

SPECIFIC PLAN

UNIVERSITY AREA NEIGHBORHOODS

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PREPARED FOR

THE CITY OF TUSCALOOSA AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

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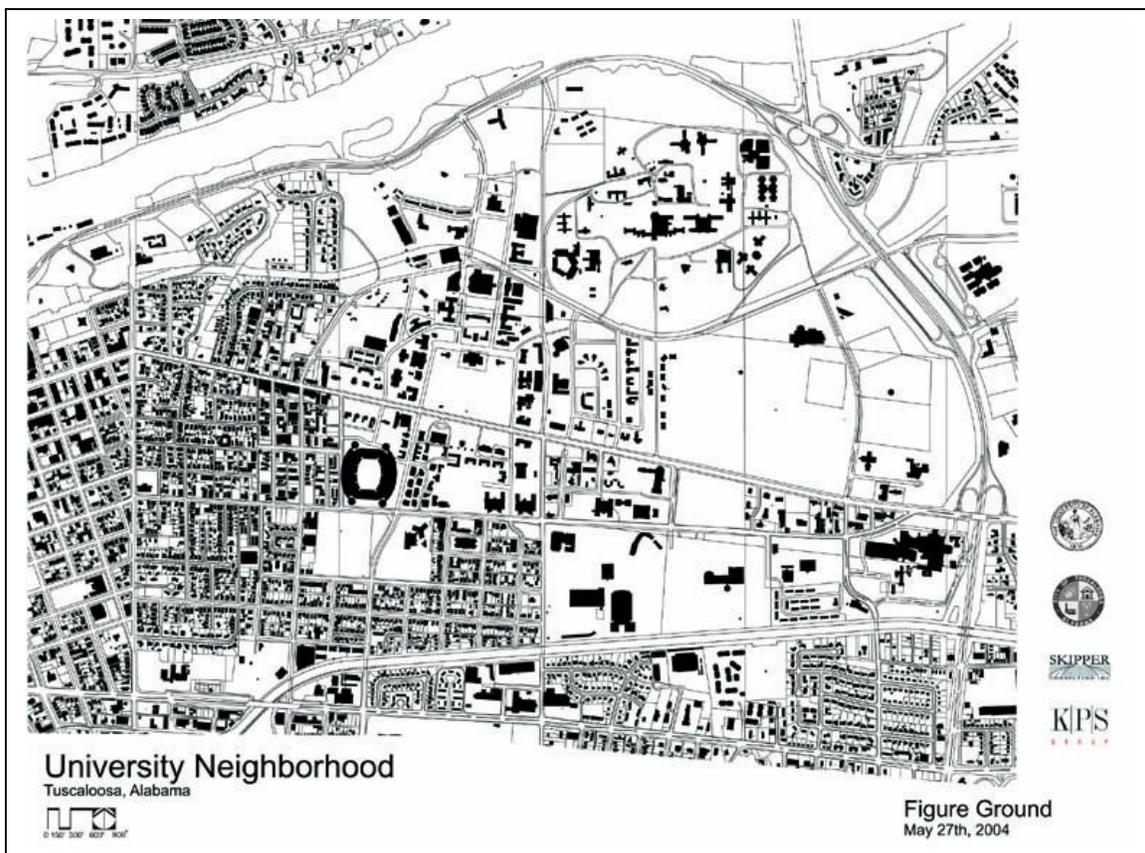
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I. INTRODUCTION

This Specific Plan for the University Area Neighborhoods of Tuscaloosa is the result of a unique degree of cooperation between the City of Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama. They joined forces in 2003 as the University Neighborhood Partnership Committee to determine ways to improve the quality of life in the several neighborhoods adjacent to the University of Alabama—the traditional neighborhoods that for decades have been the short-term off-campus home to thousands of university students.

During the early stages of forming themselves into a working group, the members of the committee determined that it was time for city and university to jointly plan for the systematic improvement of the University Area Neighborhoods. The city and a nearby neighborhood had just completed a Specific Plan for that area of the city, and “the Partnership,” together with a number of residents and property owners, agreed the time was ripe for specific planning to guide reinvestment, revitalization and redevelopment of private properties in and around the university neighborhoods. In response, the City of Tuscaloosa, with support from the University of Alabama, retained KPS Group and Skipper Consulting of Birmingham to engage the neighborhood association and city representatives in preparation of a “Specific Plan” for the neighborhood and its adjacent commercial areas.



The project began with meetings with City, University, Student Government and Neighborhood Partnership representatives, to collect and analyze information they had about the area. The consultants built a base map of the neighborhood, using the city’s mapping system, augmented with information from the university. Inventory site visits built upon this knowledge of the neighborhoods, and information was depicted on thematic maps and

reviewed at working meetings of the Partnership. The city engineer's office provided traffic information for the neighborhood. Economic and housing development opportunities were discussed with developers and landlords.

Students, university staff, neighborhood residents, landlords, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials participated in a planning workshop early in the process. They shared ideas about neighborhood assets and liabilities, the major trends they anticipated, and the influences those might have on the neighborhood. They spoke of their visions for the University Area Neighborhoods and possible opportunities for both private and public investment. This information was converted to a Strategic Concept for the neighborhoods, and this was reviewed in several meetings of the Neighborhood Partnership. This provided the opportunity to build consensus in support of development, revitalization, accessibility improvements and public investments. These ideas are the core of this Specific Plan, which includes recommended revisions to the Tuscaloosa Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. Both are intended to stabilize and protect critical portions of the neighborhood and to encourage and enable appropriate private revitalization and redevelopment activities.

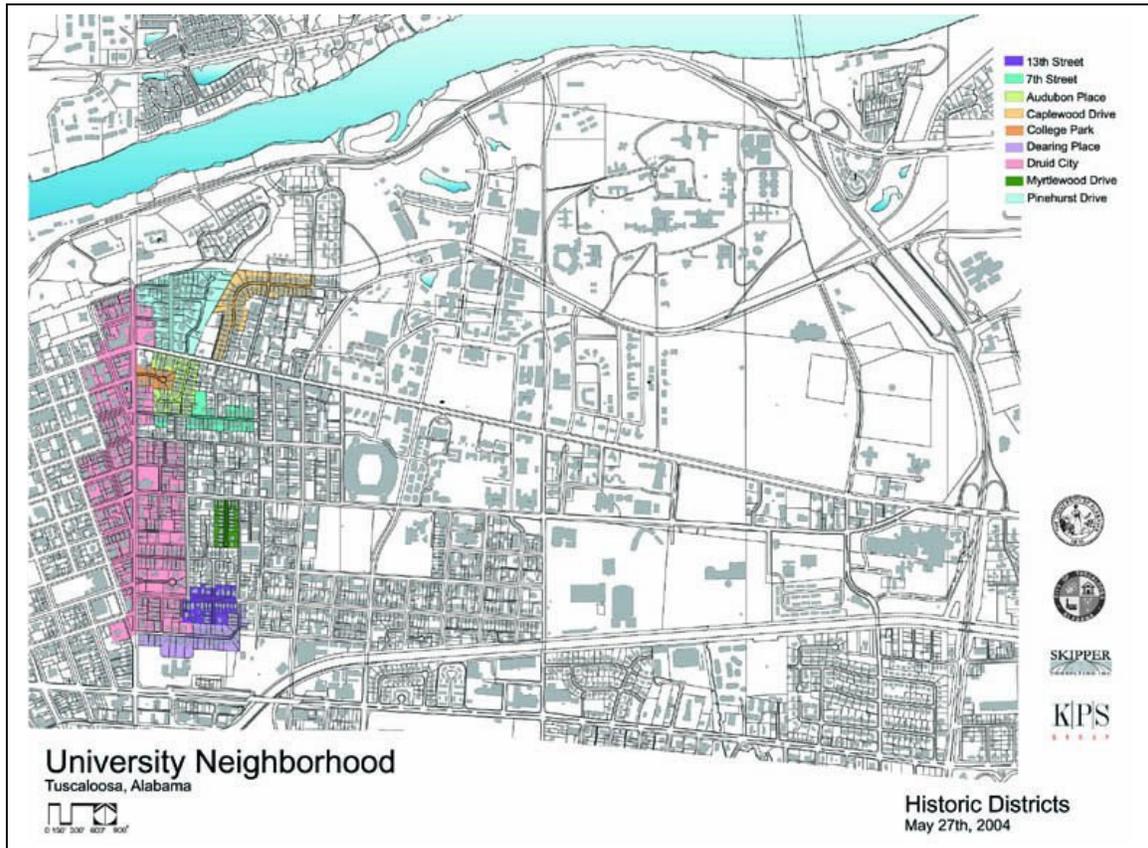
This document and the research, analysis, evaluation and consensus-building included in the process leading to this document will help to form and provide details to the new citywide Comprehensive Plan. Adoption of this Specific Plan by the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Commission and its endorsement by the University of Alabama signals the intent of both parties to cooperate to implement the concepts presented in this document. Both also acknowledge the need to continually review the needs of the neighborhood and the surrounding community and university campus, and to cooperatively update the plan as needed to keep abreast of changing ideas and conditions.

