

West Homewood

Neighborhood Plan



Summer 2013

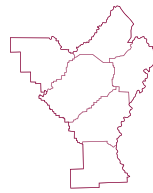


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This plan was prepared as a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), MPO and RPCGB as a requirement of Title 23 USC 134 and subsequent modification under Public Law 109-59 (SAFETEA-LU) August 2005. The contents of the plan do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the USDOT.



RPCGB
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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The West Homewood Neighborhood Plan

This planning process is the result of citizens, business owners, property owners, and City leadership seeking to move West Homewood forward. The City of Homewood approached the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) in summer 2012 about conducting a master plan for the neighborhood as part of RPCGB's Building Communities Program. This document describes the planning process, the vision established to move the neighborhood forward over the next 15-20 years, and specific steps residents, business owners, property owners, and the City of Homewood can take to bring the vision to reality.



Public Involvement Meeting - Fall 2012



A meeting with RPCGB staff, Homewood Council Members Vance Moody and Fred Hawkins, and West Homewood Property owners - Fall 2012

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How to achieve the vision with a new approach to building and zoning codes

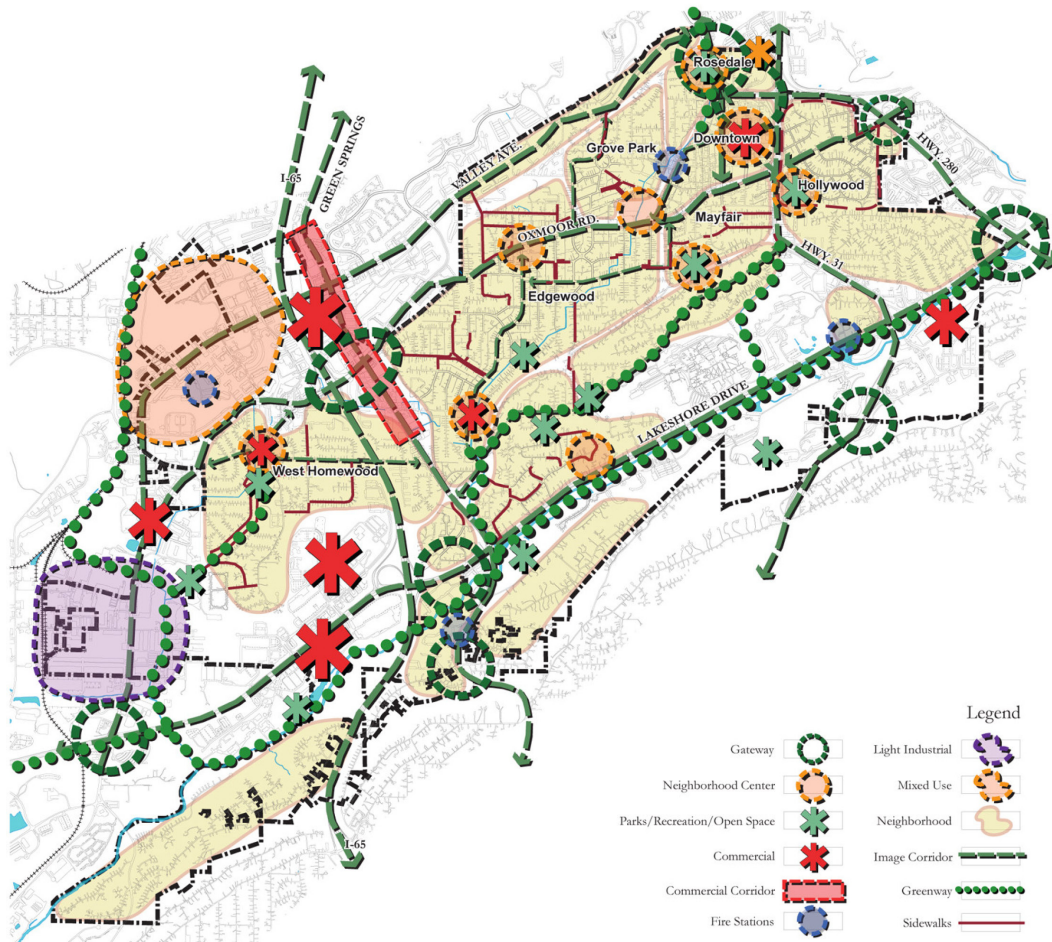
4. How and Where to Start - page 26

Public-private partnerships and specific projects the City of Homewood and private developers and businesses owners can start working on now to build momentum for future development

Homewood Master Plan, 2007

The Homewood Master Plan conducted in 2007 set a city-wide vision and created an important context for this planning process. The Master Plan identifies several important strategies and principles necessary to highlight here. Most relevant for this plan is the emphasis the Master Plan put on the redevelopment of neighborhood centers, specifically naming West Homewood as a center in need of more walkable development.

In the map from the Master Plan shown below, the commercial area at the intersection of Oak Grove Road and Oxmoor Road is identified as the center of West Homewood. In the following pages are highlights from the Master Plan that are most relevant to include in consideration of the future of West Homewood.



Concept Map from the Master Plan (2007)

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Homewood Master Plan

The Importance of Neighborhoods



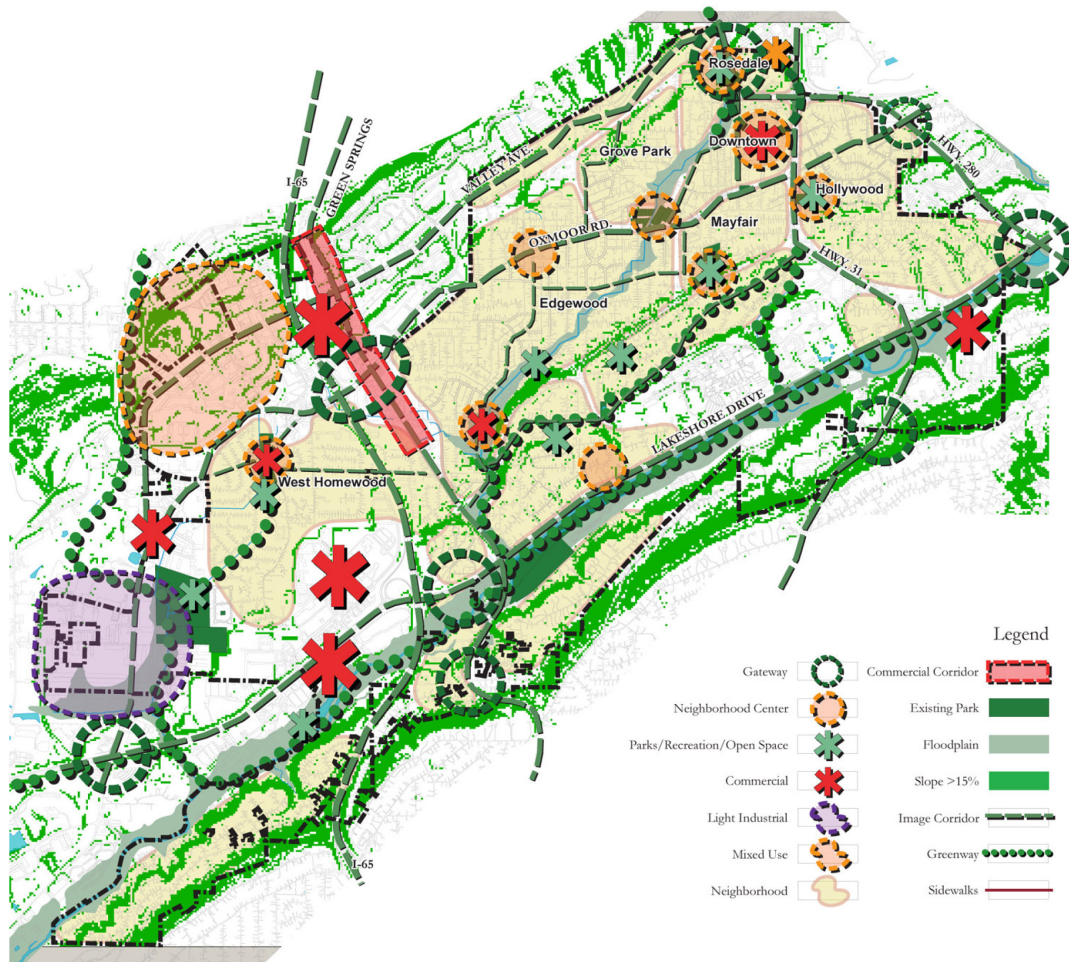
*“Downtown may be the symbolic heart of Homewood, but neighborhood centers—those existing and those that have been lost over time—are the symbolic hearts of the city’s four largest neighborhoods: Edgewood, Hollywood, Rosedale and **West Homewood**. As was noted in the first Town Meeting, the residents of each of these places—and other neighborhoods—seek to conserve the values associated with their own parts of the larger community that is Homewood, Alabama. This plan is largely about that quest.”*

