



**CITY OF OPELIKA
PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING AGENDA
300 Martin Luther King Blvd.**

May 1, 2025

TIME: 3:00 PM

A. OPELIKA 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

1. Presentation and discussion of Comprehensive Plan (Public Hearing)
2. Resolution Adopting Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan

“In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Opelika will make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting. If you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the ADA Coordinator 72 hours prior to the meeting at (334)705-5130.”

 CITY OF
Opelika 2040
Comprehensive Plan

DRAFT April 17, 2025

DRAFT
04/17/2025
FOR STAFF REVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to the residents of the City of Opelika, and to everyone who participated in the planning process for the Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This Plan was made possible by the contributions and insights of the residents, business persons, property owners, representatives from various groups and organizations, and other community stakeholders. Opelika City Council, Planning Commission, and the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee were instrumental in guiding the planning process.



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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the City of Opelika kicked off the process of developing its Comprehensive Plan to establish a long-term vision for the community. The planning process included fieldwork, data collection, demographic analysis, public outreach, and collaboration with key stakeholders and City staff. This document is an effort of the community and represents aspirations for Opelika's future.

What is the Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan represents the City's official visions for the future which is intended to guide the City for the next 20 years. The Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan is to be used as a policy guide that outlines actions to work towards achieving the City's vision. It is designed to serve as a foundation for decision-making for the City, developers, residents, and other stakeholders.

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Plan is to guide decisions related to development regulations, capital improvements, and other local policies and actions. It is a tool for the community to help coordinate efforts and direct how the City may use its resources. The Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan includes goals, recommendations, and specific projects, policies, and programs to guide decision-making and direct future growth and development in the City and its growth areas. The Plan is comprehensive both in breadth and scope, with recommendations for areas that encompass land use, housing, economic development, transportation, parks and recreation, and community facilities. The Comprehensive Plan provides a vision for the future, based on community input and consensus, and provides the framework for updating regulatory tools like zoning, subdivision regulations, annexations, and other policies.

How to Use the Plan

The Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan serves the following key functions:

Communicate the City's Vision

The Plan is a powerful statement of the community's vision for how it grows and changes over the coming years. The Plan identifies the City's priorities and charts a path for long-term growth.

Inform Development Proposals

The Plan is a long-term guide by which to measure and evaluate public and private proposals that affect the physical, social, and economic environment of the community. The Plan guides and assists in the evaluation of public and private development proposals and helps ensure that proposed development supports the City's long-term objectives.

Foundation for the Regulatory Framework

The Plan is a foundation for zoning regulations, the official zoning map, and other decisions guided by these regulations. Amendments to City regulations should be made to support the long-term objectives of the Plan.

Coordinate Initiatives

The Plan informs and coordinates planning initiatives that affect the City at the local, county, and regional levels. The Plan may aid and inform efforts related to housing, transportation, transit, trails, natural resources, economic development, and recreation.

CIP and Budgeting

The Plan informs the development of the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and budgeting process by helping to establish priority expenditures and the sequence of capital improvement programming.

Future Studies

The Plan establishes a path forward but cannot address every issue faced by the City in sufficient detail. It should help identify additional studies and future action steps to address specific needs.

Inform and Educate

The Plan is a valuable source of information for the City Council, the Planning Commission, and the City's other Boards and Commission, as well as for local organizations, businesses, and residents. This broad spectrum of interests should use the Plan to inform the community and provide valuable information that can assist with future initiatives. The Plan is also an effective marketing tool that can be used to promote the community and highlight opportunities for investment.

Past Plans

The following plans were reviewed for inconsistencies, the relevance of previously collected data, and gaps in data that must be corrected as part of this planning process. Summaries were provided in the Existing Conditions Memorandum.

- Design Review Guidelines for Opelika's Historic Districts (2006)
- Comprehensive Plan 2020 (2009)
- Carver-Jeter Plan and Update (2014)
- Opelika Design Alabama Report (2016)
- Bike Friendly Community Report (2018)
- School Enrollment Projections Report (2019)
- Main Street Refresh Report (2020)
- 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (2020)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2021)



Planning Process

The Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan is the result of a multi-step process. The planning process stressed community engagement, assessment of existing conditions, identification of opportunities and constraints, the establishment of a vision, goals, and objectives, and the development of planning recommendations and policies. The following is a summary of the Comprehensive Plan process.





Community Outreach

Informed by a planning process dedicated to engaging the community, the Comprehensive Plan is responsive to the City and addresses the issues and opportunities most important to Opelika residents and stakeholders. Public engagement included both in-person and online outreach events.

Outreach Conducted

The planning process engaged over 700 individuals through a combination of in-person and online community outreach tools and exercises including:

- Kickoff Participants – 48
- Key Stakeholder Interviews – 14
- Online Questionnaire Participants – 438
- map.social points – 85
- Community Visioning Workshop Participants – 45
- Business Workshop Participants – 26
- DIY Kit Workshop Participants – 79

Interactive Project Website

A project website was developed to support the planning process that contained information and updates concerning the project, meeting and webinar notices, recorded webinar videos, and project documents such as the ECM. The website also hosted outreach tools, including the community questionnaire and map.social.

Online Community Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was developed to supplement in-person events by offering opportunities for individuals to get involved that were not time constrained and could be accessed around-the-clock. This helped capture input from those unable or unlikely to attend a workshop.

map.social

map.social is a public outreach tool allowing individuals to provide feedback and comments tied spatially to a point or area on a map. The tool provided a way for anyone to create a map of their community, identifying their issues, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one and group interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders identified by City staff for their unique perspective. Stakeholder interviews provided a more personal setting for a detailed discussion of specific issues relevant to the City of Opelika.

Business Workshop

A business workshop was held to engage with the local business community and gather feedback and input from a business and development perspective. The workshop included a review of the status of the planning process to be undertaken as well as an interactive polling exercise designed to gather input regarding issues, opportunities, and key strengths and assets of the City.

Community Visioning Workshop

The Community Visioning Workshop was the primary outreach event for the Comprehensive Plan. The workshop included an exercise designed to gather input regarding issues, opportunities, potential projects, and key strengths and assets of the community. The workshop was also an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to express their visions for the future of the community.

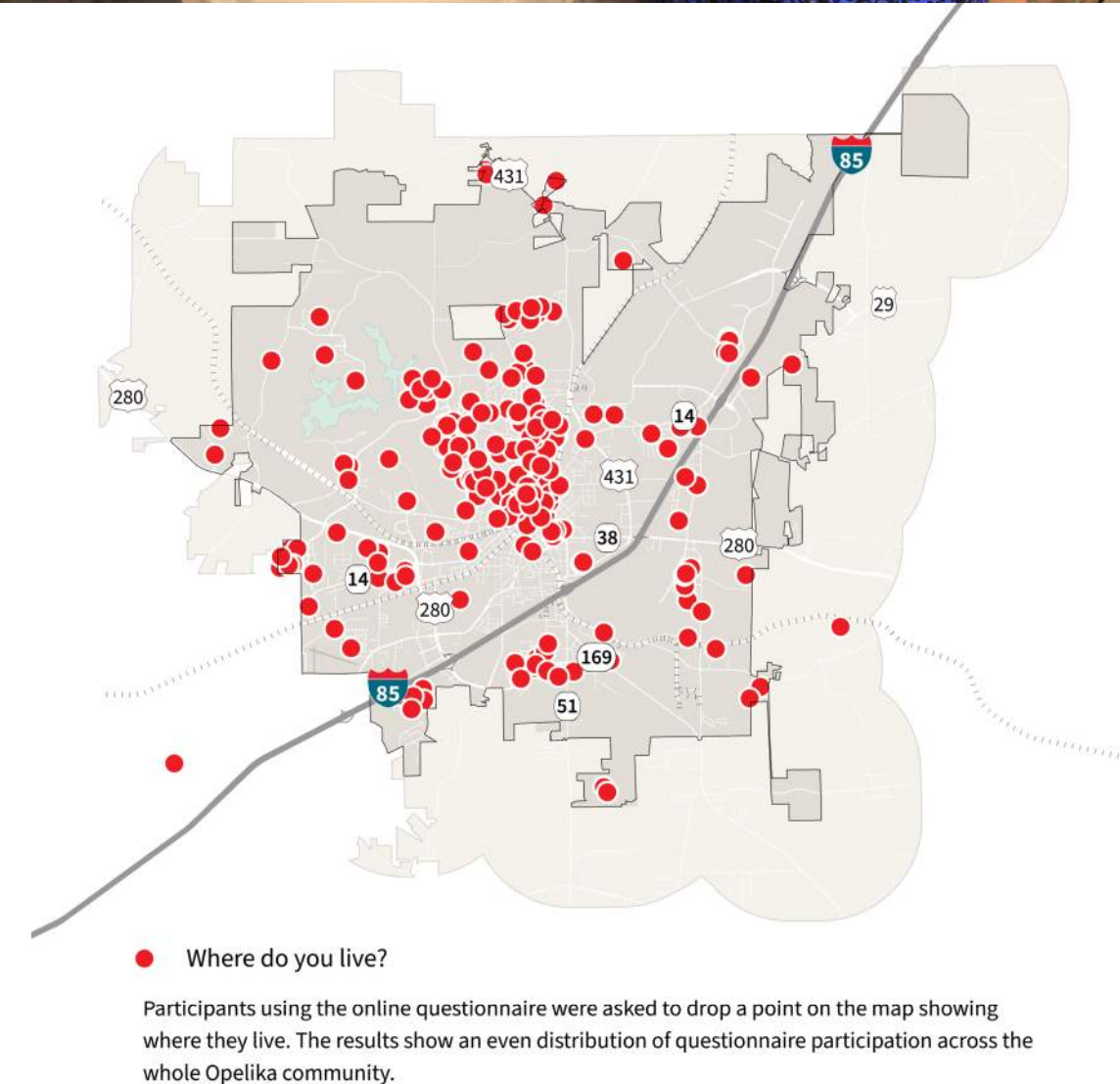
DIY Kit Workshops

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) workshop kits were provided to engage residents at the local or neighborhood level. Using the kits, City staff facilitated seven workshops to gather input outside of more formal planning activities. Opelika High School Students, Keep Opelika Beautiful, and several drop-in format DIY Kit Workshops were held, engaging a total of 79 participants in the planning process.

Community Quotes

A selection of comments from the community outreach are included throughout the Plan with minimal edits for clarity and/or brevity. These comments are intended to provide insight into community perspectives and context for the Plan's recommendations.

Opelika is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family.



COMMUNITY PROFILE

Overview

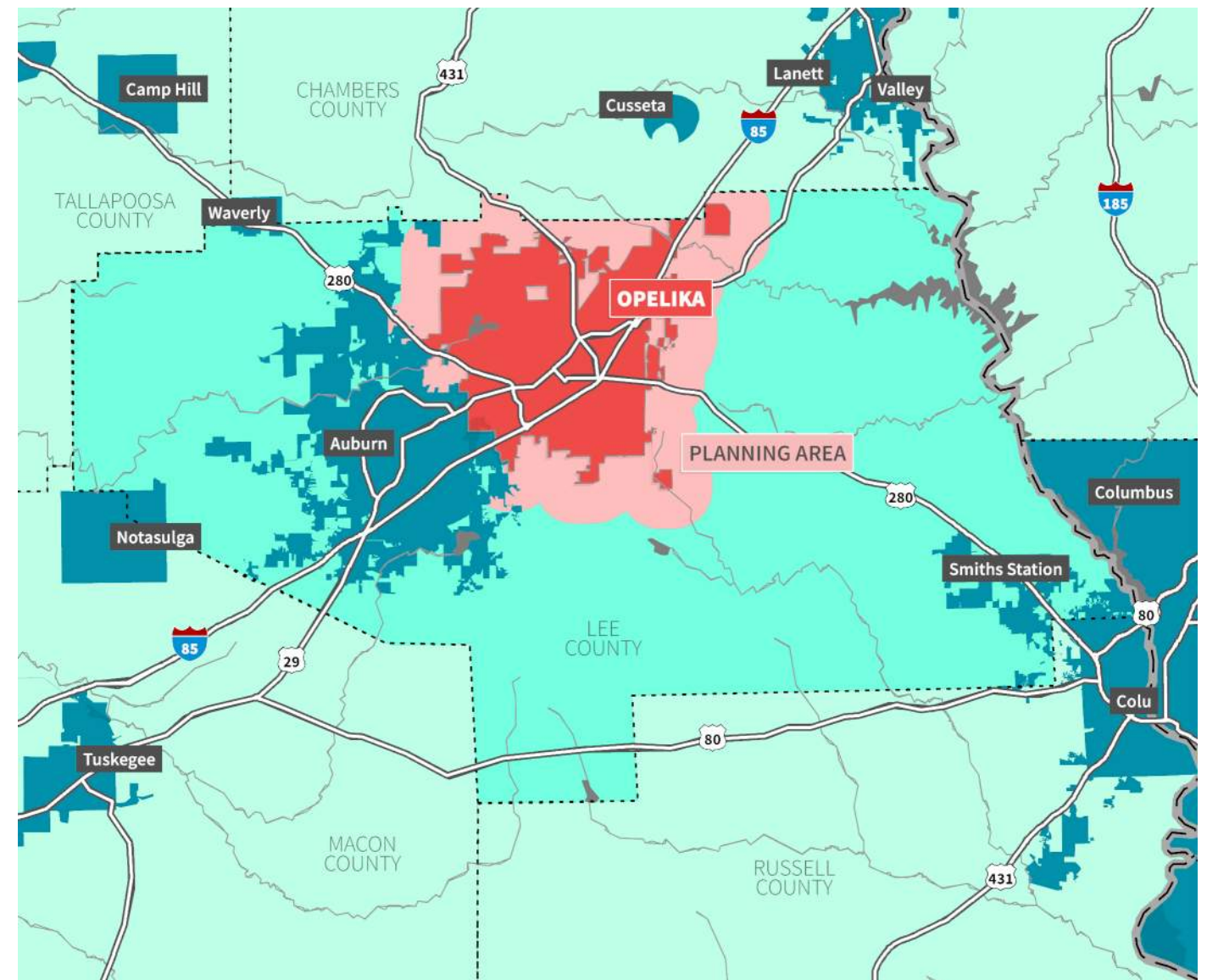
This chapter provides a snapshot of current conditions related to demographics, market, land use, and zoning regulations. It answers the question of Where is Opelika Today? Collectively, this understanding of the City's needs and existing opportunities, along with community input, created a foundation for Opelika's vision for the future.

Regional Setting

As of the 2020 U.S. Census, the City of Opelika has a population of 30,908 residents and is growing. Opelika is the second most populated municipality within Lee County and serves as the county seat. Opelika is bordered by Auburn to the west and Chambers County to the north. Opelika enjoys a unique regional position, with convenient access to several large and mid-size cities via Interstate 85 and U.S. Routes 280 and 431. Opelika is 100 miles southwest of Atlanta, 110 miles southeast of Birmingham, and approximately 60 miles northeast of Montgomery. Columbus is just 30 miles to the southeast.

Planning Area

The Code of Alabama Section 11-52-30 (2022) states that beginning January 1, 2023, the planning jurisdiction of any municipal planning commission shall include all land located in the corporate limits of the municipality and all land not located in any other municipality within a mile and a half outside the corporate limits. Opelika's planning area adheres to these statutes. The planning area encompasses the City's primary growth areas and extends one and a half miles out from the current municipal boundary. To the southwest, Opelika abuts Auburn, and the planning area is not extended. To the north, the planning area ends at the Chambers County line.



Demographics

The demographic profile summarizes the existing characteristics of Opelika’s current population. Understanding Opelika’s demographics enables the City to respond to the community’s needs, provide necessary services, and predict future demands more adequately. The following profile will guide the planning process, ensuring the Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan is founded on accurate demographic data and an understanding of existing trends, issues, and opportunities. Where appropriate, the City of Opelika has been compared to Lee County and the State of Alabama to provide regional context.

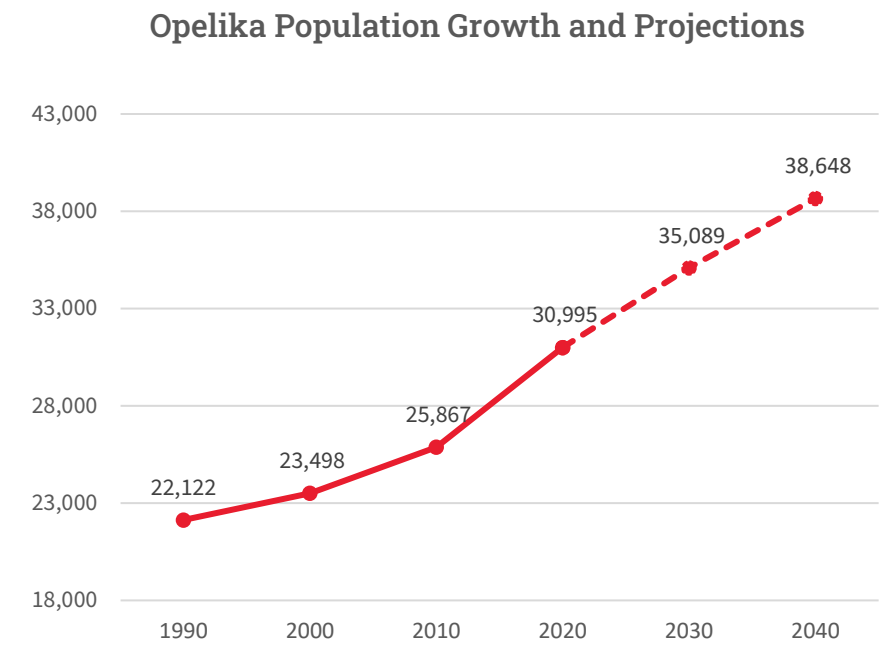
Population

Population growth in Opelika has been consistent over the past 20 years, outpacing the growth rate of the state but trailing slightly behind growth in Lee County.

According to the 2020 US Census, Opelika’s population is 30,995. The population has grown 31.9% since 2000, at an annual rate of 1.5%; the rate increased to 2.0% after 2010. Over the same period, the State of Alabama grew at much slower rates, while Lee County grew at slightly faster rates of 2.1% since 2000 and 2.6% since 2010.

	Opelika	Lee County	Alabama
Population (2020)	30,995	174,241	5,024,279
Households (2019)	11,866	60,237	1,867,893
Median Age (2019)	37.7	31.9	39.0
Average Household Size (2019)	2.5	2.58	2.55
Median Household Income (2019)	\$48,459	\$51,463	\$50,536

Source: 1990-2020 US Census, University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research, Houseal Lavigne Associates



Source: 1990-2020 US Census, University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research, Houseal Lavigne Associates

Age

The median age is rising in Opelika, and children are becoming a smaller percentage of the population.

Although the Opelika grew by 29% from 2000 to 2019, the number of residents aged 19 and under grew by just 3%. The fastest-growing groups were those aged 55-64 (82%) and 65+ (56%). Growth in the 65+ group has accelerated since 2010, contributing to the median age rising from 34.1 in 2000 to 37.7. Lee County and Alabama also both experienced growth in their older populations, mirroring conditions seen on the national level as the Baby Boomer generation ages.

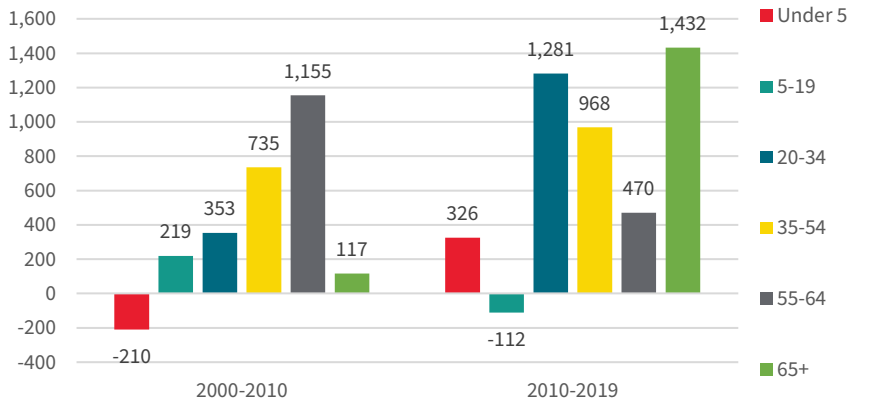
Race and Ethnicity

Opelika’s population continues to be a predominant mix of White and Black/African American residents.

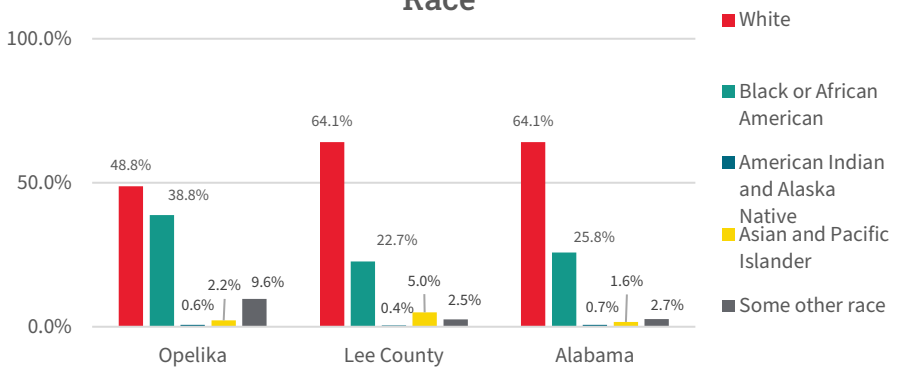
Opelika’s population comprises of 48.8% of residents who identify as White and 38.8% identifying as Black/African American. The share of Black residents has decreased since 2000, and the population of Asian and Pacific Islander residents has grown from 0.9% to 2.3% during this time. The County’s demographics reflect the numbers at the state level, with figures closer to a quarter of the population Black or African American and a little less than two-thirds White.

Hispanic or Latin American is an ethnicity that includes individuals of all races as defined by the U.S. Census. In 2020, 7.8% of Opelika’s population identified as Hispanic which is over two percent more than the percentage identifying as Hispanic in Lee County (5.3%) and Alabama (5.2%).

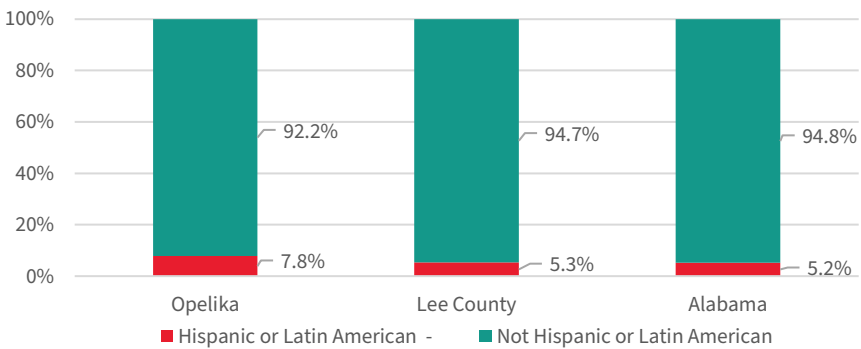
Population Change by Age Group



Race



Hispanic Population



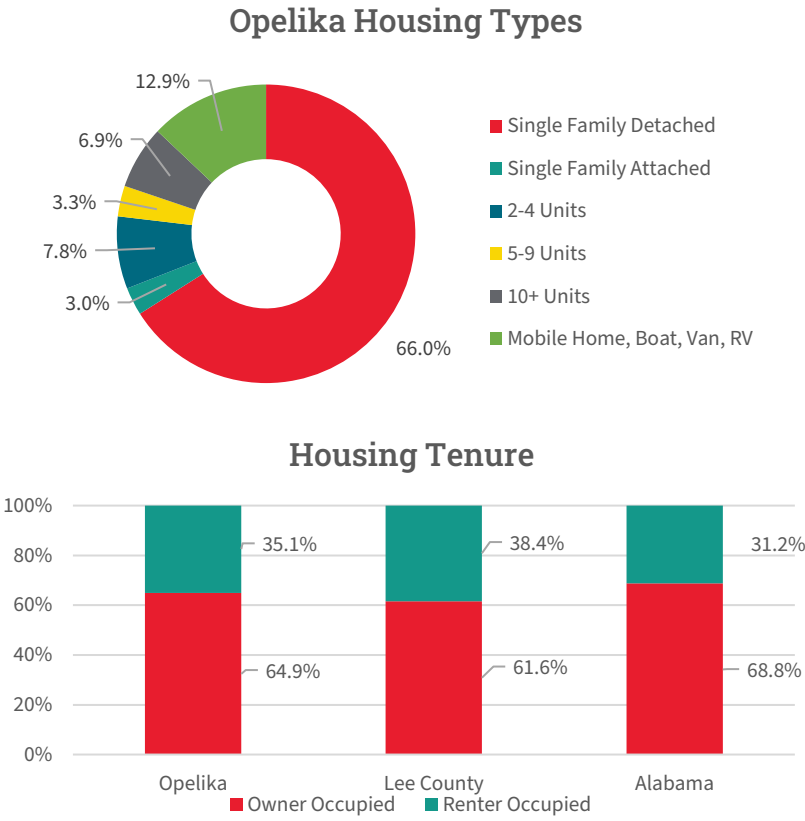
Source: 2015-2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing

Opelika’s housing stock predominantly consists of owner-occupied single-family homes, similar to Lee County and the State.

Opelika has a housing stock consisting of 66% single-family detached homes, which is a similar share to that of the state, but nearly eight percentage points higher than that of Lee County. Opelika has the lowest share of residents living in mobile homes (13%) followed by Lee County (16%) and the state (17%). The proportion of residents in multifamily buildings (two or more units) is 19% in Opelika, compared to 24% in Lee County and 15% in the state. Opelika vacancy rates are slightly higher than Lee County at 2.1% for homeowners and 7.5% for renters. The figures for Lee County are 1.8% and 7.4%, respectively.

Housing tenure refers to households owning or renting the housing units they reside in. In Opelika, 65% own and 35% rent. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, White residents own homes at a rate of 77% while the home ownership rate for black residents is 48%.

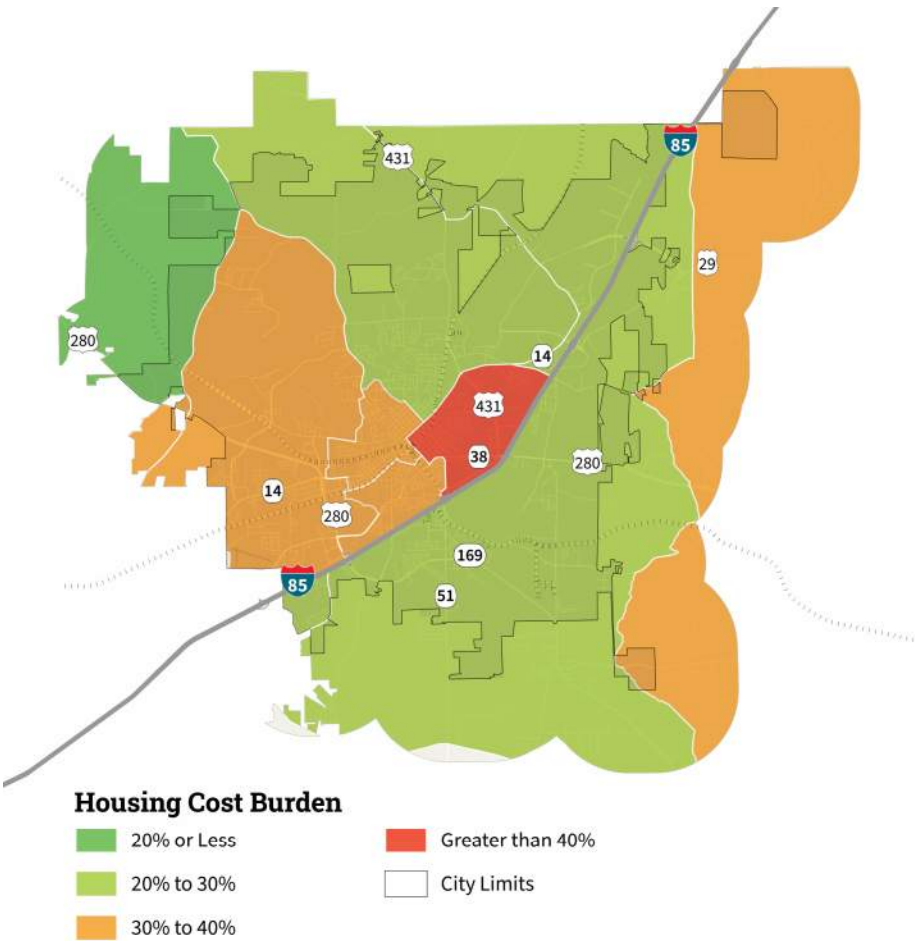


Source: 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Housing Cost Burden

Housing cost burden is defined as a household paying more than 30% of its income towards housing. Greater than 35% indicates a severe burden. Opelika residents experience housing cost burden at a rate of 28 percent, including 13% who are severely burdened. At 45%, renters experience cost burdens at more than twice the rate compared to homeowners and severe cost burdens at four times the rate of homeowners. Lee County has slightly higher rates of cost burden overall when compared to Opelika. Median homeownership costs in Opelika have decreased relative to the cost of living over the last 10 years, while costs have increased for renters.

The Housing Cost Burden map summarizes cost burden by census tract, indicating what portion of Opelika households are spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Green census tracts are the least cost-burdened, while red tracts experience the most cost burden.



Income

The median income in Opelika has grown modestly in recent years but remain just below the median for Lee County and Alabama. Fewer individuals in Opelika face poverty compared to Lee County and the state.

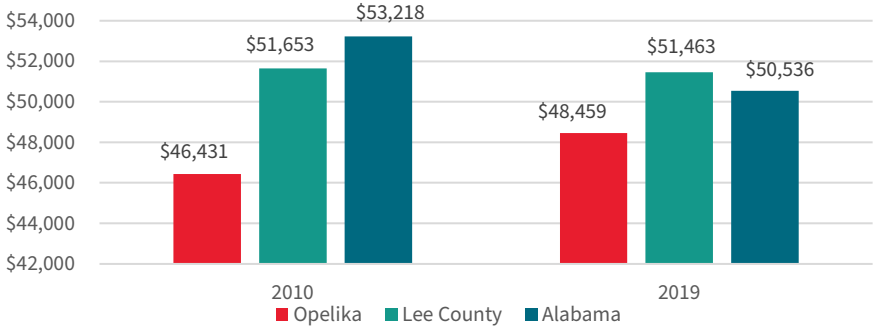
The median household income in Opelika was \$48,459 in 2019, up from \$46,431 in 2010. This represents a 4.4% increase, while Lee County and Alabama saw decreases of 0.4% and 5.0% respectively when adjusted for inflation. The local increase in median income can be attributed to an increase in households earning between \$75,000 and \$99,999, and a decrease in households earning less than \$25,000. Lee County has the largest proportion of households earning greater than \$100,000/year.

Employment

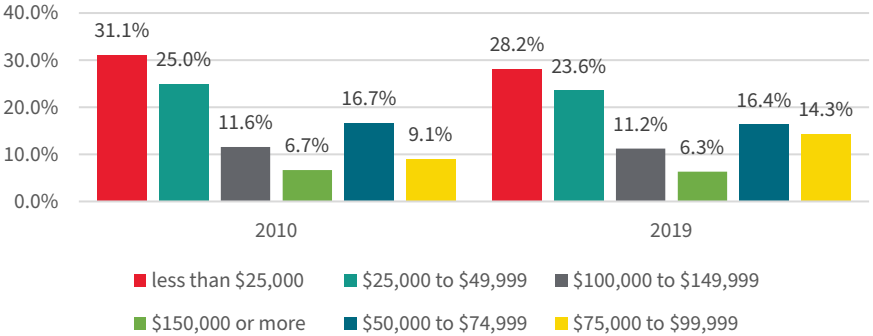
The number of jobs is increasing in Opelika. Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest sector within Opelika, while manufacturing is the leading employer of Opelika residents.

The number of jobs in Opelika grew at an annual rate of 1.9% between 2008 and 2018 (the latest year the data is available), which is the same rate as the City’s population growth over the past 10 years.

Median Household Incomes



Household Income Distribution



Source: 2015-2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Jobs and Employment Sectors

The North American Industry Classification System (NAIC) is the standard used to classify business establishments for the purpose of collecting and analyzing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy. Health and Social Assistance is the largest NAIC business sector within Opelika, accounting for 19% (4,062) of all jobs. According to the U.S. Census, 14% (1,681) of Opelika residents are employed in this sector.

Though Health and Social Assistance is the large NAIC business sector within Opelika, it does not employ the most Opelika residents. The Manufacturing sector employs 15% (1,732) of Opelika’s residents. This means that most jobs provided by the Health and Social Assistance sector within Opelika are filled by non-Opelika residents. The same can be said about other top sectors within Opelika, such as Administration, Waste Management, and Remediation and Retail Trade.

Unemployment

The unemployment rate in the Opelika metropolitan area is 2.9% as of August 2021, which is lower than the national rate of 5.2%. According to the American Community Survey, 64.7% of Opelika residents are in the labor force, higher than the figures in greater Lee County and Alabama at 61.0% and 57.4% respectively.

Opelika Resident's Jobs: Top Sectors

	Total Jobs	Share	5-Year Job Growth	10-Year Job Growth
Manufacturing	1,732	14.8%	23.5%	-3.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,681	14.4%	15.3%	9.9%
Educational Services	1,544	13.2%	18.9%	16.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	1,223	10.5%	23.9%	34.1%
Retail Trade	1,197	10.2%	40.3%	12.1%
Totals:	7,377	63%	23%	12%

Local Job Market in Opelika: Top Sectors

	Total Jobs	Share	5-Year Job Growth	10-Year Job Growth
Health Care and Social Assistance	4,062	18.7%	7.1%	7.0%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	2,803	12.9%	-3.3%	40.1%
Retail Trade	2,618	12.1%	16.8%	12.5%
Accommodation and Food Services	2,243	10.3%	20.9%	44.0%
Manufacturing	2,175	10.0%	40.1%	-9.4%
Totals:	13,901	64%	14%	18%

Source: 2003-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Existing Land Use

This section examines Opelika’s existing land use composition and development patterns. The existing land use inventory is based on field reconnaissance and aerial imagery examination.

Agriculture

Agriculture uses include land actively used to produce crops, raise livestock, grow orchards, and conduct farming-related activities. Farms devoted wholly or partially to agritourism are included. Low-density single family detached homes within the same parcel utilized for agricultural production are also included in this land use.

Single-Family Detached

Single-family detached consists of single-family homes occupying individual lots ranging in size from modest to large. Single-family detached is the predominant residential type within the City. Single-family detached includes both newer planned subdivisions and older established neighborhoods in traditional neighborhood patterns.

Single-Family Attached

Single-family attached includes structures where dwelling units share an exterior wall with at least one adjacent unit while still maintaining a separate dedicated entrance for each unit. This land use includes Cityhomes and duplexes. Less common are small single-family attached homes on lots in established neighborhoods.

Mobile/Manufactured Home Park

Mobile and manufactured, detached single-family homes are transportable structures suitable for year-round occupancy. Most are in established parks, developed as single properties for the placement of manufactured homes and owned by an individual, partnership, public or private association, or corporation.

Multifamily

Multifamily includes residential structures with multiple dwelling units stacked vertically with shared entrances and corridors, such as apartment buildings and condominiums. Multifamily homes are in all parts of Opelika, ranging in price point, tenure, and age. Senior and assisted living multifamily developments are included.

Mixed Use

Mixed Use includes structures with first floor/ground level commercial uses and residential or office uses above. Mixed use is found in the buildings comprising Opelika’s DownCity and Central Business District.

Commercial

Commercial uses include retail and service businesses such as shops, restaurants, banks, gas stations, and auto service stations. Opelika’s commercial strips and big-box retail destinations are primarily located along two corridors, Interstate 85, and Pepperell Parkway/State Route 14. The historic DownCity is also a predominant Opelika commercial district.

Hotel or Accommodations

The hotel or accommodations land use commercial establishments providing sleeping accommodations and lodging services. Clusters of several national hotel chains are located along Interstate 85 at U.S. Route 280 and Gateway Drive.

Office

Office land uses include large-scale office developments or planned office parks used for professional services or medical offices. Office uses also include small individual office buildings, many of which are located DownCity.

Industrial

Industrial uses include both heavy and light industrial businesses such as manufacturing, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials. Notable examples found in the City include the manufacturing campus at the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park. Heavier industrial uses, such as a quarry, milling and lumber operations, and packaging and logistics businesses located within Opelika or its planning area are included.

Airport

The airport land use includes ground facilities such as hangars, runways, and airport parking. Auburn University Regional Airport (AUO) is a public use airport located partially within Opelika limits in the southwest portion of the City.

Public/Semi-Public

Public and Semi-Public includes local government uses, municipal facilities, community service providers, schools, and places of worship and assembly. Opelika City Hall, the police station, its fire stations, the library, churches, Southern Union Community College’s Opelika campus, the City’s public schools are public/semi-public uses.

