

Covington Corridors

A Study and Advisory Document on Housing and
Land Use along Covington's Major Corridors

Prepared by Georgia Conservancy
for the City of Covington



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I. Scope & Purpose

In April 2020, the City of Covington contracted with Georgia Conservancy to conduct a Housing and Land Use Study along the major corridors of Covington, GA. The main objective of the study was to advise on the existing, planned, and future locations of multifamily housing in Covington; secondary objectives included review of current demographic conditions, analysis of future population projections, analysis of physical and character conditions of individual corridors, and to put forth recommendations for multifamily design standards and updates to the zoning code. The final deliverables of the study were recommendations for changes to the zoning code as it relates to regulations on multifamily developments, with the intent of channeling multifamily housing developments to appropriate locations, discouraging multifamily housing developments where they might burden existing infrastructure, and ensuring satisfactory design standards for multifamily buildings.

The timeline of the Housing and Land Use Study spanned six months. Initial research and data-gathering tasks began in April 2020. The City of Covington and Georgia Conservancy pursued an aggressive timeline, aiming to complete the work before the expiration of a citywide moratorium on the acceptance of applications for multifamily developments. The moratorium was enacted in January 2020 with an initial termination date of April 20, 2020. However, the term of the moratorium was extended to October 2020 and extended once more from that month to a final termination date in November 2020. Georgia Conservancy contracted with the City to conduct the Housing and Land Use Study and deliver final zoning recommendations from April to November.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

- Kim Carter** – Former Mayor of Covington
- Mary Darby** – Former Director of Planning & Zoning, Covington
- Mill Graves** – Former Director of Economic Development, Electric Cities of Georgia
- Jennifer Hise** – Permitting & Licensing Specialist, Covington
- Steve Horton** – Mayor of Covington
- Daryl Ingram** – Economic Development, Covington
- Jerry Silvio** – Real Estate Developer specializing in industrial development
- William Smith** – Economic Development Manager, Covington
- Tres Thomas** – Director of Public Works, Covington
- Shamica Tucker** – Director, Covington Housing Authority
- Frank Turner** – City Attorney, Covington
- Randy Vinson** – Former Planning Director, Covington

Additionally, the following professionals participated in the planning process:

- Renee Criswell** – Planner, Covington
- Dan Dobry** – Division Manager for Croy Engineering | Interim Planning Staff (2020)
- Janna Keller** – Planner, Covington
- Monica Sagastizado** – Former Planner, Covington

Mary Darby, Covington’s Director of Planning & Zoning for the majority of the project timeline, was the chief project liaison and project manager from the City.

In addition to the TAC, Georgia Conservancy also facilitated public engagement through a survey campaign that distributed surveys virtually and in-person. In-person surveys were placed in prominent locations that received many visitors, including Covington City Hall. Virtual surveys could be accessed by scanning QR codes on signs placed in high-profile locations or through the City’s website. In addition, the surveys were distributed to major employers in the local area. Physical in-person engagement meetings were considered infeasible and inappropriate due to public health practices recommended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Georgia Conservancy sought the expertise of Aaron Fortner, former Founder and Principal of Canvas Planning Group, an urban planning and design consultancy, for additional recommendations and guidance regarding zoning text amendments.

Lastly, Georgia Conservancy engaged with the City of Covington Planning Commission and City Council throughout the process to take recommendations and brief the members of said governing bodies on proposed zoning changes and findings related to multifamily housing in Covington. A schedule of the meetings follows below:

- 04/13/20** – Project Kickoff Meeting w/ Technical Advisory Committee
- 05/26/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #2
- 06/16/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #3
- 07/07/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #4
- 07/28/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #5
- 08/06/20** – Planning Commission Meeting, Project Overview & Discussion
- 08/12/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #6
- 08/27/20** – City Council Retreat, Project Overview Briefing
- 09/17/20** – Technical Advisory Meeting #7
- 09/29/20** – City Council Meeting, Project Progress Update
- 10/13/20** – Planning Commission Meeting, Discussion of Proposed Text Amendments & Project Recommendations
- 10/19/20** – City Council Meeting, 1st Reading of Proposed Text Amendments
- 11/02/20** – City Council Meeting, 2nd Reading of Proposed Text Amendments

Georgia Conservancy is thankful to everyone who engaged in the creation of this document.

II. Timeline & Methodology

The Housing and Land Use Study began with data gathering, geographical definition of the study's corridors, analysis of past plans and documents related to the study areas, mapping and GIS analysis, review of the existing zoning code, and other foundational research. At the same time, the Technical Advisory Committee was formed, commencing monthly or bi-monthly meetings to review and discuss progress updates and ongoing objectives. Meetings with the TAC began during May 2020. All analytical findings were presented to the TAC throughout the course of the study, and TAC members were interviewed individually and polled during group meetings to gauge opinions, aspirations, and challenges related to multifamily housing and urban growth in Covington.

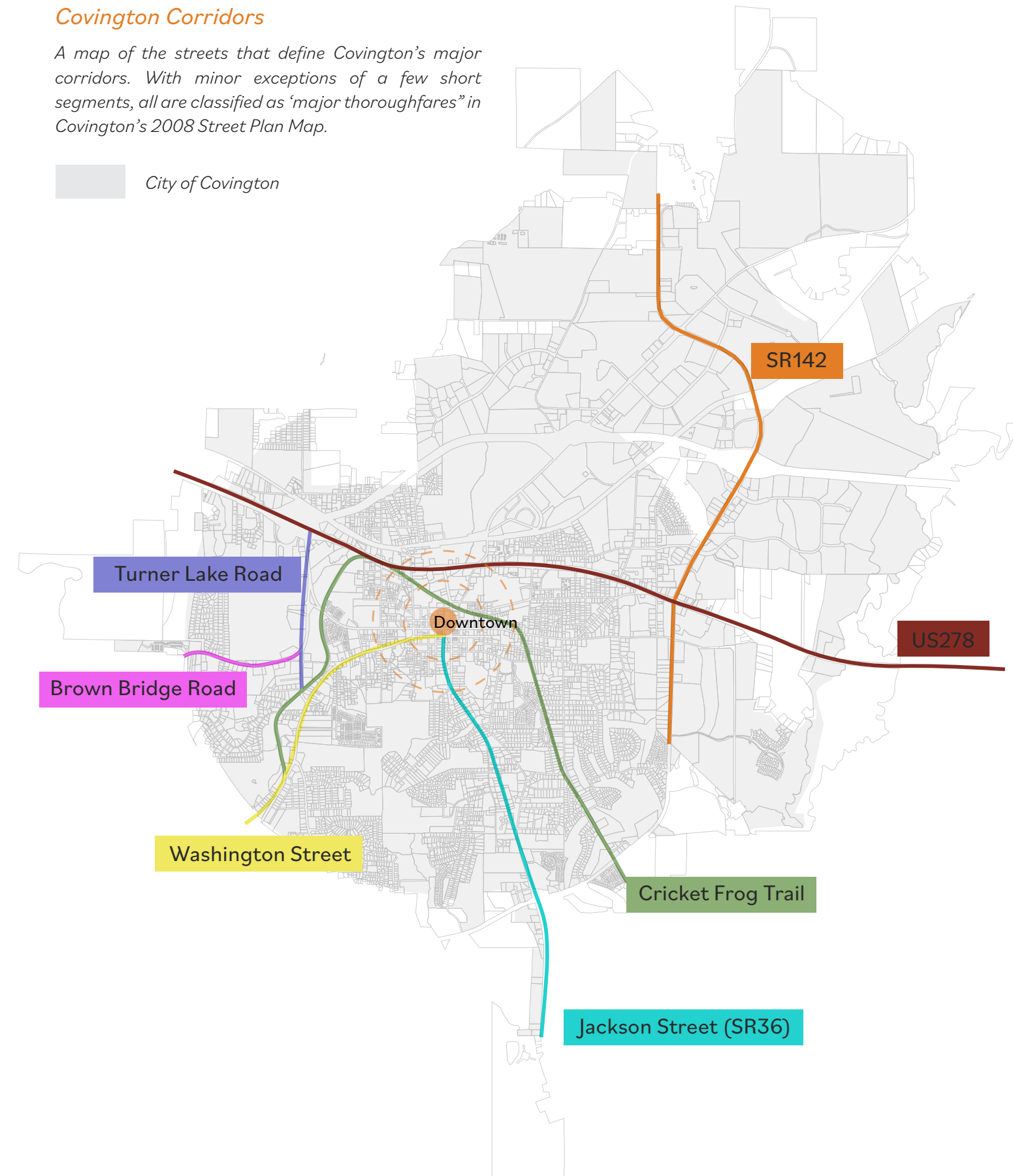
The public engagement survey was launched during May 2020 and distributed with the help of City Staff and the Office of the Planning Director. Survey results were received continually, and data was updated as responses became available. The survey was an effort to collect various opinions on questions related to housing type, price, availability and conditions in Covington from those who live and/or work in the city. Georgia Conservancy received about 440 responses to the survey, which were summarized and interpreted. Survey results were treated as general findings that proffered some sense of community opinion. Scientific statistical analysis was not used to interpret the findings, nor were conclusions drawn on the survey data alone. Rather, insights gleaned from the survey formed one component of the dataset used to propose general recommendations on community preference, infrastructural capacity, and local character.

