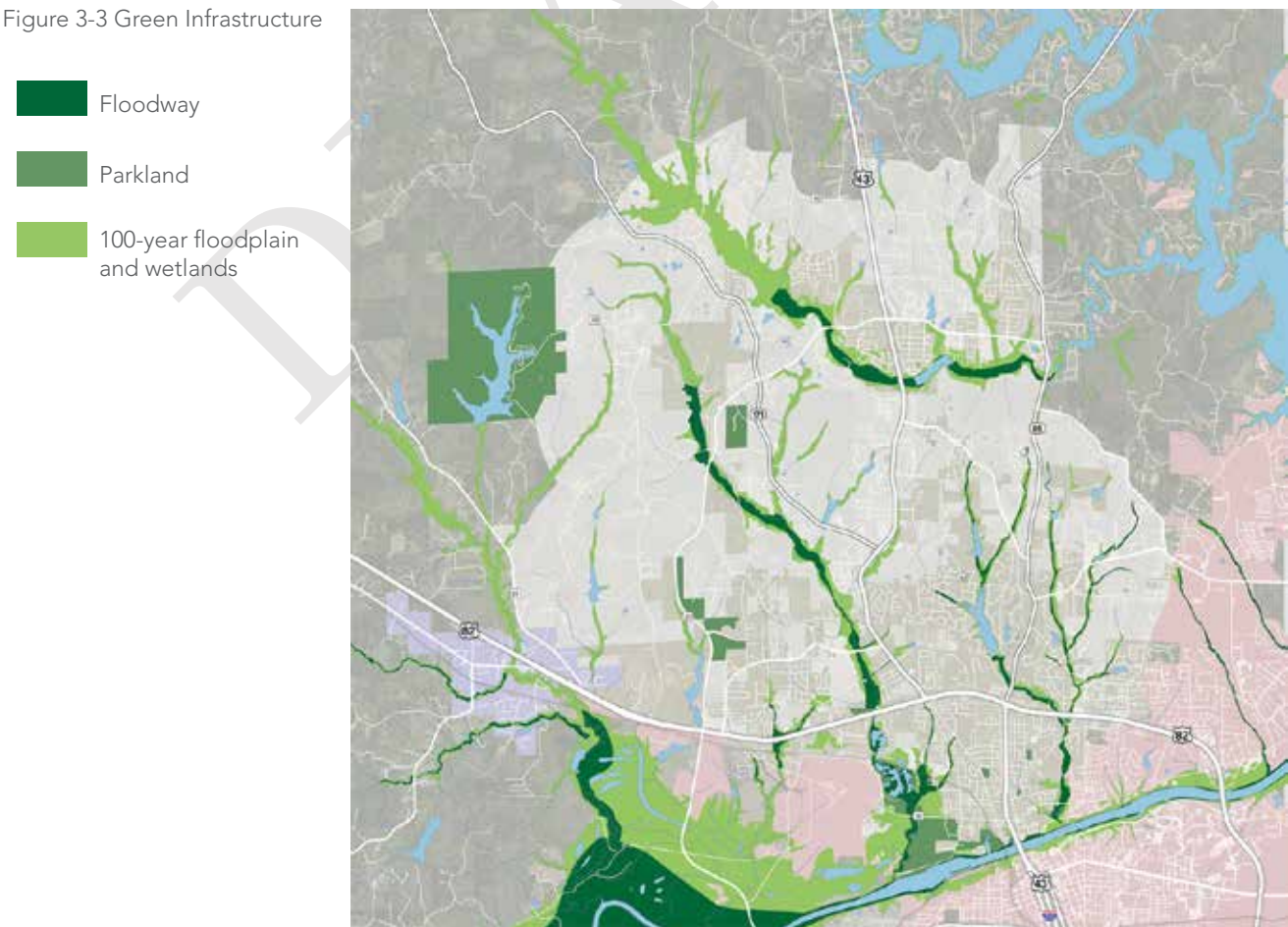
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



The Black Warrior River is the most dramatic feature of Northport’s natural landscape and the reason the city was originally settled. Later on in the life of the city, the creeks that flow across the city, the rolling hills through which they flow and the area’s natural tree canopy attracted residential development further north. In addition to their scenic qualities and opportunities for outdoor recreation, these features, together with public parkland, represent Northport’s “green infrastructure.” In the same way that roads and water and sewer lines serve vital functions for the city, Northport’s natural features contribute to stormwater management and water and air quality. Green spaces also help to manage high summer temperatures in heavily developed areas and conserve habitat for local wildlife.

While flood prone areas, steep slopes and other natural features are often viewed as obstacles to development, Northport can encourage more environmentally-friendly growth practices by promoting “conservation development.” This means clustering buildings, streets and parking areas into the most developable portions of a site

Figure 3-3 Green Infrastructure



while retaining natural areas that contribute to the city's green infrastructure network. Clustering development can also reduce the amount of infrastructure—streets, water, sewer and gas lines and power transmission lines—necessary to serve a development. This reduces development costs and the city's long-term maintenance costs for the city and utility providers.

Natural features should be incorporated into the design of new development so that they continue to serve “green infrastructure” functions and act as amenities that add beauty and value to the developments around them.

Waterways

Local creeks and the riparian areas alongside them collect, filter and funnel stormwater to the river. They are also crucial habitats for fish and wildlife. Channelization of natural drainage ways—straightening or deepening streams or replacing them with concrete channels or culverts—should generally be avoided or limited. Channelization increases the velocity of stormwater flows, which can exacerbate erosion, sedimentation, non-point source pollution and downstream flooding.

Flood Zones

Flood zones fall into three basic categories: floodways, 100-year flood zones and 500-year flood zones. The floodway (or “regulatory floodway”) is the portion of a waterway and adjacent land that is necessary to convey flood waters before they exceed a designated height. Development is prohibited in floodways to avoid increases in flood height and exacerbating upstream flooding. 100-year flood zones—areas with an annual 1% chance of flooding—straddle the floodway and are available for development, subject to some restrictions, including raising buildings above flood elevation and flood insurance requirements. 500-year flood zones—areas with an annual 0.2% chance of flooding—tend to be relatively small and are available for development with little or no restriction.

When development occurs in the 100-year floodplain, it should be planned and designed to avoid increasing flood hazards. This is done by limiting the amount of impervious surfaces (e.g., buildings, streets and pavement), raising buildings above the base flood elevation, using “low-impact” development techniques or some combination of these strategies. Conservation development and other efforts to retain open space in these areas are encouraged so that they maintain their natural functions and are planned and designed as part of the city's green infrastructure.

Wetlands

Development in designated wetlands is regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers in accordance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Conserving wetlands contributes to flood management and water quality and protects fish and wildlife habitat.

Steep Slopes

Northport's steeper slopes are found in the northern parts of the planning area. While steep slopes can provide scenic views, development on them is generally more difficult and expensive than on flatter sites and can increase erosion issues. When slopes are graded, natural drainage systems are altered, which can have impacts well beyond the site. Development on slopes of more than fifteen percent should be avoided or limited to lower densities of development so that less grading and clearing is required. Retaining natural vegetation on slopes helps to limit erosion.



Heavy rains in 2021 caused flooding along creeks and other low-lying areas. Photo credit: Ryan Phillips, Patch.com

INFRASTRUCTURE

How the City invests in public infrastructure should be leveraged to influence the location, type and intensity of growth consistent with the community's vision and the development strategy in this plan. By coordinating infrastructure planning with land use planning, the City can encourage "intentional growth" and discourage or limit the impacts of undesired growth. Annexation and land use decisions must take into account the cost to build and maintain infrastructure and to provide fire and police services and public facilities. This helps the City maintain high levels of service *and* balance the costs of public investment with the economic benefits of growth.

If growth exceeds the City's infrastructure and public service capabilities, what makes Northport attractive to residents and prospective development is put at risk. Once that has happened, options to remedy infrastructure and service deficiencies are fewer, more complicated and more expensive. Traffic congestion on McFarland Boulevard is an example of this.

Potential solutions to reduce congestion are more limited now that the corridor has been developed. Improvements that are available, including the work that is underway today, will be costly but of limited impact.

Northport is a community of choice. It's desirability for new housing development remains strong, which is reflected in continuing residential development despite currently high construction costs. The city is in a position to be selective about growth, to choose when and where to invest in infrastructure to facilitate development and to set high standards for that growth.

Infrastructure planning is not just about meeting the needs of development as the city expands outward. Upgrading infrastructure in aging or declining neighborhoods and business areas—in combination with other strategies—can be used to attract private reinvestment in aging or declining neighborhoods and business areas.



McFarland Boulevard, between US 43 and AL 69, is the most heavily traveled corridor in Northport. Most businesses along the corridor were built prior to implementation of access management requirements by ALDOT. As a result, there are roughly 30 access points on each side of the highway in under one mile—averaging one driveway or intersection every 166 feet. A high frequency of access points along major roads increases congestion and potential for collisions.

Street Network

Traffic congestion is a common frustration noted by residents in planning meetings and surveys. McFarland Boulevard, AL 69 and a few other roadways experience congestion during morning and afternoon rush hours. While adding lanes to congested roads can help, without other factors being addressed, they can easily become congested again as growth continues.

A critical factor to be addressed on major thoroughfares, particularly McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard, is access management. Access management improves safety and reduces delays caused by mixing through traffic and local traffic. This involves implementation of design standards and physical improvements, such as consolidating driveways, building frontage roads and building or modifying medians.

Capacity improvements, ranging from access management to widening for additional lanes, are recommended on McFarland Boulevard, Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard, AL 69, Union Chapel Road and Mitt Lary Road.

As private development adds to Northport's street network, connectivity must be increased. More street connections create alternative routes for local motorists to lessen pressure on US 82, AL 69 and US 43. Local street connections that allow motorists to avoid the intersections of these major roads will also reduce congestion.

Strategic connections that can be made to provide more route options (see Figure 3-4) include:

- connecting AL 69 (near Martin Road) to US 43 at Tom Montgomery Road
- connecting Union Chapel Road to US 43 at AL 171
- extending Northbrook Drive to Union Chapel Road
- connecting Flatwoods Road to Rose Boulevard
- extending Hospital Drive south to 3rd Street

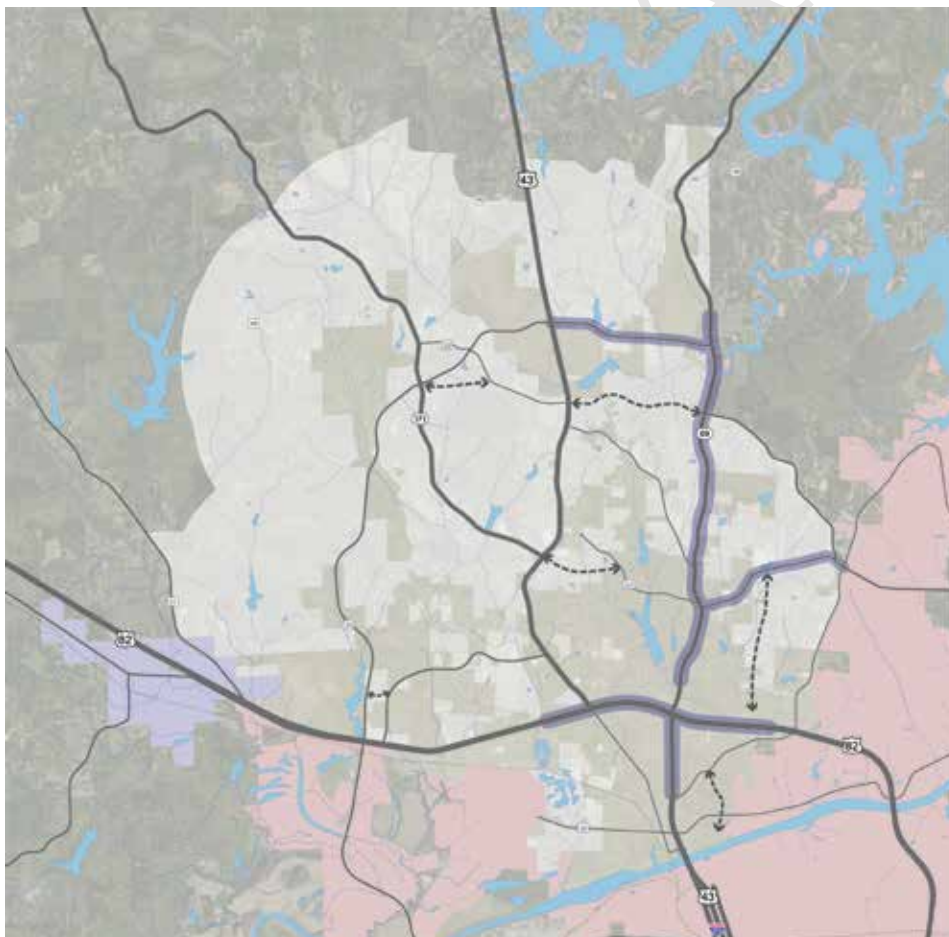
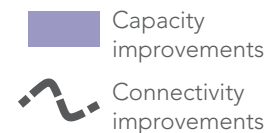


Figure 3-4 Transportation Strategy



Utilities

One of the most powerful tools the City has to shape growth is the municipal sewer system. Access to the sanitary sewer system is a necessity for most types of development. The sewer system must have the treatment capacity to support overall growth. In addition, adequately-sized sewer mains must be in place to move higher volumes of sewage from densely developing areas to the wastewater treatment plant. How the City invests in its sewer system determines the extent to which the community can grow and also *where* it grows.

In addition to increasing treatment capacity over time to meet the city's future population size, Northport Utilities will strategically upgrade mains and pump stations to support continued development north of McFarland Boulevard as portrayed in this plan and complete a new outfall to the Black Warrior River.

As the sewer system grows to accommodate continuing development, water and sewer components in already developed areas must also be maintained. Aging water and sewer lines must be replaced from time to time. In some cases, they must be upgraded to improve effectiveness and efficiency. This includes various investments in the water system such as improvements to the water treatment plant and repairs and upgrades to storage tanks and pumps.

City Facilities

The City must evaluate public facilities from time to time to determine whether they need to be expanded or relocated or both to serve the increasing needs of the growing city. The Fire Department, in particular, is directly affected by the direction and extent of city expansion. If additional development occurs along the Rose Boulevard corridor, the City should consider the construction (or relocation) of a fire station for the west side and to what degree it would improve response times and the department's ISO rating.



Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Northport residents desire a more walkable community. To be “walkable,” three conditions must be present:

- a variety of community destinations (businesses, schools, parks, etc.) within proximity of neighborhoods
- pedestrian facilities connecting neighborhoods to nearby destinations
- pedestrian-friendly design of business areas, schools and other destinations.

Downtown Northport, some nearby neighborhoods and many newer residential areas have at least some sidewalks. However, many neighborhoods and most major roads, which interconnect the various parts of the city, do not have sidewalks. Bicycle and pedestrian investments by the City should be strategic, prioritizing connections to schools and parks from neighborhoods where such connections can be made safely.

A visionary project shown in Figure 3-5 is a citywide trail extending north from the Levee Trail, following along Rose Boulevard, Mitt Lary Road and ultimately making its way back south to reconnect with the Levee Trail. The citywide loop includes bicycle and pedestrian facilities proposed in the Kentuck plan and in the Northern and Southern Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans. The loop would likely involve both on- and off-road facilities. Some segments may be required of or installed cooperatively with the construction of future subdivisions and other private developments. Several future connector roadways (see Figure 3-4) would have sidewalks, bicycle facilities or some combination of these to help complete the citywide loop or provide additional connections between parks, schools and neighborhoods.

Sidewalks are provided on the Hugh Thomas Bridge connecting Northport and Tuscaloosa. The community has expressed interest in developing a bicycle and/or pedestrian crossing that offers a safer, more pleasant link across the river. ALDOT approval must be obtained to make bicycle and pedestrian improvements on this and other US and state highways.

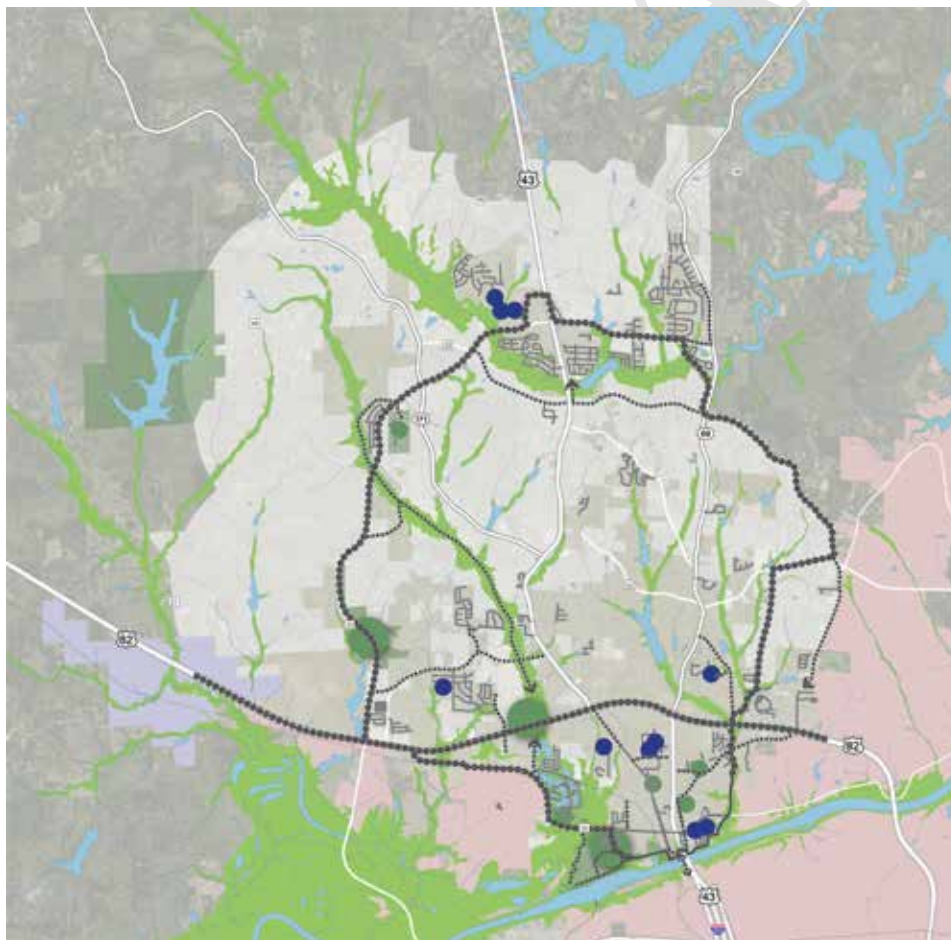


Figure 3-5 Bicycle-Pedestrian Strategy

-  Existing sidewalk
-  Bike and/or pedestrian connection
-  Park
-  School

PARKS AND RECREATION

In the next several years, the City will embark on three major projects, creating unique recreational opportunities for residents and capturing economic opportunities through increased tourism:

- transformation of Kentuck Park into a major sports and events complex with passive recreational areas and trails interconnecting the venue to the river, Van de Graaf Arboretum and Downtown Northport;
- multi-phased development of an outdoor adventure park along Rose Boulevard with hiking and biking trails, zip line courses, cabins and a retreat center; and
- construction of a park on McFarland Boulevard that will include a host of water-based recreational activities along with dining and retail components.

As it grows, Northport will invest in its recreation system to provide parks closer to where people live, complementing the city's planned recreational attractions and regional amenities offered by PARA. While some existing and future residential areas will feature privately-developed amenities, neighborhood-scaled parks with varying combinations of passive and active recreational space will be distributed throughout the city. Two areas recommended for evaluating future neighborhood park sites are shown in Figure 3-6: the growing northern residential communities around Mitt Lary Road and the central residential communities north of McFarland Boulevard.

Complementing city parks would be a network of on- and off-road trails forming a citywide loop and connecting neighborhoods to parks and other community destinations.

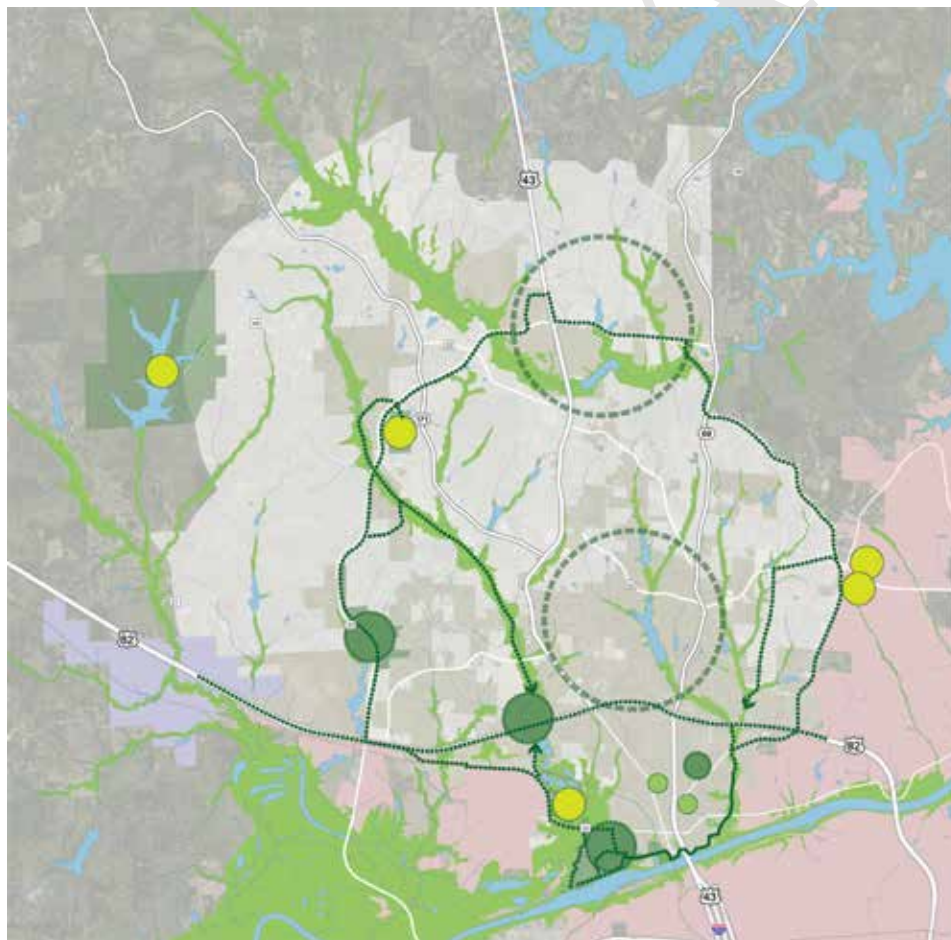
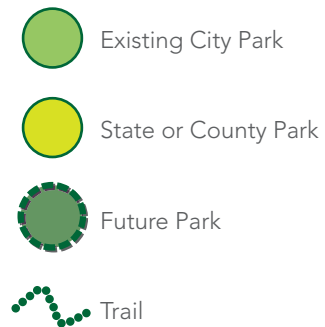


Figure 3-6 Parks System



ANNEXATION

Today, there are large gaps in Northport's city limits. Prior to the citywide plan adopted in 2007, properties were annexed along Rose Boulevard and around Mitt Lary Road and US 43 far north of the mostly contiguous portions of the city. These annexations greatly expanded the areas for which Northport must provide police and fire protection services. And, to accommodate the development that soon followed, the water and sewer systems had to be expanded, stretching across large swaths of unincorporated land.

Future annexations should be targeted to:

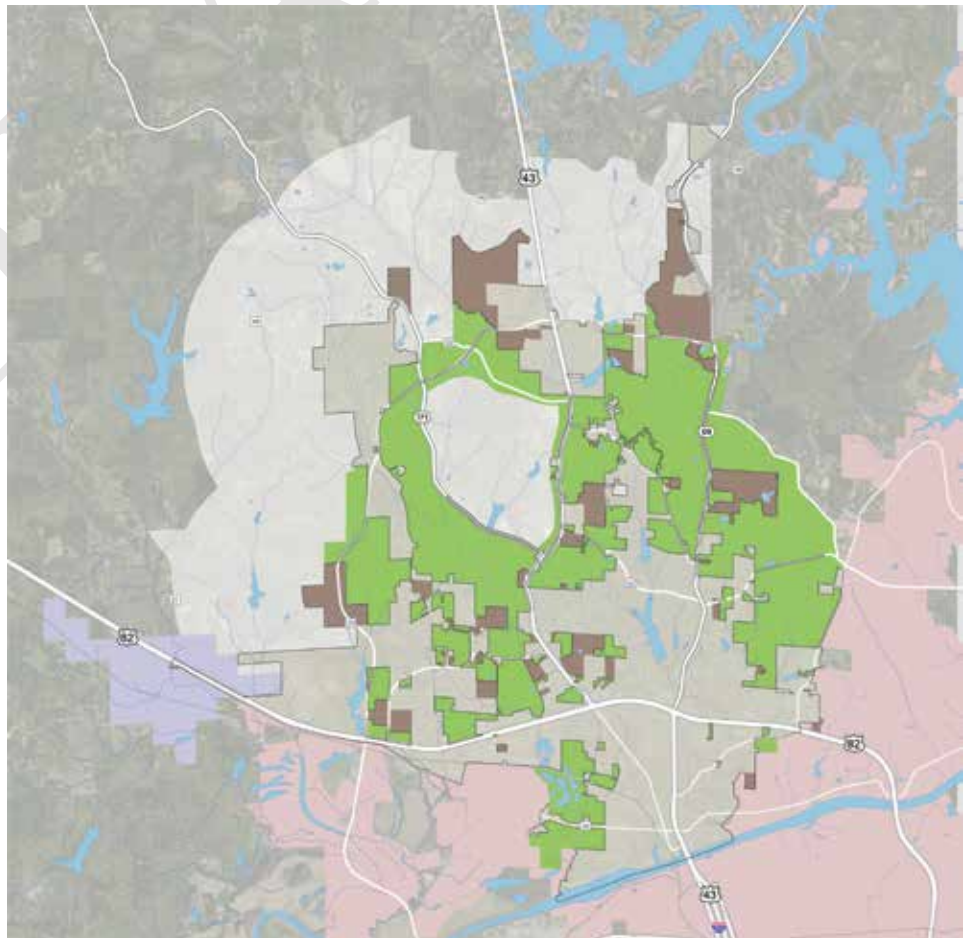
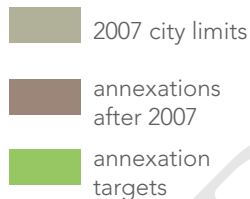
- capture existing or future business areas or other revenue-producing or high value development
- have more influence over future development, such as through zoning
- simplify municipal service boundaries.

Figure 3-7 highlights areas that are desirable for annexation for one or more of these reasons. In particular, the City should pursue annexation of property along Rose Boulevard, US 43 and AL 69. The City should expand eastward to the Tuscaloosa city limits along Watermelon and Martin Roads and to the southwest along Fifth Street.

If annexed, the areas shown in Figure 3-7 would have little impact on the size of the police jurisdiction and other municipal services areas.

Annexing property along the major roads identified above should be considered a priority. Remaining unincorporated pockets between AL 69, Martin Road and Watermelon Road should be incorporated whenever opportunities arise.

