



# 4

## ROBERTSDALE

### VISION 2040



*Future Housing and Livability*

This chapter presents Robertsdale’s long-term vision for meeting housing needs over the next 10 to 15 years. It addresses a variety of housing types and densities, affordability considerations, the scale and volume of new construction, and strategies to accommodate projected population growth through 2040. The chapter integrates insights gathered from public engagement efforts, including the community opinion survey, public workshops, and monthly work sessions. It outlines key strategies and actionable steps the city should pursue to realize the community's housing goals and vision.



While Chapter 3 of this Plan—*Robertsdale Today*—provides a snapshot of current housing conditions, this chapter builds upon that foundation to define future housing needs and align them with community preferences. Together, this creates a strategic framework to guide housing development for city leaders, residents, and stakeholders.

Robertsdale is an exceptional place to live and raise a family. The aim of this Plan is to preserve and enhance those qualities through thoughtful, responsible development that maintains the city’s small-town charm and distinctive character.

## 1. WHAT’S ON THE HORIZON?

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As outlined in Chapter 1 – *Welcome to Robertsdale*, the city is situated within the seventh-fastest growing metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in the United States. Baldwin County has experienced a 66% population increase over the past 20 years and Robertsdale’s population has increased by more than 93% since 2000, rising from 3,840 to 7,421 residents in 2023. Surrounding municipalities have seen even greater rates of growth, leading to substantial residential development—including areas outside city limits—which has placed increasing pressure on transportation infrastructure, public facilities and services. Ongoing regional economic development, including new industrial projects, and the expansion of existing industries, is generating additional employment opportunities and contributing to a growing regional workforce. Combined with a thriving tourism economy, these trends are expected to continue drawing new residents to the area. Robertsdale’s centralized location in the county positions it as a highly attractive destination for both future residents and development investment.

Where and how will Robertsdale house future residents moving into the city?

According to future population projections discussed in Chapter 3- *Robertsdale Today*, the city is expected to gain between 3,000 and 5,000 new residents by the year 2040. Depending on the growth rate applied—either the more conservative 10-year average of 2.16% or the more recent 3-year average of 3.2%—Robertsdale’s population in 2040 is estimated to range between 10,671 and 12,677. Based on U.S. Census data, the city’s average household size is 2.61 persons. Using this figure, the number of housing units required to accommodate a population increase of 3,250 to 5,256 residents is estimated at approximately 1,245 to 2,014 units. While a portion of this population growth may be absorbed by existing housing stock, a significant share will require the development of new residential units to meet future demand over the next 15 years.



If growth trends continue, future population projections for Robertsdale will require approximately 1,245 to 2,014 new housing units by 2040. This is in addition to the current population and housing stock.

Chapter 3 – *Robertsdale Today* presented building permit data for Robertsdale as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through 2022 and 2023, respectively. More recent data compiled by Baldwin County and the Eastern Shore Metropolitan Planning Organization (ESMPO) extends this analysis through 2024, offering additional insight into housing construction data within the MPO’s jurisdiction. This includes records of preliminary plats, final plats, and approved residential building permits. The ESMPO began tracking and reporting housing development data in 2018 to support regional transportation and community planning efforts. This resource enables a more detailed and up-to-date analysis of housing trends in Robertsdale and nearby communities. The data set focuses on residential subdivisions consisting of 10 or more lots or units; smaller subdivisions are not included and are therefore supplementary to the figures presented. Information about each preliminary and final plat approved is reported by year and includes the development name, location, acres, number of lots/units, density units per acre, months approved, and plat number of lots/units. The tables and charts on the following pages provide a visual summary of this data for Robertsdale and other ESMPO communities from 2018 through 2024.

Robertsdale experienced notable residential growth in 2018, with approvals for 38 new preliminary residential lots, 78 final lots, and 60 residential building permits. Growth remained steady in 2019, with 57 preliminary lots, 72 final lots, and 83 additional building permits issued. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 slowed construction activity nationwide; however, Robertsdale experienced an increase in residential development due to population migration from larger cities into Baldwin County. This is reflected in the approval of 143 new preliminary

Preliminary and Final Subdivision Plats for Housing Approved in Robertsdale 2018-2024,

Source: Baldwin County & ESMPO

Year	Development	Location	Acres	#Lots/ Units	Density Units per Acre	Month Approved	Preliminary Plats - # Lots/Units	Final Plats - #Lots/ Units
2024	Blackwater Ridge Phase 2	Northwest corner of Wilters St. and BBE	34.52	93	2.69	FEB	93	
	Blackwater Ridge Phase 3	Northwest corner of Wilters St. and BBE	18.54	89	4.80	FEB	89	
	Forest Park	East of College Ave., north of Wilters St.	95.77	129	1.35	APR	129	
	Cottages of Aventura – Phase 3 B	East of Rawls Rd., north of Thompson Rd.	10.27	34	3.31	APR		34
	Parker Place	South of AL HWY 104, west of CR 65	10.1	10	0.99	MAY	10	
	Palmer Farms	South of W. Richmond St., west of Palmer St.	19.39	18	0.93	JUN	18	
	Ridge at Robertsdale	North of CR 48, west of AL HWY 59	38.81	97	2.50	JUN		97
	Alexander Park – Phase 2	West of AL HWY 59, north of CR 48	3.53	13	3.68	AUG	13	
	Avery Park	West of AL HWY 59, south of Thompson Rd.	39	67	1.72	AUG	67	
	Amberly - Phase 3	East of Adam Dr., north of CR 48	16.99	63	3.71	SEP	63	
	Amberly - Phase 4	East of Adam Dr., north of CR 48	14.48	65	4.49	SEP	65	
	Amberly – Phase 5	East of Adam Dr., north of CR 48	10.11	48	4.75	OCT	48	
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>595</b>	<b>131</b>

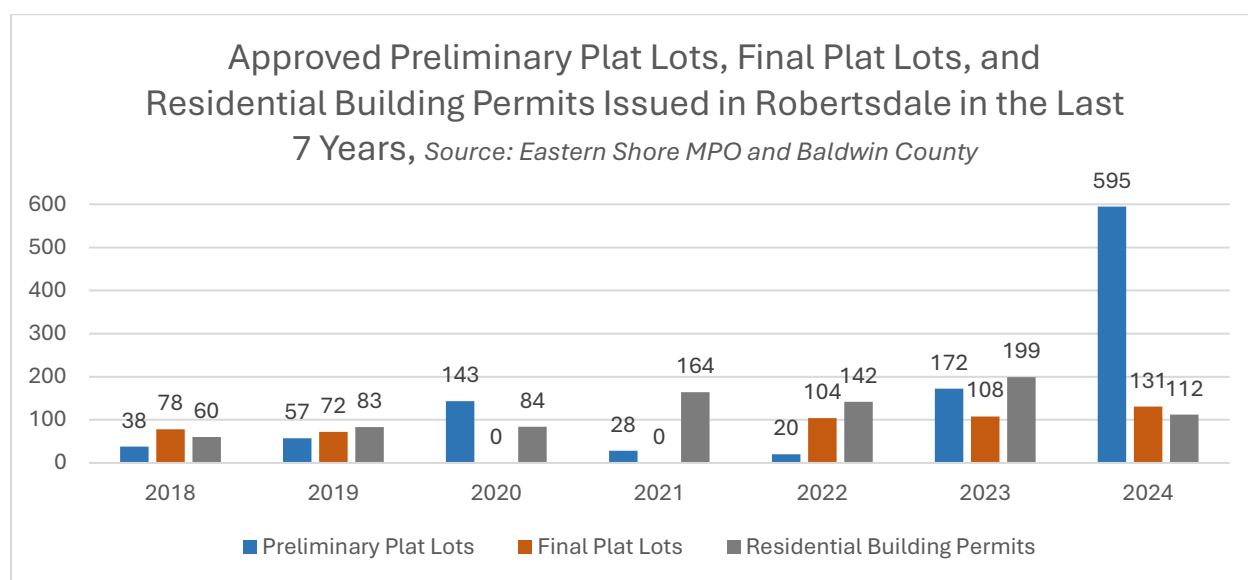
Robertsdale 2040 ~ Built Together \_\_\_\_\_

Year	Development	Location	Acres	#Lots/ Units	Density Units per Acre	Month Approved	Preliminary Plats - # Lots/Units	Final Plats - #Lots/ Units
2023	Ridge at Robertsdale	Northeast corner of CR 65 and CR 48	38.8	97	2.50	JAN	97	
	Blackwater Ridge- Phase 1	Northside of Wilters St., westside of BBE	33.04	75	2.27	APR	75	
	Cotton District - Phase 2	Northeast of CR 54, eastside of Delta Ave.	20.44	30	1.47	JUN		30
	Ponder Place- Phase 2	Southwest corner of Ponder Loop and HWY 59	10.27	43	4.19	JUL		43
	Ponder Place- Phase 3	Southwest corner of Ponder Loop and HWY 59	9.65	35	3.63	JUL		35
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>172</b>	<b>108</b>
2022	Parker Place	Eastside of Sanca Ln., south of AL HWY 104	10.1	20	1.98	MAR	20	
	Ponder Place- Phase 1	South eastwest corner of Devin Rd. and AL 59	19.08	54	2.83	JUN		54
	Amberley PUD- Phase 2	Northeast corner of CR 48 and Adams Dr.	19	62	3.26			
	Amberly 1	Northeast corner of Adams Dr. and Fairground Rd.		50		DEC		50
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>20</b>	<b>104</b>
2021	Cotton District – Phase 2	Northside of CR 54 next to Phase 1	9.45	28	2.96	SEP	28	
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>
2020	Alexander Park	Off Krachak Ln., 600 ft. east of Palmer St.	9.96	38	3.82	JAN	38	

Robertsdale 2040 ~ Built Together

	Ridgewood Park	Off Wilters St., 600 ft. west of College Ave.	38.71	55	1.42	MAY	55	
	Amberley PUD-Phase 1	Northeast corner of CR 48 and Adams Dr.	18.2	50	2.75	DEC	50	
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>143</b>	<b>0</b>
Year	Development	Location	Acres	#Lots/Units	Density Units per Acre	Month Approved	Preliminary Plats - # Lots/Units	Final Plats - #Lots/ Units
2019	Crystal Orchard-Phase 5	Northeast corner of Thompson Rd. and CR 55	33	12	0.36	JAN	12	
	Cotton District - Phase 1	North of CR 54, ½ mile west of AL HWY 59	38.38	45	1.17	FEB	45	
	Alexander Court	Westside of AL HWY 59 between CR 52 and CR 54	10.15	38	3.74	JUL		38
	Cottages of Aventura- Phase 3A	Westside of Rawls Rd. between Thompson Rd. and Devine Rd.	9.69	34	3.51	SEP		34
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>57</b>	<b>72</b>
2018	Grove Parc	CR 48 south	28.4	29	1.02	JUN		29
	Alexander Court	West Illinois St., 700 ft. west of Palmer St.	10.15	38	3.74	AUG	38	
	Ridgewood Place- Phase 1 & 2	College Ave. and Wilters St.	9.76	20	2.05	SEP		20
	Grove Park-Phase 2	North of CR 48 on eastside of AL HWY 59	28.4	29	1.02	OCT		29
<b>TOTAL</b>							<b>38</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>7 YEAR TOTAL</b>							<b>1,053</b>	<b>493</b>

lots—nearly three times the amount approved in 2018 and 2019—though no final lots were completed that year. The city also issued 84 new residential building permits in 2020. In 2021, the number of approved preliminary lots dropped significantly to 28, and final lot approvals remained at zero, highlighting the continued effects of pandemic-related shutdowns and supply chain disruptions. Despite these challenges, the city issued a record 164 residential building permits, suggesting a rise in smaller-scale residential developments (fewer than 10 lots) and ongoing population growth. By 2022, preliminary lot approvals declined further, while the number of final lots increased, indicating the progression and completion of previously approved subdivisions. That year, 142 residential building permits were issued—remaining high in comparison to earlier years.



Residential development in Robertsdale accelerated in 2023, with approvals for 172 preliminary lots, 108 final lots, and 199 residential building permits—marking the highest number of approvals across all three stages of residential development in any single year up to that point. However, 2024 surpassed these figures, with a record-setting 595 new preliminary lots approved—137 more than the combined total of the previous six years. Final lot approvals in 2024 also reached a new high of 131.

In the last three years, Robertsdale has approved 787 new residential lots on preliminary plats, 343 lots on final plats, and 453 new residential building permits. This post-pandemic surge in housing activity is projected to outpace the city’s previous housing boom in 2006. Since 2018, a total 1,053 preliminary residential lots have been approved in the city, excluding subdivisions with fewer than 10 lots. This represents the conversion of over a thousand lots of agricultural or undeveloped land to residential use, much of it with impervious surface coverage. These

developments necessitate significant investment in infrastructure, including stormwater management, sewer and water systems, and electric utilities, as well as expanded public services such as police, fire protection, education, and healthcare.

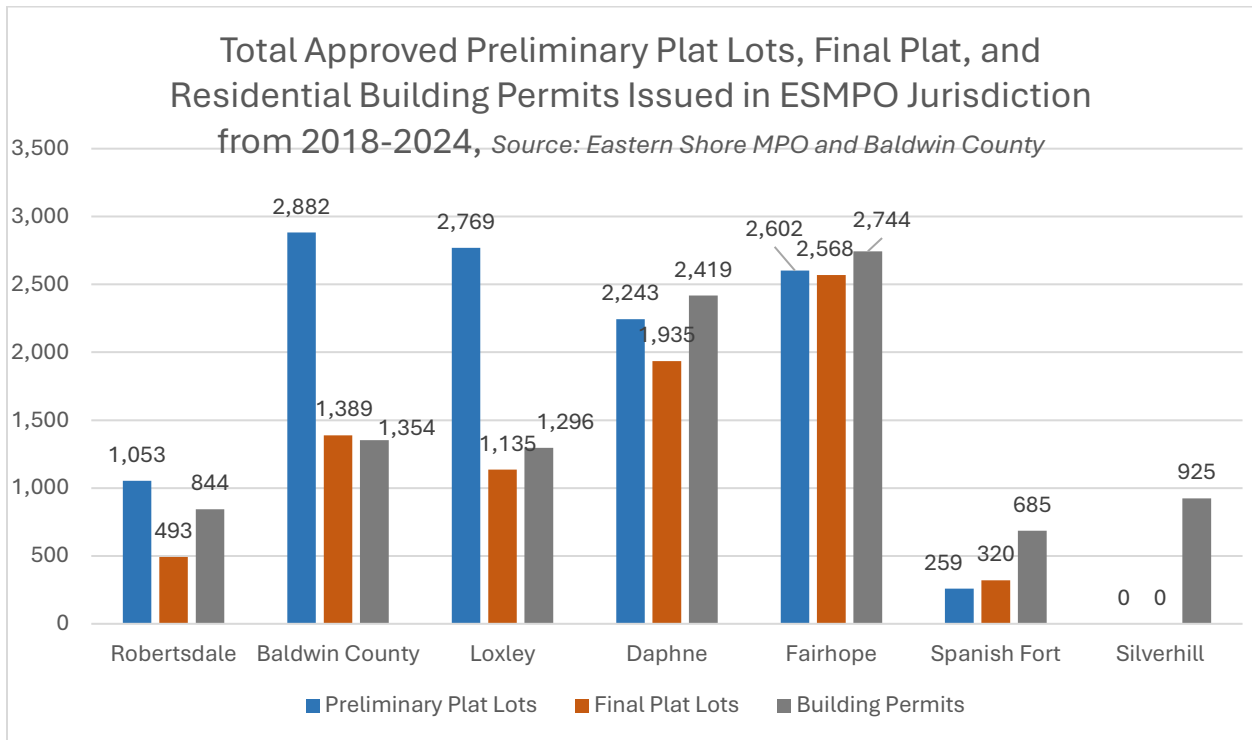


Robertsdale has approved 1,053 preliminary lots, 493 final lots, and 844 residential building permits since 2018.

