

Citizens expressed a strong desire for **mixed-use** development, which allows for further integration of commercial and residential land uses extending beyond the central business district and into both existing and new residential neighborhoods. This idea is reflected in many citizen comments that used the words “**livable**,” “**walkable**,” etc. to express their desire for complete neighborhoods.

Housing Vision

A diversity of housing choices will be dispersed throughout the community to achieve an adequate supply of safe, quality, affordable, energy efficient, and accessible housing.

Affordable housing was described by the City’s Affordable Housing Policy Committee’s 2008 Report as “Any housing where basic housing costs, including rent, utilities, mortgage payments, and home repairs necessary to maintain a reasonably safe and secure home in standard condition are less than 38% of household income for home occupants and 30% of household income for renters.”

to medical, social, commercial, service, and housing options that will support their needs throughout their life cycle. Policies promoting a variety of housing types and housing flexibility, combined with highly walkable places close to amenities, appeal to people who want to live in the same home or neighborhood as they age. An example is multigenerational designs that allow extended families to live together in comfortable arrangements. Creating homes like these requires looking at existing accessory dwelling unit policies, zoning policies, and possibly adjusting

The Principles of Livable and Sustainable Communities

Principle: We value attainable and diverse housing options.

Columbia promotes **affordable housing** and responsible home ownership by assisting with home ownership in older areas of the City, and supporting private nonprofit organizations that will develop, purchase, and manage affordable housing units in Columbia. Housing options should be diverse and attractive, and designed to integrate seamlessly into the surrounding neighborhood.

Maintenance and **rehabilitation** of deteriorating housing stock will be encouraged by providing assistance to owners and holding absentee landlords accountable in neighborhoods where the quality of housing is declining due to a lack of maintenance. Efforts will be made to maximize the environmental design capacities of existing housing stock, as older houses may need **energy efficiency**, storm water, and other upgrades.

Principle: We value attractive, vibrant, and diverse places.

Columbia will create memorable and **attractive** boulevards and streetscapes that incorporate landscape design, site amenities, art, and thematic elements.

Columbia will promote neighborhoods that are economically, aesthetically, and **socially varied**.

building codes to allow for neighborhood-compatible flexibility. These issues are discussed in the third policy in this section.

Affordable housing is the product of several factors. While typically describing housing for lower-income individuals, affordable housing may also mean residents can afford to live in a variety of locations which meet their needs, are safe, and allow for flexibility of choice. Flexibility in housing designs and types allows existing neighborhoods to provide options for a variety of incomes. Reducing energy costs through greater efficiency and transportation costs through proximity and alternatives are additional ways to increase affordability.

Protecting existing affordable housing is another concern moving forward as market factors drive development. While downtown has more housing than ever before, increased desire to live downtown is driving up prices. As land becomes valuable, existing affordable housing, often in the form of older structures, is being replaced by new, higher-rent structures. As the community prioritizes infill development, conversations about the value of the existing housing stock, affordable housing, and historic preservation will need to take place.

Affordable housing may also be encouraged through incentives less directly tied to land use policies, like reducing regulatory barriers and partnerships with affordable housing organizations. The City’s Affordable Housing Policy Committee report defines and describes such policies and strategies to encourage affordable housing. Addressing neighborhood compatibility and affordability is further discussed in policy three of this section.

Policy Two: Support Mixed-Use

Citizens have expressed a strong desire for **mixed-use** development, which allows for further integration of commercial and residential land uses beyond the central business district into both existing and new residential neighborhoods. This idea is reflected in many citizen comments using the words “**livable**” and “**walkable**” to express their desire for complete neighborhoods.

Building on many of the strategies described in policy one, complete neighborhoods have safe and convenient access to the

goods and services needed in daily life. This includes a variety of **housing options**, **universal design** of public and private spaces, access to grocery stores and other commercial services, quality public schools, public open spaces and recreational facilities, affordable transportation options, and civic amenities.