Parks and Open Space

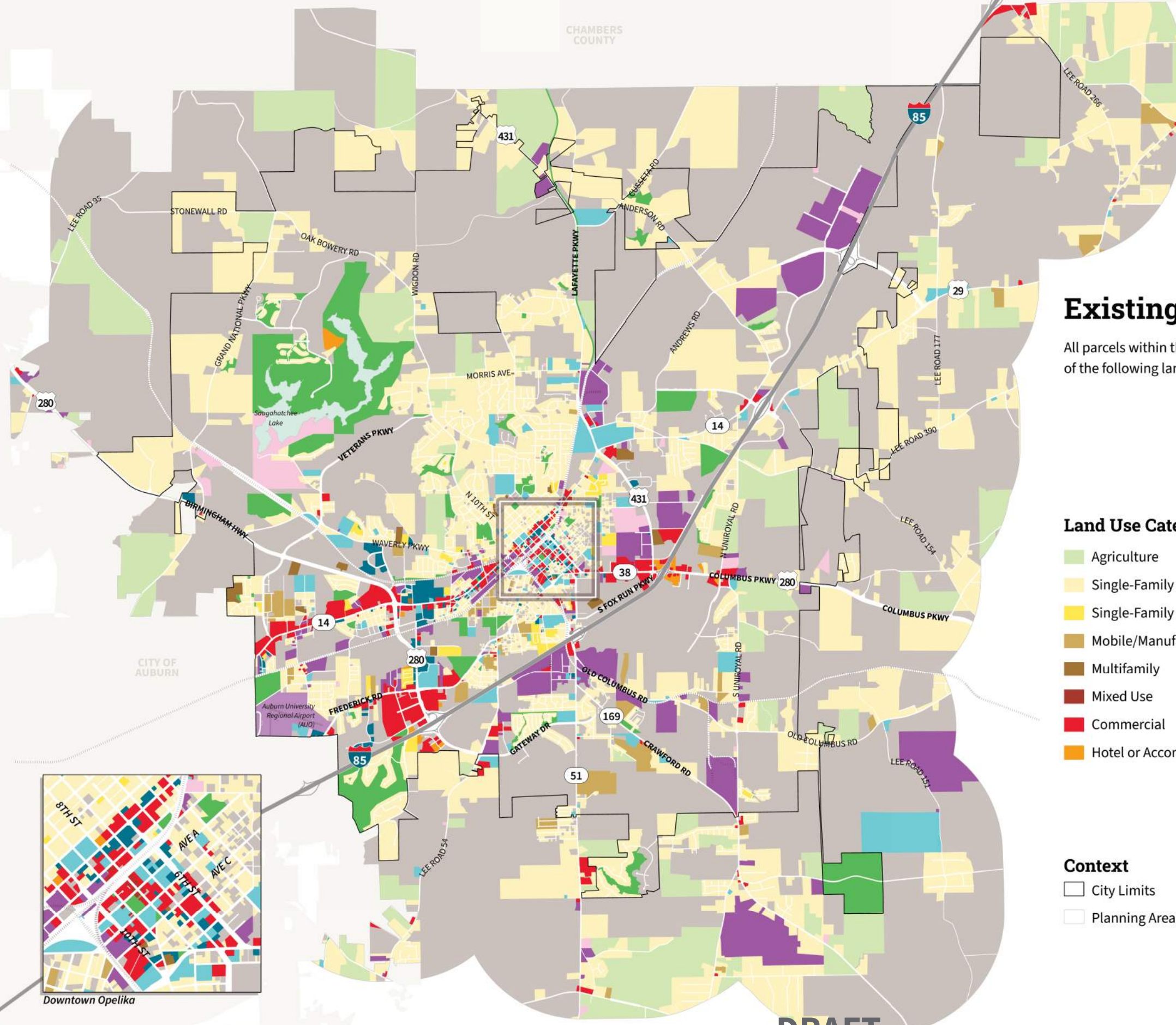
This land use includes parks that provide both active and passive recreation options and open space areas. Parks consist of public parks owned and maintained by the City and private parks in planned subdivisions. Open space areas include preserved natural areas, private golf courses, cemeteries, and detention ponds and creeks in planned subdivisions.

Utility or Railroad

Utility and railroad land uses support local infrastructure and provide rights-of-way or easements for the transmission of gas, electric, water, and sewer. This includes both facilities and infrastructure as well as related rights-of-way. Parcels and rights-of-way associated with the City’s two active rail lines, the Central of Georgia District and the A&WP Subdivision, are included.

Vacant or Undeveloped Land

Undeveloped land includes natural areas such as fields or wooded areas that have not been prepared for development but have not been set aside for conservation. In their current state, development could not occur without first improving the site. Vacant uses include properties and parcels that can reasonably be considered available for development/redevelopment. This includes properties that have been prepared for development and those that once held a structure that has since been demolished.



Existing Land Use

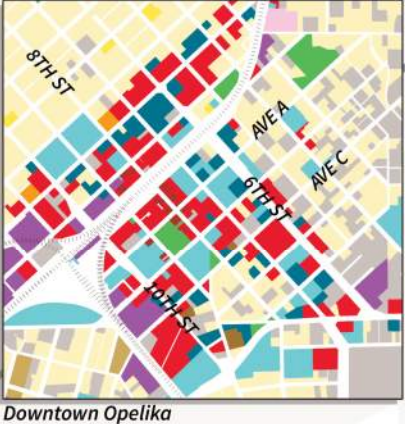
All parcels within the City limits and its planning area are categorized into one of the following land use classifications.

Land Use Categories

- Agriculture
- Single-Family Detached
- Single-Family Attached
- Mobile/Manufactured Home Park
- Multifamily
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Hotel or Accomodations
- Office
- Industrial
- Airport
- Public/Semi-Public
- Parks and Open Space
- Utility or Railroad
- Vacant or Undeveloped

Context

- City Limits
- Planning Area
- Railroads
- Saugahatchee Lake



DRAFT
04/17/2025
FOR STAFF REVIEW

Zoning and Development Regulations

The City of Opelika Zoning Ordinance provides the legal framework to regulate the built environment. Zoning and development controls are critical to shaping the community. They establish what specific land uses are permitted; the density, intensity, scale, and orientation of those uses; and requirements for parking, signs, and other standards.

Zoning Districts

Rural District (R-1)

This district is intended to protect agricultural land and to provide areas for the development of extremely low-density residential uses. Development is limited to acreage tracts and agricultural uses. Mobile home living and recreational vehicle areas are conditionally permitted. It is intended that areas within this district will transition to higher intensity uses as increased service becomes available.

Residential Transition District (R-1A)

This district is intended to serve as a transition district. The district allows residential lot sizes that are compatible with both Rural District (R-1) and Low Density Residential District (R-2).

Low Density Residential District (R-2, R-3)

These districts provide areas for development not exceeding four dwelling units per acre. Development in these districts should be compatible with the character, scale, and density of the existing neighborhood.

Medium Density Residential District (R-4, R-4M)

These districts allow for a mix of residential type including, but not limited to single family detached, duplexes, cottages, Cityhouses, apartments, patio homes, cluster homes, mobile homes, subdivisions, and mobile homes parks. Developments are not to exceed nine units per acre. Development should be served by sanitary sewer and should be in context with the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.

High Density Residential District (R-5, R-5M)

These districts are intended for areas with densities of no more than sixteen dwelling units per acre. Development should be served by sanitary sewer and should be in context with the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.

DownCity Commercial District (C-1)

This district serves as Opelika’s central business core, allowing for uses such as retail, office, banking, insurance, government, food service, high density residential, service, and limited light assembly and manufacturing. Development within this district is characterized by lot line to lot line construction, off-site parking, and a mix of uses within building properties.

Office/Retail District (C-2)

This district is intended to provide areas for offices and neighborhood small retail uses. This district also allows residential, banks, fast food establishments, convenience store and similar uses.

General Commercial District (C-3)

This district is characterized by a broad range of retail, wholesale, and service uses. Additional uses include motels, individual businesses, small strip centers, banks, fast food establishments, grocery stores, and other similar uses.

Industrial Districts (M-1, M2)

These districts are intended for a wide range of uses, including but not limited to manufacturing, wholesale, warehouse, processing, assembling, and commercial. Development in these districts should be served by sanitary sewer or have provision for adequate on-site disposal. Industrial District M-1 is intended for private ownership and District M-2 is intended for public ownership.

Institutional District (I-1)

This district is intended for major institutional uses such as government buildings, parks, cemeteries, school, the East Alabama Medical Center, and related medical uses. Permitted uses are limited within this district to protect these institutions from incompatible uses.

Special Districts

Special districts are included below. These districts are intended to provide special designated areas to take advantage of or highlight unique opportunities in those areas. They are characterized by special controls and may not in all cases exist at the time of the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance at any location in the City.

Airport Overlay District (AP)

Regulations from Section 7.4 apply to all property included within the airport height control zones of the Auburn University Regional Airport. The intent of this section is to regulate and restrict the height of buildings, structures, and objects of natural growth and otherwise regulate the use of property in the vicinity of the Auburn University Regional Airport. The Zoning Ordinance establishes three airport overlay zones which include the Airport Height Notification Zone (Subzone A and Subzone B), Airport Runway Protection Zone, and Airport Noise Impact Zone.

Flood Plain Overlay District (FP)

Ordinance No. 106-11, known as the City of Opelika Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance overlays and supplements regulations of the Zoning Ordinance. These regulations apply to all land identified as a special flood hazard area by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in its Flood Insurance Study (FIS). Areas of special flood hazard may also include those areas known to have flooded historically or defined through standard engineering analysis by government agencies or private parties but not yet incorporated into a FIS.

Gateway Corridor District (GC-P, GC-S)

Regulations from Section 7.6 authorizes the establishment of the gateway corridor overlay district and will apply and supersede the underlying district regulations. The district includes roadway corridors and their adjacent development. Uses typically include retail, wholesale, motel, recreation, office, fast food establishments, and other similar uses. The district is characterized by special design controls enforced to prevent incompatible uses and to maintain an attractive gateway or entrance into Opelika.

The gateway corridor overlay district is divided into two subsections based on the development pattern that the of the roadways. The Gateway Corridor – Primary Overlay District (GC-P) is applied to corridors that typically have larger lots with ample parking and greater building setbacks. The Gateway Corridor – Secondary Overlay District (GC-S) is applied to corridors that feature smaller, more standardize lots.

Hospitality Overlay District (HOD)

This district is intended to provide an area within DownCity Opelika with a special classification for unique mixed use commercial and residential development. The Hospitality Overlay District is characterized by its focus on a variety of entertainment and art venues, retail, personal services, offices, and restaurants.

Planned Residential Development (PRD)

This district may be an area of minimum contiguous size to be planned, developed, operated, and maintained as a single entity and containing one or more residential types and limited commercial uses incidental to the residential development. The intent of this district is to provide alternatives to the conventional residential development regulations. Regulations permit greater flexibility in residential design in order to encourage innovative residential plans, promote superior residential developments, and offer neighborhood amenities such as usable open space, designated recreational areas, sidewalks, decorative street lighting, and streetscapes.

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Section 8.18 of the Zoning Ordinance defines a planned unit development as a large, unified development of five acres or more adhering to a comprehensive development plan and located on a single tract of land, or on two or more tracts of land which may be separated only by a street or other right-of-way. The regulations are intended to encourage the appropriate development of tracts of land in all zoning districts sufficiently large to allow comprehensive planning and to provide flexibility in the application in a manner consistent with the general purposes of the Zoning Ordinance.

Retail/Entertainment District (R/E)

This district is intended to provide an area with a special classification for unique, mixed use development. This district is characterized by its focus on tourism, with a variety of entertainment venues, retail, service, and residential. The Retail/Entertainment district is limited to developments meeting the criteria in Section 6.4(A) of the Zoning Ordinance and is only granted upon application to and approval from the Council.

City Commercial (VC)

This district is intended to accommodate low intensity office, clinics, and professional service, and limited retail uses within converted single family detached structures, or within new structures which are compatible in scale and design with nearby single family structures.

City Residential (VR1, VR2)

This district is intended to accommodate, protect, rehabilitate, and maintain specific residential areas of the City traditionally known as “mill Citys” but may also be applied to other similar neighborhoods. The establishment of this district is an effort to preserve the character of these areas and to help meet affordable housing needs within the City.

Subdivision Regulations

The City’s Subdivision Ordinance, adopted in 1991, provides a guide for the subdivision of land. The ordinance governs all subdivisions of land within the municipal boundary and within three miles beyond the City limits. The ordinance includes regulations pertaining to general requirements, street layout, easements, improvements, and conformity to the elements of the Opelika Comprehensive Plan.

VISION AND GOALS

Overview

The Vision Statement is an aspirational narrative that paints a picture of what the City can achieve following the adoption of the Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Vision Statement depicts the community's collective desires and serves as the foundation for the Plan's goals and recommendations, and actions.

The Vision is supported by Goals, which establish the framework for more detailed recommendations and actions within the Comprehensive Plan. Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes.

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to help the City aspire to reflect the Vision Statement, ensuring movement in the right direction.

Community Vision Statement

Opelika will continue to flourish as an appealing and desirable community that preserves its historic charm even as it experiences reinvestment and grows strategically outward. The City will celebrate and promote its historic and lively Downtown, support its businesses large and small, and attract new residents looking to enjoy the Opelika way of life. People will come to Opelika for well-paying jobs, good schools, and high-quality homes. Newcomers will stay for the long term when they discover a community that offers amenities and a welcoming atmosphere for all.

Opelika's neighborhoods will be attractive and provide desirable and accessible housing for people in all stages of life. New homes in and around Downtown will fit the City's historic context, fill in empty lots, and reflect established neighborhood patterns. The City's historic neighborhoods will see renewed investment, benefitting from a well-guided preservation program that promotes rehabilitation of existing housing stock alongside new housing. In Opelika's new neighborhoods, the increasing diversity of housing options will provide a range of attractive homes available at a variety of price points.

As Opelika continues to grow, its economy will thrive, displaying the community's innovative and enterprising spirit. The City's focused efforts to redevelop its most important sites, such as the Mill Village, will result in areas that boast a traditional neighborhood feel with an attractive mix of commercial development and new housing.

Opelika's business-friendly environment and active chamber of commerce will continue to make the City known as a desirable place to work and invest for businesses of all types and sizes. The City will continue to build on its attractive and marketable Northeast Opelika Industrial Park and other large-scale employment assets. At the other end of the spectrum, the City will also be known for supporting new entrepreneurs and existing small businesses in the thriving Downtown and throughout the community.

The City's investment in its road network will support a high-quality system that is well-connected and easy to navigate. Strategic road extensions and intersection improvements will link areas that were previously disconnected. The City's commitment to increasing mobility and connectivity for all will also expand the network of on-street bikeways, side paths, and sidewalks, allowing anyone in the community the option to walk or bike for leisure or necessary trips. Core historic neighborhoods, such as Carver, Jeter, Pepperell Mill Village, and the Northside residential district, will benefit from increased investment in sidewalks, improving walkability and activity.

The City will align infrastructure and expansion of services with strategic growth, ensuring that it right-sizes utility extensions and grows at a pace it can support. Partnering with Opelika Water Board and Opelika Power Services, the City will continue to take a long-term view of water and power needs, ensuring that facilities are adequate, dependable, and prepared for the future.

Opelika's community facilities and services will continue to be hallmarks of the City. The City's Public Works, Police, and Fire departments will diligently work to make Opelika the most attractive and safe community in the region. Opelika City Schools will continue to provide quality education, bolstering the City's image as a desirable place to raise a family. Collaborative community partners, such as Opelika's local health care providers, Southern Union State Community College, Opelika Public Library, the Chamber of Commerce, and more, will continue to build the community's image, character, and desirability.

As Opelika grows, its focus on access and residential proximity to parks and open space will ensure that these amenities meet the needs of all residents. The City will invest in well-programmed parks furthering its reputation for world-class facilities first established by the Sportsplex. The community will continue to enjoy natural recreation areas such as Siddique Nature Park and the City's many walking tracks and trails, ensuring anyone can get active, enjoy the outdoors, and play in Opelika.

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Goals

The community’s planning efforts should work to support these goals. They are ambitions and will require the culmination of many incremental actions to be fully achieved. Goals for Housing and Neighborhoods, Economic Development, Transportation and Mobility, Community Facilities and Infrastructure, and Parks and Open Space are supported by policies, recommendations, and detailed plan content in subsequent chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use and Growth

- Prioritize development within the City’s municipal boundary and priority annexation areas, and ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place to support future growth.
- Support a balanced mix of uses that creates attractive residential areas, well-paying employment opportunities, vibrant commercial districts including retail in growth areas and near Downtown, and high-quality open spaces and recreation opportunities.

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Ensure Opelika provides a range of housing choices and price points for residents of all income levels and stages of life.
- Reinvest in the City’s oldest neighborhoods, preserve its historic assets, and ensure high-quality design in new residential development to increase Opelika’s desirability as a place to live.

Economic Development

- Continue efforts to preserve, revitalize, and extend Opelika’s historic Downtown, establishing a lively, pedestrian-friendly center of activity where residents and visitors gather to dine and shop.
- Support small businesses, large commercial centers, and innovative industries to strengthen the City’s diverse tax base.
- Ensure that businesses and industries that locate in Opelika provide high-quality, diverse employment opportunities that pay a living wage.

Transportation and Mobility

- Provide a seamless, efficient, connected system of roads and streets that enhances the community’s character and safely moves traffic throughout the City.
- Establish a multimodal network for pedestrians and bicyclists to ensure residents have safe and convenient options to travel between their neighborhoods and throughout the City without a car.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

- Work with local utilities and providers to maintain reliable infrastructure networks, efficiently providing water, sanitary sewer, stormwater drainage, power, and telecommunication services to meet Opelika’s current and future needs.
- Maintain public facilities and partnerships with service providers, including the Opelika Public Library, the City’s fire and police departments, public works facilities, public schools, higher education institutions, healthcare providers, the Chamber of Commerce, electricity services, and broadband providers, to support the provision of community services and ensure a high quality of life and overall desirability in Opelika.

Parks and Open Space

- Reposition and expand the City’s network of parks and recreation facilities as growth occurs to serve the activity and recreation needs of residents throughout the community.
- Promote preservation and public access, including trails, sidewalks, bikeways, and parking areas, ensuring the community can experience Opelika’s unique natural assets, environmental features, and open space areas.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The Land Use and Development chapter provides a framework for future planning decisions, building upon the desirable characteristics of Opelika's residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and employment areas. This chapter includes three sections:

- **Constraints and Influences:** Provides an overview of factors that affect the future development of the City.
- **Land Use Plan:** Provides the framework for land use and development within the City and its planning area.
- **Growth and Development Strategy:** Identifies areas where future growth should take place over the next two decades.

The recommendations of the Land Use and Development chapter guide land-use decisions while providing the flexibility for creative, individualized approaches to land development that are consistent with the community's vision. The Land Use and Development Plan represents a policy guide for well-managed reinvestment and expansion as the City's population grows.

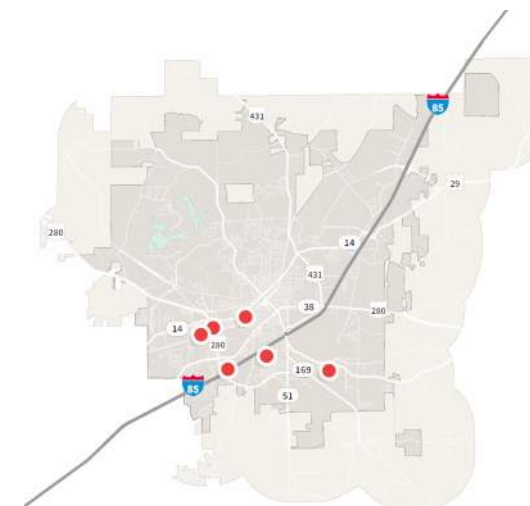
The Land Use and Development Chapter is supported by two subsequent chapters—Housing and Neighborhoods and Commercial and Industrial Areas. Those two chapters will provide further specificity and detail to the broader land use designations and recommendations found in this chapter.

Constraints and Influences

In addition to the City's existing development pattern, the Land Use Plan is influenced and constrained by floodplains, watersheds, brownfields or contaminated areas, roadway connections, and current development plans. This section of the Land Use Plan examines these factors to provide context for future growth and development.



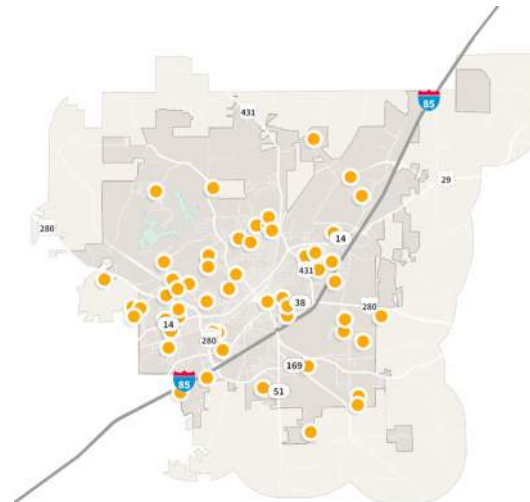
FLOODPLAIN



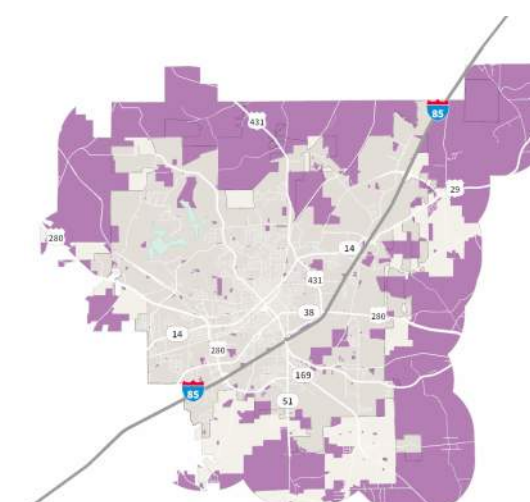
CONTAMINATED AREAS



PLANNED ROADWAYS



PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS



SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE



NOTABLE AREAS OF INFLUENCE

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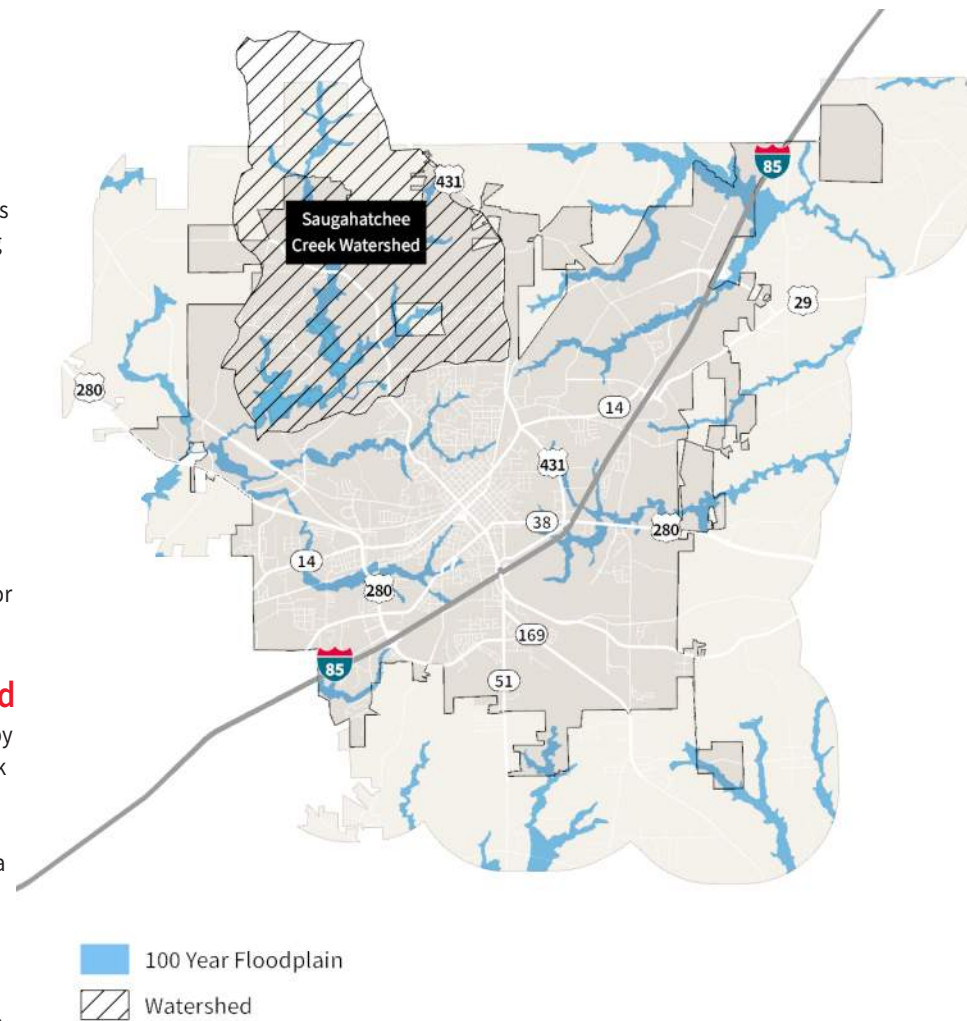


Floodplain

There are approximately 5,600 acres of floodplain throughout the Opelika and its planning area. Flood risk impacts land use, development, and urban services. Developing within the floodplain is a risk, as damages that result from frequent flooding can be costly. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which administers the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), regulates development activities in the floodplain and encourages local governments to adopt higher standards for floodplain development. Future development should not be located within the floodplain and existing development located within the floodplain should be improved to enhance resiliency or relocated outside of the floodplain.

Saugahatchee Creek Watershed

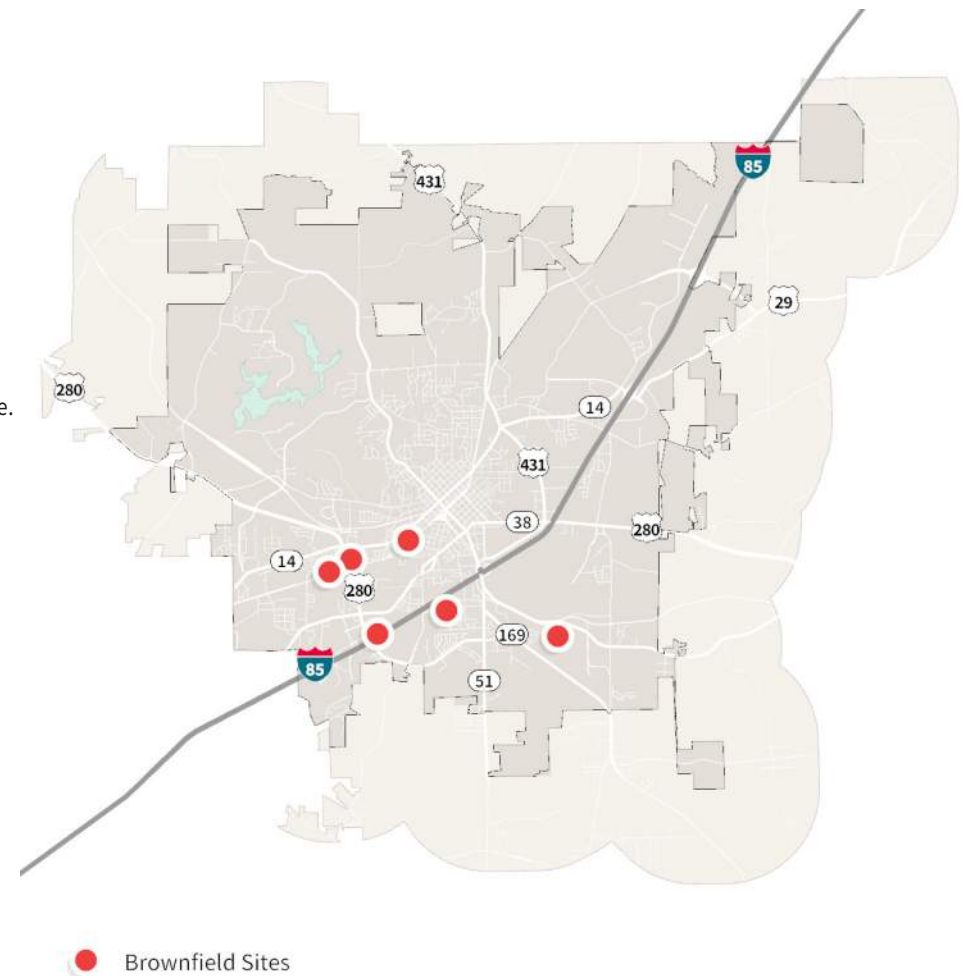
A watershed is the total land area drained by a river or a stream. The Saugahatchee Creek Watershed is part of the larger Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Basin; the 70-mile creek is one of the largest in the Lower Tallapoosa sub-basin. The area of the watershed is approximately 220 square miles. The Saugahatchee Creek Watershed provides a local drinking water source in Opelika. Current regulations limit development with sewer to two units per acre or without sewer to one unit per three acres.



Brownfields or Contaminated Areas

Brownfields are properties previously used for commercial or industrial purposes that have possibly been contaminated by a pollutant, petroleum, or other harmful substances or contaminants. As of 2021, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management has identified four brownfield sites in Opelika. Though it takes additional work to remediate brownfield sites, redevelopment is possible. Depending on the characteristics of the property, brownfields can be redeveloped into a variety of different uses including residential, commercial, industrial, mixed use, public open space, and recreation

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BROWN-FIELDS AND CONTAMINATED AREAS, SEE CHAPTER 4C, PAGE 37



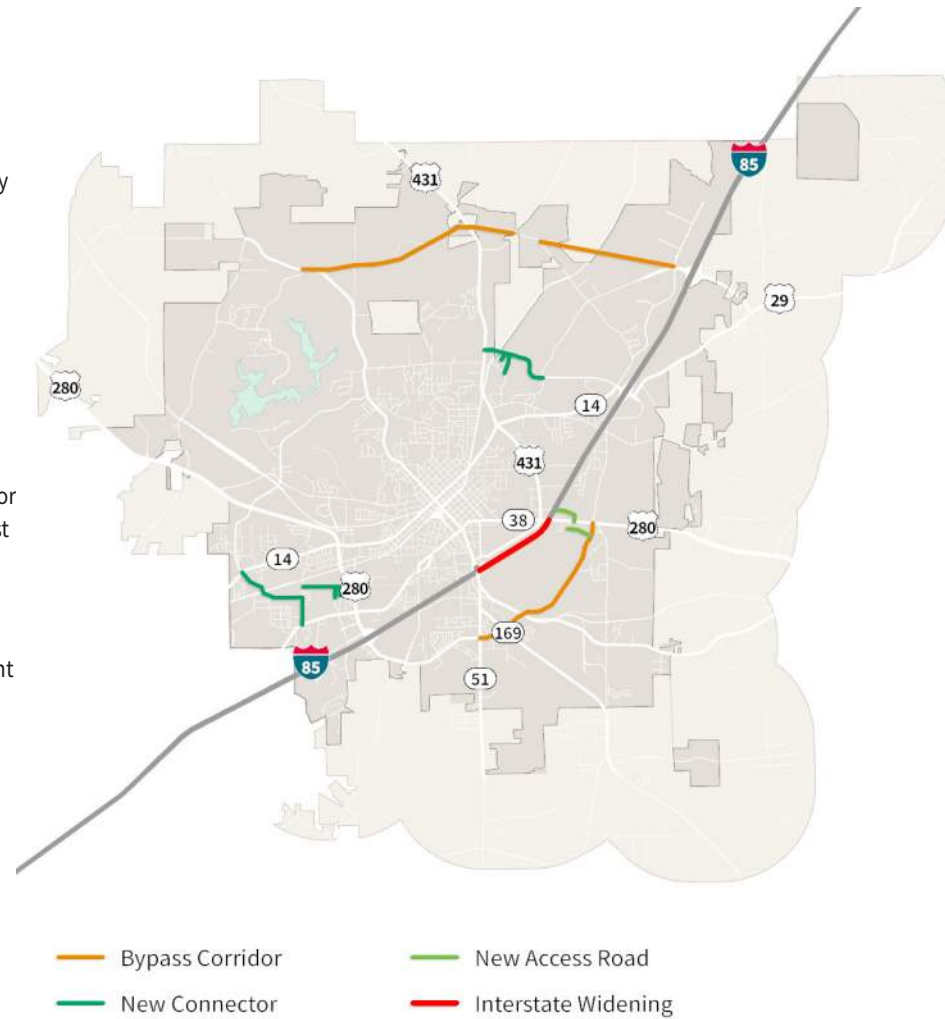


Planned Roadway Connections

The City, ALDOT, and the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Planning Organization have identified several significant planned roadway infrastructure improvements. Improvement projects impacting the City include:

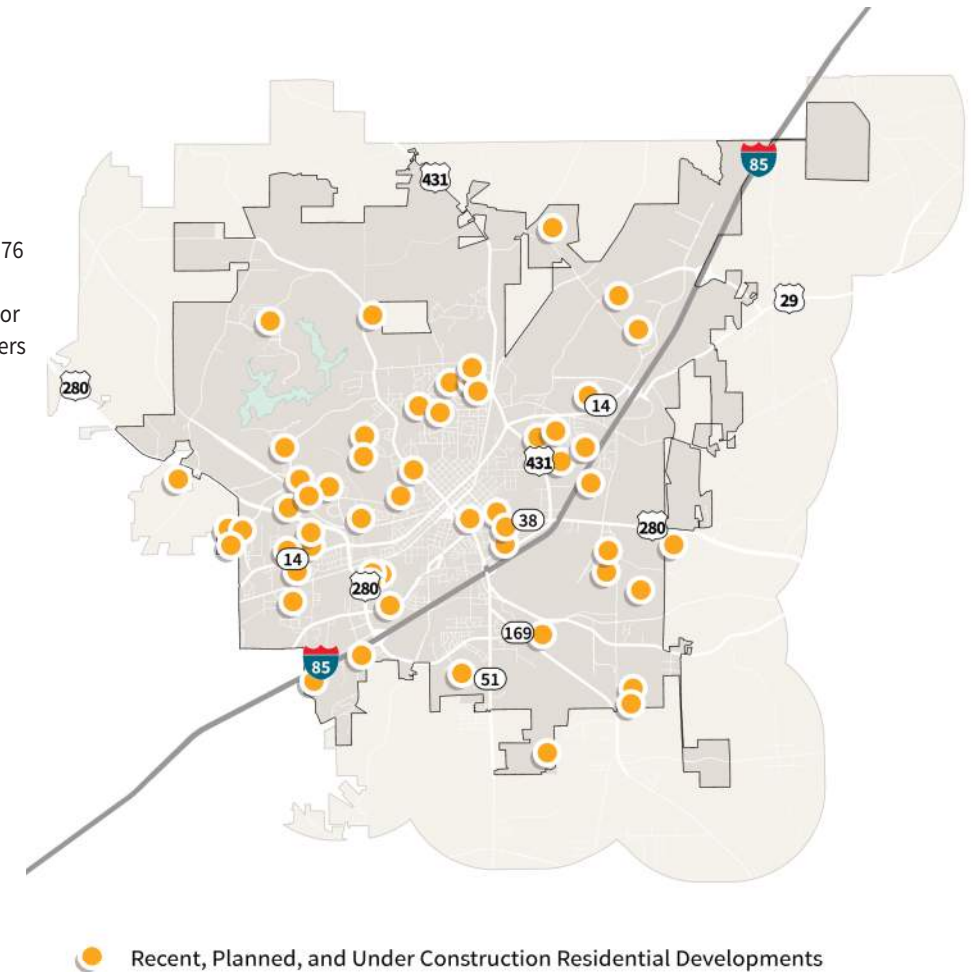
- Extension of Gateway Drive from Marvyn Parkway to intersect with Columbus Parkway at North Uniroyal Road.
- Extension of Veterans Parkway south from Pepperell Parkway to Frederick Road.
- Establishment of a northern bypass corridor between Anderson Road and the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park and Oak Bowery Road and the Grand National area.

New roadway connections, extensions, and improvements can enhance the development potential of properties. Parcels that were not previously accessible may gain access by new roadway connections or extensions. Additionally, roadway improvements may increase the amount of traffic flow which, in turn, may allow for denser development on adjacent and nearby properties.



Recent, Planned, and Under-Construction Developments

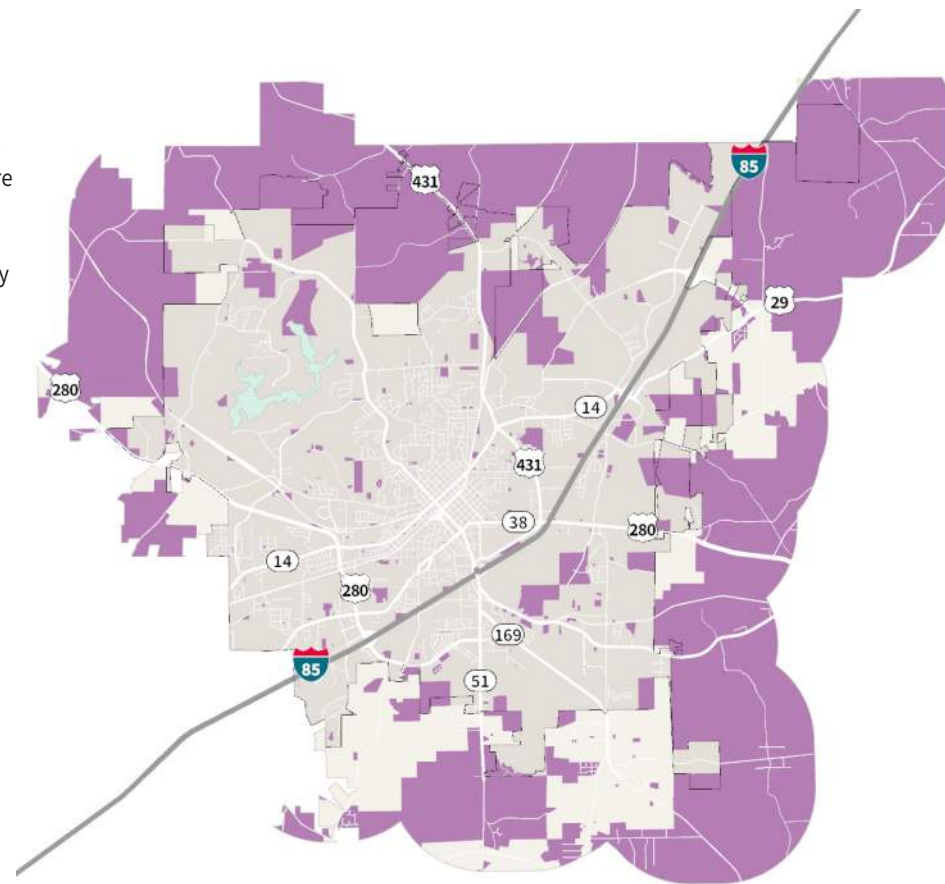
Between October 2016 and June 2021, the City of Opelika had approved 3,074 single-family detached lots, 772 single-family attached units, 918 multifamily units, and 176 assisted/independent living units. Many of these developments have been completed or are currently under construction, while others have yet to be started.





