

Suffolk/Virginia

Huntersville Initiatives Plan

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Prepared for
City of Suffolk, Virginia

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I Introduction

THE INITIATIVES PLAN FOR the Huntersville neighborhood is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process. The process began in 1997 when Urban Design Associates was hired by the City to create a plan for the historic downtown area. Since that time, the process has expanded to include plans for other parts of the City including the East Washington Street neighborhoods, Hall Place, and some of the outlying historic villages including Holland, Whaleyville, and Chuckatuck.

The City's Comprehensive Plan calls for revitalizing existing developed areas to help reduce sprawl and its associated traffic problems. Huntersville, in particular, is a historic neighborhood located in northeastern Suffolk, an area which is growing rapidly and has seen a lot of new development in recent years. Huntersville is adjacent to new commercial development and to highway connections; although these factors contribute to Huntersville's isolation from other residential areas, both also make it an ideal location for revitalization.

(right)
Huntersville's Old School



(below right)
Magnolia Park



(far right)
Aerial photograph of Huntersville and its surroundings



The Neighborhood Planning Process

The physical plan for Huntersville is the result of a two phase planning process that involved the neighborhood residents and stakeholders.

During the first phase, the design team visited the neighborhood to document and photograph the existing conditions and historic structures of the area. A number of long-term residents led a tour on August 30, 2002. From the information collected and the city’s GIS information, the design team generated a set of analysis drawings called X-Rays®. Each X-Ray focuses on one or two key pieces of information, such as streets or buildings, helping the design team to understand the neighborhood patterns and make informed decisions during the design process.

The City of Suffolk planning department held a public meeting in the summer of 2003 to ask the community about the area’s strengths, weaknesses, and vision for the future.

The second phase, and the focus of the planning process, was the design charrette – an intense three day design workshop, held in the community with area residents and property owners. The community was led by a Steering Committee, made up of residents, property owners, and stakeholders. The plan was created by the local community, with the design team facilitating the process and creating the drawings.

The Huntersville design charrette was held October 28–30, 2003 at the North Suffolk Public Safety Center on Route 17. The charrette began with a kick-off public meeting where the design team asked the participants to review and amend the area’s strengths, weaknesses, and visions for the future. Participants were also asked to map the area’s strengths and weaknesses using green and red dots. The design team used the answers to these questions to generate a list of design guidelines which acted as a checklist during the design process.



The charrette process included participation from neighborhood residents.

Assets, Liabilities, Hopes, and Dreams

Strengths

- Opportunity for new homes
- Recreation for youth
- Church - membership both within the community and from other communities
- Location, location, location (convenient, easy highway access - prime property)
- Strong sense of community
- Daycare center
- Park: playground, good access
- Two ways in and out of the neighborhood
- Masonic Lodge
- Old Store

Weaknesses

- Overgrown vacant lots
- Drainage ditches need cleaning
- Bad road conditions - need repair
- Absentee property owners
- Buildings that are not being maintained

- Lack of streetscape and landscaping
- Lack of new housing
- Poor street lights
- Lack of sidewalks
- Lack of public transportation
- Traffic influx by non-residents
- Lack of lights in park; park gates not locked at night
- Conflicts with overhead electric lines and tree limbs; lack of maintenance of trees
- On-street parking on Freeman Avenue
- Lack of street connections
- Speeding in neighborhood
- Above-ground propane tanks (need underground gas service)
- Magnolia Park: access and layout
- Crime from other neighborhoods
- Water tower area - used as a dumping ground
- Poor access to amenities across I-664
- Poor pedestrian environment



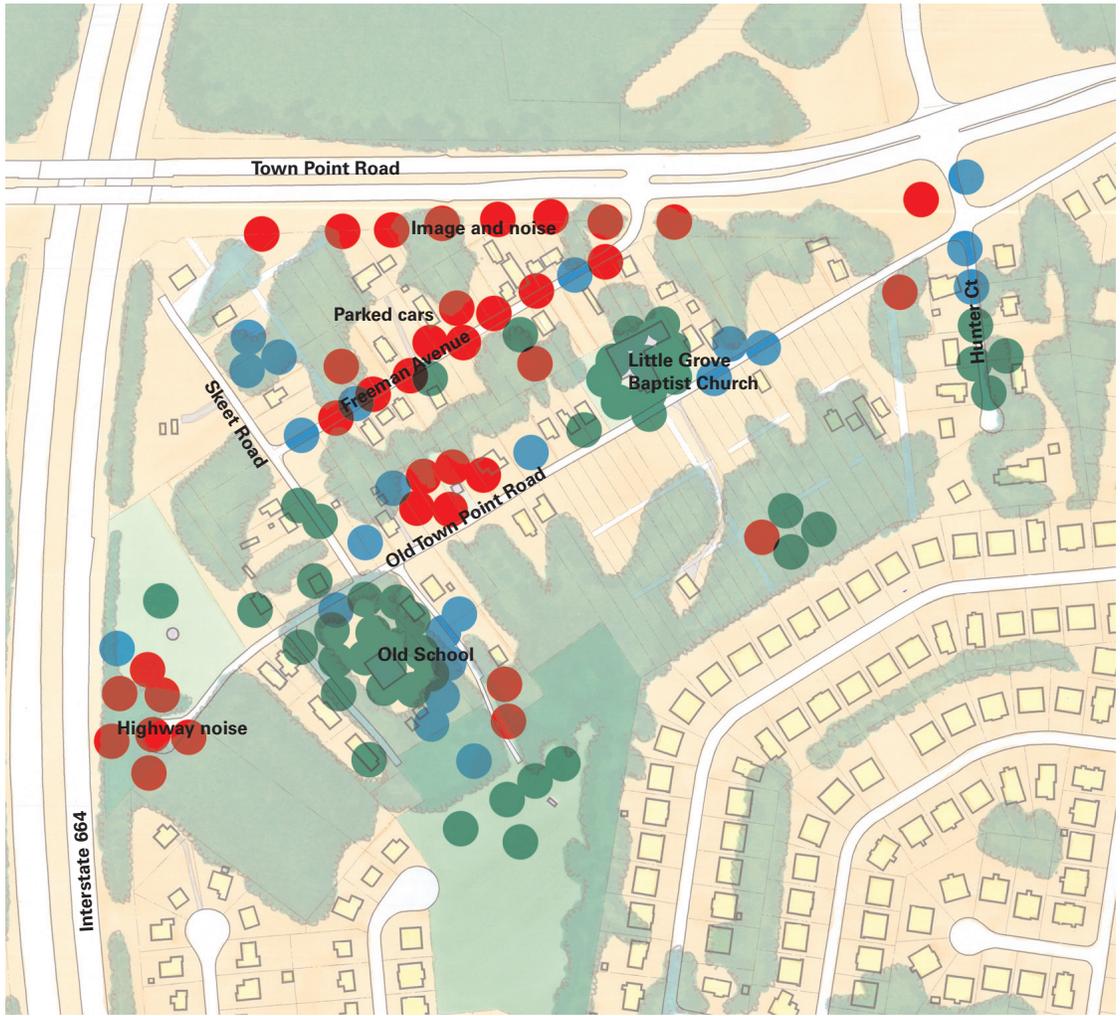
Strengths brought up by residents included the historic homes in the area (far left) and the Old School (left).

