



## Part Three: Appendix



# Existing Conditions

A thorough review and understanding of existing conditions, physical, economic and social, was critical to identifying the opportunities and constraints facing the Independence Boulevard plan area, and to developing the plan vision, goals and policies. The following discussion highlights those existing conditions, trends and forecasts most relevant for the plan area.

The Independence Boulevard plan area covers a large amount of land, and includes a wide diversity of communities, businesses, and physical conditions. The portion of the area closest to Uptown (roughly from Briar Creek to Albemarle) is the oldest part of the corridor. This area is currently experiencing the most deterioration in commercial properties on Independence, but the neighborhoods are relatively healthy (Echo Hills is the only one of the City's Neighborhood Statistical Areas in this area classified as "transitioning", while the other four are all considered "stable.") Independence Boulevard has been converted to a hybrid freeway-arterial in this area.

The section from Albemarle Road to Wallace Road has healthier commercial properties. However, anecdotal evidence collected by market analysts Robert Charles Lessor and Company (RCLCO) indicates that retail and office tenants are reluctant to extend their leases in this area, as this stretch of Independence Boulevard will be converted to a hybrid freeway-arterial condition over the next several years. Three of the four neighborhoods in this section are classified as "transitioning."

The final section, from Wallace Road to the City boundary, has been developed the most recently. The shopping centers are all considered healthy by RCLCo., with low vacancy rates, and the residential neighborhoods are stable. Several large, undeveloped parcels remain in this section.

## Trends

Several trends are currently influencing the economy, market conditions, and physical appearance of the plan area.

### *Trend 1: Commercial Decline*

One of the most visible and alarming trends is the decline of the commercial properties on the section of Independence Boulevard closest to Uptown. These properties are characterized by high vacancy rates and dilapidated buildings and parking fields. This decline has been caused by a number of factors, including:

- **Obsolete Facilities:** The worst performing shopping centers on Independence were all built prior to 1965. Physically, the structures and parking lots are in a state of serious disrepair. For the most part, they do not include the facilities or amenities required by most modern retailers. Additionally, high-quality retail tenants are also turning away from "strip" commercial developments, such as those found on Independence. These businesses—and the people who shop at them—are increasingly attracted to more "nodal" developments, characterized by their orientation



Vacant shopping centers in the plan area.



New street-oriented retail on US 74 (Wilkinson Boulevard).



Barrier creates retail visibility problem in the plan area.



High speeds and turn lanes exemplify the road's "hybrid" nature.

to pedestrians, higher-quality architecture, and concentrated development pattern.

- Access and visibility: Retailers need two fundamental things to survive—good access and high visibility. Along the section of Independence Boulevard that has been converted to a hybrid freeway-arterial, they have neither. Access is limited to right-in/right-out movements; for a driver on the opposite side of the road from a business he wants to visit, he must make a series of maneuvers through several interchanges to arrive at the shop. Visibility is also a problem. The high speeds make it difficult for drivers to notice signage or shop-fronts. The concrete barrier in the middle of Independence greatly restricts visibility of the businesses on the opposite side of the roadway.
- Regulatory constraints to redevelopment: Regulatory factors are also contributing to the lack of reinvestment in the commercial properties on Independence Boulevard. The transitional setback, which, at the beginning of this planning process, extended 175 feet from the centerline of Independence, makes it difficult to redevelop smaller parcels. The setback was reduced by City Council action in early 2009 to 125 feet for the corridor west of WT Harris Boulevard and 140 feet east of Harris. (The Phase I Study examined some of these regulatory constraints in greater detail.)

The combination of these three factors, along with changing demographics and markets, has contributed to the blighted and vacant commercial properties along the section of Independence from Briar Creek to Albemarle. With the planned conversion of the road to a similar hybrid freeway-arterial condition from Albemarle to Conference another stretch of commercial properties may face similar challenges.

### *Trend 2: Shifts in Residential Preferences*

Just as the retail industry is rapidly changing in response to a number of demographic and social forces, so is the residential market. Generation Y, loosely

people born between the late 1970s and mid 1980s, are beginning to purchase their first homes, and are exhibiting very different preferences than previous generations. This demographic cohort is choosing smaller, attached units set in mixed-use, walkable environments.

The Baby Boomers are also trending towards smaller units in walkable environments. As this enormous group enters their retirement years, they are showing a preference for living in dynamic places that offer a variety of things to do—and easy ways to get to these activities. Instead of isolated condos in retirement communities, many of them are choosing higher density buildings in urban cores or townhomes in suburban town centers.

While the demand for multi-family properties is expected to continue increasing, the multi-family choices in the plan area could be considered obsolete because they do not offer the amenities, floorplans, or site design that is preferred by these new demographic groups. They are not walkable and have no mixture of land uses. They do not include the latest recreational amenities, and in some cases may not be “wired” for the latest technologies.

The market analysis conducted by Robert Charles Lessor, Co (RCLCO) shows that there is a demand for additional apartments and condominiums in the plan area (see study under separate cover). The infrastructure and land use patterns of the area, as well as its proximity to Uptown, also point to multi-family residential being an important part of the corridor’s revitalization.

### ***Trend 3: Changing Transportation Behavior***

With wildly fluctuating transportation costs, more Americans are embracing alternative methods for moving around their communities, including transit, biking, and walking. The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) saw a 17.4% ridership increase in fiscal year 2008, with over 23 million trips. The new LYNX Blue Line served 2.8 million riders in its first seven months of operation, averaging 14,147 riders per day—a figure 55% higher than the projected 9,100 daily riders.



Signs of disinvestment in the plan area.



Access management limiting accessibility to businesses.



Aging multi-family units in the plan area.

## **Infrastructure Inventory**

### ***Water and Sewer***

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities provides potable water and sanitary sewer service to the plan area. There is currently one existing water tank and one existing booster pump station in the area, and no plans for additional facilities are programmed in the FY2009-2013 CIP or the 10-Year Needs plan.

There are no lift stations or waste water treatment plants in the plan area. Two major capital improvements are programmed for the area, however. Phase II of the Briar Creek Sewer System Improvement Project, which is currently in the design stage, “will enhance system performance, provide increased sewer capacity for present and future needs, and protect the water quality in Briar Creek.” Phase IV of the McAlpine Relief Sewer Improvement Project also runs through the plan area, and will provide increased capacity while protecting the water quality of McAlpine Creek. Phase I of that project is currently underway.

### ***Stormwater***

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services currently has several stormwater projects underway or planned in the area, including projects associated with Briar Creek, Edwards Branch, and McAlpine Creek.

Redevelopment of many parcels in the Plan Area would benefit from a regional approach to managing stormwater under the City’s new Post-Construction Controls Ordinance. See Map 25 and the associated text for more details on potential locations for regional stormwater facilities.

### ***Parks and Recreation***

The plan area falls within the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department’s East Park District. Park facilities in the area include the Briar Creek Greenway, Edwards Branch Greenway, Cederwood Park, Campbell Creek Greenway, Mason Wallace District Park, McAlpine Creek District Park, and the McAlpine Creek Greenway.

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department does not currently have any new parks or nature preserves programmed for the plan area.

### ***Police and Fire***

The majority of the plan area falls within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department’s Independence Division, which covers the area from roughly Albemarle Road to the City boundary. The Independence Division has three distinct response areas, all of which cover some portions of the plan area. The other two

divisions which serve the plan area are the Providence Division, Response Area 2 (south of Independence Boulevard, between Albemarle Road and the western border of the plan area) and the Eastway Division, Response Areas 2 and 3 (north of Independence Boulevard, between Albemarle Road and the western border of the plan area).

Fire Station #29 (located at 2121 Margaret Wallace Rd) and Fire Station #3 (located at 6512 Monroe Road) serve the Independence Boulevard plan area.

There are currently no plans for new police or fire stations in the area.

### ***Schools***

Several public schools are located in the plan area, including Chantilly, Oakhurst, Idlewild, and Greenway Park Elementary Schools and East Mecklenburg High School. A number of private schools can also be found in the area, including Resurrection Christian, Garr Christian Academy, Bible Baptist Christian, and Alexander Children’s Center. The region has one charter school, Socrates Academy.

Although no new schools are currently programmed for the area, East Mecklenburg High School is over-capacity and a reliever facility may need to be built in the future. This facility is currently included in the School Board’s 10-Year Plan, and is identified as potentially being built near Albemarle Elementary School, which is to the north of the Plan Area.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is currently completing a significant renovation and expansion of Idlewild Elementary, and renovations are also scheduled for East Mecklenburg High School. McClintock Middle, located just south of the plan area boundary on Monroe Road, is scheduled to be completely rebuilt at its current location.

## Demographics

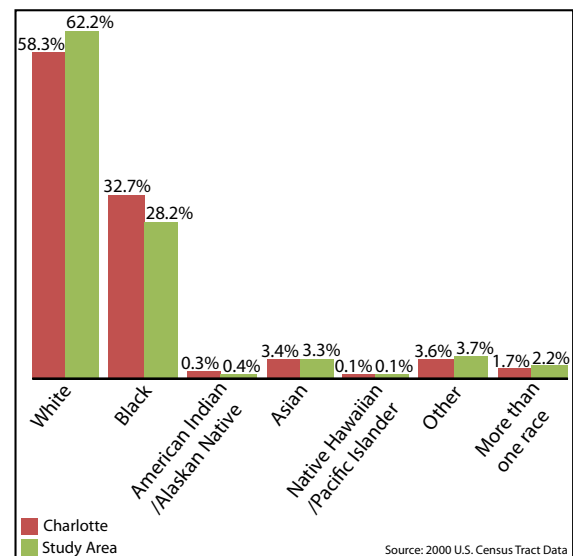
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 77,072 people living within the Independence Boulevard study area. This represents only 14.2% of Charlotte's 540,828 population. The majority of residents in the study area are white- 62.2%, about 28.2% are black with the remaining 10% being American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander and others. The racial composition of the study area very closely resembles that of Charlotte.

A substantial part of the adult population has attained higher education- 41.8% of the population over age 25. Of the total population, 23.5% has attended some college and 21% are high school graduates only. The figures for the study area very closely reflect those of its city. In Charlotte, 42.9% of the adult population has attained higher education, 22.1% have attended some college and 20% are high school graduates.

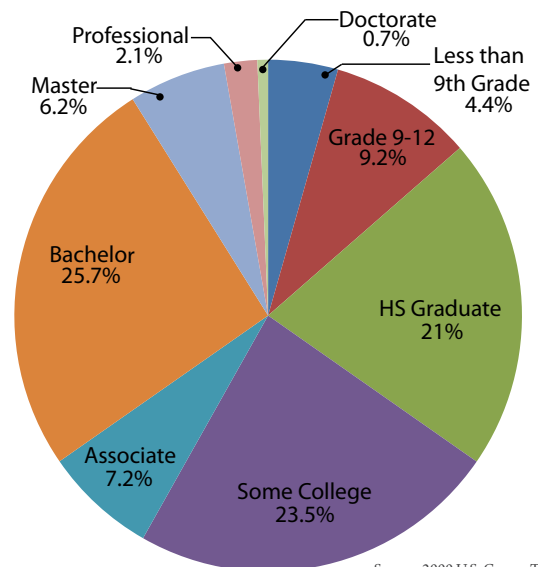
The majority of the population of the study area is employed in the Management/Professional industry. Of the total, 31% are employed in Sales/Office, 13% in the Service industry, 11% in Production/Transportation and 9% in Construction and Maintenance. The city-wide figures are almost the same. The majority of the Charlotte population is employed in the Management/Professional industry, with 29.2% in Sales/Office, 13% in Service, 12% in Production/Transportation and 8% in Construction and Maintenance.

Most people living within the study area or 91.7% commute to their places of work using a private automobile, only 3.4% commute by public transportation, 1.3% walk and 0.1% ride bicycles. The city-wide commute pattern is very similar. 91.2% of the Charlotte population commute to work using a private automobile, only 3.2% use public transportation, 1.5% walk and 0.1% ride bicycles.

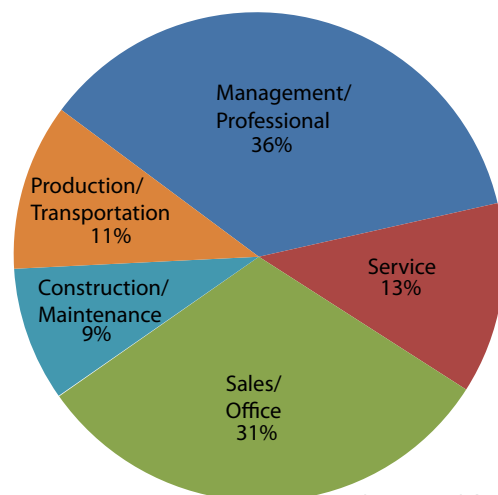
Note: This data is nine years old and changes have taken place that will likely be reflected in the upcoming 2010 census.



Population Characteristics for Independence Boulevard Study Area



Educational Level for Independence Boulevard Study Area



Employment Industry for Independence Boulevard Study Area

## Neighborhoods

There are about 40 neighborhoods or Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSA), within the Independence Boulevard study area. Eight of these neighborhoods have been included in the 2008 Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study. These NSAs are Oakhurst, Echo Hills, Chantilly, Sardis Woods, Sardis Forest, Eastway/Sheffield Park, East Forest, and Stonehaven. The Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study analyzes the social, physical, crime and economic characteristics of Charlotte neighborhoods. These characteristics are numerically aggregated and then used to further classify these neighborhoods into “stable”, “transitioning” and “challenged”.

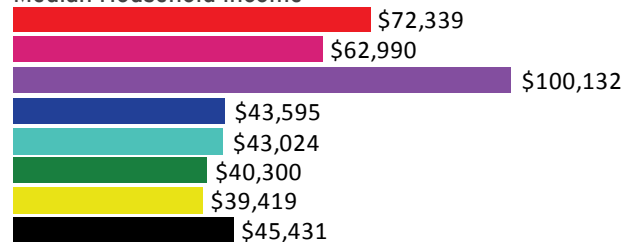
Stable NSAs are those that exhibit minimal problems on the neighborhood level. The quality of life in these neighborhoods is higher than the city-wide average. Transitioning NSAs are those that exhibit neighborhood problems on a moderate scale. The quality of life in these neighborhoods is average compared with that of the city. Such neighborhoods are in transition and may be improving or declining. Challenged NSAs are those which score low to moderate on the quality of life indicators. The quality of life of such neighborhoods is lower than that of the city-wide average. Out of the 8 neighborhoods studied, all are considered stable, with the exception of East Forest, Eastway/Sheffield Park and Echo Hills which are considered to be in transition.

Of these eight NSAs, Stonehaven, Sardis Woods and Sardis Forest consistently score high on indicators such as median “household income”, “average house value” and “percent homeowner”. Some other neighborhoods score as low as 23% for some quality of life indicators such as “percent home ownership”.

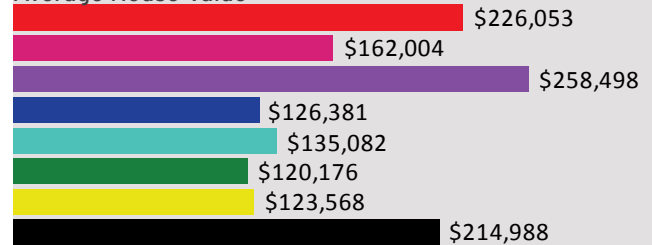
Neighborhood Statistical Area Status

| NSA                    | Status        |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Stone-Haven            | Stable        |
| Sardis Woods           | Stable        |
| Sardis Forest          | Stable        |
| Oakhurst               | Stable        |
| Echo Hills             | Transitioning |
| Eastway/Sheffield Park | Transitioning |
| East Forest            | Transitioning |
| Chantilly              | Stable        |

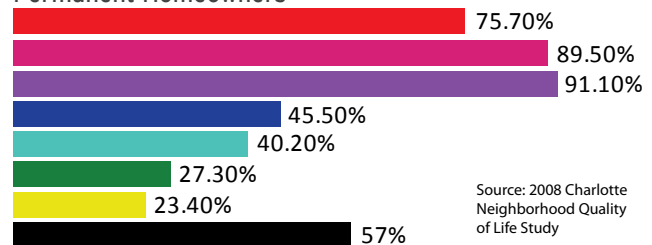
Median Household Income



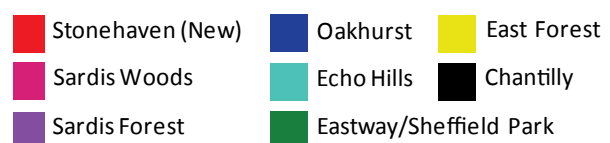
Average House Value



Permanent Homeowners

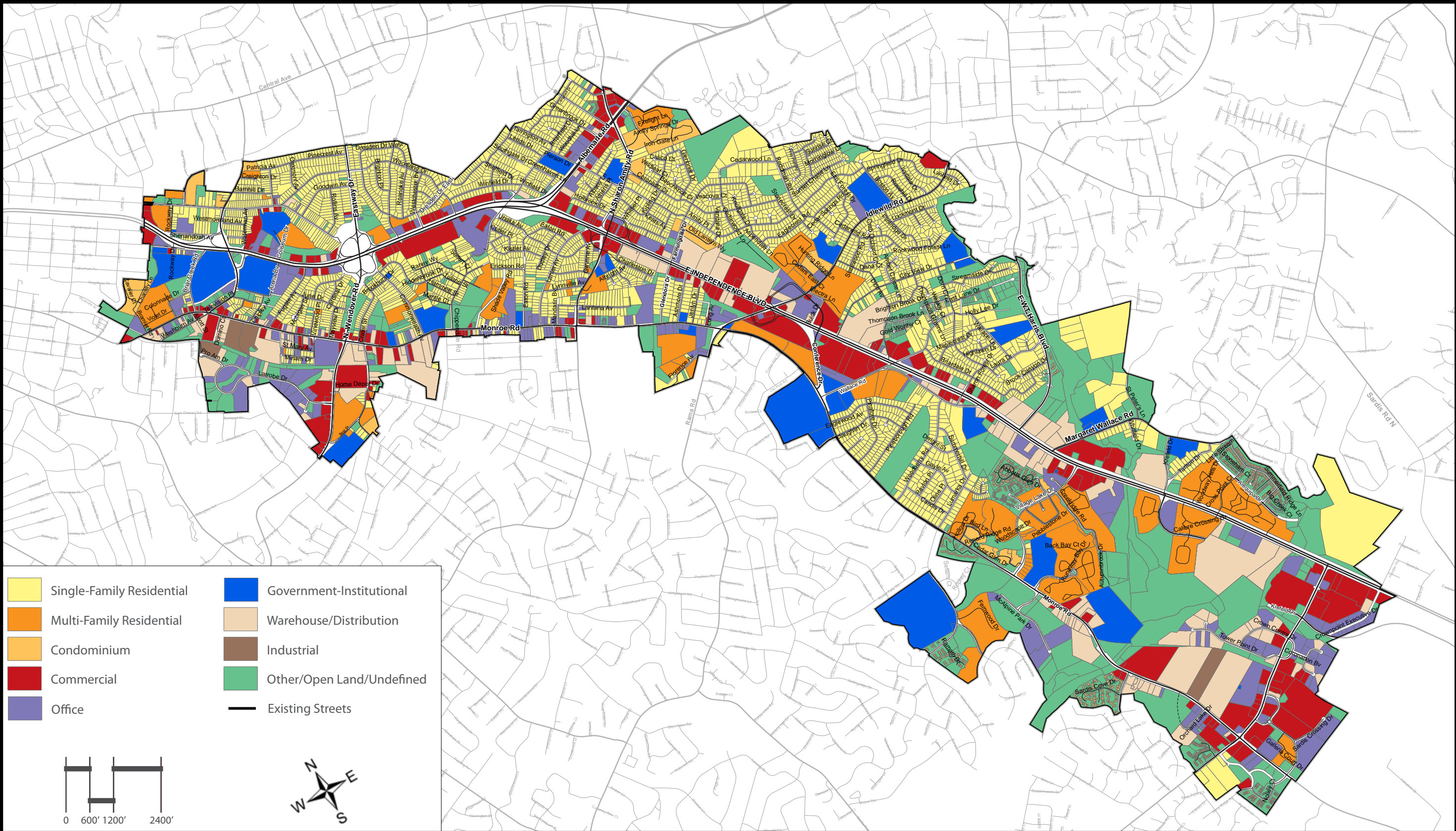


Source: 2008 Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study



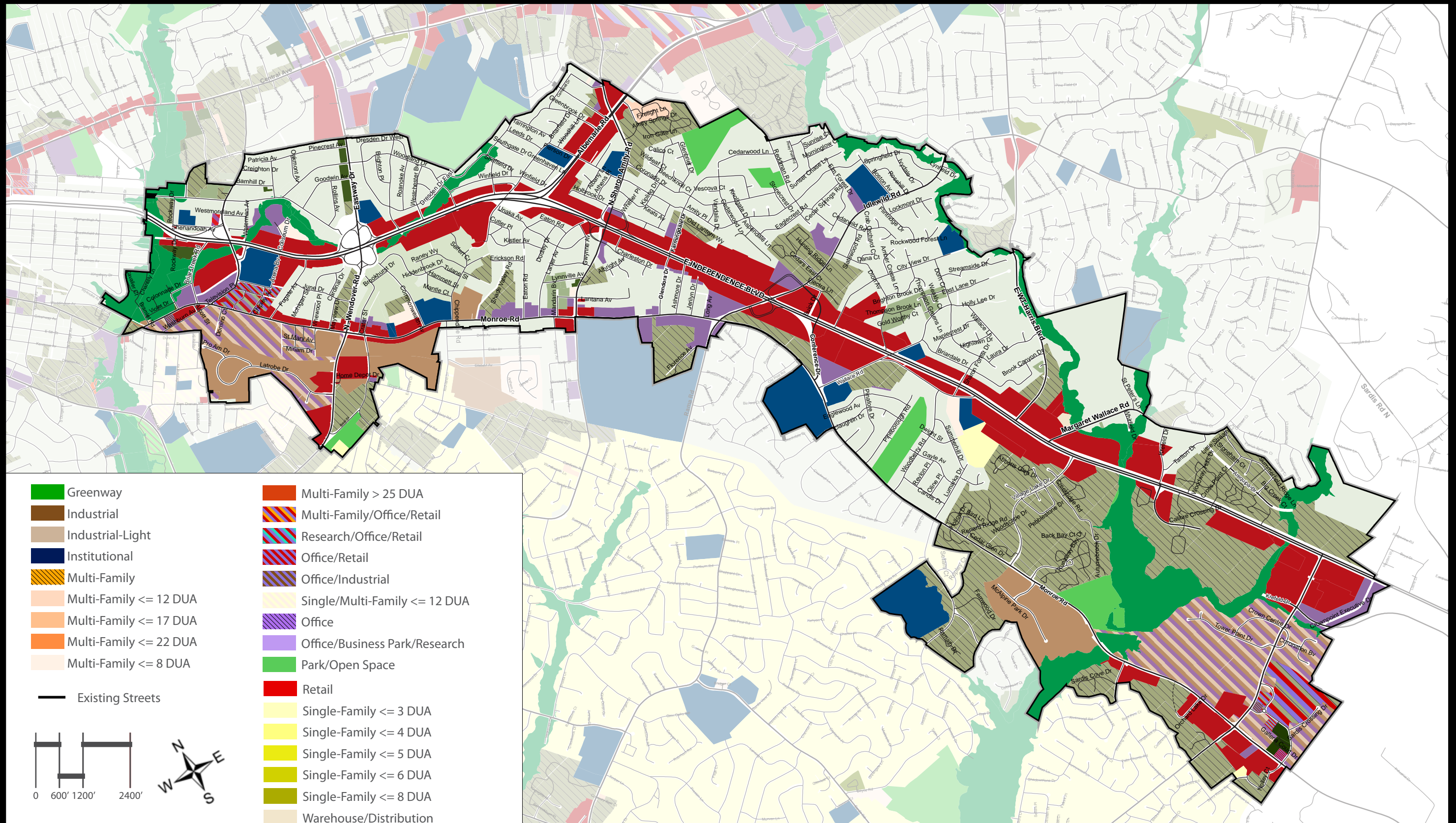
# Independence Boulevard - Existing Land Use

Map 19



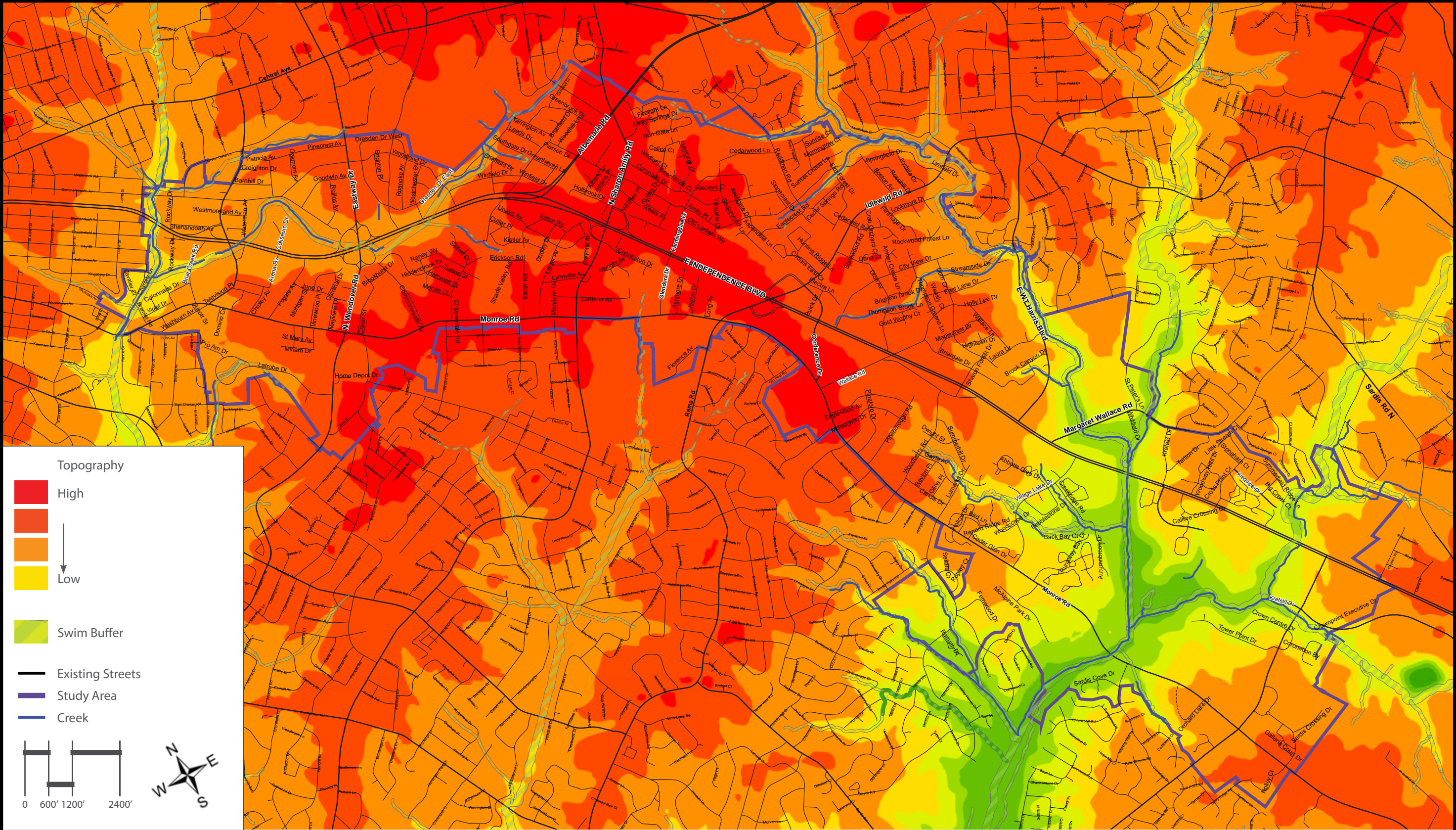
# Independence Boulevard - Adopted Future Land Use

Map 20



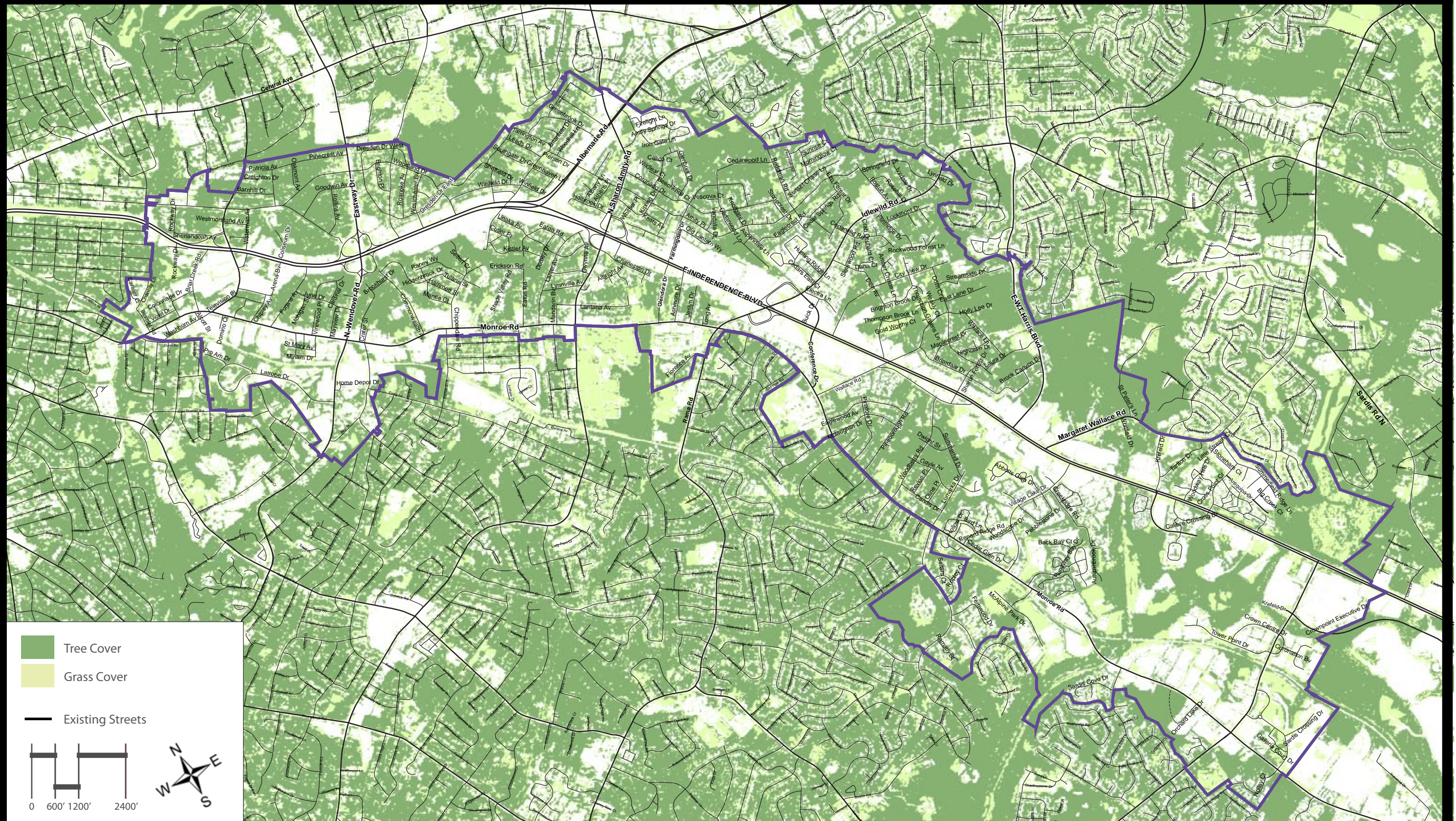
Independence Boulevard - Topography and Drainage

Map 21



# Independence Boulevard - Tree Cover

Map 22

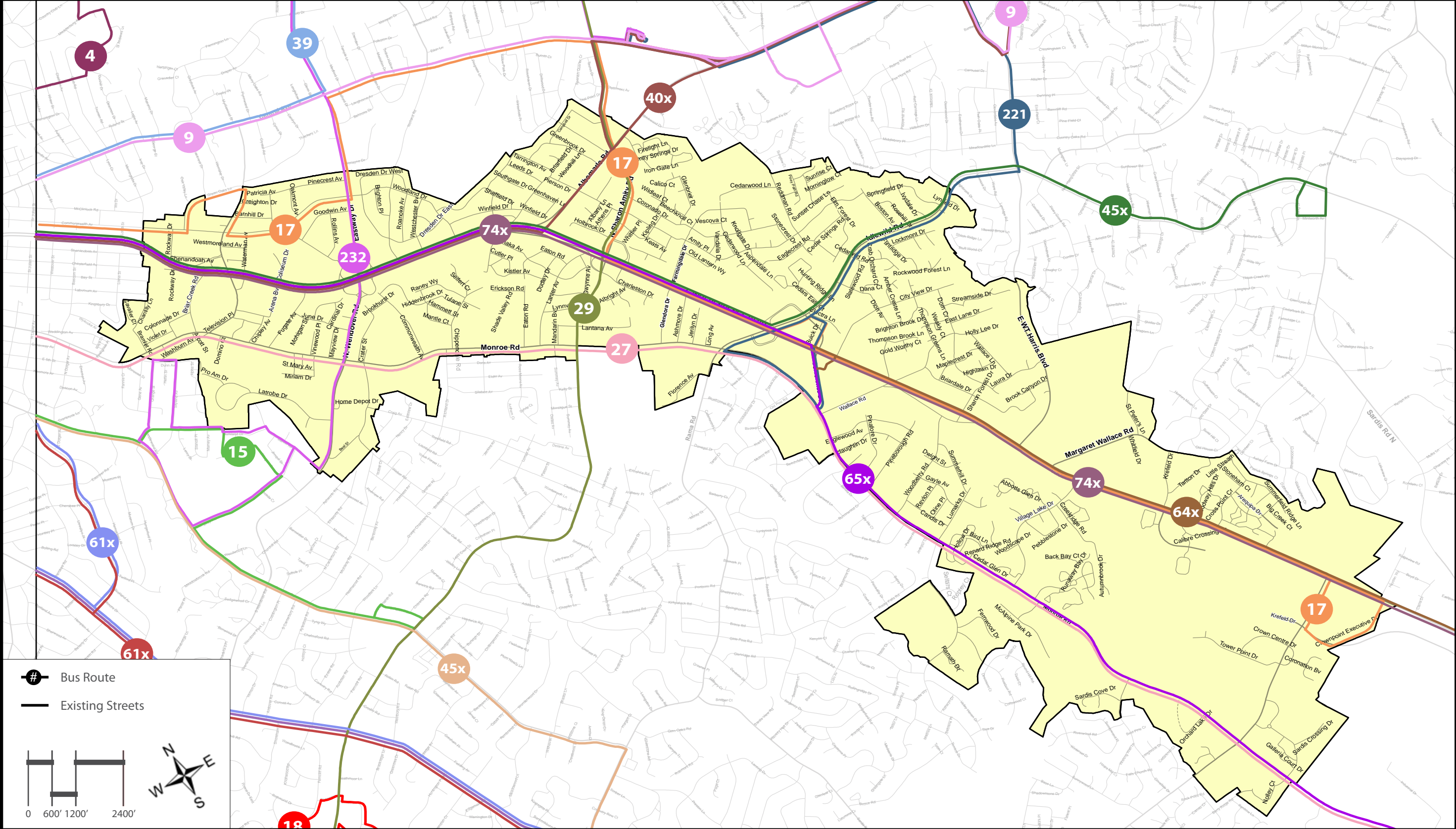


## Map 23



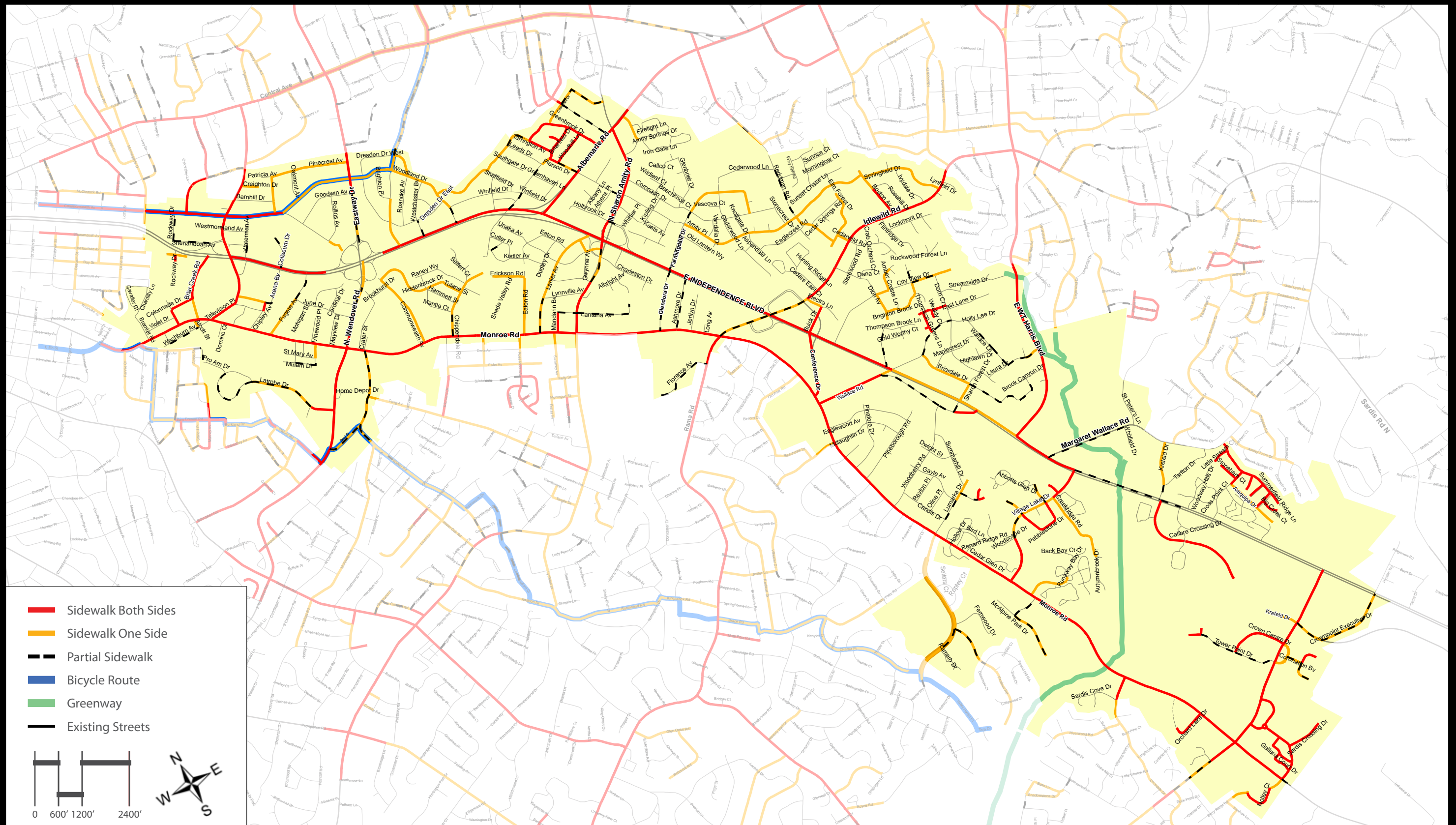
Independence Boulevard - Existing Transit Routes

Map 24



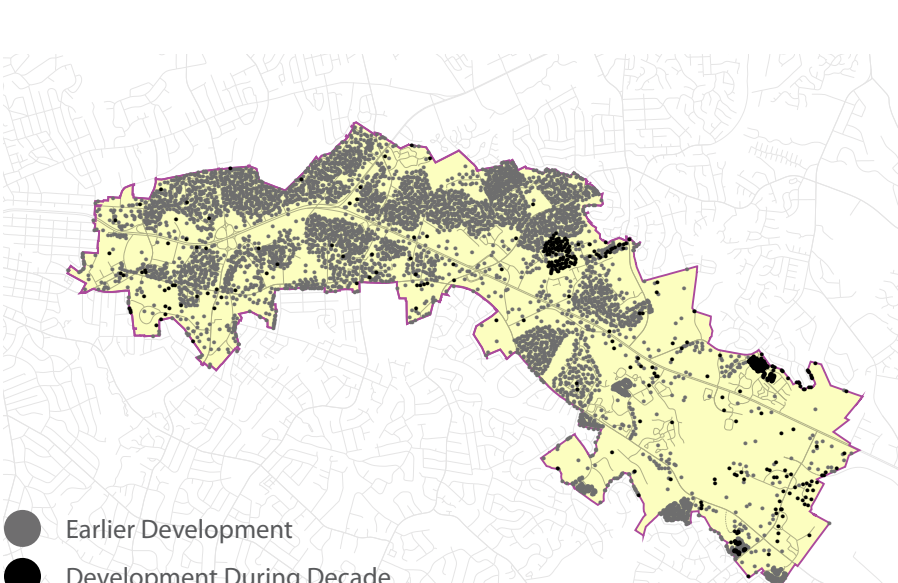
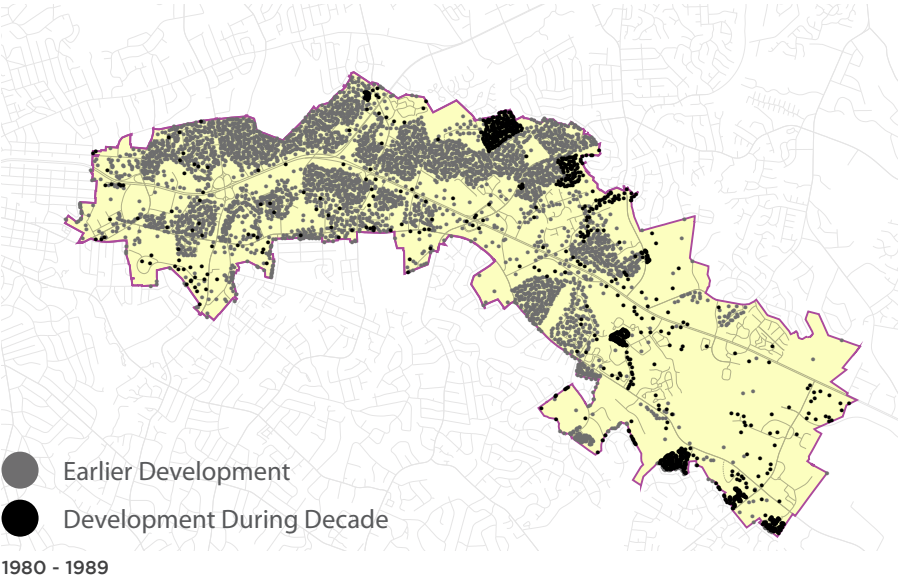
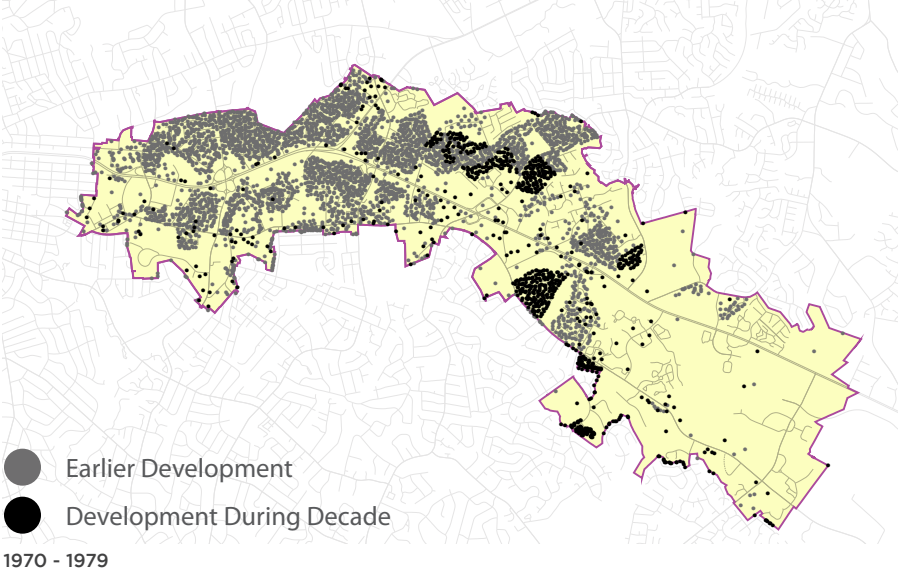
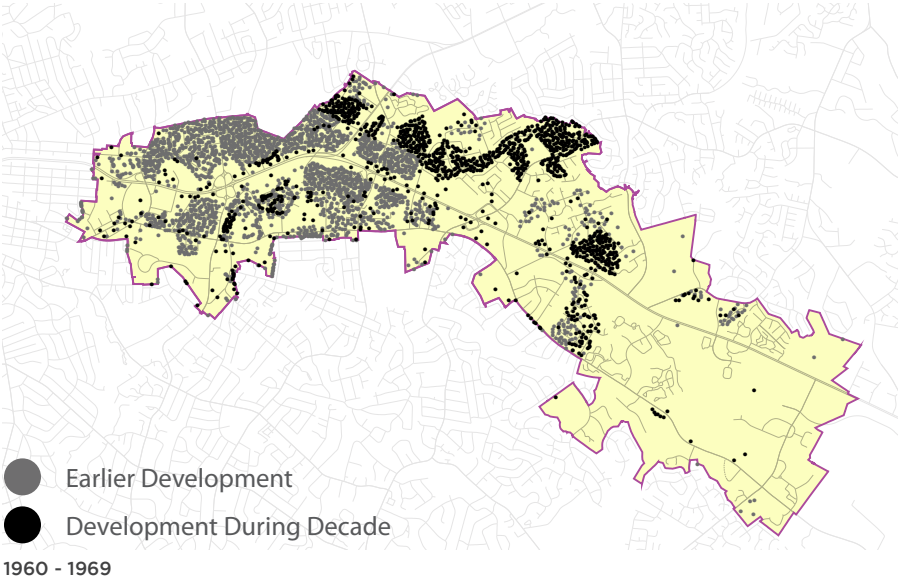
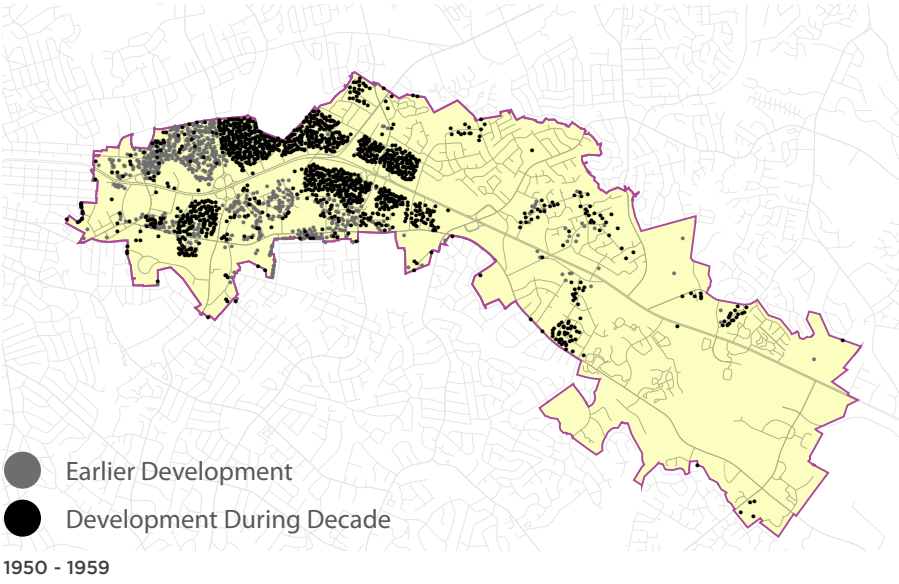
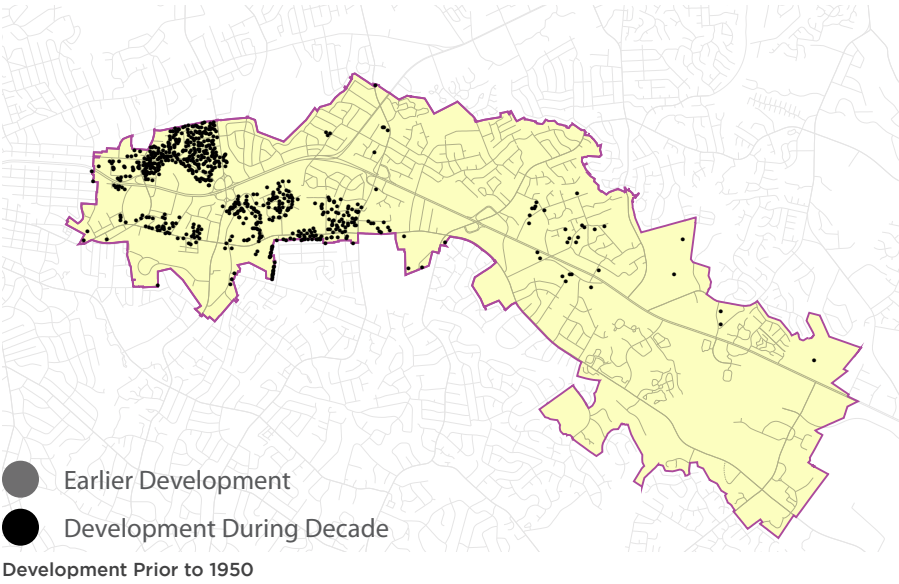
# Independence Boulevard - Existing Pedestrian and Bicycle Network

Map 25



Map 26 - Development History

Development of the Plan Area generally occurred from west to east (from the Center City outward), and the bulk of development took place prior to 1980. Development in the past 30 years has largely been in the form of scattered site infill and single-site multi-family projects.



## Map 27



