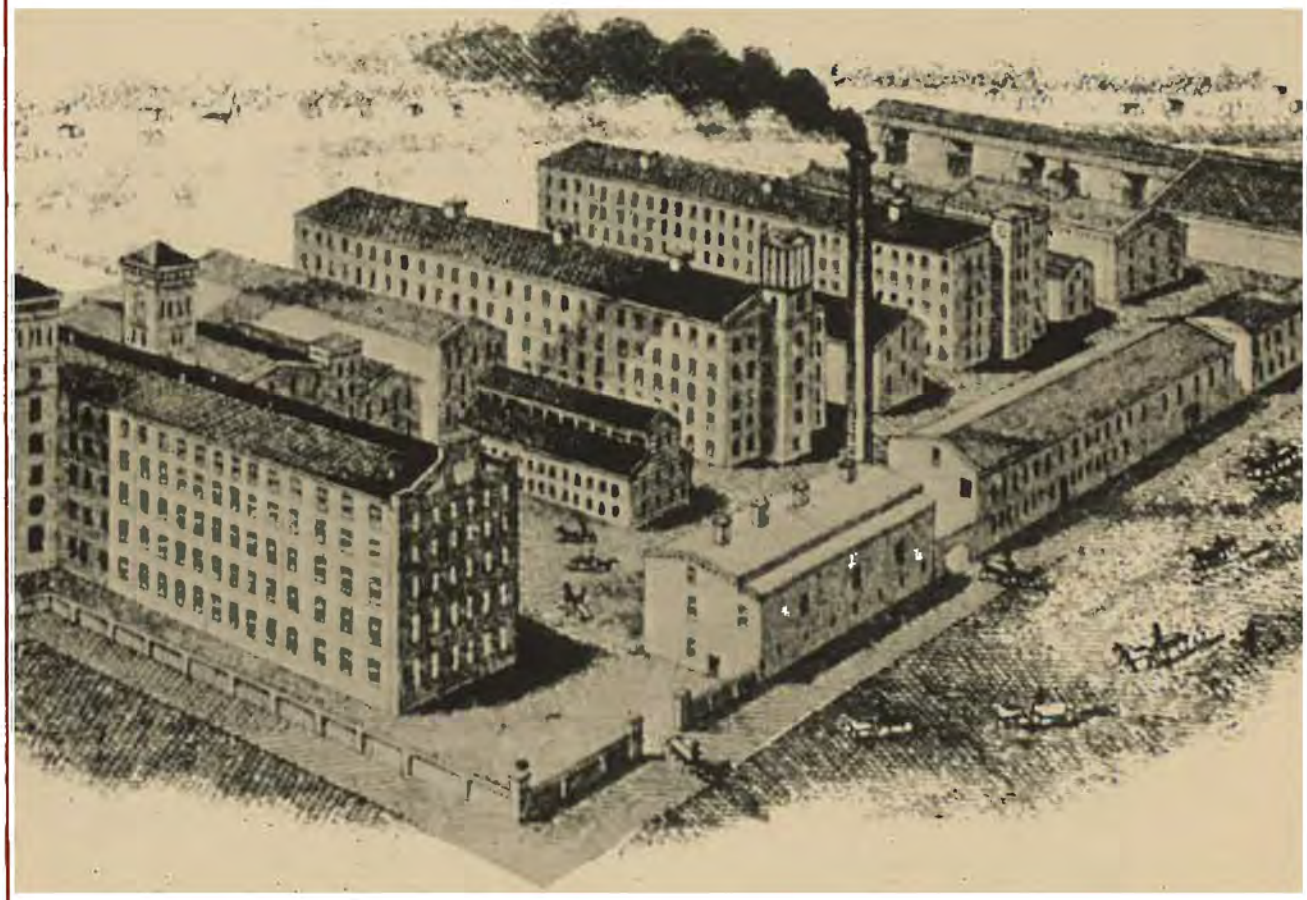
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES

NORTH HIGHLANDS AREA



COLUMBUS • GEORGIA

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES: NORTH HIGHLANDS AREA

Prepared By Planning Division
Department of Community Development
City of Columbus, Georgia

April, 1983

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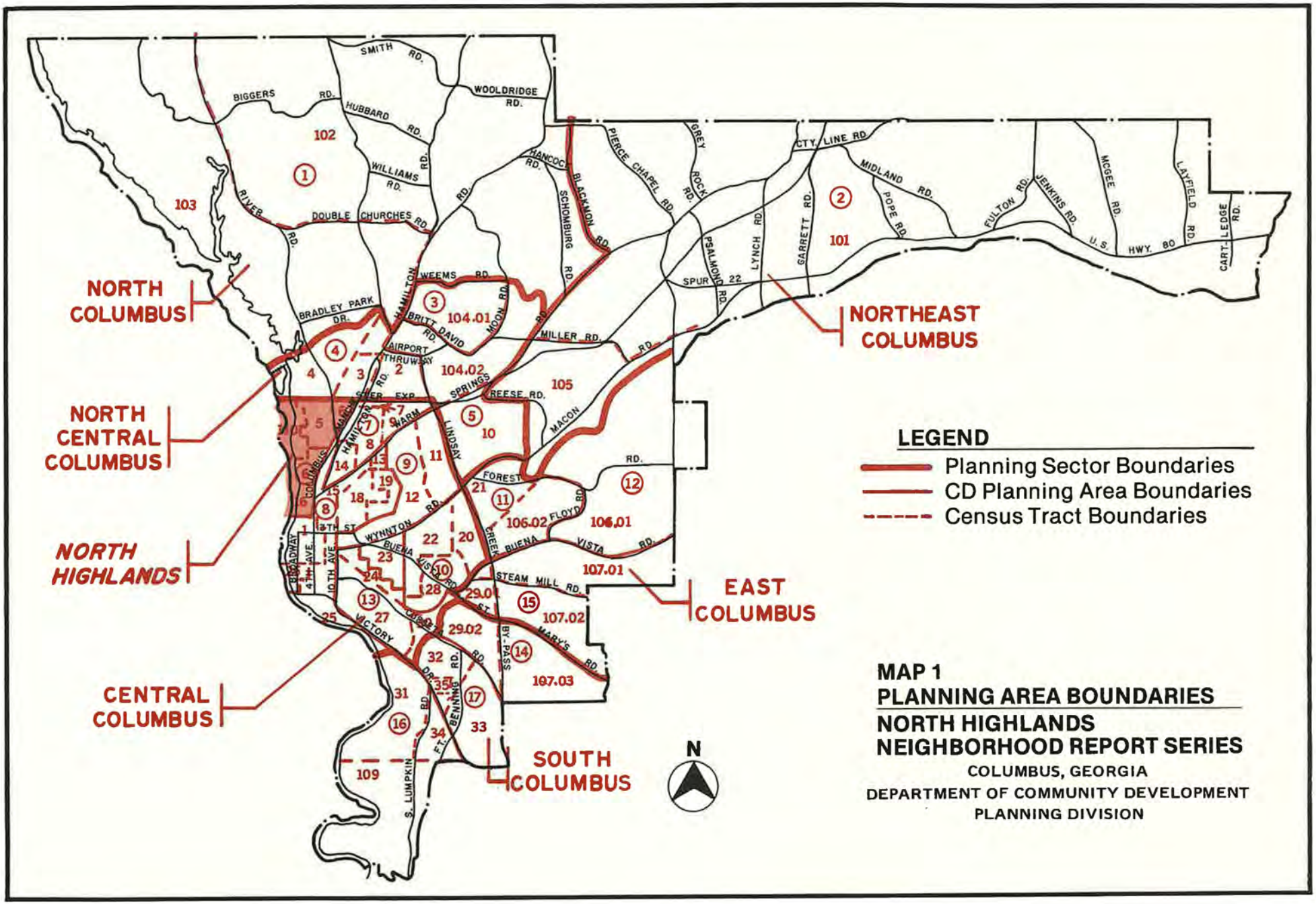
NORTH COLUMBUS
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MAP 1
PLANNING AREA BOUNDARIES
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING DIVISION

Introduction

This report is part of the neighborhood analysis program being carried out for the City of Columbus by the Planning Division of the Department of Community Development. The program has several objectives:

- to update and supplement the data in previous neighborhood analyses in order to determine area trends;
- to assess the effect on particular neighborhoods of the recommendations contained in the Land Use Plan and specific redevelopment plans;
- to identify and address issues concerned with planning and future development in the neighborhoods of Columbus; and,
- to direct public policy and action to preserve and improve neighborhood areas.

The North Highlands neighborhood was chosen for study because data from the 1980 Census indicate continuing economic decline in the area and because the Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan will have a significant impact on the neighborhood. The following report outlines existing conditions and makes recommendations for future public policy and actions.

Location

The location of the North Highlands neighborhood is shown on Map 1. The area is bounded on the south by 15th Street, on the west by the Chattahoochee River, on the north by 45th Street, and on the west by Hamilton Road to River Road and then by the Central of Georgia Railroad tracks and Third Avenue. The boundaries of the neighborhood follow census tract boundaries and include census tracts 5, 6, and 16 in Columbus as well as Census Tract 110, which is Bibb City.

History

From the establishment in 1828 of City Mills on the Chattahoochee River through the construction in 1943 of Anderson Village by the Bibb Company on one of the last tracts of vacant land, the development of North Highlands has been linked to the industrial growth of the city. The waterpower of the river drew industry, and industry determined the land use and transportation patterns with which the current residents live.

The southern portion of North Highlands was part of the original plat for the Town of Columbus in 1828. Along Second and Third Avenues many of the town's leading citizens built substantial homes which still stand as testimony to the wealth of that era. The Commons land and later the railroad effectively separated this High Uptown area from development to the north, where

City Mills and its attendant worker housing spread from the riverbank eastward.