Figure 3-7 Annexation Strategy



COMMUNITY IMAGE

Gateways and Image Corridors

During the visioning process, participants expressed a desire to improve the community's outward appearance and image. To create a positive first impression for visitors, the City will install and maintain attractive signage and landscaping at its primary gateways:

- along Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard as visitors cross the Black Warrior River
- the intersection of Watermelon Road and McFarland Boulevard
- the intersection of Rose Boulevard and McFarland Boulevard
- north of the intersection of US 43 and Mitt Lary Road
- along AL 69 near the water treatment plant
- along Union Chapel Road near Watermelon Road

Northport's "image corridors," the major roadways along which most visitors travel through the city, are critical to the community's outward appearance. This includes the design of the roadways themselves and the development alongside them. While the design of the US and state highways in Northport are controlled by the ALDOT, the City can work with the Department of Transportation to optimize landscaping, lighting and maintenance. The appearance of private development on these highways can be improved by adopting and/or updating standards for buildings, landscaping and signage that apply whenever new development or redevelopment occurs.

Wayfinding

The City can enhance its image and support tourism by developing a wayfinding signage system directing visitors to community destinations. Gateway and wayfinding signage should be designed for consistency, employing city branding, to convey to visitors that Northport is thoughtful, organized and cares about its image.

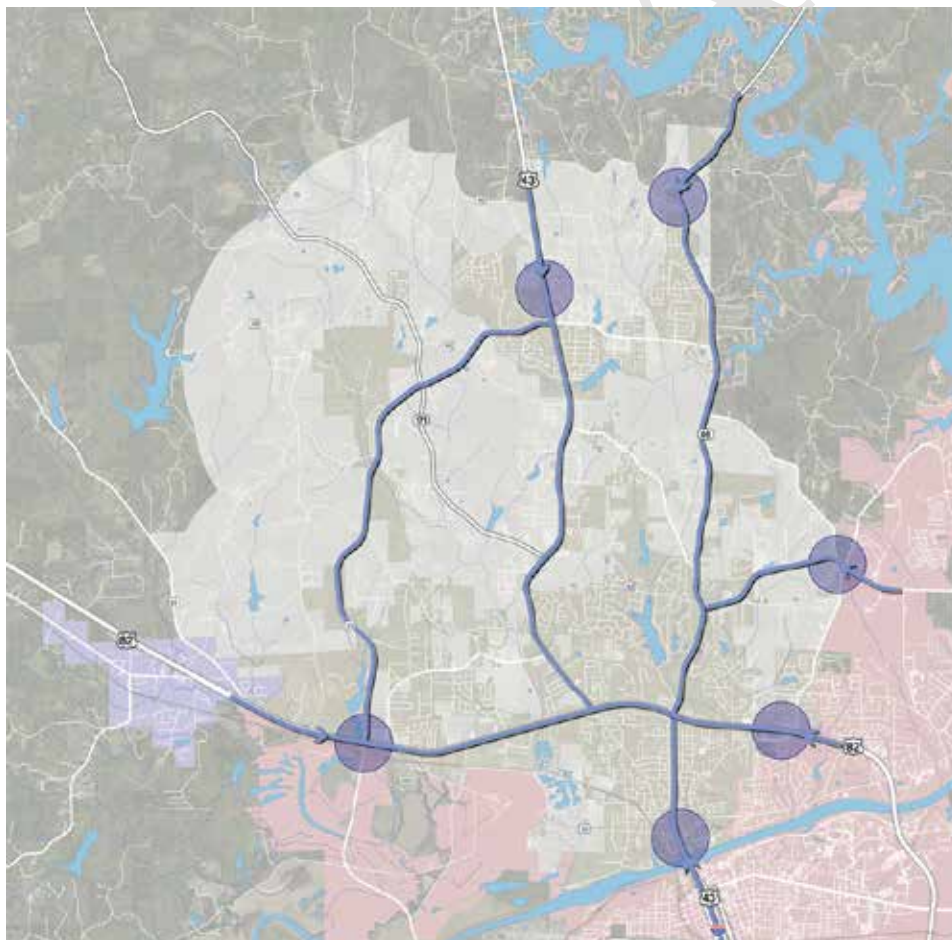
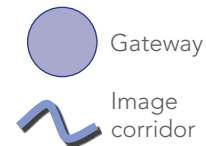


Figure 3-8 Gateways and Image Corridors





NORTHPORT
compass

LAND USE PLAN



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Land Use Plan is to identify the range of uses, densities and development patterns that may be allowed in a given area—should changes occur in the future—to support orderly growth and avoid incompatibility between neighboring uses that can harm property values.

The Plan represents a desired pattern of land uses. It is not intended that existing uses, which differ from the land use plan, must change. But, if they do change, then changes should be consistent with the overall pattern established in the Land Use Plan.

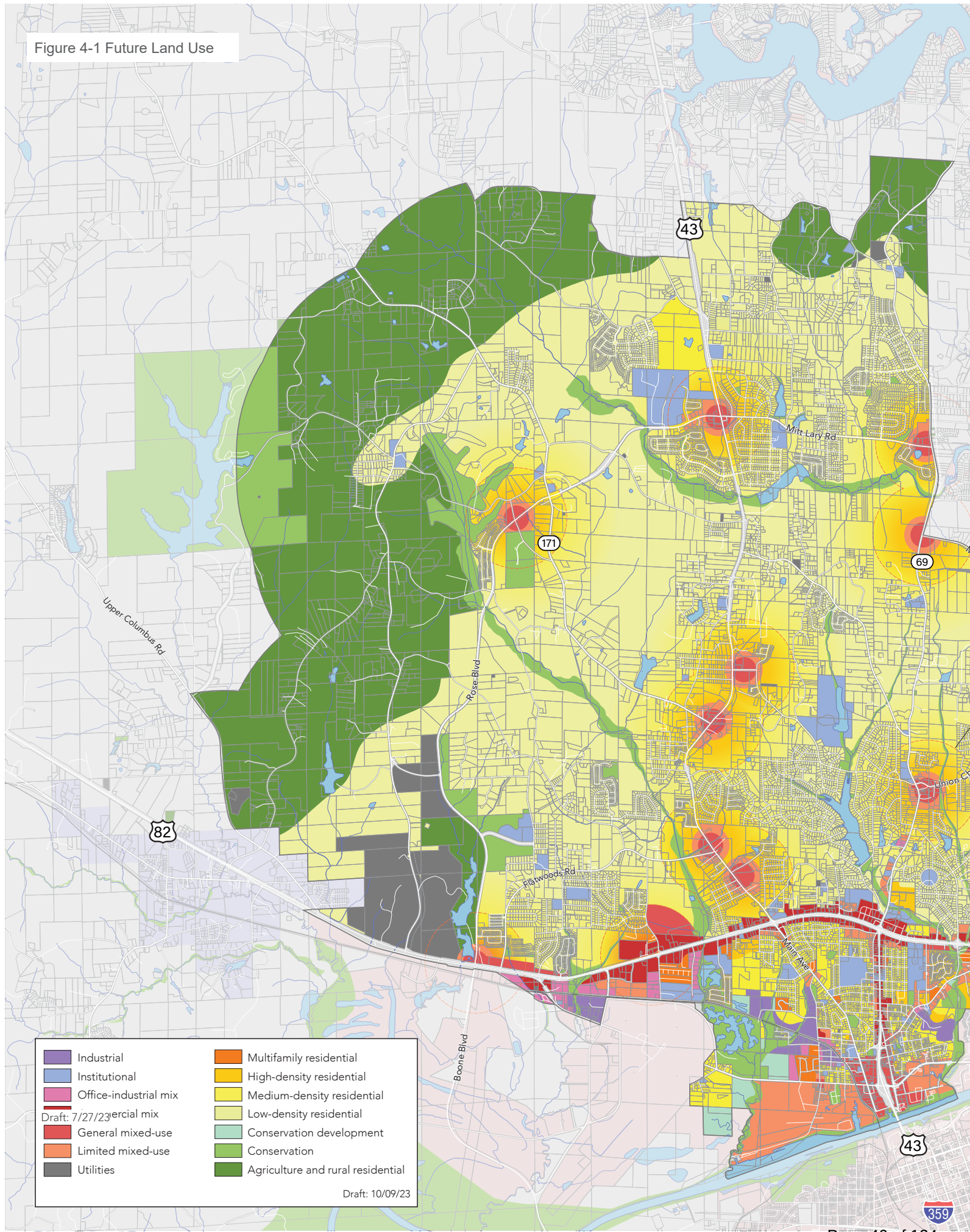
The Land Use Plan is used by the City for a variety of purposes. One of the most common of these is in reviewing the appropriateness of zoning and subdivision applications. The Future Land Use map (Figure 4-1) is not a zoning map but a guide for the Planning Commission and City Council in considering changes to the zoning map as development proposals are made. It is to be consulted in planning for expansion and new development of public facilities and utilities to serve the growing community because it represents a reasonable picture of the future state of the community.

LAND USE PRINCIPLES

The Land Use Plan is built around the following principles:

- Arrange uses to avoid incompatibility that can harm property values.
- Provide comfortable transitions between uses of different types, densities and intensities.
- Arrange uses so that traffic from industrial, commercial and other traffic generators is not funneled through residential areas.
- Treat commercial and mixed-use areas as nodes or hubs around which residential, institutional and other community activities are clustered.
- Avoid continuous, linear commercial development along major roads. Residential development can be appropriate along major roads. In such cases, single-family lots should be turned inward and an attractive landscaping screen provided along the major road frontage.
- Locate higher density residential uses close to commercial and mixed-use nodes and major roads and lower density residential areas further out from commercial and mixed-use nodes and from major roads.
- Designate environmentally sensitive areas for recreational uses or development types that will limit impact on flood plains, steep slopes and drainage patterns.
- Face similar uses across streets. Arrange uses so that land use transitions occur mostly along rear lot lines and man-made and natural barriers (railroads, highways, streams, etc.). Land use transitions along side lot lines should be considered on a case by case basis and may require buffers between some uses.

Figure 4-1 Future Land Use



LAND USE TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The following land use types are depicted on Figure 4-1 Future Land Use map. Development guidelines for each category or subcategory address street and subdivision design elements, including street connectivity, pedestrian facilities, street-side stormwater drainage improvements and provision of open space. Street connectivity guidelines are provided in the form of allowable block lengths. This is intended to support mobility and effective emergency response when developments involve changes to existing streets or construction of new streets. Where not specifically addressed, street connectivity, drainage and other design elements should be consistent with that of neighboring developments or as otherwise specified in City plans and standards.

Conservation

This category includes land permanently reserved as open space and/or recreation including public parks and cemeteries. Floodways are also included to assure conservation of these areas and reduce development impacts on area waterways.

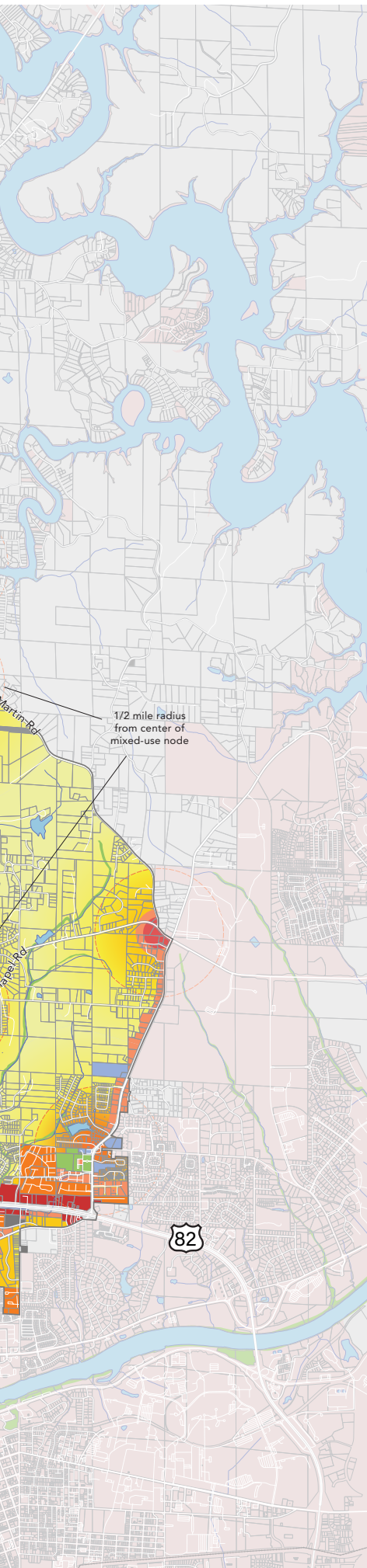
Agriculture and Rural Residential

This category includes crop farming, timbering, raising of livestock, single-family housing, and some agriculturally-related business uses that produce little traffic, do not require access to the sanitary sewer system and involve a low ratio of building to land area. Lot sizes for residential development are at least one acre. Lot sizes for agricultural uses will tend to be much larger, comprising multiple acres.

- Street connectivity is limited. Most properties are served by existing roads.
- Street-side stormwater drainage is handled by swales rather than curb and gutter.
- Sidewalks are not provided but off-street paths may be desirable for pedestrian, bicycle, or all-terrain vehicle use.

Conservation Development

This category is applied to a few undeveloped properties south of McFarland Boulevard with flood, wetland or other environmental features present. Potential uses vary based on the existing uses adjoining each property. The intent is that buildings, parking and other site modifications are clustered into portions of the property that will have minimal impact on floodplains, wetlands and natural drainage patterns. To accomplish this, modification of conventional zoning requirements may be considered, including “density averaging” for residential subdivisions.





Residential

This category includes multiple subcategories with varying densities of residential uses. Low intensity institutional uses, parks and open spaces are also included in each residential subcategory.

In all residential development, street-side stormwater drainage is handled by gutters with raised curbs; and utilities are placed underground.

Low Density Residential

This subcategory includes single-family detached houses on relatively large lots—15,000 square feet or larger. Low density residential areas are typically located where the street network is relatively sparse and where utilities infrastructure and public facilities are more limited.

- Block lengths are generally less than 900 feet.
- Green space is incorporated primarily through generously-sized yards.
- Sidewalks should be provided, at a minimum, along collector streets and should be set back from the road edge. Alternatively, low density subdivisions can be connected to community destinations through on- or off-street paths.

Medium Density Residential

This subcategory includes single-family detached homes with moderate lot sizes, generally 3-5.5 dwellings per acre. Medium density residential areas are typically located convenient to business areas and public facilities and where the existing and planned street network and other infrastructure are more robust.



- Block lengths are generally less than 750 feet. Connections to adjacent subdivisions or other development may be necessary.
- Green space is provided through moderately sized yards and common open space within residential subdivisions.
- Sidewalks are provided on at least one side of local streets and on both sides of collector streets. Sidewalks are set back from the curb by a buffer strip planted with street trees.





High Density Residential

This subcategory includes single-family development at densities that exceed 5.5 units per acre, which accommodates a wide range of housing types—traditional detached homes on small lots, townhouses (attached single-family), and cottage developments. Duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes may be appropriate in limited locations.

High density residential areas are located adjacent to commercial and mixed-use nodes, where infrastructure is robust. They act as a transition between nonresidential development areas and lower density residential neighborhoods

- Block lengths are generally less than 600 feet. Street connections to adjacent residential areas and other development will typically be necessary.
- Since yards on individual lots tend to be small, green space is provided primarily through common open spaces in residential subdivisions and within the streetscape.
- Sidewalks are provided on both sides of local and collector streets. Sidewalks are set back from the curb by a buffer strip planted with street trees.

About 54% of the projected demand for housing over the next several years will be for households with annual incomes at \$100,000 and below. Housing types in the High Density Residential category can contribute significantly to meeting these needs. Higher density lowers land and development costs so that the resulting homes are more affordable.

Multifamily Residential

This subcategory includes multifamily residential developments and other high density residential types. Multifamily residential areas are located adjacent to commercial and mixed-use nodes along McFarland Boulevard and the intersection of Watermelon and Rice Valley Roads. In these locations, street and utilities infrastructure is better able to accommodate the demands of concentrated housing. Multifamily areas act as a transition between nonresidential development areas and lower density residential neighborhoods.

- Block lengths are generally less than 600 feet.
- Green space is provided primarily through common open spaces and within the streetscape.
- Sidewalks are provided on both sides of local and collector streets. Sidewalks are set back from the curb by a buffer strip planted with street trees.



The residential uses in this subcategory are also appropriate in upper stories of mixed-use buildings in the General Mixed-Use and Limited Mixed-Use categories.

Density and Open Space

The amount of “common open space” should increase with the density of housing development. Common open space becomes more essential as housing density increases since residents have less open space of their own.

While common open spaces may include pools and other recreational amenities, they are mostly comprised of green space. Green space is needed for stormwater management because of the increased concentration of impervious surfaces (buildings and parking). Higher amounts of impervious surfaces also increase temperatures. Trees within common open space provide shade to limit those effects, which is especially important during Alabama summers.

Common open spaces must be usable and accessible to residents of the development. This assures that they are an appropriate substitute for the lack of individual open space while also serving environmental functions.



Commercial and Mixed-Use Areas

This category includes multiple categories with varying scales and mixes of commercial, institutional and other uses.

- Shopping and dining uses should be concentrated at the heart of mixed-use nodes (identified in the Development Strategy) with other business and commercial uses flanking the core uses or located in upper stories of buildings. High density residential uses may be appropriate at the edges of commercial and mixed-use areas and in upper floors of buildings.
- Block lengths should be less than 800 feet except where access management needs prevent shorter block lengths along major roads.
- Green space is provided in common open spaces, landscaping and within the streetscape.
- Sidewalks should typically be provided on both sides of the street to facilitate pedestrian access throughout each district and to connect to adjoining neighborhoods. Sidewalks should be buffered from streets, as appropriate to the location, by a tree-lined buffer strip.
- With the exception of some highway segments, streets should generally have raised curb and gutter.
- Parking areas of adjacent businesses should be connected and the number and size of curb cuts, particularly along major roads, carefully managed.

When buildings are located closer to the street, they are more visible to motorists and easier to access for pedestrians. Motorists also tend to drive more slowly in areas where buildings are close to the street.

Commercial Mix

This subcategory includes a wide range of commercial activity—retail, business and personal services, dining, entertainment and lodging accommodations. Office and institutional uses are also appropriate in these areas.

Commercial uses in this category typically serve regional, commuter and citywide markets and may involve large footprint buildings. To enable regional and citywide access, these areas are located along McFarland Boulevard and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard, where the existing and planned street network is capable of absorbing high traffic demand.

These areas should be designed to accommodate pedestrian access from nearby neighborhoods and from one development to the next, including on-street sidewalks or paths and interior walkways that connect to on-street facilities.

Block lengths may exceed 800 feet, particularly along McFarland Boulevard, due to access management needs. Shared driveway access and cross access between adjoining developments are encouraged.



General Mixed-Use

This category includes a wide variety of commercial uses as well as recreational, institutional and high density residential uses. This category is applied to the downtown area and at commercial nodes north of McFarland Boulevard (as identified in the Development Strategy) to provide nearby neighborhoods with convenient access to goods and services.

Some existing developed areas in this category exhibit a range of uses but with little physical cohesion. As new development occurs, creating a stronger sense of place and cohesiveness between uses and buildings should be stressed. Parking lots should be located to the side of buildings or toward the interior of developments so that buildings line streets to create more visual cohesion and to support pedestrian access.

Intensive commercial uses that traditionally do not fit well alongside single-family neighborhoods can be considered on a case-by-case basis and should incorporate screening, buffers and other design elements to maintain compatibility and avoid negative impacts on neighbors.



Limited Mixed-Use

This category includes commercial, recreational, institutional and high density residential uses. These areas will tend to include a higher percentage of office, service and other non-retail business activity, compared to the "Commercial Mix" and "General Mixed-Use" categories. This range of uses serves as a transition between neighborhoods and the core of commercial, mixed-use and industrial nodes. Use flexibility is also intended to optimize reinvestment opportunities in already developed areas.

These areas should have a high level of walkability through more compact development patterns, smaller block sizes and generous pedestrian infrastructure. Parking lots should be located to the side of buildings or toward the interior of developments so that buildings line streets to create more visual cohesion and to support pedestrian access. To this end building setbacks from the street may be minimal.

General and Limited Mixed-use Areas are intended to develop in a block pattern around or adjacent to major intersections—extending from the intersection or major road a block or more in depth—rather than in a linear pattern, where commercial uses extend for only one lot depth along the major road.



Office-Industrial Mix

This category includes professional and business offices, business services and small-scale, light industrial uses. Automotive repair, building trades (plumbing, electrical, etc.) and similar uses are also appropriate. These areas are located adjacent to industrial activities south of McFarland Boulevard to provide a transition between more intensive industrial uses and neighboring business and residential areas.

Commercial and light industrial uses should be limited to those carried on primarily within buildings. Outdoor storage, work yards and loading/unloading areas should be located toward the interior of sites, away from street views and any adjoining residential areas. Such site elements should be screened along side and rear property lines when adjoining dissimilar uses.

Building setbacks and location of parking should be determined based on the predominant pattern in the area, though internalized parking and shallow building setbacks are encouraged.

Streets serving Office-Industrial Mix areas should include sidewalks as appropriate to their context, such as when they are needed to connect neighborhoods to nearby schools, parks or other community destinations. Streets should be lined with raised curb and gutter unless context indicates otherwise.



Industrial

This category includes warehousing and distribution, manufacturing, extraction and research and technology-focused industries. This category is applied where industries are present today, most of which emerged along the railroad. Industrial areas typically require a high level of transportation access and relatively flat land.

Light industrial uses tend to be less land intensive and more compatible with non-industrial uses than “heavier” industrial uses. However, they must still be located with consideration to how truck access would affect neighboring uses and buffered from residential and other less intensive uses. Manufacturing and other heavy industrial uses, which produce noise, odor, fumes and other impacts on adjoining land uses must be located, planned and designed to limit their impacts on business and residential areas nearby.

Outdoor storage, work yards and loading/unloading areas should be located toward the interior of sites, away from street views and any adjoining residential areas. Such site elements should be screened along side and rear property lines when adjoining non-industrial uses.

Low impact development techniques should be incorporated into site design to limit the effects of high impervious surface ratios and support stormwater management.

Industrial areas need not have sidewalks except as determined by context. For example, sidewalks may be desirable to connect industries to an adjacent commercial area so that employees can walk to nearby restaurants and other businesses. Context should also determine whether streets are lined with swales, valley curbs or curb and gutter.



Institutional

This category includes government facilities, schools, places of assembly and worship, medical, and community service uses and lands. NOTE: Only existing institutional uses are shown on the Future Land Use Map. Depending on their scale and intensity, future institutional uses are appropriate in most areas of the city and therefore are included in other land use categories.

Large churches and schools, and other higher intensity institutional uses, which tend to comprise larger buildings and draw larger amounts of traffic, should generally be located in high visibility places where access is suitable and adjacent land uses are compatible. Less-intense institutions, which range from small churches to elementary schools, may be appropriate in or adjacent to neighborhoods provided there is sufficient transportation access that does not interfere with the enjoyment of the neighborhood.

The development pattern—building heights, setbacks, parking location, street and sidewalk design—of institutional uses should be consistent with the pattern of the dominant use in the area (i.e., residential, commercial, etc.). However, internalized parking is encouraged.



Utilities

This category includes water, sewer, gas, electrical, telecommunications and other existing utility facilities. NOTE: Only existing locations are shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Like institutional uses, utility facilities are appropriate in most areas of the city, and in many cases, their location in a particular part of the city may be a necessity. Sewer pump stations, water storage tanks, electrical substations and similar utility facilities are appropriate in any land use area. Depending on the type and design of the facility and its location on site, landscaping or other screening elements may be necessary for visual compatibility with surrounding development. Treatment plants and other large scale facilities should be located away from residential areas when possible. Otherwise, screening, buffers and other design elements should be provided to maintain compatibility and avoid negative impacts on neighbors.





TRANSPORTATION



INTRODUCTION

The existing transportation conditions assessment evaluated vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle accessibility in Northport and the surrounding area.

Northport relies on a system of roadways to support the local transportation demands of its citizens and businesses. But as the existing conditions assessment illustrated, the City faces some challenges with local and regional accessibility and mobility.

During the development of the Comprehensive Plan, several concerns were expressed by citizens and City leaders. Some of these issues include:

- Stakeholders feel that public infrastructure has not kept pace with the growth of the community
- Traffic signals on state roadways
- Lack of funding for transportation projects
- Heavy traffic on roadways compared to the size and desired “small town feel” of the city
- Undersized sewer and road infrastructure impacting development in areas around the city
- Access management issues with too many driveways along busy roadways.

These concerns seem to reflect a desire among citizens that Northport maintain its residential “hometown” character while still providing efficient travel options that support growth. Several global strategies will need to be implemented if that vision is to be accomplished.

Global Strategies

The following strategies are intended to inform City policies and decision-making regarding development of Northport’s transportation system growth management and infrastructure. These concepts are described in more detail later in this section of the plan.

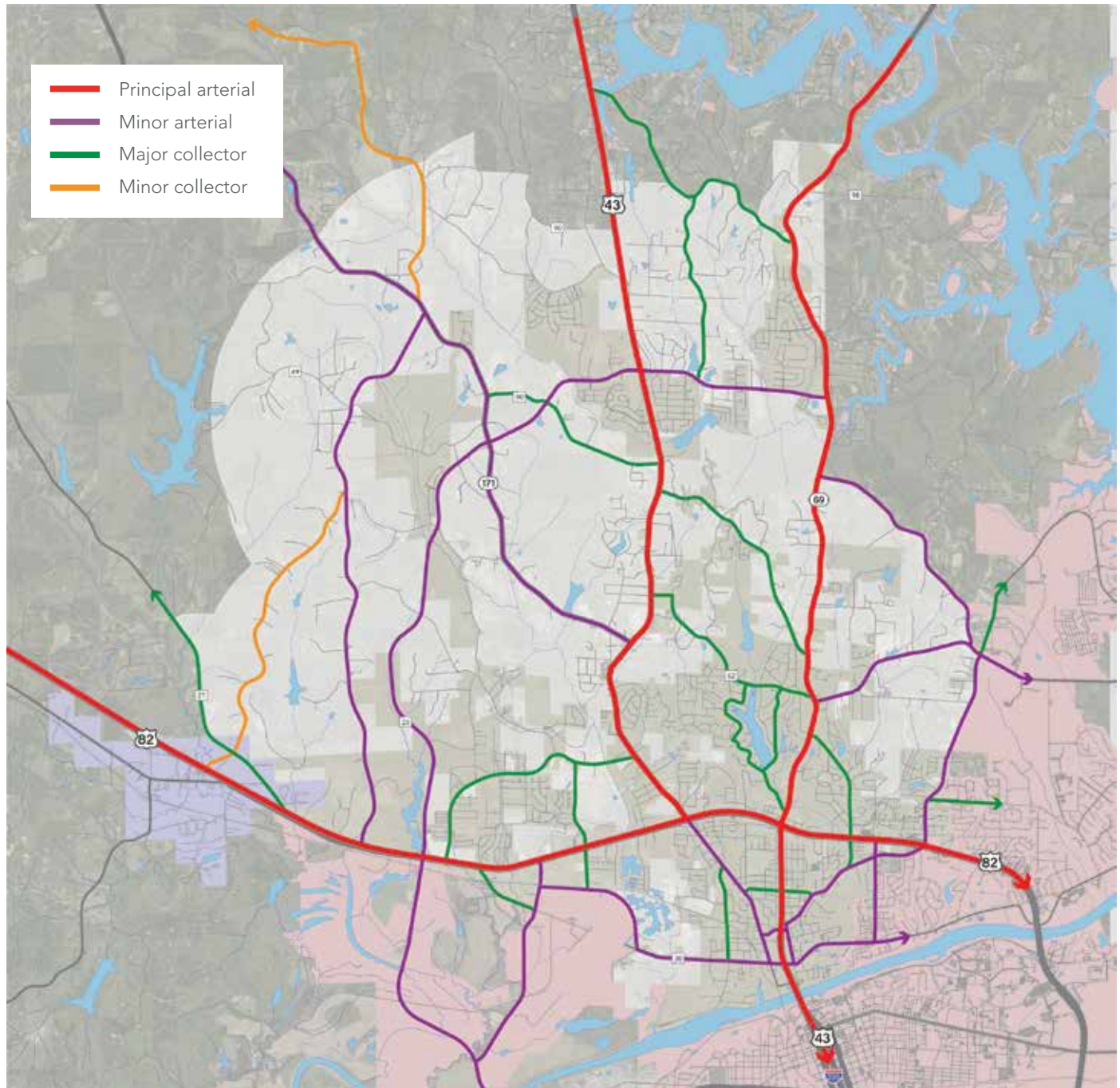
1. Maintain existing transportation system integrity.
2. Develop street networks in new growth areas.
3. Be sensitive to roadside context when planning new or modified transportation projects.
4. Consider the needs of all transportation users in planning and designing new transportation facilities.
5. Apply access management principles to important collector and arterial streets to preserve capacity.
6. Encourage alternative modes of travel through design and policy decisions.