Hopes and Dreams

- Opportunity for new housing, such as Habitat for Humanity; investment in community
- Street improvements: streetlights, sidewalks, curbs and gutters
- Conveniences and small businesses, such as barber shop and beauty salon at the Old Store or neighborhood entrance
- Public transportation
- Better police presence, especially Friday and Saturday nights
- Lights for playground
- Natural gas as an energy/heating option
- Address drainage problems
- Neighborhood services and jobs for local residents within walking distance
- Remain a mixed-income neighborhood of single-family homes, including low income
- Recreation/community center for seniors
- Renovate school for senior use, after school programs, and for public use
- Create an attractive community - clean up ditches, etc.
- Sound barriers on interstate
- New housing
- Gym
- Satellite City office



Hopes and dreams included improvements to Magnolia Park (current access shown above left) and street improvements, such as along Freeman Avenue (above).



Strengths and Weaknesses

The Huntersville residents indicated strengths with green dots and weaknesses with red dots on the area map. Areas that were seen as the most important places to do something were marked with blue dots.

Design Principles

The input from neighborhood residents and stakeholders was incorporated into a list of design principles that helped guide the planning process.

- 1 Maintain and enhance Huntersville’s historic character
- 2 Improve the streetscape to include the resolution of the drainage ditch problem with the installation of curbs and gutters

- 3 Make streets pedestrian friendly
- 4 Create a gateway for the community onto Town Point Road
- 5 Promote appropriate infill development
- 6 Improve Magnolia Park and its connections to the Huntersville neighborhood

Existing Conditions Analysis

Huntersville was founded along Old Town Point Road as an agricultural center. Recently the area has grown as new residential subdivisions have replaced agricultural land. The neighborhood is easily accessible to major transportation corridors such as interstate highway I-664, I-64 and I-264. The surrounding area is serviced by both water and sewer.

Using the City’s GIS mapping, the

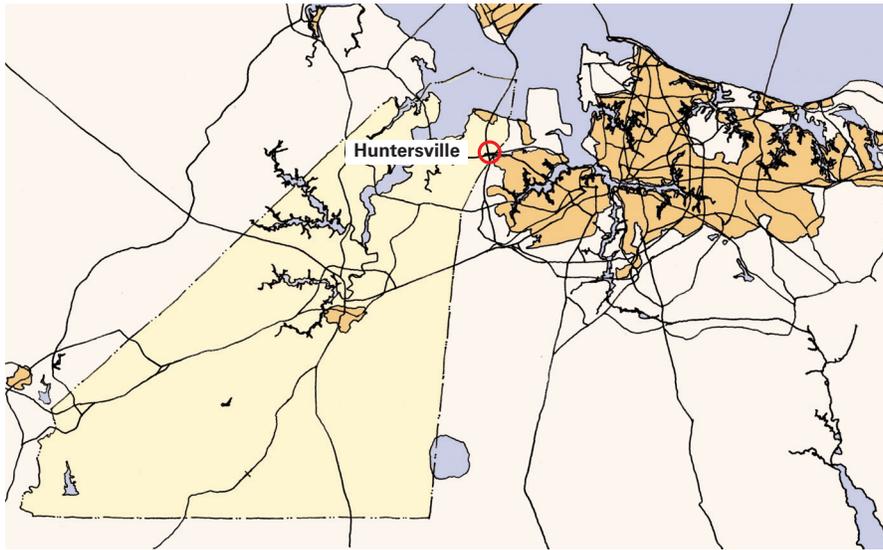
design team compiled a map of Huntersville and its surroundings. The neighborhood and its context were analyzed and a series of X-Ray drawings were created to analyze the neighborhood and its context by examining layers of information separately.

A portrait of existing conditions, showing land use and tree coverage, was used as a base for all the design work throughout the charrette.



The portrait shows the current land use patterns.

- Key**
- Residential Bldgs
 - Institutions
 - Commercial Bldgs
 - Parks
 - Public Property
 - Tree Coverage



Location

Huntersville is located near the intersection of Interstate 664 and the Western Freeway in the northeastern part of Suffolk, near Portsmouth.



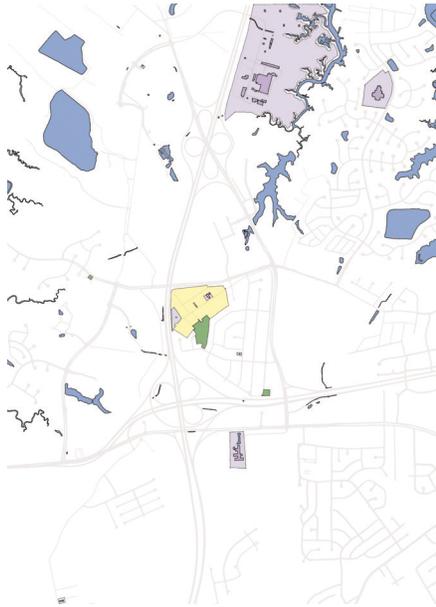
Street Network

Regional road connections are strong, but street networks in Huntersville and in the newer residential developments around Huntersville are disconnected and isolated.



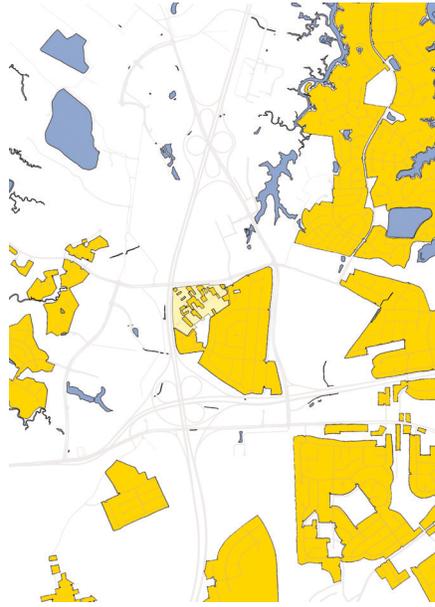
Figure/Ground

Although Huntersville was once a town in a rural landscape, its surrounding area is now covered by suburban residential and commercial development.



