



City of Riverdale Department of Community Development
Planning and Zoning Administration

STAFF REPORT
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MEETING DATE: MAY 11, 2022

Date April 27, 2022
From: Angela Rambeau, Zoning Administrator
Petition: **MARTA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Proposal**

Request: Consideration of changes to the City of Riverdale Comprehensive Plan-Community Goals and Policy and Community Work Plan

Background

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment is to reflect the significant changes associated with MARTA's planned Southlake Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. The BRT enters Riverdale from the north along SR-85. At Lamar Hutcheson Parkway it turns northeast, and then exits Riverdale on the east on Upper Riverdale Road.

This amendment establishes the policy direction of the City of Riverdale's future BRT station areas. This BRT investment will not only provide access to high-capacity transit in Riverdale but is also anticipated to spur considerable development—particularly around the future station areas.

Later in 2022, the City of Riverdale will be embarking on a full update of its Comprehensive Plan; during the full update process, the City will revise its future land use map and special planning areas to reflect Riverdale's three future station areas.

Conclusion

Staff recommends approval of the revised Comprehensive Plan.

Attachments: Appendix to City of Riverdale Comprehensive Plan

APPENDIX

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT RIVERDALE STATION AREAS

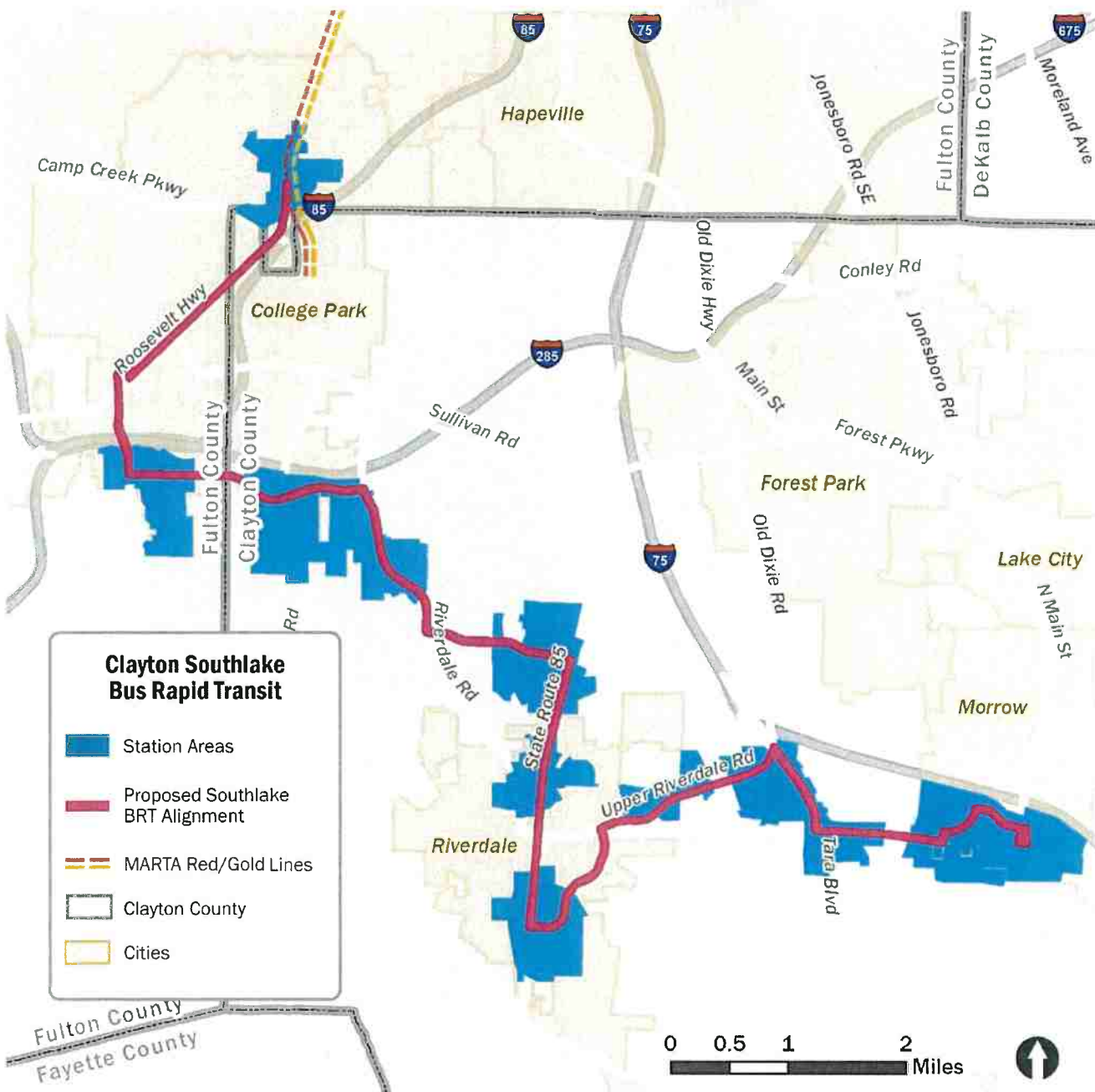


Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment is to reflect the significant changes associated with MARTA’s planned Southlake Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. Shown in Figure 1, the BRT starts at the existing MARTA heavy rail station in Downtown College Park. It then travels southwest on through College Park and unincorporated Clayton County, entering Riverdale from the north along SR-85. At Lamar Hutcheson Parkway it turns northeast, and then exits Riverdale on the east on Upper Riverdale Road.

This amendment establishes the policy direction of the City of Riverdale’s future BRT station areas. Later in 2022, the City of Riverdale will be embarking on a full update of its Comprehensive Plan; during the full update process, the City will revise its future land use map and special planning areas to reflect future station areas.

Figure 1. Map of Planned Southlake BRT Alignment



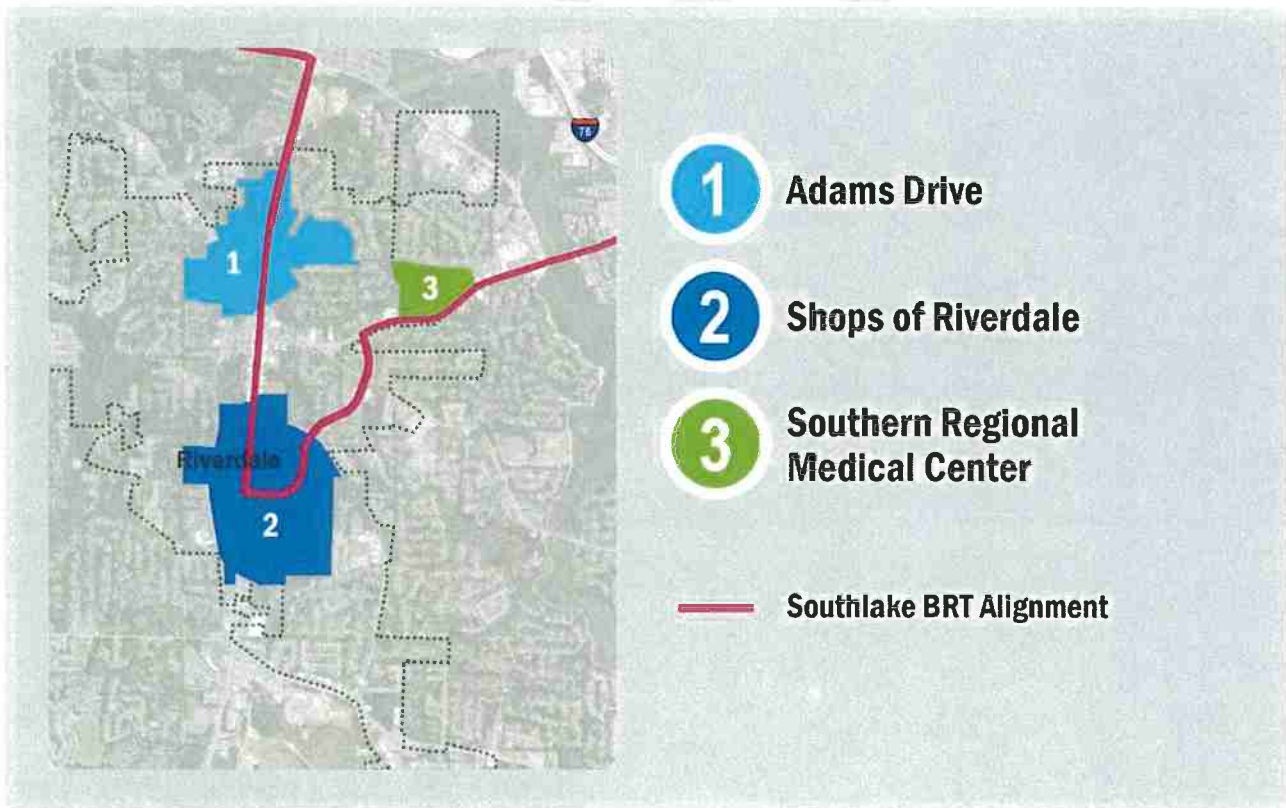
This BRT investment will not only provide access to high-capacity transit in Riverdale but is also anticipated to spur considerable development—particularly around future station areas. MARTA has been studying the proposed BRT line since 2019, and recently completed a detailed study on transit supportive land uses (TSLU) for future station areas. The study focused on the “the Big Five” elements of transit supportiveness:

1. Density/Intensity
2. Mixed Uses
3. Walkability
4. People-Friendly Design
5. Managed Parking

The TSLU study’s purpose was two-fold: develop draft model ordinances to support the future transit investment and identify station area boundaries. Ultimately the TSLU study resulted in three model ordinances that are designed to be context-sensitive. Two ordinances are intended to address “core” areas immediately surrounding the station. The first—the TOD-Core Redevelopment/New Build Model Ordinance—focuses on suburban contexts that are in need of higher levels of intervention and change through larger scaled redevelopment. The second core model ordinance—TOD-Core Infill—was developed for station areas that already have strong “bones” and walkable infrastructure in place, such as historic main street communities. The third model ordinance is Residential Support, and is intended to make modest improvements to single-family neighborhoods that are nearby.

In Riverdale, MARTA’s TSLU study identified three future station areas. These station areas were based on initial station locations from MARTA, and a robust analysis of surrounding parcels looking at 19 metrics of current and future transit supportiveness including proximity to station location, land use, infrastructure, walkability, and development potential. Figures B shows MARTA’s recommended station areas in Riverdale.

Figure 2. Southlake BRT Station Areas in Riverdale



Engagement

To vet these station areas and their associated policies, MARTA and the City of Riverdale collaborated to provide the following opportunities for public input:

- MARTA's Southlake BRT Public Workshop – March 28, 2022
- Online Survey – available March 28 – April 16, 2022
- City of Riverdale Planning Commission – May 11, 2022
- City Council Hearing – May 23, 2022

Input gathered at these opportunities was generally in favor of these station areas and the proposed policies for transit supportive land uses.

The following section is an overview of each station area, as well as preliminary development concepts.

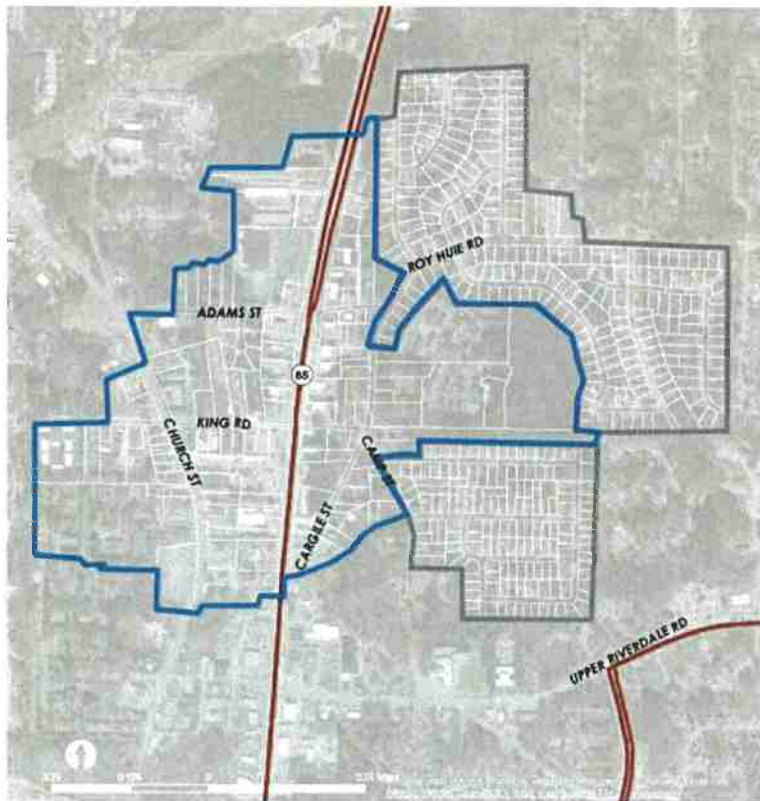
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ADAMS DRIVE STATION AREA