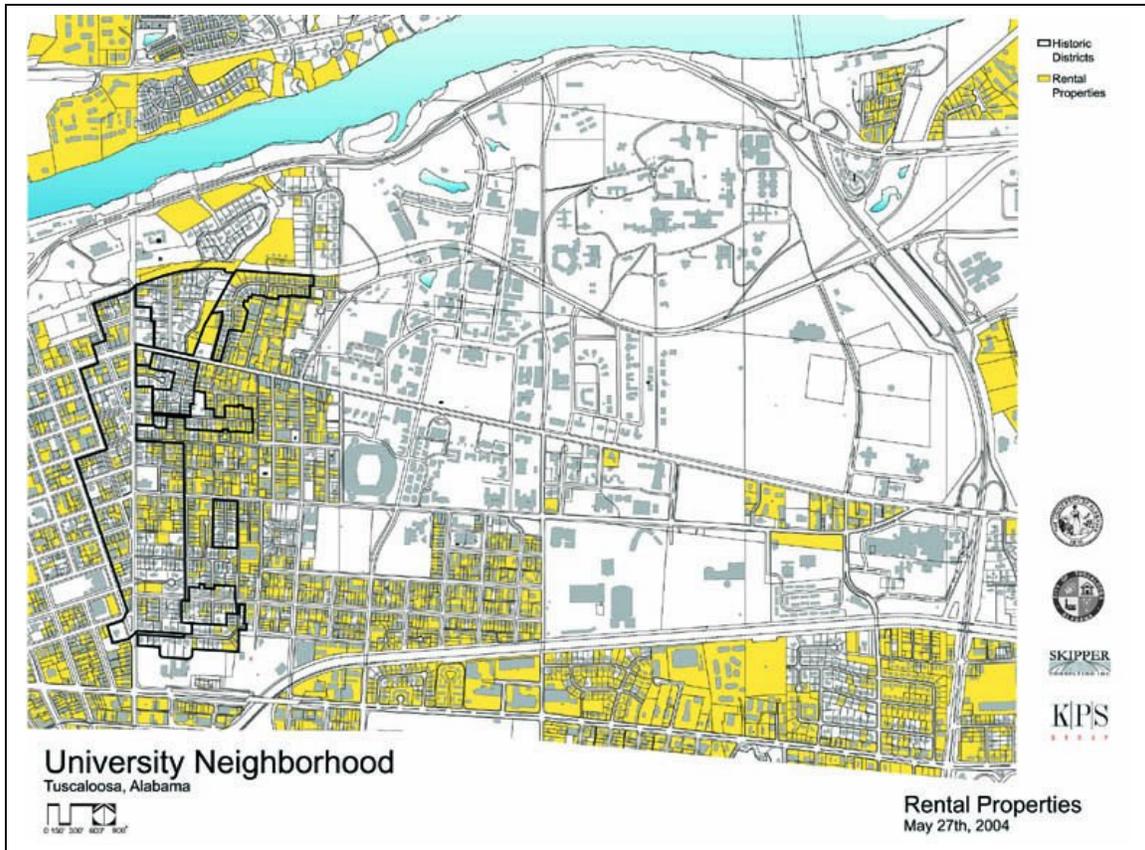
II. THE UNIVERSITY AREA NEIGHBORHOODS

The University Area Neighborhoods planning area is bounded on the north by the Black Warrior River, on the east by McFarland Boulevard, on the south by Fifteenth Street and on the west by Queen City Avenue. However, for purposes of this Specific Plan, the planning area does not include the dominant land use, landowners, employers or traffic generators, which are the University of Alabama, Bryce Hospital and Druid City Hospital, though the conditions of the planning area are intimately related to them and some of the following descriptions refer to them. The planning area is adjacent to and is in part one of the city's older sections, though it contains some of the city's newest so-called multi-family residential developments, in this area dominated by university students.

Historic Districts

Tuscaloosa has a large number of historic structures, mostly residences and many of them included within nine locally designated Historic Districts (with others anticipated) that are located within the University Area Neighborhoods. Once dominated by owner-occupants, most of these properties are now firmly in the hands of landlords and occupied by renters. The history these properties represent to some people, the care lavished upon them and the neighborhoods of which they are a part has further fueled vocal opposition to expansion of rental housing in the area, led primarily by owner-occupants and their allies in the preservation community.



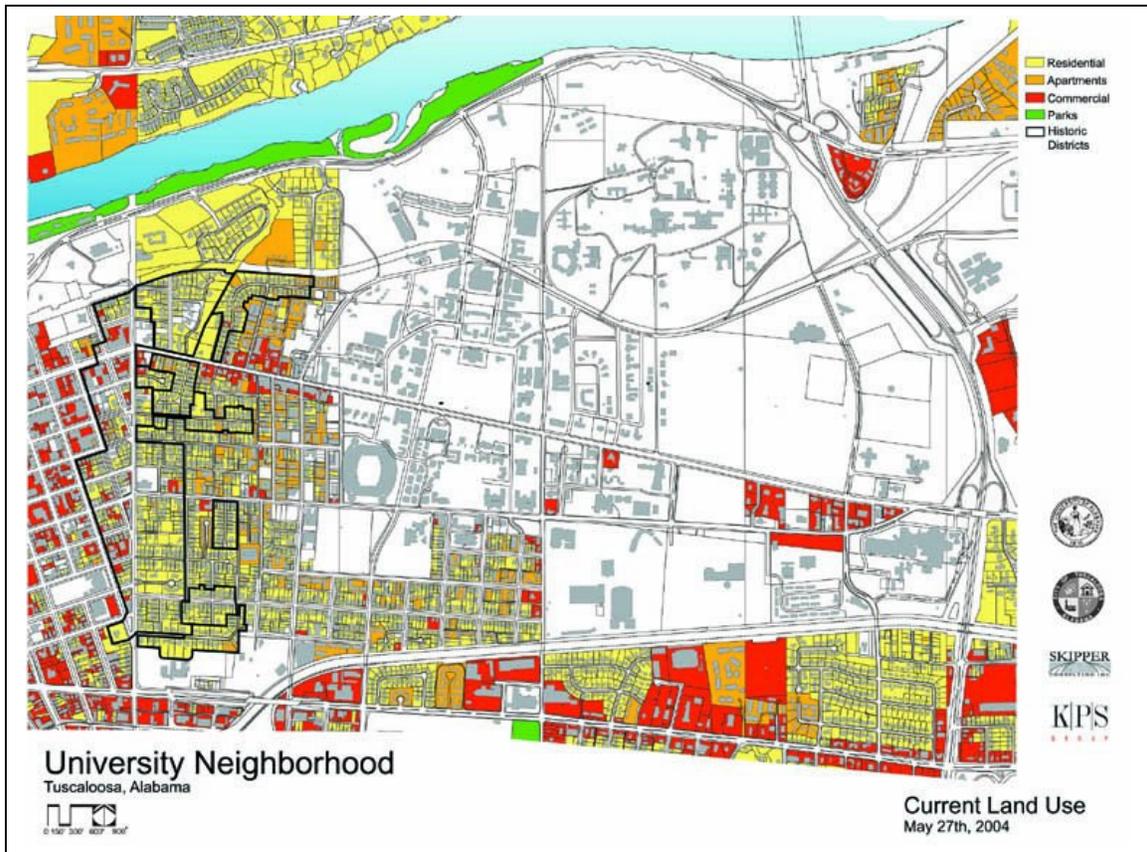


Rental Properties

The extremely high percentage amount of rental housing—and especially student housing—in an area that was once dominated by owner-occupied housing can be seen on the accompanying map. The two types of property owners have different objectives for the use of their property, which often has led to differing—and often conflicting—levels of care and maintenance. This change and the shift in occupancy type from owner to renter have altered the demographic makeup of the area and led to tensions among residents and between owner-occupants and the often-absentee owners of rental housing.

Current Land Use and Development

The overwhelming majority of the property in the University Area Neighborhoods is used for residential purposes—people live there. And most—but not all—of the people who live in this area are associated with the University of Alabama in some manner—students, faculty, staff, or employed in some commercial venture serving them. These are mostly situated in “strips” of commerce arrayed along several of the more heavily traveled arterial and collector streets of the planning area. Housing density varies considerably, but on average is much higher than most anywhere else in the city. This has brought together a diverse mix of people but, again, students and those serving them in one fashion or another dominate the demographics. The highest population concentrations are shown on the map in the orange tones—for the most part, located in those places where more or less direct accessibility to the university campus is greatest.

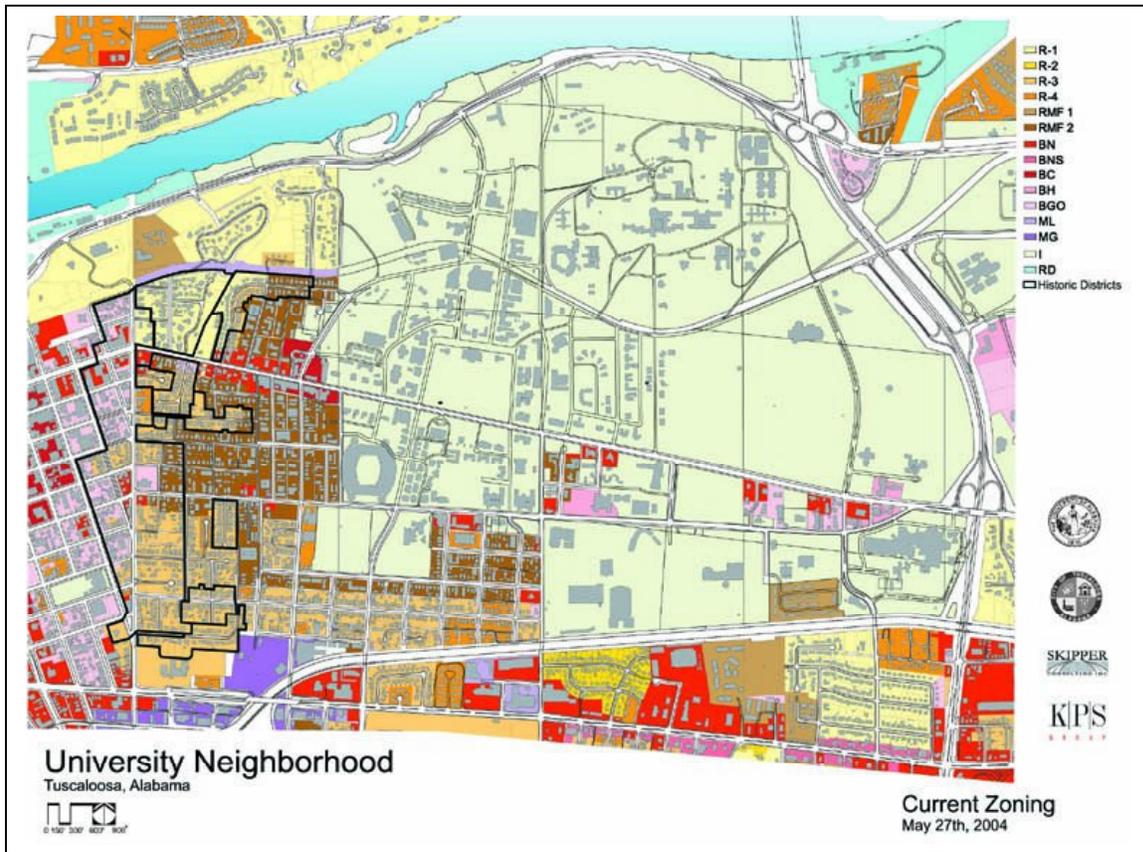


Road Classifications

The planning area has rather porous edges: traffic of various types and volumes flows through the planning area and the university campus more or less at will. The arterials that bisect and provide the edges for the planning area also carry most of the traffic, much of which is passing by or through. The collector streets are simply narrower, lesser-traffic versions of the arterials that carry less through traffic. The pattern in general indicates relatively easy east-west access, but fewer options in a north-south direction.

