

# Cahaba Heights COMMUNITY PLAN



Adopted November 13, 2008  
by the Planning and Zoning Commission  
of the City of Vestavia Hills, Alabama

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Building Communities Grant  
through the  
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

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### Acknowledgements:

The Cahaba Heights Steering Committee wishes to give a special thanks for the outstanding leadership of former mayor Charles A. “Scotty” McCallum in commissioning this study.

We also owe a special debt to Al Folcher for his dedication to the city and his never-ending drive for perfection.

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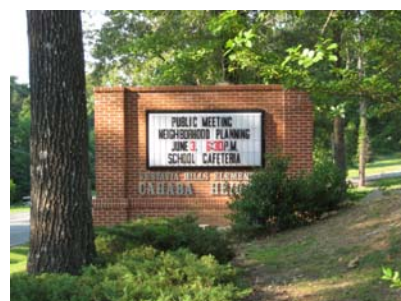
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cahaba Heights Community Plan was developed as an extension of the City of Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan. The plan was prepared by the City through a Steering Committee made up of Cahaba Heights residents, businesspeople and City representatives with assistance from planning consultants KPS Group, Inc. of Birmingham, Alabama and the transportation planning firm of Skipper Consulting, Inc.

The planning process began with a community workshop in June 2008, during which attendees voiced concerns on current issues and described their visions for the future of the community. Additional meetings were held to gather further input and to give the community opportunities to respond to recommendations emerging from the plan process.

This plan targets several topics of particular importance to Cahaba Heights: community character, transportation, facilities and parks, neighborhoods, business areas and infrastructure. The Steering Committee and consultants evaluated issues and opportunities within these categories and prepared recommendations to implement Cahaba Heights' growth and revitalization strategies. The primary goals of the plan include:



### **Gateways and Image Corridors**

Maintain a positive image along Cahaba Heights' major streets and gateways through signage, landscaping, street design and quality private investments

### **Land Use and Transportation**

Ensure residential and non-residential development patterns appropriate to Cahaba Heights that are coordinated with and supported by effective street and pedestrian networks

### **Commercial Centers and Business Development**

Encourage quality commercial and mixed use developments in commercial centers that maximize the use of available land, retain and build upon Cahaba Heights' unique scale and character and support community interaction and walkability

### **Neighborhoods**

Ensure residential development patterns that are compatible with existing neighborhoods and community preferences while encouraging maintenance and reinvestment in Cahaba Heights' existing neighborhoods

### **Community Facilities and Recreation**

Plan for new community facilities and recreation areas that provide convenient access for Cahaba Heights residents

The goals of this plan will not be achieved overnight. Therefore, the various public and community actions identified in the plan must be coordinated to assure effectiveness and efficiency and prioritized to provide an attainable and realistic schedule for implementation.

**Strategic Concept.** The Strategic Concept described in Chapter III portrays the core structure of Cahaba Heights – its general land use patterns, major roads, and community institutions. Building upon that structure, it reflects several aspects of the vision for Cahaba Heights – increased walkability, enhanced gateways and image corridors, focused development in commercial centers, and future recreational access.

**Land Use and Regulations.** The Plan includes land use policies supplemental to the Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan to assist in local decision-making regarding zoning and subdivision requests. These policies include, in particular, encouragement of compact and mixed use development in Cahaba Heights’ commercial centers. These patterns of development are not supported by the zoning classifications available in the Vestavia Hills Zoning Ordinance, so modifications to the City’s development regulations are encouraged. The Future Land Use section also includes recommendations on residential densities to guide decision-making and maintain appropriate relationships between existing and new residential development.

**Public Improvements.** The Plan recommends a combination of specific public improvements in gateways, streets and pedestrian facilities and ongoing street and drainage improvements. Gateway improvements suggested by the plan include signage and landscaping in two different contexts: at entryways into the community and at entryways into Cahaba Heights’ commercial centers. Street projects include capacity improvements on major streets, modification of the Cahaba Heights Road-Dolly Ridge intersection, access management improvements, and similar investments to assure safe, calm traffic flow throughout the area. Establishing a more walkable environment in both neighborhoods and commercial centers was a high priority to residents and businesses. Thus, the plan suggests additional projects that may be incorporated into the City Sidewalk Master Plan or initiated as part of streetscape improvement or access management efforts. The plan also recommends maintaining paratransit services in Cahaba Heights and taking advantage of the regional transit route serving the Summit.

**Community Involvement.** The public participation that guided the development of this plan must transition to continued collaboration between residents, landowners, and business people together with City officials and staff in the implementation of the plan. Several issues and desires brought forward by the public can not be adequately addressed by the City alone. Organized efforts by community leaders, in partnership with the City of Vestavia Hills, will be necessary to tackle items such as upkeep and beautification, business development, neighborhood parks, and overall stewardship of the community. The people of Cahaba Heights are passionate about their community – and that passion must translate to action.

The Cahaba Heights Community Plan does not seek to reinvent Cahaba Heights but instead solidifies a commonly held vision for the area – one that builds upon the community’s unique assets to further the safety, comfort and quality of its neighborhoods and foster prosperity in its commercial centers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This Community Plan is the result of cooperation between the City of Vestavia Hills and the residents, property owners and businesses of Cahaba Heights. Six years after annexation, these diverse groups joined forces, determined to improve the quality of life while retaining Cahaba Heights' special character.

In the context of the Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan, the Cahaba Heights Community Plan provides a focused, more detailed study of the assets, issues and opportunities particular to Cahaba Heights.

The City and a team of planning consultants worked with a Steering Committee of Cahaba Heights residential and local business leaders to prepare planning maps, augmented with site visits, interviews and strong community participation during a series of public meetings.

Shared ideas, anticipated major trends and lively discussion formed the core of a new Strategic Concept, from which a detailed plan developed. The Community Plan is intended to stabilize and protect critical portions of the community through better regulation and public investment while encouraging and enabling private revitalization and development activities.

The Cahaba Heights Community Plan recognizes the value of the community's neighborhoods and commercial centers, underlying natural resources, history and community values. The plan will guide development by balancing growth and infill with the conservation of the community's spirit, character and neighborhoods.

*Break-out session during the June 2008 Community Meeting held at the Vestavia Hills Elementary School – Cahaba Heights. Over 200 members of the community came forward to listen and share their vision for Cahaba Heights.*





## HISTORY

Cahaba Heights grew out of a small settlement around a pumping station along the Cahaba River. In 1887 the Birmingham Water Works charged engineer W.A. Merkle to construct the pumping station to withdraw water from the river where it would then be sent to a reservoir on Shades Mountain and then distributed throughout the growing city. The community was originally named “Merkle” for the engineer who served as the pumping station’s first supervisor after its construction.

Later the settlement moved upland and became known as “New Merkle”. The first school opened in New Merkle in 1906 with an enrollment of 113 students. Over time New Merkle earned the image of being a rough, wooly community – allegedly moonshiners and bootleggers were common to the area. In 1953 Mr. E.A. Hollis, principal of the school, suggested the community’s name be changed to “Cahaba Heights.”

After remaining an unincorporated part of Jefferson County for many years, the citizens voted overwhelmingly to annex into the City of Vestavia Hills in 2002. Today, with a population of approximately 5,200 residents, Cahaba Heights is a unique part of Vestavia Hills and of the region. The community, located between downtown Birmingham and the Highway 280 corridor, serves as an important link between the southwestern portions of Vestavia Hills and the new growth area of Liberty Park. Cahaba Heights’ central location and proximity to Highway 280 and I-459 provide convenient access to the major shopping and employment hubs in the metropolitan area. Since its incorporation into the City, the Cahaba Heights area has experienced increased interest in both commercial and residential development and reinvestment.

## Key Concepts and Terminology

The recommendations of this plan rely on concepts and terminology, which are defined as follows:

*Access Management.* Development practices, regulations and/or improvements that ensure adequate distance between intersections of streets and driveways to maintain traffic capacity and improve safety for motorists and pedestrians by reducing conflicts between through traffic and local access.

*Active Recreation.* The use of an open space for organized sports. Active recreational uses often require physical improvements to open space for sports activities, which can preclude the use of the space for other recreational uses.

*Commercial Center.* A central hub or concentration of activity and development, often including businesses, community institutions, and civic or public spaces. They may also include high-density residential uses, at their edges or in the upper-stories of buildings.

*Gateway.* An arrival point into the City, community and/or a commercial center generally along an “image corridor”. Gateways represent physical opportunities to make a positive impression on visitors. They may include signage and landscaping improvements, but are also impacted by the character of development alongside them.

*Image Corridor.* A major street that, due to its location and frequency of use, should convey a positive image of the surrounding community through its design and through the character of adjoining development.



*Mixed-Use.* The combining of different land uses (especially residential and non-residential uses) on the same site or in the same building. In this plan, “mixed-use” is broken down into the following land use categories:

*Retail/Mixed Use.* A land use category including commercial and mixed-use but with an emphasis on ground floor retail and services. This category forms the core of a commercial center to allow for and encourage a concentration of shopping and dining uses.

*Limited Mixed Use.* A land use category including commercial and mixed-use but with an emphasis on less intensive commercial uses, such as offices, and residential uses. This category corresponds with the edges of a commercial center, providing a transition to adjoining residential areas.

*Planned Mixed Use.* A land use category in which the mix of uses is largely determined by a specific plan for the area, as approved by the City.

*Passive Recreation.* The use of an open space for a variety of recreational activities, but generally excluding organized sports. Passive recreation can include playgrounds, walking paths and trails, picnic areas, and open spaces designed flexibly for free play.

*Wayfinding.* The ways in which people orient themselves in the built environment through visual cues, including signage, architecture, and other design elements.

## II. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

### COMMUNITY MEETINGS

The first Community Workshop set the pace for a spirited community involvement process. Break-out sessions gave Cahaba Heights residents, business people and property owners the opportunity to speak their minds about their likes, dislikes and vision for the future of the community.

During the first community meeting, the audience of over 200 addressed three major areas: Community Assets, Issues and Opportunities.

#### Assets

Assets are critical, defining characteristics that meet or exceed the standards of the community. The primary assets recorded during the meeting include:

- Unique, village atmosphere
- Good schools and community services
- Pedestrian friendly
- Rich natural environment with lots of trees
- Moderate development intensity
- Low overall traffic
- Suburban setting
- Quiet, clean and family-friendly
- Nice people
- Shopping and employment opportunities within the community
- Convenient location

#### Issues

While not necessarily a problem, issues are any aspects that do not meet the expectations of the community. The concerns voiced during the meeting are summarized below:

- Traffic flow
- No public park space
- Noise
- Too many service stations
- Ordinance and traffic enforcement
- Abandoned, overgrown properties in both residential and commercial areas
- Inconsistent and undesirable signage
- Lack of clear gateway(s)/community focus
- Drainage, open ditches, no curb and gutter
- No community library annex
- Inadequate street lighting
- Need turn signals at busy intersections
- Lack of pedestrian connectivity
- Through traffic on certain streets
- Narrow streets
- Few sidewalks or crosswalks
- Old water lines
- Increased density of infill/loss of green space

## Opportunities

Building upon the assets and recognizing the issues of the planning area, participants were asked to envision Cahaba Heights in the future. Participant were then asked to describe the pieces currently missing from their visions. This brought to the surface the following opportunities:

- Library annex, additional city services
- Continuing improvements to elementary school
- Parks, especially small, passive parks and open space
- Pedestrian improvements
- Drainage and street improvements
- Connectivity
- Regular upkeep of private property
- Swift city action

The assets and issues mentioned by participants demonstrate the need to build and improve upon the physical quality of Cahaba Heights as well as continuing to organize and build relationships among and between the several major constituents—residents, business representatives, local developers, property owners, Vestavia Hills elected officials and city staff.

Following Community Meetings, the steering committee and consultant team developed additional information, with special emphasis on the issues that seemed of particular concern – community image, transportation and pedestrian accessibility, public facilities and services, neighborhood conservation, commercial development, and infrastructure improvements.

The diverse range of issues confirmed the need for an overall, comprehensive approach to the Community Plan for Cahaba Heights and its implementation by all responsible parties.

### III. STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Although Cahaba Heights is a relatively new addition to Vestavia Hills, it is critical to the future of the city. With a growing population and convenient location, Cahaba Heights represents a scale and pattern of development unique within Vestavia Hills, which should be enhanced through responsible planning and investment and neighborhood support.

The Strategic Concept is organized into several key policy areas. These deal with critical physical characteristics of the community and its neighborhoods. The Strategic Concept describes the basic intent for improving the community within these areas, which are then further explored in the remainder of the plan.

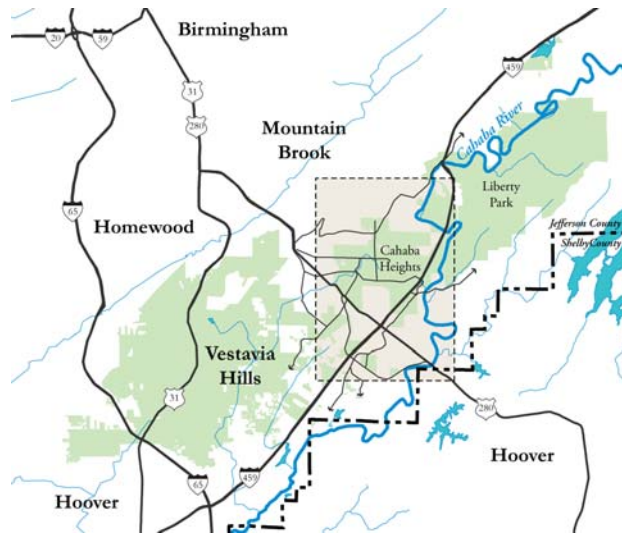


Figure 1: Regional Map

- Gateways and image corridors
- Transportation
- Commercial centers
- Neighborhoods
- Community facilities and recreation

#### Gateways and Image Corridors

Cahaba Heights’ major streets (Dolly Ridge Road, Crosshaven Drive, Cahaba Heights Road, and Green Valley Road) provide gateways to commercial centers and neighborhoods. These streets serve as “image corridors” that portray an image of the community to residents, businesses, and visitors. Cahaba Heights’ gateway and image corridors should be enhanced, visually and functionally, and protected from inappropriate changes in accord with the following:

- Maintain a positive image along Crosshaven Drive, Cahaba Heights Road/Pump House Road, and Dolly Ridge Road
- Improve wayfinding through appropriate signage and development patterns along the community’s image corridors and major decision points
- Improve major gateways through landscaping and signage improvements as appropriate
- Encourage quality private investments along image corridors and major gateways

## Transportation

Cahaba Heights is in a convenient location with easy access to US Hwy 280 and I-459. However, its location also makes it susceptible to through traffic on local streets – Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road, Crosshaven Drive, Green Valley Road and Overton Road. And, although Cahaba Heights has a well-interconnected street network, many streets need improvement, including intersection improvements and widening of key streets. Also, Cahaba Heights is the perfect size – most all destinations are in easy walking distance from area neighborhoods – for getting around without a car, though, prior to annexation there had been no investments to support such accessibility. After annexation, however, the City has planned and will be constructing sidewalks throughout the area as funds become available. Mobility and accessibility should be improved in Cahaba Heights in accord with the following:

- Interconnect neighborhoods, commercial centers, the elementary school and other community destinations, with sidewalks and/or other linkages
- Minimize congestion on community streets through access management improvements and standards
- Minimize through traffic in neighborhoods
- Improve local streets over time through repaving, installation of curbs and gutters, sidewalks and intersection lighting

## Commercial Centers

Significant nodes or concentrations of people, commercial activity and development are designated in this plan as *commercial centers*. Commercial centers include the areas devoted primarily to commercial use along Cahaba Heights Road, between Dolly Ridge Road and Crosshaven Drive, the roughly triangular commercial development area captured between Green Valley Road, Crosshaven Drive and Greendale Road, and the planned Patchwork Farm development along Cahaba River Road. Commercial centers should serve as places for economic development, but also as focal points and hubs of community life for residents. Infill, redevelopment and reinvestment in these centers should be carefully managed in accord with the following:

- Guide private and public investment in commercial centers to create a more cohesive physical environment that retains and builds upon the community's uniqueness
- Promote the efficient use of land already devoted to non-residential uses by encouraging shared parking, access, circulation and loading
- Avoid encroachments into adjacent residential areas to the degree practicable
- Ensure that “like faces like” (residential to residential, non-residential to non-residential) across a street wherever possible
- Maintain appropriate building scales with logical transitions to adjoining neighborhoods
- Retain residential character when existing single-family homes and duplexes are converted to commercial use

## Neighborhoods

Cahaba Heights has made itself into an attractive location for living, working, and shopping. With a widely varied housing stock (attached and detached single-family homes, duplexes, apartments and condominiums and assisted living facilities), most of the community's buildings have been built since the 1950s. Because of its desirability, various areas within the community have attracted residential development and redevelopment. The issues facing Cahaba Heights' neighborhoods include drainage and street improvements; maintenance and upkeep of existing residences; and compatibility of residential infill and redevelopment. Existing neighborhoods should be improved and new residential growth carried out in accord with the following:

- Carefully manage residential development patterns to assure compatibility with positive examples of existing neighborhoods
- Promote property maintenance through community action and City enforcement
- Locate higher density housing in or at the edges of commercial centers with proximity to major streets and where there is less disruption to lower density neighborhoods

## Community Facilities and Recreation

Community facilities in Cahaba Heights include the Vestavia Hills Elementary School-Cahaba Heights, a police and fire station, the New Merkle House community center and several area churches. The City also is in the process of developing a park and athletic facilities as a part of the planned mixed-use development at Patchwork Farm on Cahaba River Road. The City also has sold land to the Freshwater Land Trust for development of a linear park near the Cahaba Pumping Station east of I-459. Quality community facilities and open spaces should be planned for and provided in accord with the following:

- Enhance recreational opportunities at the elementary school
- Identify opportunities for a community park to serve as a focal point and gathering space for Cahaba Heights' residents
- Identify opportunities to provide additional city facilities in Cahaba Heights as appropriate
- Encourage the development of small neighborhood parks to provide passive recreational spaces in convenient locations to Cahaba Heights' neighborhoods

The accompanying map is a representation of this Strategic Concept (Figure 2). It indicates the general locations and interrelationships of each of the plan's major recommendations. Implementation of this Strategic Concept will update and strengthen the community with a complementary mix of uses, including an appropriate variety of housing types and densities. This, in combination with improvements to the public realm will increase the potential for a vibrant community environment – with strong neighborhoods focused around attractive, successful centers of commerce and community life.







## IV. GATEWAYS AND IMAGE CORRIDORS

### GATEWAYS

Cahaba Heights' major gateways include the intersection of Cahaba Heights Road and Dolly Ridge Road; the entrance along Crosshaven Drive from the nearby Summit shopping center; Cahaba Heights Road near Sicard Hollow Road; and Crosshaven Drive south of Overton Road. Each of these



Intersection of Dolly Ridge Road and Highway 280, a major entryway into Cahaba Heights

gateways introduce visitors to the commercial centers at the heart of the community. The entrances at Dolly Ridge Road and Highway 280 and at Cahaba Heights Road near the Cahaba Pumping Station are also important gateways, serving as entries into the community and the City of Vestavia Hills. The nearby highway interchange at Pumphouse Road, although a gateway for Cahaba Heights, is located in the City of Mountain Brook. Another entryway into Cahaba Heights' is the eastern end of Cahaba Heights Road, between Crosshaven and I-459.



The design and signage of gateways should vary with their location and purpose. For instance, gateways at the edges of the community announce to visitors their entrance into the Cahaba Heights community of Vestavia Hills. These may be sited with flexibility along the entry corridor and will generally take the form of monument signs sitting apart from adjacent development. Landscaping should be relatively informal and lighting should be directed toward the sign, either from above or below, and shielded to prevent glare to motorists and pedestrians. The design of each gateway should take advantage of the best characteristics of each location.

Gateways into commercial centers serve a different function and may take on a different form. These should be sited at intersections and integrated into the design of the streetscape or public space, where applicable. Gateway signage may be provided through decorative banners attached to light poles or freestanding, as shown in the example at left. The commercial centers along Cahaba Heights Road and Crosshaven should be named to help brand and market them, in much the same way that individual businesses in a shopping center or even an historic downtown area may be collectively promoted. Incorporating the names of the commercial centers into signage will increase local pride and support wayfinding for visitors.

The rendering on the facing page illustrates the ways in which gateways may be improved through public investments in signage, landscaping and street improvements and through investments in private properties alongside them.



Improvements shown in the rendering below include:

- sidewalks and crosswalks
- intersection improvements
- frontage landscaping
- gateway signage/banners
- ornamental lighting around intersection
- reuse of vacant business on SE corner



Figure 3: Gateway Rendering, Cahaba Heights Road and Dolly Ridge Road

## IMAGE CORRIDORS

Dolly Ridge Road, Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road, Green Valley Road, and Crosshaven Drive are integral to the way visitors view the community. Cahaba Heights' image corridors should be safe, comfortable, and interesting. This is not simply a matter of aesthetics; the economy of the city is tightly linked to its physical character, and a quality image must be maintained to be competitive. By taking appropriate care with development along these corridors, Cahaba Heights will further ensure marketability and prosperity.

The following strategies should be followed to assure a positive image at these key locations and corridors:

- *There should be a cohesive and coordinated, private development pattern along image corridors and gateways.*
  - Scattered or strip patterns of commercial development should be avoided.
  - Retail and other non-residential uses should be oriented toward major streets.
  - Large buildings should be broken down into separate volumes, both horizontally and vertically.

- Individual developments should be planned and designed with careful attention to context to create a cohesive physical environment.
- Buildings placement should reinforce pedestrian circulation, so that pedestrians may walk along building fronts rather than along or across parking lots and driveways.
- When possible, driveway access to major roads should be limited.
- *Pedestrian facilities should be included along image corridors, to the degree practicable.*
- *Appropriate lighting and tree plantings should be used at gateways and along image corridors.*
- *Public and private sign types should be appropriate to their context. Due to the compactness of Cahaba Heights, attached buildings signs and freestanding monument signs are appropriate.*
- *Wayfinding signage should be provided at key decision points to assist visitors in finding their way to important destinations in the community.*
- *The City should work with Mountain Brook, Jefferson County, the State of Alabama and other concerned agencies to provide appropriate signage and improvements near the Highway 280/Pumphouse Road gateway into Cahaba Heights.*

## WAYFINDING

Wayfinding improvements include public signs that direct visitors to commercial centers, parks, schools and other public facilities, churches and parking areas. These types of signs may occur in commercial centers as well as at major gateways into the community, such as at the intersection of Dolly Ridge Road and Highway 280. Because Cahaba Heights' commercial centers do not have frontage on the highway, directional signage at this intersection will increase awareness and could lead to additional business patronage.

As more and more sidewalks are installed on area streets, kiosks may also be installed in commercial centers to provide directions for pedestrians. To assure success, wayfinding signs must be consistent in design, both in Cahaba Heights and throughout the city, and be legibly and strategically placed. Similarly, street signs should be installed at all intersections in accord with City specifications.

## V. LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

Land use and transportation strategies are included together in this chapter to reinforce the concept that these issues are integrally related and therefore must be considered simultaneously. Different land uses and densities require different levels of transportation infrastructure. Conversion of one type of use or density to another will have direct impacts on street design and capacity, property access, street network connectivity and pedestrian facilities.

### LAND USE

The Future Land Use map (Figure 4) portrays a pattern of various development types and their relationships with one another. The Cahaba Heights Future Land Use map provides additional detail to the Future Land Use map of the Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan. The following sections describe the types of uses and their associated development patterns as indicated in the Future Land Use Map. Transitions between different land use categories occur at mid-block or along rear lot lines, rather than along the centerline of streets, so that similar uses and densities may face one another across a street.

It should be noted that the land use designations on the Future Land Use map are not intended to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any particular action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document, the City of Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan and its implementing regulations. Site considerations relating to topography, geology, soils or hydrology will be of major importance when locating and arranging land uses and densities of development. These realities, plus attitudes toward development on the part of public officials, other agencies, area residents, property owners and developers will play a large part in determining appropriate development location and design.

### Residential

Residential uses are noted on the Future Land Use map according to gross density: High Density (more than 6 units per acre), Medium Density (2.5 to 6 units per acre); and Low Density (less than 2.5 units per acre). The differing densities of residential uses are arranged based on existing development patterns and to provide a logical and comfortable transition from commercial centers and areas of higher intensity to the least densely developed areas in the community. Similarly, higher density residential development should be avoided on sites otherwise surrounded by housing of lower density.

**Low density residential uses** include existing single-family neighborhoods with spacious lots and relatively large yards. These areas should be maintained at lower densities to conserve topography, natural drainage and tree cover. The character of these areas varies between suburban, estate subdivisions and more rural neighborhoods, both dominated by generous amounts of open space. Low density residential areas are characterized by relatively long block lengths and limited street connectivity. Streets may include swales to address runoff, rather than raised curbs. These areas currently do not have sidewalks. To improve pedestrian access to the surrounding community, sidewalks may be installed on selected streets. Vestavia Hills' R-1 Zoning District is consistent with this land use category.



# Future Land Use

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  Low-Density Residential    |  Retail/Mixed Use  |  Institutional        |
|  Medium-Density Residential |  Limited Mixed Use |  Parks and Open Space |
|  High-Density Residential   |  Planned Mixed Use |  |
|  Birmingham                 |  Jefferson County  |  Mountain Brook       |

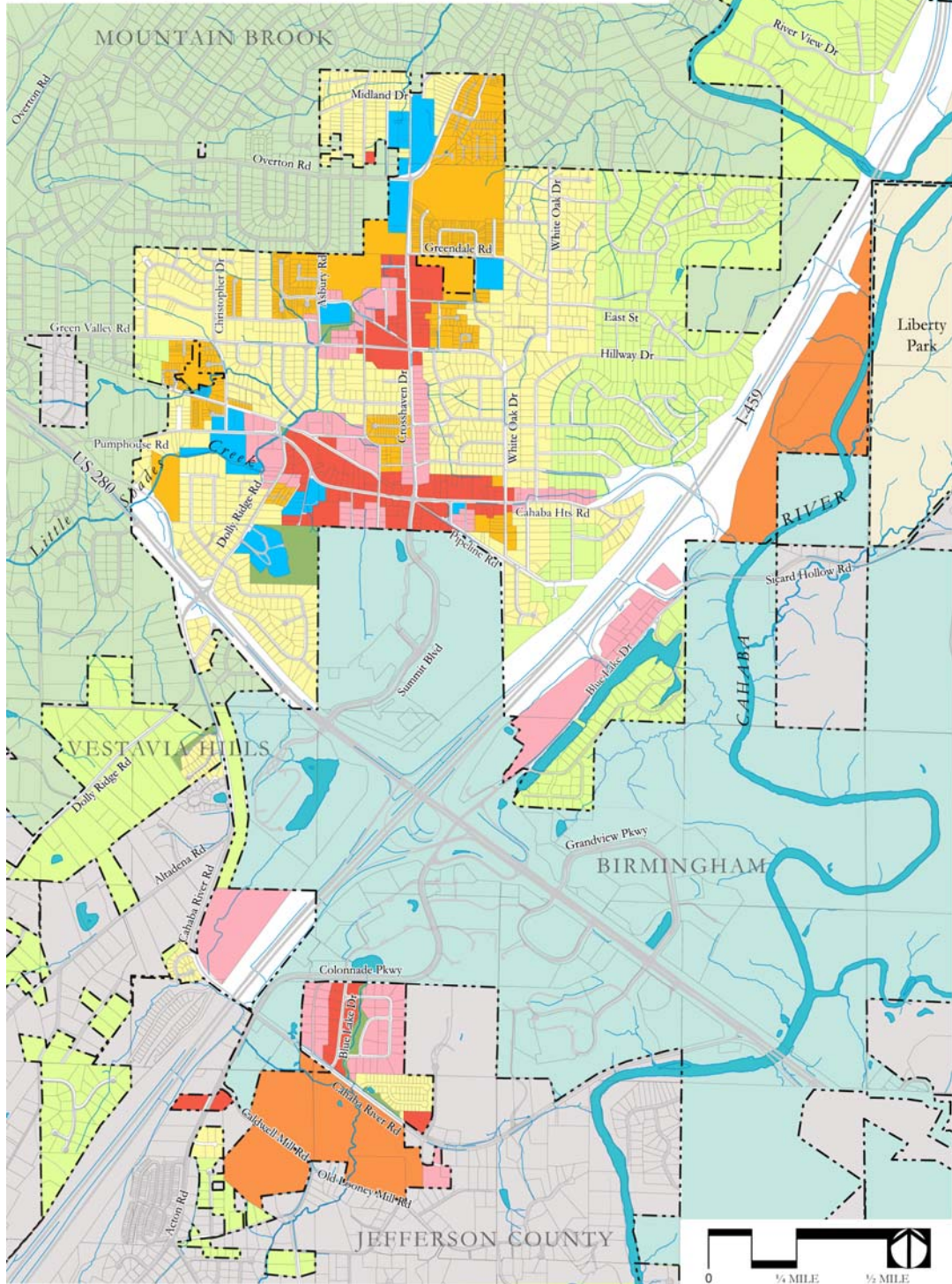


Figure 4: Future Land Use Map

**Medium density residential uses** include moderately sized single-family detached housing. Most future medium-density residential development should be located relatively near the community's commercial centers and in relatively close-in locations. Blocks are generally 300 ft or greater in length, providing a moderate level of street connectivity. Currently, most of these areas do not have sidewalks, but may be improved over time through installation of sidewalks on one or both sides of the street. Stormwater runoff may be addressed by vegetated swales, valley gutters or raised curbs. New medium density residential development may accommodate on-street parking on one or both sides if raised curbs are installed. The City's R-2, R-3 and R-4 Zoning Districts are appropriate to this land use category.

**High density residential uses** include small lot single-family detached and attached housing, duplexes and multi-family residential developments. New high-density residential uses are intended to be adjacent to or within commercial centers. High-density residential neighborhoods are highly connected to the city street network and have relatively short block lengths. In new developments, local streets should include on-street parking; and sidewalks should be provided on both sides of streets, separated from the street by a planting strip. Because lots are smaller and generally narrow, building setbacks are minimal. Additional green space should be provided in common open spaces. Alleys should be considered in new developments to provide access to parking at the rear of lots, rather than front-loaded driveways. Alleys also provide a discrete location for utility lines and garbage pick-up. Vestavia Hills' R-6, R-7 and R-8 Zoning Districts are compatible with this land use category. The R-5 Zoning District may also be appropriate, especially near commercial centers.

## Commercial and Mixed Use

Cahaba Heights' commercial areas are focused around the three commercial centers shown in the Strategic Concept Map (along Crosshaven Drive and Green Valley Road, Cahaba Heights Road, and at Patchwork Farm). While few of the commercial centers include sidewalks today, the City has planned for the installation of sidewalks along the major streets to connect surrounding neighborhoods to the elementary school. Over time, raised curbs and sidewalks should be installed along the major and local streets serving commercial centers, through a combination of new development and City-sponsored public improvements. As new development occurs, existing rights-of-way may need to be widened to accommodate additional traffic, sidewalks and on-street parking (in appropriate locations).

The following land use categories accommodate various mixes of retail, service, office, residential and institutional uses. Modifications to the City's commercial zoning designations or creation of one or more mixed-use zoning districts will be necessary to facilitate mixed-use development. Otherwise, the existing B-2 and B-1 zoning districts, respectively, correspond most closely with the "Retail/Mixed Use" and "Limited Mixed Use" categories described below. The City is in the process of updating its zoning ordinance. In the draft ordinance, a proposed neighborhood-scale commercial and mixed-use district has been developed based on the current B-1 classification. Similarly, a larger scale commercial and mixed use district has been developed around the B-2 and B-3 classifications. If adopted, the neighborhood district would be appropriate for general application in the Retail/Mixed Use and Limited Mixed Use areas. The community commercial district would be appropriate around major intersections, such as Green Valley Road and Crosshaven Drive, Crosshaven Drive and Cahaba Heights Road and Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road and Dolly Ridge Road.

