

Suffolk/Virginia

# Fairgrounds Revitalization Plan

*Prepared by* U R B A N D E S I G N A S S O C I A T E S

Prepared for  
City of Suffolk, Virginia

JULY 2001  
Amended April 9, 2008



## Table of Contents

### *Acknowledgements*

<i>I</i>	<i>Introduction</i>	I
	The Neighborhood Planning Process	
	Assets, Liabilities, Hopes and Dreams	
	Design Principles	
	Existing Conditions Analysis	
<i>II</i>	<i>Vision</i>	7
	Frameworks	
	Plan Alternatives	
	Master Plan	
<i>III</i>	<i>Initiatives</i>	12
	Washington/Hall/Pinner Intersection	
	East Washington Street Revitalization	
	Street Connections	
	Fairgrounds Residential Development	
	Infill Development	
	Neighborhood Park	
	Planters Peanut Plant	
	Police Precinct Building	
	Orlando Revitalization	

## Acknowledgements

### Steering Committee

Helen Daughtrey  
Reverend Robert Hobbs  
James E. Richards, Sr.  
Albert Jones  
Clifton Winborne  
Eddie Hicks  
William Goodman  
Amanda Rodgers  
Charles Christian  
John Riddick  
Susie Bennett  
Larry Rucker  
John Riddick

### City of Suffolk

The Honorable Curtis R. Milteer  
*Mayor*  
The Honorable W. Rufus Powell  
*Vice Mayor*  
Steve Herbert  
*Assistant City Manager*  
L. Elizabeth McCoury  
*Downtown Development Coordinator*  
D. Scott Mills  
*Director of Planning Department*  
Robert P. Goumas  
*Principal Long Range Planner*  
LaNita Wiggins  
*Office of the Assistant City Manager*

### Consultant

Urban Design Associates

# I Introduction

THE INITIATIVES PLAN FOR the Fairgrounds area of East Suffolk is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process. The process began in 1997 when Urban Design Associates (UDA) 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 neighborhoods, the Civic Center, and Hall Place.

Historically, the name "Fairgrounds" referred to the commercial district along East Washington Street between Pinner and Factory Streets. The Fairgrounds Revitalization Plan, however, encompasses the adjacent residential and industrial areas to the south including the Orlando neighborhood.

## The Neighborhood Planning Process

The physical plan for the Fairgrounds 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. From the information collected, the design team drew base maps and 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,

### Aerial Photograph from the East

*The Fairgrounds area in East Suffolk, located on East Washington Street between Pinner and Factory, was the heart of the African-American commercial district.*



helping the design team to understand the neighborhood patterns and make informed decisions during the design process.

The second phase, and the focus of the UDA planning process, was the design charrette – an intense, multi-day design workshop, held on-site with the area residents, workers and property owners. Using the charrette process, the plan was created by the local community, with the design team facilitating the process and creating the drawings.

The Fairgrounds design charrette was held July 16–18 2001 at the Metropolitan Church on County Street. The charrette began with a kick-off meeting

where the design team asked the participants about the area’s assets, liabilities, and long-term community hopes and dreams. Participants were also asked to map the area’s strengths and weaknesses using green and red dots (see next page). 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 (see page 4).

The community agreed that the Fairgrounds area should be revitalized as a mixed income residential neighborhood with new and rehabilitated houses and a vibrant commercial shopping area on East Washington Street.



**Charrette Photos**

*Community residents participate in the strengths and weaknesses mapping exercise (above).*

*Ray Gindroz of Urban Design Associates explains one of the neighborhood design alternatives using the study model (left).*

**Assets, Liabilities, Hopes and Dreams**

**Assets/Good Things**

- Churches: St. Mark's Church, Metropolitan Church
- Historic buildings: Phoenix Bank Building, Horseshoe Cafe, Roper Building, Diggs Building, old kindergarten building on Tynes
- History/tradition: the Carver Theater, the Silver Slipper, Dr. Barnes drug store
- Business district on E. Washington
- Laundromat at Factory and E. Washington
- Norfolk & Western Train Station
- Beautiful houses on Culloden

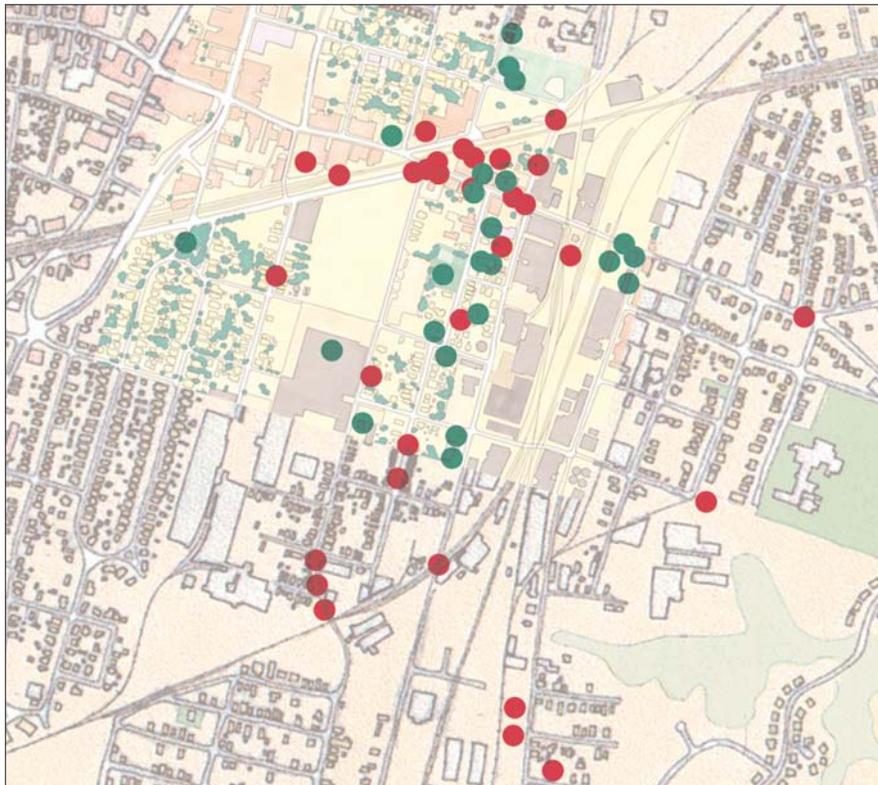
- Funeral home next to Phoenix Bank

**Liabilities/Bad Things**

- Culloden/Hall/E. Washington and County/Liberty/Washington intersections
- Truck traffic on Culloden St. and County St
- Obstruction at railroad crossings
- Spruce, Van Buren and Madison streets
- Unsightly buildings along railroad tracks
- Junk yard on Factory
- Unoccupied building between railroad tracks and E. Washington