Maintenance of existing facilities has become a top priority for government agencies. Because of the time involved in and cost of building new roadways and expanded existing ones, it is imperative to get the highest possible performance out of existing roadways. System maintenance includes managing items associated with roadway performance such as pavement, drainage, markings, signage, and traffic signals. Assessment of operational performance on major roadways should be conducted regularly to identify low-cost improvements as well as higher-cost, longer-term projects.



Improvements underway on McFarland Boulevard (US-82)

Figure 5-1 Functional Classification



Regional vehicular access is provided by US-43, US-82, and SR-69. US-43 merges with I-359 south of Northport, connecting to I-20/59 and providing access to Birmingham and Meridian, MS. Additional regional access is provided by SR-69 which extends north, connecting Northport to Jasper and I-22.

South of US-82, Northport has a well-connected system of arterial and collector streets (see Figure 5-1). North of US-82, however, there are few east-west routes, which

makes travel in those directions challenging in the rapidly developing north side of the city.

Because of local and regional commuting patterns, the major roads in Northport that provide access across the river—to Tuscaloosa and to the interstate—experience congestion during peak periods (see Figure 5-2). The most congested roadways are US-82 (between US-43 and Watermelon Road) and SR-69 (north and south of US-82).



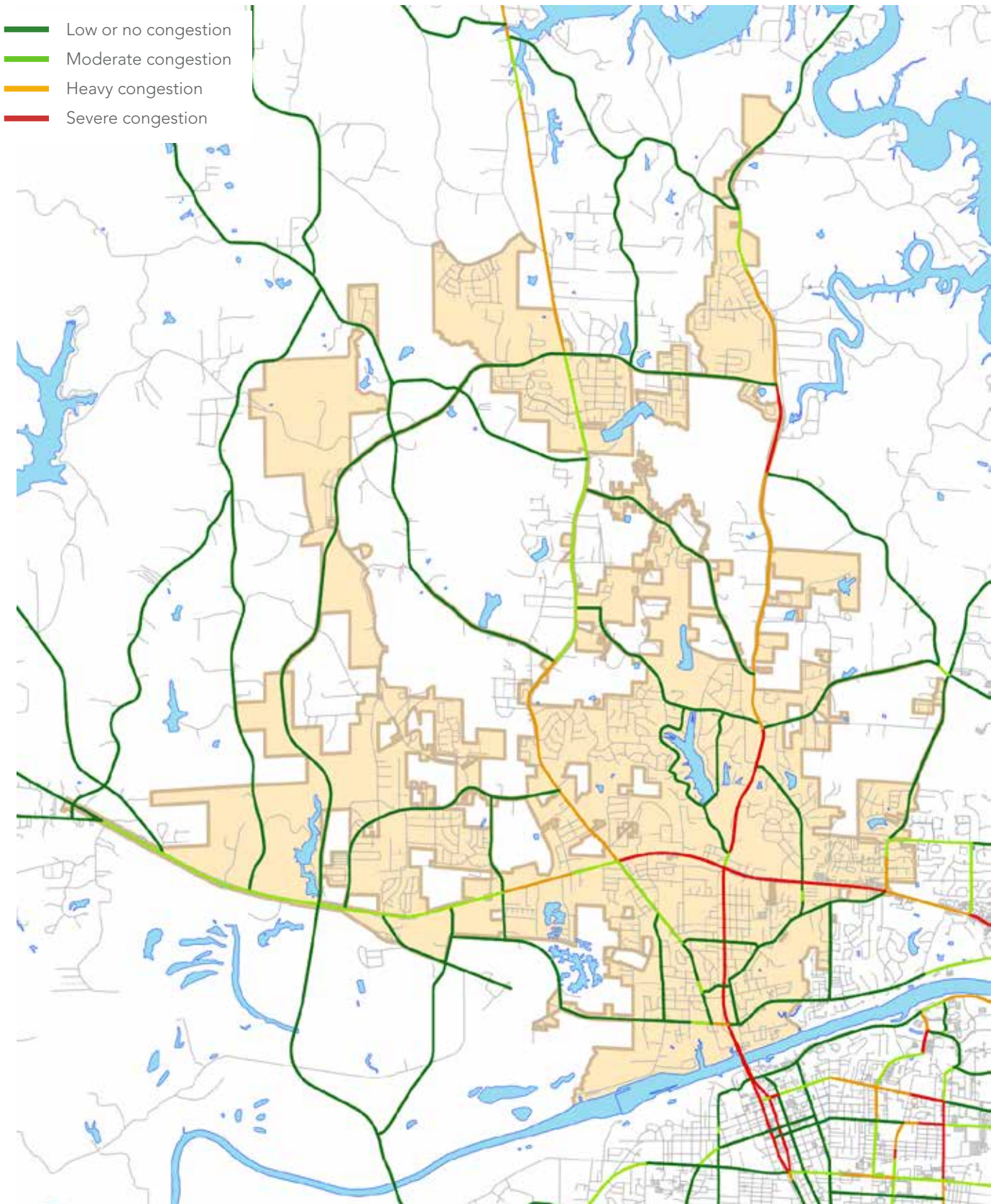


Figure 5-2 Existing Congestion

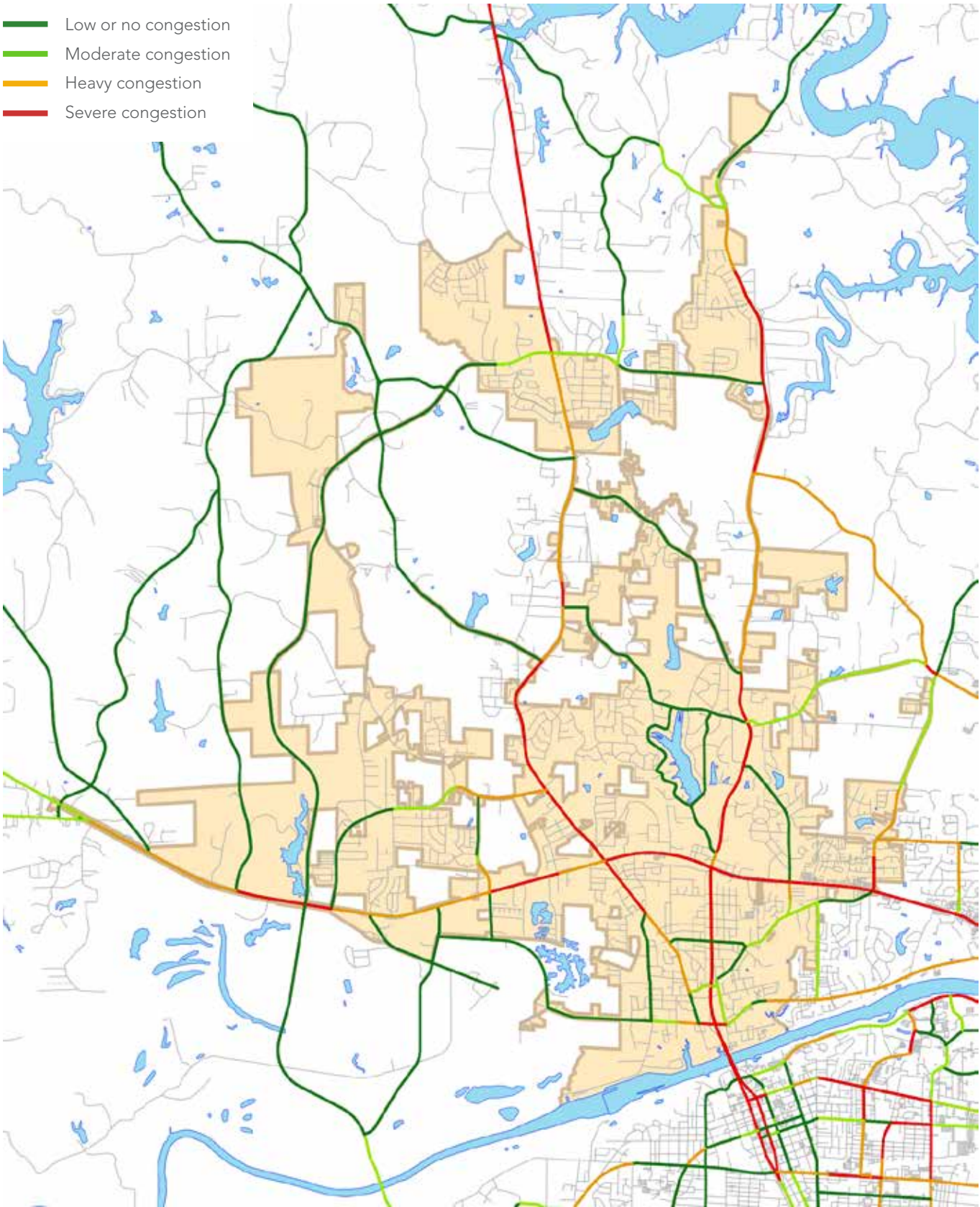


Figure 5-3 2045 Projected Congestion with no improvements

STREET NETWORK

Future Conditions

An assessment was conducted to evaluate the future transportation impacts of land use decisions made during the planning process and to develop recommendations that would support future growth and improve mobility and safety for all modes of transportation in the city. The transportation assessment was conducted at the city-wide level.

As documented in the Existing Transportation Conditions assessment, roadway segments currently exhibiting heavy to severe congestion based on analysis of the volume to capacity ratios seen from the 2015 base year model 24-hour volumes include:

- SR-69, between the Black Warrior River and Union Chapel Road
- SR-69, between Union Chapel Road and CR-70
- SR-69, between CR-70 and Mitt Lary Road
- US-82, between US-43 and Watermelon Road
- US-82, between Watermelon Road and Academy Drive
- US-43, between US-82 and SR-171
- US-43, between Rose Boulevard and Lary Lake Road
- Watermelon Road, between US-82 and Rice Valley Road

The 2045 travel demand analysis was based on the demographic and highway network assumptions used in the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). A review of the proposed land use plan developed for the comprehensive plan illustrated that the population and employment forecasts are consistent with the assumptions used in the travel demand model.

As shown in Figure 5-3, the 2045 traffic conditions based on the output from the Tuscaloosa Area LRTP travel demand model illustrate that currently congested areas will continue to experience congestion; and overall congestion is forecasted to increase as a function of future population and employment growth.

Roadway segments forecasted to experience congestion in the year 2045 include:

- US-82/McFarland Boulevard
- 5th Street and Rice Mine Road NE
- US-43 North/ Main Avenue
- Harper Road
- SR-69 North
- Martin Road E
- Flatwoods Road between Harper Road and US-43 South



Northbound traffic backing up on Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard near 10th Street during afternoon rush hour



Northbound traffic backing up on Watermelon Road (south of US-82) during afternoon rush hour

Street Connectivity Projects

The following street connections, which are intended to create alternate routes and relieve pressure on US-82 and other major roads and intersections, are shown in Figure 5-4. The street network improvements were modeled in the 2045 Tuscaloosa Area LRTP travel demand model to evaluate their effect on traffic patterns and congestion.

Some of these connectivity projects may be planned and constructed by the City of Northport. Others may involve contributions by developers planning and constructing subdivisions in those locations.

1. Northbrook Drive

Explore the feasibility of constructing a new roadway connection from Northbrook Drive to Twin Oaks Drive then to Union Chapel. This connection would relieve strain on the intersection of McFarland Boulevard and SR-69 and the segment of SR-69 between Union Chapel Road and McFarland Boulevard. Modelling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 25,000 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 60 feet.

2. CR-62 extension

Explore the feasibility of constructing a roadway connection from SR-171 at US-43 to CR-62. This would provide an alternative for motorists now using McFarland Boulevard and US-43 to reach the western and northwestern portions of the city. Modelling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 12,400 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 60 feet.

3. Hospital Drive connector

Explore the feasibility of extending Hospital Drive south to Rice Mine Road. This would provide an alternative route for those using Rice Mine Road to travel between Northport and Tuscaloosa. Modelling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 20,800 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 60 feet.

Regional Connectivity

Northport could see traffic benefits from construction of the long-proposed Tuscaloosa Eastern Bypass. Two road projects proposed in this plan—for their benefit to Northport commuters—would help to form part of the regional bypass, which would connect from Rose Boulevard across Northport and then along the east side of Tuscaloosa to Skyland Boulevard (US-11). Connecting these local roads to the larger corridor would further enhance travel options for Northport residents and other regional commuters.

4. Flatwoods Road to Rose Boulevard

Explore the feasibility of constructing a new roadway connection from Flatwoods Road to Rose Boulevard. This connection would pull traffic away from McFarland Boulevard and its intersection with Rose Boulevard. Modelling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 1,000 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 50 feet.

5. East-west connector

Explore the feasibility of constructing a new four-lane roadway connection from SR-69 at Martin Road to US-43 at Tom Montgomery Road. This would form part of the Eastern Bypass, improving access to and through the northern parts of the city. Modelling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 55,700 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 120 feet.

6. Rose Boulevard to Tom Montgomery Road

Explore the feasibility of constructing a connection from Rose Boulevard at SR-171 to Tom Montgomery Road as part of the proposed Tuscaloosa Eastern Bypass. Modeling indicated the proposed connection would carry approximately 15,000 vehicles per day. Minimum right-of-way should be 120 feet.

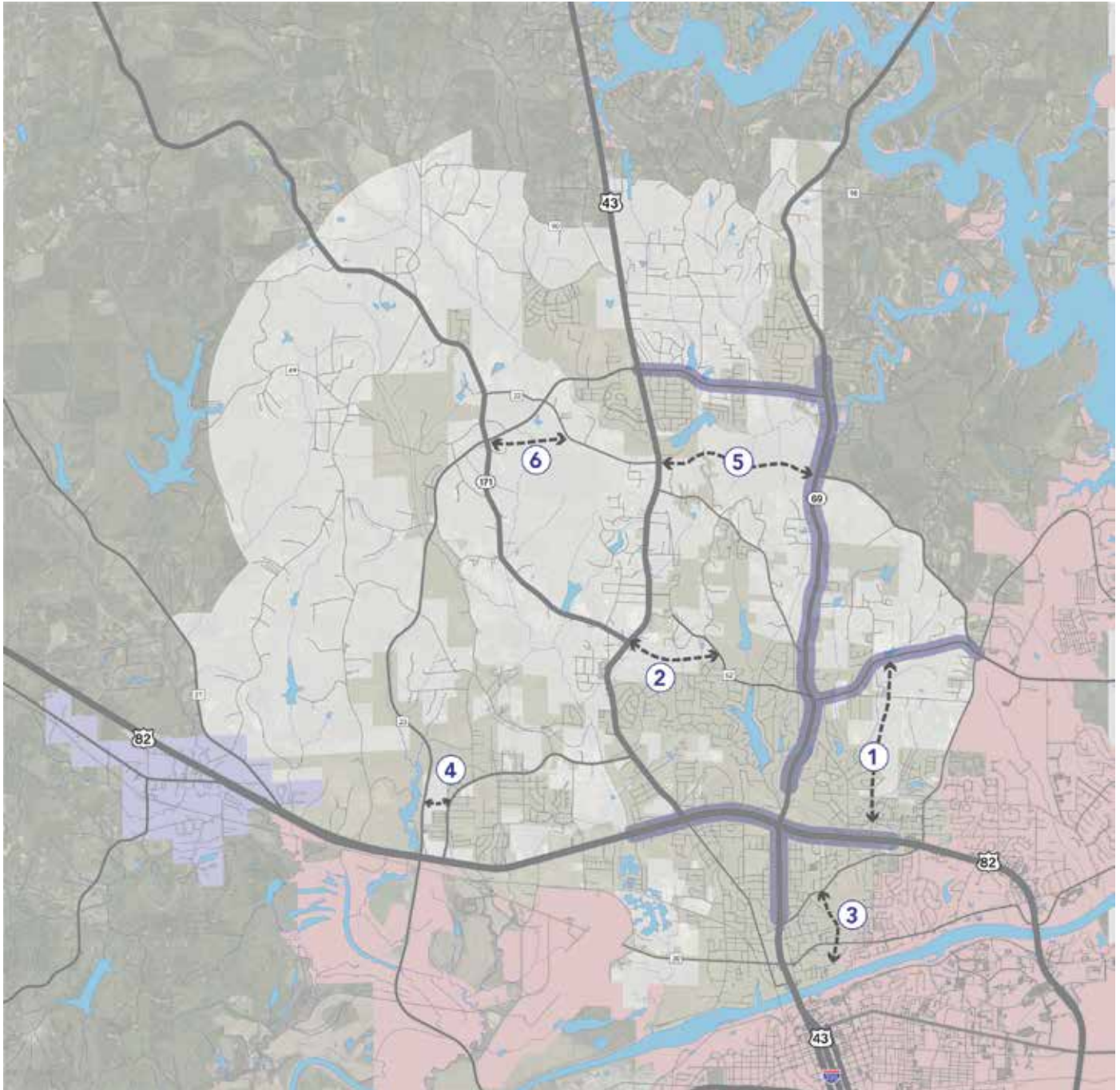


Figure 5-4 Street Network Improvements

During the planning process, residents were invited to identify locations where they experienced issues in the street network. Comments highlighted locations where participants experienced congestion, safety concerns and issues with road conditions.

As can be seen from the results of the mapping exercise, most of the places where participants noted congestion or traffic delays (indicated with red icon) occur along Northport's major roads, particularly McFarland Boulevard between US-43 and SR-69.

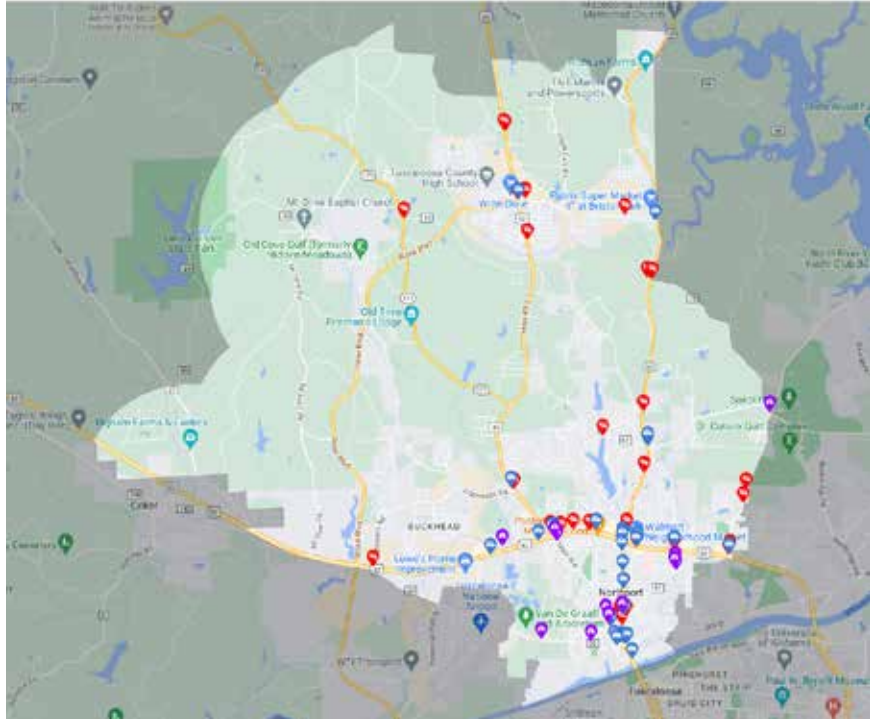


Figure 5-5 illustrates the 2045 traffic conditions taking into consideration the positive effects of the proposed local street network improvements and the Eastern Bypass. The model reveals that the improvements will help reduce congestion along several corridors, while improving east-west connectivity and providing an additional pathway to Tuscaloosa.

The modelling results also indicate that traffic patterns will change as a result of making more connections in the street network. Once other routes are created, some commuters will choose those over segments of McFarland Boulevard, SR-69 and US-43 that are already congested today. Population growth over the next twenty years will only exacerbate congestion on those routes and at their intersections without network improvements. While Figure 5-5 shows that segments of major roads like McFarland Boulevard will continue to experience congestion during peak periods, some segments will see improved traffic flow despite higher overall traffic counts projected in 2045.

As an example of how overall traffic patterns will change, use of Union Chapel Road as a route to travel between Northport and Tuscaloosa will increase during peak periods. Related improvements, such as connecting CR-62 to US-43 and SR-171, will expand the areas of the city that can be reached by way of Union Chapel Road. As a result, traffic volumes on Union Chapel will increase to the point widening may be needed.

Notably, current congestion levels along Main Avenue south of McFarland Boulevard and on Watermelon Road south of Union Chapel Road are projected to decrease as a result of street network improvements and the changing travel patterns they induce.

Construction of the proposed bypass is projected to reduce congestion levels on US-43, US-82, and Main Street. However, improvements to SR-69 would still be required to meet future travel demand with or without the bypass.

Traffic volumes projected for the Hospital Drive and Northbrook Drive extensions indicate the latent demand for these alternate routes.

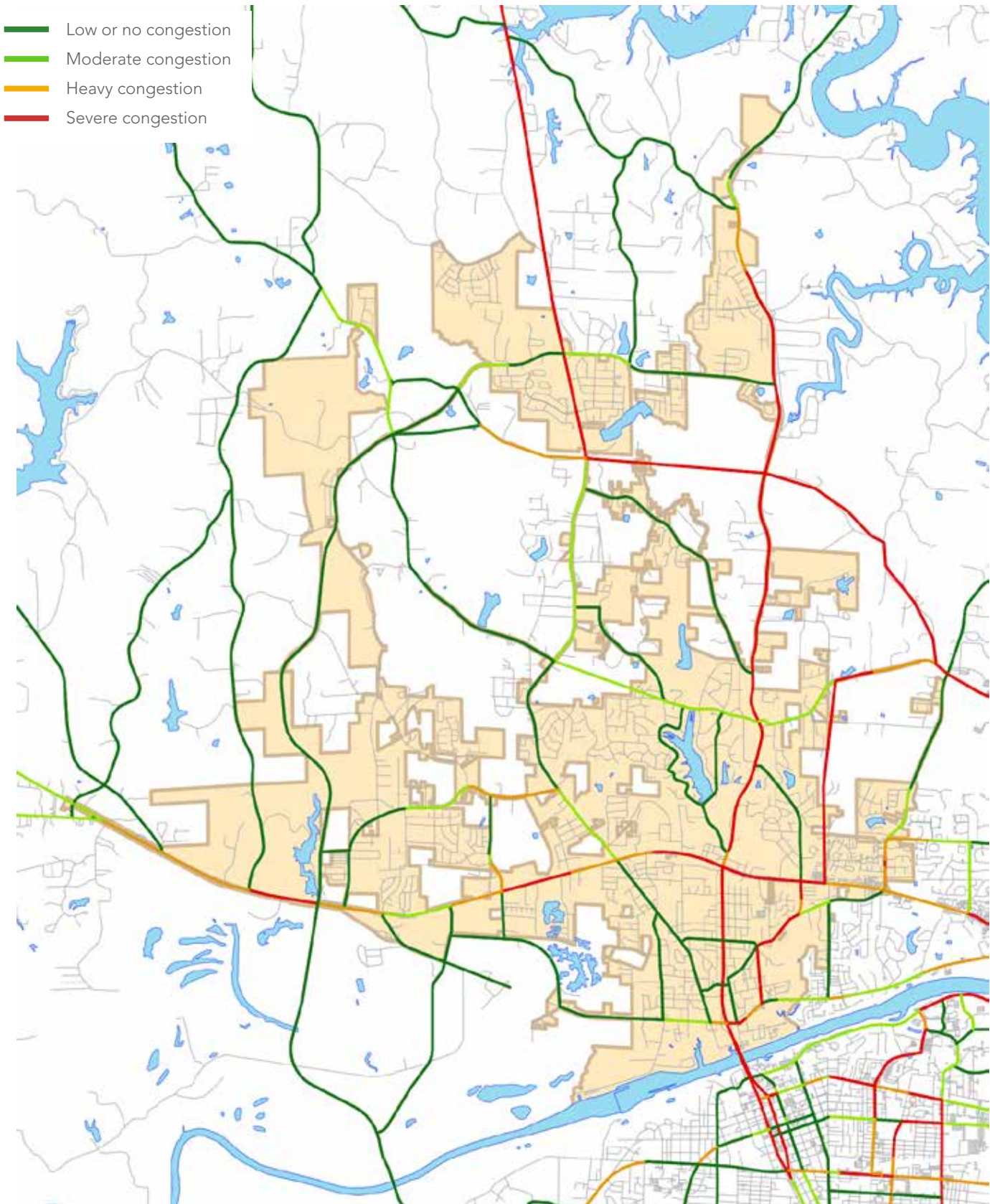


Figure 5-5 2045 Projected Congestion with Network Improvements

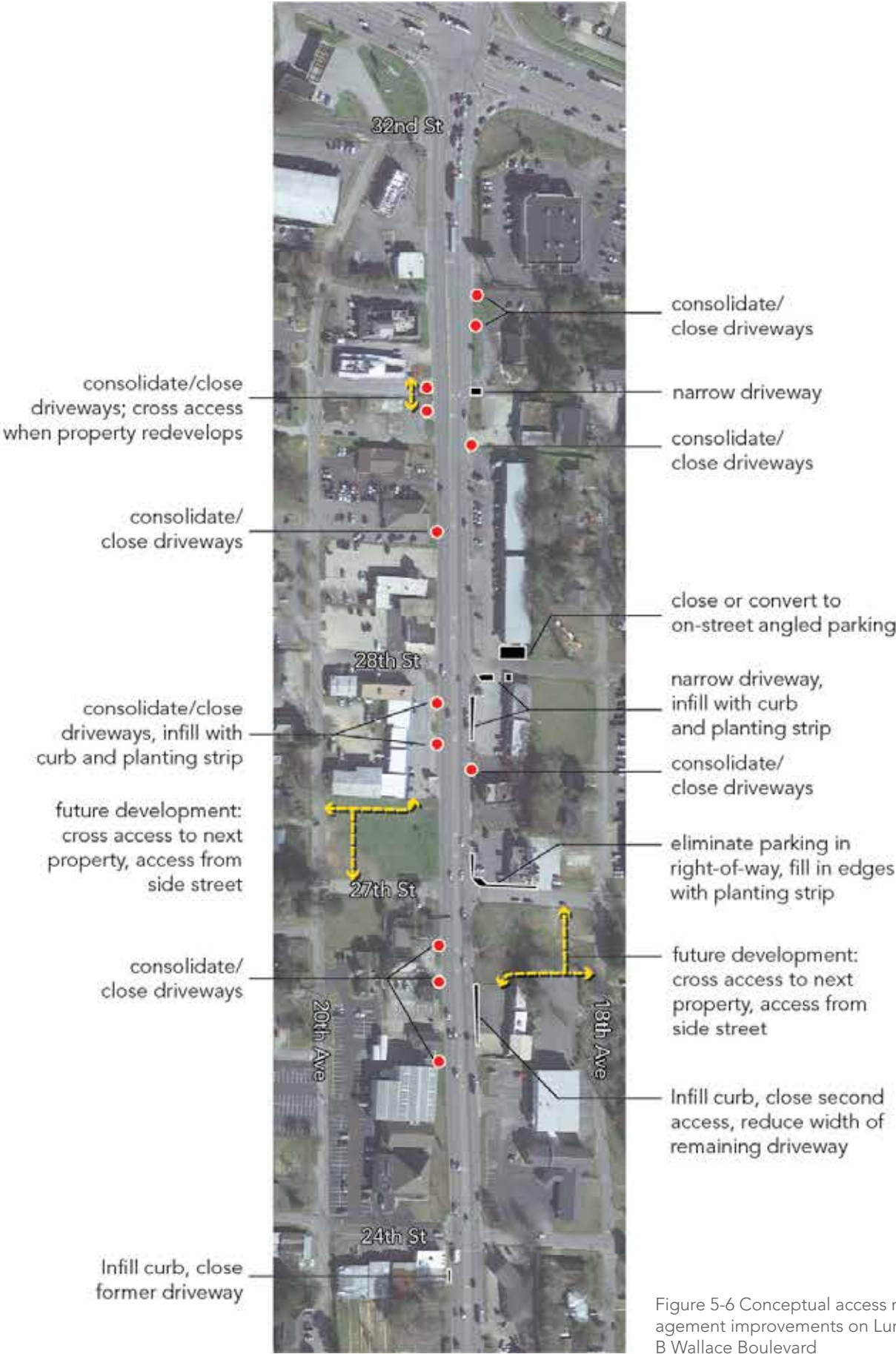


Figure 5-6 Conceptual access management improvements on Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard

Capacity Projects

The 2045 Tuscaloosa Area Long Range Transportation Plan lists two previous capacity projects and one planned capacity project in the Northport area that will have an impact on future traffic conditions in the City. That project includes construction of a parkway parallel to Carrolls Creek from US-43 to SR-69 at Martin Road and improvements to Martin Road from SR-69 to Watermelon Road. The future roadway described in that MPO project is the East-West connector shown in Figure 5-4.

