



COMPREHENSIVE 20-YEAR LAND USE PLAN UPDATE



ADOPTED 2020



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

City Council

Chuck Burris, Mayor

William Bo Perkinson, Vice Mayor

John Coker, Council Member

Mark Lockmiller, Council Member

Dick Pelley, Council Member

Planning Commission

Tom Hamilton, Chairman

Jona Garrett, Vice Chairman

Jordan Curtis, Secretary

Janice Hardaway

Eric Newberry

Frances Witt-McMahan (Mayor's designee)

Council representative John Coker

Special Thanks:

Anthony Casteel, Community Development Director

C. Seth Sumner, City Manager

James Gallup, Assistant to City Manager

Lisa Dotson, Athens Main Street Director

Eric Newberry, Athens Utility Board Manager

Adam Trent, GIS Technician

Sam Stephens, Athens Historic Commission

Kathy Price, McMinn County Economic Development Authority Executive Director

Doug Unger, Athens Utility Board Senior Engineer

Harley Knowles, Tennessee Wesleyan University President

Chad Reese, SETD Planning Director

Prepared By:

Bryan Hill, AICP, Community Development Partners, LLC

Richard "Rick" Russell, AICP, Brown, Pearman, Russell, LLC



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HISTORY AND CONTEXT



INTRODUCTION

Athens is a charming city located just off Interstate 75, about halfway between Knoxville and Chattanooga, in the heart of McMinn County. Athens is the seat of McMinn County, and is the largest city with 13,559 of the County's 52,569 residents¹. The community contains a range of natural assets, a built environment with a variety of amenities, historic aspect, and public services that provide residents and visitors with rich experiences and a high quality of life.

The *Athens Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update* provides the long-term vision for the residential, business, and institutional elements of the city. The plan supports this vision with guidelines for land uses, the location and quality of future development, and the objectives and policies for development activity that supports the long-term health and vitality of the city.

The *Athens Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update* covers a planning period of 20 years, from 2017 to 2037. The information presented in this plan should be used as a framework to guide municipal officials, community leaders, business owners, industrialists, and others as they make decisions that affect the organization of future growth and development in the City of Athens.

The City of Athens is authorized by State Law to generate a general plan for physical development under Tennessee Code Annotated Section 13-4-201². Under this code, the general plan should contain the following elements: (1) recommendations for the physical development of the area of the municipal planning jurisdictions; and (2) Identification of areas where there are inadequate or nonexistent publicly or privately owned and maintained services and facilities when the Planning Commission has determined the services are necessary in order for development to occur. Ultimately, the plan should provide the land use guidance to promote safety, order, convenience, prosperity, and the general welfare of the community³. The Plan should work in partnership with other local and regional plans developed over recent years (See **Plan Consistency**). Each of these plans plays a part in an interconnected approach to guiding the future of the city.

Goals, Process, and Methodologies

Goals for this plan were generated as a collaborative effort with key stakeholders, and the general public in Athens and the surrounding region. Stakeholder and public participation were essential to identifying local needs and problems perceived by the community at large. Methodologies used to gain stakeholder and public participation include interviews with decision makers, public officials, and service providers as well as interactive public workshops.

The process for developing the plan included in-depth research to understand the **Background and History of the City**, as well as **Natural Factors** and **Socio-economic Factors** affecting land use in the community. A **land use analysis** was carried out by using Geographic information systems

¹ 2017 American Community Survey, <https://www.census.gov/>, accessed 10/22/2019

² TN Code § 13-4-201 (2018)

³ TN Code § 13-4-203 (2018)



(GIS) to map environmental constraints, patterns of growth and employment, and the availability and location of public services throughout the municipality. A **suitability analysis** was carried out to overlay these factors and determine the relative suitability of various areas for development. Finally, using all these factors, a draft future land use map was generated and presented to the public during **workshops** to gain their input before the development of the final **land use map** and plan. **Objectives and policies** were developed to support plan goals and land uses illustrated in the land use map.

Plan Goals:

1. Maintain the validity of existing zoning in Athens with an updated Land Use Plan and Map
2. Assess land areas, utilities, and other services needed to accommodate anticipated long-term population growth in Athens
3. Provide evaluation for the protection of historic assets in Athens
4. Generate high-level direction for the development and connectivity of trails, greenways, and non-motorized elements
5. Coordinate with the single-family and multifamily housing studies being generated for the McMinn County Economic Development Authority Housing Task Force to address the lack of diverse and adequate housing in Athens
6. Provide land use evaluation in support of future industrial growth and development in Athens



Plan Consistency

Local, regional, and statewide planning documents provide the context for understanding trends as well as future facilities or other aspects that could affect growth in the city and region. These plans were reviewed to ensure that this project remains consistent with these previous efforts and recommendations. Following is a brief discussion of previous relevant planning efforts and how they relate to this plan.

Athens

Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan (2004)

The last coordinated land use planning effort in Athens was the Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan completed in 2004. This plan provided development goals, objectives, and policies and included a public process to identify needs and priorities for land use and development in the City of Athens and the urban growth boundary. The plan also provided methods for implementation, including zoning, subdivision regulations, project review, capital improvements, infill development, annexation, and citizen led efforts. Many of the more specific objectives and policies from the 2004 Land use and Transportation Policy Plan have been enacted. This Land Use Plan Update carries forward the recommended objectives and policies from the 2004 plan, except for those pertaining to annexation. Due to legislation passed subsequent to the 2004 plan, annexation authority has changed significantly (See History and **History and Major Events** below).⁴

The Municipal Zoning Ordinance for the City of Athens, Tennessee (2016)

The Municipal Zoning Ordinance for the City of Athens was last updated in 2016. The Ordinance was made in accordance with the recommendations of the Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan. The Ordinance delineates districts with associated regulations on use and development within each district. The purpose of the regulations in this zoning ordinance is to promote the public health, safety, convenience, order, and general welfare of the City of Athens. The map and regulations for districts under this ordinance were consulted extensively during the development of this Land Use Plan Update. Comparisons between existing land uses and the map in this ordinance provided an important basis for designing the future land use map (See **Future Land Use Map** below).⁴

Minimum Subdivision Regulations of Athens Tennessee (2016)

The City of Athens last updated their subdivision regulations in 2016. The division of land into lots, blocks, and streets, and the associated provision of public utilities has significant impact on both the public and private sectors and can be difficult and costly to change once established. The purpose of the subdivision regulations is to ensure that the subdivision of land and provision

⁴ <http://www.cityofathensstn.com/>



of public utilities aligns with the **Land Use Plan**, and promotes the health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity and general welfare of the city⁵.

AUB Strategic Plan (2017)

The Athens Utilities Board (AUB) is authorized as the Department of Utilities under the City's Charter and operates and manages utilities within Athens. In 2017, AUB undertook a strategic planning effort, facilitated by the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association (TVPPA), to identify priorities for the coming five years. The effort and resulting document identified successful past strategies, developed consensus around objectives, and outlined strategic initiatives for the coming five-year period, and detailed actions corresponding with those initiatives. The project team for this Land Use Plan Update held several interviews with staff from AUB to discuss these initiatives and their potential impacts on existing and future land uses in Athens.⁶

AUB Fiscal Year 2020 Budget and Five-Year Budget Plan (2019)

Each year, the Athens Utilities Board generates a budget plan for the coming five-year period. The plan reviews a detailed budget for year 1 and provides conservative projections for the next five years. The plan discusses the budget for various elements of the utility systems, including those for sewer, water, electricity and gas. Shortfalls in revenue are identified and strategies for covering these shortfalls are developed. The plan also lays out capital strategies for replacements and growth. According to the latest Budget Plan, completed July 2019, the board anticipates that all divisions should be able to operate under current rate structures for the coming fiscal year.⁶

Athens Retail Strategies Reports (2018)

In 2018, a series of reports and data-based tools were produced for the City of Athens in order to assess retail services and ultimately attract new business. 'Trade areas' in which most retail activity occur were determined through travel and spending patterns. The reports then assessed demographic and economic conditions as well as retail purchasing patterns within this trade area. Recommendations were made based on the findings of this assessment. The findings and recommendations of the Retail Strategies reports were reviewed by the planning team and included as part of the **Land Use and Transportation Analysis**.⁷

City Park Elementary – Traffic Impact Study (2017)

The Athens City Schools is in the early stages of developing a new building program to accommodate over 1,700 students. As part of the early stages, the city worked with a consultant to conduct a traffic impact study and determine the impact that these changes could have on traffic circulation and activity in the area. After analyzing existing traffic counts at intersections

⁵ <http://www.cityofathensstn.com/comdev/>

⁶ <https://www.aub.org/>

⁷ <https://www.retailstrategies.com/athens/>



around the schools as well as traffic generators, the report concluded with potential low-cost and high-cost improvements to maintain smooth and efficient traffic flow at these intersections.

By analyzing routes and providing recommendations that could improve non-motorized access to City Schools, the **Objectives and Policies** in this land use plan could support the city in addressing the potential intersection traffic concerns described in the Traffic Impact Study (City of Athens, www.cityofathensstn.com/).

City of Athens Signal Timing & Operations Study (2019)

In 2018, Athens was awarded a TDOT Community Transportation Planning Grant (CTPG) to assess signal timing, progression, and pedestrian safety and connectivity at 15 intersections on key corridors, including the 5-Points intersection in downtown Athens. The study inventoried existing traffic conditions from traffic counts and TDOT data, analyzed the condition of existing infrastructure, and made recommendations for improved signal timing and pedestrian safety measures. Cost estimates for signalization and pedestrian improvements are also provided. The safe and efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians is an important element of enhancing non-motorized accessibility, intensive regional business, and a diversified economy, as discussed in the **Objectives and Policies** of this land use plan (City of Athens, www.cityofathensstn.com/).

Transportation Planning Report – Athens Bypass

The Athens Bypass Transportation Planning Report, completed by TDOT in 2009, analyzes options for developing a new I-75 exit that would bypass Athens and connect traffic with US-11, US-411 and SR-30. The report studied three primary options; a no build option, south bypass option, and north bypass option. The purpose of the report was to evaluate opportunities for meeting the mobility, safety, and economic development needs of Southeast Tennessee, including both Athens and McMinn County. The report provides measures of effectiveness for evaluating each of the three options studied. Ultimately, development of any of these options would require the support of the Federal Highway Association (FHWA) as well as local officials. At the time of this Land Use Plan, the planning team was unaware of any further discussion of action being taken towards pursuing one of the bypass options and was therefore not considered as a significant factor during the development of this plan (City of Athens, www.cityofathensstn.com/).



McMinn County

McMinn County EDA Single-Family and Multi-Family Housing Studies (2019)

Single-family and multi-family housing studies are currently in the process of being generated for the McMinn County Economic Development Authority (EDA). These studies provide assessment and recommendations for single-family and multi-family housing within Athens and McMinn County. Safe, adequate housing is an important concern for any local government and should be an integral part of a land use plan. Therefore, the project team for this land use plan coordinated closely with EDA and consultant team completing these studies while developing this land use plan. The adequacy of existing residential zones was analyzed with an **Existing Zoning/Build-out** analysis that compared projected growth rates with allowable densities and available land.⁸

Athens/McMinn County Recreation Planning Report

The last coordinated plan for parks and recreation in Athens was as part of the McMinn County Recreation Plan Report. To develop this plan, representatives from Athens, Calhoun, Englewood, Etowah, Niota, and McMinn County came together to identify needs and opportunities to improve recreation facilities, programs, and services for residents of McMinn County and its communities. The plan included a county-wide public process, inventory and analysis of existing facilities and programs, comparisons with standards, and recommendations for improvements for each jurisdiction. The report identified that Athens provides funding for parks and recreation at 30% above the state average and has more than adequate acreage for parks and recreation facilities to serve its population. Rather than new parks, recommendations for Athens centered on maintenance, renovations, and trail extensions. These recommendations align with the **Objectives and Policies** of this land use plan⁹.

Rails to Trails Study, McMinn County Tennessee Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Horse Path Potential Feasibility Study (2011)

This 2011 study assessed the feasibility for developing a 6.4-mile rail to trail project that would convert an old railway into a continuous non-motorized path between Athens and Englewood. The study included consideration of capital costs, maintenance costs, and available materials, as well as user behaviors such as frequency of use and potential for vandalism. The study used these considerations to explore the willingness of local stakeholders to develop the trail. The study also explored the potential economic impacts of the trail on local communities. The study concluded that there were significant upsides to the development of the trail and recommended the communities pursue the necessary steps to commence its development. Since the completion of the feasibility study, several miles of this trail, now named the Eureka Trail, have been developed. This Land Use Plan supports the continued development and use of the Eureka Trail through non-motorized connections illustrated on the **Parks and Trails Map** and discussed under the

⁸ <https://www.makeitinmcminn.org/>

⁹ <https://www.mcminncountyttn.gov/>



Objectives and Policies section of this report. (McMinn County, <https://www.mcminncountyttn.gov/>)

Regional

Southeast Tennessee Development District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2018)

The Southeast Tennessee Development District (SETDD) produces a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for a planning region covering southeast Tennessee and northwest Georgia. The latest strategy report, completed in 2018, provides high-level analysis of demographics, infrastructure conditions, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the region's economic development. The plan concludes with strategies for building the regional economy to benefit residents, visitors, investors, and overall community resilience. Many of the **Objectives and Policies** of this Land Use Plan Update align with these strategies, particularly those policies that promote intensive regional business opportunities, and a diversified economy for Athens and McMinn County, and the development of non-motorized connections between parks, residential, and commercial areas in the city and county.

Southeast Tennessee Development District Annual Report (2018)

The Southeast Tennessee Development District (SETDD) produces an annual report that provides a snapshot of regional conditions in the areas of services for aging and disabilities, workforce development, community and economic development, and regional partnerships. The outcomes and successes described in this plan were consulted during the development of **Objectives and Policies** for this Land Use Plan Update.

