



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

CITY OF TUSCALOOSA

SPECIFIC PLAN – DISTRICT 6

Prepared for:
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Specific Plan for District 6 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 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 6 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 6 COMMUNITY

Figure 1 shows the location and configuration of District 6. The District is an irregular configuration of lands coincident with the corporate City limits. The greatest contiguous areas are east of McFarland Boulevard, south of Veterans Memorial Parkway, and west of Buttermilk Road. Of note are the large islands of county lands surrounded by the City south of Skyland Boulevard and outlying lands east of Buttermilk Road connected by corridors along major arterials. These outliers are newer subdivisions and Cottondale Industrial Park. The community is comprised of many well established subdivisions, such as Woodland Hills, Cherokee Hills, Beech Hills, and Coventry located north of I-59 and south of Veterans Memorial Parkway; Parkside and Broadview located between I-59 and Skyland Boulevard; and Springhill Lake and Woodland Forrest to the south of Skyland Boulevard. Also, Covington and Camden Lakes are a few of the most recent developments which are in the vicinity of Paul W. Bryant High School.

2.1 Physical Features

Figure 2, is an aerial photograph with the outline of the District 6 shown.

The density of man-made features varies considerably across the District, largely because of the shape of the District and the roadway system 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 within the District are the Veterans Administration and the adjacent University of Alabama lands comprising the Arboretum and the former golf course, the Woodland Forrest golf course, McFarland Mall and the other large commercial developments along Skyland Boulevard, and the interchanges along I-59 and the associated commercial development. In addition, the neighborhoods/subdivisions and the large percentage of green space are between Veterans Memorial Parkway and I-59 are easy to interpret. Expanses of green space are also apparent with the previously listed golf courses and undeveloped lands that are along watercourses.

The surface-water system of the area is shown in Figure 3. The east/west oriented streams within the western portion of the District include Crib's Mill Creek and Cypress Creek. These streams, and associated tributaries, flow to the west. The north/south oriented streams, which flow to the north, are within the eastern portion of the District or adjacent to the District. These streams include Cottondale Creek and its unnamed tributaries. Also shown on Figure 3 are the extent of the flood plains and wetlands associated with these streams. The streams and many manmade lakes, land surface topography, and the layout of roads and streets and buildings are also shown on Figure 4, a portion of the US Geological Survey topographic map of Tuscaloosa (USGS, 1983). Steep slopes along the stream valleys and flanking the lakes are common to the local terrain.

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, Figures 2 and also shown on Figures 1 and 4. In general, the major arterials are east/west roads across the District. Several roads that diagonally cross the District include Loop Road, Hargrove Road, and the eastern portion of Skyland Boulevard. North/south access is difficult and is fairly limited to McFarland Boulevard and streets through the residential developments. Therefore, access shortcuts through neighborhoods/subdivisions are common, and, as a result, speed tables and added stop signs have been installed to reduce traffic speeds.

2.3 Current Land Use and Development

As shown on Figure 5, current land use, the majority of the property in the District is predominantly used for residential purposes. The District also includes large tracts of institutional use properties such as the Veterans Administration, The University of Alabama property near Five Points, and school property. These institutional uses tracts are shown in light blue on the map.

Housing density varies considerably, as can be seen based on location within the District and the parcel sizes, and this has brought together a diverse mix of people. The highest population concentrations are shown on the map in yellow, which are for the most part, single-family housing concentrations.

There are also commercial uses which are mostly situated in “strips” of commerce distributed along the more heavily traveled arterials, including McFarland Boulevard and Skyland Boulevard. The commercial uses are shown in red on Figure 5. These businesses include retail and services concerns, automotive sales and repairs, the JVC complex, and the Cottondale Industrial Park at the I-59 interchanges. Also, the Woodland Forrest golf course is assigned a commercial use here (Figure 5).

2.4 Rental Properties

As shown on Figure 6, rental housing is dispersed throughout many parts of this community, especially in some of the neighborhoods made up of single-family housing. The map includes all rental properties, whether residential or commercial/business. This explains the many large parcels that are designated “rental” along Skyland Boulevard, Hargrove Road, and Buttermilk Road north of I-59 that are commercial enterprises. Rental properties situated within 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 7, reflects the current use of land. Commercial and business concerns are shown in red, blue, pink, and purple along the major arterials. The predominant zoning is single family residential and multi-family residential as shown in the yellow through tan colors. The University-owned and park properties, which are predominantly green space, are zoned Institutional and are shown on the map in light green. 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 the Leroy McAbee, Sr. Activity Center on January 17, 2008, 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 Councilman Bob Lundell met four 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 6 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 following assets have been organized by priority of importance as ranked by the Advisory Committee:

- Low density neighborhoods/mostly single-family residential
- Trees and green belts
- Good garbage pickup and great water/sewer/garbage department
- Close to fire department and excellent City services
- Low pollution
- Stable neighborhoods with long-term residents
- Proximity of “home” to daily needs
- Good quality of schools (especially Arcadia)
- Less traffic, good street network, and bicycle-friendly in some areas
- Lowest crime rate area in Tuscaloosa County
- Parks, including the UA Arboretum and Bowers Park
- Strong homeowners and neighborhood associations
- Low noise levels within neighborhoods, except for trains
- Well-kept medians and right-of-ways
- Good condition of street and roadways
- Proximity to medical care/clinics/hospitals
- Accessibility to major roads and Interstate 59
- Proximity to emergency service and the non-emergency 311 service
- Affordable housing in quality neighborhoods, for example Circlewood
- Bird sanctuary within Cherokee Hills

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.

- Not enough sidewalks; the area and City are not a "walkable community," need better connectivity with current sidewalks
- Clear-cutting/lack of preservation of green space
- Clear-cutting for development/no tree preservation
- High density residential developments in wrong places (examples are Hargrove Road, Buttermilk Road)
- Conversion or development of single-family residential neighborhoods into new apartments
- Litter (what happened to "Anti-Litter Campaign?")
- On-going Loop Road improvements project
- Gateways into City need improvement and enhanced image
- Poor lighting within neighborhoods
- Rezoning along Hargrove Road will increase the already congested traffic
- Lack of curbs and gutters, and narrow roads through established older neighborhoods (i.e., Shannon Drive)
- Unsightly business signage/signs too tall/billboards close to neighborhoods
- Noise from Interstate 59, Woodland Road, Loop Road, Hargrove Road to neighborhoods
- Lack of "safe roads" (i.e., Kicker Road between Hargrove Road and 15th Street)
- Woodland Road is a busy thoroughfare
- Problematic sanitary sewer system (especially within portions of Cherokee Hills, Woodland Hills)
- Lack of maintenance on completed PUDs/lack of enforcement of existing regulations on PUDs
- Lack of communication between UA and neighborhoods – student housing within neighborhoods has resulted in incompatibility of lifestyles amongst neighbors. UA should take more responsibility/increase student housing opportunities. What are plans for the closed golf course?
- Cars parked in front yards (mostly rental units)
- Need for more curbside recycling

The participants' view of local assets tends to stress the positive physical and social 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 6 and surrounding areas and 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 6 and its implementation by all responsible parties.

