

## CHAPTER 3 – LAND USE PLAN

### Introduction

The Land Use Plan describes the preferred land use for various areas of the Town in the context of the vision, goals, and objectives outlined in this comprehensive plan. It establishes a policy framework for allocating land to categories of use (e.g., residential, commercial, etc.) and managing the community's land resources to address the needs of residents for an environment in which to conduct everyday life. It also is the intent of the Land Use Plan to establish policies and a spatial organization that supports the goal of a sustainable, productive, and less costly future for the community. Finally, they relate the comprehensive plan to the State's Visions.

The Land Use Plan mirrors current land-use patterns and how the community organized overtime to meet the needs of its residents. This accounting includes how land use, buildings, structures, travelways, and public facilities are arranged. Noted is how these built environment components fit into the natural environment and the role features like topography, streams and rivers, soils, and vegetation play in sustaining Denton's quality of life.

The concept of "sustainability" expands the perspective from which Denton considers the direction set by the plan's goals and objectives for improving Denton's environmental, social, and economic footprint while reflecting its residents' unique qualities, situations, and aspirations. Sustainability implies that poorly managed resources are vulnerable to a slow-moving disaster scenario where humanity runs out of critical physical resources, overshoots ecological carrying capacity, or is subjected to unforeseen catastrophic events. Conversely, a resilient Denton finds the most effective way to maintain and enhance property values, stimulate business, provide quality services to its residents, and preserve the special features that give the Town its unique character while concurrently conserving land, natural and energy resources, and reducing negative environmental impacts and prosper.

### Goals, Objectives, And Policies

#### Goals

- A sustainable and efficient land utilization pattern. One that meets current and future residents' needs protects the environment and results in the least cost for infrastructure expansion, operation, maintenance, and life cycle costs.
- Compact, balanced, and sustainable development.
- Demographically diverse neighborhoods that provide safe, independent living at all life stages.

- Long-term financial stability and adequate revenues to meet expenditures without relying on outside sources.
- A physical layout that enhances the public realm and adds value to properties.
- Integrated neighborhoods that reflect the positive characteristics of existing residential neighborhoods.
- A viable economic base that encourages further financial investment, business retention, diversification, and expansion.
- An economy that offers a broad range of employment and business opportunities.

### Objectives

The Land Use objectives intend to advance plan goals and set a course for implementation actions. They are the framework for public policies and regulations affecting individual and collective well-being. They are critical milestones toward achieving environmental sustainability, economic stability, and social inclusion. These objectives are:

- Accommodate future growth through infill and redevelopment that enhances neighborhood stability and property values.
- Ensure that the demands of new development do not adversely impact the provision of Town services and facilities.
- Ensure new residential neighborhoods are fully integrated into the community and reflect existing residential neighborhoods' positive characteristics.
- Require physical connection between new and existing neighborhoods.
- Encourage a diverse mix of housing types and costs.
- Support re-investment in the Central Business District and along the waterfront.
- Encourage further economic investment, business retention, diversification, and expansion and offer various employment and business opportunities.
- Set aside land for the development of employment uses, including small businesses and light industrial uses, to meet the projected needs of residents.

- Work with the County to address the impacts of new development on facilities and services.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas and conserve natural resources.

### Policies

The following policies recognize that the land use plan and environmental and building code regulations that affect land use do not always coincide with how random and unexpected events influence, e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic or how individuals and businesses need to use land. Overly restrictive or unresponsive codes can thwart community development efforts, leading to income disparities, uncoordinated development, inefficient land use, and housing problems. The Comprehensive Plan's land-use policies emphasize flexibility to adjust to shifting community needs and economic conditions while requiring a rigorous accounting for public revenues, expenses, assets, and long-term liabilities. Accordingly, Denton's land-use policies are as follows:

- Future residential development will occur primarily through infill and redevelopment within the incorporated area.
- Employment uses are a priority.
- The Denton Pattern Book will be used as a model for determining the context-appropriateness of the proposed infill and redevelopment.
- Regulations will be assessed for their impact on infill and redevelopment investment and revised as appropriate.
- New development will be revenue neutral or revenue positive. If not, appropriate offsets will be required.

### Existing Land Use

Map 3-1 shows the current land use development pattern based on the Department of Assessment and Taxation classification system. Table 3-1 provides a tabular summary. Rather than uniform spatial patterns with each use type located in a separate district, the existing land use data reveals a historical pattern of mixed uses throughout all residential neighborhoods. This mix of uses is one feature that defines Denton's unique character. These patterns should inform the range of allowable uses under zoning as the urbanization of Denton continues in the planning period and beyond.

<b>Table 3-1: Existing Land Use</b>		
<b>Land Use Classification</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Single-Family	943	27.2%
Townhouse	30	0.9%
Multi-family	20	0.6%
Commercial	357	10.3%
Mixed-Use*	7	0.2%
Public	287	8.3%
Semi-public	108	3.1%
Industrial	51	1.5%
Agriculture	1,310	37.8%
Made Land	8	0.2%
Unclassified	2	0.0%
Water	99	2.8%
Other	246	7.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,467</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
* Includes properties classified as Residential Commercial and Commercial Residential		
Source: Maryland Property View		

