

# WALNUT RIDGE

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## Comprehensive Plan

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## Chapter One: Introduction

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### 1.1 The Plan

This document contains the officially adopted Comprehensive Plan for Walnut Ridge, Arkansas.

The plan serves as an official policy statement of the City of Walnut Ridge for directing orderly growth and development within its city limits and planning area. The Walnut Ridge Planning Commission directed the preparation of the plan during a process which included careful study of the area. Areas of analysis include Walnut Ridge's history, demographics and projected population, topography, utility capacity, transportation systems, existing infrastructure, and surrounding land use.

The plan will help guide the decisions of both the Planning Commission and City Council during the planning period, estimated to be 25 years. The Comprehensive Plan serves all citizens and property owners within the planning area as well as others having a stake in the future of the city. Specifically, it impacts the following:

- Residents of the area who expect a stable social and economic environment.
- Potential residents who may be contemplating major investments in the community.
- Business owners whose livelihood depends on continued growth and prosperity.
- Potential business owners and investors who may move into the city.
- The Walnut Ridge Planning Commission.
- The Walnut Ridge City Council.
- Municipal departments and department heads.
- Organizations promoting economic development in the area.
- Professionals in real estate or development.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a broad guideline for orderly growth and development. It is not meant to direct land use arrangement precisely nor is it a zoning ordinance. It should serve as an instrument to blend public and private interests in a manner that will best suit the entire community. Citizens and business interests may look at the plan as a "constitution" for the City of Walnut Ridge. Unlike a national constitution, however, it may change more often to meet new challenges and growth issues.

The plan will remain flexible, allowing for necessary modification of land uses. It plots land usage areas according to long-term community needs, not short-term individual gains. Planning should also be based on sound development principles. The plan addresses pertinent community issues as a whole rather than treating isolated problems as they may arise.

### 1.2 Authority

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is consistent with the provisions of Arkansas Codes, Annotated (A.C.A.), §14-56-403. This section requires that plans of a municipality be "... prepared in order to promote, in accordance with present and future needs, the safety, morals, order, convenience, and general welfare of the citizens." The statutes further state that plans may provide for, among other things, the following:

- Efficiency and economy in the process of development
- The appropriate and best use of land
- Convenience of traffic and circulation of people and goods
- Safety from fire and other dangers

- Adequate light and air in the use and occupancy of buildings
- Healthful and convenient distribution of population
- Good civic design and arrangement
- Adequate public utilities and facilities
- Wise and efficient expenditure of funds

### **1.3 The Planning Area**

The Walnut Ridge Planning Area Boundary appears in graphic form on the plan map, planning area boundary map, and other maps used with this document. The Planning Area Map was prepared in accordance with statutes found in the Arkansas Codes, Annotated § 14-56-413. A copy is on file with the City Clerk and the Lawrence County Recorder.

*The Walnut Ridge Planning Area Boundary comprises those areas surrounding the city that may likely grow to become part of Walnut Ridge in the future.*

The Planning Area Boundary depicted on the Comprehensive Plan map includes those lands within the territorial jurisdiction of Walnut Ridge for which it may prepare plans, ordinances, and regulations. This area extends beyond the city limits to include those areas most likely to become a part of the city within a period of twenty-five years. The City of Walnut Ridge will, in accordance with A.C.A. § 14-56-422, file the plans, ordinances, and regulations as they pertain to the territory beyond the corporate limits with the county recorder of Lawrence County.

### **1.4 Planning Methods**

This document contains only the relevant portions of the ideas and data collected and organized during the planning process. During that process, the Planning Commission supervised study of all pertinent aspects of community growth and development.

The planning team gathered and used both secondary and primary data during the planning process. One of the most exhaustive of the primary data files collected was used to create the existing land use map for the planning area. This map identified the various land use areas by polygons. The descriptions matched conventional small town land use classifications. The land use polygons were arrayed in a geographic information system that permitted detailed analysis of the land use relationships that currently exist.

Existing data from various City departments also provided much of the information used in the analysis of existing conditions. Also, information from the State of Arkansas database compiled in GeoStor supplied information ranging from floodplain polygons to digitally orthorectified aerial photography.

Citizens of the city and planning area provided information at a community design charrette and public hearings. The Planning Commission shared its collective experience and first-hand knowledge of development trends in the area. The input and insights from this body and the public helped form a great deal of the plan's goals, provisions, and recommended actions.

The planning team synthesized and analyzed the data during the summer of 2014. The team then prepared a draft plan outlining initial findings and recommendations. Public hearings provided a venue to fine-tune plan provisions and place them in priority.

### **1.5 Relationship to the Land Use Regulations**

The Arkansas planning statutes, in A.C.A. § 14-56-416 (a)(1) provide:

*Following adoption and filing of the land use plan, the commission may prepare for submission to the legislative body a recommended zoning ordinance for the entire area of the municipality.*

The statutes further provide in A.C.A. § 14-56-417 (a)(1):

*Following adoption and filing of a master street plan, the Planning Commission may prepare and shall administer, after approval of the legislative body, regulations controlling the development of land.*

These provisions, along with the modern history of planning since the landmark case of Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co., 272 U.S. 365 (1926), signify a strong relationship between the plan and its supporting regulations. In simple terms, a municipality first plans, then regulates. The primary supporting regulations consist of the zoning code and development (subdivision) regulations. As stated in A.C.A. § 14-56-412 (e):

*In order to promote, regulate, and control development and to protect the various elements of the plans, the commission, after adoption of appropriate plans as provided, may prepare and transmit to the legislative body such ordinances and regulations as are deemed necessary to carry out the intent of the plans, or of parts thereof.*

Planners take these provisions literally and encourage municipalities to base decisions in land use and development upon adopted plans to the greatest extent possible. At the same time, it has been noted in court decisions in Arkansas that plans are not legal documents but rather broad statements of municipal policy. The legal force arises from the adopted regulations developed to support the plan. In order to reconcile these considerations, the Planning Commission will first determine if a proposal deviates from the spirit and intent of the plan. If it does, the Commission will then consider an amendment to the general plan before considering the proposal.

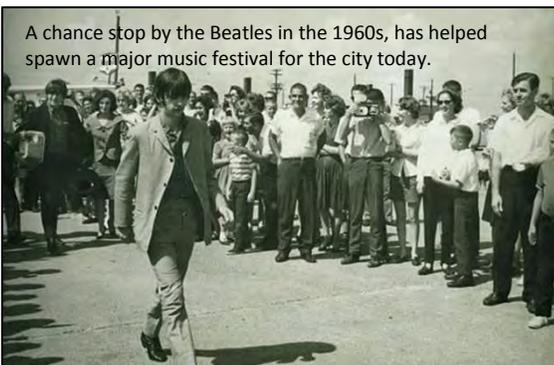
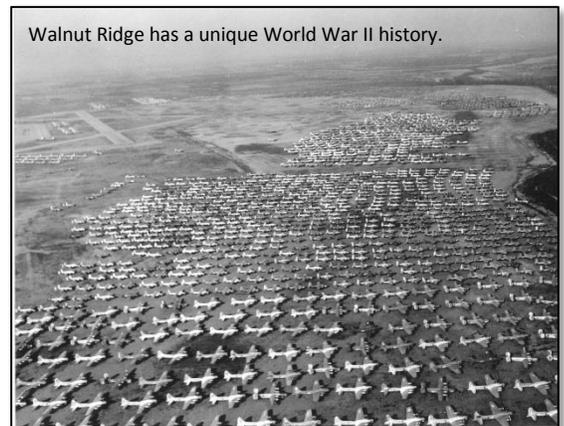
## Chapter Two: Context

### 2.1 History

The City of Walnut Ridge has a history that predates European settlers. The area was home to the Osage tribe. The earliest Europeans to come through the area were likely Spanish and French explorers. The first permanent settlers came to Walnut Ridge around 1860, settling in a higher elevated area separate from the current town. This is now referred to as Old Walnut Ridge, and it is believed Old Walnut Ridge was better suited for farming. In 1873, it was announced that the railroad would be laying tracks through the area and as a result the current city formed around these tracks. Colonel Willis Miles Ponder, a Civil War veteran from Missouri, formally founded the town in 1875. He initially called the town Pawpaw, but later changed the name to Walnut Ridge after learning there was already another town in Arkansas with the name Pawpaw. Ponder would eventually become the town's first mayor.

Sawmilling and agriculture helped the town grow in its early stages and provided substantial income for its citizens. Cotton was the main crop grown, but corn and hay were prevalent as well. Walnut Ridge has had several newspapers throughout its history. The earliest, *The Lawrence County Journal*, began publishing in 1877 under J.H. Balding. The Bland family merged the *Walnut Ridge Blade* with the *Times Dispatch*, and today it still operates under the latter name.

An Army Air Force Flying School was formed by the U.S. Government near Walnut Ridge during World War II. The airbase was completed in the summer of 1942, and over the next two years, several pilots were trained to fly BT-13s there. In the final year of the war, the airbase was used to hold German POWs and was traded to the Marine Corps, becoming the Walnut Ridge Marine Air Facility. After the war, the airbase was used to dismantle planes. Over 10,000 planes were flown in and stored at the airport and industrial park. It was the largest number of airplanes ever amassed in any one place. In 1947, the U.S. government formally turned the base over to Walnut Ridge, and today it is in use as a regional airport.



During the height of their popularity, the Beatles made a stopover at the airport en route to their final concert in 1964. To commemorate this occasion, the town changed the name of a downtown street to Abbey Road, erected a sculpture of the Beatles in a downtown park, and created a fall music festival called Beatles at the Ridge.

Because of the town's delta location in Lawrence County, today agriculture is the primary economic engine for the Walnut Ridge area. Rice and soybeans are the main crops grown. In addition to agriculture, Walnut Ridge has a large industrial complex. Frit

Industries, Morgan Buildings and Spas, Bosch, Douglas/Quikut and others provide jobs for the area. There is one public school system in Walnut Ridge that runs kindergarten through twelfth grade. Williams Baptist College (formerly Southern Baptist College) is found at the city's northern edge. After many years of sharing a dual county seat system with the town of Powhatan, Walnut Ridge became the official county seat of Lawrence County in 1963.

Today, Walnut Ridge is a stable and peaceful community. From the Beatles, to railways, and German POWs, Walnut Ridge has been built on a unique and interesting past. Moving forward, the residents of Walnut Ridge will be standing on the foundation of a proud past to build a strong and prosperous future.

Adapted from *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*

## **2.2 Regional Setting**

Walnut Ridge is the county seat of Lawrence County, located in northeastern Arkansas in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. It shares a border with the City of Hoxie, and is 24 miles northwest of Jonesboro, 27 miles west of Paragould and 14 miles south of Pocahontas. Other nearby towns include Black Rock, Minturn, O’Kean, Portia, Powhatan, and Sedgwick. It is also conveniently located just outside of the Jonesboro Metropolitan Area. Larger cities such as Memphis and Little Rock lie 93 and 127 miles away, respectively.

Three major U.S. Highways run through the city. It is situated at the crossroads of U.S. Highway 412 and U.S. Highway 67. Also, U.S. Route 63 runs through the southern portion of the town. The western terminus of Arkansas Highway 34 begins in Walnut Ridge. The nearest airport with commercial service is 30 miles away at Jonesboro Municipal, which offers scheduled daily nonstop flights to St. Louis via Air Choice One. Memphis International Airport is located 103 miles from the city.

Walnut Ridge is located among four different state parks: Old Davidsonville, Lake Charles, Lake Frierson, and Crowley’s Ridge. All are located within 20 miles of the city. This offers excellent opportunities in boating, fishing, camping, and sightseeing. The city is also in a premium spot for opportunities in hunting ducks, geese, turkey, or deer.

## Chapter Three: Trends

### 3.1 Population

TABLE 3.1.1  
POPULATION HISTORY  
WALNUT RIDGE AND HOXIE, ARKANSAS

Year	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie
1970	3,800	2,265
1980	4,152	2,961
1990	4,388	2,676
2000	4,925	2,817
2010	4,890	2,780

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS

TABLE 3.1.2  
RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Race	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
White	97.2%	96.5%	97.4%	77.0%
Black or African American	0.9%	0.2%	0.7%	15.4%
American Indian	1.0%	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%
Asian	0.0%	0.0%	<0.1%	1.2%
Two or more races	0.8%	2.3%	1.1%	2.0%
Hispanic	2.0%	1.5%	0.9%	6.4%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.1.3  
AGE CHARACTERISTICS, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Age	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Under 5 years	5.7%	8.7%	6.0%	6.7%
5 to 9 years	6.2%	2.7%	6.6%	6.7%
10 to 14 years	6.6%	4.3%	6.2%	6.8%
15 to 19 years	6.3%	6.4%	7.4%	6.7%
18 years and over	77.8%	80.2%	77.1%	73.8%
20 to 24 years	5.2%	13.5%	6.2%	6.9%
25 to 34 years	10.8%	10.5%	11.0%	13.0%
35 to 44 years	9.9%	13.9%	12.2%	12.5%
45 to 54 years	16.5%	14.4%	13.9%	13.7%
55 to 59 years	4.1%	5.7%	5.9%	6.4%
60 to 64 years	7.0%	6.5%	6.7%	6.0%
65 years and over	21.7%	13.4%	18.0%	14.6%
65 to 74 years	10.3%	8.7%	9.8%	8.1%
75 to 84 years	5.7%	3.9%	5.8%	4.8%
85 years and over	5.7%	0.7%	2.4%	1.7%
Median Age	44.3	37.6	39.0	37.2

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.1.4  
POPULATION MIGRATION, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Residence 1 Year Ago	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Same House	83.0%	87.5%	87.7%	81.3%
Different House in Same County	13.1%	9.0%	8.0%	11.0%
Different House in Same State	1.7%	1.0%	2.4%	4.0%
Different State	2.2%	2.2%	1.8%	3.4%
Foreign Country	0.0%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

### 3.2 Education

TABLE 3.2.1  
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT RATES, 2000-2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Educational Attainment	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
High School Grad or Higher, 2000	60.5%	62.5%	63.3%	75.3%
High School Grad or Higher, 2011	75.0%	75.0%	75.8%	84.8%
Bachelor's or Higher, 2000	9.5%	4.3%	8.5%	16.7%
Bachelor's or Higher, 2011	11.2%	5.1%	9.4%	14.5%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

### 3.3 Income

TABLE 3.3.1  
PER CAPITA INCOME (2011 DOLLARS)  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Geography	1999	2011	% change
Walnut Ridge	\$20,218	\$15,166	-25.0%
Hoxie	\$16,296	\$14,689	-9.9%
Lawrence County	\$18,612	\$15,506	-16.7%
Arkansas	\$21,906	\$21,203	-3.2%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.3.2  
HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2011 DOLLARS)  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Household Income	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Less than \$10,000	18.9%	14.4%	13.2%	9.9%
\$10,000 to \$24,999	32.1%	19.9%	27.7%	22.2%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	20.3%	48.9%	32.3%	28.7%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	20.1%	10.5%	16.7%	19.1%
\$75,000 to \$99,000	4.8%	2.4%	5.1%	17.8%
\$100,000 to \$199,999	3.9%	3.8%	4.9%	9.9%
\$200,000 or more	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	1.8%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.3.3  
 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2011 DOLLARS)  
 WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Geography	1999	2011	% change
Walnut Ridge	\$39,092	\$24,405	-37.6%
Hoxie	\$33,054	\$33,201	+0.4%
Lawrence County	\$36,642	\$32,337	-11.8%
Arkansas	\$43,816	\$39,572	-9.7%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.3.4  
 INCOME TO POVERTY RATIOS, 2011  
 WALNUT RIDGE AND HOXIE

