

# *Optimist Park* Neighborhood Plan



**Adopted by Charlotte City Council**  
March 25, 2002

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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A diverse group of participants supported the planning process for the *Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan*. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission would like to thank the following people for their time, commitment, and invaluable support in developing this plan.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

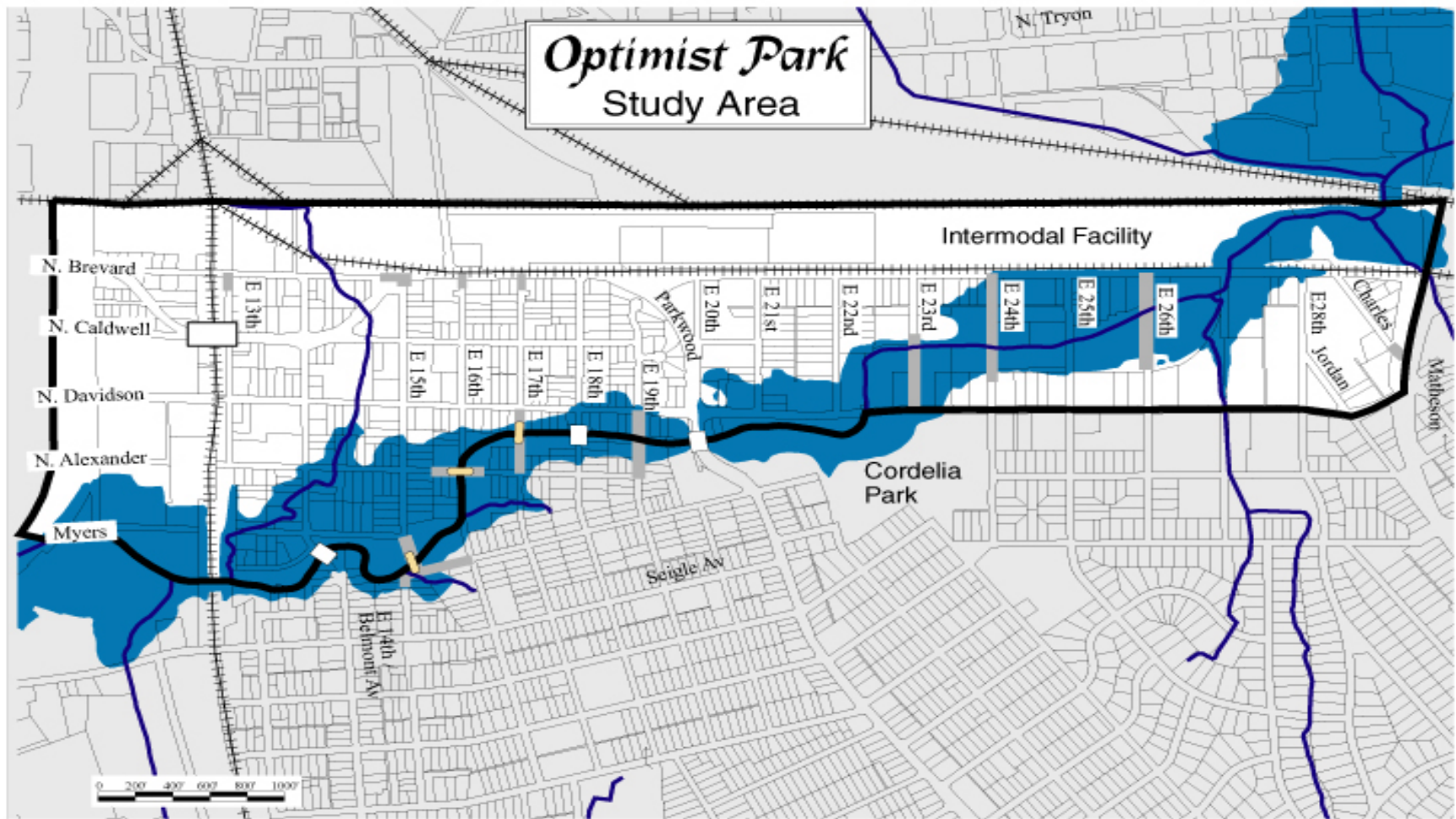
The Optimist Park neighborhood serves as a gateway to the Center City from North Charlotte. The boundaries used in developing this plan are Matheson Avenue, Brookshire Freeway, Little Sugar Creek and the Norfolk-Southern Intermodal Rail Yard (See **Map 1**, Boundary Map). The neighborhood is bordered by the Belmont and Villa Heights neighborhoods and is located just across I-277 from the recently revitalized and still developing First Ward neighborhood (formerly Earle Village).

The neighborhood is primarily developed with a mixture of residential and industrial land uses. The residential area is largely comprised of single family homes. Nonresidential land uses in the neighborhood include churches, convenience stores, and large scrap yards.

There are positive things happening in Optimist Park, although this community, like many inner-city neighborhoods, has its share of problems. The purpose of this plan is to address the livability and long term viability of Optimist Park by developing strategies to address the neighborhood's physical, social, and economic conditions.

The Charlotte Neighborhood *Quality of Life Report*, released in 2000, classifies this community as "threatened". This classification indicates that there are significant issues that must be addressed in order to improve the quality of life in this neighborhood. These issues include public safety, lack of homeownership, eroding residential fabric, aging industrial uses, and needed infrastructure improvements.

This plan updates previous planning initiatives for this area they include: the *Optimist Park Special Project Plan*, adopted in 1983 and the *Central District Plan*, adopted in 1993. During previous planning efforts, some of the needs in this community were addressed. Nevertheless, there are numerous social and physical issues in this area that still need attention.



Legend	
	Study Area Boundary
	Little Sugar Creek
	Bridge
	ROW exists, no pavement
	Pedestrian Bridge
	Flood Plain
	Railroad

**Optimist Park**  
Neighborhood Plan

February 2002

Map **1**

## PROCESS

The process for developing the Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan was initiated in the spring of 2000 and began with a public meeting to receive input from interested citizens. Participants shared valuable information about the community and issues they face. At this meeting, volunteers agreed to serve on a study group and work with City and County staff to develop a plan for this neighborhood. Study group members included property owners and representatives from the neighborhood, religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, City and County staff, and others. The study group met a total of nine times to develop this plan.

Key issues identified during this process include the need for public safety and crime prevention, preservation of the residential fabric of the neighborhood, redevelopment of the industrial land uses, higher educational levels and better paying jobs for area residents, and recreational activities for all ages.



*Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan Study Group Meeting*

## PLAN ORGANIZATION

The Optimist Park Plan is organized into two parts: Volume 1: The *Concept Plan* and Volume II: *The Implementation Plan*. The *Concept Plan* identifies planning challenges and includes goals and recommendations for improving the overall area. It will serve as a policy guide that addresses how a part of the community should be maintained and/or changed in the future and what public and private investments and strategies should be pursued to realize the vision for the area.

The *Implementation Plan* identifies strategies to implement recommendations included in the *Concept Plan*. The *Implementation Plan* is not intended to be an adopted document; rather, it is to serve as a guide for Planning staff and other agencies responsible for implementing the *Concept Plan*.

## VISION

The vision reflects the community's desire for Optimist Park's future, if recommendations in this plan are implemented. Many of the suggestions centered around having a safe neighborhood, a safe recreational area for children, facilities for the youth and seniors, well maintained homes, after school programs, and strong leadership.

The community agreed, essentially, to adopt the vision that the Community of Shalom, an initiative of the United Methodist Church to rebuild communities, has for the neighborhood with some additions.

***Optimist Park is a drug free, safe, healthy, clean, and economically sound neighborhood of involved citizens who take pride in and care of their neighborhood with:***

- *Well-maintained historic houses dating from the early 20th century and new residential and commercial development that is quality-built and compliments the architectural character of the historic structures.*
- *A mixture of housing types and small businesses offering neighborhood goods and services as well as employment opportunities.*
- *An active neighborhood association, churches, schools, and recreational facilities that serve all community members.*
- *Beautiful street and greenway amenities that are safe, well designed, and provide linkages to all parts of the community.*



## **GOALS**

The following is a summary of the overall goals of this plan:

1. Improve neighborhood safety.
2. Promote a land use and urban design pattern that preserves and enhances the neighborhood.
3. Provide a proper transition between residential and nonresidential development.
4. Preserve and upgrade the quality of the existing housing stock.
5. Increase homeownership opportunities.
6. Link residents with educational and employment opportunities.
7. Provide recreational opportunities for all ages.
8. Improve the overall appearance of the neighborhood.
9. Increase neighborhood organization capacity building skills.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a summary of the key recommendations taken from the *Concept Plan*. For a more comprehensive listing of recommendations see Volume I: *The Concept Plan*, and for implementation strategies, please see Volume II: *The Implementation Plan*.

### 1. Community Safety

- Improve safety in the neighborhood for area residents and business owners.
- Strengthen and continue community policing, as well as, the relationship between police, area businesses, and residents.
- Locate a police satellite facility in the neighborhood.
- Improve street lighting.

### 2. Land Use and Urban Design

The land use pattern proposed to achieve the vision for the future of the community is reflected on **Map 8**. Specific changes to the *Central District Plan* are detailed on **Map 9**. The following summarizes the intent of the specific land use changes recommended.

- Encourage infill development that is consistent with and sensitive to the existing character of the neighborhood.
- Redevelop scrapyards and other industrial land uses with a mixture of residential, office, and retail land uses.
- Improve physical relationship between residential and nonresidential land uses.
- Preserve open spaces and critical natural areas along Little Sugar Creek.
- Strengthen and preserve the historic residential character of the neighborhood.

### 3. Transportation and Infrastructure

- Provide pedestrian linkages to transit stations, recreational facilities, and other area amenities.
- Consider traffic calming measures for Davidson Street and the entrance into the neighborhood off Caldwell Street.
- Ensure that current and future transit service meets the needs of area residents, employers, and employees.
- Continue efforts to reduce flooding and storm drainage problems.

#### **4. Housing**

- Rehabilitate, update, and preserve existing housing stock, particularly those structures with historic architectural features.
- Promote homeownership opportunities.
- Develop strategies to prevent the displacement of residents through gentrification.
- Develop ways to attract other builders, in addition to Habitat for Humanity, to the neighborhood.

#### **5. Employment**

- Improve linkages between the neighborhood and employment opportunities.
- Link residents to JobLink Centers and other employment services.
- Encourage area businesses to publicize available employment opportunities.

#### **6. Community Facilities and Services**

##### **A. Human Services and Education**

- Educate residents on resources and programs available to address social needs in the community, specifically for the youth and elderly.
- Ensure that schools located in and around the community are comparable physically and academically to the best schools in the County.
- Increase the number of children that pass competency exams.
- Better prepare residents for employment and higher educational opportunities.
- Increase involvement and sharing of facilities between the schools and community.
- Increase parental and citizen involvement in the educational system.

##### **B. Recreation and Open Space**

- Develop supervised recreational programs and activities for children within the neighborhood boundaries.
- Develop a comprehensive outreach initiative that focuses on the recreational needs of neighborhood youth, teens, and seniors.
- Encourage residents to utilize parks and recreational facilities in the area.
- Continue development of the greenway along Little Sugar Creek.

## **7. Community Organizing**

- Maintain and strengthen the neighborhood association.
- Increase the organizing and capacity building skills of neighborhood leaders.
- Continue the neighborhood's partnership with the Community of Shalom.

## **8. Community Appearance**

- Better define gateways into the neighborhood and provide streetscape improvements along interior streets.
- Educate residents and business owners on appropriate ways to dispose of garbage and bulky items.
- Improve the relationship between residential and nonresidential land uses through the use of buffers, screening, and design elements that are sensitive to adjacent residential areas.
- Develop programs to educate and encourage residents, business and property owners on ways to better maintain and beautify their property.

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**Volume I: CONCEPT PLAN**

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## NEIGHBORHOOD BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Optimist Park was developed around the turn of the century as a streetcar suburb to provide housing for the workers in nearby textile mills. It was built near the convergence of two rail lines on what had formerly been farmland.

One of the City's oldest and best preserved textile mills, Alpha Mill, is located in Optimist Park at 12<sup>th</sup> and Brevard streets. It was built in 1888-89 and was one of the first cotton mills in Charlotte. This Mill provided some of the momentum that transformed Charlotte into a leading textile manufacturing center. Louise Mill is another textile mill located in the area.

Optimist Park was once a flourishing community of well maintained homes; however, that began to change in the late 1950s as the "outer suburbs" developed and people began moving away from Charlotte's Center City. Many of the traditional jobs were displaced from the community because of mill closings and relocations. This loss of jobs contributed significantly to the population decline in the area.

Crime, poorly maintained houses, low educational levels, and unemployment are some of the factors that demand attention and impact the quality of life in this neighborhood. The *Quality of Life Report* classifies Optimist Park as a "threatened" neighborhood. The report indicates that Optimist Park has a high rate of arrests, high unemployment, and a high percentage of absentee homeowners. These variables contribute to its status as a "threatened" neighborhood.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### POPULATION

Since 1960, Optimist Park has experienced a 74% decrease in population. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, there was a 44% decrease in population and between the 70s and 80s, there was a 46% decrease in population. However, between 1980 and 1990, there was a 12% increase in population. It was during the 1980s that Habitat for Humanity began building homes in this neighborhood.