Figure 5-4 highlights several corridors where increasing capacity, preserving existing capacity through access management improvements, or a combination of these will be needed to ease growing traffic concerns. These include:

- McFarland Boulevard (US-82).** Various improvements are underway as of the writing of this plan. Once complete, continued implementation of access management policies and standards and construction of additional access management improvements, e.g., closing, combining or relocating existing driveways, will be necessary to maintain capacity of the improved roadway and increase safety.
- Union Chapel Road (CR-62).** As growth has occurred in the northeastern parts of the city, use of Union Chapel Road as a commuter route has increased. Modelling indicates that use of the two-lane roadway will grow substantially, particularly once street network connections are made. Ultimately, this corridor should be widened to add lanes. In the interim, turn lanes and acceleration lanes should be added with any new developments so that drivers entering and leaving the roadway do not bog down through traffic.
- SR-69.** This two-lane roadway is already experiencing congestion on its northern and southern ends. Continued local growth over the next twenty years will only worsen on SR-69 unless the roadway is widened and lanes added. In addition, proposed street network improvements are expected to further increase use of the roadway between Martin Road and Union Chapel Road.
- Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard (US-43).** Closing, combining, and relocating driveways and other access management improvements along this corridor will help preserve traffic capacity and make access to businesses and cross streets safer. Such improvements can afford more area for landscaping and sidewalks to improve the corridor's image and increase pedestrian accessibility. The types of improvements that can be made to the corridor are illustrated in Figure 5-6.
- Mitt Lary Road.** Ongoing residential growth combined with business development at the road's intersections with US-43 and SR-69 have forced considerable traffic onto the roadway. While much of the corridor is already developed, subdivision construction in any remaining areas should provide right turn and acceleration lanes to limit impacts on traffic flow. Network connectivity improvements are expected to alleviate some strain on the roadway.

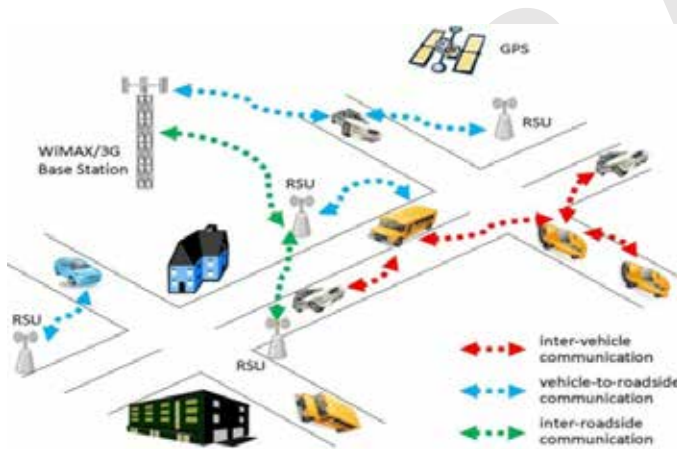


Two transportation projects are currently in design phase that will improve travel on existing roadways: Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard (including replacement of the bridge shown above) and US-43 from Mitt Lary Road to Paul Howell Road.

System Management and Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Projects

Additional recommendations to help manage vehicular traffic include:

- **Traffic Signal Optimization.** Develop and implement a citywide signal timing program in conjunction with the regional transportation operations program (RTOP). Re-timing every three years is optimal.
- **School Traffic Management Plans.** Conduct a detailed traffic study and traffic management plan for each public school within the City of Northport.
- **Neighborhood Traffic Management Plans.** Conduct neighborhood traffic management plans for neighborhoods with documented traffic concerns.
- Install fiber optic cable for traffic signal communication and other ITS applications along key corridors such as US-82, US-43, and SR-69 if not already installed.



Global Transportation Strategies

The following are general strategies that should be implemented to address existing transportation deficiencies and position the City for future growth.

Develop Street Networks in New Growth Areas

The Comprehensive Plan outlines several major growth areas. As they develop, it will be important to plan for and construct a local street system to provide access as well as to disperse traffic in a balanced, less concentrated fashion. Plans for subdivisions and other large developments should designate a hierarchy of streets (alley, local, collector, and major collector) sufficient to support the vision for land use and density. Street connectivity should increase with the density of development.

HIGH

Street Network Connectivity

LOW



Maintain System Integrity

System maintenance includes managing items associated with roadway performance such as pavement, drainage, markings, signage, and traffic signals. A regular assessment of operational performance on the major roadways helps identify low-cost improvements as well as higher-cost projects that may take years to plan and implement. Proactive pavement management and signal timing programs are excellent building blocks for a system preservation program.

Be Sensitive to Roadside Contexts

Throughout the planning process, citizens expressed concerns about maintaining Northport's quality of life. Perceptions about quality of life and aesthetics are often heavily influenced by transportation facilities. Throughout the United States one can find numerous examples of roadways that were "improved" to increase capacity and travel speed but did significant damage to the appearance and quality of the community. Mobility is not the only consideration—roadside context must be taken into account when making transportation decisions to protect, if not improve, the community's character. Transportation decision-making should consider a wide range of issues: community values, environmental impacts, aesthetics, cost, and mobility for all modes. A collaborative public process enables broad consideration of the impacts and opportunities created by potential transportation projects.

Consider All Transportation Users

The City has been proactive in pushing for consideration of pedestrian accommodations in recent subdivision developments. It is recommended that Northport develop a Complete Streets resolution to guide developers on the appropriate typical sections (including number and width of vehicle lanes, bicycle facilities, buffer zones, sidewalks, and/or parking lanes) required for future development based on the magnitude, location, and land use of the proposed development. "Complete Streets" is a name adopted by the National Complete Streets Coalition to describe a process of planning and design that considers the entire roadway area (travelway, shoulders, and adjacent space) and all potential users.

Manage Access to Major Roads

Access management is the planning, design, and implementation of land use and transportation strategies to maintain traffic flow and safety along primary roadways, while considering access needs of various land uses and development types. Allowing unlimited or unrestricted access to roadside development eventually degrades the carrying capacity and safety of the roadway. By managing roadway access however, a governing agency can increase safety, extend the functional life of major roads, reduce congestion, support alternative modes of travel, and improve the built environment. It is recommended that the City designate several important roadways as "access management corridors" where the City would design and construct access improvements and/or enforce access management standards as properties are re-developed over time.

Support Alternative Modes of Travel

Northport currently offers limited choices for travel other than by private vehicle. There is a modest network of sidewalks, even fewer acceptable bicycle routes and no fixed route transit service. Encouraging the design and construction of new bicycle and pedestrian facilities is an excellent way to support and encourage citizens to make alternative choices for their transportation. One potential way to encourage the use of public transportation would be to implement microtransit service and provide connections to Tuscaloosa Transit and the University of Alabama shuttle bus service.



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PROJECTS

Northport has grown to cover roughly 20 square miles—and up until the last few years, much of the city developed without sidewalks. As evidenced by community input, residents want a more walkable city. Given the amount of the city that does not have sidewalks, the community must be strategic in planning and investing in pedestrian improvements.

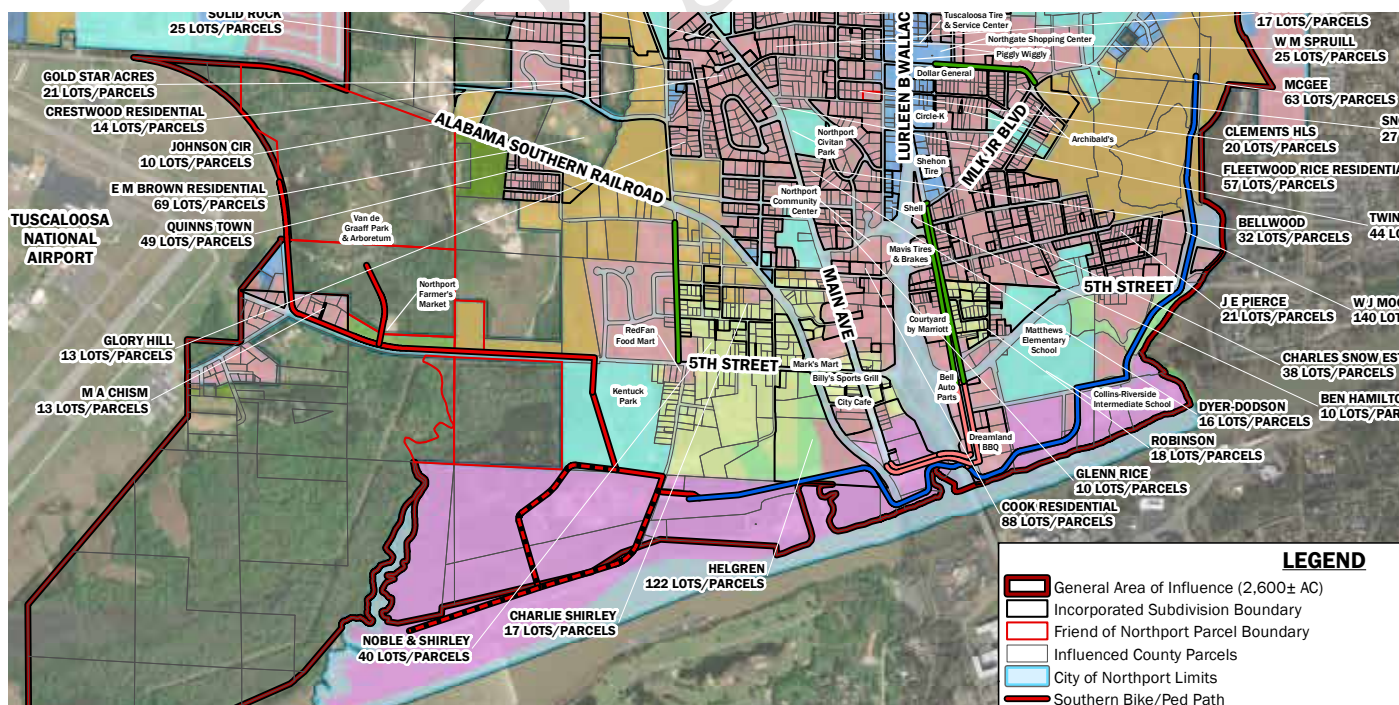
Improving pedestrian and bicycle accessibility from neighborhoods to parks, schools and other community destinations can encourage walking and bicycling and chip away at vehicular travel for some local trips. Walking and bicycling are also enjoyed as forms of recreation, and so sidewalks trails and bicycle accommodations should be considered as part of the city's recreational system. Interconnecting downtown, the riverfront, parks and local business areas can also contribute to tourism and economic development more broadly.

General Recommendations

In addition to requiring sidewalks in new development, already developed areas also need to be considered. Adding sidewalks to existing streets can be difficult, time-consuming and expensive. This is made more daunting considering the number of road miles in the city without sidewalks.

Improving pedestrian infrastructure citywide must be approached incrementally. The City has begun this process with evaluating and identifying several initial priorities through the Northern and Southern Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans. The plan for the northern area emphasized connecting neighborhoods to nearby schools. The plan for the southern area focuses on projects that will improve connectivity to Kentuck Park, downtown, the Levee Trail and surrounding areas. As reflected in these plans, connecting neighborhoods to schools and parks should be a top priority.

Off-street routes may be more appropriate or feasible in some cases than adding sidewalks to existing streets. Off-street routes, when available, should be designed as shared-use paths—accessible facilities that are designed for use by bicyclists and pedestrians alike.



Excerpt from the Southern Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

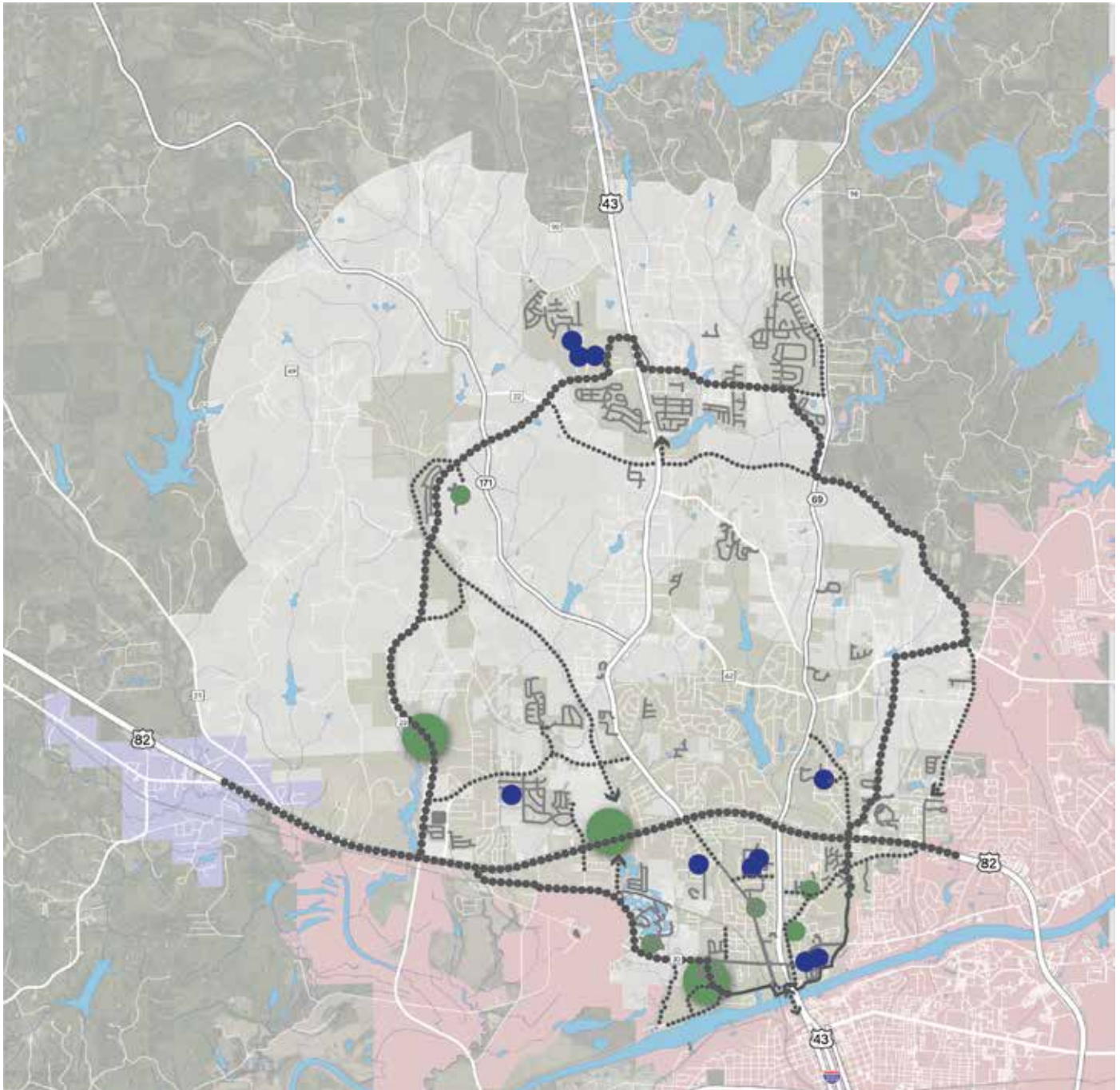


Figure 5-7 Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements

A citywide trail system can connect neighborhoods to schools, parks and other destinations. Small recreational areas can be placed at strategic points along trails.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Project Concepts

The following projects are recommended to support bicycle and pedestrian mobility and are illustrated in Figure 5-7. The routes described in this plan are conceptual. Further investigation and design will determine their alignment and whether and what type of bicycle accommodations are feasible.

1. Citywide Loop

Develop a citywide bicycle/pedestrian loop that begins and ends with the Levee Trail. Figure 5-7 demonstrates this proposed loop as a combination of on-and-off road elements that links projects from the North and South Bicycle-Pedestrian Plans, the future Adventure Park, Kentuck Park and other community features. Planning for each segment should include an analysis to identify challenges related to steep grades around waterways, environmental impacts, and overall constructability.

2. Priority Connections

Special emphasis should be given to the improvement of connectivity around schools (e.g., Flatwoods Road, Hunter Creek Road, and 23rd Street), around parks, and near Main Avenue and Bridge Avenue. Connections to schools will typically be sidewalks but can also include off-street walkways or shared-use paths.

During the planning process, residents were invited to identify locations where they felt pedestrian or bicycle facilities were needed. Red icons indicate bicycle facilities. Blue icons indicate pedestrian facilities.

Comments reflected an interest in having bicycle facilities along some of Northport's major roads for recreational bicycling. Sidewalks and other pedestrian accommodations are desired mostly in the southern portion of the City and around several schools.

3. New Roadways

Include bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities in the design of future roadway connections (e.g., Northbrook Drive extension, East-West connector, and CR-62 to SR-171 connector). Some of these routes can help complete sections of the citywide loop.

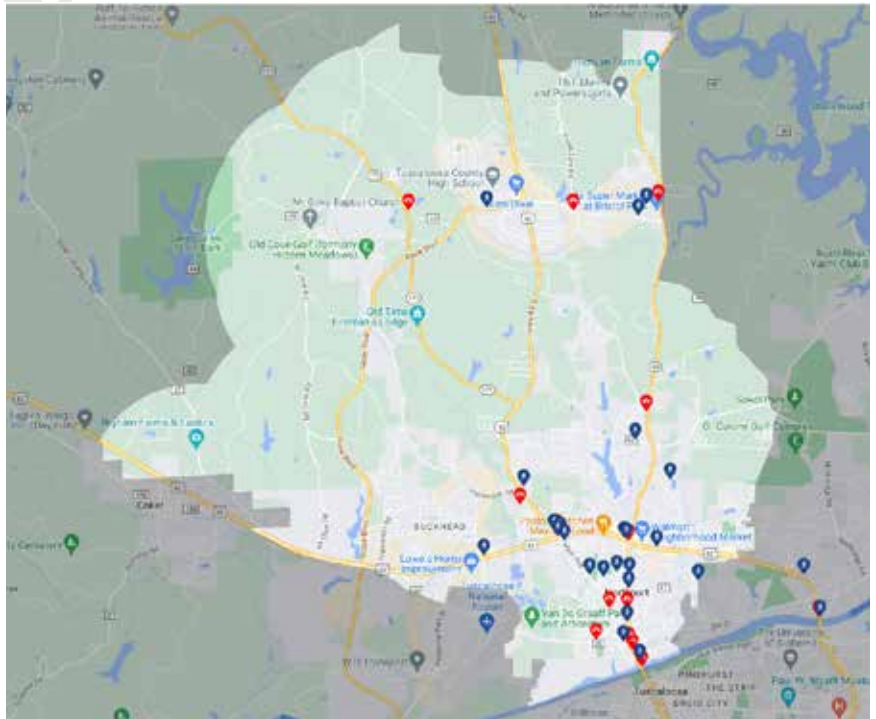
4. On-street Bicycle Accommodations

Evaluate further and pursue funding, as appropriate, for previously proposed projects in the 2020 Tuscaloosa Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, including installation of bike lanes on Main Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard and signed bicycle routes on local streets.

5. River Crossing

Partner with City of Tuscaloosa to devise a way for bicyclists and pedestrians to cross the river between Downtown Northport and Downtown Tuscaloosa

In addition, sidewalks and other on-street facilities should be considered whenever an existing roadway is to be widened or access management improvements made along it. Whenever a future development or subdivision occurs in an area where a trail or shared use path has been proposed, the facility should be required as part of the development.





Residential sidewalks should be wide enough to allow two people to walk side by side or to pass one another without one having to give way to the other. Residential sidewalks should be set back from the curb by a “planting strip.” This separates pedestrians from traffic, which makes walking feel safer. In higher density development, the planting strip should be wide enough—at least five feet—for street trees, which offer shade and another buffer from traffic. Tree species must be selected appropriately and a root barrier provided to prevent damage to sidewalks, curbs and utilities.



Urban sidewalks in downtown and mixed-use environments vary in width and often extend to the curb, particularly when on-street parking is present. Trees (planted in tree wells), parking meters, waste receptacles, news stands, street lights and other street furnishings are located along the outer edge separating activity on the sidewalk from the street. If wide enough, these sidewalks can accommodate outdoor dining alongside building fronts and/or in the furnishing zone. They may be surfaced with concrete, decorative pavers or some combination of surface treatments.



Shared-use paths are paved paths wide enough for use by bicyclists and pedestrians—ten feet or more. They may be located alongside roads taking the place of conventional sidewalks, or they may be located in rights-of-way or easements away from streets. If located along a street, they should be separated from the street edge by a planting strip. Off-street routes are sometimes the best option to link areas without sidewalks to nearby destinations or other parts of the bicycle-pedestrian system. Shared-use paths can be concrete or asphalt and sometimes have a center line stripe.



Bicycle lanes are space within the roadway reserved for use by bicycles. They are located at the outer edge of the travelway and should have a horizontal clear space of about five feet (between the curb or edge of pavement and the outside vehicular travel lane). Bike lanes may be “protected” from vehicular traffic by bollards or raised curbs. They are typically designed with one lane on each side of the street though in some circumstances, they may need to be located together on one side of the street.



Sharrows or “shared lanes” are lanes within the roadway that are for use by motorized vehicles and bicycles. Sharrows are typically installed on existing streets where there is insufficient width to provide full-width bicycle lanes. They provide less protection for cyclists than bicycle lanes but can be appropriate on lower-speed (35 mph or less) streets in urban contexts and in residential areas.

MULTI-MODAL COMMUNITY

To accommodate Northport's continued growth and future increases in traffic, this plan identifies street connectivity improvements that will help distribute traffic away from already congested corridors. Even with these improvements accomplished, traffic will increase to an extent on some roadways—ones that are not currently congested, that capacity improvements will become desirable if not ultimately necessary. Capacity projects—widening and adding lanes—on existing roadways are often difficult, expensive and can take many years to complete. Some of the roadways that will need additional capacity are under state or county control. The City may need to consider other strategies to improve mobility and manage traffic across the community.

Carpool/Shuttle Service

Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data was processed for the City of Northport. This data illustrated that the vast majority of Northport residents commute outside of the city to work. The City should consider implementing carpool and/or shuttle service between Northport and Downtown Tuscaloosa/The University of Alabama.

Micro-Transit

Implement micro-transit service to potentially improve the vehicle mode share in the city. The micro-transit service is commonly used to bridge the gap between individual private transportation and public mass transit. Micro-transit is often used to expand the geographic and demographic reach within a city by serving populations that are low-density, low income, and those that lack other reliable transportation options.



Park and Ride

Coordinate with the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization to establish one or two park and ride lots at locations in Northport to support potential car-pool/shuttle service between Northport and Tuscaloosa.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

Improve the existing trail system to provide more local connections between residential neighborhoods and schools, parks, business areas and other destinations. These improvements could reduce the vehicle mode share in the city by reducing the number of short vehicle trips.

Local Employment

Improve the balance between local jobs and housing. Adding more higher paying jobs within the city could be the most practical, direct way to address future travel demand. Reducing the number of trips in and out of Northport during commuter peak hours is compatible with the City's future growth plans and economic development opportunities.

Roundabouts

Explore use of roundabouts at select locations to improve safety and mobility. At some intersections, roundabouts can improve traffic flow more than conventional stops and signals. Roundabouts also avoid the long-term costs of signal maintenance and signal failure during power outages.



Truck Traffic

In coordination with the City of Tuscaloosa, develop wayfinding systems and designated truck routes to direct trucks to the industrial areas in southwest Northport and around the Tuscaloosa Airport to minimize heavy truck traffic through Downtown Northport.

DOWNTOWN PARKING

A parking analysis was performed for Downtown Northport during the planning process. This study included analysis of the existing parking patterns to determine the occupancy and turnover characteristics for standard weekday and Saturday periods. The study included on-street parking along Main Avenue, 22nd Avenue, and 4th Street and the North Lot, located approximately 250 feet north of 5th Street (see Figure 5-8).

The parking inventory was conducted in April 2023 and during Kentuck Art Night in May 2023. During weekday lunch and Saturday dinner peak periods, the occupancy rates for both on-street and off-street parking were observed to be well below the optimal utilization threshold of 85% (see Table 5-1). This implies that sufficient parking is available in the downtown area for the peak weekday lunch and Saturday dinner periods. Turnover rates show that most of the vehicles parking for only a short period are able to use on-street parking options, which is desirable. The weekday lunch period indicates both a higher occupancy rate and higher turnover rate than the Saturday dinner period. It should be noted that there were more businesses open during the weekday lunch period than the weekend dinner period.