From May to July, Georgia Conservancy reviewed data on public infrastructure that was made available by the City. Corridors were analyzed and new datasets on corridor conditions were created. A total of seven corridors were examined in the study. Six of these consisted of properties along roughly those streets identified as "Major Thoroughfares" in the 2008 Covington Street Plan Map, and the seventh consisted of properties along the planned length of the Cricket Frog Trail that runs through the eastern and western halves of the city south of Highway 278.

Upon completing the analysis of existing conditions, Georgia Conservancy moved forward to develop criteria by which to select areas propitious for multifamily developments from the standpoint of fostering sustainable city growth. Candidate areas for multifamily development were then defined as nodes. The recommended nodes are intended to serve as guidelines for siting of future multifamily developments rather than absolute prescriptions, and nodes are not to be interpreted as targeting specific land parcels but only as indicators of suitable areas with flexible boundaries.

Covington Corridors

A map of the streets that define Covington's major corridors. With minor exceptions of a few short segments, all are classified as 'major thoroughfares' in Covington's 2008 Street Plan Map.



In the final phase of the study, from late August to November, the project team produced recommendations for changes to language in Covington’s zoning code, upon condition of approval by City Council. All zoning recommendations were reviewed by the City Attorney. They were presented to the Technical Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, and City Council and revised, when applicable, according to feedback from those groups. Besides delivering recommendations on zoning changes, Georgia Conservancy also identified parcels for rezoning consideration by the city. Covington City Council was asked to vote on commencing a rezoning process on the proposed parcels during a working session on September 29, 2020. The Council voted to proceed with the rezoning process.

A hearing on the proposed zoning changes before Covington Planning Commission was held on October 13, 2020. The first reading of the zoning changes by the Mayor and City Council was held the following week on October 19, 2020. Covington City Council approved the zoning changes during the second reading on November 2, 2020.

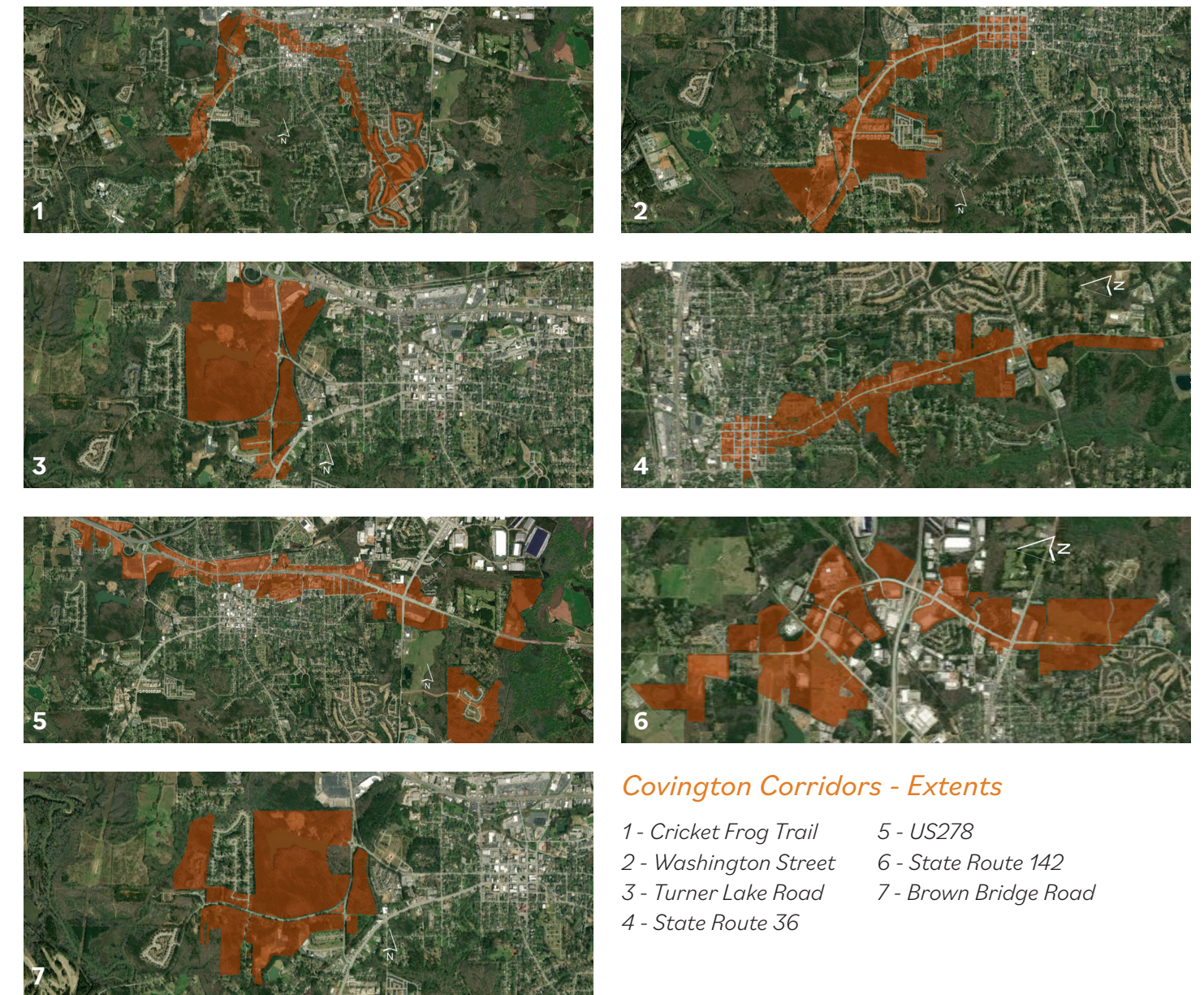
III. Introduction

The present study arose as an effort to meaningfully address aspects of how multifamily housing is delivered in Covington. Past planning efforts—including the City of Covington Comprehensive Plan and the Georgia Conservancy’s own Housing in Newton County report—have demonstrated how the city could benefit from new and more diverse types of multifamily units. The latter report found that rentership in Newton County is on the rise and 40% of households in Covington are “cost-burdened,” meaning they pay 30% or more of their household income on housing. The report found that 53% of Newton County households consist of one or two people, whereas only 18% of the housing stock consists of one or two bedroom units, revealing a mismatch between household makeup and housing product in Newton County. The lion’s share of housing in the county is made up of for-sale single-family detached homes, though the county does possess a significant amount of building stock that could be effectively leveraged for redevelopment. The report established an evident need for multifamily housing, which could both mitigate the undersupply of units suitable for smaller households and add new rental units, potentially at lower price points than typical single-family homes in the area.

In contrast to the Housing report, the corridor study tackled the regulatory framework that determines the location, type, and design of multifamily developments in the city. Early community concerns indicated that multifamily developments were permissible across too much of Covington’s geography and that the design standards for multifamily housing were not adequate to defray low-quality development. The initial findings of the study clarified the appropriateness of these concerns. While multifamily as a permitted use is restricted to a few zoning categories, these categories were widespread and dispersed on the zoning map, though still significantly less so than single-family categories. Covington’s zoning code was not

without design standards, and in fact, some design regulations were more stringent than expected. But the planning team found they often did not address the issues of highest concern, nor were they clearly consolidated in the zoning code.

Georgia Conservancy’s first priority was to assess the existing conditions and the character of each of the seven corridors. This involved assessment of physical characteristics based on GIS data, land use and zoning, location and proximity of community assets, and local infrastructure with a mind to prioritize locations for multifamily housing in the future and consider where the allowance for multifamily use could be annulled or restricted. The findings of this phase of the study culminated in the identification for potential rezoning and the nodes with greatest potential to support multifamily development while maintaining community character.



IV. Public Outreach Survey

In order to collect data on housing factors and to better assess aspects related to the housing citywide, Georgia Conservancy formulated a survey that was distributed by the Planning Department of the City of Covington. The goal of the survey was to understand community perceptions and preferences related to several aspects of multifamily housing. Topics surveyed included general information on where multifamily should go, what types of multifamily would be appropriate for Covington's character, and which features or services were most valued for their proximity when residents would choose a hypothetical place to live. While comprehensive in its scope, the survey was not intended to provide scientific results that could conclusively determine what aspects of multifamily are best for Covington; rather, it was deployed so the planning team could understand broadly how Covingtonians feel about multifamily, including what aspects of it they find favorable and unfavorable. The survey results formed one data point in our larger examination of community goals, capacity, and the character of each corridor in the study area.

