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Understanding the Context of Our Future Decisions

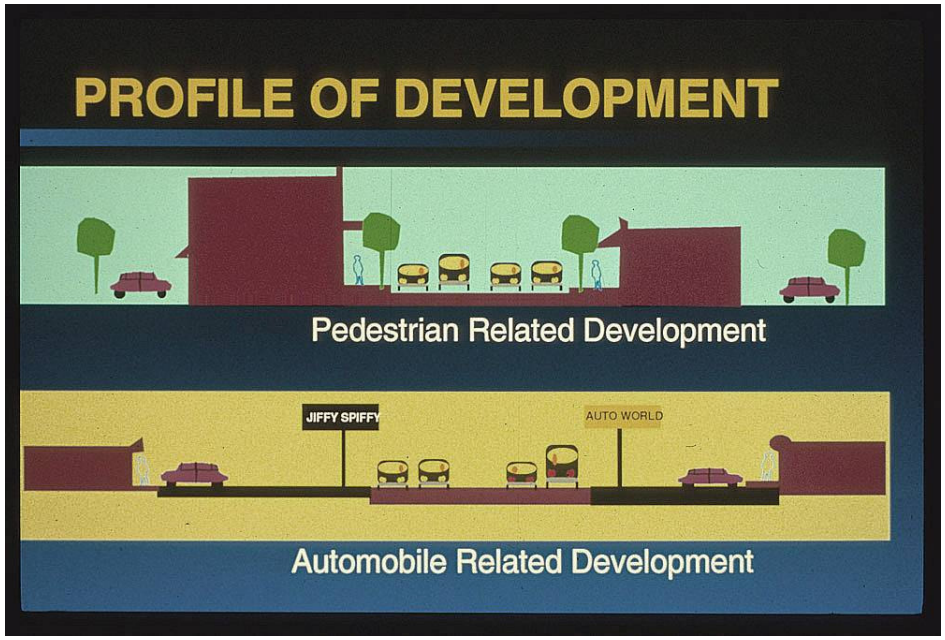
Decisions and directions that compose this Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) were not made solely in-office. Our decisions and the recommendations contained in this document were formed by a range of influences. Those influences as outlined in the following pages were arrived at through feedback received from various public outreach efforts including a citizen survey, telephoned suggestions by the public and a series of public forums in several locations throughout the City.

In this period of American history (2007 and 2008) where we are experiencing a constantly changing national and world economy, including rising gasoline prices, the estimates and assumptions used in developing this Plan, clearly have an impact on mobility and land use patterns. For example, rising gasoline prices will undoubtedly affect where people elect to live with relation to where they work and where they shop and how they get there. Not only will the size of automobiles continue their downward scale as they have since the 1950's, but the frequency that families use them will also be scaled back to reflect the rising cost associated with their operation. That will impact how and where land is developed in the future. Some of the changes that may occur could be in the rise in popularity of more compact, walkable new developments, located nearer to where we live rather than separated from the central business districts or other work centers. The nature and scale of

the development would correspond to the market in which it is located.