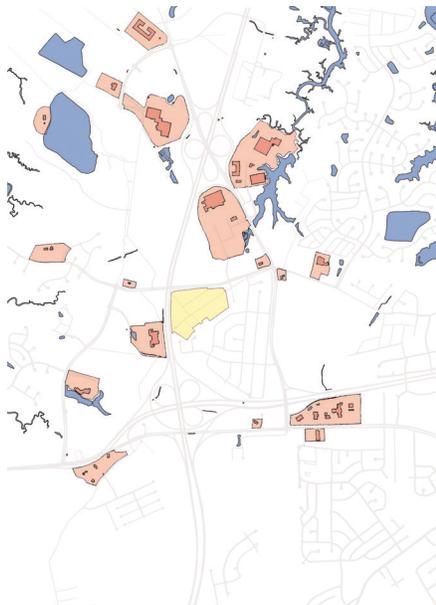
Institutions, Parks & Open Space

The number of institutions in the surrounding areas is limited. Huntersville is adjacent to the only major city park in the area.



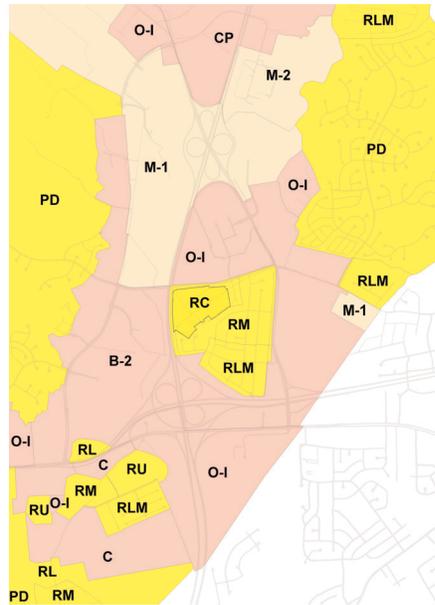
Residential Settlement Patterns

Housing in the area is not contiguous, with large developments separated by thoroughfares; within Huntersville the fabric is broken by vacant lots.



Commercial Uses

Huntersville is surrounded by large-scale shopping areas, some of which are within walking distance.



Zoning

Huntersville is zoned for compact residential and is surrounded by commercial and industrial zoning, and some lower density residential.

II Frameworks



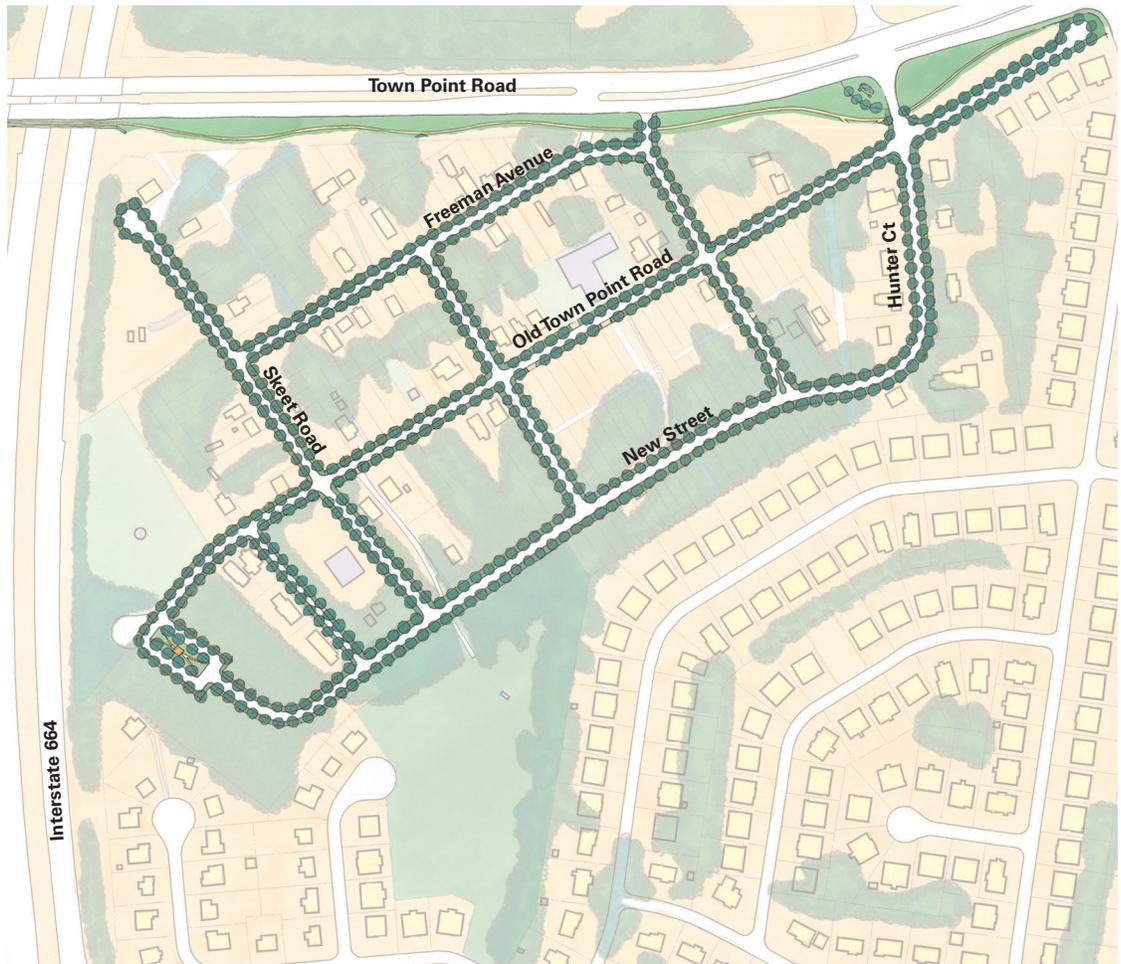
HUNTERSVILLE IS A HISTORIC crossroads community, which was located along a major heavily traveled road. Over time, with the development of I-664 and the new alignment of Town Point Road, Old Town Point Road was disconnected at both ends of the neighborhood and Huntersville became isolated from its surroundings. Although there are two entrances to the neighborhood, the street grid is marginal and confusing. The neighborhood is hidden from view and the entrances are not attractive. In addition, the neighborhood's greatest amenity, Magnolia Park, is disconnected from the neighborhood and hidden from view.

Creating an interconnected network of streets and open space will open the community up and change its image, while making it more walkable and easier to navigate by car.

