



Woodlawn Community Revitalization Plan

City of Birmingham, Alabama

Draft: September 10, 2012

Introduction

This plan was prepared to provide guidance to the City of Birmingham and the various public and private agencies, individuals, and organizations committed to the revitalization of Woodlawn's historic business district and surrounding residential community. The plan was prepared with the assistance of a diverse group of stakeholders and is based on a thorough evaluation of community conditions and a consensus vision for the future of Woodlawn.

Woodlawn's revitalization will not be successful—the well-intended and highly positive impacts of individual efforts will not have a sustained impact on the community—without all partners working together toward a common goal and executing strategies that are related to and support one another. The betterment of the community must be approached from many avenues to have long-lasting effects, including public safety, housing, education and social services, employment opportunity, and economic development.

This plan is intended to fulfill that role—as a unifying, comprehensive guide for revitalization efforts both public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit.

Background

The Woodlawn neighborhood is named for the Wood family, who moved into the Jones Valley of eastern Jefferson County in 1824. The town of Rockville developed on the original 1200 acres owned by the family. In 1870 the community was renamed Wood Station. At that time the Alabama Great Southern Railroad built a rail line through the area. The small farming community developed along an unpaved county road that would later become Georgia Road.

The community established its first school—private Woodlawn Academy—in the 1870s. During the 1880s, the community grew and so did its rail line. After changing the community’s name to Woodlawn, its residents incorporated the town in 1891. Upon state approval of the incorporation, Woodlawn adopted its official seal—a circle within a circle—to signify a unity of community interests.

Woodlawn grew to 2,500 residents by 1899. During this period, the town installed sidewalks and built a public library, fire department, and its second City Hall building, which still stands today. Woodlawn was annexed into Birmingham in 1910. By then, its business district was blossoming and three elementary schools and two high schools were in operation. In 1926, the Wood family gave locals access to the bathhouse on their property—the site of today’s Willow Wood Park.

Woodlawn began to experience decline by the mid-1950s. Increases in crime were noted in the mid 1970s. Signs of blight emerged including unkempt vacant lots, health issues, dilapidated housing, and unsafe street conditions.

In the early 1970s Woodlawn’s 7000 residents were predominantly white. Almost half of the community’s homes were owner-occupied. By 1975, homeownership had dropped below 20 percent. Plans to revitalize the neighborhood were then discussed and actions were taken to spur reinvestment. In 1988 the city completed streetscape improvements for the business district along First Avenue North, parts of First Avenue South and a few connecting streets.

Past attempts to revitalize the business district, eliminate blight and improve housing conditions have had some successes but have not reached a sustainable level. In the late 1990s a group of public, non-profit and for-profit agencies and area volunteers took on a fairly successful housing initiative that resulted in the development of a detailed housing inventory and GIS database, preparation of a community master plan, renovation of nearly twenty homes, construction of a community garden, and home ownership counseling services. The YWCA, a major partner in that effort, continues to be active in improving housing in Woodlawn and has been an important partner in the development of this plan.



Woodlawn City Hall, erected 1908

“Woodlawn’s corporate entity did cease [in 1910], but her community identity grew stronger with the passage of years, and I do not know of any place in this country where the spirit of community cooperation is stronger.”

-quote from a 1947 radio speech lauding the civic-minded character of the community



New home under construction by Birmingham Affordable Rental Community on 2nd Court North

Planning Area

The planning area is located in the Woodlawn community of the City of Birmingham and includes all of the South Woodlawn neighborhood and portions of the Woodlawn neighborhood. The boundaries of the planning area are (see Figure 1 below):

- Interstate 59 (north)
- Interstate 20 and Brussels Avenue (east)
- Norfolk Southern Railroad (south)
- 47th Street North and Messer Airport Highway (west)

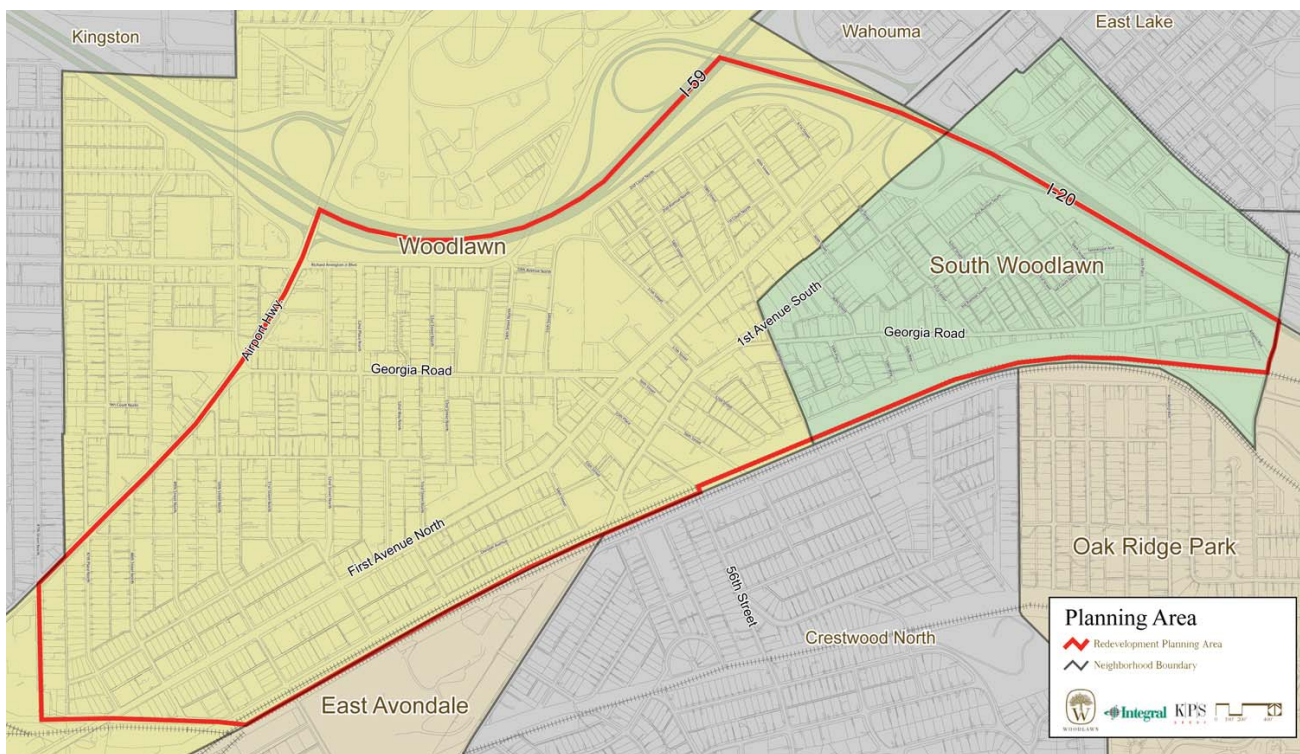


Figure 1: Planning Area

Process and Approach

In 2010 Woodlawn United was formed, a partnership including Main Street Birmingham, YWCA of Central Alabama, Cornerstone Schools, the Woodlawn Foundation, the Dream Center, Christ Health Center, the Woodlawn Community Association and other area stakeholders. Woodlawn United convened a series of meetings to discuss ways in which the partnership could support individual efforts to revitalize the community. It was determined that to sustain these efforts, the strategy would have to be coordinated and holistic. The community must address all of the major issues that contribute to disinvestment and population loss in the neighborhood—education, crime,

housing conditions, and economic opportunity. It was also determined that new investment in the community must help create “critical mass,” otherwise community problems would likely re-emerge.

Since then members of Woodlawn United have hosted several meetings with community residents, business representatives, educators and nonprofit groups to discuss housing, safety, business and education needs and community priorities. Based on this ongoing dialogue this plan was prepared to advance the efforts of Woodlawn United and the City of Birmingham to bring new life to the Woodlawn community.

Existing Conditions

Woodlawn developed as a streetcar suburb and much of that original development pattern remains in place today. There is a dense network of streets that provide relatively small, walkable blocks. The nucleus of the community is the historic commercial district along First Avenue North. Several community churches and historic Woodlawn High School are located in this area. The Norfolk Southern rail line separates the Woodlawn and South Woodlawn neighborhoods from the Crestwood North (originally Woodlawn Heights), East Avondale and Oak Ridge Park neighborhoods to the south.

The construction of Interstates 20 and 59 north and east of the Woodlawn community had a major impact on the area. Many residential lots were demolished or moved to make way for the interstate system. Today, part of the Woodlawn neighborhood lies north of the interstate, cut off from the rest of the community.

Over time housing that once fronted on the First Avenue North streetcar line, east and west of the central commercial district, has been redeveloped for a variety of commercial and institutional uses. Mostly single-family residential areas surround the commercial area that now spans the length of First Avenue North. Small apartment buildings and complexes emerged, some clustered along the east side of the original town center while others were built in the midst of single-family residential blocks. Due to an array of factors including housing age, crime, inadequate property management for rental properties, and economic conditions, many single and multifamily properties have deteriorated, families have left and homes have been vacated, some of which have been demolished. While a portion of residents stay in Woodlawn by choice, others have remained, oftentimes in substandard housing, because they cannot afford to move elsewhere.

