

EXISTING CONDITIONS **2**

CONTEXT

STUDY AREA LOCATION

*NATURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL
FACTORS*

CIRCULATION

MARKET

*LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT
PATTERNS*

The UD is characterized by a rich blend of natural, cultural, commercial, and civic resources that make it an exceptional area within the larger metropolitan region, with an enviable concentration of local, and regional anchors that fall into the following general categories:

- Primary schools
- State University
- State Cooperative Extension Services
- Houses of worship and faith-based institutions
- Parks and recreational facilities
- Mexican consulate
- Nature preserves

The state university, UALR, is one of the region's largest employers and enrolls an estimated 12,000 full- and part-time students each year. This, in addition to the district's other anchors, makes the area a regional destination as a place for work, recreation, study, commerce, and as a home to thousands of Little Rock's citizens.

CONTEXT



Fourche Creek Bottoms



University of Arkansas at Little Rock

STUDY AREA LOCATION

The City of Little Rock has grown along an east-to-west corridor that roughly parallels U. S. I-630 with the downtown business district to the east, and more recent suburban residential communities to the west. The University District Study Area (UDSA) is located south of the I-630 corridor and roughly midway between the City’s downtown and its western areas of expansion.

The UD is made up of the area surrounding the UALR main campus and is generally bounded by 12th Street on the north, Rock Creek on the west, Fourche Creek Bottoms on the south and Monroe Street on the east. The UDSA, especially for land use and zoning analysis, extends to I-630 on the north because the Interstate highway is such a dominate feature. However, whether the area between 12th Street and I-630 is included in the UD or other adjacent redevelopment areas depends upon a consultative process now underway. UD redevelopment initiatives will be coordinated closely with adjacent redevelopment areas regardless of where final boundaries are established. These adjacent redevelopment programs include the Mid Town initiative centered on Markham and University Avenue, the War Memorial Park initiative, and the areas centered on 12th Street and Cedar/Pine Streets being redeveloped by Black Community Developers. The major development impacts of the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences (UAMS) campus will also influence final designation of redevelopment program boundaries.