Participants could access the survey through a QR link or site address displayed on printed signs placed throughout the city, on hand-outs distributed at the Covington Square, available at City Hall, and distributed to industrial businesses. Four hundred and forty (440) respondents accessed and complete the survey, with the lowest completion rate at 96.5%. The survey posed ten questions, listed here:

1. What is your housing situation?
2. What kind of unit do you live in?
3. What amount would you consider to be affordable for your household (rent/mortgage per month)?
4. What types of housing do you think your community needs more of? (Multiple answers)
5. If you were to rent or buy a new home, which type of housing do you think would be available in your community? (Multiple answers)
6. Where do you think your community needs to build new housing? (Multiple answers)
7. Please select your top 5 housing preferences and rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being your top choice.
8. Below are some possible housing affordability issues that communities face. Please identify the degree to which you believe each issue is easy or challenging for Covington residents, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very challenging.
9. Below are some possible issues with housing types and locations that communities face. Please identify the degree to which you believe each issue is easy or challenging for Covington residents, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very challenging.
10. Please rank your preferences for the following multifamily housing configurations from 1 to 9, with 1 being your highest preference and 9 being your lowest preference. Please note that all of these types of units can either be bought or rented.

A list of the possible answer choices per question is included in the appendix. The first three questions collect information on the housing situation (owning, renting, etc.), housing type, and perceptions of affordable rates of respondents. Most Covingtonians who responded to the survey own rather than rent their homes (81.3% to 13.9%) with the remainder living with a friend, housing insecure (have experienced or having come close to experiencing being without a home in the last 12 months), or in "other" situations (<1%). As for housing type, residents responded as overwhelmingly living in single-family homes (90%), followed by those living in an apartment, duplexes, or in a townhome at roughly 2% of respondents assigning to each type. Assessments of what monthly rates were personally considered affordable by respondents varied, but almost 75% of respondents identified one of four sub-ranges within \$900-1500+ as being affordable for them.

The second set of questions (Questions 4-6) were intended to gauge the perceived need for various housing types versus the perceived availability of those types and where respondents believed new housing should be located. Respondents believed that their communities were most in need of additional single-family homes, although total votes in this category represented 57% of all marks and significant pluralities existed in support of townhomes, mother-in-law suites/accessory dwellings, and condominiums, starting from highest to lowest in that order. Respondents could select multiple choices in their response to Questions 4 and 5. In terms of perceptions of availability of housing types, the results indicate that the majority believed that single-family homes were available in their communities. This result was outstanding when compared to the perceived availability of other types of housing. A higher percentage believed that apartments were available than that apartments were needed in the community. Question 6 asked respondents to identify where they thought new housing should be built. Almost 50% believed new housing should go "just outside of downtown," followed by "near or above retail," and then "along major corridors." A slightly higher percentage believed that new housing should be located "far outside of town" than did in "in Downtown."

Questions 7-9 asked respondents to rank factors driving housing choice and to rank challenges related to affordability and to housing type and choice. Safety and affordability ranked as the top priorities affecting housing choice. For resolutions of issues related to housing affordability, almost all situations were foremost considered as "challenging" to resolve or achieve. For issues related to housing type and choice, almost all issues were also foremost considered "challenging" to resolve or achieve, with the notable exception of the case of "small households (2 people maximum) to find housing that is the right size for them" being most commonly ranked as "easy."

The final question dealt with preferences for different types of multifamily housing. Townhomes were most preferred among all categories. The next most popular types were accessory dwelling units (detached), accessory dwelling units (attached), duplexes, and single-family homes converted to multiple-unit

dwellings. Medium to larger multifamily types, like buildings with 12 or less units or buildings with more than 12 units, were less desirable to respondents than other types of multifamily housing. Under the current zoning laws in Covington, accessory dwelling units are not a feasible option for landowners or future builders to implement.

These results were parsed based on responses to one of the other questions as a base. For example, responses of participants were categorized, in one breakdown, by the participant's reported affordable rates (Question 3). Responses to the rest of the questions were broken down by number of responses per each answer group in Question 3. Data breakdowns by other leading responses were also visualized and are included in the appendix.

V. Corridor Analysis

Seven corridors, defined in conjunction with the Office of the Planning Director, comprised the geographic areas for the study: Brown Bridge Road, the Cricket Frog Trail, State Route 142, State Route 36, US Hwy 278, Turner Lake Road, and Washington Street. A 100-ft buffer from the street centerline was used to define the lateral extents of the corridors. Namely, any parcel that fell within the 100-ft buffer was considered as part of the corresponding corridor. Parcels that fell out of this boundary are not irrelevant to the makeup of the corridor, but the 100-foot cutoff allowed the geographic definition to proceed on a systematic basis while taking in enough parcels to be able to form a reasonable characterization. Because several of the corridors intersect, some parcels were assigned to two or more corridors. The dataset took into account roughly 1,300 unique parcels.

As stated in Section III, the purpose of the corridor analysis was to document existing conditions, determine each corridor's character, and establish a baseline framework that could then be used for further analysis on its capacity for multifamily. Data assessed for each corridor included parcel sizes, existing zoning, building height, corridor width, corridor speed limit, and many other metrics. Understanding how each corridor is used currently enabled the planning team to envision potential multifamily structures that fit within the infrastructural capacity and aesthetic context of each area.

US278 Corridor

Federal Highway 278 is a major, 5-lane thoroughfare that passes through Covington and is the main access point to the city from Interstate 20. Traffic intensity on the road is high, both in number of vehicles and travel speed. As a gateway into the city and one of its main arteries, the land surrounding US278 has become a focal point for commercial activity. The highway is lined with conventional commercial developments with deep setbacks, large parking lots, and numerous disaggregated curb cuts, where commercial typologies

include big-box retailers in strip mall centers, small offices, food and beverage chains, and auto-sales lots. A Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) study on the US278 corridor was completed in 2008, and much of the corridor is currently governed by a Community Improvement District (CID). Both of these efforts demonstrate the extensive attention the corridor has received due to its visibility and prominence as a gateway and main thoroughfare that also passes near Covington's downtown.

The corridor contains 345 parcels encompassing a total land area of 765 acres. Half of the land is zoned Corridor Mixed-Use (CM), which is representative of the intent that the corridor support a diverse array of land uses in the future. Meeting that vision must entail a transformation of the corridor from its predominantly single-use commercial character, a shift that has not been supported by new developments or redevelopments since the city's adoption of mixed-use zoning categories (CM, NM, TCM), which were implemented only a decade ago. As it stands, however, the mixed-use categories merely allow but do not mandate or incentivize a mix of uses within a development, which would likely lead the majority of developers to opt to deliver conventional, single-use product.

The CM, CR, NM, and NR-3 zones that comprise nearly 60 percent of the land in the corridor permit multifamily uses of varying types and intensities, but several reasons render it unlikely the corridor will help spur multifamily residential growth rapidly or in large numbers. The absence of a mixed-use requirement, few undeveloped lots, and land permissive of multifamily in excess of what could meet current demand mean that it is highly improbable that every zone that allows multifamily will receive a multifamily residential product in some part, form, or fashion. Any change in that respect will certainly be slow-going. But this is not to undercut the fact that past city-led planning efforts have made clear that a transformation of the corridor into an active, mixed-use center is desirable. Future land use designations indicate that the land along US278 is slated for mainly mixed uses, with some public/institutional, office, and strictly commercial lands expected. Although there is not much land left vacant in the corridor, there are parcels that would make good candidates for retrofit developments and redevelopments. For example, car sales lots and other transitory uses may be quicker to concede to alternative uses, while the expansive parking lots of strip malls and big-box retailers present opportunities for shopping center retrofits.

Cricket Frog Trail Corridor

The Cricket Frog Trail corridor is a far-reaching corridor that spans from the southwestern city limits, winds northwards through downtown, and turns southwards again to terminate at the edge of Covington's southeastern quadrant. The characters of the surrounding land uses between segments of the trail are distinct from one another. On its eastern side, the corridor passes through established residential neighborhoods; the northern segment goes through downtown and intersects with the US278 corridor; and finally, the western portion moves between commercial, residential, and manufacturing land uses. It

includes 384 parcels and is the most diverse corridor in terms of zoning composition. It also most frequently intersects with the other corridors.

The corridor is unique amongst the rest because it is based upon the trail of the same name rather than a street. Segments of the Cricket Frog Trail have been completed but much of it remains undeveloped. The completed trail will offer a pedestrian and cyclist-friendly connection that will conveniently serve most of the city south of US278. The trail leverages the right to use an old Norfolk Southern rail right-of-way, and the city has already commenced paving additional stretches of the trail.

The city recognizes the Cricket Frog Trail as an important economic development driver. New developments along the corridor are most likely to seek lands along the north and west segments of the trail, where lots are relatively larger, display a variety of zoning designations, and generally not as likely to be embedded in established single-family neighborhoods. The condition of single-family neighborhoods covering most of the eastern half of the trail makes that segment less amenable to development changes. The future land use map indicates that the city likewise expects that those lands will remain as single-family residential neighborhoods.

State Route 142 Corridor

State Route 142, north of US278, is one of Covington's main industrial corridors. South of US278, the corridor has a residential character. In all, the corridor stretches from the intersection of SR142 and Scenic Parkway to some distance north of the intersection of SR142 and Alcovy Road, near the airport.