Framework

(above)
Existing conditions plan

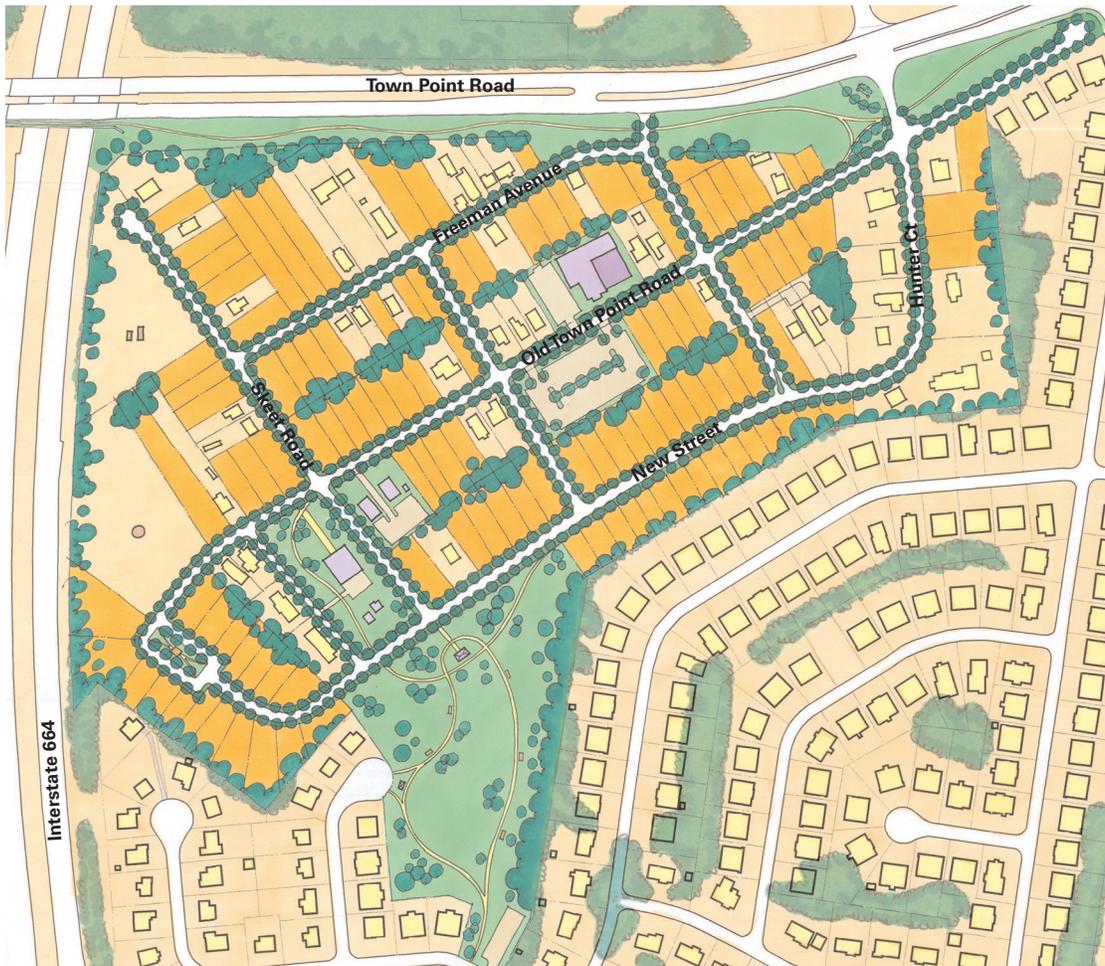
(right)
Framework of proposed streets that provide more connections within the neighborhood and give a frontage to Magnolia Park.



The interconnected framework of new streets provides opportunities for infill development that did not previously exist; allowing for the creation of strong addresses and for taking advantage of existing amenities, especially Magnolia Park.

An interconnected street network provides the flexibility for incorporating a range of house types, from small detached homes to one-story cottages to larger houses, and including the opportunity for ground floor retail at the entrance to the neighborhood.

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Initiatives Plan

The proposed framework of streets provides the opportunity for infill development.

III Initiatives



THE SPECIFIC INITIATIVES proposed at the design charrette focused on the desires identified by neighborhood residents within the proposed street framework. The initiatives include:

II

- 1 Neighborhood entrance improvements
- 2 The Old School area
- 3 Magnolia Park improvements

These initiatives contain both short term and long term components. Short term components are ones in which implementation can begin immediately to within a five year period. Long term components are ones that require significant time to implement – five, ten, or perhaps twenty years.

