



STAFF REPORT: Town Zoning Map and Code Amendments

1. Background and Purpose.

- a. To guide future growth, the Town of Abita Springs Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Board of Aldermen adopted the Comprehensive Master Plan¹ on March 28, 2024, via Resolution 2024-002 concluding over a year of community engagement and technical analysis. This Plan is meant to be implemented incrementally over the next 10-20 years in support of the Town's Vision, which includes "...ensure that change in Abita Springs diversifies the town's economy, increases employment opportunities, enhances walkability, preserves green space, improves access to nature, grows sustainably, and upgrades the quality of life." This Vision is further broken down into five "big ideas" including:
 - Enhance the Downtown and make it a unique destination.
 - New development should be compatible, respectful of context, and green.
 - Streets should be safe and provide a "sense of arrival" at gateway places.
 - Preserve land, increase access to nature, and build sustainably.
 - The Plan must be implementable and fiscally responsible.
- b. The Comprehensive Master Plan includes a Future Character Area Map, including broad typologies of development such as downtown or traditional neighborhood, to provide a vision for future key areas in the Town but does not fully guide consideration of future zoning and subdivision requests town-wide.
- c. During the master planning process, the Town also developed a proposed zoning map that was reviewed and ultimately put on hold when the Master Plan was adopted, because the public requested additional input in the long-term land use vision for the Town.
- d. In most master planning processes, the development of a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) supports future rezoning requests like the proposed rezoning map previously considered. As part of the adoption of the Master Plan, the Planning Commission requested the Town immediately pursue development of a Future Land Use Map prior to consideration of any future comprehensive rezoning proposal.
- e. After the Master Plan was adopted, the Planning and Zoning Department tasked Desire Line (www.desire-line.com), a local urban and regional planning firm, with beginning to implement the Comprehensive Master Plan. Immediate tasks included the development of a Future Land Use Map and an updated Comprehensive Zoning Map that incorporated more community engagement on proposed land use and zoning updates.
- f. Desire Line and the Town Planning and Zoning Department (herein called the "Planning Team") presented and discussed a draft Future Land Use Map (FLUM) to the Town Planning and Zoning Commission on August 29 and September 26, 2024, and held a Community Meeting to collect comments on the draft FLUM on September 4, 2024. The Planning and Zoning Commission adopted the Future Land Use Map as an appendix to the Comprehensive Master Plan on October 24, 2024. The Future Land Use Map is a guiding document to support the Town's growth and development and not a regulatory tool like the Town's zoning map and land use regulations.

¹ Full document can be found here:

https://www.townofabitasprings.com/files/ugd/509006_e5dadfd712724dbfbc35377b8c8043ea.pdf

- g. Updating the Town’s official zoning map also requires updating the Town’s land use and zoning Code to ensure the Map and the Code work together to support the Town’s future vision. This process of comprehensively updating a local map and land use code is consistent with best practices recommended by the American Planning Association and required by the State of Louisiana. It is an important way for parishes, cities and towns to support residents’ vision for their community by updating local land use laws and zoning districts to create more predictability in local development patterns.
- h. This report supports the adoption of the Town’s Official Zoning Map and Land Use and Zoning Code Amendments (amending the Town Code of Ordinances, Part 9 – Planning, Zoning, and Development), in order to effectuate zoning changes and implement a zoning code that support implementation of the Town’s Comprehensive Master Plan and Future Land Use Map.

2. Findings

- a. The Planning Team reviewed the Town Zoning Code and Zoning Map and found that, in addition to executing the goals and vision of the Master Comprehensive Plan, the following goals could be accomplished within the scope of the Zoning Code and Zoning Map amendment process:
 - Correct long-standing issues with the current zoning map;
 - Align zoning district regulations with best practices in Town planning;
 - Streamline code administration and enhance predictability in development outcomes; and
 - Increase public understanding of land use practices and produce a zoning code and map that reflect the public sentiment of Abita residents.
- b. Further, the Planning Team found the current Town zoning map and Code to be more permissive than many in the Town may realize: mapping many areas with Commercial zoning that allows large commercial development, not requiring comprehensive landscaping standards for new development, providing limited guidance or provisions for existing land uses in the residential / commercial district, and having limited guidance on development procedures, minimum standards, and the purpose and intended development patterns for existing zoning districts in Town.
- c. To address these issues and support implementation of the Town’s Master Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Team presented a draft Zoning Code outline, approach, schedule, code amendment packets, and a framework for zoning districts, permitted uses, development standards, and procedural requirements as part of the following eight (8) public meetings:
 - **September 4, 2024:** Community Open House focused on collecting input on the draft Future Land Use Map.
 - **March 27, 2025:** Planning and Zoning Commission, presentation focused on community feedback.
 - **April 2, 2025:** Community Open House focused on draft Zoning Map.
 - **April 24, 2025:** Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, presentation and discussion focused on community feedback and code approach.
 - **May 29, 2025:** Code and map approach presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission
 - **June 26, 2025:** Use and Design Standards Presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission
 - **July 18, 2025:** Zoning Community Open House
 - **July 31, 2025:** Map and public survey results presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission
- d. In addition to the meetings listed here, the Planning Team deployed digital and paper community surveys and online polls and accepted written public comment throughout the study process, including:

- **Community Survey**, open from April 2nd – May 23rd, 2025 [88 total respondents]
 - **Facebook Poll**, open from April 25th – May 7th, 2025 [517 total respondents]
 - **Micro-Survey**, open from May 29th – June 26th, 2025 [199 total respondents]
- e. Throughout public meetings with the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Planning Team presented the Zoning Map and Code in an iterative process, collecting feedback on drafts in development, and building the Code and Map over the course of the planning process with input from the public and the Commission. As part of this process, the following key findings have informed the development of the **final Zoning Code amendments** for consideration:
- Use a standard use-based zoning code, where land uses are regulated separately from building design, to support simpler code administration within the Town. This enables the code to precisely tailor use impacts and the design of buildings and sites to the desires of the Town, and is simpler to administer than a form-based code, which does not adequately consider the impacts of land uses on neighboring properties and on infrastructure such as Town sewer and traffic.
 - Better distinguish and clarify differences in residential land development patterns in the Town, including Conservation Residential, Neighborhood Residential, Townhouse, and Multifamily Residential districts.
 - To support the development of more attainable, high quality housing, add and limit the mapping of Traditional Residential District to enable the development of existing lots, where appropriate.
 - Maintain the intent of the existing Residential – Commercial overlay district by implementing a mixed-use zoning district, which allows both residential and low-impact commercial uses, such as boutique stores, small restaurants, or offices.
 - Limit commercial uses in the mixed-use district to only those having the lowest intensity and apply stringent use standards. This mixed-use district and its associated provisions aim to:
 - Support and promote land use compatibility with nearby residential uses,
 - Maintain the existing small-town, personalized aesthetic unique to Abita Springs,
 - Encourage businesses that provide enhanced quality of life amenities and services for local residents in the area such as restaurants, community gathering venues, and local or artisan businesses.
 - Support small-scale food, artisan, entertainment, and craftsman-type employment opportunities for local residents.
 - Streamline existing Industrial Districts into one (1) Light Industrial District to avoid confusion and reflect existing residents and town understanding of these uses and their future development.
 - Utilize a new Civic District to consolidate and streamline existing Parks and Schools zoning districts.
 - Limit overlay district standards to site design and aesthetics, whereby base zoning districts manage land uses and related activities, to avoid confusion and conflicting land use standards.
 - Include a streamlined table of permitted, conditional, and prohibited uses for each zoning district, informed by community input and reflective of the Town’s desire to encourage uses that are permitted by right, prohibit undesirable uses, and conditionally approve uses that require community input to assess and better understand potential development impacts.
 - Streamline, consolidate, and remove conflicting or unclear language related to specific land use standards, such as animal-related uses, auto repairs / service, home occupations, parking garages, places of assembly (such as school auditoriums or churches), short-term rentals, temporary retail sales, and townhouses.
 - Consolidate and renumber existing site design, parking, landscaping, and tree preservation standards for the Town into a single area of the Code, entitled “Land Development Code” to support user navigation and more efficient code administration. *Note: the scope of this project did not include updating or streamlining these development standards, so they are*