**Strengths and Weaknesses Map**

*Using the existing conditions site map residents indicated neighborhood strengths with green dots and weaknesses with red dots.*



### Hopes and Dreams

- Improve East Washington Street: add lights, flowers, benches like the rest of Washington; remove/improve derelict buildings; save historic buildings especially on north side; improve traffic
- Provide live/work opportunities and supervised place to eat, dance, play pool on E. Washington
- Revive/re-use hotel building, Phoenix Bank building, Roper Building, Diggs Building, and Horseshoe Café
- Improve Washington/Culloden/Hall and County/Liberty/Washington intersections
- Improve neighborhood access - provide more than one way in and out
- Improve housing in the area and add new high quality housing (not low-income)
- Convert industrial/warehouse buildings to condos or luxury apartments
- Bury wires and improve sidewalks
- Provide more police patrol.
- Improve recreation area on Tynes with supervision and shade
- Restaurant in old railroad station
- Clean up/beautify/widen Factory
- Improve Birdsong
- Use historic “Mr. Peanut” fences around neighborhood parks

### Design Principles

The input from neighborhood residents and stakeholders about the area’s strengths and weaknesses were incorporated into a list of design principles to help guide the planning process.

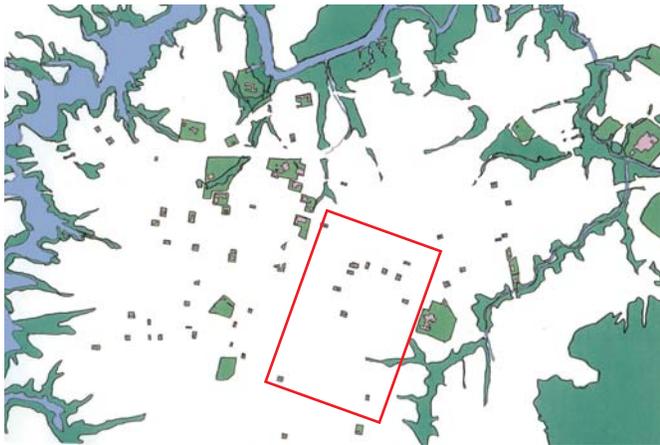
- 1 Revitalize the area into a mixed use, mixed-income East Suffolk neighborhood
- 2 Respect and build upon the Fairgrounds’ history
- 3 Create new residential streets with greater neighborhood connectivity
- 4 Revive the Fairgrounds commercial area of East Washington Street / attract small businesses.
- 5 Improve the look of East Washington Street with improved streetscaping, new sidewalks, historic lighting fixtures, underground wires and street trees.
- 6 Calm traffic.
- 7 Improve the E. Washington/Hall/Culloden and County/Liberty/E. Washington intersections.
- 8 Improve the Orlando neighborhood and the entrance to Suffolk along Factory Street.
- 9 Tie together the existing residential neighborhoods through the construction of new, mixed income houses and small apartments based on Virginia architectural precedents.

### Existing Conditions Analysis



#### Streets

The streets in Suffolk are laid out in a series of grid patterns that are interrupted and separated by railway tracks, ravines and large industrial sites.



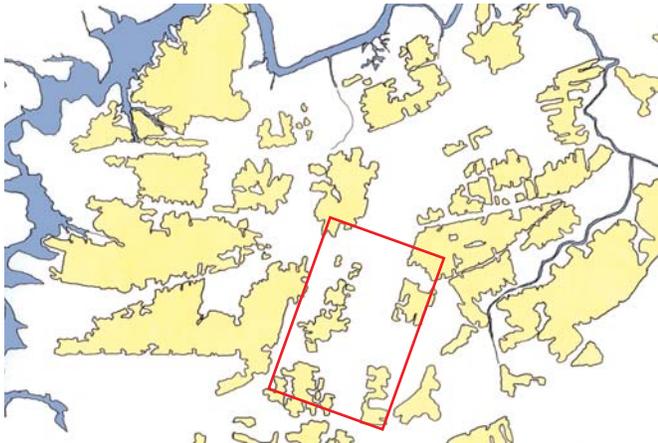
#### Parks, Institutions & Open Space

The City of Suffolk is surrounded by the Nansemond River to the north and west and Shingle Creek and the Great Dismal Swamp to the east. The study area has very few parks.



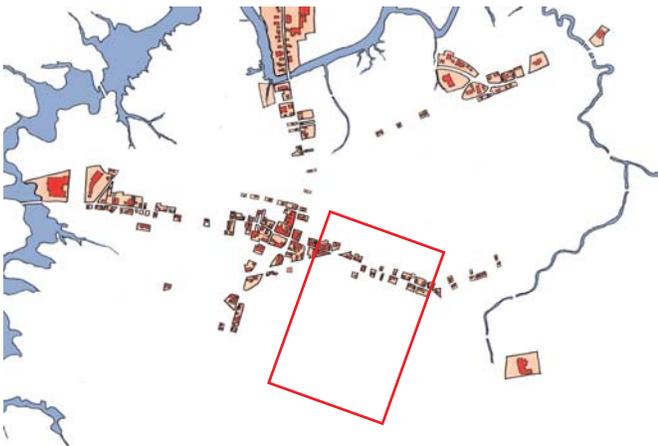
#### Figure/Ground

The building footprints reveal that Suffolk is made up of a series of residential neighborhoods, a dense downtown commercial core, and several industrial areas to the east of downtown.