The Adams Drive station area is poised to serve as a gateway to Riverdale from the north. Anchored by H Mart, the proposed Adams Drive station area is characterized by SR 85 and strip commercial uses. Although not presently considered a “center” in terms of its current land uses, ridership projections for this area show strong support for a future station.

There are two single-family neighborhoods that are in close proximity to the station area. These neighborhoods are expected to remain single family, but MARTA recommends allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to encourage gentle density and greater housing diversity.

Figure 3. MARTA’s Recommended Adams Drive Station Area



- Recommended Adams Drive Station Area (TOD-Core)
- Recommended Residential Support Overlay
- Southlake BRT



Example of common housing type in adjacent residential areas



Strip commercial along SR 85

Development Concept

To demonstrate the type of development envisioned as part of a future transit station area, the planning team selected a demonstration site. This site is five parcels that constitutes the block bounded by SR 85, Camp Street, Cargile Street, and the Waffle House service drive. Currently this site is characterized by declining strip commercial uses and a densely wooded area along Cargile Street.

By redesignating this area Mixed Use Town Center, horizontal mixed use development becomes an appropriate use. This sample concept shows two multi-family buildings fronting SR 85, with a commercial building at the corner of SR 85 and Camp Street. A third multi-family building could be accommodated on the northeast corner, with a row of townhomes fronting Cargile Street providing a transition to the single-family residential area to the east.

Figure 4. Development Concept in Adams Drive Station Area



BIG FIVE ELEMENTS IN CONCEPT:



- 38 dwelling units (du)/acre for multi-family on SR 85 and townhouses
- 0.83 floor area ratio for commercial and multi-family on Camp Street



- Horizontal mixed use (Option B in ordinance)



- Pedestrian upgrades to SR 85
- Creation of two new local roadway links across site
- Connected sidewalk network



- Street trees
- Mix of new park space and preserved woodlands
- People-scaled building design and setbacks from roadways



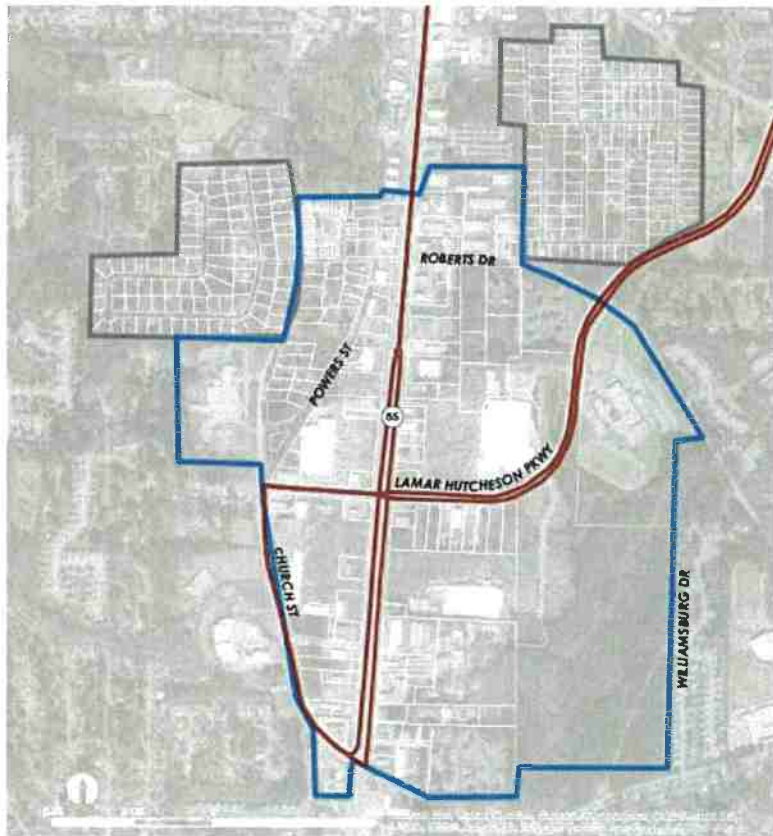
- Parking located to the rear and sides of buildings
- Reduced amounts of surface parking
- Multi-family served by internal structured parking

