

Willoughby District Land Use Plan

Juneau, Alaska

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June 2011



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1.0 Introduction

The actions of Juneau's residents and the adopted plans of the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) have recognized the Willoughby District as Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural area for at least 50 years.

In the 1960's, the City provided the land and Juneau citizens voted to support a one year, one percent sales tax to raise matching funds to build the Alaska State Museum here. Today, in addition to the nearby State Capitol and Alaska State Museum, the Willoughby District is home to major State offices, the Juneau Centennial Hall Convention and Visitors Center, the Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska's Andrew Hope Building with its meeting spaces and ANB/ANS Juneau camp home, the Juneau Arts and Culture Center (the JACC), Zach Gordon Youth Center, and Juneau's public broadcasting offices and studios.

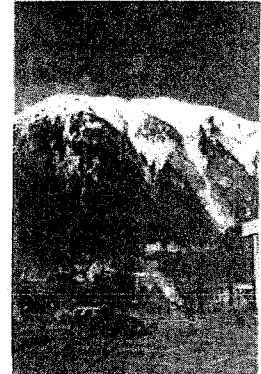
The CBJ Comprehensive Plan establishes direction for growth in this area:

1. Support the establishment of a Cultural Campus;
2. Seek to strengthen and enhance the Capitol Complex; and
3. Provide for mixed use development that integrates residential, retail and office uses.

Zoning reinforces this direction. The area's Mixed Use 2 zoning district calls for dense residential development in buildings where the 1st floors are occupied by stores, restaurants, offices and other places with activity. Top floors of mixed use buildings are filled with residential, office, or commercial uses and sometimes a mix of all three.

The Willoughby District Land Use Plan is a Long Range Plan. The projects in it will be accomplished over time by a series of near to long term public sector investments in park and plaza space, infrastructure, and parking; and through private sector investments as land owners are ready to improve their properties.

The Plan will be a blue print for development in this area for the next 20-25 years. It will be used by CBJ staff (and portions of the plan will be adopted into Juneau's Comprehensive Plan), public and private landowners, developers, and the general public.



The Willoughby District Land Use Plan was developed by building upon CBJ direction and following a process that included:

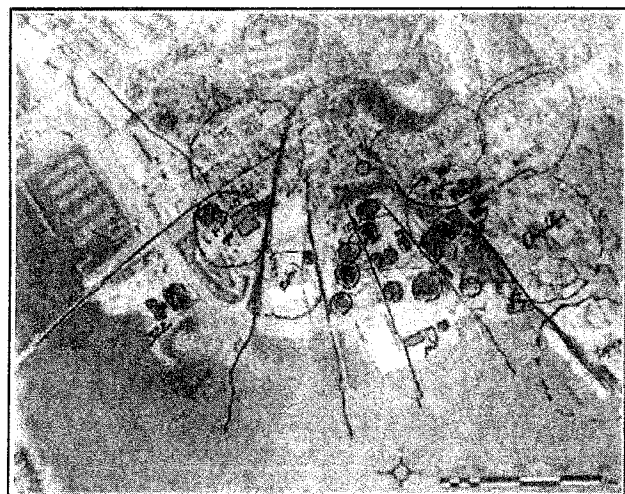
- An inventory of current land uses and building conditions, traffic patterns and pedestrian facilities, employee numbers, existing parking spaces, community destinations, and current CBJ Comprehensive Plan policies and zoning standards.
- Identifying the District's assets and challenges. Applying planning and design principles that offer ways to showcase assets and tackle challenges.
- Collecting and reviewing photographs illustrating changes in the District over the last 50 years, research into area history, and compiling and studying past area plans.
- Conversations with those having day to day local knowledge of the area - the people who work in the district – occurred while mapping and inventorying local conditions.
- A web-based survey was conducted to solicit opinions on goals, priorities, concerns, and to better understand how people access the area and why they visit. The survey generated over 250 comments. All public comments (survey, public meetings, email and by mail) are organized by theme and summarized in Appendix A.
- Meetings with landowners and residents, CBJ committees and staff, and State agencies took place. This included meetings that the Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indians of Alaska generously helped to organize and host to ensure that the voice of the area's Alaska Native residents was clearly heard.
- The consultant team hosted a public meeting in mid-November that about 45 people attended.

The Plan is being prepared in advance of significant investment that is anticipated over the next two to ten years. Projects include construction of a new State Library, Archives and Museum facility, improvements to Whittier Street, creation of a public plaza between the State Office Building and the new Museum as parking is relocated, completion of Juneau's long-planned Seawalk nearby, and more. These investments will likely stimulate some private property owners in the area to reinvest in their property.

With the benefit of a community endorsed Willoughby District Land Use Plan to help guide, coordinate, and set clear rules for these investments, this area can be much more than any one individual project could create alone.

The Willoughby District will continue to be a place that welcomes all ages, income levels, and populations. Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural campus will thrive as the public and private sector both take actions to achieve the vision established in this Plan. As this Plan is implemented, there will be:

- Public open space and plazas to showcase Juneau's civic, arts, and cultural assets.
- A better walking environment to and through the area that links new public spaces.
- More and easier crossings of Egan Drive that reconnects the waterfront and the Willoughby District.
- A connected grid of well-lit streets, with wide sidewalks and landscaping.
- Relocated, consolidated parking that is behind and under buildings, on-street, and in parking garages.
- As a result of the two items above, developable parcels are created that are suited to denser, mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses, and, more housing, both market-rate and affordable.
- Public features and incentives to discourage single occupancy vehicle commuting and manage parking demand.



