

# Alston Avenue 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 Alston Avenue light rail station. Opportunities, challenges and potential impacts of the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier will be evaluated.

## Existing Land Use and Development

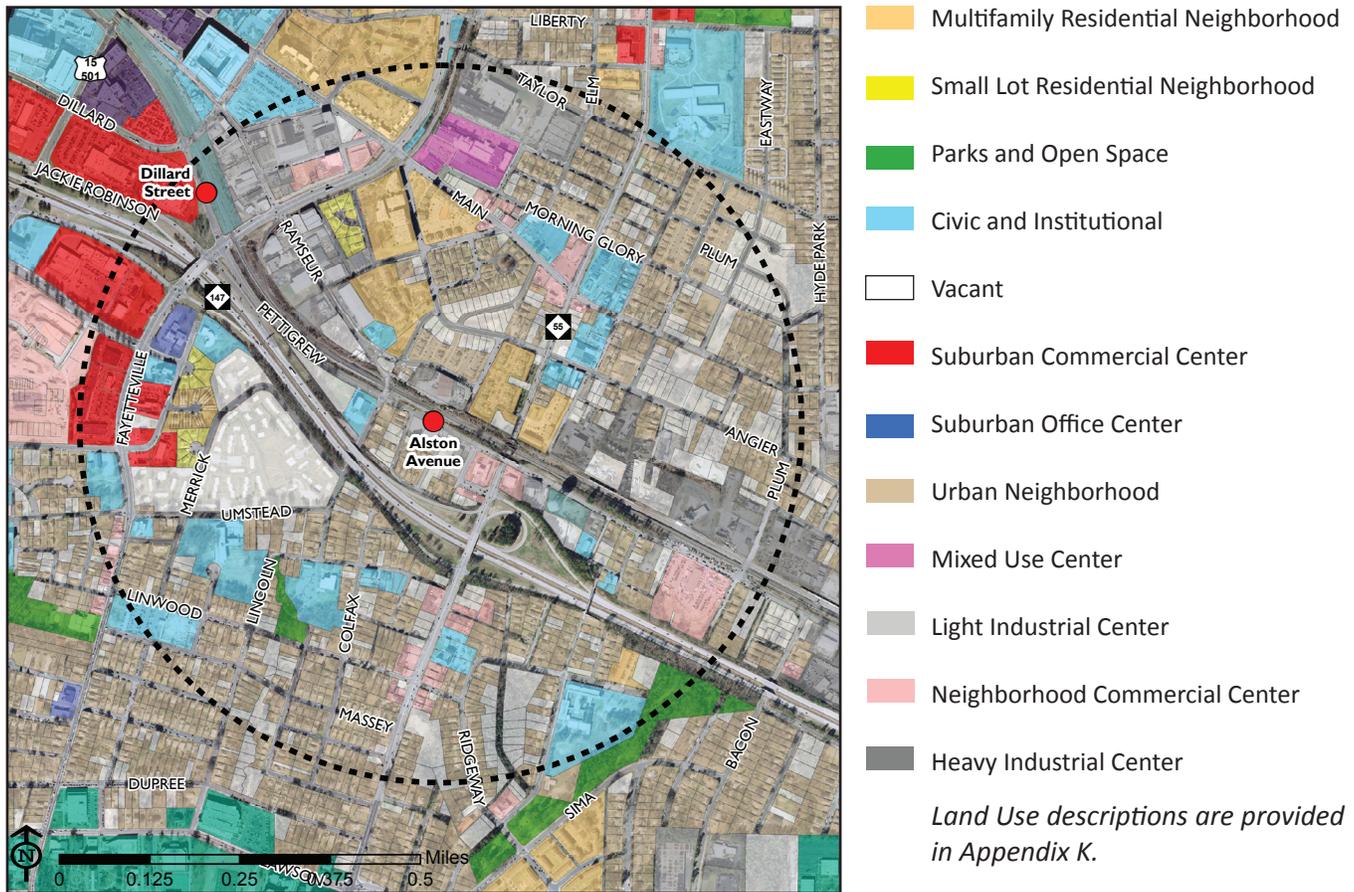
As one of the oldest parts of Durham, the area around the proposed Alston Avenue station consists of active and abandoned industrial businesses located along or near the freight rail corridor, along with single-family houses, vacant lots, and civic uses. Several former industrial textile mill buildings, Golden Belt and the Hosiery Mill, have been adaptively re-used and are now residences, offices, and commercial spaces. A number of National Register Historic Districts, including Golden Belt, East Durham, Stokesdale, and the Cotton Mills Village, significant as single-family neighborhoods, are also in the vicinity. 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 already designates an area centered around the proposed Alston Avenue station as a 302-acre Compact Neighborhood. The original boundary adopted in 2005 extended south of the Durham Freeway and north to Taylor Street. In 2006, the boundary was amended to exclude areas south of the Durham Freeway. In light of a significant development opportunity immediately south of the freeway and the presence of intact and historic neighborhoods, re-evaluation of the Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries ought to be considered.