The loss of population and decline in household incomes has had a significant impact on business investment. While there are a variety of businesses still operating in Woodlawn, few are retail businesses serving local residents.

Assets

- Historic business district
- Landmarks and Institutions
 - McDonald's
 - The Ice House
 - Willow Wood Recreation Center
 - Woodlawn High School, magnet school
 - Oliver Elementary School
 - Gibson Elementary School (closing, new Hayes k-8 opening)
 - Cornerstone School
 - Health Center
 - Dream Center
 - Library
 - Area churches
 - Woodrow Hall
- Accessibility (airport, interstate, US Hwy 11)
- Past streetscape improvements (sidewalks, signage, lighting, etc.)
- YWCA housing
- Well-defined edges
- Proximity to Crestwood North
- Traffic counts on First Avenue North (US Hwy 11)
- Historic housing on 59th Place (south of Georgia Road)



Figure 2: Assets

Issues

- Crime; perception of crime (particularly Georgia Road)
- Inadequate code enforcement
- Scattered vacant properties
- Deteriorated and vacant housing units
- Poor rental property management
- High rental occupancy, low home ownership
- Limited access to high quality early learning options
- Railroad crossings
- Street; sidewalk; lighting conditions (particularly in residential areas)
- Motels, prostitution
- Noise (airport, railroad, industry, interstates)
- Awkward intersection of street grids (traffic safety, wayfinding)
- Multifamily islands in single-family areas
- Zoning
- Drainage on First Avenue South
- Vacant and underutilized commercial properties
- Lack of restaurants and other retail desired by residents
- Transit

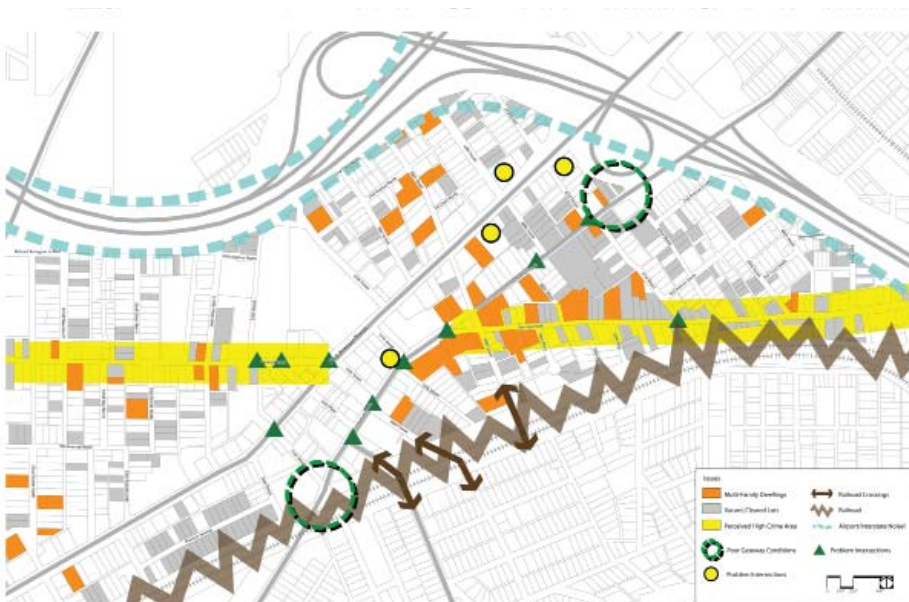


Figure 3: Issues

Opportunities

- Build on sense of place (historic business district) as a mixed-use hub
- Land banking for assembly/resubdivision/redevelopment
- Early learning center to serve Woodlawn area
- Partnerships with area churches and institutions
 - Grace Episcopal Church/Aletheia House
 - Birmingham Home Ownership Center
 - Neighborhood Housing Services
 - Jefferson County Community Education and Outreach
 - Jefferson County Child Development Council
- Improve gateway on First Avenue South at railroad overpass
- Better connect historic commercial area to Dream Center/Health Center
- Develop new mixed density housing to east, expand on YWCA efforts
- Sidewalk, lighting and landscape improvements
- Improve drainage on First Avenue South
- Grocer, other food store
- Places for families to gather; dining
- Neighborhood open spaces
- New business investment, job creation (service employment)
- Increased police visibility; substation to reduce crime/loitering
- Connectivity with Crestwood (physical, economic, psychological)



Figure 4: Opportunities

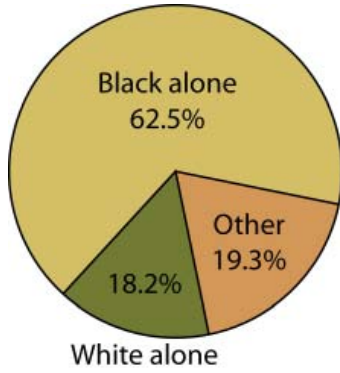
Plan Objectives

The Woodlawn Community Revitalization Plan is intended to support the achievement of the following objectives:

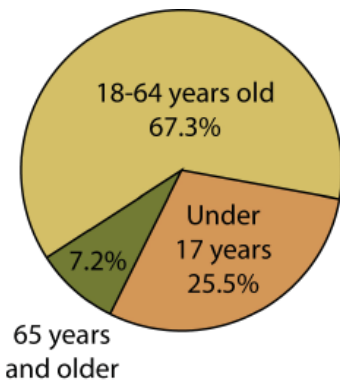
- To eliminate blighting and deteriorating conditions.
- To stabilize and improve development conditions so that private reinvestment may occur.
- To promote sound growth of the community, in the context of preserving community identity and long range land use goals.
- To promote the development of safe, well-designed and maintained affordable housing to provide for the housing needs of the community.
- To provide public improvements such as sidewalks, streets, utilities and lighting as deemed necessary to create a safe, attractive environment.
- To stimulate economic growth and development.
- To create a partnership between the public and private sector
- To create a “cradle-to-career” educational pipeline for area residents that includes public and private educational programs, schools and other facilities.
- To improve public safety through crime deterrence programs, elimination of blight, and physical improvements.

Socioeconomic and Housing Conditions

Data collected and evaluated regarding the Woodlawn study area's socioeconomic and housing conditions reinforces the character of the community reflected in its Assets, Issues, and Opportunities. These conditions echo the problems that have been and continue to be faced by many older urban neighborhoods in metropolitan cities throughout the nation. Socioeconomic and housing information for the Woodlawn community outlined below is based on data for Census Tract 3 (Jefferson County, Alabama) from the US Census 2000 and 2010 and the Census Bureau's Annual Population Estimates.



Racial Distribution, 2010 Census



Age Distribution, 2010 Census

- Woodlawn, like the City of Birmingham overall, is experiencing a continued decline in population. Between the 2000 US Census and 2010, Woodlawn is estimated to have lost over 1,100 residents or 29.3% of its 2000 population. Birmingham's population decreased by 12.6% in the same time frame. In contrast, the US population rose by 9.7% between 2000 and 2010.
- Woodlawn is predominantly African American (62.5% according to 2010 Census) but is becoming increasingly ethnic, with nearly one out of five residents being of another non-white race. The 2010 white population in Woodlawn was 18.2%. In 2000, the city overall had a racial distribution of: White (24.1%), African American (73.5%), and other ethnicity (2.4%).
- The distribution of age is generally consistent with the city overall. However, in 2010, Woodlawn had a slightly higher percentage of children (25.5%) —17 years of age and under—and a smaller percentage of those 65 years of age and older (7.2%) than the city at large. The City of Birmingham had a child-age population of about 21.5% and a senior population of 12.4%. In 2010, the US had a similar age distribution to that of Birmingham: 24.0% were 17 years old and younger and 13.0% were 65 years and older.

