

South Square/ MLK JR. Compact Neighborhood

Introduction

This section will describe in greater detail the proposed changes to the Future Land Use Map for the area around the proposed South Square and Martin Luther King Jr. light rail stations. Opportunities, challenges and potential impacts of the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier will be evaluated.

Existing Land Use and Development

Formerly the site of South Square Mall, development around the proposed South Square and MLK Jr. Stations has remained an auto-oriented commercial destination. Big box retailers such as Target and Sam's Club anchor the shopping centers; however, vacancy of outparcels and supporting retail appears to be a rising issue. Suburban style office buildings, including the recognizable 17-story University Tower, and medium density garden apartments surround the shopping nodes before transitioning to single family neighborhoods. The area has built out according to current zoning designations, which are primarily commercial, office and medium density residential. A map and description of existing land uses and development can be found in Figure 1.

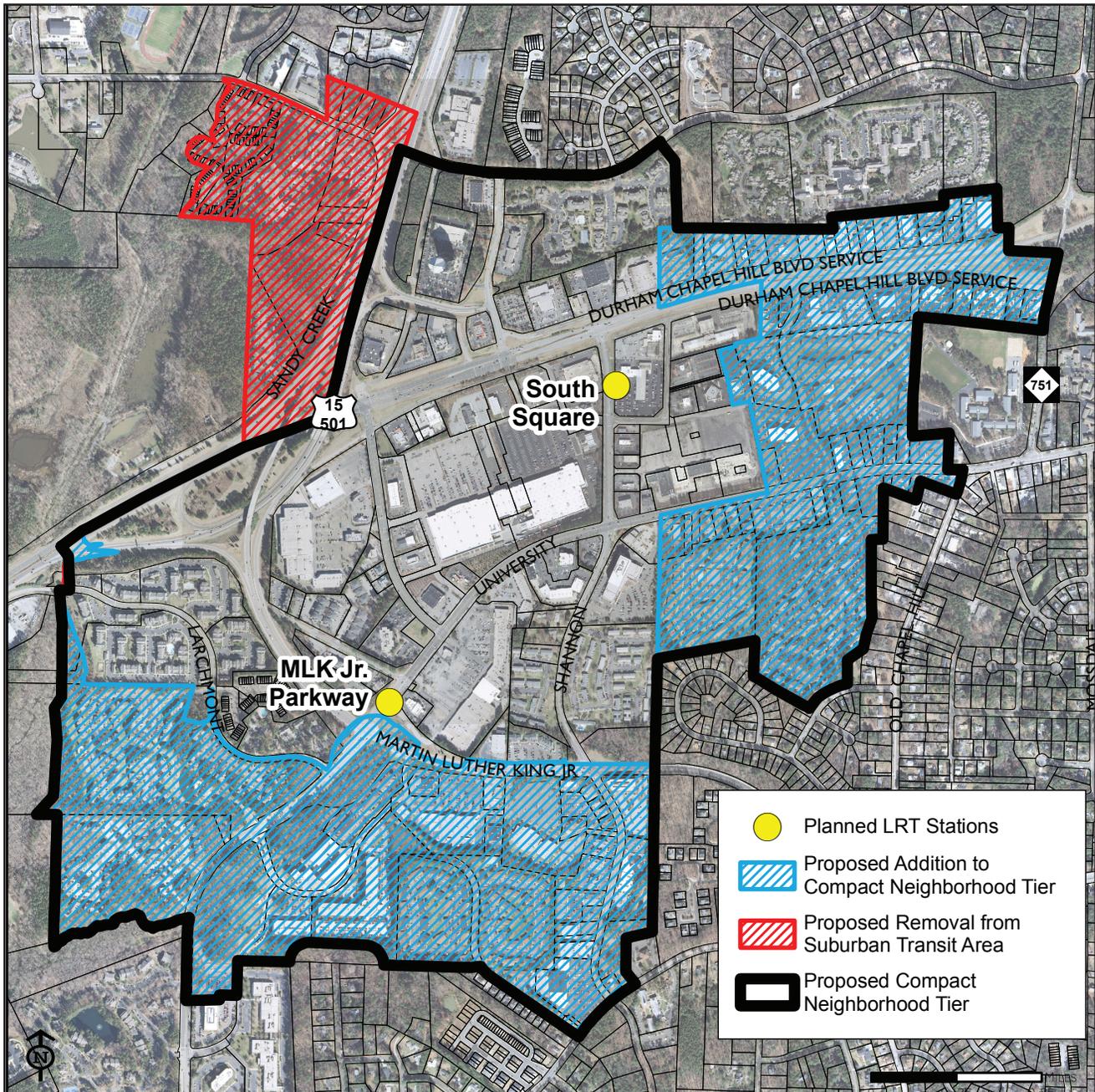
Proposed Changes to the Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map currently designates an area centered around the South Square shopping center as a 366-acre Suburban Transit Area. This original boundary made sense in 2005 when plans for the regional rail corridor included a rail station on Pickett Road and a South Square station site option on Westgate Drive. However, current light rail transit plans include a new station location near the intersection of MLK Jr. Parkway and University Drive and a South Square station location on Shannon Road between Durham-Chapel Hill Boulevard and University Drive. As plans for the Durham-Orange Light Rail station locations have changed over time conversion from a Suburban Transit Area to a Compact Neighborhood Tier needs to be considered, along with re-assessment of the boundaries. Staff recommends three-part amendments to the Future Land Use Map: Development Tier, Future Land Use Designations, Technical Updates. Each is explained in greater detail on the following pages.