In the northern section, most parcels are zoned for industrial uses or as Corridor Mixed-Use (CM). Much of the land that is part of the corridor south of US278 is not developed, less a car dealership and a few small commercial establishments, but there are single family residential neighborhoods west of the parcels abutting the roadway. The SR142 corridor will incorporate the forthcoming Town Center Mixed Use development at the SR142-Alcovy Rd intersection, a planned development that will feature commercial and residential uses and a rare example of mixed-use outside of downtown Covington, though at a larger scale and sparser structural density. Town Center is uniquely placed in that it is surrounded by industrial land uses, away from existing commercial amenities and with no neighborhoods or residential uses in proximity. Therefore, the development must generate, for itself, a local residential population and some supporting commercial services. The environment around the site does not promote pedestrian activity, and so Town Center must deploy a design strategy that can alone provide a walkable area in that sector of the city, but it must simultaneously afford a means for visitors, which will make up a large fraction of its users, to arrive by car, as the site is removed from the rest of the population. Although it faces challenges, Town Center has the potential to be a transformative development that completely redefines the surrounding area.

Aside from the potential effects of Covington Town Center, the SR142 corridor north of US278 is not ideal for new multifamily and mixed-use developments due to its distance from commercial centers and the city core. The area is mostly industrial and does not afford a variety of uses and activities that could benefit locals, especially those with limited automobile access. Furthermore, the infrastructural capacity in the area may be unable to accommodate a large influx of new residents, which will be discussed later. New housing in the area would be near Covington's industrial centers of employment, but new residents would be stranded relative to the rest of the city. They would need to rely on cars to access most amenities and activity centers, including Downtown and commercial uses along US278. In short, the corridor's industrial quality and poor supply of nearby amenities, as well as its distance from the city's core in general, makes it a low-ranking candidate for new residences. Again, this is mainly true of the section of the corridor north of US278. Furthermore, Covington Town Center may be a catalytic development to change the northern corridor's existing character by infusing new amenities and a new local population.

State Route 36 Corridor

The SR36 (Jackson Hwy) corridor extends from downtown south just past Covington Bypass Road. It consists of 315 parcels covering 337 acres of land, a little less than half of which permits some form of multifamily use. Excluding downtown, this figure drops, and most of the remaining CM parcels are beyond Covington Bypass Rd and quite distant from the heart of the city. A pocket between Old Monticello St and Petty St, which flank either side of Jackson Hwy, is zoned as a mix of NM and CM and seems to be intended as a potential location for a mixed-use neighborhood in the future. It is disconnected from other mixed-use centers by stretches of single-family residential parcels.

Throughout the study process, concerns arose from stakeholders that multifamily properties along Jackson Highway may significantly overburden its traffic capacity.

Washington Street Corridor

Washington Street links the cities of Covington and Porterdale. It is a diverse, perhaps underattended, and somewhat less developed corridor. The subdivision pattern is irregular and fragmented, with parcels of small and large extremes. The street pattern moving away from Downtown becomes sinuous and affects the parcel shapes. The corridor is near the Clark's Grove development and serves as the access point to Walker's Bend, a neighborhood managed in part by the Covington Housing Authority that features a mix of housing typologies.

Near downtown, the corridor is intended for lower-intensity mixed-use development; many of those parcels are zoned Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NM). More than a third of the land area is zoned as light

industrial. Besides SR142, parts of Washington Street make up Covington's smaller industrial node. The City may choose to rezone some of the vacant industrial parcels to accommodate other uses, but a better resolution would be to retain light industrial uses among or on the same lot as residential and commercial ones, if compatible.

Turner Lake Road Corridor

Turner Lake Road connects US278 and Washington Street, as well as linking to Brown Bridge Rd. and providing a route to downtown through Clark Street. It is an important route connecting to other main roads in western Covington and is subject to higher levels of congestion as such. It leads to Turner Lake Park and includes two shopping centers at its intersection with US278. One of the shopping centers is the site of the old K-Mart. Both, but especially the old K-Mart site, feature expansive and underutilized parking areas that make the sites compelling candidates for redevelopment. The corridor also contains large greenfield parcels zoned CM or NM.

Due to its transitional character, its mix of existing land conditions, large parcels, and its accessibility from Downtown, the Turner Lake Road corridor presents an array of opportunities for mixed-use and multifamily developments, should additional traffic not cause undue congestion.

Brown Bridge Road Corridor

The Brown Bridge Road corridor shares parcels with the Turner Lake Road corridor in its eastern half. The shared parcels have flexible and diverse zoning while the western portion of the corridor shows a single-family residential character. Besides the site of an existing multifamily development, the easternmost parcels are slated to retain their single-family character, or be developed as such, according to the future land use map. They are more distant from Downtown and other commercial centers, making them less ideal for substantial multifamily developments. Parcels at the intersection with the Turner Lake Rd. corridor, however, are better opportunities for such developments and may not require rezonings. In all, the corridor is not extensive, composed of 64 parcels, including those shares with the Turner Lake Rd. corridor. Ninety percent (90%) of the land area in the corridor is in single-family residential zones, but this includes Turner Lake Park and Leafstone Apartments, the existing multifamily residence.

VI. Future Potential Multifamily & Mixed-Use Nodes

After completing the corridor analysis, Georgia Conservancy identified several nodes along the corridors as candidates for future multifamily or mixed-use developments. The nodes were then compared and ranked by their suitability for development based on a host of characteristics. The assessment involved assigning a score to each node based on its correspondence to the identified criteria, which resulted in either a 1-point addition or deduction depending on the type of criteria. For example, a characteristic with a positive denotation would add one point to the score, and vice versa. Scores ranged from two to twelve points and were the basis for the ranking method. The higher the score, the stronger the node as a candidate for multifamily or mixed-use development.

Each node means to represent a general area, not specific parcels. Although specific parcels were picked along with each node, this was for ease of depiction. Not all the parcels outlined in the nodes are equally suitable, and there may be parcels outside the drawn boundaries in the same general area that would make good candidates for desired developments.

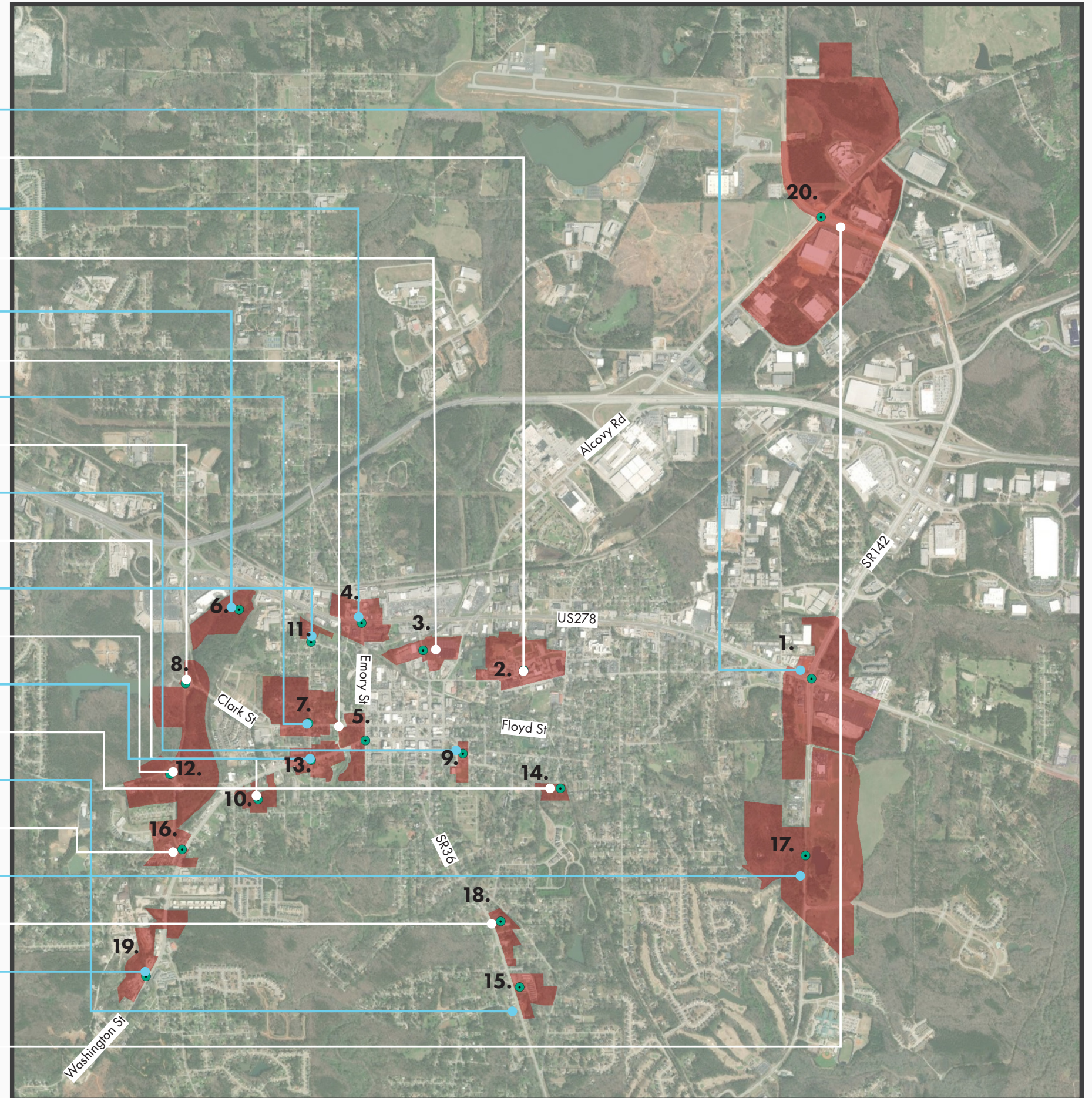
The nodes were assessed on several characteristics. These included considerations of the current zoning in the area and the designated future land use, proximity to Downtown and other commercial centers, transportation network connectivity, proximity to amenities and services, proximity to the Cricket Frog Trail, and inclusion in the US278 Community Improvement District (CID). In general, what influenced scores most was a node's proximity to amenities, commercial centers, and significant features like the Cricket Frog Trail. Nodes that could ensure more convenient access to those elements if developed received the highest scores. Alternatively, nodes distant from activity centers and amenities received lower scores, as developments in those areas, if not robust in uses and functions in themselves, would necessarily depend on distant establishments to provide for residents.