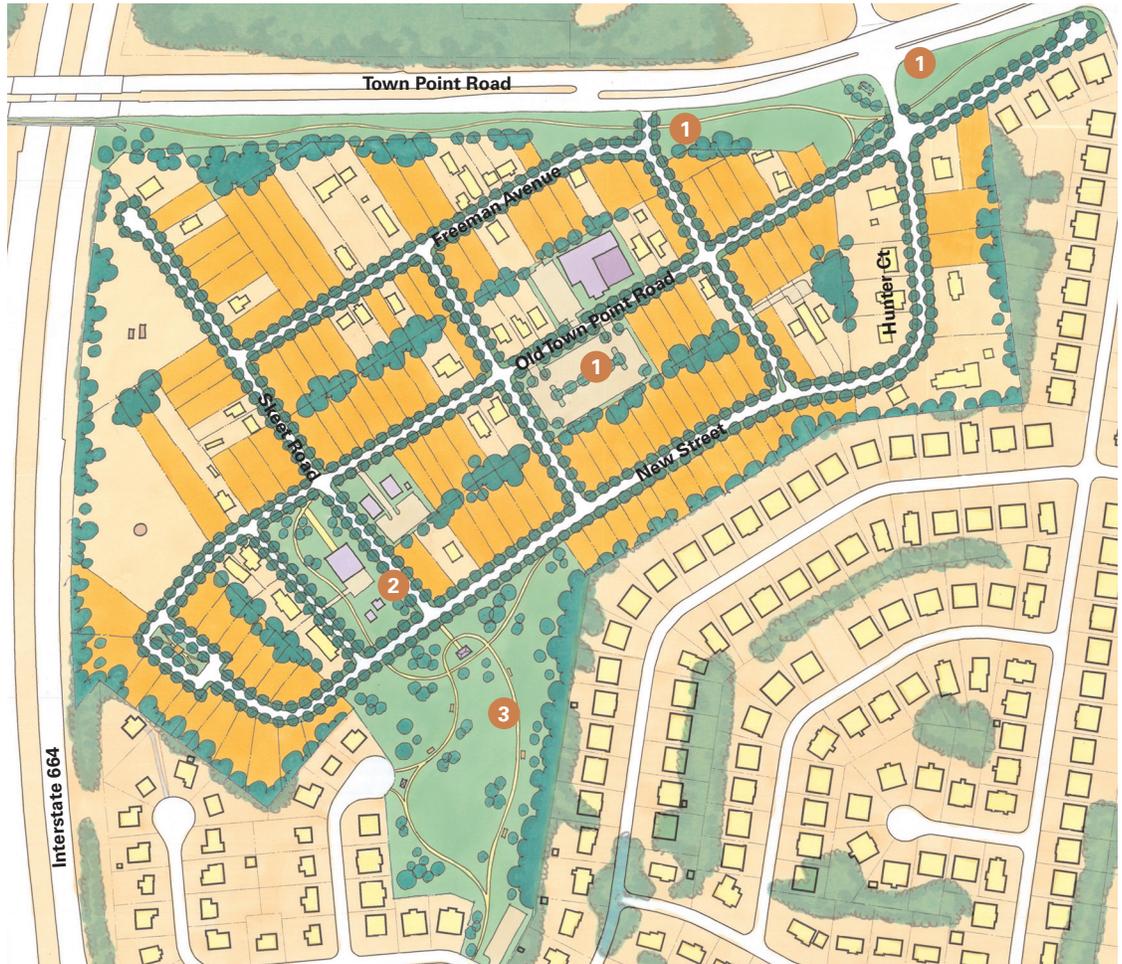
Initiatives Plan

(above)

Portrait showing existing land use (above)

(right)

Proposed Initiatives Plan for Huntersville outlining improvements.

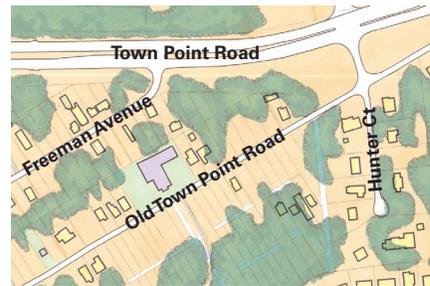


1 Neighborhood Entrance Improvements

The improvement of the image of a neighborhood relies heavily on its gateway, which has the ability to create a very positive or very negative impression. The entrance to Huntersville from Town Point Road currently does not make a favorable impression; the entrance at Hunter Court (A) is mostly empty land with only a small sign for Little Grove Baptist Church. At Freeman Avenue (B), the entrance is even more negative. An awkward street alignment leads to an overgrown area with a view of the backs of some houses that are not in good con-

dition. The historic residential neighborhood is not perceived from either entrance.

The solution is to open up the entrances, clean up the street connections, and develop new housing that is visible from Town Point Road. Linked to this is the improvement of the Little Grove Baptist Church site, a major institution near the neighborhood entrance.



The existing conditions plan (left) and the proposed initiatives plan (below) for the neighborhood entrance area.



A Hunter Court Entrance

At the Hunter Court entrance (1), new signage and landscaping announce the presence of the neighborhood. The open space is transformed into a park that creates an address for the neighborhood.

New housing along Old Town Point Road (2) on currently vacant lots is highly visible from Town Point Road. High quality housing would be developed in an architectural style compatible

with the historic homes of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood residents requested that some small scale neighborhood retail be explored. The neighborhood entrance would be the best and most visible location for this. The corner lot at Hunter Court and Town Point Road (3) could be developed as a small shop or cafe. If that is not feasible, a corner house could be developed on that site.



Illustrative plan of the Hunter Court entrance to Huntersville.

B Freeman Avenue Entrance

The Freeman Avenue entrance, from a traffic point of view, would function best if realigned. A new street (1) perpendicular to Freeman Avenue running to Old Town Point Road would provide more of a traditional “T” intersection with better sight lines and would also lead directly into the heart of the neighborhood street network.

The realignment of the entrance leaves some space for a new entrance green space similar to that at the Hunter Court entrance to the neighborhood (2). This provides an address for new housing visible from Town Point Road (3) and also serves to clean up the existing relationship of backyards to Town Point Road.



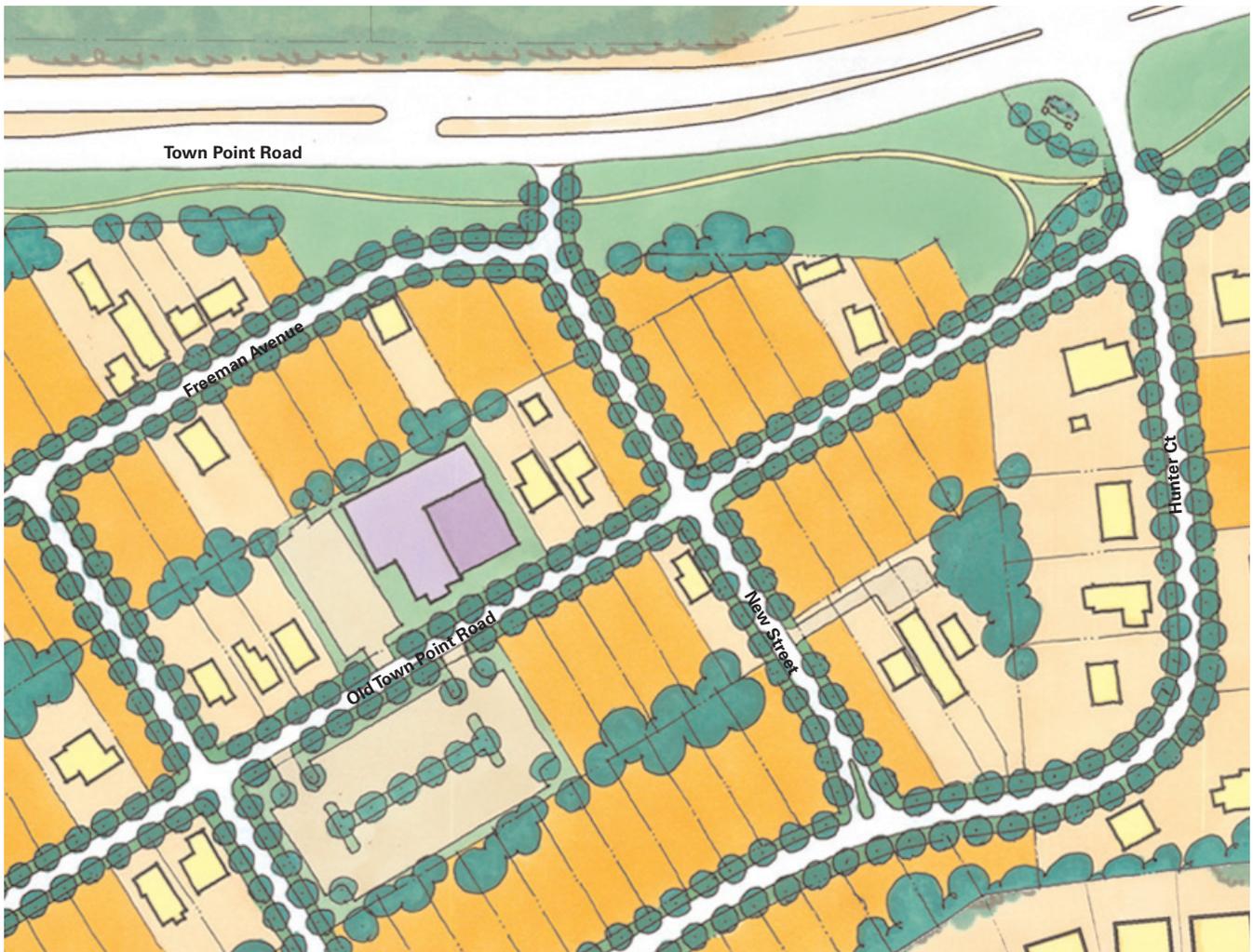
Illustrative plan of the Freeman Avenue entrance to Huntersville.