Percentage of Poverty Level	Percentage of Population (Walnut Ridge)	Percentage of Population (Hoxie)
Under 50%	12.2%	9.7%
50% to 99%	15.8%	10.7%
100% to 124%	10.9%	4.3%
125% to 149%	2.4%	12.8%
150% to 184%	6.6%	15.7%
185% to 199%	1.7%	1.5%
Over 200%	50.4%	45.3%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.3.5  
 POPULATION RATES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL, 1999-2011  
 WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Poverty Category	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Individuals below poverty level, 1999	13.6%	24.2%	18.4%	15.8%
65 years and older	18.6%	28.0%	20.1%	13.8%
Individuals below poverty level, 2011	28.0%	20.3%	23.3%	19.8%
65 years and older	10.4%	25.7%	11.8%	10.5%
Families below poverty level, 1999	10.0%	20.7%	13.9%	12.0%
No husband present	29.9%	43.9%	37.8%	34.7%
Families below poverty level, 2011	23.6%	17.0%	19.0%	14.9%
No husband present	55.3%	30.6%	46.9%	38.9%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

### 3.4 Housing

TABLE 3.4.1  
SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A  
PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (*SMOCAP*) RATES, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Affordability Category	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Less than 20.0 %	50.8%	51.9%	49.3%	46.9%
20.0 % - 24.9 %	1.2%	16.9%	10.5%	15.4%
25 % - 29.9 %	4.9%	0.7%	8.2%	10.4%
30 % - 34.9 %	9.4%	8.2%	7.5%	6.9%
35 % or more	33.7%	22.3	24.5%	20.4%
PERCENTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING	56.9%	69.5%	68.0%	72.7%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.4.2  
GROSS RENT AS A  
PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (*GRAP*) RATES, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Affordability Category	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Less than 20.0 %	20.8%	31.0%	26.0%	27.5%
20.0 % - 24.9 %	12.8%	18.4%	14.0%	12.7%
25 % - 29.9 %	13.5%	18.4%	13.6%	11.2%
30 % - 34.9 %	6.5%	7.8%	8.7%	9.0%
35 % or more	46.5%	24.4	37.6%	39.6%
PERCENTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING	47.1%	67.8%	53.6%	51.4%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.4.3  
HOUSING VACANCY, 2000-2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND HOXIE

Type of Vacancy	Walnut Ridge 2000	Walnut Ridge 2011	Hoxie 2000	Hoxie 2011
For Rent	70	131	39	12
For Sale	26	0	18	17
Rented or Sold, Not Occupied	25	63	16	21
Seasonal Use	12	0	7	5
Abandoned/Other	85	114	53	94

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.4.4  
HOUSING INVENTORY RATES, YEAR BUILT, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Year Built	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
2005 or later	3.2%	0.9%	2.5%	4.8%
2000 – 2004	0.3%	7.0%	4.0%	9.4%
1990 – 1999	9.9%	9.6%	15.7%	18.2%
1980 – 1989	12.1%	18.4%	13.3%	16.5%
1970 – 1979	20.0%	23.8%	24.4%	20.0%
1960 – 1969	15.1%	13.4%	14.5%	12.0%
1950 – 1959	13.0%	10.0%	8.3%	8.3%
1949 or earlier	26.3%	17.1%	17.2%	10.8%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.4.5  
HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS, 2000-2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND HOXIE

Housing Type & Characteristics	Walnut Ridge 2000	Walnut Ridge 2011	Hoxie 2000	Hoxie 2011
Total Housing Units	2,250	2,247	1,108	1,256
Single-Family	79.7%	83.4%	85.7%	79.5%
Multi-Family	14.6%	15.8%	11.4%	14.2%
Mobile Home, trailer, or other	2.7%	0.8%	2.9%	6.2%
Occupied Units	90.6%	86.3%	89.3%	88.1%
Owner Occupied	62.4%	62.5%	65.5%	60.4%
Renter Occupied	37.6%	37.5%	34.5%	39.6%
Vacant Units	9.4%	13.7%	10.7%	11.9%
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.0%	0.0%	2.4%	2.5%
Renter Vacancy Rate	8.3%	14.9%	9.3%	2.5%
Median Monthly Mortgage (2011 Dollars)	\$786	\$671	\$632	\$617
Median Value of Owner-occupied Units	\$69,669	\$66,500	\$54,471	\$47,200
Median Rent	\$517	\$461	\$485	\$521

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

**3.5 Employment**

TABLE 3.5.1  
EMPLOYMENT RATES BY INDUSTRY, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Industry	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	8.2%	5.7%	8.7%	3.3%
Construction	6.1%	8.4%	6.4%	7.4%
Manufacturing	9.3%	27.6%	14.9%	15.0%
Wholesale trade	0.8%	0.5%	1.4%	2.8%
Retail trade	10.1%	13.0%	11.6%	13.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.4%	3.1%	7.5%	5.6%
Information	1.4%	0.5%	1.3%	1.7%
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, and leasing	4.7%	4.0%	4.3%	5.0%
Professional, scientific, management, and administrative	6.2%	1.4%	2.7%	6.7%
Educational, health, and social services	30.5%	24.7%	25.5%	22.4%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	10.4%	2.8%	7.1%	7.5%
Other services (except public administration)	3.3%	5.9%	4.8%	4.8%
Public administration	3.8%	2.5%	3.8%	4.6%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.5.2  
EMPLOYMENT STATUS, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Status	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
% population in civilian labor force	51.1%	55.0%	51.7%	60.6%
% Employed	47.3%	47.0%	47.0%	55.8%
Unemployment rate	3.8%	8.0%	4.7%	7.8%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.5.3  
PLACE OF WORK, 2000-2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND HOXIE

Place of Work	Walnut Ridge 2000	Walnut Ridge 2011	Hoxie 2000	Hoxie 2011
Lawrence County	69.0%	67.0%	67.1%	60.4%
Outside Lawrence County	29.1%	32.0%	30.4%	38.8%
Outside Arkansas	1.9%	1.0%	2.5%	0.8%

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

TABLE 3.5.4  
COMMUTING TO WORK RATES, 2011  
WALNUT RIDGE AND SELECTED ENTITIES

Transportation Mode	Walnut Ridge	Hoxie	Lawrence County	Arkansas
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	83.9%	90.3%	80.1%	80.9%
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	9.7%	6.6%	11.8%	12.1%
Public transportation	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.4%
Walked	2.4%	0.4%	2.3%	1.8%
Other means	1.4%	2.3%	1.4%	1.4%
Worked at home	2.5%	0.5%	4.3%	3.3%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	20.3	19.8	23.8	21.1

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES

### **3.6 Demographic Conclusions**

The preceding data can tell us a lot about the long-term trends and future of the City of Walnut Ridge. Understanding the story behind these demographic trends will be crucial in planning the community's future.

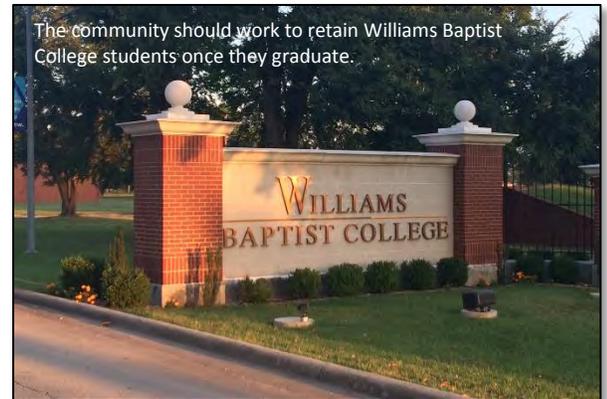
Walnut Ridge is a stable rural community. Its demographic trends are indicative of a rural farming community with an industrial base. While the city appears to be facing future challenges, it has many great assets and opportunities of which it can make use.

The city's population is notably aging, with the median age over seven years older than the state average and 21.7% of its population 65 years and older. There are a couple of factors responsible for this trend. First, the city's share of retirement age and very elderly residents is high. This is indicative of a nationwide trend seen in rural communities. Second, the city has a smaller share of younger working age residents, being those persons between 20 and 44. This is seen despite the city having healthy numbers of school age children. It also means it is likely that Walnut Ridge is not retaining the city's youth once they graduate high school.

*Like many rural communities, the city's overall population is aging as its workforce retires and young adults move away. The city will need to work to promote a quality of life to retain and attract young and middle-aged adults.*

These age characteristics play a large role in shaping the city's demographic trends. Also important for the city will be to recognize the impacts of an aging population and working to address their needs. For example, maintaining quality medical facilities and assisted living facilities will be important. However, the city will likely need to work to provide a high quality of life to make Walnut Ridge attractive for a younger working-age population.

The city has seen positive gains in its rates of educational attainment. Since 2000, its number of residents with a high school diploma rose from 60.5% to 75.0%, and its number of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher rose from 9.5% to 11.2%. The former is a substantial gain while the latter is a positive trend opposite that of the state's. Civic leaders should be proud of this change, as it is less frequently seen among rural communities in Arkansas. However, the low rates of college-level educational attainment are concerning given the presence of Williams Baptist College. Most college cities see higher rates of this type of educational attainment. This statistic may be indicative of the fact that many students leave the area after graduation. Reversing this trend will be important for the community.



*Falling incomes and growing poverty rates are concerning problems the city must face.*

A growing challenge for the city can be seen in its residents' income levels. Both per capita and median household income have fallen substantially since 1999. These numbers are on par with the nationwide economic downturn, and in Walnut Ridge these numbers could be showing the shrinking of the middle class. People are making less or working part-time, and as a result overall income levels have simply dropped. It's an interesting trend given the overall low unemployment rate (3.8%) found in the city.

Another growing challenge for the city can be seen in its poverty levels. Since 1999, the number of individuals below the poverty level has increased from 13.6% to 28.0%, and for families that number has increased from 10.0% to 23.6%. Single-mother poverty rates also increased from 29.9% to 55.3%. Poverty rates for those 65 years and older have decreased from 18.6% to 10.4%, though. All of these trends parallel those of Lawrence County as a whole, and to a lesser extent the state.

In terms of housing, data shows that Walnut Ridge has an aging housing stock with 74.4% of its homes having been built more than 30 years ago. The aging housing stock is a notable area of concern for the city, and increased code enforcement is something that may need to be further addressed going forward. Also, the number of abandoned/vacant structures has risen from 85 to 114 since 2000, and the rental vacancy rate has increased. Addressing issues of abandoned and vacant structures will be absolutely critical in looking at the city's future. Focus could be put on condemnation of dilapidated structures. This would open up good opportunities for infill development in the older parts of the city.

*Addressing issues of abandoned and dilapidated structures will be absolutely critical in looking at the city's future.*

Housing costs also appear to be a growing concern. Affordability rates for renters and homeowners are lower than county and state averages. Though a concern, it is likely less a function of a housing market than it is an effect of the hard times experienced within the local economy in recent years. However, because of the city's aging housing stock and the emerging need for new housing, it will be important to ensure new affordable housing is provided.

One way to sustain housing affordability would be to encourage infill development. Infill development is simply development that “fills in” existing platted lots inside the city rather than converting agricultural land outside the city for residential uses. Infill development is usually advantageous because there is typically no need to place new utilities or build new streets, two costly hallmarks of traditional development. In addition, infill development is usually less taxing on city services, which can result in savings passed onto tax payers and utility customers.

The economy in Walnut Ridge shows that it relies largely on agriculture; educational, health, and social services; retail trade; and manufacturing with those industries accounting for almost 60% of the occupations found in the city. Given

*A good sign for Walnut Ridge is its high level of employment diversity.*

all the agricultural land surrounding the city, it is not surprising that over twice the state average of Walnut Ridge residents work in that field. However, educational, health, and social services at 30.5%, is the city’s dominant industry. Given the presence of two school districts in close proximity, Williams Baptist College, and Lawrence Memorial Hospital, and being a county seat,

this statistic should not be a surprise. Regardless, the city has a healthy level of employment diversity.

Walnut Ridge’s employment diversity is caused by its geographic location and its position as the dominant city within Lawrence County. It is in the heart of prime agricultural land, but it also conveniently located to the jobs and amenities of Jonesboro and Paragould. This makes the city an attractive place to live for those seeking employment in Craighead, Greene, Jackson, and Randolph counties.

*Walnut Ridge has many assets in the form of its leaders, people, location, and infrastructure that will it address its challenges, and point the city towards a bright future.*

Overall, the above data indicate Walnut Ridge is currently facing challenges which it likely hasn’t been presented until the last decade. However, the city is blessed with many assets and opportunities in the form of people, leaders, and organizations that will ensure the city continues to head towards a brighter future.

### **3.7 Charrette/Public Workshop Findings**

The following contain the recommendations provided from the Community Design Workshop. The recommendations range over a wide variety of topics; however, a few central themes emerged.

*Transportation* – Transportation was a very commonly discussed item by most of the groups within the charrette. Many of the concerns dealt with issues of safety and encouraging biking/walking. The city’s existing grid system helps prevent major traffic problems and can forestall the inevitable necessity of widening certain major streets. The number of major corridors in city was also identified as issue of concern, as changes in traffic patterns have and will likely play a big role in defining where commercial development goes. These issues will need to be carefully examined in developing the plan.



*Recreation and Quality of Life were big concerns for many of the workshop participants.*

*Recreation and Quality of Life* – This topic was mentioned by all groups as a priority. Improving quality of life and increasing recreational opportunities is seen as major need and desire. Improvements in quality of life and recreation can be used to set Walnut Ridge apart from neighboring communities to make it a highly attractive place to live. It will be important to examine the viability of the numerous proposals and set priorities for the city to explore and develop in the future. However, it is certain addressing quality of life will be an important component of this plan.

*Commercial Development* – Every group in the charrette indicated that additional commercial development is needed in Walnut Ridge to serve the wants of residents. Participants cited a lack of restaurants, hotels, and other commercial services in the city. While it's likely the finished development of the U.S. Hwy 67 Bypass will encourage new commercial development, it is important that arrangements are made to open land up for development and that new commercial structures be built in a way that provides long-term physical assets for the community. The U.S. Hwy 67 Bypass provides a blank slate for Walnut Ridge and developers to define an image for the community. However, participants also cited a need to preserve the city's downtown and historic assets. It will be important to strike a balance between encouraging new development and retaining existing businesses.

The following include all suggestions provided by the groups.