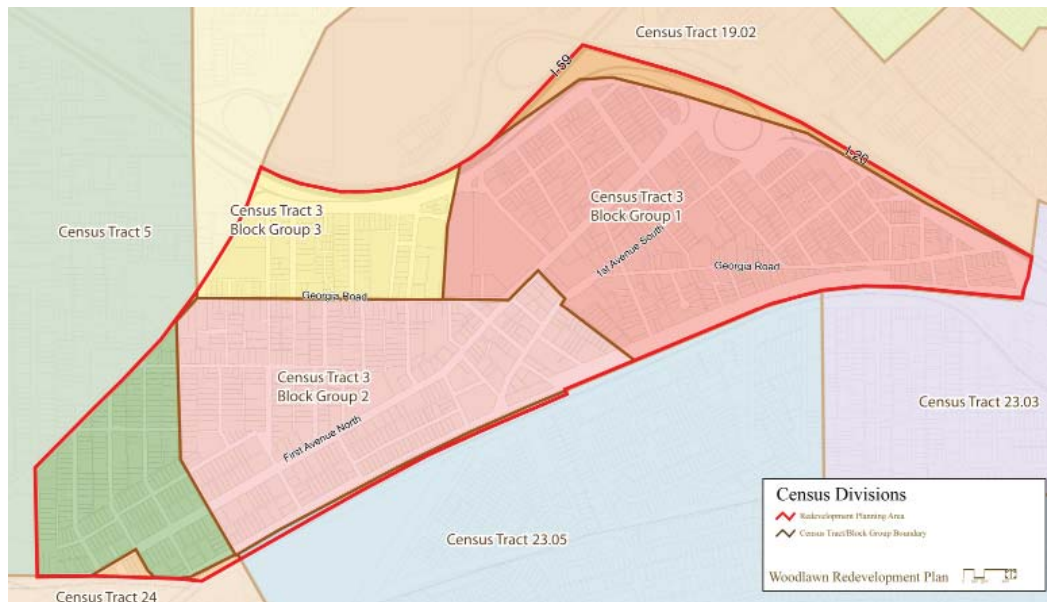
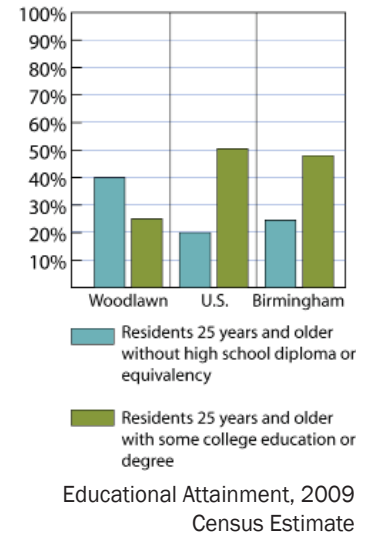
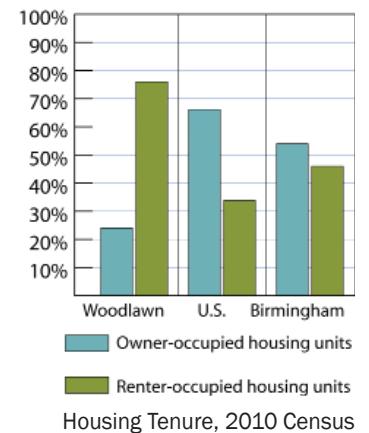


Figure 5: Census Divisions

- The neighborhood is predominantly lower-income.
 - In 2009, almost two-thirds of all Woodlawn families earned less than \$25,000 per year. According to the 2000 Census, only one out of five American families earned less than \$25,000; and in Birmingham almost 40% of families earned less than \$25,000.
 - In 2009, 32.8% of Woodlawn’s family households earned incomes below poverty level and, of those, 79% were families with children under 18 years. In 2000, 9.2% of American families and 20.9% of Birmingham families earned incomes below poverty level. Of those US and Birmingham families with incomes below poverty level, the percentages of those with children were similar to that in Woodlawn.



- Woodlawn residents tend to have limited educational backgrounds.
 - Over 40% of Woodlawn residents 25 years and older have no high school diploma nor GED. According to the 2000 Census, less than 20% of the US population and only 24.5% of Birmingham’s population had not received a high school diploma or equivalency.
 - About one-quarter of Woodlawn residents have some college education or have attained an associate or higher degree. Of US and Birmingham residents 25 years and older, over 50% and about 48%, respectively, had received some college education or a degree according to the 2000 Census.



- The housing stock is aging and in danger from neglect and other blighting factors. Over 60% of the housing units in Woodlawn are fifty years or older and only about 8% have been built in the last twenty years. By comparison, the 2000 Census estimated that only 35% of housing units were built prior to 1960 and about half of those in Birmingham were built prior to 1960. Vacancy has increased considerably. Mitigating this issue to some degree, over the last several years, the City has become more proactive in demolishing and clearing deteriorating housing. While this lessens their blighting effects, the remaining, untended urban land and other vacant structures, some awaiting demolition, continue to contribute to community blight.

- Housing ownership in Woodlawn has declined considerably. In the last fifty years, originally strong single-family areas have been weakened by increased rental of originally owner-occupied single-family homes and encroachment of poorly managed multifamily dwellings into these same areas that had been permitted by past incidents of spot zoning. In Woodlawn in 2010, it is estimated that three out of four occupied housing units are renter-occupied (74.1%). According to the 2010 Census, only 34.9% of American housing units were renter-occupied while renter occupancy in Birmingham was 50.7%. 23.0% of all housing units in Woodlawn were estimated to be vacant in 2010.

Blighting Conditions

The following issues are present in Woodlawn and are considered under the Code of Alabama to be characteristics of blight:

- Structures, buildings, or improvements that are unfit for human habitation or occupancy because of dilapidation, deterioration, or unsanitary or unsafe conditions, vacancy or abandonment, neglect or lack of maintenance, inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, vermin infestation, or lack of necessary facilities and equipment.
- A concentration of properties having defective or unusual conditions of title which make the free transfer or alienation of the properties unlikely or impossible.
- Structures from which the utilities, plumbing, heating, sewerage, or other facilities have been disconnected, destroyed, removed, or rendered ineffective so that the property is unfit for its intended use.
- Excessive vacant land on which structures were previously located which, by reason of neglect or lack of maintenance, has become overgrown with noxious weeds, is a place for accumulation of trash and debris, or a haven for mosquitoes, rodents, or other vermin.
- Property which, because of physical condition, use, or occupancy, constitutes a public nuisance or attractive nuisance.
- Property with code violations affecting health or safety.
- Property that has tax delinquencies exceeding the value of the property.

Concentrations of vacant and tax delinquent property (see Figures 7 and 8), defective and complex chains of title on properties and abandoned, dilapidated buildings have increased in the neighborhood over time. Property titles in some cases include sewer, demolition, weed abatement and other types of liens. Abandoned properties, both with and without structures, frequently become overgrown.

Much of the tax delinquent property is previously developed single family lots but that are now vacant and abandoned land. Few delinquent properties remain occupied. Though struggling, Woodlawn's commercial district is mostly free of tax delinquent property. There are a number of vacant buildings in the commercial district but few properties are totally vacant.

Given the age of housing and the overall pattern of disinvestment, housing conditions are a concern in the area and without significant housing reinvestment, including infill of vacant properties, redevelopment and rehabilitation of residential properties, blighting conditions are likely to continue.

