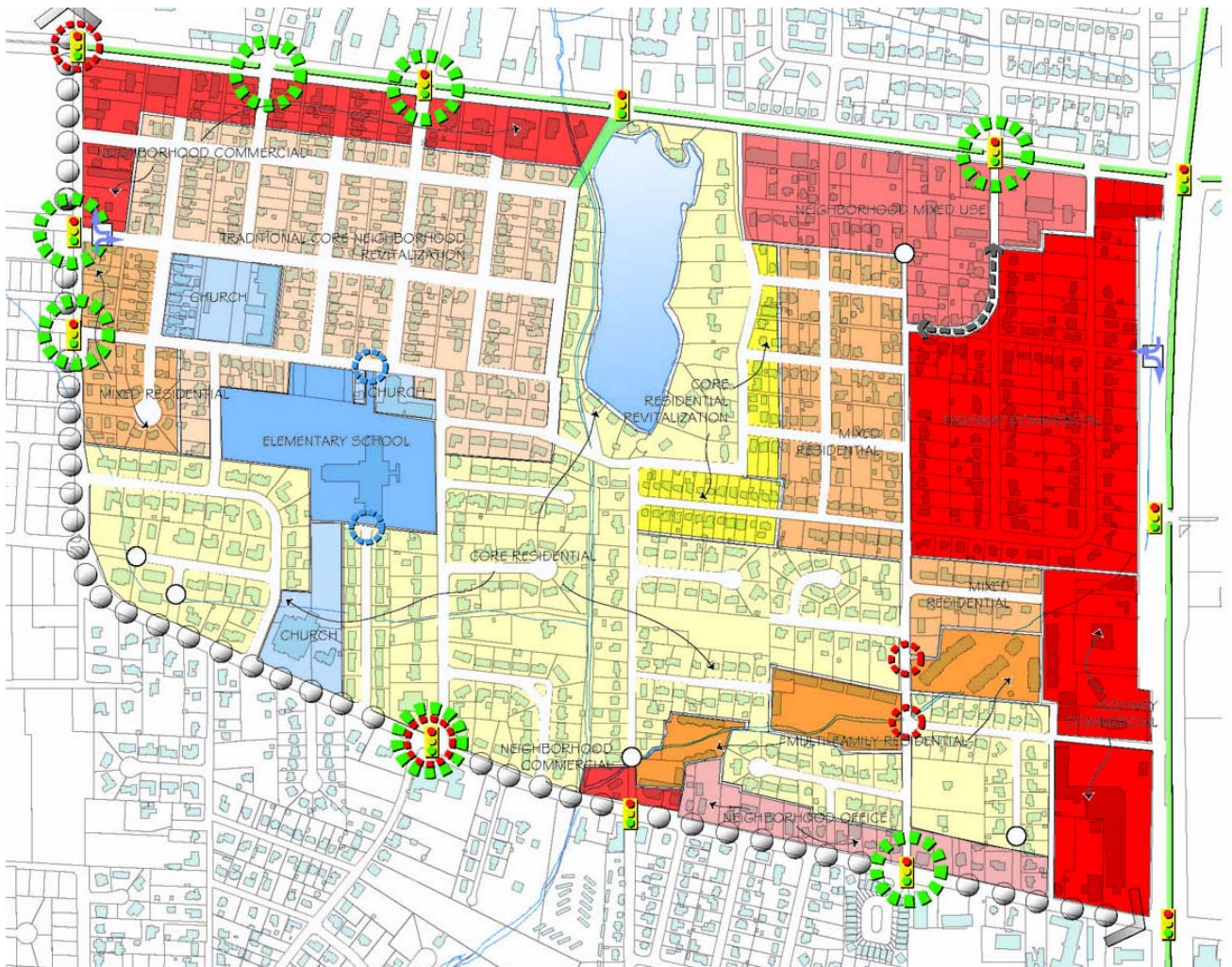


Specific Plan

Forest Lake Neighborhood Tuscaloosa, Alabama



Specific Plan

Forest Lake Neighborhood Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Prepared for the
Forest Lake Neighborhood Association, Inc.
and the
City of Tuscaloosa

KPS Group, Inc.
Skipper Consulting, Inc.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Specific Plan for the Forest Lake Neighborhood of Tuscaloosa is the result of a unique degree of public-private cooperation between the City of Tuscaloosa and the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association, Inc. Both parties agreed the time was ripe for specific planning to guide reinvestment, revitalization and redevelopment in and around the neighborhood. A developer with plans to build a large shopping center had just purchased a major portion of the east side of the neighborhood. The neighbors were concerned that a domino effect might have a significant adverse impact on the quality of neighborhood life and the value of their properties.

In response, the neighborhood association retained KPS Group, Inc. and the City of Tuscaloosa retained Skipper Consulting, Inc. to cooperatively engage the neighborhood association and city representatives in preparation of a "Specific Plan" for the neighborhood and its adjacent commercial areas.

The project began with meetings with city and neighborhood association representatives, and collection of all the information they had about the area. A base map of the neighborhood was built by the consultants using the city's mapping system. Inventory site visits augmented the knowledge of the neighborhood, and as much as possible was depicted on thematic maps. The city engineer's office provided evaluations of the water, sewer and drainage systems serving the neighborhood. Economic development opportunities were discussed frankly with local developers. Housing conditions and opportunities were reviewed with city officials.

Neighborhood residents, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials participated in a planning workshop early in the process. During that workshop they identified a vision for the neighborhood from which the consultants would build a strategic development concept. The participants shared ideas about neighborhood assets and liabilities, the major trends they anticipated, and the influences those might have on the neighborhood. They spoke of their visions for the Forest Lake Neighborhood and possible opportunities for both private and public investment.

Workshop results were converted to a preliminary Strategic Development Concept for the neighborhood, and this was reviewed through several public meetings of the Association. This provided the opportunity to build neighborhood consensus for the core concepts for development, revitalization, accessibility and public investments. This forms the core of this Specific Plan, which includes recommended text for a new district for the zoning ordinance and recommended map amendments. Both are intended to stabilize critical portions of the neighborhood and to encourage and enable appropriate private revitalization and redevelopment activities.

