



**A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

**CITY OF TUSCALOOSA**  
**SPECIFIC PLAN – DISTRICT 3**

**Prepared for:**  
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## CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0	THE DISTRICT 3 COMMUNITY .....	2
2.1	Physical Features.....	2
2.2	Roads and Traffic.....	2
2.3	Current Land Use and Development.....	3
2.4	Rental Properties.....	3
2.5	Current Zoning .....	3
3.0	ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION .....	4
3.1	Assets.....	4
3.2	Liabilities.....	5
3.3	Opportunities and Visions for District 3 Communities.....	7
4.0	STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT .....	9
4.1	Green Infrastructure .....	9
4.2	Corridors and Centers .....	10
4.3	Neighborhoods .....	11
4.4	Gateways .....	11
4.5	The Concept.....	11
5.0	THE FUTURE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LAND .....	13
5.1	Major Development Themes .....	13
5.2	The Uses of Land.....	13
5.2.1	Residential.....	13
5.2.2	Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas .....	14
5.2.3	Commercial and Office .....	15
5.2.4	Village Centers .....	15
5.2.5	Neighborhood Redevelopment.....	15
5.2.6	Mixed Use.....	16
5.2.7	Gateways.....	16
6.0	STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN .....	17
6.1	Early Action .....	17
6.2	Capital Improvements.....	18
6.3	Development Regulation, Guides and Standards.....	19
6.3.1	Link Zoning Ordinance and Other Controls to Plan.....	19
6.3.2	Coordinate Plan with Other Plans and Agency Activities.....	19
6.3.3	Development Criteria .....	20
6.4	Annexation .....	23
7.0	CONCLUSION .....	24
8.0	REFERENCE MATERIALS.....	2

## FIGURES

- Figure 1. Location of District 3
- Figure 2. District 3, areal map
- Figure 3. Aerial photograph
- Figure 4. Current land use
- Figure 5. Rental properties
- Figure 6. Current zoning
- Figure 7. Strategic Development Component
- Figure 8. Future land use

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Specific Plan for District 3 is the result of cooperation between the City of Tuscaloosa and residents. Specific planning to guide public and private reinvestment, revitalization and redevelopment in and around this planning area was timely, and the participants joined forces to determine ways to improve the quality of life in the community.

Objectives for the Specific Plan established at the outset of this process include:

- Devise a physical vision for the District and surrounding area that will provide details to the various elements of the City Wide Future Land Use Plan
- Prepare a plan to guide land use, housing, accessibility, conservation, and economic development
- Recommend appropriate public investment to support specific plan implementation
- Prepare District 3 for continuing implementation of the Specific Plan
- Provide a legal framework for implementation

As a part of the planning process, the consultants (P.E. LaMoreaux & Associates, Inc. [PELA]) built a planning map system of the community, based on the city's mapping system. That information was augmented with results of site visits, research, and community-wide meetings and the meetings of the Advisory Committee for the District in an effort to build knowledge of the community. This information was depicted on thematic maps and reviewed at meetings held in the District during the process.

Community residents, landlords, local developers, property owners, city staff, and elected officials participated in the workshops of Advisory Committee meetings during the process. They shared ideas about community assets and issues, the major trends they anticipated, and the influences those might have on the community. Also discussed and developed were their visions for Tuscaloosa and specifically the District and the possible opportunities for both private and public investment. In addition, specific guides or standards were developed for growth, and redevelopment/revitalization. They also reviewed and helped to revise the draft version of this document.

Information and suggestions from the Advisory Committee workshops and other public meetings were converted to a Strategic Development Concept. These ideas are the core of this Specific Plan, which is intended for use and guidance to stabilize and protect critical portions of the community and to encourage and enable planned growth and development.

## **2.0 THE DISTRICT 3 COMMUNITY**

Figure 1 shows the location and configuration of District 3. With the exception of a small area of institutional properties (Bryce Hospital and a portion of the The University of Alabama), District 3 is located north of the Black Warrior River. The District includes Lake Tuscaloosa and surrounding properties within the city limits. Because much of the District is Lake Tuscaloosa and the surrounding narrow band of land, the planning process was focused on the District and adjacent areas, both east and west, which are located south of the confluence of Carroll's Creek with Lake Tuscaloosa (Figure 2). The community is comprised of many well established subdivisions, such as Indian Hills, Heritage Hills, and High Forest, located north of the Black Warrior River and south of McFarland Boulevard; Woodridge, Covey Chase, and River Dale, located between Rice Mine Road and McFarland Boulevard; and The Lakes at North River, Crown Point, and Greystone, some of the recent developments, adjacent to Lake Tuscaloosa.

### **2.1 Physical Features**

Figure 3, is an aerial photograph with the outline of the District 3 shown.

The density of man-made features varies considerably across the District, largely because of the lakes and in part because of the history of the place, history of ownership of the land, and when it was developed. Major institutions such as schools and hospitals, industrial properties and shopping centers are easy to identify by their large size and the considerable open space around them. The patterns of smaller commercial properties and buildings along the larger streets are apparent, as are those of the various types of housing, especially the single-family homes within the neighborhoods.

Prominent features are the Black Warrior River, Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol and Harris Lake. The lakes are assets of significant importance to the City, and acres of undeveloped property surround Lake Nicol and Harris Lake. Predominant green space is also apparent with Sokol Park, North River Yacht Club and golf courses, and some open areas in major institutions.

These patterns on the land are considered in this plan.

### **2.2 Roads and Traffic**

The patterns of roads and traffic are visible on the aerial photograph, Figure 3 and also shown on Figure 2. In general, the water bodies (Warrior River and the lakes), dictate the road pattern development. East/west access is difficult and is limited to crossings at the dams and a few bridges. Access to properties and residential developments situated between Lake Tuscaloosa and the two smaller lakes, Nicol and Harris, is essentially by New Watermelon Road, across Lake Tuscaloosa's dam. The major arterials are McFarland Boulevard, Rice Mine Road, Watermelon Road and New Watermelon Road. Access shortcuts through neighborhoods/subdivisions are common, and, as a result, speed tables and stop signs have been installed to reduce traffic speeds.

### **2.3 Current Land Use and Development**

As shown on Figure 4, current land use, the majority of the property in the District is predominantly a mix of uses including institutional and properties used for residential purposes. The District and surrounding area includes a significant amount of public and institutional lands, especially City-owned property surrounding Lake Nicol and Harris Lake, City-owned property at the Lake Tuscaloosa dam, parks, hospital, school and University property. These are not dispersed evenly across the community, but are large parcels at the edges of the District bounds.

Housing density varies considerably, and this has brought together a diverse mix of people. The highest population concentrations are shown on the map in the yellow tones which are, for the most part, single-family housing concentrations.

There are also spotty commercial uses, mostly situated in “strips” of commerce distributed along several of the more heavily traveled arterial roads, including McFarland Boulevard and Rice Mine Road. Also, the North River Yacht Club is assigned a commercial use here (Figure 4). And, there is a significant industrial base in the community, though the larger enterprises are not within the District, but are outside the city limits and south of the Black Warrior River.

### **2.4 Rental Properties**

As shown on Figure 5, there is a limited percentage of rental housing in many parts of this community, especially in some of the neighborhoods made up of single-family housing and the large parcels that are City or parks properties. The map includes all rental properties, whether residential or commercial/business. This explains the many parcels that are designated “rental” along the eastern shore of Lake Tuscaloosa and New Watermelon Road, where the Yacht Club is a commercial enterprise and also areas being developed are large areas controlled by developers or real estate agencies. Rental properties in the established neighborhoods are an important facet of life in this community, for owners and renters have different objectives for the use of property. These differences have led to differing, and often conflicting, levels of property care and maintenance.

### **2.5 Current Zoning**

For most of the community, current zoning, as shown in Figure 6, does not necessarily reflect the current use of land. Much of the City-owned and park property, which is predominantly green space, is zoned residential (R-1) and is not of single-family residential use. Much of the area surrounding the District is unzoned, being situated outside the Tuscaloosa corporate limits and not subject to zoning. In addition and of note, there are a number of islands of unincorporated lands, and therefore unzoned. As a consequence, nonconforming land uses of adjacent properties are and can be of issue.

### **3.0 ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION**

Community residents, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials met at Northridge High School on November 29, 2007, for a “town meeting” style community workshop with the consultants (PELA) and Planning Department representatives. The participants shared ideas about community assets and liabilities (issues), and major trends they anticipated and the influences those might have on the community. In addition, an Advisory Committee was formed from volunteers and individuals from the community to aid in the planning process. The Committee members represented diversity in age, gender, profession, and spatial distribution of various locales across the community. The Advisory Committee and Councilwoman Cynthia Almond met five times with PELA and members of the Planning Department. They provided insightful discussions and input about the community and spoke of their aspirations for District 3 and possible opportunities to create or fill in some of its missing pieces, and address growth.