**Residential**

Suffolk is made up of a number of residential neighborhoods, represented by contiguous yellow areas; the residential pattern in the Fairgrounds area is very fragmented.



**Commercial**

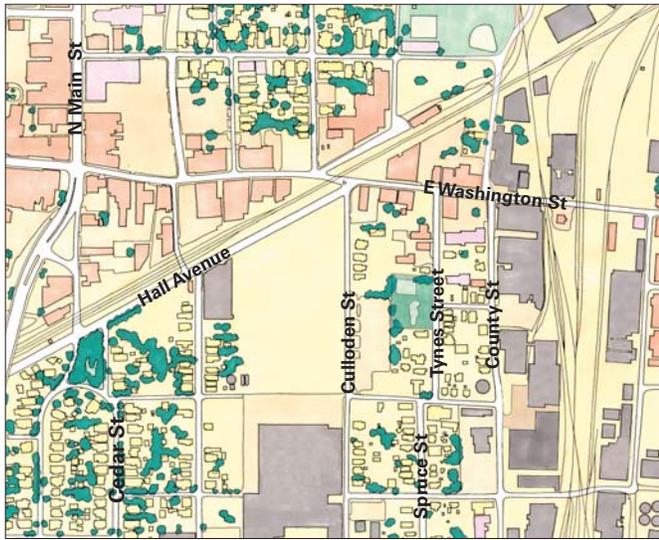
The commercial areas in Suffolk are concentrated along three major corridors: Constance Road, Main Street and Washington Street. Many of the commercial buildings in the Fairgrounds area are vacant.



**Railway & Industrial**

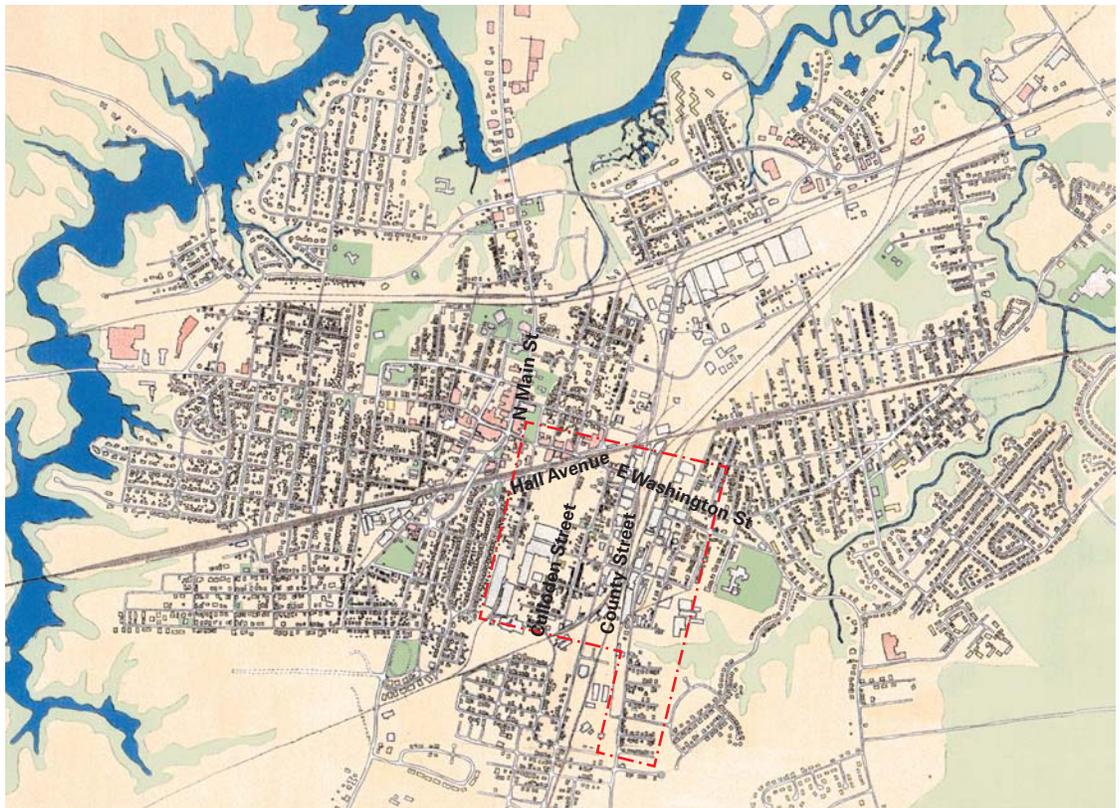
The city is crossed by several major railway lines with industrial uses concentrated along them. There are two major industrial areas in the Fairgrounds area: the Planters site and the Factory/County corridor.

## II Vision



### Downtown Suffolk Existing Conditions Plan

*The study area, outlined in red, as seen within the context of downtown Suffolk (right). Existing conditions plan of the Fairgrounds area.*



THE INITIATIVES PLAN FOR the Fairgrounds is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process and builds on the work done for the East Washington Neighborhoods and Hall Place. The Plan looks in detail at this area and proposes a number of physical design initiatives aimed at repairing the area by creating a vibrant, mixed-income, mixed-use, neighborhood. 7

The vision begins with a frameworks plan that examines the study area in the context of downtown Suffolk. The following page sets out the three plan alternatives explored during the charrette. This is followed by the detailed Master Plan and descriptions of specific initiatives.

**Frameworks**

The Frameworks Plan is used as a design tool to examine potential connections between the study area and adjacent commercial, industrial and residential areas of downtown Suffolk. Many of the problems found in Suffolk neighborhoods result from the city’s inadequate street framework which forces traffic onto a few overburdened major streets. Creating new street connections will help the neighborhood initiatives succeed.