1.1 Willoughby District Boundary

The Willoughby District is the area bounded by Gold Creek, Egan Drive, Willoughby Avenue, and Village Street.

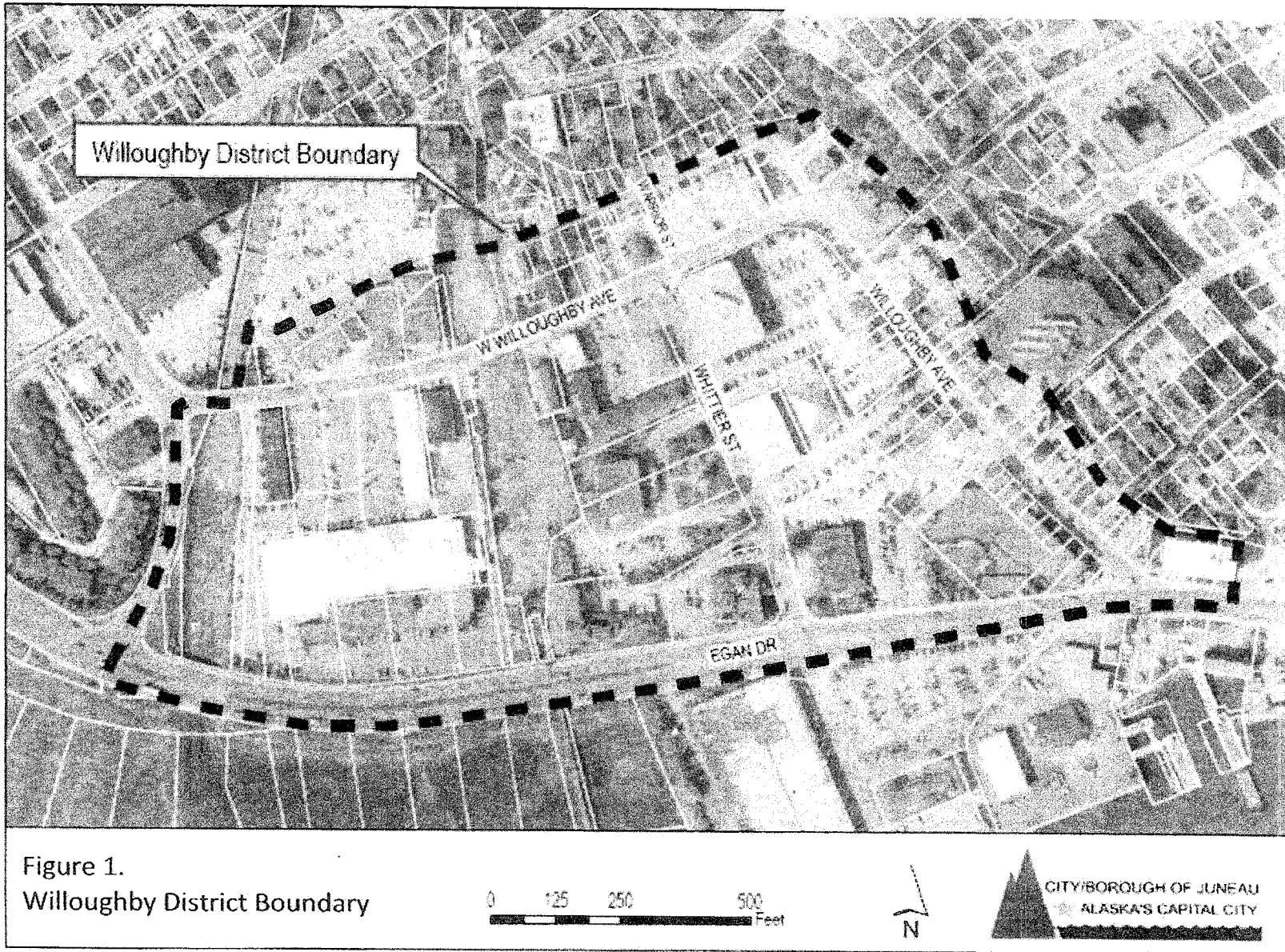


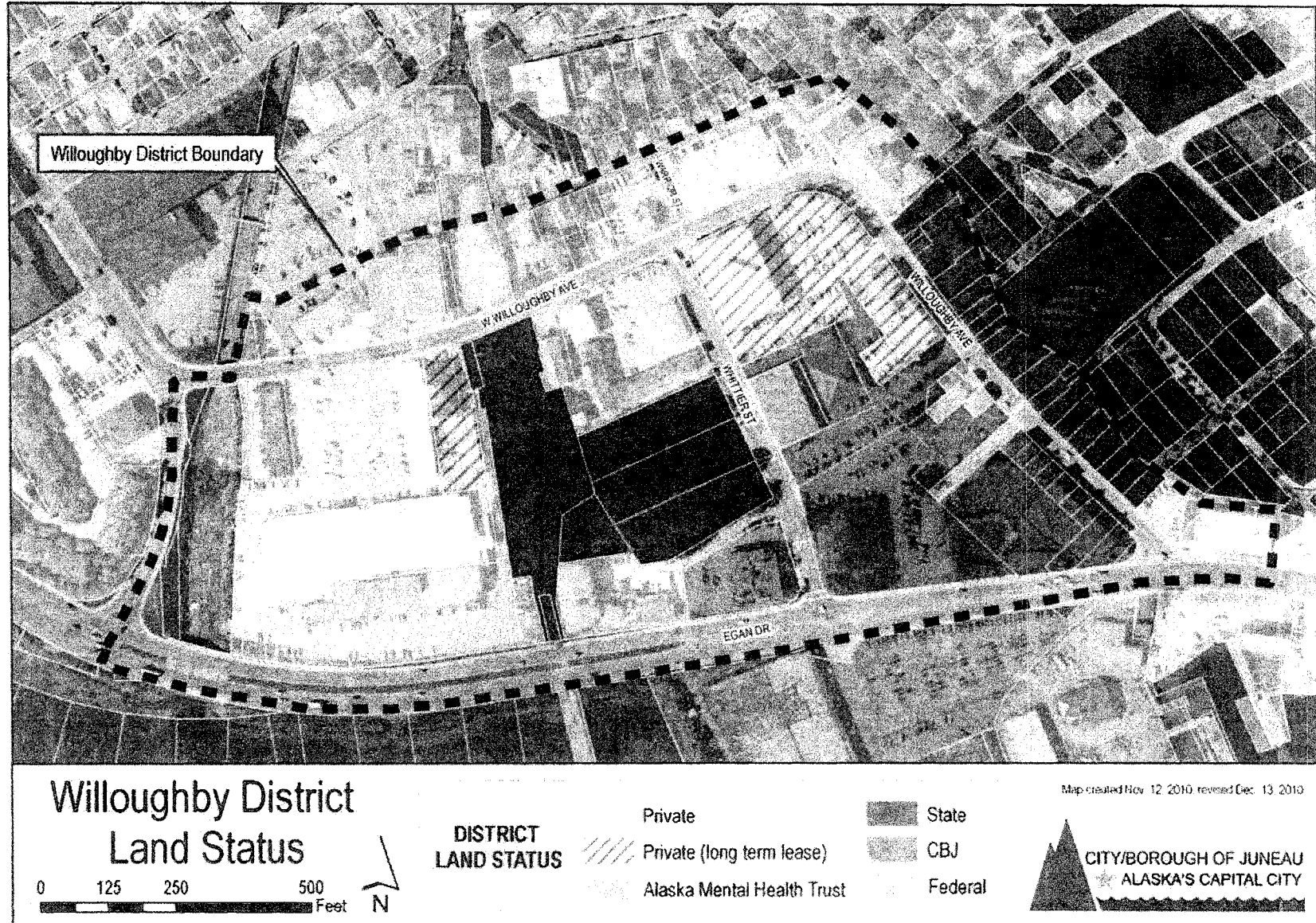
Figure 1.
Willoughby District Boundary

Aerial photo taken June 2006

Map created Oct. 20, 2010

1.2 Land Status

Land in the Willoughby District is split about evenly between approximately 27 private land owners and publicly owned land. Public land is owned by a combination of the City and Borough of Juneau, State of Alaska, and Alaska Mental Health Trust. Immediately northwest and southeast is land also owned by the federal government.



Aerial photo taken June 2006

5.0 Willoughby District Land Use Plan

Chapter 4.0 reviewed a series of improvements to take better advantage of area assets and specific ways to address and remedy land use obstacles and challenges in the Willoughby District. These concepts, together with public comments