**Retail/Mixed Use** is a focused commercial use category, in which shopping and dining uses are the primary ground floor uses. Lodging, personal services, offices, and upper-story residential uses may also be appropriate. Pedestrian accessibility and outdoor spaces for people to relax, dine outside and

interact are recommended. Building heights should generally not exceed 3 stories, although 4-story buildings may be appropriate at select locations, such as important intersections. Parking should be located to the side and/or rear of buildings so that building entrances may be close to the sidewalk and encourage window-shopping and pedestrian traffic. This pattern also enables shared parking and cross access between adjacent developments.

**Limited Mixed Use** is a focused commercial use category, in which offices and business support uses are the primary ground floor uses. Lodging, personal services, institutional and high-density residential uses may also be appropriate. Shopping and dining uses may be appropriate, with the size of development being an important consideration. These areas are typically adjacent to Retail/Mixed Use areas and generate activity that supports nearby shopping and dining uses. These areas also provide a reasonable transition between more intensive development areas and neighborhoods. Therefore, the scale and intensity of development in these locations should be managed to assure a comfortable relationship with adjacent housing. These areas should include sidewalks to connect between neighborhoods and commercial centers. Parking lots in front of buildings may be acceptable but their depth should be minimized so that buildings are relatively close to the street, providing a comfortable and attractive pedestrian environment along the street.

**Planned Mixed Use** is a special category applied to property between the eastern side of I-459 and the Cahaba River and to the Patchwork Farm development south of Cahaba River Road. The uses applicable to these sites will be defined largely by the specific plans established by the City. These sites may include commercial, recreational and civic uses and housing.

The Cahaba River site includes a combination of land acquired by the City, privately held property and a buffer along the river sold to the Freshwater Land Trust by Vestavia Hills. The buffer is intended to be developed as a linear park. Other types of uses that may be appropriate in this location are varied but should be considered with regard to impacts to the watershed and limited access to the site.

The Patchwork Farm site, acquired by the City, is planned for the construction of additional sports facilities, a 9 – 12 acre passive recreation space and commercial and residential development as a planned unit development (PUD). Patchwork Farm will be a new commercial center and hub of activity in Vestavia Hills providing additional active and passive recreation opportunities to Cahaba Heights residents and the community-at-large.

## Institutional

Institutional uses include existing institutional, academic, governmental and community service uses and lands. New institutional uses should be developed typically in or adjacent to commercial centers or in other locations specified elsewhere in this Plan. Several zoning designations allow institutional uses, however, the INSTI District corresponds most closely with the locations and intents of the Future Land Use map.

## Parks and Open Space

Parks and Open Space uses include active and passive recreational facilities, cemeteries, and areas intended to be maintained in a relatively natural state to prevent harm to sensitive environmental features.



## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation planning in Cahaba Heights should seek to provide a street network that supports desired development patterns, balances access and mobility, moves vehicles efficiently and lends a sense of community to commercial centers and neighborhoods. An interconnected street network should be maintained to disperse local traffic and thereby avoid congestion on major streets. To maintain safety and street capacity, driveways along major streets must be carefully managed. Developers should be required to plan for and effectively address the need for connections (cross-access drives, alleys, pedestrian passages, etc.) between adjacent, compatible land uses.

The following evaluations, transportation planning strategies and recommended improvements resulted from synthesizing public comments with information produced through field observation and traffic counts and input from the Police Department and other City staff. Traffic counts were taken at three major intersections (Dolly Ridge Rd. and Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Rd., Cahaba Heights Rd. and Crosshaven Dr./Summit Pkwy., and Green Valley Rd. and Crosshaven Dr.) and the level of service (LOS) at each was determined (refer to the Appendix for this information).







While Cahaba Heights' street network is interconnected, limited rights-of-way and lack of curbs and gutters are typical of many community streets. Most streets were not provided with sidewalks originally. Over time, development of driveways and cul-de-sacs directly off of major streets, have reduced the efficiency of the street network; while narrow rights-of-way make it difficult to restore or add capacity. Street design, network design, access management and pedestrian accessibility must all be considered together – and in the context of land use – to address Cahaba Heights' transportation and accessibility goals. The following strategies are recommended:

- *Prioritize street improvements and incorporate into the City's capital improvements planning process.*
- *Install sidewalks, first leading from the elementary school along major streets to provide pedestrian access between neighborhoods, the elementary school, commercial centers and community facilities by continuing and supporting current City sidewalk planning and construction.*
- *Require sidewalks in all new development, especially when located close to a commercial center, school or other community facility.*
- *The City should continuously engage and partner with Jefferson County to implement street improvements on county roads in Cahaba Heights.*
- *Consider a variety of traffic-calming techniques to determine the most suitable to specific problems and locations (refer to the Appendix for an overview of available techniques).*
- *The City should work with property owners along major streets, especially in commercial centers, to consolidate driveways and develop cross access between properties.*
- *Adopt access management standards for new construction and subdivision to preserve traffic capacity.*
- *Assure availability of transit and paratransit services in the Cahaba Heights area.*



Dolly Ridge Road looking north from the elementary school

# Transportation Improvements

-  Center Turn Lane Addition
-  New Vehicular Access
-  New Pedestrian/Bicycle Access
-  Road Closure
-  Existing Street Modification
-  Sidewalk Master Plan Project

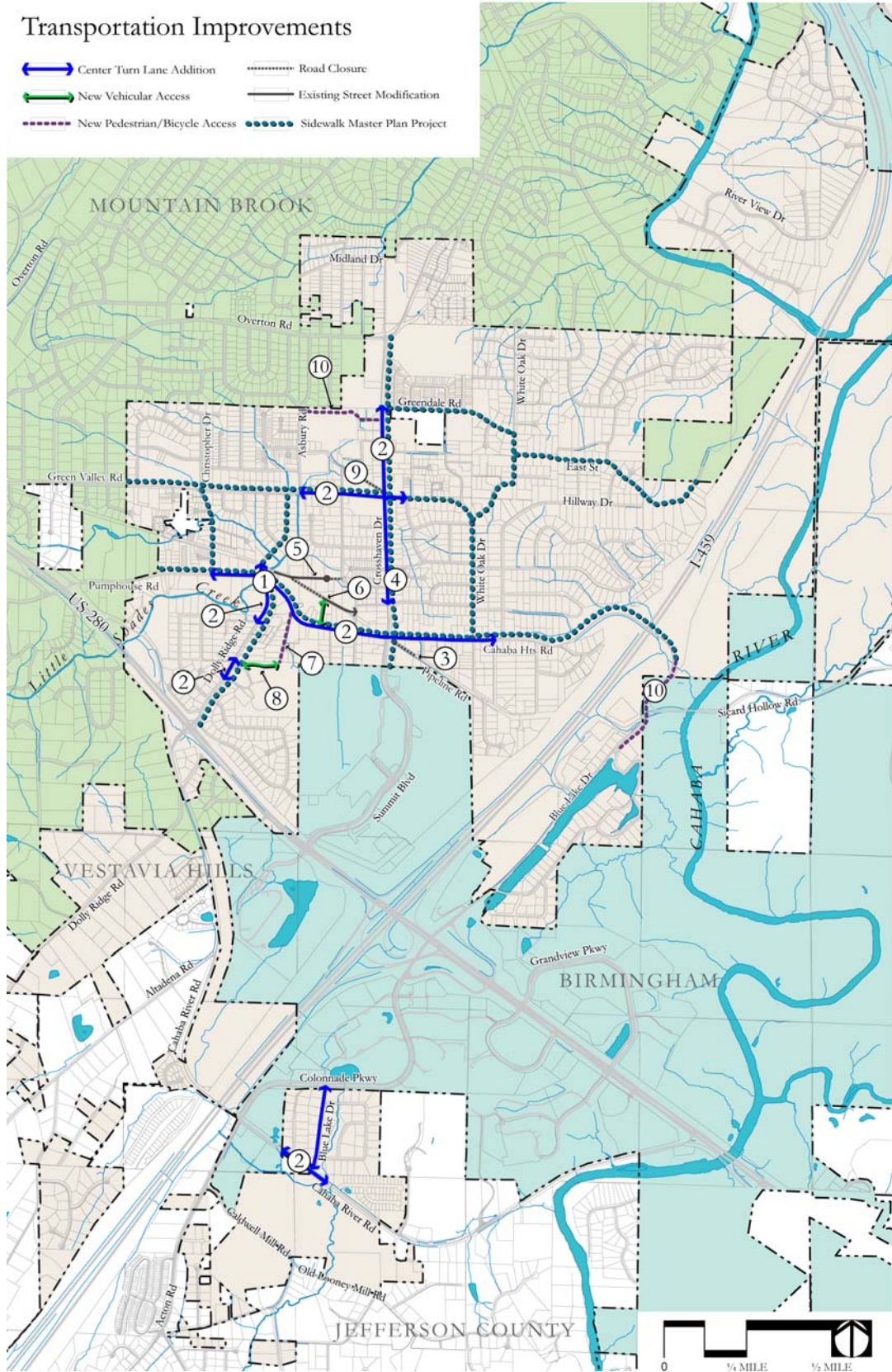


Figure 6: Transportation Improvements



## Transportation Improvements

General improvements are needed throughout Cahaba Heights, such as repaving and installation of appropriate drainage features (swales, valley curbs or raised curbs). The Transportation Improvements Map (Figure 6) represents specific projects to improve traffic flow and pedestrian access and several “typical” projects that illustrate how to address traffic issues in the locations indicated as well as other locations with similar conditions. These projects will take several years to implement and must be prioritized, their funding identified and coordination between related projects considered. The map also shows those projects proposed in the Vestavia Hills Sidewalk Master Plan. The numbered items on the map refer to the improvement projects described in this section.

1. **Intersection of Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road and Dolly Ridge Road.** This intersection maintains levels of services (LOS) between “A” and “C” (LOS is ranked from “A” to “F” with “A” representing free flow of traffic and “F” representing significant congestion). Geometric realignment of the intersection will involve conversion of the right-turn slip lanes (onto Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road from Dolly Ridge approaches) into right-turn lanes with adequate stacking space (see Figure 5). Used often in the absence of right turn lanes, the existing slip lanes allow right turns from Dolly Ridge Road at a relatively high rate of speed and can be a barrier to pedestrians. In conjunction with crosswalk installation, this improvement will greatly enhance pedestrian safety while calming traffic and maintaining an appropriate level of service. This project will also better accommodate gateway improvements. These changes can be accommodated within the existing right-of-way.
2. **Capacity improvements on major streets.** To accommodate existing and future traffic, a center turn lane should be installed along the segments of Dolly Ridge Road, Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road, Crosshaven Drive, Green Valley Road and Cahaba River Road as shown on the Transportation Improvements map. Sidewalks and raised curbs should be simultaneously installed (except as otherwise currently planned for sidewalk improvements). Driveways should be consolidated and cross access provided where possible at that time. For road segments with less than 50 ft right-of-way width, easements should be required with new development to provide adequate space for sidewalks and planting strips. For road segments with 60 ft right-of-way width, a 5 ft planting strip can be accommodated between the sidewalk and street.

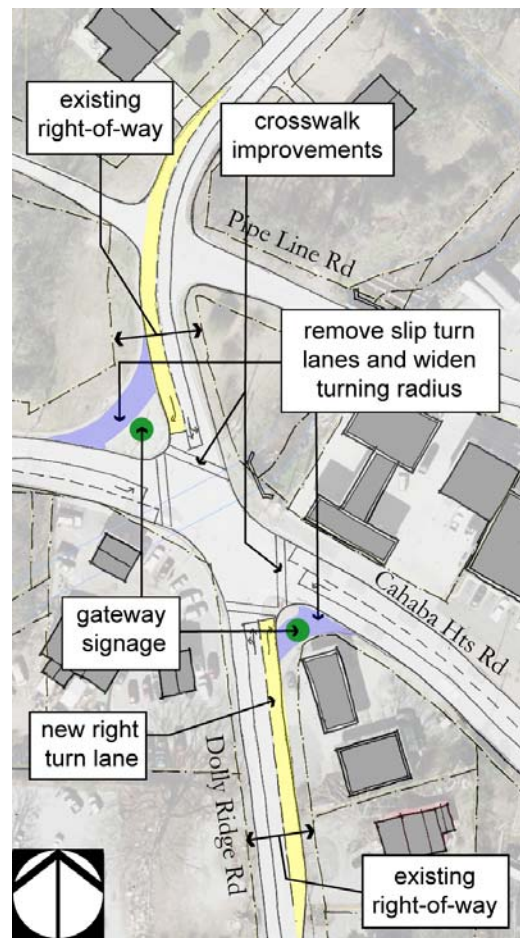
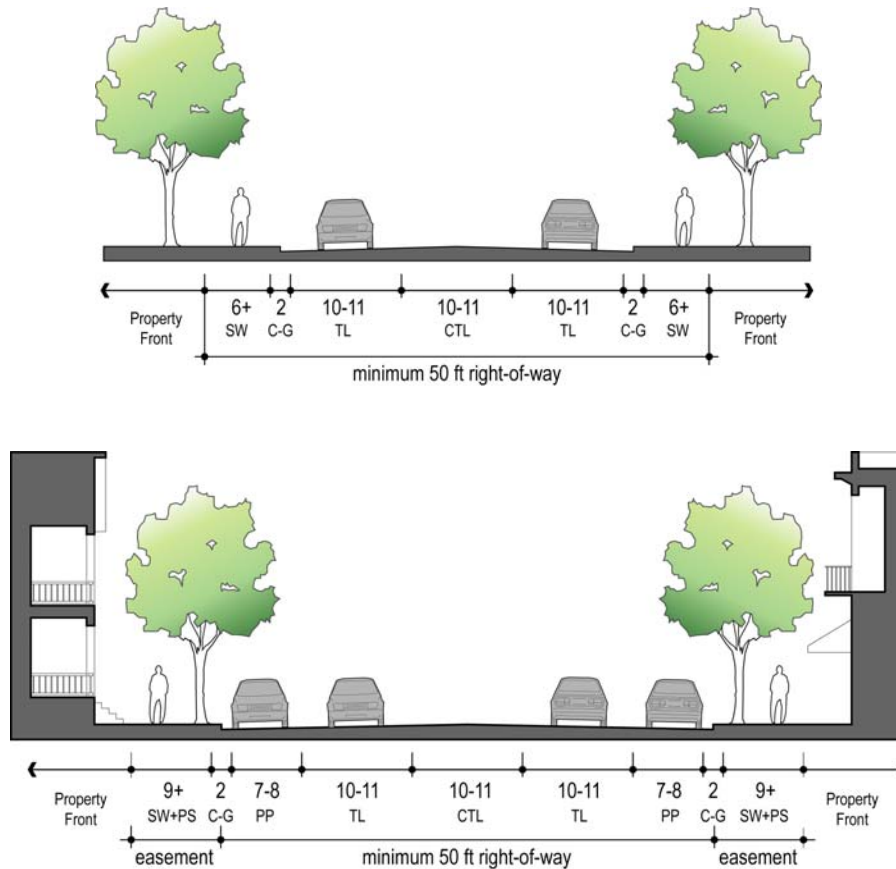


Figure 5: Intersection improvements, Cahaba Heights Road and Dolly Ridge Road

Two alternative cross-sections are provided in Figure 7. The first represents minimum-recommended improvements that can be accomplished without additional right-of-way or easements. The second represents an alternative design for the principal streets serving Retail/Mixed Use areas. This cross-section will require either additional right-of-way or easements for construction of sidewalks and planting strips. Due to curves and grade changes, these cross-sections may need to be adjusted (such as no on-street parking and wider lane widths) for use on segments of Cahaba Heights Road.