SHOPS OF RIVERDALE STATION AREA

The Shops of Riverdale station area is envisioned as the Riverdale Town Center, an area where the City has focused much of its recent investment. The City’s vision for the Town Center is generally aligned with transit-supportive principles and is reflected in the City’s Town Center Mixed Use (TCMU) zone.

Like Adams Drive, there are single-family neighborhoods that are in close proximity to the station area. These neighborhoods are expected to remain single family, but MARTA recommends allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to encourage gentle density and greater housing diversity.

Figure 5. MARTA’s Recommended Shops of Riverdale Station Area



- Recommended Shops of Riverdale Station Area
- Recommended Residential Support Overlay
- Southlake BRT



Example of housing in station area



Isolated pockets of green space

Sample Development Concept

To demonstrate the type of development desired in the station area, the planning team created a development concept for a site requested by the City. This large site stretches between Lamar Hutcheson Parkway and Rountree Road. It was a focus of the City's 2006 LCI study, but its proposal focal point--the Town Center--was built at a different site.

There is an almost infinite variety of possible configurations of the site for transit supportive land use. However, the presence of a creek and a major utility corridor constrain some of these options. The concept below shows a walkable retail center near Lamar Hutcheson Parkway that gives way to a residential village of mixed housing types to the south.

Figure 3. Development Concept in the Shops of Riverdale Station Area



BIG FIVE ELEMENTS IN CONCEPT:



Density/ Intensity

- 20.6 dwelling units/acre for residential
- 0.75 floor area ratio for commercial area



Mixed Use

- Horizontal mixed use (Option B in ordinance)
- Mix of housing types



Walkability

- Addition of new local roadway connections from Lamar Hutcheson Parkway to Rountree Road
- Greenway path
- Pedestrian link to adjacent school



People-Friendly Design

- Ample green/open space
- Greenway preserved
- People-scaled housing
- Building design and site locations that relates to pedestrians, not cars



Managed Parking

- Parking structure to serve retail/commercial center
- Surface lots to sides/behind residential structures

SOUTHERN REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER STATION AREA

The proposed Medical Center station area is governed by the City of Riverdale on its west side, and Clayton County on its east side. It is one of the most constrained areas in size along the proposed corridors because of the large amounts of single-family residential in close proximity to the medical center and the Flint River.

Given the small size of the station area, it is even more important that the nearby single-family neighborhoods are as transit supportive as possible. These neighborhoods are expected to remain single family, but MARTA recommends allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to encourage gentle density and greater housing diversity.

Figure 7. MARTA's Recommended Southern Regional Medical Center Station Area



- Recommended Southern Regional Medical Center Station Area
- Recommended Residential Support Zones
- Southlake BRT



Example of medical offices



Existing multi-family housing

Additional Community Goals and Policies

In addition to the City of Riverdale's existing community goals that support transit, mixed use, and smarter growth, the following are additional goals and policies to specifically support transit-oriented development around future Southlake BRT stations.

GOAL: ENCOURAGE NEW GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN STATION AREAS

- Ensure growth around future transit stations that is dense enough to support ridership, with a goal of at least 15 dwelling units/acre for residential development and floor area ratios (FAR) of 1.0 for non-residential development
- Encourage a mix of land uses around future station areas to activate areas throughout the day and evening
- Prohibit land uses that are heavily car-oriented in station areas
- Prioritize locations within future station areas for new City facilities
- Incentivize high-trip generation land uses to locate in future station areas
- Prioritize infrastructure capital improvements in future station areas to support and encourage development

GOAL: ENHANCE TRANSIT-FRIENDLY CHARACTER OF THE SOUTHLAKE BRT CORRIDOR AND AROUND ITS STATION AREAS

- Prohibit block lengths of over 800 feet in station areas
- Require people-oriented development setbacks, particularly short setbacks at building frontages
- Encourage active, people-friendly building design with active facades, high-quality design and materials, and entrances oriented toward the sidewalks
- Promote vertical and horizontal mixed uses in station areas, striving towards a diverse mix of commercial and residential uses

GOAL: EXPAND AND ENHANCE PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES IN STATION AREAS TO CREATE A COMFORTABLE, WALKABLE ENVIRONMENT

- Develop new local street connections that prioritize people and safety, minimizing lane widths and maximizing space for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit
- Design roadways to reduce crossing length for pedestrians and include pedestrian safety islands/medians where appropriate
- Require high-quality streetscape components such as trees, pedestrian-scaled lighting, benches, and substantial buffer between the sidewalk and travel lanes
- Prioritize pedestrian infrastructure that provides direct links to existing and planned regional pedestrian/bicycle connections
- Ensure sidewalk facilities are designed to maximize accessibility and accommodate the movement of people of all ability levels

GOAL: REDUCE THE AMOUNT AND VISIBILITY OF PARKING IN STATION AREAS

- Prohibit surface parking areas in front of buildings in new developments and limit parking to the sides of buildings
- Reduce parking minimums and establish parking maximums in station area zoning
- Work towards a goal of less than 2.75 parking spaces per 1,000 building square feet within station areas
- Encourage surface parking lot design that is conducive to future infill development
- Encourage shared parking
- Encourage coordinated parking districts in station areas

GOAL: PROTECT AND PROMOTE DIVERSE HOUSING OPTIONS IN STATION AREAS

- Pursue an affordable housing strategy to maintain existing affordability in the BRT corridor
- Support inclusionary housing initiatives in station areas
- Enable the construction of small residential unit sizes to promote a variety of housing types

Future Land Use

Riverdale’s future land use map was last updated in 2018. Since this time, planning for the Southlake BRT has advanced and will have a particularly strong influence around the future station areas on SR 85.

In the City’s upcoming full update of its Comprehensive Plan, the following changes are recommended:

- To improve transit-supportiveness of surrounding land uses, the Adams Drive and Shops of Riverdale station areas would transition to the Mixed Use Town Center designation.
- The Southern Regional Medical Center would remain Office Professional, but its description modified to allow a broader range of possible uses and improved walkability:

“Office Professional Mix. This classification is envisioned to primarily support an office environment, with supporting retail and residential uses. It is campus-like in setting, with a focus on walkability and connectivity to different modes of transportation.”

Special Planning Areas

In the City’s upcoming update, the three future stations areas should also become special planning areas. Specifically, the recommended changes are:

1. Adding Adams Drive Station as a “Future BRT Station Area”
2. Adding the Shops of Riverdale Station Area as a “Future BRT Station Area”
3. Expanding the Health and Wellness Service Area to include all of the Southern Regional Medical Center Station Area

Recommended text for the Future BRT Station Area is as follows:

“MARTA is advancing its plans for BRT in the City of Riverdale. The areas surrounding the future station area are in need of special consideration to plan for context-sensitive density, mixed uses, walkability, people-friendly design, and managed parking. They are also opportunities to provide a broader diversity of housing types.”

New Community Work Program Items

The following text amendments integrate transit-supportive land use principles into three new work program items. Although there are many additional projects that would support future station areas, the City will be undergoing a complete update of its Comprehensive Plan in late 2022/early 2023 and can identify specific actions through that process.

Description	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	Est. Cost	Possible Funding Source	Responsible Party
Community Development								
In the 2023 Comprehensive Plan Update, update the future land use map and special planning areas to reflect station areas					X	TBD	City	Staff/Consultant
Make minor modifications to MU and TCMU zoning districts to accommodate station area development					X	n/a	n/a	City Staff
Work with MARTA on Southlake BRT Transit Oriented Development Pilot Study				X	X	n/a	n/a	City Staff