Many citizens believed that Columbus would expand rapidly into North Highlands, and the area up to 29th Street was platted by the end of the Civil War. However, development was sporadic until the turn of the century when the Bibb Company constructed a new dam and mill on the river. The company built a separate town for its employees on the hills along the river with a variety of housing, a church, a school, and recreational facilities. This town, Bibb City, has kept its identify and incorporated status although the Bibb Company no longer owns the housing or provides services.

The industrial development of North Highlands was further spurred by the completion of the North Highlands hydroelectric dam by Columbus Power Company in 1902. Industrial plants could now be constructed away from the riverbank, and this allowed an expanded area for manufacturing development. The railroad which had been built north to serve the Bibb Company attracted other textile operations to the area. By 1910, three more were in operation.

The land use pattern generated by the textile mills still predominates in North Highlands: a mixture of industrial use with housing and small commercial service centers. By Columbus's Centennial Year of 1928, the city had annexed all of the neighborhood up to 42nd Street except the land held by the mills in incorporated villages. A map of that year shows only three tracts as open, undeveloped parcels. Thus the pattern established in the early 1900's remains today.

While development since 1928 has included the expansion of existing mills, it has been primarily residential: the replacement of deteriorated housing, the construction of Anderson Village by the Bibb Company, the subdivision of two remaining tracts for residential use, and the provision of low-income rental housing. Since 1950, the projects of the Columbus Housing Authority have accounted for more than 50% of all new construction in the neighborhood. There has been virtually no new construction since 1970.

Population

The population of the North Highlands neighborhood has declined by 43% over the last twenty years to 7,654 in 1980. All four census tracts have lost population. In part the decrease can be attributed to smaller household size. Some of it, however, is the result of the demolition of substandard housing units and the absence of new construction to replace them. This has occurred primarily in the southern part of the neighborhood where there is a higher percentage of rental units.

Minorities account for about one-fourth of the total population of the neighborhood, but the percentage varies considerably from one census tract to another, from 48% minority in tract 16 to 0 in tract 110. The construction of 400 units of public housing in tract 16 has substantially altered its racial composition from 11% minority in 1960.

A significant population trend is the increase of 5.2% in the number of elderly persons in North Highlands. One-sixth of the neighborhood residents are above the age of 65 and make up about 8% of the total number of elderly persons in Columbus. While this age group increased in number, all other age groups declined.

Planning Division projections for the next twenty years indicate a slight increase in the population of North Highlands. This will result partly from the generation of public and private investment which is expected to accompany implementation of the Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan.

FIGURE 1
CHANGES IN NEIGHBORHOOD POPULATION
NORTH HIGHLANDS
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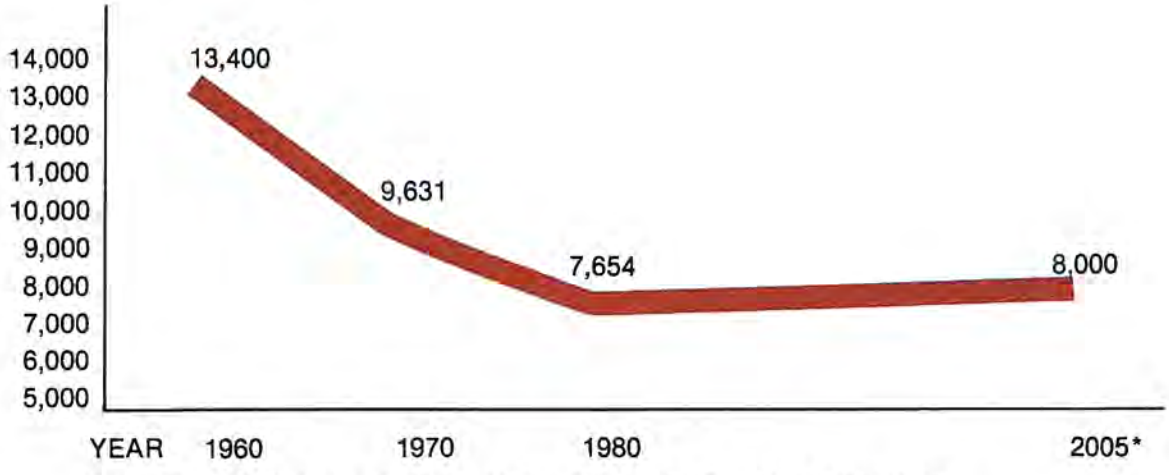


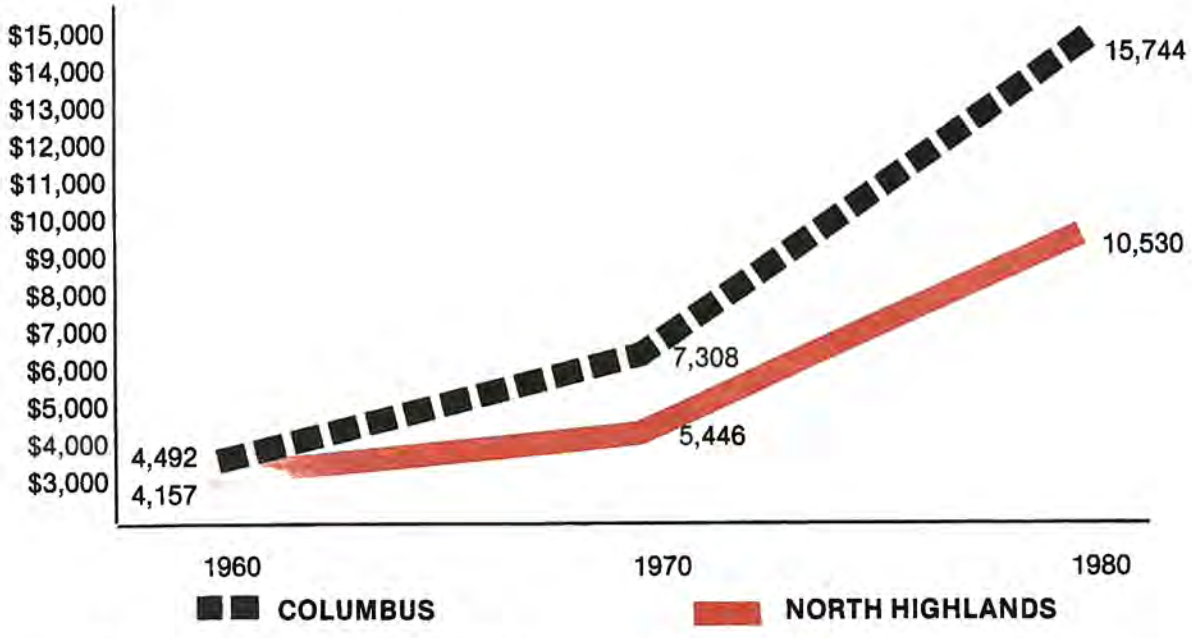
Sources: U.S. Census of Population; *Planning Division projection.

FIGURE 2
POPULATION BY AGE
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES

	1970		1980		%CHANGE '70 - '80	
AGE	NH	Col.	NH	Col.	NH	Col.
0-4	913	16,271	644	13,471	-1.1	-1.8
5-17	2,368	44,997	1,745	36,700	-1.8	-5.3
18-64	5,259	96,020	4,002	104,793	-2.3	+4.2
65-+	1,091	10,089	1,263	15,144	+5.2	+2.9

Source: U.S. Census of Population.

FIGURE 3
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES



Source: U.S. Census of Population

It is also anticipated that younger families will replace some elderly homeowners in the more stable, moderately-priced residential areas in the northern section of the neighborhood.

Economically, the neighborhood has not kept pace with the city as a whole. In 1960 median family income was 92% of Columbus's median. By 1970, it had fallen to 75% and in 1980 median family income was only 67% of that of Columbus. One-third of the families are below the poverty level, and the share is somewhat higher for the elderly segment of the population. Conditions are worst in the southern portion of the area, census tract 16, where 43% of all families are below poverty level, the median family income is $6,046, and per capita income is $2,568. Although this area lowers neighborhood averages, income levels in all four tracts are below those of Columbus.

The effects of decreasing population and economic conditions are apparent throughout the neighborhood. Empty lots filled with litter and overgrown with weeds indicate the demise of housing and give cause for further disinvestment. Abandoned commercial structures evidence the inability of the residents to support these ventures and of the merchants to draw customers into this neighborhood. The dilapidated appearance of many homes is the result of the physical and financial limitations of elderly homeowners as well as the reluctance of landlords to invest in rehabilitation. This cycle of deterioration will continue and will spread unless steps are taken to stabilize and improve the physical environment in North Highlands.

Recommendations

The deteriorated, dilapitated, and generally negative appearance of the North Highlands neighborhood, particularly the portion below 35th Street, virtually precludes its selection by private developers for investment in new construction. An attitude survey conducted in the area indicates that most residents are concerned with this problem as well. Without a substantial effort to change the neighborhood's image, the process of decline will continue.

1. Unauthorized dumps along the riverbank must be removed and "No Dumping" signs posted. After the initial trash removal, the sites should be checked periodically to assure that dumping does not recur.
2. The owners of vacant lots and buildings must assume the responsibility for their maintenance. This includes the removal of trash and debris as well as the control of weeds.
3. The Solid Waste Ordinance, Section 13-167.7 (A) and (B), must be enforced through the neighborhood to eliminate the accumulation of "junk" around homes and businesses.
4. The Health Department should be responsive to the fact that present conditions in the neighborhood create serious rodent and snake problems for residents.

