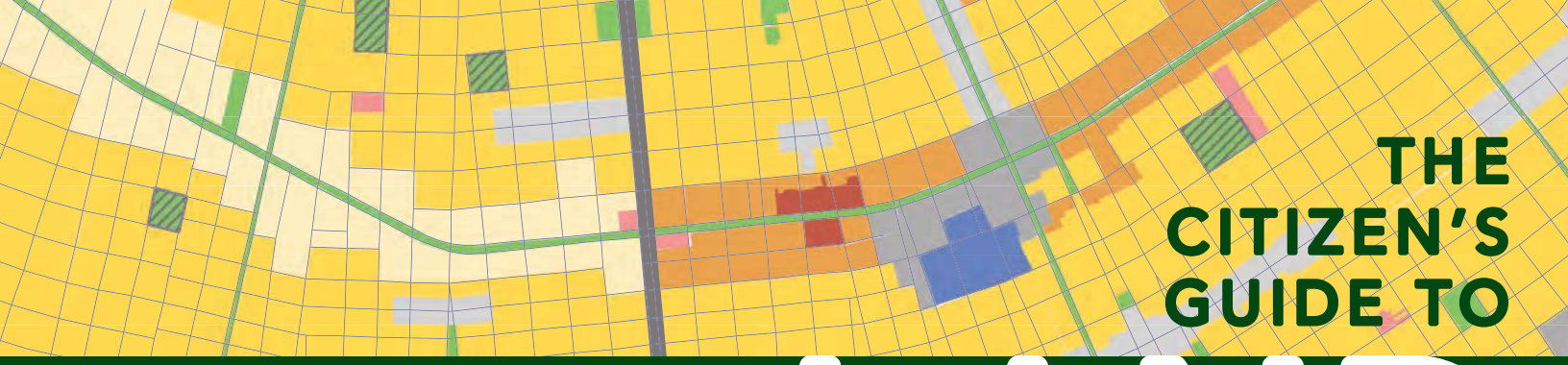
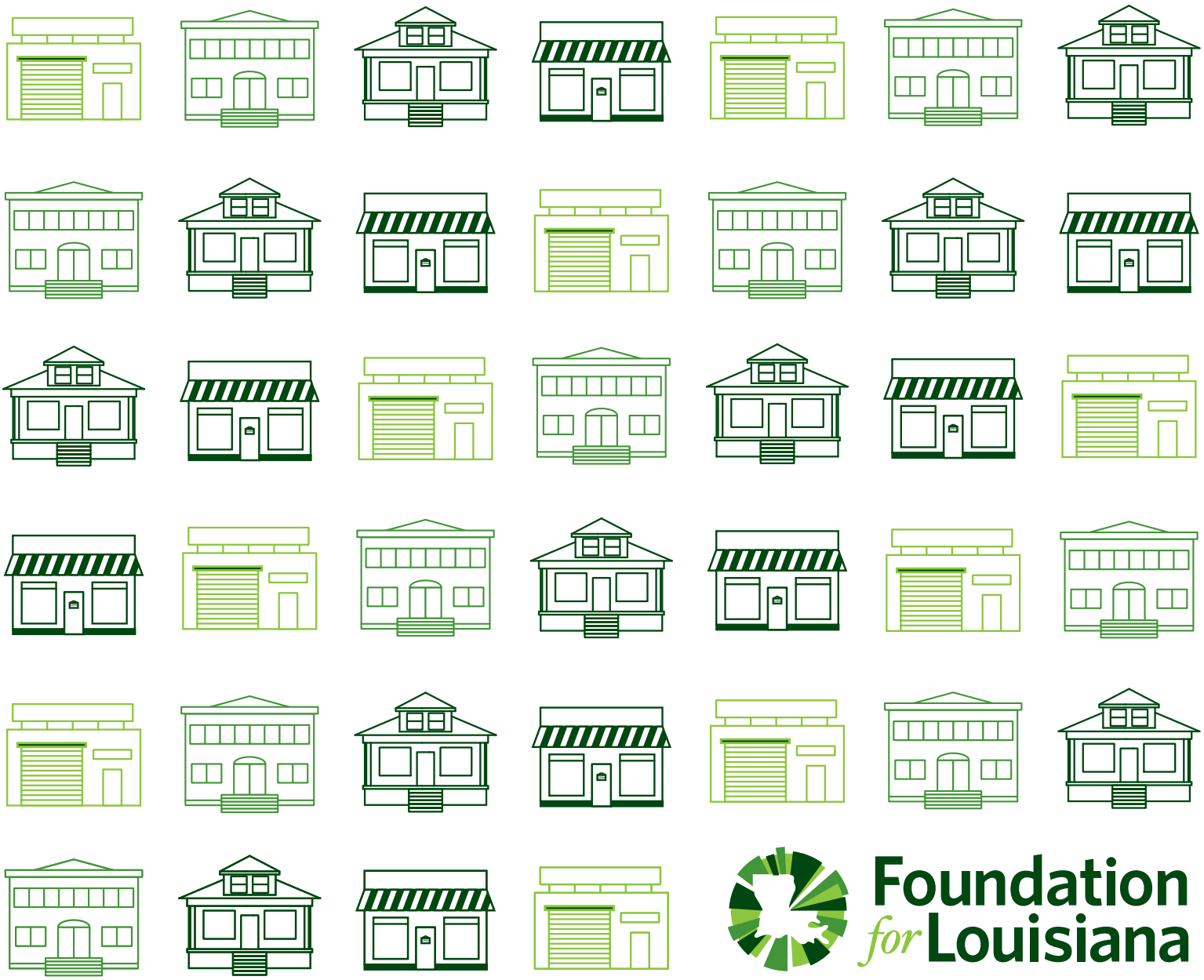


THE CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO LAND USE



Foundation for Louisiana

Forward

Foundation for Louisiana is proud to have commissioned and played an active role in the development of the Citizen's Guide to Land Use and Citizen's Guide to Urban Design. The intent in creating these two resources was to build upon the community organizing, citizen engagement and public partnerships undertaken by the Foundation's predecessor, the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation. This work mobilized residents and neighborhoods in New Orleans to provide substantive input as the city laid out a vision for recovery from hurricane Katrina in the Unified New Orleans Plan, and a vision for the future in the update of the city's master plan.

The release of these guides is timely given a renewed commitment by municipalities throughout Louisiana to create or update master plans and land use regulations in an effort to create more resilient communities. Natural and man-made disasters that have impacted the state over the past six years have highlighted the necessity for communities to be forward thinking about how to grow and function in a manner that limits risks to people and property.

The Foundation believes that residents play a fundamental role in the planning process. We have learned through our work in New Orleans that residents are in need of support and resources to ensure that both their concerns and visions are addressed in plans. The Citizen's Guides are resources that can be used to facilitate and expand dialogue between the public, planners and policymakers on issues impacting the character and future of Louisiana's communities. It is not the intent of the guides to be prescriptive, assigning values of "good" or "bad" to the built environment. Rather the guides provide a common vocabulary to facilitate constructive dialogues in the community planning process.

Foundation for Louisiana is at work for resilient communities. We encourage you to use these guides in your effort to create a more resilient community and a more resilient Louisiana.

Flozell Daniels, Jr.

President and CEO
Foundation for Louisiana

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Using this Guide

The Citizen's Guide to Land Use provides an introduction to basic land use concepts. It also helps create a common 'language' between residents, planning practitioners and planning department directors throughout the state of Louisiana. The Guide offers all parties involved a common entry point into the decision-making process. Residents will have a better understanding of how land use decisions affect their community, will be able to read a land use map, and will feel more confident articulating their feelings towards a proposal. Practitioners will be able to spend less time explaining basic terms and concepts, freeing them to concentrate on addressing the specifics of a current project. Though the guide will be used in different ways by different groups, it will be most effective when all groups use it.

Tips for Residents

The importance of being proactive cannot be overstated. To ensure your voice is heard, you must be aware of current proposals in your area. Meetings may not be well advertised or may be held on short notice. Some simple steps, such as creating and checking an e-mail account, joining a neighborhood group or simply keeping track of changes in your community can help keep you in touch with new developments. The information in this guide is only valuable when it can be put to use—and many times government officials and other decision-makers may not come to you; you will have to go to them.

Tips for Land Use Professionals

This Guide is intended to set up a baseline. It is important to know the contents of the Guide, as it very well may be the only knowledge of land use planning many residents have. Referring to concepts contained in the guide should lead to a more productive and streamlined participation process, as it will help avoid a constant rehash of land use concepts not directly related to the project at hand.

Tips for Planning Directors

Engaging and informing residents around land use issues prior to a major planning process is the best way to ensure that the plan is driven by their vision. Discussions and conversation during planning activities will be more representative of the community's true desires. Furthermore, effective communication will help stakeholders avoid getting hung up on minor issues, as a greater understanding of the process will help community members see the full intent of a project or proposal.

* * *

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, and thank you for helping to create a safer, more sustainable and more equitable Louisiana.