“...n the visions shared in the Town Meeting, Homewood would become an even more walkable city, with a complete network of sidewalks within and between neighborhoods and nearby commercial centers. There would be safe pedestrian crossings, and neighborhood traffic would be calm by design, rather than by retrofitting. Parks and recreation areas and schools would be interconnected by greenways and trails, and the Homewood Community Greenway would be completed and interconnected to a regional trails system.”

- Homewood Master Plan, 2007

Homewood Master Plan Neighborhood Planning and Design

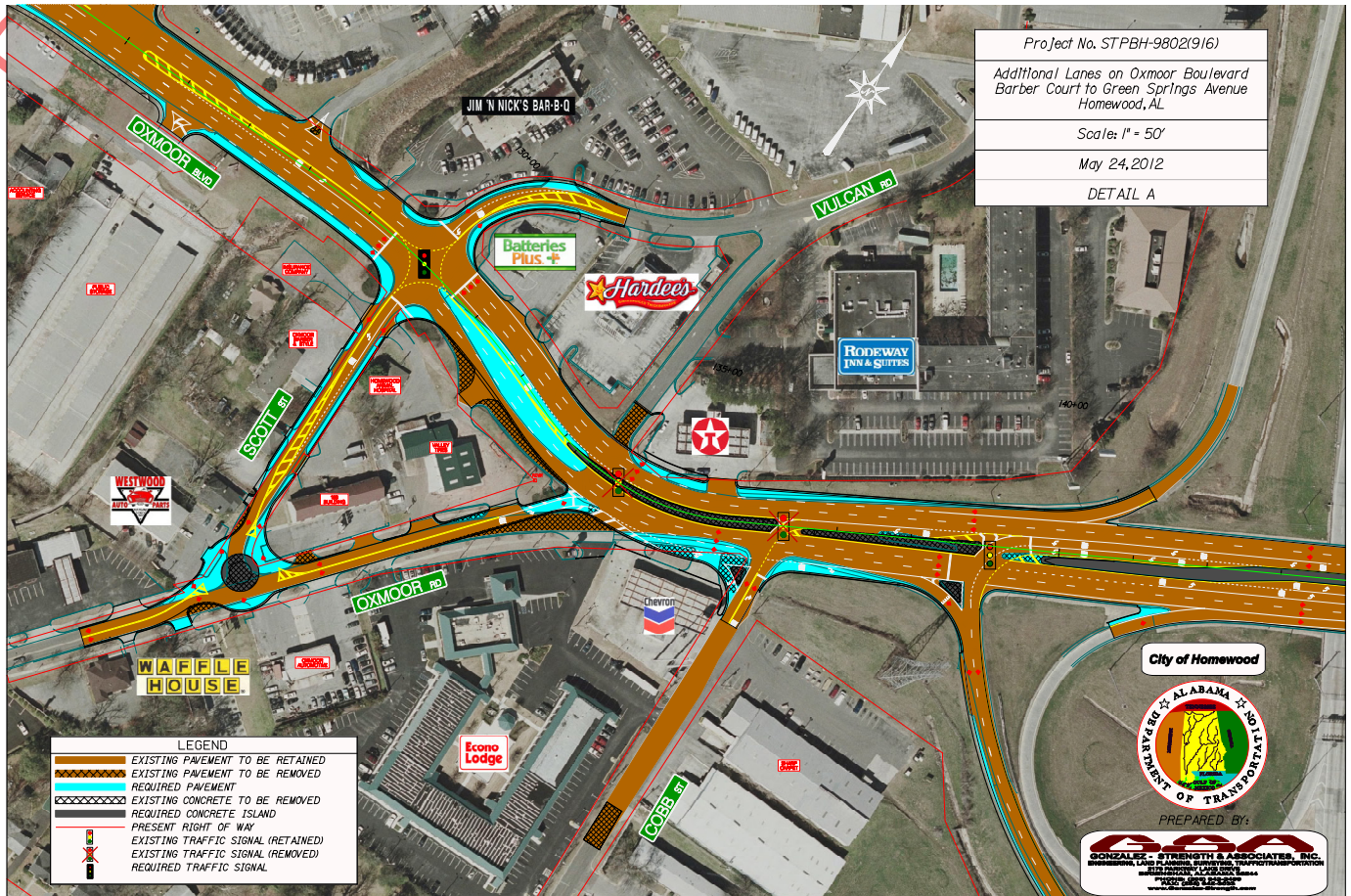
Through the Homewood Master Plan process in 2007, West Homewood residents asked for a walkable, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood center and set the stage for a more detailed, step-by-step, neighborhood-level plan. This context combined with the Neighborhood Planning and Design Criteria listed on the following page established by the Homewood Master Plan guided RPCGB staff in the approach to this plan and in the development of the Visual Preference Survey mentioned later in this document. In bold font on the next page are the criteria that came up most forcefully in talking with neighborhood residents and in the results of the Visual Preference Survey conducted at the first public meeting in the Fall of 2012.



Neighborhood Planning and Design Criteria

- Determine appropriate public uses, greenways, neighborhood parks and community parks.
- Link green infrastructure and landscape elements together into open space systems that organize development.
- **Plan and design the neighborhood to look into open spaces, rather than back into them.**
- **Plan and design neighborhood-scale commercial, civic and open spaces to meet the daily needs of residents and to provide a destination or focal point for the neighborhood.**
- **When commercial uses are appropriate, plan and design a walkable, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood commercial center with enduring architecture that will add value to the neighborhood and community overall.**
- Fully integrate the destination or focal element into the neighborhood so buffers are not necessary.
- **Make all neighborhood destinations pedestrian-oriented with easy vehicular and pedestrian access from within the neighborhood.**
- Retain, and reinvest in as appropriate, medium density housing to assure a concentration of residents adjacent to neighborhood destinations.
- Allow for porches and courtyards—they provide shelter, seating places, and a comfortable transition from the public street to the private dwelling and are a welcoming gesture to visitors.
- Clearly distinguish the front door as the primary welcoming feature of each residence.
- Provide a perception of a strong, solid foundation, a sense of durability, strength and importance with foundation walls and raised entrances—the residence will appear to be sitting on a platform, as an important structure, separated from street level.
- Locate garages away from all community areas—they too often present blank walls to public view.
- Set the garage back from the main façade of the home—they are the most utilitarian space, and do little to foster community interaction.
- Retain native vegetation and woodlands along roadways wherever possible.
- Incorporate existing trees and shrubs into the streetscape by carefully planning alignments and grades.
- Plan and design neighborhood streets and buildings to appropriately incorporate all four degrees of community and privacy: public, semipublic, semi-private and private.
- Require internal vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections within development areas and between adjacent land uses.
- Provide internal connections (roads, pathways, open space, etc.), between adjacent land uses, such as residential subdivisions or commercial developments, to serve as a secondary means of emergency access, encourage more sense of community, and minimize local traffic on major roads.