Figure 5-8 Parking Study Area

Table 5-1 Downtown Parking Utilization

Location	Supply	Occupancy Rate			Turnover Rate		
		Weekday Lunch	Saturday Dinner	Art Night	Weekday Lunch	Saturday Dinner	Art Night
Main Avenue	131	51%	35%	49%	1.6	1.1	1.1
22nd Avenue	9	30%	15%	11%	1.0	0.3	0.1
4th Street	10	52%	0%	12%	1.5	0.0	0.4
North Lot	34	26%	3%	92%	0.4	0.0	1.3
All Public Parking	184	45%	27%	53%	1.3	0.8	1.0

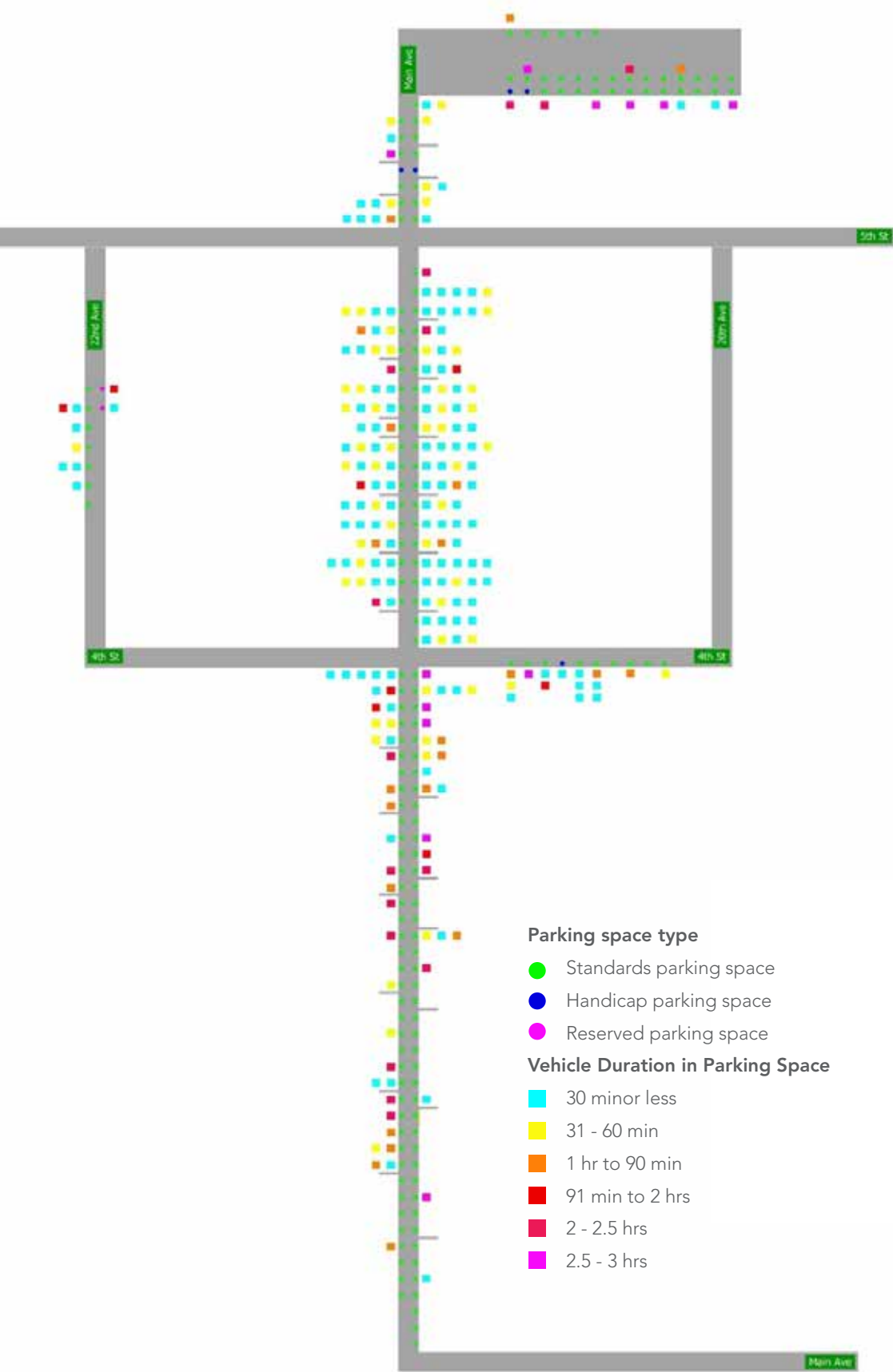


Figure 5-9 Weekday Lunch Parking Utilization

Kentuck Art Night had the highest parking occupancy rate at 53%, due to the 92% off-street occupancy at the North Lot for attendees of the event. The on-street occupancy (44%) was comparable to that of the weekday lunch period (49%). Once the North Lot was full, Art Night attendees utilized on-street parking. In addition, a total of seven different vehicles parked in the grass area adjacent to the North Lot during the Art Night observation period.



The combined occupancy and turnover rates illustrate that there is sufficient parking supply to meet current demand in the downtown area. While the analysis indicates that, overall, there is sufficient parking available, there are several strategies and improvements the City could consider to improve the visibility, safety and utilization of public parking as downtown continues to grow and revitalize:

- Add signage at parking lot entrances to delineate whether specific lots are for public or private use.
- Add wayfinding signage along Main Avenue, 5th Street, 20th Avenue, 4th Street, and 22nd Avenue to direct drivers to public parking areas.
- Modify the entrance/exit of the North Lot to allow incoming and outgoing traffic to have separate lanes. The existing configuration has traffic sharing one lane. This occurs primarily during Art Night, when the North Lot is full, but drivers are still circulating through the lot.
- Add a designated crosswalk near the intersection of 4th Street at Main Avenue.
- Purchase and pave the existing gravel lot on the southwest corner of 4th Street and Main Avenue; paving and striping parking spaces in this lot would improve the parking capacity and circulation at this location.



The images above compare the walking distances for parking areas at a big box retail development and in Downtown Northport.

DRAFT





NORTHPORT
compass

DOWNTOWN + RIVERFRONT



INTRODUCTION

This section of the Comprehensive Plan updates elements of the 2008 Downtown and Riverfront Plan. Many of the concepts and principles established in the 2008 plan remain valid. It is not intended that this section replace the previous plan in its entirety.

The following additional areas were incorporated into the update:

- properties fronting on the north side of 10th Street between Main Avenue and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard
- properties fronting on the east side of Bridge Avenue between Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and 8th Street
- the former site of the Sprayberry Center (owned by the Tuscaloosa County Board of Education) on Rice Mine Road and adjoining properties fronting on 15th Avenue

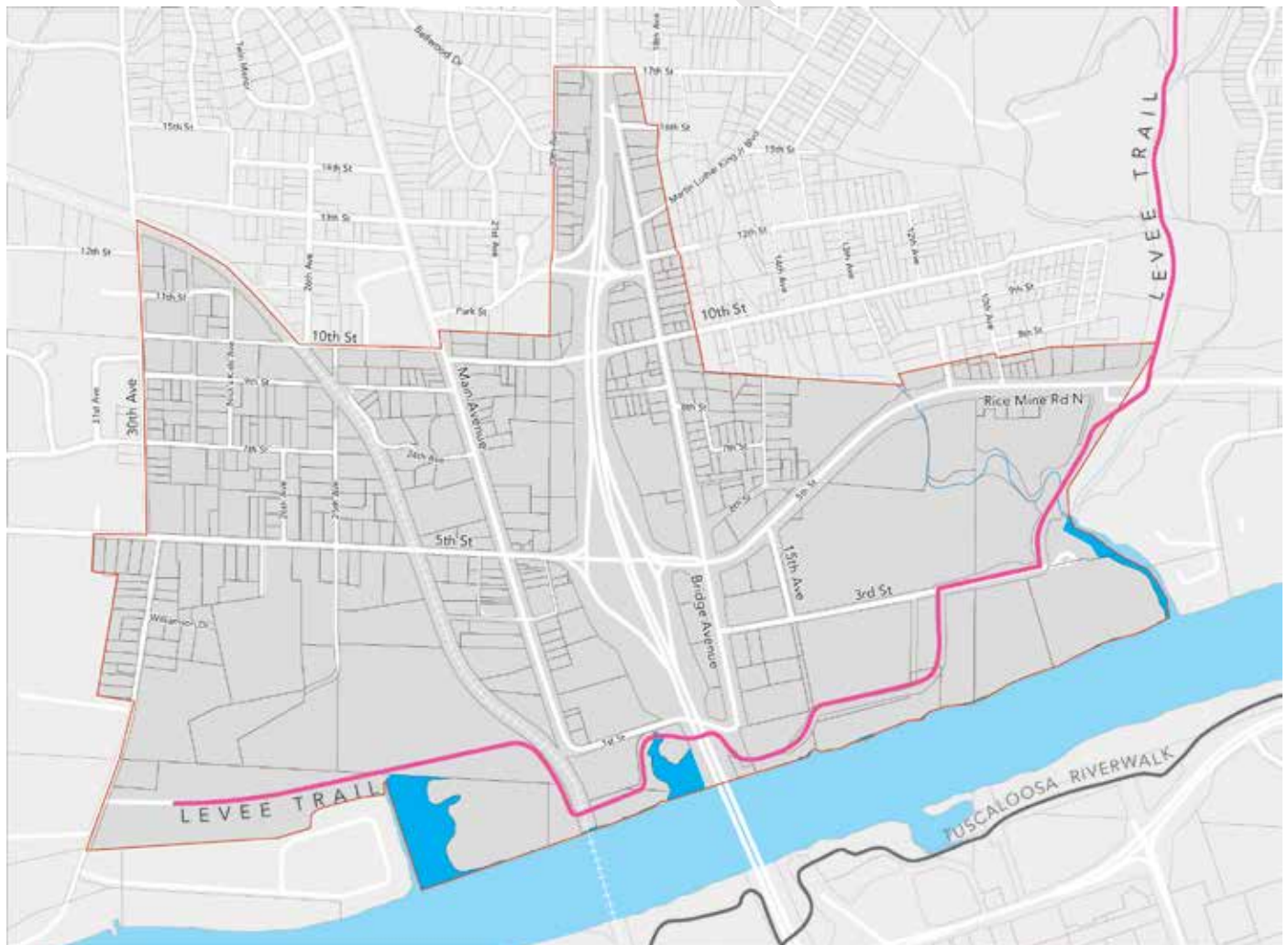
VISION

Two meetings were held to gather input from the community to refresh the vision, goals and strategies for the downtown and riverfront areas. Those included a focus group meeting for stakeholders and a public meeting.

Focus Group Summary

The focus group meeting was held at the Civitan Building on May 2, 2023 and included merchants and business and property owners from the downtown and riverfront areas. This conversation emphasized that, while change has occurred in the intervening years, several of the issues highlighted in the 2008 plan remain: limited parking, truck traffic, and high traffic volumes in the historic core that make crossing the street difficult. Stakeholders noted that resolving these will be important to the future of downtown and the riverfront, as well as business recruitment, improvements to area schools, and reinvestment in vacant and underutilized properties.

Figure 6-1 Downtown and Riverfront Plan Area



Public Meeting Summary

On May 22 a community-wide planning meeting was held at Northport City Hall. The following is a summary of participants' input.

What is missing in the downtown area?

coffee shop, bike racks, water fountains, public art, EV charging stations, green space, mixed-use building with retail business on ground floor, parking deck, more varied restaurants, entertainment, ADA accommodations, adequate utilities infrastructure

What opportunities does the "east side" present?

walkable connections, housing (east of Bridge Avenue), luxury condominiums overlooking the river, a food hall similar to Ponce City Market (Atlanta), relocate the schools for new development, an amphitheater, an aquarium, businesses that serve/draw commuters, a specialty grocery

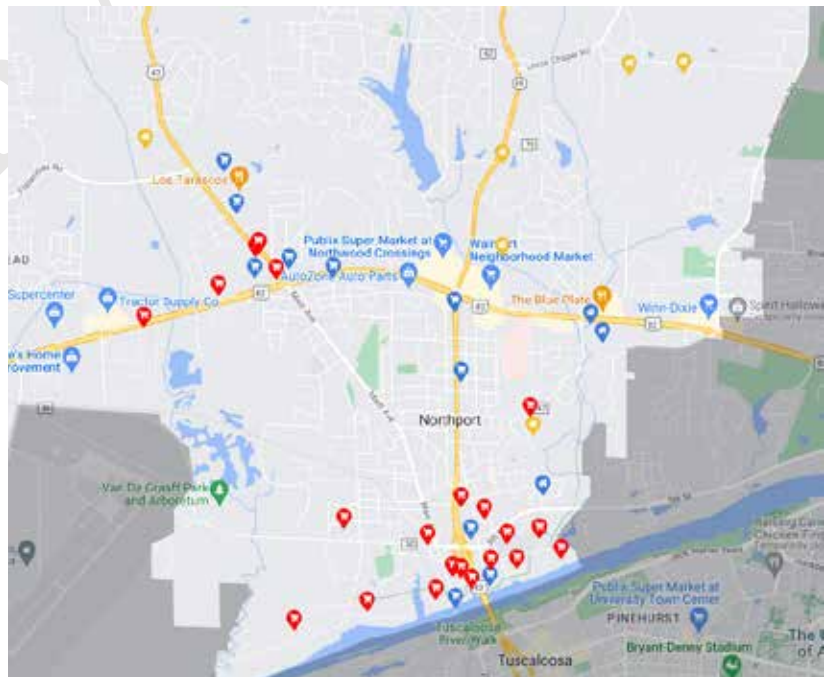
Meeting participants identified the Cullman Warehouse District as a model of the development they envision for the downtown area east of Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard.

How can Northport take greater advantage of the river as an asset?

nature park west of the trestle that gets you closer to the river, unified lighting and streetscape improvements, selective clearing to make the river more visible, recreating a historic bridge, pedestrian bridge over the river, pedestrian ferry, chairlift/gondola over the river, micro-brewery along the river, boat dock, large paddleboat for tours and special events

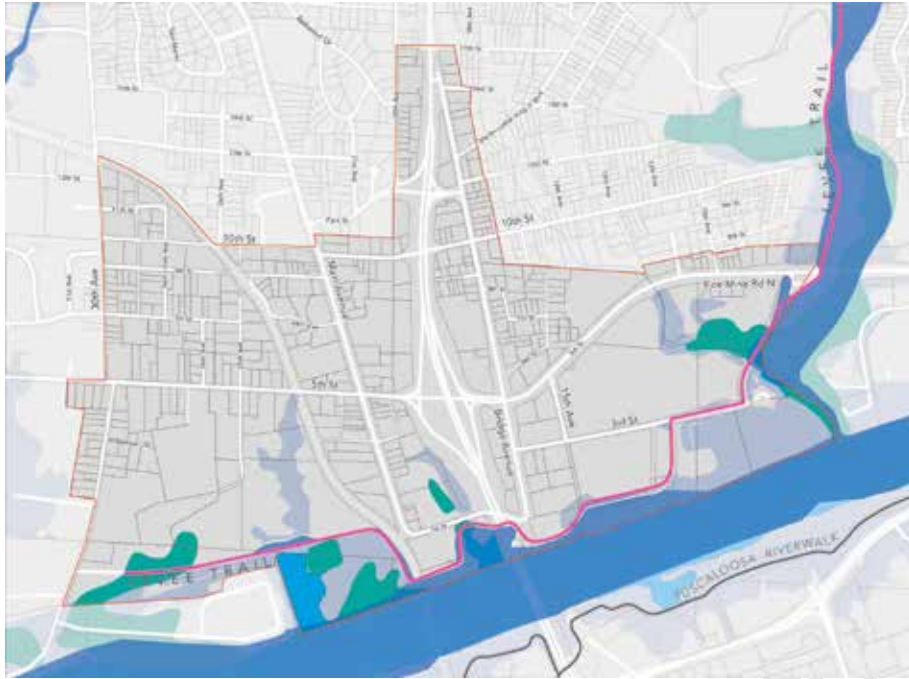


A former factory turned shopping and entertainment hub in Franklin, Tennessee was suggested as an example of the types of development opportunities for the "east side."



As part of the community engagement process, residents participated in an online mapping exercise to identify locations in the city where they wanted to see more business development and reinvestment in existing business areas. As shown in the map above, many participants identified locations in the downtown and riverfront area where they would like to see more development and reinvestment.

Figure 6-2 Flood zones and wetlands



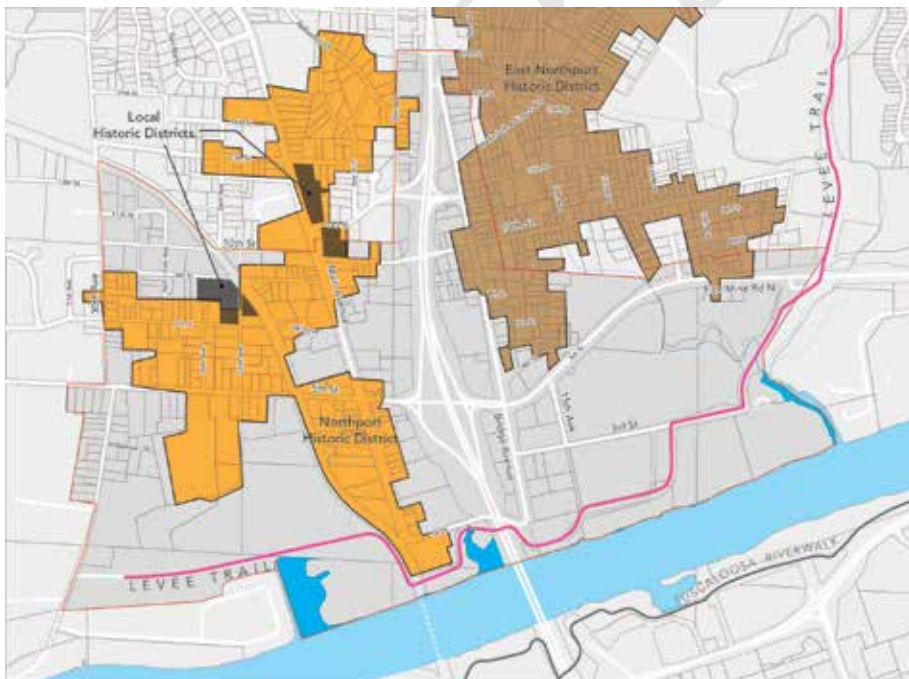
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Floodplains and Wetlands

Wetlands and areas subject to flooding occur primarily along the Black Warrior River to the south and along Twomile Creek to the east. As a result of levee improvements, some areas inland from the levee may be less at risk of flooding or may no longer be classified as wetlands.

- Wetland
- Floodway
- Flood zone A, AE (100-year floodplain)

Figure 6-3 National and local historic districts



Historic Districts

Within and adjacent to downtown are two areas on the National Register of Historic Places: the Northport Historic District and the East Northport Historic District. The National Register designations do not come with regulations on properties or buildings except for projects that involve federal funding. However, reinvestment in historic buildings are eligible for tax credits if they meet standards established by the Secretary of the Interior.

The City has designated two local districts, in which building projects must be approved by the Northport Historic Preservation Commission.

Figure 6-4 Existing development



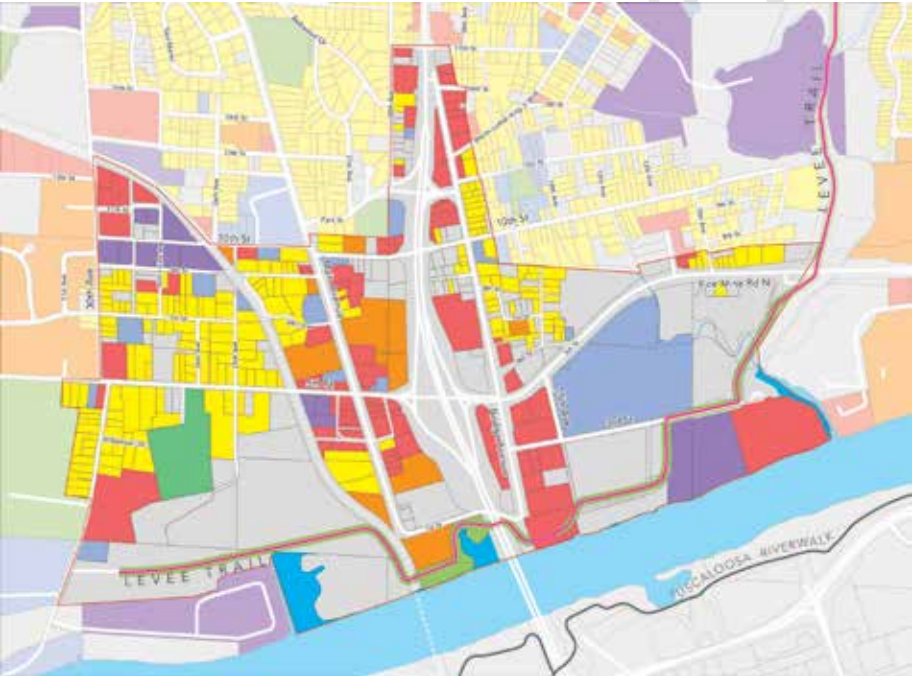
Development

As can be seen in the figure-ground map at left, development in the downtown and riverfront area is somewhat sporadic. Buildings are most heavily concentrated around the intersection of Fifth Street and Main Avenue.

Due in part to the construction and widening of Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard over time, the development pattern on the west side of Bridge Avenue is quite different from that on the east side.

Despite availability of land that is not constrained by flooding or wetlands, the southern half of the study area is relatively undeveloped.

Figure 6-5 Existing land uses



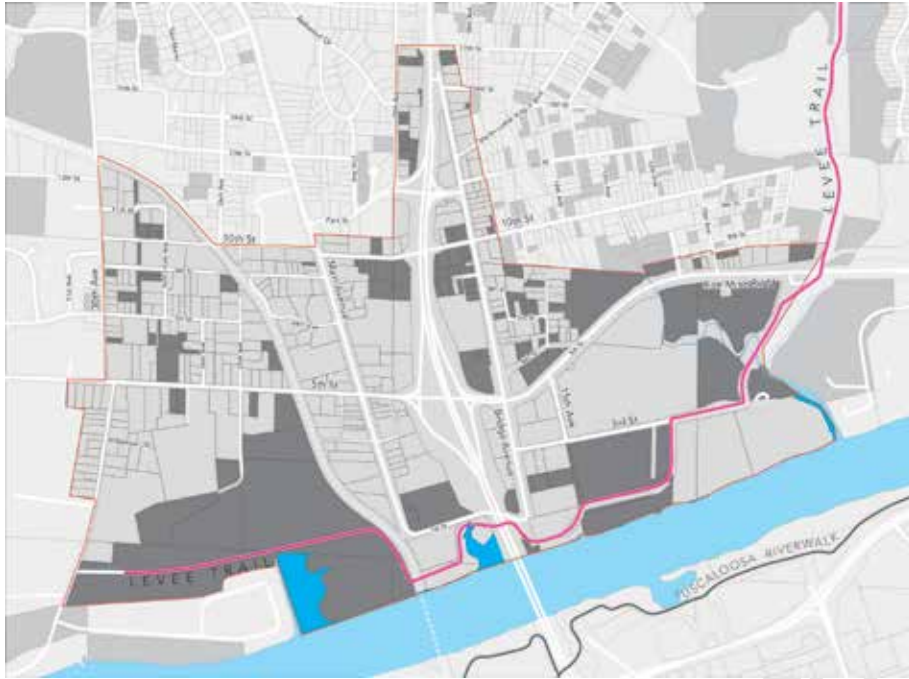
Existing Land Uses

A variety of activities occur in the downtown and riverfront area—businesses, industries, housing, schools and churches.

The businesses in the downtown core make up only a small part of the overall study area.

- Single-family residential
- Multifamily residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Open Space

Figure 6-6 Vacant land

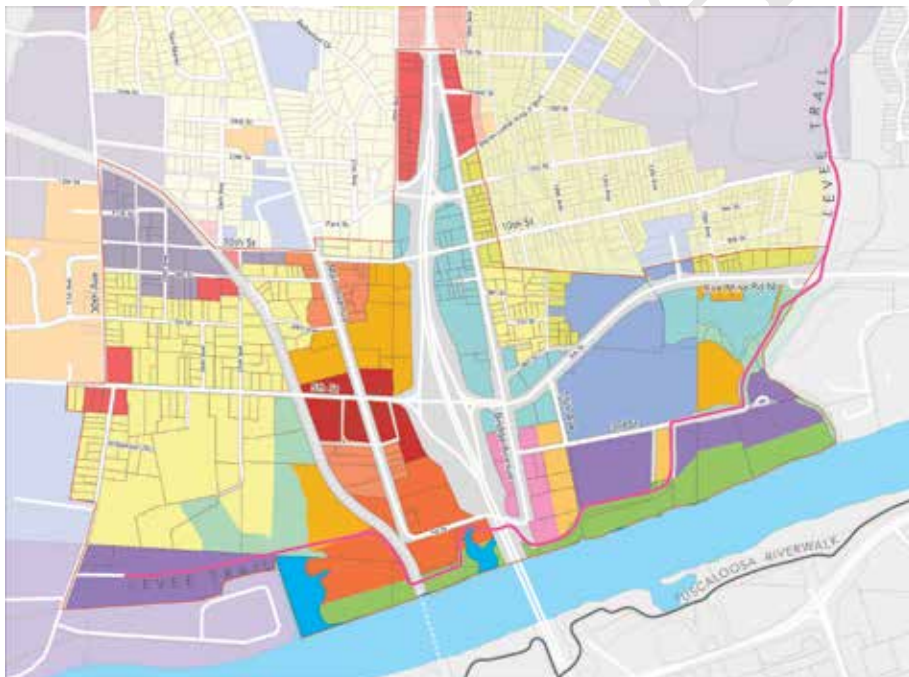


Vacant Land

There are several large vacant sites and clusters of undeveloped property throughout the study area, some of which are in strategic locations, such as the intersection of Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard and 10th Street, 3.5 acres on Main Avenue and First Street, a 5.5-acre property on Rice Mine Road owned by the Board of Education and an 8.2-acre property along the Levee Trail owned by the Northport Housing Authority.

The City owns multiple properties west of the railroad trestle, a portion of which is proposed to become a natural park area with paths branching off of the Levee Trail.

Figure 6-6 Existing zoning



Zoning

After the 2008 plan was approved, the City added several new zoning designations that were applied to downtown and riverfront properties. These included mixed-use districts along Main and Bridge Avenue, three residential districts, a “working riverfront” designation and two conservation/open space categories. Each district has its own permitted uses and development standards based on the design concepts in the 2008 plan.

This map includes rezonings that have taken place since adoption of the 2008 Plan.