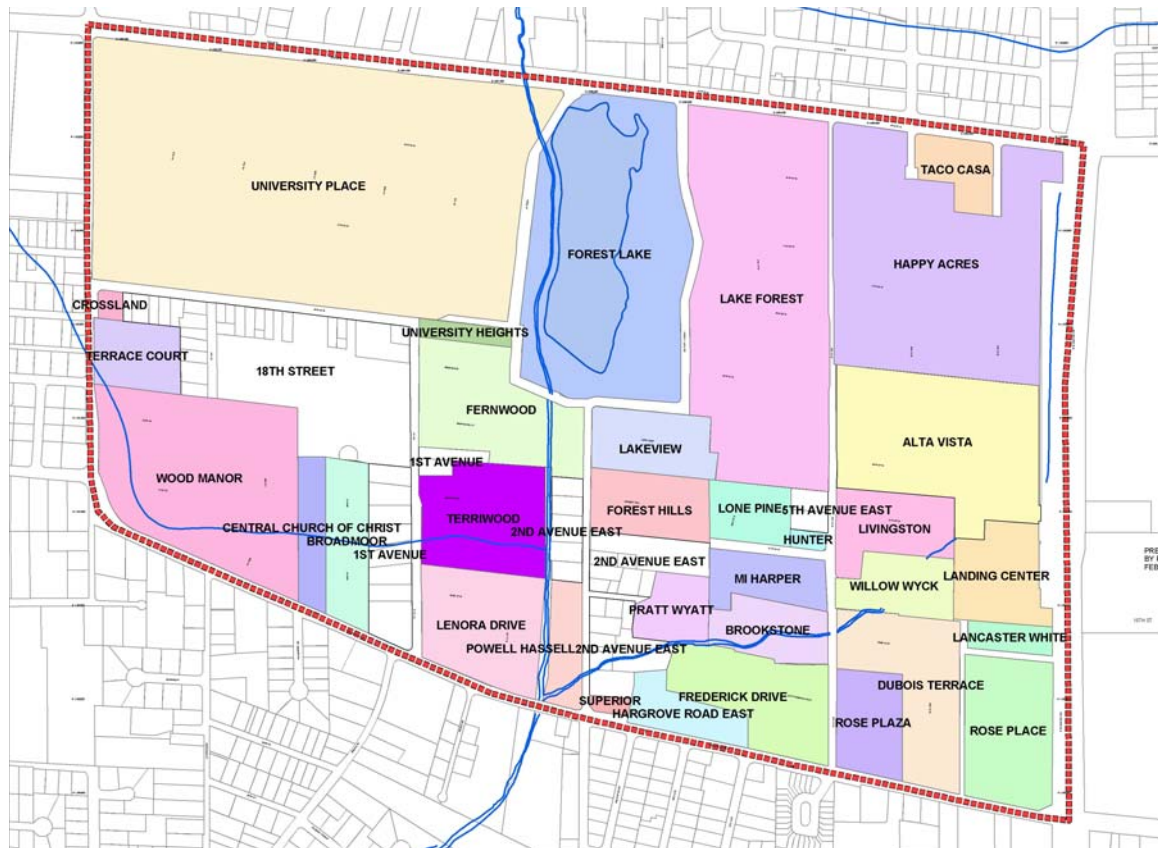
This is the City of Tuscaloosa's first specific plan, and as such it is intended to serve as a model for detailed planning and urban design that will provide extension and greater detail to the city's Comprehensive Plan. As of late 2003 a new comprehensive planning process for Tuscaloosa had begun. Work is in progress on a Strategic Plan for the city that will provide much of the vision and organizational basis and direction for the forthcoming city-wide Comprehensive Plan.

This document and the research, analysis, evaluation and consensus building that have been included in the process leading to this specific plan will help to form and provide details to the new city-wide Comprehensive Plan. Adoption of this specific plan by the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association and the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Commission will signal the intent of both the city and the neighborhood to cooperate in every way possible to implement the concepts that are presented in this document. Both also acknowledge the need to continually review the needs of the neighborhood and the surrounding community and to cooperatively update the plan as needed to keep abreast of changing ideas and conditions.

2. THE FOREST LAKE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Neighborhood

Forest Lake is bounded on the north by 15th Street, on the west by Hackberry Lane, the south by Hargrove Road and the east by McFarland Boulevard. It is one of the city's older areas, though it contains subdivisions whose development occurred up through the 1960s. The map showing the many subdivisions and individual developments is helpful to an understanding of the lack of east-west street continuity as well as the differences in the look and feel of different parts of the neighborhood now called Forest Lake.



Forest Lake Subdivisions

Structures and Drainage

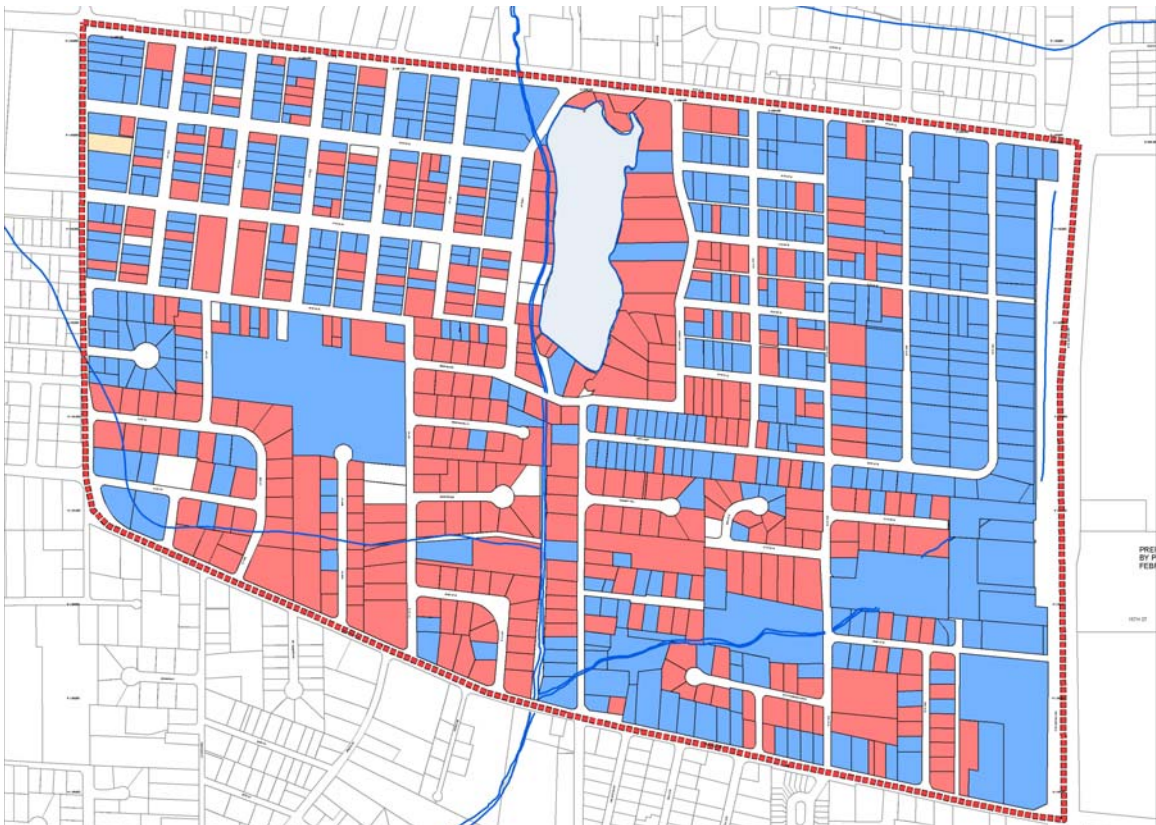
The neighborhood was built over an extended period of time, during which new ideas emerged about housing and commercial development. This is reflected in the differences in lot and house sizes, as well as the depth of commercial lots along 15th Street, as shown on the next page. It also explains some of the drainage problems that have worsened over the years as more and more construction resulted in more stormwater runoff and greater flooding problems along the creeks that drain the neighborhood.