Staff recommends three-part amendments to the Future Land Use Map: Development Tier, Future Land Use Designations and Technical Updates. Each is explained in greater detail on the following pages.

Figure 1: Existing Land Use and Development Map

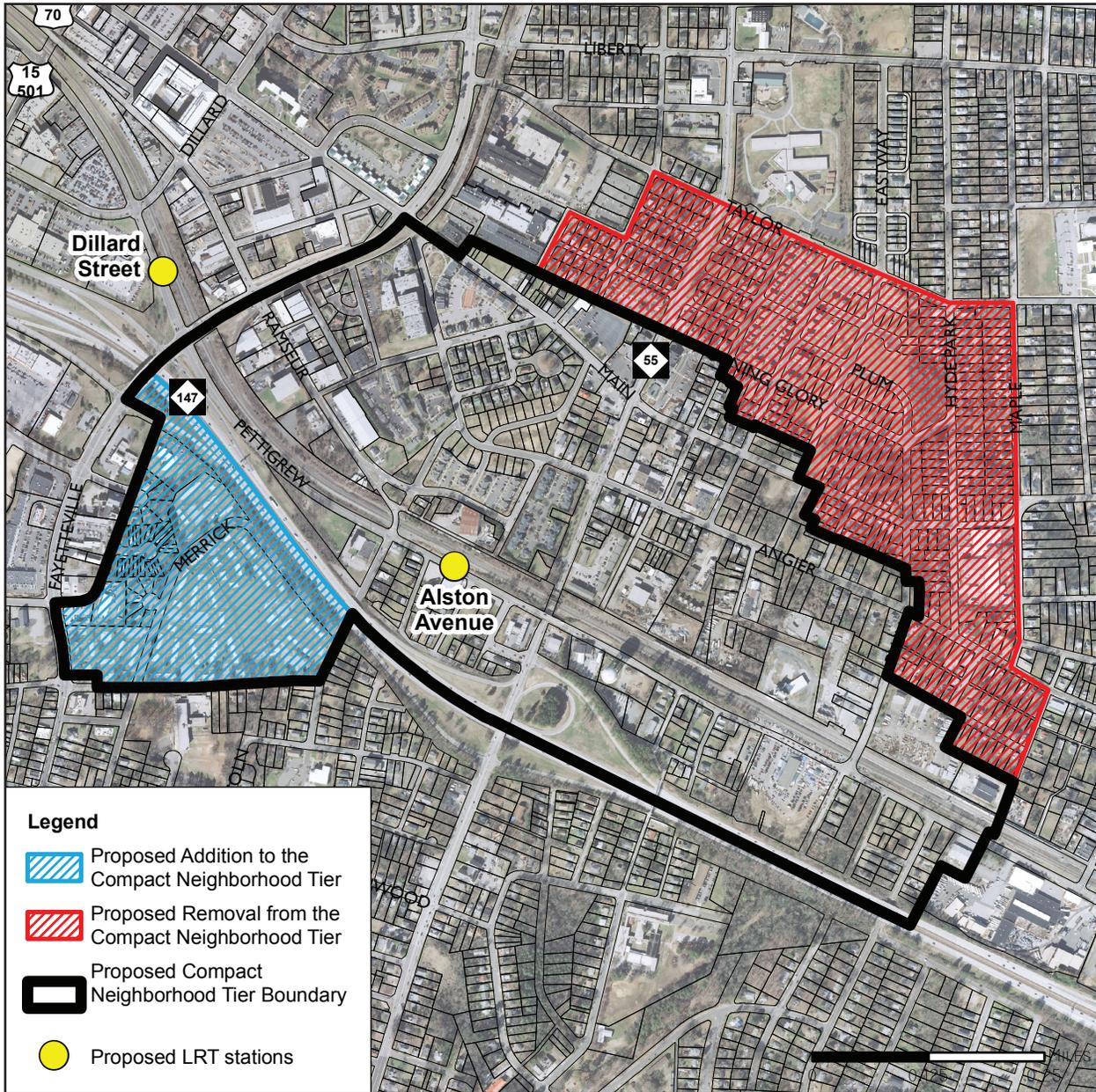


Land Use Type	Acres	Percent of Half Mile Area
Right-Of-Way	154.7	31%
Urban Neighborhood	106.9	21%
Vacant	78.6	16%
Civic	39.1	8%
Light Industrial Center	30.6	6%
Multi-Family Residential	26.9	5%
Neighborhood Commercial Center	17.6	4%
Suburban Commercial Center	14.5	3%
Heavy Industrial Center	12.9	3%
Mixed Use Center	5.4	1%
Small Lot Residential Neighborhood	4.0	1%
Utility	3.4	1%
Parks and Open Space	3.2	1%
Suburban Office Center	1.8	0%
Mixed Use Neighborhood	0.4	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>500.0</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Proposed Change: Development Tier**