### Infrastructure

- Extend city utilities to land along the U.S. Hwy 67 Bypass
- Encourage more development of fiber optic lines
- Re-examine water rates

### Recreation

- Enhance Stewart Park (Splash Park, Skate Park, Tennis Courts, Driving Range, Small Golf Course)
- Better utilize the area at Stewart Park (amphitheater, water park)
- Expand Stewart Park to the land just south of the park
- Expand Stewart Park to NE Front St.
- Gate the entrances to Stewart Park
- Create a Sports Complex by fencing the Soccer, Baseball, and Softball areas to allow the city to charge admission for tournaments
- Develop more small neighborhood parks, particularly along the rail-trail.
- More parks within each quadrant of the city
- Build a golf course along Hwy 412 on the west side of the city
- Connect Stewart Park to the Walnut Ridge Schools campus via trail
- Create a dedicated recreation area for senior citizens
- Build an aquatic center/new, larger community center (possibly near the water treatment plant)
- Improve the county fairgrounds
- Need a community/regional museum (Funeral Home/New Park location/Old Sloan Gym)
- Develop the land along Village Creek as a greenway park to make it an asset
- Connect Williams Baptist College to the rail trail

### Transportation

- Encourage more through streets
- Repave Colonial Street
- Make U.S. Hwy 412 from Front St. to U.S. Hwy 67, a three-lane road
- Close NE 2<sup>nd</sup> St. between Compu-last Dr. and Park Rd.
- Build more sidewalks
- Build bike lanes on some city streets
- Build a crosswalk across the railroad on Holder St. to allow access to Stewart Park
- Better promote Amtrak access
- Build trail overpasses on Main St. and U.S. Hwy 67 (near Williams Baptist College)
- Encourage more transportation choice
- Lower speed limits on Main St. near Walmart

### Industrial Development

- Encourage more industrial development near the south side of the airport
- Work to attract freight industries to the airport area
- Build more warehousing

### Commercial Development

- Plan for retail and commercial development near the city's major highways, especially U.S. Hwys 412, 67, and 63
- Need to plan for increased growth demand on the north side of the city
- Need a new grocery store
- Add a movie theater and a community theater
- Need a hotel along the bypass
- Discourage commercial development along the Bypass at U.S. Hwy 412
- Update and freshen up downtown and preserve historic assets

### Zoning and Regulations

- Protect the city's flood areas
- Implement regulations for business licenses
- Enforce permit laws
- Work to preserve or condemn some older structures downtown
- Protect residential areas against oversized accessory buildings
- Provide fencing regulations
- Enforce building codes
- Prohibit metal façade houses
- Create regulations on unsightly lawns

### Housing

- Encourage more residential development near Williams Baptist College on the west side of WBC
- Encourage more residential development throughout the city
- Build more alternatives for senior housing
- Demolish abandoned and dilapidated houses

### Other

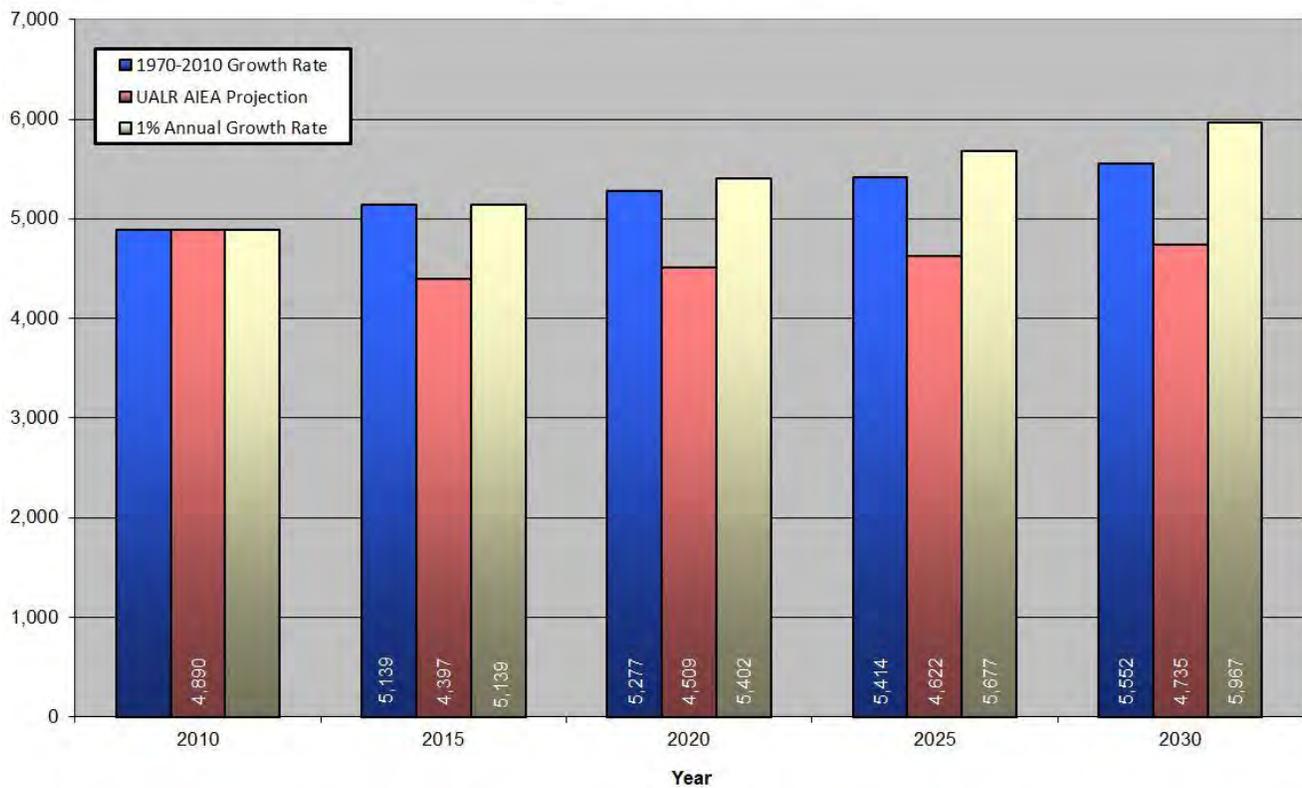
- Light the bypass exits
- Build stronger ties between the city and Williams Baptist College
- Work to support Williams Baptist College
- Encourage a merger of College City with Walnut Ridge
- Enhance the gateways into Walnut Ridge
- Develop an adopt-an-intersection program
- Community storm shelters/multi-purpose building
- Promote greater quality of life
- Address fence problem near the Walnut Ridge school band room
- Explore getting railroad quiet zones through the city
- Work to reduce the areas which are prone to flooding (Village Creek retention area)
- Encourage greater beautification

### 3.8 Population Change Scenarios

In 2000, the population of the City of Walnut Ridge was 4,925, a net gain of 537 persons from 1990. Since 2000, the city has seen a net loss of 35 persons for a total population of 4,890 in the 2010 Census. However, Walnut Ridge’s historic growth rates suggest a return to population growth. Walnut Ridge’s historical growth rate data from 1970 onward indicates the population could reach 5,552 by 2030. Projections from the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Institute for Economic Advancement, however, have the population declining by 255 persons over the next 17 years to 4,735. Such projections can be unreliable as the factors affecting local population can be very volatile and difficult to predict. For example, the addition of as little as 50-100 jobs in Walnut Ridge or the area could provide a substantial population increase within a very short period of time. Therefore, to study the effects of future population growth it is important to utilize alternative scenarios.

The first scenario, already provided, would present modest population gain based on linear extrapolation of trends over the last 30 years. This scenario would yield 5,552 persons by 2030. The second scenario, also already provided, is based on data from UALR for Lawrence County. This scenario would yield 4,735 persons by 2030. A final growth scenario mimicking slightly higher than traditional growth rates would assume one percent annual growth and yield a 2030 population of 5,967 persons. These three scenarios present a range of growth possibilities for the city. The likelihood of any of these scenarios occurring rests both within and outside the control of the city and its residents. It is possible that over the course of the next 20 years that Walnut Ridge may experience population change resembling each of the scenarios.

City of Walnut Ridge  
Population Projection Scenarios



## Chapter Four: Goals and Strategies

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### 4.1 General

This section sets forth the goals, objectives, and policies which will guide the development of the general plan. They are based on the history, trends, geography, and issues facing the city. The goals are the end toward which the plan is directed and represent the overall vision of the city. The objectives are the means to achieving this end. Policies represent specific actions and stances the city will take in order to achieve its goals and objectives.

The main purpose of this plan is to influence community change; however, there are several other issues the city should address before tackling growth issues. First, the city should focus on fixing the basics, such as addressing abandoned and dilapidated housing. Next, the city should focus on building on assets that already exist in the community. Then, the city should focus on creating a community of choice with a high quality of life. These areas stress that a city which is growing in population may not be as important as a city which is growing in quality. Such quality can be measured in terms such as median income levels, educational outcomes, employment opportunities, recreational opportunities, and quality neighborhoods. Addressing these areas first will help ensure Walnut Ridge is a sustaining community that is competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Guiding Principle:** *Walnut Ridge will be a community of choice by focusing on providing a high quality of life, investing in the people of the community, and aggressively seeking economic development opportunities.*

### 4.2 Fixing the Basics

GOAL 4.2.1: To build and maintain a solid foundation for community growth and development.

**Objective 1:** To be aware of current city trends, maintain the comprehensive plan, and use it to guide future growth.

Policies - It is a policy of the city that:

1. The planning commission will conduct annual reviews of its comprehensive plan and land use regulations to ensure they remain applicable and up-to-date.
2. The city's land use regulations will be consistent with and designed to carry out the provisions of the comprehensive plan.
3. Future street construction will conform to the transportation component of the comprehensive plan.
4. Development proposals will be evaluated in terms of their compatibility with the comprehensive plan.
5. All development or re-zoning requests must conform to the comprehensive plan.

**Objective 2:** To regulate land use and buildings in a way that builds a better community.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Provide and carry out land use and building regulations that protects the health, safety, and welfare of the community.
2. Use land use and building regulations to create a community that future generations will be proud of.
3. Find ways to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of historic structures, especially within downtown.
4. Explore and use innovative regulatory tools designed to specifically address community problems.

**Objective 3:** To use code enforcement as a means to enhance the community.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Use city resources to enforce the city's zoning and subdivision regulations.
2. To focus code enforcement efforts on neighborhoods where blighting influences could serve to destabilize property values.
3. Use a collaborative approach with property owners in addressing code enforcement violations by helping property owners in need identify resources to assist them.
4. To use the provisions of Arkansas law such as the "City Cleanup Tools" Act and other laws to address nuisances and unsightly, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions on private property.
5. Use the condemnation process as a means to remove abandoned and dilapidated structures that serve to harm the city's neighborhoods.

**Objective 4:** To provide decent, safe, and affordable housing for all Walnut Ridge residents.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Encourage infill housing development in the city's existing platted subdivisions.
2. Encourage home ownership as a means of long-term community investment.
3. Work with community organizations to make residents aware of programs that assist in creating home owners.
4. Permit housing types that provide options for residents throughout all life phases.
5. Permit a diversity of housing types to provide affordable options for all of the city's population.

### **4.3 Building on Assets**

GOAL 4.3.1: To build on existing physical assets within the community.

**Objective 1:** To build and maintain a diversified economic base.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Build upon its economic base so that it will not be vulnerable to future changes and can attract a variety of employers.
2. Support retention of existing businesses located in Walnut Ridge.
3. Target small-scale employers and industries as well as large-scale employers that complement the regional industrial mix as an economic development strategy.
4. Advertise available industrial property using available resources.
5. Work with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Northeast Arkansas Intermodal Authority, and East Arkansas Planning and Development District to attract potential employers to the regional area.
6. Promote the creation and continuance of job training programs that enhance the city's employment base.
7. Develop an economic development strategy that places high importance on investing in the city's people and future workforce.

**Objective 2:** To enhance the city's appearance.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Provide welcoming gateways into the community that will provide a positive first impression for visitors.
2. Work with community organizations to encourage and develop programs aimed at community beautification.

**Objective 3:** To preserve, protect, and enhance downtown.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Use zoning and building codes to encourage rehabilitation and reuse of historic structures.
2. Leverage public resources and infrastructure investments to encourage private investment in downtown.
3. Encourage the coordination and joint-marketing of downtown businesses.
4. Promote and assist in providing regular and seasonal events and programming for downtown.

GOAL 4.3.2: To coordinate land use planning, growth, and utilities in the most efficient and effective manner.

**Objective 1:** To provide all areas within Walnut Ridge with adequate sanitary sewer and water distribution facilities and to assure the availability of utilities for the growth of the city.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Control the extension or provision of utilities in order to carry out the provisions of this plan.
2. Ensure that no proposed development will result in a reduction in the adopted level of service for utilities.
3. Require all developments within the Planning Area Boundary to be served by central water and wastewater services if technically feasible.
4. Require all developments to install public utilities and become annexed to the city as a condition of tying onto city utilities.
5. Require all future development plans to have adequate public utilities before being approved by the Planning Commission.

GOAL 4.3.3: To provide a functional and efficient transportation system.

**Objective 1:** To maximize roadway capacity and preserve corridors to allow for future roadway construction.

Policies - It is a policy of the city that:

1. Residential streets will be designed to provide good access to abutting properties while also discouraging use by through traffic.
2. Collector streets shall be designed in such a manner as to minimize traffic speeds near residential areas.
3. Site plans reflect the fact that controlling access points to arterials results in fewer accidents, increased capacity, and shorter travel time. Access Management shall protect the roadway capacity by requiring the property owner to limit entrances on the street. Where possible, regulations controlling access points along streets classified as collector and above will be established and enforced.
4. Subdivision regulations include the provisions required for the attainment of all necessary right-of-ways at the time of subdivision approval.

#### **4.4 Creating a Community of Choice**

GOAL 4.4.1: To create a community with a high quality of life.

**Objective 1:** To create residential neighborhoods that are functional and offer easy access to work centers, commercial areas, and community facilities such as parks and schools.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Promote compatible infill development of the city's existing neighborhoods.
2. Reinvest in the infrastructure of the city's existing neighborhoods.

3. Encourage new neighborhoods that are planned to combine a variety of design elements, uses, densities, and housing options.

**Objective 2:** To preserve, protect, and enhance the environment.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Encourage new developments that are designed to be compatible with the natural and built environments of the surrounding area.
2. Encourage public green space.
3. Work to preserve the city's existing floodplains from intrusion of new development that may alter existing drainage patterns.
4. Work with agencies like the Arkansas Forestry Commission to encourage the planting of trees throughout the city.
5. Consider drainage in the development review process.

**Objective 3:** To preserve Walnut Ridge's small-town atmosphere.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Reinforce community identification, pride, and cohesiveness by supporting neighborhood and community activities and providing opportunities for community members to volunteer in city events or improvement projects.
2. Ensure new development is compatible with existing patterns of development.
3. Work to encourage compatible infill development within existing neighborhoods.

**Objective 4:** To enhance recreational opportunities and create a walkable community.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Ensure sidewalks run along streets, making pedestrian transportation both functional and safe.
2. Ensure sidewalks and bike paths form a safe, uninterrupted connection between the home, office, and retail areas.
3. Install traffic calming devices where appropriate in order to slow traffic speeds and make streets more inviting and safe for pedestrians.

GOAL 4.4.2: To manage development in a way that will maintain community stability and prosperity.

**Objective 1:** To assure that residential properties develop so that the values of adjacent properties do not suffer and the character of residential property is not affected by the encroachment of non-residential uses.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Protect existing neighborhoods from intrusions of adverse land uses and commercial developments.
2. Promote infill development to maximize the potential of underutilized property within the city.
3. Review all proposed developments in relation to specific and detailed provisions which at a minimum:
  - Regulate the subdivision of land.
  - Regulate the use of land in accordance with this Plan and ensure the compatibility of adjacent land uses.
  - Regulate areas subject to seasonal and/or periodic flooding.
  - Ensure safe and convenient traffic flow on- and off-site and accommodate vehicle parking needs.
  - Ensure that developments do not result in a reduction in any adopted level of service for infrastructure.
  - Protect against adverse impacts to the environment.

- Ensure the availability of suitable land for utility facilities necessary to support proposed development.

GOAL 4.4.3: To maximize the use of land.

**Objective 1:** To achieve well-planned developments that feature a maximum use of the land, good traffic circulation, convenient access and egress, and a pleasant environment for the residents and to reduce per capita cost of municipal services.

Policies - It is a policy of the city to:

1. Promote higher density development in areas served by wastewater utilities.
2. Promote a balance of infill development and new development.

## Chapter Five: Plan Elements

### 5.1 Land Use Standards

Many land use plans focus on the separation of different types of land uses. This approach often fails to take into account whether or not proposed land uses actually create any adverse influence on one another. In other words, the strict separation of land use types becomes an end in itself and not an element of the urban design process. In departure from this approach, this plan emphasizes the nature of land uses. Thus, the size, use intensity, traffic generation, and the overall impacts of a development become more important than the actual activity conducted on the property.

*These land use standards directly correspond to the Future Land Use Categories depicted on the Comprehensive Plan Map and describe the intended future character for each area.*

#### Downtown Commercial

Character: Area intended to serve as the city center of Walnut Ridge. A mix of uses is allowed as one might find within a downtown environment. All development should enhance the visual aesthetic of the city. This area is intended to be the city's heart and historic center. New structures should continue the existing pattern of development.

General uses: General Commercial, Office, Entertainment, Second-story Residential in mixed-use structures  
Density: N/A  
Lot size: N/A  
Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
Appropriate zoning: C-1

#### General Commercial

Character: Area intended for the city's primary commercial streets. All development should enhance the visual appearance of the city. Special regulations for design, signage, and landscaping may apply. Alternatives to simple "strip" commercial development are encouraged.

General uses: Retail, office, etc.  
Density: N/A  
Lot size: Minimum 6,000 square feet  
Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
Appropriate zoning: C-2

#### Open-Display Commercial

Character: Area intended for general commercial uses as well as those types of commercial uses which require the use of outside display such as car or farm implement dealerships. Location should be limited to areas with traffic counts such as along freeways or portions of major traffic arterials. All development should enhance the visual appearance of the city. Special regulations for design, signage, and landscaping may apply.