Current Zoning

For most of the planning area, current zoning tends to reflect current use of land by type but not density. At first glance, the pattern of zoning for residential density appears a creature of ready accessibility to and from the university campus. However, it generally allows higher densities than are currently present (and thus the market—and space for parking—can bear), especially to the west of 14th Avenue and south along 12th Avenue and thus leads investors to speculate on properties in anticipation of higher returns from rental housing. A comparison of the current land use and current zoning maps demonstrates this characteristic in much—but certainly not all—of the planning area. Also to be noted on the current zoning map is the conflict between multi-family zoning and certain of the Historic Districts (which are subject to design and development standards that strongly discourage redevelopment).



III. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Neighborhood residents, students, local developers, property owners, university and city staff and elected officials gathered on the university campus in April 2004 for meetings with consultants. The participants shared ideas about neighborhood assets and liabilities, major trends they anticipated and the influences those might have on the neighborhood. They spoke of their aspirations for the University Area Neighborhoods and possible opportunities to create or fill in its missing pieces. The following are summaries and interpretations of comments and suggestions made by the participants.

Assets

For purposes of this project, an asset is defined as a critical, defining characteristic of the neighborhoods, and a condition that is at least up to the standards of the participants. The following assets are presented in approximately the order in which they were suggested.

- *Off-campus freedom*
- *Community feel*
- *Home cooking*
- *Party houses*
- *Old homes*
- *Trees*
- *Sidewalks*
- *Open fields*
- *Mix of neighborhoods*
- *Churches*
- *Post Office*
- *Historic districts*
- *Town and Gown*
- *Close to Downtown*
- *Shopping opportunities*
- *University Strip retail and restaurant*
- *Area proximity to the university campus*

Liabilities

For purposes of this project, a liability is not necessarily a problem, but rather is defined as any aspect of the neighborhoods that does not meet the standards of the participants. The following liabilities are presented in approximately the order in which they were suggested.

- *Security / lighting*
- *Housing conditions*
- *Parking on the street*
- *Waste management*
- *Party houses*
- *Landlord-tenant relations*
- *Traffic circle design/location*
- *Neighbor communication*
- *Landlord deposit abuse*
- *Noise*
- *Parking problems*
- *Transit missing*
- *North-south traffic access*
- *University Strip's image and lack of commercial diversity*
- *University Strip accessibility*
- *No place for bicycles*
- *Three-unrelated occupant limits*
- *Property maintenance*
- *Uninformed and secretive tenants*

It should be noted that the assets tend to stress the positive *physical* aspects of the planning area, while the liabilities focus instead upon relationships and communication—or the lack thereof. The assets are those of a mature, mixed-density residential and commercial environment that has experienced an accelerating rate of change from owner-occupancy to student rentals over the past few decades. The liabilities mentioned are consistent with these changes, and most of them are associated with the tensions such changes can bring to a neighborhood that is so close to a major university.

The assets and liabilities mentioned by the participants demonstrate the need to build and improve upon the physical quality of the neighborhoods as well as continuing to organize and build relationships among and within the several major constituents—residents, students, local developers, property owners, university and city staff and elected officials. This range of issues to be dealt with indicates the need for an overall, comprehensive approach to the Specific Plan for the University Area Neighborhoods and its implementation by all responsible parties.

Opportunities for the Neighborhoods

Building upon the assets and recognizing the liabilities of the planning area, participants in the April 2004 meetings were each asked to envision the University Area Neighborhoods at some time in the future—say ten years out—and imagine its physical form, with the land uses and activities and facilities that would provide an appropriate quality of life for each of them and their neighbors. Rather than share those visions directly, each participant was asked to describe the pieces currently missing from the planning area, and to suggest a location for them if at all possible. This lively discussion brought to the surface the following, which are presented here as general and physical opportunities for converting the planning area from its present condition to one more in tune with the desires of neighborhood residents, students, local developers, property owners, university and city staff and elected officials.

General Opportunities

- *Attitudes and relations*
- *Organization and information*
- *Student activities and recreation*
- *Regulations and enforcement*
- *Environmental quality*
- *Routine maintenance*
- *Access and parking*
- *Redevelopment*
- *Wayfinding*
- *Security*
- *Image*

Physical Opportunities

- *Major image corridors*
- *Gateways and decision points*
- *Bicycle and pedestrian corridors*
- *Neighborhood redevelopment*
- *Neighborhoods and centers*
- *Commercial redevelopment*
- *Neighborhood parking*
- *On-campus housing*
- *On-campus parking*
- *Security upgrades*
- *Roadway changes*

Over the course of the following month, these opportunities were reviewed, considered and organized into the form of a Strategic Concept for the University Area Neighborhoods, then presented and reviewed at the May 2004 meeting of the Neighborhood Partnership Committee.

Goals for University Area Neighborhoods Development

The University Area Neighborhoods planning area is first and foremost a collection of *neighborhoods*—places where people should be able to live with and adjacent to one another in various types of households that form a loose sense of community. The special mix of residents also requires good accessibility to each other, to the university, to places to shop, work and recreate. In response, the following set of overall goals for the planning area was devised, then presented to and reviewed by the Neighborhood Partnership Committee at its June 2004 meeting.

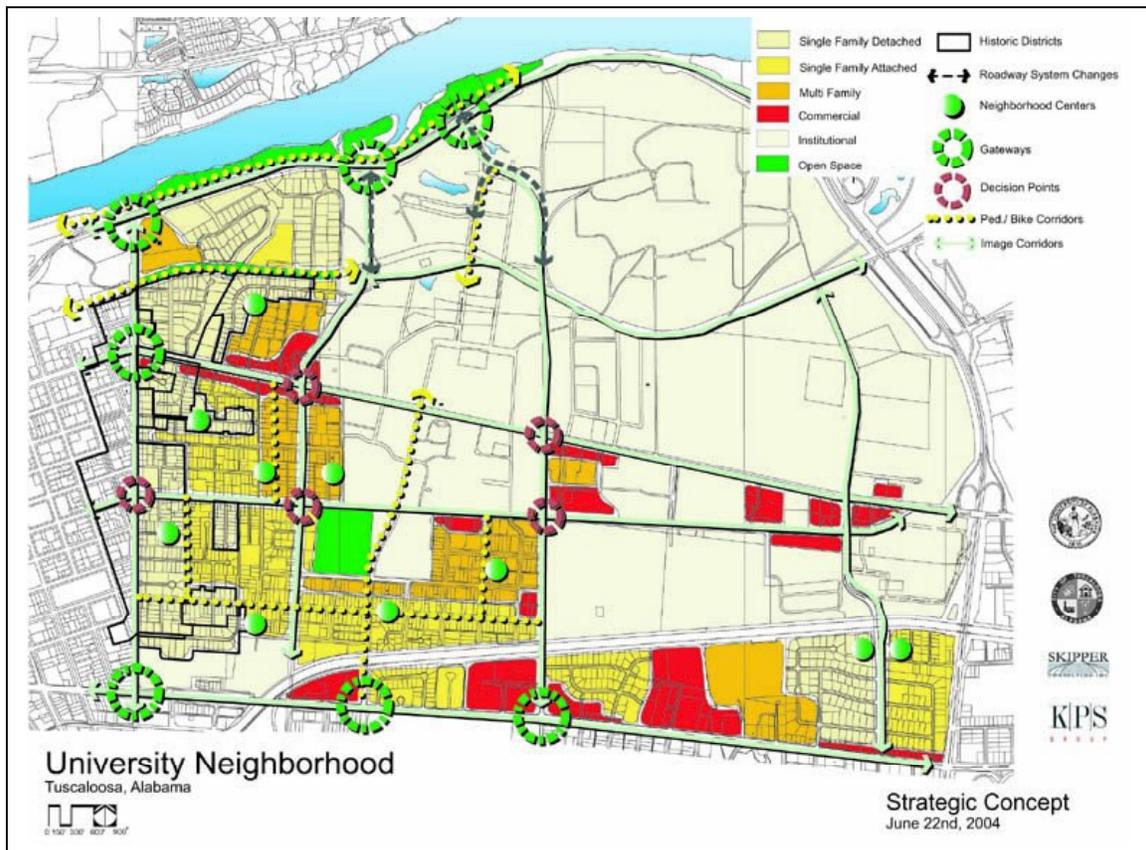
- To take advantage of proximity between places to work, learn, shop and live
- To provide safe, convenient, attractive accessibility for motor vehicles (including places to park), for bicycles (and their storage) and for pedestrians

- To provide safe, accessible, attractive neighborhoods
- To provide accessible, safe, attractive commerce
- To encourage appropriate redevelopment
- To transition between uses logically
- To support Historic District integrity
- To separate incompatible uses
- To concentrate similar uses

Strategic Concept

The results of the analysis and evaluation led to preparation of a Strategic Concept for the University Area Neighborhoods and its review at the June 2004 meeting of the Neighborhood Partnership Committee. This concept provides a general overview of the ways in which the City, University and private sector may build on the heart and structure of the neighborhoods as they all cooperatively engage, support and shape its future.

The Strategic Concept is organized into several key policy areas. These deal with critical physical characteristics of the neighborhoods, residential development as the majority of its land uses and majority renter occupancy, the University Strip at the heart (if not the geographic center) of the planning area, and accessibility by pedestrians and bicycles and the motor vehicle traffic passing through.



The accompanying map is a representation of this Strategic Concept that is driving the several parts of the University Area Neighborhoods Specific Plan depicted in Chapter IV. It indicates the general locations and interrelationships of each of the plan's recommendations.

The following points summarize the ideas depicted in the Strategic Concept map. They are intended to guide city, university, landlord and neighborhood decisions regarding private and public initiatives and investments.

- Population density is increased and concentrated according to the beneficial mutual relationships that are associated with proximity to the University Area Neighborhoods' three recognized critical assets: the University of Alabama campus, the University Strip and the locally designated historic districts.
- Moderate to high density, multi-family housing are located in areas having a high degree of accessibility to campus.
- Between the higher and lower density residential areas there are provided generous places for moderate-density housing.
- There is economic incentive to reinvest in housing to increase overall density, yet also protect the Historic Districts.
- There is at least one *focus area*, of an appropriate type, included in each recognized neighborhood—a vest-pocket park, an open space, a common parking area or some combination thereof.
- There is a system of primary bicycle and pedestrian corridors to interconnect the campus and the University Area Neighborhoods.
- The University Strip is improved as a diverse, specialty commercial and dining anchor for the area, and appropriate commercial infill and minor additions are promoted.
- Appropriate infilling of compatible, small-scale commercial uses is encouraged along the eastern portion of University Boulevard and along Paul W. Bryant Drive.
- Major trees and other landscape improvements are used to mark key internal decision intersections.
- Significant buildings, major trees and landscape improvements are encouraged as ways to mark the gateways to the major image corridors.