The housing recommendations and strategies outlined in the City's previous Comprehensive Plan projected the need for 945 additional housing units by 2025—bringing the total to 3,109 units—to accommodate anticipated population growth. These projections emphasized the development of affordable housing in response to priorities identified through public engagement and community input gathered for the previous plan. According to U.S. Census estimates, Robertsdale had approximately 2,741 housing units in 2022, falling 368 units short of the 2025 target, though still three years from the projected benchmark. However, based on preliminary plat data from Baldwin County and the Eastern Shore Metropolitan Planning Organization (ESMPO) for 2023 and 2024, the city has surpassed the plan's housing goal. An estimated 399 additional units have been approved beyond the original projection, bringing the city's estimated total housing stock to approximately 3,508 units, not including new residential constructions under 10 lots. This surplus, driven by market demand, highlights the rapid pace of growth in Robertsdale and Baldwin County. It also provides a buffer that can be applied toward meeting long-term housing needs identified in this plan update. **As a result, the projected number of additional housing units needed by 2040 to meet projected population growth could be revised to an estimated range of 1,245 to 1,615 units. It is important to note that this estimated "need" only applies if the desire to continue to grow at the existing rate is supported.**

Residential construction data for Robertsdale highlights the city's steady growth over the past six years; however, this growth is modest compared to the significant residential development observed in most other communities within the Eastern Shore MPO (ESMPO) jurisdiction, as shown in the following diagram. Communities such as Fairhope, Daphne, Loxley, and unincorporated Baldwin County have each experienced two to three times the residential development seen in Robertsdale during the same period. From 2018 to 2024, Baldwin County approved 2,882 preliminary plats, followed by Loxley with 2,769, Fairhope with 2,602, and Daphne with 2,243. In terms of final plats, Fairhope approved 2,568—five times more than Robertsdale—followed by Daphne with 1,935, Baldwin County with 1,389, and Loxley with 1,135. Residential building permits were 2-3 times Robertsdale's totals, with Fairhope issuing 2,744, Daphne 2,419, Baldwin County 1,354, and Loxley 1,296. Among the ESMPO communities, only

Spanish Fort and Silverhill experienced slightly less residential development than Robertsdale during this six-year timeframe.



Several municipalities within Baldwin County have enacted temporary development moratoriums in response to rapid growth and its associated impacts on infrastructure and quality of life. Since 2020, Fairhope, Daphne, Spanish Fort, Foley, Gulf Shores, and Orange Beach have adopted these measures to ensure that existing infrastructure and public services—including water, sewer, gas, schools, roadways, police, and fire protection—can adequately support current residents while being upgraded to accommodate future growth. While these communities remain committed to supporting growth and progress, unregulated or accelerated development can place unsustainable pressure on essential services. Temporary moratoriums can provide the necessary pause for strategic planning, enabling local governments to assess the impact while guiding and managing growth. Moratoriums can give cities time to improve infrastructure capacity and thoughtfully map out the type of progress and development that blends into the community’s character and preserves the atmosphere residents desire.

Public input gathered during the engagement process for this Comprehensive Plan update reveals a significant shift in community perspectives on housing compared to the previous plan. While earlier goals emphasized expanding the housing stock with a focus on affordability, current feedback reflects a distinctly different set of priorities and strategies for guiding residential development over the next 10 to 15 years.

## 2. WHAT DID THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS TELL US?

Ongoing public engagement was a key component throughout the two-year comprehensive plan update. During the development of this plan, residents had opportunities throughout the planning process to voice their opinions and provide feedback on key issues important to them. Chapter 2 – *Comprehensive Plan Overview* – provides a detailed explanation of the public engagement efforts and the various tools used to gather community input. It details a summary of the results of the Public Opinion Survey and provides analysis of citizens' current housing goals and desires. For a complete inventory of the feedback received through the public opinion survey, community workshops, and steering committee work sessions, refer to Appendix 1: *Public Engagement – Visioning Survey Results*.



Some comments pertaining to housing were recurring and repeated, resulting in these views to be more pronounced than others, shaping a pattern for analysis. These views and perceptions, along with their associated research, were used to formulate the housing goals and strategies outlined at the end of the chapter. The analysis of each viewpoint focused on why the perception exists, how extensive is the cause, and what we can do to remedy the concern and support the desired solution.

### *What We Heard from the Community...*



The city has experienced too much residential subdivision development in recent years and is growing too fast. We're losing the small-town feel of our community.

Too many large farm homesteads, agricultural lots, and open spaces have been developed into housing subdivisions. It's changing our rural culture and identity.



The increased housing and subdivision development has put too much strain on the existing infrastructure. The effects are having an adverse impact on public services.

Some of the new housing subdivisions that have been built in recent years have structures that are too small, too close together, and not constructed with high quality materials or design.

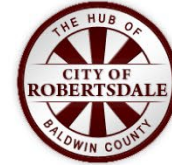
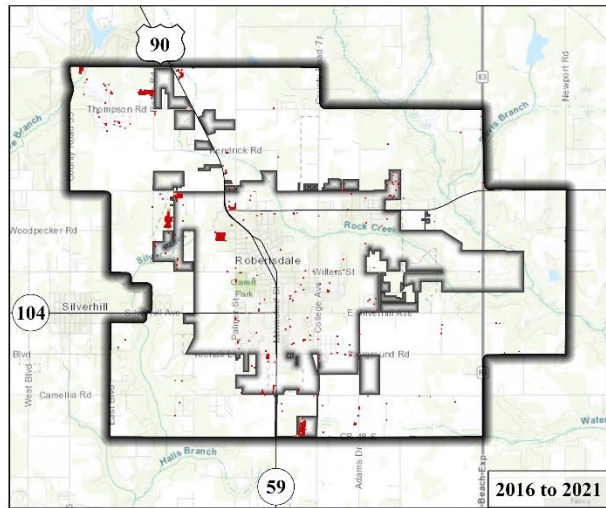
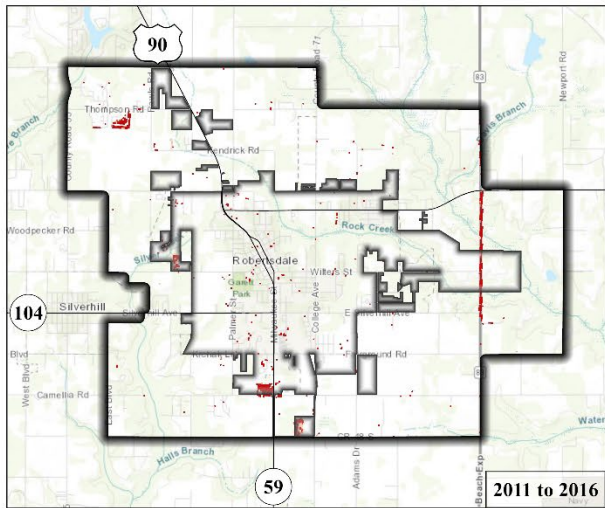
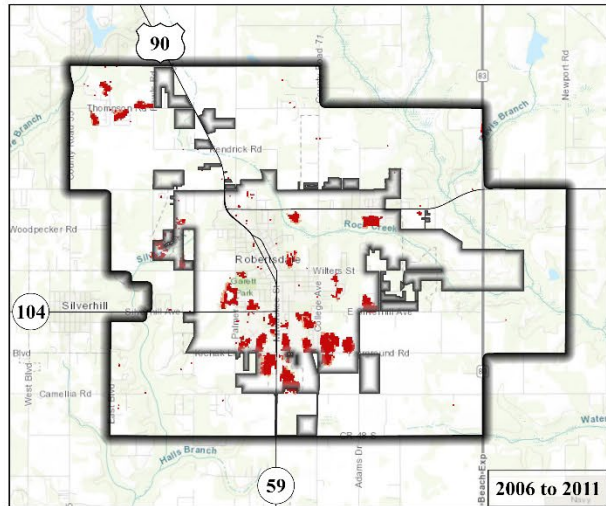
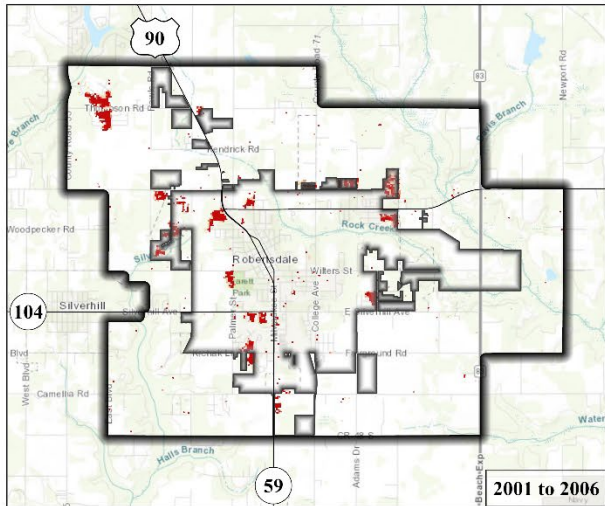


We need more affordable housing in Robertsdale. Longtime residents are being priced out of their hometown. We need more affordable options for seniors too.

## ***Taking a Closer Look...The Housing Boom and the Decline of Agriculture***



To evaluate the extent of farmland and open space loss in Robertsdale in recent years, the SARPC planning team conducted an impervious surface analysis spanning from 2001 to 2021, utilizing the latest available Esri software and data. Impervious surface analysis measures and maps areas where the ground no longer allows water infiltration—such as roads, rooftops, and parking lots—by analyzing changes in aerial imagery over time. The following maps display this transformation in five-year increments, highlighting where previously pervious areas, including agricultural lands, have been converted to impervious surfaces through development.



**Farmland Loss: 2001 to 2021**

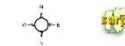
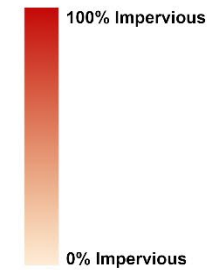
These maps indicate those areas in which totally pervious surfaces (such as farmland and other open greenspace) were replaced by impervious surfaces in the time frame labeled on each map.

Overall, from 2001 to 2021, we lost a total of 65 acres of open space to highly developed land, and a total of 599 acres to varying degrees of intensity (from 20% to 100% imperviousness).

Areas of deepest red show us where open space was converted to total impervious surface (100%).

Land Use Study Area

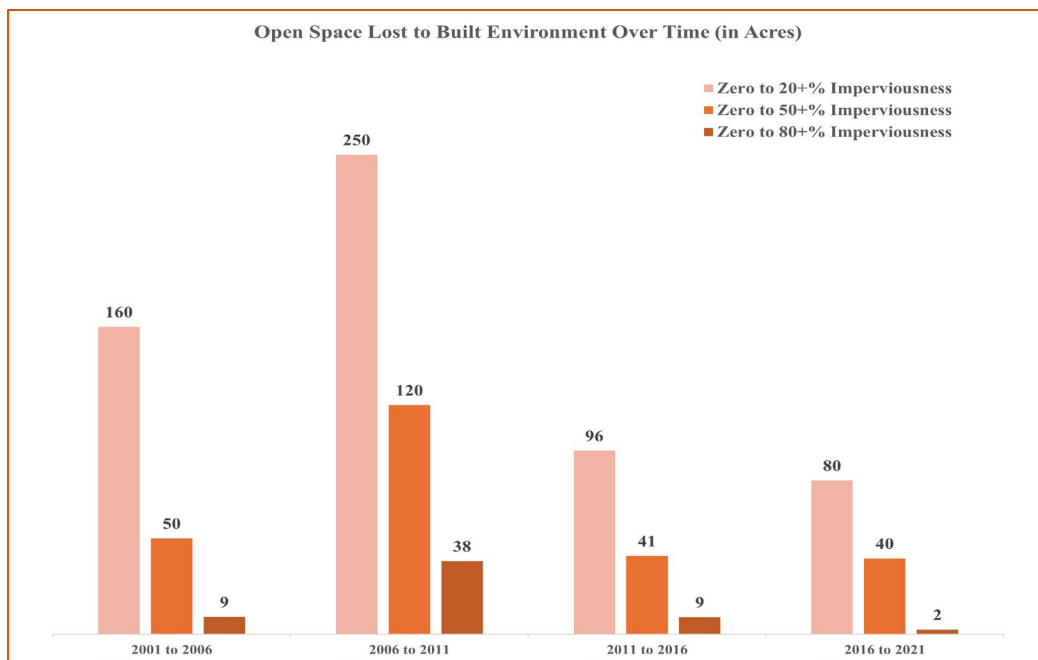
Corporate Limits



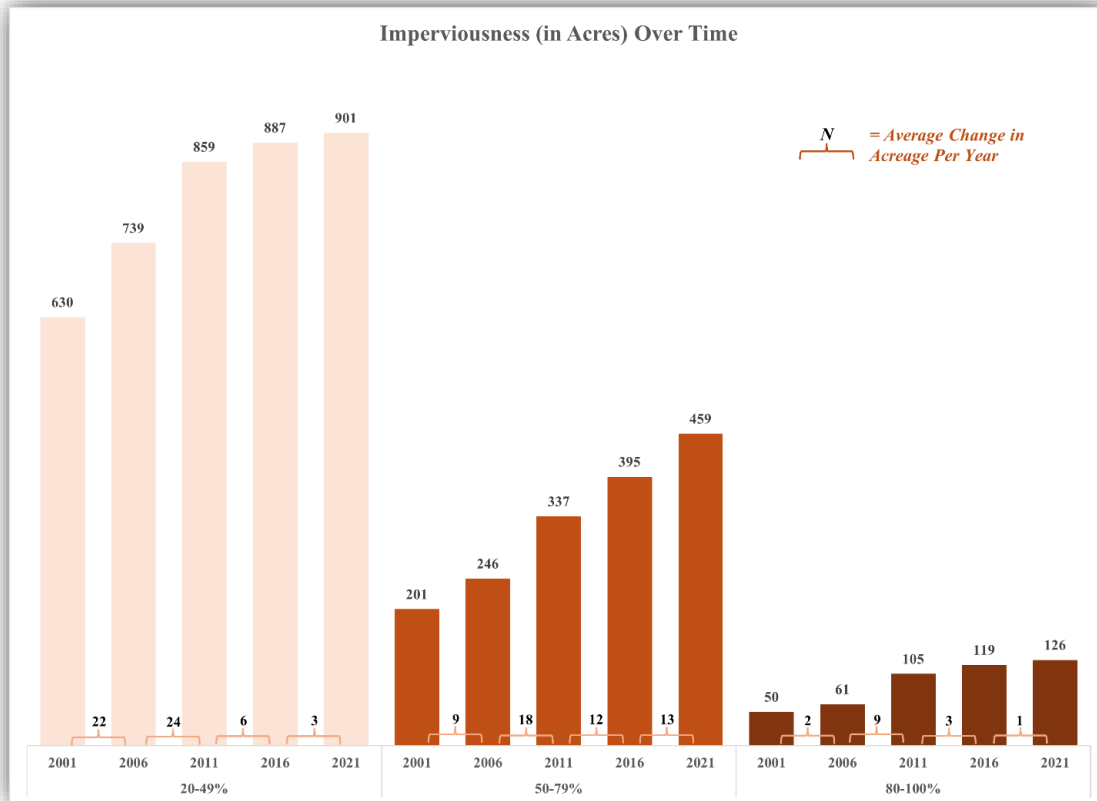
Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, NGA, EPA, USDA, NPS

An analysis was conducted on the designated Land Use Study Area, delineated by the outer boundary, with municipal limits also clearly identified. The red areas on the accompanying maps indicate where previously pervious land was converted to impervious surfaces due to development—darker shades of red signify a higher percentage of imperviousness. The first two maps, covering the periods 2001–2006 and 2006–2011, illustrate significantly more development activity compared to the later two timeframes. During both earlier periods, major subdivision developments were constructed in the northwest area outside of Robertsdale’s municipal boundaries. These years also saw the addition of apartment complexes and notable expansion at the city’s industrial park. Growth occurred across several sectors, including healthcare, municipal services, and recreational facilities. Between 2006 and 2011, there was a marked increase in commercial development along Highway 59, accompanied by new residential subdivisions in the southern portion of the city. The substantial growth observed between 2001 and 2011 corresponds with the national housing boom of the 2000s, as described in Chapter 3 – *Robertsdale Today*. This period of market-driven expansion contributed to widespread development across Baldwin County, transforming large areas of pervious, often agricultural, land into impervious surfaces.