These nodes are designed to serve as guidelines for city leaders and other parties interested in Covington's future development. Two general trends emerged from the creation and analysis of these nodes.

First, many of the sites encompassed by the general area of these nodes have already witnessed development of some sort on them or in their vicinity. This phenomenon makes sense given the selection criteria, especially those that gave higher scores to nodes in closer proximity to existing services. As this project ages and Covington grows, these nodes can provide imaginative options for new development, as well as redevelopment on sites where multifamily would be welcomed and fits with established corridor character.

NODE RANKS

1	1. US278 - SR142
	2. Ficquett Campus
	4. US278 - Emory St
	3. Ace Hardware - Pace St
2	6. US278 - Food Depot Area
	5. Washington St - Emory St
3	7. Clark St - West St
	8. Turner Lake Rd - Clark St
4	9. Covington Police Department
	10. Washington St - Hydes
5	11. West St - Stone Mountain St
	12. Turner Lake Rd - Brown Bridge Rd
6	13. Washington St - West St
	14. Conyers St - Mill St
8	15. SR36 - Self Storage Area
	16. Washington St - Turner Lake Rd
9	17. Martin Luther King Jr Ave - Quarry
	18. SR36 - Lifepoint Church Area
10	Cricket Frog West Terminus - Washington St
	11



CRITERIA

Aligned with current zoning/multifamily is permitted under current zoning

Aligned with future land use

Close proximity (0.5mi) to downtown, due to its cultural, recreational, and civic service amenities

Close proximity (0.5mi) to the Cricket Frog Trail

Close proximity (0.5mi) to a major civic use outside of downtown (library, school, cultural center), a hospital, or Turner Lake Park

Close proximity (0.5mi) to at least one major grocer

Close proximity (0.5mi) to commercial centers (US 142 or US278 shopping centers or commercial strips) other than downtown

Short-trip, direct vehicular access to industrial employment centers

Contains unbuilt parcels b/w 2.5-5 acres

Direct access (vehicular), relatively to core areas; connection to core areas is not blocked by major barriers or complicated by insufficient connections

Encroaches significantly on floodplains

In an area with hospitable pedestrian environment (away from high-traffic roads)

May incorporate publicly owned land

May induce improvements through redevelopment of non-ideal land use (e.g. strip malls, storage centers, large parking lots)

Contains several vacant parcels that could accommodate development

May improve connectivity between existing streets

May utilize parcels with the US278 CID

Multiple existing possibilities for roadway access if development were to occur

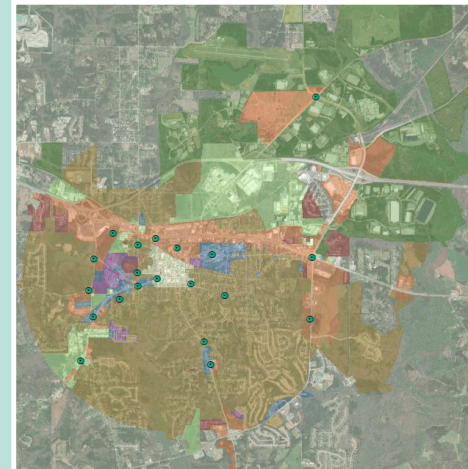
Relies on development of urbanized land, primarily, rather than large greenfields

Isolated from developed areas and/or other neighborhood centers

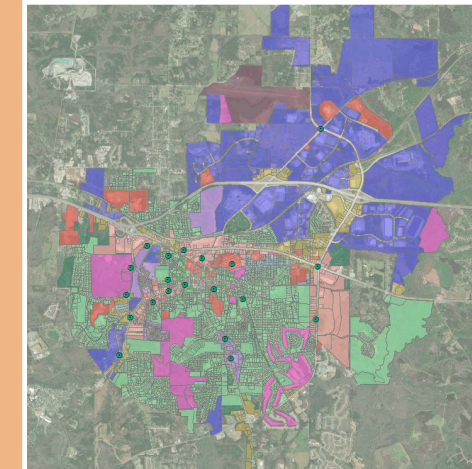
Likely will require parcel assemblages from multiple owners

Development may depend on, or more likely to occur, if another node is developed

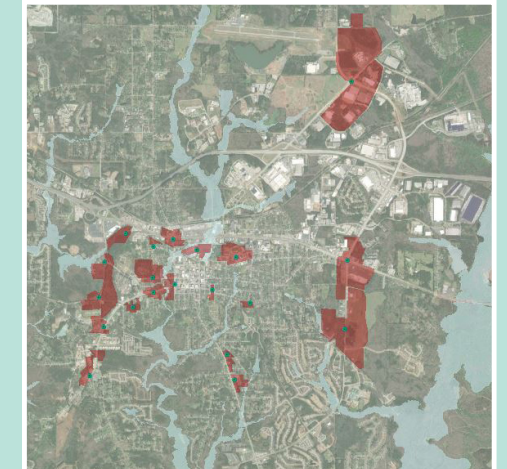
ZONING



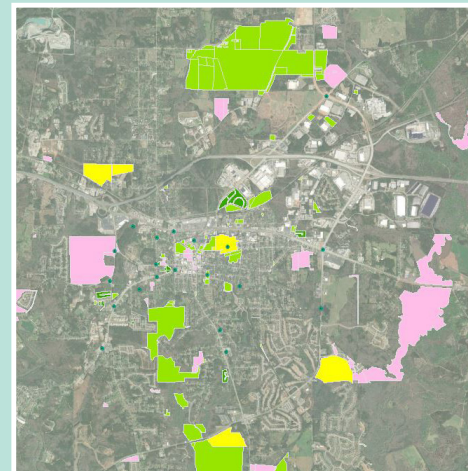
FUTURE LAND USE



FLOODZONES



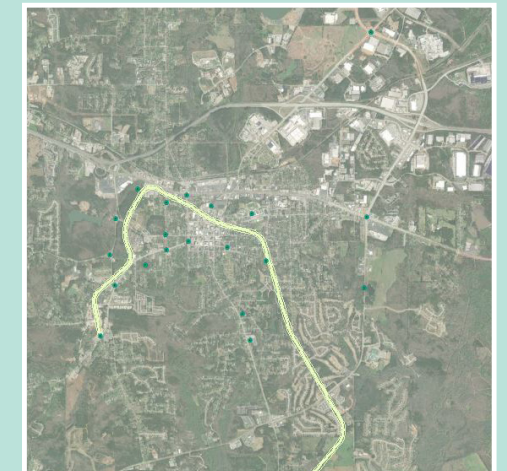
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP



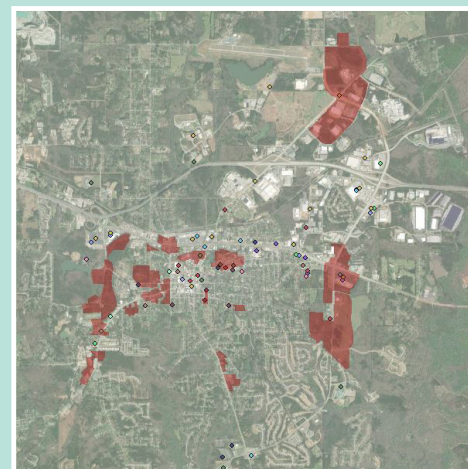
PROXIMITY



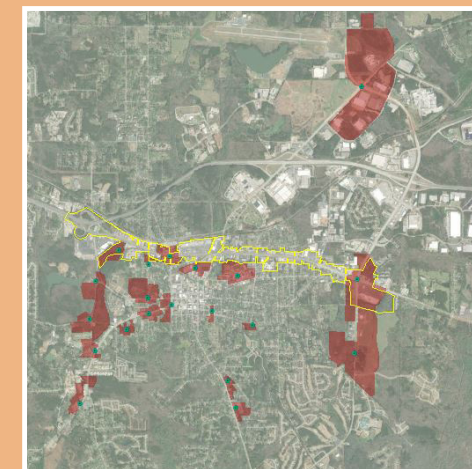
CRICKET FROG TRL



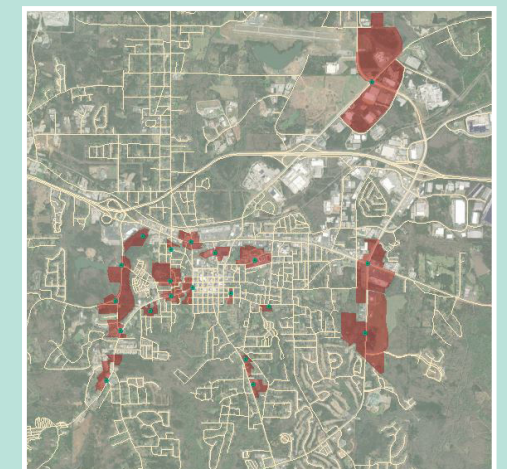
AMENITIES



US278 CID

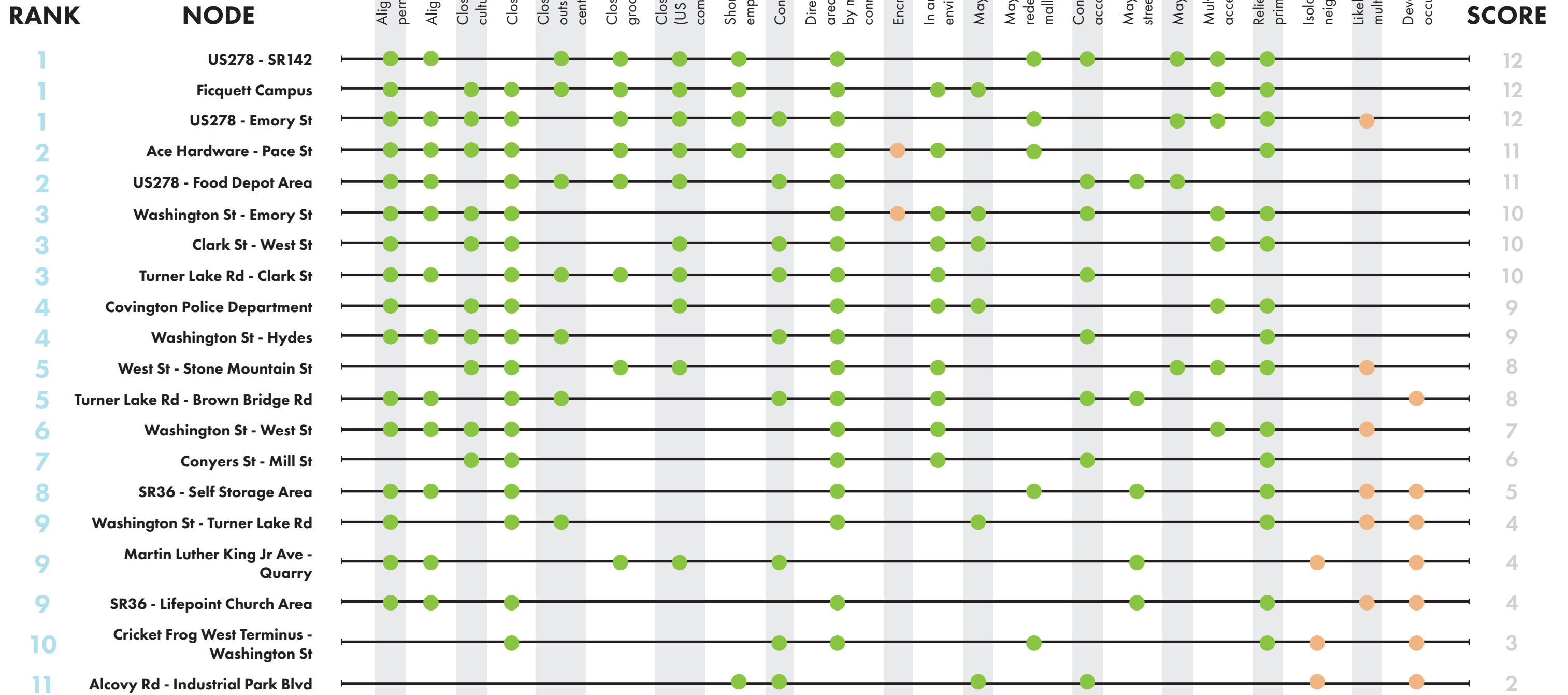


ROAD CONNECTIVITY



RANKINGS

- +1
- -1



Second, many of the nodes are in close proximity to each other, suggesting that Covington’s built form could support a walkable community. In order to accomplish this while maintaining the city’s historic character and legacy, housing infill and redevelopment should be pursued at these nodes when possible. Certainly, opportunities for new development exist; however, redevelopment can fill in gaps between neighborhoods and corridors that can foster an interconnected community with many housing options for folks of all backgrounds.

VII. Infrastructure Considerations

From the beginning, it was important to identify locations where new construction would not overwhelm existing infrastructural capacity. Infrastructure-related concerns were categorized by three fields: roads and traffic capacity, sewer capacity, and effects on school enrollment (student capacity). Correspondingly, we received feedback from the City’s Public Works Department on the following information related to each node: a qualitative measure of the current transportation infrastructure’s ability to handle additional traffic, and whether sewer improvements would be needed with forthcoming multifamily or mixed-use development. The need for water and/or sewer improvements and doubts over the traffic capacity of the respective roadways do not preclude new developments at impacted nodes, but they are weighty concerns to contemplate before permitting higher intensity developments. The city may choose to consider a potential incentive system that encourages developers to improve impacted infrastructure to a sufficient standard in exchange for a density bonus or reduced permitting fees. A table summarizing where local water, sewer, and traffic infrastructure may need improvement before accommodating developments that would bring in many new residents and/or visitors is included in the Appendix. The data was received from the Covington Department of Public Works.

VIII. Changes to Covington Zoning Code

As part of the Corridor Study, Georgia Conservancy was tasked with reviewing and recommending changes to Covington’s zoning code. Suggested changes were to ensure desirable and appropriate outcomes in the built environment as related to multifamily residential and mixed-use developments, as well as to redact inconsistencies and irrelevant artifacts in the language pertaining to zoning districts and design standards. The City last undertook a significant zoning rewrite fairly recently, in 2008. Thus, only a small number of modifications were necessary. The structure, divisions, logic, and the intent of the code’s existing regulations were not changed or affected by the recommendations. Where recommendations were made, they altered aspects or regulations related to the design and classification of building types, or regulations within specific zoning districts, or occasionally definitions and dimensional requirements.

The changes sought to grant the City of Covington greater control in channeling multifamily residential developments to appropriate areas, and to ensure those developments would be of an appropriate type and design quality. For example, a greater array of multifamily types now appears in the code. This language is intended to facilitate multifamily developments that fit within the character of each corridor, as recommended by the analysis appearing in Section V of this report.

A summary of the key changes to the zoning code are detailed here:

1. Requirement for new developments in Corridor Mixed-Use (CM) zones to provide a mix of uses.

New developments in CM zones are required to facilitate a mix of land uses within the development, for example commercial and residential uses, rather than developing for a single land use.

Previously, this stipulation did not exist, and so a “mixed-use” label on a zoning district did not necessarily lead to a mixed-use result. The new requirement instructs developers whose plans include a residential component to include a non-residential use in the development. The non-residential component must account for at least 20% of the square footage of the development and be constructed prior to or at the same time as the residential component. The regulation does not prohibit development of purely commercial or other non-residential type projects; it only prevents purely residential projects. The non-residential use is to ensure a diversity and proximity of different uses where citizens must live. The regulation would apply to Corridor Mixed-Use (CM) districts only. Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NM) districts were excluded because of the diminutive dimensions of NM parcels, in comparison, which might complicate or hinder construction of conventional mixed-

use developments. In general, the project team found NM areas could support small-scale types of multifamily that fit within a more residential neighborhood character. Lastly, the relative sparsity of NM parcels compared to CM meant that omitting them would not undermine the new requirement. It was deemed more beneficial that NM zones continued to permit both single-use and mixed-use developments.

2. Creation and consolidation of design standards for building typologies.

A new section of the code (16.28.05 – “Building Typology”) was created to better define and clarify how multifamily residential buildings are classified and to consolidate the design standards related to each.

The new section defines several building typologies and links them to specific design standards. The section also includes a table showing in which zones each typology is permitted. Developers can use section 16.28.05 to identify which typology corresponds to the buildings in their development plans and then reference the design requirements that are tied to those typologies. There they will find information on maximum gross base density, minimum unit sizes, maximum units per building (some typologies prescribe a range of units or a maximum number). If a max density is not defined under a typology, the max density of the zoning district should be referenced. The general regulations of the zoning district supersede the regulations of section 16.28.05 where there may be discrepancies. Section 16.28.05, however, is well aligned and should not interfere with the primary regulations of any zoning district. Developers may find density bonuses, to be granted if certain conditions are met, in section 16.28.05.

3. Reapportionment of density bonuses without changing maximum allowable density in either CM or NM zones.

A development in NM, CM, CR, TCR, or TCM zones may acquire a density bonus of an additional 3 units per acre by locating multifamily dwellings within walking distance of commercial centers, and they may acquire an additional 7 units per acre for dedicating 40% or more of the project as open space. However, the maximum allowable gross density in NM and CR zones cannot exceed 15 units/acre while the maximum allowable gross density in CM, TCR, or TCM zones cannot exceed 26 units/acre.