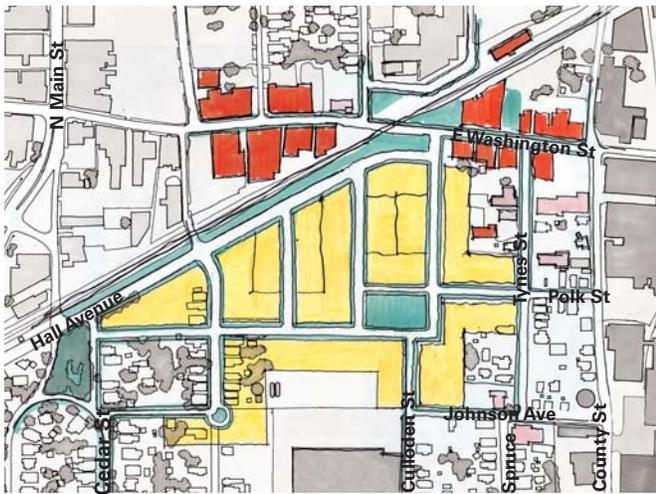
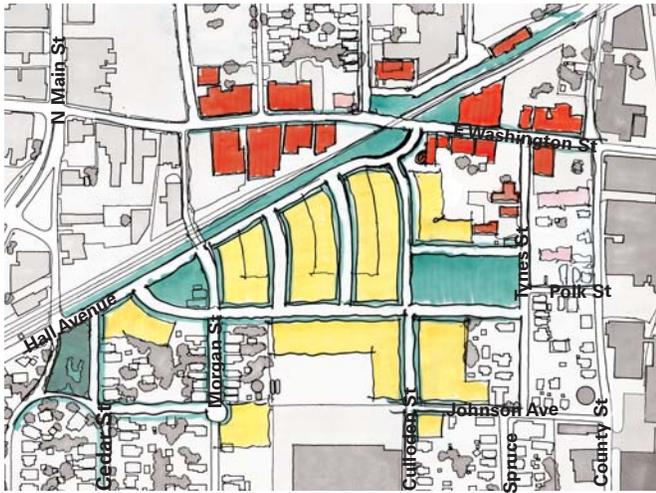
The Frameworks Plan is also used to establish clear land use boundaries; for example, the industrial areas (indicated in grey) should be defined by streets or alleys, not intermixed with other uses.

The Frameworks Plan highlights the following street connections.

- 1 Improved East Washington Corridor
- 2 Improved intersection at Hall and Culloden
- 3 Caroline / Hall connection
- 4 Culloden Connection to Factory
- 5 Liberty / County / Moore Improvements
- 6 Factory / Finney Connector
- 7 Factory Street streetscape improvements
- 8 New neighborhood street network

**Frameworks Plan**  
*The Frameworks Plan illustrates new road connections in and around the Fairgrounds area.*





**Plan Alternatives**

During the first day of the charrette the design team, working with the community, developed three alternative design solutions for the Fairgrounds area. The three alternatives all focused on revitalizing the East Washington commercial corridor and creating a revitalized residential neighborhood in the area to the south. All three plans resolve the intersection at Hall and East Washington and create a residential buffer at the north edge of the Planters Peanut Factory.

*The first alternative* employs slightly curving residential streets and maintains a large public park and playground between Tynes and Culloden. It also keeps Morgan Street to Johnson Avenue with new and renovated homes. A small park is created at the intersection of Morgan Street and Hall Avenue.

*The second alternative* realigns Culloden Street north of Polk Street at a smaller park, with new housing along Polk east of Culloden. Morgan Street continues south to Johnson Avenue.

*The third alternative* shows wider, smaller rectilinear blocks with a larger park west of Culloden at Polk. Morgan street is realigned with all new construction. Johnson is connected to the Hall Place park with residential frontage as a buffer from the Planters site.

At a meeting held during the second day of the charrette, the community selected preferred alternatives which the design team then refined to create the hybrid master plan.