3.3 Opportunities and Visions for District 6 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, or 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.

- Return area to lakes communities – area behind Cherokee Hills/Woodland Hills, achieve by property swaps
- Land use of UA golf course should be useful to many, not some, such as a park or extension of the Arboretum; do not promote development of a housing complex or apartments
- Promote planning and construction of buffers at new developments – green space preservation
- Consider future use of UA golf course as an extension of the University campus with a village-setting for retired professors/nationwide village for think-tanks/or as an expansion of the Veterans Administration for a quality medical facility
- Maintain the existing estate lots, specifically within Cherokee Hills and Beech Hills
- Develop and enhance “character” for District 6, using design standards for developments and revitalization/redevelopment
- Promote the redevelopment of declining areas: Loop Road area, new “Midtown,” and condos at McFarland Mall, (don’t use green space)
- In conjunction with the current substantial growth in some areas, ensure the preservation of natural resources
- Ensure that the identified liabilities are addressed and turned into assets
- Construction of no more “temporary structures”
- Architectural compatibility within all new developments
- Connect parks, adoption and implementation of the bicycle and pedestrian plan
- Maintain the low crime rate

As indicated, much discussion was focused on the UA former golf course due to the significant acreage of that property and its important location relative to the adjacent and surrounding community. In summary, 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 and revitalization of previously developed areas, 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 cooperatively engage, support, and shape its future.

The Strategic Development Concept, as outlined and illustrated in Figure 8, 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 corridors, 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. The first step was to identify resources, sites and areas that may be critical to the community.

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, floodplains, 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 floodplains; slope of land surface, particularly steep slopes; parks, recreation areas, and protected areas; city wide green ways (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 8, McFarland Boulevard has been designated as a commercial corridor from Veterans Memorial Parkway south through District 6, and to the city limits at Highway 82. Another corridor is along Skyland Boulevard, across the District. 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. Currently within District 6, the following have been designated as commercial activity centers (Figure 8):

- Intersection of McFarland Boulevard and I-59
- Intersection and vicinity of intersection of McFarland Boulevard and Skyland Boulevard
- Intersection of Buttermilk Road and I-59
- Intersection of planned eastern bypass and I-59
- Five Points

Also, on the periphery of the defined District but critical to commerce and transportation are the centers at Cottondale and at the intersection of 15th Street and McFarland Boulevard, especially the later.

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

Those centers within and at the eastern part of District 6 are currently expanding (Five Points, Cottondale, and at Buttermilk Road) or placed for future development consideration (at the planned future bypass). These centers should have a clear focal point rather than extend along the City’s arterial corridors.

Institutional and civic uses are a traditional land use category typically including academic, governmental and community service uses and lands. Three institutional centers are shown (Figure 8) in the vicinity of Five Points. These centers include the Veterans Administration, and The University of Alabama property – the Arboretum and the former golf course.

Industrial land uses are typically large freestanding facilities and large employment centers, predominantly of manufacturing, technology, distribution, and service-related businesses. One industrial center, the JVC area, is shown on Figure 8. A potential area of growth into an industrial center is the Cottondale Industrial Park at Highway 11 and I-59.

4.3 Neighborhoods

The predominant current land use and zoning within the District is residential. 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

Older neighborhoods are desirable because of many existing attributes such as well constructed homes and buildings, lot sizes, walkable streets, natural landforms maintained at development, and other physical amenities.

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 8. The gateway is located at the intersection of McFarland Boulevard and Interstate 59.

4.5 The Concept

The map, Figure 8, provides a 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 9) 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 9 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 9 in yellow. 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 sparsely developed and forest land use.

Growth and development require consideration of green space and the topography and watercourses of tributaries of Cottondale Creek in the southeastern portion of the planning area and likewise the watercourses associated with Cypress Creek and Rum Creek in the southwestern portion of the area.

5.2.2 Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas

Bowers Park, one of the City's major multi-recreational parks, is a prominent land use as shown on Figure 9. Also shown is Snow Hinton Park. These parks, although located at the bounds of the District, occupy much lands adjacent or in close proximity to existing neighborhoods and residential areas.

The UA Arboretum and the former golf course is a significant green space within the District. The land use for the Arboretum is not expected to change. However, since closure in November 2003, the future use or uses of the 160-acre golf course was not certain. Recently, September 2008, UA president Dr. Robert Witt reported that there were no plans for the course at this point other than to remain as green space. Dr. Witt also indicated that any decision would be made in consultation with the City and the neighborhood.

One proposed park is indicated on the Future Land Use Map (Figure 9). The proposed location, provided by Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority, is in the vicinity of Daffron Road and Paul Duncan Road, south of Hargrove Road East (approximately 6,500 feet south of the edge of the map – see City Wide Future Land Use Plan, Figure 2). 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. 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.

Overall, 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 business establishments are shown on the future land use map in dark blue along McFarland Boulevard, Skyland Boulevard, and segments of Veterans Memorial Parkway. No additional corridors, corridor extensions, or supplemental commercial activity centers other than those centers as indicated within the Strategic Development Concept, are currently proposed. The planned actions/approach advocated herein are for revitalization and redevelopment of existing corridors and major intersection businesses.

Any development and redevelopment within the corridors and of centers are to be consistent with this Plan.

5.2.4 Neighborhood Centers

A *neighborhood 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 streets/roads and are dispersed throughout established, growing, and future neighborhoods. The neighborhood center concept was developed as a means of promoting small enclaves of businesses and support serves within residential areas and thus precluding development of any additional commercial corridors and large commercial activity centers. Nine village centers are shown on Figure 9. Several are located in adjoining districts and many are at or outside of the City limits, within or in the vicinity of residential growth areas. There are limited services at some of these locations currently. The locations of the centers are described as follows:

- Intersection of 2nd Avenue and Hargrove Road
- Intersection of 37th Street and McFarland Boulevard
- Intersection of Loop Road and Hargrove Road East
- Intersection of Pelham Heights Road and Old Cottondale Road
- Intersection of Bear Creek Cutoff and Highway 82
- Intersection of Jug Factory Road and 15th Avenue
- Intersection of Jug Factory Road and Columbia Parkway (planned road - 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan, WARC)
- Intersection of Columbia Parkway and Hargrove Road East
- Intersection of Buttermilk Road and Jim Jones Road

5.2.5 Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization

Revitalization is one of the most effective means to “breathe new life” into communities or neighborhoods that are affected, or even plagued, by a variety of certain social, physical, environmental, and economic issues. These issues can act as barriers to new investment opportunities and result in a diminishing standard of living for residents. Preservation and revitalization are processes that have authority, scope, and financial requirements to provide the stimulus to reverse the trends, address the issues, and create a new image for a neighborhood.