Housing

More than one-half of the housing in North Highlands was constructed prior to 1939. Of the 3,231 total units, only 165 were built after 1960, with no new housing being added since 1970. The age and poor original construction of many units combine to produce residential areas in need of substantial maintenance and repair. These conditions in an area of below-average income have produced pockets of deteriorated structures.

For the purpose of the housing survey of the neighborhood, units were evaluated on the apparent exterior structural condition of foundations, floor joists, walls, roof and chimneys. Deficiencies in porches, sills, steps and windows were noted as ancillary evidence of general condition. Structures were rated as follows:

Good - - No apparent exterior code violations

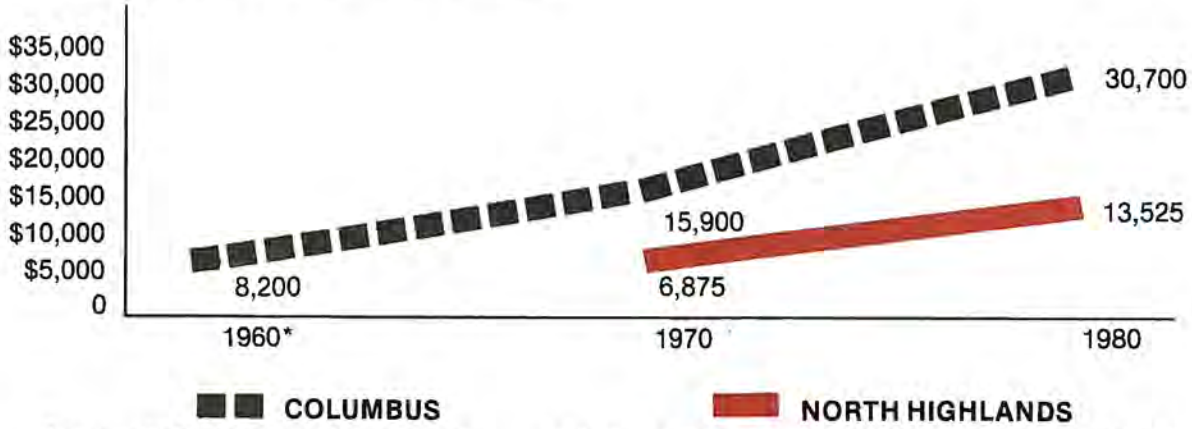
Fair - - Require exterior repair to meet code standards

Poor - - Structurally unsound

The survey results showed that 10% of all housing is in fair condition, but less than 1% is in poor condition.

The portion of North Highlands south of 35th Street is a designated code enforcement treatment area and is currently being reinspected. The program has resulted in the demolition of substandard units, removing unsafe housing but creating gaps in residential areas and leaving unsightly and unhealthful vacant lots. Some uninhabitable buildings remain, but owner-occupants appear to be complying

FIGURE 4
VALUE OF OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES



Source: U.S. Census of Population

*(Not calculated for census tracts 5, 6, 16, & 110 in 1960)

with code standards as their financial ability allows. A code enforcement program is useful in encouraging a minimum level of maintenance, but it needs to be coordinated with other programs to ensure that the neighborhood survives the treatment.

Housing north of 35th Street is predominately in standard condition, although here too age and construction have created pockets of deterioration. Stable residential areas in this part of North Highlands provide standard moderately - priced housing, a commodity which is increasingly difficult to find in the Columbus market. As older residents sell their homes, it is expected that younger families will be attracted by the low cost and convenience of this area.

North Highlands has lost more than 350 housing units over the last ten years. The rate of loss, however, has lessened from 1.4%/year between 1960 and 1970 to 1%/year between 1970 and 1980. Planning Division estimates for the year 2005 indicate that the number of units will increase modestly. This will result from the assemblage and redevelopment of vacant parcels north of downtown and from development of riverbank property.

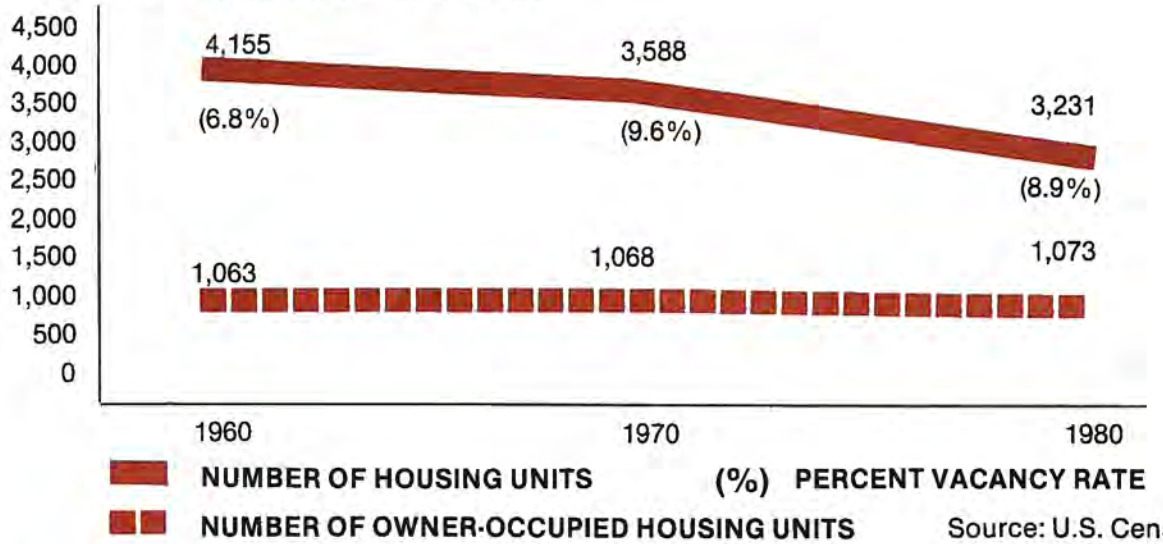
The number of owner-occupied housing units in this neighborhood has remained relatively constant over the last twenty years. The demolition of substandard units was offset between 1960 and 1970 by the divestment of residential holdings by the Bibb Company. The continued increase in the percentage of home ownership between 1970 and 1980 may be explained by the fact that recent housing losses have been in rental units. While the homeownership percentage continues to increase, the neighborhood remains far behind Columbus as a whole with only 37% of housing being owner - occupied.

The median value of owner-occupied housing units, while 44% below that of Columbus, has kept pace with the city-wide rate of increase. Homeowners in this neighborhood appear to have a lifetime tenure; residents who have lived at the same address for 40 years are not uncommon.

Most housing units are not eligible for VA or FHA financing because of their incompatibility with floorplan requirements. Conventional mortgage loans are difficult to obtain. Thus, real estate activity is predominately in rental units with seller-financing, equity, or cash sales.

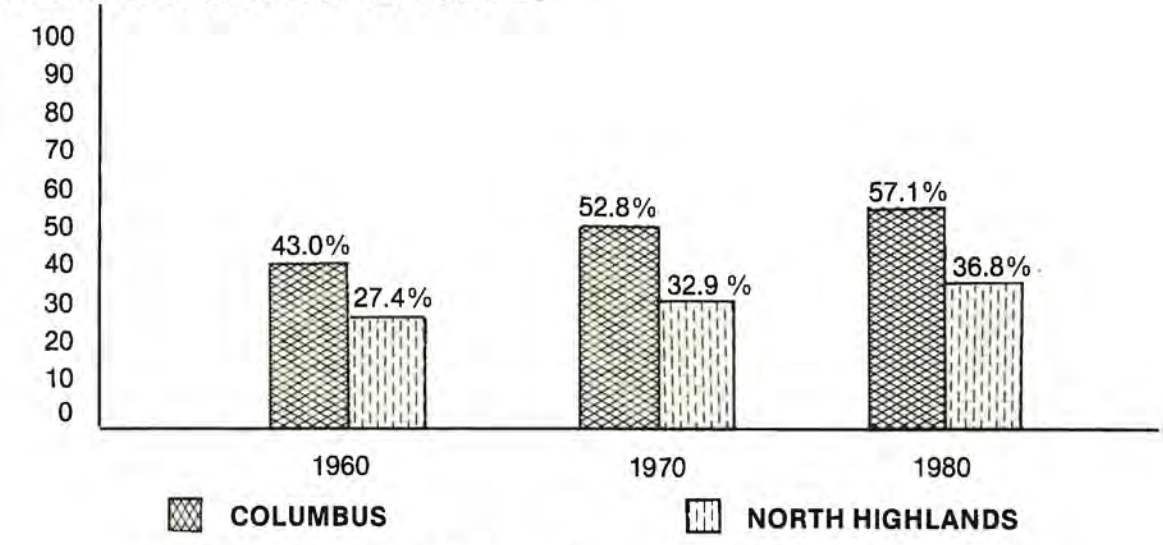
Most current property transactions are related to perceived redevelopment potential. Just as in the late 1800's, North Highlands is seen as a logical growth area for the city. In addition, investors hope to profit from rental units while awaiting the opportunity to develop. The problems caused by absentee landlords have decreased as the number of demolitions has increased, but almost 1500 units of privately-owned rental housing remain. These units

FIGURE 5
NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES



Source: U.S. Census of Population

FIGURE 6
OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS
AS PERCENT OF OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES



Source: U.S. Census of Population

are for the most part older single-family homes which require sustained maintenance to meet minimum standards for habitation.

The Second Avenue project will result in the loss of 34 housing units between 41st and 45th Streets. The Housing Authority has relocated fourteen families and eight individuals and anticipates that four more families will be displaced. Of these relocations, all four homeowners chose to leave North Highlands, but the majority of renters found housing in the area.