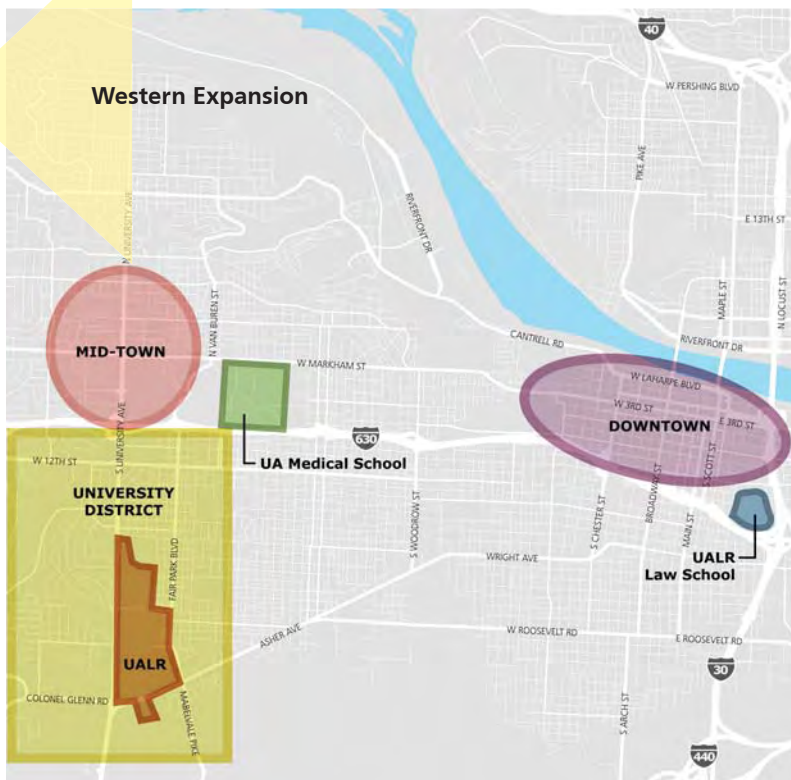


Diagram of general location within the region

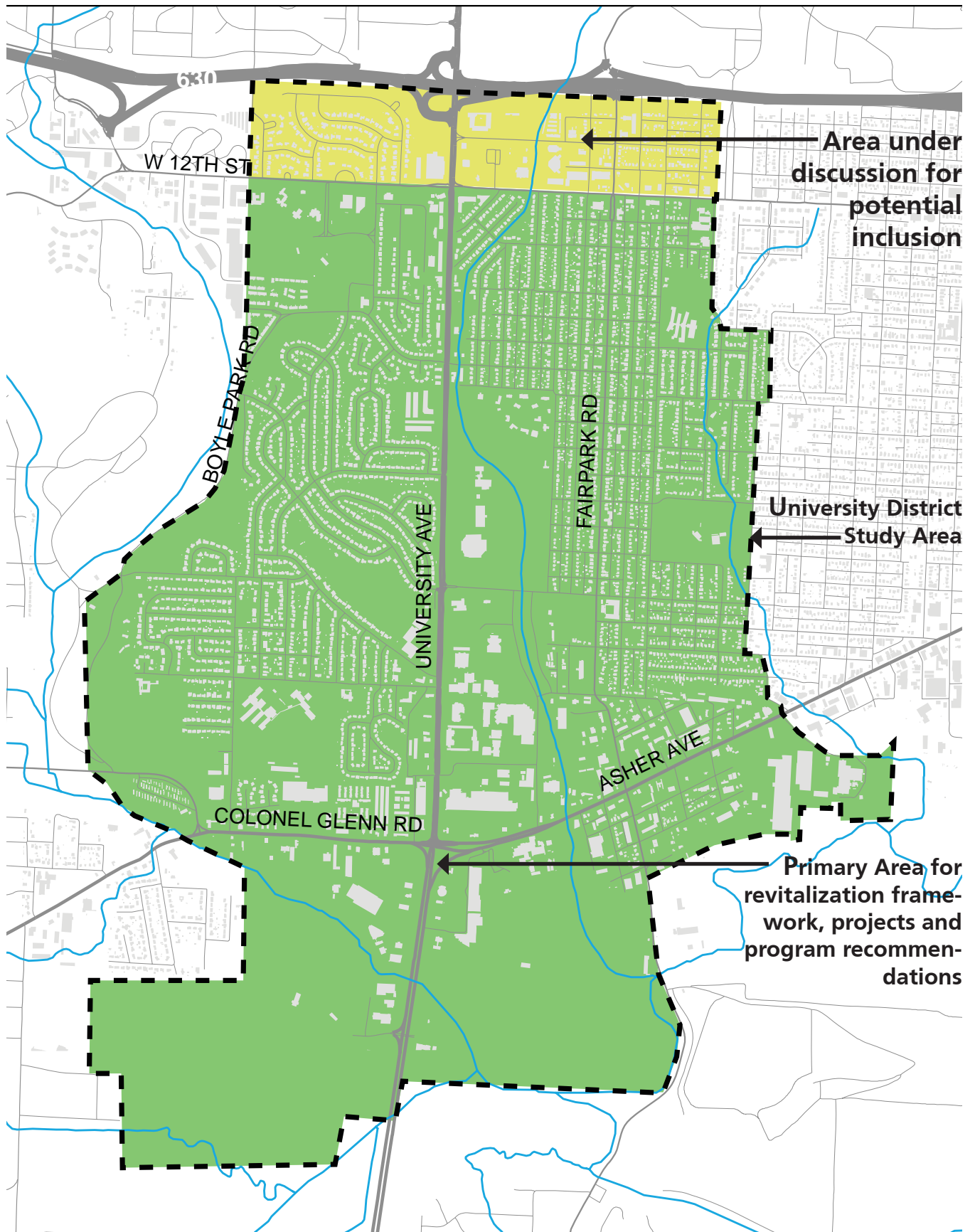


Figure 2-1: Study Area Delineation

NATURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL



Diagrams of physiography, vegetation cover, and floodplains



Coleman Creek

A dynamic landscape of contrasting hills and flatlands, the district’s natural and environmental resources play a critical role in shaping its character and patterns of development. This physical geography is a direct result of the district’s location within two of Arkansas’ distinct physiographic regions, the Ouachita Mountains and Western Coastal Plain. Dominant among these formative factors are the two creek corridors—Rock and Coleman creeks—that pass through the district along a mainly north-south axis and empty into the regionally significant and unique floodplain ecosystem, Fourche Creek Bottoms. Audubon Arkansas has recently begun preserving this important natural and heritage resource. The combined creek corridors and floodplain bottom area are heavily vegetated with a wide variety of canopy and mid-story trees, shrubs and herbaceous under-story plants.

In addition, the area is home to numerous active and resource parks that retain significant vegetation massings, as well as the UALR campus that has stately Pines located throughout. However, while this abundant vegetation dramatically improves the overall character and quality of the district, the ecological integrity of the various environments were neither evaluated nor assessed as part of this planning effort.

Large areas of the district are located within the 100 year floodplain. Within the Ouachita Mountain zone, the 100 year floodplain zones are narrow in and tight to the creek floodway. In contrast, within the Western Coastal Plain the floodplain encompass wide areas and will substantially effect any future revitalization efforts in these areas.

Coleman Creek is a critical natural resource; it travels through many neighborhoods and the UALR campus, and links the district to the City’s War Memorial Park. A detailed description of the creek corridor’s three primary extant conditions is provided:

- North of 19th Street, the creek functions as an undesirable infrastructure element with its watercourse channeled into an open concrete-lined culvert that abuts, but is fenced off from, residential and commercial properties.
- Along its central zone, between 19th Street and Asher Avenue, it exists as a natural, though degraded, riparian corridor with vegetated banks of varying widths; the area from 19th to 28th street is densely wooded, while between 28th Street and Asher Avenue creek bank is thinly wooded and transitions into large expanses of turf lawn or asphalt parking areas.
- Lastly, south of Asher Avenue the creek runs through a remnant grassy meadow established when this area was pasture for Coleman Dairy cows.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The UD has an abundance of new and old commercial, institutional, and civic landmarks and destinations that both add to, and detract from, the character and quality of the district; Boyle and Curran-Conway parks, the UALR Stephens Center, and the new Hilton Hotel are positive points of reference, while the University Plaza, Coleman Dairy, and the numerous strip-malls along the S. University Avenue corridor have a negative visual impact.

As with the spectrum of quality of the many landmarks and destinations, the district has a broad mix of attractive and unattractive view sheds. These range from the pleasant collegial UALR edge along University Avenue to the poorly maintained commercial and light-industrial properties that line the Colonel Glenn/Asher Avenue corridor.

The district's built environment falls within two categories; the residential homes built pre-WWII that are primarily located east of University Avenue, with the remaining residential, institutional and commercial structures built during the latter half of the Twentieth Century—largely completed before the 1970s. Commercial development along the primary street corridors is largely the one-story strip-mall and big-box varieties, with the nondescript buildings located along the back of properties to provide large expanses of asphalt parking adjacent to the street. The combination of expansive asphalt, low buildings set back from the street, and wide roadways results in a dehumanizing environment widely viewed as a less-than-desirable commercial environment.