Proposed Change: Development Tier

As directed by Comprehensive Plan policy 2.4.1e., convert the existing Suburban Transit Area into a Compact Neighborhood Tier with updated boundaries developed with community input. As shown in Figure 2, a 64 acre area on the northwest side of US Highway 15-501 is recommended to be removed from the Suburban Transit Area, while approximately 333 acres is recommended to be added to the Compact Neighborhood Tier generally south of MLK Jr. Parkway and west of Shannon Road. The changes result in a Compact Neighborhood Tier of approximately 708 acres.

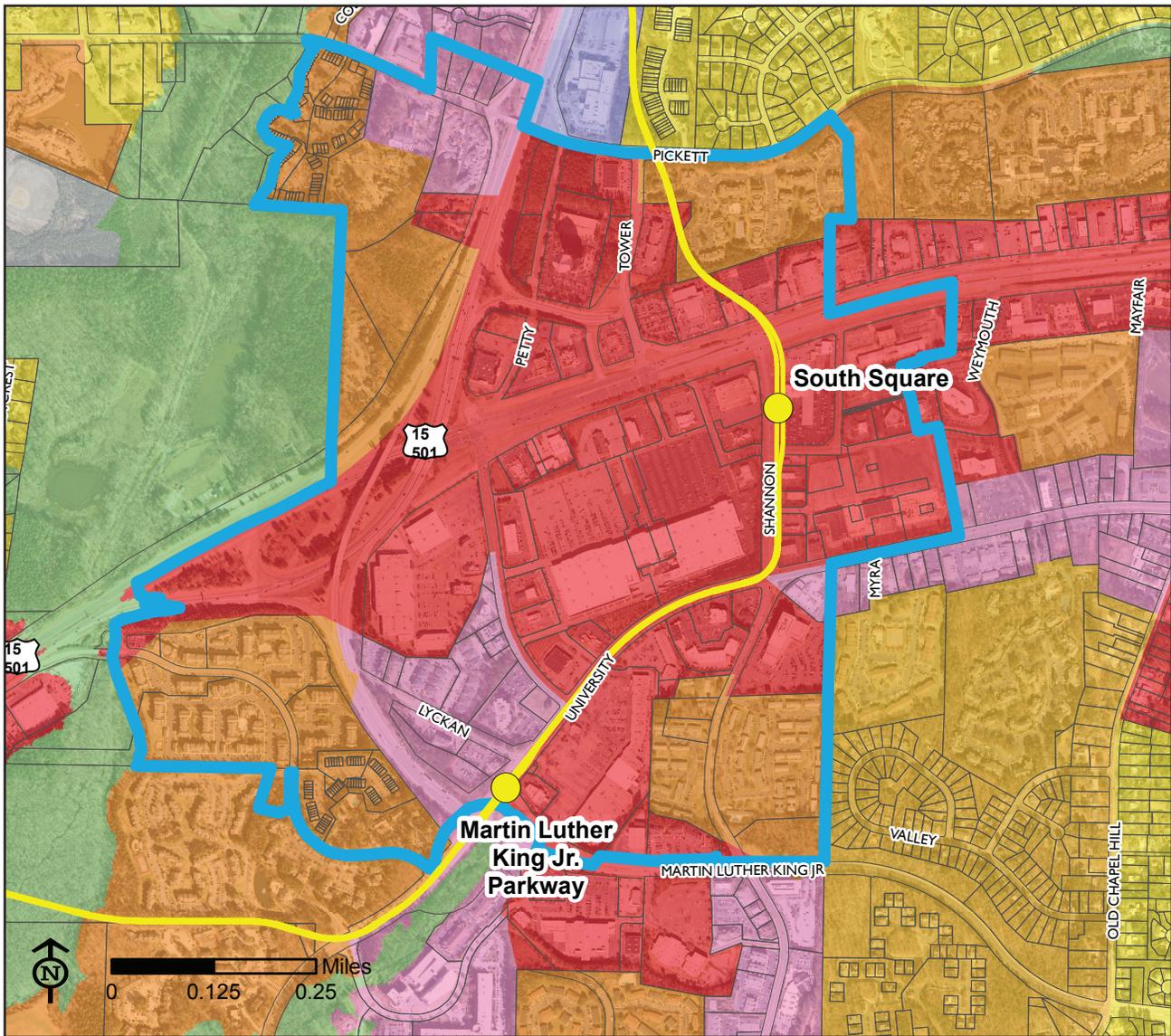
Figure 2: Proposed Development Tier Changes



Proposed Change: Future Land Use Designations

Amend the future land use designations shown in Figures 3 and 4 to Design District. This is the category on the future land use map that directs future zoning map changes to the Compact Design (CD) zoning district, a form-based district which encourages a mix of uses and emphasizes pedestrian-oriented design.