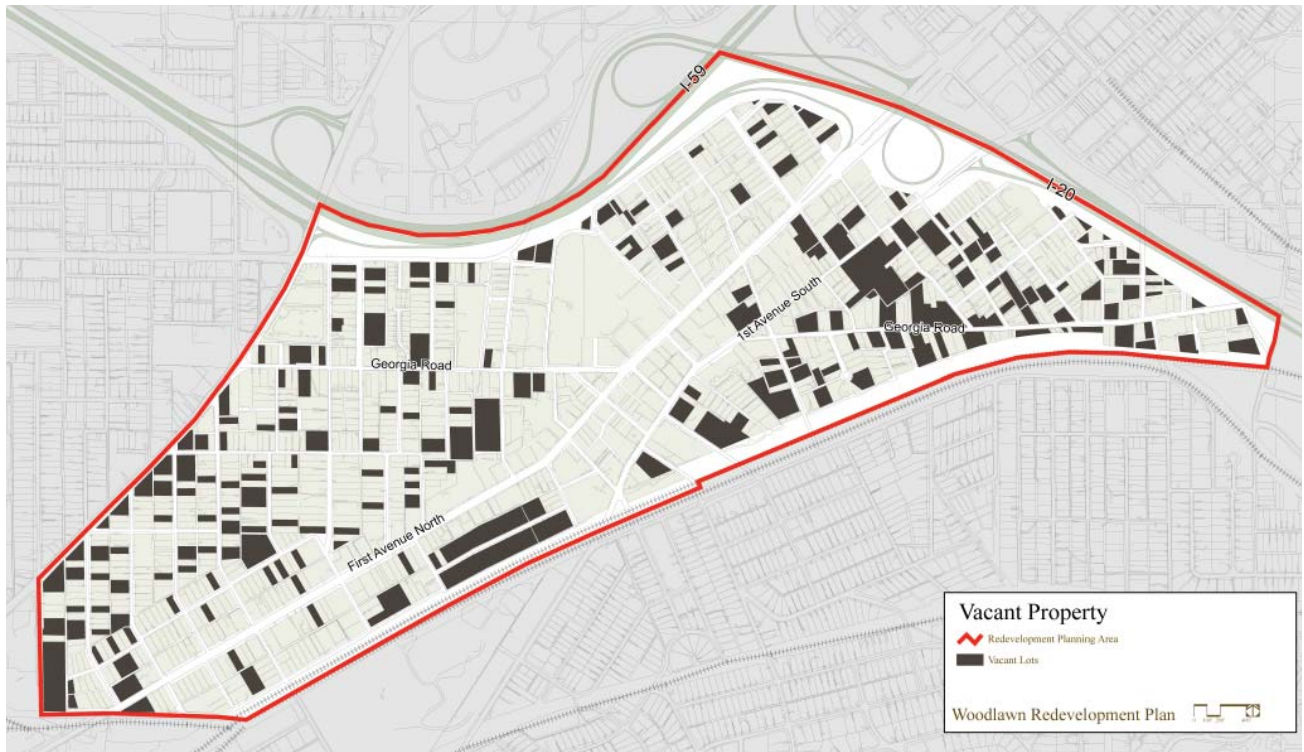


Figure 7: Vacant properties

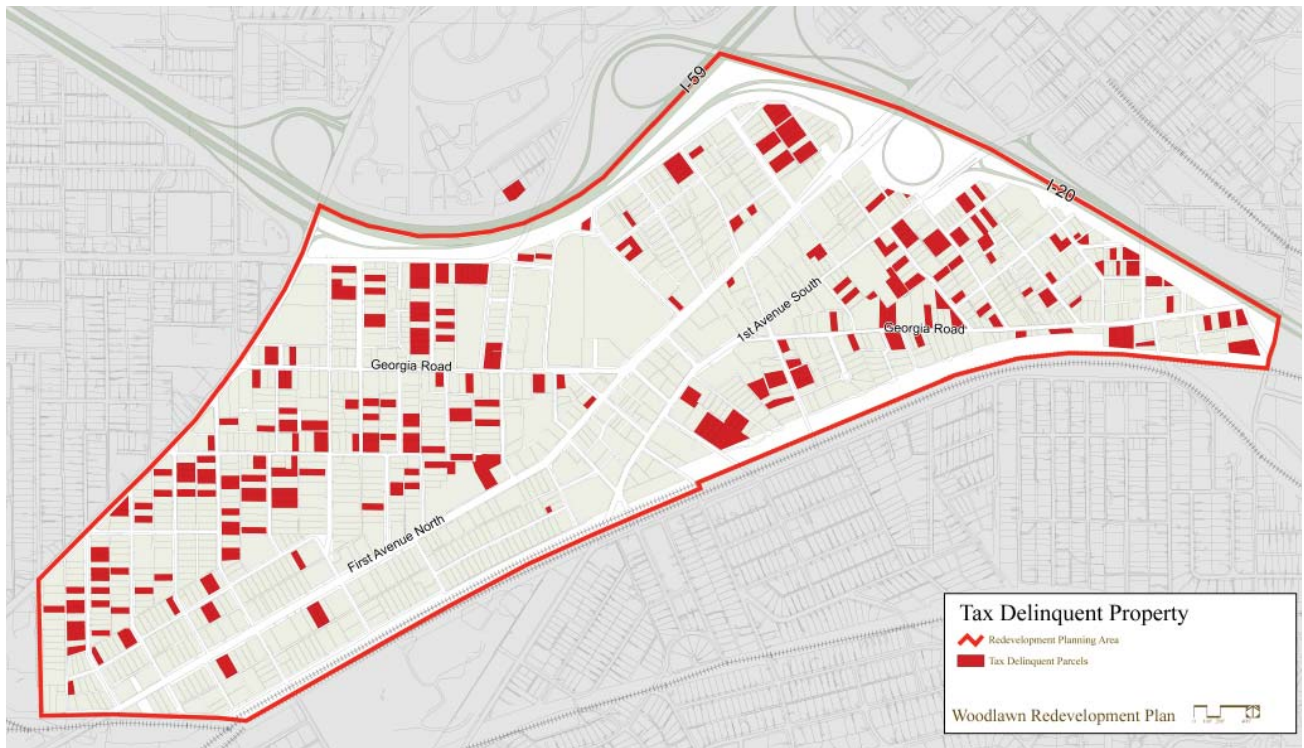


Figure 8: Tax delinquent properties

Strategic Concept for Revitalization

The strategic concept for the revitalization of Woodlawn reflects the major physical and perceptual elements of the community—its gateways, image corridors, and wayfinding system; accessibility and mobility; activity centers and the neighborhoods that support and depend on them; public safety; and parks and open space. The concept is intended as a broad-based physical vision for the future—of a revitalized Woodlawn community. It lays out an overall, comprehensive structure in which revitalization may be executed by many players with optimum synergy. The concept is general in nature and sets the foundation for elaboration of more detailed responses to land use, transportation, economic development, housing, education, and public safety issues. See Figure 9.

The concept builds upon and sustains Woodlawn’s assets, considers and attempts to resolve the broader physical implications of the community’s issues, and provides a framework in which its opportunities may be realized.

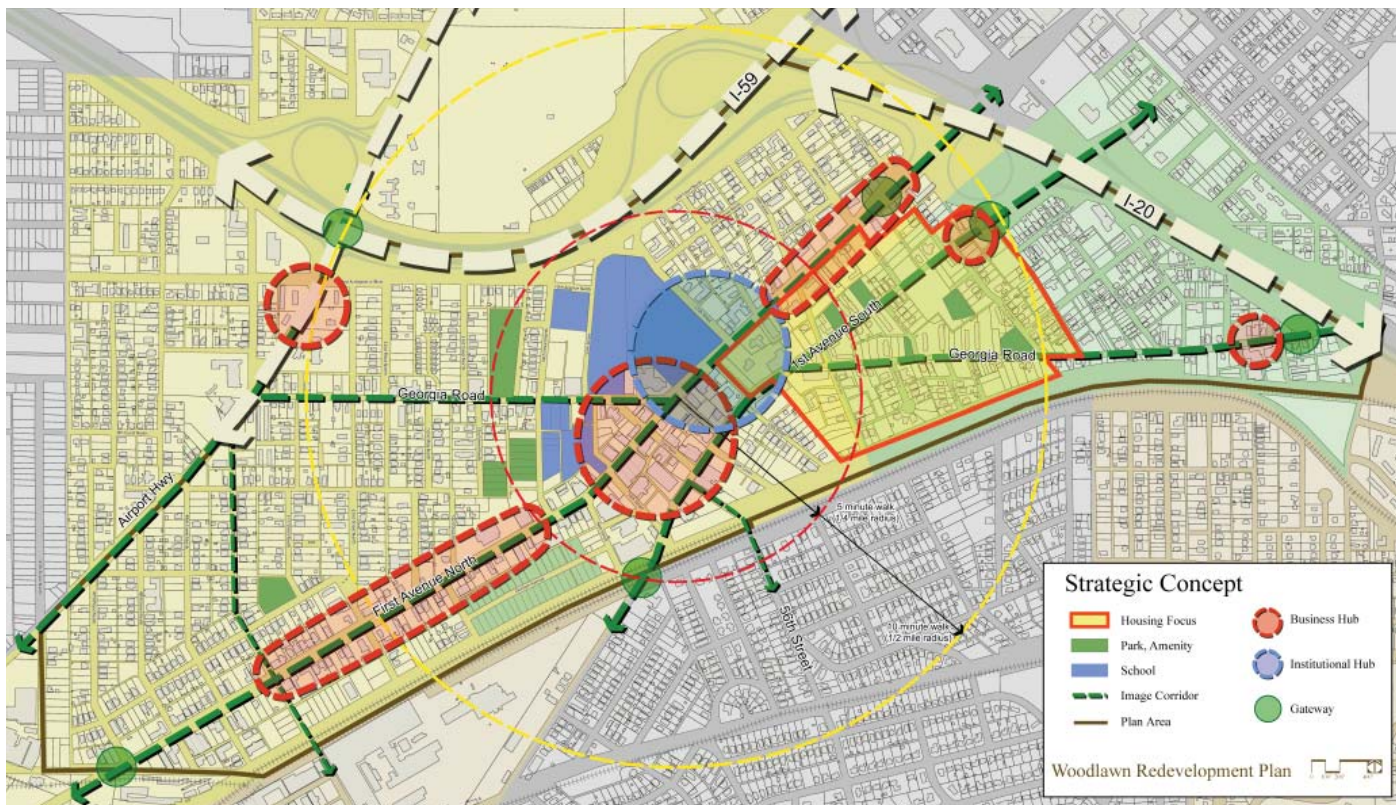


Figure 9: Strategic Concept

Improve Public Safety and Access

Public safety involves a wide range of elements, from pedestrian and traffic safety to crime deterrence. Improvements must be made to raise the level of safety and the perception of safety in Woodlawn. When residents and business owners feel safe they will be more likely to stay in Woodlawn, maintain and reinvest in property, interact with one another, shop locally and activate its public spaces. Such care and commitment to the community will inevitably increase actual public safety. But to do this, physical changes to the environment in combination with a strengthened police presence are necessary.

The City of Birmingham Police Department, with support from the Woodlawn Foundation, initiated a Citizens on Patrol program to deter crime in Birmingham neighborhoods. The program was launched in Woodlawn in 2012 and is to be expanded to other neighborhoods over time. Opening a police substation in Woodlawn would physically and symbolically increase city police presence in the community. Substations are generally very small and can be housed in an otherwise vacant storefront or collocated with a business or institution. Such a facility would not be manned throughout the day but could serve as a check-in point for regular patrols.

The planning and design of buildings and sites should follow urban and environmental design techniques to create a more consistent, safer, and more comfortable community. Known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, these include natural surveillance, territorial reinforcement, access control, and maintenance. See sidebar. Similarly, diligent code enforcement on behalf of the city is necessary to minimize public and attractive nuisances, such as dilapidated structures and overgrown lots that become havens insects and rodents.