Tenure

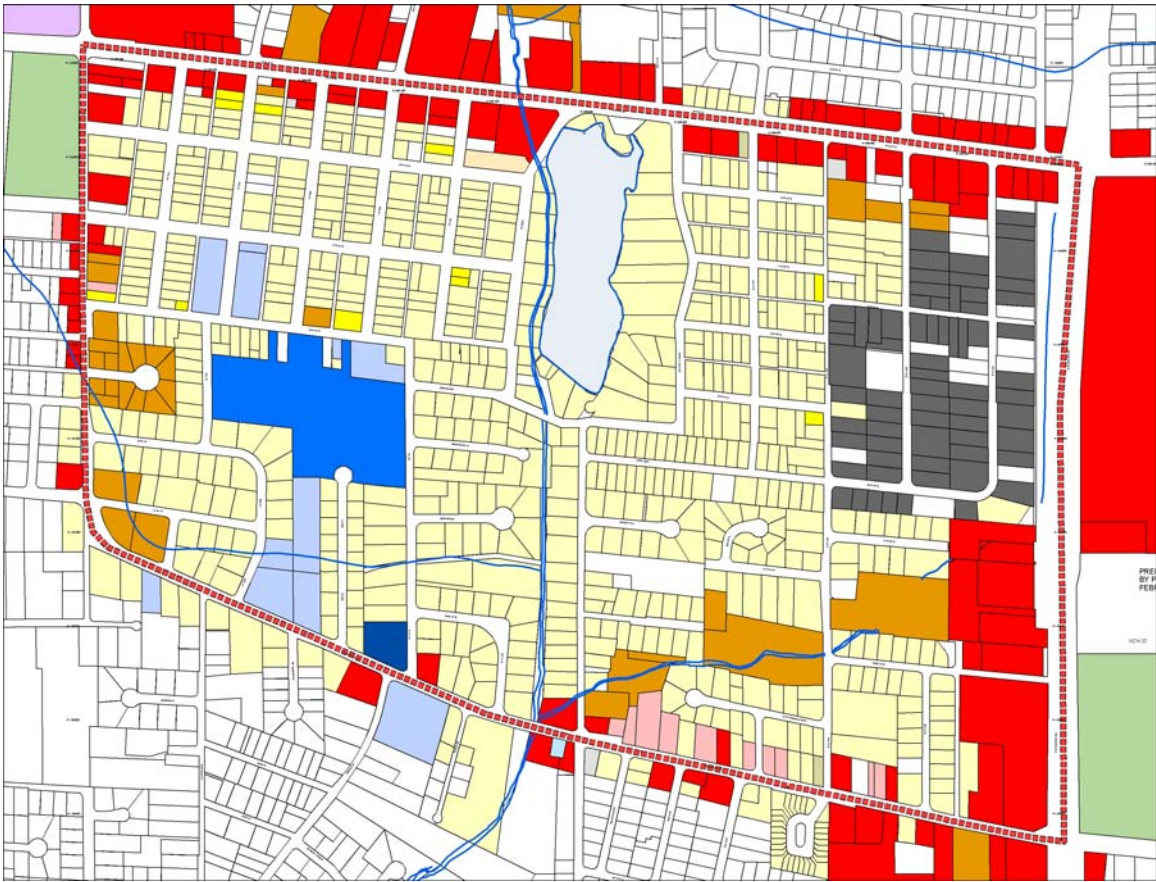
The very large percentage amount of rental housing—and especially student housing—in an area that was once dominated by owner-occupied housing can be seen on the next page. The two types of property owners have different objectives for the use of their property, which often has led to differing levels of care and maintenance. The increase in occupancy type from owner to renter has thus led to tensions among residents and between owner-occupants and the absentee owners of rental housing.



Forest Lake Structures and Drainage Systems



Forest Lake Owner (red) vs. Renter (blue) Occupancy



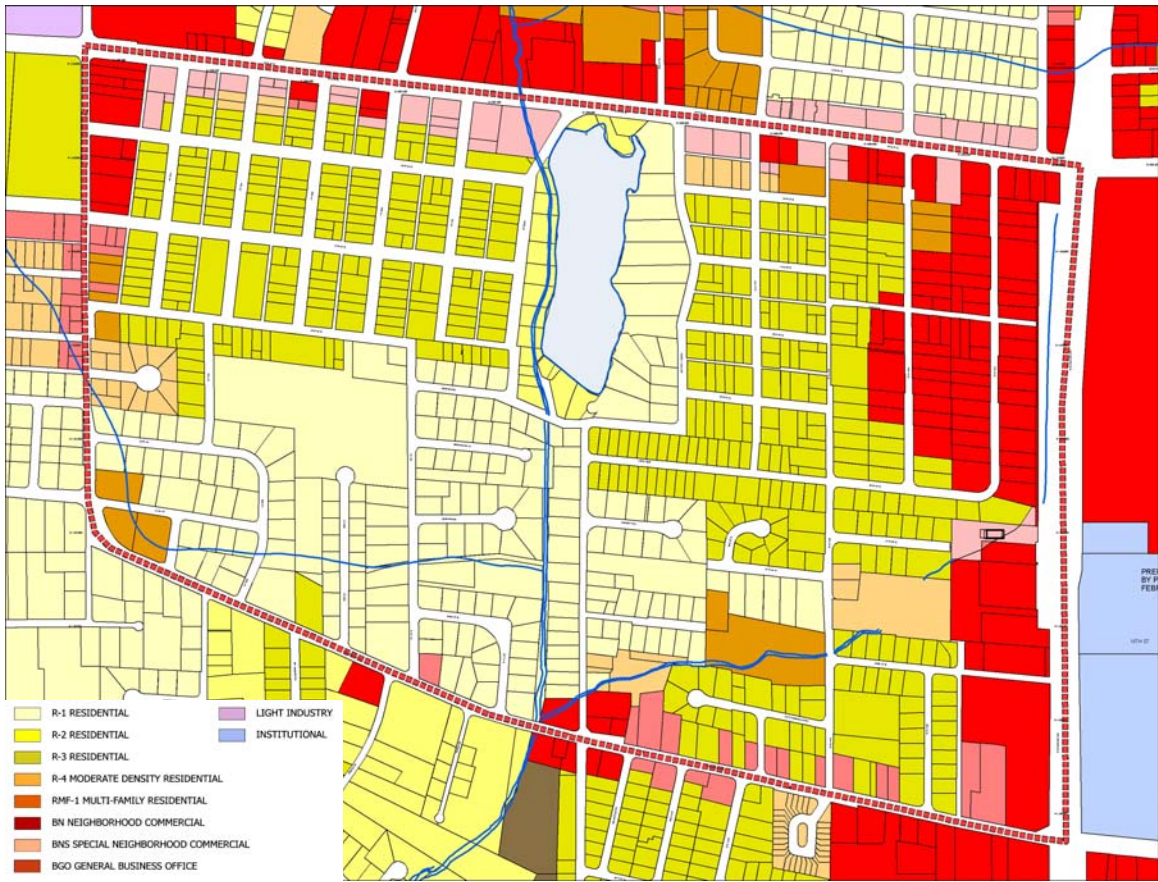
Forest Lake Land use and Development—mid 2003

Existing Land Use and Development

The Forest Lake Neighborhood is a neighborhood in the usual sense of that term: it is mostly a place where people live. It is predominantly an area of single-family residential uses (yellow), yet includes a significant number of multi-family residential units (orange-brown) located around the perimeter, and thus close to the collector and arterial streets. Conveniently, a number of commercial uses (red) and office uses (pink) form much of the perimeter of the neighborhood. The lots to the east side of the neighborhood indicated in the dark gray tone are those that, by mid-2003, had been purchased by a developer desirous of converting that area to a shopping center fronting McFarland Boulevard. University Place Montessori School (dark blue) is the cornerstone of the neighborhood. There are several medium-size churches (medium blue) also in the westerly portion of the neighborhood. The school and churches draw a number of non-residents to the neighborhood on a regular basis.

Existing Zoning

The existing zoning of the Forest Lake Neighborhood is shown on the next page, opposite the Existing Land use map above for purposes of comparison. The colors are similar but not exactly the same. In this map, the allowable residential densities of the individual zoning districts vary (from lowest to highest density) from light yellow through a yellow-green to beige to medium brown. Commercial use districts are indicated by red tones—from pink through rose to red—indicating different allowable uses in each. The neighborhood's several significant institutions are not accounted for by separate district identification.



Forest Lake Zoning—mid 2003

3. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION: NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOP

Neighborhood residents, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials gathered for the centerpiece of the planning process: a planning workshop at University Place Montessori School the evening of July 14, 2003. Their objective for the evening was to devise a vision for the Forest Lake Neighborhood from which the consultants would build a strategic development concept.

Following an overview of the neighborhood presented in the form of maps and photographs, the participants shared their ideas about neighborhood assets and liabilities, the major trends they anticipated and the influences those might have on the neighborhood. They spoke of their visions for the Forest Lake Neighborhood and possible opportunities to create or fill in its missing pieces. The following is a summary of the comments and suggestions made by workshop participants.