Homeownership rates in this community continue to climb, but the population continues to decline. The 1990 Census indicated a population of 848. In 2000, approximately 179 families with a total population of 642 lived in Optimist Park, which represents a 24% decline over the last ten years (See **Table 1**). Many inner city neighborhoods have experienced a phase of decreasing popularity while the suburbs experienced a significant population increase. However, the change in Optimist Park can largely be attributed to the demolition of deteriorated or dilapidated housing units in the 1980s.

Data shows that there is a large youth population in this community with children under the age of eighteen comprising 38 percent of the population. By contrast, adults over the age of 64 comprise 8.1 percent of the population (See **Table 2**).

**Table 1: Population Changes for the Last 40 Years**

Year	Population	% Change
1960	2470	
1970	1392	-44
1980	757	-46
1990	848	12
2000	642	-24

Total Population Decrease between 1960 and 2000 1,828

Total Population Change between 1960 and 2000 -74%

Source: US Census

### INCOME

In 1989, the median household income for 35% of the households in this neighborhood was less than \$15,000 annually. In 1990, the median household income was \$23,688. This is just above half the City's average income of \$41,385 (See **Table 2**).

**Table 2: Socioeconomic Data**

<b>DIMENSION</b>	<b>OPTIMIST PARK 1990</b>	<b>CITY 1990</b>	<b>OPTIMIST PARK 2000</b>	<b>CITY 2000</b>
<b>Population</b>				
Blacks	656	125,827	448	176,964
Whites	47	259,760	37	315,061
*Other	145	10,347	163	48,803
Population Under Age 18	333	95,718	206	133,635
Population Age 65 or over	70	38,802	40	47,665
Total Population	848	395,934	642	540,823
<b>Households</b>				
Married with Children Households	49	34,856	36	44,268
Female Heads of Households with Children	47	12,269	35	17,962
Families Living Below Poverty	43	7,862	**	**
Total Number of Households	223	158,991	179	251,449
<b>Education</b>				
High School Graduates	52	58,388	**	**
College Graduates	45	93,271	**	**
<b>Other</b>				
Unemployment	33	9,432	**	**
Median Household Income	\$23,688	\$41,385	**	**
Housing Values	\$39,653	\$134,200	**	**
Violent Crime Rate	3%	1%	**	**
Homeownership Rate	41%	55%	57%	57.2%

\*Under population, other includes American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and others.

\*\*2000 Census information unavailable for these variables

Source: 1990 and 2000 Census



## HOUSING

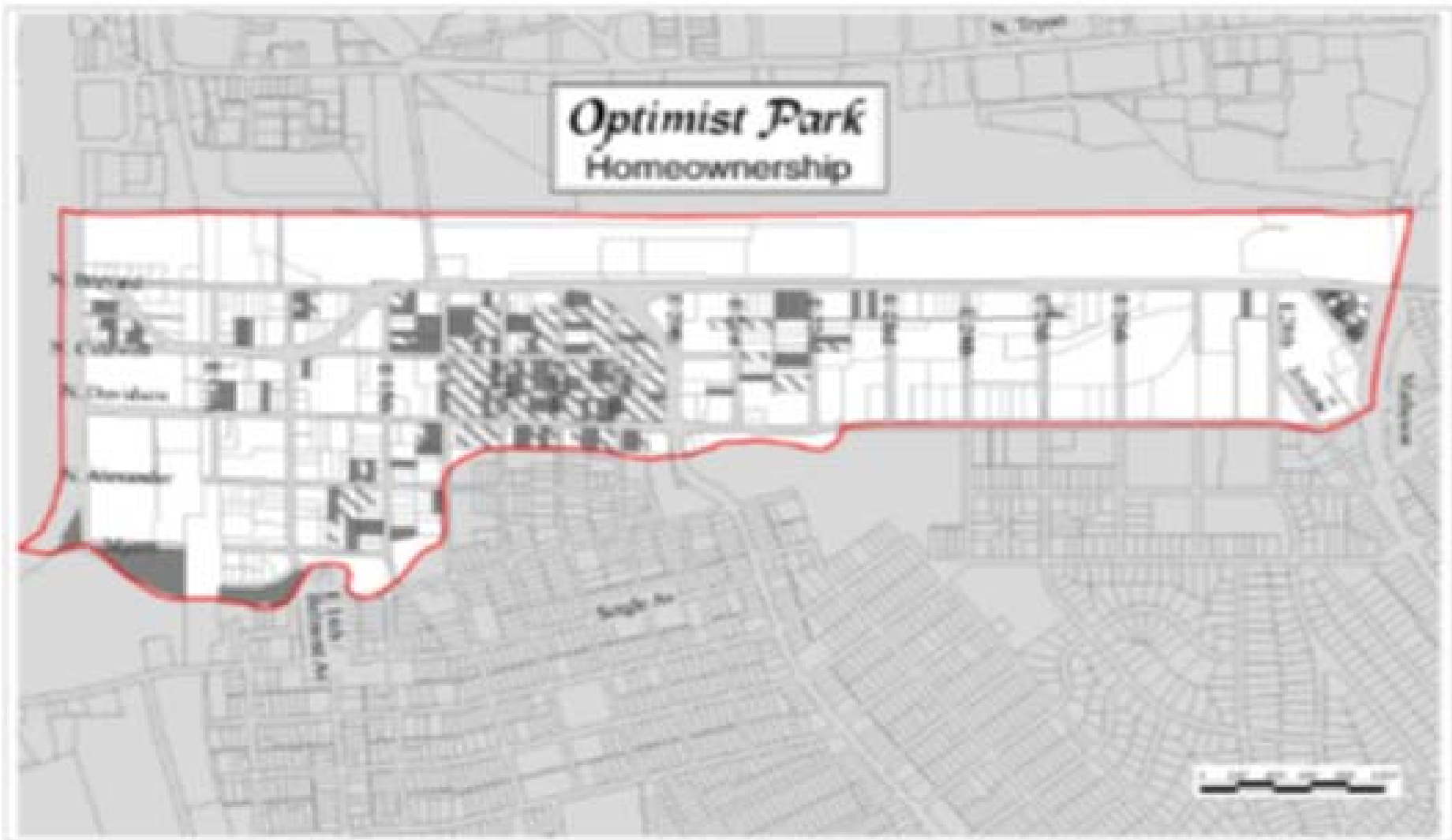
In the early 1980s, over 97% of the housing units in Optimist Park were considered deteriorated or dilapidated. Today, only a few boarded up housing units remain in the neighborhood and efforts are underway to renovate some of these structures. The *2000 Quality of Life Index* shows that 7.1% of the houses are still substandard, but current efforts to renovate houses in the neighborhood should further lower this percentage.

During the late 1980s, Habitat for Humanity built numerous homes in the neighborhood to provide homeownership opportunities. This significantly increased the number of homeowners in this community. In 1990, 41% of the homes in the neighborhood were owner-occupied and in 2000, 57% were owner-occupied. However, the acquisition and removal of houses from the floodplain by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services could affect the homeownership rate in the future (See **Map I-2**, Parcel Acquisition for Little Sugar Creek Floodplain).



*Habitat for Humanity Homes*

The latest Census information indicates that the study area contains approximately 179 residential structures, 169 of these are single family homes (See **Table 3**). The percentage of owner occupancy, 57%, is comparable to the City's average of 57% (See **Table 4** and **Map 2**). The average house value is \$39,653, which represents about 1/3 of the City's average housing value of \$134,200.



		<p><b>Legend</b></p> <p> Owner Occupied       Rental Occupied</p> <p><i>Owner/renter property information is provided for Residential Land Use only</i></p>	<p><b>Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan</b></p> <p>January 2002</p>	<p>Map 2</p>
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**Table 3: Housing Units by Type**

Type	No. of Units	% of Total Housing Units
Single Family	169	94
Duplex/Triplex	5	3
Multi-Family	5	3
Total Number of Units	179	100%

Source: Mecklenburg County Tax Records 2001

**Table 4: Owner-occupied versus Renter-occupied Housing**

	Optimist Park 1990	Optimist Park 2000	City 1990	City 2000
Owner-occupied	41%	57%	55%	57%
Renter- Occupied	59%	43%	45%	43%
Total Number of Units	223	179	158,991	251,449

Source: Mecklenburg County Tax Records 2001

## COMMUNITY SAFETY

Residents have a good relationship with the community police officer in their neighborhood and have a Neighborhood Watch organization. However, crime is an ongoing problem and a primary concern of residents.

Statistics indicate that the crime rate in this community is three times higher than the City's average. The types of offenses reported most frequently during the last four years were larceny, burglary, and assault. The high crime rate validates the concerns of those that live in Optimist Park regarding the safety of their neighborhood (See **Tables 5 and 6**). Residents are especially concerned about the amount of drug trafficking through the neighborhood and have observed people walking to this neighborhood from other areas to purchase drugs and stealing items to trade.

During the first six months of 2001, there were 35 drug arrests. Major drug activity was concentrated at the intersections of Parkwood Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> Street, 17<sup>th</sup> and Caldwell streets, and Matheson Avenue and Brevard Street. Other high drug traffic areas include 18<sup>th</sup> and Davidson streets and 16<sup>th</sup> and Davidson streets (See **Map 3, Drug Arrests**).

The overall number of criminal incidents reported decreased from 280 in 2000 to 264 in 2001. Aggravated assaults decreased from 40 cases in 2000 to 25 cases in 2001 and non-aggravated assaults remained constant with 36 cases in 2000 and 37 cases in 2001. Overall the number of offenses reported decreased by 9%

The number of arrests made in the neighborhood has shown a 19% decrease in the last year. In 1999, the number of arrests made in this neighborhood peaked at 170 and during 2001 the number of arrests made was 112, the lowest in the last five years. While this is good news for the community, efforts to strengthen the neighborhood watch and police visibility are still vital.

**Table 5: Most Frequently Reported Criminal Offenses**

Offense	1998	1999	2000	2001
Larceny	55	45	43	59
Burglary	41	33	35	46
Aggravated Assault	34	28	40	25
Larceny from Auto	37	24	26	30
Non-Aggravated Assault	48	39	36	37

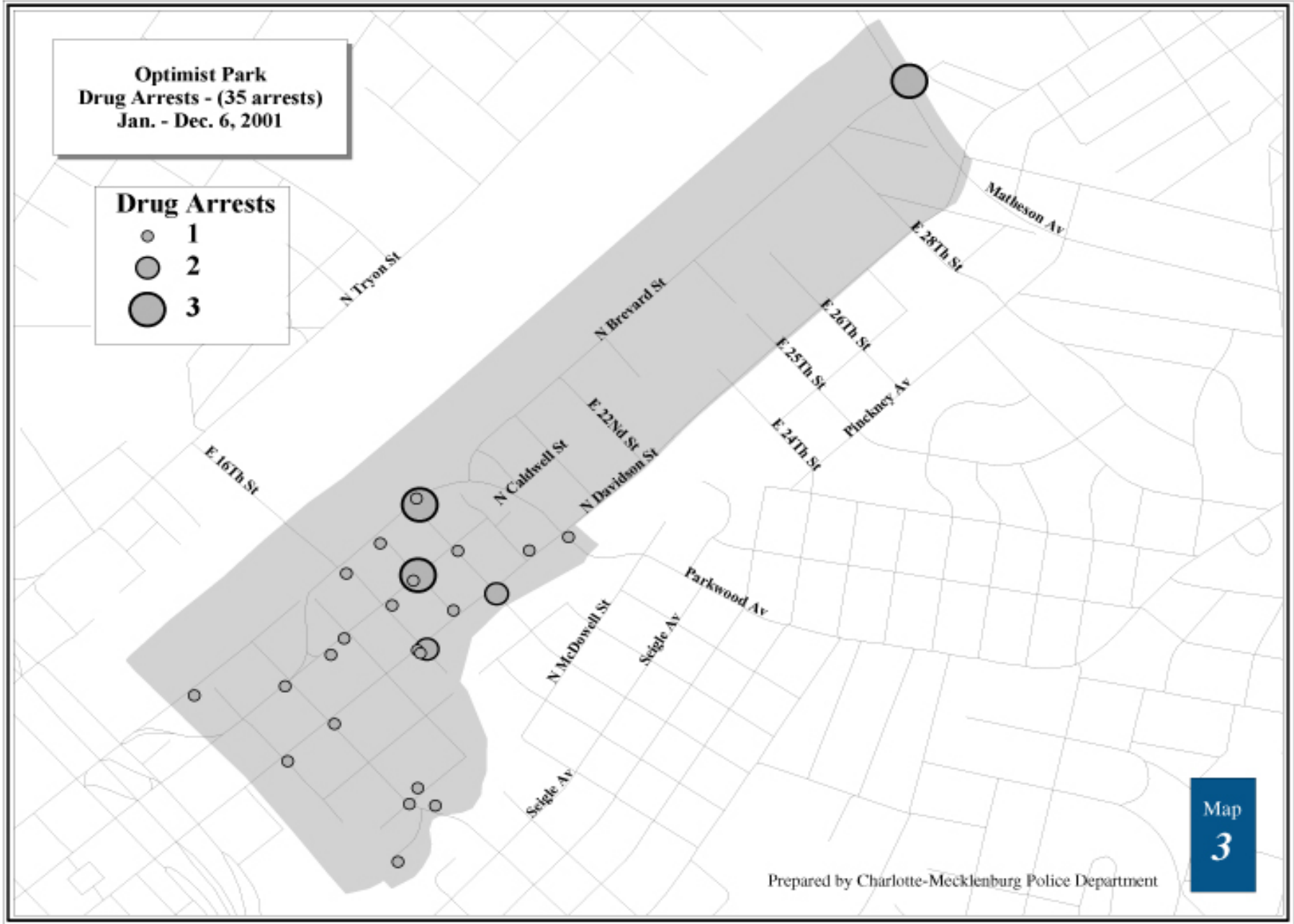
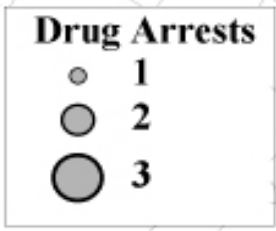
Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Crime Analysis Department, December 2001

**Table 6: Number of Offenses Reported and Arrests Made During the Last Four Years**

Year	No. of Offenses	% Change	No. of Arrests	%Change
1998	277		146	
1999	256	-8	170	24
2000	280	9	139	-18
2001	264	-9	112	-19

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Crime Analysis Department, December 2001

**Optimist Park  
Drug Arrests - (35 arrests)  
Jan. - Dec. 6, 2001**



Prepared by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department



## LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN

There is a mixture of land uses located throughout the neighborhood. However, the predominant land uses are heavy industrial and residential as illustrated on **Map 4**, Existing Land Use. Other uses in the neighborhood include churches, a daycare center, and retail land uses. The zoning in this neighborhood is mostly multi-family (R-22MF) and heavy industrial (I-2) (See **Map 5**, Existing Zoning). The property zoned for multi-family land uses is predominantly developed with single family homes and the industrially zoned property is developed with heavy industrial land uses that have outdoor storage.