General uses: Retail with outdoor display, general commercial, office, etc.  
Density: N/A  
Lot size: Minimum 6,000 square feet  
Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
Appropriate zoning: C-3

#### Industrial

Character: Designation allotted for medium and large-scale industrial uses. Uses within the district should not present a nuisance to adjoining property owners by way of the creation of excessive noise, vibration, odor, smoke, toxic substances, and/or hazards harmful to the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

General uses: Manufacturing, wholesaling, warehousing, mining  
Density: Not applicable  
Lot size: Minimum 10,000 square feet  
Utility requirements: Sewer and water service intended  
Appropriate zoning: I-1

### Airport Industrial

Character: Area intended for industrial uses compatible with the surroundings of the Walnut Ridge Regional Airport. Use of properties should generally occur within enclosed buildings and feature uses like manufacturing, warehousing, assemblage, or fabrication.

General uses: Indoor manufacturing, warehousing, assemblage  
 Density: Not applicable  
 Lot size: Minimum 10,000 square feet  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and Water Services needed  
 Appropriate zoning: I-A

### Agricultural

Character: Area intended for a variety of rural uses including large and small-scale farms operations and single-family residences on large lots. If sewer service becomes available, these areas should be converted to higher intensity land use designations.

General uses: Single-family residential, small-scale commercial, and agriculture  
 Density: 1/3 unit per acre  
 Lot size: Minimum 3 acres  
 Utility requirements: None  
 Appropriate zoning: Outside City / A-1

### Low Density Residential

Character: Area reserved for single-family homes following development patterns similar to the majority of existing residential development within the community.

General uses: Single-family homes  
 Density: <6 units per acre  
 Lot size: Minimum 6,000 square feet  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
 Appropriate zoning: R-1

### Medium Density Residential

Character: Area intended for single-family homes, townhouses, and duplexes. This area is intended to provide residential housing at medium densities, offering a greater diversity of housing choice.

General uses: Single-family, townhouses, duplexes  
 Density: <9 units per acre  
 Lot size: Minimum 6,000 square feet for single-family  
 Minimum 9,000 square feet for multi-family  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
 Appropriate zoning: R-2

### Medium-High Density Residential

Character: Area designed for high intensity residential uses that include four-plexes, apartments, retirement centers, etc. This category is intended to provide for a greater diversity of housing choice and provide affordable housing options. These areas should be adequately served by a collector level street or higher.

General uses: Multi-family dwellings, retirement centers, etc.  
 Density: <20 units per acre  
 Lot size: Minimum 6,000 for one unit  
 Minimum 9,000 square feet for multi-family  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
 Appropriate zoning: R-3

### Manufactured Home Residential

Character: Area intended for single-family homes, manufactured homes, and manufactured home parks. These areas provide a maximum diversity of housing choice and incorporate a mix of densities and residential uses following a more generally scattered pattern of land use.

General uses: Single-family homes, manufactured homes  
 Density: < 8 units per acre  
 Lot size: Varying Requirements  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
 Appropriate zoning: R-MH

### Public/Institutional

Character: Area allocated for public uses that otherwise are not wholly compatible with other districts in this land use plan. These developments should be handled on a case-by-case basis. This district is specifically set aside for schools, jails, airports, campuses, and other similar uses.

General uses: Schools, jails, airports, campuses  
 Density: Not applicable  
 Lot size: Not applicable  
 Utility requirements: Sewer and water services  
 Appropriate zoning: All districts

### Utility/Transportation

Character: Area allocated for public uses such as roads, railroads, utilities, etc. These lands are primarily to be held in public hands, but may also be held in private ownership. Areas no longer in use for rights-of-way or utilities are intended to revert to ownership of adjacent property owners or be used for new public purposes such as recreational trails.

General uses: Roads, utilities, etc.  
 Density: Not applicable  
 Lot size: Not applicable  
 Utility requirements: None  
 Appropriate zoning: All districts

### Recreational

Character: Intended solely for recreational uses. Areas currently designated for recreational use are listed on the future land use map. Potential future recreational areas are specifically denoted. It is expected that as the city grows, additional areas will be given the recreational designation due to the addition of new parks.

General uses: Parks, Golf Courses, Trails  
 Density: N/A  
 Lot size: N/A  
 Utility requirements: None  
 Appropriate zoning: All zones

### Flood Hazard

Character: Areas denoted as federally designated floodways which are frequently flooded. Such areas are not suitable for any types of building improvement because they are used as the primary flowage space for creeks and streams. The possibility for damage to building improvements is high within these areas.

General uses: Open space preservation  
 Density: N/A  
 Lot size: N/A  
 Utility requirements: None  
 Appropriate zoning: A-1

### Open Space

Character: Reserved for natural preservation, resource conservation, and recreational uses under both public and private ownership. This use area includes floodplains and environmentally sensitive areas. Development is not intended for these areas. However, uses which have little or no impact on the surrounding areas or that can be mitigated can be allowed.

General uses: Recreation and Natural Preservation  
 Density: N/A  
 Lot size: N/A  
 Utility requirements: None  
 Appropriate zoning: A-1

## **5.2 Housing and Code Enforcement**

Like many rural communities, housing is an important issue for Walnut Ridge. The city has many historic homes with charm and character, but an increasing number of the city's homes are becoming vacant, abandoned, or dilapidated. Despite a drop in the size of the city's overall housing inventory since 2000, the city's number of vacant housing units has seen increases. With almost 75% of the city's housing stock over 30 years old, if not addressed, this issue may threaten the community's stability in the long term.

Since 2000, the city's number of abandoned houses has increased. Abandoned homes are problematic for a number of reasons. They serve as a blighting influence on neighboring properties, serve to decrease property values, discourage community and financial investment, and make selling surrounding properties more difficult. This makes working to eliminate dilapidated and abandoned houses a top priority for the city.

### **Property Maintenance and Code Enforcement**

Property maintenance is another important issue affecting community stability and should be a main priority of the city. Simple factors such as tall grass or broken windows can change the perception of an area, and, in turn decrease property values and lead to blight and increased crime. The city should enforce codes uniformly and strictly. If the city feels its regulations are too strict or hard to enforce, it should revisit and possibly revise these codes instead of becoming lenient with enforcement.

As was previously stated, addressing the growing number of dilapidated and abandoned houses in Walnut Ridge should be a top priority for the city. State law provides cities the authority to remove dilapidated and unsafe structures. Section 14-56-203 of the Arkansas Code, Annotated, sets forth the authority as follows.

*Cities of the first and second class shall have the power to order the removal or razing of, or to remove or raze, any buildings or houses that in the opinion of the council have become dilapidated, unsightly, unsafe, unsanitary, obnoxious, or detrimental to the public welfare and shall provide, by ordinance, the manner of removing and making these removals.*

However, before doing so the city should first explore other options of compelling the property owner to remediate the problem to ensure the city is not exposed to undue legal risk. For example, the city might cite and fine the property owner for violations of the building code. If that avenue has been exhausted without improvement of the situation, the condemnation procedure may be an appropriate measure to use. To ensure the condemnation process results in the desired effect, the city should annually budget funds to allow for the tear down of abandoned and dilapidated structures.

***The city should consider providing a dedicated yearly fund to address the condemnation and removal of abandoned and dilapidated structures.***

The city might also consider adopting a property maintenance code. Often a city has a patchwork of various ordinances used for ensuring good property upkeep. Sometimes these ordinances conflict or create a confusing set of differing procedures for different types of property violations. A property maintenance code can be used to consolidate these various ordinances into a single document, fill in gaps in existing



Addressing issues with abandoned and dilapidated structures should be a growing concern for the city.

ordinances, and create a uniform procedure for handling violations. Code enforcement can be a difficult task, and a tool that makes it easier is worth considering.

### Recommended Actions

- 1) Work to condemn and demolish or repair existing dilapidated and abandoned housing.
- 2) Use code enforcement to address maintenance and safety issues on neglected properties.
- 3) Find funding to allow for the condemnation of structures and increased code enforcement.
- 4) Consider the creation of a property maintenance code.
- 5) Work to encourage infill development of existing neighborhoods in addition to new housing at the city's edge.

## 5.3 Quality of Life

### Recreation

*Investments in parks and recreation should be seen as economic development tools for the city, as they can attract new residents.*

Recreational opportunities in the form of parks are a key component to providing the type of high quality of life that attracts and retains residents. This is in large part because proximity to a job is sometimes a secondary concern in deciding where to live within a metropolitan area. This places Walnut Ridge in a position where it must compete against communities throughout the Greater Jonesboro area for new residents. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the adequacy of the city's existing park system against commonly used standards for municipal park systems.

From a review of the current recreational facilities provided in Walnut Ridge, it appears the city has more than adequate land area devoted to recreational uses. As a general rule of thumb about 10 acres of park space is needed for every 1,000 people. With the city's population at 4,890, the city would generally need about 50 acres. Walnut Ridge currently has over 130 acres of park space.

The city's current facilities include several parks/recreational facilities. The main city park, Stewart Park, is located on NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. It features basketball and tennis courts, a walking trail, open space, a pavilion, playgrounds, a swimming pool, fishing pond, archery range, arboretum, and ball fields. Being well maintained, it is a facility of which the city can be proud.

The plan proposes several improvements to Stewart Park as enhancements. The largest improvement would be the redevelopment of the ball field complex. The redevelopment would include construction of 4-5 ball fields to accommodate a wide age range of users as well as 3 soccer fields. The conceptual rendering below shows how the complex might be designed. The development of the complex would require closing of portions of NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street along with fencing of access to the park. Along with the improvements this would allow the city to hold lucrative baseball and soccer tournaments and collect admission to help support maintenance of the parks. This project would likely include the relocation of the park's tennis courts and softball fields. These rearrangements could potentially open additional space on the park's west side for redevelopment to other uses.



Stewart Park is a wonderful asset for the community.



Other potential enhancements to the park include improvement of the park’s archery range. Over time it has fallen into disrepair. Walk-in entrances from the neighborhoods flanking the east and west sides of Stewart Park are also proposed as well as potential construction of a splash pad. Finally, a secondary entrance on the park’s south side off Robin Lane, and development of a separated trail along Park Drive are also proposed.

The city’s other parks include Cavanaugh Park Guitar Walk, featuring a unique giant replica of a Epiphone Casino guitar with interpretive kiosks, and Beatles Park, which replicates the famous picture of the Beatles crossing Abbey Road in silhouette within a downtown pocket park. Both parks give downtown a unique charm and character and help draw tourists.

Future development of other parks and other recreational opportunities in the city should be closely tied to new development. As the city grows, it will be important to ensure new facilities are built. The city should consider parks during the development review process for the new subdivisions. Often times, many developers are willing to construct park facilities at their own expense and deed these properties over to the city. Exploring these options could allow the city to significantly



expand recreational opportunities without incurring great expense. However, the city must evaluate each proposal objectively, and only accept those that would benefit the city and its residents long term.

### Neighborhood Reinvestment and Beautification

Another way to increase quality of life is to encourage greater neighborhood reinvestment. The city can take a lead in this area by improving infrastructure in existing neighborhoods. This may come in the form of street repairs, utility line improvements, sidewalk projects, etc. These types of investment are a sign to the community that the city is committed to neighborhood improvement and encourages residents to also reinvest. However, reinvestment may not always take the form of hard infrastructure. It might include soft-scape improvements like landscaping and beautification.

*While often taken for granted, beautification projects can send a strong message to the community and instill community pride.*

City beautification can instill community pride and make a community more attractive to visitors. However, beautification projects often enjoy much success when the community is engaged and committed. In order to gain community support for beautification projects, the city should work to get the community involved in the

effort. If residents have invested their time in beautification projects, they are more likely to support continued efforts by the city. The plan recommends that the city support and help organize community beautification projects to get residents involved. These might include neighborhood clean-up days, Adopt-a-Street programs, a community garden project, or other programs.

### Recommended Actions

- 1) Maintain and enhance the city's existing parks.
- 2) Expand the city park system as the city grows.
- 3) Explore the redevelopment of and enhancement of the city's baseball park complex.
- 4) Restore the archery range at Stewart Park.
- 5) Relocate the tennis courts at Stewart Park to be adjacent to the basketball courts.
- 6) Provide additional walk-in entrances to the park as well as a secondary southern entrance.
- 7) Explore ways of creating a local after-school program like a Boys and Girls Club.
- 8) Consider creation of an Advertising and Promotions Tax to provide capital and operating expenses for the city parks system.
- 9) Work with community organizations to encourage and develop programs aimed at community beautification.
- 10) Reinvest in the infrastructure of existing neighborhoods.
- 11) Work to develop programs such as adopt-a-street and neighborhood cleanup days that use community volunteers to beautify the city.

## 5.4 Downtown and Tourism

In this section downtown and tourism are discussed together. While this might seem like an odd pairing, the two topics are highly connected. Having a strong downtown encourages a stronger tourism industry and vice versa. Therefore, this plan's discussion of tourism will focus centrally on its connection to downtown.

*The comparative health of the city center remains a key element by which visitors, potential residents, and industries will judge the community. A strong downtown will help make a strong Walnut Ridge for the future.*

Downtown Walnut Ridge has strong potential to become more vibrant and a greater tourism draw. Its unique Beatles theme gives the city a distinctive character. Despite

tremendous strides forward including the siting of a hotel, restaurant, and boutique retail, its full potential is not currently being realized. Capitalizing on this potential will require targeted effort by both the public and private sectors. The end result will be a downtown loved by visitors and Walnut Ridge residents that is a stronger economic boon to the city.

### Preservation of Buildings



The plan encourages continued redevelopment of downtown. Plan goals and objectives recognize the role of downtown as becoming a district of diverse uses. This diversity should include a wide array of uses including governmental offices, churches, banks, loft apartments, professional offices, shops, restaurants, and boutiques. What ties these uses together is the urban fabric of downtown and its pedestrian-friendly scale.

Key in maintaining downtown Walnut Ridge will be the preservation and maintenance of its historic structures. Downtowns often suffer the death of a thousand cuts when structures go unmaintained, dilapidate over time, and are eventually torn down. Often when a structure is lost it is never replaced. As structures are lost, the

downtown slowly dies from the gradual loss of what makes it unique: historic buildings. This makes the preservation of downtown's structures vitally important. The tear down of any historic building in downtown should be avoided if possible without creating an eminent threat to the health and safety of the public. Because much of downtown lies within a National Register of Historic Places district, property owners can have access to state and federal tax credits that can make otherwise unfeasible building projects feasible.

Many buildings have been altered over time in ways that have diminished their appearance in an effort to keep up with architectural trends. Typically a product of the 1960s-1980s, these alterations were also intended to help downtown compete with new suburban shopping centers. However, these alterations have unfortunately typically only harmed downtown. The city should encourage property owners to rehabilitate historic structures to an appropriate historic appearance. Such efforts could enhance the economic vitality and appearance of downtown.

### Zoning and Building Codes

The public sector can also take an active role in strengthening downtown's tourism potential. Improved zoning and building codes are actions the city can use. There are several two-story structures throughout downtown. Within these the structures the city should use its zoning code to allow and encourage mixed-use occupancy of these structures. Often this means commercial retail uses on the bottom floor of a structure where street activity can support business and residential or office uses on the floors above.



The city can also encourage full use of these structures by adopting the Existing Building Code. Often restoring or rehabilitating an historic structure to meet modern building codes can be impossible or prohibitively costly. The Existing Building Code is designed for historic structures, and provides alternative means for old buildings to meet modern building code requirements.

### Downtown Projects

Listed below are several projects and programs that could be used to build a stronger downtown:

*Streetscape Improvements* – Downtown has already seen improvement in recent years with improvements throughout. However, the streetscape for downtown’s “front door” U.S. Highway 67 could be improved to help attract visitors into downtown. The string of vacant parking lots leading into downtown serves to mask the improvements downtown has made. One way to address the issue could be to redesign the streetscape and redevelopment of parking lots along U.S. Highway 67 from Vine Street to Main Street. A conceptual sketch of how this streetscape and redesign might look is shown below. Because the highway is controlled by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), any improvements would need to be designed, approved, and constructed by AHTD. However, this also means that the cost of these improvements could be shared between the city and AHTD. While the project would increase the “walkability” of the corridor, it would also provide aesthetic improvement that might spur further private investment.



