

SPECIFIC PLAN

THE WEST TUSCALOOSA COMMUNITY

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

PREPARED BY

K|P|S

G R O U P

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This document is the result of cooperation between the City of Tuscaloosa and residents of the West Tuscaloosa Community. They agreed the time was ripe for specific planning to guide public and private reinvestment, revitalization and redevelopment in and around the planning area, and they joined forces to determine these and other ways to improve the quality of life in the community.

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

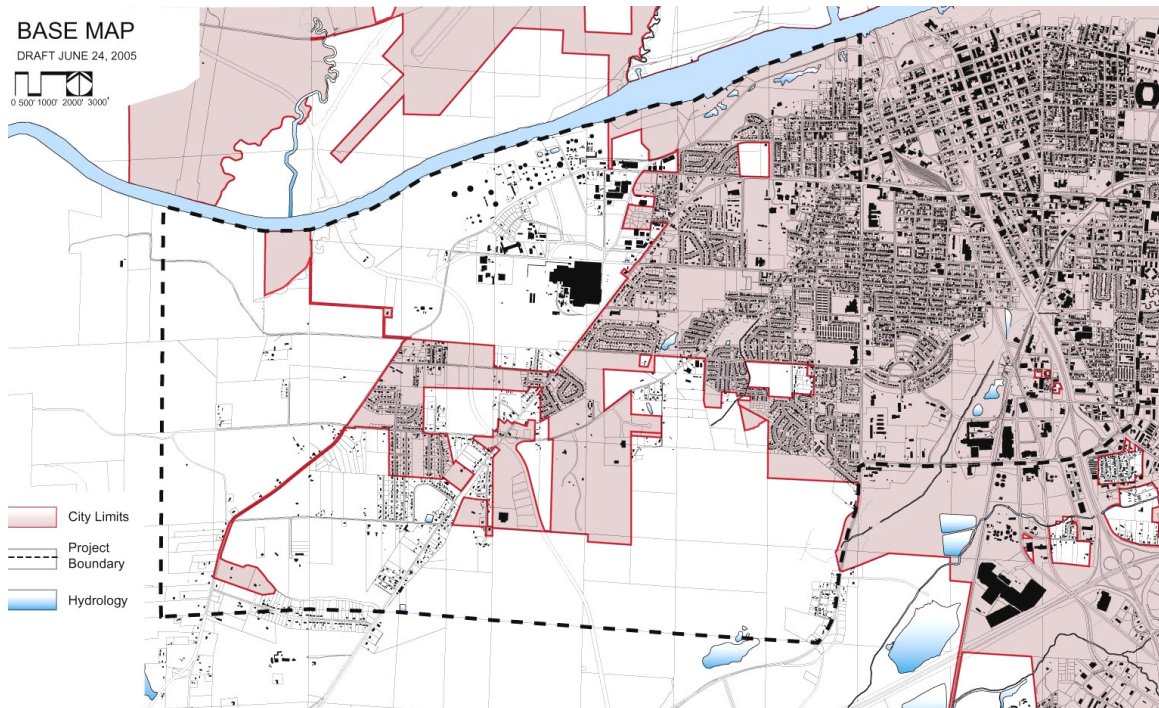
- Help the West Tuscaloosa Community devise a physical vision that will provide details to the various elements of the Tuscaloosa Comprehensive Plan
- Prepare a plan to guide land use, housing, accessibility, and economic development
- Recommend appropriate public investment to support specific plan implementation



As a part of the planning process, the consultants built a planning map system of the community, based on the city's mapping system. They augmented that information with the results of site visits and discussions with local residents in an effort to build knowledge of the community. This information was depicted on thematic maps and reviewed at community planning workshops and other public meetings that were held in the planning area during the process.

Community residents, landlords, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials participated in the planning workshops and other public 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. They spoke of their visions for Tuscaloosa and the West Tuscaloosa Community and the possible opportunities for both

private and public investment. They also reviewed and helped to revise preliminary and draft versions of this document.

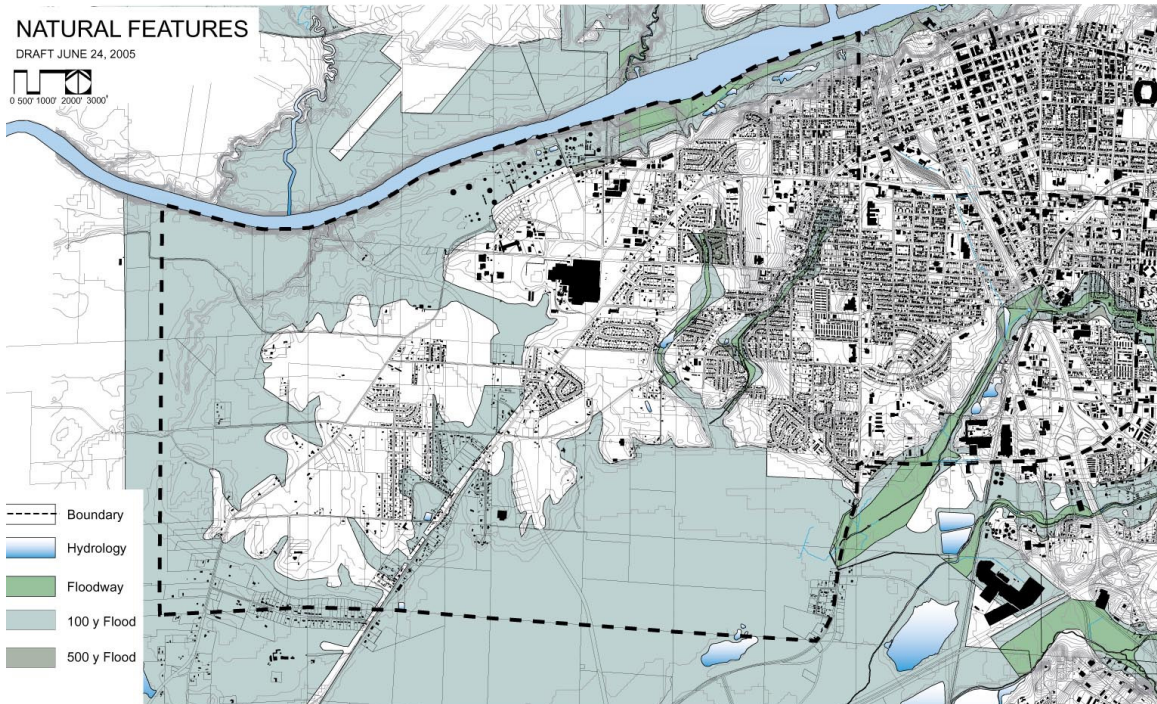


Information and suggestions from the planning workshops and other public meetings were converted to a Strategic Development Concept, which was reviewed and modified during subsequent community meetings. The planning process provided the opportunity to build consensus in support of development, revitalization, accessibility improvements and public investments. These ideas are the core of the this Specific Plan, which is intended to stabilize and protect critical portions of the community and to encourage and enable appropriate private revitalization and redevelopment activities, supported by public investment and regulation.



## II. THE WEST TUSCALOOSA COMMUNITY

The West Tuscaloosa Community is one of the older parts of the city. It developed around and associated with the railroads and local industries. The planning study area initially was bounded generally on the north by the Black Warrior River, on the east by Martin Luther King Boulevard on the northeast and southeast and 10th Avenue in the center, on the south by Moody Swamp and on the southwest and west by ragged edges of existing development. About midway through the planning process it became clear that the planning study area should extend southerly to include all of the Mallisham Parkway and its interchange with Interstate Highway 20-59. Maps later in this document include that additional planning area.



### Physical Features

The map above presents several features laid on top of a topographic map, which shows lines of equal elevation above sea level. Included are buildings, street and railroad rights-of-way and boundary lines of parcels of land. Included also are the community's water features—streams, ponds and lakes—and the floodplains adjacent to some of these water features. Maps later in this document include wetland areas, which have been accounted for in this plan.

The density of man-made features varies considerably across West Tuscaloosa, in part because of the history of the place, and who owned—and now owns—the land and when it was developed. Major institutions such as schools and hospitals, industrial properties and shopping centers are easy to locate 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 apartments and single-family, detached forms.

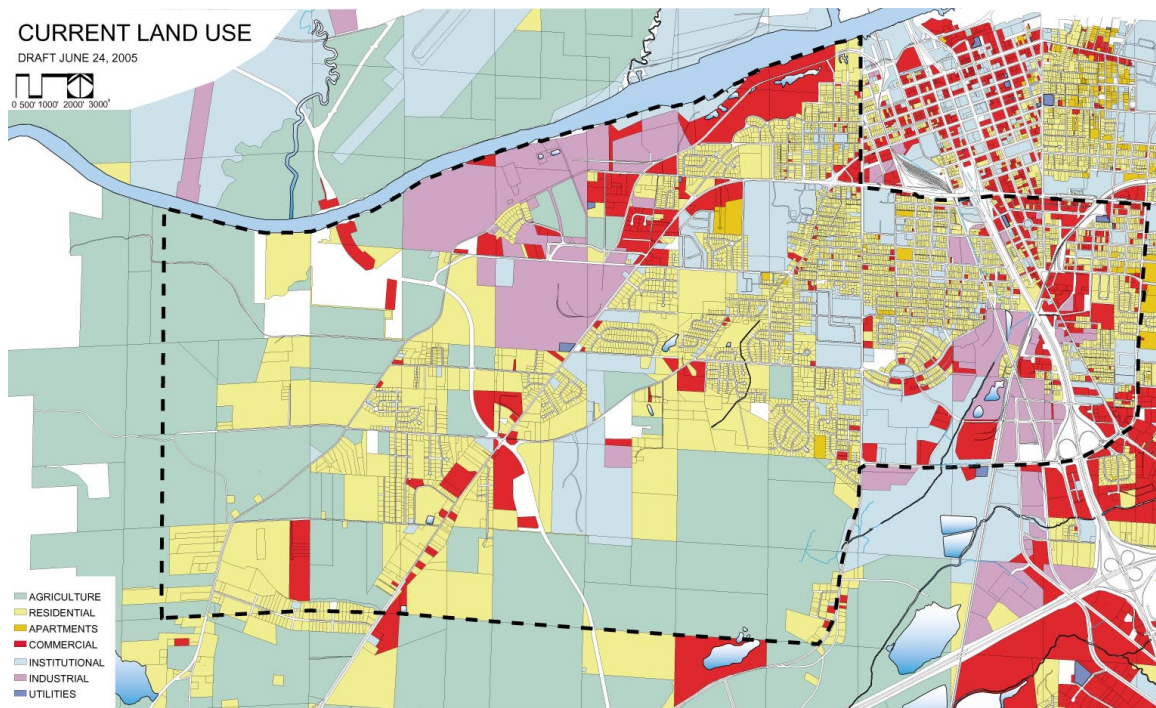
Also apparent are the large amounts of open property—largely undeveloped, but including some open space areas in major institutions. All these patterns on the land are considered in this plan for the West Tuscaloosa Community.

## Current Land Use and Development

As shown on the *Current Land Use* map, the overwhelming majority of the property in the West Tuscaloosa Community is used for residential purposes—people live there. Housing density varies considerably, and this has brought together a diverse mix of people. The highest population concentrations are shown on the map in the orange tones—for the most part, multi-family housing concentrations.