The following diagram illustrates the loss of open space acreage as it transitioned to varying levels of imperviousness over time. Changes were measured across three thresholds: from 0% to 20%+, 0% to 50%+, and 0% to 80%+ imperviousness within each timeframe. Between 2001 and 2011, approximately 410 acres of previously fully pervious land became at least 20% impervious, 170 acres reached 50% imperviousness, and 47 acres exceeded 80%



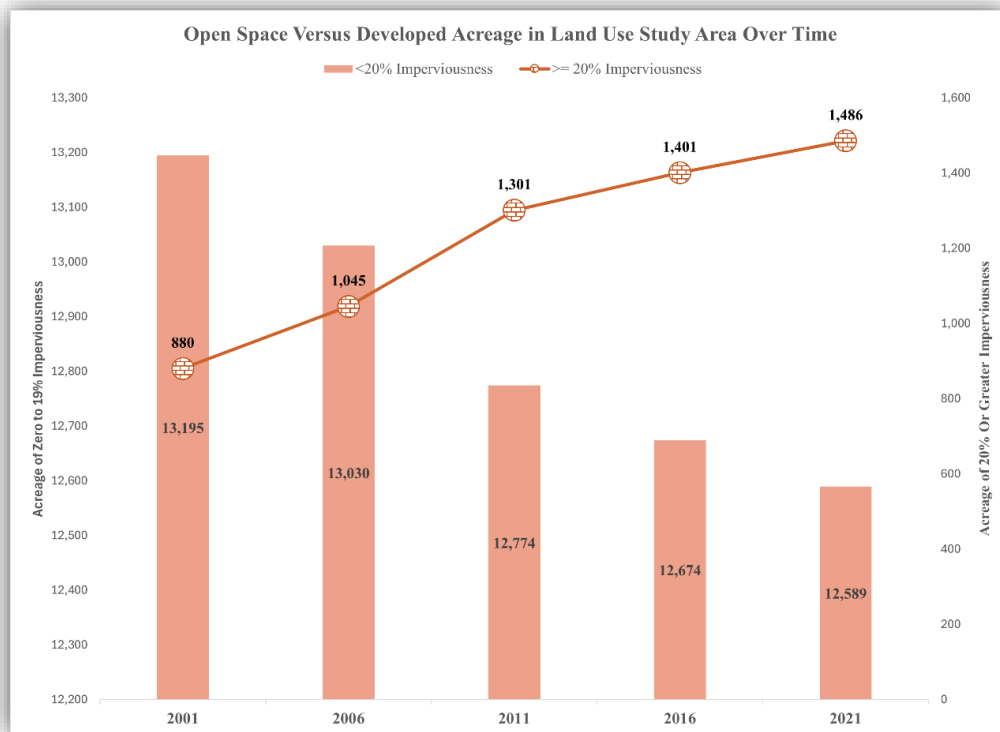
imperviousness within the study area. It is important to note that this conversion was not limited to residential development; a significant portion of the land was developed for commercial, institutional, industrial, recreational, and municipal uses.



The diagram above presents an inventory of acreage by imperviousness level within the Land Use Study Area for each year, along with the average annual acreage change due to development. For instance, in 2006, the study area contained 739 acres classified as 20–49% impervious. By 2011, this increased to 859 acres—reflecting an additional 120 acres and an average annual conversion of approximately 22 acres of fully pervious land. As shown in the accompanying maps, the majority of development within the study area occurred between 2001 and 2011.

Following the Great Recession, development activity within the area slowed considerably. Between 2011 and 2016, notable developments included the construction of the Wal-Mart Supercenter and two new residential subdivisions, with continued residential growth occurring in the northwest area outside Robertsdale’s municipal limits. From 2016 to 2021, the city experienced additional residential subdivision expansions, ongoing growth in the northwest unincorporated area, and more commercial and municipal development.

The following diagram illustrates the change in open space versus developed acreage within the Land Use Study Area over time. In 2001, approximately 13,195 acres of land were classified as less than 20% impervious, while 880 acres exceeded the 20% impervious threshold. By 2021, the extent of land with less than 20% imperviousness had declined to 12,589 acres, while land with more than 20% imperviousness increased to 1,486 acres—reflecting a net shift of over 600 acres. This trend highlights the gradual reduction of open space and the steady expansion of developed land throughout the study area.

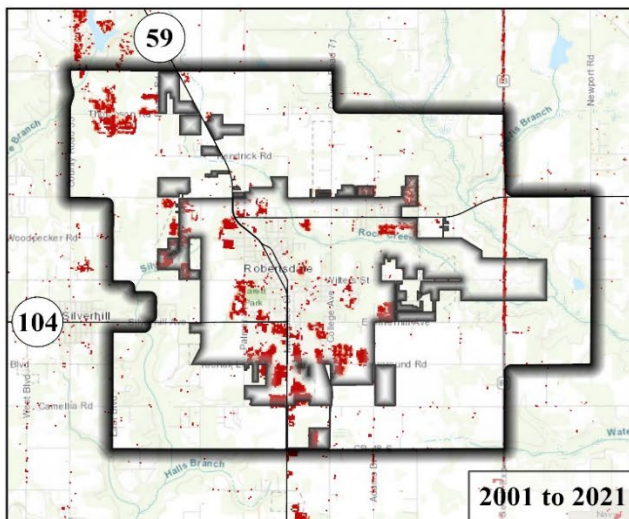
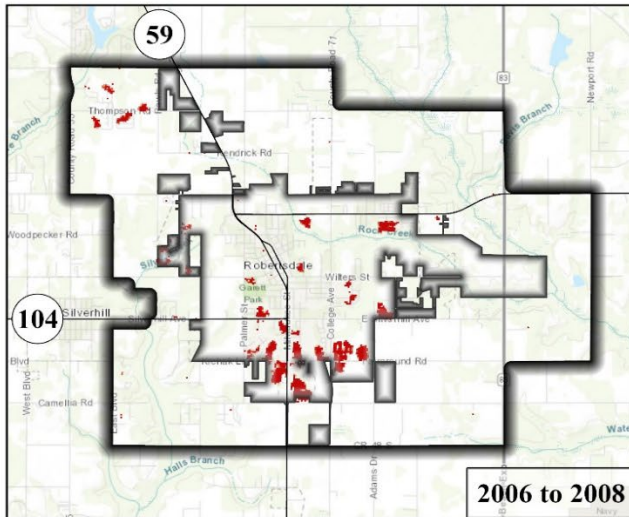
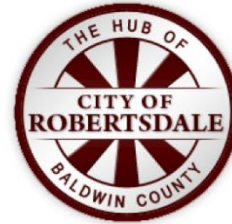


The analysis of the Land Use Study Area from 2001 to 2021 reveals that approximately 65 acres of open space were converted to highly developed land, with a total of 599 acres developed to varying degrees of imperviousness (ranging from 20% to 100%). In total, over 600 acres of previously fully pervious land were transformed into a mix of land uses over the past two decades. This pattern of development has contributed to growing community concerns regarding the pace of growth, the loss of agricultural lands, and the proliferation of new subdivisions. It is important to point out that these figures reflect the broader Land Use Study Area, not just the land within Robertsdale’s municipal boundaries, and that a substantial



Over 600 acres of open land were transformed into a mix of developed land uses over the past two decades in the Robertsdale study area.

portion of this development was non-residential in nature. The majority of this transformation occurred during the mid-2000s housing boom, particularly between 2006 and 2008, as depicted in the maps and diagrams.



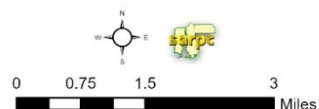
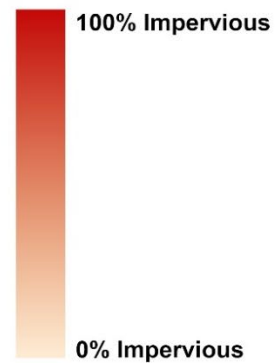
### Farmland Loss: A Closer Look

Breaking the 2006 to 2011 timeframe into smaller increments, we find a significant upward development trend for the period between 2006 and 2008. This is shown here to visualize the intensity of open space loss during this time.

We find that from 2006 to 2008, 35 acres of open space were lost to highly developed land. This is the most significant change of any time period studied.

Overall, from 2001 to 2021, we lost a total of 65 acres of open space to highly developed land, and a total of 599 acres to varying degrees of intensity (from 20% to 100% imperviousness).

- Land Use Study Area
- Corporate Limits



## DID YOU KNOW?

Impervious surface analysis is not only beneficial in studying development patterns over time, it is also used to reduce the effects of urban development on water resources, especially in relation to stormwater runoff and flood risk. It helps support informed decision-making for environmental impact and the planning of effective stormwater management for developed areas as well as our croplands. Here's a few applications for the study maps:

**Stormwater management:** Designing drainage systems, implementing green infrastructure (e.g., rain gardens, permeable pavements), and establishing stormwater retention ponds to mitigate the effects of increased runoff.

**Sustainable development:** Identifying areas for green spaces, promoting low-impact development (LID) practices, and managing the overall density of development to minimize impervious surface coverage.

**Water quality management:** Assessing the impact of impervious surfaces on water quality and implementing strategies to reduce pollutant runoff that affects community water supply.

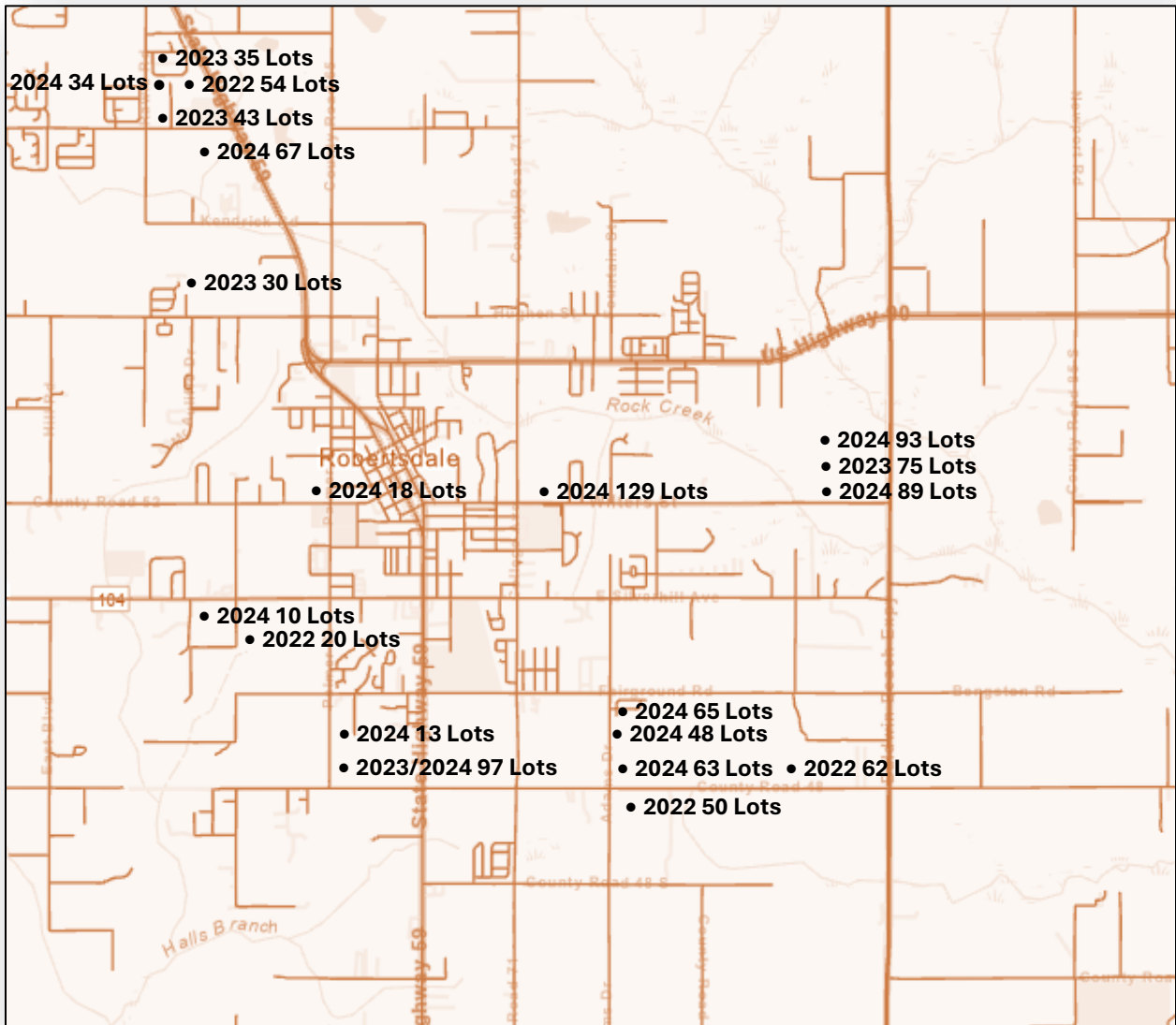
**Land use planning:** Informing zoning regulations, building codes, and development guidelines related to impervious surface coverage.

**Infrastructure planning:** Guiding the design and placement of transportation networks, buildings, and other infrastructure to minimize impervious surfaces and their associated impacts.

It is important to emphasize that this analysis covers data only through 2021. However, more recent information from the Eastern Shore MPO and Baldwin County, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, indicates a notable surge in residential development within the city during 2022, 2023, and 2024. The *Preliminary and Final Plats for Housing Approved in Robertsdale* table in the previous section identifies the locations of these new subdivisions. The proposed densities and number of units in each development offer insight into the potential impacts of continued open space conversion on community perception, infrastructure, and public services.

Over the past three years, Robertsdale has approved a total of 1,095 new residential lots through both preliminary and final plats, encompassing approximately 450 acres of previously undeveloped land. This represents roughly 75% of the total acreage developed over the past 20 years, now proposed for construction within a condensed 3- to 5-year period. As these developments are built out, it will be critical to closely monitor their cumulative impacts on infrastructure and public services—including roadways, utilities, and schools—to ensure the continued delivery of quality service and the protection of public safety. **An analysis of the city's current utilities, infrastructure, and public services is assessed in Chapter 9 – Future Community Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure.** The following map illustrates the recently approved subdivisions, their locations, and the number of lots associated with each.

### NEW RESIDENTIAL APPROVED LOTS IN ROBERTSDALE FROM 2022, 2023, AND 2024, GENERAL LOCATIONS



Approximately 1,095 new residential lots are in various phases of development in Robertsdale from recent plat approvals, totaling over 450 acres of land slated for development.

In conclusion, the analysis of open space and farmland loss within the study area over the past 24 years reveals that nearly 1,700 acres have been converted—or are in the process of being converted—from 100% pervious land into varying degrees of development and impervious surface. This market-driven growth, not only in Robertsdale but throughout Baldwin County, is transforming the rural landscape and shifting predominant land uses from agriculture and farming to suburban and urban development. Almost all of this change is driven by private property owners who choose to sell their highly desirable acreage for substantial profit. While local governments have limited authority to intervene, there are ways they can support farmers who wish to continue in the profession.