SW = Sidewalk, PS = Planting Strip, C-G = Curb and Gutter, PP = Parallel Parking, TL = Travel Lane, CTL = Center Turn Lane

Figure 7: Street Cross Sections for Commercial Centers

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate two options for improving access issues along Cahaba Heights Road, specifically between Oakview Lane and Crosshaven Drive, where several narrow lots on the north side of the road each have driveways along the major street. This resulted from the conversion of several single-family homes to commercial use, without creation of cross access – vehicular connectivity between adjacent properties – or other access management improvements. The intent is to maintain capacity along Cahaba Heights Road by reducing traffic friction and potential hazards associated with turning movements between the street and adjacent driveways. Access improvements will create a safe, legible pattern for property access along Cahaba Heights’ image corridors.

The first option illustrates cross access between the narrow lots that front on the north side of the street, allowing several existing driveways to be consolidated. Because the buildings are set back from the street, most on-site parking can be preserved. However, for any of the

properties to change to a use with greater parking demand or to expand, additional parking areas would be necessary at the rear of the buildings with access from Pipe Line Road.

Note: The following illustrations are conceptual in nature and are not intended as precise solutions. They portray access management practices that should be considered in new developments and in public investment in street improvements. These concepts should also be considered along the commercial portions of Cahaba Heights' other image corridors.

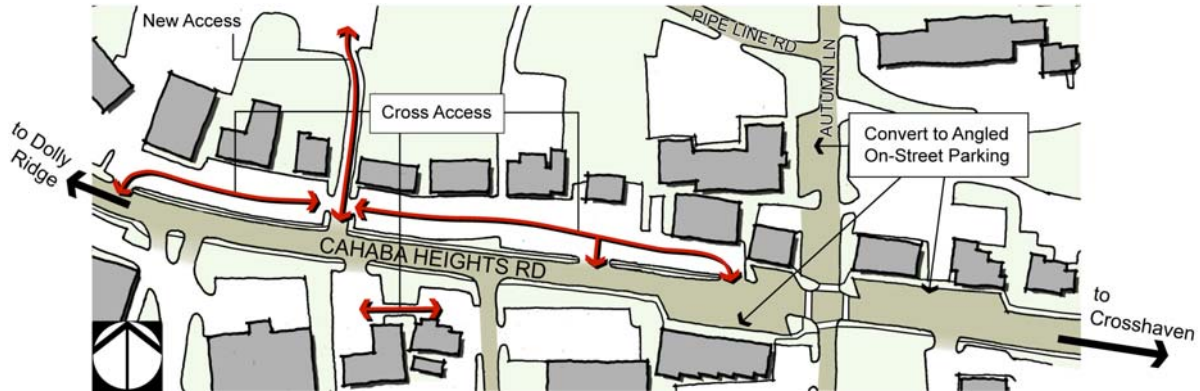


Figure 8: Access Management Option 1, Cahaba Heights Road

In the second option, most properties would be accessed from the rear, rather than directly from Cahaba Heights Road. This would allow existing driveways to be closed or consolidated and angled on-street parking, sidewalks and street trees installed. The new on-street parking would replace the existing on-site parking. This would require additional right-of-way; however, the removal of on-site parking from the frontages of these buildings would allow them to be expanded forward toward the street in the future, where their entrances would be easily accessible from future sidewalks and on-street parking. As in the previous option, expansion of uses or conversion to more intensive uses would require additional parking in the rear.

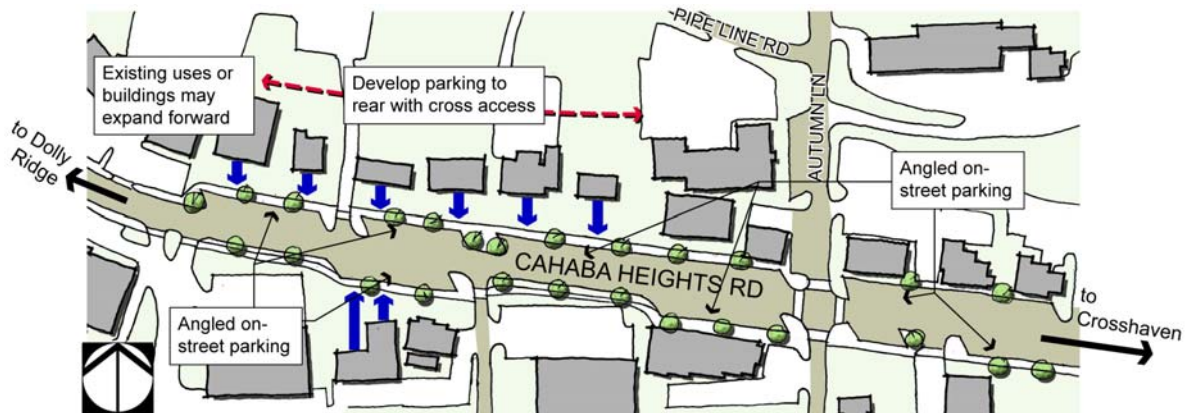


Figure 9: Access Management Option 2, Cahaba Heights Road

- 3. Pipe Line Road (east of Crosshaven Drive).** The segment of Pipe Line Road northwest of Dr. Michael Melvin Drive should be shortened, possibly converting it to a cul-de-sac, so long as adequate access from the public street is maintained along abutting properties. The existing portion of the street northwest of Melvin Drive may be converted to an alley or

cross access driveway. Appropriate signage and a visible distinction between the public street and alley/driveway should be provided to inform motorists of the dead-end.

4. **Crosshaven Drive (Ridgely Drive to Valley Park Place).** This segment of Crosshaven Drive, if fronting properties convert to commercial uses, should be widened to accommodate a (one-way left) center turn lane. After such improvements, curb cuts along the segment must be carefully managed. Easements should be required in new commercial development to accommodate a 5 foot wide sidewalk separated from the street by a 4-5 foot planting strip.
5. **Belwood Drive.** This street should be converted to a cul-de-sac prior to intersecting with Autumn Lane as shown in the map. This would alleviate non-residential traffic from the residential portion of Belwood Drive further east. See also #6 below for related improvements.
6. **Pipe Line Road (Autumn Lane to Dolly Ridge).** A portion of Pipe Line Road between Belwood Drive and Autumn Lane should be converted to an alley, maintaining access to the rear of properties fronting on Cahaba Heights Road. The segment between Dolly Ridge and Belwood should be retained and improved to provide a more legible connection to Belwood. The intersection of Pipe Line and Autumn Lane should be realigned to provide a near-perpendicular intersection. A new north-south running street or alley (between Dolly Ridge and Autumn Lane) may be constructed to connect Pipe Line and Cahaba Heights Roads, otherwise Pipe Line Road will require a hammerhead or cul-de-sac terminus.
7. **Oakview Lane.** A sidewalk should be constructed along Oakview Lane to provide additional pedestrian access to the elementary school and playing fields.
8. **Secondary Access to Playing Fields.** A vehicular entry/exit should be created at the end of Oakview Lane to provide additional access to the playing fields so as to distribute traffic away from the Dolly Ridge entrance. The entrance/exit should be gated so that access to the playing fields and school can be controlled when the playing fields are not in use.
9. **Sunview Lane.** To reduce access conflicts near the intersection of Green Valley Road and Crosshaven Drive, the Sunview Drive intersection at Crosshaven should be closed and a cul-de-sac constructed. Street access to lots fronting only on Sunview Drive must be maintained. The portion of the right-of-way that becomes closed may be converted to a multi-use path or public space or acquired by adjacent properties.
10. **Multi-use Path.** An easement should be acquired from the properties along the alignment shown on the map to construct a multi-use path from Asbury Lane to Crosshaven Drive. A portion of the multi-use path may be created by closing Waynely Drive and retrofitting it as a multi-use path. The multi-use path would provide convenient access between the higher density housing along Asbury Lane and the commercial activities along Crosshaven Drive.

A similar path or trail should be constructed along the north side of Cahaba Heights Road, west of North Cahaba Drive, to connect under I-459 to the Blue Lake area and the proposed park north of the pumping station. A portion of this route has already been identified for sidewalk improvements as a part of the Sidewalk Master Plan. The City may require portions of this be constructed at the time of development of properties between North Cahaba Drive and I-459.



## Traffic Calming and Sight Distance

In community meetings speeding and cut-through traffic, particularly in neighborhoods, were raised as issues to be addressed. Proper posting of the speed limit and enforcement of the posted speed limit by the Vestavia Hills Police Department is the most effective means of reducing speeds on area roadways. However, it is not feasible to enforce the posted speed limit at all times of the day on a consistent basis. Therefore, the City may elect to install traffic calming devices to discourage speeding and reduce cut-through traffic along streets with recurrent complaints. A variety of traffic calming methods and the process to determine appropriate solutions are described in the Appendix.

East Street is a particular example of the need to evaluate alternatives for addressing traffic concerns on neighborhood streets. Because East Street is the only access to the nearby Mountain Brook soccer fields and public works facilities, residents are concerned with through traffic. Since the opening of the soccer fields, traffic has increased with significant spikes during tournaments. Vestavia Hills has considered several strategies to address the issue, including various proposals and negotiations with Mountain Brook to develop other accesses to the complex. However, no feasible solution has emerged. City officials and staff continue to work with Mountain Brook representatives to encourage carpooling and busing to reduce the volume of traffic during tournaments and other peak periods and to provide notice to neighborhood residents. The Vestavia Hills Police Department has also monitored traffic and found that, though a few instances of speeding have occurred, the primary issue is the volume of traffic. To improve comfort and safety for neighborhood residents, sidewalks and curbs should be installed. This will provide a protected space to walk and bicycle separated from traffic by a raised curb. Due to narrow pavement width along certain segments of the street, especially curves, there may be a need to widen portions of the roadway in conjunction with curb and sidewalk construction. Because widening and resurfacing can result in higher speeds, travel lanes should be striped so as to narrow the perceived roadway width to encourage safer driving behavior. If additional improvements are later deemed warranted, other traffic calming interventions, such as those outlined in the Appendix, should be considered. Speed bumps and rumble strips are not recommended due to liability issues and increased noise.

Sight distance issues were raised during analysis of existing traffic conditions. Adequate sight distance is necessary for motorists to safely merge onto a street from an intersection or driveway. Generally, the higher the speed limit on the street on which the motorist wishes to merge, the greater sight distance is needed. Sight distance can be reduced by obstacles adjacent to the road, vegetation and changes in grade. Sight distance problems were identified along Cahaba Heights/Pumphouse Road and Green Valley Road. Several sight distance problems can be resolved by cutting back overgrown vegetation. Other instances involve reduced visibility caused by changes in grade along the major road (e.g. Cahaba Heights Road and Green Valley Road at Autumn Lane). If practicable in a given case, these problems are most effectively treated by relocation of the driveway. Such issues can also be mitigated by converting a driveway access to a right-in/right-out configuration.

## Regional Transportation Issues

Regional efforts to improve public transportation and to address congestion along Highway 280 will have an impact on Vestavia Hills, especially in the area of Cahaba Heights. The City and its residents must have a voice in regional transportation and transit planning to ensure that regional proposals respond appropriately to the needs of the city and the Cahaba Heights community.

**Highway 280.** For almost two decades, public officials, the business community and residents throughout the metropolitan area have debated how to address increasing congestion on Highway 280, a major artery linking Cahaba Heights to the region. The highway was widened in the mid



1990s to accommodate increased traffic as rapid growth occurred south of Interstate 459. More recently the ALDOT considered a proposal to convert the highway to an elevated toll road, an idea that generated considerable controversy. That proposal was then scaled back and is now being evaluated for use southeast of I-459. The Cities of Mountain Brook and Homewood have pushed for alternatives to the elevated road concept for the segment of the highway north of I-459, fearing the elevated road would have significant negative impacts on businesses and neighborhoods along the corridor.

Because of potential impacts on Vestavia Hills neighborhoods along the corridor, Cahaba Heights gateways and overall connectivity between Liberty Park, Cahaba Heights and the remainder of the city, Vestavia Hills must play an active role in this regional issue.

**Transit Access.** Improving mass transit has been a major regional concern for many years. Paratransit services have been successfully implemented in the metro area and are an important aid to residents with limited mobility. However, few major steps have been made to improve the quality, efficiency, or reach of the overall regional transit system due to a lack of consensus among state and local officials on how to fund and operate a new and improved system. Meanwhile, the system's operating costs have increased with higher fuel prices and an aging bus fleet. Increased costs have resulted in Mountain Brook reducing transit funding and canceling the Route 51 route that served the Mountain Brook and Cahaba Heights area.

Transit access is a quality of life issue for those with little or no access to personal vehicles and others with limited mobility, but it is also an economic development issue. Transit service provides access to jobs in Vestavia Hills from other parts of the metro area as well as access to area colleges for students who live in Vestavia Hills. The nearest remaining bus route to Cahaba Heights serves the Summit shopping center at Highway 280 and I-459. The City should consult with the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority to initiate changes to the existing routes that serve the Summit with the goal to have them proceed through Cahaba Heights either coming or going to the Summit, thereby serving the Cahaba Heights area by providing increased access connecting to jobs and shopping in Cahaba Heights' commercial centers.

## VI. COMMERCIAL CENTERS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

In September 2008, the Cahaba Heights Steering Committee, with assistance from City staff and the Vestavia Hills Chamber of Commerce, held a public input meeting for the businesses of Cahaba Heights. A diverse cross-section of the business community attended and voiced many of the same desires for the commercial centers that residents had envisioned for the whole of Cahaba Heights – mainly that Cahaba Heights should become more walkable and should have a stronger sense of arrival at its gateways.

Business representatives counted among Cahaba Heights’ assets its proximity to the Summit shopping center, strong demographics, and its “village” character. They also praised the uniqueness of the area, its friendly people and strong sense of community. One of the most important of its assets to local businesses is its convenient location in the metro area. Cahaba Heights is also centrally located within the City of Vestavia Hills, providing a “bridge” between the various parts of the city divided by Highway 280 and Interstate 459.



Green Valley Road looking west from Crosshaven Drive

Participants noted issues to be addressed such as few pedestrian facilities, maintenance of commercial properties, and the amount and speed of through traffic. A large volume of traffic flows through Cahaba Heights daily, especially to and from Highway 280 and the Summit, without proportionate benefits to area businesses.

The meeting brought new ideas and reinforced other concepts emerging through the plan process to improve business opportunity. Business representatives recognized that Cahaba Heights’ commercial centers need to be more walkable – that businesses tend to thrive under such conditions. There needs to be greater organization among area businesses and collaboration with the City and Chamber to brand and market Cahaba Heights’ commercial centers. Specific suggestions included streetscape improvements, traffic calming and directional signage at Highway 280 and Dolly Ridge Road to overcome the lack of visibility from the highway, one of the most heavily-traveled routes in the region. And finally, plans for improving commerce in Cahaba Heights should take into account lessons from successful commercial areas of comparable scale in the region, such as Crestline Village in Mountain Brook or Downtown Homewood.



Heights Plaza, on Cahaba Heights Road, features offices, dining and a fitness center

## COMMERCIAL CENTERS

Cahaba Heights' commercial centers are places for business activity *and* focal points for the community, providing opportunities for interaction and leisure away from residents' homes. Each commercial center should be publicly and privately improved to ensure an attractive image that supports business activity. The way commercial and mixed-use developments are planned and designed should transform commercial centers into more cohesive, vibrant and walkable environments.