Ongoing Projects in West Homewood



Map Courtesy of Gonzalez-Strength Associates and ALDOT

Oxmoor Road Improvement Project

The intersections of Oxmoor Road and Cobb Streets to Oxmoor Boulevard have been a source of neighborhood concern for decades. The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has commissioned engineering consultants to propose changes to the intersection and increase capacity on Oxmoor Boulevard as well as improving the Interstate 65 interchange. The map below shows the specifics of the proposed changes. These are important changes as they help alleviate concerns for safety on Oxmoor Boulevard and enhance the streetscape on Scott Street which will have more traffic and potentially more opportunities for development. The inclusion of these changes to the West Homewood Neighborhood Plan is critical to the success of future development. This planning process will allow the neighborhood residents and businesses to respond with appropriate measures to the proposed transportation changes.

Patriot Park Revitalization Project



Groundbreaking ceremony for Patriot Park

Patriot Park was recently renovated by the City of Homewood. The park's success has sparked interest in the neighborhood's redevelopment from both residents and business owners and is a major source of momentum moving the neighborhood forward. To the left is a picture from the park's Grand Opening and below is a rendering of the park featured in the *Homewood Star* by Kelly Landscape Architects, the park's designers.

The Homewood Star

Volume 1 | Issue 12 | March 2012

neighborly news & entertainment for Homewood



Best of Homewood
Winners - pg 12

O'Carr's
- pg 16



HHS Basketball
- pg 19



A park for West Homewood



The new expansion of Patriot Park will begin this March. Photo courtesy of Homewood Parks and Recreation.

By **BROOKE BOUCEK**

The West Homewood community will have access to expanded recreation facilities at Patriot Park. Construction is scheduled to begin in early March at the corner of Oak

Grove Road and Raleigh Avenue.

"It will look like a scaled down version of [Homewood's] Central Park with similar amenities including pavilions, paved walking paths, restrooms, a large green space with new sod and lighting around

the perimeter of the park," Homewood City Councilman Fred Hawkins said.

Councilmen Vance Moody and Fred Hawkins have been advocating for the park expansion on the city's agenda and have

See **PARK** | page 15

Oxmoor Road improvements project underway

By **CRAIG KLEIMEYER**

West Homewood residents can look forward to reduced traffic and safety problems along Oxmoor Road. Survey and design work has begun for the city's Oxmoor Road improvements project.

City residents can expect construction to begin in 2014 and last about 18 months, according to City Council member Fred Hawkins. The improvements will span about a mile, from Green Springs Avenue to Barber Court.

"While it's under construction, there will be a little bit of bother temporarily, but when it's built, traffic and safety will be a lot better," Hawkins said. "The road will be better designed to accommodate the traffic." The plan includes turn lanes and road realignments that will improve traffic flow.

According to Hawkins, the Homewood City Council will soon determine a date for a public meeting to discuss the road projects with residents and business owners and to give the public an update on what to expect. The construction area

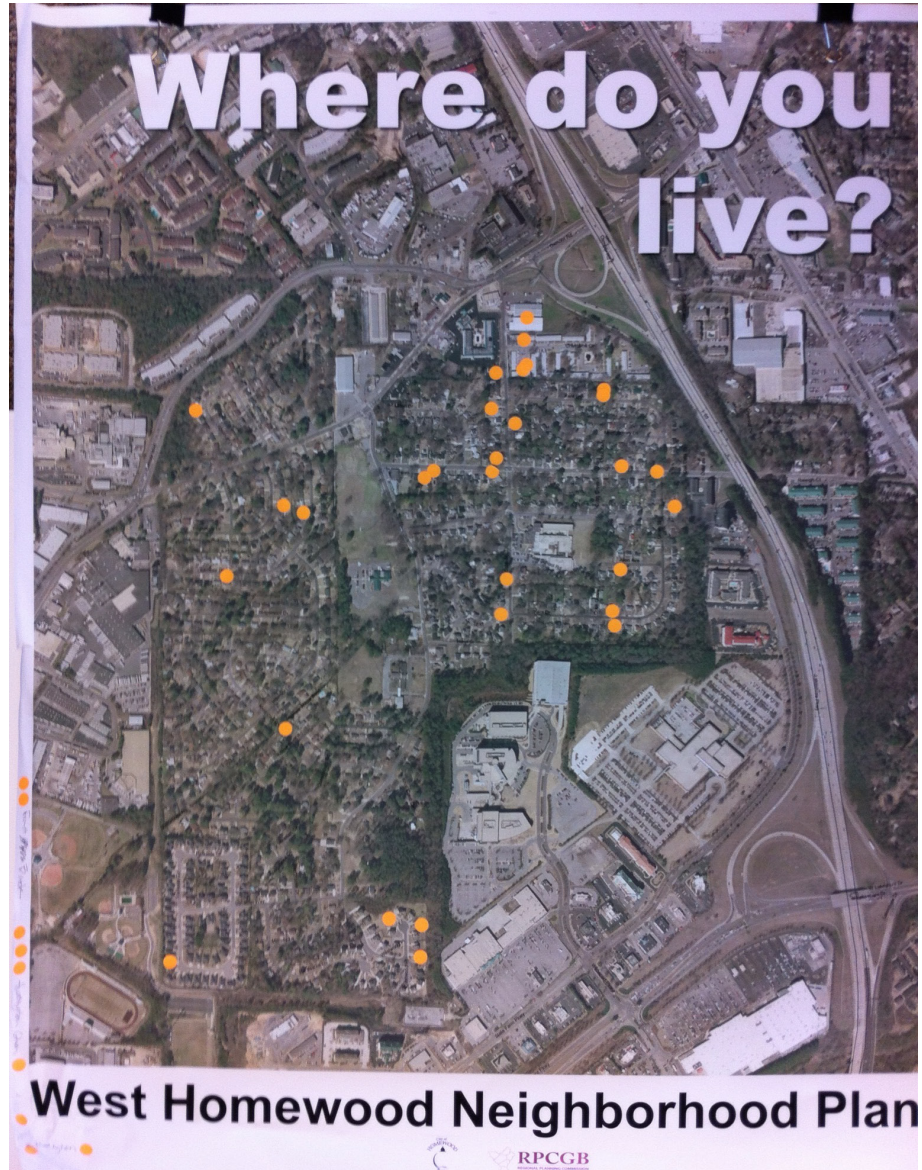
See **OXMOOR** | page 23

Image Courtesy of The Homewood Star and Starnes Publishing

Establishing a Vision for West Homewood

With the context of the 2007 Master Plan and the proposed changes to Oxmoor Boulevard, Oxmoor Road, Scott Street and Cobb Street, RPCGB and City of Homewood staff advertised for and planned a public involvement meeting at Homewood's Senior Center located off of Oak Grove Road and located next to Patriot Park.

The goal of the meeting was to listen to members of the community and identify a direction in which they wanted to neighborhood to move. In order to solicit input and ideas from the community, RPCGB and City staff spoke to residents and business owners one-on-one, distributed a questionnaire and asked meeting attendees to participate in a visual preference survey. The results of both the survey and the questionnaire are listed on the following pages.



Map displayed at the first public involvement meeting. Orange dots show residential locations of meeting attendees. Several dots on the bottom left edge of the map indicate attendees who live in neighborhoods further southwest of this map area further down Oxmoor Boulevard



RPCGB staff soliciting input from residents on the direction of the plan



A father and son participate in the Visual Preference Survey



Residents filling out questionnaires

Visual Preference Survey Results

A Visual Preference Survey uses images rather than words to communicate ideas about the character and identity of a particular kind of place or neighborhood element. RPCGB staff prepared a survey for the first public involvement meeting using posters to display different images for the same category of place or neighborhood element. Meeting attendees were asked to “vote” for the image they found most appealing and ideal for West Homewood by placing a dot next to the image. Below is an example for the “Gateways” category. It is clear with the cluster of dots near the image at the top right of the poster that residents favored the stone Homewood sign.



The overall results of the survey showed that West Homewood residents overwhelmingly favored a character of future development that created opportunities for neighborhood-scaled shops, restaurants, and businesses, pedestrian infrastructure in terms of wide sidewalks, street trees, benches, sidewalk dining and signage, and well-lit streets designed to slow traffic and provide access for biking and walking as well as driving. These posters show the images from the Visual Preference Survey conducted at the fall 2012 meeting that residents favored as the ideal form and character of future development.