Woodlawn was developed with good pedestrian infrastructure and is well laid out to support transit. The pedestrian environment has weakened over the last eighty years as automobiles began to dominate public investments in transportation and the patterns of private development. Woodlawn's pedestrian environment, including public infrastructure and private development patterns, must be restored to better fit the transportation needs of residents. Increased pedestrian activity can also foster safety and community interaction while also bringing more potential shoppers past the storefronts of Woodlawn retailers.

Crime Deterrence through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Natural surveillance deters crime by increasing opportunities in the urban environment for people to observe (consciously or not) activity in public or semi-public spaces where crime may occur. Increased visibility, often referred to as "eyes on the street," increases risks for potential criminals.

Natural territorial reinforcement deters crime by promoting a sense of ownership, occupancy, and control over private spaces. It also includes operational considerations such as frequency of maintenance and promoting continuous activity to discourage would-be trespassers in both public and private spaces.

Natural access control focuses on the distinction and management of passage between public and private space, such as locating entrances where they are easily surveillable and limiting the size or number of entrances and exits. It also includes the use of appropriately designed fences, gates, and other barriers to free passage.

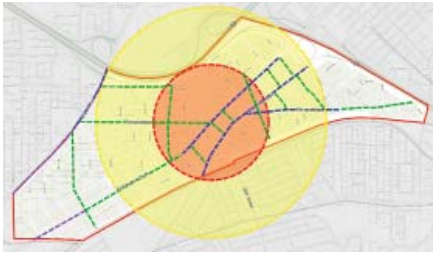


Figure 10: Major Pedestrian Routes

Pedestrian safety and accessibility will be improved through sidewalk repair and construction, installation of crosswalks (where necessary) and pedestrian lighting. Lighting is a major concern of residents, for traffic and pedestrian safety, and should be incorporated into planned and future streetscape improvements. In 2011, the City garnered a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant to begin street and sidewalk improvements in Woodlawn (see Figure 11). Those improvements will be focused on First Avenue South, Georgia Road and several cross streets in the South Woodlawn neighborhood and in the eastern portion of the Woodlawn neighborhood. More extensive streetscape improvements may be necessary to fully improve safety in crossing First Avenue North east of the high school. Following this initial phase of work, continued sidewalk and lighting improvements, as needed, should be slated for the western portion of the Woodlawn neighborhood

Attention also needs to be paid to the ways in which buildings, driveways, and parking are provided to better support pedestrian safety and access. Figure 10 illustrates primary pedestrian routes. It also shows the five-minute and ten-minute walking distances from the center of Woodlawn’s historic business district. This “pedestrian shed” captures a large part of the neighborhoods to the east and west of the historic business district and extends into Crestwood North. Increased accessibility from Crestwood North may improve opportunities to attract those residents into Downtown Woodlawn as it improves and as more shopping and cultural activities emerge.

Street paving is another issue for area residents impacting safety, drainage, and community image. Paving conditions along the eastern segment of Georgia Road in particular are recognized as a problem by residents. A bond issue is currently being considered by the city that would be a source of funding to repave area streets.

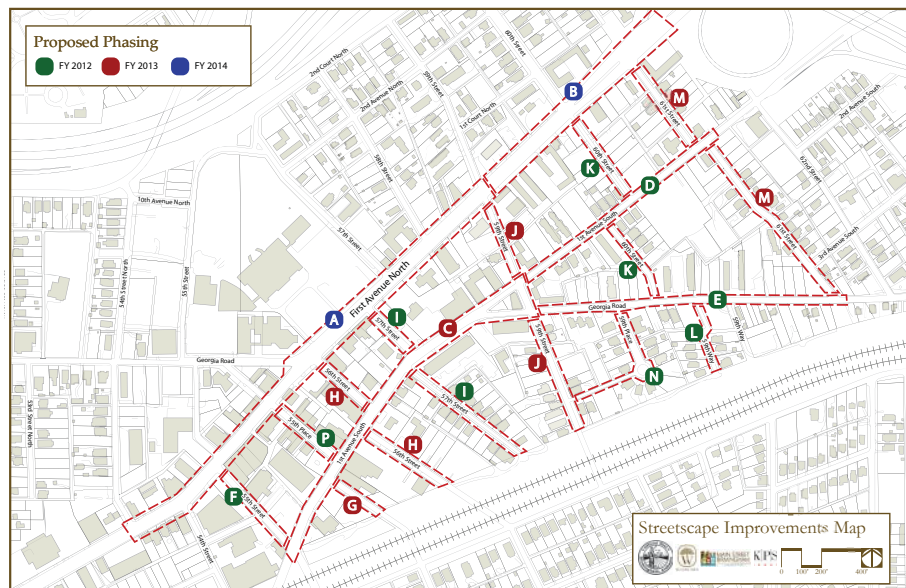


Figure 11: 3-Year Phasing of Street Improvements included in CMAQ grant

Improve Community Image and Perception

Presenting a quality physical image of the community at gateways, or major arrival points (see Figure 12), is essential to attracting economic interest and instilling community pride. Major gateways shown in the Strategic Concept are located at arrival points along major roads. The intersection of Georgia Road and Airport Highway and the intersection of 55th Place and the Norfolk Southern railroad also act as gateways into the community.

Creating an attractive gateway experience involves more than just signage and landscaping, although those can be important. It requires consistency and quality among the buildings and properties along major streets as well as attractive, well-maintained street environments.

Shown in Figure 13 Woodlawn’s image corridors—the major streets through which visitors travel and experience the community—include First Avenue North, Georgia Road, First Avenue South and 50th Street. The level of maintenance and quality of development and public improvements leave a lasting impression on visitors and affect the community’s self-image. Reinvestment and ongoing maintenance assure a pleasant impression of the community for residents, visitors and potential investors.

Efforts should be made by property and business owners to improve the appearance of properties along these major routes including regular maintenance. Aggressive code enforcement actions should be pursued to cause dilapidated buildings, some unsafe and unable to be occupied, to be repaired or removed. Likewise, the City must regularly tend to Woodlawn’s roadways, including repaving, mowing grass strips in the right-of-way, and maintaining street lighting in working order.



Dilapidated buildings along one of Woodlawn’s primary roads have a significant impact on the community’s image.

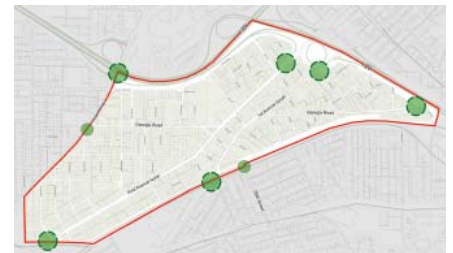


Figure 12: Gateways



Figure 13: Image Corridors

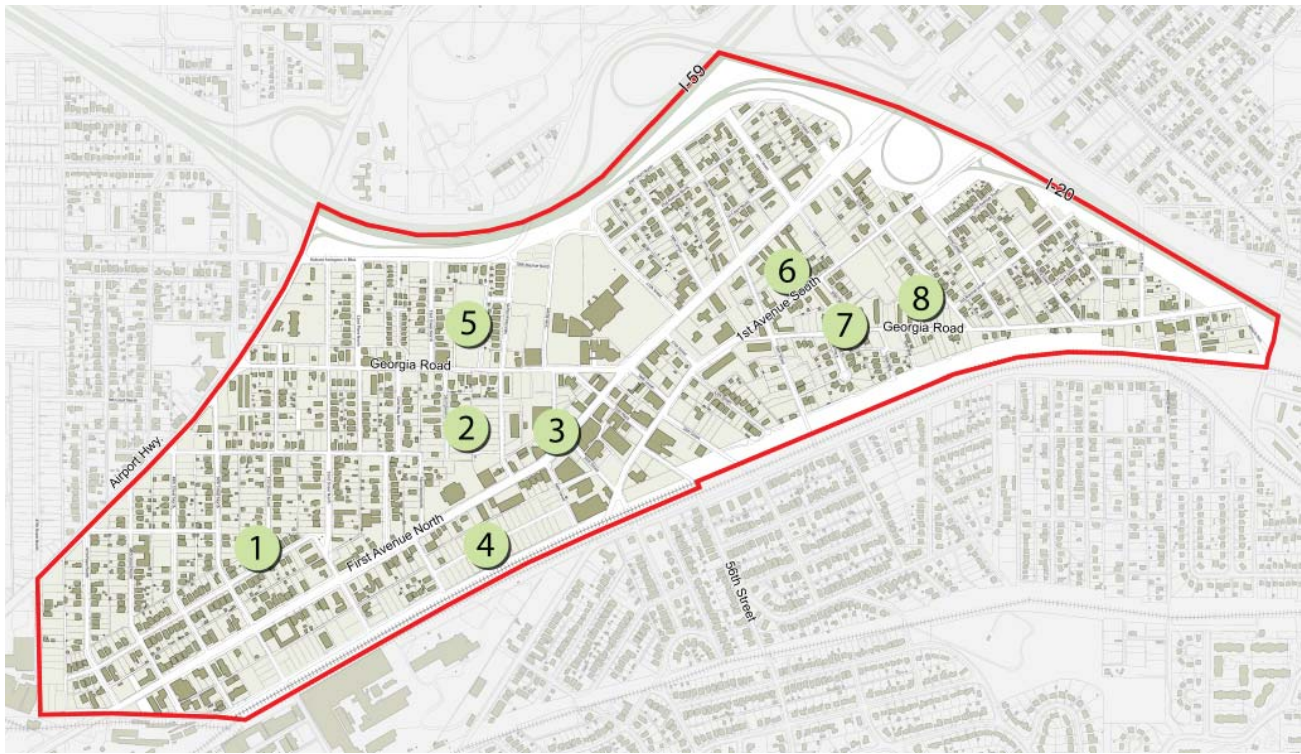


Figure 14: Existing and Proposed Parks and Open Spaces

1. Potential neighborhood parks site (1.15 acre vacant site owned by City)
2. Planned Cornerstone Schools sports and recreation site
3. Potential civic space (former Woodlawn UMC sanctuary site)
4. Potential urban farm site (5.3 acres)
5. Willow Wood Recreation Center (existing)
6. Playground and recreation space at Interfaith Hospitality House (existing)
7. Community Garden (existing)
8. Open space(s) associated with proposed housing development