 Historic Downtown Core	 Bridge Ave South	 Neighborhood Center	 Multifamily Housing
 South Main Riverfront	 Bridge Ave North	 New Urban N'hood	 Conservation
 Residential, Comm. and Inst.	 Working Riverfront	 Historic Neighborhood	 River's Edge

2008 Plan

The Downtown and Riverfront Plan envisioned ways in which development adjacent to the historic downtown and in the areas along and east of Bridge Avenue might embrace and take greater advantage of the river. Selective infill and redevelopment was considered for the historic core. Dramatic changes were seen occurring south of the historic core, around a new marina west of the railroad and on the east side of Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard. In these areas multistory buildings with a mix of commercial and residential uses were envisioned creating more weeknight and weekend activity and making the downtown area a bigger draw to visitors.



The development concept included constructing a vehicular access under the railroad trestle to make the area to its west side accessible for development. In this area a public marina was proposed, which would draw activity to support neighboring development. Other public improvements included a Fourth Street pedestrian connection under the trestle, a pedestrian bridge over the river and a plaza and civic building at the foot of the bridge.

The southern half of Bridge Avenue would become a contemporary, mixed-use counterpart to the historic downtown. Vacant sites between Rice Mine Road and Third Street would become a new river-adjacent neighborhood featuring a mix of housing types around the existing schools. The north end of Bridge Avenue would see a mix of redevelopment and reinvestment to create an attractive transition to the business areas to the north.



2008 to Present

While some key parts of the 2008 plan have not come to fruition, several changes have occurred:

- downtown zoning districts were established with design standards recommended in the plan
- the City constructed streetscape improvements along Main Avenue south from the historic core to First Street
- two housing developments arose in the South Main Riverfront area and an existing apartment building was renovated
- a hotel was recently opened on Bridge Avenue, and a commercial site at the intersection of Fifth Street and Bridge Avenue was redeveloped
- the County Board of Education's Sprayberry Center was vacated, demolished and put up for sale
- a river towing company purchased the State Docks where the proposed public marina was to be located
- single-family homes have been constructed on vacant lots along 30th Avenue
- streetscape improvements are in process along First Street from Main Avenue to the highway overpass

Recent Plans

Several public improvements and other changes have been planned or announced that will impact the evolution of the historic downtown and riverfront:

- streetscape improvements along Main Avenue from the historic core north to McFarland Boulevard and along First Street from the highway overpass to Bridge Avenue
- expansion of Kentuck Park into a regional sports complex and event facility, which will include a nature park and trail network immediately west of the railroad trestle
- sidewalk improvements along 30th Avenue (5th to 12th Street) and along Bridge Avenue (5th Street to Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard)
- bicycle-pedestrian path concept along Fifth Street west of Kentuck Park

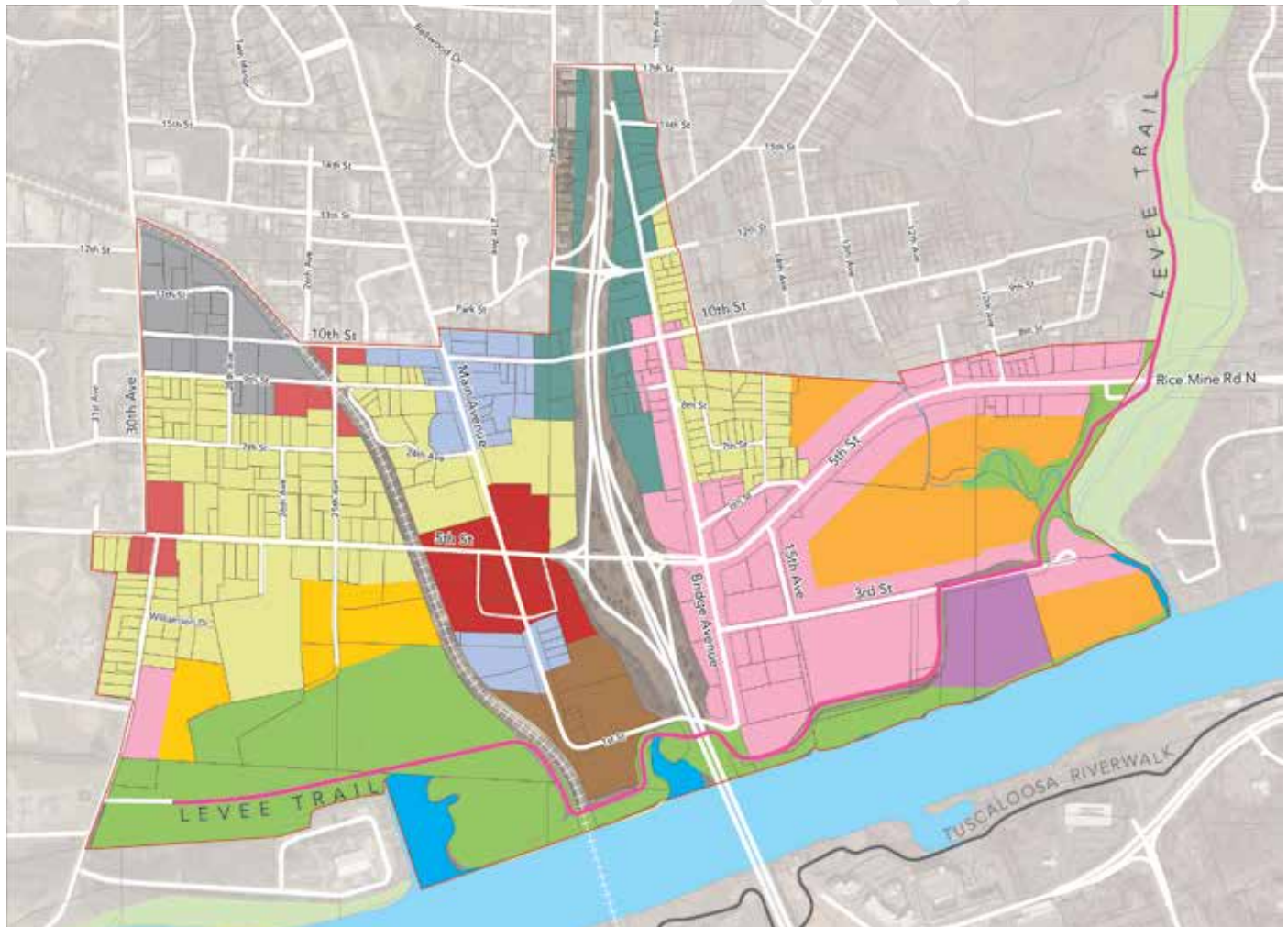
UPDATING THE PLAN

Many of the vision elements and development concepts of the 2008 plan are still relevant today. The subdistricts established in the 2008 plan and their boundaries have been modified (see Figure 6-7). The following concepts and strategies reinforce elements of that plan and include updated approaches informed by changes that have taken place since 2008. Figure 6-8 illustrates areas where new development and redevelopment are desirable as well as the connectivity improvements that will link and support these opportunities.

Historic Downtown Core

- Opportunities to relocate industrial/heavy commercial uses now operating in the historic downtown core should be pursued and those sites made available for development compatible with the character and types of uses in the historic core, whether commercial, residential or a combination of these.
- The gravel lot immediately south of Fourth Street should be developed with a building along Main Avenue and parking to the rear.
- Fourth Street (west side) should be designed as a "shared street" for use by pedestrians and vehicles using special paving (see photos at right).

Figure 6-7 Updated Subdistricts



Historic Downtown Core	Neighborhood Center	Commercial/Mixed-use
South Main Riverfront	West Neighborhood	Neighborhood conservation
Mixed-Use	East Neighborhood	Mixed-use conservation
Working Riverfront	Conservation and Parks	Light Industry

- In contrast to the previous plan, it is not recommended that 22nd Avenue and 20th Avenues be formalized into streets with sidewalks and businesses fronting on them. Like Fourth Street converting them into shared streets will make the best use of limited space (see photos below).
- West of 22nd Avenue, Fourth Street should transition into a shared-use path connecting to the proposed trails on the west side of the trestle.



Shared streets are narrow ways designed for use by pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. They do not have raised curbs and feature pavers to slow vehicles.



South Main Riverfront

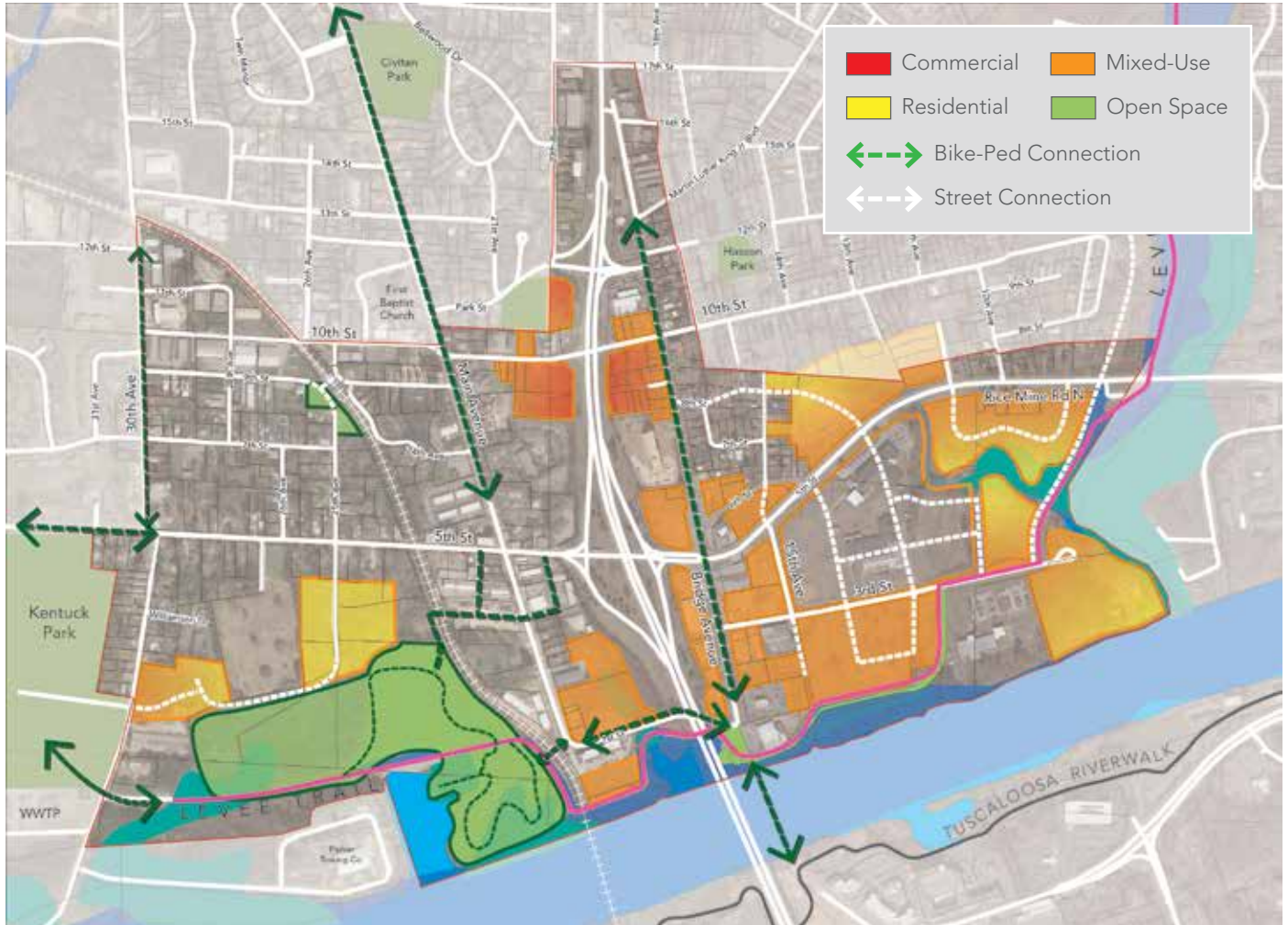
- The south end of Main Avenue is the best opportunity to connect the historic downtown core to the riverfront. The First and Main housing development took advantage of a crucial link between the historic downtown and the river. The southern half of the property has not been developed, representing an important opportunity to create a physical connection between the Main Avenue business district and the river. A restaurant, public space or a combination of the two would provide a means for downtown visitors to enjoy the riverfront. Pedestrian access from Main Avenue should also be included.
- As properties on the east side of Main Avenue south of the historic core develop, parking should be situated to the rear of buildings and away from Main Avenue. Depending on the uses and scale of the development of these properties—multi-story, mixed-use is preferred—structured parking may be warranted. If the parking structure were designed so that spaces were included for public use, it may be appropriate for the City to contribute financially. This could be in the form of tax incentives for the development or direct funding toward construction of the parking structure. In the case of the latter, public parking fees could pay down the city's financial contribution over time.
- A major departure from the 2008 plan is the concept of a park west of the trestle. This concept emerged with the preparation of the Kentuck Park master plan. This park would occur in the area previously proposed for mixed-use development around a public marina. This change reduces the need for a street or vehicular access through the trestle. Nonetheless, a pedestrian connection from Main Avenue to the trail would be valuable to the South Main Riverfront.

Mixed-Use

Bridge Avenue

- The Bridge Avenue corridor is the best area to attract walkable, mixed-use development to create a “larger downtown” despite being separated from the historic core by the highway.
- The Fifth Street exit is the primary gateway into the downtown area, so the character of development at Fifth and Bridge greatly affects first impressions for visitors coming into Northport from across the river.
- The First Street connection under the bridge is a critical link between the east and west sides of the riverfront. Improving that street connection and creating a focal point there, as suggested in the 2008 plan, will bridge the divide caused by the highway.
- Extending 15th Avenue south from Third Street would help to organize any mixed-use development into a walkable, block pattern that brings the public closer to the trail and riverfront.
- Developments adjacent to the trail should be arranged so that buildings overlook the trail and river.

Figure 6-8 Development strategy



Mixed-Use (continued)

Fifth and Third Streets

- Land fronting on Fifth and Third Streets and available properties between Third Street and the levee should be targeted for mixed-use development.
- There should be multiple pedestrian links connecting to the portion of the Levee Trail along the river. This will increase use of the trail, which will, in turn, benefit adjacent development. Developments along this portion of the trail should be arranged so that buildings overlook the trail and river.

30th Avenue

Properties on the east frontage of 30th Avenue near the entrance to Kentucky Park are appropriate for mixed-use development given the proximity to the park and Levee Trail.

West Neighborhood

- The area around Williamson Cemetery is proposed for single-family residential development. This includes City and privately-owned properties. Residential development in this area would benefit from proximity to the proposed nature park to the east and Kentucky Park to the west.
- A street connection between the cemetery and future park are to the south could provide an additional connection from 30th Avenue to 25th Avenue would provide an additional route for traffic headed to/from events at Kentucky Park.
- A connection should be made to the shared-use path proposed to cross under the trestle from Fourth Street in the historic core.

East Neighborhood

- If new schools are built elsewhere to replace the aging elementary and middle schools, these properties should also be targeted for redevelopment.
- Frontages on Fifth and Third Streets are designated for mixed-use development (see “Mixed-Use” above).
- New streets will open up the interior of the property for residential development.



Mixed-Use Conservation

- These areas along Main Avenue, referred to as “Residential-Commercial-Institutional” in the 2008 plan, include already developed properties with a mix of uses, generally including single-family homes and small businesses and institutional uses.
- While there is some variation in the types and sizes of buildings, they are mostly historic structures that are intended to be retained. In the event of redevelopment, any new buildings would be expected to maintain residential scale and character. Parking areas must be located to the side or rear of buildings so that a front lawn is maintained.
- Existing and future buildings may contain residential, small-scale commercial enterprises and institutional uses. For example, an existing home may be adapted to a business use, but a single-family home may not be demolished to make way for a substantially larger business structure.

Neighborhood Conservation

- Existing neighborhoods, on the east and west sides of the highway are to be maintained primarily for moderate-density residential use, with the exception of the existing multifamily properties on the east and west sides of Main Avenue north of the historic core.
- Any redevelopment in these areas would be limited to residential, open space and institutional uses. Flexibility in lot size and width is intended to optimize reinvestment opportunities.

Neighborhood Centers

Fifth and 30th

- The intersection of Fifth Street and 30th Avenue is intended as a small commercial node to serve surrounding residents (and visitors to nearby Kentuck Park).
- Any reinvestment or redevelopment should improve the walkable nature of the center, including addition of sidewalks. Off-street parking should be to the rear or side of buildings.



The Depot

- The train depot and adjoining properties are intended primarily as a civic node rather than a commercial one. However, properties fronting on 10th Street may be developed for small-scale businesses.
- Reconfiguration of the intersection of Ninth Street and 25th Avenue (at an unsignalized railroad crossing) is recommended for safety purposes. This could also create more space to enable greater use of the train depot property.

TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES

Conservation and Parks

- This subdistrict is anchored by the proposed nature park and trail system on the west side of the trestle. A plaza or green space at the terminus of Bridge Avenue would serve as a destination along the Levee Trail.
- A natural, well-maintained buffer should be retained along the river's edge. This is accomplished in part by the Levee Trail.

Working Riverfront

- This subdistrict, in contrast to the 2008 plan, is limited to an existing industrial property on Third Street.
- The property to the east of the towing company property is not recommended for future industrial development as this would likely increase truck traffic on Third Street through an area proposed for mixed-use and residential development.

Light Industry

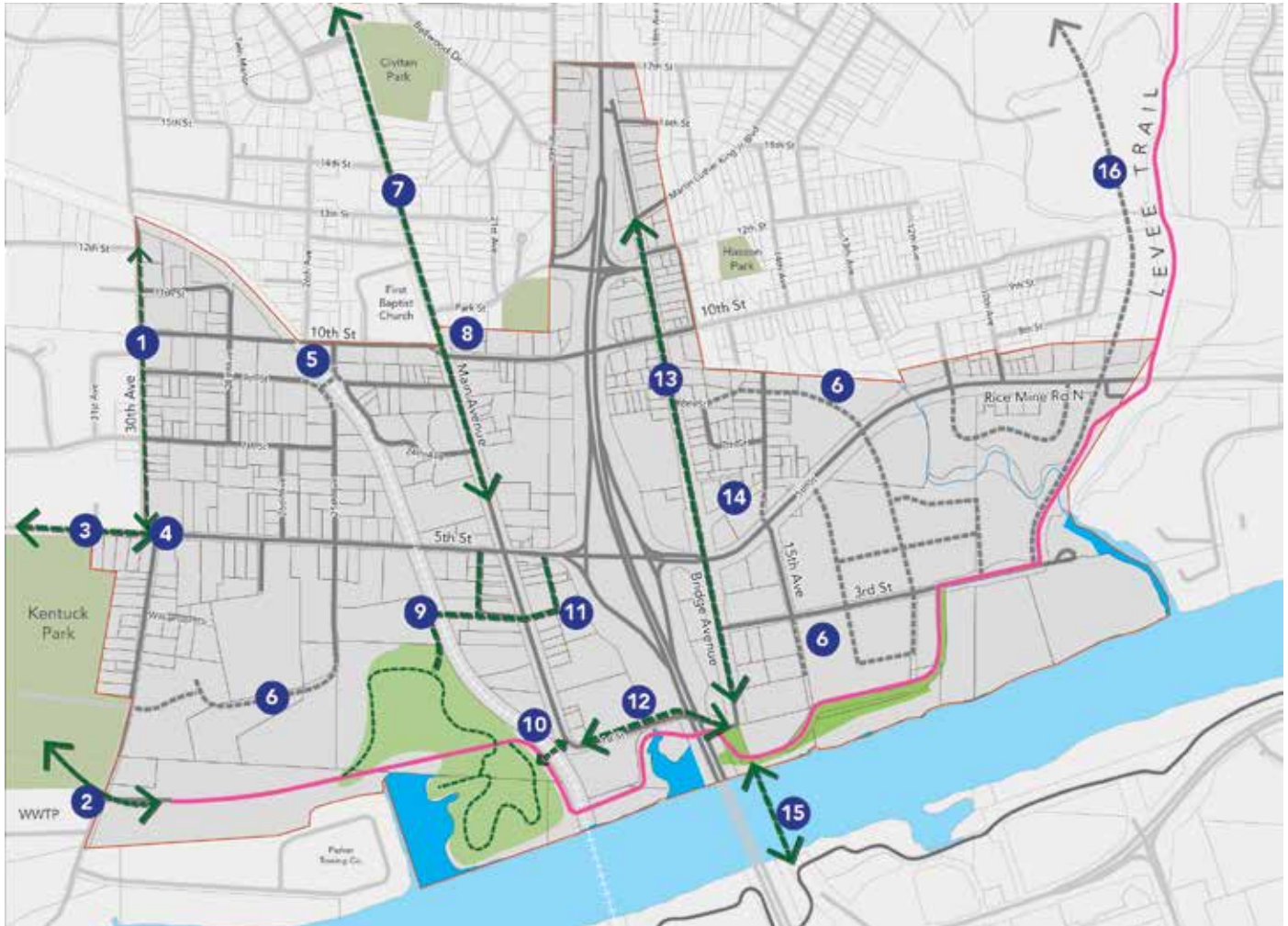
- As proposed in the 2008 plan, the industrial development area along the railroad northwest of downtown may remain but should not be expanded.
- Existing uses and any new development or reinvestment should improve the character of the area through the use of higher quality facade materials and screening of outdoor storage and work areas.
- Streets serving existing businesses and adjoining neighborhoods are narrow and lack curb and gutter and should be improved over time.

The following improvements are recommended to facilitate vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian mobility and access to the downtown and riverfront and to interconnect the area's assets: the historic core, riverfront, Levee Trail, and existing and proposed parks. Currently planned projects, including those proposed in the Southern Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and Kentuck Park Master Plan, are indicated with an asterisk (*). See Figure 6-9.

1. Installation of sidewalks on 30th Avenue*
2. Extension of Levee Trail into expanded Kentuck Park*
3. Addition of shared-use path (or other bike-ped improvements) on Fifth Street*
4. Realignment of 30th Avenue and 5th Street intersection
5. Reconfiguration of the railroad crossing/intersection at Ninth Street and 25th Avenue
6. Extension of existing streets/construction new streets (part of future development)
7. Sidewalks/streetscape improvements on Main Avenue to McFarland Boulevard*
8. Realignment of 19th Street and Main Avenue intersection



Figure 6-9 Street, bicycle and pedestrian strategies



9. Add shared-use path in Fourth Street right-of-way to connect downtown core to future nature park
10. Add shared-use path to connect First Street to Levee Trail and nature park
11. Redesign Fourth Street, 20th and 22nd Avenues as "shared streets"
12. Streetscape improvements on First Street from Main Avenue to Bridge Avenue*
13. Sidewalks/streetscape improvements on Bridge Avenue*

14. Close Sixth Street and make ROW available for development
15. Improve bicycle and pedestrian access across river (in conjunction with City of Tuscaloosa)
16. Hospital Drive connector

In addition to these projects, the City should assess opportunities to add bike racks at strategic locations on Main Avenue, along the Levee Trail and, in the future, in the Bridge Avenue area as it develops.

In any future, publicly-funded parking areas, charging stations for electric-powered vehicles should be incorporated.

GETTING ORGANIZED

Creating a strong organizational structure will be helpful in implementing plan concepts for Downtown Northport and the riverfront. That structure would reflect a more formal, committed partnership and alignment among the City of Northport, its redevelopment authority and the merchants association.

The City and downtown merchants association should consider creation of a “Main Street” program. Main Street organizations typically have a board made up of merchants, property owners and other community stakeholders. The board sets policies and priorities for the program. A staffperson oversees the day-to-day tasks of the organization, focusing their time fully on the needs of downtown and the future of the riverfront. In Alabama, there are several models including volunteer, part-time and full-time staffing. Typically, paid staff is funded by member fees (e.g., merchants and property owners) and contributions from the City and others. In a few cases, this role is completely paid for and housed within City staff.

More information on creating a Main Street organization can be obtained from Main Street Alabama. The state-wide organization provides resources to over thirty member communities on using the Four-Point Approach® created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and applied successfully in communities throughout the country. The four “points” are: Economic Vitality, Promotion, Design, and Organization.

A Main Street organization, including its staff person, does not have to be focused only on the historic downtown core. Their role can and should involve the riverfront and any adjoining commercial and mixed-use areas, such as Bridge Avenue.

There are 31 cities in Alabama that have “designated” Main Street programs and another 34 that are Main Street “network communities.” Main Street Alabama is a nonprofit organization that provides training, technical assistance and other resources to advance economic vitality in traditional commercial districts throughout the state.

Benefits of creating a Main Street or similar downtown organization include:

- having a designated representative whose primary responsibility is downtown; merchants have their own businesses to run and the City has many other areas and constituencies to serve
- board membership is not limited to merchants; they can include representatives of companies who are active in the community and others who can bring their knowledge, relationships and influence to bear
- Main Street staff offers a regular interface between downtown stakeholders and the City
- having a formal organizational structure increases the ability to take on large projects and long-term efforts
- getting organized helps to divide the workload and to coordinate volunteers for special projects and events.



PROMOTION

The purpose of promotional activities is to raise awareness of downtown businesses and points of interest and bring people to downtown and the riverfront who are unfamiliar or who visit infrequently. It can include branding and marketing efforts; print and online advertising; sales events; and community events.



Events

Northport already does an excellent job with community events, including the Dickens Christmas and other seasonal events. In addition, the Kentuck Arts Festival has grown the reputation of both the city and its historic downtown area. The festival brings thousands of visitors into the city annually, many of whom patronize downtown businesses before or after attending the festival. The community has additional opportunities to host parades and other seasonal events downtown.

More frequent, regular events are also helpful in drawing people downtown. Kentuck Arts Night does this. Other weekly or monthly events can encourage residents to visit more often and draw visitors from nearby communities as well. Event opportunities that not only bring people downtown, but give them the opportunity to be on the river, should be explored. As described in the 2008 plan, the plaza at First Street and Bridge Avenue can be a perfect host site for riverside events.

Wayfinding

The historic downtown core is not visible as one crosses the bridge and enters the city. Only the Bridge Avenue and east side is easily visible. Implementing a citywide wayfinding signage system will help promote downtown and the riverfront by signaling to visitors where they are and points of interest nearby.

The type, size and location of signage along the Hugh Thomas Bridge and Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard are controlled by the Alabama Department of Transportation, who installs and maintains the standardized trail-blazer signs there now. As can be seen in the image below, there are too many signs in too short a distance of the exit ramp to be effective. The City should consult with the ALDOT to install more effective signage for the downtown on this approach. Overhead signage may be the most effective and appropriate method to announce the various destinations given the limited space.



DOWNTOWN ZONING

Following the adoption of the 2008 plan, zoning districts with design standards were created based on the subdistricts established by the plan. It is recommended that these zoning classifications be evaluated as the City proceeds with a comprehensive update to the Zoning Ordinance.

Considering the changes that have occurred since adoption of the prior plan and the recommendations in this update to the plan, there appear to be opportunities to simplify downtown zoning. This might include some consolidation of subdistricts, reclassifying some areas using conventional zoning districts and applying special development standards through a downtown overlay, or some combination of these.

As part of the zoning update, the City should evaluate the specific standards established in the zoning subdistricts to determine—based on their implementation over the last several years—where requirements need to be tightened or loosened. Any regulations for which variances may have been frequently sought and approved are likely to need adjustments.





PUBLIC FACILITIES + INFRASTRUCTURE



PARKS AND RECREATION

Historically, parks and recreation facilities and activities have been provided by both the City of Northport and the countywide Parks and Recreation Authority (PARA). Generally, PARA has been responsible for larger recreational facilities serving Northport and surrounding communities, while the City has focused on smaller facilities. But in recent years, the City has taken steps that are changing this dynamic. Three major recreation projects have been planned that will greatly expand the amount of park space and the types of amenities available to residents.