Update the Compact Neighborhood Tier with boundaries developed with community input. As shown in Figure 2, an approximately 85 acre area that encompasses portions of the Golden Belt and East Durham National Register Historic Districts and Eastway Village is recommended to be removed from the Compact Neighborhood Tier. Approximately 38 acres is recommended to be added to the Compact Neighborhood Tier south of the Durham Freeway, including the former Fayette Place parcel. The changes result in a Compact Neighborhood Tier of approximately 255 acres.

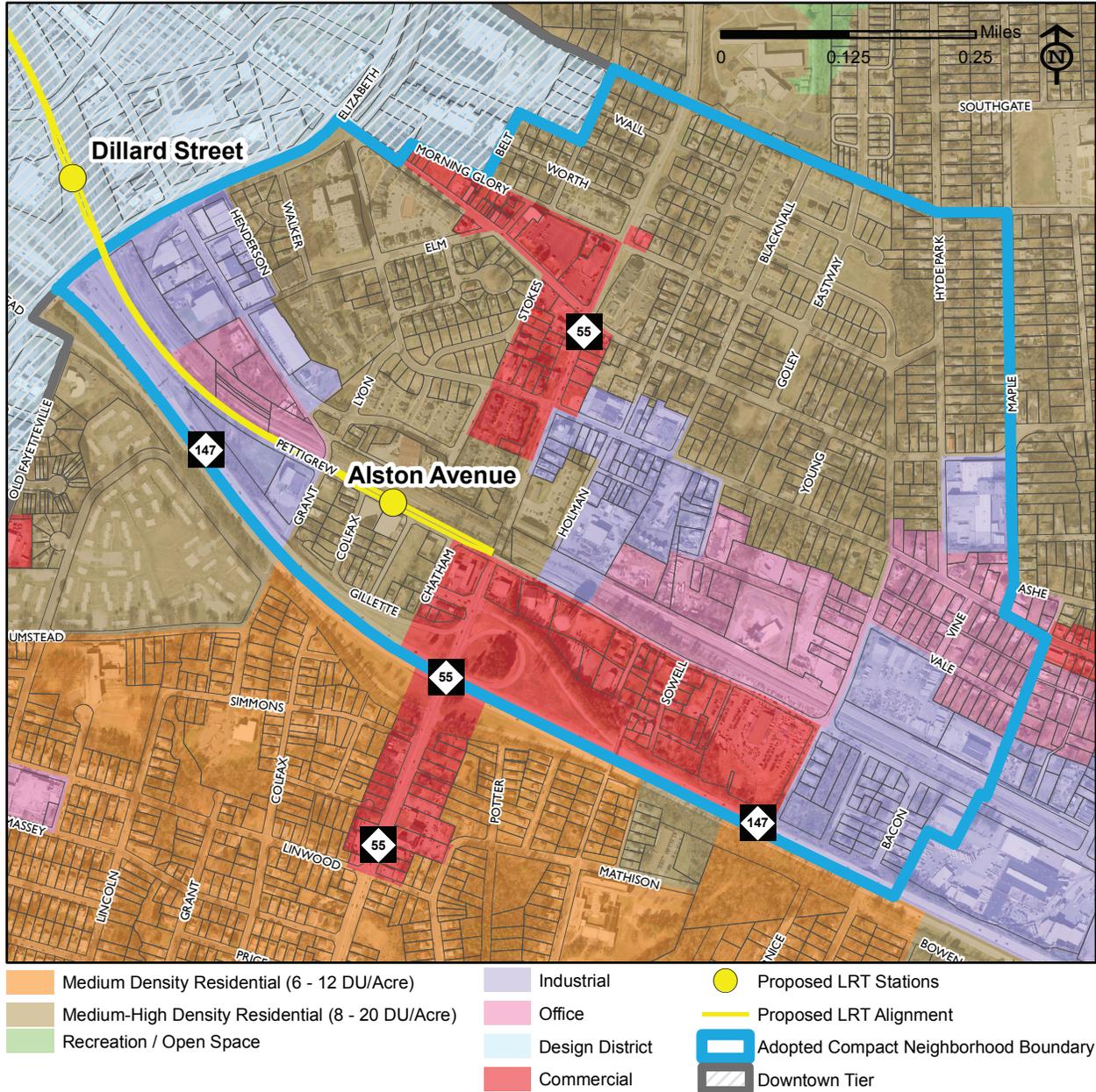
**Figure 2: Proposed Development Tier Changes**