Assets

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

- The Lake
- Central location
- Good neighbors
- Community atmosphere
- Diversity—race, age, income
- Variety of housing prices and sizes
- Ease of access (arteries)
- Convenience of central location
- McFarland commerce
- 15th Street commerce
- Reasonably well-maintained houses
- Trees and green space
- Reasonably priced real estate
- Elementary school
- Churches
- Self-contained neighborhood
- Safe neighborhood
- Low crime
- Relatively flat
- Good family structure
- Pedestrian friendly
- Near three parks

Liabilities

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

- Rental properties in general
- Seemingly permanent “For Rent” signs
- Garage sale signs that stay up for weeks
- Poor maintenance of rental properties
- Lack of sidewalks and pedestrian crossings
- Pedestrian access to neighborhood
- Heavy truck traffic on Hargrove
- On-street parking
- Parking in front yards
- Parking at intersections
- Non-family households
- Land use incompatibility problems
- Poor east-west accessibility
- Cut-through traffic
- Traffic calming measures
- In-fill with two-story structures
- 15th Street commercial redevelopment
- Drainage problems
- Speeding vehicles
- Trains on Hackberry backing up traffic
- Traffic stacking at Hargrove/McFarland
- Poor traffic signal coordination
- Lack of clear zoning patterns
- Zoning that does not fit reality
- Lack of alley maintenance
- Open ditches and their maintenance
- Flooding of Cribbs Creek
- Sight distance: Hargrove/Hackberry curve
- Traffic shifts as development occurs
- Traffic prevents access to commerce
- Aging infrastructure

- Impact of transition to rental property
- Substandard roadways/narrow streets
- Student housing concentrations
- Apartment complexes generate traffic
- Excessive median cuts—dangerous
- Checkers Restaurant access
- Lack of sidewalks and curbs
- School impacts on traffic

Major Outside Influences

Participants discussed several major influences that may emerge from outside the neighborhood that may affect the neighborhood or its residents. It quickly became clear that individuals from the neighborhood would not have much power over these influences, and that a coordinated effort of both the neighborhood and city government would be required.

- Central High School's future status
- Converting residential to commercial
- University plans for student housing
- University's impact on Cribbs Creek
- The Pate development
- People buying up residential property
- Storm runoff from Pate development
- Methodist church building program
- Businesses relocating from downtown
- Widening of roadways

Recommended Actions

In response to the outside influences listed above, the participants reached consensus they would have to take the following actions in order to avoid being overpowered.

- Stay organized
- Be proactive (press city officials)
- Be proactive (negotiate with developers)
- Educate people inside the neighborhood
- Educate people outside the neighborhood
- Stay vigilant

Visions for the Neighborhood

Participants were asked to envision the Forest Lake neighborhood at some time in the future—say ten years out—and imagine the way they would like it to be physically, with the land uses and activities and facilities that would provide an appropriate quality of life for them and their neighbors. Rather than share those visions, the participants were asked to describe the pieces currently missing from that vision, and to suggest a location for those pieces if at all possible. This lively discussion brought to the surface the following suggestions, not all of which were physical.

- More owner-occupied housing
- More apartments at the edges
- Mixed-use neighborhood edges
- Neighborhood pool and park
- Neighborhood commerce at the edges
- More sidewalks
- Neighborhood marketing program

Building the Vision/Part 1: Private Redevelopment

In order to build on the assets and fill some of the missing pieces, participants suggested the following as appropriate for the private sector to consider as part of its role in bringing about the quality of life that had been seen in participant visions of the neighborhood.

- Tennis courts on vacant property
- Leave neighborhood as it is
- Pate center access via walking and bikes
- Buffering of uses with redevelopment
- Rentals—convert to owner-occupied
- Develop on-campus student housing

Building the Vision/Part 2: Public Investment and Redevelopment

To further the visions and support private development, the participants suggested the following public investments should be suggested to city officials (several were in attendance to hear the message directly).

- Underground utilities
- Railroad crossing on Hackberry
- Traffic solutions outside neighborhood
- Signal reorganization and timing
- On-campus student housing
- Central High School redevelopment
- Street closings in the neighborhood
- Median closings along 15th Street
- Small park(s) in the neighborhood
- Drainage system improvements
- A sidewalk improvement program

Building the Vision/Part 3: Taking Care with Critical Assets

To be certain that the strategic development concept to emerge as a result of the workshop would be respectful of the neighborhood's most respected Assets, participants were asked to name their sacred cows—those assets that should not be altered, moved or harmed in the quest for their visions of the neighborhood. There were surprisingly few.

- The churches
- University Place Montessori School
- Forest Lake
- The 15th Street corridor

Constraints to Achieving Participants' Visions for the Neighborhood

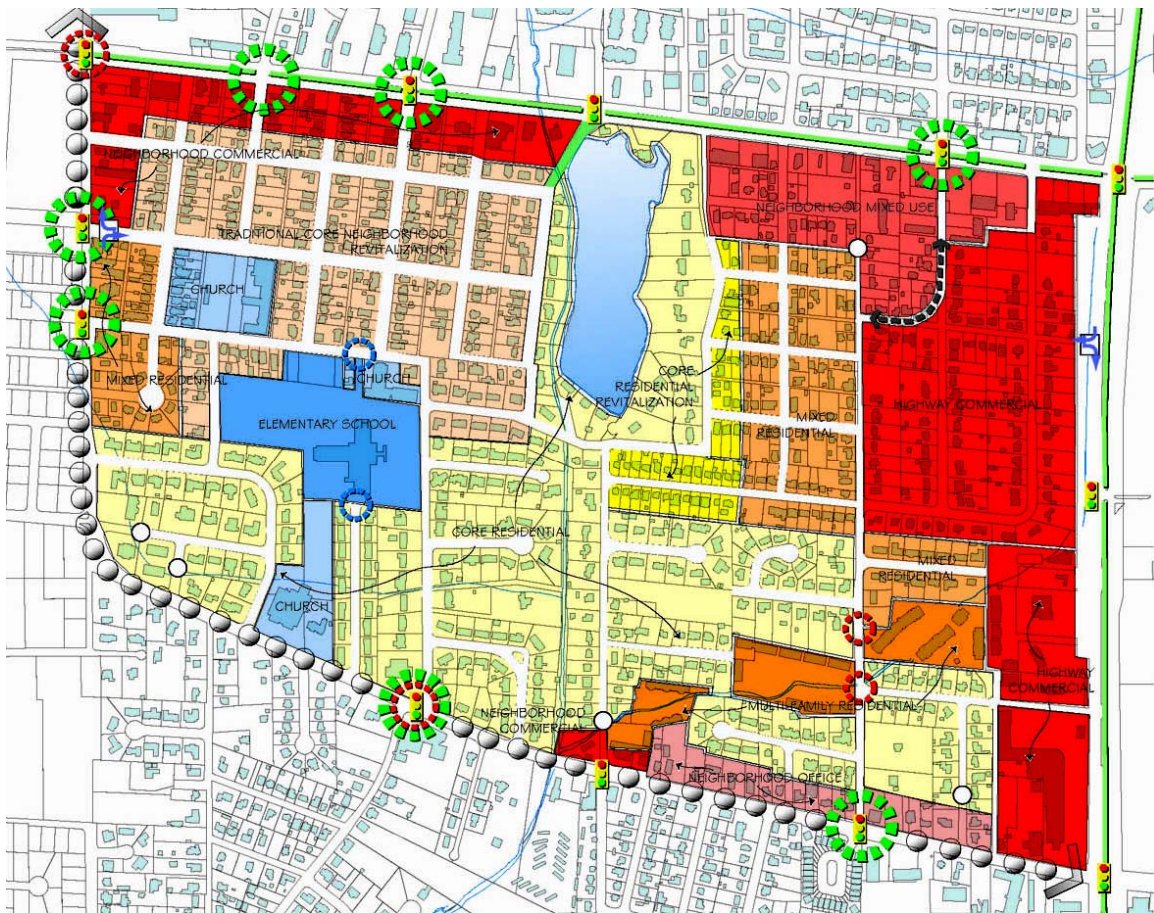
Finally, participants were asked to name the important constraints—whatever came to mind that seemed to be holding back their desire for a better neighborhood. Again, there were surprisingly few items mentioned, and all were directed at the perceived lack of enforcement of important local ordinances—the city's zoning, housing and traffic laws. This indicates the respect shown city officials and the law by local residents as well as the importance—symbolic as well as actual—of regular and systematic enforcement of all local regulations.

4. STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The neighborhood planning workshop results were reconstituted into a Strategic Concept and presented for review and comment at the next several public meetings of the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association. Residents and city representatives provided ideas for improving and detailing the concept, which deals with land use and development, revitalization and redevelopment, accessibility and public investment. The revised concept is the core of the Specific Plan for the neighborhood, which includes new zoning text and map amendment recommendations designed to encourage and enable revitalization, infill and redevelopment.

The Strategic Concept is organized into several key policy areas. These deal with critical physical characteristics of the neighborhood, residential development as the majority of land uses and its majority of owner occupancy, the commercial development that helped instigate the planning process and provides much of the neighborhood's sense of convenience, and accessibility by pedestrians and vehicles and the traffic passing through.

The map below is a representation of the Strategic Concept of the Forest Lake Specific Plan. It indicates the locations and interrelationships of each of the plan's recommendations. A larger-scale, foldout version of this map that includes a legend is located at the back of this document. On the following pages there are policy commitments that serve as explanation to each of the concepts shown below, intended to guide city and neighborhood decisions regarding private and public initiatives and investments.



Forest Lake Strategic Development Concept

Critical Neighborhood Characteristics

There are several resources that are critical to the identity and spirit of the neighborhood. These must be maintained at all costs and enhanced insofar as practicable. Policies that would accomplish this include:

- Enhance the condition of the Lake as the symbol of the neighborhood
- Maintain the neighborhood as a pedestrian-oriented residential area
- Maintain University Place Montessori School as the neighborhood's major public institution
- Limit outside traffic yet maintain access to neighborhood commerce and institutions

Residential Development

The neighborhood is primarily a residential environment whose quality of life should be maintained and enhanced through a variety of means. Policies to guide such actions include:

- Keep the "core residential area" intact
- Revitalize and enhance the essential core of the University Place subdivision as a traditional neighborhood with tree protection and curb, gutter and sidewalk improvements
- Revitalize/redevelop the Crossland and Terrace Court subdivisions for mixed residential uses
- Contain institutional buildings and parking presence in a manner that conforms to the Specific Plan and thus does not dominate their surroundings
- Revitalize the Lakeview subdivision as a vital, traditional part of the neighborhood core
- Reorganize and redevelop the Forest Lake Drive frontage of the Lake Forest subdivision
- Redevelop southerly Lake Forest subdivision for mixed residential uses in a manner that conforms to the Specific Plan
- Redevelop the Livingston subdivision for mixed residential uses in a manner that conforms to the Specific Plan
- Maintain the multi-family developments in the southern portion of the neighborhood and assure their accessibility to the nearby collector streets

Commercial Development

The neighborhood contains a significant amount of commercial land use along its edges. This commerce contributes to the convenience associated with living in the neighborhood, even as it serves a community-wide market. This requires close proximity and good access, yet compatibility with the neighborhood's primary residential environment.

The following policies are designed with those considerations in mind:

- Enhance Fifteenth Street as a neighborhood business address through a combination of revitalization and redevelopment southerly only to the extent that will maintain viable residential uses along the north side of Sixteenth Street; offer selected street closure and vacation as incentives for planned neighborhood commercial redevelopment that conforms to the Specific Plan
- Redevelop the northerly portion of the Lake Forest and Happy Acres subdivisions for an appropriate mix of commercial and residential uses; offer selected street closure and vacation as incentives for planned neighborhood commercial redevelopment that conforms to the Specific Plan
- Enhance Hackberry Lane facing Monnish Park as a neighborhood business address through a combination of revitalization and redevelopment that conforms to the Specific Plan easterly only to the extent that will maintain viable residential uses along the west side of Fifth Avenue
- Limit McFarland Boulevard frontage commercial development to its present zoned boundary
- Limit Hargrove Road frontage commercial development areas to those designated for neighborhood office uses with neighborhood commercial gateways, all conforming to the Specific Plan

- Redevelop the properties and uses at the intersection of Forest Lake Drive and Hargrove Road to an appropriate mix of neighborhood commercial uses in a way that conforms to the Specific Plan

Pedestrian Accessibility

Forest Lake Neighborhood prides itself on being pedestrian friendly, and yet there are relatively few sidewalks. Thus a cooperative, public-private neighborhood sidewalk improvement plan and program should be devised to enlarge the Specific Plan's policies toward pedestrian access between the neighborhood and:

- University Place Montessori School from Second Avenue north and south
- Monnish Park with protected crosswalks at Seventeenth Street
- University Place Shopping Center and Snow Hinton Park with protected crosswalks on McFarland Boulevard at the Fifteenth Street and Hargrove Road intersections

Vehicular Accessibility and Traffic

Traffic is one of the most volatile issues in the neighborhood. To be sure, through traffic should be discouraged from passing through the neighborhood without some reason for stopping. However, a good network of streets must be assured to provide property access to residents and merchants. As with most things in life, this required compromise. The following is a consensus set of public-private policies to guide actions that would affect vehicular accessibility and traffic control for the neighborhood.

- Reorganize and time all traffic signals on the perimeter of the neighborhood
- Install a traffic signal at Hargrove Road and East Fifth Avenue
- Widen the Hackberry Lane/Hargrove Road corridor to five lanes between Fifteenth Street and McFarland Boulevard
- Extend the Fifteenth Street median to allow openings only at Fourth, Second, Lake, East Sixth and East Seventh Avenues
- Reorganize access to the Crossland and Terrace Court subdivisions from Hackberry Lane to Eighteenth Street at the time of redevelopment
- Close the following streets as a condition of redevelopment in accord with the Specific Plan and the planned Development District of the Zoning Ordinance:
 - Access from Hackberry Lane to Terrace Court
 - Access from Hargrove Road to Fourth Court and Dubois Terrace
 - South End of Forest Lake Drive
 - Fifth Avenue East between Sixteenth and Seventeenth Streets East
- Close Lake Avenue between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets to through vehicular traffic and improve the right-of-way for pedestrian access
- Create neighborhood gateways (significant entrances to the neighborhood) at:
 - Fifteenth Street at Fourth, Second and East Sixth Avenues
 - Hackberry Lane at Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets
 - Hargrove Road at First/Prince and East Fifth Avenues
- Improve the intersections of:
 - Fifteenth Street and Hackberry Lane
 - Fifteenth Street and McFarland Boulevard
 - Hargrove Road and First/Prince Avenues
 - Seventeenth Street as a right-in, right-out only to and from Hackberry Lane
 - Fifth Avenue East at Willow Wyck and Brookstone apartments with roundabouts
 - Seventeenth Street East and Sixth Avenue East
- Devise a neighborhood curb and gutter improvement plan and program
- Remove the present speed humps throughout the neighborhood

5. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Through a planning process full of community analysis and public evaluation and discussion, a number of policies have emerged to guide the efforts of both the City of Tuscaloosa and the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association to make their own opportunities and to take advantage of them. These policies, outlined in the preceding chapter, are focused on the protection and enhancement of places that neighborhood residents deem important, as well as development of community assets presently underutilized or incomplete. Several actions on the part of the city and the neighborhood will be necessary to assure plan implementation.