Although no Historic Districts have been designated within District 6, neighborhoods established many decades ago comprise most of the lands between Skyland Boulevard and Veterans Memorial Parkway. As advocated by the Advisory Committee, maintaining and sustaining these neighborhoods should be an important objective of this Plan. This area is shown in light green on Figure 9. The current zoning over this area is predominantly single-family residential and any zoning change to higher density should not be designed or developed. In addition, several neighborhoods are unique with estate-sized lots, which should be preserved.

In keeping with the revitalization process, the Advisory Committee concurred that Loop Road is an important arterial through this community of established neighborhoods, however travel is difficult, unsafe, and image along the route has declined. A Loop Road Corridor (Figure 9) should be designed and developed to improve travel and incorporate a beautification project.

This corridor is suggested along the interval of Loop Road between Hargrove Road to Veterans Memorial Parkway. The project should include traffic safety, curbs and sidewalks/bike lane, turning lane(s) as possible, and a uniform landscaping theme for the corridor.

With this approach, as defined by the Advisory Committee, the commercial and business development areas would remain along the established corridors and centers, several commercial activity centers would be expanded and newly developed, and the neighborhood 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.

No new areas of mixed use are currently included in this Plan.

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 at the intersection of McFarland Boulevard and I-59 (see Figure 8), five additional gateways are shown on the future land use map (Figure 9), and listed below. One of those gateways is at a neighborhood center.

- Intersection of McFarland Boulevard East and Highway 82
- Intersection of Buttermilk Road and Jim Jones Road
- Intersection of Skyland Boulevard and Interstate 59
- Intersection of Buttermilk Road and Interstate 59
- Intersection at University Boulevard East and Skyland Boulevard

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 centers, described in Sections 4.0 and 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

Commercial activity centers, commercial corridors, and residential development in proximity to waterways will be required to design projects to minimize impacts to slopes, and to enhance, protect, and preserve the nearby waterbodies and floodplains and access to them.

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

- 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 collector or arterial street shall contain a minimum of 50 percent unobscured windows, doors or display areas
- 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 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 neighborhood 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 Historic 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

- Promote and develop more mixed use areas/centers throughout the community
- Loop Road beautification program to include landscape unity
- Estate-size lots shall be maintained (Cherokee Hills/Beech Hills/others south of Skyland)
- Redevelopment of businesses along Loop Road with neighborhood-friendly businesses
- Redevelop/revitalize the McFarland Mall and vicinity
 - Primary gateway to Tuscaloosa
 - Consider mixed use or Intermodal Facility
- Promote Low Impact Development (LID) for single family developments at Buttermilk Road area and other new “green areas”
- Consider Circlewood neighborhood to Historic District designation
- Consider establishment of a city park in the southeast part of the Plan area
- The University of Alabama is to recognize the value of open space and green space to the neighboring community in any future uses of the former golf course that are considered

Transportation

- Evaluate potential means to improve connectivity west to east, across the community
- Design and develop ways to widen streets and add turning lanes, particularly, Loop Road and Buttermilk Road
- Redesign and redevelop the Veterans Memorial Parkway and Loop Road intersection (is currently confusing and dangerous, needs lighting improvement, better signage, etc.)
- Install appropriate lighting and warning signs at critical/dangerous sections of arterial and neighborhood streets
- Promote and implement the Tuscaloosa Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (WARC)
- Promote walking, cycling, public transportation/better for the environment and community
- Concentrate student housing around University
- Promote quality of life environment within the community
- Design and develop connectivity between Midtown to University Mall (overpass/underpass)
- Design and develop connectivity between Home Depot/Target development to Hargrove Road
- Complete a transportation study to address for the community:
 - Mass transit/public transportation needs
 - Removal of stigma associated with uses
 - Potential location(s) for transportation hub/intermodal facility
 - More routes for Tuscaloosa trolley
 - Car pooling/ride-share program

Image

- Develop a plan for architecture/building design themes
 - Themes shall address and accentuate the natural setting; specify architectural styles and building materials
 - Promote high-quality architecture
- Building heights shall be designed based on type of development and on the topographic setting/no high rise developments
- Commercial/retail buildings shall be designed and developed for long-term use considerations, no new temporary structures or metal buildings shall be constructed.
- Underground utilities/no utility poles
- Design and develop green space buffers between commercial and residential areas
- Help image by improving and “cleaning up” what we have within the community
- No rezoning or additional zoning of mobile home parks (RMH)

- 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
- 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 new billboards
 - No neon
 - Consider difference between commercial and residential
 - Not offensive/unsightly

As developed by the Committee, the future community can be characterized as well planned neighborhoods, connectivity by green spaces, limited large commercial expansion, and attractive small enclaves of commercial/retail business to support the neighborhoods.

6.3.4 Revitalization Plan

As stated previously, preservation and revitalization are processes that have authority, scope, and financial requirements to provide stimulus to reverse the trends of decline, address specific issues, and create a new image. A plan is needed to methodically describe the existing conditions and issues within the neighborhoods and to specify the actions to follow. This plan should address, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

Social Issues

- Lack of neighborhood identity
- Decline in sense of community
- Lack of positive community image
- Increase in conflicting lifestyles of neighbors

Economic Issues

- Incompatible adjoining land uses
- Increase in residential rental properties/student housing
- Declining conditions of business concerns within the neighborhoods

Physical Issues

- Confusing or inefficient street patterns
- Inadequate infrastructure such as street conditions, lack of sidewalks, sparse street lighting, the extent of sanitary sewage line
- Aging, deteriorating and poorly maintained houses, sometimes intermingled with well maintained houses
- Lack of attractive, usable open spaces
- Reconstruction and new construction strategies

The plan development should involve participation of property owners and residents within the specific community.

6.4 Annexation

The future land use map (Figure 9) 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 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 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 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 and 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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FIGURES

- Figure 1. Location of District 6
- Figure 2. Aerial photograph
- Figure 3. Hydrology, flood plain, and wetlands
- Figure 4. Topographic map
- Figure 5. Current land use
- Figure 6. Rental properties
- Figure 7. Current zoning
- Figure 8. Strategic Development Concept
- Figure 9. Future land use