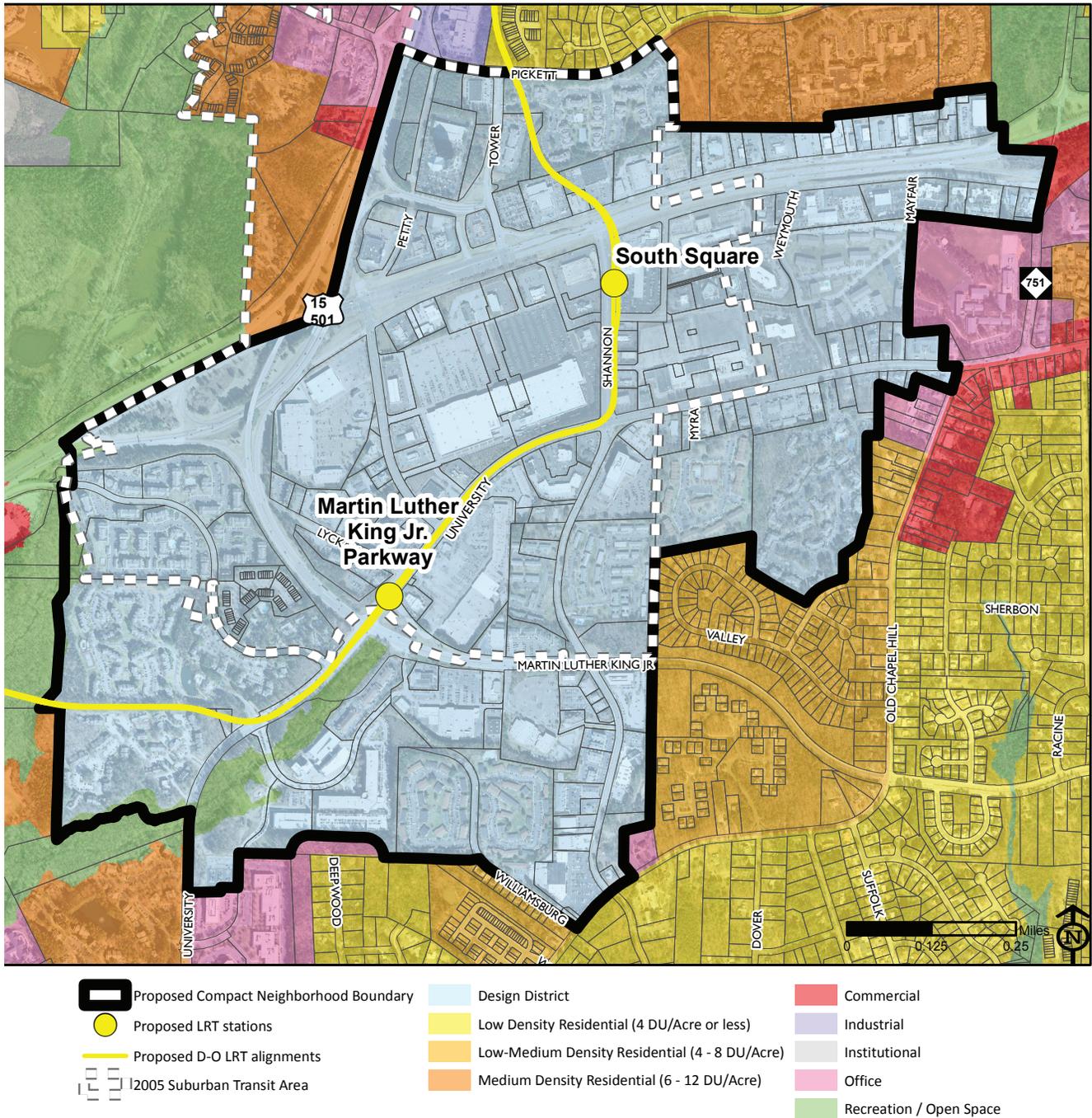
Figure 3: Current Future Land Use Map



- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| Low Density Residential (4 DU/Acre or less) | Industrial | 2005 Suburban Transit Area |
| Low-Medium Density Residential (4 - 8 DU/Acre) | Institutional | Proposed LRT stations |
| Medium Density Residential (6 - 12 DU/Acre) | Office | Proposed D-O LRT alignment |
| Commercial | Recreation / Open Space | |

This proposal would convert 345 acres of Commercial, 189 acres of Medium Density Residential, 114 acres of Office, and 40 acres of Low Medium Density Residential to Design District.

Figure 4: Proposed Future Land Use Map



Proposed Change: Technical Updates

Correct minor mapping errors that will result in small (approximately 1 acre or less) changes to the Future Land Use Map, mostly impacting the Right-of-Way.

Opportunities and Challenges for Compact Neighborhood Development

The transition of South Square/MLK Jr. Parkway into a walkable mixed use neighborhood will not happen overnight, but will be dependent on the pace of private development interest. Already developed in a suburban pattern (only 3 percent of land within a half-mile of the stations is currently identified as vacant), there are numerous challenges and opportunities:

Challenges:

- **The existing roadway network is limited.** This area lacks a grid network of streets to encourage a dispersal of traffic and provide more alternate routes for people on bikes and people walking. The result is large, congested roadways.
- **Large roads that carry significant traffic volume.** Roads that are multiple lanes with fast moving traffic are difficult for people on bikes and pedestrians to navigate safely and comfortably. In order to become a walkable and bikeable destination, a new network of smaller streets may be necessary.
- **Commercial strip development is economically viable.** Durham-Chapel Hill Boulevard (US Highway 15-501 Business) cuts through the South Square station area. For several decades this area has been a center for auto-oriented commercial development. Assembling parcels with good visibility and highway access might be challenging while the market for strip commercial development still exists.