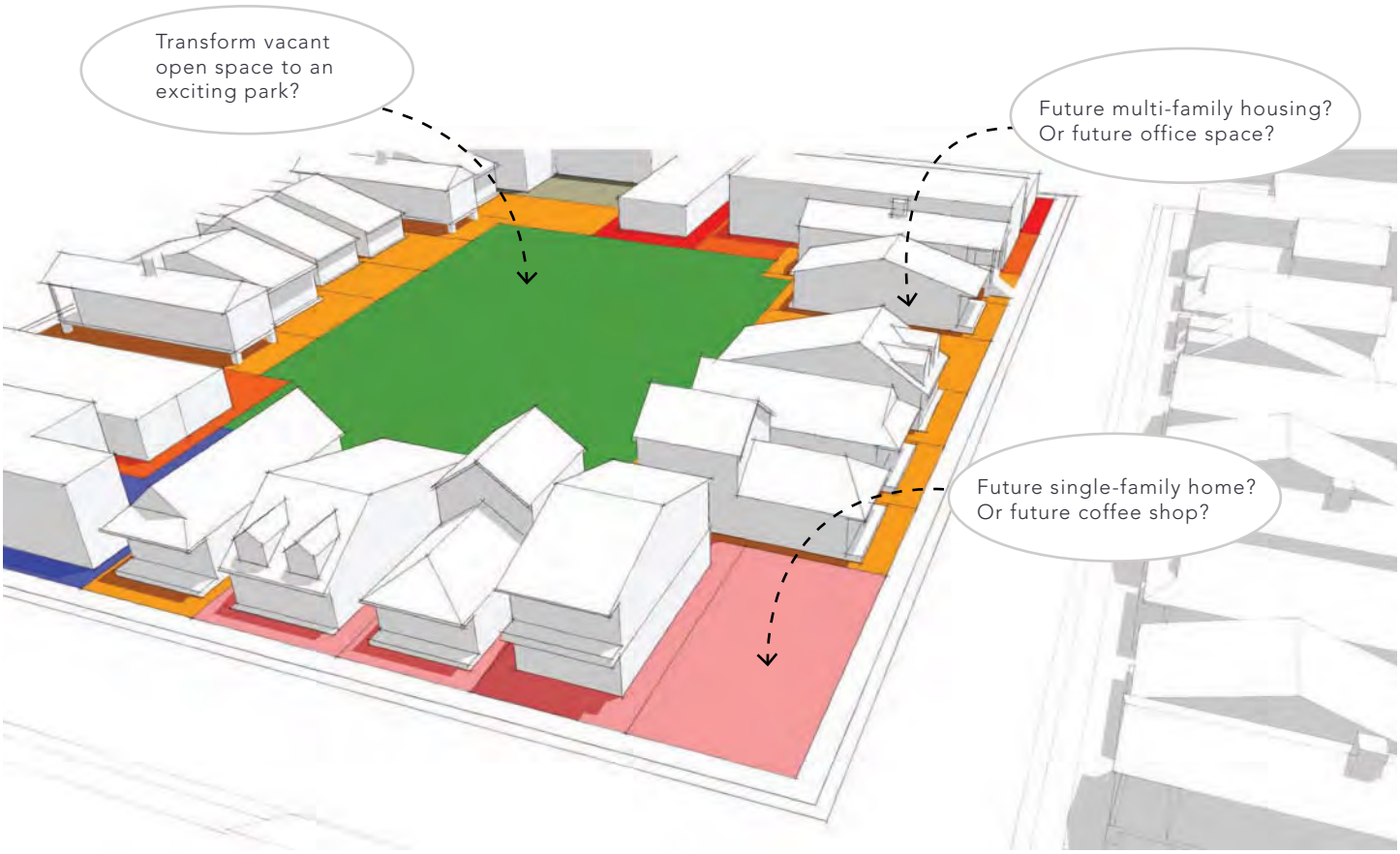
Introduction

What is land use?

"Land use" is the phrase planners use to refer to a collection of colors, maps and concepts used by **planners** and other professionals to illustrate what is taking place in your parish, city, or neighborhood.

Land use focuses on the interaction of people with the built and natural environment. Buildings, waterways, streets, and public activities are all aspects of land use.

In the context of a changing city, land use helps us understand how our complex neighborhoods work. This is a vital part of deciding how we want our neighborhoods to look, feel, and function in the future. **Land use planning** is the strategy for reaching these future ambitions.



Introduction
How Will This Guide Help You?

This guide explains **land use** and planning so that you, as a citizen of Louisiana, can impact the future of your town or city. As a citizen, you have the ability to influence what your neighborhood will look like in the future. Understanding fundamental concepts of land use planning will help make your influence stronger.

Have you ever been in a room of doctors, lawyers, artists, or community leaders and at some point the conversation becomes almost a foreign language? Chances are we all have experienced professional "**speak**" at some point. No one means to be rude, but sometimes professionals use language exclusive to their fields.

Land use is described by an established set of specialized terms that inevitably slips into both public and private discussions. This Citizen's Guide has been created to help decipher the code and give citizens a strong and engaging voice in the land use planning process.

This guide will help you by defining land use vocabulary, explaining current planning practices, and focusing on your role as a citizen in the process.

Throughout this document, important vocabulary essential to any land use conversation is bolded and included in a glossary on the first page of each chapter.

Graphics and photos throughout the Guide illustrate concepts. If you have a desire to improve your neighborhood, use this guide to understand how **land use planning** can do just that.

The Story of Your Neighborhood

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 | Key Terms

Community-Based Planning	A process in which planners use input from people who live in a neighborhood as a primary source for determining long-term plans | 2
Intensity	The degree of impact caused by the use and the layout of the built environment | 12
Land use	The way a piece of land is being used and how it interacts with the surrounding area | 2
Land Use Planning	A collaborative effort of planners and citizens to improve a neighborhood by understanding the way it currently functions | 2
Land Use Plan	A collection of maps and documents that plan for future uses based on current use | 2
Land Use Map	A color classification of what types of buildings and activities are occurring or are planned to occur in the future | 3
Lot	Another name for a single piece of land. Sometimes used interchangeably with "parcel," seen below | 12
Master Plan	A group of documents, charts, graphs, and maps that embodies all aspects of long-term planning (15-30 years) in a city | 12
Objectives	Goals stated in a larger, long-term context that are achieved through guidelines | 12
Overlay districts	Geographic areas that have additional, thorough land use regulations to preserve unique or historic qualities | 3
Parcel	A lot (or single piece of land) or contiguous group of lots owned by an individual, business, corporation, governing agency, etc. | 2
Planned Development Area	A large piece of land with specific regulations for planning and development | 3
Planners	Professionals who study and assist with determining how land should be used in cities and neighborhoods (also called urban planners) | 12
Zoning	Power of the local government to classify land and determine its future use | 12
Zoning Map	A map that graphically shows all zoning district boundaries and classifications within an area | 12

1.1 Land Use and Planning

What is the story of your neighborhood? What is happening there? What role does your neighborhood play in your town? What might your neighborhood look like in 20 years?

When you understand **land use**, you are empowered to better comprehend and impact your neighborhood's story.

While land use describes how a **parcel** of land is being used, **land use planning** is the larger, systemic process of deciding how neighborhoods, towns and cities might function in the future.

Cities generally change very slowly. Planning is a method of connecting slow change with the long-term vision of citizens and neighborhoods.

Planning brings people together to address problems and situations in a neighborhood or an entire city. This is called **community-based planning**.

The most fundamental truth in planning is that a community knows what is best for their neighborhood. You are a local; you know the streets, the buildings, the people. This is why your input and the voices of your neighbors plays such an important role in planning.

A **form-based code** is a fairly recent innovation in planning and zoning. Rather than planning the land use of a parcel, form-based codes specify the "form"- or physical design, height, shape and positioning on a parcel – that a building may take. This strategy generally creates areas with a high degree of visual conformity.

Very few cities in Louisiana have adopted a form-based code to date because of the desire to continue to regulate land use as part of planning and zoning law.

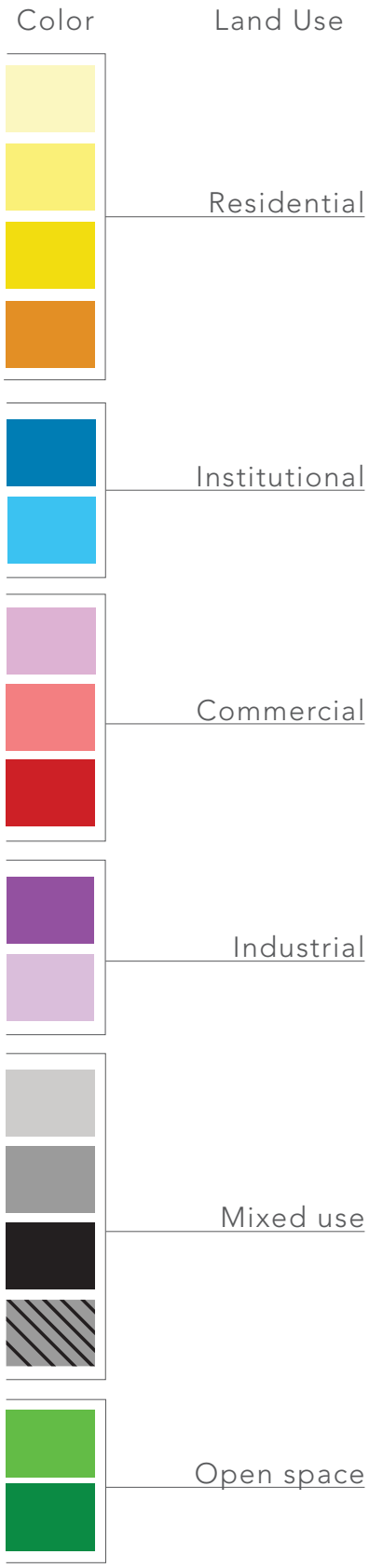
1.2 The Color Palette

Because cities and towns are complex, planners use a series of colors to represent and simplify patterns of land use.

The color palette for categorizing land use is standardized. Depending on the level of detail, **land use maps** can incorporate shades of color to demonstrate the density of the built environment. From this, we can better understand the intensity of land use, a topic we will discuss in greater detail later in this Guide.

Land use maps may also incorporate textures to highlight areas of unique land uses such as **planned development areas** or **overlay districts**. These topics are expanded upon later in this Guide.

A land use map, beyond just being a two-dimensional representation of your town or city, is perhaps most importantly a transposition of local policy onto your community's intended development.