**Proposed Change: Future Land Use Designations**

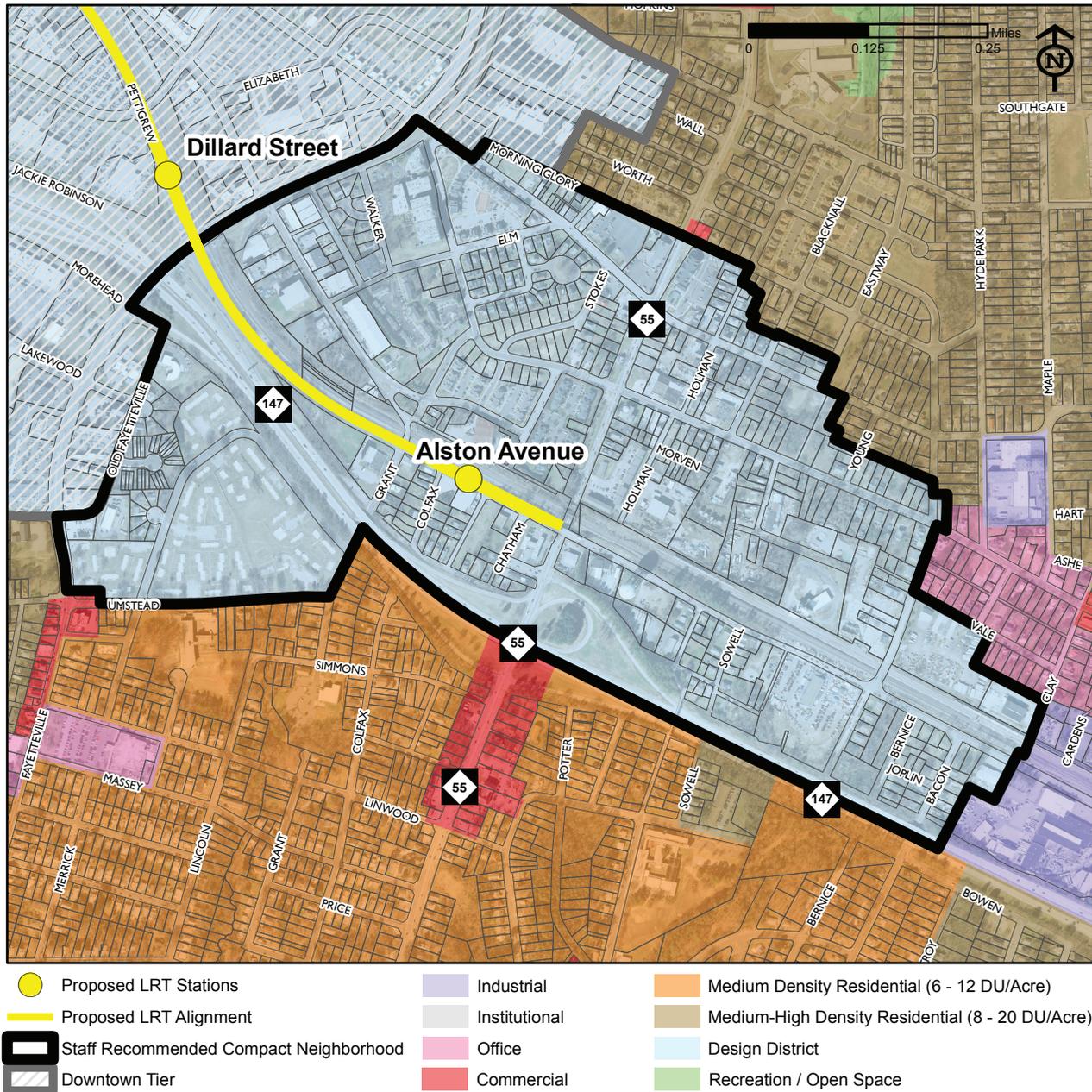
Amend the future land use designations shown in Figures 3 and 4 to Design District. This is the category on the future land use map that directs future zoning map changes to the Compact Design (CD) zoning district, a form-based district which encourages a mix of uses and emphasizes pedestrian-oriented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