Thrive 2055 Capstone Report (2016)

The 16-County Thrive 2055 region contains 16 counties in Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama surrounding Chattanooga, and lying in the Tennessee River Valley. The Thrive 2055 Capstone Report is a visionary effort by a consortium of volunteers from the public, private, educational and nonprofit sectors in the region who worked together to determine long-term goals for the region and produce a 40-year action plan for reaching those goals. Key themes in the goals of the plan include:

- Protection of the region's natural treasures
- Coordination of regional transportation improvements
- Investment in education and training
- Diversification of employment opportunities and economic enterprises
- Growth of communities from within

These priorities were considered along with community driven goals in the development of **Objectives and Policies** for land use in Athens.



Ongoing

Athens Downtown Master Plan

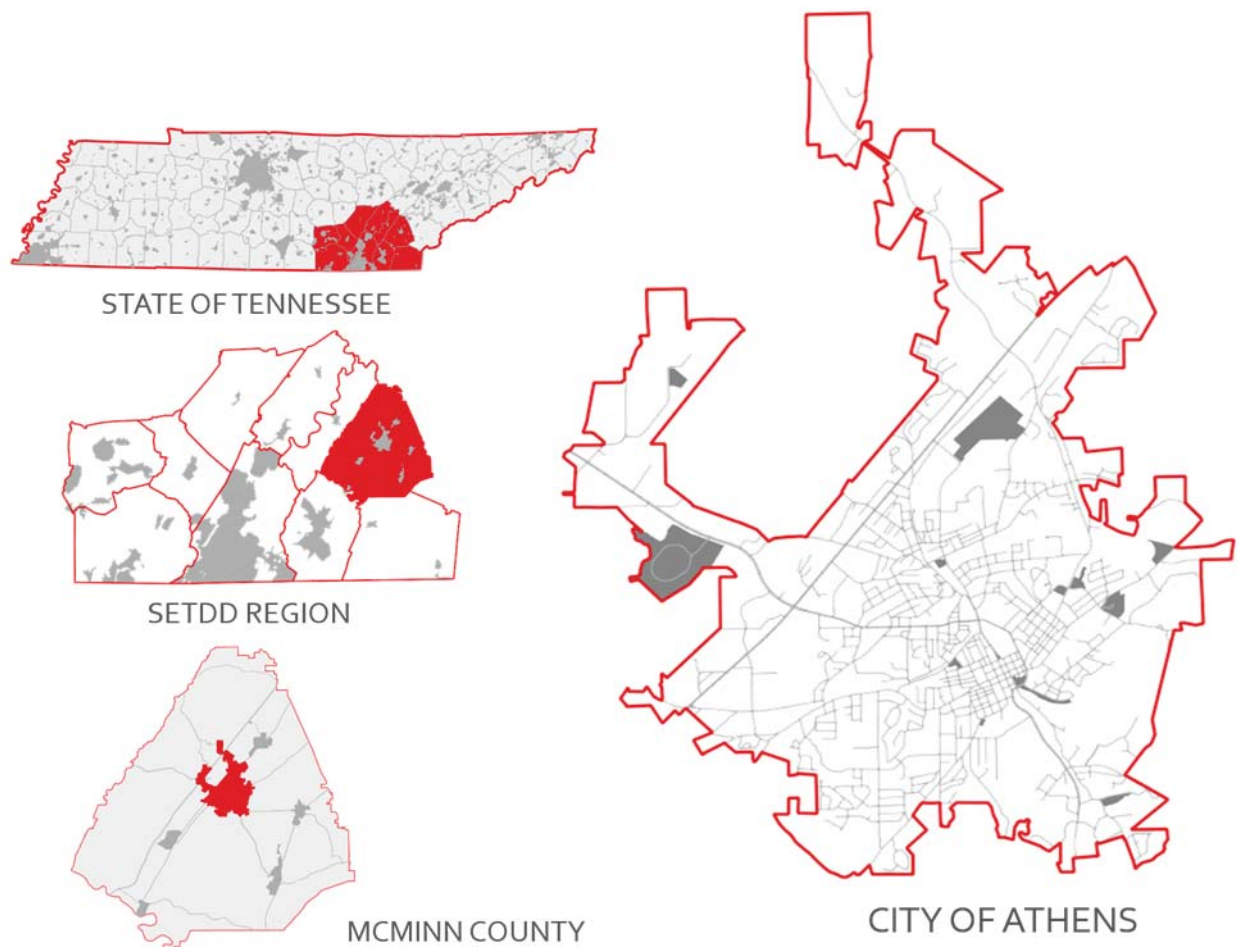
Main Street Athens, which recently merged with the Downtown Business Association, is leading an effort to develop a master plan for the revitalization of downtown Athens. To kick off this process, Main Street Athens has been conducting a survey of downtown businesses and retail establishments. The organization plans on using the findings of this survey, along with best practices in downtown development, to begin developing a plan. The director of Main Street Athens participated on the steering committee for this Land Use Plan Update, and the project team attended a regular Main Street Athens meeting early in the process to understand issues and priorities as they relate to land use (City of Athens, www.cityofathensstn.com/).



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE CITY

Location and Context

The City of Athens comprises an area of about 9,900 acres, or approximately 15.5 square miles. The City is situated near the heart of McMinn County and is the county seat. McMinn County covers an area of about 276,700 acres or roughly 432 square miles. Athens is located 49 miles to the northeast of Chattanooga and 52 miles to the southwest of Knoxville. McMinn County is part of the Southeast Tennessee Development District and the Southeast Rural Planning Organization. About 1% of the total area of McMinn County is comprised of water bodies. The Conasauga, Chestua, Cane, Estanella, Mouse, Oostanaula, Rogers, and Spring Creeks flow through the county and empty into the Hiawasee River basin on the border of McMinn and Bradley Counties¹⁰.



¹⁰ Land Use Plan 2004-2014, Local Planning Assistance Office, Chattanooga, Tennessee, January 2004



History and Major Events

The 2004 land use plan provided in depth research on the historical events that have helped to shape land use in Athens. That plan assessed the impact of events in the following areas:

- Early settlement patterns
- Original development of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad
- Establishment of Tennessee Wesleyan University – beginning in 1857
- The impacts of the Civil War on the industry and economy of Athens
- The role of the Mayfield Dairy Farm industry
- The impact of sanitary sewer moratoriums on city wastewater facilities
- Improvements to stormwater drainage in the Athens Central Business District
- The potential impact of a bypass connecting I-75 with U.S. Highway 11/Congress Parkway and State Route 30/Decatur Pike
- The designation of Athens as a Stormwater Phase II community by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Among those events listed above, there are several changes that have taken place since completion of the previous land use plan that could have important implications for land use and development in Athens:

- Wastewater capacity has been deemed sufficient for foreseeable growth and development over the planning period
- Improvements to the Central Business District stormwater system were completed
- To mitigate repetitive flooding issues at the corner of Jackson Street and Green Street in downtown, the City of Athens utilized grant funding to purchase properties, establish Athens Market Park and build the Athens Market Pavilion, which regularly hosts events and farmers markets
- Eco Park, including lift stations and constructed wetlands was built as a joint effort between the City of Athens, State of Tennessee, and Denso Manufacturing
- A Transportation Planning Report for the Athens Bypass was completed in 2009, exploring multiple options for bypass development. Political and financial support for bypass options discussed in the report have not materialized and due to the age of the report, an updated study may be warranted.
- The City of Athens was certified by the EPA as a Phase II municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) in 2016. The permit is currently being managed by the City.
- The City has allocated a line item in this year's capital budget to develop a feasibility study for the development of a stormwater fee.



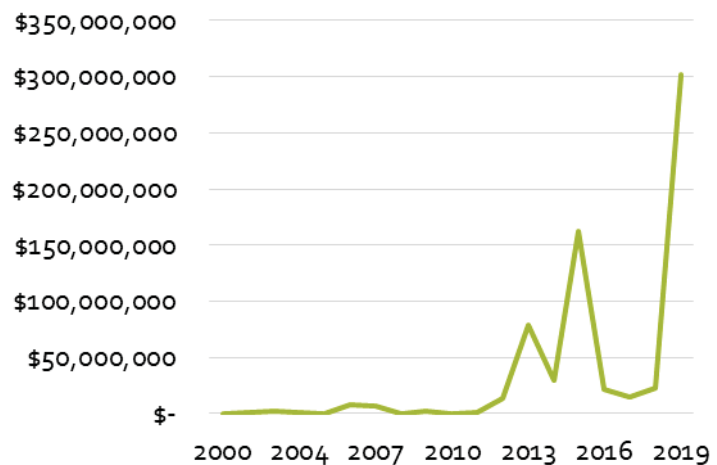
Legislative Changes

Several statewide legislative changes have taken place since the completion of the 2004 land use plan that could have substantial impact on land use and development in Athens.

Public Chapter 707 (PC 707) passed in 2014 provided a moratorium on annexations that still exist today. Under PC 707, cities can only annex properties to expand corporate limits by consent of property owners or by referendum. The law establishes consent as the primary basis for all future annexations. This law could have substantial impact on the growth and development outside of Athens but within the Urban Growth Boundary (UBG). Multiple discussions were held between the planning team and City leadership and staff, and it was determined that the land area within the corporate boundaries of Athens was sufficient for anticipated growth over the coming 20 years.¹¹ The only anticipated annexations over the planning period is the addition of properties owned by McMinn County EDA for industrial or intensive business development uses. City leadership indicated a willingness to annex these properties when they are brought to the city for annexation with written consent.

Public Chapter 605 (PC 605), or the Uniformity in Tax Increment Financing Act, enhanced the ability of local governments to encourage economic development through tax increment financing (TIF). Under a TIF funded project, investments are made in local infrastructure or facilities within a specified district. Those investments raise the property values in the district, and those increased property tax revenues are used to pay for those initial investments.

TIF's have become an increasingly popular way to fund redevelopment efforts in communities across the state. Between 2000 and 2010, there were a total of 17 TIF projects developed across Tennessee with a total sum of \$22,887,897 on file. Since 2010, there have been 58 TIF projects across Tennessee with a total sum of \$645,606,140 on file. As of the date this report, TIF funded projects have occurred in 28 out of the state's 95 counties.¹² Given their increasing popularity, the Tennessee legislature passed the Uniformity in Tax Increment Financing Act of 2012¹³ to streamline to process for



TIF Project Totals by Year in TN

¹¹ Municipal Boundaries in Tennessee: Annexation and Growth Planning Policies after Public Chapter 707, Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, January 2015

¹² <https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/sboe-services/property-tax-incentive-programs/tax-increment-financing/reported-tif-information.html>

¹³ <http://www.tsc.state.tn.us/Tennessee%20Code>



applying to and tracking the use of TIFs in Tennessee. A community wishing to develop a TIF funded project must first develop a redevelopment or economic impact plan that describes the project and area of development, and outlines the allocation, impacts, and timeline for use of TIF funds. Athens has used TIF funding over recent years to fund developments related to a grocery store and a new retail establishment.

Land banking is the process of acquiring and converting vacant, abandoned, or tax-delinquent properties for productive use and asset development. Land banking authorities in the State of Tennessee are public authorities established by the local government to acquire, hold, manage, and develop tax-foreclosed properties. Common uses of land banks include development of affordable housing, public open spaces, or commercial redevelopment. The land banking authority does not usually hold a long-term interest in the local properties, but rather is a vehicle for clearing titles, eliminating financial barriers, removing development obstructions, and transferring ownership for productive uses and redevelopment.¹⁴ The first land bank was established in Oak Ridge in 2013. Seeing its successes, the Tennessee state legislature has passed multiple amendments over the years that expand the authority of local governments to create land banks and has recently authorized nearly two dozen land banks around the state.¹⁵

Governance

The City of Athens is governed by five councilmembers, who elect Mayor and Vice Mayor under the provisions of a Council-Manager form of government under General Law, Section 6-35 of the Tennessee Code Annotated¹⁶. Council members are elected from the community at large and serve for four-year staggered terms. Responsibility for all day to day operations lies with the City Manager. The City Manager also appoints all city staff aside from the city judge, city attorneys, and employees appointed by the Athens Board of Education and Athens Utilities Board. The Citizens Advisory Board and the Recreation Advisory Board provide recommendations to City Council on issues and needs in the community.

The Athens Board of Education is an independent elected board of officials elected from the community at large and manages employment, regulations, and policies in the Athens school district. Members of the Board are elected and serve terms in the same way as City Council members. The Athens Board of Education does not have jurisdiction over its annual budget.

The Athens Utilities Board is the City's utility board established by the City of Athens to purchase, manage, produce and distribute electricity, gas, and water and to manage the treatment and disposal of wastewater within Athens. The Board is comprised of five commissioners who are elected by a majority vote by the City Council and serve four-year staggered terms.

¹⁴ <https://comptroller.tn.gov/boards/state-board-of-equalization/sboe-services/property-tax-incentive-programs/land-banks.html>

¹⁵ <https://thda.org/news-media/thda-shares-insights-with-counties-considering-land-banks>

¹⁶ Tenn. Code Ann. § 6-35-101



City Council meetings are held the third Tuesday of every month at 6 PM at the Athens Municipal Building, and the public is invited to attend.¹⁷

Municipal Finances

The financial capacity and stability of a municipality directly affects its ability to accomplish goals and recommendations of the plan. According to the 2017-2018 Annual Budget for the City of Athens, the municipality's total estimated revenues for the fiscal year 2017-2018 and the budgeted revenues for fiscal year 2018-2019 increased \$530,000. Expenditures increased by \$612,600 over this same period due to planning capital improvement investments. The City of Athens is currently debt-free and holds adequate reserves in case of an emergency.

The largest source of revenue for the City is the property tax levy. Because of the City's strong financial position, the current municipal property tax rate is \$1.27 per \$100 of assessed valuation of real property. Budgeted property tax revenues for the 2018-2019 fiscal year increased to \$5,550,000 from the estimated property taxes revenues of \$5,250,000 in the 2017-2018 fiscal year. The second largest source of revenue for the City of Athens is the 2% sales tax, which increased to 2.75% between the budget for the 2018-2019 fiscal year and the estimates for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

¹⁷ "Charter for the City of Athens, Tennessee", http://www.cityofathenstn.com/athens_cht.pdf



FACTORS AFFECTING LAND USE IN ATHENS



NATURAL FACTORS AFFECTING LAND USE

Natural factors affecting development in Athens include climate, topography, drainage and flooding, and soils and geology. Many of the factors described in this section remain unchanged since the 2004 plan and were therefore taken directly from that plan. Changes and updates to that text are noted in the footnotes of each page.