Farmers across Baldwin County are choosing to sell and exit farming altogether—a trend that reflects a broader national issue affecting many rural communities. The result is the gradual erosion of the rural, small-town identity that defines so many cities. Having a better understanding of the problem is key to formulating solutions:

## **“Don’t Sell the Farm!”**

### **Addressing the Decline of Family Farms and the Exit from Local Agriculture:**

The sentiment of "don't sell the farm" reflects the deep value placed on agricultural land within communities, encouraging farm owners to retain their property and resist subdivision for development. The growing trend of farmers selling their land and leaving the agricultural profession is a national issue with implications for food security, rural economies, and the future of farming. Small and family-owned farms, in particular, face mounting challenges, including economic and financial pressures, encroaching development, market volatility, and limited access to resources and support systems. Perhaps the most pressing factor is the aging farming population and the lack of younger family members willing to take on the demanding lifestyle—especially given the modest financial return. Even with these challenges, protecting existing farmland is important because it holds significant social and cultural value, shaping the character of rural communities and serving as a source of identity for many families. Land ownership is often viewed as a lasting intergenerational legacy, passed down through generations and reinforcing family and cultural bonds. In addition, protecting local farmland is essential to ensuring long-term food security and a stable, resilient food supply.



### **Why Are Farmers Leaving the Land?**

- Shrinking Profit Margins -Farmers face volatile markets, rising input costs (seeds, fertilizer, equipment), and unpredictable commodity prices—making it harder to sustain a profitable operation.

- Development Pressure & Land Values -Rapid urbanization and real estate demand drive up land values and taxes. Selling land becomes too tempting, even for farmers who want to keep farming.
- Aging Farming Population -The average farmer is nearing retirement. Many lack a succession plan, and younger generations are less likely to take on the demanding lifestyle with limited financial return.
- Competition from Agribusiness -Large-scale operations benefit from economies of scale, outcompeting smaller farms on cost, efficiency, and access to markets.
- Debt & Limited Financing -Many small farms rely on loans. When prices fall or costs rise, debt becomes unsustainable. Affordable financing and market contracts remain out of reach for many.
- Barriers for First-Time & Expanding Farmers -High land prices, expensive equipment, and lack of capital make it difficult for new farmers to get started or for existing farms to grow. These trends also erode rural jobs and community support systems tied to agriculture.



### What Can We Do About It?

Simply urging landowners not to subdivide is not enough. As the phrase “*you can’t make people farm*” suggests, the challenges facing agriculture go far beyond land use choices. Real, lasting solutions require a combination of policy, education, financial tools, and community support:

- Conservation Easements -Voluntary legal agreements that permanently restrict development on private land to protect resources, including agricultural use. In return, landowners may receive tax benefits or financial compensation. A tool used in Farmland Protection Programs but can be used alone by individual property owners.
- Farmland Protection Programs -Government strategies and programs—such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)—offer incentives like tax relief or direct payments to landowners in exchange for conservation easements that keep land in agricultural use.
- Agricultural Zoning -Land use regulations that restrict non-agricultural development in designated farming areas.
- Residential Land Use Planning - Using strategies like conservation subdivisions and clustered development to allow for growth while preserving farmland. Smart growth principles can steer development away from prime agricultural land and maintain the rural character of the community.
- Purchase and Transfer of Development Rights (PDR/TDR) Programs -These tools allow landowners to sell development rights, which are then used by developers in areas designated for growth. This approach compensates landowners while permanently preserving farmland for agricultural use.

- Public Awareness and Education -Educating citizens about the value of farmland and promoting local food systems through farmers' markets, farm-to-school programs, and agri-tourism. These efforts build public support for farmland preservation and strengthen local agricultural economies.
- Financial Support for Farmers -Providing education on access to affordable credit, loans, grants, and subsidies. Programs like USDA microloans and Value-Added Producer Grants help small and mid-sized farms cover operating costs, invest in infrastructure, and adopt modern farming practices. USDA Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Alabama Farmers Federation are resources for support.

Ultimately, the decision to continue farming, sell, or subdivide land lies with individual property owners. While municipalities may encourage agricultural preservation, they cannot compel landowners to remain in farming or prohibit the sale of private property without raising legal concerns related to land use rights and potential regulatory takings. It is important to recognize that local governments are limited in their authority; they can guide growth through planning policies, implement temporary development moratoriums to allow for planning, and promote the preservation of open space—but only with the cooperation and consent of the citizens of the community.

## What happens when they do sell the farm?



Growth and development are inevitable, especially in fast-growing regions. Developers will continue to develop, and metropolitan areas will expand—it's often not a matter of *if*, but *when*. In this context, it's important to understand the perspective of landowners, particularly longtime farmers. When property values reach a point that allows for a comfortable retirement—and younger generations are no longer interested in continuing the farm—it's understandable why many choose to sell. Ultimately, municipalities have no authority to require someone to farm their land. What they *can* do is support and incentivize those who do choose to continue agricultural uses.

**So, what can you do as a resident? You can plan.**

You can help determine how new development should look—its design, lot sizes, and overall density. You can help guide where development should occur—and where it should not. Your city has tools available to shape residential growth and farmland preservation, such as:

- **Residential & Agricultural Zoning** regulations to maintain larger lots and rural character
- A **Future Land Use Map** in the Comprehensive Plan to establish areas designated for estate, low-, medium-, and high-density residential development and agricultural land uses
- An updated **Land Use Ordinance** that reflects the vision and priorities of the community

These tools only work with public involvement. Adopting and updating zoning regulations and land use plans require coordination between residents, city staff, and elected officials—and public input

through community meetings and hearings. Remember: Your current land use regulations are the direct result of your previous Comprehensive Plan, shaped by public feedback. The next generation of regulations will come from this planning process. Most importantly—get involved. Participate in your local government. Attend meetings. Serve on boards or committees. The more engaged the community is, the more the city will reflect the values and vision of its residents.

## Taking a Closer Look...Too Many Small Housing Subdivisions



Another recurring concern voiced throughout the public engagement process is the perception that many of the newer housing subdivisions developed in recent years feature homes that are too small, placed too closely together, and lack high-quality construction or thoughtful design. To evaluate the size, quality, and density of residential development in Robertsdale since 2000, the SARPC planning team analyzed housing stock characteristics using U.S. Census data, as



**More larger housing is desired in Robertsdale.**

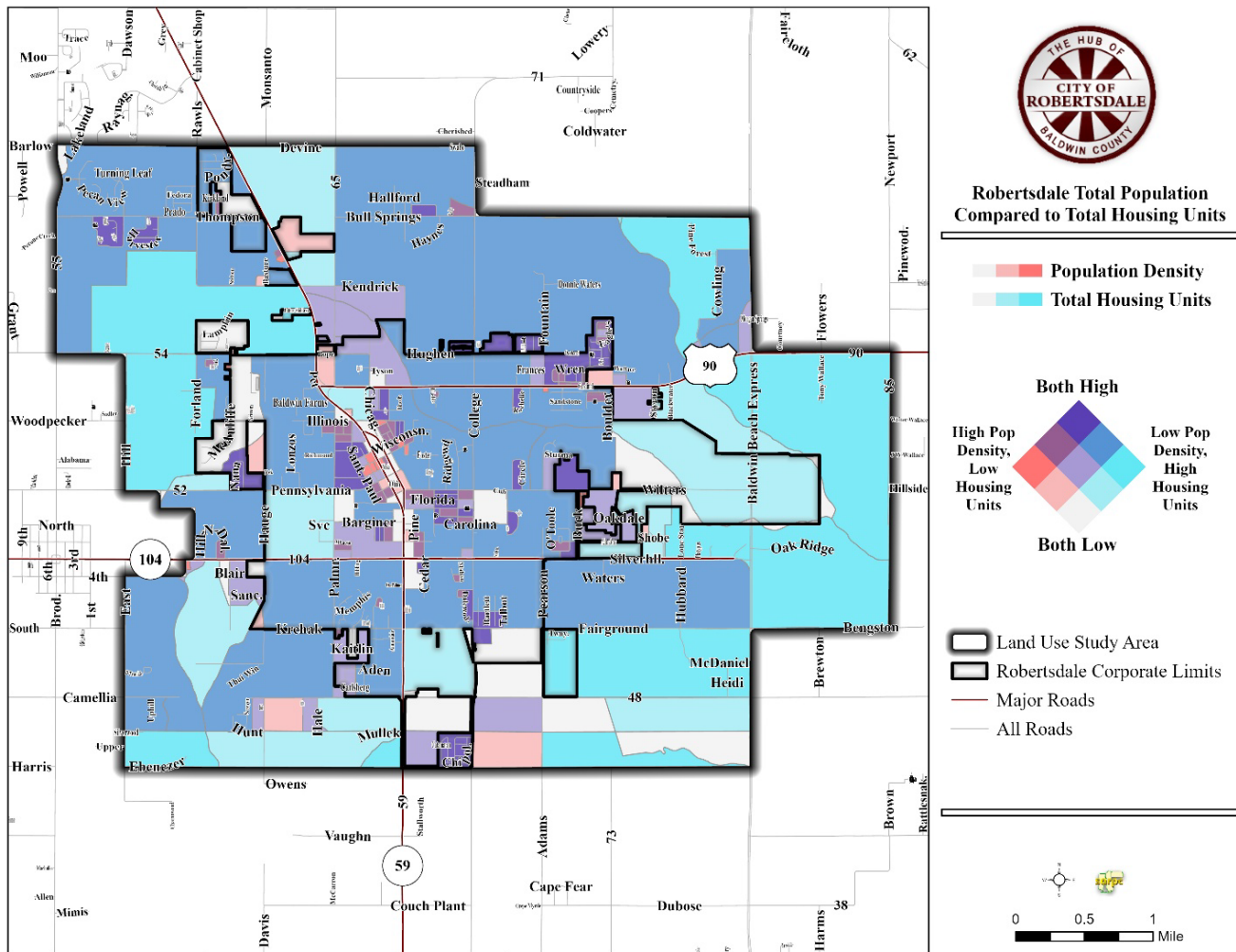
detailed in *Chapter 3 – Robertsdale Today*. This data revealed that Robertsdale has a lower proportion of larger homes compared to nearby communities. Specifically, only 10% of the housing units in Robertsdale contain four or more bedrooms—significantly lower than the proportions found in Baldwin County overall and in neighboring cities, where the share is two to three times higher. There is a clear gap in Robertsdale’s housing stock for larger,

upper-middle-class “step-up” homes. Households in this income bracket typically have greater purchasing power and are seeking more spacious, amenity-rich homes on larger lots that reflect a higher standard of living. There is a demand for this type of housing in Robertsdale to prevent the out-migration of this population to surrounding communities. This deficiency presents an opportunity for future housing development that satisfies the market demand, meets future housing population projections, and supports local opinions of preserving a more small-town rural character through low density lot sizes, if developed correctly.

**There is a need for larger homes in Robertsdale with four or more bedrooms.**

Next, the SARPC planning team utilized Esri software and 2022 block-level data to assess the current housing density in Robertsdale. A quantitative bivariate map was generated to compare population density with the number of housing units per block within the defined study area. The analysis categorized density levels on a graduated scale from low to high intensity.

The areas shaded deep purple on the map represent locations where both housing unit counts and population density are high. Lighter purple areas reflect blocks with a balanced ratio of housing units to population—higher and denser than blue zones, but not as intense as the deep purple. Lighter blue areas indicate a greater number of housing units relative to the population, typically found in neighborhoods with larger, rural residential lots. In contrast, darker blue areas show higher population concentrations on lots that still maintain more housing units than population, but at a greater density than light blue areas.



White areas correspond to blocks with minimal or no housing units and very low population density, generally denoting undeveloped land or areas designated for recreational, commercial, or industrial use. Shades of pink and coral highlight blocks with fewer housing units and slightly higher population figures relative to adjacent areas. These colors commonly represent mixed-use areas with a combination of commercial and residential development, and where duplexes, multi-family dwellings, and institutional housing are more prevalent. Such areas often include downtown, midtown, and neighborhoods with smaller residential lots.

To support smart growth principles, the most effective development pattern places the highest-density residential neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown core and commercial areas, with a gradual transition outward to lower-density housing and agricultural uses. This approach promotes walkability, reduces infrastructure costs, allows proximity to public spaces and essential services, and preserves open and rural land by preventing urban sprawl. Housing developments built far from city centers, without amenities like stores, schools, parks, or efficient transit, create isolated communities and lead to higher infrastructure costs for local governments. In larger cities where growth has extended beyond the urban core, this often leads to the emergence of concentrated pockets of higher-density development on the periphery. To serve these distant neighborhoods, micro-downtowns or neighborhood commercial hubs—often developed as Planned Unit Developments (PUDs)—are introduced to provide nearby services and amenities. However, in smaller communities, this pattern can have unintended consequences. When higher-density or commercial development occurs far from the city center, it can draw economic activity away from the downtown and encourage sprawling development along major corridors. Density mapping serves as a valuable tool for cities to evaluate these development trends, allowing for more intentional planning of future residential growth, commercial centers, and infrastructure investment.



An analysis of Robertsdale’s density map reveals that the majority of the study area is shaded dark blue, indicating where most of the city’s housing units are concentrated. These areas represent low- to moderate-density residential development and are not currently viewed as problematic or unbalanced. However, deep purple areas—particularly those located away from the city center or distant from established commercial corridors—may warrant closer monitoring and strategic planning moving forward. The map identifies six such areas of higher-density residential development:

- The northwest quadrant around Thompson Road near the middle school, outside the municipal limits

- The northeast edge along the municipal boundary
- The central eastern area near the elementary school
- The central western area, south of the industrial park
- The southeastern portion along Fairground Road near the high school
- The southeastern boundary, east of Highway 59 and south of County Road 48

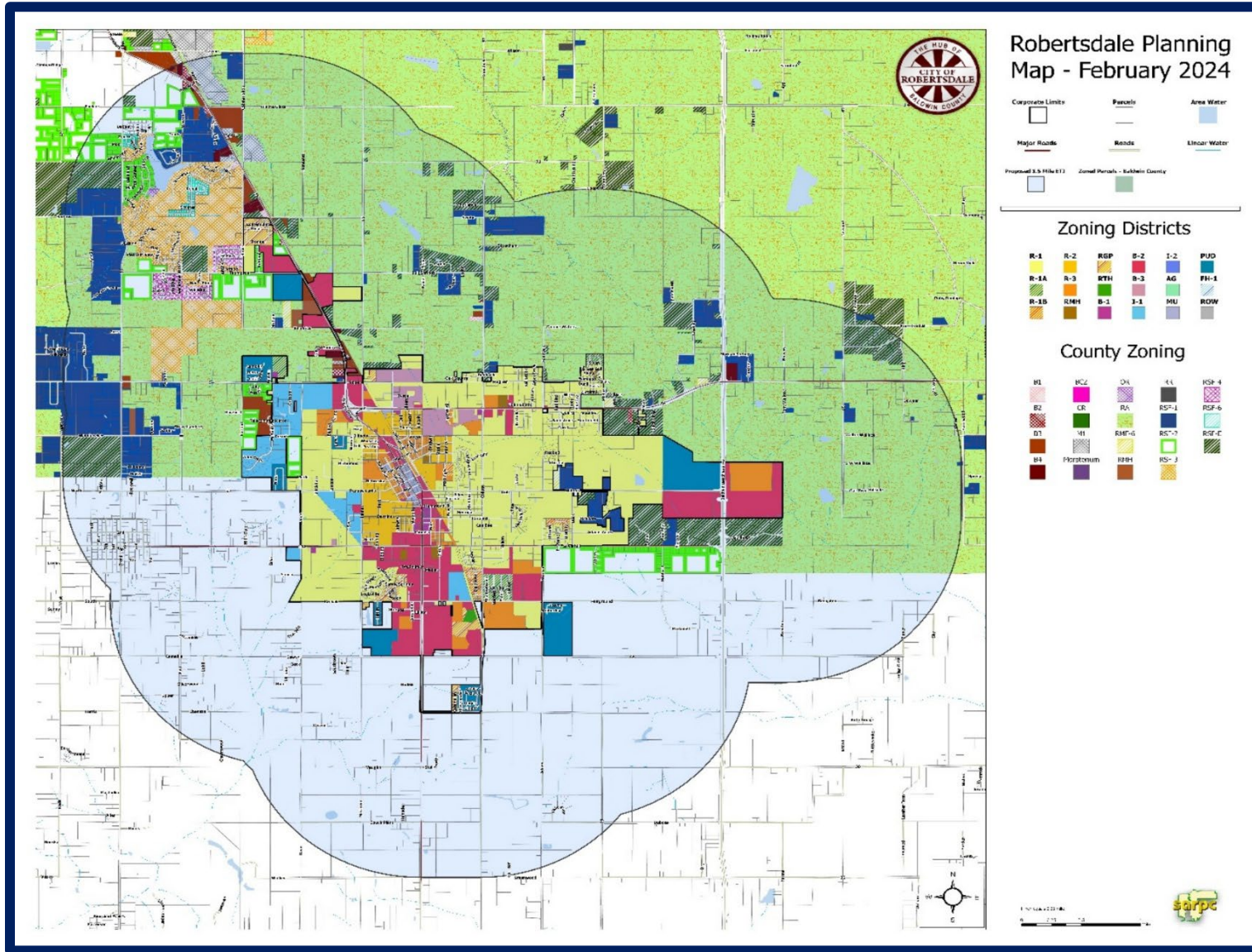
These areas may require careful consideration to ensure that future growth is well-integrated with services, infrastructure, and nearby amenities.