There are also spotty commercial uses, mostly situated in “strips” of commerce arrayed along several of the more heavily traveled arterial and collector streets. And there is a significant industrial base in the community, though most of the larger enterprises are outside the city limits

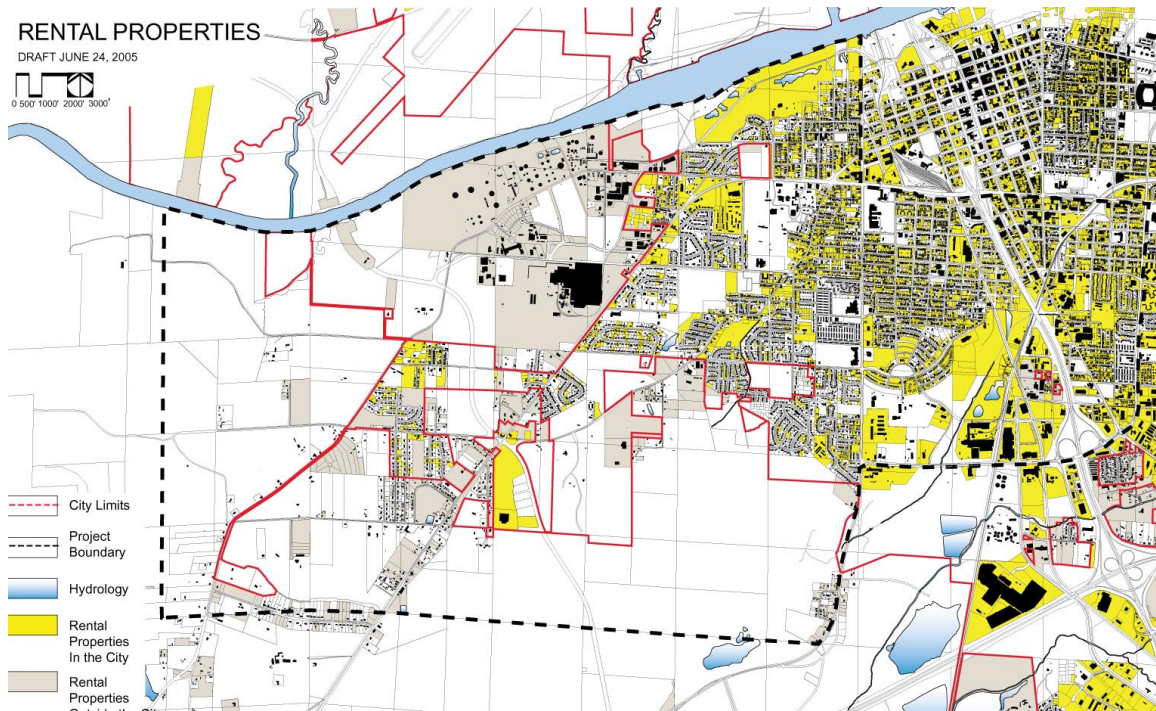
The community includes a significant amount of public and institutional lands, especially schools, hospitals, churches and parks. These are not dispersed evenly across the community, but rather concentrated in large parcels that tend to separate neighborhoods from one another and from access to shopping and places of employment.



## Rental Properties

As shown on the *Rental Properties* map, there is a high percentage of rental housing in many parts of this community, especially in some of the neighborhoods made up of single-family detached housing. This is 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

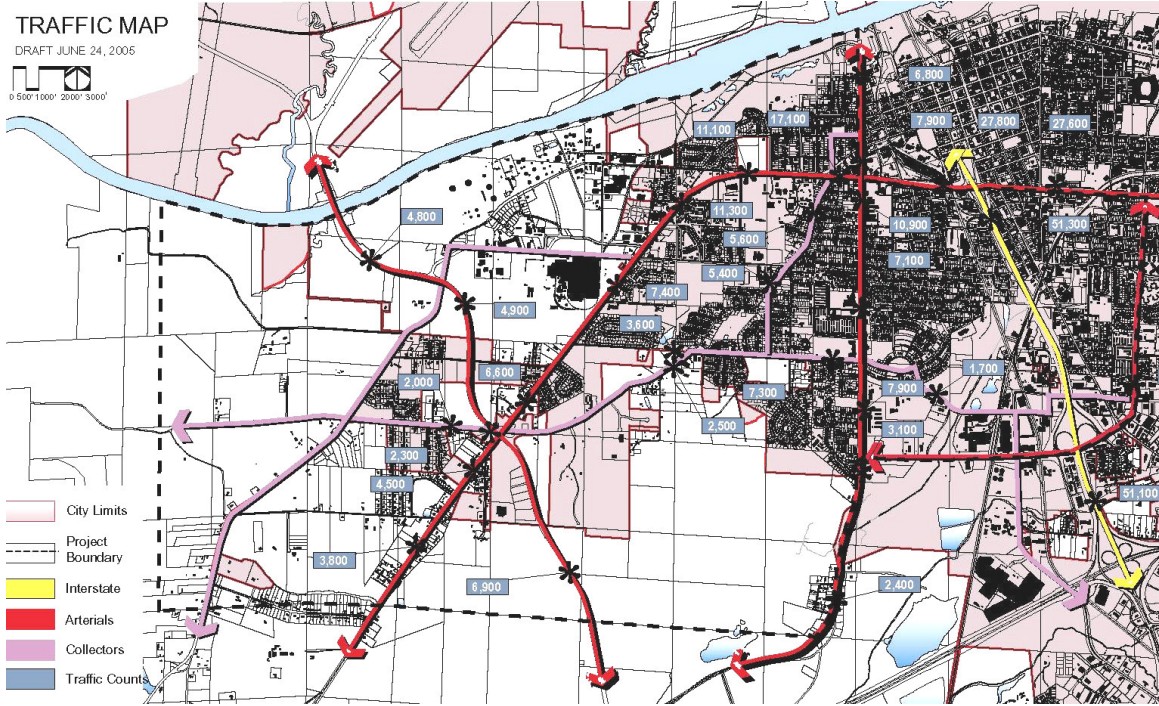
differing—and often conflicting—levels of property care and maintenance in this area. The shift in occupancy type from owner to renter in some areas over the years has altered the demographic makeup of the area and led to some tensions among residents and between owner-occupants and the often-absentee owners of rental housing.



## Roads and Traffic

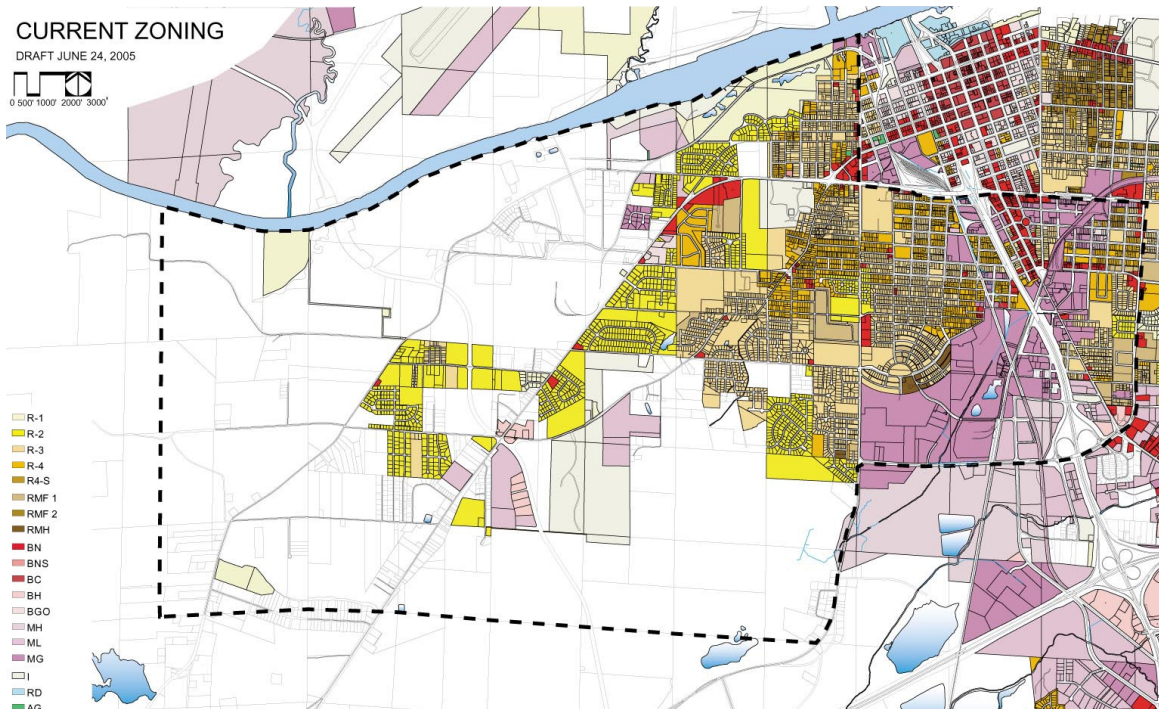
The pattern of roads and traffic on the next page in general indicates relatively easy east-west access in the northerly portion of the community, but fewer such options to the south.

The community has rather porous edges: local, and through traffic of various types and volumes flows through more or less at will. The arterials that bisect and provide the edges for the planning area carry most of the traffic, much of which is passing by or through rather than having an origin or destination within the community. The collector streets are simply narrower, lesser-traffic versions of the arterials that are also subject to less through traffic pressures.



## Current Zoning

For most of the community, current zoning tends to reflect current use of land by type but not density. However, much of the area is unzoned, being situated outside the Tuscaloosa corporate limits and not subject to zoning.



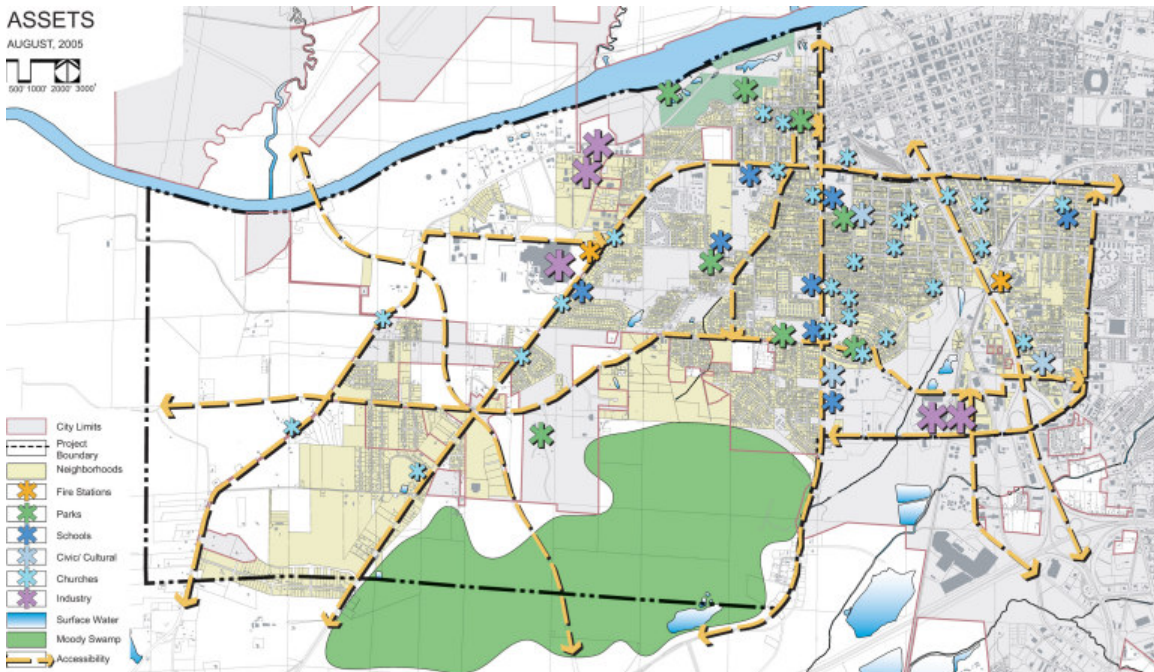
### III. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Community residents, students, local developers, property owners, college and city staff and elected officials gathered at the McDonald Hughes Center on July 19, 2005 for a “town meeting” style planning workshop with consultants. The participants shared ideas about community assets and issues, major trends they anticipated and the influences those might have on the community. They spoke of their aspirations for the West Tuscaloosa Community and possible opportunities to create or fill in some of its missing pieces.

#### Assets

For purposes of this project, 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 following assets have been organized according to type rather than the order in which they were suggested.