Opportunities:

- **Many shopping center buildings are reaching the end of their functional “lifespan”.** Shopping center buildings are typically designed to last between 20-30 years, meaning that the potential for redevelopment or infill may be approaching in the foreseeable future.
- **Large parcels.** Especially near the proposed stations, there are several large underused parcels. Larger parcels are easier to assemble for redevelopment than smaller parcels with varied owners.
- **Build a new network of streets.** If redevelopment occurs, there are opportunities to construct additional streets through large parcels, which will alleviate pressure on existing roadway network.
- **Highway access.** Transit-oriented development benefits from decent access to the highway transportation network. In this area, US Highway 15-501 Bypass and Business routes provide good access and visibility to these station areas.
- **Next stop: Duke.** With few affordable opportunities to develop near Duke University, South Square station will be only one transit stop away from a major education and employment center.

Justification for the Compact Neighborhood Tier Boundary

The recommended Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary emerged as a result of community input and the adherence to the general boundary guidelines developed by staff at the onset of the project. While the boundary description is explained in detail in Figure 5, in general, it includes non-residential uses like shopping centers and office, as well as already-built higher density apartment complexes. Important environmental areas and single family neighborhoods are avoided. Where possible, property lines and recorded easements are followed.

Plan amendments are evaluated against criteria outlined in paragraph 3.4.7 of the Unified Development Ordinance:

Criteria 1: Whether the proposed change would be consistent with the intent, goals, objectives, policies, guiding principles and programs of any adopted plans.

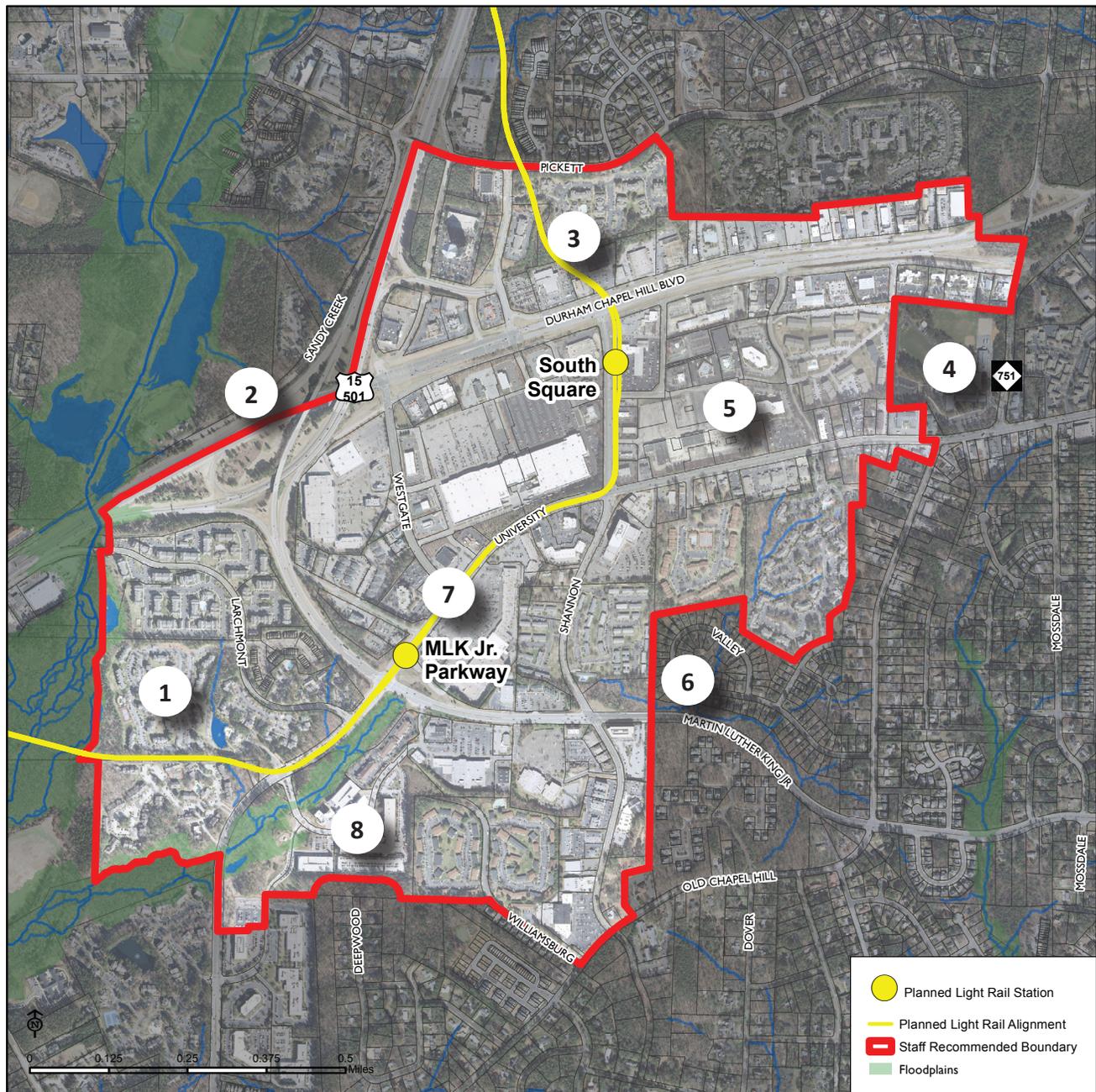
Staff believes the proposed boundaries for the South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood Tier are consistent with numerous city and county goals and policies. For many of the reasons outlined in the introduction, the Durham Comprehensive Plan includes goals, objectives, and policies in support of Compact Neighborhoods surrounding regional rail stations (Policy 2.1.2e., Objective 2.2.4, Policy 2.4.1a.). Amending the Future Land Use Map to Compact Neighborhood is a step toward the vision of higher density, mixed use and walkable neighborhoods that are supported by transit.