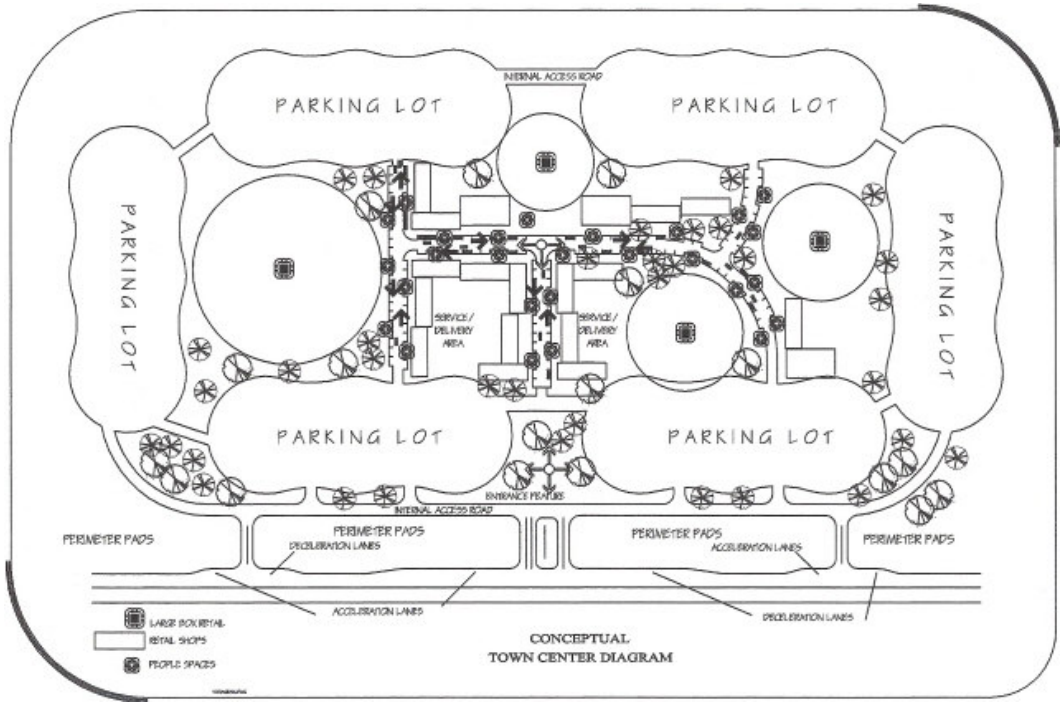
CONSOLIDATED COMPACT DEVELOPMENTS

We will need to re-tool our thought process concerning the growth of our community not in terms of the "sprawling", expansive patterns out in the suburbs laced together by a network of roads and tied to the urban core by another network of roads, but in terms of a more compact, cohesive and sustainable pattern of development. The development profile needs to be re-tooled from the old automobile-related standard to a more pedestrian-related one. Instead of a central business district over here and commercial malls over there and residential subdivisions in still another area, we need to think in terms of "Places". "Places" that will contain work centers, residential areas, restaurants, and commercial/retail centers. The size of the "Places" will ultimately be broken down into two standards of development. Those two standards will be Community Retail Service areas and Neighborhood Retail Service areas.



Community Retail Service areas will develop as nodular points at critical intersections along our transportation mobility system. These are the larger of the two standards and will include large box retail, sit down restaurants, movie cinemas, office parks, food market centers, private recreation activities, transportation stops, and possibly satellite government offices. They will be a cohesive unit that will offer an interface of three modes of transportation (vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian). Connectivity between like and unlike land uses within these "Places" will be of paramount importance so that the residents of the residential areas may walk, bike or drive unimpeded to destinations within the Community Retail Service area "Place". The primary trade area of "big box" retailers in Dothan is currently measured by an 80-mile radius. As the population in this area increases, that radius will shrink.

Neighborhood Retail Service areas will develop around pre-existing or residential developments popping up at some distance from the Community Retail Service areas. They may contain multi-family housing, specialty retail, small restaurants, gas station-convenience stores, garden office parks, day cares, medical offices, and other activities that would support a much smaller trade area than the larger, Community Retail Service areas. Since they are smaller, connectivity issues would only impact the one or two residential neighborhoods that they serve.



Attempts will be made by the City, by public-private investments and by some private investors to re-populate the downtown area. There will probably be some success limited to infill tracts devoted to the development of an Urban Traditional Neighborhood or an Urban Planned Unit Development. The former will be strictly residential in nature and the latter a mixture of commercial/residential. Yet, unless the government desires to get back into the business of developing residential "projects" as seen from the 1940's through the 1970's in many metro areas of the U. S. to house those individuals and families now living in inner city neighborhoods, redevelopment will be a hit and miss proposition. This is due mostly to the fact that nearly all of the property inside Ross Clark Circle has already been developed. More likely, the area around the Wiregrass Commons Mall will be the first area to be "re-invented" or redeveloped as a Community Retail Service area "Place" with some sort of mixed use, commercial/residential theme. **The Northside Mall** opposite the Wiregrass Commons Mall also has the same potential. If the City continues to expand westward, it may become necessary for the City to develop a satellite office containing some part of government services now available only in the downtown while the center of government and its administrative offices remain within the central business district.