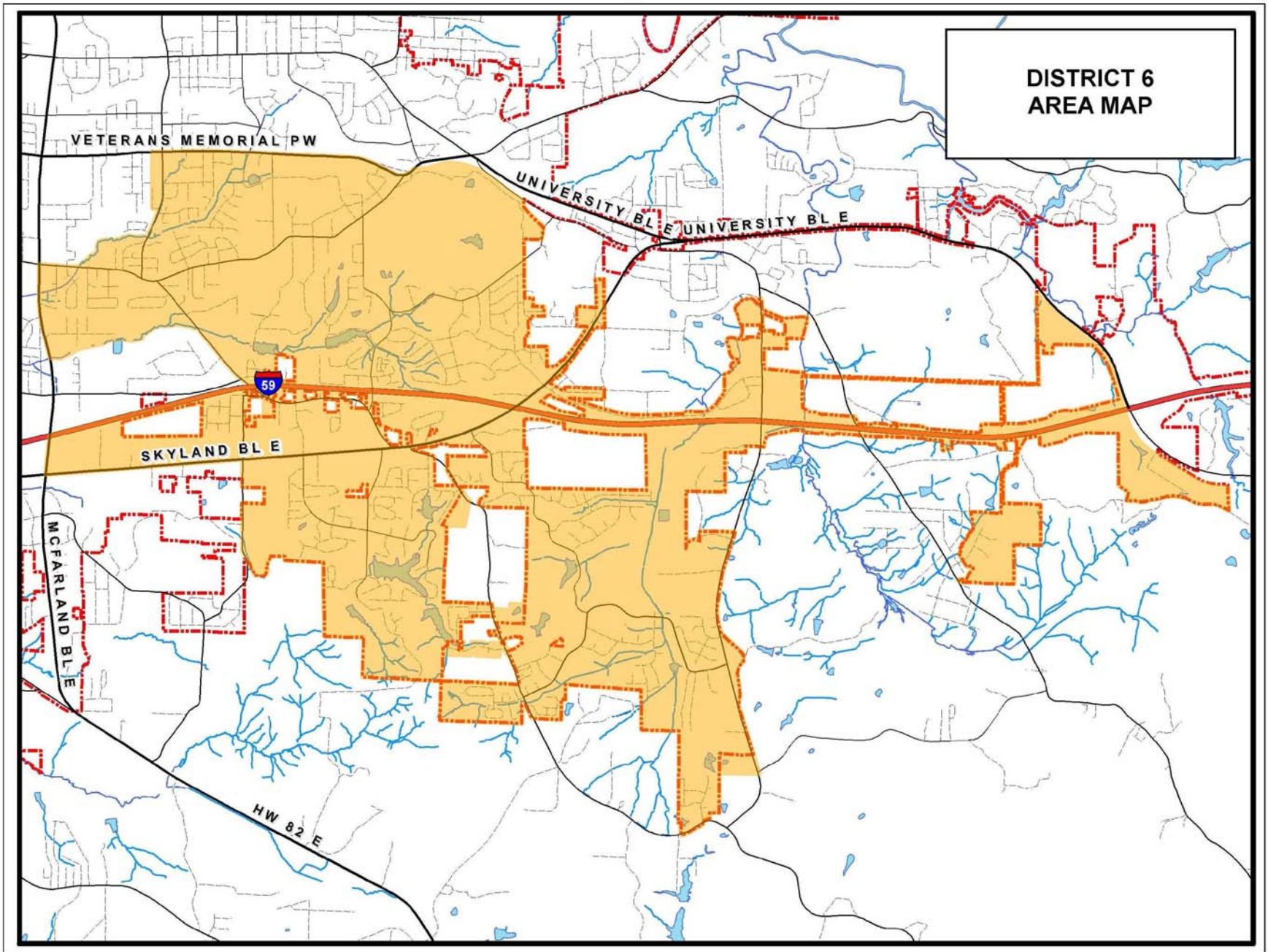


Figure 1. Location of District 6

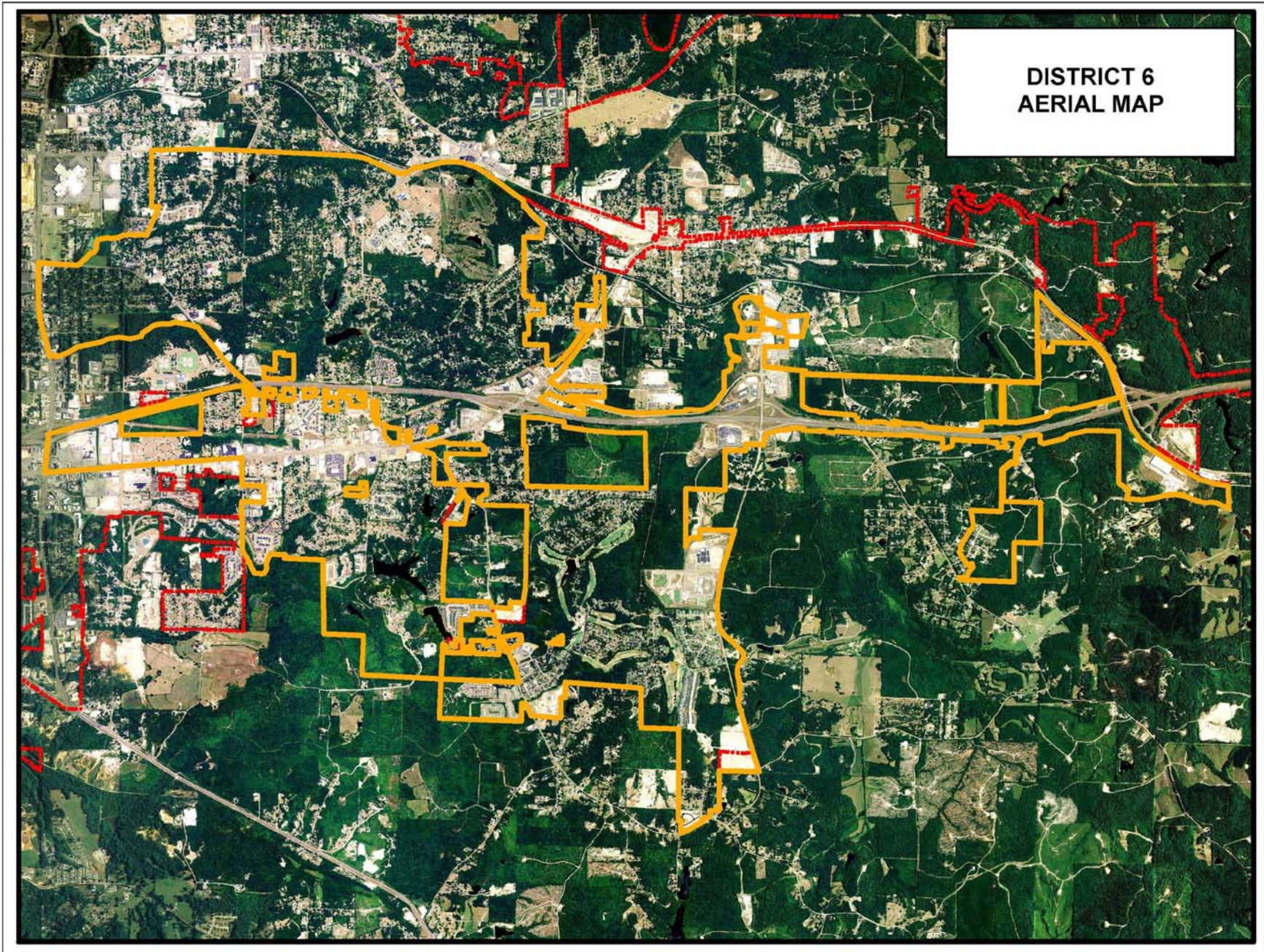


Figure 2. Aerial photograph