#### **3.1 Assets**

For this Plan, an asset is defined as a critical, defining characteristic of the community, and a condition that meets or exceeds the standards of the participants. The list of assets developed from the community meeting were furthered and discussed by the Advisory Committee. The Committee also suggested that the assets be organized or separated into several categories. The following assets have been organized by priority of importance as ranked by the Advisory Committee:

##### **SAFETY**

- Secluded/safe neighborhoods
- Peaceful and quiet

##### **NATURAL ASSETS**

- Lake Tuscaloosa
- Lake Nicol and Harris Lake
- Trees
- Black Warrior River

##### **DEVELOPMENT**

- Well-planned neighborhoods
- Quality of residential developments
- Quality of commercial developments
- Rapidly appreciating property values
- Single-family residential developments
- Limited commercial growth
- Compatibility of commercial to community developments
- Centralized commercial growth



## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

- Good schools
- Community spirit (good sense of community)
- Green space
- Sokol Park
- Phelps Center
- Ol' Colony Golf Complex
- Proximity to medical resources (doctors, hospitals)
- Good walking areas
- Publix Grocery and local banks
- Low population density
- Major shopping areas are elsewhere
- Less traffic
- North River Yacht Club
- Westervelt-Warner Museum of American Art

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Access to University and downtown
- Underground utilities in many developments
- New Paul Bryant Bridge
- Jerry Plott Water Treatment Plant

### **3.2 Liabilities**

For this Plan, a liability or issue is not necessarily a problem, but also can be defined as any aspect of the community that is below the standards of the participants. The following liabilities have been organized by priority of importance as identified by the Advisory Committee.

## **NATURAL CONDITIONS**

- Too many trees cut down for development
- Clear-cutting/lack of preservation of green space

## **DEVELOPMENT**

- Inappropriate or absence of planning (too little, too late)
- Uncontrolled development
- Inappropriate commercial development (Rice Mine Road)
- County islands surrounded by in-City parcels
- Lack of zoning in County affects District 3
- No landscaping requirements/needs uniform theme with commercial development and plantings
- New development that is not compatible with neighborhoods
- Increased crime vs. new development

- Unsightly signage/signs too tall/large billboards
- Commercial lighting is inappropriate (light pollution)
- Irresponsible developers

### **SAFETY**

- Traffic on Rice Mine Road
- Speeding
- No speed controls on New Watermelon Road and Rice Mine Road
- No police precinct

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

- Limited public access to Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol, and Harris Lake
- Lack of tree ordinance
- Limited walking paths from residential to community
- No post office
- Limited connectivity (pedestrian and streets)
- Lack of upkeep of existing landscaping
- Lack of good restaurants
- Litter on Paul Bryant Bridge and Rice Mine Road
- Limited areas of curbside recycling

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Single access across Lake Tuscaloosa (dam)
- Lack of bike lanes/sidewalks
- Lack of infrastructure to accommodate growth explosion
- Limited width of roads
- Poor water pressure
- Power outages in neighborhoods

The participants' view of local assets tends to stress the positive physical aspects of the planning area which affect and enhance quality of life, while the liabilities focus upon development issues and relationship and connectivity, or the lack thereof.

The assets and liabilities developed by the participants demonstrate the need to emphasize and to build upon the physical quality of District 3 and surrounding areas and to continue to organize and build relationships among and within the major constituents – residents, landlords, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials. This range of issues to be addressed indicates the need for an overall, comprehensive approach to a plan for District 3 and its implementation by all responsible parties.

### 3.3 Opportunities and Visions for District 3 Communities

Building upon the assets and recognizing the liabilities within the planning area, participants in the Advisory Committee workshops were asked to envision the future of the community, 10 years, 20 years, and 40 years from now, and to imagine the land uses and activities and facilities that would provide an appropriate quality of life. The participants provided the listing that follows, presented here as general and physical opportunities and visions of the Committee, to address the desires of community residents, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials.

The responses have been listed accordingly, but have not been prioritized.

- Proper development of riverfront – similar to Madison, Mississippi – stone, brick, columns, buildings, green space, byways
- Architectural design uniformity
- Self-contained community
- Suitable and conformable development
- Pedestrian-friendly community with greenways and connectivity
- Parkways like Jack Warner Parkway, with limited access
- More natural areas for hiking/biking
- Limited access bypass
- Better landscaping on Rice Mine Road
- Enhancement of public transportation
- Landscaped parking lots
- Connectivity in pedestrian ways across Black Warrior River to Riverwalk
- Completion of Riverwalk Master Plan
- Green space required with development
- Preservation and protection of land around Lake Nicol and Harris Lake
- Bridge over the North River/McWright's Ferry Road
- Preservation and protection of river and lake corridors/floodways
- Run-off/lake siltation program
- No further industrial development along the river (Black Warrior River)
- Stable schools/neighborhood schools
- More restrictions on mobile homes
- Elimination of County islands
- Abatement of odor emissions from industry
- More turning lanes on major roadways and wider roads
- Four-laning of Ol' Colony Road
- Pedestrian walkway around Ol' Colony Golf Course
- Good buffers between residential and commercial developments
- More parks
- Green belt/scenic byways

- Implementation of a Scenic Byway Master Plan
- Clear-cutting limited and completed responsibly
- Environmental protection/preservation of wetlands
- Retain single-family density/low residential density
- No "big box" stores
- Greenway from dam and south along North River to Black Warrior River
- Promote single-family homes, low residential density land use
- Adoption/implementation of bicycle and pedestrian plan

The opportunities and visions developed by the Committee are focused on quality of life attributes that can be realized from coordinated planning and development of land along with preservation and protection of green infrastructure and natural resources.

## **4.0 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT**

Information from the inventory and analysis, plus the assets, issues, opportunities and visions brought out at the town meeting session and Advisory Committee workshops, were reviewed, considered and organized into a Strategic Development Concept. That concept was presented at an Advisory Committee session to solicit comments and advice. After fine-tuning based on responses, this concept recommends ways in which the City, in cooperation with residents can engage, support, and shape its future.

The Strategic Development Concept, as outlined and illustrated in Figure 7, is organized into several key “policy” areas. These deal with critical physical characteristics of the community and its neighborhoods, residential development as the majority of its land uses, the organization of commercial areas into strong commercial activity centers and localized enclaves of businesses, and accessibility by pedestrians and bicycles and the motor vehicle traffic passing through.

### **4.1 Green Infrastructure**

The concept of green infrastructure, originating in the United States in the mid- 1990’s, emphasizes the importance of the natural environment in land use planning. Green infrastructure is the network of natural areas and open spaces, including wetlands, greenways, parks, preserves, and vegetation, that naturally manages stormwater collection and routing, reduces flooding, and improves water quality. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has broadened the concept to apply to runoff management at the local level through the natural systems, or engineered/constructed systems.

One of the central findings of the *Tuscaloosa 2020: A Census Strategic Plan* was that, our high quality of life and environment should be nurtured through well-planned growth around our valuable natural resources. This consensus was also reflected in the input from the Advisory Committee. The idea of a green infrastructure has been built into the land use planning process.

Natural resources have limits, and development decisions affect far more than the property owner. The type and intensity of development ultimately affects the surroundings. Some land uses are inherently incompatible with others, and once development decisions are made, many are practically irreversible.

This Specific Plan and the City Wide Future Land Use Plan recognize the idea that a green infrastructure is critical to the quality of life for the City. It is an integral part of balanced community conservation and development. The first step in mapping these green infrastructure components was to identify resources, sites, and areas that may be critical to the City – the environmental conditions associated with protection of watersheds, water courses, wetlands, flood plains, slopes, and public and semi-public parks, open space and the sources of water supply for the City and conservation areas.

The infrastructure components addressed in the planning process include surface water bodies and associated watersheds; wetlands and flood plains; slope of land surface, particularly steep slopes; parks, recreation areas, and protected areas; city wide greenways (pedestrian facilities and cycling pathways). Greenways can provide opportunities for alternative forms of transportation (boating, hiking, walking, cycling), act as wildlife corridors, development buffers, and storm water recharge areas and will ideally serve as links in the chain of the City's system of parks.

## 4.2 Corridors and Centers

Significant nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development are designated in this Plan as *corridors and centers*. Each of these should be located, planned, and designed to relate to, support and affect urban form, environmental quality, adjacent residential neighborhoods and the transportation network in a positive way. Centers and corridors exist in a variety of types and sizes, but the most successful examples contain many, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- Anchor or focus of activity
- Compact, densely developed core
- Vehicular accessibility, internal vehicular circulation, and pedestrian accessibility
- Pedestrian oriented
- Well-defined edge without walls or signs
- Visual coherence

A commercial corridor is a commercial arterial with a mix of business and commercial enterprises typically along both sides and adjacent to (one or two blocks) a major street or boulevard. This broad category of uses typically includes retail, office, restaurant, hospitality and accommodations, either separately or as part of a mixed-use area.

As shown on the Strategic Development Concept, Figure 7, McFarland Boulevard has been designated as a commercial corridor from the Black Warrior River to the city limits of Northport. Another corridor is along Rice Mine Road, from New Watermelon Road south to near the Black Warrior River. The development would occur where appropriate, recognizing the existing residential areas fronting Rice Mine Road. These commercial corridors were defined in the City Wide Future Land Use Plan.

The City Wide Future Land Use Plan also described and specifically designated Commercial Activity Centers. A commercial activity center is defined as a significant node or concentration of development and associated infrastructure, and is typically located at the intersections of major streets or interstate exchanges. The area of the intersection of Rice Mine Road and New Watermelon Road has been designated as a commercial activity center (Figure 7).

Regional commercial activity centers serve both city wide and regional markets, and should present a positive image to the visitor and resident alike. While these centers rely primarily on customers arriving by car, pedestrian access and activity should be designed for and encouraged.

Typical uses include major retail businesses, grocery and other “big box” stores, and support retail and services businesses, including gas and service stations, restaurants and car dealerships. These uses should be organized into centers having a clear focal point rather than extended along the City’s arterial corridors. An appropriate transition should be made between the center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

### **4.3 Neighborhoods**

Traditional neighborhoods are a valued asset of the City and a desired model of residential development. New and developing neighborhoods represent growth. However, not all growth has been within the framework of a plan.