The Strategic Concept updates the historic pattern of development that emerged and continued over several decades in the early part of the last century. It is proposed to strengthen that pattern with a complementary mix of uses, including a limited variety of housing types and densities and augment the quality of life with improvements to the public realm that will increase the potential for an active neighborhood street life.

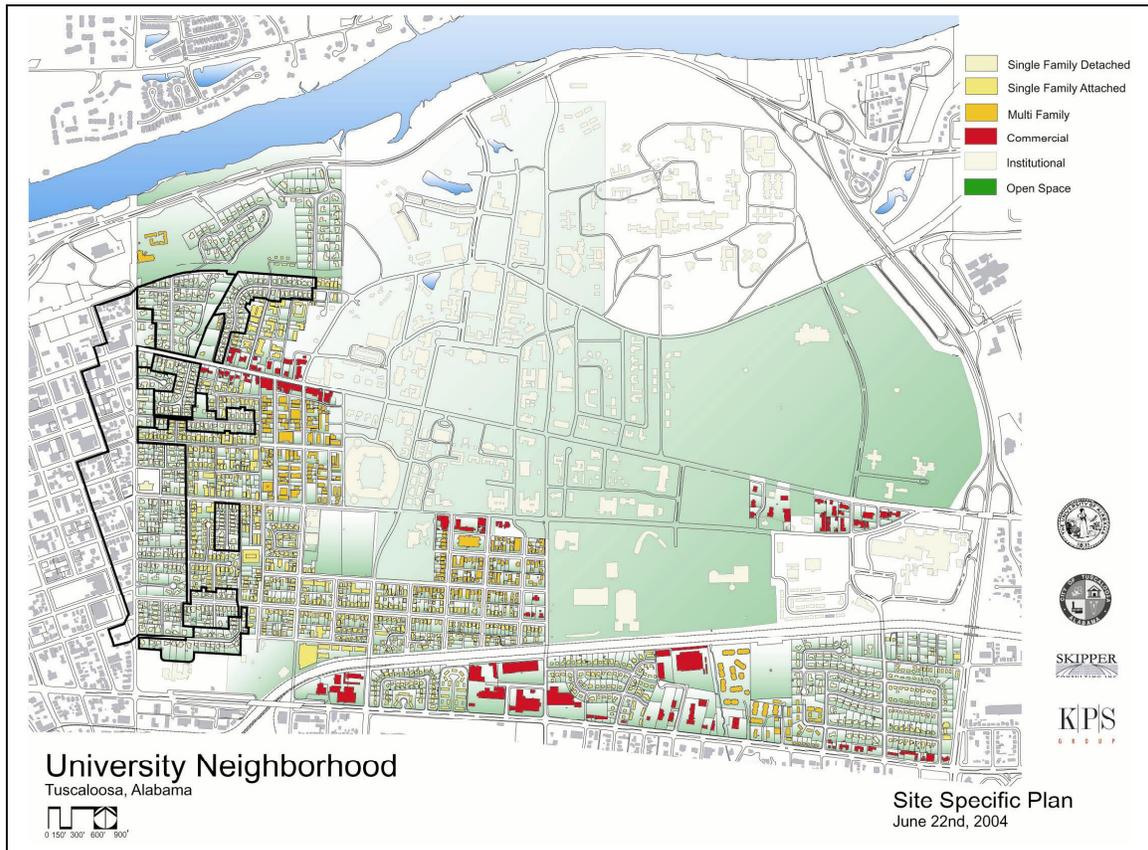
To build up the perception of a quality neighborhood-centered living environment, new residential development should be planned, designed and built in ways that will help to focus many eyes on neighborhood streets. This may be accomplished through infilling of vacant areas, through reinvestment and redevelopment and by converting insular development patterns to those more in tune with traditional, street-front mixed housing. At the same time, residential quality of life includes accessibility to diverse, healthy neighborhood-scale and focused commerce, services, open space and recreation. The Strategic Concept promotes significant reinvestment in a balance of neighborhood-scale commerce and in safe streets and sidewalks to support such connections.

IV. SPECIFIC PLAN

The Specific Plan is based upon the Strategic Concept presented in the previous chapter. It is organized through the use of three major systems: public space, wayfinding and accessibility and the use of land. The following sections summarize the essential characteristics of these systems. These are followed by recommendations for upgrading the residential character of the neighborhoods and the University Strip through reinvestment and redevelopment. Each of these sections is supplemented by conceptual development design standards.

Public Space

A recurring theme of this plan is to provide appropriate public spaces in which residents may come together as a community of neighbors. Public space is an integral part of the plan that is used in several ways: to organize and separate the uses of land; to provide view corridors and lend identity to the various neighborhoods and other parts of the area; to allow and encourage pedestrian accessibility and movement; and to provide space for active and passive recreation activities.



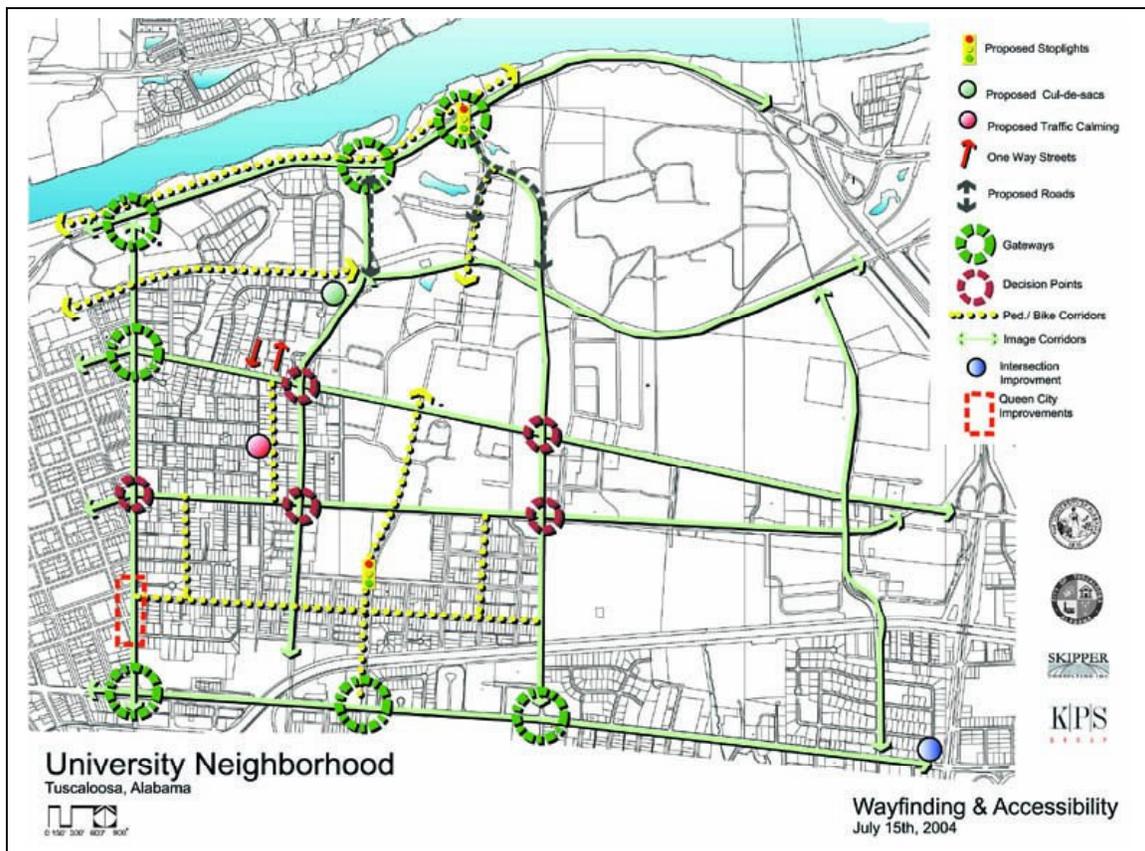
These spaces are organized into a pattern in accord with the following major premises in addition to the policies of the Strategic Concept: presented in Chapter III.

- Provide and maintain a quality physical environment to help attract and retain private reinvestment

- Enhance the existing street pattern by opening selected arterial and collector streets to improve vehicular and pedestrian character and circulation
- Treat streets and pedestrian ways as important components of the public realm, with pedestrian lighting and significant trees along all streets and sidewalks
- Use significant buildings, major trees and landscape improvements to mark gateways to major image corridors
- Use major trees and other landscape improvements to mark key internal decision intersections
- Give pedestrians priority and encourage walking by making the area a varied and desirable place to be
- Include a *focus area*, of an appropriate type, to each recognized neighborhood—a vest-pocket park, an open space, a common parking area or some combination

Wayfinding and Accessibility

The accessibility system is a complete network of streets, sidewalks and alleys, all fully interconnected. For major wayfinding purposes the accessibility system is organized using several streets that have been designated the area's major image corridors. These include Jack Warner Parkway, University Boulevard, Paul W. Bryant Drive, Campus Drive, Queen City Avenue, Twelfth Avenue, Tenth Avenue and Sixth Avenue. These streets are important because the largest element of the public realm (aside from the University campus) is the city street network. The image of the street and sidewalk provides the setting for and sets the tone of development of private property.



It should be noted in particular that the image of all streets in the area is critical: they should be among the best in Tuscaloosa. They should feature not only good driving surfaces appropriate to the type and speed of traffic, but also sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting and landscaped edges. To support this image, all off-street, surface parking should be located toward the interiors of blocks and away from intersections.

The systems of bicycle and pedestrian circulation are as important as that for motor vehicles. Sidewalks and bicycle routes should form interconnected networks of accessibility throughout the University Area Neighborhoods. Giving bicycle routes and sidewalks priority will encourage cycling and walking—and interaction—within the public realm. All of the area’s streets should have open, high quality sidewalks to serve as primary pedestrian routes. All of the area’s image corridors and other routes noted in this Specific Plan should provide for the needs of bicyclists.