Land Use Map

Land use maps use colors to display what is taking place on the ground. Looking at the land use map below helps us understand what a place looks like in real life. For example, because the commercial land use is located along a street, it is reasonable to assume that a number of businesses are located along the street.

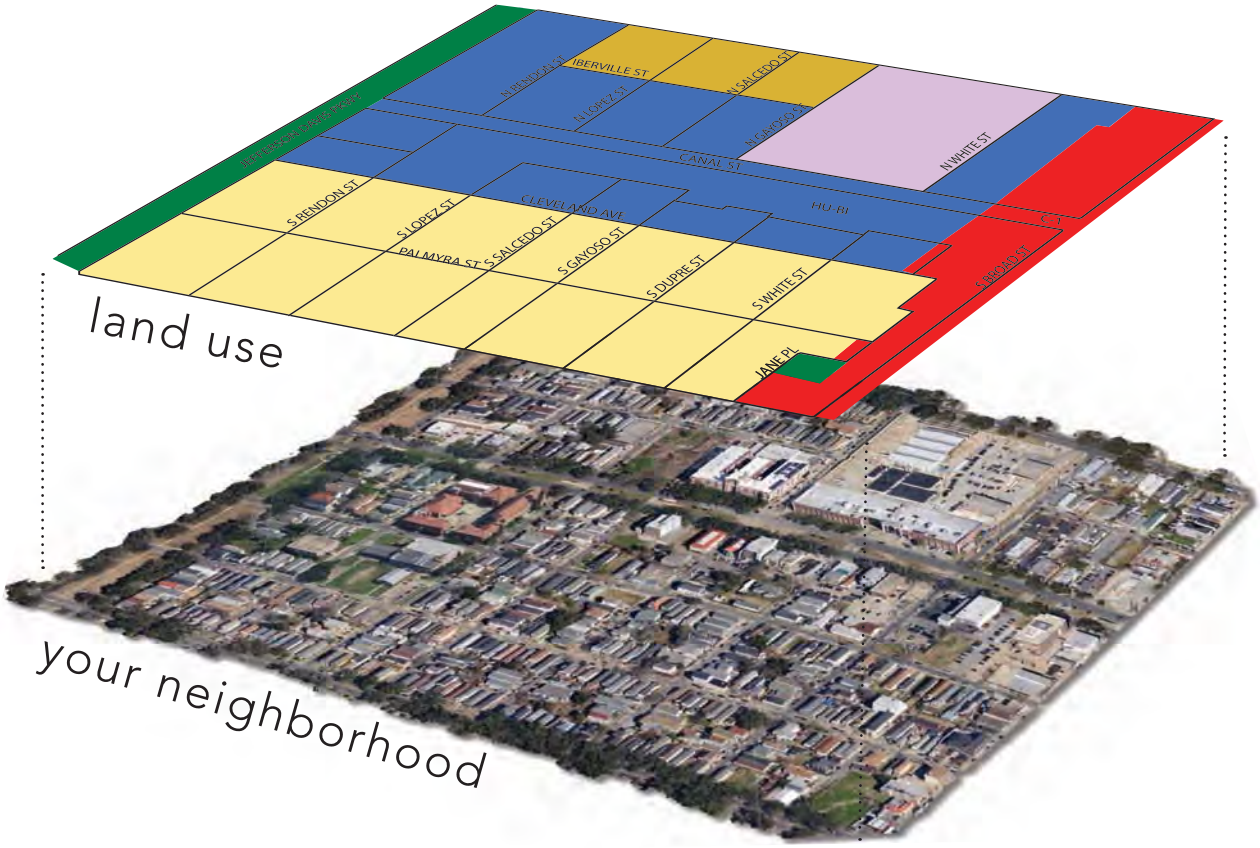
- single-family housing
- multi-family housing
- commercial
- institutional
- open space

When you learn what the colors on a land use map mean, you are empowered to understand how your neighborhood functions.

In most cases, land use maps are two-dimensional maps of lines and colors. They typically display street names, bodies of water, and major roads so readers can easily orientate themselves to the area the map is displaying.

As you travel through the place where you live, it can be difficult to identify which land uses are dominant in your city or neighborhood. Land use maps are useful because they simplify the chaos.

The following pages describe the basic colors commonly used in land use planning. They are explained in simple, no-nonsense language. Each color also has a standard definition used by land use professionals. These official definitions are taken from the Land Based Classification Standards (LBCS) created by the American Planning Association (they appear at the end of the section).

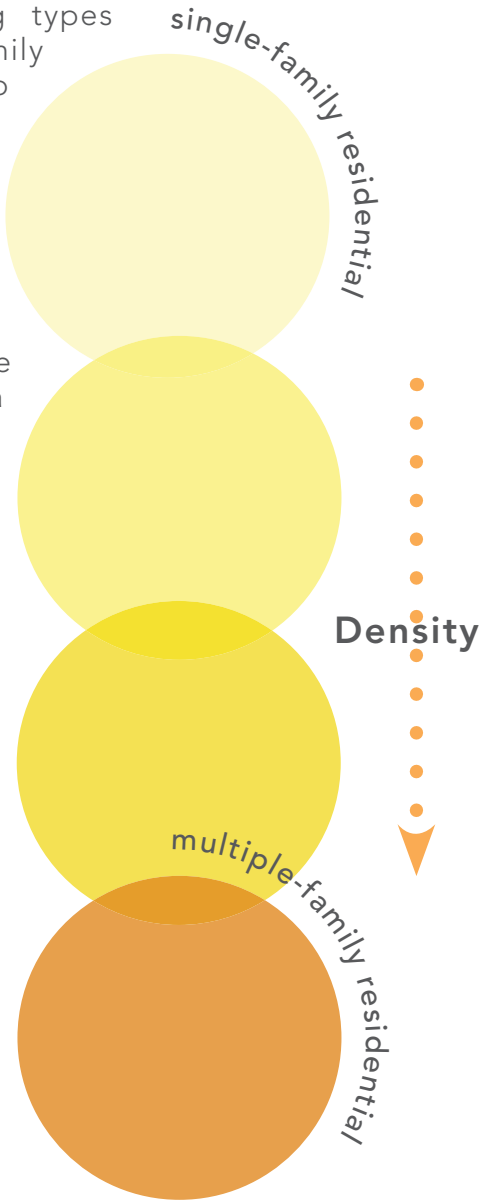


1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Residential

Yellow

Yellow is used to designate Residential land uses.

Residential land use is land that is being used for housing. Housing types can vary from individual family homes, to mobile homes, to apartments and much more. Because the type can vary to a great degree, the architecture and density will vary as well. Land use maps specify the type and density of residential buildings in an area. These areas are represented on a land use map by the color yellow. Frequently, more dense residential areas are shown as darker shades.

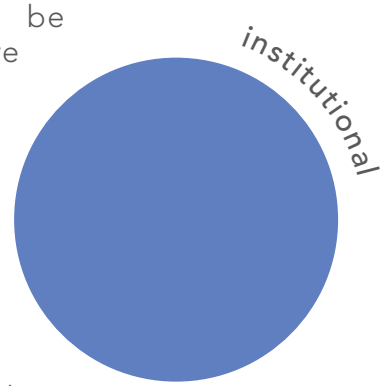


1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Institutional

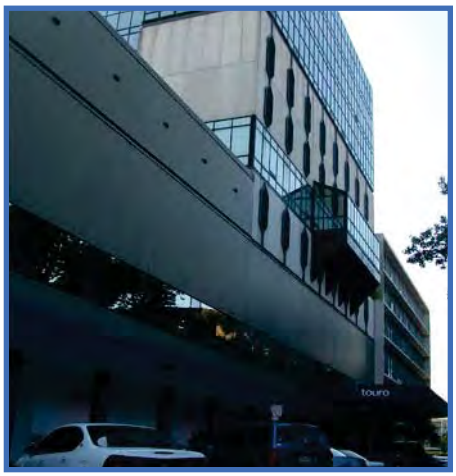
Blue

Not to be confused with bodies of water, blue is used in land use maps to designate institutional land uses.

Institutional land use can be thought of as places where you learn or join together with others for a common purpose. These buildings have a cultural, social, or educational focus and are owned by an institution such as a city government or university.



Examples of institutional uses include schools, libraries, hospitals, community centers, police and fire facilities, museums, art centers, places of worship and cultural centers, among others.

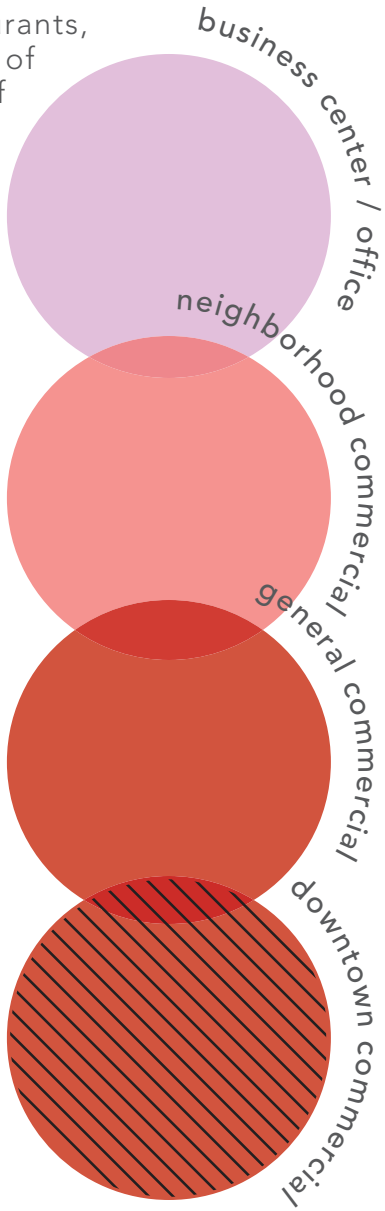


1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Commercial

Red

Red is used to designate commercial land uses.