Recommendations

North Highlands has a stock of affordable housing, both rental and owner-occupied, which should be preserved as a resource for the low and moderate income residents of Columbus. In spite of the wide range of conditions in the housing, approaches to its preservation are essentially the same throughout the neighborhood.

1. Residential areas need to be buffered from adjacent commercial/industrial activity and transportation corridors.

- New development on land currently zoned for these uses should incorporate site design, fences, and/or plantings to minimize its impact on existing housing.
- The city should provide buffers and landscaping in accordance with the Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan to protect existing residential areas from projected high traffic volumes on Second Avenue.
- Further encroachment of incompatible land uses via rezoning should be discouraged.

2. The Code Enforcement program should continue to ensure that housing units are in standard condition.

- For low income owner-occupants, code enforcement should be carried out with emphasis on identifying units for a coordinated rehabilitation loan/grant program administered by the Columbus Housing Authority.
- For rental units, the program should provide timely reinspection and action on noncompliance.

3. The Columbus Housing Authority should maintain an information clearinghouse for sources of funds available for housing rehabilitation and provide assistance to residents in obtaining these funds.

4. Residential redevelopment should be compatible in scale and density with existing housing.

5. Mortgage loan disclosure data should be monitored to ensure that conventional loans are being made available for rehabilitation and purchase of housing in low-income neighborhoods.

Transportation

Streets - The street system in North Highlands contains several major elements of the city-wide street and highway network. Arterial streets that pass through the neighborhood are First Avenue, Second Avenue, River Road, Hamilton Road, the Columbus-Manchester Expressway, 45th Street and 18th Street. Streets serving as collectors are 23rd Street, 29th Street, 35th Street, 38th Street, and Meritas Avenue.

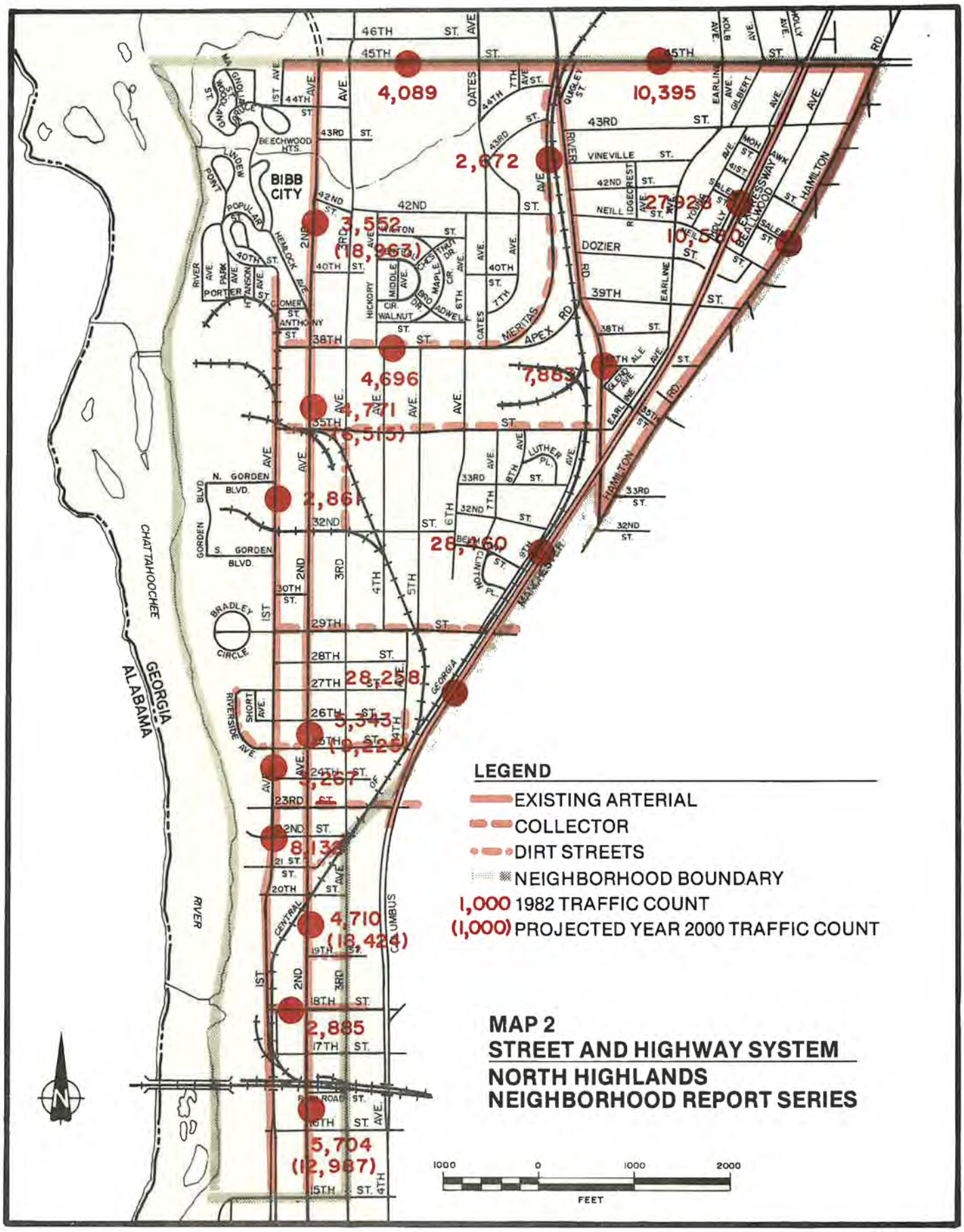
The *Year 2000 Transportation Plan* proposes a number of improvements in the street system which would affect the neighborhood. The development and improvement of Second Avenue into a major transportation corridor linking the North Bypass with downtown is now funded and is being implemented. From 13th Street to 35th Street, parking is to be removed and intersections improved to allow for four through lanes of traffic. Between 35th and 45th Streets, parking will be removed and the roadway reconstructed to five lanes with the center lane serving as a turn lane.

This project will have an immediate impact upon existing commercial uses along Second Avenue, particularly upon the Bibb City commercial area, through the removal of on-street parking. The long-range effect of increased exposure and traffic volume is expected to be pressure for redevelopment. The Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan sets forth the policy for ameliorating immediate impacts and for directing future redevelopment.

Other major transportation improvements recommended for this area include the upgrading of the Columbus-Manchester Expressway from four to six lanes with intersection improvements and the upgrading of River Road from 45th Street to Hamilton Road from two to four lanes. In addition, 18th and 20th Street are recommended for improvement to tie the Medical Center complex into Second Avenue. Both projects are programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program for construction in fiscal year 1988, depending upon financing and change in traffic volumes occasioned by the completion of Second Avenue.

The street network of arterials and collectors, traffic volume, and accompanying strip commercial development are divisive elements in North Highlands. The stable residential areas are those which are not interrupted by either the automobile or rail corridors through the neighborhood. As transportation improvements proceed, the value to the city of maintaining a stock of low to moderately priced housing should be considered.

Local streets in the southern portion of the neighborhood dead-end on the east at the railroad tracks and on the west at the river. The dead-ends of 21st, 22nd and 23rd Streets at the river are sites of garbage dumping and the attendant problems of rats and snakes. Portions of 19th, 21st and 25th Streets and Riverside Drive are unpaved, and the lack of curbs



MAP 2
STREET AND HIGHWAY SYSTEM
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES

and gutters exacerbates drainage problems in hilly and low-lying locations. These unpaved streets appear no more than dirt lanes, too narrow for the passage of two cars.

Rail - The North Highlands area is located along the Central of Georgia's route to Atlanta. Six trains averaging 50 cars each traverse the length of the neighborhood on a daily basis. At Railroad Street and Second Avenue, there are 16 crossings each day, of which eight trains are 100 cars long. Hazardous and congested intersections involving the tracks exist at the Columbus - Manchester Expressway and 23rd and 29th Street. Ones involving River Road exist at 35th Street and Apex Road.

Spur tracks which serve the textile mills intersect a number of major streets at oblique angles and divide residential blocks. Train traffic on the spurs is on a demand basis, averaging two or three 4-car trains per week.

Transit - North Highlands is served by two bus routes. The route which uses Second Avenue connects the neighborhood with downtown, the Medical Center and Fort Benning to the south and with Peachtree Mall, St. Francis Hospital, and Columbus College to the northeast. It leaves Second Avenue to provide service to Wilson Homes, Fox School, and recreation areas. The bus runs every 30 minutes, Monday through Saturday.

The second route runs on Hamilton Road and serves Cross Country Shopping Center and the Airport every 25 minutes.

Adequate transit service is essential to this neighborhood because 39% of households have no automobile. The residents of census tract 16, where 713 households are without a vehicle, are particularly dependent upon the bus for work, shopping, and medical attention. Present service levels appear to be adequate for these needs; however, residents have expressed a desire for Sunday service.

Pedestrian. North Highlands is an area where there is much pedestrian activity. Children walk to school and to activity centers. Older residents walk to shop and to meet and talk with their neighbors. Existing sidewalks are inadequate to accommodate this activity. Paths have been worn between the curbs and houses in some locations, and in others where a slope exists the residents walk along the gutters.

Although some sections are missing, relatively continuous sidewalks are present along First, Second, Third, Short, and Meritas Avenues and Bradley Circle as well as in Anderson Village and Bibb City. Along other streets in the neighborhood, the presence of sidewalks is spotty. Many community facilities have only partial access by sidewalk: Fox School has no sidewalk on the east and only a partial one on the west; North Columbus Park lacks a

sidewalk along its western edge; and Open Door Community Center has none along its southern edge. These locations are so heavily used that vegetation has been worn away and the paths are very muddy when it rains.