All sidewalks should be human-scaled, attractive and compatible with residential neighborhoods. All traditional sidewalks and other pedestrianways should have trees, benches and other street furniture as appropriate to the location, and pedestrian-scale lighting. Many eyes focused upon the sidewalks—and the activities taking place there—will support the pedestrian system. This all relates to the needs to promote redevelopment and reinvestment in housing that addresses the sidewalks in a traditional manner—with porches, front yards and accessibility to one’s neighbors and neighborhood as well as with sufficient off-street parking. The entire area will be safer and more neighborly as a result.

Specific vehicular traffic improvement recommendations are few, simply because considerable time and expertise has been expended by city staff toward resolving most of the problems created by a street pattern that has evolved over time. There are projects already planned for the City and University; others are being studied to determine their feasibility; several additional projects are proposed as a part of this plan.

Planned Roadway Improvement Projects

- Lengthen the westbound left turn lane on Jack Warner Parkway at McCorvey Drive and install a traffic signal at this intersection
- Relocate McCorvey Drive from its present alignment to connect with Hackberry Lane; connect the existing McCorvey Drive and Hackberry Lane into the new alignment as T-intersections; cul-du-sac Seventh Avenue just south of the new alignment of McCorvey Drive
- Construct a connection between Jack Warner Parkway and Campus Drive (with a fallback plan to convert Reed and Grace to a one-way pair and close the easterly end of Riverside Drive in the event the new connector is not feasible)
- Construct a traffic signal at the intersection of Tenth Avenue and Twelfth Street
- Install signal coordination on Paul W. Bryant Drive between Hackberry Lane and Twelfth Avenue

Potential Roadway Improvement Projects

- Construct a roadway to interconnect Jack Warner Parkway and Campus Drive between the Sherwood Drive Subdivision and McCorvey Drive.
- In the event the above project is not constructed, cul-du-sac Riverside Drive to the west of its current intersection with Campus Drive and convert Reed and Grace Streets to a one-way pair, Grace northbound and Reed southbound

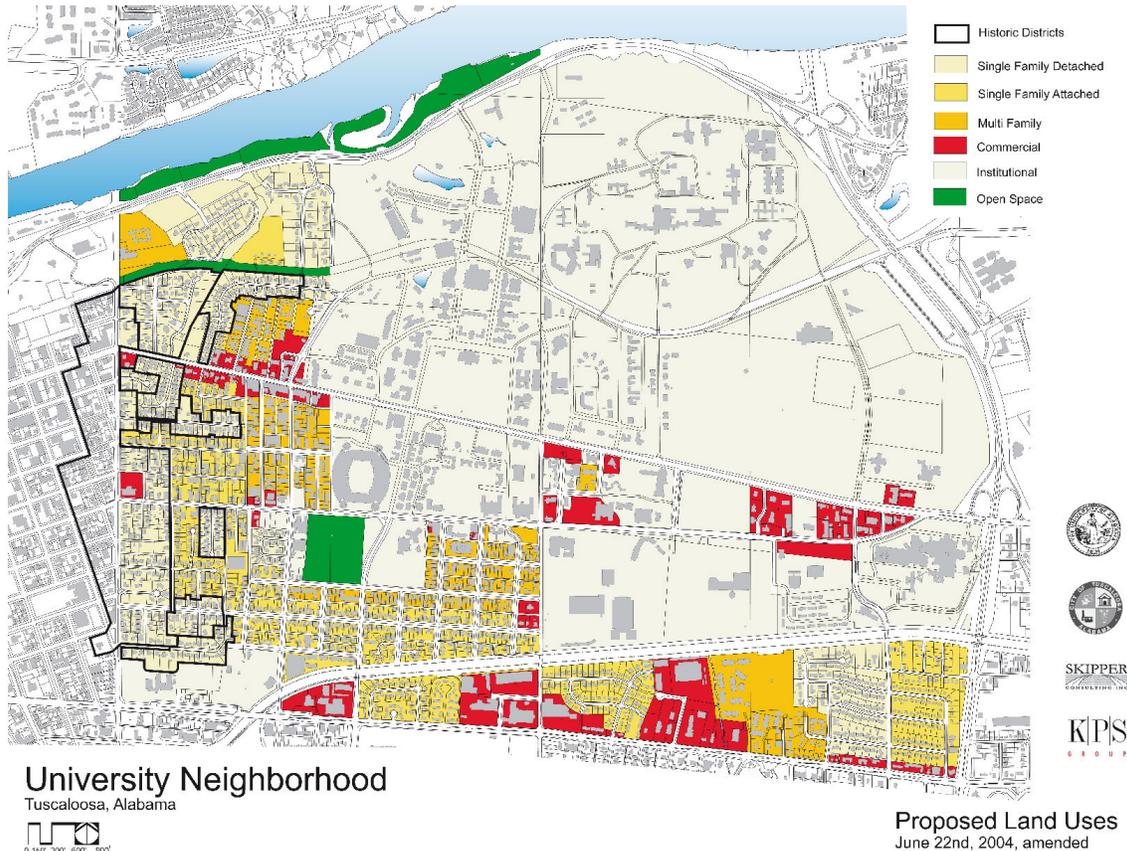
Proposed Roadway Improvement Projects

- Conduct a traffic calming study of Fourteenth Avenue between Paul W. Bryant Drive and University Boulevard
- Cul-du-sac Seventh Avenue East north of Fifteenth Street to separate the existing residential neighborhood from the surrounding commercial land uses or, as an alternative, close the two Seventh Avenue East median openings on Fifteenth Street to convert these intersections to right-in/right-out accesses
- Remove the connection between Queen City Avenue and 21st Avenue and remove the traffic signal at this location; cul-du-sac 14th Street just east of 21st Avenue and remove the existing traffic circle at the intersection of Queen City Avenue and 13th Street to encourage non-resident motorists to utilize 21st Avenue rather than Queen City Avenue and help to preserve the integrity of the historic districts

The Use of Land

Planned land uses include residential, institutional, retail and entertainment. All of these are intended to be integrated with one another and accessible by motorists and pedestrians. They are organized into a pattern in accord with the following major premises in addition to the policies of the Strategic Concept presented in Chapter III:

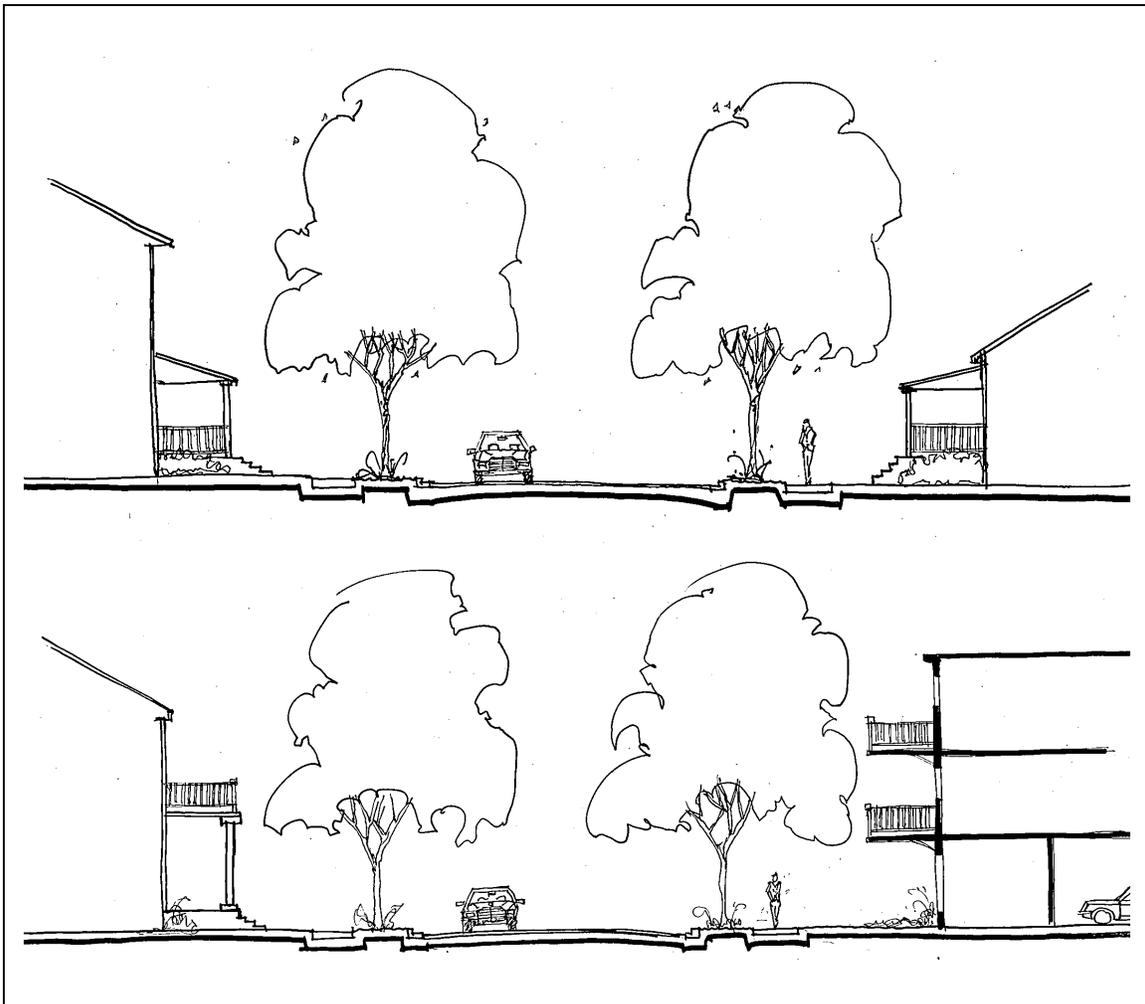
- Concentrate similar land uses and building densities
- Transition between uses logically—typically back-to-back
- Provide a framework for building out the neighborhood vision



- Concentrate residential densities according to campus accessibility
- Support the integrity of the locally designated Historic Districts
- Encourage appropriate reinvestment and redevelopment
- Retain existing facilities of public and private institutions
- Diversify, expand slightly and improve the image of University Strip commerce
- Concentrate moderate-high density multi-family housing in areas of high accessibility to campus, including upstairs in commercial buildings
- Selectively infill University Boulevard in the east part of the planning area and Paul W. Bryant Drive properties with appropriate, small-scale commercial uses

Guidelines for Housing Reinvestment and Redevelopment

The concept of *neighborhood* is essential to this plan's vision as the basic unit of development, revitalization and enhancement of the off-campus student residential experience. Within and among these neighborhoods, a range of housing types and price levels can bring a diversity of people into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to community life and experience.