To better understand what is causing these high-density areas, a map illustrating Robertsdale's zoning districts alongside adjacent Baldwin County zoning districts was reviewed and is included on the following page. The residential expansion occurring outside the municipal limits in the northwest portion of the study area is largely influenced by the proximity to Central Baldwin Middle School. Surrounding the school, Baldwin County zoning designations—RSF-2, RSF-3, and RSF-4—support moderate-density residential development. Lower-density zones, RSF-1 and RSF-E, are positioned around these more concentrated districts. Increased residential density near schools is a common and generally desirable pattern, with many advantages including walkability, efficient infrastructure, and more affordable housing options. However, there can be disadvantages if growth occurs too quickly, resulting in poor traffic circulation, pedestrian and cyclists' safety concerns, and overcrowded schools. Given these risks, this area—as well as the neighborhoods surrounding Robertsdale High School and Robertsdale Elementary School, which are also experiencing similar development pressures—should be carefully monitored to ensure that the quality of infrastructure, public services, and community amenities is not compromised by unbalanced or rapid growth.



The area to the east of the high school is zoned by the city as R-1, R-1A, R-1B, and PUD for low, moderate, and high density. The county also has limited zoning east of the high school, denoted as RSF-2, or moderate density. It is important to note that most of the land east of Pearson Street/Adams Drive, along Fairground Road to the Baldwin Beach Express, at the time of this plan's preparation, was not within a city or county zoning district. These large parcels of land are currently open to any type of development and lack any restrictions associated with zoning or land use. Additionally, the housing density map used for analysis includes data only

# ROBERTSDALE AND BALDWIN COUNTY ZONING DISTRICTS WITHIN THE STUDY AREA



through 2022 and does not reflect the most recently approved residential lots. As shown on the 2022–2024 New Residential Approved Lots Map, this area is projected to accommodate between 176 and 288 new housing units in the near future. Based on the U.S. Census estimate of 2.61 individuals per household in Robertsdale, this equates to an expected population increase of approximately 752 residents in this area around the high school. The approved housing density associated with these lots, according to the *Preliminary and Final Subdivision Plats for Housing Approved in Robertsdale 2018-2024* table, located in the previous section, ranges between 3.26 and 4.75, allocating high density residential development.

The area surrounding Robertsdale Elementary School is zoned by the city as R-1 and R-1B, permitting both low- and high-density residential development. Adjacent Baldwin County zoning includes RSF-E, RSF-1, and RMF-6, reflecting a mix of low-density single-family and multi-family residential districts. According to the *2022–2024 New Residential Approved Lots Map*, 129 new residential lots were approved directly across from the elementary school in 2024. Based on an average household size of 2.61 individuals, this development is expected to generate approximately 337 new residents in this area. The proposed density for this subdivision is 1.35 units per acre, categorizing it as very low-density residential development. The area around the middle school has been approved for an additional 179 to 233 new housing units, resulting in a population increase of approximately 608 residents. The proposed housing density of these five developments around the middle school ranges between 1.72 to 4.19, representing a combination of low, moderate, and high-density housing subdivisions.

Since 2022, approximately 650 new residential lots have been proposed in the areas surrounding the three schools in Robertsdale, resulting in an estimated 1,697 additional residents living in close proximity to these educational facilities.

The high-density area northwest along the municipal boundary is zoned by the city as R-1 and R-1A, low to medium density districts. This area should be monitored carefully to guide housing and neighborhood commercial development along Highway 90. Growth in this area has been driven by its strategic location near Highway 90, the Baldwin Beach Express, and recent government and commercial investments near the Highway 59 intersection. Continued development pressure is anticipated, particularly in areas adjacent to the Baldwin Beach Express corridor. The county has already designated lots for commercial and multi-family zoning around the Highway 90/Beach Express intersection. As the city prioritizes infill development and downtown revitalization, this area could emerge as a future mixed-use neighborhood commercial hub—potentially functioning as a secondary "micro-downtown"—within the next 15 to 20 years through the use of Planned Unit Development (PUD) strategies. The city should

begin long-range planning discussions regarding the desired vision for this area, including opportunities for conservation and public access along Rock Creek and the Blackwater River.

The central west area around the industrial park, displaying high density, is both city and county zoned—PUD by the city and RSF-2 by the county. It is important to note, at the time of this plan's development, property along County Road 52, and to the south of CR 52, remains unzoned by the city or county, and therefore is open to any type of development and lacks any restrictions associated with zoning or land use. The Town of Silverhill's municipal limits nearly abuts the City of Robertsdale's west boundary. Silverhill has expanded their town limits, east along HWY 104, to Blair Lane. It is anticipated that the area between Silverhill and Robertsdale will continue to be susceptible to residential growth pressures. All residential density types would be considered appropriate in this area due to its location between both growing municipalities, provided that sufficient infrastructure is in place to support growth.

The high-density area located near the southeastern boundary—east of Highway 59 and south of County Road 48—is zoned by the city as R-1B and PUD, both of which support higher residential densities. These zoning classifications are appropriate given the area's close proximity to Highway 59 and surrounding commercial development. However, all adjacent properties to the west, south, and east remain unzoned by either the city or county, leaving them open to unrestricted development without land use or zoning regulations. Given its strategic location along the Highway 59 corridor, this area is expected to continue attracting both residential and commercial development in the future.

**The majority of Robertsdale's residential subdivision developments fall within low to moderate density standards, however six areas of the city should be monitored closely to ensure controlled growth and sufficient infrastructure.**

In conclusion, the analysis revealed that the majority of the city's residential subdivisions, through much of 2022, fall within low to moderate density standards. Six areas were identified as exhibiting higher residential density, with five of these locations aligning with expected growth patterns—situated near the city's three schools, adjacent to neighboring municipalities, or along the Highway 59 corridor. Only one area, located in the northwest portion, along the municipal boundary, reflects somewhat premature high-density standards. While this pattern may resemble suburban sprawl, its location along Highway 90 and in close proximity to the Baldwin Beach Express suggests that future development pressures in this area are foreseeable, though not yet warranted. Given the substantial volume of residential growth experienced by

both the city and county in recent years, all six high-density areas should be closely monitored to ensure adequate infrastructure capacity. Although all six areas demonstrated a mix of housing densities, the city's residential zoning regulations—including minimum lot sizes, density thresholds, and PUD standards—are contributing to increasingly urban development patterns, which differ from the lower-density characteristics typical of more rural or suburban communities.



## ***Taking a Closer Look...Affordable Housing***

While the need for more affordable housing in Robertsdale was not a dominant theme during the public engagement process—nor was it cited as frequently as other concerns—it did emerge as a topic of interest, though to a lesser extent than in the city's previous comprehensive plan. Affordable housing remains a nationwide issue, as outlined in *Chapter 3 – Robertsdale Today*. Following an in-depth analysis of local housing trends and affordability metrics across Robertsdale, Baldwin County, and nearby municipalities, the SARPC planning team found that Robertsdale ranks as the second most affordable city in the county, second only to Bay Minette. Robertsdale offers a relatively high proportion of smaller housing units (one- and two-bedroom homes) compared to county and state averages, as detailed in *Chapter 3*. The city also provides a broader range of rental opportunities, including an abundance of duplexes and multi-family housing. Approximately 35% of Robertsdale's housing stock is renter-occupied—significantly higher than the Baldwin County average of 25%, and notably above the rates seen in surrounding municipalities. According to the U.S. Census, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Robertsdale's median gross rent is \$962, substantially lower than Baldwin County's median of \$1,286.



**Briarwood Estates**

Different definitions of affordable housing exist however, the most widely accepted standard, used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is that a household is paying no more than 30% of its gross income for housing costs, including utilities. This 30% standard is intended to ensure that households have enough remaining income for other necessary expenses such as food, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and savings. If a household spends more than 30% of its income on housing, they are considered to be

experiencing a housing cost burden. If they spend 50% or more, they are considered to be severely cost-burdened.

The SARPC planning team researched the number of properties within the city that participate in government supported affordable housing programs, such as the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8), USDA 515 Rural Rental Housing Program, and the Low-Income Housing Tax (LIHTC) Program. While not a complete inventory of all affordable housing options in the city, the following nine properties provide some support for affordable housing, to some or all their units, through government assistance: Annandale Park Apartments, Belle Isle Apartments, Briarwood Estates, Inglewood Garden Homes, Hilltop Apartments, Robertsdale Garden Townhomes, Robertsdale Village, Sandlewood Manor, and The Landing. Many of these properties are required to reserve at least 40% of their units for income-restricted tenants, with some developments offering affordability across all units. Collectively, these properties contribute approximately 468 affordable housing units within Robertsdale that are supported through government housing assistance programs.



**Inglewood Garden Homes**

Determining the ideal percentage of affordable housing within a city's total housing stock is a complex matter, influenced by local demographics, economic conditions, housing market dynamics, and community policy objectives. While there is no universal standard, many communities that choose to establish a benchmark commonly aim for a minimum of 10% affordable housing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Robertsdale has a total of 2,741 housing units. With 468 government-supported affordable housing units currently in place, the city exceeds the 10% threshold by 194 units. Additionally, the city's inventory of smaller housing units and multi-family options—often associated with more affordable housing choices—is expected to grow as newly approved higher-density developments are constructed over the next several years.

In conclusion, Robertsdale does not have a deficiency in affordable housing. The city currently possesses the most affordable housing options in Baldwin County, south of Interstate 10. In addition, 17% of the city's housing stock supports government-assisted affordable housing,

exceeding community planning standards. Furthermore, the city has approved plans in place to expand these types of housing choices in the immediate future to further support the local needs of the community.

### 3. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



As Robertsdale anticipates the arrival of 3,000 to 5,000 new residents over the coming years, the city faces important decisions about how and where to accommodate this growth in a way that aligns with community values, infrastructure capacity, and quality of life. This projected population increase will require the development of approximately 1,200 to 1,600 new housing units. Thoughtful planning must determine where these homes will be built, what types of housing will be offered, and how growth can be managed. The city is charged with the difficult task of maintaining adequate services and upgrades to existing property owners, while ensuring new development is aligned with the community character and meets citizen's desires, not just for housing and public services, but for transportation, recreation and the economy.

To date, approximately 60% of the land area in Robertsdale's city limits is developed according to the Land Use analysis. The remaining 40% of undeveloped land is farmland, forested, or vacant lots. 24% of the land in Robertsdale's municipal limits is currently used for agricultural purposes, totaling over 995 acres. 6.27 % of the land in the city is classified as wooded/undeveloped and includes 264 acres. There are currently over 196 vacant acres in the city comprising 4.66 of the city land area. All of this undeveloped land could conceivably be purchased by a developer and subdivided for development as it is zoned. This undeveloped land represents a pivotal opportunity for shaping the city's future development. Are the current city regulations and ordinances working to accomplish Robertsdale's new identified goals and vision? What tools can the city use to ensure housing future goals are met? What new policies, regulations, and design standards could be implemented to achieve future housing needs? As the city looks ahead, it wants future development to be guided by community vision, not driven by market pressures.



During the development of this plan, SARPC planners collaborated with the Robertsdale community, the steering committee, city leadership, and staff to formulate the following goals and actions to help guide the city and residents to achieve their shared housing strategy. Combining data and community vision, this section outlines Robertsdale’s housing goals and proposes actions to achieve those goals, that once implemented, will establish a blueprint for the future housing landscape of Robertsdale.

## GOAL 1

### **Maintain the small-town character and rural landscape of Robertsdale and support farmlands and agricultural land uses.**



During the development of this plan, SARPC planners reviewed Robertsdale’s residential zoning districts to gain insight on lot size requirements that influence residential development patterns and to identify any current regulations that could be modified to support the preservation of the small-town character and rural landscape densities. Robertsdale’s residential zoning district specifications were compared to three surrounding municipalities, as well as Baldwin County’s regulations. SARPC’s planning team found that for a smaller, more exurban, suburban city, Robertsdale’s residential zoning regulations are more urban, than exurban in nature, and not conducive to rural preservation. Simply put, Robertsdale’s residential districts had smaller minimum lot sizes and reduced setback requirements, resulting in higher density provisions and smaller lot and home sizes. These more urban residential regulations are contributing to the more dense residential subdivision developments and the loss of the rural landscape. To remedy this, the city should amend the residential district regulations of the Land Use Ordinance to provide for larger estate lots as well as increase the lots sizes of the existing residential zones. It is also recommended that the city decrease the minimum size of the agricultural district and assess Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations to ensure the built product, resulting from regulations, meets current goals. Therefore, the following actions are proposed to achieve the identified goal above.



**Action H1: Amend the Land Use Ordinance to establish an Estate Residential Zoning District with a minimum lot size requirements of one acre.**

The use of an estate residential zoning district is to establish and maintain low-density, large-lot neighborhoods with single-family homes, often serving as a transitional buffer between

agricultural areas and more densely populated residential and commercial areas. These districts aim to provide a quiet, rural atmosphere with ample space for residents and allow for limited agricultural or livestock activities. They also preserve the rural character of an area, maintaining a less developed, open feel. The following maps, created by the SARPC planning team, identify all the parcels within the city and the study area that are currently single-family residential use, including manufactured home occupied, that are one acre in size or larger. These lots would qualify for the proposed Estate Residential District.