Good neighborhoods place an emphasis on community, livability, appearance, diversity, transportation opportunities (walking, bicycling, vehicle), convenience, and safety for all residents. To achieve this, the most successful neighborhoods generally exhibit characteristics that are largely missing from most conventional subdivisions as they have been developed over the past decades. Principles intended to guide planning and design for all Tuscaloosa neighborhoods follows:

- Preserve and enhance the open space system
- Design each neighborhood appropriate to its context
- Create a focus appropriate to the needs of the neighborhood
- Design the neighborhood with walkable, bikable, interconnected streets
- Reserve places for public open space and civic buildings
- Design streets appropriate to the scale and character of the neighborhood
- Design safe streets
- Redevelop, revitalize, and preserve older neighborhoods

### **4.4 Gateways**

A positive community identity is strengthened by gateways, which help establish strong edges, foster a sense of pride of place, and a sense of arrival. Gateways should reflect the particular characteristics of its settings and provide a welcoming introduction. One gateway has been designated in the City Wide Future Land Use Plan and is shown on Figure 7. The gateway is located at the Tuscaloosa-Northport city limits on McFarland Boulevard.

### **4.5 The Concept**

The map, Figure 7, provides the visual representation of this Strategic Development Concept. It indicates general locations and interrelationships of the Plan recommendations, which are intended to guide city, landowner, landlord, and community decisions regarding private and public initiatives.

Aspects include:

- Gateway image improvements
- Commercial activity center enhancement/reinvestment
- Neighborhood placement and design
- Protection and preservation of natural resources

- Sidewalk and trail investment
- Commercial corridor reinvestment
- Parks and recreation investment
- Annexation and expansion of corporate City limits

These principles and concepts and their applications are discussed in more detail in Sections 5.0 and 6.0 of this Plan and the City Wide Future Land Use Plan.



## **5.0 THE FUTURE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LAND**

The major land use recommendations and their locations presented in this Section of the Plan result from an in-depth analysis of environmental, physical, and economic conditions, the existing and forecasted utility and transportation infrastructure, the input and ideas of the Advisory Committee, and the vision and principles illustrated and outlined in Section 4.0, Strategic Development Concept. The future land use map (Figure 8) illustrates how different parts of the District and surrounding area should function and relate to one another. The map portrays various development sites and areas by type, their interrelations with each other and the neighborhoods. The map is intended to serve as a guide that shows desirable land uses for the community.

### **5.1 Major Development Themes**

The City intends that development should be planned, sited, and designed in a manner compatible with the green infrastructure, as a first step in providing development creativity, efficiency, stability, image, diversity, and control. The intent is to structure a balance between development and conservation. This Specific Plan is based on the community's input and evaluation of its assets, liabilities, opportunities and visions. The Plan specifically addresses the future land uses and principles attendant to a community, as follows, and as described in more detail within the City Wide Future Land Use Plan:

- Protect green infrastructure
- Build a community of neighborhoods
- Maintain and enhance community character
- Expand transportation and accessibility opportunities
- Protect and reinvest in the community

### **5.2 The Uses of Land**

As described, Figure 8 illustrates the future uses of land. The map was developed and organized to support the Strategic Development Concept; to incorporate recognition of green infrastructure protection, preservation, and enhancement; and to include input and consensus of the Advisory Committee. However, the map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny, nor preclude any particular action without the consideration and application of the intentions, principles, and standards in this Plan, the City Wide Plan, and appropriate governing regulations and ordinances.

#### **5.2.1 Residential**

Residential growth areas are shown on Figure 8 in yellow. Two shades of yellow are utilized, with the lighter yellow to represent growth in the future, 20 to 40 years from now current. These growth areas were delineated based on evaluation of recent and current growth patterns, proposed planned expansion of the City (annexation), short-term and long-term transportation project plans, and public school strategies.

The growth areas may include a variety of residential uses – very low-density on large lots, low-density larger single-family detached housing, medium-density residential, and high-density as apartment and condominium housing. The residential growth areas are predominantly outside of the corporate city limits, and exhibit expansion into areas that are currently rural and farm and forest land use.

Growth and development require consideration of the topography, green infrastructure in the vicinity of North River and tributary streams to North River and the lakes, and Conservation Areas as delineated in the City Wide Future Land Use Plan and the Strategic Development Concept.

### **5.2.2 Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas**

Sokol Park, one of the City's major multi-recreational parks, is a prominent land use as shown on Figure 8. The park occupies much land between Lake Tuscaloosa and the City of Northport, and is adjacent or in close proximity to existing neighborhoods and residential growth areas.

One proposed park is shown on the Future Land Use Map (Figure 8). The park location is not meant to be precise, but should be considered as a “placeholder” for more specific planning to determine detailed needs and locations. Also, at this time any designation as a community or district park has not been assigned. The proposed park is located in the vicinity of Lake Nicol and Harris Lake. Actual location decisions will be made either when a public agency has determined to invest in a facility, or when a private development project triggers the need and means for its acquisition and construction. Development plans will be approved, and property negotiations and construction plans will be prepared and financed, as appropriate.

#### *Conservation Areas -- Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol, Harris Lake, and the Black Warrior River*

Conservation Areas are delineated to include at least the area within the 50-year flood plain of Lake Tuscaloosa and a prescribed elevation above the normal pool levels of Lake Nicol and Harris Lake. These areas are shown, in general, on the Future Land Use map (Figure 8), by a bold green line around these three water bodies. A detailed discussion of the conservation areas to be established around these lakes may be found in *Land Use Assessment of Parcels Within the Police Jurisdiction of the City of Tuscaloosa and the Watersheds of North River-Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol, and Harris Lake* (PELA, 2007), which is incorporated herein by reference and is considered an amendment to the City Wide Future Land Use Plan.

A linear Conservation Area is designated along both the north and south banks of the Black Warrior River, across the entire area. It is intended as an extension of the City's (and Northport's) system of river parks and walks, and as a means of preserving for future generations green space, viewscales, and the natural vegetative buffer along the Black Warrior River.

The green infrastructure is not and shall not be simply the land left over when all development and building is completed. Green space is to be logically linked to other green space and is to preserve for the City its streams, lakes, flood plains, steep slopes, recreational resources, and public access to them, for the community at large.

### 5.2.3 Commercial and Office

The corridors of existing commercial and office establishments are shown on the future land use map in dark blue along portions of McFarland Boulevard and Rice Mine Road. Future corridors are designated as light-blue strips (three corridors) which have been placed strategically on Rice Mine Road (as growth to the existing corridor), between North River and existing residential development on McWright's Ferry Road, and on Watermelon Road between Old Colony Road and Sharpes Lake Road (the intersection of Watermelon Road with the planned eastern bypass).

Any development/redevelopment of corridors and the large commercial activity center are to be consistent with this Plan.

### 5.2.4 Village Centers

A *village center*, termed by the Advisory Committee during the planning process, is a limited collection of retail or retail and business that serves nearby local neighborhoods. The centers are typically at the intersection of roads and are dispersed about 1½ to 2 miles apart. The village center concept was developed as a means of promoting small enclaves of businesses and support services to the residential growth areas and thus precluding development of any additional commercial corridors and large commercial activity centers, particularly east of Lake Tuscaloosa and North River. Nine village centers are shown on Figure 8. There are limited services at some of these locations currently. The locations of the centers are described as follows:

- Intersection of Martin Road Spur and planned eastern bypass
- McWright's Ferry Road, east of North River
- Intersection of New Watermelon Road and McWright's Ferry Road
- Intersection of New Watermelon Road and Lake Nicol Road
- Intersection of New Watermelon Road and Old Watermelon Road
- Intersection of Lake Nicol Road and Harris Lake Road
- Intersection of Deerlick and Old Power Plant Road
- Intersection of unnamed county road and the proposed bypass across the Black Warrior River
- Intersection of Jack Warner Parkway and the planned eastern bypass

### 5.2.5 Neighborhood Redevelopment

In coordination with growth of the future commercial corridor as infill of the area along Rice Mine Road and between the two current corridor areas (Figure 8), development of the parcels adjacent to the roadway with commercial/business concerns would occur.

In concert with this development would be redevelopment of the adjacent portions of neighborhoods, such as Gaineswood, Brandonwood, as shown in light green on Figure 8. This may be accomplished by the discouragement of further development of single-family lots, and the encouragement of creating more uniform developments with limited controlled access to Rice Mine Road.

With this approach, as defined by the Advisory Committee, the commercial and business development areas would be strategically planned along several corridors and the village centers dispersed throughout the residential developments.

### **5.2.6 Mixed Use**

This is a development type in which various primary uses—for example, residential uses of various densities as well as office, institutional, and retail/commercial—may be combined (horizontally and/or vertically) in the same building or within separate buildings on the same site or nearby sites.

Two areas of mixed use are shown on Figure 8. Future development is shown located on the west bank of the Black Warrior River, south of the confluence with Daniel's Creek, at the crossing of the proposed bypass across the Black Warrior River.

Those areas located near the Black Warrior River will require appropriate design and density to enhance, protect, and preserve slopes, watersheds, flood plains and conservation areas and access to the same.

### **5.2.7 Gateways**

Gateways provide community identity by marking the major entrances to the community or City. They foster a sense of pride of place and arrival. In addition to the designated gateway on McFarland at the Northport City Limits, five gateways are shown on Figure 8. Four of those gateways are at village centers, as follows:

- Intersection of Martin Road Spur and planned eastern bypass
- Intersection of New Watermelon Road and Old Watermelon Road
- Intersection of unnamed county road and the proposed bypass across the Black Warrior River
- Intersection of Jack Warner Parkway and the planned eastern bypass
- Intersection at north end of Bryant Bridge and McWright's Ferry Road

The placement and construction of any gateways should consider appropriate placement, signage, and lighting requirements and any associated landscaping.