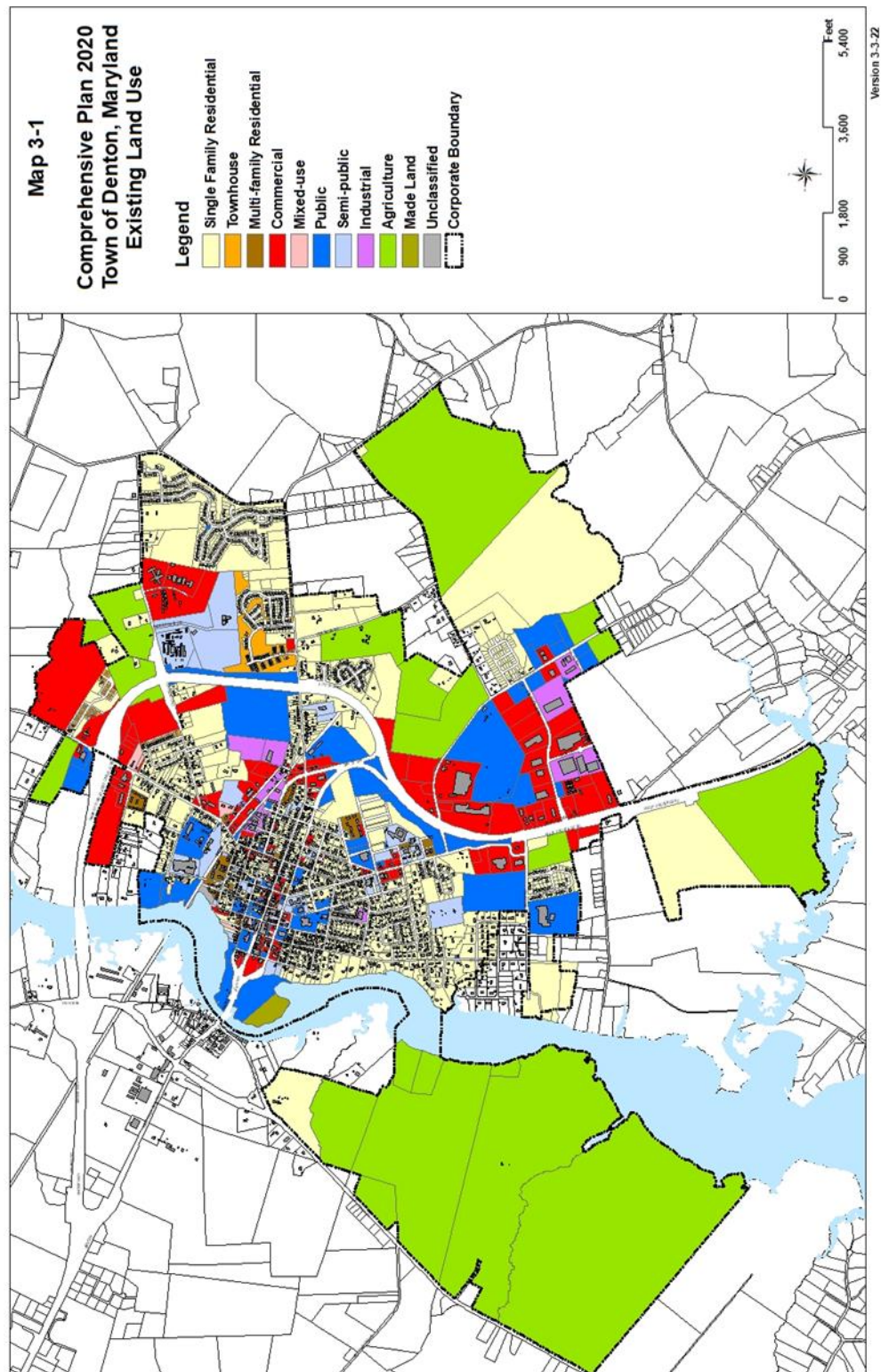
## Current Zoning

### Base Zones

Denton's corporate area is divided into eleven base zoning districts, as shown on Map 3-2. The zoning district coverage details are summarized in Table 3-2.

<b>Table 3-2: Zoning districts by acres and percent of total</b>		
<b>Zoning Districts</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
CBC	51	1.5%
CM	50	1.5%
GC	53	1.6%
I	281	8.2%
MI	7	0.2%
MR	333	9.8%
RA	963	28.2%
RHC	292	8.6%
RP	226	6.6%
TR	319	9.4%
SR	834	24.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Map 3-1 Existing Land Use



Among the current zoning districts, three are primarily intended for residential use with varying intensity. These districts are MR (Mixed Residential), TR (Town Scale Residential), and SR (Suburban Residential), and they collectively cover about forty percent of the Town area.

The CBC (Central Business Commercial District) is primarily designated for retail and office development, with some residential options allowed. The CM (Commercial Medical District) was established to encourage the clustering of medical-related uses and assisted living facilities.

RHC (Regional Highway Commercial) and GC (General Commercial) are the primary commercial zoning districts. RHC serves areas for various retail and office establishments, commercial services, and regional markets, catering to residents and travelers on major roads or streets. The GC District provides space for less intense commercial and business activities, meeting local needs, and is located within the core areas of the Town.

The I (Industrial District) is designated for light manufacturing, fabricating, warehousing, and wholesale distributing facilities, most of which are in the Denton Industrial Park. The MI (Mixed Industrial District) includes an area with existing light industrial and commercial uses, some transitioning into a commercial and residential mix.

The RP (Recreation and Parks District) was created to preserve and protect areas in the Town with a recreational character. However, the Town intends to eliminate this district due to potential fairness and takings issues.

The RA (Rural Agriculture District) is intended to maintain the Town's rural or agricultural character until adequate public facilities become available. A significant portion of the RA District is included in the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bays Critical Area, reducing the developable area significantly.