*Programming and Events* – Downtown should be the de facto location for community events and festivals. Beatles on the Ridge has proven how wildly successful festivals can be when held in a downtown. Holding regular events and programming is key to having a successful downtown. They generate pedestrian traffic, which creates the vibrancy and activity that is the lifeblood of a downtown. Regular events such as the Farmer’s Market, seasonal celebrations, festivals, and monthly or weekly special events are recommended by this plan to keep downtown healthy.

*Coordinated Marketing* – Downtowns often face difficulty because it is difficult for small businesses to leverage the same marketing resources as national chain businesses. Businesses in downtown often exist and succeed because of other businesses in downtown. As such, downtown can often be effectively marketed as a single entity. Doing so, requires broad participation and support. Businesses within downtown should consider creating a downtown merchants association to work on coordinated marketing efforts to benefit all downtown businesses.

## Recommended Actions

- 1) Work to realize Walnut Ridge's tourism potential through the development and promotion of downtown.
- 2) Work to improve downtown's southern gateway on SW Front Street.
- 3) Encourage the location of retail ventures such as antique stores, coffee shops, and boutiques within downtown.
- 4) Consider adoption of the Existing Building Code.
- 5) Draft a zoning code that allows mixed-use of multi-story structures.
- 6) Encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of the city's historic structures.
- 7) Leverage public resources and infrastructure investments to encourage private investment in downtown.
- 8) Encourage the coordination and joint-marketing of downtown businesses.
- 9) Promote and assist in providing regular and seasonal events and programming in downtown.
- 10) Seek Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for community projects in downtown.
- 11) Encourage the retention of existing community institutions in downtown, and the relocation of new government and community institutions to downtown.

## 5.5 Commercial and Economic Development/Regional Cooperation

### Commercial Uses

For a city like Walnut Ridge, the commercial, retail, and professional service offerings of the community may not be as diverse and numerous as was seen fifty years ago. Many retail sectors and professions have seen great consolidation over the years in an effort to achieve greater economies of scale. In addition, online retailers can make operating a local brick and mortar store more difficult because of inevitable sales leakage, often because of price advantages. This often leaves rural communities like Walnut Ridge commercially underserved. However, as the city grows in population, it will also grow in number and diversity of commercial businesses.

The relocation of the U.S. 67 Highway to the city's east has created a climate of uncertainty for business. Existing businesses are reluctant to expand or improve because the impact of the new freeway is still unknown. At the same time, businesses are reluctant to move out by the new highway because its connection south to Newport is still not finished. Unfortunately, until these conditions change it is unlikely that Walnut Ridge will see a great deal in terms of commercial development or redevelopment.

Once relocation of U.S. Highway 67 is complete it will likely have a dramatic effect on the dynamics of commercial land values in Walnut Ridge. Land along East Main Street and the freeway's interchanges at U.S. Highways 412 and 63 will quickly become much more attractive for commercial development. However, with that will come the cannibalization of existing commercial businesses on U.S. Highway 412 in the western part of town and along U.S. Highway 67B, north of Village Creek. Because of this, the city should try to mitigate the negative impact of business relocations. This may mean allowing creative adaptive reuse of vacant structures by public institutions, churches, and schools; or allowing down-zoning of properties from commercial to residential. Although managing the transition will be difficult, the new freeway should be a long-term boon to the community.

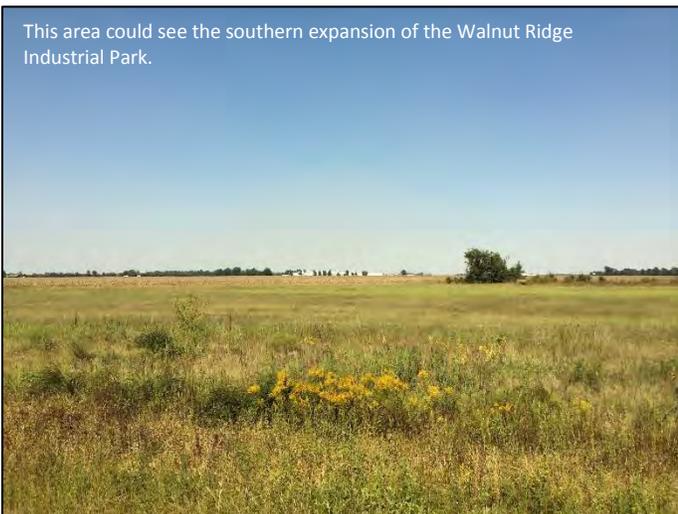


Property like this greenfield along U.S. Highways 67 and 412 should see strong demand for commercial development in coming years.

## Economic Development

In the past 60 years Walnut Ridge has had success in attracting industrial development. Over time, some industries have left and been replaced by new ones. One of the lessons learned is that Walnut Ridge community leaders need to work toward sustaining a local community with economy resiliency. This means Walnut Ridge should strive to be a community with a diverse enough employment base that it can sustain the loss of any one employer relatively well. It also means its industrial base should network and dovetail together in a way that strengthens and bolsters all local business and industry.

In attracting industry, local community leaders should focus on bringing in employers with a long-term focus and commitment to the community, that fill the gaps and support the broader regional industry, and that take advantage of the city's local resources. This means focusing on small-scale industries and businesses that usually employ 10-50 workers at one site. It also means working to find industries and businesses that serve to support other employers throughout the region. Thus, understanding the industrial mix within most of Northeast Arkansas, including Paragould, Jonesboro, Pocahontas, Newport, and Batesville is important. Food processing, warehousing, distribution centers, freight carrying, call centers, packaging, and plastic injection molding are a few examples of industries and businesses to target for economic development and growth.



This area could see the southern expansion of the Walnut Ridge Industrial Park.

An advantage Walnut Ridge has is an already developed industrial park with sites available for new industries and intermodal options with rail, highway, and air service. The industrial park is located at the Walnut Ridge Airport and covers an expansive area. The industrial park and airport are governed by the city's airport commission. Much of the land surrounding the airport is owned by the City of Walnut Ridge. Per the city's airport officials, land held by the city surrounding the airport cannot be sold because of federal restrictions. This unfortunately limits the industries willing to locate around the airport because land must be leased at market rates. This plan recommends the city work with the Federal Aviation Administration to find ways to address leasing issues to allow the further

industrial development and redevelopment around the airport. While expansion at the airport is important, the city should also explore expansion of the industrial park south of Lawrence County Road 428.

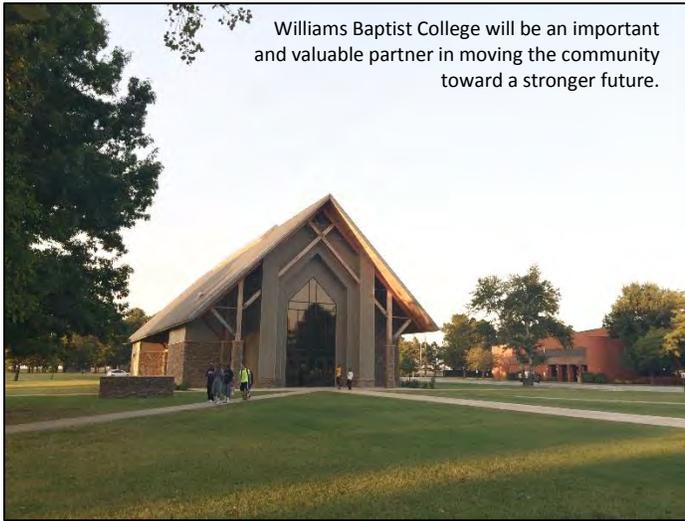
Walnut Ridge also benefits from being a member of the Northeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority. The authority covers Lawrence, Randolph, and Clay counties. It works to and has had great success in attracting major industry to the area, by focusing on potential employers that can bring in over 50 jobs. This focus dovetails well with the city's proposed strategy to attract small-scale industry.

While seeking new industrial development is important, it will also remain important to work toward retaining existing industries within the city. The city and Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce should work toward supporting industries that retain jobs and investment within the community. Retention of existing industrial employers within the community should remain a top priority and is key to the city's continued economic success.

*Business retention will be vital to Walnut Ridge's continued economic success, and should be seen as important as new industrial and business recruitment.*

## Regional Cooperation

Like any community or institution, Walnut Ridge does not exist within a vacuum. It has interdependencies with its institutions and neighboring communities. Working with these communities and institutions can often result in mutual benefit. An example of this can be seen with Williams Baptist College (WBC). WBC needs a strong Walnut Ridge to attract students to its campus, and Walnut Ridge needs a strong WBC to provide the economic and social benefits a college can provide a community.



Williams Baptist College will be an important and valuable partner in moving the community toward a stronger future.

Walnut Ridge and WBC should work as partners in enhancing the community. The city should work to provide an attractive environment for the college, and embrace it as a central part of the city and its future success. WBC should work to support the community by providing a strong presence in city. For example, this might include placing an outreach facility downtown. This might include a business incubator space downtown that could be used to allow business students an opportunity for real-world experience. It could also include community-oriented lecture programs on Arkansas history or a rotating art gallery to feature student work and art exhibitions.

The city should also explore ways it can collaborate and aid neighboring communities. The city currently collaborates with Pocahontas on regional economic development through the Northeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority. This effort has recently resulted in major success by attracting 1,000 new jobs to the region. Walnut Ridge could also potentially work with neighboring College City.

The city already operates the utility systems for its neighbor. There are likely other ways the two communities could cooperate to benefit residents of both communities. One possibility might include the merger of the two municipalities. The communities are contiguous, and College City lacks the population base or sales tax revenue to maintain its infrastructure. However, if resources are pooled as a part of larger joined community addressing maintenance would become much more feasible. Merger of the communities could also help in economic development. The combined cities would have a population over 5,000, an important milestone for attracting certain businesses.

## Recommended Actions

- 1) Encourage commercial growth at the city's future freeway interchanges and along East Main Street.
- 2) Work to mitigate problems caused by the relocation of the city's prime commercial business areas.
- 3) In attracting industry and business, target small-scale employers and industries that will complement the skill sets and industry mix of the regional area.
- 4) Work toward developing a resilient local economy.
- 5) Advertise available industrial property in the city through state resources like the Arkansas Site Selection Center website.
- 6) Work with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Northeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority, and the East Arkansas Planning and Development District to attract potential employers to Walnut Ridge and the regional area.

- 7) Work to retain and support existing businesses and industries in Walnut Ridge.
- 8) Encourage local entrepreneurship and “bootstrap” economic development.
- 9) Work with the Small Business Administration to host seminars on starting a business.
- 10) Explore the possibility of creating a public-private-partnership revolving loan fund for small business investment.
- 11) Partner with the local banking industry to find ways to make business lending more accessible to would-be entrepreneurs in the city through use of micro-lending and similar programs.
- 12) Work with Williams Baptist College as partners to advance Walnut Ridge’s future.
- 13) Encourage Williams Baptist College to consider location of an outreach facility in downtown Walnut Ridge.
- 14) Explore ways to cooperate with College City including the possibility of a municipal merger.

## **5.6 Infrastructure and Growth**

### **Utilities**

Walnut Ridge’s water and sewer systems will have a significant role in guiding and enabling the city’s growth. Growth should be encouraged first where service is already available and second where new sewer service will not require the usage of pump stations. This means directly encouraging infill development, new construction that “fills in” existing vacant properties.

*Infill development is beneficial for Walnut Ridge residents, developers, and the city. It works to stabilize neighborhoods, costs less for developers, and increases the efficiency and economy of the city’s utility system.*

The city has much existing vacant platted property. By and large, these properties are turn-key development opportunities, meaning all that is required is a building permit to start development. The street, sewer, and water utilities are typically already all in place.

Infill development doesn’t just make sense for developers, however. It also helps ensure that existing improvements the city has made to its utility systems remain cost-efficient and in turn maintain low rates for users. This is because the city does not have to maintain new lines or pump stations over a greater area. This also means that as the city reinvests in the infrastructure of existing neighborhoods, it will be getting a greater return for the tax dollars that are spent.

*The city’s utility systems are primed to allow substantial population and industrial growth.*

It is also recommended the city establish formal utility service boundaries for water and wastewater utilities. Once formally established the service boundaries should be filed with the county recorder. The water service boundaries should also be filed with the state and appended to the state water plan. This will allow the service boundaries to become officially recognized and prevent encroachment from other water service providers. Additionally, the city should adopt formal policies with regard to service extension outside of the city limits. Such a policy might state that city services may not be extended without annexation or a pre-annexation agreement if not currently contiguous with the city limits. Adopting such policies will work to provide greater incentive for annexation into the city, and ensure the city receives a mutual benefit from those it provides services to in the form of tax revenue. Considering the city’s utility systems as it relates to growth, Walnut Ridge is in an excellent position to absorb new growth with sewer service being available to both the city’s northern and southern reaches. The system has a capacity of 1.66 million gallons per day with current typical use around 0.4 million gallons per day. The city additionally has a large amount of surplus capacity for its water system. This excess capacity could allow major residential or industrial growth, and should be adequate for the city for the foreseeable future.

The city does have an area for concern. The sewer system has problems with inflow and infiltration in certain areas of the city. Inflow and infiltration is caused by either improper connections to the sewer system as can be found in older combined storm and sanitary sewer systems, or are the result of degradation of the sewer system over time by penetration of sewer lines. These penetrations, often by tree roots, allow large quantities of water to flow into the sewer mains during rain events. The city's problems with inflow and infiltration are primarily limited to the southeast portion of the city, south of Main Street and east of Front St. Addressing this issue will be important over time to allow continued growth.

### Stormwater Management

Though often ignored, proper stormwater management is an important component to guiding future urban growth. Communities often do not take the issue seriously until drainage problems create localized flooding or degrade water quality in nearby streams, rivers, and municipal water supplies. Localized flooding generally occurs due to irresponsible land development of commercial sites and residential subdivisions. Poor development practices disrupt the natural hydrological functions of land by pushing stormwater off a property onto another faster or in greater quantities. If these irresponsible development practices become common place, the problems only magnify as more water is quickly pushed off more and more properties creating greater flood hazards.

Proper development practices seek to slow the run-off of stormwater by proper grading and retention on-site. This prevents flooding from excess run-off at drainage choke points downstream. To ensure responsible development practices occur, the city should carefully consider drafting stormwater regulations. While potentially unpopular, such regulations will save money and heartache for both the city and its residents in the long run.

### Annexation

Municipalities in Arkansas may annex adjacent land by one of three methods. The first method is by direct election determined by a majority of the qualified electors voting on the issue, i.e. the voters of the municipality and the voters of the area proposed for annexation. Section 14-40-302 of the Arkansas Code, Annotated, sets forth the authority.

The second method of annexation deals with land surrounded by a city's boundaries. These "islands" may be annexed by the passage of an ordinance calling for the annexation of the surrounded land in accordance with A.C.A. § 14-40-501 et. seq.

The third method of annexation is by the petition of a majority of the real estate owners of any part of a county contiguous to and adjoining any part of the city. The process must conform to the provisions set forth in A.C.A. § 14-40-601 et. seq.

*The city has already taken a proactive approach to annexation, and taken in those areas needed to accommodate its projected growth over the next 20 years.*

Of these methods, annexation by petition is the most common and generally the least controversial. Continued reliance on this method, however, tends to produce irregular corporate limits. Such irregularity can, in turn, cause problems providing public safety and other municipal services. A common misunderstanding is that annexation by petition is done by one property owner. In reality, a majority of owners of the majority of a given area may secure a petition for annexation without the agreement of other property owners in the given area.



Annexation by election allows the municipality to select the configuration it feels is suitable for urbanization. It gives the city the greatest control in deciding which lands should be annexed for which the city can provide effective and efficient delivery of public services. Furthermore, strategic use of this annexation method enables the city to grow in a rational manner in terms of land area.