Improvements to Second Avenue will bring more traffic into North Highlands. The Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan does not address the vehicle/pedestrian conflict except as it affects the parking of employees at Swift Spinning Mill. Consideration of pedestrian crossing needs should accompany this project.

Recommendations

The highway and rail network provides excellent service to commercial and industrial operations in North Highlands. While access to the area is good, there remain conflicts between street and rail systems and between the transportation needs of businesses and the preservation of existing residential development.

1. At-grade railroad crossings throughout the neighborhood should be improved to provide for safe and smooth traffic flow.

2. All local streets should be paved and should have curbs and gutters.

3. Traffic circulation should be checked via traffic counts to ensure that new through patterns do not develop which include local streets.

4. A high level of transit service should be maintained. METRA should evaluate the feasibility of providing Sunday service.

5. As the redevelopment of Second Avenue proceeds, all required landscaping and buffers should be provided.

6. New curb cuts along arterial streets should be minimized to allow the efficient flow of traffic.

7. Complete access by sidewalk should be provided for all community facilities. Sidewalks along one side of the street should be provided throughout the neighborhood, with priority to the east-west streets between 20th and 35th Streets.

8. Crosswalks at signalized intersections should be provided along Second Avenue at 20th, 29th, 35th and 38th Streets.

The redevelopment of Second Avenue into an arterial connection between the North Bypass and the Central Business District will increase the volume of traffic passing through North Highlands. The urban renewal plan for the Second Avenue Corridor anticipates that this increased exposure will be the impetus for private investment, which has been very low in the neighborhood for many years. Adherence to the recommendations of this plan will mitigate the possible adverse effects of the project and prevent further deterioration of existing development.

Land Use and Zoning

The North Highlands neighborhood emcompasses 1,100 acres of intensive mixed land use. As the Existing Land Use Map clearly illustrates, the area has developed in a crazy-quilt pattern with a little of everything almost everywhere. There are problems of incompatibility and fragmentation in some sections, but for others the proximity of employment and commercial services is an asset. The percentage of land use is as follows:

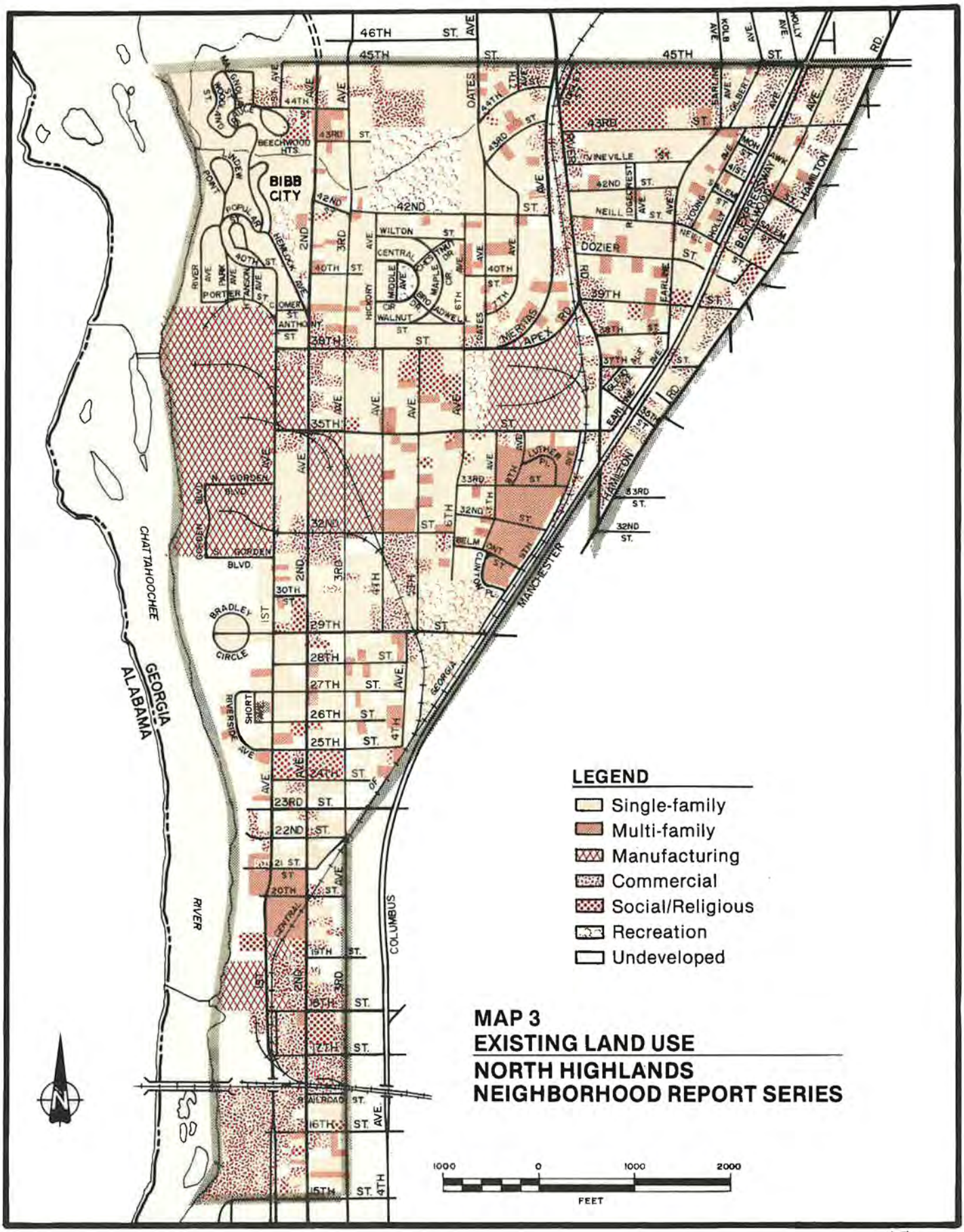
40%	Residential
20%	Right-of-way
10%	Industrial
10%	Commercial
7%	Parks
13%	Vacant/Other

Original development in Bibb City was planned by the Bibb Company, which built the town for its employees. Housing, industry, and commercial activities occupy adjacent areas but are not intermixed. The city has no zoning regulations. For these reasons, further discussion of land use and zoning will not include the acres which comprise Bibb City.

Residential development is spread across the entire neighborhood, with three-fourths being single-family houses. Multi-family units are scattered throughout, but only Wilson Homes and Chase Homes result in a marked change of population density. North of 35th Street the predominant residential zoning is R-3A, which allows multi-family dwellings of up to 6 units/building; height and density restrictions are aimed at making it compatible with single-family housing. South of 35th Street the residential zoning is primarily R-4, which allows buildings up to four stories and with moderately high coverage of land; such development is quite different in scale and density from single-family housing.

The R-3A zoning has functioned relatively well in the northern part of the neighborhood, allowing redevelopment of parcels for apartments without disrupting the essentially single-family environment. Except for the two Columbus Housing Authority projects, the R-4 zone has not been developed to allowable densities below 35th Street. It is not known what role zoning has played in land speculation in this area, but R-4 is obviously not directed at conserving the existing type of housing.

Industrial uses in the neighborhood consist of four large textile mills and a grist mill, plus other smaller manufacturing operations. These activities utilize about 70 of the 145 acres zoned M-1. The area between 29th and 35th Streets west of Fifth Avenue was zoned for manufacturing to allow expansion of the textile mills. Because it has become clear that the mills do not plan to use this land, the Second Avenue Urban Renewal Plan has designated the western part of this area, now used for single-family residences, for redevelopment as medium-density housing.



LEGEND

- Single-family
- Multi-family
- Manufacturing
- Commercial
- Social/Religious
- Recreation
- Undeveloped

MAP 3
EXISTING LAND USE
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES

In general, the industries in North Highlands appear to good neighbors. Houses adjacent to them are at least as well-kept as those in the rest of the neighborhood, and often look better. Traffic noise and parking are cause for some complaint. However, the manufacturing facilities themselves are well maintained. Physically the mills are rather grand and imposing structures, reflecting their economic impact on the area.

A major industry-related impact on North Highlands is the presence of the Central of Georgia Railroad tracks. Sixteen train crossings per day at Railroad Street disrupt traffic on Second Avenue. Tracks cut through residential blocks, detracting from the desirability of living there and creating substandard lots without street frontage. Although most housing has been removed from the narrow strip of land between the railroad and River Road, some marginal use continues.

Commercial wholesale and retail activities utilize about 90 acres in North Highlands. Major concentrations of commercial use are found in the area adjacent to downtown, along the Columbus-Manchester Expressway and River Road, and in the Bibb City retail area at 38th Street and Second Avenue. Throughout the neighborhood both nonconforming and spot-zoned parcels of retail business occur in primarily residential areas. Many of these buildings are in deteriorated condition, some abandoned and boarded up. Most rezoning requests over the last five years have been to allow more commercial use of land zoned and/or presently used for residential purposes. The approval of these requests has further fragmented land use without improving the economic position of North Highlands.

The ten acres of land devoted to religious activity are scattered in residential areas, with homes often serving as church facilities. Although this is a permitted use in residential zones, the signs and front-yard parking areas which mark these structures are often a negative influence on their surroundings.

Within the boundaries of North Highlands there are 19 structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places. With the exception of City Mills and the Bibb Company mill, these buildings comprise the northern section of High Uptown, a residential district developed before the Civil War. The area has been pressured for redevelopment as highway commercial along Second and Fourth Avenues, and the remaining buildings are deteriorating. The current policy of affording landmark protection within a C-3 zone has not resulted in the adaptation of these historic houses to a use consistent with their location in an office/retail area. Previous plans have suggested the creation of an historic district to protect this section from further encroachment of incompatible land uses.

Recommendations

The pattern of zoning in North Highlands was established to encourage redevelopment of this deteriorated neighborhood. The abundance of M-1 and C-3 zoning was designed to permit expansion of existing business as well as to attract new investment. The residential zoning allows for the replacement of single-family units with multi-family structures. With the exception of commercial strips along arterial streets, particularly along the Columbus-Manchester Expressway, the desired private investment has not occurred. However, the reconstruction of Second Avenue as an arterial has brought renewed interest in the economic potential of the area.

1. Where current zoning conflicts with redevelopment recommendations in the Second Avenue Redevelopment Plan, the zoning should be changed to conform with the Plan.

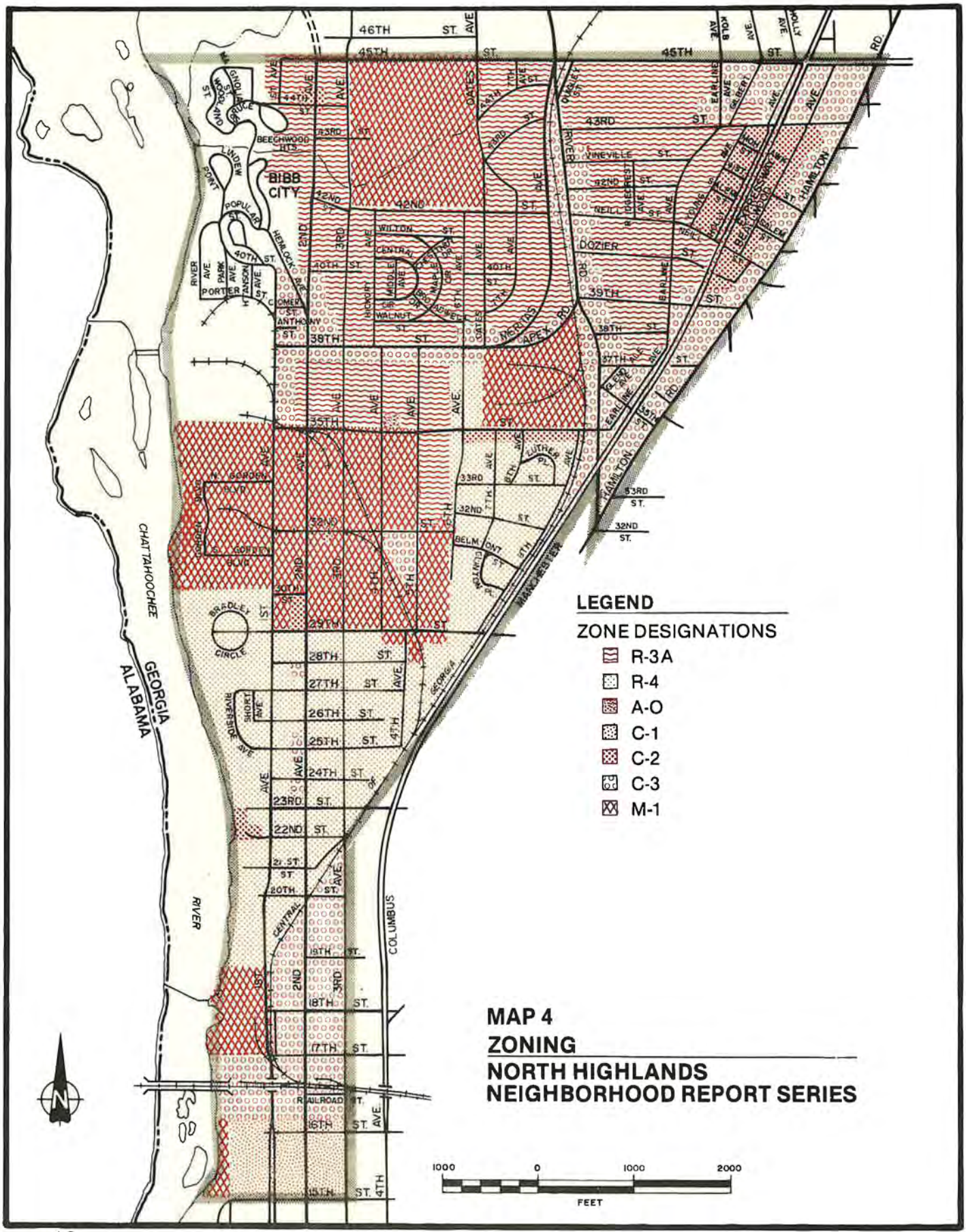
2. New commercial activity should be confined to existing commercial structures and zones. This includes encouraging the rehabilitation of abandoned commercial buildings as well as preventing strip commercial development along Second Avenue.

3. To prevent further fragmentation of residential areas, there should be no spot zoning.

4. Single-family residential areas between 21st and 35th Streets should be rezoned R-3A so that new development within these areas will be compatible with existing use.

5. To realize the goal of preservation of landmark structures between 15th and 17th Streets rezoning may be necessary. If substantial renovation is possible utilizing A-O or PUD zoning, site-specific plans should receive consideration based on their compatibility with existing use and longterm suitability for this area. The creation of an historic district would not enhance the opportunities for rehabilitation.

The Second Avenue redevelopment project is a major investment in North Highlands. If the neighborhood as a whole is to benefit from this commitment of public funds, land use and zoning policy must be made clear and vigorously enforced from the start. To do otherwise would be to allow the creation of a strip of marginal commercial use at the expense of present and future residents and deplete the supply of low and moderately priced housing.


LEGEND
ZONE DESIGNATIONS
R-3A
R-4
A-O
C-1
C-2
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MAP 4
ZONING
NORTH HIGHLANDS
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT SERIES
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BIBB CITY
CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER
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16TH ST.
15TH ST.
RAILROAD ST.
DATES FARM RD.
DOZIER ST.
VINEVILLE ST.
BEECHWOOD HTS.
BRADLEY CIRCLE
CENTRAL AVE.
EARLINE AVE.
HAMILTON RD.

Recreation and Open Space

Recreation sites in North Highlands are primarily oriented toward neighborhood use and provide both active and passive uses to the residents.

Anderson Village Park is a 1.83 acre facility located on Middle Avenue and Central Circle. Constructed by the Bibb Company to serve its mill workers, the Village originally had four playgrounds in addition to this larger area for community activities. These small play area are now partially paved for parking and have no recreational use, but the community land is maintained as a playground oriented to the immediate residential area. Both in size and function, this facility is more properly a mini-park than a neighborhood park. In addition to playground equipment, it has a picnic shelter without tables, a multipurpose court, and an open area used as a play field.

North Highlands Park at 38th Street and 6th Avenue was the site of the first municipal swimming pool in Columbus. The 4.6 acres of park directly abut the western side of the Bibb Company's Anderson Plant and is across the street from Fox Elementary School. The facilities include a swimming pool, play fields, and multi-purpose court. The Teen Tavern on the north side of the park provides teenagers with indoor recreation such as dances, TV and table games. Although it is below acreage standards, North Highlands Park functions as a neighborhood park and is heavily used by teenagers.

Chase Homes has a mini-park of two acres related to the public housing project. The area, which is separated from railroad tracks by the chain-link fence, serves as a playground for children living in Chase. The park is located at Second Avenue and 20th Street, but access is from the apartment complex.

North Columbus Park is 16.3 acres at 29th Street and 9th Avenue, adjacent to Wilson Homes and the Columbus - Manchester Expressway. The park includes a playground, a community center with gym, a swimming pool, and several ball fields. It has parking facilities, bleachers and lighting for night activities. In 1978 substantial rehabilitation was done on this park, including renovation of the community center, tree planting, and addition of lights to the ballfields.

Comer Recreation Center on its four-acre site in Bibb City was deeded to Columbus in 1976. Rehabilitation work was completed and the center reopened in December 1982. Comer is a regional facility with an excellent gymnasium, a stage, kitchen and meeting area, a pottery and crafts shop, and a game room. The offices of the Columbus Department of Parks and Recreation are housed here. Better access to Comer's location will result from the planned improvement of 41st Street.

The Par-3 Golf Course located on 18 acres north of 42nd Street between 3rd and Oates Avenues is a unique facility in Columbus, the only 9-hole, par-27 course. Acquired in 1971 with the aid of funds from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), the facility was closed in 1982 because of the theft of copper wire from the lighting system. Unless the course is operated and maintained in accordance with the original purpose as stated in the application for funding, the City may have to pay back the monies from HCRS or lose the facility. In 1983 a private operator bid to lease the course and run it in conformance with HCRS standards. It appears that the City will accept this offer and the course will reopen.

The 4.5 acre tract adjacent to the Par - 3 Golf Course on 42nd Street is developed as soccer fields. Columbus Youth Soccer uses and maintains this facility.

The Recreation Department operates a senior citizen club at Wilson Homes. The club meets once a week for handicrafts and exercise as well as socializing. The Columbus Housing Authority, through funding from the Lower Chattahoochee Council on the Aging, runs a nutrition site at Wilson which provides a hot lunch to elderly residents and involves them in daily social activities.

Two school sites in North Highlands, Fox Elementary and Daniel Junior High, have a total of 19.4 acres of land. The recreation area at Fox is primarily a playground while Daniel has play fields. Daniel Swimming Pool on 43rd Street is located on a tract adjacent to the junior high. No agreement exists with the Muscogee County School District for community use of the playground and fields at these two schools.

Bibb City provides recreational facilities for residents at two locations. The 1.5-acre playground is between Hemlock Street and Second Avenue, and tennis courts are located in a recreation area bounded by Hemlock, Linden Point, and Poplar Streets. Residents also have easy access to the river at a point where two streams enter the Chattahoochee.