Commercial land uses offer people a variety of goods or services. Commercial land uses include restaurants, places to shop, places of entertainment, places of service, larger and smaller businesses and office parks, among other uses. These land uses are often active because they attract many customers.

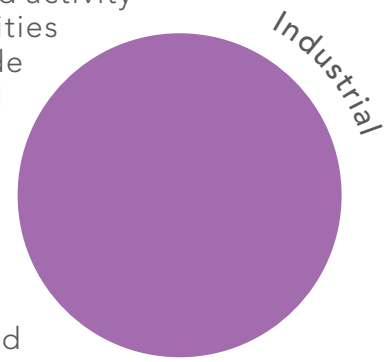


1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Industrial

Purple

Purple is used to designate industrial land uses.

Industrial land uses are places of business where manufacturing-related activity occurs. Some typical activities on industrial land include warehousing, shipping, and manufacturing. Rather than attracting large numbers of people, industrial uses are often frequented by trucks and delivery vehicles. This land use typically occupies larger lots and is located near transportation routes in order to more easily distribute goods. Industrial land uses can range from heavy manufacturing to smaller-scale, less intense artisan manufacturing.



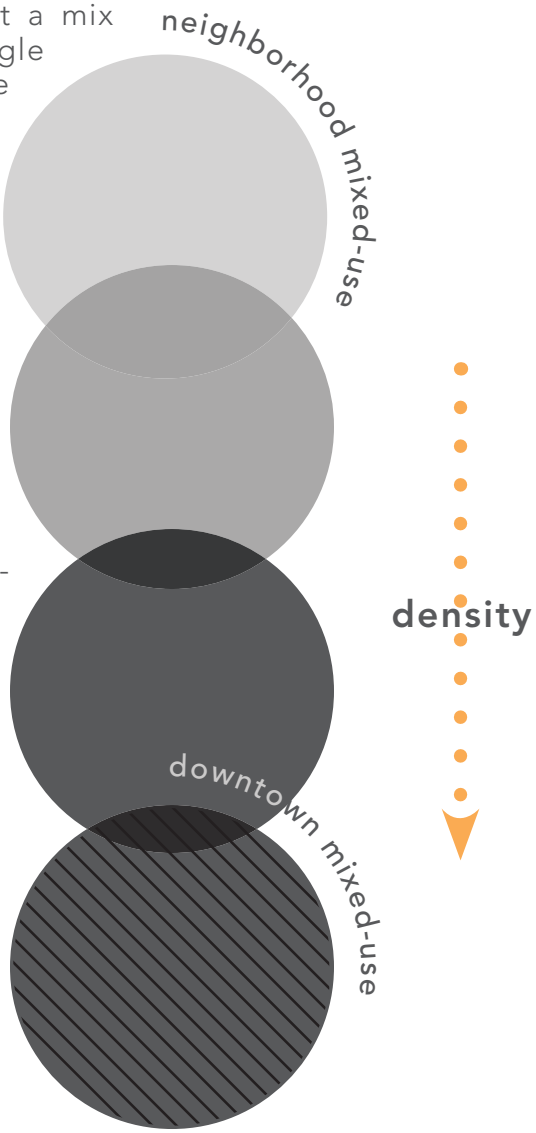
1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Mixed Use

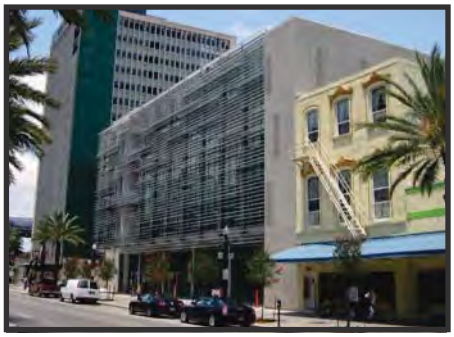
Grey

Grey is used to designate mixed-use land uses.

A sometimes ambiguous category, it is important to understand that a mix of uses may be found in a single building, such as a double house with a business in one half and a residence in the other, or throughout an entire district where many uses exist within a several block radius.

For example, mixed use may be commercial space on the ground-level and housing or offices on the upper floors. Mixed use can also focus on a certain aspect of the city. For example, mixed-use maritime promotes any development that supports maritime activity, such as a port or marina. The level of density will change based on the type.



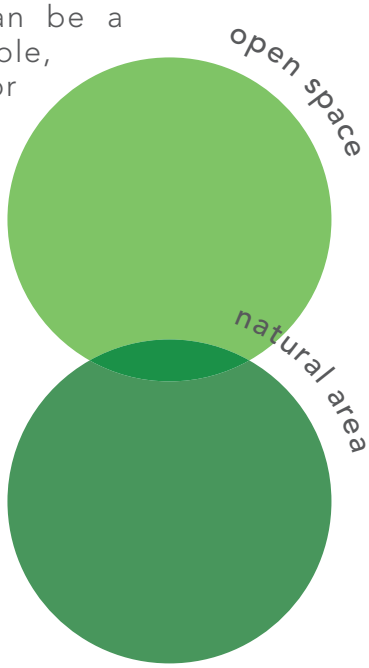


1.2 The Land Use Color Palette | Open Space

Green

Green is used to designate open space land uses.

Parkland and open space land use takes on many roles; it can be a recreational amenity for people, protect the environment, or enhance physical features in a neighborhood.



1.2 **The Land Use Color Palette** | Other Land Uses

Many land uses exist beyond the common residential, commercial, industrial and other land uses that are associated with the urban environment.

Beyond the towns and cities of Louisiana are hundreds of thousands of acres of marsh, swamp, and farmland. Assigning a color palette to these places can be difficult.

A large parcel of land may contain a commercial farm, a residence, and open land all within a single boundary. Is the palette for this parcel red for commercial, yellow for residential, or green for open space? As you can see, the traditional color palette may not apply in these cases, creating the need for a different palette.

For the purposes of this document, you do not need to worry about different color palettes. Whether in rural Louisiana or in the urban environment, land use works the same.

1.3 Zoning

Zoning is the legal tool with which to implement a **master plan**.

Local governments have the power to make your neighborhood a healthier, safer, and more balanced place to live. Planning seeks to achieve this balance by using **land use** and **master plans** to realize a long-term vision that incorporates community input as well as the past and present conditions of the built environment.

Zoning is the legal tool used to implement **land use**. It determines how each parcel of land can be used and to what degree of **intensity**. Though it may sound limiting or restrictive, zoning regulations offer flexibility. If you wish to modify the way your property is zoned, there is a process that allows for this.

In general, zoning laws are made based on plans that have been adopted by legislative bodies. Zoning is most successful when it is consistent with the long-term goals of a **master plan**. Master plans typically present an overarching vision for the city's long-term vitality, including economic development, infrastructure, housing and quality of life.

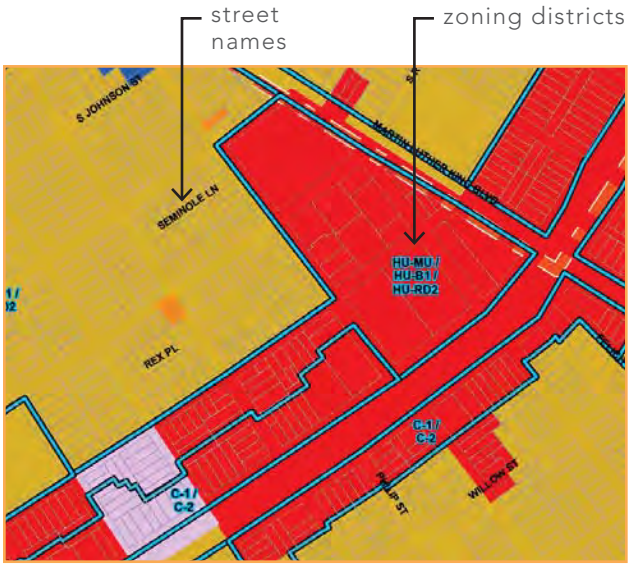
Consequently, developing a master plan is not a quick process. It takes months of writing, research, analysis, and meetings to make sure everyone in the community has a chance to share their input and all issues are addressed.

If your city has a master plan, it likely focuses on **objectives** for your city's future and guidelines for achieving those objectives. Objectives and guidelines are not to be confused with zoning. They simply describe the intent of the master plan in more detail.

LAND USE MAP | Use this tool to understand what the city looks like today.

Colors show which land uses exist today

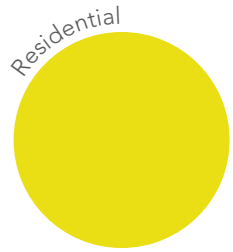
ZONING MAP | Use this tool to understand what is allowed to be built where.



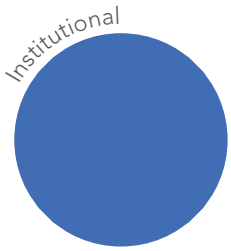
Colors correspond with zoning districts to display what uses are permitted, parcels are shown

1.4 Standard Land Use Definitions

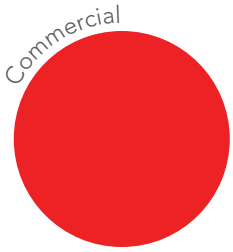
For each color, there is a standard definition used by land use professionals. These specialized definitions are taken from the Land Based Classification Standards (LBCS) created by the American Planning Association. These definitions may be used at a planning meeting, but the previous definitions are completely acceptable in conversations with professionals.