Neighborhood Responsibilities

- Stay organized
- Support University Place Montessori School
- Educate people who live inside the neighborhood
- Educate people who live outside the neighborhood
- Be proactive (press city officials for investment, regulation and enforcement)
- Be proactive (press University for involvement and cooperation)
- Be proactive (negotiate with developers)
- Support construction of on-campus student housing
- Promote the re-use of selected Central High School facilities for local recreation

City Responsibilities

- Enforce all local regulations
- Revise the Zoning Ordinance to add a Planned Development District
- Revise the sign ordinance to reduce the number and size of allowable signage
- Rezone properties to better reflect reality and the policies of the Specific Plan
- Prepare Design Standards for Fifteenth Street, Hackberry Lane and Hargrove Road
- Coordinate the traffic signal at Sixth Avenue East and Fifteenth Street with the signal at McFarland Boulevard and Fifteenth Street
- Install a traffic signal at Hargrove Road and East Fifth Avenue / construct improved two-lane section at the southern end of Fifth Avenue East
- Widen the Hackberry Lane/Hargrove Road corridor to five lanes
- Extend the Fifteenth Street median from McFarland Boulevard to Seventh Avenue East
- Close Lake Avenue between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets to through vehicular traffic
- Convert Lake Avenue to a pedestrian way between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets
- Improve the intersections of:
 - Fifteenth Street and Hackberry Lane
 - Hargrove Road and First/Prince Avenues
 - Fifteenth Street and McFarland Boulevard
 - Seventeenth Street East and Sixth Avenue East
 - Seventeenth Street as a right-in, right-out only to and from Hackberry Lane
 - Fifth Avenue East at Willow Wyck and Brookstone with roundabouts
- Devise a neighborhood curb and gutter improvement plan and program
- Organize and direct a sidewalk development program
- Remove speed humps from Forest Lake Drive and First Avenue following roadway closures and construction of roundabouts
- Correct Neighborhood flooding problems with drainage improvements

City Responses to Development Proposals

- Review proposed Master Development Plans for conformance to the Specific Plan
- Close the following streets as a condition of redevelopment in accord with the Specific Plan and the Planned Development District of the Zoning Ordinance:
 - Access from Hackberry Lane to Terrace Court

- Access from Hargrove Road to Fourth Court and Dubois Terrace
- South end of Forest Lake Drive
- Fifth Avenue East between Sixteenth and Seventeenth Streets East
- Promote creation of neighborhood gateways (significant entrances to the neighborhood) at:
 - Fifteenth Street at Fourth, Second and East Sixth Avenues
 - Hackberry Lane at Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets
 - Hargrove Road at First/Prince and East Fifth Avenues
- Reorganize access to the Crossland and Terrace Court subdivisions from Hackberry Lane to Eighteenth Street at the time of redevelopment

Priorities for Action

Implementation of the Specific Plan will require a commitment of local political will and public and private capital. For its part, the neighborhood must engage in a city-wide public relations campaign to invest more people in the process and educate the community about the benefits that may accrue city-wide from reinvestment and redevelopment in and around this neighborhood. City officials must also declare that the Specific Plan embodies their goals for the neighborhood as they commit to invest in critical infrastructure improvements, modify certain ordinances and strengthen the enforcement of all city regulations.

Implementation of the Specific Plan must be a cooperative effort of both public and private sector interests. Separately, they lack the money and power necessary for redevelopment. Together, they have all they need. Both private and public sectors can begin immediately with small actions that have the potential to create big impacts. Choosing high profile locations—gateways, neighborhood edges, high visibility locations—can intensify the impact of even small projects, with the understanding that each must be a vital piece of the whole as outlined in the Specific Plan.

To implement this Specific Plan requires coordination as well as commitment. Coordination will include funding, property availability, private sector interest and participation, the ability to issue bonds and secure other forms of gap financing, and cooperation from local utilities. This may require city involvement in a redevelopment process, which may be simple in concept, yet often is difficult to accomplish. An outline of redevelopment powers and actions is included as an Appendix. The continuing test will be one of sustaining commitment by the public and private sector leadership of the city.

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

Immediate and Continuing Actions

Neighborhood Responsibilities

- Stay organized
- Support University Place Montessori School
- Educate people who live inside the neighborhood
- Educate people who live outside the neighborhood
- Be proactive (press city officials for investment, regulation and enforcement)
- Be proactive (press University for involvement and cooperation)
- Be proactive (negotiate with developers)
- Support construction of on-campus student housing
- Promote the re-use of selected Central High School facilities for local recreation

City Responsibilities

- Enforce all local regulations
- Revise the Zoning Ordinance to add a Planned Development District
- Revise the sign ordinance to reduce the number and size of allowable signage
- Rezone properties to better reflect reality and the policies of the Specific Plan
- Devise a neighborhood curb and gutter improvement plan and program
- Organize and direct a sidewalk development program

Actions to be Completed within 1-4 Years

City Responsibilities

- Prepare Design Standards for 15th Street, Hackberry Lane and Hargrove Road
- Coordinate the traffic signal at 6th Avenue East and 15th Street with the signal at McFarland Boulevard and 15th Street
- Install a traffic signal at Hargrove Road and East Fifth Avenue / construct improved two-lane section at the southern end of 5th Avenue East
- Close Lake Avenue between 15th and 16th Streets to through vehicular traffic
- Convert Lake Avenue to a pedestrian way between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets
- Improve the intersections of:
 - Fifteenth Street and Hackberry Lane
 - Hargrove Road and First/Prince Avenues
 - Fifteenth Street and McFarland Boulevard
 - Seventeenth Street East and Sixth Avenue East
 - Seventeenth Street as a right-in, right-out only to and from Hackberry Lane
 - Fifth Avenue East at Willow Wyck and Brookstone apartments with roundabouts
- Implement the neighborhood curb and gutter improvement plan and program
- Implement the sidewalk development program
- Remove speed humps from Forest Lake Drive and 1st Avenue following roadway closures and construction of roundabouts
- Correct Neighborhood flooding problems with drainage improvements

City Responses to Developer Proposals

- Close the following streets as a condition of redevelopment in accord with the Specific Plan and the planned Development District of the Zoning Ordinance:
 - Access from Hackberry Lane to Twenty First Street (Terrace Court)
 - Access from Hargrove Road to Fourth Court and Dubois Terrace
 - South end of Forest Lake Drive
 - Fifth Avenue East between Sixteenth and Seventeenth Streets East
- Promote the creation of neighborhood gateways at:
 - Fifteenth Street at Fourth, Second and East Sixth Avenues
 - Hackberry Lane at Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets
 - Hargrove Road at First/Prince and East Fifth Avenues

Actions to be Completed within 3-6 Years

City Responsibilities

- Widen the Hackberry Lane/Hargrove Road corridor to five lanes
- Realign the intersection of Prince Avenue / 1st Avenue at Hargrove Road

City Responses to Developer Proposals

- Reorganize access to the Crossland and Terrace Court subdivisions from Hackberry Lane to Eighteenth Street at the time of redevelopment

Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this document, adoption of this Specific Plan by the Forest Lake Neighborhood Association and the Tuscaloosa Planning and Zoning Commission will signal the intent of both the city and the neighborhood to cooperate in every way possible to implement the concepts that are presented in this document.

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

APPENDIX A

Redevelopment Options for the Neighborhood

Powers of a Redevelopment Authority—per Alabama State Code: 24-2 and 24-3

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

Blighting Influences in the Forest Lake Neighborhood

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

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

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

The Neighborhood Outlook for Redevelopment

The Forest Lake Neighborhood has a few blighting influences at work—both physical and fiscal. At the same time, the neighborhood and its edges present several prime opportunities for redevelopment. If the public and private sectors work together to reinvest consistently in support of this Specific Plan, the neighborhood and its edges, with their unique geographic and market location and natural assets, will thrive and prosper. The Specific Plan, as must always be the case with redevelopment plans, strongly support the twin goals of improving the local economy and enhancing the appearance and function of the place.