A consistent goal within both the City and County Strategic Plans recognizes the need to improve the quality of neighborhoods by improving transportation choice through increasing access to transit, walking and biking. Compact Neighborhoods encourage more density, mix of uses, and walkability around light rail stations, and thus aid the City and County in realizing those goals.

Criteria 2: Whether the proposed change would be compatible with the existing land use pattern and/or designated future land uses.

Areas identified to be a part of the Compact Neighborhood Tier are largely already developed as either commercial, office, or multi-family residential, and do not infringe on protected open spaces or single-family residential neighborhoods. As a general rule, the most intense development is desired closest to the light rail stations, with densities tapering off toward the edges of the Tier.

Figure 5: Compact Neighborhood Tier Proposed Boundary Explanation



Numbers shown on the map correspond with notes on the following page. Proposed boundaries are a result of community input and adherence to general boundary guidelines developed by staff at the onset of the project. These guidelines are described in the introductory chapter.

1. Existing Apartment and Townhome Complexes.

North of University Drive, and to the west of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, is a quadrant of apartment and townhome communities generally built around 1990 (Alden Place was built later in 2001). These are moderately dense (two to four stories) complexes that are generally consistent with densities desired on the edges of Compact Neighborhoods. While redevelopment of these apartment complexes is not foreseeable in the near-term future, the proximity of the Martin Luther King Jr. Station may someday prompt a denser development pattern. To avoid including sensitive environmental land, the Compact Neighborhood Tier's western boundary follows an existing sewer easement rather than a property line.

2. **US 15-501.** The interchange of US 15-501 Bypass and Business routes creates an impenetrable pedestrian barrier, and a concise boundary for the Compact Neighborhood Tier. Areas to the north and west are primarily parks/open space and single family residential.

3. **North of Durham-Chapel Hill Boulevard.** The Durham-Chapel Hill Boulevard cuts through the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier. While it is a barrier to accessing the South Square Station from the north, there are long-term opportunities to rethink the boulevard's design. Promoting better connections between the station and areas to the north would connect existing employment (University Tower) and create opportunities to redevelop a strip commercial thoroughfare. Pickett Road and the Forest at Duke form the northern boundary of the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier.

4. **Durham Academy.** Durham Academy is not included in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier because of the nature and location of the site. It is beyond the 1/2 mile walk zone and is

currently a suburban style school campus that would not provide or receive benefit if included in the Tier.

5. **East of Shannon Road.** Redevelopment and infill opportunities are available immediately east of the South Square Station, especially north of University Drive. Large, underutilized parcels in such proximity to a light rail station provide good opportunities for transit oriented development.

6. **Single Family Neighborhoods.** Single family neighborhoods, such as Valley Run, were not included in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary. As established neighborhoods unlikely to change in character in the coming years, maintaining current land use and zoning is advised.

7. **Shopping Centers.** A significant amount of land in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier is developed as big box shopping centers, such as Parkway Plaza, South Square, and West Gate. By the time the light rail is in operation (estimated 2026), many of these buildings may be reaching the end of their functional lifespan, meaning they will either need significant rehabilitation or could pose as opportunities for more dense, mixed use, and walkable redevelopment.

8. **Blue Cross Blue Shield NC.** Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina is in the process of consolidating its operations to a Durham campus, located southwest of the proposed Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway Station. The campus is undergoing major new construction and renovation to accommodate all employees, so it is not expected that it will redevelop again in the near term future. However, because it is such an employment destination and in such proximity to the LRT station, a portion of the campus was included in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier.

Criteria 3: Whether the proposed change would create substantial adverse impacts in the adjacent area or the City or County in general.

This section will evaluate and discuss what potential environmental, housing and property values, transportation, and community service impacts could arise as a result of implementing a policy in support of Compact Neighborhoods. While in many cases it is too early to determine specific impacts, broader issues are discussed and actions are proposed that are intended to allieviate potential negative impacts.

Environment

Whenever proposals to increase density are on the table, a common concern is that it will negatively impact environmental systems. As an almost fully developed suburban commercial center, many of the natural characteristics of this area are no longer present. A tributary of Sandy Creek does extend along the south side of University Drive beginning at Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. Vegetation and a network of private trails protect the stream from surrounding development and infrastructure.