There are three housing uses associated with residential land: household activities, transient living, and institutional living. Household activities include living typically associated with single-family, multifamily, town homes, and manufactured homes, etc. Transient living pertains to uses that include hotels, motels, tourist homes, or bed and breakfasts. Institutional living includes dormitories, group homes, barracks, retirement homes, etc. It is important to note that residential activities may occur in various types of structures such as single-family homes, multifamily homes, and manufactured homes.

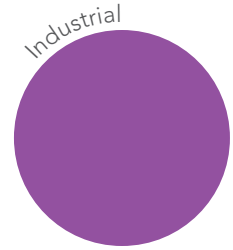


Institutional land is associated with a wide array of activities such as education, public safety, utility, health care, and military activities. Educational uses include places where instructional activities occur such as schools, colleges, libraries, etc. Public safety includes all emergency response, including fire and rescue, police, security, and disaster response. Utility use includes water supply, sewer, and power facilities. Health care establishments comprise all hospitals and clinics that treat, house, or care for patients. Interment activities are those that take place at cremation facilities and cemeteries. Lastly, military facilities such as bases, training grounds, living and recreational locations are designated as an institutional use.

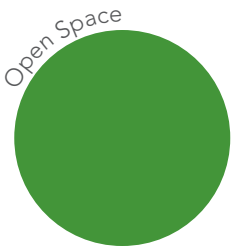


Commercial land includes both goods-oriented shopping and service-oriented shopping. The distinction between the two are in the physical attributes of activities associated with the goods or services. Restaurant-type activities include eating, dining, and similar activities that serve food or drink, which include consumption on or off premises. This also includes restaurant-type activity with a drive-through.

Office uses should be categorized including those that are primarily office-use in character. Office activities that have counters for customer service or waiting areas are especially identified as office use. Office uses with high turnovers of automobiles, such as banks with drive-through windows, department of motor vehicles, and other businesses can be included as office use if appropriate.



There are three primary activities that characterize industrial land. Heavy industry includes factories, plants, and heavy goods storage or handling activities. Factory activities include the assembly and manufacturing of goods. Storage facilities are the location of loading and unloading goods at warehouses, shipping and trucking districts and self-storage units. Solid waste management activities include landfill and waste management, which entail storing, collecting, dumping, waste processing, and other related operations. Construction activities comprise grading, digging, etc. Construction sites, including new development in the construction stage, are considered to be industrial because of the heavy operation occurring on the site.



As previously stated, there are many different types of open space. Within the urban landscape there will be many different levels of intensities that occur on open space or recreational area. For instance, sporting activity is a more intense use, which may include running and bicycle paths, equestrian sporting, golf, track and field space, etc. There are also more passive recreational spaces, which include camping, gambling, and hunting. Water sports will be a third activity often designated as open space, which comprises swimming, boating, canoeing, etc.

There will also be natural resource-related activities, which encompass agricultural, logging, quarrying, mining, and drilling activities.

Intensity and the Character of Your Neighborhood

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 | Key Terms

Buffer	Land or objects that are used to separate and create distance or block undesired effects of a land use | 19
Externality	The unintended side effects an industrial or commercial activity has on a neighborhood, such as noise, light, or a high volume of foot traffic | 18
Intensity	The degree of impact caused by the use and the layout of the built environment | 16
Land Use Map	A color classification of what types of buildings and activities are occurring or are planned to occur in the future | 17
Massing	The size and architectural character of a single building or buildings that contribute to the impression of an area | 17
Mixed Use	Development that provides services, employment, entertainment, and housing all in close proximity | 21
Physical Intensity	The visual and physical impact of the layout or design of either a district or individual building, as more or less imposing | 16
Scale	The height and width of buildings in relation to surrounding features | 17
Setback	The spatial relationship of a building to the street, property line, or adjacent buildings | 17
Urban Design	A strategy for making a place look and feel a certain way | 17
Use Intensity	The activities that accompany a land use | 16
Zoning	A power of the local government that classifies land into types and determines how land can be built upon, what activities can take place there, and to what degree of intensity | 19

2.1 Understanding Intensity

Intensity is one of the original reasons for the development of land use planning. Prior to zoning, high-intensive industries could freely locate anywhere in a city, including next to your home. Not only did this create a nuisance, it posed a threat to the health and safety of residents.

Today, intensity of land use is more often important as a means to achieve harmony. The intensity of land use refers to two factors. The first is **physical intensity**, which can be thought of as the density or proximity of buildings to one another. The second factor is **use intensity**, which is the impact an activity has on its surrounding environment.

In addition, the word "intensity" can be applied to both single parcels and entire neighborhoods. A hospital might be an intense use of a piece of land, but it is possible for the hospital to be located in an area or neighborhood populated by not-very-intense uses.

In this way, intensity can apply to a particular use, or a group of uses. Another example might be a downtown neighborhood compared to a suburban neighborhood; the suburban neighborhood is usually considered less intense than the downtown neighborhood.

2.1 Physical Intensity

There are several different aspects that define **physical intensity**; these include **setbacks**, **massing**, and **scale**. Although you often do not notice them, these aspects nonetheless create an impression on you when walking down the street.

As a regulatory tool, setbacks determine how far back from the street buildings are placed on their sites. Setbacks are a major influence on a building's relationship to the street. Typical setbacks vary depending on a parcel's land use.

Similarly, massing and scale are elements of physical intensity that affect how a neighborhood and individual land uses feel. The Citizen's Guide to **Urban Design** discusses these concepts in greater detail.

As a regulatory tool, setbacks determine how far back from the street buildings are placed on their sites. Setbacks are a major influence on a building's relationship to the street. Typical setbacks vary depending on a parcel's land use.

MASS SETBACK & SCALE

LOW INTENSITY

SMALL

LIMITED PARKING

Small-scale building height and width combined with limited parking creates a minor physical presence.

RELATIVE

UNDERGROUND PARKING

Underground parking subtracts from the physical intensity of the large building mass.

GREAT INTENSITY

LARGE

EXTENSIVE SURFACE PARKING

Large area for surface parking combined with a large building mass yields a great physical presence.

2.1 Use Intensity

Aspects of **use intensity** refer to the types of activities that occur in an area and what atmosphere or impact accompanies each type.

As mentioned previously, one of the original reasons for planning is to manage intensity. Often, managing **use intensity** means harmonizing and balancing the impact of uses.

Land use planning helps to ensure that incompatible land uses and intensities are not neighbors, and that complementary uses are clustered together. This balance helps promote healthier and more vibrant communities.

For example, neighborhoods with dense residential uses can support a higher proportion of businesses and services. These land uses balance one another.

Similarly, an entertainment district is intensive due to the higher levels of noise and light associated with the activities therein. Both uses produce very different **externalities** than, say, a use-intensive factory. But balance helps ensure that all uses are in harmony with their environments.

USE

LOW IMPACT

OPTOMETRIST'S OFFICE

does not generate a lot of traffic, limited hours of operation, no excessive noise or light pollution

VACANT PARCEL

low intensity but high impact - vacant parcels can become overgrown and be an eyesore in a neighborhood. They also can harbor undesired activity, becoming a nuisance.

HIGH IMPACT

GAS STATION

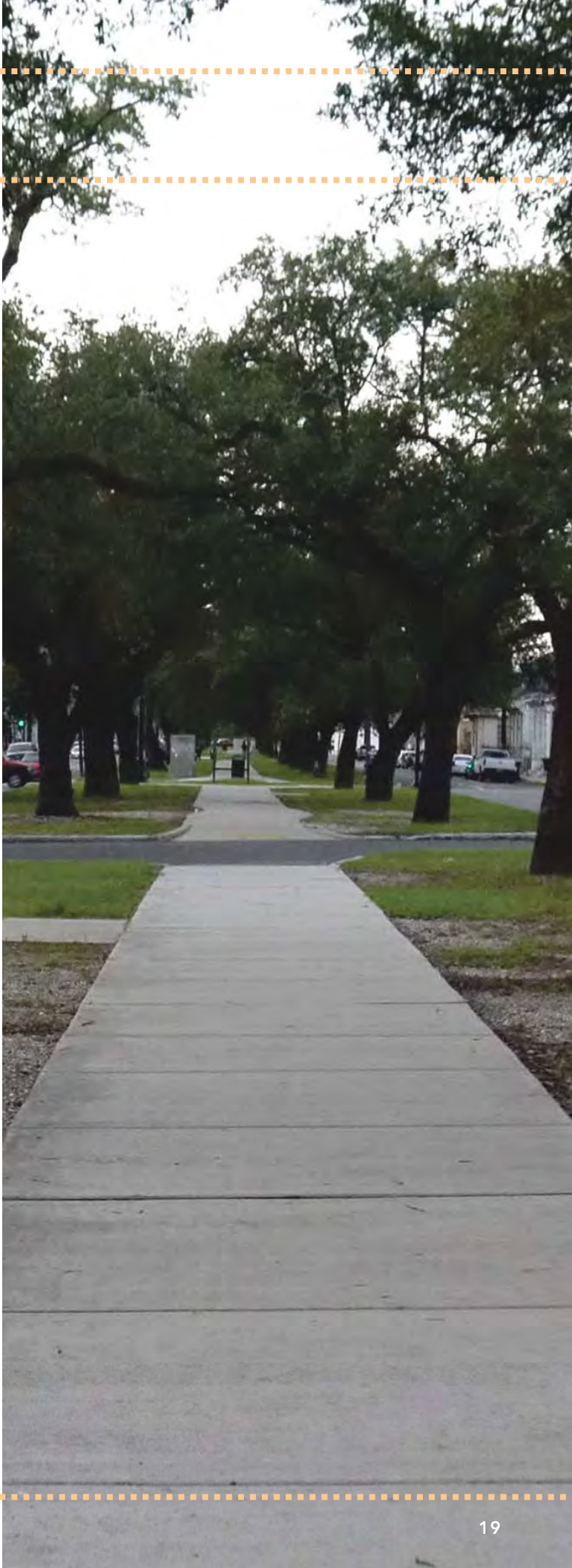
high impact and high use intensity - generates a great deal of traffic, light and noise pollution, as well as a lasting environmental impact, extensive hours of operation

2.2 Intensity and Balance

Planning takes on the challenge of balancing intensity by developing methods for coordinating conflicting uses. In planning, balance may be more focused on reconciling conflicting uses. For instance, a rule of **zoning** may require a commercial development to maintain a **buffer** of heavy vegetation or a wall if housing is in close proximity to the commercial activity. The barrier will reduce the noise pollution of service trucks, thus reducing disturbances to the residents of the neighborhood. This is a simple solution that manages different uses.