The Redevelopment Process—A Basic Outline

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

APPENDIX B

Proposed Amendment to the Tuscaloosa Zoning Ordinance

ARTICLE XI-A. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Section 24-151. General.

- A. The Planned Development District (PDD) is intended to direct and encourage planned development in accordance with a Specific Plan adopted by the Planning Commission in support of and detailing the intent of the Comprehensive Plan.
- B. The PDD shall be laid out, developed and used in accord with an approved Master Development Plan as referenced in sections 24-152-B 3) and 4) to improve properties and public facilities and services as called for in the Specific Plan through an appropriate mix of residential, commercial and employment opportunities that focus and concentrate diverse uses, densities and design characteristics through implementation of the following objectives:
 - 1) Encourage and direct development that is neighborhood supportive.
 - 2) Encourage infill and reinvestment that will add to the quality of neighborhood life.
 - 3) Encourage safe, attractive and convenient access for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists through appropriate building and site design.
 - 4) Emphasize mixed-use development that is pedestrian oriented.
 - 5) Promote livability, commerce and neighborhood vitality.
 - 6) Enhance neighborhood identity by creating more choices such as walking, biking and shopping to residents that promote safety, friendliness and livability.

Section 24-152. Criteria.

- A. The minimum development area that shall be considered for a PDD shall be an established city block or lesser area if indicated in the Specific Plan for the area adopted by the Planning Commission in support of and detailing the intent of the Comprehensive Plan.
- B. A PDD may be permitted in any location called for in an adopted Specific Plan or in any location that meets at least four (4) of the objectives referenced in section 24-151-B.

Section 24-153. Application.

- A. The owner or developer shall submit to the planning commission an application for approval of a PDD as follows.
- B. Contents of Application. The application submitted for review and approval of a PDD shall contain the following:
 - 1) A fee, which shall be in accordance with the Schedule of Fees cited in section 24-179.
 - 2) Evidence of ownership or control of the property.

- 3) A Master Development Plan of the PDD and any maps necessary to show the following minimum information:
 - (a) The direction of north, appropriate scale and topography (in not greater than five (5) feet contour intervals) waterways, flood plains, wetlands, forest cover and known areas of environmental hazards;
 - (b) The location of the various land uses proposed;
 - (c) The location of all existing and proposed public or private streets and thoroughfares, greenbelts, buffers, natural or man-made open spaces, schools, parks and community service areas within and adjacent to the project area.
- 4) Supporting Documentation. The application shall also include the following written statements and other materials:
 - (a) A legal description of the total site proposed for the PDD;
 - (b) A general description of the surrounding area, including current zoning and land uses;
 - (c) A statement of planning objectives to be achieved by the PDD through the particular approach proposed by the applicant to substantially accomplish the goals and policies of the Specific Plan for the area as applicable. The statement should include a description of the character, appearance and design of the proposed development and the rationale behind the assumptions and projections made by the applicant in relation to overall community growth;
 - (d) A development schedule indicating the estimated date when construction of the PDD can be expected to begin, to include a general discussion of how the phasing is to proceed;
 - (e) Development criteria, which shall include setbacks or other location methods, minimum finished floor areas, sign criteria, building heights, loading areas, greenbelts and buffers, off-street parking requirements for each proposed land use district, and/or any other development criteria which the applicant may propose;
 - (f) Provisions and/or plans for providing adequate accessibility for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles, water supply and sewage disposal to the property;
 - (g) Details of proposed ownership and maintenance of common areas and/or common open space;
 - (h) Outline of proposed protective and/or restrictive covenants, homeowner or business associations and architectural review committees, and a discussion of their functions;
 - (i) Any planned interim uses of any portion of the property;
 - (j) A traffic study comparing existing with proposed conditions;
 - (k) Landscaping criteria; and

- (l) Any proposed modification of existing subdivision regulations that shall be applicable to the PDD.

Section 24-154. Land Uses.

- A. It is intended that the flexibility of the PDD will allow in appropriate circumstances and in accord with the policies of the Specific Plan for the area, mixed uses within and upon any particular parcel within the PDD, taking into consideration the compatibility of the intended uses with the surrounding use(s). The PDD shall contain and provide an appropriate mix of complementary uses as called for in the Specific Plan, which shall include, when those uses include commerce, those that offer goods and services at different times of day, and those that offer a consolidated location in which people may choose to live, work, shop and participate in leisure and community activities in close proximity to one another.
- B. Uses or structures prohibited in a PDD shall be the following, to include uses and structures deemed by the planning commission to be substantially similar in use and impact characteristics to a listed use.
 - 1) Any activity, function or facility requiring a driveway directly to a collector or arterial street.
 - 2) Drive-through facilities..
 - 3) Sales, service and rental of commercial equipment and construction materials.
 - 4) Vehicle sales, service and rental, except in an enclosed structure.
 - 5) Distribution, storage and warehousing facilities.
 - 6) Outside storage and display.
 - 7) Heavy commercial services.
 - 8) General manufacturing.
 - 9) Salvage and recycling.
 - 10) Towing services.
 - 11) Wholesale trade.

Section 24-155. Review and Approval Procedure.

- A. Upon receipt of an application for a PDD, the planning commission shall conduct a public hearing thereon and shall prepare a written report to the City Council, stating the degree to which the proposal conforms or fails to conform to the applicable contents of the Specific Plan for the area and the criteria of section 24-156, and containing a recommendation that the application be approved or disapproved, with or without conditions upon the Master Development Plan, if applicable.
- B. Vacations and dedications shall be as provided in section 24-164.
- C. The City Council shall then consider the application as a proposed amendment as provided in section 24-201, hold a public hearing on the application for approval of the Master Development Plan and rezoning of the property, and shall grant or deny approval of the Master Development Plan, with or without conditions, and amendment of the zoning map.

- D. The final plat(s) of the PDD shall meet all requirements for a final plat as set forth in the subdivision regulations. Additionally, such plat shall identify common open space and private streets, if any. Information regarding recordation of covenants, association bylaws, the declaration of condominium and the like, as applicable, shall be referenced on the final plat. The final plat(s) shall be processed for signature and recordation in the manner set forth in the subdivision regulations. No certificate of occupancy shall be issued for the use or occupancy of any structure until the final plat and any applicable covenants, declaration of condominium, or association bylaws shall have been duly recorded in the probate records office.
- E. Approval of the application for the PDD by the City Council shall be an approval of the Master Development Plan. The developer of the PDD may proceed with development of the property in accordance with the Master Development Plan without further approval other than as specified in sections 24-158 and 24-159.

Section 24-156. Review Criteria and Standards.

- A. The planning commission shall, using the policies of the approved Specific Plan for the area as an overall guide, employ the following checklist during the review and approval process.
 - 1) All buildings adjacent to a collector or arterial street shall provide a main entrance on the façade of the building nearest to and facing that street.
 - 2) Building façades shall provide a visually interesting environment and avoid uniform styles.
 - 3) Buildings shall be oriented toward the pedestrian by providing a direct link between the building and the pedestrian walking system, with emphasis on directing people toward the public street system.
 - 4) A building's ground floor facing a collector or arterial street shall contain a minimum of fifty (50) percent unobscured windows, doors or display areas.
 - 5) No building facing a public street shall have any blank, windowless wall wider than twenty (20) feet at ground level.
 - 6) Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility or safety appropriate to the location, and shall:
 - (a) Be completely interconnected within the site and to adjacent public sidewalks.
 - (b) Be four (4) to six (6) feet wide in residential areas.
 - (c) Be at least eight (8) feet wide in commercial areas.
 - (d) Be vertically separated from the adjacent street surface by at least six (6) inches.
 - 7) There shall be at least one form of sidewalk buffer between the street and sidewalk, e.g., a five (5) foot wide lawn strip, native shade trees planted approximately every thirty (30) feet, on-street parking.