Planned Projects

Northport is constructing a water park and outdoor adventure park and expanding Kentucky Park. Each of these parks projects will offer residents more recreation opportunities and encourage tourism, thereby adding to the local economy.

Kentucky Park

Kentucky Park, home of the Warrior Baseball league and the annual Kentucky Arts Festival, is slated for a significant expansion, growing from 38 acres to over 160 acres. The expansion will include additional fields and parking, a recreation and events center, tennis and pickleball, and a network of trails that will connect to the Levee Trail and Van de Graaff Park. The master plan also includes an amphitheater and natural area (for festival use) on the north side. The park will be extended to the river on the south side, opening views of the Black Warrior and creating opportunities for fishing.

The expansion will enable the city to host travel ball tournaments and other events that will draw out-of-towners to Northport. Visitors to tournaments and special events may be staying multiple days, increasing business for local shops and restaurants, especially in the nearby historic downtown.



Kentucky Park master plan

Another proposal in the Kentuck Park master plan is the creation of a natural park area on the west side of the trestle near downtown and extending along the Levee Trail to 30th Avenue. The 37-acre site would feature walking trails and a pavilion along the river.

Adventure Park

A 151-acre park has been planned along Rose Boulevard that will provide a unique recreational experience to residents and out-of-town visitors. The outdoor adventure park is to be built in phases and will include trails, a lake, zipline activities, an RV campground, cabins and a retreat facility.

The campground will provide RV lodging for recreational travelers as well as those attending the arts festival and sports tournaments. The cabins and retreat center will attract multi-day visits from corporations and other groups.

The adventure park will add to Northport’s tourism potential by providing activities and lodging accommodations to draw people to Northport for a variety of reasons and lengthen their stays. Adding the adventure park to the statewide birding trail will introduce Northport to another subset of recreational travelers.

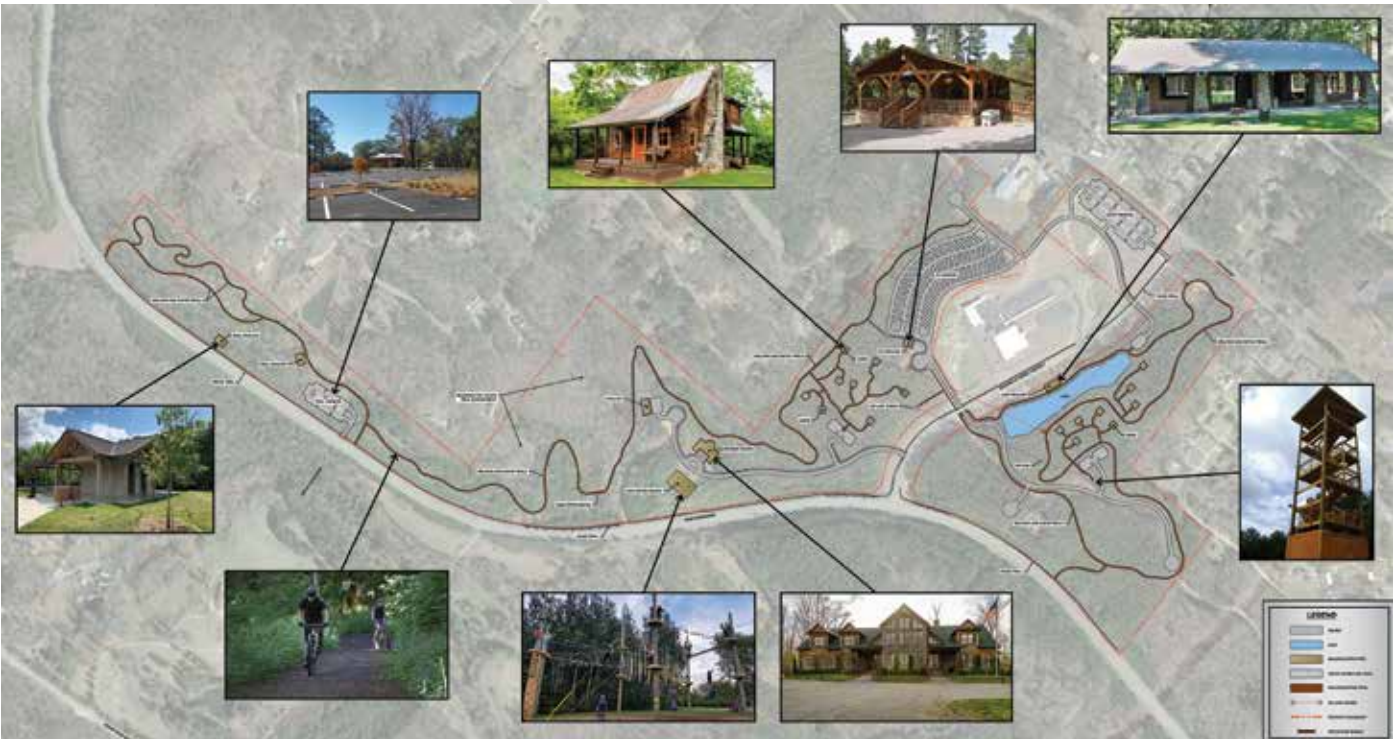
Water Park

A water park will be developed along McFarland Boulevard using an 11-acre property purchased by the City. Proposals being considered include waterslides, a spray park, wave pool and lazy river. It will add a unique recreational amenity for residents and draw visitors from outside the community. The water park is being designed and built by a private entity that is expected to operate the facility for the City. The park is projected to open by Spring 2025.

Both the outdoor adventure park and water park will provide additional activities for visitors coming to Northport for sports tournaments and other events, encouraging visitors to stay longer, which will generate more activity for local businesses.



Adventure Park master plan



Neighborhood Park

While the City has been planning these major projects, it has also been working with the Druid City Hospital (DCH) Health System to construct a wellness-oriented, neighborhood park. The park will be located on a 4.6-acre site provided by DCH between 20th Street and the medical center.

The park will include basketball courts, walking track, exercise stations and other elements to encourage fitness as part of DCH community outreach efforts.

Table 6-1 Existing and Planned Parkland

Civitan Park	5.7 ac
Hasson Park*	1.5 ac
Community Center	2.9 ac
Kentuck Park (existing)	37.9 ac
Kentuck Expansion (City-owned)	96.6 ac
Kentuck Nature Park	37.2 ac
Neighborhood Park	4.6 ac
Adventure Park	151.5 ac
Water Park	10.6 ac
Total City parkland	345.6 ac
Kentuck Park Expansion (FHN)**	7.5 ac
Van de Graaf Arboretum (FHN)	150.5 ac
Faucett Brothers Park (PARA)	78.6 ac
Total parkland (City, PARA, FHN)	582.2 ac

* Operated by Boys and Girls Club under agreement with City of Northport

** Proposed to be acquired from Friends of Historic Northport

Parks Planning

In planning for the future of parks and recreation, parkland is an important measure. With the four park projects the City has planned, the city's parkland is increasing from 48 acres to 346 acres. Another 237 acres of parkland—owned by PARA and the Friends of Historic Northport organization—lies within or adjacent to the city. Altogether, this will amount to 580 acres of parkland serving Northport residents.

For the Kentuck expansion, the City acquired 40 acres from the Friends organization to house the proposed amphitheater and festival space. The Friends organization also owns the land on which Van De Graaff Park is located and additional land between Kentuck Park and Mill Creek. The latter site, if acquired by the City, would be incorporated into the park expansion.

The Kentuck expansion is also proposed to include trails, parking and other improvements on United States government property between the park and the creek and along the river. This is not included in the parkland inventory.

Parkland

Historically, the National Recreation and Parks Association has recommended that cities have between 6.25 and 10.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. With the acquisitions that have been made for the four currently planned parks projects, the City of Northport now owns 9.7 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Taking into account the additional parkland owned by the Friends organization and PARA, total parkland in Northport is closer to 16.3 acres per 1,000 residents.

Table 6-1 shows all City-owned park properties as well as that owned by the Friends of Historic Northport and the County parks authority PARA.

The NRPA recommended 6.25-10.5 acre range would consist primarily of community, neighborhood and smaller parks. This mix of local parks would then be supplemented by regional and special purpose parks. When looking at Northport's parkland from this perspective, it is clear that the parks system will be "top heavy." A considerable portion of Northport's parkland will consist of larger special purpose (adventure park and arboretum) and community parks (Kentuck and Faucett Brothers).

Table 6-2 Community and Neighborhood Parks

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070	2080
Population	31,125	35,758	41,889	48,517	55,642	63,263	71,380
Parkland Acreage							
All community and smaller parks	126.6	270	270	270	270	270	270
Acres per 1,000 population	4.1	7.5	6.4	5.6	4.8	4.3	3.8
Parkland at 6.25 ac/1,000 population	—	—	—	303.2	347.8	395.4	446.1
Deficit (in acres)	—	—	—	33.6	78.2	125.8	176.5

Table 6-2 shows the total acreage in Northport for community and smaller parks compared to the minimum recommended threshold of 6.25 acres per 1,000 residents. This shows that by 2050, Northport will need to add land for community, neighborhood or smaller parks to meet the minimum recommended amount. The population projections shown are based on the City’s historic growth trend (since 1910).

Another traditional rule-of-thumb from the NRPA is that communities should have 1-2 acres of neighborhood parkland per 1,000 residents. Neighborhood parks are generally under 10 acres in size. They include a mix of fields or courts with passive open space and are intended primarily to serve residents in surrounding neighborhoods (rather than a citywide function). Northport has 10.1 acres of neighborhood parkland, whereas according to this rule-of-thumb, it should have somewhere in the range of 30-60 acres.

The park system should achieve a balance between large and small parks, between passive and active recreation.

Recommendations

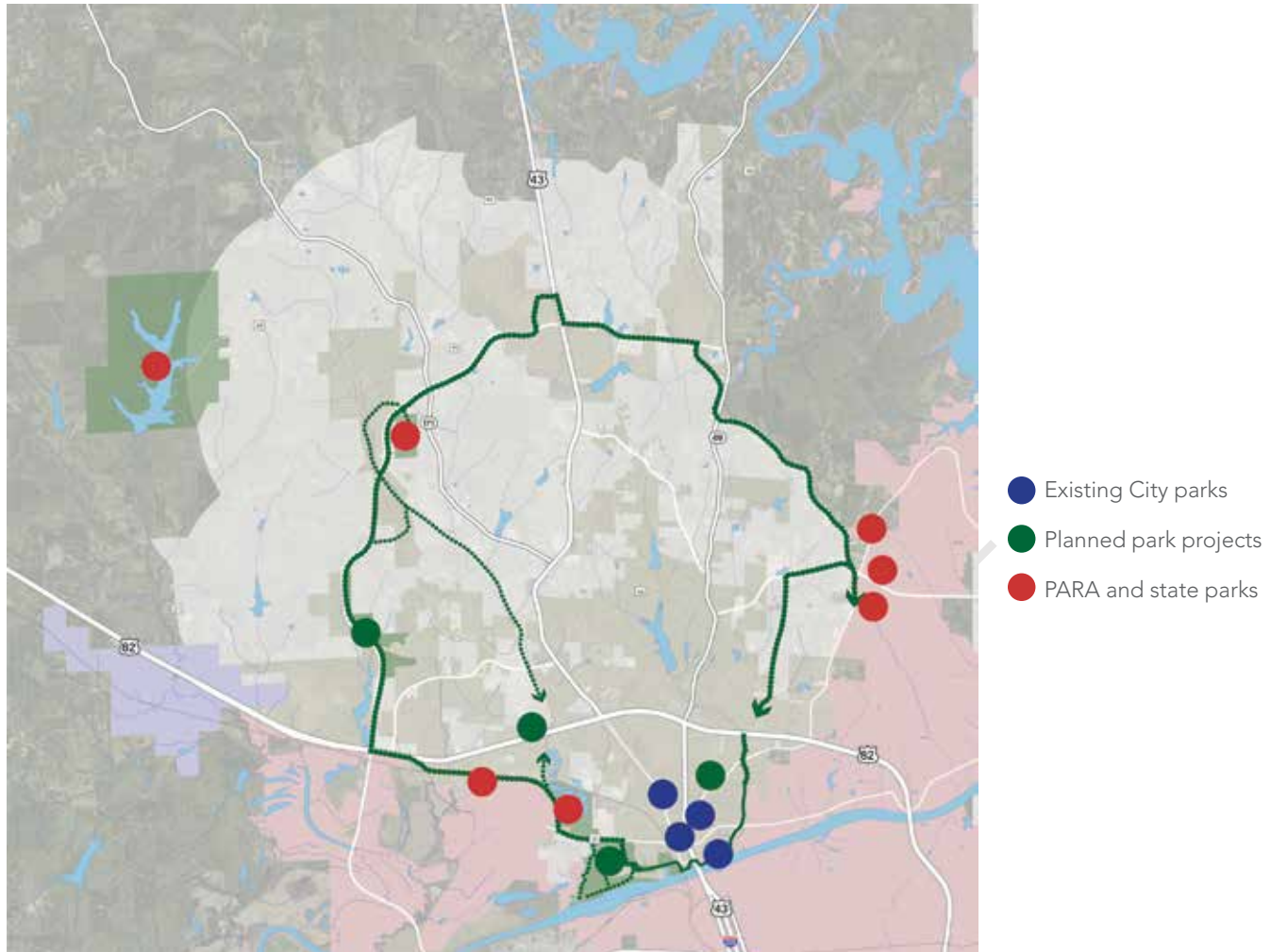
Northport’s park system should evolve so that a better balance is achieved between large and small parks and between passive and active recreational amenities. City parks should be placed in accessible locations and well-distributed throughout the community.

Figure 6-1 shows the location of Northport parks and recreation facilities—including planned facilities—alongside the PARA facilities in the Northport area. As can be seen, most public parks and recreation facilities are located in the southern portion of the city. As the city continues to grow north of McFarland Boulevard, the City should identify opportunities to acquire land for future parks.



Warrior Baseball event at Kentuck Park pavilion

Figure 6-1 Existing and planned parks and the citywide trail loop concept



Acquiring Parkland

Parkland should be sought in locations that will enable parks to be accessible by car, foot and bicycle. They should be well-distributed throughout the community—taking into consideration private recreational amenities serving some neighborhoods.

Acquiring land in advance of its eventual development for park use will help to secure locations that will be most advantageous in the future while also minimizing purchase costs. Lands with wetlands, flood prone areas and other characteristics that are disadvantageous for development may be appropriate for parks and recreation use and can often be obtained at lower cost. Such areas are appropriate for passive recreational use and, when combined with “unconstrained” land, can accommodate a wide variety of recreational uses.

Acquisition of parkland can be facilitated through the subdivision design process. The City can require housing developers to temporarily set aside a portion of tracts proposed to be developed, allowing the City to evaluate its potential for park use and to negotiate its purchase.

Similarly, the City can require that residential developers provide “usable” open space in proposed subdivisions. This is particularly appropriate and desirable in higher density residential developments, where there is less private yard area for residents. In this method, common areas can be created for the use of the subdivision’s residents or planned in coordination with the City to become park space dedicated for public use and maintained by the City. In the latter case, it is vital that the offered land be of a size, shape and location to be useful and accessible.

Citywide Trail Loop

The “citywide loop” is a visionary project proposed in this plan involving the construction of a trail system that would encircle the city. This trail system would connect the Levee Trail, parks, neighborhoods, schools, and business areas. It would be used for getting from one place to another on foot or bicycle or for leisure. Along the loop there will be a need to add trailheads, some of which could be designed as small parks with simple improvements like playgrounds, exercise stations or covered seating areas.

Civitan Park



Civitan Park

The City has developed plans to take greater advantage of the Civitan Park property to offer more outdoor recreational space to serve the surrounding neighborhood. Only a small portion of the 5.7 acre property is being utilized. The City should also study the potential of adding onto the existing building or constructing a new larger one to enable more community uses. Additional parking may be needed, which could be in the form of multiple, small parking areas accessible from off of Main Avenue.

Parks Management

As Northport and its parks system grows, the City will need to determine its and PARA’s future roles in the programming, management and maintenance of its parks. The City of Northport will be taking a more active role in the management of the adventure and water parks, though some of those responsibilities may be seen to by a private entity under agreement with the City. Should the City decide to take on greater oversight of its parks, a parks and recreation department may need to be created or a division established in the Public Works Department.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

The following recommendations include needs for City of Northport facilities and facilities provided by others. For the latter category, involvement of the City of Northport will vary.

City Facilities

- Evaluate opportunities for and plan to relocate Fire Station 1 farther west. This would improve response times in the westernmost areas of the City and may positively impact the department’s Insurance Service Organization (ISO) rating. The design of the future station should increase the number of bays.
- Invest in Fire Department staff, training, vehicles and equipment as needed to maintain and improve on the department’s ISO rating and control property owner insurance costs.
- Study the future possibility of relocating the City Hall and Civic Center facility to another location. Today, the building is of adequate size to meet city needs. However, as Northport grows, space needs for city administration will grow. If city functions were moved, the current site is in a prime location for private development. In the interim, redesign of the western driveway access along US 43 should be evaluated. The ingress/egress is too close to the McFarland Boulevard intersection, making it difficult to enter and exit during peak periods.



City Hall and Civic Center

Northport Heritage Museum



- Increase covered outdoor storage area at the Public Works facility
- Consider relocating the historic Northport Heritage Museum. The museum/welcome center, which is currently located on Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard and 12th Street, is isolated in its current location and site configuration. A new site for the museum should be considered to improve its accessibility to visitors arriving from across the bridge and to lend a more immersive setting for the museum and welcome center functions.
- Develop a plan to reinvest in the Train Depot and property to increase its usefulness to the surrounding neighborhood. There is potential to redesign the adjacent intersection at the railroad crossing that could add more space for outdoor use.



Caboose at Northport Train Depot, image: Tuscaloosa Preservation Society

Non-City Facilities

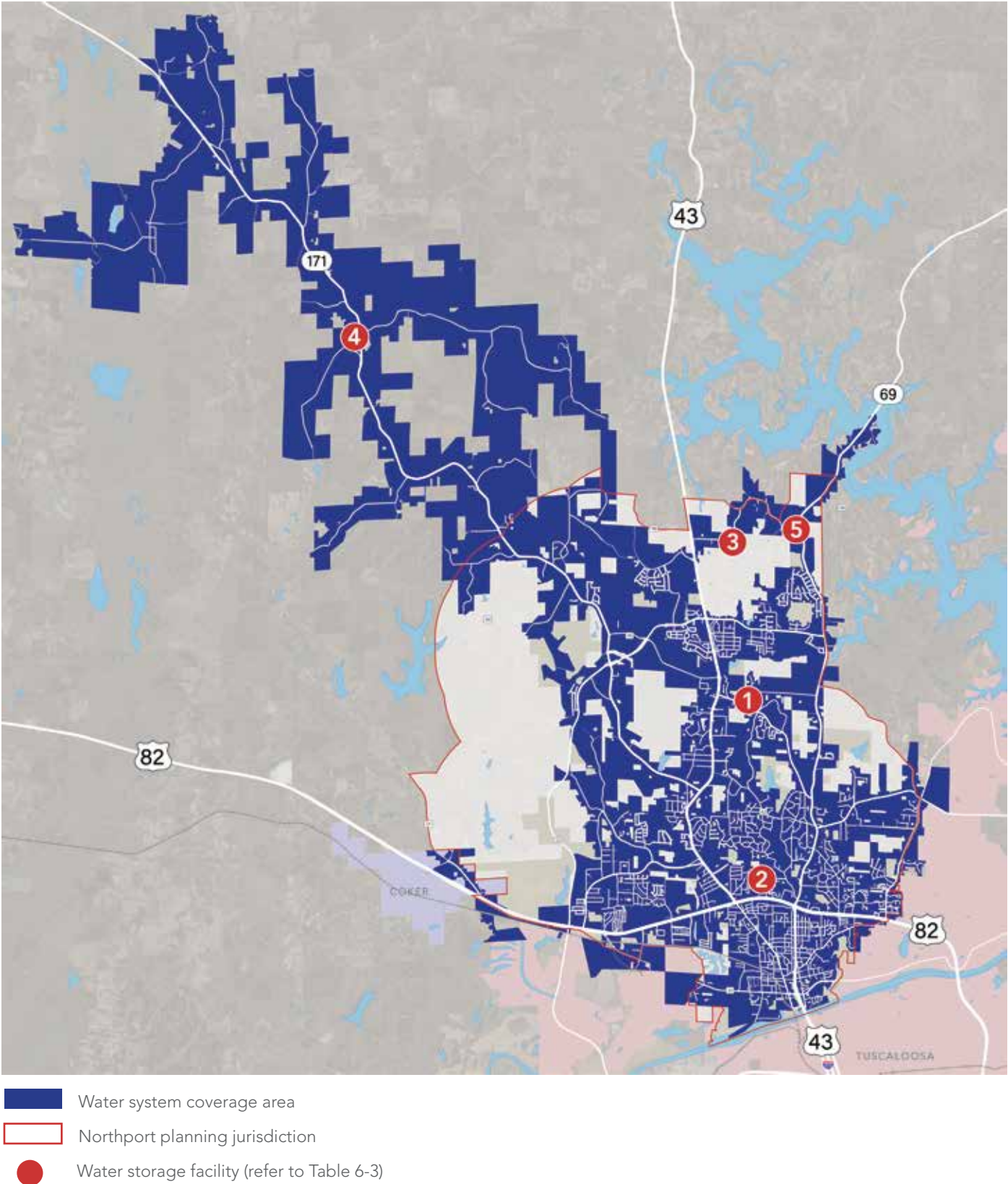
- Partner with the Tuscaloosa County Library system to consider options for improving physical access to the county library collection in Northport. This could include a branch within an existing building—possibly collocated with a City or another public use. Initially, the branch might have a small physical collection but might offer library computer access and pickup and drop-off stations. Over time the branch may expand into a larger space with a larger collection.

Collins-Riverside Intermediate School



- Replace Matthews Elementary and Collins-Riverside Intermediate Schools. The elementary school was built in 1967 and intermediate school in 1958. This would be the responsibility of Tuscaloosa County Schools but will have a substantial impact on Northport residents and the neighborhoods and businesses in the center city.

Figure 6-2 Northport Water System



UTILITIES

To support continued development, the City will need to invest in increasing the capacity of its water and sewer systems. The far northern expansion of the city limits and ensuing development that has occurred in these areas have strained Northport's sanitary sewer infrastructure, in particular.

Water System

The Utilities Department's plans for the water system include:

- inspection and repair of numerous water tanks and wells
- various improvements to the water treatment plant
- supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) upgrades
- ongoing rehabilitation of existing water lines

These projects will improve the performance of the system, including the SCADA upgrades that will improve monitoring and management of the water system. The City has begun a water model evaluation to determine current and future upgrades.

Table 6-3 Water Storage Facilities*

1	Charlie Shirley Tank	3.0 MG
2	Hightown 1 Tank	1.0 MG
3	Frank Lary Tank	1.0 MG
4	Jackson Tank	0.4 MG
5	WTP Clearwell	0.9 MG
* Hightown 2 and Old Sand Springs tanks are currently out of service.		

Storage Capacity

The water system serves customers within Northport and in unincorporated areas to the northwest. Based on 2022 usage rates, about 71% of the water system's storage capacity is used on a daily basis. As Northport grows in population, water usage will increase and additional storage capacity will inevitably be needed.

The projections in Table 6-4 show current system-wide storage capacity in the context of increasing demand as the city and its population grow. Average daily flows from 2021 and 2022 were used as a baseline. This forecast indicates that daily usage rates are likely to exceed system-wide storage capabilities in the next 30 years.

Further analysis will be necessary to determine where, how much, and when storage improvements should be made. This would include assessment of water storage facilities individually, water demand in growth areas identified in the Land Use Plan, performance and constraints within the water distribution system, seasonal fluctuations in water use, and other variables. These analyses would be performed as part of developing a master plan for the water system to guide the Utilities Department in detailing, prioritizing and implementing treatment, storage and other improvements.

Water Treatment Capacity

The Northport water treatment plant has a permitted treatment capacity of 8.1 million gallons per day (MGD). The plant's sustainable operational capacity is estimated at 6.0 MGD. The plant is currently operating at 74.7% of that.

Future average daily flow or usage for the water system was forecast based on the projections calculated for the population within the city limits and a lower growth rate in the unincorporated areas served by the system. Between 2021 and 2022 average daily flows jumped from 3.82 MGD to 4.48 MGD. The 2022 usage rate per person was approximately 110 GPD.

The projections shown in Table 6-5 reflect a daily average flow range based on the 2021 and 2022 rates. These projections are intended to compare current treatment capacity to the increased demand that will come from continued population growth. The usage rates used for the projections are daily averages and do not account for seasonal variations. Usage rates are higher than average during the summer months, for example.

While the projections indicate that continued growth will require more water treatment capacity, ongoing monitoring and planning will be necessary to guide how and when improvements should be made. This includes accounting for both average and peak seasonal usage rates, water loss, performance of the water treatment plant, and other factors. The water treatment plant will need to be evaluated and a master plan prepared to provide precise direction on upgrades and expansion.

Table 6-4 Water Storage Capacity

	2022	2030	2040	2050
Population Served	40,551*	44,531	51,540	59,133
Average Daily flow (MGD)**	4.48	4.28 - 4.92	4.95 - 5.69	5.68 - 6.53
Current Storage (MG)***	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3
% Capacity Used	71.1%	67.9 - 78.1%	78.6 - 90.3%	90.2 - 103.7%

* Population served estimate - EPA, Safe Drinking Water Information System

** Lower end of range based on average daily flow in 2021, higher end based on 2022 average daily flow.

*** Includes clear well tank.

Table 6-5 Water Treatment Capacity

	2022	2030	2040	2050
Population Served	40,551*	44,531	51,540	59,133
Average daily flow (MGD)**	4.48	4.28 - 4.92	4.95 - 5.69	5.68 - 6.53
Permitted Capacity	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
Sustainable Operational Capacity (MGD)	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
% Sustainable Operational Capacity	74.7%	71.3-82.0%	82.6-94.9%	94.7-108.9%

* Population served estimate - EPA, Safe Drinking Water Information System

** Lower end of range based on average daily flow in 2021, higher end based on 2022 average daily flow.



Sanitary Sewer

The Utilities Department's plans for the sanitary sewer system include:

- Changes to sewer treatment process to increase solids processing
- Construction of an outfall on the Black Warrior River
- Installation of pump station and upgrades to existing mains on US 82
- Replacements/upgrades of Carroll's Creek and other pump stations
- Ongoing rehabilitation of existing sewer lines
- Evaluate sewer collection capacity in the Grand Pointe/high school area.

In response to recently proposed residential growth, the City assessed the capacity of the collection system on Northport's east side. That study determined that substantial improvements were needed to accommodate continued development there. Funding has not been dedicated for those projects.

Sanitary Sewer Treatment

While collection is the primary constraint in the Northport sanitary sewer system, it will also become necessary over time to increase the ability of the treatment plant to process more waste. The plant is running at approximately 63.5% of its permitted capacity (see Table 6-6). The plant saw peak flows at 155% of its rated capacity in 2021 and peak flows at 122% in 2022.