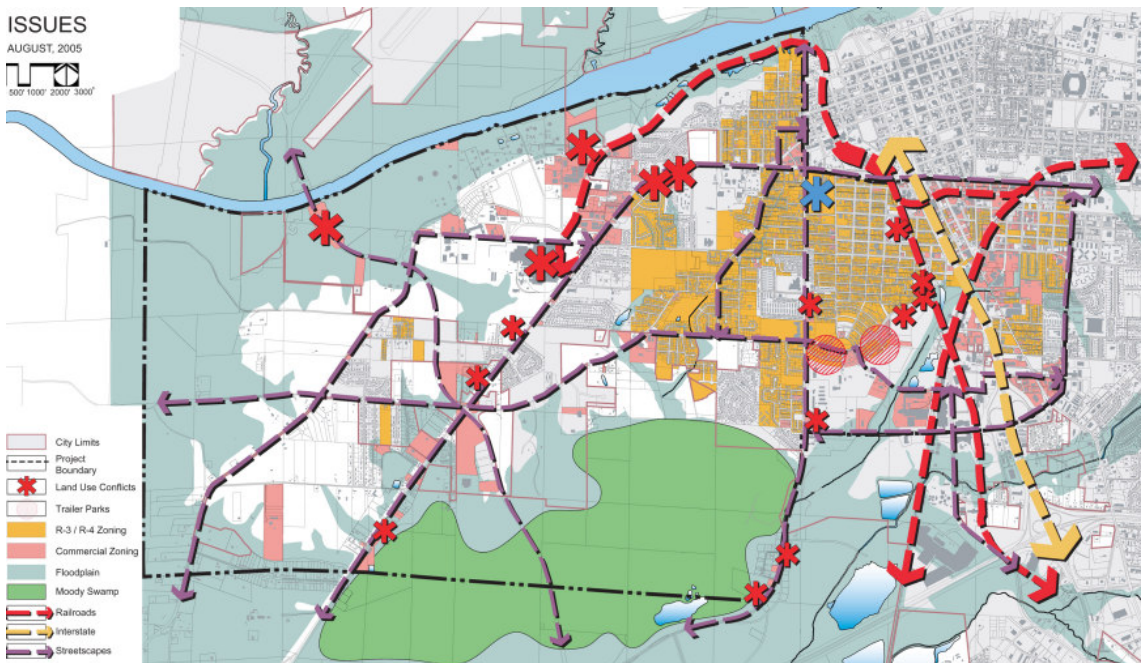
- Infrastructure
- Whatley Health Center
- Schools
- Stillman College
- Shelton State Community College—C.A. Fredd Campus
- Weaver-Bolden Branch Library
- Fire stations
- Police Sub-station
- Branch YMCA
- McDonald Hughes Center
- Freeman Park
- Palmore Park
- Kaulton Park
- Rosedale Park
- McKinney Park
- West End Park
- Harmon Field
- Tuscaloosa Country Club
- Strong families
- Great neighborhoods
- New housing development
- Strong churches
- Industry
- Black Warrior River
- Moody Swamp



## Issues

For purposes of this project, an issue is not necessarily a problem, but rather is defined as any aspect of the community that is below the standards of the participants. The following issues have been reorganized by type from the order in which they were suggested.

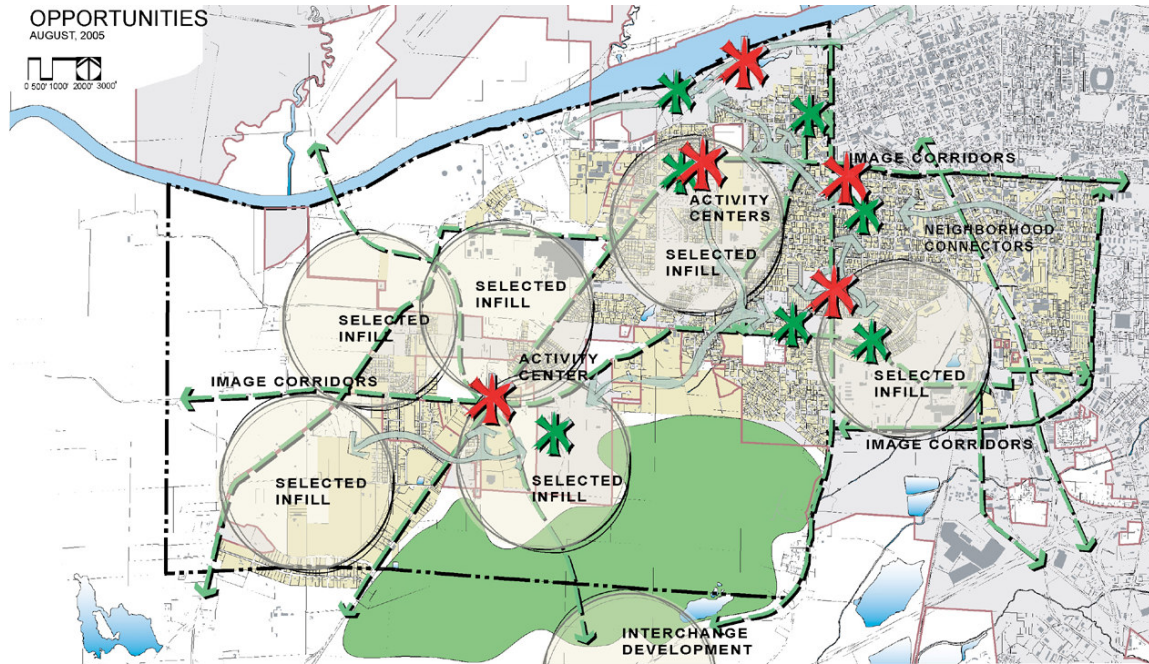
- Schools failing
- Streetscape aesthetics
- Lack of street lights
- Moody Swamp
- Environmental issues
- Floodplain
- Sewer system
- Storm drainage
- Wrong media perception
- High crime rate
- Bars on the windows
- Price gouging
- Apathy
- No community organization
- Lack of communication
- Poor self-perception
- Under employment
- Unskilled labor force
- Lack of African American middle class
- Lack of affordable homes
- No residential areas to move back into
- Lack of home ownership opportunity
- Zoning (too much R-3 and R-4)
- Toll bridge across the river
- Too much through traffic
- Too much vacant property
- Junk yards
- Goodrich and Hunt outside city limits
- Hemmed in by floodplain, railroad, Interstate
- Lack of commercial property
- Poor arterial and collector streetscapes
- Existing grocery store is inadequate
- Limited restaurants and fast food
- Very little shopping opportunity
- No post office
- No bank



It should be noted that the participants' view of local assets tends to stress the positive *physical* aspects of the planning area, while their issues focus instead upon relationships and communication—or the lack thereof. The assets are typical of a mature, mixed-density residential and commercial environment that has experienced an accelerating rate of change from owner-occupancy to rentals over the past few decades. These issues are consistent

with such changes, and most of them are associated with the tensions such changes can bring to a community.

The assets and issues mentioned by the participants demonstrate the need to build and improve upon the physical quality of West Tuscaloosa as well as continuing to organize and build relationships among and within the several major constituents—residents, landlords, local developers, property owners, city staff and elected officials. This range of issues to be dealt with indicates the need for an overall, comprehensive approach to a plan for the West Tuscaloosa Community and its implementation by all responsible parties.



### Opportunities for the West Tuscaloosa Community

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

- Major activity centers
- Image corridors
- Commercial corridors
- Street network
- Pedestrian connections
- Residential infill
- Redevelopment
- Parks and open space
- The river
- The bridge

## Visions for the West Tuscaloosa Community

Building from the discussions of assets, issues and opportunities, the town meeting participants were asked to envision the West Tuscaloosa Community as they would like it to be a decade or so from now. Following a few moments in which to think about those desired future conditions, each person was asked to share with the others one significant physical aspect of that future community that is absent from the community and its neighborhoods as it exists today. The responses have been organized according to type but have not been not prioritized.

- True neighbors
- Bedroom community
- Diversity of housing sizes
- Middle-income housing
- No rundown mobile homes
- No mobile home parks
- No bars on the windows
- Stable median age
- Low crime rate
- No weed-filled lots
- Absence of halfway houses
- Strong sense of community
- Heroes who define the word “Leadership”
- Teaching children their “roots”
- Ownership by the community
- Sense of community pride
- Can-do attitude—commitment
- Community activism
- High percentage of voters
- Partnership among schools, community and government
- Post office
- Street lights
- Standard streets
- Economic prosperity
- Employment
- Can find anything you need
- Banks / Hotel / Restaurants
- Free river bridge
- Commercial air service
- Underground utilities
- Schools equal to or better than other parts of town
- Cultural opportunities
- Sense of community pride
- Adequate medical facilities
- New YMCA
- Natural resources utilized
- Water resources used for fishing, parks and paths
- Adequate drainage system
- Adequate sewer system

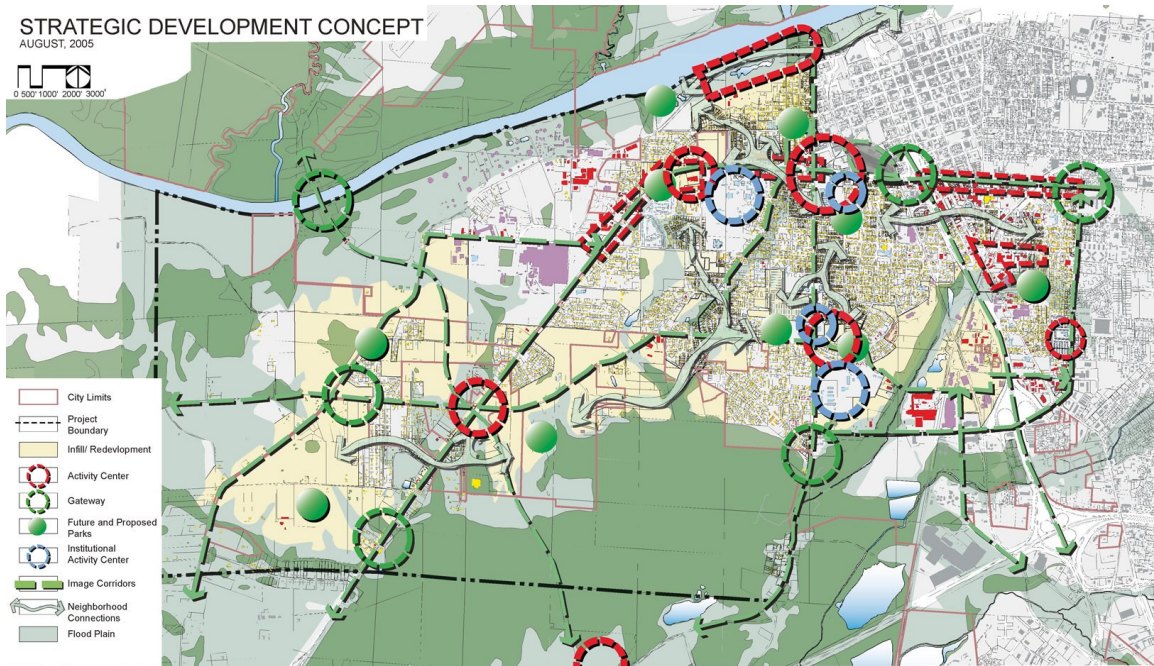
## Strategic Development Concept

Information from the inventory and analysis, plus the assets, issues, opportunities and visions brought out at the town meeting session, were reviewed, considered and organized into a Strategic Development Concept for the West Tuscaloosa Community. That concept was presented at a town meeting session held at the McDonald Hughes Center on October 26, 2005 to solicit comments and advice. After some fine-tuning based on responses that evening, this concept recommends ways in which the City, in cooperation with residents and the private sector, may build on the assets and visions of the community as they cooperatively engage, support and shape its future.

The Strategic Development Concept as outlined and illustrated on the next page 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 and shifting of renter occupancies toward homeownership, the organization of commercial areas into strong commercial activity centers, removal of the several junk yards from locations that conflict with commerce and housing, and accessibility by pedestrians and bicycles and the motor vehicle traffic passing through.



- Gateway image improvements
- Image corridor improvements
- Commercial corridor reinvestment
- Commercial activity center development
- Commercial activity center reinvestment
- Institutional activity center support
- Street networking connections
- Sidewalk and trail investment
- Parks and recreation investment
- Annexation



The diagram above is a representation of this Strategic Development Concept. It indicates general locations and interrelationships of the recommendations, which are intended to guide city, landowner, landlord and community decisions regarding private and public initiatives and investments.

As a result of implementation of the Strategic Development Concept, the following conditions may be expected in the West Tuscaloosa Community over time, through the cooperative actions of both the private and public sectors:

- Population density will increase somewhat overall compared with current conditions, and it will also spread out through selected infill development located to respond to the presence of employment, parks, open space and commercial opportunities, all supported by improvements in public infrastructure.
- Moderate to high density, multi-family housing will be located in areas having a high degree of accessibility to activity centers and corridors of various types. This may be brought about in part through incentives to encourage reinvestment in housing to increase overall density, yet also protect the neighborhoods and their natural environments.
- There will be a new park on Stillman Boulevard.
- There will be at least one *focus area*, of an appropriate type, in each recognized neighborhood—a vest-pocket park, an open space, a common park area or some combination thereof.

- There will be a system of primary pedestrian corridors to help interconnect neighborhoods with the community's various activity centers.
- The Tuscaloosa Riverwalk will be extended to an upgraded lock park on the river.
- The Martin Luther King Boulevard/Fifteenth Street intersection will be a major commercial hub of retail and services.
- The Tenth Avenue/Fifteenth Street intersecting will be a key commercial hub for the area.
- Existing commercial centers will be revitalized as supporting commercial activity centers—diverse, specialty commercial and dining facilities, with appropriate commercial infill and minor additions.
- Appropriate and compatible, small-scale businesses will be located along Martin Luther King Boulevard.
- The country club area will be revitalized as a mixed-use center, connected to its surroundings by upgraded streets and pedestrian access.
- Several major image corridors will help define the community and provide the major spines of an areawide wayfinding system.
- Mallisham Parkway will be developed as a major business corridor between Interstate 59 and the Black Warrior River.
- Significant buildings, major trees and landscape improvements will be used as ways to mark the gateways to the major image corridors and important decision points as part of the wayfinding system.
- The former toll bridge will be opened as a public facility.
- The Interstate 20/59 interchange with Mallisham Parkway will be annexed and developed as a major, mixed-use facility to serve as a gateway to the city.

Implementation of this Strategic Development Concept will update and strengthen the community with a complementary mix of uses, including a limited variety of housing types and densities. This, in combination with improvements to the public realm, will help to increase the potential for an active neighborhood street life. To build quality neighborhood-centered environments, new residential development should be planned, designed and built in ways that will help focus many eyes on neighborhood streets. At the same time, neighborhoods should be planned, designed and built to include accessibility to diverse, healthy commerce, institutions and services, parks, open space and recreation.

## IV. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

Planned overall development patterns for the community are composed of several major components, all supported by and coordinated with plans for the community's transportation system and other infrastructure. Development focus areas are nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development that should positively affect urban form, environmental quality and the transportation network. Residential neighborhoods surround and support these development focus areas, and they should be planned, designed, constructed and maintained to do so in ways that balance development and conservation as well as provide places in which to live. The overall, community-wide balance of population and consumption of land should be structured by and compatible with the community's Green Infrastructure of critical environmental resources.

To convert the West Tuscaloosa Strategic Development Concept to a future pattern of land use and development and actions to support its implementation, the community has strategically focused population concentrations upon commercial and employment focus areas. These are each supported by residential neighborhoods and interspersed with and structured by green corridors, and all are interconnected by a variety of accessibility options. These options will require less automobile travel, provide better opportunities for future transit and decrease adverse environmental effects. The city intends that development should be planned, sited and designed in a manner compatible with the community's Green Infrastructure, as a first step in providing for development creativity, efficiency, stability, image, diversity and control.

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The community and its surrounding area enjoy a wealth of natural resources critical to human well-being, whether the particular resource affects the economy, overall quality of life or the health and safety of residents. These resources vary from place to place around the area, but they have one thing in common: as they are surrounded, diminished or depleted, the community suffers.

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

Depending upon the approach to development, the land itself can present varying ranges of opportunities and hazards. For example, steeper slopes may provide opportunities for views, but they may also be difficult to build on. In combination with erodible soils, such slopes can be hazardous. As floodplains are filled in and built upon, flooding is shifted to other locations and little can be done there to eliminate the problem. Once cut, forests may take decades to grow, but they may return. However, prime agricultural soils paved over are taken out of production forever, and extinct species cannot be replaced.

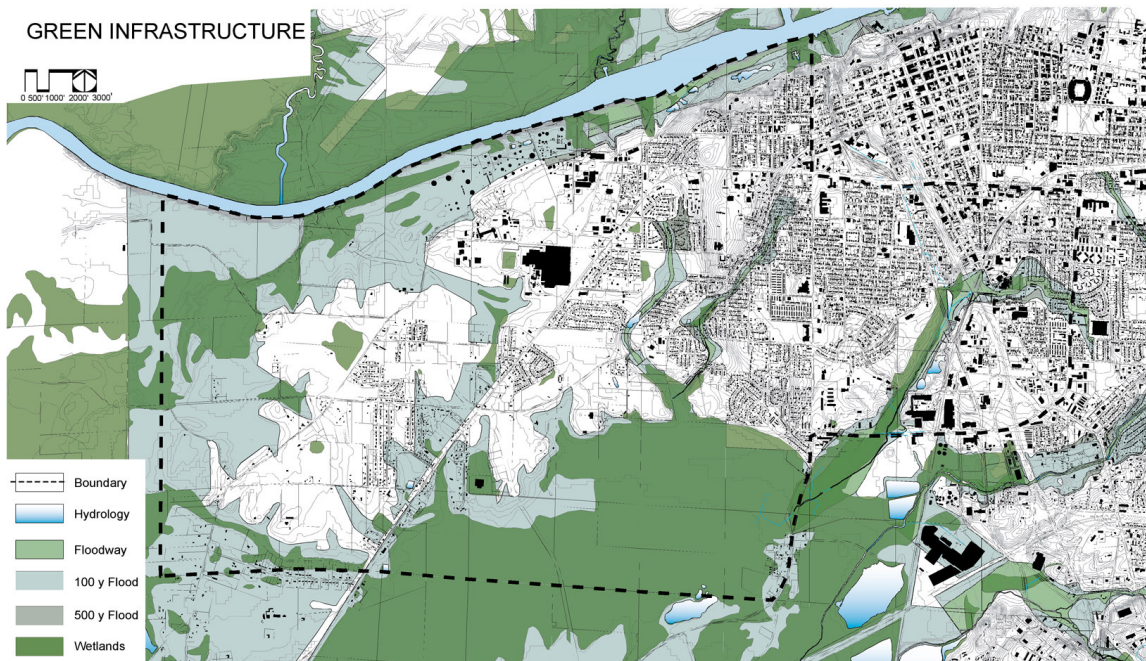
Consequently, public officials and citizens take seriously the quality of the natural environment. As a part of the planning process they have reviewed carefully the mutual impacts of development and natural resources on one another, for purposes of protection, production, health and safety, and parks and recreation. They have also considered how these natural resources opportunities together form a logical Green Infrastructure of open space and natural resource areas that may provide a framework or structuring system within which to organize, locate and interconnect urban development.

## Green Infrastructure Components

One of the essential foundations of the Strategic Development Concept is that a healthy Green Infrastructure is critical to the community's continued quality of life. The community's Green Infrastructure is not and will not be simply the land and water areas left over when all the development and building is done. This will require vigilance, in combination with guided, sensitive balancing of conservation and development.

The first step is to discern the pattern of the community's Green Infrastructure and its constituent parts—the resources, sites and areas that may be critical to the community. These are the environmental conditions associated with surface water, slopes and public and semi-public parks and open space.

The community's open spaces—many of which may appear to be simply the community's "undeveloped" lands—include many resources that are important to the community's character and well-being. Others may appropriately be set aside for reasons of health and safety, managed production of farm and forest, parks and recreation, and protection or preservation. The pattern illustrated on the Green Infrastructure map generally depicts these resources and places.



Surface water resources are the Black Warrior River, various small creeks and streams, plus small ponds, all noted in dark blue, scattered across the community. Several of these surface water resources have associated areas that are often wet and others that are intermittently flooded. The map indicates wetlands in a light green, and floodplain areas in a light gray (those mapped are so-called 100-year and 500-year floodplains—the areas having a 1.0% and 0.2% chance, respectively, of flooding in any given year).

Encroachment into floodplain areas reduces the flood-carrying capacity of the drainage system, and increases flood heights upstream and scouring from stormwater downstream. The floodway is the stream channel and adjacent portions of the floodplain that must be kept free from encroachment to allow the 100-year flood to be carried without substantial

increases in flood heights. The community has several parks and recreation areas, which are indicated on the Green Infrastructure map in dark green. Many of these incorporate or are adjacent to some of the community's most important water resources. Others include small yet nevertheless significant areas of steep slope—mostly near the Black Warrior River.

### *Green Infrastructure Policies*

#### Conserve Green Infrastructure and landscape form

The river's edge, natural woodlands along all of the community's watercourses and the rural landscape within and surrounding the community are some of its greatest assets. The community hosts rather diverse landscape features. Streambeds, wooded stream-banks and floodplains are widespread elements of the community landscape that should be conserved. Development should be planned and arranged carefully within that landscape.

#### Organize development to capitalize on critical open spaces

The community's most important natural resources and scenic locations should be reserved for public open space. These places and their interconnections should be accounted for as part of a citywide open space network. Once key areas are selected, appropriate public uses should be determined—be they greenways, community parks or regional parks. These should be linked together insofar as possible into an overall open space system, and development should be planned and designed so that buildings look into these areas rather than back up to them.

## DEVELOPMENT FOCUS AREAS

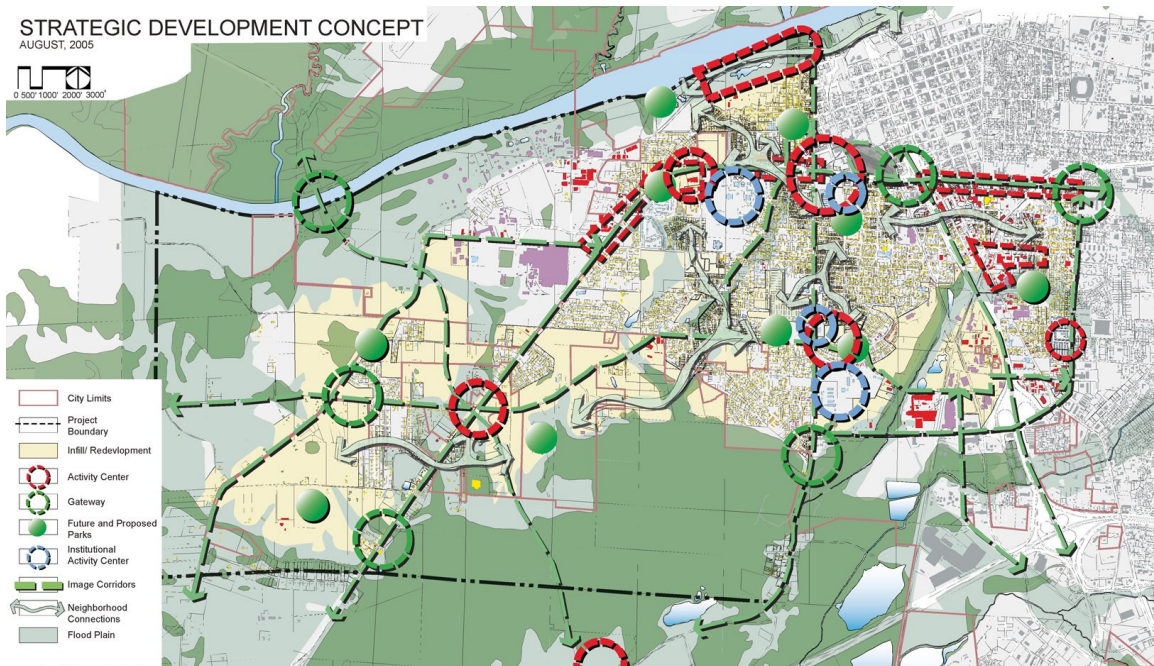
Significant nodes or concentrations of people, activity and development are designated in this plan as *development focus areas*. Each of these should be located, planned and designed to relate to, support and positively affect urban form, environmental quality, adjacent residential neighborhoods and the transportation network in a positive way. Development focus areas come in a variety of types and sizes, but most should display the following characteristics:

- *Anchor or center of activity: the focus area contains some activity or function for which it is primarily and integrally known in the region, community or neighborhood, as appropriate.*
- *Compact, densely developed core: there is a relatively high density of development of the types essential to the character of the place, with greater density of development toward the center of the focus area and less toward the edges.*
- *Internal vehicular circulation: Once having arrived by vehicle at most any location within the focus area, a motorist may, without undue effort or extraordinary wayfinding abilities, visit most any other location, on the same side of the major street, without having to re-enter that street.*
- *Pedestrian accessibility: the place is readily accessible by pedestrians from surrounding areas without exertion of undue effort or extraordinary traffic-dodging abilities.*
- *Pedestrian oriented (overall): the place demonstrates through pedestrian density throughout that it was planned and designed with the overall needs of pedestrians given priority over those of motorists and automobiles.*

- *Positive sense of place: the average person has a good feeling about the overall character of the focus area—the overall image of the place and its relation to the surrounding environment, feelings of safety, and sense of arrival and departure.*
- *Vehicular accessibility: the focus area is readily accessible by motor vehicle to any licensed driver without having to evidence extraordinary driving skills.*
- *Visual coherence: the average person senses that things fit together in the focus area—signage, landscaping, the way the parking supports getting to one’s destination, and the way most of the buildings seem to fit together.*
- *Well-defined edge: It is clear from the development pattern to most everyone where the place begins and ends without having to resort to walls or signs.*

There are several focus area types provided for by this plan. Each should be developed in accord with policies and principles appropriate for location, size and type.

- Small Commercial Centers
- Large Commercial Centers
- Mixed Use Corridors
- Employment Support Centers
- Institutional Support Centers
- Community Recreation Centers



### *Development Focus Area Policies*

#### Preserve and enhance the community open space system

All development focus areas should be carefully planned, organized and placed appropriately within the community’s Green Infrastructure. They should be strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources. The natural environment should continue to be valued as an important ingredient of all development focus areas, which in turn should be designed to conserve and utilize natural systems to assist in filtering stormwater drainage.

### Design each focus area to relate to its context

Each focus area should have an appropriate scale and mix of uses defined by its type and the population it serves. Each should be integrated into the community, with appropriate connections and transitions made to adjacent uses. Streets and service drives should be located and designed appropriate to the user, mindful of the impact on roadway capacity and safety. Vehicular access should be designed to allow for user connections to adjacent focus areas and neighborhoods, but discourage through traffic while accommodating service access and delivery.

### Create discernable, compact places

Each focus area should have a sense of identity and place, distinguishable from one to the next—perhaps by including a unique feature or activity. Development focus areas should be compact and densely developed. Their edges should be well defined. Each of these, regardless of scale, should look and feel as if it has been designed, or at least considered, as a whole, in context with its surroundings. Continuity of major design elements, such as building setbacks, height, scale, materials, landscaping and signage should be evident. Differences should not be abrupt and overwhelming, but rather provide interest and diversity.

### Design each focus area to maximize accessibility

Design can greatly influence the number of people willing to walk or ride as an alternative to driving. Appropriate links between residential and nonresidential uses should be provided. Pedestrians and vehicles should be separated from one another insofar as practicable, with the length of pedestrian crossings of parking areas kept to a minimum. Human scale should be created through building mass and form, as well as scale and detail. Building location, setbacks and orientation should enhance pedestrian comfort.

### Small Commercial Centers

These are relatively small, primarily single-use shopping areas. Predominantly auto-oriented at present, these focus areas and their surroundings should also support pedestrian activity and allow for greater pedestrian access.

These commercial areas have typically been developed at street intersections with large areas devoted to parking. While these focus areas are currently oriented to the customer traveling by auto, pedestrian accommodation is appropriate and should be a part of any redevelopment or infill development plans. Infill development should be placed at the street edge to screen the parking lots and provide human scale for pedestrians.

Typical appropriate uses would include a large grocery store, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. Residential uses should be close by and

#### **Small Commercial Centers**

##### Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial
- Office or service commercial
- Hospitality:
  - Restaurant
  - Accommodation
- Residential:
  - Adjacent (horizontal)
  - Diverse type and ownership
- Institutional/Civic
- Recreational

##### General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Intensive mixed use
- Pedestrian oriented (overall)
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

##### General Design Guidelines

- Stores serving the community
- Required building line
- Parking in the rear or to the side
- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges

easily accessible to these focus areas, which in turn should present a positive face to adjacent neighborhoods.

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger composition of the area within which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate to one another in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories. Buildings should be close to the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *At street intersections, the main building should be placed right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the initial site layout. The site should be organized so that the buildings frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, and so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Commercial streets should have trees that complement the face of the buildings and shade the sidewalk. Residential streets should provide for an appropriate canopy, which shades both street and sidewalk, and serves as a visual buffer between the street and the home.*

## Mixed Use Corridors

The primary purpose of the arterial street system is to enable the efficient movement of vehicular traffic. Safety and accessibility to property are also important, as should be accommodations for bicycle and pedestrian travel. Nevertheless, infill and redevelopment should be managed with a “can-do” attitude in mind, working toward the development of “complete streets” throughout the community.

Typical appropriate uses include large grocery and other anchor stores, supporting retail and service commercial, office, restaurant and institutional uses. While retail and other uses should address the street, they should not simply turn their backs to adjacent residential areas and wall them off: the corridor should be easily accessible to adjacent residential areas. Over time these corridors should be encouraged and assisted to mature in form to provide focal points or nodes of activity at selected locations.

### Mixed Use Corridors

#### Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial
- Office or service commercial
- Hospitality:
  - Restaurant
  - Accommodation
- Residential:
  - Adjacent (horizontal)
  - Diverse type and ownership

#### General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Well-defined edges

#### General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges
- Transition to adjacent housing



- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area in which it is located. Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*
- *Buildings should face and be close to the street, with off-street parking placed behind and/or to the side of buildings.*
- *Development should be planned and designed to maximize street frontage of buildings and minimize street frontage of parking lots: parking lots fronting streets should not be wider than half of the frontage of the associated building(s).*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the corridor so that buildings frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation along the street and building fronts rather than solely across parking lots and driveways.*
- *When possible, direct arterial street access should be limited through use of parallel road systems and by limiting the number of access points.*

## Large Commercial Centers

These are large centers, typically dominated by citywide retail and service uses. Primary vehicular access should be directed to local collector streets that intersect the arterial road network. Direct access to and from arterial roadways should be strictly limited to promote a safe street network and protect street capacity.

Large commercial centers serve citywide markets, and should present a positive image to the visitor and resident alike. While these focus areas rely primarily on customers arriving by car, pedestrian access and activity should be designed for and encouraged.

Typical uses include major retail businesses, grocery and other “big box” stores and support retail and services businesses, including gas and service stations, restaurants and car dealerships. These should be organized into focus areas having a clear focal point rather than extended along arterial corridors.

- *There should be buildings close to the street, with off-street parking behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area within which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in scale, height and configuration.*

### Large Commercial Centers

#### Typical Appropriate Uses

- Retail commercial:
- Largest shopping centers
- Wide variety of goods
- Serve regional trade area
- Service commercial:
  - Regional services
  - Auto services and dealerships
- Hospitality:
  - Restaurant
  - Accommodation
- Residential adjacent
- Institutional/Civic
- Recreational

#### General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Intensive mixed use
- Civic space(s)
- Pedestrian oriented (overall)
- Pedestrian accessibility
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edge

#### General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Density decreases to edges

- *For human scale, larger buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.*
- *Building heights should not exceed two stories.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the site. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the focus area and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

## Employment Support Centers

These are large employment areas, usually dominated by office, technology, light and medium industrial activities and other job-generating land uses, but nevertheless containing relatively few retail and service uses except those concentrated near major gateways, decision points and other strategic locations.

Each of these employment support centers should convey the image of the community as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. Imparting a strong sense of community to these focus areas especially for those who work or live near them should strengthen this image. Maintaining good physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the community, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation, can also assist in building this image.

### Employment Support Centers

#### Typical Appropriate Uses

- Light industrial
- Warehouse and distribution
- Wholesale commercial
- Retail commercial—limited
- Support office and services

#### General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Compact, dense core
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

#### General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Landscape buffers at edges

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the focus area and of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
- *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures located close by. Parking, loading or service functions should not be located at an intersection.*
- *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function.*
- *Buildings should face the street, with off-street parking located behind and/or beside buildings.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the site. Buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the employment support center and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

## Institutional Support Centers

These focus areas are dominated by major government, educational, medical and civic uses that often contain relatively few other uses except those that may be accessory to the primary uses.

Each of these focus areas should convey the image of the community as an accessible, desirable community in which to live, work and invest. This image should be strengthened by a strong sense of community relationship, especially for those people who work or live near them. It is also important to maintain physical accessibility between these areas and the rest of the community, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.

- *Each building should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the focus area and of the area in which it is located.*
  - *Adjacent buildings should relate in similar scale, height and configuration.*
  - *For human scale, larger buildings should be divided into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically.*
  - *An appropriate transition should be made between the focus area and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*
  - *At street intersections, place the main building right up next to the corner. Parking, loading or service should not be located at an intersection.*
  - *Street intersections are important, and deserve taller structures close by.*
  - *To maximize the street frontage of buildings and minimize the street frontage of parking lots, buildings should be sited so that the long side fronts the street.*
  - *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function, to complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
  - *Off-street parking should be placed behind and/or beside buildings.*
  - *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the focus area. The buildings should frame and reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.*
  - *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings.*
- Institutional Support Centers**

Typical Appropriate Uses

  - Governmental buildings
  - High Schools
  - Colleges
  - Civic Centers
  - Support services

General Development Principles

  - Positive sense of place
  - Visual coherence
  - Compact, dense core
  - Pedestrian accessible
  - Internal vehicular circulation
  - Intense center of activity
  - Well-defined edges

General Design Guidelines

  - Street trees
  - Landscape buffers at edges

## Community / Recreational Centers

It is especially important for major recreation centers to help convey an image of the West Tuscaloosa Community as an accessible, desirable place in which to live, work and invest. Imparting a strong sense of community to these focus areas especially for those who live near them should strengthen this image. Maintaining good physical accessibility between these centers and the rest of the community, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation, can also assist in building this image.

- *A citywide park, recreation or community focus area should be designed to form part of a larger physical composition of the area in which it is located.*
- *Adjacent buildings and structures should relate in scale, height and configuration.*
- *For human scale, larger structures should be broken down into separate volumes, horizontally and vertically as appropriate.*
- *Streets should be designed with street trees in a manner appropriate to their function. Trees should complement adjacent buildings and shade the sidewalks.*
- *Parking lots should be planned and designed with primary access and circulation traffic located toward the outside edge rather than the edge closest to the buildings or sports fields.*
- *Pedestrian circulation should be an integral part of the focus area. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through parking lots and across driveways and traffic to reach their destinations.*
- *An appropriate transition should be made between the park or recreation focus area and adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

#### **Community/Recreation Centers**

##### Typical Appropriate Uses

- Parks
- Swimming Pools
- Recreation Centers
- Sports Fields

##### General Development Principles

- Positive sense of place
- Visual coherence
- Pedestrian accessible
- Internal vehicular circulation
- Intense center of activity
- Well-defined edges

##### General Design Guidelines

- Street trees
- Overall landscape concept
- Transition to adjacent housing

## NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhoods, together with citywide open space and transportation systems, and the various development focus areas, form the majority of the West Tuscaloosa Community. Several types of corridors—they include local streets, trails and greenways—should interconnect these neighborhoods. Across the community, a broad range of housing types and price levels should bring together a diversity of people into daily interaction with one another, strengthening the personal and civic bonds that are essential to this community.

Good neighborhoods place an emphasis on community, livability, appearance, diversity, transportation opportunities, convenience and safety for all residents. To achieve this requires investments that are typically missing from most conventional subdivisions as they have been developed over the past few decades. The following are several principles intended to guide planning and design for all neighborhoods.

### *Preserve and enhance the communitywide open space system*

Neighborhoods should be carefully planned and organized in relation to the community's Green Infrastructure. Neighborhoods should be located in appropriate areas, sensitively sited in relation to or strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources. Conservation subdivision techniques, through which a neighborhood is designed to conserve its natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage, streets and utilities, can add to a healthy, appealing community. Such techniques may be used to maintain allowed gross densities without negatively affecting the natural environment, which should be an important ingredient of neighborhoods.

*Design each neighborhood appropriate to its context*

The scale and density of a neighborhood should reflect its location in the community. More dense development should be focused toward commercial focus areas and corridors, if nearby. Less-intense neighborhoods should be the rule away from such focus areas.

A neighborhood focal point of a type and size appropriate to the needs of residents should be included to add a sense of place to the neighborhood—for example, a park or usable community facility or open space. The focal point should be pedestrian oriented and provide for easy vehicular access, but there should also be places for neighbors to venture out into the public realm without their vehicles. Places for children to play safely should be a staple item of all neighborhoods, because open spaces add to the value of the property and help to create a more livable community. Each neighborhood should have one special gathering place, such as a neighborhood green, near its center.