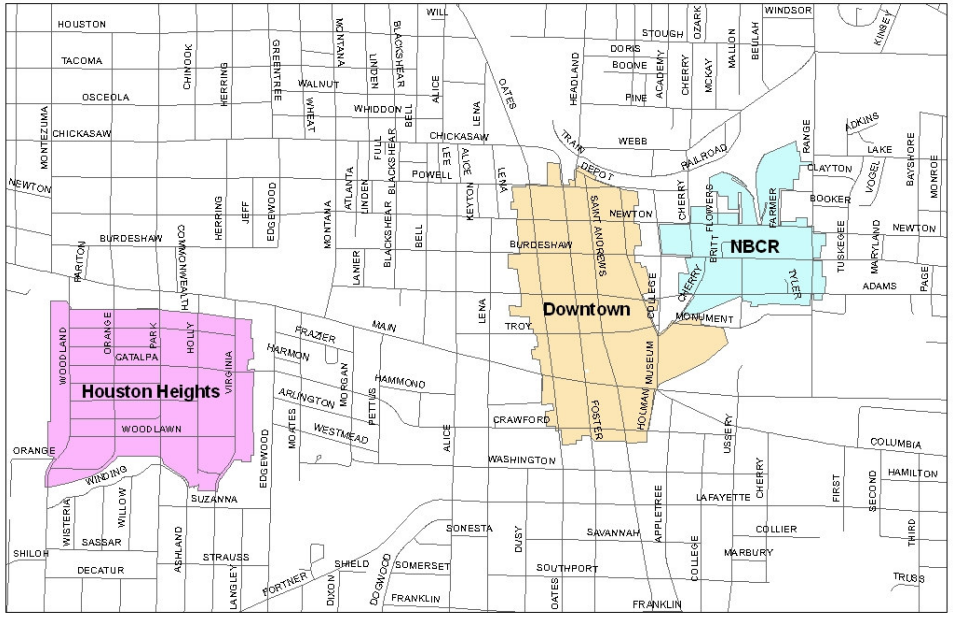
What's definite is the fact that rising fuel prices has a historic effect on where people choose to live and where they choose to work and shop. This phenomenon became evident in the 1970's when there was a perceived fuel shortage which drove the price of gasoline up from 55 cents to 75 cents a gallon. Larger metropolitan areas such as Houston, Texas saw a change in where and how new residential developments occurred. No longer were large areas being developed outside the city limits strictly as a residential project. The term "master-planned community" took fashion as large, multi-thousand acre developments sprung up that not only had a residential component, but had a commercial/office/retail one as well. Many bought homes within the new master-planned developments and worked there too. As the numbers of residential units grew, so did the food markets, retailers, service industry and schools within the new development.

Here in Dothan we need to plan for connectivity between new developments that increases accessibility. New regulations should be fashioned to address future needs not only for motorized vehicles but also for bicycle and pedestrian movement. Hard-surfaced trails should be incorporated into the design of new developments that are separate from the streets to minimize the amount of vehicular/pedestrian conflicts. Trails, not simply sidewalks, should be incorporated into the residential and commercial components at the rear of residential lots or in landscaped reserves paralleling but outside of the public street right-of-way. In this manner, the development's home owners or commercial association would be responsible for the maintenance and repair of the trails with the enforcement powers of the City for them to do so rather than expect tax payers City-wide to foot the bill.

JURISDICTION AND REGULATION

There are several regulatory factors that influence where we live and what form development will take. As a community, we should all be concerned about the quality of development that occurs. One of the tools available to us is the planning jurisdiction. The City of Dothan enjoys a five-mile planning jurisdiction (PJ) granted by State Law. The five-mile planning jurisdiction enables cities like Dothan, to protect their future interests by controlling the subdivision of land; land that will one day be annexed into the City. At the present, the City has agreed with Houston County to pull back its state-allowed five-mile planning jurisdiction to the City limits. But the City maintains the ability to review proposed developments within three miles of the City limits. In this Report, we propose that an urban growth boundary be established to replace this agreement and return this statutory authority to the City.