and information gained during other plan development steps, and a few important planning and design principles (reviewed below), were all combined to develop and refine the Willoughby District Land Use Plan.

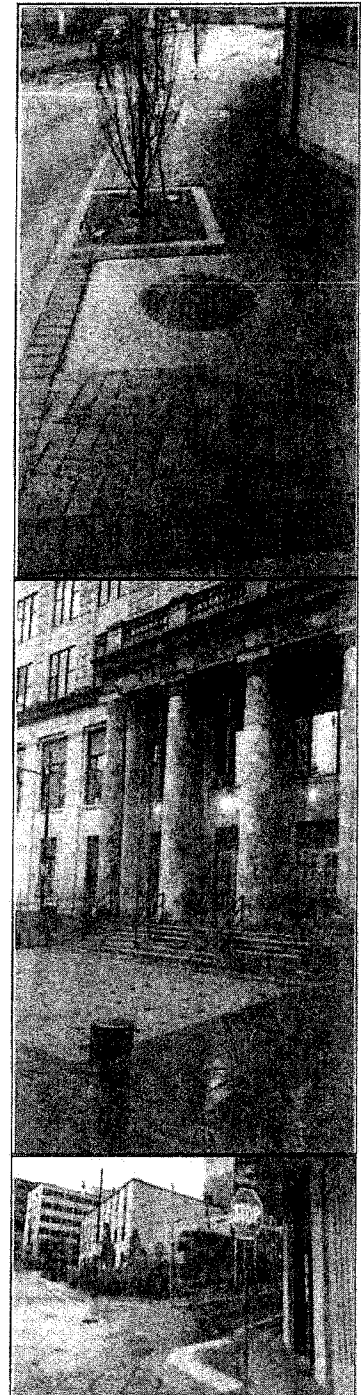
5.1 Planning and Design Principles

Building Design, Orientation and Construction

Build-To Line. Overly large setbacks are inconvenient and unpleasant for pedestrians because they increase walking distances from public sidewalks and prevent pedestrians on sidewalks from enjoying the building details and the activity within the building. In addition, they prevent the building from contributing to an intimate, pleasant, comfortable street wall, which harms the sense of place and makes the pedestrian feel as if she or he is in "no man's land." Buildings pulled up to the street sidewalk (0-10 ft setback) have more of a human scale, and are recommended all along Willoughby Avenue and some of the District's new streets.