Uniformity and variety also create balanced communities. In planning, policy determines design. Zoning's use of uniform **setbacks**, complementary building heights and adequate open space all contribute to balancing a neighborhood's character.

The end goal is not to create cookie-cutter neighborhoods, but to mold functional and appealing neighborhoods through proactive and creative tactics. Good policy will create better places to live, work, and play.



2.3 The Health of Your Neighborhood

Use intensity and physical intensity also determine how you interact with your neighborhood. When combined, use intensity and physical intensity work together to create activity. Activity is often the ultimate goal of residents, businesses, and neighbors because active neighborhoods are safer, healthier, and prosperous.

Use Intensity
+
Physical Intensity
=
Activity

You can use a land use map to better understand how your neighborhood works. Land use maps reveal patterns of development, including use and physical intensity. This information can be used to address the needs of your community.

Understanding these patterns enables you to identify economic opportunities and assist planners in increasing access and making your neighborhood a safer and well-balanced place to live.

Land use is a tool for helping to direct change toward your neighborhood's vision of the future.

2.4 Mixed Use: A New Formula for Balance

Planning for **mixed-uses** sets the stage for balancing use intensity and physical intensity, thus encouraging more activity.

Mixed uses allow for different land uses to locate on top of and next to one another. A mix of land uses gives residents easy access to the necessities of everyday life.

Not long ago, it was common practice to keep land uses strictly separate. However, today we understand that too much separation can be dysfunctional because it prohibits interaction between uses and weakens access to transportation, schools, food, employment opportunities, and housing. Pedestrian accessibility and small-scale design are key components of mixed-use development.

Mixed land uses are not a concept foreign to the Louisiana landscape. For centuries, Louisianians have been living above their places of business.

You can think of mixed use as running errands with ease — you're able to walk to the bank, stop by the grocery store, and visit a friend at a coffee shop. The concept may look different based on where you live in Louisiana, but ideally, mixing uses makes your neighborhood an exciting and convenient place to live.

Planning the future of your neighborhood

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 | Key Terms

Community-Based Planning	Using input from people that live in a neighborhood as a primary source for determining long-term plans | 24
Community Engagement	Calling for residents and business owners to share opinions, desires, and information with planners as a way of improving their neighborhood | 24
Community Input	Opinions, concerns, and desires of residents, business owners, and other individuals that may be affected by development in an area | 26
Charrette	A collaborative meeting where participants design creative solutions for problems | 24
Long-Term	A timeframe usually 15-30 years in the future that planners consider when thinking about a neighborhood plan | 27
Stakeholders	Business owners, residents, schools, employees, property owners, cultural organizations and others affected by changes in land use in an area | 27

3.1 Planning Your Community's Future

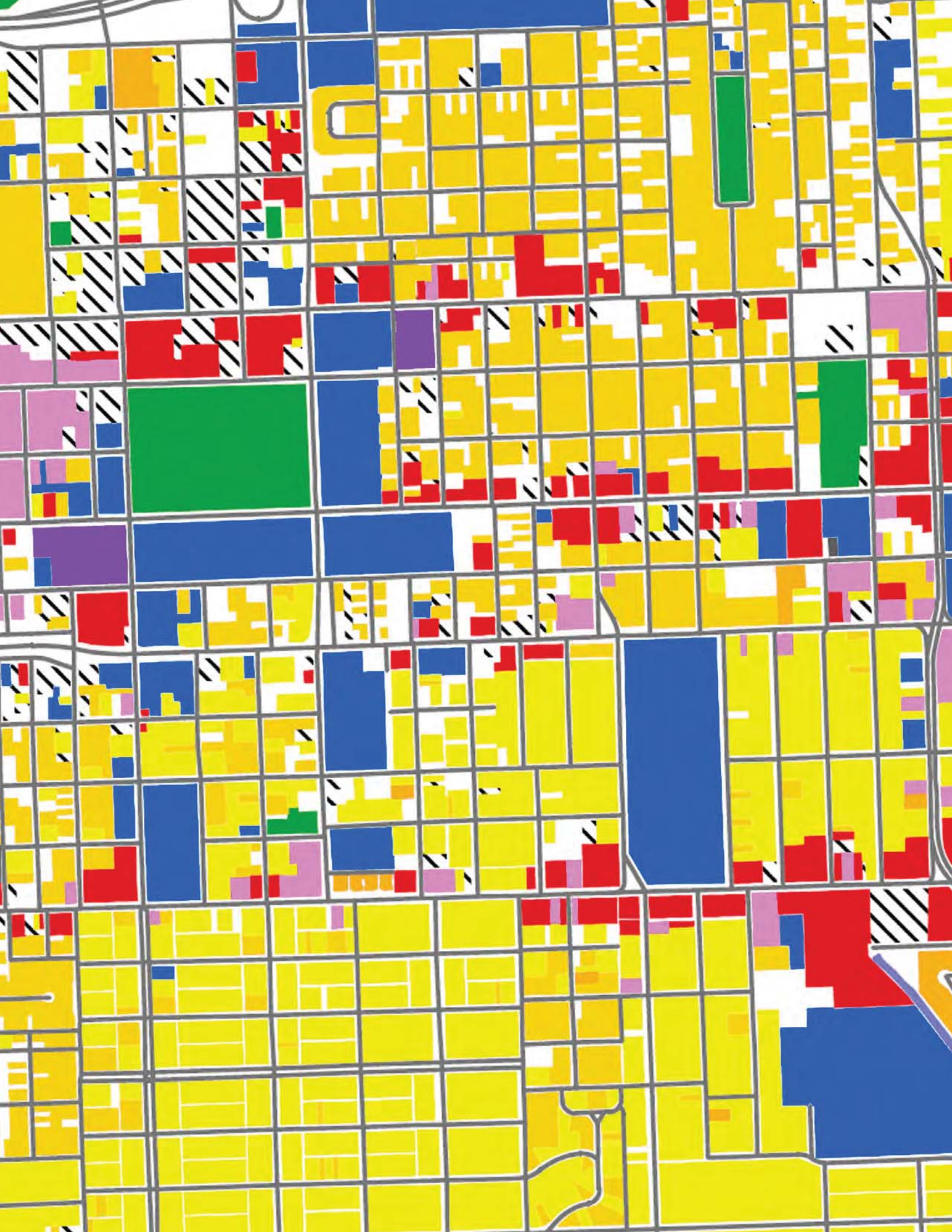
With a strong understanding of land use concepts and mapping, particularly the meaning and definition of each of the land use colors, you are now able to play a vital role in the planning processes that will help define your community for years to come.

Meaningful **community engagement** is crucial to creating strong, resourceful and resilient communities, and, given the appropriate tools and means of support, residents can charge and chart their own course for success. The information contained in this guide is one of those tools. However, for residents' efforts to be successful, they must stay engaged in the planning process.

Often, this process – even in **community-based planning** – is facilitated by planners who guide discussions and can answer questions. Sometimes this will take place in a **charette**, which is simply a meeting in which a group of people work on a common plan, issue or problem. The more information a participant has during the process, the more effective they can be in shaping the outcome.

It is important to remember that much of community-based planning is about compromise and finding common ground. A developer will bring their specialized knowledge and experience to a project, while residents will likely have a long-term vision for their community. To ensure a fair and equitable outcome, everyone must have a seat at the table—even if the results are not exactly what everyone desires. Though each project and process may be slightly different, the underlying principles found in this guide will remain the same.

Cities, communities and neighborhoods do not change overnight. Often, it takes a series of small changes over time to create a noticeable difference. Imagine the place you live twenty years from now. How might it be different or the same? No matter how it looks, a number of decisions will have to be made for that vision to become a reality. If you don't help make those decisions, who will?



3.2 Players in the Process

Citizens

Citizens provide **community input** for planning. They can also, at their own discretion, initiate the procedural process to change the way land is regulated.

Planners

Planners guide individuals through the technical process for development as well as conduct long-term planning from start (community input, research and analysis) to finish (developing maps and documents). Planners are usually employed by the local government.

Planning Commission

A planning commission is a political entity made up of members of the community. These individuals are appointed by the Mayor and the City Council. Members of the commission are citizens.

In planning and development, the commission acts as a representative of the community. Their role in the planning process involves approving long-term planning and holding hearings initiated by citizens to make changes to long-term plans. The results of these hearings do not have legal capacity, but are generally strong recommendations formulated to create the best design for the community. The recommendation of the commission is provided to the City Council to make the final legal ruling.

Commissions can vary greatly in size and are typically led by a chairman that is elected from within.

Mayor and City Council

The Mayor and the local legislative body (usually known as a City Council or Police Jury) have the final say in approving or denying proposals for planning. Recommendations by the commission play an important role in the final decisions of the Mayor and local legislative body.

3.3 Land Use and the City

Land use planning takes place at town, city, and regional levels. However, most people relate to their neighborhoods because it is difficult to understand these larger scales.