To assure continued commercial growth that is consistent with the desires of the community and that capitalizes on Cahaba Heights' unique physical make-up, the following strategies should be incorporated into city planning and private development efforts:

- *To provide a cohesive, development pattern that suits the community's vision:*
  - Provide a strong street presence with buildings facing and being relatively close to the street, which adds definition to streetscapes and supports pedestrian access.
  - In the context of planning and zoning decisions, non-residential uses should face other non-residential uses across a street to support cohesiveness and avoid conflicts between neighborhoods and commercial centers.
  - Avoid "sameness" in commercial centers while conveying the sense that things fit together—streetscapes, buildings, parking areas, public spaces, and signage.
- *Plan for higher density of development at the core of each commercial center and less toward the edges. Taller buildings should be permitted in central locations and shorter buildings required adjacent to residential areas.*
- *To enhance development and reinvestment opportunities and to avoid conversion of residential areas in the future, modify development regulations to allow for and encourage compact development in commercial centers through reduced setback requirements (which will also increase walkability) and incentives for shared parking, loading and internal circulation.*
- *Require an appropriate transition between commercial centers and surrounding neighborhoods. The arrangement of uses and the design of the streetscape, buildings and landscaping should make it clear where a commercial center begins and ends.*
- *Incorporate outdoor spaces, such as pocket parks and plazas, for people to interact, dine, rest, and other activities that foster the sense of community and support commercial activity.*
- *Market Cahaba Heights' businesses collectively marketed by the Chamber of Commerce and/or a merchants association.*
- *Reduce traffic congestion on the major streets serving commercial centers through access management improvements and standards.*
- *Install directional signage to Cahaba Height's commercial centers along Highway 280 and other peripheral roads.*

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

A wide array of businesses – retail stores, restaurants, offices, and personal services – in Cahaba Heights’ commercial centers serve the regular needs of area residents as well as those who come from outside the community for destination shopping. As a part of this plan, a market study was undertaken to identify the types of businesses that would be most appropriate in Cahaba Heights, given area demographics and the businesses already located in and around Cahaba Heights (see sidebar). There are clusters of related businesses in Cahaba Heights today that draw customers from outside the community (bicycle/outdoors; restaurants; and antiques/furniture/ furniture repair) that can be complemented by additional businesses. More often than not, Cahaba Heights’ businesses offer products and services that are local, unique and that can’t be found in shopping centers.

*...There is no way to or need for Cahaba Heights businesses to compete directly with The Summit or with Mountain Brook’s villages. The ability to walk, dine, and shop for a variety of interesting and “not available elsewhere” products and services in a quaint area such as Cahaba Heights is one of its key assets and one that should be emphasized...*

- Cahaba Heights Market Study

### Business Development Opportunities

- *Local, authentic “themed” restaurants and outdoor cafes*
- *Food gift or “eat-in” shops*
- *Women’s clothing and accessories and outdoor clothing*
- *Sporting goods and clothing and health-oriented products, services and food*
- *Locally-made, “sold at the shop” furniture and crafts*
- *Additional antique stores, import-oriented furniture and home décor shops*
- *Furnishings and products used in home restoration*
- *Office supplies and repair services for professional and home-based offices*
- *Used book store; custom-made jewelry*

Planning and business development should not seek to create one unified commercial district, but rather cultivate several relatively small hubs, consistent with the pattern today. There should be an emphasis on building “places” rather than an aggregate of physically unrelated commercial buildings. In this way Cahaba Heights may serve as a social hub for residents and for those outside the community who are attracted to its shopping, dining and entertainment offerings. A physical environment that is walkable, comfortable and interesting will encourage residents and visitors to linger and to return frequently to Cahaba Heights’ business areas.



The images above illustrate commercial and mixed use development patterns that Cahaba Heights residents preferred, including their scale, unique architecture, street trees and walkability.



## CAHABA HEIGHTS ROAD

This commercial center stretches between Dolly Ridge Road and just east of Brasher Drive. The two major intersections – at Dolly Ridge Road and Crosshaven Drive – are important hubs within this area. The highest concentration of shopping and dining uses should be located at or between these intersections, with additional retail, service, office and business support services at the edges. Through redevelopment, mixed-use buildings may be possible, including 2 and 3 story buildings with offices and/or residential uses located in upper floors. Slightly taller buildings at the major intersections would create dramatic gateways and take better advantage of these prime locations if redeveloped. In concert with the access and street improvements, selective infill development and redevelopment will greatly improve this retail and mixed-use commercial center. Existing businesses include a mix of small multi-tenant shopping centers, single-tenant commercial spaces, and residences converted for business use.

Figure 10 illustrates a reinvestment opportunity in an older business center along Cahaba Heights Road. In the example, infill uses include retail and services, office space and possibly upper-story residential units. Three new buildings are shown with frontage on Cahaba Heights Road, enhancing the existing development's street presence and contributing to the desired character of one of the community's primary roads. An internal drive (aligned with Brasher Drive on the opposite side of Cahaba Heights Road) establishes an attractive entrance into the center, lined with storefronts and sidewalks. The site is currently served by driveways on the east and west sides of the development. These access points would be improved to consolidate access with neighboring uses. Existing perpendicular parking spaces along the western frontage of the site should be converted to angled parking (for safer egress) and additional on-street parking and sidewalks extended to the eastern end of the frontage on Cahaba Heights Road. Informal parking areas are enhanced to maximize efficiency and to provide a legible circulation pattern for the site and adjacent development. Additional parking is located at the rear of the site with convenient access provided by a pedestrian passage cutting through one of the existing structures.



Figure 10: Infill opportunity on Cahaba Heights Road

## CROSSHAVEN DRIVE

Crosshaven Drive is the major spine of this commercial center, which includes commercial development along Green Valley Road and Sunview Drive. Crosshaven Drive is conveniently located between the Summit shopping center and Overton Road. As with the Cahaba Heights Road commercial center, this center should be improved through street, sidewalk and access management improvements and infill development and reinvestment. A strong core shopping and dining area should evolve primarily along Crosshaven Drive, although some dining and entertainment may be



Existing commercial development on Crosshaven Drive

appropriate within about a block west along Green Valley Road. Mixed-use development is an untapped opportunity in this area that has, but for the national economic slow-down, become more realistic in recent years in the metropolitan area. Future infill and development should maintain a maximum height of 2-3 stories. Taller buildings at the intersection of Green Valley Road and Crosshaven Drive may be appropriate to create a strong focus for the area should redevelopment of the existing properties occur in the future.

In a community meeting with business representatives, concerns were raised about traffic speeds on Crosshaven. Because of the amount of traffic on Crosshaven Drive, a center turn lane is recommended to mitigate congestion. But to avoid through traffic moving *too* quickly, other street design and contextual elements can calm traffic: narrowly-striped lanes, on-street parking, raised curbs, sidewalks, street trees, and buildings placed close to the edge of the road. These elements will create an attractive and inviting environment that is pedestrian and business friendly. The Crosshaven and Green Valley intersection has a reasonably high level of service and with addition of turn lanes and reconfiguration of Sun View Drive, increases in local or through traffic can be accommodated.

## BLUE LAKE / CAHABA RIVER ROAD / PATCHWORK FARM

This mixed use area is at the center of Vestavia Hill's fastest developing areas. Increased interest in the area began in 2005 with the development of a small shopping center on Cahaba River Road as well as the start of the Cahaba Grand garden home development. In February 2007, the City purchased 86+/- acres off Cahaba River Road known as Patchwork Farm. The City's goal is to develop a quality mixed use, multi-faceted development that will reflect the quality and style of Vestavia Hills. The Patchwork Farm development will have the \$28 million Lifetime Fitness facility as its main anchor. Lifetime is expected to open its doors in January 2010. The project will also include a four field sports complex, a 9 – 12 acre passive park, approximately 37 acres plus of office, retail and mixed-use development and a small estate residential section on Old Looney Mill Road. The main entrance on Cahaba River Road will extend Blue Lake Drive all the way to Caldwell Mill Road and will provide a "main street" orientation. The entire property is scheduled to be rezoned into a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Because it is surrounded by intensive commercial uses to the north, existing and planned commercial uses to the west and south, and multi-family residential to the east, there will be increasing interest in

acquisition and reuse of single-family lots for commercial or high density residential development in the Blue Lake area. It is estimated that 70% of existing homes are renter-occupied. Therefore, it may be appropriate for the area to convert to commercial and/or mixed use. Piecemeal rezoning should be discouraged, however. Ideally, an overall plan for the conversion of this area should be developed cooperatively between the City and its potential developers. In the event the area is not converted in one project or by one developer, such a plan could be used to ensure that individual projects are consistent with an overall vision for the area and that disruptions to existing residences are minimized as much as possible as the transition occurs.

The traffic generated by Patchwork Farm will create opportunities for additional business development in the area. Timberlake Road and Pine Lake Circle may be less appropriate for retail uses but can accommodate office or high-density residential uses or a mixture of those. Commercial reuse can occur with the existing lot pattern but resubdivision may be desirable. In either case, sidewalks should be provided on Blue Lake Drive. Installation of an alley or cross-access between properties fronting on Blue Lake Drive is recommended. If opened up to Colonnade Parkway, Timberlake Road will need to be aligned with the existing median cut. Otherwise Timberlake Road needs to be terminated as a cul-de-sac or realigned to the Blue Lake Drive-Pine Tree Circle intersection.

Note: The following representation of the Patchwork Farm Master Plan is conceptual in nature only. Street alignments and distribution of land use areas may be subject to change.

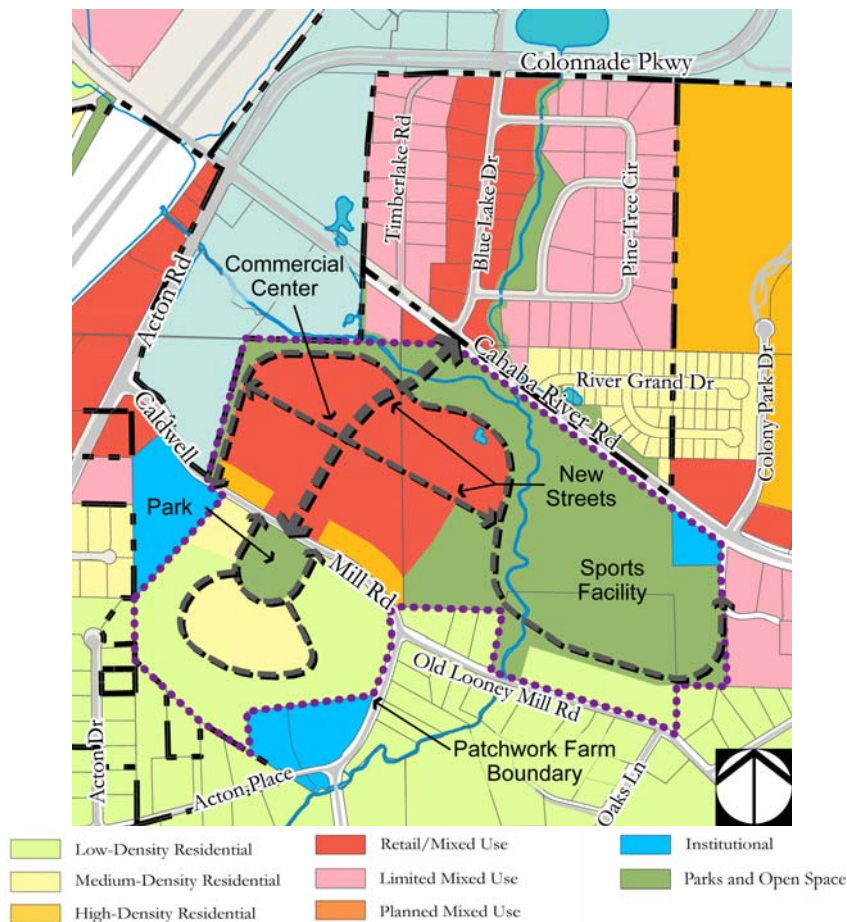


Figure 11: Patchwork Farm and Blue Lake



## VII. NEIGHBORHOODS

Cahaba Heights has made itself into an attractive location for living, working, and shopping. Because of its desirability, various areas within the community have attracted reinvestment and new construction. To maintain the positive aspects of Cahaba Heights’ neighborhoods and to assure the quality of life that originally attracted people to Cahaba Heights’ neighborhoods, the following strategies should be considered:

- *Permit higher density housing in or at edges of commercial centers, while maintaining lower densities furthest from commercial centers. provide a comfortable transition, between higher and lower density areas with medium density housing.*
- *Establish a community organization to facilitate ongoing community involvement in neighborhood needs, to promote maintenance and upkeep, and to represent community needs to the City.*
- *Require sidewalks and other streetscape elements relative to the location and density of the neighborhood.*

Public improvements, including installation of curb and gutter, sidewalks, street signs and repaving, are needed in several locations throughout Cahaba Heights neighborhoods. Residents also wish to improve street lighting. In certain areas, traffic calming improvements may be needed to reduce vehicle speeds or cut-through traffic in neighborhoods. However, to effectively enhance and sustain the quality of these neighborhoods, private investment and reinvestment are also needed. These investments may be required as a result of monitoring and enforcement of local building codes and property maintenance ordinances. In addition, zoning and subdivision requests within Cahaba Heights’ neighborhoods need to be evaluated to assure that new development or redevelopment is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood and the densities described in Chapter V: Land Use and Transportation.

During community planning meetings, residents identified the development characteristics they felt were most appropriate (see images at right) for Cahaba Heights’ neighborhoods. These characteristics will be important in designing new residential development that meets the expectations of the community and that enhances surrounding neighborhoods. For its low density neighborhoods (less than 2.5 units per acre), the community desires generous open spaces, significant tree cover, and buildings that fit unobtrusively within the landscape. For medium density neighborhoods (2.5-6 units per acre), the community desires traditional architecture, proportionate yard



Low Density



Medium Density



High Density

space with tree cover and sidewalks. For high density neighborhoods (more than 6 units per acre), the community prefers traditional, unique (not “cookie-cutter”) architecture; sidewalks; and green space incorporated into common areas and/or in the frontage of the development.

### East-Central Cahaba Heights

The neighborhoods between Crosshaven Drive and I-459, like much of Cahaba Heights, represent several eras of residential development. The hilly, easternmost portions of this area are primarily low density, single-family detached housing. Density increases nearest Crosshaven Drive, where some smaller lot single-family homes, townhouses and multi-family complexes have been developed. As indicated in the Future Land Use Map, high density residential development should be limited to the areas north of Green Valley Road and west of Bearden Drive and White Oak Drive.

### West-Central Cahaba Heights

The neighborhoods west of Crosshaven Drive also represent various eras of development as well as a wide range of housing types (apartments, condominiums, duplexes, townhouses, and detached single-family homes) and densities. In the years preceding annexation into Vestavia Hills, higher densities of development were approved in scattered locations and few instances of lower density residential development remain. Except as indicated in the Future Land Use map, these areas should remain predominantly medium density.

Several homes in the Dolly Ridge/Meadowlawn Drive area (between Pipe Line and Green Valley Roads) are located in a flood hazard area. Property damage occurred due to flooding in the area within the last ten years. To resolve the problem, the City proposed elevating the affected homes but were unable to receive FEMA funding to do so. The City has continued to monitor and address this and similar drainage issues on multiple fronts. Blockage of the creek, which is located on private property, exacerbates the drainage problem. Several pipes, installed in the area to carry stormwater, are under-designed and have aged considerably. After Cahaba Heights’ annexation, the City began replacing these with larger, more suitable pipes as funding has allowed. The City also has adopted and enforces a stormwater ordinance to assure best management practices to avoid stormwater runoff increases downstream from new developments.

### River Run, River Terrace and Blue Lake Drive

The River Run and River Terraces subdivisions were annexed by the City of Vestavia Hills simultaneously with Cahaba Heights. River Run is a mostly low-density subdivision, nestled between I-459 and the Cahaba River accessible from River Run Drive, between Overton Road and Liberty Parkway. River Terrace lies north of Old Overton Road east of I-459. Improvements needed in the area include street maintenance and buffers from light and noise along the interstate.

The Blue Lake neighborhood north of US Hwy. 280 was also annexed by the City along with Cahaba Heights. This low-density neighborhood is accessible from Lakeside Drive (off Blue Lake Drive) southwest of the historic Cahaba Pumping Station. Minor street maintenance is needed in the area. The neighborhood should be connected by a multi-use trail to the future park proposed north of the Cahaba Pumping Station.