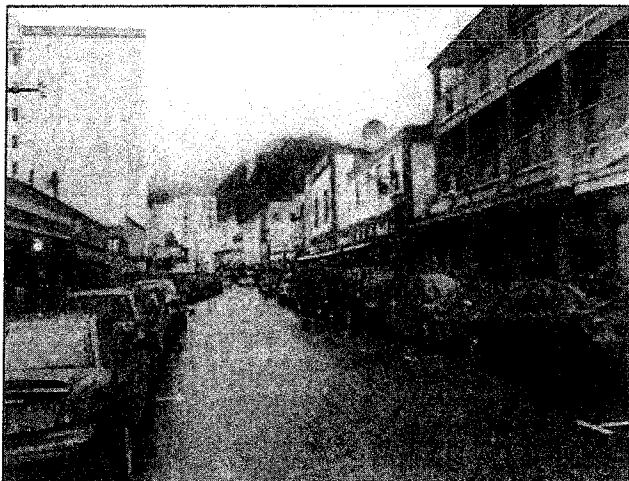
Building Height of at Least Two Stories. "Low-slung" one-story buildings are more appropriate in low-density residential areas designed for motor vehicle travel. They reduce the density and intensity needed to make transit, walking, and bicycling viable, and typically are too low in profile to form the desirable, intimate, comfortable public realm that is possible when buildings face one another across the street. One-story buildings also reduce the opportunity to create mixed commercial and residential uses. Multi-story buildings that are two to five stories in height will be an important component of the compact, walkable Willoughby District. The building profile forms the desired street wall and the additional stories allow the establishment of the number of residents needed for a viable urban neighborhood.

Buildings Oriented to the Street, Not Turning Away. A successful commercial establishment is designed to provide convenience for customers by minimizing walking distances from sidewalks and nearby buildings. Rear or side entrances, or entrances oriented toward a parking lot, make travel inconvenient for pedestrians and transit users.



Colored concrete and brick, patterns, and attention to design all make crossings visible and signal that this is a special place. (from top: Main St sidewalks by new parking garage, crossing by Capitol, and Seward St intersection)

Example from S Franklin Street in Juneau of pleasant public realm and walkable scale created by narrow streets, on-street parking, and mixed use buildings that are oriented to the street and face one another with 0 ft sidewalk setbacks, and retail on 1st floor with mixed-uses on top stories.



Such a design also cuts the building off from street life. In addition, a building with its main entrance directed away from the primary sidewalk and street "turns its back" to the public realm, reduces urban vibrancy, and does not promote street life. When a building is located at an intersection, the most convenient entrance is usually abutting the public sidewalks at the corner of the intersection.

Ground-floor Retail, Offices and Residential Above. This form of mixed use enhances vibrancy and provides more affordable housing choices. It is important that such "vertical mixing" of uses not place residential on the first floor, since it is disruptive for residences when users of the office or retail must walk through residential areas. It is also important that mixed use buildings include retail or restaurants on the first floor so that more energy and interest is at the street level.

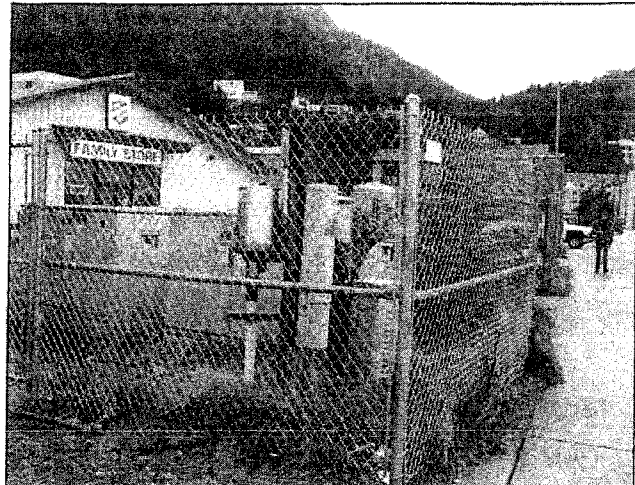
Building Facades Create Interest for Pedestrians and Enhance the Appearance of the Area. All buildings should be designed to provide interest for pedestrians and to add to the higher level of design in Juneau's Civic, Arts, and Cultural area.

Long expanses of blank walls tend to be boring and unattractive. In addition, windows attract pedestrians, who in turn act as a security system for the business. Buildings without such relief and interest tend to create a "massive scale" and make the public realm impersonal. Appearances like this are inconsistent with the civic nature and pedestrian-oriented character desired in the Willoughby District.

Parking Located at the Rear, Side or Under Building Instead of in Front. Parking areas located in front of buildings are inconvenient and unpleasant for pedestrians because they increase walking distances from the sidewalk, prevent pedestrians from enjoying the details and the activity within the building, are not attractive to look at, and increase safety problems since pedestrians must dodge cars in the parking area. In addition, they prevent the building from contributing to an intimate, pleasant, comfortable street wall, which harms the sense of place. Buildings pulled up to the street without intervening motor vehicle parking have more of a human scale, make the street more interesting and shops inside more successful.

Hidden Trash Receptacles, Loading Docks, Outdoor Mechanical and Electrical Equipment.

Trash receptacles and loading docks typically provide an unsightly appearance and an odor problem for pedestrians. In addition, improperly located and improperly screened receptacles and docks can cause noise problems for nearby land uses when the receptacles and packages are being loaded or unloaded. Therefore, they should be located as far from public sidewalks as possible and screened from view. Outdoor mechanical and electrical equipment when improperly located on a site or improperly screened, can also contribute to noise problems and create visual blight.