Covington offered a density bonus for meeting both of two conditions: 1) Dedicating 40% or more of the project as open space, and 2) locating the core of the multifamily dwellings within walking distance from areas of commerce that provides convenient goods and services to satisfy the daily and

common needs of nearby residents. The revised code apportions the full bonus into two parts, one or both of which may be met, and which will grant different levels of bonus density. The maximum possible density was not altered across any zoning district in Covington. The maximum gross base density in NM zones, with bonuses, remains 15 units per acre, and it is 26 units per acre in CM zones, again with bonuses. In each case, the same conditions may be met by a development to achieve the density bonus, but the maximum density bonus has been split among two separate conditions. First, developments that locate multifamily dwellings within walking distance from an area of commerce that provides convenient goods and services can earn a bonus of three units per acre. An additional 7 units per acre may be earned when a development conserves 40 percent of the lot as open space to be used as passive recreation common area to be owned and maintained by the owner or owner’s association. Meeting both conditions results in a bonus of 10 units per acre, capping at the aforementioned 15 and 26 units per acre maximums in NM and CM zones, respectively. In CM zones, prior to this change, a developer could achieve a 10 units per acre bonus by only satisfying one of those requirements; now, they must satisfy both.

As Covington grows and needs change related to housing, we encourage city leadership to consider the allowance of higher densities in the future. Focusing on architectural aesthetics and quality development can often be just as, if not more, effective than relying on unit/acre measures as controls. Higher density developments can be more or equally appealing to lower density ones and blend seamlessly with lower density developments or even conventional suburban neighborhoods.

IX. Individual Parcel Analysis

The text amendments to Covington’s zoning code were the primary result of the Georgia Conservancy team’s analysis of multifamily housing and land use along the city’s major corridors. As mentioned in Section V, a companion geospatial analysis sought to identify areas along each corridor where multifamily was particularly appropriate, given infrastructural considerations and barriers. This analysis also revealed areas where full build-outs of multifamily as zoned might place undue burdens on infrastructural elements, including traffic congestion and water and sewer capacity.

Georgia Conservancy wished to examine these areas more closely to fully understand how multifamily could fit in them. Corridor by corridor, we looked at parcels zoned “Commercial Mixed Use,” which currently allow the densest configurations of multifamily. For each of these, we assembled numerical data for how many units could be added as currently zoned. (NOTE: We did not assess parcels on U.S. 278, as this corridor is the most well-equipped for new multifamily development, both from an infrastructural standpoint and based on its existing character. Additionally, most of US 278’s CM zones are already developed, and redevelopment is less likely to move forward as easily as greenfield development elsewhere in the city.)

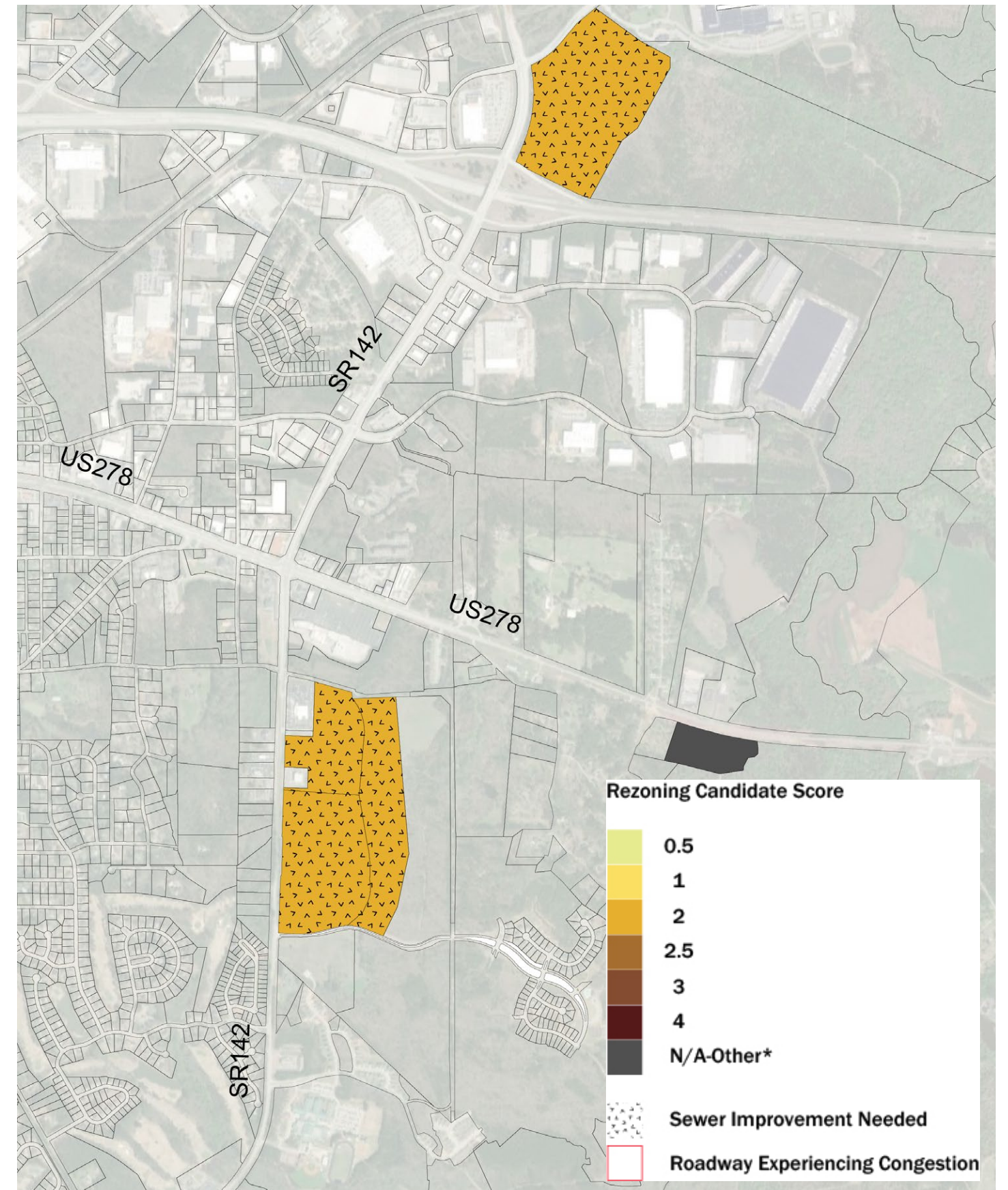
We then graded them on a rubric of five criteria (1 point each) to assess the potential negative impacts (as identified by city staff) that may arise from a maximum build-out of each parcel. The higher the score, the more negative impacts they may create. These criteria are as follows:

- No proximity to the feature named in the zone (i.e. parcel zoned “Corridor Mixed Use” would gain 1 point if not located on a major corridor).
- Roadway the parcel fronts to is already experiencing congestion.
- Sewer improvements would be needed.
- Parcel over 5 acres.
- Side-to-side adjacency w/ incompatible zone (i.e. “Corridor Mixed Use” (CM) next to “Neighborhood Residential” (NR-1) or “Heavy Industrial” (M-2)).

