

OAK RIDGE MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Work Session

Municipal Building – Court Room

Thursday, March 8, 2018

6:00 pm

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order

- II. Business Meeting Agenda Discussion
 - a. **Tire Discounters** – South Tulane Avenue, Proposed lot 484R, Tax Map 099M, Block 19CA: Site Plan approval and variance request to allow garage doors that face S. Illinois Ave.
 - b. **Taco Bell** – 101 Bus Terminal Road, Lot 495, Tax Map 100A, Block 18CE: Right-of-way abandonment to eliminate non-compliant parking on Bus Terminal Rd.
 - c. **ZYP Holdings** – Bethel Valley Road, Parcel “G”, Parcel Number 106 009.00: Zoning change from FIR Federal Industry and Research to IND-1 Industrial.

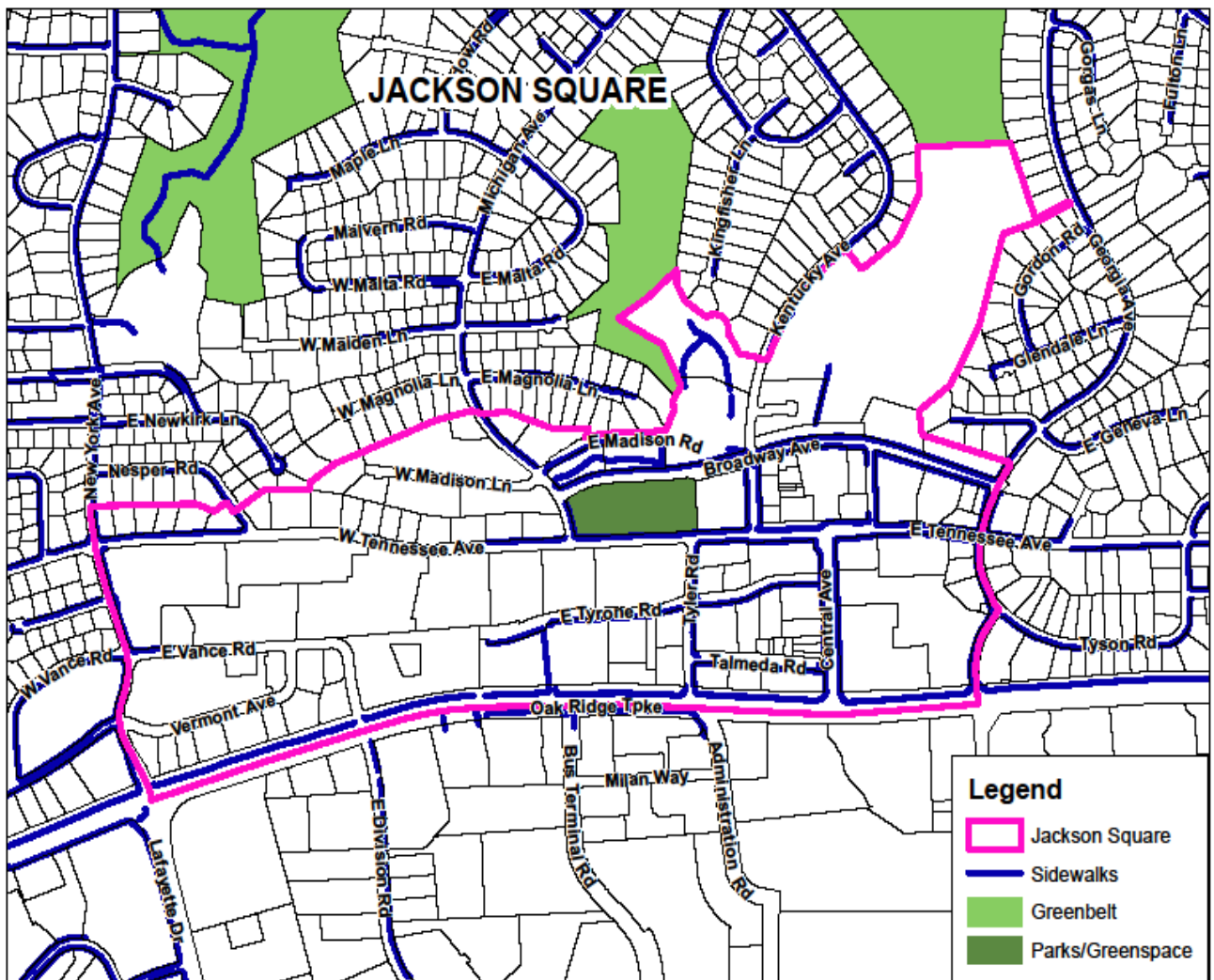
- III. City Blueprint Sub-area Plan Feedback
 - a. Jackson Square
 - b. Warehouse Row
 - c. Industrial Office
 - d. Midtown Mixed-use
 - e. Westside Mixed-use

- IV. Adjournment

JACKSON SQUARE

SUB-AREA

Jackson Square is a mixed-use district that lies north of the Oak Ridge Turnpike between New York Avenue and Georgia Avenue. It includes some of the most well known places in the City. It is not unusual to hear Oak Ridge residents speak of Jackson Square as the heart of the city. The sub-area is anchored on the west end by the Methodist Medical Center and satellite medical offices; on the east end by the historic Jackson Square that gives the sub-area its name.



Function, Character, and Zoning

The sub-area plays at least three distinct roles in the life of the city. It is a cultural center, a medical center, and a concentration of employment. Many citizens feel that the Jackson Square district in the east end of the sub-area is the cultural core of the city. The concentration of a historic playhouse, well know local restaurants, shops, public open space and the high school football stadium form a gathering place for students and residents alike. The square area tends to be active with people at the lunch and dinner hours as well as before and after plays or high school events. It is a place where memories are created and friendships are sustained.

The historic area of Jackson Square includes the Alexander House, a historic structure dating back to the Manhattan Project, now used as a senior residence. Nearby is the “Chapel on the Hill”, an interdenominational church that also dates back to the WWII years. The Oak Ridge Playhouse, local restaurants, a major engineering office, a high-school football stadium, and a collection of other offices and shops fill out the ensemble.



Two of the historic structures in Jackson Square, the Alexander Guest House and the Interdenominational Chapel.

The Medical Center has a reputation as one of the best hospitals in this part of the state. A full range of medical specializations and services are available in the hospital or nearby clinics. Many health professionals have offices in adjacent blocks. The hospital, satellite clinics and medical offices dominate the area south of Tennessee Avenue and east of New York Avenue, including substantial frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike.



The Medical Center anchors the west end of the sub-area.