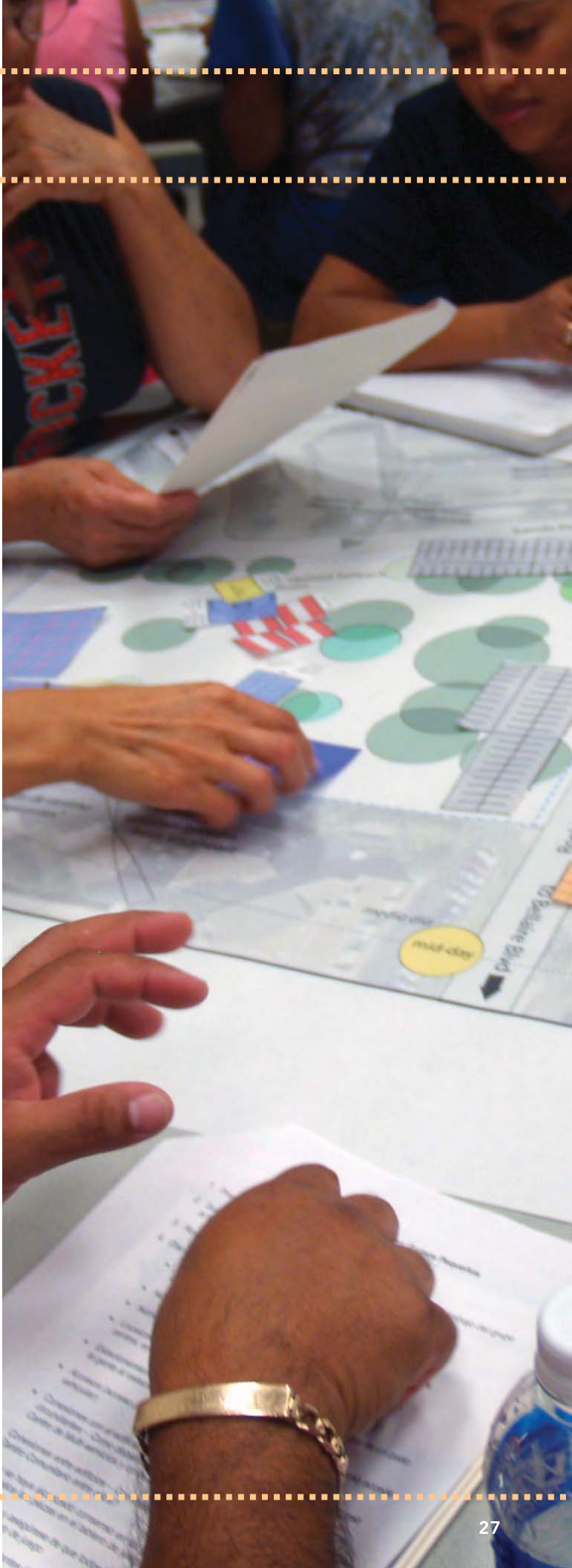
What is important to understand is that the nature of the land use and planning process is slow. Each political entity (state, region, etc.) is involved in every stage of the planning process.

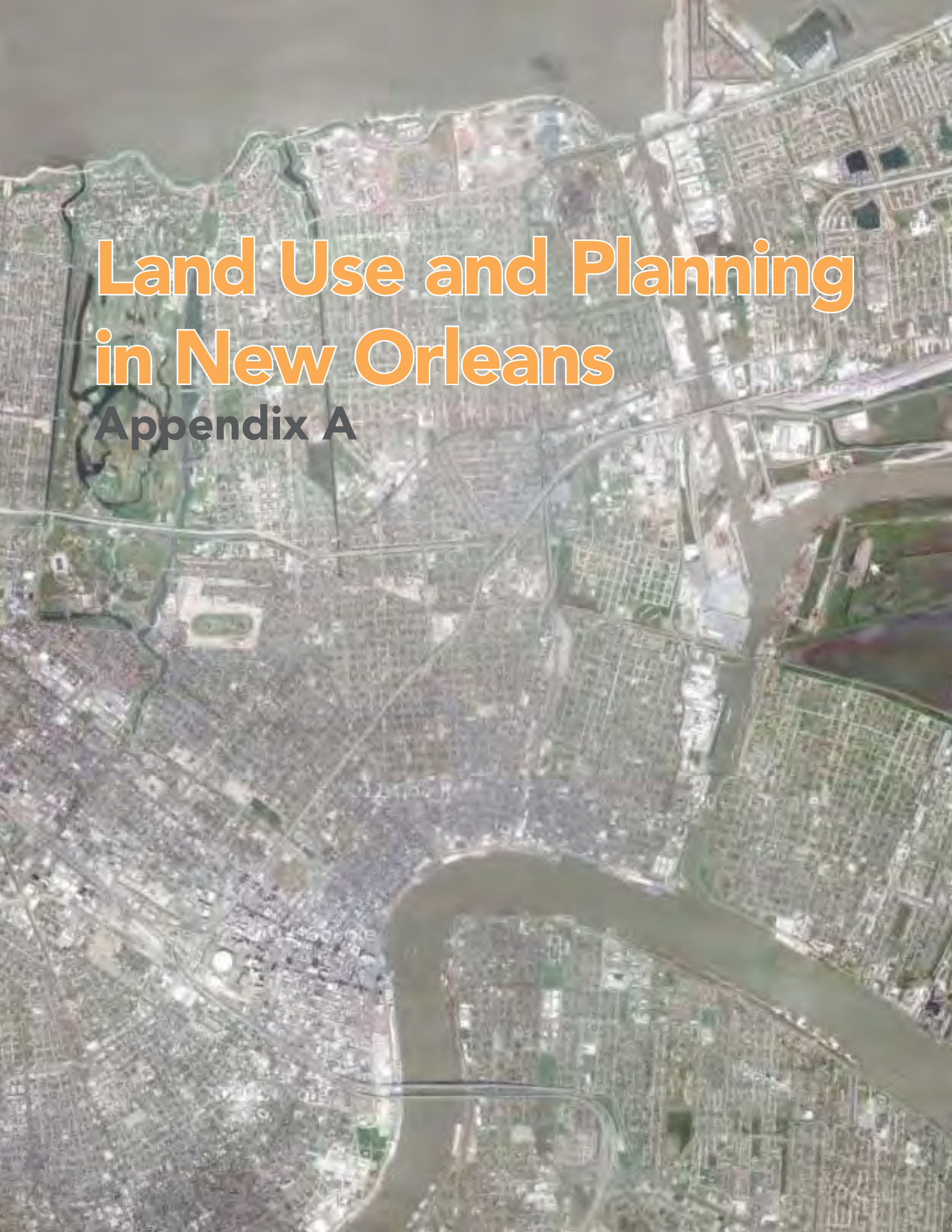
Plans take months and years to develop and are often looking decades into the future. When planners talk about the **long-term**, this timeframe is what they are talking about.

No planning process will take place overnight; however, your participation in a single evening's land use meeting can have a significant impact on your community's future.

With such a complicated process stretched over a long period of time, your input in the land use planning process will be most effective as part of a continuous dialogue.

Collaboration between neighbors, **stake-holders**, and planners ensures that your neighborhood will transform over time toward your goals.





Land Use and Planning in New Orleans

Appendix A

Appendix A | Key Terms

Big-box	A commercial use that generally refers to establishments that take up large parcels of land and sell high volumes of goods. Examples might include Home Depot or Walmart | 37
CBD	Central Business District | 36
Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance	A group of documents, charts, and maps that specify how each parcel of land can be built upon for each distinguishable area of a city | 32
City Charter	The primary piece of legislation that grants a city the power to self-govern | 31
Community Input	Opinions, concerns, and desires of residents, business owners, and other individuals who may be affected by development in an area | 35
Ex-urbs	An area of sprawling development that is located a significant distance from the city center and is characterized by single-family detached houses | 36
Intensity	The degree of impact caused by the use and the layout of the built environment | 28
Objectives	Goals stated in a larger, long-term context. Objectives are to be reached by following guidelines | 31
Place-Making	Land use planning that aims to create a specific environment by embracing certain uses and urban design standards while limiting others that may prohibit the purpose of the place | 34
Planning Districts	Groups of neighborhoods created to help gather feedback during community meetings | 35
Master Plan	A group of documents, charts, graphs, and maps that embodies all aspects of long-term planning (15-30 years) in a city | 31
Transit-Oriented Development	A type of development focused on linking public transit to high-density and mixed-use land uses and creating an environment that supports a lifestyle that is not reliant on automobile travel | 46
Zoning	An executive power of the local government that classifies land into types and determines how land can be built upon, what activities can take place there, and to what degree of intensity | 32

Appendix A

Introduction

The previous chapters of this guide have covered what land use is, its various forms, the planning process, and the individuals involved. The flexibility of the process and form has been emphasized to make clear that the degree of planning that takes place in a community varies greatly.

The following appendix expands on aspects of land use and planning that are specific to the City of New Orleans.

Appendix A

New Orleans' Master Plan

New Orleans' Master Plan was ratified in August 2010. The plan, referred to as New Orleans 2030, is a long-term, city-wide plan that addresses all **objectives** of planning for each neighborhood in the city.

The **master plan** is the ultimate tool for planning in New Orleans. In 2008, citizens of the city amended the **city charter**, changing how planning is conducted. This amendment granted significant power to the master plan. This was done to decrease the power of the City Council in land use decisions and reduce the political interference that often accompanies planning and development.

Important elements of effective planning include regular progress checks and plans that allow for future flexibility. New Orleans' Master Plan was not created out of thin air; previous plans developed in response to Hurricane Katrina served as the basis on which the Master Plan was built. Because the Master Plan carries so much weight for planning in New Orleans, it must be updated every five years. This ensures that past goals are consistent with present circumstances and that adjustments can be made in consideration of unforeseen occurrences and new information.