Good neighborhoods place an emphasis on livability, appearance, accessibility, convenience and safety for all residents. The University Area Neighborhoods enjoy characteristics that are often missing from contemporary, conventional subdivisions further from the center of the city. These include: a legible center and edge; an integrated network of walkable streets; buildings set close enough to the streets to spatially define them as public spaces; and opportunities for shopping close to home.

When sidewalks are included, far more people can find comfortable connections to neighbors, to parks, campus and shopping areas. These investments are very modest in comparison to their long-term value. When both trees and sidewalks are included in the neighborhood streetscape, the neighborhood can join with others as part of a more unified community, and the overall value increases. When neighborhoods include street trees, sidewalks and front porches, they become a more welcoming place for residents and visitors, and add significant value to the whole community.

Reinvestment and development in the R-4U and RMF-2 Districts should be reviewed for appropriateness on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the particular nature of the affected properties. For example, depending upon circumstances, some combination of the following might be appropriate:

- Adding parking to the rear of the parcel to allow more complete utilization of a dwelling unit
- Adding baths to make a dwelling unit more desirable as a rental
- Dividing a large structure to create one or more additional dwelling units
- Adding bedrooms to a small structure to make more complete use of a parcel
- Combining driveways and parking areas of adjacent dwelling units to make more efficient use of the parcels and better public advantage of street frontage
- Adding one or more dwelling units in the rear of a relatively small structure on a relatively large parcel
- Resubdividing a large parcel to create the opportunity for development of one or more separate parcels
- Assembly and resubdivision of small parcel to create the opportunity for coordinated redevelopment

The following are physical development guidelines for reinvestment and redevelopment of housing within the University Area Neighborhoods:

- The scale and density of the University Area Neighborhoods should reflect its unique location in the community
- Location, scale and mix of uses and open space should be integrated into the neighborhood as appropriate to the surroundings
- Neighborhood design should balance the needs of the motorist while creating convenient and safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Public sidewalks should provide the basic framework for the pedestrian system
- A neighborhood center appropriate to the needs of residents should provide a focal point to the neighborhood. The neighborhood center should be pedestrian oriented with easy vehicular and pedestrian access
- Local streets should have relatively narrow driving surfaces, and should feature sidewalks, street trees and front porches

- Neighborhood streets should be “calm,” an environment where drivers realize that driving too fast or too aggressively is inappropriate
- The cultural and historical resources of the neighborhoods should be protected and preserved
- Building façades should provide a visually interesting environment and avoid uniform styles
- Buildings adjacent to streets should provide a main entrance on the façade of the building nearest to and facing that street
- Buildings should be oriented toward the pedestrian by providing a direct link between the building and the sidewalk
- A building’s ground floor facing a public street should contain a significant percentage of unobscured windows, doors or display areas
- Sidewalks should be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility and safety appropriate to the location
- Pedestrian-scale light fixtures should be provided along all pedestrian corridors
- Street trees should be planted and maintained, and replaced as they decline, as specified by the city
- Surface parking lots should include landscaping distributed and designed in accord with an overall landscape plan
- Large surface parking lots should be divided into smaller areas separated from one another by landscaped areas and/or by a building or a group of buildings
- Parking structures should be architecturally integrated or designed with an architectural theme similar to that of the main building(s)
- Parking structures located adjacent to collector or arterial streets should have enclosed, ground-level uses along the streets

Guidelines for the University Strip

The University Strip is a community scale, specialty commercial center that provides focus, identity and convenient goods, services and entertainment for the residents of surrounding neighborhoods. However, it warrants targeted reinvestment to improve its commercial mix and diversity as a neighborhood- and student-oriented retail, dining and service center whose uses include limited office, entertainment and upstairs moderate density residential and selected institutional uses. One to two story buildings with storefront windows, sidewalk entries and outdoor seating areas add to the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.

University Strip buildings should be scaled to pedestrians, concentrated enough to encourage walk-in trade from the University Area Neighborhoods and walking to more than one destination. Off-street parking should be shared wherever possible, with on-street parking contributing to the intimate scale of the Strip. Parking located behind buildings permits people to walk safely and comfortably among uses that front on sidewalks rather than “front yard” parking lots. Seating and shade along the Strip promote walking and informal gathering. In sum, the Strip is a vibrant “people place” serving the surrounding neighborhoods and an extended trade area and should be supported.

The following are general development guidelines for reinvestment in and development of the University Strip. They should be augmented with a set of physical design standards:

- Retail and dining uses should be placed at street level; any office and residential uses should be placed to the rear or in upper stories
- Entertainment uses and activities should be limited, small-scale enterprises, well dispersed along the Strip.
- Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located
- Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration
- For human scale, larger buildings should be broken up into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically
- Residential entrances should be raised above the sidewalk a minimum of two feet to reinforce a privacy zone and distinguish them from commercial entrances
- Buildings should be close to the pedestrian street, with off-street parking behind buildings. Parking, loading or service should not be located at or adjacent to an intersection

Conclusion

Upgrading the University Area Neighborhoods will be a complex undertaking that may take many years to complete. Thus, some of the improvements proposed in this chapter may be taken rather literally, while other aspects are meant to be illustrative or as suggestions. The intention is to provide a physical vision for the University Area Neighborhoods that will advance the values, ideals and convictions expressed by local leaders, public officials and others who participated in the series of planning workshops and review meetings that guided this planning process.

V. IMPLEMENTING THE SPECIFIC PLAN

Implementation of the Specific Plan will require local political will and a commitment of public and private capital. City and university officials must declare that the Specific Plan embodies their goals for the neighborhoods as they commit to invest in critical infrastructure improvements, modify certain ordinances and procedures, and strengthen the enforcement of regulations. It must also be clear that plan implementation must be a cooperative effort with the private sector. Separately, the public and private sectors lack the money and power necessary to the task. Together, they have all they need.

As noted early in this plan document, a portion of the plan implementation system must focus on capital improvements—direct modifications of the physical environment—as these are proposed in the preceding chapter. This will require a commitment of both public and private capital for reinvestment in the quality of University Area Neighborhoods. Also as noted earlier, much of the commitment to plan implementation will require much more than the capital improvements usually recommended in a public plan. In fact, most of the actions will require a considerable amount of cooperation and coordination, in combination with goodwill and the not-so-simple art of persuasion.

Capital Improvements

In summary, the following are recommended capital improvements. Both the private and public sectors can begin immediately with small actions that have the potential to create big impacts. Choosing high profile and high visibility locations such as gateways and decision points can intensify the impact of even small projects, so long as each is a piece of the whole as outlined in this plan. This will require coordination as well as commitment of funding, property assembly and acquisition, private sector interest and participation, the willingness to issue bonds and secure other forms of gap financing, and cooperation from local utilities. This may also require city involvement in one or more public redevelopment actions as outlined in the Appendix.

- Campus student life facilities
- Neighborhood vest pocket parks
- Neighborhood mini-parking lots
- Pedestrian and bicycle corridors
- Curb/gutter/sidewalk upgrades
- Street tree planting program
- Handicap access upgrades
- Drainage system upgrades
- Wayfinding system
- Street lighting—pedestrian scale
- Roadway improvements
- Traffic control system upgrades
- Gateway and decision point upgrades
- CBD/Strip streetscape connection
- Targeted University Strip reinvestment
- University transit and park-and-ride
- Bicycle support system
- Residential reinvestment and redevelopment

Advice / Education / Persuasion

The policies outlined in the preceding chapter are focused on the protection and enhancement of places that neighborhood residents, students, landlords, city and university officials and staff deem important, as well as development of community assets presently underutilized or incomplete. Through a planning process that included community analysis

and public evaluation and discussion, a number of ideas emerged that may be used by the City of Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama, landlords, property owners and residents to help create and take advantage of their own opportunities.

Many of the suggestions and examples from other university communities that were shared by participants in this planning process would require relatively small funding commitments. They include activities designed to get people from each of the neighborhoods in the planning area together—especially at the beginning of each school term, for a social event in the neighborhood. Perhaps a block party could be used to get current and new residents together in a positive atmosphere. This could be supported with university orientation sessions for freshmen to include information on leasing rights and responsibilities—this is the target market of those who may desire to move into the University Area Neighborhoods at a later date.

A “good neighbor policy” publication to include information on landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities would be helpful to tenants, as would an attachment to each lease agreement that repeats the rights and responsibilities outlined on the university’s website. The Off-Campus Association could organize and operate a voluntary landlord recognition and referral system, while the two police departments could cooperatively engage in visible, coordinated police bicycle and foot patrols and continuing support of public safety education and neighborhood watch programs.

Operations / Maintenance

The City of Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama reinvest large sums every year in operations and maintenance actions that could be coordinated and channeled to be sure they support the recommendations outlined in this Specific Plan. The following is a brief list of actions that are needed in the University Area Neighborhoods:

- Solid waste management
- Right-of-way maintenance
- Open sidewalk program
- Visible, coordinated police presence
- Systematic code enforcement
- Infrastructure maintenance
- Street tree and landscape maintenance
- Parking lot upkeep

Incentives

This is a public sector plan, intended to guide public and private reinvestment and redevelopment in the University Area Neighborhoods. In contrast to some public improvement programs, planned public investment can be timed so that it may be linked to private investment in a way that provides incentives for private investments that might happen much later—or not at all—without some public participation. The following provide several examples:

- University faculty/staff housing support
- Neighborhood mini-parking lots
- Street lighting—pedestrian scale
- Right-of-way upgrades
- Roadway improvements
- Neighborhood vest pocket parks
- Student life facilities/activities
- Shared parking, e.g., with churches

Regulation

Among the most frequently heard comments from planning residents and property owners are related to the need for appropriate public regulation and the desire for continuing, routine, evenhanded enforcement. In fact, at Neighborhood Partnership Committee meetings in June and July 2004 the participants were asked to name any factor that might hold back their desire to implement plans for improving the neighborhoods. There were surprisingly few responses, but most were directed at the perceived lack of enforcement of important local ordinances—especially the city’s zoning, housing and traffic laws. This indicates the high degree of respect shown to the law as well as the importance—symbolic as well as actual—of regular and systematic enforcement of all local regulations.