Willoughby District character is not aided by unsightly electrical boxes surrounded by equally unattractive fencing next to the public sidewalk. Instead it should be behind buildings or screened.

Building Heights and Key Willoughby District Viewsheds.

Consideration to the orientation and height of buildings is needed to maintain important views, avoid undesired building shadows, and provide for air circulation. Figure 5 depicts Willoughby District key viewsheds and recommends building heights to allow under the CBJ Title 49 ~~bonus process~~.

The key viewsheds to maintain in the Willoughby District are generally middle ground viewsheds, those that are from about half to two miles out. These include views of the Gastineau Channel and Douglas Island from the Calhoun Avenue lookout on the way to the Governor's Mansion, from the 8th floor plaza of the State Office Building and from the current and future Capitol Buildings. Mixed use sites 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Figure 7) are proposed primarily for multi-story residential development and these middle-ground views also provide significant value to these buildings.

When driving to town on Egan Drive the key view to protect is the one of the Gastineau Channel and Mt. Roberts, visible when rounding the corner by Glacier Avenue. This 'gateway view' of downtown with the mountains behind is important to the sense of place that defines downtown Juneau and Alaska's State Capital.

Viewshed is less important in the heart of the Willoughby District, allowing a large area where ~~bonus points based on building design may be accrued to allow heights up to 65 feet may be allowed~~. However, orientation of future renovation and design to site 9 (Figure 7) and to the JACC must take sunlight and building shadows into account to ensure that the immediately adjacent public plaza is not unduly deprived of sunlight.

As private landowners in the Indian Village consider renovations to their properties or development of new dwellings, the buildings along Village Street that 'back' into the bluff are encouraged to build up to 4 stories, or to the base of Dixon Street. These buildings will not block views from other development and will provide residents on top floors with great sun and views. Protecting the views and not casting shadows on housing is a reason why new or remodeled buildings in the one block between Village Street and Willoughby Avenue should consider two story developments only.

A Connected Grid of Landscaped Streets and Sidewalks are the 'Bones' that Create Great Neighborhoods

Connected and Complete Streets. These are streets designed to give safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists of all ages and abilities are able to move safely along and across a *Complete Street*. The proposed grid of Willoughby District streets will provide motorists with more "real time" route choices, which is important at rush hour in this major government employment center. Connected streets distribute vehicle trips more evenly.

Narrow Streets, Wide Sidewalks, and On-Street Parking. Willoughby District streets are narrow, which forces cars to travel slowly through the neighborhood contributing to neighborhood safety, low noise levels, low traffic volumes and, therefore neighborhood livability.

Sidewalks, when properly dimensioned and maintained, provide pedestrians with a pleasant, safe, and convenient place to walk. Sidewalks that are too narrow are inconvenient, especially in areas with large volumes of pedestrians. New sidewalks in the Willoughby District will be a minimum of 8 feet, but more often 12 feet wide.

On-street parking buffers pedestrians from vehicle travel. It narrows the street which slows traffic to a safer, more livable speed. It provides convenient parking locations for nearby businesses, which is critical to retail success. It also allows businesses and residences to reduce the amount of surface parking lots which enhances urban vibrancy by improving the public realm.