*Design the neighborhood with walkable, interconnected streets*

Neighborhood planning and design should accommodate the access needs of motorists while also providing a convenient and safe environment for pedestrians. Sidewalks should provide the framework for the pedestrian system insofar as possible. The pedestrian network can be greatly improved and walking distance and infrastructure costs substantially reduced through the use of mid-block connections and cul-de-sac linkages, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems. Creating interconnected neighborhood streets and providing alternate routes will help to diffuse automobile traffic, thus lowering traffic volumes on many city streets.

*Design streets appropriate to the scale and character of the neighborhood*

Neighborhood streets should feature driving surfaces of appropriate width, at the same time providing ample sidewalks, street trees and houses that offer front porches. Neighborhood streets should be “calm” environments in which drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate. Sidewalk investment is modest in comparison to long-term value. When neighborhoods include street trees, sidewalks and front porches, they become a more welcoming place for residents and visitors, and add significant value to the whole community.



## V. THE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LAND

The functional organization of the community has been carefully considered throughout the planning process. The major land use recommendations and the key locations throughout the community that are planned for major investment result from analysis of environmental, physical and economic conditions, combined with the vision for the community and the principles illustrated in the Strategic Development Concept and outlined in the Major Development Components of Chapter IV.

The Future Land Use map illustrates how different parts of the community should function and relate to one another—in other words, the overall physical structure of the community. The map portrays a pattern of various development focus areas by type, their interrelations with each other and with the community's neighborhoods. These focus areas and the interconnections between them are critical to integrating the community's land use, transportation, community facilities and major infrastructure. Building on this structure, Tuscaloosa intends for the West Tuscaloosa Community to grow and develop as a community where public life is encouraged and quality urban design is maintained.

### MAJOR DEVELOPMENT THEMES

The community has recast its visions and a wide range of community values expressed during the Town Meeting and planning work sessions into a Future Land Use map to guide the growth, development and conservation of the community. That map projects an arrangement of land uses, accounting for the ways in which land is presently used, the essential pattern of the community's Green Infrastructure, and the essential functions of the community expressed in Chapter IV.

The map shows areas that may be generally suited to development and where sensitive environmental features may limit development capability. The land use categories indicated on the map *should not be seen as zoning districts*, but rather as general guidelines indicating desirable land use patterns for the community. The map is intended to serve several related functions:

- *Avoid and resolve land use conflicts*
- *Identify and sustain desirable land use patterns*
- *Forecast infrastructure needs*
- *Provide a foundation for zoning*

It is important to consider how the community's various development focus areas should be planned and designed in relation to the community's *neighborhoods*—where people live and come together away from work and commerce to form a community with one another. The plan is based on the community's own evaluation of its assets and opportunities. It is organized into five major policy themes to recognize and capitalize on those assets and opportunities for the community at large.

### *I. Protect West Tuscaloosa's Green Infrastructure*

Tuscaloosa intends to protect, preserve and enhance important and fragile ecosystems within developed portions of the community. It will strive to use its natural and open lands for parks and for passive and active recreation.

### *II. Build a Community of Neighborhoods*

Tuscaloosa intends that West Tuscaloosa should grow by replicating the best characteristics of the community's neighborhoods in selected locations. The city envisions population growth moving to neighborhoods that focus upon and complement the community's Green Infrastructure and that reflect the human scale and pedestrian orientation of the community. Generally, this requires the city:

- *Organize residential development into true neighborhoods.*
- *Disperse civic, educational, recreational and commercial functions in strategic locations around the community.*
- *Focus commerce into concentrated, highly accessible development focus areas served by arterial streets.*
- *Focus industry, office uses and recreational and institutional support services into development focus areas served by arterial and collector streets.*

### *III. Maintain and Enhance Community Character*

Tuscaloosa intends that the community conserve its special qualities, including its Green Infrastructure, historic buildings, pedestrian scale, and the best of its existing streets and parks and recreation areas. Maintaining and enhancing the physical qualities of the community is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of the plan.

### *IV. Expand Transportation and Accessibility Opportunities*

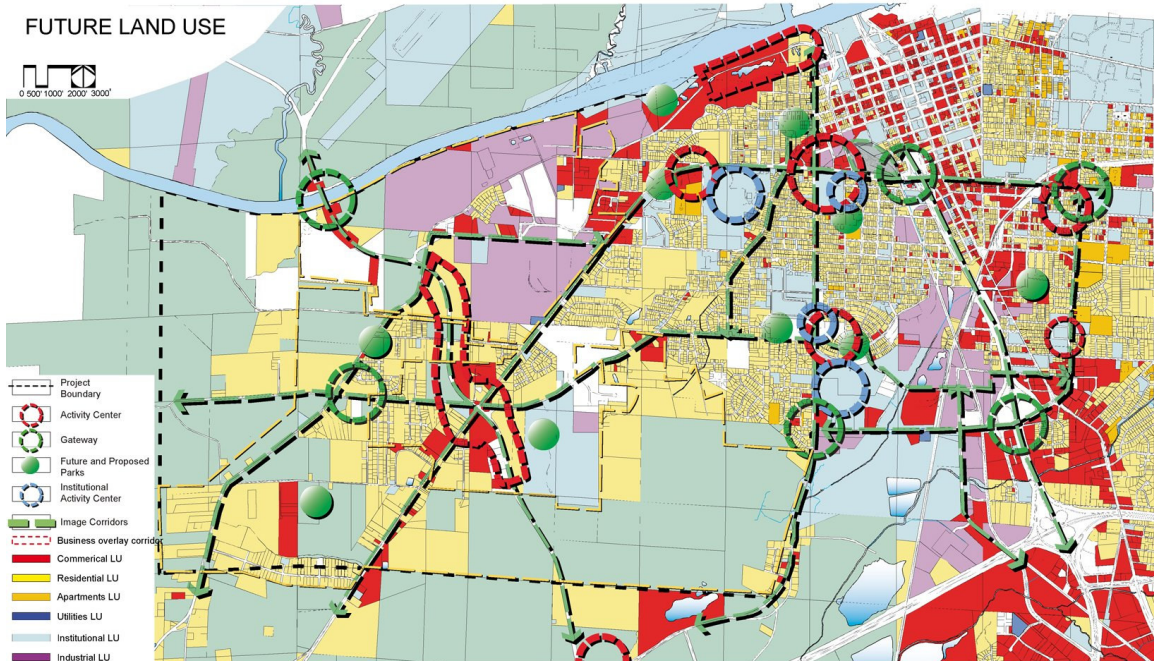
Tuscaloosa intends to reduce the dominance of the automobile in development decisions and reduce the impacts of automobiles on the West Tuscaloosa environment by encouraging development that will improve accessibility options for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Tuscaloosa will place great emphasis on improving its pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the community.

### *V. Protect and Reinvest in the Community*

Tuscaloosa intends to reinvest in West Tuscaloosa neighborhoods and the portions of the community's development focus areas and arterial corridors that are not up to the standards of the community.

These themes outline the rational framework that was used to convert the Strategic Development Concept into the community's Future Land Use map to allocate public and private resources for development equitably and in a manner through which cost effectiveness of city services may be achieved.





The future development pattern of the community has been organized in support of the Strategic Development Concept with appropriate recognition given to the community's Green Infrastructure, its street and utility infrastructure and major existing uses of land. The various types of commercial, employment, civic, institutional and recreational development focus areas should serve as magnets for activity and development. These, in turn, are intended to support the community and its residential neighborhoods, and to positively affect environmental quality and the transportation network.

It should be noted that designation of land uses on the Future Land Use map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any particular action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document and its implementing regulations. Site considerations relating to topography, geology, soils or hydrology will be of major importance when locating any particular new commercial focus area and planning and designing its uses and density. These realities, plus attitudes toward development on the part of public officials, other agencies, area residents, property owners and developers will play a large part in determining appropriate development location and design. Similarly, the presence of adequate streets as well as schools, parks and other community facilities, including water and sewer systems, should be assured before making any significant development proposals or decisions.

## THE USES OF LAND

The following descriptions of the designations shown on the Future Land Use map proceed generally from least to most intensive uses and functions, beginning with parks and protected areas, proceeding through various types and densities of residential uses. These are followed by commercial, office and other employment uses, and are rounded out by civic and institutional uses. Development focus areas and neighborhoods are to be planned and designed in accord with policy and characteristics as presented throughout this plan document.

## *Parks, Recreation and Protected Areas*

The city intends for public landholdings to be increased to provide more of the following:

*Greenways* to provide opportunities for walking and bicycling, act as wildlife corridors, development buffers, and storm water recharge areas and to provide links in the chain of the city's public park system. Ideally, they should eventually include all significant streams and appropriate portions of their floodplains. The use of greenways for multi-purpose trails should avoid redundancy with sidewalks and bikeways, but should strive to interconnect public parks and open space areas.

*Community Parks* to serve a range of both passive and active recreation needs appropriate to their location and context. They may provide a mixture of activities and uses such as active sports fields; play areas, trails, informal practice fields, picnic areas, outdoor classrooms and gathering places such as a community center. They should be carefully integrated into the natural environment, ideally with a significant portion of the land area held in a natural, tree-covered state. Park facilities and buildings should foster a positive community image, and sense of pride, which should be evident in the use of local materials and respect for local context.

*Neighborhood Parks* to provide relatively small residential areas with opportunities for appropriate levels and types of both active and passive recreation. Neighborhood parks provide a place for informal community gatherings and neighborhood events, and may include such features as shaded paths, playground structures and open space for active, unstructured play.

## *Residential*

Residential uses come in many sizes, shapes, types and densities. They are noted on the Future Land Use map according to relative gross density—the relation of numbers of dwelling units to property devoted to those uses.

Very low-density residential uses are planned for several parts of the community, especially those characterized by relatively steep slopes and those adjacent to surface water resources and their associated floodplains. This development type should take careful account of the various components of the community's Green Infrastructure, and should be subject to development requirements that may dictate the use of special techniques, which may include conservation subdivisions, large lots and low overall impervious surface ratios.

Low-density residential uses are mostly larger single-family detached housing that currently exist and are planned for further development, located primarily around the perimeter of the community, taking appropriate account of the various components of the community's Green Infrastructure.

Medium-density residential uses are mostly smaller single-family detached and attached housing presently located mostly in and near the older parts of the community. Most future medium-density residential uses are intended to be located relatively near the larger commercial, institutional and employment development focus areas and in close-in locations.

## *Commercial and Office*

This is a broad category of business uses that typically includes retail, office, restaurant, hospitality and accommodations, either separately or as part of a mixed-use focus area.

### *Industrial*

Industrial uses are freestanding (typically larger or older facilities). These are large employment centers, dominated by office, technology, distribution, industrial and other job-generating land uses but containing relatively few retail and service uses except those concentrated at major gateways to the community and other strategic locations, including significant decision points along arterials.

### *Institutional*

Civic and institutional uses are a traditional land use category typically including institutional, academic, governmental and community service uses and lands. More recently, the trend toward larger places of worship and major medical centers (as opposed to older, freestanding hospitals) has expanded the traditional definition to include a highly related mix of uses.

### *Mixed Use*

This is a development type in which various primary uses—for example, Office, Institutional, Retail and Residential—may be combined (horizontally and/or vertically) in the same building or within separate buildings on the same site or nearby sites, especially in major development focus areas as outlined in the previous chapter.

This sort of mixing has in the past occurred mostly in downtowns and adjacent to college campuses. However, the more recent trend is to carefully mix together various appropriate land uses to reduce the need for motor vehicle trips and create more walkable communities. These may include community commercial, institutional support and some employment support development focus areas.

This land use type tends to: increase the types of spaces available for both living and working; encourage a mix of compatible uses and promote the upgrading of existing developed areas with buildings designed to provide a high quality pedestrian-oriented street environment.

## GATEWAYS AND CORRIDORS

The West Tuscaloosa Community has major entries from most every direction. These gateways and the corridors they introduce to the visitor form a major part of the image of the community and should be treated as scarce assets to be protected and preserved. Community identity is strengthened by good gateways, which help establish strong edges, foster a sense of pride of place and sense of arrival. By taking appropriate care with development along these corridors and adjacent to its major gateways, the city can help to further the community's marketability by helping to attract visitors, residents and investors.