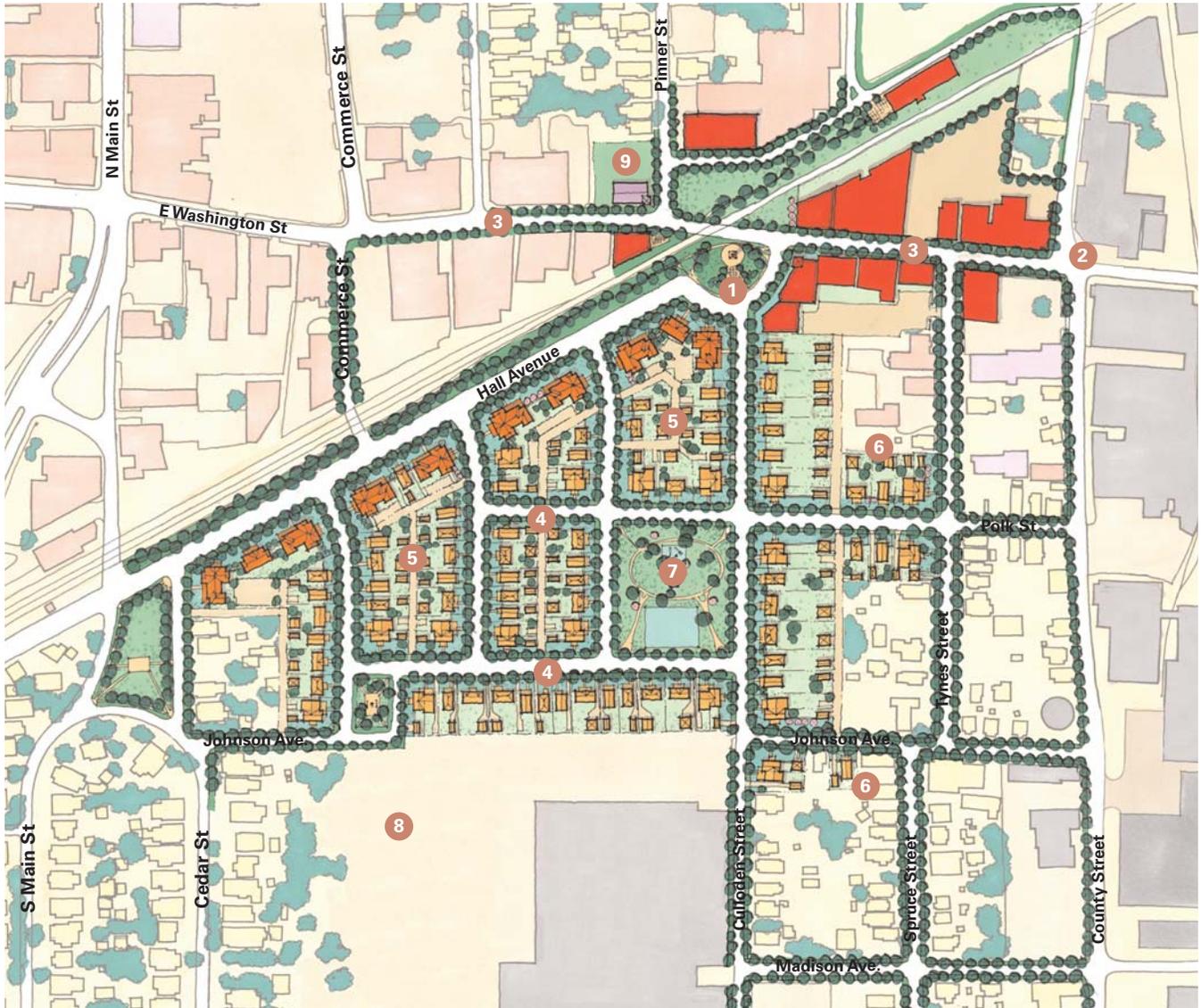
**Fairgrounds Area Master Plan**

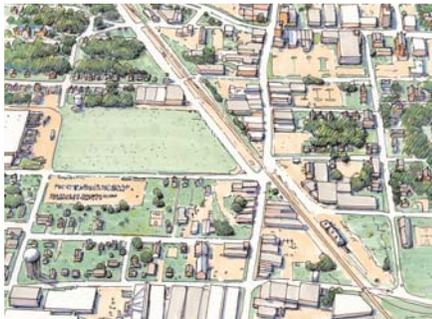
The master plan for the Fairgrounds area was created with extensive community input and contains the best ideas from preliminary design alternatives created during the first day of the charrette. Specific initiatives include the following:

- 1 Washington/Hall/Pinner intersection improvements
- 2 County/Liberty/Washington intersection improvements
- 3 East Washington Street Area Improvements
- 4 Street Connections
- 5 New residential development
- 6 Infill residential development
- 7 Neighborhood Park and Playground
- 8 Planters Peanut Plant Expansion
- 9 Police Precinct

**Fairgrounds Master Plan**

*The master plan includes the revitalized Fairgrounds commercial area with both new and renovated houses in the neighborhood to the south.*

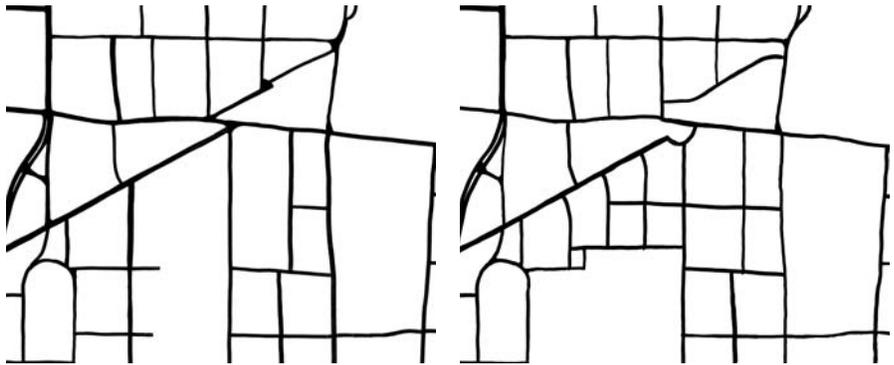




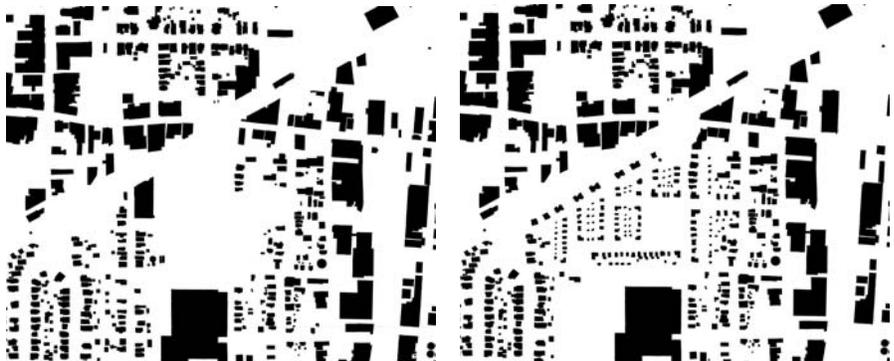
**Aerial Perspective**  
*The Fairgrounds area from the west, as it exists today (above) and as proposed (right).*



**Street Network**  
*The existing (left) and proposed (right) streets network demonstrates how the plan reconnects the street grid across the old Planters Peanut site to create a revitalized residential neighborhood.*



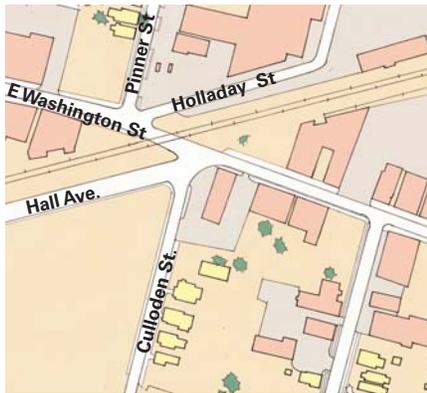
**Figure/Ground**  
*The existing (left) and proposed (right) building footprints show how the new houses will tie together two existing residential areas on the edge of downtown.*



### III Initiatives

THE MASTER PLAN FOR the Fairgrounds area consists of a number of design initiatives, which can be viewed as a shopping list of ideas that can be prioritized and implemented one at a time as funding becomes available.