Climate

McMinn County is in the humid continental climate zone with prevailing wind coming from the southwest. Winter and summer temperatures are mild, with an average winter temperature of 37.8 degrees and an average summer temperature of 75.1 degrees Fahrenheit. The climate is agreeable for outdoor agricultural work, with a history of 170 – 210 frost-free days each year. Total annual precipitation is about 57 inches. “Of this, about 30 inches, or 53 percent, usually falls in April through September. The growing season for most crops falls within this period. The heaviest 1-day rainfall during the period of record was 5.46 inches on March 16, 1973.”¹⁸ The hottest day on record is 107 degrees Fahrenheit. The average relative humidity in mid-afternoon is about 56%.

In general, the climate is particularly favorable for early maturing crops and for those crops that require a long growing season and those that can withstand dry weather during their later growth and maturing periods (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan).

Water Resources

Springs, cisterns and wells provide water for farm and family use. The Athens Utilities Board (AUB) provides water service to the City and the surrounding urban growth area. The primary water source for the City of Athens is Ingleside Spring and three wells. Water from the spring and wells is pumped and treated at the Vernon S. Wade Filter Plant located on Old Niota Road (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan). AUB also purchases water from the Hiwassee Utility Commission, which is treated from the Hiwassee River. In total, AUB serves over 8,000 customers with its water system with over 300 miles of water distribution lines. AUB also manages five above ground reservoirs to store treated water that is supplied to residential and commercial/industrial customers across the City.¹⁹

To ensure that the tap water is safe to drink, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) prescribes regulations that limit the amount of certain substances in water provided by public water systems. Additional information on the drinking water of Athens is supplied in the 2018 Water Quality Report prepared by AUB as required by EPA.²⁰

¹⁸ Richard Livingston and Melissa Oliver, Soil Survey of McMinn County Tennessee; USDA and NRCS, 2004, pg. 14

¹⁹ <http://www.aub.org/about-aub/departments/aub-water-department>, accessed 10/20/2019

²⁰ <http://www.aub.org/uploads/wqr2018.pdf>, accessed 10/19/2019



Topography

Topography can constrain development or use of land in several ways. These constraints include the steepness of grades, presence of floodplains, and the quality and depth of soils. Topography within McMinn County varies a good deal. The county lies within the South Appalachian Ridge and Valley and the Blue Ridge land resource areas. Starr Mountain, the highest point in the county, lies in the eastern part of the county at about 2,300 ft above sea level.

Elevations within the corporate limits of Athens range from about 880 to 1,100 ft above sea level. The Knobs, Red Hills, Mill Ridge, and Niota Ridge areas in the southeastern and northeastern portions of Athens present the greatest topographic challenges to development, with slopes averaging from 20 – 40 percent (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan).

Drainage and Flooding

Drainage in Athens is well defined. The municipality is entirely drained by the Oostanaula and North Mouse Creek drainage basins. The Oostanaula and North Mouse Creek have narrow streambeds with wide floodplains, and flow southward to join the Hiwassee River. The City has experienced several floods in the past, with the major source of flooding being along the Oostanaula Creek. The greatest flood known to have occurred in Athens was in March 1973. The Oostanaula Creek rose to heights of 8 to 10 feet over its banks throughout the City. Damage was extensive in the central business district along Jackson and Bank Streets. There have been 47 important floods along the banks of the Oostanaula Creek in the last 100 years. With no obvious solution for preventing flooding, the only remaining alternative for the municipality has been the practice of sound floodplain management (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan). After noting ongoing flooding issues, Athens recently carried out a project to develop wetlands on the property of the E.G. Fisher Public Library. These wetlands have been highly successful in mitigating local flooding issues in the area, and no major flooding issues have been reported in this area since their completion.



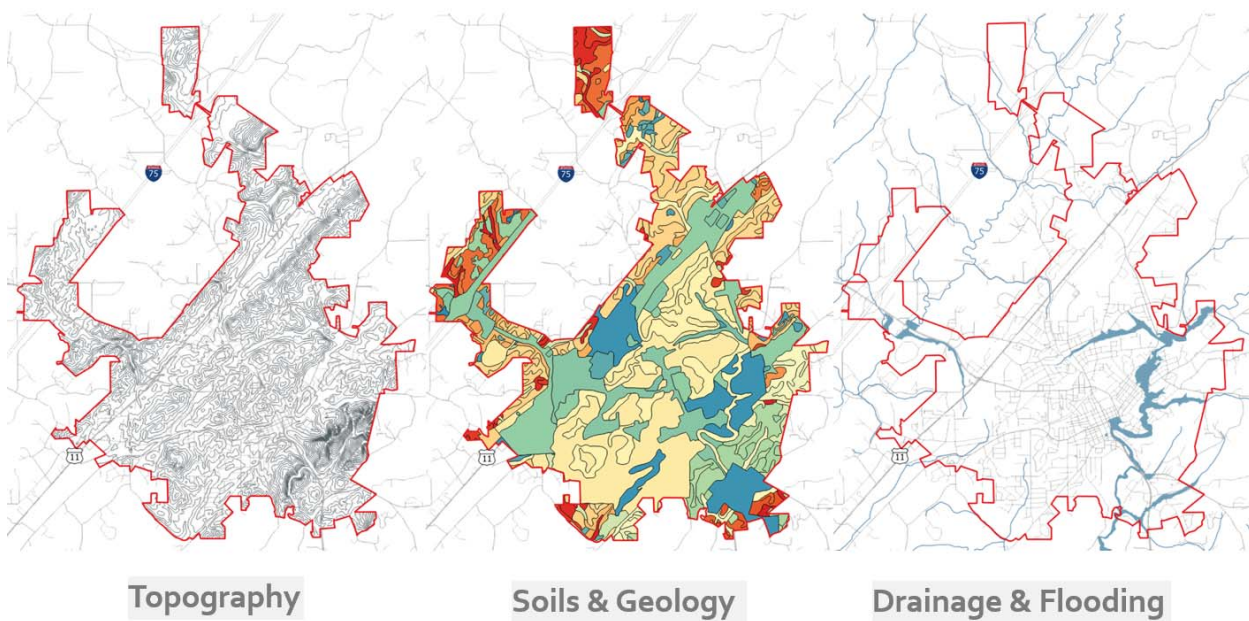
Shoal Creek at Riceville Decatur Rd



Soils and Geology

One of the most important factors affecting development in any community is the content and capability of the various soils. Knowledge of the various characteristics of the soils, such as topography, permeability, flood potential, septic tank and street capability, drainage qualities, and soil depth are important in determining the appropriate land use for particular sites (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan).

The original soil survey of McMinn County was developed in 1957. Later, an interim update to this original soil survey was completed in 1997. The 2004 Land Use Plan used the 1997 interim soil survey to document the general suitability of soil types in the City of Athens and surrounding urban growth area in a series of maps and tables. These maps and tables included classifications of soils in 8 categories. The latest soil survey for McMinn County, completed in 2004, changed the classification to 6 categories. The USDA Web Soil Survey, generated in August 2005, provides online access to the largest natural resource information system in the U.S. According to the Natural Resource Conservation Service website, “NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation’s counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site is updated and maintained online as the single authoritative source of soil survey information”²¹. The suitability of soils varies a good deal across the municipality. Up to date details on these soils and their capacity for various land uses can be accessed through the Web Soil Survey **website**. As noted in the 2004 land use plan, soil types and characteristics vary considerably across the municipality and should be considered on a site by site basis during the review of specific developments and land uses (See 2004 Athens Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan).



²¹ <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>



SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING LAND USE

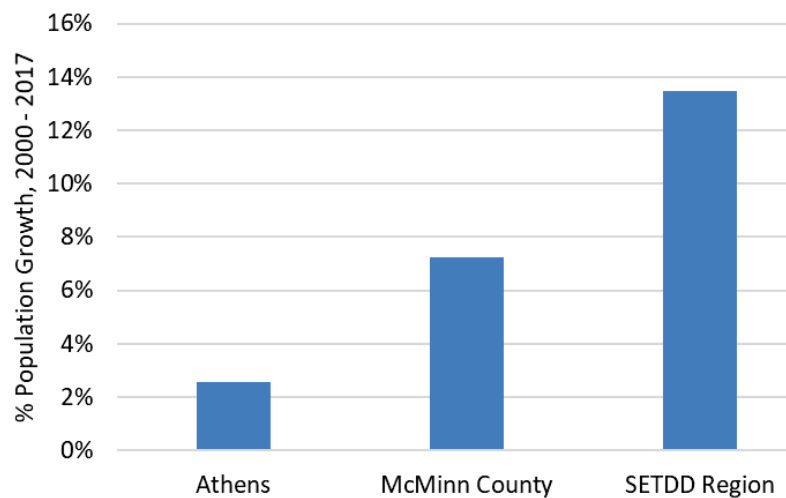
Demographic and economic factors affecting development in Athens include changes in overall population and population density, shifts in demographic factors such as age and gender, education levels, employment and income, and overall cost of living.

Population

The estimated population in the City of Athens in 2017 was 13,559 citizens. The estimated population of Athens has grown at a steady rate over the past 18 years. In 2000, Athens contained 13,220 residents, representing total growth of 2.6%. Over the same period, McMinn County's population grew from 49,015 to 52,569 (7.3% total growth), and the counties in the Southeast Tennessee Development District

region saw a population growth of 566,257 to 642,635 (13.5% total growth). This regional growth rate was faster than the statewide average over this period. Although Athens grew at a slower rate than the County and region between 2000 and 2017, the planning team anticipates that the continued growth in the County and region could create new development pressure in Athens.

While the built-out areas of Athens have a reasonably high density, there is a good deal of land that has not yet been developed within the corporate boundaries of the City. Athens has a population density of about 1,000 persons per square mile, which is about 6X the average density for the State and region, but 40% less dense than an average Tennessee city.²²



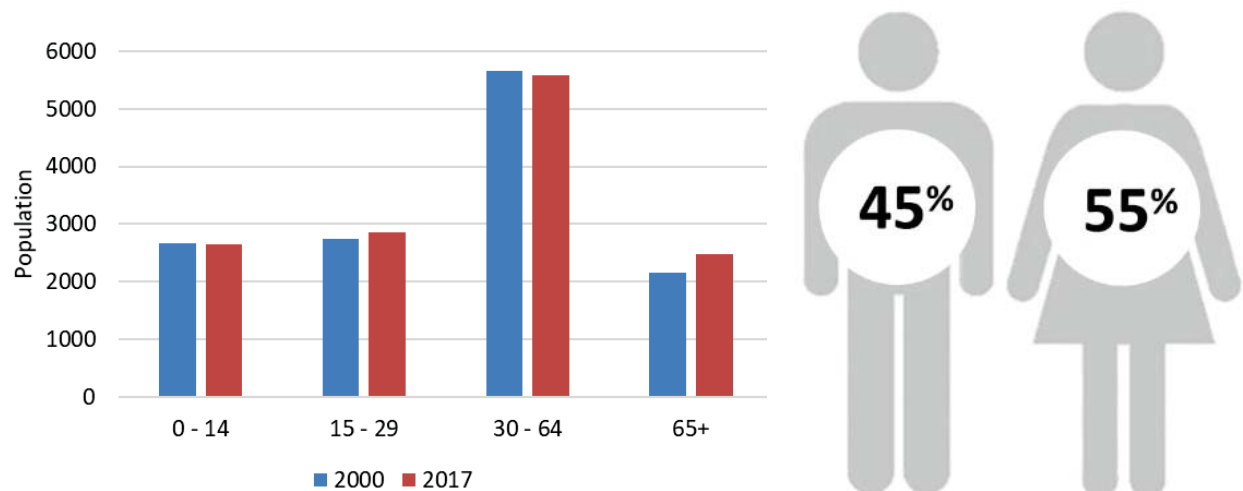
“Athens has a population density of about 1,000 persons per square mile, which is about 6X the average density for the State and region, but 40% less dense than the density of an average Tennessee city.”

²² <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>



Demographic Shift

Demographic factors such as age and gender ratio can affect future growth through their impact on migration rates, birth rates, and death rates in the community. While the populations of McMinn County and the counties in the Southeast Tennessee Development region are about 15% older than they were in 2000, the median age in Athens has remained stable with an estimated median age of 36.6 years old. It can be useful to understand the distribution of population change among various age groups. For this study, Athens' population was divided into four major age groups; children (0 – 14), young adults (15 – 29), adults (30 – 64), and older adults (65+). Among these groups, children and adults saw a slight decrease (-1%) between 2000 and 2017, while the older adults age group saw the greatest increase (15%). Another important note is the increase seen among young adults (4%) between 2000 and 2017. This age group will be looking to establish itself with new careers and industry in the city and region with potential impacts on the use and development of land. This increase in young adults also aligns with the growth experienced by Tennessee Wesleyan University over recent years. The University reported that approximately 20% of graduates stay in the community, contributing to the local population and labor force.



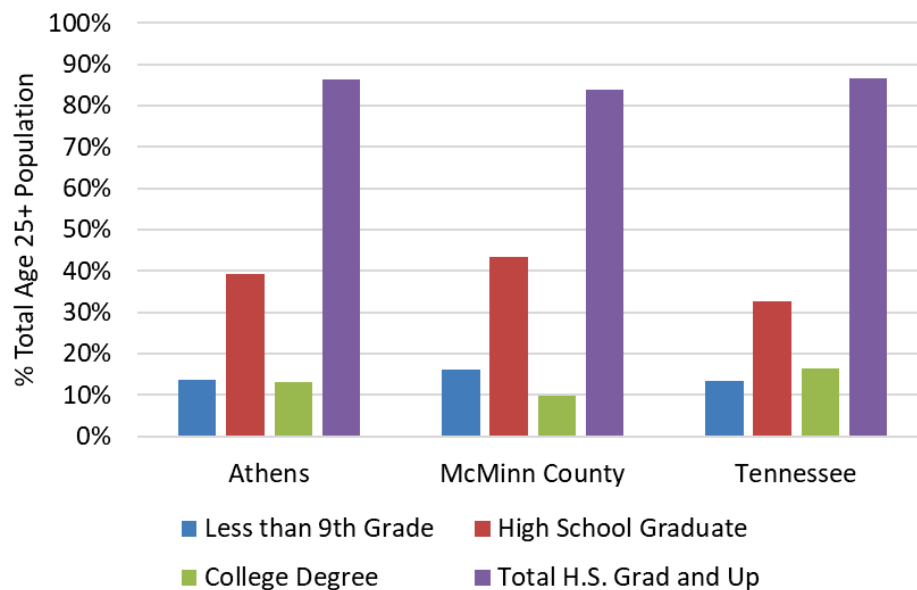
The gender ratio has remained largely stable in Athens since 2000, with about 45% of the population male and 55% of the population female (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>).