## VIII. COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND RECREATION

During the planning process, residents spoke of their desire for city facilities in the area, such as a library, and greater recreational opportunities. Because the Cahaba Heights area is predominantly built-out, there are only limited opportunities for construction of civic facilities or park land acquisition. The following strategies should be considered:

- *Establish a community organization to identify and prioritize community facilities needs, represent those to the City and incorporate into the City's capital improvements planning process.*
- *Provide safe pedestrian access to the elementary school through sidewalk improvements along Dolly Ridge Road. Consider additional access to the playing fields from Oakview Lane and adjacent neighborhoods.*
- *Consider additional opportunities for community activities and recreation at the elementary school/playing fields.*
- *Increase or match available City funding for facilities needs in Cahaba Heights through Community fundraising, including seeking public and private grants.*

### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

During community meetings residents mentioned the need for library access in the Cahaba Heights area. Vestavia Hills currently maintains a drop-off at the Police and Fire Station on Cahaba Heights Road. Books are returned to the Vestavia Hills library daily. The City is planning and fundraising for



New Merkle House on Dolly Ridge Road

the replacement of the city's central library and it will be several years before funding is available to build a branch library. In the long-term a library should be considered in either Cahaba Heights or Liberty Park. However, before then, an intermediate facility or a "virtual" library could be housed within the elementary school or New Merkle House senior center. A virtual library could be created, through which books are requested from the Birmingham-Jefferson Library system, of which Vestavia Hills is a part. The physical facilities would require temporary storage space for books being requested and returned, computer access and part-time staffing.

Pedestrian access to the elementary school will be improved by the planned construction of sidewalks along Dolly Ridge Road and adjacent major streets connecting the school to nearby neighborhoods. These improvements are being funded in part by Safe Routes to School grants through the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT). Additional access to the school and playing fields may also be constructed along Oakview Lane as described in Chapter V Land Use and Transportation.

Fire and police services are collocated in a central facility on Cahaba Heights Road east of Crosshaven Drive, Vestavia Hills' fifth fire station. Because of its central location, the station houses

several special services, including water rescue operations, not located elsewhere in the city. In community meetings, participants voiced praise for municipal emergency response services.

## PARKS AND RECREATION

Other than the ball fields and playground at the elementary school, there are no public parks or recreation facilities currently in the Cahaba Heights area. However, the City will be developing additional sports facilities and a 9 – 12 acre passive park as a part of the Patchwork Farm master plan development on Cahaba River Road. Also, another passive park will be developed along the Cahaba River, north of the pumping station on land acquired by the Freshwater Land Trust (formerly Black Warrior-Cahaba Rivers Land Trust) from the City. These two sites will provide greater access for Cahaba Heights residents to recreational facilities. Yet, there is a great desire among the community for smaller scale, passive park spaces more central to Cahaba Heights.



Playground at Vestavia Hills Elementary School – Cahaba Heights

There are only a few parcels of undeveloped land in relatively central locations that might be available for park acquisition. In considering any site for park acquisition, the size of the site must be considered not only to allow flexibility for recreational uses but also to provide for the parking that would be needed to serve the park.

Residents and property owners might also develop small neighborhood open spaces for passive recreational use through neighborhood associations or a community organization. Scattered throughout Cahaba Heights' neighborhoods, there are a few undeveloped or only partially developed properties that can be assembled as small neighborhood open spaces for use by the residents in the surrounding neighborhood. These properties could be donated to an appropriate non-profit organization or purchased using locally raised funds, grants, and/or city funding. Such spaces would tend to be small and intimate to the neighborhood, accommodating elements such as children's playgrounds, picnic areas, small pavilions or community gardens.



## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

This is a long-range plan, and change occurs in a more or less continuous manner. Neighborhoods, institutions, schools, parks and commercial centers are not developed overnight. Hence, the plan does not propose “quick fix” solutions, nor should this plan be viewed simply as an economic development platform. Rather, this plan is intended to strengthen and enhance all aspects of life in this part of the city over the long term. As such, this plan must remain a living document, able to be adapted as local conditions change.

Plan implementation will take time and goodwill. Vestavia Hills must strive to get even more people interested and involved in supporting and implementing the vision for Cahaba Heights. City government must continue to gather other agencies, public and private, onto the same team. The City and the community must continue to prioritize and take direct action on various recommendations of this plan by committing to tax themselves and to spend those local tax dollars in support of plan implementation.

City officials must help shape the action of others with effective regulation. The city must be willing to provide selected incentives to encourage others to take the lead in development activities that would further implementation of the plan’s policies. And finally, all community leaders should support city officials to support plan implementation.

This plan, as a part of the Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan, is intended to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuing use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve Cahaba Heights and the entire city. Only then can the community use it fully and creatively as they seek achievement of their comprehensive vision.

The Cahaba Heights Community Plan is to be implemented through a comprehensive strategy that combines direct public and private investment, with supporting actions of the Mayor and City staff, City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustments and other boards and agencies. Plan recommendations have been translated into an action agenda that ranges from direct action to incentives and inducements that will involve revision and continued administration and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, city budgeting and capital improvement programming, and empowerment of community and neighborhood organizations and volunteers.

## REGULATIONS

Application, updating and enforcement of City regulations will be essential to achieving the goals of this plan. This involves zoning and subdivision regulations, design review, and property maintenance standards. Improving the City’s development regulations, guidelines and procedures is the least costly of all of the plan implementation tools and can be achieved quickly. The City has been awarded a grant to take on most of this work. While the effects may not be obvious or immediate, they are widespread and will ensure, in an on-going fashion, that new development and reinvestment is consistent with the City’s desired character.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

(click on link at end of each item for more information)

### Regulatory Improvements

- Update of Zoning Ordinance [⇒](#)
- Update of Subdivision Regulations [⇒](#)
- Update of Design Review Guidelines [⇒](#)
- Adoption of Access Management Standards [⇒](#)
- Review and update of Property Maintenance Code [⇒](#), as needed

### Public Improvements

- Gateway signage and landscaping improvements [⇒](#)
- Installation of city standard street signs
- Wayfinding signage program for commercial centers [⇒](#)
- Ongoing street improvements – repaving, installation of curbs/gutters
- Capacity, streetscape and access management improvements along major streets – Dolly Ridge Rd., Cahaba Heights Rd., Crosshaven Dr., Green Valley Rd., Cahaba River Rd. and (lower) Blue Lake Dr. [⇒](#)
- Cahaba Heights Road/Dolly Ridge Road intersection improvements [⇒](#)
- Installation of sidewalks and multi-use paths, including supplements to the City Sidewalk Master Plan [⇒](#)
- Improve Pipe Line Road end (southeast quadrant of Crosshaven and Cahaba Heights Road) [⇒](#)
- Sun View Drive cul-de-sac [⇒](#)
- Belwood Drive cul-de-sac [⇒](#)
- Pipe Line Road and Autumn Lane intersection realignment [⇒](#)
- Traffic-calming improvements on local streets, as needed
- Ongoing drainage improvements
- Replacement of older water lines
- Virtual library/library annex [⇒](#)
- Land acquisition, public park construction [⇒](#)

### Other Recommendations

- Creation of Tax Increment Financing District [⇒](#)
- Organizing and marketing Cahaba Heights' businesses [⇒](#)
- Creation of community organization

## Zoning Ordinance

The City uses its Zoning Ordinance to guide growth in accord with the land use plan elements of the Comprehensive Plan and the City's area-specific plans, such as this one. To support implementation of this plan, the City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission will respond to and review zoning and development requests with consideration given to the land use recommendations in Chapter V. The City also intends to update and improve the Zoning Ordinance to better facilitate the



patterns and intensities of development indicated in City plans. Existing zoning for the study area is shown in Figure 12.

The following changes may be considered for the Zoning Ordinance in order to better support the Cahaba Heights Plan and the Vestavia Hills Comprehensive Plan:

1. Establish a new zoning district, for use in appropriate locations throughout the city, that allows horizontal and vertical mixing of residential, commercial and institutional uses subject to mixed-use site planning and design standards. This may be accomplished through the proposed Mixed Use (MU) District for master planned development, another mixed use zoning district for smaller developments, and/or by modifying the use regulations of existing zoning districts, as is proposed in the draft Neighborhood Village (NV) and General Commercial (GC) zoning districts.
2. Reduce setback requirements of business (or mixed-use) zoning districts to allow more complete and effective use of available land, thereby, encouraging new development and reinvestment. Reduced front setbacks will allow buildings be built closer to future sidewalks, creating more walkable commercial centers that accommodate window-shopping.
3. Require sidewalks be installed at the time of new non-residential, multi-family or mixed-use development in commercial centers and surrounding areas. Sidewalks should be 5 feet wide in residential areas, separated from the street by a 3 foot or wider planting strip. In commercial centers, sidewalks should be at least 5 feet wide, separated from the street by a planting strip or line of street trees. Sidewalks may be permitted in easements if right-of-way is insufficient.
4. Encourage shared parking by reducing cumulative requirements for adjacent uses (especially when mixed uses are involved) and removing regulatory obstacles that might prevent or discourage cross access and shared parking.
5. Allow on-street parking, if available or if provided by the developer in suitable locations, to be counted toward non-residential parking requirements.
6. Incorporate height or density incentives to encourage developers to provide public amenities, such as public open spaces, public parking, preferred uses, or design elements above that otherwise required by City regulations.
7. Create specific standards for landscaping in new development; screening of loading, dumpsters and appurtenances; and buffers between different uses.

Upon annexation, properties in Cahaba Heights were reclassified from established County zoning designations to the most compatible districts in the Vestavia Hills Zoning Ordinance. Updating the City's Zoning Ordinance provides an opportunity to rectify incompatibilities and issues with that conversion (such as the creation of nonconformities) while maintaining or enhancing opportunities for expansion or development in commercial centers that are consistent with community preferences. Refer also to the land use recommendations in Chapter V for guidance on addressing future zoning requests. When the City performs a comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance, it is recommended that several residential subdivisions currently zoned A-Agriculture District be changed to an applicable residential classification.

### Existing Zoning

A	R-4	R-9	Inst-1
E-2	R-5	RC-1	B-1
R-1	R-6	O-1	B-2
R-2	R-8	O-2	B-3
City Zoning Outside Plan Area			

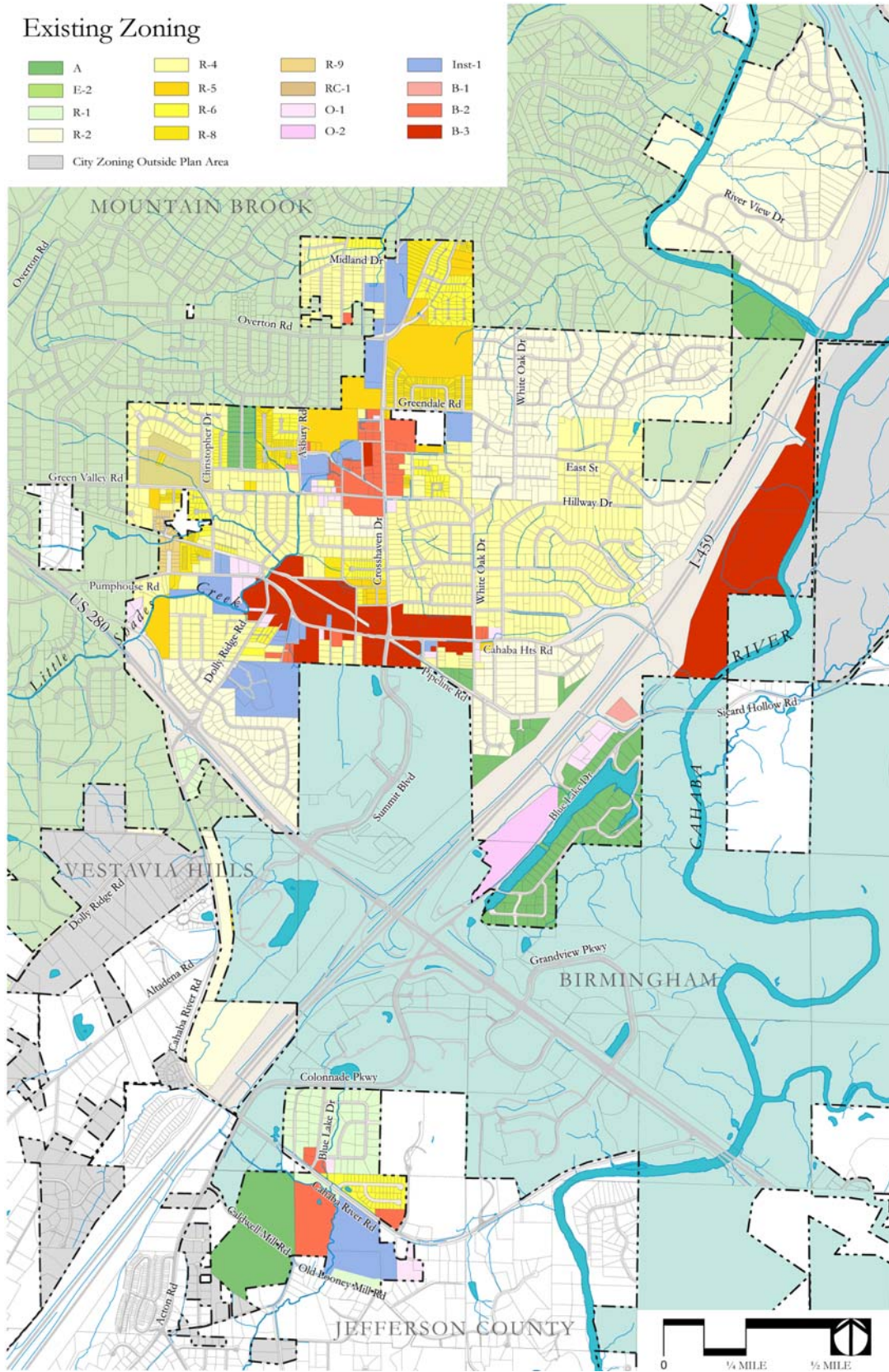


Figure 12: Existing Zoning Map

## Subdivision Regulations

Specific requirements for sidewalks and street design should be included in the City Subdivision Regulations to ensure that Cahaba Heights becomes more walkable and that the current level of street connectivity is maintained or improved through new development. Future residential subdivisions, especially those involving new streets, should be required to incorporate sidewalks, planting strips, and other elements described in the land use section of Chapter V. As described there, different requirements may be applied to different densities of residential development. However, the following general rules may be incorporated into the review criteria of the Subdivision Regulations:

- *Subdivisions located within ½ mile of a commercial center or school, regardless of their density, should include sidewalks, planting strips, curbs and gutters, and a high level of street connectivity.*
- *Subdivisions located further than ½ mile from a commercial center or school may include cul-de-sacs and swales (instead of raised curbs and gutters).*

Street design standards for Vestavia Hills' image corridors should be developed and incorporated into (or referenced by) the Subdivision Regulations. These standards should address sidewalk, landscaping, drainage, lighting, traffic-calming and on-street parking expectations as applicable to the type of street (e.g. arterials, collector, or local) and the land use context (e.g. residential, retail and service, mixed use, etc.). The recommendations in Chapter V, for the image corridors and local streets serving Cahaba Heights' commercial centers, may be used as a basis for a broader set of standards for the City. *Context Sensitive Solutions for Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares* by the Institute of Transportation Engineers includes a comprehensive set of guidelines and standards that may also be consulted in developing appropriate street design standards to support the City's mobility and accessibility goals.

## Design Review

The City of Vestavia Hills administers a design review process intended to ensure quality commercial development throughout the City. Together with the updating of the Vestavia Hills Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, the design review guidelines should also be updated. In this process, attention should be paid, not only to the review of cosmetic appearance (e.g. materials and colors) of individual buildings, but also to site design and general harmony with surrounding development. The design review process affords City officials, boards and staff, the public and developers to consider proposals *in context* so that the site planning, landscaping and architecture of new developments are not only appropriate in and of themselves but that they also help a commercial area be more than the sum of its parts.