Infrastructure

The City's growth is dependent upon but also impacts the provision of services and infrastructure. Currently, much of the City's planning area is served by water, while there are areas with sewer capacity issues and limited or lacking sewer services. As the City experiences growth, it will be necessary to expand infrastructure systems to meet increased demand.

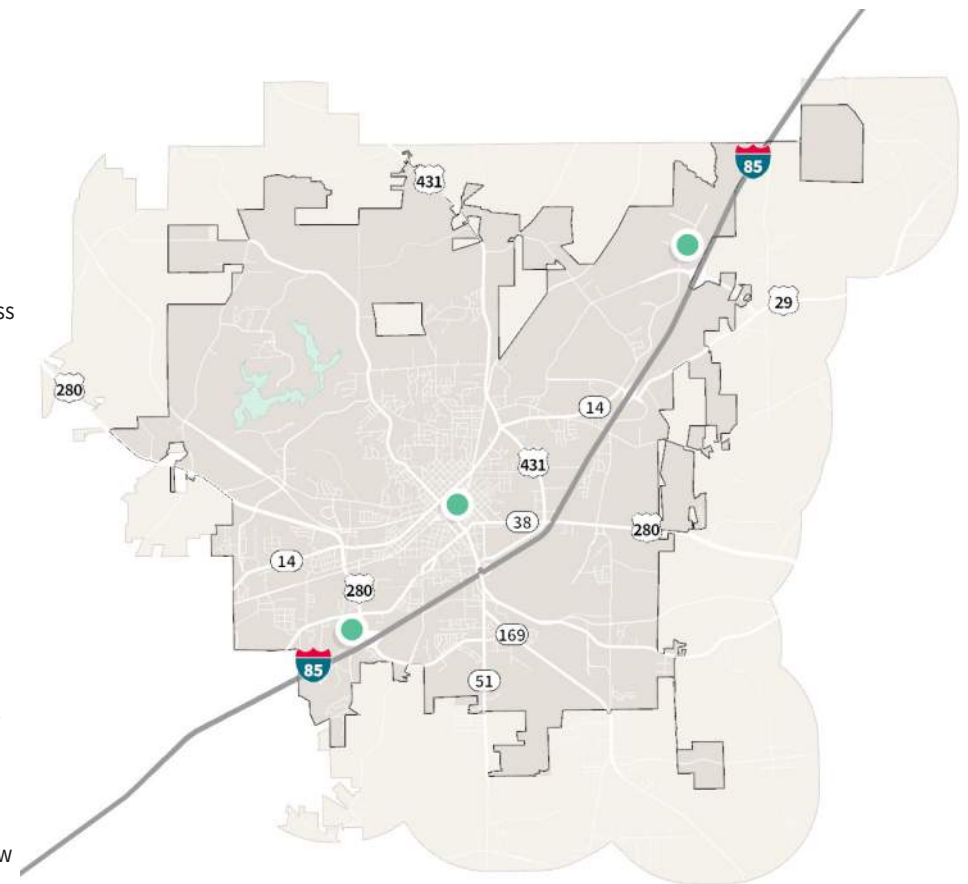


Areas not served by water or sewer

Notable Areas of Influence

The following three areas are particularly notable in the community, each providing a concentration of uses that serves the greater community and attracts people for commerce, employment, and tourism. Northeast Opelika Industrial Park supports a leading employment node in a world-class industrial manufacturing park. Downtown is the civic and cultural center of Opelika, providing local shops and restaurants in a historic setting. Tiger Town is a major commercial node, drawing shoppers from throughout the metro region.

- **Northeast Opelika Industrial Park:** a fully planned and developed industrial park with excellent regional access.
- **Downtown:** Downtown Opelika centers on the junction of the City's two active rail lines with the densest cluster of historic buildings and a consistent street wall.
- **Tiger Town:** East Alabama's largest retail center that is continually growing with new developments.



Notable Areas

LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS



Rural Reserve

Rural Reserve areas are rural in character with a mix of agricultural and rural residential uses. These areas are primarily located within the planning area and the Saughatchee Watershed. About 75% of all properties within this designation are not served by water and sewer. Development within the Rural Reserve areas requires a significant public investment in infrastructure. Due to the cost associated with infrastructure investment, new growth should be accommodated within the municipal boundary nearer the core of the City, minimizing new development within the Rural Reserve areas.



Single-Family Neighborhood

Single-Family Neighborhoods consist primarily of single-family detached homes occupying moderately sized lots. This land use is the most prevalent type within the City and consists of a range of neighborhood typologies including the historic grid block pattern neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown and newer subdivision developments throughout the community. Single-family neighborhoods should also accommodate single-family attached housing (townhomes and duplexes) in infill areas as well as transitional areas on the edges of these neighborhoods, where appropriate. Single-family attached housing is also appropriate as a buffer along primary transportation corridors and adjacent higher intensity uses such as multifamily or commercial.



Mixed Residential

Mixed Residential areas consist of multiple housing types including single-family detached, townhomes, duplexes, and multifamily buildings. These areas encourage greater variety within Opelika's housing stock and allow for more flexibility to build denser residential development in proximity to the City's major roadways, such as State Route 14/West Point Parkway and Highway 85. Areas designated for Mixed Residential can easily accommodate a variety of dwelling types, including senior, workforce, and affordable housing.



Mixed Use

Mixed Use areas primarily consist of commercial/retail uses on the ground floor with residential and/or office uses located on the upper floors. The primary objective is to provide an appropriate mix of uses by locating retail and restaurant uses on the ground floor to create a more interesting and engaging pedestrian experience, while accommodating residential and service-oriented uses on the upper floors. These areas should be characterized by uses and development patterns that provide a vibrant, safe, attractive, and "walkable" pedestrian environment. In the Downtown, Mixed Use should be implemented in combination with adaptive reuse and historic preservation.



Corridor Commercial

Corridor Commercial areas include a blend of retail, offices, and service uses along the City's major corridors such as Pepperell Parkway and Columbus Parkway. Additionally, large Corridor Commercial areas can accommodate shopping centers that serve a more regional function, drawing on a customer base that extends beyond the City limits. These areas have a mix of big box stores, national retailers, and commercial service uses in a critical mass of multiple stores and large shared parking areas consolidated along major traffic corridors and intersections.



Local Commercial

Local Commercial areas provide surrounding residents with daily goods and services like specialty food stores, daycares, or restaurants. Local Commercial uses should be near residential neighborhoods in the City, reducing the need to drive across the City for essential needs. Local Commercial areas tie into the fabric of both established and new neighborhoods and complement these areas with appropriately scaled development that emphasizes neighborhood connections. Local Commercial areas should be of a scale and intensity that is generally compatible with adjacent and nearby residential uses and can be arranged in nodes or along community corridors.



Office/Business Park

Office/Business Park areas are intended to provide for professional employment and office uses, which could include concentrations of standalone office buildings or complexes consisting of several buildings incorporated into a campus-like setting. This use includes hospital and related medical offices and uses. While certain low-impact light industrial uses such as smaller-scale manufacturing and assembly, small-scale logistics, distribution, and warehousing facilities may locate within an Office/Business Park, they should be low intensity and complementary scale, having little or no environmental impact on surrounding properties. Office/Business Park uses are typically compatible with adjacent or nearby residential areas, provided they are appropriately buffered and screened.



Industrial

Industrial uses are valued employers and contributors to the local Opelika economy. Industrial uses include both heavy and light industrial businesses such as manufacturing, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials. Industrial uses are located throughout Opelika. Notable examples include the manufacturing campus at the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park. Heavier industrial uses, such as a quarry, milling and lumber operations, and packaging and logistics businesses are included. Light industrial uses that are appropriate in Office/Business Parks are also appropriate in these industrial areas. Industrial uses are typically incompatible with residential areas and should be appropriately buffered and screened from adjacent residential areas.



Parks and Open Space

Open space areas include preserved natural areas, private golf courses surrounding Sougahatchee Lake, cemeteries, and detention ponds and creeks in planned subdivisions. Open space and environmental features contribute significantly to the City's overall quality of life and character. Parks are designated areas for active or passive recreation consisting of public parks owned and maintained by the City and private parks in planned subdivisions.



Public/Semi-Public

Public/Semi-Public includes local government uses, municipal facilities, community service providers, schools, and places of worship and assembly. Opelika City Hall, the police station, its fire stations, the library, churches, Southern Union Community College's Opelika campus, and the City's public schools are established Public/Semi-Public uses. These uses provide essential facilities and services to the community and are scattered throughout the City. Many Public/Semi-Public uses are compatible with residential areas, but some are more intense and may require a location within or adjacent to commercial or industrial areas.



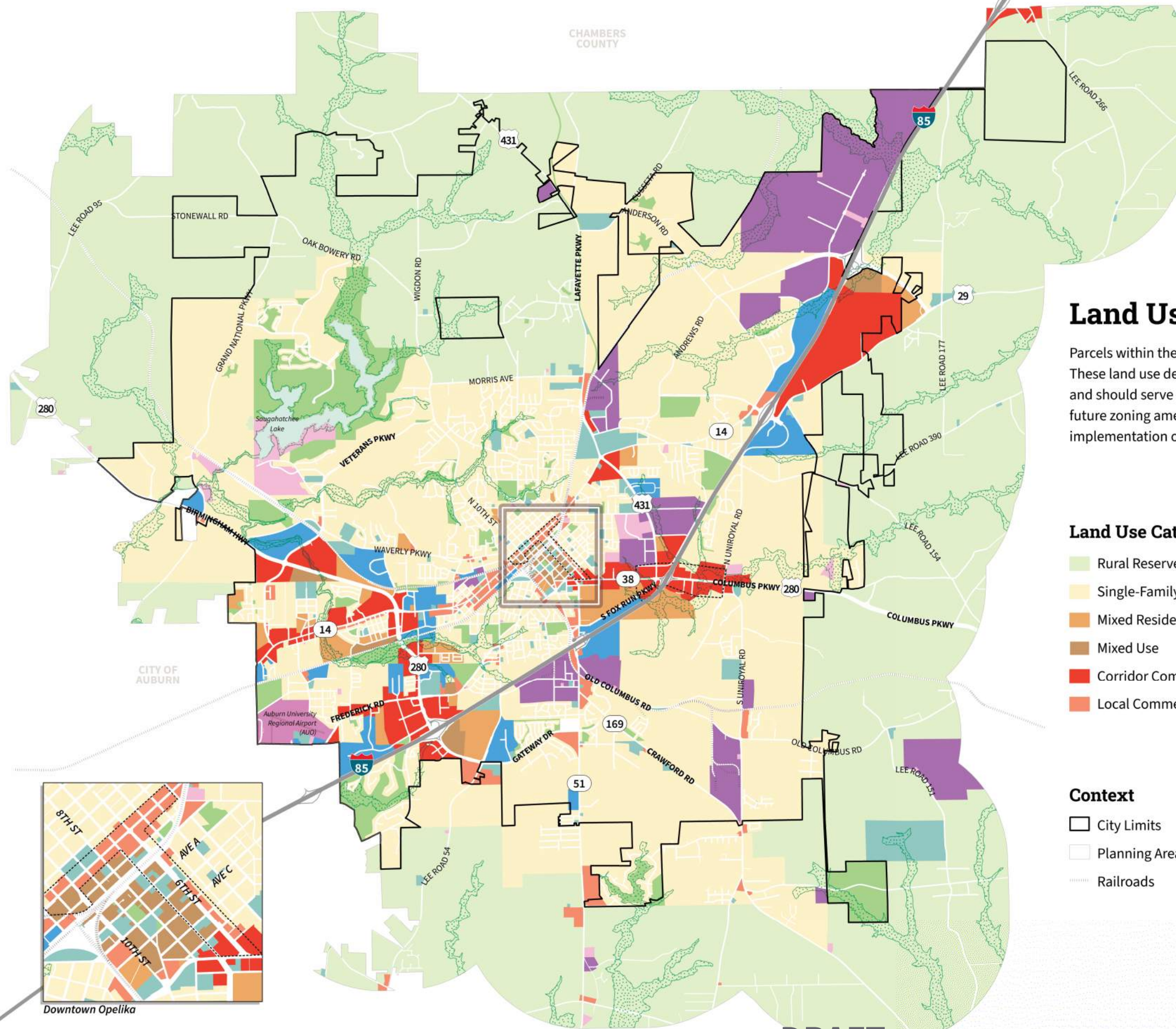
Airport

The Airport includes ground facilities such as hangars, runways, and airport parking. Auburn University Regional Airport (AUO) is a public use airport located partially within Opelika limits in the southwest portion of the City. The airport is owned by Auburn University and is categorized as a general aviation facility, offering no commercial service.



Utility

Utility uses support local infrastructure and provide rights-of-way or easements for the transmission of gas, electric, water, sewer, and other infrastructure essential to the community. This includes both facilities and infrastructure as well as related rights-of-way. Parcels and rights-of-way associated with the City's two active rail lines, the Central of Georgia District, and the A&WP Subdivision, are included.



Land Use Plan

Parcels within the City have been assigned one of 12 land use designations. These land use designations cover the full range of Opelika's land use types and should serve as the basis for development review and approval and future zoning amendments, which may be needed to realize the full implementation of the Plan's recommendations.

Land Use Categories

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Rural Reserve | Office/Business Park |
| Single-Family Neighborhood | Industrial |
| Mixed Residential | Parks and Open Space |
| Mixed Use | Public/Semi-Public |
| Corridor Commercial | Airport |
| Local Commercial | Utility |

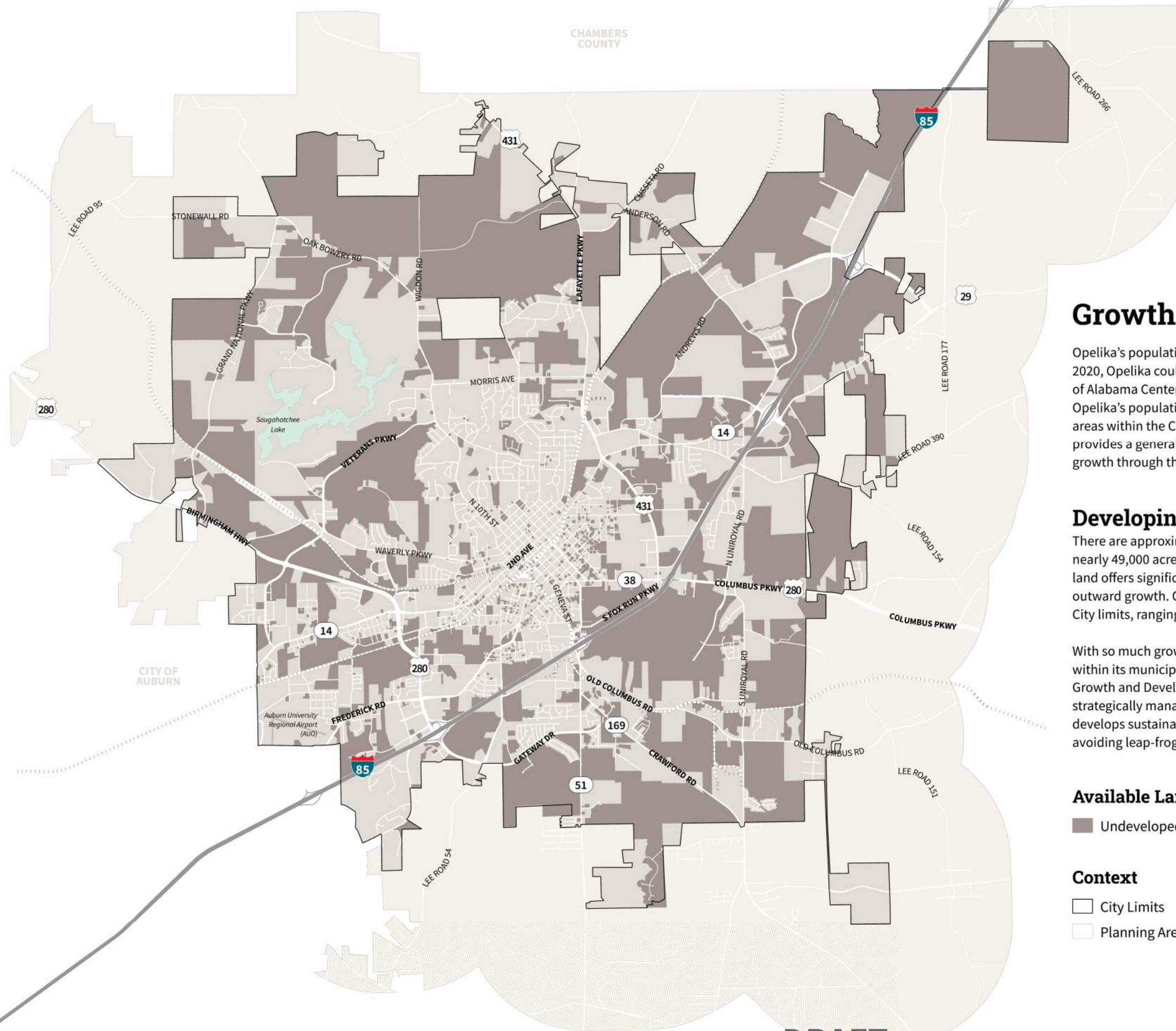
Context

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| City Limits | Saugahatchee Lake |
| Planning Area | 100 Year Floodplain |
| Railroads | |



Downtown Opelika

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Growth and Development Strategy

Opelika's population is increasing. Based on the growth rate of 2.0% from 1990 to 2020, Opelika could see an increase of nearly 8,000 residents by 2040 (University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research; US Census Data). As Opelika's population grows, additional pressure will be placed on undeveloped areas within the City and its planning area. The Growth and Development Strategy provides a general guide as to what areas are best suited to accommodate future growth through the year 2040 and where such growth should be prioritized.

Developing Vacant Land

There are approximately 2,900 parcels of vacant or undeveloped land totaling nearly 49,000 acres located within the City of Opelika and its planning area. This land offers significant potential to accommodate both infill development and outward growth. Of these properties, 2,283 (18,579 acres) are located within the City limits, ranging from less than one acre to over 500 acres.

With so much growth opportunity, it is unlikely that Opelika will develop all areas within its municipal boundary over the next two decades. The City should use the Growth and Development Strategy, in concert with the Land Use Plan, to strategically manage future growth and annexation. This will ensure Opelika develops sustainably and efficiently, maximizing existing infrastructure and avoiding leap-frog development.

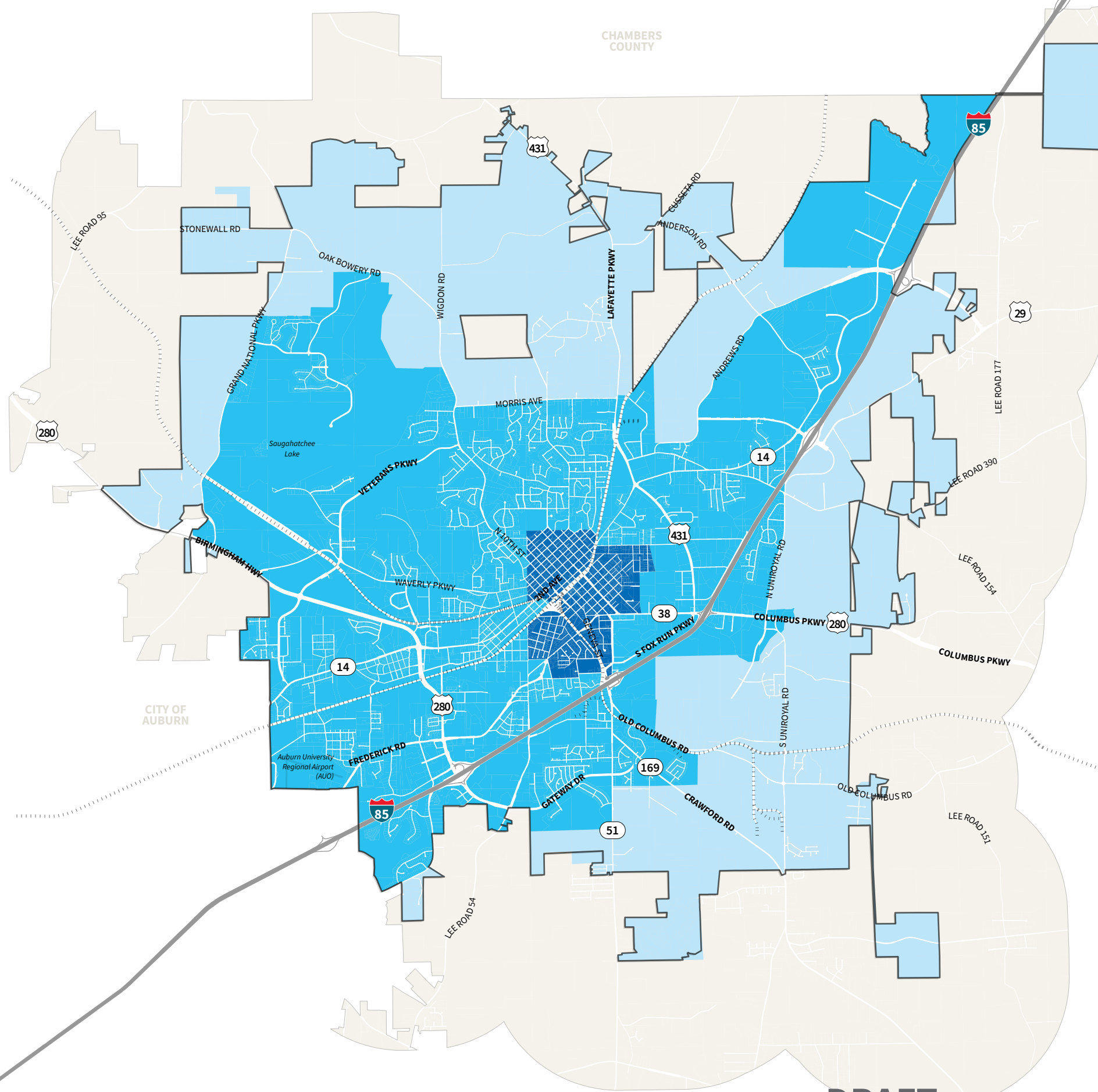
Available Land

■ Undeveloped or Vacant Land with City Limits

Context

□ City Limits
□ Planning Area

— Railroads
■ Saugahatchee Lake



Growth Areas

The Growth and Development Strategy identifies where future growth should take place over the long-term. These areas are intended to accommodate future growth and development, and many are anticipated to be developed at greater densities than currently exist.

The Growth and Development Strategy consists of three components: City Core, Primary Growth Area, and Secondary Growth Area. These components establish priorities for future growth within City limits with an emphasis on leveraging existing infrastructure. The Growth and Development Strategy does not prohibit development from occurring outside priority growth areas; rather, it encourages infill and promotes policies to avoid leap-frog development.

Growth Areas

City Core

The City Core is centered on Downtown and consists of portions of the City that have experienced extensive development, including Opelika's historic neighborhoods, established commercial districts and industrial areas, and new residential subdivisions. Future growth in Opelika should be prioritized within the City Core to stabilize and strengthen existing neighborhoods. Within the City Core, the City should encourage the development of vacant and underutilized properties and improve services, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and commercial areas.

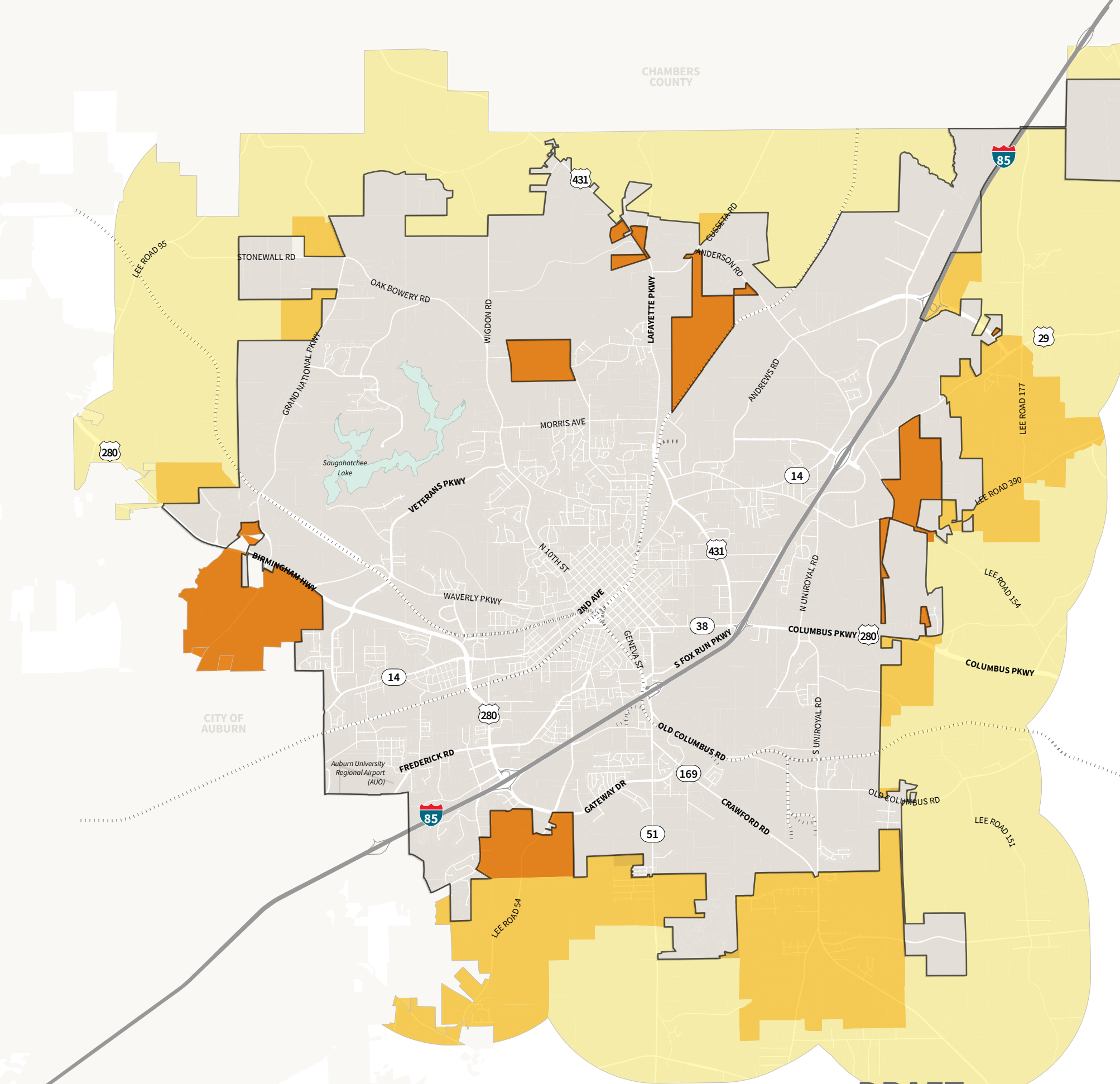
Primary Growth Area

The Primary Growth Area includes land adjacent to the City Core that is already served by infrastructure and City services and has already seen considerable development. In accordance with the Land Use Plan, future development within the Primary Growth Area should consist of Single-Family Neighborhoods and Mixed Residential. Opportunities exist for infill housing and redevelopment within the Primary Growth Area, including incomplete subdivisions. Moving forward, new housing construction should be compatible with the scale and intensity of existing development and connectivity should be encouraged with adjacent neighborhoods. Consistent with the Land Use Plan, infill in incomplete subdivisions should also accommodate single-family attached housing (townhomes and duplexes).

Secondary Growth Area

The Secondary Growth Area includes areas primarily along the northern and eastern edges of the City. These areas are rural, and many do not have access to water or sewer services. Consistent with the Land Use Plan, development within the Secondary Growth Area should primarily consist of Rural Reserve and Single-Family Neighborhood uses.

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Annexation

Opelika’s planning area comprises about 38,000 acres of unincorporated land that could be annexed into the City. This includes large areas of land on the City’s periphery, positioned between Opelika and adjacent municipalities as well as numerous smaller unincorporated pockets. The City must balance appropriate annexation in specific areas while discouraging unnecessary outward growth that could strain the City’s infrastructure and require costly extensions or improvements. Annexation should give Opelika the ability to guide growth and development within its planning area without overextending the City’s services and amenities.

Annexation Areas

- Priority 1: Unincorporated Pockets**
Priority 1 annexation areas are where annexation should take place first, maximizing the effective use of City infrastructure and services. This annexation priority includes areas that are located adjacent to the City’s current municipal boundary and are experiencing development pressure.
- Priority 2: Long-Term Growth Areas**
Priority 2 annexation areas consist of unincorporated areas that could be the focus of long-term growth and development. These are primarily located along the southern and eastern edges of the City. These areas are adjacent to Opelika’s municipal boundary and have access to existing infrastructure.
- Priority 3: Rural Reserve Areas**
Priority 3 annexation areas are less suitable for annexation due to their rural nature. Most of these areas are not currently served by water and/or sewer infrastructure. These areas should not be prioritized for annexation or development in the immediate future to reduce unnecessary outward expansion and to preserve the rural character of the surrounding landscape.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Overview

The Housing and Neighborhoods chapter adds detail and context to the broader housing categories identified in the Land Use Plan, providing strategies for preserving existing neighborhoods while supporting new housing options for Opelika's growing population. This chapter aligns with the growth and development strategy in prioritizing infill and redevelopment opportunities before outward growth. Additionally, this chapter focuses on Opelika's efforts toward increasing housing diversity, improving quality, and providing a range of housing choices for the people in all stages of life and income levels who call Opelika home.

What's the Issue?

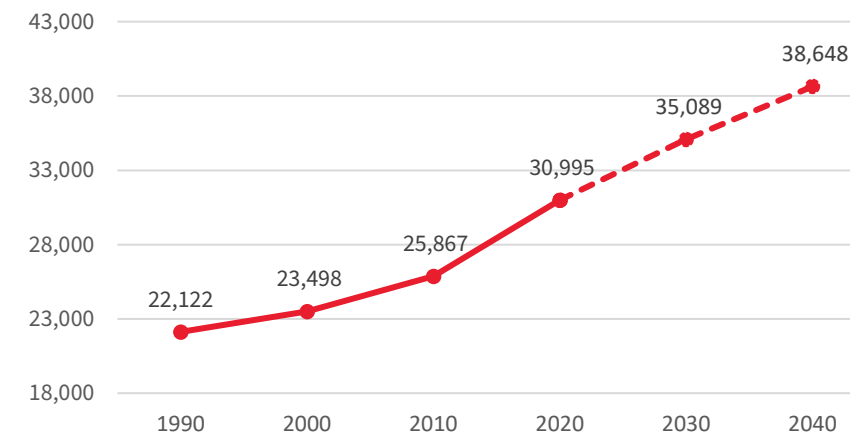
Projected Needs

The Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has historically been one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation, and it continues to grow. Within the MSA, Opelika has a population of 30,995, per the latest available Census data, and projections from the University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research have indicated that the City could grow by as much as 25%, reaching 38,650 by the year 2040. If the City maintains its current household size of 2.5 persons per household, it could expect a demand for more than 3,000 additional housing units over the next two decades to accommodate this growth. These projections align with the real demand for new subdivision housing developments the City has been experiencing and permitting over the past several years.

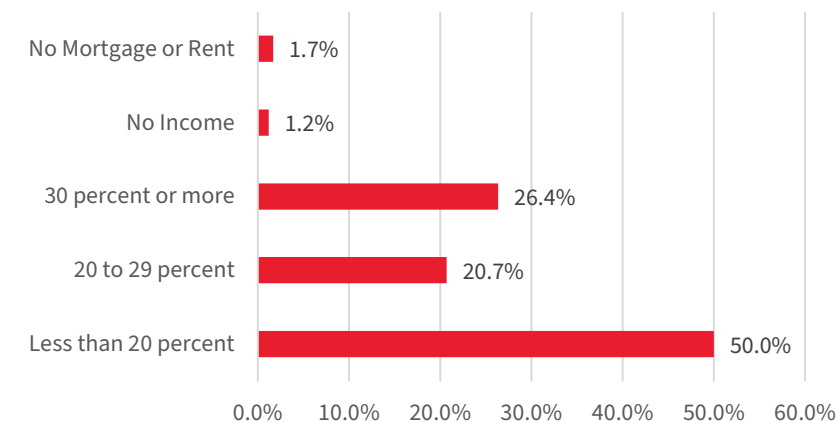
Cost of Housing

Communities that under-build housing often face a housing cost burden, typically defined as a household paying more than 30% of its income towards housing. Reflecting the community's fast growth and ongoing housing demand, currently, 28% of Opelika residents are experiencing a housing cost burden, including 13% who are severely burdened. Many of these residents are in the community's core and oldest neighborhoods.

Opelika Population Growth and Projections



Cost Burden



We need more affordable homes for low and medium income families.



Housing Policies and Recommendations

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to housing that perfectly accommodates population growth, ensures the City develops neighborhoods and communities rather than sprawling residential areas, and at the same time improves and invests in areas that need the most help. Yet this is what Opelika should aim for – managing residential growth and positively impacting its existing neighborhoods through a balanced approach.

Available Vacant Land

The City should focus residential development on its available vacant land, adhering to the growth and development strategy (Core, Primary, and Secondary Growth Areas).

Opelika has approximately 2,283 (18,579 acres) of vacant/undeveloped land within the City limits, ranging from less than one acre to over 500 acres. These offer significant possibilities to accommodate new housing. For large tracts of land on the municipal periphery, master-planned subdivisions may be a suitable pattern of development, although conservation design (see the section on Complete Neighborhoods) and connectivity will be considerations. Smaller lots in or around Downtown represent infill potential and an opportunity to create new housing interspersed with mixed-use and commercial development where there are already schools, parks, access to amenities, and existing utilities and infrastructure.

Adhere to the Growth and Development Strategy. The Comprehensive Plan’s Growth and Development Strategy identifies where future growth should occur in the long term. When considering residential proposals, the City should emphasize compact development and infill housing in and around the Core, prioritize walkability and complete communities in the Primary Growth Area, and work closely with developers in the Secondary Growth Area to ensure that new neighborhoods are connected and compatible with the rest of the community.

Infill Housing

The City should prioritize infill and redevelopment over outward growth to maximize existing infrastructure and leverage proximity to established destinations and amenities.

Infill development can strengthen established neighborhoods by adding new, quality housing stock and it can help to revitalize neighborhoods and attract new businesses. Infill can be a more sustainable and affordable way to add housing, as it can help to reduce traffic congestion and pollution; additionally, it can fill “holes” in the urban fabric left by teardowns and disinvestment.

Hurdles to developing residential infill lots can include neighborhood opposition and difficult land assembly. At a minimum, a developer working on infill lots will have multiple construction sites rather than one large development. To address barriers, the City should consider incentives such as reduced permitting fees and tailored building requirements to make residential infill a more attractive option.

Increase housing options and improve existing neighborhoods. Opelika should prioritize residential infill that increases the mix of housing choices within established neighborhoods while prioritizing compact, walkable environments. Infill housing should be located in areas that have access to essential services, such as schools and hospitals, and also near essential amenities such as daily goods, parks, and open spaces. The City’s core traditional neighborhoods around the Downtown meet some or all of these characteristics and boast an established street grid that can contribute to walkability and access to amenities. Particularly around the City’s historic neighborhoods, infill housing should fit with the existing character and neighborhood context.

Opelika contains approximately
18,579
acres of undeveloped land



Complete Neighborhoods

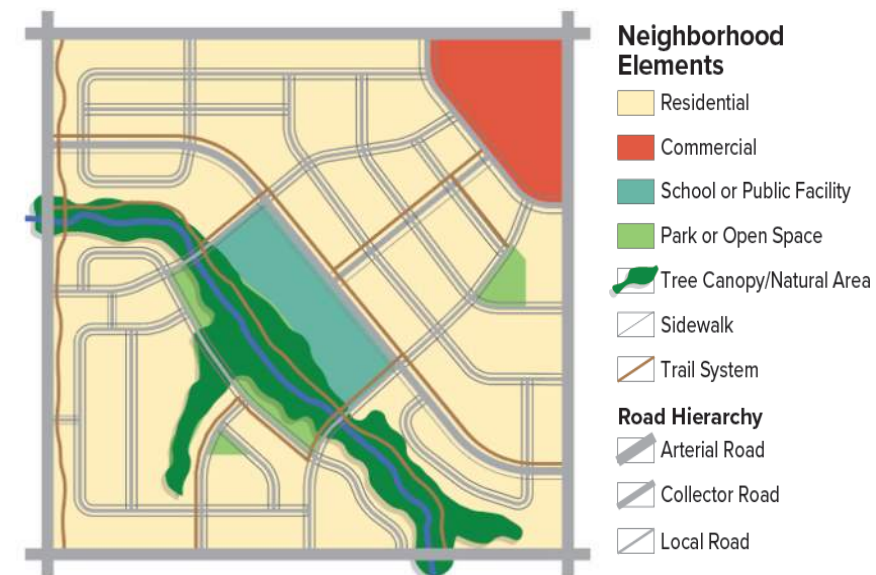
The City should promote the creation of complete neighborhood areas through compact development, increased density, conservation design, and access to amenities.