At the eastern end of the sub-unit there is an office tower at Jackson Plaza fronting on the Turnpike, with access from both Georgia Avenue and Central Avenue. The Appalachian Underwriters office tower is occupied in part by call-center operations. The frontage property on the Oak Ridge Turnpike between the medical center and Jackson Plaza is occupied by a collection of fast food restaurants, retail shops, banks, personal services and offices that are typically found along major traffic arteries. There are many two and three story apartment units along Tennessee Avenue and other interior streets.



The Appalachian Underwriters Tower in Jackson Plaza



Apartments near Jackson Square

The zoning in the sub-area is a fine-grained composition of business, office and residential districts that accommodate the mix of uses that are present.



Strip Commercial development on Oak Ridge Turnpike

Condition

The condition of buildings in the sub-area is generally good to very good. Many of the medical and commercial buildings are relatively new. Some are not yet old enough to have significant physical deterioration. Most show evidence of good maintenance. Very few buildings in the area have any of the characteristics normally associated with blight.

Signage in the area is mixed. The signage associated with the Methodist Medical Center is well coordinated. It blends tastefully with the architecture of the structures and it is effective in identifying buildings and directing drivers. In the remainder of the district it is generally a situation of individual signs for individual businesses. There are exceptions where office buildings have one exterior sign display listing all the tenants in their buildings.

The Jackson Square is worth special attention. The cultural core, including the playhouse and some of the most iconic restaurants, are housed in buildings that date back to the 1940's. These are old buildings with old structural elements, mechanical and electrical systems. Some buildings in the square have been modernized, but some have only been maintained sufficiently to meet codes. This square may be one of the most important historic preservation sites in the city. But it faces challenges.



Historic Jackson Square in context.

The structures were built in a wartime context when quick construction and economy were primary considerations. Now they are faced with the gradual impacts of age and the impending competition of the Main Street project. A successful future may require more than just continuing business as usual.

It may seem that there is a conflict between the impulse to preserve an important cultural resource and the impulse to modernize, expand and compete for more business. That does not have to be the choice. It may be possible to do both. Three things would help: factual information about the condition of all the structures in the square, clear objectives agreed upon by the major stakeholders in the square and coordinated action in support of a plan of action.



Jackson Square up close.

Transportation

The sub-area has good accessibility because of its frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike. This provides good access from the region to the area. Within the sub-area, New York Avenue, Georgia Avenue and Tennessee Avenue provide interior circulation and access to the Turnpike at signalized intersections. The few other interior streets feed into the collectors.

Substantial off-street parking is available at offices, the hospital and in the Jackson Square area.

There may be minor conflicts in turning movements at specific intersections, but the general impression is that the area is well served by the public streets. Access to the Historic Jackson as a destination is a bit circuitous for a driver not familiar with the area.

Safety

There is no specific evidence that crime is a problem of special significance in this area. The most significant public safety issue could be fire safety in some older buildings in the Jackson Square area that are typically used as restaurants or housing.

Findings, Recommendations and Place-Making

Jackson Square is one of the most beloved sub-areas in the city. It is a major employment center with the employees at the medical center and satellite offices, plus the employment in the Plaza Tower location. It is an important part of the tax base of the city. Finally, it contains the most unique concentration of historical and cultural elements in the city. All of these elements are worth enhancing.

Jackson Square has been the subject of studies and proposals in the past. It is still appropriate to give it special attention that works toward enhancing the historical, cultural and business significance of the Jackson Square district. There is already an important dynamic. It needs to be preserved and enhanced. It is unlikely to extend into the long term future without some attention from both public and private sectors. Physical obsolescence shows in some of the commercial buildings. Main Street will compete more and more strongly for customers and attention as it develops. The emotional attachments to the area may fade as older citizens pass from the scene.



Jackson Square up close.

There is potential for the historic Jackson Square to retain its status and gain more. There is ample parking and public infrastructure to support more intense development of the square. In the long term the area would be improved with updated buildings to house existing uses and the addition of more residential space. More housing in the immediate area of the square would provide a more robust customer base for the businesses and make the area lively on a twenty-four hour basis.

Some steps that the major stakeholders in the Square; building owners, tenants, historic preservationists, and owners of nearby properties, could consider, include:

- Agree to work together to try to create and implement a plan for preservation and improvement of the square.
- Agree on a few basic objectives of their work.
- Employ an architectural firm to do an assessment of existing buildings and prepare a plan for achievement of their basic objectives.

The accessibility of the district could also be enhanced by installation of a system of wayfinding signage.