Highway Retail



Brookwood Village Shopping Center



Patton Creek Shopping Center

Neighborhood Retail



Mountain Brook Village



Crestline Village

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Neighborhood Streets



Sidewalks, median and street trees - Clay, AL



Sidewalks and crosswalks in Edgewood



Sidewalks in West Homewood



Crosswalks and street trees in Edgewood

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Gateways



Signage at Central Park appealing to both cars and pedestrians

Medium Density Residential



Residential development creating increases in density that blends with low-density single-family residential

Parking



Landscaping and clear paths for pedestrians

Neighborhood Signage



Ornate, unique street signs

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Questionnaire

The scanned questionnaire below is a typical example of the responses RPCGB staff received. Very few attendees had any interest in re-naming West Homewood. Almost all meeting attendees owned a single-family home and almost all wanted to see retail development near the park and along Oxmoor Road. Ice cream shops, coffee shops (this meeting was held before Seeds Coffee Shop opened on Oxmoor), and small restaurants. Several of the more descriptive answers to the last two questions of the questionnaire are listed on the opposite page, as well.

1



West Homewood Neighborhood Survey

Are you a resident of West Homewood?

yes

Do you own property in West Homewood? If so, how many parcels?

If West Homewood were to have a new name, what would you name it?

Oakwood,

If West Homewood had more restaurants and cafes, would you want to be able to walk to them?

yes!

What else would you like us to know?

Please Develop the shops across from Patriot Park. Could easily be turned into something like Edgewood.

Especially an icecream / candy / coffee place. Every parent in the area drives past those shops to pick up from Hall-kent.

How wonderful to get a Sweet treat after playing @ the beautiful new park!!

Homewood Senior Center | Thursday, October 11, 2012



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What else would you like us to know?

I would love to see a coffee shop close to Patriot Park. I also think it would be nice to have a couple of restaurants, and a brewery like Avondale with a picnic area and TVs would be amazing.

Homewood Senior Center | Thursday, October 11, 2012



3

If West Homewood had more restaurants and cafes, would you want to be able to walk to them?

yes. Ice cream shop @ oak grove shops
Oak Grove Creamery ☺

What else would you like us to know?

Speed bumps on Raleigh Ave

Promote Neighborhood pride to keep homes + yards nice i.e.
West Hmwd beautification awards or some incentive

Homewood Senior Center | Thursday, October 11, 2012



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If West Homewood had more restaurants and cafes, would you want to be able to walk to them?

Yes

What else would you like us to know?

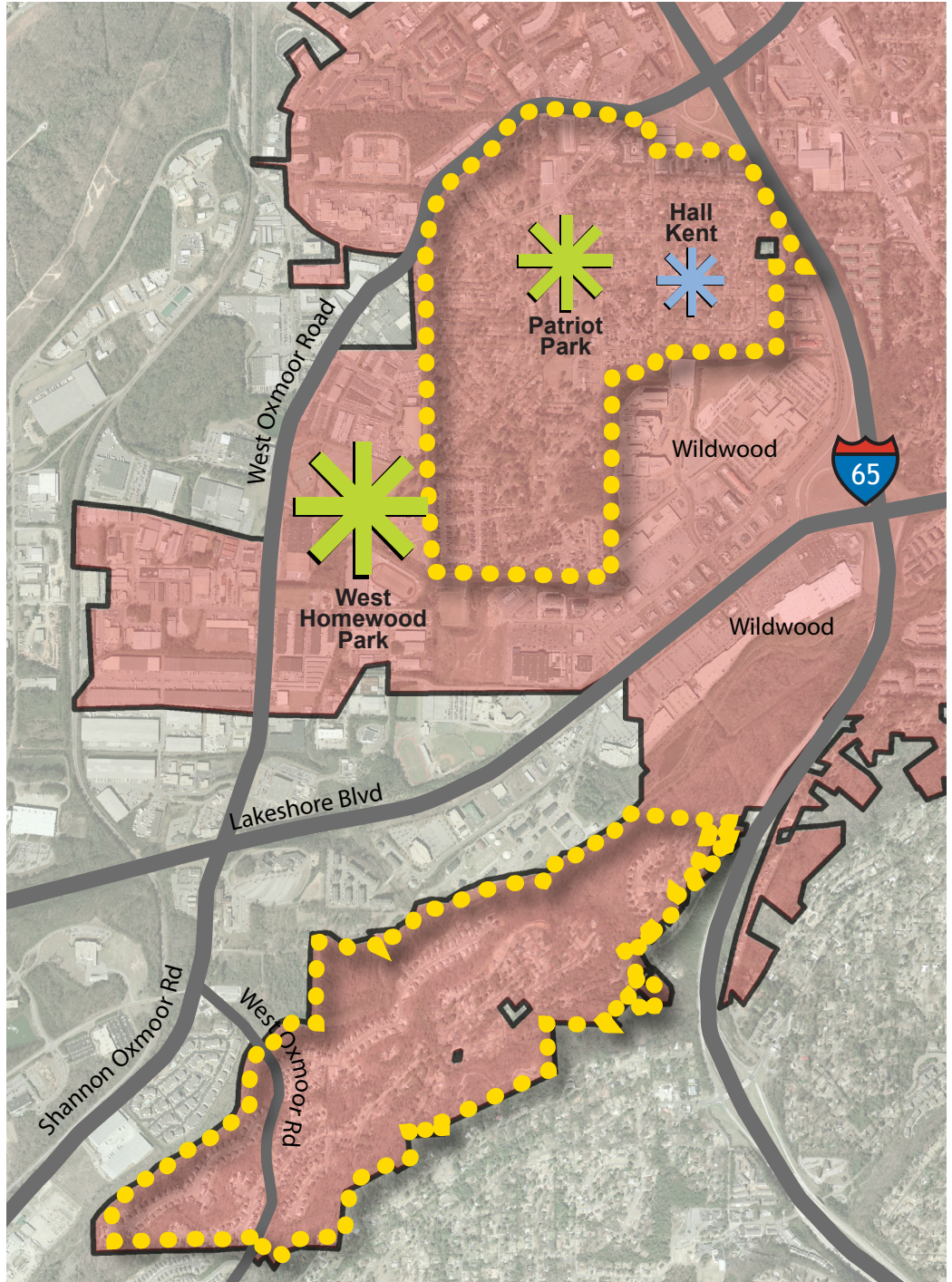
I would to see more shops across from the park.
Maybe ice cream shop or coffee shop.