Education

Educational opportunities in a location can impact the ability of its residents to advance their careers. Education can also be a major factor for individuals and businesses considering relocation. For these reasons, it can have a fundamental impact on the use of the city's land and resources.

As illustrated in the graph below, educational attainment in the City of Athens largely mirrors the county and state. The percent of residents aged 25 and over who have a high school education or above is slightly higher than the total percent in McMinn County and slightly lower than the percent statewide (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>).



The Athens City Schools system provides five schools, including two primary schools, two intermediate schools, and one middle school. High School education for Athens residents is provided through McMinn County, which has two high schools with classes for grades 9th through 12th grade. Opportunities for post-secondary education in McMinn County include those provided by the Tennessee College of Applied Technology Athens, Cleveland State Community College, and Tennessee Wesleyan University. A new Higher Education Center is currently being constructed on Denso Drive, and will include campuses of Tennessee College of Applied Technology, the University of Tennessee and Cleveland State Community College.

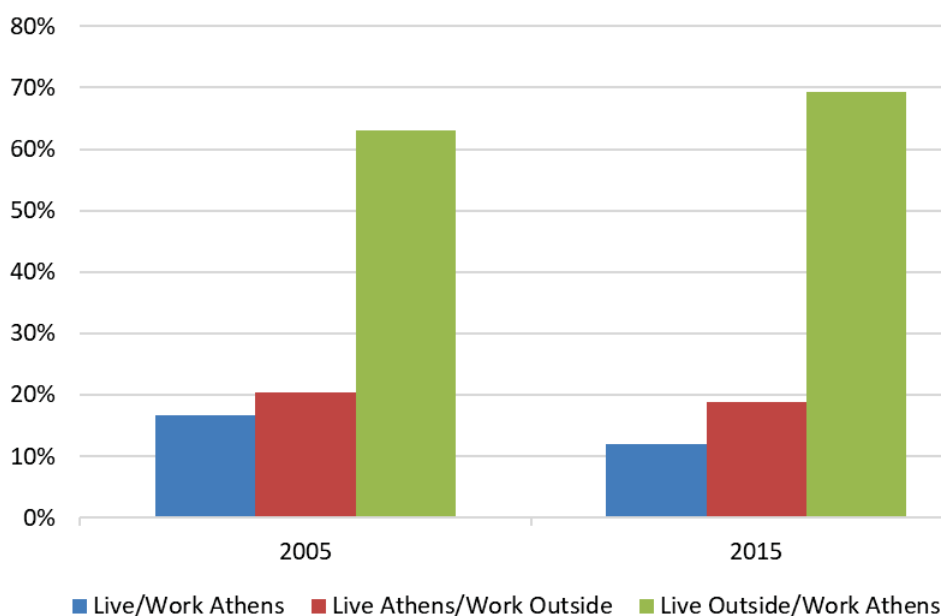
When Tennessee Wesleyan University was interviewed during the planning process, they expressed a desire and intent to grow significantly over the next ten years, expanding the student population by about 50% and increasing the proportion of students living on campus. This could have a significant long-term impact on land uses and development in Athens and was considered during the development of the **land use map** and recommended **objectives and policies**.



Employment and Income

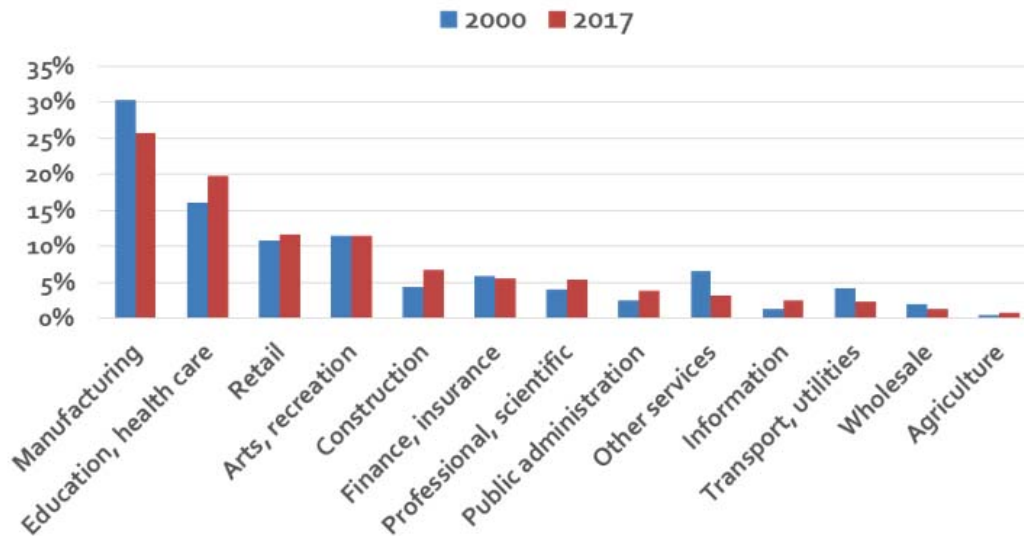
The employment rate for Athens residents aged 16 and older has decreased slightly since 2000 from 53% to 48%. The larger portion of retired residents living in the city and the increased size of the student body at Wesleyan University may account for some of this change.

Employees who work in Athens but live outside the community has increased over the years. Between 2005 and 2015, the portion of those who both live and work in Athens decreased 5%, while those who commute to Athens for work but live outside the community increased 6%. The portion of those living in Athens but commuting outside of the community for work also decreased slightly over this period.



Employment rates among industries and occupations in Athens remain similar to statewide averages, except for manufacturing. Although manufacturing occupations continue to comprise about twice the portion of employment as statewide averages, jobs in that area have been steadily decreasing. From 2000 to 2017, manufacturing employment for residents of Athens decreased an estimated 20%. During this same period, employment in the areas of construction, educational and healthcare services, public administration, and professional services all saw substantial increases. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing employment also increased over this time, but still account for less than 300 estimated jobs countywide in McMinn County.

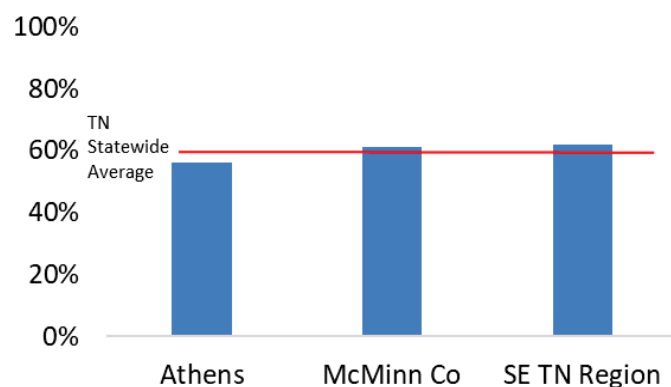
The increasing diversification of employment in Athens reflects similar trends statewide and nationally. Areas of employment with notable increases statewide and nationally that did not see substantial increases in Athens include those in the areas of arts, entertainment, and recreation.



Median household income in the City of Athens increased from \$29,277 in 2000 to \$31,177 in 2017 (6% increase). Over this same period, statewide and national median household income both increased by over 30% to \$48,708 and \$57,652 respectively

Cost of Living

Despite the lower income levels, the City of Athens remains an affordable place to live. The Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (H+T Index) generated by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) provides a comprehensive measure for cost of living at regional, city and neighborhood levels. The measure provides a score for locations based on a comparison of median incomes with median costs for housing and transportation in that location. According to this measure, Athens remains about 10% more affordable than the statewide average, and the average for the 10-county Southeast Tennessee Development District region. The affordability of living in Athens will likely continue to make it a desirable place to live.²³



Percent Income Spent on Housing and Transportation
Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (H+T Index)

²³ <https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/>

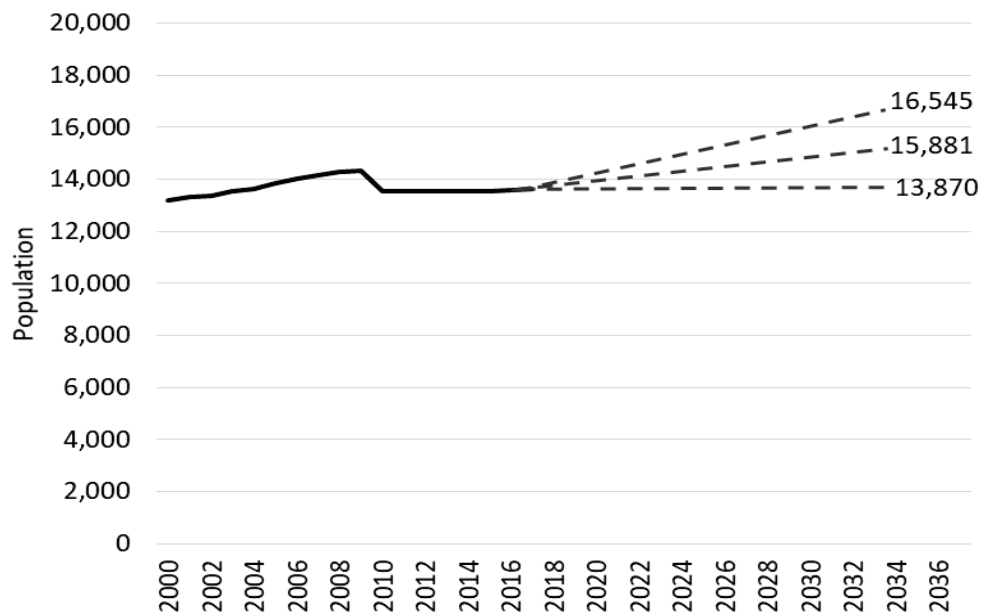


Growth Projections

Growth projections were developed for the City of Athens using several growth factors. Factors considered in the development of these projections include:

- Average population growth rates over the past 18 years²⁴ (13,870 residents in 2037)
- Average population growth rates in the 10-County Southeast Tennessee Development region (15,881 residents in 2037)
- Survival, birth, and migration rates as provided by the Tennessee Department of Health (TNDH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (16,545 residents in 2037)
- Development plans for major institutions affecting growth in the region

Based on these factors, three rates were used to forecast the future population of the community. As illustrated in the graph below, it is projected that Athens will continue to grow and will likely see a population of about 14,000 to 16,500 residents in 2037.



City of Athens Population Trends and Projections, 2017 - 2037

It should be noted that these growth rates are based on current population, demographic, and economic trends. If new industries, major employers, or a significant local tourism industry develop in the area, these forecast numbers may change and should be revisited as appropriate.

²⁴ www.census.gov



Summary of Findings

Natural factors can have important implications for how land is used and developed. Land areas with steep slopes, frequent flooding, or poor soils may be unsuitable or expensive for certain land uses or development. Topography, drainage and flooding, and soil properties vary across the municipality, creating greater constraints for development or land uses in some areas and fewer constraints in other areas.

Socio-economic factors can also have important implications for land use and development. Over the last 15 – 20 years, the total population in the City of Athens has continued to grow with the age and gender distribution remaining largely stable. Educational attainment levels remain similar to county and statewide averages. Total employment rates in the city have decreased slightly since 2000. While manufacturing continues to comprise a much larger proportion of total employment than the statewide average, Athens has started to see increasing employment diversification over the last 18 years. The total portion of those living and working in Athens has steadily decreased since 2000, while the portion of those living outside of the city and commuting in for work has steadily increased. While incomes in Athens have not grown as quickly as state and national averages, the city remains a more affordable place to live. Based on historical growth rates in the city and 10-county Southeast Tennessee Development region, growth factors provided by the CDC and TNDOH, and area plans for development, the project team developed forecasts for population growth. Based on these factors, the project team anticipates the population to continue growing and reach about 14,000 to 16,500 residents by 2037.

The factors described and illustrated in the sections above were also considered in the development of the **Suitability Analysis** described further under the **Land Use and Transportation Analysis** section of this report.





LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS



LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

Land use and transportation patterns in Athens have been driven by several factors in the city and region. The regional economy, historic resources, parks and trails, transportation systems, land use trends, zoning compatibility, and land use suitability all have an impact on land use and development in Athens. The planning team studied these factors and considered their potential impact on future land uses in Athens. Below is a summary of this analysis.

Regional Economy

The economy in Athens is impacted by the levels of production and consumption by businesses, consumers, and governments in the region, as well as the availability of major amenities such as airports and other trade centers. Regional factors impacting economic opportunities in Athens were studied and summarized by the planning team. Those factors include the strength of regional industries, the location and proximity of airports, and a Retail Leakage Study recently completed for the City of Athens. These factors have the potential to impact business development, employment, and population growth within Athens and the region.

Regional Industries

Major industries in the 10-county Southeast Tennessee Development District region include those in the areas of education and healthcare, manufacturing, and retail trade. Together, these industries supplied about 50% of total employment in the region.

In the Athens metropolitan statistical area (MSA), the automotive industry has proven a particularly strong industry over the last 20 years. This industry has provided over 3,100 jobs in the MSA over this period, ranking it in the top 20% of MSA's in the U.S. for employment in this industry. Production technology and research and development services related to the automotive industry also show particular strength in the area with a significantly higher portion of employment in these sectors than the national average.²⁵

Airports

Airports in proximity to Athens provide residents and businesses with access to travel opportunities as well as goods and services provided outside of the area. The following airports lie within 50 miles driving distance of Athens:

Local Airports:

- McMinn County Airport (MMI)
- Monroe County Airport (MNV)
- Tellico Plains Municipal Airport (85TN)

²⁵ U.S. Cluster Mapping Project (<http://clustermapping.us/>), Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, Harvard Business School. Data Sources (<http://clustermapping.us/content/data-sources-and-limitations>)



Domestic Airports:

- Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport (CHA)
- Knoxville McGhee Tyson Airport (TYS)

The Nashville International Airport lies about 165 miles to the northwest, and the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport lies about 170 miles to the south.