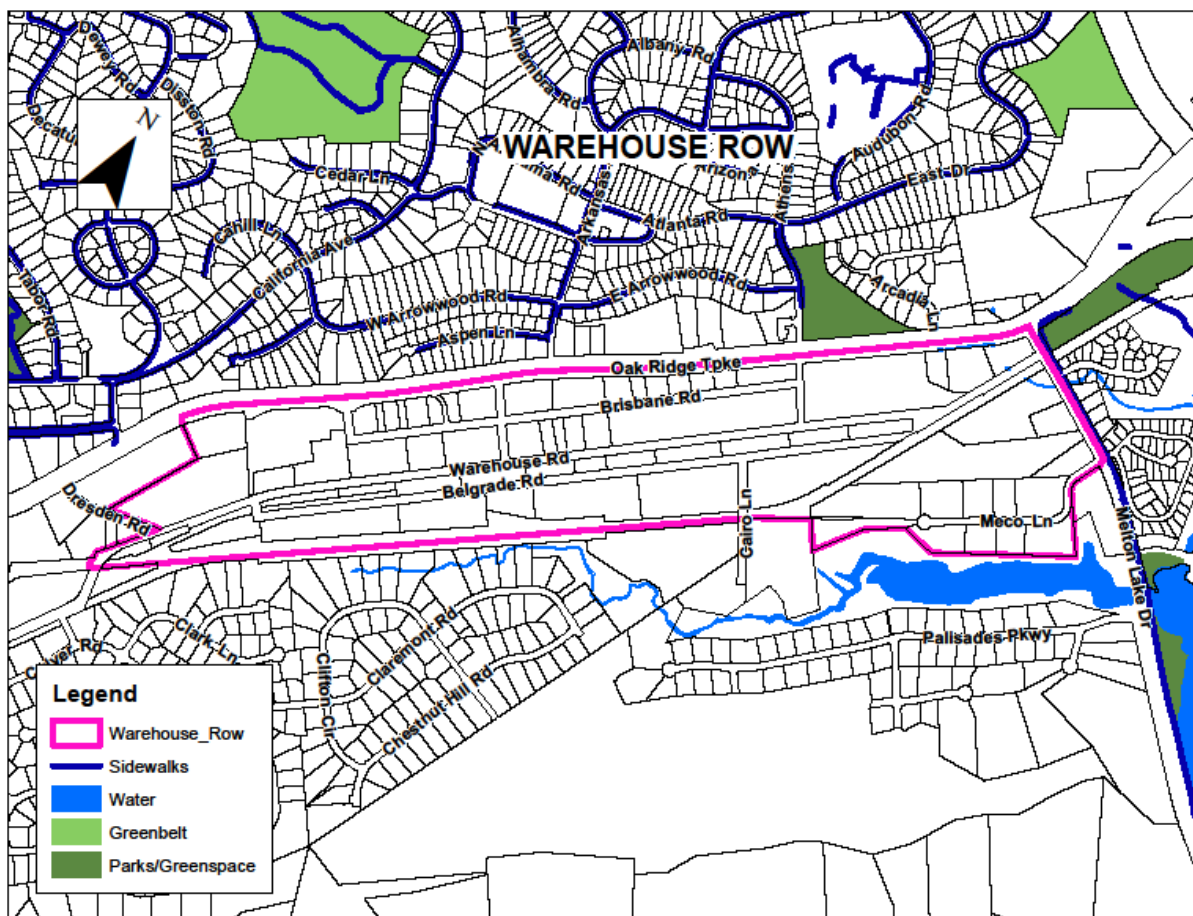


Miscellaneous other views in the sub-area.

WAREHOUSE ROW

SUB-AREA

Warehouse Row is an older development of mixed retail, office, warehouse and light industrial uses in a linear development defined by frontage on the eastern end of the Oak Ridge Turnpike and three closely spaced parallel streets between the turnpike and an abandoned railroad track.



Function, Character and Zoning

This sub-area serves a broad range of business needs. The frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike provides the visibility and traffic volumes to be attractive for several businesses that depend on drop-in customers, exposure to large numbers of potential customers or good regional accessibility at a lower cost than premium locations. There are some high quality office facilities for public agencies, the U.S. Department of Energy and the Tennessee Department of Homeland Security. There are several retail outlets, plus sales or service dealers for equipment or products that require substantial space and lower land rents.



A large office on the turnpike

As one moves away from the Turnpike to the parallel streets on the interior of the area there are older buildings mingled with newer buildings and vacant lots. Here the character is more industrial. One finds warehouses, industrial services (welding for example), and a variety of light industrial activity. Some of the buildings are relatively new and are attractive, several are old and poorly maintained. The level of economic activity is also mixed. There are well manicured light industrial firms with a fleet of service vehicles parked on-site, and antique sales out of almost derelict older industrial buildings. Mecco Lane, a short cul-de-sac off Melton Lake Drive, is a relatively new development with several modern well maintained businesses. There are still several vacant parcels in the development. Two activities normally associated with heavy industry are located next to each other on Belgrade Road, a scrap metals recycling business and the Oak Ridge Animal Shelter. The former is screened from the street by trees and the latter is set back a significant distance from the street.



Well-maintained industrial and retail buildings

The zoning of the sub-area is generally consistent with the current land uses. The properties fronting the Oak Ridge Turnpike are mostly in a business zoning district, while the interior areas are zoned for industrial uses. These business and industrial districts allow a wide range of commercial and industrial uses. The Meco Lane development is zoned IND-2, for heavy industry.

Condition

This sub-area serves important economic purposes in the city. There are modern attractive business buildings with well-maintained grounds mingled with buildings that are older or less well maintained. The areas on the roads that parallel the Turnpike have a disjointed and cluttered appearance. The area lacks the kind of visual cohesion one finds in modern industrial parks. The Meco Lane area is an exception to this observation, but its appearance would be improved by regular mowing of vacant lots.



Industrial buildings along interior streets

Signage in the sub-area is like the buildings, mixed in appearance. Individual signs appear to meet city codes, but each relates to its building and site, with little coordination among the signage as a collection. They convey information, but they tend to reinforce the disjointed visual effect of the area. There are a few exceptions along the turnpike where signs for a collection of businesses in a center are consolidated on a unified display at the entrance.



Transportation

Access to this sub-area from other parts of the city or region is good because of its frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike.

Circulation within the area is generally good, although there are localized issues. The Turnpike is a four lane highway with a median strip that allows turn lanes at entrances to frontage businesses. Some of the points of entry are at places where there is no traffic signal. This can make ingress and egress during times of peak volume a challenge.

Circulation to parcels on the interior streets appears to be satisfactory, but some of the businesses will generate movement of large trucks. In some locations the trucks will have to use the street as maneuvering space to line up with loading docks. This may not be a problem given the low volume of traffic on these streets, but it could be a source of conflict between neighboring businesses.

Safety

Several different kinds of safety issues are possible. There are challenges with some of the turning movements to access frontage properties along the Turnpike. The vacant older buildings in the interior of the area sometimes attract vagrants. The vacant older buildings with openly accessible parking areas are sometimes used as a place where people abandon junk cars. None of these issues are critical to the economic health of the sub-area at this time, but they are the kind of nagging issues that retard the improvement of the area.

Findings, Recommendations and Place-making

Warehouse Row contributes to the life of Oak Ridge in a workman like way. It provides places of employment and services. Its appearance is OK, not especially good and not especially bad. In places it is modern and neat, in places it is neither of those things. There is potential for improvement.

There is a public interest in the economic health and appearance of this district. It is one of the visual gateways to the city. It is also a substantial space devoted to business activity that could tip toward reinvestment and improvement, or it could slip into decline that would make reinvestment less and less likely. It is unclear if there is momentum in either direction at this time. Signals are mixed. Here are some things to consider.

It is time to connect the dots among several proposals that have already been made. There is an Oak Ridge Waterfront Development Plan, completed on December 14, 2009. Some elements of that plan have been implemented. It includes proposals for improvements in the Elza Gate area, a land area that

lies just across Melton Lake Drive from the sub-area and extends east, bounded by the Oak Ridge Turnpike and the Clinch River. There is also a planning process beginning on a “Rails to Trails” project that would have its eastern terminus in the same area and extend south and west through this sub-area using the abandoned rail right-of-way that runs alongside Belgrade Road. It is recommended that the design team for the “Rails to Trails” project be encouraged to explore how the two projects could be most effectively integrated, pulling the effects of an improved lakefront and a new trail into the Warehouse Row sub-area. A nature oriented trailhead near the lake will be attractive to many people. But a small public gathering place/park near the intersection of Belgrade Road and Cairo Road could serve as an alternative trailhead for people who would patronize shops, food and entertainment activities in the district.