Homewood Senior Center | Thursday, October 11, 2012



Study Area

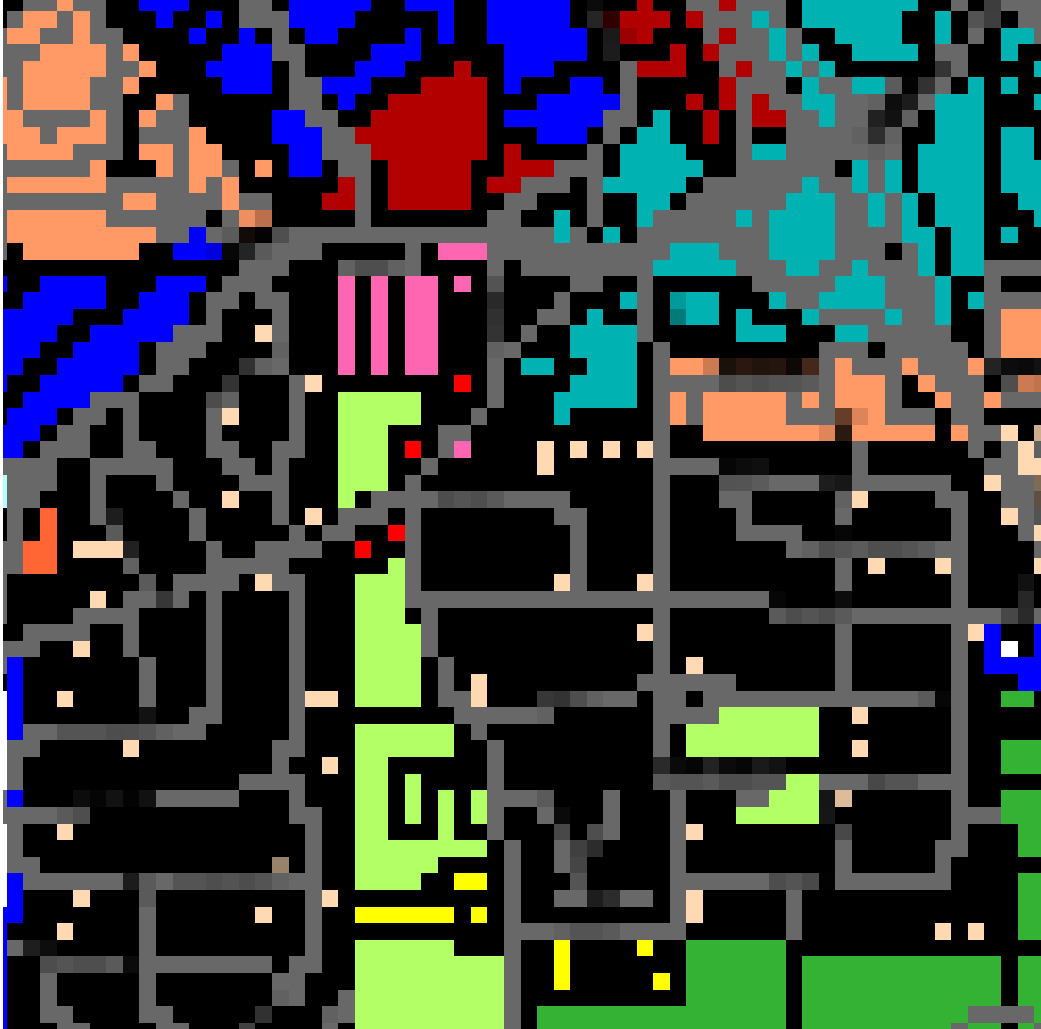
The results of the first neighborhood meeting focused the plan for West Homewood on the study area North of Wildwood Shopping Center and south of Oxmoor Boulevard, specifically on the commercial properties clustered around Patriot Park and Oxmoor Road. To create a neighborhood center with pedestrian-, neighborhood-oriented businesses, RPCGB staff, City of Homewood staff and leadership decided to develop a form-based code that would apply to those properties where neighborhood businesses could develop along streets and roadways with pedestrian access.



West Homewood Study Area

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Existing Zoning



Existing zoning in target area

Existing zoning for properties in West Homewood's neighborhood center (shown in the map to the left) does not encourage or in many ways does not allow buildings to be built up to the sidewalk, creating an environment where pedestrians have primary access to businesses as they do in places like Edgewood and downtown Homewood.

What is a Form-Based Code?

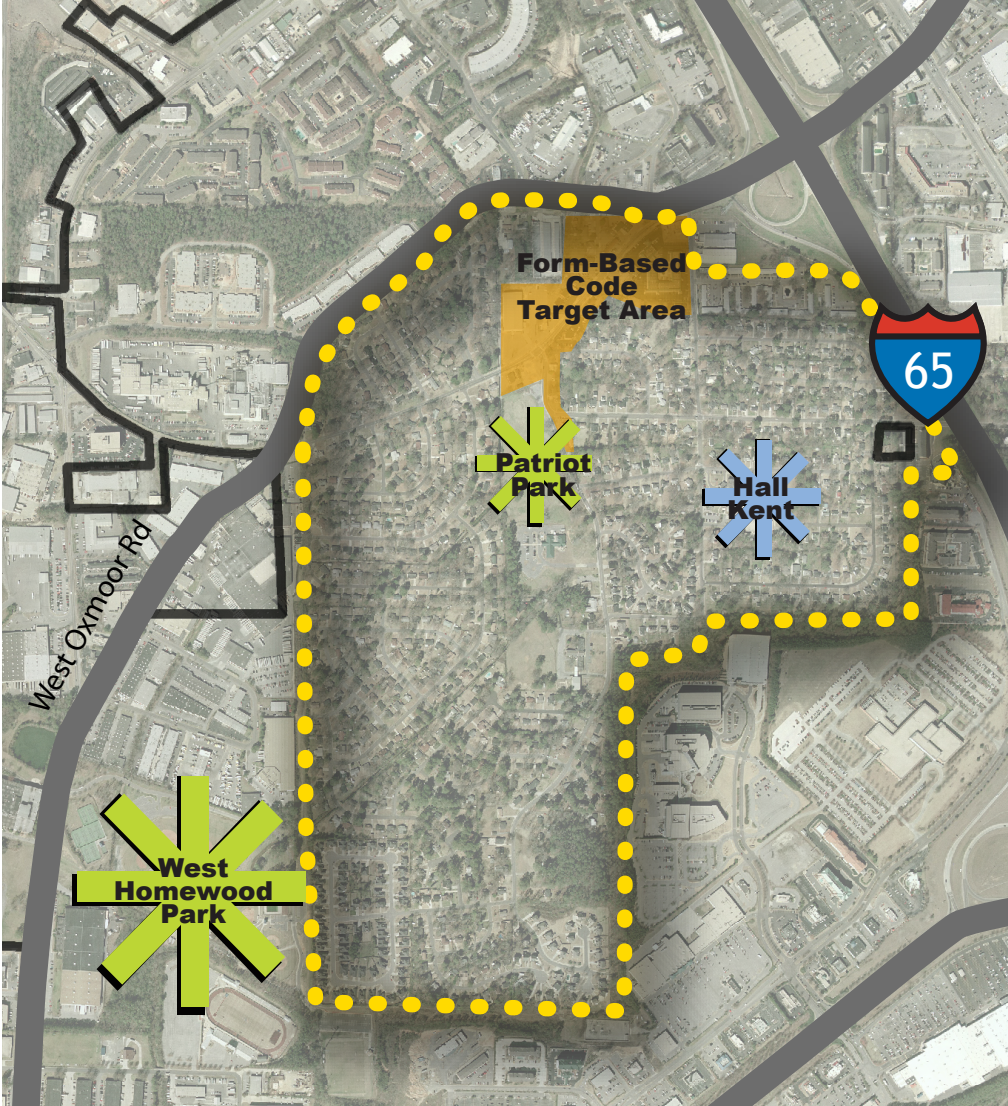
A form-based code is a regulatory tool that works in place of a traditional zoning code. It regulates the *form* of buildings and is much less concerned with segregating the *use* of buildings. This kind of code will create an environment for greater pedestrian access as well as allow property and business owners to mix uses within the same building to create a density of pedestrian activity that will foster greater foot traffic for new and existing businesses.

ZONING LEGEND

 NPD Neighborhood Preservation District	 C-2 Neighborhood Shopping District	 I-2 C Institutional District
 R-5 Attached Dwelling Unit District	 C-3 Community Shopping District	 C-1 Office Building District
 R-7 Attached Dwelling Unit District	 GURD Greensprings Urban Renewal District	

Target Area

This image shows the target area for redevelopment as a neighborhood center in the context of the surrounding residential part of West Homewood. The properties targeted for the form-based code are highlighted in orange. The images on the following page show existing conditions in the target area.