- 8) All streets shall be designed to promote traffic movement conducive to pedestrian safety and to provide create direct routes between nearby destinations as called for in the Specific Plan.
- 9) Blocks longer than 500 feet shall provide pedestrian cut-through paths.
- 10) Parking lots shall be designed to provide through pedestrian paths, clearly identifiable through changes in material or elevation, from street to building.
- 11) Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than twelve (12) feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians.
- 12) Shading, through awnings or canopies, shall be provided over public sidewalks along collector and arterial streets in commercial areas to provide protection from weather so walking is encouraged.
- 13) Street trees as specified by the city shall be planted along all streets.
- 14) In non-residential areas at least ten percent (10%) of the total site area shall be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian sensitive open space. Where feasible, this standard should be fulfilled with plazas, courtyards or other similar public spaces at or adjacent to buildings.
- 15) In residential areas at least fifteen percent (15%) of the total site area shall be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian sensitive open space that includes appropriate focal points.
- 16) Parking lots shall not dominate the development site, and shall be placed alongside or behind buildings rather than between the building and adjacent collector and arterial streets.
- 17) Surface parking lots containing fifty (50) or more spaces shall be divided into smaller areas separated by landscaped areas at least ten (10) feet wide and by a building or a group of buildings.
- 18) Surface parking lots shall include at least five percent (5%) of the total surface area devoted to landscaping distributed and designed in accord with an overall plan approved by the planning commission.
- 19) Parking lots and structures shall include clearly marked and continuous pedestrian walkways and connections to the public sidewalk system.
- 20) Parking structures located adjacent to collector or arterial streets shall have ground-level business uses along the street side(s).
- 21) Parking structures shall be architecturally integrated or designed with an architectural theme similar to that of the main building(s).
- 22) Commercial buildings along arterials and collectors may be set back up to a *maximum* of five (5) feet from the sidewalk. Such setback *may* be increased to a maximum of twenty (20) feet from the sidewalk only with written approval of the planning commission in locations where a courtyard, plaza or seating area is located adjacent to the public street.

Section 24-157. Other Regulations Not Applicable.

- A. Where conflicts may be found between the provisions of the PDD District and other provisions of the Zoning Ordinance or Subdivision Regulations, these PDD provisions shall take precedence.

Section 24-158. Building Permit.

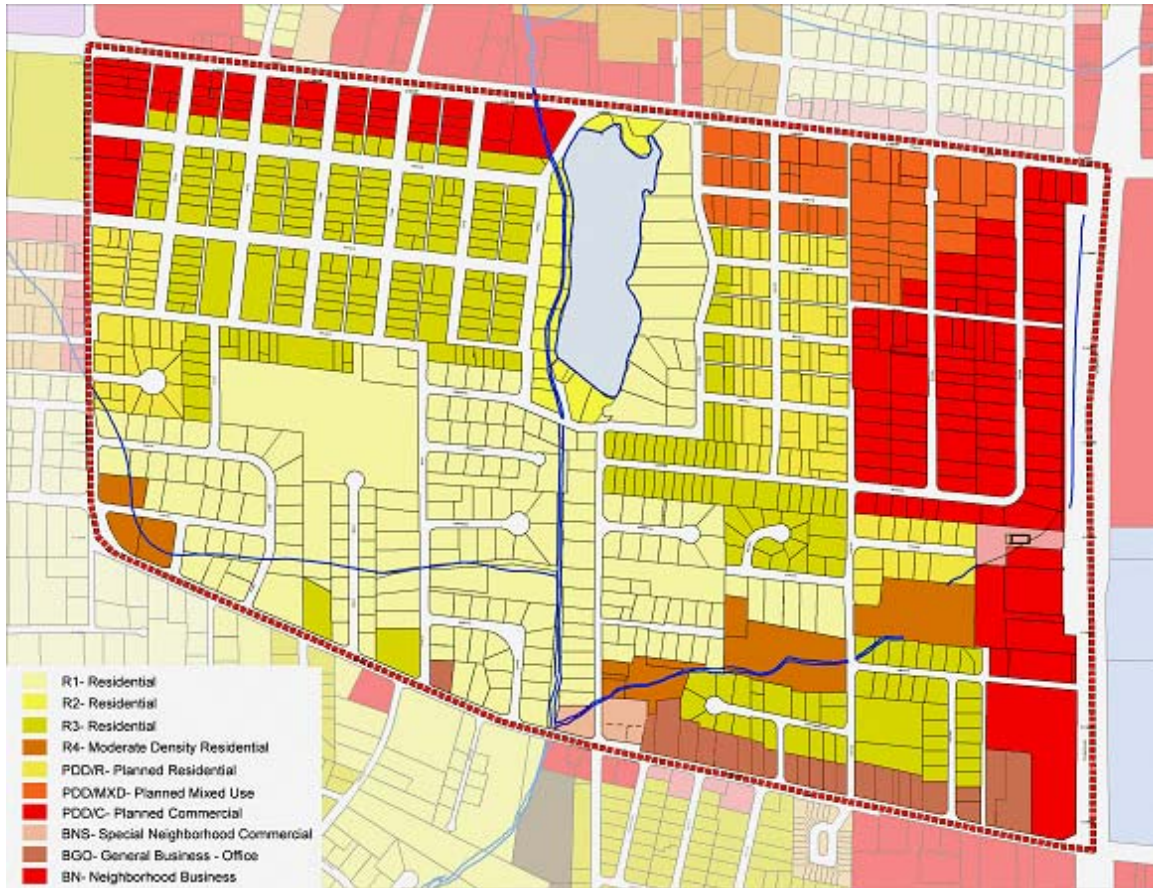
- A. General. The developer of the PDD shall proceed with the development of the property in accordance with the approved Master Development Plan and no further approvals shall be required except as set forth herein. If plans are submitted for the construction of improvements on any particular parcel within the PDD, a building permit shall be approved or disapproved as specified below.
- B. Issuance of Building Permits for Permitted Uses. Upon application for a building permit for the construction of improvements on any parcel within the PDD, if the Building Official shall determine that the intended use of the improvements is a "permitted use" in accord with the approved PDD, then a building permit shall be issued.

Section 24-159. Amendment of the Master Development Plan.

- A. Incidental Change. To facilitate insignificant adjustments of the approved Master Development Plan as may be required by engineering or other circumstances unforeseen at the time of zoning approval, either the Building Official or City Engineer, as applicable or appropriate under the circumstances, may approve alterations to the Master Development Plan that are considered incidental in scope, which approval shall be in writing. Approval of plans by official rubber stamp, initials and/or signature of the appropriate official shall be deemed approval "in writing".
- B. Major Change. A "major change" in the Master Development Plan shall be defined as any increase in density, reduction in open space, or land use district boundary change. Whenever the developer of a PDD shall request a major change, the developer shall file an application for change, which shall be reviewed in accordance with the provisions of Section 24-155 above.
- C. Approval of Plat Changes. Once the planning commission has approved any plat, any changes to such approved plat will be subject to review and approval by the planning commission through the typical process for such changes. Any approved changes to a plat will not constitute a change to the Master Development Plan.

APPENDIX C

Proposed Amendment to the Tuscaloosa Zoning Map



Note: any map revisions to a PDD classification shall be in response to a Master Development Plan approved in accordance with procedures as provided in the Planned Development District of the Tuscaloosa Zoning Ordinance