The community's major streets are the gateways to its development focus areas and neighborhoods, and consequently they tend to convey a lasting image to residents, business and industry, and passersby. They should be safe, comfortable, shaded, calm, connected and interesting. This is not simply a matter of aesthetics; the community's economy is tightly linked to its physical character, and everyone must continually strive to enhance West Tuscaloosa's image in order for it to remain competitive.

### *Gateway and Corridor Policies*

Each gateway to the community, its neighborhoods and development focus areas should reflect the particular characteristics of its setting and provide a welcoming introduction to West Tuscaloosa. Development planning and design along important corridors and adjacent to these gateways should incorporate the following strategies to assure that West Tuscaloosa will offer a positive image by providing easily recognizable transitions from outside to inside the community:

- *Prepare and implement an Access Management Plan and Program for all of the community's major entrance corridors in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Transportation.*
- *Promote and maintain commercial development that enhances the gateway function.*
- *Use lighting and tree plantings at major gateways and along corridors to welcome travelers and enhance the commercial uses of the corridor.*
- *Develop attractive and well-located signage, lighting and landscaping that differentiates each gateway from other parts of the corridor it introduces.*
- *Reinforce the concept of "place" with strong, well-designed development that is visible from the road corridor.*
- *Develop a cohesive and coordinated land use pattern for each of the community's major entrance corridors and gateways.*
- *Create a sense of enclosure through the use of build-to lines rather than setbacks along important corridors.*
- *Develop commercial concentrations at major intersections, where they can capitalize on visibility and access from the corridor.*
- *Direct commercial development to important intersections and discourage scattered or strip patterns of commercial development.*
- *Direct most parking to locations out of view of the major corridors to preserve or enhance the attractive landscape qualities of the corridor.*

### TRAFFIC AND ROADWAYS

The use of land, and physical access to that land, are both critical to the well-being of the West Tuscaloosa Community, its residents and the quality of life. The community's streets serve two essential purposes: access to adjacent property and mobility between destinations. Streets that attempt to serve both functions equally are those that tend to fail to live up to expectations. The challenge is to provide a street network that serves and supports planned development patterns, balances access and mobility, moves vehicles efficiently and lends a sense of community to neighborhoods.

Local traffic is expected to increase significantly over time in response to development consistent with the pattern of the community's development focus areas and residential development shown on the Future Land Use map. To facilitate proper planning and decision-making, the community's streets will require limited upgrading based on their relative importance and function within the transportation network.

### *Community Mobility Policies*

Mobility is in part a function of providing options for movement through the community, and that requires interconnection of most streets. Gaps in the existing local street network require individuals to increase the length of their trip and drive through congested areas as they move even short distances through the community.

An appropriately interconnected street network is one in which every street segment connects to at least two other street segments. Thus, cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets should be used only in areas where environmental constraints impede connections to other streets. Moreover, internal vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections should be required within both existing and new development areas and between adjacent land uses.

Developers should plan for and effectively address the need for internal connections (roads, pathways, open space, etc.) between adjacent land uses, including residential subdivisions and commercial developments, to provide both primary and secondary means of emergency access.

Mobility planning and design should incorporate the following strategies for planning, designing, constructing and retrofitting streets throughout the community:

- *Maintain an aesthetically pleasing street network that helps frame and define the community while meeting the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.*
- *Improve the image of the community's major vehicular corridors by taking charge of them all, regardless of the state of or pressure for development.*
- *Landscape the edges and medians of major corridors to frame development and create a more positive image for the entire city by adding color, shade and visual interest.*
- *Consolidate existing driveways along arterials and collectors and require access for new development be made from side streets.*
- *Discourage non-residential traffic from travel on primarily residential streets.*
- *Treat residential streets as both public ways and neighborhood amenities.*
- *Seek landscaped medians and appropriate access management along key arterials and collectors for purposes of roadway safety and capacity.*
- *Prepare a street network plan that allows direct connections to local destinations without diverting extra traffic onto the arterial system, to include policies for new subdivisions and a program to retrofit the existing system as needed.*
- *Require street system connections between new and existing developments to promote an interconnected roadway system throughout the community and discourage use of cul-de-sacs.*
- *Require streets be planted with street trees appropriate to their function.*

### *Community Accessibility Policies*

To achieve the community's desired levels of accessibility and mobility, given local traffic increases over the past decade and in a manner supportive of the Future Land Use map, will require modification to the community's roadway accessibility. Implementation of access management standards on state routes will require cooperative preparation and implementation of an access management plan with the Alabama Department of Transportation.

An essential way to maintain safe and reliable access and street capacity is to manage access to side streets and driveways to and from the parcels that line arterials and major collectors. Approached properly, an access management program can enhance property values while safeguarding past and future public investments in roadway infrastructure. Accessibility and access management planning and design should incorporate the following strategies for retrofitting and constructing arterial and major collector streets:

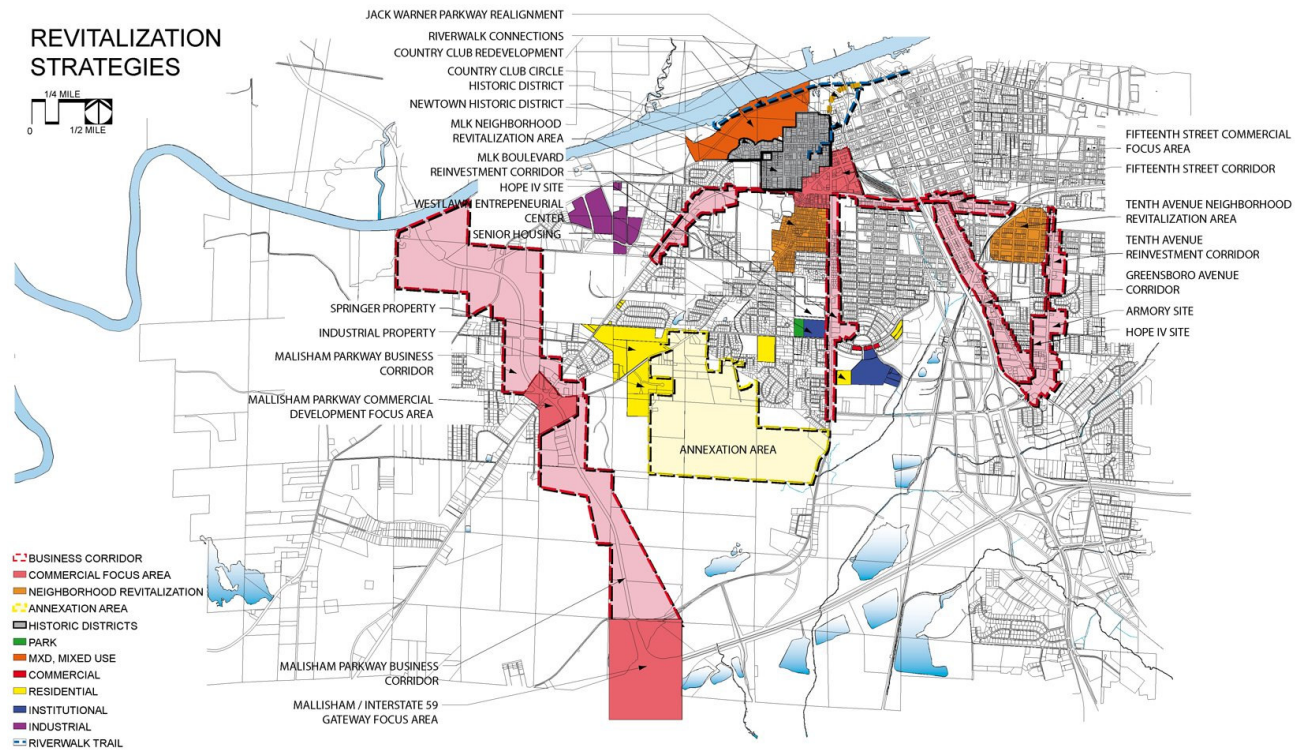
- *Separate conflict points – distance between major intersections and driveways should be regulated. As a general rule, driveways should not be located within the area of influence of intersections.*
- *Restrict turning movements at unsignalized driveways and intersections – the use of full directional unsignalized streets and driveways should be limited. Full movement intersections should serve multiple developments through joint use driveways or cross access easements.*
- *Establish design standards – design standards that address access spacing, the length of turn lanes and tapers and driveway dimensions should be developed for application throughout the community on arterials and major collectors.*
- *Traffic signal spacing – signals should only be installed when appropriate studies indicate their spacing and interconnection can be accomplished without significant impacts on corridor capacity.*
- *Turn lanes – left and right turn lanes should be required for all public streets and major access points to development focus areas.*
- *Shared driveways/inter-parcel access – joint use driveways should be required to reduce the proliferation of driveways and to preserve the capacity of the corridor.*
- *Pedestrian/bicycle planning – specific needs of pedestrian and bicyclist movements should be addressed. Traffic signals should be designed and timed to accommodate pedestrians in areas of significant activity.*

## VI. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The Specific Plan for the West Tuscaloosa Community is to be implemented through a comprehensive strategy that combines direct public and private investment, with supporting actions of the City Council, Planning Commission and other boards and commissions. Plan recommendations have been translated into an action agenda that ranges from direct action to incentives and inducements that will involve revision and continued administration and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, city budgeting and capital improvement programming, empowerment of community and neighborhood organizations and volunteers, and official decisions regarding annexation. All of these tools will continue to be used together to revitalize the West Tuscaloosa Community.

### REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

A significant portion of the plan implementation system will involve capital improvements—direct modifications of the physical environment—as proposed in the preceding chapter. This will require a commitment of both public and private capital for reinvestment in the quality of life in the West Tuscaloosa Community. Also as noted earlier, much of the commitment to plan implementation will require more than the usual range of capital improvements normally recommended in a public plan. In fact, most of the actions will require cooperation and coordination among the public and private sectors, in combination with a generous amount of goodwill and the not-so-simple art of persuasion.



Tuscaloosa is a municipal corporation, formed under powers granted by the State of Alabama. The city uses its grant of the police power to adopt and enforce growth and development regulations. The city uses its power to tax and to plan for and implement a budgeting system that includes capital investments for infrastructure facilities and services to help shape growth and development. The city has from time to time used the power of

eminent domain (the power to force sale of private property for valid public use) sparingly to enable various infrastructure investments and redevelopment actions in support of public policy and plans. These various powers will be marshaled into the following five strategies to deal with various parts of the West Tuscaloosa Community:

### *Eastern Strategy*

1. Fifteenth Street / MLK Boulevard Commercial Development Focus Area  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Business District zoning TBD*  
*Focus Area Overlay District*
  - a. *Sign regulations*
  - b. *Landscape regulations*
2. Fifteenth Street Mixed Use Corridor Focus Area  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Corridor Overlay District*
  - a. *Frontage property depth both sides*
  - b. *Access management plan and program*
  - c. *Sign regulations*
  - d. *Landscape regulations*
3. Tenth Avenue Reinvestment Corridor  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Armory Site Redevelopment for institutional uses*  
*Corridor Overlay District*
  - a. *Frontage property depth both sides*
  - b. *Access management plan and program*
  - c. *Sign regulations*
  - d. *Landscape regulations*
4. Greensboro Avenue Mixed Use Redevelopment Corridor  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Corridor Overlay District*
  - a. *Frontage property depth east side; Interstate 359 on west side*
  - b. *Access management plan and program*
  - c. *Sign regulations*
  - d. *Landscape regulations*
5. Tenth Avenue / Fifteenth Street Neighborhood Revitalization Area  
*Reinvestment planning and design for a commercial focus backed by housing*

### *Northern Strategy*

1. Riverwalk connection between Capitol Park and West End Park (Phase 5)
2. Country Club mixed use / mixed density redevelopment  
*Planned development district—RD District*  
*Riverwalk extension to Corps of Engineers lock park*
3. Jack Warner Parkway realignment and connection
4. Country Club Circle Historic District
5. Newtown Historic District potential  
*CDBG and Home Ownership Programs*