C Little Grove Baptist Church

The final component of the neighborhood entrances improvement is the consolidation and improvement of the parking for Little Grove Baptist Church. Currently, many vacant lots are being bought by the church for parking. The area is not paved and gives the appearance of neglect and vacancy. A consolidated parking lot that is paved,

well-maintained, and landscaped will change the image of the neighborhood along Old Town Point Road, and allow for new residential development close to the neighborhood entrances. Handicapped accessible parking would be accommodated in a small surface lot on the west side of the church. The church's planned expansion to the east of their existing facility is also illustrated.

Plan illustrating new consolidated parking for Little Grove Baptist Church.



2 The Old School Area

The old Joseph Gibson Elementary School in Huntersville, known to residents as “the Old School,” is very important to the residents. Many attended school here and would like to see the currently vacant building renovated as a community service facility. The Old School’s (1) location next to the Masonic Lodge, the Old Store, and Magnolia Park provide the opportunity for the creation of a community center or a senior center.

Surrounding the school, the creation of new streets will define the site’s edges. On the west, formalizing the existing

dirt road will also serve to provide an entrance to Magnolia Park. A new street that crosses currently vacant property along the back of the school provides a southern edge for the school site and a frontage street for the park. On the east, adding an extension of Skeet Road between the school and the Masonic Lodge gives an address to both civic buildings. The path that currently leads to Magnolia Park can be transformed to a drive as well as a small shared parking lot to serve the Masonic Lodge (2) and the Old Store (3). Diagonal parking along the extension of Skeet Road can serve the Old School uses.



The proposed plan turns the school into a community facility within a park created by the addition of new streets. The lodge and store are served by a parking lot behind.

The renovation of the Masonic Lodge and the Old Store are also important to the community. Renovation of these two vacant structures will greatly improve the image of the community along Old Town Point Road.

The existing pine trees define the site of the Old School, giving a civic address

to the building. Cleanup of the landscaping and fences and renovation of the building will complete the site. The land surrounding the building is the perfect setting for some passive park space for community gatherings and other uses associated with the renovated building.



(right)
Photograph showing existing conditions of the Old School.

(below)
A perspective rendering of the proposed site improvements.



3 Magnolia Park

Magnolia Park is currently difficult to access from the Huntersville neighborhood, and is in need of some improvements. The initiatives in the Magnolia Park area include new street connections, new housing, and improvements to the park itself.

Currently, access to Magnolia Park for Huntersville residents is by a dirt path through overgrown woods through a fence, adjacent to private property. Improvements to the neighborhood

street network provide an address for the park from public streets. The extension of Skeet Road will end directly on the new park entrance, linking the park into the rest of the neighborhood. Most importantly, a new frontage street will provide the opportunity for housing facing the park, allowing for “eyes on the park,” or a public face that discourages unwanted behavior and leads to a safer feeling in the park. Currently, only backyards face onto the park, and street connections to it are minimal, and only in



Magnolia Park as proposed.

the adjacent neighborhood. Many concerns about the park will be reduced by the street connection improvements.

Magnolia Park is currently mostly open field, with one play structure for young children. The addition of paths

and landscaping will make the park more enjoyable; adding shelters will provide the opportunity for neighborhood gatherings and family picnics. More, smaller play structures can provide more variety for children of all ages.



(top)
Photograph showing existing conditions of the Huntersville edge of Magnolia Park.

(bottom)
A perspective rendering showing the new frontage street.

IV Street Improvements

Freeman Avenue

*Photo of existing street
and perspective
rendering of proposed
street improvements*



THE CHARACTER OF THE streets in Huntersville leads to a negative impression on visitors. Residents stressed the need to address this issue. The street design affects the image and character of the neighborhood as well as the pedestrian environment.

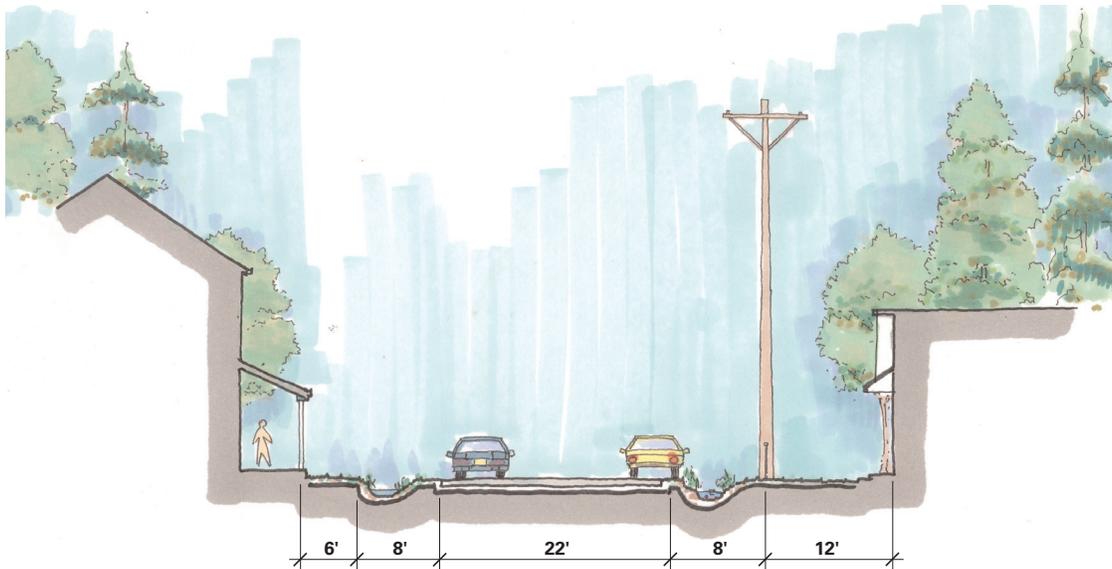
One important street for which improvements are suggested is Town Point Road, which currently has the character of a high-speed thoroughfare, making pedestrian circulation difficult. Access to the amenities across I-664 is particularly difficult. The addition of a multi-use trail along Town Point Road can both improve the pedestrian connections to the surrounding amenities and link into the city-wide parks network, with connections to all the major parks in the city. Improvements to beautify and enhance the existing neighborhood streets within Huntersville include:

- Removal of drainage ditches and the addition of a curb and gutter system
- Adding sidewalks and planting strips with street trees and pedestrian scaled lighting
- Burying the utilities for the neighborhood
- Addition of infill housing to define the streets.