**1 Washington/Hall/Culloden/Pinner Intersection** The existing intersection at East Washington Street, Pinner Street, Culloden Street and Hall Avenue is one of the most congested in Suffolk. The railway tracks are raised above the road grade and cross East Washington Street at an acute angle. The plan improves this intersection by creating a partial traffic circle at Hall Avenue, Culloden Street and East Washington. Traffic from Hall and Culloden will intersect East Washington Street further from the railway tracks, creating better sight lines and allowing room for turning movements. Turning lanes are added on East Washington to allow left turns for westbound traffic, and right turns for eastbound traffic. The south end of Holladay Street is also adjusted to meet Pinner Street at a right angle and eliminate its awkward intersection with East Washington Street.



**Intersection Plan**  
Detailed plan of the Washington/Hall/Culloden/Pinner intersection, as it exists today (above); proposed improvements to intersection (right).



**2 County Street/Liberty Street/East Washington St. Intersection**

Presently County and Liberty streets are part of the designated Industrial Truck Route, which connects U.S. Route 58 (to the east) with U.S. Route 13 (to the south) and serves both through truck traffic and local industries and businesses in the traditional core city of Suffolk. With the completion of the southwest leg of the Suffolk ring highway, a more convenient and direct route will be available to the through truck traffic that now cuts through the Fairgrounds area. Accordingly, the plan calls for the relocation of the designated truck route for through truck traffic from the County / Liberty streets corridor to the Suffolk ring highway. To help eliminate unnecessary truck traffic through the core city of Suffolk, consideration should be given to pro-

hibiting through truck traffic from utilizing the County / Liberty streets corridor. This corridor will continue to provide access for truck traffic serving the industries and businesses located in the core city of Suffolk.

The County / Liberty / E. Washington intersection needs to be improved. In the existing configuration, because County and Liberty streets do not line up, sight lines are poor and the intersection is fronted by a parking lot on the southwest corner. Recommended improvements include widening the intersection to improve safety, and the addition of landscaping and a brick wall to the parking lot. Consideration should also be given to prohibiting all industrial truck traffic from passing through the intersection.



**East Washington Street Plan**

*Detail plan of the East Washington Street Historic Fairgrounds area, showing revitalized streetscaping, new infill buildings, and renovated buildings with shared parking lots behind.*

**3 East Washington St. Revitalization**

The area of East Washington Street between Finney and Factory Streets was once the heart of Suffolk’s African American commercial shopping district. While people no longer rely on urban Main Street areas for their daily shopping needs, historic commercial streets across the country are being revitalized with with restaurants, cafes, small shops, offices, apartments, cultural attractions and museums.

The plan proposes the following improvements to the Fairgrounds area:

- a** Streetscape improvements including new sidewalks, historic street lighting and furniture, street trees and underground utilities.
- b** Restoration of the Phoenix Bank Building (possibly into a museum)
- c** Facade Improvement Program
- d** New commercial or mixed use infill buildings
- e** New Park/Plaza/Parking Lot on the old Carver Theater site
- f** Train Station restoration
- g** Horseshoe Cafe restoration



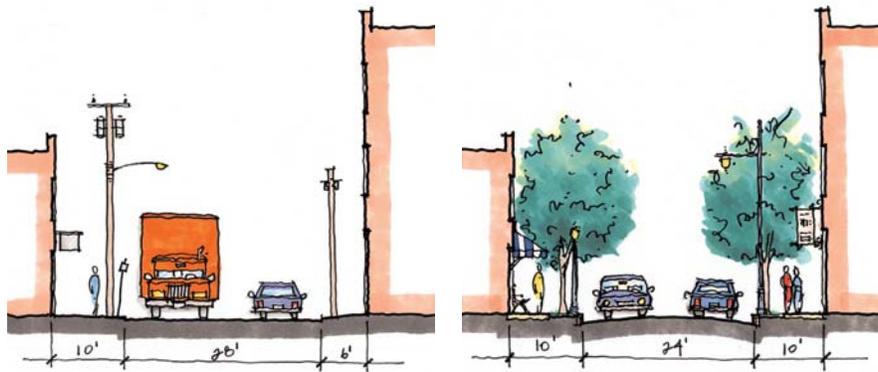


View looking West on East Washington Street towards the Pinner/Culloden/Hall intersection, as it exists today (left) and as proposed (below).



**Street Sections**

East Washington Street before (left) and after (right) proposed streetscape improvements



**Photographs**

The plan proposes the renovation of several historic buildings including Phoenix Bank Building (left) and the old Train Station (right).



**4 Street Connections**

The plan creates a number of new streets that connect the area back together across the former Planters Peanut site. Johnson Avenue is reconnected to the Hall Place neighborhood, and Polk Street continues west from Culloden into the new residential area.

In addition to creating a connected grid, the streets also form a series of new, small-scale, residential scale blocks for the new development.

**5 New Residential Development**

The master plan transforms the character of the Fairgrounds area from an open, former industrial site into a mixed income, vibrant residential neighborhood. The neighborhood will contain a mixture of traditional Suffolk housing

types with approximately 60 single family houses and 20 attached duplex houses, as well as 10 small (4 to 9 unit), residential-scale apartment buildings along Hall Avenue.

All of the new residential blocks will have alleys so that garages can be located behind the houses, except the extension of Johnson Avenue, where the houses back up to the Planters Peanut site to provide a residential buffer.

**6 Infill Residential Development**

In addition to the new residential development, the plan also identifies areas on both the east and west edges for infill development and revitalization of stable historic houses. On the west side, several houses on Johnson Avenue will be renovated. On the east side, a number of

*Closeup plan showing street connections, new and infill development and a new neighborhood park.*



houses and empty lots on Culloden, Polk, and Johnson will provide infill and revitalization opportunities. Also, the relocation of the neighborhood park from Tynes Street will create new infill lots. Revitalization of adjacent housing will help tie the new development to the existing neighborhood.

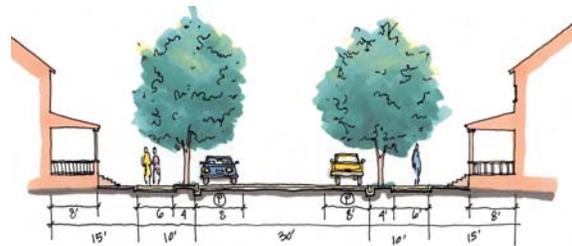
**7 Neighborhood Park/Playground**

The existing neighborhood park is relocated from Tynes Street to a location a block to the west in the center of the new neighborhood. The new park is surrounded by streets lined with houses - a pattern that is safer and provides better

surveillance. The park will contain a tot lot, space for a court or field, a covered picnic area, and will be landscaped to provide shade.