A complete neighborhood is designed to be a safe, healthy, and vibrant place to live. It provides a variety of housing options, convenient access to goods and services, and opportunities for recreation and community engagement. As the City continues to grow, some new residential development will naturally occur outward into Secondary Growth Areas. Within these areas, approved master-planned communities should contain a mix of standalone single-family homes, duplexes, and attached townhomes, and incorporate pedestrian and bicycle amenities. Developments should liberally incorporate trees, groundcover, and shrubs along roadways, within private yards, along landscape buffers, and in public open space locations.

The City's new neighborhoods should be well-integrated physically into the surrounding community, allowing good access for residents by car, bike, and on foot, and offering unimpeded access by fire and emergency service vehicles. The City should reduce the use of dead-ends and cul-de-sacs and instead, directly connect roadways and sidewalks to facilitate the most efficient and convenient methods for residents to travel within and outside their homes. The City should utilize the Land Use Plan to encourage local commercial developments across the City. Specific locations include, along State Route 51, along State Route 169, along State Route 14, as well as the intersection of State Route 14 and US Route 29.

Complete Neighborhoods

- The idea of a 'Complete Neighborhood' stems from Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit Concept, dating back to the 1920s.
- Continue to add well-designed lighting in neighborhoods to increase visibility and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists at night.
- Focus on neighborhood level crime prevention, such as Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Accommodate safe places for overnight neighborhood parking.





Incorporate Conservation Design

New neighborhoods should incorporate conservation neighborhood design principles as appropriate. Conservation design is a type of land development that seeks to protect natural resources and promote a sense of community. The approach clusters homes on smaller lots to preserve open space, such as established tree canopy, wetlands, and meadows.



Typical Subdivision

- 24 Lots
- Minimum Lot Size: 1 to 2 acres
- No Undivided Open Space



Conservation Design

- 24 Lots
- Lot Size Range: Less than one acre
- 50% Undivided Open Space

Neighborhood Design

Lee County is one of a few counties in Alabama that has its own subdivision regulations and a planning commission. Opelika and Lee County have an agreement to apply the subdivision regulations that are the most stringent to any subdivision in the City's planning jurisdiction. The purpose of the planning jurisdiction is to ensure when the City does annex property it meets our subdivision regulations to ensure basic infrastructure is developed to a basic standard.

Discourage monotonous design. When monotonous development patterns prevail, a sense of place is lost, and neighborhood identity and pride are sometimes absent. For new subdivision developments to create a sense of place, the City should establish anti-monotony standards for homes to demonstrate façade articulations, architectural detailing, street-friendly design elements such as porches, recessed windows, landscaped yards, and the use of durable materials. The City should require variations among houses in a block in roof type and pitch, window type and placement, and construction materials and colors. Design guidelines could incorporate more detailed standards such as façade articulation requirements, specifications for the percent of a front façade that can be comprised of a garage and the maximum width of garage door(s), and a front porch or stoop requirements. Complementary regulatory efforts include updating design guidelines and standards to recognize various components of architectural detailing and construction strategies reflective of known domestic architectural styles. These policies should be structured to be clear, objective, and allow for staff to evaluate and for architects to achieve compliance.

Maintain the tree canopy. Most vacant and undeveloped land in and around Opelika is covered by trees, and some of the densest canopy coverage is on large lots on the outskirts of Opelika and in the planning boundary. While some amount of tree removal is necessary to facilitate development, the process of clearcutting to prepare a property for development results in habitat loss, erosion and soil damage, and increased disaster risk due to flooding. Tree planting efforts by the City and non-profit organizations should be supported as an important tool in encouraging a culture of appreciation of increasing the urban canopy. However, developments would still be required to demonstrate conformance to Section X (Landscape Regulations) of the Zoning Ordinance.

91%

of Opelika's housing units are occupied



Attainability and Affordability

The City should invest in attainable, accessible, and stable housing to accommodate all residents.

Affordable housing was a top issue identified through public outreach. According to the latest available US Census data, 17% of the population is below the poverty line. Low-income residents will benefit from affordable housing policies to ensure long-term attainability. Opelika’s proximity to Auburn University, which has more than 31,000 students, also drives a need for housing that is attainable to its students and for graduates who want to build a life in the area. Public outreach indicated that Opelika’s housing is considered attractive to young households and first-time homebuyers. However, affordability is still an issue in the City. First-time homebuyers and seniors are also competing for housing, with Census data indicating that the City’s housing units are 91% occupied, and 72% owner-occupied.

Create a supportive policy environment.

The City should pursue multiple routes to offer a broad range of housing options to increase attainability and affordability. Strategies should include identifying areas for more housing in alignment with the Land Use Plan and Housing Framework Map, identifying zoning ordinance updates to recognize and regulate higher-density housing, encouraging mixed-use development in infill areas in and around Downtown, increasing support for first-time homeownership programs, and attracting experienced affordable housing builders.

Work with affordable housing developers and partners.

The City should provide incentives that will direct housing development and revitalization of neighborhoods within Opportunity Zones, Low-and-Moderate Income Areas, Qualified Census Tracts, and others designated by the State of Alabama or the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The City should offer financing incentives to entice private, for-profit developers who propose affordable housing in areas with a greater need, such as in Opportunity Zone Census tracts. The City should partner with nonprofits such as the Opelika Housing Authority, to ensure they can continue to provide safe, clean, and quality affordable housing technical assistance, financial support, and marketing and outreach services, ensuring residents have the assistance they need to stay in the community.

Development Process

The City should examine and strategically update the development process.

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is both a type of development and a regulatory process, generally to allow greater flexibility in the configuration of homes within neighborhoods or subdivisions, and to allow uses on a site that are different than what is allowed in the standard zoning ordinance. Most new residential development in Opelika occurs through a PUD, primarily due to the City’s minimum lot size of 7,500 sf and 60 ft width requirements, which do not fit with the current market for homes and neighborhoods.

Update the regulatory and development process, including the zoning code and subdivision regulations.

The City should update regulations to align better with the market for new homes and reserve the PUD process to promote traditional neighborhood design, clustered development, greater design flexibility, and environmental protections. The base regulations should provide clear and enforceable standards, and identify adequate provisions of public services and infrastructure to ensure new neighborhoods are as “complete” as possible. Procedures for review and approval should encourage designing for diverse contexts in Opelika and be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan vision and policies.

Smart Growth and Housing

“Smart Growth” is a planning and neighborhood development philosophy first coined in the 1990s. The movement is a response to inefficiencies created by sprawling suburban development patterns that defined housing in the preceding decades. According to the US EPA, “Smart growth covers a range of development and conservation strategies that help protect our health and natural environment and make our communities more attractive, economically stronger, and more socially diverse.” This means that new communities should have a mix of uses, take advantage of compact urban design, and emphasize connectivity, sustainability, and center the community in decision-making.

From a housing perspective, Smart Growth emphasizes housing choice and development that maximizes open space for resident use. Building quality housing for families of all life stages and income levels is an integral part of a smart growth approach. Housing options available in a community will influence families’ economic opportunities, costs of living, and how much time they spend commuting each day. Diversifying housing options within existing neighborhoods can give residents more choices about where to live.

17%
of the population is
below the poverty line



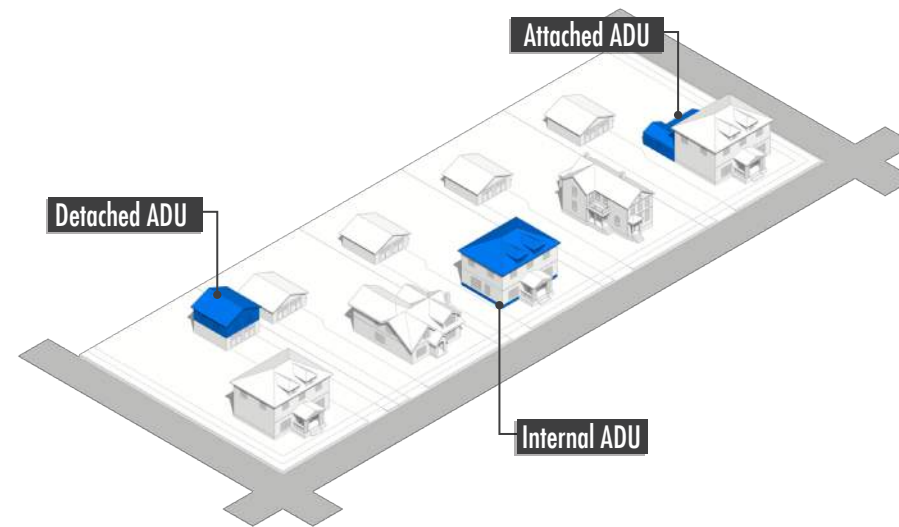
Housing Options

The City should work to increase the variety of housing options available for current and potential residents.

There will continue to be a demand in Opelika for homes at a range of price points to satisfy low- to higher-income households, families, and individuals including those in both homeownership and leasing tenancy arrangements. Without reforms to existing zoning regulations, various types of context-sensitive housing types could be inhibited from being constructed. Revised zoning regulations could also be a tool to ensure new housing reflects the configuration of historic development present in Downtown and Opelika's historic districts. Permitting ancillary dwellings and encouraging missing middle housing types are two context-sensitive ways to gradually increase the City's housing options over time.

Expand support for ancillary dwelling units (ADUs) as a diverse housing option. ADUs remain one of the most effective measures to balance neighborhood character and increase housing supply that corresponds to the needs of property owners. Currently, ADUs in Opelika are required to have combined utilities and cannot be rented or produce income. The City should re-examine this requirement, and consider a pilot program allowing ADUs as rentals, which benefits property owners. The City should consider updating its regulations to broaden the use of ADUs and permit them in existing single-family areas within the Core and Priority Growth Areas where access can be provided via an alleyway, private drive, or side street. Design guidelines should be established to regulate bulk, height, massing, and architecture to ensure the character of established neighborhoods is not compromised, and that ADUs have little to no impact on the appearance of the primary residence and character of development as seen from the street.

Support safe and livable mobile/ manufactured homes. Mobile, or manufactured, detached single-family homes are transportable structures suitable for year-round occupancy. Most are in established parks, developed as single properties for the placement of manufactured homes and owned by an individual, partnership, public or private association, or corporation. The City should take steps to ensure that mobile homes and the associated parks are safe and livable for the tenants of the mobile home park. The City's current design guidelines for mobile home parks have exempted most existing parking from coming into compliance. Going forward, mobile home zoning regulation should retain development standards, such as setbacks, minimum sizes, landscaping, and exterior design that ensures tenants have quality mobile homes and mobile home parks. The City should establish an age limit on manufactured homes being brought into parks, ensuring that new homes meet the latest building standards and practices. As a standard safety requirement, mobile home parks should include storm shelters.



Ancillary Dwelling Units

Ancillary or accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are a creative and subtle way of providing housing variety in existing single-family neighborhoods without negatively impacting community character. ADUs, sometimes called "granny flats," are typically less than 800 square feet and allow for context-sensitive infill on smaller lots, such as by placing an accessory structure behind the primary residence or through a home expansion. ADUs also provide opportunities for multi-generational housing where multiple generations of one family can live on the same property. They can be used for a variety of purposes, such as housing an aging parent, renting out to generate income, or providing a place for guests to stay. This flexibility can be especially important for aging adults who may need to provide care for a loved one or who have a fluctuating income.

Opelika's growing population could require

3,000
additional housing units by 2040



Missing Middle Housing

Missing middle housing is a term used to describe a range of housing types that fall between single-family homes and large apartment buildings. These types of housing include duplexes, triplexes, cottage courts, courtyard apartments, and townhomes. Missing middle housing is often characterized by its smaller scale, its compatibility with single-family homes, and its location in walkable neighborhoods.

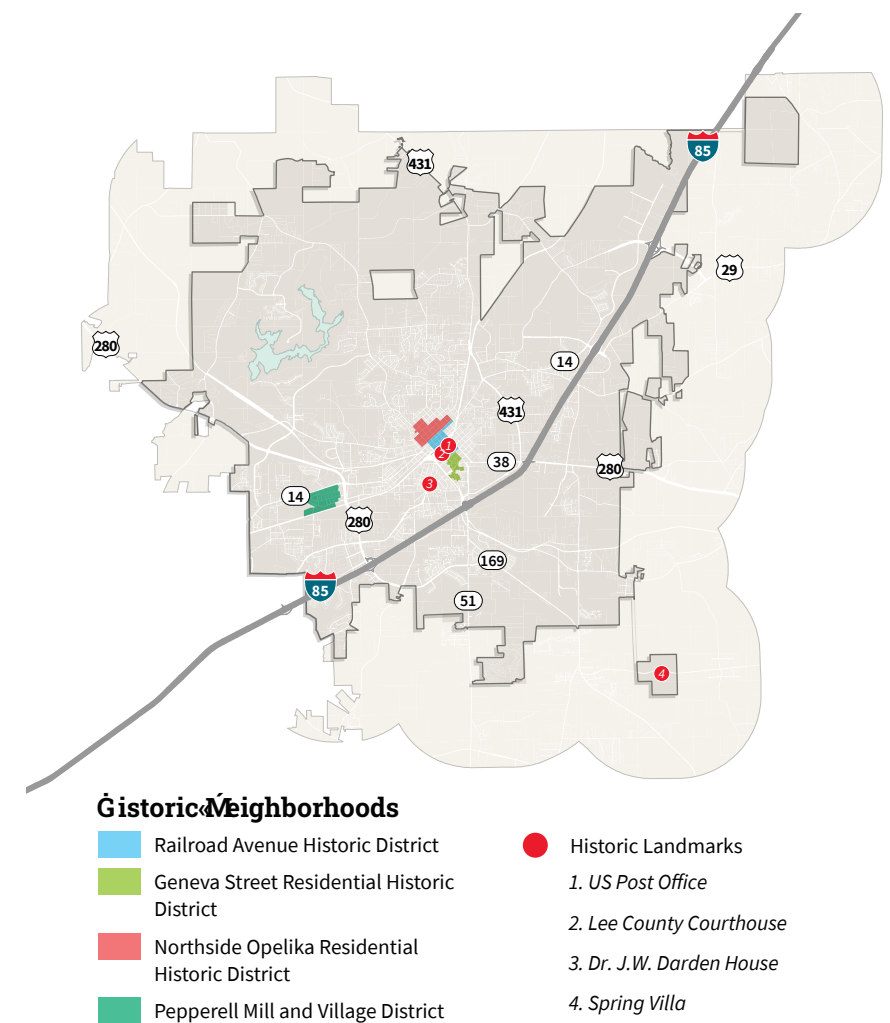
Continue to embrace “missing middle” housing. In recent years, the City has added a number of townhomes to its inventory of housing. The City should continue to embrace these and more options for missing middle housing, such as apartments or condominium buildings with low to medium densities and a form reflecting the prevailing style of similar neighborhoods. To ensure missing middle options are context-sensitive, the City should create design guidelines. Design guidelines can include direction regarding building and parking location to maintain an existing pattern of yards; building orientation towards public streets; use of high-quality materials and human scale design features to create visual interest; “overlook” into adjacent homes (the height of the new buildings); and outdoor amenity spaces. The City should consider several zoning strategies to facilitate missing middle housing, including tying the building to the lot width rather than its square footage, adopting an average unit size ordinance that provides for increased density as the average unit size decreases, and reducing parking requirements per unit.

Buildings can have both character and affordability.

Historic Homes and Neighborhoods

Opelika has four historic districts which can be seen on the Historic Districts and Landmarks map. In three of the districts, property owners must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Commission before obtaining the necessary building permits for all exterior improvements, alterations, repairs, additions, demolition, new construction, signs, fencing, or outbuildings. Of the four districts, the Pepperell Mill and Village is not a designated district and does not fall under the scope of design guidelines.

The City maintains and updates Design Review Guidelines in an illustrated document that provides guidance for height, scale, massing, expression, setbacks, platforms, entry, roof shape, rhythm of opening, and imitation of historic styles, and includes the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. A detailed section guides rehabilitation, new construction, and demolition specific to the Railroad Avenue (Downtown) District. A supplemental section provides guidelines specific to the residential Northside and Geneva Street areas. Per the City’s Design Review Guidelines, property owners in the historic districts enjoy the advantages of increased economic value and a built environment protected from unsympathetic changes. Property owners are responsible for helping to maintain the distinctive character which makes the historic districts unique.





Revise the zoning ordinance so historic districts have setback flexibility. Most of the historic homes in the Northside and Southside districts are non-conforming based on the underlying zoning of R-2 or C-2, which have setbacks that do not align with historic building pattern. The City should consider establishing the historic districts as overlays in the zoning ordinance. Overlays could accommodate historic building patterns, and allow new development to match the historic setbacks.

Maintain the City’s historic properties. Opelika has more than 750 properties on the National Register and more than 530 under Local Design Guidelines across the districts. The City is also home to four landmarked buildings. The City should continue to improve its framework for administering proposed changes to historic structures within designated historic districts, as delegated to the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission reviews alterations, additions, or demolition of structures that are located in the City of Opelika’s three districts (excluding Pepperell). A review of homes outside the historic districts should take into consideration how such properties integrate detailing and styling inspired by Opelika’s historic structures. The City should work with the Commission to create a “most endangered” list of homes for future preservation.

Promote adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse is the process of converting buildings that have outlived their original purpose to accommodate new uses. It emphasizes the preservation or rehabilitation of building features over extensive remodeling. The City should promote reinvestment in and around Downtown Opelika and throughout its historic districts through the adaptive reuse of disused commercial and industrial buildings into residential and mixed use. Successful adaptive reuse projects potentially require updating zoning and building codes to ease or even remove parking requirements. This helps Opelika further its housing goals and is responsive to shifting trends among professionals, families, and households that prefer flexibility and affordability in neighborhoods that are already well-established.



Carver and Jeter Neighborhoods
The City should continue to focus on reinvestment and marketing for the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods.

Opelika’s Carver and Jeter neighborhoods are instrumental in the history and heritage of the City. The two neighborhoods have historically been inhabited by African American families, including Dr. J.W. Darden, the Opelika region’s only African American doctor in the early 1900s, and Dr. W.E. Morton, an integral figure in the education system in the area.

The Carver-Jeter Master Plan aims to bolster the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods where these integral historic figures resided and maintain the history for generations to come. The plan aims to better connect the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods to the greater Downtown area and establish a vision for the future of the two neighborhoods. The plan was updated in 2021 to provide a revised implementation table.

Support the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods over the coming decades. Within the neighborhoods, the City has prioritized quality of life, employment, heritage, connectivity, transportation, and housing options in its official policy documents, and outlined 23 recommended projects for reinvestment. The City should continue to work with community and neighborhood representatives to identify projects that would be supported by state and federal funding to create new homes and upkeep existing residences in these neighborhoods.

Opelika’s has more than
750
properties on the National Register of Historic Places

“We need strong historic district protection to stop the loss of historic homes.”



Housing Framework

Opelika offers a variety of housing in distinct environments, extending from Downtown neighborhoods to established subdivisions to rural land. The Housing Framework addresses the City’s unique residential areas and guides change over time. The map should help the City enhance its residential character, preserve the rural edge, and ensure Opelika offers housing products to meet existing and future needs.

Traditional Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods in the community core feature smaller lots, a traditional street grid, and a mix of housing types. These include Carver and Jeter neighborhoods and the Northside, Geneva, and Opelika residential historic district areas. These areas should be a focus for infill, reinvestment, and adaptive reuse, incorporating interspersed neighborhood-serving commercial, reflecting their proximity to the center of the City.

Established Residential Areas

Established residential neighborhoods are mostly built out and will continue to consist of single-family detached homes. While these areas are largely stable, there may be some opportunities for suburban retrofits to promote walkability and further connect these areas, ensuring they remain desirable places to live in the coming decades. ADUs are appropriate in established residential neighborhoods as a factor for affordable housing and aging in place.

Downtown

Downtown Opelika is the preferred location of homes within mixed-used structures – residential over street-level commercial businesses. This can be achieved through adaptive reuse of non-residential areas and development of parking lots or vacant lots. Stand-alone medium to high density multifamily apartments and condominiums in “missing middle housing” configurations ensure the small-town character of Downtown thrives, with visitors and neighbors contributing to a lively atmosphere.

Suburban Buildout

Opelika still has unfinished subdivisions that are within the Core or Primary Growth areas that remain opportunity sites for housing. These planned residential developments will be priorities for new residential development. These neighborhoods should incorporate conservation design and complete neighborhood principles as development occurs.

Residential Growth

Undeveloped areas for residential growth are either planned or suitable for residential development. These neighborhoods should incorporate conservation design and complete neighborhood principles as development occurs – preserving the tree canopy and emphasizing connectivity to the whole community.

Long Term Development

Over the long term, Opelika’s housing growth should continue in areas that will be annexed and primary growth areas. Several of these areas are unlikely to develop over the life of the plan, however, as growth occurs, they should continue to adhere to the City’s complete neighborhood and design principles.

Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas

The boundary for the neighborhood reinvestment areas reflects Opelika’s oldest established neighborhoods, Carver and Jeter, as well as the Pepperell Mill area. The Carver and Jeter neighborhoods played an instrumental role in the history and heritage of the City, yet the neighborhoods contain properties that have been disinvested and, in some cases, stand vacant. The Pepperell Mill area is also historic, with the mill site being eyed for redevelopment, while the historic village sits just to the north along Pepperell Parkway. The City should leverage its resources to revitalize these key historic neighborhoods, ensuring they are viable and attractive residential areas for years to come.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The Economic Development chapter offers an achievable approach for maintaining and growing Opelika's commercial, employment, and industrial areas. The chapter aims to diversify businesses, grow local job opportunities, increase local shopping options, and build a sustainable, resilient economy. Prioritizing the activation of vacant structures and land and redevelopment opportunities before greenfield development and outward growth will ensure the City's commercial and industrial areas develop sustainably.

Find ways to encourage growth and attract many more diverse people and opportunities.

What's the Issue?

Maintaining Sustainable Economic Growth

Opelika is the county seat of Lee County and one the main cities of the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The MSA is included in the larger Columbus-Auburn-Opelika combined statistical area, composed of two counties in Alabama and six in Georgia with an economic output of \$19 billion.

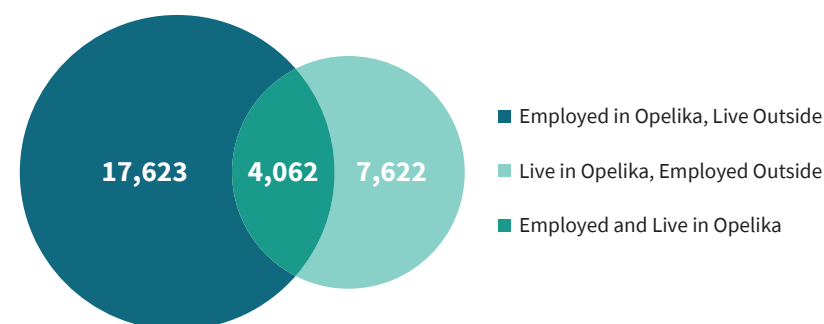
Notably, Opelika's share of the population (17.9%) in the MSA belies its role as an economic center. Of the 39,364 workers living in the MSA, 31% are in Opelika, and of 52,070 jobs, 43% are in Opelika. Based on data from the Opelika Economic Development Office and US Census, it is estimated that the City is home to more than half the number of businesses in the MSA. With low unemployment rates (2.9%), a variety of employment sectors, and healthy real estate markets, the City is positioned well in the region to continue to provide economic opportunity to its residents and neighboring residents. The policies and recommendations presented in this chapter offer opportunities to maintain and strengthen the current economic growth to ensure its sustainability.

Policies and Recommendations

A diverse, resilient economy provides employment and shopping opportunities for all residents, strengthens the City's tax base, and establishes it as an attractive place to live, work, and do business. During public outreach to the business community, participants noted that the character of Opelika's commercial areas, including the Downtown, was one of its greatest strengths. Over the coming decades, the City should leverage its assets to attract a range of commercial uses that meet the needs of residents and support a self-sufficient community.

Workforce and talent pool was identified as one of the most important issues impacting operating a business in the community. New industrial and employment uses that further diversify the City's industries should be promoted strategically within the City and its planning area, ensuring local opportunities for a well-trained workforce, and attractive sites for major employers.

Inflow/Outflow Job Counts





Regional Location and Influence

Capitalize on the City's location and influence including its access to regional transportation and proximity to a major university.

Opelika benefits from the convergence of a variety of transportation systems, including Interstate 85 (with five interchanges in Opelika), two railroad lines, and the Auburn University Regional airport on the edge of the City. In addition, a major influence in the region is Auburn University. As a top-50 rated public university and a major employer, the university is an attractive draw for businesses looking for a well-educated talent pool.

Leverage the City's location to continue to attract major employers. The City's business parks are home to some of the largest taxpayers in Opelika: Mando America, Wal-Mart Retail/Distribution, Hanwha, Crafty (AL) / Jo-Ann Stores Supply Chain Management Distribution Center, Daewon America Inc., Niagra Bottling, and Pharmavite LLC. International trade is critical to developing Opelika's business-friendly strategies as companies such as Daewon and Mando have roots in Korea and West Fraser LLC. has roots in Canada.

The City has benefited from the infusion of capital investments which attracts and supports a healthy environment for big businesses. The City should continue to invest in its business parks, and transportation infrastructure to attract and retain major global corporations, ensuring they can effectively move goods and people easily and efficiently. Additionally, Opelika should continue marketing the access and location of its business-ready parks to major employers from around the world.

Support the development of the Frederick Road corridor as a complement to the Auburn University Regional Airport. Auburn University Regional Airport, which is partially located in Opelika, has the potential to be a great multiplier in Opelika's economy. The airport can nurture nearby industries such as parts suppliers and repairs, accommodation and food services, and medical transportation. The City should utilize the Land Use Plan as a framework to enhance and support development of complementary land uses to support the success of the airport. Additionally, gateway and placemaking elements should be utilized to announce the entrance into Opelika. These elements can help to reinforce the City's identity and can differentiate it from nearby communities.

Capitalize on the City's proximity to Auburn University. The single largest employer of Opelika residents is Auburn University. Located in neighboring Auburn, it is the second largest university in Alabama with a student enrollment of 31,000 and 5,500 faculty and staff. Auburn University is the largest employer of Opelika's residents (about 7,100). The City should serve as the conduit to create connections between local businesses and the University to encourage students and recent graduates to work within the City.

Downtown

The City should utilize strategic reinvestment to promote economic vitality Downtown.

Opelika has undertaken a major effort to revitalize its Downtown and reposition it as a destination and a major draw for the City. Concerted and targeted economic development efforts as well as strategic redevelopment has bolstered the Downtown to become an asset for the City. Downtown businesses over the past ten years have taken the lead in revitalizing and reinvigorating the Downtown. While many downtowns in the region, and throughout the country, have suffered as a result of e-commerce and the lack of office workers, Opelika has brought in a brewery, distillery, and new bars and restaurants. In addition to the private investment, the City has undertaken several projects to aid this redevelopment. Some of these projects include streetscape projects, transportation updates, and an entertainment district overlay.

NOTE: See further discussion of the Downtown in the Downtown Fringe subarea, beginning on page 41.

Utilize food, experiential retail, and accommodations to create a destination in Downtown. With the development of the brewery and distillery, among others, Downtown has experienced a growing after-hours population. Residents are aware and excited about the recent investment and revitalization of Downtown and are looking for more diversity of businesses that attract a wider range of people to spend time and money in Downtown. Along with diversifying its retail and food experiences, the City should work with developers to identify appropriate locations for a boutique hotel. Downtown currently lacks hotel options which are pivotal in capturing tourists and solidifying its identity as more of a destination.

Work with property owners to envision creative ways to reinvest in properties to take advantage of the entertainment district overlay. In areas such as the Downtown, the City has taken regulatory measures to ensure that future development/redevelopment follows the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and that it will serve the needs of the community. The Hospitality Overlay District (HOD) is a zoning overlay which is intended to accommodate mixed and divergent uses within the Downtown. The City should evaluate the success of the overlay and determine whether adjustments need to be made to the application process or if the boundary needs to be expanded or reduced.

Carver-Jeter communities

The Comprehensive Plan aims to complement the Carver-Jeter Master Plan's direction on improving the neighborhoods' economic and social climate. It is the City's goal to continue implementation and funding of economic and neighborhood improvement strategies for the area's residents.

Northeast Industrial Park

The park has excellent ingress and egress to Interstate 85 via interchange Exit 66 at Andrews Road, a city-controlled four-lane divided road. This interchange directly serves the park and connects to the east with U.S Highway 29. North Park Drive, a 1.9-mile industrial access road, serves the southern portion of the park and also provides access to Interstate 85 at Exit 64. Opelika has extended North Park Drive approximately 2,600 feet north of Andrews Road into the northern 1,300-acre portion of the park. A CSX mainline forms the western boundary of the site. Located on 2,200 acres in the northern portion of Opelika, Alabama along Interstate 85, the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park is a premier example of a fully developed and planned industrial park.



Workforce Development

Work with local businesses and institutions like Auburn University and Southern Union State Community College to strengthen the local workforce.

The Auburn-Opelika Alabama Metropolitan Area has one the lowest unemployment rates in the county. At 1.8% rate (March 2023), it can indicate a shortage of skilled workers. The scarcity of labor and continued strong demand for workers boosted the average weekly earnings by more than 10% in just one year (March 2022 – March 2023). Recognizing the relationship between low unemployment and a need for a skilled workforce, the community has made gains in raising education attainment levels of its residents. From 2010 to 2019, the number of Opelika residents without high school diplomas was reduced from 19% to 10%.

Demand for workers has boosted average weekly earnings by

10%

“Re-skill” the City’s workforce. Opelika should facilitate re-skilling and training for residents who hope to acquire the skills necessary for higher-paying jobs. Partnerships between local employers and institutions such as Auburn University and Southern Union State Community College (SUSCC) can produce skilled workers who live and work in Opelika. Around the country, the manufacturing sector is experiencing one of the more acute worker shortages – and Opelika is home to several large manufacturing operations. Manufacturing The sector is also shifting from labor-intensive production toward automation requiring workers with technical know-how. Re-skilling is vital to complement and maximize the City’s efforts to attract and retain major manufacturers the City, such as recently approved tax abatements and exemptions for several of Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama (HMMA) facilities, ensuring this company and its subsidiaries remain in the community for a long time.

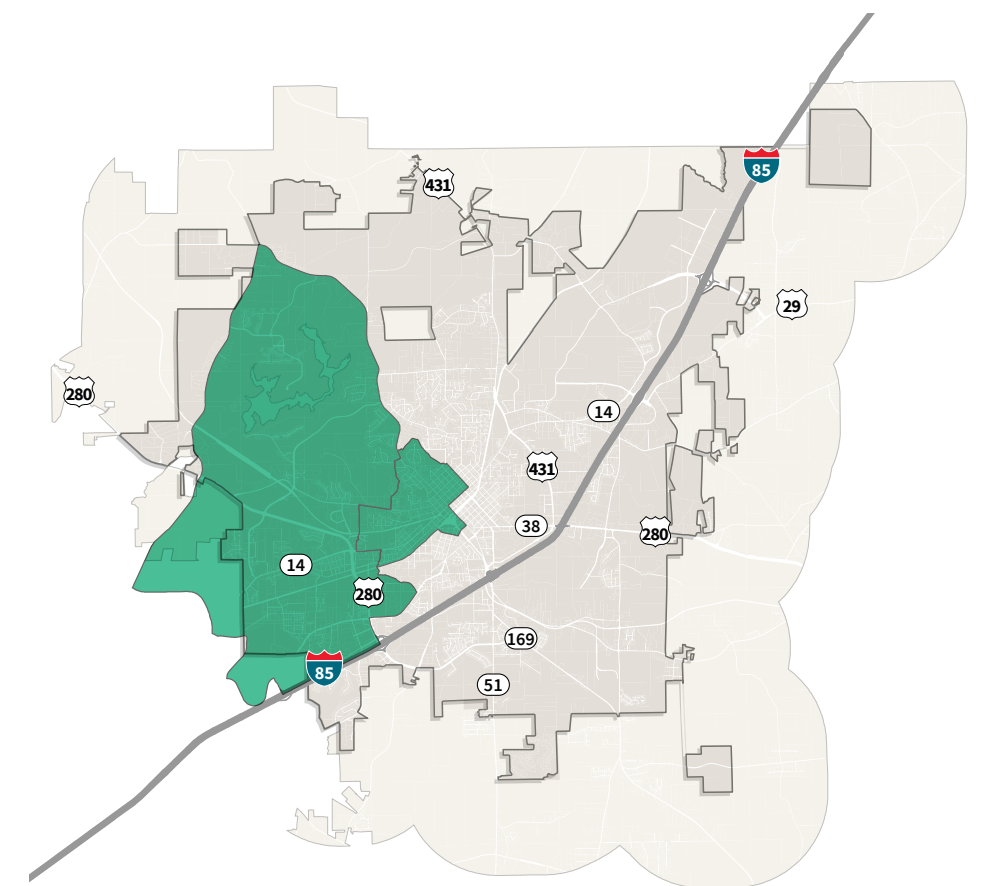
To ensure the local workforce has the necessary skills needed to embrace new jobs meet employers’ needs, the City should continue coordinate with employers and educational institutions work with employers to identify in-demand skills and ensure make that the relevant education and training programs that are offered available are relevant to the needs of the local economy to re-skill workers.

Prepare new workers. Opelika is committed to preparing workers for careers in both the public and private sectors. The City partners with the US military and local industries to allow transitioning service members to work in paid internships during their final months of service. The City should continue to invest in invest in workforce development programs, and partner with local businesses to create sector-specific training aligned with the needs of the local economy.

In addition, SUSCC’s Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) allows students to earn an associate’s degree while also getting paid work experience. In addition, SUSCC’s Center for Integrated Manufacturing provides advanced skill training for a variety of manufacturing careers such as machining, welding, automotive service, aviation maintenance, and a variety of others. The City should work with its partners to track the outcomes of workforce development programs and ensure that they remain effective and that they are meeting the needs of the City’s residents.

What is an Opportunity Zone?

Opportunity Zones are an economic development tool that allows people to invest in distressed areas in the United States. Their purpose is to spur economic growth and job creation in low-income communities while providing tax benefits to investors. The map identifies Opelika’s two opportunity zone Census tracts.



Opportunity Zones

Opportunity Zone



Tourism

The City should leverage local assets and position itself as a destination for people outside the community to increase revenue and enhance its image and reputation.

Among Alabama's 67 counties, Lee County has the fourth highest location quotient (LQ) in the Leisure and Hospitality industry, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Data. A LQ greater than 1 indicates an industry with a greater share of the local area employment than is the case nationwide. Opelika has attracted visitors by leveraging its proximity to Auburn University and by marketing and offering interesting places, historic sites, state-of the art athletic facilities, and unique natural areas for tourists to enjoy. Often cited as a perfect weekend getaway, the City boasts a number of entertaining and unique experiences.

Supporting industry. To take advantage of Opelika's unique assets, the City should encourage a broad range of visitor-friendly resorts, lodging, entertainment, and recreation opportunities for all ages and lifestyles. It should also focus on attracting competitive lodging options such as brands that have established reputations and that cater to those looking for boutique experiences while showcasing Opelika's unique attractions and identity.

Recreational tourism. Opelika should collaborate as necessary with Auburn to diversify recreational offerings such as sports and athletic fields, plan for various emerging competitive disciplines popular with younger populations such as e-gaming, motocross, and adventure sports, all the while maintaining support for traditional outdoor recreation activities such as equestrian, fishing, golf, and shooting sports. Facilities such as the SportsPlex, West Ridge Park, and RTJ Golf Trail at Grand National, among other facilities have significantly added to the recreational tourism industry by attracting travel sports tournaments and golf events.

Quality Jobs

The City should utilize its position as a major employer in the community to expand the availability of its employment opportunities.

Opelika's workers have made significant wage gains and unemployment is significantly below the national average. Almost two-thirds of residents are in the labor force and the number of jobs in the City has grown by 1.9% between 2008 and 2018. Though job opportunities for residents have improved, the benefits have not spread equally throughout the City. Opelika's overall poverty rate is 16% but in the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods, it ranges from 30% and 39%.

Raising the local standards. Opelika should encourage the creation and retention of high-paying jobs that are accessible to all of its residents, including those without a college degree. As a public employer, the City could review whether some of its job requirements, such as mandating advanced degrees, can be replaced by alternative and more inclusive standards that can be met through objective measures of on-the-job performance. In administering publicly-managed and funded economic development incentives, the City should encourage or require benefitting businesses to implement practices that lead to more equitable hiring and employment. These may include hiring residents, paying a living wage, or using disadvantaged business enterprises or other practices.

Infill and Adaptive Reuse

Identify commercial and industrial lots and buildings suitable for infill and adaptive reuse. Currently, Opelika has approximately 2,900 parcels of vacant or underdeveloped land (making up about 42,000 acres). The Land Use Plan shows 7% of previously vacant parcels as some form of commercial, office, or industrial. Of these approximately 400 properties, 50 are more appropriate for infill development or adaptive reuse based on their location within the City Core growth area. Areas within the City Core are appropriate for both infill and adaptive reuse while properties in the growth areas are more suitable for new development. Smaller lots within the City Core present an opportunity to create new commercial development where there is existing infrastructure such as water, sewer, and fiber optics.