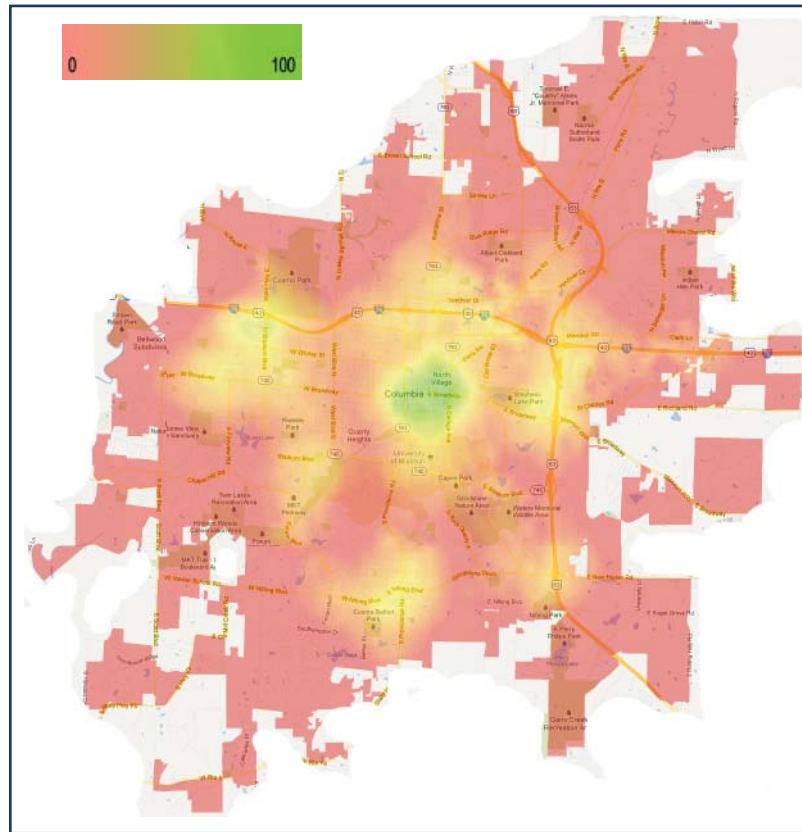
An important element of a complete neighborhood is its construction at a **walkable** and **bikeable** human scale and meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities. Walkable, bikeable neighborhoods also encourage **healthy lifestyles** for community members.

The lack of mixed-use and walkable neighborhoods is apparent in the existing land use pattern. Today, Columbia is composed primarily of homogeneous single-family neighborhoods and large regional shopping centers, rather than neighborhoods with neighborhood-scale shopping and services within walking distance. This can be seen in the low **walk scores** throughout most of the City in Map 4-8.

While only proximity to amenities is used to calculate walk scores, facilities for walking and biking—like sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails—are another component of complete neighborhoods. These elements of the built environment can be retrofitted into the existing urban fabric and provided in new developments.

A few simple changes can achieve new mixed-use neighborhoods and **enhance existing commercial nodes to include residential opportunities**. One such change is incentivizing **higher densities** in new development areas. As development densities decrease, reliance on automobiles to reach services increases, and regional, auto-oriented commercial “big box” development becomes the model for providing these services.

In order to sustain truly local **neighborhood commercial** service centers, higher densities of residential development must be built around them to supply enough local clientele to support the businesses within them. Five minutes (one quarter mile) is widely considered to be a reasonable walking time to reach services. Therefore, new neighborhood commercial nodes, or “**urban villages**,” should ideally be spaced approximately one-half