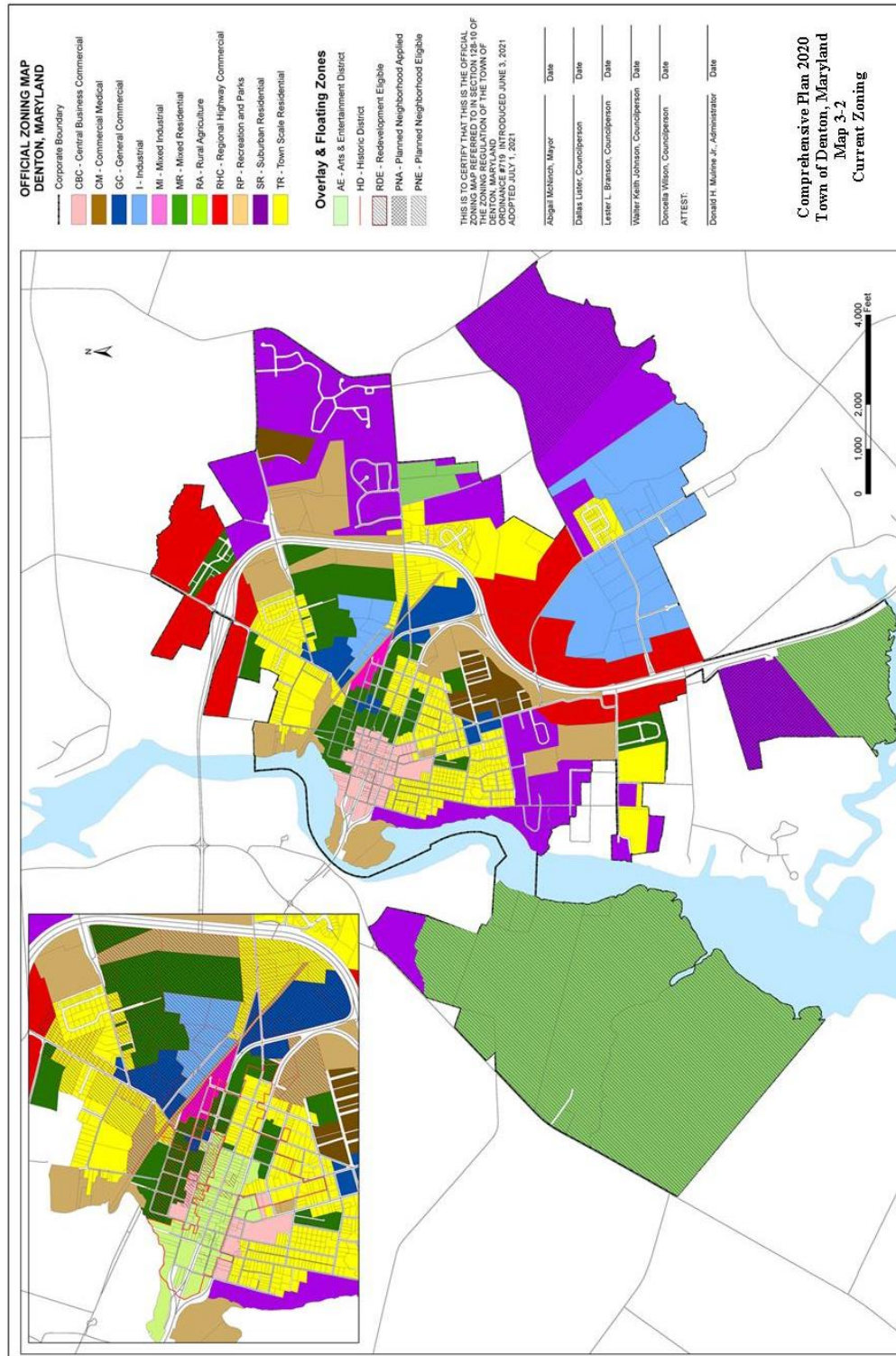
### Overlay and Floating Zones

In addition to the base zoning districts, the Town has adopted several overlay and floating zones. Overlay zones impose additional standards and processes on the underlying base zone. Examples include the Denton Historic District, which aims to preserve the Town's heritage, and the CA Critical Area, which addresses water quality and habitat conservation.

Floating zones, such as the RD (Redevelopment District) and PN (Planned Neighborhood), offer additional development options and special review procedures for eligible properties, subject to approval by the Town Council. The AE (Arts and Entertainment District) allows for mixed-use infill and redevelopment, emphasizing artistic, cultural, educational, and musical uses. The RD (Redevelopment District) permits the rehabilitation and redevelopment of blighted properties, preserving the character of surrounding neighborhoods while expanding job opportunities. The PN (Planned Neighborhood) floating zone facilitates master-planned, mixed-use developments with various housing types and densities.



## Map 3-2 Current Zoning



## Transects

Denton's land use plans historically reflected the assessed value and zoning classification of properties, emphasizing a static perception of the land's potential role, especially under changing demographic and economic conditions. Implementing the land use plan supported a regulatory framework based on best practices from a previous generation. Implementation was heavily influenced by separating land use categories, rigid development standards, and off-street parking requirements emphasizing automobile needs.

This comprehensive plan establishes a land-use platform for promoting urban design and creative use patterns, paying attention to the physical, cultural, and social systems that define the place and support its ongoing evolution. Proposed land use districts decouple the land use plan from an identity based on assessment classification or zoning. Instead, they reflect the physical characteristics of Denton's evolution from a rural crossroad village to a municipal center. They refine the Transect concepts outlined in the Denton Pattern Book. Finally, they set the stage for incremental growth of Denton through infill and redevelopment using building forms such as those depicted in the Denton Pattern Book to measure how to create flexible and financially sound buildings that give back for generations.

Transects are a geographic tool that defines a development hierarchy by the scale and location of different settlement types. Transects typically include six zones ranging in intensity from the most natural undeveloped areas to urban centers. Denton's Transects are like the rings in a tree trunk with the characteristics of each district, a reflection of the effects of changes occurring in the world, nation, region, County, and community that influenced investment and settlement patterns (see Map 3-3).

However, unlike tree rings, the Transects will continue to change while maintaining the relative spatial distribution within the community as they move through their growth and decay cycles. The objective for each Transect is to guide incremental change, ensuring it complements what came before while responding to the community's changing needs.

Describing the transects is intended to emphasize character features that should influence infill, redevelopment, and evolution to the next level of intensity, particularly in the older parts of the Town. Here, the physical characteristics of the buildings, such as those illustrated in the Denton Pattern Book, set a design framework for incremental changes that respect the unique existing physical patterns that define the neighborhoods. The development patterns that characterize these areas also reflect resilient development that produces revenues more closely aligned with public capital expenditures.

In outlying transects characterized by scattered residential enclaves and large vacant areas, infill and redevelopment aim to develop place-based, traditional neighborhoods that leverage physical form to enable connectivity, exchange, and a sense of belonging. In addition, the intent in these areas is to allow the eventual maturation of these scattered suburban settlements into vibrant neighborhoods exhibiting the following characteristics:

- A unique identity, one that has a name;



- Resident awareness of where it is, what it is, and whether they belong to it;
- At least one place that serves as its center;
- A generally agreed-upon spatial extent;
- Access to everyday facilities and services;
- Internal and external connectivity;
- Social diversity within it, or it is open to its enabling and
- A means of representation - a way residents can be involved in its affairs and an ability to speak with a collective voice.

Based on existing features, Denton is characterized by the following Transect (see Map 3-3):

#### T-6 – Urban Center

The Urban Center Zone is the historic shopping and business area for the community and surrounding region. People work, transact business, shop, dine, and reside here. The land-use categories include single-family residential and apartment units, retail, service, eating and drinking establishments, lodging, office, finance, public, civic, and institutional uses. Intensification in this Transect will primarily occur through redevelopment, as the zone has minimal vacant land.

#### T-5 – General Urban Zone

The General Urban Zone includes residential uses, including single-family, townhouse, and apartment units interspersed with various nonresidential uses. The use categories found here include retail and service, office, industrial, warehouse, personal vehicle service, and public, civic, and institutional uses. Also found are groups and assisted living establishments. In addition, the vacant and underutilized land in the Transect presents opportunities to accommodate additional population and neighborhood-scale commercial development.

#### T-4 – Urban Fringe Zone

Detached single-family residential units dominate the Urban Fringe Zone, with some townhouse units in planned developments and multifamily units. The land use in this Transect has started to define a low-density character, mainly because of current zoning. Infill and redevelopment in this Transect and the adjoining Suburban Zone will respond to market demand. However, because of increasing development costs, it wants to trend toward higher densities and various residential unit types, more characteristic of the Urban Center Zone. The development and placement of neighborhood-serving commercial, service, and civic uses in and adjacent to this zone are significant in this evolution, influencing vehicle trip frequency and length and the zone's walkability.

### T-3 – Suburban Zone

A significant portion of the land use category in this Transect is public, civic, and institutional uses. These are uses requiring a larger land area than was available in the urban transects but requiring access to urban services and proximity to population centers. Low-density single-family and agriculture are the dominant use categories. This Transect and the adjoining Rural Zone are the primary locations for master-planned developments that allow higher densities and various residential unit types. Master-planned development also presents opportunities to develop neighborhood-serving commercial, office, and service uses near residential clusters.

### T-2 – Rural Zone

The Rural Zone is almost exclusively agricultural even though urban services, e.g., public sewer and water, are accessible. Therefore, the Rural Zone functions as a holding area for future master-planned developments, with its development will be influenced by market forces and public infrastructure coverage and capacity.

### T-1- Rural Reserve Zone

The Rural Reserve, like the Rural Zone, is almost exclusively agricultural. Unlike the Rural Zone, access to urban services, e.g., public sewer and water, is unavailable and cannot be provided except at a high cost. The total maximum daily load caps applicable to the Denton wastewater treatment plant significantly multiply the cost of serving the area, requiring a separate treatment facility and likely requiring land application as the treatment method.

### Special Use

The Special Use transect designates areas with specialized purposes, e.g., institutional, industrial, and commercial. The land-use category in this Transect is almost exclusively commercial or industrial, including the Denton wastewater treatment plant. In addition, the zone encompasses current nonresidential zoning districts intended to maintain these areas for commercial and industrial uses that support the local economy and present employment opportunities for residents.

### Planning Districts

This Land Use Plan divides the Town into planning districts based on the built environment, land use, intensity patterns, and other physical characteristics (see Map 3-4). The mixed-use transects, primarily consisting of residential uses and containing a variety of nonresidential uses, cover approximately one-third of the incorporated area of the Town. Specialized nonresidential districts encompass use clusters in roughly 22 percent of the corporate area. Slightly less than a third of the corporate area consists of rural areas not currently served with public water and sewer and regions of the Town being held out from development due to sensitive environmental features. The "Other" category in Table 3-3 includes service, street, and highway corridors and set aside land unavailable for development.

<b>Table 3-3: Land Use Planning Districts Summary</b>		
<b>Planning District</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Urban Center	27	1%
Core Neighborhood	31	1%
General Urban	137	4%
Urban Fringe	412	12%
Suburban	772	22%
Neighborhood Commercial	53	2%
Special Commercial	50	1%
Regional Commercial	283	8%
Urban Employment	41	1%
Planned Employment	333	10%
Transition	23	1%
Rural Reserve	639	18%
Sensitive Area	413	12%
Other	264	8%
<b>Corporate Area</b>	<b>3,476</b>	<b>100%</b>