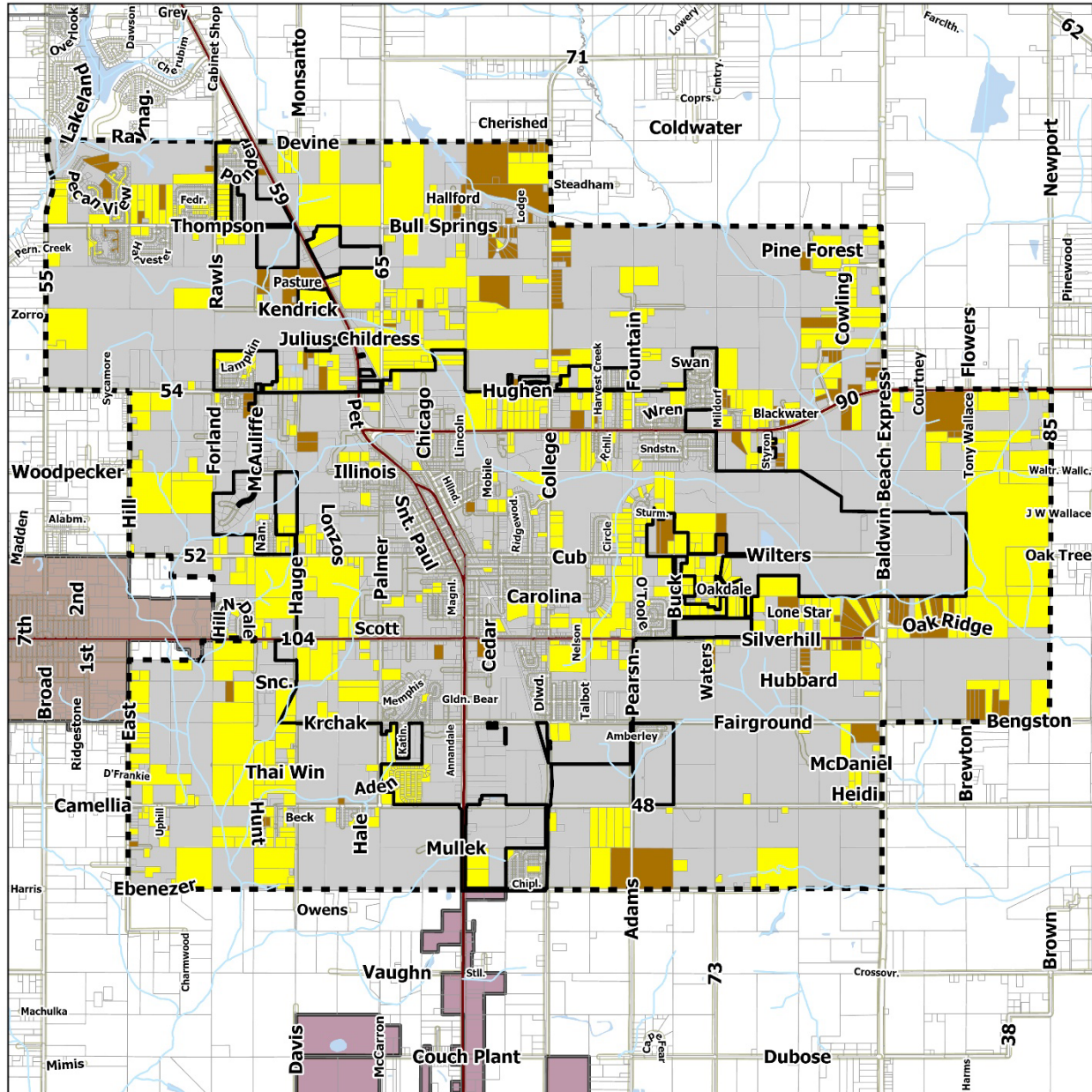


Within the city limits, there are 215 parcels, an acre or over in size, totaling 778 acres. There are nine parcels, an acre or over, with manufactured homes, totaling 34 acres.

Within the study area, there are 593 single-family parcels, an acre or over in size, totaling 3,324 acres. There are 151 parcels in the study area with manufactured homes that are an acre or more in size, totaling 570 acres. Rezoning these lots to Estate Residential would prevent these lots from being subdivided into lots sizes less than one acre.







**Parcels with Residential Land Use Equal to or Greater than 1 Acre**

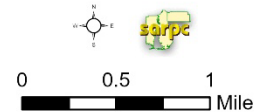
- Single-Family Residential | 593 Parcels | ~3,324 Acres
- Manufactured Home | 151 Parcels | ~570 Acres

**General Legend**

- Land Use Study Area
- Robertsdale Corporate Limits
- Tax Parcels
- Area Water
- Major Roads
- All Roads
- Linear Water

**Neighboring Municipalities**

- Silverhill
- Summerdale





**Action H2: Amend the Land Use Ordinance to increase the minimum lot size for R-1 Low Density Single-Family Residential District, R-1A Medium Density Single-Family Residential District, and R-1B High Density Single-Family Residential District.**

As illustrated in the chart below, Robertsdale’s minimum lot sizes for single-family districts are considerably smaller than surrounding communities leading to the development of smaller lots, smaller houses, and contributing to a highly urban development pattern. Increasing the minimum lot sizes for residential development would promote more open space, decrease density, and be more in line with suburban and exurban development patterns.

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT MINIMUM LOT AREA SIZES (sq ft)				
	LOW DENSITY	MEDIUM DENSITY	HIGH DENSITY	
<b>ROBERTSDALE</b>	R-1 12,000	R-1A 10,500	R-1B 9,500	
<b>DAPHNE</b>	R-1 20,000	R-2 15,000	R-3 12,000	
<b>SPANISH FORT</b>	R-1 20,000	R-2 15,000	R-3 10,000	
<b>FAIRHOPE</b>	R-1 15,000 (existing downtown) R-1a 40,000 R-1b 30,000 R-1c 20,000	R-2 10,500	R-3 7,800	
<b>BALDWIN COUNTY</b>	RSF-1 30,000	RSF-2 15,000	RSF-3 10,000	

The SARPC planning team recommends the Robertsdale’s R-1 minimum lot area regulations be increased to 20,000 sq. ft., the R-2 increased to 15,000 sq. ft., and the R-3 increased to 12,000 sq. ft. In addition to increasing the minimum lots sizes, the city should also reduce maximum densities, increase lot widths and setback requirements within these districts.



SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT MINIMUM LOT WIDTH SIZES (ft)			
	LOW DENSITY	MEDIUM DENSITY	HIGH DENSITY
ROBERTSDALE	R-1 80	R-1A 80	R-1B 80
DAPHNE	R-1 100	R-2 90	R-3 80
SPANISH FORT	R-1 100	R-2 80	R-3 70
FAIRHOPE	R-1 100 (existing downtown) R-1a 120 R-1b 100 R-1c 80	R-2 75	R-3 65
BALDWIN COUNTY	RSF-1 100	RSF-2 80	RSF-3 80

The SARPC planning team recommends that the Robertsdale’s R-1 minimum lot width regulations be increased to 100 ft., the R-2 increased to 90 ft., and the R-3 left at 80 ft. Maximum building coverage and maximum density are other specifications that can serve as tools to increase the open space on residential lots resulting in more suburban, exurban, and semi-rural subdivision developments.

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS		
	MAXIMUM BUILDING COVERAGE (%)	MAXIMUM DENSITY (units/acre)
ROBERTSDALE	R-1, R-1A, R-1B 30%	R-1 3.0 R-1A 4.0 R-1B 4.5
DAPHNE	R-1, R-2, R-3 25%	R-1 2.0 R-2 2.5 R-3 3.5
SPANISH FORT	N/A	R-1 2.0 R-2 2.5 R-3 4.0
FAIRHOPE	R-1 40% (existing downtown) R-1a, R-1b, R-1c 25%	N/A
BALDWIN COUNTY	RSF-1, RSF-2, RSF-3 35%	N/A

In small cities with rural settings, low-density housing is preferred on the periphery to maintain the character of the area. Low density preserves agricultural land uses, open spaces, larger yards, and a sense of separation between homes. City densities vary but usually translate into the following general ranges for guidance: agricultural, 5+acres, one housing unit;

rural/conservation, 3+ acres, one housing unit; exurban, 1+ acre, one housing unit; suburban, one acre, 2-4 housing units; urban 5+ units per acre.

While low-density development is often associated with rural and exurban lifestyles, smaller cities must strike a careful balance between density, character, and sustainability. A certain level of density is essential for supporting local businesses, fostering walkability, and ensuring the efficient use of infrastructure and public services. When thoughtfully planned, increased density can enhance housing diversity across income levels and household types, generate higher tax revenue per acre, and reduce per-unit costs of infrastructure and service delivery. Importantly, higher-density development can still respect and preserve a community's rural character—through strategic design, open space preservation, and context-sensitive planning.



The SARPC planning team recommends that the city decrease the maximum building coverage to 25% and the maximum density per acre to 2.0 for R-1, 2.5 for R-2, and 4.0 for R-3. These requirements would apply to all new housing developments after the adoption date of the amendment to the Land Use Ordinance. Any

existing non-conforming lots created could be grandfathered into existence.



**Action H3: Amend the Land Use Ordinance to decrease the minimum lot size of the AG Agricultural District to 5 acres.**

To support agricultural land uses and rural landscapes throughout Robertsdale, the city currently allows agricultural and related farming operations, by right, in ALL housing districts within the city's municipal limits, according to the Table of Permitted Uses and Conditions in the Land Use Ordinance. In addition, the city currently has an Agricultural District (AG). Per the Land Use Ordinance, this special zoning district "is intended to establish and preserve areas of agriculture, conservation, and such low intensity outdoor activities and uses that do not significantly change the natural character of the land or attract large numbers of people." The AG district requirements allow, by right or through special exception, more agricultural and larger farming operation activities, including limited sales, than the city's residential zoning districts. However, the minimum required lot size for this district is 20 acres. There are currently no parcels within the municipal limits with this zoning classification according to the current city zoning map. It is recommended that the Land Use Ordinance be amended to decrease the minimum lot requirements to 5 acres to allow the AG zoning district to be available to more property owners to support larger farming operations and agricultural land uses. According to the USDA, 5 acres is a great size for a beginner's homestead, hobby farms, or micro-farming operations, allowing for a variety of activities like vegetable gardening, raising livestock (chickens, goats, sheep), and beekeeping. It is important to note that the Baldwin County Rural Agricultural (AG) District minimum lot area is 3 acres. However, the county does not allow agricultural activities in all housing districts. In addition, it is recommended that the permitted uses, by right and by special exception, associated with the Robertsdale's AG district be amended to exclude certain amusement and recreational uses such as amusement parks and golf courses to preserve future agricultural landscapes.





**Action H4: Amend the Land Use Ordinance to establish a Conservation Subdivision District, with a minimum lot area of 10 acres or more.**

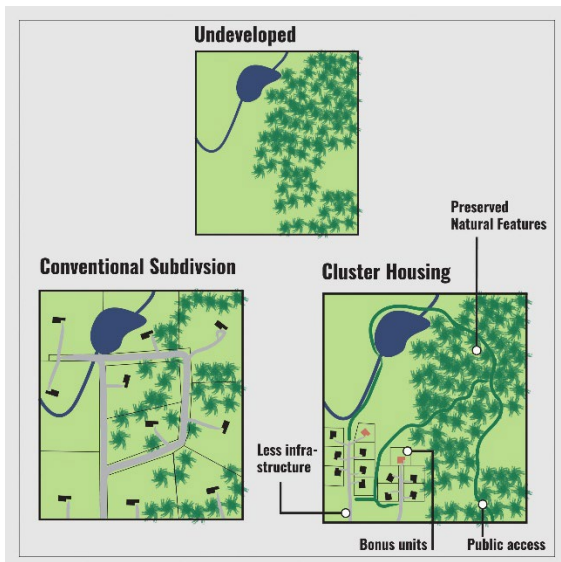
During the public engagement process for this plan, residents consistently identified Robertsdale’s rural, small-town charm as one of the community’s most valued qualities. Conservation—or cluster—subdivisions offer an effective planning tool to help preserve that character while also protecting important environmental features. These subdivisions set aside a substantial portion of the property—typically 40% to 70%—as preserved open space, steering development away from sensitive natural, scenic, historic, or agricultural areas. This open space is often protected in perpetuity for the enjoyment of residents and the conservation of natural resources.

Conservation subdivisions represent an alternative to conventional single-family development by clustering homes on smaller lots around open space, such as farmland, forests, or streams. They should be intentionally designed to achieve specific outcomes: preserving the natural landscape, protecting historic and ecological features, reducing visual and environmental impacts, and connecting to broader networks of open space and greenways. The design process begins with identifying the site’s most important features for protection, followed by



strategically locating development in the most suitable areas. These types of subdivisions offer numerous documented benefits, including increased property values, preservation of rural character, lower infrastructure costs per unit, improved stormwater management, and long-term conservation of natural and agricultural resources.

Although cities often face challenges acquiring land for trails or conservation areas due to cost and availability, conservation subdivisions present a practical solution that creates opportunities to incorporate community amenities such as walking trails, nature areas, and passive recreation spaces. Developers of large parcels can more readily integrate these amenities into their site plans, especially when supported by municipal incentives. While residents may have smaller private lots in these developments, the extensive shared open space offers a valuable tradeoff—enhancing community quality of life and preserving the surrounding landscape. Developers also benefit, as homes in conservation subdivisions have been shown to command higher market values compared to those in conventional subdivisions.



Cluster Subdivision, Source: *New Hampshire Housing Toolbox*

## CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS



Pre-Development Condition



Conventional Subdivision Layout



Conservation Subdivision Design

Source: *Chester County Government, PA*



**Action H5: Make modifications to the Planned Unit Development (PUD) Provisions in the Land Use Ordinance to establish more defined, intent-based regulations to ensure quality design, mixed uses, and responsible density.**

The City's Planned Unit Development (PUD) District is intended to promote flexibility, creativity, and innovative design by allowing a mix of land uses—including neighborhood-scale commercial, recreational, and a variety of residential housing types such as detached single-family, attached townhomes, and multi-family dwellings—within a single, comprehensively planned tract of land.

During the public engagement process, several residents voiced concerns regarding the implementation of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) in Robertsdale. Many felt that recent PUD projects resulted in subdivisions characterized by small, closely spaced homes on undersized lots, lacking the intended mix of land uses or meaningful open space. There is a growing perception that developers are utilizing the PUD designation as a means to circumvent traditional zoning regulations in order to construct high-density, low-quality housing solely for profit, with little regard for community character or long-term livability. Specifically, residents noted that existing PUDs have often failed to achieve the original intent of compact, walkable neighborhoods with a variety of housing types. Instead, many consist almost entirely of a single housing product—typically garden or patio homes—offering limited diversity and minimal public benefit.

A review of the City's Planned Unit Development (PUD) provisions within the Land Use Ordinance indicates that the current standards are moderately conservative compared to those of other municipalities and widely accepted planning practices. Existing regulations require a minimum lot area of 7.5 acres, establish density limits for both residential and commercial uses, mandate a minimum frontage of 50 feet, and include open space requirements with consideration for natural features. However, to better align with evolving community expectations and concerns, the City should consider strengthening its PUD provisions by adopting more clearly defined, intent-driven standards. Potential amendments could include establishing minimum housing unit-to-acreage ratios, mandating the



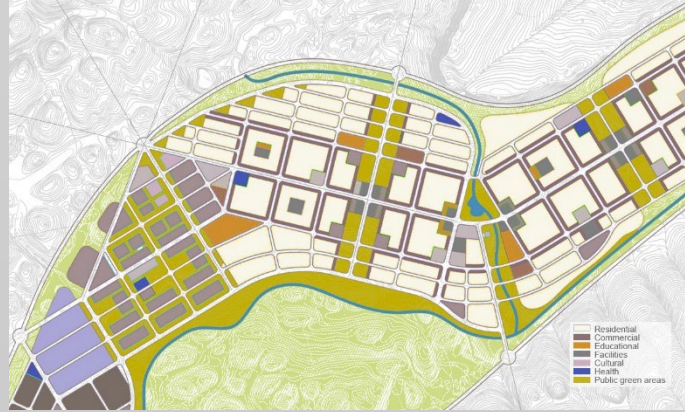
inclusion of multiple land use types within a single PUD, and requiring enhanced amenities and design elements that foster high-quality, cohesive, and well-integrated neighborhoods.