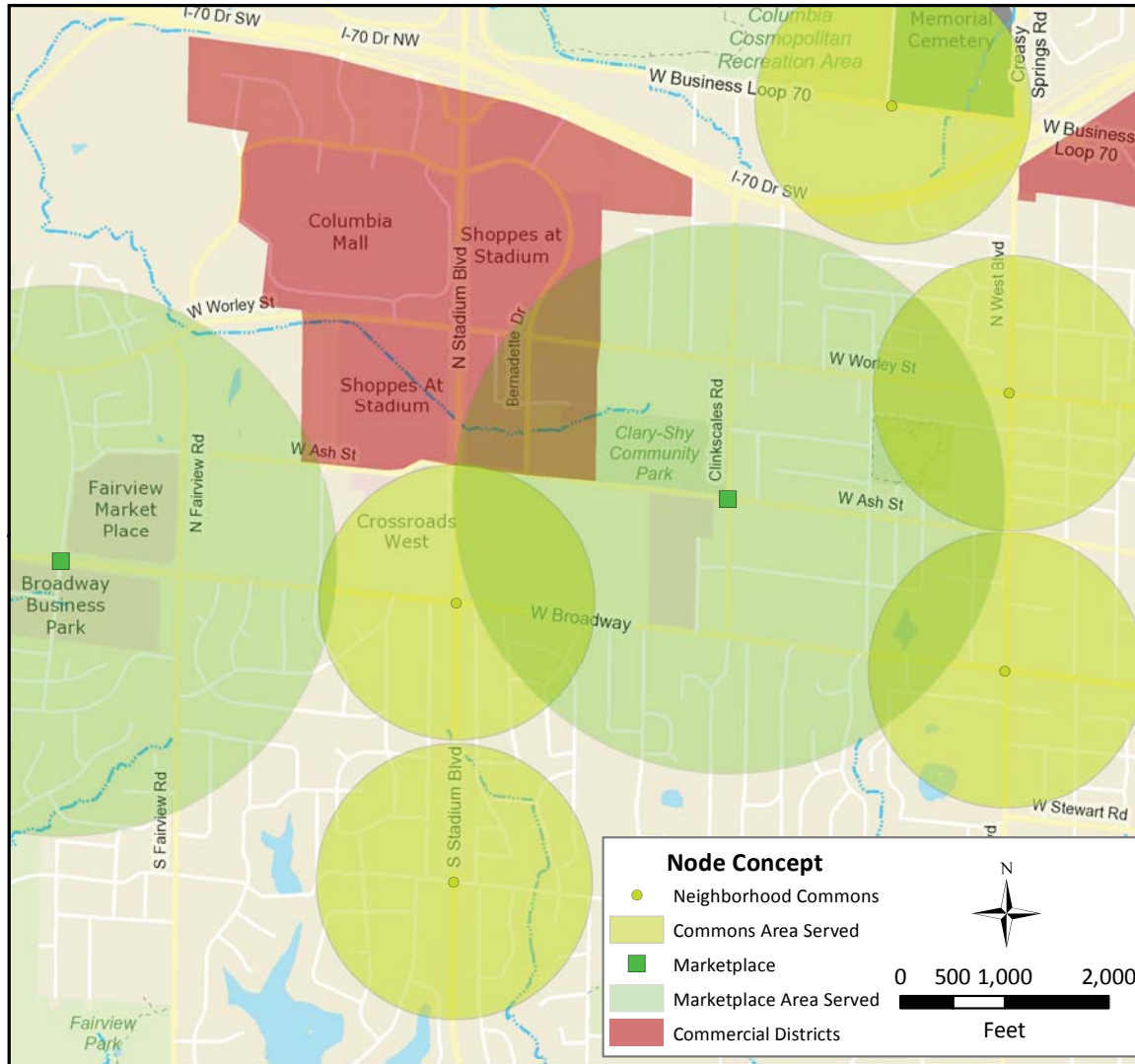
Using a 0 (auto-dependent) to 100 (highly walkable) point scale, walk scores indicate the ability—or lack thereof—for residents of various neighborhoods to walk to services, amenities, shopping, and jobs. Encouraging walkability—both in new and established neighborhoods—has health, affordability, accessibility, and other quality-of-life benefits for residents.

Map 4-8: Walk Score Map
Source: Walkscore.com

mile apart to provide walkable goods and services to surrounding residents. This spacing pattern coincides with city-wide roadway connectivity goals, which recommend intersections of public collector and arterial streets every half mile. Map 4-9 shows an area of Columbia that follows this walkable, mixed-use development pattern, with the existing nodes highlighted.

This policy has positive implications for public transportation services by encouraging the location of high-density residential and commercial services along major road corridors that are easily

“We might lose the most attractive aspects of our community: walkable neighborhoods.”



Map 4-9: Illustration of the node concept
Source: City of Columbia

An **urban village** is a medium-density development that includes mixed-use residential and commercial property, good public transit, and pedestrian-oriented urban design. In urban villages, everything you need is within walking distance (e.g. grocery stores, services, entertainment, and restaurants), including public squares to relax and meet people. These urban villages are a contrast to auto-centric, fringe development.

served by public transit, thereby decreasing reliance on automobiles as a means of accessing basic commercial services.