As there is no zoning within the unincorporated areas of the County, the only land development controls available to the City to ensure design integrity are the subdivision regulations. The most obvious problem with the County's proposal is that the City will eventually be asked to annex subdivisions outside its limits that may not have been built to City code. Just as important is extending building inspections and permitting into the PJ to ensure that buildings are in compliance with City regulations. Once annexed, the City would, by law, have to maintain the infrastructure and address housing construction issues that would otherwise be avoidable if the development met City code.



Dothan Historic Districts

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Dothan has three historic districts. The quality and the form of development that occurs within these districts, including the Downtown Commercial Historic District, the Houston Heights Historic District and the Newton, Burdeshaw, Cherry and Range (NBCR) District are impacted by design guidelines as well as basic land use regulations. Protecting and preserving the character of the development that is contained in these areas is a vital part of maintaining the heritage and character of the city.

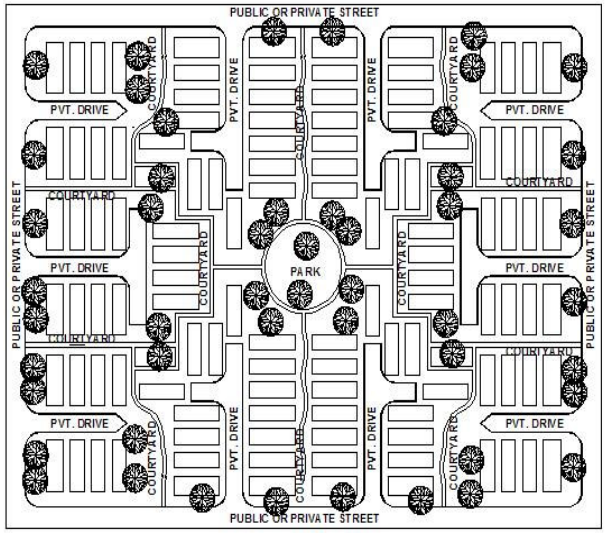
Dothan utilizes a Euclidian form of zoning that was originally established in 1946. Timing and market conditions have led to many rezoning approvals over the years. It is important to remember that zoning works to establish minimum development standards. Often, these minimums do not address all the impacts that are likely to be felt when property is developed. Since zoning was initiated in Dothan, land use regulation has continued to evolve and this traditional form may not be the most appropriate given Dothan's goals for growth. Other styles may be more appropriate in a given situation and will be explored

separately from this document. The LRDP will not change the form of zoning in Dothan, but will recommend that alternatives be evaluated for application in Dothan.

These districts were established to secure the integrity and character of certain areas within the original City boundaries. Contributing and non-contributing buildings have been located and inventoried and building permit requirements for reconstruction or new construction within the historic districts have been established. The Historic Preservation Commission is charged with overseeing and administering proposed changes to buildings in all three districts as authorized by Chapter 50 of the City code.

EXAMPLE OF CLUSTERING IN A URBAN TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD

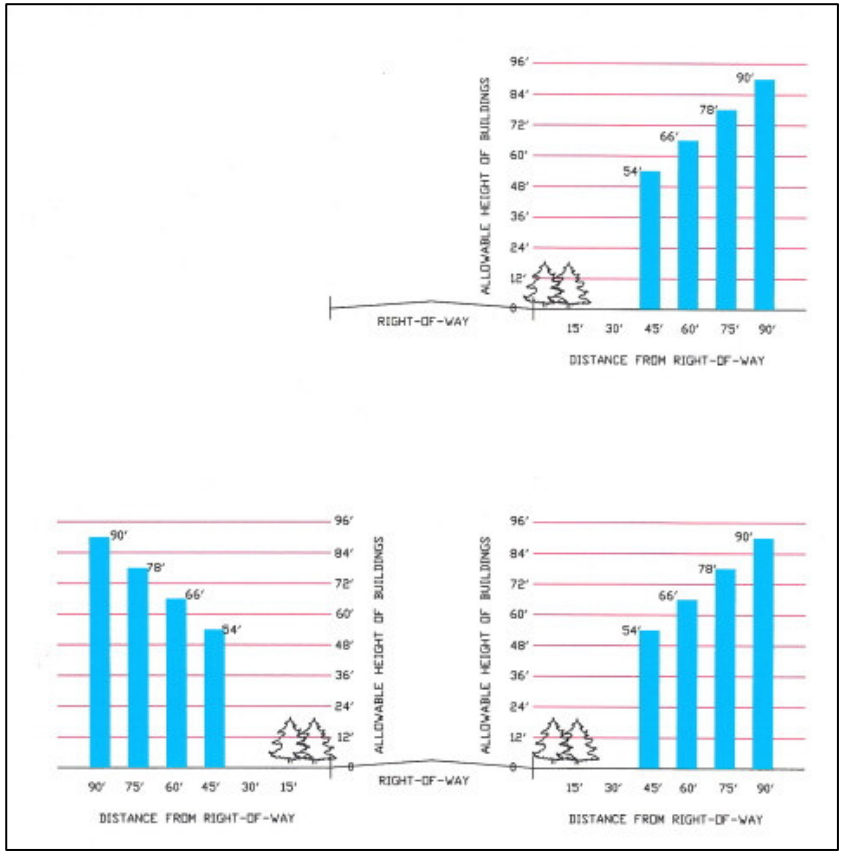
WITH "T"-TYPE, "L"-TYPE AND DEAD END PRIVATE DRIVES AND COURTYARDS, OPEN SPACE AND PARK.



A **Downtown Overlay District (DOD)** has been established to overlay the Downtown Core Area (DCA) as well as approximately 14 additional, adjacent acres. This district has three subdistricts that either relaxes or strengthens building setbacks, structure heights, off-street parking requirements, defined view corridors, as well as other criteria for re-development and new development within its confines.

Planned Unit Developments have been created by private land developers to introduce a mix of land uses that would not be otherwise allowed. The largest single PUD in Dothan is the residential subdivision named the Woodlands in the northwest quadrant of the City. Recently, the City created two new PUD forms for application in the downtown area. The Urban Traditional Neighborhood Development District (UTND) is designed to capture unique residential only development opportunities on small infill tracts. Likewise, the Urban Planned Unit Development District (UPUD) is designed for commercial application which may include a residential component.

Urban Traditional Neighborhood Development (UTND) is a floating zone that may be used in the DOD as well and modifications were also made to the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations as enabling measures for this new zone. Similar in content and area of restrictions to the UPUD, the UTND differs in allowable minimum acreage, size of lots allowed, and the presence of private drives; "T" and "L" type turn arounds on dead end drives; and impervious cover requirements among other design constraints. As the UPUD, the UTND encourages unconventional "outside the box" design techniques.



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Scenic Corridor Overlay Districts - Certain "gateway" roads into the City have been identified and a draft ordinance has been created for an overlay district along these roadways. The overlay districts would be subject to a more stringent design criteria for development than is found in other areas of the City. A separate design guideline has been developed to address such things as spacing of project entries onto a scenic corridor, the amount of landscaping, parking lot standards, building height and setbacks in relation to the street (see illustration to the right), as well as spatial orientation of buildings to the street and to each other.