The east bank of the river forms the western boundary of the North Highlands neighborhood. The only developed access to the riverbank north of the North Highlands Dam is the Georgia Power Company service road. The company's recreation plan *Middle Chattahoochee Project, Exhibit R* calls for closing the road to vehicular traffic because of erosion and security problems. The company will provide a parking area and permit pedestrian access and fishing in nonproduction area. No water access will be allowed. The plan proposes that the area north of Bibb City and south of the North Bypass be developed jointly with the City to provide a fishing dock and nature trails.

Georgia Power has no recreation plans for its 100-foot easement along the river below North Highlands Dam, although in 1974 the company pledged that the entire east bank would be reserved for public use and access except in those areas reserved for production. The only developed access point at this time is a privately - run boat ramp at 22nd Street. There is a well-established trail along much of this portion of the riverbank which indicates that it is being used on a fairly regular basis.

The developed recreation areas in North Highlands total about 55 acres, or about 7 acres/1,000 population. The sites are easily accessible by public transit and are well-distributed in relation to residential areas except for the section between River Road and Hamilton Road, which has no facilities available. While the number of developed areas is below the National Parks and Recreation Association's standard of 10 acres/1,000 population, the recreation potential of the riverbank and two school sites makes acquisition of additional land unnecessary.

Recommendations

The development of parks in North Highlands has been primarily to meet the needs of children and young adults. Playgrounds and ballfields exist in adequate supply for both the present and projected number of residents in this age range. Provision of recreation opportunities for the increasing elderly population should be a priority in park planning in this neighborhood.

(1) Anderson Village Park should be landscaped and planted to provide quiet, shady areas with outdoor furniture. The picnic shelter should be equipped with picnic tables.

(2) North Highland Park should be landscaped and planted to enhance its appearance and to buffer it from the adacent textile mill. Site improvements recommended in the *Fifteen Year Comprehensive Recreation Plan* should be implemented with priority to lighting for the ballfield, and activities which will attract a broader segment of the population.

(3) The playground at Chase Homes should have a more substantial separation from the railroad tracks than the existing chainlink fence. *Recreation Plan* improvements would make this park attractive to a wider age range.

(4) The problem of erosion in North Columbus Park should receive immediate attention.

(5) A formal agreement should be reached with the Muscogee County School District for the development and use of the Daniel Junior High School site for community recreation as detailed in the *Recreation Plan.*

(6) The Bibb City Playground will require adequate protection from 2nd Avenue as redevelopment proceeds.

(7) The Recreation Department should establish a senior citizen club for North Highlands with use of the facilities at Comer Recreation Center.

(8) The riverbank between City Mills and the North Highlands Dam should be developed for passive recreational use. Parking and picnic facilities could be established on city-owned land on First Avenue and 28th Street with a planted and maintained trail system both north and south along the bank from this site. If fiscal constraints prevent implementation at this time, changes in land use along the riverbank should be carefully monitored to assure that the recreation potential of this area is not sacrificed.

The availability of adequate recreation opportunities in North Highlands is important to residents whose incomes do not allow for travel to regional facilities or for use of private facilities. In addition, the provision of a convenient, diversified program will make the area more attractive to investors and potential new residents. Development to date has not been responsive to changes in the population to be served and the most obvious resource of the river.

Schools. The North Highlands neighborhood, which once pioneered in public educational services in Columbus, is losing facilities because of its aging population and substandard school sites. McIlhenny School has been closed and in 1982 was sold to a private developer. The *Local Facilites Plan* of the Muscogee County School System for the period 1981 - 1986 proposes closing Bibb School. Should that occur, Fox School will be the only remaining elementary school in the neighborhood.

•Columbus Area Vocational - Technical School: This school is in good condition and plans to expand its facilities across 45th Street.

•Daniel Junior High: This school was proposed for closing because its declining enrollment is no longer sufficient to qualify for state aid. Built in 1951, the building needs substantial rehabilitation, including a new kitchen, roof, and heating system.

•Fox Elementary: Originally constructed in 1921 with more recent additions, this school is planned for continued use for grades K-6. The 4.4 acre site is small, and the lack of an off-street parking area has resulted in the practice of parking between the street and the front door of the school building. The proposed addition of two more classrooms will reduce the land now available for outdoor recreation.

•Bibb Elementary: Built in 1920, this school is located in Bibb City. It is scheduled to be phased out because of the age and condition of the building and site constraints. The students from Bibb will be rehoused at existing schools by shifting the boundaries of other attendance areas.

School district projections indicate that average daily attendance will continue to decline over the next five years. In determining which schools to close, the District also considered population shifts within the community which indicate an increase in the number of school age children will occur only in north and northeast Columbus. It is expected that upon closing the Bibb School will be sold as surplus property.

Human Services. Social services are provided in North Highlands by both public and private agencies. The programs are all located in census tract 16, the area with the most severe conditions of poverty and environmental deterioration.

•The Columbus Housing Authority manages 400 units in two public housing complexes: 100 units in Chase Homes and 300 units in Wilson Homes. These projects were located in North Highlands to replace substandard housing units which were cleared out of the neighborhood. In addition, this agency administers the code enforcement program and the Second Avenue urban renewal plan.

•Enrichment Services Program currently houses its home-delivery meal program and a neighborhood outreach program in McIlhenny School. Outreach services include a clothing bank, budget counselling, referral to other agencies, transportation, blood-pressure screening and a beginning food bank. Enrichment Services Program works in cooperation with other agencies and community organizations to meet the basic needs of their clients.

A weatherization program is available to residents who meet income guidelines. This service provides labor and materials to repair and insulate homes. In fiscal year 1983, 165 homes have been weatherized.

With the sale of McIlhenny for private rehabilitaion, the future location of Enrichment Services Program is uncertain. The agency requires a commercial kitchen for the home-delivery meal program, and therefore, its choice of a new location is very limited.

•Open Door Community Center grew out of the social work projects of Hamp Stevens Methodist Church. In 1937, the neighborhood center was opened to provide social services and recreational opportunities for the benefit of poor children in the area to the south of the church. Its present facility at 1405 Second Avenue includes a small gym, a playground, and a pool. The center also provides counseling and referral services to neighborhood residents.

•The Valley Rescue Mission is a nonprofit organization which purchased the 1st Congregational Church for its headquarters in 1965. Since then it has expanded both at the original location at Second Avenue and 29th Street and into other parts of the neighborhood. Valley Rescue provides assistance on a daily basis in the form of meals and lodging for the poor and counseling for alcoholics.

•The Salvation Army has been providing services in Columbus for more than 80 years. Its location at 1718 Second Avenue provides lodging for both transient men and distressed women and children. It also provides free meals and alcoholic rehabilitation.

Utilities. North Highlands is completely served by public water and sewers. The sewer system includes combination sanitary - storm sewers; the Water Works identifies no problems in this part of the City. Bibb City provides separate water and sewer service to its residents and is currently seeking Federal assistance to upgrade the system. The neighborhood receives utility service from Georgia Power, Southern Bell and the Gas Light Company of Columbus.

Fire Protection. Fire Station No. 3, located on 6th Avenue between 33rd and 35th Streets, provides good ser-

vice coverage to North Highlands. This area averages about two fires per month with higher incidence during the winter. There are no indications that the Fire Department will change the service to this area.

Bibb City contracts with Columbus for fire protection with service from Fire Station No. 3.

Police Protection. Police protection is provided by a schedule of three to four beat units per shift which operate from Police Headquarters. The Police Department reports that the incidence of crime is high in North Highlands but is generally nonviolent, with thefts and disturbances being the most frequent offenses. Statistical measures at a neighborhood level are not currently available from the Department.

Recommendations

The community facilities available to the residents of North Highlands are badly needed and well utilized. Any reduction in services on the part of the public sector would substantially reduce the possibility of private redevelopment in this area.

1. The site of Fox Elementary School should be expanded to include its entire block, from 35th Street to 38th Street and from 5th Avenue to 6th Avenue. This would provide room for adequate off-street parking, outdoor recreation, and expansion of the school should that be necessary to serve all neighborhood children.

2. If a suitable facility can be found, the Enrichment Services Program should remain in North Highlands.

3. The reported high incidence of crime, coupled with a generally fearful elderly population, indicates that all street lights should remain on in this neighborhood.

Natural Environment

The North Highlands neighborhood is bounded on the west by the Chattahoochee River. The river is generally contained within its channel although its level varies with releases of water by the Georgia Power Company. Flood hazard areas are confined to a narrow fringe along the river; there is currently no development within these areas.

Dump sites along the riverbank are currently a major problem. From 21st to 24th Streets there are piles of trash and debris which include cars, appliances, bathroom fixtures, furniture, and large quantities of small junk. Similar conditions exist behind Riverside Drive and Gordon Boulevard. The private dump at 24th Street, reported to be inactive, has created a steep slope of exposed debris down to the river, although the part visible from First Avenue has been covered. One dump on the north side of Riverside Drive has been removed and several sites are posted with "No Dumping" signs, but it is obvious that some continue to be used.

Two small streams traverse the area. The stream between 42nd and 43rd Streets does not appear to pose any substantial problem to the neighborhood. The stream which flows south from the North Treatment Plan to the river at Bibb City contains some sewage discharge; change underway in the city-wide sewage system should alleviate this problem in about two years.

Slopes are relatively gentle except along the riverbank, the area south of 25th Street and west of the railroad tracks and in the northwest section of the neighborhood. The adequate growth of vegetation has prevented major erosion problems in these areas. However, clearance activities in the northwestern area as part of the Second Avenue project need attention to prevent erosion.