The residential portion of the community was largely developed in the early 1900s to provide housing for workers in nearby mills. Some of these homes remain today. As the neighborhood began to decline during the 1950s and 1960s, the heavy industrial areas were developed.



*Existing houses in the neighborhood*

There are some vacant parcels in Optimist Park; however, most of the vacant land in the area is located in the floodplain and recommended for open space land uses (See **Table 7**, Land Use by Acreage and **Map 4**, Existing Land Use). This open space is to be a part of the greenway for Little Sugar Creek.



*Little Sugar Creek*

The I-2 zoning classification, heavy industrial, is the most predominant zoning category in the neighborhood. The industrial zoning includes the majority of the area between Brookshire Freeway and Matheson Avenue, with the exception of the R-22MF, multi-family zoning, which is concentrated between Belmont and Parkwood Avenues. Industrial uses in the area include auto salvage yards, distribution facilities, warehouses, and uses associated with the Intermodal Yard. Several of the industrial structures in the area are vacant.



*Norfolk-Southern Intermodal Yard*

Hunter Wrecker and other scrapyards are major industrial land uses in the area. The owners of several of the industrial properties have indicated a willingness to sell and partners are needed to purchase and redevelop these properties. Some of these parcels are likely to be contaminated and, in addition to being costly to redevelop, will require a great deal of care and sensitivity to address potential environmental contamination.

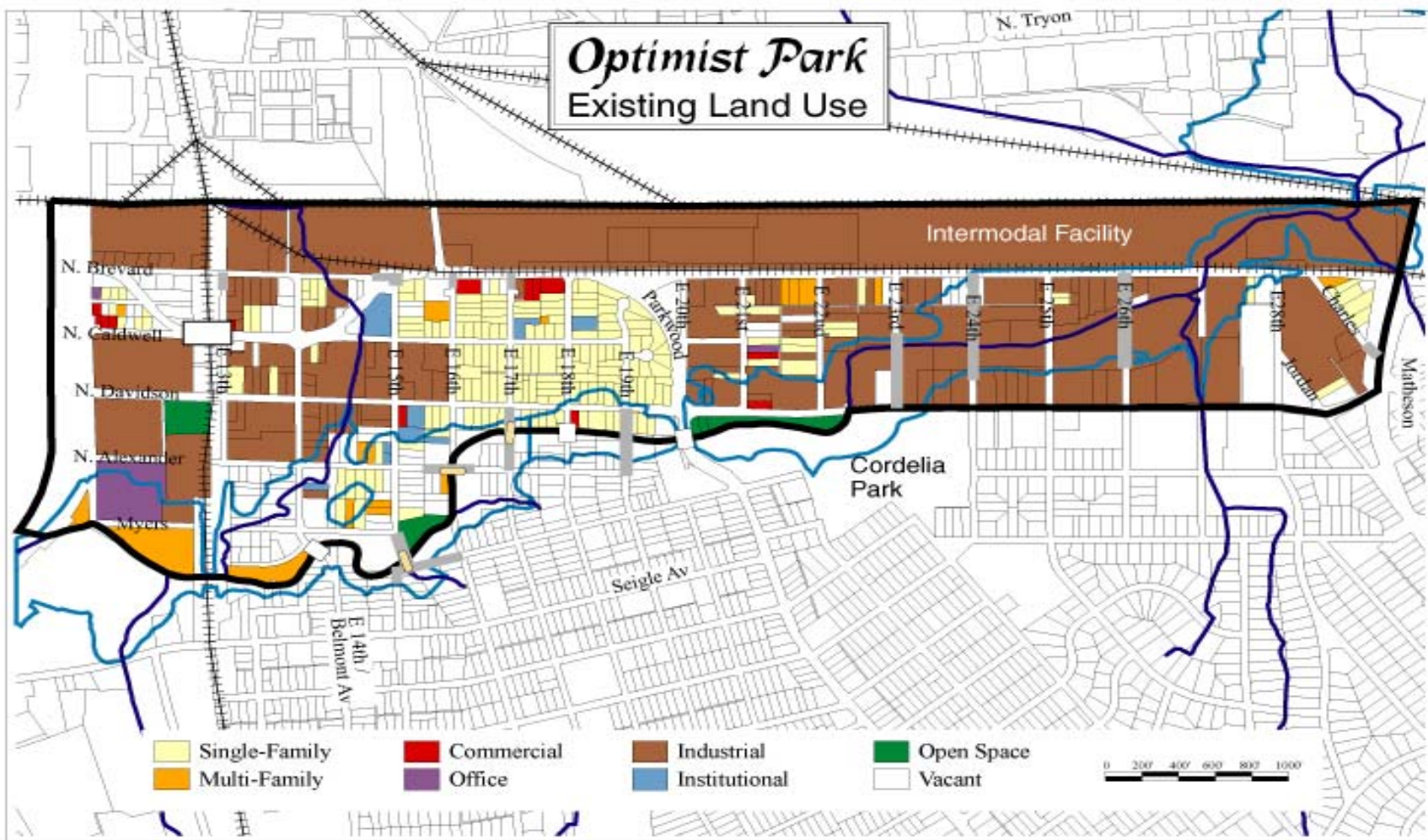


*Hunter Auto & Wrecker Service*

One parcel, the Alexander Street Center, is zoned office. Business zoning is concentrated along Parkwood Avenue, generally from Belmont Avenue to East 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Additionally, a number of retail uses are dispersed throughout the community. Many of the parcels that are zoned business are vacant or developed with residential structures.

The residential portion of this community is located primarily between Parkwood Avenue, 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Little Sugar Creek, and Brevard Street and is zoned R-22MF. This zoning classification allows multi-family residential land uses at a density of twenty-two dwelling units per acre. However, single family homes are the predominant land use within the existing residential area of the community.





Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Little Sugar Creek
- Bridge
- ROW exists, no pavement
- Pedestrian Bridge
- Flood Plain
- Railroad

*Optimist Park*  
Neighborhood Plan

December 2001

Map

4

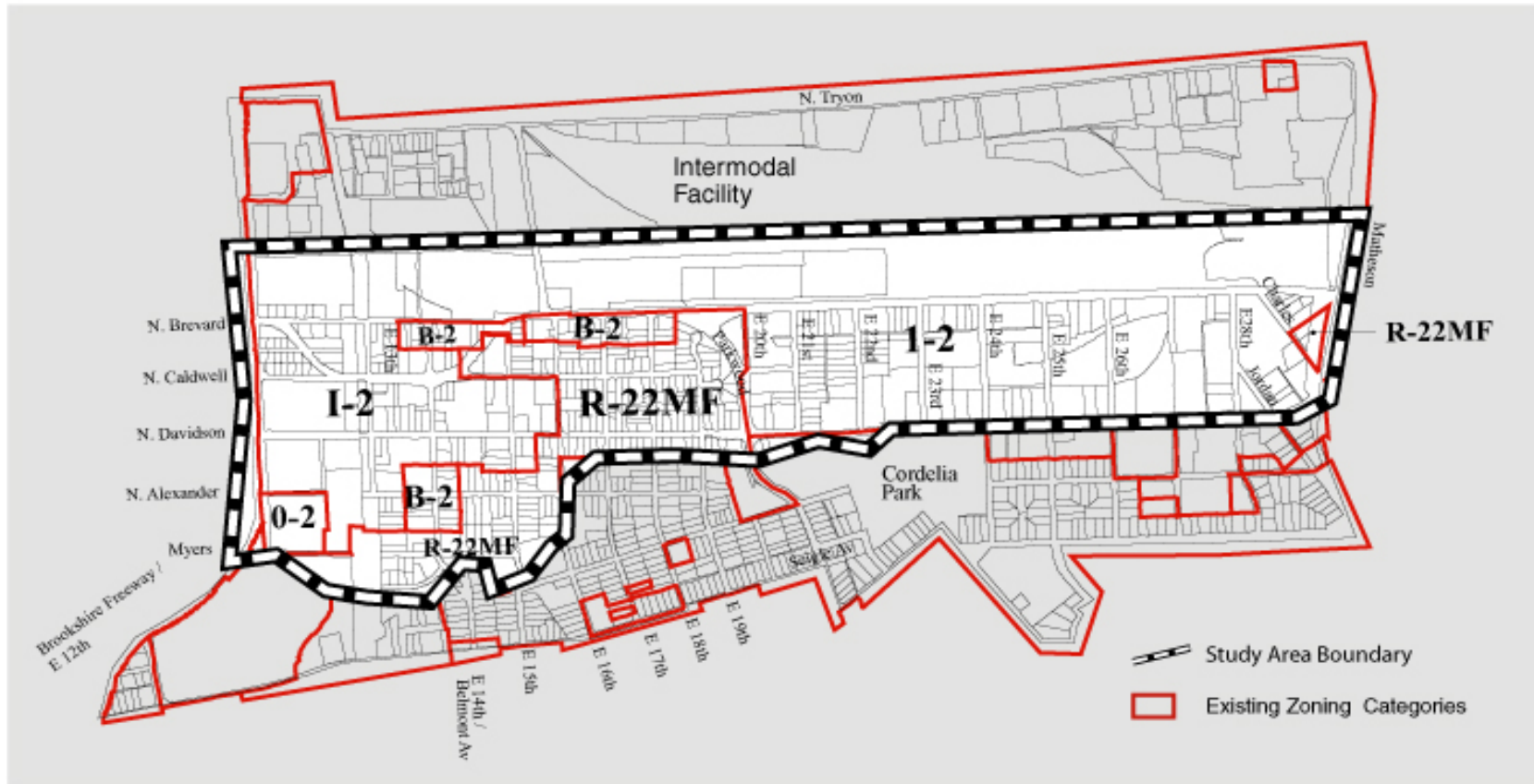


NORTH



Drawing Not to Scale

# Optimist Park Existing Zoning



Study Area Boundary  
 Existing Zoning Categories



### Existing Zoning Districts

R-22MF	Allows up to 22 dwelling units per acre
B-2	General business
O-2	Office
I-2	Heavy Industrial

## Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan

December 2001

Map  
**5**

**Table 7: Existing Land Use by Acreage**

Existing Land Use	No. of Parcels	Acres	% of Total Acreage
Single Family	179	31	12
Multi-Family	3	7	3
Institutional	5	3	1
Office	2	4	2
Commercial	18	2	1
Industrial	114	163	65
*Open Space	35	4	2
*Vacant	27	34	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Open space refers to vacant parcels located in the floodplain that are to be used as open space/greenspace and are to remain *undeveloped*. Vacant refers to *undeveloped parcels of land*.