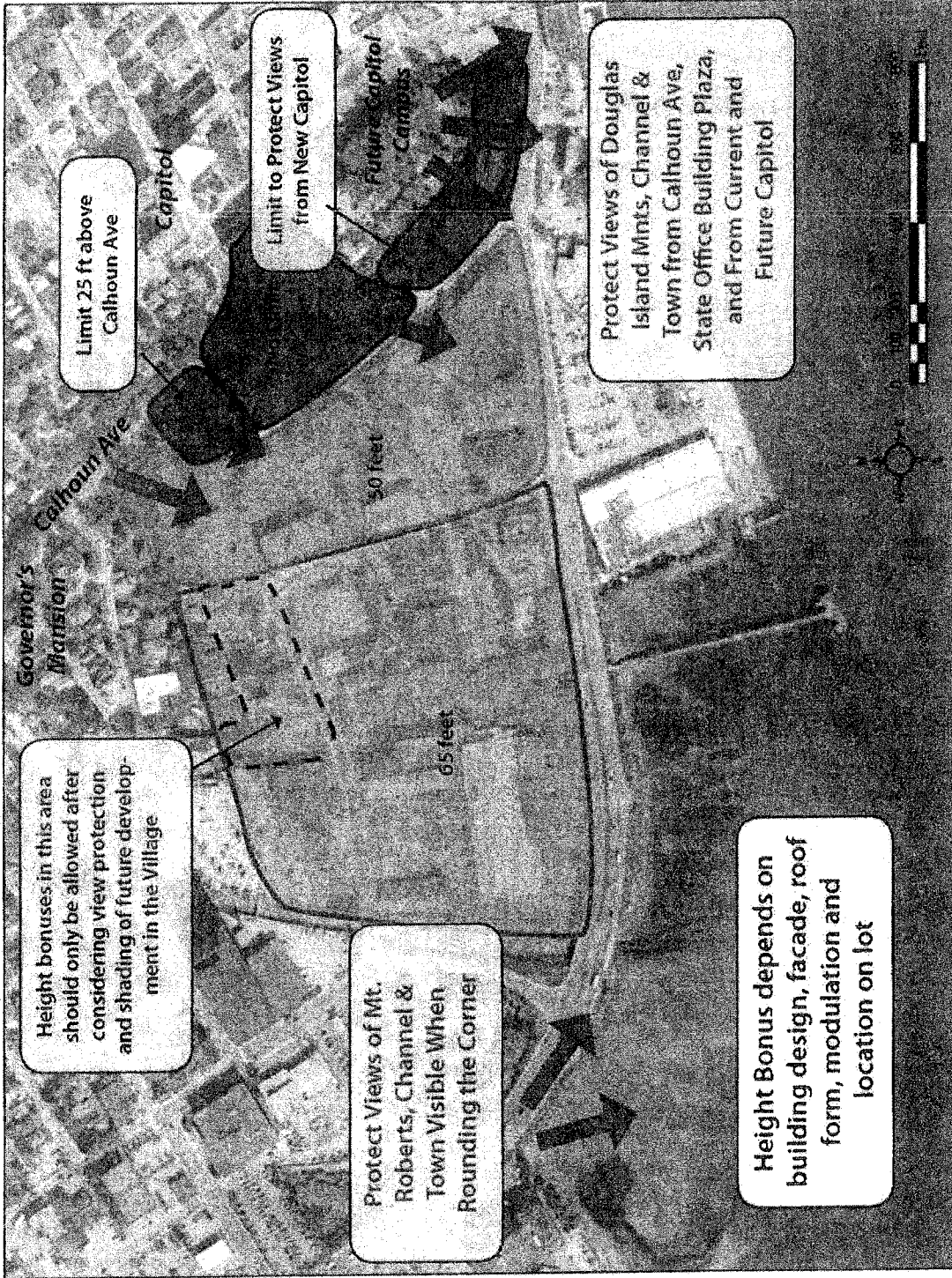


Figure 5. Building Heights (Possible with Bonus Points) and Viewsheds



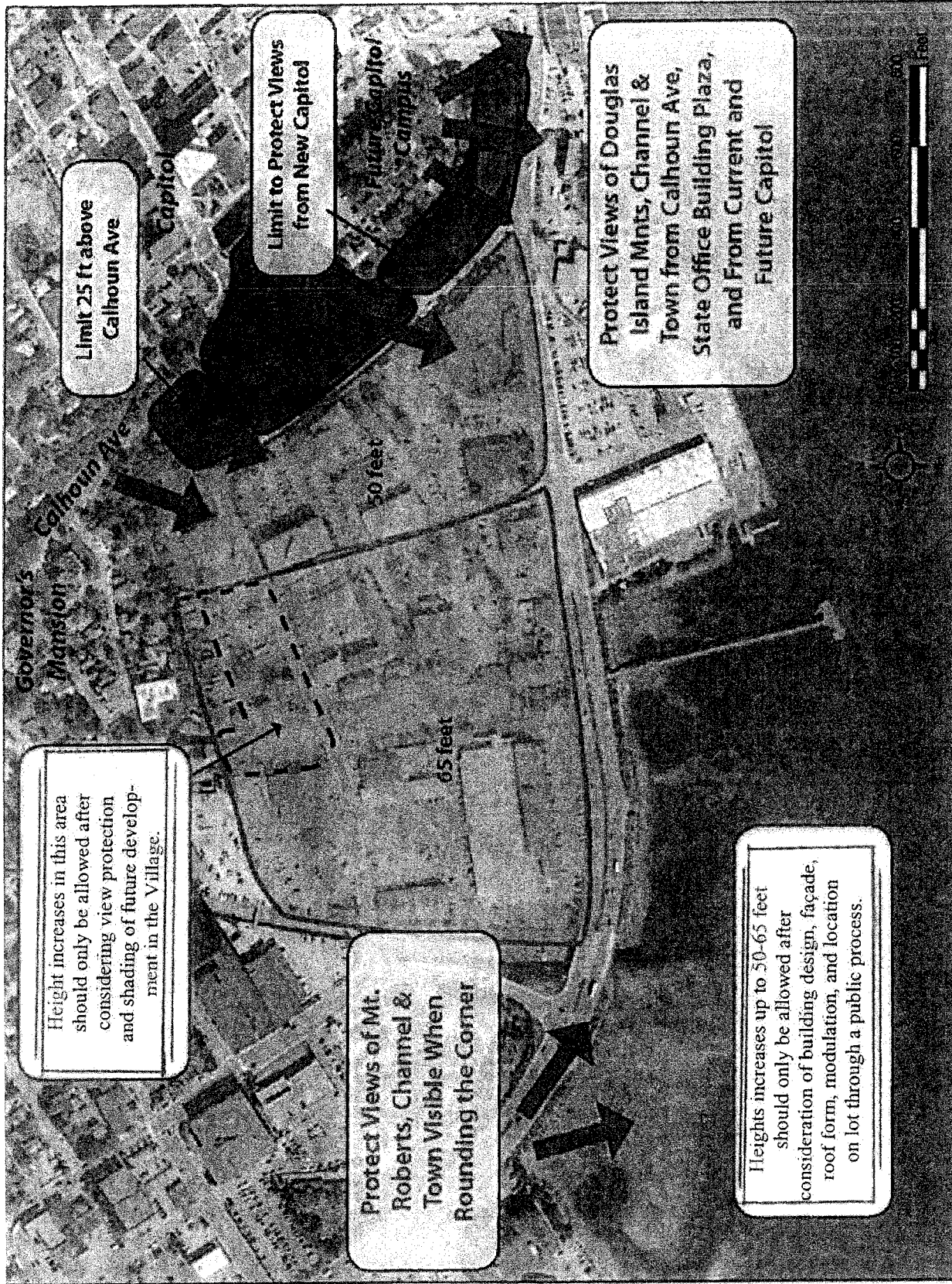
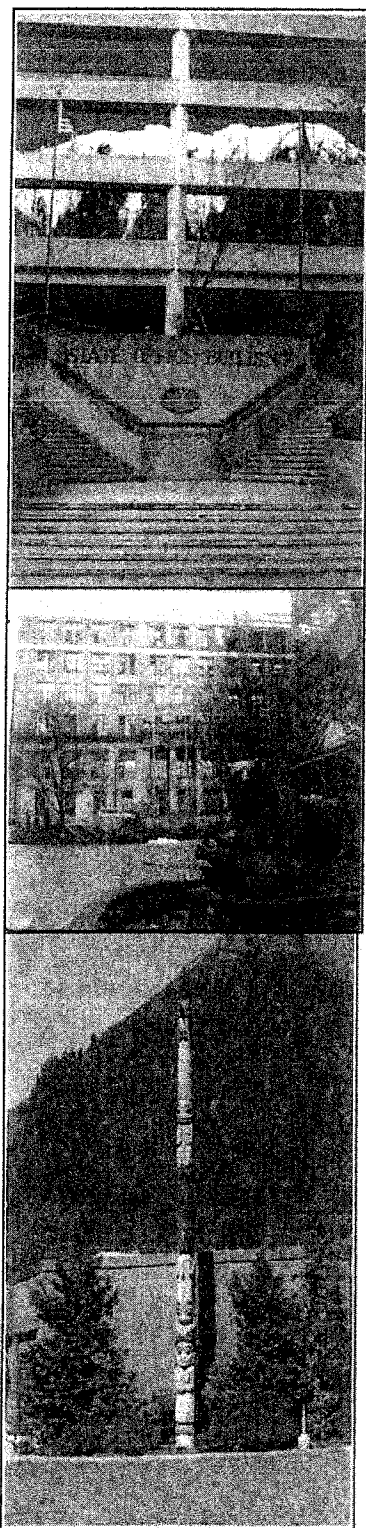