Natural Heritage Areas. There are no documented Natural Heritage Areas within the boundaries of the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier.

Tree Coverage. Current UDO standards do not require tree coverage for development with Compact Neighborhood Tiers, but do require street trees and vehicular use are landscaping.

Riparian Buffers. Because the South Square/MLK Jr. Boulevard Compact Neighborhood Tier is not within a Watershed Protection Overlay, the width of stream buffers would not be impacted (50 feet is required regardless).

Impervious Surface Area. A large percentage of the area has already been converted to impervious surface (approximately 65%). It is unlikely that increasing density through redevelopment and infill of surface parking lots will result in significant land cover conversion.

Housing and Property Values

Across the country, a common trend in areas near light rail transit is the increase of land values.^{1,2} While this can be beneficial to the broader tax base, there can be some unintended negative consequences for low income households and renters. In 2014 the City Council and Board of County Commissioners adopted a resolution that at least 15% of all housing within ½ mile of proposed transit stations should be affordable to those making 60% or less than Area Median Income. Housing is generally considered unaffordable if rent or mortgage payments plus utility costs exceed 30% of income.

The most recent Planning Department data (January 2015) shows that 47.6% of occupied housing within a ½ mile of the South Square Station is affordable to those earning 60% or less of Area Median Income. The figures for the MLK Jr. Station are somewhat higher, with 64.8% of housing qualifying as affordable. While this proposed Compact Neighborhood offers affordable living options today, preserving that affordability is of significant importance in the future as light rail and increased development interest come to the area.

Through its Affordable Housing and Transit initiatives, the City is taking steps to create and preserve affordability. Enterprise Community Partners has presented recommendations to the City Council, including that the Planning Department evaluate the feasibility of an enhanced density bonus in Compact Design zoning districts near proposed light rail stations. This possibility will be fully explored prior to any city-initiated zoning of Compact Neighborhood Tiers.

Transportation

Despite increased transit service and enhanced sidewalks and bike facilities, the automobile is likely to remain the dominant mode of transportation for the foreseeable future. The area around the South Square and MLK Jr. stations is already developed as an auto-oriented center with highway (US Highway 15-501) and major thoroughfare (Martin Luther King Jr. and University Drive) access. While some bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure exists, future redevelopment presents opportunities to expand the network and create a multi-modal district.

Traffic. Level of Service (LOS) is a common measure of traffic flow and density of vehicles. For city roads in Compact Neighborhoods, where increased “street-life” is encouraged, Comprehensive Plan Policy 8.1.2a. indicates Level of Service E, which allows for some congestion, is acceptable. The policy for state roads is to maintain Level of Service D, which allows for faster traffic flow.

As part of a long range transportation planning effort, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) conducts a Deficiency Analysis to demonstrate which roadways will exceed Level of Service (LOS) standards given future growth projections. Because it is premature to estimate with any accuracy the amount of traffic generated by future development and redevelopment in the South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood Tier, the Deficiency Analysis is the best proxy.

The Deficiency Analysis assumes population and employment figures from the year 2040 on the current transportation network in order to highlight what roads will need future improvements. While the volume of traffic is expected to increase to some degree on every

roadway, listed below are roads where traffic volume is expected to exceed roadway capacity when operating at a Level of Service D.

- Tower Boulevard (US 15-501 entrance ramp to Durham Chapel Hill Boulevard)
- University Drive (Garrett Road to Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (Shannon Road to Old Chapel Hill Road)

As part of a larger revision to the Unified Development Ordinance, the Planning Department is working with the Transportation and Public Works departments in developing standard cross-sections for new streets within Compact Neighborhoods. These will largely follow complete streets principles: minimizing unnecessary pavement width, and encouraging on-street parking, bike lanes, and sidewalks. These street cross-sections are envisioned to be applied to new collector streets and new local streets. The UDO already includes requirements to improve connectivity (a maximum 400 foot block length) and requirements for streetscape features, including landscaping and street furniture.

Pedestrian and Bicycle. The existing networks of sidewalks and bike lanes in the South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood area are limited. While major roads, like Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway and University Drive do have sidewalks, they form a limited network. The Durham Walks! Pedestrian Plan and the Durham Comprehensive Bicycle Plan recommend additional segments of sidewalks and bike facilities, as can be seen in Figure 6 and 7. In addition to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, there are a number of trails planned (Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan) through Sandy Creek Park and other natural areas. These can be seen in Figure 7.

As mentioned previously, if redevelopment occurs under Compact Neighborhood standards, there would be opportunities to create an additional street network. Sidewalks with enhanced streetscape features, such as benches, trash receptacles, and trees/planter boxes would be required. Enhancing the network of streets and adding amenities will help this area, over time, become more pedestrian oriented.

Under the broad umbrella of Station Area Planning, the Planning Department is collaborating with other departments on the Station Area Strategic Infrastructure (SASI) study. This study is intended to identify and prioritize bicycle and pedestrian projects that will enable safe and convenient access to the light rail stations.