## 6.0 STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Plan implementation will involve revision and continued administration and enforcement of the City's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, City budgeting and capital improvement programming, empowerment of community and neighborhood organizations and volunteers, and decisions regarding annexation. All of these tools must be used together to encourage the desired growth, development and sustainability.

### 6.1 Early Action

To address the commercial corridors and commercial activity center, as described in Section 5.0 of this Plan and the City Wide Future Land Use Plan, the following general guidance is provided for future implementation:

- Each center and corridor will be studied individually
- Overlay zoning for each center and corridor will be prepared
- Overlay zoning will address, but not be limited to, the following items:
  - building height criteria
  - signage requirements
  - lighting requirements
  - landscaping
  - setbacks
  - design considerations for ingress and egress
  - pedestrian safety, pedestrian pathways/walkways/sidewalks
  - building/structure design aesthetics and application of high-quality architecture
  - alternative paving surfaces
  - impervious surface ratios
  - runoff management
- Overlay zoning will be implemented as described
- If conflict exists between this Specific Plan and the City Wide Future Land Use Plan, the Specific Plan will take precedence

Development within commercial activity centers, commercial corridors, residential, and mixed use areas in proximity to Conservation Areas along the Black Warrior River, Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol and Harris Lake and any other waterways will be required to design projects to minimize impacts to slopes, and to enhance, protect, and preserve the Conservation Areas and nearby waterbodies and flood plains and access to them.

Reinvestment and intensification requirements and incentives should be devised for each commercial activity center, commercial corridors, and each village center and other development areas. These criteria might include:

- Consolidation and reduction in parking requirements for commercial and employment areas and their outparcels
- Mandatory cross-access easements and consolidation of ingress and egress among and between commercial parcels that front arterial corridors

- A building's ground floor façade facing a local, collector, or arterial street shall contain windows, doors or display areas, etc. and shall not be designed/constructed as a solid or blank wall.
- Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility or safety appropriate to the location
- Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than 12 feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians
- Interfaces between commercial developments and single-family neighborhoods shall be designed to consider building height, building location, landscaping, lighting, and noise
- Surface parking lots shall include green space within the parking lot, with landscaping distributed and designed in accordance with the Landscape Ordinance and with an overall plan approved by the Planning Commission
- Parking structures shall 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 shall have ground-level business uses along the street side(s)
- Neighborhoods shall be planned and organized carefully in relation to the natural environment, including but not limited to the slope and proximity to streams, lakes and floodways
- Neighborhoods shall be planned and designed in a manner appropriate to their context—to reflect their location in the surrounding community
- Neighborhoods shall be designed and built with walkable, interconnected streets
- Promote and maintain commercial development that enhances the function of the commercial center and center corridors
- Lighting and tree plantings at major centers and along corridors shall be used to welcome travelers and enhance the commercial uses of the corridor
- Development of attractive and well-located signage, lighting and landscaping that differentiates each gateway from other parts of the community it introduces
- Direct commercial development to important intersections and discourage scattered or strip patterns of commercial development
- Design development, where appropriate, consistent with standards and guidelines of existing (Riverfront) and any proposed Overlay Districts, as appropriate

## **6.2 Capital Improvements**

Both the private and public sectors can begin Plan implementation immediately with small actions that have the potential to create big impacts. Choosing high profile and high visibility locations, such as gateways and village centers, for early investment can intensify the impact of even small projects, so long as each is a piece of the whole. 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.

It should also be noted that public investment can and should be planned and timed so that it may be linked to private investment in a way that provides incentives for private investments that might otherwise happen much later—or not at all—without some public participation. Examples are:

- Implementation of the City's recently adopted Water and Sewer Policy

- Coordination of special projects included under Reserve Fund For Future Improvement (RFFI) with Future Land Use Plan
- Active perusal of federal funding for improvement for image and commercial corridors set out in the Future Land Use Plan

### **6.3 Development Regulation, Guides and Standards**

#### **6.3.1 Link Zoning Ordinance and Other Controls to Plan**

Tuscaloosa has adopted and enforces a zoning ordinance to regulate development. This is one regulatory tool among several that will be used to help implement the vision, goals, policies, and recommendations of the Plan:

- By directly prescribing permitted land uses and densities, and
- By mitigating impacts of adjacent land uses through prescribed joining and/or separation of land uses and development densities

This Plan and its future land use map should not be confused with the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. The Plan is a *guide* to public and private investment in land development and infrastructure. In contrast, the *zoning ordinance* is a regulatory tool used by the City to influence and direct development in ways that reflect the direction and desired form called for in this Plan.

In addition, planned developments, requiring preparation and approval of overall master plans and similar modifications, in accord with the Plan, are intended to allow innovative approaches to development, in recognition of the fact that livability and good design cannot be legislated, but can be encouraged. Other regulations, ordinances, requirements, and guidance that will be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Annexation Plan
- Subdivision Regulations
- Tuscaloosa Historical Preservation Commission Design Guidelines
- Land Development Manual
- Structures and Activities Regulations
- Tuscaloosa “Green City”
- Environmental Services Ordinances
- Overlay Zoning
- Billboards Ordinance
- Landscape Ordinance

As a part of the City Wide Plan implementation system, Tuscaloosa intends to revise the City’s Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. As a start, the ordinance should be amended to specifically link the zoning ordinance to this Plan and the City Wide Land Use Plan, with the intention that all development be compatible with uses and development criteria specified in the Plan.

#### **6.3.2 Coordinate Plan with Other Plans and Agency Activities**

This Plan is a combination of visions, maps, planning and design guidelines and examples. It is a framework for guiding public and private decisions that will affect the growth,

development and redevelopment of the community. The Plan is based on the community's vision for its own future. The Plan focuses on the physical form of the community and applies to development of private and public properties.

As such, implementation of the Plan must be coordinated with other significant entities to maximize the vision and local and regional reach of these planning efforts. Coordination for implementation should consider, but not be limited to, the following entities and their long range planners:

- Campus Plans for The University of Alabama, Stillman College, and Shelton State Community College
- City of Northport
- Rural water authorities
- City of Tuscaloosa School Board
- PARA Planning
- West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC)
- Tuscaloosa County
- Tuscaloosa County Health Department
- 911

### **6.3.3 Development Criteria**

As a concluding summary exercise, the Advisory Committee members were asked to further their ideas and visions and formulate standards and criteria specific to development in their community. Topics were focused on land use, transportation, and image. The criteria are listed below and they should be coordinated with the other criteria within Section 6.0. Overlapping and repetition is included so as to fully represent the input of the Advisory Committee.

#### **Land Uses**

- Direct, design, and develop a “Neighborhood Friendly” community
- Promote and develop only “small businesses” east of the Lake Tuscaloosa dam with green space connectivity
- Prohibit or discourage large “big box” retail businesses
- Prohibited new land uses:
  - Pawn shops
  - Motels/hotels
  - Mobile home parks
  - Truck/RV/automotive repair/sales
  - Rental-tool equipment
  - Sexually oriented adult use
  - Storage facilities
  - Drive-in movie theaters
  - Tattoo shops
- The traditional Commercial Activity Center = “Village Center”
- Maintain estate lot zoning within specific subdivisions/neighborhoods



- Promote development of local businesses, especially at village centers, as people will do business in their neighborhoods if it's available
- Promote development of local businesses, especially at village centers, to provide local places to work within the community
- The intersection of Lake Nicol Road and New Watermelon Road should be promoted, designed, and developed as a Village Center

### **Transportation**

- Promote and implement the Tuscaloosa Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (WARC):
  - sidewalks and bicycle lanes along Rice Mine Road
  - safe bicycle pathways from Lake to town
- Provide additional access for public use to Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicol, and Harris Lake
- Add access roads as commercial/retail buildings are replaced/revitalized, including:
  - Shared/limited access for businesses
  - "Service roads" used for smaller parcels – reduce curb cuts
- Design and develop or reconfigure infrastructure to increase subdivision connectivity
- Design and develop ways to help with traffic flow (many entrances to subdivisions, the Forest Lake street network is a good example)
- Study traffic flow patterns and develop a traffic light timing system that is a more effective use of the current infrastructure
- Complete a transportation study to address for the community:
  - Mass transit/public transportation needs
  - Potential location(s) for transportation hub/intermodal facility
  - Car pooling/ride-share program
  - Consideration of river transportation/ferry concept
- Add roundabouts in neighborhoods, if appropriate to aid traffic flow, calm traffic speed, and supplement green space/landscaping

### **Image**

- Promote development of businesses to suit the community and limit large commercial expansion (residents are willing to travel out of community to other commercial corridors)
- The "look" of McFarland Boulevard is undesirable within the community
- Develop a plan for architecture/building design themes
  - Themes shall address and accentuate the natural setting, specify architectural styles and building materials
  - Themes shall not be mixed over a limited area of the community, every village center and surrounding area shall display the same or similar/compatible theme
  - Promote high-quality architecture
- Building heights shall be designed based on the topographic setting, and shall not exceed two stories above street grade (for example, buildings on a hill or in a cut of a hill should be built to the height of the hill, but not

exceed two stories – many office parks south of Birmingham are good examples)

- Commercial/retail buildings shall be designed and developed for long-term use considerations, no new temporary structures or metal buildings shall be constructed
- Landscaping:
  - Promote and implement Landscape Ordinance
  - Hidden parking lots – parking behind buildings
  - Landscaping of parking lots shall consider such aspects as perimeter planting strips, internal planting areas, etc.
  - Preserve mature trees, when possible
  - Replant abundance of saplings to replace mature vegetation
  - Promote plantings of indigenous species
  - Design and create canopy coverage in parking lots
- Setbacks:
  - Setbacks for sidewalks shall consider safety, based on traffic load and speed
  - Consider smaller setbacks for neighborhood sidewalks except, if appropriate, for entry roads, etc.
- Signage Requirements:
  - Free-standing signs will be monument style
  - Design and aesthetics shall consider the architectural theme for that area
  - Signage on buildings shall be limited in number and minimal in size
  - No billboards
  - No neon
  - No backlighting, direct (flood-like) lighting on signage, directional lighting
- Lighting Requirements:
  - “Discreet” or downward lighting
  - “Decorator” poles/fixtures
  - New developments shall be encouraged to install utilities underground

Because of the predominant rural and water-oriented setting of most of the community, the desired look or image includes abundant landscaping and architecture/building design themes that suggest “out-of-doors,” rugged appeal, traditional, or “Parkitecture,” Georgian, Italianate, Tudor, or other European styles. The themes applied would be consistent throughout each village center, and surrounding area.