Figure 5. Building Heights (Possible with Bonus Points) and Viewsheds



Public plazas, grand building entrances, and public art are all typical in a Civic, Arts and Cultural District. Together they signal you are Somewhere Important and Significant.

Short, walkable block faces. In general, a neighborhood or commercial block face length should not exceed approximately 500 feet. Longer blocks tend to create inconvenient walking distances. When long blocks must be created, they should be shortened with cross-access walkways. Shorter blocks also create more corner properties, which are considered to be more 'prime' than mid-block properties.

Mixed Uses. This type of development reduces trip distances to the point where walking, bicycling, and bus trips are much more feasible for a number of different types of trips. Mixed use development adds to neighborhood and urban vibrancy by increasing the number of places people can meet -- such as a coffee shop, on the way to work or a civic event, a grocery store, a fitness center, etc.

Eyes on the Street Promotes Citizen Surveillance. More "eyes on the street" are promoted when buildings, windows, and entrances are near the street and sidewalk, and when neighborhood or commercial areas are designed for regular, frequent pedestrian activity. Areas without pedestrian activity are areas where illegal, inappropriate, or unsafe behavior can occur more easily since there is no one to observe the deed and report it or intervene.

Formal Landscaping. In pedestrian-oriented areas of a city, landscaping both softens the "hardness" of the urban area for pedestrians, and makes the pedestrian feel more comfortable by providing a separation from the street, blocking auto splashes, and helping to form public spaces, "outdoor rooms," and street corridor edges. Formal landscaping adds dignity to the area thereby inspiring a sense of civic pride.

Properly Scaled Lighting. Lighting can often detract from an intimate, pleasant, character in pedestrian-oriented areas. Lighting designed for cars tends to not be human-scaled. Pedestrian-oriented street lighting is shorter and has more numerous light fixtures and structures. This type of lighting is recommended on Whittier Street and Willoughby Avenue, at a minimum.

Terminated Vistas. "Terminated Vistas" is a concept in which a prominent building is placed at the "visual termination" of a street, or, in the case of the Museum, JACC, Centennial Hall, State Office Building, and site 10 (Figure 7), at the end of a large public plaza. This provides dignity and prominence to important civic buildings such as libraries, city halls/state offices, churches, convention centers, and performing arts centers. It sends the message that the building is an important place for the community. In addition, terminated vistas make walking more pleasant by giving the pedestrian a "goal" to walk

toward. The walk therefore does not seem endless. Such vistas also make trips more memorable by helping to orient a person to their location in the community.

Straight Sidewalks, not Curvilinear. It is important that sidewalks generally be straight, since pedestrians have a strong desire to walk the distance that provides the minimum trip length. Curving sidewalks promote the creation of "cow paths," as pedestrians take short cuts along their route. In general, curvilinear sidewalks are appropriate when needed to avoid a large tree or other important physical feature, or in an area in which most pedestrians are walking for optional recreation or exercise. This is generally not the case in an urban area, where almost all trips have a utilitarian purpose.

5.2 Willoughby District Development Themes

Five key themes characterize the Willoughby District Land Use Plan and are depicted on Figure 6.

- **The Willoughby District is the heart of Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural campus.**

It is a dynamic center for government and legislative activities; public and civic gathering; art, cultural and entertainment events; and residential and commercial activity. This area has better building design and dignified public spaces.

- **There is great public space here.**

More public space, restored creeks and streams and pedestrian connections between public spaces and civic buildings characterize this area. Public investment in streets, wide sidewalks with colored bricks or concrete, landscaping, human-scale lighting, visible crosswalks and pedestrian connection to and through the area, public open space, and public art all showcase the area and help spur private sector development.