Freeman Avenue

Perceived as a nuisance street by many of the residents of Huntersville, Freeman Avenue has an abundance of parked cars, which do not appear to belong to residents of the neighborhood. The street improvements create an environment

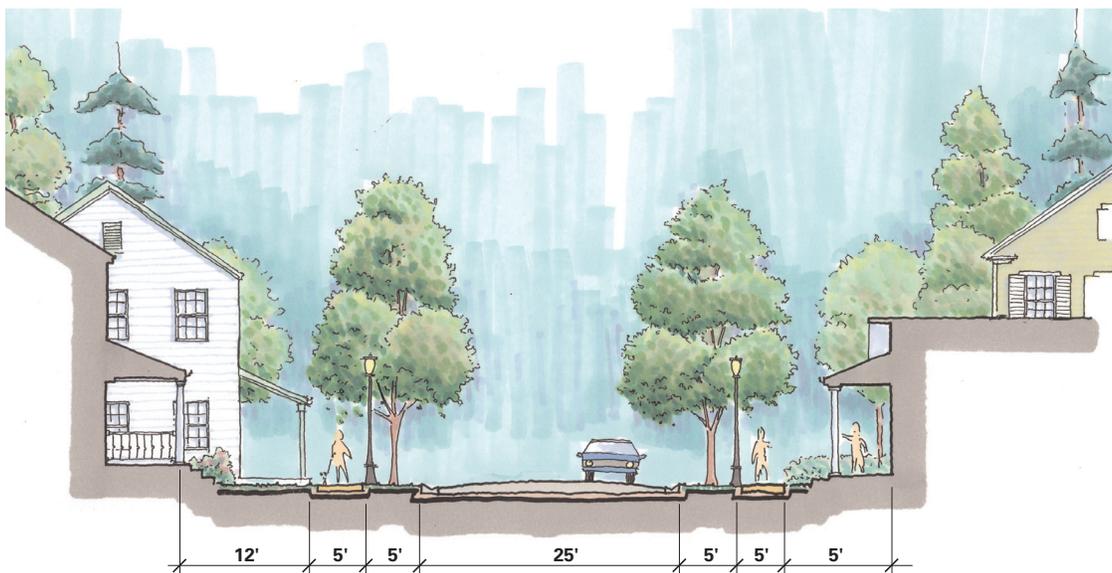
more pleasant for the pedestrian and define on-street parking into manageable parallel spaces. The addition of infill housing provides more eyes on the street, creating a continuous presence that discourages criminal activity.

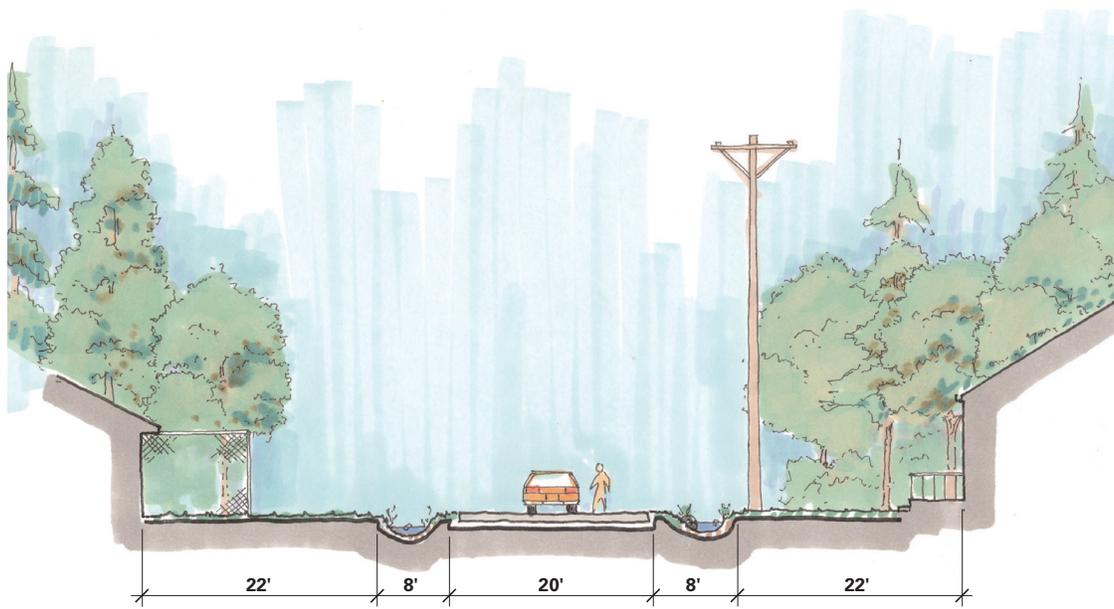


Freeman Avenue Sections

(left)
Existing section of Freeman Avenue

(below left)
Section of Freeman Avenue proposed

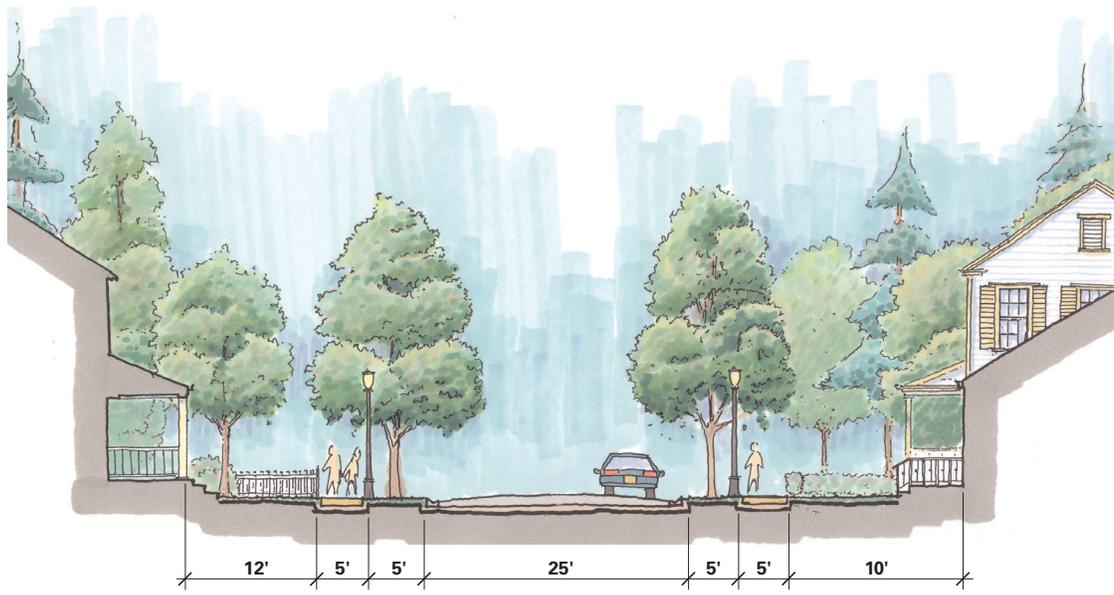




Skeet Road Sections

(left)
Section of Skeet Road as it exists today, with utility poles and drainage ditches

(below left)
The proposed section shows curbs and gutters, sidewalks, street trees, lamps, and the addition of housing.