Figure 3: Current Future Land Use Map



This proposal would convert 49 acres of Commercial, 59 acres of Industrial, 120 acres of Medium-High Density Residential, and 27 acres of Office 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 area around Alston Avenue already exhibits some characteristics of a Compact Neighborhood: a grid pattern of streets, urban densities, and a mix of uses. Still, there are numerous challenges and opportunities:

### Challenges:

- **Equitable Neighborhood Change.** This neighborhood's proximity to Downtown Durham and access to the proposed Alston Avenue Station will likely mean increased development interest. Rising land values can result in increased rents and home values which can accelerate housing turnover and the displacement of long term owners and renters. Striving for neighborhood change that is equitable and benefits all is a significant challenge.
- **Freight-oriented development.** A number of existing businesses located along the railroad corridor rely on freight spur connections. These are likely to be viable businesses even with the introduction of light rail. While heavy industrial development is not necessarily consistent with the vision of a Compact Neighborhood, there are limited sites for these businesses to relocate in Durham.
- **Contamination and brownfield clean-up.** Industrial uses can leave pollution and hazardous materials behind, contaminating the soil. These are known as brownfield sites and are often difficult and expensive to clean up. The expense of rehabilitation may make redevelopment cost-prohibitive.
- **Small parcels with varied ownership.** Especially near the station, land has been subdivided into small lots. Smaller parcels with varied owners are harder to assemble for redevelopment than larger parcels with a singular owner.
- **Station Access.** The proposed Alston Avenue Station is located on Pettigrew Street, between the Durham Freeway and the North Carolina Railroad Company corridor. While there are ongoing efforts to improve accessibility (Station Area Strategic Infrastructure study), vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle access to this site is a challenge.

### Opportunities:

- **Next stop: Downtown.** With fewer and fewer affordable opportunities to develop in Downtown Durham, the Alston Avenue station will be only one short transit stop away from a major employment, service, and entertainment center.
- **Infill Opportunities.** Recent data shows that nearly 80 acres of land within a half-mile of the Alston Avenue station is undeveloped. These vacancies provide a range of opportunities for infill development that would not displace existing residents or businesses.
- **Highway access.** Transit-oriented development still benefits from decent access to the highway transportation network. In this area, the Durham Freeway (NC Highway 147) provides good access.

## 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 undeveloped land and non-residential uses generally east of Fayetteville Street and south of Morning Glory Avenue. Intact blocks of single-family housing and historic districts 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.**

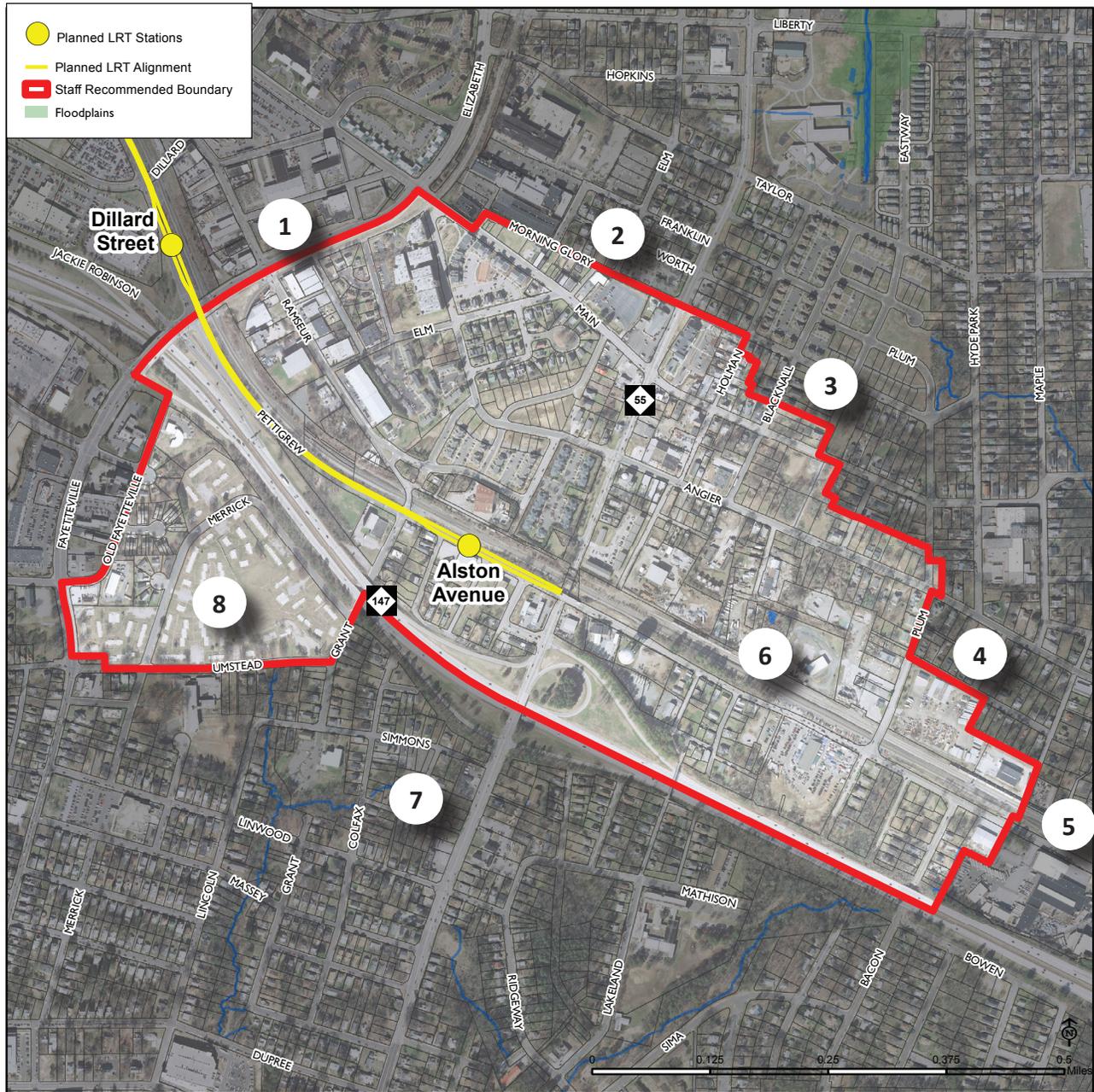
Staff believes the proposed boundaries for the Alston Avenue Compact Neighborhood Tier are consistent with numerous city and county goals and policies. For many of the reasons outlined in the introduction, the Durham Comprehensive Plan includes goals, objectives, and policies in support of Compact Neighborhoods 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.**