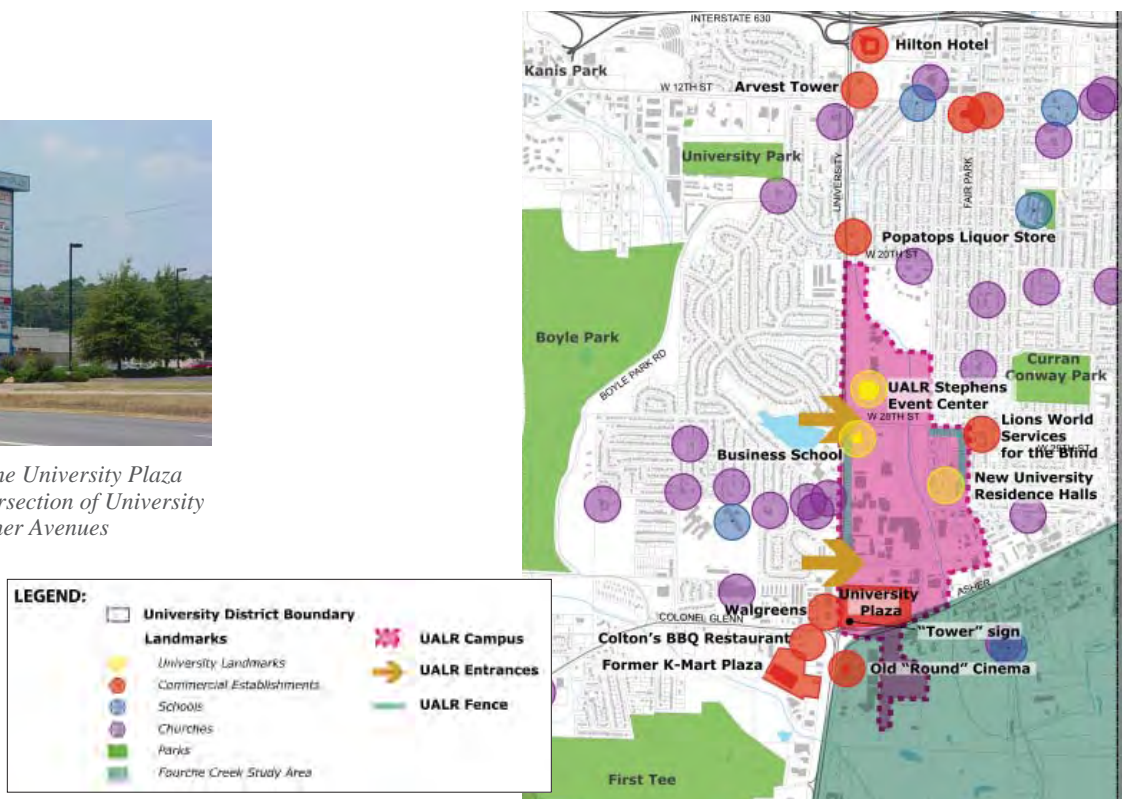
Example of University Avenue strip malls



Example of neighborhood single-family housing stock

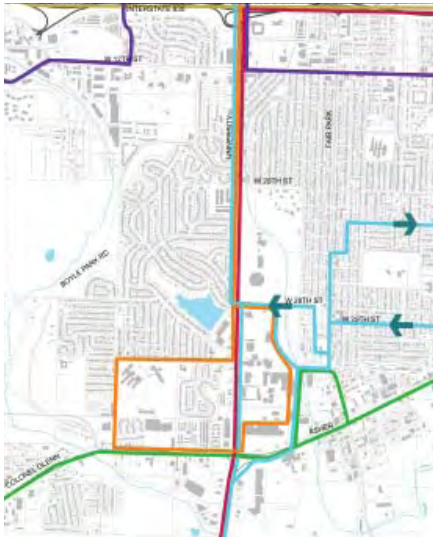


Example of UD icon, the University Plaza sign located at the intersection of University and Colonel Glenn/Asher Avenues