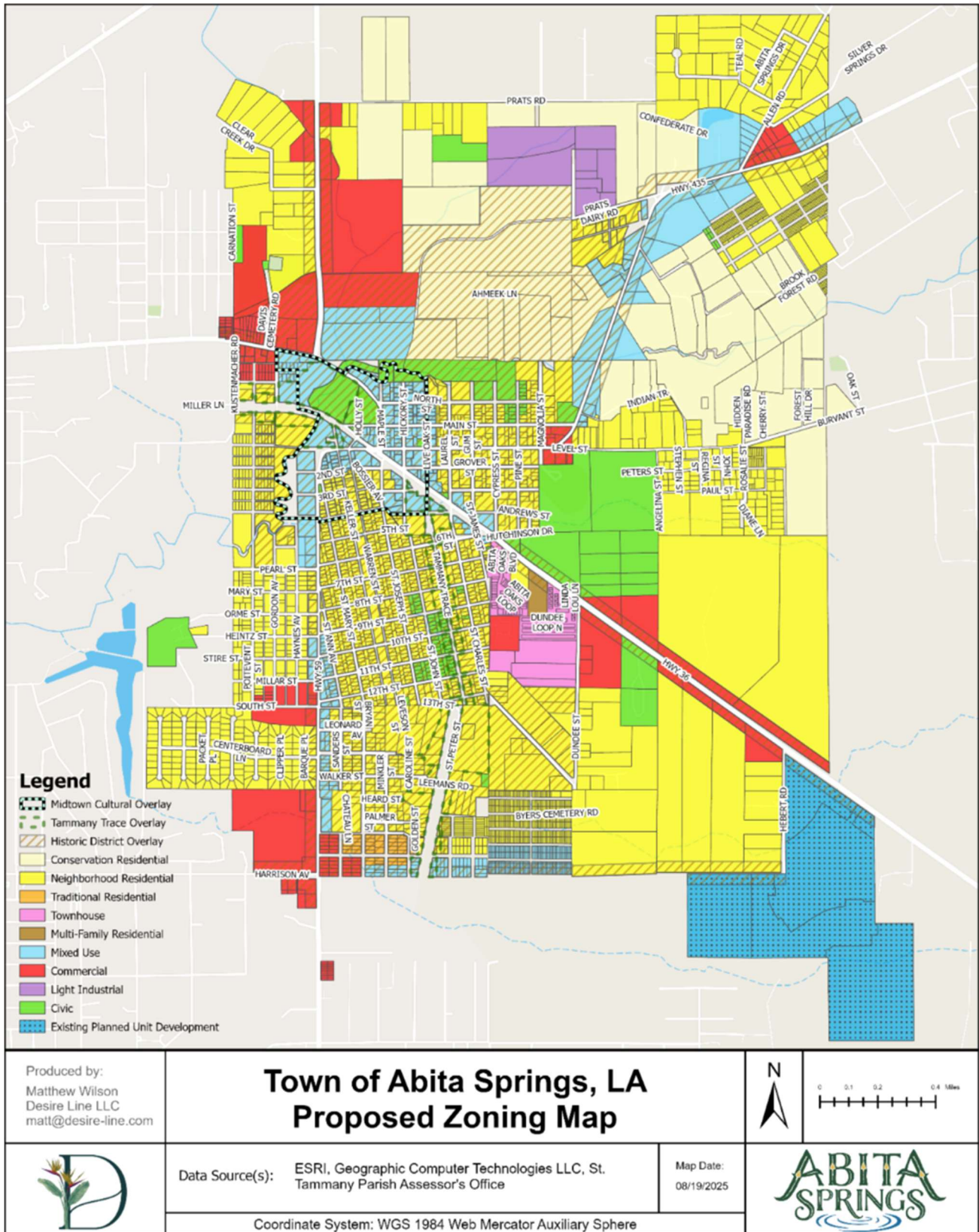
largely incorporated as written, with minor exceptions for when feedback was limited and straightforward and fell within the Team's ability to incorporate.