Much of the area identified to be a part of the updated Compact Neighborhood Tier has been included in the Comprehensive Plan since its adoption. Therefore, the proposed change is largely consistent with previously adopted policies for future growth and will not dramatically impact the existing land use pattern.

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. Fayetteville Street.** Fayetteville Street as the western boundary aligns with the Downtown Tier to promote continuity in the urban environment.

**2. Golden Belt.** Residential blocks of the Golden Belt National Register Historic District informed the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary to preserve its single-family residential character. This is consistent with input heard from the community. Included in the proposed boundary is the non-residential block between Main Street and Morning Glory Avenue. This block includes commercial buildings and vacant properties. Inclusion in the Compact Neighborhood Tier may enable more businesses to use the existing building stock or to develop on the vacant properties.

**3. Eastway Village.** The proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier avoids intact blocks of single-family homes and Eastway Village. It follows mid-block boundaries so that both sides of the street are of similar character.

**4. East Durham National Register Historic District.** The East Durham National Register Historic District informs the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary. Recognized as a historic single-family neighborhood, land use and zoning regulations should be maintained to preserve that character. This is consistent with input heard from the community.

**5. Angier Driver.** Angier-Driver, a commercial node located just off of the map, was not included in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary; however, updating zoning regulations to enable more businesses to use the existing building stock should be examined in the future.

**6. Industrial Uses.** Industrial uses on either side of the North Carolina Railroad Company's corridor are included in the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary to discourage uses that are incompatible with residential areas and to encourage environmental clean-up.

**7. South of NC 147.** With the exception of the former Fayette Place, the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary does not include neighborhoods south of NC 147 (the Durham Freeway). As established neighborhoods, current land use and zoning regulations should be maintained so that the character of the neighborhood does not change. This echoes the strong consensus heard from the community.

**8. Former Fayette Place.** The Former Fayette Place offers an opportunity for large-scale mixed use and potentially mixed income development with great access to both the Alston Avenue station and NC 147. The proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundary aligns with the Downtown Tier to the west.

### 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 urban area, many of the natural characteristics of this area are no longer present.

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

**Tree Coverage.** Because Alston Avenue is already designated as a Compact Neighborhood, the ordinance does not require a minimum tree coverage, and very limited tree coverage requirements in the Urban Tier. Instead, to promote a more urban environment, street trees and landscaping in vehicle use areas are required.