While Cahaba Heights' commercial centers have a unique character compared to other of Vestavia Hill's business centers, specific design guidelines may not be necessary to assure that new development, infill and redevelopment are suitable to that character. There are many design issues essential to all of Vestavia Hills' commercial development areas. However, there are differences that should be considered in the design review process between the types and scales of development along U.S. 31 or the Acton Road interchange on I-459, for example, than along Crosshaven Drive or Rocky Ridge Road. To address these different contexts appropriately, Vestavia Hills may supplement its general design guidelines with criteria suited to its community or neighborhood-scale commercial centers distinguished from the criteria for its city or regional scale commercial centers. The development and design strategies in Chapters IV and VI should be considered for application in



Cahaba Heights' commercial centers and similar smaller scale commercial areas in other locations in Vestavia Hills. Amended design review guidelines should be adopted by resolution of the City's Design Review Board.

## Access Management Standards

The City of Vestavia Hills should adopt access management standards to encourage shared driveways, cross access and rear access between non-residential developments along major streets. These may be adopted as a stand-alone document and referenced by the City's development regulations. Referencing such requirements in the Subdivision Regulations assures that subdivided land may be developed and provided access in conformity with the City's standards. This is especially important to consider when relatively small or narrow lots might be created along major streets. Generally, lots narrower than 50-60 feet should be required to have either shared, cross or rear access with adjoining properties rather than individual driveways (except in compliance with driveway spacing requirements).

## Property Maintenance Code

The City of Vestavia Hills has adopted by reference the 2006 International Property Maintenance Code. This code and its enforcement are intended to ensure that all properties, buildings and structures within Vestavia Hills are maintained in a safe condition and are provided with adequate utilities and facilities necessary for occupancy. The ordinance also includes provisions for the condemnation and demolition of properties not fit for occupancy. By updating ordinances and through ongoing enforcement, the City may reduce upkeep problems, but community involvement and organization will be key to sustaining improvements. To assure that local ordinances are effective in addressing concerns, City inspections staff should review past complaints, meet with community representatives and determine if additional regulations should be considered for adoption by Vestavia Hills, either as a part of the proposed code update or in a separate ordinance.

## PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

This plan recommends a variety of investments necessary to bring public infrastructure and facilities up to City standards over time, to encourage maintenance and reinvestment in Cahaba Heights' neighborhoods and to enhance the commercial centers in such a way as to maximize opportunities for their economic growth. Public improvements represent the costlier and more long-term improvements recommended in this Plan and therefore each must be carefully planned, prioritized, coordinated with other public and private actions, funding secured, responsibilities assigned and partnerships created as needed.

### Gateways and Signage

Several gateways into the community and into its commercial centers are described in Chapter IV. Volunteers of Leadership Vestavia Hills are currently developing concepts for gateway signs for use throughout the city. Specific sites should be determined for each of the gateways. The City, through its Beautification Board, should partner with Leadership Vestavia Hills, the Vestavia Hills Chamber of Commerce and other interested parties to fund gateway projects.

A wayfinding signage program for commercial centers, including district banners, should also be considered and implemented through similar partnering efforts.



## Streets and Sidewalks

The street and sidewalk improvements described in this plan and in the citywide Sidewalk Master Plan will be carried out over several years and through several coordinated strategies.

Street improvement projects, such as widening, installation of curbs, and streetscape, access management, traffic-calming and intersection improvements, will be carried out by the City and County. Improving County roads will require coordination with the Jefferson County Department of Roads and Transportation. These projects may be funded in part through federal Transportation Enhancement Grants, which require a 20% local match. However, widening and installing additional lanes are not eligible project costs. Access management improvements should be performed as part of an applicable streetscape or road widening project.

Sidewalks along several of Cahaba Heights' major streets are already planned and funding has been acquired or will be sought through the Safe Routes to School program. During the planning process, the Steering Committee evaluated current sidewalk plans and recognized the need to emphasize sidewalk construction along Cahaba Heights' major roads to facilitate school access as well as other critical plan elements. As funding becomes available, the installation of sidewalks should be considered in the context of future street projects. As private investment in the commercial centers continues over time, sidewalks may also be required as a part of new development and redevelopment, incrementally filling gaps in the pedestrian network.

Recommended multi-use paths may be funded through transportation enhancement grants or Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). LWCF grants require a 50% local match and award amounts are limited.

## Drainage and Utilities Improvements

Installation of curbs and gutters should be carried out in concert with sidewalk or other street improvement projects as much as possible. Installation, repair and replacement of stormwater drainage facilities in some locations may be performed together with street improvements. Flood control and drainage projects may be eligible for Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) funding. Repair and replacement of water lines are coordinated between the Birmingham Water Works Board (BWVB) and the City of Vestavia Hills.

## Community Facilities

Creation of a virtual library to serve the Cahaba Heights area in the near future may be assisted through state or national grants and foundations. Space may be provided in one of the public facilities currently in Cahaba Heights or in another rented or purchased space. Paid or volunteer part-time staffing will be required.

## Parks and Recreation Projects

Land acquisition for parks and other recreational projects sponsored by Vestavia Hills are eligible for LWCF grants through ADECA.

Private acquisition of land for neighborhood park space is another opportunity to develop additional passive recreational opportunities for Cahaba Heights' residents. A non-profit community organization can be established to identify locations, raise funds and negotiate with property owners

for the donation or purchase of land for small neighborhood open spaces, with support, as needed from the City.

## FUNDING AND PRIORITIES

Funding for many of the improvements recommended by this plan will be the responsibility, primarily, of the City. However, Vestavia Hills has several funding sources at its disposal. Even if Vestavia Hills were able to acquire each grant it sought, a considerable amount of local money would still be needed for matching funds and for projects not eligible for grants. Therefore, elected officials must plan ahead for such expenditures through its Capital Improvements Plan and Program; and projects must be prioritized based on their costs, need and benefits. In addition, City departments must also plan for the maintenance costs of its public streets, sidewalks, drainage system, parks, etc. Additional reference information is provided in the Appendix describing potential funding sources for the improvements recommended by this plan.

### Tax Increment Financing

For the various improvements related to Cahaba Heights' commercial centers, Vestavia Hills may consider establishing a tax increment financing (TIF) district to help pay for public investments in those areas. Normally, capital improvements, including bonds generated to fund them, are paid for out of the City's general fund. In a TIF district, public investments and associated bonds are paid out of the property tax revenues generated in the district. This method has been used by local governments throughout the nation, including several in the Birmingham metropolitan area. Creation of tax increment districts is authorized under state law (§11-99-1 to 10), which requires a resolution by the City Council and a schedule of improvements to be funded through the TIF program. TIF funds are intended to be used to correct conditions that discourage private investment, which can include public improvements, property acquisition and redevelopment.

### Priorities

Possible funding sources are shown in Figure 13 for each project, as well as general priorities – *short-term* (first 3 years), *mid-term* (4-7 years) and *long-term* (8 years or more). Recurring costs for maintenance (including street paving) and for capital projects that will take many years to accomplish (e.g. installing curbs and gutters on local streets) are referred to as *ongoing*.

<b>Figure 13: Plan Implementation Matrix</b>			
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Regulatory Improvements</b>			
Update Zoning Ordinance	S	funded	City Council/P&Z
Update Subdivision Regulations	M	funded	City Council/P&Z
Adopt Access Management Standards	S	funded	City Council/P&Z
Update Design Review/Guidelines	M	funded	City Council/P&Z/ Architectural Control Board
<b>Gateway and Wayfinding Improvements</b>			
Gateway signs and landscaping	S	City	Public Works/ Beautification Board/ Chamber
Directional signage from US 280	S	City	City/Chamber/ALDOT
Commercial center banners and beautification	M	City/Chamber/ Merchants	City/Chamber/Merchants
Wayfinding signage	S	City	Public Works/ Chamber
<b>Street Improvements</b>			
Dolly Ridge/Cahaba Heights Road Intersection	M	City/County/ grants	City Engineer
Cahaba Heights Road	M	City/County/ grants	City Engineer
Dolly Ridge Road	M	City/County/ grants	City Engineer
Green Valley Road	M	City/County/ grants	City Engineer
Crosshaven Drive	M	City/County/ grants	City Engineer
Sunview Lane (cul-de-sac)	M	City	City Engineer
Pipe Line Road (cul-de-sac)	M	City	City Engineer
Pipe Line Road/Belwood (alley and cul-de-sac)	M	City	City Engineer
Traffic-calming improvements	ongoing	City	City Engineer
<b>Sidewalk Improvements</b>			
Sidewalk Master Plan Projects	ongoing	City/grants	City Engineer
Multi-Use Path (Cahaba Heights Road east)	M	City/grants	City Engineer
Multi-Use Path (Asbury to Crosshaven)	M	City/grants	City Engineer

**Figure 13: Plan Implementation Matrix**

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Oakview Lane	L	City/grants	City Engineer
<b>Other Transportation Improvements</b>			
Street/alley access (Cahaba Heights Rd to Pipe Line Rd)	M	City	City Engineer
Vehicular access to playing fields from Oakview Lane	M	City	City Engineer/Parks and Recreation Dept.
Transit route modifications	S	City	Mayor/City Council
<b>Drainage and Utilities Improvements</b>			
Curb and gutter installation	ongoing	City/grants	City Engineer
Installation/repair/replacement of drainage pipes	ongoing	City/grants	City Engineer
Repair/replacement of water lines	ongoing	BWWB	BWWB/City Engineer
<b>Community Facilities</b>			
Virtual Library	S	City/grants	Library Board
Library Annex	L	City/grants	Library Board
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>			
Public park	S	City/grant	Parks Board/Parks and Recreation Dept.
Neighborhood open spaces	ongoing	private	private
<b>Business Development</b>			
Creation of business community organization (or under Chamber)	S	n/a	Merchants/Chamber
Naming, branding, marketing of commercial centers	S	merchants and/or Chamber	Merchants/Chamber
<b>Community/Neighborhood Improvements</b>			
Creation of community organization	S	n/a	Residents/Merchants/City
Priorities. "S" = Short-term (first 3 years), "M" = mid-term (4-7 years) and "L" = long-term (8 years or more)			



# APPENDIX A

## FUNDING SOURCES

### **Infrastructure Grants, Site Development, and Loans for Purchase of Land, Building and Equipment**

**Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)** grant funds are available for economic development activities including industrial site development, industrial access roads, destination based tourism projects and business development activities, such as technology transfer projects and small business technical assistance programs. Contact the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham or see the ARC website at [www.arc.gov/](http://www.arc.gov/).

**Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** are administered through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). Projects must meet one of three national objectives; aid in the elimination of slum and/or blighted conditions, benefit low and moderate-income families and meet other community development needs that pose an immediate threat to the health and welfare of the community. CDBG funds can be used for funding housing rehabilitation and public infrastructure projects. Other CDBG programs available include the Community Enhancement Fund, Special Fund, Planning Fund and the Economic Development Fund.

The Economic Development Fund (ED Fund) is designed to finance public and private activities necessary for industrial and other significant economic development projects. The economic development projects are funded under three distinct categories:

- ED Infrastructure Grants – for improvements such as extension of water and sewer lines and access roads.
- ED Loans – for private activities such as purchase of land, buildings and equipment, or construction or renovation of buildings.
- ED Float Loans – for acquisition, site preparation, new construction, renovation, purchase of machinery and equipment, working capital, refinancing, and other CDBG eligible activities approved by the State.

### **Recreation Funding:**

**Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Community Enhancement Funds** can be used to address activities that enhance the quality of life beyond providing for the most basic and essential needs through the competitive funds mentioned above. Examples include senior centers, neighborhood centers, community centers, fire protection activities and recreational activities such as parks. See the ADECA website at [www.adeca.alabama.gov](http://www.adeca.alabama.gov).

**Recreation Trails Program (RTP) Fund** is administered by the ADECA and was created to assist in acquiring, developing, or improving trail or trail related resources for both non-motorized and motorized user groups. See the Federal Highway Administration website at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails).

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grants** are administered by ADECA to provide “close to home” park and recreation opportunities to residents. LWCF grants can be used by communities to build a variety of park and recreation facilities, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Communities must match LWCF grants with 50 percent of the local project costs through in-kind services or cash. See the Land and Water Conservation Fund website at [www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/lwcf](http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/lwcf).

**Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) Transportation Enhancement Funds** are available through the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and fund on a matching basis (i.e. 80% federal, 20% local). They can be used for a variety of projects that enhance the surface transportation system including streetscape improvements, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities (sidewalks and rails to trails, etc.). See the Federal Highway Administration website at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu).

### **Business Development Financing / Business Owner Access to Capital**

**Alacom Finance.** Alacom finance aids small-to-medium sized businesses in packaging and structuring finance for fixed asset needs. It is certified by the Small Business Administration to package, process, close and service loans. Contact: Diane Roehrig, President (205) 870-3360.

**CIT Small Business Lending Corporation.** CIT is a full-service finance and equipment leasing company, that works to capitalize the endeavors of businesses. Contact: Michael Vance, Regional Accounts Manager, (205) 824-2810.

**Capital Solutions, L.L.C.** Capital Solutions is a non-bank finance service company specializing in SBA and conventional loan services. Contact: Jan Roberts & Nicole Reed, (205) 879-3648.

**Birmingham Business Resource Center.** The Birmingham Business Resource Center provides access to capital for a wide range of business financing needs. Programs include the Small Business Administration’s 504 loan program for fixed asset financing needs, an SBA 7(a) loan guarantee program, an Economic Development Administration funded Revolving Loan Fund for operating capital as well as fixed asset needs, and a micro-lending program. Contact BBRC at (205) 250-6380 or see their website at [www.bbrc.biz](http://www.bbrc.biz).

**Small Business Administration.** Many area banks are available to process SBA 7(a) loan guarantees. Through the SBA Guaranty Loan program the participating bank is provided a guaranty of up to 80% of a small business loan less than or equal to \$100,000 and 75% for loans over \$100,000. This guaranty reduces the bank’s risk and enables financing for a business that could not be financed without the guaranty. Contact: Jack E. Wright, SBA, (205) 290-7101.

**Southern Development Council.** Administers SBA section 504 loan funds for eligible businesses: small for-profit businesses with fewer than 500 employees, net worth less than \$6 million, net after tax less than \$2 million, must create jobs. Contact SDC at (334) 244-1801 or see their website at [www.sdcinc.org](http://www.sdcinc.org).

**The Money Store.** The Money Store is a national organization that participates in the Small Business Administration’s SBA 504 program. Loans may be used for fixed asset needs such as acquisition of a business, construction, expansion or renovation of land and buildings; or to purchase equipment or machinery. Contact Business Development Officer at (205) 982-7900.

## Small Business Technical Assistance and Counseling

**Alabama Small Business Development Consortium.** The Alabama Small Business Development Consortium provides managerial and technical consulting assistance and training at no cost to current and potential small business persons statewide. This service is offered through ten Small Business Development Centers, the Alabama International Trade Center and the Alabama Small Business Procurement System. These centers are a resource where information, counseling and assistance are coordinated and disseminated to persons who plan to start a small business or are presently operating a small business. The centers also provide the entrepreneur with education and training opportunities, which cover a wide range of business topics. Contact: ASBDC at (205) 307-6510 or see their website at [www.asbdc.org](http://www.asbdc.org).

**Service Corps of Retired Executives.** The Service Corps of Retired Executives is an organization that provides counseling to businesses by individuals who have experience in a particular field but are now retired. Contact: North Alabama SCORE Chapter, Bill Henry, (205) 934-6868.

## Other Resources

**Community Mortgage Pools** can be created by the City and participating local banks interested in the financial spin-offs associated with a revitalized commercial center. Such a pool could provide construction or permanent loans for smaller commercial or residential projects, façade improvements and renovation of existing properties.

