City of University Heights

THE HEIGHT OF GOOD LIVING: 2035

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE
CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, IOWA

NOVEMBER 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **1**
Why Do Cities Need Comprehensive Plans? 1
How Was University Heights' Plan Developed? 1

HISTORY **3**

LAND USE **5**
Residential 5
Commercial 6
Open Space 6
Current Zoning Map 7
Future Land Uses 8
Scenario One 8
Scenario Two 8
Scenario Three 9
Scenario One Map 10
Scenario Two Map 11
Scenario Three Map 12

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS **13**
Population Trends 13
Resident Characteristics 15
Education 16
Employment and Income 16

SENSE OF PLACE **19**
Goals 19
Implementation 19

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES **21**
Police 21
Fire 21
Emergency Dispatch 21
Refuse 22
Water and Sanitary Sewer 22
Library 22
Parks and Recreation 23
Goals 23
Implementation 23

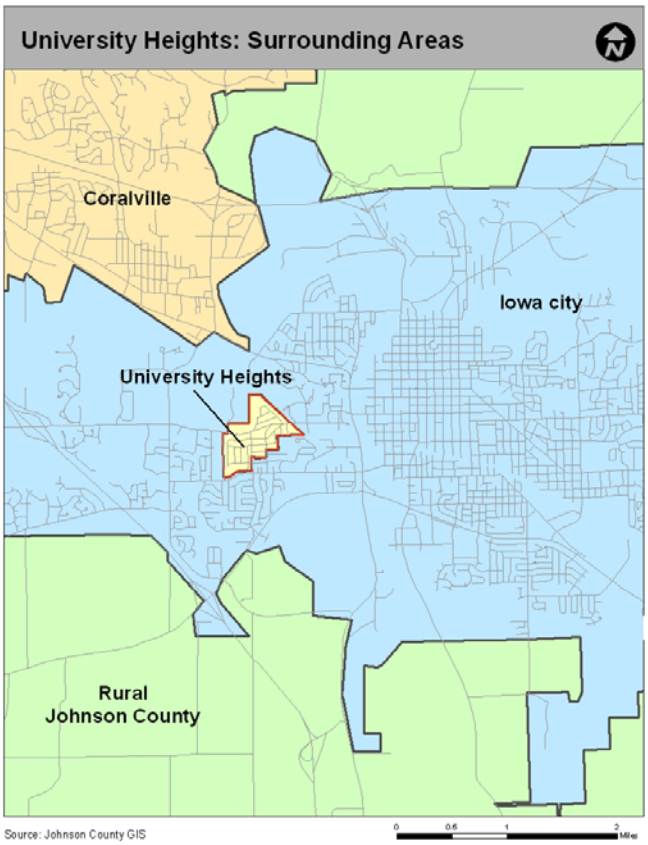
STREETS AND TRANSPORTATION **24**
Transportation Demographics 24
Streets 25
Melrose Avenue 26
Parking 26
Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities 26
Transit Service 27
Goals 27
Implementation 27

LAND USE

The City of University Heights occupies approximately 170 acres at the highest elevation in Johnson County. It is located half a mile west of the Iowa River and is bordered by the University of Iowa on the northeast and northwest and by Iowa City on its remaining sides. The Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway (CRANDIC) separates the city from the University of Iowa. Major thoroughfares of the community include Melrose Avenue and Sunset Street.

RESIDENTIAL

University Heights is almost entirely residential in nature. Over 91% of the community is devoted to the R1 Single Family Residential Zone. At present this zone is largely composed of single-family detached dwellings. The housing stock represents two distinct time periods of development. In the eastern portions of the community, homes date back to the 1930s. Western University Heights, however, consists of homes constructed during the 1960s. Significant differences in architectural styles and lot types exist between these areas.



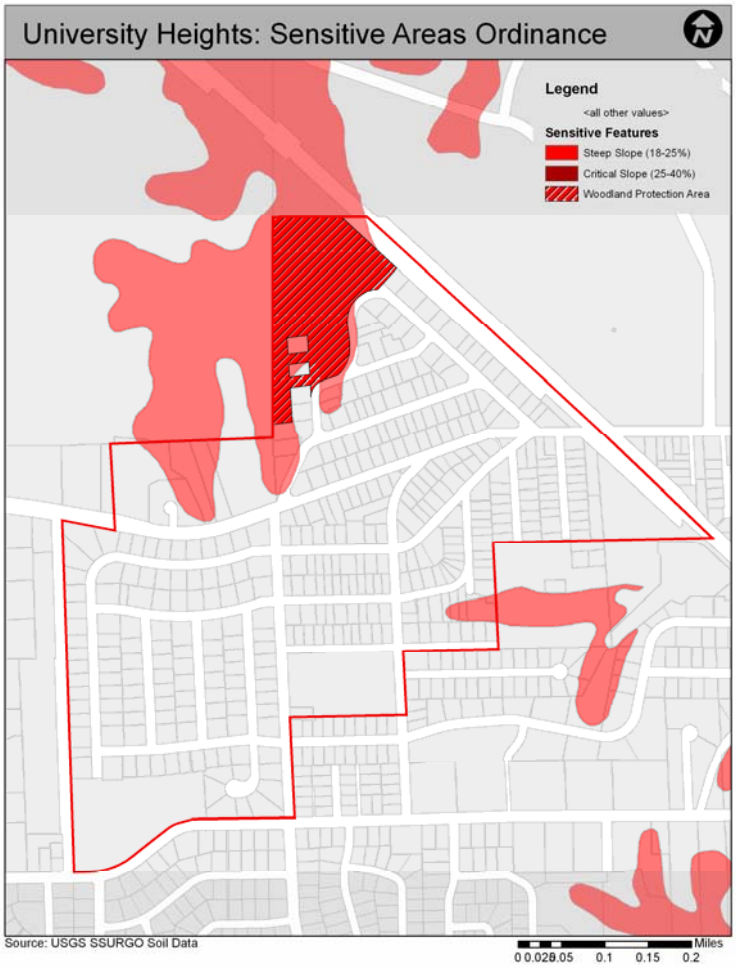
Public and religious institutions also occupy a significant portion of the R1 zone. These include Ernest Horn Elementary School, which occupies approximately 8.1 acres in southwest University Heights and St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, which occupies approximately 3.4 acres.

In addition to the R1 Single Family Residential Zone, there are also two Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). These consist of Birkdale Court, a 1.6 acre development of semi-detached single-family units, and Grandview Court, a 5.6 acre multi-family complex. Grandview Court is currently undergoing significant renovation and redevelopment.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial uses within University Heights are concentrated in two areas. The C Commercial Zone is located on Melrose Avenue at the western edge of the community. This is solely occupied by the University Athletic Club, which occupies approximately 3.8 acres. At the eastern edge of the community, also on Melrose Avenue, several businesses occupy the B Business Zone. This zone consists of about 0.8 acres and includes University Heights City Hall.

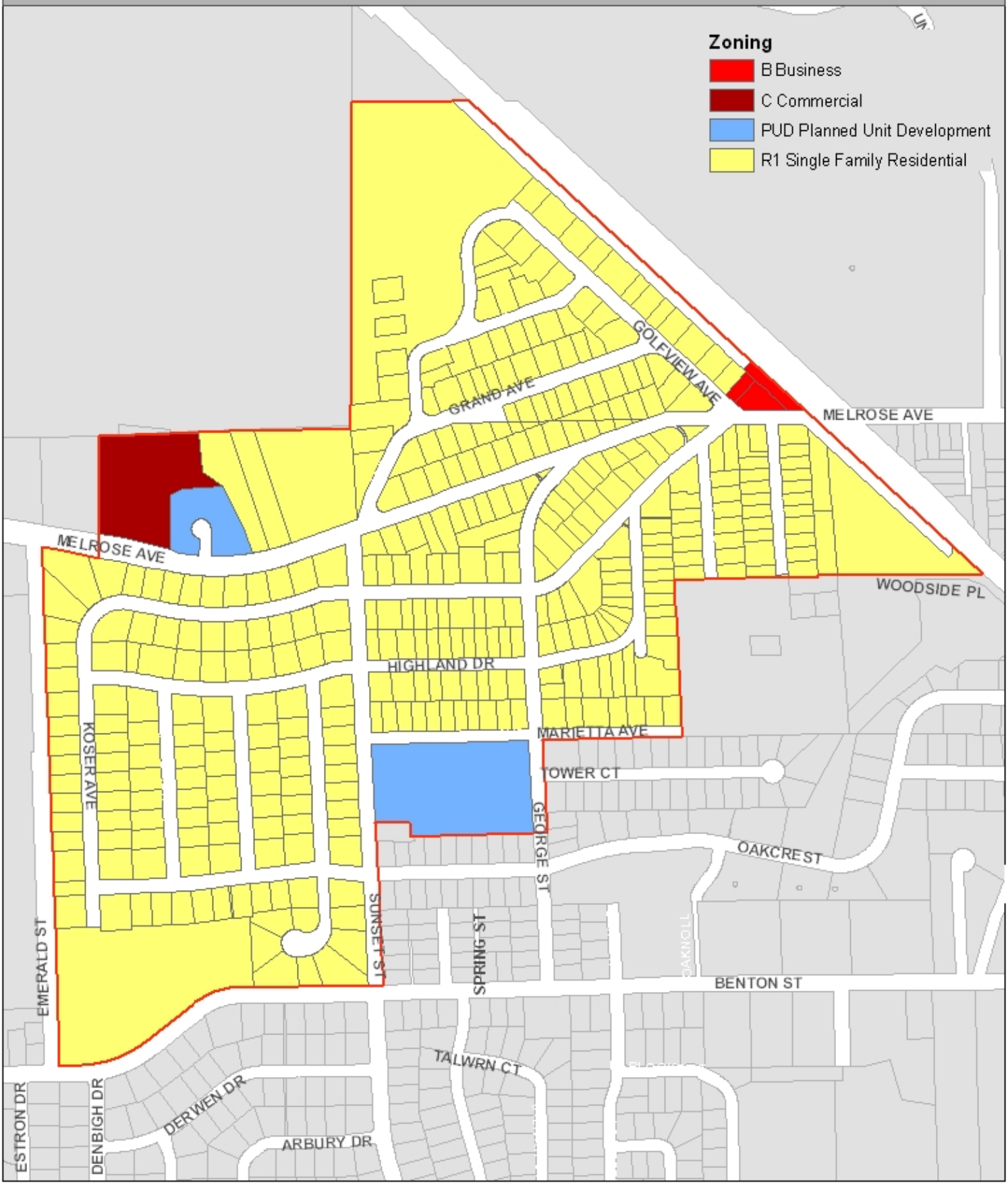
OPEN SPACE



Only one large parcel in University Heights remains undeveloped. This parcel is approximately 12.5 acres in size and is located in a steep, heavily wooded portion of the community. This area occupies about 9.5% of University Heights and is located in the northeastern corner of the city. A few small lots remain undeveloped; however new development on most is restricted because of size or difficult terrain.

In order to preserve community natural resources, University Heights established a sensitive areas ordinance in 2003. The ordinance mandates sensitive area development plans and site reviews for areas with sensitive natural features, based upon preserving steep slopes and wooded areas. As a strategy to preserve remaining community open space, the city may wish to seek donations of land or work with property owners to establish conservation easements. In addition, any development of the large parcel in the northeastern corner of the city should be clustered to maximize the retention of open space.

University Heights: Zoning



Source: Johnson County GIS

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Future Land Uses

Since University Heights is almost entirely developed, few major changes in land use patterns are anticipated in the immediate future. However, the community must decide the most appropriate use of the large parcel in northeastern University Heights, as well as several larger residential lots. The potential for conversion to commercial or institutional uses must also be evaluated. As pressure builds for the development of the Neuzil tract in Iowa City and as housing stock ages along the adjacent streets, complicated and far-reaching discussions regarding the future of those neighborhoods as small lot single family residences will need to be conducted.

Based on public input and without the benefit of any professional analysis of the merits or feasibility of any of the scenarios, three alternate suggested scenarios were created to illustrate what direction future redevelopment and new development might take.

Suggested Scenario One

The first scenario varies only slightly from the current zoning in University Heights. An open space overlay area is defined for the undeveloped property on the northern edge of the city identified as woodland areas in the Sensitive Areas Ordinance. A small parcel that is shown as open space currently serves as a picnic area along Melrose Avenue. The parcel at the corner of Golfview Ave and Melrose Ave signifies a place for public use, which could be park space or a municipal building. The other public use parcel is Ernest Horn School. Commercial development should be concentrated near the existing commercial and business zones and multi-family development restricted to its current areas.