### *Western Strategy*

1. Mallisham Parkway Business Corridor  
*Annexation as needed to complete the corridor*  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Light Industrial District zoning TBD*  
*Corridor Overlay District*
  - a. *Minimum 500' depth both sides*
  - b. *Access management plan and program*
  - c. *Sign regulations*
  - d. *Landscape regulations*
2. Mallisham Parkway / Foster's Ferry Road Commercial Development Focus Area  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Business and Light Industrial District zoning TBD*  
*Focus Area Overlay District*
  - a. *Sign regulations*
  - b. *Landscape regulations*
3. Interstate 59 / Mallisham Parkway Gateway Development Focus Area  
*Annexation as needed to control development*  
*Business Investment District incentive package*  
*Business District zoning TBD*  
*Focus Area Overlay District*
  - a. *Access management plan and program*
  - b. *Sign regulations*
  - c. *Landscape regulations*
  - d. *Wetlands impact review*

### *Central Area Strategy*

1. MLK Boulevard Reinvestment Corridor  
*Hope VI Development*  
*Westlawn site redevelopment for Entrepreneurial Center and park*  
*Senior Housing development*  
*Corridor Overlay District*
  - a. *Frontage property depth both sides, plus Barr property*
  - b. *Access management plan and program*
  - c. *Sign regulations*
  - d. *Landscape regulations*
2. MLK Neighborhood Revitalization Area  
*Reinvestment planning and design*

### *Southern Strategy*

1. Springer property  
*Residential development*
2. Industrial park property adjacent to Foster Ferry Road  
*Rezoning for residential development*
3. Property east / northeast of Palmore Park  
*Annexation as needed for residential development*

## 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 decision points along image corridors, 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 that may provide incentives for private investments that might otherwise happen much later—or not at all—without some public participation. The following provide several examples:

- *Business investment districts*
- *Pedestrian-scale street lighting*
- *Right-of-way upgrades*
- *Roadway improvements*
- *Landscape improvements*
- *Hope VI redevelopments*
- *Public facility redevelopment*
- *Neighborhood vest pocket parks*
- *Recreation facilities/activities*
- *Shared parking, e.g., with churches*

## DEVELOPMENT REGULATION

Several of the key elements of the city's development management system—such as the zoning ordinance and map, subdivision regulations, sign regulations and landscape regulations, among others—are based on the police power. Together, the elements of this system address land use, site planning, the size and location of buildings and other structures, aesthetics and signage. Each of these regulations is framed to account for various aspects of the so-called “valid public purposes” of the municipality and the appropriate statutory enabling authority in each case. Each must also respect the constitutional principles of due process of law, non-discrimination in their application, profitable use of land, freedom of speech, and the special concerns associated with balancing individual costs against anticipated public benefits.

### Zoning Ordinance and Map Considerations

Tuscaloosa has adopted and enforces a zoning ordinance to regulate development within districts as shown on the city's zoning map. This is one regulatory tool among several that may 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 Specific Plan and its Future Land Use Map should not be confused with the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. As indicated in the table on the next page, this plan is a *guide* to public and private investment in land development and infrastructure. In contrast, the *zoning ordinance* is a regulatory tool that may be used by the city to influence and direct development of the community in ways that reflect the direction and desired form called for in the Specific Plan. The table on the following page highlights these differences.

Specific Plan	Zoning Ordinance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Provides general policy guidance</i></li> <li>○ <i>Describes conditions desired in the long term – not necessarily existing or recommended use(s)</i></li> <li>○ <i>Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups</i></li> <li>○ <i>Intentionally flexible to allow responses to changing conditions</i></li> <li>○ <i>General land use categories</i></li> <li>○ <i>General land use locations</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Provides specific regulations</i></li> <li>○ <i>Describes what is and what is not presently allowed</i></li> <li>○ <i>Deals with development issues under city control</i></li> <li>○ <i>Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change</i></li> <li>○ <i>Zoning districts</i></li> <li>○ <i>Parcel-specific designations</i></li> </ul>

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.

As a part of the plan implementation system, Tuscaloosa intends to revise the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map to reflect and incorporate the land development policy of this plan as appropriate. As a start, the ordinance should be amended to specifically link the zoning ordinance to the plan, with the intention that all development be compatible with uses and development criteria specified in the plan.

Corridor overlay districts, including signage and landscape planting standards, are needed to guide the improvement of each of the arterials noted as Business Corridors on the Revitalization Strategies map and as Image Corridors in the Strategic Development Concept.

Reinvestment and intensification requirements and incentives should be devised for each of the existing commercial corridors and other development focus areas as noted on the Future Land Use map. These may include:

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

There should be guidelines in the zoning ordinance regarding the appropriate location of boundaries between districts of differing uses or significant densities. These should note the most desirable arrangement would be back-to-back, account for parcels placed side-by-side (with perhaps requirements for additional width to allow buffering; and allow designation of districts having significant differences of use, height or density in across a street from one another only under special conditions.

## Development Review Criteria

Development criteria for focus areas and neighborhoods—plus some general principles to protect the city's watershed, may be added to the development management system during the next amendment process for the city's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations. Sample criteria are provided in the following sections

### *Development Focus Areas*

To provide leverage toward timely completion and application of the concepts of this Specific Plan to development focus areas as defined in this plan, approval of any proposed change in land use or density in these areas should require completion and approval of a master development plan as defined in the Zoning Ordinance. During the review and approval process, the Planning Commission should use the policies of this plan for the subject area as an overall guide. Further, the commission should employ a checklist such as the following during the development review process for all development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval.

- *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.*
- *Building façades shall provide a visually interesting environment and avoid uniform styles.*
- *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.*
- *A building's ground floor facing a collector or arterial street shall contain a minimum of 50% 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.*
- *All streets shall be designed to promote traffic movement conducive to pedestrian safety and to provide direct routes between nearby destinations as called for in the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *Parking lots shall be designed to provide through pedestrian paths, clearly identifiable by changes in material or elevation, from street to building.*
- *Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than twelve feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians.*
- *Street trees shall be planted as specified by the city.*
- *In non-residential areas at least ten percent 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.*
- *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.*
- *Surface parking lots containing fifty or more spaces shall be divided into smaller areas separated by landscaped areas at least ten feet wide and by a building or a group of buildings.*

- *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 and Residential Development*

To provide leverage toward the development of neighborhoods in West Tuscaloosa, no new medium- or high-density residential development, or any residential development that requires site plan review, should be permitted in the absence of an adopted master development plan as defined in the Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Commission should use the policies of this plan for the subject area as an overall guide. Further, the commission should employ a checklist such as the following during the development review process for all residential development requiring a master development plan or site plan approval.

- *Neighborhoods shall be located sensitively in or strategically placed away from the most valuable or threatened natural resources*
- *Neighborhoods shall be planned and organized carefully in relation to the natural environment*
- *The citywide open space system shall serve as part of the neighborhood edge*
- *Neighborhoods shall be designed to conserve natural systems and thereby require less capital investment for earthwork, clearing and drainage*
- *The neighborhood shall be planned and designed in a manner appropriate to its context—to reflect its location in the community*
- *Dense development shall be located toward development focus areas and corridors; less-intense development shall be located away from such areas*
- *There shall be included in each neighborhood a legible, compact center appropriate to the needs of the residents—for example, a park or usable community open space*
- *The neighborhood center shall be pedestrian oriented with easy vehicular and pedestrian access from within the neighborhood*
- *Neighborhoods shall be planned and designed to locate higher density housing to take advantage of neighborhood center amenities*
- *The neighborhood shall be designed and built with walkable, interconnected streets*
- *Neighborhoods shall accommodate the access needs of motorists while providing a convenient and safe environment for pedestrians*
- *Sidewalks shall be installed along all street frontages as needed for pedestrian mobility and safety appropriate to the location—at least one side of local streets and both sides of collector streets*
- *Blocks longer than 500 feet shall provide pedestrian cut-through paths*
- *Pedestrian-scale light fixtures no greater in height than twelve feet shall be provided along all areas accessible to pedestrians*
- *Street trees shall be planted as specified by the city.*
- *At least 15% of the total residential development shall be dedicated to accessible, usable, pedestrian-sensitive open space that includes appropriate focal points*

- *Neighborhood pedestrian accessibility shall be enhanced through use of cul-de-sac linkages, as well as trails within greenways or other open space systems*
- *Interconnected neighborhood streets shall be provided to assure alternate routes to every destination to diffuse automobile traffic*
- *Outdoor places shall be provided so that children to play safely away from their own homes*
- *Neighborhood street environments shall feature relatively narrow driving surfaces, ample sidewalks, street trees and front porches*
- *Neighborhood streets shall be planned and designed to provide a “calm” environment where drivers realize that driving fast or aggressively is inappropriate*
- *Buildings shall be sited close enough to streets to spatially define them as public spaces*

### *Green Infrastructure Area Development*

The city’s Green Infrastructure is critical to the health, safety and welfare of the West Tuscaloosa Community. In response, the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations, as appropriate, should be amended to require use of a Conservation Subdivision approach in or adjacent to any area defined as part of the city’s Green Infrastructure.

### *Watershed Conservation and Development*

As a final example in this series, the Planning Commission, using the policies of this Specific Plan as an overall guide to protecting watersheds as a part of the city’s Green Infrastructure, should prepare and use a checklist such as the following for use during the development review process for all development projects requiring a master development plan or site plan approval:

- *Favor citywide low gross density / focused medium net density conservation subdivision development to gain useful open space, recreation opportunity and watershed protection.*
- *Design and build residential streets at the minimum width necessary for their use.*
- *Minimize the use of cul-de-sacs and set their minimum required radius to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles.*
- *Allow use of vegetated open channels in the right-of-way of selected streets serving low-density development to convey and treat stormwater runoff.*
- *Keep impervious parking area to that actually required for the intended use to help make shared parking solutions attractive.*
- *Reduce overall imperviousness of parking lots by permitting pervious materials in spillover parking areas.*
- *Require property owner association management of community open space.*
- *Require use of naturally vegetated buffers, including floodplains, steep slopes and wetlands, and along streams.*
- *Limit clearing and grading of woodland and native vegetation to the minimum amount needed for building areas, access and fire protection.*
- *Manage community open space, street rights-of-way, parking lot islands, and other landscaped areas to promote maintenance of natural vegetation.*

- *Maintain all “blue line” streams at least at their current lengths.*
- *Prohibit new stormwater discharge of unmanaged stormwater into wetlands, aquifers and other critical water bodies.*

## ANNEXATION

West Tuscaloosa is well positioned to accommodate new residential growth and to support more commerce. Generally speaking, more households bring more dollars to be spent in the community. However, residential growth by itself comes at a cost to the city’s services and facilities. Residential land uses by themselves are usually a drain on municipal finances, for it typically costs more to provide services to a household than its owners typically pay in *ad valorem* taxes. In contrast, owners of commercial, industrial, farm, forest and open lands within municipalities typically pay more in local tax revenues than it costs local government to provide services to their properties. However, the critical tax for Alabama municipalities is retail sales tax, which shoulders the majority of municipal finances. Therefore, new residential growth should be balanced with commercial and industrial growth and preservation of farm and open space areas in accord with this plan.

### Annexation Concept

The Revitalization Strategies map earlier in this chapter indicates areas within which annexations will be given high priority during the planning period. 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 future, will be prime considerations.

Annexation decisions should take into account at least the following questions and criteria, in addition to all elements of this Specific Plan and the city’s Comprehensive Plan, when considering the appropriateness of any particular annexation.

- *Efficiency of providing services—will the annexation result in demand 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?*





## VII. CONCLUSION

This is a long-range plan, and change occurs in a more or less continuous manner. Neighborhoods, institutions, schools, parks and commercial and industrial centers and focus areas 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. Rather, this Specific Plan for the West Tuscaloosa Community is intended to strengthen, revitalize and optimize all aspects of life in this part of the city over the long term. As such, this plan must remain a living document, able to grow and change as local conditions change.

Plan implementation will take time and goodwill. Tuscaloosa must strive to get even more people interested and involved in setting and implementing the vision for West Tuscaloosa. City government must continue to gather other agencies, public and private, onto the same team. The city and the community must continue to prioritize and take direct action on various recommendations of this plan by committing to tax themselves and to spend those local tax dollars in support of plan implementation.

City officials must help shape the action of others with not just more regulation, but more *effective* regulation. The city must be willing to provide selected incentives to encourage others to take the lead in development activities that would further implementation of the plan’s policies. And finally, all community leaders should support city officials who strive to use every power they have under the law in concert with every public investment they make to support plan implementation.

This Specific Plan, as a constituent part of the Tuscaloosa Comprehensive Plan, is intended to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve West Tuscaloosa and the entire city. Only then can the community use it fully and creatively as they seek achievement of their comprehensive vision.