Regional Retail Study

A retail study was recently completed for the City of Athens. This study identified the primary trade area for the city, demographics in that trade area, available commercial properties, and leakage of local retail spending. Based on these analyses, the report identifies four major areas of focus for future retail growth:

- Restaurants
- Apparel
- Fitness
- Grocery

Locating businesses in the industry areas in Athens could have substantial impacts on future growth, development, and improved quality of experience for both residents and visitors.²⁶

Historic Resources

The preservation and use of Athens historic resources can provide valuable assets for the community's future development and quality of life. McMinn County contains 18 assets and areas registered under the National Register of Historic Places. Of these 18 assets, 9 are located in and immediately around Athens (see **Map 3** in **Appendix B**). An H-1 historic overlay district comprises about four blocks just east of downtown. This overlay does not change the underlying zoning conditions. However, the Athens Historic Preservation Commission has adopted official design guidelines to manage development with design specifications in the H-1 Overlay (compulsory) and within the Historic Commercial Core District (non-compulsory)²⁷.

Nominating this area under the National Register of Historic Places could provide it with further recognition and support continued preservation efforts. In addition to the area currently covered by the H-1 historic district, there are continuing discussions on developing a historic overlay for the central business district area.

²⁶ <https://www.retailstrategies.com/athens/>

²⁷ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>



Form-Based Codes

One specific measure being used by other Tennessee communities to enhance historic preservation while maximizing potential for economic development is the establishment of a form-based code. Form-based codes can replace or overlay existing zoning and provide guidelines for the design and form of buildings, roadways, and public spaces in Athens. By creating a form-based code, the town could expand design guidelines that enhance historic preservation throughout the town's entire jurisdiction. In addition, a form-based code could provide design guidelines for buildings, public spaces, and right-of-way under one umbrella. Finally, a form-based code would also provide a focus on the design, or "look and feel", of buildings and spaces while allowing the flexibility to utilize those spaces for a wider array of uses and activities. It is important that the community is understanding and supportive of this effort. The town should therefore begin the effort with an intensive involvement process that asks community residents for their preferences and endeavors to reach consensus on design and development goals. For example, such an outreach effort may seek to answer whether the community wishes to replace existing zoning with form-based codes in part or all of town, or instead use form-based codes as an overlay to existing zoning in order to keep existing use restrictions and guidelines (See <https://formbasedcodes.org/> for more resources).

Parks and Trails

Athens contains 15 parks and trails, comprising approximately 325 acres. There are also approximately 2,000 acres of undeveloped parcels of 5-acres or greater. Most of these parcels are privately owned but could represent opportunities for recreation, trail connections, or to fill other gaps in the community. Regional Park located off Decatur Pike in the western part of the city provides several regionally significant amenities, including scenic walking paths, a large playground, a convention center with classrooms and event spaces open to the public, and the largest splash pad in the entire state of Tennessee.

Athens contains approximately 16 miles of existing trails and sidewalks. The Eureka Trail is a regional trail, connecting Athens to Englewood. Another regional trail, currently in its conceptual stage, is being proposed to connect Athens with Tellico Plains.

As part of this study, the project team mapped and identified key connections that could improve connectivity among trails, and connect with schools, commercial areas, and residential areas (See **Map 4** in **Appendix B**).





Transportation System

Athens roadways are composed of several categories. Interstates 75 runs along the northwest portion of the city and connects Athens with Knoxville and Chattanooga. Other categories include principal arterials, minor arterials, collectors, and local roads. Three roadways running through the City are on the National Highways System: I-75, Highway 11, and Highway 30. Transportation infrastructure needs are addressed with the City's bi-annual paving schedule. Major state routes running through Athens were repaved in the last 2 years.

During the planning process, discussions were held with the Southeast Tennessee Development District and TDOT regarding planned transportation projects. The only projects identified for the foreseeable future were intersection improvements and regular maintenance projects. No major expansion projects were identified.

One component of transportation improvements identified during the planning process was the need for transportation safety measures to address intersections and roadway segments with higher rates of collisions in the city.

See **Map 5** in **Appendix B**.

Utilities

The presence or lack of utility service can have a major impact on the location and type of future development and land use. Utilities in Athens are provided by Athens Utilities Board (AUB)²⁸. Sewer, water, electricity and natural gas have been developed throughout much of the area within the corporate boundary of Athens, providing sufficient service to accommodate existing and anticipated future development over the planning period.

During the planning process, the project team interviewed AUB staff on current and future projects planned for Athens. According to these interviews, the organization's planned improvements include annual budgeted repairs to address inflow and infiltration (I&I) issues in the sewer system as well as routine capacity upgrades and maintenance for pump stations at Cedar Springs and Sterling Road. No plans for major expansion had been identified at the time of the interviews.

See **Map 6** and **Map 7** in **Appendix B**.

Existing Zoning/Build-out

As indicated in the **Growth Projections** section, Athens is projected to see continued levels of growth. This growth is anticipated to cause a need for further development in Athens to accommodate additional housing, as well as the goods and services to meet the needs of a larger population.

²⁸ <https://www.aub.org>



While demand is anticipated to continue increasing, the land areas as organized under existing zoning in Athens are largely sufficient to meet projected needs. To determine the adequacy of existing zoning, the project team looked at allowable densities under the existing zoning regulations and compared them with demand created by projected future development. According to these calculations, even if the City of Athens were to grow at the highest of the **projected growth rates** to 16,500 residents in 2037, available land would only need to be developed to about 30% of its maximum density over the next ten years to accommodate the larger population.

“Even if the City of Athens was to grow at the highest of the projected growth rates to 16,500 residents, available land would only be developed to about 30% of its maximum density over the next ten years.”

Suitability Analysis

A suitability analysis illustrates the geographic context for opportunities and constraints for land use and development within the corporate boundaries of Athens. The analysis considers the **natural** and **socio-economic factors** affecting land use and their impact on the relative suitability of parcels across the city. Factors considered as part of this analysis include:

- Slopes and hilltops
- Streams and floodplains
- Proximity to existing sewer services
- Proximity to major thoroughfares
- Proximity to employment centers

A map was generated to illustrate the relative suitability of city parcels based on each of these factors, and an overall suitability map was generated by overlaying all of these factors.

This analysis revealed that most of the areas in the City of Athens have a high suitability for future land uses and development. It also revealed that some areas of the city are less suitable than others due to topographic or hydrologic constraints, or limited access to services and employment opportunities (See **Map 8** in **Appendix B – Maps**)

Appendix B also provides a map identifying the location of vacant parcels overlaid on the suitability map to illustrate the relative suitability of undeveloped land (**Map 9**).



COMMUNITY VISION



COMMUNITY VISION

The community was engaged by the planning team to provide input on the analysis, land use map and policy recommendations for the Land Use Plan Update. Public workshops were held at the Regional Park Conference Center in the evening of Friday, September 27th and the morning of Saturday, September 28th. The workshops were open house format, and participants were invited to drop in to review information and provide their feedback at any time during this period. The meetings were advertised in the local newspaper, on the website, and through social media in the two weeks leading up to these meetings.

Participants were engaged by the planning team at a series of maps and posters set out on easels and tables. Large note pads were also provided, and participants were asked to write their comments and suggestions for the plan. Feedback from participants is summarized in the boxes below. Images of the sheets containing comments and suggestions collected from participants are provided in **Appendix A – Community Meetings**.





Comments:

- Hwy 305 between I-75 and Congress Hwy cannot accommodate commercial growth
- Hwy 305 is dangerous due to speed and congestion
- Do not have internet & TV access everywhere in City
- Tellico Ave needs sewer to Congress Hwy
- City and county have limited internet connectivity
- Connect industrial parks by Hwy
- Connect Decatur to Duncan parallel to I-75
- Annex open land to build residential & develop new frontage road for retail/commercial
- Strengthen preservation of downtown & neighborhoods – don't lose our historic assets
- 3rd interchange
- How can we contribute to the continued preservation efforts for the African American community and the J.L. Cook legacy? What/how will this community's African American presence be included in the future growth of Athens?

Suggestions:

- Widen Hwy 305
- Widen Hwy 305 to 4 lane with a turn lane
- "Missing middle" of small assisted living community
- Need water & sewer on West Street (behind Lowe's)
- Form-based zoning
- Creative/flexible transitional areas between zones
- More flora & multimodal connectivity between neighborhoods - less cars
- Develop exit 49 (Mt Verd Road) with nice restaurants, apartments, gas stations (similar to exit 25 in Cleveland)*
- Develop a multipurpose community center that holds hundreds of people utilizing the "vacancy to vibrancy" model
- Review vacant buildings & convert to vibrant spaces
- Increase awareness of the importance of young people's voice in building up a community for generations to come. How are we reaching them/acquiring their input?
- Create overlay of vacant properties and suitability for developers

*Comment was emailed after public meetings



LAND USE PLAN



LAND USE PLAN

Central to the land use plan is a land use map that illustrates community aspirations for layout and intensity of land uses within the corporate limits of the city. The plan also provides land use objectives and policies, designed to meet the **goals** of the project and enhance public health and orderly and effective development opportunities.

Future Land Use Map

A land use map was generated by the project team, considering both the **natural** and **demographic** factors impacting development and the findings of the **land use analysis**. The map illustrates the areas that should be developed or preserved for various land uses within the corporate bounds of Athens.

To generate this land use map, the project team used several filters. The **first filter** was a comparison of existing land uses with existing zoning. If the two align well, it is an indication that the current zoning regulations do a reasonably good job in meeting land use needs. If, on the other hand, there is a good deal of development or land uses that have occurred that do not align with the zoning map, it may be an indication that the distribution of land uses currently regulated under the city's zoning should be revisited. A review of the existing zoning map with the existing land use map revealed that existing zoning is reasonably consistent with land uses within the corporate boundaries of the city (See **Map 1** and **Map 2** in **Appendix B – Maps**)

A **second filter** used by the project team was to interview key stakeholders to understand if existing zoning would meet the needs for future development. The only future need identified by the project team that the current zoning may not adequately address was the expansion of Tennessee Wesleyan University in the 3-block area from E. College Street to E. Hornsby Street and between N. White Street and Green Street.

The **third filter** was to overlay layers of public services, such as roadways and utilities, as well as environmental constraints, such as slopes and wetlands to determine how well those services and constraints align with existing and intended land uses. Environmental constraints considered are the ones described in the **Natural Factors Affecting Land Use** section. The project team developed maps to document the following public services by type and location throughout the municipality:

- Parks and Trails
- Roadways
- Utilities

A suitability analysis developed by the team provided another way to illustrate these opportunities and constraints (See **Map 8** in **Appendix B – Maps**).



The **fourth filter** was to gather input and feedback from stakeholders and the public during interviews, steering committee meetings, and public workshops. A draft land use map was generated and presented during meetings and workshops and input was gathered on its proposed elements.

Based on these filters, a **final land use map** was generated. Because the existing land uses align so well with the existing zoning in Athens, the future land use map also aligns closely with existing zoning.

There are a few key differences to point out:

- The three-block section from E. College Street to E. Hornsby Street and between N. White Street and Green Street is currently zoned as Central Business District but has been classified for civic/institutional land uses under the land use map in order to accommodate growth of the University.
- All the land currently zoned for heavy industrial (I-2), intensive commercial (B-3), and medical (M-1) were designated under the land use named, “regional commercial”. These are the land uses and industries that generate the highest volume of heavy vehicle traffic, have the greatest volume of regional traffic, and have the heaviest utility demands. These factors all have a similar impact on land use and development in those areas. Designating them as one land use also provides the community with some flexibility as development continues in these areas.

The chart below compares future land uses in the Future Land Use Map with existing zoning. It also provides the residential density intended for each land use type, the number of acres in each land use type, and the percentage of the total (See **Map 10** in **Appendix B – Maps** for future land uses).



Land Use/Zoning Conversion Table

Land Use Types	Density	Existing Zones	Acres	%
Civic/Institutional	5 – 10 DU/Acre	P-1	79	1%
Office/Light Industrial	n/a	I-1	307	3%
Regional Commercial	n/a	B-3, M-1, I-2	3,102	33%
Commercial	5 – 10 DU/Acre*	B-1	305	3%
Mixed Use – Town Center	5 – 10 DU/Acre*	B-2	58	1%
Parks and Recreation	n/a	n/a	325	3%
Rural Residential	> 1 Acre Lots	R-E	637	7%
Low Density Residential	2 – 4 DU/Acre	R-1	1,070	11%
Medium Density Residential	4 – 5 DU/Acre	R-2	2,774	29%
High Density Residential	5 – 10 DU/Acre	R-3, R-4	918	10%

*Requires review. Must meet all adopted life, safety, and fire codes



Objectives and Policies

Objectives and policies were formulated and validated with the steering committee and the public during public workshops. These objectives and policies are oriented to support desired land use outcomes in Athens.

Objective 1 – Support 2004 LUP Policies

The 2004 Land Use Plan generated by the City of Athens provided a series of objectives and policy recommendations to support desirable land uses in the City. Those objectives and policies were provided for the following areas:

1. General Development and Growth Management
2. Residential Uses
3. Commercial Uses
4. Industrial Uses
5. Public Land
6. Utilities
7. Vacant land
8. Transportation
9. Signage

Many of the more specific recommended objectives and policies from that plan have been carried out. This plan update continues to support and carry forward all the recommended objectives and policies from the 2004 plan.

Policy 1 – Continue policies in 2004 Land Use Plan

The city should continue to carry out the policies called for in the 2004 Land Use Plan, as listed on pages 60 through 85 of that plan.

Objective 2 – Align regulations and services with new land use map and plan

Maintain regulations and services that support land uses and development patterns that align with this updated land use map and plan.

Policy 1 – Regulations support land use map and plan

Zoning regulations should be updated and maintained to support this land use plan and map.

Policy 2 – Utilities and services support land uses that align with land use plan and map

Public services such as roadways and utilities should be provided to encourage development that aligns with this land plan and map.