Introducing walkable, **mixed-use** nodes at neighborhood edges also presents an opportunity to integrate new housing options into neighborhoods that are mostly homogeneous, thus providing opportunities to accommodate greater demographic diversity and creating neighborhoods that are more economically, aesthetically, and **socially varied**.

The concept of mixing land uses to create more complete, **livable**, and **walkable** neighborhoods should not be limited to residential environments. Mixed-use principles and policies are applicable to new and existing commercial and **employment centers**, which traditionally have lacked residential components. Most notably, Columbia's **downtown**, which is home to a diverse range of commercial and industrial uses, has historically been void of residential opportunities. This trend has been changing with the introduction of several apartment buildings over the past few years. However, there remains a strong demand for more downtown residential units and a greater variety of unit types to meet the needs of diverse demographics and incomes.

Bringing residents to commercial areas has different challenges than bringing commercial services into established residential neighborhoods. The challenges associated with introducing com-

The node concept is a good way to think about how we can mix residential, employment, and commercial uses. Map 4-9 shows an area of Columbia that has three levels of commercial development:

- **Neighborhood-scale commercial** is a walkable center located within a residential neighborhood; it can include a small market, day care, and small professional offices.
- A **marketplace** provides for the sale of day-to-day needs and should be built around a primary tenant, ideally, a grocery store.
- A **commercial district** is a regional shopping destination built at an automobile scale. It can also include high-density apartments and large office buildings. Columbia Mall and Shoppes at Stadium are examples of this type of commercial.

mercial uses and development into residential areas are discussed in the following section.

Policy Three: Facilitate Neighborhood Planning

One of the most controversial issues in land use allocation is development and redevelopment in established neighborhoods, also known as **infill development**. It can be particularly challenging when commercial uses are proposed in or near residential neighborhoods. Traditional land use planning has resulted in a landscape of homogeneous and segregated land uses. As Columbia strives to achieve a greater mixture of uses, it is important to recognize and respect unique neighborhood characteristics.

How can the City achieve successful integration of commercial uses into established neighborhoods? There are two strategies that help create a climate where residential neighborhood stakeholders become more accepting of infill redevelopment. The first strategy is early neighborhood engagement. The second is addressing land use compatibility issues.

Early neighborhood engagement means involving neighbors in the process well before specific development proposals are submitted, to **identify potential infill sites** in their neighborhoods and to discuss how these properties could and should be used. Early engagement provides an opportunity to evaluate options without the immediate threat of change. It allows neighbors to contribute ideas, **build consensus**, and prepare for the fact that a vacant lot or dilapidated building may be a sign of change to

come. Neighbors may also identify business types of benefit to residents and seek to match desired uses with ideal locations.

Creating **neighborhood land use plans** may be the best method of identifying what transitional parcels should be used for in the future. City staff should work with established neighborhood and homeowners' associations to develop neighborhood plans—especially in areas where older housing stock or poor building conditions may present opportunities for redevelopment. The goal is to create neighborhood land use plans that identify site-specific redevelopment concepts and outline conditions that mitigate particular land use compatibility concerns of neighbors. This represents a proactive approach to infill development and mixed use and was a strong recommendation that emerged from public input.

Public input also indicates considering **historic preservation** and community character, as well as property maintenance and aesthetic considerations, is important in neighborhood planning. This may be achieved through regulatory policy, incentives, or guidance, such as design compatibility standards developed by neighborhoods themselves.

Planning will also help neighborhoods encourage attainable and diverse housing and home ownership options while preserving their neighborhood's character. Residents can identify goals for their neighborhood—perhaps flexible zoning options or overlays to encourage or incentivize certain housing options or mixed-use

Infill development refers to the development or redevelopment of vacant or underutilized land in established areas. It is the opposite of sprawl.

Principle: We value historical character.

The vibrancy, historic integrity, and eclectic character and composition of the greater downtown will be preserved and enhanced. Neighborhoods and historic areas with a unique character will be protected by promoting **historic preservation** of significant structures rather than demolition. Sensitive redevelopment will be supported within historic neighborhoods.

Principle: We value neighborhood planning.

Columbia citizens will celebrate a sense of community through strong neighborhood planning. **Neighborhood land use plans** should be prepared to support positive development and redevelopment in both new and old neighborhoods. The personality and character of established neighborhoods should be preserved. School enrollment needs should be anticipated with new residential development, and schools should continue to be the focal point of new neighborhoods.