As developed by the Committee, the future community can be characterized as well planned neighborhoods, connected by green spaces, with limited large commercial expansion and attractive small enclaves of commercial/retail business to support the neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were described as “villages of small towns.”

## 6.4 Annexation

The future land use map (Figure 8) shows portions of the planning area outside of the corporate City Limits with expanses of planned growth. As the City considers annexation of new areas, the ability to protect the City and its fiscal basis, its people and resources, as well as assure the ability to provide services, present and the future, will be prime considerations. Annexation decisions should take into account at least the following questions and criteria, in addition to all elements of the City's Comprehensive Plan, when considering the appropriateness of any particular annexation.

- Efficiency of providing services—will the annexation result in demands on public facilities and services that may exceed the capacity of such facilities and services, or will annexation cause or eliminate awkward and irregular boundaries that cause difficulty or inefficiencies in supplying utilities and services?
- Fiscal soundness—will annexation of the property significantly add to the revenue base of the city? Comprehensive annexations that “pay their way” by including commercial areas whose taxation may help to cover the cost of necessary support services should have priority.
- Image compatibility/enhancement—is the property to be annexed consistent with Tuscaloosa standards, character and image, or might annexation allow for the elimination of existing or potential land uses and improvements and be considered a blighting or deteriorating influence, or perhaps prevent untimely or inappropriate development of property?

An Annexation Plan is a specific implementation component to the Future Land Use Plan. The Annexation Plan should analyze all areas abutting the city limits for a minimum of 3 miles. The Annexation Plan should delineate these areas into four sections: north, east, south, and west. Each area should then be evaluated for growth potential, and a cost benefit analysis should be done to determine priority for future annexations.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

There is a clear consensus within the community that the City should be a green community in which planned growth and diversified economic development provide an attractive, efficient, and productive environment and a high quality of life where people and goods will move easily about the urban area. This movement will occur by the people using their feet, bicycles, boats, buses, and cars powered conventionally as well as alternatively fueled, and where such movements will occur on streets, river and lakes, along bikeways, and pedestrian pathways that are attractive as well as functional.

Participants provided the following guidance for land use planning in their Community and Tuscaloosa:

- Carefully consider the overall natural resources, environmental quality and the environmental impacts of growth before approving development projects.
- Integrate the system of highways, streets, bikeways, and walkways with the development pattern to help promote a sense of connection and community.
- Enforce development codes to ensure high quality development that is environmentally sound and aesthetically pleasing.
- Revise the City's annexation policies to ensure the long-term health and welfare of its citizens.

This Plan:

- Ensures that as development occurs, the City's most significant natural features and resources will be conserved and enhanced.
- Provides a general guide that may lead to making and revising regulations regarding type, intensity, and timing of development.
- Suggests and illustrates patterns for land use and development that strive for a sustainable community.

This is a long-range plan, and change occurs in a more or less continuous manner. Gateways to the City, greenways, image, commercial corridors, institutional and commercial activity centers, neighborhoods, schools, parks, bicycle and pedestrian routes, and transportation infrastructures are not developed overnight. Hence, the Plan does not propose or provide "quick fix" solutions, nor should this plan be viewed simply as an economic development platform.

The Tuscaloosa City Council, Planning Commission and City staff intend to use this document as a basis for continuing to update the City planning process to:

- Engage citizens, property owners, and investors in a continuing conversation as to the most appropriate form and direction for development and conservation of the City's resources.
- Identify and advise regarding priorities for infrastructure improvements – conservation areas, roads, greenways, parks, schools and other public facilities.

This Plan provides guidance to assist public officials and private citizens as they consider investments that may have long-term implications for the community. The contents of this Plan should be continuously discussed, evaluated, monitored, and renewed as changes occur in physical, social, political, and market conditions.

## 8.0 REFERENCE MATERIALS

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West Alabama Regional Commission, Tuscaloosa Area 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan, August 30, 2004, prepared for the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

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## FIGURES

- Figure 1. Location of District 3
- Figure 2. District 3, areal map
- Figure 3. Aerial photograph
- Figure 4. Current land use
- Figure 5. Rental properties
- Figure 6. Current zoning
- Figure 7. Strategic Development Component
- Figure 8. Future land use