Old Town Point Road Sections

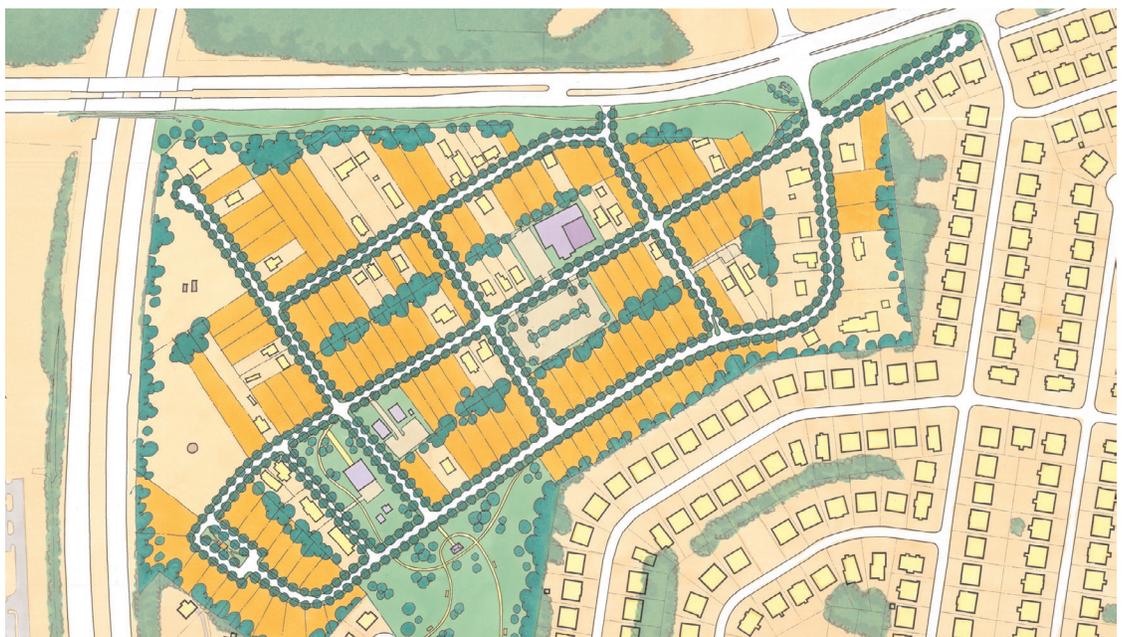
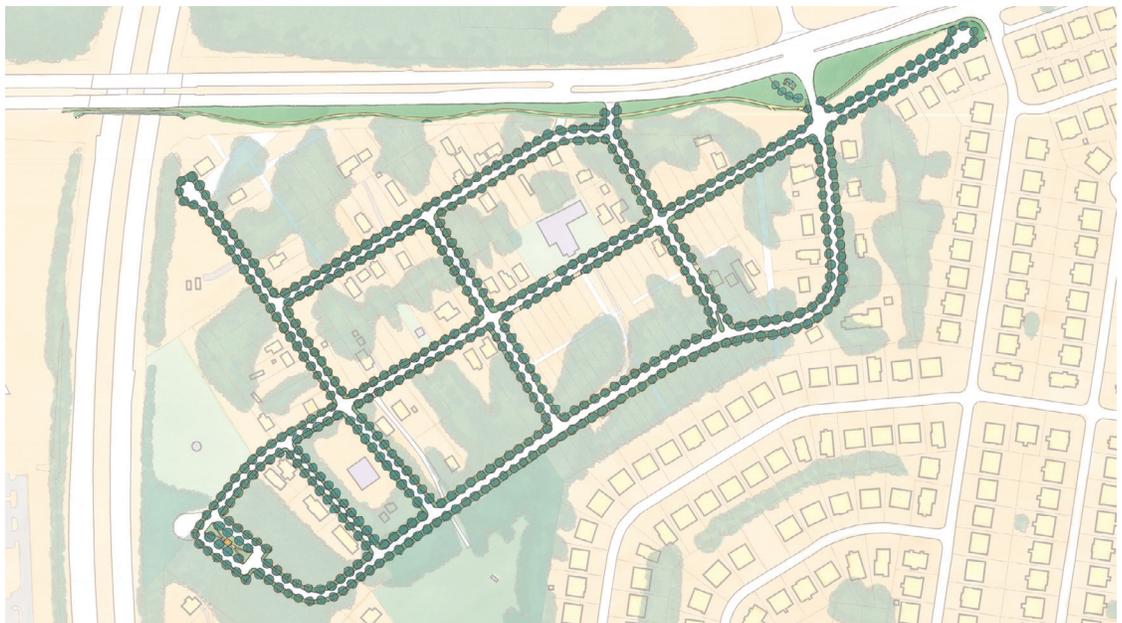
(left)
Section of existing configuration of Old Town Point Road

(below left)
Section with proposed street improvements



v Infill Housing Guidelines

THE IMPROVED NETWORK OF NEIGHBORHOOD streets provides the opportunity for a substantial amount of infill housing. Infill development will provide a dramatic image change for the neighborhood, especially high quality housing designed in a character to fit with the historic houses already existing in the neighborhood.



Infill housing should recreate physically defined streets and spaces. A range of house types, including small detached single family homes, one-story cottages, larger homes, and occasional corner duplexes, will match the historic architectural character of the neighborhood. Like existing homes, these would be parked from the front, with garages or parking pads in the back of the lots,

allowing the houses themselves to have a strong presence on the street. Setbacks are based on those existing currently in the neighborhood. Porches on the homes would create a pleasant streetscape. These infill homes illustrated along Old Town Point Road at the neighborhood entrance serve as a model for all development in the neighborhood.

(top)
The proposed street elevation of a part of Old Town Point Road

(bottom)
Lot diagrams showing parking in the rear, a consistent setback, and possibilities for lot landscaping.