District destinations

CIRCULATION

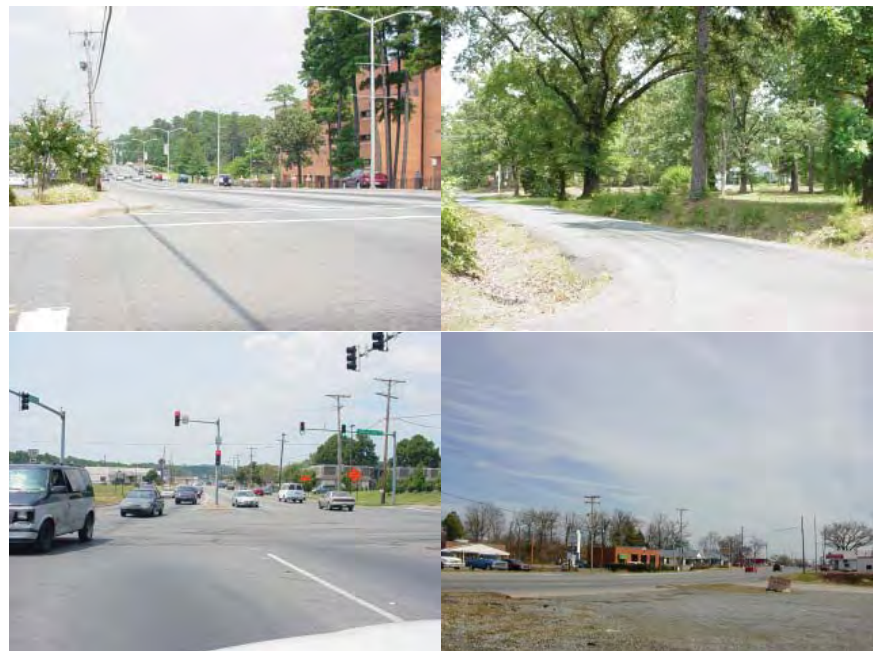


As one of Little Rock’s older urbanized areas, the district has significant infrastructure and built environment. Its primary circulation network is configured as a traditional north-south/east-west grid with three mid-1900’s neighborhoods—Broadmoor, Point O’Woods, and College Terrace—breaking the grid to conform with site topography.

Overall, the district’s circulation network consists of neighborhood-scaled streets, which are linked to automobile-focused connector and major arterial corridors. The connector streets are Fair Park Boulevard and 12th Street, while the arterial corridors are University Avenue and the combined Colonel Glenn Road/Asher Avenue roadways.

A dedicated pedestrian circulation system, or sidewalks, is practically non-existent throughout the district, and where extant sidewalks are typically in poor condition, narrow and lacking in user amenities that create a pleasant and safe experience.

Similarly, the district does not have any dedicated, marked, and striped bicycle lanes, and cyclists are currently forced to share undefined roadways with automobiles. This condition is extremely dangerous to cyclists and discourages alternative forms of transportation.



Diagrams of existing vehicular, transit, bike, and pedestrian circulation

Examples of UD roadways; University Avenue, neighborhood street, Colonel Glenn Road, and Asher Avenue

MARKET

The market assessment for the study area projected the demand for various land uses through the year 2015. Retail, office (service), and residential demand within a one- and three-mile radius of the UALR campus were calculated based on demographic informations and projected growth. The growth rate in each of these sectors was modest. Specifically, the new demand summary within a one mile radius for each category through 2015 indicated the following:

- Services (Office) 16,500 SF
- Retail 35,400 SF
- Residential 700 units (includes students)

In addition, it is believed that through the growing research needs based on nanotechnology, bio informatics and related fields, an initial demand of 50,000 square feet of space could be warranted. This may be an opportunity for the development of a larger 100,000 SF building to allow for future research growth capacity.

Growth and new investment by the university over the next several years will be the primary catalyst for investment within the study area. With a projected enrollment increase of 3,000 full-time equivalent students by 2015, additional faculty and the goal of increasing the on-campus housing capacity, significant financial investment will be required. Private sector investment related to the expansion of the university's research capabilities should be an additional economic stimulus.