Abandoned rail line east and west of Melton Lake Drive

Continued improvement of the lakefront area and an “on the ground” trail along the old rail line would be a stimulus for new uses to repurpose some of the older warehouse buildings in the area. A restaurant, bike shop, and microbrewery are some of the possibilities. The older warehouse buildings have the kind of spaces often sought by artists. The existing zoning would allow most of these new uses. This is not a proposal to replace warehousing and light industrial activity with new “trendy” things. On the contrary, the long term interests of the property owners and the city will be served by a revitalized commercial-industrial district. But new activities can provide a market for underused spaces, especially in a time of transition. The kind of uses suggested are not necessarily in conflict with traditional light industry.



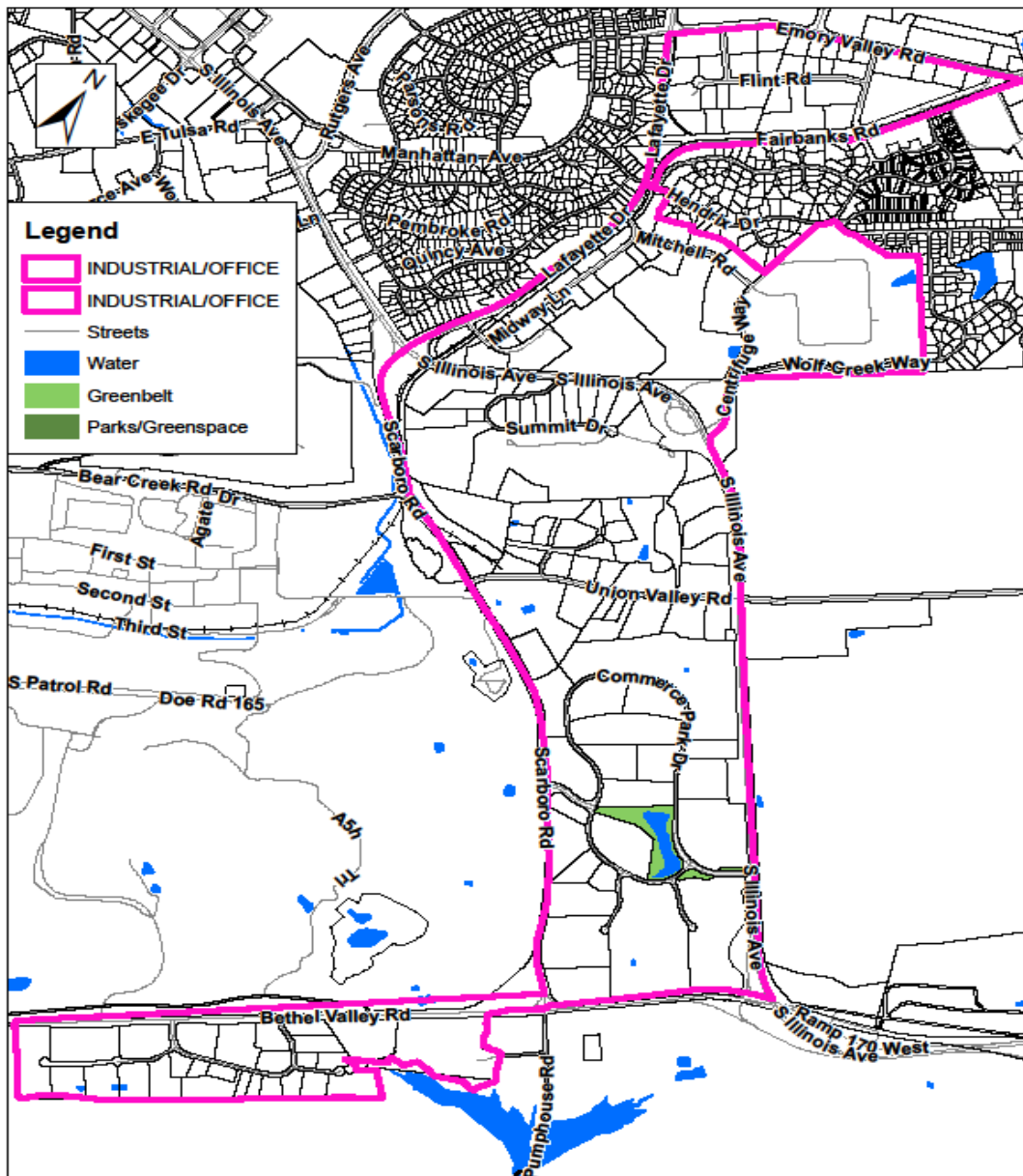
Vacant land near the abandoned rail line

The most important element leading to improvement of the district could come from the businesses and property owners in the area. They might want to consider forming a property owners association to encourage coordinated improvements in the district. Business owners may now feel little incentive to put time or money into efforts to improve the appearance of their property. But acting together in a coordinated way they might be surprised at what they could achieve with relatively little investment, not only in the appearance of the area but also in marketing older buildings to new uses. Action on the part of the private sector in the area would be an incentive for the city to also invest to improve the area.

The most challenging element of a district improvement program would be to make an overt effort to create a more pleasing gateway effect on the Turnpike. The Turnpike between the corporate limits, just beyond the rail viaduct, and Melton Hill Drive is a pleasant drive with the Elza Gate Park on one side of the road and natural vegetation on the other. But at Melton Hill Drive there is an abrupt transition to strip commercial development with all the visual clutter that goes with it. Coordinated efforts of public and private sectors might make it possible to improve the transition.

INDUSTRIAL/OFFICE SUB-AREA

This sub-area is a sprawling collection of light industrial and office facilities that stretches southward from Emory Valley Road at Lafayette Drive to Bethel Valley Road. It has elements that range from relatively dense urban areas to low density suburban clusters --- offices, research parks and light industry. Some of it is normal urban activity, automobile repair and business offices, some if it is high tech industry and research. The physical development reflects that diversity of activities in a series of relatively small enclaves where like uses cluster.



Function, Character, and Zoning

This sub-area plays a vital role in the economic life of the city. It provides space for business offices and for light industrial activities such as warehousing, auto repair and related mechanical operations. Most importantly, it provides space for energy related and science based manufacturing/research. These various activities tend to be clustered together in different enclaves within the sub-area.

An enclave of light industrial activity is located between Emory Valley Road and Fairbanks Road. This was the first city sponsored industrial park. Most of the firms located along Emory Valley Road and the central interior street, Flint Road, occupy modern buildings in an industrial park setting. The buildings are set back from the street with landscaped lawns. There is off-street parking for customers and employees. For the most part loading docks and outdoor storage of materials are screened from the street. ATC Nuclear and Broadway Electric Service Corporation are representative firms in this area.



Emory Valley Road and Flint Road industrial park.

Midway Lane is just south of the area described above. This street is lined with locally oriented light industrial services. Auto repair and service are typical businesses in this area. The buildings are relatively small and vary in age and condition. Some are attractive modern structures with paved parking areas, some are very modest structures with gravel lots and visible outdoor storage of materials. There are more concrete block and metal facades than brick in this area. The area is not blighted, it just has the look of a series of business ventures with wide varieties of investment capital and sophistication. Several structures are vacant.



Midway Lane has its assets and challenges.

Nearby Mitchell Road is an upscale contrast to Midway Lane. It is fronted by a series of modern brick office buildings. Each has paved off-street parking and well landscaped grounds. A facility operated by Babcock and Wilcox Technical Services is located at the end of Mitchell on a secured site. Babcock and Wilcox is associated with work on missile warheads. Centrus, a firm involved in gas centrifuge uranium enrichment is also present on the same site.



Mitchell Road offices are well-maintained and landscaped



Mitchell Road terminates at a secured site.

The triangle bounded by South Illinois Avenue, Mitchell Road and Centrifuge Way is mostly occupied by upscale offices, scientific research and manufacturing activities. The Y-12 Credit Union, FLIR, AMETEX and the United States Enrichment Corporation are occupants of this area. FLIR manufactures detection equipment for chemicals, radiation, biological hazards and explosives. AMETEX manufactures precision measurement devices with commercial and defense applications. The U.S. Enrichment Corporation is a

government corporation created to produce enriched uranium. Most of the buildings in this area are modern and occupy spacious, well-landscaped sites.



The Y-12 Credit Union is a prominent architectural entry point for the city.

Summit Drive off South Illinois Avenue is an undeveloped industrial/office park. There is one vacant industrial building in the site. Otherwise it is a finished street with utilities in place and numerous vacant parcels. It is an elevated site with spectacular views of the city. Since there is no shortage of industrial sites around the city, thought might be given to the potential for alternate uses of the property. High rise apartment or condominiums could take advantage of the views. They would have ready access to South Illinois Avenue but the grades on Summit Drive might be a problem during inclement weather. These grades would be even more of a challenge for trucks serving industrial operations. A segment of this street has not yet been accepted by the city as a public street.



Is



Summit Drive a problem or an opportunity waiting to be exploited?

The Union Valley Road area, the city's second industrial park, is heavily populated with high tech and energy or defense industry firms. The group includes facilities of Bechtel National (nuclear cleanup), Canberra Industries (radiation detection), Information International Associates (data management), and ZYP Coatings Inc. (high tech paintable coatings). Buildings are modern, attractive, and generally set on spacious well landscaped grounds. There is some vacant office space in the area.



Bechtel is a large presence on Union Valley Road.

The Commerce Park area is a developing office/industrial park with activities similar to Union Valley. Most of the occupants of the Park are firms that support defense or energy related activities. Current firms with a substantial presence include:

- Oak Ridge Technical Center, first class office and business center flex-space built and operated by the Cowperwood Co.
- Oak Ridge Tool Engineering, conducts R & D and builds equipment for aerospace, defense, energy and business customers.
- Atkins, Oak Ridge, a design, engineering and project management firm.
- Coors Tek, Oak Ridge, a manufacturer of ceramics engineered for specific purposes.
- U.S. ITER, a firm heavily involved in R & D associated with the peaceful uses of fusion energy.
- SITEL, a firm that specializes in customer experience management (call centers).
- Merrick and Company, a firm designing and manufacturing material handling systems for the Uranium Processing Facility in Oak Ridge.

One of the most visible occupants of the park is the Covenant Presbyterian Church. It sits on the edge of a high bluff overlooking South Illinois Avenue where it enters the city. The south façade and steeple serve as visual landmarks. Commerce Park is relatively new and still has several vacant sites awaiting development. Some of the vacant sites have physical development challenges.



Commerce Park and Bethel Valley are major contributors to the role of the city as a center for R & D and high technology engineering and manufacturing related to energy production.

The Bethel Valley Road area is also populated with high tech firms. Most of them front on Alvin Weinburg Drive or one of the short cul-de-sacs that branch off of it. Firms located in this area include:

- Cryomagnetics, engaged in engineering and manufacturing of superconducting magnets.
- TTE Casting Technology, Inc., design and manufacturing of products for a variety of industries.
- Advanced Laboratory Technologies, environmental health and nuclear forensics.
- Protomet Corporation, engineering and manufacturing of machining products.
- Delta M Corporation, design and manufacturing of flow meters and nuclear reactor power products.
- Applied Machinery, steel fabrication.
- Barnhart Crane and Rigging, large scale cranes and rigging.
- Vacuum Technology, design and manufacturing of vacuum equipment.
- Tru Skill Machine Shop
- Nuclear Lead, manufacturing lead products for nuclear energy, medicines measurement.
- Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, a DOE institute with expertise in STEM workforce development.

These operations work out of relatively modern facilities with attractive buildings and landscaped grounds. Even the heavy industry operations that require outside storage tend to be orderly. There are a few building sites still available for development.



This is a representative example of development in the Bethel Valley Road area.

Most of the properties in this sub-area are zoned IND-1 or IND-2, appropriate for light and moderate industrial activity. A few parcels are zoned appropriately for office use.

There is also a noncontiguous element of this sub-area on Bear Creek Road adjacent to the Clinch River. It includes operations related to the nuclear industry: Bionomics, a hazardous waste disposal firm; Energy Solutions Inc., a firm engaged in the processing, packaging, and disposal of radioactive material for permanent disposal; and Central Training Facility, which provides training for security of nuclear industry facilities. While the firms handle disposal of materials from local DOE operations they are not limited to that client base. The properties in this location have the characteristics of heavy industry and are appropriately zoned IND-2.



Firms on Bear Creek Road

Condition

The buildings and grounds in this sub-area range from good to excellent in their condition and appearance. Even the most modest area along Midway Lane is orderly and functional. Most of its buildings are reasonably well maintained, some are modern and attractive. There is some visual clutter arising from outdoor storage of equipment and materials, mostly along Midway Lane. At the other end of the scale, Commerce Park and other enclaves are relatively new, in excellent physical condition, and are attractively designed and well maintained. On the whole this sub-area is an asset to the community.

Signage in the area follows the same trajectory as the buildings described above. In the most modest area it is functional and individualized. In Commerce Park it follows design guidelines and is both complementary to the buildings and functional.

Transportation

The individual sites within this sub-area all front on streets that have short direct connections to major arteries: Emory Valley Road, Lafayette Drive, South Illinois Avenue, Scarboro Road, or Bethel Valley Road. Roads and streets are in generally good condition and have a cross-section adequate to their role.

There is no rail service to this sub-area.

Safety

This sub-area is a relatively low crime area. There are no visible fire safety problems, although the specialized activities conducted in some of the facilities could require specialized response teams. There are occasional issues on Midland Lane with abandoned vehicles or people trying to live out of RV vehicles on vacant parking areas.