Recommendations

1. Dump sites along the riverbank must be cleaned up and monitored to prevent future dumping.

2. Any development of the riverbank must provide for erosion control.

3. Construction activities for the Second Avenue project should include erosion control measures, particularly in the clearance areas north of 41st Street.

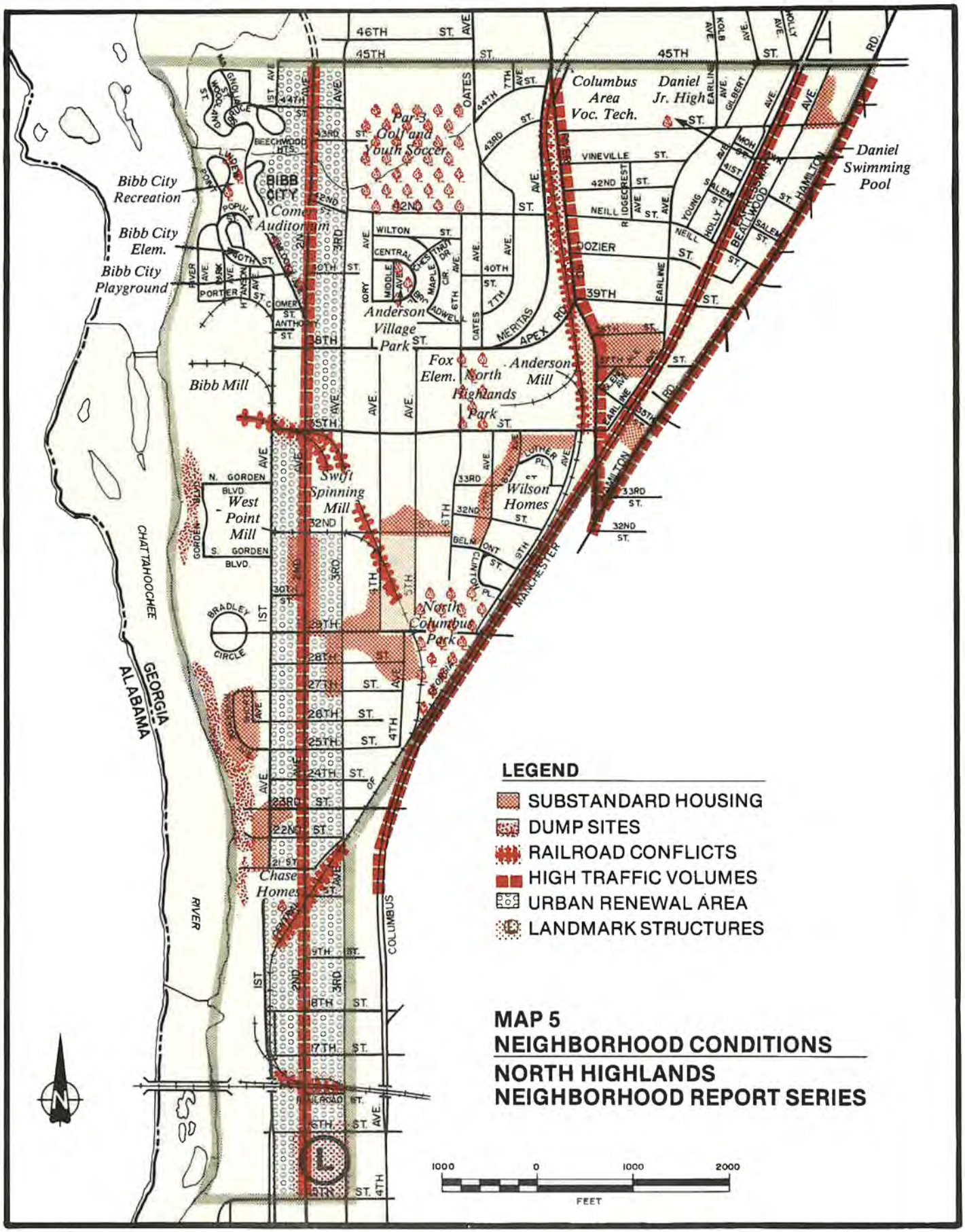
Summary

Previous Plans: North Highlands is within the Central Columbus planning sector, as designated in the *Land Use Plan for Columbus, Georgia,* published in 1977. Recommendations in the Plan directed at this neighborhood stress the preservation and improvement of existing residential development. The proposal that Second Avenue be redeveloped as a commercial/industrial strip was made prior to the designation of this corridor as an urban renewal area. In term of general policies, this analysis does not conflict with the broad recommendations of the *Land Use Plan.*

Neighborhood analyses were done for North Highlands in 1968 and 1978. *Neighborhood Analyses,* the 1968 report prepared by Barbour-Cooper and Associates, Inc., divided the area so that it forms all or part of three study areas. The findings for all three areas include the presence of substandard housing, mixed land uses without proper buffers, unpaved streets, and conflicts between zoning and land use. The treatments recommended were clearance and redevelopment for the sections of most severe housing conditions and rehabilitation and code enforcement for the remainder. A code enforcement treatment area was established between 20th and 35th Street.

The report *North Highland Area Neighborhood Analysis,* prepared by Candeub, Flessig and Associates in 1978, covers the area in this analysis except for Bibb City. Conditions within the neighborhood had not changed substantially in ten years separating the two reports. Although some substandard housing units were demolished and zoning changed to accommodate commercial development along the Columbus-Manchester Expressway, the essential character of North Highlands remained virtually the same. Recommendations included the elimination or rehabilitation of substandard housing, code enforcement, buffering incompatible land uses, and improving recreational facilities.

The most recent study of North Highlands is that presented in the *2nd Avenue Redevelopment Plan,* completed in 1982 by the Planning Division. This report deals with the blocks on either side of Second Avenue through the entire length of the neighborhood. Again, conditions described are not substantially different from those identified in 1968. The plan divides the Second Avenue corridor into sections and recommends specific policies for each. Taken together, the recommendations are to conserve and improve existing development until market conditions provide the opportunity for redevelopment; reinvestment is then directed by use and intensity to appropriate locations within the corridor.


Bibb City Recreation
Bibb City Elem.
Bibb City Playground
Par 3 Golf and Youth Soccer
Columbus Area Voc. Tech.
Daniel Jr. High
Daniel Swimming Pool
Anderson Village Park
Fox Elem.
North Highlands Park
Anderson Mill
Bibb Mill
Swift Spinning Mill
West Point Mill
Wilson Homes
North Columbus Park
Chase Homes
CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER
GEORGIA
ALABAMA
LEGEND
SUBSTANDARD HOUSING
DUMP SITES
RAILROAD CONFLICTS
HIGH TRAFFIC VOLUMES
URBAN RENEWAL AREA
LANDMARK STRUCTURES
MAP 5
NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS
NORTH HIGHLANDS
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Changes in neighborhood conditions, 1978 - 1982: North Highlands has continued to experience a piecemeal loss of housing, especially in the southern portion of the neighborhood. Third Avenue has no housing units remaining between Railroad and 20th Streets and retains very few from 20th to 27th Streets. Other areas which have lost units are First Avenue between 22nd and 26th Streets, Fourth Avenue between 26th and 28th Streets, 22nd and 23rd Streets between the river and Third Avenue, and 37th Street between River Road and Holly Street. The widening of Second Avenue requires right - of - way acquisition and subsequent removal of 39 units above 42nd Street. The land left vacant by the removal of housing units has not been developed.

New investment in the neighborhood has been directed primarily to the development of highway commercial sites along the Columbus-Manchester Expressway. Plans to remove on-street parking along Second Avenue have caused some concern in the commercial area at 38th Street. Although it is recommended that parking be replaced with off-street spaces, a policy decision to do so has not been made. One store has closed in anticipation of reduced business. Other merchants in this area believe that increased traffic will bring more customers; one major renovation is being planned to take advantage of the expected increase in business.

In 1974 the estimated number of jobs in North Highlands was 5,667. The estimates for 1982 indicated that this number has grown to 5,847. The textile mills, which employ the largest number, lost jobs during this period, but highway commercial employment along the expressway increased.

There have been four rezonings since 1978 involving a total of five parcels. Three of these changes were to allow commercial use. One change was to apartment - office zone; the parcel has not been redeveloped for this use.

Portions of three local streets have been paved: 4th Avenue between 26th and 28th Streets and both 24th and 26th Streets from 3rd Avenue to their dead ends.

Treatment: North Highlands is a part of Columbus which has been in decline for many years. Present conditions are a disservice to the residents, many of whom are long-time homeowners, and detract from the desirability of investing in new development or rehabilitating what is there. The recommendations outlined in this analysis are basic steps necessary to prevent further deterioration and stabilize the area.

The housing stock in North Highlands is old and in need of substantial rehabilitation, but continued loss

of housing will benefit neither the residents and businesses nor the city as a whole. The area is a good neighborhood for energy conservation, offering employment opportunities and public transit as well as proximity to downtown and other commercial services. Preservation of the neighborhood will benefit not only current residents but also those families who will require affordable housing in the future.

The Second Avenue Redevelopment project presents an opportunity to focus both public and private attention on North Highlands. The redevelopment plan presents a framework for directing reinvestment to maximize its benefit to the neighborhood. The recommendations in the plan should be reflected in all public policy for the area in order to facilitate its objectives.

In order to give North Highlands a chance to become a healthy neighborhood, the City should:

- Enforce existing environmental ordinances.
- Combine code enforcement treatment with a rehabilitation grant/loan program for low-income homeowners.
- Change the Zoning Atlas to reflect existing plans and enforce it consistently.

Without a commitment to conserve and improve existing development, the neighborhood will continue to deteriorate. With that commitment and some help, North Highlands will be able to attract the types of reinvestment which can improve the neighborhood.