Appendix A

New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance

A **Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance** (CZO) is a group of documents, charts, and maps that specify how each parcel of land can be built upon. A CZO is a tool used to carry out a **master plan**.

Zoning is the set of rules that classifies land into types and determines how land can be built upon, what activities take place there, and to what degree of intensity.

The City of New Orleans' Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance was developed in correspondence with the creation of the master plan. In city planning, zoning can become out-of-date if it is not thoroughly and regularly evaluated. In New Orleans, the CZO became obsolete from years of piecemeal amendments. This was a problem for the city because it made development and investment more difficult and confusing. Sometimes, even the most well-laid plans need to be changed to adapt to current conditions in a town or city.

The new CZO creates incentives for investment that are vital to improving quality of life in New Orleans. As you compare where to raise a family, start a business, or buy a house, an effective CZO will guide you through the process. Overall, an effective CZO encourages progress in the city.

The Amendment Process

Prior to the five-year update of the **Master Plan**, City Council sets aside a time period once a year during which property owners can propose amendments.

For example: you would like to open a restaurant on a lot you own. However, your piece of land, like the others around it, is classified as single family residential - a classification that does not allow for commercial uses such as a restaurant. You feel that mixed use is a better classification for this piece of land and propose to amend the future land use map to allow for this use. By proposing this change, you are opening up options that will allow for you to open a restaurant, rent out the upper floor as an apartment, or many other possibilities.

PROCESS

1 Pre-application Meeting

The first step in the amendment process is meeting with the district planner to determine if the request is relevant to the master plan.

2 Public Meeting

The second step in the amendment process is for the City Planning Commission (CPC) to hold a public meeting. This gives nearby neighbors an opportunity to hear what the plan entails. This is also the time for residents to voice praise or concern. Perhaps a neighbor thinks a new restaurant would be a great addition to the area, but is concerned about limited street parking or an increase in signage. This is the opportunity for them to make these concerns known and ensure they are addressed.

3 Public Hearing

The next step in the amendment process is for the City Planning Commission to hold a formal public hearing. In this hearing, the commission establishes a recommendation to grant or reject the proposed amendment. This recommendation is provided to City Council for the final decision.

4 Formal Public Hearing

The final step in the amendment process is a formal public hearing. In this hearing, City Council chooses to grant or deny the proposed amendment. The recommendation provided by the CPC is used here to assist City Council in making a final decision.

Appendix A

Placemaking in New Orleans

Place-making is an exercise in planning that seeks to preserve and enhance the character of the different areas of a city.

During the creation of the Master Plan, eight "places" were established within the city of New Orleans:

- Rural Places
- Historic Core Places
- Historic Urban Neighborhood Places
- Suburban Neighborhood Places
- Destination Places
- Central Business District
- Industrial Employment Places
- Open Space

These places were created by classifying the time period of the built environment (pre-WWII or post-WWll), as well as the character of the overall environment.

As a resident or visitor of New Orleans, you can easily recognize the qualities and characteristics of each unique place – simply examine the uses and character of the built environment.

Appendix A

New Orleans Planning Districts

The New Orleans City Planning Commission designates 13 **planning districts** that group neighborhoods together for the purposes of gathering **community input** and organizing the planning process for the city. Each district is comprised of designated neighborhoods whose boundaries are determined by the boundaries of census tracts.

Knowing what district you live in is the first step to providing input on planning issues in the city.

The map below shows the 13 districts and the boundaries that define each.

Downtown Exposition

A top priority for cities in the 21st century is to strengthen the core of the city. Suffering from the expansion of the suburbs and now **ex-urbs**, cities have lost some of their luster and appeal. The purpose of the downtown exposition label is to encourage development that complements assets within the **CBD**, such as the Convention Center and Superdome.

New downtown development should support high-volumes of visitor traffic and promote an environment that is lively twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This district is not defined by massing and scale to the same degree as other districts to allow for a diversity of design that promotes place-making.

General Commercial

General commercial typically means a **big-box** development that acts as an anchor for an area. Higher levels of vehicular traffic and surface parking characterize this type of use. In New Orleans, general commercial is planned to exist further away from the city center. This is a strategy for preserving historic and cultural character.

Neighborhood Commercial

Maintaining the character in existing high- to medium-density residential areas is a major goal of many of the planning districts. Neighborhood Commercial is planned to expand access while maintaining character through small-scale development. This type of land use emphasizes pedestrian accessibility, offers a variety of services, and should be consistent with the architecture and scale of the residences surrounding it.

Typical businesses that fit the mold of neighborhood commercial development include pharmacies, boutiques, banks, coffee shops, and small professional offices, among others. These businesses increase access, act as an anchor or icon in the neighborhood and also improve landscape and lighting.

Industrial

In New Orleans, industrial land uses are aimed to strengthen port activity, manufacturing, and other uses that create jobs. As part of the Master Plan and CZO, there are regulations that minimize negative effects from this use. Industrial land uses are located near transportation routes throughout the city.

Institutional

Institutional land use can be thought of as places where you learn or join together with others for a common purpose. These buildings have a cultural, social, or educational purpose.

New Orleans' Master Plan focuses on preserving and expanding the current, large-scale institutions. As part of the Master Plan and CZO, institutional uses are planned to coordinate with residential, mixed use, and commercial uses.

Open Space

Parkland and open space are land uses that enhance or preserve the natural environment. New Orleans' Master Plan recognizes the environmental, cultural, physical, and economic benefits of parks and open space. To promote the benefits of the use, the CZO enforces design standards to ensure that adequate amounts of open space accompany development and that sensitive areas are preserved to maintain environmental quality and manage flooding.

Transportation

New Orleans' Master Plan has an extensive plan for transit within the city as well as the region. The plan prioritizes strategies and investment for transit and roads, such as continued investment for maintaining the roads, updating the truck route system, improving airport terminals, replacing buses with more fuel efficient models, and much more.

The Master Plan has a strong focus on public transit, including potential routes for expanding the street car lines and areas where stops can be improved with shelters and street furniture. Because there is such a wide variety of transit options, all components of the plan for transit in New Orleans were developed on a prioritized schedule.

Residential

The goal of planning for residential uses in New Orleans is to promote economic development, preserve the existing character of stable neighborhoods, and decrease blight.

As the Master Plan strategizes for increases in density, the New Orleans CZO plans for preservation of existing neighborhood character. Residential uses are categorized by the time period in which they were built, as well as density. Each category of residential land use places a limit on the number of units that can be built per acre. This restricts the type of building that can be constructed, essentially guiding development to ensure that massing, scale, and setback are consistent and local character is preserved and expanded upon.

Mixed Use

A prevailing objective in New Orleans' Master Plan and CZO is to allow for more mixed-use development. Businesses with homes or offices above have long been a part of the New Orleans vernacular. The city's planning tools embrace this historic trait and guide the expansion of mixed use, such that one investment catalyzes the next.

Types of Mixed-Use

High Density

A high-density, mixed-use neighborhood is built to accommodate ample commercial, office, and residential options. Often such a neighborhood serves the residents as well as outsiders because the area becomes a destination for work, retail, and entertainment. A central element of high-density, mixed-use neighborhoods is transit. A neighborhood that embraces visitors and houses large populations must have the means to move these people in and around the area. Transportation options must be concrete and offer opportunities to expand. In planning this is referred to as **Transit-oriented Development**.

Medium Density

Medium density mixed-use focuses on residential retention through commercial options. Typically, ground-floor retail with housing options on the floors above characterizes the medium-density designation. Ground-floor retail serves the residents as well as surrounding neighborhoods to some degree. For example, a staple bakery, medical office, or clothing store may attract residents from outside of the neighborhood.

Low Density

Low density mixed-use developments have slight impacts on a neighborhood's built character, as non-residential uses are less common, appear more sporadically, and are usually woven into a neighborhood's fabric. These buildings are often converted residential buildings or have non-residential uses on the ground floor. Examples include cafes, convenience stores, restaurants, flower shops, or even day-care.

Downtown

New Orleans' central business district will continue to support high-intensity environments. One major focus of this district is to support a 24/7-entertainment environment to nurture tourism. A second major focus is high-density office, which includes governmental and institutional uses. Planning for high-density residential is ongoing. No light or heavy industrial uses are permitted.

Health/Life Sciences

This category is planned as mixed-use health and sciences. Existing clusters of hospitals and medical research facilities may expand within this land use. The district also plans for new housing development that buffers the district and blends into surrounding areas.

Maritime

Several areas of the city harbor outlets for unique maritime activity. These districts promote a range of activities, such as aquatic, commercial, and single family residences. The purpose of this district is to maintain some degree of the natural environment and preserve the economic advantage provided by the unique confluence of resources.

Appendix A

Planned Development Area

Planned Development Areas are large under-utilized or under-developed parcels that are completely within the external levee protection system. As New Orleans grows, these areas may be built upon after a multi-tiered planning process is completed. In this process, community input, environmental analysis, and city approval is necessary.

These areas are vitally different from sensitive environments such as wetlands because they are surrounded by existing development and possess the capacity to be built upon for a variety of uses such as recreational, residential, commercial, or industrial.

Closing Thoughts

The importance of understanding land use cannot be overstated. Land use is the foundation on which all other planning decisions in a neighborhood are built and directly shapes the character of a community.

Using this guide as a reference, you now have a strong set of tools to employ as you take a leading role in crafting your neighborhoods, towns and cities. Use the information contained in this guide not only as a way to engage in the planning process, but also to envision the future of your community. The clearer your vision, the more potential it will have to impact your neighborhood.

To dig deeper into some of the concepts discussed in this guide, please read The Citizen's Guide to Urban Design, which has been created as a companion volume to this one. That guide elaborates on how the built environment influences the quality of life in communities.

Thank you for using this guide, and thank you once again for working for stronger neighborhoods, more resilient communities and a more equitable Louisiana.

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