Identify programs and incentives to promote the repositioning of obsolete structures and vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial properties. The City should consider incentives for infill development to promote redevelopment of key properties. Some examples include reduced permitting fees, increased maximum densities, reduced setbacks, reduced parking requirements, and/or allowable building height. Additionally, the City could consider identifying infill development zones to launch projects that revitalize underperforming or vacant lots and buildings. The City could also promote the adaptive reuse of commercial and industrial properties that would better serve the community as residential buildings in areas especially near Downtown. During outreach, participants mentioned that there were several warehouses in and around Downtown that should be redeveloped. Allowing for this type of redevelopment would give property owners the flexibility to incorporate residential in a non-traditional space and would increase activity in the Downtown after hours.

Brownfields or Contaminated Areas

Brownfields are properties previously used for commercial or industrial purposes that have possibly been contaminated by a pollutant, petroleum, or other harmful substances. As of 2021, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management has identified four brownfield sites in Opelika. Though it takes additional work to remediate brownfield sites, redevelopment is possible depending on the characteristics of the property. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) supports brownfield redevelopment through several programs who cater towards property owners, developers, and public entities.

Economic Development Framework

Opelika is home to a large variety of commercial, office, and industrial businesses located throughout the City from Downtown to the warehouses and industrial development on the City’s perimeter. The Economic Development Framework focuses on the City’s commercial, office, and industrial areas. The map should help the City support existing businesses, attract new businesses, diversify the City’s tax base, and ensure that there are high-quality employment opportunities for its residents.

Neighborhood Node

Neighborhood Nodes provide residents and visitors to Opelika with access to daily goods and services including grocery stores, day cares, or restaurants. These areas should be located near residential neighborhoods at key intersections reducing the need for residents to travel a significant distance to access these essential needs and amenities. Neighborhood Nodes should tie into the fabric of both established and new neighborhoods and complement these areas with appropriately scaled development that emphasizes neighborhood connections. Neighborhood Nodes are located primarily south of Downtown and serve the rural reserve and single-family land within the planning area but outside of the City. These uses are typically found along key arterials such as State Route 51, 169, and 14 which serve these areas of the City.

Commercial Reinvestment and Revitalization

Commercial Reinvestment and Revitalization are commercial areas that would benefit from investment/ beautification. They are typically one-off developments. Within the City, these areas are made up of small strip centers, dealerships, hotels, and miscellaneous and auto uses. A flexible range of formats are encouraged including plazas and visually appealing strip development. Special attention to site aesthetics, landscaping, building design, and signage is recommended to ensure visually-appealing development that enhances the area’s aesthetic quality. These properties typically lack cross access and could benefit from shared access drives to create more cohesion between businesses. These areas should prioritize updating pedestrian facilities to provide better connections. Additionally, parking lots should be beautified by including landscaped perimeters and islands.

We need to have a unified plan for growth.

Regional Commercial Draws

Regional Commercial Draws are existing and potential commercial areas. Of the existing areas, Tiger Town, which is the largest retail center in east Alabama, is a 130-acre mixed use commercial development located at the intersection of Interstate 85 and Highway 280. The major regional commercial node offers one million square feet of retail space. Current tenants include Kroger, World Market, Target, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Home Depot, Best Buy, and Lowe’s, among many more freestanding restaurants, banks, offices, and hotel sites. Tiger Town is still growing with new commercial developments planned in the immediate surrounding area.

Regional Commercial Draws should be established in two new locations. The first is on the west side of the City around the planned business/tech park. This area sits along the developing Birmingham Highway commercial corridor connecting to I-80 and Tiger Town. The second location is the area surrounding the existing industrial area on the far east side. With expanding industrial development, access to the interchange, and new subdivisions coming online, this area has the potential to serve a large population.

Downtown

Downtown Opelika centers on the junction of the City’s two active rail lines. The Downtown is loosely bounded by 2nd Avenue, 6th Street, Avenue C, and 10th Street, with the densest cluster of historic buildings and a consistent street wall along 8th Street between Railroad Avenue and Avenue B. Downtown Opelika is central to the Economic Development Plan. Its unique urban pattern and potential deserves increased attention as a district for entertainment, tourism, and complete neighborhood.

The Downtown has historically been the City’s business center, and the Lee County Courthouse at 215 South 9th Street is a focal point. The Downtown has become increasingly vibrant in recent years and now includes breweries, a distillery, and local restaurants and shops. Downtown Opelika is the preferred location of mixed-used structures – residential over street-level commercial businesses. Buildings of this type can be achieved through adaptive reuse and strategic development of parking lots or vacant lots.

Traditional Office and Industrial

Traditional Office and Industrial areas are intended to provide for professional employment and office uses, which could include concentrations of standalone office buildings or complexes consisting of several buildings incorporated into a campus-like setting. While certain low-impact light industrial uses such as smaller-scale manufacturing and assembly, small-scale logistics, distribution, and warehousing facilities may locate within an Office/ Business Park, they should be low intensity and of complementary scale, having little or no environmental impact on surrounding properties. Office/Business Park uses are typically compatible with adjacent or nearby residential areas, provided they are appropriately buffered and screened.

Legacy Industrial

Legacy Industrial areas provide vital employment and contribute greatly to the Opelika economy and tax base. They have typically been in the City for many years, if not decades. Industrial uses include both heavy and light industrial businesses such as manufacturing, natural resource extraction, warehousing, and the distribution of goods and materials. Light industrial uses that are appropriate in Office/Business Parks are also appropriate in these industrial areas. Industrial uses are typically incompatible with residential areas and should be appropriately buffered and screened from adjacent residential areas. Though these areas should be preserved to ensure that the legacy businesses with history in the City can remain, no further expansion of these areas is proposed. New industrial growth should occur in the areas designated as Modern Industrial, Business, and Office Parks.

Medical District

Opelika has begun to build out a medical district on the southwest side of the city, along Pepperell Parkway just east of Highway 280. The Medical District area consists of health care facilities, both in-patient and out-patient. It also includes specialized medical offices and pharmacies. The district is anchored by the East Alabama Medical Center which serves the region. This area should continue to be a preferred location for medical facilities and providers and should act as a regional-serving medical district.

Modern Industrial, Business, and Office Parks

Modern Industrial, Business, and Office Parks feature flex buildings which are versatile options for businesses needing spaces traditionally thought of as light industrial and office. Flex users often include research and development, distribution, and sales. Within the City, these areas have been targeted for expansion and include large warehouses, large parcels, and are located off Birmingham Highway or I-85.

The most prominent of these areas is the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park. This fully developed and planned industrial park sits along I-85 and should continue to be leveraged for its location, access to the interstate, and large-scale employment assets. The City also features the Fox Run Business Park and the Opelika Innovation and Technology Park. Both of these areas allow for flex-uses and are home to a wide variety of companies, but the Opelika Innovation and Technology Park specifically is targeted towards those who are focused on the creation of new and innovative technologies.

The City should enforce stringent design standards to continue to create industrial and office parks with high-quality architecture. Office parks should be developed as a cohesive district with sufficient landscaping, consistent signage, buried utility lines, and proper pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Industrial uses are typically incompatible with residential areas and should be appropriately buffered and screened from adjacent residential areas.

SUBAREAS

Overview

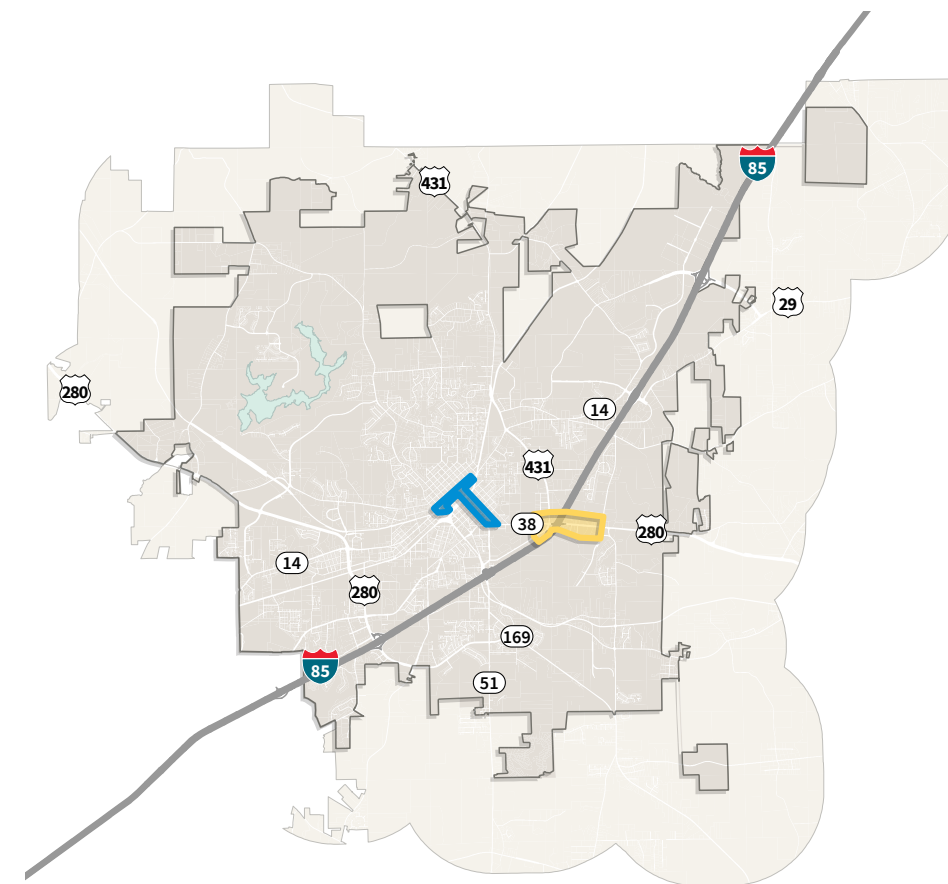
Subarea plans focus on specific areas of the City to address unique issues and opportunities and to identify site-specific recommendations and improvements. They offer clear directions on improving design, access, and evaluating opportunity sites. A subarea plan encourages potential reinvestment, promote development, and establish or reinforce the character of a particular area. These plans are practical tools for shaping future development and reviewing proposals. The plans cover two key areas: the Downtown Edge, which includes main roads and the surrounding areas near Opelika's Downtown, and the Highway 280 Corridor, a vital link from Interstate 85, currently home to several motels that are prime candidates for redevelopment. The framework for each subarea is based on urban design, placemaking, and access and mobility to improve the subarea.

Urban Design and Placemaking

Urban design involves the planning and shaping of a physical setting. It improves the aesthetics of an area, enhances a sense of community, and enhances the quality of life for the users. The design integrates landmarks, accessibility, and aesthetics to support economic development. The urban design of the subareas is essential to creating a positive and inviting first impression that welcomes residents and visitors alike. The Urban Design and Placemaking framework provides recommendations and improvements intended to maximize and highlight the positive aspects of the subareas to mitigate those elements that may negatively impact the community's experience of the subareas and to improve it strategically as an active and lively place.

Access and Mobility

Access and Mobility refer to the ease with which people and goods move through an area. This includes everything from sidewalks and bike lanes to transit and roads. Access and mobility are essential to ensuring a safe, efficient, and inclusive transportation system. This framework offers suggestions and enhancements to facilitate smoother movement, overcome accessibility barriers, and foster an environment encouraging activity and accessibility. By prioritizing access and mobility improvements, the City can create welcoming and accommodating environments for all users and goods, improving its residents' overall quality of life.



Subareas

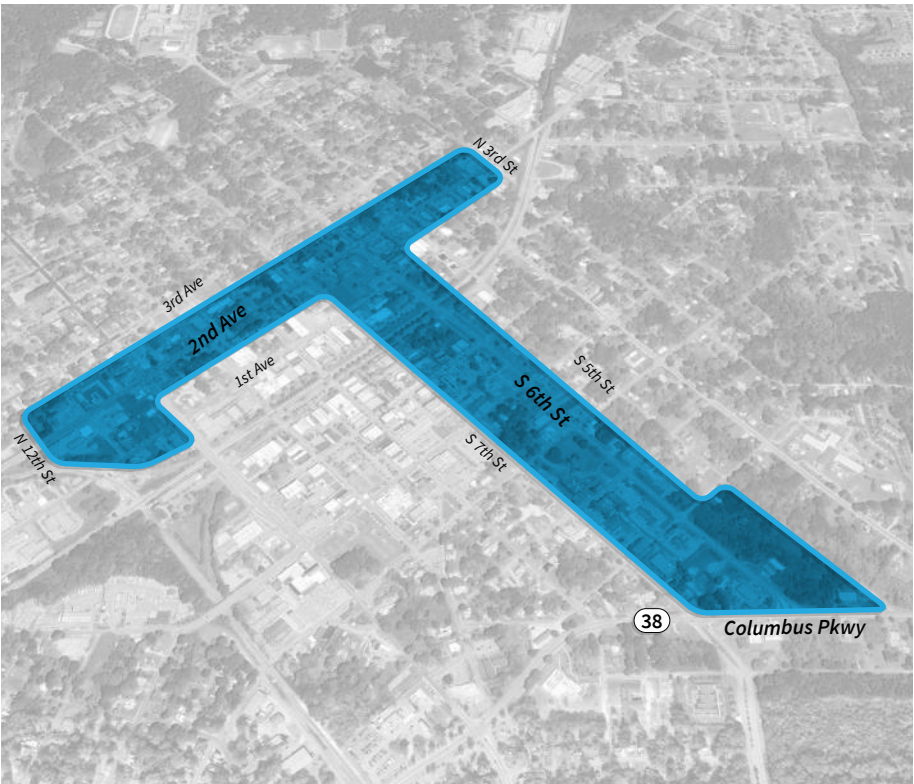
- Downtown Edge
- Highway 280 Corridor



Downtown Edge

The Downtown Edge includes two corridors, and the adjacent land uses framing Opelika’s Downtown – 2nd Avenue from approximately 12th Street to 3rd Street and 6th Street from 2nd Avenue to Columbus Parkway. The 2nd Avenue corridor is characterized by a range of existing land uses: storage and light industrial/manufacturing, service businesses such as salons and lodging, fast food, places of worship, banks, auto parts stores, and offices. Drive-throughs, surface lots, and driveways are standard features along the corridor. The 6th Street corridor includes a similar mixture of uses; entire blocks are devoted to banks, while others include single-family homes, small business conversions, automotive and personal services, and offices. Setbacks along 6th Street are deeper than on 2nd Avenue, giving 6th Street a high-speed, “pass-through” feel reinforced by its width and lack of sidewalks.

As currently configured, the two corridors and their adjacent land uses frame the City’s historic Downtown but do little to reference it, invite residents and visitors into the heart of the City, or connect to the surrounding neighborhoods.



Highway 280 Corridor

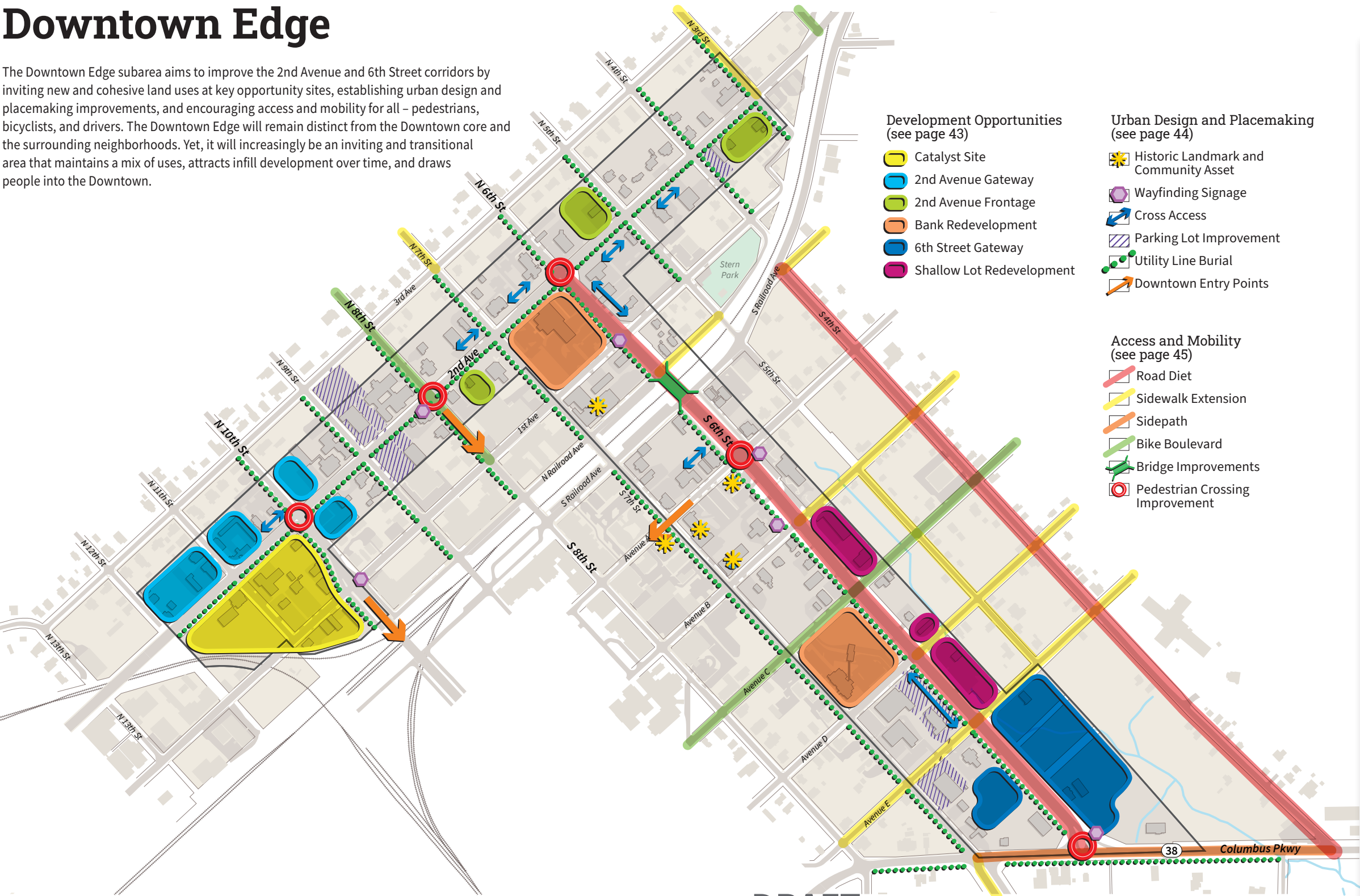
The Highway 280 corridor experiences an annual average daily traffic volume above 22,000 vehicles, serving as an essential connection for Opelika from Interstate 85. Currently, the corridor accommodates a series of motels needing redevelopment, along with gas stations and auto-oriented chain restaurants on the interchange’s eastern side. This corridor section also intersects with Uniroyal Road, characterized by numerous curb cuts, no sidewalks, and a lack of landscaping.

On the western side of the interchange, a range of outdated hotels, gas stations, old commercial retail structures, car auto dealerships, and automotive stores are present. Like the eastern side, this area needs sidewalks and landscaping. A portion of Fox Run Parkway, which runs through the southwestern part of the subarea, lacks sidewalks amidst local commercial establishments such as liquor stores, auto parts shops, and RV dealerships.



Downtown Edge

The Downtown Edge subarea aims to improve the 2nd Avenue and 6th Street corridors by inviting new and cohesive land uses at key opportunity sites, establishing urban design and placemaking improvements, and encouraging access and mobility for all – pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. The Downtown Edge will remain distinct from the Downtown core and the surrounding neighborhoods. Yet, it will increasingly be an inviting and transitional area that maintains a mix of uses, attracts infill development over time, and draws people into the Downtown.



General Considerations

Create an Active and Lively Downtown Edge

While there is currently a wide range of existing land uses within the Downtown Edge, they are not a mix that fosters activity and interaction. The Downtown Edge will complement the City's urban core with an active blend of walkable attractive "third places" – communal public spaces and local businesses where people can recreate, relax, and enjoy themselves.

Connect Adjacent Neighborhoods

Northside Opelika Historic District is a single-family neighborhood north of 2nd Avenue. The Jeter neighborhood east of 6th Street has a similar layout, though it is not a historic district. These neighborhoods are within a 5-10 minute walk to Downtown, yet they do not feel connected to the core of the City. The Downtown Edge will remove barriers and promote a connection between the City's established neighborhoods and Downtown.

Establish a Design Language that References the Downtown

Opelika's historic Downtown is characterized partly by pedestrian-scale lighting, pavers, street furniture, activated alleys, street trees, light pole banners, and public realm and pedestrian-oriented features that establish a sense of place. Downtown Edge will be visually connected to the urban core, and placemaking features will create a sense of arrival.

Development Opportunities

2nd Avenue Gateway

The 2nd Ave Gateway features four opportunity sites, including the Golden Cherry Motel, suitable for adaptive reuse. Development of these lots should align with the catalyst site to ensure continuity in the overall appearance and maintain consistent uses.

2nd Avenue Frontage Lots

Underutilized lots on the 2nd Avenue Frontage should be developed into commercial and retail spaces based on community needs. Street infrastructure improvements should be prioritized, and curb cuts should be minimized to improve street functionality.

Underutilized Banks

The vacant or underutilized banks on the downtown edge offer an opportunity for infill development, combining dense residential and commercial uses. The development should focus on minimizing curb cuts and incorporating quality landscaping.

6th Street Gateway

The sites at the gateway to 6th Street offer a similar opportunity to the catalyst site in the subarea. Developing a mix of housing types with well-planned designs, thoughtful landscaping, and effective access management would support the corridor's growth.

6th Street Shallow Lots

Implementing a road diet on 6th Street presents an opportunity for the underutilized shallow properties along the street. These properties could be converted into local commercial spaces, such as restaurants, convenience stores, or grocery stores, to serve the neighborhood better.

Catalyst Site

The Downtown Gateway Catalyst Site acts as a gateway to downtown Opelika, presenting a dual development strategy of residential and commercial uses. Commercial uses, including restaurants, bars, and boutique stores, will anchor the northern section along 2nd Avenue, between 11th and 10th Streets, with dedicated parking access. There will be multi-family residential units facing 1st Ave, complemented by rear parking and a green buffer separating them from commercial uses.

The intersection at 1st Avenue and Railroad Avenue should feature mixed use development that promotes a lively, walkable environment attracting a mix of residents, businesses, and visitors. Multifamily residences will expand across the 1st Avenue, featuring pedestrian-friendly access to encourage foot traffic towards a revitalized area. Additional housing will be situated on the west side of the site, with rear parking accessible from the 1st Avenue. The site will include alleys to promote pedestrian and bicycle mobility, along with open spaces for communal activities, integrating commercial and residential uses.

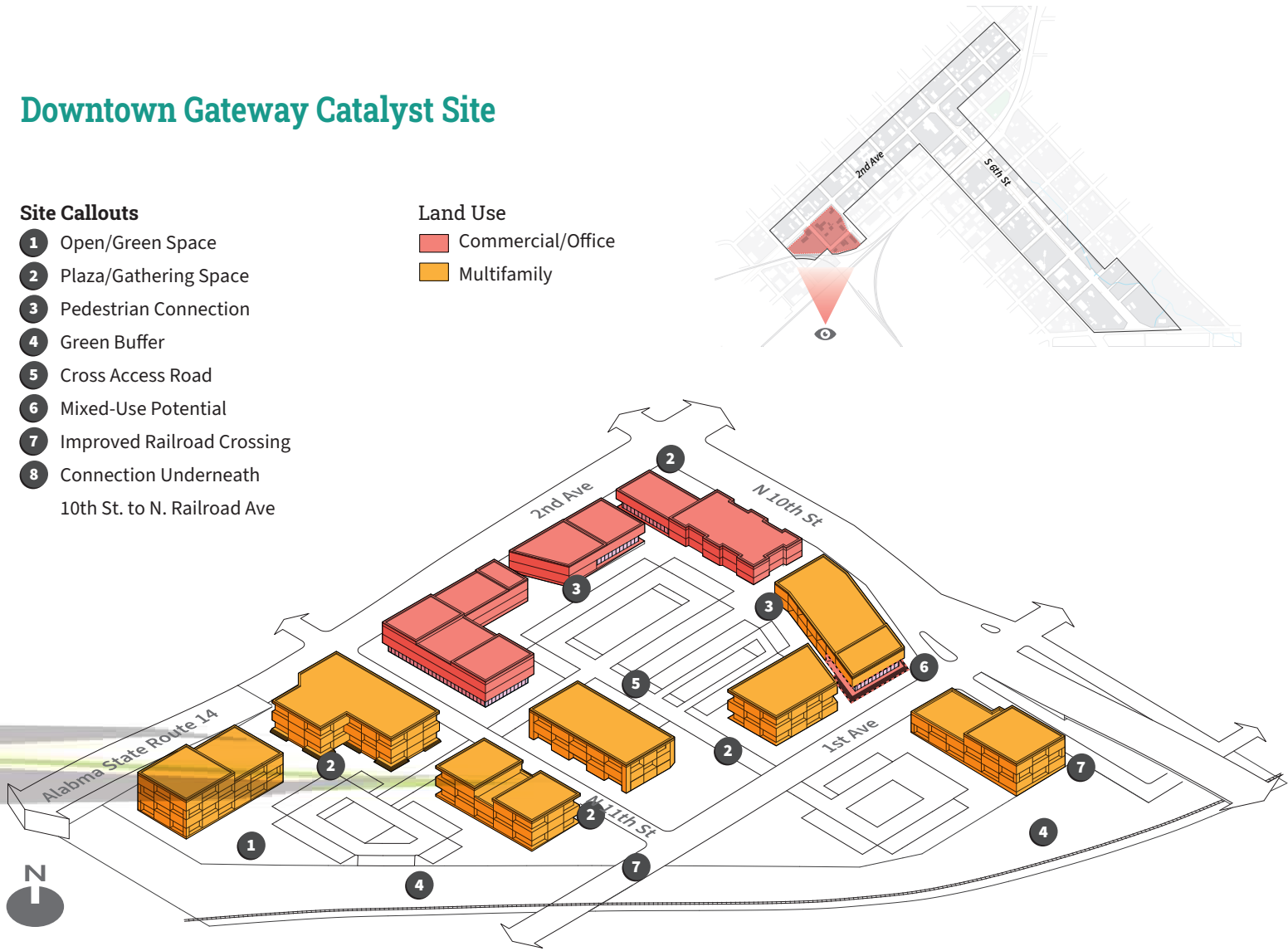
Downtown Gateway Catalyst Site

Site Callouts

- 1 Open/Green Space
- 2 Plaza/Gathering Space
- 3 Pedestrian Connection
- 4 Green Buffer
- 5 Cross Access Road
- 6 Mixed-Use Potential
- 7 Improved Railroad Crossing
- 8 Connection Underneath 10th St. to N. Railroad Ave

Land Use

- Commercial/Office
- Multifamily





Urban Design and Placemaking

Historic Landmarks and Community Assets

Historically or culturally significant structures or sites are recognized and preserved as historic landmarks. They benefit a city by attracting tourists, fostering a sense of identity and community pride, and contributing to economic development through cultural and heritage tourism. Additionally, they provide residents and visitors with information about the history and culture of the city. Several landmarks have been identified in the subarea as areas to preserve, and they can be repurposed for different uses without altering the existing structure.

Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding involves orienting oneself within an environment using signage, which includes visual elements like signs and symbols. It improves orientation, provides clear guidance, and assists individuals in efficiently navigating complex spaces, including cities, campuses, and buildings. Clear wayfinding signage can improve safety, reduce confusion, and create a smooth flow of people, thereby increasing accessibility and user-friendliness. The Downtown Edge would benefit from establishing design guidelines specifically tailored for wayfinding, signage placement, and directions leading to downtown.

Cross Access

A cross-access arrangement or agreement allows people or vehicles to move between two or more adjacent properties. Cross access will enable drivers to shift between developments without using the roadway. It improves accessibility by allowing shared pathways between neighboring properties, enhancing traffic flow, and reducing detours through public areas. This can increase interaction, simplify site access, and streamline space efficiency.

Parking Lot Improvement

A well-designed parking lot ensures easy and safe access for drivers while protecting pedestrians. However, poorly designed lots can be visually unappealing and negatively impact the environment. A practical solution to this problem is to incorporate buffering, where landscaping is used as a barrier between parking lots and other areas, reducing noise and visual impact. Moreover, screening with elements like trees and fences can obscure the view of parking lots, enhancing the overall look of the surroundings.

Utility Lines Burial

Utility line burial refers to the practice of placing power lines, telecommunication cables, or other utility infrastructure underground instead of having them overhead on poles. It offers aesthetic improvements by eliminating overhead wires, enhancing the overall visual appeal of an area. Furthermore, it can improve the reliability and safety of utility systems, reducing the chance of outages due to weather events. The Downtown Edge features prominent overhead utility lines along the thoroughfares that detract from its appearance and should be buried to improve the corridor's aesthetics.

Downtown Entry Points

Downtown entry points are specific points individuals enter a City's central business district or downtown area. A distinctive feature, signage, or architectural element often marks the transition from surrounding areas to the downtown core. The three main entry points into downtown Opelika, 8th Street, 10th Street, and Avenue A, are the prominent streets that lead into the heart of the city's commercial, cultural, and civic activities. The design and visibility of downtown entry points can contribute to the urban center's overall identity, aesthetic appeal, and welcoming atmosphere, as they are essential in guiding visitors to the downtown area.



Access and Mobility

Road Diet

A road diet reduces the number of vehicular lanes on the road, reallocating space for bicycle lanes, pedestrian areas, and green spaces to improve safety. The road segment on 6th Street is suitable for a road diet as it connects the Jeter community, churches, residential streets, and the town center. Existing sidewalks along South 6th Street are not wide enough between 2nd Avenue and Avenue D. Road diets would reduce traffic speeds, accommodate alternative transport modes, and foster healthier, more sustainable lifestyles in this community.

Sidewalk Extension

Extending sidewalks enhances community safety and accessibility, reducing accidents and encouraging physical activity. Identified streets in the downtown edge subarea would benefit from sidewalk extensions to improve walkability. Careful planning is essential to ensure pedestrian safety, foster community connections, and beautify the area with features like adequate lighting, greenery, and seating areas. A minimum width of 6 feet is preferred, with 5 feet meeting ADA standards.

Sidepaths

Sidepaths are reserved for pedestrians and cyclists and are located parallel to roadways. Using them on urban or rural collectors and arterials with an annual average daily traffic volume of more than 4,000 vehicles or speeds exceeding 40 mph is recommended. The width should be 8 to 12 feet, with a minimum 5-foot separation from the roadway, increasing as the speed and volume of traffic increase.

Bike Boulevard

Bike boulevards are designed to prioritize and enhance bicyclist safety and convenience by incorporating traffic calming measures and bike lanes. Avenue C and 8th Street are referred to as bike boulevards since they connect the Downtown Edge and neighborhood neighborhoods. The boulevards should be prioritized as they enhance cyclist safety, encourage sustainable transportation, and contribute to more bike-friendly urban environments.

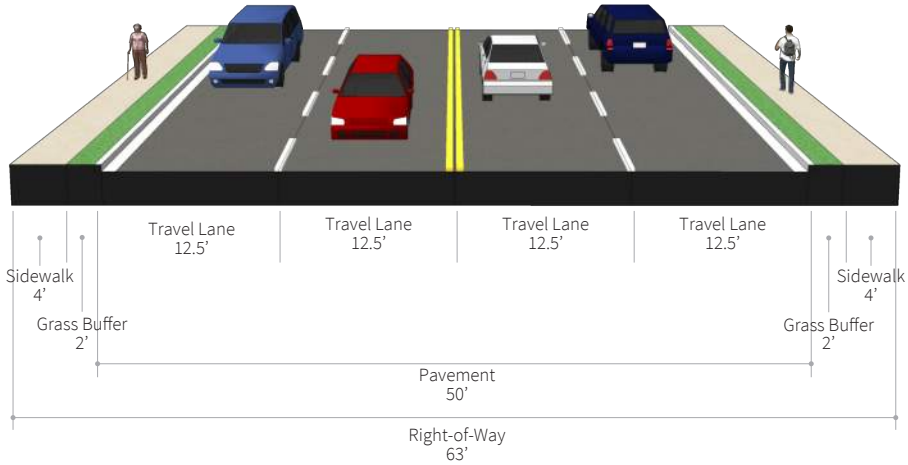
Bridge Improvements

Bridge improvement involves enhancing existing bridges, functionality, and safety, focusing on pedestrian facilities. The bridge has narrow sidewalks without barriers between pedestrians and traffic flow, making pedestrian comfort and safety difficult. Improvements may also include aesthetic upgrades such as decorative lighting and banners to complement the downtown area's design.

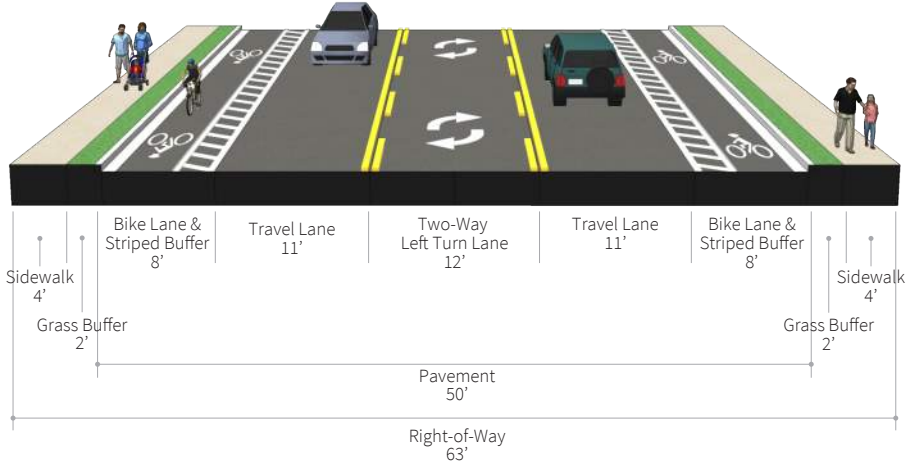
Pedestrian Crossing Improvement

Pedestrian crossing improvements involve enhancing the safety and accessibility of locations where pedestrians cross the streets. It can include marked crosswalks, pedestrian signals, and islands where people can stand safely. These changes help keep pedestrians safe by giving them clear and safe places to cross, reducing the chance of accidents and making walking easier in cities. The identified pedestrian improvements in the subarea should be prioritized for people's safety and for efficient traffic flow.

6th Street Typical Cross Section Existing



6th Street Typical Cross Section Proposed



4th Street and 6th street roadway cross sections illustrate proposed cross sections as depicted in the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2021)

South 6th Street Road Diet

South 6th Street, a local road linking 2nd Avenue and Columbus Parkway, is a prime candidate for a road diet due to moderate traffic and excess capacity. This 0.45-mile segment, important for access to the Jeter community, churches, residential areas, and the town center, currently has inadequate sidewalks between 2nd Avenue and Avenue D. The City's ADA Transition Plan aims to address this issue with improvements focusing on road diets and sidewalk expansion. Additionally, there are plans to introduce a series of roundabouts and side paths at Columbus Parkway's southern end.

4th Street Road Diet

4th Street, linking South Railroad Avenue with Columbus Parkway, is ideal for a road diet due to its low traffic volume and wide lanes. Spanning about 0.8 miles, this local street serves the Jeter community, including churches, a school, and residential areas. There are sidewalks, but they are poorly maintained and too narrow. According to the City's ADA Transition Plan, the City plans to resolve these issues by restriping the road diet and improving the sidewalks along the segment.

Highway 280 Corridor

280 Highway's lack of pedestrian pathways, minimal greenery, and excessive driveway entrances highlight the need for holistic development. It is intended to become a vibrant commercial area for dining, shopping, and leisure activities. There will be major retail outlets, renowned restaurant chains, automobile showrooms, and mixed-use residential spaces. The redevelopment will prioritize superior architectural quality and design standards. This will ensure that the corridor meets the community's commercial needs attractively and functionally.

Development Opportunities (see page 47)

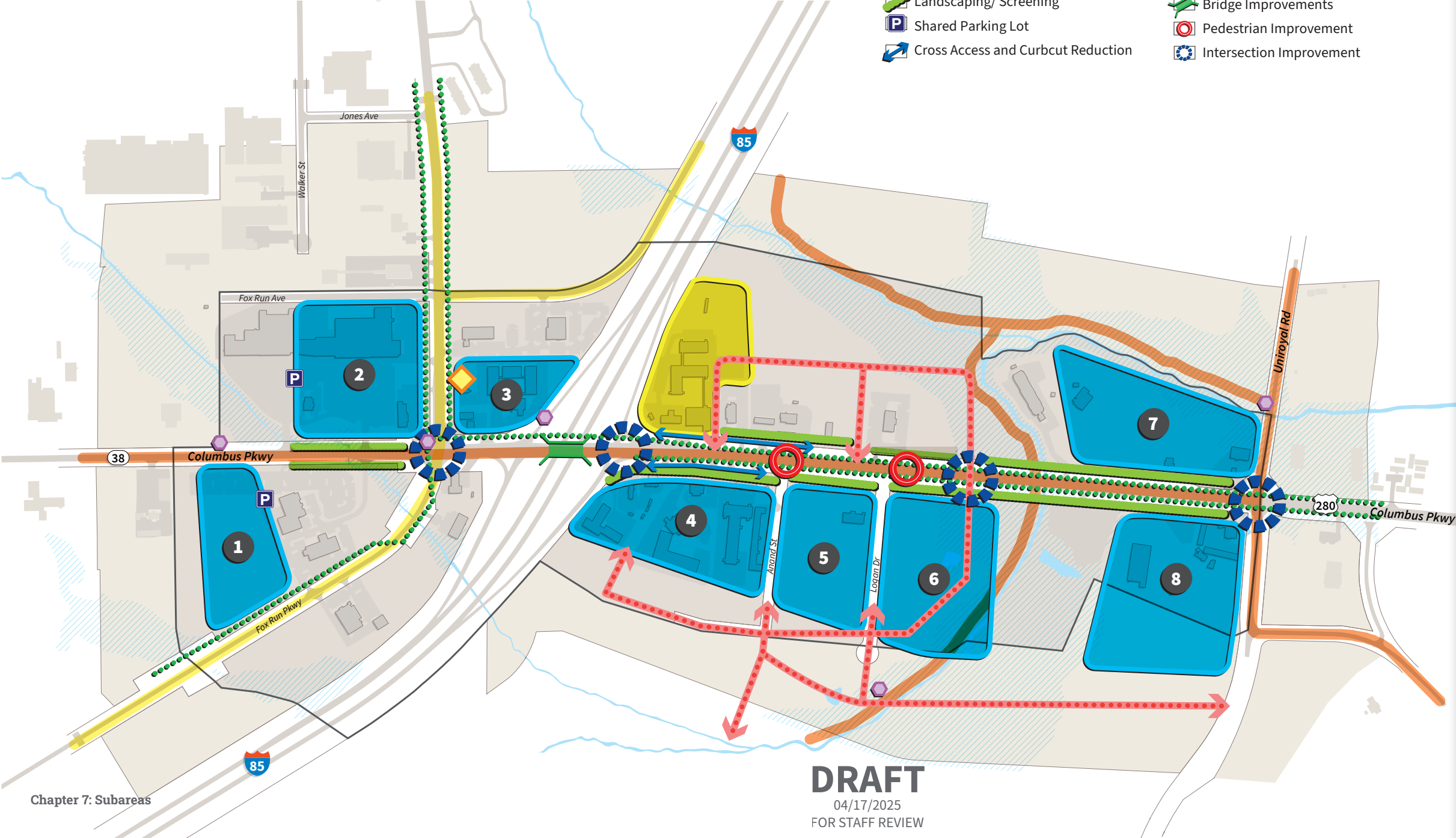
- Opportunity Site
- Catalyst Site

Urban Design and Placemaking (see page 48)

- Wayfinding Signage
- Utility Line Burial
- Billboard Removal
- Landscaping/ Screening
- Shared Parking Lot
- Cross Access and Curbcut Reduction

Access and Mobility (see page 49)

- New Roadway
- Sidewalk Extension
- Sidewalk/Trail
- Bridge Improvements
- Pedestrian Improvement
- Intersection Improvement



General Considerations

Create a Destination to Shop, Eat, and Play

Although there are a few places to shop and eat along the corridor, their quantity and quality are insufficient to stimulate activity or economic growth. To transform the area into a destination, the focus should be on improving the experience for people by prioritizing pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, encouraging a mix of retail and recreational spaces.

Revitalize the Corridor

280 Highway corridor currently has underutilized motels that require investment. These structures are isolated and have a negative impact on the corridor. The corridor lacks an anchor like a regional commercial center that would attract people to it for shopping and dining. To revitalize the corridor, incorporating sustainable practices and incorporating a variety of uses would be beneficial to create a lively environment.

Promote Transitional Uses

The 280 corridor serves as a vital link to downtown Opelika. Along the route, there are auto parts shops, a neighborhood commercial center, and chain restaurants, but the businesses lack a design theme. The focus should be on promoting transitional use through regulations and policies that permit a diverse mix of businesses and uses. At the node, regional commercial uses should transition into local commercial and mixed residential uses along the corridor.

Development Opportunities

1 Site 1

The site is adjacent to car dealerships, making it natural to provide auto dealership services at the site, which is located along Columbus Parkway and South Fox Run Parkway. Interconnected parking lots would add value, aligning with and enhancing the functionality.

2 Site 2

There are undeveloped lots on the site's front and too many entrances, which impacts traffic on Columbus Parkway. It may be beneficial to simplify the access through Fox Run Parkway. Due to the existing infrastructure, the site is ideal for big stores, national chains, and services. However, the large parking area needs more green buffers and landscaping.

3 Site 3

The site, currently featuring a rundown motel and surrounded by businesses like a hotel, shopping center, and restaurants would benefit most from redevelopment into a new hotel.

4 Site 4

280 Highway is surrounded by aging motels and gas stations that have merged into a prominent site at a key location, affecting traffic without street improvement. The city should focus on attracting retailers and entertainment venues to these sites and developing them similarly to the catalyst site.

5 Site 5

The commercial site should incorporate a national retailer with limited parking and landscaping buffers to capitalize on visibility and high traffic volume, maximizing its retail potential.

6 Site 6

To maximize this site's potential, restaurants and highway services should be prioritized along the frontage, while housing should be prioritized along the remaining portion. Additionally, floodplains are preserved as parklands for recreation and environmental enhancement.

7 Site 7

The site next to a motel, with varying terrain and floodplain areas, could be repurposed for local commercial. It is suited for local services like specialty food stores, daycares, and restaurants.

8 Site 8

The site at the intersection of Uniroyal Road should be developed into a local commercial facility on the frontage. The development should also include a variety of housing types while maintaining floodplains.

Catalyst Site

The proposed catalyst aligns with the Downtown development typologies. It features a commercial development along Columbus Parkway with a central parking lot between the development. Access to the development is through the planned side street beside the existing fast-food chain restaurant. Multifamily housing will start north of this road, transitioning from commercial to residential areas, with a suggestion for the road's brief extension to improve connectivity to residential parking. The site will include two parking lots on its east and west sides and a north-south pedestrian corridor to promote access to commercial spaces. An east-west corridor between commercial and residential areas will act as a buffer and activation zone. The north green space buffer addresses and protects the floodplain.

Catalyst Site Visualization

- Land Use
- Commercial/Office
 - Multifamily

- Site Callouts
- 1 Open/Green Space
 - 2 Plaza/Gathering Space
 - 3 Pedestrian Connection
 - 4 Green Buffer
 - 5 Cross Access Road
 - 6 Improved Streetscape
 - 7 Pedestrian Corridors





Urban Design and Placemaking

Wayfinding/Signages

Wayfinding involves orienting oneself within an environment using signage, which includes visual elements like signs and symbols. They improve orientation, provide clear guidance, and assist individuals in efficiently navigating complex spaces, including cities, campuses, and buildings.

Utility Line Burial

Utility line burial involves relocating overhead power lines and telecommunication cables underground, improving area aesthetics, and eliminating visible wires. Additionally, it can enhance the reliability and safety of utility systems, reducing the chance of outages due to weather events. Along the 280 Highway Corridor, where overhead lines are prominent, burying these lines during roadway projects could significantly improve the corridor's aesthetics.

Billboard Removals

Billboards contribute to visual clutter and distract drivers, leading to concerns about the safety and aesthetics of the area. Removing billboards along the corridor and near the intersection could enhance the City's visual quality and improve its character. The City should implement /update regulations about the density and size of billboards and encourage innovative solutions that can reduce the clutter in Columbus Parkway.

Landscaping /Screening

A well-maintained landscape enhances a commercial property's appeal and welcoming atmosphere, drawing in potential customers. Including diverse streetscape improvements creates a sense of place and an aesthetically pleasing character along a corridor. The corridor lacks sufficient landscaping, making it less attractive and inviting. The City should develop landscaping policies that enhance the corridor's visual appeal and create an inviting environment for residents and visitors

Shared Parking Lot

A shared parking lot refers to a parking area used collectively by multiple businesses and attractions. The City could optimize land use and reduce the overall amount of space dedicated to parking by allowing different users to share parking. This approach reduces parking space spread and makes destinations more accessible by improving land use efficiency.

Cross Access and Curb Cut Reduction

Curb cuts provide a transition between sidewalks and streets, typically for vehicle access to driveways or parking lots. Overusing curb cuts increases traffic congestion, reduces pedestrian safety, and creates a less attractive streetscape. To minimize excessive curb cuts, the City should collaborate with the concerned authority to repurpose existing curbs with side roads.

Façade Improvements

Façade Improvements refer to enhancements and renovations to the exterior appearance of a building. These improvements typically focus on front-facing elements like façade, entrance, and other exterior features. Several abandoned and underutilized buildings in the commercial center on the west side of the subarea. These improvements could significantly benefit the aesthetics, functionality, and overall visual appeal.

Siting and Articulation

Orienting buildings along the primary road promotes a consistent and pedestrian-friendly streetscape, enhancing the sense of place. It increases visibility and accessibility, attracting more potential consumers. The City can benefit from aligning buildings along main roads. Buildings positioned at important intersections should feature appealing, well-designed structures. They can also incorporate design elements that add variety to the front, making it visually attractive.

Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure refers to natural or nature-based solutions for managing water, improving air quality, and enhancing biodiversity. The city should utilize green infrastructure strategies to reduce flood risk, improve air and water quality, and develop a more resilient corridor.

Outlot Development

Outlot development refers to the commercial or retail development of parcels or lots adjacent to a large shopping center or retail development. Along the 280 Highway corridor, there are several out lots requiring development. The City should create design standards to guide the overall development and involve Property owners, developers, and real estate agents to attract new businesses.



Access and Mobility

Side Street

Side Street access refers to entering and exiting a development from a secondary street, typically adjacent to the main road. It is usually used for driveways, parking lots, and retail or residential development entrances. Using side streets improves the traffic flow and provides a dedicated development access point. There are several new side streets included in the framework which are advantageous because of the high traffic volume along the corridor. Incorporating side streets access could reduce congestion and disperse traffic more effectively.

Sidewalk Extension

Extending sidewalks enhances community safety and accessibility, reducing accidents and encouraging physical activity. Identified streets in the downtown edge subarea would benefit from sidewalk extensions to improve walkability. Careful planning is essential to ensure pedestrian safety, foster community connections, and beautify the area with features like adequate lighting, greenery, and seating areas. A minimum width of 6 feet is preferred, with 5 feet meeting ADA standards.

Side Paths/Trails

Side paths are shared-use paths that are located within a road's right-of-way. They are often used on higher-speed or high-volume roads with limited intersections or driveway access. These paths are wider to accommodate all non-motorized users. The corridor currently lacks sidewalks, and as the development occurs along it, the City should add side paths that will increase walkability.

Bridge Improvements Pedestrian Improvement

A pedestrian crossing is a defined area that allows pedestrians to cross the road safely. It is marked with painted lines and often with traffic signals or signs to ensure their safety. The crosswalks reduce the risk of accidents and promote orderly movement between pedestrians and vehicles. The 280 subarea has high traffic flows and no designated pedestrian crossings. The city should install crosswalks at intersections to facilitate pedestrian movement and improve safety.

Intersection Improvements

Intersection improvements aim to optimize traffic flow, enhance safety, and address congestion issues. There are over 22000 vehicles traveling along the 280 Highway corridor on an average daily basis, making it an area in need of improvements. The City should conduct a traffic analysis based on the corridor's traffic patterns and challenges, such as signal timing adjustments or lane expansions.

Traffic Calming Measures

Traffic Calming measures are used to reduce vehicle speeds, increase pedestrian visibility, and encourage drivers to yield to pedestrians at crossings. To better manage traffic on the corridor, the city should implement a traffic control system that adapts to the heavy traffic flow.

Smart Parking Solutions

Smart parking solutions detect real-time parking space availability, helping optimize on-street parking, parking garages, or surface parking lots. The future land use promotes corridor commercial use along the corridor, which could benefit from smart parking solutions. To avoid excessive parking requirements, the city should also prioritize the provision of shared parking lots between different uses.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Overview

A well-integrated network of quality transportation options for driving, biking, and walking is integral to the quality of life for residents and economic competitiveness for businesses. The Transportation and Mobility chapter focuses on improvements to Opelika's transportation system that can reduce inefficiencies and areas of congestion, provide missing linkages in the roadway network, increase the ease of walking and biking, and strengthen economic competitiveness through major arterial and highway access.

What's the Issue?

Creating a Connected System

With the fast-paced growth occurring in the region, and the City's population growth projected to increase by 25%, the City needs to ensure that transportation systems and infrastructure can accommodate this new growth. With an approximate 18,500 acres of vacant or undeveloped land, the City will need to work with ALDOT and other partners to ensure that new developments are adequately served to provide a seamless, efficient, connected system of roads and streets that enhances the community's character and safely moves traffic throughout the City.

Strengthening Multimodal Network

Though improving the vehicular transportation network is a priority, not all members of the community have access to a personal vehicle. Multimodal transportation options are crucial to creating an equitable transportation system. The subsequent recommendations establish a multimodal network for pedestrians and bicyclists to ensure residents have safe and convenient options to travel between their neighborhoods and throughout the City without a car.

Vehicular Transportation

Safe and efficient traffic circulation throughout the City is accomplished by maintaining a network that maximizes accessibility and minimizes conflicts. This section identifies the components of the City's existing system and provides recommendations for transportation improvements, transportation infrastructure and its relation to the growth strategy, traffic volume, road diets, and parking.

Functional Classification

All roadways in Opelika are classified according to a national system utilized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The classification establishes the function of each segment within the larger transportation network, and includes the following designations:

Interstate

Interstates are high-speed roadways that provide high levels of mobility but no direct land access. They connect activity centers, employment hubs, and other important destinations to one another, and prioritize regional efficiency and speed. Interstate 85 runs northeast to southwest through Opelika, part of a nationwide system of limited access, divided highways that links the major urban areas of the United States.

Principal Arterial

Principal arterials accommodate large volumes of traffic and provide less provisions for adjacent land access, includes limited traffic controls, and travel is intended to be at higher speeds and longer distances.

Minor Arterial

Minor arterials accommodate quickly moving, higher volumes of traffic. Adjacent land use access is common. They are typically continuous through the community and connect to other communities and principal arterials. Travel is intended to be at moderate speeds and for longer distances.

Major Collectors

Major collectors accommodate an even distribution of mobility and access. They may be continuous through the community and their function is to connect arterials to local roadways, and travel occurs at lower speeds and shorter distances than arterials.

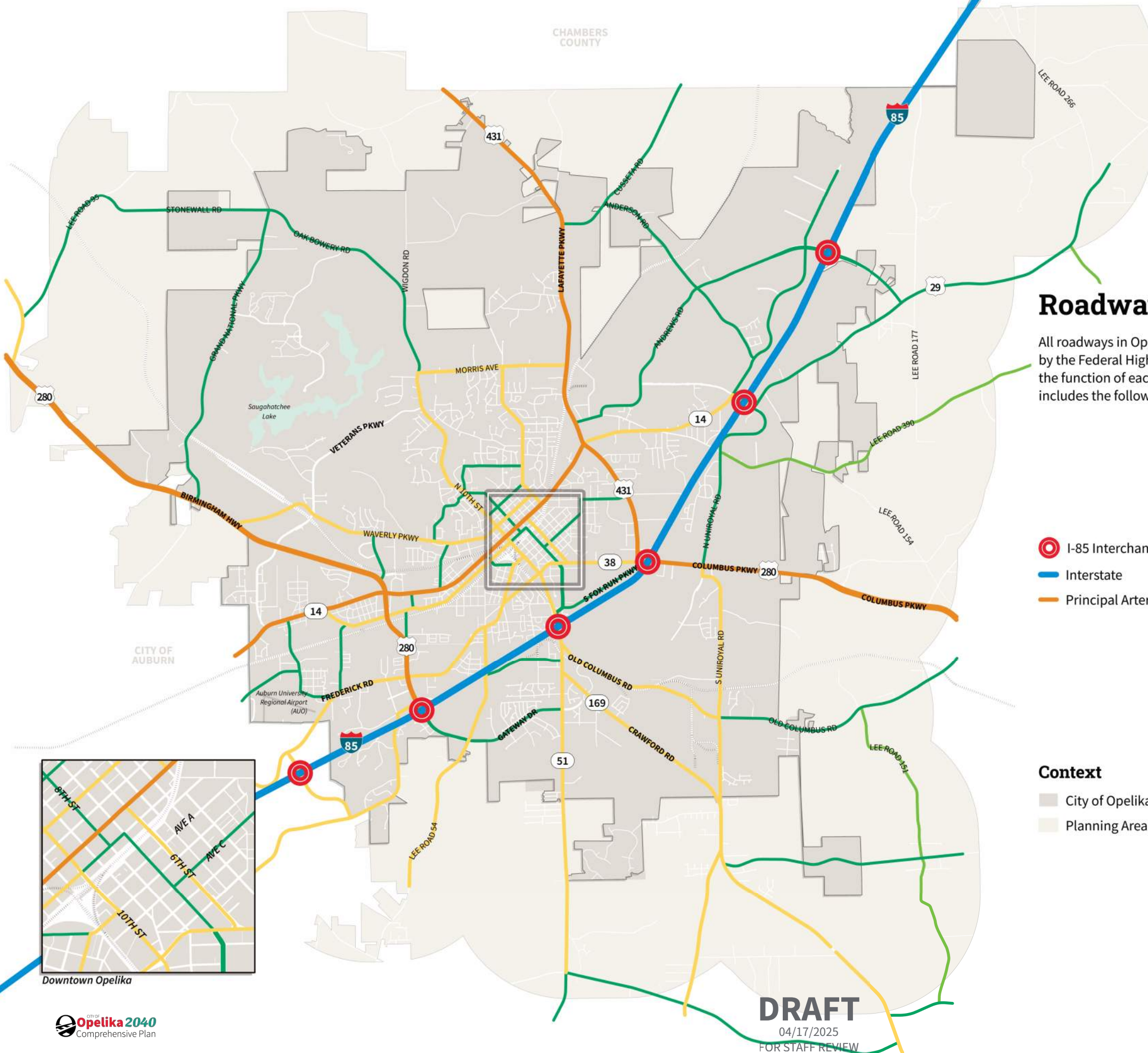
Minor Collectors

Minor collectors accommodate an even distribution of mobility and access. Their function is to provide service to any remaining population that is not served by a higher classified route, and they are designed with an emphasis on property access that mobility.

Local Roads

Local Roads accommodate local traffic with direct access to local land uses and are typically not continuous through the community. Travel speeds and volumes are low as there are few connections to the arterial roads.

City needs to ensure that transportation systems and infrastructure can accommodate new growth



Roadway Classification

All roadways in Opelika are classified according to a national system utilized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The classification establishes the function of each segment within the larger transportation network, and includes the following designations:

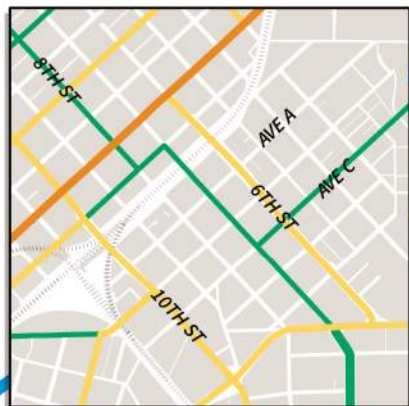
-  I-85 Interchange
-  Interstate
-  Principal Arterial

-  Minor Arterial
-  Major Collector
-  Minor Collector

Context

-  City of Opelika
-  Planning Area

-  Railroads
-  Saugahatchee Lake



Downtown Opelika



Transportation Improvements

The City should to ensure that land use development and transportation improvements are complementary to maintain connectivity throughout the City.

Several planned roadway infrastructure improvements have been identified in the City's 2016 Master Plan 2030 by ALDOT (Alabama Department of Transportation), and/or by the Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Planning Organization administered by the Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG). These new roadway connections, extensions, and improvements can enhance the development potential of properties. Parcels that were not previously accessible may gain access by new roadway connections or extensions. Additionally, roadway improvements may increase the amount of traffic flow which, in turn, may allow for denser development on adjacent and nearby properties.

Planned roadway improvements include the following:

- Replacement of the functionally obsolete bridges in Opelika along Interstate 85 at exit 60, a grant-funded project scheduled for completion by Spring 2024.
- Extension of Gateway Drive from Marvyn Parkway to intersect with Columbus Parkway at North Uniroyal Road.
- Extension of Veterans Parkway south from Pepperell Parkway to Frederick Road.
- Establishment of a northern bypass corridor between Anderson Road and the Northeast Opelika Industrial Park and Oak Bowery Road and the Grand National area.
- Roundabout at Sportsplex Pkwy and West Point Pkwy.
- Sportsplex Pkwy extension to Lafayette Pkwy.
- Access management roads around commercial properties east of Interstate 85 exit 62.

- Roundabout at Columbus Pkwy and 6th Street.
- Roundabout at Columbus Pkwy and 7th Street.
- Extension of Hi Pack Dr to Cunningham Drive and extension of Thomason Drive to Cunningham Dr.
- Roundabout at Gateway Drive and Marvyn Eastern bypass SR-169 to US 29.
- Construction of 4-lane boulevard Celebrate Alabama Spine Road and realignment of US 29.

The City should work with ALDOT and other related organizations to reference the annexation plan and growth plans established in Chapter 4 to prioritize roadway improvements. Opelika's planning area comprises about 38,000 acres of unincorporated land available for annexation and 49,000 acres of vacant or undeveloped land. This includes large areas of land on the City's periphery, positioned between Opelika and adjacent municipalities as well as numerous smaller unincorporated pockets. As these areas continue to develop and are annexed into the City, transportation improvements should coincide with future development to ensure that future residents and businesses are properly served by transportation infrastructure.

Work with ALDOT to improve connectivity and circulation across the City by implementing proposed roadway improvements. Throughout outreach, interviewees and workshop participants identified areas of congestion throughout the City and consistently mentioned issues with east-west traffic. Implementation of the proposed bypass corridors, and new connectors will improve east-west connectivity.

“
The community roundabouts
have been a great addition.”



Access Management

Maintain an efficient, safe circulation of the City’s roadways to establish a transportation network that maximizes vehicular and pedestrian accessibility while minimizing potential conflicts.

An efficient and safe access management system ensures that the location, spacing, design, and operation of driveways, median openings, interchanges, and street connections works together to create a cohesive network. Access management is a technique that can be used to control access points between adjacent land parcels and all manner of roadway types. The benefits of access management are that people enjoy a safer, faster, and a more predictable transportation system. The community also enjoys increased efficiency, more attractive corridors, and improved infrastructure for various modes like walking, cycling, and public transit.

Limit direct access to major roadways. To ensure safety and efficiency, minimizing direct access to major roadways can be highly effective. The Public Works Manual currently states that local circulation systems and land-development patterns shall not detract from the efficiency of bordering major streets. Strengthening this strategy can give the City some teeth to minimize conflict points between pedestrians and vehicles which improves traffic flow and enhances safety. Consolidating access points and providing internal cross access can further enhance vehicular circulation. Additionally, there is potential for the integration of cul-de-sacs with adjoining arterials via dedicated pedestrian and bicycle paths. This typically offers safe and convenient non-motorized access in areas where direct vehicular entry is restricted. In more residential areas maintaining direct connections to lower-speed local roads rather than high-volume state highways fosters pedestrian and bicycle activity.

Update subdivision regulations and the Public Works manual to require multiple points of access to minimize congestion and improve emergency access. Local access is key to connecting residents to the City. One way to increase connectivity is to ensure that new subdivisions have two points of access, two ways in and out. Typically, single access subdivisions create points of high traffic and congestion where they join the primary street network and are disconnected from other neighborhoods by roads that dead end at cul-des-sacs.

Having multiple points of access allows for a more contiguous street network and would remove these barriers. Roadways that provide these access points should also include sidewalks and bike lanes where appropriate to support multimodal transportation options in the City. Existing subdivisions should also be encouraged to find ways to expand points of access and open up connections to neighboring developments and subdivisions such as through stub roads or easements.

Traffic Volume

Plan upgrades and new infrastructure based on traffic volume to reduce the stress on existing systems.

Traffic volume is a key factor of roadway operations. Volume measurements are taken in a number of ways, one standard being Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT). The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) measures AADT throughout the state and regularly places several portable counters throughout Opelika. The data is collected and presented publicly on the ALDOT website to assist with planning for new areas, roadway improvements, and more. AADT varies based on roadway type and function. Opelika sees a lot of traffic passing through and traversing the City’s corridors, reflecting to the community’s many employment centers and shopping destinations.

Identify and upgrade streets that should be kept for moving cars most efficiently, and those that should be for targeted multimodal integration. The highest traffic volume within the City is along Interstate 85, with year 2020 counts ranging from approximately 36,500 north of Columbus Parkway to 51,000 vehicles near the Geneva Street intersection per day.

One of the City’s busiest intersections is Gateway Drive and Pepperell Parkway. In 2020, approximately 18,400 to 24,200 cars passed through the intersection on Gateway Drive daily, and approximately 19,900 to 21,000 traveled through the intersection on Pepperell Parkway. Where Pepperell Parkway becomes 2nd Avenue through Downtown, year 2020 counts range from 14,400 to 17,000.

“
Transportation in and around
Opelika needs work.”



Road Diets

Implement the proposed road diets listed in the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to increase safety and allow for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Road diets are typically a reduction of excess roadway capacity to a more streamlined, compact vehicular footprint with the purpose of creating a more complete street. Road diets allow for added bicycle and pedestrian facilities by adding streetscape infrastructure or restriping the existing pavement to open up space for bike lanes, sidewalks, center turn lanes, land scaped medians, pedestrian refuge islands, parking, and bulb outs.

Work with ALDOT and other organizations to implement the following road diets in accordance with the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The road diets identified in the plan are as follows:

- McCoy Street (Geneva Street to Columbus Parkway)
- Reduction in lanes from six to four
- Adding a 4' striped buffer on either side
- Adding two 6.5' bicycle lanes
- South 6th Street (Columbus Parkway to 2nd Avenue)
- Reduction in lanes from four to two with a two-way left turn lane
- Adding a 3' striped buffer on either side
- Adding two 5' bicycle lanes

- Installing new 5' sidewalk on both sides south of Avenue D
- South 4th Street (Columbus Parkway to South Railroad Avenue)
- Reduction in lane size from two, 14' lanes to two, 10' lanes
- Adding 4' bicycle lanes on either side
- Magnolia Street (Carver Avenue to Martin Luther King Boulevard)
- Reduction in lane size from two, 14' lanes to two, 10' lanes
- Adding 4' bicycle lanes on either side

Parking

Reassess parking standards, particularly in pivotal areas like commercial corridors and Downtown, with the aim of transitioning from rigid standards to a more adaptable and flexible approach.

In the Downtown, most streets offer parallel parking. Around the Courthouse Square, standard pull-in parking is available in parking lots off Avenue A and Avenue B. Diagonal parking is also provided on Avenue A, as well as in a lot between North and South Railroad Avenues from 8th Street to 9th Street. Outside of Downtown, Opelika's commercial areas predominantly provide surface parking located at the front of buildings and in large surface lots to accommodate regional commercial centers such as Tiger Town and Pepperell Corners. Many commercial developments with larger lots feature perimeter and internal landscaping, making commercial areas aesthetically appealing and positively impacting stormwater runoff.

The City should conduct a Downtown parking study to determine if the existing parking supply is sufficient based on projected growth. A detailed parking study would measure occupancy throughout the day, assessing the use and adequacy of existing parking in Downtown. Undertaking a targeted, parking study would inform policymakers on parking demand, give the community the opportunity to weigh in on issues specifically related to parking, provide a basis for wayfinding and parking management, and provide valuable insights to aid in managing congestion.

The City should consider outlot development within underutilized parking lots along the commercial corridors. The City should also consider establishing standards for outlot development that address the unique needs of these types of buildings, including the need for additional signage facing parking areas and rights-of-way, and the need to accommodate service areas while minimizing their visibility. Outlot development in underutilized parking areas helps maximize development potential while decreasing negative visual impact of surface lots within commercial development. Outlot development can also provide new opportunities for commercial development along built out corridors. By right-sizing parking requirements, it is likely that several areas will present opportunities for additional development.

Road Diets Best Practice

FHWA provides the following guidance on road diets for roads with varying ADTs:

Less than 10,000 ADT	A great candidate for road diets in most instances. Capacity will most likely not be affected.
10,000 – 15,000 ADT	A good candidate for road diets in many instances. Agencies should conduct intersection analyses and consider signal retiming in conjunction with implementation.
15,000 – 20,000 ADT	A good candidate for road diets in some instances; however, capacity may be affected depending on conditions. Agencies should conduct a corridor analysis.
Greater than 20,000 ADT	Agencies should complete a feasibility study to determine whether the location is a good candidate. Some agencies have had success with road diets at higher traffic volumes.

“Additional parking options need to be considered for the downtown area.”



Active Transportation

Active transportation refers to non-vehicular travel such as bicycling, skateboarding, running, jogging, or walking. Benefits of active transportation include a healthier population and reduced emissions resulting from fewer total vehicle miles traveled. The ability to easily participate in these activities is a quality-of-life measurement.

Multiuse bike/pedestrian trails and bikeways (on or off-street lanes) are usable for recreation and transportation purposes. The 2016 Master Plan 2030 called for bike trails throughout the City, including a mountain bike trail at Spring Villa Park. The Master Plan also recommended that pedestrian and bicycle facilities be analyzed and included in new roadway projects and installed on existing roadways.

“Sidewalks need massive improvements all around town. Bike lanes are needed everywhere too.”

Per the Opelika *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*, the City maintains approximately 216 centerline miles of roadway. Currently, 15 percent of City roadways include sidewalks, while just four percent include dedicated bicycle facilities. The *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* identifies roads that are suitable for cycling with existing paved shoulders, as well as the following existing marked bicycle facilities on Opelika roadways.

Pedestrian Network

The City should identify non-motorized connections between people and destinations and areas for increased connectivity of existing and planned facilities.

Sidewalks facilitate pedestrian connectivity and promote walking. They are part of the City’s public space, and a good network can contribute to activating both residential and commercial areas in the City. During outreach it was frequently cited that the community needed to add, extend, improve, or maintain sidewalks to support pedestrians in the community. The Public Works Manual states that sidewalks within the City should be a minimum width of four to six feet to meet ADA standards, but sidewalks of eight to ten feet are encouraged in areas with high pedestrian volumes, such as Downtown.

A complete list of City-wide sidewalk improvements is outlined in the *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* and include improvements resulting from road diets and shared use paths. Some of the high priority sidewalk improvements include segments along N Railroad Avenue from N 5th Street to N 6th Street, along Carver Avenue from South Street to Toomer Street, and along Avenue E from S 8th Street to Lee Street. In total, the *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* recommends 42.3 miles of additional pedestrian facilities.



Adopt a Complete Streets ordinance. The City should prepare and adopt a Complete Streets ordinance to expand its network of multimodal transportation routes throughout the community. “Complete Streets” is a transportation approach that ensures all future street projects consider the needs of all travelers, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. These policies require that as roadway projects are planned and new streets are constructed, consideration is given to safe, convenient, and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation. Throughout outreach, participants felt that pedestrian infrastructure needed to be included in all future developments. This could be achieved through this type of policy.

Bicycle Network

Establish a more complete network for bicyclists to allow for safe and convenient options to travel throughout the City without a car.

The mobility of bicycles is crucial to promoting healthier lifestyles and promoting active recreation and tourism. To better support alternatives to driving, the City should work to expand its bicycling network to create a cohesive system.

The City should build upon the recommendations outlined in the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as well as the Carver-Jeter Area Master Plan. The City of Opelika is actively trying to improve its bicycling infrastructure to ensure that its residents can move in and around the community without being restricted to a car. Outreach efforts pointed to cycling as an attractive form of recreation and transportation and that the City needed to continue to improve their existing bicycle network. The *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* highlighted several improvements and a prioritization and phasing procedure for implementing the recommendations. The plan recognizes that the immediate installation of non-motorized transportation facilities on every local roadway is cost prohibitive. The plan establishes priorities for potential facilities based on a weighted criteria in addition to a phasing methodology (based on the prioritization score, City staff input, mobilization, and engineering judgement) which breaks out potential projects into eights phases. In total, the Plan provides a proposed 88 miles of additional cycling infrastructure.



Cycling Infrastructure Types

Bike Boulevard

A bicycle boulevard is a low-stress shared roadway bicycle facility, designed to offer priority for bicyclists operating within a roadway shared with motor vehicle traffic.

Side Path

A side path is a bidirectional shared use path located immediately adjacent and parallel to a roadway. Side paths can offer a high-quality experience for users of all ages and abilities as compared to on-roadway facilities in heavy traffic environments, allow for reduced roadway crossing distances, and maintain rural and small-town community character.

Bike Lane

Bike lanes designate an exclusive space for bicyclists using pavement markings and optional signs. A bike lane is located directly adjacent to motor vehicle travel lanes and follows the same direction as motor vehicle traffic.

Paved Shoulder

Paved shoulders on the edge of roadways serve as a functional space for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel in the absence of other facilities with more separation.

Shared Use Path

A shared use path provides a travel area separate from motorized traffic for bicyclists, pedestrians, skaters, wheelchair users, joggers, and other users. Shared use paths can provide a low-stress experience for a variety of users using the network for transportation or recreation.

The City should prioritize bicycle infrastructure projects as they have the most potential to foster connectivity in the City. The City should prioritize the following projects based on the phasing methodology developed in the *Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* as they have the most potential to address gaps in the current network.

The City should implement the following feedback from League of American Bicyclists (LAB) to ensure that the next application results in a Bronze award. The City of Opelika has applied through the LAB to be certified Bike Friendly Community. The City has applied twice and still falls short of the Bronze award based on a few criteria. They are as follows:

- Adopt a Complete Streets policy with implementation guidance.
- Adopt a bike parking ordinance for new and existing buildings.
- Evaluate reducing speeds on community roadways or implementing traffic calming measures to optimize neighborhood greenways for biking.
- Host a League Cycling Instructor (LCI) seminar to increase the number of local LCI's and boost community education for cyclists and motorists.
- Organize a Bike to Workday event.
- Encourage more local businesses, agencies, and organizations to promote cycling to their employees and customers through the national Bicycle Friendly Business program.
- Encourage Southern Union State Community College to apply to the Bicycle Friendly University program.
- Create a bicycle count program for data collection, gauge facility use, and collect observational demographic counts to examine social equity goals.

Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Projects

Street	From	To	Facility Type
Veterans Pkwy	Pepperell Pkwy	Academy Dr	Shared Use Path
Frederick Rd	Gateway Dr	Long St	Road Diet (Sidepath)
McCoy St*	Columbus Pkwy	Geneva St	Bike Lane
Thomason Rd	1st Ave	Gateway Dr	Road Diet (Bike Lanes)
S 6th St*	2nd Ave	Columbus Pkwy	Road Diet (Bike Lanes)
S 4th St*	S Railroad Ave	Columbus Pkwy	Road Diet (Bike Lanes)
N Railroad Ave*	N 5th St	N 6th St	Sidewalk
Carver Ave	Toomer St	Clanton St	Shared Use Path
Carver Ave	South St	Toomer St	Sidewalk
Toomer St	W.E. Morton Ave	Carver Ave	Shared Use Path
Clanton St	Carver Ave	McCoy St	Shared Use Path
Ave E	S 8th St	Lee St	Sidewalk
Magnolia St	Martin Luther King Blvd	Carver Ave	Bike Lanes



Alternative Transportation

The City's current alternative transportation system is made up of several differing pieces. It includes a public transit system served by Lee-Russell Transit (LRPT), two active rail lines which run through the community, and the Auburn University Regional Airport, a regional asset, which sits within its southwest corner. The following sections provide recommendations to ensure that the City works in conjunction with these various alternative transportation entities to facilitate a well-served community.

Lee-Russell Public Transit

Work with Lee-Russell Public Transit to evaluate the availability of services currently offered to residents.

Opelika does not have a fixed-route transportation system. LRPT offers a dial-a-ride service. The service is provided on a first-come, first-served, space available basis. The number of trips that are available each day is based on designated time slots. LRPT provides curb to curb service that includes assisting passengers into the vehicle from the curb. The service is open to any member of the public who lives in Lee or Russell Counties. Fares are based on the service utilized and the distance traveled.

Coordinate with LRPT to study feasibility of offering fixed-route service. The Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Planning Organization 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan identified the need to improve existing dial-a-ride services to meet high demands. One option to increase reliability and demand is to offer fixed-route services. Partnering with other organizations such as Auburn University can lead to a more reliable public transit service.

Rail

Improve bike, pedestrian, and vehicular connections across railroads throughout the City.

Opelika's "Historic Railroad Town" image is reinforced by the fact that there are still two active rail lines in the heart of the community. The CSX Transportation Class 1 Railroad running on the A&WP Subdivision main line and the Norfolk Southern Corporation Class 1 Railroad running on the Georgia District branch line intersect west of Downtown just south of the 1st Avenue/North 10th Street intersection. CSX is the prominent railroad through Downtown, with tracks running parallel between North and South Railroad Streets. Both CSX and Norfolk Southern carry a variety of commodities throughout the state and are an important piece of the states economy.

Improve pedestrian signage and infrastructure at railroad crossings. Two examples of disconnected facilities at railroad crossings are 1st Avenue between 10th St and 11th St and Martin Luther King Boulevard just east of Clanton Street. Improvements to these intersections could include, warning device upgrades, more reflective crossbuck warning signs, yield signs, pedestrian gate skirts, and clearly marked sidewalks or shared-use paths across the railroad tracks.

Auburn University Regional Airport

Continue to work with the Auburn University Regional Airport to ensure employers and users of the airport have success.

Auburn University Regional Airport (AUO) is a public use airport located partially within Opelika limits in the southwest portion of the City, approximately three miles west of Interstate 85 near U.S. Highway 280/431. The airport is owned by Auburn University and is categorized in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems as a general aviation facility. Regional employers and users of the airport include Auburn University, Evans Realty, Eagle Budweiser, Capitol Vial, Great Southern Wood, Briggs & Stratton, FedEx, and the Alabama State Police.