**8 Planters Peanut Plant Expansion**

With the redevelopment of Morgan Street, the Planters Peanut site will have room for expansion and parking to the west up to the alley behind Cedar Street.



**Street Section**

*Cross section of typical new residential street (above right).*

**Street Elevation and Detail Plan**

*Closeup street elevation (right) and plan (below) showing the area above the new neighborhood park. The lot sizes and architectural character are based on traditional Suffolk neighborhoods.*

### 9 The Police Precinct Building

With all of the proposed improvements to the Fairgrounds area the vacant lot at the northwest corner of East Washington and Pinner Streets becomes a very prominent entrance to the neighborhood and to downtown Suffolk.

The plan recommends building a neighborhood police precinct building on this site, for a number of reasons. First, the City, as part of the Public Safety Building Campaign, is looking to build a neighborhood precinct. Second, the construction of a new public building will encourage further private investment. Third, neighborhood police precincts have been shown to have a positive impact on neighborhoods, by decreasing crime rates and increasing the perception of neighborhood safety.

The plan is for a 6000 s.f. building to house the neighborhood police precinct office. The solid, brick building (inspired by the old Fire Station at Saratoga and Market Streets), will be a prominent civic presence with a corner tower facing East Washington Street. The building is set close to the sidewalk to reinforce the commercial street-wall along East Washington Street.

#### Police Precinct Building

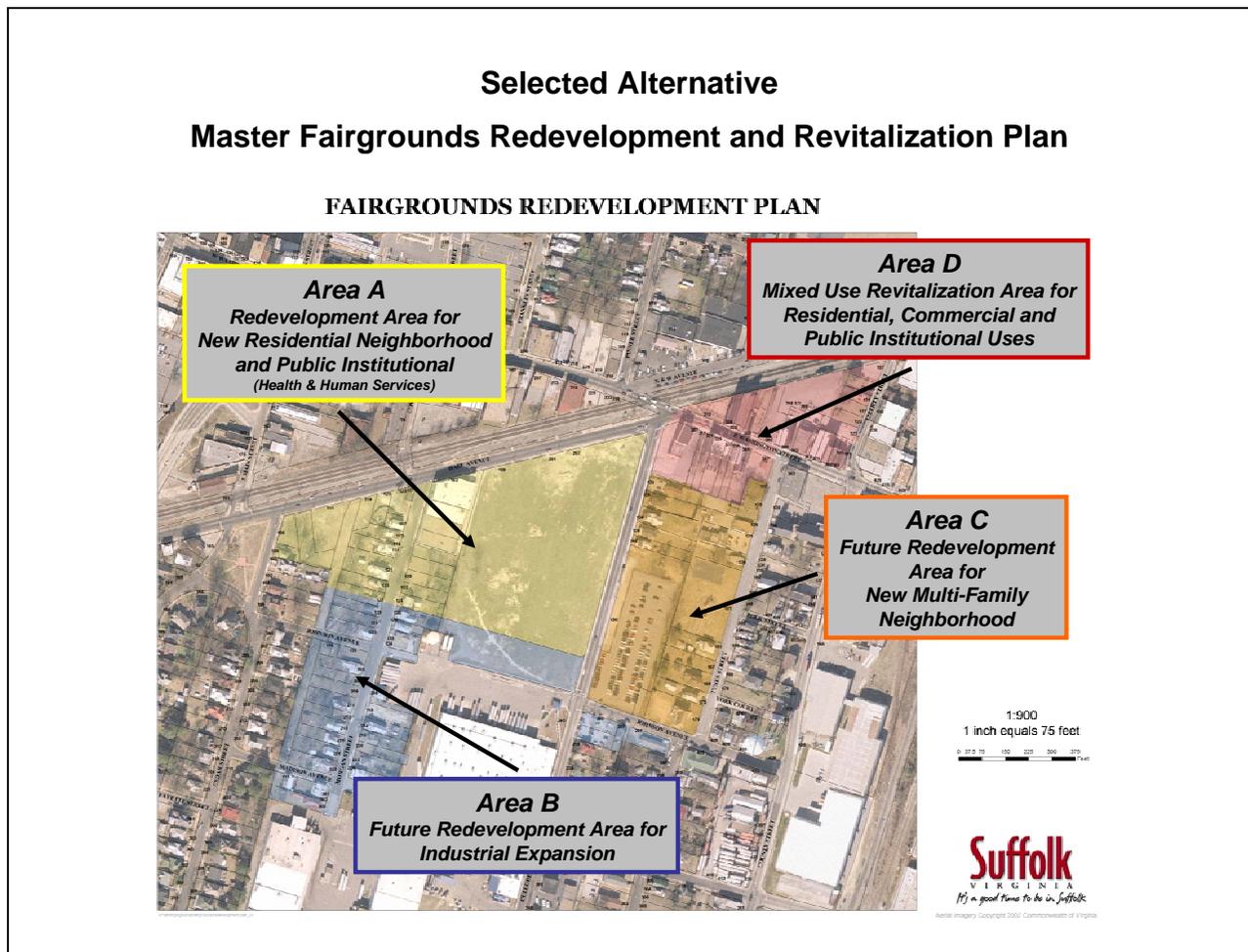
*Historic precedent (top), elevations (middle), and eye-level perspective at East Washington and Pinner (right).*



### 10. Health and Human Service Building

As an alternative to the Master Development Plan discussed earlier, the following Master Redevelopment and Revitalization Plan and the associated Conceptual Master Development Plan and Conceptual Master Schematic Plan were presented for consideration. These alternative plans address two important matters pertaining to the successful redevelopment and revitalization of the Fairgrounds area:

1. The alternative plans incorporate a new Health and Human Service building ; and
2. The alternative plans address site development concerns for the property on which the former Planters Peanut processing facility was located.