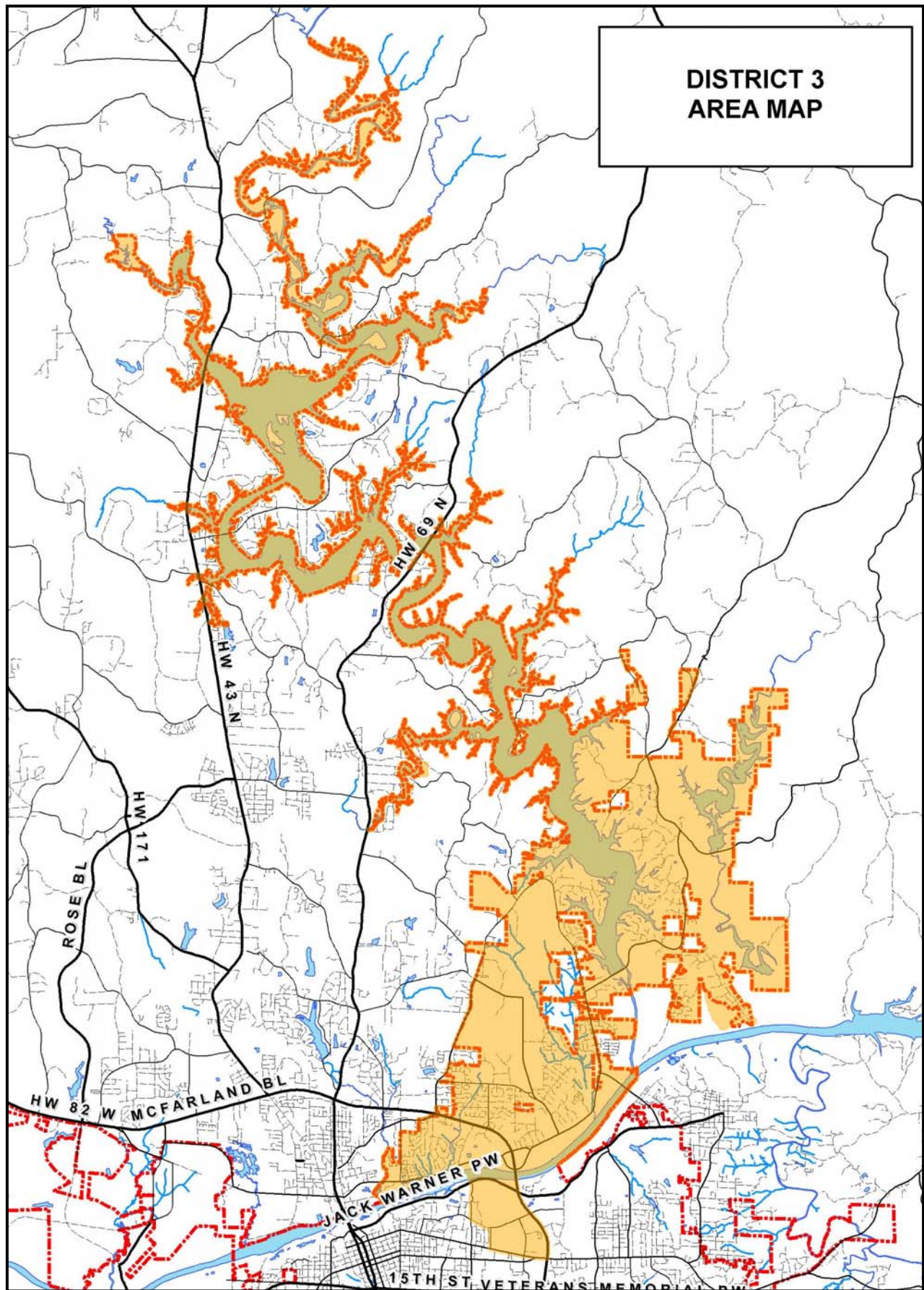


Figure 1. Location of District 3



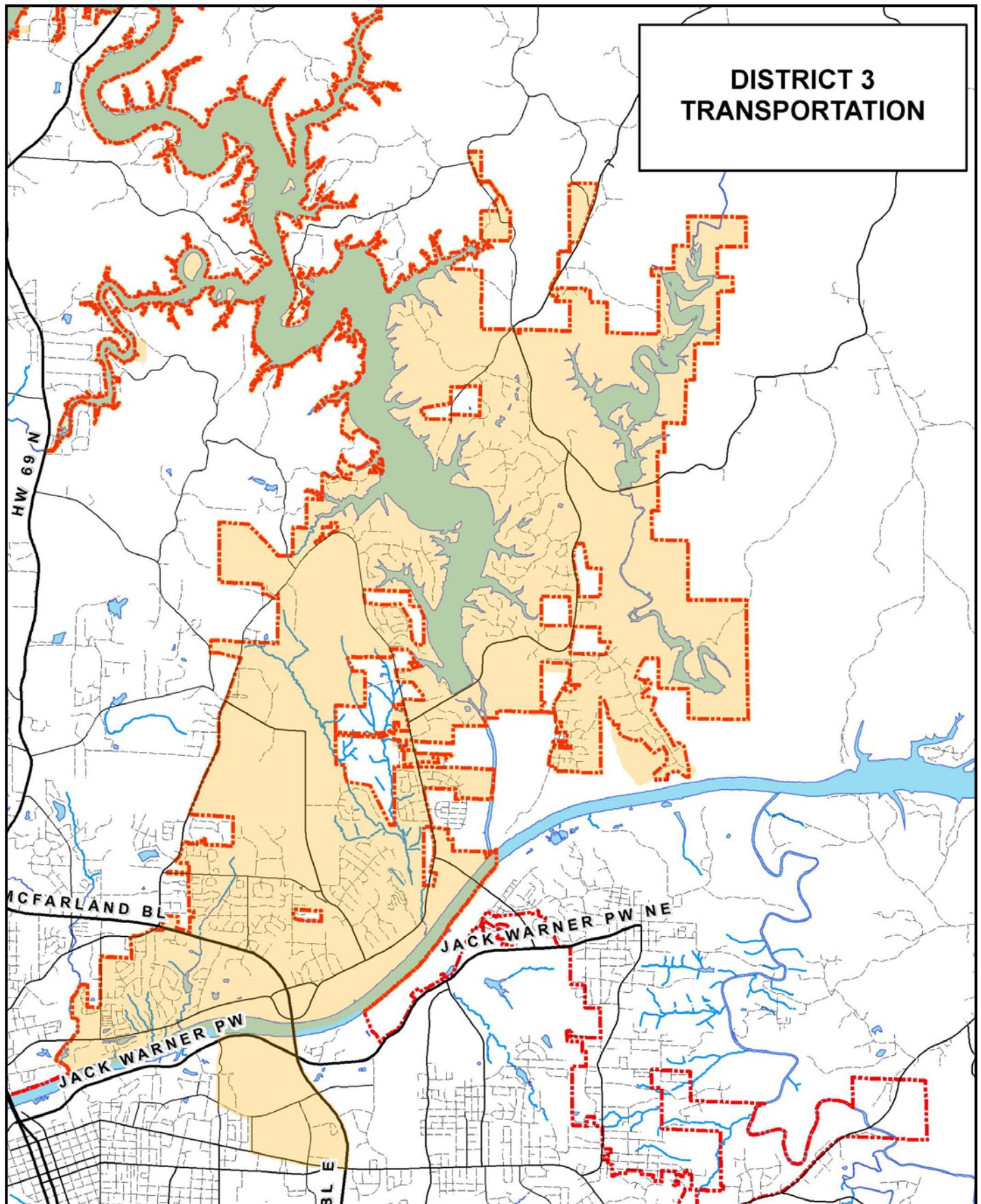
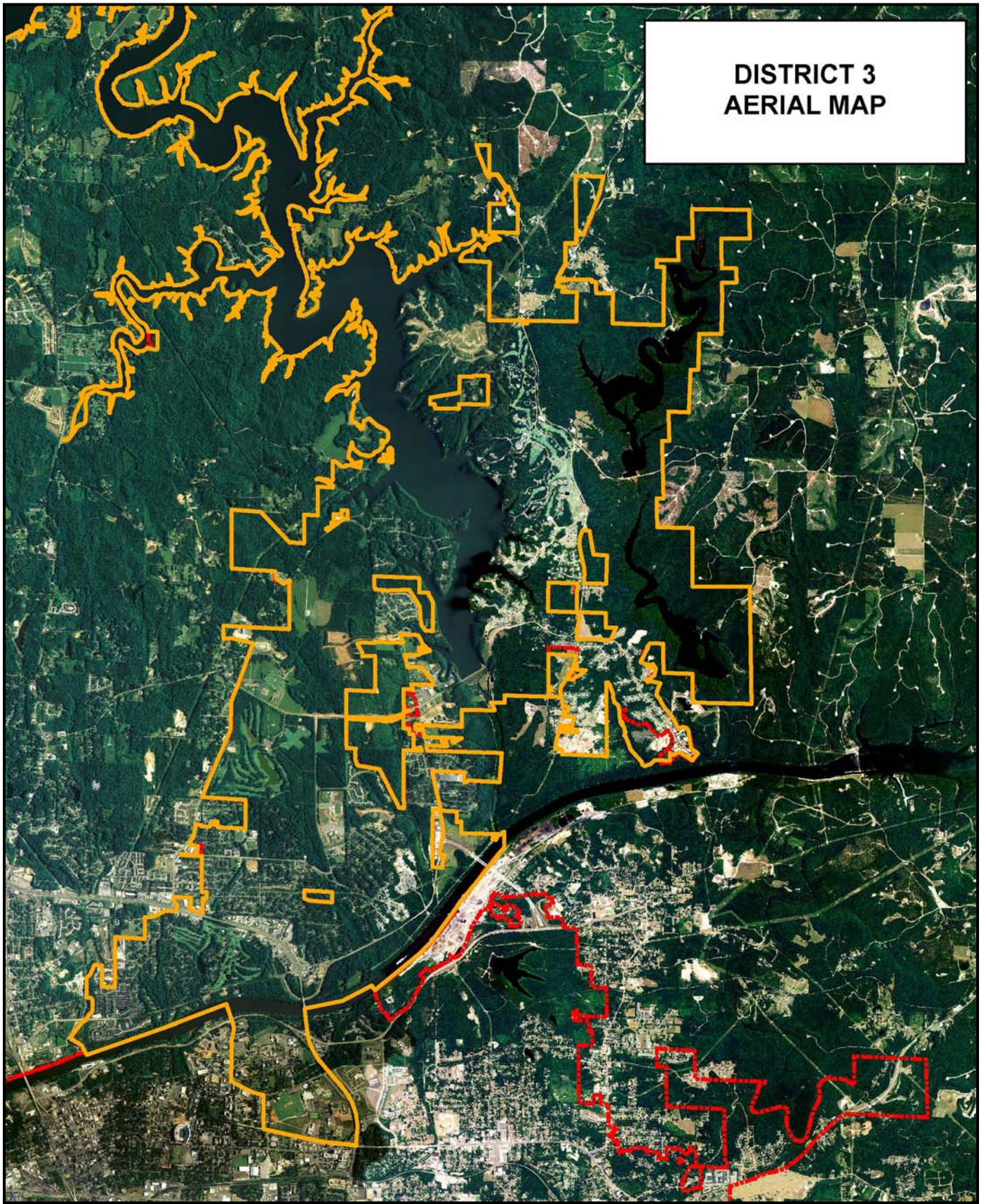