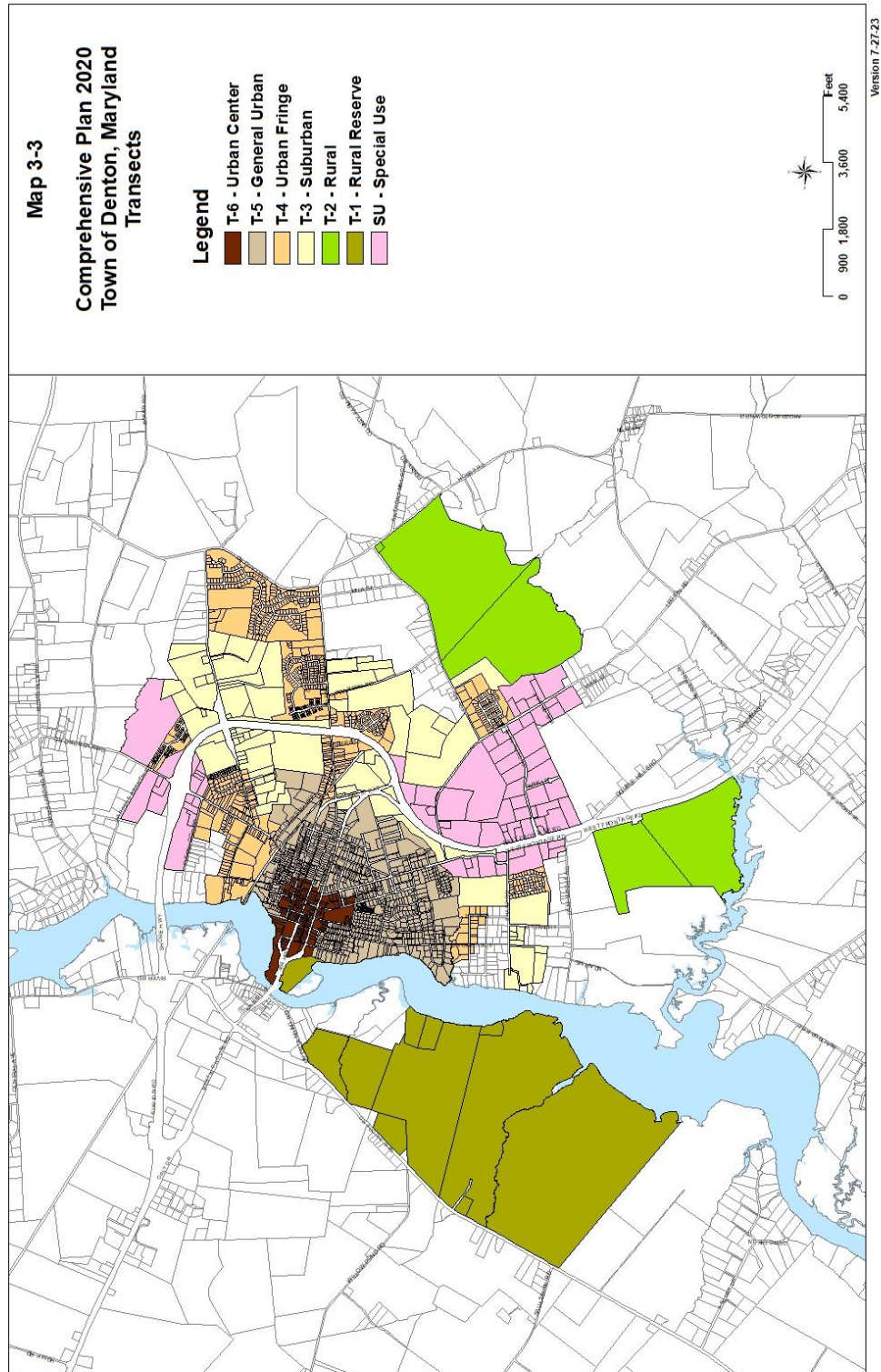
### Urban Center (T-6)

The Urban Center is the historic shopping and business area for the community and surrounding region. People work, transact business, shop, dine, and reside here. The Urban Center is the smallest and most intensely developed planning district. It includes the County Court House, library, municipal office, private offices, retail shops, restaurants, personal service establishments, and mixed-use residential, including live/work units and residential uses above retail stores. The Urban Center is centrally located within comfortable walking distance of the surrounding neighborhoods. Although residential use is allowed in the district, office, institutional, and mixed-use redevelopment are preferred due to their role as a vital service center for the County and surrounding neighborhoods.

The overall intent of this planning district is to maintain and enhance the economic vitality and aesthetic appeal of the downtown area as it continues to transition from a traditional commercial center to an area more oriented toward specialty retail services, offices, and governmental uses. Accordingly, town programs will focus on the following:

- Continue to promote the development of the Town center as an economically important and aesthetically pleasing place to live, work, visit, and shop.
- Initiate streetscape improvements and support public/private initiatives to improve the physical appearance of the streetscape.

## Map 3-3 Transects



- Support and encourage the efforts of property owners and merchants to promote physical and commercial revitalization, including measures to address traffic and pedestrian circulation issues and parking demand.

Apply design controls to ensure the historic and aesthetic character of the downtown is maintained and improved.

### Core Neighborhoods (T-6)

The Core Neighborhoods planning district includes properties adjacent to the Urban Center. The planning district is a mixed-use district comprising service, employment, commercial, and residential properties. Public and semi-public uses occupy much of the land in the district and include government offices, churches, a public park, a police station, parking lots, and facilities of non-profit organizations and telecommunications utilities. Residential uses include detached, attached, and small-scale multifamily units. Commercial uses in the Core Neighborhoods planning district include a convenience market, food store, laundromat, office, and retail with second-floor apartments.

This planning area will include various household living options, including detached, attached, and multifamily units. Additionally, the area will continue to include public buildings, schools, churches, public recreational facilities, and accessory uses compatible with residential surroundings. Redevelopment of existing properties will be the primary means of intensification in this planning district.

### General Urban (T-5)

The General Urban planning shares many of the characteristics of the Core Neighborhood district, albeit more residential, but also commercial, public, and semi-public uses. The General Urban planning district reflects the evolution of land use and buildings in the community, a pattern beginning over 150 years ago and completed in the 1970s. Nearly a quarter of all residential units were built from 1860 to 1889. Over half of the units are 100 or older, and the average age of all dwellings is nearly 92 years. The district includes a mix of multifamily, detached single-family, and townhouse units. In addition, this district has approximately twelve acres of vacant land that presents an opportunity for residential or small-scale commercial infill development.

