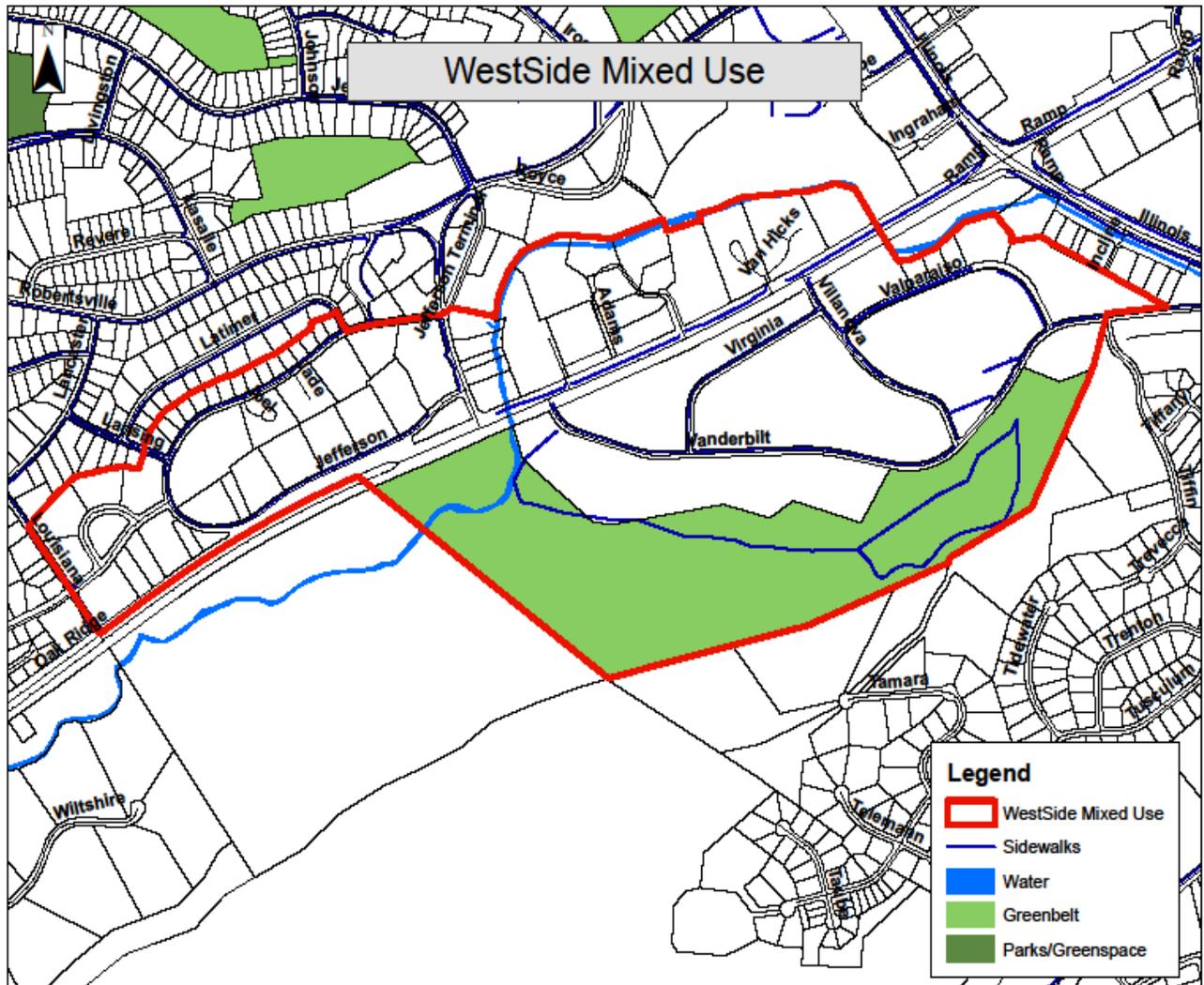


WESTSIDE MIXED USE SUB-AREA

This area contains a mixture of residential, commercial and public uses along both sides of the Oak Ridge Turnpike west of the intersection of the Turnpike and Illinois Avenue. Structures exhibit a wide range in age, quality of construction and maintenance. Development on the south side of the highway has a sense of visual order; the development on the north side of the highway tends to be more individualized and varied in quality.



Function, Character and Zoning

The portion of the sub-area south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike consists almost entirely of two uses. There is a large older apartment complex, Rolling Hills, which occupies an elevated site visible from the Turnpike but accessed from local streets: Vanderbilt Drive, Virginia Road, Villanova Road and Valparaiso Road. There is a small line of single family homes fronting Valparaiso Road. The other major use of land in this area is greenbelt which borders the south side of the Turnpike and the apartments.