Findings and Recommendations

This sub-area plays vital roles in the life of the city. It is a significant employment center and an important part of the tax base of the city. Its various firms support the role of the city as a center of excellence in research and development of energy and defense industry products. It a visual and substantive asset to the city.

There are three basic needs in the sub-area. The first is to continue to provide adequate city services to meet the needs of highly specialized industries. It is beyond the scope of this report to address those in detail. They could include specialized waste disposal, fire suppression or security needs, as examples. The specifics will be made known and addressed in direct communications between individual firms and the relevant city departments.

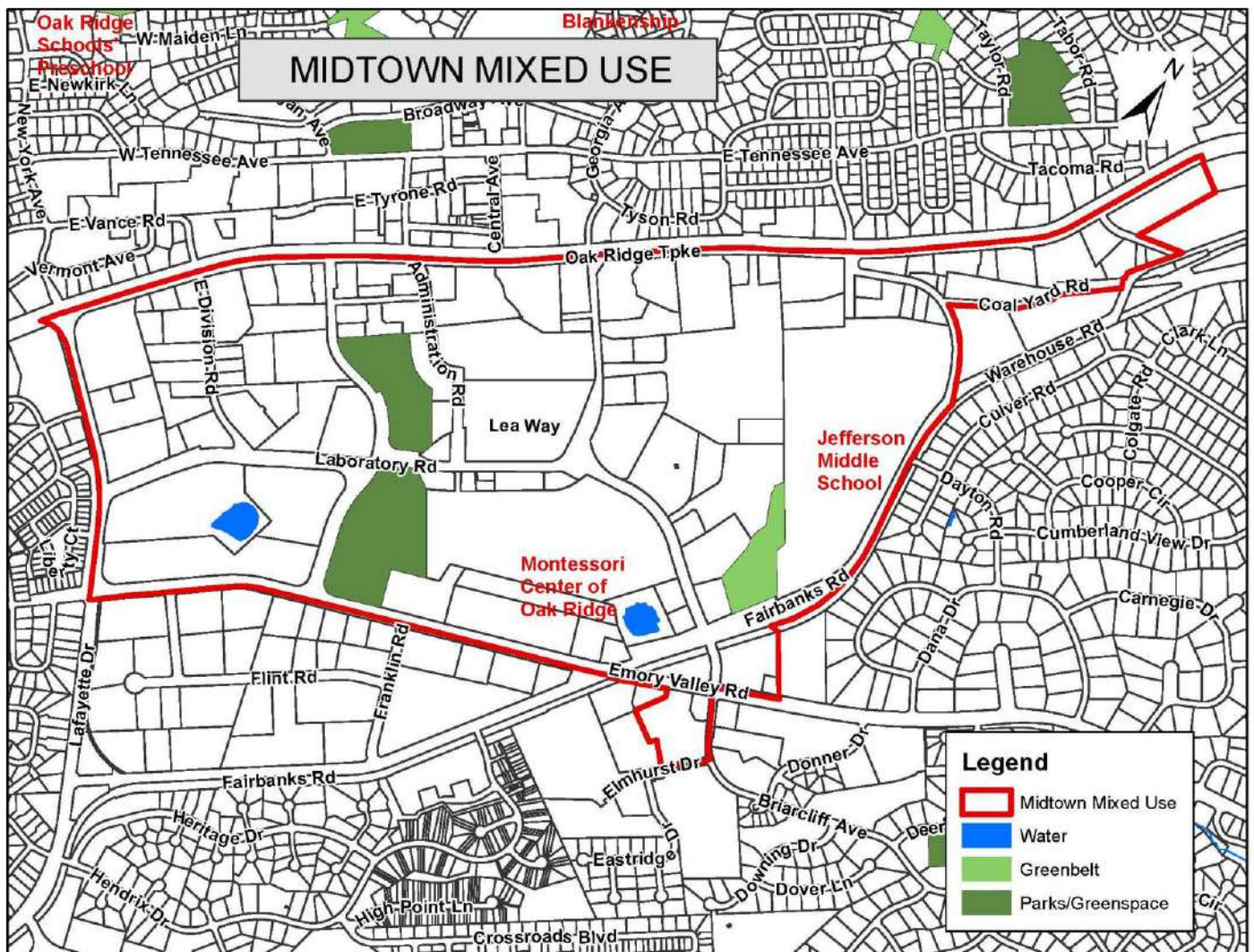
The second basic need is infill development to get occupants for vacant buildings in the sub-area and new construction for vacant sites. The initiative for this activity will come from the private sector with support from the city, Chamber of Commerce, etc. Where there are physical limitations for vacant sites, alternative uses might be considered. In Commerce Park, for example, a restaurant or housing development might be a welcome neighbor to existing occupants.

The third basic need will be addressed by the city. Although the overall condition of the sub-area is excellent, there will be a need for continuing vigilance in code enforcement to assure that the quality of the area is maintained or improved. There is too much investment of capital and too much positive image to let either one slip.

As a final note, the owner(s) of the vacant parcels along Summit Drive are encouraged to explore the potential for refocusing the efforts to develop that property. It has one vacant industrial building. It is relatively modern and appears to be in good condition. The remainder of the vacant land might be shifted to residential use to take advantage of the views and proximity to the city center and west Knox County. Retail commercial uses do not appear to be appropriate because of the lack of visibility to the city below and difficulty of access. It is beyond the scope of this report to make a final determination of the issue, but an alternative is worth consideration.

MIDTOWN MIXED USE SUB-AREA

This area is home to an important collection of activities that are located south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike, east of Lafayette Drive and north of Emory Valley Road and Fairbanks Road. It includes a community college, a big-box retailer, a middle school, substantial apartment complexes, and modern office buildings. It will be described below by the southwest quadrant, the northwest quadrant, and a large triangular area that forms the east side of the sub-area.



Function, Character, and Zoning

The southwest quadrant of the sub-area is bounded by Emory Valley Road on the south, Lafayette Drive on the west, Laboratory Road on the north and Briarcliff Avenue on the east. The primary activities in this quadrant are:

- Bristol Park Apartment Homes, a large up-scale complex of two and three story buildings.
- Science Applications International Corporation, a large scale government services and technology support company.
- Carl Yearwood Park, a public facility, that has a ball field (softball or Little League) with off street parking and lights, a skateboard park, and open space.
- Brookdale, Oak Ridge, a senior living facility.
- Anderson County office facility and senior center.
- An assortment of small medical offices and clinics.
- A branch campus of the Roane State Community College. The campus, with two major buildings and off-street parking, is located on a large tract in the interior of the block. Access is provided off Briarcliff Avenue and Laboratory Road.



A variety of uses in the southwest quadrant of the area.