Figure 2. District 3, areal map

**DISTRICT 3  
AERIAL MAP**



**Figure 3. Aerial photograph**

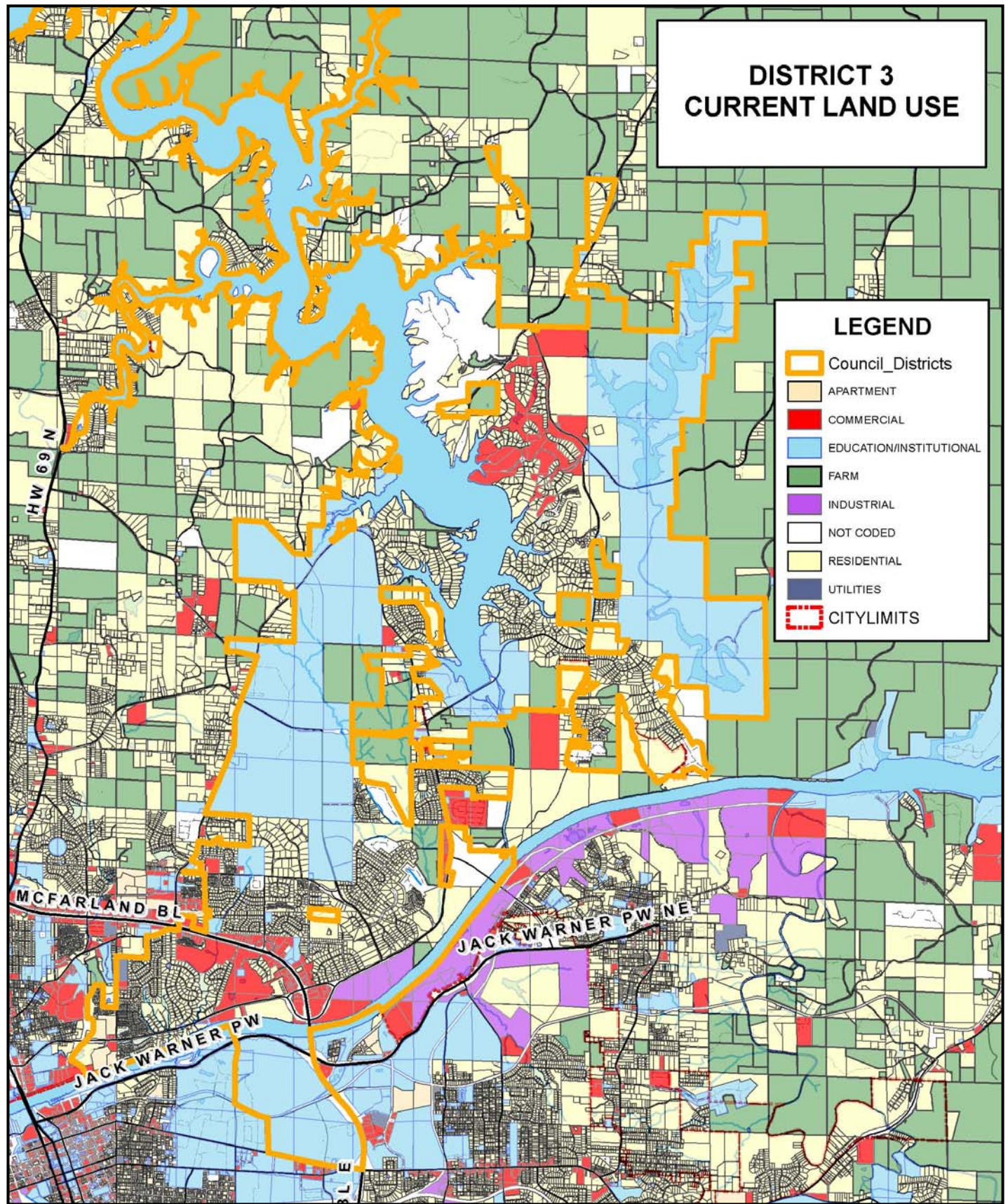


Figure 4. Current land use

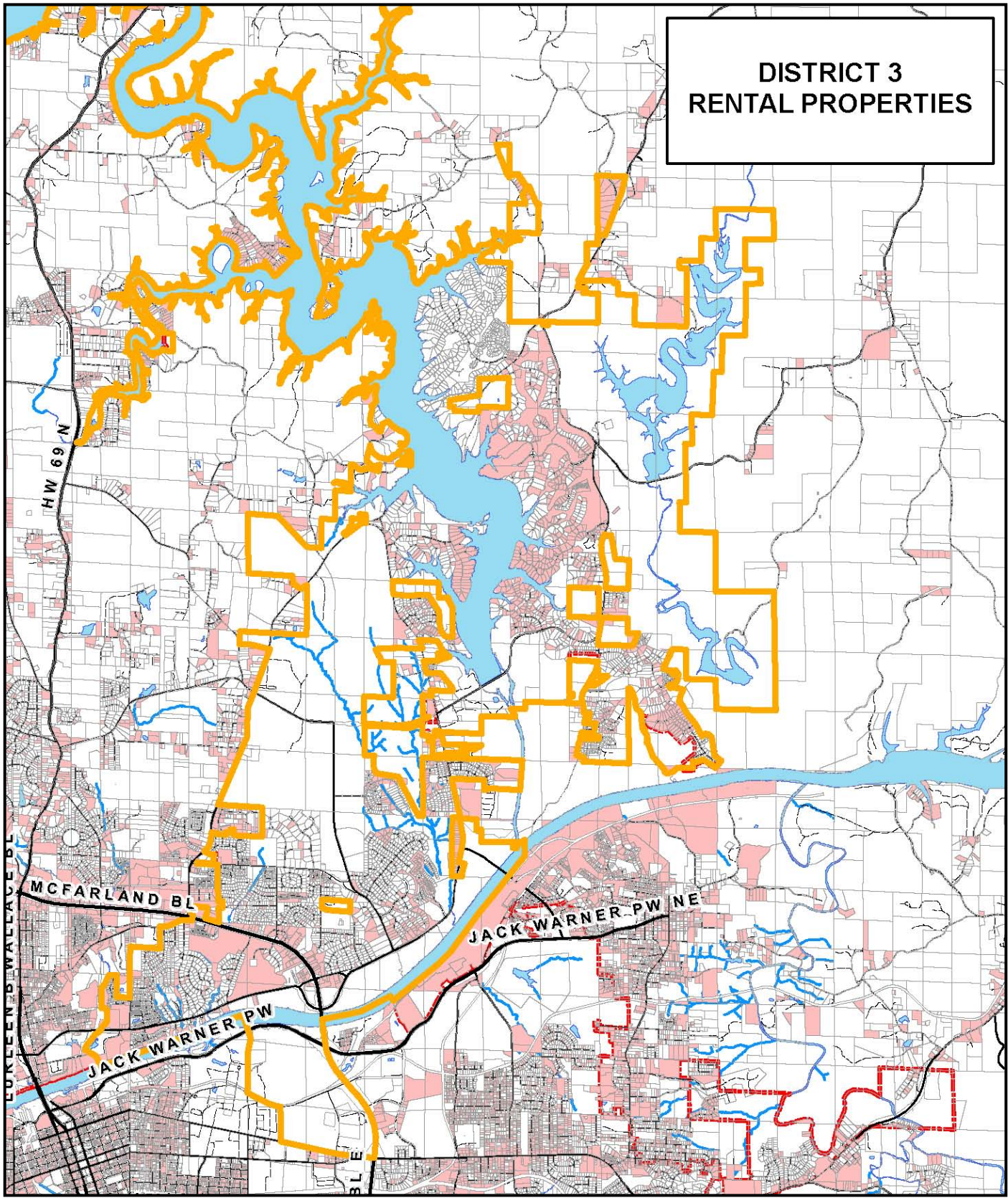


Figure 5. Rental properties

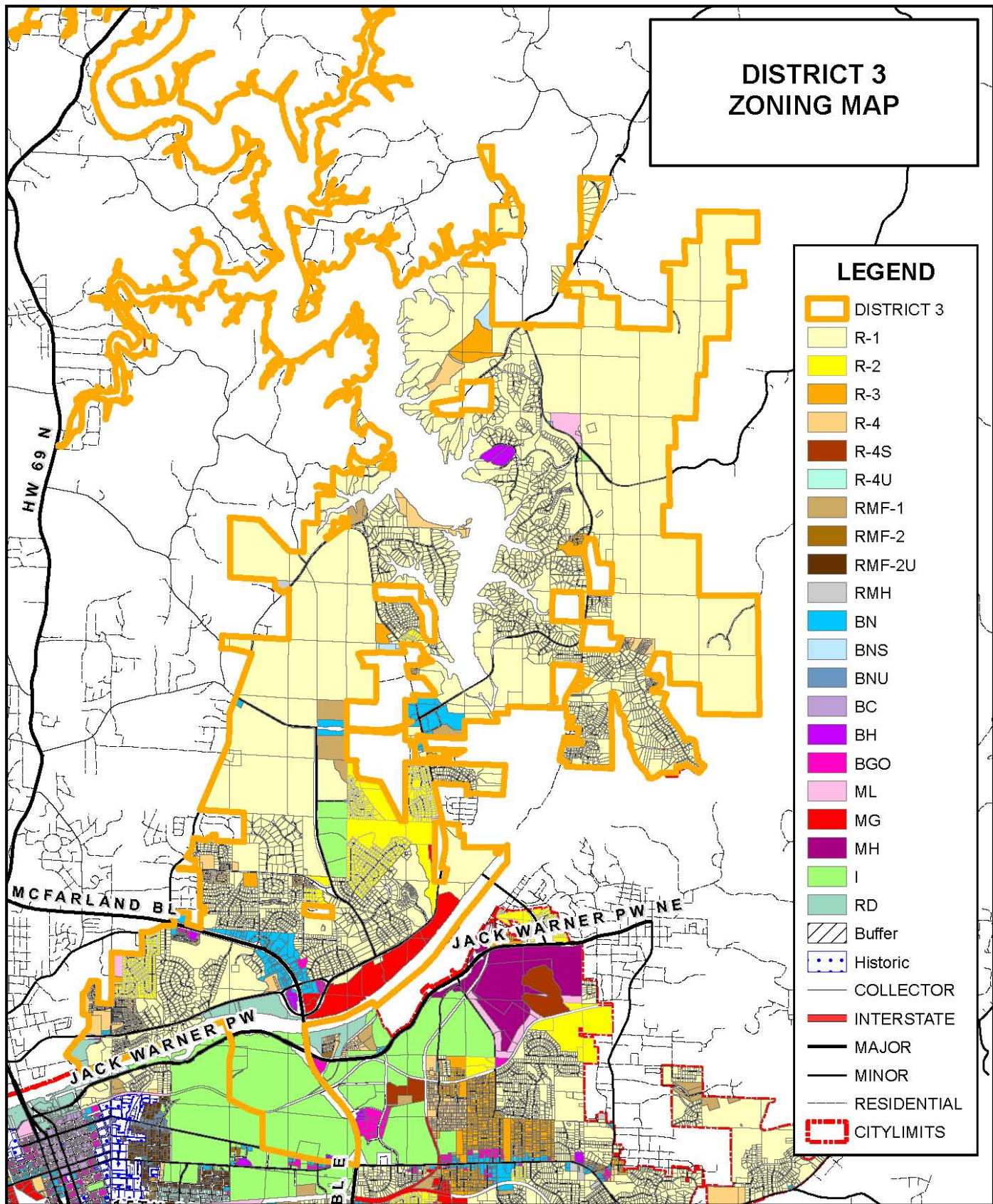
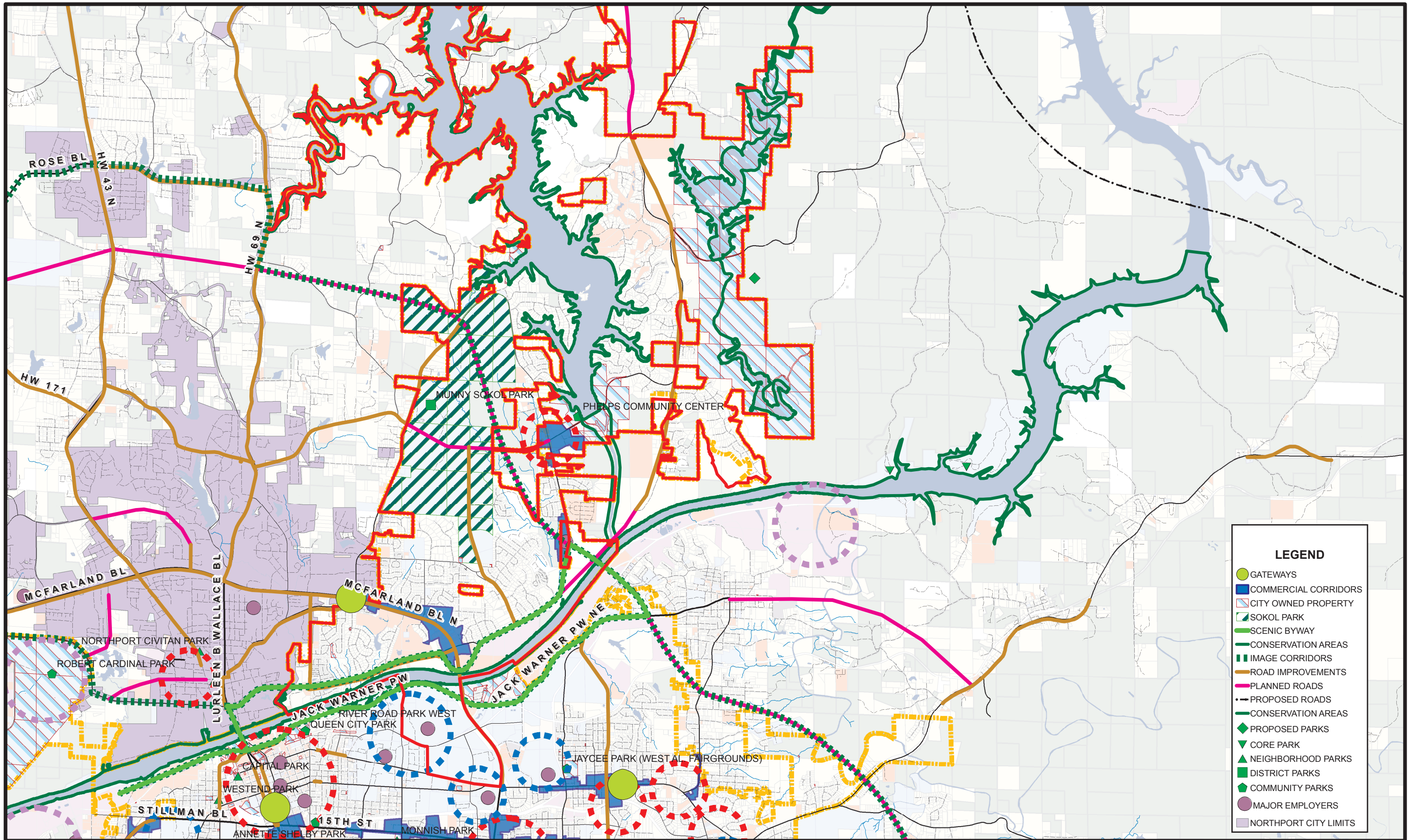