West Homewood Study Area



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Existing Conditions



Oak Grove Rd across from Patriot Park



Oxmoor Rd between Oak Grove Rd and Scott Street



Oak Grove Rd across from Patriot Park



Oxmoor Rd between Oak Grove Rd and Scott Street



Oxmoor Rd and Scott Street intersection

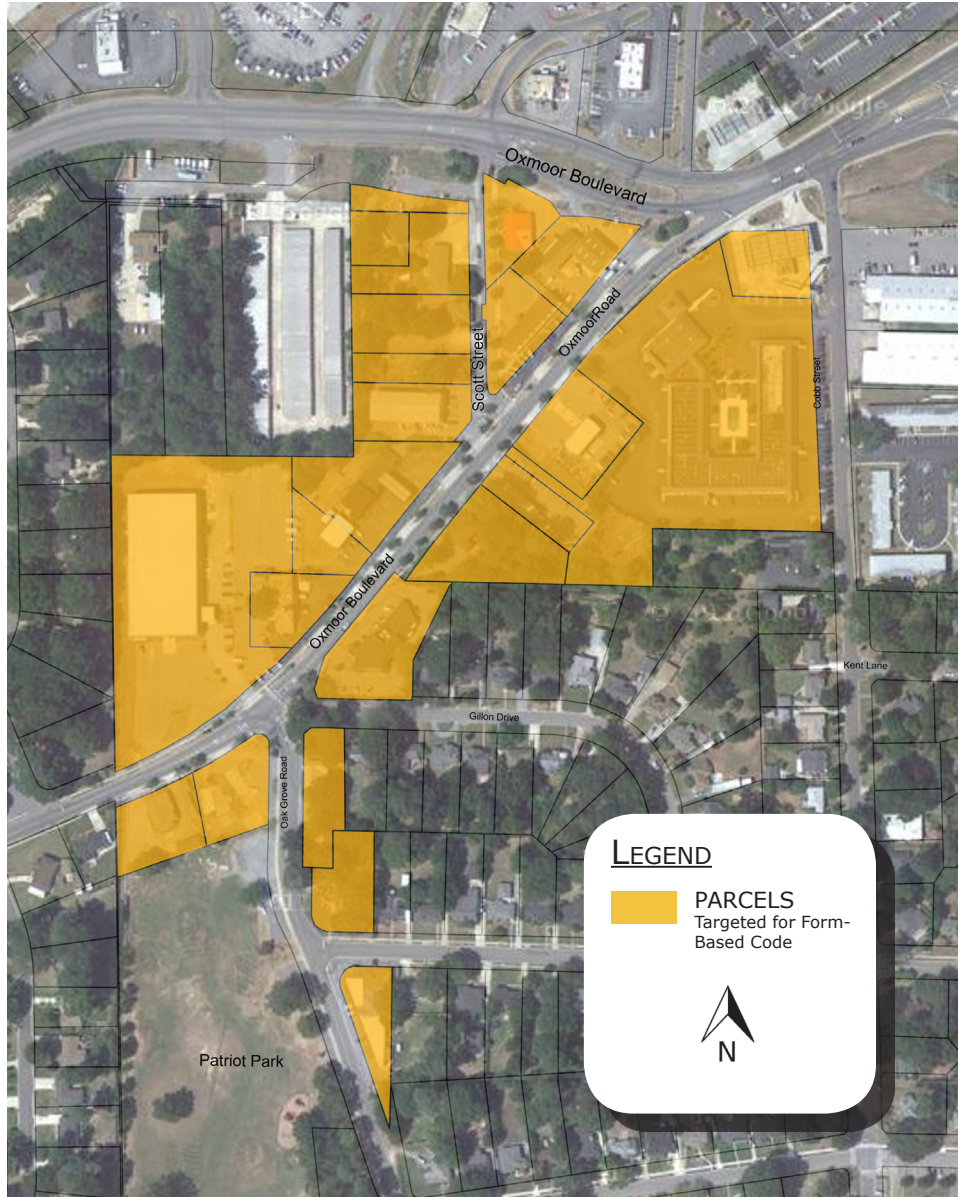


Oxmoor Rd between Oak Grove Rd and Scott Street

These buildings and parking lots are characteristic properties developed under traditional zoning codes. It's clear that these businesses are oriented toward automobiles as the primary way to attract customers. Pedestrians have to cross parking lots without clearly defined paths to get to businesses. In order to create an environment more conducive for neighborhood residents to walk to existing and future businesses, the form-based code developed for this area needs to specifically address the way new development will address the public realm in regard to sidewalk width and frontage, street parking and parking lot locations. Even for automobile-oriented businesses, the form-based code allows buildings to address the street in a way that provides quality public spaces for pedestrians while simultaneously creating appropriate access for cars to businesses.

Illustrative Plan

The illustrative plan on the opposite page shows a potential redevelopment scenario that would occur if every parcel shown in orange in the map on this page were redeveloped according to the form-based code. Buildings are shown located directly adjacent to the wider sidewalks where pedestrians - neighborhood residents walking from their homes - get primary access to businesses while cars still have easy access to parking lots behind or beside buildings or on-street parking on the southwestern part of Oxmoor Road and along Oak Grove Road. It is important to note that this illustrative plan shows only one scenario of future development. West Homewood's neighborhood center will evolve over a long period of time and many of the existing buildings will may not ever be redeveloped. The illustrative plan simply shows the reason behind the code - to create a walkable, vibrant neighborhood center filled with neighborhood-oriented businesses.



Targeted Properties

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The full form-based code recommended for adoption as an official code by the City of Homewood for the target-area parcels is attached to this document as an appendix.

Illustrative Plan for Study Area

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Where to Start

To change the character and identity of a neighborhood center, both neighborhood businesses and residents have to support and work with the City in a positive, public-private partnership that builds momentum and energy for redevelopment. The City of Homewood has taken significant first steps by investing in sidewalks and street lights throughout the neighborhood as well as in the recently completed renovation of Patriot Park. This plan recommends building on the success and popularity of Patriot Park and focusing its first round of investments in the public space adjacent to the park, creating opportunities for private business and property owners to reinvest in their properties and take the first steps in bringing the vision of West Homewood's residents to reality.

Oak Grove Road Retail Redevelopment

First and foremost, the existing commercial building directly across Oak Grove Road from Patriot Park is actually built and oriented with pedestrian access as a primary focus. The public space for parking and the sidewalk in front of the building - the space



Existing conditions at retail building across from Patriot Park



Proposed improvements to the public space in front of the building as well as a scenario for renovations to the exterior of the building

between the businesses and the park - is in need of repair and updating and lacks attractive and functional pedestrian infrastructure. This is a great opportunity to create a catalyst project that will bring momentum because the property received a significant amount of interest from citizens during this planning effort who want to see small retail and dining establishments there. To support their private redevelopment and encourage other business and property owners to do the same, the first public investments should be made in the streetscape (all within city right of way) around the building to create a pedestrian-friendly, walkable atmosphere around the park where retail business mentioned above can thrive. This creates immediate momentum in the neighborhood and will bring the attention of investors to other parcels in the neighborhood. Below is a rendering of proposed changes to the public space in front of the building.



Aerial view retail building across from Patriot Park (Raleigh Ave on the left of the building and Oak Grove Rd on the the bottom)



Proposed improvements to the public space in front of the building as well as a scenario for renovations to the exterior of the building

Oak Grove Road/Oxmoor Road Intersection Redevelopment

The City of Homewood purchased the lot pictured to the right on the corner of Oak Grove Road and Oxmoor Road during this planning process. To create a thriving, pedestrian-oriented environment, corner lots are extremely important as they make the transition from one street to another making the design of both the building and the public space critical to the success of both streets' character and identity. Because the City of Homewood now owns this parcel, there is both a great opportunity to provide an incentive for developers as well as continue the redevelopment momentum from Oak Grove Road out onto Oxmoor Road.