The intention is for this planning district to continue to include various household living options, together with such public buildings, schools, churches, public recreational facilities, and accessory uses as may be necessary or are generally compatible with residential surroundings. Land-use change will occur through infill and redevelopment projects. One and two-family units will be allowed by right. Small, stand-alone, context-appropriate multifamily (e.g., triplex, fourplex units) infill units may also be allowed. Townhouses and multifamily unit groups may be permitted in a master-planned development. Additional small-scale, primarily neighborhood-serving retail and service uses compatible with their surroundings may be permitted.

### Urban Fringe (T-4)

The Urban Fringe planning district reflects town growth from rural to early suburban beginning post-WWII. Land use in the Urban Fringe planning district is almost exclusively residential. This district's character is less dense than the older Urban Core and General Urban districts. Residents in the Urban Fringe planning district are within a reasonable walking distance of the Urban Center Core and contribute to the market area strength for retail and service uses.

Land-use change will occur through infill and redevelopment projects, including master-planned communities. The district has vacant and underutilized land that presents residential or neighborhood-scale commercial infill and redevelopment opportunities. The district aims to accommodate future residential development in patterns, forms, and densities similar to the neighboring Core Neighborhood and General Urban planning areas. Public buildings, schools, churches, public recreational facilities, and accessory uses compatible with the residential surroundings will also be located here. One and two-family units will be allowed by right. Small, stand-alone, context-appropriate multifamily (e.g., triplex, fourplex units) infill units may also be allowed. Multifamily unit groups may be permitted in a master-planned development.

### Suburban (T-3, T-1)

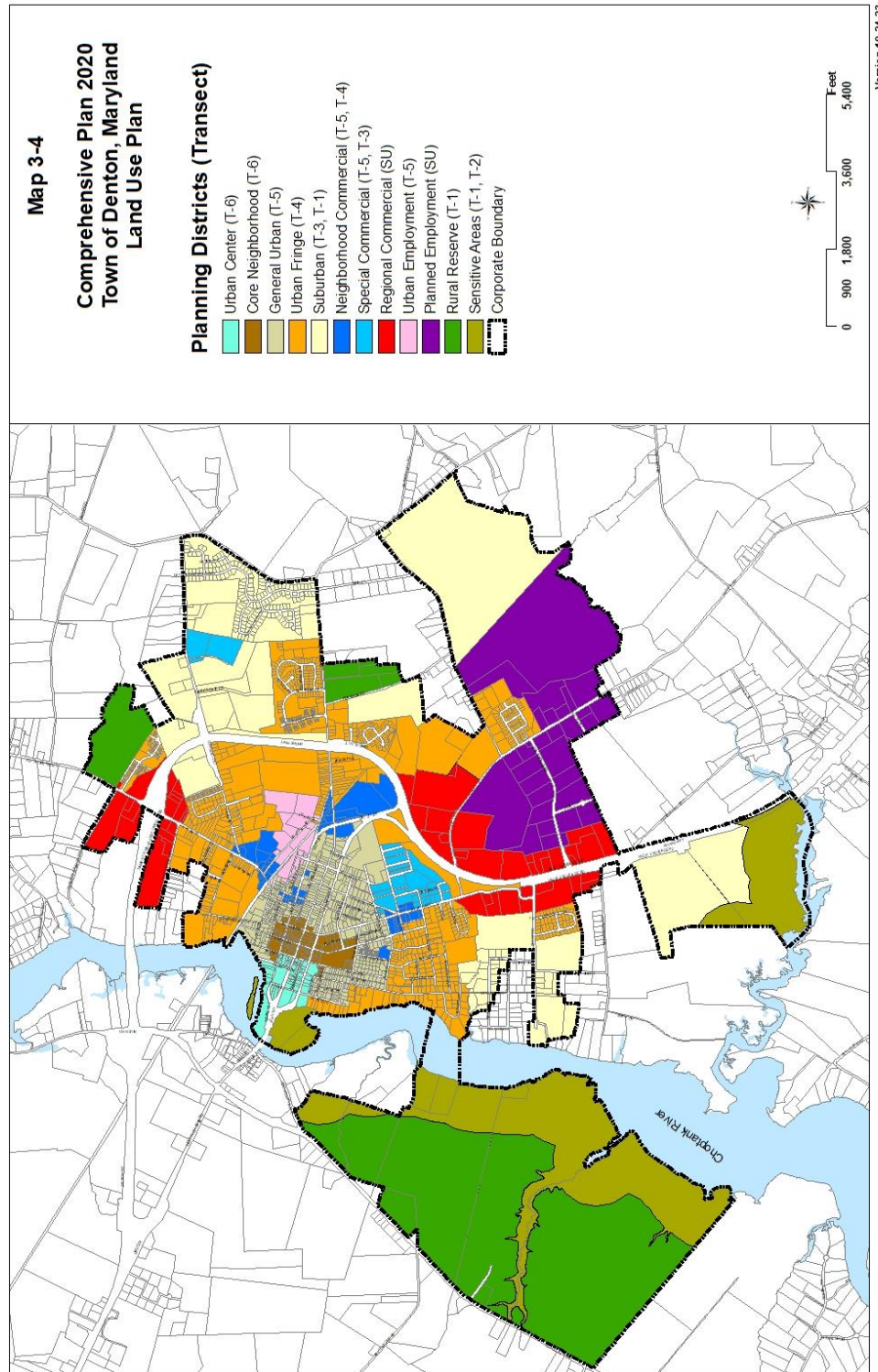
The Suburban Planning district is the most extensive planning district, with the most potential for infill development. The district already includes a mix of detached single-family, townhouse, and multifamily units and over 214 acres of vacant land.