Services and Infrastructure

The proposed South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood Tier is already within the city limits of Durham. Future development that increases density may cause an influx in demand in the following areas:

Water and Wastewater. Water main distribution systems serve to supply potable water and to support fire suppression throughout the community. A well-designed system can maintain adequate pressure to support demand of individual properties and provide high flow rates to fire hydrants/fire suppression systems in emergency situations. The material and age of the system's water mains can be factors in system breaks, leaks, and pressure and flow degradations.

Wastewater or sanitary sewer infrastructure consists of a collection of gravity flow sewer mains, lift stations, and pressurized force mains that transport sewage to a wastewater treatment plant. An efficient collection system has the capacity to accommodate all of the existing land uses within its particular sewer basin. Beyond capacity, the material and age of pipes within a system can also impact its effectiveness.

The City of Durham maintains water and sanitary sewer infrastructure within the proposed South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood Tier. Wastewater from the station area is treated by the South Durham Reclamation Facility. Based on communication with the City of Durham's Water Management Department, because the area is already heavily developed, the system appears to be adequate in size and extent to accommodate proposed changes to land use.

Figure 6: Existing and Proposed Pedestrian Network

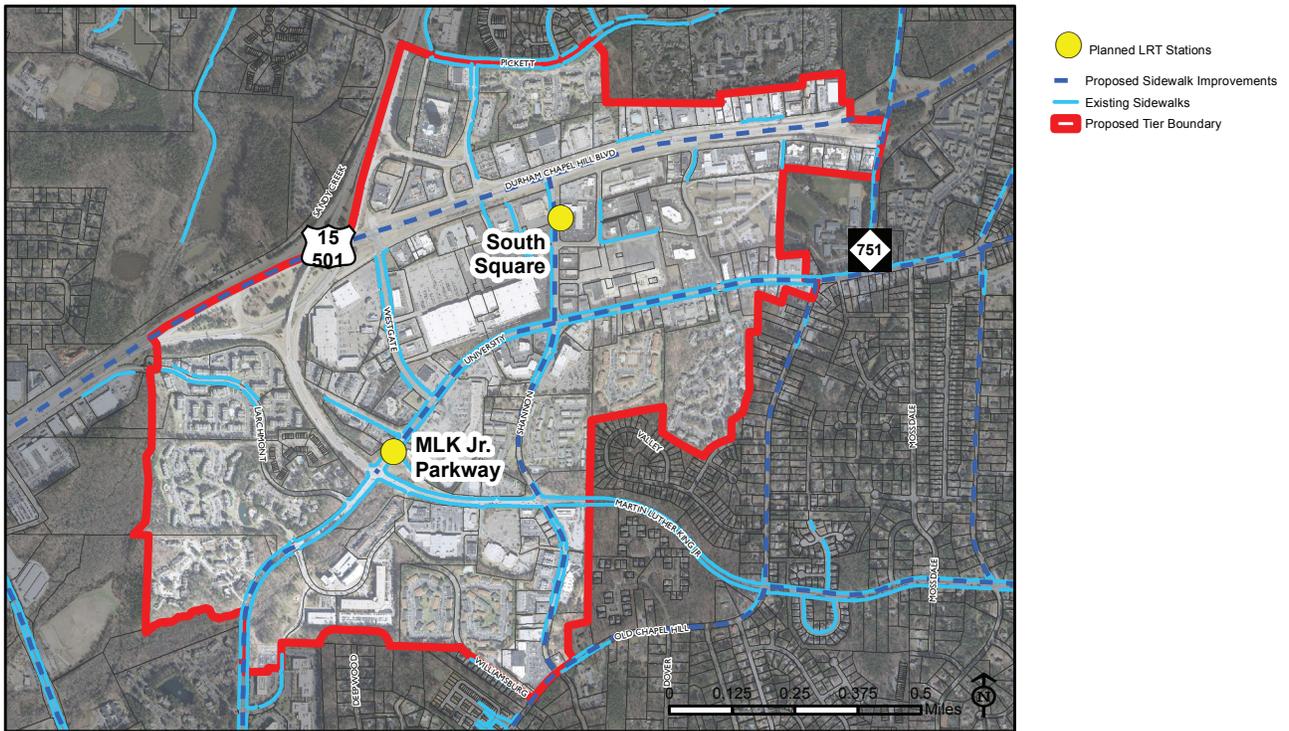
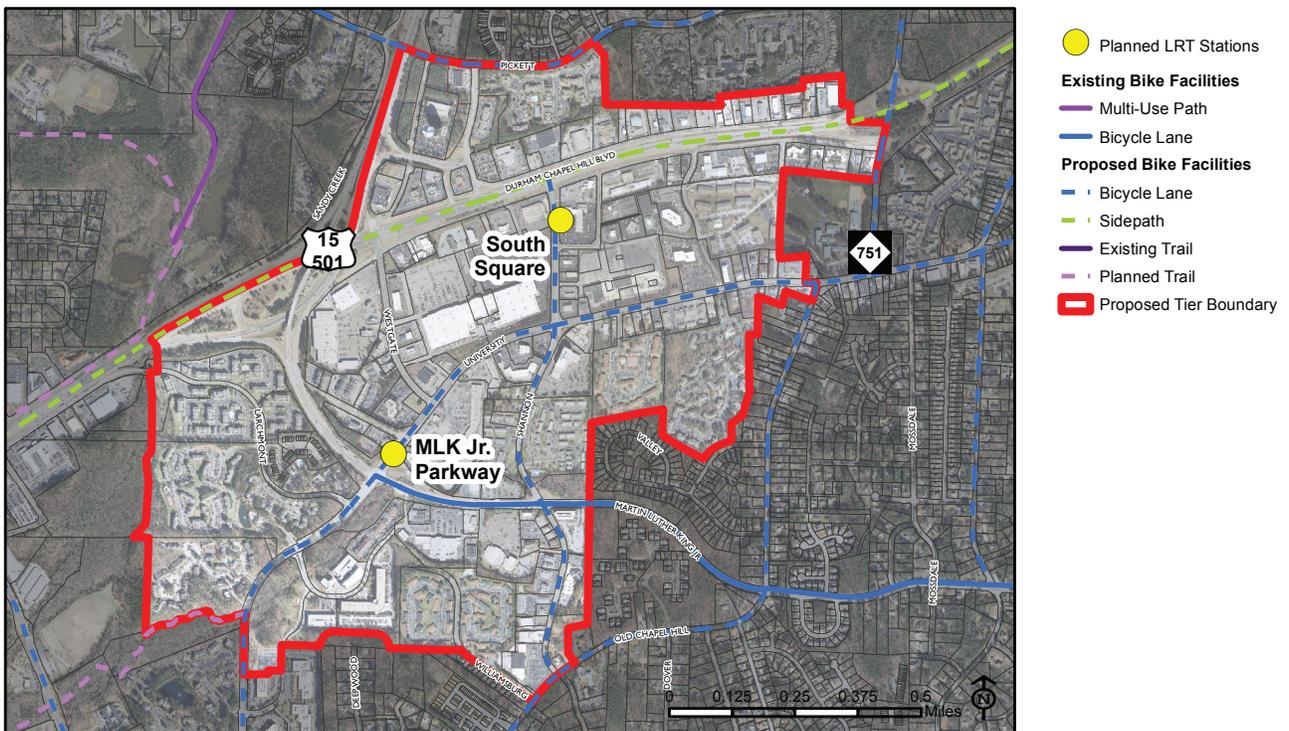