- **The number of residential units in the Willoughby District triples over the next 20 years.**

Denser residential development is along Village Street, in mixed-use buildings by Gold Creek, and above the first floor along Willoughby Avenue. Residential units are a mix of market rate and affordable housing. They are townhouses, apartments, condos and loft style and serve populations such as legislative staff, seasonal workers, and

residents that no longer wish to own a large house or need smaller housing units (the elderly, “snowbirds”, single parents, etc).

Builders also benefit from permissive regulations, zoning bonuses and financial incentives in the District that are available for building housing, 1st floor retail, transit oriented development features, or by providing a higher level of building design.

- **Willoughby Avenue is the center of the commercial area.**

Lining Willoughby Avenue are stores, places to eat, and services; buildings are built to the sidewalk and have canopies to shelter walkers from the rain; attractive street front displays and wall murals make walking fun.

Developers benefit from reduced parking requirements that recognize that residents in this walkable downtown area are close to services and transit and less reliant on cars. Those attending evening events park in spaces vacated when workers leave at the end of the workday. Offices and retail stores have nearby on-street parking, some surface parking tucked behind buildings, or parking in garages or below buildings.

A pilot project to show how formal private-public partnerships with development agreements could work in Juneau is discussed to allow cost sharing for development that accomplishes the public goals/development guidelines described in this chapter.

- **All of the above is possible because the area’s former super-blocks are now a grid of human-scaled streets and wide sidewalks, and parking has been relocated behind or under buildings and in garages.**

Together these improvements have created developable parcels that enable denser mixed-use buildings and residential development.

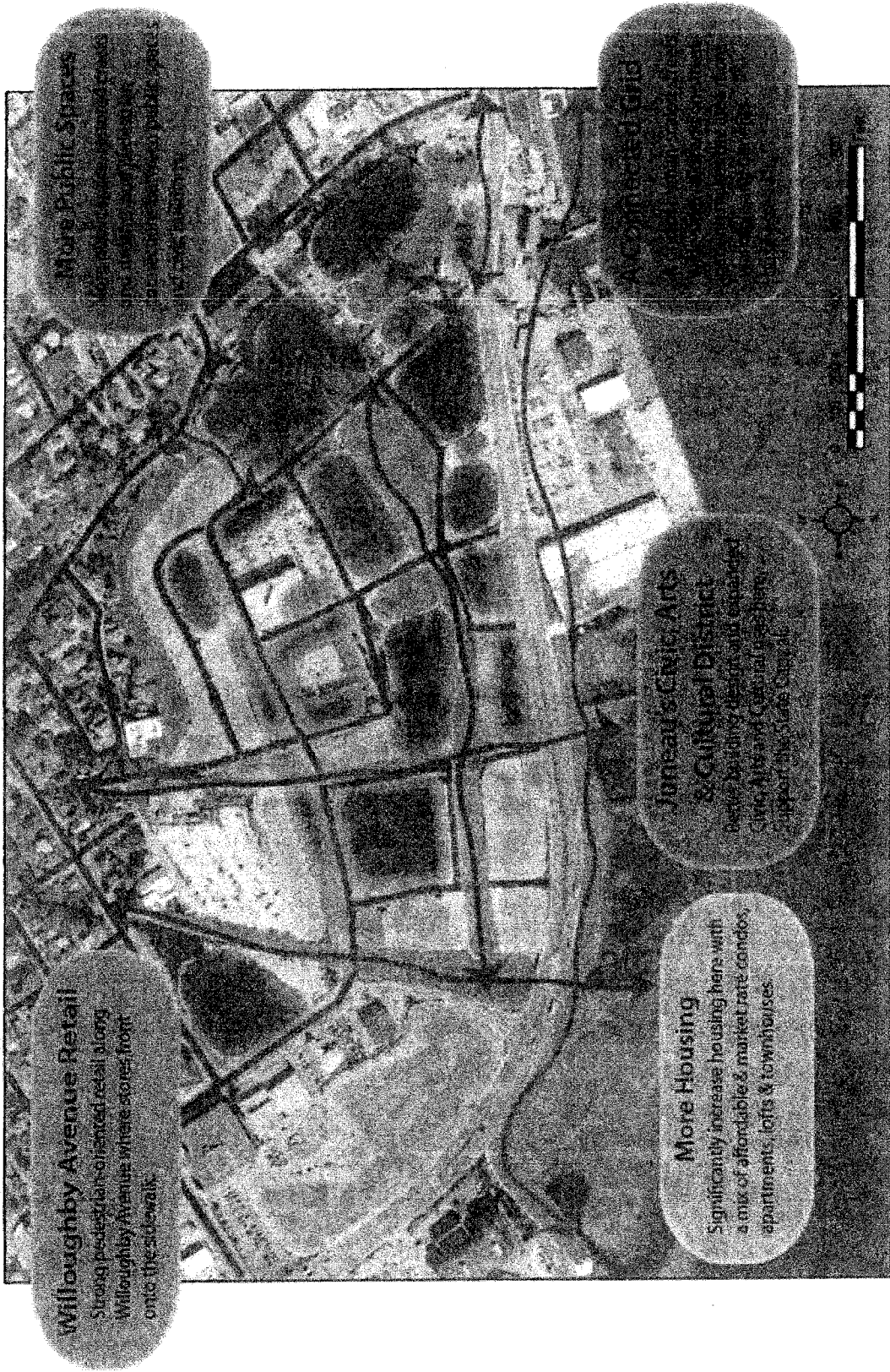


Figure 6. Themes - Wiloughby District

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