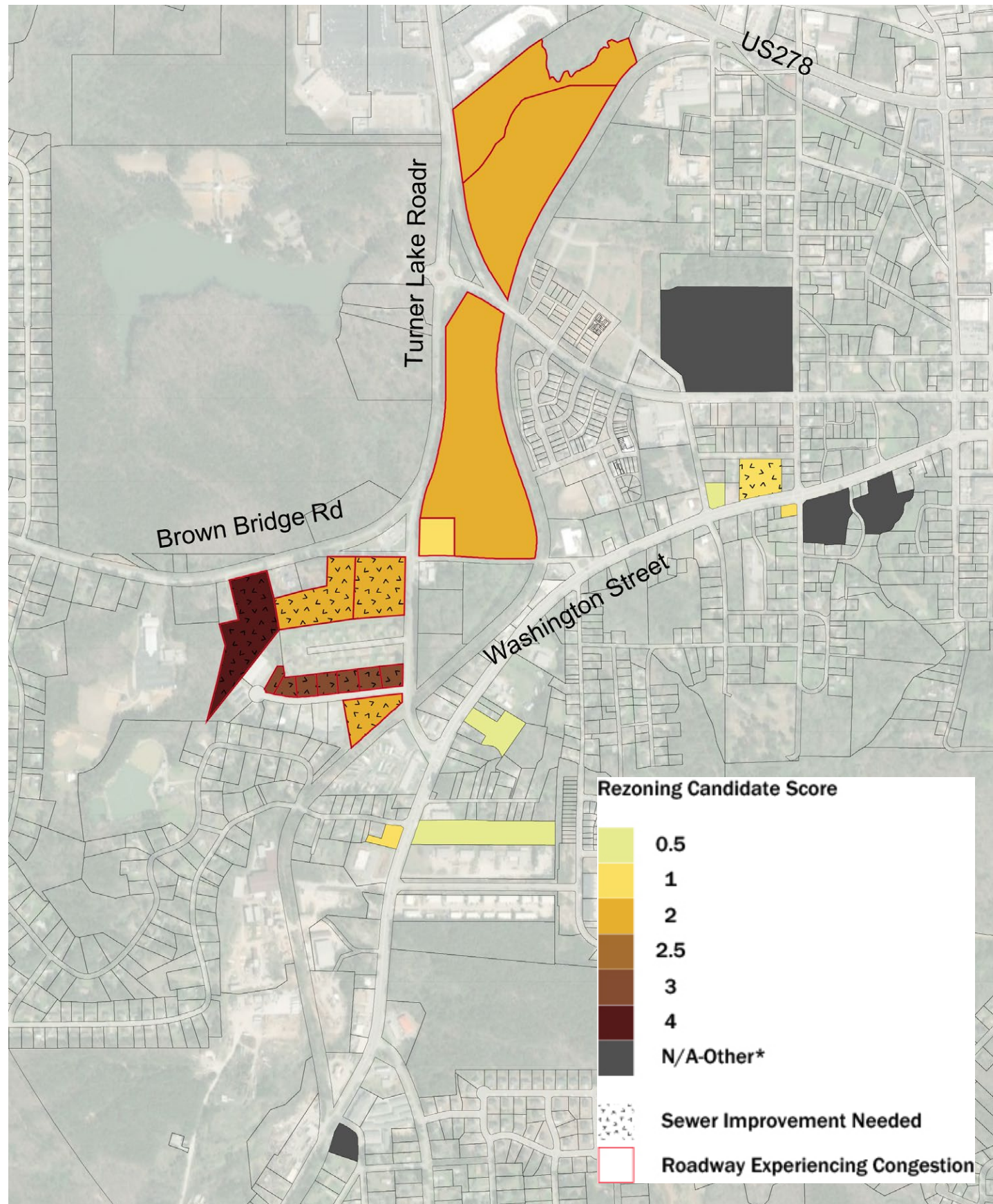
The figures on the next pages depict each parcel, shaded by its score from 1-5. A higher score suggests that the parcel was tagged in more categories that would make it suitable for rezoning. A copy of the analysis is included in the Appendix.

In this analysis, we included the difference in total units and total new vehicles on Covington’s roadways if the parcel were to be downzoned. Specifically, we looked at how these parcels would be affected if downzoned from CM to Neighborhood Mixed Use (NM), the next lowest tier of zoning designations that allow multifamily.

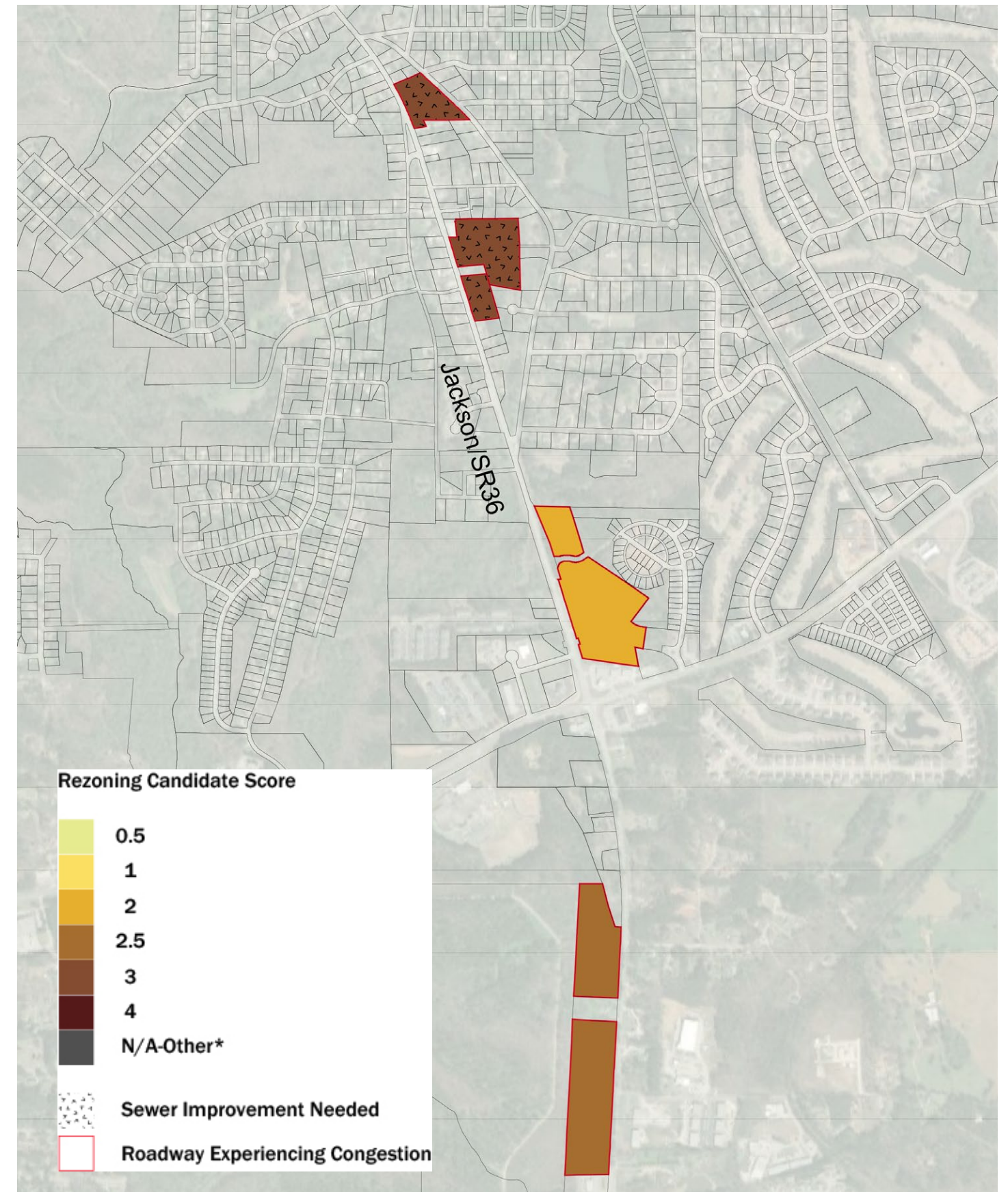
The purpose of this exercise was to inform city leadership and staff of opportunities to channel multifamily to places along major corridors where it is most appropriate. This analysis does not seek to recommend an ideal, numerical threshold above which city staff ought to pursue rezonings; rather, it is intended to aid decision-makers as they decide which parcels, if any, are most appropriate for rezoning based on city infrastructure, pending development opportunities, and community character. Ideally, these findings are designed to work together, to limit growth in certain areas that are less equipped to accommodate it, while allowing and encouraging growth in other areas that can benefit from multifamily and mixed-use developments.



* Parcel consists of multiple zones which may be replaced by a single zoning designation



* Parcel consists of multiple zones which may be replaced by a single zoning designation



* Parcel consists of multiple zones which may be replaced by a single zoning designation

X. Conclusion and Next Steps

This Housing and Land Use Study along Covington’s major corridors is intended to help city leaders understand present challenges related to multifamily housing, present opportunities for how these challenges may be addressed and alleviated, and suggest possible solutions for how to simultaneously strengthen the city’s housing stock, community character, economic vitality, and quality of life.

Through the proposed text amendments, now adopted by Covington City Council, leaders in Covington have taken the first step to ensuring multifamily developments of quality that can be supportive of city services and the local economy. Below, we outline potential next steps that city officials can explore to further strengthen Covington’s approach to land use along its major corridors:

1. Now that the proposed text amendments are approved, city officials should consider partnering with a developer to roll out a successful multifamily pilot project along a corridor that can accommodate new, innovative forms of housing. If this first pilot project is not a redevelopment project, city officials should consider engaging in a second pilot project that delivers housing on a redeveloped site.
2. Potential impacts to infrastructure were discussed several times throughout the study period and this report. These impacts were assessed by Covington city staff and professionals from other organizations who are familiar with the capacity of Covington’s road network, water infrastructure, and sewer infrastructure. To understand more fully the status, capacity, and needs of these systems and how specific multifamily developments might affect each, we recommend a separate analysis be performed by leading experts in the field.
3. The potential CM to NM rezonings should be contemplated and assessed for their impacts. Pairing each potential downzoned parcel with additional infill along corridors near services should be considered.
4. After any rezonings occur, the zoning map and Future Land Use Maps should be updated to be in harmony with each other.
5. Ongoing partnerships with creative developers should be pursued, especially with those interested in retrofits of vacant commercial properties, small-scale infill, and other housing development that fits Covington’s character.
6. As Covington grows, mechanisms governing density—including height limits, maximum units per acre, and incentives for developers—should continue to be revisited.
7. After the zoning amendments have matured for a few years, these should also be analyzed for their effectiveness. Consider presenting the results to City Council, Planning Commission, and other local governing bodies and citizens’ groups.

Georgia Conservancy can continue to be a resource on the material described in this report, as well as on any questions that may arise from it. We are excited for the future of Covington and believe that this work can support its unique charm and high quality of life.