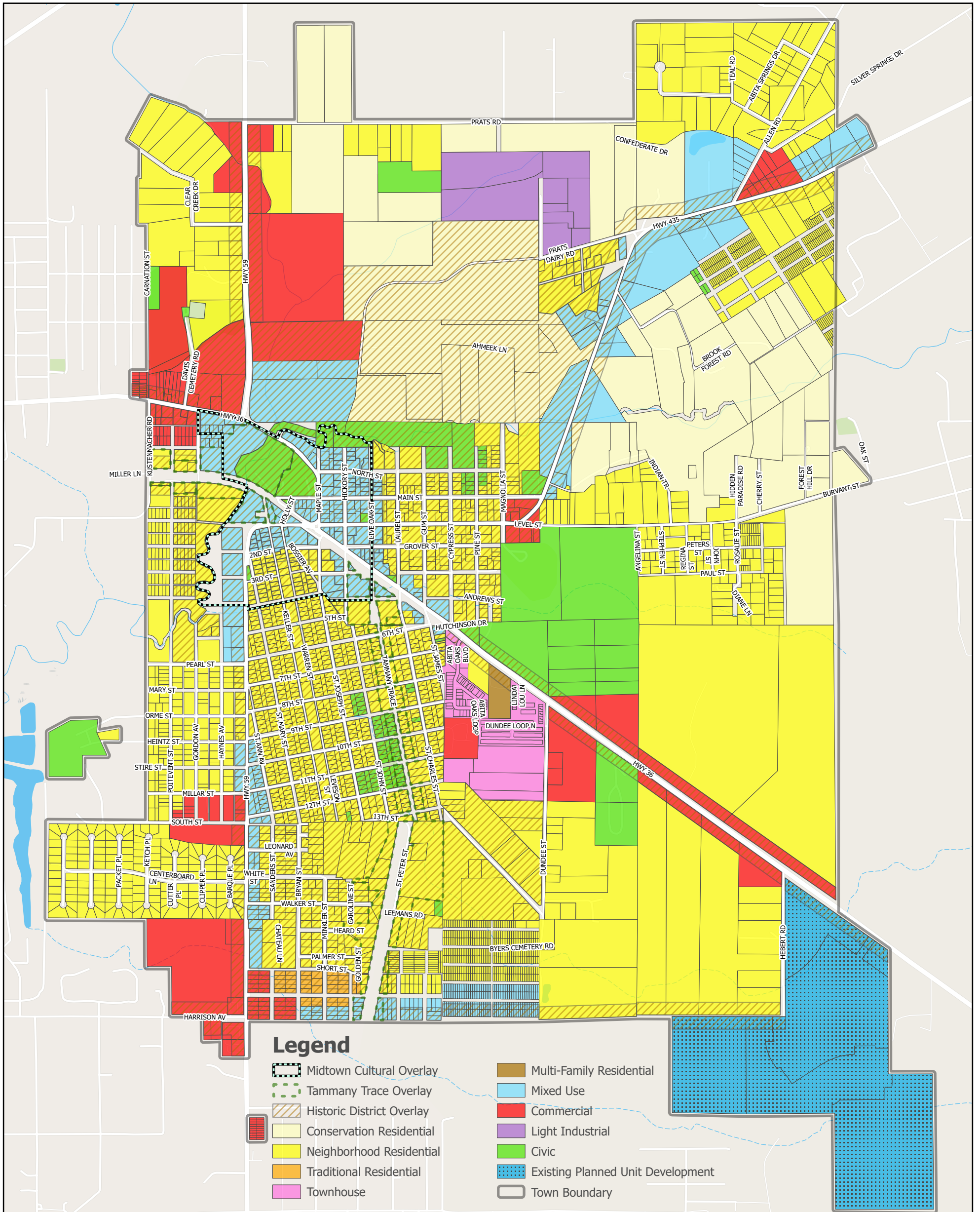
- Update and streamline sign regulations to incorporate content neutral standards consistent with federal law.
 - Update and provide comprehensive procedural standards for future land development requests to support more predictable, streamlined and efficient land development applications.
- f. Throughout meetings with the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Planning Team continuously discussed and refined the draft Zoning Map in an iterative and transparent process. From this process, the following key findings informed the development of the **final zoning map** for consideration:
- While the Future Land Use Map was adopted as a long-term vision for the Town consistent with the Master Comprehensive Plan, many in the community expressed the need to adopt the zoning map more incrementally, or slowly, and to avoid going from today's reality to the 20 year vision in a only few months.
 - This concern was expressed by residents concerned with commercial encroachment, as well as those who lived near state highways that were not improved to handle the level of commercial development (and associated traffic) envisioned on major roadways in and out of Town. For these reasons, Commercially zoned areas have been significantly reduced since the first draft of the Zoning Map, often changed to the less intense Mixed-Use district in areas that are already developed with commercial uses in the vicinity or are along the more heavily accessed road or pedestrian corridors in the Town, and the Mixed-Use District has also been significantly reduced, often changed to Neighborhood Residential to reflect more of the existing residential development patterns in Town.
 - Residents preferred to largely keep residential districts where they are currently mapped or expand these areas. Survey respondents also largely supported the proposed mapping of the Conservation Residential district, which is an existing, unmapped zoning district in Town.
 - Survey respondents expressed concerns over the possible proliferation of duplexes in Town, so these land uses are limited to the townhouse, multifamily, mixed use, and commercial districts.
 - There is broad consensus on keeping heavy commercial uses and light industrial sites out of Town Center.
 - Throughout the process of presenting the draft Zoning Map to residents in public meetings, the Planning Team further reduced the recommended area of the traditional residential district, changing proposed areas to the Neighborhood Residential zoning district.

3. Planning Team Recommendation:

- a. Upon consideration of technical elements and public comments and community feedback, the Planning Team recommends the adoption of a Zoning Map for the Town shown in **Exhibit A: Recommended Zoning Map FOR DISCUSSION at 8/28 Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting.**
- b. The Planning Team also recommends the adoption of an ordinance amending the Town Code of Ordinances to implement the Planning, Zoning, and Development Code in: **Exhibit B: Recommended Land Use & Zoning Code Amendments FOR DISCUSSION at 8/28 Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting.** (*see separate Code printout*)

Exhibit A: Recommended Zoning Map FOR DISCUSSION at 8/28 Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting





Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, USGS, St. Tammany Parish

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Exhibit A: Draft Zoning Map



0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

Data Source(s): ESRI, Geographic Computer Technologies LLC,
 St. Tammany Parish Assessor's Office

Map Date:
 08/27/2025



Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere