



PURPOSEFUL PLANNING

BY: AINSLEY ALLISON

No doubt, you have heard city leaders refer to Plan Pelham time and time again. Adopted in January 2020, it is our city's Comprehensive Plan and serves as a guide regarding land use, development, growth management, and capital improvement decisions over the next 15-20 years.

The Plan also influences zoning decisions, which in turn guides development permits in the city. Zoning is complex and often hard to understand, but its purpose is simple. It ensures balanced communities, protecting the rights of property owners while promoting the general welfare of the city.

A Zoning Official is responsible for safeguarding regulations and ensuring compliance for development of all types. Telling current businesses, future businesses, and residents how to manage their property to comply with the City's Zoning Ordinances can be unpopular at times. However, once the information is explained, those individuals see the importance of the Zoning Official's responsibility for maintaining the City's regulations.

Some of the typical regulatory compliance issues that staff encounter are non-permitted signs and banners and cars parked on the right-of-way. Other times it may be a camper, RV, or boat parked in the front yard.

A major takeaway from Plan Pelham was that residents and businesses wanted to see our major corridors cleaned up. The City listened by hiring a Zoning Compliance Inspector.

Rich Knighton's background is in architecture design. He canvases Pelham's thoroughfares daily. If an area is found to be out of compliance, he works with the



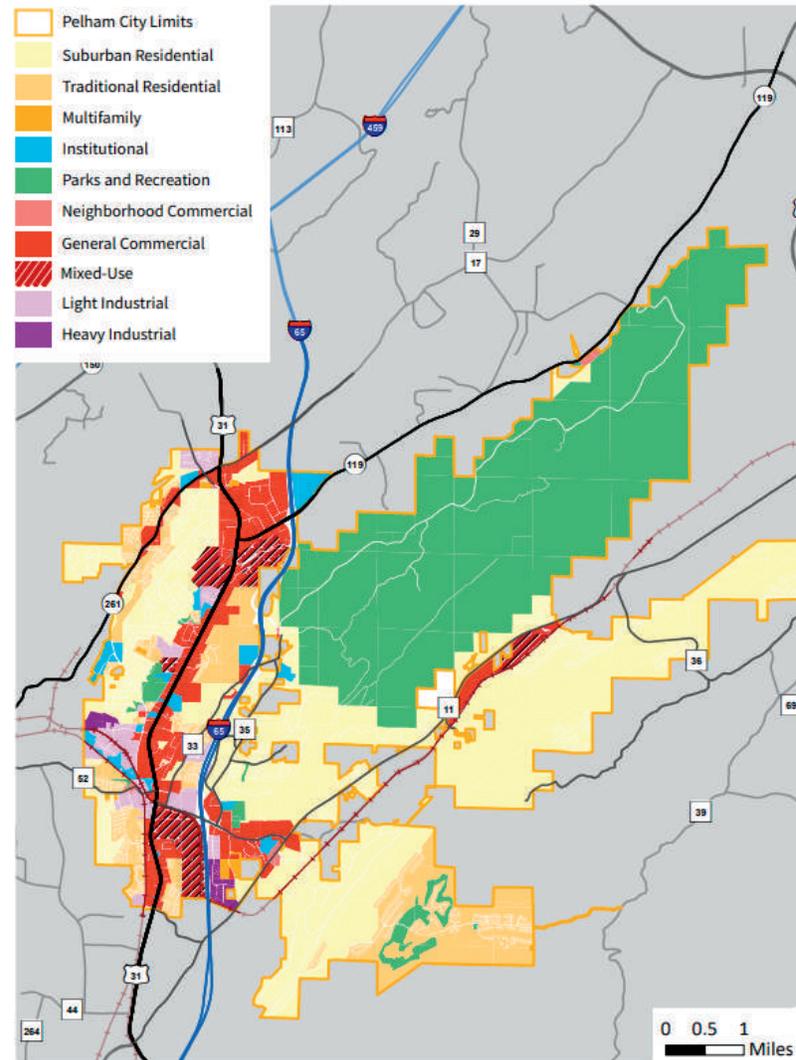
responsible party to ensure any problems are corrected. Knighton has lived in the Pelham area for 20 plus years, so he is invested in our city's success.

Knighton is involved with zoning compliance from the very beginning stages of new development. He assists with plan reviews and business license inspections for new tenants. His previous background has been so valuable in a short time to offer guidance and insights to existing development projects and new ones as they adapt to zoning regulation requirements.

While it is important to enforce current zoning, it is also important to listen. A zoning ordinance is a living, breathing document, and it is crucial to adapt to changes over time. One great example is the recent amendment to the section of the zoning ordinance governing home occupation. Staff had started seeing an increase in residents requesting a license for home business, which was most likely fueled by the pandemic. Prior to the latest amendment, home occupations were limited to residential zones with the exception of R-T TOWNHOUSE RESIDENTIAL and R-A APARTMENT DWELLING DISTRICT. It was discouraging to turn people away based on the current zoning requirements that prevented the resident from obtaining a license because they lived in an apartment or townhome. As a result, staff presented changes to the zoning ordinance to the Planning and Zoning Commission that were ultimately approved by the City Council.

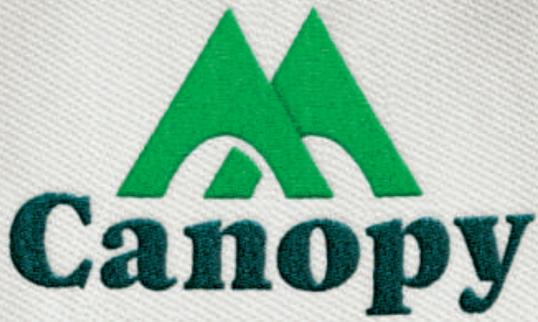


Figure 3.1: Future Land Use Map



Another major change to zoning that came out of the comprehensive planning process was the allowance of mixed-use developments. These are popular among developers these days and are attractive to cities because of the live-work-play experience they offer. The City has one such development underway and another has received approval.

Prior to 2020, Pelham's zoning ordinance did not allow for mixed-use developments. City leaders and staff worked with developers to understand their vision and then partnered with the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission to author an amendment. We now have the ability to work with smaller sites that would otherwise require a minimum of 40 acres for a Mixed-Use in a Planned Unit Development (PUD). This awards a lot of opportunities along the Highway 31 corridor where an abandoned property may have a higher use.



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