The revitalization plan presented earlier proposes the construction of a new residential neighborhood on the former Planters Peanut processing site at the corner of Hall Avenue and Culloden Street. This site was acquired by the City of Suffolk in April 1995

after the former peanut processing facility was demolished and cleared to a depth of two feet. This redevelopment scenario likely requires placing underground utilities and homes on or through sub-surface debris. The concern, of course being, that

this may have an adverse impact on the development and construction of the neighborhood. Therefore, it was determined that consideration be given to identifying other potential uses that would be more suitable for this site.

After thorough consideration and much deliberation, the City Council selected this location

as the preferred site for the new Health and Human Service building as identified in Area A of the “Selected Alternative” Master Fairgrounds Redevelopment and Revitalization Plan. This facility will house the Suffolk Health Department and the Department of Social Services.



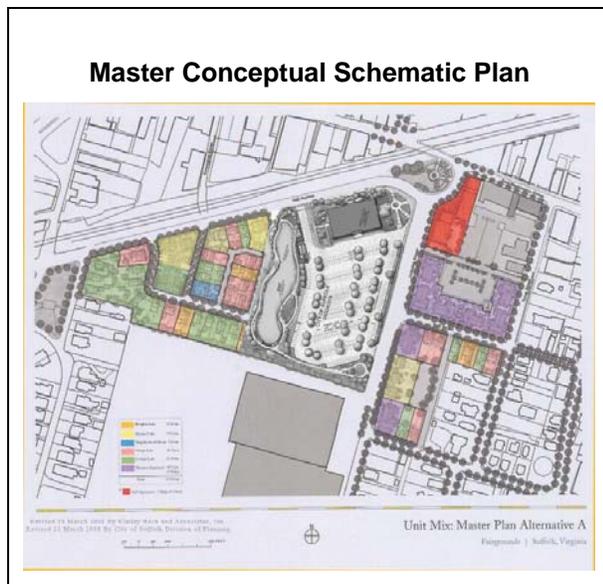
The incorporation of the Health and Human Service building into Fairgrounds has received substantial support from the community, service providers, business, and City leaders. The “selected

alternative” will continue to serve those in the low to moderate income levels and promote a vibrant mixed use community in the City of Suffolk.

Locating this specific use on the subject property is consistent with the frameworks and principals guiding the redevelopment and revitalization of the Fairgrounds area and efforts will be made to mitigate potential adverse impact to individual components of the plan, most notably the adjacent new low and moderate income residential neighborhood. The density of the redesigned neighborhood is consistent with the previous configuration. A storm water management facility has been included with this redevelopment scenario to serve both the Health and Human Service building and the new adjacent residential neighborhood. This needed feature was omitted from the previously presented alternative Mater Plan.

Locating the Health and Human Service building in the Fairgrounds area is logical choice supported by the following guiding principals:

- Close proximity to the population to be served;
- Centrally located within the greater downtown Suffolk;
- A system of streets, sidewalks and parking lots allow safe and convenient access to the site;
- Sidewalks and public transportation provide safe ways to reach the site without a car;
- The storm water BMP not only manages storm water, but will also serve as a visual buffer and recreational and passive open space for the Fairgrounds community; and
- Encourages non-residential uses and activities during daytime hours in the East Washington Street Corridor.



**Orlando Revitalization**

The physical plan for the Orlando area builds on the plans already put into place by the City.

**1 Street Connections** The connecting of the dead-end streets on the east end of Orlando makes the street network safer

and easier to navigate.

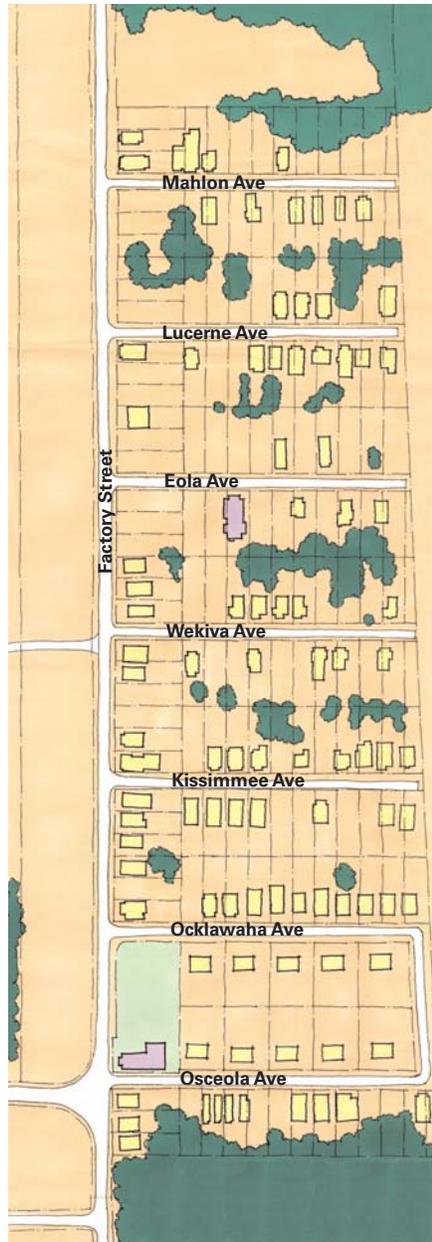
**2 Infill Residential** infill would have a similar character to the existing houses, maintaining the same setbacks and massing.

**3 Neighborhood entrances**

Entrances on Factory Street at each end

**Orlando Neighborhood Plan**

Existing plan (left), and proposed master plan (right).



of the neighborhood could include signs and landscaping. Along with strong new residential nearby along Factory, these improvements will send a clear signal that visitors have entered a strong residential neighborhood.

**4 Neighborhood Park** A park at the center of the neighborhood can include a

tot lot and multi-use courts as well as pavilions for picnics and gatherings.

**5 Factory Street Residential** New residential buildings complete the buffer from the industrial area west of Factory, making this part of Factory Street strong residential frontage on both sides.

**Orlando Neighborhood Plan**

*View looking north on Factory Street.*