A study conducted in 2015 to plan for the WWTP projected that the population would reach 31,620 in 2040; however, the population has already exceeded that amount. Population projections were prepared as part of this comprehensive planning process to understand the impact of continued growth on the water and sewer systems.

Using the revised population projections and the average daily flow rates seen in 2021 and 2022, the amount of waste that would need to be treated daily was forecast through 2050. This analysis is intended solely to compare existing treatment capacity against projected growth. Additional examination and planning should be conducted by the Utilities Department to guide decision-making on how and when to make upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant.

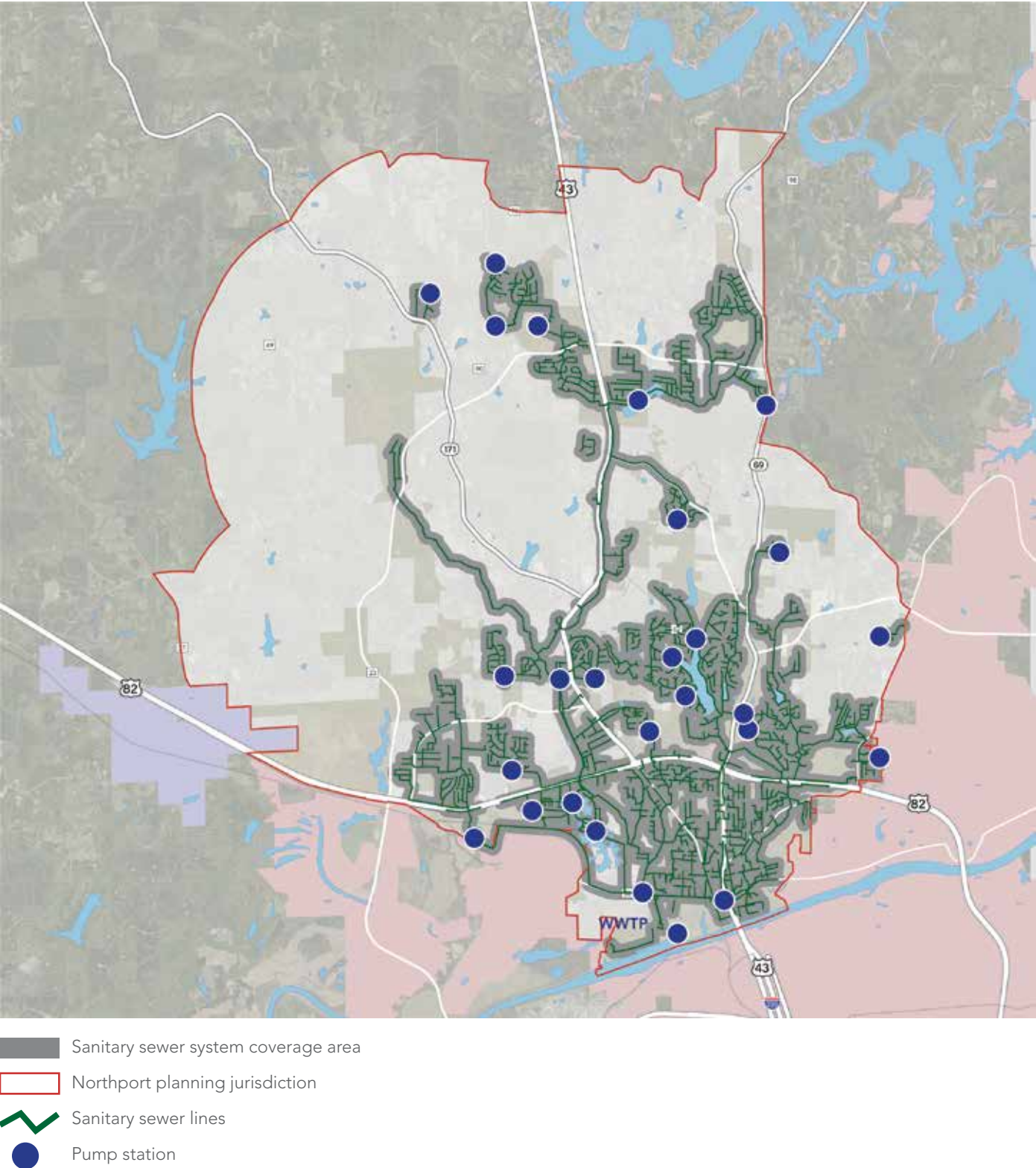
Table 6-6 Wastewater Treatment Capacity

	2022	2030	2040	2050
Population	32,575*	35,757	41,889	48,517
Average Daily Flow (MGD)**	3.17	3.30 - 3.48	3.87 - 4.08	4.48 - 4.72
Permitted Capacity (MGD)	4.99	4.99	4.99	4.99
Percent Used	63.5%	66.1 - 69.7%	77.5 - 81.7%	89.7 - 94.6%

* Population estimate from Northport 2023 Annual Water Quality Report

** Lower end of range based on average daily flow in 2021, higher end based on 2022 average daily flow.

Figure 6-3 Northport Sanitary Sewer System



Sanitary Sewer Collection

The capability of the sewer system to collect effluent and transport it to the wastewater treatment plant is the primary limitation in the system today. This limitation is constraining growth in many areas, both north and south of McFarland Boulevard.

The distances involved in upgrading lines and associated facilities north of McFarland Boulevard raise the cost of system improvements. This includes undeveloped and sparsely populated areas that will not offer new customers until more development occurs.

Increasing the capacity of the collection system will need to be prioritized. Analysis prepared for this plan divided the system into four sewer basins (see Figure 6-4):

- the center city south of McFarland Boulevard;
- the western area centered around Rose Boulevard north of Olivewood Road;
- a central area centered around US 43; and
- along AL 69 and areas further east.

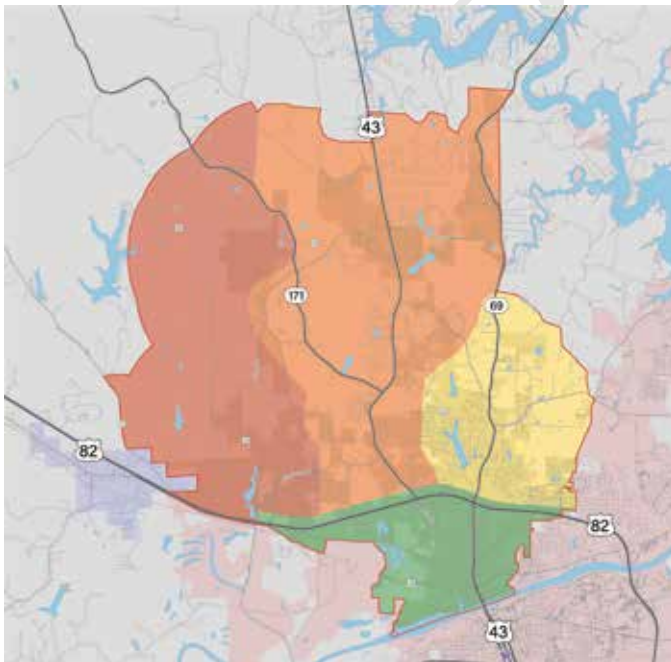


Figure 6-4 Sewer basins

Development opportunities will be limited in each of these areas until the collection systems—mains, pumps and lines—serving them are increased in capacity. The following priorities are recommended:

1. **Upgrade the collection system in the center city** to receive and transport increasing flow volumes from all areas of the city. These investments will be necessary to support upgrades to the sewer collection system and future growth in the areas north of McFarland Boulevard.
2. **Improve the collection system to serve east Northport** - AL 69, Watermelon Road, and Martin Road areas. Watermelon Road is a convenient location for health care services, offices and other businesses serving both Northport and Tuscaloosa. It is also a desirable location for high density development because of its convenience to commuters working in either city. However, north of Union Chapel Road, the Martin Road area has no existing sewer access. While AL 69 is becoming congested, proposed transportation improvements will ease that and support continued residential development in this already desirable location.



Existing nonresidential development along Watermelon Road

3. **Upgrade the collection system along US 43.**

Improvements in the US 43 area are expected to be cost-effective because of the makeup of existing sewer infrastructure—most of the mains along US 43 are 15" or larger—and the potential development to be served. Any downstream collection mains under 15" should be upgraded. This will enable the collection system to support continued development in the northernmost parts of the city as well as "infill" development along the corridor south of Mitt Lary Road, including continued business and residential growth around Northcreek Boulevard and AL 171.

4. **Upgrade the collection system serving west**

Northport. There is capacity in the collection system to take on some additional development in the southern most portions of this sewershed around Harper and Flatwoods Roads. However, extending service to the unsewered areas north and west of Olivewood Road will come at a higher cost. And, there is little development potential west of Rose Boulevard at its south end. Immediately west of Rose Boulevard along McFarland Boulevard is the Black Warrior Solid Waste Authority, and across the highway to the south is the Tuscaloosa city limits. For these reasons, public investments to upgrade and extend sewer west of Rose Boulevard and north of Olivewood Road are not recommended as a priority at this time.

The Utilities Department should develop a master plan for improvements to the sewer collection system using the Land Use Plan to estimate the future population to be served in each of these four areas. This would provide more definition to how sewer mains and pumping stations will need to be upgraded to handle future flows in each basin.

Impact Fees

To help fund upgrades to the sanitary sewer system, the City levies impact fees. These are fees collected for any parcel connecting to the sewer system for the first time. Current fees were established in 2004 and should be evaluated to determine whether increases are necessary to enable the city to make system improvements.





IMPLEMENTATION



The City has prepared this plan as a guide to inform future decisions about land use and development, infrastructure improvements, city facilities and services. The plan is also intended to help residents, property owners, merchants, builders, and developers invest in the community by providing a reasonable expectation of its future physical layout and character.

The Comprehensive Plan is to be carried out through a combination of public and private investment, decisions by the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission and other public boards and commissions. The plan's recommendations will continue to be translated into action through:

- revision and enforcement of the city's development regulations;
- transportation improvements in cooperation with County roads and transportation departments (county roads) and the Alabama Department of Transportation (US and state highways);
- city budgeting and capital improvement programming; and
- public and private decisions in support of planned, cost-effective annexation.

Northport is a municipal corporation with certain powers granted to it by the State of Alabama. The City uses its police power to promote the health, safety and general welfare by enforcing local ordinances and development regulations. The City uses its taxation power to plan for and make investments in infrastructure, city facilities, and services, all of which have an influence on the growth and development of the community. All of these tools will continue to be used together to shape Northport in accord with the community's vision as embodied in this Comprehensive Plan.

ACTION PLAN

The matrix on the following pages lists capital projects and other community efforts identified during the comprehensive planning process and described in previous sections.

Actions are organized into the following categories, several of which echo the major goals of the plan:

Transportation

Infrastructure

Public Facilities and Recreation

Economy

Timeframe

Each action is assigned a timeframe based on its importance to the community, sense of urgency, cost considerations, expediency and other considerations. These include:

- **short-term** (1-5 years)
- **mid-term** (6-10 years)
- **long-term** (more than ten years)

"Low-hanging fruit"—projects that are inexpensive and relatively simple to accomplish—are typically assigned early timeframes. Accomplishing these tasks shows progress and helps build confidence.

Tasks referred to as "long-term" may be extraordinarily important to the community but will likely take a considerable amount of time to complete because of costs or other complicating factors. However, initial steps for some mid- and long-term tasks may need to be taken relatively soon to assure they can ultimately be accomplished within the desired timeframe.



Priorities

Once plan recommendations had been prepared, the community was asked for their input on priorities. Open House attendees used sticker dots to vote for projects they felt were most important. Participants also used an online survey to rate the importance and urgency of plan recommendations.

The following initiatives were considered the highest priorities by those who participated in the Open House voting and online survey:

- Bridge Avenue streetscape improvements
- AL Highway 69 widening/capacity
- Repair/replacement of older water and sewer lines
- Street maintenance
- Bicycle-pedestrian access across the river
- Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard improvements
- Walkability around schools and parks
- Citywide bicycle-pedestrian loop
- East-west connector road
- Two Mile Creek flood improvements

Lead - Partners

These are local, state and other entities whose involvement—which may vary from political support to technical assistance—may be essential in pursuing and completing the task. The lead organization is listed first followed by potential partner organizations.

Often, the City of Northport will lead and be responsible for implementing plan actions. However, in a few cases, it will be appropriate for other organizations to oversee certain initiatives with various types of support from the city government. Private foundations and nonprofit or community groups may also play supporting roles depending on the nature of the action.

Potential Resources

These are organizations and programs that offer funding, technical assistance, or other types of assistance relevant to the particular effort.



Work on McFarland Boulevard to improve traffic flow was underway during development of the Comprehensive Plan

Transportation

Project/Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Resources
Improve existing streets	Ongoing	City	
Improve Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard	Mid-term	City/ALDOT – Tuscaloosa MPO	ATRIP, RAISE, RCN
Widen AL 69	Long-term	City/ALDOT - County, Tuscaloosa MPO	ATRIP
Build Northbrook Connector	Long-term	City – (subdividers/ROW)	ATRIP
Connect AL 171 to Union Chapel Rd	Long-term	City – County (subdividers/ROW)	ATRIP
Extend Hospital Drive	Mid-term	City	ATRIP
Connect Flatwoods Drive to Rose Blvd	Long-term	City – (subdividers/ROW)	
Build East-West Connector	Mid-term	City/ALDOT - County, Tuscaloosa MPO (subdividers/ROW)	ATRIP, RAISE
Improve Tom Montgomery Road	Long-term	City/ALDOT - County, Tuscaloosa MPO (subdividers/ROW)	ATRIP, RAISE
Improve walkability around schools and parks	Ongoing	City – Tuscaloosa MPO	
Improve bicycle-pedestrian access over river	Long-term	City - City of Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa MPO	RAISE, RCN, RTP
Build citywide bike-ped loop	Long-term	City – County, Tuscaloosa MPO	RAISE, RCN, RTP, Sweet Trails Alabama
Connect Levee Trail to Main Avenue	Short-term	City	
Improve Bridge Avenue Streetscape	Short-term	City – Tuscaloosa MPO	RAISE, RCN

Short-Term = 5 years
 Mid-Term = 6-10 years
 Long-Term = more than 10 years

ATRIP Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program
 RAISE Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity
 RCN Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods
 RTP Recreational Trails Program (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs)

Infrastructure			
Project/Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Resources
Upgrade sewer collection system for growth in east Northport	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	CWSRF
Upgrade sewer collection system for growth in north/central Northport	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	CWSRF
Upgrade sewer collection system for growth in west Northport	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	CWSRF
Conduct lifespan analysis and prepare master plan for wastewater treatment plant improvements	Short-term	Utilities Dept.	
Make improvements to wastewater treatment plant per master plan	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	CWSRF
Repair/replace sewer lines	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	CWSRF
Repair/replace water lines	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	DWSRF
Analyze water storage, treatment plant and distribution and prepare water system master plan	Short-term	Utilities Dept.	
Perform upgrades to water treatment plant per master plan	Ongoing	Utilities Dept.	DWSRF
Plan, design and construct flood improvements along Two Mile Creek	Short/Mid-term	Engineering Dept.	BRIC, WIFIA, WFPO
Plan, design and construct flood improvements for the Buckhead/Shirley Farm area	Ongoing	Engineering Dept.	BRIC, WIFIA, WFPO
Short-Term = 5 years Mid-Term = 6-10 years Long-Term = more than 10 years			

BRIC Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

CWSRF Clean Water State Revolving Fund (Alabama Department of Environmental Management)

DWSRF Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (Alabama Department of Environmental Management)

WFPO Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (US Department of Agriculture)

WIFIA Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act 2014 (Environmental Protection Agency)

Public Facilities and Recreation

Project/Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Resources
Relocate Fire Station #1	Mid-term	Fire Dept.	
Improve Fire Dept. staffing, training and equipment	Ongoing	Fire Dept.	
Increase outdoor storage for Public Works	Short-term	Public Works Dept.	
Develop local recycling facility	Long-term	Public Works Dept.	
Build plaza/park overlooking river (east)	Mid-term	City	
Develop plan for Train Depot	Mid-term	City	
Improve county library access	Short-term	City - Tuscaloosa County Library system	IMLSG, private foundations
Prepare long-term parks and recreation plan	Short-term	City	
Improve Civitan Park	Short-term	City	
Build neighborhood park adjacent to Northport Medical Center DCH	Short-term	City - DCH	
Build citywide bike-ped loop	Long-term	City/Engineering Dept.	RAISE, RCN, RTP, Sweet Trails Alabama
Build initial phase of Adventure Park	Short-term	City/Engineering Dept.	
Short-Term = 5 years Mid-Term = 6-10 years Long-Term = more than 10 years			

IMLSG Institute of Museum and Library Services Grants to States
RAISE Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity
RCN Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods
RTP Recreational Trails Program (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs)



Economy

Project/Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Resources
Improve Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard	Short-term	City/ALDOT – Tuscaloosa MPO	ATRIP, RAISE, RCN
Improve community gateways	Short-term	City	
Improve Bridge Avenue streetscape	Short-term	City – Tuscaloosa MPO	RAISE, RCN
Develop wayfinding master plan	Short-term	City	
Build water park	Short-term	City – private operator	
Develop conference center at Adventure Park	Mid-term	City – County	
Create downtown organization	Short-term	Downtown merchants, City	Main Street Alabama
Update downtown zoning	Short-term	City	
Reduce congestion on major roads	various projects: See Transportation		
Upgrade sewer system	various projects: See Infrastructure		

Short-Term = 5 years
 Mid-Term = 6-10 years
 Long-Term = more than 10 years

ATRIP Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program
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GROWTH MANAGEMENT

To support Northport's goal of "intentional growth" and to pursue other initiatives throughout the plan, the City intends to update its zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.

Zoning Ordinance

Northport's zoning ordinance regulates development components such as land uses, density, parking and signage and applies only within the city limits.

Following the adoption of the 2008 Downtown and Riverfront Plan, new zoning regulations were adopted for the "Core City" area, including special setback, landscaping and building design standards. Adoption of a new comprehensive plan creates a strategic opportunity to assess and update zoning regulations to better support the development patterns envisioned within the plan.

The following should be considered to improve the usefulness and usability of the zoning ordinance and to assist in the implementation of the development goals of this plan:

- Reorganize the zoning ordinance to make it more user-friendly and enable easier integration of any future amendments
- Update standards for the RS-Special District to include criteria for acceptance. The RS-SD functions similarly to planned unit development allowances in other zoning ordinances. To receive the flexibility offered by the special designation, the applicant must show that the proposed development features elements that meets one or more development or design goals of the city.
- Improve provisions for cottage subdivisions in appropriate residential zoning districts to increase attractive, affordable housing choices suited to empty nesters and other smaller households
- Add provisions for conservation subdivisions to incentivize retention of sensitive environmental areas as open space amenities in residential subdivisions

Cottage development



Conservation subdivision

- Simplify Core City zoning regulations, look for opportunities to combine some core city districts or apply conventional districts in their place (such as for single-family residential areas)
- Modify C-2 and C-3 Districts to support desired development patterns in the mixed-use nodes identified in this Plan—compact, walkable, vertical mix of uses, green space—OR establish an alternate mixed-use zoning designation with design standards to accomplish the same.
- Evaluate open space requirements for single-family, multifamily and mixed-use developments, require a greater amount of usable open space with amenities in higher density development

- Update short-term rental regulations to maintain a supply of single-family dwellings for long-term housing use, minimize impacts on housing prices and avoid concentrations that can harm property values and neighborhood vitality
- Update landscaping requirements to expand on buffers between conflicting uses and screening requirements
- Incentivize use of low impact design techniques in support of stormwater management particularly in nonresidential developments



Low impact design for stormwater management

- Update existing and/or create new development standards to improve the appearance of development along Lurleen B Wallace Boulevard and McFarland Boulevard
- Review regulations for consistency with state and federal laws, update as needed.
- Update sign regulations to assure content-neutrality and comply with First Amendment case law, update restrictions on off-premise signage
- Modify site plan and other zoning approval processes that place final approval authority with the Planning Commission or that grants the Commission authority to increase or reduce requirements other than those associated with subdivision development; Planning Commission's authority with regard to zoning is advisory only in accordance with the enabling legislation of the Alabama State Code.

Subdivision Regulations

Northport's subdivision regulations govern the division of land—most often for single-family residential developments—and the manner in which streets, drainage and other infrastructure elements are designed. Northport enforces its subdivision regulations within its planning jurisdiction (1.5 miles beyond the city limits).

The following should be considered in updating the Northport Subdivision Regulations to assist in implementation of the development concepts in this plan:

- Add standards for street connectivity applying to access to subdivisions from existing adjoining streets and for the layout of streets within subdivisions to support traffic flow and emergency response
- Incorporate additional access management standards, particularly for subdivision development along major roads that are not subject to ALDOT requirements
- Incorporate open space requirements for residential subdivisions with the amount of open space increasing with housing density
- Evaluate street pavement width requirements with consideration of traffic calming, whether on-street parking is permitted
- Evaluate minimum lot size for residential development outside of city limits; specify minimum lot size for nonresidential development outside of city limits.
- Allow exception to street frontage requirement of lots to allow for cottage developments
- Develop design standards to allow and regulate the planting of appropriate species of trees between the curb and sidewalk
- Enable use of low impact development techniques in the design of streets and drainage systems as an alternative to conventional approaches

KEEPING THE PLAN RELEVANT

Comprehensive planning is often viewed as an occasional activity overseen by the Planning Commission, while preparing the city budget is an annual responsibility of the City Council. As a result, the relationship between the city's plan and its budget can become tenuous if not considered together. The connection between the plan and annual budgets can be strengthened by coordinating plan updates with budgeting processes.

Coordinated updates can help the City Administrator, Mayor and Council better determine capital budget priorities and coordinate public investments envisioned in the plan. To coordinate plan policies and their implementation, each city department, board, authority, and commission (and non-city groups that may be eligible for City funding assistance) should review the Comprehensive Plan and submit a report to the City that would include the following:

- All tasks essential for accomplishing elements of the Comprehensive Plan during the coming year that are or should be the responsibility of the respondent.
- Suggested changes in City programs – including but not limited to regulations, capital investments, operation and maintenance, and intergovernmental coordination – that the respondent feels to be in the best interests of overall plan implementation.
- Suggested changes in City policy toward growth and development as described in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Suggested changes in the respondent's responsibility or authority that would better enable implementation of any parts of the comprehensive plan.
- A preliminary budget proposal, including capital equipment and investments needed to deal with the above, and the portion of those costs it is requested that the City bear.

The City Administrator's office would collect this information for consideration in drafting a capital budget and suggested plan amendments for the coming year. After discussions with department heads and others, the City Administrator would forward a draft capital budget and suggested plan amendments to the Planning Commission, who would review it in light of the comprehensive plan. The Planning Commission would report to the City Administrator the findings of its review of proposed capital investments, recommendations for plan amendments, and adjustments to development regulations.

The City Administrator would prepare and present a proposed capital budget and revenue forecast to the City Council. The Planning Commission would take action regarding any recommended changes to the Comprehensive Plan and/or subdivision regulations and suggest zoning ordinance amendments, as needed, to the Council.

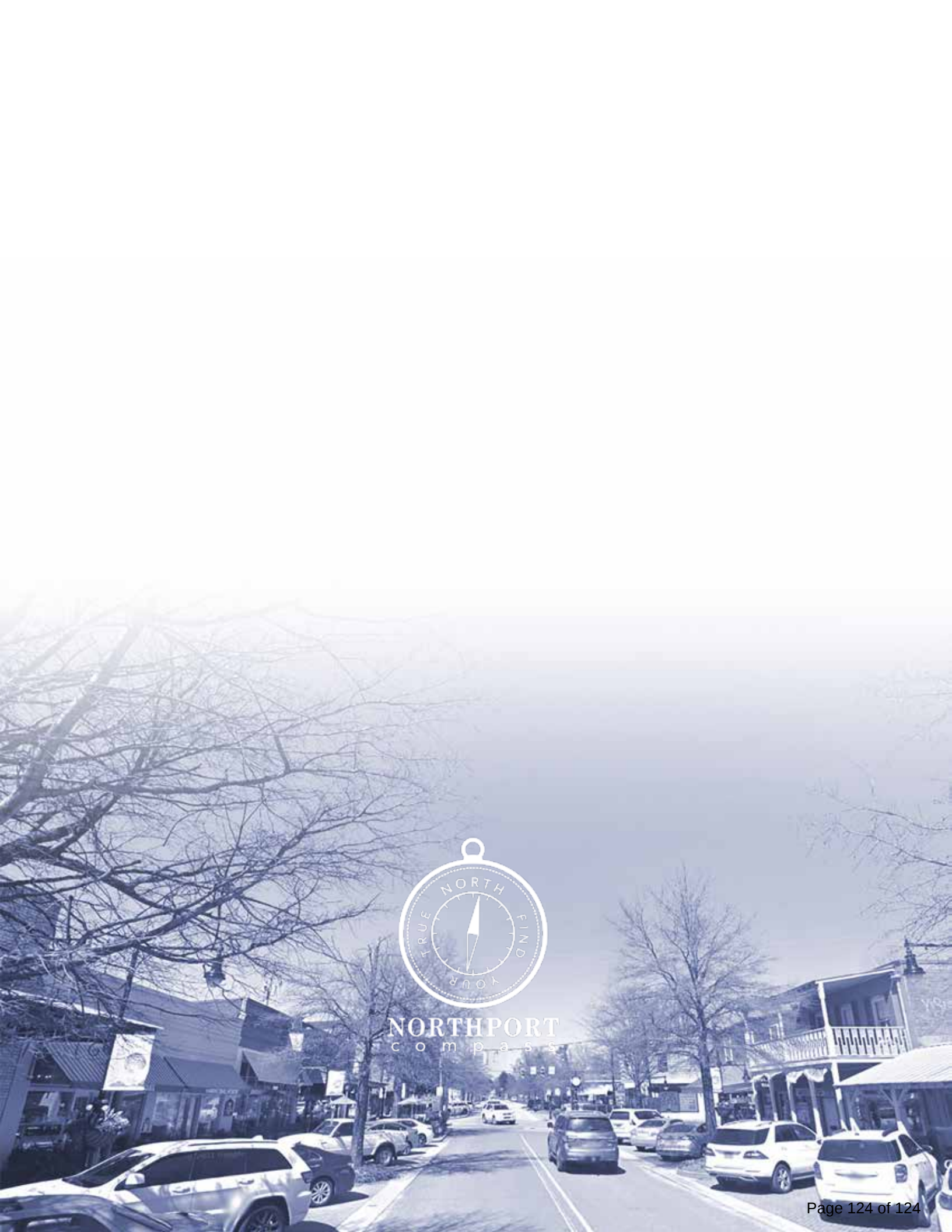
Amendments and Supplements

Plans prepared by the City for specific corridors, neighborhoods or districts, once adopted by the Planning Commission, become amendments or supplements to the Comprehensive Plan. Likewise, a parks and recreation master plan or a plan for the citywide bicycle-pedestrian loop will amend this plan, add more detail and extend the relevance of the Comprehensive Plan.

While it is intended that decisions by the City Council, Planning Commission and others should be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, circumstances change and may require a decision that appears in conflict with the plan. In addition, there may be proposals or other circumstances in the future, in which the issues involved are not fully or clearly guided by the plan. When such events occur, the City should consider amending the plan to account for such changing conditions so that the plan remains relevant.



DRAFT



NORTHPORT
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