Source: Mecklenburg County Tax Records, 2001

**Table 8: Existing Zoning Summary**

Zoning Category	Acres	% of Total Acreage
Multi-Family	47	19
Office	4	2
Business	10	4
Industrial	187	75
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mecklenburg County Tax Records, 2001

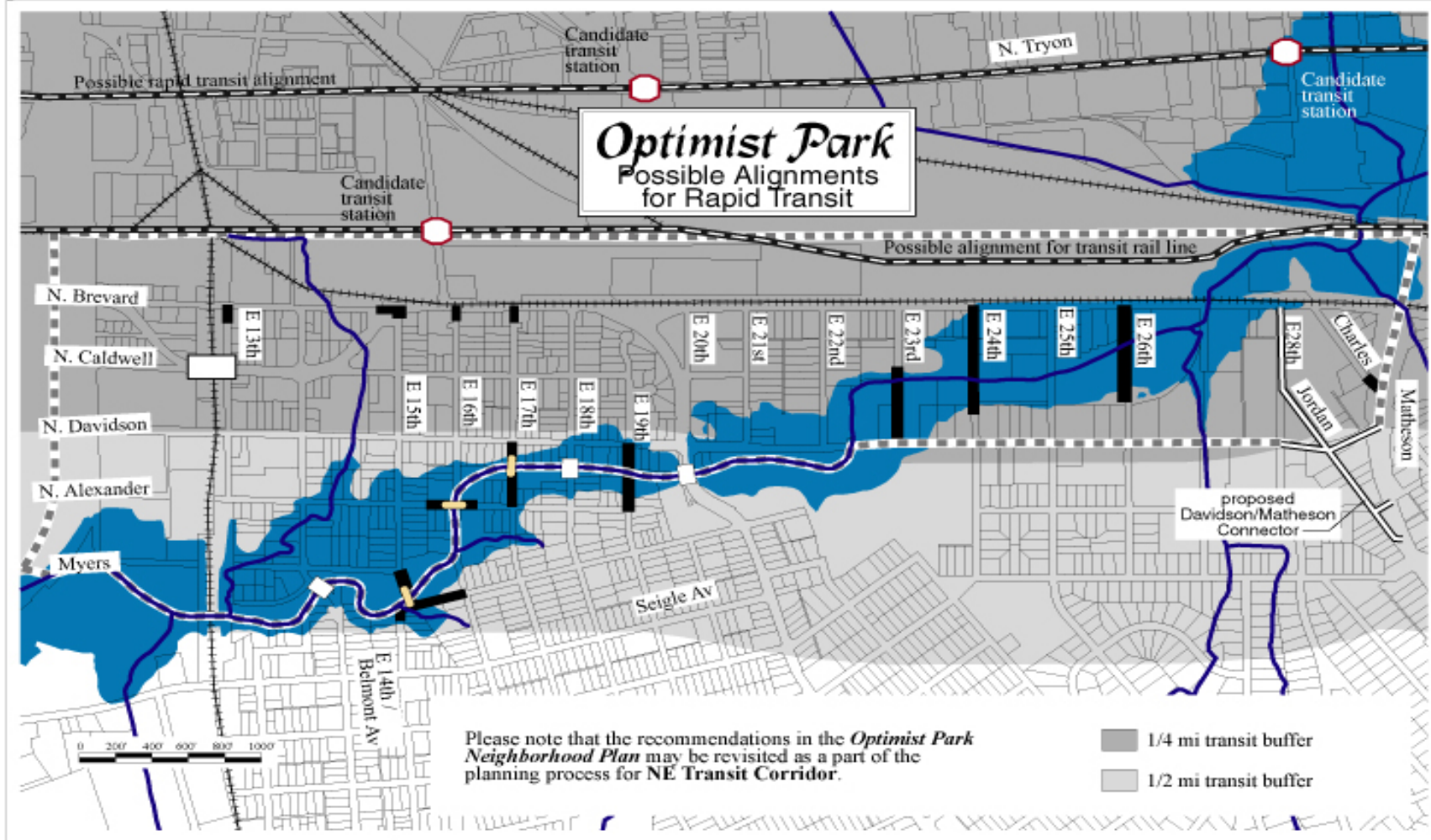
## TRANSIT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg is currently involved in an extensive study of four rapid transit corridors, referred to as a Major Investment Study (MIS). The MIS process began in May of 2000 and involves a comprehensive review of potential rapid transit alternatives – what mode the transit will be and what route it will take – and extensive public involvement. A decision on the final alignment and mode is expected in the Spring of 2002.

Optimist Park is located in the Northeast Transit Corridor. This corridor extends approximately 14 miles northeast from Center City Charlotte to the Cabarrus County line near Concord Mills mall. The major transportation facilities in the corridor include I-85, US 29 and NC 49, and the Norfolk-Southern main line, which traverses the Optimist Park study area.

There are four potential alternatives that are being evaluated in the Northeast Corridor; a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternative, two light rail (LRT) alternatives and a combination of LRT and BRT. LRT vehicles draw power from overhead wires and operate on a fixed “track.” BRT consists of buses operating in exclusive busways and/or highway shoulders, or on roads with improvements to allow buses to bypass traffic congestion. The following are the three alternatives still under consideration that, if one were chosen, would likely have a significant impact on Optimist Park:

- *Alternative NE-4:* This alternative consists of LRT only and would begin in the Center City along the North Carolina Railroad alignment, following the east side of the Charlotte Intermodal Yard, adjacent to the Norfolk Southern (NS) main line to North Charlotte. The line would cross over the NS main line near Sugar Creek Road and continue north along the North Tryon Street median, ending at either UNCC or a park-and-ride lot near I-485.
- *Alternative NE-5:* Alternative NE-5 consists of LRT operating on a dedicated right-of-way along North Tryon Street from the Center City to I-485. The line would operate in mixed traffic from the Center City to the weave area (I-85/US 29/NC 49), then use the median along North Tryon to I-485.



Legend	
—	Study Area Boundary
—	Little Sugar Creek
—	ROW exists, no pavement
—	Pedestrian Bridge
—+—+—+—	Railroad
—	Possible Rapid Transit Alignment (under study)
○	Candidate Transit Station

**Optimist Park**  
Neighborhood Plan

December 2001

Map **6**

- *Alternative NE-6:* NE-6 consists of LRT operating in mixed traffic on North Tryon Street from Center City Charlotte to the weave area, plus BRT service. The LRT portion of the alignment would use narrow-width rail cars that operate in the street. The BRT portion would begin in the Center City on Trade Street to North Graham Street and I-85 and then would use the future University City Boulevard extension at North Graham Street and Sugar Creek Road. The alignment continues to Neal Road where the BRT service splits. One leg follows the proposed University City Boulevard extension to US 29 and on to Salome Church Road, through the Kings Grant area to Concord Mills mall. The other leg follows a new busway through the University Research Park across WT Harris Boulevard, continuing to I-85 on a new structure northeast of the WT Harris/I-85 interchange and through Kings Grant to Concord Mills mall.

Once a final alignment and mode are selected, there will be further land use planning around station areas, and the land use recommendations in this plan may have to be revisited.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### Human Service and Educational Needs

There are a number of resources available to this community. The Belmont Center, which is located in close proximity to Optimist Park, provides a number of services to area residents. A branch of Mecklenburg County Public Library is located within the facility, Mecklenburg County Social Services Department has a full time staff member at this site, and Family Outreach has an office that offers family counseling.

The Alexander Street Center, which is located in the neighborhood, is an untapped resource. This facility is home to UJAAMA, an organization that assists with homeownership and other uses. This Center appears to be underutilized and may offer the opportunity for other services and activities to be located there to serve this community.



*Belmont Center*



*Alexander Street Center*

## Park and Recreational Facilities

The greenway along Little Sugar Creek, which is currently under construction in this neighborhood, and a basketball court at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Myers Street are the only public recreational facilities located within the neighborhood boundaries. Previously, two parks were removed from the community. Optimist Park, which was a ball field, was used to build Habitat houses and Peoples Park was removed due to criminal activity and has been incorporated into the greenway. Cordelia and Alexander Street Parks are both within close proximity of this community. New playground equipment was recently added to Cordelia Park and construction of new playground equipment in Alexander Street Park is currently underway.

The greenway along Little Sugar Creek is currently being developed in Optimist Park. It is proposed to pass under I-277, connect with First Ward Park, and eventually extend to Pineville. Even with access to these facilities, residents desire to have a park with playground equipment located within the boundaries of the neighborhood. They are concerned about the safety of children crossing Parkwood Avenue to access Cordelia Park and using the proposed underpass to Alexander Street Park. The neighborhood would like to have active recreational uses located near the residential portion of Optimist Park.

A bright spot in the midst of the heavy industrial development in this community is McGill Rose Garden. The property owners, Henry and Helen McGill, started the Rose Garden in the 1950's when the site was still home to Avant Fuel and Ice Company. Initially, Mrs. McGill planted two rose bushes to add some beauty to the area. The garden now has over 1,000 rose bushes and is open to the public. It is often used for weddings, receptions, classes, and other events.



*McGill Rose Garden*

## **STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In the initial stages of the planning process, a public meeting was held and input was received on the opportunities and issues that exist in this area. In summary, opportunities that were identified include:

- Potential for redevelopment of some of the industrial land uses
- Architectural features of some of the older houses
- Infill development on vacant property
- Relationship to the Center City, First Ward Place, and North Davidson - NODA District
- Location within the Northeast Transit Corridor
- Children
- Small business development
- Partnerships with churches, schools, and corporations

The manner in which the physical and social conditions affecting this community are addressed will greatly influence its future. The positive attributes must be strengthened. Therefore, this plan provides a framework for change that builds on existing opportunities.

## **ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

During the planning process, a number of issues were also identified. Staff provided information to resolve some of the issues during the process. However, there are other issues remaining. Some of these will require long term strategies, while others may be completed in a short time frame. The issues that were identified focused on:

- Safety
- Appearance of the industrial land uses
- Gentrification
- Transportation (the need for traffic calming devices)
- Litter
- Unemployment and job training
- Education
- Lack of recreational facilities
- Appearance of the community



The opportunities and issues have been organized into the categories below:

1. Community Safety
2. Land Use and Urban Design
3. Transportation and Infrastructure
4. Housing
5. Employment and Job Training
6. Community Facilities and Services
  - *Human Services and Educational Needs*
  - *Recreation and Open Space*
7. Community Organizing
8. Community Appearance

## **VISION AND CONCEPT PLAN**

The vision represents the community's desire for Optimist Park's future, if recommendations in this plan are implemented. During the planning process, the study group discussed at length what they think the vision for this neighborhood should be and then agreed that the vision that the Community of Shalom has for the community should be adopted and built upon.

### ***Vision***

**The vision for the Optimist Park Neighborhood is a drug free, safe, healthy, clean, and economically sound neighborhood of involved citizens who take pride in and care of their neighborhood with:**

- *Well maintained historic houses dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. New residential and commercial development that is quality built and compliments the architectural character of the historic structures.*
- *A mixture of housing types that blend with small businesses offering neighborhood goods and/or services and employment opportunities.*
- *An active neighborhood association, churches, schools, and recreational facilities that serve all community members.*
- *Beautiful street and greenway amenities that are safe, well designed, and provide linkage to all parts of the community.*

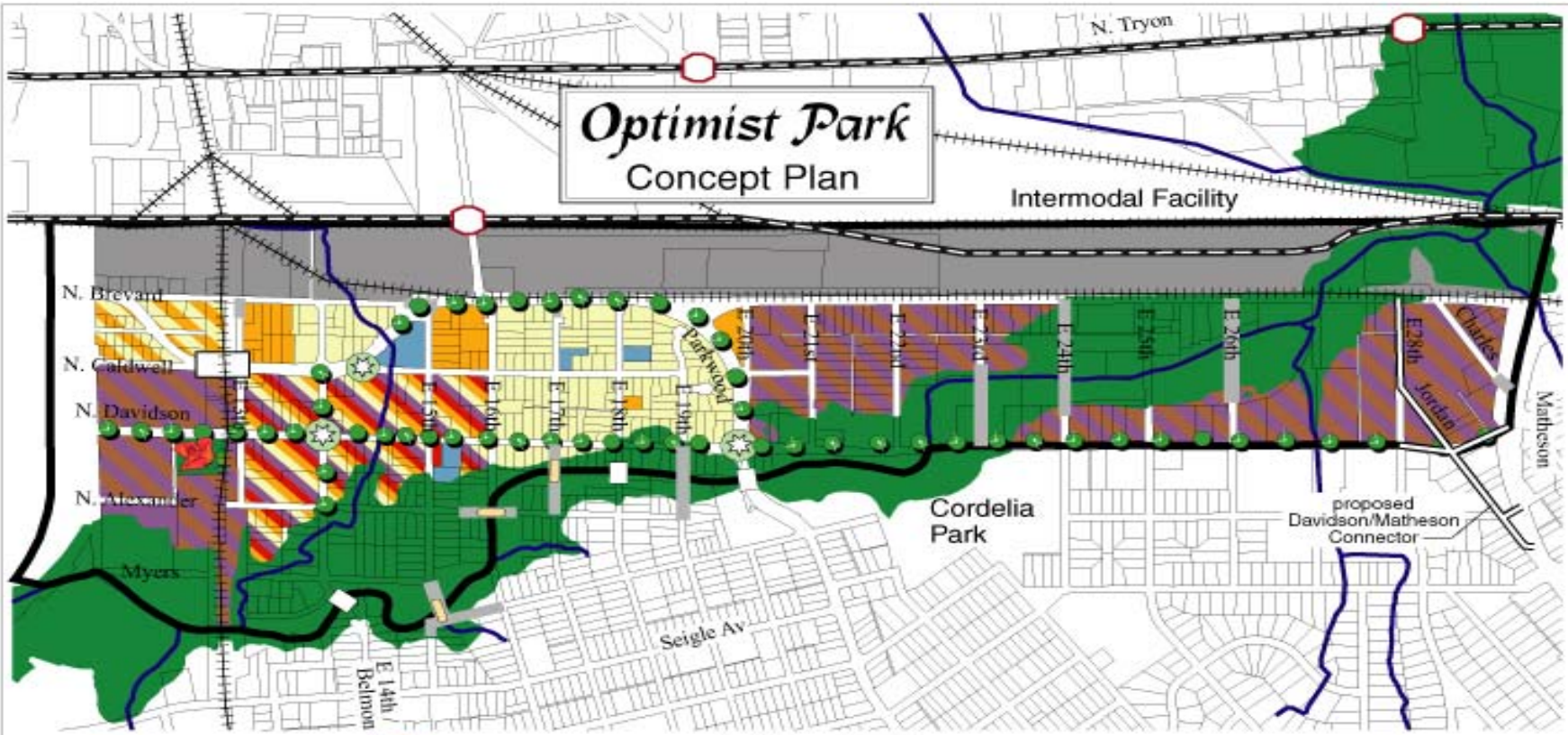
## Key Development Concepts

The development concept adds a visual description to the vision and includes design concepts (See **Map 7**, Concept Plan). It should be noted that the recommendations in this plan may be revisited as a part of the transit planning process.

### The Concept Plan for Optimist Park Envisions:

- *Infill housing on vacant lots similar in character to existing mill houses.*
- *Redevelopment of the scrapyards and other industrial sites with a mixture of residential, civic, office, and neighborhood services.*
- *Redevelopment of the area bounded by (12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, Caldwell, and Alexander streets) and industrial land uses along North Davidson Street, between Matheson and Parkwood avenues with a mixture of office, business park, and light industrial land uses.*
- *Streetscape improvements along Parkwood Avenue and Davidson Street. Gateways at the intersection of Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue, as well as, the intersection of Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue (to include a roundabout). The plan also envisions an improved gateway into the neighborhood off Caldwell Street.*
- *A condominium development on the northerly side of 15<sup>th</sup> Street between Caldwell and Brevard Streets, a mixture of housing types along Calvine Street, and multi-family development at areas designated on **Map 8**, Proposed Land Use Map.*
- *Development of the greenway system along Little Sugar Creek.*

# Optimist Park Concept Plan



- |                                  |  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Single-Family (up to 8 dwa)      | Mixed Use <i>Mixed Residential/ Office/Commercial</i> (Maximum 25,000 of Commercial) | Future Study Area                              |
| Multi-Family (up to 17 dwa)      | Office/Light Industrial/Business Park  | Possible Rapid Transit Alignment (under study) |
| Mixed Residential (up to 12 dwa) | Open Space   | Candidate Transit Station                      |
| Office                           | McGill Rose Garden   | Gateway Feature                                |
| Institutional                    |  | Streetscape Improvements                       |

Please note that the recommendations in the *Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan* may be revisited as a part of the planning process for NE Transit Corridor.



### Legend

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Study Area Boundary | ROW exists, no pavement |
| Little Sugar Creek  | Pedestrian Bridge       |
| Bridge              | Railroad                |

## Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan

February 2002

Map  
**7**

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### COMMUNITY SAFETY

Public safety was the issue that was echoed most often throughout the planning process. The need to live in a safe environment and feel secure is important to residents. Crime in this community is significantly higher than the City's average. Residents generally do not feel safe and indicate that the presence of drugs in the community, undesirable pedestrian traffic, and the need for more police visibility are major concerns. There is also concern about traffic from the Men's Shelter that is located on North Tryon Street. Residents indicate that people come to the community to buy drugs and often take things that they can sell. The high property crime rate of 23.7% or 114 incidents indicate that there is a problem with thefts.

Optimist Park has a Neighborhood Watch Program. This program is based on the concept of neighbors looking out for each other to prevent crime and can be a real crime deterrent. The program is only as effective as the neighborhood makes it and requires teamwork between residents and the police. It is important to have participation throughout the neighborhood in order to have a successful watch program.

The need for smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in homes in this community are additional safety issues that should be addressed. There have been some house fires in the neighborhood and many homes lack proper detection devices. Some residents may not recognize the importance or be able to afford these safety devices.

#### **Goal:**

Improve safety in the neighborhood for area residents and business owners.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue community policing program.
2. Increase police visibility.
3. Improve street lighting.
4. Promote and strengthen the Neighborhood Watch program.
5. Locate a satellite facility for police and/or fire in the neighborhood.
6. Maintain and strengthen the relationship between police, area businesses, and residents.
7. Consider Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Guidelines when developing/redeveloping property (*See Page 30*).
8. Educate residents on home safety.

## LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN

The *Concept Plan* seeks to achieve a mixture of land uses, different housing types, and additional greenspace in this neighborhood. The mixture of uses could include civic uses, retail, office, single family, and multi-family residential development.

The maximum retail square footage envisioned for the mixed use development at the intersection of Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue is 25,000 square feet combined total for all four corners. These uses are to provide neighborhood services to residents in the area, as well as office and residential development. The buildings in this area should be developed close to the street with a maximum vertical height of four stories. Additional design guidelines are on page 28.

Land use and zoning recommendations in this plan will update recommendations in the *Central District Plan*, adopted in 1993 (See **Map 7**, Proposed Land Use, **Map 9**, Proposed Changes to the Central District Plan, and **Table 9**). However, these recommendations may be revisited once a transit alignment and mode are selected for the Northeast Transit Corridor. Even if the transit alignment and station are located near Optimist Park, consideration must be given to the character of the original development and protecting the existing single family development.

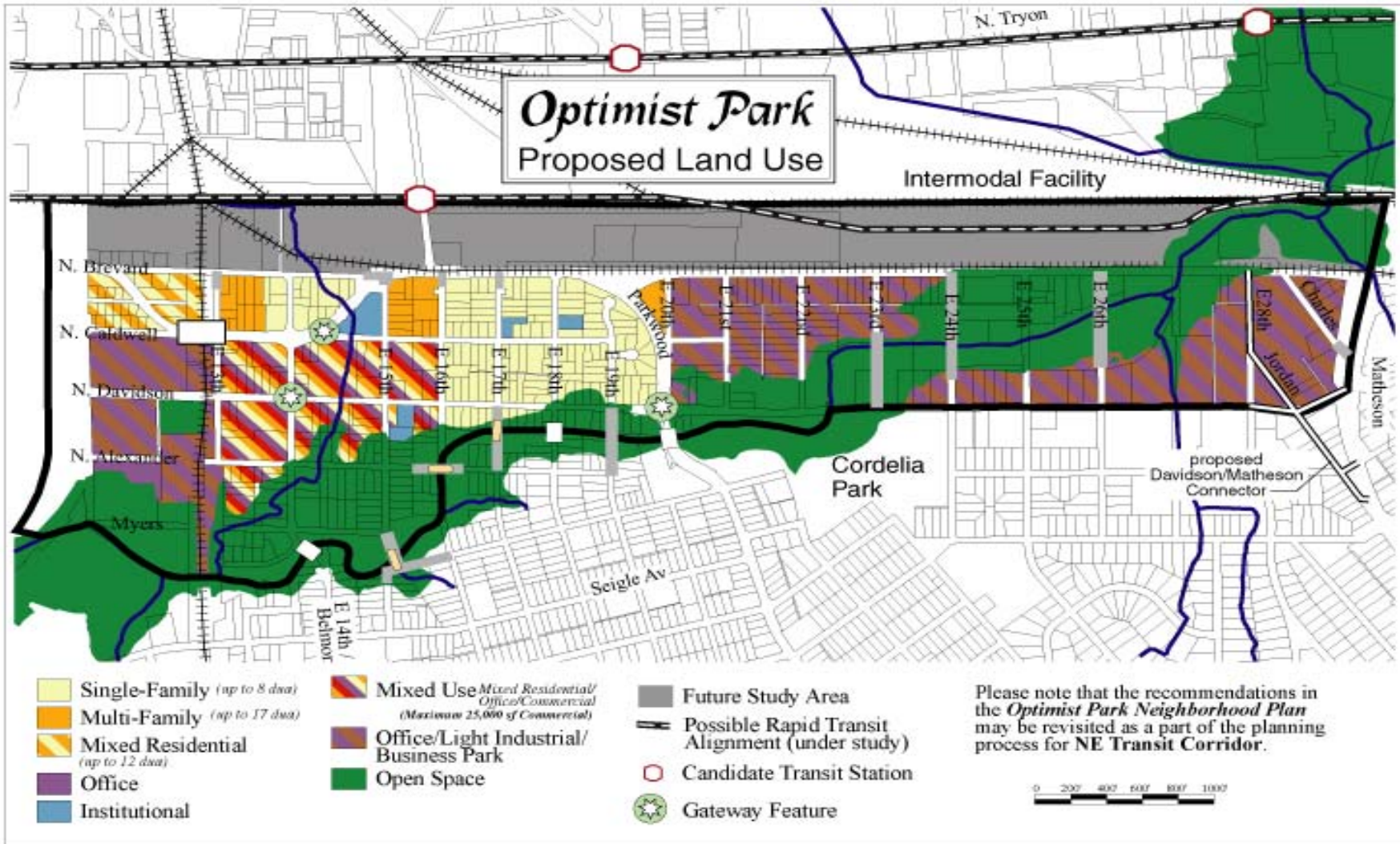
This plan does not include specific recommendations for the Intermodal Yard. This area should be looked at more closely detail if the Yard is relocated, and a detailed redevelopment study for the future use of this site is recommended.

The recommended land uses in this plan provide for desirable types of nonresidential development that would provide basic needs and services for residents in this community. Development/redevelopment should take place in mixed-use settings to create combined opportunities for living, working, shopping, and recreation.

Areas designated for **mixed residential development** are recommended for a mix of single family and multi-family land uses and may be developed with either use as long as the overall density does not exceed 12 dwelling units per acre.

**Mixed use development** refers to areas designated for a combination of land uses. Areas recommended for a mixture of residential, office, retail, and open space should be developed with at least two of the recommended land uses. If a residential component is developed, the density of any single family development should not exceed 8 dwelling units per acres and the density of any multi-family development should not exceed 17 dwelling units per acre.

Areas designated for a mixture of office, light industrial, and business park land uses may be developed with a single use or any combination of the recommended land uses.



**Legend**

- Study Area Boundary
- Little Sugar Creek
- Bridge
- ROW exists, no pavement
- Pedestrian Bridge
- Railroad

**Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan**

February 2002

Map 8

The following goals and recommendations provide further land use guidance:

**Goal #1:**

*Protect and enhance the existing single family residential core.*

**Recommendations:**

1. Encourage the redevelopment and rehabilitation of homes with historic character.
2. Preserve single family residential development in the core of the neighborhood between Parkwood Avenue, 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Davidson Street, and Brevard Street. The density should not exceed 8 dwelling units per acre.
3. Encourage infill development/redevelopment that is consistent with and sensitive to the existing historic character of the neighborhood.
4. Improve physical relationship between residential and nonresidential land uses.

**Goal #2:**

*Implement a land use and zoning pattern that provides housing choices, employment opportunities, protects the fabric of the residential area, and allows for a mixture of land uses.*

**Recommendations:**

1. Redevelop scrapyards and other industrial land uses with a mixture of residential, civic, office, and retail land uses integrated either horizontally or vertically.
  - a. The retail square footage in the mixed use proposed at Davidson and Belmont streets should be dispersed on all four corners, among other land uses, and not exceed 25,000 square feet total (See **Map 9**: #15 and #16).
  - b. Retail development should provide neighborhood oriented services.
  - c. Office and residential development may exist as a single use; however, when integrating nonresidential and residential development, nonresidential uses should be located on lower floors.
  - d. The more intense land uses should be located at intersections with residential development on the fringes, adjacent to existing or proposed residential development.

2. Redevelop industrial land uses between the railroad tracks, 12<sup>th</sup>, Alexander, and Caldwell Streets and also the area between Matheson and Parkwood Avenues, North Davidson, and Brevard streets with a mixture of office, business park, and light industrial land uses (See **Map 9**: #11, 12, and 13, and 14).
3. Develop parcels along Calvine Street with a mixture of residential development not to exceed 12 dwelling units per acre. Lower density development should be located adjacent to existing residential areas (See **Map 9**: #1).
4. Develop multi-family land uses (condominiums) in the area bounded by 16<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, Brevard and Caldwell Streets not to exceed 17 dwelling units per acre (See **Map 9**: #7).
5. Develop the greenway along Little Sugar Creek (See **Map 9**: #17, #18, and 21 - 26).
6. Apply design standards to ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with the vision for the area (See *Implementation Plan* for specific guidelines).

**Goal #3:**

Ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with residential areas.

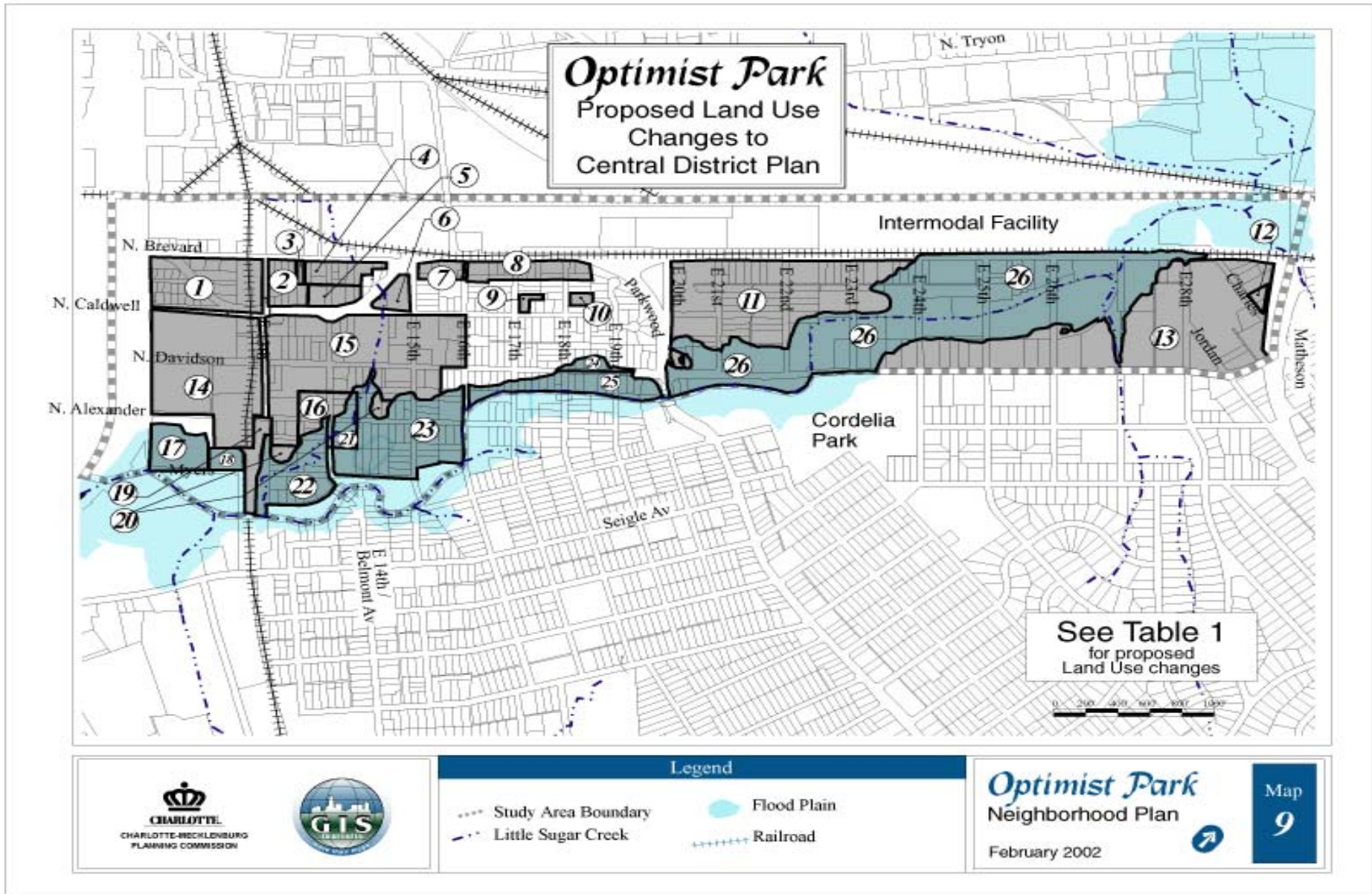
**Recommendation:**

1. Consider the following design guidelines when developing or redeveloping parcels in Optimist Park.

**Single Family Development**

1. Preserve old mill houses and older buildings with historic character.
2. New houses should blend with the scale and setbacks of existing development.
3. Orient structures toward streets or common open space.
4. Discourage parking pads and protruding garages. Garages should be flush or set back from the façade.
5. Provide vehicular connections between abutting and adjacent residential developments.
6. Provide direct pedestrian and bicycle connects to all abutting and or adjacent developments including retail centers and transit stops.
7. Provide more than one entry to a development.
8. Keep road widths and curb radii on neighborhood streets to a minimum.
9. Ensure that collector streets align with existing collector streets at thoroughfare intersections to promote safer crossings for pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.
10. Provide pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks, greenway, and transit stations.
11. Preserve existing trees.





**Table 9: Summary of Land Use Recommendations**

Area	Proposed Land Use	Adopted Land Use (Central Dist. Plan)	Existing Land Use	Existing Zoning
1	Mixed Residential (up to 12 dua*)	Industrial	Industrial	I-2
2	Multi-family (up to 17 dua)	Industrial	Industrial	I-2
3	Multi-family (up to 17 dua)	Business	Vacant/Single family/Multi-family/Office/Business	B-2
4	Mixed Residential (up to 8 dua)	Business	Vacant/Single Family/Industrial	B-2
5	Mixed Residential (up to 8 dua)	Industrial	Vacant/Industrial	I-2
6	Institutional	Multi-family	Vacant/Industrial	R-22MF
7	Multi-family (up to 17 dua)	Business	Vacant/Single Family	B-2
8	Mixed Residential (up to 8 dua)	Business	Vacant/Single family/Business	B-2
9	Institutional	Multi-family	Institutional	R-22MF
10	Institutional	Multi-family	Institutional	R-22MF
11	Office/Light Industrial/Business Park	Industrial	Vacant/Single family/Multi-Family/ Business/Office/Industrial	I-2
12	Office/Light Industrial/Business Park	Multi-family	Vacant/Single family	R-22MF
13	Office/Light Industrial/Business Park	Industrial	Vacant/Single family/Industrial	I-2
14	Office/Light Industrial/Business Park	Industrial	Open Space/Office/Industrial	I-2
15	Residential/Office/Business/Open Space	Industrial	Vacant/Single family/Business/Industrial	I-2
16	Residential/Office/Business	Business	Business/Industrial	B-2
17	Open Space	Office	Office	O-2
18	Open Space	Industrial	Industrial	I-2
19	Office/Light Industrial/Business Park	Multi-family	Vacant	R-22MF
20	Residential/Office/Business	Multi-family	Vacant/Multi-family	R-22MF
21	Open Space	Business	Business/Industrial	B-2
22	Open Space	Multi-family	Vacant	R-22MF
23	Open Space	Multi-family	Vacant/Single Family/Multi-family/Institutional	R-22MF
24	Open Space	Multi-family	Single family	R-22MF
25	Open Space	Single family	Single family/Multi-family/Business	R-22MF
26	Open Space	Industrial	Vacant/Industrial	I-2

\*dua – dwelling units per acre

### **Multi-Family Development**

1. Orient buildings toward streets or common open space and provide pedestrian access to street.
2. Provide vehicular connections between abutting and adjacent residential developments.
3. Provide direct pedestrian and bicycle connections to all abutting and or adjacent developments including retail centers and transit stops.
4. Provide more than one entry to a development.
5. Keep road widths and curb radii on neighborhood streets to a minimum.
6. Ensure that collector streets align with existing collector streets at thoroughfare intersections to promote safer crossings for pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.
7. Provide pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks, greenway, and transit stations.
8. Screen dumpsters and service areas.

### **Mixed-Use Development**

#### **Mixed-Use Development at Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue**

(See Design Concepts, Page 31)

1. Integrate land uses.
2. Office and residential land uses may be developed in either a vertical or horizontal pattern; but must be well integrated with other uses.
3. Retail development should be located on the ground level and front along the street in mixed use areas. Large retail buildings are discouraged.
4. Limit building heights to four stories.
5. Front and locate buildings close to the street.
6. Orient and design buildings to address the rounded corners of the intersection.
7. Provide a minimum 5 to 7-foot wide sidewalk on both sides of the street.
8. Connect new and existing sidewalk.
9. Provide planting strips between the sidewalk and street.
10. Install pedestrian scale lighting and trash receptacles.
11. Provide vehicular connections between abutting and adjacent developments.
12. Provide direct pedestrian and bicycle connections to all abutting and or adjacent developments including retail centers and transit stops.
13. Provide more than one entry to a development.
14. Keep road widths and curb radii on neighborhood streets to a minimum.
15. Ensure that collector streets align with existing collector streets at thoroughfare intersections to promote safer crossings for pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.
16. Provide pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks, greenway, and transit stations.
17. Screen service areas and locate to rear of building.

### **Design guidelines for the intersection of North Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue (See Design Concept 1)**

1. Enhance the heart of the community by providing a roundabout or traffic circle at the intersection with a fountain or other creative feature.
2. Install decorative, pedestrian-scale lighting within planting strips to help create a pedestrian-friendly environment.
3. Provide 5 to 8-foot wide sidewalks with brick inserts and 4 to 6-foot wide planting strips landscaped with small to medium maturing trees.
4. Crosswalks should be easily identifiable by vehicles and blend in with surrounding architecture features.

### **Design guidelines for the gateway at the intersection of North Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue (See Design Concept 2)**

1. New buildings should be located close to the street and address the rounded corners of the intersection.
2. Reduce visual clutter by installing mast arm traffic signals with decorative features and improved street signage integrated into the masts.
3. Install decorative street signs at the intersection and throughout the neighborhood.
4. Install decorative lighting at the intersection to strengthen the appearance of the gateway and provide additional lighting for pedestrians.
5. The lighting may be installed in the planting strips or on the sidewalk, if the width is 7-feet or greater.
6. Provide a 5 to 8-foot wide sidewalk along North Davidson Street and 6-foot wide planting strips landscaped with small to medium maturing trees.
7. Install a new crosswalk to provide a stronger visual appearance for vehicles approaching the intersection.

### **Design guidelines for gateway entrance at Caldwell Street and Parkwood Avenue (See Design Concept 3)**

1. Install decorative street signs at the intersection and throughout the neighborhood.
2. Install decorative lighting at the intersection to strengthen the appearance of the gateway and provide additional lighting for pedestrians.
3. The lighting may be installed in the planting strips or on the sidewalk, if the width is 7-feet or greater.
4. Provide a 5 to 8-foot wide sidewalk.
5. Develop a new landscape plan for the pedestrian island and replace existing vegetation with colorful flowers and shrubs to enhance the intersection.
6. Install new sidewalk 4 to 6-foot wide that includes 5-foot wide planting strips with small maturing trees. As an alternative solution, sidewalks that are a minimum 7-feet wide without planting strips may be provided.
7. Calm traffic entering the neighborhood.

### **Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)**

The concept of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is being recognized more frequently as an effective tool in reducing crime. Studies have shown that the design of the physical environment can result in a lower incidence of crime, a higher perception of safety, and an overall increase in quality of life. Many of the same quality of life features that make communities more attractive and neighborhood friendly can also prevent crime.

Crime often occurs because the opportunity to commit the crime exists and the chance of detection is low. The inability to commit crime without being seen by others will often discourage offenders. Designing the physical environment so that criminal activity does not go unnoticed can reduce criminal opportunity. A properly designed site makes the user feel safer and the offender feel at greater risk of exposure.

The following safety measures should be considered when designing or developing sites:

1. Use building orientation, location, and alignment to existing streets to convey the relationship of the development to its neighbors.
2. Orient building fronts toward major streets.
3. Avoid large setbacks to facilitate observation and movement of people and traffic.
4. Locate all public open spaces and recreational facilities to maximize natural surveillance from buildings, public roads, and walkways.
5. Centrally locate open spaces or recreational facilities where they are the focus of development and convenient to use.

# Design Concepts

## Design Concept 1



*North Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue*

## Design Concept 2



*North Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue*

**Design Concept 3**



*Parkwood Avenue and North Caldwell Street*

## **TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Optimist Park serves as a major transportation gateway to Center City Charlotte. Parkwood Avenue, Brevard, Caldwell, and Davidson Streets help facilitate the traffic flow between the Center City and the northeastern portion of the City and County. Optimist Park is developed on a grid street pattern, which provides good accessibility throughout the neighborhood. However, the traffic volume and the speeds at which cars travel along neighborhood streets are a problem.

Many of the transportation and infrastructure needs of this community were addressed through previous plans. Earlier this year, the width of the lanes on Parkwood Avenue was reduced and a median installed to calm traffic through this area. In addition, the Davidson-Matheson Connector is a planned roadway project in the area. This proposed roadway will ease some of the truck traffic on neighborhood streets and is to connect Matheson Avenue with Davidson and Brevard streets in the area of the Intermodal Yard.

Most of the streets in Optimist Park have sidewalks on both sides; however, there are a few streets that do not have sidewalks. Also, some of the sidewalks have utility poles in the middle of them and are not handicap accessible. Crosswalks and other devices to make the area pedestrian friendly are needed.

### ***Goal #1:***

Implement traffic calming measures to reduce speeding in the neighborhood.

#### ***Recommendations:***

1. Consider the feasibility of traffic calming techniques to slow traffic traveling through the neighborhood.
2. Post speed limit signs on neighborhood streets.
3. Limit truck traffic through the neighborhood.

### ***Goal #2:***

Improve pedestrian safety.

#### ***Recommendations:***

1. Install crosswalks at key intersections.
2. Install wider sidewalks in redevelopment areas.
3. Provide pedestrian linkages to transit stations, recreational facilities, the greenway, and other areas.



**Goal #3:**

*Ensure that current and future transit needs of this community are considered during the transit planning process.*

**Recommendation:**

1. Residents should attend transit meetings and become involved in the transit planning process.

**Goal #4:**

*Continue efforts to mitigate flooding and storm water problems in the area.*

**Recommendation:**

1. Continue efforts to acquire land and preserve open space within the floodplain.

**HOUSING**

Housing is the keystone of a healthy community. Quality, affordable housing is an important indicator of a community's vitality and ability to attract residents of all ages and income groups. The homeownership rate in Optimist Park is only around 25%, which is significantly lower than the City's average of 57.2% (See **Map 2**, Homeownership). There is a need to increase homeownership opportunities and maintain the historic character of homes in the community. As surrounding areas are improved and redeveloped, it is important to maintain the affordability of homes for current residents to be able to afford to remain in the neighborhood.

Areas around transit stations will provide development and redevelopment opportunities. However, it is important to maintain affordable housing opportunities in these areas.