The city should carefully examine all annexation requests using cost-benefit analyses, and only accept those that may strategically benefit the city. These analyses should consider both those economic considerations that can be measured and political considerations which cannot be as easily measured. Such examinations should provide cost outlays for additional city service provision and/or potential sales tax revenue increases as well as acknowledge the long-term political ramifications for an annexation. Using these types of analyses would allow the city to see the impacts of annexation in a more transparent way.

There is already enough vacant land in Walnut Ridge to accommodate all future growth in the next 20 years. The city has completed major annexations in recent years that greatly expanded its corporate limits. The annexed territory includes all of the city's major potential growth areas. The city's proactive step should relieve the city from having to worry about annexation for the foreseeable future.

### Recommended Actions

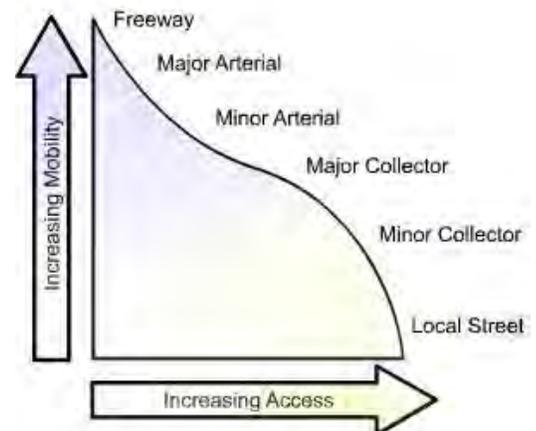
- 1) Encourage infill development as a means to provide utility services in a more cost-effective manner.
- 2) Develop a long-term plan for the development and improvement of the city's utility system.
- 3) Establish formal utility service boundaries and file them with the Lawrence County Recorder and Arkansas Natural Resources Commission.
- 4) Control the extension and provision of utilities as a means of carrying out the provisions and goals of this plan.
- 5) Require that all developments within the Planning Area Boundary be served by central water and wastewater service, if technically feasible.
- 6) Require all developments within the Planning Area Boundary that request city utilities to become annexed as a condition of providing city utilities.
- 7) Consider developing regulations to control storm water drainage.

## 5.7 Transportation System

### Master Street Plan

On the Comprehensive Plan Map is contained the city's Master Street Plan. This plan indicates the location of proposed new roads as well as those streets that should be widened in the future. The street classification system is broken down into three types: local, collector, and arterial streets. Overall, a street system should represent a well-planned network operating like a circulatory system.

*Local* – Local streets have the lowest speed and carrying capacity, and filter traffic to collector streets. Local streets also are primarily designed to permit access to abutting property. Walnut Street is an example of a local street.



*Collector* - Collector streets allot for more traffic and higher speeds, and serve as primary connections to arterial streets. Collector streets are designed to balance access to abutting property and providing sufficient traffic flow to permit greater mobility within the city. Free Street serves as a collector street.

*Arterial* - Arterial streets have the highest carrying capacities and primarily serve to permit through traffic and connect the city to outside destinations. These roads are typically designed around permitting unimpeded traffic flow, and are not primarily designed to provide high property access. Drive spacing requirements and access limitations are common to arterial streets. Main Street and U.S. Highway 67 are examples of arterial roads.

These street classifications correspond to the street cross sections shown in the Chapter Six of this plan document. These cross sections dictate the standards of how new streets should be constructed. They also dictate the standards for how existing streets should be improved.

While the plan proposes the construction of numerous roads, it is intended that most of these road projects be built and constructed as property is developed. In this way, existing residents and the tax payers will not be burdened with handling costs for these road projects. Rather, those costs will be borne by the developers that create the necessity for the new roads and which stand to gain from their construction. However, circumstances may arise where it is advantageous for the city to be proactive in widening or constructing roads to meet the needs of the community and help direct growth in an orderly manner.

### Future Roads and Projects

Overall, a street system should represent a well-planned network operating like a circulatory system. To achieve this, a number of road projects are proposed as a part of this plan. These projects include street widening and the construction of new streets. As has been stated previously, it is anticipated that some, if not most, of these projects are intended to occur and be paid for by developers as new development is built where these projects are proposed.

As a general policy, the city plans to extend its existing street grid into undeveloped areas of the city. The gridiron street system has numerous inherent advantages including the dispersion of traffic, reduced need for wider streets, and increased mobility. However, one of the primary reasons is to allow for orderly future growth. As the city grows, extending streets like Memorial Lane as an extension of Free Street will allow for long-spanning corridors that will open land to development and move traffic across the city without funneling it to Main Street or other major corridors.

The following contains a list and description of some of the proposed road projects:

*Lawrence 445 – Tedder Connection* – This project would involve extending Lawrence County Road 445 south via SW Matt Drive to meet with Tedder Drive in Hoxie. It would include an overpass over the BNSF railroad, and provide an additional north-south connection to Hoxie for the city. The project is important for both convenience and safety, as it would be the only north-south above-grade crossing over the BNSF railroad on the west side of Walnut Ridge and Hoxie. For emergency response, it could mean saving delays for fire trucks and ambulances when every second counts, especially during an event like a train derailment that could paralyze the city. Similar overpasses on the Union Pacific are less feasible because of area constraints. This project would likely be funded through public funds and private development.

*U.S. Highway 412 Interchange Service Roads* – The plan recommends two service roads on the eastern and western side of the U.S. 412 interchange. The eastern road would extend from Highway 91 north to U.S. Highway 67 via Lawrence 609. The western extension would extend from Lawrence 620 north to U.S. Highway 412. The service roads

would enable greater development of the entire area surrounding the interchange. The western service road connecting to U.S. Highway 67 will be particularly important. The easy-on and easy-off nature of its direct access to the highway will make the property north of the interchange very attractive to development. The service road will help ensure that same level of access to more of the property, making it more attractive to development as well. This project would likely be funded by public means and through private development.

*U.S. Highway 63 Interchange Service Roads* – The U.S. 63 Highway corridor is likely to see increased commercial development. However, the full commercial potential of the city’s highway frontage may not be realized without proper access. This is due to the fact that the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department is expected to be very reluctant in granting direct access to the highway. The plan proposes that a parallel set of access roads run along the city’s U.S. 63 Highway frontage. These access roads will allow more of the city’s frontage to realize its full development potential and, in turn, provide needed sales tax revenue to the city. Although the city could require these roads be built by developers as the property develops, it might also consider providing this infrastructure with city funds in advance of development.

*Free Street Extension (Memorial Lane)* – Free Street is one of Walnut Ridge’s few at-grade crossings of the Union Pacific Railroad. It additionally runs adjacent to Walnut Ridge School’s campus. These two conditions make it an important street for the city. The plan proposes extending Free Street north of U.S. Highway 412 via Memorial Lane to Lawrence 446. As the city grows the route would provide a valuable alternate north-south/east-west route throughout the city that would parallel Main Street and U.S. Highway 67 B. It would be constructed through public means and private development.

*Industrial Park South Entrance and Loop Road* – As the city’s industrial park grows, it is likely some of the growth will head south from the airport towards U.S. Highway 67. Additionally, a loop around the eastern portion of the airport could enable further development of the industrial park over time. The plan recommends a new south entrance to the park with direct access to U.S. Highway 67 that connects north to Lawrence 428 via Lawrence 429. Additionally, the eastern industrial park loop road would from S. Miller Street east around the airport and connect with Lawrence 408. These projects would likely be constructed through public means, ideally through special appropriations or economic development grants.

## Sidewalks and Trails

Although providing adequate roadways for automobiles is very important, it is also necessary to adequately provide for the needs of pedestrians. Sidewalks and trails are often overlooked within many cities’ transportation systems. This can leave many people in the city without safe means of getting from their homes to school, to work, or to shop. As such this plan recommends further development of the city’s sidewalk system.

The city currently has few sidewalks throughout many portions of the city. Where sidewalks exist, many are old and beginning to deteriorate. Continued maintenance of existing facilities is important, and reinvestment in these sidewalks should continue to take precedence over the building of new sidewalks. This type of reinvestment also



sends a positive message to property owners that older neighborhoods remain an important part of the city's fabric and can lead to further private investment.

The city's current trail along the BNSF rail spur serves to provide a recreational outlet for Walnut Ridge's citizens. However, the trail/sidewalk system should be expanded further to serve more areas of the city and connect the city's park, Williams Baptist College, and Walnut Ridge schools. Doing so could help further promote use, and also create a trail system that could be readily used by children, students, and other recreational users.

At its northern end, the expansion would include running the trail north to the heart of the Williams Baptist College campus from its current terminus at Miller Street. Additionally, an overpass across U.S. Highway 67 would serve to provide safe crossing for the trail at the highway. Toward the south, the trail would have a spur at its crossing of Village Creek. The trail would run north with the creek it reached an unnamed tributary a few hundred feet to the north. The trail would follow this creek through a neighborhood to its intersection with NW Front Street. It would then cross the railroad at Holder Street to tie in with the trails at Stewart Park. The trail would exit Stewart Park at its southwest corner and follow the unconstructed right-of-way of NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street to SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street and the Walnut Ridge School campus.

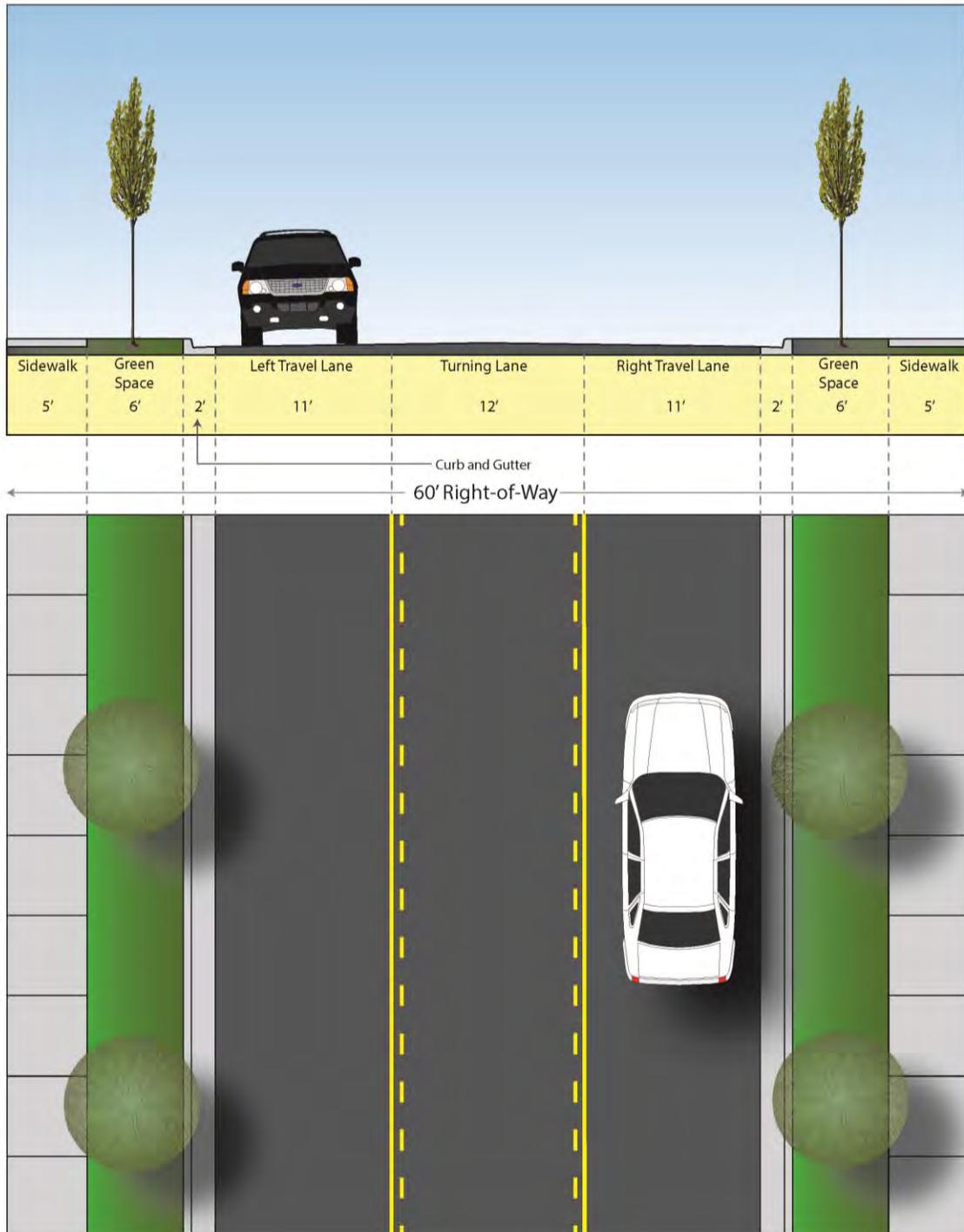
### Recommended Actions

- 1) Utilize the Master Street Plan component of this plan to direct the improvement and construction of streets in the city.
- 2) Adopt revised Subdivision Regulations to carry out the provisions of the Master Street Plan component in this plan.
- 3) Use the Comprehensive Plan as a guide in evaluating all development proposals to ensure compliance with the Master Street Plan.
- 4) Use city resources to expand and repair the city's street network.
- 5) Expand the city's trail system.
- 6) Invest in infrastructure that will protect and encourage pedestrian activity.
- 7) Seek funding for trail/sidewalk projects via the Safe Routes to Schools and Recreational Trails grants programs managed by AHTD.

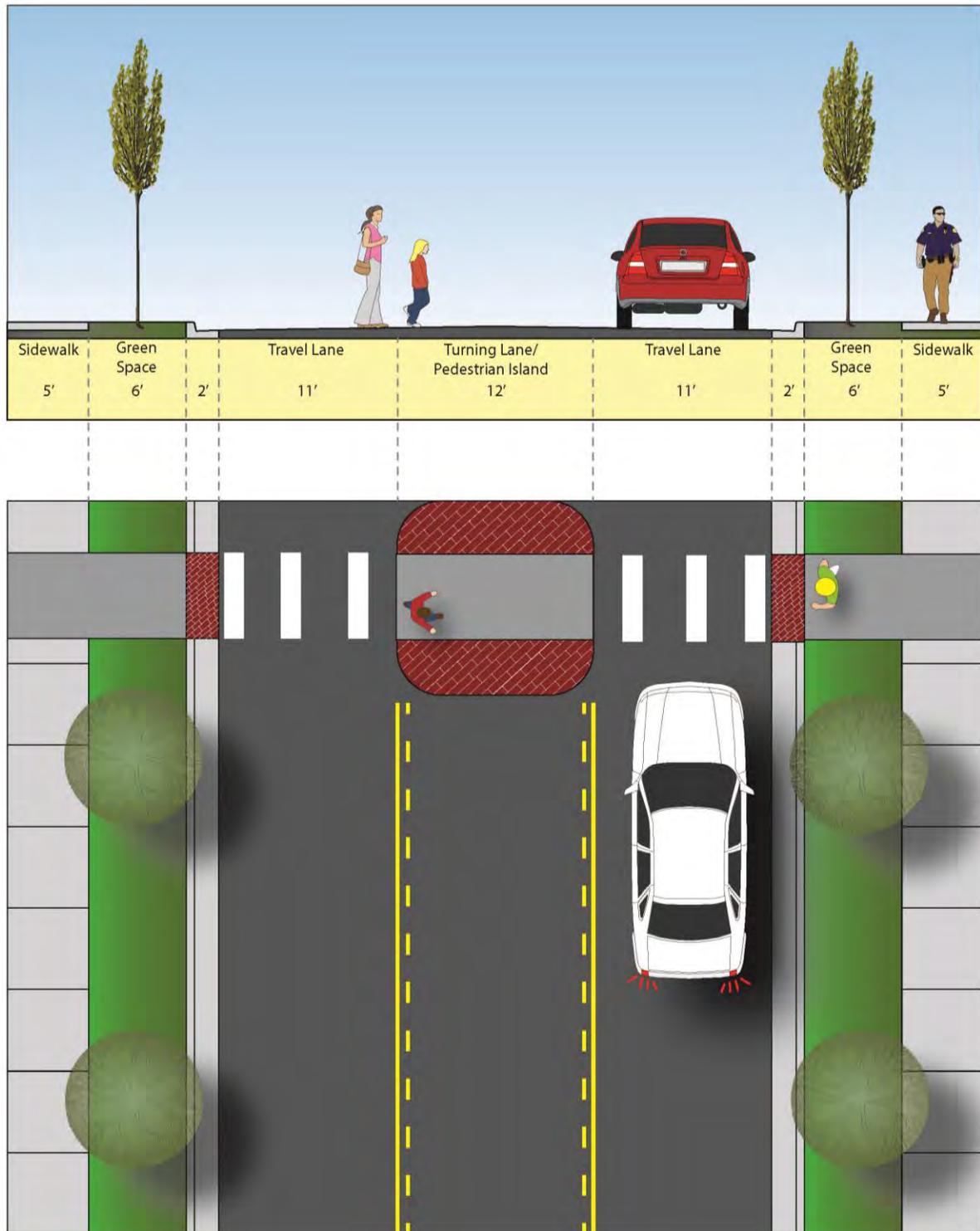
## Chapter Six: Street Standards

All arterial streets are state-managed highways and shall be constructed to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department's standards. Any state highway deemed a collector shall also be constructed to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department's standards.

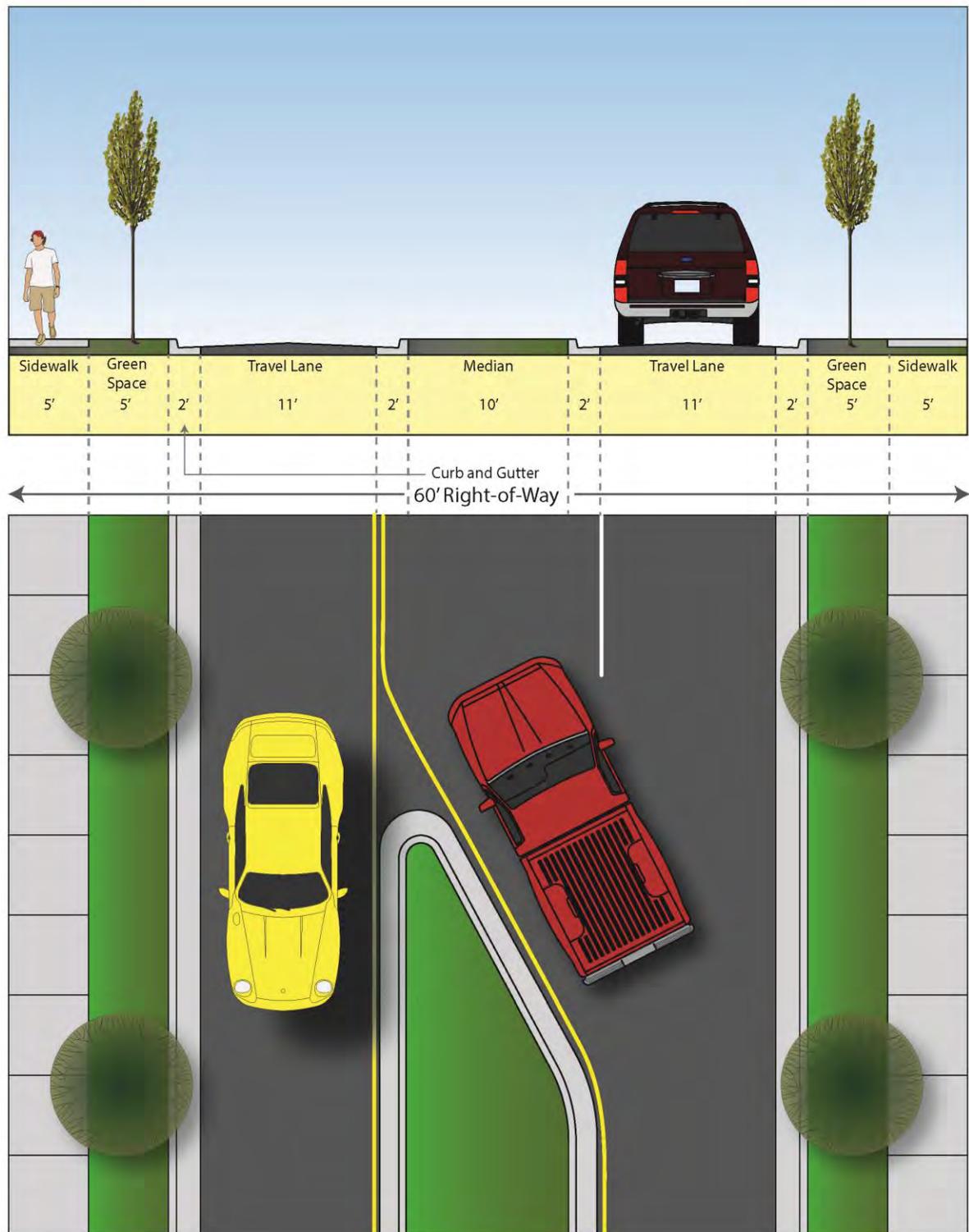
### C1.0 – Collector



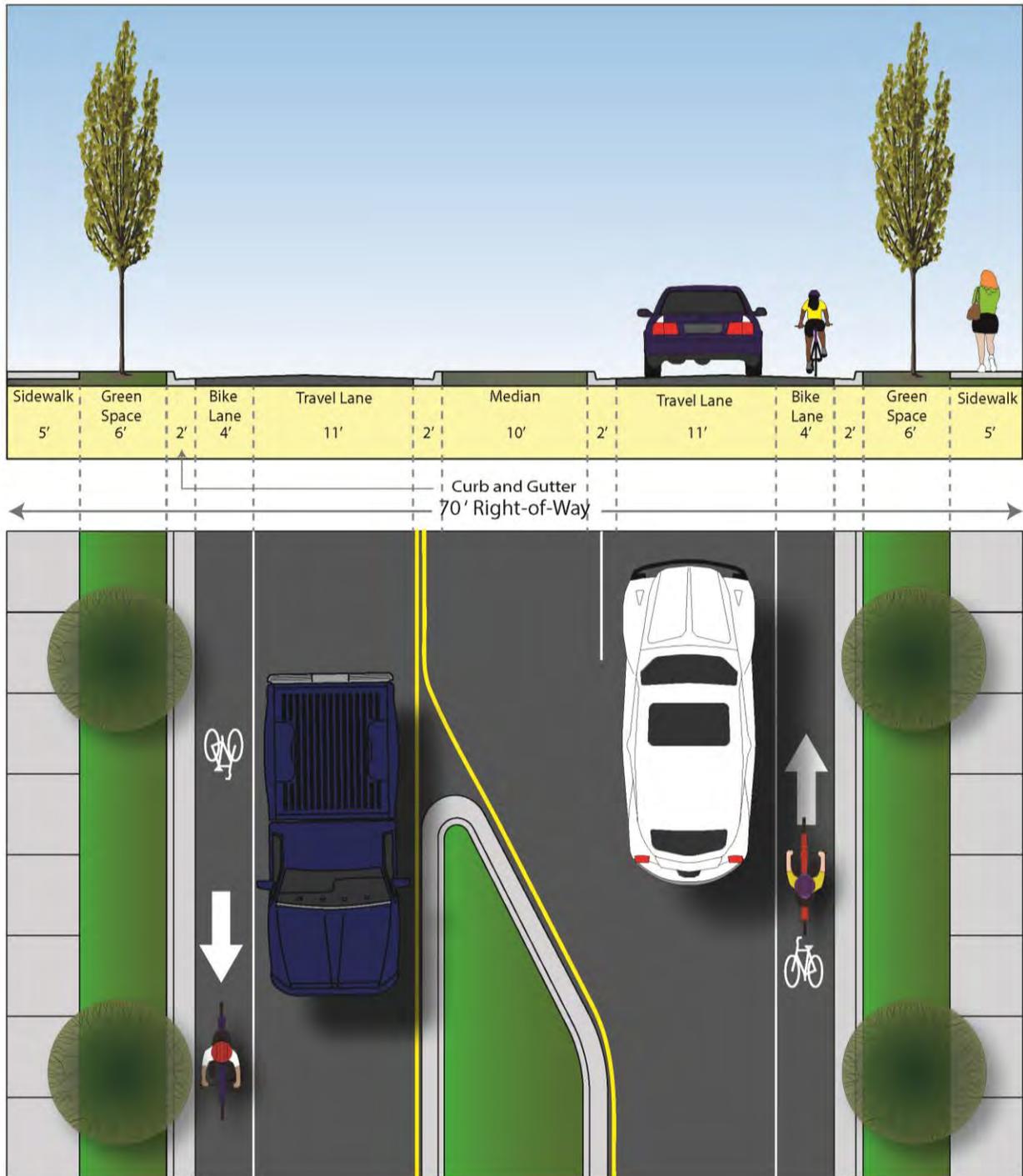
C1.1 – Collector with Mid-Block Crossing



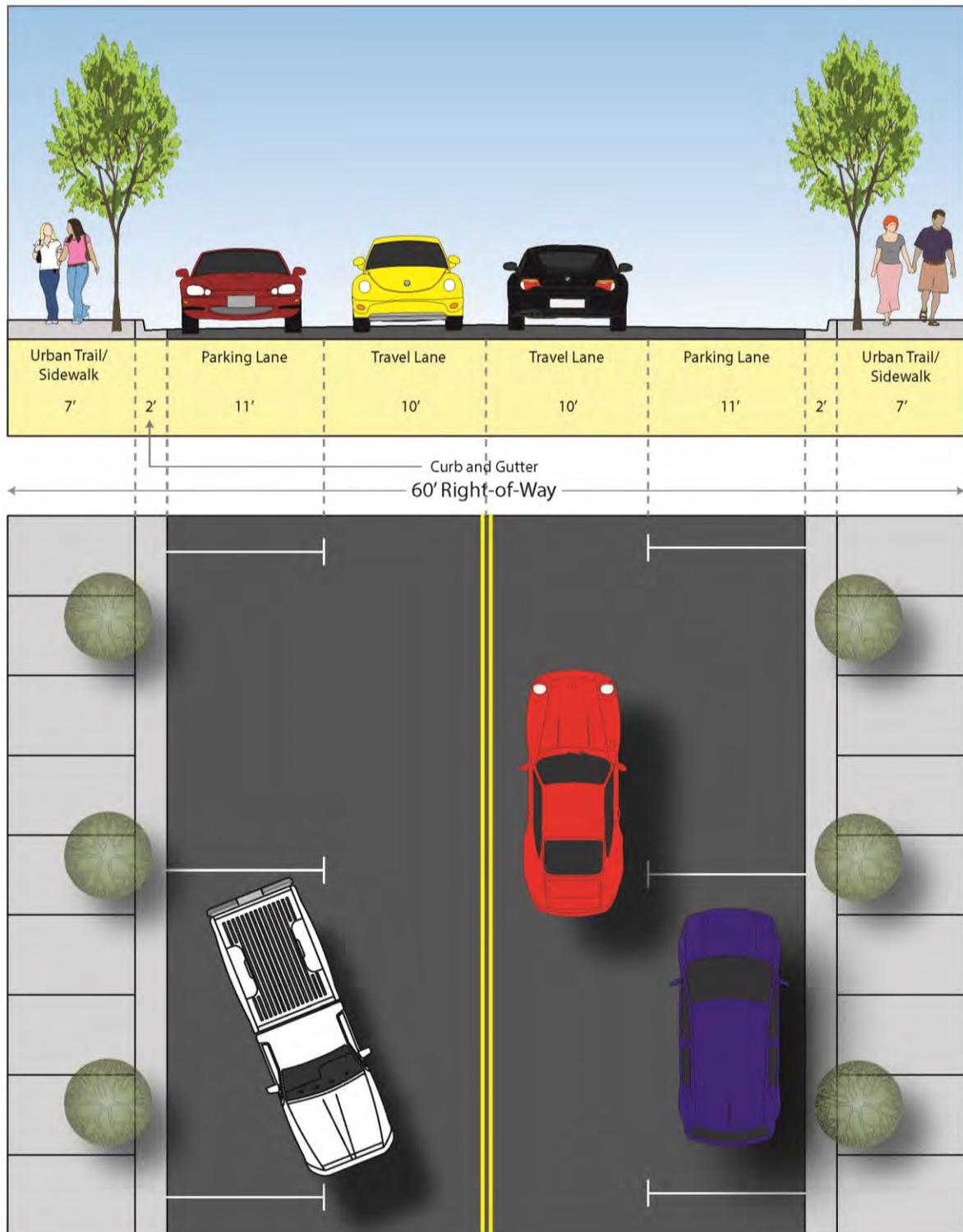
C2.0 – Collector Boulevard



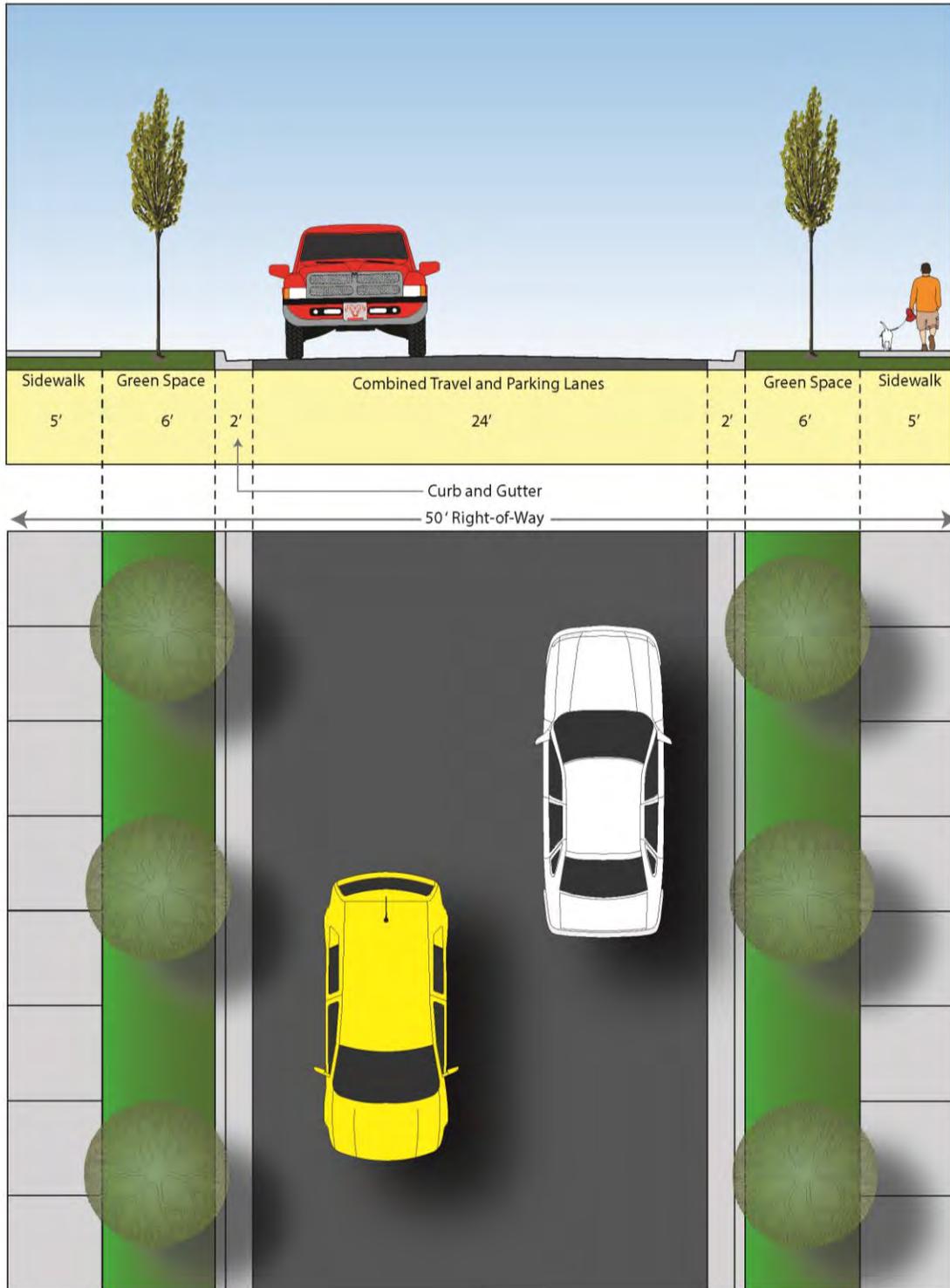
C2.1 – Collector Boulevard with Bike Lanes