Figure 6. Current zoning

Figure 7. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT



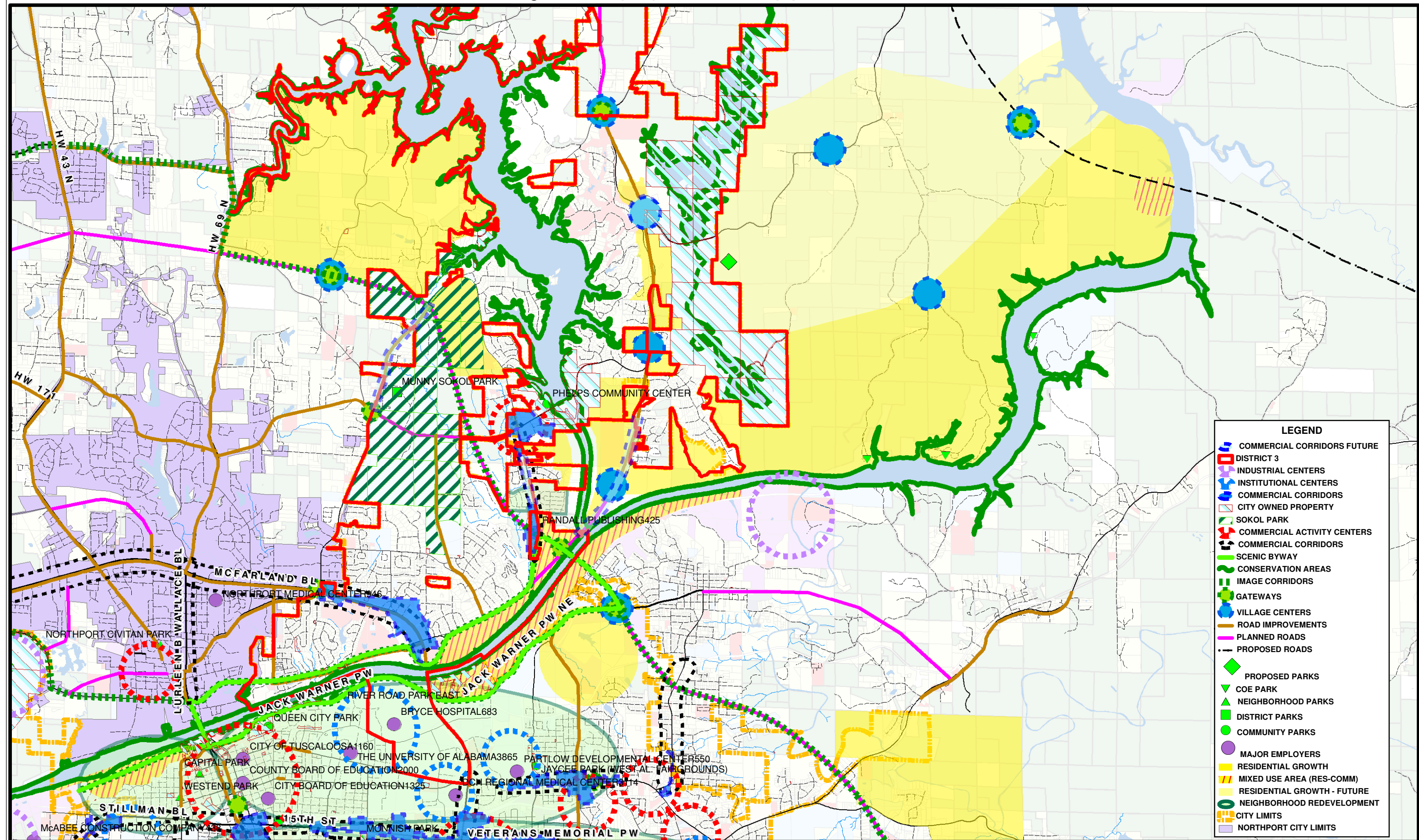
**LEGEND**

- GATEWAYS
- COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS
- CITY OWNED PROPERTY
- SOKOL PARK
- SCENIC BYWAY
- CONSERVATION AREAS
- IMAGE CORRIDORS
- ROAD IMPROVEMENTS
- PLANNED ROADS
- PROPOSED ROADS
- CONSERVATION AREAS
- ◆ PROPOSED PARKS
- ▼ CORE PARK
- ▲ NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS
- DISTRICT PARKS
- ◆ COMMUNITY PARKS
- MAJOR EMPLOYERS
- NORTHPORT CITY LIMITS

MAP SOURCE: PLANNING DEPARTMENT, CITY OF TUSCALOOSA, KPS GROUP INC., WEST ALABAMA REGIONAL COMMISSION, PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY  
107200/STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT DISTRICT 3



Figure 8. FUTURE LAND USE



**LEGEND**

- COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS FUTURE
- DISTRICT 3
- INDUSTRIAL CENTERS
- INSTITUTIONAL CENTERS
- COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS
- CITY OWNED PROPERTY
- SOKOL PARK
- COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY CENTERS
- COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS
- SCENIC BYWAY
- CONSERVATION AREAS
- IMAGE CORRIDORS
- GATEWAYS
- VILLAGE CENTERS
- ROAD IMPROVEMENTS
- PLANNED ROADS
- PROPOSED ROADS
- PROPOSED PARKS
- COE PARK
- NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS
- DISTRICT PARKS
- COMMUNITY PARKS
- MAJOR EMPLOYERS
- RESIDENTIAL GROWTH
- MIXED USE AREA (RES-COMM)
- RESIDENTIAL GROWTH - FUTURE
- NEIGHBORHOOD REDEVELOPMENT
- CITY LIMITS
- NORTHPORT CITY LIMITS

MAP SOURCE: PLANNING DEPARTMENT, CITY OF TUSCALOOSA, KPS GROUP INC., WEST ALABAMA REGIONAL COMMISSION, PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY  
107200/STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT DISTRICT 3