**Alabama has Special Improvement Districts, Capital Cooperative Districts, Business Improvement Districts and Tax Increment Districts.** See Code of Alabama, Sections 11-99, 11-99A, and 11-99B for more details. A county or city may form an Improvement District. The district may issue tax exempt and taxable bonds to finance infrastructure costs for a subdivision. Eligible costs include roads, water, sewer, storm sewers, drainage, curb and gutter, docks, harbors, flood control, dams, berms, sidewalks, parks, schools, athletic facilities fire and police protection facilities, mass transit facilities, air transport, business and industrial recruitment, hospitals and medical facilities, signs and other property owned by public or utility companies.

Developments may be residential, commercial, or industrial. Generally private roads will not qualify for tax exempt financing. The county or city assesses the lots to pay principal and interest on the bonds. Assessments are payable over the term of bonds. No 10-year limit as under prior law.

A **Business Improvement District (BID)** is where property owners in a designated geographic area voluntarily collect annual assessments that are spent on projects to enhance the local business environment. Project examples include improvements to streetscape, marketing efforts, business recruitment activity and security programs.

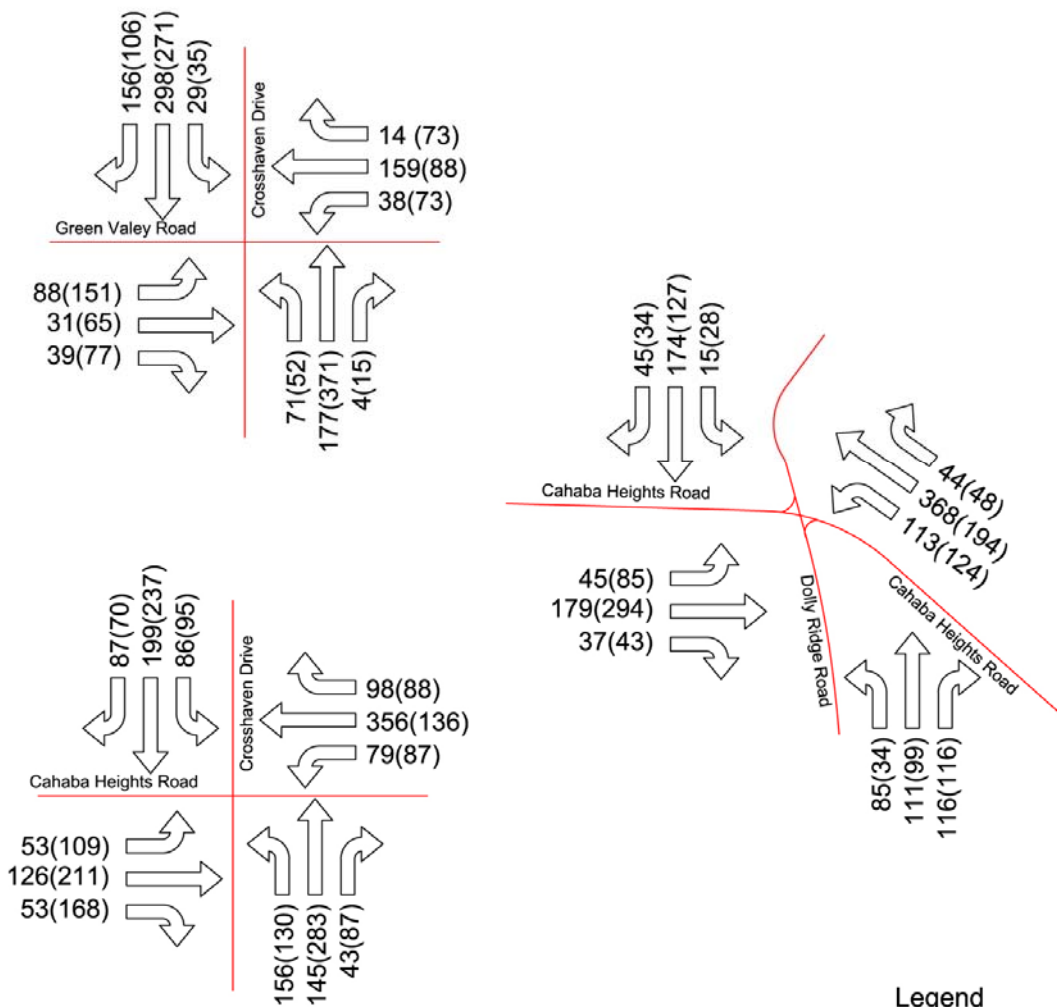
**Tax Increment Financing (TIF)** is a procedure whereby a municipality can issue bonds to provide infrastructure for private development projects. The incremental increase in tax revenues from the higher property base resulting from private development is pledged to the payment of municipal bonds. Tax Increment Districts are permitted under Alabama law, Code of Alabama 11-99.





# APPENDIX B

## EXISTING PEAK HOUR TRAFFIC ANALYSIS



Legend  
50 AM  
(50) PM



North  
Scale: n.t.s



### Existing Peak Hour Traffic Volumes

Cahaba Heights - Vestavia Hills, Alabama

September 2008

Weekday Peak Hours: 7-8AM (morning) and 4-5PM (afternoon)

**Peak Hour Levels of Service  
Cahaba Heights**

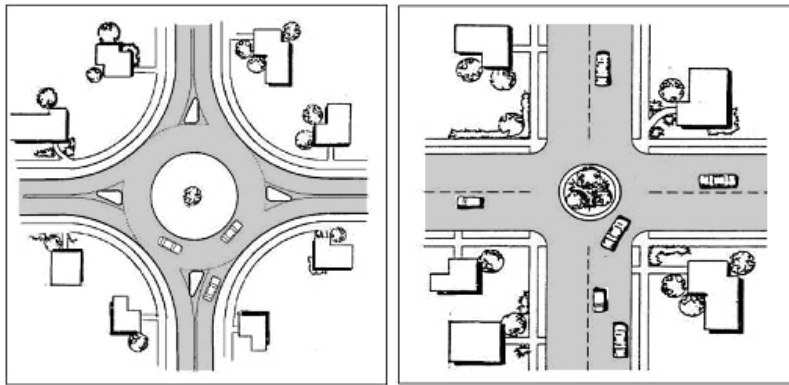
Intersection	Approach	Morning Peak Hour Level of Service	Afternoon Peak Hour Level of Service
Crosshaven Drive/Summit Drive At Cahaba Heights Road	Eastbound Westbound Northbound Southbound	C C C C	C C C C
Crosshaven Drive At Green Valley Road	Eastbound Westbound Northbound Southbound	B B B B	B B B B
Dolly Ridge Road At Pump House Road/ Cahaba Heights Road	Eastbound Westbound Northbound Southbound	B A C C	B A C C

## APPENDIX C

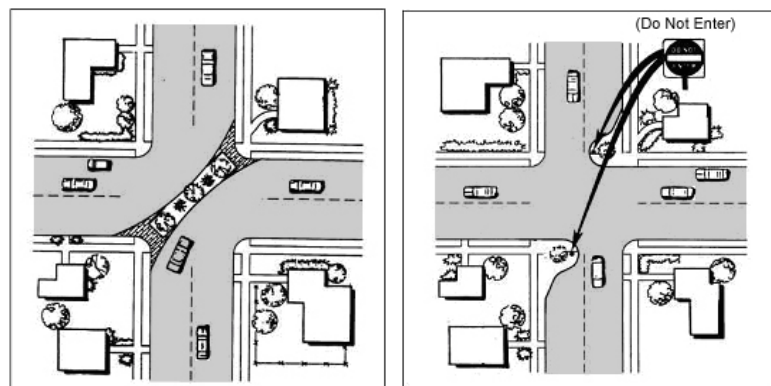
### TRAFFIC CALMING TECHNIQUES

Traffic calming involves changes in street alignment, installation of barriers, and other physical measures to reduce traffic speeds and/or cut-through volumes. The simplest and among the best traffic calming techniques involve narrowing the perceived driving area by placing buildings relatively close to the street, installing street trees, and/or creating on-street parking lanes (if sufficient space is available). Alternatively, the following is a list of structural traffic calming devices that may be considered on a case-by-case basis in Cahaba Heights.

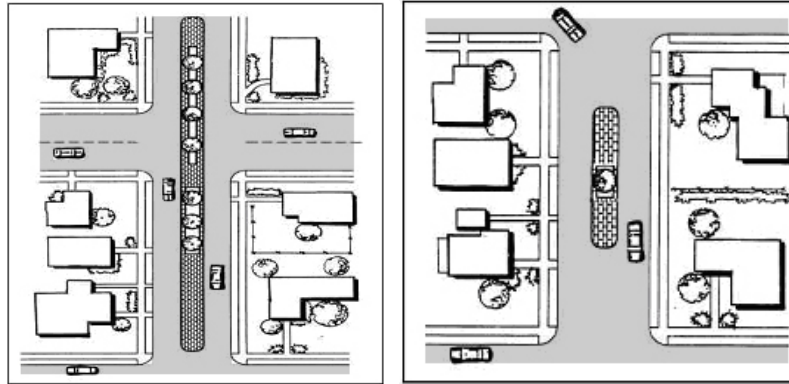
- *Roundabouts* and *neighborhood traffic circles* are barriers placed in the middle of an intersection, directing all traffic in the same direction without the need for signalization.



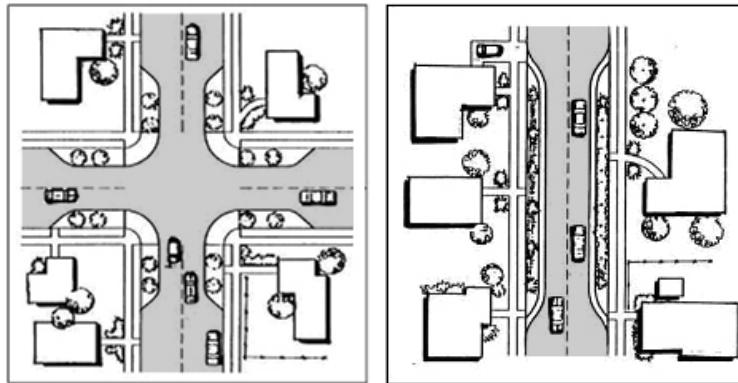
- *Diagonal diverters* are barriers placed diagonally across an intersection, blocking through movement; they are sometimes called *full diverters* or *diagonal road closures*. *Half closures* are barriers that block travel in one direction for a short distance on otherwise two-way streets; they are sometimes called *partial closures*, *entrance barriers*, or *one-way closures* (when two half-closures are placed across from one another at an intersection, the result is a *semi-diverter*).



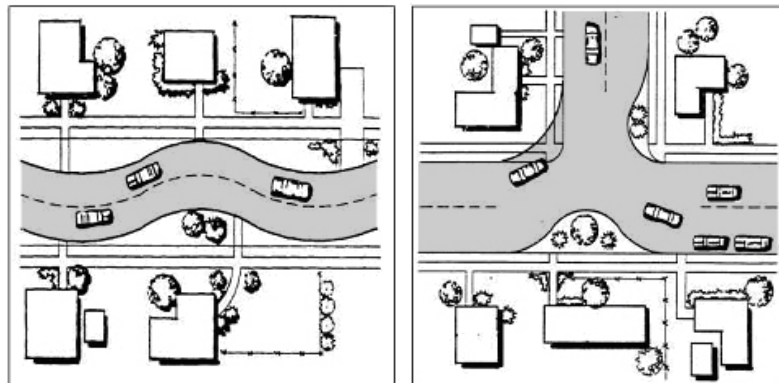
- *Median barriers* are raised islands in the centerline of a street and continuing through an intersection that block the left turn movement from all intersection approaches and the through movement at the cross street. *Center Island Narrowings* are raised islands located along the centerline of a street that narrow the travel lanes at that location.



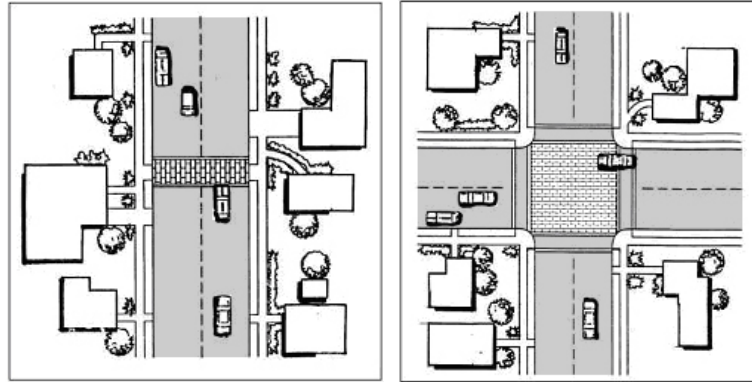
- *Bulb-outs* and *Chokers* are curb extensions at intersection corners or at mid-block, respectively, that narrow a street by extending the sidewalk or widening the planting strip.



- *Chicanes* are a series of roadway narrowings or curb extensions that alternate from one side of the street to the other forming S-shaped curves. Similar treatments may be applied to intersections.



- *Speed Tables* are long raised speed humps with a flat section in the middle and ramps on the ends; sometimes constructed with brick or other textured materials on the flat section. A *raised intersection* is a vertical traffic calming installation used to slow traffic through an intersection and place pedestrians and vehicles on the same plane.



Statistical studies have shown that installation of traffic calming devices may be an effective means of reducing excessive vehicle operating speeds and cut-through traffic. However, it should be noted that there are certain limitations and drawbacks to the use of traffic calming devices, which may include increased noise and liability on the part of the City. The following procedure should be utilized for analysis and evaluation of any site under consideration prior to installation of any traffic calming technique:

1. A preliminary field review of the roadway section should be undertaken to familiarize the investigator(s) with the operational and geometric characteristics of the roadway and to expedite data collection and evaluation.
2. A spot speed survey of at least 30 total vehicles traveling in both directions on the roadway section under consideration should be performed with either a radar unit or automatic traffic counter. Included in the tabulation should be the date, time, and prevalent weather of the surveys, and direction of travel and travel speed of each vehicle.
3. A 24-hour traffic count should be performed on a typical weekday, in a location at or near where the spot speed survey was conducted, using an automatic traffic counter. The data should be separated by direction of travel and tallied in periods of not longer than 60 minutes. Additional traffic counts may be performed if warranted due to the need to study diversion of traffic to other roadways. The date and prevalent weather of the traffic count period should also be noted. Traffic calming devices should not be considered for roadways that have less than 750 total vehicles traveling in both directions on a daily basis and an average travel speed of less than 35 miles per hour. Traffic counts should be used to estimate the diversion of traffic to other roadways. Traffic calming devices should not be installed if the traffic diversion would result in a traffic increase on any residential roadway of 50% or more.
4. A summary of all traffic accident reports from the Police Department pertaining to the subject roadway section, for at least the three full preceding years, should be evaluated.
5. Field collection of roadway data related to vehicle operating and design speed should be undertaken. This should include pavement surface and edge treatment, horizontal curvature, vertical curvature, corner sight distance, stopping sight distance, width of roadway, distance



to obstructions, posted speed limit, access points, pedestrian and bicycle activities, and roadway grades.

The City Engineer should analyze roadway geometric data for comparison to the following:

- Traffic calming devices will not be installed in a horizontal curve or a vertical curve where the visibility of the device is restricted, or on an approach to these curves.
- Traffic calming devices will not be installed on roadways at any location where the grade exceeds 5%, including the approaches to each traffic calming device installation.

The accident patterns should be studied by the City Engineer to determine trends of accidents which: (1) might have been prevented if vehicle operating speeds were generally lower on the subject roadway, or (2) might have been more severe if traffic calming devices were in place. There are no criteria for the minimum number of accidents that might have been prevented had operating speeds been generally lower.

Use of each roadway section under consideration should be evaluated as an emergency vehicle (fire department vehicle or ambulance) route or access point. Traffic calming devices should not be utilized on roads that serve as a primary route for emergency vehicles (an average of at least five emergency vehicles a day engaged in an emergency call) or a primary access route for emergency vehicles into an area of 100 or more residential dwelling units or ten or more businesses.