Figure 7: Existing and Proposed Bicycle and Trail Network



Schools. Students from the proposed South Square/MLK Jr. Compact Neighborhood are in the attendance zones of four schools: Forest View Elementary, Hope Valley Elementary, Githens Middle School, and Jordan High School. Figure 8 summarizes information on school capacity and projected student enrollment from the Durham Public School's *2013 Long Range Facility Study*.

The Durham Comprehensive Plan specifies a system wide level of service standard of 110% capacity. Once that level is reached, policy 11.1.1b. directs the Planning Department to consider mitigation commitments from private developers or recommend denial of zoning map changes that cause student generation to increase above the rate of current zoning. While the policy is applied at a system wide basis because of liberal magnet

and transfer policies, it should be noted that Githens Middle School is expected to exceed 110% capacity by the year 2020. There are currently no scheduled renovations to expand capacity.

Amending the Future Land Use Map to Compact Neighborhood could lead to additional student enrollment over time. While it is premature to determine with any certainty what the impact will be, Durham Public Schools has been made aware of these potential impacts. The Planning Department is committed to working with the school system to reflect changes to the Future Land Use Map in the next iteration of the Long Range Facility Study, which is updated every two to four years.

Figure 8: Projected Student Enrollment

School	2012-13	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Forest View	659	658	664	670	679	680	681	680	678	679	686	697
Hope Valley	628	653	656	659	664	665	665	665	664	664	668	674
Githens Middle	852	999	934	912	913	915	916	1015	1093	1129	1130	1131
Jordan High	1810	1715	1719	1761	1766	1798	1846	1762	1754	1758	1779	1836

Capacity Legend



Criteria 4: Whether the subject site is of adequate shape and size to accommodate the proposed change.

The proposed South Square Compact Neighborhood Tier is 708 acres, and is of adequate shape and size to accommodate the proposed change.

Amendments to Tier Boundaries are also evaluated against additional criteria outlined in paragraph 3.4.8 of the Unified Development Ordinance:

Criteria A: The site is contiguous to the proposed Tier.

The proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier forms a contiguous area and does not leave an isolated pocket of Suburban Tier.

Criteria B: The site is not in the drainage basin for Lake Michie or Little River or in the one-mile critical area around Jordan or Falls Reservoirs.

The proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier is not located in the drainage basin for Lake Michie or Little River and is not within a watershed protection critical area.

Criteria C: The extension does not violate any agreements with neighboring jurisdictions.

The proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier is entirely within the City of Durham jurisdiction and does not violate agreements with neighboring jurisdictions.

Criteria D: If the proposal is to expand the Suburban Tier, extending utilities to service the site is determined to be technically feasible by the Public Works Director or designee and will not result in inordinate cost to the City.

This evaluation criterion does not apply; the proposal does not expand the Suburban Tier.

Endnotes

¹ Booz Allen Hamilton. "Impacts of Rail Transit on Property Values." <http://reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/bestpractice083.pdf>

² Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy. "Maintaining Diversity in America's Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change." October 2010. http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/TRN_Equity_final.pdf

This page is intentionally blank.