Establish a joint vision for the Auburn Regional Airport with the City of Auburn and Auburn University. The City should work with the City of Auburn and Auburn University to ensure that any airport expansion is in-line with Opelika's established Land Use Plan. Establishing a collaborative vision for the airport is important to promoting economic growth, enhancing connectivity, efficiently using land, and establishing a stronger regional identity.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Overview

Community facilities and infrastructure significantly contribute to Opelika residents' overall quality of life. They include the facilities and services provided by government or non-government agencies for the community's benefit and use. These include educational facilities and providers, public safety agencies, social services, and critical water, power, and wastewater infrastructure. The condition, availability, reliability, and accessibility of these services and facilities are critical to Opelika's livability and economic vitality. Most community facilities are not under the purview of the City of Opelika. As such, collaboration and communication between the City and service providers, including utilities, and other government organizations, are vital to the community's overall success, ensuring Opelika continues to be well served as it grows. These recommendations and issues have been informed by the Community Facilities Survey, which provides a reflection of the community's needs and priorities.

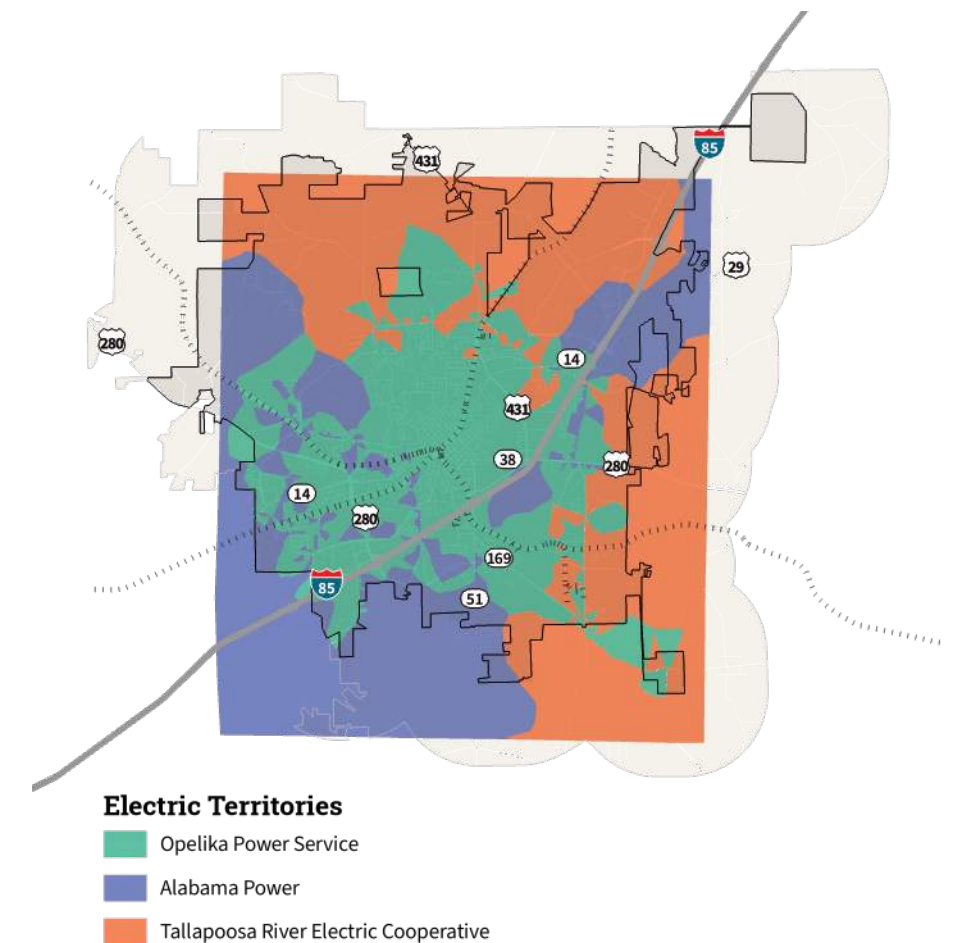
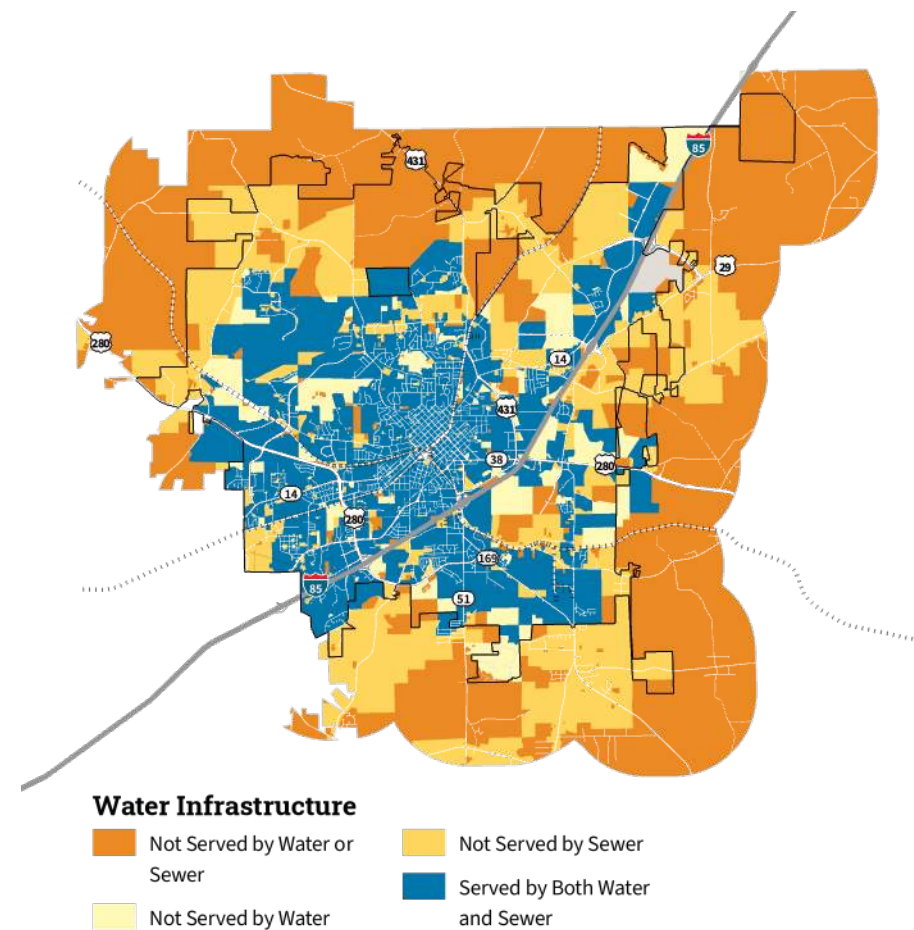
What's the Issue?

Aging Infrastructure and Inadequate Coverage

Opelika faces challenges maintaining reliable infrastructure networks essential for its growth. Collaboration with local utilities and service providers ensures efficient water delivery, sanitary sewer, stormwater drainage, power, and telecommunication services. To ensure the city's sustainability and resilience, these networks must be adapted to meet current and future demand.

Quality, Reliable Infrastructure Requires Collaboration

Public facilities in Opelika, including essential services such as public safety, education, healthcare, and libraries, require ongoing maintenance and enhancement. Partnerships with service providers and community organizations are necessary for these facilities to serve the community's growing needs adequately.



“Infrastructure arrangement is key in determining the character and sense of place.”



Government and Administration

City Governance

The city should enhance community and public awareness programs.

The City of Opelika follows a Mayor-Council form of governance. The Mayor and five City Council members serve four-year terms. The Mayor is elected at large, and each Council member is elected for one of the five wards established in the City which can be seen on the Voting Wards map . The Opelika City Administrator is responsible for the supervision of the City’s daily operations, reporting directly to the Mayor concerning budgetary matters as they affect the day-to-day functions of the City’s department heads. As part of this governance structure, Opelika is committed to fostering a dynamic and participatory relationship between citizens and the government.

Enhance community and public awareness. To enhance community involvement in City governance, the City should develop and implement comprehensive civic engagement and public awareness programs. These initiatives could include regular community forums, workshops, and town hall meetings that allow residents to interact with City officials and council members. Additionally, the City should utilize digital platforms and social media to increase accessibility and reach broader audiences. This will promote accountability, encourage community participation in decision-making, and strengthen the community and government bond.

Chamber of Commerce

The City should strengthen economic development and support local business. The Opelika Chamber of Commerce was established in 1910 to spearhead economic development and promote the commercial, industrial, agricultural, and civic interests of the City of Opelika and the surrounding area. The Chamber originally supported local businesses like Pepperell Manufacturing and U.S. Rubber’s Southern Tire Manufacturing. Today, the Chamber supports over 240 events, provides programs advertising opportunities, and offers regular seminars on topics such as marketing, employment law, social media, international protocol, and Small Business Administration loans. The Chamber has five staff members.

The City should strengthen economic development and support for local business. The Opelika Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the Opelika Economic Development Department and Industrial Development Authority, should further strengthen its economic development strategies focused on supporting local businesses, attracting new investors, and encouraging entrepreneurship. This could involve creating business incubators, offering incentives to small businesses, and organizing trade and business fairs. Additionally, providing training and resources on emerging business trends and marketing can help local businesses adapt and thrive in the changing economic landscape.

Community Resources

Public Library

The city should work with the library to encourage more utilization of the facility. The City of Opelika recently constructed a new library located at 1100 Glen Street. The library offers a wealth of resources besides books, including audio materials, computer labs, internet access, and space and programming for children and young adults. The new building provides additional community and meeting spaces including the Lewis Cooper Jr. Auditorium, which is capable of seating up to 250 people. A library is often one of the only spaces in a city where residents can spend time and find entertainment and enrichment without spending money. As such, libraries are unique assets that can be utilized to strengthen a community.

To maximize the utility and impact of the new public library, the library should continue offering various programs and services that cater to all age groups and interests. These may include hosting workshops, educational courses, speaker series, museum exhibits, and cultural events in collaboration with local schools, government offices, and other community groups. Additionally, it should explore ways to leverage the Lewis Cooper Jr Auditorium as a venue for local events, lectures, and community gatherings to boost library foot traffic and strengthen its role as a community engagement, cultural exchange, and learning center.

As the City grows and library usage continues to increase, the library should examine other ways to further their mission without having to travel to the main library. This could include placing book vending machines or pickup locations at other city facilities or partner organizations.

Preserve historical records. The city should work with the library to create an archive to catalog and centralize all of the City’s historical records.



Public Safety

Law Enforcement

The Opelika Police Department serves the City of Opelika. The department has 92 sworn officers with about 25 support staff employees. The department receives and average of about 50,000 service calls per year. The Police Department has four divisions: Patrol, Detective, Administration, and Community Relations. Response times vary depending on the type of call and required response however, the department has noted that traffic congestion is a potential issue affecting response times. The department is taking an active role in strengthening its relationship with the community. The Police Department supports many community programs, including the Citizen's Police Academy which aims to educate adults 18 years or older on various aspects of police work within the City.

The department should expand its community policing efforts. Build on the success of the “Together, Opelika” campaign by expanding community policing efforts. The City should collaborate with the police department to identify and focus resources on the areas of the community that face greater risks or threats to public safety. This could include increasing patrols, community policing initiatives, and safety awareness campaigns tailored to these areas. Additionally, collaborating with local organizations to develop community specific safety plans can be beneficial.

The department should work with the public works to improve traffic management systems. The City should implement advanced traffic management systems to address the issue of traffic congestion affecting response times. These systems can include traffic signal preemption for emergency vehicles, which allows them to navigate through intersections more quickly and safely.

Fire Protection

The Opelika Fire Department serves an area of 60 square miles and operates four firehouses, providing emergency and public safety response services for the City. The Opelike Fire Department consists of over 70 state-certified Firefighters and Nationally Registered Emergency Medical Technicians. The Fire Department provides community outreach services such as smoke detector installations, fire extinguisher training, CPR classes, school and company fire safety presentations, and station tours.

The City should budget and plan for necessary equipment and technology upgrades. The City should continue to ensure that both the Police and Fire Department are equipped with the latest technology and equipment. This includes modern vehicles, communication systems, and data analytics tools for predicting and responding to emergencies for the police department. Similarly, the fire department should include high-tech fire trucks, advanced life support equipment for paramedics, and modern protective gear for firefighters. Additionally, regular training in the use of this equipment should also be provided to maintain a high level of readiness.

The City has recently updated much of its Fire fleet and constructed a new Fire Station to meet continued growth. As the city continues to grow, additional stations, especially to the east may be necessary. Additionally, Fire Stations 2 and 4 may need to be renovated or relocated to continue to meet future needs.

The Department should maintain and expand its public safety education efforts. The City should continue to expand their comprehensive training working with Alabama Fire College in fire safety, first aid, and emergency preparedness in public safety education programs.

The City should promote collaborative partnership across its departments. The City should continue to foster a collaborative approach to public safety by working closely with other departments, neighboring jurisdictions, and community groups. This collaboration can include sharing resources and joint training exercises for a unified response to larger scale emergencies.

Together, Opelika

The “Together, Opelika” campaign is an initiative to build trust and relationships with residents.

We Serve You
Because Together,
WE ARE OPELIKA.

OPELIKA
POLICE DEPARTMENT



Health Care and Community Services

The City should work with the healthcare providers to improve services and improve healthcare facilities.

East Alabama Medical Center

East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC) is a regional referral hospital serves an 11-county area in east Alabama, is licensed for 314 general, acute care beds and houses a 26-bed skilled nursing facility. EAMC is a comprehensive hospital offering various services, from cancer and emergency care to heart, maternity, mental health, and neonatal intensive care. Additionally, the hospital specializes in neurology, orthopedics, pediatrics, primary and preventative health, rehabilitation, senior care, sleep medicine, surgery, women’s health, and wound care. The hospital also offers educational programming to train and educate residents and support the community.

Neighborhood Mobile Clinic

Opelika Neighborhood Mobile Clinic is a traveling clinic that provides free medical services to under-served populations such as primary and preventative healthcare and routine and chronic illness screenings.

Continue to with EAMC and other local healthcare facilities. To improve the integration of healthcare services, the City should continue to work with EAMC and other local healthcare facilities. This could focus on facilitating patient referrals, sharing medical resources and coordinating public health initiatives. It will reduce service overlaps and provide a comprehensive approach to addressing health needs.

Expand mobile clinic services to improve healthcare accessibility. To enhance healthcare accessibility for underserved communities, the City should partner with the clinic to increase the reach and its frequency. This can be achieved by adding more mobile units, extending operating hours, and covering a wider range of services, such as dental care and mental health screenings. Forming partnerships with local organizations and businesses will offer further support, ensuring these mobile clinics are well-equipped to meet the community’s healthcare needs.

Partner with educational institutions to train healthcare workers. Academic learning must be aligned with industry requirements through partnerships between local employers and educational institutions. Collaborating with universities and colleges to create healthcare training programs will ensure a constant supply of qualified healthcare professionals. The City should establish partnerships with local universities and colleges to develop healthcare training programs to help ensure that there is a steady supply of well-trained healthcare professionals in the community. This may also include internships and practical training opportunities at medical facilities in the area.

Work with health providers to launch health awareness programs. Health Education and Awareness Programs focus on educating the public about health-related topics, including nutrition, lifestyle choices, and prevention, to improve overall health outcomes in the community. The City should develop and implement comprehensive health education and awareness programs within the community. These programs can be delivered through schools, community centers, online platforms, and public campaigns. Health and wellness education can improve public health outcomes and reduce the burden on local health systems.



Education

The city should collaborate with the school district to expand the infrastructure for education and to implement initiatives to support students and teachers. A wide range of educational opportunities is available in the City, ranging from preschool to community college, ensuring that students have a comprehensive learning experience. Over the years, the number of students enrolled in schools has remained stable across all grades, reflecting consistent participation in educational programs. The Opelika City Schools, which oversees public education, accommodate most of the community’s students, reflecting the community’s strong reliance on public education.

Continue to invest in pre-K. The city should continue to invest in pre-K expanding the program to make it available to all 4 year olds within the city. Opelika City Schools has been a leader in the State of Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program. Now in its fifth year, the program has six classes housed at Opelika High School. Citywide there are a total of 16 classes either through OCS or other institutions.

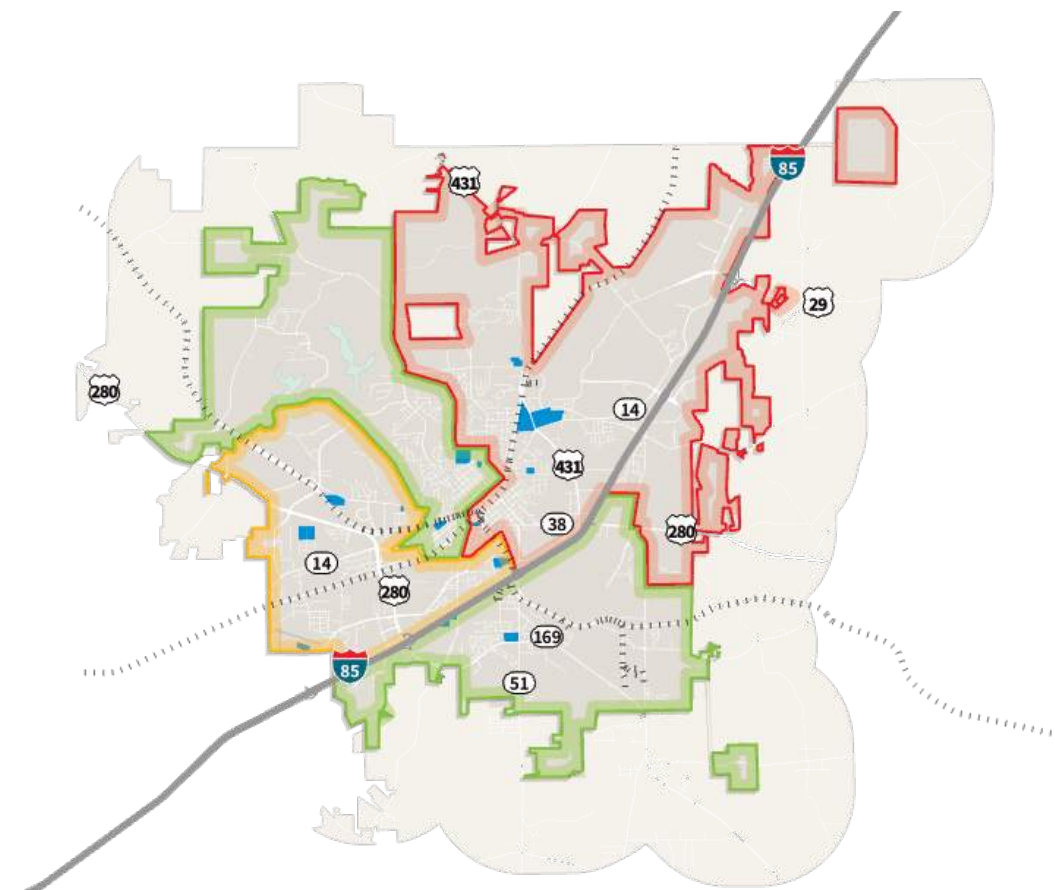
Opelika City Schools

Opelika City Schools is the public school district for the City of Opelika. Opelika City Schools serves about 5,000 students on nine campuses. The district operates three elementary schools, three intermediate schools, one 6th grad academy, one middle school, and one high school. The district also operates the Opelika Learning Center which provides programs for at-risk students.

Work with the school district to implement initiatives to support student from all backgrounds. To support its diverse student body, the Opelika school district should launch initiatives specifically designed for low-income and minority students. This includes tutoring, counseling, and after-school programs which are key to enhancing educational outcomes. Additionally, ensuring equitable access to technology and the internet at home is essential. Specifically, a growing segment of the student body may not come from homes where English is the primary language. Supporting and engaging these students and their families both improves educational and community wide outcomes.

Expand educational infrastructure. Workshop participants stressed that schools in the area are currently operating at capacity, indicating a need for infrastructure improvements. The school system has seen tremendous growth over the last decade growing by almost 20%. This has created the need to build new facilities. This growth is likely to continue over the next 10 years. The City needs a plan to strategically enlarge educational facilities, including adding classrooms and improving existing buildings, to support a growing student body. This expansion should focus on adding classrooms and enhancing the existing infrastructure to provide a conducive learning environment for a larger student body. In addition, new schools should be built in areas with significant population growth based on the future land use plan. This will ensure that the education system remains robust and responsive to community needs.

“
Strategic plans should include programs and services to address the now significant portion of the population that is opting out of public education.”



School Districts

- Carver Primary / West Forest Intermediate
- Jeter Primary / Morris Avenue Intermediate
- Southview Primary / Northside Intermediate

Work with the school district to develop strategies for teacher recruitment and retention. Opelika Schools need to implement comprehensive teacher recruitment and retention strategies to address the teacher shortage. This could include offering competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, mentorship programs for new teachers, as well as incentives targeted at teachers from underserved areas.

Collaborate with the school district to integrate technology into schools to adapt to the digital age. To stay aligned with the digital age's demands, the City should collaborate with schools to weave technology throughout the curriculum. This effort should focus on granting students access to digital learning tools, online resources, and interactive software. Furthermore, it's critical to roll out teacher training programs, ensuring that educators are proficient to use these technologies effectively.

Work with school districts to help identify potential facility locations. The school system has seen tremendous growth over the last decade growing by almost 20%. This has created the need to build new facilities. This growth is likely to continue over the next 10 years.

Southern Union State Community College

The City should foster partnerships with local businesses and industries for Educational Programs. The Southern Union State Community College (SUSCC) is a public community college located in Wadley, Alabama with a branch campus in Opelika at 301 Lake Condry Road. Academic programs at the community college emphasize practical application, technical programs emphasize career competencies, and health sciences programs emphasize specialized training in the health care industry. Additionally, SUSCC offers dual enrollment, which enables high school students to earn credits toward both their high school diploma and college degree.

Promote partnership for Educational Programs. Partnering with local businesses and industries can facilitate the development of specialized educational programs that meet the needs of the local labor market. Partnerships with these organizations may facilitate internships, mentorship programs, and curriculum development that focuses on practical, real-world skills. These initiatives would provide students with valuable work experience, as well as strengthen the economy and workforce of the City.

The City should partner with SUSCC to build the necessary infrastructure that would allow the community college to add a residential program. The Opelika campus is one of the largest community colleges in the state without a residential program. Additional student housing closer to the downtown area would also strengthen the economic outlook for Opelika.

ASCEND –Advanced Manufacturing Career Training

ASCEND is a non-credit SUSCC program offered at no cost to the participant that prepares people to enter the workforce. ASCEND makes participants a “preferred candidate” with local industry partners. The program helps improve skills, making candidates preferred for full-time employment in a long-term career. Opelika partners include Briggs and Stratton, Golden State Foods, Mando, Pharmavite, and more.



Utilities

Water Services

The City should continue to prioritize upgrades, extend its water system and improve watershed management practices.

Water services refer to the provision of a safe and adequate water supply in Opelika, meaning that when residents and businesses turn on the faucet, clean and drinkable water is distributed every time. It also means that adequate water pressure is maintained for fire protection. The Opelika Utilities Board operates the water system for the City of Opelika. Opelika Utilities has two treatment plants, one of which is located within the City. These two facilities are the Saugahatchee Water Treatment Plan and the Betts Water Treatment Plan. Combined, the treatment plants have a capacity of 24 million gallons per day (MGD). The Opelika Utilities water system has more than three times the capacity of the current demand of seven million gallons per day.

Upcoming Projects

Opelika Utilities has several water services projects under construction within City of Opelika rights-of-way. Locations for some of these improvement projects include Grand National Parkway, 10th Street, 6th Avenue Area, and Brannon Avenue Area.

Prioritize and fund upgrades for aging water infrastructure. According to the previous comprehensive plan, 60% of Opelika’s water facilities are over 50 years old, which requires significant investments for replacement and rehabilitation. To ensure a reliable and safe water supply, the City should conduct a comprehensive evaluation to prioritize the most critical infrastructure needs. Additionally, the City should allocate appropriate funds for upgrading and modernizing these facilities to ensure they meet current standards and can efficiently meet the community’s future needs.

Continue to work with the utilities board extend the water system. While Opelika’s current water demand is well within the capacity of the existing treatment plants, the city must take proactive measures to ensure that its infrastructure can handle the coming growth. The City should work closely with the Utilities Board to assess future water needs and develop a strategic plan for expanding existing facilities or constructing new facilities to accommodate the growing population and prevent potential shortages.

Water pressure is also a concern in some areas. As the city continues to grow, properties in higher elevations are increasingly harder to provide adequate water pressure due to the elevation of current water tanks.

Implement and regularly review the water pricing structure. During the outreach phase for the plan, members from the utility board indicated that the water pricing rates are among the highest in the state. To address this, the City could follow a tiered pricing structure by distributing costs more equitably among different user groups. Tiered pricing can be used as a tool for water conservation where the cost per gallon of water increases as usage exceeds certain thresholds. This encourages consumers to use water more efficiently, since higher consumption would result in higher charges. To ensure the pricing structure remains fair and effective, the utility board in Opelika should make it a regular practice to review consumption patterns, operational costs, and customer feedback. Consequently, the tiered pricing rates should be adjusted to reflect the true cost of water provision and encourage conservation efforts.

Improve watershed management practices. Watershed management is essential to ensuring the sustainability of Opelika’s water supply. Surface and ground water quality is impacted by stormwater runoff and potential contaminants entering watersheds. To maintain water quality, the City should not only follow but also update the comprehensive strategies delineated in the current Watershed Protection Plan. This effort should encompass the implementation of water quality monitoring, establishment of protective regulations incorporating Best Management Practices, and the expansion of watershed monitoring initiatives. For detailed strategies on watershed management, please refer to the Parks and Open Spaces chapter on page 71.



Sanitary Sewer Services

Continue to work towards expanding the capacity and modernize the sewer infrastructure. Opelika’s sanitary sewer services are operated by the City of Opelika’s Wastewater Division of the Public Work Department. The primary duties of the Wastewater Division are to maintain Opelika’s 251 miles of sewer lines, construct new connections, and install new sewer line extensions. The City operates two wastewater treatment plants and 25 lift stations. Flow is the amount of wastewater flowing by a particular point over some specified time, and the two wastewater treatment plants report flow in terms of millions of gallons per day (MGD). The Westside Wastewater Treatment Plant was opened in 1984 and has a capacity of 4.0 MGD. The Eastside Wastewater Treatment Plant was constructed in 2006 and has a capacity of 5.0 MGD.

Servicing Future Growth. Land areas with sanitary sewer access are more conducive to higher intensity uses and developments than land areas without sewer access, assuming other conditions are right for such uses or developments. The 2016 Master Plan notes that both wastewater treatment plants can be expanded to meet future growth needs.

A sanitary sewer master plan should be performed to ensure there is both adequate capacity and access to areas that the city wished to prioritize for development. Specific, analysis should be examined to reduce the dependence on lift stations.

Work towards expanding Wastewater Treatment Capacity. Expanding the capacities of the Westside and Eastside Wastewater Treatment Plants is essential to support future growth and ensure the infrastructure can handle increased wastewater needs from new developments. To accommodate anticipated growth and ensure environmental sustainability, the City should expand wastewater treatment capacity in accordance with the 2016 Master Plan. The strategic expansion could include upgrading existing facilities and constructing new ones, ensuring Opelika is able to surpass its current treatment capacity of 9.0 MGD.

Assess and modernize aging sewer infrastructure to enhance efficiency and reliability. Investing in modernizing the existing aging sewer infrastructure is essential to reducing failures and improve efficiency. The City should conduct an assessment to identify areas needing urgent updates, followed by a phased modernization plan to prioritize critical sections for future expansion. Furthermore, the City must develop a comprehensive sewer plan in close cooperation with all stakeholders to ensure seamless integration of new developments with existing sewer infrastructure.

Electric Utility Providers

The city should continue to provide low-cost, reliable electric power while exploring renewable energy sources.

Opelika Power Services (OPS), Alabama Power, and Tallapoosa River Electric Cooperative (TREC) provide electric service within the City of Opelika and its planning area. OPS is owned and operated by the City of Opelika and supplies electricity to more than 31% residents and businesses. Alabama Power and TREC each serve an equal share of the community, providing electricity to 34.16% of the residents. This diversified electricity supply framework ensures that Opelika and its planning area have access to reliable and efficient energy services.

Continue to provide an adequate supply of low cost and reliable electric power. To maintain its competitive edge and foster growth, the City of Opelika should prioritize investments in energy infrastructure, adopt renewable energy sources, and implement energy efficiency measures. These steps will ensure a continuous supply of low-cost and reliable electric power, essential for attracting new businesses and supporting economic development.

Create a comprehensive and proactive approach to renewable energy development. The City should transition to renewable energy to enhance sustainability and economic resilience. This involves diversifying the energy mix, particularly if reliant on coal, by investing in solar panels for public buildings, offering residential solar rebates, and exploring large-scale renewable projects. Additionally, adopting energy conservation measures like LED lighting, improved insulation, and smart meters can reduce costs and enhance city resilience, essential when current energy sources are costly or harmful.

Broadband

The City should continue to improve broadband infrastructure by working with broadband providers. Broadband service is provided to Opelika residents and businesses by Point Broadband through a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network. FTTP network refers to the installation of optical fiber directly to an individual building, increasing connection speeds and reliability. Point Broadband reports that its network can support speeds up to 1,000 megabits per second (Mbps). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines high-speed internet/broadband as having a minimum download speed of 25 Mbps. According to the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), much of the City and its planning area is meeting the criteria, as shown on the Broadband Coverage map.

Maintain and improve broadband infrastructure working with Point Broadband and Opelika Power Services. The provision of broadband infrastructure is critical for the development of the City, as it fosters professional opportunities, education, workforce development, and supports businesses through equitable access to digital services. In cooperation with broadband providers, the city should review the regulatory processes for expanding the existing fiber network in underserved areas while balancing the potential aesthetic impacts. Additionally, future development and improvements should include additional capacity to ensure scalability and accommodate growing needs.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Overview

Opelika residents enjoy access to 450 acres of parkland and numerous open space areas that provide opportunities for recreation and interaction with nature. Residents and tourists cited Opelika’s parks as a notable asset in the public outreach process. Protecting and expanding the current system of parks and natural areas allows Opelika residents to enjoy various recreational activities, connect with the natural environment, and lead healthier, happier lives.

The Parks and Open Space chapter provides an inventory and analysis of Opelika’s parks and open space areas. It considers current and future population needs, providing recommendations to guide preservation, maintenance, and future growth.

What is the Issue?

Opelika residents benefit from parks and open spaces that exceed the standards for the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Even with a projected increase of 10,000 people by 2040, the current parkland leaves the City with an excess of almost 70 acres. However, parkland is not evenly distributed and not all residents have the same access to parks. New growth areas need to be adequately served by parks. To meet park standards for all residents, the City must address gaps and underserved regions.

Policies and Recommendations

Parks and Recreation

The City should expand the City’s network of parks and recreational facilities as growth occurs to serve community needs.

The City of Opelika owns and operates eleven parks. The Opelika Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for maintaining and operating all public parks and recreation facilities. The Parks and Recreation Department currently has 30 full-time employees with additional part-time seasonal workers. The Department noted that they are appropriately staffed for their current parks and programming but that any additional parks, park facilities and programming would require additional staff.

Reposition and expand the park network to ensure all residents can access parks.

The City’s eleven parks span 450 acres, exceeding the NRPA standards by 150 acres. However, after reviewing the Park Service Area analysis, 45% of residential parcels are not within a park’s service area. A park service area is dependent on the size of the park. Community Parks (Opelika Sportsplex, Floral Park, and West Ridge Park) have a service area of 2 miles, which is approximately a 5-minute drive. Neighborhood Parks (Municipal Park, Jeter Park, Courthouse Square, Moore Stadium, Miles Thomas Field, and Shady Park) have a service area of 0.5 miles, approximately a 10-minute walk.

Mini Parks (Ray Ward Park) have a service area of 0.25 miles, a 5-minute walk.

According to the Park Service Area analysis, there is a lack of parks within the northwest and southeastern portions of the City. As development encroaches on the Secondary Growth Area (established in Chapter 4), the City should collaborate with developers to construct additional parks, ensuring that new residents have access to recreational spaces by NRPA’s standards.

The City has continued to update park facilities. This includes the new swimming pools at the Sportsplex and Covington Recreation, 24 pickleball courts, and redesigning Floral park with a new inclusive playground and stadium. Older facilities such as Municipal Park, Denson Recreation, Moore Stadium, the Armory, and Springvilla should be evaluated for needed renovations or repurposing.

Park Type	Service Area	City of Opelika Parks
Community Parks	2 miles	Opelika Sportsplex
		Floral Park
		West Ridge Park
Neighborhood Park	0.5 miles	Municipal Park
		Jeter Park
		Courthouse Square
		Moore Stadium
		Miles Thomas Field
Mini Park	0.25 miles	Shady Park
		Ray Ward Park

Note: Campgrounds, dog parks, and natural preserves are not included in this analysis

45%
of residential areas are not within
a park’s service area



Enhancing community well-being and connectivity by adopting clear standards for parks. The city’s current guidelines for parks and open space in new developments are inconsistent. To enhance community well-being, it should adopt clearer standards, like mandating a specific amount of parkland per 1,000 residents. New projects, depending on their size, should provide community spaces. Additionally, collaborating with NGOs to integrate pocket parks into existing neighborhoods and linking them through trails could further benefit residents’ health and connectivity.

Ensure that the Opelika Sportsplex is accessible to community residents by providing adequate connections via bicycle, walking, public transit, and vehicle. The Opelika Sportsplex and Aquatics Center is the City’s fitness and community center at 1001 Sportsplex Parkway. The facility offers amenities such as basketball, racquetball, a swimming pool, a splash park, cardio equipment, weights, an indoor and outdoor track, group fitness classes, and personal training services. While the Sportsplex is a modern, top-quality facility, it is not conveniently located for much of the community. Expanding or constructing another facility with similar amenities may be needed as the population increases.

Multi-Use Trails

The City should work with Creekline Trails of Opelika to plan, fund, and build trails around the community to expand and strengthen the off-street trail network.

The Opelika Parks and Recreation Department maintains just over three miles of trails. About half of these trails have paved surfaces, while the rest have natural surfaces. These trails include the Bandy Park walking trail (0.25 miles), Master Gardens Nature Trail at Municipal Park (0.23 miles), West Ridge Park walking trail (1.08 miles), and Wood Duck Heritage Preserve and Siddique Nature Trail (1.5 miles). The national standard for trails, also set by the NRPA, is 8.5 miles of trails per park and recreation agency jurisdiction. This standard is also developed based on the jurisdiction’s population. Currently, the City of Opelika is short of this standard by 5.5 miles of trails.

Utilize the Creekline Trails plan as a framework for new trail construction. Creekline Trails of Opelika is a community initiative to create hiking and biking pathways along Opelika’s creeks and roadways. The Creekline Trails vision includes over twenty miles of multi-use paths and nature trails along scenic streams and major thoroughfares; greenways, greenspace, and pocket parks connected to parks, schools, and businesses; and a robust system of bike lanes for safe, alternative transportation throughout Opelika and beyond.

Improve the accessibility and enjoyment of existing parks by linking trails. Creating seamless connections between existing parks and the expanding trail network is essential to improve the city’s green infrastructure. This would bridge the current park and trail connectivity gap, ensuring residents have continuous access to outdoor recreational activities. By integrating trails with parks, the city can offer a more cohesive and accessible green space network, promoting healthier lifestyles and fostering greater community engagement with nature.

Open Space

Collaborate with partners and developers to protect Opelika’s existing natural areas and preserve significant open space in new development. Open space includes unprogrammed natural areas, which contribute to the beauty of Opelika but are not intended for recreation. Open spaces often include land that has been specifically set aside to preserve natural features or environmental assets, land set aside for landscaping within subdivisions or site design, and properties with extreme grade changes or other features that make development challenging.

The City should collaborate with the Friends of the Opelika Wood Duck Heritage Preservation and Siddique Nature Park to identify sites in the City that have the highest potential for ecotourism , including the types of programing that could take place at these locations. The Opelika Wood Duck Heritage Preserve and Siddique Nature Park is one of the most unique locations in the City and presents a significant opportunity for ecotourism. As a part of the Piedmont Plateau Birding Trail, this 85-acre preserve is the fourth highest place in inland Alabama for seeing bird species.

“
Please invest in more trails, and public transit options.



Tree Canopy Strategies

There are many approaches to regulating the removal, preservation, and planting of trees. Two common approaches include:

Tree Preservation and Replacement

The tree preservation and replacement strategy require a property owner/developer to survey and preserve all trees that meet a certain set of criteria, such as certain high-value species of trees of 10 inch or greater diameter at breast height (DBH). The property owner/developer could request administrative approval to remove trees required for preservation but would be required to replace them at a specified rate, typically based on the DBH of the removed trees, for example one replacement tree could be required for each 10 DBH of trees removed.

Tree Canopy Coverage

The tree canopy coverage strategy establishes a base requirement for tree canopy coverage (would vary based on district) that all development sites would be required to meet. This strategy provides a property owner/developer with the option of removing all trees on a site but incentivizes preservation by requiring a lower base tree canopy coverage amount based on the percentage of required coverage met by preserved trees.

Environmental Features

The City should work to protect sensitive areas with resiliency best practices and hazard mitigation. Environmental features contribute to the landscape and character of Opelika. These features can impact the community's growth and development, transportation, appearance, and identity. The existing tree canopy and floodplain within the City are the two primary environmental features that significantly impact future development. Tree preservation and enhanced resiliency concerning the floodplain are essential as they allow for a healthy ecosystem and promote ecosystem services.