Objective 3 – Protect Historic Assets in Athens

Develop regulations and investments to protect and celebrate the historical characteristics of Athens.

Policy 1 – Continue to explore Central Business District as a historic district

As noted under **Historic Resources** section, the city has been in ongoing discussions regarding development of a historic overlay for the entire Central Business District. These discussions should continue with the goal of identifying and protecting the architectural and design elements that make the Central Business District valuable and unique.

Policy 2 – Consider Consistent Residential Densities in Historic Neighborhoods

The City has been in discussions regarding appropriate architecture and densities for its historic neighborhoods. To this end, the city should consider updating underlying zoning to R-1 or provide other appropriate density standards for non-commercial properties in historic neighborhoods.

Policy 3 – Nominate historic districts to the National Register of Historic Places

The existing H-1 Historic District, as well as any additional areas brought under a historic overlay in Athens, should be nominated by the City to be recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

Policy 4 – Develop form-based code with illustrative guidelines

Form-based codes can replace or overlay existing zoning and provide guidelines for the design and form of buildings, roadways, and public spaces. In doing so, they create a focus on the image, or “look and feel”, of buildings and spaces while allowing the flexibility to use those spaces for a wider array of functions and activities. The form-based code is often accompanied by a visual tool that provides a menu of illustrative design guidelines and architectural detailing for each area. It is important that the community is understanding and supportive of this effort. The City should therefore begin the effort by assessing the buildings, spaces, and environments with unique history or heritage. The City should then engage community residents to understand their values and preferences, and endeavor to reach consensus on design and development goals. For example, such an outreach effort may seek to answer whether the community wishes to replace existing zoning with form-based codes in part or all of town, or instead use form-based codes as an overlay to existing zoning in order to keep existing use restrictions and guidelines. To this end, the City should consider passing a resolution stating intention to explore the application of form-based code for the City of Athens (See **Form-Based Codes** on page 29 for additional detail).

Policy 5 – Ease requirements and provide incentives to encourage adaptive reuse where appropriate

Older buildings can be a valuable resource, providing architecturally rich and cost-effective spaces for a diversity of residents, businesses, and services. However, the potential reuse of these



older buildings is often not realized because of outdated zoning and development standards, or because of lacking financial tools.

Where appropriate, the City should ease some of the more costly requirements and regulations, including those for **parking, building height, density, floor-area-ratios, and open space** to encourage developments and programs that reuse older buildings. Lengthy permit-review times can also pose a barrier to developments that reuse older buildings. The City should consider developing a **multi-departmental team** that will become familiar with the older buildings in the city and coordinate to provide efficient review of proposed projects. Finally, where appropriate, Athens should consider developing **overlays or policies** that identify the general areas where reuse of historic structures should be encouraged through the ease of requirements and restrictions and an expedited review process.²⁹

Policy 6 – Develop resolutions or ordinances requiring demolition review

The city should consider passing a resolution or developing an ordinance requiring review of structures for historical significance before demolition is approved.

Objective 4 – Support non-motorized connectivity

Develop regulations and investments to enhance and support the safety and connectivity of the non-motorized network in and around Athens.

Policy 1 – Prioritize non-motorized routes connecting parks, schools, residential areas and regional trails

The city should prioritize improvements to the non-motorized network that connect parks, schools, residential areas, and regional trails as illustrated on the Parks and Trails map in **Appendix B – Maps**.

Policy 2 – Provide higher priority for improvements at high-collision intersections

During the prioritization of transportation improvement projects for funding, a higher weight should be given to improvements that enhance safety at high-collision intersections, particularly those that have had instances of pedestrian/bicyclist fatalities or severe injuries.

Policy 3 – Install benches, water fountains, and bike repair stations along non-motorized routes

Installing benches, water fountains, and bike repair stations at key locations can encourage bicycling and walking to access businesses and trails in Athens. The City should determine the best locations for bicycle racks and repair stations and identify local funding or grants to develop infrastructure.

²⁹ <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/untapped-potential-strategies-for>, accessed 11/27/2019



Policy 4 – Prioritize improvements on roadways with low bicycle level of service (BLOS)

Where appropriate, the City should prioritize improvements to bicycle routes with low bicycle level of service (BLOS) as identified by the TDOT Bicycle Suitability Index³⁰

Objective 5 – Support industrial and intensive regional business in Athens

Develop regulations and investments that support continued growth of industrial and intensive regional business enterprises in Athens.

Policy 1 – Annex and regulate properties requested for annexation by McMinn County EDA

McMinn County EDA intends to continue acquiring properties for use in industrial and intensive business development. When those properties are brought to Athens for annexation, the city should annex and regulate the properties to encourage and support industrial and intensive business enterprises.

Objective 6 – Support a diversified economy in Athens and McMinn County

Develop regulations and investments that support diverse businesses and programs in the City of Athens.

Policy 1 – Develop area plans as needed to encourage business diversity

To attract and retain a healthy diversity of businesses, the City should consider generating area plans where appropriate to ensure developments improve the economic and social vitality of the City and are consistent with the overall vision for the community. These area plans can, for example, identify strategies to maximize the reuse of underutilized properties, ensure the effective use of infrastructure, coordinate orderly commercial development, and identify and protect unique assets.³¹

³⁰ <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/public-trans/TDOTBicycleSuitabilityIndex.pdf>, accessed 10/22/19

³¹ <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/redevelopment.htm>



APPENDIX A – COMMUNITY MEETINGS

COMMENTS

- Hwy 305 between I-75 and Congress Hwy. cannot accommodate future commercial growth.
- Hwy 305 is already dangerous due to speed and ~~suggestion~~ ^{congestion}.
- Do not have internet & TV everywhere in City.
- Tellico Avenue needs sewer to Congress Hwy.
- City and Country are challenged w/ limited Internet connecting.
- Connect Industrial Parks by Hwy.
- Connect Denton to Duncan parallel to I-75, Annex open land to build Residential & Develop new Hwy fronts as Retail/Commercial.
- Strengthen Preservation of Downtown & Neighborhoods — don't lose our historic assets.
- 3rd interchange.
- ~~SECTA~~ ^{SECTA} capture overuse of vacant properties for reuse.
- How can we contribute to the continued preservation efforts for the African American Community and the SL Creek legacy? What/HW will this community's (AA) presence be included in the future growth of Athens?

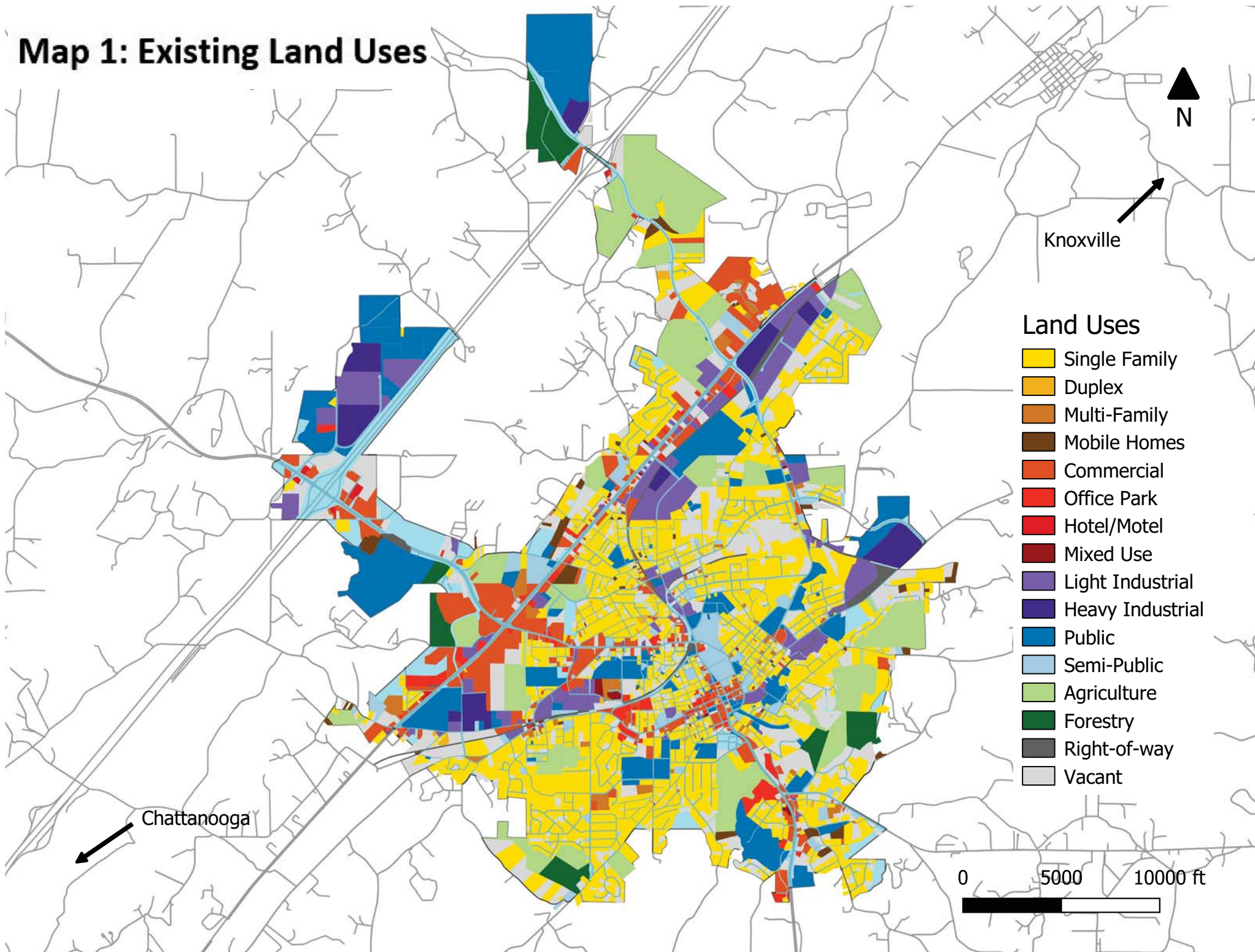
SUGGESTIONS

- Widen Hwy 305
- Widen Hwy 305 to 4 lane with a turn lane.
- "Missing Middle" Small Assisted Living Community.
- Need water & sewer on West Street (behind houses).
- Form-based Zoning.
- Creative/Flexible uses in Zones-transitional areas.
- More flora & connectivity (multi-modal) between neighborhoods & commercial areas — less cars.
- Develop opportunities for a multi-purpose community center that holds hundreds of people. Example: Convert the old N's New County High School into a community center for: Centers, barbeques, carp sessions, Events, etc. (youth events etc) utilizing vacancy to vibrant.
- Reuse ~~vacant~~ vacant building & convert to vibrant space.
- Increase awareness of the importance of our young people's voice in building a community for generations to come. How are we reaching them/acquiring their input.