Enhance Quality of Life

Improving the quality of life in Woodlawn is an essential element of the revitalization process and is addressed through a combination of several objectives in this plan:

- Community safety and walkability
- A cradle-to-career educational pipeline
- Economic opportunity
- Access to parks, open space and recreation
- Community health

Parks, Open Space and Recreation

Figure 14 identifies existing and proposed open spaces in Woodlawn. Willow Wood Recreation Center is a City-operated facility on Georgia Road west of First Avenue North. Existing open spaces also include the playground at the Interfaith Hospitality House and a community garden on Georgia Road and 60th Street. As new housing is added in South Woodlawn, outdoor space should be made available. This can be in the form of public park space or common open spaces serving attached residential and multifamily dwellings. A former apartment site on 51st Street and 2nd Avenue North, currently owned by the City, would make a good location for a small neighborhood park, providing space for picnics, playground and other amenities to supplement Willow Wood.

The former site of the historic Woodlawn United Methodist Church sanctuary would be an ideal location for a civic open space in the historic business district. Since the loss of the sanctuary, the space has been cleared but otherwise left open. The church is considering improvements to create a permanent open space there that will memorialize the sanctuary, which served as a signature landmark for the community.

Cornerstone Schools has acquired land adjacent to its campus to build recreational fields and outdoor play areas for students. There may be an opportunity for the school to allow use of the space by area youth when not in use by the school.

The housing initiative being proposed by the Woodlawn Foundation proposes several open spaces in strategic locations in eastern Woodlawn serving both multifamily and single-family areas. An urban farm and educational facility is also under consideration for a site along Division Avenue. The site could also be used for recreational purposes although it is located away from most of the residents.



Common open spaces in future housing developments will offer convenient access to the outdoors and safe, comfortable recreational space for families.

Community Health

The Woodlawn community has some local access to healthcare, including two dentists and the Christ Health Center. There are also numerous hospitals within a short drive (Trinity Montclair, St. Vincents, Children’s Hospital, and UAB Hospital). There is need for a general practitioner in the area.

As documented in a study funded by Main Street Birmingham in 2011, Birmingham communities with limited access to healthy, nutritious foods are at greater risk for a variety of health problems. Although not located in one of the “food deserts,” indicated in the study, Woodlawn has few choices for buying groceries, particularly fresh produce but does have a number of retailers offering less healthy fare. The potential development of an urban farm in the community, as is being considered along Division Avenue, would provide access to locally grown produce. An educational component at the farm would promote better nutrition to ultimately improve community health.

Sidewalk improvements and access to nearby recreational spaces promotes healthier, more active lifestyles, which can reduce obesity levels and help ward off long-term illnesses associated with obesity.

Focus Residential Reinvestment

The ultimate goal of Woodlawn’s revitalization effort is to improve existing conditions to a degree that the community is able to retain residents and attract new residents and businesses. In order to achieve this, “critical mass” must be reached through an initial phase of investment. The amount and quality of housing reinvestment must be substantial to have a transformative effect on the community, to attract further reinvestment and improve community self-image. Critical mass can be accomplished through new residential development, rehabilitation of existing housing, or a combination of these.



Housing Strategy

Housing investments will provide an enhanced, broader set of choices for area residents, some of whom may now live in homes below their standards yet who have few better or affordable options. Reinvestment will also remove blight, attract new residents and investors and support local business development.



The YWCA has begun considerable investment in the area, acquiring and renovating or redeveloping residential properties to provide quality housing choices for low and very low income families. The Interfaith Hospitality House and adjacent YWCA housing investments have created a strong new core around which future housing revitalizations efforts may reach a critical mass for success and sustainability.



High quality construction and design in affordable housing development by the YWCA sets a desirable standard for future housing investments in the area.

The South Woodlawn neighborhood provides the greatest opportunity to accommodate new housing with little or no disruption to existing homes. The site of the former Carver Apartments, now vacant and owned by the City, is the largest vacant property in the Woodlawn area and it is surrounded by other smaller vacant residential lots. Some multifamily developments in the area have declined over the years, in part due to poor management and, in a few cases, are believed to have been havens for criminal activity. Some existing multifamily developments may be renovated while others may be more appropriate for redevelopment for new housing that is more compatible with the neighborhood. Enhanced property management will reduce the likelihood of future physical deterioration and criminal activity.

This location also capitalizes on several of Woodlawn’s assets including proximity to the historic commercial district, interstate access, local public institutions (Woodlawn High School and Woodlawn Library), and health and social service facilities (Christ Health Center and the Family Resource Center).

The most feasible and effective way to create critical mass early on, while assuring quality and affordability, will be through an initial phase of multifamily residential development. This will offer Woodlawn renters additional and improved options. A mixed-income housing model and limited density will

prevent the concentration of poverty that has been known to further the decline of urban neighborhoods. Because vacant sites in South Woodlawn are clustered in an area of existing multifamily adjoining the First Avenue North commercial district and the major roads of First Avenue South and Georgia Road, higher density development is appropriate in this area. Also see Figure 15 Existing Land Use and Figure 16 Future Land Use Map.

Opportunities to include new single family development and rehabilitation of existing single family homes in the area should also be explored either in addition to multifamily development during first phases of reinvestment or immediately after. This will help to grow homeownership and stabilize the residential portions of the community. Given existing conditions in the area and economic constraints posed on home buying in the wake of a national recession, a focus on home ownership will be more difficult in the early stages of reinvestment but will become increasingly more successful as other forms of reinvestment and neighborhood stabilization occur (as well as improvements in the national economy).



This rendering of Infill single family housing and rehabilitation of historic residences on 59th Place reveals the character that drew people to live in Woodlawn originally.

Expand Economic Opportunity

According to a report prepared as part of the current citywide comprehensive planning process, the Woodlawn business district is, at present, best suited as a neighborhood-oriented business area. Simply put, Woodlawn is not ready to become a citywide destination for shopping and other commercial activity. There are several initiatives that will lead to the Woodlawn business district better meeting the needs of surrounding neighborhoods that could ultimately lead to Woodlawn attracting customers from other parts of the city.

As previously mentioned, improving Woodlawn's image will help recruit more business activity and investment. Two of three priority projects that a Merchants Association working group identified to improve business conditions addressed image improvements: dressing up railroad overpasses on First Avenue South and beautification along First Avenue North. At least one of the railroad overpasses is in need of structural repairs, complicating efforts to simply aesthetically fresh it. The structural issues, though, re-emphasize the need to work with the railroad company to address these concerns.

Woodlawn United partners were able to secure funding from Cawaco RC&D Council to begin beautification efforts along First Avenue North. This project will include a variety of cosmetic repairs, replacement of distressed street trees, replanting tree wells, and adding flowers and greenery in strategic locations along the road.

Most of the Woodlawn business area is located in a city-designated commercial revitalization district and Main Street Birmingham (MSB) has been tasked

with guiding economic development in the area. MSB works closely with the Woodlawn Merchants Association and is beginning to realize some successes in the district. These efforts will prove more successful over time as Woodlawn's image improves and as the loss of population is reversed. More occupied rooftops will help create the demand needed to attract shops and restaurants desired by today's residents. High quality, mixed-income housing, in particular, can improve the customer base necessary to attract the most desired business types.

As more businesses come to the area, more jobs become available for area residents. But to fully broaden economic opportunity for residents, a strong educational foundation must be in place, including not only good public schools but also early learning facilities and programs for adults to learn career skills.

The New Markets Tax Credit passed by the state legislature in 2012 may be of assistance in economic development in Woodlawn. It is intended to spur business growth in qualifying, low-income census tracts.

Provide an Educational Pipeline

Education is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty that too many in low income neighborhoods like Woodlawn become trapped in. To address these needs and supplement public school education, Woodlawn United partners plan to develop an early learning center in Woodlawn aimed for ages 0-3, a crucial time that impacts intellectual development later in life.

Woodlawn United partner Cornerstone Schools of Alabama operates a parochial school in Woodlawn. Cornerstone offers income-based tuition levels to assure that children of needy families are able to attend the school. The Woodlawn facility serves 5K-5th grade and provides a uniquely affordable, private alternative to city elementary schools.

Enrichment programs associated with Woodlawn High School are being supported by Woodlawn United partners to broaden educational opportunities for area children in the public school system. Summer Programs such as the YWCA's CREW, Woodlawn Summer Academy and Dr. Henry Panion's Music Technology Programs are supplemental educational services being offered to the community through collaborations with the Woodlawn Foundation

Nonprofit endeavors such as the Desert Island Supply Company and a planned literacy tutoring service are establishing roots in Woodlawn to expand the educational network serving the community. Desert Island Supply Company hosts creative writing workshops and works with local schools and teachers to promote writing skills.

Public and private support for these efforts should continue to provide maximum opportunities for the youth of Woodlawn to develop intellectually and be positioned for college and/or career.

In addition to development of an early learning center serving the Woodlawn area, the Woodlawn Foundation intends to develop adult education and workforce training programs to complete the cradle-to-career pipeline to serve the community and help Woodlawn residents achieve their economic goals.

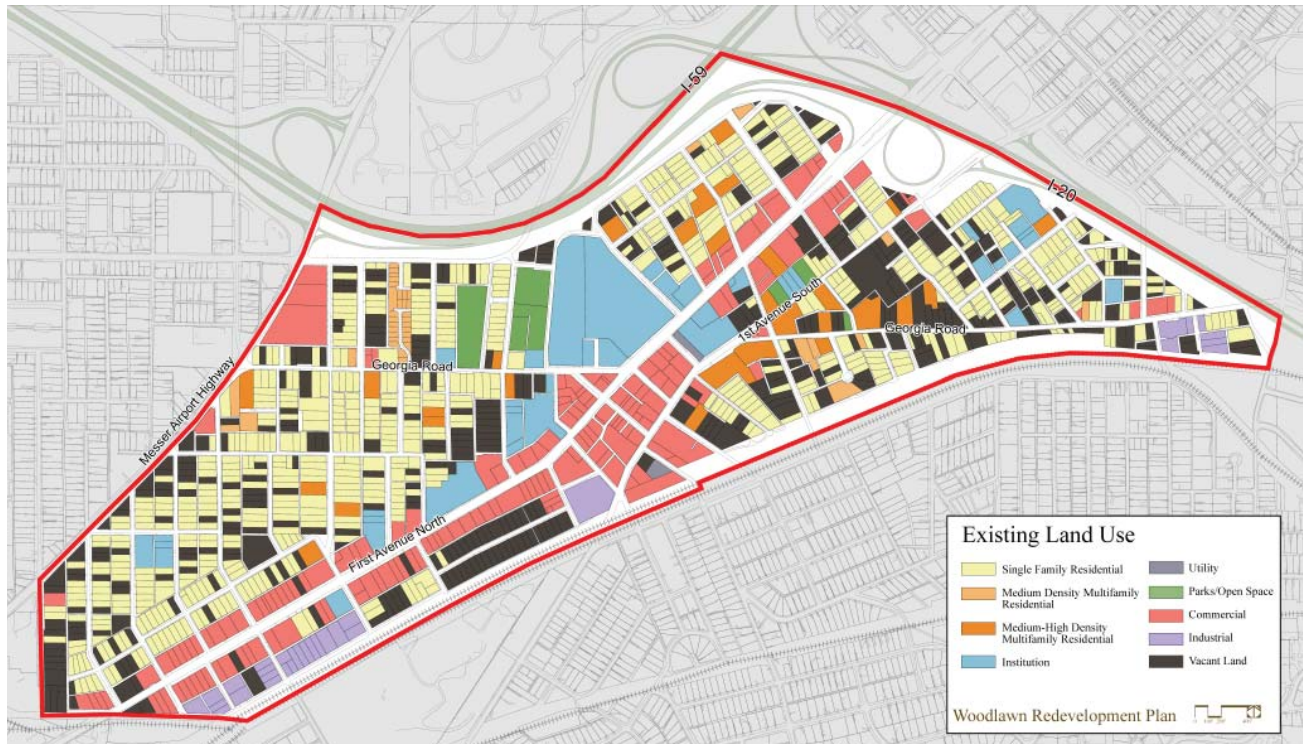
Land Use Plan

Figure 15 shows the pattern of land use investment—and disinvestment—in Woodlawn today. To support the ultimate success of revitalization efforts, the land use plan herein will help achieve appropriate development patterns and avoid developmental decisions that have contributed to the decline of Woodlawn’s residential and business areas. The following land use goals, policy elements and land use and design principles shall apply with respect to future investment and regulatory decisions throughout the Plan Area.

1. Land Use Goals

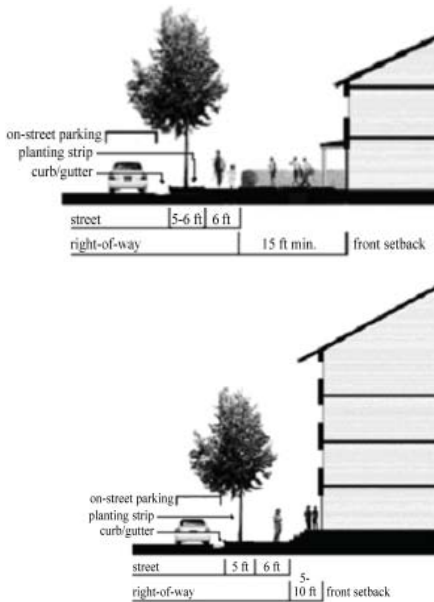
1. Provide a shared physical vision through which all stakeholders may contribute to the betterment of Woodlawn.
 - Create sustainable, safe and quality environments within Woodlawn’s neighborhoods and business areas.

Figure 15: Existing Land Use Map



- Foster safety and crime deterrence through land use policies that reflect best urban design practices.
- Encourage residential reinvestment and increase owner-occupancy over time.
- Encourage business reinvestment and mixed-use development in Woodlawn’s historic business district that serve the needs of the community and provide job opportunities.
- Provide appropriate locations for quality, multifamily residential development and redevelopment to assure affordable and desirable housing choices.
- Encourage reinvestment in Woodlawn that is of a mix, density, and design to support business development, walkability and transit access.

Land Use Policy Elements



In single-family dwellings, front yards provide a transitional, semi-public space between the public sidewalk and the private zones of the home. With denser, urban housing types, such as townhouses and multifamily buildings, buildings are placed closer to the sidewalk and a change in grade between the entry and sidewalk level (i.e., a stoop or terrace) provides the semi-public transition. Building entrances may also be recessed, through a forecourt, where changes in grade are less feasible or where ADA accessibility is necessary.

2. Foster the revitalization of Woodlawn’s historic business district into a walkable, mixed-use core.
 - Encourage use of vacant upper-stories for offices and residences.
 - Concentrate retail and service uses in storefronts centered around 55th Place and adjoining blocks.
 - Strengthen the character of and investment in properties between 55th Place and the Library, Dream Center, Health Center node.
 - Encourage uses and development patterns in the historic core that support transit, bicycle, and pedestrian access.
 - Discourage commercial uses oriented primarily to motorists, including car washes, gas stations, and drive-through businesses.
 - Maintain a strong, local institutional presence.
 - Create a civic open space in a visible, central and accessible location.
 - Encourage reuse of industrially-zoned property for compatible commercial uses.
3. Encourage supportive commercial reinvestment along First Avenue North corridor.
 - Direct non-retail commercial investment generally to First Avenue North at the edges of the historic district.
 - Encourage patterns of reinvestment that support multi-modal access.
 - Accommodate commercial uses oriented primarily to motorists, including car washes, gas stations, and drive-through businesses subject to design standards appropriate to a multi-modal environment.
4. Protect and enhance single-family residential areas to increase investment and home ownership.
 - Define specific areas for protection of single-family dwellings and prevention of further multifamily residential encroachment.
 - Encourage the discontinuation of existing islands of multifamily dwellings.

- Establish a neighborhood conservation zoning district with uses limited generally to detached single-family residential and dimensional regulations adjusted to the prevailing patterns of single-family development in Woodlawn.
5. Designate areas appropriate for high density residential development.
 - Locate future development and redevelopment for multifamily dwellings toward the eastern edge of the mixed-use core.
 - Encourage a variety of higher density housing types (cluster housing, single-family attached, multifamily, etc.) to accommodate housing needs for a variety of incomes.
 - Avoid placing multifamily housing facing or between detached single-family dwellings on the same block face.
 - Establish an overlay district or similar regulatory tool to require design practices that support urban design consistent with the historic development patterns of the community, safety, durability, and provision of quality common open spaces
 6. Support institutional functions in and directly adjacent to Woodlawn's historic business area.
 - Encourage continuation and reinvestment in public and private schools serving the Woodlawn area.
 - Encourage continuation of other public and private institutions providing services to the Woodlawn community, including the Woodlawn Library, Dream Center, and Health Center.