Existing conditions on the parcel at the corner of Oak Grove Road and Oxmoor Road

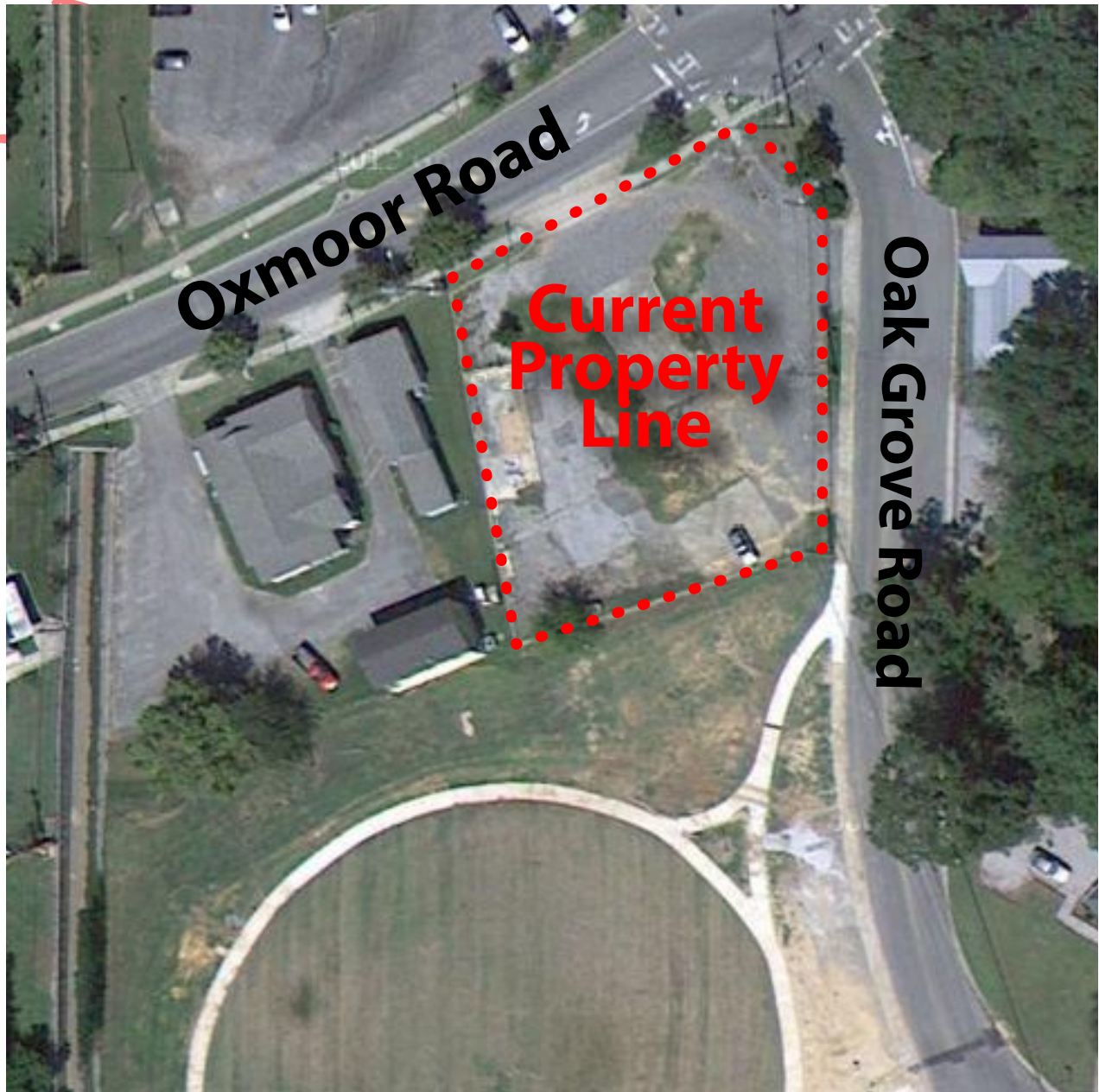


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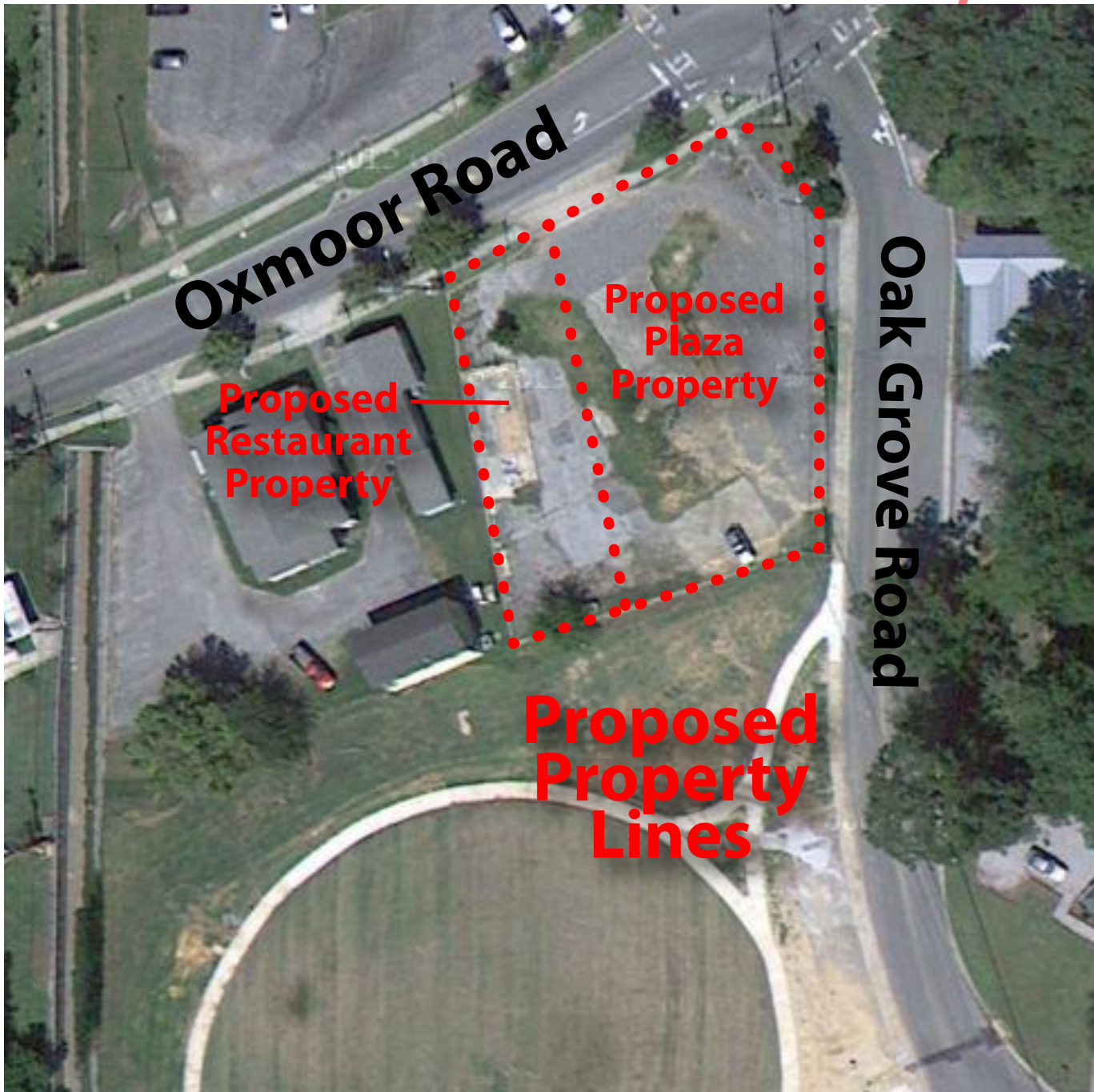
Instead of the typical two sides of public frontage most corner lots have, this lot has three sides because the southernmost property line faces the park. This parcel is also at the end of a view corridor down Oxmoor Road when traveling southwest. This plan proposes a plaza on the front corner of the City-owned lot that provides a focal point at the end of the view corridor as well as leads pedestrians and residents to the park. In this way the plaza acts as a gateway to Patriot Park. The type of use this plan recommends is a cafe or restaurant similar to the images shown on this and the previous page. Outdoor tables provide a soft transition from the commercial space of a restaurant into the public space of the park and plaza. Examples of this kind of development are shown below.



Oak Grove Road/Oxmoor Road Intersection Redevelopment



With the proposal for a plaza adjacent to a future retail/restaurant structure, a subdivision of the corner parcel is necessary. The image to the right shows the current property line and the image on the next page shows the proposed subdivision, creating space for a plaza wholly owned by the City of Homewood and an adjacent parcel to be sold to and wholly owned by a private business.