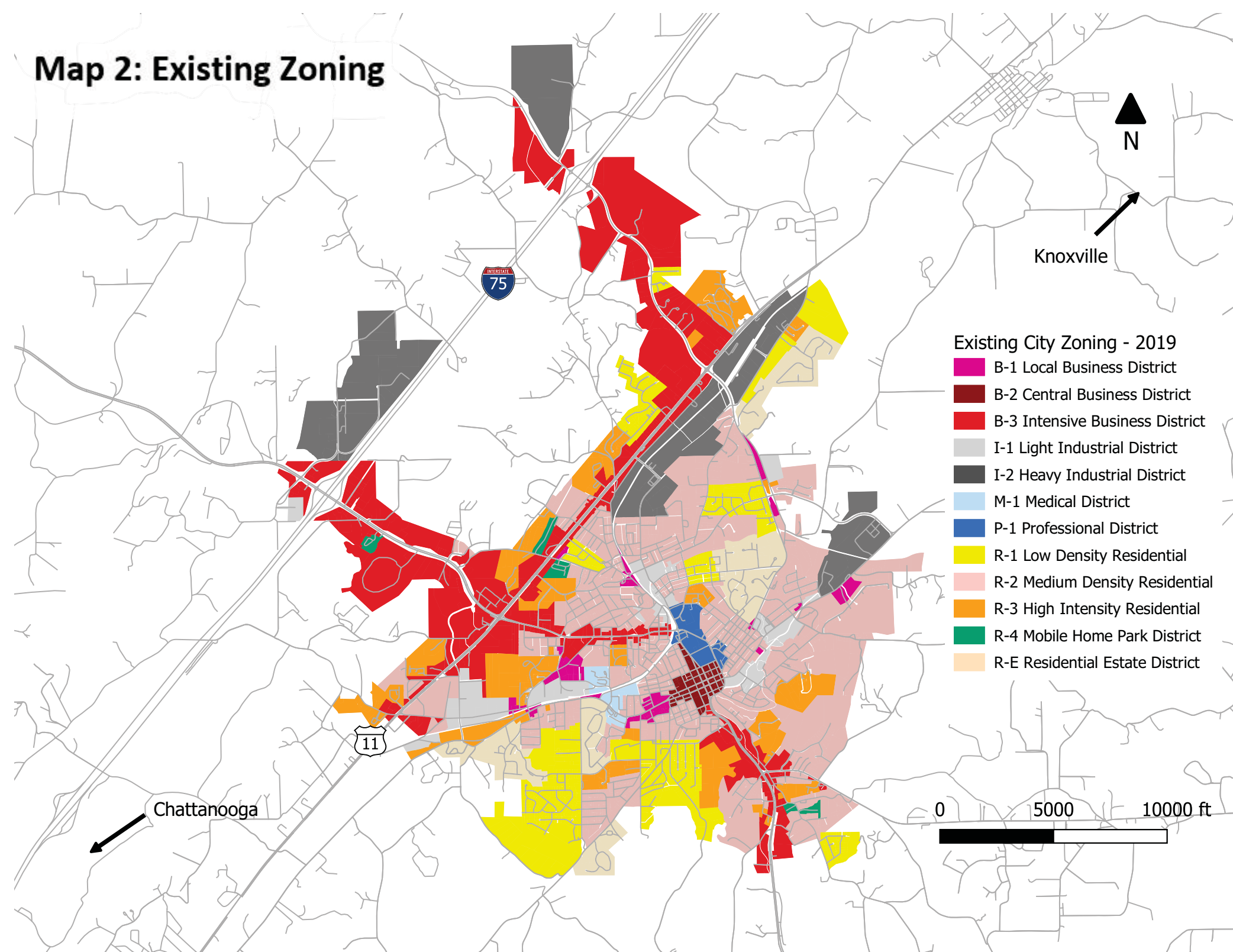


APPENDIX B – MAPS

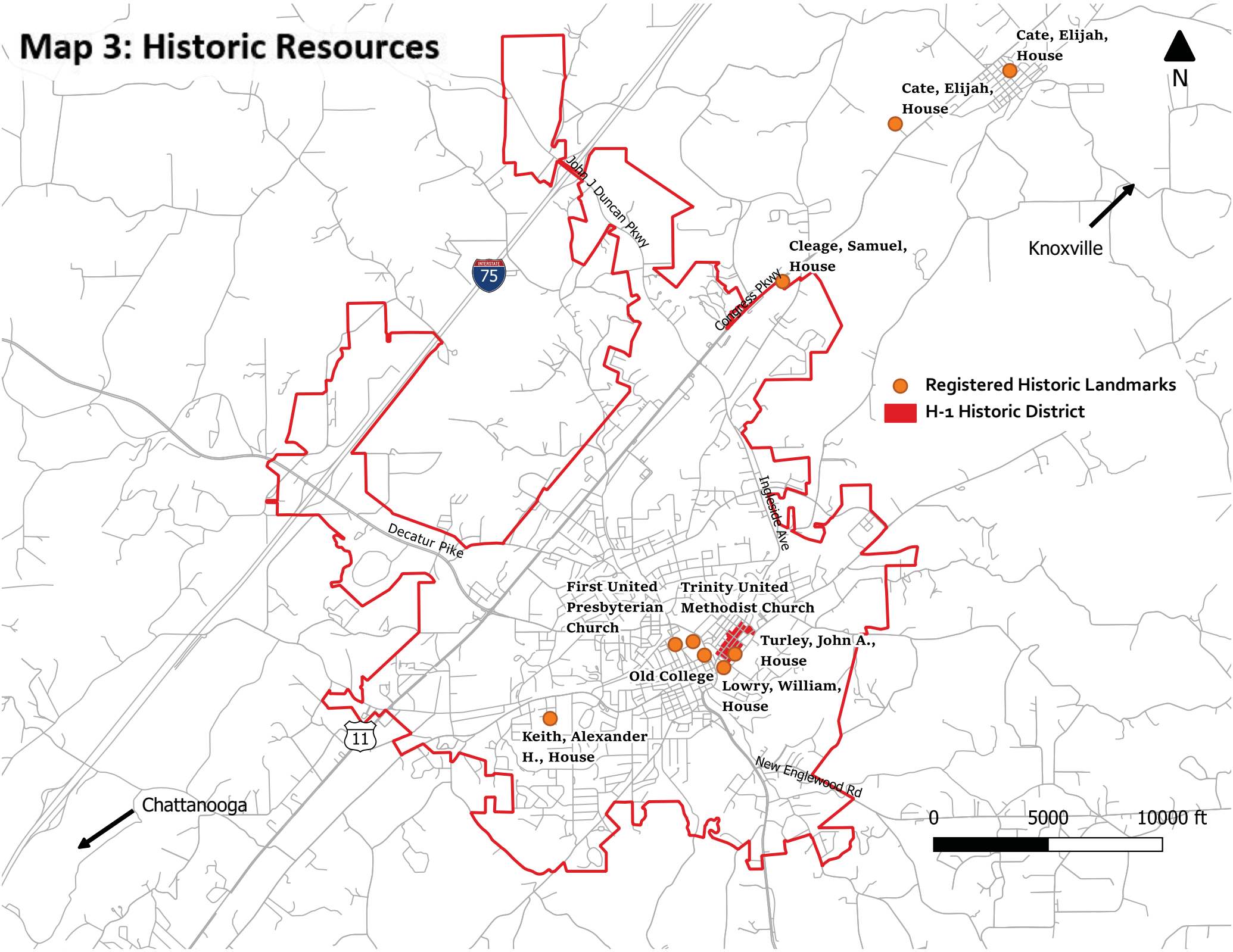
Map 1: Existing Land Uses



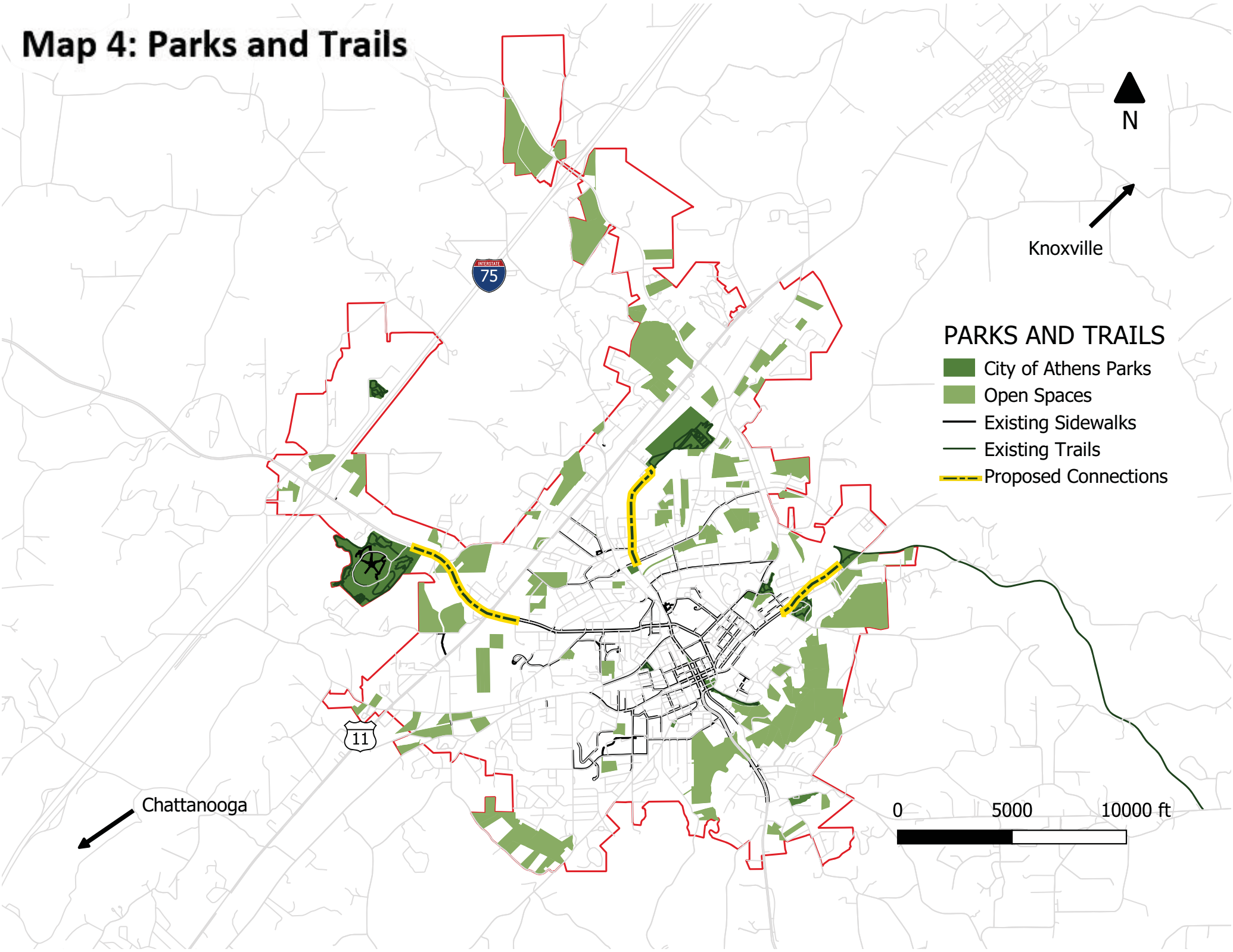
Map 2: Existing Zoning


















Map 3: Historic Resources

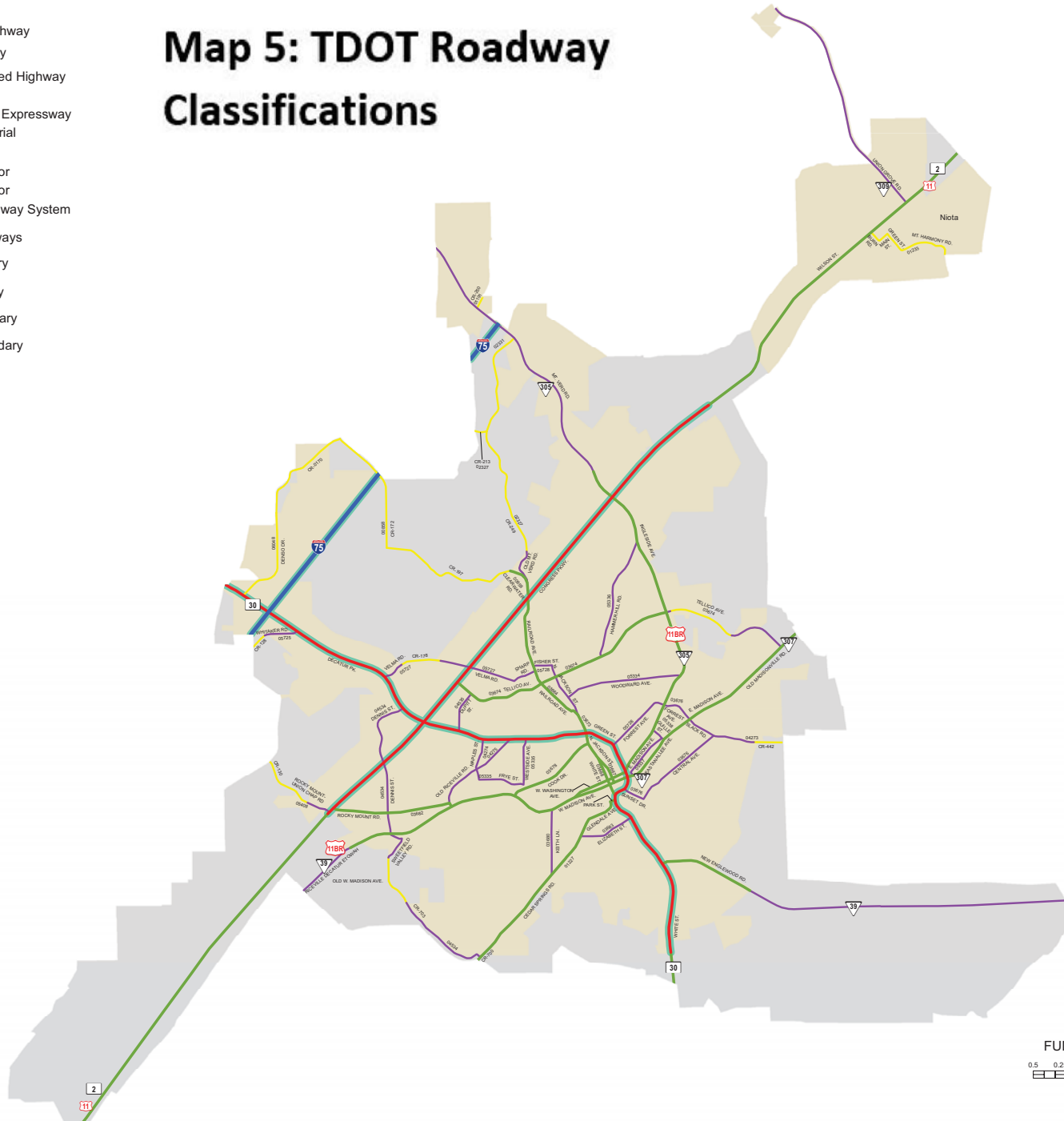


Map 4: Parks and Trails



-  Interstate Highway
-  State Highway
-  U.S. Numbered Highway
-  Interstate
-  Freeway and Expressway
-  Principal Arterial
-  Minor Arterial
-  Major Collector
-  Minor Collector
-  National Highway System
-  Major Waterways
-  Park Boundary
-  City Boundary
-  Urban Boundary
-  County Boundary

Map 5: TDOT Roadway Classifications



TN **TDOT**
 Department of
 Transportation
 Long Range Planning Division
 Data Visualization Office