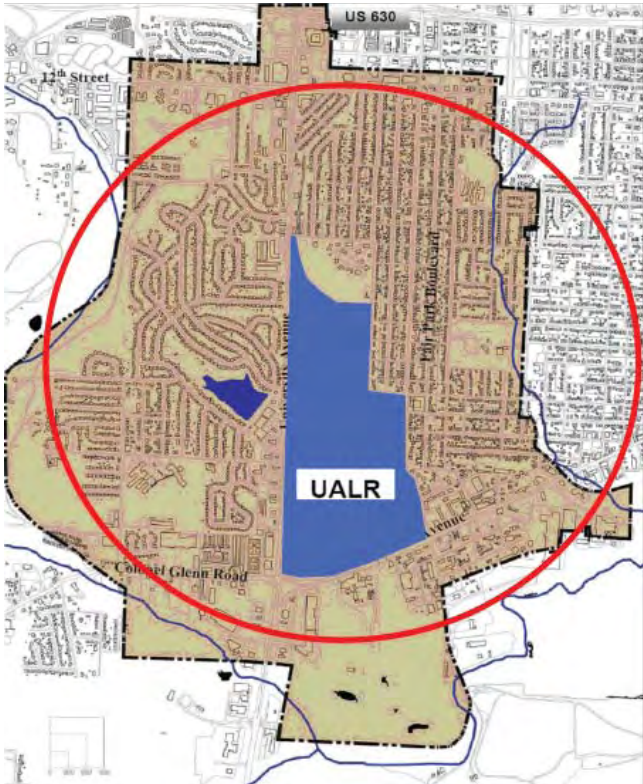


Diagram of one-mile radius

LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

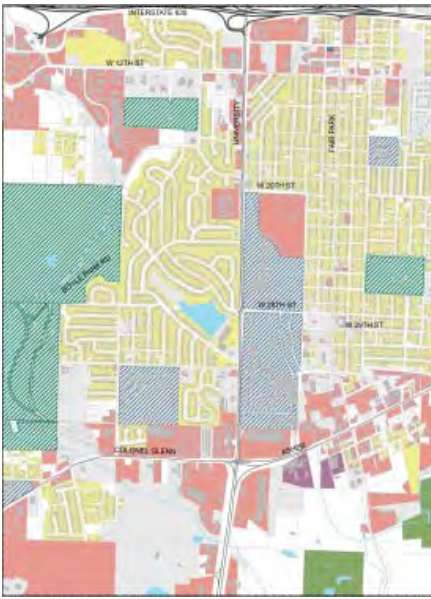


Diagram of existing land use

The land use pattern within the study area is quite fragmented, the consequence of piecemeal land use changes over time. This, in turn, has resulted in adjacent land use incompatibilities at some locations, such as light industrial uses next to single family residential.

Residential uses are predominant and occur in a more continuous pattern that promotes consistency and defines the primary historic character of this area. However, parks and institutional uses are also significant in number and size, and their distribution throughout the district helps to establish amenity and destination connectivity. Commercial and light industrial uses are concentrated in a “strip” pattern along the major roadway corridors, particularly University Avenue, 12th Street, and Colonel Glenn/Asher Avenue corridors. Much of the retail is auto-oriented, and the development is obsolete or substandard.

Present zoning tends to reflect existing land uses, and as such, it reacts to, rather than influences, development patterns. The City’s zoning framework does not include a specific mixed-use zoning designation. This is a significant shortcoming for the purposes of the UDRP, since mixed-use development is an important tool in revitalization efforts—accommodating additional “rooftops,” attracting 24/7 activity, and providing maximum flexibility to meet ever-changing market trends.

The UD is seen as one of the City’s “transitional” zones, marking the evolution from the City’s historic pattern of traditional neighborhoods of street grids and walkable blocks east of University Avenue, to the more recent suburban development pattern west of the Avenue, where discontinuous streets and cul-de-sacs are the norm and adjacent neighborhoods often do not connect. Nevertheless, the district’s overall development pattern should be considered “urban” in character, with an in-town identity and sense of place.

The area’s numerous neighborhoods are geographically intact, and although each is different in feel, they all consist primarily of single-family detached homes of modest scale and diverse architectural styles. The overall district and its neighborhoods are partitioned by three major roadway corridors, lined up with mostly small-scale, community-focused retail, restaurants, and offices; being auto-oriented, these corridors do not promote alternative modes of circulation, such as pedestrian and bicycle. There are numerous resource-based and active recreational areas within the district, providing a “green” mosaic that serves to connect its neighborhoods.

While residential and open space uses occupy significant areas with logical connectivity, and in most cases appropriate adjacent uses, the commercial corridors are highly fragmented with numerous different and incompatible adjacent uses throughout the three major corridors.