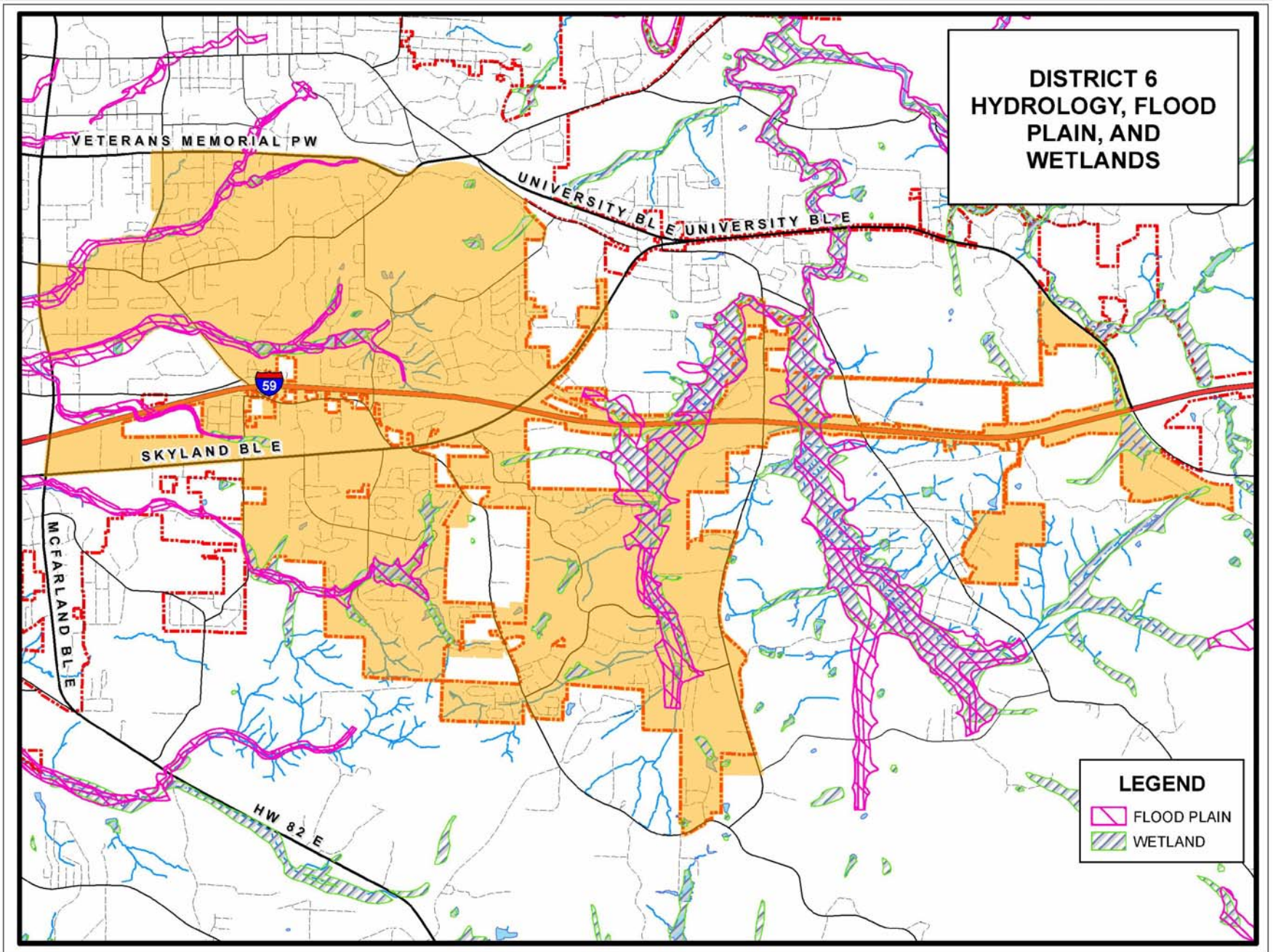


Figure 3. Hydrology, flood plain, and wetlands

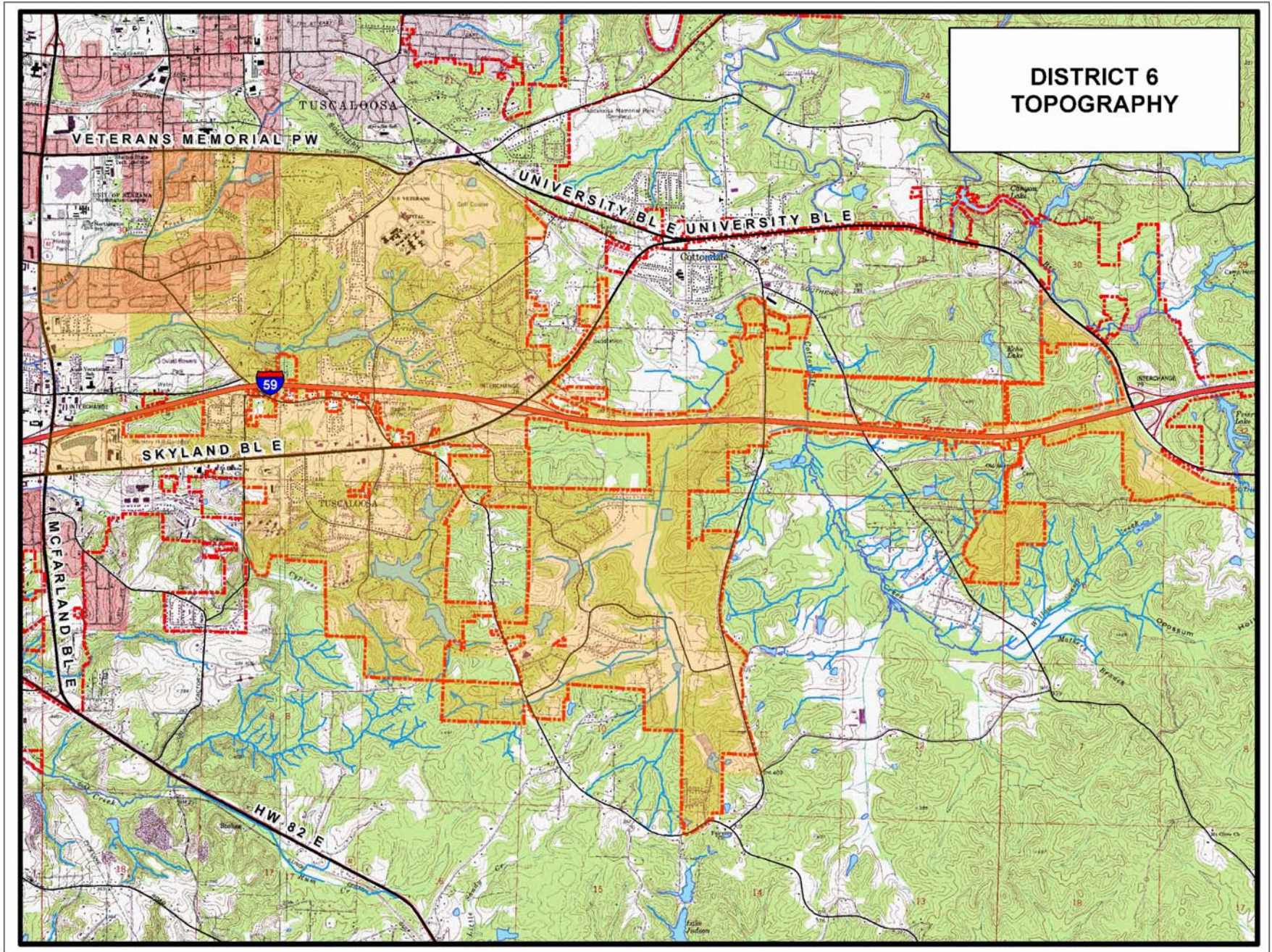


Figure 4. Topographic map

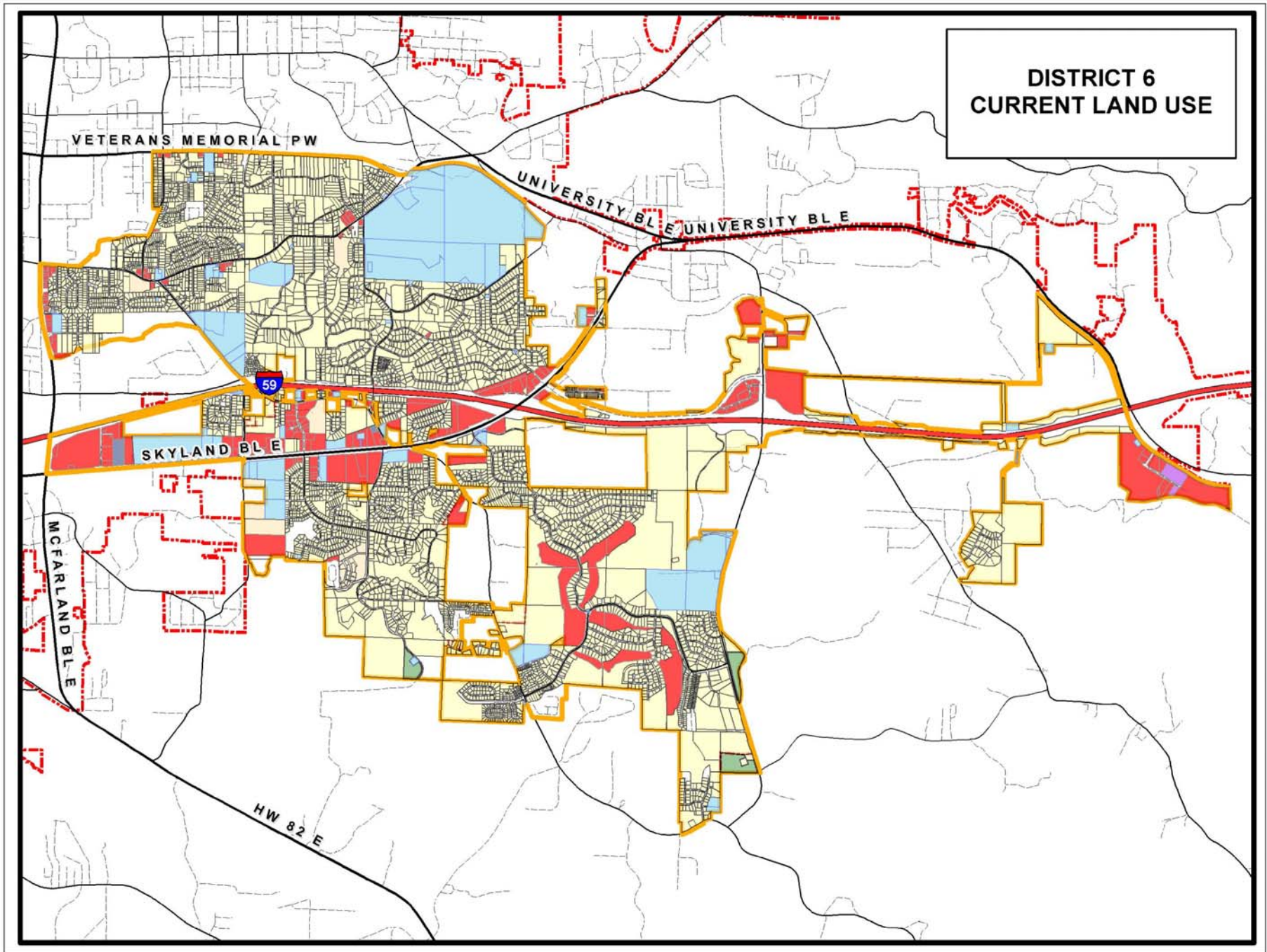


Figure 5. Current land use

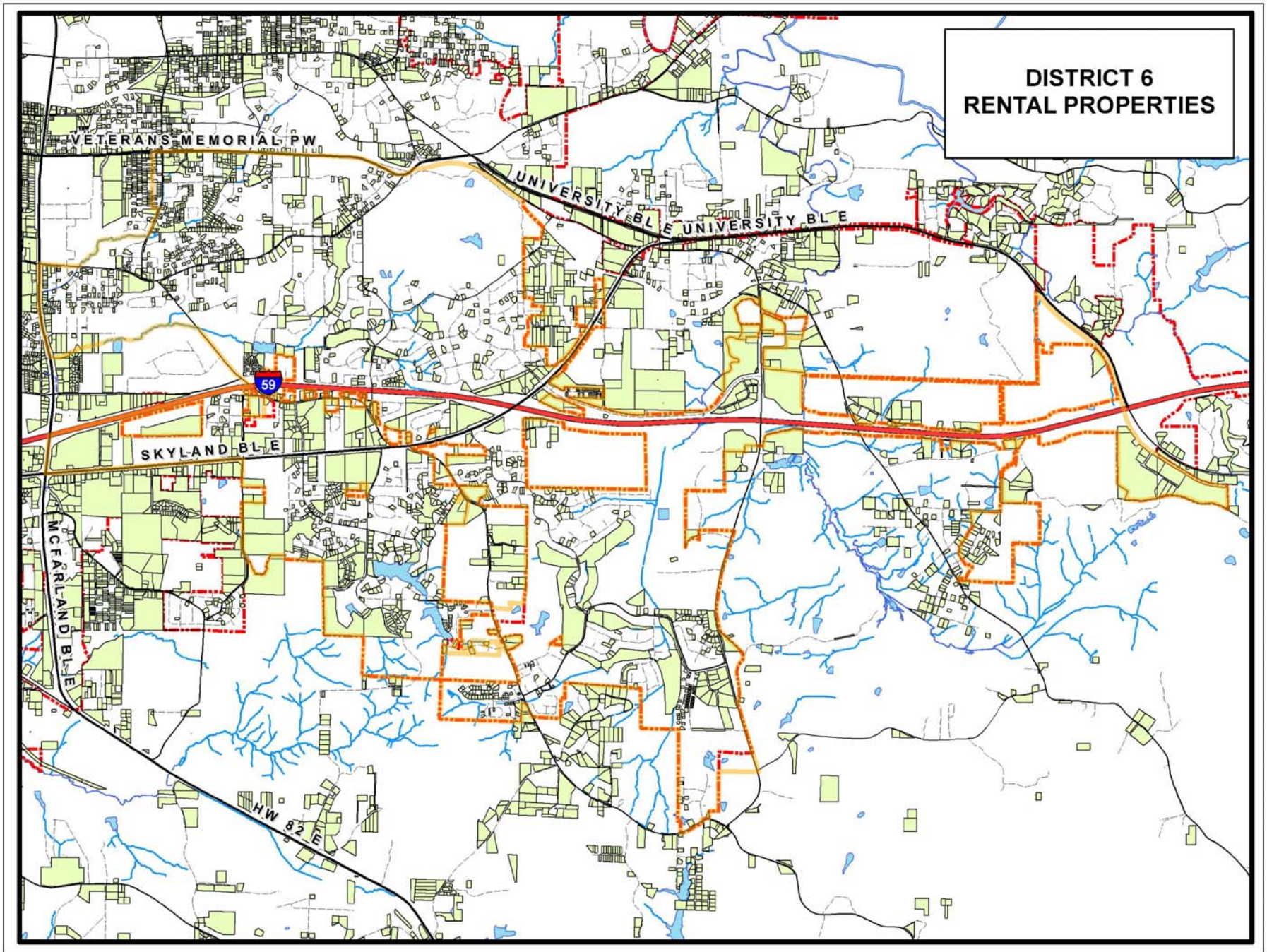


Figure 6. Rental properties

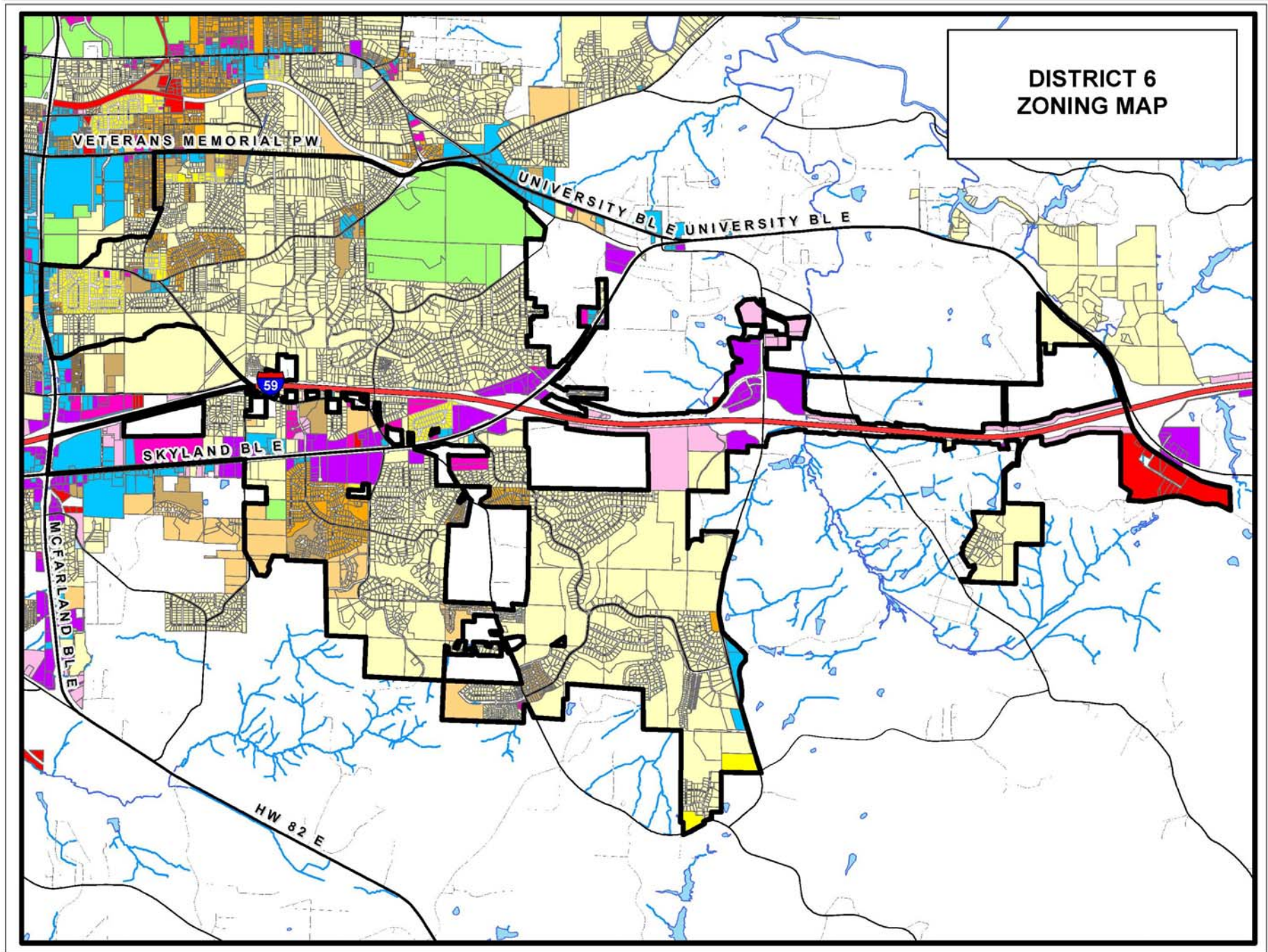


Figure 7. Current zoning

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

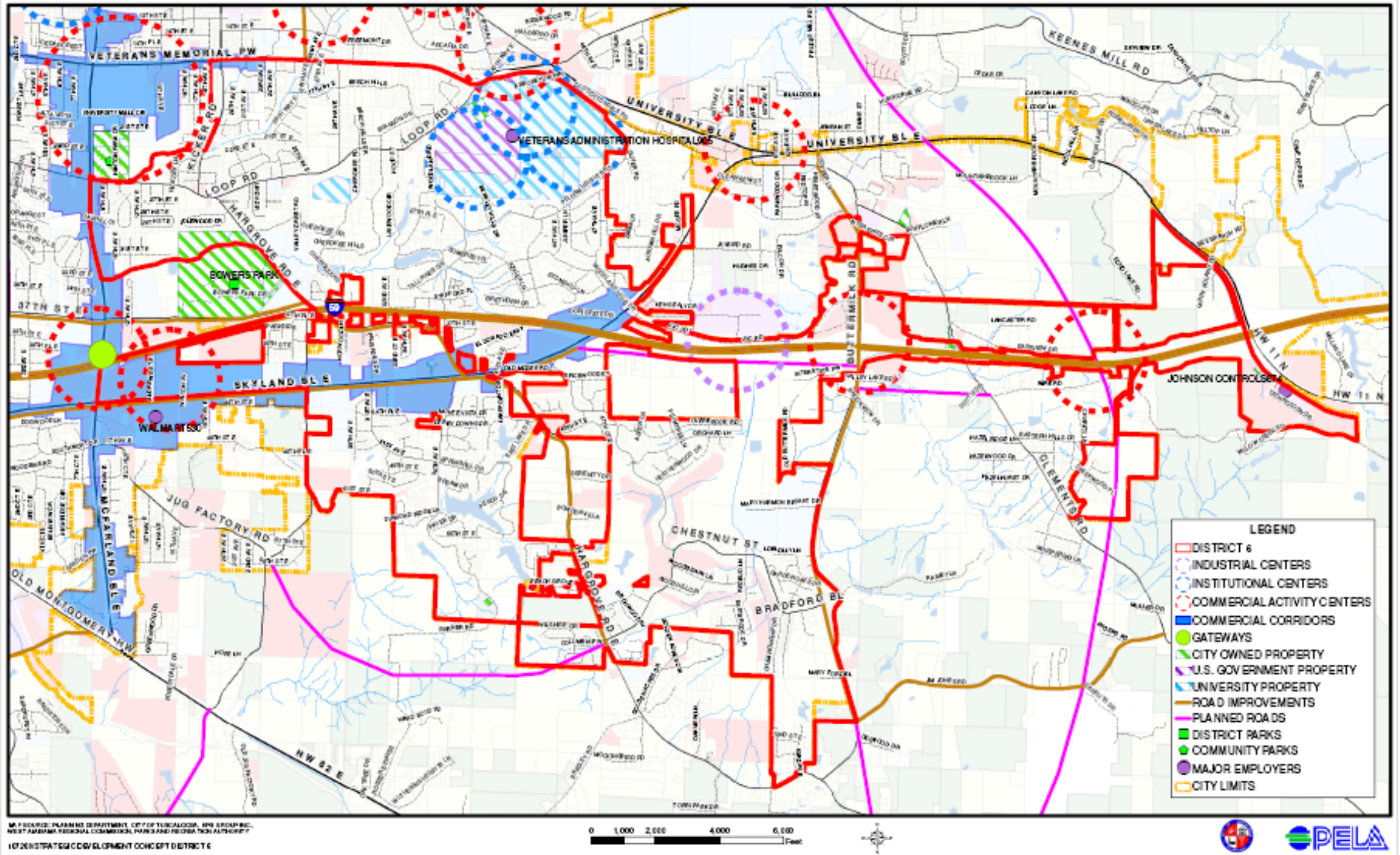


Figure 8. Strategic Development Concept

FUTURE LAND USE

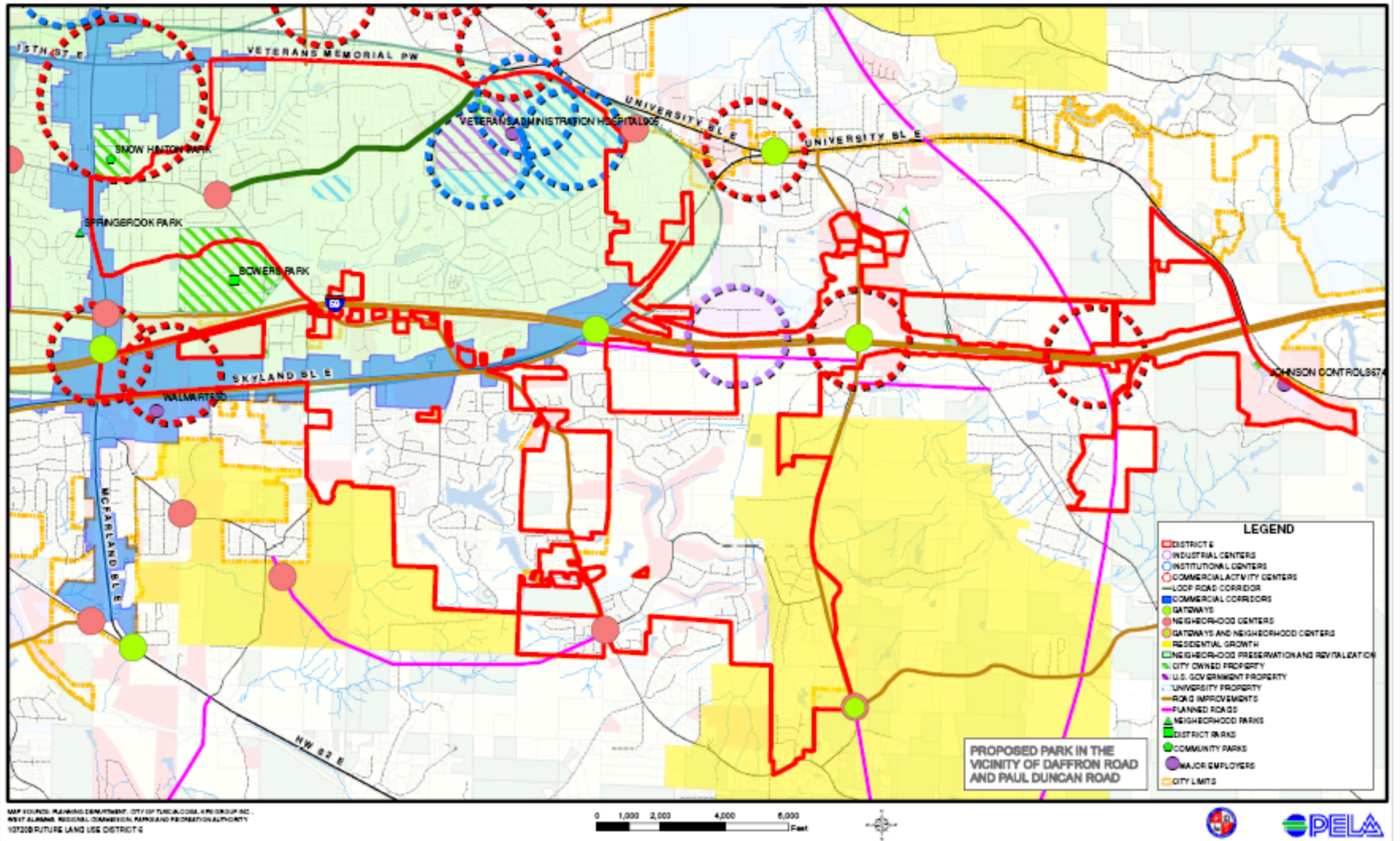


Figure 9. Future land use