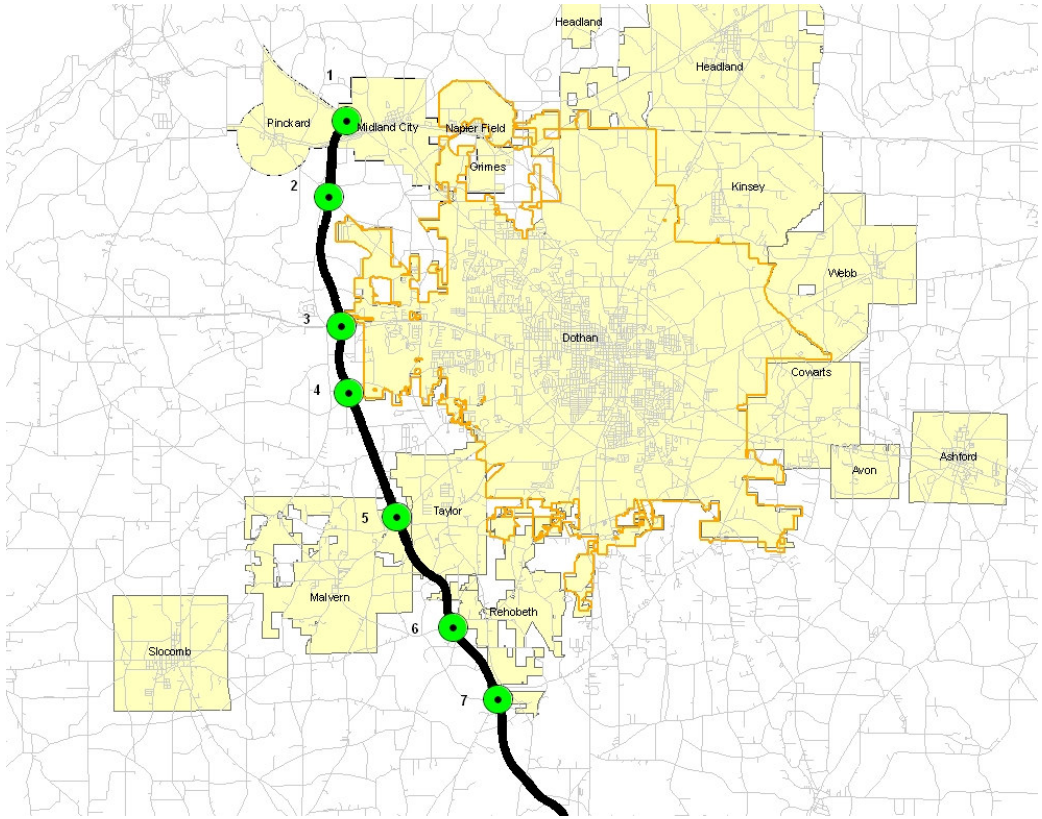
Large Regional Development Projects

Country Crossing, a music-oriented theme park is planned just to the south of the City limits of Dothan located on U.S. 231 South. Its development promises to have significant impact on not only the entertainment industry, but new service industry land uses, new housing uses, and support commercial uses. This development would constitute the creation of a major new market that would permeate the general vicinity of Country Crossing as well as along U.S. 231 South with development activity occurring both nearby and at a short distance from the entertainment center. Already, the City Planning

& Development Department is seeing feasibility and speculative rezonings for development projects by other developers in the general area of Country Crossing.

Impact of the I-10 Connector

Should the long awaited I-10 Connector become a reality, there will be significant new mixed use development activity associated with its construction. Since it is proposed to be a limited access roadway, it would be in the City's best interest to actively pursue annexation of the land in the area of proposed interchanges 2, 3, & 4 (shown in the map to the right). Land development strategies should be implemented that promotes concentrated activities at and nearby these nodes. Since potential development may not occur for some time, the City should look at creating a "reserve" district until firm plans can be presented.



As the area population grows, our employment, service and retail industries will continue their growth proportionally. If Dothan is not able to provide housing or an economic base for our share of the region's demand, development would occur within the unincorporated areas of Houston and Dale Counties. The City of Enterprise, 25 miles to our west is also enjoying an economic boom of sorts and growth will continue over the next decades on a regional level to fill in the gaps between Dothan and Enterprise.

Water will be the most valuable resource for the future of the area. Steps are now in place to introduce a surface water reservoir into the area, but others will be needed to take care of the burgeoning growth the Dothan area is sure to see during the life of this Plan.