**Goal #1:**

Enhance the appearance and quality of housing in the neighborhood.

**Recommendations:**

1. Rehabilitate, update, and preserve the existing housing stock, particularly those structures with historic architectural features.
2. Encourage infill development and redevelopment that follows basic design guidelines and is consistent with the existing residential character of the neighborhood (See Design Guidelines, page 25).

**Goal #2:**

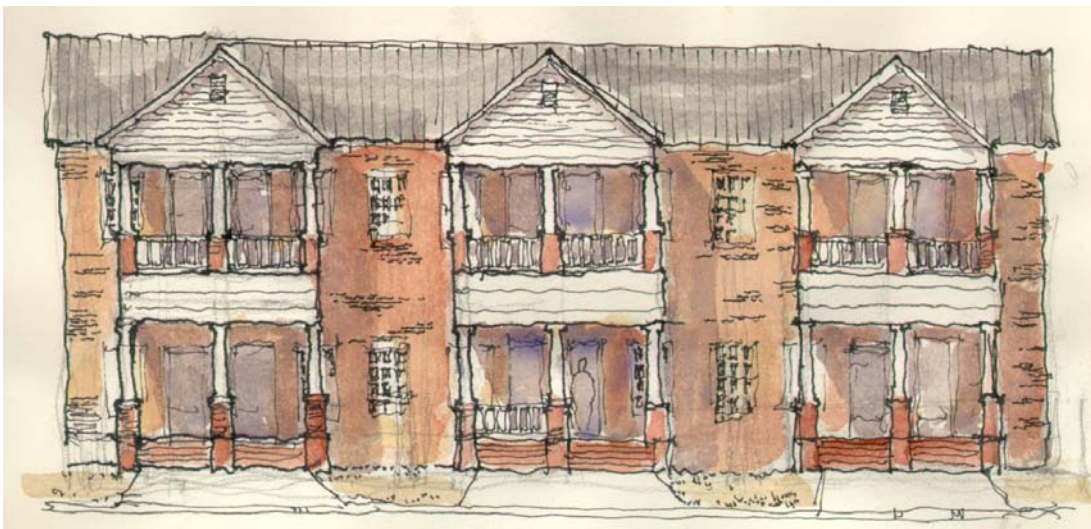
Increase homeownership opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

1. Educate residents on homeownership programs and opportunities.
2. Establish partnerships with builders to renovate and develop new housing in the neighborhood.
3. Encourage the development of housing for mixed income groups.
4. Develop ways to avoid gentrification and keep housing affordable for existing residents.



*Apartments on 16<sup>th</sup> Street*



*Encourage infill development consistent with the residential character of the neighborhood*

## **EMPLOYMENT AND JOB TRAINING**

Although the City's unemployment rate over the past several years has been low, high unemployment is a problem in Optimist Park. The *Quality of Life Index* shows that the community has a low percentage of high school graduates and high unemployment rate. However, its close proximity to the Center City - a major employment center, employment opportunities along North Davidson Street, access to transit, thoroughfares, and other employment areas provides a good job base for those in need of employment. In addition, the potential for rapid transit to be located in this community will provide even better access to other areas.

Optimist Park is also included in the Charlotte Enterprise Community program. This program is designed to market available job programs, conduct job fairs, engage in training partnerships, and make small businesses aware of job credits and other opportunities available for hiring Enterprise Community residents.

### **Goal #1:**

*Improve linkages between the neighborhood and employment opportunities.*

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide training that would increase the employability of residents and also inform residents of employment opportunities and services such as the JobLink Centers.
2. Encourage area businesses to publicize employment opportunities that are available.

### **Goal #1:**

*Better prepare residents for employment and/or higher educational opportunities.*

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Educate Optimist Park residents on employment services that are available.
2. Publicize information on employment centers that are served by transit.
3. Encourage students to participate in college preparation and programs that would prepare them for employment.
4. Educate residents on opportunities for higher education.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

Residents in Optimist Park desire additional social and educational programs and activities. The high rates of female heads of households, a family living below poverty, unemployment, as well as, the high youth population in the neighborhood indicates a need for these types of programs. It should be pointed out that some residents might be unaware of the resources and programs that are currently available to them.

### **A. Human Services and Educational Needs**

#### **Goal #1:**

*Develop ways to address social needs in the community.*

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Increase awareness of existing programs and services available to the community, specifically the youth and elderly.
2. Utilize available resources to address drug abuse, family problems, and other social concerns.

#### **Goal #2:**

*Develop ways to help children do better in school.*

#### **Recommendations**

1. Involve the entire community in the education process and solicit support and encouragement from religious institutions, businesses, residents, and others in the education process.
2. Provide incentives and recognition for children that excel and develop ways to encourage children that are not doing well academically.

#### **Goal #3:**

*Ensure that schools in and around the community are comparable physically and academically to the best schools in the County.*

#### **Recommendation:**

1. Upgrade existing schools in and around the community to ensure equity in educational facilities.

**Goal #4:**

*Better prepare residents for employment and/or higher educational opportunities.*

**Recommendations:**

1. Encourage students to participate in college preparation classes to better prepare themselves for higher education and/or programs that would better prepare them for employment.
2. Increase percentage of high school graduates and decrease percentage of dropouts.

**Goal #5:**

*Increase the number of children that pass competency exams and the number of high school graduates in Optimist Park and surrounding neighborhoods.*

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide programs to help children increase their test taking skills and prepare them for the competency exams.
2. Develop incentives to encourage students to remain in school until graduation.

**B. Recreation And Open Space**

There are a number of recreational facilities in and around the area. Those facilities include Cordelia Park, Little Sugar Creek Greenway (currently under construction) Johnston YMCA, and Alexander Street Park. However, residents desire a recreational facility specifically for their neighborhood to provide structured activities for the youth and seniors. The high youth population (38%) supports the need for recreational activities within the community.

**Goal #1:**

*Provide recreational opportunities for all residents.*

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop supervised recreational activities and/or transportation to nearby facilities for children within the neighborhood boundaries.
2. Develop a comprehensive outreach initiative that focuses on the recreational needs of neighborhood youth, teens, and seniors.
3. Encourage residents to utilize parks and recreational facilities that are available in the area.
4. Continue development of the greenway along Little Sugar Creek.
5. Preserve open space in redeveloped areas.

## **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

A strong community organization with representation and participation from a wide cross section of the community would make a significant difference in this neighborhood. It is important for residents and business owners to work together for the overall good of the community. This will be essential in implementing the recommendations in this plan. Currently this community partners with the Community of Shalom and HELP (Helping Empower Local People).

The Optimist Park Community of Shalom is a very active group. The United Methodist Church created Communities of Shalom to foster churches and communities working together to rebuild and renew community life. The group supports this community in many ways and has an office with a part time staff person located in Optimist Park.

### **Goal #1:**

Maintain and strengthen the Optimist Park Community Association.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue to provide leadership and development training for a cross-section of the community to increase the organizing and capacity building skills of neighborhood leaders.
2. Increase efforts to recruit members, especially renters, landlords, and business owners.
3. Encourage residents to report issues to City and County staff.
4. Continue to provide information and develop new ways to communicate neighborhood activities and events to residents.
5. Encourage youth participation in programs and activities.
6. Residents should participate in programs and utilize resources that may exist outside the neighborhood such as Community University and the Neighborhood Symposium.

### **Goal #2:**

Develop public/private partnerships to support neighborhood projects.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Encourage businesses and individuals to support community improvement efforts.
2. Collaborate with other groups and organizations to maximize resources.
3. Continue partnership with the Community of Shalom.
4. Encourage the formation of a business association.

**COMMUNITY APPEARANCE**

The overall appearance of Optimist Park is marginal. The borders of this community are somewhat distinct, but are not clearly marked. There is only one sign that identifies entry into the neighborhood. There are areas that could serve as gateways to clearly define entry into the neighborhood, if they are improved and clearly marked.

Several of the industrial businesses in the area are unattractive, particularly the scrap yards and industrial land uses. The scrap yards are located in the very heart of this community. These areas serve as a gateway into the residential area of Optimist Park and indirectly as a gateway to the Center City. In addition, illegal dumping and litter are problems in the area. Measures should be taken to make this community more attractive.

**Goal #1:**

Improve the overall appearance of the community.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Educate residents, business, and property owners on how to better maintain and beautify their property.
- 2. Educate business owners on programs available to assist them in approving the appearance of their businesses.
- 3. Organize neighborhood beautification projects and develop other ways to encourage residents, business, and property owners to better maintain and beautify their property. Identify and clean up vacant and overgrown lots.5. Develop methods to keep dead end streets from being used as dumping grounds.

**Goal #2:**

Better define gateways into the neighborhood and provide streetscape improvements along interior streets.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Create a gateway into the residential portion of the community with neighborhood entrance signs and other improvements at the following locations (See Concept Designs, Page 31):
  - a. Caldwell and 17<sup>th</sup> Street
  - b. Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue
  - c. Davidson Street and 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Belmont Avenue
- 2. Develop and implement a streetscape plan that enhances the environment and includes street trees, lighting, and signage for Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue.

## **CONCLUSION**

This plan is an attempt to provide guidance for the future development/redevelopment of the Optimist Park neighborhood. This neighborhood is located in an area that has several development and redevelopment opportunities. Its proximity to the Center City contributes to its attractiveness as a prime area for development. However, this community faces many challenges and efforts should be directed at making it a more desirable place to live, work, and play. Support from numerous resources will be extremely important for the successful revitalization of Optimist Park. Implementing the recommendations in this plan will require participation from the public and private sector. The neighborhood organization should take ownership of the recommendations and have a lead role in monitoring and implementing the plan.



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**Volume II: IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

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## INTRODUCTION

This document outlines actions necessary to implement the *Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan*. Implementing the *Plan* will require participation by many groups. Those groups include area residents and property owners, neighborhood organizations, religious institutions, City and County agencies, and others with an interest in this community. In some instances, implementation may be the sole responsibility of area residents and property owners, a collaborative effort by neighborhood organizations and the public or private sector, or the full responsibility of local government agencies. Charlotte City Council will not be asked to adopt this document; however, many of the strategies recommended in this plan will require future action by City Council and will be presented to them for approval individually.

# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

## 1. COMMUNITY SAFETY

### Goals:

- *Improve safety in the neighborhood for area residents and business owners.*
- *Strengthen and maintain the relationship between police, area businesses and residents.*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Continue the community-policing program and increase police visibility. **(Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police)**
- Promote and expand the Neighborhood Watch program and educate residents on appropriate ways to report crime. **(Optimist Park Community Association (OPCA), landlords, and tenants should work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police)**
- Identify areas where street lights need to be installed. **(OPCA, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police, and Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT))**
- Seek out agencies/organizations such as the American Red Cross that provide training classes and devices for home safety. **(OPCA)**
- Consider the Design Guidelines in the *Concept Plan* when developing/redeveloping property and the Planning Commission should apply them through the rezoning and subdivision review process. **(Planning Commission and Developers)**
- Encourage citizen involvement, especially youth, in safety programs and interaction with police on an informal basis. **(OPCA)**
- Enhance communication with police and continue to invite officers to meetings and other neighborhood activities. **(OPCA)**

## 2. LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN

### Goals:

- *Protect and enhance the existing single family residential core.*
- *Implement a land uses and zoning pattern that allows for a mixture of land uses that include a variety of housing choices, employment opportunities, and neighborhood services.*
- *Apply design standards to ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with the vision for the area. (See **Map 8**, Proposed Land Use and **Map 9**, Proposed Land Use Changes to the Central District Plan).*
- *Ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with residential areas.*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Rezone the area that is currently developed with single family homes from R-22MF to R-8 (See **Map I-1**, Proposed Zoning Change). **(Planning Commission)**
- Work with Habitat, other agencies and private sector to encourage the redevelopment and rehabilitation of homes. **(Neighborhood Development and OPCA)**
- Support efforts to preserve existing single family housing units. **(Neighborhood Development)**
- Redevelop scrap yards and other industrial land uses near the intersection of Davidson Street and Belmont Avenue with a mixture of residential, office, and retail land uses. **(City and Developers)**
- Work with property owners to encourage redevelopment of industrial development along North Davidson Street between Parkwood and Matheson avenues with a mixture of office, business park, and light industrial land uses. **(OPCA and the City)**
- Consider relocating government services to area designated for a mixture of land uses to serve as a catalyst for future development/redevelopment in this area. **(City/County Joint Use Task Force)**