**Riparian Buffers.** Because the proposed Alston Avenue 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 56%). It is unlikely that increasing density through redevelopment and infill of vacant 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.<sup>1,2</sup> 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 55.8% of occupied housing within a ½ mile of the Alston Avenue Station is affordable to those earning 60% or less of Area Median Income. 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

As an urban neighborhood, the area near the Alston Avenue station has a dense network of local streets and major thoroughfares. The light rail corridor parallels the Durham Freeway and freight railroad corridor, which split the station area into a northern half and a southern half causing some difficulty for station accessibility. Within a ½ mile of the station sidewalks form a relatively complete network in residential neighborhoods, though gaps do exist. Plans to widen Alston Avenue, the principal north-south street will help ease congestion and build improved sidewalks.

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

As part of a long range transportation planning effort, the DCHC Metropolitan Planning Organization conducts a Deficiency Analysis to demonstrate which roadways will exceed 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 Alston Avenue 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 LOS D.

- S Alston Avenue (E Main Street to NC 147)
- Durham Freeway (S Alston Avenue to Fayetteville Street)
- Durham Freeway (S Alston Avenue to S Briggs Avenue)

**Alston Avenue Widening Project.** The North Carolina Department of Transportation is pursuing a project to widen Alston Avenue from two lanes to four from the Durham Freeway north to Holloway Street. The widening project will provide sidewalks and temporary bike lanes (north of Main Street). The project is already funded and planned to be bid out for construction in 2015, with construction expected to take a number of years.

**Pedestrian and Bicycle.** Within the proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier, sidewalks form a relatively complete network in residential neighborhoods, though gaps do exist. 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 natural areas that would build off of the Bryant Bridge and connect through City parks. These can be seen in Figure 7.

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 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 Alston Avenue Compact Neighborhood Tier. While there is an extensive network in place, the age and condition of pipes can impair flow. Rehabilitation of aging infrastructure will likely be needed in the foreseeable future (5 years).