To ensure that future PUDs meet community standards, the city should update its PUD provisions with consideration of the following:

- More clearly define the purpose of a PUD as a tool to:
  - Encourage high-quality, mixed-use and mixed-density development.
  - Promote neighborhood connectivity, open space preservation, and cohesive design.
  - Allow flexibility from conventional zoning only when resulting in community benefits beyond what traditional zoning permits.
- Limit use of PUDs for small infill lots unless meeting strict design criteria and open space preservation.
- Require a range of lot sizes and housing types (e.g., single-family estate, single-family detached, townhomes) to avoid monotony.
- Set maximum and average net densities depending on context (e.g., 3 units/acre in edge-of-town rural areas, up to 6–8 units/acre in walkable areas or near city center).
- Prohibit all lots from being the minimum size—enforce variety through subdivision design.
- For all PUDs over 20 acres, require:
  - At least two land uses (e.g., residential + neighborhood commercial, or residential + civic or recreational uses).
  - Inclusion of meaningful public or private amenities: trails, playgrounds, clubhouse, or preserved natural open space.
- Require neighborhood-serving commercial uses for larger PUDs near major roads or intersections.
- Require at least 20–30% of gross land area be reserved for functional open space (parks, greenways, preserved wetlands, etc.).
- Encourage conservation subdivision principles where sensitive lands exist.
- Require stormwater best practices and tree preservation standards.
- Require sidewalks, internal street connectivity, and multiple access points to surrounding neighborhoods or arterials.
- Establish architectural guidelines or minimum material standards to ensure quality appearance.
- Require buffers between incompatible uses and transitions to adjacent lower-density zones.
- Allow PUD approval only if consistent with the Future Land Use Map and Comprehensive Plan goals.

## PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENTS (PUDs)

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a specialized zoning and development approach that permits a coordinated mix of land uses and housing types—such as single-family homes, duplexes, townhomes, and apartments—within a unified, master-planned community. Unlike conventional zoning, which typically separates residential, commercial, and recreational uses, a PUD encourages the integration of these elements to create cohesive, self-contained neighborhoods. PUDs often feature neighborhood commercial amenities like retail shops and restaurants, along with parks, green spaces, and recreational



facilities. The intent is to foster a vibrant, connected community that offers diverse housing options, promotes resource conservation, and reduce infrastructure costs through efficient land use. PUDs can also serve as effective tools for providing affordable housing options through multi-family integration. They also accommodate senior living arrangements that benefit from shared amenities and supportive environments. PUD developments are governed by single ownership, such as a homeowner's association (HOA) to ensure coordinated management and maintenance. PUDs allow developers a large degree of flexibility in where to locate uses as compared to traditional zoning districts. They are most common in suburban, exurban, and rural areas, where a larger supply of undeveloped land and lack of surrounding uses lend to a higher degree of flexibility in planning and development. If designed thoughtfully, PUDs can result in a mix of uses and housing types with the potential to increase access to housing at various income levels while reducing excess car trips and rural development.

### PURPOSE OF PUDs:

**Flexibility in Design:** PUDs allow for variations in building heights, setbacks, and densities, providing creative and innovative design solutions, varied housing types, commercial, and open space.

**Mixed-Use Development:** They incorporate a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. They are not one type of land use; they are micro-communities inside of the city.

**Community Focus:** PUDs are designed to foster a sense of community through shared amenities—like parks and recreational facilities—common areas, and opportunities for social interaction.

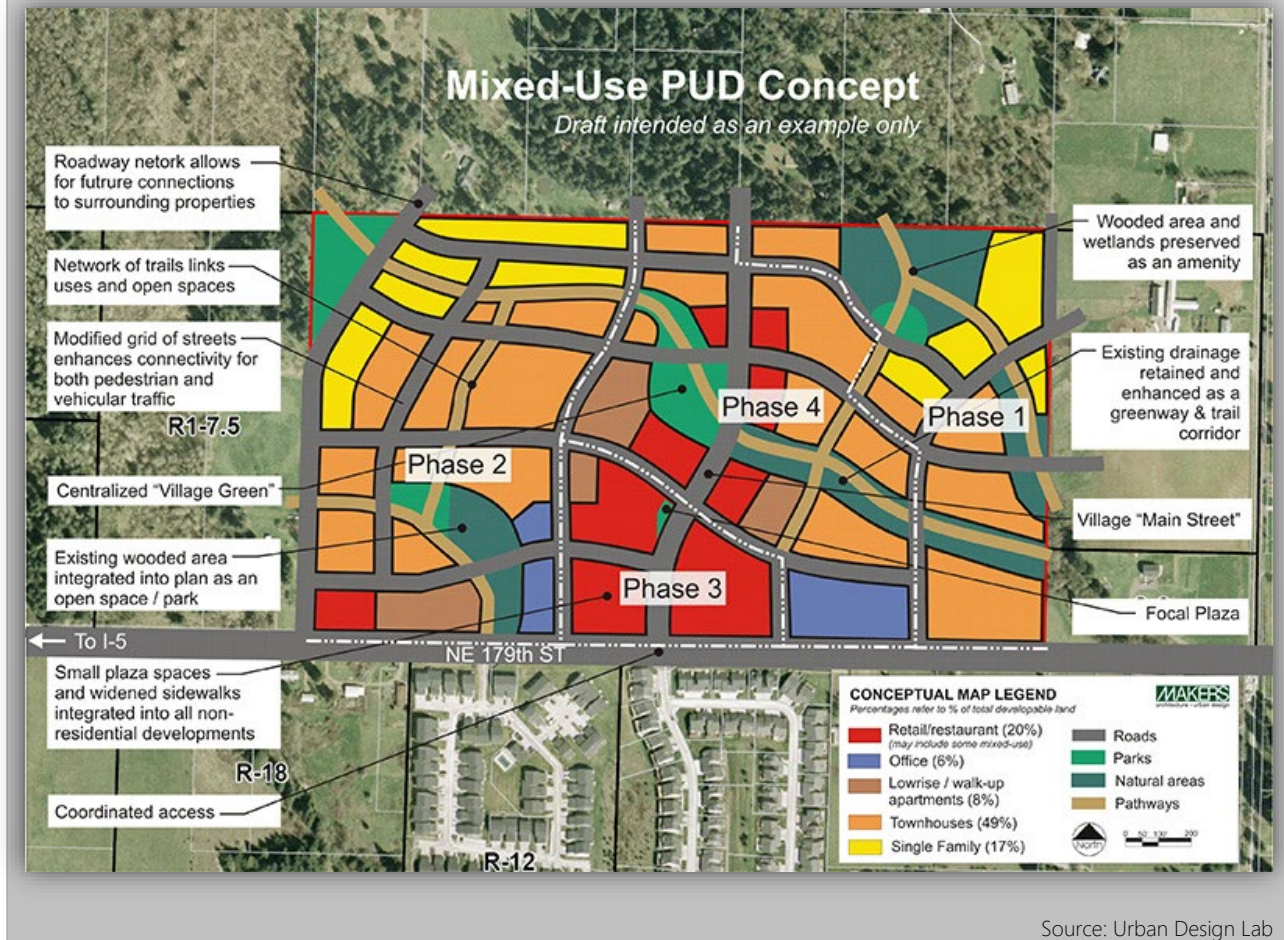
**Convenience and Walkability:** By integrating residential, commercial, and recreational elements, PUDs reduce reliance on cars and promote walkability, offering residents easy access to essential services and entertainment within the development.

**Efficient Land Use:** By allowing for higher densities and mixed uses, PUDs can make better use of land resources, reduce sprawl, and contribute to land conservation such as agricultural land uses.

**Cost Savings through Design and Functionality:** PUDs can lower public utility costs due to shared amenities and efficient site design, more targeted roads and parking, and less unnecessary infrastructure compared to traditional developments.

**Enhanced Property Values:** Well-maintained PUDs with desirable amenities can increase property values, making them attractive long-term investments.

**Addressing Housing Needs:** PUDs offer a range of housing options at various price points, making homeownership more accessible to diverse populations, including first-time buyers and retirees.

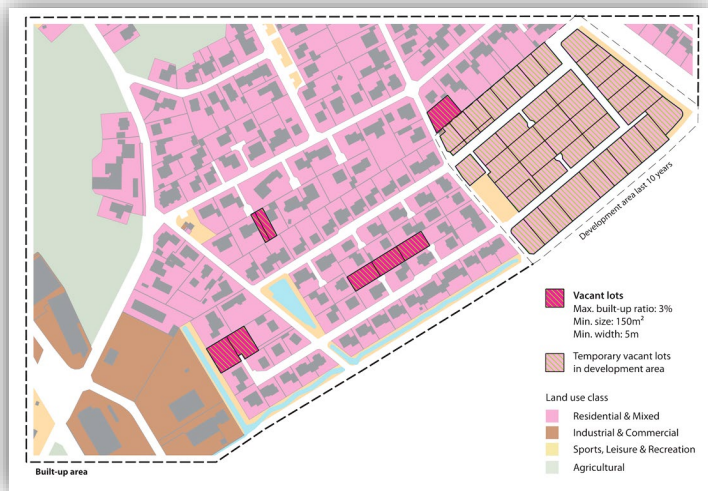


**Action H6: Encourage infill development of existing residential neighborhoods to reduce sprawl and conserve agricultural lands and open space.**

Infill residential development—building new housing on vacant or underused parcels within already developed areas—offers numerous economic, environmental, social, and infrastructure benefits, especially for growing communities seeking to maintain character, reduce sprawl, and support revitalization. Infill development is a powerful tool for cities like Robertsdale that want

to revitalize their core, protect their rural edges, expand housing choices, and make smart use of existing infrastructure. Key Benefits of Infill Residential Development include:

- **Efficient Use of Land and Infrastructure** - Utilizes existing roads, utilities, schools, and public services, reducing the need for costly new infrastructure. Reduces urban sprawl by directing growth inward rather than outward into farmland or natural areas. Supports smart growth and more sustainable community development patterns.
- **Revitalization of Older or Underutilized Areas** - Breathes new life into vacant lots, aging neighborhoods, or abandoned properties. Catalyzes private investment and increase surrounding property values. Helps cities reclaim blighted areas and promote community pride.
- **Promotes Walkability and Access to Amenities** - Builds homes close to downtowns, schools, parks, and shops, reducing reliance on cars. Supports the development of complete neighborhoods where people can live, work, and play.
- **Expands Housing Options** - Adds housing diversity (e.g., townhomes, duplexes, cottages) in areas that may lack affordable or smaller-unit options. Helps address housing shortages and rising costs without converting rural or greenfield areas.
- **Environmental Sustainability** - Reduces pressure on undeveloped land, helping to preserve farmland, forests, and sensitive ecosystems. Limits vehicle emissions by shortening commute distances and encouraging alternative transportation. Encourages low-impact development and stormwater management retrofits.
- **Fiscal Responsibility** - Generates more tax revenue per acre than low-density greenfield development. Saves municipalities long-term infrastructure and service costs (roads, water, emergency services).



According to the Current Land Use Map and analysis, Robertsdale has 217 vacant parcels, totaling over 196 acres, within the municipal limits, zoned for various land uses. It is

recommended that the city identify undeveloped lots that would be suitable for residential infill of single family and multifamily developments and encourage developers to consider these target areas for future development. Tools and strategies cities can use to attract developers by reducing barriers and increasing benefits include:

**Streamline the Approval Process** - Fast-track permitting or pre-approval for infill projects that meet zoning/design standards. Developers value time certainty and predictability—streamlining reduces delays and carrying costs.

**Offer Financial Incentives** - Waive or reduce impact fees for infill projects using existing infrastructure. Provide grants or tax abatements (e.g., TIF districts, property tax freezes) for revitalizing underutilized parcels. Create a local housing fund or public-private partnerships to help cover upfront costs for infrastructure, site prep, or demolition. Greenfield development often avoids upfront costs—level the playing field for infill sites.

**Provide City-Owned Land or Land Banking** - Identify and market publicly owned vacant or surplus lots for infill development. Establish a land bank to acquire and assemble underused or tax-delinquent properties and make them “shovel-ready.” Offer land at reduced cost or through RFPs with clear community goals (e.g., affordable housing, mixed use). Land assembly is a major barrier—cities can take the lead to reduce risk and scale.

**Promote Market Demand and Public Support** - Support infill areas with public realm improvements: sidewalks, lighting, green space. Market the benefits of walkable, downtown-adjacent living—especially to young professionals, retirees, and downsizers. Engage the community early to reduce opposition and create neighborhood-scale design guidelines that address concerns. Developers follow demand. Showing community buy-in and a strong market helps attract investment.



## GOAL 2

**Continue to ensure the quality, safety, and long-term maintenance of housing stock to support a healthy, attractive, and sustainable community.**



Robertsdale can ensure high-quality, well-maintained housing through a multi-faceted approach that combines code enforcement, development standards, and community

partnerships—preserving property values and maintaining a safe and vibrant community.



**Action H7: Continue to protect the quality of life in existing and new neighborhoods by strictly enforcing the Land Use Ordinance.**

Continued enforcement and compliance with the Land Use Ordinance will ensure the separation of incompatible land uses and densities; preserve and/or create open spaces and landscaped areas; promote the connectivity of roads, schools, parks, and open spaces; require, where feasible, the installation of sidewalks, and other amenities, throughout the development; and prevent stress on the existing public infrastructure and public services.

The city will continue to implement, and update if necessary, regulations that protect existing neighborhoods from encroaching incompatible land uses and densities, by utilizing buffers between transitioning zoning districts.



**Action H8: Implement compliance with the International Building Codes (IBC) 2021 Regulations.**

The city will continue to require, through building codes and inspection, a high quality of construction for residential structures that meets all flood and hurricane specifications. This includes issuing code violations for existing properties that are not in compliance. Encourage developers to locate new utilities underground to prevent damage during tropical storms and hurricanes. Encourage the rehabilitation of deteriorated structures and demolish dilapidated structures that are a health and safety hazard to the community.



**Action H9: Encourage Traditional Neighborhood Development design principles in infill and new development, especially closer to the city's core center.**

Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) is a planning approach that draws inspiration from the way towns and neighborhoods were built before the dominance of the automobile—compact, walkable, mixed-use, and centered around community life. It replicates the enduring and historic development patterns found in American towns and applies these patterns to new



development. It is often used in village planning, PUD development, and infill development. The purpose of Traditional Neighborhood Development principles is to create vibrant, walkable, human-scaled neighborhoods that promote a sense of place, community interaction, and accessibility—with a balanced mix of housing, shops, public spaces, and civic uses. Design guidelines include:

- **Walkability** - Streets designed for pedestrians first, with narrow lanes, wide sidewalks, street trees, and safe crossings. Daily needs are within a 5–10 minute walk from homes—“the ¼-mile radius rule.”
- **Connected Street Network** - A grid layout with frequent intersections and multiple routes—reduces congestion and encourages walking, biking, and local travel.
- **Mixed Land Uses** - Integrates homes, shops, schools, parks, and civic buildings in close proximity. Encourages live-work opportunities and supports small-scale, local businesses.
- **Housing Diversity** - Includes a mix of housing types— single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes, cottages, apartments—to accommodate a range of ages, and incomes.
- **Defined Center and Edges** – Promote a central public square, village green, or main street with civic buildings and retail. Clearly defined boundaries, often buffered by greenbelts, farmland, or natural features.
- **Human-Scaled Design** - Buildings and streets are proportioned for people, not cars. Front porches, stoops, low fences, and shallow setbacks create inviting transitions between public and private space.
- **Civic and Public Space** - Includes parks, trails, and community gathering spaces integrated throughout the neighborhood. Public space is treated as functional infrastructure, not just leftover land.
- **Architectural Harmony** - Emphasizes local character, culture, heritage, scale, and design consistency. Uses traditional materials and details to foster a sense of continuity and timelessness.





**Action H10: Encourage property owners to improve properties that have been neglected or that are exhibiting sub-standard maintenance.**

Overgrown vacant lots, abandoned properties, and deteriorating structures present significant challenges for residents, business owners, investors, and the City of Robertsdale. Unsafe and dilapidated buildings pose serious health and safety risks, while abandoned structures often become magnets for criminal activity and pose hazards—especially to children and nearby residents. In addition to diminishing neighborhood appearance and livability, blighted properties place a strain on city resources, increasing the demand for maintenance, law enforcement, and fire protection services.

Robertsdale residents take pride in their community’s appearance and livability. However, some property owners—whether through neglect, lack of awareness, or disregard for local regulations—violate property maintenance codes intended to preserve neighborhood standards. While the city already has ordinances in place to address these concerns, some may require updates, and more consistent enforcement is needed to ensure compliance.