A number of suggestions were made, including examples from other university communities. These were researched during the planning process. The following is an outline of existing and suggested regulations recommended for consideration as a part of a comprehensive approach to plan implementation. Specific recommendations regarding the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map follow.

- Zoning Ordinance and Map revisions
- Anti-Neglect Ordinance
- Sidewalk Maintenance Ordinance
- Nuisance Party Ordinance
- Noise Ordinances System
- Landscape Ordinance
- Housing Code
- Rental License and Inspection System
- Parking Permit System
- University Strip Design Guidelines
- Historic District Standards

Proposed Zoning Ordinance Revisions

Several revisions of the Zoning Ordinance are recommended to bring it into conformance with the land use and density recommendations of the Specific Plan:

- Define *family* in a manner that relates appropriately to University Area Neighborhoods zoning districts and supports the integrity of the locally designated historic districts
- Create a new *R-4U* version of the current R-4 district for use in the University Area Neighborhoods to permit low-density and moderate-density (but not multi-family) dwellings
- Reduce the maximum building height in the RMF-2 district to four stories
- Create a new *BNU* district to provide a single district for the University Strip whose land uses and densities will be compatible with the University Area Neighborhoods
- Modify parking requirements for the R-4U and RMF-2 districts to base the required number of spaces according to number of bedrooms rather than units, with a minimum number of spaces per unit
- Consider use of a special site plan review overlay district to assure compatibility of use and density in selected buffer areas within the neighborhoods
- Consider the use of an overlay district along Paul W. Bryant Drive to provide more specific corridor controls

Proposed Zoning Map Revisions

Several revisions to the Zoning Map are recommended to bring it into conformance with the land use and density recommendations of the Specific Plan:

- *RMF-2*: reduce the area to focus on those portions of the University Area Neighborhoods designated for moderate-high density multi-family housing based upon accessibility to the university campus
- *R-4U*: use this moderate-density district as the predominant University Area Neighborhoods residential district
- *Special Site Plan Review Overlay District*: require site plan review in this buffer area to assure compatibility of use and intensity
- *BNU*: combine all the University Strip commerce, except the parcels flanking the Audubon Place intersection, into this common district whose land uses and densities will be compatible with the University Area Neighborhoods

Recommended Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibility for implementing this plan must be shared across the City of Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama, private property owners, merchants, developers and landlords, residents and others, including non-profit groups such as the Original City Association and the Off-Campus Association. The matrix on the following page recommends allocation of the various responsibilities among these parties. Most of the actions recommended require one of these take a primary role, with various degrees of support. Other actions require a cooperative effort among these groups, though every successful action requires a champion, regardless of the degree of responsibility.

RECOMMENDED ACTION	City	UA	Private Residents	Others	
University transit and park-and-ride	S	P	S	S	
Roadway improvements	P	S		S	
Traffic control system upgrades	P	S			
Pedestrian and bicycle corridors	P	S		S	
Bicycle support system	C	C	C	S	S
Student life facilities/activities		P		S	
Visible, coordinated police presence	C	C			
Systematic code enforcement	P		S		
Zoning Ordinance and Map revisions	P	S	S		
Anti-neglect ordinance		S	S		
Noise ordinance system	P	S		S	
Nuisance party ordinance	P	S		S	
Landscape ordinance	P		S		
Rental license and inspection program	S	S	S	S	P
Parking permit system	P	S	S	S	
Curb/gutter/sidewalk upgrades	P		S		
Street tree planting program	P		S		S
Sidewalk handicap access upgrades	P		S		
Drainage system upgrades	P	S	S		
Wayfinding system	P	C	C		C
Street lighting—pedestrian scale	P	S	S		
Gateway and decision point upgrades	C	C			
Downtown/Strip streetscape interconnection	P				
Targeted University Strip reinvestment	C	C	C		C
Residential reinvestment	S		P		
Residential and commercial redevelopment	S	S	P		
Solid waste management	P		S		
Right-of-way maintenance	P				
Open sidewalk program	P		S	S	
University Strip design guidelines	P		S		
Street tree and landscape maintenance	P		S	S	
Parking lot maintenance	C	C	C	S	
University faculty/staff housing support	S	P	S		
Shared parking arrangements	C	C	C		C
Neighborhood vest pocket parks	C		C		
Neighborhood mini-parking lots	C		C		

P = Primary responsibility

C = Cooperative effort

S = Support role

VI. CONCLUSION

Both the University of Alabama and the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Commission, as parties to this plan, acknowledge the need to continually review the needs of the neighborhood and the surrounding community, and to cooperatively update the plan as needed to keep abreast of changing ideas and conditions. The City of Tuscaloosa's forthcoming Comprehensive Plan may provide the first opportunity to review the policies and recommended actions contained in this planning document in light of new information about the entire city and its planning area that will emerge from that process.

The continuing test will be one of sustaining commitment by the public and private sector leadership of the city. The following priorities are suggested as a logical progression for the actions proposed to carry out the policies outlined in this plan. Each of the priorities should be reviewed on a regular basis based on current development opportunities, community need, potential return-on-investment and the gains that may accrue from project visibility. Implementation must certainly be tailored to fit current needs and circumstances.

APPENDIX A: RECOMMENDED ZONING ORDINANCE REVISIONS

1. *Revise the Definitions in Article I to incorporate the following and to delete any conflicting language:*

- *Family:*
 - One (1) or more persons related by blood, marriage, adoption or guardianship plus two (2) unrelated persons occupying a dwelling unit and living as a single housekeeping unit; or
 - One (1) or more persons related by blood, marriage, adoption or guardianship plus one (1) unrelated person occupying a dwelling unit and living as a single housekeeping unit in a locally designated Historic District; or
 - Not more than five (5) unrelated persons occupying a dwelling unit and living as a single housekeeping unit in the RMF-2, R-4U and BNU zoning districts upon significant reinvestment, redevelopment or qualification through staff review and certification in accordance with the provisions of Section 24-45.

2. *Revise Article III to create a Special Site Plan Review Overlay District as a buffer within which site plan review by the Planning Commission is required to assure compatibility of use and intensity in selected locations in accord with the Specific Plan.*

3. *Revise Article III to create a new zoning district with the following Statement of Intent:*

- *R-4U Residence District:* This district is created for two (2) purposes:
 - To provide minimum standards for development and use of low and moderate density dwellings meeting modern standards with respect to light, air, open space and parking; and
 - To encourage consolidation and/or replatting of such lots for single-family, two-family and townhouse dwellings meeting modern standards.

4. *Revise Article III to permit the following as Permitted Uses for R-4U Districts:*

- Accessory uses and structures items b, c, d, e and f
- Noncommercial park, playground or recreational area
- Single-family dwelling
- Townhouses
- Two-family dwelling

5. *Revise Article III to permit the following as Special Exception Uses for R-4U Districts:*

- Joint garage
- Electric substations and similar public utility structures

6. *Revise Article III to add R-4U District standards for Area, Width, Yards and Usable Open Space, and Ground Coverage Ratio that are comparable to those for the R-4 District that will allow for duplexes on Lots of Record within the district.*

7. *Revise Article III to read as follows:*

- Upon redevelopment, significant reinvestment or qualification through staff review in accordance with Section 24-45 of this Chapter, off-street parking shall be required in the rear yard of the R-4U District

8. *Revise Article III to modify the Height Regulations for Apartment Dwellings for RMF-2 Districts to a maximum of four (4) stories or 60 feet*
9. *Revise Article III to add a Section 24-45 to read as follows:*
 - a. Significant reinvestment, redevelopment and qualification through staff review and certification in the R-4U and RMF-2 Districts shall be reviewed for appropriateness and conformance with and detailing the intent of the Specific Plan for the University Area Neighborhoods on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the particular nature of the affected properties. For example, depending upon circumstances, the following could qualify:
 1. Adding parking to the rear of the parcel to allow more complete utilization of a dwelling unit
 2. Adding baths to make a dwelling unit more desirable as a rental
 3. Dividing a large structure to create one or more additional dwelling units
 4. Adding bedrooms to a small structure to make more complete use of a parcel
 5. Combining driveways and parking areas of adjacent dwelling units to make more efficient use of the parcels and better public advantage of street frontage
 6. Adding one or more attached or detached dwelling units in the rear of a relatively small structure on a relatively large parcel
 7. Resubdividing a large parcel to create the opportunity for development of one or more separate parcels
 8. Assembly and resubdivision of small parcel to create the opportunity for coordinated redevelopment
 9. New construction of one or more dwelling units
 - b. Application for redevelopment, significant reinvestment and qualification through staff review and certification shall be accompanied by a site plan defining the areas wherein buildings may be constructed; the locations and extent of parking and the proportionate amount thereof; the location of all roads, driveways and walks and the points of ingress and egress, including access street where required; the location, height and character of walls, fencing or other forms of screening; the location, size, character of exterior lighting; and the character and extent of landscaping, planting and other treatment for protection of adjoining properties.
 - c. The Zoning Official shall, using the policies of the approved Specific Plan for the area as an overall guide, employ the following checklist during the review, approval and/or certification process.
 - 1) All buildings adjacent to a collector or arterial street shall provide a main entrance on the façade of the building nearest to and facing that street.
 - 2) Building façades shall provide a visually interesting environment and avoid uniform styles.
 - 3) Buildings shall be oriented toward the pedestrian by providing a direct link between the building and the sidewalk.
 - 4) No building facing a public street shall have any blank, windowless wall wider than twenty (20) feet at ground level.
 - 5) Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility or safety appropriate to the location.

- 6) There shall be at least one form of sidewalk buffer between the street and sidewalk, e.g., a five (5) foot wide lawn strip, native shade trees planted approximately every forty (40) feet in residential districts.
- 7) Exterior light fixtures shall be no greater in height than twelve (12) feet.
- 8) Street trees, of a caliper no less than two (2) inches, and as specified by the city shall be planted and maintained along all streets.
- 9) Usable open space shall be provided in accordance with Article III of this Chapter.
- 10) Parking shall be in accordance with Article IX of this Chapter.
- 11) Parking shall be in the rear yard.
- 12) Parking lots shall be designed to provide through pedestrian paths, clearly identifiable through changes in material or elevation, from street to building.
- 13) Parking lots shall not dominate the development site, and shall be placed alongside or behind buildings rather than between the front of the building and adjacent streets.
- 14) Open, surface parking lots containing fifty (50) or more spaces shall be divided into smaller areas separated by landscaped areas at least ten (10) feet wide and by a building or a group of buildings.
- 15) Surface parking lots shall include at least ten percent (10%) of the total surface area devoted to landscaping distributed and designed in accord with an overall landscaping plan.
- 16) Parking lots and structures shall include clearly marked and continuous pedestrian walkways and connections to the buildings and public sidewalk system.
- 17) Parking structures shall be architecturally integrated or designed with an architectural theme similar to that of the main building(s).