This planning district intends that infill development will eventually mature the planning district into a pattern of vibrant and connected neighborhoods. Infill development will include additional single-family residential areas of spacious character and public buildings, schools, churches, public recreational facilities, and accessory uses as necessary or usually compatible with residential surroundings. Over sixty percent of the Suburban planning district is located east of the MD 404 corridor, presenting challenges to linking neighborhoods with the goods and services offered in the older parts of Denton.

Infill development will also include master-planned developments that increase household living options in the planning area and bring the overall residential density to fiscally sustainable levels. These master-planned developments will play a significant role in urbanizing this planning district and setting the stage for future public investment in neighborhood-serving services and facilities. The Town's expectations for master-planned developments are that they exhibit the following characteristics:

- An integrated mix of uses, including residential, commercial, employment/office, civic, and open space.
- A range of housing types and densities.
- Compact design

## Map 3-4 Land Use Plan





- Interconnected streets are designed to balance the needs of all users with sidewalks and on-street parking.
- Open spaces are integral to the community.

### Special Commercial (T-5, T-3)

The Special Commercial Planning District contains medical-related uses, including care and assisted living facilities. Its purpose is to set aside an area for medical-related uses and assisted living facilities. Permitted uses in the district are customarily associated with medical care and assisted living.

This planning district has substantial capacity for additional development, and policies and regulations should continue to encourage and support this purpose. Development can generally be described as infill and redevelopment. In this sense, development and design objectives are the same as for any commercial infill and redevelopment project, namely that development:

- Protect the character of existing historic commercial areas.
- Improve the visual appearance along major highway and street corridors.
- Improve access and circulation to and within commercial and business sites.
- Improve sales and property values.
- Encourage appropriate design linkages between sites.
- Require context-sensitive site planning and building design.

### Neighborhood Commercial (T-5, T-4)

The Neighborhood Commercial planning district encompasses properties along main travel routes in three locations within the corporate area. Over time, these areas have evolved in response to the demand for goods and services from surrounding neighborhoods and close-in market areas. The district includes clusters along the Sixth Street corridor, Fifth Street north of Kerr Avenue, and Gay and East Market Street. Current uses include auto, office, personal, medical, warehouse, and retail. In addition, the district includes apartments, single-family units, and mixed retail and residential. They are located within reasonable walking distance of surrounding areas and play a vital role in the Town's walkability.

This district aims to provide areas for commercial uses, primarily catering to local needs within the core areas of the Town. Development and redevelopment will be compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods. Additional commercial areas will likely be needed to serve neighborhoods on the east side of MD 404.

### Regional Commercial (SU)

The Regional Commercial Planning District includes retail, service, and office uses serving regional markets with access from major roads or local streets. Land uses here include big box and shopping center establishments and convenience establishments catering to the traveling public. In addition, the Regional Commercial Planning District includes over 100 acres of vacant land, sufficient to meet current and future demand.

This zoning district is intended for more intense, auto-oriented regional commercial and office development at appropriate locations along MD 404 where easy and safe access is available or can be provided. It provides land for retail and office establishments and commercial services serving regional demand and for the traveling public on or near major roads or streets in the Town. At the same time, it is intended to maintain the appearance of the highways and their access points by limiting outdoor advertising and establishing high standards for development. Commercial development in this area will be well-planned commercial concentrations instead of traditional forms of highway strip commercial. Commercial development in this district will be subject to high design standards and require other site design amenities that enhance aesthetic appeal. Planning objectives for this district are:

- Locate future regional commercial development in areas designated in the Land Use Plan.
- Encourage infill and redevelopment of regional commercial sites.
- Improve the visual appearance along major highway and street corridors.
- Provide for these roadways' continued safe and efficient use and pedestrian and traffic safety.
- Improve access and circulation to and within commercial and business sites.
- Implement access control standards to minimize intersection and site access points.
- Encourage appropriate design linkages between sites.
- Require context-sensitive site planning and building design.
- Provide good, orderly, and effective outdoor advertising displays compatible with their surroundings.
- Enhance overall property values and the visual environment in the Town by discouraging signs that contribute to the visual clutter of the community.

- Ensure new larger-scale commercial development is located in well-planned and designed commercial parks or plazas.
- Discourage typical strip-commercial forms of development.

### Urban Employment (SU)

The Urban Employment Planning District is a remnant nonresidential district located off main highway corridors and proximate to the older urban neighborhoods. It contains a mix of commercial, industrial, public, and semi-public uses, including auto service, warehouse, and transportation establishments. Public and semi-public land uses include municipal and state-owned properties and a church cemetery. This planning district has some vacant and underutilized land targeted for employment uses. The transitional nature of the district suggests a broad range of infill and redevelopment uses may fit in the district.

### Planned Employment (SU)

The Planned Employment planning district encompasses industrial and commercial establishments that benefit from significant thoroughfare access and sites of adequate size to address parking, maneuvering, screening, and other uses requiring large sites. Current uses occupy over one-half million square feet of warehouse, light manufacturing, and flex space. In addition, the Planned Employment planning district has adequate room for other industrial and commercial employment establishments and should continue to be retained for these types of uses.

The Planned Employment district is intended primarily for light manufacturing, fabricating, warehousing, and wholesale distribution in low buildings, with off-street parking for employees and access from major thoroughfares. This district includes land containing existing or planned "light" industrial development. The Town intends to ensure that development in these areas is consistent with the following policies:

- Future industrial development will be encouraged to be located in planned employment parks.
- Industrial development must provide controlled access and adequate bufferyards to screen adjacent non-industrial development from potential adverse visual, traffic, noise, dust, odor, and glare impacts.

### Rural Reserve (T-2)

The Rural Reserve planning district includes several hundred vacant acres at the Town's southern and eastern borders and on the west side of the Choptank River. Most of the land is agricultural and includes several large-lot residential uses, primarily along the eastern border. This district is intended to protect and preserve areas of the Town which are presently rural or agricultural and to protect the watershed. Land management practices that conserve the existing forest, buffer

wetlands, and conserve fish and wildlife habitats are essential in this area. Hence, an essential objective for these areas is the application of best management practices to control nonpoint pollution into receiving streams for all agricultural practices and habitat loss.