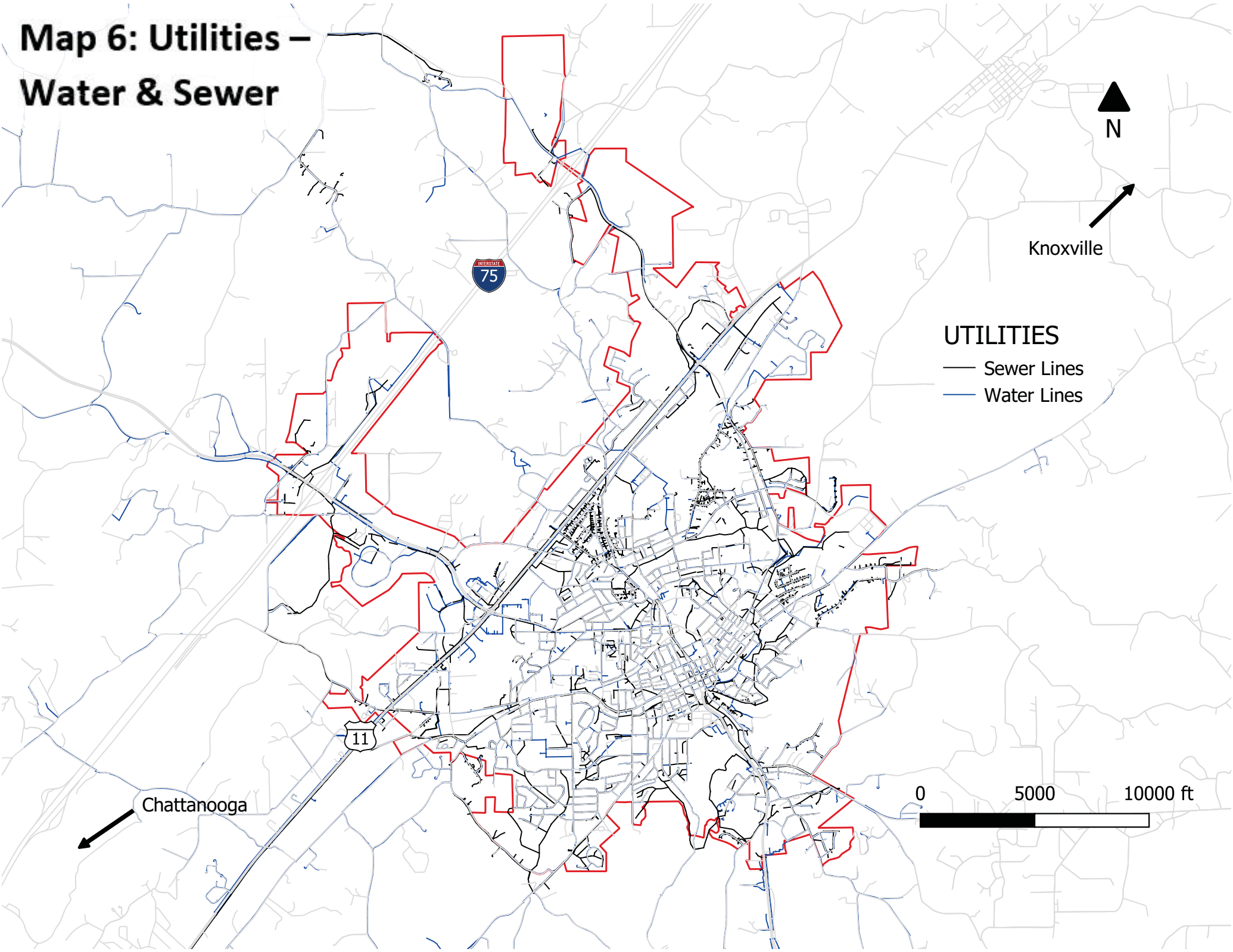
**ATHENS
 (NIOTA)**

**TENNESSEE
 FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

0.5 0.25 0 0.5 1 1.5 2
 Miles

Date: 9/24/2018

Map 6: Utilities – Water & Sewer



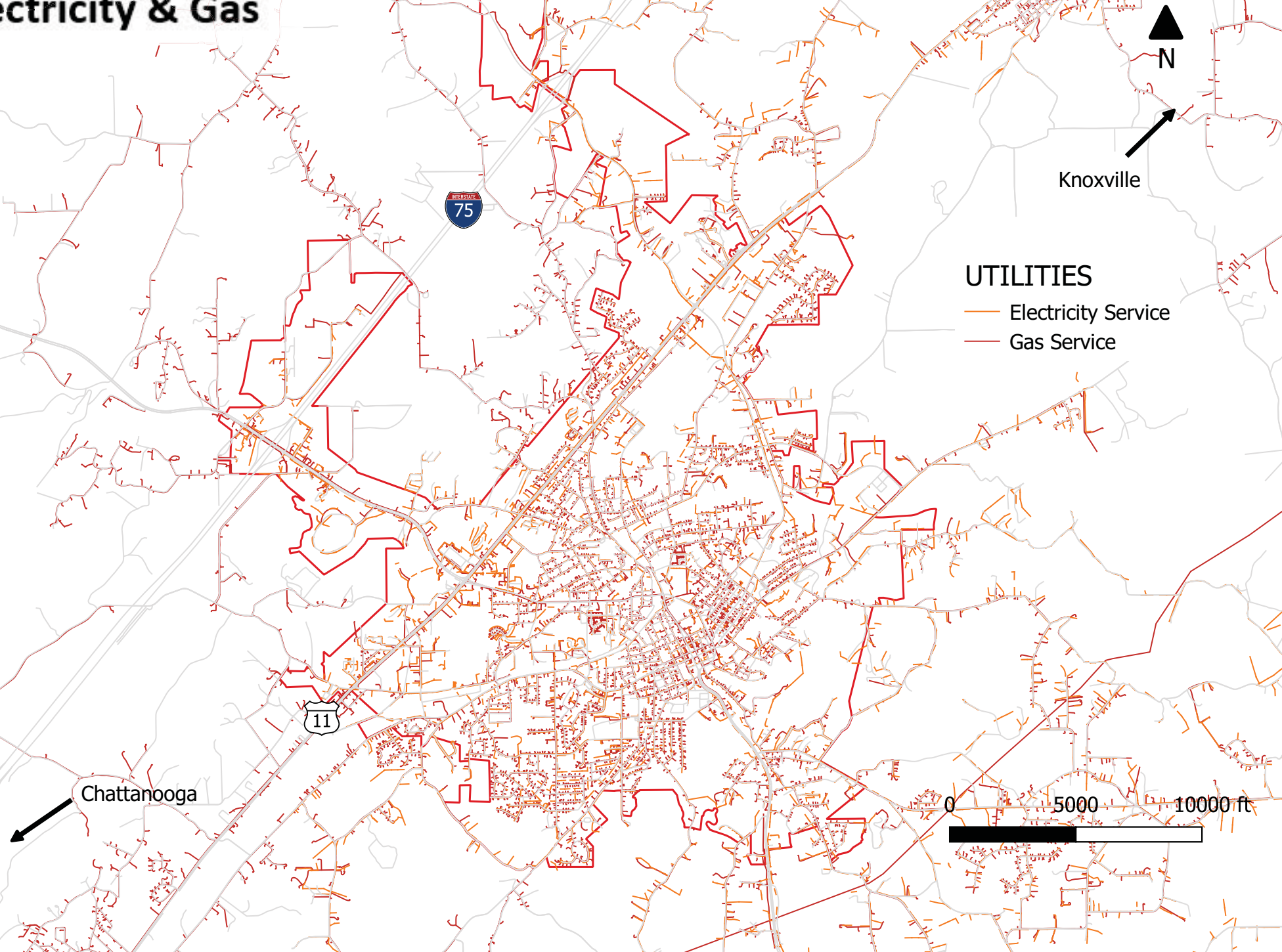
▲
N
↗
Knoxville

UTILITIES
— Sewer Lines
— Water Lines

0 5000 10000 ft

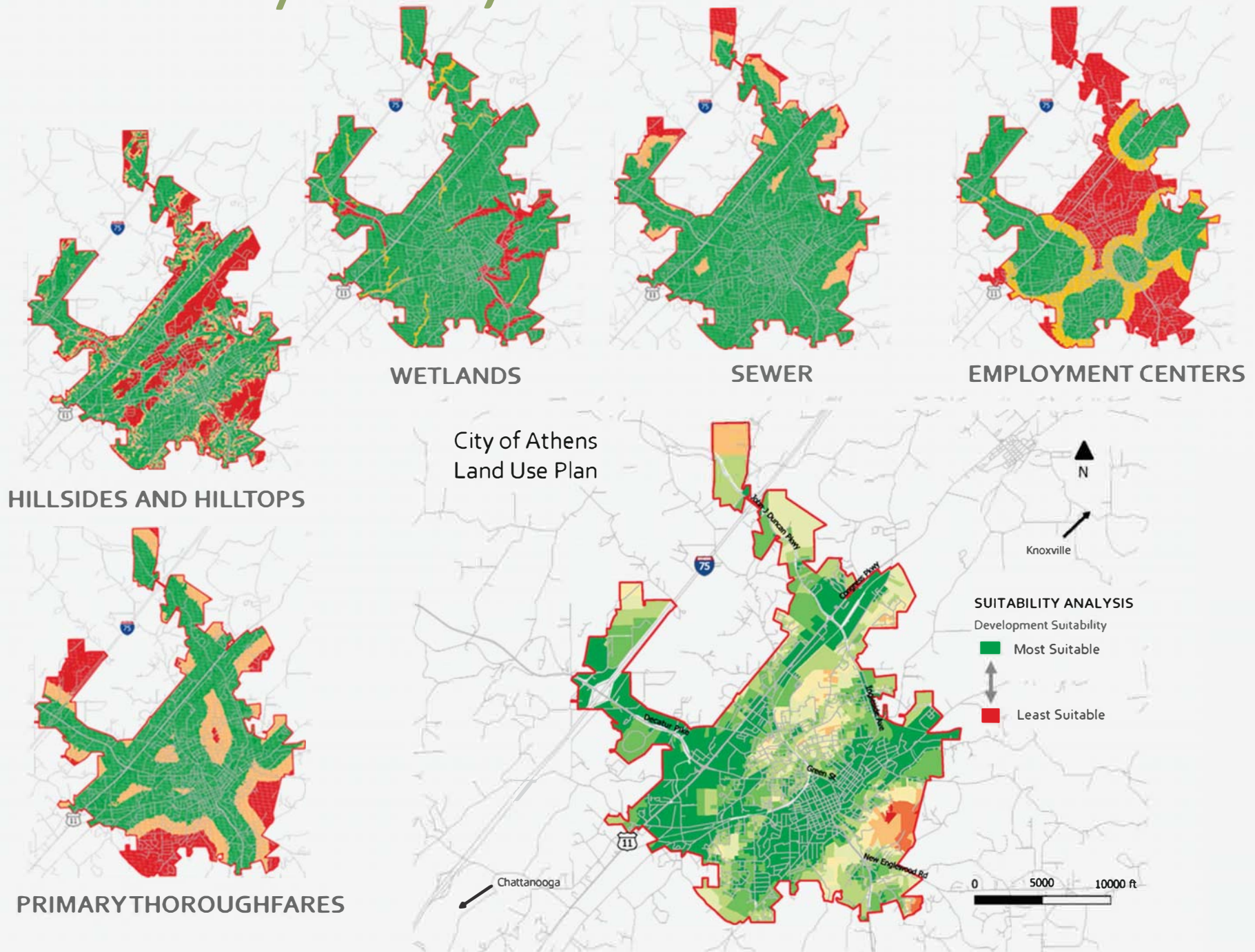
↙
Chattanooga

Map 7: Utilities – Electricity & Gas



Suitability Analysis

Map 8: Suitability Analysis



Map 9: Suitability – Parcels Overlay



Knoxville

Suitability Analysis

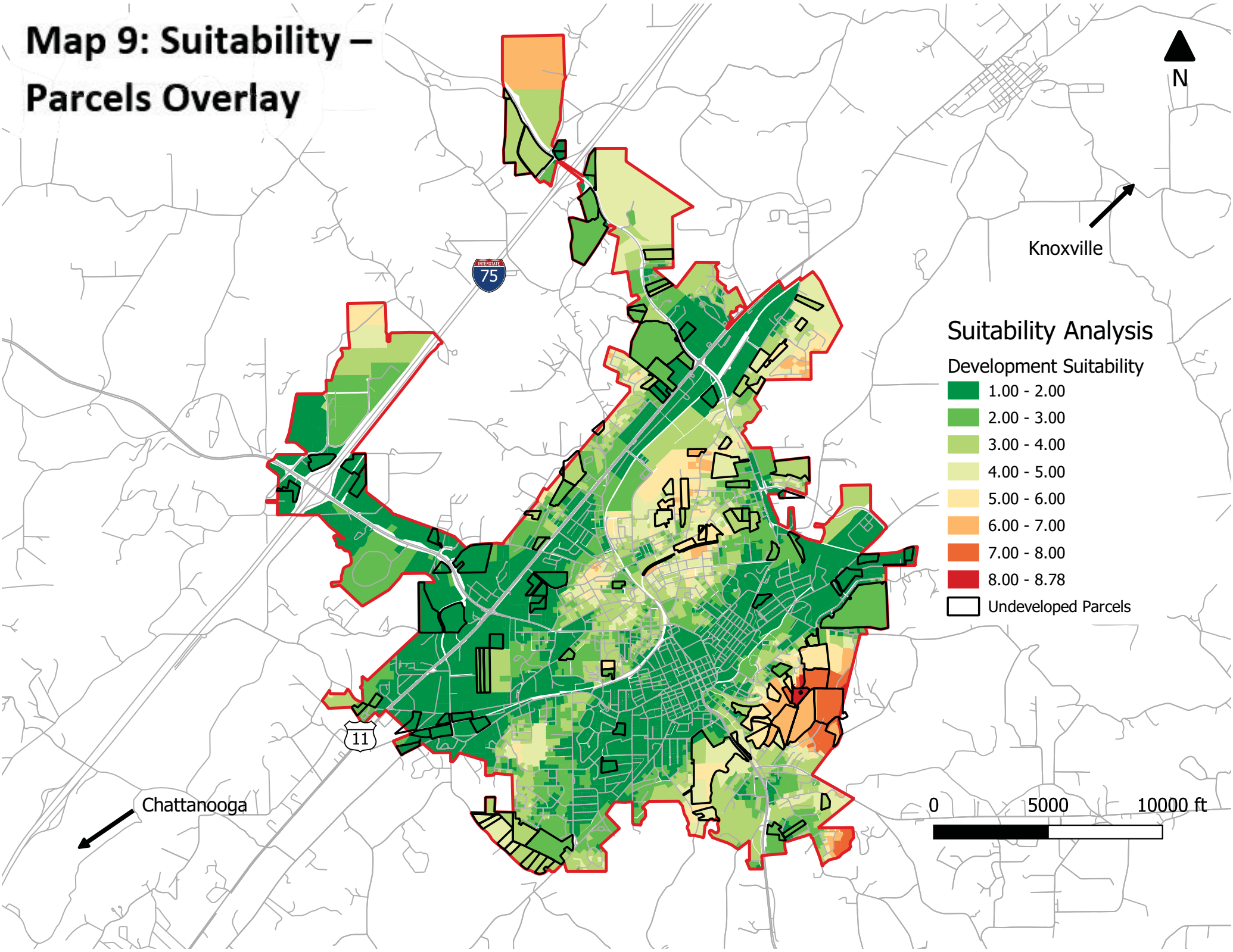
Development Suitability

- 1.00 - 2.00
- 2.00 - 3.00
- 3.00 - 4.00
- 4.00 - 5.00
- 5.00 - 6.00
- 6.00 - 7.00
- 7.00 - 8.00
- 8.00 - 8.78

Undeveloped Parcels

0 5000 10000 ft

Chattanooga



Map 10: Future Land Use Map