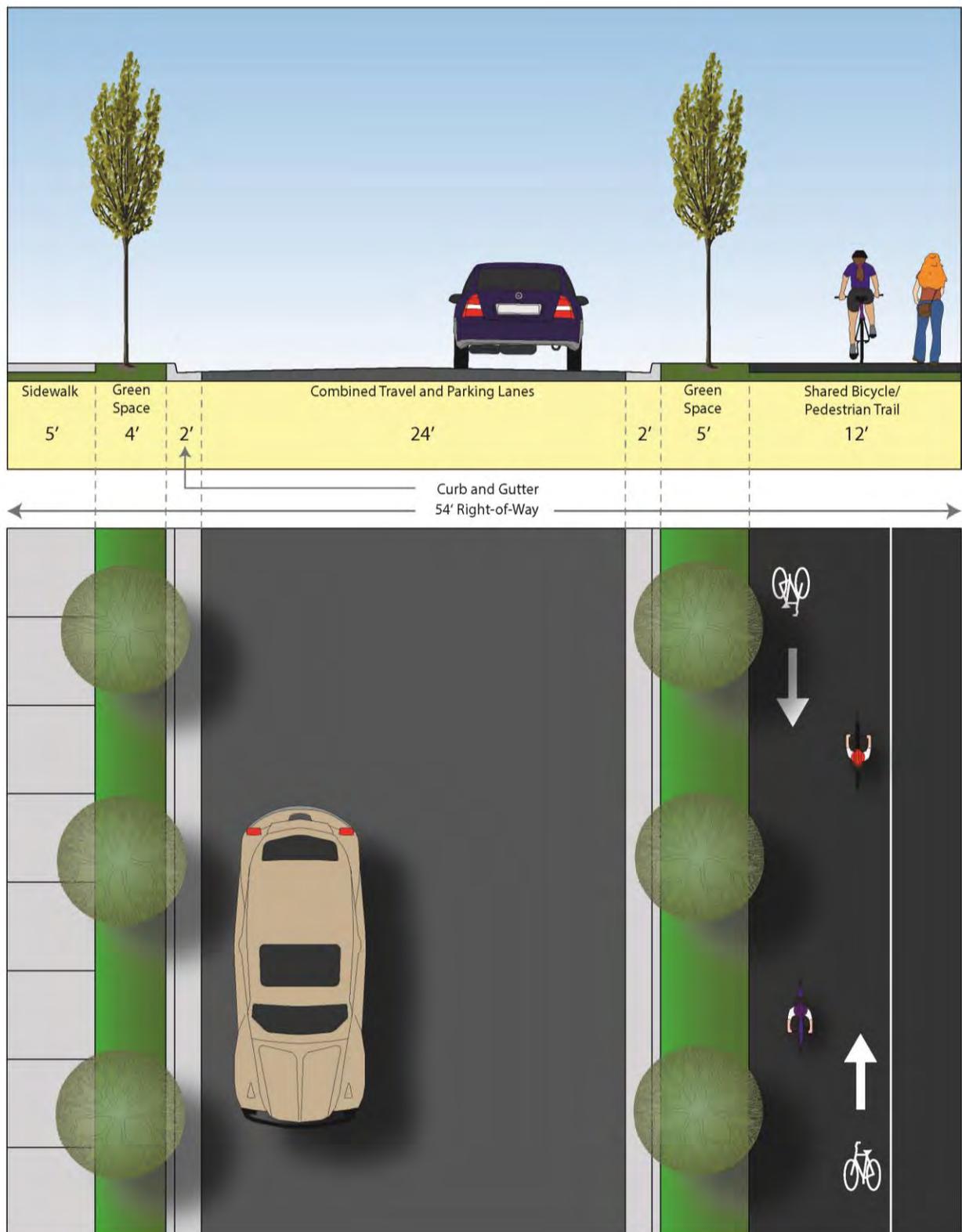
C3.0 – Urban Collector



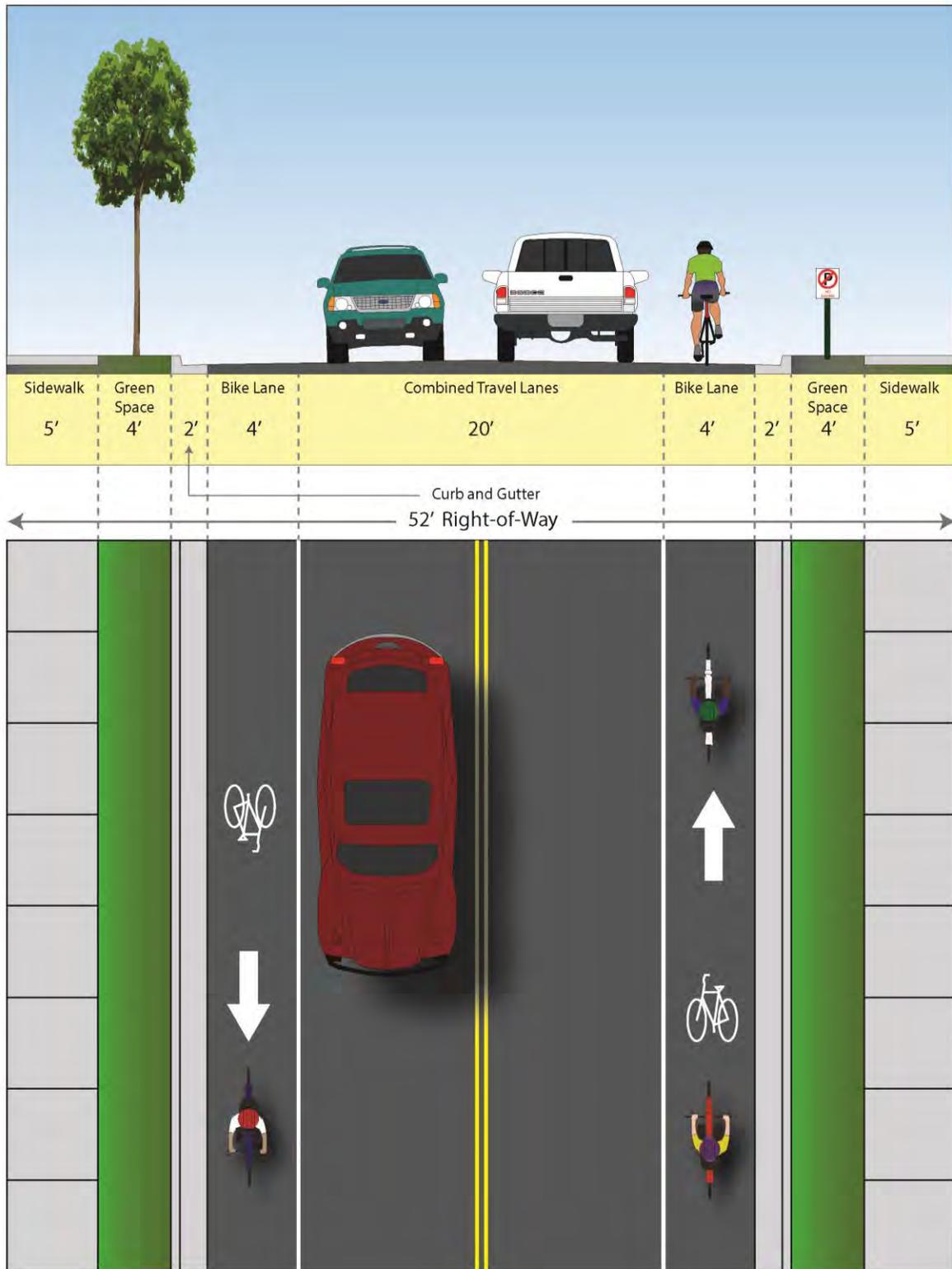
L1.0 – Local Street



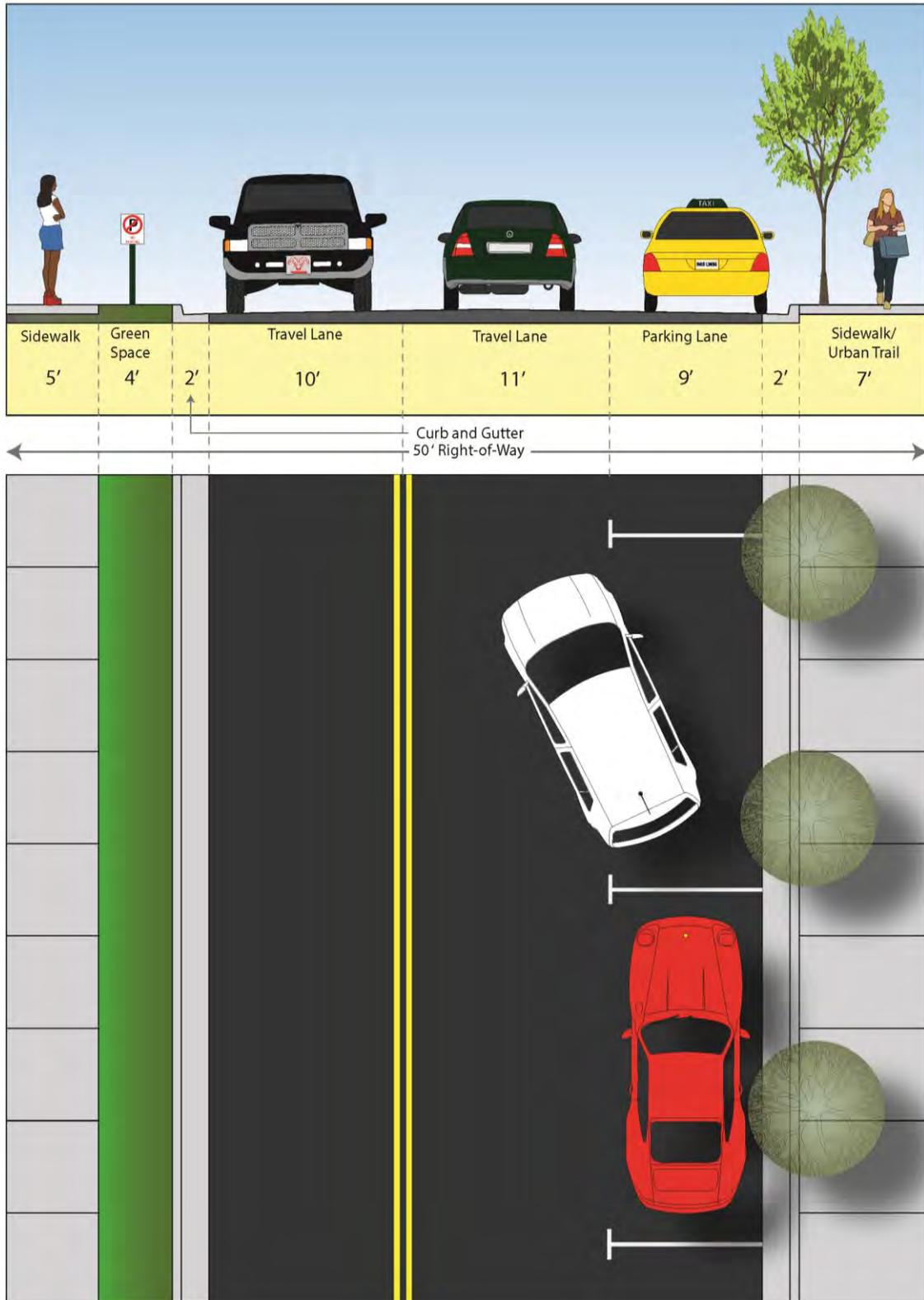
L1.1 – Local Street with Trail



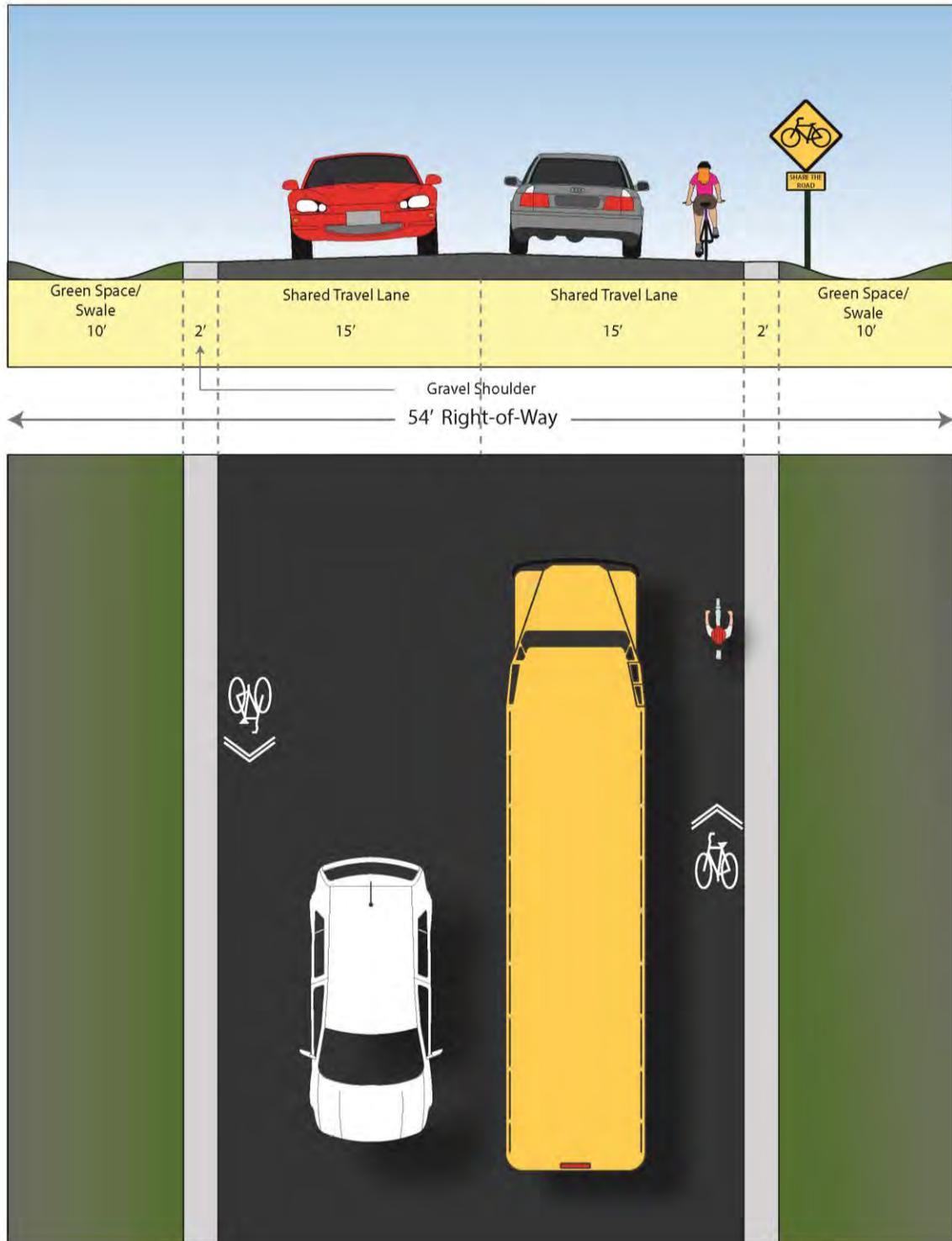
L1.2 – Local Street with Bike Lanes



L2.0 – Local Street with Parking Lane



L3.0 – Rural Local Street



# Chapter Seven: Plan Map