Due to water and wastewater constraints, land west of the Choptank River will see no substantial development during the planning period. However, parcels east of the Choptank River may see development as Planned neighborhoods if water and wastewater capacities are allocated and facilities provided.

### Sensitive Environmental Areas (T-1)

The Sensitive Environmental Areas planning district encompasses features, the appropriate management of which has been determined as essential to efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and achieve the goals of the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Program. This planning district has little development capacity due to regulatory and environmental constraints. Sensitive areas not shown in this planning district occur elsewhere in the Town. The vulnerable nature of these areas, e.g., stream corridors, significant drainage ways, forests, and sensitive plant and wildlife habitats, is addressed through development regulations such as the Stormwater Management and Forest Conservation Ordinance. If developed, density will be limited to one dwelling unit per 20 acres. The Town's policies for this planning district are:

- Conserve, protect, and enhance the overall ecological values of the Critical Area, its biological productivity, and diversity.
- Conserve existing breeding, feeding, and wintering habitats for those wildlife populations that require the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, or coastal habitats to sustain populations of those species.
- Conserve the land and water resource base necessary to maintain and support land uses such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture.
- Conserve the existing developed woodlands and forests for water quality benefits.
- Protect the large forest areas that provide habitat for the successful forest interior dwelling birds (FIDS) breeding and population maintenance.

### Recommendations

The following outline recommended actions to implement the Land Use goals and objectives and the intent of each of the Planning Districts.

## Development Regulation

### **Objective: Facilitate context-appropriate infill and redevelopment in the Urban Center, Core Neighborhoods, General Residential, Urban Fringe, and Transition planning districts.**

One strategy Denton can follow is increasing their housing, jobs, and community amenities without expanding its footprint into undeveloped lands. Of course, infill development has always taken place within Denton. Still, the percentage of infill growth instead of "greenfield"—on open space or agricultural land at the urban fringe—has been relatively small. The primary aim of the objective is to construct new housing, workplaces, shops, and other facilities within existing urban or suburban areas. This development can be of several types:

- building on vacant lots,
- reuse of underutilized sites (such as parking lots and old industrial sites), and
- rehabilitation or expansion of existing buildings.

Infill development is an essential strategy for Denton's suburban areas and its urban neighborhoods. In older built-up neighborhoods, infill and redevelopment will be a lot-by-lot process. In suburban areas, the incremental development of subdivisions and master-planned communities should result in active neighborhood centers, foster a "sense of place," and add a broader range of housing options and a better balance of workplaces, homes, shops, and community amenities.

Flexible development standards and processes for infill and redevelopment proposals should apply in the old town Denton neighborhoods. These are areas of the Town where most lots are nonconforming in some respect. Projects deemed context-appropriate should be provided with a path forward to approval.

All large vacant or underdeveloped properties in the Urban Fringe and Suburban planning districts of ten acres or more should be eligible to apply for the Planned Neighborhood floating zone. This change to the current zoning ordinance will incentivize infill development within the existing corporate area.

### **Objective: Streamline review processes and allow more flexibility to vary standards for context-appropriate projects, including mixed-use.**

Anything that makes development more costly for developers makes housing more costly for people. Time is money; a convoluted permitting process makes housing more expensive. Therefore, infill and redevelopment projects in the expanded Redevelopment District should not be subject to lengthy and expensive review processes, e.g., rezoning or special exceptions. Instead, if determined to be context-appropriate, these projects should be approved by the Planning Commission.

### **Objective: Embrace some mixed-use and allow more residential unit types as infill and redevelopment, including the "missing middle" housing types.**

By-right permitted residential unit types should include the next intensity increment in all residential districts. In this context, no planning district should be exempt from change, and at the same time, no planning district should experience sudden, radical change. Thus, for example, a duplex should be allowed in exclusively single-family unit districts, and accessory dwelling units should be permitted in all districts that allow detached single-family dwellings. In addition, context-appropriate stand-alone multi-plex units should be allowable when determined to be context-appropriate, consistent with the guidance provided in the Denton Pattern Book.

**Objective: Ensure regulations support and encourage local small businesses and local entrepreneurs.**

Local entrepreneurs and small businesses serving local markets often begin as home-based businesses that evolve. Likewise, the space needs of these businesses change over time, e.g., moving from the garage to an affordable downtown space or elsewhere in the Town. Therefore, zoning regulations, administrative processes, and procedures should be flexible enough to allow for the evolution of small businesses while ensuring appropriate protection for neighboring properties.

Capital Improvements

**Objective: Ensure new development is productive (income versus liabilities).**

Conducts a thorough analysis of the cost versus benefits of significant developments to ensure the project does not adversely impact the provision of Town services and facilities. This analysis should include evaluating the public costs versus benefits, including the cost associated with infrastructure expansion, operation, maintenance, and life cycle replacement.

**Objective: Prioritize capital investment on infrastructure maintenance and incremental improvements to resolve neighborhood service issues.**

In a time of dwindling funding from federal and state sources, it is imperative that the Town target local financial resources to maintain existing infrastructure and improve community areas where residents struggle. Small investments in existing neighborhoods are the best rather than significant investments in "shiny" big capital projects. The community's tax base is an asset, but its infrastructure is a long-term liability.

The lowest risk, highest return investments the Town can make are small and incremental. They are based on maximizing the return on existing investments in public facilities. Prioritizing maintenance sustains core and critical systems and enables more productive use of built infrastructure. Financing small, incremental investments in maintenance and small system expansions supports growth and productivity without adding substantial long-term liabilities. In addition, it recognizes that targeting investment and responding to feedback better enables individuals and businesses to adapt their places incrementally over time.