10. Revise Article IV to create a new zoning district with the following Statement of Intent:

- *BNU Business District:* This district is created to provide minimum standards for the development and use of retail and service establishments within the University Strip area along and adjacent to University Boulevard adjacent and to the west of the University of Alabama campus to enhance its role as a neighborhood-oriented commercial center and its pedestrian orientation to students.

11. Revise Article IV to permit the following as Permitted Uses in a BNU District:

- Accessory use on the same lot with and customarily incidental to any of the below uses permitted in the district concerned
- Appliance repair store, watch or camera repair store and the like
- Automobile filling stations with or without convenience store
- Bar, tavern
- Confectionery or bake shop
- Doctor or dentist office, medical or dental clinic, medical laboratory

- Financial institution, including bank, savings and loan company, credit union, finance company, or mortgage company
- Food catering
- Grocery or drug store
- Laundry and dry cleaning pickup and delivery establishment, not including a dry cleaning or laundry plant
- On-site sign, subject to regulations set forth in Article X
- Package liquor store
- Personal service shop, including tailor, barber, beauty shop, shoe repair, and the like
- Photographic studio
- Professional office, i.e., insurance, real estate, lawyer, architect, engineer, and the like
- Real estate office, insurance agency
- Restaurant with or without attached lounge and without drive-through food pickup windows or carhop service
- Retail sales store, but not including a motor vehicle sales agency, farm equipment sales agency, heavy construction equipment sales agency, building supply and lumber retail sales store, or package liquor store
- Unified shopping center, incorporating any of the above uses permitted in the district concerned

12. *Revise Article IV to permit the following as a Special Exception Uses in a BNU District:*

- Apartment(s), only as an upstairs use above a Permitted Use

13. *Revise Article IV to add a Maximum Floor Area Ratio of 0.8 for the BNU District.*

14. *Revise Article IV to add a Minimum Front Yard Depth of "None" for the BNU District.*

15. *Revise Article IV to add a Maximum Building Height of three (3) stories or 45 feet for the BNU District.*

16. *Revise Article VII to add a Section 24-91 (1.6) Apartments in BNU Districts to read:*

MANDATORY

- a. At least one (1) off-street parking space per bedroom shall be provided.
- b. Apartments shall not be situated in such a way as to interrupt commercial frontage.

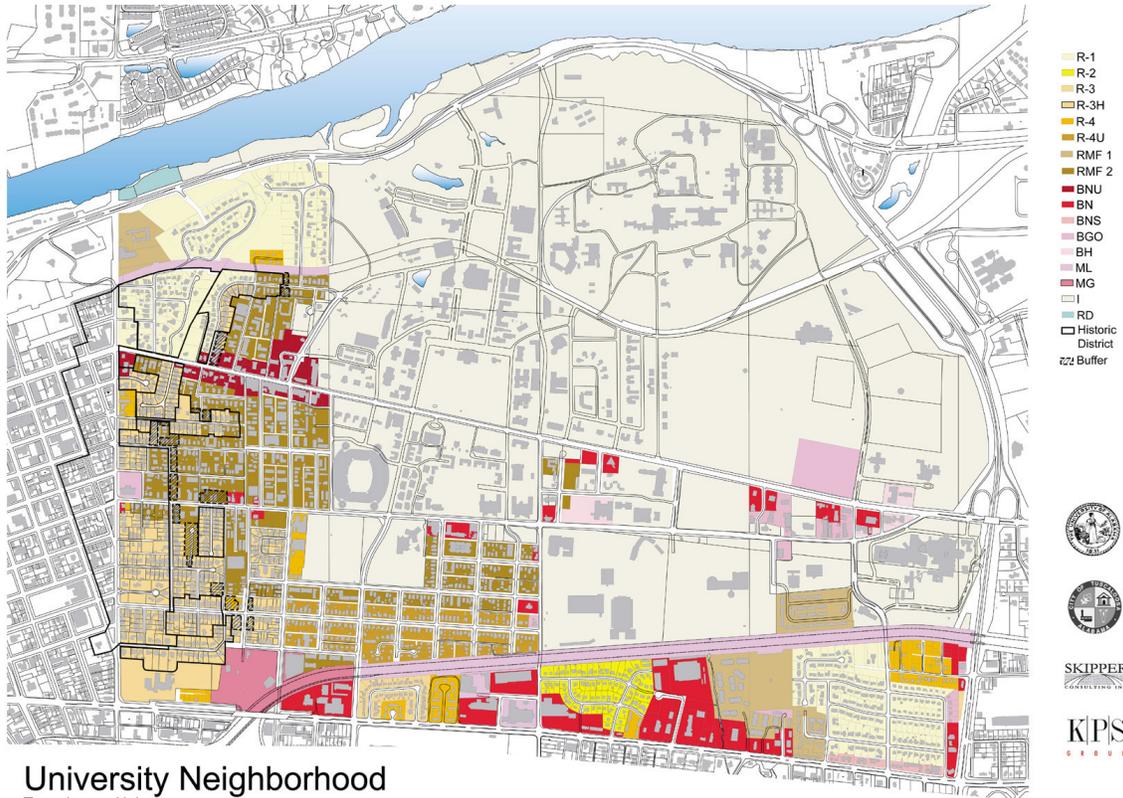
17. *Revise Article IX regarding Minimum Requirements for Off-Street Parking to add the following and to delete all conflicting language:*

- Single-family, two-family and townhouse dwellings in the R-4U and RMF-2 districts: One (1) space per bedroom, with a minimum of two (2) spaces per dwelling unit
- Apartment dwellings in the R-4U and RMF-2 districts: One (1) space per bedroom, with at least two (2) additional spaces per ten (10) units, with a minimum of two (2) additional spaces per apartment complex

18. *Revise Article IX, Section 24-122 (b) to include the area east of Reed Street on the north and east of 14th Avenue on the south of University Boulevard of the BNU District.*

APPENDIX B: RECOMMENDED ZONING MAP REVISIONS

The map below presents a recommended zoning pattern for the planning area that will substantially implement the Proposed Land Uses map in the Specific Plan.



University Neighborhood

Tuscaloosa, Alabama



Proposed Zoning
October 13, 2004, amended

APPENDIX C: REDEVELOPMENT NOTES

Powers of a Redevelopment Authority

According to the Alabama State Code, Sections 24-2 and 24-3, Redevelopment Authorities have the following powers:

- Make and execute contracts.
- Borrow and accept grants-in-aid.
- Issue bonds and other obligations.
- Enter into agreements with public bodies.
- Require rehabilitation of blighted properties.
- Acquire property by purchase or eminent domain.
- Dispose of property for private enterprise or public use, with restrictions to run with the land, in accord with the Redevelopment Plan.

Blighting Influences in the University Area Neighborhoods

Blight takes two distinct forms in any community: fiscal and physical. Both uses of the word describe conditions of underinvestment in and around the University Area Neighborhoods. The typical dictionary defines the noun *blight* as “something in an impaired condition.” The verb *to blight* means “to cause to deteriorate.” On the other hand, the Alabama State Code defines blight as “...areas, including slum areas, with building or [other] improvements which, by reason of dilapidation, obsolescence, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, and sanitary facilities, excessive land coverage, deleterious land use or obsolete layout, or any combination of these or other factors, are detrimental to the health, safety, and welfare of the community.”

Physical blight refers to the visible deterioration of property as described above, plus accumulations of trash, overgrown vacant lots and obsolete signage. Conditions of physical blight can often be lessened by enforcement of laws already on the books—parking ordinances, housing ordinances, weed ordinances, condemnation and demolition policies and sign ordinances. When the city council makes its nuisance policies clear and enforcement consistent, conditions of physical blight will decrease substantially.

Fiscal blight is the result of a subtle and systemic neglect. Examples of fiscal blight include a pattern of inappropriate land uses, underutilized or overoccupied properties, and the steady erosion of property values that may be due to a wide variety of reasons, including changes in tenure. Fiscal blight is a contagious condition. It usually spreads quickly throughout a neighborhood, sending the same message to property owners and criminals alike: no one cares about this place—do with it what you will. Fiscal blight requires a more concentrated effort to correct, not simply redevelopment of individual properties, but larger-scale redevelopment of whole blocks in accord with a Specific Plan.

The Outlook for Redevelopment

The University Area Neighborhoods has a few blighting influences at work. At the same time, the neighborhoods present several prime opportunities for private reinvestment and redevelopment rather than taking a public approach. If the public and private sectors work together to reinvest consistently in support of implementing this Specific Plan, the neighborhoods, with their unique geographic and market location and natural assets, will thrive and prosper. The Specific Plan (as is also the case with a redevelopment plan) strongly supports the twin citywide goals of improving the local economy and enhancing the appearance and function of the place.

The Public Redevelopment Process—A Basic Outline

In the event that public participation in the redevelopment process is deemed convenient or necessary to the public interest, the following is an outline of the redevelopment process as it is typically practiced in Alabama:

- Engage a consultant and an attorney experienced in redevelopment.
- Prepare a Redevelopment Plan for the target area(s), based upon the Specific Plan, to include: findings of blight; a specific program of potential uses organized into discrete projects; street and public spaces diagram(s); design and development standards, including building setback, height and bulk requirements; and an outline of public and private sector duties and responsibilities under the plan.
- Form and appoint a Redevelopment Authority, under Title 24, Chapters 2 and 3 of the *Code of Alabama* and adopt the Redevelopment Plan.
- Amend the zoning ordinance as necessary.
- Rezone target property and surrounding properties as appropriate.
- Develop design guidelines for the development compatible with the Specific Plan
- Form one or more taxing districts as appropriate.
- Arrange for appropriate financing mechanisms.
- Acquire and assemble properties as needed for redevelopment project(s).
- Prepare Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the private redevelopment projects called for in the Redevelopment Plan, and approach landowners regarding their desire to participate.
- Distribute one or more RFPs to potential developers and/or landowners.
- Receive, review, select and negotiate preliminary development arrangement.
- Review and negotiate with developer to achieve desired final design.
- Transfer properties to the developer with contract and covenants, conditions and restrictions that run with the land to assure performance in accord with the Redevelopment Plan.
- Begin construction.