The western end of the study area is mixed use development around Jefferson Circle and beyond that on Lincoln Road and Lincoln Circle. The area on the Turnpike in front of Lincoln Road includes two older small shopping centers, Four Oaks and West Side Plaza. Behind them on Lincoln Road and Circle are a large vacant greenhouse, two union halls, and Serenity Club, a facility for support groups dealing with substance abuse and similar problems. The frontage along South Jefferson Drive, which is a frontage road along the Turnpike, includes two churches, offices of the Oak Ridge Utility District, a mortuary, a Boys and Girls Club, and a bank. The Boys and Girls club has significant space for outdoor sports that extends through the block to North Jefferson. North Jefferson Drive has older single family and duplex housing on the north side of the street and a church, a Moose Lodge, and two small housing developments. The Joel Lane development is public housing for tenants who receive case management care on the site. The Jade Lane development is private housing. The short segment of Jefferson Terminal in the study area is occupied by an auto salvage business, a floor covering business, and a convenience food store.



This vacant bank building is one of many vacancies in the area.



Church on North Jefferson Drive

The frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike from Jefferson Terminal back to Van Hicks Road is a mingled collection of commercial and non-profit enterprises: a gasoline service station, a girls club, a YWCA building, offices and a few shops.

The development in and around Van Hicks is public housing. The Oak Ridge Housing Authority has its offices here as well. The Adams Street loop has Dogwood Manor, a 23 unit Section 202 rent supplement facility for low income elderly, a pet day care, a vacant office building and an AMVETS facility.



Dogwood Manor



ORHA Office

The zoning in the sub-area consists of a fine-grained mix of residential and commercial districts that match in general the uses on the ground. There is also a defined flood plain along the East Fork Popular Creek behind the Van Hicks development. The long stretch of undeveloped land on the south side of the Oak Ridge Turnpike west of Jefferson Avenue is a flood plain protected by flood plain zoning.

Conditions

The condition of buildings and the general appearance of this area is mixed, reflecting differences in the age of structures and quality of maintenance. The two small shopping centers at the west end of South Jefferson are examples. The Four Oaks Center appears to be in better physical condition of the two but much of the center is vacant, perhaps more than a third. That includes a vacant restaurant out parcel. West Side Plaza has visible physical deterioration, especially the roof, but is more fully occupied. Both centers could use better landscaping and maintenance in the rear. Moving east through the area, most of the commercial buildings appear to be in reasonable condition, although there is a high level of vacancy. The small number of housing units in the area also show a range of conditions, although most of them appear to be up to code. As a group, it is the public and quasi-public uses that are in the best condition: churches, the Boys and Girls Club, public housing, etc. Signage is individualized to buildings or businesses.



Four Oaks Center and West Side Plaza

Transportation

The properties in this sub-area have very quick access to the Oak Ridge Turnpike. For those who use Louisiana Avenue or Jefferson Avenue there is signalized access to the Turnpike. At all other access points the challenge is to make left turns onto the Turnpike. Those who are accustomed to doing it probably use the center turn lane as a merging lane. This can work but it is not always a safe practice.

Safety

The traffic issue described above is the only notable safety issue in the sub-area. There are no significant safety issues otherwise, with the possible exception that the many vacant buildings could become targets for vagrants and the fires that they can start in cold weather.

Findings, Recommendations and Place Making

The developed area south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike presents orderly development. Although the apartment units are old and modest by current standards, they were well designed and well landscaped, and have been well maintained. It is the area along the north side of the Turnpike that presents challenges, especially in the area west of Jefferson Avenue. Here we find a high rate of vacancy and some structures showing significant physical deterioration.

It is hard to know the exact cause for the problems that exist. Is there a high rate of vacancy because the market for commercial space is overbuilt, or have tenants moved elsewhere because the quality of the spaces is not up to current demands? Is lack of maintenance a result of high vacancy rates or a cause of vacancies? There is some talk in the community that property owners are not willing to invest more in their properties because of Serenity House and "halfway houses" in the neighborhood. If true, it probably reflects misunderstandings about the role of Serenity House and other social service programs, but the impact can be negative anyway. It may be that all these forces are at work and not in the same way in every case. Whatever the cause it is clear that the west end of this sub-area needs revitalization. The alternative is a downward spiral that will have a negative effect on the many viable businesses and good buildings in the area. The city can help with code enforcement, but most of the solution will have to come from property owners.