The northwest quadrant of the sub-area is bounded on the north by the Oak Ridge Turnpike, on the west by Lafayette Drive and on the south and east by Laboratory Road. There are several local streets within the quadrant. The major activities in this quadrant are:

- The First Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.
- Several fast food restaurants on the Oak Ridge Turnpike.
- An auto dealership on the Oak Ridge Turnpike.
- A funeral home.
- Older shopping centers with frontage or access onto Oak Ridge Turnpike and Division Street.
- Several office buildings with a variety of tenants, especially medical offices.
- A Federal Office building.
- Offices of the Department of Energy and the Office of the DOE Inspector General.



Views in the northwest quadrant of the study area.

The eastern section of the sub-area is bounded on the north by the Oak Ridge Turnpike, on the west by Laboratory Road/Briarcliff Avenue, and on the south and east by Fairbanks Road. The significant uses of land in this area are:

- A Home Depot located in the center of the triangle, with access off the Oak Ridge Turnpike and Laboratory Road.
- Jefferson Middle School.
- Office and commercial buildings along the Turnpike frontage and offices around the perimeter of the area.
- Two automobile dealerships in this segment of the Turnpike.
- NuSAFE, a manufacturer of radiation detection and measuring systems, ACSI, a large scale engineering firm, and Offices of the Social Security Administration on the Turnpike.



A wide variety of uses share the same area.

The sub-area also includes a small appendage south of Emory Valley Road at Briarcliff Avenue. It contains a neighborhood shopping center that serves the Emory Valley Residential Sub-area as well as passing traffic on Emory Valley Road.



The neighborhood shopping center on Emory Valley Road at Briarcliff Avenue.

The zoning in the sub-area is fine-grained, i.e. it has a mix of small districts of residential, office, commercial and industrial classifications reflecting the mix of land uses in the area.

Condition

Most of the buildings in his sub-area are relatively modern and well maintained. Landscaping is well maintained and parking lots are paved and lined. A few buildings can be identified as older structures because of their design and materials, but for the most part they are suitably maintained. The marginal exception is an older multi-tenant building on Division just off the Turnpike that has several vacant stalls.

Signage is individualized to each structure or use except for a few shopping centers and office buildings. The area is not cluttered; neither is it particularly well-coordinated visually.

Transportation

The sub-area has good access from its arterial border streets: the Oak Ridge Turnpike, Lafayette Drive, Emory Valley Road and Fairbanks Road. Laboratory Road serves as the internal collector. Travel distances from local internal streets to any one or more of these major streets is short. The primary traffic generators in the sub-area all have direct access to one or more of the border streets.

Safety

As a primarily commercial area with retail sales and office uses this sub-area poses no special safety issues. There is a branch fire station in the area fronting on the Oak Ridge Turnpike. The Roane State Community College campus has its own security.

Findings, Recommendations and Place Making

This sub-area houses a significant part of the commercial activity in Oak Ridge. Home Depot is a major big-box retailer. There are offices and numerous retail sales establishments. There are also two major public institutions, Jefferson Middle School and a branch of Roane State Community College. All these activities are housed in relatively modern and attractive settings. In all these ways the area is an asset to the city.

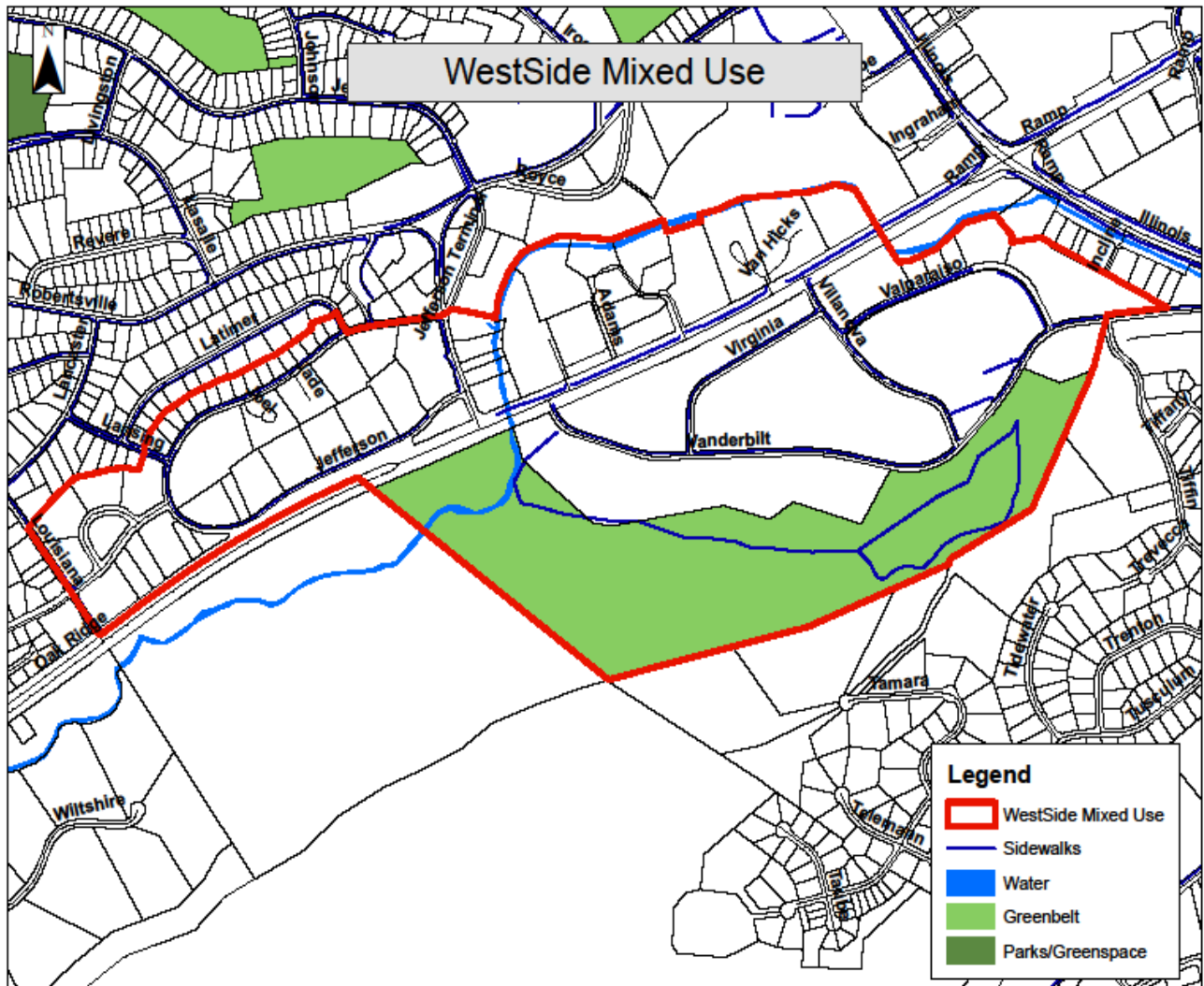
There is a way in which this sub-area manifests a distinctive characteristic of the city, but perhaps more pronounced here than in most other parts of the city. The area contains a mix of uses: commercial, residential and institutional. There is little or no conflict among adjacent land uses. Each property is sufficiently large and screened from its neighbors to mitigate adverse impacts one neighbor might have on another. This is a good thing and it makes the area visually pleasant. But it also breaks up connectivity and interaction. Each parcel tends to be an entity unto itself. The net result of these characteristics is a development pattern that is more suburban than urban and more isolated than dynamic.