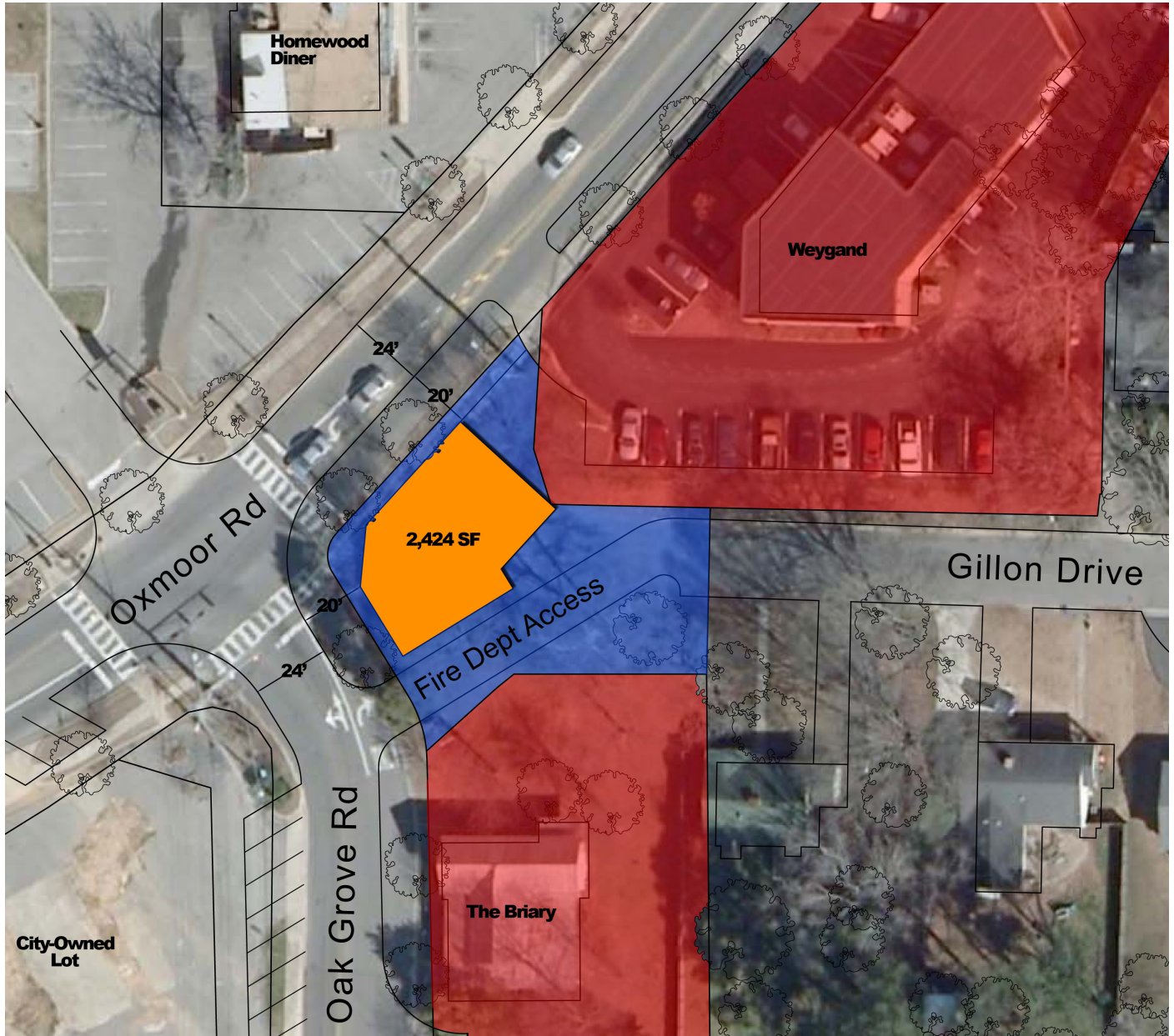
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Oak Grove Road/Oxmoor Road Intersection - New Parcel Formation

Across Oak Grove Road from the corner lot purchased by the City of Homewood is yet another opportunity for the City of Homewood to incent development that can further the neighborhood's goal of creating a vibrant, walkable neighborhood center filled with neighborhood-oriented businesses. Between the property owned by Weygand Surveyors on Oxmoor Road and The Briary cigar shop on Oak Grove Road is public right-of-way that at one time was Gillon Drive's access to the intersection. Gillon Drive currently stops in a cul-de-sac before the Oak Grove Road/Oxmoor Road intersection (shown in the map below). This plan recommends removing the cul-de-sac, continuing a lane from Gillon Drive out to Oak Grove Road in order to provide ability for the Fire Department to move quickly through the neighborhood in emergency situations, and establishing a parcel on the corner that can be developed through the form-based code into a corner lot that can also help transition the development momentum from Oak Grove to Oxmoor Road and vice-versa.



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Re-location of Fire Station 3 to the Scott Street Area

Emergency Management Systems coverage is a critical component for any neighborhood's health. Homewood's 2007 Master Plan called for re-locating all fire stations that existed at that time and adding a fourth fire station to provide optimal fire and EMS coverage for the citizens of Homewood. Since 2007, Fire Station 1 has been re-located in accordance with the Master Plan while Stations 2 and 3 are still in the planning process of re-location. The construction of a new Fire Station 3 in West Homewood could work in tandem with redevelopment projects already mentioned in this plan to create an even stronger redevelopment momentum. According to the Homewood Fire Department, the Scott Street area and the area between Cobb Street and the portion of Oxmoor Road north of the Scott Street intersection and south of Oxmoor Boulevard in West Homewood would be an optimal location to serve Station 3's service area. Built in accordance with the form-based code, the fire station could help set an architectural precedent for other redevelopment on Scott Street and Oxmoor Road. Additionally, a fire station adds a strong sense of security to an area while providing a feeling of neighborhood pride and an icon for the neighborhood. The images on the next page show examples of fire stations developed with pedestrian space and street frontage in mind.



Two of the images are from fire stations in the Birmingham region, Mt. Laurel off of Highway 280 and The Preserve in Hoover.



Fire Station No. 7 in Portland, Oregon was built in 1927 when pedestrian access and street frontage was a primary concern



Mr. Laurel fire station



The Preserve fire station in Hoover.



Fire Station 26 in Cleveland, Ohio built in 1898

Further Incentives and Opportunities

Homewood Downtown Redevelopment Authority

West Homewood falls within the Homewood Downtown Redevelopment Authority's (HDRA) target area for development assistance. To further assist business and property owners in redevelopment efforts, the HDRA can offer several avenues of support. Some general information about the HDRA:

- A five-member authority appointed by the city council and mayor to analyze the downtown area, as well as other business districts in Homewood
- Will work closely with city council to develop short-term and long-term plans that will ensure the success, growth and revitalization of specific areas AND - keep them "Homewood".
- Assist in the development of:
 - real estate analysis
 - real estate development
 - land acquisition
- Works directly with private investors and developers to attract and encourage new projects.
- Provides economic incentives (tax incentives, deferments, etc...) for property owners, business owners, developers wanting to building/improve
- Can authorize the issuance and sale of revenue bonds to finance projects and fund facade grant programs

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Future Connectivity in West Homewood

To create more access and connectivity in West Homewood, this plan recommends developing a second two-way street between Oxmoor Road and Oxmoor Boulevard. The illustrative plan to the right shows a proposed extension of Oak Grove Road north to Oxmoor Boulevard and connecting Cobb Street to Oxmoor Road with an extension of Scott Street through the roundabout. This would open up several parcels to increased development potential, increasing the value to the property owners as well as the potential tax revenue to the City.



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Conclusion

With an established redevelopment momentum coming from Patriot Park, the opportunities with City-owned property on the corner of Oak Grove Road and Oxmoor Road, the continued success of the businesses and community activities existing or newly established in the neighborhood, and the City of Homewood's reputation for working well with developers, businesses, and property owners, the West Homewood Neighborhood Center will be poised to grow and evolve. Working with the form-based code, the neighborhood can gradually transform from the automobile-oriented area that it has been into the vibrant, walkable, mixed-use community that West Homewood Neighborhood residents desire.

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