2. Land Use and Design Principles

1. Like faces like
 - Nonresidential uses should not face single-family, detached dwellings across a street.
 - Commercial and mixed uses may face one another and either may face multifamily dwellings.
 - Multifamily dwellings may face attached single-family dwellings.
 - Attached single-family dwellings may face detached single-family dwellings.
2. Appropriate land use transitions
 - Encourage development patterns and building arrangements that provide logical, comfortable transitions between uses of different scale and use impacts (traffic, lighting, noise, etc.).
 - Change uses or intensities along rear lot lines and/or alleys; corner lots are acceptable for use transition, particularly when located along a major street.
 - Place highest mix and intensities of uses within and around the mixed-use core, with the variety and intensity of uses generally decreasing away from the core.

3. Dense, mixed-use core
 - Create a mixed-use core with business and other activities that attract locals both day and night.
 - Concentrate nonresidential reinvestment and new mixed-uses in and around the mixed-use core.
 - Develop two- to three-story, mixed-use buildings that open onto sidewalks along “complete streets” to encourage a broad range of destinations that are easy to access on foot.
 - Optimize access, safety and convenience for pedestrians and transit users; improve bicycle accessibility by providing bicycle storage; accommodate vehicular access secondarily.
 - Place retail and service commercial uses at street level for visibility and to foster pedestrian traffic.
 - Place dwellings on upper floors for privacy and security.
 - Provide a civic open space in the core for informal gathering, social interaction, and community events (distinct from recreational or sports-oriented open spaces).
 - Place off-street parking to the side or rear of buildings rather than in front of them; accommodate parking on-street particularly on minor streets.
4. Neighborhood conservation
 - Discourage the continuation of existing and prohibit new multifamily dwellings located between detached single-family dwellings on the same block face.
 - Encourage reinvestment in existing detached single-family dwellings.
 - Direct development of multifamily dwellings in upper stories of buildings in the commercial district and to areas between businesses and residences.
5. Safe, comfortable environments
 - Arrange uses and place buildings on site to create clear distinctions between private, semi-private, semi-public and public areas.
 - Ensure natural surveillance (“eyes on the street”) through arrangement of uses, building placement, and optimizing window area on facades facing public areas.
 - Keep properties well-maintained to convey that they are “occupied”.
 - Limit vehicular/pedestrian access to property to surveillable locations.
 - Develop and maintain street frontages that are visually interesting so that pedestrians feel welcome and engaged.

It may be desirable to adopt new zoning provisions to accommodate development patterns consistent with the historic, urban design characteristics of Woodlawn. For example, the smallest front yard setback required in any residential zoning district in Birmingham is twenty-five feet. While this is appropriate for suburban-styled garden apartments, it is inconsistent with Woodlawn’s historic development pattern and can make infill development and redevelopment very difficult. A form-based overlay, similar to the one adopted

for Birmingham’s Highland Park neighborhood, could be adopted to fit the unique patterns of Woodlawn and better enable implementation of the housing initiative recommended in this plan.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map (see Figure 16) is intended to guide future zoning and development decisions, in combination with the previously described land use goals and policies and land use and design principles. The map includes the following land use categories, as established and defined in the citywide Comprehensive Plan now being completed:

Residential Low Density (Single-Family and Two Family). This includes single-family and two-family dwellings, schools, churches, recreation facilities and other compatible uses. Approximate target residential density is up to 16 dwelling units per acre.

Residential Medium Density (Townhouse, Small Multifamily). This includes a mix of single and two family dwellings, townhouses, and small apartment buildings (fewer than 6 units), schools, churches, neighborhood-serving public uses, and pre-existing small corner stores (by special permit). Approximate target residential density is up to 16+ to 50 dwelling units per acre.

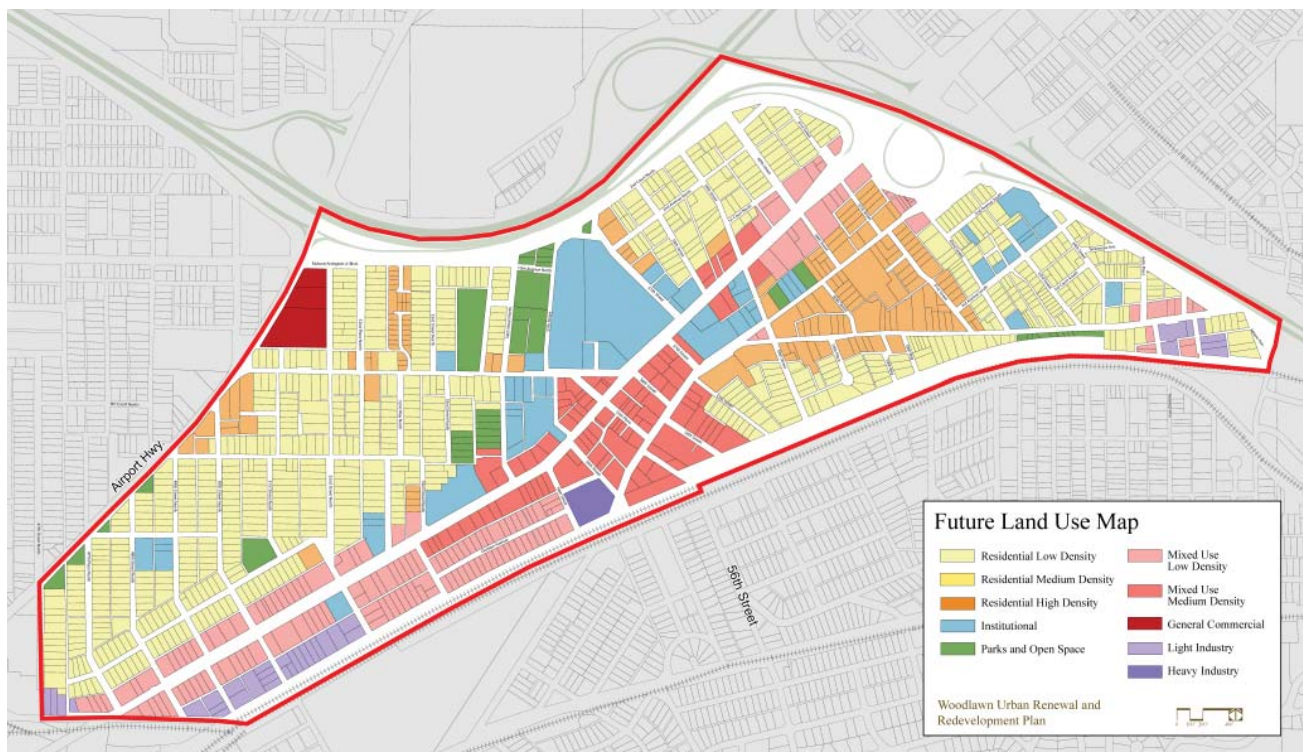


Figure 16: Future Land Use Map

Residential High Density (Multifamily). This category is intended for areas at or adjacent to major transportation/transit corridors and intersections and in downtown adjacent areas and includes multifamily rental and condominium structures and townhouses, typically in large developments or mid-rise and high-rise buildings, schools, churches, and neighborhood-serving public uses (ground floor neighborhood-serving retail allowed by special permit). Approximate target residential density is over 50 dwelling units per acre.

Institutional. This includes government facilities, schools, churches, hospitals, health clinics, nursing homes, private nonprofit facilities, public services, and cemeteries.

Mixed-Use Areas. Mixed-use centers include residential, retail, and office uses. The mixture can be vertical, with uses on different floors of a building, and horizontal, with different uses in adjacency. Mixed use centers are pedestrian-friendly and provide concentrated population and activity centers that can support enhanced transit.

- **Mixed Use – Low Density.** These are compact, walkable, residential and commercial areas, often with a “Main Street” spine that historically served as a town center with two to three story buildings. Uses can be mixed horizontally (side-by-side), or vertically (one above the other) and include multi-family, townhouse, cottage and small-lot single family residential, neighborhood supporting retail and services, offices, hotels and live/work structures. Main Street areas would typically be characterized by ground floor uses including small markets, convenience retail and services, restaurants and cafes, and existing or potential residential uses on upper floors.
- **Mixed Use – Medium Density.** Similar mix of uses as in Mixed-Use Low-Density but with provision for up to 5 story buildings.

General Commercial. These are commercial areas serving a citywide or regional trade area, including shopping and entertainment centers that offer a range of retail and service establishments including large supermarkets, department stores, movie theaters, big box stores, and supporting retail and professional services. Office uses on upper floors are also allowed, with ground floor retail encouraged. Accessible by auto, but should be designed to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, provide interior circulation between properties, and appropriate landscaping to counter heat island and stormwater impacts. Residential uses are allowed only by special permit or planned development.

Industrial Uses

- **Light Industrial.** Light industrial and office uses, potentially in “business park” settings, and typically near major transportation routes including interstates, state highways, railroad ROWs, and airport facilities. Uses include

small warehouse and distribution uses and supporting uses, such as minor retail and services to support the major uses.

- Heavy Industrial. This includes heavy manufacturing, large warehousing and distribution facilities; uses that require significant truck traffic and/or rail connections; and supporting uses such as minor retail, services, offices connected to the industrial use or serving an industrial park.

Parks and Open Space. This includes parks and playgrounds, recreational fields and facilities managed for public access and recreation.