The passage of time will bring incremental changes to this sub-area. Old buildings will be replaced, existing structures will be remodeled or expanded. New uses will be introduced on vacant parcels. It is recommended that the site reviews that will occur in the approval of these events give special attention to issues of connectivity, functional relationships and visual compatibility. The aim should be to enhance interaction among nearby land uses as well as achieve some level of attractiveness on each site.

To give a hypothetical example, there is a set of parcels in the space fronting the Oak Ridge Turnpike between East Division Road and Administration Road that contains several older buildings, some with quite a bit of vacant space. It includes some frame buildings used by Anderson County and the Security Square Shopping Center. If these parcels were consolidated into one ownership it would be a potential redevelopment site for new mixed use development, including residential, office and retail uses. It is directly across the Turnpike from the Methodist Medical Center, a potentially prime location for commercial and residential uses.

WESTSIDE MIXED USE SUB-AREA

This area contains a mixture of residential, commercial and public uses along both sides of the Oak Ridge Turnpike west of the intersection of the Turnpike and Illinois Avenue. Structures exhibit a wide range in age, quality of construction and maintenance. Development on the south side of the highway has a sense of visual order; the development on the north side of the highway tends to be more individualized and varied in quality.



Function, Character and Zoning

The portion of the sub-area south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike consists almost entirely of two uses. There is a large older apartment complex, Rolling Hills, which occupies an elevated site visible from the Turnpike but accessed from local streets: Vanderbilt Drive, Virginia Road, Villanova Road and Valparaiso Road. There is a small line of single family homes fronting Valparaiso Road. The other major use of land in this area is greenbelt which borders the south side of the Turnpike and the apartments.

The western end of the study area is mixed use development around Jefferson Circle and beyond that on Lincoln Road and Lincoln Circle. The area on the Turnpike in front of Lincoln Road includes two older small shopping centers, Four Oaks and West Side Plaza. Behind them on Lincoln Road and Circle are a large vacant greenhouse, two union halls, and Serenity Club, a facility for support groups dealing with substance abuse and similar problems. The frontage along South Jefferson Drive, which is a frontage road along the Turnpike, includes two churches, offices of the Oak Ridge Utility District, a mortuary, a Boys and Girls Club, and a bank. The Boys and Girls club has significant space for outdoor sports that extends through the block to North Jefferson. North Jefferson Drive has older single family and duplex housing on the north side of the street and a church, a Moose Lodge, and two small housing developments. The Joel Lane development is public housing for impaired tenants who receive case management care on the site. The Jade Lane development is private housing. The short segment of Jefferson Terminal in the study area is occupied by an auto salvage business, a floor covering business, and a convenience food store.



This vacant bank building is one of many vacancies in the area.



Church on North Jefferson Drive

The frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike from Jefferson Terminal back to Van Hicks Road is a mingled collection of commercial and non-profit enterprises: a gasoline service station, a girls club, a YWCA building, offices and a few shops.

The development in and around Van Hicks is public housing. The Oak Ridge Housing Authority has its offices here as well. The Adams Street loop has Dogwood Manor, a 23 unit Section 202 rent supplement facility for low income elderly, a pet day care, a vacant office building and an AMVETS facility.



Dogwood Manor



ORHA Office

The zoning in the sub-area consists of a fine-grained mix of residential and commercial districts that match in general the uses on the ground. There is also a defined flood plain along the East Fork Popular Creek behind the Van Hicks development. The long stretch of undeveloped land on the south side of the Oak Ridge Turnpike west of Jefferson Avenue is a flood plain protected by flood plain zoning.

Conditions

The condition of buildings and the general appearance of this area is mixed, reflecting differences in the age of structures and quality of maintenance. The two small shopping centers at the west end of South Jefferson are examples. The Four Oaks Center appears to be in better physical condition of the two but much of the center is vacant, perhaps more than a third. That includes a vacant restaurant out parcel. West Side Plaza has visible physical deterioration, especially the roof, but is more fully occupied. Moving east through the area, most of the commercial buildings appear to be in reasonable condition, although there is a high level of vacancy. The small number of housing units in the area also show a range of conditions, although most of them appear to be up to code. As a group, it is the public and quasi-public uses that are in the best condition: churches, the Boys and Girls Club, public housing, etc. Signage is individualized to buildings or businesses.



Four Oaks Center and West Side Plaza

Transportation

The properties in this sub-area have very quick access to the Oak Ridge Turnpike. For those who use Louisiana Avenue or Jefferson Avenue there is signalized access to the Turnpike. At all other access points the challenge is to make left turns onto the Turnpike. Those who are accustomed to doing it probably use the center turn lane as a merging lane. This can work but it is not always a safe practice.

Safety

The traffic issue described above is the only notable safety issue in the sub-area. There are no significant safety issues otherwise, with the possible exception that the many vacant buildings could become targets for vagrants and the fires that they can start in cold weather.

Findings, Recommendations and Place Making

The developed area south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike presents orderly development. Although the apartment units are old and modest by current standards, they were well designed and well landscaped, and have been well maintained. It is the area along the north side of the Turnpike that presents challenges, especially in the area west of Jefferson Avenue. Here we find a high rate of vacancy and some structures showing significant physical deterioration.

It is hard to know the exact cause for the problems that exist. Is there a high rate of vacancy because the market for commercial space is overbuilt, or have tenants moved elsewhere because the quality of the spaces is not up to current demands? Is lack of maintenance a result of high vacancy rates or a cause of vacancies? There is some talk in the community that property owners are not willing to invest more in their properties because of Serenity House and "halfway houses" in the neighborhood. If true, it probably reflects misunderstandings about the role of Serenity House and other social service programs, but the impact can be negative anyway. It may be that all these forces are at work and not in the same way in every case. Whatever the cause it is clear that the west end of this sub-area needs revitalization. The alternative is a downward spiral that will have a negative effect on the many viable businesses and good buildings in the area. The city can help with code enforcement, but most of the solution will have to come from property owners.