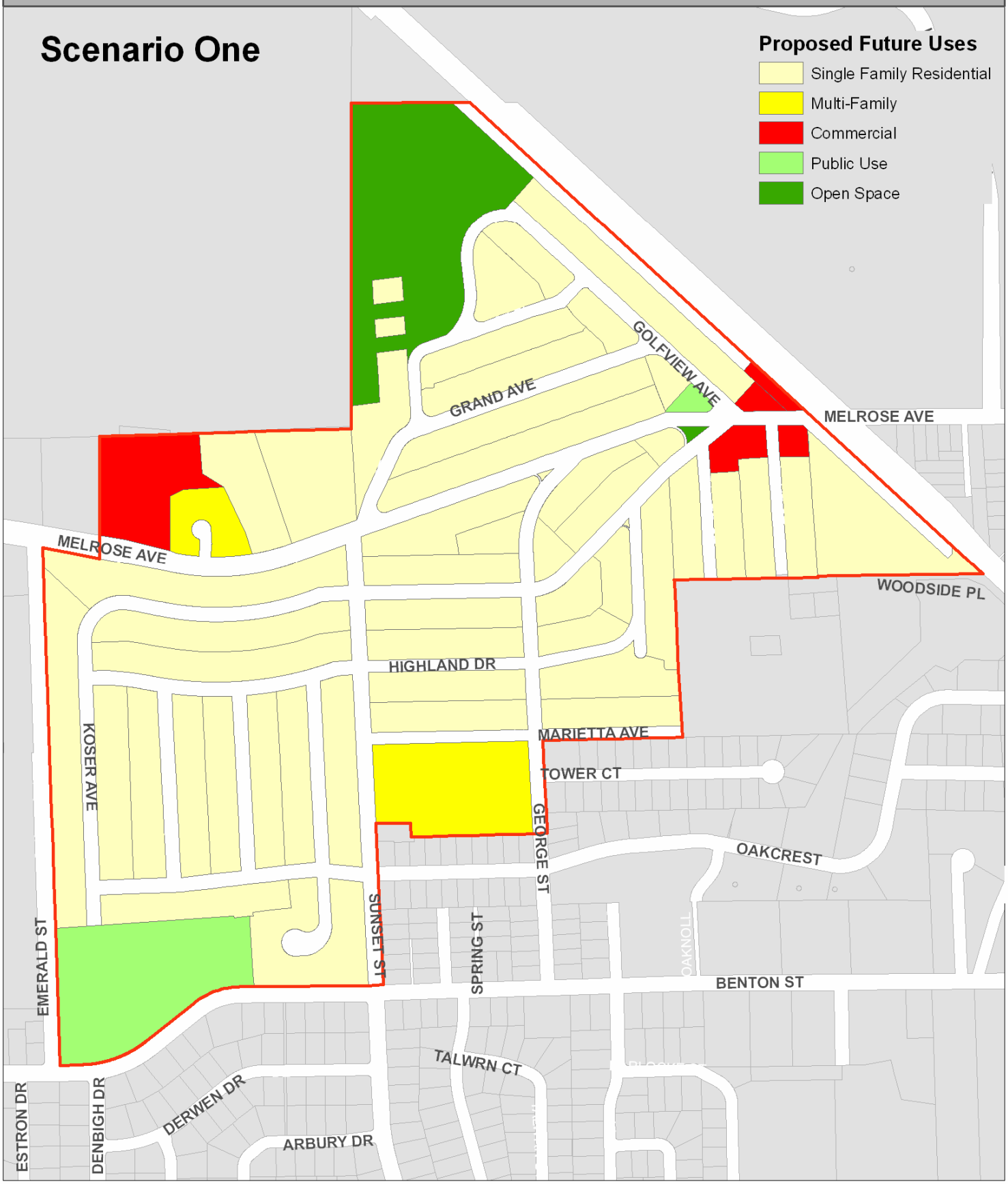
Suggested Scenario Two

This scenario includes the public use areas and adds provisions for mixed use and more multi-family development. If more multi-family development becomes a reality, it would be best for the city to allow this development to occur near the commercial areas to serve as a buffer between commercial and single family residential uses. Residents have indicated that mixed-use development may be acceptable along the city's main arterial street, Melrose Avenue. Thus, the second land use scenario indicates a new mixed-use area for the parcel along western Melrose Avenue, which is currently the University Athletic Club.

SUGGESTED SCENARIO THREE

The third scenario expands the areas for multifamily and mixed-uses along the Melrose Ave corridor. This scenario includes the same designations for commercial, public, and open spaces, but designates more areas that would be suitable for medium density development in the future along Melrose Avenue. The eastern edge of the city would be a mixed-use area, which would be more compatible with adjacent land uses. It also allows for most of the Melrose Avenue corridor to be redeveloped into a transportation corridor. This would also serve as a buffer between the street and single-family homes.

University Heights: Future Land Use



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