Figure 6: Existing and Proposed Pedestrian Network

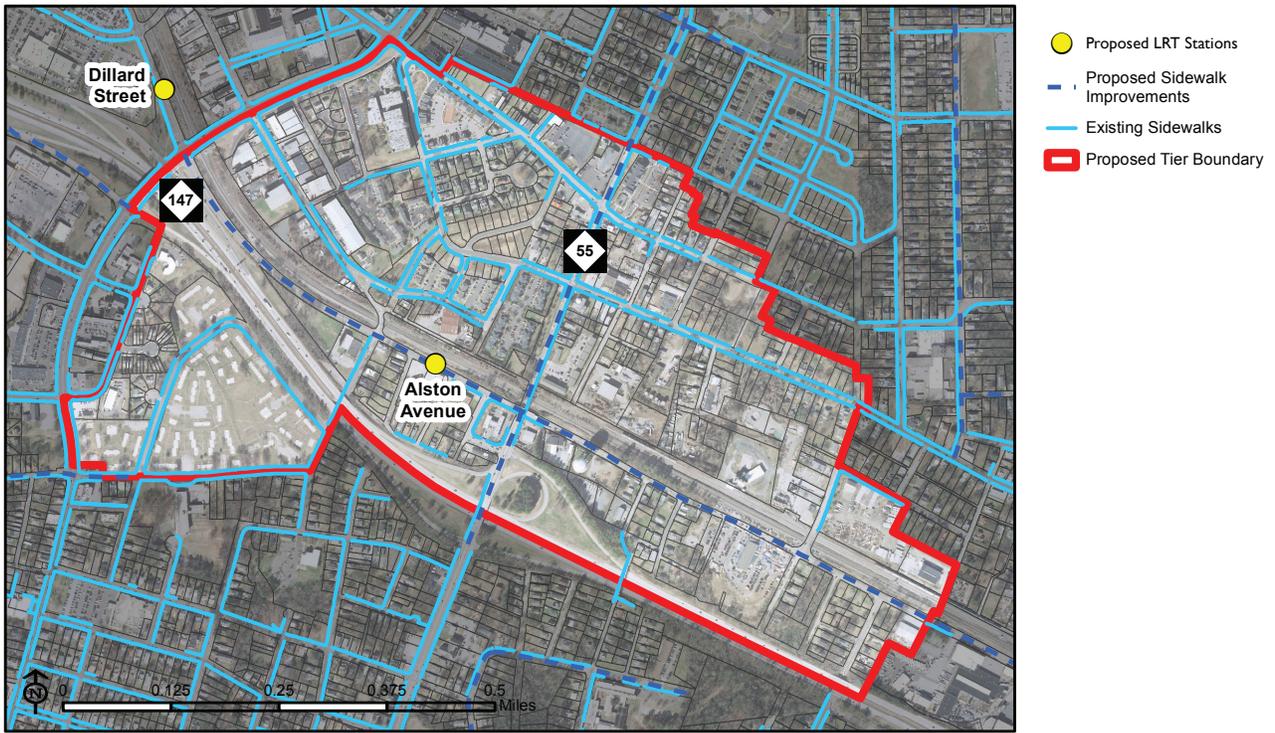
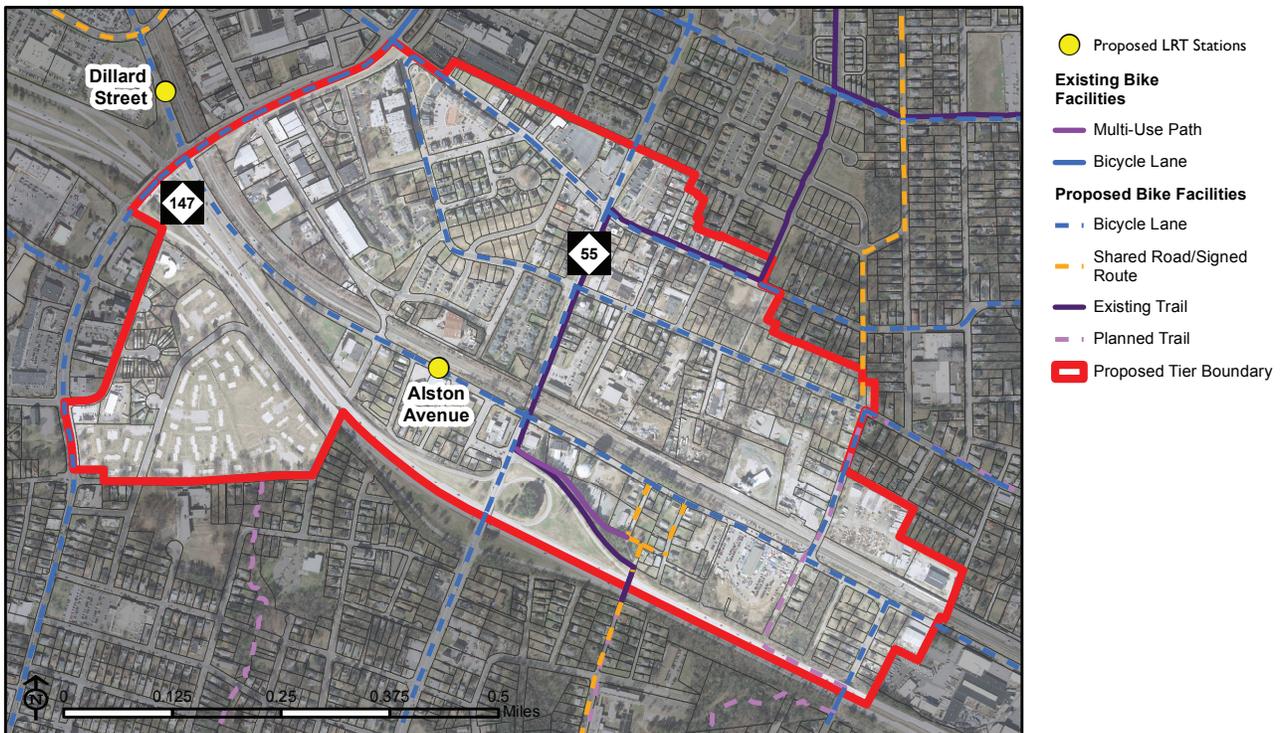


Figure 7: Existing and Proposed Bicycle and Trail Network



**Schools.** Students from the proposed Alston Avenue Compact Neighborhood are in the attendance zones of seven public schools. 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 Eastway Elementary is projected to exceed

110% capacity by 2021. There are currently no scheduled renovations to expand capacity.

Amending the Future Land Use Map to Compact Neighborhood could lead to additional student enrollment overtime. 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 Capacity	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
W.G. Pearson	586	541	541	541	541	541	541	541	541	541	541	541
Y.E. Smith	374	358	361	364	368	369	369	369	368	369	372	377
Eastway	544	585	588	592	597	598	598	598	597	597	602	608
Neal Middle	810	780	785	762	710	657	632	742	829	869	859	800
Northern High	1790	1399	1374	1404	1404	1427	1465	1397	1391	1395	1411	1457
Southern High	1540	1138	1110	1169	1181	1228	1289	1182	1171	1177	1204	1277
Jordan High	1810	1715	1719	1761	1766	1798	1846	1762	1754	1758	1779	1836

**Capacity Legend**

<95 %	95%-100%	100%-105%	105%-110%	>110%
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**Criteria 4: Whether the subject site is of adequate shape and size to accommodate the proposed change.**

The proposed Alston Avenue Compact Neighborhood Tier is 255 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 Urban 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 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/TRN_Equity_final.pdf)

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