To address these issues, the city should take a proactive and collaborative approach in working with residents to improve neglected properties and address substandard housing conditions. Property maintenance challenges are often complex, involving factors such as code enforcement capacity, aging housing stock, economic hardship, and community engagement. Therefore, the city should consider a range of targeted strategies, such as strengthening enforcement of property maintenance standards, partnering with nonprofit organizations to support cleanup programs, condemning and removing hazardous structures, and exploring creative community-based solutions like a “tool lending library” to assist homeowners with repairs. In pursuing these strategies, the city must also ensure the fair and equitable treatment of private property rights while safeguarding the health, safety, and overall well-being of the broader community.



### **GOAL 3**

**Support existing community assets and infrastructure and ensure all housing has adequate public services and amenities.**





**Action H11: Maintain public infrastructure at a level needed to continue adequate service to existing residential dwellings.**

The city will continue to monitor and upgrade current infrastructure facilities and amenities to ensure adequate services are provided to all property owners. In order to measure the city's capabilities at maintain public infrastructure at a level necessary to provide adequate service to existing residential dwellings, the city should consider the following:

- Conduct a Comprehensive Infrastructure Assessment - Inventory all public infrastructure assets (roads, water and sewer lines, stormwater systems, sidewalks, etc.). Evaluate current conditions, remaining lifespan, and capacity of each system. Prioritize critical infrastructure serving large populations or essential services (e.g., near schools, downtown, or high-density housing).
- Adopt an Asset Management Program - Implement a GIS-based asset management system to track maintenance needs, repairs, upgrades, and costs. Set performance standards and schedule routine inspections for all infrastructure categories. Forecast long-term replacement and maintenance costs and integrate them into budgeting.
- Budget for Maintenance, Not Just Expansion - Dedicate consistent funding for preventive maintenance, not just crisis repairs. Continue to explore grants and low-interest financing (e.g., from ADEM, FEMA, USDA, ALDOT, or CDBG programs) for infrastructure repairs or upgrades. Consider a dedicated infrastructure maintenance fund supported by local revenues.
- Continue to Monitor System Capacity and Service Levels - Regularly assess water pressure, sewer capacity, traffic volume, and stormwater drainage performance. Track public service complaints and response times to detect areas needing investment. Continue to conduct annual service level reviews and update the city's utility and public works performance metrics.



**Action H12: Successfully manage residential growth to prevent an adverse effect on public infrastructure and services. Allow new development only when adequate infrastructure and public facilities are in place to accommodate growth and then only at a context and scale appropriate to the locale.**

This Comprehensive Plan promotes a development pattern that prioritizes the efficient use of existing infrastructure and discourages the costly and premature conversion of rural, undeveloped land. Future growth should be directed to areas already served by adequate

public facilities and infrastructure—such as roads, water, sewer, and emergency services—to ensure that new development does not place undue pressure on existing neighborhoods or city services. Concentrating growth within established areas strengthens the city's tax base, improves access to jobs and services, enhances the efficiency of public investments, and helps protect prime farmland and open space for future generations.

The city should deny new development if the infrastructure is not in place to support it without compromising the service to existing properties and continue to require that all new developments be connected to the city's existing public water and sewer lines at the developer's expense. Robertsdale should continue to coordinate all new major development and annexation plans with community service providers to ensure adequate levels of service are extended to new growth areas and maintained in existing areas. The city should continue to account for the future infrastructure costs of development projects and estimate whether the costs of services demanded by new developments and locations exceeds the revenue they provide to the city. Robertsdale could consider strengthening subdivision and development regulations to require developers to conduct full infrastructure impact analyses on major developments.

It is recommended that the city align infrastructure planning with growth management by coordinating capital improvements planning with the Future Land Use Map to ensure infrastructure is extended or upgraded in alignment with planned growth. Robertsdale should continue to restrict or phase development in areas where infrastructure is currently inadequate or overburdened and continue to require developer-funded infrastructure improvements as part of new subdivision approvals. The city should continue to ensure all infrastructure meets city engineering standards and is turned over to the city only after full inspection and acceptance. Robertsdale could consider increasing impact fees or capacity fees to offset the burden on existing systems caused by new development.



**Action H13: Conduct an in-house fiscal impact analysis for all new proposed major developments.**

Major new developments can have significant long-term economic, social, and environmental impacts. To ensure responsible growth, it is recommended that the City of Robertsdale require a fiscal impact analysis for all major proposed developments. A fiscal impact analysis evaluates the projected costs and revenues associated with a development to determine whether it will be fiscally beneficial or burdensome to the city. To support these assessments, the city maintains

up-to-date data on municipal service costs and revenues. A typical fiscal impact analysis includes:

- Estimating the population generated by the proposed development.
- Calculating the projected cost of providing municipal services based on the city's average per-capita expenditure over the past three fiscal years.
- Estimating the anticipated municipal revenue from the new population, using historical per-capita revenue data.
- Projecting additional property tax revenue generated by the development.
- Comparing total anticipated costs with projected revenues and identifying any funding gap or surplus.

When conducted early in the planning process, fiscal impact analyses can compare multiple development scenarios—such as compact design, varied lot sizes, inclusion of trails or parks, or provision of public facilities—to inform better decision-making. If the analysis shows a development is not fiscally sustainable, the city should deny approval or require mitigation measures to offset the impact—such as contributing to infrastructure, donating land for community use, or funding public amenities. This is to prevent unforeseen costs being absorbed by the city due to inadequate infrastructure on the developer's end.



**Action H14: Assess the current Impact Fee Schedule for development to ensure the city is capturing adequate fees from development to support public infrastructure construction and maintenance given the current market cost increases.**

The city of Robertsdale maintains an Impact Fee Schedule, with impact fees assessed in connection with development approvals—such as new lots or connections. These are tied to the costs of municipal infrastructure such as water, roads, sewer, etc. Under Alabama law, municipalities are permitted to levy impact fees under § 45-2-243.84. These can be capped at up to 1% of the post-completion fair market value of new development and must follow statutory procedures for appraisals, public hearings, credits, and revenue usage.

Robertsdale utilizes impact fees to defray the cost of extending or expanding infrastructure to new developments. It is recommended that the current fee be assessed to determine it is adequate and meets current market values and costs. The fee schedule could also be amended to expand provisions for emergency medical services, public safety, street maintenance, and vary according to development type, intensity, and location.

Reforming the capital recovery fee structure could encourage preferred development patterns, such as mixed-use development, traditional neighborhood development or conservation subdivisions. These types of development will place a relatively lower burden on facilities and services due to the nature of the more compact development, and their impact fees could be lowered accordingly. It is also possible to establish level of service (LOS) metrics that decreases impacts costs for developing desired design standards. For example, if a development meets conservation subdivision requirements, then fewer utility improvements are needed to accommodate the development, and those portions of the impact fees can be lowered accordingly.

#### GOAL 4

### **Provide a range of housing options and choices that serve all income types.**



The City of Robertsdale supports a diverse housing stock by encouraging a variety of housing types, including affordable options such as duplexes and multifamily apartments. The city promotes a range of rural, suburban, and urban living environments to meet the needs of households across all income levels. This approach includes proactively anticipating and planning for future land requirements based on projected population growth and evolving housing demands.

Homes in Robertsdale are very affordable in comparison to surrounding communities. Being centrally located, Robertsdale's abundant affordable housing stock serves not just the city, but the county as well. As demonstrated in previous sections, the city currently has many affordable housing choices, with many under construction. Where choices are limited, include larger, upper-middle-class, step-up housing. This imbalance in these housing choices is a direct result of past market trends, flexible building practices, and existing ordinances and regulations. While the city cannot control the housing market, it can direct the development of new housing through modifications to the Land Use Ordinance to expand housing choices and improve the quality of the city's housing stock.



**Action H15: Continue to provide opportunities to develop a variety of housing types that meet the needs, preferences, and financial capabilities of Robertsdale's present and future residents.**

A one-size-fits-all approach to housing does not meet the needs of a growing, inclusive community. A vibrant and resilient city must offer a range of housing options to support

residents of all ages, occupations, and abilities—including first responders, teachers, janitors, managers, retirees, young professionals, and individuals with disabilities. Housing diversity is not just about variety—it is a key driver of economic resilience, social well-being, and community sustainability. Housing diversity has the following benefits

- **Economic Development** – A mix of housing types and price points helps local employers attract and retain a skilled workforce. Workers at all income levels—from service employees to executives—need access to affordable, quality housing near their jobs.
- **Long-Term Economic Stability** – Communities with a variety of housing types are more resilient during economic downturns. They experience fewer foreclosures and maintain stronger economic footing over time.
- **Supporting an Aging Population** – As the number of seniors in Robertsdale continues to grow, so does the need for housing that meets their evolving needs. Providing accessible, affordable, and low-maintenance housing options will allow older adults to age in place and remain active contributors to the community.
- **Sustaining Families** – Diverse housing options are essential for supporting children and working families. When families have stable housing that fits their needs and budget, children are healthier and perform better in school, and parents are more likely to participate fully in the workforce.



**Action H16: Continue to support opportunities to produce additional ‘Missing Middle’ housing types that support affordable housing options.**

Robertsdale should continue to support the development of additional “Missing Middle” housing types—compact, attainable homes that are compatible in scale with traditional single-family neighborhoods. These may include cottage-style developments, duplexes, townhomes, and other small-scale multifamily housing that blend seamlessly into existing residential areas. While current analysis indicates that Robertsdale meets affordable housing benchmarks,



maintaining this balance will be critical as the population grows. Encouraging a mix of housing types will help ensure continued affordability, meet the needs of diverse households, and support sustainable, inclusive growth in the years ahead.



**Action H17: Consider implementing a temporary moratorium on high-density residential developments to ensure current development standards meet community goals and existing infrastructure is in place to support current residents and future growth.**

Unlike other communities in the region, Robertsdale has not previously enacted a development moratorium; however, implementing such a measure could serve as a valuable tool to help align rapid growth with the long-term housing goals and recommendations outlined in this plan as well as update existing infrastructure to accommodate growth. The City of Robertsdale should consider adopting a temporary moratorium on high-density residential subdivisions. This strategic pause would allow the City to re-evaluate its growth management tools, zoning ordinance, and infrastructure capacity while preserving its rural landscape, agricultural lands, and small-town character. Key benefits of implementing a moratorium include:

- **Pause for Strategic Planning** –A moratorium allows city leaders and planners to revisit the city’s comprehensive plan, zoning regulations, and subdivision ordinances to ensure they align with the community’s long-term vision. These processes allow for community engagement and visioning that identifies how residents want the city to grow.
- **Preserve Agricultural Lands and Open Space** - Without intervention, high-density sprawl quickly consumes valuable agricultural land uses. A moratorium can help pause irreversible land-use conversions to give communities time to define a path forward. It allows for evaluation of farmland preservation strategies, conservation development standards, and time to update agricultural and housing zoning regulations.
- **Prevent Overburdening Infrastructure** – Allows for the assessment of water, sewer, roads, and school capacity. Rapid development strains city infrastructure and public services. A moratorium allows time to assess capacity and plan for improvements.
- **Encourage Balanced Housing Options** – It prevents cookie-cutter subdivisions by slowing the pace of development to establish better design standards, lot size

requirements, and preservation of natural features. It offers time to attract more diverse housing types such as estate lots and conservation subdivisions.

- **Preserve Small-Town Identity and Quality of Life** – It helps protect historic character and community identity by preventing rapid, unplanned growth that can erase the small-town charm and compromise a community's sense of place.
- **Encourage Smarter Growth Patterns** – Moratoriums can redirect growth to target areas, such as downtown. A pause on greenfield development can help incentivize infill development, mixed-use interest, and revitalization of underused parts of the city. It can also catalyze the development of desired housing, such as larger "step-up" homes, and estate lots.
- **Legal and Administrative Control** – It can help avoid legal pitfalls from rushed decisions.

It is recommended that the city evaluate the legal framework and scope for enacting a temporary moratorium (e.g., 6–12 months) on the approval of new high-density residential subdivisions outside of designated growth areas. During this period, the City should:

- Complete updates to its comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and subdivision regulations.
- Finalize the Future Land Use Map and growth framework.
- Develop rural design guidelines that support farmland and open space protection.
- Assess infrastructure capacity and establish level-of-service benchmarks.
- Conduct community outreach to ensure the public is engaged in the vision for how and where Robertsdale should grow.



**Action H18: Promote the development of the desired larger, single-family housing on larger lots, through a fast-track subdivision development process.**

Fast-track subdivision development (also called "pre-approved", "pre-permitted", or "template site plans") are a proactive planning tool used by cities to promote specific types of development that align with local housing, land use, and quality-of-life goals—*while reducing barriers and delays for developers*. These programs streamline the entitlement process by

offering ready-to-build site plans, design templates, or expedited approvals for subdivisions that meet the city's pre-set standards. How they work:

- **City Prepares Pre-Approved Site Plans or Design Standards** - City staff or consultants create subdivision layouts that meet local codes, infrastructure capacity, and design preferences (lot sizes, setbacks, street layout, stormwater design, open space, etc.). Plans are based on locations identified in the Future Land Use Map or Housing Strategy.
- **Designated "Fast-Track Zones" or Parcels** - The city may designate specific parcels (e.g., infill areas, near downtown, underutilized land, or near schools) where these plans can be applied. These zones often have adequate infrastructure, reducing need for costly extensions.
- **Developers Choose to Opt In** - A developer who owns or controls a parcel in one of the fast-track areas can opt to use the pre-designed subdivision layout or comply with pre-approved design parameters. They skip much of the time-consuming zoning, design, and permitting process.
- **Expedited Review and Approvals** - Because the plan has already been vetted for code compliance, environmental impact, and infrastructure compatibility, review timelines are dramatically shortened. In some cases, approvals may be granted *administratively*.

By implementing a fast-track development plan, city goals are supported by increasing housing supply in alignment with city vision, preserving farmland by directing growth to targeted areas, and encouraging desired housing types such as conservation and estate developments. To make fast-track plans attractive to developers, cities may offer the following incentives:

- **Expedited permitting and approvals** (e.g., 2–4 weeks instead of 6–12 months)
- **Waived or reduced fees** (impact, review, utility connection)
- **Pre-negotiated infrastructure coordination** with utilities, stormwater, and streets
- **Tax abatements or grants** for developments meeting affordability or green building goals
- **Technical support** from city planning staff or consultants
- **Density bonuses** or reduced minimum lot sizes within defined limits

To support rural character and more intentional housing development, it is recommended that Robertsdale adopt fast-track subdivision templates for:

**Estate-style subdivisions** with large lots and open space

**Conservation cluster subdivisions** with preserved farmland buffers

Cottage courts or duplexes near downtown

Infill-ready designs for older neighborhoods



**Action H19: Adopt an adaptive reuse ordinance to support downtown mixed-use residential development.**

An adaptive reuse ordinance is a tool that facilitates the repurposing of vacant or underutilized buildings by easing certain zoning and code requirements. These ordinances incentivize redevelopment by modifying standards such as parking minimums, setback distances, or density limits—regulations that often pose barriers when applying new development standards to older structures.

Currently, Robertsdale’s Land Use Ordinance requires reuse projects to comply with the same regulations as new construction, which can discourage reinvestment in historic buildings.

To support the revitalization of Downtown Robertsdale, it is recommended that the city adopt an adaptive reuse ordinance specifically aimed at encouraging the redevelopment of historic and underused structures. This would be particularly effective in promoting mixed-use development, such as converting second floors of downtown buildings into residential units while preserving the area’s historic character.

The city should collaborate with architects, engineers, and developers to identify which zoning requirements are most burdensome for reuse projects. Tailoring the ordinance to remove or reduce these obstacles could lead to a greater number of rehabilitated buildings and contribute to the economic vitality, housing diversity, and walkability of the downtown area.