Utilize alternative development strategies and regulations to preserve existing tree canopy. Most vacant and undeveloped land in and around Opelika is covered by trees, and some of the densest canopy coverage is on large lots on the outskirts of Opelika and in the planning boundary. While some amount of tree removal is necessary to facilitate development, clearcutting a property to prepare it development results in habitat loss, erosion and soil damage, increased disaster risk due to flooding, and aesthetic concerns as new trees take time to grow.

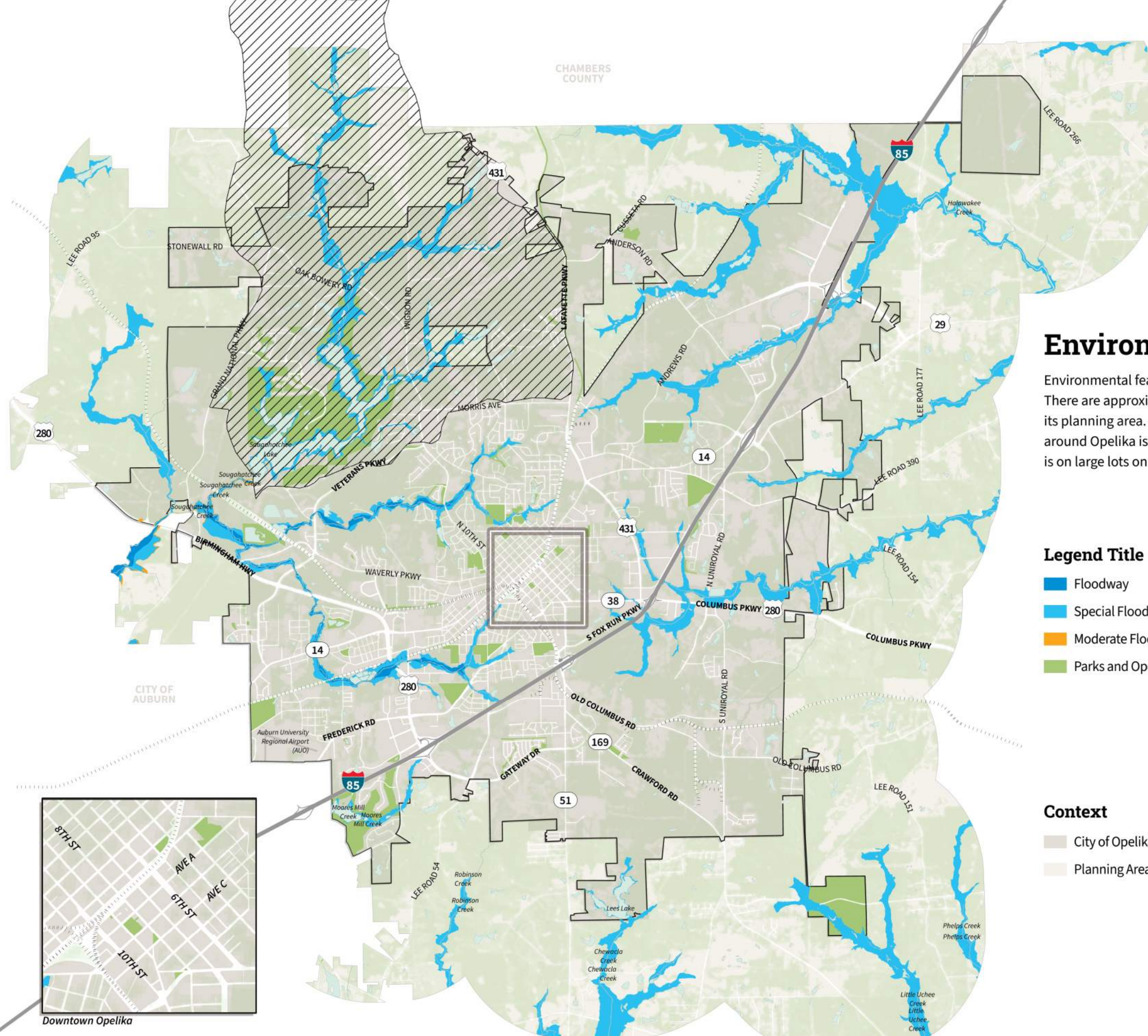
Ensure that current development is improved to enhance resiliency and that future development is not located within the floodplain. There are approximately 5,600 acres of floodplain throughout the Opelika and its planning area. Flood risk impacts land use, development, and urban services. Developing within the floodplain is a risk, as damages that result from frequent flooding can be costly. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which administers the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), regulates development activities in the floodplain and encourages local governments to adopt higher standards for floodplain development. The subsequent definitions correspond to the categories of floodways on the map.

- **Floodway:** A channel of a river or other watercourse and adjacent land areas reserved to discharge the base flood without raising water levels more than a certain amount.
- **Floodplain:** A flat, low-lying plain along a river or watercourse naturally prone to flooding. FEMA calls these areas Flood Hazard Areas and divides them into two types:
 - **Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA):** 1% chance of flooding annually (also called the base flood or 100-year flood).
 - **Moderate Flood Hazard Areas (MFHA):** Between the base flood and the 0.2% annual chance flood (also called the 500-year flood).

Water Features

Protect and enhance the quality, quantity, and dependability of Opelika's water supply. The Saugahatchee Creek Watershed is part of the larger Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Basin; the 70-mile creek is one of the largest in the Lower Tallapoosa sub-basin. The area of the watershed is approximately 220 square miles. Within the Saugahatchee Creek Watershed is Saugahatchee Lake, along with Halawakee Creek, the City's primary water supply. Saugahatchee Lake, constructed in the early 1940s, has been a viable water source for the city. It covers about 500 acres and has a watershed of about 20 square miles. The City owns this reservoir. Halawakee Creek, an arm of Lake Harding, is an impoundment of the Chattahoochee Rive r. It opened in 1986 and has served as an excellent water source. Both Saugahatchee Lake and Halawakee Creek are surface water sources.

Work with Opelika Water Board to ensure that Opelika's water sources are sustainable and can accommodate expected growth. Opelika Water Board produces a yearly Water Quality Report providing a snapshot of the previous year's water quality. The report includes details about where the water comes from, what it contains, and how it compares to Environmental Protection Agency and Alabama Department of Environmental Management standards. The City should work with Opelika Water Board to monitor water resources for changes in water quality and report any activities that may degrade the quality of the water. The City should also with Opelika Water Board to utilize Saugahatchee Lake and surrounding properties for low impact recreation that maintain water quality.



Environmental Features

Environmental features contribute to the landscape and character of Opelika. There are approximately 5,600 acres of floodplain throughout the Opelika and its planning area. Additionally, most vacant and undeveloped land in and around Opelika is covered by trees, and some of the densest canopy coverage is on large lots on the outskirts of Opelika and in the planning boundary.

Legend Title

- Floodway
- Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA)
- Moderate Flood Hazard Areas (MFHA)
- Parks and Open Space

Lake Saugahatchee Watershed

Tree Canopy

- More Dense
- Less Dense

Context

- City of Opelika
- Planning Area

— Railroads

■ Saugahatchee Lake

DRAFT
04/17/2025
FOR STAFF REVIEW

IMPLEMENTATION

Overview

The Implementation chapter identifies critical next steps to assist the City in implementing *Opelika 2040*. These steps focus on the Comprehensive Plan as a primary resource for planning efforts and policy decisions within Opelika. The Implementation chapter also establishes a foundation for implementing the goals and recommendations identified in the Comprehensive Plan for the next 10 to 20 years.

Close coordination with and participation of local departments, regional public agencies, neighboring communities, community groups and organizations, the business community, property owners, developers, and residents will be key in the success of its implementation. The following chapter provides best practices on how to use the Plan as well as funding sources to consider.

Next Steps

The following actions and strategies establish the “next steps” to be taken after the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. They will provide for the effective application of the Plan and continued community planning and investment, and ensure the Plan remains reflective of community needs and aspirations. They include:

- Reference the Comprehensive Plan on a regular basis to guide City policies and decision-making;
- Review and update the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations and other development controls to reflect policies presented in the Comprehensive Plan;
- Update and incorporate the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) with Plan recommendations for CIP infrastructure improvements;
- Promote cooperation and participation among various agencies, organizations, community groups, and individuals;
- Regularly review and update the Plan to reflect current conditions and shifts in community priorities;
- Establish meaningful partnerships with internal and external organizations and agencies and;
- Explore possible funding sources and implementation techniques.

Reference the Plan Regularly

The Comprehensive Plan should be referenced regularly as the official policy guide for planning decisions made by City staff, Planning Commission, City Council, and other elected officials and staff. It should be used as a primary resource to assist with policy formation, prospective projects, development proposals, and planning initiatives, ensuring that future decisions are in line with the City’s set goals for land use and development. Further, service providers and partner organizations should be encouraged to use the Plan when considering new development, facilities, infrastructure updates, and programming within their parameters. The Plan should be used to:

- Evaluate and shape policies and regulations
- Work with partner agencies and service providers
- Review and evaluate development proposals
- Prioritize public expenditures.
- Encourage private sector investment.
- Coordinate new facilities, infrastructure, and programming

Updating Development Regulations

While the Comprehensive Plan articulates a vision for the community, the City’s development regulations are one of the primary tools that can be used to implement Plan recommendations. Following adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the City should consider a process to update the current Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to ensure that regulations reflect current City policy and the desires of the Opelika community. Amendments to development regulations and design standards should consider complementary programs and incentives that can be used to achieve the community’s vision for economic development, neighborhood character, connectivity, and other aspects of the Plan.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

It is important that the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is coordinated with the City’s financial resources and capital planning. This will help ensure future capital investments successfully address both short- and long-term objectives of the Plan and are strategically budgeted and prioritized. CIP projects include improvements for the maintenance of City assets such as roadways, sidewalks, multi-use paths, stormwater maintenance, as well as other improvements requiring capital expenditures relating to public infrastructure.

The City should review and integrate the Comprehensive Plan into the capital improvement process, including the City’s annual budgeting process and during updates to the CIP. This will help assess funding needs and plan for potential sources, ensuring completion of desired improvements in a prioritized manner over the life of the Plan.

Local and Regional Cooperation

To ensure the success of the Comprehensive Plan’s implementation, there must be strong leadership from the City and coordination with other public agencies, neighboring communities, community groups and organizations, the local business community, the private sector, and other key stakeholders. As many of the recommendations included within the Plan pertain to issues extending past City and ETJ limits, such as water quality or roadway connectivity, regional cooperation will be key in addressing them.

Regular Updates

The Comprehensive Plan is not a static document, and it is intended to evolve with shifts in trends, issues, and opportunities. If community attitudes change or new challenges arise which are beyond the scope of the current Plan, the Plan should be revised and updated accordingly.

The City should initiate a review of the Plan at least every three to five years. Ideally, this review should coincide with the preparation of the City’s budget and CIP and the preparation of an annual action agenda. In this manner, recommendations or changes relating to capital improvements or other programs can be considered as part of the commitments for the upcoming fiscal year. Routine examination of the Plan will help ensure that the planning program remains relevant to community needs and goals.

Potential Partners

Opelika’s regional position makes it essential that the City develops and maintains partnerships with a wide variety of groups and organizations. Facilitating regular communication and cooperation with partners will support implementation of the Plan and identify opportunities to work collaboratively toward mutual interests. Further, it will facilitate a greater regional perspective in how issues are addressed in the area.

Opelika already has a wide variety of partnerships, which should be maintained in the future. Possibilities for new partnerships with organizations and agencies should be identified by the City to aid implementation. This could include neighboring municipalities, regional and state agencies, neighborhood groups, the local business community, and other groups with a vested interest in Opelika.

The City should continue to partner with or explore new opportunities with the following groups:

Municipal and County

- City of Auburn
- City of Opelika
- Lee County

Regional Partners

- Lee County Planning Commission
- Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Planning Organization (AOMPO)
- Lee Russel Council of Governments

Federal and State

- Alabama State Legislature
- Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT)
- Alabama Department of Environmental Management
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Housing and Neighborhood

- Opelika Housing Authority
- Auburn Opelika Habitat for Humanity

Economic Development

- Opelika Chamber of Commerce
- Opelika Main Street

Tourism and Culture

- Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau

Transportation

- Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee
- Airport Advisory Board
- Federal Railroad Administration
- Lee-Russell Public Transit

Parks and Environment

- Opelika Parks and Recreation Department
- Lee County Parks and Recreation
- Keep Opelika Beautiful

Public Facilities

Education

- Opelika City Schools
- Southern Union State Community College
- The Oaks School
- Trinity Christian School
- Lee Scott Academy

Public Health

- Alabama Department of Public Health
- Lee County Health Department
- East Alabama Medical Center

Services

- Opelika Police Departments
- Opelika Fire Department
- Lee County Emergency Management Agency
- Opelika Power Services
- Opelika Utilities
- Alabama Municipal Electric Authority
- Zoning Board of Adjustment

Potential Funding Sources

The following is a list of possible funding sources that the City could pursue to fund the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Development

Revolving Loan Fund

The Revolving Loan Fund Program offers low-interest, long-term financing to small and medium-sized businesses in Lee and Russell Counties, bridging the gap between bank loans and borrower equity. The program is targeted at the creation of new jobs and the maintenance of existing ones, making it an essential tool for entrepreneurs seeking to realize their business goals.

Small Business Grant Program

The Small Business Grant Program introduced by the Opelika Chamber of Commerce supports small businesses and startups. Grant amount up to \$5000 are awarded with 80% allocated to existing businesses and 20% to startups (operational for 12 months or less). For eligibility, a company must be registered with the city, have fewer than 10 employees, demonstrate a need for funding, and have not received a grant within the past twelve months.

Career Path Internship Program

Opelika is the 2nd fastest growing MSA in Alabama, having a Career Parth and Internship Program that offers opportunities in manufacturing, medical, pharmaceutical, food and beverage, logistics and transportation and innovation and technology.

AMEA Economic Development Program

AMEA's Economic Development Program collaborates with members, including Opelika, to support and attract new industries. It offers no-interest loans and grants for special projects and events, supports statewide recruitment, and fosters partnerships with utilities and groups to enhance economic growth opportunities for its members.

AIDT Training

AIDT is a state agency established to build a healthy state economy through attracting new industries to the state and expanding existing industries by recruiting and training a skilled workforce t. It provides comprehensive and customized free training to new and expanding companies through partnerships with Southern Union State Community College and Alabama State Employment Service. It also supports workforce development with pre-employment, on the job training and management training programs.

Youth Build Program

The Opelika Housing Authority's Youth Build Program is a community-based pre-apprenticeship program that provides job training and educational opportunities for youth, ages 18-24, who have not completed their High School Diploma. Participants receive cash incentives, earn credentials for specialized careers, and gain hands-on experience building homes for needy families while completing their GED or high school diploma.

Community Development (CDBG)

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) are federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The CBDG program works to ensure affordable housing, provide services to the most vulnerable areas in the community, and create jobs through expanding and retaining businesses.

Emergency Home Repair Program

The Emergency Home Repair Loan Program in Opelika, funded primarily through CDBG funds, targets low-to-moderate-income homeowners in the Carver and Jeter Communities. It offers 0% interest loans for five years to support home maintenance and improvement. Eligibility requires the property to be within city limits, owner-occupied, under 80% of median household income (HUD guidelines), and insured. This initiative aims to preserve quality housing in vital neighborhoods.

Façade Grant Program

The Opelika Main Street Bill Roberts Facade Grant Program offers financial assistance to business owners in the Downtown Historic District for exterior repairs. The initiative promotes downtown revitalization by encouraging historic preservation, enhancing tourism, and stimulating economic growth.

Homeownership Loan Program

The Opelika Home Buyers Loan Program provides down payment and closing cost assistance to low-to-moderate income first-time homebuyers, prioritizing the Jeter Avenue Target Area. It offers up to \$6,000 in grants for down payments and mandates home buyer training. Eligibility criteria include not owning a home in the past 3 years, purchasing property within city limits, excluding mobile/modular homes, and household income below 80% of HUD's median.

Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)

The Housing Choice Voucher Program, administered by the Opelika Housing Authority with federal HUD funds, assists very low-income families, the elderly, and disabled in affording private market housing. Participants select housing that meets safety standards, with subsidies paid to landlords and families covering the rent difference, guided by established eligibility criteria.

Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Families receiving welfare or other assistance can participate in the family self-sufficiency program in order to become economically self-sufficient within five years of receiving assistance. Participants can access escrow (savings) accounts from increased income and are eligible for the first-time homebuyer program, enhancing their path to financial independence.

Education

Educational Tax Credit

Employers that provide or sponsor educational programs that enhance the basic skills of their employees up to and including the 12th grade can receive a tax credit of 20% of their actual program costs. For the program to be approved, it must receive written approval from the Alabama Department of Education.

Transportation

Rebuild Alabama Act Annual Grant Program

The RAA Annual Grant Program is an ALDOT-administered transportation infrastructure grant program for projects of local interest created in the Rebuild Alabama Act of 2019. This program focuses on transportation infrastructure projects of local interest, including improvements to classified roads and bridges open to public traffic.

IA Grant

Industrial Access grants are made available through the ALDOT to construct access to roads needed to create or retain jobs at new or existing businesses. Preliminary engineering and grant administration costs are not eligible for grant funding and are, therefore, to be paid for by the project sponsor or applicant.

Alabama Industrial Access Road and Bridge Program

The Alabama Industrial Access Road and Bridge Program offers financial support to communities for building roads, bridges, and related infrastructure on public rights-of-way. Aid is provided to facilitate industrial access, enhance economic development, and connect new and expanding industries.

Other

ESG program

The Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, supports efforts across the state to address homelessness. It provides grant funding to enhance and operate homeless facilities and domestic abuse shelters, offer essential services like health and mental health care to homeless individuals, prevent homelessness, assist with rapid rehousing, and cover administrative costs. Rent and utility assistance, relocation costs, case management, and limited legal assistance are eligible activities under this program.

Implementation Action Matrix

The Implementation Action Matrix offers a comprehensive list of all implementation strategies, policies, and recommendations contained within the Comprehensive Plan. The matrix provides City staff with a tool to prioritize implementation activities and projects over the life of the plan. In addition, the matrix allows the City to approve specific, actionable items on an annual basis and evaluate progress based upon completed implementation strategies. The Implementation Action Matrix indicates the following:

Priority Level

Priority is assigned with consideration for cost and importance. Each action in the Action Matrix is indicated with one of the following:

- **Priority 1:** Near-term, low-cost, easier to implement, critical
- **Priority 2:** Mid-term, essential
- **Priority 3:** Long-term, desirable

Timeline Estimate

Timeline estimates indicate, in years, how long it would take to complete a specific action.

- **Short-term:** less than two years.
- **Mid-term:** two to five years.
- **Long-term:** greater than five years.
- **Ongoing:** requires immediate action and continued attention throughout the life of the Comprehensive Plan

Partners

The Partners section of the Action Matrix identifies potential partner organizations; however, there may be instances where an organization that is well-matched to one of the Plan goals, supporting policies, or recommendations is not listed as a potential partner for a given topic and should be added.

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
Chapter 5: Housing and Neighborhoods				
Available Vacant Land				
5-01	Encourage context sensitive infill development on smaller lots in the City's core.	Priority Two	Short-term	
5-02	Prioritize residential development on vacant or underdeveloped land.	Priority One	Ongoing	
Infill Housing				
5-03	Provide reduced permitting fees and tailored building requirements to make residential infill a more attractive option for developers.	Priority One	Short-term	
5-04	Ensure infill developments fit the existing character and neighborhood context.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
Complete Neighborhoods				
5-05	Work with partners to create complete neighborhood areas through compact development, increased density, conservation design, and access to amenities.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
5-06	Collaborate with partners to offer a mix of housing types in new developments.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
5-07	Establish clear standards to ensure neighborhoods are physically integrated with surrounding areas.	Priority One	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
5-08	Require trees and shrubs in roadways, yards, buffers, and public spaces in new developments.	Priority Three	Long-term	
5-09	Prioritize the direct connection of roadways and sidewalks over dead-ends and cul-de-sacs.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
5-10	Encourage new developments incorporate conservation design.	Priority Three	Long-term	Property Owners, Developers
Development Process				
5-11	Examine and update the development and regulations to align with current market needs.	Priority One	Short-term	
5-12	Ensure new neighborhoods have comprehensive public services and infrastructure.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Water Works, Opelika Power Services
5-13	Consider conducting a housing study to evaluate what types of housing are required to meet the community's need.	Priority One	Short-term	
Neighborhood Design				
5-14	Enforce anti-monotony rules requiring diverse facades, detailed architecture, and durable materials in new subdivision developments.	Priority One	Mid-term	
5-15	Support City and nonprofit tree planting initiatives.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Keep Opelika Beautiful
Attainability and Affordability				
5-16	Collaborate with investing in housing that is attainable and accessible for all City residents.	Priority One	Short-term	Developers
5-17	Update zoning ordinance to recognize and regulate higher-density housing.	Priority One	Short-term	Developers
5-18	Collaborate with partners and use the Land Use Plan and Housing Framework Map to identify areas for more housing.	Priority One	Short-term	Developers
5-19	Provide financing incentives to developers for constructing affordable housing in high-need Opportunity Zones.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Housing Authority
5-20	Collaborate with nonprofits to sustain and enhance the provision of safe, quality, and affordable housing.	Priority One	Mid-term	Opelika Housing Authority, Auburn University Rural Studio, Opelika Habitat for Humanity, Fuller Foundation
Housing Options				
5-21	Update regulations to expand the use of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in single-family areas.	Priority One	Mid-term	Developers
5-22	Establish design guidelines to regulate the bulk, height, massing, and architecture of development.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
5-23	Ensure safety and livability standards for mobile homes.	Priority Two	Long-term	
5-24	Encourage storm shelters in mobile home parks.	Priority Three	Mid-term	Developers, Lee County Emergency Management
5-25	Encourage missing middle housing developments.	Priority One	Mid-term	Developers, Opelika Housing Authority
5-26	Update zoning strategies to facilitate missing middle housing.	Priority One	Mid-term	

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
Historic Homes and Neighborhoods				
5-27	Consider establishing the historic districts as overlays in the zoning ordinance.	Priority Three	Mid-term	Opelika Historic Preservation Commission
5-28	Collaborate with Historic Preservation Commission to develop a "most endangered" list of homes for future preservation.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Historic Preservation Commission
5-29	Promote adaptive reuse of buildings in Downtown Opelika and its historic districts.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Main Street
5-30	Continue reinvestment and marketing efforts for the Carver and Jeter neighborhoods.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
5-31	Collaborate with developers to identify projects eligible for state and federal funding to develop new homes.	Priority One	Short-term	Developers, Opelika Housing Authority
5-32	Create Historic Overlays to allow or consider form-based guidelines in infill areas surrounding Downtown.	Priority Three	Long-term	Opelika Historic Preservation Commission, Opelika Main Street
Chapter 6: Economic Development				
Regional Location and Influence				
6-01	Continue to invest in business parks and transportation infrastructure to attract and retain major corporations.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Opelika Industrial Development Authority, Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT)
6-02	Use the Land Use Plan as a framework to develop land uses that complement and support the success of the airport.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Auburn Univeristy Regional Airport Authority
6-03	Implement gateway and placemaking elements at key entrances to reinforce the City's identity.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opleika Chamber of Commerce, Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau
6-04	Leverage City's assets to attract a range of commercial uses that meet the needs of residents.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Opelika Main Street
6-05	Strategically promote new industrial and employment uses within the City and planning area to create local opportunities for a well-trained workforce and attract major employers.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Industrial Development Authority, Southern Union State Community College, Auburn University Opelika Chamber of Commerce
Downtown				
6-06	Continue strategic reinvestment in Downtown.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Main Street, Opelika Chamber of Commerce
6-07	Identify appropriate locations for a boutique hotel	Priority Two	Mid-term	Property Owners, Developers
6-08	Evaluate the success of the hospitality overlay and determine whether adjustments need are necessary.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Opelika Main Street
Workforce development				
6-09	Collaborate with partners to strengthen the local workforce.	Priority One	Ongoing	Local businesses, Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Auburn University, Southern Union State Community College
6-10	Facilitate training programs with partners to help residents qualify for higher-paying jobs.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Industrial Development Authority, Southern Union State Community College
6-11	Coordinate with employers and educational institutions to identify in-demand skills and provide relevant training programs to reskill the local workforce.	Priority One	Short-term	Local businesses, Opelika City Schools, Auburn University, Southern Union State Community College
6-12	Invest in workforce development programs and partner with local businesses to create sector-specific training.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Industiral Development Authority, Local businesses, Opelika City Schools, Southern Union State Community College
6-13	Collaborate with partners to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of workforce development programs.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME)
Tourism				
6-14	Leverage local assets to position the City as a destination, attracting visitors to boost revenue.	Priority One	Ongoing	Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau, Opelika Chamber of Commerce
6-15	Encourage development of visitor-friendly resorts, lodging, entertainment, and recreational opportunities.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau, Developers

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
6-16	Attract competitive lodging options, including established brands and boutique experiences.	Priority One	Short-term	Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau, Developers
6-17	Collaborate with partners to diversify recreational offerings for emerging disciplines like e-gaming, motocross, and adventure sports.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Parks and Recreation, Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau, Southern Union State Community College, Auburn University
Quality Jobs				
6-18	Leverage the City's role as a major employer to expand the availability of employment opportunities within the community.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Industrial Development Authority, Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Southern Union State Community College
6-19	Create and retain high-paying jobs accessible to all residents.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Industrial Development Authority, Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Southern Union State Community College
Infill and Adaptive Reuse				
6-20	Identify commercial and industrial lots and properties suitable for infill and adaptive reuse.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Industrial Development Authority
6-21	Provide incentives for infill development to promote redevelopment of key properties.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Industrial Development Authority
6-22	Promote the adaptive reuse of commercial and industrial properties into residential spaces near Downtown.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Main Street, Opelika Industrial Development Authority
Chapter 8: Transportation and Mobility				
Transportation Improvements				
8-01	Collaborate with organizations to align roadway improvements with the annexation and growth plans.	Priority One	Short-term	ALDOT, Lee Russell MPO
8-02	Enhance Citywide connectivity and circulation through planned roadway improvements.	Priority One	Ongoing	ALDOT, Lee Russell MPO
Access Management				
8-03	Maintain and enhance the City's roadway circulation to ensure an efficient, safe transportation network.	Priority One	Ongoing	ALDOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Lee Russell MPO
8-04	Restrict direct access to major roadways to enhance safety and traffic efficiency.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
8-05	Update subdivision regulations to mandate multiple access points.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Fire Department
8-06	Construct sidewalks and bike lanes where appropriate to support multimodal transportation.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee, ALDOT
Traffic Volume				
8-07	Identify and upgrade streets for efficient car movement.	Priority One	Mid-term	
8-08	Identify and upgrade streets for multimodal integration.	Priority One	Mid-term	Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee
Road Diets				
8-09	Implement the road diets from the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to improve safety.	Priority Two	Mid-term	ALDOT
Parking				
8-10	Reassess parking standards in commercial corridors and Downtown areas.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Main Street
8-11	Conduct a Downtown parking study to assess whether the current parking supply meets future growth projections.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Main Street
8-12	Explore outlot development opportunities within underutilized parking lots along commercial corridors.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
8-13	Establish standards for outlot development, addressing needs for additional signage and service areas while minimizing their visibility.	Priority Three	Long-term	

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
Pedestrian Network				
8-14	Use the Opelika Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to identify and improve non-motorized connections, enhancing access to existing and planned facilities.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee, ALDOT
8-15	Prepare and adopt a Complete Streets ordinance to expand its network of multimodal transportation routes.	Priority One	Short-term	ALDOT, FHWA
Bicycle Network				
8-16	Build a bike network to provide safe and convenient travel options throughout the City.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee
8-17	Prioritize bicycle infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee
8-18	Adopt a bike parking ordinance for new and existing developments.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Developers
8-19	Reduce speeds on community roadways or implement traffic calming measures to optimize neighborhood greenways.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
8-20	Organize a Bike to Workday event.	Priority Three	Long-term	Local businesses, Opelika Chamber of Commerce, Opelika Bicycle Advisory Committee
8-21	Promote cycling through the Bicycle Friendly Business program.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Local businesses, organizations
8-22	Encourage Auburn University and Southern Union to apply to the Bicycle Friendly University program.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Auburn University, Southern Union State Community College
8-23	Establish a bicycle count program to track facility use.	Priority Three	Long-term	
Alternative Transportation				
8-24	Collaborate with partners to assess the availability of current transit services for residents.	Priority One	Short-term	Lee-Russell Public Transit
8-25	Evaluate the feasibility of offering fixed-route transit services.	Priority Two	Mid-term	LRPT
8-26	Enhance bike, pedestrian, and vehicle connections across railroad crossings throughout the City.	Priority Two	Mid-term	ALDOT, Federal Railroad Administration
8-27	Ensure airport expansion aligns with the Land Use Plan.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Auburn University Regional Airport, FAA
Chapter 9: Community Facilities and Infrastructure				
Government and Administration				
9-01	Develop and implement comprehensive civic engagement and public awareness program.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Community Relations, Local Community Organizations
9-02	Utilize digital platforms and social media to expand accessibility and reach a broader audience.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Community Relations Department
9-03	Strengthen economic development by supporting local businesses, attracting new investors, and encouraging entrepreneurship.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Economic Development Department, Industrial Development Authority, Opelika Chamber of Commerce
Community Resources				
9-04	Explore alternative methods for library services as the current facility reaches capacity. This includes increasing digital services, satellite/automated vending locations, or future additional locations.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Library, Local Community Groups
9-05	Continue offering library programs and services that cater to all age groups and interests.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Opelika Library, Local Schools
9-06	Explore ways to leverage the Lewis Cooper Jr Auditorium as a venue for local events.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Main Street
9-07	Create an archive to catalog City's historical records.	Priority Three	Long-term	Opelika Historical Society
Public Safety				
9-08	Expand community policing efforts.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Police Department
9-09	Focus resources such as patrols and safety awareness campaigns in high-risk areas of the community to enhance public safety.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Police Department
9-10	Implement advanced traffic systems to reduce congestion and improve response times.	Priority Two	Mid-term	ALDOT, Opelika Police Department, Opelika Power Services

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
9-11	Ensure the Police and Fire Departments have the latest technology and equipment including continued upgrades to fleet.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Police Department, Opelika Fire Department
9-12	Evalute current fire stations in terms of location and functionality to ensure that new areas of growth are covered.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Fire Department
9-13	Provide upgraded resources to maintain a high level of readiness.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Fire Department
9-14	Maintain and expand public safety education efforts.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Police Department, Opelika Fire Department, Opelika Community Relations
9-15	Expand comprehensive training in fire safety, first aid, and emergency preparedness through collaboration with the Alabama Fire College.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Fire Department, Alabama Fire College
9-16	Collaborate with the healthcare providers to improve services and healthcare facilities.	Priority One	Ongoing	East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC)
9-17	Partner with educational institutions to train healthcare workers.	Priority One	Ongoing	Southern Union State Community College, EAMC, Opelika City Schools
9-18	Develop and implement comprehensive health education and awareness programs.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Health Department, Local Schools
9-19	Expand mobile clinic services to improve healthcare accessibility.	Priority One	Ongoing	East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC), Local Schools
Education				
9-20	Consider constructing new schools in areas with significant population growth, aligned with the future land use plan.	Priority One	Mid-term	Opelika City Schools
9-21	Develop strategies for teacher recruitment and retention.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika City Schools
9-22	Collaborate with schools to integrate technology into the curriculum.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika City Schools
9-23	Partner with local businesses and Industries for Educational Programs.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Local Businesses, Industries, School District
9-24	Expand current pre-K programs to allow all four (4) year olds to attend pre-K.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika City Schools
Utilities				
9-25	Continue prioritizing water system upgrades and expansion.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Water Works Board
9-26	Conduct a comprehensive evaluation to prioritize critical infrastructure needs.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Water Works Board
9-27	Allocate funds to upgrade and modernize facilities to meet current and future community needs.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Water Works Board
9-28	Assess future water needs and create a strategic plan for facility expansion.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Water Works Board
9-29	Regularly review consumption patterns, operational costs, and customer feedback.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Opelika Water Works Board
9-30	Improve watershed management practices.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Water Works Board
9-31	Continue expanding and modernizing sewer infrastructure.	Priority Two	Ongoing	Opelika Public Works
9-32	Assess areas lacking sewer and revise existing Sewer Master Plan.	Priority One	Mid-term	Opelika Public Works
9-33	Modernize aging sewer infrastructure to improve efficiency and reliability and reduce reliance on individual septic systems.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Public Works
9-34	Work with partners to consistently supply low-cost, reliable electric power.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Power Services, Alabama Power, Tallapoosa River Electric Cooperative
9-35	Prioritize energy infrastructure investments.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Power Services, State Agencies
9-36	Collaborate with partners to explore and adopt renewable energy sources.	Priority Three	Long-term	Opelika Power Services, Alabama Power, Tallapoosa River Electric Cooperative
9-37	Collaborate with partners to implement energy efficiency measures.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Power Services
9-38	Continue improving broadband infrastructure in collaboration with providers.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Power Services, Point Broadband
9-39	Collaborate with partners to maintain and improve broadband infrastructure.	Priority One	Ongoing	Point Broadband, Opelika Power Services
9-40	Review regulatory processes for expanding the fiber network in underserved areas.	Priority Two	Ongoing	
9-41	Work with partners and developers to ensure future developments and improvements include additional broadband capacity to accommodate growing needs.	Priority Three	Long-term	Point Broadband, Broadband Providers

Opelika Implementation Action Matrix

#	Action	Priority	Timeline Estimate	Partners
Chapter 10: Parks and Open Space				
Parks and Recreation				
10-01	Conduct an update to the Parks and Recreation Plan to include trails, shared-use paths, and side paths.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Parks and Recreation Department, Opelika Creekline
10-02	Expand the City's parks and recreational facilities as growth occurs to meet community needs.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Parks and Recreation Department
10-03	Improve accessibility to existing parks and open spaces by linking trail networks to ensure all residents have access to parks.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Opelika Parks and Recreation Department
10-04	Collaborate with developers to build additional parks.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Developers, Opelika Parks and Recreation Department
10-05	Adopt clear standards, such as requiring a specific amount of parkland.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Parks and Recreation Department
10-06	Require new projects to include community spaces based on their size.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Developers
10-07	Ensure the Opelika Sportsplex is accessible to residents by providing connections for bicycles, walking, public transit, and vehicles.	Priority One	Short-term	
10-08	Evaluate older parks and closed park facilities to determine how they can best be used for park space in the future.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Parks
10-09	Create a regular maintenance plan for all parks and recreation facilities to keep them in good condition and reduce time that they are closed for maintenance.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Parks
10-10	Evaluate Spring Villa Park to determine how to best utilize the large park in the future.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Parks
Multi-Use Trails				
10-11	Collaborate with partners to plan, fund, and build trails, expanding the off-street trail network.	Priority One	Short-term	Creekline Trails of Opelika
10-12	Improve park accessibility by connecting existing parks with trails.	Priority Two	Mid-term	Creekline Trails of Opelika
Open Space				
10-13	Collaborate with partners to protect natural areas and preserve significant open space in new developments.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
10-14	Collaborate with partners to identify potential ecotourism sites and suitable programming for these locations.	Priority Three	Long-term	Friends of the Opelika Wood Duck Heritage Preservation and Siddique Nature Park Auburn Opelika Tourism Bureau
Environmental Features				
10-15	Utilize alternative development strategies and regulations to preserve the existing tree canopy.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
10-16	Protect sensitive areas with resiliency best practices and hazard mitigation.	Priority Two	Mid-term	
10-17	Ensure current development enhances resiliency and prevents future development within the floodplain.	Priority One	Short-term	
Water Features				
10-18	Protect and enhance the quality, quantity, and reliability of Opelika's water supply.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Water Works Board
10-19	Work with Opelika Water Works Board to ensure water sources are sustainable and can support future growth.	Priority One	Ongoing	Opelika Water Works Board
10-20	Work with Opelika Water Works Board to determine if Saugahatchee Lake can be utilized for recreation while still maintaining water quality.	Priority One	Short-term	Opelika Water Works Board

RESOLUTION NO. _____

RESOLUTION APPROVING OPELIKA 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

WHEREAS, Section 11-52-8 of the *Code of Alabama* provides that it shall be the function and duty of the Planning Commission to make and adopt a “master plan” for the physical development of the municipality; and

WHEREAS, the City of Opelika has engaged in comprehensive planning beginning in 1961 with regular updates and revisions leading to the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and 2030 Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the City of Opelika endeavored to create a new long range master plan, known as “Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan”; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of this new document was to meet long-term needs of Opelika by giving consideration to development patterns, changes to population and demographic trends, and shifts in the economy; and to devise innovative solutions and modern approaches which promote best practices, create desired community outcomes, and minimize the adverse effects of said changes; and

WHEREAS, the City of Opelika, in concert with Houseal Lavigne Associates, a national planning firm specializing in comprehensive planning, having assembled the Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which it deems appropriate and necessary for purposes of promoting the health, safety, and general welfare of the City of Opelika; and

WHEREAS, every effort has been made to provide citizens with the opportunity to comment on Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, the City of Opelika and the Planning Commission conducted multiple open houses, stakeholder meetings, and a public hearing on May 1, 2025, to receive comments on the proposed plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has complied with all laws of the State of Alabama and procedures for the adoption of a master plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of Opelika as follows:

1. That the master plan known as “Opelika 2040 Comprehensive Plan” and all maps attached thereto, a copy of which plan is attached hereto as Exhibit “A”, is hereby approved, authorized, ratified and confirmed.

2. That the Secretary of the Planning Commission is hereby authorized and directed to deliver a copy of said Plan to the City Council to be used by the City Council in the determination of developmental decisions.

ADOPTED AND APPROVED this the ____ day of _____, 2025.

CHAIR OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE CITY OF OPELIKA, ALABAMA

ATTEST:

SECRETARY