NORTH

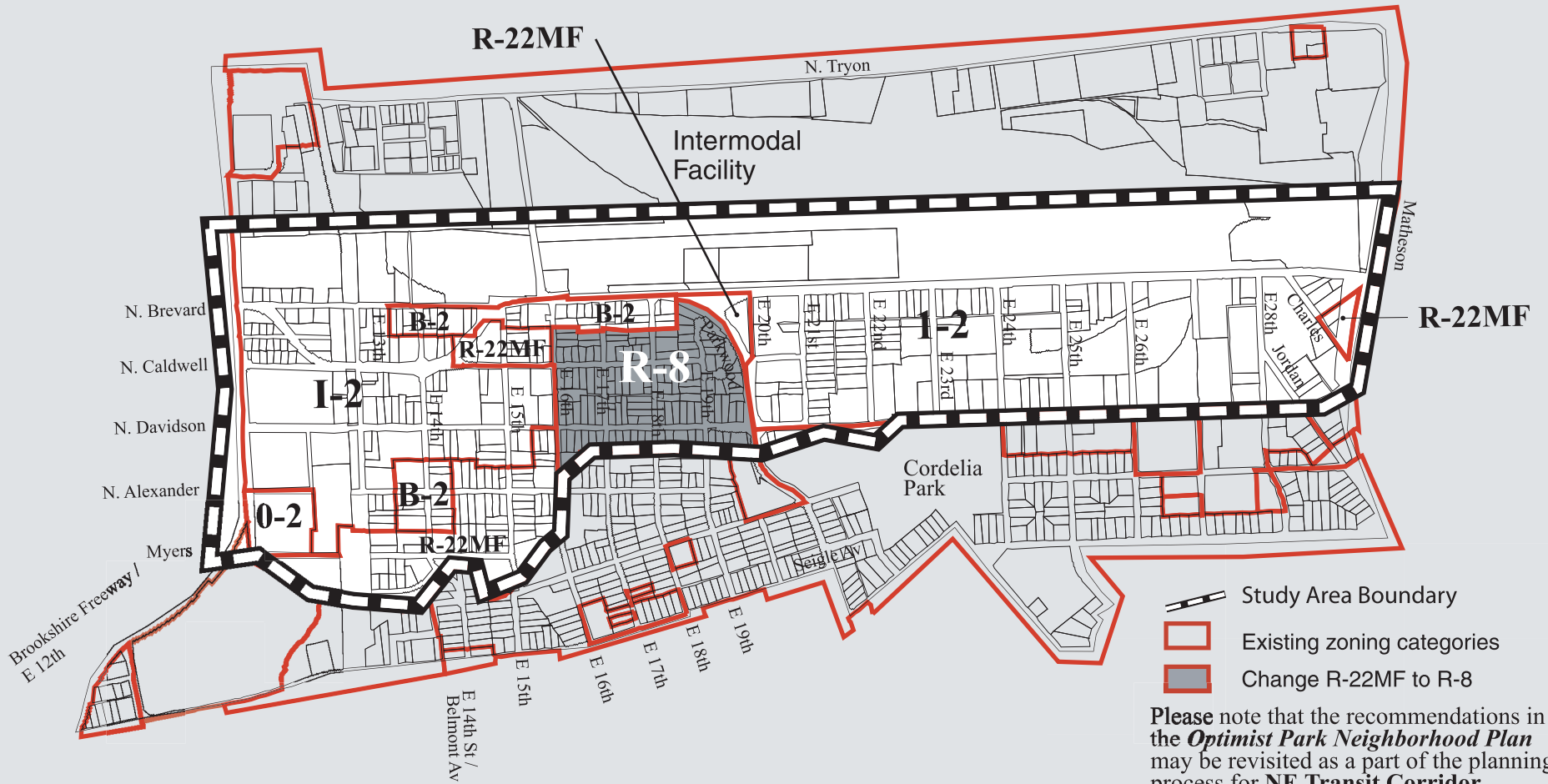


Drawing Not to Scale

# Optimist Park

Adopted  
Recommended Zoning Change

I-4



- Study Area Boundary
- Existing zoning categories
- Change R-22MF to R-8

Please note that the recommendations in the *Optimist Park Neighborhood Plan* may be revisited as a part of the planning process for NE Transit Corridor.

### Proposed Zoning Districts

R-8	Allows up to 8 dwelling units pr acre
R-22MF	Allows up to 22 dwelling units per acre
O-2	General business
B-2	Office
I-2	Heavy industrial

**Optimist Park**  
 Neighborhood Plan  
 Adopted by Charlotte City Council  
 March 25, 2002  
 February 2002

Map  
**I-1**



- Use the rezoning and subdivision process to apply design standards to new development to ensure that development is compatible with the vision for this area. **(Planning Commission)**

### 3. TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

#### Goals:

- *Implement traffic calming measures to reduce speeding in the neighborhood.*
- *Ensure that current and future transit needs of this community are considered during the transit planning process.*
- *Improve pedestrian safety.*
- *Continue efforts to reduce flooding and storm water drainage problems*

#### Implementation Strategies:

- Post and enforce speed limit signs. **(Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT))**
- Install crosswalks at key intersections. **(CDOT)**
- Residents should attend transit meetings and become involved in the transit planning process. **(OPCA and Charlotte Area Transit (CATS))**
- Reach out to community to explain the transit planning process, its potential impact on the community, and develop way to keep residents involved. **(OPCA and CATS)**
- Install wider sidewalks in redeveloped areas. **(CDOT and Developers).**
- Provide pedestrian linkages to transit stations, the greenway, and other destination points. **(CDOT and CATS)**
- Continue with the acquisition of parcels in the floodplain (See **Map I-2**). **(Mecklenburg County Storm Water Services and Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation)**

## 4. HOUSING

### Goals:

- *Enhance the appearance and quality of housing in the neighborhood.*
- *Increase homeownership opportunities*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Educate owners on programs available to assist with rehabilitation and homeownership. **(Neighborhood Development Housing Services and UJAMMA)**
- Utilize the Purchase-Rehabilitation Program to work with others to rehabilitate, update, and preserve existing housing stock, particularly those structures with historic architectural features. **(Neighborhood Development)**
- Encourage infill development and redevelopment that follows basic design guidelines and is consistent with the existing residential character of the neighborhood (See Design Guidelines in the *Concept Plan*). **(OPCA, Neighborhood Development, and Planning)**
- Develop ways to attract other builders, in addition to Habitat for Humanity, to develop houses in the neighborhood. **(OPCA)**
- Continue efforts to have tax abatement in place to keep property taxes affordable for existing residents. **(OPCA)**

## 5. EMPLOYMENT AND JOB TRAINING

### Goals:

- *Improve linkages between the neighborhood and employment opportunities.*
- *Educate residents on social programs in the area that are currently available*
- *Better prepare residents for employment and/or higher educational opportunities.*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Provide training that would increase the employability of residents and also inform residents of employment opportunities and services such as the JobLink Centers. **(OPCA, Neighborhood Development, Urban League, and other organizations)**
- Educate Optimist Park residents on the programs available through the Charlotte Enterprise Community.
- Encourage area businesses to publicize employment opportunities that are available. **(OPCA)**
- Survey employers in the Center City, along North Davidson, and in other nearby areas to determine if residents meet their employment needs. **(OPCA and Neighborhood Development)**
- Publicize information on employment centers that are served by transit. **(Neighborhood Development and CATS)**
- Inform area residents of the services available at the Belmont Center, Alexander Street Center, Johnston YMCA, and of other nearby resources. **(Neighborhood Development and the Department of Social Services)**
- Encourage students to participate in college preparation classes to better prepare themselves for higher education and/or programs that would better prepare them for employment. **(OPCA)**
- Educate residents on opportunities for higher education and on available grants and scholarships. **(Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Central Piedmont Community College)**
- Implement mentoring and apprenticeship programs in the community to train skilled workers. **(OPCA)**



## 6. COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### A. Human Services and Education

**Goal:**

- *Develop ways to address social and economic needs in the community.*

**Implementation Strategy:**

- Increase awareness of existing social service programs and services available to the community, specifically those targeted at the youth and elderly. (**OPCA, Department of Social Services, and Neighborhood Development**)

### B. Recreation And Open Space

**Goal:**

- *Provide recreational opportunities for all residents.*

**Implementation Strategies:**

- Develop a comprehensive outreach initiative that focuses on the recreational needs of neighborhood youth, teens, and seniors. (**OPCA and Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation**)
- Continue development of the greenway along Little Sugar Creek. (**Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department**)
- Encourage the preservation of open space when redeveloping areas. (**OPCA, Planning staff, and developers**)

## 7. COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

### Goals:

- *Maintain and strengthen the neighborhood association.*
- *Develop public/private partnerships to support neighborhood projects.*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Continue to provide leadership and development training for a cross-section of the community to increase the organizing and capacity building skills of neighborhood leaders. **(OPCA and Neighborhood Development)**
- Increase efforts to recruit members, especially renters and landlords. **(OPCA)**
- Continue to provide information and develop new ways to communicate neighborhood activities and events to residents. **(OPCA)**
- Encourage and solicit businesses and individuals to support community improvement efforts. **(OPCA)**
- Collaborate with other groups and organizations to maximize resources. **(OPCA)**
- Continue partnership with the Community of Shalom. **(OPCA)**

## 8. COMMUNITY APPEARANCE

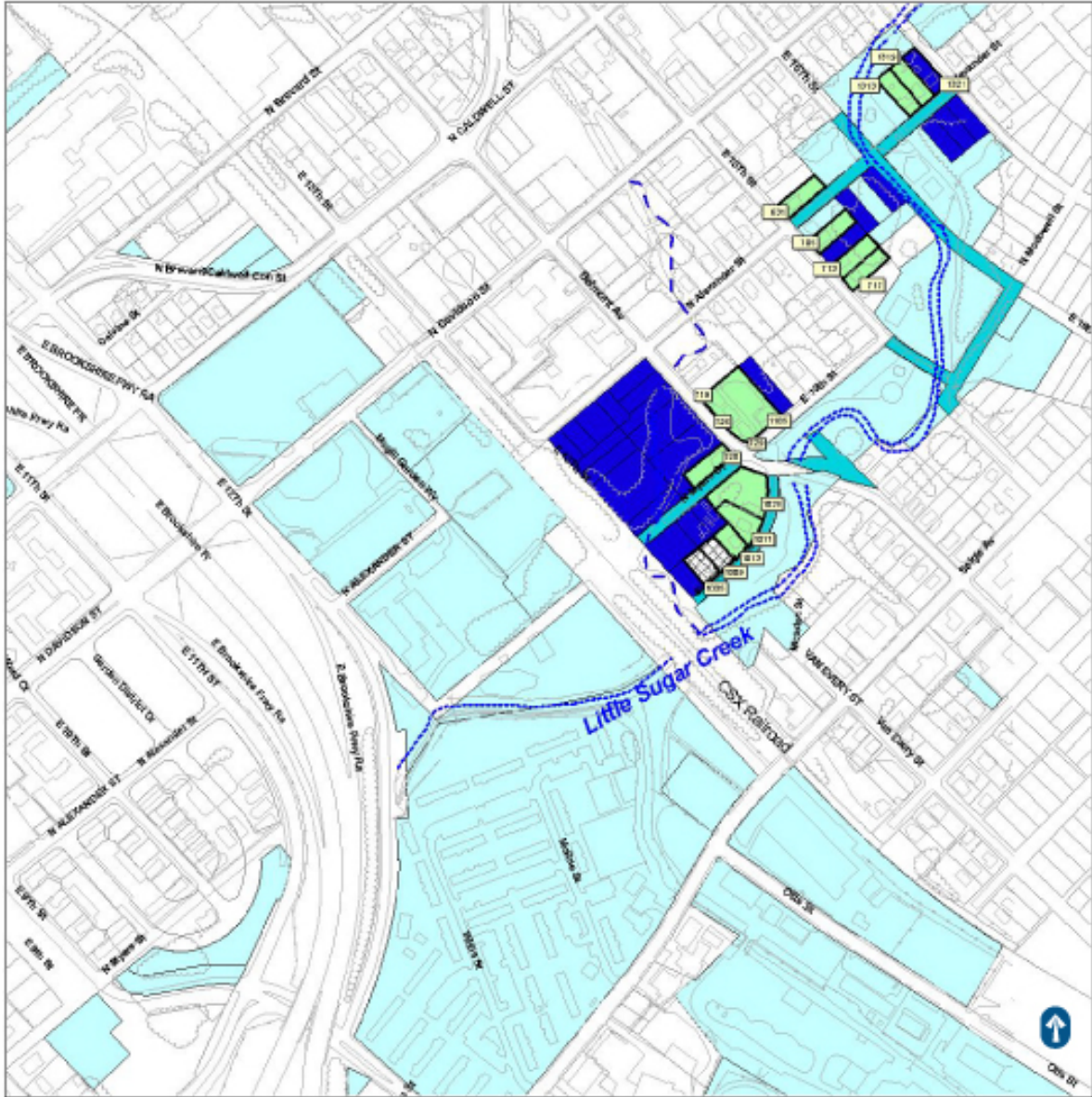
### Goal:

- *Improve the overall appearance of the community.*
- *Better define gateways into the community and provide streetscape improvements along major streets.*

### Implementation Strategies:

- Better define gateways into the neighborhood and provide streetscape improvements along interior streets. **(Engineering and Property Management)**
- Develop and implement a streetscape plan that enhances the environment and includes street trees, lighting, and signage for Davidson Street and Parkwood Avenue. **(Engineering and Property Management and Planning)**
- Encourage OPCA to pursue matching grant funds for neighborhood beautification projects. **(Neighborhood Development)**
- Encourage business owners to use City's façade grant and infrastructure improvement program to improve appearance of businesses. **(Neighborhood Development and OPCA)**
- Solid Waste Services should educate residents and business owners on the rules for rollout garbage, bulky item pickup, recycling, and how to report illegal dumping. **(Neighborhood Development and OPCA)**

# Parcel Acquisition for Little Sugar Creek Floodplain Area



### Parcel Acquisition Status

- - - - Little Sugar Creek
- Unwilling to sell
- Parcels acquired and homes removed
- Parcel acquisition under negotiation
- Street ROW to be abandoned
- City & County owned parcels



Map  
**I-2**



**CHARLOTTE**

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